

**CLASSICS TO GO**

**THE MYSTERY OF  
CLEVERLY  
A STORY FOR BOYS**



**GEORGE BARTON**

# **The Mystery of Cleverly**

## **A Story for Boys**

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## **CHAPTER I**

### **IN WHICH A BULLY COMES TO GRIEF**

“If you fellows don’t open that door and let me in, there’ll be trouble in this town before long.”

The only answer was a mocking laugh from the group of boys to whom this threat was addressed.

Herbert Harkins, his face red with rage, pounded his fist on the panels of the schoolhouse without making the slightest impression upon his fellow schoolboys.

“Open the door,” he cried again, in a loud voice.

Once more a peal of laughter sounded from within. The scene of this incident was the Cleverly District School. The time was the second of January, and the occasion was the annual frolic of the boys, known as “barring out day.”

It was a custom which, originating down east, had spread to the little town in New Jersey. The method was quite simple. After the Christmas holidays the big boys put their heads together and decided on a plan of campaign. When all of the details had been arranged, it was decided to put them into execution at the first regular session of the new year. The forenoon passed off as quietly as any other day, the boys looking very sober and extremely attentive to their studies, and keeping unusual order. The moment the schoolmaster left the house for his dinner and the smaller children were started homeward, the doors and windows were suddenly and securely locked, and the older pupils proceeded to spend the afternoon in play and hilarity.

When Mr. Anderson, the teacher, returned about one o’clock, he was surprised to find the schoolhouse in a state of siege. He made an attempt to enter, but failed. It so happened that Herbert Harkins was the only one of the

larger boys who had been locked out. Under ordinary circumstances he would have taken the incident good-naturedly; but in this case he knew that the teacher was frail and delicate, and Herbert's regard and sympathy for Mr. Anderson aroused all his manly instincts and brought his fighting blood to the boiling pitch. The teacher who had been employed in this district only a few weeks, was evidently of a sickly disposition. It was a cold day. He was insufficiently clad, and the prospect of taking some sickness which might perhaps lead to pneumonia and death made the poor man quite miserable. His face was beginning to get blue with the intense cold; but he was too weak to resort to any physical methods for opening the door.

Herbert knocked again; but his appeal was received only with jeers and shouts of derision. Mr. Anderson turned to him with a kindly smile, and said:

"There is no need of doing anything more, Herbert. I thank you for your good intentions; but I think the only thing left for me to do is to go home for the day."

As Herbert was about to reply he happened to glance upward and noticed the smoke coming from the chimney on the top of the schoolhouse. He remembered that the room was heated by means of an old-fashioned wood fire, which was constantly replenished during the day. Whenever a fresh or green log was placed on the fire, more or less smoke went up the chimney. As Herbert gazed at the little curls of smoke making their way skyward, he suddenly conceived a means of breaking up the siege in the schoolhouse and procuring entrance for himself and the teacher. To think was to act. A small pile of lumber lay in the roadway nearby. Herbert walked over to it and picked out a wide, square board. It was quite heavy; but by dint of much energy and persistence he managed to get it under his arm and carry it to the schoolhouse. Mr. Anderson wondered

what he was about to do. The boys on the inside, too, gazed at this unexpected activity with much interest. Herbert's next move was to secure a large ladder, which he put up against the side of the house. Then reaching for the board, he made his way to the top of the schoolhouse and in less than two minutes had placed it over the top of the chimney. Then he hurried down the ladder again, and rejoining Mr. Anderson, said calmly:

"I am willing to wager that we will be inside of that schoolroom before you have time to count a hundred."

And so it proved. The smoke, unable to find its way out of the chimney, was thrown back into the schoolroom, and in a minute's time the boys were choking from the effects of the fumes. Some were in favor of holding out, but when their eyes began to run water and they were filled with a stifling sensation, they quickly decided to surrender. The bars were taken down and the doors and windows thrown open.

