

STILL—WILLIAM

BY
RICHMAL CROMPTON

Table of Contents

STILL—WILLIAM

CHAPTER I

CHAPTER II

CHAPTER III

CHAPTER IV

CHAPTER V

CHAPTER VI

CHAPTER VII

CHAPTER VIII

CHAPTER IX

CHAPTER X

CHAPTER XI

CHAPTER XII

CHAPTER XIII

CHAPTER XIV

STILL—WILLIAM



"NOW YOU MUTH PLAY WITH ME," LISPED VIOLET
ELIZABETH, SWEETLY.

"I DON'T PLAY LITTLE GIRL'S GAMES," ANSWERED THE
DISGUSTED WILLIAM.

TO
COLONEL R. E. CROMPTON, C.B., R.E.

CHAPTER I

THE BISHOP'S HANDKERCHIEF

UNTIL now William had taken no interest in his handkerchiefs as toilet accessories. They were greyish (once white) squares useful for blotting ink or carrying frogs or making lifelike rats to divert the long hours of afternoon school, but otherwise he had had no pride or interest in them.

But last week, Ginger (a member of the circle known to themselves as the Outlaws of which William was the leader) had received a handkerchief as a birthday present from an aunt in London. William, on hearing the news, had jeered, but the sight of the handkerchief had silenced him.

It was a large handkerchief, larger than William had conceived it possible for handkerchiefs to be. It was made of silk, and contained all the colours of the rainbow. Round the edge green dragons sported upon a red ground. Ginger displayed it at first deprecatingly, fully prepared for scorn and merriment, and for some moments the fate of the handkerchief hung in the balance. But there was something about the handkerchief that impressed them.

“Kinder—funny,” said Henry critically.

“Jolly big, isn’t it?” said Douglas uncertainly.

“S more like a *sheet*,” said William, wavering between scorn and admiration.

Ginger was relieved. At any rate they had taken it seriously. They had not wept tears of mirth over it. That afternoon he drew it out of his pocket with a flourish and airily wiped his nose with it. The next morning Henry appeared with a handkerchief almost exactly like it, and the day after that Douglas had one. William felt his prestige lowered. He—the born leader—was the only one of the select circle who did not possess a coloured silk handkerchief.

That evening he approached his mother.

“I don’t think white ones is much use,” he said.

“Don’t scrape your feet on the carpet, William,” said his mother placidly. “I thought white ones were the only tame kind—not that I think your father will let you have any more. You know what he said when they got all over the floor and bit his finger.”

“I’m not talkin’ about *rats*,” said William. “I’m talkin’ about handkerchiefs.”

“Oh—handkerchiefs! White ones are far the best. They launder properly. They come out a good colour—at least yours don’t, but that’s because you get them so black—but there’s nothing better than white linen.”

“Pers’nally,” said William with a judicial air, “I think silk’s better than linen an’ white’s so tirin’ to look at. I think a kind of colour’s better for your eyes. My eyes do ache a bit sometimes. I think it’s prob’ly with keep lookin’ at white handkerchiefs.”

“Don’t be silly, William. I’m not going to buy you silk handkerchiefs to get covered with mud and ink and coal as yours do.”

Mrs. Brown calmly cut off her darning wool as she spoke, and took another sock from the pile by her chair. William sighed.

“Oh, I wouldn’t do those things with a *silk* one,” he said earnestly. “It’s only because they’re *cotton* ones I do those things.”

“Linen,” corrected Mrs. Brown.

“Linen an’ cotton’s the same,” said William, “it’s not *silk*. I jus’ want a *silk* one with colours an’ so on, that’s all. That’s all I want. It’s not much. Just a *silk* handkerchief with colours. Surely——”

“I’m *not* going to buy you another *thing*, William,” said Mrs. Brown firmly. “I had to get you a new suit and new collars only last month, and your overcoat’s dreadful, because you *will* crawl through the ditch in it——”

William resented this cowardly change of attack.

“I’m not talkin’ about suits an’ collars an’ overcoats an’ so on——” he said; “I’m talkin’ about *handkerchiefs*. I simply ask you if——”

“If you want a silk handkerchief, William,” said Mrs. Brown decisively, “you’ll have to buy one.”

