**The Parting of the Ways**

**by Frank Richards.**

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**THE FIRST CHAPTER.**

**Not Coming!**

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“WHERE’S thatbounder Clavering?” demanded BobCherry.
“He hasn’t come down yet.”“Theass!He’ll be late for thematch.”

And Bob Cherry, of the Remove, with a wrathful look, stepped back into the House.Outside the Greyfriars School House a crowd ofjuniors were collected, with bigcoats on over their football garb, and scarves wound round theirnecks. It was a keen, sunny winter’s afternoon, andvery cold. The GreyfriarsRemove were playing Courtfield that afternoon, and theywere about to start for Courtfield town, when Bob Cherrymade the discovery that one member of the Remove team had not yet turned up.
Itwas not far to Courtfield, and the Removitesintended towalk the distance. The kick-off wastimed for half-past two, anditwas now two o’clock, and time tostart.
Allthe members ofthe junior team were there excepting Clavering, as well as a good many more fellowswho were going with them tosee the match.
Bulstrode, thecaptain of the Remove, waslooking athis watch.
“Come on!” he exclaimed. “It’s time we were off!”

“Hold on aminute,” said Harry Wharton, “Clavering’snot here.”Bulstrode frowned.
“Hang Clavering!” he said. “Why can’the be ready to time? We can’twait for him.”
“Bob’s callinghim.”
Bob Cherry was indeed calling him.His stentorian tonescould be plainly heard by the groupof juniors in theClose, and bymost otherpersons inGreyfriars School, too. BobCherry had a powerful voicewhen he letit go.He was standing at the foot of the stairs, shouting.

“Clavering! Clavering!”
Bob Cherryexpected to see Clavering, ofthe Remove,come bolting downstairs in answer tohis call.

But he didn’t.

There was not even a reply. Bob Cherry shouted again, throwing still a little moreenergy into his powerful shout.

“Clavering! Clav! Clav! Clavering!”

Noanswer.

It was ahalf-holiday at Greyfriars and the House was almost deserted. Probably nobody besides Clavering was
lingering in the passages above, But Clavering, undoubtedly, was still in his study in the Remove passage, or else in the Remove dormitory, as he had not come down.

“Clav! Clav! Clav!”

Bob Cherry was roaring now. It seemed impossible that anyone within the extensive walls of Greyfriars could fail to hear him. But there came no reply from the junior upon whose name he called.
“Clav! Clav!” bellowed Bob Cherry. “You silly ass! We’re waiting! You fathead, we’re ready to start! You howling chump, I’ll come up for youin a minute!”
Still no reply. Harry Wharton and Frank Nugent came into the House again, and joined Bob Cherry at the foot of the staircase. Both of them were looking very puzzled. Clavering was not a fellow who usually played for the Form team, and it was an honour to him to be included in Bulstrode’seleven. It was amazing that he did not turnup in time to walk over to Courtfield. It was still more amazing that he did notanswer to his namewhen Bob Cherryshouted to him.“He can’t be ill, I suppose?” said Wharton.

“I’ll he blowed!” saidBob Cherry crossly. “He wasn’t ill an hour ago.The ass!”
“Give him another yell,”said Nugent “All together!”

And the three juniors raised their voices in unison.
“Clavering!”

Bulstrode looked in angrily atthe door of the School House.
“Leave him alone!” he exclaimed. “If he doesn’t want tocome, let him stick there. I’ll play somebody else in his place.”

“Oh, give him a chance!” said Harry Wharton. “We’ll run up and see where he is. Another minute won’t matter.”

Bulstrode growled.

“The cheeky ass! He ought to be glad to be in time. If he isn’t here in another minute I’ll leave him out of the
team.”

“Right-ho! We’ll fetch him.”
Wharton, Nugent, and Bob Cherry ran up the stairs. They were very much puzzled by Clavering’s absence. They reached the Remove passage. If Clavering was still changing his clothes, he was more likely to be in the dormitory.
“You cut up to the dorm, Franky, while we look in the study,” said Wharton.

“Right-ho!” said Nugent.

He ran up the second staircase, while Harry Wharton and Bob Cherry sprinted along the Remove passage to Clavering’s study. They reached thestudy, and Bob Cherry assailed the door with a terrific kick, which made the whole room shake. The lock was not designed to withstand assaults of that kind, and it snapped open,andthe door flew wide. Bob Cherry and HarryWharton dashed in.

“Clavering! Are you here,you ass?”

“My hat! What’s the matter with him?”

Clavering was in the study.
He was a handsome, somewhat slim junior, with dark eyesand dark brown curly hair. As a rule, Clavering looked apicture ofhealth and fitness. But at the present moment hedid not. His face was deadly pale, as he sat inthe armchair inthe study, in a strange, fixed attitude, as if all the elasticity had gone outof his limbs.

He didnot move, and did not even look up, as the juniorscame abruptly in.

“Clavering!”

“You ass!”

“Are you ill?”

“Gone to sleep?”

Frank Nugentcame speeding down the passage.
“I’ve looked in the dorm. He’snot there. My onlyhat! What’s the matter with Clavering?”

And Nugent stared in amazement at the junior in the armchair.

Bob Cherry strode towards Clavering and grasped him by the shoulder, and shook himseverely. Clavering started at last out of his deep, strange reverie.

He looked upwith startled eyes.

“What’s the matter with you?” demanded Bob, in angry amazement.

Clavering stammered.

“Nothing”

“Why didn’t you answer me?”

“I – I – Did you call me?”

Bob Cherry snorted.

“Do you mean to say you didn’t hear me calling you?” he exclaimed.

“Yes—no—yes.” said Clavering confusedly. “I—I didn’t notice. I suppose I heard you—yes.”
Bob Cherryglared at him. Bob Cherry was the besttempered fellow in Greyfriars as a rule, but this was certainlyenough to try anyone’s patience.
“You heard me,”he roared, “and you didn’t answer?”
“No; sorry. ‘You see—”
“See what?”
“Nothing.”
“If you’re not dotty, I don’t know what’s the matter with you,” said Bob Cherry. “Look here,the chaps are waiting to start for Courtfield.Have you forgotten that you’re playing in the Remove eleven?”
Clavering started.
“Ye-e-es.”
“You—you—you’d forgotten?” roared Bob.
“Yes, I’d forgotten. I—I can’t play this afternoon.”
“Can’t play?”
“No.”
“Why not?” demanded the three juniors with one voice.
“Because I—I—I can’t. Leave me alone, there’s good fellows,” said Clavering. “I—I don’t feel fit. I’ve had bad
news—I mean I—Ican’t play.For goodness’ sake, leave me alone!”
His voicerose to a cry. The chums of the Remove staredathim blankly. They did not comprehend in the least.

“My hat!” gasped Bob Cherry.
Bulstrode’s deep voicecame booming up the stairs.
“Are you fellows coming?”
Wharton stepped out into the passage.
“Yes” he called back. “Clavering says he can’t play thisafternoon.”
“Let him stick there, then; I won’t have him in the team now at any price,” said Bulstrode. “You fellows come at once.”
“Right you are!”

Wharton and Nugent wentdown the passage towards the stairs. Bob Cherry lingered for a moment longer in the
study. He wasreally concerned about Clavering. The junior was no special chum of his; in fact, Bob Cherry knew him but slightly. But Bob had a kindheart, and he could seethat there was something verywrong somewhere. His anger evaporated very quickly, as italways did.
“Clavering*,* old man, what’s the matter?” he asked.
“Nothing.”
“You’re not seedy?”
“No.”
“You’ve had some bad news that’s knocked you over?”
“Yes—no—never mind.”
“Letter from home, perhaps?” asked Bob Cherry softly. Bob Cherry remembered a letter he had once had from home himself, to tell him that his father had been wrecked and lost in the Red Sea.Clavering burst into a strange, wild laugh.
“Home!” he repeated.
“Yes; I mean from your people.”
“Mypeople? Good heavens!’ Clavering turned a white, drawn face upon the astonished junior. “Don’t—don’t ask me any questions! Leave me alone. I can’t play—that’s enough. For goodness’ sake,leave me alone!”
Bob Cherry went out of the study without another word.

**THE SECOND CHAPTER**

**The Courtfield Match.**

BULSTRODE frowned darkly as he tramped out of the gates of Greyfriars with the football team for Courtfield. He had really stretched a point in puttingClavering into the team at all; there were several other
fellows whom he knew better, and whose claims were quite asgood. But Clavering had been doing well in the Form practice, and the Remove captain had decided to give him a chance. Clavering had accepted his offer gladly enough. Bulstrode resolved that the junior should have no second opportunity of neglecting such a chance.
HarryWharton wore a very thoughtful expression. He had been football captain the previous term, and if this had happened during his captaincy he would probably have felt as annoyed asBulstrode about it. As itwas,he feltconsiderably puzzled, and a little concerned.
He knew little of Sidney Clavering. The boy had always been very reserved and quiet, and had not taken much part in the matters that most interested the Remove. He appeared to have plenty of money, but he never spoke about his people. He never accepted invitations home, and he never asked anybody to see him in the holidays. Many of the fellows would have suspected from that that Clavering’s home would not bear inspection, but for the fact that hewas well-dressed, well-behaved, and liberally supplied with pocket-money. Whoever his people were, it seemed pretty certain that they were well-off.
But what was the matter with Clavering? If he had had bad news from home, there was noreason why he should not say so. And it could be no ordinary bad news toupset the junior in this way.
Bob Cherry gave Harry a dig in the ribs, and brought him out of his reverie with a gasp.
“Penny for ***‘***em!” he said.
“Eh? For what?”

“Thoughts.”
Harry Wharton smiled.
“Iwas thinking about Clavering,” he said.
BobCherry nodded thoughtfully.
“Sowas I.” hereplied. “Queer,ain’t it?”
“Jolly queer.”
“Blessedif I understand it at all,” said Frank Nugent.
“He looked frightfully cut up, as if some ofhis people had died, or something of the sort.”
“It wasn’t that, or hewould havesaid so.”
“Funking the match, perhaps?”said Tom Brown.

Wharton shook his head.“I don’t think so. Clavering hasalways been a very quiet chap,but he isn’t, a funk.He stood up toTemple, of the Fourth, once.”
“Iremember that,” remarked Johnny Bull, “and he put up a goodfight. I don’t think he’dfunk a footer match.”
“I dare say he’snot fit,” remarked Mark Linley. “Iremember he changed colour very much when I saw him in the hall, when the postman came.”
“Oh, he’s had a letter, then?” exclaimed Hazeldene.“Yes; Ithink so.”
“Oh, it’s bad news ofsome sort, then,” said Harry Wharton. “I’m sorry for the poor chap,though I don’t see whyhe couldn’t have explained, all the same.
“Here’s Courtfield!”
The juniors tramped into the old market town. Courtfield was very busy on a Saturday afternoon. The Remove match was with the boy’s of Courtfield County Council School, and a Saturday afternoon was the only opportunity theCourtfield fellows had of meeting the Greyfriars juniors.
The football-ground was very near the big, ugly, red-brick building which the Courtfield authorities considered wasgood enough for a Council school. Near at hand was the grey old ivy-covered church of Courtfield that had been standing for three hundred years unchanged; and with that beautiful old churchunder their eyes, it was amazing that the builders couldfind it in their hearts toerect thehideous brickstructure opposite. But of what are not modern builders capable?
On the football-ground, the Courtfield fellows wore already waiting, and Trumper, and Grahame, andSolly Lazarus andthe rest came forward to meetthe Greyfriars party cordially enough. The Greyfriars fellows and the Courtfielders frequently met on fightingterms, butthey could befriendly enough,too. Bulstrode shook hands withTrumper, the captain of the Courtfield team.
“I hope we’re not late,” he said. “Wewaited for a silly ass who wasn’t ready, andcame without him.”
“That’s all right,”said Trumper. “It’s justtime for the kick-off now; but a few minutes don’t matter.”“Thertainly not” said Sally Lazarus in his soft, lisping voice.
And the boys preparedfor the match. Harry Wharton & Co. had forgotten about Clavering now. Morgan had
been put in in his place, and the Welsh junior was quite as good a player as Clavering, if not, indeed, a little better. Bulstrode gave just one snort as he remembered Clavering’s ingratitude, and then dismissed the matter from his mind.
It was likely to be a hard-contested match, for Courtfielders were evidently in good form.

The kick-off fellto Greyfriars. There was hardly any wind now. The ball rolled, and the match began.
Round the football-ground, a considerable crowd of the inhabitants of Courtfield had assembled to look on.Among them the juniors, who had come overfrom Greyfriars to watch the match, mingled.
The last matchbetween Courtfield and Greyfriars had ended in a victory for the former team. Bulstrode and his
merry men were determined to have a different finish this time. The Greyfriars juniors played up hard fromthe start. Their forward play was better than that of the home team, and more than once they broke through the defence, and came sweeping up to goal. Butthere was one back who seemed to have an almost miraculous power of clearing against the greatest odds, and it was SollyLazarus. There were two or three fellows in the Greyfriars team who were disposed to sneer at Solly as a “sheeney,” but he was not to be denied as afull-back. Time and again the Greyfriars fellows brought the ball right up, and Solly would nip in in the most wonderful way, and clear. The Courtfield crowd cheered the little, keen, nimble Jew schoolboy enthusiastically.
“Go it Solly!”
“Play up,Lazarus!”
“Well cleared, sir!”
“Hurray!”
Solly grinned serenely. He had agreat gift ofcoolness, and he was never disturbed out of his equanimity. Bulstrode brought the ball down the field, leaving the other forwards behind, and made a rush for goal, having beaten forwards and halves, and both backs being wide afield. It looked as ifthe goal-keeper was all that stood between Bulstrode anda score; but animble figure came sweeping in, and Solly, with his hands in the pockets of his football shorts, cleared, and then dodged out of the way of Bulstrode’s heavy rush.
He had not even troubled to take his hands out of his pockets, and the Courtfielders yelled with glee.
“Hurray!”
Bulstrode snorted.

“Blessed swanker!” hegrowled.
Solly chuckled.
“It ithn’t thwank, dear boy,” he said softly.
“Br-r-r-r-r!”said Bulstrode.
But swank or not, Bulstrode dropped a hint to his men to keep a very careful eye on the little Jew**.** Solly neededwatching, there was no doubt about that. The way he fed the forwards was marvelous. Trumper scored the first goal of the match, taking the ball up in midfield, where a long kick from Solly had dropped it, and bringing it down to goal, and sending it in, in spite of Hazeldene’s efforts between the posts.
Then the crowd yelled:
“Goal!”
“Goal! Hurray!”
“My hat!”said Bulstrode.
“Oh, rotten!” said Johnny Bull.
Bulstrode glared at Hazeldene.
“Do you call that goalkeeping?” he demanded.
Hazeldene glared in return.
“How could I help it?”
“Oh, fathead!”

“Hang it all, Bulstrode! Don’t rag the goalie with everybody looking on!” exclaimed Harry Wharton impatiently.
“Oh, rats!” growled Bulstrode. Hewas very ill- tempered and annoyed.
Trumper of Courtfield grinned. He had an idea that Hazeldene could not have stopped that shot, if he had been ever so good a goalkeeper. It was oneup for Courtfield, and it was the only score in the first half.
The whistle went for the interval, with the score one to nil. And the Greyfriars fellows were not pleased as they
crowded off for the brief rest.
“Never mind,” said Bob Cherry, as he sucked a lemon he had extracted from his coat pocket. “Never mind; we’ll squash ‘em in the second half.”
Bulstrode grunted. Morgan ought to have stopped Trumper,” he said.
Morgan gave asnort.
“I tried!” he said.“Clavering would have stopped him if he’d been in your place, as he ought to have been,” said the Remove captain.

“You’d better play Clavering next time, then, look you,” said Morgan sulkily.
Harry Wharton held his tongue, though he was very much inclined to speak. Morgan was quite as good a back as Clavering, and he knew it, and Bulstrode knew it. But Bulstrode was not an ideal football captain. Ragging a team while the game is in progress is about one of the greatest faults that a football captain can commit, but it was a fault thatBulstrode was very prone to commit. So long as matters were going well, Bulstrode was all smiles, but when things looked bad his temper was certain to get the better of him. Most of the team had had reason, more than once, to regret the time whenHarry Wharton was footer-captain.HarryWharton had his faults of temper, but he never made the blunder ofputting a playeroffhis form by ill-timed grumbling.
Wharton was verymuch inclined to suggest to Bulstrode that it was time to shut up, but it was no business of his to dictate to his captain. Morgan, like many Welsh boys, had a keenly sensitive nature under an outward appearanceof calmness and stolidity, and he was deeply wounded by Bulstrode’s sharp criticism, which he felt thathe had notdeserved, it was quite likely that his play in the second half would suffer in consequence, though Bulstrode, in his heavy-handed way, took no account of considerations of that sort.“I’d playClavering now if he were here!” Bulstrode growled angrily, “If I couldget him herenow I’d ask Trumper to let me change you forhim.”“My hat!”exclaimed Ogilvy.“What’s the matter withyou?”
“Talk of angels!” said Ogilvy. “Look there!”
He pointed to a figure that hadjust come in sight of the football-ground, up the lane from Greyfriars*.* It was that of a boy inEtons, with Greyfriars cap. Bulstrode uttered an exclamation of surprise.
“Clavering!”