Herbert, delighted with the success of his little scheme, remounted the ladder, and going to the roof, took the board from the chimney. The boys made no further attempts at disturbance; within fifteen minutes order had been entirely restored, and the afternoon session went on as if nothing had happened.

Most of the boys were filled with admiration at Herbert's cleverness; but a few of them murmured against him and threatened to punish him for breaking up their fun. The largest of these boys was Arthur Black, who was a year older than Herbert, and had the reputation of being the bully of the school. After the children had been dismissed for the afternoon, they gathered in groups outside the schoolhouse and talked about the unusual event. Arthur Black raised his voice above the others, declaring that he had a great notion to thrash the boy who had dared to interfere with their sport. Some of the more timid pupils

approached Herbert and advised him to hurry home in order to escape punishment. He smiled at their fears, however, and said he had no reason for running away. Just then Arthur Black approached.

“What’s that you say?” he asked in an insulting voice.

“I said that I had no reason for running away,” replied Herbert quietly.

“Well, that’s because you haven’t got any sense,” was the ugly rejoinder. “You’re a sneak and a busybody and ought to be thrown out of the school.”

“Why?” asked Herbert.

“Because you spoiled our fun,” was the reply.

“I don’t think it’s much fun to keep a sick teacher out in the cold and make him run the risk of losing his life. I—”

“Oh, we’ve had enough of your talk,” said Arthur, interrupting Herbert.

“But you will listen to what I have to say,” persisted Herbert manfully.

“No I won’t,” was the rejoinder, “and if you say another word I’ll thrash you within an inch of your life.”

“Two can play at that game,” said Herbert coolly.

The other made no reply, but began to take off his coat, and flinging it on the ground, started to roll up his shirt sleeves. Instantly the other boys formed a ring about them. There was nothing left for Herbert but to accept the invitation that was thrown down to him in such a noisy way. He took off his coat, and in a trice the two boys were engaged in a rough and tumble fight. It looked for a time as if Arthur Black, who was the older and heavier of the two, would get the better of Herbert. The boys crowded around the two fighters and urged them on with yells and shouts of approval. Herbert

kept comparatively cool, and at a critical stage in the fight he pummeled Arthur so vigorously that he cried for mercy. Indeed his nose was bleeding and one of his eyes was beginning to show evidence of the contest. Picking up his hat and coat, and hardly able to repress his tears, he hurried off towards his home. Herbert was immediately proclaimed the hero of the hour. He had thrashed the bully of the school, and from that moment he was the idol of his schoolmates and the most popular boy in Cleverly.

## **CHAPTER II**

### **HERBERT FINDS HIMSELF THE INNOCENT CAUSE OF MUCH TROUBLE**

When Herbert Harkins reached home he found that the story of his battle with Arthur Black had preceded him. His mother was at the doorway awaiting his arrival. She scanned his face anxiously.

“Are you hurt, Herbert?” she asked.

“Not a great deal, mother,” he said, with a trace of conscious pride in his voice; “but I can’t say as much for the other fellow.”

“I was sorry to hear that you were quarreling,” she remarked gravely; “it’s not gentlemanly.”

“But I could not let the other boys think I was a coward,” he cried quickly.

His mother made no reply to this, but pointing toward the sitting room, said simply:

“Your father is waiting to see you.”

Herbert started up the stairway, filled with misgivings. It was a rare thing for his father to send for him, and the serious manner in which his mother had delivered the message convinced him that it must be a matter of importance. David Harkins was above everything else a just man. He had started out in life with bright prospects, but through a series of misfortunes over which he had no control, his little fortune had been very much reduced and his health greatly impaired.

His doctor advised him to go into the country and engage in open air work as much as possible. He cautioned him above all else to avoid the occasions of excitement. The medical



man assured him that his heart was weak, and that it would not stand any severe or unusual strain. Mr. Harkins examined various properties in the vicinity of the city, and finally decided upon the neat little place at Cleverly. It contained a garden and was within a reasonable distance of the city whence Mr. Harkins' employment called him several times a week. In the meantime he cultivated the garden, and by dint of close economy managed to make both ends meet. Mr. Harkins was engaged in looking over some papers when Herbert entered the room. He laid them down immediately and turned to the boy with a look in which affection and reproach were mingled.

