

MONEY PRIZES FOR AMATEUR DETECTIVES!

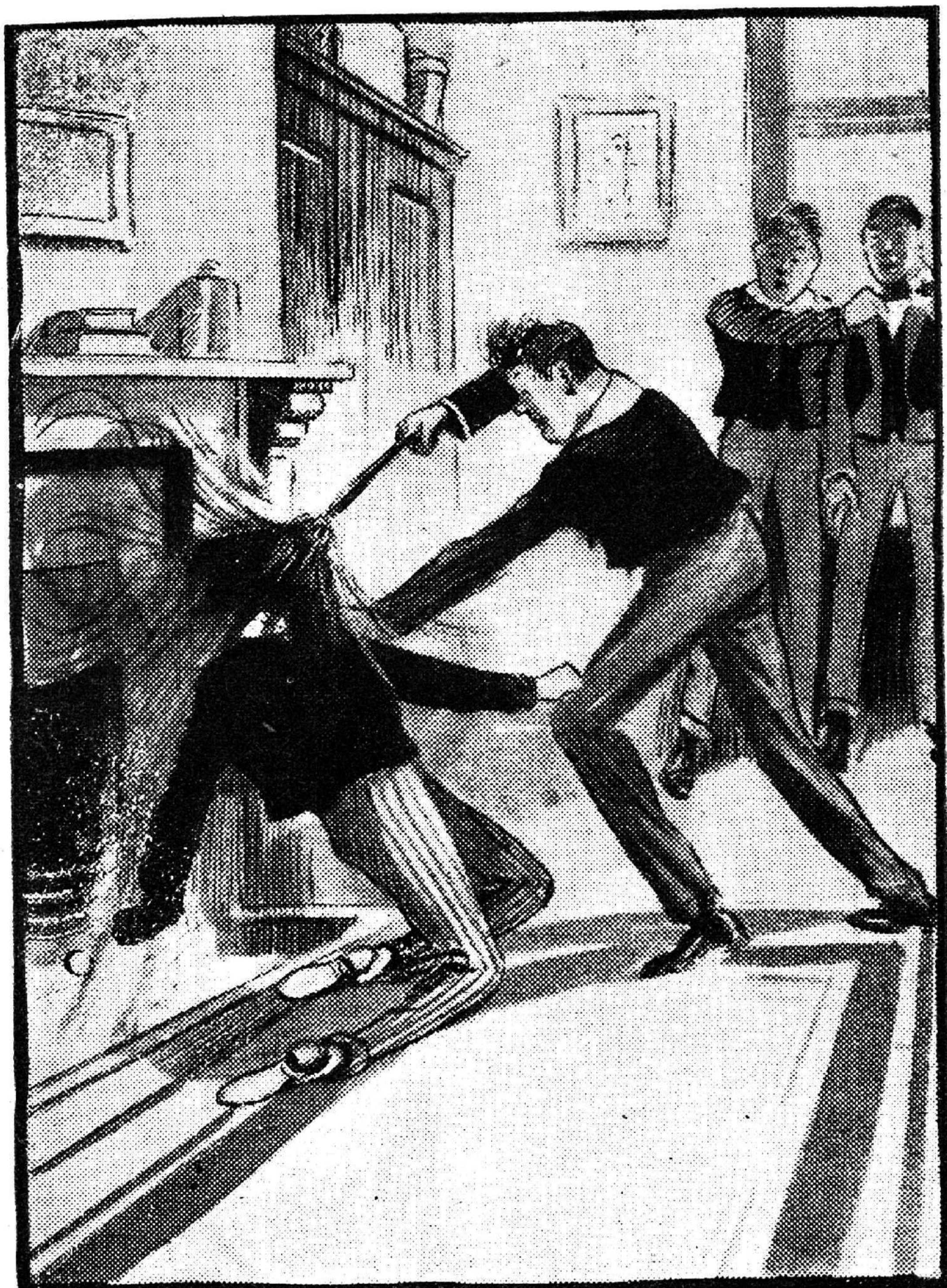
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Nelson 2d Lee Library.



HANDFORTH'S MINOR

A Delightfully Humorous Story of St. Frank's College.—Look Inside!



"You—gug—gug-g-g-g!" The soot-laden brush was plunged into his face, and the next moment Fullwood was transformed.

Handforth Minor!



A most entertaining and laughable story, featuring the unexpected arrival at St. Frank's of Handforth's younger brother. Readers will not fail to observe something distinctly Handforthian in this more recent edition of that great family. Introduces also many other well-known characters, including Nipper and Co., Archie, and the famous schoolmaster-detective, NELSON LEE, etc.

(THE NARRATIVE RELATED
THROUGHOUT BY NIPPER.)

CHAPTER I.

A MOMENTOUS LETTER!

"FOURPENCE-HA'PENNY!" said Church dolefully.

"One-and-twopence!" exclaimed McClure.

"And I've got a couple of buttons!" sniffed Handforth. "A blessed wealthy lot—I don't think! One and sixpence-ha'penny between the lot of us! I'm jiggered if I know where the money goes to!"

The famous chums of Study D, of the Ancient House at St. Frank's, had just emptied their pockets, and the result was by no means encouraging. Times were lean, by all appearances.

It was a sunny October morning, and Handforth and Co. were sunning themselves in the Triangle against the main gateway. They were, in fact, hoping in a vague kind of way—like the celebrated Mr. Micawber—that something would turn up.

They wanted the postman to turn up more than anything else. For the postman generally brought letters, and letters sometimes contained cash. The postman was overdue now.

Morning lessons were over, and it would be time for dinner presently. It was a half-holiday, and Handforth and Co. had been wondering how they

would spend the afternoon. As Church remarked, that's about all they would spend, anyhow.

There was no important football. Just a little practice, and the chums of Study D were not wanted, in any case. I had intimated that I should give some of the reserves a chance in a practice match. And Handforth—who was the regular goalkeeper—had decided to go out for a bit of a spree.

"The pictures wouldn't be bad," he declared. "They've got a ripping piece on in Bannington this afternoon—a jolly good film about detectives, and tracking. You know I'm pretty hot stuff at that kind of thing myself."

Church and McClure had offered no comment. But Church had brought up the subject of cash a few minutes later. He mentioned it casually, and Handforth had said that there was plenty of tin—until he turned his pockets out.

Then he was very astonished to find that he was absolutely stony.

As a rule, Handy was well supplied, but he was a fearfully careless chap with his money. He never knew how much he had in his pockets. If Church and McClure had been dishonest, they could have robbed him right and left—when he was flush. But they got plenty, anyhow. For Handforth was very open-handed.

Now, however, they were faced by a problem.

Unless they got hold of some supplies it would be impossible to carry out the afternoon's programme. And it very seldom happens that cash turns up just when it is particularly wanted.

"Of course," said Church slowly. "Of course—"

"Of course what?" demanded Handforth.

"We might borrow some tin," said Church. "Archie, for instance. He's always rolling in the stuff, and he'd whack out a quid like lightning. We could ask him, you know—"

"Not likely," said Handforth.

"Yes, but—"

"I don't believe in borrowing," went on Handforth firmly. "It's all very well at the time, but when it comes to paying back there's a different tale. A chap borrows a quid, and uses it. Then he gets a tip from home—a quid. He's got to pay it away, and thinks himself diddled. No fear! If no money turns up to-day, we'll go for a ramble."

Church and McClure groaned inwardly. They knew what a ramble with Handforth meant. There would be no peace for them all the afternoon. They would be dragged about, and there would be arguments all the way.

Reginald Pitt strolled up.

"There seems to be a tremendous lot of cheer knocking about this quarter," he said smilingly. "Why the dark and dismal frowns, my comrades?"

"Seen the postman?" grunted Handforth.

"Yes."

"You have?" asked Church eagerly. "The mid-day postman we mean?"

"He came about a quarter of an hour ago," said Pitt. "Rather earlier than his usual time."

"Oh, my hat!" groaned Church. "That's done it! Nothing for us!"

"Hard up?" grinned Reggie Pitt. "You have my sympathy, old sons. Let me lend you a few pence. I've got tenpence altogether, but I'm not greedy. I don't mind sharing it."

"Ass!" said Handforth. "I was expecting a letter from home. My pater said he'd write early in the week, and I was expecting something this morning. It seemed important, too, because the pater said he'd have something good to tell me."

"Well, you never know," remarked Pitt. "As it happens, there's a letter for you in the rack now. I spotted it three minutes ago—"

"For me?" yelled Handforth.

"Yes," grinned Pitt. "You've been hanging about here, and the letter's there all the time. A registered one, too—"

"Registered!" roared Handforth. "Good egg! Money!"

He sped off, and Church and McClure raced after him. Reggie Pitt stood grinning in the Triangle. He had had an idea that he would please three hearts with his little item of news.

Handforth and Co. arrived in the Ancient House lobby, and Handy dashed across to the letter rack. Yes, sure enough, there was a registered letter waiting there, and the handwriting was his father's.

"Here we are, my sons!" grinned Handforth. "There's a quid in here, at least! The pater wouldn't register it otherwise. Two or three, perhaps! We shall be all serene for cash now."

"Better open it and make sure," said McClure impatiently.

"Not here—let's get to the study."

There was really no earthly reason why the letter shouldn't have been opened in the lobby. There was nothing private about it. But it pleased Handforth to delay the actual opening for a few minutes.

They arrived in Study D, and Handforth opened the letter. He pulled out a double sheet of notepaper, but cast this aside at once. The letter, of course, was quite unimportant. The enclosures were the chief point.

"Notes!" said Church gladly. "Cash! Gelt! Tin! Old iron!"

"By George!" said Handforth. "Didn't I tell you? My pater's always jolly decent. Four quid, my sons! Two pound notes, and four ten bob notes!"

"I say, that's a jolly big tip, even for your pater!" said Church.

"I suppose he was feeling in a good day, too! By the giddy afternoon train! I honour," exclaimed Handforth. "Here you won't stand it!"

Church and McClure were more puzzled than ever.

"Who's coming by the afternoon train?" asked Church.

"Who—who?" bellowed Handforth.

"My minor, of course!"

"Your minor?" gasped McClure.

"Yes!"

"But—but I didn't know you had a minor!" said McClure, staring.

"Didn't know?" repeated Handforth, calming down a little. "Haven't I ever told you that I've got a young brother? No, perhaps I haven't! He's nothing to boast of, anyway! I've never mentioned him because he's not worth mentioning! And he's coming here—to St. Frank's!"

The very idea seemed to stagger Handforth.

"Well, it's the first time we knew you had a minor," said Church. "Wait a minute, though. I seem to remember some mention of it. But I thought he was a giddy infant—about two years old, or something."

Handforth sat down again.

"I don't know," he growled. "He's about ten, I think. Ten or eleven—blessed if I can remember. He might be twelve or thirteen! Anyhow, he's my minor, and he's a fatheaded little jossler!"

"I suppose he's been to an elementary school?" asked McClure.

"Of course," said Handforth, picking up the letter, and reading it again. "But he's left, and the pater has arranged for him to come to St. Frank's. The nerve! He's coming into the Third, too!"

"That's a bit advanced for a new kid," said Church.

"Of course," said Handforth. "He ought to go into the Second. He's a shocking dunce. I'm not going to stand it! If Willy comes here—"

"Willy!" said Church faintly.

Handforth glared.

"That's what they call him at home," he said witheringly. "I always call the little ass Bill. It sounds better. Anyhow, if he comes here I'll jolly well tell him what I think, and then pack him off home!"

"The Head might have something to say about that," remarked Church doubtfully.

"And you'd probably get into hot water with your pater, too."

"By George! I hadn't thought of that," said Handforth. "Now I can understand why he sent me an extra big tip! Bribery, by George! He thought I shouldn't mind! But I do mind!"

"Why?" asked McClure. "It's not so bad to have a young brother about. I wish I had one, anyhow—"

"You—you fathead!" sneered Handforth. "He'd be a terrific responsibility! I shall have to be looking after him day and night! He'll always be running to me, at all hours, and worrying me out of my wits!"

"Do you think I'm going to put up with it?" thundered Handforth. "Not likely! The cheek! The awful nerve! Coming here—to St. Frank's! Did you ever hear of anything like it in your life?"

His chums looked at him, dumbfounded.

"But—but what's wrong, Handy?" asked Church, bewildered.

"You—you dense idiots!" roared Handforth. "Haven't you got any sense? He's coming here, you know! He's coming to—"

"Oh, I expect he'll shake down!" said Church. "I don't see how you can stop him coming, Handy. Be sensible, you know. If your pater has sent the kid, and the Head has fixed things here—well, you've simply got to stand it."

Handforth nodded gloomily.

"I suppose I have," he admitted. "But I'll collar the young idiot as soon as he arrives, and I'll give him a good hiding! Then I'll tell him point blank that I don't want to see him, or have anything to do with him!"

"That'll be very brotherly!" said McClure, grinning.

"I'm not going to be his keeper!" grunted Handforth. "He'll have to look after himself! But if any cads start ragging the little beggar I'll punch them until they can't stand."

Church and McClure offered no comment. Handforth was always uttering contradictory statements like that. And his chums had learned that it was far better to let them pass.

"It's queer, his going into the Third," said Church, after a bit. "If he's a dunce, he ought to start in the Second——"

"Dunce!" repeated Handforth warmly. "What's that?"

"You said——"

"Did you call my young brother a dunce?" demanded Handforth wrathfully.

"Yes, but——"

"Say it again, and I'll wipe up the floor with you!" roared Handforth.

"But—but that's what you called him!" gasped Church. "You said he was a shocking dunce, you know——"

"I don't care about that!" interjected Handforth tartly. "I can say what I like! As a matter of fact, he is a dunce, but I'm not going to have you calling him one! As soon as he arrives I shall give him a lecture, and a tanning——"

Tap!

"Come in, fathead!" snapped Handforth irritably.

The study door opened, and Nelson Lee appeared.

"Oh, my hat!" said Handforth faintly.

"I—I didn't know it was you, sir!"

The Housemaster-detective smiled.

"It is quite all right, Handforth," he said smoothly. "I was expecting something far less complimentary. We will let it pass. I don't know whether you are aware of it, my boy, but your younger brother is coming to St. Frank's this afternoon."

"That's right, sir," said Handforth.

"I've got a letter from the pater here. I think it's an awful cheek, and I'm going to wipe the young beggar up as soon as he appears—— I—I mean—— That is, I shall——"

"I understood you perfectly at first, Handforth," interrupted Nelson Lee. "You intend to wipe your young brother up when he arrives. In other words, you will treat him somewhat roughly"

"I—I——"

"I am expecting something of the sort, Handforth, and that is why I have come here now," went on Nelson Lee. "I can quite understand that you do not look upon this new arrangement with favour. Elder brothers generally think it is a nuisance to have a minor in the same school."

"The fact is, sir, I thought about writing to the pater——"

"Then you must think again, my boy—you must abandon all such ideas," said the famous detective. "Your brother Willy is coming to-day, and he will go into the Third Form. I have already had a chat with Owen minor and one or two other Third Formers. And now I want your promise, Handforth, that you will do all in your power to welcome your brother, and make him feel comfortable."

Handforth looked blank.

"But—but that's awful, sir!" he protested. "I—I mean——"

"I further want your faithful promise that you will not ill-treat your brother in any way," went on Nelson Lee. "I do not imply that you are a bully, Handforth, but you are certainly thoughtless, and you do not seem to be aware of your own strength sometimes."

Church and McClure silently agreed.

"I wanted to give him a touching up as soon as he arrived, sir," said Handy.

"Then you must not do so," exclaimed Lee. "You must promise me now—on your honour—that you will not lay a finger on your brother. By that I mean that you must not attempt to correct him in any way? Do you promise?"

"Well, sir, I'll do my best," said Handforth unwillingly.

"Do you promise, Handforth?"

"Yes, sir if you particularly want it."

"Splendid!" smiled Nelson Lee. "I have your promise, Handforth—on your honour. So you must be careful. I have taken this precaution because you may think that it is your duty to punish your brother for any little misdeed. It is not your duty at all—it will be for Mr. Suncliffe to see to such matters."

"Yes, sir," said Handforth reluctantly.

"And you have rather strange ideas concerning correction, Handforth," continued Nelson Lee drily. "Upon the whole, therefore, it is better that you should not have the power to apply your peculiar methods. You have promised me, my boy, and I shall expect you to keep your word. Thank you, Handforth!"

Nelson Lee withdrew, and Handforth gazed at his chums dazedly.

"I was dotty!" he said. "I gave him that promise, you know! I—I can't think why I did it! I'm helpless now! I sha'n't be able to tan the little rotter at all! I say, this—this is awful!"

But Church and McClure didn't think so. They were filled with admiration for the neat way in which Nelson Lee had drawn Handy's teeth!

CHAPTER II.

THE COMING OF MASTER WILLY!



O WEN minor glanced at the school clock. "He'll be here within an hour," he said. "I vote we get up a party and go down to the station to meet him."

"Good idea!" said Chubby Heath.

The heroes of the Third were talking together in a corner of the Triangle. They were all talking at once, but this made little difference. It was quite a usual state of affairs.

Owen minor was the self-appointed leader of the Third in the Ancient House. He was cock of the walk, and he let everybody know it. He held this position simply because he was capable of fighting any other fag to a pulp. In the Third, Might was undoubtedly Right.

On this particular afternoon all usual topics were dropped. Even football was allowed to slide. A new kid was coming—and not a usual new kid, either. This chap was no less a person than the brother of the one and only Handforth.

The occasion, in fact, was of paramount importance.

"It's the first time I knew Handforth had a minor," said Dicky Jones. "I wonder if he'll be anything like Handy? If he is, we'll soon shove him in his place. It's a wonder to me how the Remove chaps stand Handy, you know."

"Oh, they've got to!" said Owen minor. "What's the good of arguing with Handforth? He's hopeless! I expect his brother will be just the same. So we'll make things right at the very start. We'll show the ass that we're not going to put up with any rot. We'll squash him before he can start anything."

"Good wheeze!"

"That's the idea, Owen!"

"Of course it is," said Owen minor calmly. "To begin with, I'm the leader of the Third. Does anybody dispute that?"

Nobody did.

"Very well," went on Owen. "When this kid comes, we'll sit on him, and make him thoroughly understand that he's nobody. See? If he gets any big ideas into his head because he's got a major here we'll knock 'em out."

"Hear, hear!"

"And we'll meet him at the station——"

"I shouldn't!" said Lemon.

"Oh, and why not?" demanded Owen minor tartly. "Who asked you to speak, Juicy? Why wouldn't you meet him?"

"Because it'll make him think he's important," said Lemon. "He'll get big ideas if we all swarm round him as soon as he steps off the train. He'll think we're honouring him——"

"No, he won't!" interrupted Owen.

"I'll see to that. We'll tell him to, his

silly face that we've come because we mean to have a word with him before Handforth gets a chance. We'll point out that we don't care tuppence about his fatheaded major, and that if he dares to go suivelling to him, we'll touch him up!"

"Good!"

"That's it, old son!"

"And supposing Handforth meets the train, too?" asked Lemon.

"He won't!" declared Owen minor. "I know Handy, and he'd rather eat snails than go to the station to meet his young brother! Some of the Remove chaps are saying that Handy is fearfully wild because the kid's coming."

"I expect he's a wash-out!" said Heath.

"That's why Handy's wild. He'll be shown up, you know. All the better if he is. Handforth was always too jolly cocky! If his brother is a wash-out he'll climb down a bit."

The fags discussed matters until it was time to go down to the station. Then they departed in a body—about ten or twelve of them. Only the fags-in-chief were allowed to go on this expedition. The smaller fry were barred. There was no freedom in the Third. Despotism ruled.

They were a noisy bunch as they went down the lane.

Passing through the village they were instinctively attracted towards the tuck-shop, which was presided over by Mr. Binks, the baker. The window was full of freshly made tarts and buns, and patties and scones.

And the fags gazed vainly.

They were never blessed with very much cash, and when they did have it, the money simply flew into the till at Mrs. Hake's little shop in the Triangle. She did good business with the fags on Monday, while they still had some of Saturday's pocket-money.

On Tuesday the custom dropped off badly, and by Wednesday afternoon there was practically nothing doing, so far as the Third was concerned. The Remove, of course, was a different matter.

Owen minor and Co. gazed into Mr. Binks' shop, but they did not enter. It would have been useless to enter. They didn't possess more than three-ha'pence between them.

"Oh, come on!" grunted Owen minor.

They reluctantly proceeded on their way, unconsciously licking their lips. And when they arrived at the station they found that the train was signalled. And a moment or two later it rattled in.

The fags waited on the platform.