**THE THIRD CHAPTER.**

**Three to Two!**

CLAVERING did not look towards the football field. He was looking straight before him as he walked on towards the town, and his expression showed that he had forgotten all about the match, and probably even the circumstance that his schoolfellows were in Courtfield at allthat day. Morgan looked round at him in his slow way,and then gave Bulstrode a smile that was more than half a sneer.“There’s your man, look you,”he said. “Youcan play him, if Trumper agrees, and I’ll standout.”
Bulstrode frowned. He had not meant what hehad said to Morgan; but being thus taken at his word he would not back out. He made a step toward the side of the field and shouted to Clavering.
“Clavering!”
The junior started,and looked round.
“Hallo!” he replied.
“Comehere - I want you!”
Clavering halted.
“What do you want, Bulstrode!”
“You!”
“I’m sorry—I can’t come.”
Bulstrode’s face turned red with rage. For a moment helooked very much like Bully Bulstrode of former times.
“Come here, you young cad, or I’ll come and fetch you!” he roared. “I want you to play.”“I can’t!”
“You’ve got to. Come here!”
Clavering shook his head.

“I’m sorry, Bu1strode; it can’t be done.”
And he began to walk on into thetown. Bulstroderan towards theroad, but BobCherry caught him by theshoulder.

“Hold on, Bulstrode; it’s time.”
Bulstrode gritted his teeth.
“By Jove!” he exclaimed. “I’ll hammer that cad when I get him back to Greyfriars!”
“So you want me after all?” said Morgan.
“Yes, confound you.”“You couldn’t change a player now, anyway,’ said Harry Wharton. “I dare say Trumper would agree, but it wouldn’t be the game.”
“Oh, rot!” replied his captain politely.
“You fellows ready?” asked Trumper, strolling up, and pretending not tonoticethatthere was any warmth of argument proceeding among the Greyfriars fellows.
“Yes,” said Bulstrode shortly.“All therene,” said Solly Lazarus.
The teams lined up again.
“Watch that blessed little Jew!” Bulstrode growled to his men. Solly overheard the remark, and grinned. He intended to require watching!
Wharton was thinking about Clavering, as he lined up with the rest of the team. It was curious that Clavering should be in Courtfield that afternoon, when he had refused to come there with the football team.
But the recommencement of play drove Clavering from his mind. The Courtfield fellows were playing up very hard determined to make the match a win if they could.They followed up the kick-offwith a resolute rush, andthe Greyfriars’ players were hard put to it to hold their own.
Again the Courtfield forwards came sweeping down on goal and once more Morgan failed at back, and Hazeldene in the citadel. The ball went in from Grahame’s foot, and Courtfield registered two up.
Bulstrode gritted his teeth. There was no doubt about it. Morganwas decidedly off colour, but Bulstrode had only himself to thank for it. He had thrown the sensitive lad into a state of nervousness by his ill timed henpecking, and he was reaping the results of it.But Bulstrode was far from recognising that fact. As a matter of fact, Bulstrode’s bad temper was interfering with his own play, and his form was not up to its usual standard.
He glared at Morgan and Hazeldene when the ball was tossed out of the goal again. Morgan scowled, and Hazeldene shrugged his shoulders. Bulstrode was in a towering rage when the teams lined up again. Most of the other follows were beginning to look hopeless now. The enemy were two up, and there remained twenty five minutes toplay, and the whole team bad been thrown out of sorts by Bulstrode’s bad leadership.
Harry Wharton & Co. made a big effort to equalise.
Byhard fighting and grim determination they drove their way to the Courtfield goal, and for once Sally Lazarus was beaten.
Harry Wharton sent the leather whizzing in with a quick, low shot thatgave the goalie no chance.
Then the Greyfriars fellows round the field shouted.
“Goal! Hurrah! Bravo, Wharton!”
Bulstrode looked a little brighter.
“That’s a beginning,” he said. “For goodness’ sake, keep itup! We can’t let them lick us twice running.”
For the moment fortune smiled uponthe efforts of thevisitors. Another goal came, this time from the foot of Bob Cherry, and the schoolboys cheered as the scores equalised.
Five minutes remained to play.
Both sides were making great efforts now**,**and Trumper & Co. were pushing harder and harder. The leather came up to the Courtfield goal, but Sally Lazarus cleared with a kick that took it past the halfway line and dropped it fairly at Trumper’s feet.
Trumper was speeding down the field with itin a flash.
The Greyfriars forwards and halve’s were nowhere, and one of the backs was far afield, and could not possibly get up in time. Morgan was there, but Morgan had been put into a flutter by his leader’s sharp tongue, and he was over-careful and over-anxious. He rushed to tackleTrumper, miskicked and stumbled, and rolled on the ground, and the Courtfield captain, amid a rising roar of cheering from the crowd sped on to goal.
Hazeldene was on the alert, but many a League goalie would have failed to stop the shot that Trumper sent whizzing in. It found the far corner of the net, giving Hazeldene no chance, though he made a desperate spring, andjust touched the leather with hisfinger-tips.
There was a roar.
“Goal!”
**“**Courtfieldwins!”
“Hurrah!”
Phip!It was the whistle.
The match was over.
Courtfield had won by three goals to two, and Greyfriars were defeated for the second time. Bulstrode clenched his hands as he strode off the field, hardly taking the trouble to conceal his bad temper.
“Don’t scowl with the enemy looking on, for goodness sake!” said Johnny Bull.
“Oh, go and eat coke!”
“Look here, Bulstrode—”.
“Oh, shut up!”
Johnny Bull was very near to hitting out at that moment,but he restrained himself. The Greyfriars fellows looked glum enough all round. They took their leave ofthe victorious Courtfielders, and tramped home mostly in silence. Bulstrode spoke for the first time as they neared the gatesof Greyfriars.
“It’sall that cad Clavering’s fault!”
Harry Wharton stared at him.
“Blessed if Isee how you make that out!” he said.
“That was the first thing that went wrong,” said Bulstrode. “He ought to have playedas he arranged. He had no right to stay out and force me to p1ay Morgan.”
“Morgan’s quite as good.”
“He wasn’t so good this afternoon.”
“You shouldn’t rag a chap while a match is on, then!” said Morgan sulkily.
“Hear, hear!” said Bob Cherry.
“Oh, rats!” said Bulstrode. “It wouldn’t havehappened ifClavering had played. And I never heard of suchcheek as a fellow standing out of the Form match when he’s offered a chance to play—after accepting it, too! I’ll make him sorry for himself when he comes in!”

And Bulstrode tramped into the Close with a scowling brow.

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**THE FOURTH CHAPTER.**

**Clavering’s Uncle.**

CLAVERING of the Remove walked down the old high Street of Courtfield, crowded with people who came in fromthe countryside onbusiness onthe Saturday afternoon. For a long time hewalked on, after he had passed the Council school football-ground, like a fellow in a dream, his hands thrust deepinto his trousers’pockets, and his eyes fixed onthe path. He was not thinking of the match he had missed, or the anger of his Form captain, but he was certainly thinking deeply of something, for the wrinkle between his brows was deep, and growing deeper, and his lips were hard set.
Suddenly he paused, and looked about him.Hehad walked almost through the town, and with a gesture of
annoyance he stopped, and, turning, retraced hissteps. In his deep and painful reverie the junior had evidently walked past his destination. He moved back along the High Street till he came to a corner, where several articles of furniture stood outside a shop on the pavement. In the windows were more articles of furniture, and oleographs, and cheap oil paintings inwonderful colours, andbrass fenders, and antiques fresh from the factory at Birmingham. Over the facia of the shop, in gilt letters, was the name of “Israel Lazarus,” and smaller letters announced the interesting fact that Mr. Lazarus dealt in second hand furniture, antiques, paintings, foreign stamps, coins, and other articles, allgenuine, and of the best quality.
Some of the Greyfriars juniors had sometimes purchased articles of furniture at the shop of Mr. Israel Lazarus. Study furniture in the Greyfriars Remove was, as a rule, short-lived. But it was certainly notto purchase furniture that Sidney Clavering had come there. He entered the little shop, the wrinkle in his brow growing deeper, ifpossible, and little Mr. Lazarus—whose bright, black eyes and handsome aquiline nose proclaimed his Oriental extraction— bowed to him over the counter, and rubbed his plump hands together as if, like the famous Sir Jacob Kilmansegg, hewas “washing his hands with invisible soap in imperceptible water.”“And vat can I do foryou to-day, young shentleman” asked Mr.Lazarus. “Is it a table, this time?”Clavering looked at him.
“Or a pair of handsome windsor chairs?” Mr. Lazarus insinuated. “Worth double the monish, and going sheap.”
“Eh?”“Asquare of carpet for the study?” Mr. Lazarus suggested. “Really handsome, and scarcely worn - only a holein the centre — merely noting—”
“I haven’t come here to buy anything,” said Clavering

“Oh!” said Mr. Lazarus. But his urbanity of manner didnot desert him. “You havesomedings tosell, ain’t it? The monish was tight. I understand.You sell your cricketbat and buy him again in ze summer?”
“I don’t want to sell anything,” said Clavering.

“Then vat do you want, mein cootness?” said Mr. Lazarus, in perplexity.
“You have a lodger here?”Mr. Lazarus comprehended.
“Oh, my cootness! You have come to see mein lodger?”

“Yes,” said Clavering. “Mr. Brandon.”
“You goes to ze side door and rings ze bell, or you goes round trough ze garden,” said Mr. Lazarus. And he turned again to the big account-book he had been engaged upon when Clavering entered—an account book in which Mr. Israel Lazaruskept an account of the profits and losses of his day’s trade.

“Thank you,” said Clavering.

He left the shop, and the old gentleman glanced after him curiously from under his thick, bushy eyebrows with his keen and glittering black eyes. The worn and white look in Clavering’s facehad not escaped him, and the dealer wondered what a Greyfriars junior could have to do with his lodger, Mr. Brandon. Mr. Lazarus was a keen old gentleman, and he knew things outside the secondhand furniture business, and he knew that the junior who had spoken to him was in distress. But it was no business of his, and Mr. Lazarus buried himself in his figures again, and dismissed the matter front his mind.
Clavering turned into the by-street, and entered the garden of the house behind the shop. There was a low, wooden verandah behind the house and a man was standing there smoking a thick, black cigar. He caught sight of Clavering the moment the junior entered the side gate, and removed the cigar from hismouth with a decidedly dirty finger and thumb.
“’Ere you are, then?” he said.

Clavering looked up at him.
“Here I am,” he repeated. “Is my uncle here?”
“He’s inside.”
“Very well.”
Clavering came up the steps of the verandah, and the thick-set man with the cigar held outa stubby hand to him. The boy hesitated a second, and then took it, and hastily released it again. Momentary as his hesitation had been, it did not escape the keen, light-brown eyes of the stubby man.
“Not getting ‘aughty, old pal, are you?” he asked, with a sneeringlaugh.
“Where is myuncle?”
“Indoors.” The stubby man resumed his cigar, and went onspeaking withit between his yellow-stained teeth. “No side, young ‘un, do you understand? It won’t pay you to put on anyside with the Gander. Savvy?”An expression of intense dislike came over Clavering’s face, though he did his best to restrain his feelings.
“I came here to see my uncle”,” he said.
“Foller me,” said the man who gave himself the peculiar name of the Gander—perhaps because he may have had reason for concealing the one he really owned. “This way.”
He moved into the house by a half-glass door opening from the verandah.A man was seated in the room, with his feet upon a fender before a blazing coal fire,and with a pipe in his mouth. On the table, at his elbow, stood a bottle half full of liquid, an ashtray, and a glass.
“’Ere you are, old pal!” said the Gander.
The man turned his head.
He was a man somewhat like the schoolboy in features, but like in no other respects. Once he had been handsome, but drink and careless ways of life had deeply marked his face. His eyes, with streaks of red in the white, were uncertain and watery, and his complexion was of a darkly-bronzed colour. His hand, which was shapely enough, shook as he held his pipe in it. Yet there was a kind of good-nature in the face, and the glance he cast at the boy was not unkindly.
Clavering caught his breath as be entered the room. The air was close and heavy with the fumes of tobacco and spirits, but the Gander did notseem to notice it—perhaps he liked it.
“Ah! So you’ve come Sidney?” exclaimed the occupant of the room.
“Yes, uncle.”
“Sit down.”
Clavering came to the table, and stood there, his hand resting upon it. He did not accept the invitation to sit down.
“You had my letter?” asked Mr. Clavering.
‘Yes; that’s why I’m here.”
“Good!”
“You told me to come here and ask to see Mr.Brandon,” said Clavering abruptly.”Why did you not come in your own name uncle?”

The elder man hesitated.

“P’r’aps your uncle knows his own business best,” said the Gander, with the same sneering laugh.
Clavering took no notice of thestubby man, and Mr. Clavering made a deprecatory gesture with his uncertain hand.
“Don’t be hard on the boy, Gandy.”
“I don’t want to be ‘ard on ‘im,” growled the Gander; but I ain’t having any side, you mark that—no side,”
“I’m sure Sidney does not mean to put on any side towards you, Gandy.”
Clavering did not speak, and did not seem to see the almost imploring look his uncle cast towards him, evidently wishing him to confirm his statement.
“Now, don’t let us have any disagreement,” said Mr. Clavering hastily.“Gandy is a good friend of yours, Sidney— a very good friend.”
“Oh! I should say so!” grunted Gandy.Clavering did not look at him.
“You wanted to see me, uncle!” he said.
“Yes, yes, certainly!”
“Why could you not come to Greyfriars?”
“It was—was better not,” said Mr. Clavering hesitatingly, and the Gander laughed. The junior turned fiercely upon the thick-set man.
“You can keep out of this!” he exclaimed, with gleaming eyes. “I came here tosee my uncle, not to see you. I don’t want to have anything to say to you.”“Ho!”“I can’t understand why my uncle should speak to such aman as you are; but I won’t, in any case!” Clavering broke outfiercely. “Mind your own business! Let me alone with my uncle!”
“Sidney, my lad!”
“Lethim shut up, then!”said Clavering.
“Shut up!” roared Gandy, his dark, coarse face crimson with rage “Shutup—eh? Don’t you make signs at me, Jim Clavering! I’m going to ‘ave this out. Shut up! I’ll tell this young spark wot he is—”
“Gandy!”
“I’ll ‘ave it out, I tell you!” roared the angry Gandy. “I’ll bring ‘im to his senses. I’ll have no lip from thebeggar’s brat—the pauper who’s been living on me for these two years past!”
Clavering turned pale.
“It’s a lie!” he exclaimed fiercely.
“A lie is it!” exclaimed the Gander, flinging the stump of his cigar violently into the grate. “Askhim! Ask your uncle!”
Mr. Clavering was silent, and his hand shook more than ever.
Clavering turned a strange, almost wild glance uponhis uncle.
“Uncle!”
“Ask him!” said theGander. “Ask him who’s paid your feesat Greyfriars ever since your father died!”“Uncle!”
Mr. Clavering was silent.
“Ask him who’s sent you your pocket-money; who’s paid for your clothes and your books!” exclaimed Gandy.
“Uncle!” said Clavering, in a voice of agony.

But still James Clavering did not reply.

**THE FIFTH CHAPTER.
A Crushing Blow.**

THE Greyfriars junior looked from one man to the other—from the liquor-sodden, weak, shame stricken face of his uncle to the hard and powerful bulldog physiognomy of the Gander, and back again. His brain seemed to be in a whirl. Why did not his uncle deny what this brute declared so vehemently? There could be only one reason—he did not deny it because itwas true!“Uncle!”said Clavering.
“Ask him?” sneered the Gander.
“Will you answer me, UncleJim?”
Mr. Clavering drew a long, weak breath.
“What do you want me to say, my boy?” he asked tremulously.
“Is what that man says true?”
Mr. Clavering did not speak.

“Tell him!” said the Gander.
“Is ittrue, uncle?”
“Yes!”groaned Mr. Clavering.
Clavering stood quite still,

“That man has paid my feesat Greyfriars?”

“Yes.”“I owe him all I have?”
“Yes.”
“Everything?”

“Yes.”

“My heavens!”Clavering sank into a chair.He did notfeel grateful. The discovery had made him almost sick and giddy. There was noroom forgratitude; he knew that without thinking aboutit. If the Gander had done this he had done it with some ulterior motive—some motive that thejunior fearedto know.TheGander regarded him with a hard, sneering grin, and lighted afresh cigar.
“I—I did not know!”faltered Clavering at last. “I—I did not know. I—I thought—”
TheGander laughed in mocking laugh.“You thought youruncle was paying for you—hey?”
“Yes.”
“And where did you think he wasgetting the money from?” asked the Gander sneeringly. “You know your father died a bankrupt two years ago, soon after youwent to Greyfriars. You know you were left without a penny. And you had always heard of your Uncle Jim as the wastrel ofthe family—hey?”
“It was true enough,” said James Clavering.
“You knew your uncle had been in prison,” pursued the Gander. “Don’t say you didn’t know it.”
“I knew it,” Clavering muttered.
“Where did you think he got the money from to pay for you at an expensive school—hey? What do you think he lived on?”

Clavering made a passionate gesture.
“I never knew!”he cried. “I’ve thought and thought about it till my head seemed splitting. I never could tell! I feared sometimes, that Uncle Jim made his money in some way he couldn’t explain; then I felt that I must be wronging him.”
Mr. Clavering buried his face in the tumbler. It was clear that the man was quite under the influence of the Gander; that there was only one will where those two were concerned, andthat that will wasthe Gander’s. “Well,” said the Gander sneeringly, “Uncle Jim had the money from me. I’ve paid every penny of it—and more
beside. Your uncle would be in quod. now if I hadn’t kept him out of it. Ain’t that true, Jim Clavering!”
“I suppose so,” said Mr. Clavering weakly. “Don’t be hard on the boy, Gandy.”
“Who’s ‘ard on him?” said Gandy angrily. “Only I don’t want any side.”

“If you’ve done all this for me, I – I – suppose I ought to be grateful,” said Clavering falteringly. “But —but whydidyou doit? You’re no connection of mine;I’ve only seenyou as a friend of Uncle Jim’s, and I never liked you— and you knew it!”
The Gander laughed hoarsely.
“I ain’tdone it forcharity,” he said. “Notbut what I won’t treat you well if you be’ave. But you’ve got to work for your living.”
“I’d rather do that than be dependent on you!” said Clavering.
“Do be quiet, Sidney!” whispered his uncle. “Don’t anger him!”