"Herbert, I hear bad reports about you."

"I'm sorry for that, father," was the response, "because I don't believe I deserve them."

Mr. Harkins glanced at Herbert keenly, and the look which he received in return seemed to satisfy him, for he said:

"Tell me in your own way all about this quarrel—give me all the details, and do not attempt to hide anything."

Herbert told everything clearly and quickly. As he concluded his father nodded his head as if to indicate that he understood and then sighed deeply. Herbert noticed this, and said with trembling voice:

"You believe me, don't you?"

"I do."

"Don't you think I did right?"

"I do."

"But why are you so sad?"

"Because I regret this thing very much—because I am sorry you quarreled with Arthur Black."

“But you said I was justified.”

“I did; but unfortunately you have offended a powerful man. I suppose you are old enough to understand these things. John Black, Arthur’s father, is not only the richest man in Cleverly, but he is the president of the bank, and I—I owe him money.”

David Harkins put his head in his hands as he spoke, and leaning on his desk, sat there for some time buried in thought. Herbert was silent for awhile, then rushing up to his father, cried out impulsively:

“I’m awfully sorry, father; I didn’t intend to do anything wrong. I never thought of injuring you. If I can repair the damage in any way I’ll be only too glad to do so. Tell me what to do.”

“Do,” cried his father, with a sudden return of his natural dignity; “why do nothing; you are guilty of no wrong and have nothing to regret. However,” with a sigh which he could not conceal, “I’m sure we will hear more about this before the evening is over.”

And so they did. About eight o’clock that night there was a loud rapping at the door, and a stout, pompous man was ushered into the parlor. He had iron gray hair, heavy bristling eyebrows and scowled in the most severe manner. He looked about the little room in a disdainful manner, and then dropped abruptly into the easiest chair at hand. His manner was aggressive. He carried a heavy cane and pounded it on the floor impatiently while awaiting the arrival of Mr. Harkins.

Such was John Black, bank president, capitalist and the most unpopular man in Cleverly.

“See here, Harkins,” he cried out abruptly as Herbert’s father entered the room, “I came to see you about that boy of yours.”

“What about him?” asked Mr. Harkins quietly.

“A great deal about him,” spluttered the banker, “he’s a young rowdy; that’s what he is. He set on my boy Arthur at school to-day and beat him in the most brutal manner.”

“A boys’ fight?” queried Herbert’s father lifting his eyebrows.

“You may call it a boys’ fight,” thundered the other; “I call it an outrage. Why that child of mine came home with his nose bleeding—do you understand sir—with his nose bleeding.”

“That child as you call him,” ventured Mr. Harkins, a note of amusement in his voice, “is, I believe, nearly seventeen years old.”

“What’s that got to do with it?” shouted the other.

“Nothing, except that he’s nearly two years older than my boy.”

“Age is not the only thing—”

“No,” interrupted Mr. Harkins, “weight should be considered. Arthur is not only older, but he is much heavier than Herbert.”

“Do you mean to say,” exclaimed the banker in amazement, “that you are taking up for that boy?”

“Oh, no,” said Mr. Harkins pleasantly, “that’s not necessary. Herbert seems to be fully capable of taking up for himself.”

“Take care, Harkins,” said the rich man, banging his cane angrily on the floor; “take care; don’t attempt to trifle with me!”

David Harkins paid no attention to this outburst, but sat silent wondering what would come next. His curiosity was soon satisfied.

John Black arose with a gesture of impatience.

“There is no need of my wasting any more time here,” he exclaimed. “I came over to give you a chance to set yourself straight.”

“To set myself straight?” queried Harkins.

