

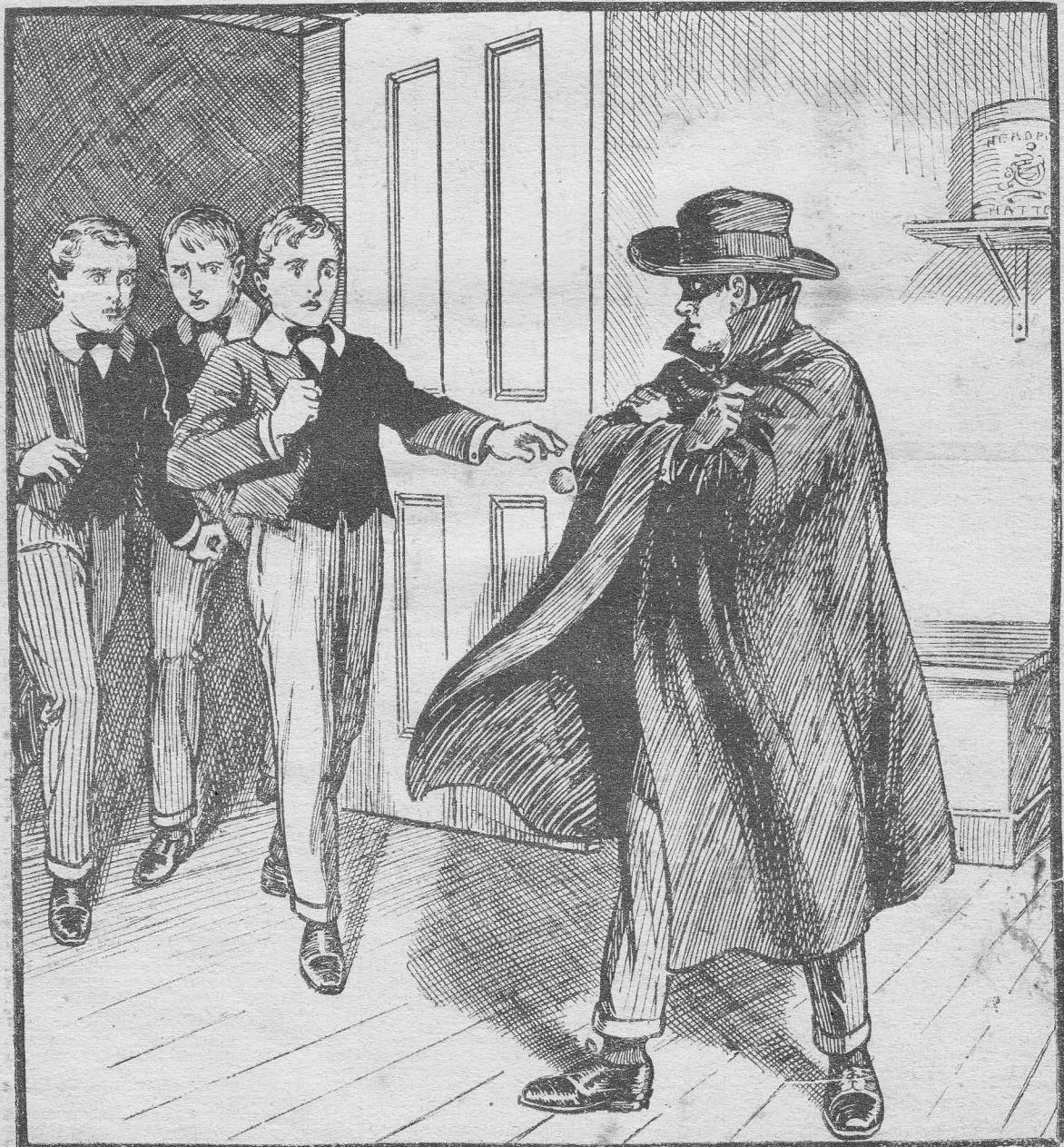
LONG STORIES By FRANK RICHARDS, MARTIN CLIFFORD, and OWEN CONQUEST INSIDE!

The Penny $1\frac{1}{2}$ Popular

Week Ending
November 29th, 1919.

No. 45.
New Series.

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



A STARTLING SURPRISE FOR JIMMY SILVER & CO.
(A Thrilling Scene in the Magnificent Long Complete School Tale of the Chums of Greyfriars.)



Wharton's Last Chance!

A Magnificent New Long
Complete Story of
HARRY WHARTON & Co.
of Greyfriars.

By FRANK RICHARDS.

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

On the Sick List.

NO sunshine, no pleasure, no hope—No vember!" That melancholy statement was made by Bob Cherry of the Remove who was not given to making melancholy statements as a rule.

Eleven footballers stood in the junior Common-room, gazing disconsolately out of the window.

It was a half-holiday, but the eleven looked anything but cheerful. For the rain was coming down in torrents. It lashed against the window-panes; it formed little pools of mud in the Close.

"This puts the kybosh on our match with the Upper Fourth!" grunted Johnny Bull. "Absolutely!" growled Frank Nugent. "Blow the beastly rain! It's coming down in bucketfuls!"

Harry Wharton looked savage. He was more annoyed than anybody with the clerk of the weather.

The great contest for the captaincy of the Greyfriars Remove was still in progress, and each of the candidates had had a trial week, with the exception of Wharton.

Wharton's week was beginning now, under conditions which could hardly be called ideal.

All the other candidates had been favoured with good weather. The sun had shone on the efforts of Vernon-Smith, Peter Todd, Dick Russell, and Billy Bunter. But now that Harry Wharton was about to make a desperate effort to regain his old position, the skies were weeping.

"Let's play, and chance the rain!" said Vernon-Smith.

Wharton looked up eagerly.

"I'm game!" he said.

"But we shall be soaked to the skin!" said Peter Todd.

"Who cares?"

"It will be more like a swimming gala than a footer match," said Bob Cherry. "Still, I don't mind. Let's go and tackle Temple."

Cecil Reginald Temple, the captain of the Upper Fourth, was in his study. He had not changed for the match, evidently regarding the fixture as "off."

Temple looked up in surprise as the footballers trooped in.

"What the thump—" he began.

"Buck up!" said Wharton.

"The match is due to begin," said Vernon-Smith.

Temple stared.

"You burbling chumps!" he said. "You're

not thinking of playing in this sort of weather surely?"

"What's wrong with the weather?" said Bob Cherry. "It's certainly a trifle damp, but you ought not to mind that. Remember what's written on the coat-of-arms of Lord Temple de Temple—'Never mind the weather!'"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I shouldn't dream of turning out in this slush!" said Temple.

"In other words," said Wharton, "you're funky of a beking?"

Temple flushed.

"My dear fellow, you couldn't lick the Upper Fourth, not if you tried for a thousand years!" he declared.

"Rats!"

"We're ready to lick you now!" said Bob Cherry.

Temple could not resist that challenge. He knew that if he refused to play he and his Form-fellows would be dubbed funks.

"All serene," he said. "I'll round up the other chaps, and we'll turn out. But it's nothing short of lunacy to play in this rain!"

Temple experienced a great deal of difficulty in persuading his followers to turn out. After a good deal of argument, however, they made their way to Little Side.

The Upper Fourth were garbed in raincoats, but the Removites had nothing over their jerseys and shorts.

"What about a referee?" said Nugent.

"We'll ask Wingate," said Wharton.

But the captain of Greyfriars, when he was approached, said nothing in the world would induce him to spend ninety minutes in the pouring rain.

Several of the seniors were applied to in turn, and their remarks were more emphatic than polite. They voted the juniors mad, and appeared to have no desire to be added to the list of lunatics.

Even Coker of the Fifth declined to take on the job, so it was eventually decided to dispense with the services of a referee.

With the rain pelting down from the lowering sky, the two teams lined up for the tussle.

Temple & Co. did not remove their raincoats, and their pace suffered in consequence. It was almost impossible for either team to control the greasy ball, and play was farcical.

Harry Wharton & Co. were soon drenched to the skin. It was cold as well as wet, and the players suffered acute discomfort.

"Groooh!" panted Bob Cherry. "This is awful!"

"The absolute giddy limit!" said Johnny

Bull. "We must look a priceless set of asses!"

"Thank goodness there aren't any spectators!" said Nugent.

The juniors were soon plastered with mud from head to foot. Every time they slipped they had a mud-bath—and they slipped a dozen times every five minutes, on an average.

Presently Bulstrode, in the Remove goal, gave vent to a loud sneeze.

"Atishoo!"

"Look out!" yelled Peter Todd, for Temple was advancing towards goal with the ball.

But Bulstrode developed quite a sneezing fit, and he was helpless when the ball came whizzing in.

"Goal!" cried Temple exultingly.

"You silly chump!" roared Johnny Bull, turning to Bulstrode. "Why couldn't you have put off your beastly sneezing fit till another time? Why couldn't you—Atishoo! Atishum—yum!"

"Why," said Bulstrode, "you've got a sneezing fit yourself!"

Within the next few moments at least half a dozen juniors were doubled up with sneezing. Bulstrode had set the fashion, and Nugent, Bob Cherry, Hurree Singh, and Peter Todd were now among the victims.

And still the rain pelted down, and still the game went on—although everybody had had enough when half-time came.

"I think we'd better cry off," said Vernon-Smith.

Harry Wharton nodded.

"I didn't think it would be as bad as this," he said.

Temple & Co. were only too willing to abandon the game, especially as they had scored the only goal; and the footballers squelched off the field of play.

Shortly afterwards Harry Wharton & Co., soaked to the skin, limped along the Remove passage. Their progress was accompanied by violent fits of sneezing.

Mr. Quelch happened to encounter the procession. The Form-master nearly fell down when he caught sight of the drenched juniors.

"Bless my soul!" he exclaimed. "Surely you boys have not been playing football?"

"We've been trying to, sir," said Bob Cherry. "Of course it was rather wet, but—

Atishoo!"

Mr. Quelch drew back hastily. He had a horror of influenza.

"Why, some of you appear to have caught a chill!" he exclaimed.

"Oh, no, sir!" said Peter Todd. "Merely a slight cold—Atishum-m-m!"

The Remove-master frowned.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

Raw Talent.

"HOW are you fellows getting on?" Harry Wharton asked the question as he looked in at the doorway of the sanatorium as he came downstairs next morning.

"Shoo!" said Bob Cherry.

"Shum!" said Frank Nugent.

"We're sitting up and taking a little—'tishoo!" said Peter Todd.

"And you'll be taking some, too, if you hang around here!" said Vernon-Smith.

"Hear, hear!" said Johnny Bull. "You'd better clear off, Harry. It's no joke being an inmate of this place."

Wharton hesitated.

"I looked in to see if any of you would be fit for the Highcliffe match," he said.

"No hope, I'm afraid," said Nugent. "We may be out by Saturday, but that won't give us time to find our feet."

Harry Wharton groaned.

"Looks as if I shall have to take the field on my own!" he said.

"Rats!" said Bob Cherry. "You'll be able to scrape together a team of sorts."

"Wonderful what you can do with raw material," said Squiff. "There are heaps of fellows who don't play at all badly, and if you put them through their paces you'll be surprised at the result."

Wharton nodded.

"I must see what can be done," he said. "An revoir, you fellows!"

As the morning advanced Wharton's heart grew considerably lighter.

It was surprising what a lot of talent could be unearthed in the Remove.

Dick Russell and Ogilvy, Wibley and Morgan, Dick Rake and Tom Dutton, volunteered at once. And all of them were players who fell little short of first eleven standard.

Bolsover major agreed to turn out at full back, and Tom Redwing and Monty Newland agreed to play.

Every place was now filled, except the goalkeeper's. And Wharton remembered, with a glow of satisfaction, that Hazeldene was a first-rate goalie. Indeed, he sometimes turned out for the first eleven in place of Bulstrode.

Flourishing the list of players in his hand, Harry Wharton went along to Hazeldene's study.

"Hallo!" said Hazeldene, looking up.

"What's the latest?"

"Will you turn out as goalie against Highcliffe?" asked Wharton.

Hazeldene shuffled his feet. He looked very uneasy.

"I'd like to," he said, "but—"

"But what?"

"I've got an appointment on Saturday."

"Oh!"

"It's a very important appointment, and I can't put it off."

"One of your relations coming down?" asked Wharton.

"No."

"You're going over to tea with Marjorie at Cliff House?"

"No."

"Then what the thump—"

"I wish you wouldn't be so beastly inquisitive!" said Hazeldene.

Wharton coloured up at that.

"Oh, very well!" he said. "If you choose to put it like that I'll get out!"

And he went, slamming the door behind him with such violence that the noise echoed along the Remove passage.

Hazeldene's refusal to come up to the scratch had created quite a big difficulty. Good goalkeepers were not as plentiful as blackberries in the Remove, and the Highcliffe forwards were certain to profit if there was a weakness in the Greyfriars goal.

Harry Wharton ransacked the Remove studies from end to end, and he finally found a volunteer in Micky Desmond. The Irish junior vowed he would keep the citadel intact against all comers, and Wharton put his name down.

That afternoon the new eleven turned out for practice, and Wharton was surprised at the marked ability which was displayed. Indeed, he began to wonder whether he had been guilty of unfairness in the past in leaving such good players out of the first team.

Wharton kept his men well up to the mark, and when the day of the match dawned he had full confidence in his scratch team.

The match was to be played at Highcliffe, and punctually to time the Remove eleven turned up. Frank Courtenay and the Caterpillar were waiting for them at the gates.

"Hallo!" exclaimed the Caterpillar, shaking

hands with Harry Wharton. "Have you been buyin' your team at a second-hand shop?"

Wharton laughed.

"They may be only oddments," he said, "but they're good enough for Highcliffe." "Faith, an' we're good enough for Newcastle United!" said Micky Desmond.

Frank Courtenay & Co. anticipated little difficulty in defeating the second-rate team which Wharton had brought over.

When the match started, however, they had the surprise of their lives!

Dick Russell and Ogilvy took the ball down the field between them, and Ogilvy scored with a lovely drive.

"Goal!"

The Caterpillar rubbed his eyes in wonder. "Where did these dazzlin' stars come from?" he exclaimed.

"Give it up!" said Frank Courtenay. "We shall have to put a stop to their merry antics."

But this was not easy. Wharton's new team played with dash and resolution, and shortly afterwards Monty Newland headed a second goal.

"Worse and worse!" groaned the Caterpillar. "Time we put our shootin'-boots on, Franky!"

Highcliffe played desperately after this, and they managed to reduce the lead just before the interval.

"Two to one for us!" said Wharton, as the lemons were handed round. "Keep it up, you fellows! You're doing splendidly!"

The second half of the game was fast and keen.

There was no lack of goals. Frank Courtenay scored twice in five minutes for Highcliffe, and Wharton and Dick Russell put on three goals for Greyfriars.

Highcliffe rallied fiercely just before the finish, and in the last minute the Caterpillar drove the ball past Micky Desmond into the net.

But the Remove had won—by five goals to three—and there was great rejoicing.

Frank Courtenay & Co. took their defeat smiling.

"We had an off-day," said Courtenay. "We weren't so nippy on the ball, and we deserved to lose. Will you stay to tea, Wharton?"

"Delighted!" said Harry.

The rest of the Greyfriars team hurried home, to acquaint their schoolfellows with the result.

Harry Wharton spent an enjoyable hour in Frank Courtenay's study, and then he, too, turned his face towards Greyfriars.

He was walking along the road in the gathering dusk, when he heard the tinkle of a bicycle-bell.

Some bicycle-bells have a distinctive sound, and Wharton knew at once that the cyclist was Marjorie Hazeldene, of Cliff House.

The next moment the girl had dismounted, and was beside him.

Wharton raised his cap.

"Out for a spin?" he asked cheerfully.

Marjorie nodded. Even in the dim, uncertain light, Wharton could see that she looked worried.

"Punctured your bike?" he asked.

"No."

"What's the trouble, then?"

"I want your help, Harry!"

The girl spoke eagerly—almost appealingly. Wharton was serious at once.

"Rely on me to give you all the help I can, Marjorie," he said.

"Thank you!" said Marjorie. "I knew you would say that. It—it's about my brother."

"Oh!"

"You have got him out of a good many tight corners in the past," continued Marjorie. "I'm afraid it will be necessary again. I hate to always saddle you with this sort of thing—"

"That's all right," said Wharton. "If the young duffer's been getting into a scrape, I shall be only too willing to pull him out of it. What exactly is the trouble?"

"He's got mixed up with Ponsenby & Co. again," said Marjorie.

Wharton frowned.

"Confound that fellow Ponsenby!" he exclaimed. "He's everlastingly making mischief. I suppose Hazel's been with him this afternoon?"

"I'm afraid he has. I saw them walking along the shore together, at Pegg. There were several others there—all from Highcliffe. I asked Peter to come away from them, and I believe he would have done, but Ponsenby told me to mind my own business." "The ill-mannered cad!" said Wharton hotly.

"I have never heard of such foolishness!" he said. "You have exposed yourselves to very grave risks. You will rub yourselves down, and then proceed immediately to bed!"

"To—to bed, sir?" stammered Nugent.

"Yes—without delay!"

The juniors exchanged dismayed glances. It was not nice to be despatched to bed, like naughty boys, in the middle of the afternoon.

But the Form-master's word was law, and there was nothing for it but to obey.

The juniors trooped up to the Remove dormitory, gave themselves a brisk rub-down, and then got into bed.

"This is the end of a perfect day!" grunted Johnny Bull. "I don't think!"

"Fancy spending a half-holiday in bed!" said Squiff. "Did you ever?"

"The worst of it is we shall miss tea," said Wharton. "If one of us goes down to fetch some, he's bound to be spotted by Quelch!"

At the end of half an hour—during which time a sneezing concert had been held in the dormitory—the juniors were ravenous.

Bob Cherry was on the verge of slipping out of bed to go in search of tuck, when Dick Russell and his chum Ogilvy came in. They brought with them a laden tray. There were muffins and crumpets, and toasted scones, and a plate of cake.

"Pile in, you fellows!" said Dick Russell.

"Dick," said Bob Cherry, "you're a Good Samaritan! Let me fold you to my pillow, and weep!"

"No, thanks!" laughed Russell. "I'm not pining for a dose of the 'flu'."

The juniors were soon sitting up in bed, regaling themselves with hot muffins and tea.

"This is prime!" said Peter Todd. "Thanks ever so much, you fellows!"

"Don't mench!" said Ogilvy. "We might as well do you a good turn while we can. We shan't have a chance to-morrow."

"Eh? Why not?" asked Johnny Bull.

"Because you'll be in the sanny."

"Well, you're a Job's comforter, and no mistake!"

After tea the footballers lay chatting to each other, and sneezing intermittently.

In the evening cocoa and biscuits were sent up to them by Mr. Quelch's instructions.

"Lucky dogs!" said Bolsover major, when the rest of the Removites came up to bed. "I wish I could lie in bed and be molly-coddled!"

"Yes, rather!" said Skinner.

Bob Cherry was about to say "Rats!" but he said "Atishoo!" instead.

In the morning it was obvious that there were casualties in the Remove.

Harry Wharton had come through unscathed, and his companions who had taken part in the match with the Upper Fourth were the victims of influenza colds.

When Mr. Quelch arrived in the Form-room to conduct morning lessons he was greeted by a volley of sneezing.

