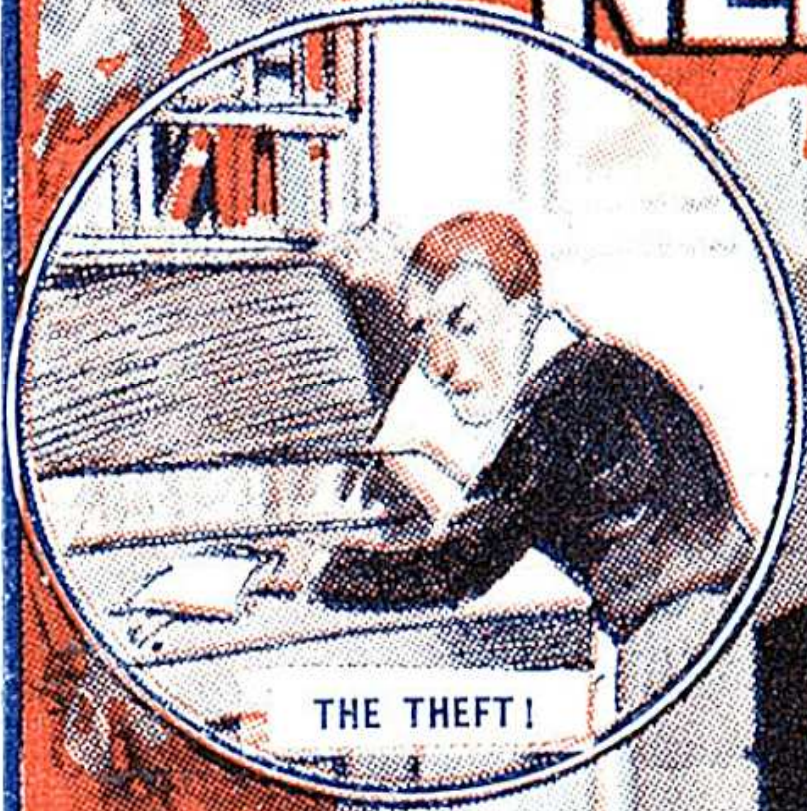


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THE THEFT!



HANDFORTH

GETS THE SACK!

HANDY BEHIND THE BARS?

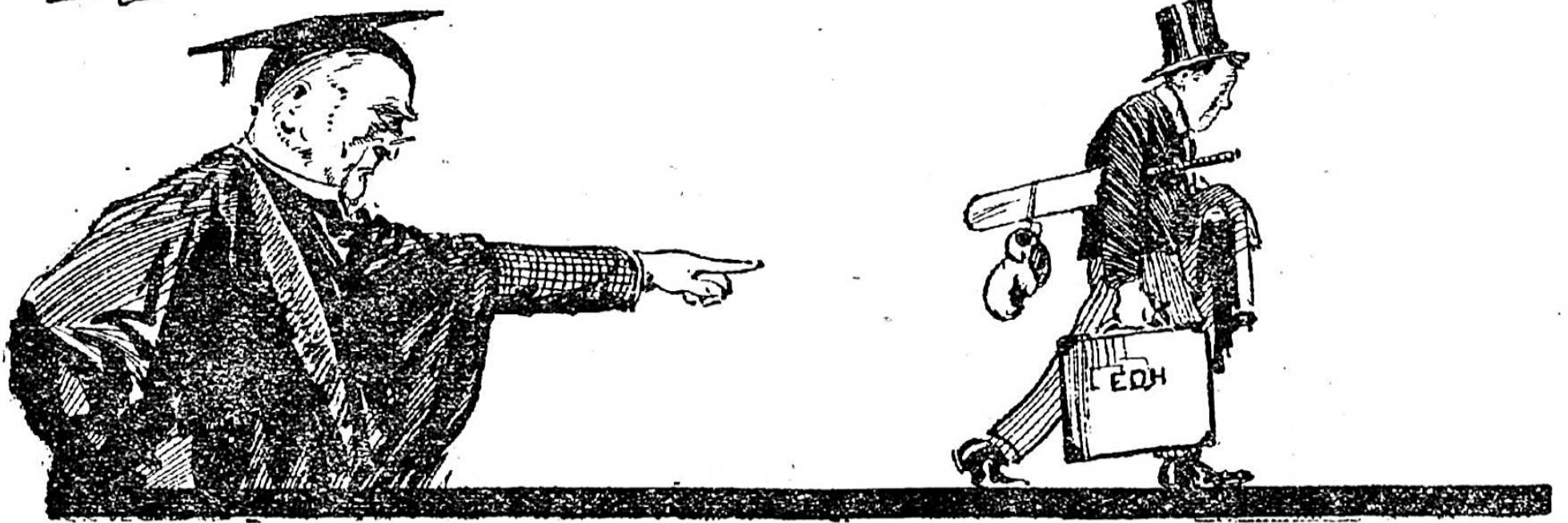
He is under sentence of expulsion—but will he go?

You'll enjoy this Stunning Long Complete Story of Fun and Sport at St. Frank's.



"Confound you!" snarled Forrest, and he kicked out with all his strength, catching Marmaduke squarely. The friendly little monkey gave a screech of pain. Right on the heels of it sounded a stern voice: "Forrest!" The cad recognised Mr. Crowell's tone, and he swung round, alarm on his features.

HANDFORTH GETS THE SACK!



By EDWY SEARLES BROOKS

*Handy is for it this time—but he doesn't deserve it!
Read about it in this stunning long complete yarn of the
Boys of St. Frank's.*

CHAPTER 1.

FORREST GETS THE WORST OF IT!

MARMADUKE, in the friendliest possible mood, hopped in front of Bernard Forrest, and showed his gleaming teeth with chattering exuberance.

Forrest, of the Remove, came to a dead halt.

"Keep away from me, you dirty rat!" he snapped. "I'll kick you into the middle of next week if you come any nearer!"

To tell the truth, Forrest was somewhat nervous of Willy Handforth's pet monkey. It was very seldom he encountered the little animal, but when he did, Marmaduke generally spat at him, and showed his teeth. Marmaduke seemed to have an intuition that Bernard Forrest was a cad.

But this afternoon he was particularly amiable. His master had just released him for a little exercise, and this happy moment rarely arrived until the evening. Marmaduke considered himself particularly lucky, and he was on good terms with everybody.

The midday meal was only just over, and it was a half-holiday. Bernard Forrest had just emerged from the West Gate, en route for Little Side. And there was Marmaduke in the fairway, grinning at him, and hopping about joyously.

"Get out of my way!" said Forrest harshly.

Marmaduke seemed to recognise a hostile force, but he was in such high spirits that he made a run towards Forrest, with the intention of giving him a playful clutch as he swept by. Willy happened to glance through the open doorway of the outbuilding at this particular moment.

"Confound you!" snarled Forrest, in alarm.

His foot shot out, and the unfortunate Marmaduke caught it slantwise. The little monkey gave a screech of pain, and nipped off.

Willy Handforth saw red. He dropped Marmaduke's drinking-cup, hurled himself towards the doorway, and then checked. A stern voice had intervened, and the Third Form skipper decided to wait.

"Forrest!" said the stern voice. "Do you hear me, Forrest?"

The cad of Study A turned, and beheld Mr. Crowell, the master of the Remove. Mr. Crowell had only strolled through the West Gate by chance, but he had not failed to observe that ill-natured kick.

"Speaking to me, sir?" said Forrest, staring.

"You know well enough that I am speaking to you, Forrest!" retorted the Form-master curtly. "Do not imagine that I missed that cowardly kick of yours just now. I am amazed. I am staggered that a boy

of your age should commit such an ungentlemanly act."

Forrest had the decency to flush.

"I don't know what you mean, sir!" he blustered.

"Don't deny it!" thundered Mr. Crowell. "You kicked that unhappy monkey deliberately and maliciously. You will write me five hundred lines, Forrest—and I shall want them before tea!"

Forrest had made some very pretty plans for the afternoon, and to see them utterly wrecked by this edict not only alarmed him, but filled him with inward rage. He breathed hard as he glared at the master.

"I say, sir, what's the idea?" he protested hotly. "That rotten little beast was just going to snap at me. I only kicked out like that to defend myself. I didn't mean to touch the little brute."

"The monkey was in no way threatening you, Forrest, so it is useless for you to make things worse by lying!" retorted Mr. Crowell angrily. "Why, the creature is perfectly harmless, or it would not be allowed any freedom whatsoever. Another word, young man, and I will add to that imposition by taking you indoors and caning you. I am ashamed that such a boy as you belongs to my Form! Leave my sight, sir!"

But it was Mr. Crowell who left Forrest's sight, for the Form-master strode off with set lips and angry eyes. The Remove considered that Mr. Crowell was several kinds of a tyrant, but they had never accused him of inhumanity. In his own way, Mr. Crowell was very tender-hearted, and it always enraged him beyond measure if he saw a dumb animal being ill-treated.

"Infernal old fool!" muttered Forrest savagely. "Who told that busybody to come nosing about?"

Willy Handforth appeared in the doorway of the bicycle shed—which was also the pets' quarters, being a long, commodious building. He gave a peculiar whistle, and Marmaduke scooted down the tree, and came to his young master's side. He cringed past Forrest, and crouched at Willy's feet.

"All right, Marmy, old son; hop back to bed for a minute," said Willy gently.

The intelligent little monkey obeyed on the instant, and Forrest smiled in a supercilious, sneering manner. He was feeling bitter and angry. His whole afternoon was wrecked, for there was no getting out of that impot. Mr. Crowell was as hot as mustard.

"I suppose you're feeling pleased with yourself—eh?" said Forrest, as he glared at Willy. "That confounded monkey of yours can consider himself lucky! He's a fit companion for you, too—"

"Wait a minute!" interrupted Willy smoothly. "You kicked old Marmy, and Mr. Crowell gave you five hundred lines. Well, I happen to consider that punishment a dotty one. You're not going to escape with a mere impot, you miserable cur!"

Forrest flushed crimson.

"Why, you cheeky cad!" he roared. "If you talk to me like that—"

"I'd knock you down, but it isn't good enough," interrupted Willy contemptuously. "You need more drastic treatment—and you'll get it! The fellow who kicks one of my pets doesn't escape with five hundred lines!"

Willy put his fingers to his mouth, and issued three shrill, devastating blasts. Bernard Forrest started. He knew what that signal meant. He turned aside hastily, and hurried off. Willy made no attempt to check him, but stood there, waiting.

And before Forrest could reach the nearest gateway, out of the walled, private road five fags came hurtling through the gate from the West Square. Another four rushed up from the main gates. Three others breathlessly appeared from Little Side. The Third always answered its leader's urgency call without question or hesitation.

Bernard Forrest was trapped between the three fires.

"That's the chap!" said Willy. "Down on him!"

Bernard Forrest was downed. He made a feeble protest at first, but it was smothered with utter ruthlessness. His immaculate flannels—donned but fifteen minutes since—were utterly ruined in about ten seconds. He found himself buried beneath a pile of fags. They sat quite impartially upon his legs, his body, and his head. With the utmost cheerfulness they piled upon him, and awaited further orders.

"Good!" said Willy, as he came along and inspected the pile. "That cad just kicked Marmy, and it's up to the Third to teach him better manners. He needs a lesson. Take him away, and chuck him into that bed of stinging nettles behind the paddock wall."

"Is that stiff enough?" asked Chubby Heath dubiously. "Oughtn't we to throw him to the lions, or something?"

"He'll find those nettles pretty bad," said Willy grimly. "I got among 'em by accident yesterday, and I know what they're like! Off with him!"

His faithful followers were only too ready to obey orders. And Forrest, in spite of his threats, was yanked off, whirled over the wall, and dumped forcibly into a tangled mass of very choice nettles. By the time he had rolled over twice, and had scrambled to his feet, he was stung in about a hundred different places.

"You—you young demons!" he panted. "Just wait—"

But Forrest thought it advisable to bolt. The fags were prepared to roll him in the nettles again, and he fairly streaked away from the danger zone. Twenty minutes later he came downstairs from his dormitory in the Ancient House, immaculate again, but with countless red spots on his face, and bitter fury in his heart. He was in no mood to stand the fresh shock which awaited him.

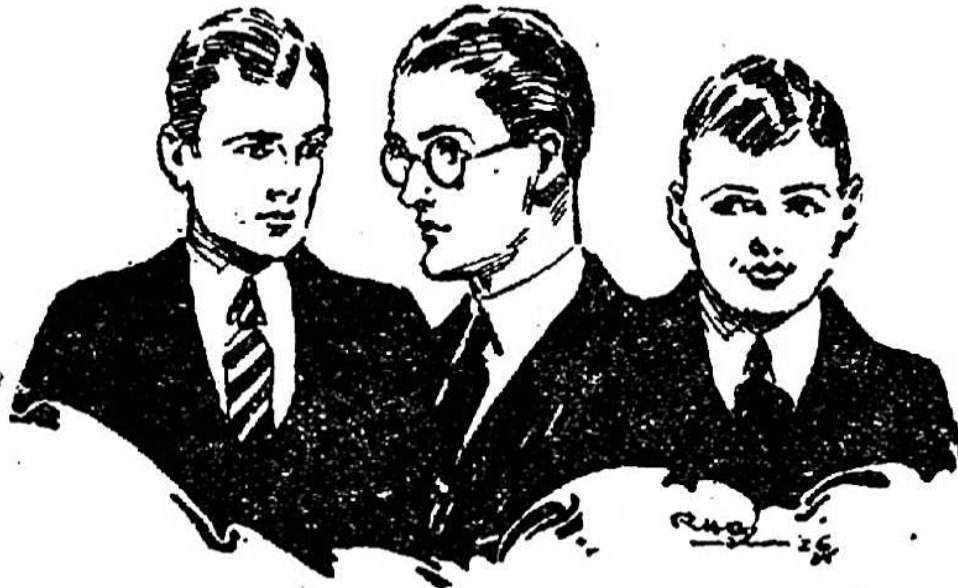
"I say, Forrest, seen this?" shouted Gulliver, as the leader of Study A appeared. "Look at this notice!"

THEY'RE LOOKING FOR ADVENTURE!

CORKING

NEW

SERIAL!



STARTS

NEXT

WEEK!

BOB, HAROLD and FATTY.

You will meet these three adventure-loving boys in the wonderful new yarn which commences in next Wednesday's issue of the NELSON LEE LIBRARY—

“THE ROLLICKING ROVERS”

They start on a treasure-hunt which carries them right round the world! The author is Mr. Colin Collins—he is new to the pages of the Old Paper, but he's a rattling fine writer for all that. This yarn is packed with thrills—and fun! Mr. Collins knows how to make you laugh, as well as how to keep you on your toes with excitement. This rousing yarn will grip you from the start.

Look out for it - - - - - NEXT WEDNESDAY!

“Hang the notice!” snarled Forrest.

“But it's important, man!” panted Bell. “The Remove's in for a special exam. to-morrow morning! The first of the big ones, you know. And it doesn't say what the subject's going to be.”

Forrest took notice of his two study mates at last. This was indeed grave news! He strode across to the baize-covered board, and inspected the notice. There was no mistake about it. It was a brief announcement that the Remove would sit for a special examination, on a subject to be announced at the fatal hour, on the following morning at ten-thirty.

“This is just what I needed to make me feel happy!” said Forrest sourly.

“It's a dirty trick not to say what the subject's going to be!” complained Gulliver. “How the dickens can we prepare ourselves?”

“That's just the trap they catch us in!” wailed Bell. “We're supposed to be well up in every subject—that's what we've been swotting for. And they'll spring something awful on us at the last minute!”

Forrest's lip curled.

“You've been doing a fat lot of swotting!” he sneered.

“What's the matter with you, Forrest?”

asked Gulliver, staring. “No need to use that tone to us, is there? What's happened?”

“Everything's happened!” retorted Forrest. “That beast of a Crowell has given me five hundred lines for one thing—and they've got to be done before tea. Let's get out of here; some of the other chaps are coming.”

Edward Oswald Handforth appeared in view, accompanied by Church and McClure. The famous chums of Study D. were looking rather flustered and hot—having just settled a little argument in the cloak-room. A few other juniors were arriving on the scene, too.

“What's up, Forrest?” asked Handforth, staring. “Lost all your week's pocket-money on your favourite gee-gee?”

“Go and boil yourself!” retorted Forrest curtly.

He vanished, and Handforth was about to give chase when a yell from Church stopped him. Church had just read that notice.

“Oh, corks!” he said, in alarm. “We've got an exam. to-morrow. I say, it's a bit thick to give us only twenty-four hours' notice like this! I thought we were sitting for the exams. next week.”

Handforth forgot his hostile intentions towards Forrest. He inspected the notice with care, and in the meantime Dick Hamilton

and Tommy Watson and Archie Glenthorpe and a few other juniors came along. They gathered round the notice-board in a sombre group.



CHAPTER 2.

ENOCH SNIPE ACTS THE FOOL!

DICK HAMILTON looked round at the others, and smiled.

— "Well, there's nothing particularly alarming in this, is there?" he asked, with a chuckle. "If you fellows have been doing your cramming properly, you'll be fully prepared. Why worry?"

"Absolutely not!" agreed Archie Glenthorpe, nodding. "I mean to say, the old gear-box is fairly humming with bottled knowledge. Odds history and geography! Haven't we been on top gear for the last three weeks?"

"Yes, we have!" said Handforth, glaring.

"Dash it all, is it absolutely necessary to fix me with the good old optic?" asked Archie. "I mean, I haven't done you any injury—"

"And what's the result?" asked Handforth, appealing to the others. "I ask you? What's the result of all this beastly swotting?"

"Well, I should think we ought to be pretty well prepared for the exams.," said Watson.

"You chump!" roared Handforth. "I don't mean that result. Of course we're prepared for the exams.—but at what cost? What happened the other day, when we had the third Test Match? We lost!"

Browne, of the Fifth, who happened to be passing, winced.

"Why remind us of that murky occasion, Brother Handforth?" he asked sadly. "Let it be a forgotten memory—"

"I wasn't talking to you, anyhow!" interrupted Handforth tartly. "We've lost two of those Test Matches in succession, and if the Aussies win the next one, we're finished. The Ashes will be gone for good!"

"An undeniable truth, brother, but while there is another game we still have hope," said the captain of the Fifth. "It must be our aim to win this fourth match, and thus draw on level terms with our sturdy Cornstalk and Gumsucker rivals from down under!"

"That's the only thing to be done," agreed Dick Hamilton. "If we win the next match we shall draw level. Two wins each. By Jove, that'll mean a pretty hot struggle for the Ashes in the last game of the series at Lord's!"

"If we don't win the fourth match," said Browne, "that game at Lord's will be a mere ghost of a tussle. What will there be to fight for? Nay, brothers, there must be no talk of losing the fourth match."

"We shouldn't have lost the third if we hadn't had to do so much swotting!"

grumbled De Valerie. "And now these beastly exams. are going to make things even worse. They're starting already!"

The juniors were undoubtedly justified in airing their grievance. This term had been set aside for sport—by the boys. But Dr. Stafford, the Head of St. Frank's, had decided that an excess of sport was detrimental to the welfare of the school. Naturally, the school regarded this as sheer imbecility, but they thought it wiser not to express this view. The headmaster had power behind him, and they had none.

In short, Dr. Stafford had announced some special examinations for this term, and they were being held for the express purpose of making the boys work—the idea being that they would check their madness for sports. But, somehow, the scheme hadn't panned out in that way. The school had devoted itself to swotting obediently—since there was nothing else to be done—but the sports programme had been adhered to without a single abandonment.

But it had only been accomplished by dint of strenuous labour—by employing every spare moment for either practice or cramming. And, not unnaturally, the school was beginning to feel the effect. A certain weariness was manifesting itself, and even the First Eleven was below par.

And it was so important that the First Eleven should be at the top of its form, too. For in conjunction with the real Test Matches this year, St. Frank's had instituted a novelty—a similar series of minor Test matches—Young England versus Young Australia. St. Frank's represented Young England, and Young Australia was made up of seniors and juniors from several big Public Schools within a thirty mile radius. All members of the team were native-born Australians, and their cricket was brilliant. They already held the lead in the tussle for the "Schoolboy Ashes."

Such was the interest and importance of these games that the final match of the series was fixed for Lord's. William Napoleon Browne had arranged this apparent miracle. Lord's! The famous ground where a genuine Test Match was to be played! The whole of St. Frank's was looking forward to that great occasion with awe and subdued excitement.

The St. Frank's First was training hard now—getting ready for the fourth match, which would seal their fate. This was no time to be bothering with exams! But the "beaks" thought otherwise. And any boy who failed to obtain a certain percentage of marks would be debarred from games and sports till he made up the lost ground. So the desire to make a good showing in the exams. was keen!

"Of course, we've got nothing to be afraid of," said Handforth. "I don't care what the subject is, if it comes to that. Any chap who has swotted properly is well up in everything. The best thing we can do is to forget this notice until to-morrow."

"Hear, hear!" said De Valerie. "We're

due out on the playing-fields. We can't waste all the afternoon indoors. Coming?"

"Yes," said Dick Hamilton. "But it'll be a good idea to get in some extra swotting to-night, though. There's nothing like being on the safe side."

They strolled out, and Handforth stood there, frowning.

"There was something I wanted to do," he said, wrinkling his brow. "Something that had to be attended to before I went out to the nets."

"That torch battery for old Crowell?" asked Church.

"By George, yes!" said Handforth. "Just like him to ask me to get a giddy torch battery on a glorious afternoon like this! I can't bother about it. Who's going to the village, anyhow?"

"Snipe's just off, if you want something," said Fullwood, who was passing. "He offered to do some errands for me, but I politely declined."

"Where is he?" asked Handforth.

"Crossing the Triangle, I believe."

Edward Oswald hurried out, and caught Enoch Snipe, of the Fourth, as he was about to go out into the lane. Snipe belonged to the East House, and he was an unpopular junior. Small and thin, and so round-shouldered that he looked hunch-backed, he had sharply-pointed features, and a foxy expression. His red-rimmed eyes were pale blue and watery. He was a cringing sort of fellow, and was renowned for his vindictive cunning. He would take a blow meekly—but would generally retaliate in some spiteful fashion behind his enemy's back.

