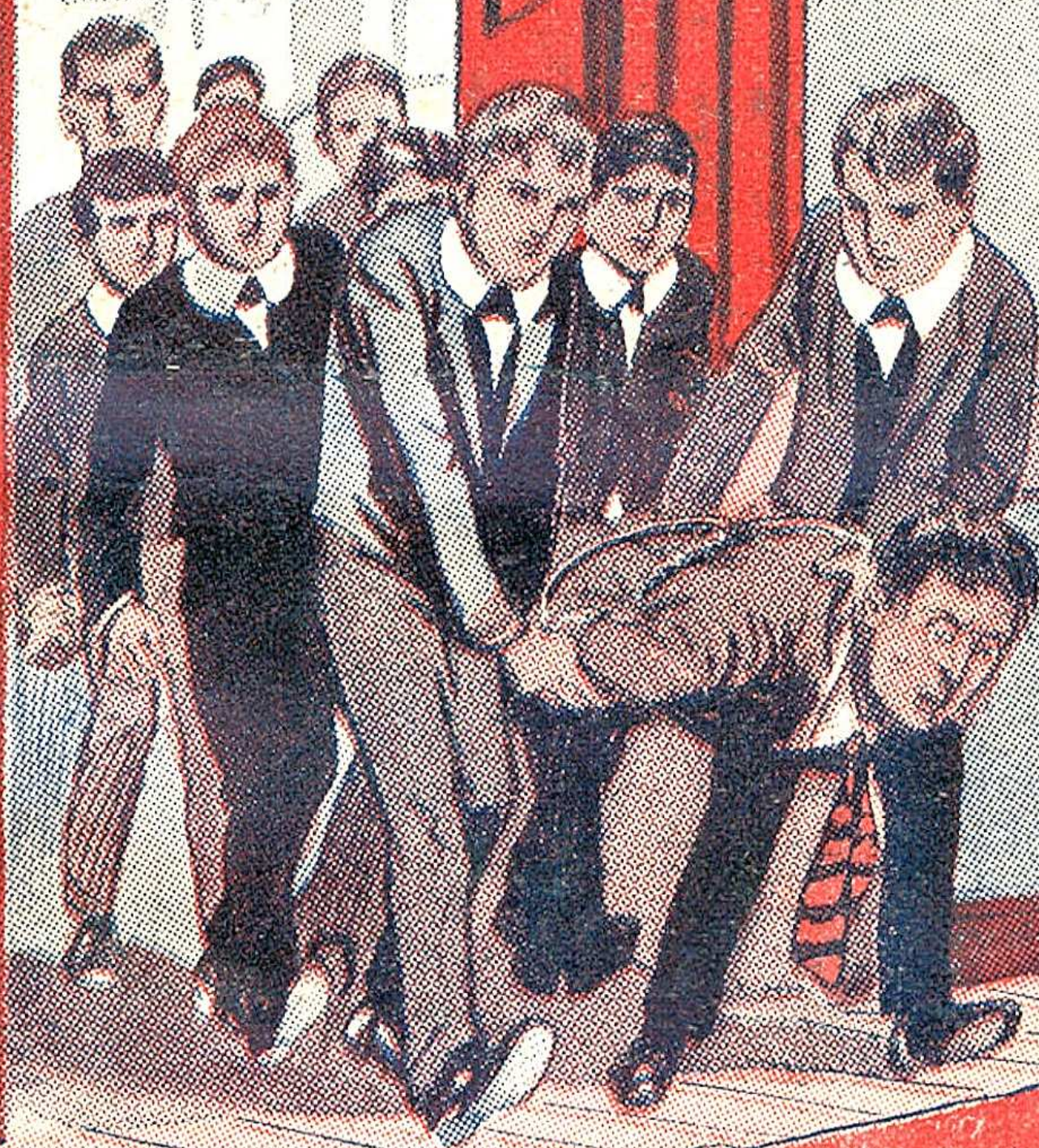


HOW THE REBELLION BROKE OUT AT ST. FRANK'S !

# The NELSON LEE

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Like a trussed owl, the bully of the West House was conveyed by Willy and his satellites to the treacle bath.

# The REVOLT OF THE WEST HOUSE





And, simultaneously, the fags hurled handfuls of feathers, obtained from numerous pillow cases. The air became thick with clouds of feathers—and Sinclair was the centre of the storm.



# The REVOLT OF THE WEST HOUSE !



*By EDWY SEARLES BROOKS*

Since the beginning of the new term, the West House at St. Frank's has been groaning under the tyrannical rule of Guy Sinclair, appointed as House Prefect by Mr. Stokes in place of Morrow. Sinclair is nothing but a bully and a cad, and has obtained his position by a form of blackmail against his Housemaster. As exposure would mean the ruin of another, whom Stokes has pledged his word to shield, Sinclair has been allowed to do very much as he likes, enjoying even greater autocratic powers than is the privilege of most prefects at St. Frank's. Goaded by constant persecution and injustice, the West House have now decided to rebel against the prefect's continuance in office, and how this state of affairs is brought about is the main subject of this week's exciting story.

**THE EDITOR.**

## CHAPTER I.

### TROUBLE IN SINCLAIR'S STUDY.

**W**ILLY HANDFORTH opened the door of Guy Sinclair's study and looked in.

"Get a hustle on, Dicky," he said crisply. "You're wanted."

Sinclair's study contained one occupant, a small but grimy individual who looked more like a sweep than a self-respecting member of the St. Frank's Third Form. He was in the act of sweeping up the fireplace, but Willy had a vague idea that Dicky had been exploring the chimney.

The West House was quiet. It was mid-

afternoon, and a half-holiday, but as the January day was soaking wet not many fellows were out. And football was quite washed out.

"I can't come now," said Dicky Jones mournfully.

"Why not?"

"I've got to clean this study up."

"If you clean it up before giving yourself a bath you'll make everything twice as bad as it is now," said Willy tartly. "What's the idea, anyhow? You're not supposed to fag for Sinclair at this unearthly hour."

Dicky sat on his heels on the hearthrug and groaned.



"You don't know what torture is yet," he said in a hollow voice. "Not supposed, eh? Time doesn't mean anything to Sinclair. He and Kenmore fag us morning, noon, and night. We can't get a minute to ourselves; we're kept on the run like galley slaves. You're a lucky beast, being in the Ancient House."

Willy Handforth frowned.

"I may be lucky, but there's no need to call me a beast," he said severely. "I only allow my particular friends to call me a beast, my lad. There's a meeting of the Third on, and you've got to be present. We've got to decide our policy regarding the Head's latest whim."

"And what's that?" asked Dicky.

"My dear chap, haven't you heard?" asked Willy in surprise. "He actually cut up rusty yesterday because two of our chaps were discovered digging for worms in the back of his garden. Did you ever hear of such a nerve? Just as if they hurt the mouldy old place!"

"Digging for worms?" repeated Dicky with mild interest.

"Never heard of angling, I suppose?" said Willy, coming into the study and closing the door. "Worms are in great demand as bait, and the best patch of earth is at the bottom of the Head's garden. The soil must be rich, or something—anyhow, the worms seem to like it. The Head kicked up an awful fuss. Made some fat-headed complaint about pulling up bulbs, or something. Just as if a few bulbs make any difference."

"Were the chaps swished?"

"Not exactly," replied Willy. "You see, one of the gardeners spotted 'em, but couldn't find out who they were. And now the Head's had the sauce to ban all angling in the Third!"

"What do I care?" asked Dicky. "I think fishing's a fatheaded sport, anyhow. I'm not interested in—"

"That doesn't matter; you've got to attend the meeting," interrupted Willy. "It's a gathering of the whole Form, and if you're not there within half an hour there'll be trouble."

"Where's the meeting going to be?"

"In the tuckshop."

"Oh, well, that makes a difference!" said Dicky, brightening up. "I suppose you'll stand treat, being Form skipper? Not much good me going to the tuckshop, I've only got a bent halfpenny."

"Well, we'll see about it later on," replied Willy, with a fatherly air. "This question of the worms has got to be settled to-day. Imagine it. They only dug up about two yards of flower-bed, and raked out a lot of onions, and there's all this fuss. The gardener says they were bulbs, but Owen minor swears they were onions."

"Then Owen minor was wrong," growled Dicky. "Of course they were bulbs. Who ever heard of onions in a flower-bed? After all, it was a bit thick, digging up the Head's garden for worms. You Ancient House chaps go it too much. You'd better not be caught here either," he added, with a glance at the clock. "Sinclair's liable to roll up at any minute."

Willy looked at the other fag curiously. Dicky Jones was one of the most mischievous fags in the Third—cheeky, happy-go-lucky, with a fund of high spirits. But he seemed different now. Those high spirits of his seemed to have been killed. There was a dull expression of resignation in his eyes. A week or two of slavery in Guy Sinclair's service had left their mark.

"There's something rummy about you, my lad," said Willy frowning. "If Sinclair's coming it a bit too strong the Third will have to look into it. We can't allow—"

"Shush, you ass!" hissed Dicky fearfully.

Willy was standing with his back to the door, and the latter had just opened. Guy Sinclair himself stood there, looking in. The captain of the West House made no comment, and Dicky was in a fever.

"Why should I shush?" asked Willy in astonishment. "I was talking about that cad, Sinclair, wasn't I?"

"Oh, my hat!" moaned Dicky.

He made a fearful grimace at Willy, by way of a warning, and seized the poker. He polished it vigorously with his handkerchief in his agitation. Not that these secret signs were necessary. Willy was fully aware of Sinclair's presence, having seen his reflection in the mirror. But a trifle like that was not going to bottle him up.

"We chaps in the Ancient House can't understand your weak spirit," went on Willy. "Sinclair wouldn't last two minutes in the Ancient House. We'd take him by his dirty neck and kick him out. After all, what is he? A bully, a blackguard, a hooligan, and a crook. One of these days he'll end up in Pentonville. Nobody can understand what he's doing at St. Frank's. It can't be many years since he escaped from Borstal."

Dicky Jones was nearly in a state of collapse by this time, but he took good care to say nothing. He waited in a dull kind of way for the thunder to crash out ripping his handkerchief to shreds in the meantime.

Sinclair had listened to Willy's first words in amazed fury, and his handsome, supercilious face took on a vicious scowl as he heard the other references to himself. With one sweep he clutched at Willy's neck.

"Missed!" said Willy calmly



That mirror was rather handy. The leader of the Third had been expecting something of this kind, and he was fully prepared. But Sinclair wasn't. Grabbing at nothing, he lurched forward, lost his balance, and blundered across the table. The inkpot sprang up and spurted its contents into his face. Willy took up a strategic position at the door.

"Another job for you, Dicky," he remarked. "Somebody's spilt the ink on the clock face now. My hat, what a dial!"

"You infernal young hound!" hooted Sinclair wildly. "You did that on purpose. I'll skin you alive for this!"

"Remember who you are!" admonished Willy coldly. "That's no way for the head prefect of a House to speak to a fag. Where's your dignity? No wonder these West House chaps look upon you as a sort of insect. I've often wondered, Sinclair—do you leave a trail on the floor when you walk along? I've never seen a slug that doesn't."

Sinclair made one dive for Handforth minor. But he might as well have tried to catch a sunbeam. Before he could even get to the door Willy was at the end of the passage. He didn't believe in running away from danger as a rule. But Guy Sinclair was notorious.

As head prefect of the West House he held full sway, and his rule was despotic and harsh. Since his appointment to the prefectship he had gone from bad to worse, and discontent and revolt stalked hand in hand through the whole House. Even now there were whispers of rebellion.

Willy had no fear of Sinclair, for Willy was an Ancient House junior. And Sinclair's rule only held good in the West House. Not that Willy made a habit of uttering insulting remarks to prefects. He was generally quite the opposite in his attitude. But Guy Sinclair was such a notorious outsider that he received respect from no one. He was hated like poison by the boys of his own House, and only maintained control by reason of his tyranny. But even this method was liable to strain itself to breaking point.

"Young brat!" exclaimed Sinclair savagely, as he slammed the study door. "What the deuce do you mean by bringing him here, Jones?"

"I didn't bring him," retorted Dicky sullenly. "It's not fair to blame me, Sinclair. I can't stop him walking indoors, I suppose?"

"No back answers!" snarled Sinclair. "You're as bad as he is. And why haven't you cleared this study up? Confound you! Where's my cane? I'll show you something!"

Dicky sprang up, trembling. He was quite a plucky youngster by nature, but repeated applications of Sinclair's cane had

reduced his nerves to rags, and he was positively afraid of the bullying senior. He bore the weals and bruises of the last atrocity even now.

"Please, Sinclair, it's not fair!" he muttered. "I've been working ever since you left me—"

"You've done nothing!" interrupted the prefect. "You confounded little liar, you've made the study grimy instead of clean. And what have you done with my cane?"

"I haven't touched it—"

"You'll only make things worse by more lies!" interrupted Sinclair, who was in a vile temper. "Where's that cane? Answer me, or I'll twist your arm until you howl."

He seized the fag from the rear, and hooked his arm round in a vice-like grip.

"Answer me!" repeated Sinclair savagely.

"I haven't touched it!" groaned Dicky, biting his lip with pain. "Oh! Chuck it, Sinclair! Oh, you cad!"

He ended up with a scream, forced involuntarily from between his lips. He would take a swishing without a murmur, but the agony of this arm-twisting torture was more than human flesh and blood could stand.

"Now!" panted Sinclair. "Where's that cane?"

Outside, Arthur Morrow, of the Sixth, paused in the corridor. He had heard that scream distinctly and he frowned. Morrow was the most popular senior in the West House, and he had been the Head Boy until Sinclair had usurped his position. He acted without a second's hesitation.

Flinging open the door of Sinclair's study, he took in the situation at a glance.

"Stop that, you cowardly hound!" he shouted hotly. "Good heavens, Sinclair, can't you do anything else but bully these helpless fags?"

Sinclair twirled round, but he maintained his grip on Dicky Jones' arm. His face was flushed with vindictive rage.

"Get out!" he shouted thickly.

"I'll get out when you've released that kid!" retorted Morrow. "I'll give you two seconds. Drop him, confound you!"

Sinclair gritted his teeth. For a second he saw red. With one vicious twist, he wrenched at Dicky's arm, and the fag gave a sobbing, choking cry and turned as pale as death, swaying dizzily.

## CHAPTER II.

### THE NEED FOR ACTION.



MORROW leapt forward.

"Let that fag go!" he thundered furiously.

Guy Sinclair backed away before the fury of Morrow's advance. Dicky Jones sank to the floor,



and remained there for a moment, sobbing convulsively. He crawled away to safety beyond the table.

"Get out of this study!" panted Sinclair. "I'll stand no interference from you, Morrow! Get out!"

"You cur!" breathed Morrow.

That one sight of Dicky's face—pale and drawn with agony—had made him forget all his dignity. He only knew that he was facing a brute, and that the brute needed a lesson.

Crash!

Morrow was one of the finest boxers in the Senior School. And the upper-cut he delivered was a real beauty. It caught Sinclair on the chin, and nearly lifted him off his feet. He crashed over with a fearful, devastating havoc of crockery, for he fell against a side-table filled with tea-things.

He lay on the floor, motionless—knocked clean out. Morrow cooled down on the instant, and stood there trembling.

"And the next time I catch you at this game I'll give you another!" he said curtly. "Jones, you'd better cut off. If Sinclair bullies you any more, come and tell me. It won't be sneaking. The cad will half-kill you unless he's checked."

Dicky didn't answer—he hardly moved. He was crouching on the floor, with his right hand clutching his left arm—the arm that Sinclair had twisted. His face was still drawn with agony.

"Get up, Dicky!" said Morrow kindly.

He took hold of the fag, and helped him to his feet. Dicky drew his breath in sharply, and tried his utmost to avoid a gasp of pain. But he failed. He stood there, in mortal agony.

"I'm glad I knocked him out!" muttered Morrow. "You'd better let me look at that arm, young 'un——"

"It's—it's all right, Morrow, thanks," said Dicky tremblingly. "It won't last long—you needn't bother. Th-thanks for coming in like that. Don't tell the others, will you?"

The fag swayed to the door, and reeled out. Morrow looked after him uncertainly, and then transferred his gaze to Sinclair. The head prefect was just showing signs of coming round. Morrow didn't wait for anything further. He strode out of the study, and slammed the door.

He was fairly seething with indignation when he strode into the Senior Day-room. Being a wet afternoon, the apartment was well patronised. It was a very comfortable room—with lounges, writing-tables, and a cheerful open fire in addition to the radiators.

"Hallo! Who's been upsetting you, old man?" asked Chambers, of the Fifth, as he glanced up from a magazine.

"You needn't ask, need you?" snorted Morrow. "That dirty cad, Sinclair! I was passing his study when I heard a scream, and found him twisting a fag's arm. Great

Scott! Like the bully in a confounded school story! These sort of things aren't done nowadays."

"Better forget it," said Stanhope, of the Sixth. "We've all got to suffer the man, anyhow. No good making a fuss!"

"That's where you're wrong!" snapped Morrow. "Making a fuss is the only thing we can do. I'm sick and tired of Sinclair's despotism. Something's got to be done."

"Easily said, but what can we do?" asked Phillips. "It's contrary to all etiquette to complain to the Housemaster. And it wouldn't be any good, anyhow."

Morrow frowned. There was something in Phillips' remarks. Mr. Beverley Stokes was undoubtedly acting in a strange way this term. His first startling act had been to dismiss Morrow from the prefectship without any cause, and his second had been to appoint Guy Sinclair.

Sinclair wasn't a West House fellow at all. He belonged to the East House, but he had transferred especially in order to take up this appointment. There wasn't a senior in the whole of St. Frank's less fitted for the post.

The seniors had been amazed at the Housemaster's strange decision. And their astonishment had been even greater when Mr. Stokes had raised no objections to Sinclair bringing his friends across with him. Kenmore, Grayson, Shaw, and Parkin had left the East House in a body, and were now firmly entrenched under Mr. Stokes' roof. Even Forrest, Gulliver, and Bell, the cads of the Ancient House, had transferred—much to the open satisfaction of the Ancient House, and to the dismay of Mr. Stokes' juniors.

And since then the Housemaster had let things drift on, with Guy Sinclair ruling the West House like an autocrat. He was the supreme power. And his decision was final. He had been allowed to institute all sorts of vindictive punishments, and Mr. Stokes had remained passive.

It was an open secret that Sinclair and his set had formed a night club of their own. One of the top rooms had been converted into a comfortable den, and here the revellers foregathered after Lights Out, to indulge in Bridge playing for high stakes, gambling, and smoking. But Mr. Stokes appeared to be in total ignorance of this "Cheerio Club"—as it was called.

Sinclair had gone even further. It was a regular practice of his to confine the juniors within the House—a form of detention which was literally nothing but a term of imprisonment. But he very kindly allowed his victims to bail themselves out. For sums varying in accordance with the financial status of the juniors, they could pay bail, and regain their freedom. The whole thing was a form of robbery. Sinclair took good care to cloak it over with high-sounding terms, but nobody was deceived.

So there was some reason for Arthur Morrow's frown. It would certainly be useless



to approach Mr. Stokes—even if the etiquette of the seniors allowed such a move.

"No, we can't go to the Housemaster," said Morrow, at length. "But we can make a move on our own account. There's no reason why we should stand Sinclair's nonsense as meekly as his fags have to stand it."

"But what on earth can we do?" asked Chambers.

"Give the man the hiding he deserves!" snorted Morrow.

Cuthbert Chambers looked horrified. He had a great idea of dignity, and he was just as lordly and exclusive as any prefect. It was this aloofness of his, in fact, which had lost him the captaincy of the Fifth. When William Napoleon Browne had arrived at St. Frank's he had brought a breeziness with him which gained him the full support of the Fifth, and he had been elected skipper within a day. And Browne was the most popular skipper the Fifth had ever had. Incidentally, he didn't care two straws about dignity, and was just as amiable in the fags' quarters as he was with the Head himself.

But Chambers was different. In addition to being dignified, he was several kinds of an ass, to say nothing of being a dandy. He shook his head with cold disapproval as Morrow talked of giving Sinclair a hiding.

"My dear man, it couldn't be done," he protested. "The senior section of the House has got to remember its standing. The juniors can rag a man to their hearts' content—but when we do that sort of thing it's a brawl."

"Something in that point of view," agreed Phillips, nodding.

"Nonsense," said Morrow. "Perhaps you'll accuse me of brawling? Not five minutes ago I knocked Sinclair out."

The Senior Day Room sat up and took notice.

"You knocked him out?" repeated Hodder, staring.

"Clean out," said Morrow grimly. "Take a look at my knuckles! I simply couldn't help it—when I saw him twisting that fag's arm I went for the brute bald-headed. I left him lying on his study floor; too dazed to speak, or even get up."

There was a buzz of keen interest.

