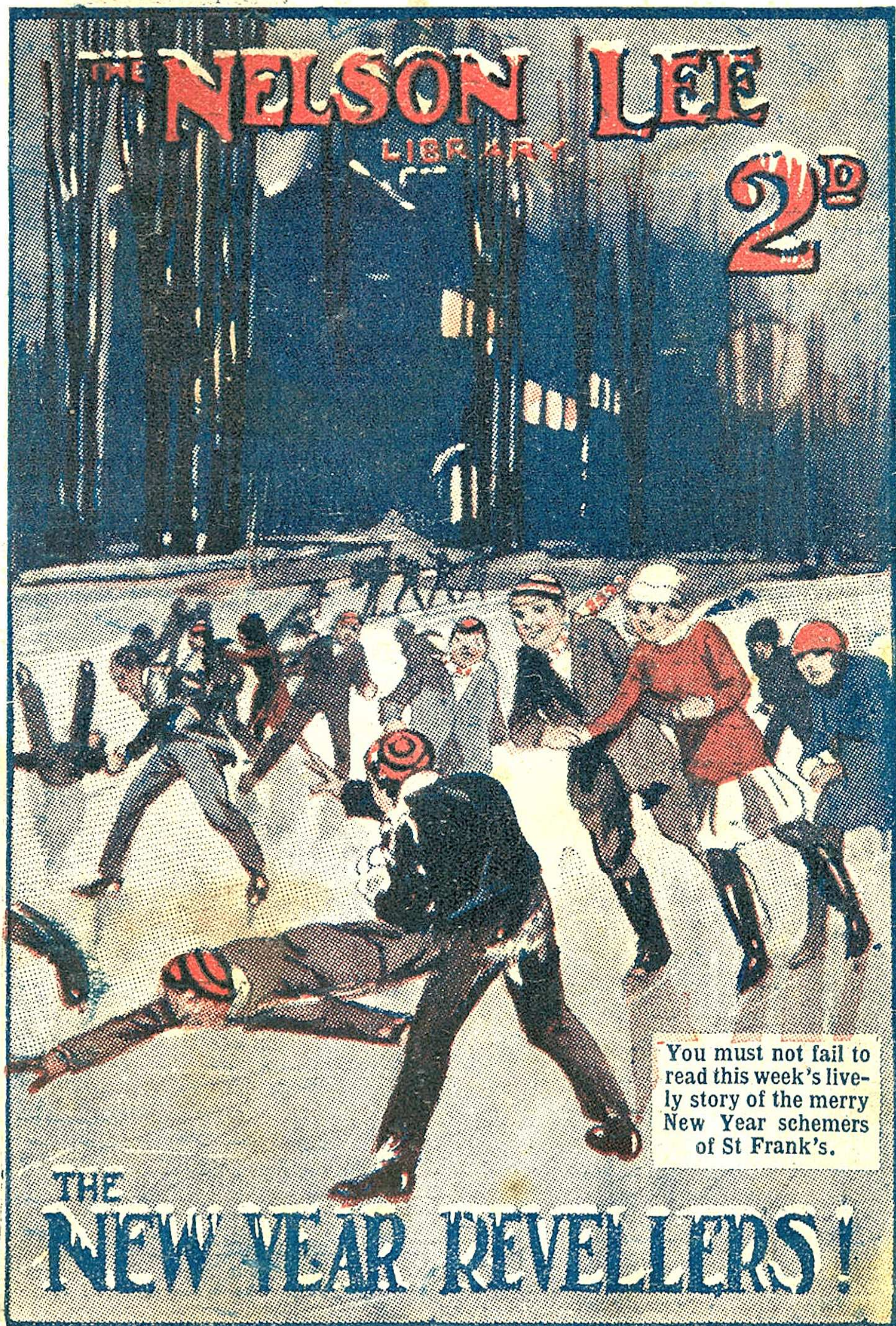


SPECIAL NEW YEAR STORY THIS WEEK!

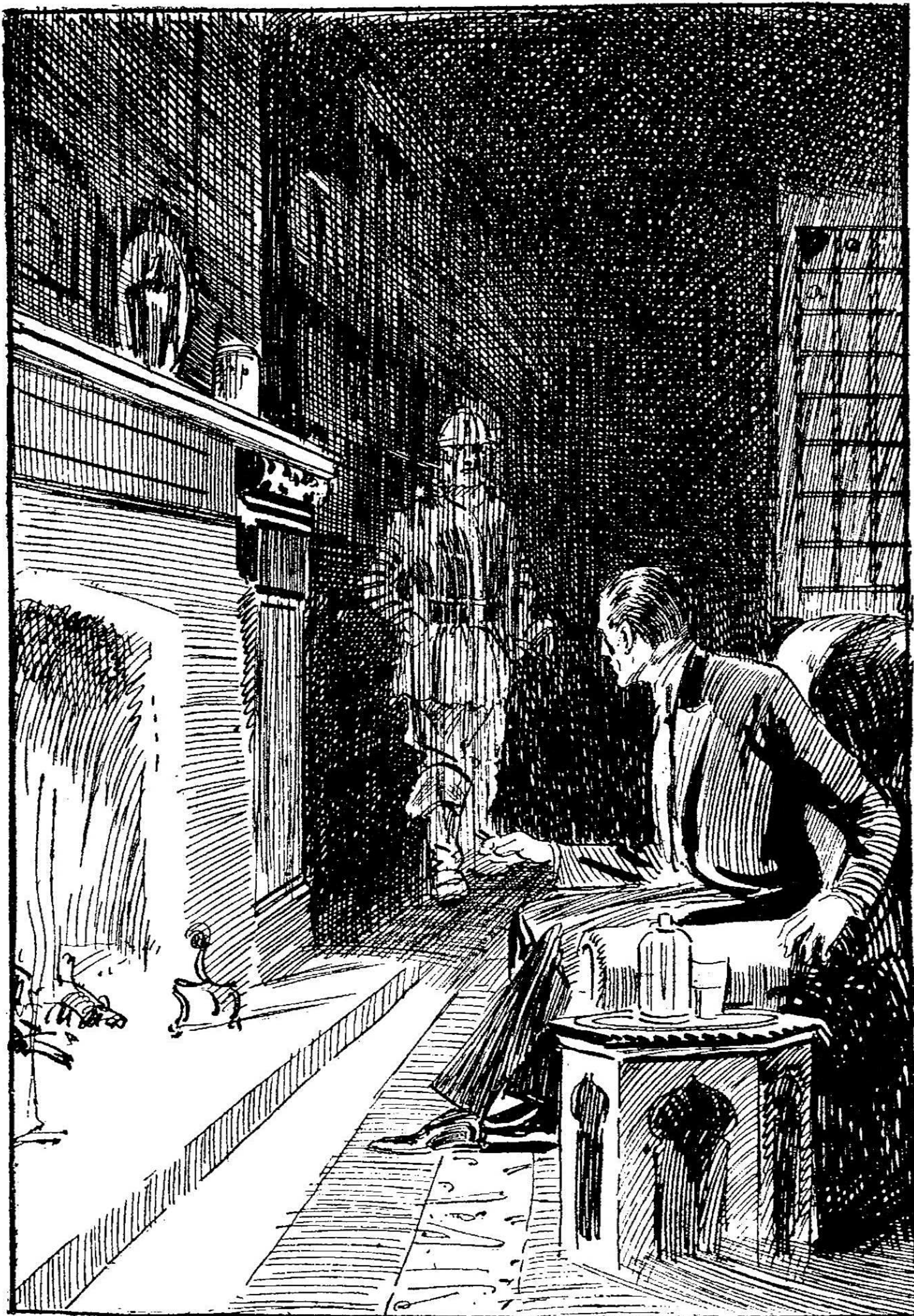


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You must not fail to read this week's lively story of the merry New Year schemers of St Frank's.

THE NEW YEAR REVELLERS!



A strange figure seemed to materialise out of the very shadows. And Bruce felt a queer sensation assail his skin as he recognised the familiar form of a Cromwellian Roundhead.

THE NEW YEAR REVELLERS!



By EDWY SEARLES BROOKS

This week's story relates how our youthful guests at Dorrimore Castle connive in a daring plot to bring about a reunion between Miss Halliday and Mr. Bruce, each of whom thinks the other dead. Though at one time Miss Halliday does not seem to appreciate the good intentions of the merry schemers, the result more than justifies the means. Altogether, it is a tophole New Year story.

THE EDITOR.

CHAPTER I.

THE CHRISTMAS CONSPIRATORS.

WILLIAM NAPOLEON BROWNE, the lanky skipper of the Fifth Form at St. Frank's, threw open the door of Dorrimore Castle, and allowed the moonlight to flood in.

"A wonderful night, Brother Willy," he observed genially. "Without wishing to be too personal, I trust that you and your young companions are in a fit condition to face this icy ordeal?"

"I don't know about Chubby and Juicy, but I'm all right," replied Willy Handforth, as he struggled into his overcoat. "What's that in your pocket, Juicy? My hat! Haven't you eaten enough without boning a pocketful?"

"Alas! Such criminal tendencies in one so young!" said Browne sadly.

"You Fifth Form chump!" roared Juicy Lemon. "It's only my cap!"

He indignantly pulled out the headgear in order to prove his statement. Unfortunately a number of Brazil nuts rattled to the floor, accompanied by three or four

squashed chocolates, intermingled with a bunch of muscatels.

"Oh, corks!" breathed Juicy in dismay. "A somewhat awkward predicament, Brother Lemon," said Browne. "Let us not inquire too closely into further details. I trust, however, that you will clear away the debris with all decent speed. I may be squeamish, but mangled chocolates invariably affect me with nausea."

Browne turned his head away in silent agony as Juicy Lemon stuffed a conglomerated mass into his mouth, and pushed the rest of the stuff back into his overcoat pocket. Considering that Juicy had been steadily packing himself with good things for the last eight hours, it was a matter for wonder where he found room for these final items.

It was Christmas night—late. In fact, it was close upon eleven o'clock, and although the party was by no means petering out, Browne had insisted upon escorting Willy & Co. home. It was a surprising move on Browne's part, for he was not usually keen on fraternising with the fags. It was all the more astonishing, too.

because Browne had been the life and soul of the evening, and his loss would be severely felt. However, he had insisted, and when Browne insisted he was as firm as a rock.

"It's a dirty trick, Browne, buzzing off like this," complained Reggie Pitt, as he came along with one or two other juniors. "It's hardly eleven yet, and I thought we were going to keep up the revels into the small hours!"

William Napoleon Browne sighed.

"While realising that my loss will be a bitter blow I have no alternative but to tear myself away," he replied. "Something impels me to venture forth into the night with these human confectionery depositories. It is no exaggeration to state that they are literally overloaded to a point far beyond the danger mark. At any moment they may capsize. It is therefore my duty, as the eldest fellow of the party, to steer them homewards."

Dick Hamilton chuckled.

"Perhaps you're right, Browne," he agreed. "In any case, it's time those fags were off home. Mr. and Mrs. Heath will wonder what on earth's happened to 'em."

"If they stayed any longer they'd probably explode," declared Pitt. "It's a good idea of yours to see them home, Browne. They'd never manage it alone."

The fags made no comment. Under ordinary circumstances they would have indignantly protested against these remarks. But Juicy Lemon and Chubby Heath were in a condition bordering on coma. It wasn't all due to sleepiness. It was a kind of reaction after hours of overwork. Their interiors were still performing miracles of overtime.

But they were quite happy. They had spent one of the most enjoyable Christmas evenings they could remember. Even Willy only grinned cheerfully at the gentle sarcasm of the Removites. And presently they went out into the moonlight, and set off through the glistening snow, with Browne dodging round them like a hen looking after her brood.

There were quite a number of St. Frank's fellows in Dorrimore Castle. Handforth & Co. were in evidence, to say nothing of Dick Hamilton and Tommy Watson and Tregellis-West. Reggie Pitt and Archie Glenthorne were there, too, and a few others.

In order to make the party more complete six of the Moor View girls were among the guests. And all of them were looking happy and cheerful after the merry festivities.

The girls were in fancy costume, while the fellows were resplendent in evening dress. Curiously enough, however, there were no adults in the party. They seemed

to have the whole great castle to themselves.

Willy & Co. had come over during the day from Chubby Heath's home, which was situated a mile or two distant. As a matter of fact, the very party itself had originated in Willy's fertile brain.

He had tricked them down into Derbyshire on the Christmas Eve, thinking it a huge joke. But he hadn't reckoned on the blizzard which had swept the country from end to end. And the party had found itself stranded in the snow.

To the best of Willy's belief, Dorrimore Castle was empty, deserted. In desperation, the stranded guests had broken in, and there had been many surprises. Although Lord Dorrimore was not in residence, the party had fared sumptuously throughout the whole of Christmas Day. In fact, they had had a perfectly glorious time.

For it turned out that a number of special banquets had been prepared, and the party was not slow in taking advantage of the fact. It was the whim of Mr. Henry Bruce, a distant connection of Lord Dorrimore's. Ten years earlier Mr. Bruce had made every arrangement for his wedding on Christmas Day. But at the last moment his fiancée's parents had forbidden the wedding, and had taken her away. A mere girl of seventeen, she had been compelled to obey her stern father.

And the affair had affected Bruce so deeply that every year since then he had come to the castle alone, and had lived his wrecked wedding-day over again. But on this occasion his arrival had been delayed. After that tragedy he had gone to America, to forget, but had never forgotten.

And every Christmas he had made the pilgrimage across the Atlantic. This year, however, his liner had shed her propeller during a storm and he had not arrived until Christmas night, only to find these unbidden guests in possession.

As they were all personal friends of Lord Dorrimore's, and as they had sought refuge there from the storm, he had willingly permitted them to remain. Indeed, he had urged them to accept the castle's hospitality for two or three days, and had promised to do everything in his power to make their Christmas a happy one.

But Henry Bruce himself had not joined in the festivities. He had retired at once, leaving the youthful party to itself. And the youthful party had entered into the spirit of Christmas with a vim. Even now the jollifications were in full swing.

The departure of Browne, however, had a big effect. Soon after midnight the party grew quieter, and little groups were scattered about here and there, talking. Yawns were frequent. It seemed, moreover, as though some special subject was occupying the minds of many.

Handforth & Co., for example, were deeply engrossed in an alcove. And on one of the big lounges Irene Manners and Doris Berkeley were conversing earnestly with Reggie Pitt and Nipper.

"It's no good putting it off," Doris was saying. "We've got to settle on something. Can't you suggest a scheme, Dick?"

"But it's a very delicate subject," protested Nipper. "Strictly speaking, I don't think we ought to butt in. At least, if we do, we shall have to be jolly tactful."

"That's my opinion, too," agreed Pitt dubiously. "Take my advice, girls, and leave this thing alone."

The two girls regarded him coldly.

"I'm surprised at you, Reggie," said Doris. "I'm disappointed, too. I thought you had more enterprise. I thought you were always ready for something brainy."

Reggie Pitt was greatly distressed.

"But think of the situation!" he protested.

"We have thought of it," put in Irene. "And it demands attention. We all know that Mr. Bruce has been pining for ten years because Miss Halliday was torn away from him on their very wedding-day. And she's one of our under-mistresses at the Moor View School. Imagine that! Doesn't that fact alone give us a right to help?"

"It's all very well to talk about helping," growled Nipper. "But in an affair of this kind our help may not be welcomed. That's why we've got to tread so lightly. I'd like to see this romance glued together again, but—well, you girls are suggesting a jolly tall order!"

"The taller the better," insisted Doris. "Where's the credit if we don't do something difficult? Miss Halliday was forced to marry somebody against her will, and he was killed a year or two ago in Italy, in a motor smash. She's using her maiden name again now——"

"But we know all this!" interrupted Pitt.

"Of course you do; but you're so jolly thickheaded that I've got to drive it in again," said Doris, in her direct, straight-from-the-shoulder fashion. "Haven't you chaps got any sense? Here's Miss Halliday, only twenty-seven, and ready to look years younger if she'd only try, a widow, and earning a living in our school. Why, it's wicked. Her husband left her penniless, and she's got to work!"

"It's shameful!" said Irene indignantly.

"But we can't do anything——" began Nipper.

"Mr. Bruce is worth pots of money," continued Doris unperturbed. "And the very fact that he's come here year after year proves that he's always remained true. And now he believes that Miss Halliday was killed!"

"Yes, that's pretty rotten," admitted Nipper thoughtfully. "It's quite easy to understand, though. Not living in England, he's probably out of contact. He must have seen the reports in the papers, and accepted them as genuine. And, of course, it's a certainty that Miss Halliday never communicated with him."

"Well, we've got to bring those two together," said Irene firmly. "Ten years ago they ought to have been married here, and I'll bet they still love one another. He's a bachelor and she's a widow. Why the dickens shouldn't we wangle it between us?"

CHAPTER II.

MORE SCHEMING.



DICK HAMILTON scratched his head.

"Sounds easy, doesn't it?" he observed. "But you can take it from me, girls, it'll be fearfully ticklish. In fact, it's so ticklish that I funk it."

"Coward!" said Doris scornfully.

Nipper grinned.

"I'd cheerfully dive into the lake through a hole in the ice to pull out a drowning cat, and I'd fight any amount of hooligans to order," he said. "But when it comes to repairing a shattered romance—well, I AM a coward. I don't mind admitting it. I tell you it's a precarious business."

"But why?" asked Irene.

"Because there's no telling what might happen," replied Nipper grimly. "Women are so jolly rummy. I'll bet Miss Halliday will go through fire and water rather than come near Dorrimore Castle, when she hears that Mr. Bruce is here. That's a woman all over. She's probably pining for him, but she wouldn't touch him with a barge-pole."

The girls looked at him coldly.

"Is that your true opinion of girls?" asked Doris, with chilly disdain.

"Cheese it!" grinned Reggie Pitt.

"Nipper doesn't mean to be personal. And I agree with him, too. The only way to fix this thing up is to get Miss Halliday here on a pretext of some sort. We mustn't breathe a word of the real object. This is where strategy is required. She and Mr. Bruce have got to be brought together as though by accident. It's the only way."

"I believe they're right, Doris," said Irene thoughtfully. "Of course, we could tell Mr. Bruce that she's still alive, but that would spoil everything. He'd dash off to London, and we shouldn't be in the show at all. The great thing is to bring her here."

"Does she know where you are, Irene?" asked Nipper.

"Not exactly," replied Irene. "I told her that I should do some visiting during the holidays, but I didn't go into any details. She's a dear, and I'd just love to do something."

"I suppose you know her address?"

"Of course," put in Doris. "Her parents are dead, and during the holidays she stays with an aunt of hers in Cricklewood."

"Well, why not send her a telegram in the morning?" suggested Nipper.

"But she'd smell a rat when she saw this address—"

"She mustn't see this address," said Nipper. "We can bribe one of the footmen to take an early train into Chesterfield, say, and send off the wire from there. He'll have to wait for a reply, and then 'phone up."

"But I don't quite understand," said Doris.

"The scheme is to send a telegram something like this," said Nipper. "We'll make it urgent: 'Need you terribly badly. Please come by first train. Wire time of arrival to post office, Chesterfield. Will wait anxiously. Please, please, come.—Irene Manners.' She'll simply think you've got stranded, or something, and dash down to your assistance like a two-year-old."

Irene's eyes sparkled.

"She's ready to do anything to help anybody!" she exclaimed. "She'd come at once if she got a telegram of that sort. All the better to give no explanation. She'd be so worried that she wouldn't waste a minute. What about when the reply comes?"

"The footman will wait for it, of course, and telephone up to the castle," replied Nipper. "I believe we're disconnected now, owing to the blizzard, but the line will probably be all right to-morrow. We shall have heaps of time, and we can go to Chesterfield and meet the train."

"And then what?" asked Doris.

"That's the rub," admitted Nipper. "But you wanted me to suggest a way of getting her down, and I've done my bit. We could have a car there, and you could easily pitch a yarn—without telling any fibs, of course—and then we could drive here without her knowing the actual destination. It'll be dark by the time she arrives, and once she's in the castle—Well, won't that be enough?"

"Enough!" echoed Irene. "It'll be everything! Dick, you're a genius!"

"Rats!" grinned Nipper. "It's the one obvious plan. A dozen other fellows might have thought of exactly the same stunt. If Miss Halliday is as soft-hearted as you say, she'll fall into the trap beautifully."

"Before we go to bed we'll find one of those footmen, and bribe him to secrecy," declared Doris. "And by to-morrow night we'll have Miss Halliday here. Oh, ripping! Mr. Bruce won't know anything about it until she turns up—and she won't

know who she's going to meet until she sees him!"

"Gorgeous!" breathed Irene.

They would probably have received a little shock if they could have listened to Handforth & Co., who were over in the alcove. The chums of Study D were close in confab.