At any ordinary time Handforth wouldn't have asked this particular Fourth-Former the slightest favour, but there were so few fellows going to the village this afternoon that Snipe became quite important. And Mr. Crowell had particularly asked Handforth to buy that torch battery.

"Half a tick, Snipe," said Handforth. "Going to the chemist's?"

"I can go, please, Handforth," said Snipe, cringing.

"Don't duck down like that, you ass!" said Handforth, glaring. "I'm not going to biff you! Look here, go to the chemist's and buy an eighteenpenny battery for an electric torch."

"Certainly Handforth, if you want me to," said Snipe. "Two or three other fellows have given me their commissions, too. If you'll give me one-and-ninepence, I'll get your battery."

"It's only one-and-six——"

"But, please, Handforth, I always charge a percentage when I fetch things," said Snipe. "It's only fair——"

"Why, you grasping worm!" roared Handforth. "Do you mean to say you're going to charge me threepence for just going into the chemist's? Clear off! I'll get my minor to go! I'd a good mind to biff you!"

Snipe dodged away, and ran down the lane, and Handforth strode off with an expressive snort. He wasn't so accustomed to Snipe's little ways as the Fourth was. Snipe never did anything for nothing.

"Likely I'm going to run his errands without any profit!" muttered Snipe, as he went on his way.

The ring of a bicycle-bell sounded behind him, and he stepped nervously aside. A girl coasted past him, and Snipe looked after her enviously. She was from the Moor View School—a pretty girl with dark hair, and dressed in cool white. Snipe had always been jealous of Handforth and Pitt and the other juniors who were on such good terms with Irene Manners & Co.

And just then something dropped from the handlebar of the girl's bicycle—her bag. It had been jolted off by a depression in the road-surface. She applied her brakes, and nimbly jumped from her machine.

But Snipe had seized his opportunity. He ran forward and retrieved the bag before its pretty owner could reach the spot. Here was a chance to speak to one of the girls on equal terms, anyhow!

"Thanks awfully," she said, giving Snipe a dazzling smile. "But you shouldn't have troubled, really. It's all the fault of this road. It's perfectly revolting the way they neglect them!"

She was Joan Tarrant, and she spoke with rather an affected manner—which Snipe thought distinctly topping. He also knew that Joan was not on friendly terms with Irene Manners and her chums. In point of fact, she was regarded by all the nice girls of the Moor View School as a "little cat!" In a word, Joan Tarrant was a species of feminine Forrest.

"I—I'm only too jolly glad to help you, you know!" said Snipe breathlessly. "I wish it had been something more—I mean, I wish I could do something again. I—I've often wanted to speak to you."

"Really?" said Joan sweetly. "How perfectly wonderful! And I've wanted to speak to you, too."

"Do—do you mean that?" asked Snipe.

"Rather!" replied the girl, with a nod. "I think it's perfectly loathsome the way the other boys treat you. I've always liked your face. Let's walk down the lane together, shall we?"

"Oh, thanks!" panted Snipe. "Thanks awfully!"

He was entirely unsuspecting, for his vanity was touched. He hadn't the faintest idea that Joan was deliberately fooling him. But it was just the kind of thing that Joan was an expert in. She always took delight in ill-natured deception. It was her pleasant intention to lead the unfortunate Snipe on, and then laugh him to scorn when she had grown tired of the comedy.

But Enoch Snipe was so conceited that he was perfectly blind.

CHAPTER 3.

A MOMENT'S FOLLY.



JOAN TARRANT finished her third ice-cream—at Snipe's expense—and concluded that she was already well repaid for deigning to take any notice of this insignificant little worm. Any fellow who would pay for three sixpenny ice-creams was worth cultivating!

They left the little confectioner's shop in Bellton High Street, and Snipe, mean though he was, felt no pang at being three shillings out of pocket. He would have paid every farthing of his pocket-money in order to boast of his friendship with one of the Moor View girls. It was something for which his shallow little spirit had never dared to hope.

"Isn't it strange that we haven't spoken to one another before?" asked Joan, giving him another of her dazzling smiles. "We're going to be great friends, aren't we?"

"I—I hope so!" said Snipe eagerly. "I say, you're just the kind of girl I like, you know. Shall—shall we walk through the village a bit?"

"That's a wonderful idea," said Joan, nodding. "Let's go out into one of the country lanes. It's so much quieter there," she added, with a laugh. "People can't spy on us."

"Oh, I say!" said Snipe, with a snigger.

"You know what people are for talking," went on Joan. "They'll create a scandal at the least little thing. And if I'm friendly with a fellow, I like being really pally. You can take my arm if you like."

Any other fellow but Snipe would have seen that she was laughing up her sleeve. For, actually, she was highly amused at this senseless junior's impossible conceit. Quite apart from the fact that she regarded all boys with supercilious scorn, Enoch Snipe was about the last fellow in the world she would have chosen for a friend.

"Perhaps we'd better leave it for another day," she suggested, after they had walked a short distance. "Strolling down one of the lanes, I mean. It's so much better in the evening, isn't it?"

"Oh, rather," agreed Snipe, looking at her admiringly. "I say, I didn't know you were such a sport. May—may I call you Joan?"

"We'll see—the next time we meet," she replied gaily.

"Can we fix it now?" asked Snipe breathlessly.

"Of course," said Joan. "Let's meet at the stile—you know, the one that leads into the wood—at ten o'clock to-night. It'll just be lovely and moonlight then. So wonderfully romantic."

"But—but that's after locking-up!" protested Snipe.

"What of that?" asked Joan lightly. "If I'm game enough to break bounds, aren't you? And won't it be perfectly thrilling to

meet in the moonlight? I'd just love it!"

Snipe was filled with joy.

"I'll be there!" he promised.

Inwardly, Joan Tarrant was shaking with laughter. She wouldn't have dared to break bounds for a young prince, let alone this insignificant whipper-snapper. But what a huge joke to tell the other girls! How simply gorgeous! A St. Frank's fellow breaking bounds to meet her at the stile at ten o'clock! Her only regret was that she couldn't be there to witness his discomfiture.

"Well, that's settled, then," she said sweetly. "I don't know how I shall spend the minutes until ten o'clock comes. Oh, won't it be perfectly gorgeous? I shall have to say good-bye now, because——"

"Oh, can't I come with you?" asked Snipe eagerly. "My bike's at the repair-shop, you know—I came down to the village on purpose to fetch it. I'd already planned to go into Bannington."

Joan shook her head.

"Then I won't spoil your arrangements," she replied. "I'm going to Caistowe."

"Oh, but I can come to Caistowe, too, if you like," offered Snipe.

Joan, however, refused to accept his company, although she made it quite clear that she was "perfectly thrilled" at the thought of meeting him at ten o'clock, at the stile. She had often fooled a fellow in this fashion, but never quite so completely as she had fooled Snipe.

She rode off, after giving him a warm handshake and a flashing glance from her dark eyes. Enoch Snipe was so bewildered that he almost forgot to go and fetch his bicycle. He was convinced that Joan had found him attractive.

At last he forced himself to be fairly calm; he got his bicycle and rode into Bannington. By the time he reached the town he was more settled in mind, but he was still unsuspecting. He was thrilled to the core to think that he was really friendly with one of the Moor View girls.

With a smug satisfaction he paused in front of a jeweller's window to inspect the trinkets. It might be a good idea to buy a bangle, or something, to give Joan when they met. He knew how girls loved such things, and it would help to make the friendship even stronger. But Snipe's mean nature came to the fore again, and he decided to wait.

He had to go into the jeweller's, anyhow, in order to fetch a repaired study clock for Grayson, of the Fifth. He went in, and while the jeweller was absent from the counter, fetching the clock, Snipe stood there, dreamily gazing at his reflection in a big mirror behind the counter.

It wasn't a very pleasing reflection, although Snipe seemed quite satisfied with it. His gaze wandered, and took in the rings and wrist-watches in the glass show-case which formed the top of the counter. Then he noticed a gold wristlet-watch quite near him, on the top of the glass. It had,



Handforth stared in blank amazement as he saw Snipe bending over Mr. Crowell's bureau, a sheaf of papers in his hand. "Hallo! What's this!" exclaimed Handforth, and Snipe almost jumped out of his skin.

apparently, been left there by the jeweller a moment before.

It was a lady's watch, too—just the sort that would look ripping on Joan's wrist. Snipe was fascinated by the thought. What a present for her! What a wonderful gift! Why, she would be his pal—

Snipe's heart jumped into his mouth. Could anything be easier? Here was the watch lying ready to his hand! And there wasn't a soul in the shop. The Fourth-Former's miserly instincts were alert. He was famous in the East House for his desire to get something for nothing. Acting on a sudden impulse, he seized the gold wrist-watch and crammed it into his pocket.

The very action awoke him from his trance.

In that same second he realised his mad folly—his criminal insanity. What on earth could have come over him? Just because a girl smiled at him he was ready to turn thief! And he wasn't a thief, really—he hadn't the pluck to be one. Besides, Enoch Snipe wasn't so bad as that, for all his faults.

He put his hand in his pocket to grasp the watch, so that he could replace it on the counter before the jeweller returned. He couldn't imagine what had possessed him to do such a thing. He was frightened out of his life.

"Just a minute, young man," said a stern, cold voice.

"Wha-a-at?" bleated Snipe, with a jump.

"You young thief!" exclaimed the jeweller

icily, as he appeared from behind a showcase. "Take that watch out of your pocket, or I'll call the police!"

Snipe nearly fainted. He had been seen, after all, from behind that show-case! And he had meant to put the watch back! That was the cruel part of the whole affair—he seemed to be a thief, and yet he wasn't one. He had never had any real intention of pocketing that watch.

"Please, I—I—" he panted desperately.

"Lying won't help you," said the jeweller grimly. "Upon my soul, aren't you ashamed of yourself? A public schoolboy—a scholar of St. Frank's! Is this the sort of thing they teach you at that great college?"

"But—but you're wrong!" gasped Snipe. "I—I only put it in my pocket for fun! I was pulling it out when you spoke—"

"That's a likely tale!" interrupted the jeweller angrily, as he took the watch from Snipe's trembling hand. "You're nothing but a common thief, and it's my plain duty to hold you here until I call the police in."

"Oh!" moaned Snipe. "Please, I—I—" Words completely failed him, for he was on the point of utter collapse. The fact that he had never intended taking the watch only made the position worse. He was suffering for his moment of folly.

The jeweller, however, was convinced in his own mind that Snipe was telling the truth. He had seen the junior's effort to replace the watch, and he guessed that it

was just an insane piece of youthful indiscretion. But there could be no excuse for Snipe's initial act. He needed to be taught a severe lesson—one that would live in his memory, and prevent any repetition of that thieving tendency.

"Look here, young man, I'm not hard-hearted," said the jeweller sternly. "I don't want to wreck your career, and get you expelled from the school. I don't want your parents to suffer disgrace for your sins. So I'll give you a chance."

"Oh, thank you!" babbled Snipe. "I—I didn't mean to—"

"I'll give you a chance," repeated the jeweller. "You took that watch, and if you'll buy it, I'll drop the whole matter."

"Buy it?" asked Snipe dazedly. "How—how much is it?"

"Five pounds," said the jeweller.



CHAPTER 4.

FORREST'S TEMPTATION.

ENOCH SNIPE grasped the counter with a feeble grip.

"Five pounds?" he repeated dully. "But—but I haven't got five pounds!"

"That's your trouble—not mine," replied the jeweller, with set lips. "I don't suppose you've got the money on you now, but you'll have to get it. I'll give you until closing-time to-night—seven o'clock."

Snipe clung desperately to the show-case.

"But—but I can't find five pounds!" he panted. "I can't—"

"If you're not here by seven o'clock with that money, I shall have to tell the police," interrupted the jeweller. "Come here at seven o'clock with five pounds, and you'll have the watch. I'm giving you a chance to escape disgrace!"

"Oh, but can't you please—"

"Now get out of this shop!" said the jeweller coldly. "And don't forget—seven o'clock this evening!"

Snipe staggered out. Unless he obtained five pounds he would be arrested. And that would mean the sack! And his people—His thoughts boggled at the possibilities.

The jeweller smiled grimly after the junior had gone, and turned to an assistant, who had remained discreetly behind a screen.

"That'll teach the young idiot a lesson, Watkins," said the jeweller.

"You ought to have called the police, sir," said the assistant.

"Nonsense! The boy didn't actually steal."

"But he tried to, sir," said Watkins.

"I don't think so," replied the jeweller. "He meant to put it back—he realised the idiocy of his action as soon as he had committed it. Just a moment's foolishness, Watkins. I've given him a thorough scare."

"But do you think he'll come back at seven with the money?"

"Of course he won't," replied the jeweller

drily. "He'll come back in a blue funk and plead with me to let him off. Of course, I shan't tell the police, or anybody else—but I'll warrant that young rascal will never let his fingers stray again!"

But Enoch Snipe was not to know of this simple plan for teaching him a lesson. As he rode out of Bannington he was obsessed by one idea. Unless he obtained five pounds by seven o'clock he would be arrested!

It was a shocking prospect, and one that made Snipe utterly desperate. Perhaps the jeweller hadn't thought of this possibility, or he might have adopted different tactics. The worthy man never dreamed that Snipe would actually attempt to get the money.

And matters were not improved for the luckless Enoch when he happened to pass Doris Berkeley and Mary Summers, of the Moor View School, on the outskirts of Bell-ton. They both pulled him up, and he dismounted.

These girls were of a very different type to Joan Tarrant. Their prettiness was more wholesome, being natural—for Joan, in spite of her youth, was in the habit of resorting to artificial aids.

"Just a minute, Snipe," said Doris, in her businesslike way. "I was hoping we'd catch sight of you. Have you been out with Joan this afternoon?"

Snipe looked at the girls resentfully.

"I suppose you'll make a big song about it?" he asked, with a whine. "You're friendly with Pitt and Hamilton, aren't you? Why shouldn't I—"

"We just want to give you a word of warning, that's all," put in Mary, with a contemptuous glance. "Joan's been laughing uproariously. Couldn't you tell that she was only fooling you?"

"Fuf-fooling me?" stammered Snipe, with a start.

"That's all," said Doris. "She's been boasting that you're going to the stile after lights-out—but you can be quite sure that she won't be there! Joan's simply led you on, and we'd like to give you the tip."

Snipe was so staggered that he hadn't any words to thank the girls. He went off without even raising his cap—not that Doris and Mary were surprised at this. They knew Snipe's character, and they had only warned him because they had a keen sense of fair play. It struck them as being particularly mean of Joan to fool this unhappy junior.

Snipe was filled with bitterness as he continued his ride. He didn't doubt the truth of what he had just heard. Both the girls had been so obviously earnest and indignant that even Snipe's conceit was shattered. And he could see now that Joan had made a butt of him.

His feelings were too deep for words. Purely for her sake he had got himself into this shocking mess. He was in danger of arrest—the sack—disgrace! It wouldn't have been half so bad if Joan had been a real friend. But to suddenly discover that she was a fraud only added to his mental agony.



Here's another great character whom you'll meet next Wednesday in—

**“THE
ROLLICKING
ROVERS!”**

It's Cap'n Ben—a real old sea-dog. He's treasure-hunting with the rest of them, piloting the boys to strange distant corners of the world in their stirring quest for hidden gold.

DON'T FORGET ————— NEXT WEDNESDAY !

“Oh, the cat!” he muttered bitterly. “I might have known she was only pulling my leg! And—and I nearly took that watch for her! And unless I buy it for five quid by seven o'clock to-night, I'm as good as finished!”

There was no consolation for the East House junior, whichever way he looked. Even supposing he found the fiver—the remotest of remote possibilities—he wouldn't know what to do with the watch! He might have given it to Joan, but now that he knew the truth he would sooner have crushed it under his heel. And Snipe's knowledge of commerce convinced him that a watch bought for five pounds could not be sold for much more than three. He was bound to be the loser, for there is a vast amount of difference between buying and selling.

But what was the use of wondering how he could get rid of a watch which wasn't even his? To Snipe, who was accustomed to regarding five shillings with respect, a sum like five pounds seemed a million.

And while he was mentally tortured in this way, another little incident was occurring at St. Frank's which was destined to fit in the scheme of things quite neatly. Bernard Forrest, in fact, was taking his lines to Mr. Crowell.

While Gulliver and Bell had enjoyed the delights of the river, and while the other juniors were busy on the cricket field, or engaged in other sporting pursuits, Forrest had stewed in Study A, plugging at those five hundred lines. For even the high-and-mighty Forrest, when it came to a question of an impot, was compelled to toe the line.

Gulliver and Bell had come in just as Forrest had finished, and they were scarcely surprised to find their leader in a vile temper.

It was a delightful summer's afternoon, and during his work Forrest had heard the cheerful “clack” of bat meeting ball, the shouts of the Test Eleven men at practice, the hundred-and-one other sounds which denoted outdoor enjoyment.

Mr. Crowell was in his study when Forrest entered, and he nodded absently.

“Oh, it's you, Forrest,” he said, glancing up. “What do you want?”

“Those lines, sir.”

“Which lines?”

“You told me to deliver——”

“Oh, yes, of course,” interrupted Mr. Crowell, still abstracted. “That's right, Forrest—I remember now. Wait there for a moment, and I will examine them. You have been commendably prompt.”

He took the lines, but did not give them his immediate attention. He laid them aside, and continued his perusal of the papers already in front of him. Mr. Crowell was not necessarily at liberty because the school had a half-holiday. In point of fact, this was one of his busiest afternoons.

Forrest was impatient at this delay—irritated that he should be kept waiting. But he thought it inadvisable to make his feelings known. He could only stand there and wait.

He noticed that Mr. Crowell was inspecting some typewritten sheets. Idly, Forrest looked at the words on the top, trying to read them from an upside-down angle. Then, suddenly, his impatience vanished. A gleam entered his eyes, and he watched closely.

The questions for to-morrow's special exam.!

Naturally, Mr. Crowell was busy with them, since he was the master of the Remove, and since this exam. was for the Remove only. It was just a sort of preliminary canter,

a forerunner of the big examinations to follow.

Forrest couldn't see much, but he detected the word "examination," and another word, "questions." But the very point he wished to ascertain evaded his scrutiny. He couldn't see what the subject was. And that, of course, was the all-important point. If he could only find out the subject of to-morrow's exam., he and his chums would be able to read up that subject, and be in a safe position.

Mr. Crowell looked up sharply.

"Upon my word, I had almost forgotten, Forrest!" he said, hastily gathering the papers and rising to his feet. "Just one moment."

He went to his bureau, placed the papers in a drawer, and locked it. Then he turned back to his desk with obvious relief and picked up the impot.

"H'm! Your handwriting doesn't improve, Forrest," he said critically. "Good gracious, these latter pages are disgraceful. You must do better than this, young man."

Forrest was silent, resentful and anxious.

"However, I will overlook it for this once," continued Mr. Crowell, taking the closely-written sheets and tearing them in half. "I hope it will be a lesson to you, Forrest, not to ill-treat dumb animals. You may go."

Forrest mumbled something, and went. There was a supercilious curl on his lip as he went down the corridor.

"What a filthy shame!" he grunted. "I take hours over those rotten lines, and he calmly tears them up! But, by gad, if I could only get a glimpse of those exam. papers! If only——"

He shrugged his shoulders and grunted. What was the use? He knew the temptation was great, but the risks were greater. It wasn't worth the candle, for any hint of discovery would mean instant expulsion.

The morrow's exam. was to be a special one, and the subject would not be known until the fellows were actually at their desks in the class-room. So there was no chance of being primed in advance. Of course, a glimpse at those papers would make the whole exam. child's play. For Forrest would not only know the subject, but the questions, too. And a mere hour's concentrated work would ensure him full marks.

But the impossibility of the thing only served to give his temper a sharper edge. When he got back to Study A he was positively fuming.



CHAPTER 5.

A WAY OF RAISING THE WIND.

GULLIVER and Bell were preparing tea.

It was rather early as yet, but they felt that Forrest would appreciate something soothing. He slammed the door as he came in, and glared at the tea-things.

"What's the idea of this foolery?" he asked harshly.

"Tea," said Bell, waving his hand.

"You infernal idiot! Haven't I got eyes?" snapped Forrest. "But it's not tea-time yet!"

"We—we thought you'd like a cup——" began Gulliver.

"You shouldn't think!" interrupted Forrest nastily. "Before a fellow can think he needs something to think with. I don't want any beastly tea now. I'm fed up!"

"No need to bark at us, old man," complained Bell. "You've finished the lincs, haven't you? I should think you ought to feel relieved. Has old Crowell told you to do 'em again?"

"Not likely," growled Forrest. "He'd better try those games on me! No, I'm peevish because of something else. I spotted old Crowell's private exam. papers for to-morrow—the subject, the questions, and everything!"

"By Jove!" said Gulliver, staring. "What's the subject?"

Bernard Forrest looked at him sourly.

"I said I saw the papers, you fool—not the subject!" he snorted. "Do you think I'd be peevish if I knew the subject? We've hardly done any swotting at all, and we shall be absolutely at sea to-morrow."

"Well, we knew it was coming," said Bell sadly. "We've only been putting off the evil day—— I say, wouldn't it be possible to get a peep at those giddy papers?" he added breathlessly. "If you saw where old Crowell put them——"

"You can't help being an imbecile, Bell, so I'll excuse you," interrupted Forrest. "Go ahead and look at the papers. They're in the top left-hand drawer of Crowell's bureau. It's locked—but to a clever chap like you that'll be nothing. And don't forget to bid me good-bye after you've been publicly sacked."

Bell flushed.

"No need to be so beastly sarky!" he grunted. "I suppose it *would* be too risky, eh? What a rotten pity, though. We know where the giddy questions are, and daren't look at 'em! And we're just about as fit for that exam. as a set of infants. What asses we were not to swot properly!"

This wasn't particularly helpful, and his companions stared moodily in front of them. It was too late to start cramming now—unless, of course, they knew the particular subject to be read up. Forrest & Co. had always been slackers of the very first water.

"Oh, hang—let's have tea!" said Forrest suddenly.

Just then the door opened, and Enoch Snipe looked nervously in.

"Can—can I speak to you, please, Forrest?" he asked.

"What's that thing in the doorway?" said Forrest, glancing round. "Who said this House wasn't troubled with vermin? Kill it, Gully!"