One or two people alighted. And one of these arrivals was a junior schoolboy. He was about the same age as Owen minor, but slightly bigger in build. At the first glance at his face, the Handforth trademark was revealed.

There was the same aggressive jaw, and the same big nose. But this Handforth was milder altogether than Edward Oswald.

He was attired—wonder of wonders!—in a dark-blue velvet suit! And upon his head there was a kind of sailor hat! For a junior to come to St. Frank's in that get-up was frightful.

Etons were the thing. And the fags regarded Handforth minor with open scorn and contempt. All their ideas of him went crashing to the ground. He was, indeed, a wash-out.

No wonder Handy had bucked at the idea of this—this thing coming!

Owen minor took a deep breath, and strode forward. He planted himself in front of the new arrival, and stared at him with frank curiosity.

"Hallo!" he said. "So you've come, have you?"

"Yes, thank you!" replied the youngster meekly. "Are—are you from St. Frank's College, please?"

"Yes, please!" said Owen minor. "We're from St. Frank's College, please! And we've come to meet you, please!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I suppose you're Handforth?" went on Owen.

"Yes, please, that's my name!" said the new boy. "My Christian name is Willy."

"Help!" said Chubby Heath, falling into the arms of two other fags. "Fan me, somebody! Willy! Willy be called that for long?"

"You—you fathead!" roared Owen minor. "Bringing out a rotten pun like that! Well look here, Handforth minor, the fact is, we've come here to touch you up a bit. See? We've come here to make you jolly well understand that we're the giddy leaders of the Third!"

Handforth minor looked round with interest.

"It is very kind of you!" he said meekly.

"Glad you know it," said Owen minor. "We wouldn't do it to any ordinary kid. The fact is, we know your major. He's in the Remove—and I dare say you know his little tricks as well as we do."

"Please, Edward is rather rough!" said Handforth minor. "Really, I haven't seen much of him, because we've never been at the same school. And even during the holidays he nearly always leaves me to myself. Edward is very trying sometimes. Father says that I must try to please him."

"You'll have a job!" said Chubby Heath. "But we're not going to have you trading on your giddy major's name. Understand? We've come here to——"

"Who's doing the talking?" demanded Owen minor tartly.

"Well, I was, then——"

"You're going to shut up!" said the leader of the Third. "I'm the spokesman, and I'm not having any of you fatheads butting in. See? Hallo! There goes the train. That's better! We shall be more private now."

"What about your luggage?" asked Lemon, looking up and down the platform.

"It came by an earlier train, I think," said Willy Handforth. "I do hope it's here, because mother says that I've got to change my stockings in the morning, and I mustn't forget to wear thick underthings——"

"My only hat!" gasped Owen major. "His icklo chesty might get a cold! Poor little darling! Has anybody got any hot-water bottles?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I think it's very rude to make fun!" said Handforth minor stiffly.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Wait until you've been at St. Frank's a bit," grinned Owen. "We'll soon knock the silly stuffing out of you, my lad. Thank goodness you're not like your fatheaded brother! All he can do is to punch noses, and look for trouble generally. If you want to find trouble we've got plenty on hand."

"But, really, I don't like trouble!" said Handforth minor. "I think trouble is most bothersome, you know. Shall we be leaving the station soon? I'm feeling a little bit hungry, and I thought there might be a baker's shop near by."

"What-ho!" said Owen minor. "As a matter of fact, there is a tuck-shop down the street. Come on!"

They went down the platform, Handforth junior gave up his ticket, and they all emerged into the road. And here there was another pause. It wasn't because of the fact that the fags couldn't talk going along, but, somehow or other, they all seemed to gather together in a clump.

Handforth minor was in the centre, and he looked about him rather bewildered. He had certainly not expected to find such a big crowd waiting to meet him.

"About your major!" said Owen. "Before we go any further, I want to come to an understanding. I'm the leader of the Third Form. Everything I say has got to go. Do you grasp that?"

"Yes, of course!" said Willy. "You are quite plain, thank you."

"Well, as a matter of fact, he is!" said Chubby Heath regarding Owen's face.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Don't be funny—doesn't suit you!" snapped Owen minor. "Well, I'm the leader of the Third——"

"I think you mentioned that before," said Handforth minor meekly.

Owen stared.

"I don't want any lip!" he said darkly. "If I like, I'll mention it fifty times! I can wipe up any other fellow in the whole Form! And it'll only take me about two minutes to wipe you up, if I feel inclined. You've got to jolly well understand that I'm the boss. If you dare to disobey any of my orders, you'll go through the mill!"

"But—but I didn't know that one boy was a kind of master over all the others!"

said Handforth minor innocently. "It wasn't like that at my other school."

"You young fathead!" snapped Owen. "Who's talking about masters? I mean in ordinary matters. Well, about Handy—your brother. He's a fearful ass, really. But he can fight—he's got fists like legs of mutton! And he's a bit of a rotter, too. For two pins he'll punch a chap's nose."

"But Edward is very kind!" said Handforth minor stoutly. "I know he's rough, but he's always generous."

"He's an ass," persisted Owen minor. "And this is what I want to warn you about. It's quite likely that you'll get a few large doses during the next day or two. Every new kid does. And if you go running to your major, and pitching yarns to him, we'll make your life a misery!"

The new boy looked astonished.

"But why should I go running to Edward?" he asked. "I can take care of myself, thank you. I sha'n't mind a little roughness—father told me to expect it when I got to St. Frank's."

"Oh, did he?" said Owen minor, glaring. "Did he?"

"Yes, he told me that all the boys I should mix with would be uncouth and devoid of manners!" said Willy Handforth. "He told me that I shouldn't mind this, because boys in the Third Form are always like that. He told me that I should soon get used to it, but warned me against getting into the same way. Father told me that all the boys in the Third were little ruffians."

The fags were dumbfounded for a moment.

"You—you insulting little rotter!" roared Owen minor.

"Bump him!" said Chubby Heath fiercely.

"Frogmarch him!"

"But—but really!" protested Handforth minor. "I have not insulted you, I hope! I've only told you what my father said—and perhaps he was wrong. But if you really do hurt me now, I shall think he was right!"

Owen minor took a deep breath.

"My hat! You're right!" he said.

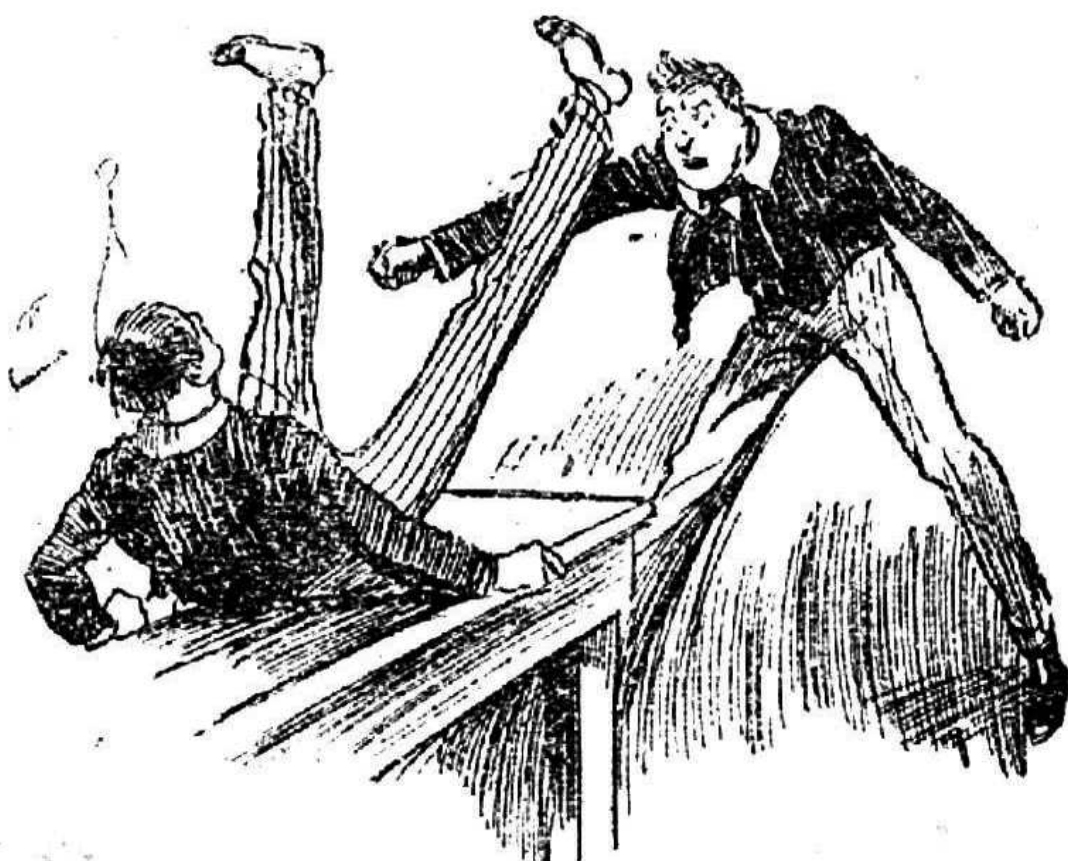
"After all, it wouldn't be fair to swipe you for your father's giddy ignorance. Well, as long as we understand one another, we'll let it go at that. There's two things to remember—I'm the leader of the Third, and if you go telling tales to your major you'll get slaughtered!"

"Thank you!" said the new fag mildly.

"I don't think I shall forget, please!"

As a matter of fact, Owen minor and Co. did not quite know what to make of Willy Handforth. He was certainly very meek and quiet, but his freedom of speech was somewhat disturbing. He attributed things to his father—but there was no question that he spoke the words himself. And he seemed quite ready with an answer at short notice.

But he looked so childlike in his velvet suit and sailor hat, he wore such a bright expression, that the fags couldn't bring themselves to the point of cleaning up the road



Fullwood crashed against the tea-table which, fortunately, was not laid, toppled completely over it, and alighted on the other side of the study.

with him. And he hadn't given them the slightest excuse for doing so. That was the awkward part of it.

And so, reluctantly, they moved on—until the foremost fags commenced hurrying for some unaccountable reason. The truth was, they had just come within sight of the tuckshop, and they were again irresistibly drawn towards it—notwithstanding the fact that they were stony.

"Here you are—if you want to buy some giddy cakes," said Owen minor, "buzz in, and we'll wait out here for you. Don't gorge too much!"

Handforth minor looked round in surprise.

"But won't you come in, too?" he inquired.

Chubby Heath carelessly kicked a stone.

"The fact is, we ain't hungry," he said, with an air of boredom. "The tuck's not up to much, anyway. We'll wait out here."

"That's it," said Owen minor. "Buck up."

"Oh, what a pity!" exclaimed Willy. "I was hoping that you would be quite hungry."

"Why?"

"Because I was going to ask you to come in and have some buns, too," said the new fag. "I've got plenty of money. Father gave me a pound note before I came away, and I've got some loose silver, too. I'm awfully sorry you're not hungry."

The fags looked rather sickly.

"Well, to tell the truth, I do feel a bit peckish, now I come to think of it," said Owen minor. "Thanks awfully, kid! Of course, it's not exactly the thing for old hands to allow themselves to be treated by a giddy new boy—but we don't mind for once in a way," he added condescendingly.

"Yes, we'll come in, if you like," said Chubby Heath promptly.

"Oh, splendid!" said Handforth minor.

He led the way into the tuckshop, and the

fags followed him like a flock of sheep. The smell within the establishment was enough to make any healthy fag long for piles of money to spend. And there were cakes and pastries and scores of lovely things which fairly made the mouth water.

"I want you to have just what you like!" said Handforth minor, smiling. "It doesn't matter about the expense—I shall be only too pleased to pay. Please eat anything you fancy!"

"What-ho!" said Owen minor. "Good man!"

With one tremendous bound, the new kid soared up tremendously in the estimation of the fags. Any fellow who could invite them to eat what they liked, and then foot the bill, was not only a novelty, but an absolute treasure. And the fags sailed in very much as though they had been systematically starved for a week.

As a general rule, new kids were tight with their money. They didn't know their new companions, and treating was foreign to them. And they nearly always had a tremendous desire to stick tightly to their pocket-money. This new kid was quite different.

It was, as it were, Handforth's strain. Sir Edward was generous—Handy himself was open handed to a point of recklessness—and Willy appeared to be just the same. And the fags could forgive any amount of sins to a fellow who was generous. There was no pose about this treating business. It was quite obvious that Willy was doing it simply as a matter of course.

Whether he noticed any difference in the attitude of his escort is a question—he certainly showed no sign. But when they emerged from the tuckshop there was a difference—and quite a marked one. The fags were now all smiles—somewhat jammy smiles. And they regarded the new kid with almost affectionate interest.

"He's not so bad!" declared Chubby Heath. "And, anyhow, we'll soon knock him into shape."

"He's decent!" said Lemon. "Dash it all, he whacked out about nine bob in old Binks' place. Phew! Nine bob, you know! All in one go!"

It was quite a fortune to Lemon. His weekly pocket-money amounted to half-a-crown, and that generally lasted about three days. For any fag to lay out over three times the amount on one feed was somewhat appalling to Lemon's mind.

They all arrived at St. Frank's, and Owen minor was not in the least surprised to see a burly figure waiting in the gateway. Quite a number of other fellows were hovering about in the vicinity.

They pretended to be chatting, and looked in every direction but the gateway. It wasn't dignified to take an interest in a new kid for the Third. But they were genuinely interested in Handforth's younger brother—and anxious to obtain a glimpse of him. But it wouldn't do to let this be seen.

Of course, their object was painfully obvious, really. And as soon as the escort of fags appeared in the Triangle, all eyes were turned upon them. Handforth was standing just inside the gateway, his legs astride, and his fists resting on his hips. He glared at his minor aggressively.

"So here you are!" he said darkly. "Cheeky young bounder!"

"I'm awfully pleased to see you, Edward!" said Handforth minor eagerly. "It's a long time since——"

"Don't call me Edward!" interrupted Handforth. "I've told you dozens of times, you young ass, that I won't have it!"

"But what shall I call you?" asked his brother meekly.

"Oh, I don't know!" snapped Handforth. "As a matter of fact, you oughtn't have come at all—I mean, I'm jolly pleased to see you! I—I hope you settle down all right, and enjoy yourself!"

It cost him a great effort to change his views so suddenly—but he had brought to mind his promise to Nelson Lee. He extended his hand, and grabbed his brother's. After all, there was no harm in shaking hands—but Handforth gave Willy's an extra hard squeeze, just to relieve his feelings.

To his surprise, and inward disgust, Willy merely winced, and said nothing. Handforth had been longing to hear a wild howl. He was so disappointed that he glared at his minor and sniffed.

"All right—you can clear off with these kids!" he said. "Of course, you can't expect me to have much to do with you. I'm in the Remove. And you're only a giddy fag! See you later, perhaps!"

Handforth thrust his hands into his pockets, and sauntered off—feeling that he had done the right thing.

The rest of the Remove fellows grinned hugely. And they felt rather disappointed. Handforth minor was totally different to what they had expected. He was meek—he was mild—he had none of his elder brother's aggression. In fact, he was nothing more nor less than a milky new kid. It was hard to believe that he was the brother of the redoubtable Study D leader.

But Handforth minor had only just arrived!

CHAPTER III.

THE RUMOUR!



R ALPH LESLIE FULLWOOD tossed a cigarette end away, and laughed.

"Here they come!" he said briskly. "Good business! They're a little bit before time, an' we shall be able to have a decent game!"

Gulliver and Bell nodded.

The rascally Nuts of the Ancient House were lounging on the water-front at Cais-towe—the little seaside resort three miles

from St. Frank's. The October afternoon was singularly mild, and the Nuts felt merry.

They had arranged to meet three "goey" blades from Yexford College. At St. Frank's, Yexford College had a rather bad name—chiefly owing to the fact that the Senior Eleven was not at all particular about fouling on the football field. Also, Yexford was famous for its slackness.

The three Yexford juniors who were now approaching were of a type very similar to Fullwood and Co. One of them was named Swallow, and he was the leader of the Nuts.

"What-ho, my merry lads!" he exclaimed as he came up. "Here we are again! Haven't seen you since the first week of term! How goes it?"

"Rippin'!" said Fullwood.

They shook hands all round. The other two Yexford fellows were named Winsford and Rickaby. All three were sallow-complexioned, and generally unhealthy looking. Too much cigarette smoking was largely to blame.

"Well, what about that little game?" asked Fullwood, after they had exchanged greetings. "There's a fine little parlour at the back of the Fisherman's Arms. We've been there before, an' we can thoroughly enjoy ourselves."

"Sorry," said Swallow. "Can't be done."

"Eh? Why not?"

"Well, you see, we've got to go into Bannington," said Swallow. "Some of our fellows agreed to meet there, and if we don't turn up it'll look funny. It's a rotten nuisance, but there you are. Still, I'm glad we've met, because I can collect that quid you owe me."

Fullwood scowled.

"So that's why you came?" he demanded gruffly. "An' you won't even play the game? You won't get your quid!"

"But I'm hard up—"

"I can't help that," said Fullwood. "I haven't got a quid now—I've had some wicked luck with the horses. Next week I'll be able to pay you. I'd forgotten all about the quid!"

"I hadn't!" said Swallow grimly.

There was an awkward silence for a moment or two. Fullwood was greatly chagrined. He and his chums were nearly stony, owing to bad speculations on gee-gees, and they had been absolutely relying upon this little outing to supply them with funds. They had definitely planned to fleece the Yexford fellows.

And instead, Swallow, had calmly reminded Fullwood that he owed him a sovereign. It was not at all what the Nuts had expected. Fullwood didn't believe the yarn about going to Bannington. The Yexford fellows were clearly unwilling to do any card playing.

Indeed, it was quite possible that the matter had been mentioned just to see if the St. Frank's Nuts were well provided with

cash. Possibly Swallow and Co. had had exactly the same kind of plan in mind.

"Well, it seems that there's nothing much to be done," remarked Rickaby, after a bit. "It's a bally nuisance, but it's no good grumbling."

"No," said Fullwood slowly. "I'm sorry about that quid, Swallow. I'll post it to you next week—"

"You said that a month ago!"

"I know, but I was disappointed over a remittance," said Fullwood glibly. "Well, you chaps, we'll be clearing off. There's nothing to keep us here. The only excitement we shall have to-day is gettin' a look at Handforth minor."

"What's that?" asked Winsford.

"Oh, nothin'!" said Fullwood. "There's a chap at our school named Handforth—a bit of a rotter. His younger brother has come down to-day, an' he's goin' in the Third. It's nothin', anyhow!"

Rickaby stroked his chin.

"Handforth!" he repeated thoughtfully. "That's a queer kind of name, you know. I've heard it before. Some chap I met last week mentioned it. He was talking about a place called Selcombe."

"Selcombe!" repeated Gulliver.

"Yes; it's an elementary school, I think, near London."

"Handforth's young brother comes from an elementary school," said Fullwood. "I expect it's the same kid. What about him?"

Rickaby chuckled.

"It seems you've got a nice young spark at St. Frank's!" he grinned. "According to what this chap was telling me, young Handforth was sacked from Selcombe elementary school."

Fullwood and Co. were all eagerness at once.

"Sacked!" said Fullwood breathlessly.

"Yes."

"Are you sure?"

"No; but I heard it as a fact."

"Did you hear what the kid was sacked for?"

"Yes; there was quite a fuss about it," said Rickaby. "The young rotter was cribbing the answers from exam. papers. The old trick—you know. Anyway, he was colared, and sacked like a shot."

"Thanks!" said Fullwood. "This is jolly interestin'. So Handy's minor was sacked, was he? We'll soon do somethin' about that!"

"Well, so-long!" said Swallow. "I think you're a dirty dog for not paying that quid to-day—I was relying on it. If you don't send it by the end of next week I'll jolly well do something drastic!"

"Do it!" snapped Fullwood. "Go to the dickens!"

They parted. When each party had plenty of money, and hoped to rook the other party of that money, they were all smiles and good

cheer. But when they knew that they were all stony, insults were a mere detail.

"The cads!" said Fullwood sourly. "Draggin' us all the way to Caistowe for nothin'! I was relyin' on them for some cash. An' now we've got nothin'—we're pretty near the edge as a matter of fact."

"But, I say, this is good news about Handforth's minor!" said Bell viciously. "We ought to be able to do somethin' about it. We'll jolly well make the whole school ring with the news! It'll be one in the eye for Handforth!"

Fullwood looked thoughtful.

"We'll go easy!" he said. "It may be wrong—perhaps it's only a rumour with no truth in it. So we can't start talkin' yet. We shall have to make certain of it before we do anythin'. Besides, I've got an idea!"

"What is it?"

"Never mind now—I'll tell you later."