“I’m not afraid of him!”The Gander showed his yellowteeth in an evil grin.
“You’d like to leave Greyfriars - eh – and go out into the world to work?” he asked.

Clavering’s heart sank.
Would he like that?
It was all so sudden and so terrible that he hardly knew what he would like; he hardly knew whether he was not
dreaming it all. It all seemed like some dreadful, feverish nightmare.
The Gander watched the changing expression of his white face with a sneer.
“You be ‘ave yourself, my boy, and don’t put on side,” he said, “and you’ll be all serene I ain’t a ‘ard man. Am
I a ‘ard man, Jim Clavering?”
“No,” faltered Clavering’s uncle.
“You ‘ear what your uncle says?” said the Gander. “You listen to ‘im!”
“What did you do it for!” said Clavering. “Tell mewhat youdid it for.”
“I’d my reasons,” said the Gander, “Perhaps I wanted auseful boy, brought up at agood school, to ‘elp me inmy business.”
“Your business?” said C1avering. “What is your business?”
The Gander chuckled.
“Tell him what my business is Jim Clavering,” he said.
Clavering’s uncle made an appealing gesture.
“For mercy’s sake,Gandy, don’t be too hard on the poorboy so suddenly!”he exclaimed. “Sidney will understand; he will like you, he will be grateful to you, when he has time to reflect. Let him down lightly.”
“What is his business?” repeated Clavering, in a quivering voice.
“You’ll know soon enough!”grinned the Gander. “Never mind now!”Perhaps for a moment, there was a throb of pity in the man’s hard heart for the miserable boy. “I don’t want tobe ‘ard on you. Don’t you put on any side, and we’ll get on all right. I don’t want to take you away from Greyfriars. I ain’t a ‘ard man, You can ‘ave a talk with your uncle now, andI’ll ‘ave a smoke in the garden.”
And the Gander went out, and closed the door behind him.
There was a long silence in the room. Clavering sat in a strangely helpless attitude, his eyes fixed upon his uncle’s face.But Mr. Clavering did not meet his gaze. He kept his eyes turned away,and lighted and relighted his pipe severaltimes with trembling fingers. But he was not smoking. Once he burnt his fingers with a match, and muttered acurse.
It was easy to see that the man was a bundle of nerves; he had been drinking to get up the courage for this interview, but the potent spirit failed of its usual effect, and he could not speak, hecould not look at the miserable boy.
Clavering broke the silence at last. It was torture to him.
“Uncle, will you explain this?”
“There’s nothingmuch to explain, Sidney,” said his uncle heavily. “It’s true what he’s told you. I’ve never had any money. I was always the wastrel of the family. Yourfather used to send memoney, and while he did that I kept pretty straight. But when he died—a ruined man—I had no chance then. I don’t defend myself. I’ve been weak and worse than weak. But—but—” His voicefaltered. “Sidney, lad, I’ve alwaysbeen fond of you; and when I came to see you after poor Sid died, I—I meant what I said— that I’d do everything I could do foryou. And—and when Gandy offeredto find themoney tokeep you at the school, how could I say no? You know what you feltlike when you thought you had to leave. If it hadn’t been for the Gander, Sidney, you’d have left the school that day, and never gone back. You’d have gone out to work, if you could have got any—or starved!”
Clavering shivered.
“I let the Ganderdo it,” said Mr. Clavering“I—I knew what he wasdoing it for, Sidney; but—but—but I hoped for the best. I hoped that something might happen before the time came for him to claim you. But—but nothing has happened. But you’vehad two more years of good school, Sidney, and two years of good clothes, and good, healthy life, and good education, my lad; and if you want to kick over the traces now you’re more fit to look after yourself than youwereas a boy ofthirteen - a fagin the SecondForm. Say that youthink I did it for the best, Sidney.”
The boy’s voice was dry and husky as hereplied:
“I suppose you did, Uncle Jim. But—butwhy did the Gander do it? Why did he do it?What does he want in return?”
“Well, he’s—he’s entitled to something, Sidney,” said the man hesitatingly. “You’ll acknowledge that yourself, won’t you, lad?”
“I’ll pay him back if ever I can—”
Jim Clavering shook his head.“How’ll you pay him, Sidney?If you left Greyfriarstomorrow you couldn’tearn your living, my poor lad; youhaven’t been trained forthat, as I knew very wellwhen I let him pay for you to stay at school. “There’s not a street arab in this town who’s not more able tosupport himself, Sidney, than any fellow from a public school if he’s really down on hisuppers.”
“I suppose that’s true”,” said Clavering, with a bitter laugh. “I can’t get any wages, I suppose, forconstruing Virgil, or playing football.”
“Youcan’t, Sidney. You’re dependent on the Gander— heaven help you!—and so am I,” said Mr. Clavering.
“But why—why has he done it?”“Because you must be useful to him in return, now you’re old enough.”
“How can I be useful to him?”.
“In his business, I mean.”
“What is his business?”
Mr. Claveringdid not answer.
There was a longsilence. Clavering did not repeat the question; he dreaded to hear the answer.
What business, indeed, was the Gander’s likely to be? What business consorted with those keen,cunning eyes, that cunning mouth, that hard heart and cruel tongue?
“I—I tried to break it to you in my letter, Sidney,” faltered Mr. Clavering at last.“I wanted to make it come less hard.”
Clavering laughed grimly.
“Your letter knocked me over, uncle; but itwasn’t so bad as this. You wrote to me that you were a ruined man; that I must never expectanything from you again.”
Mr. Clavering nodded.“It’s true,Sidney. It’s not new—but it’s true.The Gander dictated the letter. He’snot really a hard man, Sidney, if you know him. He agreed that the truth must be broken to you gently, and he told me what to write.”
“I understand.”
“I told you to come here and ask for me in the name ofBrandon,” went on Mr. Clavering. “I did not want to use my name here, Sidney. If anyfellow fromGreyfriars should see me, I don’t want him to know that I’m a relation of yours. If you’re going to stay atGreyfriars, lad, you must keep up appearances.”“Stay at Greyfriars, uncle?”

“Yes.”

“On that man’s charity?”The man by the fire made no answer.
“And if I stay at Greyfriars, uncle, how am I to be useful to him—in his business, whatever that is?”“In the vacation, Sidney, and—and sometimes you can have aday or twoaway fromthe school, and help him.”
“Helphim—in what?”Mr. Clavering finishedthe contents of his tumbler. His lips moved,but he did not speak. His eyes avoidedhis nephew’s.“Will you tell me?”
“I can’t!”groaned the man.“Sidney,my lad, I’d have done anything to save you from this. I swear I would. I always hoped that something would turn up; something to make it possible for me to look after you**.** But I’m a wreck; I’m done for! The Ganderholds the whip-hand.”
“Tell me what he wants.”Mr. Clavering shook his head.“Ican’t! Ask him; he’ll tell you himself.But—but myadvice to you is to let it rest today.Think over thematter, Sidney, and think over how you stand. And—and be civil to the Gander; he holds both of us in the hollow of his hand.”
Clavering rose to his feet.“I - I think I’ll be getting back to Greyfriars now!” he muttered. “I feel sick. Goodbye, Uncle Jim!”
“You don’t hate me, Sidney?”
The boy shook his head.
“I believe you’re fond of me, Uncle Jim, and you did it for the best, he answered. “Heaven knows what would have become of me, else. But—but I feel sick! Goodbye!”

“Goodbye, my poor lad!”
Clavering passed out into the verandah. The Gander was not in sight,and Claveringwas glad of it. He hurried
throughthe garden to the gate. Just as hewas opening it, it was pushed open from outside, anda boy of about his own age came in, and they met face to face in the dusk.
“All therene,” said a soft, lisping voice, as Clavering started back with an exclamation. “I’mnot a thilly ghost.”
“Lazarus!”stuttered Clavering.
Solly nodded.
“Yeth, rather!” he said cheerfully.
**“**You young hound! You’re spying upon me?” Clavering exclaimed furiously.
Solly stared at him in astonishment.
“My onlyUncle Tham!” he ejaculated. “Quitea mithtake, I assure you, dear boy. What on earth should I thpy on you for?”“What did you come here for, then?” exclaimed Clavering
“Becauthe I live here,” said Solly simply.
“Oh!”
“You’re looking rather theedy my thon,” said Solly, peering at Clavering with his bright, black eyes, in the dusk.
“Anything the matter?”
“No!” muttered Clavering. “I—I’m sorry for what I just said; I—I’m rather upset.”
“All therene, my thon,” said Solly.
Clavering passed through the gateway, and hurried down the street, leaving Solly Lazarus standing there in the dusk, looking after him very curiously.

**THE SIXTH CHAPTER.
The Rotters!**

QUITE a little crowd of Greyfriars fellows were in the Close in the early winter dusk to greet the returning Remove eleven. Coker of the Fifth had come down to the gates with Potter and Greene, and Temple, Dabney & Co. of the Upper Fourth turned out as soon as they heard of the arrival of the Removites. The Remove at Greyfriars thought a great deal of themselves—much more than anybody else did. Indeed, the other fellows did not hesitate to characterise the Remove as swanking duffers, which was unjust, and merely indicates how the other fellows regarded them. They had defeated the Upper Fourth many a time on the footer-field; and they had challenged Coker & Co.— promising the Fifth a licking if theyaccepted the challenge— which the Fifth did not do. The Remove, certainly, had a way of acting as if all Greyfriars, if not the whole county, belonged to them. Hence the crowd of fellows turning out to meet them. For a Fourth-Form fellow had been cycling through Courtfield that day, and he had paused to see the finish of the match, and he had seen the Remove eleven defeated. And he had scorched back to Greyfriars on his bicycle, to carry the news to Temple, Dabney & Co.,and prepare a reception for the defeated Removites. Not that the Fourth wanted to triumph ungenerously over a fallen foe. They only wanted to point out to the Remove that pride often goeth before a fall, and that a more humble attitude would well become a Form that could not uphold the Greyfriars colours in the football-field. They had prepared an elaborate joke on the Remove, a “rot” of great magnitude.
“Here the conquering heroes come!” roared Coker, in his stentorian voice.
And the Fourth and Fifth-Formers roared together;
“Hurrah!’’
The Removites stared.
Of Fry’s scorch home to Greyfriars, and his carrying the news of defeat, they knew nothing. They concluded that the Fourth and the Fifth supposed them to be returning victorious. Even so, it was unusual enough for Fourth and Fifth to turn out like this to greet the Removites on their return, it wasa most unfortunate moment for the fellows to choose to do honour to the Lower Fourth team, now that they were returning defeated, and very sore with their defeat.
That was the little joke planned by Temple and Coker and their friends. They knew perfectly well that the Remove had been defeated; and they were affecting to believe that theywere returning victorious, as if they naturally assumed, from the manners and customs of the Remove, that they couldn’t possibly be beaten. As indeed they might have done; for if the Remove fancied themselves at anything, it was at the great game of football.

“Here they come!”
The Removites stared.

“Hurrah!”

“Room for the giddy conquerors!”
“Bravo!”
The dusky Close seemed swarming with Fellows; all the Upper Fourth, half the Fifth, the Third and the Second had turned out. Even Sixth-Farmers were looking out of their study windows Wingate himself, the captain of Greyfriars, was looking on, grinning.
“Hurrah!”
Bulstrode gritted his teeth.
“Oh,hang it!” he muttered. “The silly assesthink we’vewon!”
“Nice come down for us when we explain!” growled Nugent.
“All young Clavering’s fault—”
“Oh, rats!”
“Look here, Bob Cherry—”
“You’d better explain,” said Harry Wharton curtly.
But it was not so easy to explain. The roar of voices in the Close, the deafening cheers, made it difficult to make one’s voice heard. And the cheerers were determined to hear no explanation.
“Hurrah!”
“Hip, hip, hurrah!”
“Cheers for the conquering heroes!” roared Coker.
“Hurrah!”
“Cheers for the invincibles!”
“Hurrah!”
“Cheers for the Remove, who’ve never been licked!” shouted Temple.“Oh, rather!”

“Hurrah!”
Bulstrode turned crimson. It was really difficult for the Remove players to make their way across the Close tothe School House, so dense was the throng of their enthusiastic greeters.
“Bravo, Bulstrode!”
“Good old Remove!”
“Cheers for the victors!”
“Hurrah!”
“Look here, you dummies!” roared Bulstrode, exasperated. We haven’t won—”
“He says he hasn’t one goal against him!” shouted Temple, interrupting.
“I didn’t; I said—”
“Hurrah!”
“How did it go, Bulstrode? Seven or eight to nil, I suppose.”
“Ha, ha, ha!”
“Hurrah!”“Chair him home!” roared Coker.
“Good egg! Hurrah!”
“Let me alone!” yelled Bulstrode. ‘“I tell you—”
“Hurrah!”
Coker and Temple and Dabney seized the captain of the Remove, and hoisted him shoulder high. In spite of his furious kicking and struggling they bore him across the Close in that elevated position, crimson with rage, and vainly trying to make his voice heard.
“My hat!” said Bob Cherry. “What will they say when they know the facts?”Wharton flushed angrily.
“They know already!” he exclaimed. “They know—or they’ve guessed. They’re rotting! This is a jape on us.”
“Phew! My hat!”
“Room for the giddy conqueror!”roared Coker, as Bulstrode was swept up the steps shoulder-high, and carried into the lighted hall. “Hurrah!”“Bravo!”
Loder, the prefect, came angrily out of his study.

“What’s this frightful row about?” he exclaimed.
“Conquering heroes,” explained Coker. “The Remove have beaten Courtfield by nine goals to nil—“

 “We haven’t!” roared Bulstrode, struggling to get down.
But his supporters held his legs fast and a big Fifth Former behind held his hands, and he was helpless.
“Sorry!” said Coker. “I mean ten goals to nil.”
“It wasn’t!”
“Well, eleven goals to nil,”
“Ha, ha, ha!”“Lemme get down, you idiots!” roared Bulstrode. “We haven’t won—”
“They haven’t one goal against them!” said Temple.

“Wehaven’t won—”
“Hurrah!”
“Courtfield—”
“Hurrah!”Loder burst into a laugh. He was not a good-tempered prefect asa rule, but he was glad to see the Remove taken down a peg.

“Oh stop this rotting!” exclaimed Harry Wharton. “Courtfield beat usby three goals to two.”
“My hat!” exclaimed Coker, apparently in the greatest astonishment. “You don’t mean to say that you’ve been
beaten!”
“Yes, idiot!”“Ha, ha, ha!”
The Remove footballers, with crimson faces, came in into the midst of a roaring crowd. Alonzo Todd, of the Remove, who had not been to Courtfield, but had heard Fry bring in newsabout half an hour before, made his voice audible.“My dear Coker, yousurely forget! I distinctly heard Fry telling you that the Remove had been beaten, when he
came in on his bike.”“Ha, ha, ha!”roared Coker.
“Oh, we knew he must be mistaken!” said Temple blandly. “The Remove are an unbeatable team*.* They wouldn’t swank so much if they were beatable. How many goals did you beat them by, Cherry!”“Oh, rats,” growled Cherry.“Any ofthem crippled forlife?”asked Dabney.
“Go and eat coke!”
“Cheers for the Remove!” roared Coker. “Cheers for the conquering heroes!

Ha, ha, ha!”
“Rats!”
And the Removites tramped upstairs, glad enough to hide their blushes in the Remove dormitory, leaving the School House hall rocking with laughter. For once, at all events, the laugh had been turnedagainst the Remove, and the “rotters”laughed and laughed till they could laugh no more.

**THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.**

**Wharton’s Advice.**

BULSTRODE came down, after changing, in an exceedingly bad temper. He knew, although he would not admit it, that his bad management was in a great part responsible for the loss of the Courtfield match. All his anger was directed against Sidney Clavering, and Bulstrode’s look showed that there was a lively time in store for Clavering when hereturned toGreyfriars. Bulstrode came into the junior common-room with his hands in his pockets and a scowl upon his face.
“Clavering back yet?” he asked.
“Haven’t seen him,” said Bob Cherry shortly.
“I shall have something to say to him,when he comes in!” growled Bulstrode.
Harry Wharton looked round.
“You’d better let Clavering alone, Bulstrode.” hesaid, “It wasn’t his fault.”
“Isay it was his fault!”“Then you’re talking out of your hat. If you hadn’t ragged Morgan, he wouldn’t have let that last rush beat
him.”
“Rot!”“It’s quite true, look you!”said Morgan.
“Bosh!”
Wharton compressed hislips. It was some little time later that Clavering came in. He did not come into the common-room, but went directly upstairs to the Remove passage.
Bulstrode followed him up, and a number of juniors followed Bulstrode. Clavering had goneinto his study, and
Bulstrode pushed open the doorwithout knocking, and strodein.
Clavering was standing by the window his brows deeply wrinkled, his face pale. Hewanted to be alone, to think over that strange interview with his uncle in Courtfield, and he looked annoyed as Bulstrode came in.
“What do you want?” he asked abruptly.
“I want a word with you!”said Bulstrode angrily. “We’ve been beaten at Courtfield!”“I’m sorry!”
“It was your fault!”“How was it my fault?” said Clavering.
“You failed us at the last moment, and I played a silly duffer in your place!”saidBulstrode.
“Did you? You could have played someone else, I suppose?”said Clavering. “You had the whole Form to choose from.”
“I’ll trouble you to come down to the gym.”
“What for?”
“For a licking.”
“Oh, don’t bother!”
“What!” roared Bulstrode.
“Don’t bother me now!” said Clavering sharply. “I’vegot other things to think about! Hangyour football match, and you, too!”
“My hat!”“And get out of my study, please!”

Bulstrode turned crimson with anger.