"We'll work this thing absolutely single-handed," Handforth was saying jubilantly. "We'll surprise everybody. See?"

"I don't think we ought to touch it," said Church, shaking his head.

"Rats!" retorted Edward Oswald. "You know the facts as well as I do. If any two people ought to be brought together, they're Mr. Bruce and Miss Halliday! Dash it all, I'm not usually sentimental, but it's Christmas-time, and there's a fine chance here to show the others up!"

"How shall we show them up?" asked McClure.

"By proving that we're smart enough to bring off a wedding that was abandoned for good," replied Handforth. "My dear asses, it's easy! It's as simple as rolling off a form!"

"Don't you believe it——" began Church.

"You hopeless idiot!" snapped Handforth. "All we've got to do is to write Miss Halliday a letter, and tell her that Mr. Bruce is here, and that he thinks she's dead. She'll simply whizz down by the first train, and chuck herself into his arms. Easy!"

Church and McClure grinned.

"Is that what you call tact?" asked Church. "My dear Handy, she wouldn't move an inch from home! She'd call you an interfering young puppy for meddling in her affairs! And she'd be estranged from Mr. Bruce for all time!"

"Of course she would," agreed McClure. "You mustn't do anything ram-headed like that, Handy. There's only one way. We've got to send her a telegram."

"By George! A wire, eh?"

"That's it," nodded McClure. "And we mustn't send it from here, either. She'd tumble. We can pop into Buxton in the morning, and send the telegram there."

"How would it be to sign it as though one of the girls sent it?" suggested Church. "That's not a bad idea, you know! I've heard that she'll do anything for the girls. Let's use Doris Berkeley's name."

"But what shall we shove in the wire?" asked Handforth.

"Oh, anything," said McClure. "We can intimate—without using the actual words—that Doris is stranded in Buxton. Miss Halliday will come down like a shot. We can easily reckon what train she'll be on—there can't be more than two, anyhow. We can meet them, and spin her a yarn about Doris. Then we'll bring her here in the dark, and there you are."

Handforth's eyes gleamed.

"By George!" he exclaimed tensely. "Haven't I always told you chaps to trust me when it comes to something big? We'll

have Miss Halliday here by to-morrow night, and there'll be a wedding in no time! A new line for us, eh?"

"Handforth & Co. matchmakers!" grinned Church.

"Anyhow, it's something to pass the time," said McClure, with a rather callous attitude towards affairs of the heart. "We shall get some sport out of it, too. There'll be general excitement when Miss Halliday arrives to-morrow evening. Won't the girls be pleased?"

Undoubtedly, Nipper had been perfectly right when he declared that his suggestion was the obvious one. It had occurred to two sets of conspirators independently.

And this, in a way, was very unfortunate.

One wire would probably have the desired effect. But when Miss Halliday received two there was a distinct risk of complications. In fact, by the way things were going, Miss Halliday was in for a somewhat astonishing day on the morrow!

For others were putting their heads together, too.

There was something very humorous in the whole situation. The St. Frank's fellows and the Moor View girls had been discussing the affairs of Henry Bruce and Muriel Halliday all the evening, on and off. Everybody agreed that it was too bad that this ten-year-old romance should be allowed to languish, and die. And it was only natural that various sets of heads should be put together on precisely the same scheme.

The trouble was, these sets of heads worked independently. For each group wanted to surprise all the rest. A highly praiseworthy plan, but it would have been far better if all the guests had combined in a general meeting.

As it was, the most unfortunate complications were probable!

CHAPTER III.

ARCHIE, TOO!



"PHIPPS, laddie, the old bean has been buzzing!"

Archie Glenthorne made this startling announcement as he lolled in bed, attired in his dazzling silken pyjamas. It was now two a.m., and the house-party had at last retired to rest.

Archie had a bed-room to himself, and Phipps was stealthily moving about, arranging his young master's attire for the morning. And for some little time Archie had been unusually quiet. Phipps, indeed, had believed that he was already asleep.

"Indeed, sir?" he said mildly.

"Absolutely!" declared Archie.

"I trust there is nothing seriously wrong, sir."

"Wrong!" repeated Archie. "Good gad!

Certainly not, Phipps! The fact is, the young master has become dashed romantic!"

"I am surprised to hear that, sir,"

"What-ho! I mean, what?" said Archie. "Romantic, Phipps. Absolutely! Instead of pushing off into the good old forty winks, I've been absolutely lying here, thinking of this and that, and so forth. The old gear-box has fairly hummed."

"Upon what subjects, sir?" asked Phipps. "I venture to suggest that you wear the grey tweeds to-morrow—"

"Odd coats and waistcoats! We're not talking about clothing, Phipps!" ejaculated Archie, pained. "I'd like to see you with a somewhat moony expression on the old dial, gassing about romance. I mean to say, I feel like it. The old atmosphere reeks of it."

Phipps nodded slowly.

"You are doubtless referring to the little affair of Mr. Bruce and the young lady whom he was to have married ten years ago, sir?" he asked. "A sad case, Master Archibald. A distressing business altogether."

"What-ho! Rather!" agreed Archie. "I'm glad to see, Phipps, that the telepathy scheme is working. In other words, you've biffed the old nail fairly with the mallet. I presume you know all about this dear girl? This young lady of the splintered romance?"

"I cannot say that I am fully acquainted

"I mean!" broke in Archie, aghast. "You, Phipps! Dash it, the young master is absolutely staggered! I thought you were the laddie who knew every dashed thing! This Miss Halliday is an under-mistress at the Moor View School."

"Miss Halliday, sir?" asked Phipps. "But I understand she was a widow."

"Absolutely! A Mrs. Thornton," explained Archie. "But when the Thornton blighter legged it off the old sphere, she considered she'd had enough of his bally name, and went back to the old love. I mean to say, it sounds a lot better for a schoolmistress to be a miss. That's dashed rummy, Phipps! How can a mistress be a miss?"

"I gather your meaning, sir," said Phipps. "But let me advise you to dismiss this subject, and compose yourself for sleep—"

"Good gad!" interrupted Archie stiffly. "If I choose to dispense with a few of the forty, it's my business, laddie. And just at the moment the grey matter is fairly bubbling. I mean, I can feel it seething behind the old forehead. In fact, Phipps, I've been thinking."

Archie sat up, and gazed at Phipps intently.

"The scheme," he went on, "is to bring these two fractured hearts together, what? It seems a frightful shame, Phipps, that they should remain unstuck. I'm not a romantic lad, as a rule, but this thing has absolutely biffed me in the centre. I mean, the poor chappie doesn't even know that she's alive!"

"Distinctly distressing, sir."

"Something's got to be done, Phipps," declared Archie. "What about it? We've got to bring these two together. I leave it to you, Phipps, to dash out a brainy suggestion."

"Have you thought of any plan, sir?"

"I say, really!" protested Archie. "You're the lad to think, Phipps! I mean, you've got all the mechanism!"

"It is a very delicate subject, sir——"

"All the same, Phipps, you've got to deal with it," insisted Archie. "The young master is firm on the point."

Phipps continued his minor tasks for some little time, and Archie did not disturb him. He felt certain that the massive brain was getting to work. And, sure enough, Phipps soon came up to the scratch.

"As far as I can see, sir, the best thing will be to get Miss Halliday down to the castle by a simple ruse," he ventured. "A ruse, sir. She must not know, of course, her actual destination—neither must she be aware of the fact that Mr. Bruce is here. Either of those items would have the effect of ruining the plan."

"Go on, Phipps—I'm absolutely eating it."

"The more simple the ruse, sir, the better the chances of success," continued Phipps. "I do not think we need worry as to the course of events after Miss Halliday is actually in the castle. In the nature of things they will shape their own path. We only need scheme for the purpose of enticing Miss Halliday here."

"A somewhat mouldy proposition, what?"

"On the contrary, sir, it is simplicity itself," said Phipps. "A mere telegram, sent in the name of one of the young ladies, from a neighbouring town, such as Matlock, and Miss Halliday will come."

"Good gad!" said Archie, staring at Phipps in fascination.

"If you wish, sir, I will journey to Matlock in the early morning," continued Phipps unperturbed. "I happen to know the clerk of one of the principal hotels there. So I shall have an address from which to send the telegram——"

And Phipps smoothly proceeded to outline the scheme which had independently occurred to Nipper and Handforth & Co. Without the slightest hint of combination, the same suggestion had occurred to all three parties.

It was not coincidence, it was merely an obvious expedient. There were not many ways in which Miss Halliday could be fetched, under the circumstances. And the ruse of a decoy telegram was the simplest.

Without question Miss Halliday was due for a surprise on the morrow.

For still more people were active.

At that very moment in fact William Napoleon Browne and Willy Handforth were reclining amid the cushions of a corridor coach on an express train for London. It

was a special train, one that had left Buxton at midnight. In consequence of the recent stoppage, all sorts of extra trains were being run.

"I consider, Brother Willy, that we have proved absolutely the brainiest of all," Browne was observing genially. "Without being absolutely certain, I have a suspicion that more than two heads have been put together on this eventful night."

"You bet they have!" grinned Willy. "But we'll have the laugh on them."

"Of that there is no question," agreed Browne. "For while the others are thinking of futile schemes to induce Miss Halliday to journey to the castle, we are en route for London to fetch her, if necessary, by force. Shall we be denied, Brother Willie?"

"Not while we can breathe!" replied Willy promptly.

"A brave, bold statement," said the tall Fifth-Former with approval. "I like it, Brother Willy; I have no doubts as to the wisdom of my choice of companion. I feel that we are a victorious team."

They were both in high spirits. Little did the others imagine the truth. Browne's non-return had occasioned no comment. It was taken for granted that he had been persuaded to stop at Chubby Heath's home.

But the brainy William Napoleon had come to the same decision as the others. He would bring Henry Bruce and Muriel Halliday together—after ten years.

Browne, however, had decided to leave nothing to chance. He was going to London, and would bring Miss Halliday back personally.

Realising the delicate nature of the subject he considered that it would be rather a ripe scheme to take Willy Handforth along. Willy was celebrated for his audacity and coolness. If anybody on earth could persuade Miss Halliday, Willy could. He was a genius at getting his own way.

And it had been so simple, too.

The three fags had decided to go home, for Chubby's people would necessarily be anxious. And Browne, after a brief consultation with Willy, had escorted them out. They had left at the hour of eleven, because there was only just sufficient time to reach the train.

Browne's trip would not even be suspected, for he judged that everybody would take it for granted that he was at Chubby Heath's place. In reality, Browne and Willy were rushing through the night towards London.

Expense, of course, was no object, for Browne was exceedingly flush. And he was determined to get ahead of everybody else.

There could be no denying that Miss Muriel Halliday was booked for one of the busiest days of her life.

CHAPTER IV.

EXTRAORDINARY!



"I 'VE got to go, aunt—I simply must!"
"But, my dear child——"

"This telegram is from Irene!" said Muriel Halliday, with a worried frown.

"Whatever can have happened? Why doesn't she say? Perhaps the poor girl is stranded in Chesterfield? She only says that she urgently wants me to go by the first train."

"But Chesterfield is such a long way," protested her aunt.

"I know it is, but what else can I do but go?" asked Miss Halliday, in distress. "I'd no idea that Irene was up in Derbyshire. And when she's in trouble I've got to be by her side. How can I find out about the trains, auntie? Have we a timetable?"

The simple home of Mrs. Walters was in a ferment. Muriel's aunt was a stout, kindly lady, who had been widowed for more than twenty years. She had a comfortable income, and she led a smooth, tranquil life.

It was breakfast time now, rather a late breakfast on Boxing morning, since late hours had been kept the previous night. The time indeed was after ten o'clock. And right in the middle of breakfast that telegram had come from Irene Manners.

Muriel Halliday was full of concern at once.

She hadn't the faintest idea what had happened. But Irene wanted her, and she would have to go. For Miss Halliday felt sure that the girl would never have wired unless the matter was very vital.

Muriel had not been at the Moor View School for long. But she was already attached to many of the girls there. And Irene & Co. were among her particular favourites. She felt compelled to fly to Irene's assistance.

"You really ought to think twice, Muriel," said her aunt earnestly. "It is Boxing Day, and the train service is bound to be limited. Besides, isn't Derbyshire the place where they have had that terrible amount of snow?"

Muriel nodded.

"Yes, but the trains are running again now, I saw it in this morning's paper," she replied. "Oh! I wonder—— Why, of course, aunt! How silly of me not to think of it before!"

"Think of what before, child?"

"That snowstorm," said Muriel. "Irene must have been caught in it. She's stranded in the midst of all that snow."

"But the trains are running again——"

"We can't tell what happened," interrupted Muriel firmly. "I expect Irene was



"Well, the fact is, we've come here especially to take you up to Derbyshire," said Willy impressively.

in one of those trains that got snowed up on Christmas Eve. She's probably at a hotel, and hasn't got any money left——"

"Surely she would telegraph to her parents?"

"Oh, aunt, why are you so exasperating?" asked Muriel. "I'm dreadfully sorry, but I shall have to go to Chesterfield at once. The girl has appealed to me, and I can't possibly disappoint her. It isn't as though she were a forward girl. She's one of the sweetest creatures in the school. I couldn't imagine her doing anything foolish or wrong. I expect she's just frightened, and wants me to help her. Will you ring for Janet?"

Mrs. Walters sighed and rang for the maid. Muriel was determined to send a telegram at once, addressed to Irene Manners, c/o the Post Office, Chesterfield.

Everything in fact was going smoothly.

The whole idea of that telegram had been to leave Muriel in doubt. She would naturally assume all sorts of alarming things, and would hurry to catch the first train. The plan was working beautifully.

Muriel searched the bookcase for a timetable, but after she had found it she realised that it would probably be useless. After that big blizzard it was certain that the trains would be running at different

times. She would have to ring up the station inquiry office at St. Pancras.

Although only twenty-seven, Mrs. Thornton—or, as she preferred to be called, Miss Halliday—looked considerably older. But this was solely owing to her determination to be a perfect schoolmistress. She felt that she could wield more authority if she cultivated an austere aspect.

It was rather a hopeless task, for Muriel Halliday was not the type of woman to be austere. With smarter clothing, with her hair arranged attractively, and with a little touch of powder, her appearance would have been transformed. Indeed, she knew well enough that she could make herself look years younger than her actual age if she desired. But it didn't suit her book. It was rather a pity, for Muriel was really a very pretty girl. It seemed a shame that she should conceal her beauty so drastically.

Fortunately there was no thought in her mind of Dorrimore Castle. She knew, of course, that Chesterfield was in the same neighbourhood, and perhaps she had an unconscious longing to go back there. She had not been to Derbyshire since that fateful Christmas, ten years earlier. Her life had been one of hardship and sadness.

A mere girl of seventeen, almost a child, she had been compelled to marry a man she secretly detested. But her old-fashioned parents had been as hard as nails, and had broken her will. Their harshness had recoiled upon themselves, and they had received full punishment. For the man of their choice had turned out to be a worthless rogue, an idle waster who had soon tired of his girl-wife, and who had neglected her grossly.

Muriel's parents had never really recovered from the shock of that discovery. To the full they had realised their almost criminal blindness in separating her from Henry Bruce. All along she had unconsciously showed them that she still cared for the man she had been parted from.

And they had died within a short period of one another, regretting to the end their terrible mistake. And now Muriel's waster husband was dead, too, having killed himself while recklessly driving a motor-car in Italy. It was only by the mercy of Providence that Muriel herself was alive.

It was scarcely to be wondered at that she desired to live in obscurity, occupying the post of schoolmistress at a private academy. She was thrown upon her own resources now, and for the first time in her life she was enjoying a little contentment. But now and again, as Irene & Co. had noted, a certain inexpressible sadness would creep into her eyes. And they instinctively felt that in these moments she was thinking of Henry Bruce.

As the girls had said, what a chance! Bruce was at Dorrimore Castle, labouring under the delusion that Muriel was dead. And Muriel herself had long since come to the conclusion that Bruce had thrust her out of his life. It seemed a sin and a shame to neglect this opportunity of bringing them together.

If she had only guessed the real purport of that telegram! But any idea of Dorrimore Castle, or Henry Bruce, never entered her head. Her one thought was to reach Chesterfield as soon as possible.

Matters might have gone smoothly if all the guests at Dorrimore Castle had joined together in their consultations. But there were four independent parties engaged in the task of bringing Muriel Halliday and Henry Bruce together. Complications were inevitable.

Janet, the maid, answered the ring and entered the cosy little breakfast-room. She brought a surprise with her in the shape of another buff-coloured envelope.

"Please'm, it's just come," said the maid, flurried.

"Good gracious!" ejaculated Mrs. Walters. "Another telegram?"

"Yes'm, for Miss Muriel."

"Quick! Let me see it!" said Muriel. "You may go, Janet."

She tore open the wire, and her aunt watched her anxiously while she read it. Muriel's expression changed, and a bewildered look came into her eyes.

"I can't understand it!" she exclaimed at last. "This telegram is from Doris!"

"Oh, dear!" said her aunt. "Whoever is Doris? I do wish you would explain, Muriel. I'm so mixed up—"

"But I can't explain, aunt," said Muriel, worried. "It's a perfect mystery. Doris Berkeley is Irene's closest chum. And this telegram is from Buxton. Doris urges me to take the first train and go to her. She seems to be in some sort of fix. What a strange coincidence."

"But where is Buxton?" asked poor Mrs. Walters weakly.

"Why, Buxton is in Derbyshire, too," said Muriel, with a start.

"Then another of those girls must have got lost in the snowstorm!" exclaimed her aunt, with a shake of her head. "There's something very peculiar about it, Muriel. Surely they could communicate with one another, if they are so close? Why should they send telegrams to you, on Boxing Day, too? It's too bad!"

"But, aunt, I can't ignore them—"

"Perhaps not, my dear, but I think these girls are very inconsiderate," said Mrs. Walters frigidly. "I don't believe they are half as sweet as you make out. It isn't as if you were their headmistress. Besides, during the holidays you are supposed to be free. Why should these girls ask you to travel all that terrible distance?"

"Listen!" said Muriel suddenly. "What was that?"

She had heard something which sounded suspiciously like a double-knock, and a moment later the door flew open, and Janet reappeared—with still another buff-coloured envelope.

"Please Miss Muriel, there's another of 'em!" she said breathlessly.

"How perfectly extraordinary!" ejaculated Mrs. Walters.

Muriel took the wire, and Janet retired. And a minute later Muriel was looking rather grim. The anxious light had died out of her eyes, and its place was occupied by an expression of suspicion.

"It must be a trick, aunt," she said firmly.

"My dear child, what in the world——"

"This telegram is from Irene Manners, too!" said Muriel. "And it isn't from Chesterfield at all, but from Matlock."

"Matlock!" said her aunt feebly. "Where is Matlock?"

"In Derbyshire, too!" said Muriel. "Irene couldn't be in two places at once, could she? The little wretches! It's just a joke—but I can't understand why they should take all this trouble. It isn't the First of April!"

Mrs. Walters, although hopelessly confused, seemed to see one gleam of hope.

"Then you're not going away at all?" she asked anxiously.

"Of course not!" replied Muriel promptly. "I don't know whether Irene is at Chesterfield or Matlock— Besides, it's obviously a practical joke. I shan't even send them any replies. It'll be a lesson to them not to play such tricks. Why, it's dreadful! These other telegrams might have been delayed, and I might have gone! I never thought those girls were so mischievous!"

Mrs. Walters sighed, and shook her head.

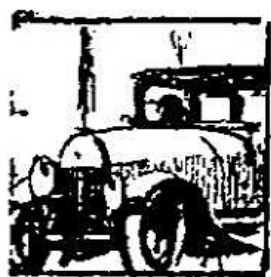
"Ah, you never can tell, Muriel!" she said wisely. "The sweeter they are, the more careful you've got to be. I've always thought you were rather too generous in your praise of those girls."

Muriel sat back in her chair and frowned.

"All the same, I'm puzzled," she admitted. "I'm dreadfully puzzled!"

CHAPTER V.

WILLY HANDFORTH ON THE JOB.



WILLIAM NAPOLEON BROWNE depressed the clutch and brake pedals, slipped his gear into neutral, and brought the little saloon to a standstill against the kerb. He switched off the engine, and then turned and smiled benevolently upon Willy Handforth, who occupied the seat next to him.

"As they say in the great classics, Brother Willy, so far so good," he observed. "If you'll take the trouble to gaze through the Triplex, you will be stunned by the architectural beauties of Cricklewood. I must confess that this particular region is somewhat blighted, but we must not judge too harshly."

The smart saloon—one of the very latest things in the Morris-Oxford line—had glided to a standstill in the main road, not far from the celebrated Crown. Motor-buses and taxis were continually passing, and there was an appearance of briskness on this crisp Boxing morning.

