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THE
SECRET SOCIETIES
OF **ST. FRANKS!**

A rearing
story of school
and

New Series

WEDNESDAY.

September 3rd, 1927.

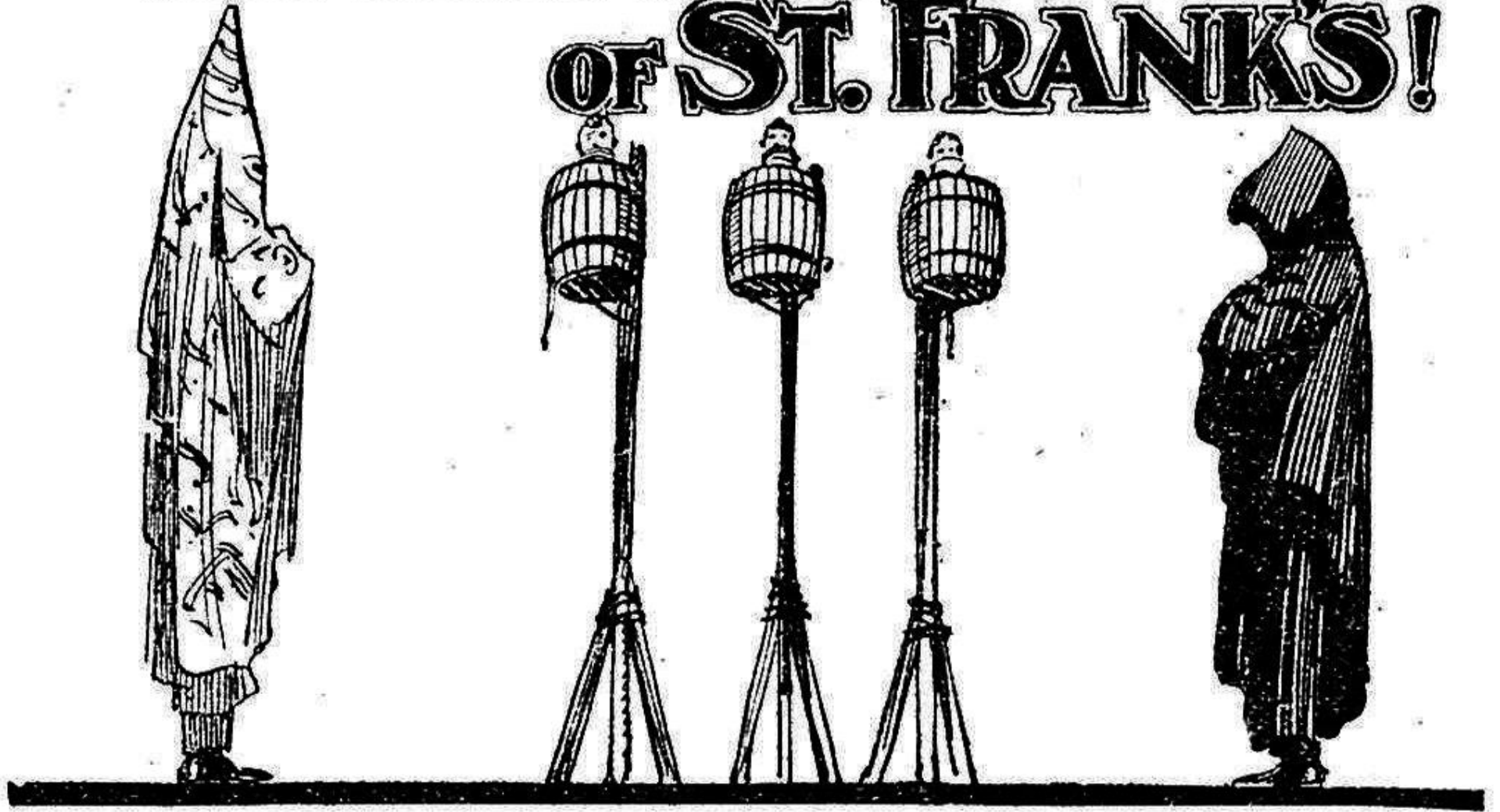
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Charlie Talmadge had no chance of escaping, for he was securely clamped down. "Proceed with the punishment!" said the Chief Avenger solemnly. Swish, swish, swish! The cane rose and fell with mechanical regularity, and, although the force behind it was not great, it was a most humiliating moment for Talmadge. The Remove had scored over the Fourth Form once more!

The Ancient Order of Avengers! The New Klux Klan!

THE SECRET SOCIETIES OF ST. FRANK'S!



By EDWY SEARLES BROOKS

The feud between the Remove and the Fourth Form at St. Frank's becomes even more bitter in this vivid long complete story, which introduces Nipper, Handforth and many other popular characters.

CHAPTER I.

The Ancient Order of Avengers!

INCH by inch the dormitory door slowly opened, and Handforth & Co., dressing in the moonlight, paused in their occupation. A hooded figure appeared in the doorway, silent, sinister, and mysterious.

"My only hat!" murmured Handforth, with a start.

Midnight had just boomed out from the old clock tower of St. Frank's, and the school was supposed to be fast asleep and snug for the night. But in the Remove, at least, there was a certain amount of activity.

"Who—who is it?" asked Church in a low voice.

The hooded figure made no reply. It advanced silently into the room, and pointed an accusing finger at Handforth.

"Prepare!" said a deep, accusing voice.

The hooded figure now stood in the full flood of the moonlight that came streaming through the window, across the roof of the West House. And there was something very mystic about that figure. It was enveloped in a long black cloak, with voluminous folds, and the head was entirely enclosed in a hood, after the fashion of a monk. Two narrow slits were provided, and behind these twinkled a pair of sharp eyes.

"Here, chuck it!" muttered Handforth. "What do you mean—prepare?"

"I mean that it's time you chaps were ready!" said the hooded figure cheerfully.

"We shall keep Pitt and the other fellows waiting unless we're pretty brisk."

It was the voice of Nipper, the genial Junior skipper of St. Frank's. He proceeded to pull his hood off, and stood revealed in all his smiling cheeriness.

"By Jupiter!" said McClure. "I must say you looked pretty awful, Nipper, in that hood! Enough to give anybody the creeps!"

Nipper grinned.

"Well, the Ancient Order of Avengers is a grim and murky secret society," he said drily. "There wouldn't be much fun in the game if we looked like a crowd of pierrots, would there? Aren't you fellows ready yet? Where are your cloaks and hoods?"

"Under the beds," said Handforth briefly.

The door opened again, and two or three other hooded figures stole in. They were all wearing rubber-sole shoes, and they made no sounds whatever. They came in like a lot of shadows, looking as mysterious as Nipper had done.

"Beware!" said one of them ominously. "The Avengers are abroad!"

"Jolly good!" said Nipper, nodding. "I don't know who it is, but that voice is just the stuff we want!"

Ralph Leslie Fullwood threw his hood back.

"I pass muster, then?" he asked, grinning. "Good egg!"

The others revealed themselves as Clive Russell, Archie Glenthorne, Tommy Watson, Sir Montie Tregellis-West, and Cecil De Valerie. They were all members of the Ancient Order of Avengers.

In other words, the Remove Secret Society was preparing for its first attack on the enemy.

And the enemy, to be brief, was the Fourth Form.

Just at present there was a grim feud in progress between the Fourth and the Remove. It had been going on for a week or two, and there had been some very exciting doings at St. Frank's. Exactly how the feud had started nobody could remember. It was only known that the two Junior Forms were at serious loggerheads. John Busterfield Boots and his men were bitterly opposed to the Removites. There was no fun in this feud. It was a very deadly affair. There had been free fights, attacks and counter-attacks, and numerous incidents. The warfare was getting hotter and hotter.

Indeed, Dr. Stafford, the headmaster, had heard about it, and he had banned the entire conflict. He had even gone so far as to cancel all the half-holidays for the Remove and the Fourth, and to gate everybody. And it was officially known that if any fights took place between the rival Forms the ringleaders would be either flogged or expelled. The Head had taken very drastic action.

And so—the Ancient Order of Avengers had come into being.

It was a means of getting round the headmaster's ban. Handforth had thought of the idea, and the rest of the Removites had been filled with wonder. It was rather unusual

for the great Edward Oswald to suggest a scheme that was really practicable. And now, two or three days after Handy's big idea had been mooted, the Avengers were ready for their first raid. They intended making it a grim, spectacular affair, for other preparations had been going on, too. It had not been merely a question of making the cloaks and hoods. All sorts of things had been necessary.

There were many points in favour of this secret society.

Even if the juniors were spotted by prefects or masters—even if the Head himself encountered them—they would be safe. For they would be unrecognisable, and they would be able to steal away, and the mystery of their identity would never be solved. And so, in secret, they would be able to wage their warfare against the Fourth.

"Well, come on!" said Nipper briskly. "It's nearly a quarter past twelve already, and we shall have to be moving."

Handforth & Co. were ready, and all the hooded figures, adjusting their headgear, padded silently out of the dormitory and then down the corridor. Outside, in the darkness of the West Square, they met a number of other figures, similarly attired. These Avengers were Reggie Pitt and his valiants of the West House Remove. At St. Frank's the Remove Form boarded in the Ancient House and the West House, whilst the Fourth Form had their quarters in the Modern House and the East House. Thus this feud was a battle for supremacy between all four Houses, two Houses on either side.

"All supplied?" came a whisper from Reggie Pitt.

"Yes, we're ready," replied Nipper.

"Good!" said Pitt. "Then let's get on with the dirty work! Let the Ancient Order of Avengers commence the mighty doings of the night!"



CHAPTER 2.

A Surprise for Boots and Co.!

JOHN BUSTERFIELD BOOTS sat up in bed, and looked about him with bewildered eyes.

"Must be dreaming!"

he muttered, staring.

"You are not dreaming, my friend," said a low voice. "You are in the hands of the Avengers! Make no outcry—make no attempt to escape! It will be bad for you if you try either of these two things! Remember, there is no escape from the Avengers!"

"Great Scott!" said Boots blankly.

There was an amazed expression on his startled face. His grey eyes were filled with wonderment, and his wide, humorous mouth was now set in a thin line—with a little twist at one corner. In the moonlight his tousled hair looked even redder than usual—a great mop of tangled tow.

"So this is the game, is it?" he said grimly. "By Jingo, you can't fool me, you idiots! Hoods and cloaks, eh? I'll bet you're some of those beastly Removites!"

"Silence!" ordered one of the Avengers. "One warning has been given, John Busterfield Boots! The Avengers do not give their warnings twice!"

There were half-a-dozen of the hooded figures in the little dormitory, and two stood over either of the three beds. Percy Bray and Walter Denny were sitting up, too, as amazed as their leader. They were not exactly scared, but they were certainly startled.

"All of you will get out of bed and dress yourselves," said the leader of the Avengers. "Remember, if you make the slightest sound you will be gagged and bound! If you wish to escape this indignity, you will give us your word of honour—solemnly—that you will make no outcry, nor attempt to struggle. Do you give us your word?"

"No, we jolly well don't!" snapped Bray.

But Buster Boots pursed his lips. He could see that they were easily outnumbered. There was no hope of escape from those hooded figures, and Boots had no desire to be gagged and bound. He was a masterful youth, capable and self-reliant, but he knew when he was beaten.

"Well," he said gruffly, "I'll give you my word—and that stands for Bray and Denny, too. We don't want any rough-house stuff here, in the middle of the night. We won't struggle, and we won't make any outcry."

"You silly ass——" began Denny.

"Dry up!" said Boots. "What's the good of fighting? We shall only be tied up in our own sheets and gagged with our own pillow-cases!"

His chums could see the sense of this remark, and they nodded.

"Oh, all right!" growled Bray. "Go ahead!"

"It is well!" said the leader of the Avengers. "We did not look for such common-sense from the enemy!"

"Ah, then you admit that you're members of the Remove?" said Boots quickly.

"We admit nothing!" replied the Avenger.

Boots & Co. were just a little uneasy as they climbed out of bed and dressed themselves. They had not recognised any voices, and they could only guess that these figures belonged to the Remove. To even hazard at their real identity was impossible.

Buster Boots' chief emotion was one of anger—anger against himself. Why hadn't he thought of this wonderful stunt? Why hadn't he formed a secret society? He could have kicked himself. And he resolved then and there that on the morrow a Fourth Form secret society should come into being! These Remove fellows were not going to have everything their own way!

At last they were ready. Bray, angular and loose-jointed, only put on his trousers and jacket—over his pyjamas. He was looking very angry and flushed. Walter Denny, with his broad, squat figure, was even more

enraged than his companions. He was a domineering sort of fellow, inclined to be a bully, but Boots had always discouraged this tendency in Denny's character.

"All right, you rotters!" he growled. "You've got us this time—but you won't catch us on the hop again!"

"Silence!" ordered one of the Avengers. "You have given your word to make no outcry!"

"I can speak, I suppose?" snapped Denny.

"You can speak when you are addressed—but not otherwise!" came the curt reply.

And while this was going on in one dormitory, Bob Christine & Co., in another dormitory, were undergoing exactly the same treatment. Six Avengers had invaded their bedroom, and were making them dress. After the first shock of amazement, they, too, guessed at the identity of the intruders.

Bob Christine, usually sunny and genial, was now in an aggressive mood; Roddy Yorke and Charlie Talmadge were just angry. Out in the corridor, they came face to face with Boots & Co., each one escorted by two of the hooded figures.

"My only hat!" groaned Bob. "So they've collared you, too?"

"Yes," muttered Boots. "But don't worry. We'll get our own back for this!"

"Let the prisoners be silent!" said one of the Avengers in a grim voice. "Any further talking, and gags will be at once applied. And always remember that when the Avengers make a threat the Avengers carry out that threat!"

The six captives were then marched silently downstairs and into the lobby. Here there was a halt. John Busterfield Boots and his men were blindfolded. They protested, but in vain. They were blindfolded very thoroughly, for black bags were dropped completely over their heads and drawn tight round their necks. They could breathe easily enough, but they could see absolutely nothing.

Then they were twirled round and round, until they lost all sense of direction. After this they were marched onwards, down corridors and passages, until they were hopelessly confused.

They guessed that all this was being done deliberately, so that they would not know their true destination. And they were all filled with curiosity—and just a little fear.

What were these Avengers about to do to them?



CHAPTER 3.

The Punishment Chamber!

LET the prisoners be unblindfolded!"

The voice was cold and unemotional. The Fourth-Formers felt the bags being removed from their heads, and their vision was restored. They looked about them wonderingly.

They knew that they had passed out into the open during the course of their recent march. At least, they believed so. They had felt a coolness in the air—a kind of damp chilliness. Yet it hadn't seemed exactly like the outer air. They were all puzzled by their experience. And now that they had reached their destination they had no knowledge of its whereabouts.

For they found themselves in a curious chamber—an apartment entirely enshrouded with black curtains. Even the ceiling was covered with these same black draperies. There was no doorway—no window. Just the black curtains all round, with two acetylene bicycle lamps showing a focused glare upon a curious contrivance in the very centre of the chamber. All the Avengers were in the deep shadows, mysterious figures moving about in the gloom.

"Well I'm jiggered!" said Buster Boots, in a startled voice.

"Where are we?" asked Bob Christine. "And—and what's that thing in the middle there?"

One of the Avengers waved a hand.

"You may well ask," he said. "You are in the Punishment Chamber of the Ancient Order of Avengers!"

"The Punishment Chamber?" asked Percy Bray.

"Yes, the Punishment Chamber!" repeated the Avenger. "And now, dogs, you are about to be placed on the rack—to suffer for your many crimes."

"Crimes be blowed!" said Boots arrogantly. "And who are you calling dogs? You may think it's jolly clever to act like this—to come here dressed up in the guise of a giddy Black Hand gang—but we'll get our own back!"

"Rather!" said Christine hotly. "These Removites aren't the only fellows who can form a Secret Society! They've done it so that they can get at us on the quiet—in spite of the Head's orders. But two can play at this game!"

"Empty words!" said one of the Avengers mockingly. "We fear nothing—and least of all we fear the Fourth! The Ancient Order of Avengers stands supreme!"

"By George, rather!" said one of the other cloaked figures.

"That's Handy, I'll bet!" said Boots, with a nod.

"Rats!" roared the Avenger who had just spoken. "How the dickens did you recognise my voice? I—I mean——"

"It will be advisable, comrade, for you to be silent!" said the Chief Avenger. "Speech is unnecessary at this juncture. We are here to act. Number two, step forward!"

Another of the cloaked figures came forward, and stood at attention near the curious mechanical arrangement in the centre of the apartment.

"Prepare the first prisoner for punishment!" said the relentless chief.

"Look here, cut all this out!" said Boots aggressively. "What do you mean—punishment? If you think we're going to submit——"

"There is no question of submission!" interrupted the hooded figure. "You are here to obey—to take your punishment. Resistance will be useless. Recently, you and your companions have indulged in practices which are cowardly and despicable. You have hurled stones at unsuspecting individuals. You have used dogwhips in a cowardly and discreditable fashion."

Buster Boots stared.

"What!" he ejaculated. "You—you rotters! What do you mean by accusing us of the very things that you have done yourselves? You know jolly well that you used that dogwhip! You smashed Bob Christine across the face with it! You threw stones——"

"Enough!" interrupted the Chief Avenger. "It is quite useless for you to make charges against us—justified or unjustified. For you do not know our identity. You may, perhaps, guess—but guessing is not knowing. And when you deny the statements that we have just made, we can only pity you!"

The Fourth-Formers were hotly indignant. They knew that they were not guilty of the charges that the Avengers had just made.

But, if it came to that, neither the Removites nor the Fourth-Formers knew that some outside influences had been at work. There was an unknown trickster somewhere—somebody who had been perpetrating these outrages, so that the schoolboy enemies should remain at loggerheads, and so that the feud should become more and more intense. Nobody even knew of this Unknown, and so the misunderstandings had been growing, and the animosity had increased.

"Let the first prisoner be brought forward, and placed on the rack!" said the leader of the Avengers. "And remember, you Fourth-Formers, that this is just a taste of what will follow—if you indulge in any further exhibition of vindictive animosity. The punishment will be more and more drastic. The time has come for you to take your gruel—and you must take it without grumbling."

"Oh, go ahead with it!" said Boots impatiently. "But you needn't think that you'll keep up this game, my fine mystery men! We don't know who you are for certain, but we can guess—Hamilton, Handforth, Pitt, De Valerie, Fullwood! Am I right? I'll bet you're all here!"

"Ah, but you cannot be certain!" said the spokesman of the Avengers, in a mocking voice. "Much can be conjectured—but nothing can be known."

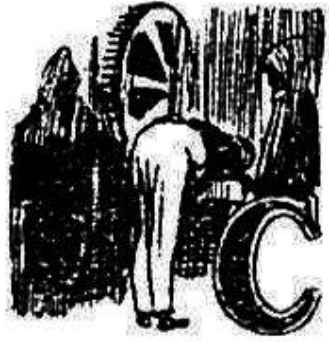
"There'll be no conjecture about the bashing you're soon going to receive!" said one of the other Avengers. "That will be real enough, anyhow! So let's get on with the washing!"

Charlie Talmadge was singled out from the rest of the enemy, and led forward to the "rack." Talmadge resisted forcefully. His forehead was wrinkled, and his hazel eyes were filled with fury.

"Chuck it!" he protested. "You—you silly idiots! I'm not going to be strapped to that beastly contraption. Lemme go!"

But his guards took not the slightest notice. He was forced down into a most significant position—face downwards, with his legs held by a wooden clamp, and his arms stretched out in front of him. His body was humped—in a most significant position.

None of the prisoners could fail to guess what the forthcoming punishment would be like!



CHAPTER 4.

The Swishing Machine!

CHARLIE TALMADGE had no chance.

He was clamped down by means of the mechanical contrivances. Straps held

his wrists, and he was sprawling helplessly over that trestle-like arrangement.

"Proceed with the punishment!" said the Chief Avenger solemnly.

"Comrade, we obey!" said two of the others.

Swish—swish—swish!

Talmadge was pleasantly surprised. It was not half so bad as he had been expecting. True, the cane came down with considerable force on his rear quarter, but Talmadge had received many a worse swishing from a master. But nothing could alter the fact that this experience was most humiliating.

Everything was mechanical in this chamber.

The cane was held in a kind of mechanical arm, and it was operated by one of the Avengers, who turned a great wooden wheel. As they drove it round, a ratchet released a spring at intervals, and caused the arm to whirl backwards and forwards. It was certainly a very novel proceeding.

"Twelve!" said the chief, at length. "Let the punishment cease, and let the prisoner be freed!"

Charlie Talmadge was unstrapped, and placed on the other side of the apartment. He was red with indignation.

"All right, you rotters!" he panted. "We'll pay you out for this!"

"You bet we shall!" said Buster Boots aggressively. "They've got the better of us now—but this triumph won't last for long. They'll wish they'd never touched us before we've finished with them!"

"The trouble is, my friend, you will not know who to deal with!" said one of the Avengers drily. "You may guess—but you can't know for certain. And surely your sporting instincts would not allow you to take revenge on people that have not been proven guilty? You cannot act on mere suspicions alone."

"Can't we?" said Buster Boots. "You wait and see! There's not much suspicion about it, either! I know for a jolly certainty that you fellows are Removites, and I could name pretty nearly every one of you, too!"

Roddy Yorke was the next victim, and he

struggled violently. But it was all unavailing. He was strapped down, and the swishing business preceeded. Yorke's loose-limbed figure squirmed as the cane descended, and he uttered all sorts of threats. But he could not escape the punishment. After that, one by one, the rest of the Fourth Formers were dealt with. Boots came last—and he received twenty-four strokes instead of a dozen. As leader of the Fourth, he was being especially privileged.

"It is over!" said the Chief of the Avengers. "Let this be a solemn warning to you, my lads. Always remember that every exhibition of vindictiveness on your part will be punished by similar means. Whatever action you may take—whatever trickery you get up to—the Avengers will know. The Avengers will take drastic action!"

"That is so!" said the other Avengers.

"We see all—and know all!" continued the chief relentlessly. "Nothing can escape our vigilance. You may believe that you can have secrets from us, but in this you are mistaken. Our organisation is perfect—our scouts are everywhere, and the Order is invincible!"

"Rats!" said Buster Boots gruffly. "All this sounds jolly impressive, but we don't take any notice. And, by jingo, you're going to suffer for this night's work! You haven't hurt us much—that giddy rack of yours is more for show than anything else. But the indignity is a different matter. And we're going to have our revenge!"

"This is foolish talk!" said the chief warningly. "Have I not already told you that the Order is all-powerful? But enough! It is not our intention to argue, or to waste further words."

Buster Boots made a sudden dash—rushing at the fellow who had just spoken, and attempting to pull his hood away.

"I know who you are!" he shouted. "You're Hamilton! But I want to be certain!"

Three of the other Avengers came sweeping round him, and they dragged him back. He had not succeeded in his intention.

"Foolish youth!" said the chief mockingly. "You are helpless against the strength of the Avengers! Do not attempt to—"

"Rats!" interrupted Boots. "I nearly had you, my lad—and I know you are Nipper all the time!"

"You know nothing!" replied the other. "You can only guess. And now you are to be returned to your own quarters. On the morrow, many tongues will be wagging—many ears will have heard the full story. You do not like that, eh? You do not relish the thought of the whole school talking about your humiliation? But, remember, you have earned it! By your despicable conduct you have earned a much greater punishment than we have administered! But the Avengers will always fight cleanly!"

"You—you silly idiot!" roared Bob Christine angrily. "You're the fellows who haven't been fighting cleanly! It was you

who threw the stones, and did everything else! And now you have the nerve to accuse us of it! I am ashamed of you all! At one time I was your pal—but I wouldn't come near you with a barge-pole now!"

"Hear, hear!" chimed in the other Fourth Formers.

The Avengers listened in astonishment.

