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## GOADED TO REVOLT!



The moving stream of water caught the mistress amidships, so to speak. She was lifted bodily for about two yards, and hit the wall with rather more force than was pleasant.

# GOADED TO REVOLT!

A rousing story of the great "Barring-Out" series, in which the boys of St. Frank's are driven to revolt against the new regime of Petticoat Rule, introduced by Miss Jane Trumble, the recently elected chairman of the school governors.

Abounding in rich humour and lively incidents, the stories of this exceptionally fine series stand

supreme as the best modern examples of school life and adventure fiction.

**(RELATED THROUGHOUT BY NIPPER)**

## CHAPTER I.

### THE ALARM!

**W**REATHS of thick, whitish smoke curled insidiously under the door.

And Miss Jane Trumble, the Headmistress of St. Frank's College, sat at her little writing-desk, totally unconscious of the strange phenomenon. As a matter of fact, she had her back to the door, and was very busy with her pen.

The hour was late.

The great public school was asleep—or should have been asleep. Long since the juniors and the seniors had retired for the night. The domestic staff had finished its daily labours.

Miss Trumble was not usually engaged in letter-writing at this hour—which was fairly close upon midnight. But she didn't feel sleepy to-night, and she wanted to get the writing off her mind.

The fellows would have been somewhat startled if they could have seen Miss Trumble just now.

She was, in the words of Reggie Pitt, not exactly an oil-painting at the best of times. Miss Trumble was big, angular, and bony. She always dressed in a very prim fashion,

with a high neck and long sleeves. There was something about Miss Trumble which reminded one of a wardress.

But now she was very different.

She was attired in a long, flowing dressing-gown of wool, and carpet slippers encased her feet. Her hair was in a somewhat extraordinary condition, being smothered with curious pins and wisps of paper. To be quite truthful, Miss Trumble was a sight.

But what did it matter? She was quite alone, and there was practically no prospect of anybody seeing her.

And the wreaths of smoke continued to curl under the door.

Miss Trumble was still ignorant of that remarkable circumstance. She sat back after a few moments, and selected a cough lozenge from a little box on the desk. She smiled pleasantly—at all events, she smiled as pleasantly as her face would allow.

She was thinking of her triumph.

Only a brief week or so earlier she had descended upon St. Frank's like a cyclone. Elected to the position of Chairman of the Board of Governors, she had come down to the school to look round.

And she had arrived in the middle of a public flogging—when Dr. Malcolm Stafford



had been busy with the birch. And Miss Trumble had been horrified. The idea of corporal punishment was absolutely opposed to all her ideals. She regarded it as brutal and debasing.

Not that Miss Trumble was kind-hearted or excessively soft. It was her pet theory that schoolboys should be dealt with in a different manner. Instead of canings and birchings, she favoured sentences of bread-and-water for a day, and such-like atrocities.

Most of the juniors preferred a couple of good, swift strokes of the cane to a hundred lines. It was a somewhat laborious task to do an imposition—but a caning was over in a minute, and the smart didn't last long.

Miss Trumble had been up in arms with the Head. And in her excitement she had commanded him to cease. Anyhow, Dr. Stafford, humiliated before the school, had resigned.

And because Miss Trumble refused to apologise, every other master in the school resigned, too. Even Nelson Lee had gone. The masters had believed that strong action of that sort would bring Miss Trumble to her senses.

It didn't.

She accepted the resignations, and immediately engaged lady teachers in their places! Such a thing as this was unprecedented—well-nigh unbelievable. Yet it had happened.

At first the school—particularly the junior school—had been up in arms. There had been talk of a revolt. But Fenton, the popular captain of the school, had put a swift stop to all that kind of thing. Fenton had pointed out the humour of the situation—he had made the fellows realise that the position was not serious, but funny.

And for a day or two the school enjoyed the joke.

But now, however, the flavour was becoming somewhat unpalatable. Many of the juniors couldn't see where the joke came in. Miss Trumble had made many unpopular changes. Football was banned—forbidden! Football was too rough—it was a game fit only for hooligans. And the delightful pastime of net-ball—usually enjoyed by girls—was substituted.

So far there had been no actual game of net-ball, but it was certainly coming. Miss Trumble was a determined sort of person.

Another institution which filled the juniors with wrath was a big curtailment of the evenings. Instead of going to bed at nine-thirty, they were packed off at eight. And supper was a thing of the past.

It was all very well for Fenton to describe the affair as a joke. It made very little difference to him—being a Sixth-Former and a prefect. It was the Remove that felt the greatest effect of these changes.

Miss Trumble had other ideas, too. She pondered over them as she sat in her bedroom, with the finished letter in front of her. And she sighed with contentment. Upon the whole, she felt that her triumph was complete.

There had been one or two unpleasant little affairs, it is true. Some of the younger boys were very high-spirited, and they needed a great deal of quelling. But she intended to quell them. And she would not use a cane, either.

At this point in her thoughts Miss Trumble lifted her head and sniffed.

She sniffed sharply, and half-turned, gazing at the fireplace. There was a cheerful blaze in the grate, but not the slightest sign of any smoke. Yet Miss Trumble could smell smoke—a curiously acrid, pungent kind of odour.

"Extraordinary!" murmured the Headmistress.

She looked round, her heart beating just a little more rapidly than usual. A mysterious and unaccountable smell of burning is always alarming at dead of night. One has an instinctive desire to get up and investigate.

Miss Trumble was no exception.

She rose to her feet, looked round, and then paused, one hand clutching at the back of her chair. Her eyes dilated, and her breath came and went in short, rapid gasps.

"Good heavens!" she panted hoarsely.

Her gaze was fixed upon the door. It was tightly closed—locked, in fact—but underneath it came a series of thick, curling spirals of smoke. And smoke was oozing like a kind of whitish treacle through the other cracks, too. And the vapour was spreading over the floor.

It was hardly surprising that Miss Trumble was startled.

Panic seized her. She had a horror of fire—and this unaccountable smoke coming under her door could have only one explanation. There was something horribly significant about it.

And the slow, deliberate way in which the smoke oozed under the door was fascinating. Miss Trumble gazed at it, and found it almost impossible to move. She felt that she was rooted to the spot.

But then, suddenly, action returned.

She felt the necessity for some move. It was absurd to stand here, doing nothing—when the school was possibly burning. Her heart came up into her throat as she remembered that there was a big drop outside the window. The only escape was down the corridor, and then down the main staircase.

What if the staircase was already blazing?

She would be cut off—doomed to perish here, in this section of the building, without any prospect of escape. Miss Trumble, like an emotional woman, began to picture all sorts of horrible details. She even made up her mind that the school was blazing in a dozen different places.

And her thoughts were for herself—for her own safety.

In her panic, she could think of nothing else but self-preservation. There was no room in her mind for considering the hundreds of schoolboys who were under her care.

Her great responsibility did not strike her.

Dr. Stafford, in a similar position, would have thought of his boys first. That was just the difference between a master and a mistress—at least, a mistress of Miss Trumble's style.

She only had fears for her own safety.

And, suddenly, she dashed forward with a choking cry. She reached the door, turned the key in the lock, and grasped the handle. In that second a kind of momentary calmness came to her.

Were her fears groundless? Was the smoke merely the result of some harmless cause? A fireplace downstairs, perhaps—a chimney choked up by some natural mishap—

She did not allow her thoughts to go further, but swung the door open.

A choking, blinding mass of smoke surged into her face.

It was thick, whitish in colour, and caught her in the throat. The whole passage was utterly choking with the terrible fumes. And there came to Miss Trumble's ears a horrible sound of crackling.

It seemed far-distant and mysterious. But she knew, on the second, what that crackling meant. Her worst fears were justified.

And Miss Trumble's panic increased a thousandfold.

"Fire!" she screamed, her voice cracking with frenzied alarm. "Fire! Help! Help!"

It was a cry that was sufficient to awaken the whole school.

"Help!" shrieked Miss Trumble. "Fire! Fire!"

She could think of nothing else to say. Indeed, she was half-demented with fear. And she clung to the doorpost, with one hand on her throat, staring madly into the smoke-filled passage.

She was too agitated to take any sort of action. To dash through that smoke was an impossibility. She might hurl herself into the very heart of the fire! And to retreat was equally futile.

"Help! Help!" she screamed.

And then she heard a sound, just opposite. There was a door there, as Miss Trumble well knew. It was the door of the House-mistress's bedroom. And Miss Babbidge, also attired in a dressing-gown and slippers, opened her door. She had awakened from sleep, fearful at the sudden cries.

Miss Babbidge was the Housemistress, and it was her duty to see after her boys, first and foremost.

She opened her door, the smoke surged into her face, and she lost her head just as completely as Miss Trumble had lost hers. She screamed wildly. Her appeals for help were absolutely hysterical.

"Save me! Save me!" she shrieked.

And then, further down the passage—or, to be exact, just round the angle of the next passage—another door opened. In the intense gloom and the thick smoke, a third feminine figure appeared—attired in very much the same manner as the others. This was the figure of Miss Teezer, the mistress of the

Remove. She gave one look, and added her voice to the chorus.

And when three women start screaming all at once the echoes, as Archie Glenthorne would have said, are somewhat aroused. The noise the three mistresses made was rather extraordinary.

And what a show-up!

Instead of rising to the occasion, and doing everything possible for the boys in their care, these women were as helpless as blocks of wood. In fact, blocks of wood would have been preferable, since they would have caused no trouble.

Many women, no doubt, would have acted in a very different way—but Miss Trumble and her precious colleagues were not of that calibre. When it came to an emergency, they were lost.

In the Remove dormitory, some distance away, I awoke out of a sound slumber. The dormitory was still and silent, except for a few snores, which appeared to come from the direction of Handforth's bed.

For a moment or two I couldn't understand why I had awakened. Then, in the far distance, I seemed to hear a sound which resembled the shrieking of the wind on a wild night. That's what it seemed like to me at the moment. Then, as I strained my ears more, I started.

"Somebody's screaming!" I told myself, in astonishment.

What on earth could it mean? Screaming—in the dead of night! I remembered the mistresses, and came to the conclusion that one of them had been scared by something. I didn't know whether to snuggle down between the sheets again or not.

I was decided a moment later.

For a second voice came to the assistance of the first. Then, vaguely, I understood that cries for help were being indulged in. As I leapt out of bed Reginald Pitt and De Valerie and Jack Grey awoke.

"Buck up, chaps!" I said briskly. "There's something wrong!"

"What's the funny noise?" asked Grey, yawning.

"I think it's Miss Trumble screaming for help!" I replied. "Quick! Shove some things on, and we'll investigate. We can't allow these women to be shrieking all over the giddy place. It doesn't sound well!"

And then Edward Oswald Handforth sat up.

"Hallo! What's the matter?" he demanded sleepily. "It's night! What the dickens are you chaps doing out there—Great pip! Who's that screaming? I've never heard such a row—"

"Go to sleep again, Handy—you aren't wanted!" interrupted Pitt.

"You—you fathead!" snorted Handforth, leaping out of bed. "If there's anything wrong—if there's any work to be done—I'm the chap for it! Huh! Go to sleep again, eh? Not likely!"

In next to no time Handforth had slipped into his trousers, pulling them on over his

pyjamas. Then he dashed at the dormitory door, and reached it just in advance of myself. By this time the whole dormitory was awake. Sleep, after Handforth had been aroused, was quite impossible.

Edward Oswald wrenched open the door, and hurried out into the corridor. And he suddenly paused in his tracks.

"Smoke!" he gasped, sniffing.

"My goodness, so it is!"

"The place is on fire!"

"My hat!"

"Listen!" I said tensely. "Dry up, you asses!"

We stood there, breathing hard, and filled with sudden excitement. The corridor was filled with a haze of smoke—indistinct, but sharp enough to the nostrils. And now the voices of Miss Trumble and the other ladies were ten times more pronounced in tone.

"Help! Help!"

"Fire!"

"There you are!" roared Handforth. "What did I tell you? The giddy school's on fire! By George! We'd better make haste and do something!"

He tore down the corridor without waiting for the rest of us.

"Oh, the hopeless ass!" I shouted. "He's sure to make a mess of it! He always blunders!"

We hurried along after Handforth, turned the corner, and then made our way into the private section of the building—where the masters slept. The mistresses, of course, now occupied this wing.

Handforth, dashing on in advance, found the passages filled with smoke—particularly the one with Miss Trumble's bedroom in the middle of it. This passage was full right up. The fumes were so thick that it was impossible to see for more than a few inches.

Handforth paused—groping.

"All right," he bawled. "I'm coming!"

"Oh, thank Heaven!" screamed Miss Trumble. "Help! The place is on fire!"

"That's all right; we'll soon do something," shouted Handforth.

Curiously enough, just as he put his hand out, he felt it touch something cold and metallic. Then, in a flash, he knew. There was a fire hydrant fixed in a small recess just here.

There was one, in fact, in every passage, but Handforth hadn't even thought of such a detail as this. His main idea was to discover the seat of the fire. It would be time to deal with it then.

But now that his hand was on the hydrant there was only one thing to do.

He tore away at the hose, pulled it out, and then fumbled with the taps. In the meantime, several fellows had thoughtfully opened the windows; the main idea being to clear out the choking smoke. A stiff draught came, shooting icily down the passage.

And the smoke shifted like a bank of fog.

Hizzzz! Splutter—splash!

After a considerable amount of handle

turning, Handforth succeeded in his object. A stream of water came out of the hose with great force, and it was only by sheer luck that Handforth was holding tightly on to the nozzle. The thing was like a snake—it writhed and wriggled in his grasp.

But Handforth was triumphant.

After all, the only thing to do in a fire was to get the hose going. This was a most important matter.

"By George!" gasped Handforth. "Now we'll soon see what's wrong! It won't take me two minutes to put this giddy fire out!"

He hurried down the passage, directing the hissing stream of water straight in front of him. Then he turned at the corner, and the hose changed its direction, too.

The water simply shot down the passage in a great column. Even if Handforth had made any attempt at aim he could not have done it better. The full force of the powerful stream caught Miss Trumble in the neck. Her screams for help came to an end abruptly.

With a gurgling, gasping cry, she went over backwards, soaked to the skin, and feeling quite cool.

## CHAPTER II.

### HANDFORTH, AND A HOSE.



"O H, my goodness!" said Handforth blankly.

The smoke had cleared considerably, chiefly on account of the draught which had come whizzing in at the open windows. And the leader of Study D had seen Miss Trumble go over.

He was so startled that he didn't move the hose.

And the water continued to play upon Miss Trumble in the most thorough manner. Twice she tried to rise, and twice she was knocked over again. And, by now, the corridor was looking more like a river.

At last, Handforth pulled himself together and shifted the hose. It never struck him that he could easily turn it off if he wanted to do so. And it was rather unfortunate that Miss Babbidge should have emerged from her own room at the same moment.

Swish!

The moving stream of water caught the Housemistress amidships, so to speak. She was lifted bodily for about two yards, and hit the wall with rather more force than was pleasant.

She screamed wildly, not because she was hurt, but because the icy water was enough to make anybody scream. Miss Babbidge considered that the fire was much preferable to this.

"Great pip!" said Handforth faintly.

And then he waxed rather indignant.

"Why can't you keep out of the way?" he roared. "You can't expect me to put the fire out if you keep butting in like this! And where is the fire, anyway?"

Miss Trumble rose to her feet, and stood there shivering, and looking very unsteady.

"Take—take that dreadful thing away!" she panted hoarsely.

"All right, ma'am; but the fire has got to be put out, you know," said Handforth.

"I think I'd better——"

He paused as Tommy Watson, Pitt and I, and two or three others came rushing up from the rear.

"You—you dangerous ass!" I gasped.

"You'll flood the school with that hose—turn it off! Haven't you got more sense than to do a mad thing like this?"

"What?" said Handforth, turning round.

"Look out!" howled Pitt.

"Turn that thing away!" yelled Watson wildly.

Hiss! Splash! Swish!

In about five seconds we were soaked. Handforth was rather bewildered now, and the stream of water shot past us and caught Archie Glenthorne just as he was emerging from the doorway of his own bedroom.

He was quite a long way away, but the pressure of water was fierce, and Archie received a kind of downpour. The stream hit him all over at once, and he sat down in the doorway, utterly bewildered.

"Gadzooks!" he gasped. "I mean to say, stormy seas, and what not! Help! In other words, S.O.S.! The bally old ship's sinking!"

Still the water streamed upon him. Archie crawled away on all fours, and just managed to get inside his bedroom again. He closed the door with a slam, and lay on the carpet, dripping water from every inch of his person.

"This, as you might say, is absolutely frightful!" he murmured, with chattering teeth. "I mean, it's positively positive! Archie, in fact, is drowned! Absolutely gone down for the third time!"

In the meantime, about six other Remove fellows had suffered from the effects of Handforth's carelessness. He still kept control of the hose pipe, because nobody had sufficient pluck to go near him.

So far, by some miraculous chance, he had not wetted his own person. He was only slightly splashed. But such a thing as this could not last. Fate would not allow it.

Handforth wrestled valiantly with the nozzle. He was vainly trying to find the tap which would turn off the stream of water. And, in his struggles, he directed the hose upwards.

The result was startling.

The hissing stream of water struck the ceiling with tremendous force. And the water came down like a tremendous fountain. It descended over Handforth in a hissing, bewildering cascade.

"My only sainted aunt!" he mumbled faintly.

He never knew exactly how he did it. But, somehow, his hand touched a kind of lever. And the stream of water ceased with an abruptness which was rather dramatic.



Miss Trumble's panic increased a thousandfold. "Fire!" she screamed, her voice cracking with frenzied alarm. "Fire! Help! Help!"

Handforth stood there, soaked through, and shivering with cold.

"Well, anyway, I've put the fire out!" he gasped.

There was a swift, sudden rush. About a dozen juniors seized Handforth, dragged the hose away, and held it. Other fellows came along and held Handforth. He was too dangerous to be left at liberty.

"You fatheads!" he shouted. "Leggo! What's the idea of——"

"You'd better go back to the dormitory and get some dry things on!" advised Pitt grimly. "You—you perilous madman! You nearly flooded the school, and you haven't even touched the fire!"

"There's no fire now, you ass!" said Handforth indignantly.

"The smoke's gone, anyhow; but you didn't do that!" put in Armstrong. "My

goodness! I'm wet through! There'll be a fearful lot of trouble over this—you see! Handy ought to be sacked!"