"Well, hang it, I'm glad to hear the news," said Frinton enthusiastically. "Good for you, Arthur! But you'll have to look out for squalls! Even an ex-head prefect can't knock his successor down without footing the bill! Sinclair's liable to drop down pretty heavily."

"What can he do?" asked Morrow contemptuously. "I caught the man red-handed—caught him in the worst kind of petty bullying. I should say he'll drop the whole incident. If he doesn't, I don't care a straw. For two pin's I'll challenge the man to a fight, and slaughter him!"

Morrow spoke with feeling. He was a Sixth-Former, but he was also human. And at the moment he had sunk his dignity. He was as anxious for a fight as any junior.

"I'll bet you're right about Sinclair dropping it," said Chambers. "He won't have the nerve to take any action. Good thing, too! We don't want the other Houses talking about us."

Morrow looked more grim than ever.

"They can talk as much as they like," he retorted. "And even if Sinclair's inclined to drop the affair, I'm not. In fact, I think it's up to us to get out a vote of censure—a written condemnation of Sinclair and his methods."

### CHAPTER III.

#### THE VOTE OF CENSURE.



THE Senior Day-room was dubious.

"Better be careful," remarked Rees, of the Sixth. "The juniors can do that sort of thing, but we've got to go easy."

"Can't have the school talking," agreed Stanhope.

"Confound the school—and confound your caution!" snapped Morrow. "This is an exceptional case. Sinclair has had his head for weeks, and it's about time we pulled him up. The juniors daren't act, but we can. Anyhow, I'm going to get out that vote of censure. If you fellows won't sign it, you won't be fit to call yourselves Saints! We stand for independence and freedom at this school—not serfdom!"

Seldom had Morrow been so worked up. He strode to a corner, and sat down at one of the desks. He pulled out some paper, and unscrewed his fountain-pen with vicious force. Then he stared at the ceiling for inspiration. The other seniors looked at him for a moment or two, and gathered round the fire, discussing this unusual situation.

The fact was, Sinclair had made little change in the smooth running of the Senior School. In one or two instances he had aroused indignation and anger—but, on the whole, the seniors had carried on in much the same way as ever.

The head prefect had confined his tyrannies to the junior section of the House. They were weaker, and easier to handle. It was a comparatively easy matter to act the despot with the Remove and the Third. Their code of honour forbade any complaint to the Housemaster—and Sinclair, in any case, seemed indifferent to Mr. Stokes' censure.

For quite a long time Morrow had seethed with helpless impotence. But that incident in Sinclair's study had brought matters to a head. It was high time the prefect discovered the attitude of his fellow-seniors. Until now they had treated him with cold



indifference — disapproving silently and aloofly.

"You'd better chuck it up, old man," said Stanhope, strolling over to Morrow's corner. "We don't want any of these theatricals. The best thing we can do is to ignore the man——"

"That's my idea, exactly," interrupted Morrow. "Virtually, we'll send him to Coventry. But I don't see any reason why he shouldn't know—in black and white. It's about the only thing that'll penetrate his thick hide. Clear off, Stanhope, there's a good fellow. Let me finish."

"Oh, well, if you're set on it——"

"This vote of censure is going to be pinned on the board," growled Morrow. "If there's no other signature on it but mine, it's going up."

Stanhope shook his head, and walked away. And ten minutes later Morrow rose from the desk, and joined the others. There was a gleam of quiet satisfaction in his eyes.

"How's this?" he asked.

He held up the sheet of foolscap paper, and the other seniors crowded round. Morrow had drawn the thing up very neatly, and it ran as follows:

#### "VOTE OF CENSURE.

"We, the undersigned, hereby declare that we are in unanimous agreement, concerning the questionable conduct of Guy Sinclair, Head Prefect of the West House.

Whereas, Guy Sinclair has set himself up as a despot, a tyrant, and an autocrat, and has violated every unwritten law of conduct associated with the post of Head Boy, and

Whereas, the said Guy Sinclair has also instituted a system of intolerable servitude—particularly among the junior members of this House, and

Whereas, he has furthermore forfeited every claim to the respect of his fellow-seniors,

We, the undersigned, unanimously agree that until he voluntarily abandons his autocratic rule, and returns to orthodox methods as hitherto practised, he shall be avoided and regarded as non-existent.

"(Signed), ARTHUR MORROW."

The other seniors looked at one another rather dubiously.

"A bit thick, isn't it?" asked Chambers.

"Not half thick enough!" retorted Morrow. "I was just thinking that I'd made it altogether too mild. I doubt if Sinclair's tough skin will be penetrated."

"If that notice doesn't give him a nasty pain, nothing on earth will," grinned Phillips. "Why, I can't remember anything of this sort happening before. The head boy of a House sent to Coventry! That's what it amounts to, in cold blood. Well, here's my name, anyhow."

He pulled out his fountain-pen, and attached his signature. Frinton and Bryant added theirs.

"Any more?" asked Morrow.

"Hang it all, it's a bit too much, you know," protested Chambers. "We ought to think carefully before we make this public. If it's shoved on the board the whole House will get to know of it within an hour."

"The sooner the better," said Bryant grimly. "Personally, I'm rather keen on everybody knowing that I don't approve of Sinclair. And this is a good way of showing our attitude in a dignified way."

"But the other Houses will talk, too," said Stanhope. "It might even get to the Head's ears."

"Nothing we'd like better," interrupted Morrow. "Stokes won't do anything, but the Head might. We can't actually show it to him, but if he hears, indirectly, that the majority of us are fed up with Sinclair——"

"Eh? What's all this about?"

Kenmore, of the Sixth, had just come in, and he joined the crowd of seniors near the fireplace. They regarded him coldly, for he was looked upon as an intruder, just as much as Sinclair was.

"It's a vote of censure," said Chambers bluntly.

"A which?"

"You'd better read it."

Morrow held it up, and Simon Kenmore passed his eye down it. He looked astonished at first, and then angry.

"What on earth is the good of that thing?" he demanded. "Sinclair's the head prefect, don't forget, and he'll take pretty drastic measures if you pin that piece of foolery on the board. It's an insult."

"If Sinclair takes it as an insult, that's his affair," snapped Morrow. "It's simply an expression of opinion."

"Well, don't pin it up," said Kenmore. "Take my advice, and burn it! Sinclair's pretty mad with some of you fellows already. He'll make it hot for everyone who signs that drivel."

"Make it hot, eh?" snorted Chambers. "Do you think that boulder can treat us in the same way as he treats the kids?"

"Give him a chance," sneered Kenmore. "You'll soon see!"

"Where's your pen, Morrow?" asked Chambers pompously. "I'll sign this drivel, as Kenmore calls it. And everybody else had better sign, too. We're not going to be scared of threats like that!"

Kenmore's attitude was the one thing needed to spur the doubters. By the end of two minutes there were ten signatures at the bottom of the manifesto, representing all the decent seniors of the West House. The crowd wasn't such a big one, even at full strength, for the Fifth and Sixth at St. Frank's boarded fairly equally in the four Houses. Stokes', of course, was the only one affected. Lee's, Stockdale's, and Goole's were carrying on in the same placid manner as usual. Indeed, in the other Houses nobody quite realised the tension



that Sinclair had caused. Most of the rumours were discredited as gross exaggerations.

The Fourth Form was not even remotely affected, for the Fourth boarded exclusively in the Modern House and the East House.

"There it is, and there it stays!" said Morrow as he pushed home a final drawing-pin. "And now I suppose you'll run along and tell Sinclair all about it?" he added, turning to Kenmore. "Give him my compliments, and tell him that I hope his front teeth are all loosened. But perhaps he hasn't recovered yet?"

"You're jealous—that's what's the matter

"Did I?" asked Willy. "Prove it!" "Take two hundred lines for impertinence!" snarled the prefect.

"Where shall I take 'em to?"

"You young hound—"

"Sorry, but can't stop," interrupted Willy carelessly. "Fenton sent me here on an errand. As for your two hundred lines, you can give 'em to one of your own fags. I don't belong to your beastly House."

He went into the senior day room and closed the door. Kenmore gave a snort and went his way. Somehow Willy Handforth generally left a fellow with a feeling of



"Missed!" said Willy calmly.

Grabbing at nothing, Sinclair lurched forward, lost his balance, and blundered across the table. The inkpot sprang up and spurted its contents into his face.

with you!" sneered Kenmore. "Just because you were kicked out of the prefectship, you're jealous of Sinclair. Stokes knew what he was doing when he threw you out!"

"While we're on the subject of throwing out—" began Morrow.

But Simon Kenmore didn't wait. He strode to the door, flung it open, and nearly fell headlong over somebody who was just coming in. Indeed, a foot shot out, and Kenmore tripped over it and went flying.

"Sorry!" said Willy Handforth.

Kenmore recovered himself and twirled round.

"You did that on purpose!" he roared.

helplessness. He was quite right, too; Kenmore had no authority to impose any punishment. He could only report Willy to one of the Ancient House prefects, and he wasn't likely to do that.

"Busy, Morrow?" asked Willy. "Fenton wants you over in the Ancient House if you've got time—something about football, I believe. Hallo! What's the notice? The eleven for the Helmford match?"

He strolled over to the board, and read the vote of censure. A sad expression came into his eyes, and he looked at the seniors with pitying scorn.





"My hat!" he said at length. "My—hat!" His words were limited, but the tone in his voice was so expressive that the seniors regarded him with deep, inquiring frowns.

#### CHAPTER IV.

##### WILLY SHOWS THE WAY.



**A**RTHUR MORROW regarded Willy Handforth severely.

"What's the idea of this 'my hat' business?" he demanded. "I don't like that tone of voice of yours! Doesn't the thing suit your majesty? Is there something wrong with it?"

"You mean, is there something right with it?" asked Willy.

"You young ass!"

"Look at it!" went on the fag contemptuously. "A whole crowd of you—Fifth and Sixth Form chaps, and that's the most you can do! Pin up a few milky, watery words, and then kid yourselves that you've done something wonderful! Tear it down, for goodness' sake!"

"You're asking for trouble, my lad," said Chambers darkly. "Are you going to get out of this room quietly, or shall we kick you out?"

Willy snorted.

"You soon talk about kicking me out," he growled, "but what about kicking Sinclair out? Of course, he mustn't be touched! He's a blackguard and a cad, and I pride myself on being as decent as the next chap. But still he mustn't be touched! And why not? Because he's a senior!"

"Look here, Handforth minor——"

"Because he's a senior!" repeated Willy tartly. "Anybody might think you seniors were princes or emperors! Mustn't be touched—mustn't be fingered! You'll soon be going about in glass cases!"

"You cheeky young sweep——"

"Wait!" interrupted Willy curtly. "I don't want any interruptions."

"By George, you nervy young beggar——"

"And when it comes to brain capacity, where is it?" asked Willy, with a helpless gesture. "Where? My hat! If I had an X-ray apparatus in here, I shouldn't be able to find a square inch of brain in the whole room! No offence, of course," he added kindly. "I don't blame you. I suppose you were born that way. But I'm jolly sorry for the whole crowd of you!"

The senior day room was startled. Willy included everybody in his condemnation, and he had worked himself up to a fine pitch of contempt. He looked at the seniors with eyes that flashed with scorn.

If there had been only two of them present, they would have taken Willy firmly, and Willy would have passed through a painful two minutes. But he was fearless. With nearly a dozen seniors round him, he stood in their very midst, and cared nothing

for his own safety. Indeed, he was well aware of his peril.

"Go on! Why don't you grab me and find a cane?" he asked. "I can't do anything against the whole bunch of you. I'm helpless. But that won't stop me saying that I regard you as a set of weak-kneed jelly-fish! You fellows need somebody to tell you the horrible truth!"

"Are we going to stand this?" asked Chambers thickly. "The young fox! He knows we can't touch him! He knows he's so outnumbered that it wouldn't be cricket to jump on him!"

"I'm glad you see my point of view," nodded Willy. "I knew I was safe all the time. Of course, there was a risk of being biffed out into the passage during the first minute, but that's over now. You've taken it calmly. Well, that's something to your credit, anyhow."

"You patronising young donkey!" snorted Morrow. "Do you think we care a toss for your opinions?"

"Of course you don't," agreed Willy. "All the same, you're going to have 'em! I can't see you fellows doing a thing like this without showing you the idiocy of it!"

"The what?"

"Idiocy," repeated Willy firmly. "I'm not afraid of repeating anything! You can't scare me off like that. Don't you realise that you're on the wrong tack? What's the good of that notice to Sinclair?"

"Look here, young Handforth——"

"Don't interrupt!" said Willy, frowning. "You fellows are hopeless when it comes to action. I suppose you were all right terms and terms ago, when you were in the juniors, but you've become so dignified that you're chock full of starch. Chunks of jelly—that's all you are—weak-kneed and wobbly! I don't like saying these things, but it's the best way. The truth hurts, but you'll soon realise that I'm right."

Morrow pointed to the door.

"We'll give you just ten seconds to get out," he said smoothly. "You're such a cheeky young beggar that you're safe. But unless you clear out at once——"

"Chuck it!" interrupted Willy impatiently. "Here am I doing you a good turn, and you don't show any gratitude. I'm giving you the straight tip. That vote of censure is about as much use as hitting a rhinoceros with a feather. Sinclair won't even feel it! He's the boss in this House, and he'll simply tear the thing up, and laugh in your faces! In fact, it'll please him. He thrives on opposition."

"You've got too much to say!" growled Stanhope. "I'm hanged if I know why we stand here listening! If any other fag talked like this we'd annihilate him on the spot."

"Give me another minute, and I'll buzz off," said Willy. "I'm amazed at your dullness. You let Sinclair get full control of the House, and then grumble at him! You issue these votes of censure. Sinclair couldn't ride the high horse unless you let him!"



"You're the fellows to blame—not Sinclair!"  
"Oh!" said Morrow grimly. "How's that?"

"Why, you've allowed him to tread on everybody ever since the beginning of term," replied Willy. "You've watched him acting the despot, and you've done nothing. And it's in your hands all the time to shove him in his place. Take my advice, and tear that notice up. A horsewhipping would do Sinclair twice as much good."

Willy was in earnest now; there was no suspicion of cheek in his voice, and, amazingly enough, the seniors were listening to him. No other junior in the whole of St. Frank's could have commanded their attention, especially after his opening shots. But there was some indefinable quality about Willy Handforth which rendered him immune from danger. Moreover, there was a deal of wisdom in his words.

"Hang it all, I believe the young beggar's right," admitted Morrow slowly. "A thorough horsewhipping would be worth a dozen of these censures. At the same time, young Handforth, it's like your nerve to come here——"

"I know it; no need to tell me," interrupted Willy. "But what's the good of a chap if he hasn't got any nerve? It always makes me wild when I see you seniors standing on your blessed dignity! I'll tell you what," he added brightly—"I'll have a talk with the Third, and we'll show you exactly what you ought to do with Sinclair. Is it a go?"

"No, it isn't," said Morrow curtly. "We don't want any advice from you, young 'un. You'd better clear while you're safe."

"It won't take us long, you know," argued Willy. "A fellow like Sinclair needs drastic treatment. It's no good adopting these half measures. Neck or nothing—that's me. What Sinclair needs is a little rough stuff. Frogs-marching round the Triangle, for example, ducking in the fountain, or rolling in the mud. Anything of that sort would subdue him. Tar and feathers might not be a bad idea. But it's got to be something drastic. A vote of censure like that thing on the Board is a mere joke. Why not pull yourselves together, forget your silly dignity, and let something rip?"

"That's about enough!" growled Morrow.

"Oh, well, please yourselves!" said Willy, strolling towards the door. "You can't say I haven't told you. I can tell you where to find a horsewhip, if you like, and I'm quite willing to give you an object lesson in the right method. So we'll leave it at that. Any time you want any advice, you know where to find me. The Third's always ready to come to the rescue."

He opened the door, and the seniors gazed at him speechlessly.

"Well, I'll be popping off," he added casually. "When you've thought the thing over come along to my quarters and I'll

give you a few more tips. But don't forget—drastic methods. Sinclair's a beast, and unless you act pretty quickly he'll take root. Take the bull by the horns and show a bit of pluck. Dash it all, I'm ashamed of you. What's more, I shan't feel like coming into this House again until you've behaved like men. That's a fair warning, so you'd better look out!"

He vanished, and the door closed. Several of the seniors breathed hard, and one or two even made a grim move towards the door. Once Willy's compelling personality was absent his listeners realised the enormity of his cheek.

"Hold on!" said Morrow, a gleam in his eye. "The kid's right!"

"What!"

"Of course he's right!" snorted Morrow. "We're a crowd of idiots for not seeing it before. That vote of censure's no good; Sinclair needs a lesson that he won't forget for years!"

"Yes, but——"

"Kicking is what Sinclair wants," went on Morrow fiercely. "Confound it, young Handforth's told us the truth. It's about time we chucked this pretence of dignity aside. Once Sinclair realises that we're ready for violent action, once he has a taste of the lash, he'll crumble to bits. Who's with me?"

"But, man alive, it's revolt!" gasped Chambers, horrified. "And whoever heard of the seniors of a House revolting?"

"I don't care who's heard of it—this is an exception to the rule!" snorted Morrow. "I'm ready for a big move, anyhow, precedents or no precedents. And if you fellows have got an ounce of backbone you'll support me!"

Apparently Willy's words had gone right home.

## CHAPTER V.

### THE AFFAIR OF DICKY JONES' ARM.



CLARENCE FELLOWE paused as he was passing the open doorway of the West House cloak-room.

The poet of the Remove was in a thoughtful mood, having had a commission from Nipper to prepare a few verses in honour of Roddy Yorke's birthday. And Clarence was seeking for a theme. But as he passed the open doorway of the cloak-room he came to a halt and listened. A peculiar sound came from the place, a sound which almost resembled a moan.

"There it is again!" murmured Fellowe. "Like someone in pain!"

He entered the cloak-room and looked round with a mildly inquiring eye. Clarence



was quite harmless. As a rule, he went about the school indifferent to the various rags which were generally in progress. As far as he could see, there was nobody in the cloak-room, and he was slightly suspicious. It was a wet afternoon, and on such occasions the fags were rather fond of spoofing him. There were scores of overcoats and caps within sight, but there seemed to be no human presence. Then, as he stood there, another moan sounded—from the very end of the cloak-room. Clarence looked round sharply, and took two strides with his thin, lanky legs.

"I'll swear there's someone here," he said softly. "I'd better search this gear. If it's those cheeky japers, I'll soon curtail their capers. Come out and show yourself, young man. You can't fool me with such a plan."

He cautiously moved the coats and other clothing aside, but found nobody. Then he noticed a movement from the other corner of the cloak-room, and detected a fag crouching there. But there was no sign of fun on the youngster's face. Indeed, he was looking pale and haggard, and his eyes were wet.

"I trust there's nothing wrong?" asked Clarence, with concern. "Your face is somewhat long. I think you're Dicky Jones? But why the hollow moans?"

"It's all right—nothing!" muttered the fag huskily. "Sorry, Fellowe, I didn't think anybody could hear. I say, don't tell Willy or any of the others. I hate a fuss."

Clarence eyed the fag even more closely. "There's something wrong with you I see—you'd better tell it all to me," he said confidentially. "Has someone hit you on the nob, or have you only lost a bob?"

"I tell you it's nothing," said Dicky. "Please go away, Fellowe. I—I'd rather be alone. I—I'm not feeling very well."

Clarence could see that the fag was very far from his usual self. That pale, drawn look on his face was alarming. He was biting his lip, too, as though to keep control over himself.

"You fill me with distinct alarm," said the Removite, shaking his head. "What's wrong with your left arm?"

Footsteps sounded behind.

"Spouting poetry to yourself, Clarence, old man?" asked a cheery voice. "Well, it's better than inflicting it on the other chaps. Hallo! Who's that up the corner?"

The new arrival was Tommy Hobbs, of the Third. Tommy had a weird looking contrivance under his arm, made of wood, metal bolts, and Meccano parts. It was one of his own inventions—a patent wind indicator. Hobbs was the mechanical fiend of the Third, and he had come along for his overcoat. Rain or no rain, he meant to go

outside to put his invention to the test.

"I'm glad you've come along, young Hobbs. Perhaps you'll understand these sobs," said Clarence mildly. "There's something wrong with Dicky Jones. He's full of pains and hollow groans."

Tommy pushed forward.

"We've been looking for you, Dicky," he said, regarding the other fag closely. "We thought you were in Sinclair's study, but nobody—My only hat! You're as pale as a sheet. What's wrong, you fathead?"

"I tell you it's nothing!" said Jones fiercely.

"No need to jump down my throat—"

"Can't you go away, and leave me?" panted Dicky. "I can be in the cloak-room if I like, can't I? I'm not feeling very well."

"A second ago you said it was nothing."

"Well, it isn't much—"

"Then come outside with me, and get a breath of fresh air," interrupted Hobbs, pulling hold of Dicky's shoulder. "It'll do you good—"

He broke off abruptly, for Dicky Jones had uttered a gasping cry of acute agony. His face screwed itself up, and his breath came in great sobs. He sank back among the coats, weak and dizzy.

