

NELSON LEE

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VENGEANCE TUNNEL!

An amazing incident from the super-thriller yarn of exciting and perilous adventure featuring the Night Hawk, complete inside.

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KITTENS'

Gangsters Dogged By Kittens!

But the Kittens are
Human!

CHAPTER 1.

Robbed—and Doomed!

SMACK! Thud! Thud!
"Go it, boys! Oh,
well hit, Ted!"

"Quicker with your
left, Jimmy!"

In Scrapper Huggins' training gym, down White-chapel way, half a dozen of Thurston Kyle's Kittens—that tough and cheery gang of adventurers who were the Night Hawk's devoted followers—were enjoying a quiet hour together.

Next to fighting themselves they loved nothing better than to watch others at the game. And the two young Kittens in the ring, promising boxers who were training to be pro.'s, were putting up a fast and clever show.

Encouraged by the keen whispers of praise and expert advice, they were mixing it gleefully, getting faster and faster as the bout went on. Left, right, duck, sway and side-step. They boxed as finely before that small but critical audience as they would have done before the packed audience of the Albert Hall.

Yet it was no fight; only a friendly three rounds—and no hard feeling afterwards. Spite was something not known among the Kittens. Arguments were settled in a rough and ready way, with or without gloves, but when they were over the combatants settled down once more in the steady atmosphere of paldom that welded the little band into one.

They were a queer lot, the Kittens; kept together by loyalty and the love of thrills and



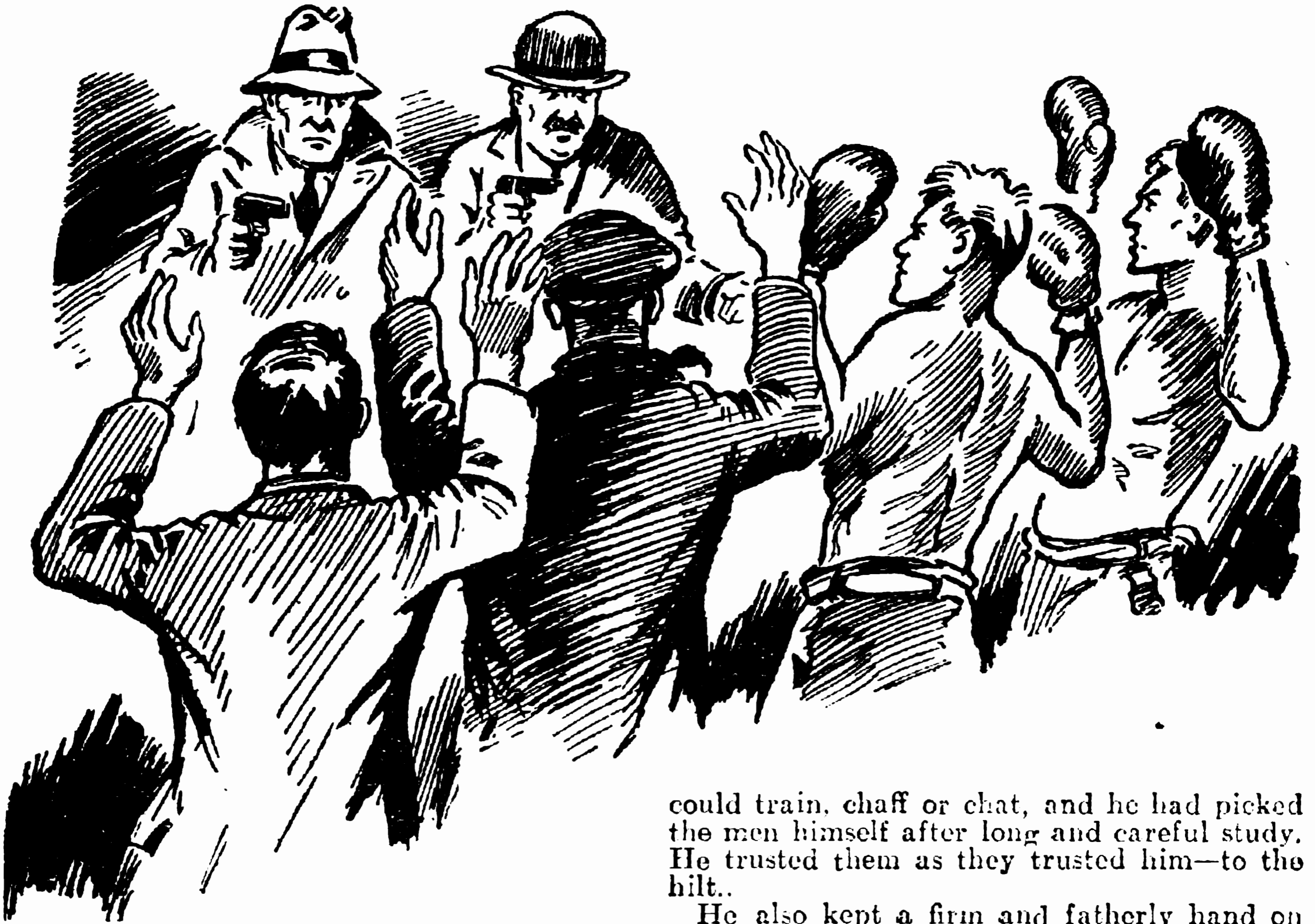
adventure. Rough and ready too, preferring straight hitting and a few words to polished manners. It was true that the less they saw of the police the better they liked it, but there was nothing crooked about them. Their distaste was the result of independence, not fear.