"Why, you ungrateful rotter!" snorted Handforth. "Wasn't I doing the best I could to save the school? Haven't I saved all your lives? In fact, I was the only fellow who kept his head."

Any further argument was out of the question, for just then a diversion came. Miss Trumble appeared upon the scene. She had got into another dressing-gown, and was wearing a thick shawl over her head and shoulders.

"Children, children!" she exclaimed, in a voice that was trembling with agitation. "Compose yourselves! There does not appear to be any very serious danger—"

"We thought you were half dead, ma'am, by the way you shouted for help!" said one of the juniors.

"Ahem! Nonsense!" said Miss Trumble hastily. "I—I was somewhat alarmed at first, but it was Miss Babbidge who, unfortunately, lost her head. Under the circumstances, I cannot blame her. Do you boys know anything about this fire?"

"Not a bit, ma'am," said Armstrong.

"I suspected, at one time, that you had been playing some trick, and had set the school on fire!" exclaimed the Headmistress severely. "You must go back to your beds at once!"

"But what about the fire?"

"We've got to find the cause of all that smoke, Miss Trumble!"

But several members of the Sixth Form were on the scene by now. And the most extraordinary feature of the whole affair was that no sign of any fire could be found.

Box-rooms were examined, cupboards, bedrooms, and, in fact, every inch of space that could be thought of. But nothing was smouldering. There was no smoke or fire.

The search was continued downstairs, but everything was normal.

"It's a marvellous kind of thing!" exclaimed Morrow, of the Sixth. "There can't be smoke without fire! But it seems that there was this time! What do you make of it, Fenton?"

The School Captain looked grim.

"Those kids!" he said briefly.

"You think they were playing a trick?"

"My dear man, there's nothing else for it," said Fenton. "I'll guarantee those young sweeps did the whole thing on purpose. It's just what they would do, the reckless young bounders."

And this, indeed, was the only conclusion that could be arrived at. But both Fenton and Morrow were very puzzled when the Remove, as a whole, gave its assurance that they knew nothing of the imitation fire. And Fenton believed us. He knew that we were not the kind to evade responsibility.

Miss Trumble had retired to her bedroom again, but when she heard the report she was severe and angry. Fenton had gone to

her door to assure her that everything was all right.

"There can be no question that the Remove boys are responsible!" declared Miss Trumble angrily. "From the very first I suspected that there was some form of trickery at work. The naughty children shall suffer!"

Fenton shook his head.

"It wasn't the Remove, Miss Trumble," he said.

"How do you know?"

"The boys have assured me that they know nothing—"

"I have learned that boys do not pay much heed to the truth!" interrupted Miss Trumble curtly. "You will go to the Remove, Fenton, and tell the children I am very annoyed. Indeed, say that I am quite furious. As a punishment for their wickedness, I shall sentence them to bread and water for the whole of to-morrow!"

Fenton looked rather alarmed.

"But, hang it all, that's hardly fair," he protested. "You can't punish the Remove unless you've got some kind of proof, Miss Trumble! We don't do things like that at St. Frank's!"

"Silence!" commanded the Lady Head.

"How dare you argue?"

"I'm not attempting to argue, Miss Trumble, but I think you ought to know that it's absolutely wrong to give the Remove such a punishment!" said Fenton boldly. "The boys know nothing about this smoke—absolutely nothing! It would be the height of injustice to punish them, particularly as there is no shadow of evidence. As Captain of the School, I protest!"

Miss Trumble was startled.

"Fenton!" she said curtly. "I am astonished! Indeed, I am amazed that you should talk to me in that fashion!"

"I am sorry, Miss Trumble, but I felt compelled to do so."

"I shall say nothing further at the moment—this is not the place!" exclaimed the Headmistress, with dignity. "But your protest is quite useless. You will give the boys the message, as I instructed."

Fenton compressed his lips.

"Very well!" he said shortly. "But it is quite wrong."

He turned on his heel, and walked away, inwardly boiling.

Even he was beginning to see that the rule of the women was not such a joke, after all. They were not so broad-minded as the masters, and were quite ready to inflict punishment without the necessary evidence.

Fenton went to the Remove dormitory, and found the juniors in bed—but not asleep. They were either chipping Handforth, or discussing the mystery of the unaccountable smoke.

"Anyhow, there'll be a nice job for the servants to-morrow!" said Church. "The passages are soaked! It's a good thing there's no carpet on the floors. The damage is serious enough, anyway."

"And Handy's going to catch it hot to-morrow," declared Jack Grey.

"I am?" snorted Handforth. "What for?"

"Listen to him!" said Pitt. "He nearly drowns about ten people, and then asks a question like that."

Fenton came in.

"Look here, kids, about that smoke," he said bluntly. "Do you absolutely assure me, honour bright, that you don't know anything about it?"

"Honour bright, Fenny!" chorused the juniors.

"In fact, I've got your word that it wasn't your jape?"

"Of course you have," I said. "There's no need to ask any questions of that sort, Fenton. I was the first chap awake in the whole dormitory. Everybody else was sound asleep—and the smoke must have started long before then."

Fenton nodded.

"Well, I'll see what I can do," he said.

"Miss Trumble has given you a pretty severe sentence, but I'll have another talk to her in the morning, and put it right. You're a set of young monkeys, but I'm not going to have you punished when you don't deserve it."

"What's the sentence, Fenny?"

"What's the old witch done?"

"You're to have nothing but bread and water all to-morrow," said the prefect.

"What!"

The Remove was galvanised into startled activity. A number of fellows even jumped out of bed.

"Bread and water all to-morrow!" roared Handforth.

"That's the sentence."

"But—but it's ridiculous!" I protested. "Miss Trumble must be mad! I've never heard of anything so unjust before! We didn't cause that smoke, Fenny! But perhaps she's decided on the bread and water wheeze because of Handforth and the hose?"

"No—it's a punishment for causing the fake fire," said Fenton. "But you needn't get excited. I'll do everything I can in the morning to make things right. Go to sleep now, and forget it."

And Fenton went out, leaving the Remove fuming.

"Bread and water!" said Pitt, with a sniff. "That's her favourite punishment. Instead of giving lines, or a good old swipe with the cane, she trots out this bread and water torture!"

"We—we shall die!" wailed Fatty Little. "Great bloaters! Bread and water all day, you know! It's too awful for words! I shall collapse before evening, and then——"

"Don't you worry, Fatty—I don't suppose for a minute that it'll come off," I put in. "Anyhow, let's go to sleep now. We've had quite enough disturbance for one night."

And the Remove settled itself to slumber.

In the meantime, a little conclave between three small figures was going on in the Third

Form dormitory. These three figures belonged to those redoubtable heroes, Willy Handforth, Chubby Heath, and Owen minor. The three leading lights of the Third seemed pleased with themselves.

"It worked!" said Willy in a dreamy voice. "It worked like a charm!"

"You're a wonder!" said Heath and Owen.

"Rats! There was nothing in it," went on Willy. "Just a couple of smoke bombs, and a few old fireworks! It didn't take me more than half an hour to manufacture the giddy contrivance."

Chubby took a deep breath.

"I've never seen so much smoke in all my life!" he exclaimed. "It scared me for a bit."

"I was nearly suffocated!" grinned Willy. "But it was a success, my sons—and that's where we score! We made all the smoke, and yet there wasn't a single trace to account for it. That's because I put the apparatus on a big chunk of tin. The remains are under my bed now. I'll smuggle it out in the morning all right!"

"Of course, your major was an ass to butt in with that hose!"

"Oh, you can always trust Ted to put his foot in it!" said Willy with contempt. "But that's got nothing to do with the main issue."

"With the what?"

"Oh, that's a term that they always use!" said Willy vaguely. "You see, we started out to prove that the mistresses would absolutely fail in an emergency. It was a test."

"And they failed," said Owen minor.

"I should jolly well think they did!" grinned Willy. "Mind you, they're responsible for our safety—and all they could do was to come to the door and howl for help! My hat! What a show up!"

And Willy and Co. went to bed, fully satisfied with themselves. They had proved to their own satisfaction that petticoat rule was a dismal failure. If the mistresses acted as they had done over a puff of smoke, what would they do in a real fire?

### CHAPTER III.

#### ARCHIE DOES THE TRICK.



**M**ORNING came, and the Remove was rather grim.

The prospect of bread and water for breakfast did not appeal to them.

And they sought out Fenton as soon as possible. As it happened, Fenton had already had another interview with Miss Trumble.

He was looking angry and grim.

"It's no good, kids," he said gruffly. "She won't budge!"

"She still sticks to the sentence?" I asked warmly.

"Yes."

"But didn't you explain to her——"

"I explained everything," interrupted the

school captain. "I argued until I got impatient. By Jove! If it had been a man instead of a woman, I should have done something else, too!"

"It's not a joke, Fenny, is it?" asked Pitt.

Fenton looked at him sharply.

"No—it's not much of a joke," he agreed. "But I don't want you youngsters to do anything silly. That's all. This bread and water stunt is pretty rotten for you—but you won't die."

He nodded and walked off.

"And that's how the matter ends!" said Pitt gruffly. "What does Fenton care? He's not sentenced to bread and water."

It was hardly possible for Willy Handforth and his chums to move about the Ancient House without becoming aware of the facts. The Remove juniors were holding miniature indignation meetings at every corner. And Willy was somewhat startled.

"I say, we can't allow this, you know," he said, shaking his head.

"Can't allow what?" asked Chubby.

"Why, this bread and water rot!" said Willy. "The Remove chaps are being punished for what we did! That's off-side, if you like! The best thing we can do is to own up, and tell Miss Trumble!"

"Then we shall get bread and water!" said Owen minor, in alarm.

"Can't help that—it was our jape," said Willy firmly. "After the feast, the reckoning, you know. It's jolly certain we're not going to let somebody else suffer. We're not cads of that kind!"

Heath and Owen were somewhat dismayed, but Willy was determined. He approached a group of fellows in the lobby. They included Pitt and Handforth and Tommy Watson and myself. And Willy briefly explained matters.

"Oh, so you caused all that smoke, did you?" I asked warmly.

"Pretty rich, wasn't it?" grinned Willy. "You see, it was a test. We just wanted to find out what the women would do when it came to an emergency. I rather think we——"

"You—you young demon!" exclaimed Handforth, grasping his younger brother. "So we've got to have bread and water for the whole day because of your silly rot? I'll jolly well slaughter you——"

"Hold on, Handy!" I interrupted. "If your minor had been the wrong sort, he'd have said nothing. It wasn't his fault that Miss Trumble sentenced us to bread and water. I don't blame him for the jape—it was a good one."

"Of course, we can't let you chaps suffer," said Willy. "I'm just buzzing along to Miss Trumble now. I'll explain things, and then she'll revoke the giddy order. Can't do anything else. Of course, it'll mean bread and water for us, but I daresay we'll survive!"

And Willy, cool as ever, marched off.

"He's a jolly decent little kid!" said Jack Grey warmly. "You ought to be pleased with your minor, Handy. He's as straight as a die, and always does the right thing."

"My minor's one of the best!" agreed Handforth. "Of course, he's got too much cheek, and he doesn't respect me enough. Otherwise he's all right. He's a little brick over this business."

The prospect of the sentence being squashed bucked the Remove up wonderfully. In the meantime Willy presented himself at Miss Trumble's study with all the assurance in the world. Nothing could upset the fag's equanimity.

"What do you want little man?" demanded the Headmistress, frowning at Willy through her glasses. "You should not come bothering me——"

"Shan't keep you a tick, miss," interrupted Willy. "About that smoke, you know."

"Smoke? Do you mean in the night——"

"That's it," said Handforth minor, nodding. "You've sentenced the Remove to bread and water, haven't you? Well, that's all wrong. I did it—just little me!"

Miss Trumble looked at Willy, with a start.

"Good gracious!" she exclaimed. "You did it?"

"Yes, rather!" said Willy. "You see, I faked up a smoke bomb—just for fun, you know. So if there's any bread and water business, I'm the chap to get it! Shall I tell the Remove chaps it's O.K.?"

The Headmistress frowned.

"No, you will do nothing of the kind," she snapped. "I am amazed that a boy of such tender years should have such precocity! As a punishment for this confession of guilt, you shall have nothing but bread and water throughout the whole of to-day and the whole of to-morrow!"

"Help!" murmured Willy.

"What did you say?" demanded Miss Trumble.

"Nothing much, miss. I was only just gasping a bit," said Willy. "It's a bit thick, you know—two days with nothing but bread to eat! Still, it's better than having the Remove suffer for nothing."

"I shall make no alteration whatever to the sentence on the Remove!" declared Miss Trumble tartly. "I am convinced that all the boys are equally guilty. You may go!"

Willy staggered.

"What!" he gasped. "Have I confessed for nothing? Have I landed myself into two days' starvation for this? Look here, miss, it's not fair! Those Remove chaps didn't even know about it——"

"Silence!" said Miss Trumble tensely. "Your impudence is intolerable! I am even beginning to understand why the majority of schools make use of the birch!"

"I'm glad to see you're learning, anyway," growled Willy.

Miss Trumble quivered.

"Go!" she said shrilly. "Go before I lose my temper!"

"My hat!" said Willy. "I thought you'd lost it ages ago! Well, miss, I think it's a pretty rotten shame, and I don't mind telling you so, either. You can look out for squalls from the Remove!"

And Handforth minor, feeling that he had spoken rather too boldly, shot out of the study with all speed, before Miss Trumble could even think of her retort.

Willy took his report to the Remove, filled with indignation.

The Remove listened, and was staggered. Such unfairness as this was foreign to them. On many an occasion a boy, or a group of boys, had been sentenced for some crime they had not committed. And the confession of the real culprits had always automatically quashed the sentence.

This was something quite new. Willy had confessed, he had admitted his own guilt. And yet the sentence of bread and water on the Remove was to stand! It wasn't justice at all—it was the rankest kind of farce. And the Remove fairly boiled with rage.

A quick punishment might have been forgotten. But this was long and lingering when meal times came round they had bread and water set before them. The Remove was certainly being goaded into some kind of concerted action.

However a diversion was created by Archie Glenthorne.

Teddy Long was the first to discover that the one and only Archie was really bad. Archie had been looking a bit queer for a day or two. He had seemed listless, and had taken no interest in life.

The explanation was not far to seek. For Archie had lost Phipps. Phipps was Glenthorne's valet, and he had always attended to every one of his young master's wants.

In fact Archie was not the same as other juniors. He was the most helpless fellow under the sun, and when he had come to St. Frank's he had brought Phipps with him. A special arrangement had been made with the Head, and Phipps's presence was not considered improper.

But Miss Trumble had decided otherwise. Although Archie paid the man's wages, Miss Trumble had declared that Phipps had no place in the school. He had therefore been sent away, leaving Archie stranded. At present, Phipps was at Glenthorne Manor, the home of Archie's pater, just outside Bannington.

Teddy Long went to Archie's study with a very definite object. The sneak of the Remove was hard up—broke to the wide, in fact. He was sadly in need of funds, and Archie was his salvation.

Teddy was always borrowing odd shillings from Archie, and the latter never remembered anything about them. He didn't require repayment. That's why Teddy Long favoured Archie with his attentions.

"I say, Archie, I don't like to bother you,

but could you just spring five bob?" asked Teddy, as he edged his way into the study. "Only until to-morrow, you know. I'm pretty certain to get some cash from home by then."

This was his usual tale, which Archie never heeded.

"Of course, if you can spring ten, all the better!" went on Teddy, growing bold. "I'll pay you back——"

A kind of moaning sound came from the lounge.

Teddy Long moved forward into the room, and then saw that Archie was lying full-length on the big, luxurious Chesterfield. He was surrounded by cushions, and he gazed at Teddy with a sort of glassy expression.

"What-ho!" he murmured. "Phipps, don't you know?"

"Phipps!" said Long. "He's not here now, Archie."

"Good old Phipps!" mumbled Archie. "I mean to say, absolutely the lad! The one and only. Jolly old Phipps. Greetings, laddie!"

"I'm not Phipps!" exclaimed Teddy, staring.

"Absolutely!" said Archie, closing his eyes.

Long looked rather alarmed. There was something about Archie he didn't like. He went nearer, and found that the genial ass of the Remove was much paler than usual. Archie opened his eyes again, and the glassy, fixed expression in his eyes was even more pronounced.

"Ain't you well?" asked Teddy, with frowning anxiety.

"Phipps, old sportsman, the young master is passing into the vast and frightful beyond!" murmured Archie. "That is to say, the good old earthly existence is dashed near a termination!"

"Well, I'm blessed!" said Teddy faintly.

He rushed out of the room, and came tearing down the passage. He met Tommy Watson and I just outside Study C. Handforth and Pitt and a few more juniors were talking a little further down.

"I say, Archie's dying!" shouted Teddy Long breathlessly.

Nobody took much notice of him as a rule, but this statement secured him full attention. In a moment, he was surrounded, and he blurted out what had been taking place in Archie's study.

As a result, about eight of us invaded the luxurious apartment. We found Archie still on the lounge, and Handforth shook him. It was like shaking a dummy.

"What's the matter with you, fathead?" demanded Handforth.

"Phipps!" said Archie. "So here you all are, what? Good old Phipps! That, as it were, is the stuff! Kindly dash about, Phipps, and proceed to make a dose of the good old brew! The young master would be

pleased with a cup of tea. Phipps. Get busy, laddie!"

"He's dotty!" said Tommy Watson blankly.

I took Archie by the shoulders.

"Pull yourself together, Glenthorne," I said. "Phipps isn't here. You're asleep, or day dreaming! Get up off that lounge, and move about a bit."

"Absolutely not!" said Archie mechanically. "Go away, Phipps!"

"He thinks everybody's Phipps!" exclaimed Teddy Long, in a scared voice. "He thought I was Phipps, you know!"

"Then he must be light-headed!" said Handforth grimly.

No matter what we did, it made no difference. Archie persisted in mistaking every one of us for Phipps. And that fixed, unpleasant expression, remained in his eyes.

He was not himself by any means. He could scarcely walk, for we pulled him off the lounge, and made him move about. In the end, we were obliged to let him get back. He was in a bad way.

"Look here, the best thing we can do is to fetch Miss Trumble," I said grimly. "There's something wrong with Archie—badly wrong. He's never been like this before!"