"Great Scott!" gasped Hobbs. "I hardly touched you. What's wrong with your arm, Dicky? Is it broken, or something?"

Dicky made no answer. He was incapable of answering. But his pain was obvious. And while Tommy Hobbs stood looking, he heard a familiar whistle in the lobby.

"Willy!" he muttered. "Good!"

He dodged out quickly, Clarence Fellowe having wandered off to his own quarters. Willy Handforth was just sauntering along from the senior corridor, feeling highly satisfied with himself. Chubby Heath and Juicy Lemon, his faithful chums, were in sight, too. They were waiting for their leader in the doorway.

"Still raining," said Chubby, as Willy came along. "There's a break or two in the clouds, though—"

"I say, Handforth minor," said Tommy Hobbs, from the cloak-room doorway. "Come here a tick. There's something funny here."

"Yes, I can see it," agreed Willy, nodding. "You'll see it, too, if you look in the mirror."

"Don't be an ass!" protested Hobbs. "There's young Jones in the cloak-room here, and he's half killed, or something. There seems to be something wrong with one of his arms. I just touched him, and he nearly fainted."

Willy looked serious in a moment. His brain had a habit of working rapidly. He had left Jones in Guy Sinclair's study, and



now Hobbs was telling him that Dicky had been half killed. The inference was obvious.

"Let's have a look," he said crisply.

He pushed into the cloak-room, and Chubby Heath and Julcy Lemon followed, curious to see the human wreckage. They hadn't hoped for such a livener in the middle of such a dull afternoon as this.

"Dicky!" exclaimed Willy sharply. "I say, Dicky. Great pip. The chap's in awful agony, from the look of him. What's the matter with you, you silly chump?"

"Nothing!" panted Dicky Jones ferociously. "Can't you leave a chap alone?"

"Has Sinclair been knocking you about?"

"No. I—I mean— Can't you see he hasn't?" muttered Dicky. "I don't need any of your fatheaded sympathy. Go and eat coke!"

It was quite common for the fags to rebuff one another in this blunt fashion. They hated being fussed over. If a fellow had a black eye, he preferred to make light of it. In some instances, it was regarded as a mark of honour.

But Dicky was bearing no signs of violence. Only his pale cheeks, and his haggard expression told of the pain he suffered.

"None of that, you ass," retorted Willy. "Sinclair's been torturing you, or something. You can't spoof me. Come on—let's have the truth."

"The beast!" muttered Dicky fiercely. "Oh, the bullying cad! You know all about it—so what's the good of keeping it up? The rotter twisted my arm. Satisfied? Clear off, and leave me alone! I came here to get a bit of peace, and you're all swarming round like flies!"

"Twisted your arm, did he?" said Willy grimly. "Just like him! Let's have a look at it. Take your coat off—"

"I—I can't!"

"What do you mean—you can't?"

"I don't know—it hurts too much," muttered the other. "There's something rummy about it. Every time I move I get an awful pain. I can't even lift my arm an inch. I expect it'll get all right—"

"And those dotty seniors stick up Votes of Censure!" snorted Willy fiercely. "Let's have a look at that arm, Dicky! None of your rot! I'm your skipper, and you've got to obey orders."

He seized Dicky firmly, and felt the injured arm gingerly. But, although his touch was light, Dicky winced and shrank back. A moan escaped him, and he reeled giddily.

"Don't!" he panted. "Oh, don't touch at!"

"I say, there's something queer about this," exclaimed Willy sternly. "That's no ordinary twist! I'm not going to mess about, either. You're coming straight down

to Dr. Brett's! I believe your arm's broken!"

Dicky Jones looked alarmed.

"I won't go!" he gasped. "I don't want any fuss—"

"You won't go, eh?" roared Willy. "We'll see about that, my son! I'm giving orders—and you've got to obey. This is a time for action—not delay! Will you come quietly, or shall we carry you?"

Dicky gave a sigh.

"Oh, all right—but it's all rot!" he grunted. "Don't—don't touch that arm! I shall scream if you do! No, I can't put my overcoat on—I can't ride a bike, either. We shall have to walk."

He was very unsteady as they left the cloakroom. But Willy Handforth was in deadly earnest. He had a deep suspicion that there was something gravely wrong here. And Dr. Brett was the only man to discover the truth.

The fags had hardly reached the doorway when Willy's eyes took on a sudden gleam. A neat saloon car was just gliding away from the steps of the Ancient House. It was William Napoleon Browne's Morris-Oxford.

"Good!" said Willy crisply. "Browne's the man for the job!"

## CHAPTER VI.

### WILLY HANDFORTH'S VOW.



IT required a great deal to surprise William Napoleon Browne, but he was surprised now. The tall, elegant captain of the Fifth was about the coolest senior in the school,

and he generally took things with supreme sang-froid.

But when his car was rushed upon and attacked by a yelling horde of savages, he received a bit of a shock. The onslaught came without warning, too.

He had just started up, and was gliding past the West House when the affair burst upon him. The horde of savages turned out to be four members of the Third Form, but Browne had plenty of excuse for making the mistake.

With a series of wild yells, Willy Handforth & Co., assisted by Tommy Hobbs, fairly hurled themselves at the Morris-Oxford. Two of them leapt upon one foot-board, and two upon the other. Utterly regardless of life or limb, they hurled themselves into the battle.

"Stop!" roared Willy. "Just a minute, Browne!"

Browne had already applied his brakes, and slipped his gear into the neutral.

"Without wishing to be impolite, Brother Willy, might I point out that this procedure



is contrary to all the recognised standards of Safety First?" he asked mildly. "I have occasionally run down an unwary rat, and at intervals I have even removed a few hairs from a rabbit. But it would grieve me exceedingly to pulverise a fag."

"Don't jaw so much," retorted Willy. "We want your car."

"There is, of course, nothing like modesty——"

"What's more, we're going to have it!" said Willy grimly.

"Much as I hate these little contretemps, I fear there will be a difference of opinion on the subject," said Browne. "Brother Lemon, be good enough to remove your foot from the front wing. It is a fad of mine to preserve the enamel. Alas, life is full of woes! With perfectly peaceful intentions, I set out upon a brief jaunt to the village, and my car is now in danger of being wrecked before I can even cross the harbour bar."

"It's a first aid case, Browne," said Willy. "That beast, Sinclair, has twisted Dicky Jones' arm, and I believe he's broken it. We want you to rush the poor kid to the doctor's."

Browne changed his manner at once.

"Then why waste all this time in foolish delay?" he asked crisply. "Were the Brownes ever tardy in coming to the rescue? Place Brother Jones within the chariot, and we will step on the gas to some purpose."

During the first few moments, Browne had taken this affair to be a mere rag. But Willy's earnest tone—and the expression on his face—satisfied the Fifth Former that his early impression was wrong.

And Dicky Jones, in no condition to make much protest, was gently helped into the car, and the other fags piled in after him. The doors were slammed, and Willy waved to Browne.

"Right-ho—you can make her hum!" he said briskly.

Browne gave a glance at Dicky. The fag was sitting on the edge of the rear seat, supported by Willy and Chubby Heath. He was undoubtedly in a bad way, and the slightest touch caused him to wince.

"Be of good cheer, Brother Jones—we shall soon have you outstretched upon the operating table," said Browne comfortingly. "You have nothing whatever to fear, for if the doctor is absent, I will attend to your case personally. Courage is the watch-word."

"No need to go to the doctor at all!" muttered Dicky Jones rebelliously. "It's all rot! I shall be all right by tea-time!"

"Such," said Browne, "is gratitude!"

"I don't suppose his arm is badly crocked, but it's just as well to make sure," said Willy. "It's no good you growling, Dicky. We shan't be satisfied until Dr. Brett has examined you."

The car started, and was soon on its way to the village.

"Better fetch the doctor up to have a look at Sinclair while you're about it," said Dicky Jones presently. "He needs it more than I do."

"Eh?" said Willy. "What's happened to Sinclair?"

"Morrow knocked him out."

"Splendid!" beamed Browne, glancing round. "This is indeed news of cheering import. Details, Brother Jones! Do not leave us in this state of suspense."

"There's not much to tell," replied Dicky. "Morrow came in while Sinclair was twisting my arm, and he let fly. My hat! It was a beauty! Knocked Sinclair clean over, and smashed all the giddy tea things! The beast was absolutely out."

Willy pursed his lips.

"Why didn't I know this before?" he asked. "I gave those seniors a piece of my mind in the Day-room, and Morrow didn't even tell me that he'd biffed Sinclair over. I'd have been less severe if I'd known."

"As it was, I gather that you left the Senior Day-room in a state of quivering nervousness?" asked Browne. "I feel compelled to remark, Brother Willy, that in a matter of nerve you rank second only to myself. Be good enough to appreciate the high honour I am paying you."

"Honour?" sniffed Willy. "I'll admit your nerve's pretty hot, Browne, but I could beat it any day!"

"We will not pursue the subject," said Browne gracefully.

They had nearly reached the village by this time, and after passing down the High Street, the car pulled up in front of Dr. Brett's front gate. Dicky Jones was assisted out, and even Browne accompanied the fags to the front door. It was opened by a maidservant.

"Dr. Brett at home?" asked Willy briskly.

"Yes, but I am afraid he's engaged——"

"Urgent case!" interrupted Willy. "Please go and tell him that we can't wait. Not exactly a matter of life or death, but jolly urgent."

"Tell him he's not wanted at all!" said Dicky. "These fatheads dragged me here against my will——"

"Dry up, you young ass?" roared Willy.

The maidservant hardly knew what to make of these contradictory statements, but she ushered the visitors into the waiting-room, and vanished.

"Well, here we are," said Chubby Heath.

"You are full of useful information, Brother Heath," agreed Browne, nodding. "Even the most argumentative fellow will not deny that we are here. And, lo and behold, Brother Brett flows in."

Dr. Brett came into the room with a quick stride.



"Sorry, young 'uns—can't give you much time this afternoon," he said crisply. "I am full up with dispensing work—"

"Oh, blow your beastly medicines," interrupted Willy, frowning. "Just have a look at Dicky's arm. There's something wrong with it."

"It's nothing—only a twist," growled Dicky, still rebellious.

The doctor wasted no time. He stood over the patient, touched the arm once or twice, and looked rather grim.

"We'll have to have that jacket off," he said.

With deft fingers, he slipped the coat from Dicky Jones' back. The fag winced once or twice, but made no outcry. Then the doctor gently rolled up the shirt sleeve, and felt Dicky in the region of the shoulder. His expression became more serious.

"H'm!" he muttered. "It's a good thing you came."

"Is it serious, sir?" asked Dicky anxiously.

"No, not serious, but—"

Dr. Brett broke off, and Dicky Jones uttered a wild howl of anguish. For the doctor had given his arm a sudden peculiar pull, applying pressure to the shoulder at the same moment. The fag swayed dizzily, but Dr. Brett held him firmly.

"It's all right—all over now," he said quietly. "Sorry, youngster! I thought it better to do the trick without giving you any warning. Hurts, eh? Yes, you'll have to use a sling for a day or two. Your shoulder will be black and blue—"

"But what was it?" asked Willy, staring.

"Dislocated shoulder," rapped out the doctor. "This is what comes of fooling about, I suppose. You young scamps oughtn't to be so rough."

"A dislocated shoulder!" echoed Willy, taking a deep breath.

"It might have been serious if you hadn't brought him here without any delay," said the doctor. "I suppose I'd better not make too many inquiries, eh? Let's have another look."

He examined Dicky closely, applied soothing balms, and placed the fag's left arm in a sling—with a strict warning that it wasn't to be used for three days.

At last the party found itself outside again.

"Swift work," observed Browne approvingly. "Are we to assume, Brother Jones, that the temporary dislocation was caused by Brother Sinclair's excessive zeal?"

"The cad—the unutterable brute!" exclaimed Willy fiercely. "He twisted poor old Dicky's arm until he dislocated the shoulder! Think of it! Why, it's—it's horrible!"

"Brother Sinclair is in need of drastic correction," said Browne. "You must allow me to take full command of this situation. I shall regard it as a privilege to point out

the error of Brother Sinclair's ways to him—"

"And we shall regard it as a privilege if you keep out of it!" interrupted Willy tartly. "This isn't your affair, Browne! Like your giddy nerve! You're an Ancient House chap!"

Browne elevated his eyebrows.

"More useful information," he said smoothly. "May I ask to which House you belong, Brother Willy?"

"The Ancient House, of course—but I'm different," retorted Willy. "This is a Third Form affair, and we're going to deal with it in our own way. Dicky's one of our crowd, and we're going to avenge him. So don't you poach on our preserves, my lad!"

Browne sighed.

"Alas!" he said sadly. "Scorned—rejected! And yet, to be just, I confess that I see your point of view. Assure me that Brother Sinclair will soon be weltering in the broth, and I will relinquish my claims to his scalp. One word from you, Brother Willy—"

"You can leave it to me!" interrupted Willy firmly. "I told those seniors that I'd show 'em what to do with Sinclair! By jingo, they'll soon have a practical demonstration! Before we've done with Sinclair, he'll look less like a human being than ever!"

Browne smiled with benevolent peace.

"Something tells me, Brother William, that all will be well," he beamed. "It does my old heart good to hear these stirring words. I may be wrong in inciting you to acts of violence—but go to it!"

## CHAPTER VII.

### THE HOUSEMASTER'S SECRET.



MR. BEVERLEY STOKES started. "What is this?" he asked sharply.

Nobody in the Senior Day-room at the West House answered. The Housemaster was standing at the notice-board, reading Morrow's famous Vote of Censure.

He had entered the apartment a minute earlier, in order to have a few words with two of the seniors. Nobody had said anything about the Vote of Censure, and Mr. Stokes had seen it by accident.

"Is this your handwriting, Morrow?" asked the Housemaster, turning with a frown on his youthful face. "But I needn't ask. I am well-acquainted with your handwriting. What does it mean?"

"Isn't it clear enough, sir?" asked Morrow.

Mr. Stokes was silent for a moment. He realised that his question had been superfluous. The Vote of Censure was clear to the point of being painful. The Housemaster was nonplussed. He had entered



the Senior Day-room in quite a good humour, but now he was changed.

"I don't approve of this sort of thing, Morrow," he said curtly.

"I am sorry, sir."

"I shan't tear it down, but I would like you to know that I wish to see it destroyed," went on Mr. Stokes. "Things have come to a pretty pass when Sixth Form boys indulge in this type of nonsense."

Mr. Stokes' tone was not only bitter, but cutting. He spoke with much more irritation than the situation demanded. Of late he had been very irritable, indeed. The cheeriness which the fellows knew so well had deserted Mr. Stokes this term. In many respects he was a changed man.

It was nearly tea-time now, and the late January afternoon was becoming dusky. The Senior Day-room was still crowded, but Guy Sinclair had not shown up. He hadn't even seen the Vote of Censure yet.

"I'm sorry you regard it as nonsense, sir," said Morrow quietly.

"Why on earth can't you leave the fellow alone?" demanded Mr. Stokes. "Is there any necessity for this type of persecution? He is the head prefect of this House, and it is ridiculous to use such terms as 'despot' and 'tyrant.' And you have no right to accuse him of questionable conduct."

"But, hang it all, the man's an absolute outsider, sir," protested Frinton.

"I cannot have Sinclair subjected to this sort of petty spite," snapped Mr. Stokes. "In common fairness——"

"If you're going to talk of common fairness, sir, that Vote of Censure isn't half strong enough," interrupted Morrow fiercely. "We haven't done this without sufficient reason. The fellow's a cad. He's an utter bounder!"

"Hear, hear!"

"He ought to be kicked out!"

"We're sick of him!"

Mr. Stokes looked round with an angry frown.

"That's quite enough!" he snapped. "I don't intend to pursue the subject—but I strongly advise you to abandon these tactics. They won't do the least amount of good."

He strode out of the Senior Day-room without another word, and closed the door with unnecessary force. He didn't pause until he reached his own private quarters—beyond the louver-covered door which separated this section of the House from the schoolboy domain.

He entered his comfortable drawing-room in a state of fuming impatience, and didn't

notice the presence of his wife until she spoke.

"Why, Barry, has something upset you?" inquired Mrs. Stokes.

She looked absurdly young as she sat on the lounge, busily engaged with some fancy work. She put it down, and looked at her husband with sudden anxiety.

"That wretched boy again?" she asked.

"I'm worried, Joyce—infernally worried," said Mr. Stokes, sitting down heavily. "I'm so helpless! Matters are gradually coming to a head—steadily but surely—and I can't do a thing to stop them. This false position is driving me crazy!"

"But it'll soon be over now, Barry!" she said quietly. "It can't last much longer. We're expecting a letter from either Mr. Lambert or his son any day. And then you'll be able to send this young black-guard about his business. Oh, I could smack his face every time he passes me!"

"We've been expecting that letter for days, Joyce," said the young Housemaster slowly. "But, somehow, it doesn't come. And in the meantime I'm helpless—I've got to uphold Sinclair, and make myself unpleasant to the very boys I like the best. It's intolerable!"

He rose to his feet, and paced up and down.

"They've just pinned up a Vote of Censure," he went on. "I agree with it—I agree with every word of it! The thing isn't half strong enough! And yet I've advised the fellows to tear it down. What else can I do? That young demon will recommence his threats unless I'm careful. Thank Heaven I've been able to keep in the background for most of the time. Sinclair's running my House now—I'm nobody!" he added bitterly.

He sank down into the chair again and stared at the fire. And Mrs. Stokes made no comment. She had seen her husband in this worried state several times of late, but she had found it impossible to comfort him.

There is no smoke without fire—and the reason for Guy Sinclair's triumphant reign in the West House was perfectly simple, once the secret was revealed.

In a way, it was a sordid business.

Just before the end of the holidays, Mr. Stokes had been prevailed upon to do a service for a family friend—a Mr. Rodney Lambert. This gentleman's only son had been indiscreet enough to visit a notorious London night club—thus jeopardising his position as private secretary to Lord Swaffield, a peer who had made a dead set against all the night haunts of London.

In a fit of good-humour, Mr. Stokes had undertaken the task of fetching young Lambert away. But on that fateful night Guy Sinclair, accompanied by two questionable companions—not St. Frank's fellows—had been on the "razzle." They had seen Mr. Stokes within the night club, and Sinclair's friends, bent upon a rag, had taken a flashlight photograph.

# ANSWERS

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To make matters worse, young Lambert had been half-intoxicated and had resisted the Housemaster's efforts to get him away. A violent scene had followed. Both Mr. Stokes and Lambert had been thrown out—an affair which was liable to be misunderstood by casual witnesses.

But Mr. Stokes had succeeded, and he didn't mind much. He returned the foolish youth to his father, and had given his word of honour that he would breathe no word of that incident to a living soul. It was that promise which was now responsible for Mr. Stokes' unhappy predicament.

On the very first day of term, Mr. Sinclair had demanded the head prefectship of the West House—and had shown Mr. Stokes the photograph which had been taken in the night club. Sinclair, of course, was labouring under the delusion that Mr. Stokes had a guilty secret—one that was calculated to secure his instant dismissal if it reached the Headmaster's ears.

And Mr. Stokes' silence—enforced by that promise—only lent colour to Sinclair's assumption. Without delay, the Housemaster had taken steps to get in touch with the two Lamberts—the father being in America, and the son in the South of France. Once released from that promise, his arm would be strong. He would be able to pitch Sinclair out with scant ceremony.

But no letter had arrived yet, and Mr. Stokes was compelled to maintain his attitude of meek submission. But he was storing everything up. And he swore that there would be a day of reckoning.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### THE TROUBLES OF HANDFORTH.



"HALLO! Am I butting in?"

The cheery inquiry came from the doorway, and Mr. Stokes started up with an assumed air of geniality.

"Don't be silly, Mary!" he said, smiling. "You've come at just about the right time. Tea will soon be in now. What have you been doing with yourself all the afternoon?"

Mary Summers advanced into the drawing-room, and gazed keenly at her aunt and uncle. She had been staying with them for a few days, and her visit was booked to continue for quite a few weeks. She was a girl of about fifteen—slim, graceful, and dark-eyed. Lots of the West House fellows were ready to swear that she was the prettiest girl for miles.

"There's something the matter," she said quietly. "I've noticed it before, uncle. Whenever I come in, you both freeze up, and pretend to be careless and cheery. I hope I'm not in the way here?"



"Stop that, you cowardly hound!" shouted Morrow hotly. "Good heavens, Sinclair, can't you do anything but bully these helpless fags?"

"How can you be so ridiculous, Mary?" laughed Mrs. Stokes. "In the way, indeed! I'm dreading the day when you will leave!" "Then what's all the mystery about?" asked the girl bluntly. "I do believe it's got something to do with that dreadful boy, Sinclair."