"We have it officially that Miss Halliday resides in this desirable residential thoroughfare immediately to the left," continued Browne, indicating a quiet side street. "While I lurk here, Brother Willy, it is your duty to beard the lioness in her den, and act the part of a decoy. Remember, I am placing one hundred per cent faith in your vast abilities. I trust, Brother Willy, that I am not too optimistic."

Willy grinned.

"You're too gassy, anyhow," he said frankly. "Leave it to me, Browne, and there'll be nothing to worry about. I'll be back here within five minutes."

"Splendid!" beamed Browne. "I observe that you have the do-or-die spirit highly developed. But there remains one grave question. Will you return alone, or bring the damsel with you?"

"I shall probably return alone," replied Willy. "We can't expect Miss Halliday to walk to the end of the street, can we? I'll buzz along and give you the tip, and you can draw up to the front gate in style."

"A programme that warms my old heart to its innermost cockles," said Browne approvingly. "Having no dictionary chained to me at the moment, I am slightly uncertain as to the meaning of the word 'cockles'—but we can dispense with this dear little problem. Go, Brother Willy, and do your stuff!"

Willy opened the near-side door, and hopped out on to the pavement. He waved a cheery hand, and sauntered round the corner, whistling. He was so confident, in fact, and his spirits were so high, that he performed one or two dance steps, and finally vanished from Browne's vision, careering along backwards.

"Alas, I fear there is no controlling these sprightly children!" murmured Browne. "However, Brother Willy is undoubtedly bulging with the necessary grey matter. I feel that I have made no error in sending him upon this delicate mission. While lacking the celebrated Browne tact, he possesses in marked degree, the equally celebrated Browne confidence. And in an affair of this kind, extreme youth is the vital point."

Browne had revealed remarkable wisdom in his decision. He was determined to return to Dorrimore Castle with Muriel Halliday. No amount of rebuffs would shift

him from his purpose. And when William Napoleon started anything, he never rested until it was finished. Failure was the one word which he refused to include in his vocabulary.

But he had realised from the very outset that the mission was delicate. He had perfect faith in his own eloquence—in his own tact—in his own extraordinary powers of persuasion.

But he freely admitted that he lacked Willy's stupendous cheek. He had plenty of cheek of his own—a staggering amount, in fact. But it was of a totally different brand of cheek to Willy's. And Browne felt that where he would meet with insurmountable obstacles, Willy would take exactly the same path and find a perfectly smooth course.

It wasn't any ordinary subject.

It was an affair of the heart, and Browne feared that his own presence would be embarrassing to Muriel Halliday if the conversation turned on that question. Browne was a tall fellow, who looked nearer twenty than his actual seventeen summers.

Willy, on the other hand, was a mere youngster—and he was capable of discussing love affairs with a perfectly impartial coolness. He was undoubtedly the right fellow for the job.

Not that either Browne or Willy anticipated any such subject cropping up. Their scheme was to get Muriel Halliday to accompany them to Derbyshire on a pretext—an apparently innocent one which would have the desired effect. The general idea was to make no mention of Henry Bruce.

In fact, Browne's scheme was precisely similar to all the others—except in the vital particular that Willy would deliver the message by word of mouth, instead of relying upon a telegram. Browne had plenty of confidence in Willy's persuasive abilities.

So he waited in his new car with a feeling of serene anticipation. He was pleased with his car, too—another reason for his contentment. He had previously owned an open two-seater, but now he was the proud possessor of a saloon of the same make.

In the meantime, Willy Handforth walked about a hundred yards down the quiet street and entered the gateway of Mrs. Walters' comfortable little home. Janet answered the door to him, and Willy rather wondered at her flustered appearance. He didn't know that Janet was somewhat bewildered at all these Boxing-morning callers.

After a brief delay Willy was escorted into the breakfast-room, where he found Muriel and her aunt waiting for him with smiles of welcome. At least, Muriel was smiling. Her aunt was looking a trifle worried.

"Hallo, Miss Halliday!" said Willy briskly. "Merry Christmas! This your aunt? Good! Merry Christmas, Mrs. Williams!"

"Really!" protested Muriel's aunt. "Who

—who is this young gentleman, Muriel? My name is Mrs. Walters, if you please!"

"Oh, sorry!" said Willy lightly. "I knew it was one of those Christian names beginning with a 'W.' Hope I haven't disturbed brekker?" he added, with a glance at the table. "It can't be helped if I have—I've come on a jolly important subject!"

"Really?" said Muriel. "Forgive me, but I don't know who you are. I've seen you before—and I know that you belong to St. Frank's. But I can't quite remember—"

"My hat!" said Willy tartly. "I'm Handforth minor, of the Third! My major's a bit sweet on Irene Manners, you know. Not that he can help it, poor chap—he's often smitten like that. I'm blessed if I can see anything in these girls to go dotty about."

Muriel smiled at Willy's refreshing candour.

"I don't think we need discuss either your brother or Irene," she said. "You mentioned that your visit was an important one," she added drily. "If there is anything I can do—"

"Lots!" interrupted Willy. "The fact is, old Browne's outside—"

"Old Browne?"

"Fifth Form chap," explained Willy. "Quite a brainy sort, in his own way. He's got his own car. If you'll get your things on we'll hurry off at once. There's not a minute to waste."

"Indeed!" said Muriel. "But where are we going to?"

"Well, the fact is, we've come here especially to take you up to Derbyshire," said Willy impressively.

Mrs. Walters gave a queer cry.

"Derbyshire!" echoed Muriel, with a start.

"No need to faint over it!" said Willy, with a stare. "It's not at the other end of the earth. Some of the girls have got a scheme on, you know. I can't tell you what it is because it's a secret. But you can take my word for it that they're as keen as mustard on you joining 'em. They need you badly. So buck up and get your things on."

Willy spoke in a matter of fact tone, and apparently took it for granted that Muriel Halliday would obey the summons without question, just as though she had been asked to go along the road as far as Kilburn.

After due consideration Willy and Browne had decided that this matter of fact air would pay the best. According to Browne, women were funny people. Let them think they were urgently needed and they wouldn't budge an inch. It was better to pitchfork them into the thing.

Unfortunately for the two schemers, Muriel was not entirely unprepared. She smiled rather grimly and shook her head.

"I am sorry," she said. "But I can't go."

CHAPTER VI.

NOT QUITE SUCCESSFUL.



WILLY HANDFORTH frowned:

This wasn't the exact idea. He had been expecting Muriel Halliday to evince a great deal of interest in the subject, and he had anticipated the enjoyment he would gain from keeping her in the dark. But she didn't seem to care a jot. She just said she wouldn't go.

"Look here, that's all rot!" said Willy firmly. "You don't seem to understand the importance of this thing, Miss Halliday. Browne and I have come all the way from Derbyshire to take you back. We've been travelling all night. You can't let us down like that. Besides, what about the girls?"

"Well, what about them?"

"They'll be terribly disappointed if you don't turn up," said Willy earnestly. "They're not exactly in trouble, but you're badly wanted. Take my word for it—"

"Haven't you got any message from Irene, or one of the others?"

"Well, no," admitted Willy. "But that's nothing."

"Are you sure this isn't a trick?"

"A trick?" echoed Willy aghast. "You mean to stand there and think I could come here with the idea of tricking you? Great Scott! I say, Miss Halliday, that's a bit offside, isn't it?"

He spoke with such indignation that for a moment Muriel was deceived. Willy was inwardly alarmed. Things weren't going right at all. Muriel Halliday was obviously sharper than Browne had given her credit for being.

"You do it very well, Willy," said Muriel calmly. "I think your name is Willy, isn't it? For some reason you want me to accompany you back to Derbyshire?"

"Yes. The train goes—"

"Never mind the train," interrupted Muriel. "What part of Derbyshire are we going to?"

Willy was nearly floored.

"What part?" he repeated, gaining time. "Oh, you know—where there's lots of snow! We shall get out at Buxton—"

"Not Chesterfield?"

"My hat, no!" said Willy promptly. "Chesterfield? Never seen the place. What on earth put Chesterfield into your head?"

"Is Irene at Chesterfield?"

"Of course she isn't."

"You're quite sure of that?" asked Muriel.

"Sure? I'm positive!"

"And she's not at Matlock, either?"

"Matlock!" echoed Willy. "Of course she isn't at Matlock. Haven't I told you that we shall go to Buxton?"

"Then Irene is at Buxton?"

"No, she isn't!" growled Willy. "But that's not the point—"

"Is Doris at Buxton, then?"

"Oh, my goodness!" snorted Willy exasperated. "I'm blessed if you're not as bad as old Suncliffe. No wonder you're a schoolmistress. What's the idea of all these giddy questions? Anybody might think I was in class!"

"You haven't answered my question," said Muriel, keeping her face straight with difficulty. "I'm sorry if I'm upsetting you with all these questions, Willy. But I really want to know if Doris is in Buxton."

Willy took a deep breath.

"Of course she isn't in Buxton!" he roared. "Of all the dotty— Sorry!" he added with a grunt. "You're enough to make a saint say things!"

"So neither Irene nor Doris are in Buxton?" said Muriel. "And they're not at Chesterfield or Matlock? That's quite final, isn't it?"

"Absolutely," said Willy. "I'd tell you where they are in a minute if I could—but that would spoil everything. You've got to take my word for it that you're badly wanted."

Muriel Halliday looked at him calmly.

"If there is a good reason for my going to Derbyshire I will go," she said. "But I won't dream of leaving London unless I know the reason. I'm not going all that way on a fool's errand. Come along, Willy, tell me the exact truth. Why am I wanted so urgently?"

Willy was growing more exasperated every minute.

"Girls and women are all the same!" he said tartly. "They want to know everything. Can't take anybody's word now. It's a bit thick, Miss Halliday. You'll never forgive yourself if you—"

"Just a minute," interrupted Muriel. "There's something here I can't understand. You have distinctly told me that Irene is not at Chesterfield. But does she want me to go to Chesterfield?"

"No!" said Willy firmly. "What an idea."

"It may seem absurd to you, but can you explain the meaning of this?" asked Muriel, handing Willy a pink form. "Read that, and then let me know your opinion."

For some few minutes Willy had felt that there was a piece of grit in the machinery. He didn't exactly know why the scheme wasn't functioning properly, but Muriel's very manner was significant. There was her aunt, too. Throughout the conversation Mrs. Walters had been regarding Willy with an expression that was positively warlike.

"Great corks!" gurgled Willy blankly.

It took him about ten seconds to read that wire, and to see that it had been dis-

patched from Chesterfield. It took him about another five seconds to realise that he had put his foot in it properly. He couldn't be blamed for this, for he had known nothing about this wire.

"Well?" asked Muriel.

"Eh? Oh, this wire!" said Willy, with a start.

"Can you explain it?"

"It's from Irene; she wants you to go to Chesterfield."

"I know that," said Muriel Halliday. "But you have just told me that Irene is not at Chesterfield, and has no intention of going there. Perhaps you can tell me what this means, too?"

She handed over another wire.

"From Matlock!" gasped Willy. "And this is from Irene, too!"

"Curious, isn't it?" asked Muriel, with deadly coolness. "It is even more curious when you note that one was dispatched at nine-thirty, and the other at nine-thirty-seven. I don't think Irene could have got from Chesterfield to Matlock in seven minutes, could she? And she couldn't be in two places of once."

Willy realised that he would have to do something drastic.

"Oh, well, of course," he bluffed. "There's nothing funny here. Just a little hitch, that's all. Some of those girls must have sent those telegrams by mistake. I've already told you that you're wanted in Derbyshire. Those wires simply prove that I'm right!"

"They prove that a good many of you have been conspiring to entice me away from London," agreed Muriel. "I don't mind going if I'm satisfied with the reason. But I don't mean to be made the victim of a Christmas joke. It's a long way to Derbyshire and you'll have to tell me the full truth."

She handed Willy the third telegram to read, and the hero of the Third was inwardly staggered. Now he could understand why he had been received so suspiciously. But for those wires he would probably have succeeded in carrying Muriel off with ease. But now, of course, her mind was filled with suspicion. A child could have seen that some sort of plot was afoot, and Muriel was no child. She was a keen observer with a ready, alert brain. She wasn't the sort of girl to rush into a thing without careful consideration.

"Of course, the whole thing's messed up," said Willy indignantly. "Properly messed up. Just when Browne and I thought we were going to work the wheeze, those featherheads up at the castle send those wires. No wonder you gave me the bird when I came in."

Muriel had only heard one word.

"The castle!" she echoed with a start. "Oh! You—you don't mean——"

"It's all right; I said it on purpose!" growled Willy. "It wasn't a slip. What's the good of keeping it secret any longer? You won't budge an inch until you know the truth, so I might as well bring it out."

Muriel had gone very white.

"Do you mean Dorrimore Castle?" she asked quietly.

"That's it," nodded Willy. "Six of the girls are there, and quite a lot of St. Frank's chaps. We're having a merry time, a really ripping Christmas, Miss Halliday. And we thought it would be a great idea if you joined us."

"Is that all?" asked Muriel, with strange intentness.

"You'll have a wonderful time," declared Willy, hedging the subject. "We've got skating and tobogganning, and all sorts of things. One of the merriest house parties you can think of. We want you to come."

Muriel had been thinking rapidly for a few seconds. She shook her head, and there was something about that shake which filled Willy with dismay. It was so absolutely final.

"No," she said. "I am sorry, Willy—I can't go!"

CHAPTER VII.

BEYOND WILLY'S UNDERSTANDING.



THIS was beyond all reason. All this time, and Muriel Halliday had made exactly the same refusal. Willy Handforth felt that he would have to do something

to wake things up.

"That's all rot, Miss Halliday!" he protested. "You can't slide out of it like that. The girls are expecting you. Those wires are enough to tell you how eagerly they need you. And Browne and I have come all the way to London on purpose to take you back. Don't do the dirty on us!"

"I can't go, Willy," insisted Muriel. "In any case, why was it necessary for you all to adopt these subterfuges?"

"These which?"

"Why should one telegram be sent from Chesterfield, one from Matlock, and another from Buxton?" put in Mrs. Walters. "If you ask me, there's something behind it all. And doesn't Dorrimore Castle belong to Lord Dorrimore?"

"Of course it does," said Willy. "But——"

"Then my niece could not think of going unless she received a formal invitation from Lord Dorrimore himself," declared Mrs. Walters. "The idea! It wouldn't be proper at all. What next will you children expect?"

Willy Handforth was rapidly losing his famous patience.

"Of course there's something behind it!" he roared. "Anybody could tell that. Something jolly good, too. I didn't mean to say a word about it, but I've got to now. And when I do tell you you'll jump upstairs like a jack-in-the-box and pack your things," he added confidently.

Willy had come to a decision. Those telegrams had ruined everything, so the only course was to come straight out with the full yarn. That, of course, would clinch matters. To Willy's mind there wasn't a shadow of doubt on the subject. It was a trump card.

Here was Muriel, a widow, and she didn't even know that Henry Bruce was at the castle. As soon as she learned that fact, she would be as keen as mustard upon dashing down to Derbyshire by the first express.

Willy's reasoning was typically that of a junior schoolboy. He had no conception of the traps and pitfalls that beset his delicate path. He simply took it for granted that everything would be straightforward. He couldn't understand how it could be otherwise.

Anybody with an ounce of sense knew that Bruce was still dotty on the girl he had lost ten years earlier. If he wasn't, why did he keep up the Christmas banquets? And everybody knew that Muriel Halliday had spent a pretty awful time with her late husband. If there was one sensible thing in all the world, it was to bring the long-parted pair together. Willy brought his trump card out with a flourish, only to find that he had mistaken the suit. It wasn't a trump at all.

"Oh, well, I've got to tell you," he said grimly. "The fact is, Miss Halliday, you've got to come with us to Dorrimore Castle because Henry Bruce is there. Now what about it?"

Muriel jumped to her feet, aghast.

"Henry Bruce!" she whispered breathlessly.

"I thought that would do the trick!" grinned Willy. "He's waiting for you, and all the rest of us are jolly keen on seeing you engaged. With luck, we ought to bring the wedding off on New Year's Day."

"Good gracious me!" ejaculated Mrs. Walter blankly.

For the first time Willy noticed that Muriel was taking the news in a rather peculiar way. Instead of flushing with delight she had turned more pale than ever. She grasped his arm with such force that he winced.

"Go!" she said tensely.

"Eh?" gasped Willy. "What the—"

"Oh! How dare you?" panted Muriel angrily. "How dare you come here on such a mission? Auntie this is dreadful. Oh,

it's perfectly dreadful! I shall die of shame. I can't BELIEVE it!"

Willy stared in utter dismay.

"Here, I say, chuck it!" he protested. "What the dickens—"

"You wretched boy!" said Muriel, turning upon him fiercely. "I shall never forgive you for this—I shall never forgive any of you!"

"But—but—"

"You don't realise what you've done!" went on the girl in agony. "I wouldn't go with you to Dorrimore Castle if you paid me a million pounds. The humiliation of it. Mr. Bruce must be filled with contempt—"

"But he doesn't know anything about it!" roared Willy. "Great Scott! You don't think we've told him the wheeze?"

A wave of relief passed over Muriel's distressed face.

"You haven't told him?" she pressed. "He doesn't know?"

"Of course, he doesn't!" snorted Willy indignantly. "We're not quite mad, are we? That's the whole idea of the thing—to give him a surprise!" he added, treading deeper into the mire without realising it.

"To give him a surprise?" breathed Muriel.

"Exactly!" nodded Willy, recovering some of his assurance. "Fancy you getting it all wrong like that! Here's the idea in a nutshell. Henry Bruce is down there, mooning about, and looking pretty miserable—thinking about you, of course. He's not miserable because he's thinking about you, but because you're not there. Is that clear?"

Muriel had no words.

"So we've been talking about things," continued Willy blithely. "Browne and I got our heads together, and we've come to London to fetch you. We're going to take you back to Dorrimore Castle, and give Mr. Bruce the surprise of his life!"

"Oh!" breathed Muriel, her cheeks flushing.

"Just imagine his joy," went on Willy, treading on such thin ice that it was liable to crack at any moment. "Think of his delight! We'll smuggle you into the castle, and then spring you upon him all of a sudden. See? You'll fall into his arms, and we'll simply fade away. How's that?"

Willy Handforth ended on a triumphant note. It seemed to him that the thing was a dead cert. Naturally, Muriel would leap at it, and agree like a shot. Being a sensible girl, how could she do anything else? It was obviously her duty to buzz along and make the poor chap happy!

For once Willy was out of his element. In any ordinary, every-day affair his colossal cheek worked wonders. But in this delicate matter of Henry Bruce's shattered romance, he was on perilous ground, indeed.

"Oh, auntie!" murmured Muriel brokenly.

She sank into her chair, and covered her flushed face with her hands. She was horrified by all that Willie had said. These St.

Frank's boys, and her own girls of the Moor View School were planning to take her to Henry Bruce's side! To Muriel Halliday the whole thing was too terrible for words. She was sensitive to a degree.

Ever since her husband's death, two years earlier, she had half-hoped, half-dreaded, to hear from Henry Bruce. But during those two years he had kept silent. And she had realised that her unformed dream was impossible. She had deceived herself into believing that it was her own secret—locked within her own heart. And here were the boys and girls openly discussing it! It filled the poor girl with agonised confusion.

"I say, what's the matter?" asked Willy, staring.

"Go!" breathed Muriel, finding enough strength to steady her voice. "Oh, I daren't trust myself to tell you what I think! Go, and don't dare to interfere again! And if you breathe a word of this to Mr. Bruce I shall never forgive you. Indeed, I'm afraid to ever show my face again!"

Willy was staggered.

"You take the giddy cake!" he snorted. "What the dickens is there to worry about? Don't I keep telling you that Mr. Bruce is waiting? He loves you like anything! He's gone through that wedding feast every Christmas Day for the last nine years——"

"Stop!" commanded Muriel tensely.

"No jolly fear!" retorted Willy, with warmth. "Perhaps it's not right to say that he loves you—he only loves your memory——"

"Will you be quiet?" insisted the girl.

"He loves your memory because he thinks you're dead!"

"Dead!" echoed Muriel, with a start.

"Ah, I thought that would shake you up a bit!" said Willy, with a nod. "Perhaps you'll change your tone now? Don't you understand. He saw that report of an accident in Italy, and the poor chap thinks that you were killed. He hasn't the faintest idea that you're alive!"

"Oh!" murmured Muriel, her eyes becoming softer.

"So just think of the surprise when we trot you in, alive and kicking!" continued Willy calmly. "He'll fairly go off his dot with joy. You don't seem to realise that he's pining for you. So come along and make him happy. Two hearts asunder—you know the stuff!"

Muriel had calmed herself considerably.

"Not another word!" she said, her voice trembling. "Perhaps I ought not to be angry with you for this, Willy—you don't understand. But if you want to please me, go back to the castle, and tell your

friends that the whole plan is impossible. And please, please say nothing to Mr. Bruce. Don't even tell him that I am alive."

