

**THE 'FIFTH' AT ST. FRANK'S!**

Explosive School Yarn Inside!

# NELSON LEE

2<sup>d</sup>



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The "Fifth" at St. Frank's—Extra Long; Extra Funny; Extra Good!

# HANDY'S FIREWORK FIASCO!

By  
**EDWY  
SEARLES  
BROOKS**

## CHAPTER 1.

Preparing for the  
"Fifth"!

**W**ILLY HANDFORTH, of the Third Form at St. Frank's, paused interestedly as he was passing through the Ancient House lobby. Three Removites were at the letter-rack, and the burliest of the three was about to open a letter.

"I'm just in time," said Willy, strolling up.

The burly Removite started.

"Just in time for what?" he asked coldly.

"It's no good your trying to hide that letter, Ted," said Willy. "I've already spotted the envelope, and I can see that it's from the pater. If there's any cash in there, I want my share—and I shan't be satisfied with five bob, either."

Edward Oswald Handforth sniffed.

"You'll get nothing out of this," he retorted. "It's an answer to a special letter I sent the pater last week, asking him for an extra tip of five quid for fireworks. This fiver's mine, understand? All mine! I'm pretty generous, as a rule, but for once I'm going to be hard."

"Well, go ahead and open the letter," said Willy, who wasn't at all sure that it contained a fiver.

"I'll open it when you've gone," retorted his major. "I've already told you that this fiver's mine, and it's going to be spent on fireworks for a special Remove display. So it's no earthly use your hanging round."



"That's final?"

"Absolutely final!"

"All right, I'll take five bob now and we'll call it square," said Willy, as he noticed the carelessly-stuck flap of the envelope.

"Good enough," said Handforth promptly, handing over two half-crowns. "Now, that's agreed, isn't it? You won't expect any share of what's in this letter?"

"Not even a smell," agreed Willy cheerfully.

Handforth grinned triumphantly at Church and McClure, the two other Removites who were with him. He was rather pleased



that five bob on spec."

"But there's no money in this letter at all!"

"That's your misfortune, not mine," said Willy. "Perhaps the pater's sending it on later—or he may be sending fireworks."

"By George! That's possible," said Handforth, eagerly looking at the letter. "All the same, it's a bit thick. I particularly wanted to select my own Roman candles and rockets and—Hallo, what the—"

His voice trailed away, and Willy looked sympathetic.

"No fireworks?" he asked.

"Listen to this," said Handforth thickly. "'No, Edward, I shall certainly not let you have any money for fireworks. I do not approve of the uncontrolled use of these dangerous playthings by schoolboys. In any case, it is a shameful waste of money to burn it in this useless fashion. A firework display, conducted as an exhibition by competent

with himself. For once he had definitely got the better of his wide-awake minor, and it was such a novel occurrence that he looked at his chums for their approval.

"Better open that letter," said Church bluntly.

Something in his tone wiped the smile off Handforth's face, and he quickly inserted his thumb under the flap and tore open the envelope. He hastily withdrew a double sheet of notepaper, but failed to discover any fiver.

"There's no money!" he ejaculated blankly.

"Willy could have told you that a minute ago," said McClure. "Why do you suppose he agreed to that five bob? In fact, any ass could have seen there was no money in that envelope; the flap was stuck down too carelessly."

"You—you young robber!" roared Handforth, glaring at Willy.

"Do you mean to say that you deliberately— Give me that five bob back!"

"Not likely!" retorted Willy. "A bargain's a bargain. I agreed to take

experts, is quite another matter. Surely there will be something of that sort at St. Frank's this year, as usual?"

"Of course there will," put in Church. "But all the chaps like to have fireworks of their own, too. Hasn't your pater got enough sense to see that?"

"There's more here," fumed Handforth, red with indignation. "Listen to this bit: 'No schoolboy should be allowed to handle fireworks of any kind. You, in particular, Edward, cannot be trusted with them. I positively forbid you to buy any fireworks of any kind. I would really much sooner trust Willy—' But that doesn't matter," said Handforth hastily.

"Good old pater!" grinned Willy. "I'm afraid he knows you too well, Ted. If you're feeling at a loose end on Wednesday evening, come along and look at the Third Form display; we'll show you something first class."

He sauntered off, leaving his major speechless.

"Well, it's no good making a fuss, Handy," said McClure. "There'll be plenty of fireworks

**HANDY'S HOME-MADE  
FIREWORKS  
"WORK" A FIRE  
AT ST. FRANK'S!**

without yours, to say nothing of a whacking great bonfire and plenty of guys. I hear that K. K., by the way, is thinking of making an effigy of you. Like his nerve!"

Fortunately Handforth had not heard.

"So the pater forbids me to buy any fireworks!" he said, suddenly finding his voice. "He thinks he can stop me, does he? He thinks— Oh, my only hat!"

He was looking at the letter again, and there was a note of dismay in his voice.

"What's the matter now?" asked Church.

"My pater says he's coming to Bannington to-morrow to make a political speech, and he'll be here in the morning," replied Handforth blankly. "You know what a pig-headed man my pater is! If he finds I've got any fireworks, he'll bone them! And he's staying over the Fifth, too!"

"That seems to settle it, then," said McClure, with relief.

Handforth's chums had been worrying for some days. They knew what a careless, reckless fellow Handy was, and all his talk about buying five pounds' worth of fireworks had seriously alarmed them. Much as they sometimes desired to slaughter him, they really had no wish to see him blow himself to bits.

"Settled, is it?" said Handforth darkly. "I can't buy any fireworks, but I can make some."

"Make some!" yelled Church

"Why not?" asked Handforth, enthused by this sudden brainwave. "The pater says I mustn't buy any fireworks, but making them is a different thing."

"It is," agreed McClure grimly. "You silly ass, you'll kill yourself if you try any dotty games like that! You can't be trusted with explosives and gunpowder and all that. Anyhow, you won't make 'em in Study D," he added firmly.

"He won't make 'em at all," said Church. "He's only bluffing."

**B**UT Handforth wasn't bluffing. The very instant morning lessons were over, he vanished. Church and McClure, missing him, commenced a hasty, frantic search. They feared the worst. Going down the Remove passage, they made desperate inquiries.

"What's the good of asking us where Handy is?" said Nipper, the genial Remove skipper. "In any case, I thought that you fellows were his keepers!"

"He's escaped," said Church gruffly. "I believe the silly ass is making fireworks somewhere."

"Then the farther away from St. Frank's he is, the better," grinned Kirby Keeble Parkington. "Handy's dangerous enough with a packet of penny squibs, so goodness knows what he'll do if he makes some fireworks of his own!"

"It's his pater's fault," growled Mac. "Sir Edward has refused to let him buy real fireworks, so the chump has decided—Hallo, what's the matter here?" he added,

his train of thought interrupted as he glanced into Study H. "Where's all the furniture? - Somebody having a spring clean?"

Vivian Travers and Jimmy Potts, who shared Study H, were standing in a perfectly bare room. Even the carpet had been removed.

"We got fed up with our old furniture and effects," explained Travers coolly. "The couch was moth-eaten, the table was rickety, and there wasn't a chair fit to sit on. And when the bookcase started falling to pieces last week, we decided that something ought to be done."

"Lucky bargees," said K. K. enviously. "Their people have given them permission to order a whole lot of new stuff from the Phoenix Furnishing Company in Bannington, and they're going to settle the bill."

"About sixty quid, roughly," said Potts casually. "We're going to surprise you fellows, I can tell you! A real Brussels carpet, big chesterfield, mahogany bookcase, easy-chairs, and all the rest of it. We chose the stuff on Friday, and it's coming in this morning."

"It isn't fair," complained Church indignantly.

"Rats!" said Travers. "Archie Glen-thorne's study cost twice as much to furnish. Why shouldn't we live in comfort, too?"

Travers and Potts were fortunately possessed of very wealthy parents, and a matter of sixty pounds or so was a mere trifle to such people. All the same, the two lucky juniors realised that it was a big concession, and they were truly appreciative. Study H, in future, was to be a palace of luxury.

Church and McClure hurried off to find Handforth, more eager than ever now. This news about the Study H furniture would probably excite him so much that he would forget all about his precious fireworks.

"He'll probably be in the lab.," said Church. "If Study H can have new stuff, why can't Study D? I say, what about trying to get round Handy's pater? He's coming to-morrow, and the thing might be wangled, particularly as he has refused to whack out any cash for fireworks."

Mac shook his head.

"I can't see Handy's pater shelling out for new furniture," he said. "What's the good of new furniture, anyhow, when Handy's about? He breaks everything in no time."

They only went to the laboratory as a last resort, for they hardly thought it possible that Handforth would be rash enough to make fireworks openly in "Stinks," where a master or a prefect might easily interrupt him.

However, there he was, as busy as a bee at one of the benches. His face was adorned by black smudges, one of his eyebrows looked patchy, and there was a blister on his left hand. But he looked happy—until he spotted his chums.

"I don't want any interference from you asses," he said sternly. "I've just got the



right formula for making these squibs."

"My only hat!"

"They're miles better than the squibs you can buy," continued Handforth, waxing enthusiastic. "Red fire, with green explosions, and an occasional burst of blue. It's all to do with the ingredients."

"But you can't make your silly fireworks here!" protested Church.

"I'm doing it, fathead!"

"A prefect might come along any minute

—"

"Let him come!"

"We want you in the Remove passage," urged Mac. "Travers and Potts are having a lot of new furniture in their study—"

"Blow Travers and Potts!"

"Sixty quids' worth of new stuff!"

"I don't care if they're having six hundred quids' worth," said Handforth coldly. "You're only trying to get me away from this firework wheeze. Clear off! Wait a minute, though. Just watch how these squibs go off!"

"You're mad!" gasped Church, backing away. "It's bad enough to make them here, but it's sheer insanity to let them off. Where are you getting the powder from, in any case?"

"Powder!" repeated Handforth scornfully. "You mean gunpowder? My fireworks are made with special chemicals, my sons. I haven't experimented in 'Stinks' for terms without learning a few things about chemistry."

He coolly picked up a brown paper cylinder which was tied at one end, and screwed up at the other. He struck a match, and lit the screwed-up end, grinning amusedly at his chums' alarm.

"Nothing to be scared of, you chumps," he said. "These are only parlour fireworks. Watch! I can hold it in my hand all the time."

The home-made squib suddenly burst into activity, and Church and McClure—who knew exactly how much reliance to place upon Handforth's word—made a dive for the door. They were only just in time.

Bang-sizzzz—zurrrrh!

The squib was not so harmless as Handforth imagined. It suddenly leapt out of his hand, exploded in mid-air, whizzed towards the ceiling, exploded again, and sent a shower of red fire over its manufacturer.

"Hi! I'm burnt!" howled Handforth, leaping about wildly.

Little curls of smoke arose from his hair, and there was a pungent odour mingled with the acrid chemical smoke.

"Smells as if somebody's shoeing horses!" said Church.

"I'm not a horse, you idiot!" snorted Handforth. "Oh, crumbs! Half my hair's burnt off. There must have been something wrong with that particular squib. I'd better show you another."

But Church and McClure had seen enough. They fled.

## CHAPTER 2.

### A Costly Demonstration!

OUTSIDE the Ancient House stood a motor-van, and an interested crowd of juniors had gathered round, watching the two men in green aprons as they hauled out various articles of furniture.

"That new stuff for Study H," said Church, as he came up with McClure.

The Phoenix Furnishing Company was delivering the goods, and the Removites looked on enviously. Vivian Travers and Jimmy Potts had not exaggerated. Their new goods and chattels were tip-top.

Later, after the van had gone, parties of fellows went along to inspect the study. It was a picture: soft carpet, handsome rugs, mahogany table, the easiest of easy chairs, and so forth; and everything brand, spanking new. Even William Napoleon Browne and Stevens and Chambers and other notables of the Fifth came along to give the study a "once-over."

Nobody could quite understand why Handforth hadn't barged in. Edward Oswald, in fact, didn't publicly appear again until dinner-time. His other eyebrow was half missing by now, and there was a burn on his chin.

"I've cured that defect," he murmured to Church, as he sat down. "Those squibs of mine are first-class now. I've made some Roman candles, too. Wait till after dinner—I'll show you."

"We'd better go into the middle of the golf course," suggested Church. "You can let the fireworks off on the first tee, and Mac and I will stand on the ninth."

"Idiot!" whispered Handforth. "I'll let 'em off in the study."

His chums said nothing, but thought a lot. There were one or two suspicious bulges in Handforth's pockets, and Church and McClure fully expected some of their leader's home-made fireworks to start exploding in the dining-hall. When Handforth dabbled in chemicals there was never any knowing what would happen!

However, the meal passed off without trouble, and Church and McClure managed to get their leader safely away. They didn't quite know what to do about him. This firework-manufacturing stunt would have to be stopped. But how? His father could never have suspected that his ultimatum would lead to such hazardous doings.

"We can't sneak on him, and he won't listen to reason," murmured Church worriedly. "So what the dickens can we do?"

An inspiration occurred to him as Handforth was leading the way into Study D.

"You haven't seen the new stuff in Study H, Handy," he remarked casually.

"By George, no!" said Handforth. "Let's go along now and have a look at it."

His chums thought they had successfully side-tracked him; but actually this move was to prove fatal.

Travers and Potts were lounging in the two easy-chairs, and as nearly everybody



also had viewed the study by this time, Handforth & Co. were the only visitors. Travers got to his feet very promptly.

"Well, we might as well get it over," he said resignedly. "We've been expecting you, Handy. Don't sit on the table too heavily, will you? These chairs are made to sit on, and not to throw at people. In other words, dear old fellow, go easy."

Handforth grinned.

"I don't blame you," he said indulgently. "We're all the same with new stuff. When I got my Morris Minor I wouldn't let anybody breathe on it, and if a chap dared to touch it I biffed him. Now they can crawl all over it for all I care—and it doesn't hurt it a bit."

"Well, don't crawl all over this furniture," said Potts pointedly.

Handforth's inspection was brief.

"Jolly good," he announced, after one swift glance round. "And now," he added brightly, "I've got something to show you."

He pulled some brown-paper cylinders out of his pocket, and Church and McClure jumped.

"Not here, Handy!" gasped Church, aghast.

"This is just as good as our own study," retorted Handforth.

"Better," said Travers, with conviction.

"He doesn't mean in that way!" yelled Church. "Here, chuck him out! That's a home-made fire-work he's got, and——"

"Don't take any notice of these half-wits," interrupted Handforth coldly, as he struck a match. "These squibs of mine are guaranteed. They wouldn't hurt a fly."

"Come on, Jimmy!" shouted Travers. "Out with him! We're not taking any chances with our new furniture!"

"Not likely!" agreed Potts.

They rushed at Handforth, but at that moment the squib commenced its operations. A shower of harmless red fire spurted from the open end, accompanied by lots of smoke and a gentle hissing. It was quite a pretty effect.

"You see?" said Handforth triumphantly. "Stand back, you fatheads! In half a tick this red fire will change to green!"

"Let it change out in the passage!" yelled Travers.

Bang!

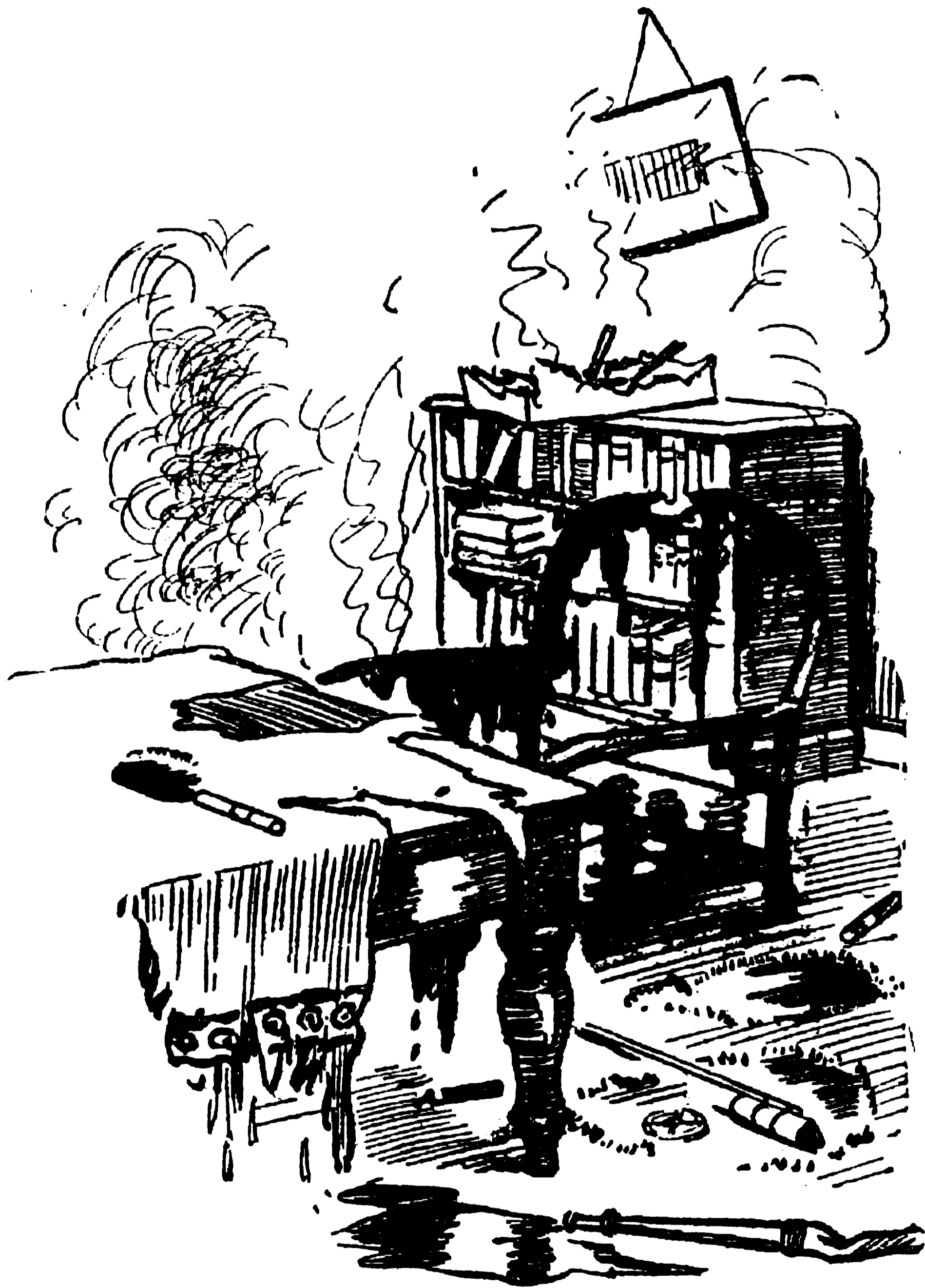
The change didn't come exactly as Handforth had anticipated. The squib gave a violent explosion, twisted in his hand, and leapt upon the new plush tablecloth, liberally bespattering it with green fire.

"Look out!" bellowed Potts. "You've ruined our new tablecloth!"

"Great Scott!" gasped Handforth. "I can't understand——"

Another minor explosion sounded. With impish abandon, the squib leapt off the table, soared through the air, and dropped into the open top of a big cardboard box which stood on the bookcase.

Unfortunately nobody was looking at the squib at that moment. The tablecloth had burst into flames, and all hands were required at the pumps, so to speak. The fire



was soon subdued, but the tablecloth was ruined. There was a hole in it as big as a tea-tray, and the beautiful mahogany of the table was blistered and scorched.

"Look what you've done!" roared Travers furiously. "Why, you—you——"

"I say, I'm sorry!" babbled Handforth, genuinely upset. "I'd no idea——"

"Where's that squib?" asked Church, looking round wildly.



"It fell on the floor, I believe," said Potts, his face red with wrath. "It's burnt out now, anyhow, so we needn't bother. Look at this tablecloth—and the table! You'll have to pay for this, Handy!"

"Of course," agreed Handforth earnestly. "Dash it all, I wouldn't try to get out of it. I'll buy a new tablecloth, and——"

An ominous hissing interrupted him, and they all stared round at the bookcase. Travers and Potts jumped wildly.

"Our fireworks!" gasped Sir Jimmy.

He got no further. The ominous hissing changed into a series of quick-fire explosions, and Travers was obliged to back away at the double. The box was suddenly alive. Crackers and other fireworks were leaping in all directions.

Bang—bang—sizz—bang!

It was deafening and bewildering. Within the space of two seconds the entire room was full of vicious, spurting, flaming fireworks. Roman candles and squibs and rockets were going off with terrific effect.

"The door!" gurgled Church hoarsely.

A red star shot out of a burning Roman candle and struck him on the shoulder, spraying its molten fire in every direction. A rocket, screaming and hissing, dived between Travers' legs and shot across the floor, leaving a trail of yellow fire in its wake. It struck the wall, rebounded, and exploded with a terrific bang. Big catherine wheels were whizzing round the room, and Handforth let out a wild yell of alarm as one spun past within an inch of his nose.

Already the room was full of choking smoke, and it was as much as the five juniors could do to find the door and get out. They staggered into the passage, half-blinded and half-choked, and Travers slammed the door shut. Inside the room the explosions were increasing, until they almost resembled the shattering rattle of machine-gun fire.