Mr. and Mrs. Stokes exchanged a swift glance.

"There you are—I knew it!" said Mary promptly.

"I wish you wouldn't ask any questions, Mary," said Mr. Stokes, placing an arm round her shoulder. "I can assure you there's nothing really secretive in the affair—and before long you will know everything."

Mary smiled up at him.

"That's all right, uncle," she said. "It's horrid of me to be so inquisitive. But were you talking about tea?"

"It'll be in very shortly now——"

"Sorry, Auntie, but I'm booked out," interrupted the girl. "I've promised to have tea in the Ancient House, with Dick and Tommy and Montie."

"Great Scott! With whom?" asked Mr. Stokes.

"Don't you know who Dick is?" asked Mary.

"I am well aware that you are referring to Hamilton and Watson and Tregellis—"



West," retorted her uncle. "But you appear to be on very familiar terms with these boys, Mary! So it's come to taking tea with them, eh? There's no holding you youngsters nowadays!"

"I couldn't refuse," protested Mary. "Besides, I know you don't mind——"

"Not a bit!" laughed Mr. Stokes. "I was only joking. But it certainly strikes me that Master Hamilton is the favoured one. I have seen you with him every day this week, Mary."

The girl flushed slightly.

"Well, what about it?" she challenged. "You've seen me with the others, too. Is that clock right? Half-past four! I shall be late!"

She hurried out, and lost no time in crossing the West Square to the Ancient House. And in less than two minutes she was tapping upon the door of Study C, in the Remove passage.

She had left her aunt and uncle so hastily because she was rather confused. Mr. Stokes' shot had gone home. She had certainly been favouring Dick Hamilton—more familiarly known as Nipper—to a greater extent than the others. And Edward Oswald Handforth, the celebrated leader of Study D, was torn with doubt and jealousy in consequence.

Mary's presence in the school, in fact, was disturbing. Irene & Co., of the Moor View School, were some distance away—a fellow was only liable to meet one occasionally. But Mary was actually at St. Frank's, and there was no telling when she would run into a chap. Of late there had been a marked smartening up in the Remove. Mr. Crowell, the Form-master, had felt impelled to congratulate his boys on their smartness and general appearance.

Handforth, particularly, was transformed. Formerly, he had gone about with baggy trousers and linen that was none too clean and crumpled. But now he was always spotless. Church and McClure were having the time of their lives, for their aggressive leader was afraid to enter into any serious rough-and-tumble. Violent rows in Study D were becoming obsolete.

A slight altercation was taking place in that famous apartment even as Mary was knocking at the door of the next study. Handforth was more than usually dandified. His hair was glossy, his collar was white as snow, and his clothing sat upon him with perfect grace. Even Archie Glenthorne was reconsidering his former opinions of Edward Oswald.

"You can't do it, Handy," Church was saying. "It wouldn't be the thing at all. You can't palm yourself on that tea-party without an invitation."

"We're all going," said Handforth firmly.

"Not likely," declared McClure. "You may be dotty on Mary Summers, but we're not. I should think we know where to draw the line!"

"Rather!" agreed Church.

Handforth glared.

"Mary Summers?" he repeated, with badly assumed astonishment. "Oh, is she going to be there?"

Church grinned.

"You do it well, old man, but you can't spoof us," he said kindly. "You wouldn't be bursting to take tea in Study C if Mary wasn't the invited guest. And look at the way you've dolled yourself up!"

"You silly fathead!" roared Handforth. "For two pins I'll—I'll——"

"Better go easy," suggested McClure. "She'll hear you—there's only this thin wall between us."

Handforth gave a gulp.

"She hasn't arrived yet, has she?" he asked eagerly. "I didn't think she was going to turn up until five!"

"You're a fine swain!" snorted Church. "Half a minute, though," he added. "I thought you tried to kid us that you didn't know anything about Mary's presence. You're bowled out, old man. Why not give it up as a bad job?"

"You might just as well," added McClure. "You don't stand an earthly chance against Nipper. My poor old chap, she doesn't care a couple of straws about you! All these clean collars and fancy waistcoats are wasted. Nipper's the chap she likes. Didn't she refuse your invitation to tea yesterday? And hasn't she accepted Nipper's to-day? Why say more?"

Handforth looked sad.

"It's a dirty trick!" he said unhappily. "Those bounders have all the luck! But they can't dish me like that!" he added grimly. "We're going to stroll into Study C—just as though Mary wasn't there—and sit down at the table. Fellows are always doing it."

"Not when there's a special guest," protested McClure.

"But we shall pretend she isn't there," argued Handforth earnestly.

"I can see it coming off!" grinned Church. "When you start pretending, Handy, you make an obvious thing about ten times as obvious! They'll spot your game in a tick, and biff you out on your neck! You can't afford to take a risk like that with Mary looking on!"

Handforth frowned.

"Leave it to me, and there'll be no biffing out!" he said firmly. "Well, ready? We're going in now."

"Are we?"

"Yes, we are."

"Oh, well, you seem to have made up our minds, so there's nothing more to be said," said Church drily.

"What do you mean—I've made up your minds?"

"You ass, you're always doing it!" snorted McClure. "We haven't had any minds of our own for years! How often do we get a voice in? If we want to go somewhere, and you don't—well, we don't go. But if you want to go somewhere, and we're against it—we do





27. Then you ask a question like that! Still, this time you're wrong."

"Absolutely wrong!" agreed Church. "You can butt into Nipper's tea-party if you like—but we're not. We made up our minds before you made 'em up for us. So that's final. As a matter of fact, we're taking tea with Fullwood and Russell. They asked us this afternoon."

And Church and McClure strolled to the door.

"Wait a minute!" gasped Handforth. "You can't leave me in the lurch like this. You deserters! You unfaithful rotters! There'll be no chance unless the three of us pile in. I couldn't do a thing like that on my own—it would look too glaring."

"It'll look just as glaring if we all do it—and we're rather keen on our manners," said Church stiffly. "My hat, isn't it marvellous what love will do to a chap? He doesn't know the difference between right and wrong, and he loses all sense of proportion. Of course, it's a form of madness. Poor old Ted—you're badly bitten!"

Handforth opened his mouth to speak, but the words failed to form themselves. Church and McClure marched out, and in less than ten seconds they had vanished. Safely within Study I, they told Ralph Leslie Fullwood and Clive Russell all about it—and one tea-party, at least, was hilarious.

## CHAPTER IX.

### A STICKY BUSINESS.



"**M**ORE tea, Mary, old girl?"

Sir Montie Tregellis-West, in his

very best manner, held out his

hand for the fair guest's cup.

The fact that it was quite full

had escaped Montie's attention. He and his fellow-hosts were pressing Mary to partake of all sorts of dainty dishes.

"What about one of these cream-puffs?" asked Nipper.

"Or another sardine-sandwich?" pressed Tommy Watson.

"Steady! I can't eat everything at once, can I?" laughed Mary. "I'd no idea you'd have such a wonderful spread as this."

Study C was certainly looking unusually festive. With a crackling fire in the grate, there was an air of genial cheeriness about the apartment. The table was covered with a gleaming white cloth, and the tea-things and dishes were of exceptional quality. For a junior study, indeed, they were astonishingly good. Mary didn't know that Nipper had spent a full hour conjuring up the various items from every corner of the Ancient House.

"Hallo! Having tea?"

The door opened abruptly, and Handforth strolled in. But as he made the remark before he was actually inside the study, much

of its effect was lost. It was obviously a prepared speech.

He took two strides into the room, and then started violently.

"Oh, sorry!" he apologised. "You've got a visitor, eh? Good-evening, Mary! Awfully pleased to see you here! I'd no idea—I mean— Sorry, Watson, old man!"

He nearly knocked Tommy Watson out of his chair as he reached across the table to shake hands with Mary. Unfortunately, Watson was drinking his tea at the moment, and about half a cupful descended into his lap.

"You clumsy ass!" he howled, leaping up.

"Eh? My hat," gasped Handforth, "what the dickens did you do that for? You ought to be more careful in the presence of a lady! Where's my chair?" he added, looking round.

"You left the door open, Handy," remarked Nipper politely. "You don't mind closing it as you go out, do you?"

"But I'm not going out, you fathead!" snorted Handforth. "I—I mean— Sorry! You're not a fathead, of course. I'd forgotten Mary was here when I said that."

Considerably flustered, he closed the door, but omitted to place himself on the other side. As there was no fifth chair in the study, he was rather helpless. The table wasn't very big, either. It comfortably accommodated one on either side.

"What were we talking about?" asked Watson stiffly. "Oh, I know! Montie was saying that Irene is looking rather pale lately—as though she has suffered some serious loss."

"Begad!" ejaculated Sir Montie. "Really, old boy, I don't remember—"

Watson winked across the table.

"Haven't you noticed it?" he asked in surprise. "Poor old Irene! A jolly nice girl, you know! It must be pretty hard lines when a fellow drops her like a hot brick, and forgets all about her!"

"A chap like that ought to be boiled!" said Nipper firmly.

Handforth felt that something was going to break. It wasn't so much that he was being studiously ignored, but the conversation was painful. He had always had a tender spot for Irene Manners—until the arrival of Mary. Indeed, it was generally acknowledged that he and Irene were friendly in the extreme. Church and McClure declared that he was touched on the subject. But of late he had neglected her shamefully.

"Er— No; I mean— What?" said Handforth feebly.

"Hallo! Still here?" asked Nipper, turning round. "Anything we can do for you, Handy?"

"Well, I—I thought— Tea, you know," said Handforth. "Of course, I can't stay!" he added hastily. "Great Scott, no! Thanks all the same, but I'm booked. I just—er— just dropped in, you know."



"Then what about just dropping out?" suggested Nipper. "As you can't stay, we wouldn't dream of detaining you."

"It's too bad!" laughed Mary. "I believe he wants to join us at tea all the time. In fact, I'm sure he does."

"Not at all!" said Handforth hastily. "Still, if you really insist— Eh? Anything wrong, Nipper?"

"I don't like to be blunt; but you're spoiling the tea-party," said Nipper firmly. "If you want to make yourself useful, Handy, go and make some toffee. You're famous for treacle-toffee. That last lot you made was hanging about the House for a month."

"It stuck to our boots wherever we walked," said Watson, grinning.

"Treacle-toffee?" asked Mary, her eyes sparkling. "Oh, how lovely! I'm terribly fond of treacle-toffee."

"You—you mean it?" gasped Handforth. "I say, would you like me to make some?"

"I'd love it!" she declared.

"It's a bit risky——" began Watson dubiously.

"But treacle-toffee is my favourite," insisted Mary. "Can you really make it, Ted? It would be perfectly lovely to have some real home-made stuff. And if you made it, it would be all the better!"

Edward Oswald nearly reeled with joy. He hadn't the faintest idea that Mary was taking her cue from the others, and pulling his leg. The one thought which throbbed through his brain was that she wanted some treacle-toffee—his treacle-toffee. A keen light entered his eyes.

"I'll make it right away!" he promised tensely. "You'll be here for another hour, won't you? Good! It'll be done long before then. Promise me you won't go until I come in with it."

"If you won't be too long——"

"Trust me!" said Handforth briskly.

He dashed to the door, tore it open, and flew out. The tea-party in Study C relapsed into helpless mirth for a few minutes, before continuing the meal. And Handforth tore off to the domestic quarters, in search of the necessary ingredients.

He even didn't mind being left out of the tea-party. Mary wanted to try some of his treacle-toffee—and even Nipper hadn't received an honour like that! He made up his mind to manufacture a tremendous lot of it.

For a fleeting second an uncomfortable thought entered his mind. He had made some treacle-toffee once before—but even his loyal chums had scarcely called it a success. In the first place, he had made it in a saucepan which had previously been used for glue—a sheer piece of carelessness on Church's part. In the second place, he had cooked the toffee until it was pitch black, and appallingly bitter.

In short, the toffee-making episode had been a ghastly failure. But Handforth did not allow such uncomfortable thoughts to enter his head now. He had been asked to make some treacle-toffee for Mary—and

nothing short of raging lions would have turned him from his purpose.

There was one slight drawback. On the earlier occasion he had worked in accordance with a recipe. But it was lost now, and he would have to rely upon his memory. Not that a trifle of this sort made much difference. He knew, at least, that he would require treacle. And he also knew that treacle could be found in one of the big store-rooms.

He penetrated to the vicinity of the kitchen—this section of the House being, of course, quite out of bounds. By sheer luck he escaped attention, and when he turned into a narrow passage, where three or four store-rooms were situated, he was still undetected.

None of the doors were locked, for the cooks and maids were busily at work near at hand, and nothing would be locked up until late in the evening.

Handforth was so fired with determination that he was prepared to take any amount of risks. Indeed, he didn't realise there were any risks. He only knew that he had to obtain some treacle. That ingredient, at least, had firmly impressed itself upon his mind. He could still vividly remember the awful mess that Study D had been in on the earlier occasion.

Luck was with him. By the sheerest possible chance he entered the very store-room where the treacle was kept. He didn't know that it was the main supply, however. In a great school like St. Frank's, vinegar, treacle, sugar, etc.; were stored by the case or barrel.

In a cupboard not far off cans of treacle could have been found, but Handforth had come to the chief supply. He found himself staring fascinatedly at a big barrel of it. There was no doubt regarding the barrel's contents. It was plainly labelled treacle, and to clinch matters, some of the stuff was oozing out at the top.

But the barrel was unopened, and untapped. There was a huge bung below, but Handforth didn't even see it. He confined his attention to the top. And in such a mood as his he was prepared to indulge in any act of destruction. Mary wanted some treacle toffee, and there was nothing more to be said.

Naturally there was only one inevitable result.

Handforth found a crowbar, forced the top of the barrel completely out, and found an everlasting supply of treacle at his service. He tore up the last portion of the lid with a gasp of satisfaction.

Unhappily he caught the piece of wood against a shelf which lay immediately overhead. There was an ominous metallic sound as a can of paraffin oil toppled over, and came hurtling down. That paraffin had no right to be there, it had been



thoughtlessly placed in the store-room by one of the domestics.

And it was falling straight into the treacle.

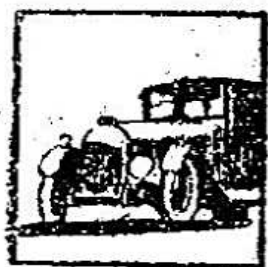
Handforth made a valiant attempt to avert the disaster, and only involved himself in a greater one. A blob of treacle had fallen to the floor, and he skidded dizzily upon it as he reached out.

The next second, with a gasp of unutterable horror, he thudded against the top of the barrel, overbalanced, and pitched into the sticky mass. The can of oil caught him between the shoulders, and rolled past him into the treacle.

Edward Oswald Handforth gave one gurgle, and dead silence followed—a thick, sticky silence.

## CHAPTER X.

### WILLY ON THE WARPAT.



**W**ILLY HANDFORTH frowned thoughtfully.

"You cut off to the West House, Chubby, and do some scouting," he said. "Be back here with-

in five minutes, and bring the information. If you haven't got it, don't come. In fact, you'd better not let me see you for a week. Understand?"

"What have I got to do?" asked Chubby. "It's a bit thick, threatening me—"

"This is no time for half measures," interrupted Willy curtly. "You've got to find out exactly where Sinclair is, and bring me the details. Before we undertake this raid we've got to know the position. Sinclair's going through the hoop this evening, and we're going to carry the affair through with clockwork-like precision. My hat! We'll teach those weak-kneed seniors a lesson!"

Chubby vanished into the gloom. The leading lights of the Third were gathered in the shelter of the West Arch, and the Triangle was black and dim. Nothing could be seen but the gleaming lights of the Modern House and the East House across the way. It was still raining slightly, but nothing to hurt. There were signs of a clearing up.

Willy had had no tea. He hadn't even thought of tea. Even that important meeting regarding the headmaster's dug-up garden had been shelved. The other fags were rather disgruntled, but they knew better than to breathe a word of complaint in Willy's hearing. He was in one of his most determined moods. The first grumbler would know all about it if he dared to open his mouth.

It had to be something particularly urgent for Willy to miss tea and not

know it. But this affair of Dicky Jones had worked him up to a fine pitch of indignation. Unquestionably, the leader of the Third was justified in his warlike attitude.

Guy Sinclair had committed an atrocity.

It was one thing to swish a fellow, and it was another thing to twist the arm of a helpless fag until his shoulder was dislocated. It wasn't merely an act of bullying, but a piece of utter savagery. And it demanded swift and complete punishment. As Willy himself had said, half measures were useless.

Sinclair was not the kind of fellow to take any notice of a mere rag. His punishment had to be something out of the ordinary. To leave it to the seniors was impossible. Willy could not trust them to take strong action: They would only talk, talk, talk. Sinclair would be ostracised, or something like that, and he would simply laugh at the whole business.

But he wouldn't laugh by the time Willy had done with him.

Dicky Jones had been taken indoors, and comfortably settled in an easy chair, with some books to read. He had strict orders not to move or to exert himself. His shoulder had swollen, and he couldn't move his arm much. Indeed, Dr. Brett had ordered him to report to his Housemaster, and to go into the "sanny." But Willy had scorned this suggestion.

The unfortunate fag's agony had cut Willy to the quick. Even now Dicky was in continuous pain, and that hulking cur was the cause of it. The Third had made up its mind to act strongly, and to risk the consequences. They wouldn't even take the trouble to act secretly. Everything Willy declared, should be open and public.

"I hope Chubby comes back and tells us that Sinclair's in the Senior Day-room," said Willy anxiously. "That's the place we want to collar him, before the eyes of all the others. It'll be an object lesson!"

"But we shall be half slaughtered afterwards—" began Juicy.

"Never mind about afterwards," interrupted Willy. "I'll take all the blame; it's my idea, anyhow. If Sinclair likes to make a fuss let him. I don't think he'll be keen on an inquiry."

"No; by George, we've got him there!" agreed Owen minor.

"What's that moving over by the West House?" asked Juicy suddenly. "Can't you chaps see a figure in the Square? There's something queer—"

He broke off and started. The other fags were equally puzzled. A strange-looking figure was lurching towards the archway, keeping to an erratic course. It reeled up, accompanied by a peculiar gurgling sound.

"What is it?" breathed Juicy Lemon, startled.



Willy Handforth pulled out an electric torch and flashed it on. He was in no mood to be interrupted by minor trivialities. If any idiot was trying to be funny—

"Great guns!" ejaculated Willy blankly.

He was momentarily taken aback. His companions simply stood there and gaped. For the newcomer was quite unrecognisable, and in an extraordinary plight. He was obviously a junior, and his head and shoulders were entirely obliterated by a sticky, messy mass of black substance which rendered his features indistinguishable.

The sticky stuff dripped down, and left a trail of blobs along the pathway. And the unhappy junior came onwards with outstretched hands as though feeling the way.

"Hold on, there!" said Willy. "Mind where you're going, you ass! What's happened? Who's been having a game?"

The figure paused and gave an extra loud gurgle.

"Clear off!" it spluttered thickly. "Where's the fountain pool? Gimme some water. I'm nearly suffocated!"

Willy nodded with pitying understanding.

"My major!" he said tartly. "I might have known it. Trust Ted to get himself into trouble. What's that all over you, you ass? Glue?"

"It's treacle!" panted Handforth stickily. "I fell into a barrel of it just now, and got out through the window. My goodness! I'm in a horrible state!"

"Treacle!" repeated Juicy Lemon. "It smells more like paraffin!"

"It was that rotten paraffin which caused the trouble!" snorted Handforth, attempting to wipe some of the mess off his face. "The can fell off the shelf, and I tried to save it. But I couldn't. I went right into that giddy barrel, and the paraffin poured down my neck!"

"And then into the treacle, I suppose?" asked Willy.

"Yes."

"We shall be having some wonderful treacle puddings before long," said Willy grimly. "You wasteful bounder. That's a whole barrel of treacle gone West. What on earth were you doing? My hat!" he added abruptly. "A barrel of ruined treacle. They can't use it indoors. Why shouldn't we— Yes, by jingo, it's an idea!"

A keen light had come into Willy's eyes. He looked at his chums, and beckoned them aside.

"We're going to improve on our original plan," he said crisply. "As soon as Chubby comes back we'll make the final arrangements."

The unfortunate Edward Oswald was completely forgotten. His toffee-making project had ended in complete disaster. He had every reason to feel miserable. He wouldn't

be able to keep his promise to Mary, and every stick of clothing on him was ruined. And there would probably be an inquiry about that treacle. He staggered towards the fountain pool with a dull sense of hopelessness within him.

But his minor was overjoyed at the turn of events.

In the meantime Guy Sinclair emerged from his obscurity. Nobody had seen him since the early afternoon. Morrow had been the last fellow to set eyes on the head prefect, and at that moment Sinclair had been outstretched on the floor of his study, suffering from the effects of a knock-out.