They were Thurston Kyle's Kittens—that was enough. The Night Hawk, their adored chief, always worked alone, fighting crime

of Dynamic Action Featuring the Night Hawk!

PREY!

By **JOHN
BREARLEY**



or enemies with his uncanny skill in science, his great wings and ruthless determination. He had resolutely cut Scotland Yard or any other authority out of his schemes. And the Kittens, of course, weighed in with him joyously.

Although they were already fairly well off as the result of their lavishly-paid services to Thurston Kyle, they still worked honestly at any job—provided it kept them out on the busy streets they loved and could be dropped the second the Night Hawk called them to action.

Never to a soul did they breathe a word of their exploits. It was only among themselves that they were known as the Kittens. To outsiders they were "Scrapper Huggins' lot," and the other and more shady gangs that knew them—even the vicious "raccourse bunch"—usually gave them a wide berth, for harming one Kitten meant taking on the whole heavy-hitting squad forthwith. And the police, too, knowing they were "straight" to all intents and purposes, never troubled to inquire into their activities.

As for Scrapper Huggins, he "ran" them. His gym. was their headquarters where they

could train, chaff or chat, and he had picked the men himself after long and careful study. He trusted them as they trusted him—to the hilt.

He also kept a firm and fatherly hand on the squad's finances, for the Kittens were a reckless crowd who poured their money away like water when they had any. At the present moment the wall-safe in the expugilist's little office contained a hefty treasure belonging to the men—a great wash-leather bag of cut and uncut gems to the value of many thousand pounds. They had been given to the Kittens by Prince Budrudin, Rajah of Bhuristan, for the gallant manner in which they had helped him to regain his long-lost throne.

In his quiet methodical way the Scrapper was gradually disposing of the stones for hard cash. He had to take care, however, that no "official" inquiries arose as to where the jewels had come from, because that Bhuristan stunt of the Kittens was one exploit in their careers that had to be kept dark—very dark.

He had practically agreed to sell the whole consignment to a certain Dutch gentleman, who often dealt in precious stones without asking too many questions. The deal was to be clinched to-morrow. And when the cash was paid over, the Scrapper firmly intended putting it straight into the bank, where, if the Kittens wanted it, they'd have to ask him for it.

"And that'll stop the beggars from bein' broke *all* the time!" he chuckled to himself as he watched the young well-trained boxers before him. "But won't they howl when I tell 'em! Ho, ho!"

He straightened up from the ring-post on which he was leaning, looking huger than ever in old flannels and sweater. Striking a little gong to end the bout, he vaulted into the roped square.