"I'll go and fetch her!" said Pitt promptly.

Within five minutes, he was back with the Headmistress. He had evidently given her a full account, for she was looking quite alarmed after she had vainly attempted to talk with Archie for five minutes. He mistook her for Phipps, too.

"The boy is ill," said Miss Trumble, at length. "This—this is terrible!"

"Better send for the doctor, ma'am!" suggested Pitt.

"I really think it would be best, Miss Trumble," I put in. "Do you think I'd better telephone for Doctor Brett? If he's at home, he can be up in here in ten minutes, you know. He's got a car."

"Yes, yes," said the Headmistress, greatly agitated. "Get the doctor here as quickly as you can!"

"Right," I said promptly.

I hurried away, and within three minutes I was talking on the telephone. Fortunately, Dr. Brett was at home, and he promised to be up as quickly as possible.

Brett was the village practitioner, and quite popular at St. Frank's. He was a thoroughly likeable sort of man, too.

I went back to Archie's study with the news.

"Splendid!" said Miss Trumble. "The poor boy's getting worse and worse. He's

inclined to be feverish. Whatever can it mean? Why should he be attacked in this way?"

"I think he's pining for Phipps, ma'am," said De Valerie.

Miss Trumble started, and looked up sharply.

"Absurd!" she said. "Do not be so ridiculous, child!"

"Just as you like, ma'am, but it's rather queer that Archie should mistake everybody for Phipps," said De Valerie, in a bit of a huff. "I think that proves that his mind is pretty well occupied by Phipps, anyway!"

"How long has he been like this?" asked the Headmistress.

"Well, he's been rather strange in his manner for a day or two," I replied. "But he's never been as bad as this before. I expect it's been preying on his mind. You can't realise how much he has missed Phipps. The poor chap can't get on without that man of his."

"It is most absurd," said Miss Trumble. "A child of his age has absolutely no right to have a man to attend to every one of his requirements! I've never heard of such a thing!"

"Neither had we—until Archie came, Miss Trumble," I replied quietly. "But, you see, Archie's different. He's one of the best chaps in the world, but he's helpless. He's always had Phipps."

"Absolutely!" came a murmur from the couch. "Good old Phipps! The fact is, old chum, I'm dashed glad you've come back. The young master was withering. Positively withering, don't you know! Just like a bally leaf in the full blast of an autumn gale!"

"Good gracious!" said Miss Trumble, startled.

"There you are—you see how it's affected him, ma'am," said Pitt. "He can't help it—he's made that way."

The Headmistress looked anxious.

"I do hope the poor child isn't sickening for a fever!" she exclaimed. "He certainly appears to be rather delirious! I think we had better get him to bed as soon as possible."

"Absolutely not!" mumbled Archie faintly. "Pray don't be so absolutely ridiculous, Phipps! Bed, you know! What a ghastly idea? What, in fact, a poisonous proposish!"

"No, you'd better not put him to bed, ma'am," said Tommy Watson. "The doctor will be here in a few minutes, and he'll know the best thing."

"Rather."

"Wait till the doctor turns up!"

By this time the study was fairly well filled. And fellows had come into the passage, too, and the whole house was talking about the curious indisposition of Archie Glenthorne.

In the middle of it Dr. Brett arrived.

He came bustling in, as brisk as ever. The crowd made way for him, and he bade Miss

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Trumble a crisp good-morning. Then he sat down beside Archie, and examined him.

He looked at his eyes, felt his pulse, and seemed rather suspicious.

"Tell me, my boy, what are your sensations like?" he asked. "Do you feel any headache, or—"

"Absolutely not!" interrupted Archie. "The fact is, Phipps, the young master is dashed brilliant. He's feeling positively frisky, in fact. Phipps, laddie, I'm dashed glad to see you back!"

Dr. Brett frowned.

"Why do you call me Phipps?" he asked curiously.

no trace of anything abnormal. I even suspect that he is playing a little trick."

"Good gracious!" said Miss Trumble.

"Of course he isn't, doctor!" I said, nudging Brett as I spoke. "All Archie wants is Phipps again. If Phipps comes back, he'll be as right as rain. He's pining for Phipps."

Dr. Brett looked at me, and I winked—but Miss Trumble didn't see it. Brett kept his face very straight.

"Oh!" he said thoughtfully. "H'm! Well, well!"

It was clear to me that the Doctor was pondering over the matter. I was rather



"Help! In other words, S.O.S.! The bally old ship's sinking!" With water still streaming upon him, Archie crawled away on all fours.

"Absolutely!" said Archie.

"The boy does not seem to be able to talk lucidly!" put in Miss Trumble. "He can talk of nothing else but this man, Phipps."

"A cup of tea, Phipps!" said Archie, gazing at Dr. Brett with his glassy expression. "Dash around, and brew some of the good old stuff! In other words, look fearfully lively!"

The Doctor was more puzzled than ever.

"As far as I can make out, the boy is perfectly healthy," he said. "I can find

suspicious of Archie on my own account. The presence of Dr. Brett might be very useful—if he would only do his part. But it was very questionable if the Doctor would agree.

He examined Archie again.

"Yes, I'm afraid the boy is pining," he said at length. "He can talk of nothing but Phipps. I consider, Miss Trumble, that he will make a rapid recovery if Phipps is brought back."

Miss Trumble looked severe.

"I do not agree with that man being

here!" she said curtly. "It is most preposterous!"

"In that case, there is nothing that I can do," said Brett truthfully. "I am afraid I must leave the matter entirely in your hands, madam."

"Do you think the boy will get worse?"

"Really, I cannot give any answer to that question," said the doctor guardedly. "As you can see, he is most peculiar in his attitude. At all events, I think it would be just as well to bring Phipps back as a trial. If it proved successful, there can be no question as to the wisdom of the decision. But I do not urge you either way."

"Phipps!" moaned Archie. "Dear old Phipps!"

Miss Trumble pondered for a few moments. More than anything else, she hated surrender. But the prospect of Archie getting really bad rather haunted her. She did not ponder for long.

This was because Archie hastened matters.

Quite suddenly, he gave a convulsive shake. Then suddenly he made a series of extraordinary grimaces, struggled with himself, and finally lay back, exhausted—breathing hard.

"Quick! The boy's having a fit!" gasped Miss Trumble.

Dr. Brett seized Archie's hand, and held it firmly.

"That's enough, young man!" he said softly. "No more of that!"

"I will have Phipps brought here at once!" said Miss Trumble, with great agitation. "This—this is terrible!"

Reggie Pitt pushed forward.

"It's all right, ma'am; Phipps will be here in about ten minutes, I should think," he said. "I thought he might be wanted, and so I 'phoned for him about ten minutes ago. He's coming on a bike as hard as he can buzz!"

"That's good!" said Dr. Brett, with approval.

Upon Archie's face there was an expression of serene joy.

"I do hope the man will not be long!" said Miss Trumble, in a state of agitation.

"Dear, dear! What a dreadful affair. I do hope the boy will not come to any serious harm over this!"

Dr. Brett smiled.

"I think we can safely say, Miss Trumble, that the young man will be perfectly all right in future!" he exclaimed, "particularly if he's allowed to retain Phipps at the school."

"We shall see—we shall see!" murmured Miss Trumble.

In the meantime Pitt had gone out, and he was only just in time to meet Phipps in the triangle. It only took Reggie about two minutes to acquaint Phipps with the facts.

"Very well, sir, I will see what I can do," said Phipps gravely.

He hurried indoors, and the crowds of Yellows parted as Phipps entered Archie's

study. The valet went straight to the lounge, and bent over the elegant junior. Archie gave a glad cry.

"Absolutely!" he gurgled. "I mean to say, Phipps! Dear, jolly old Phipps! The one and only priceless laddie! Stand there, old sportsman, while I gaze upon you and feast the optical department!"

"I hear you are rather unwell, sir," said Phipps.

"Absolutely not!" declared Archie stoutly. "Why, dash it all, I've never felt more fearfully robust! I mean to say, the young master is absolutely oozing with seventeen varieties of energy!"

Archie sprang up, and proceeded to do a few exercises.

"What-ho! What-ho!" he exclaimed. "How's that, Phipps? How, I mean to say, is that? Dashed good—what? And now, dash about and—Gadzooks!" he added, gazing round. "It seems, as it were, that the entire populace is gazing at us! What's the scheme?"

"How do you feel, my boy?" asked Miss Trumble.

Archie bowed low.

"A thousand pardons, old dear—I should say, dear madam!" he exclaimed hastily. "Most frightfully careless of me, but I didn't observe your presence, I mean, I did observe it; but there you are! What? The fact is, the old brain has been somewhat confused. But we're positively all serene now. Phipps, the priceless one, has returned to the fold!"

Dr. Brett looked rather grim.

"I rather think I'm no longer required!" he said. "It might be just as well, Miss Trumble, to let the boy keep this man here. If you don't, I really can't guarantee a lasting cure."

"About four hundred and thirty thanks, old duck!" murmured Archie.

Miss Trumble looked very annoyed, but, under the circumstances, she was practically compelled to agree. She didn't actually say so, but she passed out of the room leaving that impression.

The Doctor and all the other intruders passed out, too.

And Archie was left alone with Phipps. The door had hardly closed, when Archie proceeded to do a kind of hornpipe in the middle of the floor. Then he suddenly pulled himself up short, and tried to look dignified.

"Success, Phipps!" he said genially. "Success, as it were, in vast and considerable chunks!"

"Do you think that Miss Trumble will allow me to remain, sir?"

"Absolutely!" declared Archie. "Why, dash it all, if she sends you out once more into the wilderness, I shall positively work the old wheeze again! By the way, Dr. Brett is several kinds of a priceless ripper!"

"Quite so, sir," said Phipps. "He appreciated the situation, and assisted you. In-

deed, but for his co-operation, I rather fancy the scheme would have failed."

"Oh, absolutely!" agreed Archie. "But the old geyser—that is to say, the genial lady with the hawk-like visage—she, as it were, was absolutely dished! Never a suspicion! In other words, spoofed!"

"Very completely, sir!"

"And here we are—back to the good old times!" said Archie gladly. "As one chappie to another chappie, what do you think of the young master now? I mean, don't you consider that the old bean has been frightfully alert?"

Phipps smiled.

"I think you have been very clever, sir," he replied.

"Such praise from you, laddie, is praise indeed!" exclaimed Archie. "Good enough! We will proceed to chat upon subjects in general! Clothing, and neckties, and what not!"

And Archie and his valet got together!

#### CHAPTER IV.

##### SOMETHING LIKE A SCRAP!



THE day passed rather quietly.

Except for that one diversion, with Archie as the central figure, nothing of any particular interest happened. The Remove was

suffering from a rather severe fit of the blues.

Bread and water for breakfast, and bread and water for dinner, had not put the juniors in the best of humours. The goading process was going on. And every minute of the day something else happened to annoy them.

Not anything big, but a hundred and one irritating trifles. In the Form-room Miss Teezer was becoming more and more autocratic. She was gaining the measure of the Remove now, and she was proving to be a Tartar.

She was spiteful, and was very fond of inflicting petty punishments. And in many cases she punished the wrong fellow. All these things got on the juniors' nerves. By tea-time they were feeling just about fed-up. But there was one consolation. They would be able to indulge in something rather more substantial than bread and water, for tea was a meal that they partook of in their own studies—providing their own food.

But the Remove got another shock.

Mrs. Hake's little shop in the corner of the Triangle had been closed all day; this added to their irritability. Sometimes the old lady who presided over the tuck shop would take it into her head to visit a sister or a friend, or one or two wholesale suppliers in Bannington. Anyhow, she would go off for the day, and the shop would be closed.

This was one of those days. But Mrs. Hake had never failed to return in time for tea. It was her big selling time. She always did brisk business in the late afternoon.

She was open all right; but then came the shock.

When the Remove fellows piled in to purchase their requirements, they were calmly informed that Miss Trumble had given instructions that no Remove boys were to be served! This was adding insult to injury. Not only were the juniors sentenced to bread and water in the dining-hall, but they couldn't even buy food of their own!

It was like adding a draught to the flame. The storm showed signs of bursting out into real activity. So far it had been slumbering. The resentment was there, but it had not revealed itself fully.

Of course, Miss Trumble's absurd ban was easily eluded. Fifth-formers and fags were approached, and Mrs. Hake did brisk business. There had been no mention by Miss Trumble about the other boys. Willy, for example, was in and out of the tuck-shop for nearly an hour. He spent money like water. And the parcels he carried indoors could hardly have been counted. Willy didn't mind. He was good-natured, and he also had an idea that he would be invited out to tea. As it happened, he was.

To be exactly truthful, Willy had about four teas, visiting one study after another. As he afterwards explained, it seemed a pity to let such opportunities go begging.

After a good feed the Remove felt better; but this did not alter the resentment against Miss Trumble, and all the mistresses in general.

The boys didn't know it, but a bit of a storm was blowing up already—something that they could not even anticipate. It really started in the Housemistress's study.

It arose from a mere trifle—as big things sometimes will.

Miss Babbidge was rather irritable, for she had had a few words with Miss Trumble. The latter had criticised her management of the Ancient House. Furthermore, Miss Babbidge had lost a side-comb, one she particularly prized.

And she decided to make inquiries at once.

She rang the bell for Tubbs, and when the page-boy came, she instructed him to bring Mary Jane to her study at once. Mary Jane was one of the housemaids, and was quite popular among the juniors. For she was always willing to do anything that the boys wanted.

She arrived in the study, looking somewhat aggressive. Mary Jane had an idea that a grumble was coming; the Housemistress could scarcely have sent for her at such a time otherwise.

The maid-servant had been rather discontented of late—not because she was that kind of girl, but because Miss Babbidge had in-

terfered in many ways, and grumbled without cause.

Practically all the servants in the Ancient House thoroughly detested Miss Babbidge. She had a nasty habit of coming in unexpectedly, and criticising things before she knew the actual truth.

Mary Jane had several times bemoaned the absence of the masters. Everything had gone all right then—there had been no friction. But with Miss Babbidge finding fault all round, and with Mrs. Poulter on edge, matters were somewhat unpleasant. Mrs. Poulter was not generally on edge, but the Housemistress's constant bickering made her so.

"Well, ma'am?" said Mary Jane, as she stood in front of Miss Babbidge.

"Oh, there's just one thing I want to ask you, my girl," said the Housemistress. "I think you swept out my bedroom this morning?"

"Yes'm."

"Did you see anything of a side-comb?" asked Miss Babbidge. "It is tortoise-shell, with a few stones set in a row."

"I never seed it, ma'am," said Mary Jane.

"You are quite sure?"

"Yes'm."

"I want you to think carefully," said Miss Babbidge sharply. "The comb was on the dressing-table when I left—I am quite sure of that. Yet, an hour later, I could not find it. You had been in the room in the meantime."

Mary Jane turned red.

"You ain't accusin' me of stealin' it, are you, ma'am?" she asked, rather indignantly.

"I did not say that—although the circumstances appear suspicious," replied Miss Babbidge. "A side-comb would naturally appeal to a girl like you. If you did take it—"

"Well, I never!" broke in Mary Jane warmly. "There ain't no if about it! I ain't seed the comb! Two years I've bin here—two years, an' never 'ad a word sed like this before! Ask Mrs. Poulter! She'll tell you that I ain't the kind of girl to pinch things!"

The Housemistress frowned.

"You are getting quite excited!" she said tartly. "There is no reason for that, Mary Jane! I have not accused you. I am simply saying that if you did take the comb, and return it to me, I will not be severe. I am giving you a chance."

"I don't want no chances!" retorted Mary Jane hotly. "My! You speak as though I did pinch the thing—"

"Do not use such common expressions!"

"You don't expect me to pick and choose

words after I've bin accused of stealing, do you?" demanded Mary Jane excitedly. "I'll go an' tell the 'ead mistress about this! It ain't fair! Sayin' as I took your old comb, when I never set eyes on it!"

"You swept out the room, my girl, and your attitude now does not impress me!" snapped Miss Babbidge. "Indeed, I am becoming more and more convinced that you are guilty."

Mary Jane breathed hard.

"You say I took it?" she asked. "Do you call me a liar?"

"You are extremely coarse!" retorted the Housemistress. "I am quite convinced that you are lying to me. And I shall take good care that Miss Trumble knows of your conduct."

"So shall I—I'll tell 'er myself!" shouted the girl.

"How dare you raise your voice to me?" exclaimed Miss Babbidge hotly. "You are forgetting yourself—"

"Yes, an' you forget yourself, too! If you was accused of stealin' and lyin', you wouldn't like it!" said Mary Jane, her eyes flashing. "It ain't often I lose my temper—but you'd best be careful!"

"Are you daring to threaten me?" demanded Miss Babbidge.

"No, I ain't!" snapped Mary Jane. "But mine's a funny temper, mine is! I'll go for months an' months without sayin' a cross word! But then, if I'm really riled, I let out proper! There ain't no holding me back once I get started! Just as if I'd steal your blessed old side-comb! D'you think I ain't got side-combs of me own? Likely!"

Miss Babbidge rose to her feet, trying to be dignified.

"That will be sufficient," she said curtly. "You will go! Miss Trumble will deal with this matter later."

As a matter of fact, the Housemistress was rather alarmed. She felt that the whole matter had gone too far. And Mary Jane's attitude, which was quite justified, was somewhat too aggressive to be comfortable.

Miss Babbidge went to the door, and opened it. She stood half outside, looking at the girl.

"Come!" she said shortly.

"'Tain't likely!" exclaimed Mary Jane, who was still fiercely angry. "I ain't goin' until you apologise!"

"How dare you? How dare—"

"There ain't much darin' about it!" put in Mary Jane. "You've accused me of stealin' an' tellin' lies! Yes, an' without no proof! I've got my rights, same as you've got yours! An' I ain't goin' to be called a thief!"

Miss Babbidge began to get very angry, too.

"You—you impudent hussy!" she shouted, suddenly losing control of herself. "I wonder you dare speak to me in that fashion! This is dreadful! I've never been so insulted in my life!"

(Continued on page 15.)

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# OUR DETECTIVE STORY SECTION

No. 10. PRESENTED WITH "THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY." Feb. 10, 1923



## *The String of Pearls*

A Detective Romance of Scotland Yard  
illustrating some of the ingenious methods  
of criminal detection as practised by our  
greatest detective experts.