"By George!" said one of them. "Do you hear that, you chaps? They're accusing us of the very things that——"

"In your excitement, comrade, you are losing control of your voice," said the chief warningly.

"My only hat!" gasped the hooded figure. "I—I'd forgotten!"

Boots & Co. were seized, and once again those bags are placed over their heads, so that they were completely blindfolded. They only knew—with absolute certainty—that Handforth was a member of the Ancient Order of Avengers. They could guess at the identity of the others, but they could not know. But the famous Edward Oswald, naturally, had given himself away. Not that it really mattered. Indeed, it was just as well that Boots and his companions should realise that the Remove was on the warpath.

CHAPTER 5.

A Startling Discovery!



THE sound of softly padded feet died away in the distance, and John Busterfield Boots and his companions found themselves alone.

They were in the darkness of the upper corridor in the Modern House, and the black bags had just been removed from their heads. There they were, in a row, with their backs against the wall. To give chase was impossible, for cords had been tied round their ankles, and knotted so securely that it was impossible to untie them with any speed.

It was a very simple ruse to enable the Avengers to get clear away before any of the victims could follow. Boots realised this at once, and grunted.

"It's no good!" he said gruffly. "We can't chase them. By the time we've untied these rotten knots they'll be back in their own quarters. So we shall have to give it up as a bad job."

"The awful bounders!" said Bob Christine. "Ancient Order of Avengers, eh? We'll give them something to be going on with in return for this!"

They struggled with the knots, and eventually succeeded in untying them. But five minutes had elapsed by then, and the Modern House was quiet and still. None of the masters had been disturbed, and Boots & Co. decided that their best policy would be to get straight back to bed. They could do nothing to-night. Any act of retaliation would

have to be carefully thought out, and then carefully put into execution.

Free once more, Buster Boots regained some of his equanimity.

"When you come to think of it, it's a pretty good stunt," he said grudgingly. "In fact, a priceless game!"

"This secret society stuff, you mean?"

"Rather!" said Boots. "Why the dickens didn't we think of it? Just look at the possibilities! Scores of them—hundreds! No need to worry about the Head's ban, or anything!"

"Why not start a rival secret society?" suggested Bray.

"Why not, indeed?" said Boots. "In fact, that's what we shall do!"

"Good idea!" said the others eagerly. "What shall we call it?"

"Never mind that now," replied Boots. "We can't spend the night in discussing a secret society. Let's leave it until to-morrow, and then we'll go into the thing thoroughly. And, by jingo, won't we make those Ancient House fellows sing small! My sons, we're going to beat them at their own game!"

"Hear, hear!"

All the animosity against the Avengers had vanished. The Fourth-Formers were glad enough of the idea, and they were keen on forming a secret society of their own. But that, as Boots had just said, could wait until the morrow.

So they crept along the corridor, and entered their respective dormitories.

They bade one another good-night, and Boots and Bray and Denny went into one room, while Christine & Co. went further up the passage.

"Well, that's that!" said Boots, as he commenced undressing. "It's rather spoilt our beauty sleep, but who cares? Are you fellows very sore?"

"Not particularly," said Denny. "I don't think much of their swishing apparatus. I'll bet we'll get up something better!"

"Rather!" said Boots. "Our policy will be to beat these chaps at their own game! Well, to begin with, we'll——"

The door burst open, and Bob Christine ran in.

"The cads!" he panted. "The rotters!"

Boots and his companions stared at Bob.

"What's the matter?" asked Boots.

"Why, aren't your beds the same?" asked Christine. "Haven't they treated your sheets in the same way?"

"What the dickens are you talking about?" asked Denny.

Bob Christine ran across to the nearest bed, and then turned.

"Yes, they're just the same!" he said fiercely. "The destructive rotters! The mean, contemptible curs!"

"What the thunder——"

Buster Boots went across to the bed, and then his voice died away. He stared blankly. His bed was in very much the same condition as usual, except for the fact



“Well, I’m jiggered!” exclaimed Church. “Look at this—it came through the window!” And he held up a small brown-paper parcel. Handforth and McClure stared at it curiously. Was this some fresh trickery on the part of the Fourth Formers?

that both the sheets had been deliberately torn to ribbons! In fact they were no longer sheets—they were just heaps of rags. There wasn’t a single piece larger than a pocket handkerchief. The pillow-cases had been dealt with in a similar fashion.

“My only hat!” said Boots.

“My bed’s the same!” gasped Bray.

“And mine, too!” said Denny furiously.

“And so are ours!” put in Bob Christine. “While one party of those Avengers swished us, another party must have come up here and committed this deliberate damage! Is that playing the game?”

“It isn’t!” said Buster Boots hotly. “It’s nothing but dirty trickery! I say, this is getting too thick for words!”

The juniors were startled.

“We can’t explain it, either,” said Bob Christine. “We can’t give those chaps away—we can’t speak. If it comes to that, we couldn’t give any names because we don’t know who did it. As far as I can see, we shall have to get hold of the matron and ask her to hush it up.”

Buster Boots agreed.

“Yes, that’ll be the only way,” he said. “We don’t want the masters to hear of this. Leave it to me, you chaps. I’ll speak to the House Dame in the morning, and I’ll tell her

that we’ll pay for the damage. She can easily put fresh sheets on, and we shall have to square up out of our pocket money. It’s the only thing to be done.”

“Yes, but isn’t it a bit awful?” asked Bob, taking a deep breath. “By Jove! I didn’t think that Nipper and his pals were capable of such behaviour as this! A jape is a jape and a rag is a rag—”

“And these sheets are rags!” said Boots, with a wry grimace.

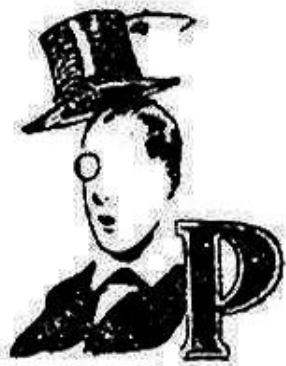
“But this is going beyond the limit!” went on Bob, who failed to appreciate the humour. “Nobody would have grumbled if those chaps had come here and turned our rooms upside down. That sort of thing is permissible—it’s understood. But wilful damage is—is—”

“You can’t find words, eh?” said Boots sympathetically. “Same here! An act like this is nothing more nor less than blackguardly. And those Removites are responsible!”

And certainly it seemed that such was the case. True, Boots & Co. had no direct evidence. They could only guess. How were they to know that neither Nipper, Reggie Pitt, nor any of the others had any suspicion of this outrage? They were not responsible, and they had gone back to their own

quarters, satisfied that the night's work had been well and truly accomplished.

But who had done this other thing? What was the explanation of the mystery?



CHAPTER 6.

Trouble Brewing!

PING!
Archie Glenthorne, of the Ancient House, started so violently that his shiny topper jerked off his head and rolled half-way across the lobby.

"Good gad!" ejaculated Archie.

Ping!

This time Archie jumped about a foot into the air, and by sheer misfortune he landed right on the top of his wonderful silk hat. It crumpled to destruction beneath his weight.

"Archie, old man, I don't like to see this display of temper!" said Nipper severely as he walked up. "When a fellow jumps on his own hat—it's a bad sign. A new hat, too! I'm surprised at you!"

"Odds tragedies and disasters!" said Archie, picking up his topper and gazing at it in dismay. "I mean to say, you don't absolutely believe that I jumped on the good old headgear, what?"

"My dear chap, I saw you do it!" said Nipper.

"Absolutely, but it was a dashed accident!" protested Archie indignantly. "It was absolutely a frightful mishap!"

"It's all very well to say that, Archie, but we all saw you jump into the air and trample on your new topper!" said Tommy Watson. "You can't get away from it——"

"Laddie, I assure you the thing was a foul mistake!" said Archie dolefully. "There was I, standing in the doorway admiring the good old crowds, thinking of this and that, and feeling particularly tranquil. And then, dash it—zing!—something smites the good old countenance amidships, and off comes the old topper!"

"Do you mean something hit you?" asked Nipper.

"Absolutely," replied Archie. "And, dash it, something else hit me a second later, and caused me to jump about twenty-five yards into the good old atmosphere! I mean to say, it's a bit mottled when a chappie can't stand in his own dashed doorway without getting his face mixed up in a lot of frightfulness!"

"You mean that two objects hit you in the face?"

"Absolutely," said Archie.

"What did they feel like?"

"Stings!" replied the genial ass of the Remove. "Absolutely like a couple of blessed wasps!"

"Snipers!" said Nipper significantly.

"What-ers? I mean to say——"

"Snipers," repeated Nipper. "Those Fourth-Formers started this game yesterday. It's a new dodge of theirs. Open warfare is out of the question, so they've taken up various positions on the other side of the Triangle, and are sniping us with pea-shooters!"

"Odds gad! I mean to say, good gracious!" exclaimed Archie Glenthorne. "Zounds, and so forth! So that's the dashed explanation! Peas, what? It seems to me dashed dangerous to stand in the good old doorway nowadays. Kindly allow me to trickle away, laddie. I rather fear that Phipps will be frightfully pipped when he sees this topper. It was absolutely his favourite! The poor old lad will wilt away when I tell him that I jumped on it!"

Archie went off, shaking his head dolefully. He felt that the day had begun very badly. Unfortunately the rest of the Removeites did not view the matter with much concern. They were inclined to grin at Archie's misfortunes.

The explanation was so simple, too. The Fourth-Formers had taken up advantageous positions at various windows in the Modern and the East House, and the expert pea-shooting snipers were on the job. The feud between the Remove and the Fourth was as keen as ever, but the fellows were obliged to adopt new tactics.

However, there were plenty of Remove fellows out in the Triangle that morning, and they were contemptuous of the "bullets" which came occasionally from the other side of the Triangle.

There was an invisible line running right down the centre of that open space—a sort of No Man's Land. It was a perilous proposition for any of the enemy forces to cross that line. Not that this rule applied so much nowadays, for any scrapping in the Triangle was liable to lead to a flogging. So many of the Remove fellows deliberately walked across into the enemy's territory, feeling certain that no trouble would result.

The Remove, as a whole, was gloating over its victory.

Everybody knew about the punishment that had befallen Boots & Co. during the night. And if the Fourth-Formers had been in any doubt as to the identity of the Ancient Order of Avengers, they were now fully satisfied. For the Removeites made no secret of their jubilation. They had scored a great victory, and they were celebrating it.

"All right, you rotters—you can jeer!" shouted Armstrong, the burly leader of the East House juniors. "But you knew better than to attack us, didn't you? You knew what you'd get if you came into the East House!"

"Rats!" sang out one of the Removeites. "You're on the list to be dealt with next!"

"Rather!"

"Down with the Fourth!"

"Yah! Rats to the Remove!"

"Steady—steady!" warned Nipper, as he went among the excited Removeites. "Re-

member the punishment if we're caught scrapping. We don't want to get into trouble with the Head, do we? Simmer down, you fellows!"

"Oh, all right!" said Somerton. "But these Fourth-Formers make me wild! They all seem to be as angry as the dickens—they've been calling us all sorts of names. Said that we played a blackguardly trick, and we're a lot of ruffians!"

"They're bound to look at things in the wrong light," said Nipper, with a grin. "And after this we shall have to expect some sort of retaliation. So we shall have to be on our guard. Boots isn't the kind of fellow to let any grass grow under his feet. He's made up his mind to seize power in the lower school, and it'll take us all our time to keep him in his place!"

Handforth grunted.

"Just look at him now," he said, nodding towards the Modern House. "There he stands on the steps like a blessed monarch. And look at his face! He's wild with fury for some reason. Anybody might have thought that we had half killed them during the night!"

Buster Boots was undoubtedly looking very angry, and the Removites could not quite understand his attitude.



CHAPTER 7.

A Puzzle for Nipper and Co.

HANDFORTH'S reference to John Busterfield Boots was rather apt.

For Boots stood at the top of the Modern House steps, like some general, surveying a proposed field of battle. Round him were his lieutenants, grouped in an admiring circle.

"Come along—we'll ignore these Remove rotters!" said Buster at length. "Let's pretend that we don't even hear them, or see them. We have as much right to the Triangle as anybody, and we're not going to be kept out of it!"

"Rather not!"

"They're only a set of destructive cads, anyhow," said Bob Christine.

They walked off towards the East House, to hold a confab with Armstrong. And when they turned their faces towards the Removites they were grim and angry. Seldom, indeed, had the Fourth-Formers looked so enraged.

The story of the torn sheets had swept throughout the entire Fourth, and all the juniors were maddened by this latest act of wanton destruction.

"The rotters haven't got any sense of humour," said Fullwood, frowning. "We didn't hurt them last night—that swishing was only light. And yet they glare at us as though we committed some awful outrage."

Handforth strode across the Triangle, and deliberately made for Buster Boots. The other fellows watched with interest. There

was not much fear of a fight in the open now—for the risks were too great.

"Just a minute, Boots!" said Handforth grimly.

Boots paused, and looked Edward Oswald up and down with contempt.

"Amazing how these Removites seem to imagine that they are as good as the rest of us!" said Boots, turning to his companions. "They don't even understand the difference between right and wrong. They've sunk so low that they can't tell when they are perpetrating a rag, or when they're committing an outrage."

"You silly idiot!" roared Handforth. "Are you talking about me? You fellows have committed all the outrages——"

"Rats!" shouted Armstrong. "We don't want any of your nonsense, Handforth! Get over your own side of the Triangle, or take the consequences!"

Handforth laughed.

"Are you going to knock me down, or something?" he asked contemptuously. "By George! Come and try it! And as for you, Boots——"

"You'd better get back, Handforth!" said Boots curtly. "I don't want to speak to you now—or ever again! I'm rather particular about my acquaintances! And you and your friends have proved—conclusively—that you're not fit to mix with decent society!"

"Hear, hear!" shouted Bob Christine. "They're a lot of hooligans!"

Nipper heard all this, and he was puzzled. Reggie Pitt and Fullwood and De Valerie and many others were puzzled, too. They could not understand the savage fury of the Fourth-Formers. Why were Boots & Co. so enraged? What had the Remove done to earn this hatred? It was a mystery.

But then, of course, the Removites knew nothing of those torn sheets! And the Fourth-Formers were labouring under the delusion that the Removites had committed that offence.

"Better come back, Handy!" advised Church anxiously. "A master might come out at any minute——"

"Rot!" interrupted Handforth. "Do you think I'm going to be called a hooligan?"

"Yes, but look here——"

"Do you think I'm going to stand here and let these chaps say I'm not fit to mix with decent society?" continued Handforth, his voice rising. "I'm going to knock Boots down!"

"Don't," urged McClure. "You'll only get yourself flogged——"

"I don't care!" thundered Handforth. "It'll be worth it! Now then, Boots, you rotter! Put your hands up, or I'll——"

"I'm ready for you!" roared Boots, losing every trace of his temper. "Nothing will give me greater pleasure than to punch your face, Handforth! You and your dirty friends went beyond all bounds last night——"

"Steady, old man!" said Bray. "You'd better not start any rough stuff out here——"

in the open Triangle! It'll only lead to trouble—"

But Boots wrenched himself free, and the next moment he and Handforth were on the point of fighting. But a crowd of Remove fellows had rushed up, and were dragging Handforth back.

The Fourth-Formers took their cue from this, and held Boots back, too. And in other parts of the Triangle the enemy forces were squaring up for an engagement which was liable to develop into a free fight at any moment.

Just then William Napoleon Browne arrived.

"What is this?" he asked, looking round with a benevolent smile. "Surely, brothers, there is not the element of a riot in this scene? Let me point out the evil consequences of—"

"You clear off, Browne!" shouted Armstrong. "Mind your own business!"

The lanky skipper of the Fifth looked at Armstrong in a pained way.

"I can only assume, Brother Armstrong, that you are peeved," he said. "In the circumstances I am willing to overlook the fault. But I would remind you that the headmaster has sent forth a certain edict. He has forbidden any fighting between the Fourth and the Remove. While I reserve my own opinion as to this, I wish to gently observe that Mr. Pycraft is in the offing."

"What!" said Boots, with a start.

"Ah, I thought that would give you a pain in the powder magazine!" said Browne, with a nod. "Seldom have I encountered such a specimen of unpleasantness as Mr. Horace Pycraft. However, let us not descend to personalities. I will merely content myself by saying that Mr. Pycraft is on the war-path—ready enough to seize any victims that come his way. Incidentally, Mr. Crowell is also very alert just now. Your respective Form-masters—"

"That's enough, Browne, old man," said Boots, nodding. "Thanks for pulling us up. We won't be idiots enough to enter into any fight here. I believe that old Pycraft and Crowell hate one another as much as we other chaps do."

"Alas!" sighed Browne. "Has the feud extended, then, to the Form-masters themselves? This is indeed terrible! And yet, in all truth, I must observe that it would be somewhat diverting to see Brothers Pycraft and Crowell settling their differences in the centre of the Triangle, with a ring of enthusiastic spectators around them. But I fear that we shall never witness this much-to-be-hoped-for incident."

And Browne went off, satisfied. He had brought the juniors to their senses, and they drifted away into their various Houses—the danger averted. Handforth, of course, was disgusted—for he had been eagerly looking forward to a scrap. But it was far better to keep the peace.

Still the mystery remained unsolved.

Nipper & Co. could not understand why the Fourth-Formers were so furious.



CHAPTER 8.

The Messages of Warning!

RASH!

"What the dickens—"

Walter Church gave a yell. His teacup had suddenly jumped out of its saucer and had landed on his chest, spilling its contents—boiling hot—all down his waistcoat.

"Who—who did that?" he gasped. "Oh, my hat! I'm scalded! Who the dickens did that?"

Handforth looked across the table, and frowned.

"Don't interrupt me in the middle of my thoughts!" he said gruffly. "If you can't keep your tea on the table, Church, it's your own fault!"

"But I didn't touch my tea!" gasped Church.

"You must have done, old man," said McClure. "Cups of tea don't leap out of their saucers of their own accord, you know. You must have jerked it somehow."

"But I tell you I didn't!" insisted Church. "I was just helping myself to another sardine when the thing happened. It's absolutely uncanny!"

Handforth & Co. were at tea in Study D. It was fairly mild this evening, and there was still sufficient daylight left—although it was very dusky outside. The window stood open, and the West Square was quiet.

"I'm just trying to think out a new scheme," said Handforth slowly. "Never mind about your tea now, Churchy—we can't be bothered with trifles. I've got an idea for a ripping jape on those beastly Fourth-Formers. If only we can get it straight—"

"Well, I'm jiggered!" said Church abruptly.

"Don't interrupt!"

"But—but look at this!" ejaculated Church, holding up something. "I found it in my lap! Now I can understand why my teacup gave a jump just now! It was hit by this thing!"

"Eh? What thing?"

Handforth and McClure looked at their companion curiously. Church had just brought to light a small brown-paper parcel, sealed with numerous lengths of string, and containing some important-looking blobs of sealing-wax.

"What is it?" asked Handforth, staring.

"Goodness knows!" replied Church. "I found it in my lap!"

"But where did it come from?"

"Somebody must have thrown it through the open window," said McClure. "That's the explanation! It fell on to Church's teacup, and tipped it on to his chest! Better open it, Churchy, and see what it is!"

"I'll open it!" said Handforth. "Don't forget that I'm leader of this study!"

He took the little parcel and cut through the strings with a table-knife. His chums looked on with keen interest while he unwrapped a long length of brown paper. At last a stone was revealed—an ordinary round flint stone—and tied to this was a label. It was a luggage label of the ordinary type, and there were some words written upon it—in printed characters.

"What the dickens is this?" asked Handforth in astonishment. "By George! These words are written in blood!"

"Don't you believe it!" grinned McClure. "It's some sort of red fluid—not red ink—and it has been made to resemble blood, I think. What does it say?"

"My only hat!" ejaculated Handforth. "Look at this!"

He held up the label, and his chums read the words:

"BEWARE! THE VENGEANCE OF THE NEW KLUX KLAN IS ABOUT TO DESCEND UPON YOU. IT WILL COME UNEXPECTEDLY — DRAMATICALLY! IT WILL COME WHEN YOU LEAST EXPECT IT! YOU CANNOT ESCAPE FROM THE PUNISHMENT THAT IS YOUR DUE.

"THE NEW KLUX KLAN."

Before Handforth & Co. could make any comment on this extraordinary document the door opened, and Nipper looked in.

"Hallo!" he said, catching sight of the label. "So you've got one, too?"

"Eh?" said Handforth, twirling round. "What do you mean?"

"Why, not five minutes ago a little parcel came whizzing through our window, in Study C," said Nipper. "I thought I'd just come along and tell you about it—but it seems that you know as much as we do. Those Fourth-Formers are getting busy!"

"Great Scott!" roared Handforth. "Then—then you think——"

"Think!" laughed Nipper. "My dear chap, it's a cert! The New Klux Klan is the Fourth Form secret society!"

"Oh, my goodness!"

"So they've started the same stunt!"

"Well, it's only to be expected," said Nipper thoughtfully. "And they have very kindly given us warning. Not that it really amounts to anything. We don't know when they'll pounce, or how they'll get to work. Somehow, I have an idea that there'll be some interesting developments during the evening."

Handforth was gradually turning red with indignation.

"The—the rotters!" he panted. "Of all the nerve! They've deliberately pinched my idea!"

"Which idea is that?" asked Nipper.

"Why, this secret society business!" replied Handforth. "I was the chap who suggested it in the first place, and——"

"My dear old scout, it's no good getting indignant over it!" chuckled Nipper. "These Fourth-Formers have as much right to form a secret society as we have. The idea isn't copyright. I may be wrong, but I seem to have an impression that secret societies have been in vogue for quite a few years."

Handforth grunted.

"But not at St. Frank's," he said. "And it's like the nerve of these Fourth-Formers to copy us!"

"Imitation is the sincerest form of flattery," remarked Church.

Handforth nodded.

"Well, yes, I suppose it is," he admitted. "Anyhow, we thought of the secret-society stunt first, didn't we? Boots & Co. have had to play second fiddle. And what the dickens do they mean by saying that they're going to pounce on us? How? When? Why can't they give us a few details?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You chump!" grinned Nipper. "If they gave us any details, we should know what to do to give them a reception! They've naturally left everything very hazy."

"Well, they'll have to be pretty smart to catch us on the hop!" said Handforth tartly. "They can't do anything until after lights-out, and we shall be well on our guard."

Nipper frowned thoughtfully.

"I'm not so sure about that, old man," he said. "I shouldn't be surprised if Boots & Co. get up to some activity during the evening. But it was jolly good of them to give us the tip. We shall be on the qui vive now, and I don't think there'll be much chance of their catching us napping."

All the same, Nipper went round to every Remove study—both in the Ancient House and the West House—and gave the warning. And the Remove, from that minute onwards, was on the alert.



CHAPTER 9.

Nipped in the Bud!

USTER BOOTS chuckled.

"Well, that's that, my sons!" he said genially.

"We sent the messages of warning, and now we

shall be able to enjoy the rest of the evening."

The Fourth-Formers were holding a confab in the Modern House Common-room, and Boots was looking particularly satisfied.

"The New Klux Klan!" he went on. "Not a bad title for a secret society, is it?"

"It's pinched!" said Armstrong pointedly.

"You mean that we borrowed it from the Ku Klux Klan?" asked Boots. "Well, perhaps we did, and we're going to adopt their style of head-dress, too—flowing white robes and conical hats. Jolly impressive, if you ask me! Better than the hoods and cloaks of the Avengers!"

"I don't altogether agree with what you've done, Boots, old man," said Bob Christine slowly. "I think it was a mistake to send those messages—to give the Remove any warning."

"Why was it a mistake?"

"Because they'll be on the alert."

"That's just the point," nodded Buster coolly. "They would have been on the alert in any case, and we haven't done any harm at all. In fact, we've put all those Remove chaps in a condition of suspense. They don't know what's going to happen, and they'll be expecting all sorts of rummy things. There's nothing so disturbing, and nothing so unnerving as uncertainty. At any minute they're expecting an attack from us, and it won't come. Our game is to wait until the bell rings for bedtime."