"Oh, that's all piffle," protested Willy. "You've got to come——"

"You must go!" she interrupted quietly.

In spite of himself, he was propelled across the room to the door, and then through the hall to the exit. Before he could fairly recover himself the front door opened, and he was thrust out, and the door slammed. Willy found himself looking blankly at the brass knocker.

"Well, my hat!" he said disgustedly. "This is what happens when you deal with women!"

CHAPTER VIII.

BROWNE TRIES HIS HAND.



WHEN Willy reached Browne's saloon, the one and only William Napoleon was watching for him with reproachful eyes.

"Ah, Brother Willy," he said sadly. "Without wishing to be too critical, may I lightly remark that you have been absent for the better part of five and twenty minutes? I will not stress the urgency of——"

"Chuck it, Browne!" growled Willy.

He got in the car, and slammed the door with such violence that the windows shook.

"Correct me if I am wrong, but is there some trifle disturbing your peace of mind?" asked Browne. "I will not mention that these doors, while soundly built, are scarcely constructed to withstand the simple pleasures of railway porters. I had no idea that it was your ambition to embark upon life with a peaked cap and shiny buttons. Neither is there any necessity to practise on my car——"

"I'm fed up!" snapped Willy. "She's refused!"

"I feared as much," sighed Browne. "Tell me all, Brother Willy."

Willy told him all—with vehement eloquence.

"So it's no good!" he concluded bitterly. "Just like all these giddy girls, she's as obstinate as a mule! I told her everything—pointed out how she would surprise Mr. Bruce, and all she did was to biff me out!"

Browne looked at Willy in a sombre fashion.

"Alas and alack!" he said gravely. "I anticipated better things of you, Brother Willy. I hoped in vain. For once the Browne judgment is at fault. In a word, you have dropped us in the oxtail!"

"What do you mean?" demanded Willy warmly. "It's a nice thing to blame me! You couldn't have done any better, you ass! How was I to know that she'd take it like that?"

ANSWERS

Every Saturday. Price 2d.

"I fear that your celebrated tact failed to come up to the scratch, Brother Willy," replied Browne. "In the course of a chequered career I have encountered a great many blunders. But never have I encountered such a colossal fiasco as this. Brother Willy, you have saddened my poor old heart."

"Go and try yourself!" snorted Willy, exasperated.

"I fear that it will be too late," said Browne. "The mischief is done—I go upon a lost cause. But yet I wonder? Have the Browne's ever been checked? Never! When we return to Dorrimore Castle, Brother Willy, we take Miss Halliday with us!"

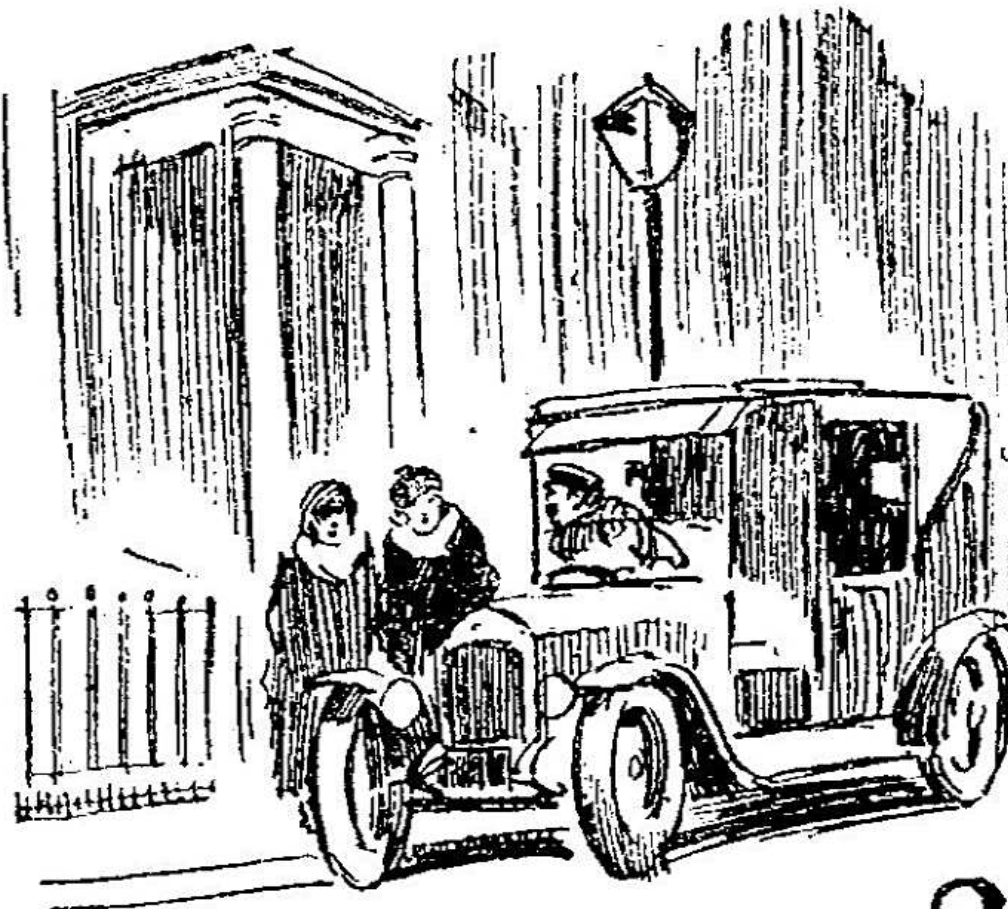
to suggest the very thing that her heart most desires."

"You're dotty!"

"Under the circumstances, we will overlook these insults, and proceed with the discussion," said Browne, frowning. "In your childish innocence, you assume that Miss Halliday is ready to act in accordance with her desires. In that, Brother Willy, you are vastly mistaken."

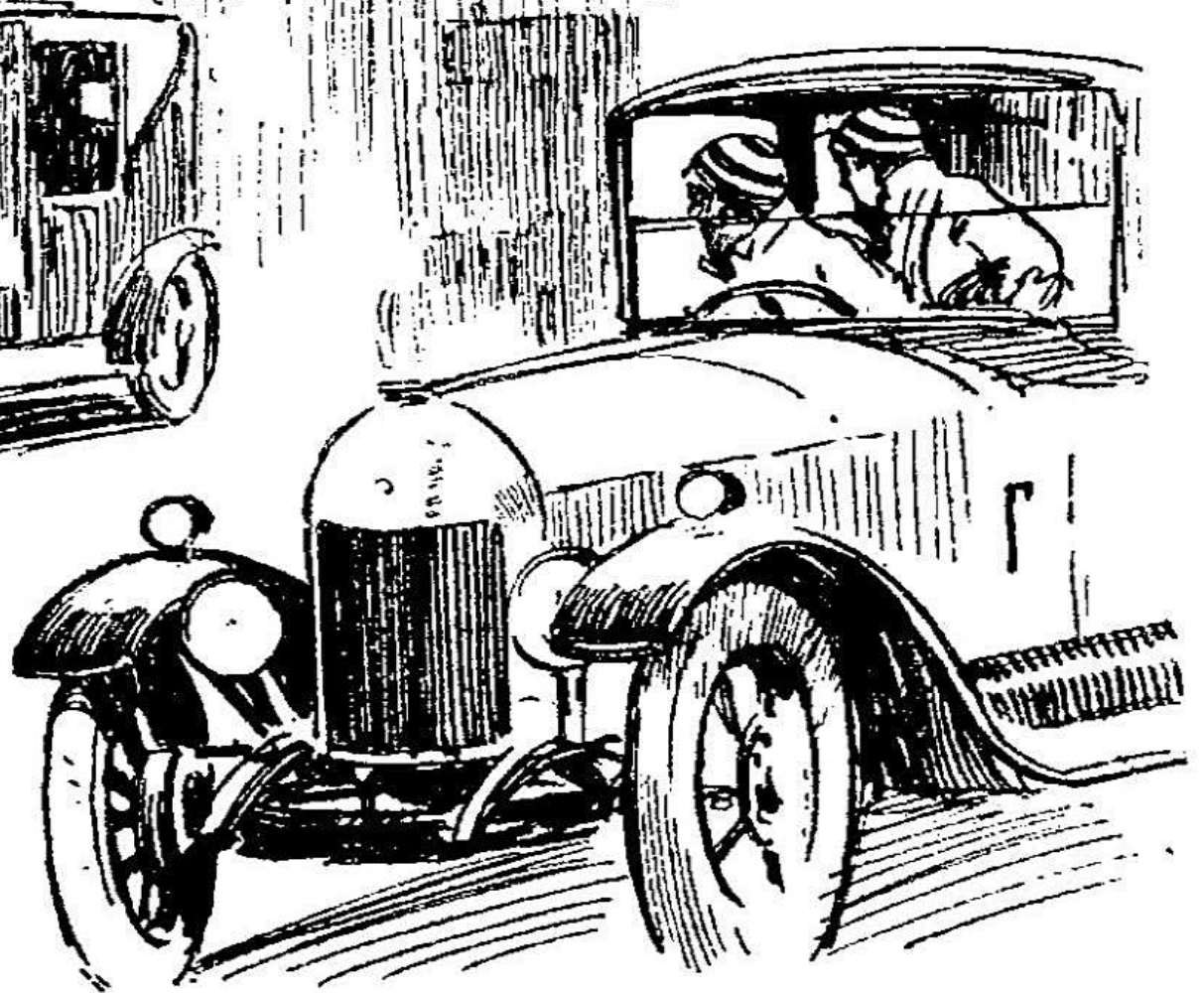
"But she wants to meet Bruce again!" insisted Willy.

"Undoubtedly," beamed Browne. "But would she, of her own volition, ever approach within a hundred miles of him? No, Brother Willy! She would not! You took



"Alas, yonder descendant of Dick Turpin has forestalled us," interrupted Browne.

A taxi-cab had whisked up, and Muriel and her aunt were already about to step into the vehicle.



"I'm sick of the whole thing," grunted Willy. "And to make matters worse, you jump down my throat! After she showed me those telegrams I couldn't do anything else but trot out the truth."

"That, if I may say so, is where you entered the nose-dive," declared Browne. "The subsequent crash was inevitable."

"But, you hopeless duffer——"

"When dealing with such a delicate subject as this, Brother Willy, the one essential was to make no mention of Henry Bruce," continued Browne. "It was there that you trod on the banana-skin. When you have grown to the mature years of a man of the world—such as myself—you will realise that the one way to obtain a woman's refusal is

the one course necessary to kill our final hope."

"Well, she deserves to be left out in the cold."

"Women are strange creatures," continued Browne wisely. "Mr. Bruce, I have no doubt, would dash Cricklewood-wards by the first train he could catch if he heard that the girl of his heart was not only widowed, but alive. He would, in fact, fly to her feet, and fix up the wedding. But, in like circumstances, will the girl fly to him?"

"Why shouldn't she?" demanded Willy.

"Ah, there you have the problem," said Browne, with a fatherly air. "Far from approaching the man of her heart, this girl

will do everything in her power to erect the barricades. Such is the way of a woman, Brother Willy. She would cheerfully die before voluntarily approaching the castle."

"Well, she must be off her giddy rocker," growled Willy disgustedly. "It's not often that I admit myself beaten, but I'm whacked here! She's spent ten years of misery, she's free, she loves the chap, and yet she won't go near him! Oh, there's no question of it—she's loony!"

Browne smiled with superior wisdom.

"It's all a question of, psychology, brother," he observed. "And by revealing the truth to her, you have not only closed the gate, but you have attached a couple of padlocks. That was your fatal mistake. Persuasive methods are now impossible. The decoy scheme is defunct. It remains for me to concentrate, and evolve an alternative plot."

"Why not have a go at Miss Halliday yourself?"

"One go is sufficient," replied Browne firmly. "I may observe, Brother Willy, that your own go was extremely drastic. No, I shall not venture to approach Miss Halliday in the ordinary manner. You were biffed out, and you will probably recover. But for a Browne to be biffed out—No, no! The thought appals me! I have the family honour to think of!"

Browne hunched himself behind the wheel, and stared unseeingly at the passing traffic. For once Willy was silent. He was beginning to realise that he had blundered, but he didn't blame himself. His blunder had been an unconscious one. How on earth was he to have guessed that Muriel Halliday would refuse to do the very thing she wanted to do? That was the worst of these women! They were so contrary!

"Thought of something yet?" asked Willy, after about five minutes.

"Our only course is to convert ourselves into villains of the deepest dye," murmured Browne. "A scaly prospect, but we must never admit defeat. We must become kidnappers, Brother Willy!"

"Kidnappers?"

"A drastic measure, but warrantable in the circumstances," nodded Browne. "Our only course is to seize Miss Halliday, and convey her to Dorrimore Castle by force. Once aboard the lugger—you are acquainted, I believe, with the formula. It is now necessary for us to evolve the plan of procedure."

Willy whistled.

"Kidnap her, eh?" he said brightly. "That's a good scheme! If only we can get her into this car, she'll be helpless! It's all closed in, and we can pull the blind down! Supposing I go to the house, and say that you urgently want to speak to her for a minute?"

Browne shook his head.

"Crude, Brother William," he declared. "Unworthy of the brain which nestles beneath your manly forehead. We must think

of something more subtle than that. A brief concentration——"

"I'll tell you what," said Willy. "I've got a mouth-organ here."

Browne winced.

"I've heard it on several occasions," he said sadly.

"You take it, go opposite the house, and start playing," suggested Willy. "Then, when Miss Halliday comes out to give you some coppers—she's bound to do that to drive you away—I'll drive the car up with a door open. You push her in, and we're off in two ticks."

Browne shook his head.

"Better than your first effort, Brother Willy, since it reveals a certain remote trace of genius," he admitted. "At the same time, I cannot quite picture myself operating the instrument of torture you indicate. No. We can surely attain our end without resorting to actual crime."

"Kidnapping's a crime, anyhow——"

"The crime I was referring to was not kidnapping, but polluting the air with the strains from that relic of the Spanish Inquisition," said Browne. "I am not aware that the Spaniards actually utilised the mouth-organ, but if not, they lost the chance of a lifetime. Can you imagine any more ghastly form of torture than to tie a man to a chair and play a mouth-organ in his face for twelve hours? The only explanation as to why this was not adopted is obviously simple. The torturer, as well as the tortured, would naturally be demented in the same period of time."

Browne shook his head again, and settled himself to think deeply. And Willy Handforth left him to it. He thought it was a rather great scheme to visit a neighbouring confectioner's and lay in a stock of milk chocolate, bullseyes, and similar delicacies.

Somehow the great plot was misfiring, and while Browne thought of further devices, Willy fortified himself.

CHAPTER IX.

THE CAT COMES OUT OF THE BAG.



"SO there you are, what?" said Archie Glenthorne genially.

"Archie, it's wonderful!" confessed Marjorie Temple. "Did you really think of that your-

self?"

"Good gad, no!" said Archie. "Phipps was the lad with the bulging brain. I mean to say, it takes a bally Cabinet Minister or a valet, to think of a thing like that. Ordinary chappies can't do it!"

"And Phipps has gone to Matlock?"

"Absolutely!" nodded Archie. "Of course, dear old girl, this is strictly sub rosa, and all that. Between ourselves, what? I'm expecting one of the dashed serfs to whizz out of the castle any minute with a message that I'm wanted on the good old 'phone. Phipps, you know, is going to ring me up as soon as the reply telegram drifts in."

Archie and Marjorie were gracefully gliding round the lake in Dorrimore Park. The ice was still perfect this morning, and the weather was glorious. Only a comparative few of the guests were indulging in skating. The others preferred the delights of the snow-covered slopes, where a toboggan run of Alpine-like glory had been constructed.

In fact, all the fellows and girls were enjoying the delights of the winter sports to the full. They had all spent a wonderful time until now; but Boxing Day seemed to be the best yet. Several of them were eagerly anticipating the evening, too.

That morning Henry Bruce had delighted everybody by presiding at the breakfast-table. He had lost a great deal of his sombre aspect, and had come out of his shell to such an extent that he was now tobogganning with the rest of the fellows, and thoroughly enjoying himself, too.

It was only Christmas Day that he looked upon as sacred to the memory of Muriel. He was now ready to throw himself heart and soul into the revels of the youthful guests. He was rather pleased, indeed, that Fate had brought them to the castle. He was being lifted out of himself.

Marjorie Temple had known nothing of the plans which the others had made. Nipper, Pitt, Irene, and Doris had sent one wire; Handforth & Co. had sent another, and Phipps and Archie had plotted the third. Everybody else was still in complete ignorance.

Marjorie was Archie's particular favourite, and vice versa. They naturally skated together. And it was just as natural that Archie should confide the scheme to the girl. She was full of enthusiasm for it.

"She's bound to come, of course," said Marjorie. "Do you know, Archie, I had a suspicion that Irene and Doris were planning something on their own account, but we've got ahead of them. At least, you have. And once Miss Halliday is in the castle the rest will be easy."

"Oh, rather!" agreed Archie. "A somewhat delicate sub.; but I mean to say, I don't see how the dashed thing can go wrong. The good old meeting, and there you are. I mean, what?"

"It's lovely to think of them being brought together again after all these years," nodded Marjorie. "I do hope there's no hitch."

Handforth & Co. were expressing the same hope. They had ceased tobogganning

for a while, and were holding a little argument on the hillside, apart from the others. Church and McClure, in fact, were having a very anxious time.

"You'll ruin everything if you keep going indoors and asking if you're wanted on the telephone," said Church rebelliously. "You've been three times, Handy. The chaps will get suspicious soon!"

Handforth snorted.

"Well, why the dickens doesn't that fat-headed footman ring up?" he asked. "I distinctly told him to 'phone me as soon as he got the reply. The chap's a washout!"

"You ass, it's pretty obvious that the reply hasn't come yet," said McClure.

"Rot! It must have come by this time," insisted Handforth. "He went off before breakfast, and the telegram must have been delivered before ten. It's nearly eleven now!"

"You can't expect a telegram before one o'clock at the earliest," growled Church. "And what's the hurry, anyhow? If Miss Halliday takes the first train, she can't get to Buxton before the evening. Why worry?"

"We want to know something for certain," retorted Handforth. "I'm sick of this waiting. Of course, the wheeze can't fail. It's a dead certainty, right from the start. We sent that wire in Irene's name, and Miss Halliday is as good as here."

"In that case, I'm blessed if I can see why you should be on the jump," said Church. "Let's get this toboggan on the go again—"

"By George!" interrupted Handforth, staring. "There's somebody just come out of that gate. I'll bet he's brought a message. No, he's going the other way, blow him!"

Handforth was gazing towards the castle. A figure had appeared from one of the numerous courtyards, but instead of coming across the park, it turned in the direction of the drive. Obviously one of the domestic staff going about his usual business.

"Are you fellows expecting anything?" asked Fullwood curiously.

He and Buster Boots were dragging a toboggan up the hillside, and they paused for a moment.

"Eh?" said Handforth, with a start.

"You seem uneasy about something, old man," went on Fullwood. "There's something on your mind. Choke it up, and Buster and I will unite in rushing to your assistance."

Handforth frowned darkly.

"Ass!" he said, with icy disdain. "When I want your help I'll ask for it! What rot! How could there be anything on my mind?"

"It's a bit of a puzzle, but you ought to know best," remarked Buster Boots.

"Nothing can't rest on nothing, can it? It wouldn't be a bad idea to consult Euclid on that point."

They passed on, chuckling, and Church and McClure grinned. Handforth didn't quite catch the purport of Buster's remark. He was too worried about other matters.

"There you are!" he said, with a grunt. "What did I tell you? We shall have to be careful. Some of these chaps are noticing!"

"Well, you've only got yourself to blame!" declared Church. "If you will go about with a care-worn expression—"

"Hallo, by George! Look there!" roared Handforth. "A pageboy running out from the castle. He's brought that message for me. Come on, you chaps!"

Even Church and McClure took it for granted that Handforth was right this time. A pageboy was hurrying out towards the guests, and it was quite evident that he was bringing a message of some kind. Archie Glenthorne and Marjorie Temple spotted him at just about the same time.

"Oh!" said Marjorie. "I wonder if—"

"Absolutely!" said Archie firmly. "The good old message from Phipps. Now we shall end the poisonous suspense, old girl. How about staggering towards the lad?"

And Irene Manners and Doris Berkeley made a move towards the pageboy, too. Dick Hamilton and Reggie Pitt were also interested. They joined Irene and Doris as they hurried through the snow.

"That telephone message, of course?" said Irene briskly.

"Pretty certain to be," agreed Nipper, nodding.

The three parties converged upon the pageboy as he approached. He paused, rather alarmed. Perhaps he had an idea that he was about to be rolled in the snow, and he thought it better to be prepared.