**H**ELDON FOYLE dropped his cigar on the pavement, crushed it under his heel, and went thoughtfully on his way as the woman stepped into a taxi-cab. In the distance some public clock faintly hammered on the stroke of twelve.

A touch of imagination, if it be harnessed to common sense, does no harm to a detective. It was just that quality of imagination which had caused Foyle, of New Scotland Yard, to pause for a second at the point where Clarges Street runs into Piccadilly. It was his common sense that took him on.

From one of the houses of that street of austere respectability a woman had emerged, closing the door behind her with infinite caution, and listening before she descended the steps. It was her caution that attracted Foyle's closer attention. He noticed that the house was in utter darkness. The woman was in evening-dress of some dark fabric, and the wrap over her head had been drawn close to shield her face. Once, as she crossed the road, she had thrown a furtive glance over her shoulder as though she feared she might be

followed. She had halted a passing taxi-cab with an air of furtive haste.

Now there was no man more acquainted with queer happenings in all grades of society than Heldon Foyle. Years of experience at Scotland Yard had made him slow to jump to conclusions. But it is not usual for well-dressed women to steal surreptitiously at midnight from houses in a fashionable quarter. The thing touched his imagination. He was stirred to speculation.

One of the great street electric lights shone down on him as he lit a fresh cigar. There was nothing of the police officer about him—he would have considered himself unfitted for his business if there had been. He might have been between thirty and forty. Tall, with broad shoulders and indomitable chin, a carefully-kept brown moustache, and steady, shrewd, humorous blue eyes; he was dressed scrupulously, but unobtrusively.

Coincidence is by no means a negligible asset to Scotland Yard. To Heldon Foyle the next day there was announced Count von Haussen, whose card bore in one corner the number of a house in Clarges Street. The chief detective gave a little whimsical

whistle as he deposited the reports which he had been busily perusing in a drawer, and prepared to receive his visitor.

The Count von Haussen was a slim-built man with a lean, sallow face, which was now twitching with some strong emotion, so that he seemed to be perpetually re-adjusting the eyeglass that he wore. His morning-coat accentuated the thinness of his figure, and he wore spats over his sharp-pointed, highly-polished boots.

"Mr. Heldon Foyle" he asked in quick staccato tones, as he shook hands. "You are the chief detective here." In spite of his German name and title his English was perfect.

"The superintendent of the Criminal Investigation Department," answered Foyle. "Will you sit down? What can I do for you?"

Count von Haussen placed his silk hat and gloves on the corner of the table.

"It is a case of robbery," he declared, plunging at once into his subject. "I have had a string of pearls stolen, taken from my safe somehow—it seems like magic. They were there two or three days ago; this morning they were gone."

Foyle nodded and lifted the telephone receiver from its place.

"Get through to Grape Street," he said quietly, "and ask Inspector Milford to come up here as soon as he can." He put back the receiver. "Milford is in charge of our West End folk," he explained; "we may want him. Go on, Count. What are these pearls worth?"

"I don't know. They have always been in my family. They are insured for £3,000, but their value is more than that. The queer thing is that the safe was not broken open. It is quite a small one, but the makers assured me it was absolutely burglar-proof. I last went to it, I believe, three days ago. The jewels were all right then. This morning, an hour ago, I had to go to it again. They were gone."

The detective stroked his chin, a habit he had when considering a problem. "You mean to say that someone opened it with a duplicate key?" he asked.

"That is impossible. There is only one key, and that never leaves my possession."

"You are sure you didn't leave the safe unlocked?"

"Quite certain."

A head showed round the corner of the door. The chief of the department beckoned with his forefinger.

"Come in, Mr. Milford," he said. "This is Count von Haussen, of Clarges Street, Piccadilly. He has had some valuable pearls stolen. I wish you would go into the matter. Take a description and the Count's statement. Let me know when you are ready, and we'll go down to Clarges Street together."

Milford bowed ceremoniously at the introduction, and disappeared with the Count. In the next twenty minutes Heldon Foyle

did many things which made several of the six hundred men under his charge exceedingly busy. He knew that the sooner the great machinery which he controlled was set to work the greater the chance of solving the problem that had been set him. A swift pursuit often saved long labour.

A list of those expert professional thieves who were known to have been in London on the day the jewels were last seen was instantly to hand, and a little army of men set to trace and check their movements. Reports were called for from the departmental men continually on duty at the London termini; from the watchers at the ports—Harwich, Dover, Folkestone, Southampton, and other places, including the continental ports.

These were all first steps in routine, to be amplified or modified by instructions as developments might occur. A known jewel thief leaving London would scarcely have escaped the triple line of observers, and once his trail was picked up he would be watched until his guilt or innocence was reasonably settled.

A cable to Amsterdam, to which place it was likely that stolen jewels might be sent for disposal, advised the police in that city of the robbery.

There may be more sport in fishing with a rod and line, which is what the single-handed detectives in books do, but there is more certainty about a net. Foyle always regarded the capture of criminals as a business matter, and, as far as possible, adopted business methods. All his precautions might go for nought—the thief might not be a professional at all—but they left him free to deal with any matters that might arise in the course of his investigation.

The chief detective had five minutes to think over events when his last order had been dispatched over the private telegraph-wire. For the first time he allowed his thoughts to ponder over the mysterious woman he had seen leaving Clarges Street the night before.

Milford stalked in at last, a big sheet of foolscap paper in his hand. Heldon Foyle began to put on his hat and coat.

"Well?" he asked. "What do you make of it?"

The divisional inspector shook his head.

"Nothing at present, sir. It's odd, if what the Count says is right."

"Do you know anything about him?"

"Only what he tells me. His father was a German, but he's lived in England all his life. The pearls—there were eighteen of them—were a kind of heirloom. He is rather vague about them, but I 'phoned through to Halford and Jones, the assessors to Lloyd's, who tell me that the man who examined them for insurance was struck by their individual purity and the way they were matched. They're worth a lot more than the money they're insured for. I've got a full technical description."

"Is this gentleman married?"

"No." Milford referred to a paper in his hand. "The only people living in the house besides himself are a Miss Ethel von Haussen—a girl who comes of Devonshire stock, whom he adopted as his daughter nine years ago—and four servants—a housekeeper, two maids, and a page-boy."

The chief detective rubbed his chin.

"Right you are, Milford. You'd better let that description go out at once. Hurry up. We'll take a taxi."

He joined von Haussen, who was waiting in the corridor. There were few men who could turn a stranger into a friend or who knew more of the art of indirect cross-examination than Heldon Foyle. The dapper little Anglicised German was as empty of all information as a wrung sponge by the time the cab drew up at Clarges Street. Foyle had learnt much of the character and history of each person in the house, not excepting Miss Ethel and Von Haussen himself.

A little hitch of the shoulder was all the sign he gave as he recognised the house from which the mysterious woman had emerged. His keen eyes noted the Yale lock on the outer door, and the couple of heavy bolts which secured it at top and bottom. Von Haussen led them through to a room at the back. It was furnished as a sitting-room. He drew aside a small curtain in a recess.

"This is the safe, you see," he said.

The two detectives stooped to examine it closely. Foyle inserted the key, and, turning the handle, swung back the heavy door. As the Count had said, there was no indication that it had been tampered with. Even their expert scrutiny could find nothing likely to prove of use to the investigation. Foyle shrugged his shoulders, and Milford made a few notes in his official pocket-book.

"You would like to question the servants?" demanded von Haussen.

"Mr. Milford will see to that," said Foyle. "Perhaps you will introduce me to Miss von Haussen first, if she happens to be in."

"Oh, certainly," said the little man. "She is probably in her room. Will you come with me? Excuse me for one moment, Mr. Milford."

Heldon Foyle found himself ushered into a dainty boudoir and bowing to a slim, girlish figure who rose from the depths of a big arm-chair as they entered. Miss von Haussen was a girl whose wholesome beauty would have attracted attention anywhere. Her exquisitely moulded cheeks were stained with a touch of scarlet as she bowed in response to the introduction. She stood uncertainly gripping the back of a chair, but her brown eyes met those of the detective steadily. Von Haussen had returned to Milford.

"I do hope you'll be able to recover the

pearls, Mr. Foyle," she said. "It's terrible to have lost them like this. As you know, perhaps, they were to have been mine in six months' time."

"We shall do our best, Miss von Haussen," he said smoothly. He was scrutinising her with subtle care, making up his mind how to deal with her. There was nothing in what von Haussen had told him that would have afforded any explanation of the midnight excursion, yet he felt sure that she was the woman he had seen.

He was becoming aware of a penetrating scent that filled the apartment. He glanced at the window. It was wide open.

"Can you tell me if you suspect any one?" he asked. "I won't conceal from you that my present idea is to believe that the robbery must have been carried out by someone in the house—someone who could have gained access to Count von Haussen's keys."

She spread out her hands—they were firm white hands—in an expressive gesture of hopelessness.

"There is no one," she said. "With the exception of Robbins, the page-boy, they have all been with us for years. It is ridiculous to suppose that any of them had a hand in it."

Again that whiff of scent. It was the pungent odour of smelling-salts. Foyle's eyes dropped for a second to the empty fire-grate. He raised his expressionless face to the girl's.

"What time does the household retire?" he asked.

"Usually about eleven."

"You—pardon me—are not engaged?"

She shook her head laughingly.

"Oh, dear, no. But I don't quite see what that has to do with it?"

The detective laughed frankly and held out his hand.

"It wasn't mere vulgar curiosity, Miss von Haussen. I wanted to know if there might be any privileged visitor by any chance. Good-bye, and thank you so much!"

He bowed himself out with an idea beginning to germinate in his mind. But he did not permit whatever theory he might have formed to possess him entirely. Neither he nor Milford left the neighbourhood of Clarges Street until a telephone-call had brought a couple of unobtrusive young men from the Grape Street police-station. Foyle met them a little out of view of the house, and gave them curt, definite instructions. For the rest of the day one or the other of them was never out of sight of Count von Haussen's house.

Milford was cynical over the whole business.

"It looks to me like a put-up job," he confessed frankly. "The servants haven't had a hand in it, that I'll swear. But we know that whoever got at that safe did it with a key. I'm inclined to think that the Count could say where those pearls are if

he wanted to. But he'll draw the insurance money before they'll turn up."

The chief detective chuckled.

"Don't you think that if this was a bogus business the safe would have been ripped to pieces?" he asked. "Just take my tip, Milford, and let every one who comes out of that house be kept under observation for a while. We'll get those pearls back, or call me a Dutchman. Hello, here's Bond Street! I'll leave you here. I want to go and get some smelling-salts."

He strode away, Milford pulled at his moustache.

"Smelling-salts?" he repeated to himself. "Well, I'm hanged."

On the mantelpiece in Heldon Foyle's room at the Yard stood three green bottles of smelling-salts. Since his first visit to Clarges Street he had been content to leave the investigation of the missing pearls case to Inspector Milford. He knew that an inquiry on parallel lines had been opened by the corps of detectives employed by Lloyd's assessors. He rarely interfered personally in a case unless it was of extreme importance, or unless it came beyond the ability of the man in whose charge it was.

But the Clarges Street developments he watched with considerable interest, so far as the formal daily reports of those engaged allowed. And at last, after three days, came Milford, his face wrinkled and worried.

He sank into a chair that his superior indicated with a long breath that was almost a sigh.

"Well?" demanded Foyle.

The other brushed back his hair from his forehead.

"It's that von Haussen affair, sir. That girl's at the bottom of it somehow, though it beats me how. The night before last was when we first began to get on to her. She came out of the house about half-past eleven or so, and took a taxi-cab. Perring, who was on duty, followed her. She went to a place in Bloomsbury Street and let herself in with a latch-key. She was there ten minutes or a quarter of an hour, then she returned home. Of course, we made inquiries about the people staying at the place, and they all seem decent folk enough. I had it out with Miss von Haussen the next day. She declared that I was drunk or mad—and that at the time she was supposed to be there she was in bed. Of course, I had to go cautiously, for Perring did not see her face, although he's certain that it was she. What does she want gadding about at that time, and with the latch-key of a strange house too?"

Foyle was turning over the pages of a report that the inspector had given to him. Attached to it was a list of the occupants of the boarding-house, with pithy remarks giving details of their avocations. He ran a finger over the list meditatively.

"There's nothing to indicate which of

these people she went to see, I suppose?" he asked.

Milford's heel tapped the floor.

"There are nine boarders there—seven men and two women. We have questioned them all, and they all deny knowledge of the girl. There's no reason to suppose it should be one person more than another."

"I've a mind to look at this place myself," said Foyle. "Let the matter rest till you hear from me, Milford."

It was an hour after this conversation that a military-looking man who used a walking-stick to assist a slight lameness, whose gold-rimmed eyeglass encircled a blue eye, and whose moustache had been carefully waxed, limped along Bloomsbury Street. It was very exceptional for Heldon Foyle, or any of his men for that matter, to use disguises that might get out of order. It is wonderful what a change can be wrought in a man by a change of clothes, a different method of arranging the hair or moustache.

The card sent into the house he at last selected bore the inscription:

MAJOR JACOB DAVIS,  
WRINGTON.

It brought him into the presence of a stern-faced, broad-built lady, whose black silk dress rustled as she rose with all the stateliness of a Bloomsbury landlady to receive him. His story had been well prepared. He had just been invalided from the Indian army, and wanted to secure permanent rooms. He had heard of her from a friend of his whose name he could not recollect.

Thus it was that Major Jacob Davis, otherwise Heldon Foyle of the C.I.D., became a lodger in the boarding-house of Mrs. Albion.

He was a popular guest. Every morning he would limp away—to his club, he said, returning at half-past six in the evening. He would play chess, take a hand at bridge, discuss politics, or tell stories of Indian frontier life with an engagingly modest air. He became the recipient of many confidences, but he seemed drawn most of all to Mr. Horace Levith, an artist, whose bedroom adjoined his own, and who used one of the top attics of the house as a studio.

Gradually the two became in the habit of smoking a farewell pipe together after the others had retired, and once or twice they shared a bottle of wine together in the privacy of Foyle's bedroom. Levith was not averse from a bottle of Beaune at anyone's expense, and Major Davis was an enjoyable companion.

But never was the soldier invited into Levith's private room; and he knew, by demonstration, that the doors of both the studio and the bedroom were invariably kept locked. To a man of Foyle's calibre, however, that mattered little. He merely bided his time.

There are always ways and means open to a man of determination who is willing to take risks. In France and other countries a detective is covered by law in whatever he may do. In England an officer has some-

# OUR DETECTIVE STORY SECTION

times to commit a technical illegality to achieve his ends.

Heldon Foyle had no shadow of legal right to use a false key to gain access to Levith's room. Strictly, he was stealing when he took a photograph from the dressing-table, smiled at the inscription on the back, and put it in his pocket.

Only one other thing he did before he left. A green-tinted smelling-salt bottle stood on a small dressing-table. He lifted the stopper, smelt it, and squinted within. Then he compared it with those three green bottles which

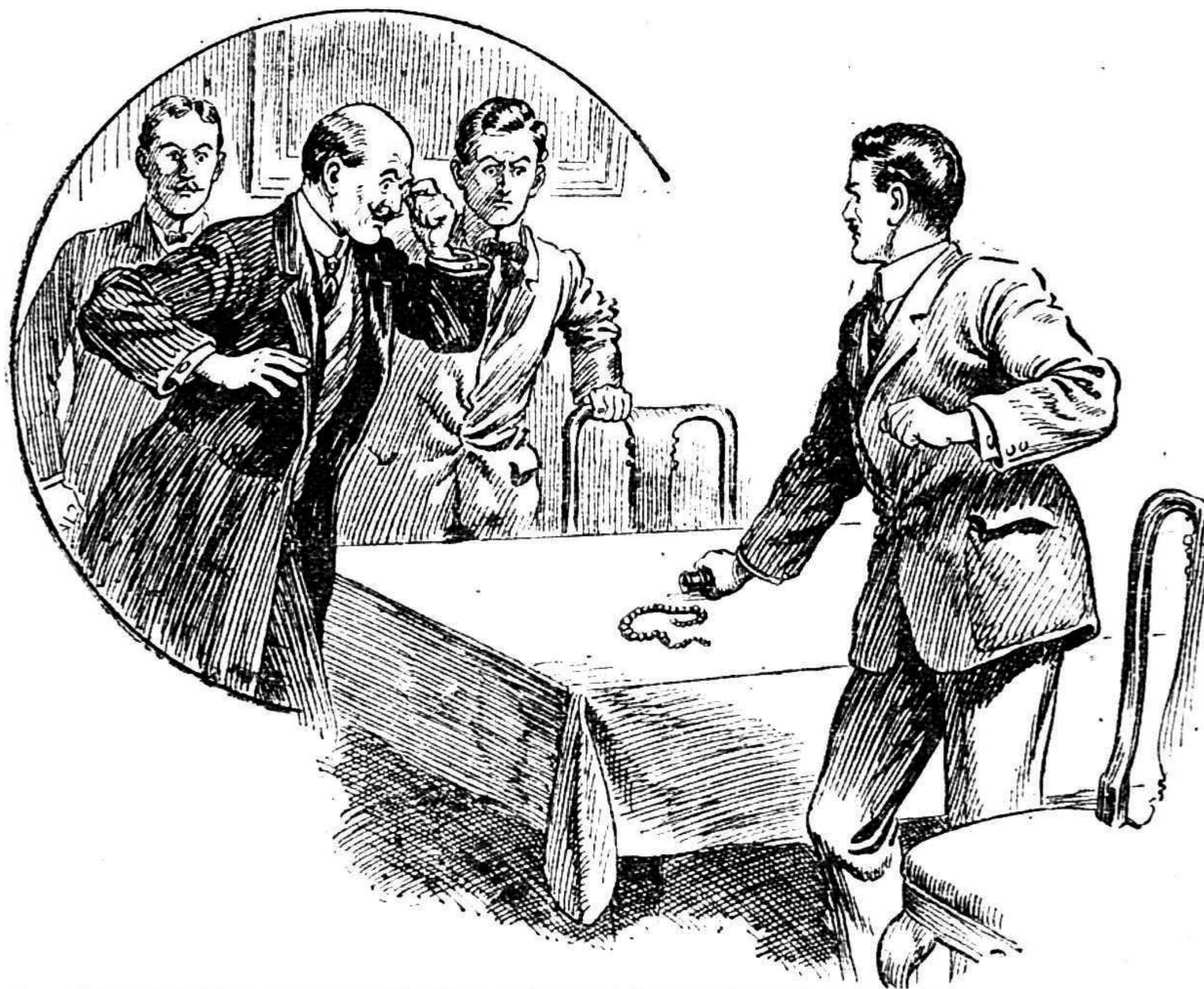
Foyle smiled at him.