Gulliver and Bell could not get much out of their leader on the way home. And when they got to St. Frank's they found that Handforth minor had been in the school for two or three hours. It was nearly tea-time, in fact, and Handforth and Co. were in their study just getting ready for the meal.

Fullwood walked in without knocking. He was alone, and he looked round with an air of caution. He closed the door after him.

"Who let that microbe in?" demanded Handforth, glaring. "I've seen things like that in a mud pool! Only they're a bit more handsome! Chuck it on the fire!"

Fullwood scowled.

"Don't try to be funny!" he said tartly. "I've come here to ask you a question. And I expect a civil answer."

"You don't always get a civil answer in this life!" retorted Handforth. "And we bar you, anyway. I'll give you just ten seconds!"

"Your minor's arrived, hasn't he?" asked Fullwood.

"The sun's up in the sky!" said Handforth sarcastically, glancing at Church and McClure to see if they were dutifully grinning.

"Don't rot!" said Fullwood. "Well, your minor has arrived—I know it."

"Then what do you want to ask for, fat-head?"

"It's a queer thing why you always want to start squabbling!" exclaimed Fullwood impatiently. "Did your minor come from Sellcombe Elementary School?"

Handforth looked up, surprised.

"Yes," he said. "At least, I think so. It was some such name as that."

"Oh!" said Fullwood calmly. "Then I've got an interestin' piece of news for you—although perhaps you know it already. Do you know why your young brother left Sellcombe?"

"Yes."

"Oh, you do?"

"He left because he was coming here!"

"Not at all," said Fullwood coolly. "He left because he was sacked. He was caught cribbin' answers from exam. papers —"

Biff!

"Yow—yaroooooh!" howled Fullwood wildly.

He crashed against the tea-table—which, fortunately, was not laid—toppled completely over it, and alighted on the other side of the study with a crash which shook the whole room.

No notice was taken outside. If such a commotion had occurred in any other study, inquiries would have been made. But for these fearsome noises to proceed from Study D was merely a matter of course.

"You—you madman!" stuttered Fullwood, sitting up. "What—what did you do that for?"

"Get up, and I'll do it again!" roared Handforth. "You—you insulting rotter! You miserable worm! Say a thing like that again, and I'll smash you into little bits, and chuck you down the drain!"

"But it's true, you fool!" snarled Fullwood. "If you don't believe me, fetch your minor here! I heard it as a fact this afternoon. He was expelled from Sellcombe School, and left in disgrace!"

Handforth was about to hurl himself at Fullwood when Church and McClure deterred him.

"Hold on!" gasped Church. "Think! As soon as Fully gets out, he'll spread this rotten yarn all over the school!"

"Will he?" demanded Handforth. "By the time I've done with him, he won't be able to speak at all!"

"Oh, don't be silly!" said Church quickly. "Wouldn't it be better to get your young brother, and make him give the lie to this cad? Make him tell Fullwood face to face that he's a dirty liar?"

Handforth considered for a moment.

"Well, perhaps you're right," he said. "As a matter of fact, I was just going to suggest the same thing myself. Look here, would you mind buzzing off and bringing my minor here at once?"

"Right-ho! I'll go!" said Church promptly.

He hurried out, and Handforth looked at Fullwood aggressively.

"Now we'll soon see about it!" he snapped. "You rotter! Coming here with a stinking lie like that! My young brother is decent all through! And if you dare to breathe a word of this about the school I'll slaughter you!"

"Wait until your minor comes!" said Fullwood sullenly.

He sat there, nursing his face. And Handforth paced up and down impatiently. He was thinking now. And he received a kind of stab as he remembered that he really knew nothing about Willy. He had known that his minor was at Sellcombe School, but he didn't know why he had left.

Also, it was rather peculiar that Willy

should have come to St. Frank's in the middle of term. Handforth had vaguely understood that Willy wouldn't come to St. Frank's for some little time.

Why, indeed, had he left Sellcombe in the middle of term, to come to St. Frank's? It couldn't be possible that this wretched story of Fullwood's was true; but, at the same time, the matter was disturbing.

Then the door opened, and Church appeared. He ushered in Willy Handforth—the latter looking rather meek. In his velvet suit, he looked as though butter wouldn't melt in his mouth.

"Come here, my son!" said Handforth grimly. "I've got something to ask you. After that I'm going to treat you to a bit of sport. You're going to see me knock this cad backwards into the fireplace, and you're going to see me rub his face in the cinders!"

"That will be most interesting, Edward!" said Willy calmly.

"Look here—answer me in one go!" said Handforth. "Is it true that you were sacked from Sellcombe for cribbing exam. papers?"

Handforth minor stood there, aghast. All the colour fled from his cheeks, and he gripped the table convulsively. It was quite clear that the question had come to him as a great shock. A sudden expression of something like fear came into his eyes. The colour flooded back into his cheeks.

"Well?" demanded Handforth hoarsely.

"I—I—"

"Is it true?" roared Handy.

Willy hung his head.

"There you are!" sneered Fullwood. "Believe me now?"

"Great pip!" said Handforth faintly.

"Then—then it's true, after all!"

CHAPTER IV.

THE PRICE OF SILENCE!



CHURCH and McClure looked horrified.

This piece of news had come into the study like a bombshell. There had never been a breath of suspicion against

Handforth's minor. But now, all in a moment, the truth was out.

Willy had left Sellcombe with a stain upon his character—he had been expelled—sacked! That was why he left in the middle of term. That was why he had come to St. Frank's at such an unusual time!

Handforth felt as though the whole room was rocking. For a few moments he felt that he wanted to dash at Fullwood and smash him up. Then, abruptly, he became absolutely calm—icily calm.

"So this is what you do when you come here!" exclaimed Handforth bitterly. "You little bounder! You get yourself sacked

from Sellcombe, and then you have the nerve to come to St. Frank's! Haven't you got anything to say?"

"No!" replied Willy quietly.

"Don't you deny this rotten charge?"

"What's the good?" asked Handforth minor. "You've already said that I'm a young rotter. How can I help it? If you knew all the facts you wouldn't go on at me as you have done—"

"All the facts?" repeated Handforth. "Were you sacked? Answer me that!"

"Yes," replied Willy, in a low voice.

"For cribbing exam. answers?"

"Yes!"

"Then what else is there to say?" asked Handforth, with a choke. "You've admitted it—you were sacked for cribbing! And that's a rotten crime! There can't be any more to say! I'm—I'm feeling pretty sick, I can tell you! You'd better clear out at once!"

Handforth minor hung back a moment.

"But, Edward, I want to tell you—"

"It doesn't matter what you say—it can't make any difference!" exclaimed Handforth quietly. "I hope to goodness the school doesn't get to know—that's all. There's no reason to bring disgrace on me as well!"

Willy turned, and left the study without a word. His face was set, and he looked strangely like his elder brother—with a grim, set jaw.

Handforth turned, and looked at Fullwood.

"Of course, you were bound to find it out!" he said sourly. "Trust you to get hold of something unpleasant! You snivelling cad! You—you—"

"You ought to apologise, instead of insulting me!" exclaimed Fullwood tartly. "You knocked me down a little while ago—for telling lies—an' it wasn't lies at all. Your brother's admitted it."

"And now, I suppose, you'll go all over the school, spreading the yarn?" asked Handforth, clenching his fists. "By George! If you do—"

"Hold on—don't get wild again!" said Fullwood. "There's no reason why I should take your private affairs about. I'm quite willin' to keep it quiet, if it'll be any good to you."

Handforth stared.

"What the dickens do you mean?" he demanded. "Out with it, you cad! What's the idea?"

"Well, it's rather delicate!" said Fullwood coolly. "The fact is, I'm hard up, an'—"

"Blackmail, eh?" snorted Handforth fiercely. "You rotten worm—"

"Nothin' of the sort!" interrupted Fullwood sharply. "I should hope I'm above blackmail! I was simply goin' to ask you if you could lend me a couple of quid—that's all. I'll pay you back at the end of next week. If you can oblige me, I can oblige you. There's nothing else in it. Of course, if you forget to ask for the two quid back, I sha'n't grumble."

Handforth breathed hard.

"And if I lend you two quid, will you keep your mouth shut?" he asked thickly.

"Of course," replied Fullwood. "That's the bargain."

Handforth nearly choked.

He had a fight with himself for a time. If he refused to lend Fullwood this money—in plain words, if he refused to submit to blackmail—Fullwood would soon be spreading the story all over St. Frank's.

And it was true! Handforth wouldn't be able to refute it—that was the dreadful part about the whole business. And the very idea of the school talking and sneering and jibing at the name of Handforth made Edward Oswald shudder.

He couldn't allow it!

"You—you dirty cad!" he said hotly. "You've got me in a corner, and you know it! Take it—and clear out, before I smash you! And if you breathe a word to a single soul, I'll—I'll—"

"It's all right—you needn't say it!" interrupted Fullwood, seizing the two notes which Handforth had flung on the table. "You can rely on me to keep mum. Thanks for lendin' me this."

He calmly strolled out of the study, and there was a dead silence.

Handforth sat down in a chair, and remained there, staring straight before him. Church and McClure felt extremely uncomfortable. They didn't know what to do. But, at last, they felt that the silence was intolerable.

"I—I say, Handy—I'm awfully sorry!" said Church softly.

"So am I, old man!" exclaimed McClure.

Handforth looked at them dully.

"It's all right!" he muttered. "By George! I'll make that cad suffer one day for this! I'll—I'll—"

"The trouble is that he might blab, in any case!" said Church. "And he's bound to come round again, asking for some more money. Once a chap starts blackmailing, he keeps on at the game!"

"So he does!" said Handforth. "But what can I do? If this yarn gets out it'll be ghastly!"

"Of course it will!"

"It'll be terrible!"

"And—and we've got to suffer all the time!" exclaimed Handforth, jerking up, and pacing up and down with clenched fists. "I've never been so worried in all my life! You chaps won't say a word, will you?"

"Of course not," said Church, rather hurt.

"You can trust us, I should hope."

"Sorry, old son," said Handforth quietly.

"Of course I can. To think that my minor should do a thing like that—get sacked for cribbing! And it's found out the very first day he arrives here. Oh, my goodness! It's horrible—it's absolutely ghastly!"

"He doesn't look a kid like that, either!" said McClure. "I would never have suspected it, Handy. But there's no question about it—he admitted it in plain language! I'm awfully cut up, Handy, for your sake!"

"Blow me!" growled Handforth. "I'm thinking about Bill! Life won't be worth living here if that story gets about. And it's bound to, sooner or later. Oh, my hat! What can I do?"

He continued pacing up and down.

Then, suddenly, he came to an abrupt halt. He stared fixedly at Church, and his cheeks were flushed.

"I know!" he exclaimed fiercely.

"You've thought of something?"

"Yes!"

"What is it, Handy?"

"I'm going to get that two quid back!" replied Handforth, rolling up his sleeves. "I'm going to get that two quid back, and then punch Fullwood all round his own study! I'm going to tell him he can do his rotten worst!"

"But he'll talk——"

"Let him!" snapped Handforth. "Let him! I don't care! He's bound to talk sooner or later, anyhow—and I'm not going to submit to blackmail! I was a blithering idiot to agree in the first place!"

"But—but when the chaps get to know——"

"I don't care what happens!" snorted Handforth. "I'm not going to be blackmailed—and I'm not going to hide anything! The thing's true—and it might as well be told!"

And Handforth, without waiting for his chums to say another word, stalked out of the study.

In the meantime, Fullwood and Co. were chuckling hugely in their own quarters. Fullwood had just come in, and he had revealed the two pounds which he had obtained from Handforth. He was feeling particularly pleased with himself.

"It's as right as rain, my lads!" he declared. "We've got cash now, an' there's plenty more where this came from!"

"But you can't get any more out of Handforth," said Bell.

"Can't I?" grinned Fullwood. "If he refuses to pay up, I'll threaten to blab the whole show! We've got a hold on him—he's simply got to pay, or accept the consequences. He's under my thumb!"

"By gad!" said Gulliver. "You're jolly deep!"

"Trust me for that!" said Fullwood lightly. "You see, the thing was true—it wasn't merely a rumour. An' you chaps have got to keep quiet, or else we sha'n't be able to draw any more cash!"

"Did he give you the two quid?"

Fullwood grinned.

"He lent it to me!" he replied. "Dash it all, I wouldn't put the thing too bluntly. He lent it to me, an' certainly he doesn't expect to get it back. An' if he does expect, it'll be all the same."

The door was flung open, and Handforth appeared.

"Good!" he said looking round.

The Nuts looked at him curiously. There was an intense fire in Handforth's eyes, and

his jaw was set in a grim, determined manner. He went straight up to Fullwood, and held out his hand.

"I want that two quid back!" he said curtly.

"But look here——"

"I want that two quid back!"

"You're not goin' to get it!" snapped Fullwood. "What's the game——"

"I want that two quid back," repeated Handforth fiercely. "I'll give you just three seconds! Bring it out in that time, or I'll knock you down!"

"Have you gone mad?" gasped Fullwood.

"No—I've recovered my senses!"

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that I was mad before—when

showed him that the two were quite intact. He stuffed them into his own pocket, and breathed a sigh of relief.

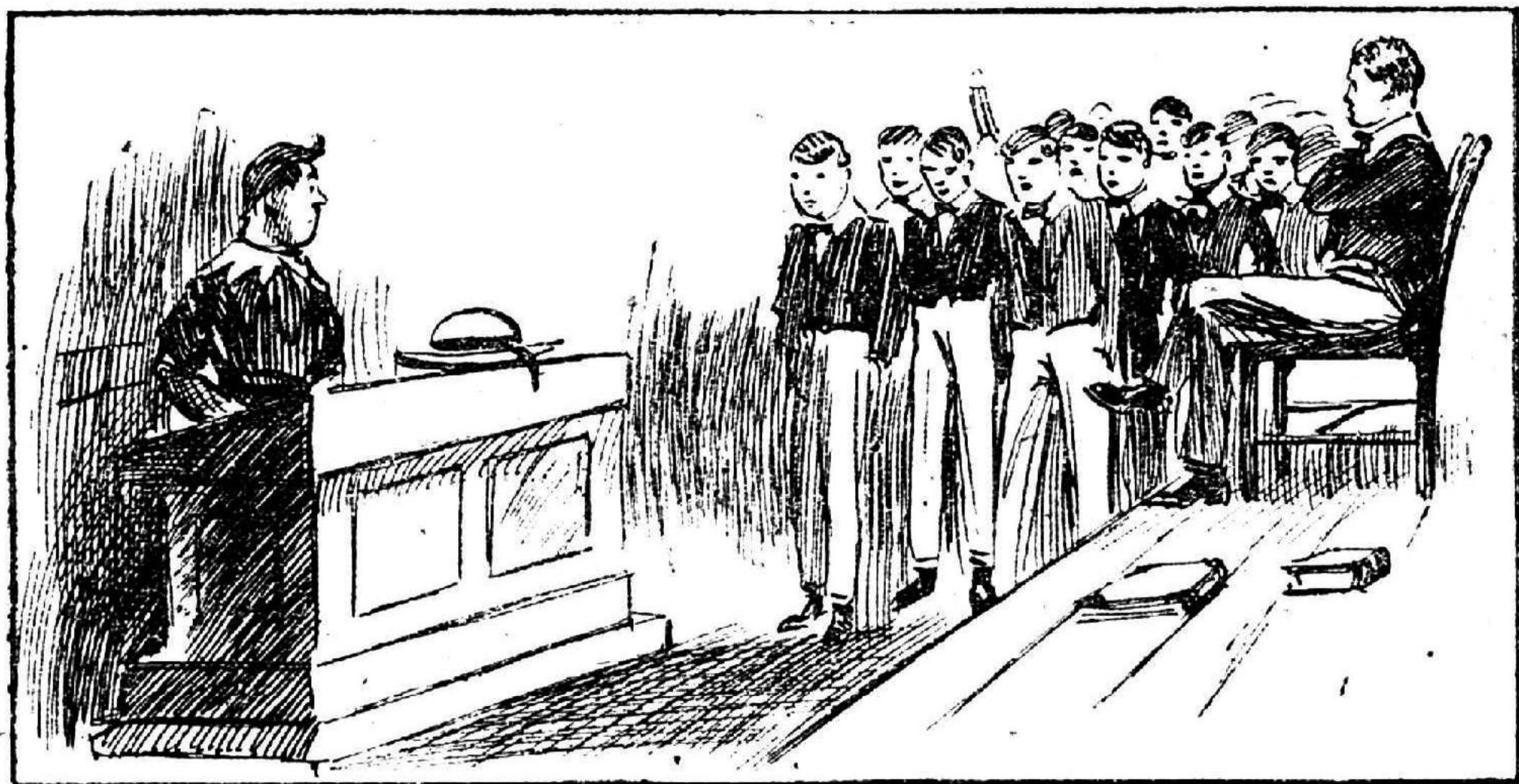
"I feel better now!" he exclaimed grimly. "And I shall feel better still after this!"

He pulled Fullwood up forcibly, holding him firmly by the back of his neck. Then he marched across to the fireplace, forcing Fullwood with him.

"Down on your knees!" he thundered.

"You—you mad fool!" snarled Fullwood, thoroughly terrified. "If you dare to touch me—— Can't you help me, you confounded rotters?" he yelped wildly.

But Gulliver and Bell hung back, thoroughly scared. They had seen Handforth in one of his usual hasty tempers, but they



"I think we ought to give the prisoner a chance," said Owen minor. "So I am going to suggest something. If he likes, he can fight me—with or without gloves!"

you came to my study!" retorted Handforth. "Do you think I'm going to put up with your filthy blackmailing? Do you think I'm going to encourage robbery and villainy like this? Not likely! I was an absolute fool to give you anything!"

"If you take that money back, I'll tell the chaps——"

Crash!

Fullwood staggered back as Handy's fist caught him in the chest. The leader of Study A fell back against the table, and Handforth pinned him down.

"Rescue!" gasped Fullwood. "Lemme a hand, you idiots!"

"Touch me, and I'll blacken both your confounded eyes!" shouted Handforth, glaring round at Gulliver and Bell. "Now then, you cad! You put the money in this pocket—— Yes, here we are!"

He plucked the two notes out of one of Fullwood's waistcoat pockets. A glance

had never before seen him so completely aroused as this.

They did not possess sufficient courage to interfere.

And Fullwood was forced down upon his knees, and Handforth grabbed a brush which was used for cleaning up the grate. He pushed it up the chimney, and it came down loaded with soot.

"Don't you put that thing on me!" screamed Fullwood. "You—— Gug—— gugggg!"

The soot-laden brush was plunged into his face, and the next moment Fullwood was transformed. He became inky all over. The soot penetrated into his hair, down his neck, into his ears, and his nostrils, and his mouth.

"That's better than slaughtering you!" said Handforth coldly. "Perhaps you'll remember it more. And you ought to thank your lucky stars that I'm calm!"

And this, in fact, was true—Handforth was calm. But it was the calmness of a cold, fierce rage. He was so angry that he forgot to be violent. He only knew that this cad had attempted to blackmail him.

And having meted out punishment, Handforth dropped his victim, and strode to the door.

"And now you can do your worst!" he said curtly. "You can go up to the clock tower, and you can shout the whole story through a megaphone if you like! But it won't be any good—because I shall have told the chaps first!"

And Handforth left the study, and slammed the door with a mighty crash.

Fullwood's precious scheme had not panned out according to programme.

CHAPTER V.

ACCUSED!



SIR MONTIE TRE-
GELLIS-WEST came to
a halt.

"Begad!" he ex-
claimed. "It seems that
somethin' is wrong with
Handy—it does, really!"

"I've never seen him look like this before, anyhow," I agreed. "Handforth! What's the matter, old man?"

We were in the lobby, and Handforth had just appeared from the Remove passage.

The change in him was remarkable. His face was drawn and haggard, and it was quite easy to see that he was absolutely miserable. But there was a kind of grimness about him which could not be mistaken.

There were one or two other fellows in the lobby, too, including Archie Grenthorne. We all looked at Handforth with interest as he halted.

"I've got something to tell you!" he said deliberately.

"I mean to say!" exclaimed Archie. "My dear old laddie! You look positively frightful, don't you know. That is, the old tissues appear to be withered somewhat! Pray unload yourself, old darling!"

"That's just what I'm going to do!" replied Handforth. "In a few minutes Fullwood will be tearing about the school with a yarn concerning my young brother. So I'm going to tell it first!"

"Why, what do you mean?" asked Pitt curiously.

"My brother was sacked from Sellcombe School!" said Handforth firmly. "He was sacked in disgrace, and he came here

"What rot!" interrupted Archie. "I mean to say, what priceless piffle, old scream! Your young brother sacked? Absolutely not. If you expect me to believe that yarn, laddie, there is distinctly nothing doing!"