"What's wrong here?" shouted Nipper, rushing up. "Hi, you're on fire, Mac!"

The back of McClure's jacket was glowing red where an

exploding rocket had struck it, and at that moment the cloth burst into flames. Nipper beat the fire out with his cap as Mac tore his jacket off.

"Thanks!" he panted. "I might have been badly hurt."



"You'll have to pay for all this furniture to be replaced," said Mr. Wilkes to Handforth, "and in addition you will write me two thousand lines!" Handforth tottered. The chopper had descended—heavily!

"Quick!"

"Fireworks?" asked Handforth, nearly choking.

"That box!" yelled Travers. "There's a couple of quids' worth of fireworks in there, and that rotten squib of yours——"



By this time crowds of fellows had arrived on the spot from both directions. The passage became packed with shouting, excited juniors. In Study H the fireworks were still exploding continuously and deafeningly.

"What's happened?" went up a yell.

"Fireworks—let off by accident—room full of smoke and flying rockets and things!" gasped Travers. "Don't go in there—you'll only get choked. Wait till it dies down a bit."

"But the room may catch fire," pointed out Nipper quickly.

Pushing his way through the crowd, he flung open the door. A great billow of choking smoke came out, followed immediately by a hissing, blazing rocket, and a few squibs and jumping crackers. There was a stampede away from the immediate vicinity, and the excitement increased.

Nipper, shielding his face, entered the study, followed by Handforth. They both became aware of a lurid yellow glow through the smoke, and as the smoke partially cleared, owing to the opened door, they saw the worst. The carpet, table, and the chairs were burning merrily, and flames were leaping up half-way to the ceiling.

"My only sainted aunt!" gurgled Handforth feebly.

This was no mishap, but a genuine disaster. Unless something was done promptly the room would become a raging furnace, and the fire would spread down the passage.

"The hose—quick!" shouted Nipper.

Somebody dashed to the corner of the passage and dragged the fire-hose from the ledge which was set in the wall. Another junior was ready with the brass turncock.

"Let her go!" yelled Nipper.

The hose became alive, and the Remove skipper directed a hissing stream of water into the burning study from the doorway. Clouds of acrid, evil-smelling steam arose as he swept the hose round the room again and again, thoroughly saturating everywhere and everything. The flames were soon quelled.

The hose was turned off, and Handforth dashed through the ruins to the window, which he threw open. Within a minute or two the brisk wind had cleared the steam and the smoke away, and crowds of fellows stood looking at the scene of destruction.

Every scrap of furniture was ruined. The carpet was burnt in a dozen places, the table was a charred wreck, the easy-chairs were half-burnt, and springs were sticking out grotesquely, the bookcase was blackened and charred.

Edward Oswald Handforth was struck dumb. He could only stand there staring like a fellow in a dream. His precious squib was responsible for this havoc!

### CHAPTER 3.

#### The Chopper!

VIVIAN TRAVERS and Jimmy Potts were speechless, too, but in a different way. Handforth said nothing because his mind was numbed by the enormity of this catastrophe. Travers and Potts were speechless because the English language contained no words adequately to express their fury.

"Well, it's a good thing we put the fire out," said Nipper practically. "Fortunately there's not much damage."

Travers found his voice.

"Not much damage?" he howled. "What about all our new furniture?"

"That's ruined, of course—every scrap of it," said Nipper. "But the fire might have spread with serious consequences. As it is, no great harm has been done."

Travers and Potts failed to agree, and said so very heatedly. It was just as well that Mr. Alington Wilkes came pushing through the crowd at that moment. A strong, firm hand was needed here, and the Housemaster of the Ancient House, for all his queer appearance, was a man of infinite resource and tact.

"Well, well!" he said, as he adjusted his glasses and looked round the study. "There seems to have been a little—accident!"

"The room was on fire, sir, so we got the hose and put it out," explained Nipper.

"Very commendable," nodded Old Wilkey. "I can see that someone had excellent presence of mind. The fire has been confined to a few paltry articles of furniture."

"Paltry articles, sir!" protested Potts, in anguish. "All this furniture only came in this morning—brand new! And look at it now!"

"I'm afraid it's pretty well ruined," agreed Mr. Wilkes. "Can anybody tell me how this fire started? I rather think I ought to know. Don't all speak at once."

"It was my fault, sir," said Handforth wretchedly.

"I cannot say that I am altogether surprised that you should be the culprit, Handforth," commented Mr. Wilkes. "I assume that the fire resulted from some act of carelessness."

"I let off a squib, sir."

"A risky thing to do indoors—and a thing, moreover, which is strictly prohibited," said the Housemaster gravely. "Even so, I cannot understand how a squib should cause such a conflagration."

"It was a home-made squib, sir," explained Handforth mournfully.

"That, of course, makes the disaster clearer," said Mr. Wilkes. "I'm afraid, Handforth, that I shall have to punish you very severely for this act of gross recklessness, although that punishment will be mitigated by your frank confession."

"It wasn't entirely his fault, sir," protested Church, in Handforth's defence. "The squib itself wouldn't have caused the fire,



but it jumped out of his hand and fell into a big box of ordinary fireworks."

"Two pounds' worth, sir—sent by my people as a present for the Fifth," said Travers, who was calming down under Mr. Wilkes' equable personality. "Before we could do anything to stop it, the squib had set fire to a lot of rockets and catherine wheels and Roman candles. They jumped all over the room, and we had to bolt."

"I see," said Mr. Wilkes, nodding. "I do not think I need any further explanations. And the one clear fact which emerges from this evidence is that your home-made squib, Handforth, wrought the damage."

"Yes, sir," said Handforth tragically.

"I do not absolve you from blame, either, Travers," continued Mr. Wilkes sternly. "In the first place, that box of fireworks should not have been left open. Indeed, it should not have been in your study at all. You know it is against the school rules. In the second place, knowing that it was open, you should not have allowed Handforth to fire his squib."

"We couldn't stop him, sir," protested Travers. "We tried to, but— Well, sir, you know what he is."

"I think I do," agreed Old Wilkey dryly. "But you know what he is, too, and both you and Potts will write one thousand lines for your blatant disregard of school rules."

Travers and Potts were staggered. Their ideas of Mr. Wilkes' fair play underwent a change. Not only had they lost their furniture, but they had received this heavy imput on top of that disaster. But, of course, Mr. Wilkes was right. He had discovered a breach of the rules, and he had to punish it.

"However, you will not be made to suffer in any other way," he continued. "All this furniture of yours must, of course, be replaced."

Travers and Potts brightened up.

"Who's going to replace the furniture, sir?" asked Travers.

"Handforth, naturally," said the Housemaster.

Edward Oswald jumped.

"Me, sir?" he gasped. "I mean, I? But—but there was over sixty quids' worth—"

"The cost of the furniture is immaterial, Handforth," interrupted Mr. Wilkes. "It is all destroyed, and as it was destroyed by your foolish action you must replace it. Additionally, you will write me an imput of two thousand lines for having the unparalleled audacity to make fireworks of your own and let them off."

The crowds of Removites entirely approved. Nothing short of an imput like that would have checked Handforth's dangerous propensities. Handforth himself didn't even hear the Housemaster's stern words; he was thinking of that furniture.

"But look here, sir," he ejaculated, an inspiration gripping him, "the school's insured, isn't it? I mean, all the furniture?"

"Of course the school is insured!"

"Then you've only got to make a claim, sir, and the insurance company will replace the furniture," said Handforth triumphantly.

Mr. Wilkes shook his head.

"It is obvious, old chap, that you don't know much about insurance companies," he said kindly. "It would be futile to make any claim, for the school is not insured against the promiscuous use of home-made fireworks. Or any other fireworks, if it comes to that. There is a very strict rule that no fireworks are to be kept indoors. If any other boys here have any of these dangerous playthings in their studies, I hope they will take this hint and remove them."

His words fell upon many guilty ears.

"Then—then the insurance company wouldn't dub up, sir?" asked Handforth, in dismay.

"If it did do so, it would certainly collect the cost of the furniture from you—or your people," replied Mr. Wilkes. "And that leads me to the point I have been aiming at. You realise, Handforth, that I must write to your father about this?"

"Oh, my hat!" ejaculated Handforth, horrified.

"I suppose I should report the whole thing to the headmaster, but I won't," continued Mr. Wilkes. "I believe in running my own House, as far as possible, in my own way. Mr. Lee has sufficient responsibilities on his shoulders without saddling him with this. So I shall write to your father, Handforth, tell him what has happened, and ask him for a cheque to cover the cost of the new furniture."

Handforth was stunned.

He remembered that letter in his pocket—that stern refusal of Sir Edward's to supply money for fireworks. He could well imagine his father's fury at being called upon to pay a sum between sixty and seventy pounds because of his hopeful son's disregard of his injunctions. Sir Edward, of course, would be furious, and it was a certainty that he would visit his fury upon his son.

"You—you can't do that, sir," said Handy desperately. "My pater won't pay. He warned me against using fireworks—"

"That is immaterial," interrupted Mr. Wilkes. "Your father is legally liable. I rather fancy I shall be able to put the thing to him diplomatically."

"Well, you needn't write, sir," said Handforth, his voice charged with tragedy. "My pater will be here to-morrow. He's coming to see me in the morning."

"Splendid!" said the Housemaster. "That's saved me a lot of work. When Sir Edward comes I will show him this room and explain the thing. In the meantime, it must be left undisturbed. It is only fair that your father should see exactly what has happened."

And Mr. Alington Wilkes, having assured himself that no vestige of a spark remained in Study H, closed and locked the window, and then closed and locked the door.

"What about us, sir?" asked Travers.

"Until your study is cleaned out and re-furnished, you will have to 'dig' with some



of your Form-fellows," said Old Wilkey. "I'll get one of the porters, or Tubbs, to come along here and clear up this mess in the passage. You boys had better disperse and go about your usual occupations."

Within half an hour the Remove passage was looking normal, and all traces of the disaster were removed. Travers and Potts made the best of things. It was good to know that Mr. Wilkes was on their side, and his assurance that their loss would be made good completely satisfied them. It would only be a question of waiting a few days.

Edward Oswald Handforth was not so philosophical. He could see no silver lining to this black cloud. The morrow loomed ominous and sinister.

"The pater will slaughter me!" he said miserably, as he stood talking to a group of sympathetic Removites in the lobby. "It would be bad enough ordinarily, but he strictly prohibited me from using fireworks. What's he going to say when he finds out

that I made some of my own, and that I set fire to that study?"

"It's not what he'll say, but what he'll do," said K. K. sadly.

"Rot!" growled Handforth. "He can't do anything."

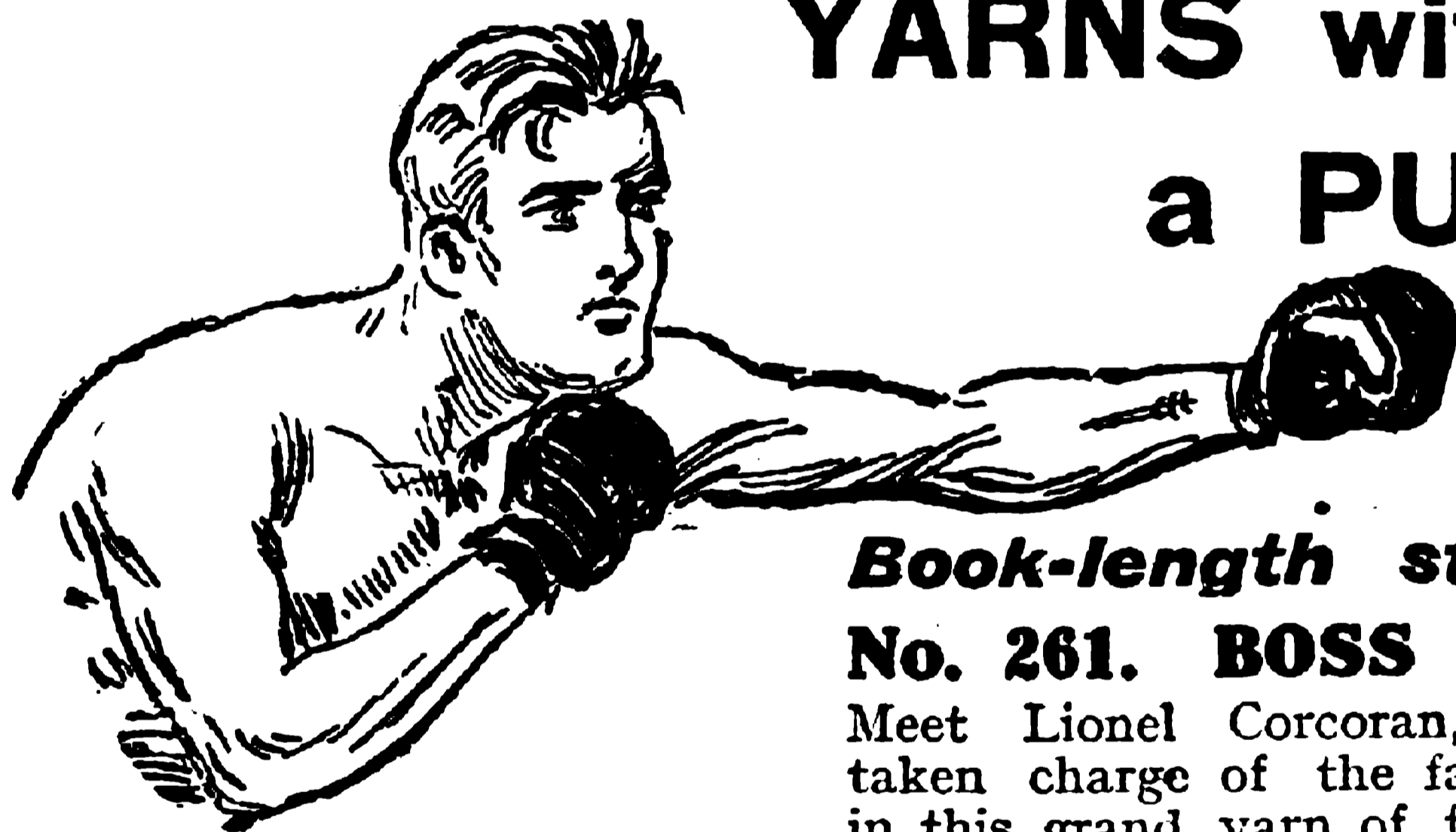
"He can give you a pasting."

"That doesn't worry me," retorted Handforth, with a groan. "If he lams into me, I shall take it gamely. But you don't think my pater will be satisfied with that, do you? He'll have to buy new furniture, and that'll cost him over sixty pounds. He'll make *me* pay that."

"How can he?" asked Deeks. "You haven't got sixty pounds."

"He'll stop my pocket money," explained Handforth, in a hopeless voice. "I shan't get another penny all this term, or next term, or the term after, either. That's how the pater will take it out of me."

"He's not such a hard nut as all that," protested Church. "Why, Sir Edward's one of the best. He's as generous as you are—and that's saying a lot, Handy."



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"You don't understand at all," replied Handforth, exasperated. "If this had been an ordinary accident, he'd have whacked out without a murmur. Here, look at this letter! He warns me in the plainest of terms. Says that no schoolboy should be trusted with fireworks—me, in particular. He forbids me to have any. That's why he'll be as hard as granite. To teach me a lesson."

"Well, old chap, you deserve it, don't you?" grinned Gore-Pearce.

"I don't want any sneers from you!" roared Handforth thickly. "I know I deserve it—and that's what makes me so wild. I'm furious with myself. I ought to be kicked for making those fatheaded squibs. I'm just a plain fool!"

"Steady, old man——" began Mac.

"So I am!" said Handforth fiercely. "If Travers and Potts had any sense, they'd knock half the stuffing out of me. All through my tomfoolery, they've lost their new furniture, and it might be weeks before they get it replaced. My pater's as stubborn as a mule, and he'll resist this claim to the bitter end."

"Old Wilkey will get him round," said Travers hopefully.

"Don't you believe it!" retorted Handforth, glaring. "Why don't you biff me in the eye, Travers? Don't I keep telling you that you won't get that furniture replaced for months? You ought to kick me from here to Bannington!"

He thrust his hands into his trousers pockets and mooched off in a state of utter dejection. So complete and absolute was his contrition that the entire Remove sympathised. When Handy knew that he was in the wrong he came out with it as bluntly as he came out with everything else. He was more concerned for Travers and Potts than he was for his own fate at his father's hands.

And so great an impression did he make that certain Removites got their heads together and discussed the pros and cons of helping him in his hour of trial.

## CHAPTER 4.

### Rallying Round Handy!

THE meeting took place in Study K—the abode of Kirby Keeble Parkington, Harvey Deeks, and Clement Goffin—although it was really Nipper's idea. Study C was rather too close to Study D for privacy.

"We've got to do something for old Handy," said Nipper, as he looked round at the gathering. "He's not exaggerating when he says that his pater will cut up rusty. We know Sir Edward, and we know that he'll bring the chopper down with an awful thump."

The meeting agreed. The Red-Hots, perhaps, were not so well acquainted with Sir Edward Handforth as the others, since these ex-Carltonians were more or less newcomers.

Fullwood, Somerton, Gresham, Duncan and Glenthorne, however, were well accustomed to Sir Edward's mule-like obstinacy.

"Handy's a good sort, and we'd like to do something," agreed K. K. "For once, we'll drop all rivalry and rally round."

"Absolutely the good old word," said Archie Glenthorne. "Rallying round old Handy seems to be the precise order of the day, what? In other words, what about it?"

"Personally, I don't see that we can do much," said Ralph Leslie Fullwood. "Sir Edward's got to know, so it's no good thinking of a wheeze to keep him away from St. Frank's. If he doesn't come, old Wilkey will write to him."

"And then he'd come, just the same," pointed out Nipper.

"What are we going to do, then—wangle Handy's pater?" asked Gresham.

"You're suggesting an impossibility, old man," replied the Remove skipper. "When Sir Edward sees that room—if he does see it—no amount of wangling will have any effect."

"What do you mean—if he does see it?" asked Watson.

"That's the point," replied Nipper. "Can't we prevent him from seeing it in its present state?"

"How? Wilkey's certain to show him."

Nipper looked very thoughtful.

"That room's locked up, and it'll remain locked up until to-morrow," he replied. "But we're not the kind of chaps to be baffled by a locked door, are we?"

"Sweetheart, what is this flash of genius?" asked Parkington.

"Well, look here, I won't beat about the bush any more," replied Nipper. "Most of us in this study are pretty well supplied with cash. If we haven't got it at the moment, our people will 'come across' in an emergency. There isn't time for us to apply to them, so we've got to take a chance."

"Go head," said Fullwood eagerly.

"I'm suggesting that we should run over to Bannington, and interview the manager of the Phoenix Furnishing Company," said Nipper. "We'll tell him what's happened, and we'll ask him to send a fresh supply of goods. We'll arrange for the stuff to be delivered at five o'clock to-morrow morning, before anybody's up."

"It grows fascinating," said K. K. breathlessly. "And at some dark hour of the night, I presume, we'll break into Study H, clear out the debris, and make the room ready for the five o'clock delivery?"

"That's it," said Nipper, grinning. "Just a little secret of our own, see? Not a word to Handy, or even to Travers or Potts. What a surprise for everybody when that study's opened for Sir Edward!"

"My child, it's not an idea—it's a thunderbolt," said K. K. admiringly.

"There's one little point," put in Fullwood. "When we interview this furniture manager, what are we going to give him instead of money?"



"Yes, that's a snag," admitted K. K., pained.

"We can give him our guarantee that we'll be responsible," said Nipper. "We'll promise to pay before the end of the week. Anyhow, isn't it worth trying? For old Handy's sake, we ought to make an effort, anyhow."

Fullwood looked dubious.

"Don't think I'm mean, but sixty odd quid is a tidy sum," he said. "And if we make ourselves responsible, we shall have to pay. It's no good going into this thing blindly, and I'm not sure that my people—after hearing the facts—would whack out my share."

"Same here," said Watson.

"Well, we needn't worry about that too much," said Nipper. "The main thing is to get that room transformed before Sir Edward sees it. The shock won't be half so great, then—we can let him know by degrees, as it were. Perhaps we can think of some wheeze to make him dub up, after all."

**T**HE enthusiastic juniors were not given to meeting trouble half way. The first thing was to get that furniture in; paying for it could look after itself. At all costs, Handy must be saved from his pater's full wrath.

The conspirators went over to Bannington in a body, and without much difficulty they got into touch with the manager at the Phoenix Furnishing Company. This gentleman listened sympathetically—and with an eye to business—as he heard of the disaster.

"This is a great pity," he commented, at length. "So all that new furniture which we delivered to-day is destroyed?"

"It's certainly ruined," replied Nipper. "If you take it back you might be able to make something of it—and allow a bit off the price of some new stuff."

"I doubt it," said the manager firmly.

"Well, anyhow, we want you to take it away," said Nipper. "Now, here's the point. Can you supply a fresh lot of stuff?"

"We can supply anything," said the Phoenix man promptly.

"That first batch of furniture was paid for by Travers' and Potts' people—but this lot is different," continued the Remove skipper. "We want to do this thing entirely on our own."

"And why not, sir?" asked the manager, rubbing his hands. "As it happens, I can duplicate that furniture in every detail. I have a big winter stock in, and not only can I supply similar articles, but exact copies!"