"Yes, I know," said Bob Christine. "And those Removites will be ready for us."

"Don't you believe it!" chuckled Boots. "They'll be expecting some sort of activity during the evening, and when the bed bell rings they'll immediately assume that we're going to do nothing until after lights-out. So they'll relax their vigilance. Then we shall swoop—just in that minute!"

"Yes, it's a jolly good idea!" said Lawrence, nodding. "You're a wise bird, Buster."

"You leave it to me!" nodded Buster Boots calmly. "We'll make those Remove chaps sit up—"

"Indeed!"

The Fourth-Formers spun round, startled. And there, in the doorway, stood Mr. Horace Pycraft, the Master of the Fourth! As usual, Mr. Pycraft had crept up unnoticed. It was one of his favourite dodges.

"Indeed!" he repeated. "So you are going to make the Remove juniors sit up, eh? This is very interesting, Boots. This is most enlightening!"

Buster Boots scowled.

"We didn't hear you come in, sir," he said pointedly.

"No, perhaps not," said Mr. Pycraft. "But I heard your final words, Boots, and I would like to point out that the headmaster has strictly forbidden any quarrelling with the Remove. Is it possible that you are about to ignore Dr. Stafford's orders? I am shocked!"

"You can't punish us for something we haven't done, sir," said Boots aggressively. "There's been no fighting to-day, and—"

"And I shall take care that there is no fighting this evening!" said Mr. Pycraft unpleasantly. "Unfortunately, I do not know your plans, and I have no doubt that you will refuse to answer me if I request you to give them to me."

"You're quite right, sir," said Boots promptly.

"I regard that remark as an impertinence, Boots!" snapped the Form-master. "You will write me one hundred lines."

Buster was silent, but he fumed inwardly.

"I am glad that I have accidentally hit upon your secret plans," continued Mr. Pycraft. "I deem it my duty to see that the headmaster's instructions are adhered to. Therefore, I shall see both Mr. Stockdale and Mr. Goole—your respective House-masters—and request them to confine you to your own Houses for the remainder of the evening. Armstrong, Griffith, and all you other East House boys. You had better go back to your own quarters."

"I don't see why we should, sir!" growled Armstrong. "There's no law against us visiting our friends!"

"Perhaps not, Armstrong," said Mr. Pycraft nastily. "But when I explain to Mr. Goole that you are planning to break the rules, I have no doubt that he will confine you to your own Houses. So you had better go now, while you are still safe!"

The Fourth-Formers glared at Mr. Pycraft ferociously.

"Furthermore, I shall make it my business to be very alert this evening," continued Mr. Pycraft. "I shall pay great attention to the junior quarters of this House and the East House. And if I see any of you boys behaving in a manner that—"

"Don't worry, sir!" interrupted Boots aggressively. "You won't see any misbehaviour. Thanks for the tip; we'll be jolly careful!"

"I do not like your tone, Boots!" retorted Mr. Pycraft angrily. "Are you daring to be impertinent again?"

"Not that I'm aware of, sir," replied Buster. "I've only told you that we shall behave ourselves. That's not very impertinent, is it?"

"I am not objecting to your words, Boots, but to your tone!" retorted Mr. Pycraft, turning towards the door. "Remember what I have said. I shall make it my business to be very watchful this evening!"

He went out, and a series of low groans arose on the air. The Fourth-Formers were filled with dismay and consternation. They looked at Boots for guidance.

"Well, that's done it, of course!" growled the leader of the Fourth. "The interfering old beggar! The beastly nose-parker! Just like him to come butting in! He's nipped our little game in the bud!"

"Why, do you mean that we can't carry it out now?" asked Bob Christine.

"It won't be worth the risk!" replied Buster, with rare common-sense. "With old Pycraft on the warpath, we shall have to go jolly easy. But don't worry. I'll think out something else—a better stunt than ever. We're not going to let those Remove fellows have the laugh on us."

"You mean—"

"I don't exactly know what I do mean yet," replied Boots bluntly. "But we shan't be able to do anything this evening. That's certain. The New Klux Klan will have to wait for a bit."

And the other Fourth-Formers said many uncomplimentary things concerning Mr. Horace Pycraft. Happily for them, Mr. Pycraft was not within earshot.



CHAPTER 10.

After Lights Out—New Style!

“NOTHING happened over on this side yet?” asked Reggie Pitt cheerily, as he came into the Ancient House at about seven o'clock, and found a group of Removites in the lobby. “Have the New Klux Klan got busy?”

“Not yet,” said Fullwood, turning.

“Aw, gee!” remarked Adams, the American boy. “Those Fourth Form guys give me a pain. I guess they're full of hot air!”

“They'll get up something soon,” said Pitt. “You can always trust Boots to be active. He's a fellow of resource.”

“Hot darn!” said Adams, with a shrug of his shoulders. “Who cares for those gorillas? Even if they do get up some game, I'll bet it'll be some punk old stunt. If you guys would only listen to me I'd give you some real, honest-to-goodness suggestions. All the best ideas come from the U.S.A., and I'm telling you that—”

“Thanks all the same, old man, but we're quite satisfied with British ideas!” grinned Reggie Pitt. “It would be a different thing if you brought out something really startling. With all due respects to the United States, though, I venture to suggest that old England can hold her own when it comes to japes.”

Reggie then passed on into the Remove passage, and made inquiries in Study D and Study C. But nothing had happened yet, and most of the juniors were doing their prep.

“All right, then—I'll get back to my own quarters,” said Reggie, as he prepared to leave Study C. “Everything's quiet over in the Modern House and the East House. No sign of activity there.”

“There's a rumour that old Pycraft is on the warpath,” said Nipper. “I don't know how true it is, but if he's really on the job we're safe for this evening.”

“Let's hope it's wrong,” said Pitt. “I'm rather curious to see how these Fourth-Formers will get busy. And it's like Pycraft's nerve to interfere!”

He went off, and prep went on in the junior studies of the Ancient House. It was just the quiet hour of the evening, when nothing was liable to happen.

There seemed very little possibility of the New Klux Klan getting to work now. As Buster Boots had said, Mr. Pycraft had nipped their plans in the bud. It would have been a very perilous undertaking for Boots & Co. to proceed with their plans and arrangements. In any case, they hadn't

reckoned upon doing anything until the bell went for bedtime.

And yet, just before eight o'clock, when Nipper & Co. were finishing their prep in Study C, the lights suddenly flickered and then snapped out.

“Begad!” said Sir Montie Tregellis-West. “A fuse has gone, or somethin'!”

“Yes—or something!” said Nipper grimly.

“Dear old boy, you don't mean—”

“This looks suspicious!” said Nipper, leaping to his feet. “Yes, look out there—across at the West House! There are no lights out over there. It's only this passage, I believe. Somebody has been monkeying—”

“Boots and his lot!” interrupted Tommy Watson excitedly.

“That's the very thought that jumped into my mind,” said Nipper. “By Jove, so they've put the lights out, have they? Well, we'll be ready for them! We told them that we should—”

He broke off, for at that moment the window was flung open and a swarm of mysterious figures came pouring in. There were six of them, at least. They could be seen, faintly outlined against the glow which came across the Square from the West House.

And these figures were wearing curious robes with high, conical hats—hats which went to an acute point at the top.

Nipper took one look, and then rushed for the door. He could see that they were outnumbered, and help was necessary. But before he could get to the door a stone, or some heavy object, struck him on the back of the head, and fell with a thud to the floor.

“You rotters!” gasped Nipper, partly dazed.

He was indignant and angry, but before he could put up any fight or dash for help two of the invading figures rushed at him, and he was deliberately tripped. And that very trip had been a foul one, for he was kicked on the shin, and forced to his knees. Then his other leg was hooked from under him, and he crashed over.

Tommy Watson and Tregellis-West were treated in the same way; in less than a minute the scrap was over, and nobody else in the passage knew anything about it. Drastic measures had been adopted.

The three juniors were roped up now, roughly but effectively. Coarse sacks had been flung over their heads and pulled tightly to their necks. They could only mumble, for the folds of those sacks were thick.

And while this had been going on, an exactly similar episode had taken place next door, in Study D.

Handforth & Co., discussing the general situation, had been attacked by a swarm of figures through the window—in the darkness. They, too, went down, and were made prisoners. Handforth fought valiantly at first, but a cowardly blow on the side of his head had finished him for the time being. He believed that somebody had kicked him, for he had been dazed for a minute or two.

All six juniors were then taken through the windows and hurried away across the West Square. The whole thing had been done within the space of a single minute. It had been a swift, decisive raid—a very effective attack.

In the meantime, fellows from the other studies were coming out and inquiring why the lights had failed. A few of them suspected trickery, but in the confusion nobody thought of going into Study D or Study C. It was not until two or three minutes later that Nipper and Handforth and the others were missed. And then it was too late to find them.

Somebody seemed to have seen a few dim figures in the West Square, but nothing had been thought of the incident. It was impossible to say which way the raiders had gone. But they had smuggled the six leading fellows of the Ancient House away—they had spirited them off into the unknown shadows of the evening.

And one thought was current. Those six juniors had been kidnapped by the New Klux Klan—the Fourth Form Secret Society!

Was it not an obvious deduction? Nipper and Handforth and Tregellis-West and the others were convinced of the same thing. They had seen those figures in their conical hats, and they knew this was the general costume of the genuine Ku Klux Klan. They had been captured by the enemy, in spite of all their vigilance!

And after that, with those sacks over their heads, they could not tell where they were being taken to. They only knew that Boots & Co. had borrowed their own idea. But these mysterious figures were much more drastic than Nipper & Co. had been. There were no gentle methods now, no signs of sportsmanship.

And it seemed idle to hope that the Removites would come to the rescue.

CHAPTER 11.

In the Hands of the New Klux Klan!



HERE was something very reminiscent in the way the six prisoners were treated. Once clear of the West Square, they were marched to and fro, up and down, in circles, and at random here and there. It was a repetition of what had happened during the previous night. But now the boot was on the other foot. This time it was Nipper and his companions who were being muddled up, so that they should not know in which direction they were being taken.

It seemed to them that they had walked nearly a couple of miles before they were gruffly told to come to a halt.

And then, at last, those suffocating sacks were removed from their heads, and they

found themselves in their own punishment-room. At least, so it seemed at first glance. It was draped in just the same way, with black cloth everywhere—even on the ceiling. But a second glance told them that this was merely a replica of their own room.

"Let the prisoners be placed in a row, and let them say nothing!" exclaimed a harsh voice. "Prisoners, you are in the Chamber of Horrors!"

"It's a pity you couldn't be a bit more original!" sneered Handforth. "We called our place the Punishment Chamber, and you've practically pinched the name! And you've borrowed our style of decorations, too——"

"Ah, then, you admit that you are a member of the Ancient Order of Avengers?"

"Yes, of course I do!" snorted Handforth. "Doesn't everybody know it? And you're Boots, I suppose?"

"It is not for you to ask questions, my friend!" said the leader of the New Klux Klan. "You are here to do as you are bidden—or take the consequences. Drastic punishment is now about to fall upon you, and the more you appeal for mercy, the greater will be the severity of the punishment."

"Idiot!" snorted Handforth. "When you hear me appeal for mercy you can expect to see the moon in the middle of the playing-fields!"

"Silence!" said the other. "I am the Grand Master of the New Klux Klan, and my word is law!"

Nipper was listening intently—trying to detect some inflection in that voice, some familiar note. But he could not do so. The voice was obviously disguised, and cleverly disguised, too. Nipper rather wondered if it belonged to John Busterfield Boots. If so, Boots had performed wonders in the way of altering his tones.

The figures of the Klansmen were grotesque in the extreme. All the fellows were attired in long, flowing robes, covered with weird-looking daubs of highly-coloured paint. These daubs were in the forms of symbols and hieroglyphics. Great conical hats descended right to their shoulders, so that it was impossible to tell whether they were big or small or medium sized. Two tiny holes allowed them to see, but great eyes were painted round these holes, giving a most startling appearance to the figures.

"Now, prisoners, you are about to be punished!" said the Grand Master. "You are dirty dogs, and you must pay the penalty for your rotten acts. Ever since the feud started between the Remove and the Fourth you have been doing caddish things."

"That's not true—and you know it!" said Nipper quietly.

"When you are required to speak, you will be told to do so!" said the Grand Master curtly. "I am speaking now, and you will interrupt me at your peril. It is not our intention to waste time, or to do much talking. We have come here to act. We are here



The six juniors, with their paint-daubed faces and glued wigs, dashed along the corridor—only to run full tilt into Professor Sylvester Tucker. Fortunately, the science master had mislaid his glasses, and only recognised them as a jumble of coloured blobs. “Dear me!” he ejaculated. “This is a most extraordinary phenomenon!”

in the interests of the Fourth Form—the victims of your hooliganism.”

“You silly fathead!” hooted Handforth. “It’s you chaps who’ve been acting like hooligans!”

“Bring the first prisoner forward!” said the Grand Master. “Yes, that is the one!”

Nipper was seized, and hauled into the centre of the Chamber of Horrors. Here there was a big post set up in the middle of the floor, with straps attached to it. The Grand Master pointed dramatically to that post.

“You are to have your choice!” he said. “Either you will go upon your knees, and lick my boots—and the boots of my associates—or you will be horse-whipped. Which is it to be?”

“Go ahead with the horse-whipping!” replied Nipper curtly.

“Good man!” murmured Handforth.

“Remember, this whipping will be severe!” continued the Grand Master. “It will be easy to escape the pain. You have but to

go upon your knees, as I have just said, and lick my boots. Is it not a fitting thing for you to do? Do not dogs lick the boots of their masters?”

Nipper glared at the figure.

“Go ahead with the whipping, and get it over!” he said angrily.

“Remember what I have just said——”

“Go and eat coke!”

“Klansmen, do your duty!” said the Grand Master harshly. “This fool refuses to recognise his masters—he refuses to obey orders when they are given to him. And what happens to all dogs when they are disobedient? They are whipped!”

“It is so!” agreed the other Klansmen.

And Nipper, forthwith, was strapped to the post, and one of the Klansmen came forward with a horse-whip.

Slash—slash—slash!

The whip descended across Nipper’s shoulders with tremendous effect—although, of course, it was not being used with anything like the force it could have been. At

the same time, this whipping was brutal and cowardly.

"You cads!" shouted Handforth thickly. "You rotters! By George! If you don't stop that——"

Slash—slash—slash!

"All right—let them go ahead!" said Nipper between his teeth. "We'll make them pay for this dirty business afterwards! Boots, I'm surprised at you! We thought you would play the game!"

"Did you?" said the Grand Master, with a chuckle. "Well, aren't we playing the game?"

"Begad!" said Sir Montie. "Then you admit that you are Boots?"

"I only admit that my boots are ready to be licked!" said the Grand Master mockingly. "That will be enough for this prisoner! Release him!"

But all those juniors were convinced that John Busterfield Boots was the chief instigator in this affair. He had practically admitted it—but the voice was so changed. Nipper himself had a tiny doubt—a mere suspicion. But he dismissed it. Very obviously, Boots was the prime mover. And there wasn't the slightest doubt that the Fourth-Formers were the guilty parties.



CHAPTER 12.

Going a Bit Too Far!

LASH—slash—slash!

Edward Oswald Handforth was undergoing the whipping, and it seemed to him that the New Klux

Klan members were giving him an extra dose. He was the last one to receive the punishment, and he uttered no sound. But he vowed, inwardly, that he would make Boots & Co. smart for this gross indignity. Indeed, it was more than an indignity. It was a brutal outrage.

"Enough!" said the Grand Master, at length. "The first part of the programme is accomplished successfully. Now follows the second part of the sentence."

"Good!" said the other Klansmen.

"You rotters!" shouted Church angrily. "Haven't you finished with us yet? What are you going to do now? I say, Boots, this is going too far! It's altogether too steep!"

"Yes, why can't you keep your head?" demanded Tommy Watson angrily. "We're all engaged in the feud, and it's perfectly legitimate for us to get up all sorts of japes and rags. But this is only a cowardly attack——"

"Be silent!" ordered the Grand Master. "If any prisoner speaks again, he will be whipped for the second time!"

Every one of the captives had been offered the choice—either they would lick the boots of their captors, or take the whipping. Needless to say, there had been no boot-licking.

The Ancient House fellows had preferred a licking of another kind.

And it seemed that the New Klux Klan had not yet finished.

Sinister preparations were going on in a corner of that grim apartment. There was a little spirit stove there, and a saucepan stood upon it, emitting a peculiarly pungent odour. The saucepan was now removed, and placed in the centre of the floor.

One of the Klansmen produced a big brush, and stirred the contents of the saucepan with evident relish.

"Glue!" said Handforth, sniffing the air.

"Glue—and other things!" said the Grand Master. "It is a special preparation, known only to the chemists of the New Klux Klan. Is everything all prepared?" he went on, turning to his companions. "Are we ready for the next operation?"

"We are ready, master!" said two or three low voices.

"It is well!" said the leader. "Let the first prisoner be brought forward!"

As before, Nipper was the one chosen. He was yanked into the centre of the room and again strapped to that post. But this time he was strapped in a different way. He was so secured that his head was bent forward, for a strap had been placed round the back of his neck, and then buckled to the foot of the post. In this unhappy position Nipper could not hold himself upright, and he could take no action at all, since his hands were roped behind him and his feet were strapped.

"Proceed!" said the Grand Master dramatically.

And the grim business proceeded.

The brush was removed from that mixture of glue and "other things," and brought down upon Nipper's bare head. It was dreadfully hot—almost scaldingly hot. But Nipper said nothing. He knew that if he protested things would only be made worse. And, after all, he was in no danger of being really injured. The heat was not more than he could bear.

The stuff trickled down his ears, and then under his collar. It was horribly glutinous—and smelled frightfully. The brush was worked up and down until his whole head was a mass of that sticky glue. And then a wig was produced.

"Place it upon the prisoner!" said the Grand Master, pointing.

It was a curious wig—a thing made of cotton or artificial silk. Nipper recognised it as one of the type that are sometimes used at fancy dress balls. This one was a brilliant green in colour. It was tight-fitting, and it was pulled on over his head until it clung there like a skull-cap. And that glue was already beginning to harden, as the cool air affected it.

"You—you miserable bounders!" said Nipper, forced into speech. "Don't you know that we shall never be able to get these confounded wigs off? We shall have to soak our heads for hours——"

"Your powers of guesswork are remarkable!" said the Grand Master. "We are hoping that it may be two or three days before you can rid yourselves of these excellent wigs. The glue, you may be sure, will be very hard in a short time. You may remember that you, yourselves, have had some experience in glue!"

Nipper made no reply. He certainly did remember something about glue! Only a few days earlier the Removites had glued the Fourth-Formers into their seats in the Form-room! This, evidently, was Boots & Co.'s revenge! But what a revenge! It was a shabby trick—a scandalous piece of work, from first to last.

"That is good!" said the Grand Master, at length. "Let him be placed aside, and the next prisoner shall be dealt with."

And so it went on—until every one of the six had been so treated. They looked extraordinary as they stood there in a row, with those wigs on their heads—red—blue—green—yellow—heliotrope and orange. The colours were positively startling.

But even now the treatment had not finished.

For every one of the prisoners was now painted in another way. Their faces were smothered with a curious kind of distemper stuff. All colours of the rainbow were used in this fresh work. By the time they were finished, they looked extraordinary. Nipper, for example, had a green wig and a vermilion face. Handforth was unrecognisable in a blue wig, with a yellow face beneath it. The others were treated in a similar fashion.

"That will be sufficient," said the Grand Master at last. "I think we have done well, and, no doubt, the other members of the Remove Form will be startled to receive their companions back in this grotesque condition. They will surely understand that the New Klux Klan is to be feared! Once again, place the bags over their heads! It is time for us to be gone!"

And within two or three minutes the prisoners were being led out into the darkness—blindfolded, so that they could not tell where they were going.

The ordeal was over, and Nipper and his companions were filled with a great and righteous wrath.



CHAPTER 13.

A Shock for Professor Tucker!

ABRUPTLY, the prisoners were brought to a halt.

"New!" came the voice of the Grand Master. "You are now in a most strange and fearsome spot. Be cautious when you remove your headgear—for you will be startled in the extreme. Adieu—until we meet again!"

There was a quick rush of footsteps, and Nipper & Co. tore feverishly at those sacks. Nipper was the first to get his off, and he stared about him quickly.

"Thought so!" he muttered. "Just their spoof!"

He was standing in the Triangle, not far from the main gates—and in the shadow of the school wall. The lights from the various buildings were brilliant, and there were no figures in view—save those of his companions. Nobody seemed to be out and about.

"By George!" gasped Handforth, as he pulled his own sack free. "We're in the Triangle all the time! Boots said something about a mysterious spot——"

"That was only his bunkum!" interrupted Nipper. "Great Scott! You do look a fright, Handy!"

"Speak for yourself!" said Handforth gruffly. "It strikes me we're all in a horrible mess. Those rotters! Those confounded beasts! There's a limit, you know, and it seems to me they've gone too far! Oh, corks! This wig is glued to my head so tightly that it's a fixture!"

He tugged at the wig in vain—until the sheer agony of it caused him to cease. The glue had set hard by this time—so hard, indeed, that Handforth had a dreadful fear that he would always be saddled with that highly-coloured wig.

To remove them out here was impossible. Even the paint on their faces had dried—until their skins felt taut and stretched. The others were soon able to see, and they flung their sacks down, then gathered in a group, angry and indignant.

"Well, we've been through it!" said Nipper. "But it's no good growling now. We'll make those Fourth-Formers sit up for this job, never fear!"

"By just giving them another swishing, I suppose?" asked Handforth bitterly. "We play the game all the time—but they retaliate by performing these dirty tricks! It's all one-sided!"

"We can't help that," said Nipper quietly. "It'll have to be one-sided, Handy. We shall continue to play the game."

"Oh, rather!" agreed Handforth. "We can't do anything else. We can't descend to these shabby games!"

They decided that the best thing, in the circumstances, was to creep into the Ancient House, and then make a dash for the bathrooms. With a little bit of luck, they might be able to steal in unobserved. It might be as well for some of the other juniors to see them—just so that the whole Remove would know how Boots & Co. had overstepped the mark. But there was little or no chance that they would get indoors without being seen by some of the fellows. What they wanted to avoid was to run into a master or a prefect.

As hesitation was useless, they went off straight away. In fact, they entered the Ancient House at the double—for somebody,

at the far end of the Triangle, had shouted to them. And that somebody had been one of the masters! This master had not seen anything really suspicious. He had only wanted to ask an ordinary, innocent question. But it was no time for these hapless juniors to be seen by masters!

They ran into the Ancient House at full speed, and dashed upstairs with complete success.

"Done it!" gasped Handforth triumphantly.

And then, just at that moment, they walked full tilt into Professor Sylvester Tucker!

"Good gracious!" ejaculated the science master. "Dear me! This is a most extraordinary phenomenon!"

He stared at the blurry blobs in front of him in amazement. It so happened that Professor Tucker had been up on the roof—trying out a new telescope of his. He had not been wearing his glasses, since his glasses always annoyed him when he was using a telescope. And he had mislaid them now. He had just been looking at some stars—and had remarked upon the extraordinary number of colours that had twinkled.

Professor Tucker was seeing an extraordinary number of colours now—of a totally different sort.

He only knew that a number of human beings were in front of him. He was so short-sighted that he could not even guess at their identity. But he knew well enough that they were no ordinary mortals. He could see red, green, blue, violet, and every other colour of the rainbow. Then they barged into him, swept him aside, and passed on. By the time he had pulled himself together, there wasn't a sound. The strange creatures had completely gone.

"Extraordinary!" murmured the professor. "Dear me! I shall have to moderate my investigations! Astronomy is a fascinating hobby, but it is inclined to get hold of one! Such colours!"