"Silence!" he rapped out.

"Atishum!"

"Cherry! Cease that ridiculous noise immediately!"

"Yes, sir! Very good, sir! At-ee-ee-shum!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"This is no laughing matter!" said Mr. Quelch sternly. "You will go at once to the sanatorium, Cherry, for treatment. You appear to have contracted influenza."

"Oh, crumbs!"

"That's number one!" murmured Frank Nugent. "There will be quite a procession soon."

Nugent was right. The procession began, and he took part in it.

By the end of the morning there were no less than ten fellows on the sick-list.

Harry Wharton could have kicked himself. It was all his fault, he reflected. It was he who had insisted on the match being played in the downpour, and now he was without a team to meet Highcliffe on the following Saturday.

The fixture with the Upper Fourth was of no importance; but the match with Highcliffe was a very big affair, involving the reputation of the Remove.

If Greyfriars lost—and they were pretty certain to lose without their regular team—Harry Wharton's chances of regaining the captaincy would be seriously jeopardised. When the time of the voting came the fellows would not be likely to make allowances.

Study No. 1 had only one occupant for the rest of that day—a very gloomy occupant, whose face wore a deep frown during tea and prep.

Harry Wharton dearly wanted to win back his old position, but the stars in their courses seemed to be fighting against him.

"My brother stayed with them, and they all disappeared into a hut."

"I know that but!" said Wharton grimly. "We paid a visit to it last week, and put Ponsonby & Co. through the mill! I suppose they're doing the cat-and-mouse stunt with Hazel—fleecing him at cards, and that sort of thing?"

"It's only too probable," said Marjorie.

Wharton was silent for a few moments. "You can leave it to me, Marjorie," he said, at length. "I'll see that your brother steers clear of Ponsonby in future."

"Thank you so much!"

"I guessed there was something wrong with Hazel," said Wharton. "He refused to turn out for the Remove this afternoon. He said he had another appointment, but if I had known that the appointment was with Ponsonby, he shouldn't have kept it. Hazel's kept straight for a long time now, and I'm sorry he's had this lapse. But I'll soon see him clear."

"I hope you won't be too late," said Marjorie uneasily.

"What do you mean, Marjorie?"

"He may have got deep into debt, in which case nothing can help him!"

Wharton looked troubled.

"I hope it won't be as bad as that," he said. "If Ponsonby fleeces Hazel like he fleeced Dennis Carr—you remember Dennis Carr, of course?—there will be trouble. But we must hope for the best. I'll keep my weather-eye open."

"I'm ever so grateful to you!" said Marjorie.

For a brief second she allowed her hand to rest in Harry Wharton's. Then she remounted her bicycle, and was soon swallowed up in the mantle of darkness which now shrouded the countryside.

THE THIRD CHAPTER. Deeds of Darkness!

WELCOME, little stranger!" Bob Cherry sang out that cheery greeting as Harry Wharton came into Study No. 1.

Frank Nugent, Johnny Bull, and Hurree Singh were also present.

"Hallo! You fellows down from the sanny at last?" said Wharton.

"Yes, thank goodness!"

"We've been living on a diet that would starve a sparrow!" said Bob Cherry. "Milk-pudding for brekker, milk-pudding for dinner, and milk-pudding for tea! Ugh! Did you ever hear anything so gruesome?"

"And we weren't allowed to get up until the doctor came this afternoon," said Nugent. "We badly wanted to go over to Highcliffe to see the match, but, of course, there was nothing doing."

"Awfully bucked to know you won," said Johnny Bull. "How did you manage to work the cradle?"

Wharton smiled.

"The raw talent wasn't quite so raw as I had imagined," he said. "The fellows played up like Trojans!"

"Bravo!"

"Why are you so late in getting back?" asked Bob Cherry. "Been despatching telegrams to all the leading newspapers telling them the result?"

"Don't be an ass! I stopped to tea with Courtenay and the Caterpillar."

"My hat! I wonder they had an appetite for tea, after what happened!"

"Are you game for a second tea?" asked Nugent. "We're just going to have ours."

"I couldn't tackle another to save my life!" said Wharton.

"Very well," said Johnny Bull. "You can squat in the arm-chair and watch the lions feed!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Harry Wharton dropped into the arm-chair, and his face clouded over. His chums watched him in some concern.

"Penny for 'em!" said Bob Cherry, at length.

Wharton looked up with a start.

"Eh?"

Bob repeated his observation.

"I—I was thinking—" began Wharton.

"Bow-wow! Leave that to the politicians!"

"Wherefore that worried brow?" asked Nugent, in concern.

Wharton rose to his feet, and paced to and fro.

"It's that fellow Hazeldene," he said.

"Has he broken out again?"

"Yes."

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Bob Cherry gave a snort.

"If he wants to go to the dogs, let him!" he growled.

"But we can't. There's Marjorie to consider."

"Oh!"

"Every time Hazeldene disgraces himself, he brings disgrace on Marjorie," said Wharton. "And Marjorie's our pal. Therefore, we're not going to stand by and see Hazel make a prize ass of himself!"

"Hear, hear!" said Johnny Bull.

And Hurree Singh remarked that the hear-earfulness was terrific.

"It's our old friend Ponsonby again," said Wharton, and his tone was savage. "Pon's never happy unless he's getting somebody into trouble. He jolly nearly ruined young Dennis Carr for life, and now he's making a catspaw of Hazel."

"What particular game is he playing?" asked Nugent.

"The same old stunt, so far as I can make out. Playing cards for money in that beastly fisherman's hut at Pegg. If the cards are marked—and they're bound to be—Hazel will be getting head-over-ears in debt. If we chip in now, we might be able to save him. But the longer we leave it, the deeper he'll get in the mire."

The others nodded. They were only too bitterly aware of the cunning and rascality of Cecil Ponsonby. Hazeldene was as clay in the hands of such an unscrupulous individual.

"Why not send for Hazel, and give him a jolly good bumping?" suggested Bob Cherry. Wharton shook his head.

"Drastic, but hardly good enough," he said.

"I'll take more than a bumping to make Hazel realise what a mug's game he's playing. We shall have to corner him one day in the hut, and slaughter Ponsonby & Co. in his presence."

"That's the idea!" said Johnny Bull. "Say but the word, and we'll come with you at any hour of the day or night."

"We must keep our eyes on Hazel," said Wharton. "I loathe and detest anything in the nature of spying, but it's for the fellow's own good. Just think what would happen if Quelch or one of the other masters caught him in that place."

"He would be fired out of Greyfriars," said Nugent.

"Exactly!"

Hazeldene of the Remove was the one topic of conversation in Study No. 1 that evening.

The juniors glanced curiously at Hazel when they went up to bed. They noticed that he was flushed and excited. He seemed to have caught the gambling fever every bit as badly as Dennis Carr had done.

No word was said to the wretched fellow. Words would have been useless just then. The Famous Five were biding their time.

Wingate of the Sixth came in to see lights out, and one by one the juniors dropped off to sleep.

Harry Wharton seemed to awake within five minutes of his head touching the pillow. But he knew that a much longer interval must have passed, for the dormitory was in complete darkness.

The wind was blowing in great gusts outside, and the windows rattled and shook.

Wharton turned over in his bed, and attempted to go to sleep again. But somehow sleep refused to come.

Boom!

What was that?

The junior sat up in bed, and there he laughed to himself as he realised that it was the first stroke of midnight. He had imagined, at first that it was the minute-gong sounding from the coast.

Still unable to sleep, Wharton slipped out of bed and lighted a candle. He had a copy of the "Boys' Friend" under his pillow, and he intended to read for half an hour or so, in the hope of being able to drop off to sleep at the end of that time. Reading in the dormitory was not permitted, but Wharton reflected that it would be much better than lying aimlessly awake.

He was groping for his jacket, when his eye lighted on a vacant bed.

"My hat!" he murmured.

The bed was Hazeldene's!

Further investigation revealed the fact that Hazel's clothes were missing. It was obvious that he had gone out—that he had broken bounds in the middle of the night!

"The silly young ass!" muttered Wharton. And he proceeded to rouse his chums.

"Wharrer-marrer?" mumbled Bob Cherry drowsily, as he felt himself being shaken.

"Out you get, Bob!"

"Is it burglars?"

"No; Hazeldene's gone out."

"Oh!"

Bob Cherry heaved himself out of bed with an effort. It was not a nice sort of night in which to turn out.

After a good deal of pressure had been brought to bear, Frank Nugent, Johnny Bull, and Hurree Singh turned out also.

"Bless that fellow Hazeldene!" growled Nugent. "You're sure he's gone out, Harry?"

"Of course! His togs are missing."

"And have we got to go and bring him back to the fold?"

Wharton nodded.

"I vote we wait till he comes in, and then scalp him!" said Johnny Bull.

But Wharton would not listen to that lazy proposition.

"We're going along to that hut at Pegg," he said. "And we're each going to take a cricket-stump, for the education of Ponsonby."

The juniors dressed hurriedly by candle-light. Their haste was due to the fact that it was intensely cold.

Presently a fierce gust of wind from without extinguished the candle. But the Famous Five did not stop to relight it. They finished dressing in the darkness, and then groped their way out of the dormitory and down the stairs.

It was black as pitch, but they knew every inch of the way to Study No. 1, from which apartment they procured the cricket-stumps.

"Better put on our raincoats," said Wharton. "We shall need them, I'm thinking."

Fully equipped for their expedition, the juniors went along the passage, and halted at the box-room window.

Bob Cherry threw up the sash, and a gust of cold air came in.

"Groo! It's perishing!" muttered Johnny Bull.

"Never mind," said Wharton. "If Hazel could face it, so can we. Come on!"

One by one the Famous Five clambered through, and emerged into the Close, where it was blowing great guns.

The juniors were well aware of the risk they were running.

If they encountered Mr. Quelch or one of the prefects, they would have no excuse to offer, for they could not give the wayward Hazeldene away. The five of them would be arraigned before the Head on a charge of breaking bounds, and "the sack," or a severe flogging, at least, would result.

But it was unlikely that anyone in authority would be on the prowl on a night like this, with the gale shrieking round the old roofs and chimneys.

"This way!" shouted Harry Wharton. He had to shout, or his voice would have been lost in the wind.

The Famous Five crossed the Close, clambered over the school wall, and were soon battling their way along the road leading to Pegg.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER. "Well Played, Wharton!"

JOVE, how it blows!"

"Talk about a giddy cyclone!" The Famous Five, with their raincoats swelling like balloons, and their caps nearly whisked from their heads, plunged along the dark road.

The whole countryside was locked in the grip of the November gale, which, however, was by no means the worst which had been known on that rocky coast. The Greyfriars district was so often storm-swept that the juniors were not unduly alarmed. But they could not help thinking with a thrill of the vessels which were out on the dark sea, being tossed hither and thither by the angry waves.

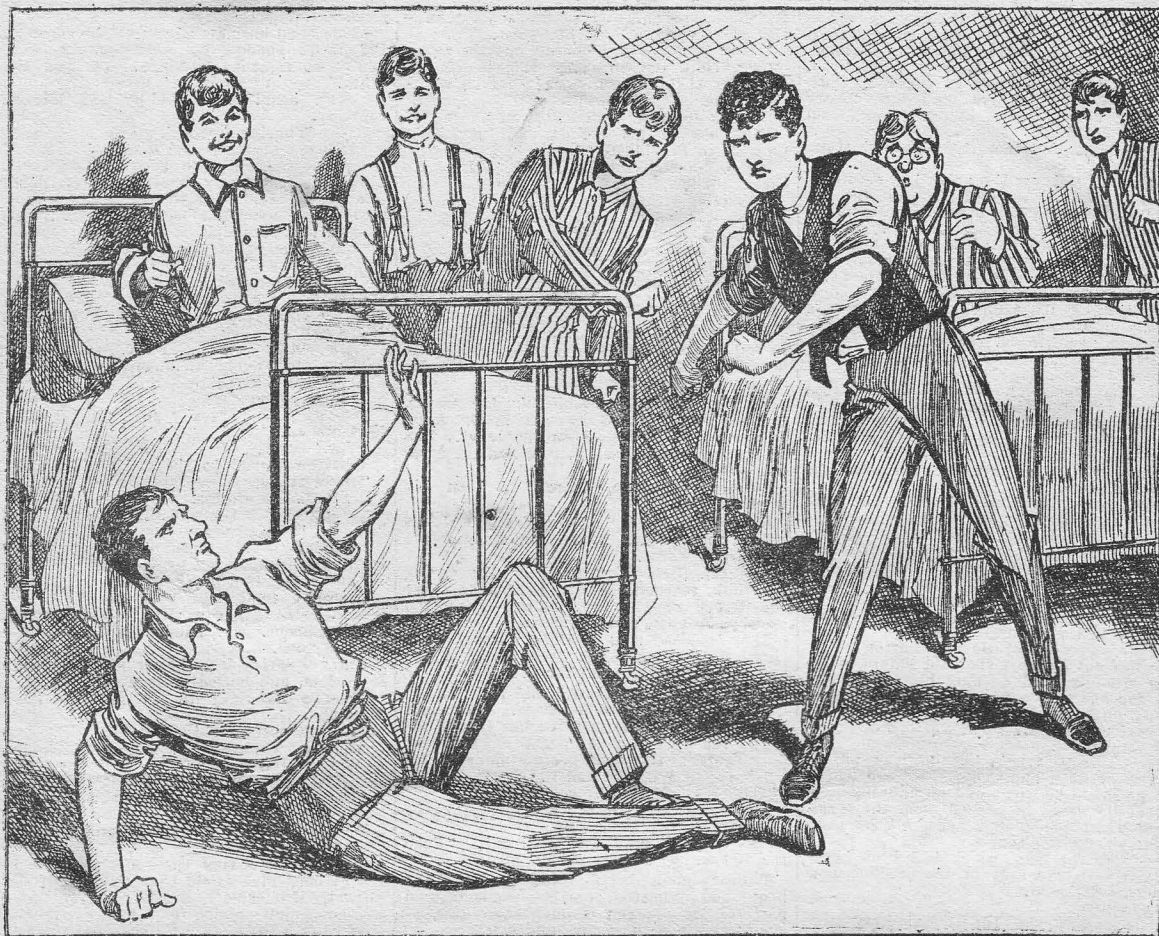
And in the midst of this storm the rascals of Highcliffe were holding high revel in the fisherman's hut at Pegg. And Hazeldene of the Remove was with them!

For Marjorie's sake—for the sake of the Remove—for the sake of all concerned, Hazeldene must be recovered from the clutches of that gang of youthful adventurers.

"It's all right for Ponsonby & Co. to be out all night," remarked Bob Cherry. "They know jolly well that nothing would happen to them if they were collared. Discipline at Highcliffe is very shaky. Of course, the Head would sack them if he knew what was going on, but he doesn't know. Mobby, the Form-master, hushes everything up."

Harry Wharton nodded.

"Mobb's believes in being on the side of the aristocracy," he said, with contempt.



As Bolsover reeled he received a terrific upper-out, which sent him crashing to the floor. The prostrate bully raised one hand to signify that he was whacked, and there were loud cheers for Wharton. (See page 7.)

"He wouldn't be above licking Pon's boots."
 "It's different in Hazeldene's case," said Frank Nugent. "There would be short shrift for him if the Head got to know about his little games. He'd be kicked out of Greyfriars. And think of the disgrace to Marjorie!"

Wharton set his teeth. He had been thinking of that all along.

"When we've dealt with Ponsonby & Co.," he said, taking a fresh grip on his cricket-stump, "we'll try and knock a little sense into Hazel. Anyway, we'll give him such a rough handling that he won't be in a hurry to meet Pon again!"

"Hear, hear!"
 "Quiet!" whispered Johnny Bull. "We're getting near the place."

"Rats!" said Bob Cherry. "It doesn't matter how much row we make in a storm like this. Even Bunter couldn't hear us—and he hears more things than any other fellow I know."

Dimly in the darkness the Famous Five could discern the outline of the fisherman's hut, which Ponsonby had converted into a snug retreat for his shady pastimes.

A subdued light—probably a candle—was visible at the window.

As the juniors approached the hut, however, this light was suddenly extinguished.

"My hat!" muttered Nugent. "They've seen us coming!"

"Looks like it!" said Wharton. "Come on! Let's run for it, or else they'll slip through our fingers!"

The juniors broke into a run. And as they went, they caught sight of a number of figures running towards the sea.

Ponsonby & Co. were running hard, as if pursued by demons. Possibly they were not aware of the identity of their pursuers. They might have supposed that they were being tracked down by agents of the headmaster of Highlife, in which case their capture would prove disastrous.

Whatever their thoughts and fears, they rushed straight for the shore, on which the great white breakers were tumbling and tossing themselves.

Presently Bob Cherry stopped short from sheer astonishment.

"My only aunt!" he exclaimed. "Look! They're trying to bunk in a boat!"

The other members of the Famous Five stopped, too, their eyes scanning the dark sea.

"You're right!" panted Harry Wharton. "They're putting out to sea! The mad fools! They'll be dashed to pieces!"

Wharton well knew that no boat—with the exception of the lifeboat—could live in such a sea.

Ponsonby & Co. had done some wild and reckless things in their time, but for sheer insanity this latest exploit on their part took some beating.

Why had they not tried to escape overland? Why had they given themselves up to the mercy of such a wild sea?

The juniors shivered a little as they stood there, straining their eyes into the darkness.

They had no love for Cecil Ponsonby and his cronies, and they had nothing but contempt for Peter Hazeldene, who was as wax in the hands of the unscrupulous Highliflians.

But the fellows who now manned that frail boat were fellow-beings, and they must be preserved from the consequences of their rash folly.

"Stop!" roared Harry Wharton, at the top of his lungs. "Come back!"

"Come back!" echoed the other members of the Famous Five.

But their voices were lost in the fury of the elements.

In an old and ill-equipped craft, which had been lying neglected on the foreshore, Ponsonby & Co. were risking their lives!

"They—they can't realise what they're doing!" muttered Johnny Bull, with chattering teeth. "They may think they're good sailors—but they'll capsize, as sure as fate!"

"The fools!" said Bob Cherry.

The juniors could distinguish the boat as it was flung to and fro by the devouring waves. It was not far out to sea, but at any moment a gust of wind, more violent than the others, might overturn it.

"We must help them!" exclaimed Harry Wharton.

"But—but how?"

"We must get a rope. Come on!"

Although the captaincy of the Remove was by no means a sure thing for him, Harry Wharton spoke with all his old authority. There was determination in his tone, and a demand to be obeyed. His companions followed him as he dashed towards the hut which Ponsonby & Co. had recently vacated.

Wharton struck a match, and the light glimmered on a coil of rope lying in the corner. Bob Cherry snatched it up, and the juniors returned to the shore.

They glanced out to sea with fast-beating hearts.

Yes, the boat was still there; but its occupants were helpless.

Faintly, amid the roar of the storm, came cries for help.

Harry Wharton turned quickly to Bob Cherry.

"The one end of the rope round my waist!" he said. "And the quicker you are the better. The lives of those fellows depend on it!"

Bob hesitated.

"What are you going to do, Harry?"

"Swim out to them, of course!"

"But—but it's madness!"

Harry Wharton clenched his hands impatiently.

"What do you think I wanted the rope for?" he snapped. "Buck up! It's our only chance of getting them in."

Bob Cherry still hesitated.