"It's true!" said Handforth.

"Well, supposing it is?" I asked quietly.

"What about it, Handy?"

"Aren't you going to jeer at me?"

I smiled.

"My dear ass, why should we jeer?" I asked. "If your young brother was ass enough to get himself sacked, that was his business. We sha'n't think any the less of you because of it."

"Of course not!" agreed Pitt. "Besides, we don't know any details about this expulsion, and so we can't judge it properly. Your startling news doesn't make much difference to me, old man!"

"And it won't make any difference to any of the decent fellows!" I declared. "The very fact that the Head has allowed Willy to enter the school is good enough for me! If he was sacked from Sellcombe for anything particularly disgraceful, he wouldn't be allowed to come here!"

"That, as you might observe, is dashed brainy!" exclaimed Archie. "I mean to say, it needs a really priceless bean to work that out, don't you know! Handforth, old chappie, cease the worry stuff! All is well, and the breeze fair!"

Handforth looked round blankly.

"You—you don't seem to scorn me!" he said

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You're not turning your backs!" said Handforth. "I—I was expecting that you'd turn against me, you know!"

"Then you did us an injustice, old chap!" I said quietly. "We know you, and we shall always be your pals. And we'll judge Willy by his deeds at St. Frank's. It's nothing to do with us what happened before he came here."

Handforth scratched his head.

"By George!" he exclaimed. "You're decent!"

He hardly knew what else to say. And we strolled on, chatting about other matters. But, unfortunately, there were a great many fellows who were only too eager to seize upon a piece of news such as was now being circulated. And they certainly did jeer about Handforth.

Merrell and his chums, for example, were heard to say that they had expected something for months. They had known that the Handforths were a rotten crowd, and nothing better could be looked for from such people.

And in the Third, Willy Handforth was going through it properly.

Owen minor was the first to bring the news.

He had been across to the tuck-shop, in order to purchase some rolls for tea. Handforth minor had provided the cash, saying that he would like to stand tea for the Heads of the Third.

And Owen minor came back, all agog.

"I say, I've just heard something!" he exclaimed, tearing into the Third Form

room. "I'll bet it's a lie—but we'll soon know."

"Is it about me?" asked Willy quietly.

"Yes."

"Then I expect it's true!"

"We'll be absolutely certain!" said Owen minor. "It seems that you were sacked from your other school."

"Sacked!" yelled the Third.

"Yes!" exclaimed Owen. "That's what they're saying. He was sacked for cribbing answers from exam. papers, and sent out in disgrace!"

"The young rotter!"

"The awful little beast!"

"And we've been pally with him!"

The fags surrounded Willy in a shouting, ominous crowd.

"You—you cad!" exclaimed Jones fiercely. "Coming here, and pretending to be so jolly good. We'll teach you!"

"Let's make him run the gauntlet!" yelled Heath.

"Hear, hear!"

"Then we'll send him to coventry!"

"Good!"

Willy Handforth looked round calmly.

"You seem pretty excited!" he exclaimed. "What's the matter? Supposing I was expelled?"

"You've no right to be here!" said Owen minor fiercely. "We'll jolly well bar you from the Form! We can stand a few things, but we're not going to have chaps here who were sacked from another school!"

"Rather not!"

"Let's kick him out!"

Owen minor called for silence.

"Did you crib exam. answers?" he demanded bluntly.

"What's the good of answering?" asked Willy. "You seem to know as much about it as I do. Even my major's against me, and so I'd better say as little as possible, please!"

"That means to say you're guilty!" snorted Owen minor. "Well, we'll jolly soon settle what's got to be done! We'll hold a court, and try him on the spot!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Good egg!"

"Shove him in the dock!"

A "court" in the Third Form was very rapidly organised. When a trial was held in the Remove the affair was somewhat elaborate, and took some time to prepare—with counsel, and everything complete.

But in the Third the proceedings were somewhat rough and ready.

The fags did not have studies to themselves—such a thing was not allowed at St. Frank's. And they generally gathered in the Third Form room—where a big fire was blazing. Here they toasted various delicacies in front of the blaze. In fact, the horrible messes which the fags consumed on various occasions would have been sufficient to make an average person feel ill. But the Third Formers evidently possessed cast-steel digestions.

Everything of any importance took place in the Third Form room.

And now a court was formed in less than two minutes!

A number of forms were pushed aside, and Handforth minor was placed in a corner, with a desk in front of him. This was the dock. The judge—Owen minor—sat on a chair which was, in turn, placed on a table. And the jury consisted of the entire Third Form. Anybody could be counsel, just as they liked, and they were all on the side of the prosecution.

"The court is now open!" shouted Owen minor, above the din. "Silence, you fat-heads. Order in court!"

"The prisoner is sentenced to run the gauntlet!" yelled Lemon.

"Fathead!" snapped the judge. "The proceedings haven't started yet!"

"Well, buck up, and get 'em over!"

Lemon was already knotting his handkerchief, so it seemed that the prisoner's fate was a foregone conclusion.

There hadn't been any excitement in the Third for two or three weeks, and the fags were just ready for some such mischief as this. And as the victim was a newcomer, and a stranger in their midst, this made it all the better.

They completely overlooked Willy's generosity in the tuck-shop—such matters as those were ignored when a trial was afoot.

"Gentlemen of the jury!" said the judge.

"I address you——"

"Hear, hear!"

"Go it, judge!"

"Silence!" yelled Owen. "You see before you the prisoner at the bar. He stands accused of a crime which is about as rotten as any crime can be——"

"Hold on!" put in Chubby Heath. "That's not your job at all!"

"Eh?"

"It's the prosecuting counsel who makes the speech to the jury!" said Heath. "I'll be the prosecuting counsel——"

"Rats!" snapped Owen minor. "I'm doing the talking!"

"Yes, but you come later—it's your job to do the summing up!"

"All right—go ahead!" said Owen reluctantly. "But if you speak for more than two minutes, I'll jolly well fight you!"

The court being thus restored to order, Chubby Heath began.

"The prisoner at the bar is a new chap," he said. "He only arrived at St. Frank's this afternoon——"

"Go on!"

"Tell us something new!"

"The prisoner at the bar is a new chap!" roared the prosecuting counsel. "You can see he's a rotter by the look in his eye! It has suddenly come to our knowledge that he was sacked from his other school. He was pitched out on his giddy neck, in disgrace. And then he has the sauce to come here!"

"Shame!"

"The rotter! Turn him out!"

"We can't actually turn him out," went on Heath, "but we can make his life one long misery. I vote we frogmarch him down the passage, make him run the gauntlet, and after that we'll send him to Coventry! And any fellow who speaks to him will be sent to Coventry, too!"

"Hear, hear!"

"That's the idea!"

"And where do I come in?" roared the judge. "You silly fatheads! You're giving the sentence, and yet you don't know anything about it!"

"Don't you agree that the sentence is correct?" demanded Chubby.

"Well, in a way it's all right," admitted Owen minor. "But I think we ought to give the prisoner a chance. So I'm going to suggest something. If he likes, he can fight me—with or without gloves!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And if he wins—if he licks me—he'll be allowed to keep his usual place in the Third, and we'll let him go on like any other kid!" grinned Owen.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Third fairly howled with merriment. For Owen minor was the champion fighter of the Form, and no fag had ever been known to stand up to him for more than five minutes. The very thought of Handforth minor defeating the fag champion was ludicrous.

"Good!" grinned Heath. "I second the wheeze!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Third Formers' idea of giving the prisoner a chance was rather farcical. The youngsters hoped against hope that Willy would accept the challenge. For they would be treated to the additional spectacle of seeing him licked.

"Well, you young cad?" demanded Heath, scowling at the prisoner. "What's your answer?"

"I'll fight!" said Handforth minor promptly.

"What!" shrieked Heath.

"I'll fight!" repeated Willy. "And if I beat him, I shall be allowed to go about just as I like?"

"Hear, hear!"

"You young idiot!" grinned Owen Minor. "If you beat me! You stand about as much chance as a mouse with a cat! Once I start, I'll knock you into the middle of next week!"

"I shall try to avoid that, please!" said Handforth minor. "But if I do beat you, the agreement stands, doesn't it."

"Yes, you young duffer! But you'll be licked in two minutes!"

"Make a ring—make a ring!"

"Go it, Owen! Swipe into him!"

Owen minor removed his jacket, and turned up his sleeves.

"With or without gloves?" he asked curtly.

"Without!" said Willy. "If you don't mind, please!"

Owen minor stared.

"There's no accounting for some chaps' brains!" he said. "If you want to be bashed about, don't blame me! I was quite willing to let you off lightly. But now you'll have to go through the mill!"

Willy looked very nervous and unsettled as he took his velvet jacket off and proceeded to roll his own sleeves up. Certainly, he had a pair of formidable arms, and his muscles were far from flabby.

Owen minor looked at him twice—the second one was a hard look.

With his jacket off, Willy looked quite a new proposition. He had a different aspect. He looked quite aggressive, and reminded Owen minor in a most uncomfortable way of Edward Oswald.

The leader of the Third had only made the suggestion in a facetious spirit—mainly to raise a laugh among his followers. He had never dreamed that Willy would accept. For it seemed that he was simply asking for trouble.

"All right—go ahead!" said Chubby Heath. "I'll keep time!"

"Better have two on the job!" said Owen minor sarcastically. "Ass! There'll be no need to keep time! He'll be licked in the first round. Somebody had better get some water, so that we can bring him to himself quickly."

"Oh, that'll do afterwards!"

"Are you ready?" demanded Owen grimly.

"Yes, please," said Willy.

"All right—look out!"

There was no formality about a Third Form fight. As a rule, it was simply a hammer and tongs affair for about three minutes, and the vanquished would collapse on the floor howling, and the victor would proceed to crow.

A fight very seldom lasted for more than one round—although a round was a very problematical matter in the Third. Sometimes it would last half a minute, whilst on other occasions a round might even be extended to two or three whole minutes. If by any extraordinary chance, a fight went into three or four rounds, the timekeeper sang out just when the fancy took him—or when he saw his own favourite getting the worst of it.

Owen minor meant to show the Third that he treated this whole affair with contempt. His big idea was to fell the new kid with one swipe. He would then wipe his feet upon Handforth minor's prostrate form, and the ragging proper would then commence. That was the programme.

Swipe!

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Owen minor's fist swung round with deadly purpose. For a fag, he knew a good bit about boxing, and he did not indulge in many wild hits at nothing. It was this deadly aim of his that made him such a terror in the Third. He was a strong youngster, and he had a bit of science.

But, for some extraordinary reason, Handforth minor's head was not there when it was wanted. He simply jerked it aside, and Owen staggered forward. His chin struck against a sledge-hammer which somebody had carelessly left about. At least, that was what Owen minor really thought at first.

As a matter of fact, it was Willy's fist—which came up with all the force of the great Edward Oswald's own. It crashed upon Owen's jaw, and he staggered back with a wild howl of agony.

"Time!" roared Chubby Heath.

"Not yet, surely?" asked Willy, in surprise. "We've only just started."

"You—you awful bounder!" gasped Owen minor, holding his chin. "By jingo! I'll show you! Rats to time! We won't care anything about it—but slog on till the end! Are you game?"

"Yes, if you are," replied Willy.

Biff!

Owen minor got a blow home on his opponent's chest. But that chest was rather solid, and Handforth minor didn't even fall back. Instead, his own fists came round. And then the amazed Third Formers were treated to an exhibition of boxing that had never been seen in the Third before.

As quick as a flash, Willy's fists struck into Owen minor. They darted about everywhere. And, like clockwork, the blows were reigned home on Owen's chest, his face, his ears, until he was dazed and bewildered.

His guard went to pieces. His own fists aimed out wildly, and Handforth minor's guard remained like a rock. Nothing could pass it. One casual glance at the two fighters proved that they were in a totally different class. Willy was skilled—a remarkably clever little boxer. He dealt with Owen minor as a dog worries a bone.

The Third looked on, staggered.

This was absolutely the opposite to what they had expected. They had been delighted with the thought that Owen minor would swipe all the spots off this newcomer. And instead of that, Willy was licking the great leader of the Third into a cocked hat.

"Stop!" yelled Chubby Heath. "Time!"

"Time!"

"Drag him off!"

Several fags tried to grasp Handforth minor, but he was still fighting hard. At last, however, he was firmly seized, and Owen was provided with a breathing space.

But the Third Form leader was a sportsman.

"Let him go on!" he panted. "Didn't we arrange to fight to a finish? You blessed cads—let him finish it up!"

"But you're getting the worst of it!" gasped Lemon.

"I know it!" said Owen doggedly. "But I can't help it—I asked for it, anyway! And we'll go on till one of us is licked!"

The dazed fags released Willy, and without a moment's wait, the latter sailed in once more. But Owen was nearly done. He fought gamely on, but it was useless. A couple of moments later he received a fearful blow on the jaw which sent him spinning backwards.

He collapsed in a heap. His nose was bleeding, his lip swollen, and one eye was showing signs of closing. Handforth minor, on the other hand, was untouched. He dropped his fists at once.

"Had enough?" he asked quietly.

"Yes!" gurgled Owen minor, sitting up. "My only hat! Talk about a surprise packet! It's—it's amazing!"

He crawled to his feet, and he grudgingly held out his hand.

"I suppose we'd better shake!" he growled. "You've licked me—and you don't get any punishment! That was the bargain!"

"But he's got to be sent to coventry!" said Lemon indignantly.

"No he hasn't!" snapped Owen minor. "An agreement is an agreement! If any of you chaps touch the kid I'll smash you! But he's capable of smashing you himself, I think! You'd better go easy with him! He's hot stuff!"

Willy Handforth looked round.

"Well, it's all over!" he said smiling. "We don't want to keep it up, do we? Will you be my guests for tea, as we originally arranged?"

And such is the composition of Third Formers, that they agreed on the spot. After all, as Chubby Heath whispered to Lemon, a feed's a feed.

CHAPTER VI.

HANDY THE SECOND!



NEXT morning a remarkable change was noticeable in Handforth minor.

For one thing, he was wearing Etons—his velvet suit was presumably only a special occasion affair. In exactly the same manner as Handforth major, he looked somewhat untidy. He couldn't help it—it was natural to him.

And now that he was in Etons, he seemed to gather more confidence round himself. He even walked in a different way. There was a suspicion of Edward Oswald's strut, and with his hands stuck deeply in his trousers' pockets, he stole across the Triangle as though he owned the whole place.

There was no doubt that his victory over Owen minor had contributed greatly to this alteration. He felt that he had gained prestige. And it was quite certain that no junior

in the Third would dare to say too much to Willy.

And now that his appearance was somewhat altered by the donning of the Eton suit, he bore an even closer resemblance to the famous leader of Study D. His face looked more like Edward Oswald's, and he was, in fact, a smaller edition. His meek and mild manner was fast disappearing.

The influence of St. Frank's was rapidly at work. The rough and ready life of the Third Form was a lesson which was sinking home with great speed. It didn't take Willy Handforth long to adapt himself to his new surroundings.

He had seen at the very outset that he was like a round stick in a square hole. So he proceeded to make himself square. He was succeeding with remarkable rapidity. Probably no junior but one with the Handforth strain could have adapted himself so admirably.

The change seemed to come suddenly, in fact.

But the truth was, Willy had been very carefully taking the lie of the land on the previous afternoon and evening. He saw how things were, and, after lying in bed for some time thinking things out, he decided that he would adopt totally different tactics this morning.

It was all new to him—at his previous school he had been amongst a lot of children, in a way of speaking. There had been practically no fighting, and the whole run of life was different.

Willy could see that it wouldn't do here.

He appeared to have forgotten all about the unfortunate incident regarding his expulsion from Sellcombe. And he looked quite cheerful and bright. He made no attempt to go over and see his elder brother. He felt that it was quite unnecessary. He could get along all right single-handed.

But Handforth came out of the Ancient House while Willy was lounging in the Triangle. He looked at his minor aggressively, and then went across to him.

"Morning, Bill!" he said gruffly.

"Hallo, Ted!" said Willy, with calm assurance. "How's that, better than Edward? What's the trouble? You're looking pretty sick!"

Handforth stared hard.

"Cheeky young bounder!" he ejaculated. "Who's been teaching you to talk like that!"

"Third!" said Willy briefly.

"By George! You've been pretty swift!" said Handforth. "Look here, what's this about Sellcombe? You told me you were sacked."

"So I was."

"Aren't you ashamed of it, you young beggar?"

"No!"

"What?"

"Not a bit!" said Willy cheerfully.

"Great pip!" gasped Handforth. "Why, you—you barefaced young rotter! I'll—I'll— Oh, my hat!"

He brought down his fists, remembering his promise.

"If you like to think all sorts of rotten things about me, Ted, I suppose you've got to do it," said Willy. "Sorry I can't stay any longer. Ta, ta!"

He strolled off, leaving Handforth fighting for breath.

He went over towards the gates, and found Chubby Heath talking with Conroy minimus. They looked at Willy rather aggressively as he appeared.

"Everything seems all serene this morning!" said Willy brightly.

"You've got a nerve!" said Chubby Heath. "Look here, Handforth minor, I'm rather careful who I mix with! I bar cribbers— Yaroooooh!"

Handforth minor's fist shot out like a sledgehammer. It landed upon Chubby Heath's nose, and Heath sat down with tremendous violence on the gravel. And Willy walked on, whistling.

Chubby Heath sat up, moaning with pain.

"Did—did you see that?" he stuttered.

"Yes, and I bet you felt it!" said Conroy minimus. "My hat! He's just like Handy himself! Let's fly without warning, you know!"

Within a space of ten minutes about five fags suffered the same fate. They merely had to mention some remark insulting towards Willy, and the latter's fist whirled out, and disaster followed.

By breakfasttime it was quite noticeable that a number of noses were unusually large. And Willy Handforth had already earned a marvellous reputation for himself. The fags were rapidly beginning to realise that this new junior was several kinds of a terror.

After breakfast Willy proceeded to the Third Form, and looked round him, and sniffed.

"Is this where we're supposed to hang out when we're indoors?" he asked.

"Yes!" said Lemon.

"Haven't we got any common room, or anything?"

"No!"

"No studies?"

"Don't be an ass!" said Lemon.

"Studies don't begin until you get in the Fourth—that's the Remove. We've got to pig it here. It's a bit rotten, of course, but there you are. It's no good jibbing against it."

Willy looked round, and sniffed again.

"Pretty mouldy, I call it!" he said.

"Look here, you outsider, if you haven't got anything better to say than that, you'd better keep your blessed mouth closed!" growled Chubby Heath.

"Well, isn't it mouldy?"

"I'll admit that it's not up to much——"

"Then what's the idea of getting ratty?" asked Handforth minor. "Just because I'm a new chap, it doesn't mean to say that I'm to keep everything to myself."

Fancy you kids standing it! Term after term, too! It's not good enough for me!"

"Oh! And what do you reckon to do?"

Willy scratched his head.

"Plenty of things to do!" he said vaguely. "Leave it to me, my sons. I'll soon make a big alteration."

He strolled out.

"The nerve!" said Chubby Heath blankly. "And do you notice the difference in his talk? I believe he was putting that soft stuff on yesterday."

"I don't!" said Lemon. "It's all because he licked Owen minor! And he's shaken down a bit, too."

By the end of the day Willy's reputation was rather terrible.

He had been punching everybody in the

In fact, so great was the feeling, that Owen minor got over half the Form together in one of the sheds at the back of the Ancient House. It was a secret meeting—very important, and very sinister.

It was so secret, in fact, that lights from a candle could be seen penetrating through the doorway—to say nothing of numerous shrill fag voices. But it was quite clear that Owen and Co. were hatching a plot.