He passed on, and, going downstairs, met Nelson Lee in the hall.

"Who is that?" asked the professor, addressing the blur in front of him.

"It is I!" said Lee, smiling. "Anything wrong, professor? If you need your spectacles, you will find them tucked in your handkerchief pocket."

"Ah, thank you—thank you!" said the professor eagerly, taking out his spectacles, and donning them. "That is better—much better! Really, Mr. Lee, I am growing more and more absent-minded. And I fear that my eyesight is becoming affected, through using my telescope too much."

"I trust not," said Nelson Lee, with concern.

"But I am sure of it!" insisted the professor. "Not three minutes ago on the upper landing, I passed some juniors—at least, I assume they were juniors. And—would you believe it? it seemed to me that their heads were green and yellow, and every other

colour! And their faces, too, were also highly coloured."

Nelson Lee laughed.

"Yes, you will certainly have to consult a specialist about your eyes," he said drily. "I can assure you, Professor Tucker, that there are no boys in this House with such coloured heads as you have mentioned it."

But for once Nelson Lee was wrong! Upstairs there were six boys with those coloured heads! But never for a moment did Nelson Lee believe that Professor Tucker had been speaking the literal truth.



CHAPTER 14.

Time to Protest!

"Done it!" said Handforth breathlessly.

His voice was rather watery, too, owing to the fact that his head was practically immersed in the washbasin. In a line, near by, were the other five victims of the New Klux Klan—with all their heads immersed in hot water. They had been at it for over half-an-hour, and at last Handforth had got the glued-on wig to come free.

But what an anxious half-hour that had been.

The minutes had sped by, and the unhappy juniors had begun to fear that nothing would ever shift that awful glue. Handforth's wig was the first to come free, and the others obtained fresh hope. But even then the ordeal was not over, for it took a tremendous time to eradicate all the glue from the hair.

Twenty times the water was changed, and the juniors rubbed and rubbed until their scalps were so tender that it was painful to even touch them. But at last the full task was accomplished.

Nipper & Co. and Handforth & Co. looked themselves once again.

As they had half-hoped, some of the other Remove fellows had come up, and had seen them. And great was the indignation throughout the Form. Fullwood and De Valerie and two or three other prominent juniors had seen these victims in their full horror—before they had even started to wash away the traces. But for Reggie Pitt swarms of other fellows would have come rushing up to the bath-rooms, too.

Reggie knew that this would be a fatal mistake, however, for it would attract attention. He therefore manoeuvred a Form meeting in the small lecture hall, with every single member of the Remove on hand.

Even Bernard Forrest and Gulliver and Bell had been routed out of Study A—where they were engaged in a little card game—to attend this meeting. And Forrest & Co. were willing enough, for they were wholeheartedly with the Remove in this feud.

"Well, we're ourselves again, thank goodness," said Nipper, as he surveyed himself in

the mirror. "We're nearly half-skinned, but I dare say we shall survive."

His face was looking very red—very tender; as for his head, the slightest touch caused agony. All of them, in fact, were really hurt. They had almost forgotten the horsewhipping—that had been a purely legitimate affair, or would have been if the whip had not been applied so brutally.

But the wig business came into another category.

So tight had the glue stuck that most of the unfortunate six had been compelled to tear out large clumps of their hair. True, they looked quite normal now, but their scalps throbbed, and would not be normal again for days.

"If we hadn't rushed upstairs to this bathroom on the spot, we might never have got those wigs off," declared Nipper. "At least, we couldn't have got them off without sacrificing half our hair. As it is, we were just in the nick of time. This latest affair is a bit too thick, you chaps—too thick altogether!"

"We ought to do something drastic!" said Handforth. "Why not raid the Modern House now, and punish Boots for—"

"It can't be done, old man," interrupted Nipper.

"Why not?" asked Handforth. "What about the secret passage we discovered the other day? The passage which leads from one of these cellars, right under the Triangle, and into the Modern House?"

"Yes, I know—"

"We've prepared it all ready," went on Handforth. "We've faked up a door, so that we can get right into the Modern House common-room! Why not go over now, and give them a big surprise?"

"We don't want to give them a surprise like that," replied Nipper. "Mind you, I'm all in favour of it, Handy—I'd just love to sweep in upon Boots & Co., and wipe them up."

"If you're in favour of it, what's the idea of objecting?"

"Well, I don't want to be sacked!" replied Nipper drily.

"Eh?"

"The Head has distinctly said that the ringleaders in any fight will be expelled," went on Nipper. "I'm known to be the ringleader in the Ancient House, and if there's a Remove raid on the Fourth-Formers— Well, you can guess the rest!"

"H'm! Perhaps you're right!" admitted Handforth. "What do you suggest, then?"

"If we do anything at all, it'll have to be done by the Ancient Order of Avengers," replied Nipper. "That's the only way. But just at the moment we'll go down into the lecture hall, where Pitt is collecting the chaps, and hold a meeting. Something has got to be done at once."

They went downstairs, and found the Form meeting in a very excited state.

"Here they are!" went up the shout.

"Poor old scouts!"

"What-ho! Absolutely!" said Archie Glen-thorne. "Good gad! There's nothing much wrong with them!" he added, peering at them through his monocle. "I was given to understand that you harmless blighters were somewhat mottled in appearance!"

"So we were—and we're going to have revenge!" said Handforth. "We're nearly scalped! Our heads are so tender that we can't touch them."

"Well, what's to be done?" asked Forrest. "If you fellows are goin' to suggest a big raid of the Fourth, you can leave us out."

"Me, too!" said Gulliver.

"We're willin' to join forces in the general feud, but we're not goin' to risk expulsion!" went on Forrest. "You can call on us for any old thing you like—but don't ask too much!"

"You needn't worry—we're not going to trouble you!" said Nipper. "All I want to say is that Boots and his men have gone altogether too far. They've overstepped the mark of reason. They not only horsewhipped us, but they committed that other offence. And they expected us to lick their boots, too!"

"My only hat!"

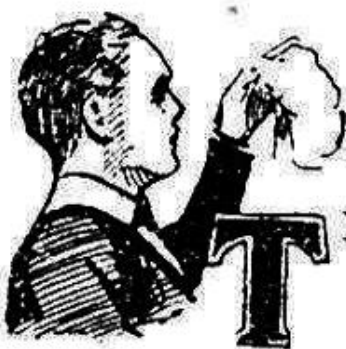
"The rotters!"

"I trust, laddies, that you did not descend to this frightful boot-licking indignity?" asked Archie anxiously.

"No—we took the horsewhipping instead!" said Church.

"Good men!" beamed Archie. "Stout chappies! I mean to say, absolutely! I must say that I regard the whole job as a piece of dirty work at the cross-roads! I rather think that we ought to rally round, and do a bit of good old revenge stuff."

And the rest of the Remove agreed in one solid voice.



CHAPTER 15.

No Satisfaction for Mr. Pycraft!

THE Remove was exceedingly indignant.

Even if the rival secret society had adopted sportsman-like methods, the

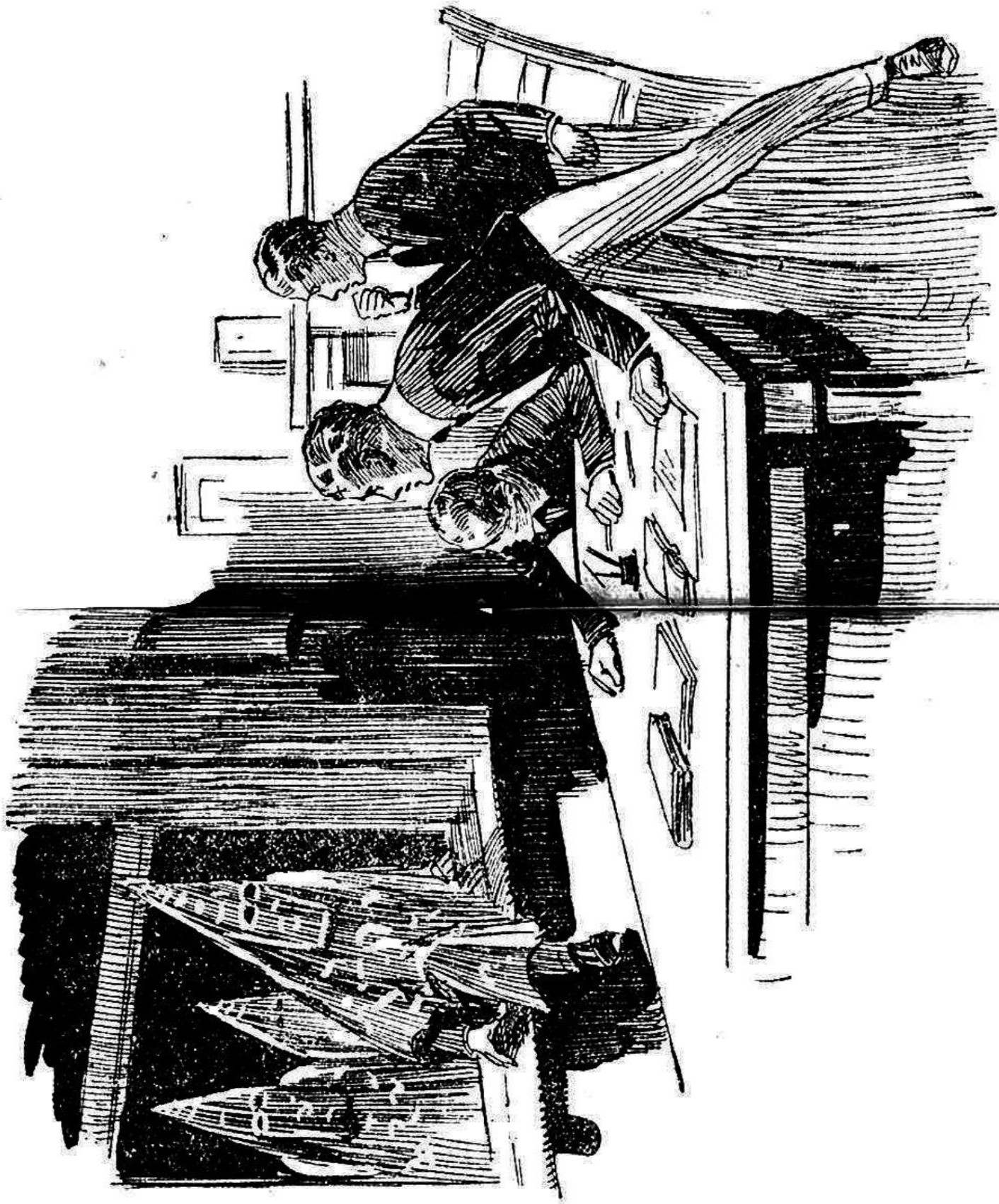
Remove would have been indignant.

The fellows would have demanded a reprisal. But the New Klux Klan had acted shabbily—in a thoroughly blackguardly way. And so the Remove was not merely indignant, but furious. Many of the fellows suggested that the Ancient Order of Avengers should adopt the same tactics—in order to teach Boots & Co. a lesson. But Nipper and Pitt and Handforth were all against this.

"No!" said Handy. "Two wrongs don't make a right, you chaps."

"Yes, but what's sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander!" retorted Forrest.

"That may be, but these old proverbs don't always apply," said Nipper. "We mustn't get too excited—and we must always remember



When the lights of Study C went out, Nipper and his schams guessed that something was about to happen. They were right! Suddenly the window was flung open and a number of curiously garbed figures swarmed in. The New Klux was about to strike!

that we've got to fight a clean battle. From first to last we'll handle this feud with decency. We won't descend to any steps that can be looked upon as hooliganism. We'll leave that to the New Klux Klan!"

"And get it in the neck every time?" asked Doyle.

"It's getting near bed-time now, so there's only one thing we can do," said Nipper. "I suggest that five or six of us go over to the Modern House as a deputation—not from the Ancient Order of Avengers, but from the Remove. We'll go under the white flag——"

"They won't respect it!" said Hubbard.

"Of course they won't!" agreed Scott. "Haven't they proved that they have no principles?"

"If they disrespect the white flag, then I shall have no hope for them," replied Nipper quietly. "They may overlook it during the first moment or two, but even Boots wouldn't ignore a flag of truce. No—we'll go over there at once. We'll protest strongly with Boots that he'll have to stop this scandalous behaviour."

"Yes, it's the only thing to be done," agreed Reggie Pitt. "We'll let them see that we're totally against this sort of thing, and that we're not going to retaliate in kind. They will probably be thinking that we shall adopt the same sort of tactics. But if we tell Boots, straight from the shoulder, that we're not in favour of it, he might put a stop to it on his side. At any rate, it's worth trying."

"Hear, hear!"

"Let's stick to clean fighting!"

"Rather!"

"We'll tell Boots and his men that we're disgusted with them!"

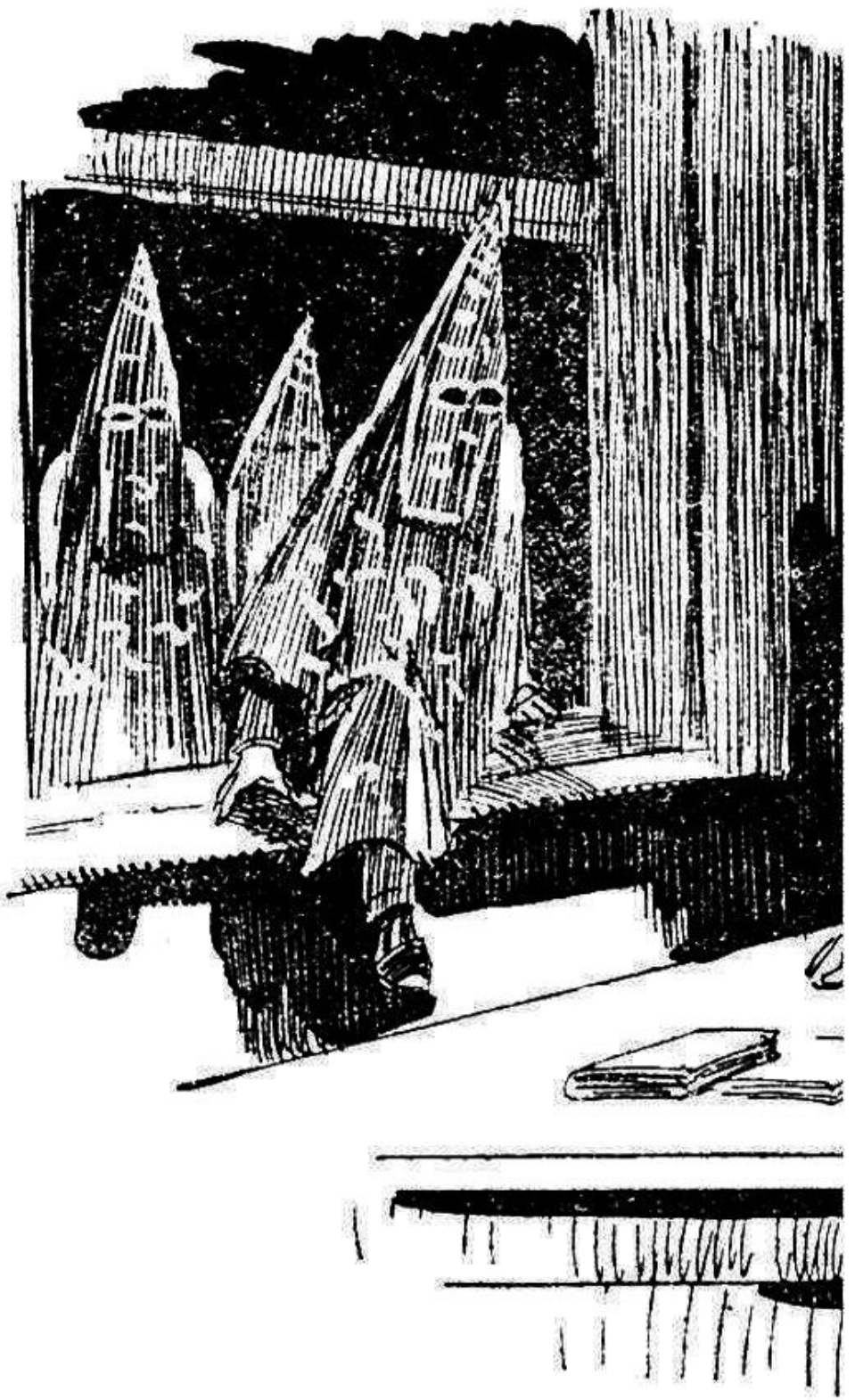
And so a deputation, consisting of Nipper, Handforth, Fullwood, De Valerie, Reggie Pitt and Dick Goodwin, was formed. And, without any further argument or waste of time, they went off.

They carried a white flag—or, rather, a clean handkerchief that had been tied to the end of a walking-cane.

Nipper marched in front with this, holding it straight up so that all could see. As they went across the Triangle the other Removites crowded out, and stood watching.

They had been warned, whatever happened, to remain on their side of the Triangle. Even if the Fourth-Formers disrespected the white flag, and attacked the deputation, the Remove was to remain idle. For, as Nipper realised, if they came to the rescue of their comrades, a free fight might easily start, and they did not want to run that risk.

As it happened, they had no sooner entered the Modern House lobby than a swarm of Fourth-Formers came round them. Nipper could see at a glance that they all belonged to the East House. They were Armstrong, Griffith, Turner, Page, Holroyd, Merrell, Marriott, Freeman, and such fellows. None of them were of any account. At ordinary times they were nonentities.



When the lights of Study C went out, Nipper. They were right! Suddenly the window was in. The New

Now, however, they were all very excited. At sight of the Removites, they rushed forward, and promptly surrounded them.

"The enemy!" yelled Merrell. "Come on—down with them!"

"Wait a minute!" said Nipper. "What about this?"

He held up the white flag, and Merrell laughed in an unpleasant way.

"You can't fool us with that thing!" he sneered. "You needn't think you can come here, just as you like—protected by a handkerchief!"

"It doesn't matter whether it's a handkerchief or a piece of rag—it stands for the flag of truce!" said Nipper. "And we expect to be treated fairly——"

"Down with them!"

"Yah! Beastly Removites!"

"Come on, the Fourth—wipe them up!"

"Hurrah!"

And the East House juniors, more excited



guessed that something was about to happen. A number of curiously garbed figures swarmed out to strike!

than ever, made a fierce charge at the deputation. Had they been less excited, they might have respected the white flag, but they hardly knew what they were doing. That much can be said for them. They only knew that six Remove fellows were in their midst, and they wanted to floor them on the spot.

"Come on!" yelled Marriott. "We've got them—we're three to one! Let's shove their faces in the dirt!"

"Hear, hear!"

"We'll grind their giddy dials into the mats!"

"Good idea!" said Snipe. "If they didn't want to be scragged, they shouldn't come here!"

"You rotters!" roared Handforth indignantly. "Have you lost all sense of honour? Isn't there any decency left in any of you? We can understand now why you adopt such rotten tactics! You haven't any principles left—"

"Cave!"

It was a shout which came urgently from the Junior passage.

"Cave!"

It came again, and the East House fellows, scenting trouble, tore out into the Triangle, and rushed to their own quarters. Just at that moment, John Busterfield Boots and his lieutenants appeared upon the scene. And so, incidentally, did Mr. Horace Pycraft.

Mr. Pycraft was hot on the scent. He had heard shouts—scuffles. Grabbing his cane, Mr. Pycraft had sallied out—hoping to surprise the juniors in the midst of a fight. It would be a triumph for him—to take the names of these young rascals, and to report them to their various Housemasters. He even hoped that he would be able to see some of them publicly flogged by the Head.

All the evening Mr. Pycraft had been listening—waiting for this moment.

And now it had come! He ran down the passage, and burst into the lobby. He expected to see the whole place filled with struggling figures. He gripped his cane in readiness—so that he could dash in amongst the fighters and lash out here and there, and bring the conflict to an end.

But what Mr. Pycraft actually saw brought him to a halt, staring.

For Nipper, Handforth, and the other Remove fellows were standing leisurely in the doorway, chatting calmly with Buster Boots, Bob Christine, and a few other Fourth-Formers. A more friendly scene could not have been imagined!

Mr. Pycraft stood there, his mouth open, his eyes large and round.



CHAPTER 16.

Very Strange!

MR. PYCRAFT came forward, thoroughly disappointed. His vision of dashing among the fighters and using his cane had faded away, but he was not going to be entirely done.

"What are you boys doing in this House?" he demanded unpleasantly, as he strode up.

The juniors turned, rather surprised.

"Speaking to us, sir?" asked Boots politely.

"No, Boots, I am speaking to these Remove boys!" said Mr. Pycraft. "Hamilton! Pitt! Handforth! What are you doing over here?"

"Talking to Boots and these other chaps, sir," said Nipper innocently.

A titter went up from the others, and Mr. Pycraft turned red.

"I can see very well that you are talking to these boys!" snapped Mr. Pycraft. "But that is not the point, Hamilton!"

"No, sir?"

"No, it is not!" went on Mr. Pycraft nastily. "How dare you come into this House!"

"We came to have a few words with Boots, sir," explained Nipper.

"You know very well that you have no right in this House!" went on Mr. Pycraft excitedly. "You do not board here!"

"If it comes to that, sir, neither do you!" remarked Handforth.

"What?" said Mr. Pycraft, with a jump. "What did you say, Handforth?"

"You board in the East House, sir," said Handforth. "I suppose you came here to visit somebody, and so did we. No harm in that, surely?"

"You—you—you——"

"If you would like us to go to Mr. Stockdale, and ask him for permission to talk with Boots, we'll do so, sir," said Nipper. "We will tell him that you were opposed to us being here."

"You will do no such thing, Hamilton!" snapped Mr. Pycraft, in haste.

"Very well, sir!"

"I am opposed to your being here because I realise that it may lead to fighting!" went on the Form-master, feeling that it was up to him to make some sort of explanation. "I know very well that you boys are at loggerheads, and I am quite aware of the fact that you have deliberately pretended to be friendly. It has been adopted for my particular benefit. I am not deceived."

"But I don't see why you should object to us, sir," said Handforth, glaring. "These beastly Fourth-Formers—— I—I mean, these Fourth Form chaps——"

"Perhaps you had better come along to my study?" suggested Boots casually. "Mr. Pycraft doesn't seem to like us standing about in the lobby, and we don't want to do anything to annoy him. Would you chaps like to come? Or to the Common-room? Any old place you like!"

"Thanks!" said Nipper, nodding. "That'll do fine!"

They went off, and Mr. Pycraft found it impossible to delay them. He keenly suspected that all this had been enacted for his benefit, and in a way, he was right. But since there was no fighting, or no breaking of the rules, he was powerless to intervene.

But the juniors had only just been in the nick of time. After Armstrong & Co. had fled, Boots & Co. had recognised the white flag, and had at once known that Mr. Pycraft was coming along. So the Removites had been treated with cold politeness, and they were now escorted along the junior passage and into the Common-room.

"One of you fellows had better stand outside the door and keep guard," said Boots,

turning to the crowd. "We don't want old Pycraft to come back, although he won't find anything to please him even if he does. There's going to be no fighting in here. These fellows have come under our roof with a flag of truce."

"But we don't want them!" said Bob Christine, glaring at his former friends.

"And we can assure you that we ourselves do not feel in pleasant company," said Nipper politely. "However, it's a duty, and we have to perform it. We have come here to protest, Boots."

"To do what?" asked Boots.

"To protest."

"Go ahead, then, although I don't know what on earth you're talking about," said Buster. "I rather think that we're the ones who ought to protest. But carry on. I'll leave my remarks until later."

He was very distant, very icy. The other Fourth-Formers crowded round in a big circle, and all their glances were hostile. Billy Nation was at the door, keeping guard, and another fellow had been posted at the end of the passage.

"Now!" said Buster Boots. "What's the trouble?"