Even Kenmore hadn't been able to find him, although Kenmore was anxious to tell him all about the Vote of Censure. The reason for Sinclair's retirement was a simple one.

He was recovering.

Locked in his own bed-room, he indulged in a two-hours' sleep, and awoke soon after tea-time with a dull headache, to say nothing of a vile temper. His jaw felt as though a steamhammer had been at it. It was so tender that he could hardly touch his chin. It was swollen, too—perceptibly. There was a puffiness about his jaws. And there wasn't a tooth in his head that didn't ache. That punch of Morrow's had been a real beauty.

However, after a wash and a dose of aspirin tablets, Sinclair felt that it would be a wise move on his part to go downstairs. In fact, it had been a mistake to remain absent for so long. For Morrow would have talked, and everybody would be assuming that that knock-out had been even worse.

So, without waiting to go into his study, Sinclair strolled casually into the Senior Day-room, as though nothing unusual had happened. He assumed an air of careless sangfroid that he was far from feeling.

"Hallo! Lots of people at home, I see," he observed genially.

The Senior Day-room was well filled. Indeed, Morrow and Chambers and a few of the others had been discussing Mr. Stokes' attitude, and they were wondering what to do with that notice on the board.

Everybody stared at Sinclair, but nobody answered. As it happened, neither Kenmore nor Parkin were in the room. There were none of Sinclair's cronies present to back him up.

"Stony silence, eh?" said Sinclair, with a nasty twist of his mouth. "I suppose you've been talking, Morrow? Spreading scandal? That's just the sort of thing you would do!"

Morrow deliberately turned his back and spoke to Phillips.

"Confound your nerve!" shouted Sinclair, his ragged temper unable to bear the strain. "If you think you can ignore me without paying— Hallo! What the thunder—"

He broke off, staring.

He had advanced across the room, and was now close to the notice-board. The un-



familiar foolscap sheet caught his eye, and he scowled with growing rage as he read the words upon it. His face became deeply flushed.

"You fools!" he said thickly. "Who started this? If you don't approve of my methods, why don't you appeal to Stokes?"

With a hiss of his breath, he tore the Vote of Censure down and ripped it into shreds. At the same moment the door flew open, and Willy Handforth stood there. Behind him were his army of avengers.

## CHAPTER XI.

### MAKING THE PUNISHMENT FIT THE CRIME.



**A** T T E N T I O N!  
March!"

The command came sharply and impressively. Willy Handforth strode into the Senior Day-room as though he owned the place. In close attendance came the other Third-Formers—five of them. Willy was looking perfectly calm and cool, but with a grim light in his eyes. The others, it must be confessed, were decidedly nervous, and showed it. But where Willy led them they were bound to go. There was no thought of mutiny in the ranks.

"What the——" began Morrow.

He was the only Senior to speak. The others simply stood there, looking at the invading fags. They were too surprised to make any comment. Such a thing as this had never happened before. It was an event in the history of St. Frank's.

If a fag came to the Senior Day-room he came by order of a prefect or a master, and he always revealed the correct amount of awe when setting foot into that lordly apartment. But Willy & Co. simply swept in without any knock on the door, and without taking the slightest notice of the occupants.

It was certainly an extraordinary affair.

Guy Sinclair had no suspicion of danger. He gave one glare at the fags and then pointed at the doorway.

"Get out!" he thundered.

They advanced as though he hadn't spoken.

"You infernal young brat!" he roared.

"Get out of this room! Handforth minor, this isn't your House——"

"Seize him!" said Willy smoothly.

He ignored Sinclair with such supreme indifference that two or three of the other seniors started grinning. There was no suggestion of impudence in Willy's manner; he acted just as though he had heard nothing.

"I say, hadn't we better——" began Chubby Heath nervously.

"Seize him!" repeated Willy fiercely.

And the next second Guy Sinclair received the surprise of his life. He was in a towering rage, mainly because of that Vote of



The fag was sitting on the edge of the rear seat, supported by Willy and Chubby Heath. He was undoubtedly in a bad way, and the slightest touch caused him to wince.

Censure, but aggravated by reason of this Third Form intrusion.

At exactly the same second Willy & Co. sprang upon the head prefect, three on either side. It was a complete surprise. Sinclair, who was expecting no such move, went down at the first onslaught. Before he knew where he was, he was lying flat on his face, and Willy Handforth was sitting on his head. Any hope of speech was out of the question, since Sinclair's nose and mouth were pressed deeply into the hearthrug. Two other fags sprawled over his middle, and two more kept his feet down. The sixth rallied round with ropes.

"Good!" said Willy. "Bind him!"

"Well, I'm hanged!" ejaculated Stanhope, aghast.

"It's a bit thick——" began Chambers.

"Not our business," interrupted Morrow curtly.

He turned his back, and the others took their cue. Every senior was heartily glad to witness Sinclair's discomfiture. And every senior longed to pounce upon the cad, and help with the good work. But they still allowed their dignity to stand as a barrier.

Willy & Co. gave their sole attention to their prisoner. The Senior Day-room might have been empty for all the attention they paid to its other occupants. With deft fingers they bound Sinclair's feet, roped his



arms behind him, and tied a thick scarf over his mouth.

"All ready?" asked Willy at length. "Good! Get into position. Now, then—all together! March!"

Sinclair was raised from the floor with a jerk. And thus, face downwards, with three fags on either side, he was carried triumphantly out of the room. The capture had been made so methodically and coolly that the other seniors could hardly believe that the incident had really happened.

No fuss, no commotion, nothing but a swift descent and a rapid exit. There wasn't the slightest sign of the recent invasion. Guy Sinclair had been taken away with perfect organisation.

Out in the corridor were other fags—Button, Hope, and Mason, of the West House; Gates and Blythe, of the Ancient House; Tommy Tripp and Deakin and Harper, of the Modern House; Jimmy Hook and Simms minor, of the East House. These were just a few of the Third Form heroes who lined the route of triumph. To be exact, the entire Third were on the job.

It was a sort of procession. As the unhappy head prefect was carried between the rows of fags, they hissed him with extraordinary violence, and then fell into place in the rear. An exit was made through the rear door, into the West Square, where farther fags were waiting.

Round the West Square, past the clump of poplars, and into the thick trees behind the chapel. Here the procession halted.

It was gloomy and secluded, although not absolutely dark. The clouds had finally broken, and a full moon was shining. The light was quite sufficient for the purpose in hand.

The fags gathered round in a huge circle, and Willy & Co. halted in the centre. There was something about this whole affair which spoke of rehearsals and careful preparation.

"Off with the gag," said Willy briskly. "And untie his ankles. That's all! Leave his arms bound."

Sinclair was jerked to his feet, and the ankle ropes were slashed. Then the scarf was removed. There was no possibility of escape, for he was in the centre of a complete ring.

"You—you young demons!" he panted hoarsely. "I'll have some of you sacked for this! Let me go——"

"You have been tried and sentenced by the Third Form, Guy Sinclair," interrupted Willy curtly. "The order is that you shall be tarred and feathered. Have you anything to say?"

"You mad young fools!" screamed Sinclair. "If you put any tar on me, I'll—I'll——" He paused, choking, realising the futility of his threats. And he was genuinely scared. "Let me go!" he went on. "Let me go, I tell you! If you drop all this, I'll forget it!"

"We want you to remember it—so we shan't drop it!" retorted Willy coolly. "This afternoon you twisted Dicky Jones'

arm until you dislocated his shoulder! Dr. Brett can prove it. And now you're going to pay! The Third doesn't allow brutes of your sort to escape scot free!"

"Yah! Hooligan!"

"Savage!"

The Third backed up their leader's condemnation with a series of catcalls. Sinclair nearly fainted with fright. Indeed, he gave such an exhibition of arrant cowardice that the fags were disgusted. The fellow wasn't even worth ragging! He was too contemptible to touch.

"Let the punishment proceed!" said Willy sternly.

"Wait!" panted Sinclair shakily. "I'll give you all some money if you let me go! Ten bob each——"

"Let the punishment proceed—and let it be stronger than ever!" interrupted Willy. "It's rather a pity we haven't got any tar. I think tar would be the best stuff."

Sinclair started.

"You mean—you mean you were fooling me?" he snarled.

"Oh, don't worry!" replied Willy. "Even if we haven't got any tar, we've got plenty of treacle! There's a certain amount of paraffin with it, so it'll do you good. They often exterminate vermin with paraffin. Ready, you chaps? Let him have it!"

For about ten seconds Sinclair yelled with helpless rage. Then his voice was still—dramatically and significantly. Assisted by Willy & Co., he had dived head-first into the treacle barrel, which the fags had raided and had brought out to this secluded spot. Even at this moment the entire domestic staff of the West House was in a ferment over the affair—not that Willy cared. That was their worry—not his.

Sinclair went right in until he vanished. Then three of the fags—specially protected by sacking—fished him out and dumped him to the ground. Sinclair had vanished. In his place lay a mass of sticky treacle—a black thing which only slightly resembled a human being.

"Good!" sang out Willy. "Stand back and let him have it!"

The fags backed away, and Sinclair struggled to his feet, making glutinous noises. And simultaneously the fags hurled handfuls of feathers, obtained from numerous pillow-cases. The air became thick with clouds of feathers, and Sinclair was the centre of the storm.

A rapid change was effected.

Instead of being a black object of stickiness, Sinclair resembled a snow-man. The feathers adhered to every fraction of the sticky surface, and when he managed to reel through his crowd of tormentors, he made blindly for the West House.

He had suffered no pain, but the indignity of this punishment was a thousand-fold more effective than any physical hurt. He, the head prefect of the West House, had



been "tarred" and feathered by the Third Form! It was the most deadly insult that any St. Frank's prefect had ever undergone.

## CHAPTER XII.

### THE LAUGHING-STOCK OF ST. FRANK'S.



**A**S Sinclair ran, his chief emotion was one of relief.

The degradation of this treatment was terrible enough, but he had suffered no pain. And, being a

coward, he was relieved to find himself at liberty, with the punishment obviously over.

But his emotions quickly changed.

He dreaded the thought of meeting anybody. If only he could get into his room unobserved, he would tear his sticky things off, conceal them, and go downstairs as though nothing had happened. And he could easily deny any rumours that circulated. It would destroy his prestige for all time if the school knew of this catastrophe. Why, within a hour he would be the laughing-stock of St. Frank's! The other Houses would howl with merriment. For weeks he wouldn't be able to show his face.

The thing was a fact—it had actually happened—but if there were no other witnesses beyond the fags, complete disaster would be averted. Sinclair would swear the story was a lie, and would visit the Third Form—or his section of it, at least—with relentless punishment. The School could suspect, but it couldn't be certain.

So Guy Sinclair pulled himself up short before he reached the doorway. So far he had escaped attention—and he was convinced that he would be able to get indoors in secret. It was only a matter of caution. The fags, thank goodness, were not following him up as he had feared they would.

Sinclair was just at the angle of the West House, near the Triangle. He concluded that it would be better to skirt the wing, enter the West Square, and get in by means of the rear door. There was far less likelihood of being seen.

"Good gracious me!"

Sinclair gave a violent start as a dim figure came along, and paused, peering at him through thick spectacles. Unluckily, he was in the full moonlight, and stood out prominently. The newcomer was none other than Professor Sylvester Tucker, the absent-minded science master.

"Extraordinary!" said the professor, examining Sinclair with amazement. "What is this? It moves! It actually possesses animation! Yet it cannot be human——"

"Get out of the way!" snarled Sinclair thickly.

Professor Tucker jumped a yard.

"Upon my soul!" he gasped. "A boy! Ah, yes, to be sure! A boy covered with some furry material. Obviously a form of joke. Ah, boys will be boys, I suppose.

But you mustn't attempt to play your tricks upon me, young man."

"Confound you, move!" muttered Sinclair.

He pushed past the professor, and vanished round the angle—deciding now to try the front entrance. During the delay some of the fags had come up, and the other way of retreat was barred.

Professor Tucker was more puzzled than ever. Sinclair had only just touched him, yet he was smothered with feathers. And there was something sticky on his sleeve—something which gave the science master a shock. He was a somewhat fussy gentleman, and anything of a sticky nature always annoyed him.

"This—this is dreadful!" he ejaculated, aghast. "Good heavens! Oil! Thick, disgusting oil! Or is it treacle? Boy—boy! Come back at once, and let me know your name——"

But Sinclair had already rushed into the West House lobby, and the very first person he encountered was Mary Summers. He paused, inwardly groaning. Fate was against him. Professor Tucker had failed to recognise him, but Mary wouldn't.

As a matter of fact, the girl took one glance at the extraordinary apparition, and nodded. She could see no face—only a walking mass of feathers. But her first guess was correct.

"Good-evening, Sinclair!" she said calmly. "I can see some of the boys have been giving you a taste of what you deserved."

Sinclair nearly choked.

"Confound your impudence!" he muttered fiercely.

"I'm afraid they weren't half severe enough, though," went on the girl. "I've heard all about Dicky's arm, you coward! I hope they horsewhipped you before——"

"Get out of my way, you interfering little cat!" panted Sinclair. "If you say a word about this to anybody——"

"Why should I say anything?" interrupted Mary. "The whole school will know in less than ten minutes. Quick, Ted! You, too, Dick! Look at Sinclair! Doesn't he look perfectly wonderful!"

Sinclair stood there, helpless with rage.

All his hopes of escaping attention were dead. Nipper, Tregellis-West, Watson, Handforth, and several others were crowding up. Even Browne, of the Fifth, and Fenton and Wilson of the Sixth, were among the interested spectators. The seniors, however, remained at a discreet distance.

"Is that Sinclair?" asked Handforth, with satisfaction. "Good! That treacle seems to be pretty useful! Wouldn't it be a good idea to get some soot, and——"

"It's not our affair, Handy," interrupted Nipper. "Leave it to the West House—and the Third. They don't seem to have made a bad start, anyhow."

"The Third!" roared Handforth. "This is my stunt!"





"Yours?" asked Mary. "I didn't know—"

"Didn't I upset the paraffin into the treacle?" asked Handforth triumphantly. "If that hadn't happened, those fags wouldn't have thought of this wheeze. So it's only fair to regard it as mine."

"Trust you to take the credit, old man!" grinned Watson. "Not that it matters who thought of the thing. Sinclair's been tarred and feathered—or much the same thing. My hat! What a come-down!"

"Perhaps he won't be so despotic after this," nodded Church.

Sinclair managed to escape. His temper was now vile in the extreme. Secrecy was

sing the sensation with a crowd of others. "That treacle idea, you know. About the richest thing that's happened this term."

"A jolly good lesson for Sinclair, anyway," said Singleton. "But I don't see why you should pinch your minor's wheezes, Handy! I understand that the Third was responsible for the whole affair."

"Yes, but it was my scheme," argued Handforth. "Of course, Sinclair's done for now. Completely obliterated. He daren't show his face again, and I shouldn't be surprised if he chucks himself into the Stowe. No senior could face the world again after being tarred and feathered!"

"Sinclair isn't the sort of fellow to take



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impossible. The whole school was already humming with the story—and his only course was to take drastic action. What was more, he would have to have the support of Mr. Stokes. It was the only way of lessening the harmful effects.

Probably Handforth was the fellow who appreciated it most. He had had a taste of that treacle, and he knew what it was like. A bath and a change of clothes had restored him to his usual good humour—particularly as Mary had voted against the treacle toffee, after all. But Handforth knew exactly how that treacle felt.

"I don't like to boast, but you fellows have got to admit that I'm pretty smart," he said, as he stood in the Triangle, discuss-

ing the sensation with a crowd of others. "And I don't think he'll feel the disgrace much. If you ask my opinion, he'll become more despotic than ever. He'll take it out of the chaps until—"

"Until there's a revolt!" said Reggie Pitt. "We've had about as much of Sinclair as we can stand. Any more of his funny business, and out he goes. We're just about ripe for something lively."

"But why did the fags grab him in the first place?" asked Tommy Watson.

"Nobody seems to know," replied Reggie. "I suppose they caught him bullying, or something like that. There's one thing certain—Willy wouldn't have organised a rag of this sort without good reason."



In the meantime, Sinclair was getting busy.

His first impulse was to rush upstairs and drop into a bath. He even got to the bathroom. Then he paused, and decided to go straight to the Housemaster's study. Everybody knew about his plight now, so he might as well let Mr. Stokes see the full extent of the indignity. Already, Sinclair was formulating schemes for revenge.

He burst into the Housemaster's study without ceremony. And Mr. Stokes sat back in his chair with a startled ejaculation. Only Sinclair's eyes and mouth were visible out of the feathers and treacle. And as he stood there, the messy stuff dripped down upon the carpet.

Barry Stokes leapt to his feet.

"What is the meaning of this?" he demanded angrily. "Who are you?"

"This is what those infernal fags have done!" snarled Sinclair.

"Good heavens!" said Mr. Stokes. "Sinclair! Go and clean yourself at once! Don't stand there, ruining this carpet!"

"Confound the carpet!" roared Sinclair. "Those fags——"

"You can tell me the details later," interrupted Mr. Stokes curtly. "Upon my soul, Sinclair, are you mad? How dare you come to me in this appalling condition? Go and remove that mess this instant!"

"I tell you——"

"I shall not repeat that order!" rapped out Mr. Stokes, taking a stride towards the enraged senior.

Sinclair gave one savage grunt, and vanished. Mr. Stokes closed the door, and regarded the litter on the floor. His frown vanished, and a look of quiet satisfaction came into his eyes.

"Splendid!" he murmured. "Young Willy's work, I'll be bound! By Jove, that youngster has certainly got the right idea!"

## CHAPTER XIII.

### SINCLAIR GETS HIS OWN WAY.



"TREACLE," said Reggie Pitt thoughtfully.

"Wonderful stuff!" agreed Jack Grey, nodding.

Sinclair, coming downstairs, frowned viciously. He was well aware that those remarks had been uttered especially for his benefit. There were quite a number of juniors in the lobby, including several fellows from other Houses. The one topic of conversation was unchanged.

Sinclair paused, regretting that he hadn't gone down the back way. But, with his mind filled with cunning schemes for revenge, he had used the ordinary staircase by force of habit. A bath and a change of clothing had made him comfortable, but he was as bitterly savage as ever. His jaw

still ached from the effect of Morrow's knock-out.

"Treacle has many uses," said Buster Boots loudly. "It can be used for puddings, or toffee, or any kind of cooking. When it's mixed with paraffin it makes a good substitute for tar——"

"Get out of this House, you young brats!" roared Sinclair, descending the last few stairs in a couple of bounds. "Any more of those insulting remarks and I'll report you!"

"That's all you can do—report us!" jeered Boots. "Do you think our head prefects will take any notice? Or the Housemasters, either? You're too well known, you cad!"

"Get out of here!" stormed Sinclair. "As for you others—you, Pitt, and you, Grey—you'll write me a thousand lines for deliberate impertinence."

Sinclair wasn't doing himself any good by this display of temper. A quiet, dignified attitude on his part, and a relaxation of his despotic rule, might have caused the House to simmer down. He hadn't sense enough to realise that he was inciting a mutiny.

"A thousand lines each?" asked Pitt.

"Yes!"

"Sorry, but nothing doing!" retorted Reggie. "We've had enough of your impots, Sinclair. You can go and eat coke!"

"Hear, hear!" agreed Jack Grey.

Sinclair stared blankly. It was the first sign of actual rebellion.

"You young hounds!" he thundered. "You're both confined to the House for a week! And you'll report to my study for a flogging——"

"Thanks, all the same, but we're engaged," interrupted Pitt. "As for that detention, we can't possibly oblige. And it's no good asking for fifty pounds bail, either. We're not fools enough to be swindled twice!"

"Swindled!" roared Sinclair.

"It's a perfectly good word," nodded Pitt.

"You—you——"

Sinclair paused, and checked himself in the nick of time. The juniors were preparing themselves to resist—and if the fags could do what they had done, the Removites would probably go a step further. With a choking gulp, Sinclair tore himself away, and hurried off.

He was followed down the corridor by a perfect hail of jeers and hoots. His indication of weakness was the worst thing that could have happened to him. He had never earned any respect from the juniors—but, hitherto, they had certainly feared him. Even that hold over them was now lost. When fear turns to contempt, matters are in a bad way.

Sinclair stalked into Mr. Stokes' study, his face pale with pent-up fury. He slammed the door with such a crash that the very room shook. Then he leaped at the Housemaster's table, and crashed his fist down upon it.

"I've had enough of this!" he shouted.



"If you can't behave yourself, Sinclair, you'd better leave this room at once," snapped the Housemaster. "Don't slam my door again like that. And don't thump my desk. I won't have it!"

"Oh, won't you?" roared Sinclair. "You'll have what I please! Any rot from you, Mr. Stokes, and I'll tell the Head everything I know! You've got to take action! My authority's being flouted by everybody—and you've got to put things right."

Mr. Stokes pursed his lips.