"Well done, lads. Very sweet li'l scrap!" he boomed benevolently. "They're comin' on, ain't they, boys?"

The other Kittens nodded, mixing chaff with good advice.

"Fine. Only Jim's left hand seems sorter paralysed!" said one.

"And Ted couldn't punch a hole in butter. More weight and shoulder behind it, Teddie, boy!"

The Scrapper grinned.

"Scat. Let 'em alone. Now, lads, into the shower bath and get dressed. And then —" The words died on his lips.

Crash!

"Hands up, all. Don't anyone move!"

FROZEN suddenly as if to stone, the Kittens stood where they were. The cheeriness of a second before had vanished abruptly. Cold waves of hostility radiated from them. Their lips became tight-set, their eyes hard and glinting.

For, with a fierce bang, the door of the gym. had flown open. A harsh command had followed instantly. In the doorway stood three masked men with levelled automatics, backing up that command in a language the Kittens well understood.

It was a hold-up! Here in the Kittens' headquarters!

Whoever the men were, they were daring customers, and they had picked their time well, for in about an hour's time the eight Kittens present would have been joined by a dozen more as others of the squad finished work and dropped in for the evening.

The outer door of the Scrapper's gym. was in a little side street; easy for the newcomers to have donned their masks unnoticed and stepped in through the little entrance, while the Kittens were absorbed in boxing. Closing the gym. door behind them now, they prowled further into the big training-room, keeping their guns well to the fore in case of need.

But the Kittens were marking time. They knew enough about guns to realise they were caught—for the moment, at least. Their hands were raised above their shoulders; their narrowed eyes were busy as they silently studied their iron-nerved foes.

All three were flashily-dressed men.

"Smart mobsmen—racin' crowd," diagnosed the Scrapper, weighing them up expertly. "An' where've I seen that leadin' bloke before? H'm!"

His pink, granite-jawed face became more mask-like than ever as he scrutinised the

leader of the gunmen. The fellow was stockily built and muscular; thick lipped, coarse, confident. Over one shoulder was slung a leather satchel such as bookmakers use on race-courses.

But the Scrapper's eyes picked out more than that. Two gold teeth gleamed in the front of the man's mouth as his lips parted in a leering grin. And just below the level of his mask, clear against his pasty skin, showed the beginnings of a strawberry birth-mark. It was this that caught the Scrapper's stare within five seconds of the breath-taking entry.

In tense silence captors and captives watched each other for a brief hard-breathing space. Then the man with the satchel jerked his head towards a further door.

"What's in there?" he snapped. "Answer up."

It was the little office where Scrapper laboriously wrote letters and did business. He said as much briefly. The other grunted.

"That's us, then. Too public in here!" he growled. "Get inside, one at a time. Any tricks, and you'll be sorry!"

The three guns rose ominously as the Kittens hesitated. There was no hope. Turning with hands still raised, they marched into the little room, followed by the masked men, and stood against the back wall. When everyone was inside and the door closed, Scrapper Huggins spoke for the first time. His words were calm and leisurely.

"Well, what's the game—'Red-eye' Parsons?"

The coarse lips of the burly gunman twitched in a snarl of surprise. After a second, however, they widened in another sneering, triumphant smile, and, without turning a hair, he jerked off the mask. The reason for his nickname was only too obvious, for the strawberry mark covered his left cheek and eyes and part of his low, wrinkled forehead.

"Huh! Know me, do you? Well, it don't matter if you do. An' I said these masks wouldn't cut any ice, anyway!"

"I know you all right!" nodded Huggins coolly. "One o' th' Liverpool dockside lot you uster be, eh? Bookmaker an' all that down here now, huh?" His contemptuous calmness made Parsons snarl again. "Well, what d'ye want?"

Parsons' grip tightened on his gun.

"No lip, fer a start!" he growled, and followed the warning with a shattering demand. "I want them sparklers you've been tryin' to sell fer the last fortnight!"

For all his self-command, a spasm of angry surprise flashed across the Scrapper's face. His mouth tightened to a straight line, and his big jaw hardened. He had imagined that the secret of the Bhuristan stones in his safe had been well kept.