"You rotter!" said Handforth fiercely. "You know what the trouble is as well as we do! We're fed-up with you and your blackguardly behaviour."

"You'd better be careful!" said Boots hotly.

"Oh, don't talk out of the back of your neck!" continued Handforth contemptuously. "Don't stand there and pretend to be a saint. You know what you did to us this evening, you and your fellow-hooligans. A feud is one thing, and there's no need to carry your activity——"

"Hold on!" interrupted Bob Christine, keeping his temper with difficulty. "What do you mean by all this? We haven't touched you this evening! We haven't been near you!"

"So you've added lying to your other accomplishments?" said Fullwood quietly.

"You—you rotter!" roared Bob. "Put up your hands! I'll—I'll——"

"Steady!" interrupted Talmadge. "Don't forget the white flag!"

"That's all very well!" said Bob hotly. "But I'm not going to have these chaps calling me a liar!"

A roar went up from the other Fourth-Formers, and things began to look rather dangerous.

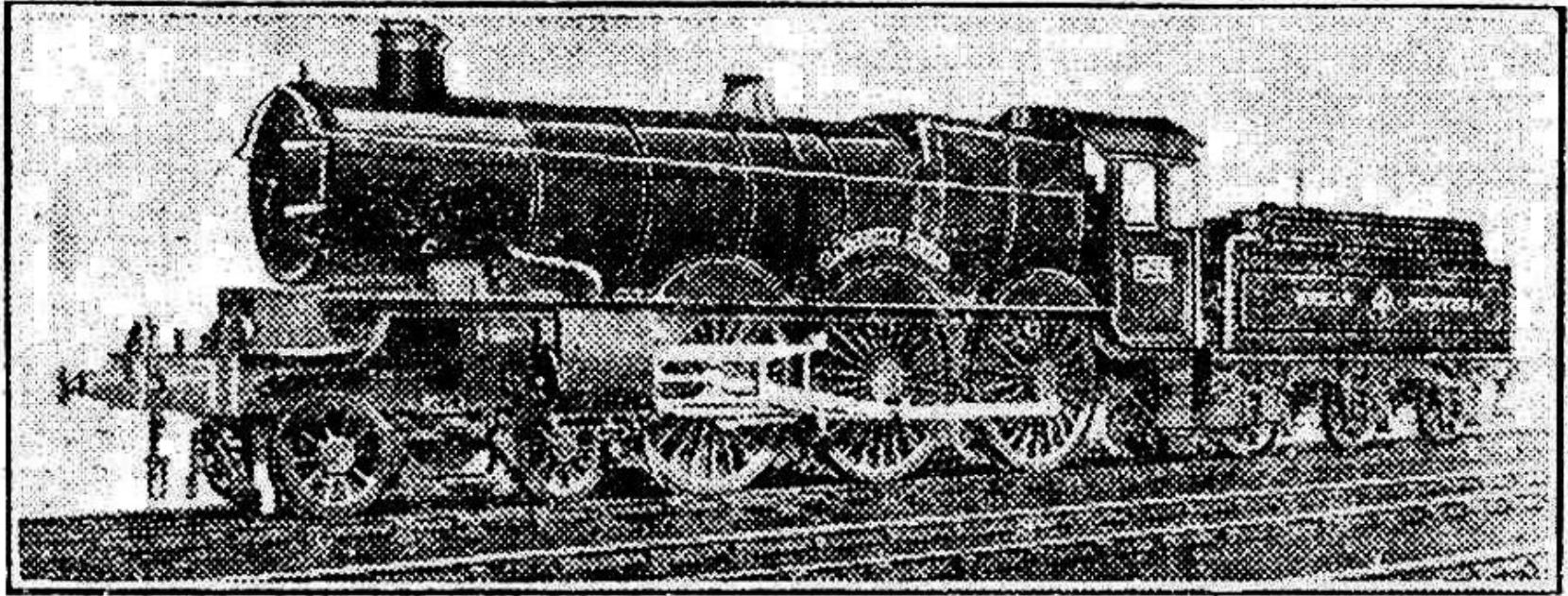
"Hold on," said Nipper. "Let's keep this thing peaceful, for goodness' sake. Perhaps you would like me to remind you, Boots? Perhaps you want your memory jogged?"

"I should very much like to have it jogged," replied Buster Boots, nodding. "What is it that we're supposed to have done?"

"Well, first of all you sent us some warn-

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ing messages," said Nipper. "You threw little parcels through our windows, both into the Ancient House and the West House. You told us to beware of the New Klux Klan. Do you deny it?"

Boots looked at the other Fourth-Formers. "We don't deny it, and we don't admit it," he replied coolly. "You can think what you please."

"Well, of course, we shall only think one thing," replied Nipper. "You are responsible for sending those messages. You haven't denied it, and that's good enough."

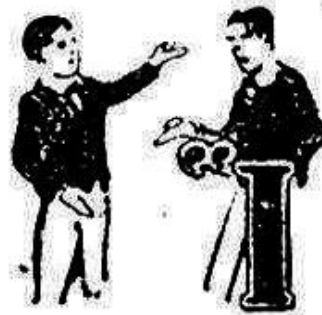
"Well?" said Christine. "Is that all?"

"All!" shouted Handforth. "We haven't started yet!"

"Then you'd better be sharp about it!" said Boots. "The bell for bedtime will go in a minute or two, and——"

"All right!" said Nipper. "It won't take me more than two minutes to explain, although it's totally unnecessary, since you know all about it. You've admitted one thing, and you'll have to admit the rest."

And the Fourth-Formers got ready to listen, wondering what in the world Nipper was about to say. For, in cold truth, not a single member of the Fourth had been across the Triangle the whole evening!



CHAPTER 17.

The Denial.

IN a nutshell, you caused the lights to go out in the Remove passage of the Ancient House," said Nipper quietly. "You collared Handforth & Co., Tregellis-West, and Watson and myself. You took us away to your Chamber of Horrors, and you gave us the choice of licking your boots or taking a horse-whipping."

"What!" shouted over half the Fourth.

"You heard me!" said Nipper.

"We did—and you're talking piffle!" said Boots curtly.

"Do you deny all this?"

"Yes, we do deny it!" retorted Boots. "It's only a made-up yarn——"

"It's not!" insisted Nipper. "After that you rubbed our heads with glue, and you fastened highly-coloured wigs on to our heads. It was a dirty trick—a cad's act. It took us an hour to get those wigs off, and to clean ourselves. We tore lots of our hair out, and our scalps are so tender that

we're still in agony. Is that what you call playing the game, Boots?"

But Buster Boots was looking at him in amazement.

"Great Scott!" he ejaculated. "You don't think that *we* did this, do you?"

"Who else did it?" asked Fullwood. "It was done by the New Klux Klan!"

"Rot!" said Buster. "It couldn't have been!"

"It was done by long-cloaked figures—figures wearing conical hats," replied Nipper. "And we came to the obvious conclusion that the New Klux Klan was responsible. Hadn't you sent us the warning, Boots?"

"Yes, but—"

"Then you do admit you sent those warnings?" shouted Handforth.

"Oh, hang it, yes!" said Boots. "But we didn't do this thing. You don't think we'd descend to that sort of game, do you?"

"It doesn't matter much who did it," replied Nipper quietly. "It was done by the New Klux Klan—and that's your own secret society, Boots. What position do you hold in this Klan?"

"I don't see that I need answer that question; but, if you're jolly curious, I'm the Grand Master," replied Boots gruffly. "But when you accuse us—"

"The Grand Master, eh?" said Handforth. "You rotter! What's the idea of standing there and denying that you took part in this rotten affair? You were there all the time!"

"I wasn't!" shouted Buster.

"Well, anyway, the fellow in charge of the operations called himself the Grand Master," said Nipper. "I rather think that's good enough, Boots. You've admitted that you sent those warning notes, and that you are the Grand Master. I rather think we can take the rest for granted."

"I should say we can!" agreed Fullwood, nodding.

"I'm sick of these chaps—for having the nerve to deny it all," put in Reggie Pitt tartly.

The Fourth-Formers were getting more and more angry.

"But we do deny it!" shouted Buster Boots. "We didn't do this job at all!"

"In that case, perhaps you'll be able to suggest who did?" asked Nipper. "If it wasn't you and your men, Boots, who's responsible?"

"How the dickens should I know?"

"You ought to know?" replied Nipper calmly. "These fellows who attacked us were members of the New Klux Klan!"

"Oh, what's the good of going all over it again?" demanded Handforth, in a disgusted voice. "They only deny everything, although we've got the proof. I'm fed up with the whole lot of them!"

"And we're fed up with you!" yelled a dozen Fourth-Formers.

"Until now I always thought you fellows were rather truthful," went on Handforth. "But you're nothing but fibbers—liars!"

A roar went up.

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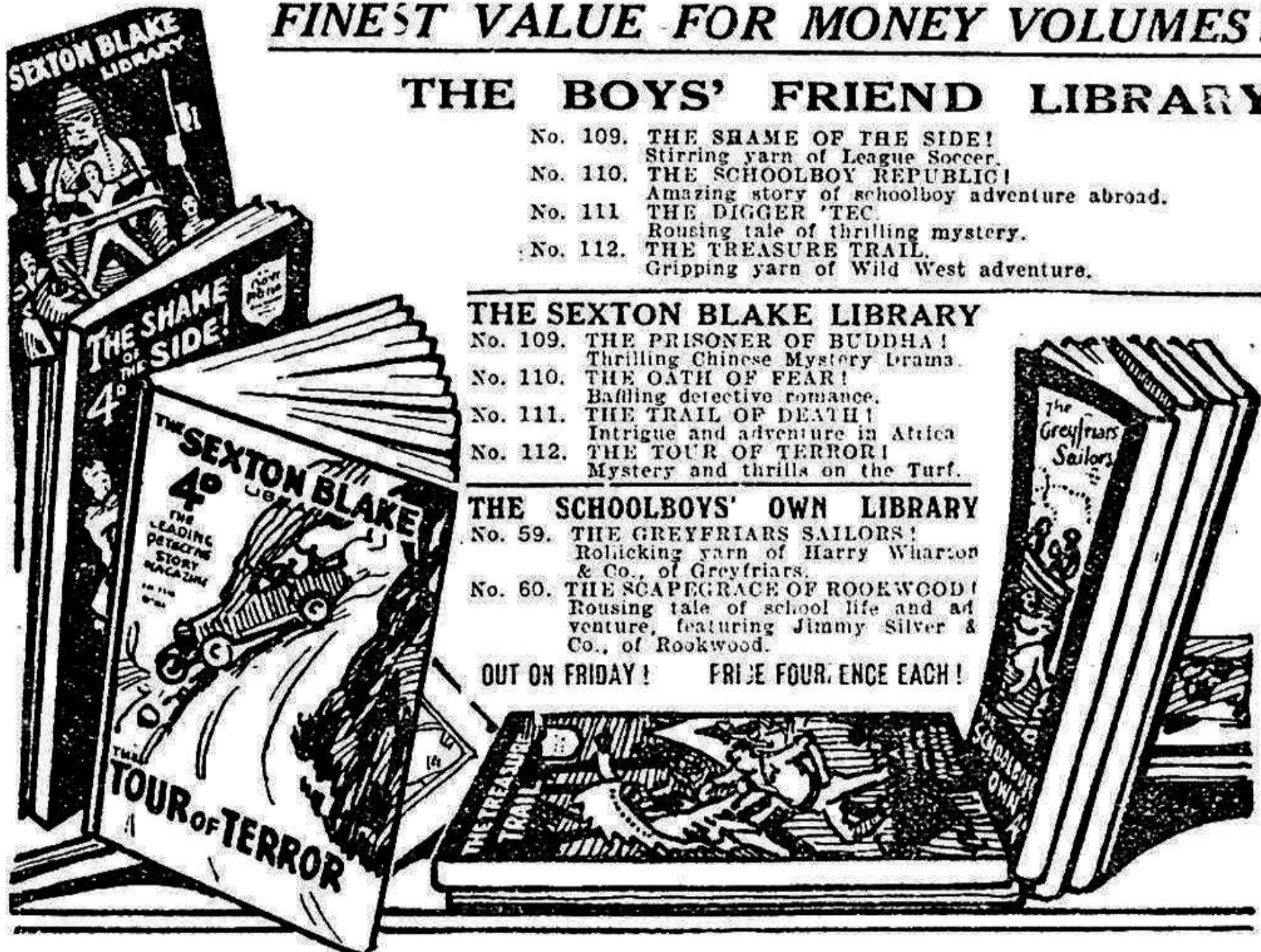
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OUT ON FRIDAY! FIVE FOURPENCE EACH!



"Grab him!"

"Get hold of Handy and bump him!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Stop it!" yelled Buster Boots. "Don't forget that these chaps have come here under the white flag. I'm not going to have any foul play——"

"Foul play is rather foreign to your nature, eh?" asked Fullwood tartly. "You don't know what it means, do you, Boots? My hat! I don't know how you can stand there and talk like that!"

Boots quivered with rage.

"You fellows had better get out while you're safe!" he said steadily. "You come here, and you make the most rotten accusations without any proof at all. You only know that you were attacked by some figures. They were all cloaked, and——"

"Hold on!" interrupted Nipper, with a queer note in his voice.

He strode across the common-room, and went to one of the window-sills. By sheer accident he had noticed something which stood there, half hidden by the woodwork in the corner. A minute later Nipper turned, and his eyes were blazing.

"You say we have no proof, Boots?" he asked. "What about this?"

"What is it?" asked Boots, staring.

"You ought to know—it's here, in your own quarters," replied Nipper. "If you're very curious, it's a pot of glue!"

"What!" shouted a number of Fourth-Formers.

"By George!" ejaculated Handforth. "They can't deny it any longer!"

Boots ran over, and looked at the glue-pot.

"I've never seen that in my life before!" he gasped.

"Oh, what's the use?" asked Nipper.

"I'm surprised at you, Buster—I'm jolly disappointed, too. I thought you were made of better stuff. Here's the glue-pot—the very one that was used in the New Klux Klan Chamber of Horrors. Why, there's even some bits of cotton stuff mixed in the glue—parts of those highly coloured wigs. And here it stands, in your common-room! We fellows were found out because Handforth was careless enough to leave some glue in his study when we glued you to your desks the other day. And now you've been found out by the same means—carelessness. This is quite enough for us!"

"More than enough!" said the other members of the deputation.

"But—but——" began Boots.

"We don't want to hear any more!" interrupted Nipper. "We came here under a flag of truce, and now we're going away. We wanted to ask you to play fair in future, but it doesn't seem to be much good. This feud seems to have robbed you of all sense of decency."

And the members of the deputation, cold and distant, walked out of the Modern House common-room, strode down the passage, and went out into the Triangle. They

found large numbers of Remove fellows waiting for them, half expecting them to be thrown out on their necks.

As the deputation went across the Triangle the juniors swarmed round, eagerly asking what had happened.

"Nothing's happened," replied Nipper. "But Boots denied all knowledge of that affair, and then we found the glue-pot in the common-room."

"By jingo!"

"Caught red-handed!"

"Yes, and we shouldn't have minded so much if they'd have owned up," went on Nipper. "But I'm fed up with them. I never thought that Boots was such a liar."

"Down with the Fourth!"

A wave of fresh anger swept through the ranks of the Remove. The two Forms, if anything, were more bitter against one another than ever before!

CHAPTER 18.

Ready for Action!



BUSTER BOOTS scratched his mop of red hair, and ran his fingers through it.

"It beats me!" he said blankly. "Those Remove

fellows really believe that we did that trick! And yet we don't know a thing about it! What the dickens does it mean?"

The common-room in the Modern House was in a turmoil.

Nipper & Co. had gone, and the Fourth-Formers were left to themselves. The whole thing was a mystery to them, since they had been in their own House throughout the entire evening. Mr. Horace Pycraft had seen to that! But neither Boots nor any of the others had had a chance to explain these circumstances to the Removites.

"It's not such a mystery to me," said Bray sourly. "I believe those Remove fellows faked up the whole yarn, just so that they would have something against us."

"Oh, draw it mild!" protested Bob Christine.

"But doesn't it look like it?" went on Bray. "What about that pot of glue? Who put it in this room? None of us here, I'll bet!"

"That's so!" admitted Boots.

"And who was the fellow who spotted it?" went on Bray eagerly. "Nipper! And why? Because he jolly well knew it was there! It was shoved through the window by one of those other Remove chaps, just so that there would be some so-called proof. The whole thing was a plant!"

"My only hat!"

"The rotters!"

"The mean, contemptible cads!"

The Fourth-Formers were only too ready to grasp at some sort of explanation, even though it might be fantastic. Percy Bray's theory certainly sounded possible. Most of

the Fourth-Formers grasped at it as though it were a positive certainty, and a fresh wave of resentment against the Remove swept through the Fourth. It coincided with the anger of the Remove. Without question the two Forms were very bitter against one another now.

But who were the real culprits?

That was a problem which nobody took the trouble to fathom. The reason for this was quite simple. The Remove took it for granted that the Fourth was guilty, and the Fourth accepted Percy Bray's view that the Remove had deliberately "framed" the affair. And so the problem was allowed to rest. Yet, naturally, somebody was responsible. Who were the unknown enemies who were working impartially against both sides? For these enemies seemed to attack the Remove and the Fourth just as the whim took them. Actually, it was a cunning, carefully-planned scheme to set the two Forms at one another's throats—and it was working like a dream! The feud was becoming fiercer and fiercer as the days went by.

"Well, anyhow, we shall have to be careful," said Buster Boots gruffly at last. "There goes the bed bell! No time for any plans now."

"What do you mean—we shall have to be careful?" asked Denny.

"Don't forget what happened last night," replied Boots.

"You think those chaps'll come again?"

"I think the Avengers will get on the track again," nodded Boots. "Don't forget, they have the advantage of us. The New Klux Klan has only just been formed, whereas the Remove secret society has been planned for two or three days, and it's now in full running order. We can't work any dodge on those chaps to-night."

"Why not?" asked a dozen voices.

"Because there isn't time to prepare it," replied Buster Boots. "We should only get ourselves into a horrible mess if we did anything in a hurry. That's the way to bring off a failure. And how do you think those Remove fellows would crow if we attempted to retaliate, and got caught for our pains? No, it's a much better policy to wait, and to prevent the Avengers from scoring another victory."

"You mean, we'd better lock all our doors to-night, or something?" asked Bob Christine.

"We'll go a step farther than that," replied Boots. "After lights-out, we'll get dressed up in our New Klux Klan costumes, and we'll remain on guard at almost every window in this House—every accessible window, anyhow. And there we'll keep watch, if necessary, until two o'clock in the morning."

"We shan't get any sleep if we do that," protested somebody.

"Rats!" retorted Boots. "There'll be a system of relief. Each fellow will watch for half an hour, and then he can go off to bed. He'll be relieved by somebody else. But we're not going to let those Avengers have another triumph!"

When the Fourth went up to bed the whole thing was definitely arranged. The war at St. Frank's was becoming more and more like a real war every day.

It had now got to the pass where guards were necessary, where the fortress had to be protected by watchers.

And soon after lights-out the members of the New Klux Klan became active.

There were nine windows where the raiders might possibly try to make an entry. Each of these nine windows was placed in charge of a Klansman. The first watch was from ten-thirty to eleven, and then from eleven to eleven-thirty, and so on.

Boots himself elected to remain awake all the time—as a kind of general. His task was to go from window to window, to keep his eye on all his lieutenants. He did not want any of them to go to sleep at their posts.

A signal was also arranged. In the event of a sudden attack by the enemy, the rest of the Fourth was to be hailed—that is, the rest of the Modern House Fourth. Armstrong and his East House cronies were, of course, out of all this. But Armstrong had stoutly declared that he would keep a similar watch in the East House.

Boots was doubtful of this, for Timothy Armstrong was very much of a windbag. As a leader he was rather a wash-out, and the East House section of the Fourth would have been in a poor way but for the guidance of Buster Boots.

And so the time went on, watch succeeding watch, until the hour of midnight had boomed out and had gone.

The night was very quiet. The school had long since settled down to sleep, and there were no lights showing from any windows. Outside, the stars were gleaming, and the moon was coming up over the trees beyond the Head's house. There was scarcely a breath of wind, and the air was mild. It was a very peaceful night indeed.

Gradually the guards in the Modern House fell to yawning. They were getting tired of this vigil. Obviously it was pointless, for the Ancient Order of Avengers made no sign. There was no indication that they were on the warpath.

But if they were—well, Boots & Co. were ready for them! Every window was guarded, and any approach would be seen in that moonlight long before the attackers got near to the Modern House walls.



CHAPTER 19.

The Surprise!

SO easy, you chaps! Not a sound, remember! When you get to the common-room, stay there, and wait for further orders."

"Right you are, Chief!"



Roughly Nipper, Handforth, and Pitt were thrust into the three tubs, after which the lids—each having a small hole to allow the head to pass through—were screwed down. The Removites were helpless—and the New Klux Klan could do their worst!

The Ancient Order of Avengers was in great force—twenty-five or thirty of them. So it seemed that Boots & Co.'s precautions were very necessary, after all! But just at that moment the Avengers were in a very peculiar spot.

In point of fact, they were strewn out in a long line, stretching almost from the Ancient House to the Modern House, but they were quite invisible to the vigilant watchers. They were invisible, because they were making the journey along the secret passage, far from the reach of any watching eyes!

It was the passage which Handforth had discovered, quite by accident, some days earlier. It reached from one of the old cellars in the Ancient House, passed under the Triangle, and came out in the Modern House—right against the Junior common-room. For hours during the night Nipper and one or two others had worked desperately. Dick Goodwin, the amateur carpenter of the Remove, had been actively engaged in this particular work, and the result was certainly gratifying.

For a cleverly-concealed door had been made, leading straight into the Junior com-

mon-room. It was at this point that the secret passage ended, and Nipper had been struck by the possibility of making an entry here—right into the Junior quarters. The work had been very successfully accomplished, for none of the Fourth-Formers had noticed any difference in the common-room. The particular section of the wall which had been converted into a door had been so cleverly contrived that it was almost impossible to detect the spot.

And now the Avengers were about to enter the enemy's territory—and to enter unknown to any of the Klansmen, although these latter were on guard!

Nipper was the first to open that secret panel, and a glance into the common-room told him that it was empty, as he had expected. The moonlight was streaming through one of the high windows, and the apartment looked very eerie and still.

Nipper crept in, and he was followed by the others in a long procession.

All of them were wearing the cloaks and hoods of the Avengers. They were all thoroughly disguised, and they knew exactly what their programme was to be. The previous night they had brought their victims

through this tunnel, but Boots & Co. had had no knowledge of it. With those black bags over their heads, they could not guess where they were being taken. Precisely the same programme was to be followed to-night, if all went well.

At length the Avengers were all present, and the panel was carefully closed again, so that there was no sign of its presence.

"Good!" murmured Nipper. "We're all here—and now we can get busy. But there's one thing I want to do first—before we start the actual raid. I want to creep out and scout round, in case any of these Fourth-Formers are on the alert. The rest of you stay here until I come back."

"That's a good idea," said Handforth. "I'll come with you."

"And that's a bad idea!" said Nipper calmly. "Sorry, old man, but I'd better go on this job alone."

"Rats!" said Handforth. "I'm coming."

"Number Two, kindly remember that the Chief has spoken!" said Nipper, in a deep, gruff voice. "The Chief has given his order, and no member of the Order must question his instructions. That is an agreed-upon rule of the Avengers!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Number Two, kindly shut up!"

"Absolutely, old bean!"

Handforth glared round at the other hooded figures through his eye-slits.

"Oh, all right!" he growled. "Just as you like! I won't say any more. I'll be a good little boy, and obey orders!"

A few chuckles went up, and Handforth subsided. Nipper softly opened the door, slipped through, and the others waited.

It was very fortunate that Nipper had thought of this simple little precaution, for he had hardly moved out of the space in front of the common-room doorway before he checked. He had caught sight of a figure at the end of the passage, against one of the windows. There it stood, grotesque and ghostly in the dim light which came through the window. There was something very uncanny about that robed figure, with its conical hat.