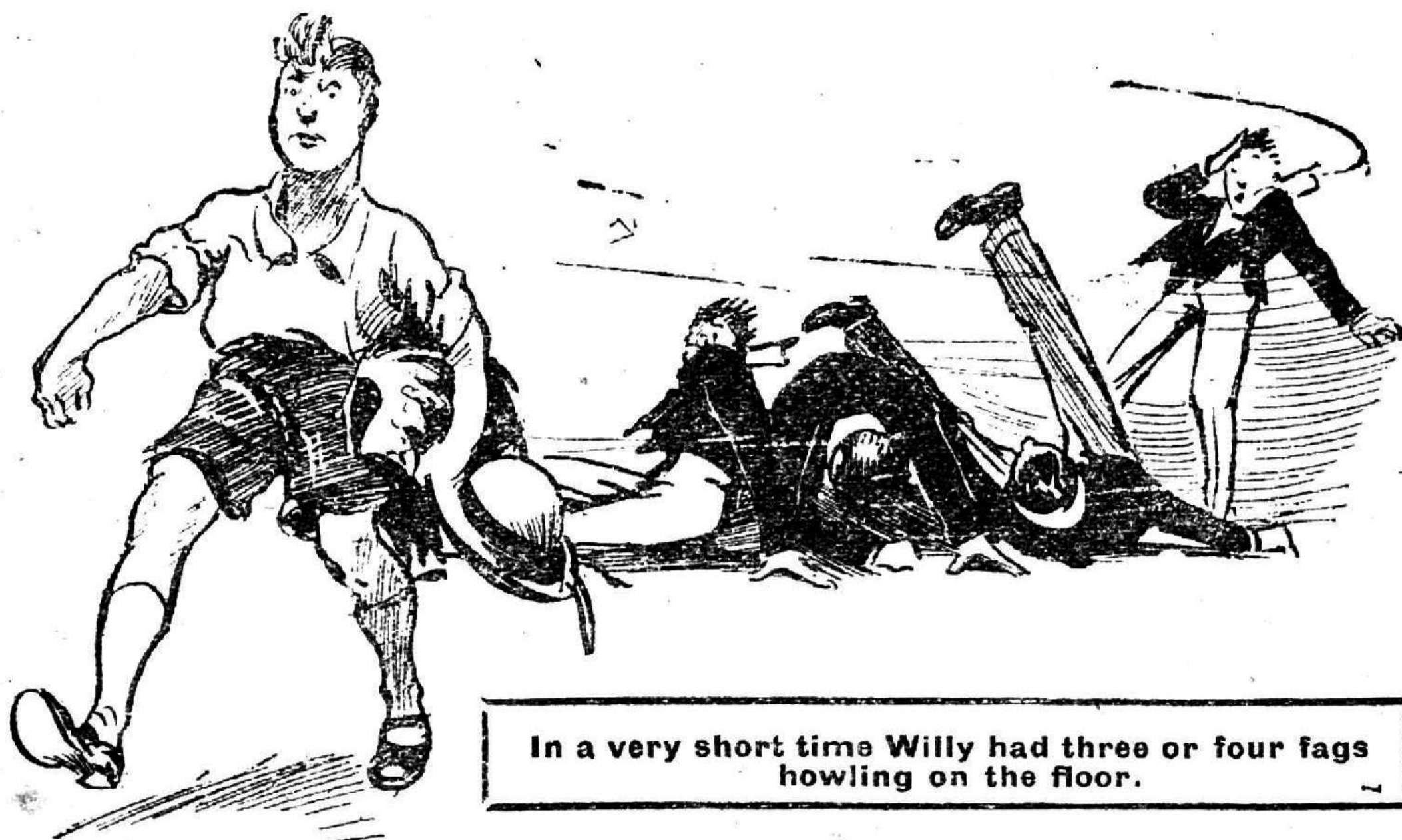
Behind the doors of their secret chamber, they talked—fiercely.

"Do you think we're going to stand it?" demanded Owen minor. "Not likely!"

"The chap's a terror!"

"He's too much!"

"And we're going to have him pitched out!" said Owen. "I don't forget that



In a very short time Willy had three or four fags howling on the floor.

Third, and as the day wore on, he grew worse and worse. To be precise, he got more and more like Handforth every hour. And, as Pitt remarked, what could be worse than that?

At all events, the fags themselves were thoroughly fed up with him. They had not been accustomed to having a fellow like this in their ranks. Willy, in one short day, had turned the Third Form inside out. And he had constituted himself the ruling leader of the fags.

He did this absolutely by right of conquest—and, in one stride, he went far ahead of his major. For even Handforth, with all his aggressive tactics, was certainly not the leader of the Remove—although he thought he ought to have been.

Handforth minor had no serious opposition, however. He took his fists everywhere, and by tea-time the Third Form was in terror of them.

we've agreed that he shall be treated as any other chap, but when it gets to a pitch like this, what can we do?"

"Nothing—except something drastic!"

"Hear, hear!"

"I vote we send him to Coventry!" said Chubby Heath.

"Rats!" sneered Owen. "What's the good of that? He won't care tuppence! If any chap refuses to speak to him, he'll punch his nose! I've never seen such a chap for scrapping in all my life! The best thing is to appeal to the Head!"

"But that would be sneaking!" said Heath.

"No it wouldn't—if we all did it together!" replied Owen minor. "Besides, we'll tell the Head that we want him taken away because he was sacked from Sellcombe. See? The Head can't refuse. If the whole Form is against a chap, the only remedy is to remove him!"

"Hear, hear!"

"But how can we tell the Head?" asked Lemon. "If we go there, we shall only get hoofed out!"

"We'll send a deputation!" said Owen minor importantly.

"A which?"

"A delegation!"

"That's not what you said at first——"

"It's the same thing, you ignorant chump!" snapped Owen. "It simply means a number of chaps who go representing a lot more chaps! See? And we'll take a petition with us, too."

"A partition?" asked Chubby Heath blankly.

"No, a wall!" sneered Owen. "A petition, ass—petition! It's simply a piece of paper, signed by the whole crowd of us! I've got the paper here, and it is all drawn up ready. I did it during lessons this afternoon!"

"Oh, so that was why old Sunny dropped on you!" said Lemon. "Let's see it!"

Owen minor produced his precious petition. At first one could only see a large number of blots. There was very little writing to be observed. Either Owen minor's pen had been in a shocking state, or he was an atrocious writer—but the fact remained that the scrawl on the petition was just calculated to make Dr. Stafford seize the writer and flog him.

But Owen minor was blithely unconscious of this possibility.

"Here we are!" he said proudly. "I reckon I've worded it jolly well! Listen to this: 'We, the undersigned members of the Third Form, appeal to you, sir, to remove, sir, an undesirable character, sir. This undesirable character, sir, is Willy Handforth minor, and he has made himself a nuisance with all respects. We want you, sir, to expel him from the school, sir, and send him away, thanking you in anticipation, sir, and awaiting an early reply, yours truly——' Now that's it—we've all got to sign our names under here!"

"My hat!" said Chubby Heath. "It sounds pretty good. But where did you find all those words?"

"I'll admit I copied some of them out of a couple of business letters!" said Owen minor. "But they go all right—and the spelling's good, too. I'll sign first, and you chaps can put your names under here."

He signed, and then all the other fags in the shed took the pen and proceeded to further deface it. As they were writing upon an upturned box, and as this box was by no means clean, the petition was grubby to a ghastly extent by the time it was completed.

"That's it!" said Owen minor at last. "Good!"

He held it up, and somebody took it from him.

"Thanks!" said Handforth minor. "I've been watching you chaps for a few minutes past."

They turned, aghast.

Willy had stolen into the shed unseen in the gloom. Now he glanced at the famous petition, grinned, and then calmly proceeded to tear it up.

"You—you rotter!" howled Owen. "What are you doing?"

"Saving you chaps from a good licking!" replied Willy. "If you took that to the Head, he'd scalp you! And it seems to me that you're still a bit reluctant to fall into line! All right—we'll see! I'll fight the lot of you!"

He had the same reckless spirit as Handforth—it seemed that he didn't count the odds.

And Owen and Co. took Willy at his word. They dashed at him from all sides—but sincerely wished they hadn't a few minutes later, for he converted himself into a kind of human windmill!

Certainly, a few blows were got home at him, but he didn't seem to notice them, and in a very short space of time he had three or four fags howling on the floor. The others backed away, hardly caring to continue the tussle.

Willy looked round, pulled down his sleeves, and breathed hard.

"And that's that!" he said. "Any more nonsense, and there'll be real trouble—not just a hint of it like this!"

He strode out—and Owen minor and Co. felt strangely faint!

CHAPTER VII.

THE LORD OF THE THIRD!



"ROTTEN!"

Handforth minor made that remark as he surveyed the Third Form room about half-an-hour later. The fire was rather dim, and the single electric light which burned did comparatively little to illuminate the big room.

Most of the Third Formers had come in by this time, and in spite of themselves, they were beginning to take a very active interest in Willy—an interest, that is, other than hostile.

It had been practically proved that it was quite useless to thwart him in any way. He had his own methods, and employed them with dire results. So Owen minor and all his followers were now looking at Willy with something like resigned calmness.

"What's rotten?" growled Owen minor.

"Everything here—in the Third Form section," replied Willy. "No comfort—no junior studies for us—nothing! Aren't you chaps just about fed up with it? Wouldn't you like more comfort?"

"Of course—but what can we do?"

"Got any ideas, Mr. Clever?"

"Plenty!"

"If they're anything like your major's ideas, you'd better bury 'em!" said Chubby Heath. "He's an awful mug when it comes

to ideas—although he's a really decent fellow in other ways."

"Never mind my major now," said Willy. "Look here, come with me, and I'll show you something!"

"Where are you going to?"

"You'll see!"

There was something so authoritative about the new fag's tones that the majority of the juniors jumped up and followed him out of the room. He led them along the passage, and then into another passage, which looked rather dusty and dim.

"What's the idea?" asked Owen. "These are box-rooms, you ass!"

"That's what I thought," said Willy. "Let's have a light on the subject."

He produced some matches, and struck one. Then he opened the first door, and the interior proved to be a comparatively small apartment with window set high up, and looking out upon the back premises.

The apartment was nearly empty, and very dirty.

"When was this used last?" asked Willy.

"Goodness knows!"

"Years, I suppose?"

"Oh, yes—six or seven years, I should think—before our time," replied Chubby Heath. "They've always been empty and dirty like this."

"All these little box-rooms?"

"Yes," said Owen. "You see, when they rebuilt the College House, they made a lot of extra room, and so we haven't been crowded out on this side for ten years or more. These box-rooms ain't really needed."

"And there are about six like this, aren't there?" asked Handforth minor.

"Yes—the six in a row, as you can see them," said Owen. "But what the dickens does it matter, anyhow? What are you trying to get at, you ass?"

Handforth minor struck another match.

"Good!" he murmured. "There's electric light on as well!"

"Going dotty?" asked Lemon.

"Not at all—but I'm wondering why you fellows have stood things so long," replied Willy calmly. "You've been content to live here, term after term, without studies, and without any comfort of any sort! Now what's wrong with the idea of turning these six box-rooms into Third Form studies?"

The fags stared, aghast.

"But—but it's impossible," said Owen minor.

"Why is it?"

"Because the Third ain't allowed to have studies, you duffer!"

"Can't we get the rules altered?" asked Willy coolly. "There's no need to let things go on in the same old rut, year after year! These box-rooms are doing nothing. They're empty, and they'll probably remain empty. So why shouldn't we commandeer them?"

"It's—it's against all the rules!"

"We should be scalped!"

"Who would scalp us?" asked Handforth minor.

"Why, the prefects—old Suncliffe—Mr. Lee!" replied Owen minor. "They'd drop on us like a hundred of bricks, and we should be absolutely squashed—flogged, or something. A gating, at the least!"

"Not if we got permission!" said Willy. They stared at him again.

"Per-permission!" stuttered Heath.

"Who from?"

"Mr. Lee."

"And you'll go and ask, I suppose?"

"Certainly!" said Willy coolly.

Owen minor scratched his head.

"Well, I'm jiggered!" he gasped. "I've met a few chaps with nerve, but you take the biscuit. Why, you ass, Mr. Lee would never agree."

"There's no telling," said Handforth minor.

"Besides, you wouldn't have the sauce to go!" said Owen. "But I must admit that it's a ripping fine wheeze! It's a stunning stunt—absolutely a topholer! I've got to give you credit for being brainy, kid!"

"Thanks!" said Willy drily.

As a matter of fact, all the fags were just beginning to realise that Handforth minor was a live wire. He had only been in the school a day, and he was literally turning things inside out. He was absolutely changing the aspect of the entire Third Form quarters.

It simply meant that Willy was not content with things as they were. He saw great opportunities of making things better—and couldn't understand why a few formalities should prevent the Third from getting busy.

"You see," went on Willy, "there are six of these rooms, and although they're pretty small, we could manage four in each pretty well. That means study space for twenty-four chaps."

"Why, that's nearly all the Third in this House!" said Heath.

"Exactly," agreed Willy. "So we could have study accommodation for all of us, and make the College House chaps go green."

Owen minor's eyes glittered.

"My hat! It would be a lovely knock for the Monks!" he said.

"Of course!" said Willy. "It only rests with Mr. Lee. There's no need to go to the Head. If Mr. Lee says O.K., we're on velvet. Do you think there's any chance?"

"Not an earthly!"

"Absolutely hopeless!"

"All right, we'll see!" said Handforth minor. "As for furniture, we can soon fake up something in that line—without any expense, either. I've got a few ideas. And now I'll buzz along and interview Mr. Lee."

"You—you'll go and interview Mr. Lee?" breathed Owen minor.

"Yes."

"Alone?"

"Of course!"

"You—you marvel!" said Owen. "Dash it all, I can't help saying it! A chap with a nerve like yours ought to do anything! I've heard that it pays to have a bit of cheek, but you're the outside edge of the limit!"

"All right—see you soon!" said Willy briskly.

He walked off, and the Third Formers gazed after him in staggered wonder. And they fully expected to see him crawl back, with his hands tucked under his arms—a sure sign that he had been caned.

But Willy was quite calm, and took things as a matter of course. He marched along to Nelson Lee's study, and tapped on the door.

"Come in!" sang out the famous detective's voice.

Willy Handforth entered.

"Ah, my boy!" said Nelson Lee, laying down his pen. "How are you getting on amid your new surroundings?"

"Splendidly, thanks, sir," said Willy. "I've just come to ask you a favour, sir. I'll be awfully glad if you can oblige, sir."

"It all depends what the favour is, young man," smiled Nelson Lee. "I hope it will not be too massive!"

Willy looked straight at the Housemaster.

"I'm afraid you'll think it is a bit thick, sir," he said. "Everything seems fine in the Third, but there's a lot of room for improvement."

"Indeed!" said Lee, raising his eyebrows.

"Of course, sir," said Handforth minor. "Tons of room! I could suggest several alterations. We Third Formers haven't got any comfort at all, sir, and we're terribly badly off, in comparison to the Remove."

Nelson Lee regarded the new boy curiously. The more he listened to him, the more he recognised the Handforth touch. Edward Oswald himself was quite capable of talking in this very same way—with all the assurance in the world. It seemed to be a characteristic of the Handforths.

"This is very interesting, Handforth!" said Nelson Lee. "So you are dissatisfied with conditions in the Third Form quarters?"

"No, sir; I didn't say that!" put in Willy quickly. "I'm not dissatisfied, but I think they might be improved."

"For that matter, my boy, there is room for improvement in nearly everything."

"That's just it, sir," said Handforth minor. "About those little box-rooms down the passage near the Third Form room, sir. There are six of them, and they're never used. Owen minor tells me that they haven't been used for years and years. They're full of dirt and dust, and absolutely grimy."

Nelson Lee tapped thoughtfully upon the desk.

"Yes, yes!" he said. "I think I know the little rooms you mean. Down the passage to the left—six of them. The windows look out upon the rear courtyard?"

"That's it, sir."

"Well, what about them?"

"I was thinking they would make rather decent little studies, sir," said Willy calmly. "We could have four chaps in each, and the Third would then have a lot more comfort, and there wouldn't be so many rows!"

Nelson Lee chuckled.

"You are a very ingenious youngster, my lad!" he smiled. "But I really cannot give my permission for this absurd scheme. I am afraid you must go back disappointed."

Willy remained quite firm.

"But I haven't finished yet, sir," he went on deliberately. "These little box-rooms are empty, aren't they, sir?"

"Practically so—yes!"

"And they're not likely to be used, sir?"

"I see no use for them just now."

"Then why can't we have them, sir," said Handforth minor, with deadly persistence.

"Good gracious!" said Nelson Lee. "You must allow me to tell you, young man, that you have a considerable cheek. Now let me ask you a few questions. If you can answer them satisfactorily, I may alter my mind."

"I'll do my best, sir."

"Well, in the first place, these rooms want cleaning out badly," said Nelson Lee. "They have been disused for years, and there is a big accumulation of rubbish and dust. How do you suppose they will be cleaned?"

"We'll do it, sir," said Willy promptly.

"No, no—"

"If we cause any trouble, or upset any of the ordinary domestics, we'll stop at once, and give up the whole scheme, sir," said Willy.

"Well, with regard to the next point," went on Lee. "And this, I may say, is a very important point indeed. What will you do for furniture? It is quite impossible for you to purchase furniture, and there is none to spare from other parts of the house!"

"I thought of that, sir," said Willy smoothly.

"Indeed!"

"Boxes, sir!" said Handforth minor.

"Boxes and sacking, sir!"

"Good gracious!"

"It's easy, sir," went on Willy. "There are plenty of old boxes and cases outside in the sheds, sir. It won't take us long to knock up some tables and chairs. And as for crockery, we can beg all sorts of odds and ends from the Remove and senior studies. And there's another point, sir—about making furniture, I mean. It'll be jolly good carpentry practice for the chaps. And it'll keep them out of mischief, too, sir. Why, they'll all be busy on this furniture stuff for weeks—improving the decorations every day! I give you my word, sir, it won't cost the school a penny to allow us this favour."

"You are a very extraordinary boy, Handforth," said Nelson Lee. "Indeed, I can see quite clearly that you are even more enterprising than your elder brother."

"I hope so, sir," said Willy calmly. "I should just like to say, sir, that we shall be only too glad if you will come and inspect things just when you like, and if it isn't panning out as you desire, we'll stop everything at once, and abandon it. But while everything is going smoothly, we should like you to let us go our own way."

"You appear to take it for granted that I shall give my permission!" said Lee.

"Yes, sir."

"You do?"

"You wouldn't be unkind enough to refuse, sir," said Willy.

Nelson Lee laughed outright.

"Upon my soul!" he exclaimed. "You young rascal, I think I shall agree! But mind you—only on condition that you carry out this project without causing the slightest disturbance in the school, or among the domestic staff."

"I give you my word, sir, that everything will be all right."

"I shall not come and interfere with you, but I shall have my eyes open," said Nelson Lee. "And if you go beyond your limits, I shall act firmly."

"You're a brick, sir," said Handforth minor enthusiastically. "Thanks awfully, sir. You'll find that we sha'n't take unfair advantage of your kindness, sir!"

"All right; off you go!" smiled Nelson Lee.

Willy sped off, triumph gleaming in his eyes. A few moments later Nelson Lee wondered why he had succumbed so easily. There was something about Handforth minor that was rather irresistible. He had a way with him that couldn't be ignored. And, after all, Lee reflected, the juniors wouldn't be doing any harm, and it would certainly keep them all out of mischief.

Willy rushed back to the Third Form quarters, but eased up as he drew near. He strolled down the passage with perfect sangfroid.

Owen minor was the first to catch sight of him.

"Here he comes!" he shouted. "Oh, it's no good. I knew he'd fail!"

Handforth minor joined them all, and it was impossible to tell from his expression what had happened.

"All serene!" he said cheerfully.

"What?"

"You—you've got permission!" yelled Heath.

"Yes!"

"You—you spoofer—"

"My dear chaps, it's true!" grinned Willy. "Absolutely! We can have those six box-rooms, and we can convert them into studies! Mr. Lee told me so!"

"Hurrah!"

Owen Minor and Chubby Heath seized Willy, and danced round him like so many Dervishes. Other fags joined in the excitement. And at that moment Willy Handforth was the most popular fellow in the whole of the Third.

"Steady on!" he exclaimed. "I've given

certain undertakings and we haven't got to go beyond them, or the whole thing's squashed. Listen to me, you chaps, and I'll go into details."

He did so, and the fags listened breathlessly.

"Furniture out of old boxes!" said Owen minor. "My hat! That's a good wheeze. We can make all sorts of things, and one study will compete with another, trying to make the best furniture."

"That's the very idea!" agreed Willy. "There's nothing like competition. But mind you, there's got to be no larking about. Unless we go into this affair seriously, and take care to keep to the rules, we shall find Mr. Lee on our track. It's up to you fellows to do the thing properly. I'll lead you!"

"Hurrah!"

"Good old Willy!"

"Hurrah!"

Handforth minor grinned as he looked round. Here was another dramatic change, indeed! Only about an hour earlier well over half of the Third had been getting up a petition to have him thrown out! And now he was hailed as the most popular junior in the Form.

The Third went absolutely wild with excitement over the scheme. A great many juniors wanted to start then and there. But Willy checked them. He pointed out that nothing could really be done until the next morning. Their best plan would be to get out of bed early, and put in a couple of hours before breakfast—in daylight.

And this was certainly agreed to be the best idea. All animosity against Willy had vanished. He was a live wire, and the fags naturally looked upon him as a leader. And they knew that he wouldn't stand any nonsense. If any fellow tried to thwart him—biff! The Handforth punch!