"You mean the same style of chairs and table and bookcase?"

"And the same pattern plush," said the manager crisply. "Come with me, young gentlemen, and I will show you. I believe I even have another Brussels carpet of the same design and colouring, and the twin brother of the tablecloth."

The Removites were delighted when they found that the manager was not speaking without his book. The Phoenix Company

had a very big stock, and choosing the duplicates of the destroyed furniture was an easy matter.

"This is going to be rich!" grinned Parkington. "Why, we can make that study look exactly the same as it was. Travers and Potts won't even know that there's been a fire. What a shock when they see the transformation!"

When it came to a question of payment the manager was not quite so affable. Until now, he had assumed that cash was to be paid. However, fellows like Archie Glen-thorne and the Duke of Somerton and Fullwood and Nipper carried weight. They gave their promise that they would settle the bill before the end of the week, and the manager compromised by agreeing to deliver the goods upon receiving a promise that the bill would be settled on Thursday. From this he would not shift.

"All right, then—Thursday," said Nipper. "You'll have your money, and you needn't worry. And you'll have all these goods at St. Frank's by five o'clock in the morning?"

"They'll be there as the clock strikes," promised the manager.

The conspirators returned to St. Frank's well satisfied.

"The old blighter hasn't given us much time in which to pay, but the chief thing is to get the study refurnished," said Nipper. "To-day's Tuesday, so we've only got until the day after to-morrow."

"With Guy Fawkes Day in between," said K. K. thoughtfully. "My children, it seems to me that we ought to think of something connected with Guy Fawkes Day to help us. I'll think this over and let my massive brain have its fling."

**T**HAT evening, Edward Oswald Handforth was silent and moody. Church and McClure had tried to cheer him up, but their efforts were futile. The knowledge that Sir Edward would be here in the morning filled Handforth's horizon with dread.

"We can't do anything," he said for the hundredth time. "I've got to take my medicine, and there's nothing more to be said."

Travers and Potts were rather concerned, too. Handforth's hints that they might have to wait weeks before they got their furniture replaced cast a gloom over their spirits.

"We jolly well won't agree to it," said Potts indignantly. "We'll tell Handy's pater point-blank that we want our stuff replaced without any silly delay. By Thursday, at the latest."

"We shall have to leave it to old Wilkey, dear old fellow," said Travers, "and even Wilkey, for all his tact, will have his work cut out. Frankly, I'm pessimistic."

They went to bed in a state of doubt and uncertainty, and Handforth went to bed more miserable than he had been for years. More than once the conspirators had been tempted to break the good news to him;



But they refrained upon realising that he would certainly "blow the gaff" to all in general. It might even get to Mr. Wilkes' ears, and Mr. Wilkes would probably forbid the whole thing.

It wasn't until one o'clock in the morning had struck that Nipper made a move. He awoke Tregellis-West and Watson, and they quickly dressed and went along to rake out Parkington and Fullwood and De Valerie and the rest. As silently as shadows the Removites crept downstairs.

It was easy work to open the door of Study H; Nipper discovered that the key of the next-door study fitted the lock. The juniors trooped in; somebody went across and pulled

until long after four o'clock, Study H was nearly looking its old self.

It wasn't much good going to bed now, particularly as they wanted to warn the van driver not to make too much noise, so the juniors sallied out into the darkness of the November night and met the van some distance down the lane.

"Funny time to have furniture delivered, ain't it?" asked the driver, in wonder.

"There's nothing in it," said Nipper. "We want to give some chaps a surprise, that's all. Now, there's a chance that your van will make a noise if you take it into the Triangle, so we want you to unload out in the lane. We'll carry the stuff in."



The junior footballers looked like figures of fire as they moved about the field. It was the most original game of football the spectators had ever seen!

down the blind, and the electric light was switched on.

"My only sainted aunt!" said K. K. "This is going to be a hefty job!"

The study was in a terrible condition. The carpet was still sodden with water, and the odour of burnt furnishings was overpowering. To clear this room out, and make it presentable, seemed a hopeless task.

Yet when they got down to it, working with a will, they were surprised to find that progress was quickly made. First of all the charred furniture was cautiously carried out and placed against the Ancient House steps. The carpet was taken up, and then commenced an orgy of swilling and scrubbing. The fellows took it in turns, while others constantly fetched pailfuls of fresh water.

All the debris was cleared away, the floor was scrubbed, and the paintwork was washed. By the time they had finished, which wasn't

"Suits me," said the driver readily.

The whole thing was successfully carried through. The van couldn't have got into the Triangle, anyhow, as the gates were locked. All the furniture had to be hoisted over the wall—and the spoilt goods were dealt with in the same way. It is said that many hands make light work, and the transfer was completed within half an hour. By five-thirty the van had departed, and by a quarter to six Study H was not one whit different from what it had been when Travers and Potts had proudly displayed their new possessions. Same carpet—same chairs—same everything.

"What a lark!" grinned Nipper, yawning happily. "Come on—let's go and have an hour or two's snooze. We can do with it."

So they all went back to bed—forgetful of the fact that there was a bill of sixty-seven pounds ten to meet on the morrow.



## CHAPTER 5.

## A Question of Payment!

SIR EDWARD HANDFORTH stepped briskly out of his car and found his elder son awaiting him on the top of the Ancient House steps. It was a fine, brisk November morning, and the weather promised well for the evening celebrations—for this, of course, was the great Fifth.

"Well, Edward?" said the visitor genially.

Handforth descended the steps almost reluctantly.

"Hallo, pater," he said, by way of greeting. "You've come, then."

His father looked at him closely.

"Anything the matter, my boy?" he asked, frowning. "Yes, I can see there is. You're not yourself. You look worried."

"I think Mr. Wilkes wants to see you, pater," said Handforth mournfully. "The sooner we get it over the better."

"Get what over?" asked Sir Edward. "What on earth are you talking about?"

"He'll tell you," replied Handy, with a sigh.

He couldn't bring himself to the point of explaining the situation here. Besides, he didn't want a scene on the Ancient House steps. Even in the privacy of Mr. Wilkes' study Sir Edward would probably make his voice audible throughout the House. But Handforth had no desire to delay matters. As it was inevitable that the chopper would drop, he wanted it to drop quickly.

He hadn't received a hint that morning of what had been happening during the night. Nipper, Parkington, Pullwood and the others all looked a bit sleepy, but nobody guessed why. And they had kept their own counsel.

"I'm very much afraid, Edward, you've been doing something you shouldn't," said Sir Edward suspiciously. "Or is it William?"

"It's nothing to do with Willy, pater," replied Handforth. "Oh, do come indoors and get it over."

He almost dragged his father to Mr. Wilkes' study, and he was not very pleased when the Housemaster instructed him to leave the room and to hold himself ready to come when called upon.

"That's done it!" he groaned, as he joined Church and McClure, who were anxiously waiting at the end of the passage. "I'm not even allowed to be there! Just you wait! You'll hear the pater's voice in a couple of ticks."

"Anybody might think he was an ogre," growled Church. "I don't believe he'll make such a fuss as you think."

In Mr. Wilkes' study, Sir Edward listened with rising anger as he heard the tale of the burnt study.

"It is most fortunate that you should be here at this time, Sir Edward," concluded Old Wilkey. "You will be able to see the study with your own eyes. I have purposely locked it up so that you could do so. You will realise, of course, that you are legally responsible—"

"I don't admit it!" broke in Sir Edward warmly. "Are you suggesting that I must make good this loss?"

"The boy cannot possibly make it good himself," Mr. Wilkes pointed out. "You, as his father, must therefore do so. The insurance company will naturally refuse to recognise any claim, and the school accepts no responsibility. Your son has admitted that the fault was entirely his—"

"No wonder the young rascal was looking so concerned!" burst out Sir Edward. "Upon my soul! After what I wrote to him, too! I forbade him to buy any fireworks, or to—"

"He told me that," put in Mr. Wilkes. "And I may say that he has acted with commendable frankness. Never for a moment did he attempt to dodge the blame. I don't wish you to be too hard on him, Sir Edward. Your son is genuinely sorry and, after all, the affair was quite an accident. Unfortunately, accidents have to be paid for."

"An accident?" retorted Sir Edward gruffly. "How could it have been an accident when you tell me that my son wilfully let off a home-made—er—squib in this room? You will kindly send for him, Mr. Wilkes. I'll show him whether I think it was an accident or not!"

Handforth was sent for.

"And what is the damage, anyhow?" went on Sir Edward. "How much would it cost to replace this spoilt furniture?"

"A matter of sixty or seventy pounds."

"What?" roared Sir Edward. "You expect me to be responsible— Certainly not! I won't agree to it for a moment! When I was at school the furniture in my study wasn't worth a fiver!"

"Times have changed, Sir Edward," said Mr. Wilkes gently.

"For the worse!" snapped Sir Edward. "A preposterous state of affairs, sir! That a junior schoolboy study should be equipped with furniture costing between sixty and seventy pounds is outrageous. I won't pay it!"

"If you don't, I'm afraid I shall be compelled to report the whole matter to the headmaster—and for your son's sake I want to avoid that," said Mr. Wilkes. "You surely must see, Sir Edward, that the cost of the furniture is quite immaterial. Travers and Potts have, perhaps, indulgent parents; but the fact remains that all this new furniture is destroyed, and it has to be replaced. It is not fair to those two boys that they should be made to suffer."

Sir Edward calmed down.

"In that argument, of course, I cannot join," he grunted. "You are quite right, Mr. Wilkes. As this boy's father, I must accept the responsibility. But, by George, my son shall be the one to pay—not me."

A tap sounded on the door, and Handforth entered.

"Well?" barked his father. "What have you got to say for yourself, sir?"

"Nothing, pater."



"You admit that your gross carelessness —"

"I admit everything, pater," interrupted Handforth dismally. "What's the good of doing anything else?"

"Surely you have something to say in your own defence?"

"Not when I know that the fire was caused by my own silly recklessness and disobedience," said Handforth. "I say, pater, don't lay it on too thick, will you? I know you're going to lecture me, but——"

Sir Edward did lecture him—drastically.

"And I may add that you'll have to pay for this damage out of your own pocket, young man," he concluded sternly. "Not one penny shall you have until this debt is cleared—and it will take a long, long time!"

"Couldn't you take it out of that legacy that Aunt Beatrice left me, and which you've got in trust, pater?" asked Handforth hopefully. "After all, that's my money, and——"

"Oh, no!" interrupted his father. "You're not going to get out of it like that, Edward. You wouldn't feel the loss at all. And I mean you to feel it. Your pocket-money is going to be rigidly cut off until this debt is discharged."

"But that'll take terms!" protested the wretched junior.

"Three or four, I should imagine, at a rough estimate," nodded Sir Edward, with a certain grim relish. "You've got to learn, Edward, that you cannot disobey me and play ducks and drakes with dangerous fireworks without suffering the consequences."

Handforth inwardly groaned. He wasn't particularly upset at this sentence, because he had been expecting it. But he was a generous fellow with his money—just as his father was generous with supplying it—and the prospect of being stony term in and term out appalled him.

Sir Edward turned to Mr. Wilkes.

"From now onwards, Mr. Wilkes, you will kindly withhold my son's usual weekly pocket-money," he said. "From my own end, I shall cease to send him those occasional—er—tips to which he has been accustomed."

"It is, of course, for you to decide," said Mr. Wilkes, rising to his feet. "The main point, Sir Edward, is that the furniture must be replaced, and at once. I suggest that we now view the study—so that you can see, with your own eyes, that I have not exaggerated the damage. I understand that the furniture was supplied by the Phoenix Company, of Bannington, and I want you to give these people your authority to re-furnish the study as near as possible as it was."

"And I've got to pay the bill, eh?" growled Sir Edward. "All right; there's no way out of it, I suppose."

Handforth said nothing, but he thought a lot. It was all very well for his pater to talk glibly about paying the bill. It was he—Handy—who would pay!

They went along to the Remove passage and a number of Removites followed at a respectable distance, rather keen upon hear-

ing Sir Edward's explosive remarks when he viewed the damage.

Travers and Potts joined the investigators. It was their study, and they felt they had a right to be present. Nipper, K. K., and the rest of the conspirators hovered about in silent glee. This was the moment they had been waiting for!

Mr. Wilkes unlocked the door.

"I shouldn't advise you to enter, Sir Edward," he warned. "There is a great deal of soot and ashes, all sodden and——"

He broke off abruptly, and his eyes opened wider behind his spectacles. But in that one moment he recovered himself.

"Well, well!" he murmured. "The fairies seem to have been at work during the night-time."

Sir Edward strode in, frankly puzzled.

"There's nothing wrong with this study," he commented. "There's been no fire here, Mr. Wilkes. You have evidently mistaken the study——"

"Oh, no," said the Housemaster. "This is the study."

"But—but there's nothing wrong with it!" gasped Handforth, looking round with gaping mouth. "My only sainted aunt! I must have dreamed it all! There wasn't any fire!"

The surprise was complete.

Handforth could hardly believe the evidence of his eyes; and Vivian Travers and Jimmy Potts, who had followed him in, were equally dumbfounded. They, too, wondered if they had been dreaming.

It was uncanny. No sign of any fire—exactly the same furniture, same pattern plush, same design table-cloth, same carpet! And every article of furniture in exactly the same place!

"Wha-what's happened?" asked Potts faintly.

"For the love of Samson!" breathed Travers. "I'm beginning to think that Mr. Wilkes must be right, and that the fairies must have been at work!"

Handforth spun round upon them.

"Do you know anything about this?" he asked blankly.

"We didn't even know that duplicate furniture was obtainable," replied Travers. "I don't pretend to know how it's happened, but Jimmy and I are quite satisfied—aren't we, Jimmy?"

"Rather!" grinned Potts. "We don't want to ask any questions. We're quite content to let the whole thing drop."

Mr. Wilkes nodded.

"And that, I think, is the most sensible thing to do," he said dryly. "As far as I can see, Sir Edward, the boys have settled this matter themselves."

"The boys?" asked Sir Edward, staring.

"I fancy I heard a chuckle in the corridor just now," explained Mr. Wilkes. "And, really, Sir Edward, I don't think it would be at all diplomatic on my part to institute any inquiries."

The genial Housemaster had "twigged." It was characteristic of his sporting nature



to be ready to wink at this incident, for he realised at once that his orders had been disobeyed, and any inquiries on his part must necessarily lead to the punishment of the generous-hearted fellows who had wrought this change.

Somebody had unlocked the door against his orders—somebody had been very busy during the night, involving the breaking of bounds. Mr. Wilkes was quite certain that at least a dozen of his boys were involved. He hadn't the faintest desire to penalise them for this good action. Therefore, his only policy was to let the matter drop.

"Upon my word!" said Edward, vaguely guessing the truth. "You mean that some of Edward's friends have clubbed together and bought this furniture in order to save him? H'm! I believe you're right, Mr. Wilkes. It would be best to leave matters as they are. You two boys are quite content?"

"Quite, sir," said Travers and Potts, in one voice.

Sir Edward looked at his hopeful son with twinkling eyes.

"You're a lucky young beggar," he declared. "You should be very proud of having such splendid friends."

Handforth's eyes were glowing.

"I don't know who did it, but they're top-notchers!" he said whole-heartedly. "And—and this means that the punishment is cut out, pater? You won't dock my pocket-money?"

"Strictly speaking, I ought to punish you just the same, or you won't take your lesson to heart," replied his father. "But, by George, I can't do it without financially benefiting on my own account—and that wouldn't be fair. So we'll call the whole thing square. And we won't make any awkward inquiries."

Chuckling, Sir Edward and Mr. Wilkes went their way. As far as they were concerned, the matter was over; but as far as the Remove conspirators were concerned, unfortunately, it was only just beginning!

## CHAPTER 6.

### Wanted—Sixty-Seven Pounds Ten!

EDWARD OSWALD HANDFORTH looked round with grateful eyes. Crowds of juniors had swarmed into the "magic" study, and the noise was terrific. Everybody was asking questions at once.

"But I can't understand it at all," Travers was saying. "I don't consider myself a duffer, but for once I'm flummoxed. Who did it—and how?"

"Yes, who did it?" demanded Handforth eagerly. "By George! You're a bunch of real sports! You've saved me from the chopper, and everything's all serene."

"Up to a point," agreed Nipper. "But only up to a point."



Jokes from readers wanted for this feature! If you know of a good rib tickler send it along now—and win a prize! A handsome watch will be awarded each week to the sender of the best joke; all other readers whose efforts are published will receive a pocket wallet or a penknife. Address your jokes to "Smilers," Nelson Lee Library, 5, Carmelite Street, London, E.C.4.

### THE OPTIMIST!

Johnny was sitting with his foot on the alarm clock.

"Good gracious! What on earth are you doing?" asked his mother.

"My foot has gone to sleep," replied Johnny, "and I'm trying to wake it up."

(R. Jones, 284, St. Benedict's Road, Small Heath, Birmingham, has been awarded a handsome watch.)

### CUTE!

Smith: "If you saw the man who stole your car, why don't you get it back?"

Brown: "I'm waiting till he fits a new set of tyres on it."

(W. Thorpe, 35, Retcar Street, Highgate, N.9, has been awarded a penknife.)

### JAMMY!

Teacher: "What would twenty-eight oranges be at seven for sixpence, and four pounds of sugar at three-pence per pound?"

Tommy: "Marmalade, miss."

(V. Oliver, 98, Robin Hood Chase, Nottingham, has been awarded a pocket wallet.)

### THE MIRACLE EXPLAINED.

A Scotsman with a dozen friends was dining in a fashionable hotel. The waiter came up with the bill.

"Bring it here!" called the Scotsman in a loud tone. "I'll pay for it."

Next morning the following headline appeared in a local newspaper: "Scotsman strangles ventriloquist."

(A. Gadd, 247, Humbertstone Road, Leicester, has been awarded a pocket wallet.)

### S-S-S-S-SPEED!

Two out of work sprinters had taken a fancy to the farmer's fowls and, having been caught in the act, were now sprinting in real earnest.

"I say, Bill," said one, "what are those black flies following us?"

Bill glanced round swiftly; then gasped and ran faster than ever.

"Faster, mate, faster!" he urged. "They're not flies—it's buckshot."

(J. Hans, c/o Forrest & Co., Rondebosch, Cape, S. Africa, has been awarded a pocket wallet.)



Something in his tone brought silence.

"We were sorry for you, Handy, so we put our heads together," he explained. "We guessed that old Wilkey would bring his blind eye into use when he spotted this study—and we were right."

It did not take him long to explain the details.

"Well, I don't mind telling you that we're mighty pleased about it," said Travers. "Our study is just as good as ever, and we never expected to be so lucky. We thought we should have to wait weeks."

"And after this I won't make any more fireworks," said Handforth fervently. "Of course, if I really put my mind to it, I could produce some perfectly safe ones; but on the whole——"

"The only fireworks you'll see after this are those that are supplied by Brock's or Pain's or Well's!" broke in Church grimly. "And Mac and I aren't going to let you handle any of those, either—safe as they are! You're not even to be trusted with a box of matches."

Handforth choked back his wrath.

"Go it! Pile it on!" he said. "I suppose I deserve it."

Nipper coughed.

"There remains, of course, the question of payment," he said gently.

"Eh?" ejaculated Handforth, with a start.

"Payment, old man."

"Payment?"

"We may have been good fairies in the night, but our fairy-like activities don't include the materialisation of furniture out of thin air," explained Nipper. "All this stuff is on tick."

"Wha-a-at?" gurgled Travers.

"My dear child, you don't suppose we can whack out sixty-seven pounds at a moment's notice?" asked K. K. "We've promised the manager of the Phoenix Furnishing Company that he'll have his money by to-morrow."

"My only hat!"

"Oh, crumbs!"

"We thought there was a catch in it somewhere!"

"We've saved the situation for Handy, and we've made things pleasant for Travers and Potts," went on Parkington smoothly. "All we need, now, is a matter of sixty-seven pounds ten to save the situation for ourselves."

Vivian Travers grinned.

"As far as I can see, Jimmy and I are out of it," he remarked. "As long as our people aren't called upon to pay this second bill, we're safe. And nobody can really expect us to shell out from our own pockets."

"No, you chaps are out of it," agreed Nipper. "But facts are stubborn things, and we're up against one now. How are we going to get that money by to-morrow? Brain-waves, forward!"

"We could have a whip round," said Church brightly.

### THE REASON WHY.

Father (enraged): "This new saw is useless. It won't cut butter."

Small Son: "Oh, yes it will, dad. Billy and I cut a brick in half with it this morning."

(J. Munford, 17, Cressy Road, Hampstead, N.W.3, has been awarded a penknife.)

### HEAR, HEAR!

Agent: "Do you want your office furniture insured against theft?"

Manager: "Yes; everything except the clock. Everybody keeps an eye on that."

(Mary Wallace, Living Van, Market Ground, Wakefield, has been awarded a penknife.)

### UNEXPECTED.

"Here's a tip for you, laddie," said the dour-looking Scots member as he entered the club-house after a round of golf.

"Thank you, sir," said the caddie expectantly.

"Go home at once. Yon big cloud means rain."

(H. Hurling, 92, Wenlake Buildings, Old Street, London, has been awarded a penknife.)

### SAFETY FIRST.

Boy (eyeing his grandfather very doubtfully as he industriously cracks and eats nuts): "Can you crack nuts?"