"My goodness!" murmured Nipper. "So these chaps are on the alert! I rather had an idea they were!"

At that moment another figure appeared, coming from one of the farther passages. It halted against the window, and Nipper strained his ears.

"All well?" came the voice of Boots.

"All well!" replied the other Klansman.

"No sign of the enemy."

"Good!" said Boots. "I don't think they'll come to-night. Still, it's just as well for us to be on guard."

He passed on, apparently on his way to another sentry-post. Nipper crept silently back into the Common-room and gave a warning hiss as two or three fellows started speaking.

"Shush!" murmured Nipper. "They're about!"

"What!"

"The Klansmen are on the watch!" breathed Nipper. "I believe there's one of them at every window—guarding the giddy place as though it were a fortress."

"Then—then we're done?" asked one of the Avengers.

"No, we're not!" replied Nipper. "But we shall have to divide ourselves into five or six little bands. We'll creep out of here, and then take different directions. We'll capture these guards one by one—springing on them by surprise. I think it'll be fairly easy, because they're not looking for an attack from within. Anyhow, let's get going—no sense in wasting time here."

"Good egg!" murmured Handforth. "Now and again, Nipper, you *do* get a sensible idea!"

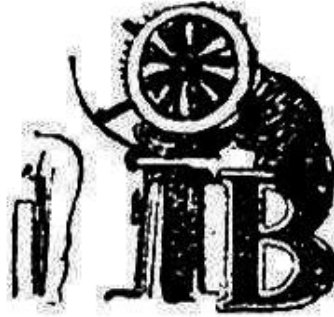
Softly the Avengers crept out.

Three minutes later the Klansman at the end window received the shock of his life. Without the slightest warning three figures jumped on him from the rear as he was pacing up and down. They bore him to the floor, they smothered his outcry at its birth, and they held him down. Swiftly he was rendered helpless, and then he was rushed away and placed beyond the reach of any of his fellow Klansmen. And almost exactly at the same time the other guards were similarly sprung upon, and rendered helpless.

The raid was a complete success. Every one of those sentries, including Boots himself, were captured, and all conveyed secretly to the common-room. But the prisoners did not know it was the common-room, for by this time those black bags had been placed over their heads, and they were helpless. Once again, Boots & Co. had fallen into the hands of the Avengers!

CHAPTER 20.

The Punishment!



BITTERNESS, intermingled with amazement, filled the mind of John Busterfield Boots.

In spite of all his precautions, the Avengers had triumphed! It was a stunning thought. But how—how? Buster Boots was utterly puzzled, and well he might be! He knew that every available window had been guarded, and that all the sentries were alert and awake. And yet the Avengers had come in, and had sprung upon them all by surprise. It was a complete and absolute mystery.

Boots was furious with himself, too. Somehow, he felt that he had blundered somewhere. These Removites should never have been allowed to get in. Not that it was any good crying over spilt milk. The Avengers were on the scene, and they would have to be reckoned with.

As on the previous occasion, Boots and his companions had no idea as to their direc-

NEXT WEDNESDAY!

**“DRUMMED
OUT OF
ST. FRANK’S!”**

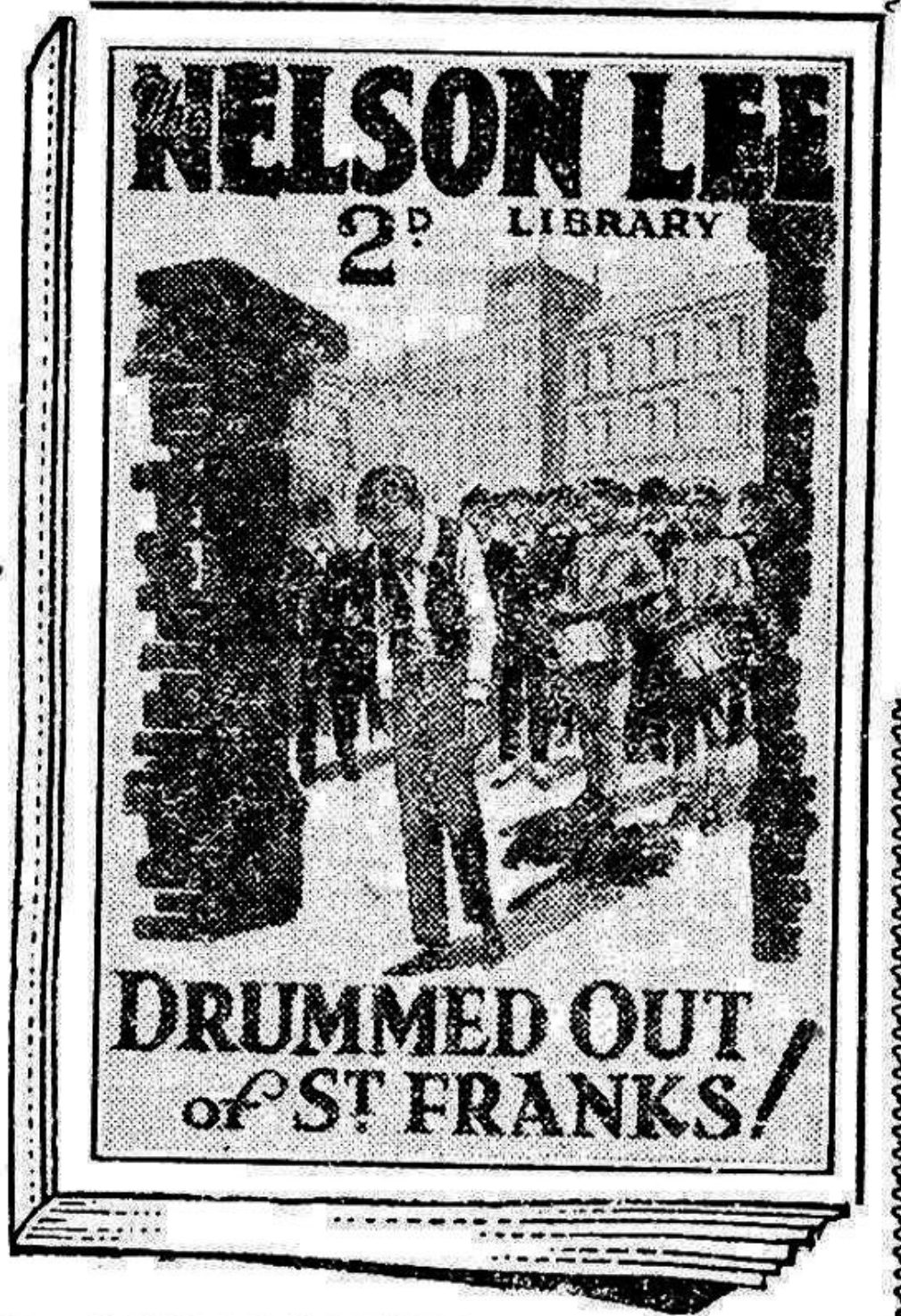
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ORDER IN ADVANCE!

tion, or their destination. They only knew that they felt a chilly period, although it did not seem as though they were outside. There was an excellent reason for this. Where it felt chilly, they were in the tunnel, below the Triangle. But not one of the Fourth-Formers even guessed, or hazarded, the truth. They hadn't the faintest idea they were being taken into the Avengers' punishment chamber by means of a secret passage.

Yet the punishment chamber was only that old cellar, long since disused. Nipper & Co. had converted it into their headquarters, and they had made a thoroughly good job of it. The cellar, with its drapings, and its air of mystery, was unrecognisable as its real self. None of the prisoners would be able to guess a thing.

Ten members of the Fourth had been seized, and they knew what was to follow as soon as they found themselves in the punishment chamber of the Avengers.

Their headgear was removed, and they found themselves surrounded by the hooded figures.

"John Busterfield Boots, you are the Grand Master of the New Klux Klan," said

Nipper, in his deep, false voice. "You have admitted this, and now you must stand your trial, together with your companions. You are all accused of descending to dirty trickery, and you are about to receive the punishment that your action warrants."

"We deny it!" said Boots hotly. "We didn't get hold of you this evening—"

"Enough!" said the Chief. "You are even now wearing the same robes that you wore before. There can be no mistaking the costume of the New Klux Klan! So you are only making matters worse by these pointless denials."

"You—you idiot!" roared Boots, exasperated. "I know you're Nipper all right—I don't recognise your voice, but you can't be anybody else! I tell you that we never touched you this evening! We were in the House the whole time—all of us! Mr. Pycraft was on the scent, and we daren't move!"

"A likely story!" sneered several of the Avengers.

"But it's true!" shouted all the prisoners.

"We cannot accept this statement," continued the Chief sternly. "You handled your

victims in the most vicious manner, but you need not fear that you are about to be handled in the same way. The Ancient Order of Avengers always fights cleanly."

"And so do we!" retorted Boots. "Those fellows who grabbed you before—goodness knows who they were—were fakes. They must have heard about our New Klux Klan, and they got some costumes ready, and put them on. Then they captured you, and made out that——"

"Be silent!"

"Absolutely! I—I mean——"

"That's enough, Boots!"

John Busterfield's story had sounded altogether too thin—too feeble. It seemed ridiculous to suppose that some outsiders had donned the costume of the Klansmen. And, because this was the actual truth, nobody believed it. It seemed too incredible! For it is often the fact that the truth is stranger than an invented tale.

"But there's another idea in my mind," went on Boots harshly. "I believe that you fellows faked the whole story. You weren't captured by any Klansmen at all—and that glue was shoved in our common-room on purpose to lend colour to your story. It was a frame-up from start to finish, and——"

"Be silent!" commanded the Chief. "Words of this sort will not serve you. You are all about to be punished. Whether you are the actual participators in the head-glueing episode is of no account. You are all members of the New Klux Klan, and that is sufficient. You must suffer for the sins of your society. And, here and now, you are to be swished."

"And let us add that the spring of this mechanical swisher has been strengthened," said one of the other Avengers, in a voice that was exceedingly like Handforth's. "By George! You'll feel it this time, you rotters!"

"Go ahead with it!" snapped Boots. "But you'll be sorry for this! You're punishing us for something we never did—you're having your revenge for——"

"That will be enough," interrupted the Chief. "We shall not descend to any glueing episodes. Our policy is to keep to straight-forward methods. If we use glue at all it is in a legitimate manner. And always remember that every time that the New Klux Klan performs a vicious act the punishment will be by swishings, and these swishings will be more and more severe. To-night, for example, you will feel this cane very forcibly."

"You won't be able to sit down for a week!" said Number Two, with satisfaction.

"Always it will be the punishment chamber—and swishings!" continued the Chief. "Not once shall we descend to questionable methods. You must realise that now—at once. And when you are being punished by the mechanical swisher—as will happen straight away—remember what is to follow if you adopt any further baseness. There

can be no escape from the Avengers. Every time they win! They are all-conquering—all powerful!"

Buster Boots & Co. were rather inclined to believe it. At all events, that mechanical swisher was all-powerful!

For the next ten minutes some very painful work proceeded—painful work which it is hardly necessary to describe in close detail. It is quite sufficient to say that when it was all over Boots & Co. were thoroughly disinclined to sit down!

CHAPTER 21.

Turning the Tables!



NOT until the prisoners had been escorted back into the Modern House were their head-caps removed, and then they found

themselves in one of the lower passages—where all was still and silent.

The Avengers had adopted exactly the same system as before.

They left their victims bound by the ankles, and it took Boots & Co. many minutes to untie the hard knots. By then, of course, the Avengers had mysteriously faded away into the night.

But Nipper & Co. had not used the secret passage this time.

There were several reasons why they shouldn't—the chief one being that Nipper feared that some of the other Klansmen would be on the watch, perhaps from the upper windows. If the Avengers were not seen departing there would be inquiries by Boots, and perhaps that secret panel in the Common-room would be discovered. Boots was a shrewd fellow, and he could easily put two and two together.

But if he heard from one of his lieutenants that the Avengers had gone in the ordinary way, creeping out into the night, he would still be unsuspecting of the real truth.

In addition to all this Pitt and Grey and Singleton and the other West House Removites were keen upon getting back into their own quarters. So it was no good for them to go into that Ancient House cellar. The Avengers, therefore, took their leave by various lower windows, and each party had been instructed to get back to bed as quickly and as silently as possible.

About the last three to leave were Nipper, Handforth and Pitt. They happened to make their exit by the same window, and after they had crept out from the shadows of the East Square, they paused in the Triangle to have a word or two. By this time most of the Avengers had gone—had silently entered their own Houses.

"Well, it was a big success, you chaps," murmured Nipper contentedly. "We've punished Boots & Co. for what they did, and I rather think they'll smart for several days."

"It wasn't bad—but it didn't go far enough," growled Handforth. "We shall have to think of something more original. This swishing stunt is all very well, but it'll get stale. We ought to invent something more drastic."

"Such as scalping 'em, or burning them at the stake, eh?" grinned Reggie Pitt. "No, Handy, it won't do. We've got to stick to their clean methods. After all, there's really nothing to beat a good old swishing. It is particularly effective if it follows a previous swishing. These Fourth-Formers will soon get fed-up with it, and they'll moderate their activities."

"That's just what I mean," agreed Nipper. "No, we don't want to alter our tactics, Handy, old man. As far as I can see, they're very satisfactory. But I'm rather puzzled about Boots. It's queer, how he keeps denying his guilt."

"I'm fed up with him!" said Handforth gruffly. "I thought Boots was a better chap, but this feud has made him degenerate."

"Of course, we may be wronging him," went on Nipper softly.

"What do you mean?"

"Well, perhaps those East House rotters are responsible," went on Nipper. "Most of the worst members of the Fourth are in the East House, you know. And, naturally,

Buster told everybody in the Fourth about his plans to form a New Klux Klan. Perhaps Marriott and Merrell, and some of those other bounders, got up that stunt on their own, without telling Boots about it?"

"That's likely, of course," admitted Pitt. "But it doesn't make any real difference. Boots is the leader of the Klux Klan, and he must suffer for what the Klux Klan does."

"Naturally," agreed Nipper. "So we can feel perfectly comfortable—knowing that we have punished the right fellow. Well, we'd better be getting back into bed. The others have all gone. So-long, Reggie—see you in the morning, and then we can think out something for the next attack on the enemy."

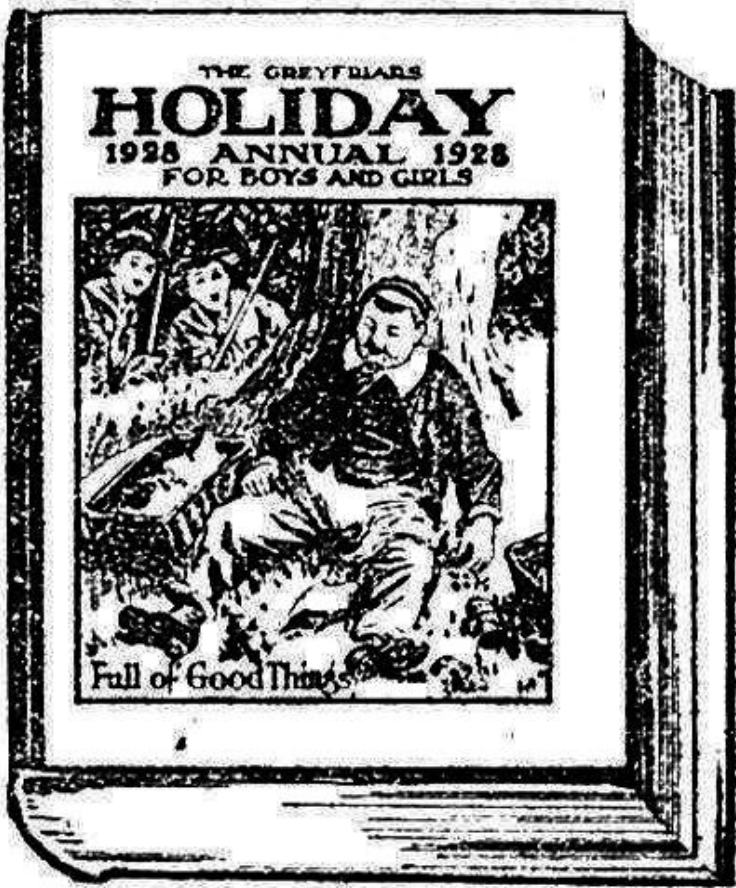
"Right-ho!" said Reggie. "I'll be getting along—"

He paused. A sudden padding sound had made itself heard, accompanied by the shuffling of loose gravel. The next second a number of figures loomed up out of the gloom—suddenly, dramatically.

"Look out!" gasped Handforth. "The enemy!"

The second surprise attack that night!

But now the tables were turned, and it was the Avengers who were surprised! A band of nine or ten Klansmen were turned upon them, and although the three Removites put up a good fight, they had no chance.



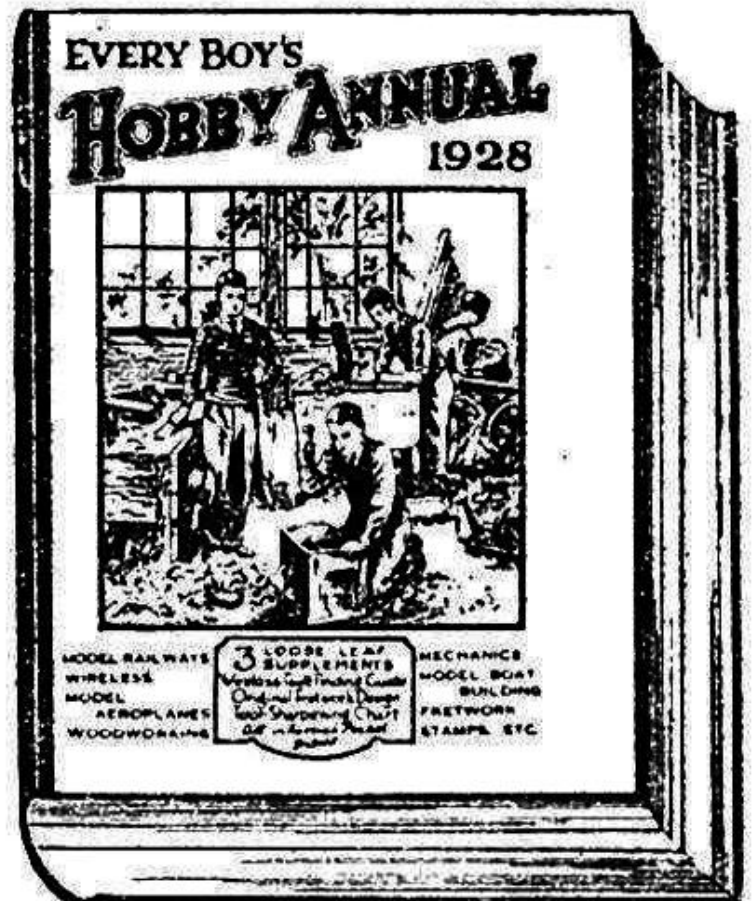
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For these Klansmen were obviously of the wrong sort! At the very outset they adopted foul methods. The Avengers were tripped up, they were kicked on the shins, and sent crashing to the ground by every dirty piece of trickery. There was no hope for them against such methods.

And now Nipper began to wonder more than ever.

For, obviously, these fellows could not be Boots & Co.—they could not be Christine, or Clapson, or any of the other Modern House contingent. There was only one possible alternative.

They were East House Fourth-Formers!

Not a word was spoken. These mysterious Klansmen whirled their victims off, and there was no rest until they found themselves deep within the recesses of the shrubbery, in the corner of the Triangle. Here all was dark. The moonlight failed to penetrate the foliage—for many of these trees here were yews and firs, and they never lost their leaves.

"You—you rotters!" hissed Handforth. "We know who you are this time! Armstrong and Merrell and you other East House rotters! If you start any more of your rotten behaviour——"

"I think they've started already!" groaned Reggie Pitt. "Somebody hacked me on the shin, and I've lost about three inches of skin!"

"You cads!" said Nipper. "Haven't you any sense of decency? Can't——"

"Be silent!" said one of the Klansmen.

Nipper started.

The voice! It was the same voice that had spoken earlier—during that head-glueing episode! The voice of the Grand Master! Clearly, then, Boots & Co. could not have been in that previous affair. Then who was this fellow who had falsely called himself the Grand Master?

Not that it really mattered. These fellows were Klansmen, and they were intent upon treating their victims in a drastic fashion.

"You have just scored a victory," said the Grand Master gloatingly. "But now, my friends, we shall score a victory. We shall pay you back for what you have just done to us! You're surprised that we've got out so soon, aren't you?"

"My only hat!" muttered Pitt. "Then you are Boots?"

"Am I?" said the Grand Master, with a chuckle. "Why should I deny it? Why keep up the pretence? Of course I'm Boots—and now I mean to get my own back!"



CHAPTER 22.

The Vengeance of the New Klux Klan!

BOOTTS!

The Grand Master had admitted his identity! And there was no real reason why he should not be Buster Boots—for there had been quite sufficient

time for the Klansmen to gather, and to make this sudden attack. Nipper realised, rather bitterly, that he and his two companions had dallied unnecessarily while they chatted over the recent events. That delay had cost them dearly—and was apparently to cost them more dearly still.

For the methods of the New Klux Klan were weird and wonderful.

"There must be no waste of time!" said the Grand Master, in a gloating voice. "These idiots were content to swish us, but we're not so easily pleased! Not by long chalks! We're going to show them something new—something original! The New Klux Klan is always up-to-date!"

"We're not content with just a silly mechanical contrivance to deliver an ordinary caning!" said one of the other Klansmen.

Every word that was uttered went to prove that these very fellows were those who had just been in the hands of the Avengers. They knew all about it—they spoke as if they were the victims. And surely it was obvious that their leader was John Busterfield Boots himself?

The New Klux Klan could not have captured three better prisoners, for they were the leaders of the Remove forces—Nipper and Handforth, of the Ancient House, and Reggie Pitt, of the West House! They were, indeed, the brains of the Ancient Order of Avengers. And yet their capture had been quite natural. The three "generals" had been having a word together on the success of their enterprise—never dreaming that they would fall so quickly into the hands of the enemy.

"Let the work proceed," said the Grand Master.

The captors had visions of being treated to further doses of glue, or something of the same kind. But they were wrong. The Grand Master had been quite correct when he had stated that his methods were original.

For, much to their surprise, the helpless trio were thrust into three tubs. These had evidently been all prepared. They were butter-tubs, by the look of them, probably secured from the rubbish heap in the corner of one of the paddocks.

"Look here, what's the idea?" demanded Handforth aggressively. "You silly idiots! If you think you're going to bottle me up in here——"

"Either be silent, or have a handful of earth rammed down your throat!" said the Grand Master. "You can choose!"

"Go to the dickens!" snorted Handforth. "I won't be silent for you, or for anybody else. I'm not going to be shut up——"

But he was. Three of the Klansmen grabbed up handfuls of earth, and rubbed it into Handforth's face—a great deal of the soil entering his mouth. He was effectually silenced. The Klansmen were utterly reckless in their actions.

The next move was even more curious than the first. For lids were produced. They were

stout lids, and they all fitted into the tops of the tubs. And in each lid there was a hole—just large enough to allow the victim's head to pass through.

Then those lids were screwed into position. Nailing would have been easier and quicker, but it would also have been noisy. The screws were driven home, and the predicament of the three Removites was very real indeed.

They were not Lound in any way, but they were quite helpless. In their cramped positions they could do very little to free themselves. And any movement—any violent movement—brought their necks into contact with the rough edges of the hole in the lid.

They could make no outcry, either, for they were all gagged—scarves being tied round their mouths.

And then they waited, wondering what on earth was to come next.

They were soon to know.