"Oh, I say!" protested Snipe feebly.

"Better cut, you ass!" said Bell. "You don't belong to the Ancient House, anyhow, and Forrest's in a pretty beastly mood this afternoon—"

"Oh, am I?" roared Forrest.

"I—I mean—" began Bell hastily.

"Clear out of here, Snipe, and get back to your own rat-hole!" snorted Forrest harshly. "By gad! The worm's had the nerve to come in and close the door!" he added, staring. "Didn't I tell you to get out?"

Forrest was so surprised that he took no action. As a rule, Enoch Snipe scooted at the first hint. But the snaky junior of the Fourth was in a desperate mood this afternoon.

"Please, Forrest, I—I want to ask a favour!" he said tensely. "I—I want you fellows to lend me five quid!"

Bernard Forrest laughed cynically.

"Five quid?" he repeated. "My dear chap! Why be so modest? You're as welcome as the flowers in May! But don't accept a miserable sum like a fiver. Shall I make it twenty, thirty, forty or fifty? Just say the word!"

Gulliver and Bell grinned. The atmosphere was clearing. The opportunity of being thoroughly caddish was having a good effect upon Forrest's temper. He was almost his old self again.

For a moment Snipe's face had lighted up—then his original expression of acute anguish had returned. He could see that Forrest was being sarcastic at his expense.

"Oh, please, Forrest!" he said feverishly. "I—I'm not joking, you know. I want a fiver terribly badly. I'll do anything you like—only please let me have it!"

Forrest & Co. regarded him curiously. The suggestion struck them as being comical. No matter how flush they were, Enoch Snipe was about the last fellow in the world they would accommodate with a loan.

But Snipe had come to Study A because he instinctively knew that there was no other quarter where there was the remotest chance of success. But Forrest & Co. were generally rolling in cash, and Snipe was prepared to mortgage his very liberty for that fiver. He would offer to be Forrest & Co's slave for the rest of the term—and for the next term, too, if necessary. Anything to get that money.

"Gully, old man, go out and 'phone to the nearest asylum," said Forrest genially. "The poor chap's scatty. I've suspected it for months—but this proves it beyond all doubt."

Snipe quivered with anxiety.

"I mean it—I mean it!" he panted. "Please, Forrest, if you'll lend me five pounds I'll—I'll come and work for you. I'll do anything you want—I'll be your fag. And—and I'll give you a gold watch this evening too," he added eagerly. "It'll pay off a bit of the—"

"Shut up, and don't be such a gibbering idiot!" interrupted Forrest curtly. "If I had a hundred quid in my wallet, I wouldn't lend

you fivepence! So the sooner you can get out of here the better."

"Why not go to Crowell's study and copy the exam. papers?" suggested Bell facetiously. "By Jove, that's an idea, you know! I'll spring a quid, Snipe, as my share."

"You can count on me for a quid, too," grinned Gulliver. "If you ask Forrest nicely he'll probably guarantee the other three."

"By gad!" said Forrest, in a changed voice.

He stared at his chums, and then he stared at Enoch Snipe. Gulliver and Bell suddenly lost their grins. They could see that their leader was really impressed—and Bell had only made the suggestion in a spirit of mockery.

"By gad!" repeated Forrest. "Bell, old man, that's an idea! Look here, Snipe, if you'll get a copy of those exam. questions you'll have your fiver on the spot. It's up to you."

Snipe was thoroughly frightened.

"Exam. questions?" he repeated feebly. "But—but you don't mean that, please? Oh, Forrest, it's impossible—"

"In that case, you can clear off," interrupted Forrest. "And if you tell anybody of this proposal, we'll skin you alive. But if you want that money so badly I don't see why you should be so squeamish."

"But—but I shall get the sack!"

"All the better for St. Frank's," nodded Forrest coolly.

"Oh, I say—"

"But that's all rot," went on Forrest. "Why should you get the sack? Those exam. papers are in the drawer of Crowell's bureau—top drawer, on the left-hand side. It's locked, but any old key will open it, I dare say. Why not have a shot? You're wrong about the risk. There isn't any."

"All you've got to do is to copy the subject and the questions," said Bell eagerly. "It won't take you five minutes, once you get the drawer open. It's a chance, Snipe, so don't be a fool!"

Snipe stood there, breathing hard.

He was realising that Forrest & Co. actually meant what they said. They were seriously proposing that he should go to Mr. Crowell's study and crib from those exam. papers! And Snipe knew what the instantaneous penalty would be if he was caught.

Not merely a caning—not merely a flogging—but swift expulsion.

It was like falling out of the frying-pan into the fire. And yet the fire offered better possibilities. Unless he got that fiver he would be sacked for certain, and he would also be branded as a thief.

But there was a chance that he could execute this commission of Forrest's with success. And that would mean he would get his fiver, and all his troubles would be over.

Of two evils, it is always better to choose the lesser. And in Enoch Snipe's desperate plight he had really no alternative.

"It—it's worth more than a fiver!" he panted.

"Why, you grasping young blighter——"

"If I get collared you don't have to pay a cent," burst out Snipe, with a slight show of spirit. "And if I succeed you're on velvet for the exam. I think you ought to make it more, Forrest. I'm the chap who stands all the risk."

"You're lucky to get a fiver, my lad!" said Forrest grimly. "Well, there's the proposition—take it or leave it."

Enoch Snipe took it.



CHAPTER 6.

FEELING THE STRAIN.

BY George, you're better than ever, Church, old man!"

Edward Oswald Handforth was enthusiastic.

Church was at the nets,

taking bowling from Jerry Dodd, the Australian junior. Taking Jerry's bowling was quite excellent practice for the Test matches, since he played against St. Frank's in these great games.

"He's hot!" nodded Jerry.

Church flushed, and proceeded to smite Jerry with all his might at the next delivery. And the Australian junior wasn't sparing him, either. Church's newly-found confidence as a batsman was most marked. He was becoming surprisingly good this season.

"You're a cert for the next big match, old son," declared Handforth ten minutes later as Church joined him. "I shouldn't be surprised if you're chosen for the fourth Test."

But Church had no illusions.

"Decent of you to think so, Handy, but you can't fool me like that," he said. "I shall be lucky if I get my Second Eleven cap. Reggie Pitt's already hinted that——"

"Rats!" interrupted Handforth. "Your form's so good that Fenton simply can't afford to leave you out. And don't you belong to Study D? If the Selection Committee starts any rot, I'll soon have something to say."

Handforth was a member of the Test Eleven himself—and was well worthy of his place, for he had done well in all three matches. But with Church it was a different matter, as anybody but Handforth would have seen.

For while Handforth possessed the true "big match" temperament, Church's quality in this respect was open to doubt. His cricket was good, and as a batsman he was making surprisingly rapid progress.

He had already played in several House matches, and had been conspicuously successful in an important fixture against Helmford, when he had been included as a substitute at the last minute. But those who knew cricket were doubtful regarding his performance in a really vital match.

There was more than a risk that he would

be nervous—and a nervous batsman, no matter how clever, may easily lose his wicket for a duck. And there was no question about the fourth Test match being vital. Edgar Fenton, the captain of St. Frank's, was making his men practice with relentless energy.

For this forthcoming Test match—due to be played in little more than a week—would be fateful for Young England.

For Young Australia had won two matches in succession—had won two out of three. If they triumphed in the fourth Test, they would naturally win the Schoolboy Ashes, and the final game of the series would lose a tremendous amount of interest. And that final game was to be played at Lord's, too!

So not only Fenton, but all the other St. Frank's cricketers were desperately anxious for the players to be in tip-top form. What a gorgeous prospect if Young England—represented by the St. Frank's First Eleven—could win this next match, and thus draw level with Young Australia!

For that would mean two matches each, with the struggle for the Schoolboy Ashes carried right on until the final match. It was such a sheer necessity that nobody at St. Frank's dreamed of any other possibility. This next match simply *had* to be won!

So Church's hope of being selected was remote. However good his form in the ordinary matches the selectors couldn't possibly take any chances on a man in this next Test. Every member of the eleven would have to be tried and proved. So Church didn't deceive himself.

"Of course, I'd love to be in the big eleven," he said longingly. "But it's too much of a dream, Handy. Besides, there are better chaps than me——"

"Rot!" interrupted Handforth.

"Of course there are——"

"And I say rot!" repeated Handforth grimly.

"Yourself, for example——"

"Oh, well, naturally," admitted Handforth, with a start. "But we're not talking about my form just now——"

"You denied that there were better players than me," said Church dryly.

"Always excepting myself," growled Handforth. "If you don't get your place in this next big game, I'll kick up such a dust that you won't see St. Frank's in the cloud! They can't dish me when I'm on the warpath."

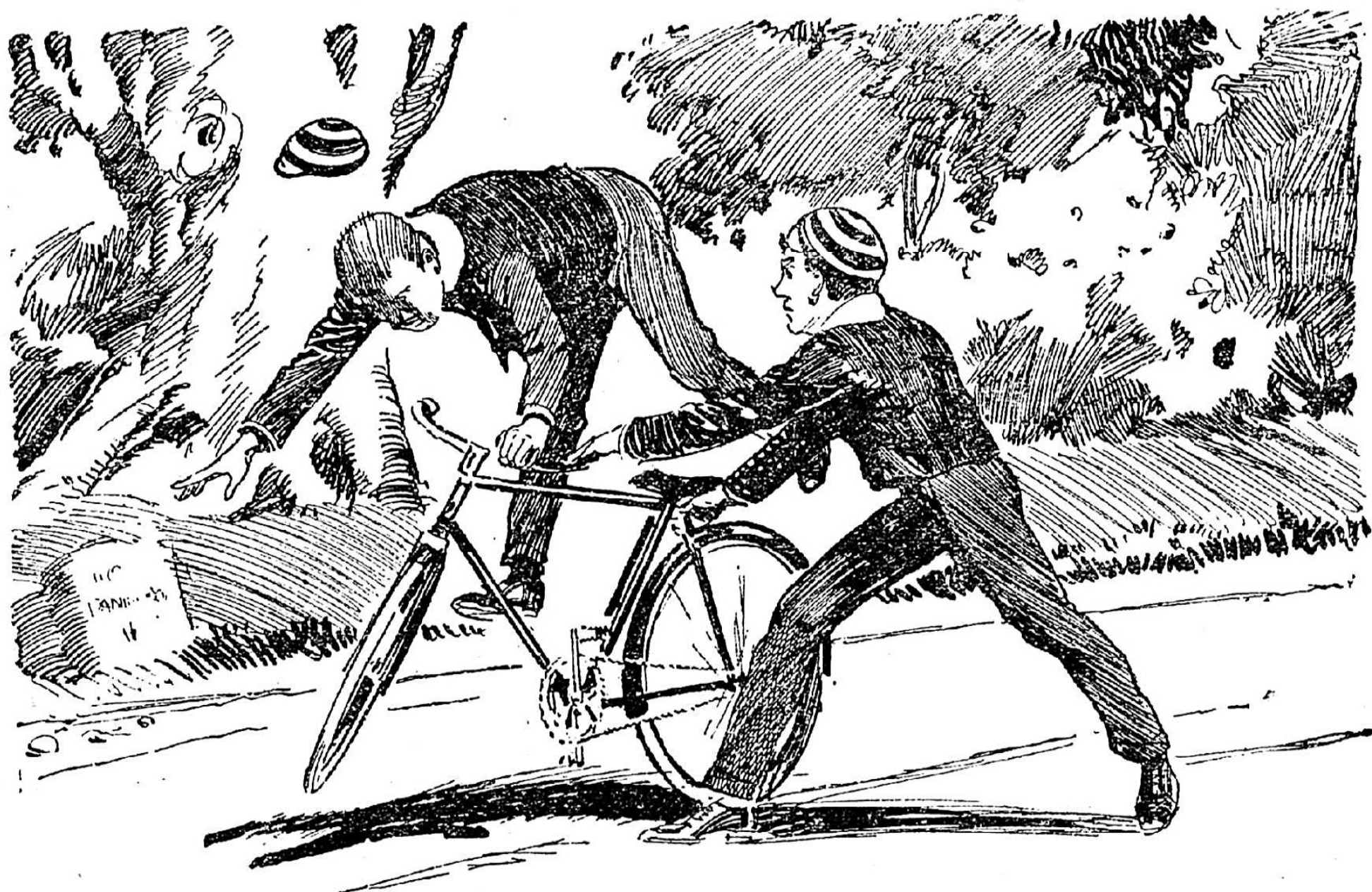
"Good old Ted!" said Willy, strolling up. "Good old fire-eater!"

Handforth frowned.

"And I don't want any comic stuff from you, my lad!" he added severely. "Just because you played in the third Test match you think you're everybody."

"Not everybody," denied Willy. "Only a few of 'em!"

"Well, you can buzz off," said his major. "I don't know why it is, but the very sight of you worries me. If ever I'm in a good



Snipe tried to spurt past Willy, but the fag grabbed the handlebars of the machine, hauling the bike round. Snipe came a terrific cropper in the road.

temper, and you come along, I get irritable. If you want any cash, you won't get any."

Willy brightened up.

"Good job you reminded me!" he said cheerfully. "Now I come to think of it, our study cupboard's rather bare. Five bob wouldn't come in at all amiss. Shell out, Ted!"

"Why, you—you——"

"Don't be silly," said Willy tartly. "Five bob!"

"You can go and eat coke!" roared his major, as a number of other juniors grinned. "I'm not going to be chivvied into shelling out at your orders! By the way, what about that torch battery I told you to get?"

Willy dived a hand into his pocket.

"Here you are," he said promptly.

Handforth took the battery, and looked suspicious.

"But you haven't been to the village," he said accusingly.

"I know that," replied Willy. "But as long as Mr. Crowell gets the battery, what does he care? It's rummy how these things get done, when you come to think of it. Crowell told you to get the battery, and you passed it on to me, and I passed it on to Chubby Heath, and Chubby Heath changed his mind at the last minute, and got Fullwood to fetch it."

"All this fuss over a rotten battery!" grumbled Handforth. "Anybody might think it was made of gold. And what does he want it for, anyway—in broad daylight? 'Bring

it to me at once!' that's what he said, the old chump! And unless I take it he'll drop on me!"

Dick Hamilton grinned.

"Mr. Crowell is getting wise in his old age," he chuckled. "He knows that the best way to get a thing is to have it brought to him without delay. And why shouldn't he have an electric torch if he wants one?"

"About that five bob——" began Willy.

"Oh, crumbs!" groaned Handforth. "I thought you'd forgotten it."

Realising that his own powers of resistance were weaker than Willy's determination, he shelled out. Then he stalked off, amid a chorus of chuckles.

"It's easy, when you know how," grinned Willy. "If old Ted came into a fortune, he'd lose the lot of it in less than a week. Never known such a careless chap with his money."

"That's a bit steep, after you've just rooked him of five bob," said Church.

Handforth strode into the Triangie, en route for Mr. Crowell's study. It was just as well to get rid of that battery at once. The Form-master was a bit touchy if a fellow farmed out his errands to others. Buster Boots and Percy Bray, of the Modern House, were chatting near the fountain.

"I think your minor's got it," said Boots casually, as Handforth passed.

"Eh?" said Edward Oswald. "Got what?"

"Your Austin Seven."

"My Austin Seven!" roared Handforth.

"Why, the young rotter—— Rats!" he added,

glaring. "I've just left my minor on Big Side."

His Austin Seven was a matter of pride with him. Being the only junior who owned a real motor-car, he naturally felt that he was far and away above everybody else in the Lower School. It was only a few of the seniors who could boast of a car.

"That minor of yours is tricky," said Boots warningly. "I may be mistaken, of course, but I'm pretty sure I saw him with your Austin Seven. He was stuffing something into the pocket of his blazer, anyhow!"

"You—you funny ass—"

"I thought I heard a purr," explained Boots solemnly. "That's the best of these little Austins—you can tuck them away so neatly. I've heard that you keep yours in a cigar-box."

Handforth refused to continue this idiotic discussion. He strode on with a sniff. The other juniors were always chipping him about the size of the little Austin, and making out that it was a mere toy. Jealousy, of course! Well, he could afford to ignore them.

He went on towards Mr. Crowell's study.



CHAPTER 7.

SNIPE TAKES THE PLUNGE.

IT so happened that Enoch Snipe was active at about this same time—and this was to result in a complication which none of the

Study A plotters could have foreseen.

After Snipe had left Forrest & Co., he had pondered over the task which he had undertaken. It frightened him. It nearly froze the blood in his veins. He was several kinds of a coward, and under any other circumstances he would have been horrified at the prospect of cribbing from exam. papers,

In fact, he was horrified now—but he was in such a position that he was obliged to act. And the sooner he acted the better. He realised this himself, for he was vaguely aware of his own weaknesses.

Any prolonged delay, and he would be in such a state of funk that he simply wouldn't be able to attempt the task at all. It was now or never. The desperate urge was upon him, and he would do well to take advantage of it.

Unfortunately, Mr. Crowell was still in his study.

This was a contingency which had to be reckoned with, and which made Snipe's projected task somewhat awkward. He couldn't very well go into the study and break open the bureau drawer in Mr. Crowell's presence.

So Snipe haunted the corridor—waiting for the Form-master to come out. He would soon be going to his tea. Once he had gone, he would be away for at least half an hour. That would be Snipe's chance.

The East House junior's feelings towards Forrest & Co. were mixed.

While being grateful to them in one sense, he was bitterly hostile in another. Once this ordeal was over he would make those cads pay! His vindictive, cunning spirit conjured up all manner of revenges which he would take. Yes, he would make them pay!

They could easily have lent him that fiver without imposing these perilous conditions. It wouldn't have been half so bad if those exam. papers included the Fourth's—for Snipe would then share the benefits. But cribbing for the Remove was quite useless to a Fourth-Former.

"Oh, the cads!" he muttered again and again. "The dirty rotters! They're afraid to do their own filthy trickery, so they take advantage of me! And they could have lent me a fiver without even feeling it! Besides, didn't I promise them the watch?"

He ambled up and down restlessly.

"I'll never speak to another girl as long as I live," he muttered, his eyes full of bitterness. "They're all the same—they're all full of deceit—"

"Hallo, what the dickens are you muttering to yourself about?" asked Reggie Pitt, as he passed down the corridor. "Waiting for somebody, Snipe?"

"Nunno! I—I mean—"

Snipe paused, gasping. He cringed away, and there was something so guilty in his aspect that Pitt stared.

"I'll bet you're up to no good!" he said suspiciously. "If it comes to that, what are you hanging about the Ancient House for? You belong to the other side of the Triangle."

"Please, Pitt, you're a West House fellow," muttered Snipe defiantly.

"Well, by Jove!" said Pitt, staring. "So I've got no right in here, either? I'm not hanging about the corridors, mumbling to myself, anyhow! My dear chap, you can continue in solitude."

Reggie Pitt went off, and thought no more of the incident. And it served to tell Snipe that this game of his was deadly dangerous. Although this corridor wasn't much frequented, he was liable to be spotted by a dozen other fellows. And even if he succeeded in getting at those exam. papers, there might be some talk. The fellows would remember Snipe hanging about there. They would put two and two together—

Panic seized the Fourth-Former, and he was on the point of throwing up the project altogether. His nerve was shattered. Perhaps, if he went back to that jeweller he might be given more time. A week, perhaps. He could do plenty of things in a week—and five pounds wasn't such a terribly big sum, after all. It had seemed a shocking amount at first.

And just then a door closed, and a brisk footstep sounded. The startled Snipe gave a gasp, and backed into a deep recess, which he had hovered near all the while. The shadows were dense there.

Mr. Crowell turned the corner and swung

past—en route to his private household quarters, to partake of tea.

The coast was clear.

The footsteps receded, and another door closed. Mr. Crowell had passed through into another part of the House! Snipe's momentary panic deserted him, and he became possessed of a new confidence. It made such a difference when he knew that Mr. Crowell was out of the way, and that no other fellows could come along and spot him—Snipe—loitering in the passage.

"I—I've got to do it!" he muttered tensely.

After all, what was it? He had already raked up a selection of keys, and once that drawer was open he would be able to copy the questions off the exam. paper in less than five minutes. It was only remotely possible that the study door would be locked.

And by this time everybody else was thinking about tea, too. There couldn't be a better opportunity. Snipe padded forward and reached Mr. Crowell's door. His hand trembled as he seized the door-knob. He turned it and slid within.

The study was empty, and the evening sunlight was streaming in through the open window. What a fool! It would have been better to have gained an entrance that way—Perhaps, not, though. There were other windows, and he might have been spotted. As it was he was safe.

He ran over to the bureau, and tugged at the top left-hand drawer. It was certainly locked, and Snipe feverishly tried the first of his keys.

It was too big, and jammed. It wouldn't come out, and he fumbled over it desperately. There was a sound behind him, and he twirled round with a gasp of horrified alarm. His nerves were jangling badly.

It was only the breeze, blowing the curtains and moving a cardboard calendar which hung on the wall. Snipe was in a pitiable state as he continued his desperate task.

At last he managed to get the key free, and he tried several others. But it seemed that not one of them would fit. He hadn't anticipated this trouble, for most of these keys belonged to cupboards and bureaux in the East House junior quarters. Snipe had borrowed them without their owners' knowledge.

"This is Forrest's fault!" he muttered. "He told me that any old key would fit, and like a fool I believed him! But there's not one— Oh!"

He uttered the final gasp as he felt the wards click back under his fingers. He had reached the last of his keys but one, and it had worked the oracle! The drawer was open. But such was Snipe's agitation that he had scratched the mahogany face of the drawer badly—and the key now in the lock, although it had turned the wards, was stuck there.

He pulled the drawer open, and his red-rimmed eyes glittered.

"Forrest was right!" he breathed. "They're here!"

A pile of papers met his gaze, and the topmost were pinned together in a sheaf. Quite obviously they were private exam. papers—intended only for the eyes of a master. Snipe quickly scanned the headings and contents generally.

"History!" he muttered. "Forrest said it was one special subject. Nobody knows that yet—and I shan't blab."

Snipe was quite determined that he would keep mum to everybody except Forrest & Co. For the fat would indeed be in the fire if all the juniors learned that history was to form the subject of the morrow's special exam. All the questions were there—set questions which would probably take the Remove by surprise. But Forrest & Co. would have plenty of time to look up these definite facts and dates, and would be able to obtain full marks.