Grandfather: "Certainly not. I haven't any teeth."



Boy (happily): "Good! Then will you please hold my nuts while I play football?"

(H. Baker, 39, Brook Street, Gornal Wood, Nr. Dudley, has been awarded a pocket wallet.)

### (H)EELS AND TOES!

Angry Farmer (to angler fishing in his pond): "What are you doing there?"

Angler: "I've just caught one of your big eels."

Farmer: "And now you're going to catch one of my big toes."

(R. Ashman, 33, Dyfed Avenue, Town-Hill, Swansea, has been awarded a penknife.)

### HARD LINES.

Slim Passenger (in crowded 'bus): "I dislike having to wait so long for a seat, don't you?"

Very Stout Passenger: "You're lucky. I have to wait for two."

(Margaret Orton, 331, Underhill Road, East Dulwich, S.E.22, has been awarded a penknife.)

### A SCOTCH STORY!

A Scotsman gave a taxi-driver a penny for a tip.

"What's this?" growled the driver, poising the coin on his finger-tip.

"Ye're a sportsman," said the Scotsman, beaming at him. "Tails!"

(L. Long, 89, Edinburgh Street, Swindon, has been awarded a pocket wallet.)



"How much can you start it with?"

"One and fourpence," replied Church.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"We admire the spirit, but I don't think one and fourpence would be of much use," said K. K. "Now, as the leader of the Remove, I suggest——"

"Rats! Nipper's leader!" broke in Watson.

"Nipper may be skipper, but it is common knowledge in the Remove that I lead," said K. K. blandly. "And, as leader, I vote that all whips round should be barred. We can't afford to pay a bill like that, anyhow—and it isn't our job to pay it."

"It's no good going to my pater——" began Handforth in alarm.

"There are other methods," said Parkington calmly. "In fact, I've got a wheeze already. Whenever you want wheezes, don't forget to come to the K. K. Limited Liability Company. The Managing Director is always ready with the goods."

"The Managing Director is always ready with a lot of gas, if that's what you mean," said Nipper pointedly. "If you've got an idea, you red-headed ass, trot it out."

"To-day's the Fifth," said Parkington solemnly.

"Go hon!"

"In other words, a festive occasion—an occasion when people are willing to whack out solid cash for any form of luminous amusement," continued K. K. "Now, Handy isn't the only one who has been experimenting with chemicals. I've had a shot at it, and, without boasting, I think I've been more successful than he."

"You've been making fireworks?" asked Travers suspiciously.

"I'll show you," said the burly red-headed giant. "I meant to keep this thing a secret until to-night, but, in the circe I'll let you in on it now. Pull the blind down, somebody."

"Not likely!" shouted Potts, in alarm. "This room's been burnt out once—we're not going to take any more chances!"

"Don't worry; there's nothing inflammable about this experiment," said K. K., as he took three small pill boxes out of his pocket. "Down with that blind."

Travers and Potts were by no means reassured, but there were so many other juniors there that they were unable to have their way. The blind was drawn, and Study H became plunged in semi-darkness.

"Watch!" said K. K. impressively.

Swiftly he opened those three boxes and dabbed his finger into the first one. He coolly smeared it down Handforth's jacket—Handforth being the nearest fellow. Where his finger had travelled a glowing streak of red fire stood out, shimmering and smoking mysteriously.

"Hi!" howled Handforth. "I'm burning!"

"You're dotty, K. K.!" gasped Church. "You've set him on fire!"

"Have I?" said Parkington. "Look here."

He put his hand over the glowing streak, and the others were amazed to see that he

could hold it there with impunity. And now he followed up his first move by adding streaks from the other two boxes. Yellow and green fire blazed on Handforth's jacket, side by side with the red.

"Well, I'm jiggered!" said Nipper, impressed.

"Not bad, eh?" grinned K. K. "Up with the blind."

With the full daylight streaming into the study, there was nothing visible on Handforth's jacket except three smudges of brownish-grey paste, flat and dull.

"Will this stuff come off?" asked Edward Oswald suspiciously.

"It might," replied K. K. "As a matter of fact, I haven't tried getting it off yet. But it's quite harmless, if that's what you mean."

"You've ruined my coat!" roared Handforth. "Why the dickens couldn't you dab it on your own?"

"I wasn't sure whether it would come off," explained Parkington cheerfully.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What is this stuff, Parkington?" asked Nipper.

"My patent luminous paint," replied K. K. proudly. "Sweethearts, it's the last word in safety fireworks! The paint is non-corrosive, non-injurious, and if I speak of it in glowing terms you mustn't accuse me of boasting. It glows better than anything I know—and the glow lasts. You didn't see it properly in that half-light. At night-time it's startling. Looks just like real fire."

"Jolly interesting and ingenious," admitted Nipper. "But how are you going to use it to rake up sixty-seven pounds ten? You seem to have side-tracked the real issue."

"Not a bit," said K. K. "My idea is for us to get up some sort of a show to-night—in Bellton, say—and charge a bob admission. It's Guy Fawkes Night, and people ought to patronise it."

Nipper scratched his head.

"I can see possibilities, but I'm not very hopeful," he said. "People aren't going to pay good money to see a lot of luminous paint—especially when there are plenty of real firework displays in the district."

"How much of this stuff have you got, anyhow?" asked Gresham.

"Not much—but I can make plenty," replied K. K. "All we need now is to think of something brainy. Some kind of exhibition. Couldn't we make some effigies, and paint them up in different colours?"

"And expect people to pay a bob a time to see them?" asked Handforth, with scorn. "My dear ass, you're mad! To raise a sum like sixty-seven quid, at a bob a time, you'd need—lemme see—yes, you'd need a couple of hundred people to pay admission."

"Your arithmetic is a bit rusty, old man," said Nipper. "Two hundred shillings only comes to ten quid. Can't you see how impossible it is, K. K.? We should need thirteen hundred and fifty people to pay their bobs."

K. K. looked downcast.



"And there aren't more than six hundred in the village," went on Nipper. "Of course, we could draw from the school—and from Moor View, too, to say nothing of the River House. But who's going to pay good money to see—"

He broke off abruptly, and his eyes shone. "I've got it!" he went on breathlessly. "By Jove! I've got the wheeze of the century!"

"Sounds promising!" prompted K. K.

"A night football match!" said Nipper triumphantly.

"What!"

"One side playing in togs smeared with your red fire, and the other side smeared with green," went on Nipper. "Goalposts, touchline, and penalty area and ball painted with yellow. What price that for a wheeze?"

"It's—it's marvellous!"

"My only hat!"

"They've had football matches by flare-lights, and they've been pretty successful," went on Nipper. "But this'll beat flarelight into fits. Try and picture it, you chaps! The whole ground in absolute darkness, except for the luminous figures of the opposing teams—the gleaming goals and touchlines—the glowing ball! It's such a novelty that it'll attract all Bannington!"

"Bannington!" yelled K. K.

"Bellton's too small, and they haven't a proper footer ground, anyhow," said Nipper. "And we couldn't hold a game like that at St. Frank's because there's no accommodation for the spectators, or no facilities for charging admission."

"A night footer match!" breathed K. K., in an awed voice. "With my patent luminous paint to show up the players! Nipper, I take back what I said. You're not only the skipper of the Remove, but you're the leader, too!"

Nipper chuckled.

"We've got to go all out for that money—and to-night's the only chance," he declared. "Why do the thing in a pettifogging way? Do it thoroughly, or not at all! We'll play this match at the Stronghold—the Blue Crusaders' ground!"

"Oh, my hat!"

"It's a First Division club, and although the public will be frankly told that it's a schoolboy game, the novelty of the thing will draw them in," went on Nipper. "We'll even give a guarantee. Money refunded if the game isn't a complete success."

"But will that luminous paint last the game?" asked Travers.

"It lasts for hours—I've tried it," said K. K. promptly. "The ball might get a bit faint after a while, but we can easily have four or five in reserve. That's nothing. We've got the idea, but how're we going to push it through? What about all the arranging? I doubt if there'll be time."

"When the Remove starts a thing, it doesn't waste any time," replied Nipper briskly. "We'll easily get hold of the ground. Mr. Piccombe, the Blues' manager, is a good sort, and I'm sure he'll help. In any case, we're safe. Don't forget that

Corky, of the East House, is the absolute owner of the Blue Crusaders. And if he won't lend us the ground, I'll eat my footer boots."

There was an immediate dash for Lionel Corcoran of the East House, and he was dug out. When he heard of the proposed "stunt" game he bubbled with enthusiasm—especially when he learned what the real object of it was.

"I'll ring up Piccombe and fix it at once," he promised. "I'll get him to rush out some special bills and have them all over the town before tea-time. They usually get fifteen or twenty thousand people for an ordinary match; but we can't expect a big crowd like that, you know."

"We'll charge sixpence instead of a bob, and if we only get three thousand we shall be well on the right side," said Nipper. "Even at this short notice we ought to draw five thousand, at the very least."

"More," declared Corky. "The Reserve games attract seven or eight thousand sometimes. It ought to be a good game, too. What's more, we'll give you a licking, my sons."

"Eh?" said Nipper.

"I said, we'll give you a licking—that is, the Fourth."

"But the Fourth won't be playing," said Nipper. "This is going to be a Remove game, you ass."

"You've never made a bigger mistake than that," retorted Corcoran promptly. "If the Blues' ground is going to be used for this match, the Fourth must have a look in. That's final. Dash it, as skipper of the Fourth, I demand it!"

And, of course, he had his way. The Removites were not in a position to jib. They didn't quite like it, because they wanted this to be a Remove stunt in order to help Handforth, with the Red-Hots and the Old-Timers as opposing forces. But Corky held the trump card, and nobody blamed him for playing it.

## CHAPTER 7.

### A Frosty Night!

PREPARATIONS went forward briskly during the day.

Corcoran, as promised, got in touch with Mr. Ulysses Piccombe, and Dave Moran and Fatty Fowkes and all the other members of the famous Blue Crusaders' team entered into the spirit of the occasion and lent a hand.

Special bills were rushed from the printers, and were being displayed in the town by mid-afternoon. The Blues generously—and humorously—became sandwich men, and paraded the town to the general amusement of the populace. The Blues, when it came to anything of this sort, were real sports.

Crowds of Fourth-Formers and Removites took advantage of the half-holiday to distribute handbills throughout Bannington. If this novel game wasn't a success, it wouldn't



be their fault. Bannington would never be able to say, afterwards, that it hadn't known of the fixture!

So enthusiastic were the juniors that they had visions of a record crowd turning up, but Mr. Piecombe wasn't bluffed by the schoolboys' red-hot ardour. He had been a football manager for too long.

"If we get four thousand in here to-night we shall be—er—inordinately lucky," he declared. "Personally, I don't anticipate more than two thousand. I hate to discourage you, but you mustn't be too—er—optimistic."

"But think of the novelty of it, Mr. Piecombe," said Boots, of the Fourth.

"Novelty—yes," agreed the manager. "That's what's going to spoil it, I'm afraid. The football public is ready enough to see a genuine game, but it distrusts anything—er—freakish. This game isn't being taken seriously, young man. All those who do come will merely come for a laugh."

It was clear that Mr. Piecombe himself held the private view that as football the game would be a wash-out. As something novel, it might attract, but that was all. The St. Frank's fellows were determined to show him that he was wrong.

K. K., with a whole host of assistants, was hard at it, making his special luminous preparation. A whip round had been necessary for this, for the materials cost well over thirty shillings.

The match was fixed for six p.m., sharp. There were two reasons for holding it at this early hour. Firstly, it wasn't liable to clash with any firework demonstrations, which weren't likely to start until seven-thirty or eight; and secondly, it would enable the fellows to get back in good time for the school celebrations. They had all obtained special permission to be out a bit later this evening. On Guy Fawkes Night the rules were generally lax.

At five-thirty, the Stronghold gates were opened, and the fellows, who were already there, were gratified to see the turnstiles merrily twirling. It had been a very excellent idea to charge sixpence, instead of a shilling. Novelty or no novelty, the Bannington public would not have taken kindly to paying a shilling admission.

By ten minutes to six the enclosures contained a fair sprinkling of spectators. In the gloom, they looked very few and far between, and the grand-stand—for which ninepence was charged—seemed nearly empty. The spirits of the schoolboy promoters flagged somewhat.

"Afraid it won't be much of a success, after all," said Travers, as he was changing in the well-appointed dressing-rooms with the other members of the team. "There aren't many people here yet."

"Hardly enough to pay for the printing and the other exes," growled Bob Christine. "Who's brilliant idea was it, anyhow?"

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"Mine," said Nipper, who was perfectly at ease. "There are more people here than you think, my sons. Ten thousand people, in this ground, look like a handful."

Mr. Piecombe came in, rubbing his lean hands.

"Well, upon my word!" he said, beaming. "I must admit, boys, that I am—er—gratified. A much better gate than I anticipated—and they are still coming in."

"How many so far, sir?" asked many voices.

"Roughly—very roughly—five thousand people have paid for admission."

"Five thousand!" yelled Travers.

"There will probably be six thousand by the time the game starts," said Mr. Piecombe.

It was indeed a pleasant surprise; for the gate-money would not only supply all the necessary money for the Phoenix Furnishing Company, but would cover all the expenses and leave a considerable amount over for charity. It had been one of the features of the bills that a certain percentage of the takings would go to the Bannington Cottage Hospital.

The schoolboy footballers were bucked tremendously, and their enthusiasm was great as they prepared to take the field. In the grand-stand and in the enclosures the spectators were waiting in a spirit of frank amusement. Not one person in ten expected to see a real game.

The players weren't out yet, but the ground itself looked promising. The goalposts, the touchline, the penalty area, and the other markings, stood out in gleaming golden fire. It was fascinating to watch.

Standing on the centre spot was the football—a burning, glowing orb. And from it, as from the touchlines, arose a kind of luminous, hazy mist. It was difficult to realise that it was not real fire.

The evening was black and cloudy, with scarcely any wind, and just a touch of frost in the air. The conditions could not have been more ideal.

At three minutes to six, the players came running out of the pavilion, and shouts of laughter and encouragement greeted them. The spectators were frankly astonished. For those players, eleven red and eleven greenish-blue, stood out even more startlingly than the golden markings of the football pitch.

It was rather uncanny. Every figure was easily distinguishable, and there wasn't the slightest possibility of the teams getting mixed up. The figures moved about the field like coloured wraiths.

"Extraordinary!" commented Mr. Piecombe, impressed.

"Gosh! It looks like being a real game, after all!" said Will Fowkes, the big sixteen-stone goalie of the Blues.

"It's going to be worth watching, too," said Gillingham, one of the backs.

They were more fascinated than ever as the teams lined up. The referee was plainly marked out from the teams by reason of the fact that he was a figure of glowing purple.

K. K.'s luminous paint could be made in any colour.

The crowds watched breathlessly. They could see nothing of the players' faces or hands or knees. Only their jerseys, shorts, stockings and boots were treated with the luminous paint. Owing to the darkness, the rest of their persons were quite invisible. The effect was weird in the extreme.

But there was no doubting the success of the wheeze.

The referee's whistle blew, and the Fourth-Formers kicked off. The glowing ball travelled from foot to foot, was passed back in a soaring arc, and a red figure dashed at it. The Removites were in red, and Reggie Pitt, on the wing, had the ball.

He ran down near the touchline, centred well, and another red figure trapped the orb, and sent it shooting goalwards.

The Fourth Form goalie leapt, and only just succeeded in saving. The ball went soaring back into midfield. And the spectators settled themselves down to watch in real earnest.

For the first ten minutes the game waxed fast and furious, Nipper scoring a goal for the Remove in the seventh minute. There was a bit of an argument with the referee because the Fourth Form goalie protested that the paint had worn off the football, and that he couldn't see it. However, the goal was allowed to stand, and a fresh ball was brought on the field.

Still, it was the first jarring note—the first indication that the game was not likely to fulfil its early promise.

And then, in the eleventh minute, came the catastrophe.

A few drops of rain had been felt a little earlier—much to the concern of all and sundry, seeing that this was Guy Fawkes' Night, and that there were to be firework displays later. Now, without warning, a sharp shower fell. As a shower, it was nothing to worry about. It was over within a minute, just one of those little bursts of rain which a passing cloud will sometimes shed. The spectators, who were warmly overcoated, were not affected much. But the effect upon the players was extraordinary.

As the rain came down the fiery red and blue figures seemed to fade and flicker. The goalposts, the touchlines, and the football did the same. All the schoolboy footballers, moving about over the dark field, vanished into thin air.

It was disastrous. One moment they were there—the next they weren't. So quick was the blotting out that the players had no time to stop, and they found themselves barging into one another in hopeless confusion.

"Here, what's up?" gasped Nipper.

"Somebody's turned the juice off!" came Travers' voice. "I say, K. K., what do we do now? You're the inventor——"

"Dry up!" shouted the anguished K. K. "It's the rain!"

"But the rain's over."



"Goodness only knows why it happened, but that paint of mine must be affected by dampness," groaned Parkington, as he groped about. "It seems to spread, too. I'm only wet in one or two places, and yet the glow vanished all over."

"Well, we can't carry on like this," said Nipper.

"We can't carry on at all," said K. K., in alarm. "We haven't got enough paint to re-do fresh sets of togs, and it might rain again, too."

By this time derisive cheers were sounding from the spectators, and the cheers soon gave place to cat-calls and jeers. A football crowd, even at the best of times, is a fickle quantity. The spectators, so delighted a few minutes earlier, were now thoroughly disgusted. Many of the good-natured ones laughed amusedly, and made for the exits. The game, after all, was a frost.

But some of the rougher elements remembered the guarantee on the bills—a satisfactory game, or money refunded! Shouts went up that the public was being swindled—demands were made for the entrance money to be returned. It wasn't long before swarms of people were running across the pitch and shouting "money back" in front of the stand.

The startled schoolboys, disappointed at first, were now thoroughly alarmed. This change didn't merely mean the stoppage of the game, but the ruin of their plans. They fled to the dressing-rooms, breathless and anxious.

Kirby Keeble Parkington was seized, and an explanation was demanded of him. Rather unkindly, he was grabbed by his exasperated companions and bumped. After all, he had done his best.

The tumult continued outside, and when, at length, Mr. Piecombe made his appearance, the teams had changed into their ordinary clothes, and were waiting to hear the worst. They heard it.

"I had my doubts of this game from the very start," said Mr. Piecombe, who was dishevelled and irritable. "Most of the people

have had their money back. A certain proportion went out peacefully, but what remains of the gate-money will only just cover the expenses. There'll be absolutely nothing for you boys."

"Oh, crumbs!"

"Nothing at all, sir?"

"Not a penny," said Mr. Piecombe. "If there is any surplus after the expenses have been met, it must go to the Cottage Hospital. But I doubt if they will get more than a mere pound or two."





"Tough luck, kids," commented Dave Moran, the Blues' skipper.

"It was that rotten shower," groaned K. K. "If the weather had only kept dry, we should have finished the game, and everything would have been all right. Thanks awfully for all you've done, Mr. Piecombe, and you, too, Mr. Moran. It's just our bad luck."

"Bad luck be blowed!" said Handforth tartly. "It's a pity you couldn't have made that paint waterproof while you were at it!

**Crack-crack-crack-bang! The excited juniors threw the jumping crackers under the feet of the workmen, who leapt about like cats on hot bricks!**



What's the good of making stuff which blots out at the first hint of dampness?"

The disconsolate juniors went their way.

"Well, it's no good grumbling at K. K.," said Nipper practically, as they went into the town. "We're up against a hard snag, my sons. To-morrow's Thursday, and we haven't got a smell of that money. We did our best, but that shower was our Waterloo."

"Oh, let's get back home," said Deeks impatiently. "We shall miss all the fireworks unless we buck up."

The other fellows were thinking the same thing, and a brisk start was made. Kirby Keeble Parkington, however, was not disposed to hurry himself. He felt responsible for this fiasco, and it weighed on his conscience.

"I'll tell you what I'll do," he said stoutly. "I'll go and see the manager of the Phoenix Furnishing Company, explain what's happened, and ask him to give us until Saturday. He can't very well refuse, and that'll give us another chance to get up a money-making wheeze."

"Well, I hope somebody else thinks of one next time," said Harry Gresham, with a sniff. "Yours don't seem to me much good, K. K."

Parkington glared.

"Well, I've still got a tongue in my head—and I can use it!" he retorted. "You wait until I've seen that manager! I'll fix this thing easily enough."

## CHAPTER 8.

### A K.O. For K. K.!

THERE was a grim light in K.K.'s eyes as he marched into the private office of Mr. Peter Hammond, the manager of the Phoenix Furnishing Company, Limited, in Bannington High Street. The big stores had just closed, but the manager was available.

"And how did the game go?" he asked affably. "All the town has been talking of you St. Frank's boys—"

"They're still talking—but not in the way we wanted," interrupted K.K. "The game was a fizzle, Mr. Hamomnd, and that's why I'm here."

"I fail to see the connection," said the manager mildly.

"We fixed up that game on purpose to raise the



money for the furniture you supplied yesterday," replied Parkington. "You gave us until to-morrow to pay, didn't you?"

"To-morrow morning, I think," said Mr. Hammond promptly.