"Did you ever hear of a Mr. Horace Levith?" he retorted.

"I don't recall the name," said the Count, frowning, a little puzzled. "Wait a moment—no, I can't remember it."

"Well, he is an artist living at a Bloomsbury boarding-house. I have taken the liberty of ordering him to be brought on here as soon as he returns. Ah, there is a ring! That should be he now. Perhaps you'll answer the door, Milford?"

The inspector slipped out. When he came



Glowing iridescent against a green table-cloth was the string of pearls. Levith clutched at a chair to support himself.

had for a time adorned the mantelpiece of his office at Scotland Yard.

"It's not exactly the same, but it will have to do," he muttered.

Then he left, locking the door carefully behind him.

It was with Milford that Heldon Foyle called upon Count von Haussen. He was quite sure what might happen, and a reliable witness could do no harm. The dapper little German received them at once.

"No news, I suppose?" he asked gloomily.

back he was accompanied by two men—one a detective-sergeant, the other Levith. The artist was pale, and stared at Foyle with unfeigned astonishment as he came into the room.

"What is the meaning of this—this outrage?" he demanded angrily.

But Count von Haussen had leapt to his feet.

"It is Ethel's drawing-master!" he exclaimed. "Levith—yes, that is the name. I could not remember. Why have you brought

him here, Mr. Foyle? Did he steal the pearls? Is—"

Foyle quieted him with a wave of the hand. "Keep still a minute, Count," he said. "He did not steal them; but he received them."

"It's a lie!" burst from the artist. "I know nothing. You can search me—search my rooms. You can't prove it."

Ignoring him, Heldon Foyle brought from his pocket a green smelling-salts bottle. He removed the stopper and shook the contents out on the table. Glowing iridescent against a green tablecloth was the string of pearls. Levith clutched at a chair to support himself.

"You see that I have already searched your rooms," Foyle said coldly. Then turning to von Haussen, he continued: "There were reasons why you should have an explanation before we charge this man. It was luck that gave me a hint before I knew that the jewels were gone. As soon as I knew all the particulars it was obvious that the robbery must have been executed at least with the connivance, if not actually by, someone in the house. I had seen a woman, whom I afterwards learnt to be Miss von Haussen, surreptitiously leave one evening—sit still, Count, I have not finished yet! That gave me an excuse for regarding her with suspicion when I knew a crime had been committed. The servants might have been guilty but their opportunities were limited compared to hers."

"I was not satisfied with her manner when I questioned her, and it was then I came to the conclusion that my suspicions were well-founded. I noticed that a bottle of smelling-salts had been recently emptied in her fire-grate. It had not been broken, for it and the salts would have been removed at the same time as the broken glass. Evidently she had emptied a smelling-bottle for some purpose. If it were needed as a hiding-place for the jewels, I could understand it. A smelling-bottle would not arouse suspicion."

"I let the matter rest, and had her watched. Once again she left the house surreptitiously, and was traced to a boarding-house in Bloomsbury. There we were at a loss for a time because there were many people in the house, and we could not definitely determine which she had gone to. I took apartments there myself and for a week made myself acquainted with all the inmates. One of the reasons that made me fix on Levith as the culprit was that he always kept his rooms locked. I got him out of the way on a pretext, and, as I expected, I found the jewels hidden in a smelling-salts bottle. I left a similar bottle so as not to arouse his suspicions should he return before I was ready."

"I had got from him some particulars of his life. He had been a drawing-master. He was a Devonshire man. He was, I knew, hard up. It was not difficult to suppose that Miss von Haussen had been his pupil at some time and that they had become lovers. You

would have objected to your adopted daughter becoming engaged to a drawing-master, I suppose?"

"Most decidedly," said von Haussen, his lips tightening.

"I thought so. It was, as I say, evident that the man was hard up. Whether he persuaded her or she did it on her own initiative, I don't know, but the fact remains that she got the jewels and they were taken to him. I suppose they were only waiting for a suitable opportunity to dispose of them. Here is a photograph I found on his dressing-table."

It was a portrait of Ethel von Haussen, and scribbled on the face of it were the words: "To my husband."

Von Haussen wheeled round on the artist. "That is so?" he demanded. "You are married?"

Levith bowed his head.

"Yes," he replied. "It is all my fault. We were married two years ago. I should have dissuaded her when she wanted to take the jewels. She argued that it was only anticipating matters, they would be hers anyway in a little while."

The Count bit his lip and stared straight in front of him. Presently he rose and abruptly left the room. He returned in a few minutes.

"It was not what I had hoped for my daughter," he said dully. "But what is to be will be. At any rate, I have to thank you, Mr. Foyle."

The chief detective was standing.

"Not at all," he returned. "I take it you will refuse to prosecute this man?"

"Of course. Good-day, Mr. Foyle. Good-day, Mr. Milford."

"Good-day, Count von Haussen."

Out in the street Foyle jerked his head back at the house.

"At any rate, we've saved those people the airing of a scandal," he said.

THE END.

**NEXT WEEK!**

**"THE 'CON' MAN!"**

Another Real Life Story of the Yard by  
an Expert,

AND

**"THE CASE OF THE  
RAVENCAR RUBY!"**

Featuring the Famous Sleuth,  
**CARFAX BAINES.**



The Case of the

VANISHED

GRAND DUKE

The Strange & Remarkable Exploits

of CARFAX BAINES

THE long winter had nearly finished its course, and could offer but a puny resistance to the advance of spring. A mixture of rain and snow was falling on the dull streets, and the ice-sheets were splitting and cracking on the Neva, when the Berlin express arrived one March afternoon at the Central Station of St. Petersburg.

Carfax Baines was among the passengers, and he had been summoned to the Russian capital on a mission that would brook no delay. Tired and hungry though he was, he drove at once to the Government buildings on the Nevsky Prospekt, and on presentation of his card he was received by General Tarovitch, the dreaded and all-powerful chief of the branch of the secret police known as the Third Section. The two men were old acquaintances, and they greeted each other as such.

"I received your wire from the frontier," said the Russian. "and I expected you at this hour. Do you know why I sent for you?"

"I can guess. I have heard some strange rumours since I returned from America a fortnight ago. They concern his Highness—"

"Yes, you are right. But I am certain that you know very little. It is a most mysterious case, and can be explained in a few words. Last autumn the Grand Duke Alexander, brother to his Imperial Majesty, obtained permission to spend the winter out of Russia. He went to Paris early in November, and for the next two months he reported his movements to the Czar by weekly letters. He wrote on January 7, to announce his intention of crossing to England on the following day. That was the last letter received from him direct. On the 9th of the month a Frenchman, M. Jean

Prevost by name, died suddenly of heart trouble in the Lord Warden Hotel at Dover. He had just arrived from Calais, and was going on to London. A stamped and sealed envelope addressed to the Czar was found in one of his pockets, and was duly forwarded to St. Petersburg. The letter was from the Grand Duke, and purported to be written at a West-end hotel in London, announcing his arrival there. Since then no communication has been received from his Highness."

"You amaze me!" cried Baines. "I heard whispers to that effect, but I could not believe them. The press of Europe——"

"Yes, I know," interrupted General Tarovitch. "The Moscow Gazette got hold of the affair, and we did not suppress the copies in time. The report was published in English and Continental journals. A week afterwards the same papers stated that the Grand Duke had arrived safely in St. Petersburg. That was false. It was true that a man was found to impersonate his Highness before the public, and that he is still impersonating him. But the real Grand Duke is missing to this day; the last word received from him was the letter found on the body of M. Jean Prevost. The mystery has baffled the most clever police of Russia, France, and England, who have been working secretly on the case. As a final resort I sent for you; all other means have failed."

"And you expect me to find the Grand Duke?"

"You must find him; I command you to succeed. And bear in mind that the same strict secrecy must be observed in the future as in the past. Restore his Highness to his country—to his august brother the Czar; but do not let the

public know that he has been missing for weeks. You shall have carte blanche, unlimited power and means. Here is a photograph of the Grand Duke. He is a handsome man of thirty-seven. As you perceive, he is clean-shaven except for a moustache. He speaks a number of languages, and would readily pass for an Englishman or a Frenchman. He travelled incognito under the name of M. Henri Lescure."

"You have set me a formidable task," replied Carfax Baines, "but I am ready to commence it. As yet, however, I have no clue."

"Nor can I give you any: none was ever found. After he left Russia his Highness was seen by none who knew him. His name does not appear on the books of the hotels in Paris from which he wrote weekly, on his own private paper, during the months of November and December. The investigations carried on in London were equally futile. M. Prevost might have solved the mystery, but death has sealed his lips. He was a Parisian, and was known to be a personal friend of the Grand Duke."

"Ah, that is something to go on with," said Baines. "As for yourself, what theory do you hold? You don't think that his Highness has met with foul play?"

"I do not," General Tarovitch replied, with a shrug of his shoulders. "I suspect a woman's wiles. The Grand Duke has probably shaken off the restrictions of his high rank, and is enjoying a period of untrammelled and careless freedom. He has always been self-willed and difficult to manage. The circumstances suggest that he took his friend, M. Prevost into his confidence, and that the Frenchman posted the letters for him, or at least, intended to post the last one when he reached London."

"Nothing else relating to his Highness was found on M. Prevost's person?"

"Nothing whatever."

The interview was prolonged for two hours, and when Baines left the Chief of Police he was in possession of all the information that was available, and his companion had furnished him with full police reports of the case, and also with the addresses of several St. Petersburg friends of the Grand Duke. He was armed as well with a letter of ample

authority. He put up at a hotel near the Nevsky Prospekt, and that night, over unlimited pipes of strong tobacco, he concentrated his mind on the difficult task before him. He was very busy during the whole of the next two days, and the result of his labours was by no means unsatisfactory to him. At ten o'clock on the following morning, he paid a second visit to the department of the Third Section.

"I have a slight clue, but I can tell you no more than that at present," he said to General Tarovitch. "I have come for information. On the 12th of last January a certain house in St. Petersburg was raided by the police, and a gang of Nihilists were captured. A police spy of the Third Section, named Gregory Daresoff, was in the house under peculiar circumstances, since he had been put on the retired list six months before. He opposed the entry of the raiding party, and he was accidentally shot and killed. Incriminating documents were found, and within a short time the prisoners were tried and sent to Siberia. Among them was a man named Paul Sandoff—"

"Yes, I remember him. He was a surly, mysterious fellow, and could not be induced to reveal anything about himself."

"I must have a talk with that man."

"What? With Paul Sandoff? My dear sir, you surely don't suspect the Nihilists of having a hand in the disappearance of his Highness?"

"I did not say so," replied Baines. "You know my methods, General. I request an interview with the convict Sandoff."

"He is far on his way to Siberia."

"Then I must overtake him. Let me know as soon as possible where he is to be found, and furnish me with a document that will give me absolute and unquestionable authority to deal as I choose with the man."

"This is preposterous! Explain your motive."

"I will at the proper time. Until then bear with me patiently."

In the end, General Tarovitch, who knew Baines of old, yielded with an ill grace. That same afternoon the detective received the written authority that he had asked for, and he was informed that Paul Sandoff was detained indefinitely at the forwarding-prison of

Zlatoust, on the summit of the Ural Mountains. By evening he had left St. Petersburg, and a fast train was whirl him through the night towards the distant city of Moscow.

High up on the top of the mighty mountain range that divides Europe from Asia, and close to the boundary stone with its carved inscriptions to that effect, lies the populous town of Zlatoust. It is in the centre of the iron regions of Russia, and contains Government works for the manufacture of arms, as well as a large depot for convicts destined for Siberia. Here, after travelling day and night from Moscow in one of the Trans-Siberian Railway express trains—a journey of nearly twelve hundred miles—Baines arrived early one afternoon. Food was his first thought, and he entered the station restaurant, with its long sideboard groaning under the weight of various tempting dishes. For a rouble he dined luxuriously on soup, beefsteak, half of a roasted fowl, and vegetables washed down with a bottle of palatable native beer.

Then, coming out of the building on his way into the town, his attention was arrested by a significant sight. The train had not yet resumed its journey eastward towards the terminus of the line at distant Tomsk, and into the forward carriages a number of convicts, chained at the ankles and garbed in a grey uniform, were marching two by two, indifferently guarded by a few Cossacks. Without delay the detective accosted the officer in charge of the party, and produced his written authority from St. Petersburg, at sight of which the man's suspicious bearing melted. He readily answered the questions that were put to him in a hurried whisper.

"Yes, these fellows are going on by rail, perhaps as far as Tomsk," he said, "and Paul Sandoff is among them. They have been waiting at Zlatoust for a long time, because the regular traffic has been so heavy. But it has fallen off lately, and to-day there is room to spare."

The last of the convicts were now on board, and the soldiers followed. For a moment Baines was undecided what to do, and then the loud ringing of a bell warned him that he had no choice in the matter, since he was unwilling to use his power to hold the train back. There

was not even time to buy a ticket. He jumped into his old carriage, and as quickly the express moved out of the station, gathering speed for its long run.

Zlatoust fell behind, and at the boundary column the last acre of European soil was passed; the wild and rugged landscape that flashed by the windows was now Siberia. There were but a few passengers, and with one or two exceptions they were new to Baines. He presently strolled forward to the rear-most of the three carriages that were occupied by the convicts, who sat listlessly on the hard seats. Only two Cossacks were in charge of them, including the officer. The latter, on receiving a tip of a couple of roubles, quietly and without drawing attention indicated to Baines which one of the party was Paul Sandoff.

By covert movements, with an air of feigned indifference, the detective managed to get a good look at the convict he had travelled so many hundreds of miles to see. He was a tall, well-built man, with blue eyes, a mass of light hair, and a tangled beard and moustache of the same colour, which had clearly not been touched by shears for many weeks. His cheeks were sunken and pallid, but by contrast with his comrades his expression was animated, and even cheerful, as if the weight of his misfortunes had not been able to crush his spirit and pluck.

A curious smile hovered about Baines's lips, and he told himself that he was more than repaid for his arduous journey as he sat down near the Cossack officer at one end of the carriage. He lit his pipe and smoked for an hour, meanwhile planning the course of action he intended to pursue when he should have reached the next station some time during the night. He had it all arranged to his satisfaction, in spite of the difficulties that the task presented, and was dozing off to sleep, when he was startled into wakefulness by a sudden shrill whistle and a series of bumps and jolts caused by the pressure of the breaks.

"What's wrong?" he exclaimed.

"Some obstruction ahead," the officer suggested, carelessly.

Baines looked from the window. It was about five o'clock in the evening, and the last rays of the sun were fading. The train, which had nearly stopped, was on a gentle slope near the base of

the Urals, and right and left of the line was dense forest. The next instant, without warning, the carriage was entered by six fierce-visaged men, three at each end. With threats of instant death, they covered the detective and the two soldiers with their rifles. The latter dropped their weapons instantly, and when Baines whipped out his revolver it was snatched from him by the officer and hurled to the floor.

"Are you mad?" was the husky exclamation that accompanied the act. "You see it is useless to resist. We are in the hands of the brodyags!"

Brodyags! The word spoke volumes. Baines realised the situation. He had heard much of the large and desperate band of convicts—fugitives from many a Siberian mine and penal settlement—who infested the eastern slopes of the Urals and committed outrages with impunity. But heretofore they had never ventured near the railway.

A shot was fired, and the train came to a full stop. On both sides of it suddenly swarmed scores of armed men, ruffians with matted beards and villainous faces, some in ragged convict garb, and others in stolen attire. Their angry shouts and the cries of the terrified passengers blended in a hoarse tumult. The attack had been well planned, and it was evident that every carriage had been simultaneously entered and taken possession of. Against such numbers the soldiers and the train officials were powerless.

"What do these scoundrels want?" Baines whispered.

"They are after plunder," the officer replied "or else they intend to liberate the prisoners."

But both theories were wrong as was quickly seen. What took place before the detective's eyes was a severe trial to his patience, and had he not been empty-handed, he would have risked his life by some act of rashness. The convicts throughout the train were promptly given to understand that they need not hope for freedom, and in spite of their clamorous appeals they were kept in their seats by the levelled rifles of the brodyags. But there was an exception. Two of the raiding party burst into the rearmost carriage, and one man, after a quick glance about, pointed with an eager shout to Paul Sandoff. The latter was instantly seized, and in spite of his

struggles he was dragged to the nearest door. He disappeared with his captors, and the other ruffians followed, taking with them the weapons of the soldiers and the detective. There was a lusty sound of cheering, and the motley band of brodyags began to retreat into the forest.

The disappointed convicts for the most part submitted to the inevitable. They might have escaped from the train, but chained as they were, recapture was certain. Baines was helpless with rage for a moment, and he could have wrung his hands in despair. The truth had been revealed to him by bits of conversation dropped by the brodyags. He knew that the express had been stopped for the sole purpose of carrying off Paul Sandoff, and it was equally clear to him why the man was wanted. The utter failure of his plans, not to speak of worse things, stared him in the face. He turned fiercely to the officer.

"You must get that convict back!" he cried. "You must!"

"It is impossible," the Cossack replied, with a shrug of his shoulders. "What can I do? It is not my fault; I was helpless!"

"Bah! you are all cowards! You never tried to do your duty!"

At that instant a rumbling noise was heard. It grew nearer and louder, and ringing cheers mingled with it. Baines was the first to spring to the ground, and what he saw roused him to unwonted excitement. An engine drawing three carriages was puffing up the slope from the east. It stopped before the heap of timber which had obstructed the express, and out poured two companies of Cossacks. This opportune arrival was easily explained. One of the brodyags, induced by greed to betray his comrades had slipped off to the nearest station and disclosed the plot to stop the express. He had told no more than that, as the detective learned with secret satisfaction.

No time was lost in starting after the evil crew, the last of whom had not been out of sight when the train had arrived. Baines joined the pursuing party, and was provided with a rifle and ammunition. He felt hopeful of retrieving what had seemed an irreparable calamity. The traitor was with the soldiers, and through his information as to the course they would take, the brodyags, who had al-

ready marched many miles, were overtaken in half an hour by the fresh-footed Cossacks.