“Well!” said William, aghast at the unfairness of the remark—
“Well, jus’ fancy you sayin’ that to me when you know I’ve not

got any money, when you *know* I'm not even *going* to have any money for years an' years an' years."

"You shouldn't have broken the landing-window," said Mrs. Brown.

William was pained and disappointed. He had no illusions about his father and elder brother, but he had expected more feeling and sympathy from his mother.

Determinedly, but not very hopefully, he went to his father, who was reading a newspaper in the library.

"You know, father," said William confidently, taking his seat upon the newspaper rack, "I think white ones is all right for children—and so on. Wot I mean to say is that when you get older coloured ones is better."

"Really?" said his father politely.

"Yes," said William, encouraged. "They wouldn't show dirt so, either—not like white ones do. An' they're bigger, too. They'd be cheaper in the end. They wouldn't cost so much for laundry—an' so on."

"Exactly," murmured his father, turning over to the next page.

"Well," said William boldly, "if you'd very kin'ly buy me some, or one would do, or I could buy them or it if you'd jus' give me——"

"As I haven't the remotest idea what you're talking about," said his father, "I don't see how I can. Would you be so very kind as to remove yourself from the newspaper rack for a minute and

let me get the evening paper? I'm so sorry to trouble you. Thank you so much."

"Handkerchiefs!" said William impatiently. "I keep telling you. It's *handkerchiefs*. I jus' want a nice silk-coloured one, 'cause I think it would last longer and be cheaper in the wash. That's all. I think the ones I have makes such a lot of trouble for the laundry. I jus'——"

"Though deeply moved by your consideration for other people," said Mr. Brown, as he ran his eye down the financial column, "I may as well save you any further waste of your valuable time and eloquence by informing you at once that you won't get a halfpenny out of me if you talk till midnight."

William went with silent disgust and slow dignity from the room.

Next he investigated Robert's bedroom. He opened Robert's dressing-table drawer and turned over his handkerchiefs. He caught his breath with surprise and pleasure. There it was beneath all Robert's other handkerchiefs—larger, silkier, more multi-coloured than Ginger's or Douglas's or Henry's. He gazed at it in ecstatic joy. He slipped it into his pocket and, standing before the looking-glass, took it out with a flourish, shaking its lustrous folds. He was absorbed in this occupation when Robert entered. Robert looked at him with elder-brother disapproval.

"I told you that if I caught you playing monkey tricks in my room again——" he began threateningly, glancing suspiciously

at the bed, in the “apple-pie” arrangements of which William was an expert.

“I’m not, Robert,” said William with disarming innocence. “Honest I’m not. I jus’ wanted to borrow a handkerchief. I thought you wun’t mind lendin’ me a handkerchief.”

“Well, I would,” said Robert shortly, “so you can jolly well clear out.”

“It was this one I thought you wun’t mind lendin’ me,” said William. “I wun’t take one of your nice white ones, but I thought you wun’t mind me having this ole coloured dirty-looking one.”

“Did you? Well, give it back to me.”

Reluctantly William handed it back to Robert.

“How much’ll you give it me for?” he said shortly.

“Well, how much have you?” said Robert ruthlessly.

“Nothin’—not jus’ at present,” admitted William. “But I’d *do* something for you for it. I’d do anythin’ you want done for it. You just tell me what to do for it, an’ I’ll *do* it.”

“Well, you can—you can get the Bishop’s handkerchief for me, and then I’ll give mine to you.”

The trouble with Robert was that he imagined himself a wit.

The trouble with William was that he took things literally.

The Bishop was expected in the village the next day. It was the great event of the summer. He was a distant relation of the Vicar's. He was to open the Sale of Work, address a large meeting on temperance, spend the night at the vicarage, and depart the next morning.

The Bishop was a fatherly, simple-minded old man of seventy. He enjoyed the Sale of Work except for one thing. Wherever he looked he met the gaze of a freckled untidy frowning small boy. He could not understand it. The boy seemed to be everywhere. The boy seemed to follow him about. He came to the conclusion that it must be his imagination, but it made him feel vaguely uneasy.