"There wasn't any mention of the morning, and we've really got until closing-time," said K. K. "Not that it matters, anyhow. We want you to give us an extension, Mr. Hammond. Say, until Saturday—or, better still, a clear week from to-day. Now that this game has failed us, there's no time between now and to-morrow evening——"

"Let me understand this clearly," interrupted Mr. Hammond, his manner changing. "You are telling me, I take it, that you cannot pay for the goods which were supplied yesterday?"

"Nothing of the sort! We can pay for them, but——"

"You are attempting to quibble with me, young man," said Mr. Hammond unpleasantly. "You can't pay for these goods to-morrow, can you?"

"Well, I'm afraid not; but if you'll give us a bit more time——"

"An arrangement is an arrangement," cut in the other. "I only delivered those goods on the distinct understanding that they would be paid for by Thursday. And now you tell me that they cannot be paid for by Thursday. That savours very much of false pretences, my young friend."

K. K. bristled.

"Go easy!" he said grimly. "I thought you'd be reasonable, Mr. Hammond. There's no need to insult me like that. We guaranteed to be responsible for the money, and even if we do ask for an extension of time, that's no excuse for you to call us swindlers."

"We won't quarrel, of course," said Mr. Hammond coldly. "You must realise that I am not the proprietor of this company, but only the branch-manager. I stretched a point by delivering those goods, knowing that you St. Frank's boys are the sons of wealthy people. If there is any unpleasantness over this affair, I shall be called to account by my directors. And, frankly, I'm not going to take the risk."

"But if you'll only give us until Saturday——"

"I won't even give you until to-morrow now," said Mr. Hammond, who was looking thoroughly alarmed. "This is an absolutely cash business, young man. We're not one of those hire purchase firms—as our prices should inform you. And seeing that you confess that you cannot pay, my only course is to fetch back the goods."

"My only hat!" said K. K., breathing hard. "What the dickens is the good of getting windy?"

"How dare you say I'm windy?"

"You're proving it, aren't you?" asked Parkington. "Dash it all, your money's safe enough. It's only a question of a day or two."

Mr. Hammond seized his telephone.

"I'll show you whether it's a question of a day or two," he snapped. "Yes? Hallo! Put me through to the warehouse."

"But, look here——"

"Is that you, Simkins?" said Mr. Hammond. "Has Banfield come in with the van? Oh, he's just in? Good! Tell him to get ready immediately for another journey. It's urgent. Some furniture has to be picked up at St. Frank's College. You'd better come up here and I'll give you full instructions."

He slammed the receiver down, and looked at K. K.

"I think you understand that," he said curtly.

"You don't mean that you're going to collect that furniture this evening?" asked Parkington, who was aghast at the failure of his usually glib and persuasive tongue. "You can't do it, Mr. Hammond!"

"No? I'm doing it," replied Mr. Hammond. "I am certainly not going to let that furniture stay there unless it is paid for. You've told me that you cannot settle by to-morrow, and you've broken the agreement under which it was delivered."

"Hold on!" said Parkington hotly. "While we're talking about breaking agreements, what are you doing? You definitely gave us until to-morrow evening—and you can't honourably take that furniture away until then."

"Haven't you told me you can't pay?"

"We might be able to pay by to-morrow—if you push us to it," replied K. K. quickly. "Look here, you've got to cancel that removal order. If you collect those things to-night, you'll be breaking the agreement, Mr. Hammond, not us. We've got until to-morrow, and we demand——"

"Oh, you're demanding now, are you?" snapped the manager. "I'm not cancelling any removal orders, and you can go back to your school and get on with your lessons. I was a fool in the first place to have any dealings with irresponsible schoolboys. I might have known what would happen."

Parkington was thoroughly alarmed. His visit had done more harm than good. By leaving Mr. Hammond alone, the Removites would have had another twenty-four hours' grace. K. K.'s efforts had merely precipitated the crisis. The burly leader of the Red-Hots felt crushed. A second failure in one day!

"Look here," he said desperately. "If we don't pay by to-morrow, Mr. Hammond, you can come and take the things away. That's only keeping to the original plan."

"The original plan is already cancelled," said Mr. Hammond curtly. "You are merely wasting your time by talking to me. That furniture belongs to this company, and I shall have it collected immediately."

**K.** K. was frantic as he leapt upon his motor-cycle and hummed back to St. Frank's. He had seen the van standing ready, and he knew that it would soon be on its way.

By the time he arrived at the school the fellows were getting ready to sally out into the paddock and the playing fields to see the



fireworks, and to make merry round the huge bonfire.

"We wondered where you'd got to, K. K.," said Nipper. "You haven't been with that Phoenix man all this time, have you?"

K. K. explained breathlessly what had happened, and Fullwood and De Valeric and Gresham and a crowd of others gathered round, listening.

"And is this how you wangle people?" asked Fullwood sarcastically.

"The man's a rotter!" replied K. K., with indignation. "It's a dirty trick to collect that stuff this evening, after that distinct understanding. What are we going to do? We're not going to stand round and see it taken away, are we?"

"But we can't pay," objected Gresham.

"And it's pretty awkward, too," said Nipper thoughtfully. "Some of the girls have come over, and Travers and Potts are proudly showing them their new belongings."

"Oh, my hat!" groaned K. K. "What a mess up if those furniture men barge in!"

"Mr. Hammond has broken his word, and we shall be justified in obstructing his men," said Nipper crisply.

"In fact, if it comes down to a point of law, I don't believe the firm's got any legal right to take the stuff. It wasn't delivered under a hire-purchase agreement, and all Mr. Hammond can do is to sue us for the money."

"He can't sue us, being minors," said Fullwood. "I suppose that's why he's got the wind up."

"Anyhow, it doesn't matter—the van's coming, and we've got to delay the men all we can," said Nipper. "At least, until the girls have gone. We mustn't let them know

of this affair. When the fireworks start, everybody will clear out of the Houses, and we must make the men wait until then."

As he was speaking, the van in question came lumbering into the Triangle, and the juniors swarmed round it. They found two men in charge.

When they heard that they were required to wait for at least an hour, they became quite unpleasant.

"No fear!" said the driver. "The boss shoved this extra job on to us unexpectedly, an' we ain't doin' no waitin'. I've got three kids at 'ome waiting to see me let the fireworks off. Come on, Bill!"

"It won't take us five minutes," said Bill.

"But you can't go to that study now," protested Nipper. "Travers and Potts have visitors."

"They'll 'ave two more in a minute," said the driver, nodding, and the two men moved towards the Ancient House steps. Evidently they resented this job altogether, and were anxious to get it over.

"We'd better do something quick," muttered K. K. "They're the same men who brought the stuff, and they know the way in, so it's no good trying to fool 'em."

"That's a pity," said Fullwood. "I was going to suggest taking them to the wrong room, and locking them in."

It was a critical moment and it seemed to the Removites that there was no way in which they could avert the invasion. But it happened that Handforth & Co. were standing in the Ancient House doorway, and they had heard everything.

Handforth was particularly concerned because it had been his folly which had reduced the other Removites to this pass. To make

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things worse, his father was at present with Mr. Wilkes—having decided to see the celebrations. He had had a very excellent reception in Bannington. He had delivered one of his most forceful speeches, and he was feeling content with the world.

But would he remain content if he happened to come out and spot the furniture being removed? That whole unfortunate subject would be revived.

So Handforth acted promptly. He turned to Church.

"Got those jumping crackers?" he asked tensely.

"Yes, but——"

"Let them off, now—we'll chuck 'em at these two men," breathed Handforth. "If we can only get them scared off, we shall save the situation. Buck up!"

It was a desperate move, but both Church and McClure saw that it was the only possibility. A match flared, and cracker after cracker was ignited. They were extra-long ones—six inches long, at least—and guaranteed to supply the maximum amount of jumps, and to explode with noisy effect.

They did.

One after another, the big jumping crackers were flung at the feet of the two furniture men. What with the darkness and the crowds of juniors protestingly surrounding them, they didn't even see the crackers until they started exploding.

Bang! Crack! Bang! Crack!

About six of them started going off at once, and the result was alarming. The crackers jumped and danced all about the furniture men's feet.

"Here, what's the game?" roared the driver frantically.

"Look out—they're 'oppin' round like they was alive!" gasped Bill.

The more they tried to avoid the crackers, the more the crackers leapt after them; and in the meantime the Removites had gathered in a solid crowd on the Ancient House steps. Somebody had let off some squibs, and these were hurled into the fray with enthusiasm.

"If you don't like it, there's your van!" yelled K. K. "The best thing you can do is to clear out while you're still safe."

But the two furniture men were not so easily put off, and the dodge, after all, had been a forlorn hope. Bill and his companion were determined men—and their determination, at this moment, prompted them to get this job over as quickly as possible.

"None of your silly larks, young gents," said the driver darkly, as he pushed into the juniors. "Seein' as it's Guy Fawkes Night we won't say nothin' about this 'ere game o' yours. But 'ere's our written instructions, an' we're goin' to carry 'em out."

Firmly, but very forcefully, the driver pushed the Removites out of his way, and Bill followed.

## CHAPTER 9.

### Upsetting the Apple Cart!

VIVIAN TRAVERS glowed with pride. "Well, it's not so bad," he admitted modestly. "The carpet's nice, and the chairs are comfy. Jimmy and I are pretty lucky, eh?"

"Next to Archie's, it's the best study in the whole passage—lots better than some of the senior studies," said Phyllis Palmer enthusiastically. "You lucky bounders! We're not half so cosy at Moor View."

"The study's too gorgeous for words," said Irene Manners.

Doris Berkeley and Marjorie Temple were the other two girls. The four of them had come along to have tea with Vera Wilkes, and in the course of the meal Vera had mentioned the gorgeousness of the new Study H furnishings. So the visitors had now come along to view the rooms for themselves.

"We shall have to see if we can't wangle something," remarked Doris. "Aren't there any hire-purchase firms about here?" she added, laughing. "Couldn't we pay two shillings a week, or something, and get some new chairs?"

"These come from the Phoenix Furnishing Company, of Bannington," remarked Jimmy Potts carelessly.

Phyllis laughed outright.

"I suppose that's a delicate way of telling us that this furniture is all paid for?" she asked mischievously. "We've all seen the Phoenix adverts—'Rock-bottom prices for solid cash.'"

"Of course it's paid for," said Travers. "Our people gave us permission to select anything we wanted, and they promised to foot the bill. So you can bet we got busy. I don't want to boast, but there's nearly seventy pounds' worth of new stuff here."

"Phew! And your people paid up?" asked Doris.

"Without a murmur," grinned Travers.

A heavy tap sounded on the door, and it was flung open. Two burly men entered, both wearing green aprons.

"Sorry to disturb you, young gents, particularly as you've got visitors," said Banfield, the driver. "Yes, this is the stuff, Bill."

"Here, what's the game?" asked Travers warmly.

"You know what the game is, sir," said Banfield, in a gruff voice. "You can take this chair to start with, Bill. I'll bring the other."

"You're mad!" ejaculated Travers, giving the girls a quick, scared glance. "You can't take any of this furniture!"

"I ain't goin' over all that argument ag'in," said Banfield impatiently. "This furniture ain't paid for, an' my orders is to take it back to the ware'ouse. Pay up, an' I'll let it stay. 'Ere's the bill—sixty-seven pounds ten."

Travers and Potts looked at it, aghast. They felt like falling through the floor. The





The workmen removed all the furniture and left Study H bare. And Travers' and Potts' cup of trouble was filled to overflowing when they saw the Moor View girls looking at them coldly.

situation was ghastly—particularly after what they had been telling the girls. What would Phyllis and the others think?

The girls, in fact, were rather shocked. It seemed to them that Travers and Potts had been telling lies wholesale. Yet, actually, the two juniors had only spoken the perfect truth, for their people had settled the bill. But for Handforth's sake the Study H pair had said nothing about the recent fire.

"Well?" asked Banfield. "Got the money?"

"Of course we haven't!" panted Travers. "It's not ours to settle, anyhow. I thought it was understood that——"

"Sorry, kid," interrupted the driver. "It don't interest me what you thought. You can't pay this bill, so out goes the stuff. I'll trouble you, young lady, to let me 'ave that chair?"

Doris jumped up hastily, and Banfield seized the big easy-chair, hoisted it on his shoulders, and marched out. Bill reappeared and took the other easy-chair. Travers and Potts, looking slightly green, found the Moor View girls regarding them with reproachful eyes.

"I say, we've got to explain," said Travers desperately.

"I don't think you need bother," said Phyllis scornfully. "Come on, girls. Let's go and find Vera."

But Travers barred the way.

"Just a minute," he said quickly. "We've not going to have you thinking that we told you a string of boastful lies about this furniture. Our people have paid the bill, and if you'll only listen——"

"If your people had paid the bill," said Phyllis, "the furniture firm wouldn't take all the things away. Besides, there's the bill on the table. I don't believe your people know anything about it at all."

"They do!" yelled Potts. "Here, you!" he added, grabbing at Banfield as the latter reappeared. "Didn't our parents give your firm full authority to send these things to us?"

Banfield, who was quite a decent fellow, and who wasn't enjoying himself at all, scratched his head.

"I don't know much, young gent, but the manager told me that he's 'avin' no more truck with schoolboys," he replied. "He said a whole crowd o' you come in on Tuesday, an' chose this stuff. The manager also says that you did it without any authority from your elders."



He and Bill seized two more articles and marched out.

"My only sainted aunt!" gurgled Potts dazedly.

"You've only made things worse still," said Phyllis gently.

"No, we haven't," growled Travers. "Look here, Phyl, in our own defence, we've got to tell you. The original furniture came in on Tuesday, but Handforth accidentally set fire to it. A crowd of our chaps went to Bannington and ordered these duplicates—to save Handy from his pater. They had that freak footer match at Bannington this evening to raise the money—but it was a frost. When we told you the furniture was paid for, we meant the original lot. It's ours, anyhow—we're not responsible for the bill."

"And it's a bit thick that we should have it taken away from us like this," said Potts indignantly. "It's—it's humiliating! Nipper and K. K. and the other chaps promised us that everything would be all right. And look what's happening!"

At last the girls began to understand.

The two men came back and went out with the table and the bookcase. If it hadn't been so tragic, the girls could have laughed. There they were, listening to the explanations, while the whole room was being cleared about them.

By the time they had thoroughly grasped the situation, the carpet had been taken up, and the last article had been placed on the van. Crowds of juniors now filled the lobby.

Handforth, of course, was frantic. He wanted to seize the two furniture men, lock them up, and carry all the articles back. But Nipper pointed out that the men were only obeying their orders.

"If we can't pay up, the goods go," he said gloomily.

"What a shame!" murmured Doris, who found herself next to him in the crowd. "Isn't there anything you can do, Nipper?"

"I've juggled with ideas until I'm dizzy," replied the Remove skipper. "It's such hard cheese on Travers and Potts. Great Scott! Here comes Sir Edward now. Look out for the explosion!"

Sir Edward Handforth took quick stock of the situation.

"So you're having some trouble about that furniture, eh?" he asked grimly. "I was wondering how you were going to pay for it."

"Look here, pater, you've got to shell out!" shouted Handforth desperately.

"I? Shell out? Nonsense!"

"But you must, pater—for the honour of our name."

"Fiddlesticks!" retorted his father. "The honour of our name's not involved at all. We didn't give this order, and we're not responsible for it. And if you expect me to pay this bill, Edward, you are greatly mistaken."

"But I accidentally burnt the original stuff, and it's my job to make it good," said Handy warmly.

"Quite so! Your job!"

"Well, you're my father, and you've got the money," said Edward Oswald. "So it's clearly your duty to pay up. Dash it, pater, we can't let the van go away like this!"

"As far as I'm concerned, the van can go to Timbuctoo," answered Sir Edward obstinately. "I told you from the first that I wouldn't submit to this imposition, and no arguments of yours will make me change my mind. Let this be a lesson to you—to all of you, in fact!"

"All of us, sir?" asked Nipper quickly.

"Yes, young man," replied Sir Edward. "I appreciate your efforts to help my son out of his scrape, but you mustn't think that you can order roomfuls of furniture with impunity—and then expect me, at the last moment, to pay. Oh, no! I'm not going to be such a simpleton."

And Sir Edward folded his arms and watched the loading of the van with grim complacency.

## CHAPTER 10.

### Sir Edward Pays Up!

ALL hope seemed lost. If something was to be done, it had to be done now. For the furniture men were closing up the back of the van and preparing to take their departure.

Fortunately, no masters or prefects had appeared, and there weren't any awkward inquiries. Being Guy Fawkes Night, nobody took any notice of crowds and commotions.

"Just a minute, you fellows!" sang out Nipper suddenly, as he jumped upon one of the stone pedestals at the bottom of the Ancient House steps. "Before this van goes, I want to say something."

"Hear, hear!"

"Go it!"

"We all belong to the Remove here, don't we?" asked Nipper.

"Yes, rather!"

"Then it's up to us to rally round Handy, and to help him in this hour of trial," declared Nipper. "And what about Travers and Potts? Is it fair to them that they should be humiliated, that their study should be cleared out?"

"No!" roared Travers and Potts, in one voice.

"There is only one person here who could—and should—settle this unfortunate problem," proceeded Nipper. "I don't want to mention any names, but you all know who I mean."

"Handy's pater!" went up a general shout.

Sir Edward spluttered.

"What! How dare you?" he said angrily. "You young rascals——"

"As you've mentioned the culprit's name, there's no harm in my carrying on," continued Nipper, addressing the crowd, and completely ignoring Sir Edward. "Handy accidentally burnt that furniture, and his pater is the one who should replace it."



"Hear, hear!"

"But as he refuses to accept his responsibilities, it's up to us to take them on our own shoulders," shouted Nipper, waxing eloquent. "The honour of the Remove is at stake! Are we to allow poor old Handy to suffer this indignity?"

"No!"

"Are you all willing to help him?"

"Yes!"

"Good! Then we can get on with something," shouted Nipper. "The situation is quite simple and plain. To save old Handy from this plight—to keep his name unsmirched—we need sixty-seven quid. If we can raise that sum, this furniture will be taken back, and the whole problem is solved."

"It's a big amount."

"A bit too big."

"Not if you open your hearts—to say nothing of your pockets," replied Nipper promptly. "The one person who should open his pockets has padlocked 'em up. We can only regret that he should be so unfair to his son, and so careless of his own good name. And it is up to us to rally round. So out with your wallets! Let's see if we can't raise this money amongst ourselves."

"Hear, hear!"

"Good old Nipper!"

The effect was magical. Wallets and pocket-books were whipped out, and the response was spontaneous and generous. Nipper's speech, apparently, had thrown the Removites into a fever of generosity.

"Here you are!" sang out Gresham. "Five quid here!"

"Here's another four!" said Fullwood.

"Eight here!"

"I can do better than that!" yelled somebody else. "Here's ten!"

Sir Edward breathed thickly. Not only was he aghast at the turn in the situation, but he was amazed that these boys should possess so much money—and such willingness to part with it. Bank notes were appearing as thick as autumn leaves.

"Good gracious me!" ejaculated the startled Sir Edward.

He was mortified, too. Being a man of highly independent spirit, and a man, moreover, of sound principle, he was horrified to see these schoolboys contributing money towards a debt which had been incurred through his own son.

"My hat! This is good," sang out Nipper. "Forty-six—fifty—fifty-two — fifty-five—fifty-seven! Come on! Only about ten quid more needed! Walk up, gentlemen!"

"Here's five, old thing," said K. K. genially.

It was really staggering. Nipper was standing there with sheaves of crisp, greenish slips of paper in his hand. The two vanmen stared open-eyed. They had not been disposed to wait; but upon the appearance of all that money they couldn't very well do anything else.

"Sixty-five—sixty-seven—and the odd ten bob!" shouted Nipper cheerily. "Good egg!"

That's the full sum, you chaps! Well done, the Remove!"

Sir Edward found his voice.

"One moment, young man," he said thickly.

"Sorry, sir—in a hurry," replied Nipper. "Nearly time for the fireworks, and we want to settle this little bit of business."

"I'll settle this business," snorted Sir Edward. "Give that money back to its rightful owners! Do you hear me, boy? Give it back!"

"But the chaps have contributed it——"

"To pay my son's debts!" boomed Sir Edward. "Huh! Do you think I'm going to stand here and see a parcel of schoolboys undertake my responsibilities? Hand that money back to the boys who—er—whacked it out. You, my friend!" he added, turning to Banfield. "Where's that bill?"

"Are you goin' to pay it, sir?" asked the driver respectfully.

"I'll write you out a cheque here and now," retorted Sir Edward. "There's been enough of this nonsense."

"Just a jiffy, sir," said Nipper. "If you pay this cheque over, will you guarantee that your son won't have his pocket-money docked? Don't forget that the fire was quite an accident, and it wouldn't be fair——"

Handy's pater hesitated—but only for a moment.

"All right, you young scamps, you win!" he said gruffly.

"You're a brick, pater!" gasped Handforth. "It's—it's all serene, then?"

"Yes, my boy, it's all serene," replied Sir Edward, smiling.

IT was. In fact, it was far more serene than Sir Edward Handforth ever supposed, or was ever likely to know. He made out his cheque, the furniture men gave him the receipt, and all the articles were triumphantly carted back to Study H. And after Sir Edward had vanished Nipper and K. K. and a few other Removites surrounded the four Moor View girls.