And, having settled things to his entire satisfaction, Willy strolled out into the Triangle, feeling very well pleased with himself.

He was just in time to run into his father!

CHAPTER VIII.

SOMETHING FOR FULLWOOD!



SIR EDWARD HANDFORTH gazed at Willy rather blankly.

"What's this?" he asked. "What's this?"

"Only me, pater!" said Willy.

"Bless my soul!"

"How goes it?" asked Willy coolly. "I must say you're looking in the pink, pater! And if you've come down to see how I'm getting on, you've wasted your journey! Everything's all serene!"

Sir Edward had, as a matter of fact, dropped down to St. Frank's to see if his

youngest son was getting on satisfactorily at the old school. He was rather staggered to see the tremendous change in such a short space of time.

"Good heavens, boy, what's happened?" he asked.

"All sorts of things, dad!" said Willy. "For one thing, I've had a few lessons since I arrived here yesterday—I don't mean school lessons. But I've had a lot of piffle knocked out of me, and I'm ten times better off. How do I look in Etons? O.K.?"

"Boy!" shouted Sir Edward. "Boy! Do you realise that you are talking just like your brother? Do you realise that you've dropped every good mannerism that you ever had? I knew very well that you were coming among a crowd of unruly young rascals, but I never dreamed that they would effect such a change in a short space of time like this!"

"I thought it as well to drop into the St. Frank's ways as quickly as possible, pater," said Willy. "What was the good of delaying things? After all, I just slipped into the new ways as easy as winking."

"I'm not sure whether to be angry or whether to be pleased," said Sir Edward gruffly.

"I think you'd better be pleased, dad," grinned Willy. "It's no good being angry, because that won't alter it."

"I really think, Willy, that you have more infernal cheek than your brother!" snapped Sir Edward. "Come with me at once. We will go to your brother's study. How has he been treating you, by the way?"

"We hardly had two words with him, dad," said Willy. "He lives in a different world, you see. Of course, there's a tremendous gulf between the Third and the Remove. I'm getting on all right; so don't worry."

They entered the Ancient House, and made their way straight along the Remove passage to Study D. They walked in, and Handforth and Co., who were at prep., looked up in astonishment.

Handforth gave one bound, and was by his father's side.

"By George, I'm glad to see you, pater!" he exclaimed eagerly. "Oh, and there's Bill! The young beggar's in disgrace, sir!"

"I'm not surprised to hear it," growled Sir Edward. "And don't call him Bill! It sounds common! I won't have it, Edward!"

"Sorry, pater!" said Handforth. "I want to ask you about Sellcombe! Some rotter here—Fullwood—got hold of a yarn that Bill was sacked—I—I mean, that Willy was expelled!"

Sir Edward looked up sharply.

"Oh, so that leaked out, did it?" he asked, frowning.

"It's—it's true, then, sir?" asked Handy dully.

"Quite true!"

"And he was sacked for cribbing exam. answers, dad?"

"Yes."

"It's a wonder he's got the cheek to come here!" growled Handforth.

Sir Edward turned to his younger son.

"Haven't you told your brother the exact truth, Willy?" he asked, frowning.

"Not yet, dad."

"Why not?"

"Because he thought the worst about me!" cried Willy defiantly. "He goes and accuses me of these things, and I allowed him to think what he jolly well chose. I didn't care!"

"You young imp!" said Sir Edward wrathfully.

"What—what does he mean, pater?" asked Handforth blankly.

"Why, it was all a mistake——"

"A—a mistake, dad?" gasped Handforth faintly.

"Yes."

"But—but——"

"Do you mean to tell me, Edward, that you dared to believe that Willy was actually guilty of this disgraceful act?" thundered Sir Edward.

"I—I——"

"How dare you?" roared Handy's father. "Why, good gracious me! Have you no better faith in your brother than to suspect him of such villainy?"

"But—but you say he was expelled!" roared Handforth.

"Don't bark at me, boy!"

"I'm not barking, pater!" said Handforth, controlling his voice with difficulty. "But you distinctly said that Willy was sacked from Sellcombe. Didn't he, you chaps?"

He appealed to Church and McClure.

"It—it sounded a bit like it!" said Church cautiously.

"Don't I keep telling you that it was a mistake, you young dunderhead?" shouted Sir Edward. "Willy was sent home—in absolute disgrace. He was, in fact, expelled. I did not believe for a moment that he was guilty, and I quite believed his statement when he told me that he knew nothing whatever about the whole affair. If you could doubt your own brother, I could not doubt my own son!"

Handforth felt rather crushed.

"You—you mean, dad, that there was some awful bloomer?"

"There was a mistake!" said Sir Edward.

"I object to these coarse terms! Three days after Willy arrived home the real culprit was caught—caught red-handed as he was stealing more examination paper answers. He thereupon confessed that he had put the blame of the other affair upon Willy. Naturally, he was at once expelled, and Willy returned—his honour absolutely cleared."

Handforth clutched at the table.

"Then—then there was really nothing in it?"

"Nothing at all—a mere incident."

Handforth deliberately commenced to turn up his sleeves. There was a grim light in his eye, and he glanced towards the door.

"What is this for?" asked Sir Edward. "I have repeatedly told you, Edward, that you must always remove your jacket when you decide to wash your hands! I detest seeing a boy turn his coat 'uffs up!"

"I'm—I'm doing this for something else, dad!" said Handforth fiercely. "There's a job that needs attention at once!"

He gazed mysteriously from one to another, and then departed from the study, closing the door with an unnecessary slam.

"The boy's gone mad!" said Sir Edward.

"No; I think he's gone to give somebody a good hiding, dad!" said Willy. "Fullwood, I expect—the chap who started that rumour going about me!"

Sir Edward rubbed his hands together.

"Good!" he exclaimed. "Excellent! I have heard a great deal about this boy, Fullwood, and I do not think a little punishment will come amiss. But it was very foolish of you not to tell your brother the true circumstances, Willy. It was very foolish, indeed."

In the meantime, Handforth made his way straight into Study A. He plunged in without a scrap of warning. And he found Fullwood and Co. just indulging in a cigarette. They jumped up in alarm as Handforth appeared.

"You—you ass!" growled Fullwood. "I thought it was somebody else!"

"You'll wish it was somebody else soon!" retorted Handforth grimly. "Now, my son! Do you know what I'm going to do with you?"

"Don't be a fool——"

"See that?" roared Handforth, thrusting in a fist forward.

"Yes, but——"

"In about ten seconds you'll feel it!" exclaimed Handforth grimly. "You cad! You worm! You crawling centipede! Tried to blackmail me with a yarn that wasn't true! You made things uncomfortable for my brother when the whole thing was a fake! You rotter!"

"A fake?" sneered Fullwood. "It's true—and you know it!"

"My pater's here, and he's just told me the truth!" said Handforth. "Willy was sacked from Sellcombe, but it was all wrong. And he was reinstated three days later, without a stain on him!"

"He must have washed unusually well!" said Fullwood tartly.

"On his character, you funny idiot!" roared Handforth. "And for starting that rumour about, and causing all this trouble, I'm going to pulverise you! Put up your giddy fists!"

"I won't!"

"You prefer to take a hiding lying down?"

"If you touch me, I'll yell for help!" shouted Fullwood desperately.

Handforth smiled—a sweet smile.

"All right—yell!" he exclaimed. "And



Handforth had secured Fullwood's head in chancery, and was pounding away at it vigorously.

then Mr. Lee might come! He'll want to know why I'm biffing you! In about five seconds he'll know that you spread that rumour, and then tried to blackmail me!"

"You—you cad!"

"You've got to take this hiding quietly, or it'll be all up with you!" said Handforth. "And I shall slosh into you with absolute delight! A blackmailer's a blot on the landscape!"

Handforth wasted no more time in words, but sailed in.

Vainly Fullwood tried to protect himself. He dashed round the study, with Handforth in full pursuit. The table went flying, and the chair crashed over. Gulliver and Bell, instead of standing by their leader, fled out through the doorway, and left Fullwood to the mercy of the avenger.

Handforth got him at last—held him, and then proceeded to do things. He punched Fullwood's nose, he blackened his left eye, and he finally made the cad of Study A howl for mercy.

This was when Handforth had secured Fullwood's head in chancery, and was pounding away at it vigorously.

"Stop—stop!" gulped Fullwood. "You're half-killing me!"

Handforth paused.

"Now then—say you're sorry!" he panted.

"I'm hanged if I will——"

Biff! Biff! Biff!

"Yow—yaroo!" howled Fullwood. "I—I'm sorry!"

"Good! Now say that you're a worm, and that you're not fit to eat off the same plate as a mongrel!" said Handforth. —

Fullwood jibbed at this.

"You—you bullying cad!" he snapped. "I—"

"This isn't bullying—it's just punishment," said Handforth. "I bar bullying, but you asked for this, and you've got it! Now I'll give you one more chance to repeat what I said. Here's my fist, look! It's coming down!"

Ralph Leslie gave a squeal.

"I'm—I'm a worm!" he panted wildly.

"You are!"

"And—and I'm not fit to eat off the same plate as a mongrel!" said Fullwood hastily.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Handforth glaced round, and saw for the first time that the door was open, and that a crowd of juniors were looking in.

"Glad to hear that Fullwood knows his breed!" grinned Reggie Pitt.

Fullwood squirmed.

"This—this blithering fool made me say that!" he hooted.

"Blithering fool, am I?" bawled Handforth. "All right, I'll give you some more for that! But you shall have another chance. Say this—say that you're never going to do a caddish action again, and that you're not fit to wipe Teddy Long's boots!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Fullwood, writhing with rage, was compelled to repeat the words. And then Handforth allowed him to go free. Fullwood only just managed to crawl away to one of the bathrooms, in order to clean himself. He looked a wreck—and he was a wreck for days.

But he had learned a lesson that he was not likely to forget very soon. At first most of the juniors were inclined to believe that Handforth had gone too far. But when they learnt the details of Fullwood's rascally conduct, they were quite convinced that Handforth had been even lenient.

Having finished with Fullwood, Handforth went out into the Triangle, to cool off. In the dusk, he saw a small figure, and he instantly recognised it as his minor. His jaw set grimly.

"Come here, you little bounder!" he said darkly.

"Speaking to me?" said Willy, turning.

"Yes, I am!"

"What's wrong?"

"If I hadn't used up all my strength on Fullwood, I'd have dragged you across the Triangle by your hair!" said Handforth politely. "You young bounder! What do you mean by it?"

"What do I mean by what?"

"You know!"

"Oh, you mean the Sellcombe business?"

(Continued on next page.)

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ADVENTURE

"Of course I do!" snapped Handforth. "You knew all the time that the thing was wrong—and yet you let the whole school think that you had really been sacked from Sellcombe in disgrace!"

Willy grinned.

"Well, it didn't matter much," he said. "In spite of that, the Third Form chaps are pretty keen on me. I don't want to boast, but I think I've stirred things up pretty completely in the Third!"

"Blessed if I know what you've been up to!" said Handforth suspiciously. "You'll come to a bad end, my lad! But you're steering away from the point. Why did you tell me that you had been sacked—"

"Because I was sacked—"

"Then why didn't you tell me that you'd been reinstated?"

"I never had a chance!" replied Willy.

"You started accusing me, and all the other fellows accused me. You didn't ask if it was true—you didn't ask me for any explanation. You took it for granted."

"And I suppose you got your little back up?" snapped Handforth.

"Well, yes!"

"Huh!" snorted Handforth. "Well, after all, I can't altogether blame you. I suppose I should have done the same. It's the family pride of the Handforths! And let me tell you this young 'un—if you do get up to any tricks in the Third—"

"I shall face the consequences!" interrupted Willy calmly. "You needn't think that you'll take a hand, because you're not

wanted! We're brothers, and we're pals—but if you chip in with the Third's affairs, you'll catch it in the neck! So that's that! So-long, old son! See you later!"

And Willy, with all the confidence in the world, sauntered back into the Ancient House and made his way to the Third Form passage. He was grinning delightedly, and by this time the Third had heard all about the whole affair. They knew that Willy hadn't really been sacked from Sellcombe at all.

And, already liking him, they now took him to their hearts freely and proudly.

He was the most energetic junior who had ever graced the Third. And, by all appearances, Handforth minor was determined to make things hum with a capital H, as soon as he had shaken down.

Willy was a second edition of Edward Oswald—only, if anything, he seemed to have more initiative than his elder brother, and was a positive mass of energy. If things didn't buck up now they never would!

And, sure enough, within four days all those box rooms were cleared out, and some temporary furniture was placed in them. In fact by the end of the week, the Third Form was proudly boasting of the fact that they had their own studies.

The Remove thought it an awful piece of cheek at first. But when they learned that Handforth minor was the instigator of the whole thing, they weren't at all surprised.

They merely wondered what Willy would be up to next!

THE END.

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# Nipper's Magazine

No. 49

EDITED BY NIPPER,

October, 28, 1922.

MY DEAR CHUMS,—Next week we shall be celebrating the Fifth of November, which, of course, means that there will be something "happening" at St. Frank's. This will please Old Cuttle immensely. In fact, I

found him in such good humour this morning in anticipation of the great event that I had no difficulty in getting him to write an appropriate article for the occasion in the Mag. next week.—Your old pal, NIPPER.

## WHAT ARE MINORS FOR?

By EDWD. OSWALD HANDFORTH.

OF course, everybody knows about my great misfortune by now. Term after term I have been dreading the day, and at last the awful thing has happened.

My young brother has come to St. Frank's!

As a young brother, he's not so bad. I'm not complaining about Willy. He's a decent kid in his own way, and if anybody starts running him down, it won't take me long to hand out a few punches.

At the same time, he's my minor—and minors of any sort are a ghastly nuisance. I mean, the thing's all rot. It oughtn't to be allowed. Can't a chap be at school nowadays without having a minor bothering about in a lower Form? Willy's in the Third, and it won't take him long to put the Third into shape, either. He's a Handforth, and he's a really decent kid.

Putting all prejudices aside, I've got to admit that Willy is well-built, handsome, straightforward, and marvellously clever. He's simply a wonder at football and cricket, and there's nothing in the world that he can't do—and do properly. He's good-tempered, hates bullying, and his very finest characteristic is a quiet, unassuming modesty.

In fact, Willy is almost exactly like me.

But that's no reason why he should come to St. Frank's. I'm blessed if I can understand why the pater didn't send him to some other school. He's come here, and there'll be nothing but ructions from morning till night, week in and week out.

What I want to know is, what are minors for?

What good do they do? How do they help a chap, and how can a fellow expect to be happy at school when he's got a minor among the fags?

Minors were only made for the purpose of worrying their majors. Just look at Owen, of the Remove. He's got a minor in the Third—an inky little bounder who can't do anything else but cheek his brother and come round borrowing three or four times a week.

It's the same with Conroy, in the Sixth. He's got a minor in the Remove, and the way those two chaps squabble is wicked. Always rowing, and always insulting one another.

It's a queer thing, but brothers seem to disagree on every possible point. When they're not punching one another's faces, they're giving one another thick ears. And it's particularly bad when one brother is two or three years older than the other.

The younger one thinks he knows everything, and all he can do is to sauce his major on every possible occasion. Of course, that's what leads to the trouble. A chap doesn't like to be cheeked by his own kid of a brother—and so, of course, he's got to sail in, and give the young fathead a lesson.

That's what'll happen with Willy. As soon as he starts any of his rot with me, I shall simply take him across my knees, and spank him until he howls. It's the only way to deal with a minor who thinks he's as good as you are. You want to treat them firmly—and give 'em no rope.

No, I've got to admit I'm puzzled. Why the dickens do parents send minors to the same school to disturb the peace of their majors?

It's one of those problems that never get answered!

But, if it was left to me, I should only take about three minutes to settle the whole question, once and for all. Of course, I'm not consulted in these matters, and so I never get a giddy word in.

That's the worst of it—nobody realises my worth!

THE END.



"Can't do anything else but cheek his brother and come round borrowing."





## CHAPTER ONE.

### THE CASE OF THE MISSING QUIDS.

THE managing director of the Imperial Bank of Britain entered the consulting-room of Messrs. Podge & Midge, and found the Firm busily engaged in picking clues out of a pink newspaper.

"Gentlemen, I appeal to you to help me!" quoth the Managing Director pleadingly. "Fifty thousand new golden sovereigns have been stolen from the Imperial Bank. The robbery took place last night. You may name your own fee!"

Mr. Podge, the immense Chief of the firm, nodded.

"We accept the case!" he puffed. "Details, please!"

"All these sovereigns are brand new, and dated for the year 1950," replied the Managing Director. "We are preparing to issue them in that year. The matter is of vital urgency!"



"Follow that man!" he exclaimed tensely.

## CHAPTER TWO.

### THE CLUE OF THE OUNCE OF SHAG.

Messrs. Podge & Midge were worried. For three days they had searched in vain for the bank robbers. They were at their wit's end. And Mr. Podge felt that he needed consolation in tobacco.

He entered a shop, and was just in time to see a rough, villainous man place a sovereign on the counter, in payment for an ounce of shag. One swift, lightning-like glance was sufficient for Mr. Podge.

The coin bore the date—1950!

## CHAPTER THREE.

### ON THE TRAIL!

Mr. Midge could see that his Chief had made a marvellous discovery. Mr. Podge's face was flushed with excitement. As he emerged from the tobacconist's shop, he pointed to the rough villain who had just left.

"Follow that man!" he exclaimed tensely.

"Follow him until you track him to his lair. He is the bank robber! Report to me later. I shall be ready for bringing off the final capture. Away!"

And, in the twinkling of an eye, Mr. Midge was on the track. He followed his quarry on foot, on buses, and on the Underground. Finally, they found themselves in Golder's Green—where all is not gold, but where a good many are green.

## CHAPTER FOUR.

### RUN TO EARTH!

An hour later, Mr. Podge was on the scene. Mr. Midge had 'phoned, stating that he had tracked the robber to one of the new bungalows which were being built on the Sunshine Estate. Mr. Podge brought twenty Scotland Yard detectives with him. The house was raided, and the bank robber was arrested. With him were three confederates.

Mr. Podge glanced round the new house swiftly. He walked from room to room,

causing the floors to sag, and the walls to quiver. New houses of the modern type were not suitable for Mr. Podge. But he smiled in triumph.

## CHAPTER FIVE.

### RECOVERING THE GOLD!

"It is no good, Mr. Podge—you have failed!" said the managing director of the Imperial Bank. "There is no sign of the gold—the house is empty."

"Leave it to me!" quoth Mr. Podge. "By a process of elimination and marvellous deduction, I have arrived at the truth. You will have observed that there are many large leaden gas-pipes in every room—a most unusual procedure in a new house."

Mr. Podge turned the gas off at the main, removed all the gas fittings, and then turned the main tap once more. And in every room there was a hissing shower of gold deposited upon the floor. For the sudden rush of gas through the open pipes was sufficient to send the hidden gold spurting out in cascades.

Another miraculous triumph for Podge & Midge!



# The Strange Affair at Heather Hall.

A Gripping Mystery Story of the Adventures of  
**NELSON LEE**, the famous Gray's Inn Rd. Detective  
and his able young assistant, **NIPPER**.



## I.

### WELCOMING HARRY BEVERLEY HOME.

**H**EAATHER Hall, in which had been born many a generation of the Beverley family, was a stately and ancient mansion of the Tudor period, densely clothed with ivy, and was situated in one of the loveliest parts of Suffolk. It was on rising ground, and looked outward for a couple of miles, across woods and meadows, to the village of Eastwold.

A stranger going by the Hall, as an October day was drawing to its close, would have lingered for a moment by the massive gates flanked by stone pillars, and passed on wondering at what he had seen.

On the balustraded terrace in front of the dwelling, at the top of the flight of stone steps that led down to the drive and the lawn, Sir Roger Beverley stood leaning on a stick.

He was a handsome old gentleman, big and broad-shouldered, with a florid complexion, and a grey beard and moustache. Gathered near-by were his staff of servants, all of whom had been in his employ for some years.

Beyond the terrace a wide avenue, bordered by trees, ran straight to the gates; and lined along both sides of it were the tenantry of the estate, men and women and children, all in their Sunday best.

It was a great event in a way, that they were waiting to celebrate. At the early age of seven, after the death of his parents, Harry Beverley had come to live with Sir Roger Beverley, whose heir and nephew he was. At Heather Hall he had grown from boyhood to youth, generous and kind-hearted, loved by his uncle, and popular with everybody on the estate. But there was a dormant weakness in his nature. Eton had brought it out, and his career at

Oxford had been cut short by folly and dissipation.