Amazingly enough, scaffold poles were produced—three of them. Each tub was then roughly rolled over on to its side, causing much pain to the prisoners, after which the tubs were roped to the tops of these scaffold poles. Special supports had been provided on the poles, so it was only necessary to hoist the tubs into position, and to rope them securely.

And then, one by one, the tubs were carried bodily away, and hoisted into an upright position. All the Klansmen took part in this work, for it was a ticklish business. Indeed, it was a dangerous business. For if one of those poles had swayed over, crashing to the ground with its human freight, the consequences might have been grave.

But this disaster did not happen. At the end of half an hour, the three poles were standing in a row, side by side, their bases embedded in the hard ground of the Triangle. Those holes must have been dug earlier—in preparation for this very event.

And there stood the three poles, grotesque-looking in the bright moonlight, with the tubs perched on the top of them. From the tops of the tubs emerged the heads of the three prisoners. It was all very weird and strange.

By this time the scarves had been removed, and Nipper and Handforth and Pitt were free to shout—if they wanted to. But shouting was the very last thing they thought of. It would be terrible if they were even seen now. For what would the masters do if they came down and discovered them in this dreadful predicament? What of the humiliation? And, above all, what would the headmaster say? He would know at once that these three juniors had been taking part in the warfare, and they would be severely punished.

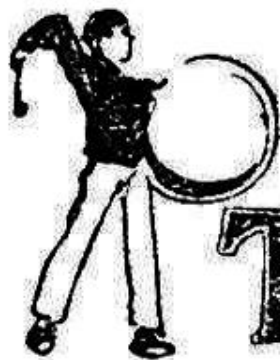
"We've got to go through with it!" muttered Nipper. "It's no good shouting, Handy; it's no good expecting to be helped. I expect the rotters mean to leave us here all night!"

"And we can't help ourselves, either!" said Reggie Pitt. "If we struggle, these poles

might sway over, and that would be jolly serious. Any sudden jar, and the rough edge of this hole would practically decapitate us! We're in an awful mess! The rotters! The cads! There's no limit to their rotten tricks!"

"Perhaps Church and McClure will come along!" said Handforth hopefully. "They're bound to look for me. I expect they're anxious already. And if they only come out, and spot us here, they'll soon bring some of the other fellows to rescue us. It's the only hope—"

He broke off abruptly, startled. For a sudden tremendous racket had burst forth—a fearsome din, which awoke all the echoes of the old school!



CHAPTER 23.

The Strategy of Browne!

THERE was something alarming in that sudden noise, which burst out so dramatically and unexpectedly.

And then Nipper, screwing his head round with much pain, saw the reason for it. Some little distance away, the Klansmen were beating sticks upon old tin cans. They were using rattles, and they were blowing whistles, and adopting every other method of making a nerve-shattering din.

And there, in the moonlight, stood those three elevated tubs, each of which bore the same placard: "The Vengeance of the New Klux Klan."

"My only hat!" ejaculated Nipper blankly.

For he could see the real purport of this sudden noise. It startled him—it staggered him.

These rotters meant to arouse the whole school, so that the masters would come down, and find the three boys in this predicament! And what would the inevitable result be? There would be an inquiry, and Nipper and Handforth and Pitt would be searchingly questioned. They would be compelled to admit that they had been taking part in an affair that night, after lights-out.

Expulsion!

It would mean nothing less than a public flogging at the very least, and in all probability, the sack for the ringleader.

There was another phase of the matter, too. The New Klux Klan would be inquired into, and, in all probability, Boots himself would be compelled to admit that he was the Grand Master. And perhaps he would get the sack, too! In that case, how could Boots himself have perpetrated this outrage? And if it wasn't Boots, who was it? There were many mysterious points about the whole affair, and Nipper found himself in a muddle. He was puzzled tremendously. Not that there was any time to think over the matter just then.

"This has done it!" shouted Pitt. "Look! There are lights coming up already! The masters will be along in a couple of minutes, and then we shall be cut down and taken in—"

doors and questioned, and— Oh, my goodness! My brain's reeling! But this looks like the end of things for us!"

"Oh, the beasts!" said Handforth, struggling wildly. "The awful cads! I never thought that those Fourth Form chaps had so much caddishness in them!"

He ceased struggling abruptly, for that pole of his was swaying to and fro in an ominous manner. And Handforth was very fond of his life. He did not want to crash down, and to receive a broken neck for his pains.

By this time, the racket had completely died down, and the Klansmen had mysteriously vanished into the gloom. They had done their work, and now they are making off. Other figures were appearing—Removites by the dozen. They came swarming out, and they soon learned the reason for the noise. They were startled to see their leaders in those barrels.

"Quick!" shouted Nipper desperately. "Don't ask any questions—cut us down. Lower these poles gently, and let us get free!"

"By George!" roared Handforth. "That's the idea. There might be time before the masters come!"

It seemed a hopeless enough dream, but the juniors had an ally, unknown to them. For William Napoleon Browne, of the Fifth, looking out from his window, saw the three tubs, and he saw the Remove fellows crowding round, excited and bewildered.

And Browne, with his usual quickness, grasped the situation.

"What's all the noise about?" asked Stevens, Browne's friend of the Fifth.

"Ask no questions, Brother Horace," murmured Browne. "But I rather fancy that our young friends of the Remove have been at war with the Fourth. There is trouble, and there is liable to be disaster unless some swift action is taken."

"But we can't do anything!" said Stevens, aghast. "We'd better not interfere—"

"We shall not interfere, brother," murmured Browne. "Let me advise you to go back to bed. Leave this entirely in my hands."

And he was off, before Stevens could ask him any questions.

Browne was bent upon a little strategic move, and he was hoping that it would be successful.

He dashed downstairs, shouting at the top of his voice.

He tore open the main door of the Ancient House, and ran out into the Triangle, still yelling. By this time one or two masters were beginning to appear. They came out in their dressing-gowns and slippers, sleepy and bewildered.

"This way!" Browne was yelling. "This way!"

And, in the confusion, prefects and masters and others were following him. Only the Remove fellows remained in the Triangle; these had now succeeded in getting those poles down, and in dragging them away to the cover of the shrubbery. Swiftly the

victims were being released from those tubs.

"Whatever is the matter?" shouted Mr. Stockdale, the housemaster of the Modern House, as he joined the throng. "Browne!"

"Follow me!" Browne was roaring. "Follow me, brothers, and all will be well! There is base work afoot, and it is our duty to keep going."

Other prefects, coming out of the various Houses, heard Browne's voice, and it was only natural that they should rush in that direction, where all the excitement seemed to be taking place.

Nipper, of course, had immediately sensed Browne's strategic move, and he was taking full advantage of it.

"Good old Browne!" he said huskily. "He's doing this to help us, you chaps. Quick! Let's get rid of these tubs and things, and then join the others. Smuggle our cloaks and things away somewhere. As long as nothing is actually seen, we shall only be taken for the ordinary chaps, and nobody will ever know what has just happened. Good old Browne!"

"Absolutely!" said Archie Glenthorne. "Good gad! Just listen to his voice, laddies! He's still shouting with the same old vim and lustiness."

This was true enough. Browne was doing the thing thoroughly.



CHAPTER 24.

Thanks to Browne!

WITH kindly consideration the moon had now gone in, leaving the school grounds very dim and gloomy. Nipper and Pitt and the others were grateful for this sudden gloom. It enabled them to complete their operations.

"My only hat!" said Nipper at last. "We've got out of those tubs, and we're free, and not a single master or a prefect has come near us!"

"They're all following old Browne," grinned Pitt.

"We're safe so far!" went on Nipper. "But I don't think we'd better remain out."

"Wouldn't it be better to join the crowd?" asked Handforth. "Wouldn't it look more natural?"

"It might, but it's not worth it," replied Nipper. "Our best policy is to get straight back into our bed-rooms. It's a fine chance now, with everybody in confusion. We know we shall be safe in our bed-rooms."

And so off they went, heartily thankful for the unexpected deliverance. The schemes of the New Klux Klan had gone completely awry, but solely owing to the intervention of William Napoleon Browne. The Klansmen had intended their victims to be discovered by all the masters and prefects. As it was, nobody but the Removites knew of

those tubs and those scaffold-poles. They had acted with much swiftness, and their efforts were rewarded.

While they scrambled back into their Houses, William Napoleon Browne had come to a halt in the centre of Inner Court, and crowds of seniors were swarming round him. Mr. Stockdale was there, too, and Mr. Pagett, of the Fifth, and Mr. Pycraft, of the Fourth, and one or two others. Nelson Lee had seen quite a lot of the events in the Triangle, but he had discreetly remained indoors. None of those juniors knew how sportsmanlike the schoolmaster-detective had been during that tense quarter of an hour.

And Browne, surrounded by the shouting crowd, appreciated that he was in a rather ticklish position. But he was perfectly cool. He was quite enjoying himself.

"What's it all about, Browne?" demanded Fenton, of the Sixth. "Who made all that noise? And why were you telling us to follow you?"

"A lithe form ran in this direction, brothers!" said Browne impressively. "A lithe, active form—manly and powerful. It came into Inner Court, and then, alas, the moon went in!"

Browne thought it unnecessary to mention that he was referring to his own form.

"There have been mysterious disturbers of the peace!" he continued. "I was awakened by various uncouth sounds, and I have been wondering. Possibly some roysterers on their way home from the local club. Perchance a band of charabanc enthusiasts. Who can tell? We only know that our sleep was rudely shattered."

Mr. Pagett pushed forward, and looked at Browne very suspiciously. Mr. Pagett was Browne's Form-master, and he knew something of this youth.

"Enough of this bunkum, Browne!" said Mr. Pagett testily. "We have all been greatly disturbed, and we were led to believe that you were on the track of the marauders."

"Alack, sir, I have failed!" said Browne sadly. "For there is no disturber of the peace here. We have gone astray, I fear. But let us search the school grounds thoroughly. Let us not give up hope. Follow me, and perchance we shall still meet with some success."

And Browne, knowing that the juniors had had time to complete their work, led the way back into the Triangle, from there into the East Square, and round by the chapel, and so into the West Square.

But everything was quiet, except for the juniors who hung out of their dormitory windows. All sorts of inquiries were shouted. And then, in the middle of it, the headmaster appeared.

But nobody could give him any explanation. The whole thing appeared to be a scare—a lot of excitement over nothing.

"Everybody must return to bed!" said Dr. Stafford angrily. "Upon my word! I

have never known such an affair in my life! The whole school disturbed in the middle of the night—disturbed and brought out of bed. Who is responsible? What is the meaning of all this?"

But nobody could answer him, and the mystery was liable to remain a mystery for all time.

By the skin of their teeth the juniors had got back into bed, and there was no evidence of that recent happening. Browne had saved them. And the New Klux Klan was defeated of its object.

But who were the members of this New Klux Klan? Boots—Christine—Armstrong? Who was the leader? Somehow, Nipper found it impossible to accept Buster Boots as the young hooligan who had directed the operations.

Later on, when the school had quietened down and everybody had gone back to bed, Browne came along to Nipper's dormitory and looked in.

"Is all well, brothers?" he inquired softly.

"Good old Browne!" murmured Nipper. "Thanks awfully, old man!"

Browne affected to be surprised.

"What is this?" he asked kindly. "Why are you thanking me, Brother Nipper? Surely there must be some error?"

"I don't think there is; but you can have it your own way, if you like," smiled Nipper. "Thank goodness we got out of that mess, that's all!"

Browne nodded.

"I must confess that for one murky moment I feared that you were all very much in the soup," he said. "However, the affair is over, and we will say no more. But I would urge you to conduct your warfare in a less hectic fashion, brothers. Pray remember that I cannot always be relied upon to dash out in the middle of the night, and to lead the populace round in circles."

And Browne went off, chuckling.

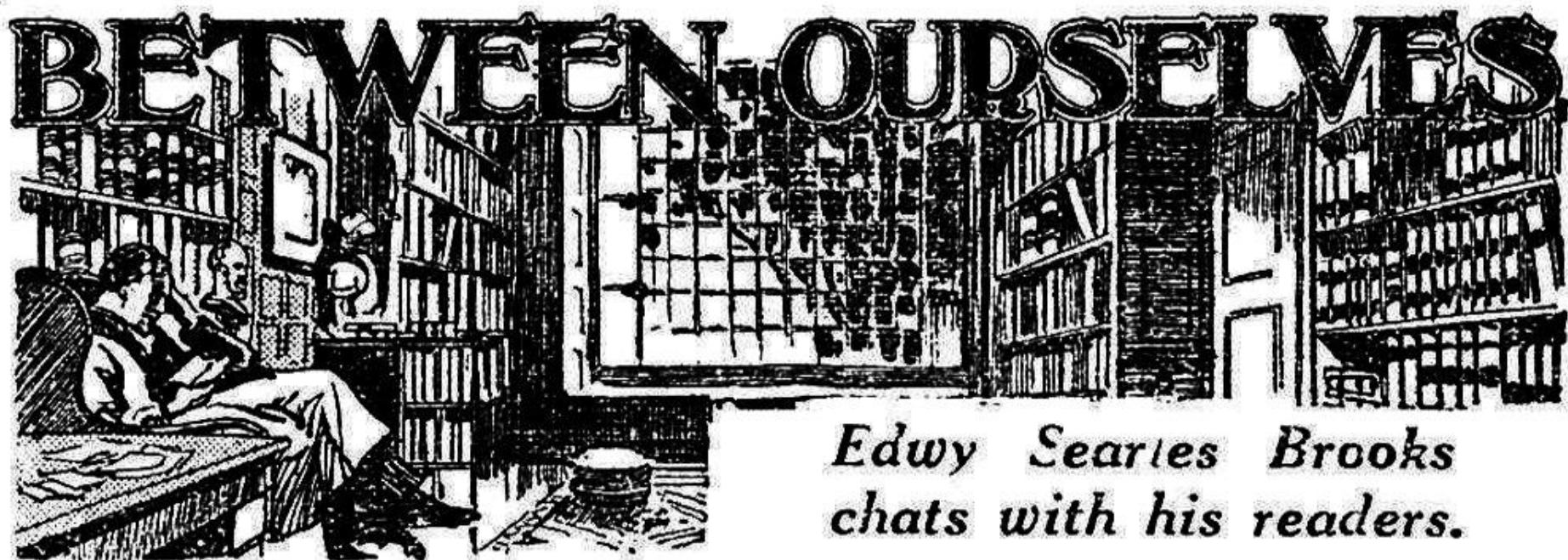
The others, after a little further talk, dropped asleep. But Nipper lay in bed for quite a time, thinking—thinking deeply.

A tiny doubt was beginning to creep into his mind. There was a mystery here, and there seemed to be no explanation. There was something about the New Klux Klan which needed a lot of inquiring into. And Boots' stout denials had been significant, too. Yes, undoubtedly something was wrong.

Nipper fell to sleep at last, with a vague feeling that the great feud between the Remove and the Fourth would soon reach a dramatic climax.

THE END.

(Nipper's quite right! Matters DO reach a thrilling climax, as you will see when you read next week's exciting story, "Drummed Out of St. Frank's!" On no account must you miss this fine yarn. Make sure of reading it by placing an order with your news-agent—NOW!



*Edwy Searles Brooks
chats with his readers.*

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pleased to comment upon such remarks as are should be addressed: EDWY SEARLES BROOKS, LIBRARY, The Fleetway House, Farringdon have my personal attention, and all will be note that the acknowledgments cannot appear my hands. Letters of very special merit will be name. Communications which name writer's age photo exchange offer is open indefinitely: my auto-please.—E.S.B.

HOW'S the enthusiasm working up? Are you all prepared to whack out that extra twopence, as I suggested in my chat of last week? But wait a minute! Perhaps some of you didn't read last week's chat, so I'd better give the details over again. And if you did read my remarks a refresher won't do you any harm.

Well, to be brief (that'll be a change for me, won't it?), I have recently been writing some stories in conjunction with Mr. Martin Clifford, the popular author of the St. Jim's stories in the "Gem Library." Mind you, Mr. Clifford's stories will be solely confined to his own characters—and in just the same way my St. Frank's stories will be confined to my characters. And yet, at the same time, there will be a certain link between the two series, which will run in the Old Paper and in the "Gem," over the same period of weeks

Now, to get down to facts. This new series will commence in the issue dated September 17th—that is, in about two weeks' time. And what I want you to do is this. I want every loyal and enthusiastic reader to buy an extra copy of No. 72, dated September 17th. As it is the first of a new series, it will be an ideal issue to give away to a non-reader. So many of you have started reading my stories accidentally that perhaps there are thousands of other chaps (and girls, too) of all ages from seven to seventy, who may like my particular kind of yarn.

You may wonder why I am referring to this two weeks in advance. Well, the reason is a simple one. If you all do buy an extra copy that week, there will be a tremendous demand—and, in fact, there won't be enough copies to go round. At least, there won't unless special steps are taken beforehand. That's why I'm telling you now. So everybody who is enthusiastic enough to fall in with this idea of mine, and to buy an extra copy, must order that extra copy at once. If you don't order it, you probably won't get it. So will you please run round to your newsagent's, or send the footman, or somebody, and order an extra copy of No. 72, dated September 17th. In this way, you will be assured of getting your two copies—one for yourself, and one to give away. And be sure of giving it to a fellow, or a girl, who has never read a story in the Old Paper. That's the vital point, remember. Give

it to somebody who is an absolute stranger to the St. Frank's characters. And, perhaps—who knows?—he or she may become another regular reader. Think of the good service you will be doing to the Old Paper by this one little act! And look here, everybody! Don't say to yourself: "Well, I needn't trouble, because all the others will do it." For that would mean that the whole thing would fizzle out. No, I want every reader to buy an extra copy.

Terence O'Grady (Dungannon), Maurice Cavill (North Finchley), Grace Forster* (Lowestoft), George Burgess (Arundel), Dorothy J. Smith* (Edinburgh), Leslie Heslop (Manchester), Norman Carter (Darlington), "S. P." (Newmarket), S. Cohen (Leeds), "Leslie"* (Golders Green), "Memoria"* (West Calder, Midlothian), H. Foord (S.E.1), Albert Borrow (Barnsbury), Terence Sullivan* (Tufnell Park), A. Clive (S.E.15), Reginald Quarrell* (Yeovil), F. M. Ambler (Dulwich), A. C. Cleeve-Sculthorpe* (Errington, British Columbia), Alan B. Bresnahan* (Caulfield, Victoria, Aus.), Harry Baxter* (Uttoxeter).

If you want my photograph, Terence O'Grady, you can certainly have it—providing you send me one of yours first. It will be quite all right if your baby niece is included in the snapshot.

I would like to send you my photo, in exchange for yours, Maurice Cavill, but how the dickens can I do it? All you've got at the top of your letter is the date, and the post-mark on the envelope is "North Finchley, N.12." So please let me have your full address. And don't blame me, in the meantime, for keeping you waiting.

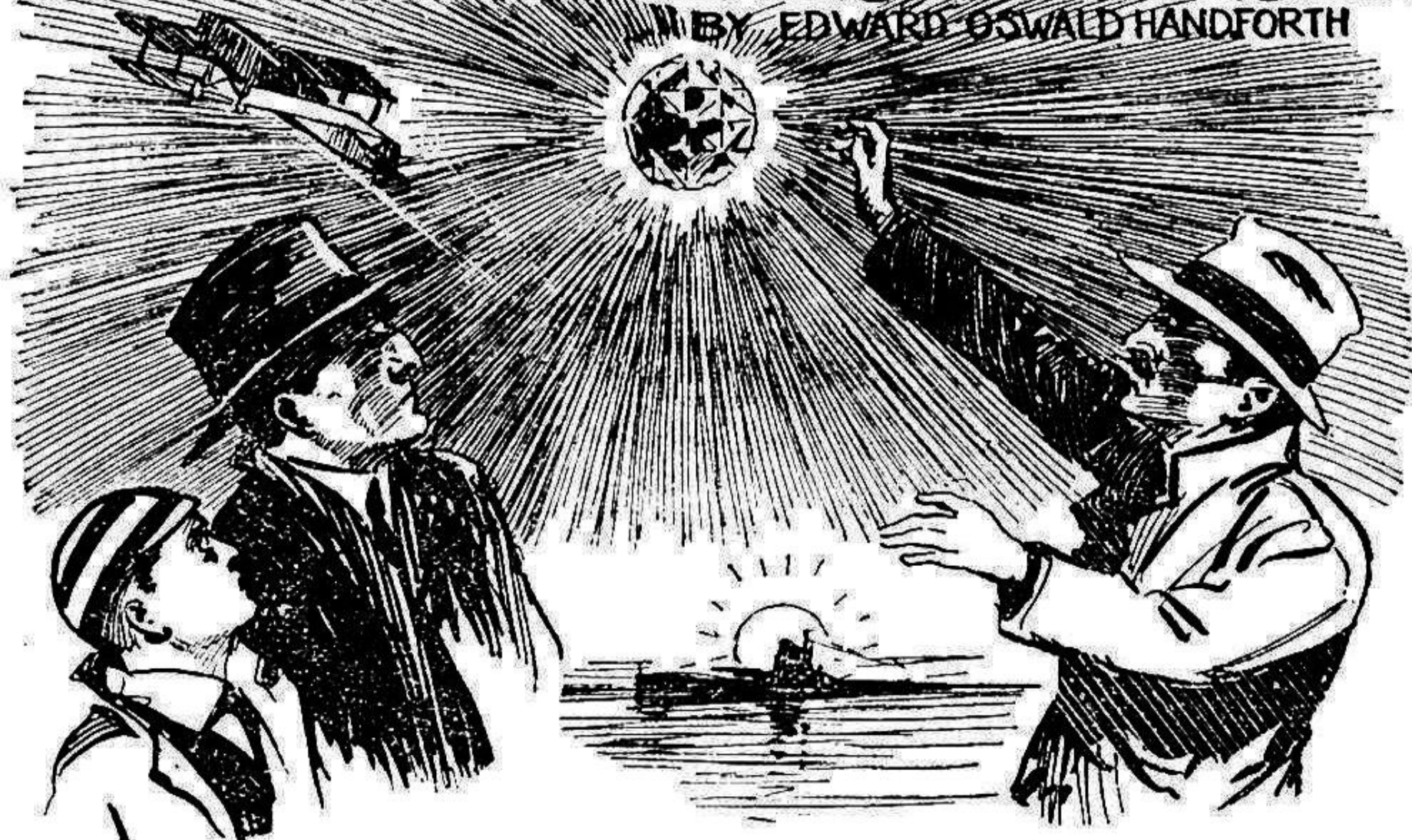
Well done, Dorothy J. Smith! You did very well to get three first prizes at your school sports. You won't forget to send me that fresh snapshot you promised, will you?

Edwy Searles Brooks

Thrills and Excitement!Handy's Great Effort!

TRACKETT GRIM'S GREATEST CASE!

BY EDWARD OSWALD HANDFORTH



SUMMARY OF THE FIRST THRILLING CHAPTERS:

Having sworn to recover the famous Blue Ruby for Sir Esau Starrs, the great astronomer, Trackett Grim and Splinter are in the Pacific Ocean. There isn't space enough for me to tell you of all the terrific adventures they've had against Armand Rocke, the unscrupulous crook. But you can take it from me that they've been through some pretty thrilling adventures. Anyhow, Trackett Grim recovered the Blue Ruby all right, and he and Splinter are flying home in their aeroplane when they are forced to descend

upon the Pacific owing to shortage of petrol. The two are picked up by a sailing vessel, and to their horror they find that it is a pirate ship! But Trackett Grim is not dismayed. He has faced worse perils than this. Unfortunately, however, he inadvertently reveals his identity and the fact that he has on him the Blue Ruby. "Ho!" snarls the captain. "So you are Trackett Grim? And you are in possession of the Blue Ruby? I'll ask you to hand it over to me, Mr. Trackett Grim!" "Never!" roars the great detective defiantly, whereupon the captain orders all his pirates to attack Trackett Grim and Splinter!

NOW READ THIS WEEK'S STUPENDOUS INSTALMENT.