"Wot sparklers?"

Parsons laughed hoarsely.

"Wot sparklers?" he mocked. "Come off it. The stones you tried to sell old Hans Donkmeyer, o' course. Don't bluff me, Hug-

gins. We nailed the old squarehead this afternoon, and made him come across. See?"

His mocking eyes moved rapidly round the little room, and finally rested on the small wall safe by the Scrapper's battered desk. He grunted placidly.

"In there, I suppose, ain't they?"

"Go to blazes!" remarked Huggins promptly.

Parsons' fleshy face grew grim and vicious, and he hunched his powerful shoulders menacingly.

"Now, listen, Huggins—we ain't here for our health," he grated slowly, "nor to pass the time o' day! I've been keepin' an eye on you fellers. I know all about them stones, an' a bit about how you got 'em, see? I want 'em! I'm not goin' to risk hanging fer such as you—but I want 'em! An' if you don't want to be cripples fer the rest of your lives, boys, you'll poppy up without trouble. Like this!"

His gun chopped down, putting a bullet so close to the Scrapper's knee that a little piece of cloth flew out of his baggy flannels. The report of the shot was no louder than a hearty sneeze, for the gun wore a silencer.

The Kittens were well up against it. And no others expected for a good hour.

Yet still the Scrapper did not move. He was of the type who become obstinate as army mules under threats. Slowly Parsons' gun moved down again until the muzzle pointed squarely at the big man's knees. The muscles on his hand tightened. It was the taciturn Alf Jenkins who saved the situation.

"Aw, don't be a goat, Scrapper! Give him the stones. We kin always wring his neck afterwards!"

The other Kittens joined in at once. It was obvious that Parsons would carry out his tough threat, and the stones didn't weigh for a moment with Scrapper's safety in the balance.

With bitterness in every line of him, the giant Kitten gave way, turning reluctantly towards the safe. His big fingers fumbled with the combination until the door swung open.

"No tricks, mind!" snapped Parsons, and stepped closer in case any weapon was hidden there beside the jewels.

A moment later a washleather bag was tossed angrily at his feet. Immediately one of the other men stepped forward, picked it up, and opened it.

"All O.K., Red!" he grinned, chuckling louder still when he pulled out a handful of flashing gems and tossed them delightedly in his palm.

Parsons laughed, too. Taking the bag, he thrust it into the satchel round his neck, keeping his eyes all the time on the smouldering Kittens. Then he looked hard at the dour-faced Jenkins.

"So you'll wring my neck afterwards, eh?" he jeered. "How d'ye know there'll be an afterwards?"

Jenkins' answer took the form of a long, narrow stare and a significant raising of the lip. It was Scrapper Huggins who replied, almost in a whisper.

"There'll be an 'afterwards' all right, Red-eye—don't worry. We'll get you for this, you welshing dock-rat!"

"Yeah? An' perhaps not!" chuckled Parsons. "Goin' to tell the p'lice about us, eh?"

"You know there'll be no p'lice in this!" retorted the Scrapper steadily. "We fight our own battles! You've bitten off a mouthful in us, friend. And you ain't in Liverpool among your pals, either. You're in London!"

"Go hon!" Parsons grew merry at the words. "Well, I won't be in London fer long, Huggins. Get me? These stones are going with me. And where I'm going—well, guess. I hope it keeps fine fer you!"

"Doesn't matter where you go!" replied Scrapper, still in the same quiet, toneless voice. "We'll get you!"

Red-eye Parsons suddenly changed his tone. He lost his bantering grin, and became what he was—a vicious gangster, glaring with the pale-blue, flinty eyes of a killer.

"You make me laugh!" he blazed. "Foller me, will you? Then let me tell you this fer your own sake. I've been in London six months now, and I know all your bunch by heart. See? I recognise 'em when I see 'em. An' if I see 'em near me after to-night I plug 'em!" He raised his gun to emphasise his threat. "An' without any noise, either!"

The Scrapper nodded solemnly.