“Yes; if you have that boy of yours apologize to Arthur at school to-morrow, we’ll call it quits.”

David Harkins stood looking at the banker as if he had taken leave of his senses. The silence lasted so long that it became embarrassing.

“Come, come, what do you say to my proposal?” asked John Black. “I don’t want to be too hard on your young one. Do as I say and the matter will drop. Your answer.”

“No!” shouted Harkins. “No; a hundred times no! Herbert did perfectly right in thrashing that bully of a son of yours. I’m proud of him for doing it. And if he would dare to apologize for it I’d disown him as a son.”

John Black grew almost livid with rage. He hurried to the door. When he reached it he looked back and shook his cane at Harkins.

“You will regret this insult; blast you, I’ll make you sorry for what you said.”

Mrs. Harkins entered the room just as the banker retired. She hurried over to her husband.

“I heard loud voices, David,” she said. “I am sorry you quarreled with Mr. Black.”

Her husband looked at her fondly. His face was pale, although he was smiling.

“I’m sorry, too,” he said; “but he irritated me beyond endurance. Besides I told him the truth. Between ourselves,” he added, “I’m really proud of Herbert.”

“But you must not tell that to Herbert,” she said anxiously; “it might be the means of spoiling him.”

“Oh, never fear, I won’t tell him; but I won’t be unjust to the boy either. I’ll deal fairly with him.”

Indeed, as has already been indicated, a love of justice was one of the most striking traits of David Harkins’ character, and unconsciously he was doing all in his power to plant the same virtue in the mind and heart of his only son.

“In spite of what you say, David,” remarked Mrs. Harkins, “I regret this incident. I do not believe in signs or any nonsense of that sort, but some strange voice within me says that this thing will have a fatal ending.”

“Oh, cheer up,” was the bright response of the husband. “It’s folly to look on the dark side of life. Anyhow, what will be, must be. All that we can do in this life is to try and live decently. A friend of mine used to say that it was a good thing always to hope for the best and prepare for the worst.”

With this bit of philosophy Mr. Harkins turned to his desk and resumed his work. As his wife closed the door, however, the cheerful look left his face, and lines of care and worry began to appear. Despite his protests to the contrary, he regretted his encounter with John Black. But his sense of right and justice was too acute to permit him to make peace at the price of truth.

While he was thinking over the events of the day, there was a ring of the door-bell, and in a moment Mrs. Harkins appeared to present Mr. Horace Coke, the lawyer of Cleverly and one of the good friends of the family. Mr. Coke was one of the old fashioned attorneys at law. He wore a suit of black broadcloth and carried a cane and a high silk hat in his hand. He had a smooth, round face, was always in a good

humor, loved children and dogs, and lived in constant peace and harmony with his friends and neighbors.

Mr. Harkins hastened to give him the most comfortable chair in the room, and Mrs. Harkins, who had remained, waited expectantly to hear the occasion of the visit. The visitor stroked his chin in an absent-minded way and seemed ill at ease. He was not smiling either, which was a strange thing for Horace Coke. Presently he said abruptly:

“It’s a lovely evening Dave, isn’t it?”

“Yes,” replied Mr. Harkins, “it is a lovely evening.”

But he knew in his heart that the lawyer had not called to make this useless comment on the weather. He knew that something more important was to come, so he sat silent and waited.

“Dave,” said the lawyer, clearing his throat, “I’m here on a very, very unpleasant errand. It was in the line of my professional duty though, and I couldn’t get out of it.”

“Indeed,” was the non-committal reply.

“No,” pursued Mr. Coke, “you see I am here representing a client.”

“Might I ask the name of your client?”

“Yes; it is John Black.”

Mr. Harkins started as he heard this name. It was not altogether unexpected, yet the sound gave him an uncomfortable feeling. Mrs. Harkins, too, was very much depressed by the announcement. Herbert had entered the room quietly during the conversation; but when he heard what Mr. Coke had said, he paused at the threshold.