A sharp conflict took place in the forest conducted on guerilla tactics. The brodyags held their ground, firing from behind trees and bushes; but finally, after considerable loss on both sides, they fell back sullenly. The Cossacks advanced, fighting every foot of the way, in scattered formation. Baines was on the extreme right of the line,

waved his empty hands; his broken fetters hung from each ankle.

"Don't shoot!" he cried. "I will go back with you to the train."

"I hope that your Highness will return to Russia with me," Baines said, blandly.

Paul Sandoff flushed with vexation and surprise.

"You know me?" he exclaimed.

"Yes; I know that you are the Grand Duke Alexander. I am aware of every



The officer, on receiving a tip of a couple of roubles, quietly and without drawing attention indicated to Baines which one of the party was Paul Sandoff.

and during a lively bit of shooting, in which he took part, he became separated from the others owing to the drifting powder-smoke.

His mishap was destined to turn out for the best. He pushed on with more haste than prudence, and had just discovered that he was getting ahead of his party, when a man sprung up in front of him from a dense copse. To his delight, he recognised Paul Sandoff. The convict

move that you have played in your daring game. I am here to save you from the consequences of your folly—to avert a public exposure. And if you will obey me implicitly I shall succeed."

"But I am not ready yet," was the obstinate reply. "My work is only half finished. At Irkutsk, when I have experienced the full measure of an exile's unhappy lot, I will reveal my identity. Take me back to my fellow-prisoners on

the train, and swear to keep my secret. Come, what is your price, sir?"

"I have none," the detective answered firmly. "I cannot disregard my instructions. We must lose no time in getting away from this dangerous neighbourhood. Until we reach St. Petersburg none must know that you are the Grand Duke."

Paul Sandoff hesitated.

"Now is our chance," the detective went on. "I warn your Highness that I am not to be deterred. Quick! At any moment we may fall into the hands of the Cossacks or the brodyags. You may be thankful that you have escaped from the latter. Your identity was revealed to them by a man who broke away from the Zlatoust prison, and they laid their plans to seize you and hold you for a heavy ransom. I gathered this from what I overheard in the train."

Paul Sandoff wavered and yielded.

"If I have been foolish," he said, "it was in a good cause. Circumstances drove me farther than I intended. I put myself in your hands, sir."

A moment later the two were speeding away from the spot, climbing higher up the tangled slope of the Urals, while behind them the clamour and firing receded in the distance. And that night they slept safely in a bear-hunter's hut. They learned subsequently that more than half of the brodyags had either been killed or captured.

To relate how Carfax Baines fulfilled his instructions to the letter, and how he and his titled companion eluded the many risks that cropped up in their path, would be too long an undertaking for this narrative; but by virtue of his precious document he pulled through all right, and one afternoon in May he and the missing Grand Duke arrived in St. Petersburg. A few hours later he received the heartfelt congratulations of the Chief of Police, to whom he modestly told the story of his adventures.

"But how did you fathom the mystery—grasp the solution so quickly?" asked General Tarovitch.

"I picked up separate links," the detective replied, "and wove them into a chain of circumstantial evidence which has proved to be correct. From intimate friends of the Grand Duke I learned that he was liberal-minded, that he desired the people to have greater political freedom, and that he had often expressed

a wish to mingle with the Nihilists in disguise and ascertain if they were as black as they were painted, or if their treatment was unnecessarily harsh. M. Prevost was a personal friend of his Highness, and the latter had been seen on several occasions in the company of the retired police spy, Gregory Daresoff. I studied the account of the trial of the Nihilists; I was struck by the manner in which Paul Sandoff went through the ordeal, and by the fact that he would reveal nothing about himself. Ergo, from the foregoing I readily built up a clue. The Grand Duke laid his plans cleverly and long beforehand.

"Having written his supply of letters and sent them to be posted at different times, he crossed the frontier, waited for his beard to grow, and then returned to Russia. By the aid of Daresoff, whom he bribed, he was admitted to the fraternity of the Nihilists. Unfortunately, the police were on the track of that very gang, and they raided the house. Daresoff, in his praiseworthy attempt to save the Grand Duke from discovery, was killed. His Highness, realizing the position he was in, determined to see it through to the end, and experience all the trials of a convict sentenced to Siberia. He intended to go on as far as Irkutsk, but unforeseen circumstances intervened. You know the rest of the narrative."

"To put it charitably," said General Tarovitch, "the Grand Duke is a misguided fanatic. I trust that his Majesty will punish him as he deserves. As for you, I am at a loss for words to express my admiration. You had better stop in Russia and join us of the Third Section."

"I appreciate the compliment," Baines replied; "but I greatly prefer my foggy London to the rigours of your northern capital."

After an audience with the Czar, who presented him with a valuable diamond and ruby pin, and a handsome cheque, Baines returned home to take up the business that was waiting him there. There can be no doubt, however, that the recent improved treatment of prisoners in Russia, and the reform of the convict laws, is directly due to the personal experiences of his Highness, and the influences he exerted upon his Royal brother.

THE END.

(Continued from page 14.)

Mary Jane tossed her head.

"Then it's about time somebody started!" she snapped. "You think you can insult anybody, an' they won't say nothin' to you! Well, I ain't that sort! As long as people treat me right I'm as 'armless as anythin'! But you'd best take back what you said about me bein' a liar!"

"I shall take back nothing!" exclaimed Miss Babbidge fiercely. "On the contrary, I am quite convinced that you are a liar—and a thief, too! I am sure of your guilt! You are nothing but a common, low-bred servant-girl! You shall leave this establishment to-morrow—in disgrace!"

Mary Jane stood quite still. She was one of those girls who could stand anything up to a certain point, but when that certain point was reached she was hardly responsible for her actions.

And now, goaded beyond endurance, she suddenly gave a wild sort of cry, and fairly threw herself at Miss Babbidge. She clutched at the Housemistress, shook her violently, and then slapped her smartly on the cheek.

"Common and low-bred, am I?" she screamed. "Don't blame me for what happens! I'll show you! A thief, am I? I don't let people say things like that to me!"

Miss Babbidge backed away, pale with alarm.

"Release me!" she shrieked. "How—how dare you? You—you wretched girl! Oh! This—this is dreadful!"

And then Miss Babbidge completely lost control of herself, too. That slap on the face did it. If she had had any common sense, she would have done her utmost to cool Mary Jane down.

But she made matters far worse by clutching at the girl's hair, and pulling at it with all her strength.

The result was what might have been expected.

In five seconds the two women were fighting madly.

And when two women start fighting something happens. The pair were absolutely enraged. Indeed, they were inclined to be hysterical, and they went at it hammer and tongs—both screaming and shouting at one another.

In other parts of the Ancient House the extraordinary sounds were clearly heard. Undoubtedly Miss Babbidge was solely responsible for this terrible occurrence. She had brought it on entirely herself. And when two or three juniors peeped round the corner of the passage to see what was happening they nearly had a fit.

I was just coming out of Study C when Armstrong came tearing along.

"Quick!" he gasped. "There's a fight!"

I heard the shrill sounds of strife.

"Fight?" I repeated. "It sounds like another alarm of fire! Who's making all that din?"

"Don't jaw, you ass—come and have a look

at it!" panted Armstrong. "It's worth quids! Mary Jane and Miss Babbidge!"

"What?" I yelled.

"They're fighting like a couple of bantams!" shouted Armstrong. "Hammer and tongs! Tearing out each other's hair by the handful! Come and have a look!"

He dashed back, and I could hardly bring myself to believe that he had been speaking the truth. It seemed too impossible—too disgraceful. For the Housemistress to be scrapping with a servant was the last thing we could have expected. It was something parallel to a master fighting with a groom.

By the time I arrived at the end of the passage it was crowded with fellows—Removites, fags, Fifth-Formers, and even Sixth-Formers. They were crowding against one another in order to get a view.

Without doubt, the whole thing was lamentable in the extreme, and it was disastrous that the boys should be witnesses. But it was hardly to be expected that they would regard it in a serious light. From their point of view, it was the richest thing of the term.

And there was no question about the fight itself.

Miss Babbidge and Mary Jane were now getting into their stride. They had come right out into the passage, and were clutching at one another in the most desperate manner.

Mary Jane was certainly getting the best of it. She was righteously indignant, and her anger was based on good grounds.

And she was determined to make Miss Babbidge suffer.

She did!

Altogether the fight did not last very long, but long enough for twenty or thirty fellows to see most of it. And nearly all the school heard. The screams were tremendous. But the climax was the best of all.

Mary Jane, flushed and excited, with her hair torn down, and streaming over her shoulders, clutched at Miss Babbidge's hair—which, until now, had eluded her.

But now she obtained a firm hold.

And, to the astonishment of everybody, Miss Babbidge's hair parted company with her head! It was a dreadful moment.

"Oh, my goodness!"

"It's a wig!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The roar that went up was sufficient to shake the school. The juniors could only see something funny in this fight. And the most screamingly funny bit of all was now taking place.

There stood Miss Babbidge, without her hair, and displaying a head that was not far from being bald. She presented an extraordinary sight, and every ounce of her dignity vanished. Under the circumstances, she couldn't very well retain it.

Mary Jane held the wig aloft.

"There you are!" she screamed. "I'll show you! I'll teach you to call me a thief!"

The Housemistress gave one shriek, and fled. She went down the passage as hard as her legs would carry her. And Mary Jane, still holding the wig aloft, went off triumphantly in the other direction.

And that's what started the trouble.

Within ten minutes the school was rocking. Seniors, juniors—practically everybody in the entire place—roared with laughter. It was considered to be the funniest thing that had happened for years.

Outside the effect was strange.

From every part of the two Houses came yells of laughter—laughter from juniors, laughter from seniors, and screams from the fags. Never had St. Frank's had such a tremendous bout of merriment.

And it sounded all the more because it was general. Not here and there, at different times, but over the entire school at the same period.

Miss Trumble heard it in her study, and wondered.

She couldn't think of any reason for such extraordinary laughter. And, at last, she sallied forth in order to make inquiries. It didn't take her long to discover the truth.

She was shocked beyond measure.

For the Housemistress to fight with a maid-servant! Miss Trumble did not divide the blame—she did not consider that Miss Babbidge was at all guilty. All her condemnation descended upon Mary Jane.

And, yet, strictly speaking, the greater fault had been Miss Babbidge's. She was educated—she was the Housemistress. If she had not chosen to fight, nothing would have come of the affair. Hers was the greater fault. But Miss Trumble did not look at it in this way.

She hurried upstairs, and found Miss Babbidge in a state of collapse. The reaction had set in, and she looked a perfect wreck, nearly fainting in an easy chair. Without her wig, she was not handsome.

All this was a tragedy—especially in the eyes of Miss Trumble. As far as she could see, Miss Babbidge would never be able to regain any self-respect. The fellows would laugh at her every time she appeared. Anybody in authority who is made to look ridiculous suffers greatly. It would be a long time before Miss Babbidge recovered her prestige.

And it was the last thing that the Lady Head desired. She was striving to prove that the school could be run better by women than by men. But this didn't prove it. An affair of this kind was a dreadful set-back.

Of this there was no question or query.

Miss Trumble only had to listen to the howls of laughter from every quarter. St. Frank's rocked. Roar after roar broke out, and even the servants themselves were cackling hugely.

Miss Trumble took action.

Clang! Clang! Clang!

We heard that sound as we were gathered

in the common-room, everybody nearly exhausted with laughter.

"My hat!" gasped Griffith, "That's the bell for Big Hall!"

"Blow Big Hall!" sobbed Owen major. "Oh, my hat! Think of it! Did you see old Babsie without her hair? The funniest thing I've seen for years! Hold me up, somebody!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It's all very well to yell like this, but what about that bell?" I demanded. "The school's being summoned to collect in Big Hall—and we've got to go. It'll be interesting, too!"

"Rather!" said Pitt, with a chuckle. "I expect Miss Trumble's going to try and explain things. She's dotty! If she had any sense, she'd let it drop! She'll only make things worse by trying to explain."

"Of course she will!"

"My hat! It'll be interesting!"

As soon as the fellows got this thoroughly into their heads, they did not hesitate. They hurried into Big Hall as quickly as possible. For they were beginning to realise that some more fun was coming.

And it certainly would be funny if Miss Trumble tried to make excuses. Within ten minutes the entire school was collected. It was not the same school as usual. Everybody, including the seniors, had the utmost difficulty in keeping serious. Somebody would make some ludicrous remark—and a burst of laughter in one section would lead to laughter in another.

Then Miss Trumble appeared on the platform.

The Headmistress was looking grave and concerned. She advanced to the edge of the platform, and coughed.

"It is not my intention to say much!" she exclaimed, amid the hush. "I think you all know of the terrible conduct of one of the maidservants——"

"What about Miss Babbidge?" yelled somebody.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Silence!" commanded Miss Trumble, white with anger. "You—you wicked boys! How dare you make fun of such a terrible affair? I need hardly tell you that the servant girl has been dismissed in disgrace——"

"Shame!"

"It's not fair that Mary Jane should be sacked!"

"She's been here for years!"

"Shame!"

"Sack Miss Babbidge as well!"

Miss Trumble raised her hand, and shook with anger.

"Silence!" she commanded, her voice rising. "I—I'm amazed at such a disturbance! Can you think it possible that the girl should be retained after what has happened? I am absolutely disgusted at the behaviour of the whole school. It is a dreadful shock to me!"

The school was silent.

"I could understand the junior boys treating this affair with a spirit of levity," went on Miss Trumble. "But it startles me to find the elder boys laughing and making fun of such a tragic occurrence. My eyes are opened—I am beginning to understand that you are utterly callous and brutal!"

"Better bring the masters back!" shouted Handforth.

"Hear! Hear!"

"We want the Head!" yelled a score of voices.

"I hardly thought it possible that boys of such high standing could be so rude and ill-mannered!" continued Miss Trumble fiercely. "But it is not my intention to make a long speech. I have called you together so that you shall hear your punishment. I cannot allow this matter to pass unheeded."

"Can't we laugh now?"

"Please, Miss Trumble, may we breathe?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Silence, you wretched children!" screamed Miss Trumble, growing angrier and angrier. "Every half-holiday will be cancelled for the period of three weeks! Furthermore, no boys, junior or senior, will be allowed out of the school grounds unless in possession of written permission. That is enough. You may go! I am disgusted with you all!"

Miss Trumble turned, and walked off the platform.

And the school dismissed. But if Miss Trumble was disgusted with the school, words failed to express how the school felt towards Miss Trumble!

## CHAPTER V.

### THE MANIFESTO!



THE Remove was in a ferment.

In every part of the junior quarters Remove fellows were gathering together in groups, excitedly discussing the situation. In-

stead of things getting better, they were getting worse.

Of that there was no question.

The whole situation was bad. And, somehow or other, the Remove suffered more than any other Form in the whole school. It seemed to be the Remove who received the majority of the hard knocks.

And the Remove was just about fed up.

"We're not going to stand it—not likely!" declared Armstrong aggressively. "If Miss Trumble thinks we'll put up with any more of her rot, she's made a mistake. I'm not the kind of chap to make a fuss over trifles—but I'm making a fuss now!"

"Hear, hear!"

"We'll soon show Miss Trumble what we think!"

"Rather!"

"No half-holidays for three weeks!" snorted Handforth, with a bitter laugh.

"Oh, yes! That's likely, ain't it? The first half-holiday we'll jolly well walk out of the classroom and go to the giddy pictures!"

"I don't know about the pictures—we'll do something!" declared Hubbard. "We'll mess up the lessons, anyhow. Fancy—three weeks and not a half-holiday! It's—it's more than flesh and blood can stand!"

"We're flesh and blood—and we won't stand it!" said Reggie Pitt quietly. "Leave it to Nipper, my sons—he'll look after this matter."

Handforth sniffed.

"That's a fat lot of good!" he said witheringly. "And what's Nipper going to do? Nothing! All he'll do is to jaw—and tell us all to wait! I'm fed up with waiting! Make me leader, and see what'll happen!"

"We don't want to see—we can imagine!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You—you jealous rotters!" roared Handforth. "But I'll tell you! If this was left to me, I'd go to Miss Trumble, and—and —"

"Dot her one?" asked Pitt.

"No, I wouldn't!" snorted Handforth. "I should hope I'm above striking a woman!"

"But she's not a woman—she's a gorgon!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What the dickens does it matter about nationality?" yelled Handforth. "I don't care if she's a gorgon or a Dane or a Solomon Islander! She's no good!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"If it was left to me, I'd go straight to her study, and tell her point blank that if she didn't cancel all the punishments, I'd clear out!" said Handforth. "That's what I'd do."

"That wouldn't be necessary?" said De Valerie. "Miss Trumble would tell you to clear out first!"

"I don't mean alone, you duffer!" snapped Handforth. "I'd tell her that I should clear out with all the Remove behind me—following like a flock of sheep! Actually, you'd be like a flock of donkeys!"

"It's no good doing that sort of thing. Handy!" said Pitt. "Miss Trumble wouldn't take any notice—except to give you the sack. And what would be the good of the Remove clearing out? No, the best thing to do is to leave it to Nipper. He'll get busy."

Pitt was not far wrong. As a matter of fact, I was busy already. Study C was the scene of a serious little conclave—quite different from the rowdy gatherings outside.

There were only five of us present—Tommy Watson, Tregellis-West, Bob Christine, Len Clapson, and myself. The two College House fellows had accepted my invitation to the discussion.

House rows, of course, were distinctly off. Under the present circumstances, we had no time for any kind of squabbling. The situation was so serious that we had to bury the hatchet.

"What I want to do is to get two or three other fellows in here," I said, as a begin-

ning. "We ought to have Pitt, De Valerie, Solomon Levi, and Handforth."

"Not Handforth," said Bob Christine. "He's too noisy."

"If we don't have him in, he'll be noisier," I said. "Besides, Handy's a very useful chap. When it comes to the actual thing, he's a jolly good man. Handy's all right."

"We'd better fetch 'em in, then," suggested Watson.

"Yes—do you mind collecting them together?"

Watson went off, and soon returned with the other juniors. There were now nine of us, and we at once formed ourselves into a committee. During the first five minutes we had dubbed ourselves with the name of the "Action Committee." And we meant to get something done.