"Indeed!" he said coldly. "After ruling this House with such atrocious judgment that you incite every boy, from the Third to the Sixth, you come to me for assistance. It won't do, Sinclair. You've taken command, and you will have to continue—or resign. You'd far better resign."

"And let Morrow step into my shoes, I suppose?"

"Certainly."

"Then you're wrong!" snapped Sinclair. "I keep the captaincy, and that's final! You've got to help me——"

"If you maintain this tone, Sinclair, I'll treat you as I did once before—kick you out of this study with less compunction than I would eject a mongrel!" snapped Mr. Stokes sharply. "Now, sir, you'd better control yourself before I lose my temper."

Sinclair nearly choked.

"Those fags grabbed me, and smothered me with treacle and feathers!" he panted. "How can I expect to keep any authority if that sort of thing happens?"

"Did you do nothing to incite them?"

"Nothing—absolutely nothing!" retorted the head prefect. "There's only one satisfaction for a crime of that sort—they've got to be sacked! Haadforth minor, Heath, and Lemon."

"Don't be so ridiculous, Sinclair!" said Mr. Stokes quietly.

"Unless they're sacked——"

"I don't want to hear any more of your threats," interrupted Mr. Stokes curtly. "The three boys you mention do not belong to this House, and the most I can do is to report them to Mr. Lee."

"You can tell Mr. Lee they ought to be sacked——"

"I shall tell Mr. Lee nothing that is opposed to my own judgment," said Barry Stokes firmly. "Between ourselves, Sinclair, I am convinced that the boys were justified. You infernal young ruffian! You've done nothing else but act the tyrant and the bully ever since you came here. I would remind you, Sinclair, that there is a limit to my patience."

"You daren't say a word——"

"Daren't!" thundered the Housemaster. "Repeat that, Sinclair! Repeat it, and I'll drag you straight before the headmaster! You can blurt your story out—you can tell him everything! If you receive any satisfaction I shall be surprised. For, remember this—whatever happens to me—you will be involved in the crash. You blackmailing young

rascal! It will mean nothing less than expulsion!"

Sinclair started back under the storm of Mr. Stokes' outburst.

"All right, sir—sorry!" he muttered sullenly. "No need to——"

"Let me hear no more of your threats!" interrupted Mr. Stokes. "As for your complaint—I ignore it. The only thing you can do is to live down this indignity. I should advise you to moderate your harshness for a week. It will give the House time to cool down."

"But I can't go on, sir!" declared Sinclair. "I've got no authority at all! Just before I came in here, two or three of the juniors deliberately refused to obey orders, and I was jeered and hooted."

"You have only yourself to blame for that."

"And what about the seniors?" demanded Sinclair. "How do you suppose I can carry on after what's happened? Those fags came into the Senior Day Room—they burst in like a flood—and knocked me down. Then they carried me out, bound hand and foot!"

Mr. Stokes frowned.

"Did any of the seniors see this?" he asked.

"See it!" shouted Sinclair. "There were nine or ten of them there! They all stood round, looking on!"

"Without attempting to interfere?"

"They didn't move a finger!" snorted Sinclair. "Fags, mind you—six miserable kids marched in and grabbed me! And all those seniors stood by and watched! Unless something's done, how can I carry on?"

Mr. Stokes considered for a moment or two.

"Yes, Sinclair, I must certainly take action here," he said at length. "It is a grave offence for any Third-Formers to attack a prefect—and your fellow-seniors should have put a stop to the outrage. I am now speaking on a matter of discipline. That the fags were justified, I do not doubt; but that does not exonerate the senior boys in the least. It was their plain duty to avert the outrage before it started."

Sinclair cooled down a little.

"Then you're going to do something, sir?" he asked.

"Yes; I'll come with you to the Senior Day Room at once, and hold an immediate inquiry," replied Mr. Stokes grimly. "In this instance, Sinclair, I am compelled to support you."

## CHAPTER XIV.

### SOMETHING THEY HADN'T KNOWN BEFORE.



THE Senior Day Room was feeling very satisfied.

Sinclair wasn't there, and there was a genial feeling of happiness in the atmosphere. The only fellows who were thoroughly unhappy were Kenmore



and Parkin of the Sixth, and Grayson and Shaw of the Fifth. The others revelled in Sinclair's discomfiture.

"The man won't dare to stick it after that," Phillips was saying. "He's bound to resign—he can't do anything else."

"It's the only possible course," agreed Chambers. "In fact, we'll put it to him pretty plainly when he shows up. Any head prefect who's suffered an indignity of that sort has forfeited all right to respect."

"He's probably resigned already," said Morrow.

But they were apparently wrong, for Guy Sinclair strode into the room with Mr. Stokes at his heels. And Sinclair was looking more aggressive than ever. His sufferings at the hands of the Third had made no difference to his arrogance.

"I'm sorry to interrupt you at this hour," said Mr. Stokes quietly. "But Sinclair has told me something which demands an explanation. There is no need for me to refer to the unfortunate indignity to which Sinclair was subjected—"

"We thought it fortunate, sir," said somebody.

"That is not the right tone," interrupted Mr. Stokes sharply. "Whatever your feelings against Sinclair, he is the head prefect of this House. Purely on a matter of discipline, I must insist on a different spirit. Sinclair tells me that many of you were present when he was seized and bound by a party of Third Form boys."

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

"He also tells me that you made no attempt to stop the affair."

"That's right, too, sir," said Morrow.

"I am surprised, Morrow!"

"I don't see why you should be, sir," went on Morrow. "We've got no particular love for Sinclair. You saw that Vote of Censure, didn't you? That ought to have told you our attitude."

"The thing was childish," snapped Mr. Stokes. "I thought you boys were above that sort of nonsense. I could understand it from the juniors—but not from you."

"Well, Sinclair's in Coventry," said Frinton. "It may seem kiddish to you, sir, but we haven't taken a step like that without good reason. And it wasn't our business to interfere when those fags came in. I don't mind telling you that we enjoyed it."

"Hear, hear!"

"Sinclair deserved all he got!"

"And a lot more!"

Mr. Stokes frowned as the Senior Day Room echoed with voices. Not one of them was in favour of Sinclair.

In his heart the Housemaster was full of sympathy for these seniors. He knew what a young blackguard Sinclair was. But it would have been a terrible pity to precipitate a crisis now. He was expecting a letter from Mr. Lambert by any post. And when it came he would be the first to go to the headmaster with the story—and Sinclair

would be expelled. Mr. Stokes was biding his time.

And he was compelled to support Sinclair—or lose complete control of the House. It went against the grain, but if that sordid night club story was circulated now—with Mr. Stokes bound by honour to keep silent—it would mean instant dismissal and disgrace for the unhappy young Housemaster.

"This is a pity," he said quietly. "I was hoping to settle the matter without inflicting any punishment. But all you boys have been guilty of bad conduct. The fact that you are seniors only aggravates the case. Your plain duty was to have saved Sinclair from those irresponsible juniors. Whatever your personal feelings for him, you should have upheld the dignity of the Senior School. I cannot excuse you. Every boy who was in this room at the time will be confined to gates for the period of two weeks."

Without another word, Mr. Stokes turned on his heel and walked out of the room. What with all his recent worry and anxiety, his temper was short—and he managed to work up some genuine anger. In a way, he was justified. Purely on a point of discipline, the seniors had been in the wrong. Under the exceptional circumstances, however, the matter could have been overlooked. Mr. Stokes had only taken action because it was necessary to pacify the schoolboy blackmailer. It couldn't last much longer, anyhow.

But the Housemaster little thought of what a storm his action would cause.

"Gated!" ejaculated Morrow, aghast. "Gated for two weeks! Why, it's ridiculous! It's absolutely outrageous!"

"We won't stand it!" stormed Chambers.

"Stokes is just as bad as Sinclair!"

The room fairly hummed with indignation.

"Surprised you, eh?" sneered Sinclair.

"Haven't I always said that I was the boss of this House? If any of you fellows ignore Mr. Stokes' order, there'll be trouble. You'd better realise that at once. I'm the real chief here."

"I wonder you've got the nerve!" snapped Morrow. "If you had an ounce of decency you'd resign on the spot."

"I thought you weren't going to speak to me?" jeered Sinclair.

"Confound you, I'm not!" roared Morrow, turning his back.

"I'm boss!" repeated Sinclair calmly. "What's more, I'm going to show this House something that'll surprise it! I'm going to make everybody suffer to the limit! The fags first—and you fellows afterwards!"

The Senior Day Room was in a ferment. It was rather a wonder that Sinclair wasn't pounced upon then and there, and booted down the corridor. The seniors were in such a reckless mood that they were almost ready for anything. Fortunately for the head prefect, he dropped his jeering tone, and walked out. He wanted to find his pal, Kenmore, and crow over his latest triumph. For



Sinclair actually fooled himself into believing that he had gained a victory.

And while this storm was in progress, another one was taking place in the Junior Common Room. Tommy Hobbs was the fellow who started it. He had wandered into the Remove quarters in search of a book, and he was instantly seized upon by Edward Oswald Handforth. Many of the Ancient House fellows were still in the West House, talking about the recent sensation.

"Just a minute, Hobbs, my lad," said Handforth. "We want to hear a few details about Sinclair. 'Who's idea was it to dip him in treacle, and then feather him? Was it my minor's, or was it mine?'"

Tommy Hobbs stared.

"Why, your minor's, of course," he replied.

"You young ass!" roared Handforth. "Didn't my minor get the idea after he'd seen me?"

"He might have done that," admitted Hobbs. "But what does it matter? Sinclair didn't get half of what he deserved, anyhow. The chap's dangerous! He ought to be horse-whipped for what he did to poor old Dicky."

"Oh!" said Pitt. "What did he do to poor old Dicky?"

"Don't you know?" asked Hobbs, staring.

"We haven't heard anything definitely."

"Why, he twisted Dicky's arm this afternoon while Dicky was clearing out his study," said Hobbs indignantly. "Morrow knocked him down for it."

"Yes, we know that," said Handforth impatiently.

"Isn't it enough?"

"I'm down on any cad who twists a fag's arm, of course," admitted Edward Oswald. "You fags deserve a spanking now and again, but I bar arm-twisting. All the same, I don't quite see——"

"But don't you KNOW?" yelled Hobbs. "Great pip! Have you fellows been all this time without knowing the truth? It only shows how you can go about with your eyes closed and your ears sealed up!"

"You silly young ass——"

"Still, I suppose there's some excuse for you," went on Hobbs thoughtfully. "Dicky didn't let anybody know until nearly tea-time, and Willy was too jolly busy on that stunt to gas much. And so were we."

"The young duffer's talking in riddles!" snorted Handforth. "He tells us that Dicky Jones had his arm twisted, and then asks us if we know it!"

The fag glared.

"Cheese it!" he said tartly. "Dicky's arm was dislocated."

"WHAT!" yelled Handforth.

"Well, not his arm—his shoulder," said Hobbs. "And that's worse. Why, we found the poor beggar nearly fainting with agony in the cloak-room—keeping it dark! We rushed him down to Dr. Brett——"

"I say, is this absolutely true?" asked Pitt sharply.

"Of course it's true," retorted Hobbs. "Go and ask old Browne! He took us down to the doctor's—and saw the arm being set, or whatever they call it. Old Dicky's going about with a sling now. I can tell you, Willy was roaring mad over the thing."

It was rather curious that Nipper should come in at that moment—just in time to corroborate Hobbs' story. Nipper had heard it from Browne, and had come over to tell the others. In less than two minutes the fact was officially verified.

"No wonder Willy took such drastic measures!" said Pitt, looking excited. "We can't let the matter stand like this, you chaps! We ought to get up a deputation to the seniors!"

"Why not suggest a barring-out?"

"Hurrah!"

"Let's end this rotten business once and for all!" shouted Jack Grey. "I suggest we pitch Sinclair out, and seize the House! What's more, I believe the seniors will come in with us!"

"By George, it's a go!" roared Handforth. "That's what we'll do—start a mutiny! We'll have a barring-out!"

"But you're an Ancient House chap, you ass!" said Singleton.

Handforth started.

"My hat! I'd forgotten that!" he ejaculated, in dismay. "I'll tell you what! I'll transfer straight away—and then you won't be without a leader! You can leave matters entirely in my hands!"

"You might take this thing away, and bury it!" said Pitt patiently. "I don't know what it's doing over here, anyhow!"

"Talking about me?" asked Handforth, aghast.

"Yes, I am!" said Pitt. "This is our affair, Handy——"

"That's all the thanks I get for offering to lead you!" said Handforth bitterly. "I don't like to stand by and see you chaps shoving your heads into a noose! No barring-out can succeed without me! I don't want to boast, but when it comes to fighting——"

"All right, Handy—I admit it!" interrupted Pitt. "When it comes to fighting, you're supreme. But I didn't know there was a barring-out. It's no good getting these wild ideas into your head. I'm suggesting that we shall take strong action against Sinclair—that's all. There's no need to start any violence against the school itself."

But Pitt wasn't quite sincere. In his heart he knew well enough that this situation held all the elements of revolt. And, secretly, he was half hoping that a crisis would come. Anything was better than a continuation of the recent tyranny.



CHAPTER XV.

THE LAST STRAW.



**A**RTHUR MORROW looked round searchingly.

"That's settled, then?" he asked.

"Absolutely!" said Chambers.

"In future, we'll simply ignore everything that Sinclair does, and everything that he says," went on Morrow. "There comes a time when we seniors have even got to forget our dignity. After all, it's only a pre-

near at hand. Mr. Stokes' two weeks gating had come perilously near the mark.

"Sinclair threatens all sorts of horrors for the future," went on Morrow. "Well, we'll take the wind out of his sails by ignoring him. And if he starts any of his tricks on the juniors, we'll protect them. That's a pledge."

"Hear, hear!"

"We've got to stand the cad—but we needn't let him tread on us!"

Every West House senior—barring Sinclair's own friends—was in the apartment now. And the vote was unanimous.

Then the door opened, and Reggie Pitt



**"You're out—and you'll stay out!"** said Morrow, pointing an accusing finger at Sinclair. **"You'd better not try to get back, because we won't have you."**

tence. There's many a time when we'd just love to knock a fellow down."

The Senior Day-room had calmed down considerably, but the majority of the seniors were still in a state of subdued excitement. Left in that condition, they would have cooled completely—and by the following morning the West House would have been running on its usually smooth course.

But there was only a slight disturbance needed to precipitate a crisis. The seniors were in just that mood to do something utterly reckless. Their exasperation had reached such a pitch that the limit was

marched in, followed by half a dozen excited Removites. The deputation had arrived.

"Hallo! What's all this?" asked Morrow, frowning.

"We're a deputation," explained Pitt. "We've heard that you fellows have got into trouble for taking no action when Willy & Co. seized Sinclair."

"That's all right," said Morrow. "You needn't bother yourselves—"

"Hold on!" interrupted Pitt. "Do you know why those fags grabbed Sinclair, and smothered him with treacle and feathers? I mean, do you know the exact cause?"



"Can't say that we do," admitted Chambers. "There's no need for you juniors to get so jolly excited, though."

"You'll be excited when you hear the truth," said Pitt grimly. "Sinclair twisted Dicky Jones' arm this afternoon——"

"I know it," interrupted Morrow. "Didn't I knock him down for doing it? The poor kid's arm was hurt, too. He wouldn't let me take him along to the matron——"

"His shoulder was dislocated," said Pitt. Morrow stared.

"Dislocated?" he repeated. "Don't exaggerate——"

"I tell you it was dislocated," insisted Pitt. "This isn't a rumour, Morrow. I wouldn't be ass enough to come here with an unverified yarn like that. Browne can tell you, if you ask him. And Dr. Brett can, too. He put the arm right, and told Dicky to report for the sanatorium. Of course, the young ass didn't—and that's why we've been in the dark."

Morrow breathed hard, and the other seniors gathered round with flushed, indignant faces.

"I say, what an awful hooligan!" said Chambers. "And Stokes gates us for standing by while the brute was punished!"

"Mr. Stokes doesn't know about this," rapped out Morrow. "He hasn't the faintest idea that Sinclair committed such an atrocity. Hang it all, those fags were more than justified. Wait here until I come back."

"Hold on!" said Pitt. "Where are you going?"

"I'm going to tell Mr. Stokes."

"Wouldn't that be sneaking——"

"Sneaking be hanged!" snorted Morrow. "When a thing gets to this stage it's got to be reported. Do you think we're going to let that ruffian continue his beastly career in this House? Sinclair's got to be hooped out—and hooped out to-night!"

"The man's an absolute waster!" roared Chambers.

Morrow hurried off without another word, and happened to run into Mr. Stokes in the corridor.

"Just a minute, sir," panted Morrow.

In two short sentences he explained the situation.

"Ridiculous, Morrow," said Mr. Stokes, with genuine scepticism. "What nonsense! I'm surprised at you believing such wild stories."

"But Dr. Brett——"

"I don't believe it, Morrow," interrupted the Housemaster. "Even Sinclair wouldn't descend to such torture. No, no! You've got to calm down, young man! It's about time you recovered your sense of proportion, Morrow."

Morrow was very exasperated.

"But it's true, sir!" he said fiercely. "Surely you'll take some steps to verify it, anyhow? Why not ring up Dr. Brett, and ask him? It won't take you more than two minutes."

This was a perfectly reasonable suggestion, and if Mr. Stokes had been less harassed and worried, he would have agreed to it. But, to tell the truth, he placed no credence in the story at all. He took it to be one of the usual highly-coloured rumours which were always circulating in a school.

"I shall do nothing so ridiculous, Morrow," he retorted.

"But Dr. Brett saw Dicky Jones this afternoon——"

"I don't care who Dr. Brett saw," snapped Mr. Stokes. "You can't make me believe that outrageous exaggeration. Sinclair probably twisted the boy's arm, but as for dislocating his shoulder—— No, Morrow, I'd advise you to be sensible."

He walked on with a curt nod.

"But hold on, sir!" gasped Morrow angrily. "Don't forget you've gated all of us for standing by while those fags seized Sinclair. We were thoroughly justified. The man hasn't got half he deserves——"

Mr. Stokes didn't even answer. He was so worried by all this continuous strain that he wanted to get away. And that story concerning Dicky Jones' shoulder was undoubtedly "tall," and Mr. Stokes was quite justified in disbelieving it. But he had been foolish in refusing to ring up the doctor.

Morrow returned to the Senior Day-room with a fierce, angry face. The other seniors burst out into fury when he told them the result.

"We're not going to stand it!" shouted Bryant. "Sinclair's a dangerous character! And Stokes isn't much better, or he'd listen to us. We can't let the matter stand as it is."

"Not likely!"

"Let's kick Sinclair out straight away!"

There was a considerable uproar—and the juniors joined in it. They were disconcerted by the news that Mr. Stokes turned a deaf ear to the truth. It was the one thing needed to precipitate a disaster. But it is generally small things which lead to catastrophes.

In the middle of the commotion, Guy Sinclair marched in. He had come, in fact, to see what all the uproar was about. He gave a shout of anger when he caught sight of the juniors.

"What are you kids doing in here?" he demanded. "Good heavens! Fags first—and now the Remove! It seems to me that you've all gone mad! Get back to your own quarters!"

The juniors didn't move.

"Do you hear me?" thundered Sinclair.

"We don't take any more orders from you," said Pitt deliberately. "You're not fit to be head prefect of this House, Sinclair, and——"



"You infernal young cub!" snarled Sinclair.

He leapt forward, and delivered a vicious, stunning blow on the side of Pitt's head which was totally unexpected. The junior captain reeled dizzily, and fell.

"That's the way I treat insubordination!" said Sinclair thickly.

## CHAPTER XVI.

### THE REVOLT OF THE WEST HOUSE.



**I**T was like a spark applied to a gunpowder fuse.

Morrow squared up menacingly, and everybody else in the room started shouting and yelling. The excitement, more or less subdued until now, broke out like a flood. The very air quivered with danger.

"You cad!" shouted Morrow hotly. "All you can do is to hit fellows younger and smaller than yourself! Hit me if you're anxious to fight!"

"You'd better not goad me!" snarled Sinclair.

"We're with these juniors to the limit!" roared Morrow. "Stokes or no Stokes, we're taking no orders from you, Sinclair! And we're willing to support the smallest fag, too! We're sick of your tyranny!"

"Hear, hear!"

"That's the stuff, Morrow!"

For a moment there was an electrical silence. A situation of this sort was almost unprecedented—two Sixth-Formers, facing one another with clenched fists, ready to let fly.

"Stand out of the way!" panted Sinclair.

"I'm taking no orders from you!"

"By gad! You'd better obey!" hissed Sinclair. "I'll give you one second, Morrow! I'm head prefect of this House——"

"Head torturer, you mean!"

Crash!

Sinclair got the first blow in, but his fist only thudded upon Morrow's shoulder. The next second Morrow's right came round, and crashed upon Sinclair's nose with devastating force. It was a punch with every ounce of Morrow's fury behind it.