"All O.K. now," grinned Nipper. "We're going to take you along to see the fireworks. Doris, old girl, that was a brain-wave of yours—about those chocolate coupons, I mean. You can have them back now."

"What a lark!" chuckled Doris gleefully.

Nipper handed over the big sheaf of crisp, greenish coupons, which Doris slipped into her bag. These coupons were given free with every packet of Burton's Bonny Chocolate. At a distance, and in a poor light, they looked remarkably like pound notes.

"Poor old Handy's pater never dreamed how he was being spoofed," chuckled K. K. "I rather think you put it over like a genius, Nipper—and the other fellows entered into the thing brilliantly. Hallo! There goes the first rocket! Come on!"

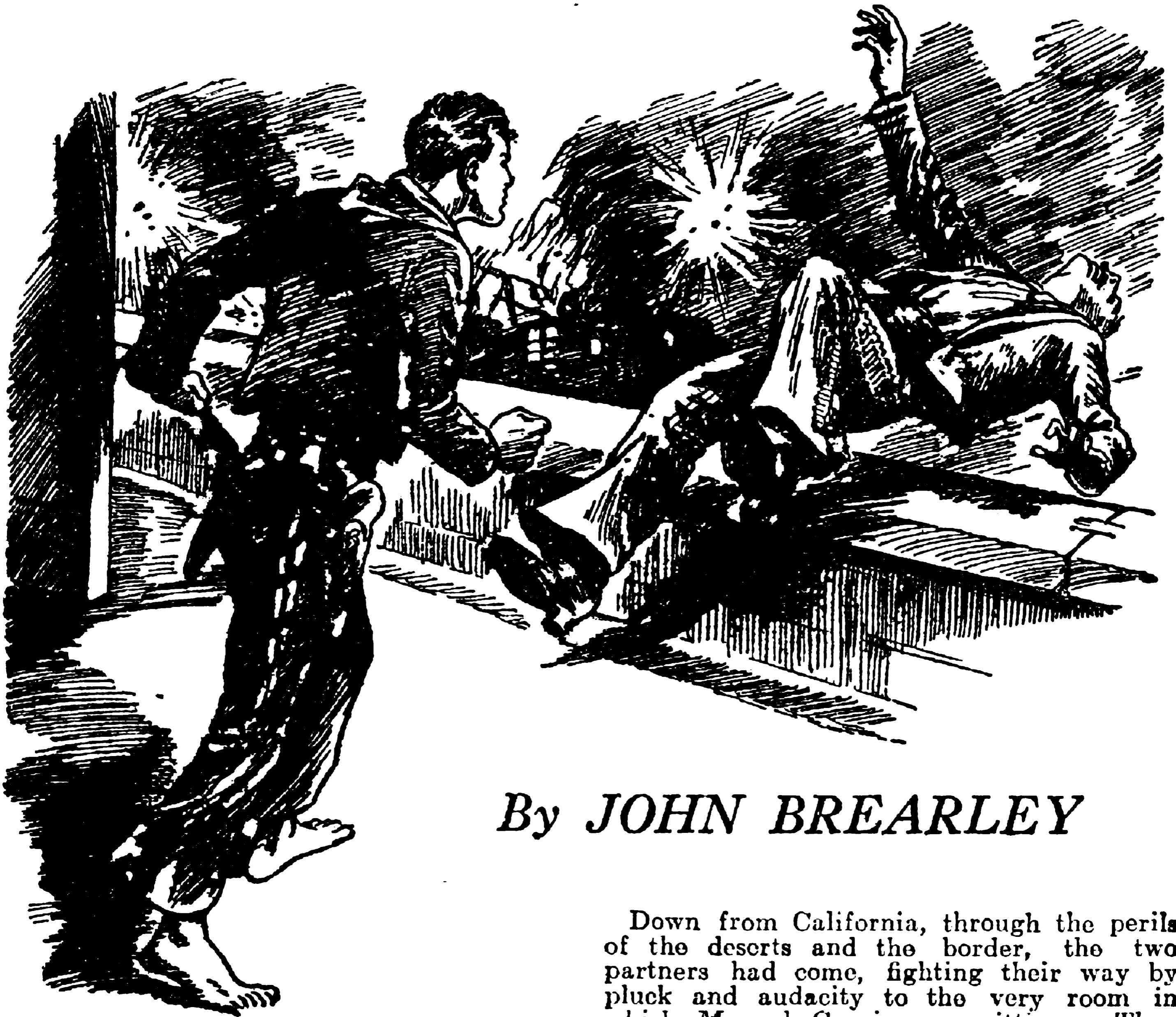
THE END.

(Next week's extra-special St. Frank's yarn: "Saints v. Friars!"—featuring Nipper & Co. and Harry Wharton & Co. of Greyfriars. Tell your pals!)



*Peter and Red in Another Smashing Yarn of Gripping Adventure!*

# VENGEANCE TRAIL!



By *JOHN BREARLEY*

## Red to the Rescue!

“**D**OGGONE it! The cunnin’ greaser skunk!”

In the darkness of the veranda surrounding the palatial mansion of Manuel Garcia, the rebel leader of Zareda City, Red Potter, of Texas, crouched, quivering with bitter rage. His big, freckled fist tightened on the .45 Colt he held till the muscles of it ached, while his keen fighting brain rapidly took stock of the position. Peter Graham, his English chum, was a prisoner in the hands of the man he had travelled thousands of miles to kill, and Red himself was surrounded by enemies who would shoot him like a wolf.

Bitterly he blamed himself for the disaster that had occurred. The end of Vengeance Trail had been in sight. Now it was as far off as ever.

Down from California, through the perils of the deserts and the border, the two partners had come, fighting their way by pluck and audacity to the very room in which Manuel Garcia was sitting. They had heard him making arrangements for flight within the hour with his chief aide-de-camp, for the Mexican Army was known to be closing in fast on the rebel city. And as soon as the coast had been clear, Peter had stepped quietly into the room for the last, reckoning with his father’s murderer, while Red kept guard out in the night against the frantic sentries searching for them in the grounds below.

*This Week’s Full-of-Thrills Yarn:*  
**TRAIL’S END!**

Which is where Red blamed himself. He, too, should have gone into Garcia’s library and stood by while Peter finished his task. Instead, he had been helpless outside, and his chum had walked innocently into the Mexican’s trap.

Such a simple trap, too. Manuel Garcia, beside himself with fear, had confessed that he had captured Peter’s father, but had not killed him, as reported—that John



Graham was, in fact, imprisoned at that moment in a secret room beneath the one in which they stood. Overcome by the news, Peter had relaxed his vigilance for a moment. He had allowed Garcia to go to his bookcase on the pretext of pressing the hidden spring there that would open the prison-room. And that had been the one chance the wily Mexican needed.

He had already told Peter that the secret entrance was beneath his desk. Instead—Red Potter growled sulphurously. The last he had seen was the floor opening right beneath his chum's feet, Peter throwing up his hands and disappearing. After that Garcia had vanished himself in magical fashion, the lights had gone out, and a tremendous explosion had hit the house somewhere.

Red addressed himself scathingly.

"Yuh great big ugly-faced ornery hunk o' nuthin'!" he gritted. "Yuh mighta known that greaser polecat would turn some doggone trick. Old Pete's a terror in a scrap all right, but he's only English, after all, and what he don't know about greasers would fill Texas. And yuh let him go and be bluffed, you poor durned—Jumping gophers, what's that?"

With one hand on the catch of the window before him, preparatory to opening it, he stiffened in amazement. The whole of Zareda City seemed suddenly to have blown up from the roots. The first explosion he had heard was nothing to the inferno that broke out now.

Crash upon crash ripped all at once through the night, red flashes flamed sharply to the sky, the thunder of falling masonry bellowed an accompaniment. From the teaming streets beyond Manuel Garcia's grounds came the vague roar of voices, shouts, and a stirring clatter of steel as the insurgent mob in the city sprang to arms. A bugle blared piercingly; others answered it. And drowning the startling din by sheer weight of sound, another volley of gun-fire seemed to tear the sky wide open.

Red's eyes blazed. The explanation came like a bullet.

"Sufferin' cats, we're under fire. The Mexican Army must have arrived with artillery. A lightning raid, by thunder! We're saved!"

Gun raised, Red was through the french window and into Garcia's library in a flash. Striking a match recklessly although the house beneath him was in an uproar, he glared round for the electric switches, turned on a light, and dived for the bookcase. It was there Garcia had pressed a hidden spring that had caused Peter's vanishing act, and it was that spring Red Potter wanted.

Luck was with him. Heedless of possible intruders, forgetful even that Peter had locked the door of the room during the interview with Garcia, Red snapped into action. For the next few seconds heavy volumes flew across the room in all directions until, close against the woodwork of a shelf, he found a tiny knob. Under his

heartly pull, part of the bookcase swung away, disclosing a tiny metal panel containing two electric switches.

"Wow!"

He pressed one and looked round cagerly, expecting to see the big opening appear again on the floor. Nothing doing. Instead, close to his elbow, a sliding doorway, just wide enough for one man, yawned silently in the wall. He had a hasty glimpse of a dark stone passage beyond.

"So that's whar Garcia greased!" he growled. "Then this other switch must be fer the underground room. Kim up!"

But before he could press it the door of the library shook beneath a frantic two-fisted knocking.

"Excellency! Excellency!" screeched a high voice. "Have you not gone yet? The Federals are upon us—we must fly! Let me in!"

"Gosh, Garcia's lootenant!" grunted Red, and crossed the room in silent strides. Turning the key quietly, he pulled the door open with a jerk. A tall officer, grey-faced with anxiety, staggered in, stammering as he came.

"Senor Garcia, we are surrounded——"

Wallop!

Paralysed by the sight of the Texan's grim face instead of Garcia's, as expected, the officer recoiled. His jaw dropped loosely. And Red, stepping in, promptly closed it with a lightning hook that knocked the man off his feet and stretched him out in the corner.

"Have that with me!" he snorted, locking the door again and making tracks for the bookcase. This time there were no more interruptions. He pulled the second switch over and cheered under his breath as he saw the great centre patch of flooring sink out of sight with uncanny speed and silence.

In a twinkling he was on his hands and knees, calling softly into the gaping blackness below, his heart pumping painfully.

"Pete! Peter, old hoss, are yuh thar?"

### On the Warpath Again!

**A** MOMENT of tense anxiety passed. Then, almost swooning with relief, Red heard his chum's voice drift up, oddly muffled but comforting in its vigorous exasperation.

"Of course I'm here! Where have you been all this time, you red-headed goat?" demanded Peter ungratefully.

"Why, yuh pore babe-in-arms!" began the indignant but joyful Texan. "Yuh haven't been thar more'n ten minutes. Yuh knew I'd come and fish yuh out, didn't ya?"

"Seems like ten years. But I knew you'd come, Reddy!" The English lad's voice shook with strange excitement. "An' I've found my dad, Red. He's here!" he called up.

"What!" The Texan jumped in astonishment. "Then Garcia wasn't bluffing, after all? Gee, but I'm glad, Pete. Is your dad——"

Knowing something of the way prisoners are treated in some parts of Mexico, his



lips hardly dared frame the question. Peter answered quickly.

"Yes, he's alive, but only just. Gimme down a chair. I can't reach you without." Chuckling with glee, Red leapt to obey. He heard Peter place the chair and climb on it slowly, breathing hard as though struggling with an awkward burden, and after what seemed an eternity, during which the thunder of gun-fire outside grew louder, he saw a limp grey head emerged slowly from the blackness.

His arms flew downwards to help, closing firmly around a pair of half-naked shoulders; and as he saw their pitiful thinness he gasped with anger. In a few seconds John Graham lay in a silent heap on Manuel Garcia's library floor, among friends for the first time for many months.

Up out of the darkness, with tigerish agility, came Peter Graham. His hand shot out and gripped Red's.

"Thanks, old son!" he said simply. A pair of eyes, like hot coals, swept the room. "Where's Garcia? Gone, of course!"

"Yuh bet!" answered Red quickly. "Legged it the moment yuh went through the floor. Scared stiff by yore visit and a shell that crumped this house somewhere!" He flung up his head. "Say, hear that rumpus outside? Waal, that's the Mexican Army paying a call on Zareda. I reckon them rebels are going tuh get it hot—and purty soon, too!"

"To blazes with 'em!" snapped Peter wildly. "Red, I want Garcia—I must get him! He's *tortured* my dad—tortured him for the sake of his mine! By the Lord Harry, he got away from me just now, but if I can get him again—"

"Shore—shore!" soothed Red. "But, feller, yuh can't chase him now. How about yore dad?"

As he had hoped, the question calmed his chum at once. The glare died out of Peter's grey eyes and he sank down beside his father. Spotting a decanter of brandy on a sideboard, Red got it and brought it back in four jumps, and together the friends knelt beside the shattered man on the floor and did their best to restore him.

The result of their labours after five minutes made both tighten their lips and stare at each other ominously. A faint colour had returned to the wasted, bearded cheeks, but it was very obvious that John Graham was past first-aid. Only long and expert nursing under skilful hands could possibly save him from the terrible treatment he had undergone—and that without delay. Manuel Garcia's torture had broken him.

Icily calm after his first scalding outburst, Peter sat back on his heels, deaf to the uproar outside in the city. The Mexican artillery was still shelling from the plains around Zareda, but there was a vicious undercurrent of rifle and machine-gun fire added to the carnage now from closer at hand, all of which Red Potter noted while he waited for Peter to speak.

"Well, this checks our plans—for a time!"

said the English boy softly at last. "Garcia will have to wait. Red, I've got to get dad to safety somehow. We must get out of this house!"

For answer, Red switched off the lights, took his friend by the arm and stole towards the window. From the darkness of the veranda they looked out over the city. The Texan sucked in a long, deep breath.

"Pete, we haven't a hope. We've gotta stick to this house somehow, if it's the last thing we do. Maybe, if we can hang on, the Mexican army'll break through soon and we can explain and do somethin'. But we can't go out. We've got into Garcia's house and now we've got tuh stick in!"

He pointed across the dark grounds. Beyond, staining the sky in red patches, were the flames of burning houses. Shells were bursting everywhere, rifles were crashing in regular volleys, and the air was full of yells and screams.

"They'll be fightin' it out in the streets soon!" whispered Red. "Them Federals are closin' in fast. If it was fer ourselves I'd say O.K., and take a chance. But with your dad to carry—not! We might git downed by a shell, a cavalry rush or bullets. And th' gardens are still full o' Garcia's men. If they caught us, they'd shoot us so full of holes we'd look like coffee-strainers!"

Reluctantly Peter saw his chum was right, and allowed himself to be drawn back into the room. Red clumped him on the back.

"I've got th' scheme!" he announced. "We've gotta git out o' this room pronto! Thar's one o' Garcia's bright boys in the corner now; we'll have some more of 'em along soon to see whar he is. They'd have been along afore only I reckon everyone's scared pink by this raid!"

"Well?" snapped Peter impatiently.

"Waal, Garcia's legged it, ain't he? An' he went out by that door in the wall. Dunno whar it leads to, but I'll bet it's somewhar that's plenty quiet!"

Peter whirled on him.

"Great Scott, why didn't you say so before? We know Garcia's trying to bolt. Why, he may still be hiding in the house somewhere, waiting to slip away. And he can't have left Zareda now 'cos it's surrounded. By gad, Red, I wonder—"

He stopped, trembling at the thought that he still might achieve the double object of getting his father into safety until the Federal troops broke in—and of meeting Manuel Garcia again. Seeing the expression on his face, Red nodded and sprang towards the fallen officer by the door.

Lying flat on his back, Captain Mendez, of Garcia's army, was just coming to, and wondering feebly if the roof had hit him. He hadn't long to wonder. The fog in his brain was rudely and abruptly dispelled by long steel fingers that twined themselves lovingly in his well-oiled hair and pulled. The yell of pain he gave was broken off short by a rough hand, and he blinked up to see two menacing figures bending over him in the gloom.



A dangerous voice spoke quietly in Spanish.

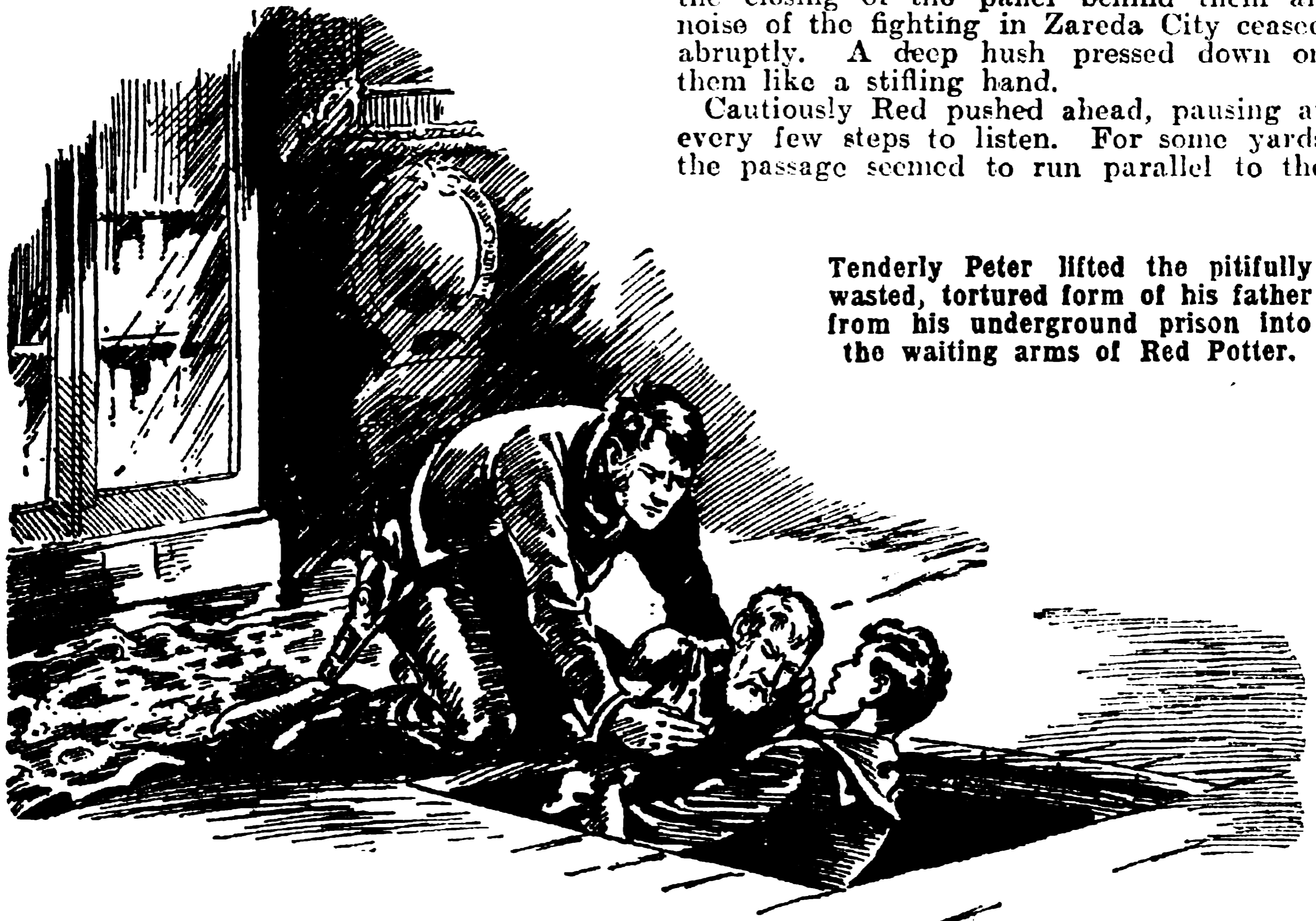
"Amigo, Senor Garcia disappeared recently through the wall beside yonder bookcase. Whither does the passage beyond lead, if you please?"

Anything in the nature of a struggle just then was beyond the unfortunate captain. Red's punch had nearly dislocated his jaw, and the muzzle of a gun pressed coldly against his temple. In a weak voice he stammered:

"To a staircase of stone, senors. One flight leads to the roof, the other to the cellars!"

"Where will Garcia be?"

"I—I do not know. I swear it. We—we



Tenderly Peter lifted the pitifully wasted, tortured form of his father from his underground prison into the waiting arms of Red Potter.

had planned to fly before the Federals surrounded the city, but now we shall have to wait somewhere——"

"Somewhere in the house, friend?"

"Yes, senor!"

Red gave a little chuckle and stood up.

"By gosh, yuh guessed it right, Pete. Garcia can't get away now, an' yuh bet he ain't fightin' outside in the streets!"

Peter said nothing. He had hoped all along to kill the Mexican in his own camp—even now he might still get the chance. He turned away quickly.

"Come on, then!"

Red hitched up his gun holster.

"Right! Lemme just throw our boy friend heah intuh that pit, and we'll mosey along. Pick up yore dad!"

There came a faint squeal as Captain Mendez was pushed into John Graham's late prison; the trap door closed over him.

Then a queer procession started on its way through the secret passage in the walls of the great stone mansion.

In the lead went Red Potter, eyes narrowed to slits, two guns ready to spit fire at a second's notice. Behind him, carrying his father as tenderly as he could, came Peter Graham.

Vengeance Trail had started again—in Manuel Garcia's house.