“I’ll jolly soon show you whether I’llget out of your study!” he exclaimed.
He strode towards Clavering, with his fists clenched. Harry Wharton caught him by the shoulder and pulled him back. Bulstrode turned fiercely upon Wharton.
“Hands off, Wharton, or –“
“Hold on!” said Harry quietly. “Don’t play the giddy goat, Bulstrode! There’s no need for us to row!”“Then don’t interfere!”
“Can’t you see that Clavering’s not fit? Look at him!”
Bulstrode growled**.** It was pretty clear, from C1avering’slook, that the junior was by no means fit for a fistica1 encounter. The Removecaptain hesitated.
“Let him alone,” said Morgan. “If you want to fight somebody, Bulstrode, you can come into the gym with me. You called me a silly duffer. It was you who were the duffer, look you!”
“Oh don’t have any rows over 1osing the match!” exclaimed Wharton. “I suppose we can take a licking without losing ourtempers about it. We’ll beat Courtfield next time.”
“I’m sorry I failed you, Bulstrode,” said Clavering. “I’ve had some bad news, and it has upset me. I think that’s excuse enough.”
Bulstrode unclenched his hands.
“Well if you put it like that, I suppose I can let the matter drop,”he growled.“But you jolly well won’t have a chance of playing for the Remove again so long as I’m Captain,I can tell you that!”
And the Remove captain strode from the study.
“Will you stay a minute, Wharton?” asked Clavering, as Wharton was following the Remove captain into the passage.
Wharton turned back. “Certainly!” he said.
“Shut the door.”
Wharton closed the door, and remained in the study alone with Clavering. There was silence for some minutes.
“Something wrong?” asked Wharton, as Clavering did not speak.
The junior flung himself into a chair.
“Yes.”
“I’m sorry!” Wharton spoke very sincerely. “If I can help you—”
“I don’t suppose you can,” said Clavering miserably. “But—but I should like toseek your advice. I—I feel as if I must talk to somebody about it, and—and you’re the only fellow I care to speak to on the subject.”
Wharton sat on the edge of the table.
“Go ahead!”he said.
“We haven’t been specially friends in any way,” said Clavering slowly, “but I think you would help me if you could.”
“Certainly I would!”
“I had a letter to-day from my uncle. Up to to-day I believed that my uncle was paying my fees at the school, and providing for me.”
“Yes I’ve heard so.”
“I’ve found out to-day that it isn’t the case. My father died two years ago.” Clavering’s face wrinkled up for a moment. “After his death, my uncle came to me, and he took charge of me, and told me that I could stay at Greyfriars. My father died a bankrupt and I had always understood that my unclewas poor and I have no other near relations. You may guess how jolly glad IwaswhenUncle Jim said I couldstay here.”
“Yes, I suppose so,”said Wharton. “It was decent of him.”“I’ve learned to-day that Uncle Jim is just as poor as I always supposed, and he hasn’t been paying for me here,” said Clavering. “Of course, what I’m telling you is in confidence.”
“Of course!”

“Uncle Jim has nothing. I don’t even know how he gets his 1iving said Clavering, with a slight shiver. “If it depended upon him, I couldn’t stayanother day at the school. I should have to turn outand look for a situation of some sort.”
Wharton looked concerned.
“That’srough!” he said.
“That isn’t all. My uncle, you understand, has sent the cheques to the Head for my expenses here, but the money has been provided by somebody else”
“A friend, I suppose?”Clavering’s lips curled bitterly.
“No! A man I’ve seen several times and never liked A man who must be a rascal, if appearances are anything to go by—a man I hate!”
“But why should he pay for you here if he’s not adecent chap?” exclaimed Harry, in astonishment.
“I don’t know.”“Your uncle—”

“He wouldn’t tell me. But the man is going to tell me”
“I don’t quite understand.”
“I’m to be useful to him in some way, he says, in return for what he’s done,” said Clavering, “and—he is a rascal! I know that!”
“By Jove!”

“Tell me what to do!” said Clavering, a1most wildly. “What would you do if you were insuch a horrible fix,Wharton?”
Harry Wharton’s face was very grave. It’s rotten!”he said. “I don’t know what I should do, Clavering. You don’t know yet, what it is that this man wants you to do?”
“Not yet. But—”

“But what?”

“It must be something that won’t bear the light, I think. What isit possible for a boy like me to do for anyman, to beworth paying more than a hundredpounds a year for me here?” “Goodness knows!”“And I know the man is a scoundrel! I know what I ought to do,” said Clavering bitterly. “Knowing that he is a rascal, I ought to refuse to take another penny from him, and leave Greyfriars, and face the world by myself.”Wharton was silent. What Clavering said wasquite correct. There was no doubt as to the path of strict duty. But it was easy to give such advice, but it was not easy to find the courage and resolution to follow it.
“But—but I can’t do it!” said Clavering, with a catch in his voice. “I haven’t been trained to work! There isn’t a kid in the Courtfield County Council School who wouldn’t have a better chance than I at trying toearn his living!”
“I suppose that’s true,” said Harry.
“I - I’ve thought it over. When I first learned thetruth, I wanted to throw that man’s favours in his face;but—but since I’ve had time to think, I think that I should go on here, knowing that he was paying for me, only”—Clavering paused for a moment— “only he wants me to do something in return. I don’t know what it is but it can’t be honest!” the junior gasped. “What can I do, Wharton?”
“Poor old chap!” said Wharton. “It’s a horrible position for a kid to be in! But one thing is jolly clear—you must not be dragged into doing anything dishonest. Whatever happens, no chap has a right to be anything but honest. If that man wants you to become a rascal, defy him and face the consequences, whatever they are.”
“Beggary?” said Clavering.
“That’s better thanrascality,” saidHarry. “I know itwould be hard to face. But it you allowed him to lead you into some wrong-doing, that would soon put the stopper on your staying here. It would be bound to come out inthe long run. You’d have to go all the same, and you’d go then with a guilty conscience.”
“I suppose that’s true.”
“But what doeshe want you to do?”
“He hasn’t said yet.”
“Find it out, then,” said Harry. “It may not be so bad as you imagine. Anyway, you must know exactly how the facts stand before you can decide.”
Clavering nodded.
“I’m afraid to know the truth,” he faltered.
“I can understand that, too; but you’ll have to face this, old fellow. And when you know exactly what the man
wants, if it’s something shady, go straight to the Head, tell him everything, and ask his advice.”
“Thanks, Wharton!” That’s what you’d advise?”
“That’s it, old fellow. It’s the best I can say.”
“Thank you!” Ofcourse, you’ll keep dark what I’ve told you?”“You can rely on that.”
Wharton waited a minute or two; but Clavering did not speak again, and he quitted the study. He wentwith a cloud on his brow. He did not wonder now that Clavering had not felt fit for footer, or that he was looking white and troubled. The unfortunate junior had reached a turning-point in the road of life; the parting of the ways was before him, and he had to choose. What would he choose? Harry Wharton resolved that, if he could help it, Clavering should not make a wrong choice.
Clavering remained alone in his study. He sat there in silence, his face white and set, thinking—thinking—thinking!
But his thoughts were without result—they came to nothing! When herose, pale and cold and troubled, he had come to no decision. It was necessary, as Wharton had said, to know the facts; but he feared to know them. As long as he could, he would put off the knowledge of what the Gander had to tell him.

**THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.**

**The Fear of The Unknown!**

THE next day was Sunday. Sidney Clavering rose with a pale face and a heavy heart. He marched into the school chapel with the rest of the Remove for morning service; but it is to be feared that he lent but a deaf ear to the Head’s sermon. There was a weight upon the junior’s mind that would not be lifted.
Harry Wharton spoke to him once during the Sunday, but Clavering hardly replied. It looked as if he already partly regretted his confidence to Wharton, made while he was still in the first anguish of mind that the discovery of his uncle’s true circumstances had caused.
On Monday morning, Clavering waited for the postman, with an eager expression upon his face. He expected a letter, and he was not disappointed, though a disappointment would not have been unwelcome to him.
The letter was addressed to him in his uncle’s hand, and Clavering carried it away to the Cloisters to read it undisturbed.

It ran asfollows:

“Dear Sidney,—Come and see me after school to-day. It is most important.—Your uncle,

“JAMES CLAVERING”

That was all.
Clavering knew very well that he was not going to see his uncle, but to see the Gander and to hear the fateful announcement that that man had to make.

He thought of not going, butgave up that idea at once.
The Gander was not a man tobe denied. If Clavering did not go to him the Gander would come to Greyfriars; and Clavering shuddered at the thought of the beetle-browed, cunning-eyed ruffian striding into the Close, and demanding to seehim.
For the Gander had a right to come if he liked. C1avering could notdeny that. The man who paid his fees at Greyfriars had a right to comeand see him there.
What did the man want!
Clavering knew that he must obey the summons; but he dreaded the coming interview with a miserable fear.
The cloud upon his face during afternoon lessons attracted more than one curiousglance towards him. After lessons were over and the Remove filed out, Bulstrode tapped him on the shoulder in the passage.
“What’s up!”he demanded**.**Clavering flushed.
“Nothing,” he said evasively.
“You’re not ill?” “Look here, I’m sorry I was so rough on you on Saturday,” said Bulstrode. “If you’vehad some bad news, I’m sorry. Is there anything a fellow can do?”
“No thanks,” said Clavering.
And he walked away, leaving Bulstrode looking perplexed. Ten minutes later, Clavering stepped out of the School House in cap and coat to walk down to Courtfield. Harry Wharton and Bob Cherry and Frank Nugent were in the dusky Quad., and they called to him.

“Clavering, old man.”
Clavering paused.“Yes. What is it?”
“A feed!” said Bob Cherry impressively. “I’ve had a remittance—ten solid bobs. We’re going to blue it, and wewant you to help us.”
“Thank you.” said C1avering, “but –“
“You’ve not had your tea?”“No; but—“
“Come on, then,” said Bob Cherry, taking his arm, “this way to the tuckshop.”
“Thanks, but—I say—”
“Don’t say anything,” said Bob cheerfully. “We’re not going to take no for an answer. You are down in the dumps, and what you want to cheer you up is a good feed. We’re going to have a good feed, and you’re going to feed with us.”
“Yes, come on,” said Nugent.
“You’re very good, said Clavering, “but—”
“Buts are barred. Come on”
“I’ve got to go out.”
“Rats! Nowhere to go after dark. Come on.”
“I—I’ve got to go to Courtfield to see myuncle,” said Clavering, flushing.
“Hard up?” said Bob Cherry sympathetically.
“No; but—“
“Then what doyou want to see your uncle for? Usual uncle, I suppose—Ikey Solomons, three brass balls—vat can I do for you, young shentleman?” suggested Bob Cherry.
Clavering laughed constrainedly.
“No—really, my own uncle!”
“Send him a wire and tell him to come here” said Bob Cherry. “We’ll save some of the jam-tarts for him.”
“I must go, Cherry.”
“Well, if you must, you must,” said Bob Cherry, releasing Clavering’s arm, “But I don’t like to see you down in the dumps like this, Clavering. You’ve got something on your mind.”
“I say, you fellows—” Afat figure loomed up in the dusk.
“Shut up, Bunter! Look here, Clavering, come into my study when you come back, and I’ll have the gloves on with you. That’ll put you in better spirits.”
“Perhaps I will. Good-bye.”“Got a pass out of gates?” asked Bob.

“No.”
“Betterget one, if you’re walking to Courtfield. Gateswill be locked long before you get back,” said Nugent. “It’s all right.”
“Don’t be an ass! Ask Wingate for a pass.”
“He might refuse; then I couldn’t go, and I must go,” said Clavering “So-long.”
And he walked away quickly.
Bob Cherry gave a low whistle. He did not know what Wharton knew; but he was feeling concerned about Clavering.
“That chap seems to be in low water,” he remarked. **“**I hate to see a chap like that. I wish I could do something to buck him up.
“I wish I could,” said Harry Wharton.
“Nothing like a feed to buck a follow up, especially in winter,” said Bob Cherry sagely. “I’d stand any chap a feed to buck him up when he’s got the blue devils. Poor old Clavering’s got something on his mind, that’s certain.”

There was a sudden sound in the darkness of the Close under the old elms, and it made the juniors start.

“Hallo, hallo, hallo! What’s that?”
Groan!
“Is that you, Bunter”
Groan!
“Bunter, what’s the matter?”

Groan!
The chums of the Remove, somewhat alarmed, hurried in the direction of the sound.

**THE NINTH CHAPTER.**

**The Right Thing!**

BILLY BUNTER was waiting against the trunk of one at the old elms with his fat features twisted up into an expression of anguish. He blinked through his big spectacles at the chums of the Remove as they approached. They gathered round him in surprise. Billy Bunter was a champion malingerer, and few fellows over believed in any of his statements, and if he had anything the matter, he exaggerated it so much that the most sympathetic fellow in the Remove was tired of sympathising with him. But the groans he wasgiving now sounded so realistic that Harry Wharton & Co. feared for the moment that there was something really the matter.
Bob Cherry dropped his hand upon the fat junior’s shoulder. “What’s the matter, Bunter?”
Groan!
“Bunter, old man—’

A deeper groan!
“Are you ill!” exclaimed Nugent.
“Not exactly ill,” gasped Bunter, “I’m in trouble”

“What’s the trouble?”
“I—I can hardly explain. I’ve got something on my mind.”
“Your hat?” suggested Nugent.
“Ha, ha, ha”
“Oh, really, Nugent—”
Nugent knocked Bunter’s hat off.
“There you are. There’s nothing on your mind now,” he said consolingly.
“I—I say, you fellows, I think you might be a little sympathetic. I’m in trouble, and I want bucking up,” said Bunter pathetically.
Bob Cherry thought that he understood.
“Oh! You want bucking up--eh”
“Ye-es.”
“I suppose what you need is a feed—a jolly big feed?” Bob suggested.
Bunter’s face brightened up wonderfully.
“Yes, that’s it,” he said eagerly. “Ajolly good feed, you know. When a chap’s down in the dumps, there’s nothing like a good feed to buck him up, is there, Cherry? You said so yourself.”
“So I did,” agreed Bob Cherry.
“That’s just how I am now—awfully down, and I need a good feed to buck me up.” said Billy Bunter. “I’m sure you’ll do the right thing, Bob Cherry.”
Bob Cherry chuckled.
“Certainly I will,” he replied.
“Thank you,” moaned Bunter. “A really good feed is what I want. I should feel all right then. Oh, oh!”
The juniors could not help grinning. Billy Bunter had heard Bob Cherry’s remarks, and he had immediately assumed an attitude of pathetic suffering. But Bob Cherry, though he was willing to stand any amount of feeds to Clavering, who was really in trouble, was not in the slightest degree inclined to sympathise with Billy Bunter. Billy Bunter had made too many demands upon the sympathy of his Form-fellows, and the supply at his disposal had been long ago exhausted.
“Shall we do the right thing by Bunter, you chaps?” asked Bob Cherry, with a wink at his companions which the Owl of the Remove did not see.
“Certainly,” said Nugent.
“I—I’m hungry,” said Bunter. “I feel very down you know. I—I’ve had bad news!”
“Bad news from home?”asked Wharton suspiciously.
“Well, from one of my titled friends,” said Bunter. “And — and I want cheering up. As Cherry said, there’s nothing like a good feed to cheer a fellow up when he’s down.”
“Quite so.”
“I—I’m ready,” said Bunter. “I—I think I’ve got strength enough to walk to the tuckshop.”
“I’m sure you have,” said Bob Cherry kindly. “What would you fancy to eat, Bunter? Rabbit-pie, I suppose, to begin with?”
“Yes, yes.”
“And then some pork chops?”
“Oh ripping!”
“After that, I suppose, a cake?”

“That would be splendid.”

“Then some jam tarts—twopenny ones, and some cream puffs?” Bob Cherry suggested.
Bunter’s mouth watered.
“I say, Cherry, that’s ripping of you,” he said.
“Not at all. You haven’t got ‘em yet,” said Bob Cherry.“You think if you had those things you’d be all right?”
“I’m sure of it, Cherry.”
“Good! Then I’m sure I hope you’ll get ‘em,” said Bob Cherry politely. “Goodbye!”
‘‘Eh?’
“Come on, you chaps!”“I--I say**,** you fellows—”
Harry Wharton & Co. strolled away in the dusk. Billy Bunter blinked after them, in amazement at first, and then in fury.He found strength to leave the tree he was leaningupon, and dashed after the juniors as fast as his fat little legs would carry him.
“I say, you fellows—” he bawled.
“Oh, buzz off, Bunter!”“Look here, you fellows———”
“Buzz off!” roared Bob Cherry.
“But what about that feed?”
“What feed?”
“The feed you’re going to stand me—”
Bob Cherry looked astonished.
“I’m not going to stand you any feed,” he replied. “What put thatidea into your head?”
“Why, you—you said—”
“Oh, rats!”
“You said jam-tarts and cream-puffs and pork chops!” yelled Bunter.
“I was asking you what you’d like!” said Bob Cherry blandly.
“Ha, ha, ha!”
“Look here, you—you rotter!” shrieked Bunter. “You said you’d do the right thing, and—”
“So I will,’’ said Bob Cherry, catching the Owl of the Remove by the shoulders. “There you are!”
Bump!
Billy Bunter sat down on the, cold, cold ground, with a shock that took his breath away.
“Ow!”“That’s the right thing for a worm like you!” said Bob Cherry pleasantly. “Don’t tell any more lies, and don’t make up silly yarns, and you won’t get bumped! That’s the moral of the story for you! Br-r-r-r!”
‘‘Ow!’’
And the chums of the Remove walked off.

“Oh! Beasts!” yelled Bunter, “Beasts! Ow!”