Snipe's panic lessened as he pulled a small writing-block from his pocket, and commenced copying the exam. papers. After all, there wasn't any need to get so flustered. Everybody was at tea, and if he only kept his head he would be out of the study within three minutes.

He scribbled frantically, and one after the other the questions were copied. But it seemed ages to Snipe before he had finished the list. He stuffed his writing-block into his pocket and took another look through the exam. papers—just to make sure that he had cribbed everything.

And at that moment a heavy footstep sounded in the corridor.

"Oh!" gasped Snipe, jumping.

Almost any other fellow would have acted—would have done something in this emergency. But Snipe was so horrified that he stood there, aghast. He was momentarily paralysed with fear, and any sort of action was impossible. All colour had fled from his face.

The door opened, and—Handforth strode in.

"Hallo!" said Edward Oswald, staring. "What the——"

Snipe's relief was so intense that a wave of giddiness came over him. He swayed as he stood. He had expected to see Mr. Crowell—and the newcomer was only Handforth! Not that. Snipe's position was ideal. Edward Oswald Handforth was not the kind of fellow to accept Snipe's presence in Mr. Crowell's study without making a few pointed inquiries.

"What's the idea?" asked Handforth, staring harder than ever. "By George! What are you doing in this study, Snipe, you rotter?"

"Please, I—I—I——"

Snipe's brain wasn't capable of inventing any reasonable excuse.

"You're a Fourth-Former," went on Handforth suspiciously. "I'll bet Mr. Crowell didn't tell you to come here. My hat! I bring old Crowell's battery, and what do I find? A worm in the room! And what's that in your hand?"

Enoch Snipe gasped.

"Nun-nothing!" he panted, backing away.

"You—you crooked bounder!" roared Handforth. "You've been spying on old Crowell's private papers. By George! It's a jolly good thing I came in. Gimmo those papers, my lad!"

He made a dive forward, and Snipe fairly shrieked as Handforth grabbed him. In a moment the exam. papers were wrenched out of Snipe's hand, and Edward Oswald turned almost pale as he recognised what they were.

"Exam. papers!" he panted. "You've been cribbing! Why, you—you unscrupulous young rotter— Hi! Come back, blow you!"

Snipe had acted instinctively, rather than with deliberate intent. The open window was near him, and he dived desperately through it. Before Handforth could realise the Fourth-Former's intentions, Snipe had gone.

"Not likely!" said Handforth grimly.

He put one leg over the sill and prepared to give chase. But just at that moment his star of fortune must have been very dim. For the door opened, and Mr. Crowell himself walked in.



CHAPTER 8.

ROUGH ON HANDFORTH.

THIS was a catastrophe of unimaginable dimension.

"Handforth!" said Mr. Crowell sharply.

The leader of Study D glanced round, and felt annoyed. He hesitated. If he paused to answer Mr. Crowell he would let himself in for a caning. It was a momentary dilemma. Even now Handforth had no glimmering of the stupendous possibilities.

"Just a minute, sir," he said briskly. "I'll be back in a tick!"

"HANDFORTH!" thundered Mr. Crowell.

His voice was so utterly commanding that the startled junior could do nothing but pause. He withdrew his leg from the sill, and stared at the Form-master in astonishment. He couldn't possibly understand the expression on Mr. Crowell's face.

But Mr. Crowell was a man with a quick brain, and he was celebrated in the Remove for his swift powers of observance. His eyes had not been likened unto gimlets for nothing. The very first glance had taken in the open drawer, and the papers in Handforth's grip. Mr. Crowell knew what that drawer had contained, and the process of putting two and two together was a lightning one. He had seen no sign of Enoch Snipe.

"What's the matter, sir?" asked Handforth, exasperated. "I was just chasing—" He paused and started. "I—I mean—"

"Well?" said Mr. Crowell ominously.

Handforth was speechless. Dimly he was getting the first glimmering of his dangerous position. Of course, he couldn't say a word about Enoch Snipe. By George! And he had nearly let something out! That impulsive

tongue of his again! And he would rather have bitten it off than committed the unforgivable sin of sneaking.

"Well?" repeated Mr. Crowell harshly.

"Nothing, sir," muttered Handforth. "But—but you mustn't think that I was—I mean, look here, sir—"

"Is any explanation necessary, Handforth?" asked Mr. Crowell, his voice not only grim beyond measure, but acute with pain. "Good heavens! You are the last boy in my Form that I would have suspected of such dishonourable conduct!"

Handforth went crimson.

"But—but I don't understand, sir!" he gasped. "Great Scott! You—you don't suspect— Oh, I say, sir!" he burst out. "I say, cheese it! I—I mean— You don't think that I—"

"When I entered this room, Handforth, you were in the act of escaping through the window," interrupted Mr. Crowell dangerously. "I see a forced bureau drawer, and some private examination papers in your hand. Not being a fool, Handforth, the truth is painfully obvious to me—"

"But you're wrong, sir!" shouted Handforth angrily. "I didn't take these papers! I wasn't escaping from the window—"

"Silence!" thundered the Form-master. "Good heavens! Do you imagine that you can make matters better by lying? Handforth, I am amazed. I am utterly shocked at this discovery—and I need not tell you that my agony of mind is intense. My boy—my boy! How could you have brought yourself to this despicable act?"

Mr. Crowell's voice was genuinely hurt. In spite of his anger he was almost on the point of breaking down. For he had always regarded Handforth as a boy of scrupulous honesty. He knew Handforth to be stubborn and obstinate and ram-headed—but these were forgivable weaknesses. But anything of a dishonourable nature had seemed foreign to the leader of Study D. And yet Mr. Crowell had caught him in the act! The Form-master could not be blamed for jumping to the one obvious conclusion.

Having seen nothing of Snipe, it was only natural that he should believe that Handforth was escaping through the window. And it was just the sort of thing a boy would do after committing such an offence as this. The exams. were to-morrow, and Handforth had clearly attempted to crib.

And Handforth himself realised his true position now. During that poignant pause the horror of his predicament swept over him like a flood. He saw it in all its stark hopelessness. For he couldn't say a word! He couldn't explain why those papers were in his hand, and why he had been climbing through the window. His code of honour was totally against it.

"Handforth, come away from that window and sit down," said Mr. Crowell quietly, his voice quivering. "Give me those papers— Yes, I thought so. Sit down, my boy."

Mr. Crowell's anger had subsided, and he was now inexpressibly upset. His face had become haggard. For in spite of what his boys said of him, he had a very human regard for the Removites.

"I should like to think that there is some explanation which at present eludes me!" he exclaimed, watching Handforth closely. "I come unexpectedly into my study, and find you in a position which is open to only one possible explanation. What have you to say, Handforth? Make a clean breast of this appalling affair, and perhaps the headmaster might see some mitigating circumstance—"

"The headmaster, sir?" broke in Handforth huskily. "But—but you're not going to take me to the Head?"

"Do you imagine that this offence of yours is a trifle?" asked Mr. Crowell sharply. "Surely, Handforth, you know that it is punishable only by expulsion?"

Handforth started up.

"Expulsion!" he panted. "The—the sack! Oh, but—"

"I advise you to be perfectly frank with me," interrupted Mr. Crowell. "Can't you see, my boy, that I am doing my best to help you? You have over-exaggerated the importance of cricket, perhaps. In your zeal to maintain your practice, you thought it might be permissible to crib from—"

"Crib!" shouted Handforth hoarsely. "Me, sir? Crib! Why, it's about the last thing— Great Scott, sir, you don't think I'm capable of a mean thing like that? I'm not such a rotten twister—"

"Moderate your terms, Handforth!" interrupted Mr. Crowell sharply. "Remember to whom you are speaking!"

"I am sorry, sir, but—but—"

"We are getting neither here nor there," interrupted the Form-master. "I am still waiting for your explanation. Why did you come to my study and break open that drawer?"

"I didn't, sir!" denied Handforth hotly.

"You didn't?"

"No, sir!"

"Then who did?"

"I—I—" Handforth paused. "I can't tell you, sir."

"Come, come! This is only nonsense!" said Mr. Crowell, his anger rising again. "I am grieved that you should deny your guilt, Handforth. Upon my soul! How can you possibly imagine that you can do yourself any good by lying? At least, I gave you the credit of being truthful. Do you deny that you took those papers out of my drawer?"

"Yes, sir, I do!" retorted Handforth, with set lips.

"Handforth!" roared Mr. Crowell. "This is far worse than I believed of you. I can see that I have been deceived in your character. You will come with me at once to Dr. Stafford. I have tried to help you, but it seems that I have only made things worse."

"Just a minute, sir—"

"You will come with me at once!" repeated Mr. Crowell harshly.

Handforth opened his mouth to speak, but thought better of it. His face was becoming even more haggard than the Form-master's. What was there to say, anyhow? All he could do was to deny his guilt, and these very denials had the sound of base falsehood. By speaking, he could only make the position worse. And by remaining silent, he tacitly admitted his guilt. Considering Edward Oswald's high moral character, this position was rough in the extreme.

He had merely come to that study to deliver Mr. Crowell's torch battery! A trivial errand, indeed! An innocent mission. Church and McClure were waiting for him in Study D, with tea in readiness. And now, like a thunderbolt, came this blow. Expulsion stared him in the face. And yet he was just as horrified as Mr. Crowell at the idea of cribbing.

"Please, sir," he pleaded, as the master flung the door open, "you're all wrong! I didn't smash open your drawer, sir—I didn't take those papers out! For goodness' sake, believe me, sir! Honestly, you've got hold of the wrong idea. It looks bad, I know, but there's something that you don't know, sir. Honour bright!"

Mr. Crowell paused, trying to believe in the junior.

"You say there is something I don't know,

THE ST. FRANK'S LEAGUE

Owing to pressure on space, the League Application Form and my chat have been crowded out this week. The Form was published in last Wednesday's issue of the "Nelson Lee Library" and will appear again very shortly.

In the meantime I am, of course, answering all letters and enquiries sent to me from readers. But I would once again mention that stamped and addressed envelopes should be enclosed with all correspondence requiring an immediate reply.

CHIEF OFFICER

Handforth," he said. "Perhaps appearances are wrong. But what is this something?"

"I am sorry, sir—I can't explain."

Mr. Crowell raised his eyebrows, and then frowned.

"You can't explain?" he repeated. "Good gracious, Handforth, this won't do. Don't you realise the utter weakness of such tactics? If there is indeed another explanation, you will tell me. And if you refuse to tell me, I can only draw my own conclusions."

Handforth thought of the contemptible Snipe, and felt helpless.

"I can only say that I am innocent, sir," he muttered thickly.

"In that case, you will come with me," snapped Mr. Crowell.

A number of juniors observed the Form-master marching across the Triangle with Handforth in close attendance—marching through Big Arch and across Inner Court. That meant only one thing. Handforth was being taken before the Head! And rumours began to circulate.

Within Dr. Malcolm Stafford's study, Mr. Crowell quietly related the facts—or what he honestly supposed to be the facts. And as the Head listened, his brow grew stern and black.



CHAPTER 9.

A SHOCK FOR THE REMOVE.

"WELL, Handforth?" said the Head, at length.

"It's all rot, sir," said the leader of Study D, with feeling.

"Do you dare to insult Mr. Crowell by——"

"I didn't mean rot, sir," interrupted Handforth, in distress. "I'm sorry, sir, but I'm so fearfully worried. That story, though. I know it sounds pretty horrible, but Mr. Crowell's wrong. I wasn't cribbing those exam. papers at all."

"Then what were you doing?"

"I just went to the study to take a torch battery, sir."

"A torch battery?" repeated the Head incredulously.

"That's quite right, sir," said Mr. Crowell. "I did ask Handforth to buy a renewal for my electric torch. And, indeed, it is quite feasible that he went to my study for the purpose of delivering it. I imagine that he was suddenly tempted——"

"I wasn't, sir," broke in Handforth hotly. "I didn't even know that those exam. papers were in the drawer! How *should* I know, sir?"

The Head glanced at Mr. Crowell.

"Yes, that is certainly a point," admitted the Form-master. "I don't quite see how Handforth could have known. But, of course, most of my boys are aware that I use my bureau for private papers. Handforth, the headmaster is waiting for you to say why you acted as you did."

"I can only say that I'm not guilty, sir,"

replied Handforth stubbornly. "I think cribbing is about the rottenest thing that any fellow can do. That's all, sir. I didn't do it, and there's an end of it."

Dr. Stafford shook his head.

"Unfortunately, that isn't the end to it, Handforth," he replied quietly. "In the absence of any explanation from you—and I fail to see how there can be an explanation—I can only come to the conclusion that you were caught red-handed. Your present attitude is thus understandable, since there is so plainly nothing to be said. Mr. Crowell, I want you to take this boy to the Punishment-room. I fear there is only one possible penalty."

Handforth hardly remembered getting out of the Head's study, for those final words of Dr. Stafford's had stunned him. His brain was dulled. There was only one possible penalty!

The sack!

The very sentence of being confined to the Punishment-room was sufficient indication—for no boy was sent there unless he was under sentence of expulsion. At rare intervals, a fellow's sentence had been mitigated to a public flogging, but, as a general rule, the Punishment-room meant only one thing.

Mr. Crowell went away sadly, so thoroughly upset that his heart was heavy, and he would certainly feel the effects of this shock for days. Schoolmasters are not the flinty-hearted tyrants that one might suppose.

In the Ancient House lobby he met Church and McClure, both of them looking worried and anxious. They had heard the rumours, and they were wondering what their leader could have been up to.

"Haven't you brought Handforth back, sir?" asked Church.

Mr. Crowell started, and sighed.

"My poor boys!" he said quietly. "I am almost as sorry for you as I am for Handforth himself. This will be a sad blow for you both."

They stared, their hearts leaping.

"What's happened, sir?" burst out McClure.

"Handforth is in the Punishment-room," replied Mr. Crowell unhappily. "In spite of the unfortunate boy's guilt, I am indeed sorry for him. Never would I have believed that he would end up in this fashion."

Mr. Crowell passed on, leaving the boys in this very unsatisfactory state—for he had given no explanation to Handforth's chums. But he had certainly left them in no doubt regarding Handforth's predicament.

"He's—he's sacked!" muttered Church dazedly.

"Oh, but—but that's impossible!" panted McClure. "He can't be sacked, Churchy! What for? Half an hour ago he was with us. He *can't* be sacked!" he shouted desperately.

Dick Hamilton and Archie Glenthorpe and a few other fellows were crowding round now, all eager for news.

"Sacked?" repeated Dick, staring.

"Handy? Don't be such an ass, Mac! There's no need to talk rubbish——"

"But I tell you he's in the Punishment-room!" babbled McClure. "Crowell just told us so! Can't we do something? Can't we—— Oh, my hat! What the dickens does it mean?"

"Steady, old man!" said De Valerie. "You're a bit wild, aren't you? A bit upset, I mean? It's no good going on like that, you fellows. Handforth's not booked for the sack. It's impossible."

"Then why has he been sent to the Punishment-room?" asked Church.

This was a poser, but De Valerie grunted.

"You must have got hold of it wrong——" he began.

"All right—go and ask Crowell," said Church worriedly. "Crowell distinctly told us that Handy has been sent to the Punishment-room by the Head. And you know what that means! It's—it's too awful for words!"

The mental anguish of Handforth's chums was rather painful to witness. They were utterly bowled over, and were looking so upset that Dick Hamilton nodded to the other fellows to slip quietly away.

"There's something rummy about this," he said cheerfully. "You needn't get the wind up, you two. Why, it's simply dotty! Handforth's about the last fellow in the school to do anything crooked or dishonourable. I expect there's a mistake."

"Of course there's a mistake," shouted Church indignantly. "Why, Handy was with us less than half an hour ago. We came straight from Little Side, and Mac and I were waiting to start tea. Then we heard that Handy had been carted off to the Head."

"And you haven't any idea why?"

"Of course not," said McClure.

"He's done nothing that you know of?"

"Nothing at all," said Church, with an expression of desperation. "It must have happened when he went to Mr. Crowell's study to take that rotten torch battery. But what *could* have happened? Handy wasn't gone for more than ten minutes——"

"Here comes his minor," interrupted McClure. "Perhaps he'll know something."

Willy came hurrying up from the playing-fields, hot, breathless, and grim. Several members of the Third had brought him the startling news, and he had come along to make a few inquiries.

"What's happened?" he asked briefly, as he halted.

"Your major's sacked," groaned Church.

"Rot!"

"I tell you——"

"Rot!" repeated Willy. "Do you think I believe that tosh?"

"He's in the Punishment-room now—and everybody knows what that means," put in McClure. "We thought you'd know something——"

"I do know something," interrupted Willy promptly.

"What is it?" shouted the Removites.

"I know that my major hasn't done anything to earn the sack," replied Willy. "It isn't necessary to make any inquiries, or to find any proofs. I know Ted! And you know him, too. If he's booked for the sack, there's been a bloomer—and it's going to be put right!"

Willy took the simple course of utterly refusing to believe anything bad against his major. In his mind, there wasn't any shadow of doubt. Edward Oswald had made one of his blunders, only this time it was more serious than usual. In some way he must have acted the giddy goat. Willy was quite aware of his major's weaknesses.

"Of course, it's up to me to get him out of this hole," he said, with businesslike crispness. "No good leaving it to you fellows. It needs a keen brain and plenty of energy. When Ted gets into a mess, he generally does it thoroughly. Never knew such a chap!"

Church and McClure glared.

"It's all very well to stand there, talking about keen brains and energy," growled Church. "But what's the good when Handy's in the Punishment-room? We don't even know what he's done! And it's no good asking Crowell. He wouldn't tell us."

"But we can ask Ted, I suppose," said Willy. "Leave this thing to me, my sons. It won't take me long to get to the bottom of the mystery, and then we'll have old Ted out of the soup in no time."

He hustled off, and Dick Hamilton smiled.

"There's an example for you fellows," he said, glancing at Handforth's chums. "There's no half-and-half measures about Willy! He just refuses to believe in his major's guilt, and, instead of wringing his hands, he's starting out to get something done. That kid's a marvel!"



CHAPTER 10.

WILLY ON THE JOB.

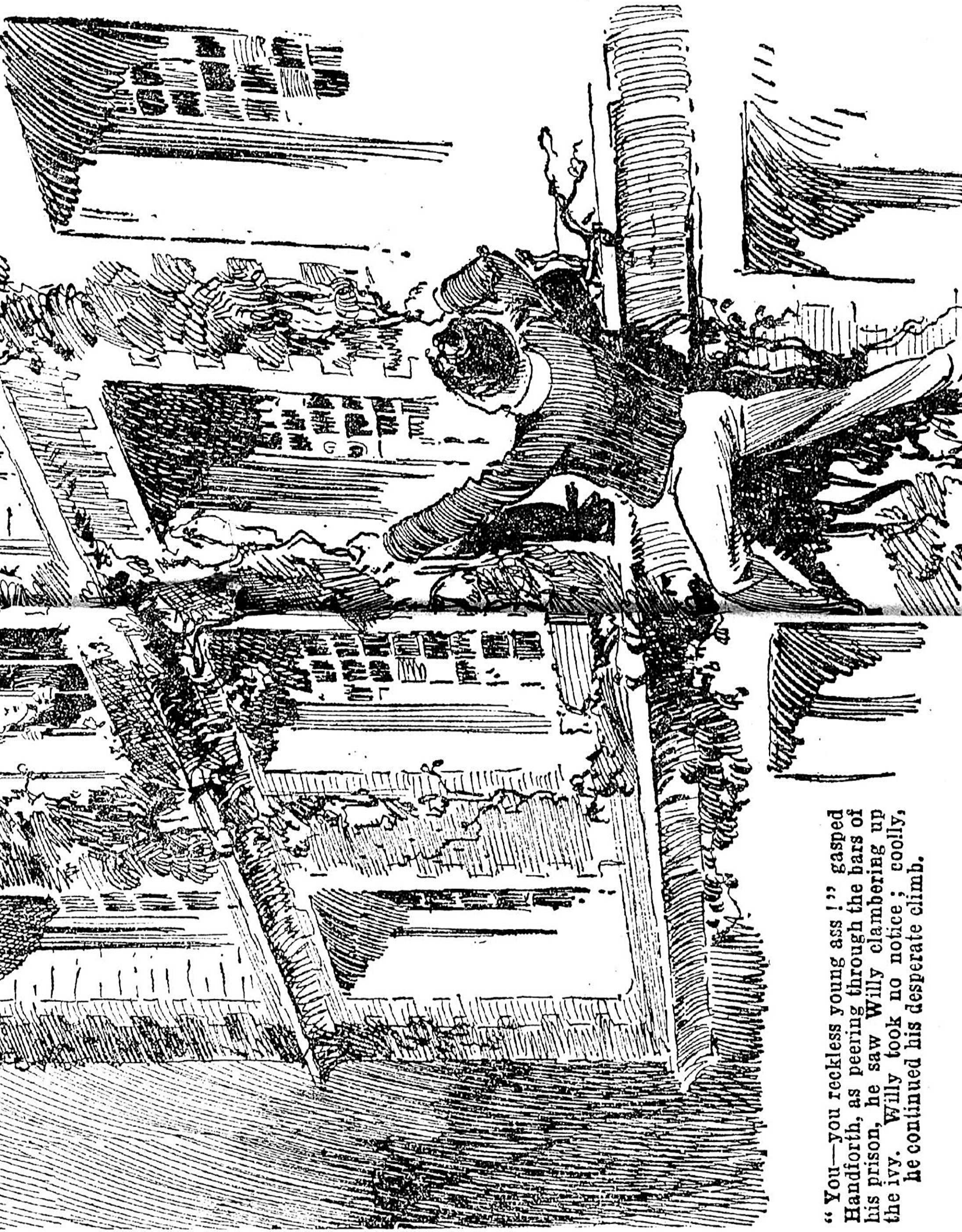
MR. CROWELL looked up sadly as his study door opened. He was sitting at the bureau, examining the scratched polish of the left-hand top drawer. There were one or two odd keys on the top of the bureau, too, and Mr. Crowell had put these aside for further attention. He started as Willy appeared, and a pained expression entered his eyes.

"Come in, Handforth minor," he said quietly.

"Thank you, sir."