As for his subsequent stay in England, it may be summed up in a few words—chambers in London, and infrequent visits to the country, extravagance far in excess of his allowance, and gambling and other debts which his uncle had again and again paid for him; until at length, his patience utterly exhausted, the old gentleman had banished the reckless youth to South Africa, giving him a sum of money, and urging him to turn over a new leaf.

As the years passed Sir Roger Beverley's sense of loneliness had increased. He had missed his nephew more, and more. Meanwhile, from time to time, he had heard good reports of him, had learned that he was earning an honest livelihood. But he had waited, judging it would be best to do so; and not until recently had he written to the youth, telling him he might return, and all would be forgiven.

To-day, after an absence of five years, the exile was coming home. A telegram had been received from him saying by what train he would arrive at Eastwold, and by now he must be well on his way in the car which had been sent to the station to meet him.

"There it is, sir!" declared William Coombe, the butler.

"I believe it is!" Sir Roger Beverley said eagerly. "Yes, Coombe, you are right!"

A silvery-grey object, dimly visible to the old baronet, had just flashed over the bare crest of a hill a mile distant. It was a motor-car. Dipping down amongst the woods, it was lost to sight for a short interval, and presently it reappeared in the golden glow of the setting sun.

It was very near now. It swerved in at the open gateway, and at a slow pace it



glided up the avenue, while the tenantry cheered loudly, and Harry Beverley smiled and nodded, and raised his hat, as he passed by those who had so hearty a welcome for him.

Emerging from the top of the avenue, the car swung round the gravelled drive and stopped; and the young man, tall and bronzed and clean-shaven, sprang to the ground. He ran up the flight of steps, and the next instant was in the arms of Sir Roger, who held him tightly for a moment, tremulous with emotion.

"My boy!" he said. "My dear boy!"

The tenantry were still cheering. The servants were waiting, telling one another how well the young master looked, and how little he had changed considering he had been for five years in the dry climate of South Africa.

Harry Beverley greeted them, speaking a few words to each, and laughing as he mentioned one of his boyish escapades to the elderly butler. Then he turned to Sir Roger, and put a hand affectionately on his arm.

"I don't know how to thank you," he said, a quiver in his voice. "I can't tell you how I felt, how glad I was, when I got your letter saying that I was to return, and you would forgive me. It was what I had longed for day by day, for months and years, while I was out on the sun-scorched veldt driving an ox-team, or doing other work. I'm not the reckless, thoughtless fellow I used to be. The folly has all been knocked out of me, uncle, and I am going to prove to you that I am worthy of your kindness and forgiveness."

"I'm sure of it," the old baronet answered, in a husky tone. "Yes, I'm quite sure of it. It was for your own good I sent you into exile, but it was a sore trial to me. Never mind about that, though. It is all over, Harry, and you are home again. Back at the old home which some day you will inherit, and will carry on the family line. Come, my boy," he added. "Let us go in."

Uncle and nephew passed into the house, followed by the servants; and the massive door, which had withstood more than one battering in the past, was shut by the butler. The tenants of the estate dispersed, trudging home to their cottages for supper and bed. The air was turning cool now. The sun was below the horizon, and the vivid colouring of the sky was fading to deep violet. The shadows of evening fell, and from the Tudor windows of Heather Hall shone soft lights, and the ruddy glow of blazing fires.

## II.

### ROUSED IN THE NIGHT.

THE weather was glorious, though November had begun. The bracken was golden and brown, and the leaves still clung to the trees garbed in their autumnal colouring, and the air was calm, and mild, and hazy.

Since morning Nelson Lee and his young assistant Nipper had tramped over the many acres of rough shooting which the detective had in the neighbourhood of the village of Eastwold, part of it from the Heather Hall estate.

They had not done badly. Burdened with a mixed bag of which they might be proud, they had returned at the close of the day to their quarters at the White Horse Inn, an ancient and comfortable hostelry some hundreds of yards from the edge of the village.

They had rested for several hours, and eaten a hearty meal in the cosy parlour behind the tap-room, where the firelight was reflected on polished brass and pewter, and on the walls panelled in black oak. And now, their supper finished, they were seated in big armchairs by the fire, Nelson Lee puffing at his pipe, and Nipper poring over a history of Suffolk which he had brought from a bookshelf.

Both were tired, and they were beginning to feel sleepy when they were joined by Sam Hobbledick, the landlord. He was a jovial old fellow, and they were on intimate terms with him, as they had stayed at the inn on previous occasions during the autumn.

They were not particularly pleased to see him at present, however. He was a bit of a bore at times, and, as Lee and the lad expected, he started on a subject of which he had fully spoken to his guests twice before.

"As I was saying this morning," he remarked, as he dropped into a chair, "it was a great event in these parts when young Harry Beverley came back from abroad a month ago. It was a rare welcome he had. A rare welcome, Mr. Lee, him being Sir Roger's heir and nephew."

The whole story was repeated—the youth's harmless escapades as a boy, the trouble he had got into at Oxford, and the reckless and extravagant life he had led in London; his banishment to South Africa, and his return to Heather Hall, his sins forgiven, after an absence of five years.

"Everybody was glad to see him," the landlord rattled on, "and especially his uncle, who had missed him sorely. Sir Roger looks a young man, and he gets more about than he did. As for young Harry, he's just the same in his ways, with a smile and a nod for everyone. He hasn't changed much since he left home, only his face seems to be a trifle harder, which I daresay is due to the climate out there in South Africa."

"I daresay it is," assented Nelson Lee, who had with difficulty kept awake. "Your conversation," he added, "is as soporific as your sound ale."

"That's a new word to me, sir," said Sam Hobbledick, scratching his head. "You're not meaning that my beer tastes soapy are you?"



"No, Sam, certainly not. And now we will be off to bed. We have had a long day of it, and both of us are tired."

"I see you are, Mr. Lee. I shouldn't have kept you sitting up so late."

Rising as he spoke, the landlord left the room, and returned with two lighted candles. He gave them to his guests, and, bidding him good-night, they ascended the stairs to their bed-chamber, a large and cheerful apartment with white curtains at the windows. It contained two beds, and in the space of a few minutes Nipper and his master had pulled off their clothes, crawled beneath the blankets, and fallen asleep.

Roused by somebody tugging at his arms, Nelson Lee awoke with a start and sat up. It was still dark, but he could dimly see the lad bending over him.

"What is it?" he muttered drowsily.

"I've been calling to you," Nipper replied. "Listen! do you hear?"

"I hear something. It's a horse, isn't it?"

"Yes, and galloping like mad. There must be something wrong, guv'nor."

"I shouldn't wonder, my boy. But it doesn't concern us. You needn't have roused me."

Thoroughly awake now, Nelson Lee rose, and he and the lad hastened to a window. They raised the sash, and thrust their heads out. Below them was the front entrance to the White Horse, over which a lamp was burning dimly, and from the left a rapid clatter of hoofs sounded in their ears. The sound drew nearer and nearer and louder and louder; and soon a black horse, moving now at a trot, stopped by the doorway of the inn. A youth was mounted on it, and at once he looked up at the window, where he could see the two heads by the dim glow from the lamp.

"Be you Mr. Nelson Lee, sir?" he asked.

"Yes, that's right," the detective replied.

"Who are you? What do you want?"

"I'm one of the stable boys from Heather Hall, sir, and Sir Roger Beverley wishes to see you most urgent. His car is being repaired, so he sent me."

"And what is wrong at the Hall?"

"I don't know, sir. Something has happened; but the master didn't say what it was. He only told me to fetch you, as he needed your help."

"Very well. Go back and tell your master that we will arrive shortly."

"Right you are, sir. I'll tell him."

With that the youth wheeled his steed around, and rode away in the direction from which he had come. Meanwhile the other inmates of the house had been roused from sleep, and could be heard stirring. Nelson Lee lighted one of the candles, and by the time he and Nipper had got into their clothes, and gone downstairs, Sam Hobbledick had opened the front door, and was

standing there with the potman and a maid.

"I heard a horseman stop outside, Mr. Lee," the landlord exclaimed. "Were you talking to him from a window?"

"Yes, he was a youth from the Hall," Lee replied.

Having explained matters in a few words, he and Nipper hurried around one side of the building to a shed in which their car was garaged; and shortly afterwards they went spinning by the inn and disappeared in the darkness that shrouded the road, wondering why Sir Roger Beverley had sent so urgent a message.

"I daresay there has been a burglary, guv'nor," the lad remarked.

"Very likely," Nelson Lee answered. "I don't suppose it is anything more serious. It is curious that the stable boy did not know what had happened, though."

They had no idea what the time was, nor could they tell, for in their haste both had left their watches on the dressing-table. It was to be presumed that the stable-boy would reach Heather Hall first, for, as Lee had observed from the window, he had come and gone by a country-lane that was nearly opposite to the White Horse, and was hardly more than a bridle-path. The youth had taken the short cut, while Nelson Lee and Nipper were on a main road that circled round the village to the west before it ran straight to the Hall.

It was such a thick, black night that they did not drive very fast. They had rather more than two miles to go, and they had covered half the distance when Lee, perceiving a vague object in front applied the brake, and stopped the car with a jerk. The flaming lamps shone on, and revealed as clearly as if by the light of day, the figure of a man who was less than a dozen yards ahead, and was hobbling across the road with a stick in his hand.

He was evidently a tramp, ragged and filthy, with a stubbly growth of beard and moustache. His tattered boots were tied to his feet with string, and he had lost the heel from one of them, which caused him to limp.

He did not glance to either side of him. Hobbling on as quickly as he could, he melted into the darkness, and was heard scrambling through a hedge as the car rolled past the spot.

"It's a queer hour of the night for a tramp to be prowling about," said Nipper.

Lee shrugged his shoulders. "I daresay the fellow has slept under a hay-rick all day," he replied, "and he is seeking for a chance of stealing a duck or a chicken from some farmhouse."

They gave no further thought to the incident, though they were to recall it later. They went swiftly on, and a few minutes later they drove through the gateway of Heather Hall, and up the avenue and round to the terrace at the front of the stately



old mansion. All was quiet, but lights shone at several windows on the ground-floor.

"There has been a burglary, I imagine," said Lee, as he got out of the car.

He and Nipper ascended the steps, and as they were crossing the terrace, the door was opened by William Coombe, the butler, who bade them make no noise, and then led them around the hall and into the library, where Sir Roger Beverley was pacing to and fro, in a dressing-gown and slippers. He was quite calm, but to the detective's keen gaze it was obvious that he was labouring under intense agitation.

"It was very good of you to come, Mr. Lee," he said, shaking hands with him. "I am sorry to have troubled you. It is fortunate that you and your young assistant were staying at the White Horse, as I happened to know, for I am afraid I shall require your assistance. My nephew, Harry Beverley, is missing."

"Missing?" Nelson Lee repeated in amazement. "Do you mean that he has disappeared?"

"I hope not," said Sir Roger. "I don't know what to think, as the circumstances are so extraordinary. I will briefly tell you the whole story, and you can judge for yourself."

"I retired between ten and eleven o'clock, and some hours later I awoke, and could not get to sleep again. Knowing that I had one of my infrequent attacks of insomnia, I rose, and turned on the lamp on my reading table. I looked at my watch and saw that the time was a quarter past two."

I partly dressed, and was about to settle down to read when I heard from below a noise that was like a door being drawn softly shut. I stepped to a window, and by what dim light there was—the moon was sinking below the horizon—I observed my nephew crossing the lawn parallel with the house. He wore a tweed suit and cap, and he had nothing in his hands.

He disappeared in the shrubbery, in the direction of a small gate leading to a foot-path which crosses my estate; and soon afterwards I heard the gate opened and closed, and knew that Harry had gone through it.

"I was puzzled and uneasy. I hurried to my nephew's bedchamber. He was not there, but his bed had been slept in. I could not imagine why the boy should have got up and dressed and gone out at such an hour. I went down to the library, and for three or four hours I sat here by a window, watching for Harry to return."

"And, finally, being greatly alarmed, I roused the butler. He sent one of the stable-boys over to the White Horse with a message for you, and a few moments ago the youth returned, and told me that you would arrive shortly. Such are the facts, Mr. Lee. I can throw no light on the

mystery. My nephew is still absent, and

The old baronet paused. "And now the night is over," he added, pointing to a window. "There is the first flush of dawn on the sky. What can have become of Harry?"

William Coombe, who had been standing by the door, shook his head gravely. Sir Roger Beverley sank into a chair, and gazed pleadingly at the detective.

"Find my boy, Mr. Lee, and relieve my anxiety," he urged, his features twitching with emotion. "It will be a terrible blow to me if anything has happened to him."

Nelson Lee's brows were knit in conjecture. Though the affair was as mysterious to him as it was to the baronet, he was not inclined to take a serious view of it. A vague idea, something in the nature of a clue to the problem, had already occurred to him.

"Before you heard the door below click shut," he said, "did you hear any other noise?"

"Nothing at all," Sir Roger declared.

"How long had you been awake at the time?" Nelson Lee continued.

"For less than five minutes, I should think. No more than that."

"It would seem, from the fact that your nephew slept in his bed, that when he retired last night he had no intention of getting up at or about two o'clock."

"I agree with you, Mr. Lee. Why did he get up?"

"That is the vital question. By the way, in what part of the house is his bedchamber situated? At the front?"

"Yes, at the front, and to the left of the main entrance."

"Did your nephew receive a letter or a message in the course of yesterday?" Nelson Lee inquired.

"He has not had a letter since he came back from South Africa, a month ago," Sir Roger Beverley answered, "and if a message had been delivered for him I should have known of it. I am sure there was none."

"Has he at any time appeared to be depressed, as if there was some worry on his mind?"

"Not on any occasion, Mr. Lee. He has always been cheerful, and at dinner last night he was in the brightest spirits. He has been at home since his return, and he and I have been almost constantly together. He had nothing to worry him. He has no debts, and I don't believe he has spent what money I have given him. So why should he have gone off like this, in the middle of the night, as if on a sudden impulse? It is beyond my comprehension, yet I fear there is some sinister explanation of—"

The baronet's voice faltered. "Find him, Mr. Lee!" he begged. "Find my boy!"

"Calm yourself," Nelson Lee bade. "I



don't think there is much ground for alarm. I want you to tell me one thing more. Of what length is the footpath you have mentioned, and where does it lead to?"

"It crosses the estate for half a mile," Sir Roger replied, "and ends at a road which leads on a roundabout course to the village of Eastwold."

Nelson Lee briefly considered. "I am glad you sent for me," he said to the baronet. "It is an interesting case, one that strongly appeals to me. Nipper and I will go at once in search of the missing young man, and we will take the butler with us, to show us the way. As you cannot sleep, of course, you had better get dressed, and have something to eat, and a cup of black coffee."

"Don't distress yourself, Sir Roger," he added. "The fact that your nephew has disappeared under such mysterious circumstances does not necessarily give rise to apprehension in regard to him. He may return during our absence, and if not, we shall probably bring him back with us."

### III.

#### A GRIM DISCOVERY.

THE rest of the servants were asleep, unaware of what had happened, when Nelson Lee left Heather Hall with William Coombe and Nipper. A pale glow was quivering above the horizon, but it was still fairly dark. The detective, who had brought his electric torch with him, first played the golden beam on the terrace beneath the window of Harry Beverley's bedchamber, and on the lawn and the drive opposite to them.

"What are you looking for?" the lad asked curiously.

"Footprints," Lee absently replied. "There aren't any visible, though. The ground is too hard and dry."

"Whose footprints? Have you been trying to pick up the trail of Sir Roger's nephew?"

"No I wasn't thinking of him. Let the matter rest at that, my boy."

Bearing to the right, Nelson Lee and his companions entered the shrubbery and made their way for a number of yards to a small gate in the hedge, beyond which was the footpath that Sir Roger Beverley had spoken of. It was a narrow and winding one, and ran between dense woods.

Lee was worried, in spite of the encouragement he had given Sir Roger, for what he had learned at the Hall had planted in his mind slender suspicion: that were of a sinister and disturbing nature. They were almost incredible, yet he could not banish them.

He walked in front of the others, moving slowly and alertly, now flashing his torch on the hard surface of the path, and now into the borders of the woods to right and left.

"It's strange the young master should have gone this way, sir, as he must have done," William Coombe remarked.

Lee did not answer. He pressed on in silence, and presently he slipped his torch into his pocket; for the soft colours of the dawn had been spreading gradually over the sky and it was now almost fully daylight. Having gone for another couple of hundred yards, and turned a sharp angle of the path, the little party found themselves on the main road.

And at once they perceived close to the left of them the prostrate and motionless figure of a man, and an agitated constable who had a brace of pheasants in one hand and in the other a large handkerchief of gaudy colours such as rustics are fond of using. West was his name, and he knew who the detective was, having seen him on several occasions at the White Horse at Eastwold.

"There's been murder, Mr. Lee!" he called to him. "Foul and cruel murder!"

"Who has been killed?" Nelson Lee exclaimed, as he hastened forward. "Sir Roger Beverley's nephew?"

"Yes, it's young Mr. Harry has been done to death!" declared the constable.

"The young master murdered!" cried William Coombe. "Oh, what a shock it will be to Sir Roger! What a terrible shock!"

Lee and his companions were silent, struck dumb with horror, while they gazed around them, and took in the whole scene at a sweeping glance. At one side of the road was a wooded hill that sloped gently upwards, and on the other side was a deep plantation.

At the edge of it was a shallow ditch that was dry, and in this, lying flat on his back, was the dead body of a young man with clean-shaven features. His head was resting on a stone. There were bruises on his face and brow, one of them obviously caused by a blow from a blunt weapon, and his pockets were turned inside out. Nipper was struck with awe, and the butler was so distressed that tears trickled down his cheeks.

"It's not five minutes since I made the discovery, sir," Constable West said to the detective. "I had been a long round of duty during the night, and I was on my way back to Eastwold when—"

"Wait a moment!" Nelson Lee interrupted.

His features cold and stern, he bent over the corpse, and thoroughly and closely examined it, shifting it from one position to another.

"The poor fellow has been dead for some hours," he said, as he stood erect. "He was attacked by one or more men—there were probably two—and a heavy blow from one of them hurled him into the ditch, where he struck the back of his head on that big stone, and fractured his skull. And then,



finding they had killed him, his assailants rifled his pockets and took to flight."

Lee paused for a moment.

"You have stated that you were on duty all night, West," he said. "Did you meet any person on your round?"

"No, sir, I didn't meet anybody," the constable replied. "I was on my way back to the village, as I was going to tell you, when I discovered the murder."

"What are you doing with the brace of pheasants and that coloured handkerchief?" Lee asked.

"I picked up the pheasants in the ditch, sir. As for the handkerchief, it was caught on that clump of bushes a little way along the road, and unless I am greatly mistaken it is going to hang a man I know."

"Indeed? Who is the man?"

"He is Ben Lockett, sir. He lives with his old father in a cottage half a mile from here, in the direction of the village. He works on a farm by day, and at night he goes poaching. He has been imprisoned for it once or twice."

"This is his handkerchief, West?"