"Hallo!" murmured Pitt. "What's the idea? We're not the only ones who seem to be expecting a message. Handforth & Co. are running up like mad, and even Archie has developed some energy."

"Got a message for us?" asked Doris, as they all paused.

"Yes, miss," replied the pageboy. "Mr. Yates—"

"Rats! This message is for me!" roared Handforth, rushing up. "I'm wanted on the 'phone, eh? Good! I'll come straight in!"

"Dry up, you ass!" hissed Church.

But Handforth, as usual, had impulsively let the cat out of the bag. It wasn't fully out, but it was certainly peeping. Nipper and Pitt and the others were regarding him in rather a curious way. So Handforth was expecting a 'phone call, too. The pageboy merely scratched his head.

"No, young gent, there's nobody wanted on the telephone," he replied. "Mr. Yates

sent me out to ask if you'd like some sandwiches—"

"What!" snorted Handforth indignantly. "Hasn't Fred rung me up from Buxton—I—I mean—"

He paused, confused, and the pageboy grinned.

"So Fred went to Buxton for you, sir?" he asked. "We was all wondering downstairs what it all meant. Tom's gone to Chesterfield, too. And they say that Mr. Phipps is in Matlock—"

"Good gad!" ejaculated Archie. "Laddie, laddie, desist! I mean, dash it, you're absolutely spilling the good old beans. Odds secrets and conspiracies. They're littered all over the frightful place!"

Nipper whistled.

"By Jove!" he exclaimed slowly. "There's more in this than meets the eye! We'd better investigate at once!"

CHAPTER X.

ANOTHER TELEGRAM.



IRENE MANNERS was looking fixedly at Handforth.

"Ted, why did you send Fred, the footman, to Buxton?" she asked.

"Eh?" said Handforth.

"Oh! The fact is—well, he just went there, you know," he added weakly. "We thought it would be rather a good idea if he 'phoned up, just—just to see if the line's in order—"

"Ted, that's an awful whopper!" said Doris grimly.

"It isn't!" gasped Handforth. "At least, not exactly. I'm not going to tell you about that telegram we sent to Miss Halliday—"

"WHAT!" shouted about six voices in unison.

"I—I mean—"

Handforth paused, red in the face, and flustered. In his confusion he had revealed the whole secret.

"Wait a minute!" said Nipper quietly. "This needs sifting out. Did you send a telegram to Miss Halliday, asking her to come down to Derbyshire to-day? Have you chaps fixed up a plot to get her here so that she and Mr. Bruce can meet again?"

Handforth glared.

"Well, supposing we have?" he asked gruffly. "We thought it was rather a good wheeze. We were going to keep it quiet until she arrived."

"Oh, my only aunt!" said Doris feebly. "That's torn it!"

"Fairly in shreds!" said Pitt, nodding.

"I don't see what there is to worry about," growled Handforth.

"Not at all!" said Irene sarcastically. "Oh, not a bit! Only we happened to send a telegram to Miss Halliday in exactly the same strain. That's all! What a hopeless mess!"

"Great pip!" gurgled Handforth. "You sent a wire, too? In whose name?"

"Mine," replied Irene.

"Oh, corks!" groaned Church. "We sent ours in your name, Irene—and we sent it from Buxton!"

"And ours was sent from Chesterfield!" said Irene, in alarm. "That means she's got two telegrams from me—from two different places! There's a horrible mix-up—What's the matter, Archie?"

Archie Glenthorne was butting in desperately.

"Odds shocks and bombshells!" he ejaculated. "I mean to say, good gad! This is absolutely frightful! Phipps has gone to Matlock, and he's sent a wire to Miss Halliday in Doris' name!"

"That," said Doris, "has finally kinked it!"

Nipper grinned.

"It's rather more than kinked, I'm afraid—it's fairly busted!" he exclaimed drily.

"This is what comes of planning these things independently. We'd have done much better if we'd held a kind of general meeting on the subject. The whole scheme's kyboshed now. Miss Halliday won't dream of coming after getting three telegrams of that kind."

"She'll smell a rat, of course," said Irene dubiously. "She'll think it's a practical joke, and stay just where she is. I say, what a fearful frost!"

"But—but there's something uncanny about it!" gasped Handforth. "The idea was a brain-wave! Somebody must have overheard me telling Church and McClure about it—"

"Rats!" interrupted Nipper. "It was just an obvious trick. There's nothing particularly surprising in the fact that it was thought of by three independent parties. We've got to do something to repair the damage."

"Laddie, I leave it to you," said Archie, shaking his head. "You're the cove with all the brains. I mean, this sort of thing is beyond the powers of Archibald. Kindly proceed to spout forth the wheeze."

"But there's nothing we can do," groaned Doris. "I say, what a pity!"

"Naturally, Miss Halliday won't dream of coming under the existing circumstances," said Nipper thoughtfully. "And if we get up an elaborate plot, she'll only get more suspicious. As far as I can see, the only thing we can do is to send a perfectly frank telegram."

"How do you mean?" asked Pitt.

"Why, we'll just tell her that we've got a big Christmas party here," went on Nipper. "We'll say that we wanted to surprise her, and we've discovered that there's been a mix-up. And we'll conclude

by asking her to come down by the afternoon train, just the same. A sort of general appeal to get her to join the party. Perhaps she'll bite."

Irene shook her head.

"But when she hears that we're at the castle she'll fight shy—" she began.

"Naturally, we won't tell her that detail," interrupted Nipper. "We'll just say that we'll meet the train in. There's quite a good chance that she'll decide to come. Anyhow, it's all we can do."

And the telegram was dispatched without further delay—being sent direct from the castle by telephone. It got through quite quickly, and was, in fact, delivered in Cricklewood forty minutes from the time of dispatch. It was only just on the stroke of twelve when a telegram-boy jumped off his bicycle opposite to Mrs. Walters' house, and approached the door.

Janet, the maid, nearly collapsed when she saw the familiar buff envelope for the fourth time that morning. Telegrams were few and far between in Mrs. Walters' household, and Janet always seemed to imagine that the arrival of one meant a death, or something terribly serious. Four in one morning left her in a state of nervous prostration.

In the meantime, Muriel Halliday was quietly preparing to make a journey to the West End before luncheon. She was rather different now. Willy Handforth's visit had brought about a subtle change.

A quiet talk with her aunt had composed her mind somewhat. She was still grimly determined to keep away from Dorrimore Castle. No amount of inducement would make her go there.

But her outlook upon life was altered.

Just one little thing that Willy had told her had made this great difference. Henry Bruce thought that she was dead! Hitherto she had never dreamed of this possibility, and she had secretly wondered why he had never attempted to communicate with her. She had, indeed, taken it for granted that he was married, and wrapped up in his own family circle.

But Willy's visit had made all the difference.

Muriel now knew that Henry Bruce was still true—and she was touched deeply by the thought that he made this yearly pilgrimage to Dorrimore Castle, solely in her memory. Indeed, she found it impossible to analyse her own thoughts—and her aunt wisely decided to say little.

It was Mrs. Walters who suggested a matinee visit to one of the West End theatres. It would help to compose the girl's mind. Being Boxing Day, all the big shows would naturally be booked right up, but there were one or two theatres where there might be a chance of getting some seats.

So Muriel and her aunt were about to take a short trip in quest of them. Muriel was unusually quiet, and that sad look seemed to have left her expression. Its place was taken by one of gentle content.

ment. He was not only unmarried, but he still cared!

She dared not think deeply on the subject—and the very idea of going to Dorrimore Castle appalled her. She wondered if the boys and girls would tell Bruce that she was really alive. In a way she hoped—No, but that would be terrible. Of course, really, it would be rather wonderful—

She flushed at these thoughts, and was positively relieved when Janet appeared, carrying the fourth telegram. Both Muriel and her aunt were just ready for venturing out.

"What is the world coming to?" asked Mrs. Walters, holding up her hands.

Muriel read the telegram.

"They seem to have found out about the fiasco of the other wires," she said, smiling. "What a dreadful amount of money this must have cost! Just look how long it is, aunt!"

"A wicked waste!" said Mrs. Walters indignantly.

"Oh, we can't be cross with them," said Muriel softly. "How eager they are to get me there! Even now they haven't mentioned anything about Dorrimore Castle. What a blessing Willy Handforth came and told me the truth! But for his visit I should have been tempted to go. Indeed, I'm sure I should have gone."

Her aunt looked thoughtful.

"Perhaps you ought to, Muriel," she said slowly. "After all, why—"

"No, no—I couldn't!" interrupted Muriel hastily. "Please, aunt! Oh, I simply couldn't. Let's go for those tickets."

It certainly seemed that fate was dead against the youthful matchmakers!

CHAPTER XI.

BROWNE THE UNCONQUERABLE.



WILLY HANDFORTH granted. "Anything stirring yet?" he asked resignedly.

"The grey matter has been stirring without interruption ever since this problem confronted us Brother Willy," replied Browne. "Unfortunately, the stirring process has only succeeded in producing a number of impracticable schemes. Clever in their way—indeed, touched with genius, as befitting the schemes of a Browne—but, nevertheless, unsuitable."

"Nearly two hours wasted!" said Willy tartly. "And we always thought you were a brainy chap, Browne!"

Browne turned in his seat, and looked at Willy thoughtfully. They were in the Morris-Oxford saloon, and it was still standing in the same place.

"It is your presence which has such a negative effect upon my inventive faculties,"

declared Browne. "That, Brother Willy, is the solution. Without wishing to be too blunt, may I suggest a quiet removal of your unnecessary person?"

"Look here, you lanky chump—"

"There are various forms of amusement," continued Browne. "Go forth, and peer into the windows of the neighbouring lollipop-shops. Indulge in a 'bus ride to Golders Green and back. Take your mouth-organ, and amuse some of the local children. Anything, in fact, to leave me in peace."

Willy didn't budge.

"I left you in peace for half-an-hour, and when I came back you hadn't thought of a thing!" he said severely. "And during that time I thought of at least five topping wheezes! That one about the accident is the best."

Browne nodded.

"I am ready to grant that the basis of the scheme is sound, but there are certain fundamental disadvantages," he declared. "No, Brother Willy, with much regret I must decline—"

"But it's so simple!" interrupted Willy. "It can't fail, either."

"I am prepared to admit—"

"All you've got to do is to drive down the road, and as soon as you get opposite Miss Halliday's house, you dash into the kerb," said Willy enthusiastically. "You buff against the front railings, and twist up the near-side wing. I let out a yell, and you race the engine—just to make a noise."

"I can see all this, but I fail to appreciate—"

"What's going to happen?" demanded Willy. "Miss Halliday will rush out, and I'll make her believe that I'm hurt. We can splinter one of the windows for effect. She'll rush in the car to my help, you'll slam the door, and away we go. If you can think of a better idea—"

"We will acknowledge that the idea is a corker," admitted Browne. "There, Brother Willy, I confess that you have excelled yourself. At the same time, there is one slight defect."

"You're too jolly particular—"

"It might be possible to scrape the near-side wing slightly, but on the other hand a wreck would probably be the concrete result," said Browne firmly. "Any impartial judge would not hesitate to declare that my car would be in no way improved. Fortunately, we can dispense with your added suggestion of a shattered window. Triplex glass, as you may be aware, refuses to shatter itself at the behest of thoughtless youth."

"Oh, well, we can do without that part."

"I think we can safely do without the other part, too," declared Browne. "No, Brother Willy, much as I desire to entice the damsel away, I do not see the fun of converting this 1926 chariot into a mass of scrap-iron."

But it'll only mean one wing—"

"Even one wing would result in a con-

siderable mass of cash flying from my already depleted pocket," interrupted Browne. "Repairs, Brother William, are no light item these days. I am convinced that we can solve this problem without indulging in actual destruction. Indeed, the glimmerings of an idea are already——"

"My hat!" interrupted Willy. "Quick! Now's our chance! She's here!"

William Napoleon Browne stared, and looked. Muriel Halliday and her aunt had just turned the corner, and were in the very act of hailing a passing taxicab. They did not even see the two St. Frank's fellows, sitting in the smart saloon.

moments when action is essential," he said briskly. "Under no circumstances can we allow these ladies out of our sight. The chase, Brother Willy, is on. The hunt has commenced."

He touched the self-starter, and the engine instantly answered. And a moment later the saloon was gliding along, immediately in the rear of Muriel's taxicab. Browne had acted with great presence of mind. It had not occurred to him that Muriel would go out somewhere, but now that she was on her way, he was determined to follow up closely.

They went through Kilburn, along Maida



It took a great deal to surprise Handforth minor, but he was surprised now. "Great corks!" he gurgled. "Old Dorrie!"

"Fate," murmured Browne, "has stepped in!"

"Let's rush up and drag her into the car!" suggested Willy. "It's quiet here, Browne! We can do it in two ticks——"

"Alas, yonder descendant of Dick Turpin has forestalled us," interrupted Browne. "I fear that we are splashing ankle-deep in the soup."

A taxi-cab had whisked up, and Muriel and her aunt were already stepping into the vehicle. The descendant of Dick Turpin took his instructions, slammed the door, and blithely performed a complete circle in the road, entirely regardless of other traffic. Browne shook himself into alertness.

"We have arrived at one of those

Vale, and continued down Edgware Road to the Marble Arch. Then down Oxford Street, and thus into Regent Street and down towards the theatrical centre. On any ordinary morning Browne might have experienced great difficulty in keeping close behind his quarry. But to-day the roads were comparatively clear.

There was no congestion, for all the vehicles were either 'buses, taxi's, or private cars. And when at length Muriel's taxi drew up in front of a fashionable restaurant, the Morris saloon was just behind.

"Our task grows more difficult," murmured Browne sadly. "Alack, we are beset by grave complications—— But what is

this, Brother Willy? Apparently we have still further to go."

Only Mrs. Walters had emerged from the taxi. She spoke to Muriel for a moment of two, waved her hand, and entered the restaurant with a kind of awestruck expression. She was a simple soul, and these West End palaces always had that effect.

The taxi drove on, but only for a few hundred yards. This time it came to a halt outside the foyer of a theatre. Browne pulled up just behind. He was beginning to understand. While Muriel had come on to book some seats, her aunt had gone into the restaurant to order luncheon.

She dismissed her taxi and entered the foyer. William Napoleon's eyes glittered. In a flash the problem was solved. The Browne genius had stepped into the breach. Here was a chance in a thousand.

"All is well with us, Brother Willy," he murmured. "Follow my instructions carefully, and we will yet descend upon Dorrimore Castle this evening as per schedule."

"You mean——"

"Delay not by asking questions, brother," urged Browne. "Open wide your ears, and suck in the following words of wisdom!"

Willy grinned cheerfully as he listened. Browne, whilst talking, kept his eyes fixed keenly on the theatre entrance. Fortunately it was one of those streets off the main thoroughfare, and there was very little traffic in the street.

Muriel Halliday appeared, and she paused just on the steps to open her bag and slip the ticket envelope within. Browne engaged his gears, and slid straight up to the entrance. Willy hopped out, and removed his cap. Muriel Halliday paused as she caught sight of him.

"Really!" she exclaimed. "How remarkable——"

"Just caught sight of you, Miss Halliday," said Willy briskly. "This is Browne, you know—chap I was talking about earlier. His car. Browne, Miss Halliday."

Browne bowed without leaving his seat.

"Charmed to meet you, Miss Halliday," he beamed. "Something told me that we should not be entirely devoid of success this morning. May we crave the honour of giving you a lift?"

Muriel hesitated, and looked relieved. She had been half fearing that Browne would introduce the subject of his trip to London, and the situation would be embarrassing.

"A lift?" she repeated. "Oh, no! I wouldn't trouble you like that, really. I'm only going a few hundred yards——"

"Do not deny us this little act of courtesy," pleaded Browne. "Always remember, Miss Halliday, that we are at your service. In little things we are just

as eager as in big things. Leap aboard, and state your destination. Willy, your arm!"

Muriel could not help feeling slightly flattered. She had no time to think, to suspect any deep plot. Obviously Browne and Willy had spotted her by mere chance, and were laying themselves out to be polite.

"Thanks awfully, but you really shouldn't trouble," she said, as she stepped in. "I merely wish to go round the corner to the Trocadero. My aunt is being dreadfully extravagant to-day."

"That's all right," said Willy briskly. "Go ahead, Browne, we're in. Make yourself at home, Miss Halliday."

He slammed the door, and Browne seemed to fumble for a few moments with his own car. As a matter of fact, he was locking it. This particular car was fitted with special locking devices. It was only necessary to lock one door, and the other three were automatically secured.

"Home, James!" said Willy calmly.

Browne smiled, and the car glided off. But instead of making in the direction of the Trocadero, it turned up Shaftesbury Avenue, and was in the region of Charing Cross Road before Muriel realised that something was wrong.

And Browne at the wheel was looking decidedly grim.

CHAPTER XII.

THE BARGAIN.



MURIEL HALLIDAY was kidnapped.

That was the long and short of the matter. And she had fallen into the trap by sheer chance, the simplest of all possible devices. Browne's scheming had been unnecessary. For Muriel herself had provided the very opening which William Napoleon had sought.

And now the saloon was purring through London with a purposeful kind of hum. Browne was an excellent driver, and there was something in his very attitude at the wheel which suggested the start of a long journey.

"Willy!" exclaimed Muriel, clutching at the bag's arm. "Where are we going? Didn't I say the Trocadero? Please ask your friend——"

"Don't you worry, miss," said Willy calmly. "Browne knows what he's doing. Taking you for a joyride, perhaps."

"Mr. Browne, I insist upon your going to the Trocadero at once!" said Muriel angrily. "It is very nice of you to take me on a long detour, but my aunt is waiting

for me in the restaurant. Please return at once."

Browne glanced round.

"It is to be feared, Miss Halliday, that we have been guilty of dirty work at the cross roads," he said gravely. "That it should have been necessary to resort to trickery in the case of a lady is a matter for eternal regret, but there are certain circumstances which warrant drastic methods. The present circumstances come within that category."

"Whatever do you mean?" she asked breathlessly.

"Brother William will oblige with a brief explanation," said Browne. "We must always realise that life is full of shocks. There are small shocks and big shocks. Brother Willy, proceed."

Browne confined himself to the driving, and Muriel looked at Willy with wide-open eyes. She even turned pale as a sudden suspicion entered her mind. Willy had tried to persuade her to accompany him back to Dorrimore Castle, and he had failed. Now she was a prisoner in this car!

"Oh!" she exclaimed. "Have you done this deliberately? Are you daring to take me away by force? I insist upon—"

"Keep your hair on, Miss Halliday," interrupted Willy. "That's more than most girls do nowadays," he added drily. "Glad to see you haven't had it bobbed or shingled. I've always thought your hair looked ripping, but it needs fluffing up a bit."

"I venture to suggest that such a course would remove five years in one stroke," declared Browne firmly.

"This—this is absurd," cried Muriel. "Why won't you stop? Why won't you— Oh! Whatever can I do? This is an outrage!"

"Oh, cheese it!" said Willy. "It's simply a case of force. You wouldn't consent to go back with us to Dorrimore Castle, so we're taking you. Some people need urging a bit. You seem to forget that Mr. Bruce is waiting—"

"You—you terrible boy!" shouted Muriel in desperation. "I never dreamed that you would play a trick like this. Please, Mr. Browne! I can understand such a trick from Willy, but I hardly suspected that you would make yourself a party to such an outrageous thing."

Browne looked pained.

"Let me assure you, Miss Halliday, that my motives are entirely benevolent," he said earnestly. "In this little affair mere personalities are of no account. I am a Browne, and therefore a go-getter. I believe it has an American origin, but we will pass lightly on—"

"Really!" breathed Muriel stormily.

"Yesterday I set blithely forth from the feudal estates of Dorrimore," con-

tinued Browne, unperturbed. "Strictly speaking, this motor-car is all wrong. We really ought to be on horseback. For are we not emulating the example of the medieval knights? It is a mistake to suppose that deeds of valour are now dead. We are conveying you to the moated castle, situate in the shire of Derby, for the purpose of welding two—"

"Stop!" cried Muriel. "This is beyond all endurance! How dare you take me away by force!"

"Merely the normal procedure," said Browne mildly. "I will admit that we are two or three hundred years in advance of our time—"

"This is simply preposterous!" declared Muriel, gazing helplessly at the swiftly passing traffic. "I won't be a party to this nonsense. Take me back to the Trocadero at once. I have never had such an experience in all my life. Why, you are kidnapping me!"

"A harsh term, but one that undoubtedly fits," agreed Browne.

"Unless you stop the car at once, and let me get out I will scream for help!" said Muriel frantically. "I tell you I will scream for help!"

Browne smiled.

"A moment's consideration, Miss Halliday, will convince you of the futility of such a course," he said gently. "I will not deny that a minion of the law would probably put the half-nelson on our progress. But what of the subsequent publicity? I urge you to give pause and think."