Willy came in, and closed the door. There was a moment of awkward silence. Mr. Crowell hardly knew what to say, and Willy respectfully waited for the master to inquire his business. Willy seldom forgot his manners.

"I—I am sorry your brother has got himself into such trouble, my boy," said Mr. Crowell, at length. "I was hoping that I



“You—you reckless young ass!” gasped Handforth, as peering through the bars of his prison, he saw Willy clambering up the ivy. Willy took no notice; coolly, he continued his desperate climb.

should be spared this embarrassing interview, but, of course, you are anxious—”

“Sorry to interrupt, sir, but what has Ted done?” asked Willy.

“I am afraid I am not at liberty to give you any information,” replied Mr. Crowell. “The headmaster, you may be sure, will publish the facts after your major’s sentence has been decided upon.

Willy started.

“Then it’s not true, sir?” he asked eagerly. “He isn’t sacked?”

The pained expression in Mr. Crowell’s eyes was intensified.

“I am sorry for giving you a moment’s hope, Willy, but you evidently misunderstood me,” he said quietly. “I fear there is no doubt as to your brother’s fate. Expulsion is almost inevitable.”

“But you just said that his sentence hadn’t been decided—”

“A mere figure of speech, my boy,” interrupted Mr. Crowell. “I should have said that the Head will publish the facts after your major has—er—left the school. This conversation can only distress us both, so I hope you will accept the position bravely and do your best to bear up.”

Willy laughed—he wasn’t distressed in the least.

“I’m not windy, sir,” he replied promptly. “My major hasn’t done anything to get himself sacked. You may think so, but there must be some mistake. If I don’t know Ted, I don’t know my own nose! Ted’s going to be cleared of this charge, and it’ll help me a lot if you’ll tell me what the charge is, sir.”

The Form-master’s eyes warmed up.

“Upon my word, Willy, I like to see this faith in you,” he said approvingly. “What a splendid spirit you have! Alas, I am afraid you are wrong in this instance, much as I would like to have it otherwise.”

“That means you won’t tell me anything, sir?” asked Willy.

“I am not at liberty to do so.”

“Then can I go to the Punishment-room, and see Ted?”

“You know that such a request cannot be granted,” said Mr. Crowell, worried. “It is against all regulations, Willy—”

“But there’s an exception to every rule, sir,” put in the Third Form skipper. “And if I’ve got your sanction to—”

“Really, I cannot grant it,” said Mr. Crowell, hurt. “I would like to, young ’un, but I should only get myself into trouble. And I can assure you that it will be useless to go to the headmaster.”

“All right, sir—I expect you’re right,” said Willy, nodding. “There’s as much red-tape in a public school as there is in a government office! I suppose I shall be allowed to see Ted after the sentence, eh? When it’s too late, sir?”

Mr. Crowell hardly knew what to say, and he was spared the saying of it, anyhow, for Willy took his departure. His interview with Mr. Crowell had not been particularly enlightening. But Willy wasn’t the kind of



“You—you reckless young ass!” gasped Handforth, as peering through the bars of his prison, he saw Willy clambering up the ivy. Willy took no notice; coolly, he continued his desperate climb.

junior to cool his heels because of a rebuff.

He went straight upstairs, and made for one of the bath-rooms. He locked himself in, opened the window, and looked out. The Punishment-room was just above, and it was plainly impossible for him to get in, since the window was barred. Although quite comfortably furnished, this dread apartment was regarded by the boys as a kind of prison cell.

“Good!” murmured Willy. “They can’t dish me!”

Ivy was clinging thickly to the wall, and the climb was a comparatively short one. But the risks were considerable, for a fall would be sheer to the paved pathway below. As it happened, there was nobody in sight—not that Willy would have cared if there had been.

He swung himself out of the bath-room window, gripped the strong ivy roots, and



wormed his way upwards. Now and again he felt one of the roots tear itself away, in spite of the tenacious grip. But there was always fresh handhold ready. A period of twenty tense seconds, and he reached the higher window-sill, and then gripped the iron bars. A moment later he was sitting serenely on the stone sill itself.

Edward Oswald Handforth, within, was startled to see a figure, and he ran across the floor, and threw open the window.

"You—you reckless young ass!" he gasped, in alarm.

"Chuck it, Ted!" said Willy. "I can't get in, but I want two minutes' chat with you. We can talk through the bars. What's up? How did you get yourself in this fix? Out with it!"

Handforth stared, in no way relieved of anxiety.

"You might have killed yourself, climbing

up that ivy!" he said angrily. "You mustn't try to get down, you young chump! It's twice as bad getting down——"

"You make me tired!" interrupted Willy tartly. "I've come up here to help you, and all you can do is to kick up a fuss. I shall be spotted soon, so we haven't got much time. How did you get yourself pinched?"

"It's all a mistake," growled Handforth.

"I know that. But what are you accused of?"

"Cribbing."

"Cribbing!" ejaculated Willy, staring.

"Crowell came into his study and found me with some exam. papers in my hand," explained Handforth. "I was just climbing through the window, and he thought I was escaping. And when he saw his bureau drawer busted open, he jumped to the conclusion that I was the culprit!" he added warmly. "Did you ever hear of such rot?"

Willy considered.

"Under the circs., you can't blame old Crowell," he replied judicially. "If he spotted you climbing through the window with some exam. papers in your hand, he was naturally a bit suspicious. Of course, somebody else broke open that drawer, and you were chasing him, eh?" he added shrewdly.

"By George!" said his major. "How did you know?"

"I didn't know—I guessed it."

"Well, as it happens, you're right," said Handforth.

"Good!" nodded Willy. "You were chasing somebody. Who?"

Handforth didn't reply for a moment. But his hesitation was only brief. There was no earthly reason why he shouldn't confide in his minor. His extremity was dire, and his heart was as heavy as lead. While it would be sneaking to breathe a word to the Head, he was at full liberty to tell Willy. For Willy could be trusted to keep it to himself.

"Look here, if you'll promise to say nothing——" he began.

"Rats!" interrupted Willy warmly. "I won't promise anything. If I want some help, I shall tell some of the other chaps—but I should hope you can rely upon me to do the decent thing?"

"By George, of course I can," replied Handforth. "Sorry, Willy, old man. The fact is, I'm all muddled. The chap who pinched those papers out of Mr. Crowell's drawer was——"

"Forrest, I'll bet," said Willy confidently.

"No, that snaky worm, Snipe."

"O-ho!" mused Willy thoughtfully. "The Snipe bird, eh? Methinks I smell a plot, Ted! Snipe's in the Fourth, and he wouldn't have any interest in the Remove exam. papers. There's more in this than meets the eye. Let's know exactly what happened."

"There's nothing to tell," growled Handforth. "I just went into Crowell's study, saw Snipe with the papers, and when I grabbed them he bolted through the window."

"And before you could get out, Crowell came in, and saw you with the papers in your

hand?" asked Willy. "Poor old Ted! I must say you're in a pretty ghastly mess. And I apologise, too."

"What for?"

"Well, I thought you'd been blundering again," explained Willy frankly. "But I can see that you were caught in a trap and left stranded. Of course, you needn't worry. I'll attend to this all right."

"You hopeless young ass!" said his major. "What can you do?"

Willy grinned.

"Everything's O.K.!" he replied cheerfully. "Merely a matter of time, Ted—just an hour or two. You're booked for the sack, but at the last minute your passage is going to be cancelled! So-long!"

"Hi!" gasped Handforth. "Hold on, you young ass—"

But Willy, clinging to the window-sill, merely kissed his hand, and Handforth could do simply nothing—for the bars prevented him from taking action. He waited there in an agony of suspense, half-expecting to hear a dull, sickening thud.

"All right, Ted—I'm in!" came Willy's voice from below. "Keep your pecker up! We'll soon have you out of the condemned cell!"

Handforth heard the bathroom window close, and he clutched at the bars in sheer relief.

"My only hat!" he muttered. "I believe he means it, too! When you come to think of it, Willy isn't such a bad sort of minor for a chap to have!"



CHAPTER 11.

SNIPE GETS HIS FIVER.

ENOCH SNIPE was not a particularly happy youth while all this was going on. After escaping from Mr. Crowell's study, he had dodged across to the East House in sheer panic—and by the luck of the wicked he had reached Study 15 without anybody observing him.

And it was a further blessing that Merrell and Marriott, the two Fourth-Formers who shared the study with him, were out for the afternoon. Snipe was able to lock his study door and breathe freely.

For the first quarter of an hour he had been in a state of hopeless funk, expecting Handforth to rout him out every minute. But Handforth hadn't come, and Snipe had vaguely wondered why. Then, venturing out, he learned that Edward Oswald was in the Punishment-room. The rumours had already reached the East House.

"I'm safe—I'm safe!" murmured Snipe breathlessly.

His relief was intense. So Handforth had been accused of the crime which Snipe had committed! The East House junior suffered no pang of remorse—but many a pang of doubt. Would Handforth keep mum? Knowing Edward Oswald's character, Snipe felt that he would.

And with growing confidence he went over to the Ancient House again, and wormed his way to Study A. Forrest & Co. had only one subject under discussion—the surprising fate of Handforth.

And then Snipe came in, looking more fish-like than ever.

"I—I've got 'em, Forrest!" he panted breathlessly.

Forrest leapt up.

"Shut the door, you young fool!" he rapped out. "What's that you said? You've got those exam. papers?"

"No, I've got the questions," said Snipe eagerly. "All of them, too! And I want that fiver, Forrest, please! You promised me—"

"We'll talk about the fiver later," interrupted Forrest. "I don't trust you an inch, my lad! Let's have a look at what you've brought—and how did you do the trick?"

"The subject is history," breathed Snipe, as he fumbled in his pocket. "I did just what you told me, Forrest—took some keys, and forced open the drawer. And I copied all the questions off the exam. paper."

Snipe said nothing of the intervention of Handforth, for he felt that that piece of news might jeopardise his much-wanted fiver. And Forrest & Co. were altogether too eager to think of Handforth now. They feverishly scanned Snipe's notes, and their satisfaction was great.

"History, by gad!" said Forrest, his eyes gleaming. "That's just about my weakest subject."

"Mine, too!" exclaimed Gulliver.

"I was never strong on history," went on Forrest. "There's something better to do these days than to dig into fusty old history books. The exam. couldn't have been on a better subject for us. We shall be able to look up these giddy questions to-night, and be beautifully primed for to-morrow."

"This is worth quids to us!" said Beil gloatingly.

Snipe listened with intense anxiety, for he had no faith in Forrest & Co. It was quite like them to repudiate him completely, and kick him out without handing over the reward. They could see that these notes were genuine. Snipe couldn't have made them up himself. He had copied every word, and they bore the stamp of the official hand.

"Good man!" said Forrest, pulling out his pocket-book. "You've earned that fiver, Snipe, my son. I'll pay up cheerfully."

Enoch fairly grabbed at the notes.

"Oh, thanks awfully, Forrest!" he said

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breathlessly. "I—I knew you'd do the right thing. But—but there's only three here."

"Exactly!" nodded Forrest. "You've got to collect a quid from Bell and a quid from Gulliver. That was the arrangement. It ought to be equal shares, really, but I'm a generous sort of chap."

Snipe looked at the other two anxiously. As it happened, they had the money, and although it nearly skinned them out, they paid up. They couldn't very well do anything else, after Forrest had set them such a good example.

He pocketed the five notes, and the load that was lifted off his mind was like a dead weight. He felt suddenly free and happy. The danger of being handed over to the police was gone—and there was still plenty of time for him to get to Bannington before the shops closed.

"Of course, there's no need for me to tell you to keep mum," remarked Forrest, as Snipe was about to sidle out. "Not a single word of this must be breathed."

"Oh, rather not, Forrest, please!" said Snipe, cringing. "I wouldn't dream of saying anything. You can trust me, please, Forrest."

"Yes, I think I can," muttered Bernard. "If you blab, you'll be the one to get the chopper. There's no proof, remember—and we shall deny all knowledge of the whole affair. So you'll be the chap to get the sack if there's any hint of— By gad!" he added abruptly. "The sack, you know! And Handforth—"

He paused, looking at Snipe curiously.

"Please, Forrest, can I go?" asked Snipe fearfully.

"Just a minute, my lad," said Forrest, with a grim note in his voice. "Do you know anything about Handforth? Do you know why he's been carted off to the Punishment-room?"

Snipe realised the necessity for showing a bold front, and he managed to assume an air of blank bewilderment. His cunning nature was coming to his aid.

"But—but I don't know what you mean, please, Forrest," he said, staring. "Is Handforth in the Punishment-room? I'm an East House chap, you know, and I haven't heard anything—"

"Handforth hasn't been collared, by any chance, in connection with this cribbing?" asked Forrest.

"But that's impossible," lied Snipe, hoping against hope that he would be able to escape.

"I put the papers back in the drawer, and locked it up. Nobody saw me go in, or anything. If Handforth is in the Punishment-room, it must be because of something else. He's always in some trouble, anyhow."

Forrest thought for a moment, and Snipe prepared to make a wild dash. He had that fiver now, and he wasn't going to give it up. During those few seconds he suffered torture.

"All right, worm—scoot!" said Forrest at length.

"Oh, thanks, Forrest!" breathed Snipe.

"And remember what I said—not a word," warned the leader of Study A.

Snipe escaped, and closed the door after him.

"I thought, for a moment, that there was something fishy," said Forrest, with a frown. "These questions are O.K. I can tell the genuine article when I see it. But it's a bit queer that Handforth should be in trouble at just the same time—with old Crowell, too."

"Oh, that's nothing!" said Bell. "Just a coincidence. Don't be an ass, Forrest. How can Handforth's affair be connected with this cribbing stunt? Snipe copied the exam. papers, and Snipe would have been caught, too, if there was anything of that sort in the wind. Besides, Handy's the last chap in the world to do any cribbing."

Bernard Forrest was convinced.

"Yes, you're right there," he admitted. "And you're right about the other thing, too. Snipe would have been collared if Crowell had made any discoveries. By gad, we're safe! That's the best three quid I've ever paid. To-morrow, my sons, we're going to get full marks with flying colours!"

And Forrest, with his half-aroused suspicions satisfactorily killed, sat back in his chair, and lighted a cigarette.

In the meantime, Enoch Snipe was rushing to Bannington.

Now that he had got the fiver, his one mania was to get rid of it. He had a feeling that Forrest & Co. might discover the truth about Handforth, and chase him for the return of their money. For if they found out that Handforth was indeed being sacked for cribbing they would guess that the exam. papers would be altered. But if Snipe paid over the money without delay he would be safe. It was that jeweller he was afraid of.

He arrived in Bannington breathless, and was panting hard as he entered the shop. But he was triumphant. Fortunately, the shop was empty, except for the jeweller himself, and he looked at Snipe with interest. Just as he had suspected! The boy's very appearance proved that he was frightened out of his wits, and desperate with worry.

"Well?" said the jeweller smoothly. "Have you got that money?"

"Yes, please, sir," said Snipe, pulling out the notes, and spreading them on the glass counter. "I've bought the watch now, haven't I? You won't tell the police, will you? I—I didn't mean to steal it—"

"Just a moment!" interrupted the jeweller, astonished. "Upon my word! Five pounds! So you've brought the full sum, eh? Where in the world did you manage to rake up this money?"

"You told me that if I didn't bring it—"

"Never mind about that!" interrupted the jeweller. "Where did you get this money?"

"Please, I borrowed it from the other chaps."

"Some of your schoolfellows seem to be pretty flush," said the jeweller suspiciously.

"H'm! I have heard some stories, though, about you St. Frank's boys. Some of you are quite wealthy, eh?"

"Yes, please, sir," said Snipe eagerly. "I—I borrowed this money, and I'm going to pay it back by instalments."

"Oh, you are?" said the surprised jeweller. "Well, look here, young man, I didn't think for a minute that you'd ever bring this money."

Snipe received a shock.

"But—but you're not going to tell the police?" he gasped.

"Of course not," said the other sternly. "My idea was to give you a lesson—and I think I've given it to you. I hope it'll teach you not to give way to a sudden dishonest impulse again. I don't think you really meant to take that watch, but that crooked tendency of yours had got to be checked. Well, take that money and get off home."

"But—but the watch——"

"That watch is no good to you, and I don't do business like that," said the jeweller. "I don't want to make a profit out of a frightened schoolboy. You take that money away, and give it back to those you borrowed it from. Forget the whole thing. Cut off, my lad!"

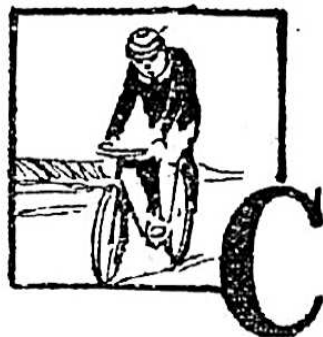
Enoch Snipe was bewildered as he made his way out of the shop. The jeweller watched him with a kind of grim amusement. He

was convinced that Snipe had had a stern lesson, and he was satisfied.

Snipe, returning to St. Frank's, soon lost his bewilderment. A great, gloating surge of joy had come over him.

He was safe!

Handforth was going to be sacked for that cribbing affair—and he had always hated Handforth, anyhow!—and he had the five pounds intact. Undreamed-of wealth for Snipe! He pedalled homewards in serene happiness.



CHAPTER 12.

WILLY MEANS BUSINESS.

HURCH paced furiously up and down Study D. McClure sat at the table, his chin resting on his hands. The evening sun-

light streamed through the window, but neither of the juniors appreciated it. Cricket had lost its charm. The river had no allure-ment, and all sports were as nothing.

Handforth was going to be sacked.

For Church and McClure this was a stunning blow—an unbelievable catastrophe. Without Handforth they would be like fish out of water. The very thought of him being sent away in disgrace stunned them.

There was some cycle practice to be done

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this evening, too. Before long there was going to be a big race—a long road race, with all the Houses competing. And Church and McClure had been enthusiastic entrants.

"It can't be true!" said Church at last. "Mac, I tell you it can't be true!"

He paused in his pacing, and stared at McClure. The latter looked up miserably.

"It is true," he said quietly. "Don't be an ass."

"But Handy, you know!" said Church, with a kind of catch in his voice. "Handy being sacked for— For what? That's just what we don't know, but it must be something pretty awful."

"Willy thinks there's been a mistake of some kind," said McClure, with a trace of hope in his voice. "Perhaps he's right, too. He's a cute young beggar. I say, how rotten for Willy!"

Church nodded.

"It's worse for him than it is for us, I suppose," he said sombrely. "After all, they're brothers. It would be a different thing if Handy was suddenly called away to Australia or South Africa. We'd get over it. But when he's being publicly expelled like this— Oh, rot! It's simply too frightful, Mac!"

Handforth's chums were more cut up than they could realise. The whole thing seemed like a nightmare—chiefly because it had come upon them so suddenly. It wasn't much more than an hour since Handforth had been with them, without any shadow of this shattering blow.

Church and McClure probably received more knocks from Handforth than any other fellows in the school. A few of the more callous juniors had facetiously remarked that Church and McClure ought to be pleased, since they would now be able to lead peaceful lives. But they only proved how thoroughly they misunderstood the chums of Study D.

For Church and McClure thought more of Handforth than of anybody. The other fellows only saw Edward Oswald's exterior—they only knew him as a blundering sort of chump. But Church and McClure knew the inner Handforth, and they knew true gold when they saw it. And it was inconceivable to them that their leader could have committed some act which justified expulsion.

"Hallo! Don't look so dead!"

Willy Handforth stood in the doorway, and his cheerful voice was in striking contrast to the recent lamentations of Handforth's stricken chums. Willy seemed so bright, in fact, that Church and McClure leapt.

"Has something happened?" gasped Church eagerly.

"Not yet," replied Willy. "But that's only a detail, old man. "Something's going to happen soon. Don't look so rocky. There's nothing to worry about. I've had a chat with my major, and I know everything."

Church and McClure fairly jumped upon him, and held him down.

"You've seen him?" rapped out McClure. "Tell us——"

"Chuck it!" growled Willy, shaking himself free. "If anybody ought to worry it's me—and I'm as cheerful as a nigger with a water-melon. I'm Ted's brother, and if he was in any danger I should go half dotty. So follow my example and smile."

His manner calmed them, and they looked at him admiringly.

"My hat, you're a cool young beggar!" said Church, taking a deep breath. "What's wrong with Handy? Why is he in the Punishment-room?"

"He's accused of cribbing," said Willy.

"WHAT!"

"Pinching the questions from to-morrow's exam. paper," explained Willy. "Old Crowell caught him red-handed, and Ted hadn't got a word to say. So he was hauled before the Head, and the chopper came down with a thud."

"Oh, my goodness!"

"Justice while you wait!" said Willy, grinning.

"And you can stand there and laugh?" gasped Church. "Why, you callous young rotter! But I've never heard such piffle! Handy cribbing—cribbing from the exam. papers, and caught red-handed! It's rot!"

"Of course it's rot!" agreed Willy. "I know my major—and you know him. I'd sooner believe that he'd opened the Head's safe with a charge of dynamite, and pinched all the school valuables!"

Willy proceeded to give the pair a brief account of his chat. And Church and McClure were much enlightened. They could understand now.

"Poor old Handy!" said Church softly. "And you can't blame Crowell, either. It must have looked simply AWFUL to Crowell—finding Handy escaping through the window with those papers in his hand."

"But what about Snipe?" demanded McClure, turning red with anger. "Come on, Church! We'll find Snipe and smash him into pulp unless he promises to clear Handy from this——"

"Steady on—steady on!" interrupted Willy coolly. "Nothing doing!"

"What?" said Mac. "Look here——"

"Nothing doing!" repeated Willy. "This is my circus."

"Why, confound you——"

"I am Ted's brother, and I've made up my mind to deal with Snipe personally," explained Willy. "I appreciate your eagerness to get busy, but I've got first claim. So hands off! Snipe's my game!"

Church and McClure were compelled to acknowledge the force of this argument, although they were reluctant to remain idle while Willy got busy.

"Can't we help?" asked Church anxiously.

"Sorry, old man, but I'd rather do it single-handed if I can," replied Willy. "But I'll call on you if I fail. That's fair, isn't it? As for Handy, you can rest your minds

about him. He'll be out of that Punishment-room long before supper-time—cleared. I'm going after Snipe now, but I thought I'd come and give you a cheering word first."