The Owl ofthe Remove scrambled up. The three chums were gone, and the fatjunior did not feel inclined to follow them any further. He rolled away towards the lighted doorway of the School House, grunting. Alonzo Todd, the junior who was distinguished by the honourable title of the Duffer of Greyfriars, was standing in the doorway, blinking out into the dusk, and Bunter groaned as he came up. Todd looked concerned immediately.
“My dear Bunter!” he exclaimed. “What ever is the matter!”
“Ow!”
“I hope you are not ill, my dearBunter?” exclaimed Todd. “If you are, you should go to bed at once, and I will sit by your bedside, my dear Bunter, and read you a chapter from the volume my Uncle Benjamin presented to me when I returned to Greyfriars, entitled ‘The Story ofa Potato.’”
Bunter shuddered.
“I—I say,Todd, I’m frightfully ill, and I’ve just been knocked down and jumped on by Bob Cherry and Wharton—“
“Dear me!”
“They took me unawares groaned” Bunter. “I was hurled to the ground, and Cherry jumped on me in
most, ferocious way!”
“Goodness gracious!”
“If I don’t have a—a little refreshment to buck me up, I think I shall very likely be seriously ill!” said Bunter, in a faint voice.

“Mypoor, dear Bunter -”

“I’m expecting a postal order this evening!” moaned Bunter. “Would you mind advancing me a few shillings off it, Toddy?”
“I should be delighted, my dear Bunter—”
“Hand it over, then!” said Bunter, in a much more lively voice. “The postal order is certain to come this evening, and—’
“That is a matter of but small moment,” said Todd, in his solemn way. “That does really not matter at all, my dear Bunter. But—”
“Well, hand over the cash, old man!”
“I’m sosorry—”
“Eh?”
“You did not allow me to finish my remark, my dear Bunter,” said Todd mildly. “I was about to say, when you interrupted me, that I should be delighted to advance you some shillings, but at the present moment I am out of funds,”
Bunter glared.
“You—you—you—”
“I am sure, however, that you will take the will for the deed, my dear Bunter—“
“You fathead!” roared Bunter.
“My dear Bunter,” exclaimed Todd, very much surprised and shocked, ‘I trust—”
“You—you silly ass!”
“MyUncle Benjamin would be shocked - nay disgusted - ifhe heard youuse those expressions, my dear Bunter—”
“Br-r-r-r!” said Bunter.
“My dear*—* Oh!”The patience of Job had its limits, and the patience of Billy Bunter was not nearly so extensive as that of the patriarch. A round fat fist came up, and wasplumped with considerable force upon the prominent nose of the Duffer of Greyfriars. Alonzo Todd gave a little squeak, and sat down inthe passage. Bunter glared at him, and walked on.
Todd was left sitting there, in a state of the greatest astonishment, which he did not recover from for at least ten minutes.

**THE TENTH CHAPTER.
A Villain’s Victim.**

“HERE you are—hey?”
It was the Gander who spoke.
Clavering had entered the little smoky room by the door from the verandah. The winter dusk was thick upon the garden, and the gas was lighted. There were fumes of tobacco and fumes of whisky in the stuffy little room, of which the window was tightly closed. Clavering coughed as he entered. He could not help it, but it did not escape the keen observation of the Gander, who translated the cough into an expression of ‘side.’
“Not good enough for you, p’r’aps!” he asked.
“Don’t be hard on him, Gandy,” said James Clavering, in his feeble, good natured way.
The Gander sniffed.
“Who saysI’m ‘ard?” he demanded.
“I’m sure Sidney doesn’t,” said poor Mr. Clavering.
“Well, don’t let us ‘ave anyside, that’s all!” said the Gander.

Clavering sat down.

“Youtold me to come,” he said.

“I did,” said the Gander.
“‘Ave you thought over what you was told on Saturday?”Clavering nodded. He was under great obligation to this ruffian; he owed all he had to him. At a word from this man he would have to leave Greyfriars — go forth alone and face cold and hunger and work and misery. Yet he could hardly restrain the expression of scorn and contempt from his face.
He had never detested the Gander so much as he did at that moment, when he realised that he was entirely dependent upon him.
“Do you wantto leave the school?”
“No,” said Clavering, in a low voice.
“You want to stay on here?”“Yes.”

“You want me to go on payin’ for you?”
Clavering flushed.
“I suppose it amounts to that,” he said miserably.
The Gander lighted a cigar.
“Well,” he said I ain’t a ‘ard man.” I never was. If you’re willing to make yourself useful, you’re safe to finish your time at Greyfriars, and to go on to Oxford arter.”
Clavering looked astonished.
“Youthink I ain’t got the money?” asked the Gander, with a laugh. “I can lay my ‘ands on more money than that, my boy; and them as is with me in the game, they could find more than I want. It’s going to be worth our while, you see.”
“I don’t see how. I—I may do something decent in the world, if I have a chance,” said Clavering. “But that’s a long way off yet—”
The Gander burst into a rude laugh.
“Ha, ha, ha! I ain’t thinking of livin’ on you when you become Prime Minister or an Archbishop!” he roared.

“Ha, ha, ha! That ain’t my investment at all.”
“You— What do you mean?”
“You’re goin’ to make yourself useful to me in my line of business,” said the Gander. “When Jim Clavering ‘ere first told meabout you, me and my pals knew how useful you would be—at Greyfriars—and at college arter. It will be a good thing for you, and a better thing for me, or I shouldn’t ‘ave took it up”

“But what can I do?”

“You can ‘elp me and my pals.”

“How?”

“You can explain to him, Jim Clavering,” said the Gander.
Clavering’s uncle groaned.
“I can’t!”he said.
The Gander shrugged his shoulders, and lighted a cigar.
“Very well; I’ll put it to ‘im,” he said. “Me and my pals are in business, young feller. Our business is to make money, and we make moneyby transferring it to our pockets from people who has too much. Savvy?”
Clavering turned pale.
“Do you mean stealing?” he asked.
The Gander winked.
“You can call it that,” he said. “Never mind what you call it—it comes to the same thing. But there’s many a job we’ve ‘ad to drop or ‘ave mucked up,because we wanted a feller to ‘elp us who was class enough for the business. Savvy? A ‘andsome, well-dressed feller of good class, that people would ‘ave confidence in at once. That’s the kind of lad we wanted in the business, and that’s what you’re going to do.”
“Become a thief!”
Clavering’s teeth grated over the words.
“If you like to put it like that—yes,” said the Gander “A sort of young Raffles, you know. F’rinstance, you get an invitation home from school with some rich young cove. When you’re at his house, you let us ‘ave a plan of the place, you find out where the vallybles are kept, and you leave a winder open on a certain night.”

“Good heavens!”

“That’s all! You stay inbed and sleep through it all. When you wake up in the morning**,** you’re assurprised as
anybody to ‘earthat there’s been a burglary overnight,” said the Gander. “Savvy?”

“Oh!”

“When you’re at Oxford, it’s the same—only you fly atbigger game. Your college will be burgled—that’s the first. You learn things about the other swells—all’s grist that comes to the mill. There’s a burglary at every ‘ouseyou’re invited to—it’s all serene;youcouldn’t be suspected.”

“Are you joking?” faltered Clavering.

“You’ll find that I ain’t!”

“Can you imagine that I, or any decent chap could be so horribly base?” said Clavering. “It’s impossible!”

 The Gander laughed sneeringly.

“You’ll ‘ave to find it possible, or it will be the worse for you!” he said. “I’ve mapped out what you’re goin’ to do—and you’re goin’ to do it!”

“I cannot!”
“Sidney!”murmured Mr. Clavering.
“Uncle, did you know this?”

“Know it!”burstout the Gander, with an angry laugh.
“Know it! Ain’t your Uncle Jim and me been pals for years in the same business—yes, and afore you wasborn,
too!”
“Is that true,uncle?”

 James Clavering bowed his head.

“I’ve been a bad lot, Sidney!” hemuttered. “I always meant well, but—”
“Is what that man says true?”

“Yes!” groaned the wretched man.

“You knew this was what he intended when you allowed him to find the money to pay my feesat Greyfriars?” “Knew!” ejaculated the Gander. “It was his idea. He was the first to say that you’d be a likely lad for the gang whenyou was a little older.”
“I—I hoped that something would turn up,” muttered James Clavering.

Clavering seemed turned to stone.
“Now you know what you’ve got to do!” said the Gander, “You’ll do it! I’ve mapped out the programme! You’ll stick to it, young fellow-me-lad!”

“Is that all?” asked Clavering dully.
The Gander reflected.

“No,” he said “it ain’t all. Sometimes I shall want you to get a day or two off from school and ‘elp me in jobsin different parts of the country—places where a young swell can get inand get information.
“Anything more?”

“No, that’s all—or about all. You’ll start at Greyfriars.”

“At Greyfriars!”

“Yes. The school plate is worth over a thousand quid. I’ve got accurate information about that,” said the Gander coolly. “I’ve ‘ad that information from an old boy—yourUncle Jim there.”

James Clavering cowered from his nephew’s glance.

“What you’ve got to do,” resumed the Gander “is to gimme a plan of the ‘ouse and make sure exactly where the
stuff is kept, and let me in. Then you can go back to bed and leave the job to me. And I’ll see that you ‘avefifty quid out of the loot. I ain’t a hard man, and I believe in fair play. Your uncle has always found me fair and squar’. Ain’t that so, Jim Clavering?”

“Yes—yes,” saidthe other man, nervously. “I’m sure-”“Now, wot do you say?”asked the Gander, looking atClavering.

The boy rose tohis feet.

“Say!” he repeated. “I say that I’ll see you hanged first! I won’t help you! I’d die sooner than become a dirty thief! And you shan’t pay another penny for me at Greyfriars! I won’t touch your stolen money!”

“Sidney!”

The Gander sneered.

“Let ‘im run on!”he said. “Let him rip! He won’t touch my stolen money, won’t he! Why, you young cub, every penny that’s been paid for you at Greyfriars was stolen money, as you call it! Every penny was made out of swag!”

“Oh, Heaven!”

“It’s too late for mighty fine ideas!” jeered the Gander. “You’ve been sharing in the swag fortwo years now!” “I—I didn’t know!” gasped Clavering. “You villain!”

“Hey?”

“Sidney! Sid!” Bequiet, for mercy’s sake! Don’t make him angry!”

“I’ll say what I think!” shouted Clavering with blazing eyes. “He’s a villain—a plotting, cowardly villain, and I’ll have nothing to do with him, orwith you, either, Uncle Jim, it you don’t kick that man out!”“Sidney!”
“Kick me out!”sneered the Gander. “It’s ‘ard to kick a man out of his own room! I’m paying the money ‘ere,
young fellow-me-lad! So you’ll have nothing to do with it— hey?”
“No, you hound!”
Clavering turned towards the door.
The Gander was crimson with rage. But he controlled his passion with a great effort, and spoke calm1y.

“‘Old on a minute!” he said. “If you go like that, kid, you’re done!We’ll settle this now, or it won’t be, settled at all!”
“It’s settled!” said Clavering, turning for a moment at the door. “I’ll have nothing to do with you and your
rascally thieving! You’re a villain and a blackguard! Do your worst! I won’t have a word to say to you!”
“You’d rather be expelled from Greyfriars?”sneered the Gander.
“Expelled!”
“Yes, expelled—as a young thief—and driven out into the world branded for life!”
Clavering swungback into the room.



**THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER.**

**At the Parting of the Ways.**

THE Greyfriars junior was deadly pale, and his eyes gleamed. His hands were clenched. It was evidently as much as he could do to keep them from the hard, mocking face of the Gander.
“What do you mean?’ he said, between his teeth. “What have I done? Why should I be expelled from Greyfriars?”

“Because I shall go and see the Head and show you up,” said the Gander coolly.

“I have done nothing!”
“You’ll ‘ave to prove that,” said the Gander coolly. “I shall make it quite clear to the schoolmaster that you’re in the gang.”
“You will lie to him?”The Gander shrugged his shoulders. Alie was not very much to the man who had lived a life of crime for twenty years.
Clavering rested his hand upon the edge of the table and tried to think.
Whichever way he turned he seemed to be in a horrible tangle. He was caught on every side like a hapless fly in the web ofthe spider.

It was not only leaving Greyfriars.It was leaving the school inblack shame and disgrace, then, that he had to fear. It was leaving amid the scorn and disgust of everybody he knew, to startlife alone, unfriended, with an ineffaceable stain upon his name!
How was he to face that?
The Gander watched the varying expressions of the boy’s face, coolly, through the blue smoke of his cigar.Clavering was silent for a long time. The smoky, foul room seemed to be swimming about him.
James Clavering sat silent, drinking. In the burning liquor that was deadening his senses and his last rag of self
respect, and slowly killing him, he found a refuge from the stings of conscience.
“You couldn’t be such avillain!” gasped Clavering at last.
“Try me andsee.”
“Youhound!”“Do youthink I’ve kept you at school for twoyears for nothing?” said the Gander contemptuously.
Clavering pressed both hands to his throbbing temples.
“The Head wouldn’t believe you!” he muttered.
The Gander laughed.
“He would believe me, when he saw my record and saw your uncle’s!”he replied. “He would want to know what you fancied your uncle was doing for a living all the time.”
Clavering groaned.
“You’d better make up your mind to it,” said the Gander coolly. “It’s a good offer I’m making you. I’m not a ‘ard man, I ain’t. You’ve ‘ad a run for two years, and now you’ve got to begin earning your keep. That’s all.”
Clavering did not reply.
“I’m coming to the place tomorrow night,” went on the Gander. “I can’t stay too long ‘ere. I get too muchattention in a country town—and ‘sides, I’ve business in London. I ain’t wasting any more time over you! You’ll let me into the school to-morrow night!”
“I can’t!”“You can, and you will! And ‘ere and now you’llgive me a sketch of p1ace —dror it up in pen and ink afore you go!”

“I won’t!”
“You know whatto expect ifyou don’t.”
Clavering stood motionless.
The Gander made a sign with his cigar to James Clavering, and the wretched old man rose, and laidpen and paper, on the table. The Gander pointed to a chair, and Clavering sat down.
“I want time to think,” he muttered.
“You can think arter you’ve done the plan,” said the Gander coolly.

“I – I –“
“Doas hetells you, Sidney.”muttered James Clavering. “That won’t commit you to anything, youknow,”
“Take the pen!” said the Gander.
Clavering hesitated, and took up the pen. His brain was ina whirl, he did not know what to think, what to decide. To gain time, to get time to think, that was what he wanted. He would never do what this villain wanted, but he must put off the evil hour of disgrace and ruin.
He dipped the pen inthe ink. Clavering was a clever draughtsman. It was easy forhim to do what the Gander wanted, so far.
Under his pen the plan worked up slowly but surely. He dotted down walls, passages, windows. The Gander watched him at work.
“Where is the silver kept?”he asked.
“In the Head’s safe.”
“Where is that?”
“In the wall in his study.”
“Put the study in, then.”Clavering obeyed,
“Anydogs kept at the school?”
“One—Gosling’s mastiff.”
“Who’s Gosling?”“The school porter.”
Clavering found himself answering the questions, dully, mechanically. To refuse meant defiance to the Gander, and to answer them, after all, committed him to nothing, so far. It was stillin his power to refuse the service the cracksman demanded.
“Where does Gosling sleep?”
“In his lodge.”
“And the mastiff is there?”
“Yes.”
“Chained of a night?”

“Yes.”
“Good! Is it easy to climb over thewall from theroad?”“Yes - If have somebody to buck you up.”
“You’ve done it yourself many atime, I dessay!” grinned the cracksman. “Well, I shall ‘avesomebody togimme aleg up, eh, Jimmy?”
“Yes” muttered Mr. Clavering.
“Inside the wall.” pursued the cracksman, “wot about that? Which winder will you open for me?”
“None!”
The Gander smiled.
“We’ll agree on a spot to meet,” he said, “Athalf-past twelve to-morrow night, my lad, you come down to theschool wall. You can sneakouter the dormitory while the other boys are asleep.”
“I—I cannot!”
“You’ll meet me at the wall,”pursued the Gander, as if Clavering had not spoken, “say at the first tree along the wall, counting from the gate. You see, I’ve spotted the place from the outside pretty well. That’s where you’ll seeme.”
Clavering did not reply.
“I’ll be there at exactly half-past twelve, and so willyou,” said the Gander. “Your uncle will bunk me up on the wall, and you’ll meet me inside, and take me into the ‘ouse. Then it will be all plain sailing.”
“It’s impossible!”“That’s all settled, then,” said the Gander,still taking nonotice of Clavering’s replies, and be rose to his feet. “Now youcan go, and your uncle an’ me’ll ‘avea little game of billiards at the RedCow down the street,”
“I cannot doit!”
The Gander’s brows contracted, and heraised his hand andpointed atthe miserable boy. In his left hand hecrushed the paper Clavering had drawn up at hisorder.
‘You’ll do it,” he said, “or you’ll 1eave Greyfriars in disgrace!”
“Iwill not!”
“I’vegot this ‘ere paper now,”said the Gander, with cruelgrin. “If I show that to your headmaster—”Clavering gave a cry.
“Oh, you villain—you villain! Give it back to me!”The cracksman laughed.“Ireckon not!” he said. “You young fool, even without that you’rein the ‘ollow of my ‘and! You’ll be where I’ve told you at thetime I’ve told you, and you’ll do what I’ve told you, or you know whatto expect! Now you can go!”
Clavering gave theGander one wild look, and staggered from the room. He went blindly down into the darkness ofthe garden, and stumbled to the gate. A hand dropped on his arm, and hegave a startled cry. Already it seemed to him that every shadow held a policeman—that eyeswatched him from every corner, suspecting that he was athief and the accomplice of thieves.
“Oh! Who—who is that?”

“All therene!” said a soft voice.
It was Solly Lazarus.