If the truth were known, Bob would rather that Ponsonby & Co. went to the bottom of

the sea than that he should lose perhaps the best chum he had ever known. A selfish thought, perhaps, but then the lives of Cecil Ponsonby and his confederates were worthless. Wharton's was not. If Ponsonby & Co. lived, they would bring nothing but discredit upon themselves and others, whereas Harry Wharton would always exercise a powerful influence for good.

"I—I don't half like the idea—" stammered Bob.

"Rats! You know I'm not a bad swimmer. I may not be able to save them all, but I'll do my best—and every minute's precious!"

Bob Cherry saw that his chum's mind was fully made up, and he hesitated no longer.

The end of the rope was securely fastened round Harry Wharton's waist, and while this was being done the junior divested himself of his boots. His raincoat and jacket were already in Hurree Singh's custody.

"Ready, you fellows?" he said.

There was a nodding of heads.

"Right! I'm going!"

And the plucky junior waded into that seething cauldron of waves.

"Good luck, Harry!"

It was Bob Cherry who spoke, and his voice faltered a little.

Slowly the rope gave out between the juniors' fingers.

"He's gone!" muttered Nugent, his voice tense with anxiety. "Heaven help him!"

"Look here, Franky!" said Bob Cherry. "Three of us can manage this rope. You cut off to the nearest fisherman's cottage, and get them to turn out the lifeboat!"

Nugent nodded. He released his hold of the rope, and the next moment he was swallowed up in the darkness.

Meanwhile, what of Harry Wharton?

He was out amongst the wild waves, swimming strongly, and ducking his head every now and again as a powerful ridge of waves loomed up before him.

Wharton's first sensation was one of agreeable surprise.

The sea was rough, but it was not so treacherous as it had looked. He had feared that he would be swallowed up and engulfed, or that he would be dashed upon the rocks. But it was possible, by keeping a wary look-out, to steer a safe course.

The cries for help, which had been borne so faintly to the ears of the juniors, now sounded quite near.

"Help, help!"

Again and again the frantic cry was repeated.

Wharton saw that he was close to the boat, which was indeed having a rough passage.

Somebody—it looked like Gadsby—was bailing out water with his cap. But there was more water coming into the boat than going out.

Wharton's practised eye told him that the frail vessel would last about another five minutes—possibly less. There would be no time to save the crew, but he would at least save one.

With this resolve, Wharton fought his way towards the boat.

Ponsonby & Co. saw him coming, and they proved their cowardice in the crisis. They flung out their hands, each one imploring Wharton to save him first.

For a moment Wharton clung to the side of the boat, somewhat fagged after his strenuous swim.

Ponsonby's hand clutched the junior's wrist.

"Quick—get me out of this!" he gasped.

Harry Wharton wrenched himself free.

If there was only time to save one, he reflected, he must save Hazel. For Marjorie's sake he must take this course. Marjorie had been a true chum to him; and, after all, Hazel was a Greyfriars fellow. His claims were stronger than those of his companions.

"Hazel!" shouted Wharton. "Jump overboard—quick! It's your only chance! I'll get you all right!"

The pale-faced Hazeldene did not relish the prospect of leaping into that angry sea. But he had the sense to see that it was his only chance.

For a brief second he hesitated, then he took the plunge.

In a moment Wharton's arms were around him, bearing him up.

Hazeldene nearly choked as the waves buffeted into his face.

"Keep your mouth shut, you ass!" muttered Wharton. "You'll need to save your breath."

Meanwhile, Ponsonby leaned forward in the boat, and screamed frantically to Wharton.

"Don't leave us like this! We shall capsize in a minute! Make that rope fast to the boat, and then we can be hauled in!"

But it would have been impossible for

Wharton—even had he not been supporting Hazeldene—to unfasten the rope which was tied so securely around his waist.

"Can't be done!" he shouted, and the words struck chill despair into the hearts of Ponsonby & Co. "But, look! There's something coming! It's the lifeboat!"

"Thank Heaven!" cried Ponsonby.

For once in his life he was genuinely grateful to Providence.

Harry Wharton held no further parley with the Highlife fellows.

Swimming strongly on his back, he piloted Hazeldene towards the shore.

Progress, however, was painfully slow.

"You'd better hang on to the rope, Hazel!" gasped Wharton, at length. "I'm whacked!"

But Hazeldene was incapable of hanging on to anything just then. He was unconscious.

It remained, therefore, for Harry Wharton to continue to support his burden—though he began to entertain serious doubts as to his ability to regain the shore.

His feet struck something in the water, and he realised that he was in imminent danger of being dashed on the rocks. But he promptly altered his course, and the crisis was averted.

In the meantime, there had been big developments.

Ponsonby's boat had capsized, and its human cargo had been pitched into the sweltering waves.

But the lifeboat, manned by the sturdy fisherfolk, reached the spot in time to effect the rescue of the four fellows—Ponsonby, Gadsby, Monson, and Vavasour.

The drenched and terrified Ponsonby insisted upon being rowed at once to safety; but the lifeboatmen hesitated.

"There were two others," said their leader. "We must hunt round for them. They can't possibly swim ashore in a sea like this!"

And the lifeboat rose up and down on the dark waters, the men peering intently for a glimpse of Wharton and Hazeldene.

And presently they found them.

Wharton's strength was far spent, but he was near to the shore now.

"Never mind me!" he called out. "Take this fellow. He's unconscious."

Willing hands lifted Hazeldene into the boat, and Wharton, partly swimming and partly being dragged through the water, at length regained the shore—and safety.

Four juniors seized him, and four voices rang out in great relief.

"Here he is!"

"Bravo, Harry!"

"Thank Heaven you're safe!"

"The thankfulness is terrific!"

Harry Wharton reeled into the arms of his chums.

Shortly afterwards the lifeboat landed without mishap.

Hazeldene was carried to the nearest fisherman's dwelling, and Ponsonby & Co. followed on foot.

The Famous Five, with Harry Wharton tottering in their midst, brought up the rear.

Thanks to the kindly ministrations of one of the fishermen's wives, the drenched juniors, including Hazeldene, quickly revived. They sat before the fire in blankets whilst their clothing was being dried.

"You will spend the night here, young gentlemen?" inquired the good-natured fisherman's wife.

"Thank you very much, ma'am!" said Harry Wharton, rather grimly. "But we must be getting back to our schools in an hour or so. We're not supposed to be out, you see."

"Won't you go back to bed, ma'am?" said Bob Cherry. "We can look after these fellows now."

The woman prepared some Bovril, and handed it round to the juniors who had suffered immersion in the sea; then she retired.

When she had gone, Hazeldene turned to Harry Wharton.

"I—I've been a cad!" he faltered.

"You have!" agreed Wharton bluntly.

"I wasn't worth the risk you ran in swimming out to save me!"

Wharton shrugged his shoulders.

"Perhaps I wasn't thinking solely of you," he said. "You behaved like a young black-guard, Hazel! You went straight for some time, I admit, but I thought it was too good to last. Why did you want to get mixed up with Ponsonby again?"

Hazel hung his head, and did not answer.

But Ponsonby turned from the fire, and glared at Wharton.

"This is no business of yours!" he snapped. "If Hazel chooses to be a pal of mine, you've no right to interfere! Keep off the grass!"

"Hear, hear!" said Gadsby and Monson together.

Harry Wharton frowned.

"It is my business—and it's the business of every decent fellow—to keep a weak-kneed idiot like Hazel away from a gang of sharks like yourselves!" he retorted.

Ponsonby muttered something under his breath, and turned back to the fire.

"Have you been gambling with these rotters, Hazel?" demanded Bob Cherry.

The question was superfluous.

Hazeldene was unable to meet Bob's honest gaze, and his very silence was an admission of his guilt.

"Are you in debt?" asked Wharton.

The wretched junior nodded dully.

"To what extent?"

"Three pounds."

"Phew! Has Ponsonby got you? I O U for that amount?"

"Yes."

Wharton turned to the cad of Highlife.

"Hand it over!" he said sharply.

Pon began to bluster.

"Well, of all the cheek!" he exclaimed. "Dashed if I see why—"

"Hand it over!" repeated Wharton. "Or we'll take it from you by force!"

"Yes, rather!" said Frank Nugent.

Ponsonby fumbled in the pocket of his jacket, which hung over a chair, and produced the document. He handed it to Wharton with a scowl.

Harry Wharton tore the scrap of paper into fragments, and hurled them on the fire.

"You've no right to do that!" flashed Ponsonby.

"I have every right to do it. I'm convinced that you've been cheating Hazel, just as you cheated Dennis Carr. If it was a just debt, I'd see that Hazel paid it; but it's nothing of the sort, and you know it! Now shut up!"

Wharton was in a royal rage, and Ponsonby had sufficient sense not to renew the argument. He knew that the other members of the Famous Five would back up their leader instantly if it came to a fight; and Ponsonby was not exactly pining for a fight just then.

"I want you to promise me, Hazel," said Harry Wharton, "that you'll chuck this game, once and for all."

"I promise!" said Hazeldene eagerly.

But, although he spoke with sincerity, the Famous Five knew only too well how much that promise was worth. The Ethiopian cannot readily change his skin, or the leopard his spots, and Peter Hazeldene would always be what Bob Cherry described as "a slippery customer." He had wanted watching in the past; he would need watching in the future.

Hazeldene had had a very bad scare that night. The vision of sudden death had loomed before him, and he was frightened and remorseful.

But when the effects of that eventful night had worn off, and things became normal again, it was only too probable that Hazel would drift once again into a career of folly. He was a youth who did not profit by experience.

Some time later Ponsonby & Co. got into their clothes, and so did Wharton and Hazeldene.

The garments were not quite dry, but it was decided to sprint back to the respective schools.

Harry Wharton left an envelope, with money enclosed, on the table for the juniors' benefactress. And then the Greyfriars and Highlife fellows vacated the fisherman's cottage, and went their several ways.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

The Dormitory Fight.

HERE on earth have you fellows been?"

Peter Todd sat up in his bed in the Remove dormitory and asked the question.

The Famous Five and Hazeldene had managed to get back to Greyfriars without mishap.

"It's nearly three o'clock!" went on Peter Todd, aghast. "Explain yourselves, you chumps!"

Simultaneously, half a dozen fellows awoke in different parts of the dormitory.

"You fellows been out on the razzle?" inquired Skinner.

"Rats!"
"Been chasing burglars?" asked Bolsover major.

"More rats!"
"Look here," said Squiff, lighting a candle, "this won't do! When six fellows roll in at three o'clock in the morning, I think we're entitled to an explanation."

Bob Cherry started on a thrilling recital of Wharton's heroism. Wharton didn't like that at all, and he trod none too gently on Bob's foot.

"Yow! What did you do that for, ass?"
"Don't shout the odds!" muttered Harry.

But Bob Cherry was not to be turned from his purpose. He felt very proud of Wharton that night, and he did not intend that the rescue of Hazeldene should go unhonoured and unsung, as it were.

Bob recounted in detail the exciting events of the night, and when he told how Harry Wharton went to what appeared to be certain death, there was a murmur of admiration from his listeners.

"Ripping!"
"Bravo, Wharton!"
"Jolly well played, old scout!"

There was only one dissentient voice. It was Bolsover major's.

"Of course, this was a put-up job," said Bolsover.

Bob Cherry flushed angrily.

"What do you mean, you cad?"
"I mean that Wharton did this gallant deed—or pretended he did it—simply to curry favour with Marjorie!"

Bolsover's cowardly assertion boomed through the dormitory.

"Why, you—you—!" spluttered Bob Cherry. "I'll slaughter you for saying that!"

And Bob took a sudden stride in the direction of Bolsover's bed.

Harry Wharton caught his chum by the arm, and swung him back.

"Leave him to me, Bob," he said quietly. "It's up to me to defend myself against that rotten insinuation."

"It's true!" blustered Bolsover.

Harry Wharton strode to the bedside of the bully of the Remove.

"Get out!" he said.

"What for?"
"I'm going to lick you!"

"Hark at him!" sneered Bolsover. "Talks like a hero in a penny dreadful, doesn't he?"

"Out you get!" said Wharton. "I'm going to make you eat your words!"

"If you can!" sneered Bolsover, slowly leaving himself out of bed. "When you find yourself lying on your back in five minutes' time, you'll be sorry you forced this fight on me!"

"We shall see," said Wharton grimly.

There was quite a commotion in the Remove dormitory as Bolsover major pulled on his trousers.

Dormitory fights were not novelties, but they always produced a big sensation.

Practically every fellow in the Remove was awake now. Even Billy Bunter, who usually required something in the nature of an earthquake to rouse him, was sitting up in bed.

"I'm your second, Bolsover!" said Skinner.

"And I'm yours, old man!" said Bob Cherry to Harry Wharton.

"I say," interposed Nugent, "do you think it's altogether wise to take him on, Harry? You've had about enough exertion for one night."

"My dear chap," said Wharton, "if I don't fight him, it will be as good as admitting that what he said was true."

"Hear, hear!" said Johnny Bull. "Nothing like having it out here and now. Pile in, you two!"

A space was cleared in the dormitory, and the two juniors, who had so often come to loggerheads in the past, confronted each other.

It was true that Wharton was tired, but he was not too tired to deal with a slanderer.

When Johnny Bull said "Pile in!" the two combatants obeyed. There was no referee, no master of ceremonies. But such an official was not necessary. The dormitory at large could be relied upon to see fair-play.

Bolsover major had the strength of a bullock, and it was no joke to collide with his fists, which had often been likened to battering-rams.

Perhaps Harry Wharton was less cool than usual. Anyway, he failed to guard Bolsover's first blow—a swinging right-hand—and he went to the floor with a crash.

"Hurrah!" chortled Skinner. "That's the stuff to give 'em!"

Bolsover was so convinced that he had delivered a knock-out blow that he was about to go back to bed. A cry of alarm caused him to spin round, and he saw, to his astonishment, that Wharton was on his feet again.

"So you want some more, do you?" growled Bolsover. "Here goes, then!"

And he hurled himself at his opponent like an angry bull.

"Squash him, Bolsover, old man!" piped Billy Bunter. "Then he won't have an earthly chance of bagging the captaincy. I shall win it instead!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Harry Wharton threw himself on the defensive. He saw that his chance would come later, when Bolsover began to tire.

The fight was not divided into rounds, and it went on unchecked for ten minutes, which was a pretty good spell, considering that it was being fought with bare fists.

At the end of that time the tide of battle began to turn in Harry Wharton's favour.

It had been all Bolsover before, and even cheery optimists like Bob Cherry had begun to wonder if Wharton could stave off defeat. They now saw that he could, and that he was capable of scoring a handsome victory into the bargain.

Bolsover had bellows to mend now, and he was very slow and cumbersome in his attacks.

"Put your beef into it, old man!" urged Skinner.

"Pulverise him!" said Stott.

"Easier said than done!" snarled Bolsover, as he warded off a couple of hurricane blows from his opponent.

Harry Wharton was doing all the attacking now, and his chums cheered him to the echo.

"Good old Harry!"

"Polish him off!"

"Impart the esteemed knock-out, my worthy chum!"

Everyone saw that a great deal depended on the result of the fight.

If Harry Wharton defeated the bully of the Remove, he would increase his claims to the captaincy.

If, on the other hand, the honours went to Bolsover major, Harry Wharton would lose a good deal of prestige.

Hammer-and-tongs, in the dim candle-light, the juniors fought and swayed. Their breath came in great gasps; their faces were hot and perspiring.

Harry Wharton was on top, but Bolsover refused to take the knock-out. He received several blows which would have felled a less sturdy fellow, but he stuck to his guns, and it really looked as if Wharton would have to abandon the task as hopeless.

"When are they going to finish it off?" asked Peter Todd plaintively. "Rising-bell will go in a minute!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Harry won't be long!" said Bob Cherry confidently.

Even as he spoke, Wharton sailed in, and drove his clenched fist full into Bolsover's rugged face.

It was a terrible blow, but there was more to come.

As Bolsover reeled, he received a terrific upper-cut, which sent him crashing to the floor.

The prostrate bully raised one hand to signify that he was whacked. And there were loud cheers for Wharton.

"Not so much row, you duffers!" panted Harry. "You'll have Quelch here in a jiffy!"

"Bless Quelch!" said Bob Cherry. "You've licked Bolsover, and that's all that matters. Hurrah!"

"Hurrah!" echoed the remainder of Wharton's supporters.

After an interval, during which Bob Cherry sponged his chum's heated face, Bolsover lurched to his feet. He stood for a moment in uncertainty, and then crossed over to his conqueror.

"I'm a cad for saying what I did," he said. "Goodness knows what made me say it. Pure caddishness, I suppose. Anyway, I take it back, and I hope you'll shake hands."

Which proved that Percy Bolsover, although a rough diamond, was not a bad fellow at heart.

Harry Wharton took the proffered hand, and gripped it hard.

"We'll say no more about it," he said.

Bolsover major crawled back into bed to nurse his injuries; and the Famous Five and Hazeldene, utterly exhausted, undressed and followed suit.

"Here endeth the entertainment!" said Bob Cherry, as he drew the bedclothes about his curly head. "Well, it's been a night of excitement, and no mistake!"

"I don't think I ever remember its equal!" said Harry Wharton.

And his chums agreed with him.

Mr. Quelch found his class afflicted with drowsiness next morning. Bob Cherry dropped into a doze several times in the course of morning lessons, and even after he had been roused with the Form-master's pointer he declined to sit up and take notice.

Harry Wharton, too, dropped from his place at the top of the class, and was ordered to write out "I must not yawn" a hundred times.

Frank Nugent, Johnny Bull, and Hurree Singh did not escape Mr. Quelch's eagle eye, and the Remove-master quipped on each of them in turn.

Hazeldene was also the richer by five hundred lines before morning school drew to a welcome close.

Mr. Quelch did not ask too many questions concerning this unusual state of drowsiness in his class, which was perhaps a good thing. Certainly the Remove-master would not have approved had he known that six of his pupils had broken bounds in the middle of the night.

Study No. 1 had a visitor that afternoon in the person of Marjorie Hazeldene.

The irrepressible Bob Cherry acquainted Marjorie with all that had taken place, and the girl's gratitude was expressed in glowing terms to Harry Wharton.

"I'm ever so thankful to know that it has all ended like this!" said Marjorie. "If you had been drowned, Harry—if you had given your life for my brother—I should have reproached myself all my life. It was wrong and thoughtless of me to insist that you should get him out of his scrape—"

"Rats!" said Wharton cheerfully. "All's well that ends well, anyway. Pass Marjorie the muffins, Bob!"

The tea-party in Study No. 1 was a great success, and the Famous Five escorted their girl-chum back to Cliff House under the early November stars.

Harry Wharton was feeling very bucked with life, and his happiness increased during the next few days, for under his temporary rule the Remove went from strength to strength.

All the football fixtures were won, and jaspers from rival Forms were successfully thwarted.

The captaincy is yours for a cert!" said Bob Cherry. "I can't think how any fellow can vote against you. You've had a wonderful week!"

"Hear, hear!" said Nugent. "Talk about Smithy and Toddy and Dick Russell—why, you've knocked the three of them into a cocked hat!"

"The election comes off next week," said Johnny Bull, "and then we'll have you back permanently as skipper of the Remove."

"Yes, rather!"

It certainly seemed that a miracle would have to happen to prevent Harry Wharton from regaining the captaincy.