"By jingo, that was good of you!" said McClure gratefully. "You've bucked us up no end. I say, what a volcanic young bounder you are, Willy!"

"Vesuvius is my second name," grinned Willy, "and in about ten minutes I shall be in eruption! If you listen carefully, you'll hear the racket of it. So-long—and keep quiet about this! No need to have the whole Lower School talking before we've got anything done. Besides, if we talk it'll be almost the same as sneaking on Snipe."

He hurried out, and got on the track in less than a minute.

Somebody had seen Enoch Snipe going off on his bicycle earlier, and he hadn't returned yet. Somebody else, just back from Bannington, added the further information that he had passed Snipe on the way—and Willy had all the clues he needed.

"Good!" he murmured. "If I buzz off now I shall meet Snipe on his way back, and that'll suit me down to the ground. What I need just now is a heart-to-heart talk with that handsome young sheik!"

Willy was at the gates, and he paused, frowning. He had just remembered that he had lent his own bicycle to Dicky Jones, of the West House. He glanced round, and saw about a dozen machines leaning against the neighbouring wall. A party of fellows were about to start off for a practice spin—in preparation for the coming long-distance cycle race.

"Hard lines about your major," remarked Buster Boots, as he came up and took hold of one of the machines. "But I must say you're looking rather indecently chirpy, my son! I expected you to be weeping and wailing and generally gnashing your teeth."

Willy grasped another machine, and turned it round.

"Ted's all right," he said calmly. "You mustn't believe everything you hear, Buster. He's in a bit of a mess, but I'm on my way to get him out of it."

"Well, hadn't you better go on your way without that jigger?" asked Boots pointedly. "It happens to belong to Billy Nation, of my House."

"I was wondering whose it was," nodded Willy. "I've lent my bike out, so I've got to have somebody's. Nation's a good-tempered chap, so you can just make my apologies to him when he comes out."

The captain of the Fourth glared. "Why, you cheeky young fag!" he roared. "Just you hand that bike over— Hi! Come back, blow you! Well, of all the confounded nerve!"

"It's urgent," called Willy, as he sped off. "When Billy hears all about it, he'll not only forgive me, but thank me as well! Don't forget to explain to him when he comes out."

Willy was soon a hundred yards away, but for a moment Buster thought of giving chase. He knew Willy, however, and thought it better not to risk an undignified failure. Besides, he and his fellow Fourth Formers had planned to go for a ride in the opposite direction, and they were already coming out.

Willy sped through Bellton, and found himself upon the Bannington road. After the inquiries he had made, he was fairly certain of meeting Snipe as the latter came back from the local town. And Willy's business with Master Snipe was of a confidential nature. He had no desire for a crowd to be watching.

There was likely to be a bit of a bother before long.



CHAPTER 13.

SNIPE TAKES THE COUNT.

ENOCH SNIPE'S confidence had greatly increased by the time he was half-way home. He had dawdled deliberately, so that he would have plenty of time to think things out. And he had come to the conclusion that he was perfectly safe.

The whole affair had panned out much better than he had hoped for.

The greatest satisfaction of all was the feel of the five Treasury notes in his pocket. Snipe wasn't a fellow who usually possessed a lot of pocket-money. A ten-shilling note was an indication of great wealth where Snipe was concerned, and he had a habit of increasing such capital by lending it in six-pences and shillings to needy Fourth Formers, and collecting it back, with an added percentage, on "pocket-money day."

With five pounds he could become a real financier. He occupied his thoughts, as he pedalled along, by reckoning how much profit he could make on that fiver by the end of the term. He was a miserly junior, and generally denied himself the little luxuries which other fellows took as a matter of course.

He calculated that he would be much more than five pounds in pocket by the time the summer holidays arrived—and that would make a fine little sum to spend during the vacation.

Handforth's plight didn't worry him in the least.

In fact, he hardly thought of Handforth at all—although he was directly responsible for Edward Oswald being under sentence of expulsion. So far as Snipe was concerned, the affair was over. The jeweller had turned up trumps, and there was nothing to worry about.

Even Forrest couldn't do anything. If something went wrong with the exam. on the morrow, Forrest might seek his blood, but there were always ways and means of avoiding Forrest. Snipe was in the Fourth, and Forrest was in the Remove—to say



Handforth, Church, McClure and Willy stood watching with very broad grins as Forrest & Co. staggered down the passage, groaning from the pain of their stinging palms, and glaring as they passed. Mr. Crowell had laid it on hot and strong.

nothing of the fact that they lived in different Houses. To a junior of Snipe's cunning, it would be perfectly easy to keep well clear of the Study A trio for a few days.

But it wasn't so easy to keep clear of Willy!

For Willy was riding towards him at the present moment, although Snipe wasn't aware of the other cyclist's identity. His eyesight wasn't particularly good, and he was completely occupied with his own thoughts.

It wasn't until the Third Former leapt out of the saddle, and stood in the centre of the road, that Snipe appreciated the possibility of danger. His recognition of Willy was a shock for him. What could Handforth's brother want with him, alone on this quiet road?

"Just a minute, Snipe," said Willy casually.

"I—I'm in a hurry!" said Snipe frantically.

He attempted to spurt forward and avoid the fag, but Willy was a bit of an acrobat in his own way, and he gave a sideways leap, grasping the handlebar of Snipe's machine.

The Fourth Former was swung round, and he came a terrific cropper in the road. Willy calmly put both the bicycles against the hedge, and nodded towards a neighbouring gap.

"Better come through here, Snipe," he said calmly. "It's more private—somebody might come along. I want a chat with you."

"You—you dangerous young hound!"

gasped Snipe, picking himself up. "You might have killed me! Don't you know that it's a mad thing to throw a chap over—"

"I know it's a mad thing for you to call me a hound!" interrupted Willy grimly. "It's a pretty dangerous thing, too. Are you coming through this gap, or shall I kick you through?"

Snipe gazed at Willy balefully. After all, he was only a Third Former—a fag—so what was there to be afraid of? Snipe made up his mind to bluster, yet, in his heart, he knew that there was something important behind all this. Willy had been talking to his major, and Willy was going to ask some questions! Snipe hadn't thought of this possibility.

"I tell you I'm in a hurry," he said impatiently. "I haven't got time to waste on a fag like you! Let me have that bicycle, and— Here, stand back! Don't you dare to touch—"

"See that?" said Willy, placing a business-like looking fist under Snipe's nose. "See it?"

"You—you—"

"In exactly ten seconds you'll feel it, unless you obey orders!" went on Willy. "I don't usually punch toads, but I'll make an exception this time. Are you going through that gap?"

Snipe thought it advisable to hedge.

"I don't want any bother with a fag," he growled. "It wouldn't look well if anybody came along and saw. Just to humour you,

"I'll go through. But I can't stop more than a minute."

He climbed through the gap, and found himself in a meadow. His voice hadn't sounded particularly confident, and he was actually in a blue funk. There was some indefinable air about Willy which Snipe didn't like in the least. The fag joined him, and stared him in the face.

"Now, Snipe, you're going to tell me exactly why you went to Mr. Crowell's study and rifled his bureau," said Willy firmly. "You're going to tell me why you wanted those questions."

"I—I don't know what you mean," blustered Snipe. "I haven't been near Crowell's study. I haven't seen any exam. papers—"

"Well, my major says he caught you red-handed," interrupted Willy. "Either he's a liar or you're a liar, so you needn't try any more denials. Some of those East House chaps say that every time you tell the truth you get a pain. You don't look in pain now, although that's only a detail. We'll soon supply you with some."

"I—I won't be fooled like this," shouted Snipe shrilly. "I tell you I don't know anything about Crowell's study—"

"Chuck it!" interrupted Willy curtly. "My major told me exactly how he found you, and I want to know the whole truth. Understand—the truth? It may hurt you a bit, but if you don't trot it out I'll reduce you to a mangied jelly!"

For a mere fag to speak to a Fourth Former in this way was beyond all endurance. But, somehow, Enoch Snipe endured it. He had an instinctive feeling that Willy Handforth was worth four of him in a fight. Snipe was an unutterable coward.

"The truth, mind you," went on Willy. "You're a Fourth Former—and Fourth Formers don't generally take a keen interest in the Remove exam. papers. I want to know why you did that cribbing. Who paid you?"

"Nun-nobody," gasped Snipe desperately.

"That's clearly admitting that somebody did," remarked Willy, nodding. "Let's make a random guess. Forrest & Co., eh?"

"They didn't!" shouted Snipe, the alarm leaping into his eyes. "I tell you they didn't! I'm not going to be questioned like this!" he went on whiningly. "I'm not going to be made to speak. I don't know anything, I tell you! Your major was just fooling you!"

Enoch was shaken completely out of his complacent mood. Willy's determined attitude frightened him. He daren't speak, either. For if Forrest ever knew that he had "peached," Forrest would hunt him down until he had made his life a misery. Forrest would exact a dreadful revenge.

"It's a pity you don't want to save me a lot of trouble," said Willy, as he removed his coat. "I hate fighting a crawling worm, but it's got to be done. If you don't tell me the

whole truth within ten seconds, I'm going to knock you down. One—two—three—four—"

"I don't know anything!" babbled Snipe, trying to dodge.

"Five—six—seven," said Willy, grasping him firmly. "Eight—nine—ten. Nothing doing, eh? Right!"

Crash!

Snipe crumpled up like a pricked bladder. It was certainly a powerful blow—one of Willy's choice rights. Snipe took it on the nose, and collapsed to the ground with one wild, anguished howl. He grovelled there so despicably that Willy felt physically sick.

"You—you creeping reptile!" he said disgustedly. "My hat! I can't even fight you! Get on your feet, blow you, and put your hands up! Are you a human being, or a chunk of refuse?"

"I won't fight!" babbled Snipe fearfully. "I won't fight, I tell you! And I won't tell you anything, either! If you don't leave me alone I'll complain to my Housemaster!"

"Oh, my only aunt!" breathed Willy, staring down at the cringing wretch. "I'm about sick of this! I thought you'd at least have the spirit to fight like a man! Clear off, and go to the dickens! I've seen better objects than you wriggling about in a stagnant pond!"

"Can—can I go?" bleated Snipe.

Willy turned aside, feeling shaky with disgust. He had always known that Enoch Snipe was utterly beneath the contempt of any decent fellow, but this exhibition simply amazed him, and all his plans were abandoned. He just couldn't stand by and watch.

Willy didn't know that Snipe was unusually marrowless this evening. He was so afraid of Bernard Forrest's wrath that he hardly realised how he was debasing himself before this fag. In any ordinary quarrel he would probably have made some pretence of fighting. But just now he was panic-stricken, and hardly knew what he was doing.

But he had enough sense to crawl off, and Willy stood there, listening as Snipe took his bicycle and rode away. The Third Form skipper felt quite relieved as all sounds died away.

"By jingo, I didn't know that such things could live!" he muttered. "And I meant to drag a confession out of him, too! A fine mess I've made of the affair. Poor old Ted looks like staying in that giddy Punishment-room for a bit longer than I— Hallo!"

He bent down, and picked something out of the trampled grass. It was a piece of folded paper, and it was evident to Willy that it had fallen out of Snipe's pocket when the latter had crumpled up. The next moment Willy uttered a kind of whoop.

"A clue!" he muttered. "Not merely a clue, but proof! It was worth coming for alone!"

He looked at the paper with intense interest. There was nothing particularly start-

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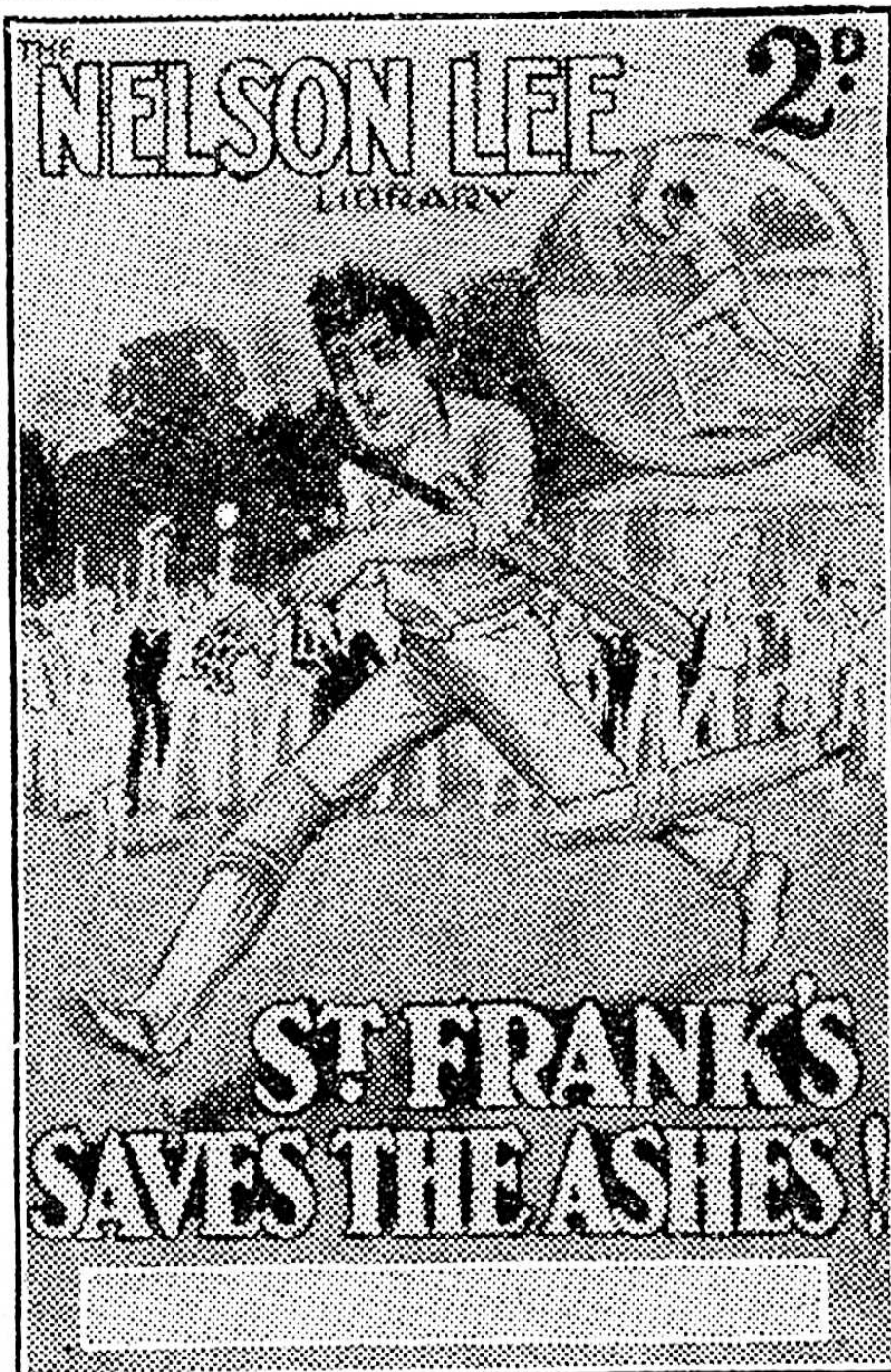
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COMING NEXT WEDNESDAY!

ling about it—a half-sheet from a writing-block, with some pencilled scrawlings upon it. The handwriting was Snipe's—a peculiarly untidy and characteristic "fist." And there were one or two examination questions there—a part of Enoch Snipe's cribbing activity.

As a matter of fact, it represented a false start which Snipe had made during the first moments of his ordeal in Mr. Crowell's study. He had made a blunder with the third question, and so had started again. And he had forgotten to destroy the discarded sheet.

"Proof!" muttered Willy thoughtfully. "H'm! But how am I going to use it? If I show this to the Head, it'll be sneaking. Willy, my son, you've got to set your brains to work, and think of something better. Don't forget old Ted!"

He stood there, deep in thought, for several minutes, and then his face cleared. His active mind had already evolved a new scheme.



CHAPTER 14.

A SPARK OF DECENCY.

HURCH and McClure were waiting at the gates when Willy Handforth arrived back, hot, but undismayed. He jumped off his borrowed machine, and they closed upon him.

"Anything happened?" asked Church eagerly. "Snipe came in about ten minutes ago, and he was looking more like an earwig than ever. Did you force the young rotter —"

"It's no good," interrupted Willy gruffly. "He practically admitted everything, but not in so many words. And what's the good? I've been thinking things over, and the only solution to this problem is for Snipe to go to the Head, and make a clean breast of everything."

"But he'll never do that, you ass!" said Church, with fresh alarm. "He wouldn't deliberately ask for the sack if he thinks that your major is booked. And we can't force him to confess to a master, anyhow. It would be almost like sneaking."

Willy nodded.

"Of course it would be sneaking, if we forced him," he admitted. "But I'm thinking of something else. My plan is to appeal to his better nature——"

"His what?" asked Church, staring.

"He must have got one somewhere," said Willy.

"You might as well appeal to a paving-stone!" grunted McClure.

"Snipe's a worm, and we all know it," said Willy. "At the same time, there must be a spark of decency in him somewhere. Our trouble will be to find it. Violence is no good—he's too much of a funk to fight, and you can't biff a chap who grovels at your feet. So our only course will be to adopt persuasive tactics. We'll dig for that decent spark until we find it."

"I tell you it's utterly hopeless," said Church irritably. "And there's poor old Handy relying on Snipe's sense of decency! Great Scott! He's booked for the sack, as sure as a gun."

"If this stunt fails, we'll try something else," replied Willy coolly. "We're not at the end of our resources yet, my sons. But it'll be far better to make Snipe confess of his own accord. I'd like the chap to do something honourable, for the sake of his own soul. And we're the three to do the trick. I'm Ted's brother, and you're his best pals. This is distinctly our merry-go-round. So let's get busy."

"By Jove, I believe there's something in it," declared McClure, flushing. "After all, what else *can* we do? It's impossible to sneak, and it's just as impossible to take Snipe before the Head by force. Come on—let's try the thing."

Billy Nation, of the Modern House, came up at that moment, looking hot and angry. It was an unusual expression for the diminutive Billy—for he was usually one of the sunniest of juniors.

"It was like your nerve to take my bike!" he said indignantly.

"So it was!" agreed Willy, handing it over. "Thanks, old man. Always remember that one good turn deserves another. If ever you want to borrow my bike without permission, it's yours."

"But, look here, you young ass——"

"I was on business connected with my major," explained Willy. "He's booked for the sack, and I've got to get him out of this mess. Of course, he's as innocent as I am, and it isn't the time to study etiquette——"

"My hat, that's different!" said Billy Nation, losing his indignation. "I'd forgotten about your major, Willy. Under the circumstances, you were welcome to my bike. If you want to borrow it again, it's yours. But, about your major——"

"You'll see him at liberty in about an hour's time," interrupted Willy briskly. "Can't go into other details now."

He walked off, and Church and McClure accompanied him. And Billy Nation shook his head as he saw them going into the East House. He did not possess Willy's optimism, and he was rather dubious about Handforth's release.

In the East House, Willy and the two Removites made straight for Study 15. They walked in without ceremony, and found Enoch Snipe sitting at the table. There was a sudden crackle of paper, and Snipe stuffed something into his pocket as he sprang to his feet. He looked at the invaders with acute alarm. Handforth's brother, and Handforth's chums!

"Help!" screamed Snipe desperately. "Help—help!"

"Shut up, confound you!" rapped out Willy, seizing Snipe, and forcing him back into his chair. "We haven't come here to smash you, although you deserve it. We're not going to harm a hair of your head, so stop this whining."

Snipe breathed hard, and tried to pull himself together. Church and McClure stood looking on with astonishment. Even Teddy Long, the sneak of the Remove, had more spirit than this spineless wretch.

"Lock the door, Church, old man," said Willy quietly. "We don't want to be disturbed."

Snipe tried to rise again.

"You're going to smash me!" he muttered. "Oh, you cads—you cowards! I don't know anything about Handforth—I tell you I don't know——"

"Chuck it!" interrupted Willy sternly. "Look here, Snipe, this is just going to be a heart-to-heart talk. We know that you went to Crowell's study to crib from those exam. papers, and we're pretty certain that you were bribed to do it by Forrest. But that's neither here nor there. You've got to go to the Head and confess—and clear my major."

"I won't—I won't!" panted Snipe. "I don't know anything about it——"

"You needn't keep up these denials—we know the whole truth," interrupted Church angrily. "And we shan't sneak on you, Snipe. We're not cads of that sort. We're going to leave it to you to confess."

"You—you won't hurt me?" babbled Snipe.

"We're not going to touch you," replied Willy.

Snipe looked relieved, and he felt much more comfortable. And it was obviously useless to keep up any pretence of ignorance with these fellows. And since they had given him their word that they wouldn't sneak, and that they wouldn't harm him, there was no reason for further denials.

"You're mad!" he said, looking at them stubbornly. "Handforth was fool enough to butt in, and he'll have to pay the conse

quences. Why, if I went to the Head and confessed, I should be sacked."

"That's better," said Willy, with a gleam in his eye. "Now we're getting nearer to the right atmosphere. So you're going to sit here, Snipe, and let my major be sacked for your crime?"

"It wasn't my crime!" denied Snipe fiercely. "I didn't want to do any cribbing! I—I hated it! I was forced——"

He broke off, and Willy nodded. "You were forced to do it by Forrest, eh?" he said. "Exactly! That's what I suspected. All you've got to do is to go to the Head, make a clean breast of everything, and my major will be cleared."

"But—but I should get the sack!" panted Snipe. "I'm not going to ruin myself——"

"You'd prefer to live on here with my major's expulsion on your conscience?" asked Willy sternly. "You needn't be afraid of Forrest—you can confess without mentioning any names. The main thing is to tell the Head that you took those papers, and that my major tried to stop you. You won't be sacked, either, because you were acting for somebody else. A flogging will be the worst punishment you'll get."

Enoch Snipe quivered at the very thought. "A flogging!" he muttered. "I—I couldn't stand it! Besides, why should I confess?" he added defiantly. "I'm safe now—and you chaps won't sneak on me. What do I care about Handforth? It was all his own fault—he shouldn't have interfered!"