**THE TWELFTH CHAPTER.**

**Solly Knows What to Do.**

SOLLY LAZARUSpeered through thegloom at the white, startled face of Clavering of the Remove.
Clavering was silent save for his hurried scared breathing.As yet he had done nothing ofwhat the Gander
demanded, but the terror of guilt was upon him, and thesoft touch in the gloom had made hisheart beat like a hammer.
“What—what do you want?” he muttered, at last.
“I don’t wantanything, my thon,” said Solly in his soft voice; “but Ishould liketo speak aword or two to you. Shall I walk down the street withyou?”
Yes, if youlike,” saidClavering.
He was anxious to get away. Hepassed through the gateway into the side street, and Solly walked down the street with him. The old High Street of Courtfield was not well lighted, but it was lighted enough to show up the white face of the Greyfriars, junior. The keen, black eyesof SollyLazarus turned upon him keenly more than once.
Clavering did not speak. Hedid not know what theJewlad wished to say, andhe did not care much. He left it to Sollyto speak.
“You’re introuble, my thon,” said Solly quietly.
Clavering compressed his lips.
“I don’t see that that’s anybusiness of yours,” he replied shortly.
Solly grinned.
“No bithneth of mine at all,” be agreed; “only I’m a good-natured chap,dear boy,and I don’t liketo see anybody in trouble.You havebeen to seemy father’s lodger?”

“Yes.”

“If you’ll take a chap’s advice you’ll keep away from bothof them,” said Solly. The lodger, and that man whocomes to see him, are a pair of blighters, dear boy. They won’t do you anygood.”
Clavering laughed bitterly. He knew that already. “Do you think I’d see themif I could help it?” he said. Sol1y started a little. He had observed JamesClavering and theGander, and he had read their characters pretty keenly, and he had decided tospeak a word ofwarning tothe Greyfriars fellow out of sheer kindness and good nature. Hehad only imagined that Clavering was a weak lad whowas being led into bad associations. Buthe perceived now that there was something more than thatin it.
“You can’t help it?” he asked.

“No.”
“But why?”Clavering was silent.
“Ofcourse, it’s not my bithneth,” said Solly quickly; “but if those rathcals have any hold over you, dear boy, the sooner you buck up against it the better.”
Clavering breathed hard. He felt the need of somebody to speak to, to confide in, and he already felt that he must sayno more to Harry Wharton. If Wharton had the slightest suspicion of the intentions of the Ganderhe would insist upon the Head being told at once, and Clavering was not ready for that yet.It came into Clavering’s mind to confide to this keen, sharp-witted Jew lad, who had ten timeshis own power for dealing with a difficult situation. He hardly knew Solly, having only met him half a dozen times, but he felt that the Courtfield fellow wanted to help him.
“The man’s my uncle,”he muttered.
“Mithter Brandon?” asked Solly.“Mr. Clavering,”said Sidney.He had forgotten for the moment that hisuncle was passing underan assumed name in Mr. Lazarus’s house.“Oh!” murmured Solly. “Then his name is Clavering! Helookth like a man who has thevera1 names, too. And theman he calls Gandy—”“I don’t know his name.”
“Uncle or not, they’re a bad lot,” said Solly, after a pause.
“Are you bound to see him, my thon?”

“Yes.”
“It’s hard cheese, then.Look here,” said Solly shrewdly. You are lookingfrightfully upset, and I can see that they are giving you trouble. Do they want you to do something or other that you’re afraid of?”

“Yes.”
“Then keep a stiff upper lip, and don’t do it,” said Solly.
“Bad always leads to worse, my thon—remember that. That rathcalGandy looks a fearful blighter, and he might be capable of anything. Don’t let him lead you into anything.”
“Suppose Ican t help it?’ muttered Clavering.
“You can help it. You can say no.”
“And be ruined.”
“My only Uncle Tham! Is it so bad as that?”
“As bad as that—and worse!” Clavering paused. “I don’t know why I’m jawing to you like this for, Solly Lazarus. I’d better hold my tongue, I think.”
Solly shook his head.
“You’d better tell me about it and let meadvise you,”he said. “I know more of the world than you do - I’ve
knocked about abit. A chap picks up knowledge serving in a thop, you know. Does that man threaten you?”
“Yes.”
“If you don’t do what he wants?”
“Yes.”
“And what is that dear boy?”
It wasupon Clavering’s tongue to tell Solly everything, and perhaps if he had it would have been better for him. It was a terrible problem he had to solve, and the cool, keen brain of the Jew boy would have solved it better than his own confused and terrified mind. Buthe checked himself. After all, what did he know of Solly? What a fool he was to blab his affairs to strangers? If he resisted the Gander all would be known, true, and it would not matter. Butifhe acceded—and that possibility, alas, was already in the back of the unfortunate junior’s mind.
“What is it?” repeated Solly softly. “I’ll keep it a thecretif you tell me.”
Clavering shook his head.“It’s nothing,” he said. “I’vetalked too much already.”

“But I thay—”
“It’s nothing. Goodnight!”
And Clavering walked away quickly before the Courtfield fellowcould speak again. Solly Lazarus looked after him with a peculiar expression.
“My only Uncle Tham!”he muttered. “There isthomething very wrong with that kid, and I wonder what that rathcal is trying to make him do? Perhaps Tholly Latharus will be able to help him out after all, without his telling anything. I’m going try.”
And Solly walked back to hishome in a very thoughtful mood. Hefound his father in the shop, and Mr. Lazarus greeted his hopeful son with an affectionate nod. Then, as he noticed the expression upon Solly’s face, his owngrew graver.
“Anything wrong, Tholly?”
“Not with me,dad,” said Solly, sitting onthe counter, nowspeaking in a low voice. “Have you seen a kidbelonging toGreyfriars who comes here to thee your lodger?”
Mr. Lazarus nodded.
“A kid came here on Thaturday and asked for Mr. Brandon,” he said.
“Did you notice anything about him?”
He looked as if he was in trouble, Tholly, that’s all. It wasno bithneth of mine.”
“His name is Clavering, father.”
“Is it?” saidMr. Lazarus indifferently.
“And Mr. Brandon’s name is Clavering, father, and he’s thatkid’s uncle.”
“How do you know, Tholly?”He told me. And those two men are trying to getthe kid to do thomething or other that he doesn’t want to do, father.”
“It’s his own bithneth. Tholly.”
“It’s ours, too, dad.” said Solly cheerfully. “If there is going to be any trouble, we don’t want to have it happen here. It doesn’t do a shop any good to be mixed up with the polithe.”
“The polithe!” ejaculated Mr.Lazarus in alarm. Mr. Lazarus was a respectable and law-abiding citizen, but he did not love the police.
“That’s what, I thaid,” replied Solly, “Both those rathcals look as if they live on bad termth with the polithe, dad. And what are they doing here, anyway?”
“I’m sure I don’t know, Tholly. They pay all right.”
Solly laughed.
“If they’re up to any thieving bithneth, father, they’d dothat here. What are they mixed up with a Greyfriars kid for, trying to make him do something he won’t do? Clavering looks asif he’s having a tooth out, they’ve upset him so. There’ssomething rotten bad in this, father.”
Mr. Lazarus made a gesture with his large fat hands.
“I can’t help it, Solly. I can giveMr. Brandonnotice to quit.”
“That’s nogood. If thoserathcals are here foranyrotten bithneth itwon’t take them long,” said Solly shrewdly “Look here, dad, I’m going to keep an eye on them, and if there is any shady bithneth going on it will do you good to let the polithe know.”
“Quite tho, Tholly—quite tho.”
“I feel quite thorry for that kid,” said Solly musingly. “I don’t know what those two rathcals are after, but Iknow it’s some low-down villainy, or the kid wouldn’t lookso white and rotten.”
“Very likely, Tholly. But—”
“I’m going to keep an eye on them.” saidSolly determinedly; “and you know I’ve got asharp eye, father.”

Mr. Lazarus grinned, he knew that.“Yeth, Tholly. But mind youdon’t get into any trouble.” he added anxiously.
“What-ho!” said Solly.
The Ganderwould nothave played his game of billiards with Mr. Clavering quite so coolly and easily ifhe had known of Solly’s determination, and had known something of Solly’s nature. But he did not know.

**THE THIRTEENTH CHAPTER.
Nothing to Say.**

CLAVERING found the gates of Greyfriars locked when he arrived there—he was long past the time for calling**-**over even. In his agitation of mind he had forgotten calling-over. He rang the bell, and Gosling, the porter, came down to the gates witha frowning face. Gosling did not like being disturbed. He peered at Clavering through the bars of the gate, and gave a sort of snort.
“Oh!” he ejaculated. “Nice goings hon, Master Clavering!”
“Open the gate!”said Clavering quietly.
“Wot I saysis this ‘ere!”growled Gosling. “These are nice goings hon, I says! You are to report yourself to Master Wingate for missing call-over.”
“Very well.”
Gosling opened the gate, and Clavering entered. The porter was still growling to himself as he re-locked the gates and retired to his lodge. Clavering walked on to the School House. For the punishment for missing call-over he cared little, but he was worried at thus having attracted attention to himself. If he decided to yield to the Gander—always that black thought—the lessattention he attracted the better. Whether he would surrender to the tempter or not he did not know. He wanted time to think it out clearly. He knew that he stood at the parting of the ways—with honesty and poverty on one side, on the other side ease and shame—and he did not know yet which he would choose, it was a terrible position for the lad, yet to many a lad comes such a choice once or twice in a lifetime, and upon thegood or bad choice depends the current of life ever afterwards. There are few who do not, at some time intheir lives, stand at the parting of the ways, with the choice of good or evil, and fortunate are those who have the strength and thedetermination to choose the right, and abide by it, in spite of temptations and sufferings.
Clavering went slowly through, the dark,misty Close towards the glimmering windowsof the School House. As he passed into the hall, some of the juniors spoke to him.
“You’re late!” said BobCherry.
Clavering nodded.
“I suppose you know you’ve got to see Wingate,” said Harry Wharton.
“Yes.”“Come to the study afterwards; there’s some of the tommy left,”Bob remarked. “Have you had yourtea in Courtfield?”

“No.”“Then you’ll come to the study?”“Thanks; yes!”Clavering passed on to the captain’s study. He knocked and openedthe door. Wingate and Courtney of the Sixth were inthe study, talking football. The captain of Greyfriars turned a grim look upon Clavering.
“So you’ve come back!” he said.
“Yes,”said the Removite.
“Where have you been?”
“I’vebeen to Courtfield.”
“Without asking for a pass out of gates?”
“Yes,”

**“**Well, you’re pretty cool about it,” said Wingate taking upa cane. “What did you go to Courtfield for?
Claveringwas silent.
“Come, if you’ve got any good explanation to give, Imaylet you off, said the Greyfriars captaingood-naturedly.
“I’ve nothing to say,” said Clavering heavily. “You may as well lick me; I don’t care.”
Wingate looked at him.

“What do you mean?”he demanded.
“Nothing. Lick me, and let me go, for goodness’ sake! I’m tired.”
“My hat!” ejaculated Courtney. “I never heard a junior talk like that before! What’s the matter with you, young Clavering!”
“Oh, nothing!”
“There is something the matter with you,” said Wingate, looking at him keenly. “You look very seedy. Are you ill?”
“No.”
“Have you been smoking?”
Clavering smiled faintly.
“No.”
“Then what’s the matter?”
“Nothing.”
“That won’t do,” said Wingate quietly, his eyes still keenly upon the face of the junior. “What have you been doing in Courtfield?”
Clavering did not answer.
“Whom have you seen there?”No reply.
“Do you refuse to answer me, Clavering?” Wingate exclaimed, his voice rising.
“I’ve nothing to tell you,” replied C1avering. “I’ve broken bounds, and missed calling-over. If you lick me, it’s all right.”
“I jolly well shall lick you, if you don’t explain,” said Wingate.
“I’m ready.”
“Queer young beggar!”said Courtney. “I suppose he’s been up to some mischief—fighting with the County School chaps, perhaps. Have you seen any of the Courtfield boys, Clavering?”
“Yes; one.”
“Why didn’t you say sobefore, then?” said Wingate angrily, “Hold out your hand.”
Clavering held out his hand. Wingate was under a mistaken impression from his reply, but the junior said no more. He took the caning with calmness, and left the study. Physical pain was little compared with the pain he was feeling inwardly—the grinding, unresting misery andanxiety.
“Now buzz off, and don’t miss calling-over again,” said Wingate.
And he closed the study door behind the junior.
Clavering went down the passage rubbing his hands. Clavering had earned his punishment, certainly; fellows generally were caned for going out of bounds without permission; but a group of sympathetic juniors met Clavering with condolences. There was always sympathy for any fellow who had been unfortunate enough to “catch it.”
“Bad?” asked Johnny Bull.
Clavering smiled.
“No; Wingate never lays it on too heavy.” he replied. “I’m all right.”
“You’re hungry?”demanded Bob Cherry.
“Ye-es.”
“Then come up to the study.”
And Bob Cherry marched Clavering off up to the Remove passage, with Wharton and Nugent and Mark Linley and Johnny Bull. Clavering went without demur and his face brightened up a little as he entered Bob’s cheerful study, with a blazing fire in it, and the curtains drawn, the tea table still set, with plenty of good things left for the latest-comer.
“Here you are,” said Bob Cherry. “Sit down.”
He pushed Clavering into the armchair before the fire, and Clavering had to sit down.
“Now, then, make the tea, Franky.”
“Right you are,” said Nugent.
“Carve the ham, Johnny.”
“Right-ho!”
“Begin with ham and beef, I suppose?” said Bob Cherry, flourishing a carving-knife over the beef, in a way that made Frank Nugent, and Mark Linley dodge quickly out of danger.
“Yes, thanks!” said Clavering.
A good meal was quickly set before the junior. But he did not do it justice. He was hungry, buthis appetite was rather sickly than keen, as it should havebeen after his walk in the sharp, winter air. It was evident to the other fellows that Clavering was out of sorts, and they tried to cheer him up. But it was a hard task. Bob Cherry did his best to play the part of “agreeable rattle,” but Clavering’s low spirits began to infect even him at last, and his flow of language grewless plentiful.
There was a tap atthe door while Clavering was having his late tea, and a fat face adorned by a pair of large spectacle looked in. “I say, you fellows—”
Bob Cherry picked up a jug.
The fat face dodged back behind the door immediately. Bunter’s voice was heard round the door.

“Oh, really, Cherry-”
“Buzz off!” roaredBob Cherry.
“Of course, I know you were only joking, in the Close, Cherry –“
“Of course I was,” said Bob.
“You really meant to ask me to teaall the time—“

“Oh no! I was joking when I biffed you over,” said Bob; “andI’m such a humorous chap that I have a way of repeating my jokes, ad lib. I’ll give you the same joke over again now.”
And Bob Cherry rushed to the door. A sound of pattering footsteps was heard in the passage, and Bunter was turning the corner atthe end by thetime Bob Cherry looked out. Bob grinned and closed the door again.
Clavering rose to his feet.
“I think I’ll be gettingoff now,’’ he remarked.
“But you haven’t finished yet,” said Mark Linley.
“Yes, thanks, I have!”
“Rats! You haven’t finished the ham,” said John Bull.
“I—I’ve had enough.”
“What about the jam tarts!” asked Nugent.
“I—I don’t care for them now.”
“Well, stay and have ajaw,” said Bob Cherry.
“Thanks, but I—I’ve got my prep to do, youknow.”
“Right you are,” said Bob seeing that Clavering was bent upon going. “I’m blessed if I know what’s the matter with you,Clav. Is it the bad news you told me about?”
“Yes,” said Clavering, with a ghastly smile.
“Can’t you tell a fellow what it is?”
“You wouldn’t understand.”“Well good night, if you must go.”
Clavering left the study. Harry Wharton followed him down the Remove passage, the other follows remaining inBob’s study.
“Hold on a minute, Clavering,” said Wharton in a low voice. “You’ve been to keep that appointment, I suppose?”
“Yes.”
“You’ve seen that man?”
“I’ve seen him.”
“And has he told you what he wanted?”
“Yes.”
“Well?”
“It—it’s nothing I can tell you,” stammered Clavering.Don’t ask me any questions, for goodness’ sake.”
Wharton’s face was verygrave.
“I won’t ask youany questions, if you don’t want me to,of course,”he said. “But you confided the matter to me of your own accord, you know; and if I knew the whole business I might be able to help you.”
“I can’t tell you anything more,” said Clavering.
“Do you mean that it’s too bad to tell me?”
“I—I—— Don’t ask me.”
Wharton nodded.
“Very well,” he said. “Tell menothing, only—Clavering, old man, for goodness’sake, think what you decide to do. If that man wants to drag you into anything rotten, don’t let him do it—don’t think of it. ! You’ve got friends who will stand by you. The Head would be kind, and—”
“Thank you, Wharton! I know you mean well,” said Clavering heavily.“But—but you don’t understand.”
He went into his study- and closed the door. Wharton remained inthe passage, verymuch troubled and disturbed in his mind.
He realised only too clearly that Sidney Clavering wasin danger—that he was in danger of falling into some abyss of wrong-doing and trouble; but he did not know what it was. He could not save him.
Clavering’s salvation depended upon himself.
He stood at the parting of the ways.What choice would he make?