But miracles sometimes do happen—or very remarkable occurrences, at any rate.

And within the next twenty-four hours the Greyfriars Remove was destined to experience one.

THE END.

(Another long complete story of Harry Wharton & Co. next week.)

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OWEN CONQUEST.

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

Jimmy Silver's Services Are in Request.

SNOOKS of the Second put his shock head into the end study, and bawled:

"Jimmy Silver!"

Jimmy Silver frowned majestically. It was a decided infraction of the dignity of the captain of the Fourth to have his name bawled at him in that unceremonious manner by a scrubby little fag of the Second Form.

But Snooks seemed quite unabashed.

"Is that ass Silver here?" he continued. "Oh, here you are!"

"Cut off, you cheeky little ruffian!" exclaimed Lovell, turning a ruddy face from the fire, where he was making toffee.

Snooks gave a sniff. It was true that the toffee was scorching a little, and some of it had run over into the fire, but there was no occasion whatever for Snooks' emphatic sniff.

"Oh, I'll cut off fast enough!" said Snooks. "What is it you are cremating, Lovell?"

Lovell did not reply. He let go the frying-pan, and picked up a ruler. Snooks executed a strategic retreat into the passage.

"Dickinson of the Sixth wants Jimmy Silver!" he called back. "You'd better buck up, Jimmy Silver. Dickinson is looking waxy. Mind, I'm not calling you again. I've got no time to waste over Fourth Form fags!"

And the cheeky Snooks sprinted down the passage just in time to escape slaughter.

"What the dickens does Dickinson want?" growled Jimmy Silver. "Just when I'm doing the leading article for the 'Journal,' too! Just like these prefects! Blessed if I go!"

"Licked if you don't!" remarked Raby.

Jimmy Silver growled again.

"You go, Newcome," he suggested. "I dare say Dickinson wants the chap who put the ink in his slippers. You can say it wasn't you. I can't say it wasn't me!"

"He might think it was me!" grinned Newcome. "Dickinson is rather hasty sometimes."

Jimmy grunted.

Upon the whole, he decided to go. A prefect of the Sixth did not like being kept waiting by a junior; and if it was that unfortunate matter of the ink in the slippers, there was no use in putting it off. So Jimmy Silver made his way to

THE PENNY POPULAR.—No. 45.



Dickinson minor stuck the candle on his washstand, and returned to bed—but not to sleep. Resting on his elbow, he started reading his lurid literature by the dim and flickering light of the candle. (See page 12.)

the Sixth Form passage, and tapped meekly at Dickinson's door.

"Come in!" growled a voice within.

That voice did not sound encouraging. Jimmy Silver entered, and warily kept near the door.

Dickinson was seated at his table, with a letter in his hand and a frown on his face. Dickinson of the Sixth was a perfect, a tower of strength in the First Eleven, and a great chum of Bulkeley, the captain of the school. He was generally popular with the juniors; but he did not look agreeable now, and Jimmy Silver was on his guard.

"I—I say, I've come, Dickinson," said Jimmy meekly. "I—I say, if you'll let me explain—"

"Eh?" said Dickinson, staring at him.

"I mean, I know what you want me for."

"You do!" exclaimed the senior, in surprise.

"Ye-es; and it was all a mistake."

"Eh?"

"You see, it was dark, and I came into this study in mistake for Merton's," Jimmy Silver explained. "I really meant the ink for Merton's slippers!"

Dickinson's face became terrific in its expression. He reached out his hand for a cane.

"So it was you who put the ink in my slippers, you young rascal!"

"Oh, seissors! I—I thought you knew?" stammered Jimmy. "Wha-at do you want me for, then?"

Dickinson of the Sixth rose to his feet, and swished the cane. Then, to

Jimmy's astonishment, instead of commanding him to hold out his hand, the prefect sat down again abruptly, and laid down the cane.

"Never mind!" he said.

"Thanks awfully!" said Jimmy gratefully. "You see, it was all a mistake. I meant it for Merton, and I only knew too late—"

"Let me catch you putting ink in Merton's slippers!" growled the prefect. "Shut up! I didn't send for you to hear you talk. I've got something to say to you. Lemme see, you're head of the Fourth, ain't you?"

"I'm captain of the Fourth," said Jimmy Silver, with dignity.

"Oh, you have a captain in the Fourth, do you?"

"We do," said Jimmy, in his most chilling tone.

Really, it was absurd for Dickinson to be unaware that the Fourth Form at Rookwood elected a Form captain with the most impressive rites and ceremonies.

"Well, all the better, perhaps," said Dickinson, after some thought. "I suppose you have a lot of influence among those young rascals—what?"

"Lots."

"Well, my minor's coming to Rookwood."

"Oh!" said Jimmy.

"He's coming on the Classical side, and he will be in the Fourth Form."

"Will he?" said Jimmy.

Jimmy Silver was not in the slightest degree interested in Dickinson minor.

He wondered why on earth the senior was telling him about it. To the captain of the Fourth a new kid more or less was a trifle light as air.

"That's why I've sent for you," said Dickinson. "Now, I've been rather decent to you, Silver. I haven't licked you half as often as you've deserved. You know that."

Jimmy Silver coughed in a noncommittal way. He was not disposed to admit it, but arguing with a prefect was a perilous business, so he coughed.

"My minor, Sidney, is rather a young ass in some respects," went on Dickinson.

"Is he?"

Jimmy Silver's tone did not indicate surprise.

"He's not much like me."

"No? I thought you said—"

"I did not send for you to be funny, Silver!"

"Ahem!"

"The young ass has been a bother at home, and most likely he'll be a bother here," continued Dickinson. "Of course, I shall look after him a bit—lick him every now and then, and all that. But I sha'n't have much time to waste on him. I should like you to look after him a bit."

"Oh!" said Jimmy Silver.

It was very flattering; but Jimmy Silver had already gathered that Dickinson minor was some sort of a queer animal, and, though flattered, he was not exactly pleased.

"What's the matter with him?" he asked.

"Nothing. Only a bit queer."

"Dotty?" asked Jimmy.

"No!" roared Dickinson ferociously.

"Oh, all right! But a chap wants to know what he's taking on," said Jimmy.

The senior was silent for some moments.

"I'd better tell you out," he said. "The fact is, the kid has been allowed to run a bit wild at home. He's got a taste for rotten books—that fat-headed rubbish that is exported from America in lurid covers—things about Dead-shot Bill and Deadwood Dave and Blood-bedabbled Jack, and the rest of it. The silly little idiot has devoured that rot till his silly head's full of it, and he thinks and dreams about coal-black chargers, and masked highwaymen, and so on. He talks in a queer, high-faluting way, and his present ambition is to become a pirate!"

"Oh, my hat!"

Jimmy Silver whistled. He had met and known all sorts and conditions of fellows, but he had never happened upon exactly that kind of fellow before.

He did not wonder that Dickinson of the Sixth was worried about the forthcoming advent of his minor at Rookwood.

If Dickinson minor was as his major described him, it was certain that he would be most mercilessly chipped in the Fourth Form.

"The pater thinks Rookwood will do him good, and help to make him a bit more sensible," the prefect continued. "I've no doubt it will in the long run. But I don't want the kid ragged to death to begin with, and I can't always be jawing him myself. I was thinking that, considering the number of times I've let you off lickings you've fairly asked for, you might take the kid in hand for a bit at first, and—and talk sensibly to him, you know—put him into the junior football, and so on, and help him generally. And don't let him become the butt of the Form if you can help it."

Jimmy Silver nodded. It was a peculiarity of Jimmy Silver that he was always ready to help a lame dog over

a stile. Any fellow who was down was sure of a helping hand from Jimmy; and it was evident that Dickinson minor, when he made his appearance in the Fourth Form at Rookwood, would be badly in want of a helping hand.

Apart from the question of the many lickings which, according to the prefect, Jimmy Silver had asked for and never received, he was quite willing to oblige.

Dickinson was watching him rather anxiously.

He felt himself in a difficulty, in which a good-natured and level-headed junior in the Fourth could help him more than anybody else. And he had judged Jimmy Silver's character correctly.

"I'm your man!" said Jimmy cheerily. "Leave him to me! I'll talk to him like a Dutch uncle! Only one condition."

"Well?"

"Don't plant him on us in the end study. We've four already. Anything short of that."

Dickinson grinned.

"I'll see that he's not planted in your study," he said.

"Then it's a go."

"He gets here to-morrow at three. You might like to meet him at the station?" the prefect suggested.

Jimmy Silver made a slightly wry face. His afternoon's holiday was already arranged for. But he nodded.

"Right you are, Dickinson!"

"Then that's all," said the Sixth-Former. "You can cut off."

Jimmy Silver cut off.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

Just Like Jimmy!

"ROT!"

"Bosh!"

"Tosh!"

Thus the Co.

Lovell and Raby and Newcome were not enthusiastic when Jimmy Silver, on his return to the end study, announced what it was that Dickinson of the Sixth wanted.

"It's simply piffle!" growled Lovell. "Blow Dickinson, and blow his precious minor! You're an ass, Jimmy!"

"And a fathead!" remarked Newcome.

"And a burbling duffer!" added Raby.

"He's always doing it!" went on Lovell, in an aggrieved voice. "Find any chap that's queer, or off his rocker, or down on his luck, and you find Jimmy Silver backing him up! He's always doing it! I'm fed-up with it!"

"Well, Dickinson asked me," said Jimmy defensively.

"Couldn't you say no?"

"Well, I never thought of saying no," admitted Jimmy. "Besides, I didn't want to say no. Why shouldn't I help a lame dog over a stile?"

"Tain't a lame dog—it's a silly idiot, by your description! This study will get called a home for idiots!"

"Well, that's what it was before I came!" said Jimmy Silver cheerfully.

"Why, you fathead—"

"Dickinson is a good sort, and it ain't bad policy to be on the right side of a prefect, either," said Jimmy Silver. "Dash it all, let's look after his young idiot of a minor a bit!"

"Blow this young idiot of a minor!" growled Lovell. "What about the footer to-morrow afternoon? Have you forgotten that?"

"Well, that's rather hard cheese, I admit," said Jimmy. "I won't ask you fellows to cut it to come with me—"

"Better not!" grunted Raby.

"You can captain the Classical team, Lovell. After all you can beat the Moderns without me for once."

Lovell looked a little mollified.

"Well, that's all right," he said. "But we want you in the front line. Tommy Dodd & Co. are in great form. But I know it's no good talking to you. Br-r-r-r-r!"

So the discussion ceased, and the Fifical Four had tea.

As a matter of fact, Jimmy Silver was not looking forward with any great joy to the arrival of Dickinson's peculiar minor. But he had said that he would look after the young duffer, and he was going to do it.

But on the following afternoon it came as a wrench to the captain of the Fourth to turn his back on the football-field for the sake of Dickinson minor.

There was a junior match between Classicals and Moderns, and Jimmy Silver ought to have been in command of the Classical team.

He went down to the ground with his comrades, and watched the teams line up for the game.

Lovell won the toss, and kicked off, and Jimmy Silver looked at his watch, and then looked on anxiously.

Tommy Dodd & Co.—the Moderns—were attacking hotly.

There was no doubt that the Modern juniors were in great form, and that the Classicals needed their strongest side to oppose them.

Jimmy Silver silently blessed Dickinson minor.

The Moderns attacked hotly, and within ten minutes Tommy Dodd had put the ball in the net, in spite of Raby's efforts to save.

"Looks like a Modern win, dear boys," drawled Smythe of the Shell, who had sauntered down with Howard and Tracy to look on with a patronising eye. "That's what these Fourth-Form kids call football! By gad!"

"Classical footer ain't much since we stood out of it," remarked Howard, with a shake of the head.

Jimmy Silver manfully resisted the desire to knock Howard and Smythe's heads together, and walked away to the gates. He was badly wanted in the Classical team, but it couldn't be helped.

He reached Coombe well before three, and entered the railway-station to wait on the platform for Dickinson minor.

The train was signalled, and a few minutes later it came in. It was a slow local train from Lantham. It crawled in, and stopped, and several passengers alighted. Jimmy scanned them, but it was evident that the new boy for Rookwood was not among them. He glanced into the carriages, thinking that perhaps the new kid had not observed the name of the station.

In a corner of a first-class carriage a lad of about his own age was seated.

He was dressed in Etons, with a silk hat pushed on his head, and he was reading.

Devouring was rather the word.

His eyes were glued upon the book in his hand—a book with a cover in lurid colours, upon which was depicted a long-haired trapper with a revolver in each hand, killing Red Indians at a great rate. Evidently the youth had forgotten time and space in his keen interest in the gory adventures of "Trapper Bill, the Dead-shot Desperado of the Rocky Mountains!"

"Hallo!" Jimmy Silver shouted into the carriage.

The youth did not heed.

Jimmy jerked at the book. Then the youth started, and blinked at him.

"Are you the new kid for Rookwood?" demanded Jimmy.

"Eh—what? Yes."

"Then here's your station."

"Oh, all right!"

The new boy scrambled out of the car-

riage only just in time. The train was already on the move. The guard shoved him aside wrathfully and slammed the carriage door.

"Hold on!" yelled Dickinson minor excitedly. "I've left my books in the carriage! Guard! Guard!"

"Come back, you ass!" yelled Jimmy Silver, grabbing the new boy by the shoulder as he jumped towards the carriage. "Do you want to be killed?"

"My books—"
"Keep off, ass!"

Jimmy Silver held the new junior back by main force. The train glided on along the metals, and disappeared down the line. Dickinson minor gave a sort of howl, like an animal robbed of its young, and glared at Jimmy Silver.

"You fathead!" he exclaimed wrathfully.

"Ass!"

"You dummy—"

"Do you want a thick ear, you new bouncer?" exclaimed Jimmy Silver wrathfully. "If I hadn't yanked you out, you'd have gone on to the next station!"

"Now I've lost my books!" howled Dickinson minor.

"Plenty more at Rookwood!" said Jimmy. "Seize you right, too! Besides, you can get the books back. Nobody wants to steal a set of school books, I suppose?"

"School books!" Dickinson minor morted. "Who's talking about school books? They weren't school books!"

"Oh!" said Jimmy. "More stuff like that you've got in your paw—what?"

"Yes," said the new junior mournfully. "A rippin' set! There was Dead-shot Dave, the Dashing Desperado of Dead Man's Gulch!" and 'Sweeney Todd, the Bloodcurdling Barber!' and 'Pink Pirate—'"

"Oh, my hat!"

"And 'Bloodstained Bill; or Barrels of Blood!" said Dickinson minor. "That was a real topper!"

"It must have been," agreed Jimmy Silver. "You're jolly lucky to have lost them, I should say! You'd get into a row if you were seen reading them at Rookwood."

"Well, I've got some more in my box," said Dickinson minor, taking comfort. "I'll lend you some, if you like."

"I'll lend you a thick ear if you do," growled Jimmy Silver. "Look here! I've come here to meet you, and take you to the school. Come and look after your box."

"Oh, all right!"

Dickinson minor shoved his lurid volume into his pocket, and followed Jimmy Silver. The trunk was taken out by the old porter, and instructions given for sending it on to the school, and then Jimmy Silver walked off his new acquaintance towards Rookwood.

THE THIRD CHAPTER. A Very Peculiar New Boy.

DICKINSON minor had not impressed the captain of the Fourth very favourably.

He was a weedy youth, with a pallid complexion, and his appearance showed that he was not much given to healthy outdoor exercise.

However, Jimmy Silver intended to make the best of him, so he talked to him as cheerily as possible on the way to Rookwood.

He tried the new junior on every subject interesting to himself, but found him wanting in all of them.

Dickinson minor did not play football, and did not want to. He had hardly ever played cricket, and didn't care for it. He

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did not swim, he did not row, he did not box. Indeed, Jimmy couldn't see what excuse he had for being alive at all.

Talk on those subjects quickly palled upon Dickinson minor. His book came out of his pocket, and he began to read it as he walked along the lane.

Jimmy Silver whistled.

Deep in the engrossing adventures of Trapper Bill, Dickinson minor forgot his companion. He slowed down, his eyes glued on the book. Once Jimmy had to jerk him out of the way of a market-cart.

"What's that piffle you're reading?" asked Jimmy, at last.

"Eh?"

"What's that rot about?"

"It isn't rot," said Dickinson minor, his eyes gleaming. "It's gorgeous! Just listen to this bit—I'll read it out—"

Jimmy Silver listened.

"Trapper Bill stood with his back to the wall, a revolver gleaming in each hand. Dead Redskins lay in heaps before him. The revolvers spurted forth fire and death, amid shrieks of horror, and rage, and agony, and fury. Blood was drenching the floor of the ranch. The wounded Redskins rolled and writhed at the bloodstained feet of the intrepid trapper. Blood gushed forth from gaping wounds. Huge and ghastly splashes of blood—"

"Chuck it!" roared Jimmy Silver.

"Isn't that ripping?"

"Groogh!"

"What's the matter with you?"

"It makes me feel sick."

"Well, you are a duffer!" said Dickinson minor disdainfully. "That's splendid! When I grow up, I'm going to be a trapper in the Rocky Mountains."

"The dickens you are!" said Jimmy.

"Or else a pirate."

"I thought pirates were out of date." "A bold, daring spirit might revive the glories of the black flag. Perhaps some day Dead-shot Dickinson will sweep the seas—"

"Dead-shot Dickinson!" shrieked Jimmy Silver.

"Yes, rather! You see how I'll make 'em walk the plank, when I'm known as the Terror of the Pacific!"

"Oh, my hat!"

"I don't see why I should stay at school, either. Black Flag Billy became a pirate when he was fourteen," said Dickinson minor. "I'm nearly fifteen."

"Quite old enough to be a pirate," grimmed Jimmy Silver.

"Why should not I lead them on—fire flashing in my red right hand?" demanded Dickinson.

"Ha, ha, ha! Lead who on?"

"My trusty band, of course!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Jimmy Silver was near the verge of hysterics. To think of this weedy, pallid duffer with a red right hand, and a trusty band, was excruciating. Dickinson minor blinked at him, and scowled, and returned to his book.

Jimmy Silver whistled. Dickinson major's description of his minor had fallen short of the reality. That any fellow could be such an arrant ass seemed almost incredible. Jimmy really wondered whether the boy was a little wrong in his head.

"Look here! Buck up a bit!" said Jimmy restively. "I want to see the finish of the footer-match. No good crawling like this!"

"You buzz off, then!" said Dickinson.

"You'd better come with me. You can read that rot afterwards."

"Rats!"

"Jolly good mind to run you along by your neck!" growled Jimmy.

"Unhand me!"

"Eh?"

"Unhand me!" repeated Dickinson.

"Oh, my hat!"

Jimmy Silver unhanded him. Dickinson minor's language savoured of the thrilling yarns in which he delighted.

"My only Uncle Peter!" ejaculated Jimmy Silver. "If you talk like that at Rookwood, Dickinson, you'll be chipped to death."

"Bah!"

"Well, keep straight on, and you can't miss the school gates," said Jimmy. "There's Rookwood straight ahead of you!"

"All right! Don't jaw!"

Jimmy Silver had meant to be patient.

But crawling along the lane while Dickinson perused "Trapper Bill," at a snail's pace, required more patience than Jimmy possessed. He cut off, leaving the new junior to come on at his own sweet will. He reached the school, and hurried down to Little Side in time to see the finish of the junior match.