Sinclair not only blundered over, but he carried two or three other fellows with him. They all leapt up, but Sinclair remained down. And the sight of him there was sufficient.

"Let's pitch him out!"

"Come on—all together!"

"Hold on!" gasped Pitt unsteadily. "If we do this thing, we've got to do it thoroughly. It means mutiny, you fellows—a complete revolt! It's the only way to get justice."

"We're ready!" roared Chambers recklessly.

"It's the only chance we shall get," went on Pitt. "It's no good taking half measures, either. If we merely pitch Sinclair out, there'll be an inquiry, and somebody will get sacked. Who's willing to go the whole hog and start a barring-out?"

"I am!" said Morrow fiercely.

"But think!" shouted Stanhope. "We're seniors, you know——"

"We're only human," shouted Morrow. "And if we don't take this matter into our own hands it'll never get done! Come on—let's kick Sinclair out to start with. Then we'll seize the House, and hold it!"

"Hurrah!"

"Good old Morrow!"

"Revolt—revolt!"

The word spread throughout the House like wildfire. By this time, all the juniors of the other Houses had gone—for it was well past calling-over. For the time being the news of the revolt was confined to the West House alone.

The call to action swept through studies and passages, and there was scarcely a fellow in the House who failed to answer. The seniors were solidly with the juniors—and this, in itself, was an event which had never before happened in the history of St. Frank's.

Third-Formers, Removites—everybody, in fact, right up to the Sixth—came surging out into the corridors to take part in the excitement. There had been a tension throughout the evening, and most of the fellows were glad of some excuse for definite action.

Nobody gave a thought to the possible consequences. They only knew that Guy Sinclair's reign was over, and that he was being presented with the Order of the Boot.

The corridors were fairly choked, and most of the fellows were too late to witness the actual ejection. Sinclair had been carried triumphantly out through the lobby, and deposited at the bottom of the West House steps.

And now he was standing there, battered, dishevelled, shaking his fist at the crowd which surged in the doorway. At last Sinclair realised that he had applied the lash too severely.

"You're out—and you'll stay out!" said Morrow, pointing an accusing finger at Sinclair. "You'd better not try to get back, because we won't have you. In two minutes your precious pals will be kicked out, too!"

"Hurrah!"

It was an impressive scene, with the light streaming out from the doorway, and gleaming down from the overhead lamp. Sinclair gave one big gulp, and attempted to save the situation.



"Stop!" he panted. "It'll be different to-morrow! Let me come back, and I'll promise to run the House on the old lines. Good heavens! This means a barring-out if you keep it up——"

"It's a barring-out already!" interrupted Reggie Pitt.

"Down with tyranny!"

"Victory for the rebels!"

"Hurrah!"

Cheers rang out, and there was a big commotion at the back of the crowd. A moment later Kenmore and Parkin came hurtling down the steps, as though ejected from catapults. They fell in a heap, and before they could rise, they were joined by Grayson and Shaw.

Finally, Bernard Forrest was shot out,

followed by Gulliver and Bell. They all picked themselves up, alarmed, furious, and battered.

"That's the lot!" said Pitt breathlessly. "There aren't any spies among us now! We're all solid for the barring-out! And we won't surrender until Sinclair's got the sack, and the old order of things is restored."

"Hurrah!"

The crowd surged back, the great door slammed, and the bolts were shot. Guy Sinclair and his cronies looked at one another helplessly.

It was too late to avert the disaster now. The West House of St. Frank's had mutinied, and there were liable to be some stirring times in the immediate future.

THE END.

A Full Description of the Exciting Scenes in the Great Revolt of the West House will be contained in NEXT WEEK'S story of this Splendid Series:

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# The House of Gems.

*A Thrilling Story of the Amazing Adventures of an English lad abroad.*

BY A POPULAR AUTHOR.

## CHAPTER I.

### THE MYSTERIOUS MESSENGER IN MID-OCEAN.

**S**AIL on the starboard bow!" And even as the look-out's cry sounded forth in the silence eight bells struck. It was midnight—an exquisitely calm, warm midnight of the moon-lit Mediterranean Sea.

Luke Winstone, the cabin-boy, leaning over the rail, strained his eyes in vain to catch sight of the sail. It was apparently some miles off still, for as far as he could see no speck was visible upon the oily, heaving waste of waters.

But as he watched, on a sudden a dull glow of fire leapt into being far in the west. For a few seconds it shone, crimson and menacing, then it died into blackness.

It was the volcano of Stromboli vomiting its periodic eruption of lava.

Luke lifted his telescope, and was just able to distinguish the humped mass of that weird and wonderful mountain, which rises as a solitary island out of the ocean, and on whose steep slopes live a population who any hour might be swept into eternity in a holocaust of cinders and flame. For a moment or two he watched, in the hopes of seeing a fresh outburst. Then, with a sharp click, he slid the glasses together again, and replaced them in their case.

A strange part of the world for a lad of sixteen to be wandering through. And a strange craft to be employed upon!

As Luke felt the engines of the yacht straining beneath him, and saw the foam-flakes swiftly hissing past overside, he pondered anew the mystery of his present life. He had obtained a post as cabin-boy on board the magnificent private pleasure-steamer Cobra a year previously, and from that day to this had cruised all over the Mediterranean. Yet he had never once caught sight of the Cobra's owner on deck. Frequently he had had to serve Harvard Cheyne, as this remarkable character was called, in the saloon; and he had often marvelled at the American millionaire's taciturnity.

What was the secret of this immensely wealthy, but extraordinarily sad-looking man's life? Why did he rush from port to port at this frantic speed?—for the Cobra was enormously fast. Why had he never any friends on board, to share the enjoyment of his cruises? Why, finally, had they put in at Palermo the afternoon before, and been told that they would stay a week, when, as subsequently transpired, their halt only lasted a couple of hours—just long enough, in fact, to get their clearance papers and replenish the steward's stores?

These were insoluble riddles, but Luke could not resist turning them over in his mind. He was on the point of abandoning them, however, when he suddenly noticed an unusual odour—the aroma of a costly cigar. A whiff of blue smoke curled past his face.

He turned quickly, with a start.

Immediately behind him stood Harvard Cheyne—the millionaire yachtsman himself—the man he had never seen on deck before!

Luke touched his cap, and was about to withdraw; but Cheyne held up his hand with a gesture commanding him to remain. On his immobile face there was a suspicion of a smile.

"Your name's Luke, isn't it?" he asked.

"Yes, sir."

"Well, Luke, are you afraid of death?"

The lad was startled. For an instant he thought the millionaire was jesting. But one glance at the steel-grey eyes and the level brows dispelled any such idea. The question had not been an idle one.

"I don't think I'm a greater coward than anybody else, sir," Luke responded hesitatingly.

"Well put," said Cheyne, withdrawing the cigar from his lips and flicking its snowy ash over the rail. "Did you hear the look-out shout, 'Sail on the port bow' just now?"

"I beg your pardon, sir, it was 'sail on the starboard bow.'"

The millionaire chuckled.



"Good!" he murmured, and then again, "Good, very good! I like that! Anyhow, it is a small boat—really only a rowing-boat, but it has been rigged with a mast and an apology for a sail. In it there is —"

He paused to re-light the cigar, which had gone out. Luke, meanwhile, strained his eyes again to see the boat of which the millionaire had been speaking. Not a trace of it could he discern even yet.

Cheyne seemed to divine his thoughts.

"I doubt if it's in sight yet from the level of the deck," he said coolly.

"Then how——" stammered Luke.

"How did I know what it is like?" repeated Cheyne, smiling at him curiously. "Oh, that's simple enough! I was expecting the boat. I have an appointment with its occupant."

"An appointment in mid-ocean?"

"Precisely. Queer—eh?—But no queerer than our hurried departure from Palermo, if you only knew it; and no queerer than many other things you'll see if you consent to a certain proposition I have to make. Didn't I hear you talking Italian to a fruit-seller at Palermo?"

"Yes, sir. I know Italian because my mother was an Italian."

"Ah, I thought there must be some reason of that sort for your perfect accent, which I heard floating in at my porthole yesterday afternoon when we were lying in the harbour. If you care to put yourself and your knowledge of Italian at my disposal, Luke, I can promise you some exciting times, and a more extensive exploration of the world ashore than you might otherwise get. I want a smart lad to help me in some rather delicate negotiations which I have in hand. I've noticed you when you've been serving me in the saloon, and taken a fancy to you, and this chance of your knowing Italian settles it. Will you throw in your lot with me?"

"I should like to be of any service to you that I can, sir."

"Honestly said, yet cautious," commented Cheyne. "I think we shall hit it off, Luke. Well, be ready for events. But remember that no servant of mine must be afraid of danger, and——"

He was interrupted by the sharp ting-ting of the engine-room bell. The yacht began to slow down.

"We are nearing the boat," said the millionaire, "and the man who is on board it may have important news for me. He is coming on to the Cobra to chat with me a while. Make a note of his face, Luke, and don't forget it. That's the first job I give you—and not a very difficult one. This solitary wanderer's face may be——" he paused solemnly—"may be to you or to me the face of death!"

In a few minutes the boat was alongside and the yacht stopped. The tiny craft was exactly as Cheyne had prophesied, and contained a solitary occupant. As this person

climbed swiftly up the ladder and swung his legs over the rail on to the Cobra's deck, Luke saw that he was dark, and of foreign build. His ferret-like eyes flitted nervously to and fro beneath his deeply hollowed brows. He was clean-shaven.

The millionaire nodded to him silently, and the two went below at once. For more than an hour they seemed to hold deep converse, while the yacht rocked motionless on the water, with the small boat moored to her side. Then at last they came up again, talking earnestly in Italian. The foreigner was gesticulating excitedly, but Cheyne was quite cool and collected. Nevertheless, the deep, horizontal line on his forehead showed that he was a prey to the keenest anxiety.

The foreigner climbed down into his boat and cast off. As he drifted away he turned and waved his hand to Cheyne, who was leaning over the rail watching him.

"Addio!" he shouted, in Italian, which Luke recognised as of a Northern accent. "We meet again at the House of Gems!"

Cheyne nodded, but did not reply. He was always a man of few words. He merely spoke over his shoulder to the captain:

"Full speed ahead!"

The order was immediately obeyed. The engine-room telegraph rang, and the Cobra's hull began to vibrate once more, after its prolonged and unusual repose. In a very few minutes the tiny craft, with its newly hoisted sail, was a mere speck of black in the moonlit wake.

"The House of Gems! I wonder what that could mean?" pondered Luke.

Though he little guessed it, he was soon to see the House of Gems, and learn the secret himself—ay, and meet death there face to face, too.

## CHAPTER II.

### THE BEARDED ASSASSIN OF THE PIAZZA DI SPAGNA.

**T**HE sun had sunk, and the garish electric lamps had sprung into being all over the modernised city of Rome. Great trolley-cars spun to and fro through the narrow streets, humming as they went. The shop windows of the Corso were ablaze with light, and the cafes were full of a chattering, merry multitude.

Luke stood in the shadow of the ancient balustrade at the foot of the flight of steps in the Piazza di Spagna. He was waiting—had been waiting for an hour or more already—and would wait for as long again if need be. His instructions from the millionaire had been clear and unmistakable, and he was determined to carry them out to the letter. The Cobra had put in at the Civita Vecchia, and he and Cheyne had come ashore and taken the next train to Italy's metropolis. As soon as they arrived, Cheyne had said:



"Go to the Piazz di Spagna at sundown, and wait there till a man approaches you and asks, 'Are you he who loves gems?' to which you must reply, 'No; but I am his messenger.' The man will then hand you a note. Bring it at once to me at the railway-station—whatever the hour."

A curious mission, certainly. But Luke was getting accustomed to his master's whims. Within the last forty hours the millionaire had had several chats with the cabin-boy, and Luke's opinion of Cheyne had risen in consequence. Cheyne might be odd and eccentric, but he was "a white man"—

"Are you he who loves gems?" it asked. Luke swung round and beheld a cloaked figure, which had stolen up unheard. The figure's face was hid, except for the eyes, which in their turn were almost completely shaded by an enormous hat.

"I am not he who loves gems," Luke answered, "but I am his messenger. If you have a message for him, I can take it."

"That is well," said the man. "I have a letter." He fumbled in a leather wallet which hung from his shoulder. "Here it is."



**The prince was not easily overcome. His strength was prodigious. Like a wild cat he writhed beneath the grasp of the millionaire and the cabin-boy.**

on that Luke would have staked his last dollar.

The minutes dragged by. Luke yawned. He was beginning to be tired. But he did not move from his post.

The sky had turned from red to purple. Night had fallen completely. The streets were emptier. The vast flight of steps behind him, which led up to the Pincio Hill, loomed sinister and lonely.

Another hour passed. Still no sign of the promised messenger. And then, at last, when Luke was almost despairing, he was suddenly awakened by a voice at his ear—a curiously deferential voice, speaking almost in a whisper.

Almost violently he pushed an envelope into Luke's outstretched hand. Without an instant's delay, he hobbled (for he was lame) up the steps into the darkness.

Luke thrust the letter into an inner pocket, and, greatly wondering, was on the point of hailing a passing cab, when something made him stop.

A cry had rent the air—a strange, wavering cry of anguish and agony. It had come from some human throat a few yards up the steps.

Luke sprang up the steps, and at a point where a feeble lantern cast its yellow rays between the balustrade, a strange sight met his eyes.



The cloaked man was lying on the stone steps, his cloak flying open and his white face turned to the stars. His hands were wildly clutching in the air, and he writhed as he lay.

Luke leapt forward, and as he did so, another man who had been concealed in the shadow, darted off, carrying the cloaked man's wallet. He was gone like a flash, but even as he went, the lamp-light fell on his darkly bearded face.

Luke bent over the cloaked man, who was groaning loudly. A dull stream of blood oozed from beneath him on to the worn stones, and dripped sullenly down the steps.

"Stabbed, and in the back!" Luke cried. "The villain!"

The man's eyes opened. He recognised Luke at once. "The messenger of he who loves gems!" he gasped. "What are you doing here? Why do you tarry?"

"Cannot I help you?" inquired Luke, bending over him.

"No, no!" The man spoke vehemently. "Go at once—go! Hark! My cry has been heard! Go, before you are found!"

It was true. Hurried footsteps were approaching—doubtless those of the police. It would be awkward to be discovered here, and perhaps might be difficult to explain.

"Go!" the stabbed man repeated. "I am done for. You cannot aid me now. Go, I tell you!"

He raised himself upon his elbow, and waved Luke away.

Figures were looming nearer. Luke, without another word, sped off. What the man had said was true. He could do no good by remaining. The assassin had escaped. It was useless to try and bring him to justice.

Half an hour later a cab deposited him at the railway terminus. Cheyne met him at the entrance.

"Only just in time, Luke, my boy!" he cried. "Have you got the message?"

Luke hurriedly told his story, and handed the letter to the millionaire. The latter frowned as he tore it open. He hastily perused it, then thrust it into his pocket.

"Ah, as I thought!" he muttered. "It was a good thing I sent you instead of going myself, or it would have been I who was stabbed instead of that other poor fellow. These are deeper waters than I anticipated, though. But, come. The Florence—Bologna express is about to start. I have engaged a sleeping-car compartment on it."

"Where are we going, then?" asked Luke.

"To Venice—to the House of Gems!"

Luke, ensconced in the upper berth of the compartment, did not soon go to sleep. The events of the night had been too exciting to allow of that. As the train rushed northward, he lay long awake, turning over in his mind the singular sequence of adventures through which the million-

aire was leading him. One thing he felt sure—that in this House of Gems, whatever it might be, in Venice, they would reach the culminating point of these episodes.

At last he slept; but his dreams were troubled. He seemed to behold again the white face of the cloaked man turned mutely to the skies, to hear his anguished cry, and to watch the bearded assassin escaping guiltily into the night. And at length he awoke, as the express whistled through a tunnel, and rubbed his eyes, so distinct had been the impression that the bearded man was somewhere near him at this very moment.

The lamp in the roof of the compartment was still unshaded. Cheyne was sitting on his bunk, bending over something which he had spread out on the open flap of his valise.

Luke gave a start as he saw what the millionaire was looking at.

For on the valise were spread out a glittering mass of jewels—diamonds, rubies, and many a strange stone of which he did not even know the name.

The millionaire was unwrapping them one by one from little packets of tissue paper, and examining each through a magnifying-glass, and as he put them aside, he made notes in a gold-clasped pocket-book.

Luke lay watching for some astonished minutes, not daring to move, for fear of disturbing his master at his delicate task. Then his eyes wandered round the compartment, and he suddenly noticed something which struck him as peculiar.

The door into the corridor was slightly ajar.

Luke felt sure that the door had been tightly shut when he had got into his berth. It seemed peculiar that it should have opened. What was odder still, it did not swing to and fro, as might have been expected with the oscillation of the train, which was travelling at a high rate of speed.

Luke watched intently. Hallo, the door was moving! It was slowly—very, very slowly—opening.

Moreover, framed in the widening chink, was the face of the bearded assassin of the Piazza di Spagna steps!

This man was peering into the compartment with fascinated eyes, watching the millionaire as he turned over his priceless playthings. But in his hand was something which gleamed.

Luke braced up all his muscles. He must act—and act at once. To cry out a warning would be futile. The murderer might leap forward before Cheyne realised his presence, and the deed would be done. No; Luke must save his master by acting, not by mere shouting.

Wider and wider opened the door. At last the bearded man, with a swift movement, let go the handle, and made a forward step.



Luke was too quick for him. With one tremendous jump he threw himself from the bunk clean into the man's arms.

The murderer was pitched right out of the compartment into the corridor, and fell with a crash, Luke on top of him. The knife flew from his grasp.

Simultaneously the millionaire rose from his feet, and seized the knife. Very quickly he bent over Luke, who had the fellow by the throat, and said:

"Let him go, Luke!"

Luke at once obeyed, and the bearded man rose and faced them without saying anything.

"This is the man who stabbed the cloaked messenger in the Piazza di Spagna!" gasped Luke.

"All the same, we must let him go," said the millionaire sternly. "We can't afford to attract attention to ourselves at this moment. We shall have an opportunity of settling with him at some future date, I do not doubt; but, meanwhile, he must be let off scot free."

The stranger had evidently understood, though Cheyne had spoken in English, for he turned and slunk down the corridor, and disappeared into another compartment. As soon as he had gone, the millionaire grasped Luke's hand.

"You're just what I expected," he said cordially. "Harvard Cheyne doesn't forget when a man saves his life, I tell you, Luke; and I shan't forget what you've done for me this night."

### CHAPTER III.

#### IN THE SILENT PALACE OF THE PRINCE.

"**C**ARRY this bag, please, Luke," said the millionaire, "and see that you don't drop it. I shouldn't like to see half my fortune drop into the Grand Canal." And he chuckled as he stepped into the gondola.

Luke followed him, grasping the precious handbag tightly. The door of the hotel closed behind them. The two rowers took up their oars. The slim black craft glided away from the hotel, and out on to the silent waters of the canal.

Cheyne and Luke had arrived in Venice nearly a week previously, but hitherto nothing had happened, and there was no sign of their visiting the House of Gems. Luke had had plenty of time to wander about and see the sights of the beautiful city of the Adriatic lagoons, while the millionaire remained in the private sitting-room of their hotel, immersed in business. Now, at last, the time had come for action. Cheyne had given orders to Luke to hold himself in readiness to go out that night, and had significantly added that he had better bring his revolver with him, in case of eventualities. A swift, two-oared gondola had been engaged for midnight; somewhat

to the hotel manager's surprise; and in this they had just embarked.

The millionaire did not speak as they glided noiselessly along; and Luke, of course, sat silent, too. Apparently the gondoliers had received their orders already, for they rowed steadily, without question. Soon they swung their craft round out of the wide Grand Canal, and into a smaller one.

The tall, lightless houses rose on either side, and a narrow strip of dim, cloudy sky was just visible between their roofs overhead. No sound was to be heard but the lapping of the water, the plash of the long oars, and the occasional weird cry of the gondoliers, who, whenever they rounded a corner, sang out the customary word of warning, in case some other gondola should be approaching from the opposite direction, and might cause a collision.

The voyage seemed a long one. For fully an hour the oarsmen wound in and out and to and fro through the canaletti, as Venice's lesser waterways are called. Luke wondered when the journey was to end. Already one o'clock had struck from the innumerable church towers of the city. And then suddenly his eyes widened with astonishment.

The gondola had just passed a house which had an overhanging balcony, whence trailed the half-withered branches of an ancient vine. They had glided beneath that same balcony, with that same vine, half an hour before. Luke recognised it perfectly. He had noticed it when they first passed it. Why had they returned that way again? They could not be more than a hundred yards away from it.

For an instant he had thoughts of communicating his discovery to Cheyne, but a glance at the millionaire's stern face and sleepless eyes dissuaded him. He must know better than Luke himself knew, and he must have some good reason for this queer, circular excursion.