"Stop at once or I will scream!" insisted Muriel tearfully.

"The publicity would indeed be appalling," continued Browne. "Imagine the headlines in the papers. 'Schoolboys Kidnap Sweet Young Schoolmistress,' 'Murky Plot to Weld A Brace Of Hearts,' 'The Schoolboy Knight Errants, Or After Ten Years.' No, Miss Halliday, we must above all be cautious. First and foremost we must exercise discretion. Publicity must be pushed firmly and resolutely into the background."

Muriel Halliday sat back amid the cushions, pale and alarmed. She was biting her lip with sheer desperation. And she knew well enough that Browne's advice was right. To stop the car by screaming, and thus invite publicity would be too terrible for words. Her only course was to plead.

Her feelings towards Willy were mild in comparison to what she felt for Browne. He was so much older, and ought to have known better. Her emotions for Browne bordered on the homicidal. The gaze that she directed at the back of his head was so fierce that Willy expected to see William Napoleon's hair singeing.

Muriel had no idea that Browne was inwardly tortured. This sort of thing grated

against his finer feelings. He hated taking advantage of a lady, and something told him that this episode was a trick of the deepest dye. But it was either this or returning to Dorrimore Castle, a failure. And the latter thought was positively out of the question.

"Please, please go back!" pleaded Muriel at length. "Oh, you don't understand, you don't realise what this means!"

"Alas, we are only too acutely aware of the situation," said Browne, glancing over his shoulder. "We beg for your forgiveness, Miss Halliday. We grovel at your feet, humble sinners. At the same time, we have no alternative but to proceed with the plot. The Browne reputation is at stake, and nothing can be allowed to thwart our purpose."

"But I can't go—I can't!" cried Muriel desperately.

"At this juncture I feel bound to remind you that we hold the trump card," said the Fifth-Former. "That we should be compelled to play it is an everlasting pity. But feminine obstinacy, Miss Halliday, must be checked. In more ways than one I feel justified. And Time, the great healer, will no doubt purge me of this sin. One word from you, and Brother Willy and I are your slaves. One word will be sufficient."

"That's all, Miss Halliday," said Willy eagerly. "Just promise us you'll come back to Dorrimore Castle, and we'll whisk you back to the Trocadero in two ticks. Browne's only going round in circles; we're quite near Piccadilly Circus even now. Just your word, and——"

"No, no!" said Muriel. "I can't—I won't! This is terrible!" She suddenly grew angry again. "It is an outrageous affair!" she added hotly. "I won't agree to your ridiculous terms. Take me back at once! I insist!"

Willy glared.

"Of all the blind people!" he burst out. "Can't you realise that we're doing this as a favour? We've come all the way to London to help you, and you simply hinder us at every turn! In the end, we're compelled to kidnap you! If you won't see common sense, we've got to force you! There you are—I don't want to be rude, but I can't help it!"

"Oh, Willy, you don't understand——"

"Chuck it, Miss Halliday!" grunted Willy. "Of course, we understand. We know exactly what's in your mind—don't we, Browne?"

"Unfortunately, yes," agreed Browne. "You, Miss Halliday, are worrying solely on a question of convention. In your heart you are keen on accompanying us to Dorrimore Castle. In all truthfulness, do you deny this?"

"Oh, how dare you?" breathed Muriel feebly.

"At least, you parry the thrust," said Browne calmly. "A point to us, Brother Willy! A distinct point. Such bluntness on this subject is regrettable, but this is a time for bold, unvarnished words. Convention urges you to avoid Mr. Bruce like the plague—but your heart is whispering quite a different story. You see, all subterfuge is useless. And we are determined to dispense with these foolish pretences of modern life, and force the issue. At your age, Miss Halliday, there may be invisible barriers. But at our age there are none. Let us be quite frank."

Muriel had absolutely no words. She could only sit there, her heart throbbing violently. Uncannily enough, every word that Browne said was true. That's what she couldn't understand. Her whole being was thrilled by the thought of meeting Henry Bruce again—and yet, left to her own devices, she would have stifled such emotions.

William Napoleon Browne and Handforth minor, in their youthful wisdom, were determined to dispense with such trifles as convention. They had come to London to fetch Miss Halliday, and by all appearances they were not to be denied!

CHAPTER XIII.

THE SURPRISE IN THE TRAIN.



MURIEL was having a fight with herself.

It was quite a one-sided affair, as she was well aware. Indeed, what possible chance was there for her to win this battle against her two determined abductors? She made one last effort, but was soon convinced of its futility. Besides, although she wouldn't acknowledge it, she was thrilled by the thought of failure. In a word, she was hoping for failure.

"This—this absurd joke has gone far enough!" she exclaimed, attempting to make her manner frigid. "I'm not cross with you, boys, for taking this interest in me, but it cannot go on. Take me to the Trocadero at once!"

Browne chuckled inwardly. He detected the note of failure. He knew that she was merely bluffing.

"Unhappily, we must decline," he replied tranquilly. "Indeed, since you remain obdurate, there is only one course left. We had hoped to return to Derbyshire by train. I have ample trust in my steed, but the journey is long, and we desire to reach the castle by early evening. Alas, it will be nearly midnight by the time we actually pull rein at the drawbridge, and urge sundry serfs to admit us."

"What—what do you mean?" asked Muriel breathlessly.

"The answer is simple," replied Browne. "We are now setting resolutely out of Lon-



don. In a word, we are switching off the inner-circle, and taking the main line. We now set out upon the turnpike, and start on the long journey by road."

"Oh, but you can't do that!" cried Muriel, in alarm. "You can't!"

"And yet we are doing it!" said Browne kindly.

He stepped on the accelerator, and the car fairly hummed.

"Thank goodness!" said Willy, with a sigh. "It's good to know that we've settled something at last. It'll take us seven or eight hours, and I can get a good nap. Call me when you want a relief at the wheel, Browne."

"While appreciating the kindly thought, I must, nevertheless, decline the offer," replied Browne. "The general idea is to reach Dorrimore Castle—and not, as you evidently assume, the bottom of a ditch. I have a high regard for many of your talents, Brother Willy, but I tremble to think of the consequences if you took the wheel."

Muriel listened to this banter with growing alarm. She really thought that the journey had started. And she knew that she could do nothing to prevent it. She was helpless. And, at last, she fully realised that the keynote of this twain was determination.

"Please, stop!" she pleaded. "I can't go to Dorrimore Castle like this! I've got no luggage—I've got no clothing! I can't arrive at the castle in this morning dress! I've nothing—absolutely nothing!"

"A serious drawback, I will admit," agreed Browne. "But the remedy is simple. Your word of honour to accompany us obediently, Miss Halliday, and we will return to the Troc."

"There's my aunt, too!" cried Muriel. "She'll be in a terrible way, poor thing!"

"We must trust that she will recover," said Browne. "Come, Miss Halliday, let us get down to brass tacks. Give us your word, and we will return to the Troc.—where you must allow me to entertain you at luncheon. Indeed, upon that point I insist. Later, we will return to Cricklewood, you will pack your grips, and we will catch the afternoon train. I have the schedule mapped out to the minute. There is still time to put it into execution."

"I don't know what to say!" exclaimed Muriel despairingly.

"I should imagine the choice is simple," declared Browne. "On the one hand, you arrive at Dorrimore Castle as you stand. On the other hand, you arrive hours earlier, and well equipped. You will observe that the fundamental point is precisely the same. Whichever way you choose—you arrive!"

Muriel capitulated. There was nothing else for it. As Browne had pointed out, there was really only one choice. She tearfully gave her word of honour that she would accompany her escorts to Derbyshire by the

afternoon train. But Browne clearly detected the note of breathless anticipation which crept, unbidden, into her voice. And Browne felt that his conscience was clear. In spite of her indignant words, she wanted to go. It was her true desire. And Browne was serenely happy. By taking the bull by the horns, he had smashed the barriers of convention at a stroke.

Left to their own devices, Muriel Halliday and Henry Bruce might have been kept apart for months—perhaps years. But these schoolboy plotters were determined to waste no time.

In less than five minutes the Morris saloon was outside the Trocadero. The whole venture was a success. Muriel had recovered her composure by this time, and she was pale, but calm. She entered the restaurant to find her aunt—Browne promising to join them after he had parked the car.

"I venture to proclaim, Brother William, that our united efforts have clicked," suggested Browne contentedly.

"About time they did!" grinned Willy. "By jingo, Browne, you're a marvel!"

William Napoleon beamed.

"A remark," he said, "that is merely an expression of the obvious!"

And they gripped hands on the strength of their victory.

The well-filled train glided smoothly out of the great London terminus, and William Napoleon Browne lay back with a contented sigh. There was no getting out of the affair now.

Everything had gone smoothly—except for a certain painful period in the Trocadero, when Mrs. Walters had roundly called Browne to book for his high-handed methods.

But even Muriel's aunt was secretly pleased after she had calmed down. Indeed, she was so secretly pleased that she was on the train at the present moment, having decided to go to the castle, too. Browne had generously invited her. The mere fact that he had no authority was a trifle to the great William Napoleon.

Muriel had packed quite a lot of luggage, for Browne had pointed out that she would probably stay there for a week. It was just as well to be prepared. And the girl was very quiet, now that the train journey had actually commenced. She had given her word, and she had no thought of backing out. But, inwardly, she was in a tumult. The prospect was a strange one for her.

She knew that she was going to meet Henry Bruce thought that she was dead! for ten years—since that day when her foolish parents had taken her home—after practically dragging her from the altar. And Henry Bruce thought that she was dead! It was undoubtedly a situation of unusual interest.

Now that the suspense was over, Browne and Willy were content. Browne decided that it would be quite an excellent idea to indulge in a sleep. The train was an

express, and was due to arrive in Buxton at about eight o'clock. It was later than Browne actually liked, but Boxing Night was exceptional, and nine o'clock at Dorrimore Castle would be quite early.

Willy Handforth was not particularly keen on sleeping. He thought it a good idea to walk about the corridor, from one end of the train to the other. He had no particular reason for this manoeuvre, but it offered a certain amount of thrills.

He started off on his quest blithely. At the back of his head he had a vague idea of locating the dining-car, so that he could direct the others to it when the appropriate moment arrived.

There was nothing to worry about now. When Buxton was reached a party from the castle would be waiting. For Browne had taken good care to dispatch a long wire, modestly proclaiming his success, and stating the exact time of arrival. That telegram, incidentally, had created something akin to a sensation upon its delivery. Just when everybody had believed that the scheme had fallen through, William Napoleon Browne bobbed up triumphant.

Willy did not locate the dining-car. And for a sufficient reason. He had only got as far as the second coach from his own compartment when he uttered a gasp. He was just passing a first-class compartment, and he casually eyed the occupants as he went down the corridor.

It took a great deal to surprise Handforth minor—but he was surprised now.

"Great corks!" he gurgled. "Old Dorrie!"

"Eh?" ejaculated one of the gentlemen within the compartment. "Why, hallo! One of those St. Frank's imps, as I live! The one and only Willy! Well, well! What are you doing on this train, young man?"

"Dorrie!" repeated Willy blankly. "Great kippers!"

Lord Dorrimore elevated his eyebrows.

"Anyone might think I was an Egyptian mummy come to life, or somethin'!" he protested mildly. "Why these picturesque ejaculations? Is it so very astonishing that I should be travelling to my own feudal estates?"

"It's not that!" burst out Willy. "I'm going there, too!"

"Splendid!" said Dorrie. "We won't go into any details regardin' invitations. If it comes to that, you're always welcome—and you know it. But it might be interesting to know the whys and wherefores. I was under the impression that the castle was bolted and barred."

"But—but we thought you were abroad, sir!"

"There's no tellin' where I am," said Dorrie, shaking his head. "You can never be certain as to my location, young 'un. I'm a human will-o'-the-wisp. About three

weeks ago I thought it would be a bright idea to get home for Christmas. I'm a bit late, but blame the sea. How's everybody?"

Willy took a seat beside his lordship and poured out his story. He couldn't contain himself. Lord Dorrimore here! Lord Dorrimore on the way to the castle! It was almost too good to be true!

"So that's the position," concluded Willy, at last. "Of course, it'll be ten times as good with you there, sir. It'll give the whole party a zip and a go. And you can be best man at the wedding!"

Lord Dorrimore chuckled heartily.

"Well, upon my soul!" he exclaimed. "How on earth you can sit there and look me in the face I'm hanged if I know! You unmitigated young rascal! You mischievous young imp! Dash it, you've got the cheek of—"

"Hi, steady!" protested Willy.

"All the same, I admire you for it," grinned Dorrie. "You're the cause of all this business!"

"Of course I am," agreed Willy. "It was my original idea to get the chaps and the girls down to the castle on a fool's errand."

"There's nothin' to boast of there, my lad!" said his lordship severely. "You must have got the mind of a hobgoblin to think of such things! So the whole crowd planted themselves in the castle, an' wolfed Mr. Bruce's banquets? I'll bet old Henry was a bit surprised, wasn't he? I haven't seen him for goodness knows when! An' now you're taking Miss Halliday down to the castle! You scheming young scamps! Words fail me!"

"Don't you think it's a good idea?"

"My dear kid, I think it's touched with genius!" declared Dorrie promptly. "As for your pal, Browne, the man's a marvel. We shall have to go along an' interview him. The fact is, I've got an idea."

"Something to help the scheme along?" asked Willy eagerly.

"Surprisin'ly enough, yes," smiled his lordship. "You needn't stare like that. It savours of doubt. I don't often get an idea; I'm a man of action rather than wheezes. But this time I fancy I've got hold of a fairly useful notion."

Browne was delighted when he found that Lord Dorrimore was on the train. A certain amount of plotting took place, quite unknown to Muriel and her aunt.

His lordship very tactfully made his identity known to Muriel, and swore that he wouldn't go near the castle unless she and her aunt promised to be his guests for at least a week. His genial good nature, in fact, worked wonders. Long before the journey was ended Muriel was feeling happier than she could ever remember.



CHAPTER XIV.

THE TRANSFORMATION.



EDWARD OSWALD HANDFORTH stamped up and down the platform with his hands thrust deeply into his overcoat pockets.

"She's late!" he said gruffly. "The company had an excuse yesterday, but the line's clear now. It's perfectly disgraceful!"

"Don't be unreasonable, Ted," said Irene. "The train's only a minute overdue, so far, and I believe she's signalled. Oh, I wonder if Miss Halliday will really arrive? I've got an awful feeling that Browne has been spoofing us."

"If he has, there'll be practically no Browne left by the time we've finished with him," said Dick Hamilton grimly. "But he's not in much danger. I'm pretty sure that wire was genuine."

There were eight or nine St. Frank's fellows and Moor View girls in the group. It was just after eight o'clock, and they were waiting on the snow-covered platform for the London express to steam in.

There was no mistake about the period being Christmas. Snow was falling again, but not in sufficient quantities to delay the service. The flakes were descending in feathery profusion, and already the figures of the waiting group were whitened.

"Here she comes!" sang out Doris eagerly.

The train rolled in, and within a few minutes there was a scene of animation and bustle. The Dorrimore Castle party had suspended all Christmas festivities for the purpose of coming to the station. They could easily continue the revels later.

"There's old Browne!" said Church, pointing. "My hat! And look! Great Scott! It's Lord Dorrimore!"

Browne and Willy found themselves surrounded as they stepped out of the train, and Lord Dorrimore was nearly overwhelmed.

"Look out! Steady!" he gasped. "What's all this? In another second I shall be under the bally train. By gad, it's good to see you youngsters again," he added, as he pumped the nearest hands. "You girls, too. Well, this is the best surprise I've had for æons."

"Fancy you being here, Dorrie!" exclaimed Nipper enthusiastically. "What a chap you are for bobbing up when you're least expected. I say, do you know what's been happening?"

"I know the whole murky story," nodded Dorrie. "Your fellow-criminals have told me everything. And I've got to confess that I'm as guilty as any of you. I've been hatching a plot, too."



Browne gulped. She was facing him. For a moment he believed that he had gone out of his mind. It was Muriel.

"But where's Miss Halliday?" demanded Irene.

"Give her a chance," said Browne deprecatingly. "Being a young lady yourself, you will doubtless appreciate the fact that other young ladies invariably take their own time when leaving railway trains. There are always sundry packages to collect, hats to straighten, hair to be patted into shape, and similar trivialities."

"I can see her!" cried Doris. "Cheerio, Miss Halliday! I say, what a sport you are to come. This is simply grand!"

Muriel found herself nearly lifted off her feet by the excited girls.

"I'm not a sport at all," she denied. "I didn't want to come. In fact, I'm awfully afraid, even now. It was Browne who forced me. What a terrible young man!"

"Browne's a living wonder," said Doris promptly.

William Napoleon smiled placidly as he overheard the remark. It just suited him to bask in the praise of his fellow-guests. Fame was his life-blood, and when he was in any kind of prominence he was at the very top of his form.

Outside the station several closed motor-cars were waiting. One of them had been sent by Yates especially for Lord Dorri-

more. For Dorrie had wired to his butler, and he had also wired to Bruce. But Bruce had intended giving the boys and girls a surprise, and had said nothing.

"There's nothing for you to worry about, Miss Halliday," said Irene, when they were bowling over the snowy roads. "Mr. Bruce hasn't the faintest idea that you're coming, and we're going to smuggle you into the castle so that he doesn't know. Then we're going to do things."

"Do things?" asked Muriel, perturbed. "What things?"

"Wait and see!" said Doris firmly. "At school you're our mistress, but now you're

He just made up his mind to bring me here, and he allowed nothing to baulk him. He'll be Prime Minister one day."

"His pater's a famous judge, you know," smiled Irene. "I expect that's where he gets his gift of the gab. But we're not talking about Browne, we're discussing you. After all, why shouldn't you meet Mr. Bruce again?"

"I do wish——"

"Now don't be sorry for anything, Miss Halliday!" interrupted Doris severely. "Now that Lord Dorrimore is here everything's perfectly proper. He's the host, not Mr. Bruce."

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OUT ON FRIDAY !

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one of us, Miss Halliday. And you've got to obey orders without question."

Muriel sighed.

"So it seems," she said. "I've done nothing but obey orders ever since this morning. And now I'm less able to assert myself than ever. What can I do against such numbers as this?"

"Nothing—except do as you're told," smiled Irene. "We'll be awfully tactful, Miss Halliday. But, oh, it seems such a dreadful shame that an opportunity of this sort should be missed. I think Browne's a perfect dear!"

"He's a perfect terror!" said Muriel, with feeling. "I've never known a boy like him.

"That does make a difference," admitted Muriel, with relief.

"All the difference in the world," declared Irene. "We are all Dorrie's invited guests. And why shouldn't he invite you to the castle just as he's invited Mr. Bruce? And what is there in you two meeting there? Why, it's the most natural thing in the world!"

Muriel Halliday hardly trusted herself to speak. She was certainly much easier in mind now—now that she knew that Lord Dorrimore was host in his own castle. The whole situation was different. Muriel had been one of the first to realise this.

When the castle was reached two of the

cars went straight to the front entrance and discharged their loads. Henry Bruce was in the great hall to welcome Lord Dorrimore, and he was a bit puzzled as to why so many of the guests had gone to meet the train. He concluded that they must have got to know of Dorrie's coming.

In the meantime two other cars glided noiselessly to the rear. Muriel and her aunt were escorted indoors by the six girls, and taken straight upstairs to a special suite that had been prepared. And Irene & Co. didn't lose a minute.

"Dreadful!" declared Doris, in horror.

Muriel had removed her fur coat and hat, and was now standing in her travelling dress. Not only Doris, but the other girls regarded her with blank disapproval. Poor Mrs. Walters wondered what on earth was the matter, and Muriel herself was puzzled.

"Dreadful!" repeated Doris. "That frock is ten years too old, Miss Halliday. And just look at your hair! Quick! Where's your baggage? You've brought some evening gowns, I suppose?"

"Several," replied Muriel. "But I don't see—"

Within a minute her baggage was unpacked, and the evening gowns brought to light. One by one the girls rejected them.

"Impossible!" they declared in unison.

"Irene!" cried Muriel. "I don't understand. Doris! Why are you talking so strangely? Two of those frocks are quite new—"

"Can't help it; they're hopeless, Miss Halliday," interrupted Irene. "They're all suitable for a matron of forty. Why should you hide your light under a bushel? You may be twenty-seven, but you won't look a year more than twenty by the time we've finished with you."

"What did I tell you?" exclaimed Marjorie. "Miss Halliday and I are just about the same size. I'm sure she could wear my frocks!"

Muriel was utterly startled.

"Oh, but that's absurd!" she protested.

"Don't forget, you're obeying orders to-day," said Doris severely. "Any more insubordination, Miss Halliday, and I'll fetch the cane. Nowadays all smart girls of twenty-five or twenty-six wear the same frocks as girls of fifteen or sixteen. You'll be in the fashion. And Marjorie's evening gowns are too gorgeous for words."