Victory:

THE famous pair were never happier than when scrapping—than when fighting against deadly odds. They sailed into this fight with huge enjoyment. Ripping off their coats, they attacked the pirates, and man after man went down.

The decks were covered with struggling figures.

At last, every pirate was laid out. There must have been between twenty and thirty of them, and Trackett Grim did not pause until he had knocked out the last man. There they were, littered all over the deck,

in all sorts of attitudes. Every man was battered and bruised, and Trackett Grim and Splinter stood in the centre of the circle, eyeing their handiwork with satisfaction.

"By George!" panted Trackett Grim at last. "That was a pretty decent scrap, Splinter. And we have won completely. The pirates are beaten, and the ship is ours!"

"What are we going to do with them, sir?" asked Splinter, as he looked at the pirates. "They'll recover soon, and then there'll be another attack on us!"

"No, there won't," replied Trackett Grim. "We're going to rope them all up, and shove them below."

Then, as Trackett Grim stood there, with the breeze blowing into his heated face, with every spar and yard and jib-boom creaking musically, an astounding thing happened.

For suddenly, all the pirates leapt to their feet. By a curious coincidence every man had recovered consciousness at the same moment, and every man had the same thought.

"Look out!" roared Splinter. "They're making another attack!"

But he was wrong. The pirates had had enough of Trackett Grim's fists. They were scared out of their wits, and, with one accord, the pirate captain and his men leapt overboard!

They all went—every man. Trackett Grim and Splinter watched as the scoundrels went swimming through the blue water—swimming away to certain death, for there were sharks all round, and it was impossible for those rotters to go far.

"What does it mean, sir?" asked Splinter

"Why ask such unnecessary questions?" said Trackett Grim. "Is not the explanation obvious? These men are so afraid of us—so terrified by our very appearance—that they have preferred certain death from the sharks, rather than risk another encounter!"

Treachery Again!

"LOOK, sir!" said Splinter, pointing. Trackett Grim looked. Several hours had passed, and the famous detective was at the wheel. The sailing ship was buzzing along spankingly, and everything seemed to be all right. Any other man, of course, would have been terrified at the thought of managing a great sailing ship all by himself, with only the assistance of one boy. But Trackett Grim was quite different. He was in the habit of facing difficulties that ordinary men would shiver at the thought of.

"What is it, Splinter?" asked Trackett Grim.

"A storm, gov'nor," said Splinter, still pointing. "Don't you see it? Look at that horrible black cloud! Look at it sweeping over the face of the ocean—straight towards us!"

"By George!" said Trackett Grim, staring. "It's not a storm, Splinter—it's a tornado!"

There was not the slightest question that Trackett Grim was right. A deadly tornado was sweeping down upon the vessel! The sky grew darker and darker, and before long vivid flashes of lightning split the clouds.

And then, suddenly, the tornado seized the pirate ship in the bows, and she swung

round, reeling giddily. Complete darkness swept down at the same moment, and the front part of the ship was forced on to the water, until great waves came rolling up the decks and underneath the bridge.

Then came a staggering discovery.

During one of those lightning flashes, Trackett Grim's marvellous eyes saw something unusual. All round the ship, as far as the eye could see, were gigantic waves—many of them rearing upwards for hundreds and hundreds of feet. But as one of those flashes of lightning blazed out Trackett Grim saw—the conning-tower of a submarine!

And he knew, in that flash, that it was Armand Rocke's submarine! Once again he was about to cross swords with the master crook!

There was something else, too. For, in the next flash of lightning, both Trackett Grim and Splinter saw that the deck of the submarine was crowded with men. The pirates!

"By Heaven!" roared Trackett Grim. "Treachery! We thought those men had gone to their deaths—but all the time they

we're only swimming to Armand Rocke's submarine! They are his men, Splinter—his underlings! It was a trick—and now we are in deadly peril!"

"Do you think they mean to fire on us, sir?" panted Splinter.

Before Trackett Grim could answer, there was a flash of flame from the submarine, and then came a terrific boom. It wasn't thunder this time, but the explosion of one of the submarine's sixteen-inch guns.

"Look out!" roared Trackett Grim.

A shell was coming—straight for them! In a trice Trackett Grim pulled Splinter out of the way, and dodged. The shell went harmlessly over the deck of the pirate ship, and dropped into the sea beyond. Only Trackett Grim's extraordinary presence of mind had saved their lives.

Not that it made much difference.

For there came another boom—another blaze of fire, and then a terrific explosion from astern. The ship shook and quivered in every joint; the next moment she started settling, stern foremost. She had been hit—below the water-line!

"Splinter, get the life-belts!" roared Trackett Grim. "We're going down! They've sunk us, the dastardly miscreants!"

It was only too true. The sailing ship was sinking rapidly, and even as Trackett Grim and Splinter were dashing for the life-belts, the vessel gave a final plunge, and vanished under the surface.

But during those few moments of grace, Trackett Grim had constructed a tiny raft.

NOTE.

Handforth flatly refused Mr. Edwy Searles Brooks' offer of assistance in the writing of this story, and insisted that it should be published exactly as he wrote it. The story now appears as it came from Handforth's pen, with the exception that certain errors in spelling and punctuation have been corrected by the Editor.

and now he and Splinter were clinging to it, out there upon that dark, storm-tossed ocean.

The sailing ship had vanished, the thunder and lightning still blazed, and there was now no further sign of the submarine. Armand Roche had done his worst. But the great criminal did not know that Trackett Grim and Splinter were still alive—still determined to carry on.

There they were, our celebrated pair, clinging to that raft, exposed to the cruel, icy winds, and at the mercy of the storm!

Alone on the Limitless Ocean!

“ANY sign of a sail, sir?” Splinter asked the question, in a hoarse, husky voice. Well, who wouldn't be husky, after three or four days without any grub, and without even a drop of water?

“No, not a sign of anything!” replied Trackett Grim in ringing, fearless tones.

A day or two on a raft made no difference to Trackett Grim. Not likely! The famous criminal investigator was as sound as a bell. Perhaps he was feeling a bit thirsty, but he didn't say anything about it. As for food, he never gave it a thought. At times, when clients were few and far between, Trackett Grim had gone without grub for weeks on end, and his iron constitution had always seen him through.

He was standing on the raft, shading his eyes against the glaring sun, and gazing out across the limitless ocean. North, east, south and west, there was nothing but sea. Heaving billows, and flying spray. The raft rocked about like a cockle shell, but Trackett Grim stood there, as solid as a rock. No other man in the world could have kept his balance like this, but, then, Trackett Grim was different.

“We shall never be picked up, gov'nor,” said Splinter, in a melancholy voice. “We're right out of the track of ships, and we're drifting further and further into the tropics.”

Trackett Grim sat down, and lit his pipe. “Well, Splinter, we have the Blue Ruby,” he said complacently. “At least, Armand Roche hasn't got the booty! The miscreant tried to kill us, but he failed. He thinks we're at the bottom of the ocean, but here we are, on the top!”

“What does it matter about the Blue Ruby, sir?” groaned Splinter. “We can't eat the Blue Ruby! And we're hungry—we're starving!”

“Nonsense!” said Trackett Grim, frowning. “Fasting is good for the constitution, Splinter!”

“Well, we're thirsty, sir.”

“It's going to rain soon,” said the great detective, looking up at the sky. “You needn't get the win' up, you young fathead! As soon as the rain comes, we shall be able to get a good drink.”

And so the hours passed, with the tropic sun blazing down upon them, and making the raft as hot as fire. The sea was like a great millpond, as smooth as glass, reflecting the sun's burning rays, and fairly sizzling with heat. It was an awful ordeal but never once did Trackett Grim utter a grumble.

Slowly the day wore on.

At times, the tiny raft would be tossed this way and that and nearly turned completely over, owing to the force of the buffeting waves. But the sun never ceased to shine, and the sky was cloudless. There was not a sign of a sail in any direction, and the hapless pair seemed to be doomed. Even Trackett Grim's iron constitution was beginning to go a little bit rusty.

At last the night came. Another night of terror! Another night of complete darkness, with nothing but the sea round them, and with no hope of grub. It was a pretty lively sort of prospect.

They tried to sleep, but it wasn't much good. The raft was only about as big as a table, and every time Splinter tried to get a snooze a wave would slosh all over him, and soak him to the skin. It was just the same with Trackett Grim. The pair of them were soaked all the time.

And then, at about midnight, when the moon was beginning to rise over the horizon, a sudden icy blast came along from the north. It was so unexpected that Splinter sat up, staring. The air was suddenly as cold as ice, and Splinter staggered to his feet, staring out across the black sea, wondering what the dickens could have happened.

A moment later he gasped aloud. He had seen something out there—something in the blackness of the night.

“Look, gov'nor!” he panted. “What's that?” “Eh?” said Trackett Grim, starting up out of a doze. “What's what? What are you jawing about, you chump?”

“I suddenly felt a cold wind, sir—” “By George, so you did!” said Trackett Grim, staring down at his waistcoat. “Look at this, Splinter! I'm jiggered if there aren't a lot of icicles hanging from my watch chain! I wondered why it was so chilly!”

He stood up, too, and then that mysterious thing came looming out of the blackness of the night. It towered up for hundreds and hundreds of feet—a mass of menacing whiteness.

What was it? What was this thing which came up out of the night?

A Haven of Refuge!

It only took Trackett Grim about ten seconds to discover the truth.

“My only hat!” he ejaculated. “It's an iceberg!”

“A what?” said Splinter, staring. “An iceberg, young 'un!” repeated Trackett Grim. “Look at it—like a whacking great island! And, by George, it's only just come in the nick of time! This raft is going to sink!”

“Oh, my goodness!” said Splinter, as the raft rocked beneath their feet, and began to topple over. “What shall we do, sir?”

“Get on to the iceberg, of course—it's our only chance,” said the great detective. “It'll be pretty cold on there, but we shall be safe.”

The raft had been buffeted about by so many heavy seas that the nails were beginning to work loose. And now, at last, it broke into about fifty pieces, and sank.

But not before Trackett Grim and Splinter, with a couple of magnificent leaps, had reached the iceberg. There was a ledge quite near to the sea surface and Trackett Grim and Splinter jumped upon it, and found themselves in safety. The raft vanished amid the swirl of the foam, and they watched it go without regret. They were fed up with the thing, anyhow.

They climbed up an icy path, and before long they were on the top of the iceberg, looking out over the calm sea. The iceberg was a huge one—about as big as Willard's Island, in the middle of the Stowe. Only, of course, it wasn't an island, because it was floating.

“What are we going to do now, sir?” asked Splinter, shivering. “We shall freeze to death on this iceberg!”

“Rats!” said Trackett Grim briskly. “There's only one thing for us to do, Splinter. We'll light a fire!”

Splinter could have kicked himself for not having thought of this idea on his own. Anyhow, within ten minutes a blazing fire was going, and the flames roared up, and gave warmth to the shipwrecked pair. And then the dawn came, the sun began to shine, and Trackett Grim and Splinter found themselves on the iceberg, without a ship in sight.

There wasn't anything for breakfast, but, at least, they were able to allay their thirst. They broke off chunks of the ice, and chewed it. It was better than nothing.

Suddenly, Trackett Grim uttered a cry of triumph. In a trice, his revolver was out, and he pulled the trigger three times in succession.

Crack, crack, crack!

Three seagulls thudded to the ground, and Trackett Grim grabbed them, and turned a triumphant face towards Splinter.

"Now what about it, my lad?" he demanded. "Who said we didn't have any breakfast?"

"You're a marvel, sir!" panted Splinter. "I didn't know there were any seagulls here!"

"Neither did I, until I spotted these three!" replied Trackett Grim. "Come along, my lad! Help me to pluck them. We'll soon have some grub!"

And so the seagulls were plucked, and before long they were merrily roasting over the tripod which Trackett Grim had fixed over the fire. The famous detective was never at a loss. When things seemed blackest, he was always ready with some ingenious plan.

They felt a lot better after their breakfast, and then Trackett Grim decided to rig up a big signal. It was quite likely that there would be some ships passing by before long, and he wanted to be able to attract their attention.

"Have a look round, Splinter, and see if you can find some wood," said Trackett Grim. "We'll have to fix up a sort of mast, and we can tie your shirt to it. It'll be a good signal."

Splinter did not dream of objecting. He knew that he would be cold without his shirt, but he bravely decided to make the sacrifice.

So he went round, looking for some wood, and it was while he engaged upon this mission that he came face to face with a tremendous adventure.

It must be remembered that neither Trackett Grim nor Splinter had thoroughly explored the iceberg yet. It was like an island, as I've said before, and there were hills and valleys on it.

Suddenly Splinter lost his foothold, and went slithering down a hillside, sending the snow and ice spurting in all directions. And then, with a gulp, he saw something immediately ahead of him—further down. He couldn't stop himself, and he was too startled to even utter a sound.

"Guv'nor!" he roared. "Help—help!"

For there, right in front of him, waiting with open arms, was an enormous Polar bear!

To say that Splinter was startled would be putting it too mildly. The poor chap was doomed. There was the Polar bear—a great, brown monster, with claws about six inches long. And as Splinter came sliding down, so the Polar bear raised itself on its hind legs, and opened its arms.

Down—down!

And then Splinter uttered his last gasp. For he thudded into the Polar bear's arms, and the dread creature uttered a roar of triumph. The arms came closing over Splinter, crushing him—hugging him in an embrace of death!

Armand Roche on the Scene Again!

SPLINTER'S peril was awful. There he was, in the embrace of that Polar bear, and although he struggled gamely he could do nothing. Slowly but surely the bear was hugging him to death. Splinter could feel his ribs cracking, but when he tried to get free he found that he couldn't move

an inch. Every atom of breath was knocked out of him, and he gave himself up for lost.

"Guv'nor!" he roared, at the top of his voice. "Where the dickens have you got to?"

And then came an answering hail from Trackett Grim. In any moment of peril, the famous detective was always on the spot. When his assistant was in danger, Trackett Grim was there. Never would he allow Splinter to perish like this.

Crack!

Trackett Grim's revolver spat fire and lead, and the Polar bear, with a bullet in the very middle of its brain, toppled over and gave a few death struggles. Splinter pulled himself free just as Trackett Grim came slithering down the hillside.

"You young ass, why didn't you shout before?" asked Trackett Grim. "You might have been hurt!"

"Look out, sir!" said Splinter, as he stared round. "Here's another of the brutes!"

It was true enough. A second Polar bear had come into sight, and it was charging down upon our heroes like a big avalanche. The whole iceberg quivered and shook under the weight of those dreadful footfalls. In a trice, Trackett Grim levelled his revolver, and pulled the trigger.

Click!

There was no report, and then, in that dreadful moment, Trackett Grim realised that he had used his last cartridge! There was only one thing to be done. With all his strength, Trackett Grim flung the empty revolver into the Polar bear's face. His aim was as true as a die, and the revolver took the Polar bear between the eyes, and stunned him. He dropped like a felled ox, and this gave Trackett Grim time to reload the revolver, and dispatch Bruin with a well-placed bullet.

"There is no need to get excited in such moments as this, Splinter," said Trackett Grim coolly. "You only have to keep your head, and everything is all serene."

"It was a dreadfully narrow escape, sir," said Splinter. "But why are you looking so happy?"

"Because, my boy, we are no longer in danger of starvation," replied Trackett Grim, with a wave of his hand towards the two Polar bears. "There is meat enough here to last us for two or three months, if necessary, and these furs will make wonderful coats for us."

Splinter gazed at his famous master in awe and wonder.

"You think of everything, sir," he said, marvelling.

"Of course I do," replied Trackett Grim. "How do you think I earned my reputation?"

It wasn't long before the two Polar bears were skinned, and then Trackett Grim proved what a wonderful man he was. All the meat was carved up into handy joints, and the two skins were hung in front of the fire to dry. And so, later on in the day, Trackett Grim and Splinter were walking about in wonderfully warm fur coats. They were now well equipped for the Arctic blasts. It didn't matter how cold the weather became, they were safe. And they had plenty of meat, and their hopes were beginning to rise. Even if they didn't meet a sail, it was quite likely that they would drift on that iceberg until they ran ashore somewhere.

But this was not to be.

For a further dramatic development took place. In about the middle of the afternoon, a sudden crash sounded. It was so tremendous that the iceberg shook from end to end.

"We've hit something, sir!" cried Splinter excitedly.

(What has the iceberg hit? And what new perils will our two intrepid heroes have to face? You'll know when you read next week's wonderful instalment, you chaps. It's the best I've written yet, and it simply teems with thrills and surprises!—E. O. H.)



THE CHIEF OFFICER'S CHAT.

All LETTERS in reference to the League should be addressed to the Chief Officer, The St. Frank's League, c/o THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY, The Fleetway House, Farringdon St., London, E.C.4. Enquiries which need an immediate answer should be accompanied by a stamped and addressed envelope.

The Fellow Who Copies.

A LANCASHIRE correspondent is plainly much annoyed by the actions of a school chum who has developed the bad habit of copying.

"Every time I happen to look at my books I find him gazing at them," says my correspondent indignantly. Of course, this copyist has the lesson exactly the same as his companion, and the whole business is not fair. The offender denies that he acts this way, but the facts are there, and facts are stubborn things.

The paltry imitator wants telling off. This will happen to him sooner or later, but it would be far better if he learned how to play the game for himself. Imitation may be the sincerest form of flattery, but it can be carried too far.

The Largest Railway Station.

A Birmingham pal (T. B.) wants to know something about the largest stations in the country. The three biggest are Waterloo, Waverley, and Liverpool Street.

Well Done, Pompey!

Billie, of Portsmouth, sends me a trenchant defence of the "N. L. L." It exasperated him to see some sarcastic comments about the paper by a reader who did not like this, that, and the other—but who still remained a reader, which was sure proof that he was talking out of the back of his neck!

This Bullying Business.

As a rule, the bully's victim has himself to blame. The average bully is merely a loud-talking impostor. Show him that his hectoring swagger and the rest of it make him a general nuisance—and put it pretty forcibly—and the lout will climb down quickly.

Too Much Sympathy.

Anybody will feel sorry for the loss of a favourite dog, but that the thing can be overdone is shown by a correspondent who writes from Hurstwood about his chum.

The latter had a fox terrier, and the animal was a great favourite. Unfortunately, it got old and died. My correspondent's friend has taken it all much to heart. He can't cheer up, but just mopes round the place, a misery to himself and everybody else.

He must just buck up. No need to forget the four-footed friend, but where's the sense of spending weeks in regrets when there is the world's work to be done?

A Play of St. Frank's.

R. A. J. A. Gleeson, of 7, Laurel Villas, S. C. Road, Limerick, has started on a play of St. Frank's. He has got through Act 1. Good luck to the enterprise!

CORRESPONDENCE WANTED.

G. Bradley, 7, Cranbrook Road, Thornton Heath, Surrey, wishes to hear from readers who are keen on fretwork.

George Burgess, 271, Northstoke, Arundel, Sussex, wants old series "N. L. L."

W. Stevens, 36, West Street, Leytonstone, London, E.11, wishes to hear from readers anywhere.

Norman Jarvis, 31, Wrotham Road, Broadstairs, Kent, wishes to hear from match-brand collectors, also from amateur magazine editors.

J. Fowler, 260, Deepdale Road, Preston, Lancs., has back numbers of "N. L. L." to sell.

T. G. V. Cushing, 1, Stafford Street, Earham Road, Norwich, wishes to hear from readers willing to form a club.

Walter B. G. Brown, 32, Hampton Street, Northampton, wishes to correspond with readers, especially patrol leaders of the Boy Scouts.

John Burke, 328, N. C. Road, Phibsborough, Dublin, wishes to correspond with readers.

A. Dyer, 3, Melville Street, Johannesburg, South Africa, wishes to correspond with readers in Canada and Australia.

R. Yarwood, 66, Coverton Road, Tooting, London, S.W.17, wishes to hear from Jim Gamblin, of Battersea.

Fred Martin, 15, Livingstone Road, Hove, Sussex, wishes to obtain old and new numbers of the "N. L. L."

C. E. Miller, 20, Ashcombe Street, Fulham, London, S.W.6, wishes to hear from members who will join a club.

William Maxwell Wilson, 11, Pilkington Street, Maori Hill, Dunedin, New Zealand; wishes to hear from readers interested in stamps and photography.

Leonard Shaw, 4, Prendergast Street, Dunedin, New Zealand, wishes to hear from readers in Canada and England. All letters answered.

S. Buckingham, 2, Arlington Road, Ashford, Middlesex, wishes to correspond with readers in this country.

A. D. Luke, 8, Paradise Place, Plymouth, has back numbers of the NELSON LEE LIBRARY for sale. He would also like to correspond with readers interested in stamp collecting, sport, photography, and cycling.

E. Watkins, 174, Baker Street, Christchurch, New Zealand, asks for correspondents in India, Crown Colonies, and China.

Erik Ormerod, "Tregenna," 16, Ashbourne Avenue, Blundellsands, nr. Liverpool, wishes to correspond with stamp collectors in Cyprus, Palestine, Gibraltar, Mexico, and Brazil.

J. E. Newstead, 8, Hawthorn Road, Levenshulme, Manchester, wishes to obtain back numbers of the "N. L. L." (new series) before "The Knights of Northestria," that is, Nos. 1-36. He also wishes to correspond with readers interested in stamps and cigarette cards—especially overseas.

E. Meakin, 21, Bristol Road, Ilkeston, Derbyshire, wishes to correspond with readers in Canada and Australia.

"Billie," Motor Drivers' Home, Portsmouth, wishes to hear from readers.

(Continued on next page.)

CORRESPONDENTS WANTED

(Continued from previous page.)

E. G. J. Cope, 42, Talma Road, Brixton, London, S.W., wishes to correspond with readers about swimming and cricket.

George F. Hodgson, 70, Sunny Side, Scalby Road, Scarborough, Yorks, would like to correspond with readers anywhere. He also has back numbers of the "N. L. L."

R. E. Langley, "Walden," Nash Grove, Wokingham, Berks, wishes to correspond with readers in Western Australia.

Eric W. Barber, 281, Lincoln Road, Peterborough, wants to hear from stamp collectors. He also wishes to obtain the complete set of the adventures of the St. Frank's fellows on their Voyage to the Moon. Will the owner of the series state price?

W. G. Bignell, 17, Susans Road, Eastbourne, wishes to hear from readers anywhere who are interested in science, particularly chemistry and physics.

Albert Dimond, 15, Exmouth Road, Walthamstow, London, E.17, wishes to correspond with readers in the United States.

William D. Denby, 213, Berkeley Street, Glasgow, would like to hear from anyone wishing to join his stamp club.

Norman S. Stein, 459, Commissioner Street,

Fairview, Johannesburg, Transvaal, South Africa, wishes to hear from any O. O. in his area, also from stamp collectors.

Harold G. Dell, Parsonage Road, Ringwood, Hants, wants to hear from readers interested in his amateur magazine, "The Report."

Henry Cathcart, 177, Bernard Street, Bridgeton, Glasgow, S.E., wishes to correspond with readers in U.S.A., France, Australia, Spain, and India, interested in stamps and fretwork.

K. Murray, 18, Rhyll Avenue, Wayville, South Australia, wishes to hear from stamp collectors anywhere; also with readers in his district.

R. A. J. A. Gleeson, 7, Laurel Villas, S.C. Road, Limerick, Ireland, wishes to purchase back numbers of the "N. L. L." before 513.

F. Dicker, 53, Northgate Road, New Malden, Surrey, wishes to correspond with older readers, ages 17 to 18, about things in general.

R. M. Lott, 5, Grove Road, Freemantle, Southampton, wishes to hear from the nearest O. O.

R. W. Edwards, 100, Main Road, Lydney, nr. Crewe, Cheshire, wishes to hear from readers.

Andrew Proctor, 37, Frederick Street, South Shields, Co. Durham, wishes to hear from readers in the south of England.

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