He sat there, pale and sulky. He felt that he was safe, and the suggestion that he should confess was sheer madness. But there was something hypnotic about Willy's gaze—something that caused Snipe to inwardly squirm. Under Willy's influence he was weakening. He felt himself slipping, although he swore that he wouldn't shift an inch. Why should he? These fellows had promised not to sneak, and they had promised not to hurt him. He could defy them!

"Then that's final?" asked Willy quietly. "Yes!"

"You won't go to the Head, and you'll let my major be sacked?"

"I—I can't do anything else!" muttered Snipe whiningly.

"All right," said Willy, rising to his feet. "Then we'll go."

"But look here——" began Church and McClure.

"We'll go!" repeated Willy, giving them a warning glance. "We'll leave you to your misery, Snipe. I hope you will have peace in future—I hope you'll have pleasant dreams."

"What—what do you mean?" asked Snipe fearfully.

"By to-morrow my major will be gone—expelled in disgrace," said Willy. "If you've got a conscience, Snipe, it'll probably give you a nasty pang every time you meet me in the Triangle. And you needn't think that

you'll sleep comfortably, either. You'll have nightmares. The thought of your rottenness will haunt you in your dreams. Week after week, and month after month, you'll suffer. And as the time goes on, you'll suffer more and more."

"It's—it's not true!" panted Snipe hoarsely. Willy leaned over the table.

"A few words of confession—a flogging—and that conscience of yours will be freed," he went on. "Snipe, haven't you got an atom of decency in you? Can't you see that this is utterly dirty? Why not confess now, and have it all over? You don't know how relieved you'll be—and you don't know how much you'll go up in our estimation."

There was a world of appeal in Willy's voice—and Snipe felt himself slipping more swiftly.

"These chaps say that you're rotten to the core," went on Willy. "I suggested this idea to them, and they suggested that I might as well appeal to a paving-stone. Are they right? Can't you prove that you're an ordinary human being, with feelings and a conscience? Put yourself in my major's place," went on Willy quietly. "How would you like to be sacked for something you didn't do? How would you like it?"

"Don't—don't!" muttered Snipe, covering his face with his hands.

"And remember that my major has kept mum about you!" exclaimed Willy relentlessly. "There's decency for you! Instead of sneaking, and explaining the truth, he's willing to suffer expulsion, and let you go free. Would you do a thing like that, Snipe?"

Snipe merely sobbed, breaking down completely.

"Come along, old man," murmured Willy. "You're feeling better now, aren't you? Once you've made a clean breast of it you'll be a new man. Aren't you game to do something decent for once?"

Snipe looked up, despair in his eyes. "I—I didn't mean to get your major into trouble!" he sobbed shakily. "He came in by accident. I—I didn't try to get him into a mess!"

"But he's in a mess, all the same," said Willy. "And you're the one chap who can get him out of it. Which is it going to be? An hour of misery now, with a bit of pain—or weeks and months of torture?"

Snipe suddenly stood up, his eyes glittering.

"All right!" he muttered thickly. "I'll confess! You're right—you were right from the first! I've been a beast and a cad—and I'll try and be different in future. I'll go straight to the Head and confess."

Church and McClure looked at him in amazement, and Willy breathed a quiet sigh. There was such a change in Enoch Snipe that one would hardly have recognised him. His cringing attitude had gone, and he stood there, upright and transformed. Willy had dived for that spark of decency, and had found it!



CHAPTER 15.

ON THE CARPET.

GOOD" said Willy briskly. "Bring him along, you chaps!"

"You needn't trouble," said Snipe, his very voice losing its habitual whine. "I'll go without being forced. I don't suppose I should have had much peace if I'd let things go on. It's better to get it all over."

Church unlocked the door, and he and McClure were quivering with excitement. Even now they could hardly realise that Willy had wrought the miracle. It had seemed such an impossible thing—and yet it was accomplished.

A minute later Fortune assisted them. For in crossing the Triangle they happened to run into Mr. Crowell—and Willy seized his opportunity. He knew that he had worked Enoch Snipe round, but he had a fear that this wave of contrition might pass rapidly. Before reaching the headmaster's study, Snipe might lose his newly-found courage. In spite of his youth, Willy was a keen student of human nature.

"Just a minute, sir," he said quietly. "Snipe's got something to say to you."

Rather to Willy's surprise, Snipe at once nodded.

"Yes, sir," he admitted. "There's something on my mind, and I'd like to get it off. And I want to tell the Head, too."

Mr. Crowell looked at Snipe in surprise. He didn't know the boy well, for Snipe wasn't in his Form. But there was something about his whole demeanour which compelled attention. Mr. Crowell was still sad and worried over the tragedy of Handforth.

"Well, my boy?" he said gently.

"It's about Handforth, sir," said Snipe. "He didn't take those examination papers from your drawer. I was the one who did it."

Mr. Crowell started so violently that his glasses dropped off.

"You!" he ejaculated. "Good heavens! Then—then—— Snipe, are you telling me the truth? This is extraordinary! I actually saw Handforth escaping through my window——"

"He wasn't escaping, sir—he was chasing me," explained Snipe. "He came in and found me copying the exam. papers, and grabbed them. But you called him back before he could get through the window."

Mr. Crowell was staggered.

"You will come with me to the Head at once, Snipe," he said tensely. "Upon my soul! This only proves how easy it is for a miscarriage of justice to take place. I can understand now—I can realise why Handforth maintained his protestations of innocence. Good gracious! What a narrow escape!"

Snipe went off with the Form-master, and Willy looked happily at Church and McClure.

They were in a sort of dream, and couldn't quite bring themselves to earth.

"Well, we did the trick, you see," said Willy softly.

"You did it, you mean," muttered McClure. "It's beyond me! I never thought that chap had it in him, you know."

"That worm!" said Church, staring. "That hopeless, sneaking, marrowless insect! And he actually went of his own accord! I've never seen such a change in a chap in all my life! For all we know this may be the turning point—it may alter his whole character and make him decent."

"You never know," said Willy, nodding. "It'll take time, of course. Perhaps it's only a flash in the pan, but old Ted will soon be free now. Let's hope that our efforts will have a lasting effect. What's the good of a fellow if he can't do a bit of good in the world?"

In the meantime, Enoch Snipe was standing tremblingly in front of Dr. Stafford. His newly-found courage was not of a permanent nature—for this transformation was not a real miracle. He was already becoming frightened, but he fought gamely—an extraordinary thing for Snipe. He was trying to maintain the spirit which Willy had brought out. Somehow, Snipe was feeling in an unreal atmosphere. Even the flogging—which he was almost certain to receive—did not seem so terrible now.

"But this is a most remarkable statement of yours, Snipe," said the Head, after he had heard. "You declare that you opened Mr. Crowell's drawer and copied the questions from the examination papers?"

"Yes, sir."

"And Handforth came in and caught you?"

"Yes, sir."

"Handforth was in no way implicated?"

"Of course he wasn't, sir," replied Snipe. "I think he came in to give something to Mr. Crowell——"

"That electric torch battery," said Mr. Crowell, nodding.

"That's right, please, sir," said Snipe. "He grabbed the exam. papers, but I managed to get out of the window. I—I want to clear him, sir. It isn't fair that he should—I—I mean, he's innocent——"

"In face of this statement of yours, Handforth's position becomes at once understandable," agreed the Head gravely. "I fear

..... NEXT WEDNESDAY!

ST FRANK SAVES TEASHERS!



.....

there has been a sad injustice done to the boy. You have done the right thing, Snipe, in coming to me with this confession. Mr. Crowell, I should like you to release Handforth at the earliest moment, and inform him that there is no need of any further inquiry."

"I shall be happy to do so, sir," said Mr. Crowell gladly.

"As for you, Snipe, I find it difficult to decide upon your punishment," went on the Head sternly. "Undoubtedly you deserve expulsion—"

"But—but I didn't do the cribbing for myself, sir!" blurted out Snipe. "I'm in the Fourth, sir, and those questions weren't of any use to me. I was bribed, sir."

"Indeed! By whom?"

"I—I'd rather not say, sir."

"I cannot, of course, compel you to speak, and perhaps it would be rather unfair to force such a statement from you," said the Head thoughtfully. "But you must be prepared to receive a heavy punishment for your own part in this disgraceful episode. You say that you were bribed, Snipe. What money did you receive for your despicable services?"

"Please, sir, five pounds!" muttered Snipe miserably.

"Good heavens!" ejaculated the Head. "Five pounds! Where is this money?"

The Fourth-Former pulled it out and laid it on the Head's desk.

"You will quite understand, Snipe, that I cannot permit you to retain this money," said the Head. "Neither can I return it to its original owner, or owners, since I am in ignorance of their identity. I should not return it, in any case, for it has been utilised in a disgraceful fashion. It shall be sent to a deserving charity, and the receipt will be handed to you."

"Yes, sir," said Snipe dolefully.

"Mr. Crowell, kindly place this boy in the inner room for a few moments," continued the Head. "Snipe, remain there until I require you."

A moment later the Head and Mr. Crowell were alone.

"I am inclined to believe the boy," said Dr. Stafford, pursing his lips. "Obviously, he was acting in the interests of others—since the Remoye examination papers would be of no benefit to a Fourth-Form boy. The bribery money is an additional proof. H'm! A most distressing affair, Mr. Crowell."

"But it has its compensations, sir," said Mr. Crowell happily. "I cannot tell you of my relief. I could not credit that Handforth was guilty, for I know the boy's character so well. And yet the evidence seemed so conclusive—"

"About those papers, Mr. Crowell," interrupted the Head. "You will prepare fresh ones. Remember, Snipe copied those ques-

tions, and they are probably in the hands of his bribers by this time."

Mr. Crowell smiled, and made a reply which caused the Head to smile, too.

"In that case, no real harm has been done," said Dr. Stafford. "Handforth will be freed at once, and I shall give Snipe a severe flogging. There is no need for this matter to be made public. After Snipe has been flogged it will be over and done with—and perhaps the wretched boy will have learned his lesson."

Exactly fifteen minutes later Enoch Snipe crawled slowly back to the East House. He was wracked with pain, he was minus his ill-gotten gains, and his feelings towards the world were bitter.

But there was no question that the experience had done him good!



CHAPTER 16.

POETIC JUSTICE.

EDWARD OSWALD HANDFORTH regarded Willy warmly.

"By George, you said you'd get me out—and I'm out!" he ejaculated. "Good man! You're not such a useless young bounder, after all!"

Willy grinned.

"Whenever you're in trouble, Ted, old man, call me in!" he said cheerfully. "If it comes to that, I spend about half my life dragging you out of holes. That's what I'm at St. Frank's for! The pater told me to look after you—"

"You silly young ass, the pater sent you here so that you could be under my eye!" roared Handforth. "Just because you rescue me from the sack, I'm not going to stand your cheek—"

"Chuck it, Handy!" said Church. "Willy's a brick! The way he worked Snipe round was worth quids and quids! Snipe's had his flogging, and the whole affair's over. Let's forget it."

And they tried to carry on as usual—although Church and McClure were so happy that evening that they sadly neglected their swotting up for the morrow's exam. They had seen Snipe wriggle his way across the Triangle, and they knew what had happened. And Willy, in a private word with Mr. Crowell, gathered that the school in general would not hear the details.

Handforth, of course, was questioned by all sorts of fellows regarding his narrow escape; but by dint of superhuman efforts he managed to keep his tongue still. And the crowd soon got tired of questioning, and the affair was dropped.

Forrest & Co., too, were quite content.

They were so eaten up with their own satis-

faction that they knew nothing about Snipe's flogging. So far as they were concerned Snipe was done with. He had secured those questions for them, and he had been paid. And Handforth's unexpected release from the Punishment-room gave them further security.

For it was now quite obvious that Handforth's threatened expulsion had nothing to do with the cribbing. Somebody must have made a mistake, and there was an end of it. Forrest & Co. regarded the morrow with perfect equanimity.

When they went into the Remove class-room the next day they were serenely confident. Most of the other fellows were looking anxious and thoughtful. An exam. was always an ordeal—except to those fiends who fairly gloated in work. Forrest and Gulliver and Bell were primed up beautifully. What they didn't know about history—particularly in regard to the set questions for the exam.—wasn't worth inquiring into.

And then came the bombshell.

"The subject for this special exam.," said Mr. Crowell sweetly, "is geography."

He watched his Form with close attention. All the juniors except three received the announcement with relief. For geography, after all, was a fairly favourite subject, and presented no super-difficulties.

But Forrest & Co. not merely went pale, but they sat bolt upright in their seats, utterly aghast. The blow was a stupendous one. They had primed themselves with history, and they were sitting on this exam. for geography! And they hadn't even looked the subject up once in the past month!

"Geography," said Mr. Crowell agreeably. "Hamilton—Watson! You will distribute the papers at once."

But Forrest & Co. hardly heard. It was impossible to make any demonstration, and they merely gazed at once another with sickly, ghastly expressions of dismay. Anticipating full marks in this exam., they wouldn't get a dozen!

Mr. Crowell's eyes were keener than usual—and that is saying a lot. As he had told the Head, those exam. papers in his drawer were preliminary ones, in readiness for the big exams. to follow. It would be quite easy to alter them before they were needed. The cribbers would gain nothing, since geography was the actual subject for to-day.

So the Head had agreed that the young rascals would be sufficiently punished to find themselves the losers by their duplicity. In any case, it would be extremely difficult to prove their guilt.

Not that Mr. Crowell had any doubts. Watching the Remove, he had no difficulty in detecting the haggard looks of Forrest & Co. He had suspected them from the first, and his suspicions were verified."

"Of course, they will fail badly," Mr. Crowell told himself. "So much the better. It might teach them a lesson that they will

long remember. For in the long run they will suffer very heavily."

The exam. progressed, and Forrest & Co. were utterly at sea. Their discomfiture and distress became so obvious that many of the other fellows regarded them in astonishment. But Handforth & Co., at least, knew the truth. And they enjoyed themselves tremendously.

Handforth felt like telling everybody, but he restrained himself. Forrest & Co. were suffering enough agony already. They struggled hopelessly with the questions, befogged at every turn. Their papers were liable to be set aside for special attention. Indeed, it was practically certain that they would be required to suffer this exam. all over again. And their periods of detention—for compulsory swotting—would also be considerable. The outlook was completely black.

But as soon as the exam. was over Forrest & Co. rushed off on the warpath. They were no sooner out of the Form-room than they released their long-bottled wrath. In the Triangle they breathed white-hot fury.

"Dished!" hissed Forrest. "That—that rotten worm of a Snipe swindled us! He didn't copy the exam. papers at all—and he got his fiver by fraud! We're absolutely nowhere in that exam."

"Let's slaughter him!" suggested Bell furiously.

It was a suggestion they all agreed upon. And a minute later they burst violently into Study 15, in the East House. Luckily, Enoch Snipe was alone. He was still sore and low-spirited. He was broke, and he was beginning to wonder if he had been a hero or a fool. Probably the latter!

And then the avengers swept in and slammed the door.

"Now, you dirty trickster, you're going to be skinned alive!" snarled Forrest. "You fooled us over those exam. questions—the subject was geography instead of history! Grab him—"

"If you touch me, I'll scream the House down!" gasped Snipe desperately, as he backed away. "You—you liars! I didn't swindle you—I copied those questions off Crowell's exam. papers—"

"You didn't!" snapped Forrest. "You made them up—"

"Keep back!" panted Snipe, trembling with fear. "I'm not going to stand any hitting from you. I'm sore all over now, because of that flogging."

"What flogging?" demanded Forrest harshly.

"I told you a lie about Handforth yesterday," retorted Snipe, seeing daylight. "He was put in the Punishment-room because Crowell thought he had been cribbing. He found me on the job—and I escaped."

"Well, I'm hanged!" muttered Forrest, staring.

(Continued on page 44.)

THE VANISHED MUMMY!

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CHAPTER 1.

THE WRECKED MOTOR-WAGON.

“**B**REAK not the sleep of Amen-hetep! Ra and Amen guard this portal, and a curse shall lie heavy on ye who dare to enter!”

Professor Strode uttered the words slowly and solemnly. His urgent summons had brought Nelson Lee and Nipper in haste to North Wales, and Nipper guessed they were about to hear something extraordinary from the famous Egyptologist.

“That warning was chiselled on the entrance of the tomb, Mr. Lee, and I ignored it,” the professor continued. “I dared the curse of Ra and Amen. I rifled the tomb, and I’ve regretted it ever since!”

“But your troubles could hardly arise from a 5,000-year-old curse,” Lee said, practically. “It was not the threat of Amen-hetep’s tomb that made you send for me.”

Strode fingered his bushy black beard, and glanced at Nipper with twinkling eyes.

“No; I’d hardly ask a 20th-century detective to lift a Ra and Amen curse, Mr. Lee,” he smiled. “No, sir, I’ve sent for you because Amen-hetep has vanished—after I’ve spent a small fortune in bringing him from Egypt to England!”

“Vanished!” Nelson Lee exclaimed. “Do you mean the mummy has been stolen?”

“I’ll tell you the tale, as far as I know it,” Strode replied quietly. “I broke into the tomb ten weeks ago, and got one hand badly crushed in entering the place. We portered the sarcophagus from Thebes to Cairo, my damaged hand growing steadily worse. At Cairo, I was forced to go into hospital for three days, and to leave my mummy in charge of a curio-hunter whom I met in the Cairo hotel. Finally, I got permission from the Egyptian Government to bring the mummy home, and arrived in Liverpool two days ago. I was again taken ill when the ship entered the Mersey, and I begged Mr. Ferrandi, the Cairo curio-

hunter, to arrange a conveyance to take the mummy from Liverpool to my house.”

“You look a very healthy person, professor,” Nelson Lee exclaimed. “Very strange that you should be taken ill just before your voyage began, and just when it finished.”

“Very strange indeed, in face of what has happened,” Strode agreed, dryly. “Had I been well enough, I would have travelled with the sarcophagus. As it was, Ferrandi sent it away on a motor-wagon six hours before I took train—and it has never arrived!”

“But a motor-wagon cannot get lost!” Nelson Lee protested. “You’ve spoken to the man at the Liverpool depot from where it was hired?”

“Yes, but the wagon has not returned to Liverpool,” the professor answered. “What is more, the car was hired without a chauffeur, and its owners hold me responsible for its loss!”

“Gosh, sir!” Nipper exclaimed. “Then I should think you want to trace that unknown driver pretty badly.”

Strode shook his head.

“Had it been a plain theft of that sort, I’d have simply put the police on the fellow’s track,” he replied. “No, I’ve already traced the car. It crashed over the cliffs on the Llandudno road, and I fear that chauffeur, car and mummy have all been washed out to sea!”

“You’d better show us the spot,” Nelson Lee said quietly. “You’ve told us a strange tale, professor, but I’ll need very definite proof that the unknown driver has been drowned, whatever has happened to car or mummy.”

The professor’s runabout carried them swiftly from the house, and along the main road towards the Great Orme’s Head. During the journey, Nelson Lee asked many questions about the mysterious Mr. Ferrandi, who had been so friendly with Mr. Strode in Cairo and on the voyage home. The

professor could tell him very little, however; the fellow had been a chance hotel acquaintance, helping a sick man over little difficulties, as any decent chap would have done.

"Um—yes," Lee said dryly. "You've lost sight of him since, of course, though I fail to see why he, or anyone else, should want to steal a mummy."

At the highest point of the road the professor stopped the car, and the passengers jumped out. One side of the wide road was sheltered by the towering Orme, but the side nearest the sea had only a three-foot granite wall separating it from a drop that ended in needle-pointed rocks a hundred feet below.

Professor Strode had stopped his car beside a break in the wall, six feet of which had vanished, the break being roughly boarded to prevent further accident.

"The car must have driven straight at the wall, and the driver was either blind or mad!" he grumbled, as he pointed downward. "Look, Mr. Lee, you can see the wreckage of the motor-wagon impaled on a steeple of rock, but the sea has covered every other trace."

Glancing down from the roadway, Lee and Nipper saw the engine and a bit of the chassis tilted grotesquely on the point of a twenty-foot rock. Nipper only gave one quick look, then he ran across the road and began to examine the wall opposite.

"The car's been backed right up against this wall, guv'nor!" he presently called out. "Look, you can see scratches on the rock face, and wheel marks in the mud."

"Which means that the car has been deliberately smashed into the sea wall like a battering-ram!" Nelson Lee answered. "You can be very sure, professor, that the driver was not in the car when that happened. I think we'll have a closer view of the wreckage below."

"There's been another car here, guv'nor!" Nipper suddenly yelled. "You can see the marks where it's turned—why, I believe the two cars have been stopped right against each other!"

"I wondered if you'd notice that, young 'un," the great detective smiled. "If you'll look a bit closer, you'll also see that something white has been spilt on the roadway, and that careful efforts have been made to wipe it up."

Now that Lee pointed it out, the others could see a faint star-shaped splash, where some white substance had fallen on the wet road. It was barely visible, and not even the scraping of a penknife gave them any idea of what the splash meant, or whether it had anything to do with the vanished mummy.

Guided by the professor, they came to a place where it was possible to descend from road to beach. Fortunately, the tide was at its lowest ebb, and they were able to scramble over moss-covered rocks to the needle-point whereon the wagon wreckage was poised.

It was tricky work climbing that almost perpendicular rock, but the effort was worth the trouble. The instant they began prying about in the torn metal-work, Nipper spotted a sodden strip of cloth and gently worked it from the axle round which it had tightly twisted.

"Crikey, guv'nor!" he cried. "The mummy's gone over with the car all right—here's a bit of the bandage stuff it was wrapped in, by the look of it."

Hanging on with one hand, Nelson Lee took the cloth in the other hand and smiled grimly the moment he touched it.

"By the look of it, yes," he said, glancing down to where Strode stood impatiently awaiting them. "Professor, what happens to the wrapping of a mummy when it is exposed to the air?"

"It looks strong and solid for a few seconds, then it crumbles to dust, and the mummy with it," the professor answered. "But what have you got there, Lee? It looks like——"

"Coming down," Nelson Lee called, scrambling to the beach and tossing the cloth to Professor Strode. "Whatever it looks like, it's a strip of good Lancashire cotton, and was never made by the ancients of Egypt."

Strode's bewilderment was laughable, and even Nipper was staring in open-eyed surprise at the great detective.