**THE FOURTEENTH CHAPTER.
Clavering’s Choice.**

ALONE!
Clavering had locked his study door,and he was alone. He was alone in every sense of theword. In all thewide world there was no one hecould speak to with freedom; no one who could counsel him.
If his father had lived—

The hot tears started to the boy’s eyes at the thought of that. If only his father had lived! But his father was dead —he was alone in the world—and the only near relation he had was worse than none—a mere tool andweakling inthe hands of a desperate scoundrel. James Clavering was fond of his nephew, there was no doubt about that. He had hoped, in his weak, irresponsible way, to be able to help him, to save him from the hands of the Gander. But he was not the kind of man to realise such wishes. He had been helpless; he had been,in his folly, the cause of the unfortunate lad beingplaced in this position.
In his uncle there was no help. In his friends—. He had no close friends,but even so, how could boys of his ownage help him? Wharton and Solly Lazarus both meant well by him. But even if he had told them all, what could they do?
Only advise him to stand firm in the path of right and honesty; and he knew that that was his duty, without being told.
The question was, not what was right and what was wrong, but whether he had the strength to do what he knew to be right.
That was the grand question.
Upon the answer he made to that question depended his whole future. The anger and indignation with which he had first heard the Gander’s villainous terms had diedaway. Hedid not seem to have sufficient energy left to feel angry about anything. He could only feel wretched, miserable, undecided.
Always in the back of his mind was the thought that he could purchase ease and safety by yielding to the demands of the ruffian who held him in his power.
Why not?
There were reasons why, and reasons why not.
It he surrendered, what was the danger? If the school were robbed, no one would dream of suspecting him of complicity in the robbery. He was perfectly secure, so far as that went.It was his own conscience that he had to fear. He remembered the doctor’s text in Sunday’s sermon—asimple textfrom theCommandments.
“Thou shalt not steal!”
It came strangely into his mind then. He had not listened to the sermon. His mind had been too preoccupied by his troubles. But the text came back into his mind now, and he seemed to hear the deep, strong voice of the doctor. Thou shalt not steal! And the accomplice of a thief was as bad as thethief himself. What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world, and lose his own soul! What, indeed? To be safe, and respectable, and successful and rich, and toknow that he was athief—that he was of the basest of humanity. What would it profit him?
He could not do it!Then he thought of the reverse side.

To leave school, and face the world alone, pursued by the malignity of the man he had defied, and whose hatred he had provoked! Even if the Gander did not succeed in branding him as he had threatened, even then, what prospect had he to look forward to? Poverty, work, want, misery—the loss of everything that he had hoped for and expected in life!
Clavering paced his study in miserable thought.
Where could he turn for guidance? To whom could he turn for aid? There was One! But he could notpray. With that thought of surrender in his mind, with the growing feeling that he dared not quarrel with the Gander, he dared not kneel and pray for guidance. The thought came miserably into his mind that he was only wasting time—that when the hour came, he would do as he had been ordered.
He knew it!
As he realised that more clearly, he threw himself into a chair with a bitter laugh. If only he could drown his consciousness, and cease to think—if only he could still the wild throbbing of his brain! He began to understand why it was that his uncle was the slave to drink that he had become.To a manwith arag of decency left, a life of crime wastoo terrible to be borne without that aid, the stabs of conscience weretoo sharp to beborne, unless they could bethus deadened.
What was he to do?
He rose to his feet. The room was cold. He had no fire, but hefelt suffocated; he wanted air. He threwopen the window, and leaned out intothe cool darkness of the Close.It was keen, cold, quiet—thesharp breath of the wind revivedhim, and cooled his fevered forehead.
In the silence of the night, a sound of voices came to his ears He recognised Wharton’s clear, low tones and then, with a start,the lisping voice of Solly Lazarus. What, was Lazarus doing at Greyfriars? He wondered whence the voices came, and then he realised that the next study window was open. Wharton and Lazarus were talking in Harry Wharton’s study. From the open window a shaft of light streamed out into the Close. In Clavering’s study was deep gloom. He hadno light there; he preferred the darkness in his present mood.
Wharton and Lazarus were talking of him. He knew it, even before he heard his own name mentioned. He leaned from the window, his burning forehead pressed to thecool stone to still the throbbing, and as hedid so the voices came low but clearly to his hearing.
“What do you think about it, Solly?”
It was Wharton who spoke.

“Very little, my thon.” came in reply the soft tones of the Jew lad. “But the kid’s in trouble, I know that. His uncle is staying in my dad’s house in Courtfield. He’s lodging there, you thee.”
“I see”
“I’ve been thinkingit over,” went on Lazarus. “His uncle’s a rascal and a drunkard, and the other man is a thcoundrel. The man they call Gandy, he’s a rathcal, and he’s trying to lead the poor chap into something, and the kid can’t stand against him, I think. I don’t know that it has anything to do with you, Wharton; but I thought I’d to speak to thome friend of his about it, and I thought of you. I believe you’re a friend of his.”
“Yes, certainly. I only wish I could help him.”
“I don’t know what the trouble is, excepting that he’s mixed up with a couple of awful rathcals, and theems to be in a bid way. But my idea is that you should keep an eye on him and keep dark what I’ve told you, of course. I don’t want the fellow to think I’m meddling. But thomething ought to be done.”
“Thank you very much. Lazarus. I’m glad you’ve come and told me, though I don’t see what I cando. ButI’ll keep an eye on him, and help him if Ican,you may be sure of that.”
“Alltherene, then.”
Clavering drew back from the window, and quietly closed it.
He hardly knew whether to bedispleased or not. He hardly cared for anything now. A quarter of an hour later, from the window, he saw the figure of Solly Lazarus emerge from the lighted portal of the School house, and Wharton walked down to the gates with the Jew lad.
Clavering threw himself into a chair again.
Wharton and Lazarus meant kindly by him, but in them there was no help! There was no help for him anywhere. He was wearyand exhausted withthe mental conflict. He had no strength left for resistance—for anything.
He sat in the darkness, with misery and surrender in his heart. Athalf-past twelve that night, he knew he would be at the appointed place, as the Gander had ordered him. He knew it—the Gander knew it! He was weary of the struggle. He had not made the choice—the choice had been made for him, and he resigned himself to his fate.

**THE FIFTEENTH CHAPTER.
Todd is Too Good.**

“IN the first place, the potato seed is planted in the ground!”
Wingate of the Sixth grinned as he looked into the junior common-room. It was bed-time, and Wingate
had looked in to remind the Remove of that fact. In the midst of a circle of juniors, Alonzo Todd was standing
with a book in his hand. It was the great volume presented to him by his Uncle Benjamin, and Todd was bestowing its stores of knowledge upon the Removites—or, rather, attempting to do so. For, although Bulstrode and Ogilvy and several other fellows hadrequested him to read it aloud, they did not allow him to proceed further than the first line.By judiciously-timed interruptions they prevented Todd from getting further than that.
“In the ground,”resumed Todd.
“Whatground?” asked Bulstrode.
“Any ground my dear Bulstrode.” said Todd, “Practically any ground would do. You will find the whole history of that succulent vegetable in this volume, ‘The Story of Potato.’ There are also hints for growing potatoes in the appendix—”
“Never heard of potatoes being grown in an appendix before,” said Bulstrode, with a solemn shake of the head.
“Is it a new dodge, Todd?”
“You mistake me, my dear Bulstrode. I do not mean that the potatoes are grown in the appendix of this book, but in—“
“Not ina chap’s own appendix, surely!” exclaimed Bulstrode in astonishment. “That would be bound to cause
appendicitis.”
“Mydear Bulstrode—”
“Then an operation would be wanted,” said Ogilvy. “Mydear Todd, Ishould advise you never to attempt to grow potatoes in the appendix.”
“Thechap who wrote that book is simply dangerous,” said Bolsover. “Don’t you ever try anything of the sort, Toddy.”“My dear Bolsover—”
“Bed-time, you young rascals,” said Wingate, laughing. “You can leave the story of the potatoes over till tomorrow.”
The Duffer of Greyfriars blinked at him.
“My dear Wingate, perhaps you would not mind if we stayed down till ten o’clock tonight,” he said. “The fellows are very interested in this book, and I am taking the opportunity of reading it out to them. I am going to see my cousin Peter next week, and I am going to lend him the volume. Therefore—“
“Buzz off to bed.”
“Under the circumstances, my dear Wingate—”
“You’ll be under my fist in a minute, Todd.”
“I consider—”
“Oh, come on,” said Bob Cherry, seizing the Duffer of Greyfriars by the shoulder, and jerking him towards the door. “Come off to the dorm.”
“My dear Cherry—”
“Lend a hand, Franky!”
Frank Nugent grinned, and lent a hand. Alonzo Todd was rushed upstairs, and arrived in the dormitory in a somewhat breathless state, but still with Uncle Benjamin’s valuable volume under hisarm. He sat on his bed, and gasped.
“Back in five minutes,” said Wingate grimly. “You’d betterbe in bed by then. Are you all here?” he added. “Where’s Clavering?”
Clavering had not come up with the rest.
“I think he’s in his study!” said Bob Cherry.
“Oh, I’ll see!”
Wingate descended to the Remove passage, and tried Clavering’s door. It was locked, and the Greyfriars captain knocked on it sharply.
“Who’s there?” called out Clavering.
“I am. Open the door at once.”
Clavering unlocked the door, and opened it. Wingate looked at him sharply.
“What the dickens are you doing here, with your blessed door locked?” he exclaimed. “It’s past bed-time. Getup to thedormitory.”
“Yes.” said Clavering dully.
He went up without another word. There was a buzz in the Remove dormitory when he entered. Alonzo Todd turned towards the junior as hecame in, with his kind and benignant smile.
“My dear Clavering, Bolsover says you are seedy, and that it might calm your nerves if Ishould read you a chapter from my Uncle Benjamin’s book—a very interesting treatise on the potato.”
“No, thanks,” said Clavering.
“My dear Clavering—”
“Don’t bother.”
“Nobother at all,” said the obliging Alonzo. “I should be very pleased. I will read you to sleep when you are in bed.”
“You won’t be long going to sleep if he does, Clav,” grinned Bob Cherry.
“Ha, ha, ha!”
Clavering didnot reply. He began to undress in silence. The mood of the Form jarred upon all his nerves, but the juniors hadno knowledge of what was passing in the unhappy boy’s mind. That night he was to meet the cracksman at the school wall—when the other fellows were asleep— and he had already made up his mind to doit, He was in us mood for jesting and laughing.
“Bestcure for insomnia, known,” said Hazeldene.
“Ha, ha,ha!”

“My dear Hazeldene—”
“Better get into bed before Wingate comes back,” said Bob Cherry.
Todd took his advice. The Remove turned in, Todd with his valuable book under his pillow. The Greyfriars captain came in and turned out the light, and departed. Then Alonzo Todd sat up in bed.
“My dearClavering, I will now read you a chapter, and I am sure you will find it soothing tothe nerves.”
“Oh shut up,” said Snoop.
Todd struck a match and lighted a candle he had placed ready beside his bed. Then he took out his great volume,and opened it at the first page.
“In the first place—” he began.
“Dry up”
“The potato is planted in theground—”
“Or inthe appendix?” asked Bolsover.
“In the ground, my dear Bolsover.”
“Ha, ha, ha!”
“But some fall on stony ground, don’t they?” asked Ogilvy.
“Ha, ha, ha!”
“And besides, are you referring to new potatoes or old potatoes?” asked Russell.
“Both, my dear Russell. You see—”
“Suppose,’ remarked Ogilvy thoughtfully—” suppose youknew potatoes to be old potatoes—”
“Mydear Ogilvy—”
“In thatcase, would you hold potatoes to be new potatoes?”
“I do not quite understand, mydear Ogilvy. I think—“
“What’s the difference—”went on Ogilvy.
“The difference between old potatoes and new potatoes? That is fully enlarged upon in the thirty-ninth chapter, entitled—”
“No, no! The difference between potatoes and a botanist.”
“Eh?”
“Why, one’s planted in the ground, and the other’s grounded in the plants.”
“My dear Ogilvy—”
“Great Scott!”said Bulstrode. “Ogilvy’s puns are rottener than Todd’s book. Would you mind shutting up and
letting a chap go to sleep?”
“I am going to read you to sleep, my dear Bulstrode. In the first place, the potato seed is planted in the ground—”
“I guess you’ll be planted yourself soon if you don’t up!” growled Fisher T. Fish, the American junior.
“My dear Fish—”
“Shut up!” roared the juniors.
“But I am going to say— Yarooooh!”
Biff!
A boot hurtled through the air and caught Todd upon the chest. He settled back quite unintentionally upon his pillow, and his book crashed upon the floor.
“Ow! Ow!”
“Ha, ha, ha!”
“My dear Bolsover—”
“It’s all right!” said Bolsover. “That’s part of the Story of the Boot. In the first place, the boot is chucked at a
silly ass—”
“Ha, ha, ha!”
The door opened, and Wingate looked in,with a frown upon his face. He strode to Todd’s bed, and picked up the lighted candle.
“What do you mean by having a light in the dormitory after lights-out?” he demanded angrily.
“My dear Wingate, I was going to read the ‘Story of a Potato to my friends—”
“Your friends can jolly well wait till to-morrow for it,grinned Wingate; “and you’ll take fifty lines for lighting a candle in the dorm. And I’ll take the book away with me. You can come to my study for itto-morrow.”
And Wingate walked to the door with the candle and the book.

“I-I say, my dear Wingate, take care of the book, will you!” said Todd anxiously. “It was a present from my
Uncle Benjamin and I wish to lend it to my Cousin Peter next week.
“Yes, you ass.”
“And, I—I say, Wingate, you may read it if you like.”
“Ha, ha, ha”
“Thanks awfully!” said Wingate sarcastically.
“Not at all, my dear Wingate! The volume is quite at your service. I should only recommend that, in the great
interest of tracing the history of the potato from the seed to the saucepan, you do not stay up late, reading in bed, and perhaps injure your eyesight.”
“Ha, ha, ha! I can promise you that, Todd! Goodnight!”

And Wingate shut the dormitory door, and could be heard laughing as he carried Uncle Benjamin’s valuable book down the passage.
“My dear schoolfellows,” said Todd, blinking round in the dusky dormitory, “I know a considerable quantity of that volume by heart, through continual study, and if you like I’ll reciteit to you—”
“You’ll get another boot if you do!”growled Bolsover. “Shut up, and let’s go to steep!” howled Bull.
“Oh, very well! But—”
“Shut up!”
And that unanimous roar from all the Form convinced Todd at last that the Remove were not in the least interested in following the adventures of that valuable vegetable the potato, from theseed to the saucepan. Todd’s valuable information was falling upon stonyground; and the Duffer of Greyfriars gave it upand settled down to sleep.
The Remove followed his example—with one exception.
One pale face looked wakefully from bed, twoheavy eyeswere fixed upon the glimmering square of the window, two restless ears heard the clock strike again and again. There was no sleep that night for Sidney Clavering!

**THE SIXTEENTH CHAPTER.
Solly Takes a Hand.**

“ARE you ready?”
James Clavering raised a white and wretched face into which the strong liquor he had been consuming had been unable to bring a vestige of colour.TheGander stood looking at him, with a sour and sarcastic grin.
“Yes, I’m ready,” faltered the man.
“Get your courage up, for the dickens’ sake!”growled the Gander. “You’re trembling. Take another pull at the
bottle.”
“I’ve had too much already. It makes no difference; there’s no fire in it now, I’m cold all through.”
“You’vebeen over-doing itall day, that’s what’s the matter with you!” growled the Gander. “But you have
precious little to do tonight. You’ve only got to help me over theschool wall, and wait there to take the sack as I come back.”
“Iknow.”
“Then keep a stiff upper lip!”
“Gandy, old man!” faltered Jim Clavering,
“Well?”
“Won’t you let the kid off? We’ve been pals for agood many years now. I’ve done you more than one good turn, Gandy,” said Mr. Clavering entreatingly, “Let thekid off!”“How can I get into Greyfriars without him”
“Let the school alone**.** Thereare other cribs to crack. Let him andhis school alone.”
“Hush! Youfool!” said the Gander savagely. “You might be heard!”
“There’s no one to hear. Old Lazarus is down in his room, and the Jew boy’s gone to bed,” said Mr. Clavering. “It’s close ontwelve. Look here, Gandy, let this one job slide, and—”

“And what about the other jobs?” sneered the Gander. “Not that I’m inclined to let a thousand pounds’ worth of swag go, to please a whim of yours! But what about the other jobs? Do you think that I’ve paid to have this boy brought up to be useful to me to let him go at last—to please your fancies?”
“For my sake, Gandy—”
“If you’ve done babbling, you may as well get your coat on,”said the Gander.
“You won’t let him off?”
“Not much!”
JamesClavering rose slowly and heavily to his feet. His white, wretched face seemed strangely old and lined. The liquor he had consumed had made his legs unsteady, but it had not brought warmth to his heart or courage to his mind.
Perhaps there was a weak and irresolute strain in the Clavering blood—the same strain perhaps had made James Clavering the weak tool of a gang of cracksmen, and was now about to make the same of his nephew.
“If you’re going to be so hard, Gandy—”
“I ain’t a ‘ard man,” said the Gander. “I’m goin’ to give ‘im an easy way of makin’ a livin’, and cuttin’ a good figure in the world at the same time. Look ‘ere, ‘nuff said! Are you ready to start, Jim Clavering?”
“Yes,” muttered Clavering.
The Gander opened his overcoat and took from an innerpocket a leather case*,* whichhe unfastened under the gas-jet. It contained a set ofcracksman’s tools; and the Gander looked over each of them with a keen and experienced eye.

Clavering watched him in silence.