### Red Plays "Injun"!

**I**N tense silence, Red and Peter prowled along the narrow passage deeper into the gloom, their bare feet making no sound on the rough stone floor. With the closing of the panel behind them all noise of the fighting in Zareda City ceased abruptly. A deep hush pressed down on them like a stifling hand.

Cautiously Red pushed ahead, pausing at every few steps to listen. For some yards the passage seemed to run parallel to the

side of the house, then it struck off sharply at right angles round a corner. Farther on still, it widened out surprisingly. A little gush of fresh air trickled down from somewhere ahead. Red's outstretched foot slid across the sharp edge of a step.

A light touch on the arm warned Peter to stop. He waited patiently in the darkness, supporting the frail body of his father easily on one broad shoulder. He knew Red was scouting ahead. A minute later he heard his chum's whisper close at hand.

"We're on a landin', Pete. Stairs either side—one flight up, t'other down, like that Mexican said. Which shall it be?"

"Down!" decided Peter. He would have liked to take his father straight into the fresh air on the roof, but with the city under shell-fire there was too much danger. Besides, if Manuel Garcia was lurking any-



where in these vaults, it would be right down in the deepest cellar for sure.

"Down it is, hombre!" agreed Red.

He slipped one gun into its holster, and, extending his free arm behind him, began to guide Peter's blind footsteps down the stairs. But only down two stairs. Before his noiseless foot had landed on the third, he checked the stride in mid-air and stopped.

Peter halted, too. For, out of the inky depths below a faint sound drifted up—the soft shuffle of a stealthy foot. A little bleak light crept into his eyes, and very gently he retreated to the landing and laid down his father. Then, rigid and silent as statues, the two partners waited.

"Listen to me play 'Injun' with him!" whispered Red gleefully. "Whoever that guy is down thar—an' it can only be the one we're wanting, I reckon, I'll shorely draw him up these yere stairs like hoiking a winkle from its shell!"

Before Peter could even nod, Red had deliberately coughed aloud. The sound he made was barely above a whisper, but it was sufficient to bring results. A sharp gasp answered it, followed instantly by a low challenge.

"Who is it? Is it you, Mendez?"

Only by a giant effort did Peter keep himself in hand. A wild thrill shot through him as he recognised that voice. It was Manuel Garcia down there—Garcia cut off from help, and alone. Obedient to Red's touch, however, he kept quiet. The experienced Texan, matchless at a battle of wits in the darkness, answered in the gasping whisper of a badly-frightened man.

"Yes, Excellency. You—you are safe?"

To their keen delight, the partners heard the Mexican creep nearer.

"Safe? Bah! Where have you been? What of the battle outside?"

"Alas, senor—disastrous! We are surrounded!"

A curse of dismay echoed up the staircase. From the helpless tremor in his voice, it was plain that the great Manuel Garcia was beside himself with fear. All trace of the masterfulness that had made him practically the biggest force in Northern Mexico had vanished. His narrow escape from Peter Graham in the library, followed instantly by the thunderous assault of the Mexican army whom he had thought farther off, had shattered his nerve completely.

He came slowly up the stairs now, one by one, drawn ever nearer by Red's 'frightened' whisper and the craving for human company that intense fear always breeds.

"Where are you, Mendez?" he quavered.

"On the landing, Excellency." Red was enjoying himself hugely. "I—I fear to come down, lest we fall down those narrow steps together. Have you a torch, senor?"

The Mexican was almost within reach now.

"N-no. I had one, but I have lost the accursed thing in the darkness!"

"Then that's all I want tuh know, buddy!" roared Red. "Kim up, yuh boss-thief!"

And, with the words he reached out grabbed Garcia by the coat and swirled him round straight and true into Peter Graham's arms.

"It's the Englishman again, Garcia!" whooped a voice.

Peter's crooked hands streaked upwards.

### The Fight On The Roof!

"MADRE DE DIOS!"

The madness of despair seemed to give the Mexican added strength. Paralysed by surprise, he had allowed himself to be captured by Red in silence. He could see nothing; the darkness was as solid as a wall. But now, as Peter's words rang in his brain and Peter's hand clutched at his throat, he gave a thrilling scream and hurled himself backwards and sideways. So quick was his movement and so frenzied his strength, he wrenched himself from the fatal grip, bent himself double and plunged forward.

Peter, leaping for him blindly, tripped over his prostrate father and staggered; Red took a flying fist squarely between the eyes and pitched down the steps. Before either could recover the panic-tortured Mexican was flying for his life up the stairs.

But if Manuel Garcia was frantic, so was Peter Graham. Picking himself up, he gave a roar of rage that lent wings to his enemy's heels and, reckless of bruises or falls, caring nothing for the perils that might lurk in the pitch-black gloom, he streaked up the stairs in pursuit.

Garcia's trail was plain. Peter could hear the man's footsteps pattering desperately on the stones a few yards ahead of him. Up they went, hunter and hunted, the air growing fresher as they neared the roof. They slipped on the invisible stairs, lacerating their shins, scrambled up and raced onwards, lurching and bumping against the passage walls. At almost every jump Peter's long legs closed the gap. Once he actually laid a hand on Garcia's coat tails, but a flying fall in the next stride robbed him of precious ground.

He was up again in a flash, scarce seeming to touch the ground. There was a heavy thump ahead as the delirious fugitive hurled himself against a door; Peter felt a gush of cool air and saw a glimmer of distant stars through an opening in the darkness.

Flinging himself forward, he was just in time to prevent his quarry closing the door in his face. His hefty body, twelve stone of bone and muscle driven onwards by a raging, devouring fury, slammed squarely into the obstruction, crashed it backwards and sent Garcia flying across the flat roof of the house, so typical of the country. And while he struggled to recover, Peter sailed through the air in an overwhelming, unstoppable tackle and the enemies of Vengeance Trail rolled over in a panting, punching, writhing heap.

The impetus of the rush sent them hurtling along the roof, first one, then the other



on top. Now that he was fairly caught, Garcia was fighting like a cornered lynx. Victory over this steel-muscled, silent demon who clung to him was his only hope; the deadly rattle of rifles and machine-guns and the yells of desperate rebels below told him there was no chance left for him in or out of Zareda City unless he could win back to his hiding-place.

Wrenching himself out of Peter's clutch he crouched at bay against a stone chimney. His hand flashed inside his shirt, a slim blade gleamed in the starlight and he sprang forward. But Peter had been expecting knife-work. His straight left, fast as a sword-stroke, beat the descending weapon by a split-second and pulped the Mexican's snarling mouth, while with his right hand he caught his opponent's knife-wrist, jerking it over in an agonising grip. Screaming with pain, Garcia dropped the blade. Peter kicked it out of reach.

"Bare hands now, Garcia!" he croaked. "Bare hands, you torturing brute!"

Foaming with rage and terror, his enemy came on, kicking madly. A right hook sent him staggering and limping away. Then the Englishman rushed.

A swarm of blows, bitter, accurate drives from every angle, slammed into Garcia's face and body. Helpless under the storm, he reeled backwards, blinded by the deadly hitting that knocked him down, whirled him up, smashed him sideways and backwards. He was like a straw caught up by a tornado; a whimpering hulk punched into helplessness by a younger, fiercer fighter.

And suddenly, a yard behind his foe, Peter saw the low parapet of the roof. The battle-frenzy welled up inside him in one triumphant explosion. He jumped in for a punishing, merciless finish.

"That's for Pedro Gomez—that's for my dad; an' take this with you—where you're going!" he panted.

Straight as piston-drives three lightning punches thudded into the swaying Mexican. There came a sound like a breaking stick as the last one socked home on his jaw, he tottered back for the last fatal yard, and the parapet caught him behind the knees.

Peter stopped dead. Gurgling sobs ripped through the night as, with arms feebly beating the air, his opponent tried in vain to keep his balance. But the hammering he had received and the force with which Peter had knocked him against the parapet beat him. In a second his wildly-slipping feet left the roof. To the sound of a long scream Manuel Garcia flung up his heels and vanished.

Flinging himself on the parapet, Peter peered down into the velvety darkness. A faint thud and the rustle of bushes floated up. Red Potter's voice spoke softly and unexpectedly at his side.

"An' that's the end o' the Trail, Pete!"

Peter nodded in silence. And although neither youngster was aware of it, it was at that moment that the Mexican Army, gathering itself for a final effort, swept

triumphantly, cavalry, infantry and armoured cars together, over the defences of Zareda City.

Within an hour the rebellion was at an end. Its leader, Manuel Garcia, lay hidden in the shrubbery of his house with a broken neck.

### Red Potter Sings!

**R**ED POTTER, magnificent in a red silk shirt, spangled Mexican trousers and high-heeled riding-boots, sprawled in the sun on the smooth lawn of the late Manuel Garcia's house.

For once in a way he had nothing to do, and he was doing it hard. A tall sombrero protected his eyes, his lips were parted in drowsy song. He had reached the forty-seventh verse of the "Cowboy's Lament," and had all the hot afternoon before him in which to murder the remaining fifty-three. Red was happy.

"Oh, bury me out on the lo-one prairee-ee!  
In my little grave six fee-et by three!"

Then a boot, driven by an expert toe, thudded into his ribs. The famous dirge ended in a grunt.

"Say, what the——" he began, and sat up with a jerk. "Gee, hallo, Pete! How is he?" he asked eagerly.

Peter grinned down at him with shining eyes.

"Dad's turned the corner at last!" he cried. "I've just been allowed ten minutes talk with him!"

"Yee-ee-ow!"

On the broad terrace of the house two sentries of the Mexican Army whipped round with their rifles at the ready. Slowly they relaxed, their white teeth gleaming in amused smiles. It was only the mad Americano and his equally mad British friend again. They shrugged and resumed their measured beat.

Meanwhile, Red and Peter were shaking hands hard.

"Gosh, what a week it's been!" sighed Peter finally. "I thought two days ago it was all up. That Mexican army-doctor's stuck to dad like glue, Red, and General Lopez hasn't been able to do enough for him, I reckon!"

Red did not reply. For General Lopez, the leader of the Mexican force occupying the city, was coming towards them, surrounded as usual by a glittering group of officers. He was a tall, handsome old man, of the very finest Spanish type, and he and his aides saluted the partners with the elaborate courtesy of their race.

"Senor Graham," he began in slow formal English, "I have been informed that your illustrious father is at last out of danger. I beg you will accept my heartiest congratulations."

Peter strode forward and caught the general's hand in a hearty grip.

(Continued on page 44.)



**Billy Baxter's "Hot Air" Takes Him Into the Clouds!**

# BOUNCER BILLY BAXTER!



## Billy's Secret!

**"B**Y gosh!" ejaculated Fatty Hart in a voice husky with excitement. "That fellow is heading for a crash!"

The three pals, Billy Baxter, Ginger Jones and Fatty Hart, had been strolling along the country road wishing that some sensational event would happen to brighten their lives, when they had spotted the aeroplane. To Fatty and Ginger, at least, its appearance had been exciting, for the airman was acting crazily, diving, swooping, looping the loop and generally flying in such a manner that Fatty and Ginger expected him to crash at any moment.

"He's down!" yelled Ginger suddenly, as the 'plane spiralled to earth. Nearing the ground, however, it righted itself and shot towards the sky again.

"Lumme, that was hard lines!"

In the meantime, while his pals had been staring upwards in amazement, Billy Baxter had been leaning idly against a nearby stile cutting his finger nails. At this remark from Ginger he paused, and, covering his mouth with his hand, uttered a loud yawn.

"Why doesn't he try some real tricks?" he asked.

His pals stared at him.

"Why, what do you mean, Billy?" asked Fatty Hart. "That fellow is risking his life!"

Billy smiled knowingly.

"I suppose it does look that way to you," he said carelessly. "But to anybody who knows anything about aeroplanes it's very simple. He must be a novice. Now if I was up there——"

Billy Baxter shrugged his shoulders to mean that if he was in the aeroplane they would see something really wonderful. Fatty and Ginger eyed him in open-mouthed astonishment.

"Garn!" said Ginger Jones unbelievably. "What do you know about aeroplanes, Billy?"

"It would take too long to answer that question," responded Billy, carelessly brushing an imaginary speck of dust from his sleeve. "It would be easier to tell you what I don't know."

"By gosh!" put in Fatty, recovering from his first astonishment. "Do you mean to say you've actually been up in an aeroplane, Billy?"

Billy laughed loudly.

"Mo been up in an aeroplane?" he chuckled. "That's a good one, Fatty. Why, I've been in the air so often that walking on the ground sometimes makes me sick."

His two friends were silent, and Billy had the feeling that they were swallowing his statements with some difficulty. However, they couldn't altogether disbelieve him, be-

**BILLY HIDES IN A 'PLANE—  
WHICH IS BOOKED TO CRASH  
IN FLAMES!**



cause Billy had a way of saying the most doubtful things which afterwards proved to be true.

Since there was nothing more to be said on the subject at the moment, and since the aeroplane was now a mere speck in the sky, the three pals continued on their walk. They were not going anywhere in particular, and their only reason for taking a walk was that on the return journey they could request a lift from some kindly motor-driver and thus be treated to a free motor-ride.

Motor-cars seemed to be scarce on the road that day, however, and walking on without thought of the distance they were covering, the chums were surprised to find themselves at the Bynville Aerodrome, some four miles from the village.

Several aeroplanes were circling in formation above the 'drome, and the flying fields presented a scene of intense activity, while in the roadway was a number of interested spectators.

The three friends were wondering what all the excitement was about when suddenly Fatty drew the attention of Billy and Ginger to a notice displayed in a corner of a field.

**"GRAND FLYING PAGEANT  
TO BE HELD HERE  
ON SATURDAY."**

In smaller letters below this the poster gave details of the proposed exhibition, and finished in larger type with the announcement that Captain Dibbs, acknowledged to be the world's most daring airman, would give a display of trick flying.

"Well, well!" exclaimed Billy Baxter. "If it isn't my dear old friend Dibbsy!"

His pals gasped.

"Do you know him, Billy?"

"Know him!" exclaimed Billy Baxter. "I should say I do. Why, he practically taught me how to fly. That is to say, he started to teach me; but I improved at such a rate that I was soon showing him some tricks he didn't know!"

While Fatty and Ginger were wavering between doubt and belief in Billy's claim, there was a shout of excitement from near-by spectators. Turning, the three pals beheld the same "stunting" aeroplane which had astonished Fatty and Ginger a short time before. The airman performed several tricks above the fields and presently glided to a graceful landing.

From the aeroplane descended a tall thin man with a bronzed face. Leaving his machine in the hands of the mechanics he strode towards the shed. Several of the people on the road raised a cheer which the airman acknowledged with a cheerful grin and a wave of his hand.

"Who is he?" asked Ginger Jones.

He addressed no one in particular, but an old gentleman standing near them answered his question.

"That's the famous Captain Dibbs."

It was an awkward moment for Billy Baxter, and although he tried to carry it off

with a nonchalant air it was obvious that neither Fatty nor Ginger found it convincing. On the contrary it looked as if Billy's reputation was about to suffer a serious setback.

"Of course it's dear old Dibbsy," said Billy. "Didn't you two fellows know?"

"Garn!" said Ginger Jones disgustedly. "You told us that he was flying like a novice."

Billy yawned.

"You picked me up wrong, Ginger," he suggested gently. "What I meant was that compared with me he was flying like a novice."

Still Ginger wasn't convinced.

"I thought he was a great friend of yours?" he said. "He didn't seem to recognise you just now."

"Didn't he?" responded Billy, putting some heat into his voice. "And who the dickens do you think he was waving to?"

This was a telling point. It had looked as if Captain Dibbs had been waving to the crowd, but on the other hand might he not have been waving to Billy Baxter? Even Ginger had to admit the possibility.

"And do you really mean to say you can fly better than Captain Dibbs?" asked Fatty, who was now ready to believe anything.

Billy Baxter perceived that the moment had arrived when he must deliver the shaft that would put his boast beyond doubt.

"Can you keep a secret?" he whispered.

"We can!" declared Fatty and Ginger firmly.

Billy bent closer.

"I shall probably be giving a display with the captain at the pageant on Saturday afternoon!" he said. "Now, not a word to anyone. It's a secret."

**At the Aerodrome!**

**I**F Billy Baxter had expected his friends to keep such a wonderful secret to themselves it wasn't long before he was disillusioned. Ginger and Fatty had the news all round the village before going to bed that evening, and for the rest of the week Billy was pestered with questions about what tricks he was going to do.

He managed to put most of his questioners off easily, but among his own particular friends, Fatty and Ginger, as well as Sam Binns, his avowed foe, who frankly disbelieved everything that he said, Billy had to relate some of his previous flying "adventures." In order not to be caught out in anything, he borrowed an aeroplane book from the public library and sat up till early morning reading it. He also managed to get hold of a book of instructions on flying, and this enabled him to put across some convincing yarns.

However, although he was keeping up his reputation Billy was also heading for a fall. It seemed next to impossible that he could actually give a demonstration of trick flying on the Saturday. And if he didn't—where was his good name?

In the circumstances there was only one



course for him to take, and accordingly Saturday morning found Billy walking briskly on the road to Bynville Aerodrome.

Although it was early the aerodrome was a hive of activity as the men bustled around making last-minute preparations for the display. Which was rather fortunate for Billy, because he managed to find his way into the large aeroplane shed without being noticed.

"The question is," said Billy thoughtfully to himself, as he crouched behind a monoplane, "what do I do now?"

Billy had no set idea in coming to the aerodrome, but he had a hazy notion that he might be able to use a machine during the pageant unknown to the officials. He wasn't very confident about the matter, but he really thought that he could fly a machine with the knowledge he had gained from that instruction book.

At all events, one thing was certain. He would have to fly.

While he was thinking the matter over he spotted a small group of men entering the hangar, and he saw with a thrill that they were headed by the daring Captain Dibbs himself.

They came directly towards the monoplane behind which Billy was hiding, and he crouched further into the shadows in case they should see him. Fortunately they were too intent on their business. The captain examined the engines while the others, who were mechanics, busied themselves at other parts of the machine.

"Where does it fire, Jones?" asked Captain Dibbs of one of the mechanics.

"In the rear compartment, sir," answered Jones. "There's a tape lead to the fore cockpit. She'll go up nicely a few minutes after the lead is fired."

"It's a pity to see the old bus go," remarked the captain. "She has been through some pretty stiff tests. However, they want thrills, and I suppose they must have them. I'll see that she passes out in a regular blaze of glory."

This finished their work for the time being, and they sauntered to the far end of the shed, leaving Billy thrilled with the thought that he was actually touching the machine in which Captain Dibbs was going to do his performance that afternoon. As he gazed at the 'plane a wonderful idea came to Billy.

"Goshoo!" he exclaimed. "That settles it!"

There were two cockpits in the monoplane, and the man had spoken about a rear compartment. Obviously Captain Dibbs was going to occupy the fore cockpit. Supposing he, Billy Baxter, concealed himself in the rear compartment, and afterwards, when the 'plane was in the air, crawled into the rear cockpit. Wouldn't it be a simple matter when he landed to convince his friends that he had been responsible for most of the captain's flying tricks?

Elated at this simple solution to his problem, Billy found the door of the rear

compartment—which was near the tail of the machine—and, finding it, he managed to open it without difficulty. The compartment was dark. Billy pulled himself in and closed the door.

The compartment was larger than he had expected, and although, surprisingly enough, it was loaded with paper and wood shavings, and smelled vilely of petrol, Billy stretched himself out comfortably and waited patiently for the afternoon.

### Billy in the Clouds!

**B**ILLY'S absence on Saturday morning caused no alarm among his friends, and early in the afternoon Fatty and Ginger, along with a crowd of their schoolmates, marched gaily to the Bynville Aerodrome and lined up at the ropes in front of the spectators so that they could have a good view of Billy entering the aeroplane.

"There's Captain Dibbs!" exclaimed Fatty Hart, pointing to the tall figure of the captain, who was standing by an ancient-looking monoplane. "He and Billy are great friends. Billy calls him Dibbsy."

"He would," said Sam Binns witheringly.

There seemed to be an insult in this remark, so Ginger Jones kicked Sam on the seat of the pants.

Meanwhile the pageant started, and thrilled by the wonderful exhibition of aeronautics, Fatty and Ginger almost forgot about Billy. But not quite, and as time passed and Billy failed to put in an appearance, they began to feel anxious. Surely Billy would not fail them!

The time came for Captain Dibbs' act to begin, and still Billy had not turned up. Fatty and Ginger were feeling despondent by now, while Sam Binns was jubilant.

The captain's proposed display evoked no little interest, and while his machine was being pulled into position the announcer told the spectators through a megaphone what was going to happen.

"Captain Dibbs will first of all perform some of the most daring, reckless, and wonderful tricks known to flying," he said. "Afterwards he will give an exhibition of how to abandon an aeroplane in mid-air. Captain Dibbs will make the descent by parachute, and the abandoned machine will catch fire and crash in flames."

This sounded highly exciting, and despite their disappointment Fatty and Ginger had their eyes fixed intently on the monoplane as the captain stepped into the machine. The propeller was swung, and the aeroplane took off gracefully.