"Good enough. Thanks fer the tip. But we'll still get you!"

The rock-like persistency of the giant seemed to goad the Liverpool gangster to fresh fury.

"Get me, will you?" he yelled. "Right! I'll see you don't!" Over his shoulder he jerked to the two men behind him: "Outside! Quick!"

They vanished backwards through the door in quick obedience. And Parsons stood glaring at the Kittens, gun quivering. His eyes were bloodshot with bestial passion.

"Now, you poor mutts, I'll show you what Red-eye Parsons is like! You'll get me, eh? Well, get out of this first!"

Quick as lightning he sprang back to the half-opened door, paused for a second, still covering his prisoners. His free hand dived into a pocket and came out holding something the size of a cricket-ball. Laughing harshly, he dashed the object to the ground, whipped out of the room in a frantic stride, and slammed the door.

The Kittens heard the sound of a key turning. And where the bomb had burst flashed red and venomous flames, racing swiftly in the track of the scattered spirit the missile had contained.

Before they could move the little office, with eight men in it, was on fire.

CHAPTER 2.

Snub Butts in Handily!

IN his usual harum-scarum style, Snub Hawkins, Thurston Kyle's youthful assistant, whirled his two-seater gaily out of the Whitechapel Road traffic. A neat turn of the wheel, and he slid along the gutter to the mouth of the little side-street in which Scrapper Huggins had his gymnasium.

He found another car parked there first, however—a hackney Daimler from a hire garage apparently—the driver of which gave him a cheerful professional nod as the lad edged up behind and skipped out. But when he turned the corner of the by-street, a ruder welcome greeted him. Before he could dodge, three men came blinding round the angle and knocked him spinning.

Nor did they stop to apologise. He had an instant's vision of three grimly-set faces in the uncertain light of a corner lamp, but that was all. The men tore past him and fairly hurtled into the waiting Daimler.

Two of them shot inside straight away; the third, a thick-set man with a bag, paused for a stride to shout an order to the driver. Snub, struggling with indignation and loss of breath, heard something that sounded like "Beat it for Saint"; and after that the Daimler purred instantly into its stride and was gliding through the West-bound traffic.

Pulling himself together and picking up his hat, Snub regained his temper and wind together. He had been rudely jostled, but the men were too far off now for reprisals. They had looked a tough trio, he thought—flash "roughs" on a hurried journey somewhere. He wagged derisive fingers after the Daimler's tail-light.

"Good-bye. I hope your axle breaks!" he called politely, and dismissing the incident, turned to continue his walk down the little street, cheery as ever.

With the assurance born of many a hearty welcome in the gymnasium, he banged open the outer and inner doors, and immediately came to a puzzled halt. There were usually a few of the Kittens in the big training-room, but this time it was completely empty.

It was not that, however, which made him knit his brows. The gym. might be deserted, but it was by no means quiet. The door of the Scrapper's office was shaking and creaking under the force of hammer-like blows, frantic, heavy crashes that filled the room with noise. To Snub's further surprise, too, he saw that the big padded vaulting-horse had been turned over and rammed against the door.

He grinned. From the force of the blows only one man could be the author of them—the gigantic Scrapper. Some of the festive Kittens must have japed him, locked and barred him in before bolting. Grinning wider than ever, Snub sauntered leisurely forward to take his part in the joke.

Then he saw something that wiped the fun from his face and left it hard.

Smoke! Through the jamb of the door and underneath it little grey-blue eddies were curling in rapid spirals. Scrapper's office was afire, and he was locked inside.

Heart bumping with alarm, Snub flashed across the gym in great strides, bent and vigorously dragged the horse away. As he did so, a mightier smash than ever hit the door, the panels broke, and through the cracks he caught a glimpse of Huggins' face. The sight of it redoubled his efforts. The door was locked and the key missing.

"Look out, Scrapper!" he bellowed, and jerked out the automatic from his back pocket. A red flash, a sharp report, and a bullet shattered the lock completely. Next moment Snub was flung backwards on his shoulders as the broken door flew open and the great bulk of the Scrapper hurtled out, gasping and choking. His face was blackened by smoke, and the legs of his flannels were scorched and smouldering.