"Now, you chaps, we're going to discuss this quietly," I said. "It's not funny, and there's nothing to laugh at. I've been thinking things over and I've decided—"

"Look here, I've got an idea," put in Handforth.

"We don't want any ideas now," I went on. "Just listen to me first. Any other fellow is entitled to talk afterwards. But I think I've got the prior claim, as I'm the Chairman of the Committee."

"Hear, hear! Go ahead, Nipper!"

"We don't want to talk about revolt now," I said. "There's only one excuse for a rebellion—and that's after we've tried every other means. If everything fails, we shall be justified in planning a barring-out."

"That's the talk!" said Pitt approvingly.

"Why not start a barring-out at once?" asked Handforth, glaring.

"Of course, you'd do that, I know," I said. "But it's not my way, Handy—and it's not the right way, either. As I have just said, we must make every effort to gain our ends by peaceful methods. If they absolutely fail, we shall have plenty of justification for a revolt."

"Haven't we got it now?" asked Handy.

"No," I replied. "If we had a barring-out now we shouldn't be justified. And don't forget, that's a very important point. It's all very well to look at these things lightly, but it's a grave business, starting a barring-out. And we want public opinion in our favour. Besides that, we've got our consciences to think of."

"How do you mean?"

"Why, if we're doing the right thing, we shall have nothing to worry about," I said. "And if we're doing the right thing, we shall do it with far more enthusiasm. But it would be absolute madness to revolt

if there's a chance of gaining our ends by peaceful overtures."

"You're right, Nipper; absolutely right!" said Bob Christine.

"Hear, hear!"

"Oh, well, I won't argue!" growled Handforth with an air of resignation. "What's the idea, anyhow?"

"We've got to get up a manifesto to start with," I said.

"Get up a which?"

"A manifesto."

"And what's that?"

"Why, a kind of declaration," I answered.

"But I'll explain. We've got all sorts of things to complain about, and we'll put them before Miss Trumble in a plain, straightforward manner. For example, we'll set out the various points in order."

"How do you mean?"

"To begin with, we'll say that we want football back," I went on. "We don't want net-ball; we demand football. We want supper, and the bed-time at the proper hour. We want no more bread-and-water punishment. We won't submit to half-holidays being cancelled. We won't agree to the idea of being kept in the school grounds."

"Good!" said Pitt. "That's the stuff."

"What we've got to do is to get this manifesto out now—at once," I continued. "The fewer words we can use the better. All we need is to get the different points in. Then we'll get all the chaps together in the common room, and we'll have the manifesto signed by the whole Remove—every single fellow."

"That's the best idea of all," said Bob Christine.

"Our future movements will depend upon Miss Trumble's answer," I continued. "If she agrees to make things better, all well and good. Mind you, I don't suppose for a moment that she'll grant all our demands. But when she sees that the whole Remove is unanimous, she might give way to a certain extent. If so, we shall have to discuss things, and decide what course we shall take."

"Supposing she refuses altogether?" asked Levi.

"It's no good supposing anything," I said. "The main thing is to get this manifesto out, and deliver it. We can do it within an hour if we like. And we shall take action afterwards, in accordance with the reply."

All the fellows agreed that my idea was the best.

They said there was nothing to compare with it. It was quite impossible to do anything drastic. It was only right to give Miss Trumble a chance to meet the Remove, if she inclined to do so. And there was not the slightest doubt that we had several big grievances.

The manifesto was worded at once.

By the time it was finished all the facts were set down. We told the Headmistress, in plain terms, that we protested against

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the abolition of football; we protested against the abolition of supper; we desired the bed-time back at its customary hour; we disliked bread-and-water punishment, and all the other points that I had mentioned were set down.

The language of the manifesto was polite and stiff. Under no circumstances could Miss Trumble say that we had insulted her. All we wanted was justice—and we wanted it quickly.

Even Handforth had nothing to say. He was compelled to agree that the scheme was the soundest one that we could adopt. For we gave the Headmistress a chance to avoid trouble.

While the manifesto was being worded, Tommy Watson had gone out, passing the word round to all the other members of the Remove. Thus, in just over half an hour, I found everything ready.

We had decided to sign the thing in the Lecture Hall. For one thing, it was bigger, and it enabled the whole Remove to be present at once. And I told the fellows to keep as quiet as possible.

"It's a serious business," I said, "and we don't want to attract much notice. Everything depends upon Miss Trumble's answer. We're absolutely fed up with her system of rule, and we're going to have it changed."

"Hear, hear!"

"Good old Nipper!"

"We're ready to sign as soon as you like!"

"Rather!"

"Down with Miss Trumble!"

"Now then, none of that!" I interrupted. "Don't start yelling. It's quite likely that Miss Trumble will meet us, once she thoroughly understands that we're in real earnest. And she'll certainly understand that when she gets this manifesto, signed by every fellow in the Remove."

"Hear, hear!"

The fellows came up to the big desk on the platform. One by one they signed. Even Fullwood and Co., who usually kept quite to themselves, were eager to add their signatures. For once they were entirely in agreement with the other members of the Form.

I had got the fellows to realise that there was no spoof about this business; nothing to laugh at, or make fun of. It was very serious. And the signatures were added, one by one.

At last the manifesto was complete.

"What if Miss Trumble refuses to take any action?" asked Armstrong. "Supposing she won't listen to us?"

"I've already said that we can't suppose," I replied. "But I'll tell you this—if she turns the thing down completely, there'll be trouble—and jolly big trouble, too!"

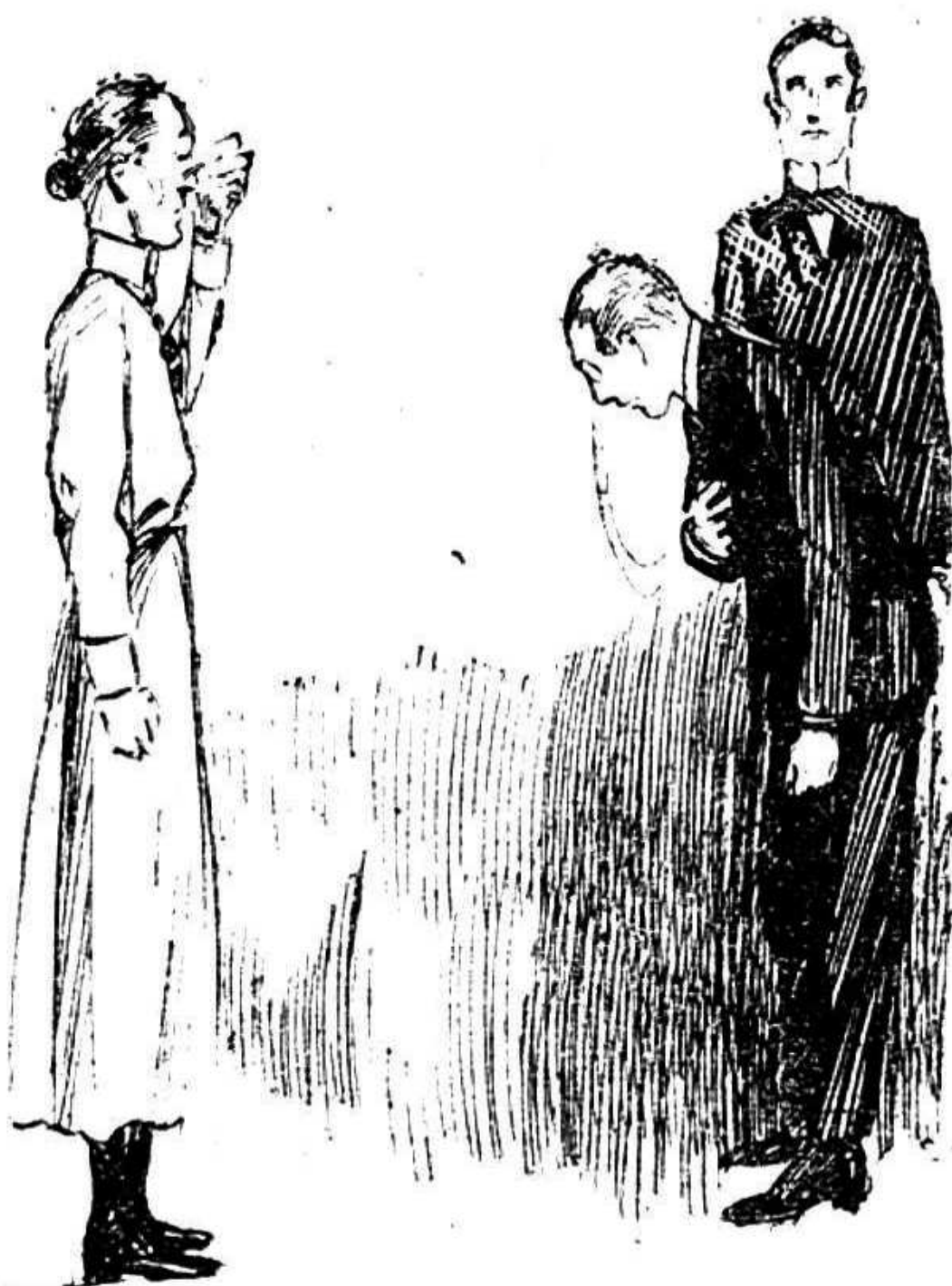
"A barring-out?" breathed somebody.

"I won't say that," I replied grimly.

"But you're not far wrong."

"Oh!"

The Remove was tensely excited. And I was just preparing to fold the manifesto up when Fenton, of the Sixth, looked in. He



Archie bowed low. "We are positively all serene now," he answered. "Phipps, the priceless one, has returned to the fold."

could see at once that something unusual was afoot.

"What's the idea of this gathering?" he asked bluntly.

Tommy Watson nudged me.

"Better hide that thing up!" he whispered.

I shook my head.

"Here you are, Fenton. This is what we've been doing," I said quietly. "I'm glad you've come. I should like to hear your opinion."

I knew that it would do no harm to show the manifesto to the School Captain. He was just as much fed up with Miss Trumble as we were, although the other Forms had not suffered so severely as the Remove.

Fenton took the manifesto, read it, and then nodded.

"What are you going to do with this?" he asked.

"Take it to Miss Trumble."

Fenton smiled.

"Do you think she'll budge?" he asked.

"Well, I don't know; but she's got a chance," I replied. "What's your idea? Do you approve?"

"Certainly," said Fenton. "Go ahead, and good luck! If Miss Trumble agrees to anything I shall be surprised; but there's no harm in trying. You have my sympathy, kids."

He went out, and the Remove felt all the better because the Captain of St. Frank's had signified his approval.

## CHAPTER VI.

### THE REPLY!



**W**ELL, what about it?" asked Handforth briskly.

"What about what?"

"How's the manifesto going to be delivered?"

"Well, we want to be absolutely sure that it gets into Miss Trumble's hands," I replied. "We could send it by post, but that would be an unnecessary waste of time."

"Of course," said Pitt. "We want her to get it at once."

"Rather," said Armstrong. "I expect she'll give a reply straight off—and that's just what we want. Can't keep a thing like this hanging about. We shall be on edge until we know the result."

"The best thing is to take it personally," I went on. "We'll put it straight into Miss Trumble's own hands and ask her to read it. There can't be any bloomer then."

"Get Archie to take it!" suggested Griffith. "He's pretty harmless, and Miss Trumble might receive him well."

Archie Glenthorne shook his head.

"Absolutely not!" he declared. "I mean to say, absolutely not, with a somewhat huge extent of emphasis. It can't be done, ladies. It's frightful, having to refuse; but there you are. To be quite candid, it's frightfully frightful!"

I grinned.

"All right, Archie; we won't trouble you—"

"Pray allow me to explain!" went on Archie firmly. "You see, old can of beans, it's this way. I, as it were— That is to say, you— No, no! Let us be precise. We— Yes, that's it! Good! Now, where were we? We, don't you know—we have got to have this thing quite straight."

"You needn't worry, Archie—"

"Absolutely not," said Archie. "Worry? Well, rather not! I mean to say, a bally thing of that sort doesn't worry me! But, to continue. Regarding the reluctant refusal. I'd jolly well go and see Miss Trumble like a bird under ordinary circumstances, but I don't think it would be quite the thing just now. Do you follow, or not?"

"Oh, my hat!" I groaned. "Who started him off?"

"Rather!" said Archie nodding. "That's just it, laddie! Once I get fairly started off, there's positively no stopping me. I mean to say, I'm a bit of a goer—what? Whizzing about here, and whizzing about there, and all sorts of stuff like that! The reason I don't want to dash into the presence of Miss Trumble is this. Absolutely! The reason I don't want to stagger into the

old girl's boudoir is on account of Phipps. You get me? Phipps, as it were, is a priceless cove—"

"Take him quietly outside and sandbag him!" I said patiently.

Archie stared.

"Dash it all!" he protested. "Dash it all! Don't think for a bally moment that I'm butting in, but don't you consider that rather poisonous? I mean to say, taking a chappie outside and sandbagging him! Somewhat frightfully severe! It's all very well to have a little chat, but when it comes to sandbagging—"

"Dry up, you blessed gramophone!" I shouted.

"What ho!" said Archie. "Of course, that's different! When you come to think of it, a gramophone is a frightfully decent thing. I've been thinking about having one shoved in the old study. There's just a corner that looks fearfully bare. Now, a gramophone would be priceless."

"Have it!" I groaned. "I don't care if you have a dozen!"

"My dear old lad!" said Archie shocked. "But that would be extrav.! One's enough, surely? You know, a few frightfully decent records, and there you are! We bring the good old London stage straight to St. Frank's! Priceless humour by W. H. Berry, don't you know; ripping rag-time, one of these dashed American chappies; sprightly duets by the topping Duncan Sisters—"

"Never mind the Duncan Sisters now!" shouted Pitt. "Great Scott! Fancy talking about gramophone records. Who wants to hear W. H. Berry, or American rag-time, or sprightly duets by the Duncan Sisters?"

"Well, I mean to say, everybody!" said Archie, with surprise. "Dash it all, sprightly duets are always somewhat decent! You sit there and listen, and away go your jolly old feet like the dickens! You grasp my meaning? For example—"

"At any ordinary time I'd be the first to agree," I said, grasping Archie by the arm. "I think it's a stunning idea. But just now you're a giddy nuisance! So trickle away—and trickle quickly!"

Archie adjusted his monocle.

"You think so?" he asked mildly. "I mean, you'd like me to flow forth?"

"I'd love it!" I replied.

"Good enough!" said Archie, with a nod. "Absolutely! One word, old darling, is good enough for me! I mean to say, every time! When Archie isn't required, off he bally well goes! And that don't you know, is that!"

"Thank goodness!" I breathed, as Archie lounged off. "When he gets started, it's a man's job to stop him! Now, about this manifesto. I think the whole committee ought to take it."

"That's a good wheeze," said Handforth. "I'll hand it in—"

"No, you won't—you'll simply be present in order to make the thing look impressive."

I interrupted. "Now, come on, let's be off. We'll go straight to Miss Trumble's study."  
"Good!"

"Come on; there's no time to waste."

And the Action Committee, having delayed long enough, went off in a body. I was at their head, and it was not long before we found ourselves outside the door of Miss Trumble's study.

"Now, don't forget; leave the talking to me!" I whispered. "There's not much necessary. You fellows have come along just for the sake of appearances. It looks more important."

I tapped on the door, and waited.

"Come in!" came the voice of the Headmistress.

We entered, looking very solemn and serious. It had all been arranged beforehand. I went straight up to Miss Trumble's desk, and the other fellows ranged themselves on either side of me—four on the left, and four on the right.

The Headmistress gazed at us in astonishment.

"What is the explanation of this—this invasion?" she inquired severely. "Come, children! How dare you play such a trick—"

"No trick, ma'am," I interrupted. "We are a committee of the Remove Form. We represent the whole Remove."

"Indeed," said Miss Trumble.

She looked us over with a severe eye.

"And why have you come here?" she went on. "Why have you bothered me at this hour? Let me tell you, it is a piece of impertinence, particularly after the disgraceful scenes of to-night."

"There is no impertinence intended, ma'am," I said. "Here is a Manifesto—"

"A what?"

"A Statement, signed by every boy in the Remove," I went on. "And we, the Committee, have brought it to you for consideration. We would like you to give us your answer as early as possible, ma'am."

Miss Trumble compressed her lips.

"Have you dared to complain?" she demanded angrily.

"Please read the manifesto, ma'am," I said. "There is no necessity for us to speak if you will read."

She took the document, unfolded a part of it, and gave it a curt glance.

"Oh, indeed!" she exclaimed sourly. "I need hardly tell you, children, that I have no time to bother with this now—"

"We want an answer!" put in Handforth gruffly.

"I have no time to read this absurd thing now!" went on Miss Trumble. "Possibly I will glance at it later. If I consider that any reply is necessary, I will post it on the Notice Board. That will do."

"Very well, ma'am," I said quietly.

I turned, and walked towards the door. The other fellows followed, Handforth glar-

ing at me in an aggressive fashion. We got outside, not exactly delighted.

"You—you ass!" hissed Handforth.

"What's the matter with you?"

"Is that what you call being a good leader?" demanded Handy. "My hat! You can't say boo to a goose! We want a reply now, not when Miss Trumble likes! What's the good of playing about?"

"Handy, you're hopeless!" I exclaimed. "Don't you think Miss Trumble's got other work to do? Do you imagine that she's going to put everything aside for our sake? We've got to give her time. In all probability she'll read it at once, and post the notice up within an hour."

"It's jolly unsatisfactory, all the same," said De Valerie. "What's the good of a notice? She can't give any proper reply like that."

"Well, we'll see," I said.

As a matter of fact, I had never had any hope of victory from Miss Trumble. But I had considered it absolutely necessary to deliver the Manifesto. That was the first essential thing.

The news soon got about the Remove.

The fellows were all on tenterhooks, too. Many of them haunted the lobby, expecting to see Tubbs come along with a notice. But the time passed, and there was no result.

There was no sign of any notice.

At length eight o'clock arrived—bed-time for the Remove. And we were destined to go to bed disappointed. I felt rather grim. It seemed to be an indication that there was not much to hope for.

"It's a slight!" declared Armstrong. "I don't suppose she means to reply at all. The blessed old Gorgon! How the dickens can we sleep without knowing what she's going to do?"

But the juniors had to resign themselves to the inevitable. There was certainly no reply for them. And when everybody was up in the dormitory, there was a great deal of discussion.