The Gander grinned as he restored the case to his pocket and buttoned up his coat and drew a muffler about his neck.
“Nothin’ like makin’ sure that the tools are in order!”he remarked “Now then, if you’re ready we’ll start!”
“Very well,” said James Clavering heavily.
The Ganderlingered behind his companion to turn out the gas, and then followed him upon the verandah and down into the garden.Neither of them noticed a diminutive figure in the deep gloom of the verandah.
The figure remained motionless, hardly breathing, till the two men had passed out into the street and the gate clicked shut behind them.
Then it emerged from the shadows, and a gleam of starlight fell upon a pale and excited face and revealed the features of Solly Lazarus.
“My only Uncle Tham!” muttered Solly, in suppressed tones. “My only Uncle Tham!”
He stole quietly down from the verandah and entered aback door and made his way to his father’s bed-room. He knocked on the door and opened it.
A deep sound of breathing, relieved at intervals by a heavy snore, announced that Israel Lazarus was sleeping very soundly after the labours of the day.
“Father!”
Snore!
“Father!”
There was a sudden ejaculation in the darkness.
“What’s that? Who’s there?”
“It’s me, father!”
“Tholly!”
“Get up!”
“Mein cootness!” ejaculated Lazarus senior, sitting up in bed, hunching up his knees, and peering at his son through the gloom. “Vatever’s the matter, Tholly?’
“Get up!”
“But vat—”
It’s those precious lodgers of yours, father!”
“Vat are you doing out of bed, Tholly?”
Solly chuckled.
“Keeping an eye on your lodgers, father, and saving you frombeing mixed up in a burglary case,” he replied.
“Burglary!” gasped the elder Lazarus. “My cootness!”
“Jump up!”
“But vat—’
“You’ve got to buzz down to tho police-station at once, father. Yourlodgers are gone out to burgle Greyfriars School.”
“Oh, my cootness!”
Solly lighted the gas. His father tumbled out of bed and began to dress himself, with his hands shaking and trembling from cold and excitement.
“Are you sure, Tholly” he gasped. “How do you know?”
“Because I heard ‘em say so; and I saw the Gander’s tools, too, through the crack in the door,” said Solly.
“Mycootness!”
“Never mind your goodness now, dad!” said Solly, with perfect coolness. “If you don’t get the police on ‘em in time they’ll burgle Greyfriars and they’ll very likely bring the loot here. If it’s found in this house you may be suspected of having had a hand init.”
“Oh, Tholly!”
“You don’t want to be charged with receiving stolen property, father do you?”
“My cootness!”
“Buck up, then!” saidSolly.“My thon,” gasped Mr. Lazarus, “if this istrue you have thaved me from getting into trouble. Tholly—”
“No time for talk, dad!” said Solly. “You mustn’t lose a minute. The burglary will be over before the police get there, anyway; but they may be in time to catch the rathcals. Anyway, it will make it clear that you’re not in the gang if you go to the polithe-station at once and give information.”
“You’re right my thon!”
Mr. Lazarus dressed himself with feverish haste. He had no doubt about the accuracy of Solly’s information, he knew his son. He was content to wait till afterwards for more detailed information.
In ten minutes orless father and son had quitted the house and were hurrying through the dark and windy streets towards the police-station of Courtfield.
Meanwhile, James Clavering and the Gander were tramping down the shadowy lane towards the school, the cracksman in high spirits, and Clavering in gloomy but submissive silence, neither of them dreaming of the storm they had left brewing behind them.

**THE SEVENTEENTH CHAPTER.**

**At the Eleventh Hour.**

BOOM!
It wasthe first stroke of twelve!
Sidney Clavering sat upin bed, shivering.
It was not with the cold. It was cold in the Remove dormitory at Greyfriars, but the junior did not feel it.
In half an hour he was to meet the Gander at the school wall.
He knew that he must do it!
He had made up his mind to that. But his heart was beating almost to suffocation as he sat up in bed, and listened to the deep tones of the clock striking thehour of midnight.
Twelve!
Clavering still listened.
There was no sound in the dormitory, save the regular breathing of the sleeping juniors and the steady snore of Billy Bunter.
All was silent.
Greyfriars slept.
The last light had been extinguished, the last window had ceased to gleam upon the dark shadows of the Close.
Clavering waited afew minutes after the final stroke of twelve had died away. Then, with cautious, silent movements, he stepped from his bed.
He had left his clothes ready, with a pair of rubber-soled shoes. He dressed quietly, taking his time, and put the
rubber shoes on his feet.No one in the dormitory was awake.
The junior, with his heart beating like a hammer, moved cautiously towards the door, and opened it.
A cold wind came from the passage, and struck him with a chill. He leaned his head from the doorway and listened.
Not a sound from below!
The whole of the vast pile of Greyfriars was buried insilence and slumber.
Clavering stepped out into the passage, his rubber shoes making no sound, and drew the door softly shut behind him.
He creptdown the passage towards the stairs.
A faint sound in the darkness startled him, and he paused, his heart beating almost to suffocation, suppressed excitement giving him a feeling almost of sickness.
But it was only a rat that scuttled behind the wainscot.
He passed on his way. Little time as he had lost, the quarter after twelve was chiming outas he reached the ground floor.
All was pitchy dark! The great door of Greyfriars was locked and bolted and barred. Not a gleam of light came from the curtained windows.
But the Greyfriars junior knew his way about. At any time he could have picked his way through the old house blindfolded.
He reached the window of the hall beside the door, and raised the blind. It was a spring blind, and, in his agitation, he allowed it to escape from his hand, and it shot up with a loud click.
He stood trembling. The sound was sharp. To his terrified ears it was like a peal of thunder in the deep silence of the house.
Had it been heard?
What if he were discovered now?
He groaned in spirit at the thought, and stood shaking and shivering, like a criminal awaiting his doom.
But there was no sound of alarm. The dreaded echo of an opening door did not reach his straining, buzzing ears.
He breathed deeply with relief. With more cautious hands he opened the hall window, and the cold wind from the Close blew upon his face.
More than once, in some reckless but innocent boyish jape, Clavering had climbed through the window into the dusky Close, with Wharton or Nugent, or some other comrade of the Remove. It was changed now. Now he stole through it silently, with guilt in his heart, like a thief in the night.
He dropped lightly into the quad.
The night was fine and cold, but very dark. A keen, wintry wind rustled the twigs on the leafless branches of the old trees.
Clavering stepped away from the house, and made his way to the appointed spot at the school wall.
It was too dark for him to see his watch, and he dared not strike a match. But he waited. He knew that he had not long to wait, and the chime from the clock-tower would warn him when the hour for meeting the Gander had come.

Musically through the night it came.
Half-past twelve!

The hour had come!

Even up to this moment Clavering had not fully made up his mind. He knew what he must do, yet he had a feeling that until be actually met the cracksman, he was at liberty to change his mind.
But now—
There was a sound of scraping on the outer side of the wall, and a grunt. Someone was climbing from the road, with the assistance of another standing below. A dark shadow loomed on the top of the school wall.

A voice came hoarsely through the darkness.

“Are you there?”
Yes,” muttered Clavering.
The Gander chuckled softly. “I reckoned you would be,” he replied. “Take this bag and stand clear while I jump down.”
Clavering caught the bag that was tossed to him. The Gander glanced back into the dusky road, and muttered a word to James Clavering.
“You wait there!” he said. “I understand!” muttered the other.

“If there’s any danger, whistle”

“Right!”

The Gander dropped lightly down inside the school wall.

“Lead the way!” he muttered hoarsely. Keep close to me!”

“Here I am!”

“You’ll get fifty quid outer this, young ‘un!”said the cracksman in a whisper. “I ain’t a ‘ard man! I do the
fair thing!”

Clavering did not reply.

His very soul was sick withinhim. His uncle, standingoutside the school wall, waiting for the plunder to be passed to him, was a type of what he was to become, after this first surrender to the Gander.
He knew it!

But the alternative! To raise his voice and give the alarm, and then— if he had been going to resist, he
should have done so earlier. He had made everything too black against himself by yielding so far to think of resistance now.

That was very clear. If he gave the alarm now, it would be supposed that he had fully intended to be an accomplice in the burglary, and that his courage had failed him. That was all! He should have resisted in the beginning! He should have refused to dally with sin for one moment. It was too late to stand firm now!
These thoughts thronged wretchedly through his mind as he led the way towards the School House, he stopped his companion outside the open window in the hall.

“Good!” breathed the Gander.

He climbed into the window and took the sack from the boy. Tom Clavering followed him in.
“The safe!” muttered the cracksman.

“This way!”

“My word! You’re born for the life!” whispered the Gander. “We’ll be proud of you yet, my lad. Lead the way!”

With sick disgust and misery at his heart, Clavering led the way. He wondered whether it was not all some evil
dream, from which he would presently awaken. But the steady breathing at his elbow, the glittering, cunning eyes that met his if he turned his head, were real enough.

“This is the room!” he muttered.

“Good!”

The door was locked, and the key was gone. But that did not delay the Gander more than one minute. He picked the lock, and opened the door, and passed into the Head’s study, the boy before him.

The cracksman closed the door behind him.

He turned on the light of his lantern, and a shaft of light shot to and fro in the shadowy room.

“Where’s the safe?”

Clavering pointed.

“Good! Hold the lantern for me. That kind of safe won’t take me long.”

The burglar selected the tools from his case.

Clavering stood motionless.

What had he done?

At that final, that fearful moment, the scales seemed to fall from the eyes of the unhappy boy.

Had he been in a dream, led on to this by some strange trance, in which he had no control over his actions? It seemed so to him, in the sudden clearness of vision that came to him, asthe cracksman bared his tools.
He could not do it! What a madman he had been to dream for one moment that he could do it. To become a thief, the accomplice of thieves, to help to rob the doctor! Oh, what folly he had been guilty of! Better anything— death itself – than that!

He made a quick step towards the cracksman.

“You must go!” he muttered thickly.
The Gander looked up,
“What?”
Clavering pointed towards the door.
“Go!” he said.
“Are you mad!” muttered the Gander, his lips drawn tight across his teeth.
“I have been, I think,” said Clavering wildly. “But I mean what I say now! Ruin me, if you like, you shall not
rob the doctor.”
“Quiet!”
“I cannot do it! I tell you I cannot do it! Go!”
“You—you fool!”
“Get out!”
“Quiet!” muttered the cracksman, livid with rage.
“You’ll wake the house! Quiet, I say!” He advanced towards the safe.
Clavering looked round wildly for a weapon. There was none to hand; but he caught up a chair, swinging it above his head with desperate strength.
“You shall not!” he muttered. “Stand back—stand back, you scoundrel, or I’ll brain you!”
The Gander started back.
There was no doubt that the boy was in fearful earnest and for a long minute there was silence, a terrible pause in the shadowed room.

**THE EIGHTEENTH CHAPTER.
The Gander’s Last Haul.**

CLAVERING did not falter.
The mist had cleared from his mind. He was firm as a rock now.
He faced the cracksman dauntlessly. The Gander looked at him with eyes that scintillated with rage under his
beetling brows.
“Will you put that chair down?” he muttered, at last.
“No!”
“What do you want—a bigger share than I’ve promised you?”
Clavering’s lip curled with scorn.
“No!”
“What then? What is it?”
“You shall not rob Greyfriars.”
“You fool! You young fool!”
“Go!” said Clavering.
“I***—***I***—”*** The cracksman gritted his teeth. “Do you understand what this means to you, you beggar’s brat?”
“I understand,” said Clavering with quiet despair. “I am ruined here—I am ruined for life. Better that than
become a thief. Get out, you cur!”
The Gander’s teeth ground together with rage. But he had his temper under control. A rich prize was to be had,
and he would not lose it if he could help it.
“Go back to bed!”he muttered. “I can do the rest of the job by myself. A hundred pounds for you to-morrow.” “Not a penny!”
“Two hundred pounds.”
“Go!”
“Very well. You’ll repent this!”

The cracksmen turned towards the door, defeated. Clavering, with a gasp of relief, lowered the chair. Like a flash the ruffian turned, and with the spring of a tiger he was upon the boy. His surrender had been only a pretence to deceive the junior, and poor Clavering had been deceived by it.
“Now then!”
Before the boy could struggle, before he could utter a cry, a savage blow had been struck, and Clavering lay senseless in the grip of the burglar.
The Gander, with a deep breath, lowered the unconscious junior to the carpet. His hand gripped the jemmy for a
moment as if he were inclined to strike again. But he did not, He took a cord from his pocket, and bound the boy hand and foot, and then stuffed a handkerchief into his mouth to stifle his cries when consciousness should return.
Then, safe from alarm, he fell to work upon the safe.
It did not take him long. In five minutes Clavering’s eyes opened—consciousness had returned, but he could neither move nor cry out. He lay with wide-open, despairing eyes, watching the cracksman at work.
The Gander had the safe, open, and he was stowing away his plunder in it, and from the gleam of greedy satisfaction in his eyes, he was pleased by his haul.
He finished his task and fastened up the bag and then looked at Clavering and his eyes met those of the junior.
He grinned cruelly, but did not speak. He shut off the light of the lantern and quietly left the study, drawing the

door shut behind him.

Clavering struggled madly with his bonds. Black despair was in his heart. His repentance had come too late. He had not been able to save the doctor’s property. He had repented, but his repentance had been delayed too long, and it was in vain. The robberyhad taken place all the same.
The boy’s anguish of mind was terrible as he lay there writhing in his bonds, striving to gethis lips free to cry out.
Butit was in vain. The cracksman had done his work too well. Clavering lay silent, save for a faint gasping sound— the bonds cruelly tight upon his limbs, and a thin stream of blood oozing overhis temple where the ruffian had struck him.

The Gander, triumphant, laden with him booty, reached the window. It had, been left open, and the Gander peered out cautiously into the quad.
Fora moment he thought he hearda sound, and then he set it downto the wind whistling in the trees and round tho oldroofs. The alarm had not been given, and there could be no enemy in the grounds.
He dropped the bag quietly outside the window,and climbed out.
With a light catlike tread, he dropped quietly beside the big. Then there was asharp exclamation in the darkness, a rush offeet, and two pairs ofhands grasped him.
“Seize him!”
“Got him!”
A terrible oath escaped the lips of the cracksman. He struggled violently, furiously, desperately. But two powerful constables were bearing him down, and he had no chance.
He was borne to the ground, and the handcuffs clicked on his wrists. Then he ceased to struggle,and lay gasping, panting, palpitating. The light of a bullseye-lantern was turned upon his face.
“Got him!” said Inspector Taylor, of Courtfield. “There were only two, and we had the other in the road, so it’s all serene now.”And the inspector proceeded to knock up the school.

**THE NINETEENTH CHAPTER.
The Right Path!**

GREYFRIARS was in an uproar.
The discovery of the burgled safe, and Clavering lying bound andgagged beside it with blood upon his face, rang through the school. All the Forms were awake—from the head to the youngest fag. Greyfriars thrilled with excitement.
Part of the story was clear at once—that Sally Lazarus, inCourtfield, had gained information as to the cracksmen’s intentions, andlaid itbefore thepolice; that the police had hurried at once to the school, had captured the man who was waiting outside the wall, and had then entered the grounds just in time to capture the chief cracksman as he emerged from the window with his plunder. But what had Clavering had to do with it? Had he heard the burglars enter, and descended alone to encounter them, or—or what? It was a puzzle, and there was no explanation from Clavering, for the boy had fainted whenhe was released, and he had beentaken to bed atonce, and now he lay there unconscious.
Of all the fellows at Greyfriars, Harry Wharton was the only one who had any suspicion of Clavering’sconnection with the cracksmen.
From what Clavering had told him, Harry could not help suspecting it. Yet he waspuzzled. For if that was what the Gander had demanded of Clavering, how was it that Clavering had gone so far, and no farther? It looked as if he had admitted the cracksman to the house and then turned againsthim.
Had he repented at thelast moment? That was what itlooked like, and Wharton was glad toknow that,however nearhe had gone to a terrible fall, Clavering had had the strength of mind to resist at the eleventh hour.
There was little more sleep for Greyfriars that night. And in themorning, the one topic was theattempted burglary, and the capture of the cracksmen, who, it was now discovered, were members of a well-known gang, much to the satisfaction of the Courtfield police. It was notoften that the local police had an opportunity of distinguishing themselves in this way.
Wharton was puzzled by the strange circumstances, and the other fellows were more puzzled still, and they were anxious to see Clavering and get some explanation. But their wish wasnot granted. When Sidney Clavering left his bed and camedown, it was to betaken directly to the Head’s study.Clavering was very pale, but veryfirm. He knew that all must come outnow; if he didnot tell it, the Ganderwould. But he had resolved in any case to make a clean breast of it, to Dr. Locke. He knew that hemust leave Greyfriars now, and he meant to tell everything before he went.
Dr Locke looked kindly at the lad as he came in.
“I wish to hear your story of what happened last night, Clavering,” he said gently. “I think I must ask you for
a full explanation, and I urge you to be quite frank with me. The capturedburglar has made some allegations that require clearing up.”

“Yessir,” said Clavering firmly.
And the Headlistened with keen attention as thejunior told histale—of the news he had received that meant ruin to him, of the choice that hadbeen offered him, of how he hadstruggled in miserable indecision—and almost fallen to crime, andhow repentance had come at the last moment.
He told it all in a lowbut, firm and shaken voice, and then stood with bowed headto hear his sentence.
The Head had not interruptedhim once.When he spoke nowit was in a soft andkindly voice.
“My poor, poor lad! If you had come to me at first, all this misery might have been saved***.*** You should have trusted me as a friend, as well as a schoolmaster, Clavering.”
“I wish I had, sir,” faltered Clavering. “I was afraid.”
“Thank heaven,” said the Head, “that you repented in time, Clavering, and that you did notbecome a thief! That atones forall!Ifear, mylad, thatit would be too unpleasant, for you to remain at Greyfriars, but it is only for your own sake that I shall send you away.But you shall not go to the fate that wretch threatened you with. You shall go to another school, where youwill have every chance of getting on in life, and that wicked man will be in prison for many years to come, and unable to harm you. You have proved that, you have honest stuff in your nature, Clavering, in spite of your waverings, and while I live you shall never want afriend.”
Clavering did not reply; he could not. The tears wererunning downhis cheeks, and nothing but a sob would come from his throat. But, that night, ere hewent to bed, on his knees hethanked God that he had, thoughat the eleventhhour, chosenthe right pathwhen he stood atthe parting of the ways.

**THE END.**