“Well,” said Mr. Harkins finally, “what about Mr. Black?”

"It seems," replied the lawyer, "that you have had a financial transaction with Mr. Black."

"Yes, sir."

"That he has your note for one thousand dollars."

"That is correct."

"Well, Mr. Black sends me here to collect it."

"Mr. Coke, isn't this a rather unusual method of doing business? I borrowed this money from Mr. Black at the bank to pay off the mortgage on my house. I understood that it was to run for several years, although we had no written agreement regarding the time. But I never heard of a banker sending a lawyer to collect a note."

"It is unusual," confessed the lawyer, "but Mr. Black has the legal right to do it if he sees fit. He says the endorsers of the note are no good and he instructs me, if payment is not made within twenty-four hours, to proceed against you."

He arose to go. As he reached the door he turned and said:

"Dave, I don't think this is a square deal; but I'm only acting as a lawyer for a client. If I had the money to spare, I'd give it to you myself."

He said good-night and departed. Mrs. Harkins turned to her husband.

"Can you meet this demand, Dave?"

He looked at her in a strained sort of way. It was a half minute before he spoke. He said simply:

"I haven't the faintest idea where I am going to get the money."

## **CHAPTER III**

### **PROVING THAT BIRDS OF A FEATHER FLOCK TOGETHER**

Herbert was deeply impressed with the scene that had taken place between his father and Mr. Coke. It was quite early in the evening, and putting on his hat and coat, he quietly left the house for the purpose of taking a walk around the town and thinking over the meaning of the events which were following each other so quickly. He was filled with remorse at the thought of having been the innocent cause of bringing disaster on their modest household; but deep down in his heart he felt that he had done the right thing in spite of the unexpected results that had followed. Herbert had always been a sturdy and resolute boy.

He had regard for the feelings and rights of others, but was always quick to resent any attempt to impose upon his own good nature. When he first entered the school at Cleverly he did not give promise of being a very bright pupil. In fact there were times when the teacher was disposed to consider him a very dull boy; but little by little the ability that slumbered with him was awakened, and by degrees he began to show evidences of more than ordinary talent. He was not quick to learn; but was always numbered among the plodders at the school. In spite of his apparent slowness, he began to advance in his classes, and when he had reached his sixteenth year was near the head of the boys in his grade. For one thing he retained the knowledge that he acquired with so much labor. He had what the teacher called bull-dog tenacity. In other words, when he started out to accomplish a certain task he never rested till it was entirely completed.



Mr. Harkins, who was a man of very unusual ability, was extremely anxious to give his son the very best education in his power. His ambition was to develop Herbert both morally and mentally, and he looked forward with great hope to the time when he would finish his tuition at the Cleverly district school. After that it was his wish that he should enter St. Joseph's College in the adjoining city, in order to obtain a higher education. The Jesuits who were in charge of that institution, had offered four free scholarships to the boys who obtained the highest average in a competitive examination that was to be held in the spring of the year. The father and son had frequently discussed this subject.

"Herbert," said Mr. Harkins, "this is no child's play. If you make up your mind to go into this thing, it will mean hard work. There will be very little time for sports."

"I appreciate that, father," Herbert would say soberly. "And when the time comes I intend to pin myself down to the hardest kind of work. I know what it means, and I have no fear of the result."

So it was that the boy trudged along in his somewhat heavy way, doing the routine that fell to all the pupils of the Cleverly School. While he did not display any special flashes of brilliancy, his averages were always good, and sometimes unusually large.

Arthur Black was the opposite of Herbert in almost every way. For years he had been one of the favored pupils at the Cleverly School. The fact that his father was rich and influential made all those connected with the school disposed to treat him with more than ordinary consideration. He was a bright boy, but extremely indolent; and as a consequence was a source of constant trouble to his teachers. Arthur had the faculty of being able to recite his lessons without having given much time to their study; but as the weeks and months went by he became more and