But, of course, nothing came of it.

It was all talk. Many of the fellows had rather wild ideas. They wanted to start a rebellion on the spot. They wanted to show Miss Trumble that the Remove was not to be sat on.

But, as I pointed out, there was nothing to be gained by undue haste. We had given Miss Trumble the chance to put things right if she liked. If she didn't like, the result would be of her own making.

It was only fair to give her the opportunity.

By doing this she would never be able to say that she would have met us if we had put our grievances before her. She would have no defence, and that would strengthen our own cause.

It was rather late before the Remove got to sleep.

In the end, the juniors fairly talked them-

selves into slumber. They went off one by one. And the matter was left in abeyance until the rising-bell clanged out in the morning.

It was probably a record for the Remove.

There was an absolute race to get dressed. Instead of turning out sluggishly, grumbling at the cold, and protesting at all manner of things, the fellows simply scrambled into their clothing.

Handforth and Pitt and I were the first three to be ready. It was a dead-heat between us, and we rushed downstairs, closely followed by a few more who were in the final stages of attire.

Our object was to look at the Notice Board.

shall inflict for such an outrageous breach of discipline. In reply to the communication itself, the Headmistress has nothing to say."

"Well, I'm hanged!" said Reginald Pitt, taking a deep breath.

"The—the old rotter!" gasped Handforth. "She's got nothing to say! She's considering the punishment! What are you going to do about it, Nipper?"

I looked grim.

"Well, there's not much question about it now," I said. "Mind you, I half expected something of this kind, although I hardly believed that Miss Trumble would be so

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I thought it highly improbable that any reply would be there yet, but I was eager enough to have a look. We dashed into the lobby, and came to a halt in front of the big baize-covered board.

"It's there!" panted Reggie Pitt.

We stared at it, and read the words that were written.

It was so brief that we read the notice in a few seconds:

"The Headmistress has read the impertinent communication signed by all the boys of the Remove Form. The Headmistress is considering the punishment she

arrogant. Fancy taking our polite statement in that spirit!"

"She ought to be boiled!" said Pitt.

By this time the other juniors were crowding round.

"She refuses to say anything!"

"She won't do anything for us!"

"We'll have a barring-out—we'll rebel!"

"Hurrah!"

"Down with tyranny!"

"Down with petticoat rule!"

I looked round anxiously.

"Steady on, you chaps—steady on!" I exclaimed. "You won't do any good by shouting like that. We can't start any-

thing now—in the early morning. We haven't made any plans, either."

"Be sensible, for goodness' sake!" called out Pitt.

"But ain't we going to do anything?" roared Armstrong.

"Yes, later on," I replied. "But you're all so jolly impatient! Miss Trumble has turned us down. She won't even listen to our requests. She hasn't had the decency to give a polite answer."

"Then let's go on strike!"

"Hurrah!"

"Not yet!" I called out. "That wouldn't be any good at all. And this isn't the place to talk about that. Leave it to me, my sons, and I'll do something. We're all in this together, and we'll see it through to the bitter end!"

"Good old Nipper!"

"We'll leave it to you, old man!"

And the Remove, although still seething with indignation, calmed down a bit. All the fellows were expecting me to take some strong, definite action. They would not expect in vain.

Already my mind was busy with plans and schemes.

## CHAPTER VII.

### THE LAST STRAW!



**A**LL day long, in spite of my constant hints that the fellows should be subdued, the Remove boiled, and nearly bubbled over.

It was only with great difficulty that the fellows held themselves in check during the lessons. Excitement and indignation were at fever pitch. And the Remove was further irritated by the petty punishments which were inflicted by Miss Teezer. She seemed to welcome the opportunity to show her power.

Of course, she knew why the Remove was so restless.

The whole school was aware of the Manifesto by this time and the whole school was also aware of Miss Trumble's reply. Even the seniors were beginning to take a big interest.

They looked to the Remove to take some sort of action. They were too dignified to take any themselves. But even the Sixth Formers were in full and complete sympathy with us. They had reason to resent the rule of Miss Trumble, and her lady colleagues, too.

By tea-time I half hoped that the ferment would die down a bit. But it didn't. If anything, the juniors became more excited than ever.

There was no doubt that all the fellows were keenly in favour of a revolt—a barring-out on the spot! But something occurred shortly after tea-time that absolutely put the lid on it,

It was something which made the Remove positively writhe.

Most of the fellows were within their studies, tea being just over. And in every study a separate discussion was going on—but the subject was the same in every case.

Even Fullwood and Co., the cads of the Remove, were taking an interest in these eventful hours. They had finished tea, too, and were enjoying—or pretending to enjoy—a cigarette by the fire.

"Of course, if it comes to any rebellion, I don't think I shall take any part in it," said Fullwood.

"Why not?"

"It wouldn't be good policy," replied Ralph Leslie.

"Oh, I don't know," exclaimed Gulliver. "We ought to back all the other fellows up in a case like this. We've got to suffer as much as they have, remember. Just think what it means—no half-holidays—and bed at eight o'clock! Why, it's put a stop to all our little games! We can't go out, anyway, of an evenin' nowadays."

"Of course we can't," said Bell. "I think Nipper's a prig an' a beast, but I'm backin' him up over this affair."

Fullwood threw some ash into the fireplace.

"I don't expect you chaps to have much brain," he said calmly. "Can't you realise that we shall do better if we stand out of any rebellion?"

"How shall we?"

"Because we'll go to Miss Trumble an' tell her we don't believe in it," smiled Fullwood. "We'll spoof her up properly—lay it on thick, you know. An' she'll call us good little boys, an' let us do just as we please."

"By gad, that's not a bad idea," said Gulliver.

"Well, it might work," agreed Bell. "I suppose Miss Trumble would give us certain privileges if we stood by her?"

"No doubt about it," replied Fullwood. "Anyway, we'll see how things go on. But you can be quite certain that some excitin' times are comin'!"

They were coming sooner than Fullwood expected.

For, at that very moment, Miss Trumble was walking along the Remove passage. She had decided to visit the juniors in their own quarters. She meant to have a few words in each study—soothing, gentle words, so that she would put a stop to all this exciting talk.

And it was only natural that she should start with Study A. She got opposite the door, and then she paused, sniffing the air. A look of alarm and horror came into her eyes.

"Tobacco smoke!" she murmured. "Impossible!"

She sniffed again, and was startled. There were no men in the Ancient House—nobody who smoked at all. Then where could this odour be coming from? The idea of the boys smoking was out of the question.

She grasped the handle of the door of Study A, and turned it.

Her entry in the apartment was so unexpected that Fullwood and Co. didn't have the slightest chance of taking the cigarettes out of their mouths. They were caught red-handed. Miss Trumble had never visited the studies before—in fact, none of the lady teachers had.

The Nuts jumped to their feet, thoroughly startled.

"Good gracious me!" ejaculated Miss Trumble, aghast.

The room was full of tobacco smoke, and the Nuts had their cigarettes in their hands. Hastily, they tossed them into the fireplace—but, of course, it was too late.

"This—this is monstrous!" panted Miss Trumble. "Children—children! What does it mean? Smoking—smoking cigarettes! Who taught you such wicked, wicked habits?"

Fullwood partially recovered himself.

"It's all right, Miss Trumble," he said, with a show of coolness. "Only just one, you know. No harm in that—"

"No harm!" interrupted Miss Trumble shrilly. "You wretched boy! This—this is what comes of allowing such young children to have separate rooms of their own! I have long feared that it was an unwise policy! Now, I am certain—quite certain!"

"There's nothing much in it——"

"Silence!" said the Lady Head curtly. "I will decide upon your punishment later. The matter is altogether too grave to be settled in a moment. One thing, however, is quite certain."

The Nuts waited, hardly knowing what to expect.

"When I first took charge of this school I feared that it was quite wrong for junior boys to have studies of their own!" continued Miss Trumble, her voice quivering with anger. "It occurred to me that such young children would not be able to use the rooms in the correct way. I have seen with my own eyes that these studies are abused!"

"All the chaps don't smoke, Miss Trumble!" put in Bell. "It wouldn't be fair to accuse the rest——"

"Enough!" rapped out the Headmistress. "What one boy will do, so will another! There is only one course that I can adopt. I must be firm—I must be quite, quite firm!"

She opened the door of the study, and pointed outside.

"Go!" she said curtly.

"But——"

"Go!" insisted Miss Trumble. "You will not be allowed to use this study again. Later, I shall make arrangements for your books and personal papers and belongings to be fetched away. But never again shall junior boys occupy these private rooms. I have seen sufficient!"

Fullwood and Co. staggered.

"You're—you're goin' to turn us out of

our study?" shouted Fullwood. "But we've always used it——"

"It is not my intention to argue!" broke in Miss Trumble. "I am more angry than I can possibly tell you."

"But, look here——"

"Silence!" shouted the lady. "Go!"

She pointed, and Fullwood and Co. had no alternative. They passed out of the study, and Miss Trumble followed them, after switching off the electric light. She took out the key, slammed the door, and then locked it. She kept the key in her hand.

"In future, the boys of the Remove will use only the common room that is set aside for their privilege," said Miss Trumble. "There shall be no more disgraceful scenes such as I have now witnessed."

The Nuts of Study A could hardly believe their ears.

Was it possible that Miss Trumble meant to turn everybody out? They could understand her doing so in their case. But the others! The others never smoked—never abused their studies.

Was she intending to be so appallingly unjust? Fullwood and Co. were more startled than they could think. And they were rather scared, too. For the rest Leslie decided that he ought to make a last effort.

"Look here, Miss Trumble—seriously!" he said, in an earnest voice. "It's not fair to turn the other fellows out. We don't mind so much—perhaps we deserve it. But none of the others smoke——"

"It is quite useless for you to talk in that way!" interrupted Miss Trumble curtly. "You are merely attempting to shield your playmates. It is quite possible that they are not smoking now—but there are other times and other opportunities. And these studies can be abused in other ways, too. I shall not give the boys any chance."

And Fullwood and Co. realised that there was nothing more to be said.

Their own feelings towards the Headmistress changed. After this it would be very difficult to gain favour in her eyes, even if there was a barring-out—even if the Nuts refused to take part in it—there was only a slim chance of Miss Trumble granting them any special privileges.

The Lady Head lost no time. She entered Study B with a grim, set face. She found it empty, for Hubbard and Long were hard up, and had descended to the awful state of having tea in Hall. Miss Trumble closed the door and locked it. Then she presented herself in Study C.

Tommy Watson and Tregellis-West and I had just finished our meal, and were sitting round the fire discussing the general situation. We heard the door open, but did not trouble to look round. Somebody or other was always dodging in.

"Boys! Why don't you stand up when I enter?"

"Begad!" gasped Sir Montie.

We jumped to our feet in a flash. There was no mistaking that voice. There was

Miss Trumble, gazing at us as though we were hardened criminals. There was no kindness in her face.

Even in that tense moment I could see what a change had come about since her first arrival at the school. She had become much more severe—much harsher. It was the sole result of her system of discipline. She had instituted these ideas, and she was finding it very difficult to carry them out. Her only alternative was to resort to harshness.

"Sorry, ma'am," I said politely. "We didn't know it was you."

"That is quite all right, child," said Miss Trumble. "You will leave this study at once. Come, I am in no mood for nonsense!"

"But what's the idea, Miss Trumble?" I asked. "This is our study——"

"It will no longer be your study!" snapped Miss Trumble. "In future, the junior boys will not have rooms of their own. My eyes are opened, and I shall not allow smoking and other vices to continue."

"Smoking!" shouted Watson. "But we don't smoke!"

Miss Trumble turned her back, and walked into Study D.

"Great Scott!" I breathed. "Well, this is the last straw!"

"Turned out of our studies, begad!" said Sir Montie blankly. "Dear old boys, it strikes me that things have come to a pretty pass—they have, really! I don't think the other fellows will like it much."

It would have been better, perhaps, if Miss Trumble had tapped upon the door of Study D before entering. As it was, she met with misfortune at the very outset. For Handforth, in his efforts to bring his chums to a proper state of subjection, was resorting to his usual methods.

Perhaps it would be better to say that his present methods were slightly unusual. Handforth had been arguing that the Remove ought to seize the whole school, and turn the mistresses out, neck and crop. And Church and McClure, in their folly had dared to differ.

Church had already received a punch on the nose, and McClure's left ear was slightly puffed. After that, they had resorted to dodging. And it so happened that Church was near the door, ready to flee, if necessary.

At this very moment, also, Handforth picked up a jam tart, and flung it at Church. It was very reminiscent of an American film comedy. Church ducked, and Miss Trumble received the tart very neatly in the middle of her face.

"That's for having the nerve to argue!" roared Handforth. "You—you—— Great pip! What the ——"

Handforth came to an abrupt halt, his voice trailing away. He had another tart ready to throw, but it dropped from his nervous fingers, and fell on the floor with a plop.

The situation was rather tense.

Miss Trumble tore the jam tart away from



**And, to the astonishment of everybody, Miss Babbidge's hair parted company with her head.**

her face, and hastily used her handkerchief.

"Upon my soul!" she said thickly. "If I had any doubts whatever, they are now dispelled! Children! Leave this room at once!"

Handforth felt that it was up to him to apologise. He did so in his own peculiar way.

"Jolly sorry, Miss Trumble!" he said gruffly. "Of course, I didn't know you were going to butt in like that! How was I to be prepared for some silly ass opening the door suddenly?"

"You are making matters no better by adding insult to injury!" stormed the Headmistress. "I have long suspected that these studies were being grossly misused. In future the junior boys will have no such privilege. You will make your exit now!"

"What!" gasped Handforth. "You're going to turn us out of the study?"

"Go!"

"You're turning us out for good?" yelled Handforth.

Miss Trumble pointed to the door; she couldn't trust herself to speak. And Handforth and Co., bewildered, indignant, and fuming, passed outside into the passage. Miss Trumble slammed the door, and locked it.

"But you can't really mean it, ma'am?" said Handforth faintly. "The fellows have always had studies in the Remove——"

"You shall have studies no longer!"

"By George!" roared Handforth. "If you think you can mess about like this, I'll jolly soon show you——"

"Silence!" screamed Miss Trumble. "How dare you argue with me? One more word and you shall have nothing but bread-and-water all to-morrow!"

Handforth gasped.

"What, again?" he snorted. "It's nothing

but bread-and-water nowadays! Great pip! If we go on like this we shall be as thin as rakes by the end of the term! I'm not going to stand it!"

"You wretched boy!" panted the Head-mistress. "This is too much! I shall deal with you later!"

Handforth was about to reply, but I dragged him aside, and gripped him tightly.

"Don't!" I breathed. "It's no good; And you needn't worry—before to-morrow comes we shall be in open revolt!"

"You mean it?" panted Handforth breathlessly.

"Yes!" I said grimly. "I mean it!"

"Good!" said Handy. "By George! This is just about the last edge of the limit! It's more than flesh and blood can stand!"

"Yes; Miss Trumble's gone too far this time!" I agreed. "She's put the lid on things with a vengeance!"

And Miss Trumble, all unconscious of the the gathering storm, passed from study to study. She acted just the same in every case. She turned the juniors out, and locked the doors behind them.

And now she was doing so without giving any explanation. Fully half the fellows hadn't the faintest idea what was in the wind. They found themselves in the passage, and were bewildered.

At last Miss Trumble had done.

She had locked every study in the Remove. Fortunately for her, Archie Glenthorne had been absent at the time, or she would have had quite a trouble with Archie. He was an amiable kind of fellow, but he would have put up a very strong protest against being turned out of his luxurious apartment.

Miss Trumble went.

And the Remove burst out into violent conversation.

"Are we going to stand this?" shouted Armstrong fiercely.

"No!"

"Never!"

"We'll stand a few things, but not this!" roared Griffith. "She not only ignores our manifesto, but turns us out of our studies on the top of it! She's absolutely asking for trouble!"

"And she'll get it, too!"

"Piles of it!"

"Yes, but not now!" I shouted. "Leave it to me, you chaps, and you'll have nothing to grumble at. After this, there's nothing else to be done!"

"Hurrah!"

"We look to you, Nipper to get things going!"

The Remove had been goaded as it had never been goaded before. It was one thing on the top of another—almost without pause. To carry on under these conditions was utterly out of the question.

And it was just the same with the College House.

Over there Christine and Co. were turned out in just the same way as the fellows in the Ancient House. And the indignation on the other side was also at fever pitch.

Only half an hour later a notice appeared on the board.

It was brief and to the point.

Miss Trumble accused the Remove of abusing the studies, and these studies were absolutely prohibited in future. The Remove was to use the common room only. Indeed, the Remove passage was to be entirely closed.

As I had said, it was the last straw.

If Miss Jane Trumble had had an ounce of common sense—if she had known anything about boys—she would never have applied the goad to such an extent as this. No human youngsters would stand it.

And during the rest of the evening the juniors hardly knew what they were doing. They were only kept from open rebellion by the knowledge that I was planning out some scheme, and that the barring-out was coming almost at once.

The rest of the school was full of sympathy. It was the Remove which suffered most every time. The seniors openly approved of our attitude. There had been rebellions before, but there had never been a rebellion where the seniors were in full sympathy with the junior cause.

Unless I was vastly mistaken, the events of the next few days were to prove exciting and thrilling.

For the great barring-out against petticoat rule was due to commence!

THE END.

**NEXT WEEK the great "Barring-Out" begins in real earnest in a capital story of thrills and dramatic situations, entitled:**

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# Editorial Announcement.

My Dear Readers.

In the foregoing stories of this series, Miss Trumble has not only proved herself to be a woman of a most unimaginative type, but one of those busybodies who strive after social reform and only succeed in defeating their most excellent motives by their rabid intolerance and fanaticism. She is unable to distinguish discipline from despotism, justice from sentimentality, or common sense from a narrowness of vision. The petty restrictions she has imposed on the Remove and the absurd nature of the punishments, revealing a hopeless lack of understanding and sympathy for those under her control, have fanned the glow of unrest that has already made its appearance throughout the school. The boys can stand it no longer, and are rallying round Nipper to bring matters to a crisis. The

Leader of the Remove has not been idle. His scheme for the great "Barring-Out" is practically complete and will be described in our next story:

**"DOWN WITH PETTICOAT RULE!"**

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Your sincere friend,

THE EDITOR.

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