During the next fifteen minutes Captain Dibbs had the spectators trembling with excitement as he performed seemingly impossible feats, dives, contortions, and swoops with the monoplane. Then at last the captain was seen to rise from the cockpit and jump off. He fell swiftly for some distance, then his parachute outspread itself, and he fell gently to earth. Above him the aeroplane rocked and swerved



madly. From it rose a tiny spiral of smoke.

"Well," declared Sam Binns emphatically, "if Billy Baxter can beat that, he's a marvel!"

**I**N the meantime, where was Billy?

Lying flat in the rear compartment of the monoplane, Billy had fallen asleep, and when he awoke he felt the machine bumping over the ground. Then it became steady, and he guessed rightly that it had taken to the air.

The captain's fifteen minutes of trick flying was a period of torture for Billy Baxter. At first he was bumped from side to side and smothered in the smelly paper refuse until he was choking, but presently he steadied himself by gripping the sides of the compartment and putting his feet tightly against the roof—at least, Billy took it to be the roof, although he wasn't sure.

At last he decided that he would have to make a move, and when presently the monoplane became comparatively steady, he opened the compartment door cautiously.

"Goshoo!" he groaned, gazing downwards on to the aerodrome. He could see the other machines on the ground and the upturned faces of the spectators.

Then Billy received a shock. Something shot past his nose, and, looking downwards to see what it was, he saw Captain Dibbs being carried to earth by the parachute. Another groan escaped Billy as he realised that he was alone in the monoplane!

"This," he decided, "is where a Baxter named William does or dies in the attempt."

On the ground Fatty and Ginger and the rest were gazing at the aeroplane, waiting for it to burst into flames. Suddenly they became aware of a small figure climbing out of the rear of the machine. At first no one recognised the figure, but soon Fatty gave a shrill cry.

"It's Billy Baxter!"

Everybody in the vast crowd held their breath as Billy clung grimly to the rocking, falling 'plane and tried to make his way to safety. A mighty cheer went up as Billy disappeared into the rear cockpit.



**Billy flung himself from the burning 'plane and he dropped like a stone—**

"Come on, Billy!" yelled Ginger Jones excitedly. "Show 'em a thing or two about flying!"

Billy Baxter didn't hear the words, although it seemed as if he did. Captain Dibbs had shut off the engine, but fortunately the propeller was still revolving, and Billy found the switch which set the engine going again. He didn't know exactly how to steer the 'plane, but he gripped the joystick tightly and decided that the best thing he could do was to fly low. In that case he would not have so far to fall.

Unfortunately the monoplane had other views, and did everything but glide to earth. It jumped to higher altitudes, turned turtle and flew upside down, chased its tail, looped loops, and generally did such amazing tricks that even Captain Dibbs, when he reached earth, watched with his heart in his mouth, so to speak.

Thinking all the time that Billy was performing these tricks as part of the display,

*(Continued on page 43.)*



The Greatest Serial Ever Written By Popular DAVID GOODWIN!

# Knights of the Road!



## Dirkley Diddled!

“Of course, sir,” said Hilton, obviously surprised at the Head’s words.

Dr. Trelawney nodded his head approvingly. He knew Hilton to be a boy of his word.

“Hilton,” he asked, “have you fought with Dirkley to-day?”

“No, sir,” said Hilton, more surprised than ever.

“On your honour?”

“Certainly, sir. I would tell you if I had. I had no idea you minded a little fighting, sir.”

“Did Dirkley capture a prisoner to-day—a highwayman?”

Hilton flushed a little uneasily.

“No, sir,” he answered truthfully. “He certainly did not.”

“Were you in the plantation this afternoon?”

“Yes, sir.”

“When Dirkley was there?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Did Dirkley fight with Conyers and Fernhall and a crowd of other boys?”

“No, sir.”

“That will do, Hilton. Tell Conyers to come in, and go downstairs yourself.”

Conyers came in, was asked the same questions, and gave, of course, the same answers. Then he, too, was dismissed.

“So, Dirkley,” said the doctor grimly, turning to him, “you have come here to tell me a string of deliberate lies!”

Dirkley choked. He had spoilt his own story in trying to make himself a hero. Being one of those boys who cannot keep from lying, he had exposed himself hopelessly by adding his own falsehoods to the true part of his tale. Two separate witnesses had

**Telling how the sneak of St. Anstell’s gets his just deserts!**



discredited him. No one was quicker to see it than the doctor. It was just what he wanted.

"But it's true, sir!" gasped Dirkley. "Fernhall's brother is Dick Forrester, and he—"

The doctor stepped across and took down a long birch rod from the wall. Dirkley looked at it in dismay.

"Have you anything more to say?" said Dr. Trelawney grimly.

Dirkley gulped and spluttered as he looked at the birch, and his pasty cheeks grew whiter.

"N—no, sir!" he stammered.

"Dirkley," said the doctor, "it is my custom to flog an incurable liar when I come across him. I dismiss you this time with a warning; but take care not to repeat what you have said to me to-night. If I hear that you have done so, this birch will take the hide off your back. Go, sir!"

### The Gipsy's Capture!

**D**IRKLEY slunk out of the Head's study, wondering what had caused his great sensation to fizzle out. He made his way sulkily downstairs, and tried to escape to a solitary class-room. But there were scouts placed on the staircase, and they seized him.

"Come on, you chaps! Here's the sneak!"

"Let me go!" yelled Dirkley at the top of his voice, hoping to bring a master on the scene.

"What have you told the doctor, you cad?" snapped Conyers. "If you've got Fernhall or the other chap into hot water we'll half kill you!"

"I haven't—I didn't!" yelled Dirkley, as Conyers and Hilton seized him and the others crowded round. "I—I only told him I'd been fighting with you chaps, and he said he'd flog me."

"I jolly well wish he had, and expelled you into the bargain!" exclaimed Hilton. "Here, you fellows, it was this beast that kept Dick Forrester's letter, and laid the trap for him. Let's rag the sneak!"

"Boo—yah—ow!" roared Dirkley. "Hoo—yow!"

So lustily did he howl that he soon brought a master on the scene—a favourite move

with fellows of Dirkley's kidney—who dealt out a hundred lines all round, Dirkley included. Shortly afterwards the dormitory bell rang, and everybody was marshalled off to bed, just as the boys had arranged to make Dirkley run the gauntlet. The sneak had a bed in No. 4 Dormitory, where—by good luck for him—none of his enemies berthed, and so he escaped their vengeance for the moment.

"I believe old Trelawney knew all the time that that highwayman and Fernhall are brothers!" muttered Dirkley savagely to himself, as he pulled the bedclothes over him. "I swear I'll be even with him. If he won't attend to the matter, I know one who will!"

He composed himself to sweet dreams of revenge, and next morning hid himself out of the way of the other fellows till chapel and morning school began. His experience was that these matters blow over if one lies low for a time; but the boys were thoroughly roused by Dirkley's underhand plot to entrap their friend and benefactor, and were not likely to forget the incident quickly. Ralph, who was the hero of the school now that he was known to have a real live highwayman for a brother, was very worried about Dirkley.

"I tell you what it is," he whispered to Hilton, before morning school broke up; "the doctor's shut Dirkley up—wouldn't listen to him, or something. But that won't stop the fellow; he'll take his tale elsewhere."

"Where?" Hilton wanted to know.

"Why, to the magistrates at Hutton, you ass! You see if he doesn't sneak off that way as soon as school's over. We've got to stop him. Pass the word round!"

The word was passed, and everybody kept a sharp eye on Dirkley. On Ralph's advice, they did not follow him too closely, but let him get away from the school; and the boys, hot on his track soon after, saw him stealing away towards Hutton, just as Ralph had predicted.

"After him!" shouted Hilton. "Come on, you fellows! Hunt him down!"

Dirkley took to his heels like a hare as soon as he saw what was afoot, and away went the whole field in pursuit. They chased him across half a dozen meadows and through a copse, gaining on him yard by yard, though he doubled and twisted like a fox.

### HOW THE STORY STARTED.

**DICK FORRESTER** learns upon the death of his father that all the vast estates and fortune, with the exception of a hundred guineas, have passed into the hands of his rascally uncle,

**VANE FORRESTER**. The latter refuses to give the boy his money, and, appointing himself guardian, states his intention of sending Dick and his brother,

**RALPH FORRESTER**, to Duncansby School—a notorious place in the north of England. Travelling by coach, Vane and the two boys are held up by

**DICK TURPIN**, the famous highwayman. Dick joins forces with Turpin, and, after bidding Ralph to be of stout heart and promising to fetch him soon, the two ride away. They have many stirring adventures together. In the meantime, Ralph has reached Duncansby School, a dreary, desolate place on the wild moorlands. Unknown to him, Vane has arranged with the headmaster that the boy shall "not live long." Ralph is rescued by his brother, who takes him to St. Anstell's College, where he is known as Fernhall. Dirkley, the school sneak, discovers the secret. After unsuccessfully attempting to capture the young highwayman—thanks to Ralph and his chums—he tells the headmaster. Dr. Trelawney is already in the know, however, and sends for Conyers and Hilton, two of Ralph's friends. "I want to ask you some questions—and answer them truthfully," says the Head, when Hilton arrives.

(Now read on.)



"Stick it, boys! We've got him at last!" shouted Conyers, as the sneak forged along not a dozen yards ahead.

Dirkley saw before him a couple of gipsy caravans. Spurting all he could, he rushed towards them, the pursuers close at his heels. He sprang up the steps of the nearest van and dived inside.

"Save me—save me!" he yelled to a big, swarthy man who was sitting at the door. "Keep them out! I'll pay you a crown if you keep them off and let me get clear!"

The gipsy took a sharp look at Dirkley, nodded, and slammed the door, which reached halfway up the opening of the caravan, just as the boys reached it.

"Now then, my gorgios, what do you want?" demanded the man roughly.

"Hand that chap out! He's our prisoner!" cried the boys. "He's a sneak!"

"Keep them off! Don't give me up!" wailed Dirkley.

"I won't give you up," said the gipsy, with a glance at Dirkley's showy clothes and the flashy jewellery he wore. "Clear off, you!" he added threateningly to Conyers, who had mounted the van steps.

"They won't give him up!" shouted Conyers, and then saw that a number of other gipsies had gathered round menacingly. "Come on, you chaps; we'll take him for ourselves. We're not going to be cheated of him. Forward!"

"Keep back, you kinchins!" shouted the gipsy on the caravan steps, snatching up a blunderbuss and levelling it. "Back, or I'll scatter this load among you. Be off!"

"Yah!" shrieked Dirkley, triumphantly dancing up and down inside the van. "Cowards! Come on, if you dare!"

The boys checked and halted. Two of the other gipsies levelled blunderbusses at them, and several more drew knives.

"Here, we must drop it, you fellows," said Hilton hastily. "We don't want any bloodshed! I don't mind a rough-and-tumble, but knives and guns are no joke—and those beggars mean business."

"Come on! Let's get back," put in Conyers. "We'll catch Dirkley when he reaches the school again. We can't tackle those blessed brigands."

The pursuers retired in the direction of St. Anstell's, for it was nearly call-over time, and Dirkley's hoots of derision followed them.

They had run a long way in pursuit of their quarry, and they were within a mile of the school again when a horseman came trotting towards them. It was Dick Forrester.

"Well met!" cried the young outlaw. "What news, lads?"

The boys hastened to tell him all that had befallen, and Dick laughed hugely. Then suddenly he became grave and, after a moment's thought, called Ralph to him.

"There's more in this than meets the eye, old boy," he said quietly. "You'll find Dr. Trelawney your best friend if there is trouble, remember that. This Dirkley fellow looks like causing trouble; but I think I

see a way to settle the matter. Hasten back to St. Anstell's now, and keep your eyes open. Good-bye, lads!"

Dick waved his hand and cantered off, and half an hour's search brought him to the camping-ground of the gipsies; but they were there no longer. The wheel-marks on the turf showed plain which way the vans had gone. Dick laughed softly to himself. He rode along at a gentle trot, following the tracks.

They wound about strangely, skirting the sides of the wood. It was not long before Dick caught sight of the vans ahead of him, and cantered on to overtake them. A broad grin grew upon his face as he heard a disturbance in the rearmost van. It was Dirkley's voice raised in frantic protest.

"Let me go! Put me down!" it wailed. "I shall be late for call-over! Give me back those things!"

"You'll be late indeed afore we've done with you!" said the voice of the big gipsy. "Give me that there scarf-pin. Look, Anita, my chi, what a pretty gold pin from the young gorgio!"

"You thieves!" snivelled Dirkley. "I'll set the constables on you for this! Oh, put that dreadful knife away!"

"He says he'll tell the chokengres," said the big gipsy, with a mocking laugh. "You'll have little chance for that, my chal. There's money to be made out o' you, by the look o' your clothes!"

"Let me go!" blubbered Dirkley.

The sneak and bully, like most of his breed, was the first to cry out when trouble came.

"Good-day to you, brother!" cried Dick, arriving just at this moment. "Do you happen to have a young chal with you from St. Anstell's?"

"What is that to you?" growled the gipsy suspiciously, laying a hand on his gun.

"Save me!" yelled Dirkley, rushing forward and sticking his head over the door. "For pity's sake make them let me go!"

"You'll not get him from us!" said the gipsy. "We won't give him up; he's our prize!"

"Nay, I'm not here to fight you for him," cried Dick, with a laugh. "What will you do with him?"

"That's to be seen," said the gipsy, looking at Dick with a more friendly eye. "Hold him for half a year maybe till there's a fat reward for him."

"Boo-hoo!" bellowed Dirkley. "I want to go home! Make them give me up!"

"You don't know when you're well off, my son!" grinned Dick. "I know a hundred boys who are waiting for your blood. St. Anstell's is too hot to hold you."

"Are you going to peach on us, gorgio?" said the big gipsy darkly. "I tell you none shall take him from us!"

"Keep him, and welcome, and I wish you joy of your bargain!" said Dick. "The farther he is from this part of England the better. D've mark me? 'Tis a very scurvy



little dog, I fear, but you may make a man of him yet. And look ye, don't ill-treat him. Here's a trifle to pay for his keep."

"Well, well!" cried the gipsy, with a wink, catching the well-filled purse Dick flung to him. "The chal shall have no such bad time of it with us. I see you are a friend, for all you are not of the Romany. If ever you need a helping hand from our brethren of the woods and ways, say Jasper Griengre is your friend, and you may come by good service. Good ride to you, and a fair road!"

"Boo-hoo! Ow!" wailed Dirkley, as the caravan jolted off, leaving Dick laughing and waving his hat by the woodside.

"A rare piece of luck!" chuckled Dick to himself as he rode back. "Yonder little tale-bearer might have made sad trouble for Ralph, to say nothing of myself, and now the gipsies have got him I warrant they'll stick to him. It is no bad life with the Romany folk, and I'll go bail they miss him little at St. Anstell's. Hallo! What do you want, my lad?"

A little barefooted urchin from one of the vans came running after Dick and called to him.

"My father, Jasper Griengre, bids me ask your name, and whether 'tis Dick Forrester," said the youngster.

"At your service," said Dick. "And what then?"

"We have been seeking you with this message three days," said the young gipsy. "It was trusted to us on the chance of our finding you."

"Thank you," said Dick, taking the message eagerly, for he recognised the writing. He threw a loose guinea to the gipsy boy, who caught it, and raced back after his caravan.

Dick tore the note open and read it.

"I am giving this to the old Romany in the hope of his finding you in time. If you get it, meet me in the west front room of the Old Grange at Calthorpe Hill, at ten on Monday night. 'Tis a safe place. Greetings, old comrade, and a loose bridle to you.

"Yours  
"RICHARD TURPIN."

"And right blithe I shall be to see the merry rascal again!" said Dick, as he put the note away. "I owe him too much to be long apart from him, and he will give me good counsel. He'll have news of Vane Forrester, too, I dare swear!"

*(Startling developments in next week's exciting chapters of this magnificent serial, lads.)*

## BOUNCER BILLY BAXTER

*(Continued from page 39.)*

Fatty, Ginger, and the rest of Billy's schoolmates were yelling themselves hoarse. Even Sam Binns forgot his animosity and was cheering with the rest.

Then all at once a hint of tragedy entered into the affair and the crowd fell silent.

"Look!" shouted Fatty hoarsely. "The 'plane's on fire!"

High above them, trying hard to steady the monoplane's wild career, Billy Baxter suddenly became aware that something was wrong. A burning smell struck his nostrils, and, looking round, he beheld the rear of the monoplane in flames.

Billy realised now why the paper refuse had been in the compartment, and why Captain Dibbs had left the aeroplane. The thought of his plight sent several shivers down his spine.

"At least," he consoled himself, "no one can say that I didn't go one better than Captain Dibbs."

But this was poor consolation, and Billy began thinking about how to save his life. With the flames now taking a firm hold, the 'plane was turning its tail upwards, and diving in a headlong flight towards the ground.

There seemed nothing he could do, and Billy was frantically jerking the joystick when his foot came into contact with a large bundle which lay on the floor of the cockpit.

"Whew!" gasped Billy as he stared at the bundle. "Don't tell me this is my lucky day!"

It was a parachute, probably left there by some mistake on the part of a forgetful mechanic.

Fortunately for him, Billy's book of instructions on flying had mentioned parachutes, and in a moment or two he was struggling into the one he had found.

But he wasn't saved yet. With the parachute fixed on his back he attempted to steady the 'plane once more, and he actually succeeded in turning its nose upward. It was now or never! Billy climbed over the edge of the cockpit and took the jump.

He dropped like a stone until he was well clear of the burning monoplane, then he remembered to pull the parachute rip cord release. In a moment the parachute arrested his flight, and he swayed gently to the earth.

Billy Baxter opened his eyes to find Captain Dibbs unstrapping his parachute. He was surrounded by the cheering crowd, in the forefront of which Billy spotted Fatty, Ginger, Sam Binns, and the rest of his schoolmates.

"Hallo, Dibbsy!" said Billy.

The captain grinned.

"Some stunt, laddie!" he said approvingly.

Fatty, Ginger, Sam and the others looked on with shining eyes. The admiration and envy on their faces caused Billy to sigh thankfully. His reputation was still good.

THE END.

*(Billy hobnobs with a real live rajah next Wednesday—with amazing and amusing results!)*



# VENGEANCE TRAIL!

(Continued from page 35.)

"Thank you, Excellency. And thank you for the kindness that has pulled dad through!"

"Pooh! Nothing!" he smiled graciously. "Could we have done less for the two caballeros who have saved Mexico from a serious disaster? Yes; I insist. As I have told you, had it not been for you and your comrade destroying Garcia's munition-train the rebellion would have been raging still."

From one of his officers he took a letter and held it out.

"I have another pleasant task to perform, Senor Graham. When your honoured father is recovered sufficiently to receive the news, pray inform him that his title to the Buonaventura silver mine he discovered is secure. I have been in touch with my government in Mexico City. This letter confirms my news!"

Left to themselves, Peter put the warrant carefully into his pocket and fixed Red with a merry eye.

"Reddy," he grinned slowly, "I reckon the day I knocked the tar out of you in San Francisco was the luckiest day of my life!"

The Texan snorted and placed his big hands on his hips.

"Oh, yeah?" he drawled pugnaciously. "An' I suppose, yuh long-legged, low-flung ornery English galoot, yuh reckon yuh kin wallop me ag'in, huh?"

"Anytime I like, you red-headed American blighter!" was the cheerful reply. "An' when my dad's better and our mine's in working order, perhaps I will!"

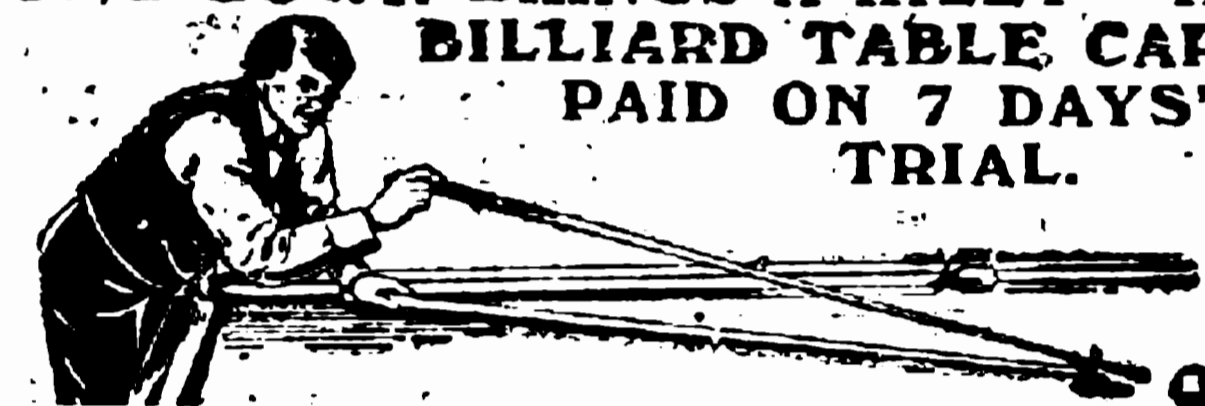
Still wrangling, the partners on Vengeance Trail sauntered across the lawn towards Garcia's house.

A month later, with John Graham again in the saddle, the trio rode out across the plains towards the mountains of Sonora. Red "sang" to them as they went.

THE END.

(John Brearley's latest—and greatest—detective-thriller yarn featuring the Night Hawk and Nelson Lee next week, "The Last Round!" Don't miss it.)

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