After him came a stifling billow of smoke, through which yellow streaks of fire glinted dully. And through the smoke, to Snub's increasing horror, lurched other Kittens—five of them, all in a worse plight even than Huggins. The boy was on his feet again like a cat, darting forward to help them.

A great hand shot out and stopped him. The Scrapper pointed dumbly to where a fire-extinguisher hung beside some wall-bars. As Snub wheeled and jumped for it obediently, the giant himself plunged back into the burning office and came out holding on each arm the limp forms of the two young boxers, still with their gloves on, their half-naked bodies badly burned.

Snub nipped in with his extinguisher. Szzzzz! Szzzzz! went the hissing liquid, cutting wide black swathes on the charred floor, beating back the flames. So thick was the smoke that the youngster's eyes were almost blinded in a moment, but screwing them up he advanced doggedly, spraying everywhere until the Scrapper joined him with a second extinguisher.

Together they fought the stubborn fire until at last they gained the upper hand. One by one the flaming patches spluttered and died, the smoke began to clear as it rolled out of the wider gymnasium behind. There came a shattering crash of glass as the Scrapper flipped a stool through the little office window. And after that the peril was over.

The two gasped their way back into the gym., for nothing more could be done for a while.

Three of the Kittens still lay where they had fallen, coughing and clawing at their eyes. Jenkins and another, apparently not so badly affected, had pulled themselves together and were bending over the two boxers. The Scrapper's great fists clenched and

unclenched fiercely while he stood staring at his pals.

It was his strength and pluck that had gone a long way to saving them, short though their terrible imprisonment had been, for he had plunged through the first gust of fire to hurl himself at the door. Had it not been for Snub's quick work, however, even his mighty efforts would have been in vain. He laid a hand on the boy's shoulder.

"Thank 'ee, sir. Thank goodness you were 'ere."

"Rats!" panted Snub. "I had the evening clear and just dropped down for a chat. But, gosh, Scrapper, how on earth did it happen?"

Before answering him the huge man strode across to the big first-aid chest in the corner of the gym., returning with cotton-wool and a can of carron oil, which he handed to Jenkins with a brief nod. Not until he saw the taciturn one expertly bathing the boxers' burns with the soothing oil did he turn to Snub and briefly explain.

"So they grabbed the stones young Buddy gave the boys and bolted, leavin' us to burn!" he finished. Snub gasped his amazement and consternation.

"My hat! The crawlin' scuts! And I saw 'em go!" he snapped, remembering the three men who had collided with him at the street corner and raced away in the Daimler. The Scrapper wheeled on him fiercely.

"You saw 'em? Where? When? Which way did they go?" he panted.

Never before had Snub seen the genial giant look so terrible. His blackened face was set in deep harsh lines, but it was his eyes that made the lad gasp inwardly. They



Snub was knocked spinning as three men raced desperately past him. He did not know that they were "Red-eye" Parsons and his gangsters, escaping with thirty thousand pounds' worth of jewels.

were wide open and hard as agates; steady, expressionless, yet filled with a deep cold fire, like those of a lynx deprived of its kill.

"They flew past me outside, knocked me sideways. Slung themselves into a hired Daimler and headed west. I don't think the driver's one o' the gang—I heard the leader yell something like 'Beat it for Saint' and they were off. I lost the rest."

The Scrapper nodded slowly.

"Beat it for Saint Pancras!" he finished softly, without a second's hesitation. Calmness was fast returning. His voice had steadied and colour had come back to his face. But the deadly look in his eyes still burned. "Yes, St. Pancras. That's how I've been figgerin'. An' I'll get him!" His lips parted in a mirthless smile; he banged his fists together.

"He's beating it for Liverpool, where the rat comes from. He won't stop running till he's among his pals in some hide-away in the docks. An' he's taken our stones with him. He'll peddle 'em on the sly to the swell gamblers and con. men that work the Atlantic ships, see? Gosh, I know his sort backwards, and their tricks!" His war cry came again in a fierce deep snarl. "I'll get him!"