Then he addressed the meeting on Temperance, his audience consisting chiefly of adults. But, in the very front seat, the same earnest frowning boy fixed him with a determined gaze. When the Bishop first encountered this gaze he became slightly disconcerted, and lost his place in his notes. Then he tried to forget the disturbing presence and address his remarks to the middle of the hall. But there was something hypnotic in the small boy's gaze. In the end the Bishop yielded to it. He fixed his eyes obediently upon William. He harangued William earnestly and forcibly upon the necessity of self-control and the effect of alcohol upon the liver. And William returned his gaze unblinkingly.

After the meeting William wandered down the road to the Vicarage. He pondered gloomily over his wasted afternoon. Fate had not thrown the Bishop's handkerchief in his path. But he did not yet despair.

On the way he met Ginger. Ginger drew out his interminable coloured handkerchief and shook it proudly.

“D’ye mean to *say*,” he said to William, “that you still use those old *white* ones?”

William looked at him with cold scorn.

“I’m too busy to bother with you jus’ now,” he said.

Ginger went on.

William looked cautiously through the Vicarage hedge. Nothing was to be seen. He crawled inside the garden and round to the back of the house, which was invisible from the road. The Bishop was tired after his address. He lay outstretched upon a deck-chair beneath a tree.

Over the head and face of His Lordship was stretched a large superfine linen handkerchief. William’s set stern expression brightened. On hands and knees he began to crawl through the grass towards the portly form, his tongue protruding from his pursed lips.

Crouching behind the chair, he braced himself for the crime; he measured the distance between the chair and the garden gate.

One, two, three—then suddenly the portly form stirred, the handkerchief was firmly withdrawn by a podgy hand, and a dignified voice yawned and said: “Heigh-ho!”

At the same moment the Bishop sat up. William, from his refuge behind the chair, looked wildly round. The door of the house was opening. There was only one thing to do. William

was as nimble as a monkey. Like a flash of lightning he disappeared up the tree. It was a very leafy tree. It completely concealed William, but William had a good bird's eye view of the world beneath him. The Vicar came out rubbing his hands.

"You rested, my Lord?" he said.

"I'm afraid I've had forty winks," said His Lordship pleasantly. "Just dropped off, you know. I dreamt about that boy who was at the meeting this afternoon."

"What boy, my Lord?" asked the Vicar.

"I noticed him at the Sale of Work and the meeting—he looked—he looked a soulful boy. I daresay you know him."

The Vicar considered.

"I can't think of any boy round here like that," he said.



**THE BENT PIN CAUGHT THE BISHOP'S EAR,
AND THE BISHOP SAT UP WITH A
LITTLE SCREAM.**

The Bishop sighed.

“He may have been a stranger, of course,” he said meditatively. “It seemed an earnest *questing* face—as if the boy wanted something—*needed* something. I hope my little talk helped him.”

“Without doubt it did, my Lord,” said the Vicar politely. “I thought we might dine out here—the days draw out so pleasantly now.”

Up in his tree, William with smirks and hand-rubbing and mincing (though soundless) movements of his lips kept up a running imitation of the Vicar's speech, for the edification apparently of a caterpillar which was watching him intently.

The Vicar went in to order dinner in the garden. The Bishop drew the delicate handkerchief once more over his rubicund features. In the tree William abandoned his airy pastime, and his face took on again the expression of soulful earnestness that had pleased the Bishop.

The breast of the Bishop on the lawn began to rise and sink. The figure of the Vicar was visible at the study window as he gazed with fond pride upon the slumbers of his distinguished guest. William dared not descend in view of that watching figure. Finally it sat down in a chair by the window and began to read a book.

Then William began to act. He took from his pocket a bent pin attached to a piece of string. This apparatus lived permanently in his pocket, because he had not given up hope of catching a trout in the village stream. He lowered this cautiously and drew the bent pin carefully on to the white linen expanse.



**FROM THE TREE WILLIAM MADE A
LAST DESPERATE EFFORT.**

It caught—joy!

“Phut!” said the Bishop, bringing down his hand heavily, not on the pin, but near it.

Thank You for previewing this eBook

You can read the full version of this eBook in different formats:

- HTML (Free /Available to everyone)
- PDF / TXT (Available to V.I.P. members. Free Standard members can access up to 5 PDF/TXT eBooks per month each month)
- Epub & Mobipocket (Exclusive to V.I.P. members)

To download this full book, simply select the format you desire below