"But the affair grows more ridiculous every moment," the professor exclaimed. "The mummy wasn't a fake—I'll put my reputation on it that when I opened the tomb of Amen-hetep it had been sealed for thousands of years!"

The detective's eyes held a glint of amusement when he turned to his young assistant.

"You've seen the signs on the road above, young 'un, and you found this," he said, pointing to the cloth. "We've a plain story, up to a point—now what do you make of it?"

"I don't know, guv'nor," Nipper began, then his mouth opened and he started to grin. "My hat! The mummy's been swopped over from car to car when they stopped alongside each other. Then this car's been toppled over as a fake accident to make the professor think his Amen-hetep has been lost in the sea."

Nelson Lee nodded approvingly.

"You're partly right, young 'un, except for the little fact that the wrecked wagon never held a mummy," he said, surprisingly.

"But it did," Strode protested. "I'm quite confident that the sarcophagus was loaded on to this motor-wagon——"

"And I'm equally confident it did not contain the remains of Amen-hetep, or any other Egyptian king," Lee said quickly. "I'd remind you, professor, that you were in a Cairo hospital for three days, and that you left the mummy-case in charge of a comparative stranger."

"Gosh, you mean to say the mummy was taken from its case in Cairo, and something

else put there in its place?" Nipper gasped.

"This bit of rag proves it," his guv'nor answered. "It was never meant to fall into our hands, and it would not have done so if the car hadn't chanced to drop on this needle of rock. But that strip of cloth shows me that no mummy rested in the case when it reached England, and I'm afraid, professor, that you've been used as a catspaw by a very clever man."

"I don't see what you mean," Strode said grumpily.

"Whatever the case held, it was not a mummy," Lee said definitely. "This strip of cloth gives the game away, and if the car had dropped into deep water—as it was intended to do—the fraud would never have been exposed. You would have been satisfied that your mummy had been washed out to sea, and something would have been smuggled into England without anyone being the wiser."

"Will anyone be wiser now?" the professor asked. "The fraud has been carried out; we're too late, Mr. Lee."

"I'm not so sure of that," the great detective replied. "One clue remains, and that is the fellow who took such an interest in you during the voyage home."

"You mean Ferrandi?" the professor said. "But he cleared off the ship before I left—you'll never trace him now, Mr. Lee."

"We're going to Liverpool to try and do so," Nelson Lee answered. "If you'll run us to Llandudno station, we may learn something of Mr. Ferrandi."

CHAPTER 2.

THE MESSAGE BY WIRELESS.

THE journey to Liverpool brought disappointing results. Everyone on board the s.s. Assyrian knew Mr. Ferrandi, but the fellow had evidently kept very much to himself, and it began to look as if they were fated to draw a complete blank. It was only when Nipper was gossiping with the purser's clerk—a boy not much older than himself—that a hint showed of anything unusual in Ferrandi's conduct aboard ship.

"Ay, I remember Ferrandi—funny little chap with a limp and a yachting cap always stuck on his nut," the boy grinned. "Came to me one night when I was giving Wireless Jones a rest; it's part of my job, you know, to listen in for S.O.S. calls when 'Sparks' is off duty."

"But what did Ferrandi want you for?" Nipper asked, impatiently.

"Asked me to send a Marconigram for him," the lad replied. "I told him he'd have to wait until Jones came on again, but he nearly wept, so at last I tapped his silly old message off just to keep him quiet."

"I'd like to see that message," Nipper hinted.

"It's agin the rules," the lad grinned—and winked! "There was nothing in it, really, but we always keep copies in the operator's room!" He winked again and strolled away, and Nipper walked slowly aft!

He left with Nelson Lee a few minutes later, and the detective was frowningly silent as they walked along the dock road.

"Well, young 'un, it begins to look like a dead end," he said at last. "Ferrandi never dropped a hint of where he was making for, and not a soul appears even to have seen him leave the ship."

Nipper took a slip of paper from his pocket, and looked at it with a doubtful grin.

"Here's a copy of a wireless message he sent off, three days before the ship docked," he said. "Can't see anything exciting in it, guv'nor—"

"Let me see it," Nelson Lee said quickly. "'Imlah, London,'" he read aloud. "'Head better; will Orme arrange examine it. You must meet him. My car engaged; will have full load aboard with my luggage.'"

The great detective stood stock still, rubbing his chin and pondering over the apparently innocent message.

"Head, Orme," he muttered. "That ought to tell us something—the first and fourth word—" He studied the message again, then handed it back to Nipper with a smile. "Young 'un, you've done well! Take the first and every third word, and read it backwards!"

Nipper picked the words out and uttered a whistle of surprise.

"'Luggage aboard; have car meet it at Orme Head,'" he read. "My hat! That's a straight tip at last, guv'nor, if we can find Mr. Imlah in time."

"Imlah is a telegraphic address, and that means business premises of some sort," Nelson Lee answered. "It also means London as quickly as we can get there. We'll 'phone the professor to follow us on."

Arrived at Euston, they soon found that Imlah was the name of a curio-dealer with a shop in Falcett Street, close to Surrey Docks station. They paid a flying visit to Gray's Inn Road; when they issued from the house, thirty minutes later, they were disguised as two black-haired, coffee-coloured coolies.

It was growing dark, and a thin mist was creeping up from the river when they located the shop in Falcett Street. They never seemed to glance at the place as they slouched slowly past, but in those few seconds they had spotted a fat, pasty face spying on passers-by from behind the curtain of gods, guns and masks that filled the window.

From the opposite side of the street they kept a close watch on the place, and in less than ten minutes they saw several ill-dressed men slip into the narrow doorway and sidle quickly out again. There was something furtive in their movements, but

the strangest customer of all was an old gentleman who rolled up in a smart Daimler, and was in and out of the shop in less than ten seconds.

"Old chap looked as frightened as a sneak-thief caught in the act," Nipper whispered. "Shouldn't think he was the kind to be interested in curios. Wonder what he wanted, guv'nor?"

But Lee's fingers were pressing warningly on the lad's wrist.

"Look, Nipper! There's another fellow making for the shop," he muttered. "He's limping—it's Ferrandi himself!"

From Professor Strode's description, they would have known the fellow in a million. A thin, wiry chap he was, wearing a duck yachting cap pulled low over his eyes, and moving so quickly that he was inside the shop almost before Nipper spotted him.

During the next two minutes another fellow slipped into the place and stayed there. Then they saw Imlah—an enormously fat chap with a red fez cap on his head—come to the doorway, and stand lazily smoking a cigarette.

"He's watching the road to make sure no one was following his pals," Nelson Lee muttered. "We mustn't stand here, young 'un, or he might spot and remember us."

They turned and slouched away down the street. Glancing back, they saw Imlah re-enter his shop and presently emerge with an iron gate in his podgy hands.

"He's going to close the place, and those other fellows are still inside," Lee said softly. "They must have a meeting on, and it can only be connected with the secret of Strode's mummy. I've an idea of their game. I'm going to pretend to know more than I do, and try and trap Imlah into an admission. Wait here, young 'un."

Nipper knew better than to question orders when the hunt was on, but he was distinctly uneasy as he watched the guv'nor step up to the curio-dealer. The fellow was as fat as a hog, but he looked as cruel as a wolf, and was certainly not the man to trifle with.

When Nelson Lee first spoke, Imlah waved him impatiently away, evidently regarding a humble coolie as so much dirt. But this coolie persisted—he even dared to take Imlah by the arm and whisper into his ear. Nipper saw the fellow start, as if someone had hit him, then, without another word, he beckoned Lee to follow him into the shop and the pair disappeared from the youngster's sight.

Ten minutes later, and Imlah sauntered to the doorway—alone! For another five minutes he stood idly smoking, though Nipper guessed that his piggy little eyes were studying every soul in sight. The lad crouched back in the entrance of a narrow alley, and, with growing dismay, he watched Imlah lock the gate, and close and bar the door!

CHAPTER 3.

THE SECRET OF THE BUDDHA.

ANOTHER fifteen minutes, and Nipper was still waiting and wondering what had happened to the guv'nor. The mist had turned to heavy drizzle; it had now grown quite dark, and at last the lad became desperate.

"If they catch me butting in, I might easily queer the guv'nor's game," he muttered. "But they're four to one, and goodness knows what he might be going through while I'm kicking my heels here. I'm going in—if there's any way of getting in."

Acting the coolie to the life, he slouched along the pavement until he reached the narrow entry that divided Imlah's shop from the next. One quick look round, then he slipped into the alley and crept up its length with a hand on the damp wall of Imlah's place.

He had almost reached the blind end when his hand touched a waterspout. A flick of the torch he carried showed that the spout ran past the windows of the first and second floors, and he guessed that this was his only chance of getting on the guv'nor's track unseen.

"I'm no cat burglar, but I've got to have a shot at this spout," he murmured. "Boots off, my lad! It's going to be a finger and toe job!"

The first window was about twelve feet from the ground, but he felt as if he'd climbed a hundred by the time he touched the stone sill. The glass of the little window was grimy and uncurtained, but the room within was dark, and appeared to be unoccupied.

Gripping the spout with both knees, and hanging on by one hand, Nipper knew that he must act quickly or fall to the ground defeated. A chance had to be taken, so he drove his elbow hard against the pane, until he felt it crack and break under the pressure.

The tinkle of falling glass made him fear discovery, but his aching limbs were incapable of holding his weight a moment longer, and he crawled clumsily into the room. He listened, but there was no sound beyond his own panting breath, and at last he risked lighting the torch again.

The place was filled with a queer mixture of gods, shields and hideous war-masks. Spears and knobkerries hung on the walls, but the room was merely a storehouse for the shop below, and he had no time to waste on curios at present.

He was making for the door when a sharp command came for him to put his hands up, and to be quick about it. He whirled round just as the electric light was switched on, and he saw that a panel had opened in one wall, and that Imlah himself stood framed in the opening!

The sight was about the greatest surprise Nipper had ever had in his life, and the shock was complete when he saw an ugly-

looking automatic pointed straight at his forehead!

For perhaps five seconds he stood absolutely still, his mind, for once, refusing to work. Then, abruptly, Imlah spoke.

"So our coolie did have a pal outside, eh?" he said, softly. "You were well hidden, little spy, for I thought I searched the street very closely."

"I dunno what y'r mean," Nipper grumbled, huskily. "I dunno what you're talkin' about—I—"

Imlah smiled wickedly, and waddled a couple of paces into the room. He was so enormously fat that Nipper could have grinned, but for the gleaming weapon that pointed so steadily at his face.

"I mean that you're no more a coolie than the fellow we've got downstairs," Imlah sneered. "You're working together—but your work, like his, has come to an end! Now, up with your hands—quickly!"

Nipper's thoughts worked overtime in those few seconds. The gov'nor had been

bullet stung viciously into the brickwork two inches from his ear. Before the fellow had time to loose a second shot, Nipper's hand swept downward and the heavy club hit Imlah square on the fez-capped head!

With a heavy grunt, the man fell face forward at the lad's feet—unconscious, but breathing heavily enough to show that he still lived. Then Nipper dropped his weapon, and lost no time in taking possession of Imlah's gun.

It was only then that the lad realised how silently the man's automatic had worked. Instead of the shattering roar that usually follows a shot, there had only been a sharp click that could hardly have been heard across the room.

"Gosh, the chap's got a Kynock silencer on the thing," he muttered, with a swift glance at the weapon. "Come to think of it, he would have—so close to a busy street, and up to his neck in some rotten game." A sudden grin sprang to his face. "My hat! But it's given a chance if only I

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captured; the gang clearly meant to put him out of the way—and he himself was booked for the same fate, if Imlah's hints meant anything.

But Nipper's face remained sulkily set, and he pretended to shrink back as Imlah advanced with the gun pointed. His hands flew up in obedience to the fellow's order, and Imlah's fat grin widened at the sight of his unhidden fear.

"Go easy with that shootin'-iron, mister!" Nipper stammered huskily. "It looks danger—"

His back touched the wall and he stopped speaking. His glance suddenly lifted from Imlah's face, and, open-mouthed, he stared past the fellow's shoulder. It was an old trick, but for a single instant Imlah was taken off his guard and half-turned his head.

That was the moment for which Nipper had waited. Like a panther he sprang sideways, his uplifted hand snatching at a knob-kerrie hanging from the wall!

As he tore the thing from its hook, a

can find out where the gov'nor is before the others come looking for this fat beast."

He crossed quickly to the open panel in the wall, and stared in amazement at the well-like shaft that dropped away to some unknown depth. A flat-runged wooden ladder was clamped to one side and, without a moment's delay, he began to descend.

His stockinged feet helped him to creep down without a sound, and he counted thirty rungs in the ladder before he touched cold stone flags, and knew that his journey had ended.

Then he heard a murmur of voices, and his groping hands found and explored a crack in the wooden wall that faced him. Working his fingers into the break, he felt the hole slowly enlarge, and guessed that this second smooth-sliding panel was another cleverly-hidden door.

As it opened, a subdued light came into the shaft and the voices grew louder and clearer. He saw now that the secret door was cleverly masked by a huge idol, and

even from the back he recognised the form of a four-armed Buddha.

"That's where you're wrong, Lee," someone said sneeringly. "You've been too clever to-night, and you've been too clever for the last time!"

"I've been threatened before, but I still live," Nelson Lee answered, coolly. "In any case, Ferrandi, my coming here is known to others, and neither you nor your beastly trade will live long after me."

"Wrong again, Lee!" Ferrandi chuckled, evilly. "My most valued curio is this poisoned dart—it comes from the forests of the Amazon, and its poison leaves no trace behind it. When Imlah returns with the blow-pipe, just one puff, and it is over! To-morrow, Nelson Lee will be found fifty miles from London, but it'll puzzle all the doctors in England to say how he died."

"Shut up, Ferrandi! You'd talk all night!" another fellow snarled. "Here, gimme that dart! I'll jab it in 'im without any blow-pipe."

Peeping round the idol, Nipper's first glimpse showed the three ruffians seated at a table, with the gov'nor tied to a chair, and facing them as coolly as if he'd been an invited guest. Now, as Nipper took in the scene, he saw the last speaker jump to his feet, gingerly take a tiny dart between finger and thumb, then reach swiftly over to strike at the gov'nor's face!

There was no time for hesitation—Nipper fired almost before he realised what he was doing. The click of the gun was drowned by a scream, then the fellow danced away from the table with a shattered hand!

Confusion followed, and Nipper was quick to take advantage of it. He was beside the gov'nor in three swift strides, cutting madly at the ropes that tied his wrists, but never uttering a word.

To gain greater freedom in using the knife, Nipper dropped the gun into his pocket, and almost brought disaster on both of them by doing so. He had slashed through Lee's bonds when Ferrandi sprang at him with a roar of fury.

Nipper's hand dropped like lightning to his pocket, but while he was still trying to jerk the gun clear someone piled on his back, and an instant later Nipper was struggling madly to free himself.

He saw the gov'nor spring like a tiger at the charging Ferrandi, and then Nipper realised that it was Imlah who had attacked him from behind. He guessed that the man had regained his senses, and had crept down the ladder as quietly as Nipper himself had done a minute earlier.

Clinging grimly to the automatic, Nipper suddenly pitched to the floor, and squirmed like a wriggling eel. Somehow, he tore free and lashed out at the ruffian's face. The blow took Imlah neatly between the eyes, but the position in which they lay robbed it of half its weight, and his great hands fastened firmly on Nipper's throat.

There could only have been one end to the

struggle, and the boy's senses were beginning to swim, when someone bent over the struggling pair, whipped the gun from Nipper's pocket, and tapped Imlah smartly over the head with its butt!

"Break away, Imlah, or I'll hit harder next time," Nelson Lee ordered sharply. "D'you hear me, man? Haven't you the sense to see the game's ended?"

Then Nelson Lee stirred Ferrandi to activity with his boot.

"Get your back against that wall, and keep your hands up, Ferrandi," he ordered. "And you as well, Imlah, you poisonous worm!"

"Queer sort of place, gov'nor," said Nipper, after the three ruffians had been roped up until the arrival of the police.

"It's used for a very queer sort of business, young 'un," Nelson Lee answered. "The left eye of that Buddha yonder will tell you why these sweeps needed a secret chamber."

Nipper took the hint, and crossed to the Buddha. The instant his finger pressed on the glaring eye, the great idol swung aside and revealed a cavity filled to the brim with white powder!

"Gosh! Dope smugglers!" Nipper gasped, with sudden understanding.

"There's enough opium in that bin to send half of London mad," Lee said quietly. "You've done big work in helping to smash this business, young 'un, for the selling of dope is the meanest way I know of making money."

"Then those fellows we saw sneaking in and out of the shop really came to buy opium—not curios?" Nipper asked.

Nelson Lee nodded.

"One of 'em happened to see us coming from our own house dressed as coolies, and mentioned the fact to Ferrandi," he said. "I was knocked on the head as soon as I stepped into the shop, and all the honour's yours, this time. You'll have an interesting tale to tell Professor Strode, young 'un."

Nipper broke into a big grin.

"Then that's why his mummy disappeared!" he gasped. "Ferrandi was the importing agent—the real mummy was hidden away in Cairo, and a dope-filled dummy put in its place."

"And the fraud would never have been exposed if the motor-wagon hadn't struck on a bit of rock," Nelson Lee said.

Nipper's grin widened.

"I was just thinking of that smashed wagon, gov'nor," he chuckled. "It was ordered in the professor's name, loaded with Ferrandi's dummy, the goods were owned by Imlah—and I'm wondering who'll have to pay for the car?"

But that was a legal puzzle which even Nelson Lee would not venture to answer.

THE END.

(Next week:—The opening chapters of a rousing new adventure serial, "THE ROLLICKING ROVERS!" Don't miss it!

CAMPING—AND GRUB!

If you are thinking of camping out, you will find this chat both helpful and interesting.

It is no easy matter to guess what quantities of food are required for several boys at camp. Even when only a few pals go for a picnic they invariably find that they have either over or under estimated their capacity for sandwiches and ginger-pop. Of course, if there is a Buster Brown in the party you can err safely on the generous side. But with normal eaters the question is a harder one.

Meals should be as varied as much as possible. If you do not have meat for breakfast, for instance, include it in your dinner menu. And if you are camping for several days, ring the changes on bacon, sausages, liver, fish, eggs, etc., for breakfast, and fried steak, stew, salt beef, ham, etc., for dinner.

Weather and Food.

The weather will affect the required quantity of such items as butter, porridge, and puddings. During hot spells butter soaks into bread, so that half a pound fairly runs away. But who wants large helpings of porridge or, say, duff, when the temperature is about eighty in the shade?

Suppose five of you decide to spend a camping holiday together. When shopping you should buy a half-quarter loaf for each meal at which you intend to eat bread. A quarter of a pound of tea will last you for four meals, and a pound of sugar, for sweetening beverages only, for two meals.

Two pounds of potatoes will be required for each dinner, but a pound of rice will supply a sweet on three separate days. Of course, you can estimate bacon if it is already cut by counting the rashers; otherwise allow half a pound for each breakfast.

Water.

Should you have to go a long way for water—don't, if you can help it!—make a te that for cooking, ablution, and washing—purposes, two gallons is needed for each person per day.

Here is a list showing how long other items of food would last five fellows:

Jam, 1 lb., three meals; cocoa, $\frac{1}{2}$ lb., four meals; cheese, 1 lb., two meals; dried fruit, 1 lb., two meals; butter, $\frac{1}{2}$ lb., four meals; milk (for beverages), $\frac{1}{2}$ pint, two meals; salt beef (boned), 1 lb.; one meal; oats, 2 lb., three meals.

Biscuits are a good stand-by at camp. As a rule, you get about twenty-five large lunch to the pound.

No Tinned Food!

Good campers (except when hiking miles away from shops) scorn tinned food. It is much greater fun to buy the raw materials where possible, and make up your own dishes. Some hardy hikers even refuse to take bread! They buy a packet of flour and cook it into dampers and "twists."

The more independent you are of shops the more you will enjoy the experience. Imagine how self-reliant you would feel after a breakfast consisting of home-made bread, fish from the river just outside the tent, and nettle tea as drink!

For dinner you could also have nettles as a vegetable, buy a few potatoes from a farmer, and catch and cook a rabbit! While for tea you could make your own butter by shaking some milk—from the near-by farm—in a bottle, spread it on to home-made bread, with which you can make dandelion-leaf sandwiches.

The greatest care should be taken when packing food. Even if it is kept in the same tent as paraffin, for instance, something is sure to become tainted. Old hands at camping, however, use candles instead of oil lamps. Then there is no risk at all. And another point—the railway companies will not allow you to take inflammable oil into their carriages.

It is an excellent plan to boil eggs hard before packing them. Then, when you wish to eat them, they can be boiled again.



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HANDFORTH GETS THE SACK!
(Continued from page 26.)

"And I went to the Head and confessed," went on Enoch Snipe desperately. "I told him I'd been bribed, and he pinched that fiver, and means to send it to charity. So I've got nothing to show for my pains—except weals!"

"You—you confessed!" gasped Forrest. "You told the Head—"

"You needn't worry!" interrupted Snipe contemptuously. "I didn't sneak about you chaps, and the Head decided to drop the matter. But if you touch me—if you lay a finger on me—I'll tell who bribed me! And then you'll get sacked! Come on—hit me if you dare!"

There was triumph in Snipe's voice, and he had suddenly become bold. Forrest & Co. looked at one another, and felt that every atom of their power had been taken from

them. Enoch Snipe was the master of the situation, and he lost his nervousness.

"Get out of this study!" he added coldly. "I've finished with you chaps for good—and if you made a mess of that exam., you've only got yourselves to blame!"

Forrest & Co., utterly defeated, crawled out. And Enoch Snipe breathed freely again. But whether this change in him was of a permanent nature, time alone would tell!

And next day Mr. Crowell sent for Forrest & Co. to come to his study. He held their exam. papers in his hand. He looked at the trio of cads without speaking—and he exchanged the papers for a cane.

Forrest & Co.'s worst fears were realised within the next few minutes.

Handforth, Church, McClure and Willy hung around until they reappeared, and, with broad grins, they watched the three stagger down the passage, groaning with the pain of their stinging palms—and groaning at the thought of long periods of detention and compulsory swotting which Mr. Crowell had grimly inflicted on them!

THE END.



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