Muriel gave it up. She certainly protested once or twice, but hers was like a voice crying in the wilderness. Whether she liked it or not, she was compelled to do exactly as she was ordered. William Napoleon Browne had been insistent, but Irene & Co. were positively akin to slave-drivers.

CHAPTER XV.

THE LEGEND OF DORRIMORE CASTLE.



ARCHIE GLEN-THORNE beamed good-naturedly upon all and sundry.

"A somewhat priceless party, dear old girl," he observed. "I mean to say, Christmas cheer, and all that sort of stuff. And the star turn still in the good old offing!"

Marjorie Temple glanced at the drawing-room clock.

"Not much longer to wait now, Archie," she confided. "It's half-past eleven, and Miss Halliday's all ready. Honestly, you won't know her. She looks wonderful—simply topping."

"Oh, rather!" agreed Archie. "I always thought she was a pippin, as it were. Eh? You want me in this frightful affair, Handy, old boy? Absolutely! On with the good old revels!"

The guests were thoroughly enjoying themselves. Archie found himself dragged into a particularly noisy parlour game. There had been plenty of sport ever since Lord Dorrimore had arrived, and he and Bruce had entered heartily into the Christmas games. Scarcely anybody noticed that two or more of the girls were absent at different periods.

The St. Frank's fellows did their utmost to pretend that they had no knowledge of any secret plot. On the whole, they succeeded very well. Bruce, at all events, suspected nothing.

"Well, what about leavin' the youngsters to it for a while?" suggested Dorrie, as the clock struck the half-hour. "Come along to the library for a quiet smoke, Harry, old man. We can join the throng later. I understand they're keepin' up these noises until about three o'clock in the morning. There's a huge supper on the schedule for one o'clock, in the banquetin' hall. Let's have a breather while we can."

"We need it," said Bruce drily.

He was quite ready to accompany Lord Dorrimore to the library, never dreaming that this move had been previously arranged. They found the great, book-lined room quiet and sombre after the glare of the other part of the castle.

A log fire was crackling in the huge open grate, sending forth flickers which played rather eerily upon the black beams overhead. Only one electric light was gleaming, a standard lamp on the central desk, with a heavy shade. This left the greater part of the room in dense shadow, relieved only by the lurid flickers from the fire.

"Ah, nice and peaceful here!" sighed Dorrie, as he fell back into an easy chair.

"Whisky-and-soda, old man? Help yourself. Yes, I'll have one. Thanks!"

Bruce poured out a couple, and they lit their cigars. In the library there was not the faintest sound of the guests. This great room was completely isolated.

"I'm awfully glad you're here, Dorrie," said Bruce. "A perfectly delightful surprise. It was a bit embarrassing when I first came and found all the youngsters in possession; but I've got over that now."

"Of course, they know all about that—well, you know what I mean."

"Yes," said Bruce. "They seemed to have the whole story pat."

"Well, why not?" asked Dorrie. "The whole county knows about it, Harry. An' time's a great soother. By the way, are you quite sure about Muriel?"

"Sure?" asked the other, with a start. "What on earth—"

"I mean, about her death?" said Dorrie carelessly. "I've heard that the accident was only fatal to her husband. There's a chance that she's alive."

Bruce leapt to his feet.

"Alive?" he echoed hoarsely. "Good heavens, Dorrie! You don't mean—" He dropped back with a hopeless gesture. "Forgive me, old man. But I wish you wouldn't say things like that. If only there was the slightest gleam of real hope—"

"Awfully sorry, Harry," said Lord Dorrimore, with concern. "I ought to have been more careful. What we need is the old Roundhead. He'd tell us the truth."

"The Roundhead?" repeated Bruce.

"Amazin' chap," said Dorrie. "One of our family spectres, you know. He's supposed to appear at about Christmas time, generally at midnight. Accordin' to the old legend, he's the ghost of one of the old Roundheads who drifted into the castle in Cromwell's time. My worthy ancestors—yours, too, if it comes to that—saved a lot of his men. And this old boy—apparently an officer—was so grateful that he decided to haunt the place."

"Queer kind of gratitude, isn't it?"

"Not a bit," laughed Dorrie. "This Roundhead is as harmless as a kitten. Just saunters in when he pleases, you know, and brings good news. That's just the point. He only appears when there's something decent to impart. Most ghosts foretell death, or somethin' like that. Of course, we wouldn't stick an apparition of that sort. We're rather particular."

Henry Bruce laughed.

"Have you ever seen this remarkable ghost?" he asked.

"Well, to tell the truth, I haven't," admitted Dorrie. "But you know what these legends are. Come to think of it, it's rather rummy that I should mention

Miss Halliday a minute or two ago. I wonder if there's some good news—"

"Please, old man," said Bruce quietly. "I'm not over sentimental, but I rather look upon that subject as sacred. I'm afraid you're treating it rather too lightly."

"My infernal clumsiness again!" grunted his lordship. "Forgive me, Harry. Somehow I've got an idea that you're as much in love as ever. Oh, well, I'll leave you alone for five minutes, if you don't mind!" he added, getting to his feet. "Stay here until I come back."

"Right you are," said Bruce, nodding.

Dorrie went out and closed the door, leaving Henry Bruce alone in the great room. Within a few seconds he was sunk deep into a reverie. He sat in the enormous chair, gazing absently into the flickering embers of the fire. It was not difficult to guess the trend of his thoughts.

Boom, boom, boom!

Subconsciously Bruce heard the great clock tolling out the hour of midnight. He didn't shift from his position. Between his fingers his cigar idly sent up a curl of blue smoke.

Clank!

Bruce started. Somewhere in the dense shadows of the room a peculiar metallic sound had disturbed the stillness. Bruce started up and looked. Then he leapt back a pace and caught his breath in.

"Who's that?" he asked huskily.

With that same clank a strange figure seemed to materialise out of the very shadows. And Bruce felt a queer sensation assail his skin as he recognised the familiar form of a Cromwellian Roundhead. There was something weird and extraordinary about this apparition, particularly as it had appeared almost immediately following Lord Dorrimore's reference to the legend.

"Fear not!" came a soft voice, a voice which seemed peculiarly unreal. "I come with tidings of happiness!"

CHAPTER XVI.

ALL'S WELL.



HENRY BRUCE stared at the figure rather dazedly.

"Who are you?" he asked sharply. "What trickery—"

"Unworthy thought!" exclaimed the figure reproachfully. "Alas, too seldom find I the opportunity to appear within these walls. Too seldom have I joyous news to proclaim. And you, Henry Bruce, are not the man to deny my tongue."

Bruce felt that he was suffering from a delusion. This thing was altogether too fantastic. He wanted to rush forward and

get to close grips with this singular visitant. But somehow he was held where he stood. He could only stare.

"Are you man or spirit?" he demanded hoarsely.

"Neither!" said the figure solemnly. "I am no man, since flesh and blood is unable to materialise from darkness. And I am no spirit, since spirits are denied the power of speech. But I bring news. In your poor ignorance you believe that your Muriel is dead. Yet I tell you she is living."

"Good heavens!" ejaculated Bruce aghast.

"Go you to the great room in another part of the castle," said the apparition. "Look closely, and there you will find your lost one. Could any tidings be of greater joy than these?"

Bruce was dazed. Before he could put any further question, or move a step, the Thing seemed to vanish. He passed a hand over his eyes, and looked again. He was staring into the shadows. There was nothing. With a husky cry he tottered forward. But that section of the great library was devoid of any presence.

The door opened, and Dorrie bustled in.

"Hallo!" he exclaimed briskly. "What on earth—What's the game, Harry? Explorin' the room?"

Bruce turned, his face flushed and his eyes gleaming.

"Dorrie, I think I'm going mad!" he said tensely.

"What rot!" said his lordship.

"Just now I fancied I saw something—that infernal Roundhead of yours!" exclaimed the other. "It must have been a delusion; but I'll swear—It spoke to me, too. I can't seem to realise—it was all over in less than a minute. I must have dreamed it."

Dorrie looked quite concerned.

"Don't you believe it," he said firmly. "That's just one of the old beggar's tricks. He only appears for a moment or two at a time. But what's the good news? He always brings glad—"

"He said that Muriel is alive!" muttered Bruce, with a catch in his voice.

"By the Lord Harry!" shouted Dorrie. "Then it's true? You can count on it, old man. Rather a pity he didn't say where you could find her—"

"But he did!" gasped Bruce. "He said that I should find her in the drawing-room. Dorrie, it's madness! It's nothing but my crazy imagination. Your words must have preyed on my mind. Oh, this is cruel—cruel! I never dreamed that I was subject to such hallucinations!"

Bruce's distress was so acute that Dorrie quickly crossed over to him, and took him round the shoulders.

"Steady, old son!" he said softly. "Don't take it like that. Honestly, it was

no delusion. Take my advice, and go to the drawing-room."

Bruce looked at him with staring, wide eyes.

"Dorrie!" he gasped. "What—what are you saying?"

"Go to the drawing-room," repeated his lordship quietly. "It's never wise to disbelieve that old Roundhead. Go along!"

He gently propelled Bruce to the door, and a moment later Bruce was fairly running down the great corridor towards the drawing-room. There had been something in Dorrie's manner which sent his heart leaping within him. His common sense told him that he was acting like a madman. But nothing could stay his progress. His brain was in a tumult.

Reaching the drawing-room, he burst through the great doorway and paused, drawing in his breath with a gulp. He stood there, clutching at the heavy curtains against the doorway.

And his heart sank like lead within him.

The drawing-room was just the same as when he had left it—full of noisy young people. Handforth & Co. were monkeying about near the fireplace. Irene Manners and Doris Berkeley were laughing and chatting with the other girls against the big lounge. But there was nobody else. The drawing-room contained no added figure.

"Fool!" groaned Bruce. "I might have known!"

He was pale and shaky. He felt that he had been tricked and defrauded, but only by his own hallucination. He turned to go, but some of the fellows caught sight of him and rushed round.

"Here he is!" shouted Reggie Pitt. "Come on, Mr. Bruce—"

"No, no!" panted Bruce. "I don't feel—"

"Rats!" yelled Handforth. "Blind man's buff! You're blind man!"

It was useless to resist. They were fairly swarming over him. In a moment a handkerchief was fastened over his eyes, and he was thrust, reeling, into the middle of the room. He heard a rush of feet, the whisk of skirts, and then everything was uncannily silent.

"I can't join in this!" muttered Bruce desperately.

He tore the handkerchief from his face and stared. The great drawing-room was empty, save for himself and one of the girls. Just one of the jokes, of course. She was half turned away from him—a slim, slight figure.

Bruce gulped. She was facing him. For a moment he believed that he had gone out of his mind. It was Muriel! Not the Muriel as he pictured she might be to-day, but as she had been ten years earlier. Exquisitely pretty, with delightful curls and

those wonderful eyes of hers. She looked just as young and charming.

"Am I sane?" breathed Henry Bruce.

But exactly ten seconds later he no longer doubted his sanity. One touch and he knew the truth.

Bruce's brain refused to work, but he knew that a miracle had happened.

.

Lord Dorrimore raised his glass high.

"Now then, all together!" he said cheerily.

"Here's to the happiness of Harry Bruce and his fiancée!"

"Hurrah!"

A rousing cheer went up, and glasses clinked. It was 2 a.m., and the supper party had just sat down in the banquet hall. On either side of Lord Dorrimore sat Henry Bruce and Muriel Halliday. And Lord Dorrimore had taken the opportunity to announce the engagement.

Everybody was feeling in the highest of spirits. The boys and girls were particularly pleased with themselves, for it was

owing to their efforts that this Christmas had brought such happiness to two people.

"There's one thing that's puzzling me," said Bruce, after he had replied to the toast. "What about that Roundhead? In the light of what's happened, I can't believe it was a real ghost."

"Guilty, m'lord!" grinned Nipper, standing up.

"Was it you, you young bounder?" ejaculated Bruce.

"Well, we had to do something to break it gently, you know," smiled Nipper. "It was Dorrie's idea. He fished out the old relics, and I struggled into them. Of course, I was hiding up that end of the library all the time—"

"That's enough!" interrupted Bruce, with a snort. "Well, I've often heard of people being blind, but I never knew I was a bat until to-night!"

And the revels proceeded, and nobody thought of going to bed until nearly dawn. Without question the Christmas holidays had proved a time of happiness for all.

THE END.

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MR EDWY SEARLES
BROOKS CHATS
TO HIS READERS

(NOTE.—If any reader writes to me I shall be pleased to comment upon such remarks as are likely to interest the majority. All letters should be addressed to EDWY SEARLES BROOKS, c/o The Editor, THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY, Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London E.C.4. Every letter acknowledged has been personally read by me, and I thank each writer most heartily. But although all letters afford me an equal amount of pleasure, I am reluctantly compelled to confine my individual replies to those of general interest.—E.S.B.)

jumps out of my morning mail and hits me in the eye I'll put an asterisk against it, just to let everybody know that it's a corker. Naturally, you know that an asterisk is a star, don't you? This thing *. If you ever see that little chap after your name you'll know that I've starred your letter. You'll know that I've placed it in the front rank. Of course, all the other writers will simply go green with rage, but if I put a star against every name the idea wouldn't fizz at all. I shouldn't be surprised if one or two stars are knocking about in the acknowledgements given immediately below.

* * *
Mervyn Varnadine (Maylands, W. Australia), 3071 (Glasgow), R. Linford (Princes Gate, Kensington), Harold Winter (Worthing), John Francis Tyler (South Hackney), Elenor Lees (Sydney), L. Smith (Huddersfield), Alec William Wigley (Battersea), Betty** (Melbourne), H. Tonge* (Kearsley), Harry Sainson (Beeding), S. H. Yeo (Wallasey), Good Luck (Luton), John R. Holt (Wallasey), Stanley Nelson (Cleethorpes), F. O. Critchley (Liverpool), G. Larrett (Woodbridge), The Unknown (Bradford), Darling (Falkirk), George Burgess (Selsey), A. J. Southway* (Farnborough), Member No. 2533 (Poplar).

* * *
You'll notice that I've given Betty, of Melbourne, two stars for her letter. No, it isn't because she belongs to the fair sex, so don't you get any silly ideas of that sort. Her letter was not only exceptionally well written, but the composition was equal to the calligraphy. Also, she must have taken immeasurable pains over it. I think it will be a good idea to "double-star" any letter that is even better than these special ones. It's a sort of hallmark. So when you write to me next time try to make your letter a sterling one.

* * *
Now for some replies. As one fellow said, there's trouble coming unless I stick to my job. There's a fat lot of satisfaction for you if I fill these pages up with nonsense of this kind, isn't there? By Jove, I'm at it again, too! But don't worry; I'm chained to the typewriter, and there's no escape. I'm padlocked here until I've polished off these current letters. The first one that deserves mention is from a

An idea has just occurred to me. In fact, it's what I might call a star idea. No, I'm not bragging. But as this idea happens to concern stars, you'll soon get the hang of it. And you're quite wrong when you deduce that I'm going to talk about astronomy. I'm not going to rise above your heads like that. In fact, I couldn't, because my own knowledge of astronomy isn't anything like so comprehensive as Professor Tucker's.

* * *
Now about those stars. Hitherto, there has been nothing to distinguish one of your extra special letters from the ordinary run of correspondence. Of course, ALL your letters are jolly welcome, but now and again I receive a grubby, mauled, pencilled atrocity which has probably been carried about for weeks in the pocket of the writer—doubtless waiting for the wherewithal to purchase a stamp. After being thrown in the gutter once or twice and trodden on occasionally it finally reaches my hands. I think I ought to keep a pair of gloves for letters of this kind.

* * *
Now, on the other hand, I get letters—much, much more frequently—of exactly the opposite type. That is to say, letters of outstanding merit—letters written in perfect English, or excelling in penmanship, or generally meritorious. Then again, I get letters which make no pretence to be neat or grammatically perfect, but which nevertheless fairly bristle with downright braininess. And really, I think these exceptional letters should receive some sort of special recognition, even if I can't spare space for an individual reply. So in future, when I receive a letter which

fellow I can't name. At least, I don't think it would be quite cricket if I did, because I'm going to quote some of his words. Here they are: "For the last two years my parents have refused me reading THE NELSON LEE, but nevertheless I managed to smuggle a copy indoors every week. The other day I thought of an idea of proving to them what the old book really was. So I showed them one of your "Between Ourselves," and they read it and became immediately impressed. Then they began reading your stories, and were still further impressed. Thanks, old man. I hope your parents are now regular readers. I'm afraid lots of people condemn our paper unread, in spite of my repeated returns to the attack. I use that word "attack" deliberately, because I don't want anybody to think for a moment that I'm defending myself. I take a pride in my stories, and always try to make them clean and honest. Anyhow, it does my old heart good when I think of the tens of thousands of wonderful pals I've discovered all over the world. And now I'm talking to you all generally, let me wish you A Happy and Prosperous New Year. We're going to have some jolly good times before next Christmas comes, aren't we? I think you all know that I fairly revel in writing these schoolboy stories every week, and when I know that I'm pleasing you I feel just like that old grandfather you've seen in advertisements. But I'm not nearly so ancient. In fact, I'm only a kid.

At least, that's what some people tell me. They've actually called me an overgrown schoolboy. Like their blessed nerve, isn't it? You wouldn't believe what I have to put up with. I'm dashed if some of you readers don't write and tell me the same thing. Oh, corks! I'm wandering off again, after I distinctly told you that I was chained to those letters.

I'll admit, Betty, that I DID shy like a frightened horse when I first took your letter out of the envelope. But as I've given you two stars for it, I don't think you need fear my wrath. Wrath, indeed! I should be a pretty boorish sort of beggar if I got wild at a letter that must have taken you two or three whole evenings to write. It was entertaining, too—every single line of it. And not once did I frown, although your personal hints were more or less—well, personal. But why should I mind? Some fellows write to me and call me an old jizzer. Others tell me I'm getting lazy, and that I'm an old bounder. (That's one of your remarks, Lionel, my lad). In fact, I'm so used to these personal touches that I like 'em. When it comes to that I have never noticed any particular

starchiness between real friends. It's a lot better when we just let ourselves go. As for that wish of yours, Betty, I'm hanged if you're not going to get it. And a lot sooner than you hoped for, I'll bet. Next week there's a new series starting, and if Handforth doesn't come up to the scratch in the third or fourth story he'll probably come up to the scratch in the fifth or sixth. But he wants a lot of persuading. You know what an obstinate beggar he is. Oh, yes! Do I like hot crumpets with blackcurrant jam? You might as well ask me if I like breathing. And don't forget to write again. But you shouldn't make your letters so ridiculously brief. Let's have a long one next time.

Awfully sorry, Good Luck, but it's not much use asking me how Tinker came to be with Sexton Blake. Perhaps you had better write to the Editor of "The Union Jack Library." He's an awfully nice chap, and he'll answer your question in next to no time.

There's no need for you to worry about those back numbers, John R. Holt. All the stories you want will be published in THE MONSTER LIBRARY, sooner or later. However, if you are determined to make your set of the Old Paper complete from No. 1, I dare say you will have a chance of obtaining the back numbers when the League magazine starts. You'll be able to advertise for back numbers then, but only, of course, if you are a League member yourself.

The next time you write a letter to me, Unknown, I wish you'd write in English. That thing you sent was all gibberish. How can I read that stuff? Even when I held it in front of the mirror it was still pretty awful. By the way, aren't your initials S.T.? Or was that effusion from your brother?

Yes, Darling, girls can join The St. Frank's League. I say, that looks pretty bad, doesn't it? But if these fellows WILL give themselves such funny names what am I to do? All the same, I've got an idea that this particular fellow is a member of the fair sex. The League is open to everybody, every sort of age and every sort of sex.

You sign yourself "A Staunch Supporter Always," A. J. Southway. In fact, you tell me that it is your motto. In that case, why weren't you a member of the League when you wrote your letter? Anybody who wants to PROVE his loyalty to Our Paper must join the League. So all you laggards, buck up.

E.S.B.



THE CITY OF MASKS;

or, THE CASE OF THE BOY KING!

A Gripping New Tale of Detective Adventure, introducing SEXTON BLAKE and TINKER.

CONCLUDING INSTALMENT

VEILBURG replaced the receiver of the instrument and stepped back sullenly.

"Have a cigarette, Mr. Blake," said Clodie, with a cheerful grin. "I guess if we could only have this gleeful stunt filmed we'd sure make lots of dollars. I'm a bit in the dark still, anyhow. What happens, anyhow, when these police guys start their big push?"

"They'll discover, to their sad astonishment, that instead of being the trappers they'll be the trapped. Mr. Clodie," said Sexton Blake. "Every person whose name appeared on that murder-list has been warned and is prepared. I am hoping it will be a bloodless affair, but in Kamfak that is too much to hope. Instead of the royalists being in gaol before dawn, I am expecting a fine haul of secret police and Sarjoites. We have our lists of these gentlemen, and we shall be busy."