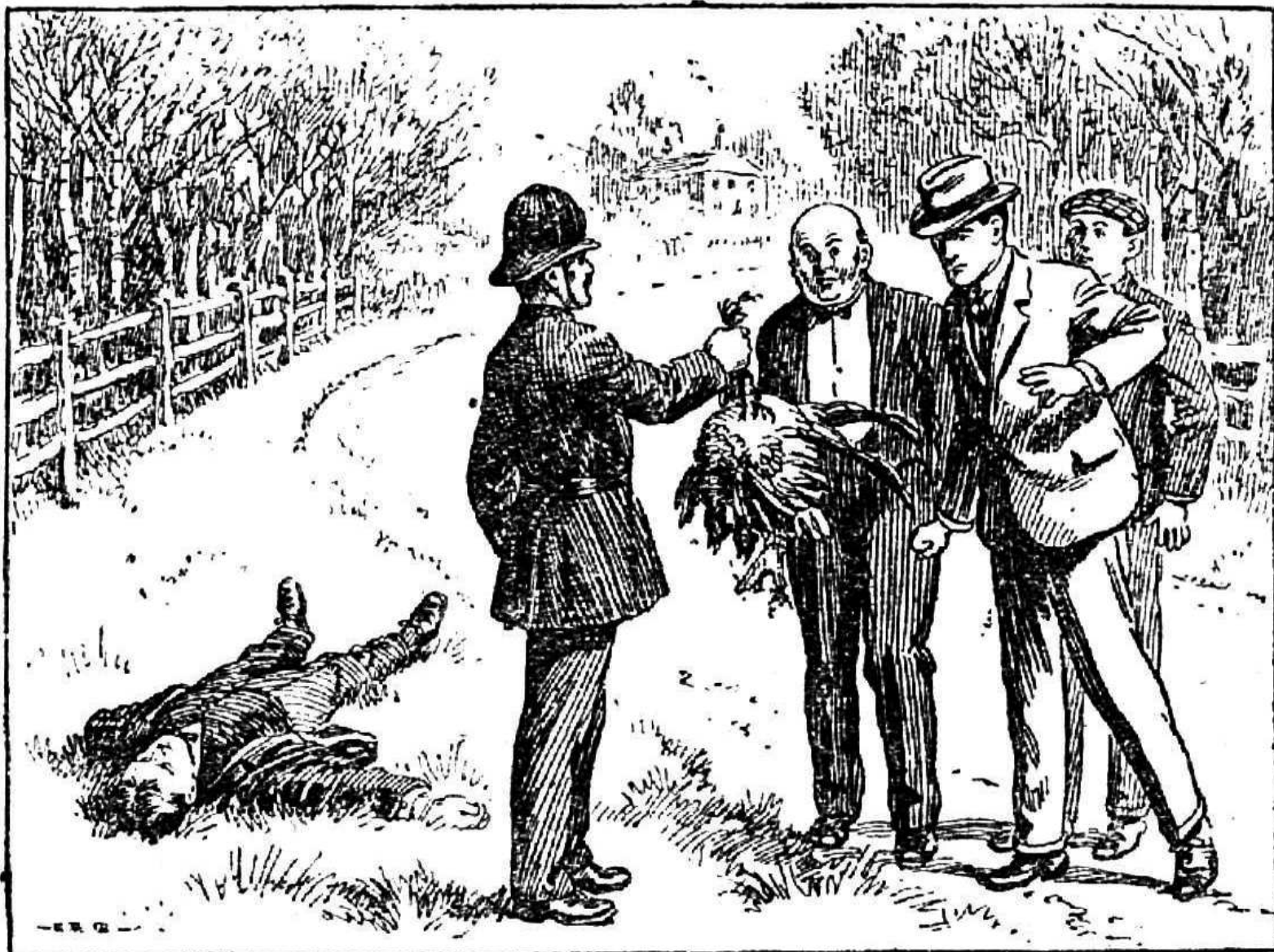
"It is, sir. I can swear to that, and I am certain it was he who killed young Beverley."

"Have you any other reason for thinking so?"

"I have, Mr. Lee, and a good one. I'll tell you in a few words what it is. Nearly six years ago, when Harry Beverley was staying at the Hall, he got kind of friendly with a pretty girl named Peggy Marsh, who was engaged to Ben Lockett. He didn't mean any harm to her. He wasn't that kind, to give him his due. But he turned the girl's head, and after he was sent out to South Africa she wouldn't have anything more to do with Lockett. She broke with him, and went into service at Brandon, and married somebody there. Ever since Ben Lockett has had a grudge against young Beverley, and he was heard to speak of it only a day or so ago. So there you are!"

Constable West slapped his thigh, and looked triumphantly at the detective. Nipper nodded. William Coombe was fairly shaking with excitement and passion.

"You're right!" he cried. "You're right."



"It's not five minutes since I made the discovery, sir," constable West said to the detective.

West! I've heard the tale, and I know myself that Ben Lockett has been vindictive towards the young master because of Peggy Marsh. What happened is clear enough. Lockett had been poaching last night, and he slipped out of the woods, with some pheasants he had snared, just as Harry Beverley came along. He quarrelled with him, raking up the past, and hot words led to a fight. Then Lockett, who was the stronger of the two, knocked the young master down in the ditch, and killed him. And in mad terror, realising what he had done, he fled in such haste that he left the pheasants behind him, and lost his handkerchief."

"I reckon that's just how it was, Coombe," the constable assented.

"Of course it is. The handkerchief will hang Lockett. You must arrest him without delay."

"Yes, if he's at home. As likely as not he isn't."

Nelson Lee was inclined to agree with Constable West and the butler, and so he was as far as related to the murder. He said as much, remarking that the circumstantial evidence against Ben Lockett was as strong as it could be. But he was thinking of something else, of a problem which he did not mention.

Having given the constable a brief explanation, telling him what had occurred at the Hall, and had brought him here at this early hour with William Coombe and his young assistant, Lee began to investigate on his own account.



He searched the edge of the plantation, and discovered dim footprints pointing towards the scene of the crime. He could perceive none on the road, which had a hard and flinty surface, but on crossing to the other side of it he noticed a single footprint which was as faint as the others. To his keen eyes it seemed to differ from them. He disappeared into the trees and shrubbery at the base of the hill, where he could be heard moving about; and when he returned, after an absence of ten minutes, there was a curious expression on his face.

"I'm not so sure now as to Ben Lockett's guilt," he said quietly. "There was somebody else here. I found on the hillside yonder at a damp spot, the distinct imprint of a pair of boots. They were made by large and clumsy boots, and one of them had no sole."

"No sole?" repeated Nipper. "Then the person must have been the ragged tramp we saw as we were driving to the Hall."

"I should say so, my boy. Doubtless he was."

"Do you think we could follow his trail, guv'nor?"

"I dare say we could, but what would be the use? It must have been some hours after the murder when we saw the tramp. It would be difficult for us to find him, as he is probably not in that neighbourhood now."

In a few words Nelson Lee described the incident to William Coombe and the constable, asserting that the tramp had been on the road near the spot where the unfortunate young man had been killed, and that he had subsequently ascended the wooded hill. A discussion ensued, and different views were expressed.

"It may be that the tramp did the murder," Nelson Lee continued, "and rifled his victim's pockets before he fled to the shelter of the woods. Ben Lockett afterwards came out of the plantation, and, having discovered the crime, he hastily took to flight because he was afraid he would be suspected."

"Or it may be the other way round, sir," said William Coombe. "More likely Lockett committed the murder, and after he had fled, the tramp found the young master's body, and robbed him."

"Lockett is the guilty party," the constable doggedly declared. "That's my belief, and you can't shake it. Here's his handkerchief, and here are the pheasants he dropped when he attacked young Beverley."

"I am inclined to that opinion myself, West," said Nelson Lee. "The evidence is much stronger against Lockett than against the tramp, who I dare say came later on the scene. But there is one point, and a striking one, which I have not yet raised. Why did Harry Beverley get out of bed at about two o'clock in the night, dress himself, and quietly leave the house? Why did

he come across the estate by the footpath, and where was he going when he met his death? That he could not have had an appointment with Ben Lockett you must admit."

"I haven't given much thought to that, sir," the butler replied, in a puzzled tone. "It's very strange, isn't it? I can't account for it."

"Nor can I," said Constable West, shaking his head. "It's a queer business. What is your opinion, Mr. Lee?"

Nelson Lee merely shrugged his shoulders. "Come along," he bade; "we are wasting time here. We had better go at once to Ben Lockett's home, and arrest him on suspicion."

Nipper, who had not joined in the conversation, shared the views of the others. He had no doubt of the farm labourer's guilt. He could see that his master was puzzled by the point he had raised, however, and he was pretty sure there would be some sensational and unexpected development of the case. It was now broad daylight. For three or four hundred yards the little party of four held along the road, and of a sudden, as they were passing the mouth of a narrow lane on the left, Nelson Lee stopped.

"Look," he said, "here are the dim tyre-marks of a car that went in and out."

"And what of it, sir?" Constable West inquired.

"I don't know," Lee replied. "It is possible that the discovery will be of some value. We will see."

With his companions at his heels he entered the lane, and when he had followed the tyre-marks for twenty yards or so he paused and pointed to the ground. What he meant was obvious. The car had stopped here, presumably in the night; and, after a long or a short interval, it had turned round and gone back in the direction from which it had come which was towards London.

"I don't understand this, sir," remarked William Coombe.

"Nor do I," the constable answered. "The lane leads to a field yonder, and ends there. The persons who were in the car might have driven in here by mistake, but if so why did they return as they had come, in the direction of the village?"

"That's the question, and it is an interesting one," said Nelson Lee. "There were at least two men in the car, I imagine. They left it here, for some reason, and went off."

"And where do you suppose they were during their absence, sir?" Constable West inquired.

Nelson Lee did not answer the question. He stood for a few seconds in deep thought, a keen sparkle in his eyes. What puzzled the others, Nipper included, was not much of a mystery to him. He had been hoping to pick up a clue, and he had discovered one, which, he felt, strengthened the vague



theory he had previously formed. Yet it did not alter his mind in regard to the murder of Harry Beverley. He was still inclined to believe that the crime had been committed by either the tramp or the poacher.

"We need not bother about the car," he said at length. "Not until we have arrested Ben Lockett, at all events. That we must do without delay."

#### IV.

##### THE DISAPPEARANCE OF BEN LOCKETT.

NELSON LEE and his companions retraced their steps to the road, and a brisk walk of half a mile brought them to a small, ivy-clothed cottage with a strip of garden in front of it. They walked quickly up the garden path, and as they reached the door it was opened by an elderly, bearded man, who gazed at the visitors in surprise. The man was George Lockett. He knew William Coombe and the constable, but Nipper and the detective were strangers to him.

"What does this mean, West?" he asked, as he led the party into a plainly furnished sitting-room.

"We've come on unpleasant business," Constable West replied. "We want to see your son; where is he?"

"I—I don't know," faltered the old man, showing some apprehension.

"He went poaching last night. Didn't he come home afterwards?"

"Yes, he did. I heard him come in. He woke me up, and I fell asleep again. Ben isn't here now, though. I missed him when I rose this morning. He must have gone out soon after he returned, for his bed hasn't been slept in. I suppose you saw him poaching, West, and he has disappeared because he was afraid of being arrested."

"He was afraid of more than that," the constable said grimly. "Did he take any spare clothes with him?"

"Only what he was wearing," George Lockett answered. "He hasn't any others."

"Did he wake you to say he was going? Or did he leave any written message for you?"

"No, he didn't do either."

"Don't try to deceive me, George!"

"I'm not. I've told you the simple truth."

Constable West produced the coloured handkerchief.

"This belonged to your son, I believe," he said.

"Yes, it does," George Lockett assented.

"I don't deny it. But what's the trouble? Why have you brought all these people with you? Is—is it something worse than poaching?"

"Yes, much worse. I have to tell you, George, that your son has committed a cruel murder."

"My boy has? A murder? It can't be possible!"

"There can't be any doubt about it. You knew that Ben had a grudge against Sir Roger Beverley's nephew, of course. Well, he met young Harry in the night near the footpath that leads to the Hall, and there was a fight between the two. Harry Beverley was knocked down. He fell into the ditch by the roadside, and was killed by striking the back of his head on a stone. Your son fled in such haste that he dropped a brace of pheasants he had snared, and lost his handkerchief."

"I found them at the scene of the murder less than an hour ago, and at the same time Coombe came along from the Hall with these people, who are Mr. Nelson Lee, the London detective, and his young assistant. They are staying at the White Horse, over at the village, and Sir Roger Beverley sent for them because he had discovered that his nephew was missing."

"Good Heavens, is it so bad as that? My boy a murderer! I can't believe it. West! There must be some mistake! It is true that Ben had a grudge against young Beverley, but I'm sure he wouldn't have harmed him! I can't believe he is guilty!"

"Then why has he disappeared, George?"

"I don't know! It looks suspicious, I'll admit! It—it will make my heart—"

The old man's voice faltered and choked. From what he had been told he could not have faith in his son's innocence. He dropped heavily into a chair, and sat there trembling with anguish, while tears streamed down his pallid cheeks. It was a pitiful sight, and all were deeply moved.

"It's a queer case," Constable West said in a low tone to the detective. "Ben Lockett's flight is proof of his guilt."

"Yes, I am afraid so," Nelson Lee replied. "There doesn't seem to be much room for doubt."

"If he had merely discovered the body he wouldn't have disappeared, would he?"

"No, West; I should say not. But remember that circumstantial evidence is not always reliable, no matter how strong it may be."

"It is reliable enough in this case, Mr. Lee, and you know it."

The cottage was thoroughly searched, on the chance that the young man might be hidden somewhere; and then, leaving old George Lockett in great distress, Lee and his companion took their departure, and paused on the road.

"I am going on to the village with the constable and my boy," Nelson Lee said to the butler. "I want you to return to the Hall, and break the sad news to Sir Roger Beverley."

"Very well, sir," William Coombe reluctantly assented. "But I dread the thought of it. It will be the hardest thing I have ever had to do, Mr. Lee."

He turned in the direction of Heather Hall, walking slowly; and Nelson Lee, with



Nipper and Constable West, pushed rapidly on to the village of Eastwold, and then to the police-station. Inspector Basham was on duty, and he was acquainted with the London detective, who held a short and private conversation with him. He told the whole story, touching briefly on the various details, and the inspector listened aghast.

"What a terribly tragic affair it is!" he exclaimed, when he had learned all. He had never had anything like it before in this part of the country! "That fellow Lockett is guilty, of course."

"It would seem so," Nelson Lee murmured.

"I'll have him sought for," Inspector Basham declared. "He is probably miles away by now, though. As for the tramp, I don't suppose it matters about him."

"I should like him to be found also. I will see to that."

"You can have all the assistance you want, Mr. Lee. By the way, do you attach any importance to the mysterious motor-car you have told me of?"

"I would like to know why it was left in that lonely lane, and who the occupants of it were. That is all."

"And what about Harry Beverley? How do you account for his leaving the house at that hour of the night?"

"I have a dim sort of a theory, Basham, I won't speak of it now, however."

The inspector nodded, and glanced at his watch. "I shall be engaged until twelve o'clock, when I will be at your service," he said. "The first thing will be to have the poor fellow's body brought to the village. I will send a couple of my men for it in a car in less than half an hour, and you can go with them if you like."

"Very well," Nelson Lee replied. "I wish to get back to the Hall as soon as possible. Meanwhile, I'll have something to eat," he added as he rose from his chair. "I shan't be long."

It was some distance to the White Horse, so Lee and Nipper had a hasty breakfast at a small hotel in the village, and returned to the police-station to find the car waiting. They drove with the two constables—one of whom was West—to the scene of the murder, and from there they walked on by the foot-path to Heather Hall. William Coombe opened the door to them and took them to the library, where Sir Roger Beverley was huddled in a big chair by a blazing fire. He seemed to have aged by years, and there was a dull lustre in his eyes as he looked on. He had partly recovered from the first shock of the news, and now was in a sort of a numb state, aware of the loss he had suffered, yet not acutely sensible to it.

"My boy!" he said in a piteous tone. "My poor Harry! They say he has been murdered! Is it true? Must I believe it?"

"Yes, I fear you must," Nelson Lee softly replied. "You have my deepest sympathy, Sir Roger. I wish it was in my power to comfort you."

"You can't. Nobody can. This blow will break my heart. But one thing you can do for me, Mr. Lee. Find that scoundrel, Lockett, and bring him to justice."

"I haven't much doubt that he will soon be found. He cannot elude arrest very long, as a description of him will be widely circulated."

"I hope not. Do your best, please. Spare no expense. I am not vindictive, Mr. Lee, but it will be some consolation to me if that ruthless scoundrel who murdered my nephew is caught and—"

The old gentleman's voice faltered, and he sat gazing into the leaping flames, mumbling to himself, his haggard face twitching with emotion.

"My boy!" he whispered. "My boy Harry!"

Nelson Lee and Nipper left him, and, accompanied by William Coombe, they went up to Harry Beverley's bedchamber, and thoroughly searched it. They found nothing, however, to throw any light on the young man's mysterious departure after retiring to bed. They descended the stairs and passed out of the house, and a few moments later they were spinning along the road in their car, bound for the village.

"It strikes me, guv'nor," the lad remarked, "that you are more interested in the men who were in that motor-car than in anybody else."

"It is a complicated case, my boy," Nelson Lee replied, rousing from a reverie, "and sensational developments are to be expected."

And that was all he would say on the subject.

## V.

### THE SQUIRE'S EXTRAORDINARY VISION.

**T**HOUGH Nelson Lee had a theory of his own, a suspicion which he kept to himself, he was most anxious, for a reason which he did not divulge to his young assistant, that both Ben Lockett and the tramp should be found.

Of the young poacher news was speedily forthcoming. It was learned that very early in the morning, several hours after the murder had been committed, he had travelled up to London from a station a couple of miles to the south of Eastwold, and the local police promptly communicated with Scotland Yard, sending an accurate description of the fugitive to Inspector Lennard, the detective's friend.

The search for Ben Lockett was pursued in London, and meanwhile Nelson Lee and Nipper drove about the surrounding country in their car, in a widening radius, making numerous inquiries. They stuck to their task for a day, and part of another; and on the afternoon of the second day they arrived at the Eastwold police-station, with the tramp, whom they had found sleeping in a



barn. He was a dull-witted old fellow, and the statements he made in the presence of Inspector Basham were to be believed.

Berry was his name, he said, and on the night of the murder, having stumbled on the body of Harry Beverley, and perceived that he had been killed by violence, he had taken to flight lest he should get into trouble.

Such was the tramp's story, and when he had told it he was discharged, but told to keep in the neighbourhood.

No news had yet been received from Scotland Yard, and that evening, after they had had their supper, Lee and the lad came from the White Horse to the police-station, and sat with the inspector in his private room. Inspector Basham was

in an inquisitive mood. He had been led to think that the detective had some secret theory of his own, something relating to the mysterious motor-car, and he tried tactfully to get it from him. But Lee was not to be drawn. He carefully evaded the questions that were put to him, and now and again led the conversation into a different channel, while he puffed serenely at his pipe.

"As there is nothing for me to do down here at present," he said at length, "Nipper and I will go shooting to-morrow. I have a spare gun, Basham, if you should care to—"

He was interrupted by a call at the telephone. The inspector rose and stepped to the instrument. He conversed with somebody for a short interval, listening most of the time; and when he dropped the receiver, and turned round, there was a strange look in his eyes.



**Sir Roger Beverley was standing by a window, all of a tremble, his hand convulsively clutching the back of a chair. He declared afterwards that he had seen the ghost of his dead nephew cross the lawn, and suddenly disappear in the shrubbery.**

"The most amazing thing has happened at Heather Hall!" he exclaimed. "I have been talking to William Coombe. His master called to him loudly, and he hastened to the library. Sir Roger Beverley was standing by a window, all of a tremble, his hands convulsively clutching the back of a chair. He could not speak coherently at first, but he finally declared that he had seen the ghost of his dead nephew cross the lawn, and suddenly disappear in the shrubbery. When the butler told him it must have been a delusion he grew very angry, and insisted that he was right. What do you think of it, Lee?"

Nelson Lee sprang to his feet. There was a flush on his usually colourless features, and that flush was a sign of suppressed excitement.

"Come, we will be off at once," he said. "We will hasten to the White Horse, and get my car. I must have a talk with Sir Roger about his delusion."

THE END.

**CAN YOU SOLVE THE MYSTERY OF HARRY BEVERLEY?**

**Prizes offered—see next page!**

**The Solution of the Problem will be Unfolded NEXT WEEK!**



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MY DEAR READERS,

I hope as many of you as possible will enter for our Problem Story Competition this week. Some of you may have quite wonderful deductions to offer, but you are afraid that when you put them down on paper, mistakes in spelling, or grammar, will not give you a chance. Let me assure you at once that this is not an English essay competition. It is a test of your detective abilities, and so long as you make your meaning perfectly clear you need not worry about literary composition. In selecting the prize-winners my first consideration will

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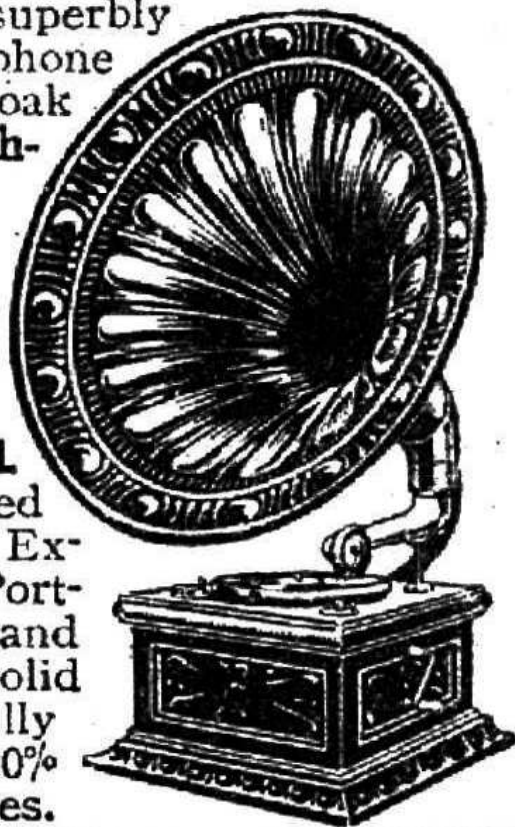


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