The Classics came off the field at last with glum faces, beaten by two goals to one. Tommy Dodd & Co. were chirping gleefully. The Modern leader clapped Jimmy Silver genially on the shoulder.

"Licked again!" he remarked. "Pity you weren't in the game, Silver. We'd have had a different result."

"You would!" growled Jimmy.

"I mean, we'd have had three to nil, instead of two to one," said Tommy Dodd sweetly.

"Fathead!"

Jimmy Silver joined his chums.

"Well, we've lost," grunted Lovell. "Have you brought in your prize idiot safe and sound? It doesn't matter about the footer, of course."

"Can't be helped," said Jimmy Silver.

"Keep smiling!"

"Oh, rats!"

And the Fistical Four went in to tea.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER. Brought In.

JIMMY SILVER & CO. were finishing tea in the end study, when Dickinson of the Sixth looked in. Jimmy gave a rather guilty start. He had forgotten all about Dickinson minor.

"Hallo, Dickinson!" he said affably.

"Come in! Try these jam-tarts—"

The prefect grunted.

"Where's my minor?" he asked.

"I—I—I met him at the station, and brought him along," said Jimmy.

"Well, where is he, then? He hasn't reported himself to Mr. Bootles."

"Ahem! I came on a bit ahead," said Jimmy. "But he was in sight of the gates when I left him. He can't have missed the place."

"Well, he hasn't come in," grunted the Sixth-Former. "I suppose it serves me right for trusting a fag to do anything."

"Oh, draw it mild!" said Jimmy, jumping up. "I'm sorry. I'll go and look for him now, Dickinson."

"You needn't trouble!" growled Dickinson.

He strode away, evidently offended. Jimmy Silver picked up his cap.

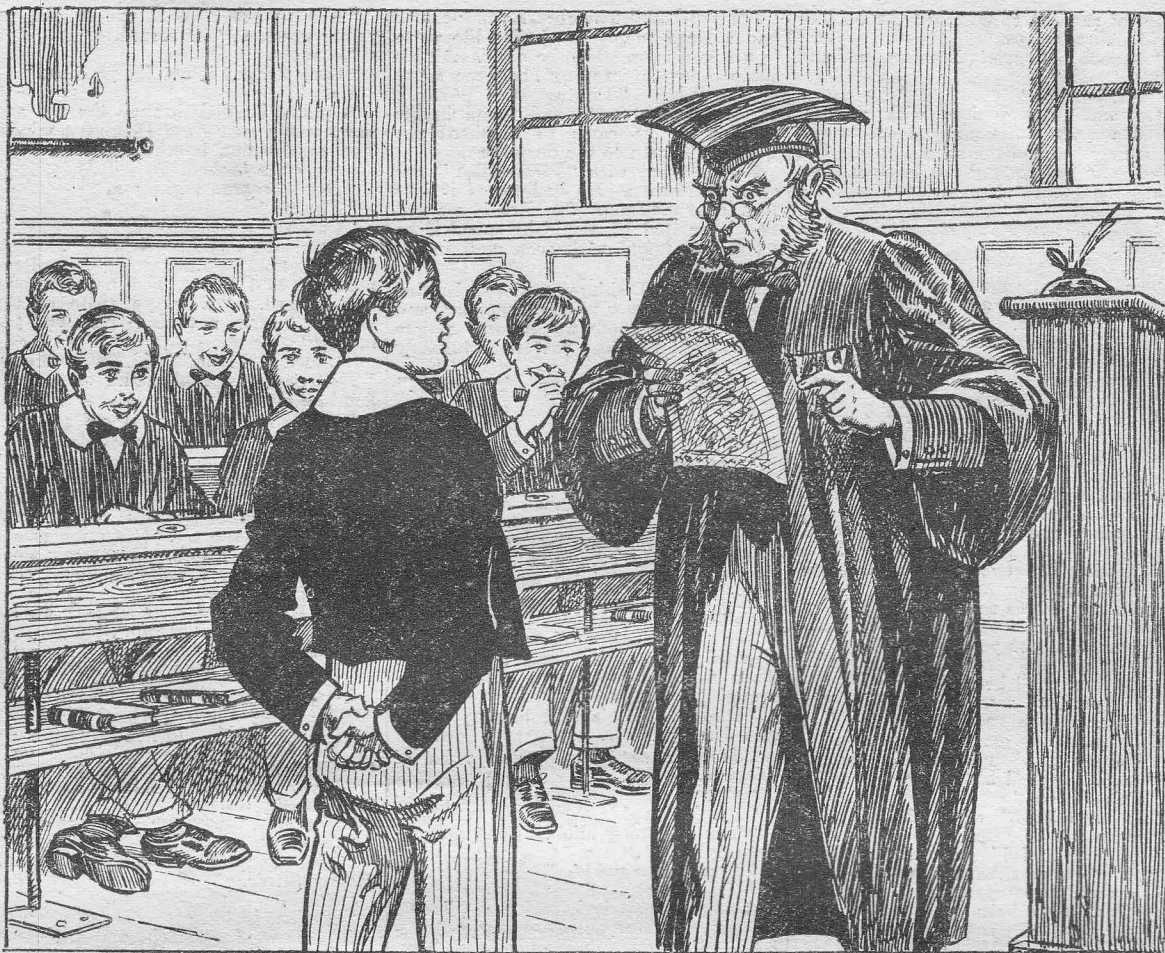
"You haven't finished your tea," said Lovell.

"I'm going to look for that silly idiot," said Jimmy. "He was reading a blood-curdling book, and I'll bet a doughnut that he's passed the gates without noticing. He may be at Rookdale by this time."

"Oh, my hat!"

"We'll come!" said Raby.

"Buck up, then! I didn't mean to leave the born idiot in the lurch," said



Mr. Bootles took the gory volume from Dickinson minor's hand, and looked at it, with thunderous brows. The Classical Fourth looked on, waiting for the storm to burst. "Bless my soul!" ejaculated Mr. Bootles. "Dickinson, I am surprised at you! I am shocked! I am disgusted!" (See page 13.)

Jimmy Silver repentantly. "But how was a chap to know he was such an idiot?"

The Fistical Four left their unfinished tea—Lovell growling—and went out into the quad, where the dusk was falling. The gates were not yet closed, however, and the chums of the Fourth hurried out into the road to look for Dickinson minor. It was an hour since Jimmy Silver had left him, and ten minutes would have been enough for him to reach the school. The only explanation was that, immersed in the thrilling adventures of Trapper Bill, he had passed the school and gone on.

The Co. hurried down the road towards Rookdale.

A quarter of a mile from the school they came upon the new junior. He was still walking slowly on, his head bent over his book, straining his eyes in the dusk to see the print.

"There's the balmy duffer!" growled Jimmy Silver.

He ran on, and woke up Dickinson minor with a thump on the shoulder.

The new junior gave a yell, and dropped his book, and spun round, his eyes blazing.

"Aha! Stand back!" he yelled. "Stand back, caitiff, or with my trusty blade— Oh! Ah! Ha! Oh!"

"Well, of all the silly idiots!" ejaculated Lovell in astonishment.

"You—you startled me," mumbled Dickinson. "I thought it was Red-handed Dick, the Terror of the Prairies,

for a moment! I was just at the place where he's creeping into Trapper Bill's tent, knife in hand."

"You thumping ass!" shouted Raby.

"Look here—"

"Come along," said Jimmy Silver.

"Your major's waiting for you, and he's ratty. Get a move on!"

"Have I passed the school?" asked Dickinson, looking round vaguely.

"Yes, a quarter of a mile, fathead!"

"Have I, by blazes?"

"By what?" yelled Newcome.

"Blazes!" said Dickinson.

"Is that the kind of language you've learned at home?" asked Lovell. "It won't do for Rookwood."

"Trapper Bill always says blazes."

"It may do for Trapper Bill, but it won't do for the Fourth Form at Rookwood. And if you say it again I'll dot you on the nose!" said Lovell wrathfully.

"Oh, you're a tenderfoot!" said Dickinson contemptuously.

"A—a what?"

"A greenhorn!"

"What on earth language is he speaking?" said Lovell, in wonder.

Jimmy Silver chuckled.

"That's the American language as printed in books for budding youth," he said. "Dickinson, you ass, you'll be the guy of the Form if you jaw like that!"

"Bah!"

"Don't baa at me like a silly sheep!"

"I didn't say baa—I said bah!" growled Dickinson. "The Black Pirate

always says 'Bah!' and grinds his teeth."

"Never mind the Black Pirate now. Get a move on!"

"I'm not going to hurry. I'm reading."

"Chuck reading for a bit. The gates will be locked in a few minutes."

"Bah!"

With that scornful "Bah!" Dickinson resumed his volume. The Fistical Four glanced at one another.

It was evidently a time for action, not for words.

Jimmy Silver seized the new junior by the right arm, and Lovell took the left. Raby jerked his book away, and tossed it over the hedge. Newcome helped him from behind with a goal-kick.

"Yaroooh!" roared Dickinson.

"Kim on!"

"My book—"

"Kim on!" roared Jimmy Silver.

"Unhand me!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Jimmy Silver & Co. did not "unhand" the new fellow. They rushed him along the dusky lane at top speed. Dickinson had no choice about going. He had to run, with an iron grasp fastened upon both his arms.

"Grooogh!" he gasped. "Yow! Leggo! I'm out of breath! I kik-kik-can't keep it up! Leggo!"

"My dear chap," grinned Jimmy Silver, "if you're going to be a pirate you'll have to learn to run. You'll have

a lot of running to do when the bobbies are looking for you."

"Groooh! Leggo! I mean, unhand me!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

On went the juniors with a rush. Dickinson was quite pumped out by the time they reached the school gates. Old Mack was just coming out to close them when the Fistical Four arrived with the new junior.

"Just in time!" remarked old Mack grimly.

"Groooh!" gasped Dickinson.

The Fistical Four marched their prisoner across the quadrangle, and into the School House. There they slackened down. The new junior was taken to the door of his elder brother's study. Jimmy Silver opened the door.

"Here he is!" he announced.

"Groooh!"

Dickinson minor was shot into the study like a stone from a catapult. He crashed on the table, and rolled off, and sprawled on the floor. Jimmy Silver & Co. beat a hurried retreat.

Bulkeley, the captain of Rookwood, was in the study talking to Dickinson of the Sixth. The two prefects stared at the sprawling new boy.

"Hallo! Who's that?" said Bulkeley.

"My minor!" growled Dickinson.

"Get up, Sid, you young idiot!"

Sidney sat up.

"Gerrrooogh!" he said.

The prefect grasped him by the shoulder, and jerked him to his feet. Dickinson minor gasped for breath.

"Unhand me!" he snapped.

"What!" yelled his major.

"Unhand me!"

"Is he dotty?" asked Bulkeley, in astonishment.

"Jolly near it!" groaned Dickinson major. "He gets that rot out of Yankee books about buccaneers and pirates, and Redskins. He's been whopped for it—I've whopped him regularly every vacation. I suppose I'd better whop him now."

"Stand back!" said the cheerful minor. "If I had my trusty rifle—"

"Your what?" shrieked Bulkeley.

"You wait till I'm a bit older, George!" said the new junior. "Wait till I get a trusty rifle, that's all!"

"That's how he goes on," said the major hopelessly. "I suppose he's a bit cracked."

Dickinson minor snorted.

"Pirate Dick was supposed to be cracked when he killed his uncle, and ran away to sea," he said. "But he became the Terror of the Pacific."

"Well, my hat!" said Bulkeley.

Dickinson major looked round for a cane. But he changed his mind.

"You're late, Sid," he said. "I'll take you to your Form-master. Come on! See you later, Bulkeley!"

The prefect marched his hopeful minor off to Mr. Bootles' study, and Bulkeley stared after them blankly. Then he chuckled. Dickinson minor was quite a new thing in his experience. And the captain of Rookwood felt exceedingly glad that he was Dickinson minor and not Bulkeley minor.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER. Not Popular!

"HERE'S the giddy pirate!"

All the Classical Fourth stared at the new junior when he came into the dormitory that night.

The fame of Dickinson minor had already spread in the Lower School.

His absurd style of talking had been at once noted. It was in vain that the Fistical Four had relieved him of

"Trapper Bill." The cheerful new-comer had a large supply of similar literature in his box, upon which he drew. All his spare time that evening had been spent in perusing "Pirate Dick"—which Neville of the Sixth had found in his hand when he came to shepherd the Classical Fourth to the dormitory.

Neville's sharp with "Pirate Dick" was short and snappy. He had tossed it into the common-room fire, and warned Dickinson that he would be caned if he were ever found with such stuff in his possession again.

Whereupon Dickinson minor had rolled his eyes in proper piratical manner, and muttered that there would come a time—a remark that the prefect fortunately did not hear.

"Here's the merry buccaneer!" chortled Flynn.

"Where's your giddy black flag?" asked Townsend.

"And your trusty dagger?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Dickinson minor blinked at the grinning juniors. He was trying to make his eyes flash in the manner of Pirate Dick. But his eyes didn't flash—they only looked like boiled gooseberries.

"Now, then, turn in!" said Neville, at the door.

The chuckling juniors turned in. Neville put out the light, and retired. Then a sound was heard of somebody scrambling out of bed.

"Hallo! Who's that turning out?" said Jimmy Silver.

"Tremble not!" came the voice of Dickinson minor.

"Eh?"

"'Tis but me!"

"You thumping idiot! What are you getting up for?"

"Trouble me not!"

"Oh, my hat!"

A match scratched, and a candle-end glimmered in the darkness of the dormitory. Dickinson minor opened his box, and extracted a volume, upon the cover of which a hanging man was depicted in lurid colours. He stuck the candle on his washstand, and returned to bed—but not to sleep. Resting on his elbow, he started reading by the dim and flickering light of the candle.

Half the Form were sitting up in bed, staring at him.

Reading in bed, was, of course, strictly forbidden in the school. Dickinson minor's watery and blinking eyes were accounted for now.

"Dickinson!" rapped out Jimmy Silver.

"Don't bother!"

"You young ass!"

"Silence!"

"What?"

"Cease this idle chatter. I am reading."

"You're not allowed to read in bed!"

"Bah!"

"If a prefect should come in and catch you, you'd be whopped!"

"Bah!"

"Don't you know you're ruining your eyesight, you unspeakable idiot, reading by candle-light?"

"Bah!"

"Oh, let the silly idiot alone!" growled Lovell. "I want to go to sleep!"

"Sure the light'll be seen in the dorm," said Flynn. "They'll think it's a dorm feed. Put that candle out, Dickinson!"

"Bah!"

"Don't bah at me, you silly spalpeen! Put that candle out!"

Dickinson minor did not trouble to reply this time. Flynn glared at him from his bed. His bed was next to Dickinson's.

"Are ye puttin' that candle out, ye young goosoon?" he roared.

No reply.

"Sure I'll put it out for ye, then."

Whiz!

A pillow hurtled through the air, and there was a roar from Dickinson minor. The candle was knocked over and instantly extinguished.

"Dog!" roared Dickinson.

"Phwat!"

"Caitiff!"

"Sure, he's dotty intoirly. But, dotty or not, he's not going to call me names!" said Flynn, and he scrambled out of bed. "Now, ye thafe of the worruld, turn out and put up yer hands!"

"Chuck it, Flynn," said Jimmy Silver. "That pasty ass can't stand up to you. Let him alone!"

"Faith, hasn't he called me a dog?" demanded Flynn indignantly.

"Well, he's potty!"

"Are ye gettin' up, Dickinson?"

"Bah!"

Flynn groped for his pillow, and whirled it in the air. Dickinson minor was striking a match. It came in time to give light for a telling swipe. The pillow smote the youthful disciple of Pirate Dick, and he rolled over on his bed with a resounding yell.

"Yaroooop!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Now go to sleep, or sure I'll give ye names!" said Flynn, and he scrambled back into bed.

"Ha!" hissed Dickinson minor.

"Wait!"

"Howly Moses! What am I to wait for intoirly?"

"Revenge!"

"Great pip!"

"Shut up, you mad duffer!" howled Jimmy Silver.

"Bah!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Scratch went a match, and Dickinson minor lighted his candle again. Whiz came a slipper, and the candle went out, and the new junior gave a howl. There was a chuckle from all the beds.

"Better give it up, kid!" chuckled Oswald. "You'll get a boot or a pillow every time you light the candle. Go to sleep!"

"Bah!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Dickinson minor's melodramatic "Bah!" almost sent the juniors into convulsions. But the new boy gave up his attempt to keep the candle alight. It was evidently N.G.

"I say, you chaps," he called out, after a short silence.

"Hallo!" said Jimmy sleepily.

"Look here, I can't go to sleep! I never go to sleep till twelve. I always read in bed at home."

"More duffer you!" said Jimmy.

"That's what makes you such a pasty-faced monkey," said Hooker politely.

"I'll tell you a story if you like," said Dickinson.

"Oh, let's go to sleep!"

"No; let's hear the story, if it's a good one," said Raby considerably. "Is it about footer, Dickinson?"

"Bah! No!"

"A yarn about a jape?" asked Newcome.

"Certainly not!"

"Well, go ahead, and we'll sample it," said Jimmy Silver.

"It's about Red-handed Dick," said Dickinson. "He was called Red-handed Dick because his hands were generally blood-stained."

"Groooh!"

"When he was ten years old, he shed blood for the first time—"

"Nothing like starting early, bedad!"

"His first victim was his uncle. His uncle insisted upon Dick going to school, but the wild, free heart of the rover disdained lessons. In the dead of night he rose from the bed, and seized an axe—"

"Chuck it!"

"With creeping steps, like a panther stealing upon his prey, Red-handed Dick crept towards his uncle's room. He pushed open the door, and heard the heavy breathing of the tyrant within. For a moment he hesitated."

"Only a moment?" chuckled Lovell.

"Only a moment! He thought of the old man lying sleeping at peace, and for a moment his heart smote him. Then he ground his teeth, and his eyes flashed fire. The tyrant must die! He crept on—"

"Ring off!"

"With both hands he raised the axe aloft—from his set lips came no sound, but—"

"Yaroooh—oh—ow—yoop!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

A slipper had smitten Dickinson minor on the side of the head at that point in his thrilling story, causing a sudden break in the narrative.

"Yow-ow-ow! What rotter threw that? Yoop!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Shut up, and go to sleep!" chuckled Jimmy Silver. "We've had enough of Red-handed Dick!"

"And enough of Dead-shot Dickinson!" chortled Lovell.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The juniors settled down to sleep, and Dickinson minor grunted and followed their example.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

Mr. Bootles is Shocked.

DICKINSON minor attracted a good deal of attention in the Fourth Form the next day, and the days that followed.

Jimmy Silver manfully kept his promise to Dickinson major, and looked after the new fellow as much as he could.

But Dickinson minor defied looking after.

The lurid rubbish upon which his mind had been fed had had an extraordinary effect upon his somewhat weak head. Apart from his mania—for it almost amounted to a mania—he was a good-natured and obliging fellow, whom nobody could dislike. But the high-faluting style of his talk made him an object of general merriment, and, as his elder brother had feared, it was not long before he became the butt of the Form.

It became the ordinary amusement for an idle hour to draw Dickinson out, and pull his leg, and the junior fell a victim every time. He would explain to grinning circles of juniors his ambition to become a pirate, or a brigand, or a rover of the Rocky Mountains, his ambition of the moment changing with every lurid book he read.

