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Opening extract from
**The Dangerous Discoveries of
Gully Potchard**

Written by
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THE
DANGEROUS DISCOVERIES
OF GULLY POTCHARD



JULIA LEE

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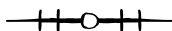
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For my sons



The Cast List

IN SOUTHAMPTON

At No. 17 Wentworth Gardens:

Gully Potchard, a delivery boy
Hetty Marvel, his aunt, a boarding-house keeper
Whitby Marvel, his cousin, a dancer
Leicester Marvel, his cousin, a schoolboy
Dorchester (Dora) Barnicott, his cousin, an expectant mother
Impey, Dora's daughter

At No. 8, The Square:

Agnes Glass
Mrs Glass, her mother
Mr Glass, her father
Randolph, her brother
Aisling O'Rourke, a maid
Rob Boxer, assistant groom
Miss Jencks, governess to Agnes
Mrs Vyne, an elderly neighbour

Mr Leopold Janner, a printer
Mrs Janner, his wife
May, their daughter

Mrs Arcadia Pomfret and Lancelot Delabole Esquire,
joint proprietors of the Pomfret–Delabole School of Dance

Tom Garnett, a pianist

Bertha Hapgood and Dilys Smith. Together with
Whitby Marvel they make up the Lovely Lightfoot Sisters,
a dance troupe.

Nathan Boldree, a no-good

Charlie Scudder and **Kiv McKyver,** his henchmen
‘**The Dolphin**’, a recent associate of Nathan Boldree

Miss Sylvestra Lobell, a comic songstress

Captain Pye, a sailor

Horatio and **Chance,** two dogs

ON THE ISLAND

Alfred Potchard (Uncle ABC) bookshop keeper
and great-uncle to Gully and Whitby

Mrs Verona Leaf, clairvoyant

Charlotte Umber, sister of Agnes Glass

James Umber, her husband

Chapter 1

Old Enemies

‘Gully Potchard! As I live and breathe!’

A hand came thumping down on Gully’s shoulder, stopping him in his tracks. It gripped him like a vulture’s talon and twisted him round.

‘Nathan Boldree!’ he said. It came out all high and squeaky.

‘Ain’t seen you in a year or two. Where you bin hiding yourself, then?’

‘I—I’ve not been hiding at all. Just going about my business.’

‘Not round here you ain’t, or I’d’ve heard about it.’

That was Nathan all over. They’d been in the same shabby school for a few months. Nathan was one of the oldest boys there, the boss, the bully, the one in the know. Had the biggest swagger, the loudest laugh. Claimed Boldree was an old pirate name, and it could have been true. Gully

himself came from a long line of sailors and adventurers.

‘I—I was only here for a bit, staying with my uncle. Then my ma came home . . . ’ he explained, trying not to gabble.

Nathan pushed his face up close, his fat, wet lips sneering. ‘Your ma came home? Where she bin? In clink?’

‘No!’ Gully was horrified. Nathan’s folk might be familiar with prison, but his weren’t. Far from it. ‘She takes children to and from their boarding schools, all around the country. Sometimes overseas. Our glorious Empire, you know, spanning the globe. When she came back we went home to London.’ He used to wish—when he was younger, of course—that Ma didn’t have to go away so often, and so far.

‘London! Quite the wanderer, ain’t you?’

‘We’re a wandering sort of family.’

‘But now you’re back in Southampton, back in Nathan’s stamping ground.’

Gully tried to move away but Nathan held on to his coat.

‘So, Mister Potchard—what you up to these days?’

He remembered Nathan’s habit of calling people *mister*, even his classmates. It never sounded the least bit respectful—the opposite, in fact.

‘I’m a delivery boy for a printer. It’s a start, you know. A fine start.’

Nathan didn’t look impressed, or even interested. He

stepped back, in his own good time. ‘Piece o’ luck, bumping into you. How old are you now?’

‘Fourteen.’

‘See, I remember you as a bright little kid. You won’t deny that, will you?’

‘Oh, I don’t know . . .’

‘Right now I’m after someone with a bit o’ brains.’

He looked Gully up and down, shaking his head at the mismatched jacket and trousers, the worn old boots, the knitted muffler. Gully clutched at his scarf. He was fond of it. His mother had knitted it for him just before she set off on her latest trip.

Nathan himself was togged out in a racy-looking checked jacket with narrow lapels. His tall hat stood at a jaunty angle. But no smart outfit could stop him looking what he was—a bruiser.

‘You grown a bit since them days,’ he said. ‘Always was long-legged—now you’re a bloomin’ giraffe. Still a fast runner?’

Gully nodded. Running was about the only thing his gangly body was good at, so long as he remembered not to flap his arms about.

‘Well, well . . .’ Nathan said, stroking his chin, which was speckled with the beginnings of a black beard.

Gully glanced round. The noise and crowds of the High

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Street were close by, but the lane they stood in was deserted. Rain had started up again, and dusk was falling fast. He hated winter days and found himself hating this one more than most. He gave a shiver and said, ‘Really must be on my way.’

Nathan held up a hand. ‘Tell you what, Mister Potchard. I’ve got a little scheme going. Just me and one or two close associates. Might have an opening for a bright lad like you, one who’s quick on his feet. You know Pole Street?’

Gully nodded again; then wished he hadn’t. Any scheme run by Nathan Boldree stank to high heaven.

‘Pub there called the Admiral. Round the back there’s an alleyway, and a yard gate. That’s where we’ll be, tomorrow night. Come about seven.’

‘I—I don’t know if . . .’

Nathan’s insolent eyes swept over him again. ‘Seems like you could use an extra bob or two.’

‘No, I’m quite set up, thanks all the same.’

But Nathan didn’t want no for an answer. ‘We’ll be expecting you. Remember Charlie Scudder?’

Gully did: a hard-faced rat of a boy, always there when a fight broke out. Someone else he thought he had left firmly in the past.

‘Useful type, Charlie. Bet *he* remembers *you*.’ There was a hint of threat in Nathan’s voice.

‘So, what’s this scheme about?’

‘Oh . . . just a bit of business I’m keen to expand.’
Nathan’s meaty hand slapped down on his shoulder again.
‘So, we’ll see you tomorrow night. Don’t forget.’

Gully escaped into the darkening drizzle. He heard Nathan’s laughter behind him, and Nathan’s triumphant voice.

‘Quick brain, long legs for running with—and an innocent face! What a find, eh? What a find!’