"Before I abdicate and hop off the merry old throne, colonel," said Tinker, "I'll give a last command. Lock up Mr. Veilburg."

"Certainly, king," grinned Blimp. "Gawsh! I never took a command I liked better. He's put a few in clink in his time, so we'll see how he likes it. A firing-party at dawn, I suppose. Come on, Veilburg, my lad, you've heard the king's orders and your number's up."

Blimp went clanking off with his prisoner, and Tinker had a slight fit of hysterics.

"Well, it's a fine thing to be able to laugh a bit," he said. "I ought to have been a king, that's a fact. But what shall we do with the guys now we've got 'em, guv'nor? We can't very well shoot or hang them."

"No, but we can deport them, young 'un, and allow them enough to live on outside Carlovina on their ill-gotten gains, and make it a death penalty if they attempt to return," said Sexton Blake. "The French Government will be only too glad to keep a watchful eye on them if we send them to France. The secret police, of course—the

rank and file, that is—will be disbanded. There's a lot to be done yet, a great deal. I'm expecting the editors of the two newspapers, and I have a couple of leading articles to dictate to those two gentlemen which will astonish them as much as they will astonish Carlovina when they appear in print."

"Shall I go and see Peter, guv'nor?"

"If you like, young 'un."

"And what shall I tell him?"

Sexton Blake laughed. "I leave that to you, Tinker," he answered. "It makes little difference."

Celia was with her brother. Scared-looking servants were standing about the corridors wondering what had happened, but they fled at the sight of Tinker, whom they took to be the king. Celia was with her brother. At the sight of Tinker's grin, Celia clapped her hands.

"What have you done, Billy?" she cried. "I know it's good news, but what have you done?"

"Made your brother a real king, if he'll wake up and get on with it," said Tinker. "I've jugged the lot, Peter. I've got the whole of your supreme council in clink, Darro, Sarjo, Bizer, Zuss and the secretary, and chucked Veilburg in to make up the half-dozen."

"Jerusalem! You— Here, draw it mild, Billy," said the king. "Who—I say who arrested 'em?"

"Old Blimp, my son; and I sacked Zuss and made him a colonel on the spot, so you'll have to stick to that, Peter. Your cousin was quite rude to me, so I started the ball rolling by arresting him. Then the old guy in the corsets went off the deep end and started gassing that he was boss of the Royal Guard, and he went through it. I think Brentschi smelt a very big rat, for he sneaked out and tried to telephone to Veilburg that the game was up. And I give you my word, old son, it was up. Dear us! I've enjoyed myself. It's rattling good fun to be a king sometimes, Celia. You're not savage because I jugged your princely cousin, are you?"

"And they didn't know you wasn't Peter, Billy?"

"They know who I am right enough now," said Tinker. "Veilburg had got it and so had the other police-boss, Nalderg. At the witching hour of midnight, when churchyards yawn and graves give up their dead, the rest of the fun will start. The gov'nor made Veilburg bluff Nalderg over the 'phone that you'd signed that wine-tax thing, and the police were only waiting to hear that and were all ready for the big round-up. And don't be rattled because I roped in your royal cousin, Peter. He's a bad lot, and when I told them I wouldn't sign the thing, he was the first to go for me, which shows he knew all about the murder plot and was keen on it."

"Gosh!" exclaimed his Majesty. "I always thought Darro an ass, but I never dreamed he was such a dirty rogue. Where do I come in, then?"

"Oh, take my tip and sit tight till morning, and give me a chance to dye my hair and get rid of the padding," said Tinker. "I've abdicated, but you'd better let me be king a bit longer, though I don't want any power. My gov'nor will do the necessary bossing. Anyhow, we've busted the junta, Peter, and you'll be the talk of all Europe. They'll take off their hats to you and wonder how you did it, and to-morrow all Carlovina will be cheering you, except the Sarjo crush. It's the wearing of the green to-night."

"What do you mean by that, kid?" grumbled Peter. "It's rotten to keep me in the dark like this."

"How could I tell you what I didn't know myself, silly? It's the gov'nor's stunt. Every loyalist will wear a green mask, and those who wear masks of another colour will be asked the reason why."

CONCLUSION.

EXCEPT on opera nights and holidays, the cafés and restaurants of Kamfak closed their doors at midnight or earlier when their proprietors found that business was not too flourishing. A bleak wind blowing from the mountains made people hurry back to their homes, and before eleven o'clock the chilly streets seemed practically deserted.

They were not deserted, however, for here and there men lurked in the shadows, waiting for the cathedral clock to chime twelve. They were Veilburg's myrmidons, members of the secret police, armed with revolvers and carrying jemmies to force open doors if their demands to be admitted in the name of the king were refused.

Suddenly the clapper struck the bell, and the first stroke of midnight boomed out over the town, and there was a gentle tapping at doors and ringing of bells. Most of the doors were opened without any delay, and

the police went in, and Kamfak was quiet enough except for the humming of the night wind through the telegraph wires and the occasional barking of a dog.

An hour later light sleepers were awakened by an unaccustomed sound, as a troop of the Royal Guard cantered down the Grand Promenade. The cathedral clock chimed one, and then followed a more unaccustomed sound, for the great bell of the cathedral began to toll. In an instant the sleepers had awakened, and windows were thrown up.

In the main street, in the glare of the arc lamps, nothing was to be seen except a troop of the Royal Guard, with the big Englishman at the head, riding slowly towards the palace. From the crowded windows, as the bell continued to toll, people shouted to each other to know what was the matter. Then, driven slowly, came a motor-car from one of the newspaper offices, with a placard on each side of it, a placard that made the amazed citizens of Kamfak who saw it rub their astonished eyes.

"FALL OF SARJO.

KING TAKES OVER GOVERNMENT.
SUPREME COUNCIL AND CHIEF OF
POLICE ARRESTED.
LONG LIVE THE KING!"

Kamfak buzzed like a hive of excited bees. People scrambled into their clothes, and the bolder ones donned their masks and hurried out. They armed themselves, too, for it was impossible for such an amazing thing as this to happen in Kamfak without fighting and bloodshed. The curious thing was that as yet there was scarcely a green mask to be seen. The flesh-coloured ones predominated, which had made it impossible to distinguish between friend and foe.

Back rode the troopers of the Royal Guard, the big commander sitting his powerful horse like a statue. There was some booing and some cheering. There were troopers with machine-guns on the steps of the cathedral, and it was whispered that there were more machine-guns on the roofs of the opera house and newspaper offices and at the palace gates.

All at once the cathedral-bell ceased tolling and the crash of a gun sounded from the direction of the palace. Then, as if by magic, men in green masks seemed to spring from everywhere, and a great shout went up:

"The King, the King! Death to Sarjo and the junta! Death to tyrants and robbers! The King, the King!"

Revolvers cracked and bullets whistled, but there was little shooting. Nearly every man in the street who did not wear a green mask found a man with a green mask levelling a revolver or automatic at his head and being sternly told to hold up his hands. The surprise was so great, and the coup so unexpected, that there was little resistance.

Their weapons were seized and their masks taken away. They were ordered to shout: "Long live the king and death to Sarjo and the junta!" and most of them responded lustily.

"Keep to the pavements!" thundered the captain of the Royal Guard.

Again came the crash of a gun. At midnight half the arc-lamps in the main streets of the capital were switched off, but now they blazed out.

"The king, the king!"

The distant shout increased into a roar of voices, for the king was coming. It was

not like those crowded windows. Sarjo had fallen, and his fall meant that many people would lose fat jobs and secret pay, and some disgruntled Sarjoite might fire a bullet or throw a bomb from one of the windows or even from the crowd, though with so many green masks there it would have meant a lynching.

The memory of Peter's statement that his subjects were wretched shots and rarely hit anything they aimed at was not very comforting. The mounted Guard parted to let him pass, and he rode his horse up the broad steps of the cathedral, with Blimp at



Driven slowly, came a motor-car from one of the newspaper offices with a placard on each side of it, a placard that made the amazed citizens of Kamfak who saw, rub their astonished eyes.

Tinker, but few knew that it was not their boy monarch in person. He rode alone and bareheaded, wearing the uniform of Colonel of the Guard, and his breast blazed with medals and decorations belonging to King Peter. Thirty yards away rode his one attendant—a groom wearing the royal livery.

"Long live the king! Long live the king! Well done, well done! Death to Sarjo!"

Hats were flung into the air, and hats and handkerchiefs waved from the crowded windows. Tinker nodded and smiled, but he felt a chilly sensation at the back of his spine, like a trickle of cold water. He did

his side. As they swung their horses round, a searchlight from the roof of the opera house was turned on Tinker. Blimp's orders were forgotten.

Cheering wildly, the crowd surged across the square, and Blimp grinned the grin of a man who has attempted a tremendous task and accomplished it as he watched how cleverly his troopers forced the mob of people back and formed them in a half-circle round the steps, for Blimp had made the Royal Guard a force to be proud of.

The green masks lent their aid, and handing Blimp a paper, Tinker gazed at the

sea of masked faces, and waved his hand for silence.

"Chi-ike your best, Blimp," he said. "You've got a voice like a giddy earthquake, so fancy you're drilling a bunch of raw rookies, and let out. Tread on the gas with both feet, as Clodie says, and let her rip!"

Sexton Blake, who had written the Royal proclamation, and let the colonel read it over beforehand, and now the colonel raised his terrific voice so that it reached the edge of the crowd, and nearly, as Tinker said afterwards, broke half of the windows in Kamfak.

"To my people. For many and serious reasons unknown to me and cunningly hidden from me hitherto, I have dismissed the Supreme Council, and found it necessary to place the members under arrest, to be dealt with later. For the time being, I am assuming the supreme power, which is my right, but only till I can gather round me true and faithful advisers.

"It is my wish that these advisers be elected by the choice and free will of you, my people, and I pledge myself to accept your choice freely and loyally. At the moment I can tell you little more, except that I have commanded the secret police to be at once disbanded, and a force of special constables will be sworn in tomorrow to take their place and maintain order until other arrangements can be made."

Blimp had to pause, for his mighty voice was drowned in a torrent of cheers. Veilburg and his secret police were bitterly hated, and the news of their immediate disbandment was received with frantic delight. At last Blimp got going again.

"My people, citizens of my capital," he went on, "Kamfak has been called the city of masks. The time has come when it must lose that hateful name. These foolish quarrellings and bickerings and this crazy insanity of murder must end. Let no man be afraid to look another man in the face. Let us be friends and brothers. Away with your masks, for I, the King, command it. Forget and forgive, and live like brothers, for a new day has dawned for you and for Carlovian. I am young, but you have many wise and honest men among you. Choose these men for me, and let them help to guide me, for the welfare of my people and of Carlovian."

Amid a thunder of cheers masks were torn away and flung into the air. In the shadows of the porch, a girl, wrapped in a dark cloak, clasped Sexton Blake's arm, and gazed at the vast crowd with shining eyes.

"Isn't it wonderful?" said Princess Celia. "Oh, if it were really Peter!"

"It will be just as good if you keep Peter

up to the mark, my dear young lady," said Sexton Blake.

Tinker's return to the palace was a triumph. Until dawn was breaking cheering crowds thronged the streets and thronged the cafés and restaurants, which had reopened and did a roaring trade. Well-known loyalists and notorious Sarjoites hobnobbed and drank together without their masks which littered the streets. The disbanding of the secret police pleased almost everybody, for Sarjo had been in the habit of using them against friends as well as foes, if the friend happened to become a little too popular, powerful, or rich to please the members of the Supreme Council.

"If the junta has fallen and its power is broken for ever there is nothing to be got out of Sarjo or the junta," thought the Sarjoites. "And after all, there was too much shooting perhaps. This young king of ours is a fine lad and a brave one. Let us see what the King can do, then. Let us give him a chance. If he acts upon his words, all will be well; but Sarjo is strong and cunning, and may beat him yet."

But Sexton Blake was even stronger and more cunning. At the very time the crowd was cheering Tinker a special train was steaming out of Kamfak with Sarjo, Prince Darro, Bizer, ex-Colonel Zuss, Mr. Secretary Brentsch, and Johann Veilburg, it's very angry and unwilling passengers. The train was bound for the terminus, and had a strong escort with the new captain of the Royal Guard to see the members of the junta across the Carlovian frontier.

"I have to inform you, gentlemen," said the captain, as he handed them their railway tickets and passports, "that your estates have been confiscated to the Crown, but that a portion of the income, and not an ungenerous portion, will be paid to you. Your destination is Paris, where you will report yourselves to the police. Any attempt to re-enter Carlovian will be punishable by death."

"And we owe all this to that accursed English spy and detective, Sexton Blake," said Darro bitterly.

"It is my belief that Carlovian will owe much to him, prince," said the captain of the guard. "If your Excellencies will write to me and give me lists of personal goods you wish for, I will do my best to have them sent on to you."

Then the captain lighted a cigarette, bowed, and left them.

Next morning the royal barber dyed Tinker's hair. He was a puzzled barber, but he knew his place and asked no questions. The King was still in bed reading the morning paper, and grinning over it when the old Tinker, without any padding, looked in.

"Hallo, Billy, old son! I don't remember doing all this last night," said his Majesty, with a grin. "I seem to have had a jolly fine reception, and that little speech of mine wasn't half bad. Why the thump didn't they shout or heave a bomb at me, anyway?"

"Because they're a lot of silly chumps," said Tinker. "I believe the idiots are actually beginning to like you."

"Well, I suppose I'd better get up," said Peter. "All I can say is that your guv'nor and you have gallons of sauce. You've deported my Supreme Council and made me promise to give the beggars a Parliament, not to mention sacking the police. I believe I do understand you've done some jolly fine things for me, old son," he added, holding out his hands, "and I'll do my best all the time if the rotten state affairs don't interfere with the fishing and shooting. Tinker, you've been two bricks, you and Mr. Sexton Blake, and not common or garden bricks, but solid gold ones."

"Well, you get on with it," said Tinker. "Peter, I've got a word of advice for you. When you get a parliament you'll have a cabinet and some weird old beans with long whiskers and bald heads to wangle out affairs of state and suggest to you what to do. When in doubt, my lad, do a bit of thinking for yourself, and then don't sign anything until——"

"Until what?"

"Until you've asked your sister," said Tinker.

On his return to London, Sexton Blake was warmly congratulated at the Foreign Office on his success. The only thing the

heads of that important department of state did not seem to like was the presence in Kamfak of Mr. P. Clodie, of li'l old New York.

"I'm afraid you'll have to put up with that," said Sexton Blake, with a laugh. "Clodie is a hustler but a real good fellow, and he has large monetary interests there. He is to be appointed financial adviser to the government. As his own pocket will suffer unless Carlovina succeeds, I think it a wise choice. Clodie is the kind of man who knows what he wants, and generally gets it."

An extract from a letter written by his Majesty King Peter of Carlovina to Tinker at a later date seems to suggest that Sexton Blake was right about the man from New York.

"To close, old bean," wrote the King, "everything is quiet; no masks about and no shooting in the streets. Celia sends kindest chi-ikes, and the fishing is not so dusty. I've got a notion that that Yankee guy, Clodie, wants to give my sister the glad eye, and the worst of it is I don't think she'd mind if he did. As we owe him pots of money, I can't very well slice off his napper or fire him out. I expect at the finish I shall have to let him marry her, though it will be an awful punch to my royal dignity. Taking him all round, though, Arthur P. is quite a decent sort of oojah, and it may save having to pawn the Crown jewels. Blimp is fine. Come to the wedding, son, and bring the governor with you, and I'll give you both such a twister of a joy-ride that you'll never want to go home."

THE END.

THE ST. FRANK'S LEAGUE.

We publish below the first list of Organising Officers' names and addresses. Members should retain this list and carefully note the address of their nearest local officer. It is advisable to wait until the whole list is complete before communicating with O.O's. THE CHIEF OFFICER.

3. Charles R. Colwell, 69, George Street, Balsall Heath, Birmingham; 4. Elmor Martin, 47, Windmill Street, Limerick City; 5. Fred August Mayerl, 54, Richmond Gardens, Shepherd's Bush, W.12; 6. J. H. Wright, Sutherland House, Nelson Place, Broadstairs; 7. Ben Brooke, 5, Greystoke Street, Hall Street, Stockport; 8. Derek Wilson, Wicken Road, Clavering, Essex; 9. Reginald Salter, 4, Cameron Mansions, Musgrave Road, Durban, S. Africa; 10. C. McClennan, 3, Dowsett Road, Tottenham, N.17; 11. George Dawson, 123, Pencoe Avenue, Cefn Fforest, Pengam, Nr. Cardiff; 12. Leonard Osbourn, 57, Carisbrooke Road, Walthamstow, E.17; 13. John Hasney, 390, Essex Road, Islington, N.1; 14. E. W.

Kembery, London Street, Swaffham, Norfolk; 15. Claude Leverton, 17, Heathfield Road, Mount Gold, Plymouth; 16. Charles Leighton, 31, Grosvenor Park, Camberwell Road, S.E.5; 17. C. Phillips, 48, Morning-side Drive, Edinburgh; 18. Reginald Rushworth, 16, Durham Road, Low Fell, Gateshead-on-Tyne; 19. Robert Postill, 37, The Moors, Worcester; 20. William Pluck, 4, Rushby Mead, Letchworth, Herts; 21. Frank Taylor, 34, Malton Street, Oldham; 22. F. R. Inge, 235, Shern Hall Street, Walthamstow, E.17; 23. W. T. Osborne, 6, Swan Street, Isleworth, Middlesex; 24. Harold Doughty, Field House, Renishaw, Chesterfield; 25. T. Hall, The Laurels, Weston Zoyland, Somerset; 26. G. Watson, 1, Winchester Road, Basingstoke, Hants; 27. R. Bayliss, 20, Long Wall Street, Oxford; 28. William Burton, 13, Stanley Road, Balls Pond Road, N.1; 29. Charles Price, 69, Cardigan Mount, Kirkstall Road, Leeds; 30. R. J. Kaufmann, 14, Fife Road, Canning Town, E.16; 31. John Franklin, 3, Eva Street, Rusholme, Manchester; 32. Charles A. Stanley, 3, Langdale Road, Croydon; 33. George Daffern, 16, North Rock, Saltisford, Warwick.

AS SIMPLE AS A B C.

ST. FRANK'S LEAGUE APPLICATION FORM No. 27.

Jan. 2, 1926

SECTION

A

READER'S APPLICATION FOR MEMBERSHIP.

Being a regular reader of "THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY," I desire to become enrolled as a Member of THE ST. FRANK'S LEAGUE, and to qualify for all such benefits and privileges as are offered to Members of the League. I hereby declare myself to be a staunch supporter of "THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY" and THE ST. FRANK'S LEAGUE, and that I have introduced Our Paper to one new reader, whose signature to certify this appears on second form attached hereto. Will you, therefore, kindly forward me Certificate of Enrolment with Membership Number assigned to me.

SECTION

B

MEMBER'S APPLICATION FOR MEDAL AWARDS.

I, Member No..... (give Membership No.) hereby declare that I have introduced one more new reader, whose signature to certify this appears on second form attached hereto. This makes me..... (state number of introductions up to date) introductions to my credit.

SECTION

C

NEW READER'S DECLARATION.

I hereby declare that I have been introduced by (give name of introducer) to this issue of "THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY," which I will read with a view to becoming a regular reader of this paper.

(FULL NAME)

(ADDRESS)

IMPORTANT.—Complete and post off this form before the next issue of THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY is on sale. Otherwise the form becomes out of date and useless.

INSTRUCTIONS.—Reader Applying for Membership. Cut out TWO complete Application Forms from Two copies of this week's issue of THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY. On one of the forms fill in Section A, crossing out Sections B and C by running the pen diagonally across both Sections. Then write clearly your full name and address at bottom of form. The second form is for your new reader, who fills in Section C, crosses out Sections A and B, and writes his name and address at bottom of form. Both forms are then pinned together and sent to the Chief Officer, The St. Frank's League, c/o THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY, Gough House, Gough Square, London, E.C.4.

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and B, and writes his name and address at the bottom of the form. Now pin both forms together and send them to the Chief Officer, as above. One new reader will then be registered against your name, and when six new readers have been registered, you will be sent the St. Frank's League bronze medal. There is nothing to prevent you from sending in forms for two or more new readers at once, provided the forms are taken from the latest issue of THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY at the time when the forms are sent in.

Bronze medallists wishing to qualify for the silver or gold medal can apply in the same way as for the bronze medal, filling in Section B, which has been revised for this purpose. Every introduction they make will be credited to them, so that when the League reaches the required number of members, they can exchange their bronze medal for a silver or gold one, according to the number of introductions with which they are credited.

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