He was generally regarded as a little "cracked," but quite harmless. He was not exactly cracked, but he was certainly in danger of becoming so unless he changed his manners and customs.

Jimmy Silver, in the kindness of his heart, took him in hand, and endeavoured to induce him to take up footer. Footer, as Jimmy sagely opined, would blow all the unhealthy rot out of Dickinson's head, if the fellow could be induced to take the game up seriously.

But Dickinson minor firmly declined to play footer. He told Jimmy Silver that learning football would be quite useless in his future career; there would be no use for footer on the decks of the Black Pirate's schooner. Dickinson minor had planned already to have a schooner, which, of course, was to have rakish

masts, and a long, evil-looking 18-pounder mounted on the deck. Jimmy suggested that a sailing-ship wouldn't have much chance in modern times, and recommended Dickinson, when he should become a pirate, to look out for a second-hand motor-boat. But sarcasm and chipping were wasted on the cheerful new boy.

Some of the seniors, when they came to know of Dickinson's peculiarity, entered into the joke, and had him in their studies merely to make him talk, and furnish them with amusement.

The reputation of his minor was infuriating to Dickinson major. For a prefect of the Sixth to have a minor who was the laughing-stock of the Lower School was decidedly exasperating and undignified.

The prefect talked to the cheery Sidney in vain. He took the trouble to administer licking after licking in a spirit of brotherly regard.

But Sidney was impervious to lickings.

He had to take them—that couldn't be helped; but he told his major candidly that when the right hour struck he would come back with a trusty rifle or a hunting-knife for red revenge. Whereupon Dickinson major, out of all patience, would kick him out of his study.

Mr. Bootles, the master of the Fourth, came down on Dickinson after a few days for reading in class. It was Dickinson's habit to take "Pirate Dick," or some similar volume, into the Form-room, and read it under the cover of his desk. For some time he remained undiscovered, but Mr. Bootles spotted him at last. Dickinson minor was called upon to construe one morning, and he rose up with "Pirate Dick" in his hand instead of Virgil.

Mr. Bootles' eyes almost started from his head at the sight of the glaring cover of the volume.

"What—what," he gasped—"what is that? Bring that book to me instantly, Dickinson minor!"

"It's mine," said Dickinson uneasily.

"Bring it to me at once!" thundered Mr. Bootles.

Never had Dead-shot Dickinson—he was always called Dead-shot Dickinson in the Fourth—missed his trusty rifle so much. He had to obey. Mr. Bootles took the gory volume from his hand, and looked at it, with thunderous brows. The Classical Fourth looked on, waiting for the storm to burst.

"Bless my soul!" ejaculated Mr. Bootles. "Dickinson, I am surprised at you! I am shocked! I am disgusted!"

Dickinson minor nearly said "Bah!" but he stopped just in time. It would not have been judicious to "Bah!" a Form-master.

"I am revolted!" said Mr. Bootles sternly. "Can you not find a healthy English book to read, Dickinson, instead of wasting money upon this vile American trash?"

Dickinson looked sullen. "There is a paper called the 'Magnet,' which contains clean, healthy, wholesome stories," said Mr. Bootles. "You may read that, Dickinson."

Dickinson sneered.

"I've seen it, sir," he said. "Why, there isn't a single murder in it—not a drop of blood from one year's end to another!"

"You are a disgusting boy, Dickinson!"

"Oh!"

"Take this revolting book and put it into the fire!" said Mr. Bootles.

"Bah!" trembled upon the lips of Dickinson minor. But Mr. Bootles' eye was gleaming, and he had taken up his cane. Mournfully the junior rammed into the fire that estimable product of New York enterprise.

"You will take a hundred lines, Dick-

inson! I shall cane you severely if you bring a book into the Form-room again! And if you are ever found with one of those disgusting American periodicals in your possession again, you shall be caned most severely! Go to your place!"

"Bah!"

That "bah!" came out involuntarily. Mr. Bootles jumped clear of the floor in his astonishment and wrath. Then he grasped Dickinson minor by the collar.

Swish! Swish! Swish! Swish!

"You impertinent young rascal!" gasped Mr. Bootles.

Whack! Whack! Whack! Whack! Whack!

"Yow-ow-ow! Leggo! Unhand me!" yelled Dickinson, wriggling wildly. "Ha! There will come a time—"

Whack! Whack! Whack!

"Yow-ow-ow!"

"Now go to your place!" said Mr. Bootles, quite out of breath.

Dickinson minor groaned, and crawled back to his place among the grinning Fourth-Formers. After morning lessons Jimmy Silver joined him.

"Why don't you chuck it, kid?" said Jimmy kindly. "What's the good of playing the giddy ox? Hallo, what's the matter with your teeth?"

Dickinson minor was grinding them.

"For goodness' sake don't do that! You set my nerves on edge!" said Jimmy. "Is there anything wrong with your teeth?"

"Bah!" growled Dickinson.

"Now, look here, old chap—"

"My time will come!" said Dickinson minor. "Revenge!"

"You silly young idiot!"

"Bah!"

Dickinson minor strode away, muttering. Jimmy Silver glanced after him hopelessly, and then joined his chums at footer practice. But Dickinson, in a quiet corner of the quadrangle, was still muttering and grinding his teeth, and rolling his eyes. Something was evidently working in his piratical brain.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

Jimmy Silver Comes Down Heavily.

A NYBODY seen Dickinson minor?"

Jimmy Silver was asking that question up and down the School House after tea.

"Blow Dickinson minor!" said Lovell, with a grunt. "Come and get your prep done! Never mind the silly ass!"

Jimmy shook his head.

"I'm feeling a bit uneasy about him," he said. "I told his major I'd look after him. The young ass has been more queer than ever to-day."

"Well, you can't cure him. Let him rip!"

"I'm going to find him, and you're going to help me!"

"Oh, rats!"

But Lovell helped, and so did Newcome and Raby. Dickinson minor had disappeared for some time. He was not in the Fourth Form passage, or in the dorm, or in the gym, or the common-room.

"What about the top box-room?" said Raby, at last. "He shifted his gory books there out of his box when he found Bootles was coming to look in his box."

"Good! Come on!"

The Fistical Four ascended the stairs to the top box-room. A light gleamed from under the door.

"He's there!" grinned Lovell.

"Hark! Oh crumbs!"

From within the box-room came a voice:

"Revenge! Ha, ha! Revenge!"

"Mad as a hatter!" murmured Raby.

THE PENNY POPULAR.—No. 45.

Jimmy Silver, with a frowning brow, threw open the door. Then he gave a violent start. A masked figure stood before him. For a moment he did not recognise Dickinson minor.

The junior was draped in a long black cloak, and a mask of black crepe was over his face.

"What the merry thunder——" howled Jimmy Silver.

"Away!"

"What?"

"Trouble not the brigand chief!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What are you got up like that for, like a character in a cinema play?" shrieked Jimmy Silver.

"Bah! Away! A blow!" said Dickinson minor in a deep voice. "I have received a blow! Bootles dies!"

"Oh, my hat!"

"He dies like a dog!" said Dickinson minor in a deep voice. "Masked, like a grim black shadow in the night, I will track him down! His blood——"

Jimmy Silver drew a deep breath.

"He's fairly off his rocker!" he said.

"He'll be doing some mischief one of these days if he isn't stopped. Shut that door, Raby! We're going to educate Dickinson!"

"Here, you clear off!" said Dickinson, dropping into everyday language at last.

"Don't you come here bothering me!"

"Shut up, fathead! We're going to cure you!"

Raby, grinning, locked the door. Then the Fistical Four gathered round the masked and draped brigand chief. Jimmy Silver felt that the time had come for drastic measures.

"Have that rubbish off him first!" he said tersely.

"Unhand me!" roared Dickinson.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The youthful disciple of Pirate Dick and Peppo the Bandit was promptly collared. The crepe mask was jerked off, and the long black cloak, which was evidently home-made, followed. The chums of the Fourth proceeded to tear them up into fragments.

Dickinson minor glared at them in almost speechless wrath.

"Let my things alone!" he gasped.

"You rotters! Beware of the brigand's revenge! Bah! Unhand me! Yarooop!"

Four wrathful juniors collared the embryo brigand at once, and Dead-shot Dickinson came down on the floor with a terrific concussion.

Bump!

"Yow, wow, ow, wow!" yelled Dickinson, not at all in the style of Pirate Dick. But perhaps Pirate Dick had never been bumped.

"Sit on him!" gasped Jimmy Silver.

Plump!

Raby, the fattest of the four, sat heavily on Dickinson minor, pinning him down by sheer weight.

Dickinson wriggled like an eel. But there was no escape for him.

"Lemme go!" he stuttered. "Yow, ow, ow! You're squook-squook-squashing me!"

"And I'm going on squook-squook-squashing you!" grinned Raby. "Go ahead with the giddy conflagration, dear boys!"

Jimmy Silver lighted matches in the wide old grate. The fragments of the black cloak and the mask flared up and burned away merrily.

Then Dickinson minor's valuable library was seized upon ruthlessly.

To keep those precious volumes safe, Dickinson had transferred them to the top box-room. There they were secure from the eyes of masters and prefects, and especially from his senior brother. But they were not safe from the Fistical Four. Jimmy Silver & Co. were bent upon making a clean sweep.

"Here you are!" said Jimmy, handing them out from the big bag they were stacked in. "Here's Blood-stained Bill. Begin with him!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Blood-stained Bill was promptly jammed into the fire. Dead-shot Dave followed, and then the Prince of the Pistols; and Red-handed Dick, the Boy Buccaneer; and Gory George, the White Scalper.

"Yow, you beasts!" groaned Dickinson minor, as gory volume after volume was added to the pyre. "I say, chuck it! I say, leave me that one; that's a real ripper—'The Blood-hunters of Texas'—leave that one!"

"No jolly fear!"

"And that one—'The Night Hawks of New York'—let me keep that!"

"Bow-wow!"

"Oh, you rotters!"

"We're doing this for your own good, Dicky!" Jimmy Silver explained. "You must know yourself that you're going cracked through reading this rot! Now, don't you?"

"Bah!"

"And if Bootles found it you'd be ticked——"

"Villain!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The pile of smoking ashes in the grate was piled high now. The room was full of smoke and blacks. The chums of the Fourth were growing very dusty and smoky and warm.

But they were doing good work, and they did not slacken. As Jimmy Silver remarked, it was Dickinson minor's last chance of being saved from a lunatic asylum. They were Boy Scouts, and bound to do somebody a good turn every day. This time it was Dickinson minor—and it was a very good turn indeed.

But Dickinson minor did not see it in that light. He gazed mournfully at the

gory volumes as they disappeared one after another in flame and smoke.

"Groogh!" gasped Jimmy Silver, rubbing smoke out of his eyes. "That's the last! My hat, it's warm!"

"Finished!" said Lovell, in great relief. "Let's see if the duffer has any about him, though."

"Hands off!" yelled Dickinson. "I mean, unhand me!"

"I thought so!" grinned Lovell, as he turned three or four volumes out of Dickinson minor's pockets. "Here you are! 'Blood-bedabbled Bill, the Terror of Topeka——'"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"'Captain Crack-shot, the Red-handed Raider of the Rugged Rockies——'"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The fire flared up over the last burnt-offerings. Dickinson minor was almost weeping.

"Now, listen to me, my son!" said Jimmy Silver, in his most magisterial tone. "We've done this for your own good. See? You're going to give us your solemn promise never again to buy a book that's been printed in America."

"I won't!" yelled Dickinson minor furiously.

"You will—if you want a whole bone left in your body. You're going to be bumped till you do. Up with him!"

Bump!

"Yaroooop!"

"Are you going to give that promise?"

"Yow! No, no! Yow, ow!"

Bump!

"Oh crumbs! Hold on! Yes—I mean, yes!" howled the unhappy brigand.

"Good egg!" said Jimmy Silver cheerfully. "Now, thank us nicely for having looked after you!"

"You rotter—I—I mean, thank you!" stuttered Dickinson minor.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Fistical Four quitted the box-room with the satisfied feeling that follows good work well done. Dickinson minor was left to gaze mournfully upon the dust and ashes, and to reflect.

In the dorm that night the Fistical Four nodded cheerily to Dickinson minor to show that there was no ill-feeling. Dickinson minor was looking very subdued. But he did not roll his eyes, and he did not say "Bah!" Jimmy Silver was of opinion that the cure was well on its way. Perhaps Dickinson minor realised that it was all for his own good. But, like Rachel of old, he mourned for that which was lost, and would not be comforted.

THE END.

(Another long complete story of the chums of Rookwood School next week, entitled, "The Conversion of Dickinson Minor!" by Owen Conquest. Order your copy of the PENNY POPULAR in advance.)

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THE FIRST CHAPTER.

[On the Track.]

THAT is the constable, deah boys!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, of the Fourth Form at St. Jim's.

He was with Jack Blake and George Herries, and the three had just met Tom Merry, Talbot, Manners, and Lowther in the High Street of Wayland.

"What constable?" asked Tom Merry. "The one who saw one of our fellows in a motah-cah with some man or othah on Wednesday—or it may have been Tuesday—he did not seem quite suah which."

"Is he quite sure that it wasn't Wednesday week or Tuesday fortnight?" inquired Lowther.

"You haven't told us anything about him before, Gussy," said Tom.

"Haven't I? But I told Blake an' Hewies, I am suah. It was yestahday mornin', when I wode ovah heah, an' met Sir Wobert Digby at the station."

"It's worth while to speak to the bobby, anyway," said Blake. "He may have remembered a bit more. We couldn't find out that any of our fellows had been here in a car."

The seven—and scores more of St. Jim's fellows, seniors and juniors alike—were hunting for Robert Arthur Digby, of the Fourth, who had mysteriously disappeared on the Wednesday. This was Friday.

Some of the mystery surrounding Digby's disappearance had now been cleared up. It was known why he had been taken, and who had taken him.

He had been kidnapped by a bitter enemy of his father's, and was being held to ransom. A confession by Crooke of the Shell had practically established the fact that a forged letter, supposed to have been written by his mother, had been the means of luring Digby into the trap.

But exactly how the trap had been set, exactly how the missing junior had been carried off, no one knew.

A motor-car seemed as likely as anything. There was no particular reason to take it for granted that the car, if one had been used, had passed through Wayland. But the constable upon whom the eyes of the seven were now fixed had seen a boy wearing the red-and-white cap of St. Jim's in a car there between twelve and one on either the Tuesday or the Wednesday. If Tuesday had been the day, there was nothing in it at all. But if it had been Wednesday, it was quite probable that the boy was Dig.

The policeman noticed that they were looking at him, and came over to them.

Gussy stepped forward. "You wemembah me, pewwaps, constable?" he said politely.

"Oh, yes, sir! Matter of fact, I know you. You're young Mr. D'Arcy, Lord Eastwood's son, aren't you?"

"Yaas, that's so. But what I mean is you wemembah my speakin' to you yestahday. About a motah-car, you know?"

"Yes, sir, I remember. I've thought of it since, and I've been able to fix the day now. It was Wednesday, not Tuesday. After you

had gone I recalled the fact that at the moment I saw the car I was thinking of a drunk and disorderly I took in charge on Tuesday night. I wasn't on duty on Monday evening, so that makes it certain."

"Good egg!" said Tom Merry heartily. "Is it the young gentleman who is missing that you think may have been in the car?" the policeman asked.

"Yes—you've heard about him, then?" "Oh, we've been notified, sir; and I suppose every constable in Sussex—maybe in half a dozen other counties—is on the look-out. You think it may have been Master Digby?"

"We do. Would you know the car again if you saw it?" returned Talbot.

"I'm not sure. I've been thinking hard, because I saw a possible clue in it; but I can't be sure. It was a smallish car, yellow or brown, and rather shabby—that's as much as I can recall, and even that isn't as certain as I should like it to be, for I may be confusing one car with another."

"Which way was it going?" Herries asked. "Now, that I can be certain about," the constable replied. "It went the London Road. I know that because I remember thinking that the young gentleman in it was going away from school."

"Thanks ever so much!" Tom Merry said. They took the London Road after that, naturally.

But it was difficult hunting at best. They were looking for some trace of Dig; but wherever Dig was he was certain to be closely watched, and it would not be easy for him to find a way of making his presence known.

All the seven were agreed that it was unlikely that the house in which he was held captive would be in any village. It was the lonely houses which received their attention, and more than one person living in such a house was annoyed that day by the close scrutiny to which his or her habitation was subjected by boys in red-and-white caps.

Till lunch-time they kept together. But, as Talbot pointed out, by doing so they were wasting chances. So after lunch they split up. Gussy went off with Talbot; Blake and Herries took another road; and the Terrible Three held straight on.

It might have been about three o'clock when a car passed them, going at a pretty good pace. There was only the driver in it; and his goggles obscured his face. But Tom Merry fancied he had seen him before.

The car was a smallish one, and of a yellowish-brown hue. But scores of smallish cars of that colour can be seen on any main road any day, and the searchers had already passed several, which had not seemed to them worthy of a second glance, containing, as they did, ladies or children.

But there was only one man in this particular car, and that attracted their attention.

"Might be worth following, Tommy," said Lowther.

"We can't follow it far. That chap's pace is a bit ahead of—Hallo! Who's that yelling to us?"

"Sounds like Grundy," said Manners.

"Can't be anyone else," Lowther agreed.

THE FINDING OF DIGBY

A Magnificent New Long Complete School Tale of TOM MERRY & Co. at St. Jim's.

.. By ..

MARTIN CLIFFORD.

grinning: "Not in all the wide, wide world is there such another bull-bellow as that!" All three had turned their heads now.

It was Grundy who came behind, and far in the rear of him, two specks descending a hill could be guessed at, though not recognised, as Gunn and Wilkins.

The three slowed down to wait for Grundy. It was impossible to make out what he was shouting.

He came up, the sweat running fast down his face, his broad chest panting.

"Silly—asses!" he puffed. "I told you—to hold on—after—that car!"

"Why?" asked Manners.

Grundy did not slacken speed. They clapped on pace, and held alongside him. "It's—the car—the bobby saw—in Wayland!" he gasped. "At least—he thinks so! He—told us—spotted our caps—just in time. I'm nearly done. Gunn—and Wilky—left behind—somewhere!"

Grundy was not quite done, however. The Terrible Three were riding their hardest now; but he kept alongside them gallantly.

Far ahead, but still in sight, was the car. As long as the road was fairly straight and fairly open, they might hope to keep it in sight; but Sussex roads are not remarkable for being straight and open, as a rule.

"Know the number?" asked Tom.

"No. Haven't got near enough."

"Has the chap in the car twinged you?" inquired Manners.

"Think I'm an ass?" snorted Grundy.

"Chuck it, Grundy, and let us go on!" said Tom.

"Shan't! No faith in you fellows!" panted Grundy.

But it was evident that he would soon have to chuck it. The pace was telling upon the Terrible Three, and Grundy had ridden several miles before he had caught them up.

And for all that they could do the car gained on them. Once or twice they lost sight of it completely, and though they managed to pick it up again it was farther ahead, and less easy to be sure of.

"I'm done!" gasped Grundy at length.

And he tumbled from his saddle.

"So am I!" admitted Manners. And he also slipped to the ground.