At length the gondola drew up before an old, moss-hung doorway, from which a flight of steps ran down into the canal. One of the gondoliers seized a mooring-post, and drew the craft in towards the steps, so that they could alight.

Cheyne rose, and stepped out of the gondola, signalling Luke to follow. He raised a rusty but magnificently carved knocker, and very gently tapped twice upon the door.

It was immediately thrown open by a grey-haired manservant. Cheyne and Luke entered, and he closed the door behind them, and led the way into the interior of the house.

The house appeared to be one of the old palaces of Venice, though its splendours were only faintly visible in the dim light of the lantern carried by the servant. This door was obviously only a side entrance, for they passed down a long passage, and then emerged into a vast hall. From this hall a splendid flight of steps led upward to the



higher storeys, and this they began to ascend.

Almost immediately Luke's eyes were dazzled by a blinding blaze of light. From some hidden switch hundreds of electric glow-bulbs had simultaneously been turned on, and flooded the whole interior with brilliance.

At the head of the staircase, full in the glare of lamps, stood a commanding figure—that of a man, attired in evening-dress, and with the ribbon of a Royal order across his breast. He was singularly tall and imposing, and he wore that peculiar, condescending smile of welcome which is known only by personages in the highest rank.

Cheyne advanced towards this individual, and bowed with some deference.

"Good-evening, prince!" he said, in Italian. And the two shook hands.

"Have you brought—" inquired the prince, leaving his sentence unfinished.

"I have," answered Cheyne. Turning to Luke, he took the handbag from his keeping. "They are here."

"Good!" said the prince. "Will you come with me, and we can discuss the terms—"

He led the way, and Cheyne followed, into a small ante-room. Here Luke was bidden to wait. The prince and Cheyne passed into an apartment beyond, and the butler withdrew.

Left alone, Luke sat down on a couch by an open window and looked forth. Below him he could see dimly the waters of a narrow canal, but not that in which their gondola was awaiting them. Opposite him, across the canal, rose a blank wall—perhaps shielding the garden of another palace. The city was more silent than ever. Not even the cry of a gondolier was to be heard. Venice slept.

The house itself was wonderfully silent also, though now and then voices came from the inner apartment—the voices of the millionaire and the prince. But the words were unintelligible, and generally uttered in a low tone, as of those discussing dark secrets.

Seemingly this visit to the House of Gems was not to prove so exciting as Luke had hoped. He began to doze, disappointedly.

"Help—help!"

There was no mistaking that cry. The millionaire was in difficulties. Although the door was thick, Luke knew his master's voice. Besides, it was in English. He started up from the couch, upon which he had almost slept.

"Help—help!"

The shout was repeated. And almost simultaneously with it came the crash of a revolver.

Luke leapt to the door of the inner apartment and threw it open.

Within, a strange scene met his gaze.

The room in which he found himself was lofty in the extreme, and decorated in the extreme of sumptuous fashion. Electric lamps shone in clusters from the carved

ceiling, and the walls were draped with tapestry drawn tightly over the recesses in which were the windows. In the centre of the room stood a large ebony table, upon whose polished surface gleamed and glowed an immense quantity of jewels, some of which had apparently been emptied from the leather jewel-cases which lay near.

But Luke had hardly time to take in these details. His attention was instantly riveted by the drama which was being played out in the centre of the apartment.

Half across the table was stretched the figure of the prince, pinned there by the iron grasp of the millionaire. The latter had seized his arm in a grip of steel, for in the potentate's hand was clutched a smoking revolver, and it needed no prophet to perceive that this weapon would be used with murderous intent if it were not prevented.

On the floor lay the butler, his face ashy white. Blood stained the sleeve of one of his arms, where he had evidently received the first revolver bullet. But what amazed Luke more than anything was the strange alteration in the man's face. The grey hair—now revealed as a wig—had rolled aside, and black hair, tight-cropped, was visible beneath. The butler was now recognised as no less a personage than the solitary occupant of the boat which the Cobra had picked up in mid-ocean off Stromboli. Furthermore, Luke could have sworn that he had seen that same face and those same ferret-like eyes since then, though he was unable to recall where.

All those thoughts flashed through his brain in a mere fraction of a second. Before he had time to analyse his impressions he had leapt to Cheyne's aid, and tore the revolver from the prince's hand. The weapon spun across the room, and, falling upon the polished floor, exploded again, filling the apartment with stifling smoke.

But the prince was not easily overcome. His strength was prodigious. Like a wild cat, he writhed beneath the grasp of the millionaire and the cabin-boy. In his efforts to wrench himself free he swept the jewels off the table on to the floor in a shining cascade.

How long that strange struggle lasted Luke could not have told. It seemed like an hour, but probably it was only a few minutes. The weirdest part of all was that during the entire encounter, except for Cheyne's appeal for help, no one of the fighters had uttered one word. In dead silence they reeled to and fro. Not a sound was to be heard but the shuffling of feet and the agonised, gasping breaths of the combatants. A conspiracy of secrecy seemed to brood over the House of Gems.

Slowly and by sure degrees, Cheyne and Luke forced the prince to submit. At last he lay, panting and overcome, beneath their hands. Swiftly Luke stripped some of the draperies from the couch, and they tied his hands and feet. He was helpless. Only his



furious eyes and his clenched hands showed how relentless still was his hatred and desire for revenge. Nevertheless, no words escaped his tightly-shut lips.

This task was barely completed when Cheyne swung round, with a smothered exclamation of alarm.

Luke followed his gaze.

The butler, whose wound was evidently not a very serious one, had revived. He had caught sight of the gems spilled all over the floor. Raising himself painfully on to his knees, he had crawled towards one small jewel-case, which lay a little apart from the others. His eyes sparkled with cunning cupidity.

He grasped it in his hand, and then apprehensively looked up to see whether he was observed. He met the stern gaze of the millionaire.

The butler gave a gasp, and, with a supreme effort, which made every vein on his face stand out like whipcord, so great was the agony, he contrived to rise to his feet. Still grasping the jewel-case in his hand, he made a dash for the door.

"After him!" hissed Cheyne. "He must not escape!"

Luke, who had just tied the last knot in the prince's handcuffs, rushed in pursuit of the butler.

The man glanced back over his shoulder, like a hunted beast, and, seeing himself pursued, gave vent to a scream of despair. Springing across the ante-room in which Luke had waited, he threw himself through the open window. He fell into the canal outside with an ominous splash, and the dark waters closed over his head.

For an instant Luke paused, aghast. Then he scrambled on to the sill.

No thought of personal danger, or the grave risk he was running, entered Luke's brain. Not waiting to divest himself of any portion of his clothing, nor even to remove from his feet the somewhat heavy boots he wore, he raised his hands above his head, and, with one look at the dark, turbid waters, dived.

Like an arrow he cleft the air—down, down he went; then, splash! He was in, with the rush of water singing dully in his ears. Foul mud and slime filled his nose and mouth, while, so heavily impregnated with dirt was the canal that, on opening his eyes he found himself in a darkness dense as that of the grave.

Surely his downward course was done. It seemed an eternity since he had entered those awful depths. But at last the turn came, and a minute later he shot to the surface.

The gently heaving waste, rippled by his own sudden plunge, betrayed no sign of the man for whom he had risked his life. Again the plucky youngster dived, groping blindly. Once his outstretched hands came into contact with what he thought must be the butler's arm, but, to Luke's chagrin, he

found that he had grasped the side of a muddy pile.

The strain of his exertions was already beginning to tell upon him. He felt chilled through and through from his sudden immersion, and as he rose once again to the surface, struggling for a breath of fresh air, the temptation was strong within him to leave the man to his fate.

But his sturdy British pluck came to the rescue. For the third time he dived, in the direction in which a sudden eddying pool caught his eye. The butler had risen for the last time.

With a few strong over-arm strokes, the boy reached the spot. But the man had disappeared.

"Well, here goes for a last try!"

And, so saying, Luke dived again. Down, down he went, his arms cleaving the blackness. Then—thank Heaven!—his body brushed against that of the would-be suicide.

Running his hands over the almost inanimate form, Luke gripped him by the back of the neck, only to find himself the next instant enveloped by a pair of muscular arms.

Then commenced at the bottom of the canal a fight to the death. True it was that the man was weak from the result of the bullet-wound, but a frenzy of despair had seized him. It was in vain that the brave boy strove to disengage himself from the other's death-grip. He was being slowly suffocated.

Lashing out with his right, Luke caught the man a terrible blow. For a second his hold weakened. This was the boy's chance. Turning over, he drew himself away from his victim, put his strong, muscular arm under the other's chin, and in this way slowly brought his now inanimate burden to the surface.

Overhead he had a momentary glimpse of the lighted window from which he had dived, and the millionaire framed as a silhouette in it, and frantically gesticulating.

Luke shouted that he was safe, and the figure withdrew, evidently intending to descend by the stairway and come to his aid. He supported the limp figure and slowly but steadily dragged him to the nearest steps.

Almost simultaneously, a gondola shot round the corner—the gondola of the millionaire. The latter was standing upright in it, and, on seeing Luke and his burden safely at the shore, gave an exclamation of relief.

They dragged the butler's inanimate form up on to the steps, and eagerly bent over him.

"Ah, as I thought," muttered the millionaire—"dead! He could hardly have survived that bullet-wound. But how about the jewel-case?"

"Here it is," said Luke, opening the dead man's tightly-clenched hands, in which the jewel-case reposed, none the worse for its immersion.

"Thank Heaven for that!" cried Cheyne fervently. "Then our night's work has not



been in vain, after all." He took it from Luke, and thrust it into his pocket. "But we must be off at once. This miserable fellow needs no help. He is beyond human aid. And—unless I'm much mistaken—here come the police. We do not want their inquisitive attentions."

He sprang into the gondola, and Luke followed. Cheyne gave a hurried instruction to the oarsmen, and they swept off, just as a police-barge swung round the corner. The revolver-shot had evidently been heard—sound carries an enormous distance in Venice—and the guardians of law and order had come to investigate.

The police-barge stopped to investigate the body of the butler, and this delayed them. When they eventually gave chase to the millionaire's gondola, all hope of catching it was in vain. Cheyne's oarsmen were picked rowers. Like lightning they took their craft along the canals, swinging round corners at what seemed an impossibly reckless pace. In five minutes they had left their pursuers hopelessly in the rear. In ten they had drawn up at the door of the hotel.

#### CHAPTER IV.

##### THE HISTORY OF THE STAR OF HUNGARY.

"**N**OW you want to know what it's all about—eh?" queried Cheyne, as he lit his after-breakfast cigar. "Well, that's only fair, as you've taken so great a part in the affair, and been of such priceless help to me."

The morning sunshine was streaming in through the windows of their private sitting-room, and glinting gaily on the blue waters of the Grand Canal outside. Last night's tragic adventure seemed like an impossible nightmare.

"If it would be convenient for you to tell me," said Luke.

"Certainly, my boy—certainly. You have shown yourself worthy of my confidence, and will show yourself worthy of it again in the future, I dare say. Well, the prince is—never mind who he is. It's enough if I hint that he is one of the most exalted personages in Europe at this moment. Like myself, he is a gem-fancier. Gems, you know, are my hobby. I don't care twopence about anything except collecting them, and then I flatter myself that I possess the most valuable treasures in the jewel line of any man in the world.

"Jewels are like bombshells—dangerous playthings. That is why I live alone on my yacht. My yacht is my strong-room—the safest strong-room conceivable, for it is always on the move, and I am always with it. I never leave it, except to exhibit my jewels somewhere, or to collect new ones. Collecting, I may remark, takes me here and there all over the world, and——" He paused, smiling.

"But I am wandering from the point," he said. "The prince, I repeat, is a gem-fancier, like myself; but, unlike myself, he is a kleptomaniac as well. Some little time ago the Star of Hungary, one of the most valuable diamonds in the world, and of enormous historic interest, vanished. The prince was suspected of having stolen it from the Royal regalia where it was kept, but he was in too high a position to be prosecuted. There was nothing for it but to get it back from him by diplomacy.

"A Milanese detective was engaged—the man who was killed last night—and obtained a position as the prince's butler. But he could never induce the prince to betray his secret. The butler felt sure the diamond was somewhere in the prince's possession, but he never caught sight of it, though he saw, at one time or another, the whole of the prince's collection of precious stones.

"The butler then conceived the idea of persuading me to come and offer to exchange a large number of gems with the prince for the Star of Hungary. As a matter of fact, I am probably the only man in Europe who owns enough gems to make possible such an exchange, or is sufficient of an authority to be able to approach the prince with so big a proposal at all. I was written to by certain distinguished personages, and agreed to the scheme. But already the prince had begun to suspect the butler, and set spies upon him. Thus it was that an appointment in mid-ocean was needful to secure complete secrecy when we made our final arrangements, and thus it was that we had to take such precautions about being tracked.

"We went to Venice, to the prince's palace, as you know, and I duly made the proposition to him. I showed him the literally priceless selection of gems I had brought with me as a bait, and he promptly produced the Star of Hungary. At that very moment the butler—who had withdrawn into another ante-room—entered the apartment, and accused the prince of having stolen the star. He reckoned without his host. The prince drew a revolver and shot him at sight. Some suspicion of the trap into which he had fallen must have crossed his mind, for he turned to empty the second chamber of his revolver into me. I seized him just in time to save myself. The rest you know."

"But your jewels—how will you get them back?" asked Luke.

"They have already been returned, every one of them!" laughed Cheyne. "They are, in a sense, the price of my silence. The prince dare not keep them." He turned to the table, and opened a box which lay upon it. "And here," he added, "is the Star of Hungary!"

A blaze of light seemed to fill the room as he lifted the magnificent stone from its velvet-lined resting-place.

"This is what you took from the dead man's hand last night," he continued. "It may interest you to learn that, by your plucky leap into the canal, you rescued one



of the most famous crown jewels in the world, which will now be returned to its rightful owners. If you do not receive a liberal reward from a certain very liberal king, I shall be greatly surprised."

"Then why did the butler take it, and—"

"Ah, there we meet a riddle which will never be solved! That fellow, I fear, was untrue to his trust. He coveted the jewel not for his employers but for himself, and, even in death he made one last effort to steal it. Did you recognise him?"

"Yes; as the man we met in the boat off Stromboli."

"Think of him as wearing a beard, and not clean-shaven."

THE END.

## THE ST. FRANK'S LEAGUE

A further list of names and addresses of Organising Officers.

197. Joe Beddows, 12, Lord Napier Street, Salford, Manchester; 198. Miss Catherine Bailey, 11, Wellclose Terrace, Blackman Lane, Leeds; 199. J. Tym, 242, Queens Road, Sheffield; 200. Jack Osborne, 10, Cliff Street, Barking Road, Plaistow, E.13; 201. Miss Mavis Alcorn, 2, Pendarves Road, West Wimbledon, S.W.20; 202. Ben Yates, 13, Recreation Gardens, Low Lane, Birstall, Leeds; 203. Ernie Fletcher, 91, Francis Avenue, Southsea, Portsmouth; 204. Albert Radford, 370, Berridge Road Central, Hyson Green, Nottingham; 205. Billy Murdoch, c/o Master Albert Radford, 370, Berridge Road Central, Hyson Green, Nottingham; 206. F. Moore, 47, Thomas Street, Lindley, Huddersfield; 207. Joe Krietzman, 29, Ernest Street, Mile End Road, Whitehorse Lane, Stepney, E.1; 208. Harold George Ruffell, 99, Chapel Street, Stratford, E.15; 209. A. Brookman, 18, Elmar Road, West Green Road, Tottenham, N.15; 210. R. Pearson, 6, Maitland Street, Liverpool; 211. Walter G. Strange, 12, Longville Road, Newington Butts, S.E.11; 212. Frank L. Bubb, St. Andrew's Road, Southsea, Portsmouth; 213. F. Larkin, Jr., 17, Lyvedene Road, Tooting, S.W.17; 214. D. Watson, 62, Highlever Road, W.10; 215. James Hutton, Mill Street, Comber, Co. Down, N. Ireland; 216. James L. Hall, 80, Falmouth Road, Heaton, Newcastle-on-Tyne; 218. Douglas E. Strouquist, 2, Mansard Close, Jeffcock Road, Wolverhampton; 219. Master L. Ross, 14, Grove Park, Camberwell, S.E.; 220. J. O. Evans, 167, Buckingham Road, Aylesbury; 221. Douglas Hanman, 20, The Crescent, Kenton Road, Kenton, Harrow, Middlesex; 222. William Fox, 5, Victoria Avenue, Hawthorn Avenue, Hessie Road, Hull; 223. Robert L. Baker, The Cabin, 70, Upper Tulse Hill, Brixton, S.W.2; 224. E. Franchel, 151, Willesden Lane, Brondesbury, N.W.6; 225. Reginald

"The man on the train—the assassin of the Piazza di Spagna!"

"Right! He thought I would come to the Piazza di Spagna, and would place some of my gems in the keeping of the messenger there—for such were my instructions. I suspected them, however, and he was foiled. Then he tried to rob me on the train. Again he failed, thanks to your grit. I suspected him all along, but had no proofs; and, anyhow, was helpless without his aid. He has met his deserts. But if it had not been for you, Luke, I'm afraid I should not have been here at this moment alive; nor would the Star of Hungary have been rescued from its royal thief. Yes, I am glad I took you with me to the House of Gems!"

Megson, 31, Ryecroft Street, Ossett; 226. Robert A. Wheeler, 21, St. Mary's Road, Hastings; 227. Arthur Lowe, 14, Nuttall Street, Burnley; 228. Ernest Nuttall, 69, Palnk Lane, Leigh, Lancs; 229. S. L. Wise, 210, Kensington Crescent, Swansea; 230. L. A. Wrigley, 31, Plantation Street, Accrington; 231. Fred Sprules, 187d, Friern Road, East Dulwich, S.E.22; 232. John Forster, 7, Reynolds Road, Newlands, Peckham Rye, S.E.15; 233. Stanley Chadwick, 554, Leeds Road, Carlton Terrace, Huddersfield; 234. George Thomas Curry, 10, Albert Road, Kilburn, N.W.6; 235. William Alfred Hames, 30, William Street, Cleethorpes, Lincs; 236. E. G. Childs, Bridge House, Eynesbury, St. Neot's, Hunts; 237. William F. Callaghan, 75, Chapel Street, Dublin; 238. J. Gallop, 208, Albert Road, Southsea (J. L. W. Gallop); 239. Ernest Raby, Church Hill, St. Dennis, Cornwall; 240. R. Dalton, 204, The Grove, Hammersmith, W. 6; 241. Harry W. Brown, Thorncombe, Albert Street, Slough; 242. Harry Hindley, 7, Clarendon Road, South Shore, Blackpool; 243. Reginald D. Beard, 16, Wilford Terrace, Waterway Street, Nottingham; 244. W. Wallace, 19, Richmond Street, Southchurch, Southend-on-Sea; 245. Robert Birrell, 27, Gillies Lane, Crosshill, Baillieston, Nr. Glasgow; 246. William Clements, 10, Marple Street, Ardwick, Manchester; 247. J. A. Tooth, Thames Villa, Portsmouth Road, Surbiton; 248. Donald R. Hopper, 8, St. Matthew Street, Boulevard, Hull; 249. Alastair M. Smith (B197), A Company, Boys' Technical School, Beachley Camp, Chepstow, Mon.; 250. J. A. Courts, 2, Elvan Terrace, Ibrox, Glasgow, S.W.; 251. Noel M. Levet, 8, Martha Road, Stratford, E.15; 252. Joseph T. Botten, 66, Cromsworth Road, Wandsworth Road, S.W.8; 253. H. Watson, 1, Churston Avenue, Upton Park, E.13; 254. Miss Phyllis V. Smith, Laundry Cottage, The Lawn, Swindon; 255. Donald Henry D'Hooghe, Fernlea, Laburnam Road, Fairfield, Liverpool; 256. Richard A. Barrow, 58, Stafford Street, Market Drayton, Salop; 257. George H. Mason, The Cottage, off Station Road, Colwyn Bay, N. Wales; 258. J. Geddes, 21, Viewforth, Edinburgh; 259. C. Spencer, 6, Brisbane Road, Ilford.



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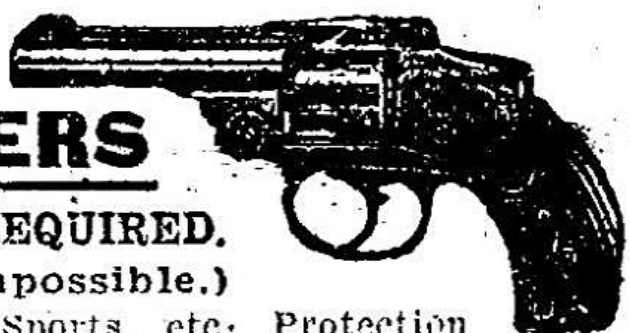
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