They threw themselves on the grass by the roadside, and Tom and Lowther held on.

"Shall have to—chuck—it—soon!" jerked out Lowther.

"Chuck it now, old man!" answered Tom. "I can keep it up for a bit yet."

Even as he spoke there was a sound like the crack of a pistol, and his back tyre went flat. Sussex roads are often mended with flint, and flint is bad for bike tyres.

Just at this moment out of a side-road wheeled Figgins and Kerr, with Fatty Wynn pedalling laboriously a few yards behind them.

"Hi! That car ahead! Keep it in sight and find out where it goes!" cried Tom.

The car was barely visible then, and between the brown hedges it showed merely because it moved.

But both Kerr and Figgins were very keen-sighted, and Kerr at least had brains quick beyond the ordinary.

They wasted not a second in asking questions. They pedalled off at a pace which was at least two or three miles an hour better than Tom and Lowther had been travelling just before their halt.

Fatty made no attempt to follow his chums. He jumped from his bike, and stood puffing hard and wiping his perspiring face with an already sodden handkerchief.

"I'd go if it was any good," he said. "But it isn't—not a scrap! I'm almost melted now."

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

Failure!

"HALLO, Thomas! Had a puncture?" It was Ralph Reckness Cardew who asked that question, coming up with Ernest Levison and Sidney Clive some ten minutes later.

"Oh, no! Fell backwards and bit my tyre, of course!" answered Tom rather crossly.

"Well, don't get your wool off, dear boy! These things do happen, even to the most perfect among us."

"Any clue?" inquired Levison.

"Rather!" replied Fatty. "It's as good as settled where Dig is."

"What?" gasped Clive.

"Well, perhaps that's a bit too much to say," rejoined Fatty. "But Kerr and Figgy are chasing a motor-car."

"With Digby in it?" snapped Levison.

"No, fathead! Who is in it, Tommy?"

"Don't know," replied Tom. "How should I?"

"You were chasing it, you know," Fatty said, looking surprised.

"It really does seem like a clue, though it was Grundy," remarked Lowther.

"Grundy? Precious fine clue, I'll bet!" said Levison.

"There's something in it," Tom said, sticking on a big patch. No water had been needed to show where the puncture was; it was easily found by the naked eye, with a needle-like silver of flint still in the rubber.

"Well, let's hear!" said Cardew.

"Can't we do something?" asked Clive.

"Nothing to be done!" Tom replied. "If Kerr and Figgy fail—well, we've lost the clue, that's all. Here come Grundy and Manners!"

The two who had been left behind rode slowly up now, and Wilkins and Gunn could be perceived in the distance. Then a bell sounded from a by-road close at hand, and Gussy, Herries, Blake, and Talbot all appeared together.

"A gatherin' of the clans!" said Cardew. "Grundy, I hear that you have been doin' somethin'. Kindly enlighten us as to what that somethin' was, old top!"

Grundy proceeded to enlighten the whole crowd. He was not too well pleased with the Terrible Three for having failed, and had already given Manners a piece of his mind on that score. But he allowed that as long as Figgins and Kerr were on the track of the car there was still hope. In fact, he expressed approval of Kerr's brains, which Fatty promised to report.

"It will buck old Kerr up no end," he said gravely, and Grundy beamed.

"What's to be done?" asked Blake.

Grundy snorted.

"I should think that's as plain as anything can be!" he said.

"I suppose we'd better wait for Kerr and Figgy to come back?" said Tom.

"Unless we ride after them," said Lowther.

Again Grundy snorted.

"I haven't learned the pig language yet, Grundy!" said the humorist of the Shell pointedly.

"You're an ass!" snapped the great George Alfred. "Suppose we did ride after them? They're out of sight now, and they may have turned down any road we pass. But I think it would really be a good thing if you and Cardew rode on in spite of that. Blake, too, perhaps."

"Why?" demanded Blake.

"Because we should be rid of three silly asses that we're better without!" was Grundy's crushing reply.

Then he turned to Wilkins and Gunn, who had just come up, and began to tell them exactly what sort of slackers he considered them.

They waited. For once Grundy was right. There was little use in going on.

And they had some time to wait. When at last Kerr and Figgins showed up along

the London Road eager shouts of inquiry greeted them.

But they came on without replying to those shouts.

"They didn't catch him," Fatty said sadly. "Well, there's one thing certain, though," he added, brightening, "if Kerr couldn't manage it no one else could. I say, you fellows, I feel jolly empty! Let's cut back to Wayland and get some tea!"

"Always thinking about grub!" snorted Grundy. "Hallo, Kerr! Have you made a mess of it?"

The New House juniors dismounted before either of them spoke a word. Both looked down in the mouth. There was no longer the least hope that they had been successful.

"Sorry, Tommy! We did our best."

"Sure you did, old chap!" said Tom heartily.

Grundy snorted again. He did not doubt that Kerr and Figgins had done their best. It was thinking of the quality of that best as compared with his own that caused him to snort.

"We reckoned we were following that car all right," went on Kerr. "It went up over a hill, and of course we lost sight of it as we pushed up."

"Of course!" growled Grundy.

"We thought we saw it go up the next hill," went on Kerr. "We did see a car near enough like it, anyway. Then we lost sight of it, and picked it up again, as we fancied."

"And we rode jolly hard, too. I can tell you!" said Figgins.

The condition they were in was enough to show that. And really no one present—not even Grundy—had any doubt that those two had done their utmost.

"So we chased it. Then it stopped in a village, and we came up just in time to see the people in it get out. There was a jolly-looking, clean-shaven old buffer, a lady who might have been his daughter, and a pretty girl, whom we put down as his granddaughter. So it wasn't the car, we knew."

"It certainly wasn't, Kerr," said Tom.

"So it all ends in failure, after I'd—"

"Hold on, Grundy!" said Talbot. "I can't see it as a total failure myself. Supposing the car was the one we're looking out for—"

"If it was it's gone—clean gone!" groaned Grundy.

"Yes, it's gone," Talbot said. "But, assuming that it didn't get ahead of the car Kerr and Figgins caught up—"

"I don't think it can have done that," Kerr said.

"Then that particular car must have left the main road somewhere within a very few miles—in a distance that can easily be computed by fellows as keen as these two."

"Yaas, wathah! Listen to Talbot, deah boys, an' don't intewwupt!"

"No one but you is interrupting, ass!" growled Herries.

All saw that there was something in Talbot's theory. Kerr wrinkled his brow, thinking hard.

"It must have been after that big hill, Figgy," he said. "I won't swear that we had it in sight all the time before that, but I am sure that the pace wasn't enough, compared with the pace of the other car, to let it get right ahead and leave us chasing the wrong one."

"But the second car must have been travelling slower, or you'd never have caught it up," Grundy said.

"We didn't catch it up. It stopped," answered Kerr.

"But you must have gained on it considerably along the road."

"I don't think so. My notion is that it turned out of one of the side roads at about the same time that the other car turned into one of them."

"There are cross-roads at the bottom of the big hill. The main road runs over both hills, and the other road along the valley between them, you know, Kerr," put in Figgins.

"Yes, that's so. They're not the only roads to be considered; but I fancy we can work it down to a matter of four miles or so—possibly three. And if we're right, the car we wanted to follow turned aside somewhere in that distance. Doesn't that help?"

"I should say it does a good deal if the car only was the right one—the one Digby was seen in on Wednesday, I mean," Talbot replied.

"Well, Grundy says it was," Tom said.

"It doesn't depend on what I say," growled Grundy. "I didn't see Digby in any car. It's the bobby at Wayland it depends upon."

"Let's go now and scout down the roads within the distance Kerr made it out to be," said Blake. "It's a waste of time to stand here arguing!"

But Tom Merry glanced westward, where the sun was already low in the sky, and then looked at his watch.

"It will be dusk in very little more than an hour," he said; "and dark very soon after that. There's no moon. If we could do any searching that could possibly be of any use in the dark I'd say 'Go on!' If I thought there was the least chance of taking Dig back with us, I'd say never mind about call-over, but keep on till morning. But if we have to go back without him to-night—which is about a hundred to one, all things considered—we shall be gated to-morrow for a dead cert. The Head won't stand it. You know how he feels about the search. He didn't half like our coming."

"But to leave Dig with those wascals when—"

"Do you really think there's a dog's chance of finding where Dig is to-night, Gussy?"

"Well, I suppose there really is very little chance, Tom Mewwy, but—"

"What do you think, Blake?"

"I hate going back like this, Tommy, but I know you're right."

"We can start out again first thing in the morning, and bring anyone who's of any use," said Kerr hopefully. "Then we can divide up and search those side roads for ten or a dozen miles for a clue. We shall have all day before us, and a crowd to help. But if we don't get back in decent time to-night all that's off. We're risking everything on the chance that that was the car, which isn't certain—and that we can track it down to-night, which isn't likely."

Talbot, Figgins, Levison, Clive—practically everyone but Gussy, too worried about Digby to be reasonable, Grundy, too obstinate to be so, and Cardew, too reckless, agreed. The three had to give way, and a start for home was made.

The chase of the afternoon might be reckoned a failure. But it was not a total failure, even from their point of view that night; and the event was to prove it was not really a failure at all!

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

Dig in Captivity.

IT had been early on the Wednesday afternoon when Digby had found himself entrapped in the lonely house in the hollow of the moor, and through the Thursday he cast about him for some plan of escape, without the least success.

During the evening of that day he had a visit from Banship.

Dig had been sitting in the darkness, wondering how he would ever be able to get through the night. He did not believe that he could possibly sleep. Several times during the day he had dozed off from sheer boredom; but the dark and the silence seemed to drive all hope of sleep away.

Then a glimmer of light showed under the door as footsteps sounded on the narrow staircase, and the key grated in the lock.

Banship came in, carrying a lamp. Dig had to shield his eyes from the light for a moment. It dazzled him after the complete darkness.

The fellow set down the lamp on the floor, and drew the only chair in the room close up to the bed, on which Dig was sitting.

"You don't know me as well as you do your Uncle Justin," said Banship.

Dig was quick to resent that sneer.

"That cad isn't any uncle of mine!" he said hotly. "I'm so jolly glad he isn't that I don't mind all this half as much as I should do otherwise. But I can't see where you come in. He played his dirty tricks to get a few pounds out of me, I know; but you won't get anything out of this game!"

"It will be the worse for you if I do not, my lad," replied Banship.

"How do you think you are going to work it?"

"I have already told you that your father is my enemy," Banship answered. "I have too much regard for my neck to deal with him in the way I should choose to deal. But by holding you to ransom I can strike a blow at his pride, as well as providing myself and my colleague below with some of the filthy lucre of which we are so short."

"Yes, the pater is proud," Dig said simply. "That's why I'm so sure that you won't screw as much as a shilling out of him!"



Dig put all he knew into a desperate dash for the car. If he could only reach it! The engine still hummed; it was only a matter of getting into gear, and Dig knew enough for that. Behind him sounded panting breath, all too close.

"Won't I? He will receive my ultimatum to-morrow morning, and he will know what to expect unless he accedes to it!"

"And what is he to expect? I'm rather interested, you know. But you needn't think I'm frightened. I know you daren't kill me or any rot like that, so it's no good trying to make me believe it!"

"How do you like your quarters?" asked Banship abruptly.

"Beastly stuffy!" replied Dig, with a shrug of the shoulders.

"You wouldn't fancy a month or two here?"

"I'm not going to stay a month or two, so we needn't talk about that!"

"And your fare? How does that suit you?"

"Well, there might be more of it, and it might be better. But it will do for a day or two, I dare say," answered Dig.

"There will be less of it, and it will be worse!" snarled Banship. "You had better be careful how you talk to me, my boy! You have too much of your father in you for my liking. Crey handled you yesterday; but what he gave you was a mere nothing to what you will get from me if I once start in on you!"

"Oh, I don't doubt that you're as big a brute as he is!" replied Dig. "You're going to keep me here, starve me, and knock me about if the pater doesn't give in and pay ransom, you say. Right-ho! He won't! You may as well know that first as last. And, for all that you can do to me, I wouldn't want him to."

"I have a great mind to give you now a taste of what will come to you if your father proves obstinate!" rapped out the rascal.

"Pile in!" replied Dig defiantly. Banship went without attempting to carry out his threat.

He had already written to Sir Robert Digby demanding the sum of a thousand pounds as ransom for his son, and had given directions that the money, in the form of five-pound notes, should be sent to him at an address in London to which he had

no intention of returning. At that address there was a woman whom he could trust to send on the cash and not to betray his whereabouts if—as he quite expected—detectives should follow up the letter.

Sir Robert received the letter early on the Friday morning, and within ten minutes was on his way to St. Jim's in a speedy motor-car. The news of her son's disappearance had now been broken to Lady Digby, and she had taken it pluckily. It did not seem to have made any difference to her progress, fortunately.

From St. Jim's the baronet went to town, and engaged detectives. A dummy letter was sent to the address Banship had given, but Sir Robert was not disposed to think that he would be caught there. He placed more reliance upon the activities of the Sussex constabulary force, and even more than that, upon the search which would be made by Dig's chums.

Dig, too, had faith in his chums. Sooner or later they would find his prison, he was sure, for it was within fairly easy distance from the school for cyclists.

But he had no notion of staying a minute longer than he could help, and during the long night watches he thought out a possible scheme of escape.

In a stand-up fight he had no chance at all with either Crey or Banship, he knew.

But if he could attack one of the scoundrels suddenly, in the absence of the other, he might manage to dodge down the stairs and out of the house.

Banship had been absent for some hours on the Wednesday afternoon, and again on the Thursday. If he went out in the car on the Friday, and Crey brought up a meal while he was absent, Dig thought he saw a chance.

All through the Friday morning both men were below. He could hear them talking from time to time, and when Crey carried up a scanty midday meal Banship shouted something about the beginning of short commons, and laughed jeeringly.

But half an hour or so later Dig heard the car started and driven away.

Crey was hardly likely to come up again yet, he fancied; but he went to work at once.

From the first he had seen that no escape was possible by the skylight over the bed, which lighted the stuffy attic. But if he could get it open, the place would become less stuffy, and he might be able to send out some sort of message to anyone who happened to pass.

He had neither pen nor pencil, and there was nothing in the den to supply the place of either. But his handkerchief had his name upon it, and that, if seen, would serve as a message to anyone from St. Jim's, at least.

So he put the chair upon the bed, and started in to wrestle with the catch of the skylight.

But he could only just reach it, and could exert little strength. The catch refused to budge for all that he could do.

He wrapped his cap round his right hand, jumped, and punched at the ground glass. It shivered, and fragments fell all around him. Through the aperture came a welcome gust of fresh air.

A strongish breeze stirred, and he thought that he could do no better than let his handkerchief go at once. It was only an off-chance, but it was worth taking, and he could do without the thing at a pinch.

Again he jumped, and had the satisfaction of seeing the handkerchief flutter in the breeze above the skylight, though, of course, he could not see whether it cleared the roof.

Footsteps sounded on the stairs as he straightened himself. Crey unlocked the door, and looked in.

He saw the broken skylight at once.

"You won't get out that way!" he snarled.

"Didn't expect to," replied Dig. "I've got some fresh air, anyway."

"You'll pay dearly for it if it happens to rain," said Crey. And he went.

There had been no chance to rush him that time. Would he come up again before Banship returned?

Dig managed to break off a leg of the

chair. He must have some weapon ready, and he could find no other.

The minutes dragged. The stuffy room grew darker as the sun dropped in the sky. Dig began to think that he must give up hope of Crey's coming again.

Unless he did something to fetch him up! But what could he do?

He began to stamp upon the floor and to yell at the top of his voice.

The ruse proved successful. Footsteps sounded on the stairs again, there was the sound of an angry voice, and Dig, still stamping and yelling, drew close to the door.

The key grated. The door was pushed open. Dig smote with all his strength.

The chair-leg took Crey upon the back of the neck as he came in with his head out-thrust. There was not enough force in the blow to have felled him by force alone; but the surprise of it was so great that he staggered, and as he staggered Dig thrust out a foot and tripped him up.

Then he jumped over him, and fairly hurled himself downstairs.

Behind him sounded lurid oaths. He darted at the door, shot a bolt, turned the key, and was outside before the scoundrel had started in pursuit.

Up the slope that led to the higher part of the moor he rushed. But already the confinement in that stuffy room and the strain of mind and body he had endured were telling upon him. His head swam, and his legs felt weak.

But his courage did not fail. He held on. Crey was not more than twenty yards behind when he gained the top of the slope and saw the dusky moor stretched out before him. Along the road which crossed it came a car.

Dig was running straight for the road. There was hope of rescue in the presence of that car.

No, there was not! Even as the thought passed through his mind Crey shouted, and Dig knew that the man in the car was Banship!

Even then he did not give up all hope. Other people must pass over the moor, lonely as it was. If he could dodge those two for but a few minutes there might be a chance for him.

But there was no one else in sight at the moment. And now the car had stopped, and Banship had jumped out.

Dig struck away from the line he had been taking. But the two men were closing in on him, and he knew that he could not run much farther.

He tried a last break. Running as if dazed, he seemed to be going straight into Banship's arms; but suddenly he swerved round the fellow, and put all he knew into a desperate dash for the car.

If he could only reach it! The engine still hummed; it was only a matter of getting into gear, and Dig knew enough for that.

Behind him sounded panting breath, all too close. Twenty yards—ten yards—five! But even as he reached the car and tried to get into the seat in front strong arms were flung around him, and he was caught!

Then he fainted.

When he came to himself he was in his prison again.

"You will have to be taught a lesson, you cub!" hissed Banship into his ear almost the moment his eyes opened.

Dig knew what that meant. He felt sick and ill, but he braced himself to bear whatever was coming without a sound.

It finished by his fainting again. But they had not got a whimper from him; and when he came to, and lay smarting and throbbing with pain in the darkness, he was glad to remember that.

Glad, too, of the fresh air that came in through the broken skylight, and of the memory of the handkerchief. He had seen that—or something that looked like it—fluttering from a gorse-bush not far from where the car had stood after Banship had scrambled out of it.

If they only came that way, his chums! There were keen eyes among them. Kerr of Tom Merry of Talbot would never miss such a sign, he was sure.

But he did not guess how near they had been to rescue that afternoon. If Banship had driven five miles an hour less, or if the accidental relay system which had enabled the St. Jim's fellows to give chase as they did had only another link, he might have been rescued then, when he made his break. For the lonely house in the hollow of the moor was not more than four or five miles from the

main road along which Kerr and Figgins had followed the wrong car.

It was not their fault—it was not the fault of Grundy, or of the Terrible Three—that they had failed then. They had done all that cyclists could do when pitted against a motor-car. And they had got upon the scent.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

Closing Up.

"CROOKE, I want you to come with us," said Tom Merry.

George Gerald Crooke sat up in bed and stared at Tom.

It was not yet light; but most of the Shell were already dressing. Arrangements had been made the night before for an early start. Mr. Railton, though he was not told anything about the clue obtained the afternoon before, had readily agreed that breakfast for any who chose to be off as soon as it was light should be provided, and some thirty or more of the Shell and Fourth in both Houses had been enlisted for the early start.

"Where are you off to?" Crooke asked.

"To find Digby. You know those two sweeps who have got hold of him—we don't—not to be as certain of them as you are, anyway!"

Crooke got out of bed, and began to dress in unusual haste. But before he had finished, all the others who were going had trooped down to Hall for breakfast. That did not matter to Crooke; he had no appetite for breakfast.

Racke got out of bed. Crooke turned to speak to him; but Racke spoke first.

"I'm goin' too," he said. "After all, if there's anythin' we can do to help I suppose we ought to do it."

The surprise among those in Hall was great when the two bad eggs came in together. No one spoke to Racke. He might do as he pleased about going; he would not go as one of the band, but as an outsider, even more of an outsider than Crooke.

Several New House fellows were at the breakfast-table. Mr. Ratcliff was not the kind of man to allow any such concession as the School House master had made about the meal. So Kerr and Figgins and Fatty Wynn, Redfern and Owen and Lawrence, Koumi Rao, Pratt, French, Clarke, and Thompson had all come across.

And, of course, all Dig's School House friends had turned out—not only Blake and Herries and D'Arcy and the Terrible Three and Talbot, but Cardew and Levison and Clive, Roylance and Durrance and Lumley-Lumley, Julian and Keruish and Hammond and Reilly, Kangaroo and Dane and Glyn, Grundy and Wilkins and Gunn, Gore, and even Skimpole.

There was no breeze this morning, but conditions were not very favourable for the search.

A thick fog filled the quad, and the leafless branches of the old elms dripped with moisture. Out in the road it was difficult to see more than a few yards ahead.

"Sure to clear soon," said Blake hopefully. "It's hardly light yet. Wait till the sun gets up. Anyway, it doesn't matter much for the next hour or so."

Their course, as they saw it, was clear—to make all speed through Wayland and well on beyond it up the London Road to that section of the highway in which Figgins and Kerr had lost one car and found another. Not till they had reached that would they slacken speed or split up.

In Wayland High Street, full of fog, Grundy dismounted with a suddenness that caused Gunn and Thompson, just behind him, to say things, for they were nearly thrown off their machines by his precipitate action.

But Grundy paid no heed to the things they said. He had sighted P.-e. Everson in the gloom, and had seen his opportunity to assert his importance, which he felt had not been sufficiently recognised by anyone that morning.

"Hallo, my man!" he said patronisingly. "Have you found out anything more about that car?"

Everson peered at him, then recognised him. Some of the others had dismounted now, and Tom Merry, Blake, and Gussy came up.

"Ah, I know you now, sir!" said the constable. "No, I haven't found out any more. I have the identification mark; but no one here that I can get on to knows that. Where are you young gentlemen off to so early, may I ask? I don't suppose you managed to run the car down yesterday; it was a bit too big a job for cyclists."

"We very nearly ran it down," said Grundy. "Hardly that," Tom corrected him. "But we have some sort of notion which way it

went, and instead of wasting time nearer home we're going straight out some miles farther, to split up into squads and search."

"Good notion!" said the constable heartily. "Would you mind telling me whereabouts along the road you start your search?"

Tom told him at once, without asking why he wanted to know.

The great George Alfred was not pleased with Tom, and as the half-dozen or so who had halted rode after the rest, he said so very plainly.

"A silly trick, I call it!" he said. "We don't want the police in this. I should very much prefer to carry it through on my own."

"You're an idiot!" snapped Blake. "We may be jolly glad to have the help of the police before we're through with this job. I'm hoping that there will be someone to arrest, anyhow, and we're not commissioned to make arrests."

"Though we can sit on the wascals till the police come along with the handcuffs," said Gussy. "An' if my friend Evahson should come in for the reward that Sir Wobert is suah to give I shall be vewy pleased."

"Oh, dry up!" snorted Grundy.

The fog was less thick, and a yellow gleam now and then showed that the sun was up. But there was still a filmy curtain that lessened considerably the range of vision when they reached the spot at which Kerr thought the first detachment should leave the main body.

"I'll go," said Grundy. "Gunn and Wilky, you'll come with me, of course. I want two more—let's see—you're a hefty fellow, Gore—you'll do for one!"

"You be hanged!" snapped George Gore. "I'm not going with you!"

"That's flat mutiny!" roared Grundy. And he really seemed surprised that no one else saw Gore's refusal quite in that light.

Thompson and Pratt went with Grundy & Co., after all.

"It's all serene," said Kerr. "That road had to be looked after, but I don't think it's at all the likeliest one."

"Will you take charge of the next lot, Kangaroo?" asked Tom.

"Depends upon whether it's a likely road or not," replied the Constable, grinning. "I'm not Grundy, you know, to be lobbied off with something that doesn't matter."

"Oh, one's as likely as another now, honest Injun!" said Kerr. "For that matter, there's no certainty that Grundy may not turn out to be the lucky one."

"Then someone else ought to go after him!" said Blake hotly. "It's no use trusting anything to that ass!"

"Right-ho! You and Gussy and Herries can go," Tom answered.

But Blake and Gussy and Herries could not quite see it that way. If there was one road likelier than another, that was most certainly the road for them, they felt.

"How many roads are there branching off in the section you've marked out, Kerr?" asked Talbot.

"Four!" replied Kerr at once. He seemed to have the whole map in his head. "But some of them branch again, you know."

"Does Grundy's?"

"Yes."

"Then someone else should go," Tom said. "Roylance, Durrance, and Lumley-Lumley, will you?"

The trio named went at once.

"We needn't stay with Grundy," remarked Roylance to his comrades.

At the next turning, which was on the opposite side, Noble, Dane, Glyn, Redfern, Owen, Lawrence, and Koumi Rao left the diminishing main body.

Then they came to the cross-roads in the valley.

"There's nothing beyond this for a couple of miles or more," said Kerr, "and I feel pretty sure that we didn't lose the car we were after later than that. So here we'd better split up the rest of us into two lots."

"Will you take one, Talbot?" Tom asked.

"If you like, old chap."

"Let's see. You can have Julian, Keruish, Reilly, Hammond, Gore, and Skimpy, Blake, what—"

"I'm going the road Kerr goes!" said Blake unhesitatingly.

"Why?" asked Kerr mildly. "I didn't know you were so attached to me, Blake."

"I'm not. It's because I know jolly well that the road you take is the one you think will lead to Dig!"

"Well, we shall want plenty for this road, Tom," Kerr said. "It forks twice within a couple of miles."

There were left Tom Merry, Manners, Lowther, Kerr, Figgins, Fatty Wynn, Cardew, Levison, Clive, Blake, Herries, D'Arcy, Clarke,

and French. Besides these were Crooke, who understood that he went wherever Tom went, and Racke, who was free to go where he chose, for no one wanted him.

Now the road which they took was the road, and so it chanced that the squads led by Talbot and Harry Noble were clean outside all that followed, which was in no sense their fault. Grundy's band would have been quite out of it all as well but for the fact that the road on which they had started led more or less in the same direction as that taken by the largest body of scouts at the outset, and curved round into it later on.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

Found!

"WILL you turn off here, Levison?" asked Tom five minutes after they had left the cross-roads.

"That's for you to say, I suppose; but I don't think it looks very hopeful," answered Levison.

"Clive, Cardew, Clarke, and French with Levison!" said Tom.

No one opposed his order, and the band was lessened by five.

It was some little time before they reached another turning, and by then Levison's squad was hurrying to rejoin them. The way they had taken had ended at a gate leading into marshy fields, and there was no sign of a house near or of the passage of a car.

Now that it came to a final splitting-up Kerr thought hard, and Tom Merry waited for his choice.

"Let's settle how we are to split up first," said Kerr.

Thus far there had been no breaking-up of chums. But now, if the bands were to be at all equally balanced, there must be.

"Tommy leads one squad, of course!" said Blake. "Who's to lead the other?"

"Will you?" returned Tom.

"Is Kerr going with me?"

"No, with me!" Tom answered, grinning.

"Hanged if I half like that!" Blake exclaimed.

"I don't know a bit more than you do which is the road, or that it's either of these," said Kerr. "How can I?"

"You can't know, of course!" agreed Blake. "All the same, you're so blessed wide that I wouldn't mind betting you choose the right one!"

"For that matter, you can have your choice!" Kerr replied.

"We'll toss for it. Who goes with me? Herries, of course! You can go with Tommy and Kerr, if you like, Gustavus."

"Wight-ho, dear boy!"

Blake, Manners, Herries, and Fatty Wynn went one way in the event, though Fatty didn't like leaving Kerr and Figgy a little bit. Blake won the toss, and elected to keep straight on. But he had chosen the wrong road.

Crooke went with Tom Merry, Lowther, Kerr, Figgins, and Gussy. Racke stood alone for a minute or two after the two bands had parted, and then, when they were lost to sight in the fog, slowly followed the more numerous party.

"Keep your eyes peeled!" said Kerr. "Confound this fog! We may pass the very house Dig is in without seeing it if it happens to be a bit off the road."

"It's lonely enough," said Tom. "We haven't met a soul since we turned off the highway!"

"Bet'ah walk, hadn't we?" suggested Gussy. "There will be less chance of missin' anythin' then."

So they dismounted and plodded along, wheeling their machines, and looking out sharply for any sign of human habitation.

Behind them Racke had also dismounted, and followed without joining up. He hardly knew why he followed, and most certainly he did not guess that his doing so was to serve him in such good stead as it did in the end.

Tom glanced at his watch.

"Past eleven o'clock, and the fog is worse than ever!" he said. "It doesn't give us a decent chance."

"I weally think it is a twiff b'wight'ham than it was, Tom Mewwy," said Gussy hopefully.

"Hallo! Here's a change, anyway!" exclaimed Figgins.

They had left the narrow, hedge-lined road behind them, and had come out upon a wide, moory upland.

It looked dreary enough under the fog. It was not, indeed, a cheery spot at the best of times, and perhaps in all Sussex no more lonely place could be found.

"Several tyre-tracks," said Kerr. "A car's been along here more than once lately, and

the same car every time, you can see that by the marks."

"Bai Jove! We're gettin' warm!" Gussy said.

Somehow his hopefulness communicated itself to the rest, though there seemed but scanty reason for it.

The fog was now thicker than ever. No gleam of sunlight showed through it. They could barely see half a dozen yards on either side.

Then Crooke darted off the road and snatched at something in a clump of gorse.

"What have you got?" cried Lowther.

"It's a handkerchief! Oh, by gad, it's Digby's!"

Crooke fairly staggered as he said that, and his face was as white as chalk.

But he was as glad as any of them at that lucky find, though his gladness was more selfish than theirs. Not so entirely selfish, however, that he was the first to see what this meant to him personally.

"Dig may have dropped that from the car," Kerr said. "If so, it's no sign that he's imprisoned anywhere near here—may be twenty miles away—fifty, for that matter. But the car's being driven into Wayland makes that unlikely; and if the handkerchief wasn't dropped from the car the house he's in must be quite close. Hang the fog!"

"It was a very still day on Friday," Tom said. "Don't you remember that there wasn't a breath of wind when Wally won the toss from me? If it had been dropped from the car it would have fallen in the road; but plainly it hasn't been there, or it wouldn't be so clean."

"Good news for you, Tommy!" exclaimed Kerr, slapping him on the back.

"Someone behind us," said Figgins.

Out of the fog rode up the Levison contingent. Their joy when they heard the good news was great.

"Only thing to do is to hunt all over this—"

"Er—'blasted heath'—quotation, Shakespeare, Tommy," put in Lowther.

"Blessed moor, I was going to say," corrected Tom. "Hunt it all over for a house, which may be twenty yards away or a couple of miles—goodness knows! We'd better hunt in couples, I think. Will you come with me, Gussy?"

"Crooke, may I have the distinguished pleasure of your company?" drawled Cardew.

"If you like, though I don't know why you want it," growled Crooke.

"Racke's behind," said Levison sardonically. "Anyone specially want him?"

"Yes, I do!" replied Kerr.

Levison stared. But in a moment he saw what both Cardew and Kerr were after. Racke and Crooke could identify either Banish or Crey at a glance. No one else there could be sure of doing so. There might be more than one house. Even if there was only one it would be necessary to make sure of something before an attempt at Dig's rescue was made.

"Racke, you're wanted!" yelled Levison.

Racke heard, but stayed sulkily behind. Levison was the last fellow whose call he was likely to obey.

"Join up again as near here as possible within half an hour," said Tom Merry, as he and Gussy slipped away into the fog.

Cardew and Crooke, Kerr and Clarke, Figgins and French, Lowther and Clive, went off in pairs. Levison waited, and called again to Racke.

But Racke made no reply. So Levison put his bike with the rest behind a gorse clump some ten yards off the road, and departed alone.

Meanwhile, Grundy and the four who had set out originally with him were approaching the moor from the other side. Having ridden while Tom Merry and his comrades were walking, they had covered twice as much ground in the time. Not far behind them came Roylance and his two companions. The road they had taken had proved a no thoughtfare after a mile or so. Blake and his hand had also retraced their way. They had arrived at quite a fair-sized town, and had agreed that it was not worth while to proceed farther in that direction. All of them still felt that the chances were that Kerr's way was right, though Kerr had not chosen it.

Thus a small army of St. Jim's juniors was converging upon the place of Dig's captivity, screened by the thick fog.

But to Cardew and Crooke fell the honour of finding it.

They stumbled upon it in the fog, walking down the slope that led to it without the

least idea that a human dwelling was near until the front of it loomed up before them.

"By Jove!" ejaculated Cardew. "Another bit of luck for you, Crooke!"

"If it's the place," agreed Crooke eagerly. "Stand by, Cardew, an' let me go an' peep through the window."

"That's the game," replied Cardew.

He stood still while Crooke crept up. For fully ten minutes he waited. Then a burly figure suddenly appeared by his side.

"Found it?" asked George Alfred Grundy.

"Don't know yet," replied Cardew coolly.

"But it must be, surely! I—"

"Here's Crooke. He may be able to tell us."

"They're here! I've seen Banship!" hissed Crooke, in wild excitement.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

Rescue!

CARDEW had to hold Grundy back. The Shell fellow was all for making an immediate rush at the house.

"Don't be a bigger silly idiot than you can help!" said Cardew. "Our game now is to gather as many as we can of the crowd for an attack. The dashed house won't run away, an' the pretty beauties inside it aren't likely to as long as they don't know they're spotted."

"I shall stay here, anyway," answered Grundy obstinately.

"Right-ho! If you're shot you won't be missed," said Cardew. "Come along an' let's find the rest, or some of them, Crooke!"

And for once he spoke to Crooke quite generally.

The two hurried up the slope, and as they came out upon the open moor they saw that the fog had cleared on a sudden. Down in the hollow it was still thick, but up here a breeze was stirring, and the sun shone, and the last wisps of fog were disappearing.

And the moor seemed dotted with figures. Cardew flung up his arms and waved wildly.

They came rushing for him—Tom Merry and the rest of the searchers.

Now from the hollow they saw smoke rising from a chimney, and they drew up to Cardew and Crooke. But before the stragglers farthest away could reach those first on the scene half a score or more had disappeared down the slope.

It was Herries who yelled: "Dig-Dig, are you there?" And when there came an answering shout from the captive no one thought of prudence or of any plan of campaign.

Tom dashed his elbow through a pane, and thrust in his hand to push back the catch of the window.

"Oh, look out, Tom! You'll be shot!" gasped Gussy.

Banish stood within a couple of yards of them, levelling a revolver at Tom's head. Roylance and Manners and Arthur Augustus dodged aside; Tom ducked. A bullet splintered the glass above him. But it was only meant to frighten them. Banish might use the weapon to more deadly effect it cornered; but all he wanted now was to get away.

With the revolver still levelled at the window, he backed, reached the inner door of the room, whisked through it, and called to Crey.

But at that moment the bolts of the front door gave way before the impact of Grundy, reinforced in weight by those behind him. They were torn from their sockets; the lock came away; the door swung open.

Crey came rushing down the stairs. But Banish was already out of the house by the back door.

The other rascal tried to follow. He knew what was in his comrade's mind.

In the sudden lifting of the fog at almost the exact instant that Cardew had come out of the hollow and signalled none of the St. Jim's fellows had noted the fact that the car had been left out on the moor, clear of the hollow.

Banish was making for it now, and there was no one but Racke near enough to have any chance of stopping him.

Racke had come along as far as the lip of the hollow. Now, as Banish came rushing up, he dodged behind a gorse-bush.

The man did not see him. He began to crank up in frantic haste.

If Racke had seen the revolver he might not have taken the risk that he took then. He would not have taken it, in any case, but that he saw help near at hand. Yet, even so, he showed more courage than might have been expected of him.

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Figgins and Kerr, Tom Merry and Manners, Roynance and Clive were on the track of Banship. Racker hurred himself at the fellow, and tried to bear him down.

"Bravo, Racker!" cried Tom, in utter astonishment.

Banship swung round and snatched up the revolver laid on the grass when he seized the crank.

"You—you cub!" he cried furiously. "You will have it? Take it, then!"

The revolver spat. Racker reeled back, with blood on his face. The scoundrel leaped to the seat, let in the clutch, and started off, bumping over the rough moor.

Tom sprinted like mad, and clutched the back of the car. Behind him long-legged George Figgins came, and also got a hold. The rest of the pursuers held on, and now Roynance swarmed up into the car after the two, and Kerr and Clive and Manners hung on behind.

Banship had dropped his revolver. He turned his head now, and the car lurched and swayed.

"We've got you!" shouted Tom, and he flung his arms around the rascal's neck.

The car swerved and slid as the hands upon its steering-wheel left it. It struck the road, reeled sideways, and shot out its occupants.

Tom and Figgy clung to Banship; Roynance scrambled up and joined them. No one was hurt.

Then a man in blue jumped off his bike, and the voice of P.-c. Everson said:

"Let me get at him! I've the darbies ready!"

In another moment Banship stood up, panting, scowling, his wrists in the handcuffs.

"Got some information," said Everson briefly. "Superintendent sent three of us along, but I rode hardest, as it happened."

Then Wilkins came tearing up from the hollow.

"They've got the other chap!" he yelled. "Grundy and Fatty are sitting on him!"

"Dig all right?" asked Tom.

"Oh, he's all serene! Gussy's hugging him!" "Racker?"

"It's only a graze, they say. The bullet just touched him, and drew blood. But who'd have thought it of Racker?"

Now the two other constables came up.

"You're ahead of us, sir," said one of them to Tom. "But it's just as well we're here—save you trouble with those scamps, anyway! I suppose the missing young gentleman is there all right?"

"Oh, he's there!" replied Tom.

"Well, you can leave these two pretty

beauties to us, and take the good news to St. Jim's, if you like," Everson said.

Within ten minutes a start was made. Racker, with a handkerchief tied to his face, and Crooke, still shaky, rode with the rest; and if they were not treated as heroes, they were at least regarded, for the time being, as two of the crowd. There could be no question of reporting their share in the shady business now; Digby would have been the last to agree to that after the part they had played in his rescue.

But Dig did not know much about that as yet. He was a bit hazy about everything. Herries gave up his bike to him, and rode on Blake's step. Gussy would have been a lighter weight; but Herries wanted to punch the head of Gussy when he suggested that.

There were great rejoicings at St. Jim's when Dig was taken back in triumph. He went home for a few days. When he returned Sir Robert came with him, and there was one of the biggest spreads on record in Hall that evening.

Banship and Crey appeared at the next assizes, and were sent down for longish terms of imprisonment. But Banship swore that he would yet have his revenge upon Dig's pater when he came out.

THE END.



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