CHAPTER 3.

The Scrapper Weaves His Net!

THE Scrapper had no time for fancy detective work. But his knowledge of men was wide, deep and long, and he could use uncanny common-sense. With Snub behind him, he hustled back to the telephone in the fire-blackened office and jerked out a number. While he was waiting for it he grabbed a charred ABC from a pigeon-hole in the desk and ruffled the pages rapidly. At last one horny thumb indicated the trains to Liverpool, and after one quick glance Snub yanked out his watch and nodded.

"H'm! If you're right, he's got forty-five minutes to catch the fast night express, Scrapper. He'll do it all right!"

"Maybe," grunted Huggins. "But I'll have him before that!" A voice through the 'phone in answer to his call made him turn. "Hallo! 'Pancras cab-rank? Is Smithy there, mate? No? Charlie Roberts, then? Awright; tell 'im Scrapper Huggins wants to speak."

Keyed up with excitement, Snub stood by. During the next few minutes he listened to many strange conversations, and his admiration for Scrapper grew exceedingly.

"'Ullo! Charlie? Good! 'Op across to the station, will yer? Tell Nobby Clarke I want 'im, quick. He's sellin' papers just in front of the booking-'all. I want him immediate. Right!" There was a pause until:

"That you, Nobby? Then listen!" Grimly the Scrapper snapped out the story of the robbery and fire, following it with descriptions of Parsons' gang, and orders. "They're headin' fer your place, see? That's almost sure. They'll be gottin' the seven forty-five to Liverpool. Stop 'em till we get there. Savvy?"

Apparently Nobby Clarke, as keen a son of the London streets as could be found, savvied without further argument. The Scrapper rang off, and promptly called for fresh numbers.

To Snub it was a revelation the way the big man sent the word round to the Kittens who were still out. He had them at his finger-tips; half a dozen numbers rolled from him in turn without hesitation. And as soon as each answered, he spoke curtly.

All sorts of places he called up—little shops in by-streets, eating-houses and cab-shelters. At each place, as Snub learned afterwards, someone departed promptly in search of the nearest Kitten, pushing his barrow or presiding over his market-stall close by.

The Scrapper's messengers were not members of the squad, but they knew the giant and hastened to obey, certain of reward and courtesy afterwards. Within fifteen minutes of first jumping to the 'phone, the leader of the Kittens had his "net" out—watchers lurking at St. Pancras, Euston, King's Cross and as far west as Paddington. But when Snub whooped congratulations all the Scrapper grunted was his war-cry again.

"I'll get him! I'll show Mr. Red-eye Parsons what buckin' the Kittens means!"

"But suppose he chases on to Liverpool by road, Scrapper?"

"He won't," replied the big man confidently. "Takes too long, fer one thing, and a train crowd's easier to hide in. 'Sides, you 'card him say 'Saint,' and that's enough fer me." Gripping the youngster, he went on quickly: "Got your car here, sir? St. Pancras is where the fun'll be, sure. Could you get there by seven-forty-five now?"

"Could I not!" replied Snub with sturdy emphasis.

"Right—thank 'ee! Alf, are you hurt bad?"

Alf Jenkins grunted. He also started for the door. Words were rarely necessary with him.

"Take Alf, then, will yer, sir?" growled the Scrapper to Snub. "I must stay here to see arter these others and stand by the 'phone. Nobby may want a 'and at St. Pancras. That's all!"

But Snub had something to do, too. Going to the 'phone, he called a Hampstead number, and the moment his master's deep voice answered burst into a complete story of the adventure so far. He heard an angry exclamation at the other end, and when Thurston Kyle spoke again, there was an edge to his tone that Snub knew well.

"I see—very bad. Go right away, boy; do what you can. If you want help, call me. I shall be ready. Good luck!"

A minute later, with the dark-faced Alf Jenkins sitting rigidly beside him, Snub was whirling his two-seater westwards.

Twenty-five minutes to get to St. Pancras Station. The chase was on.

THROUGH Aldgate, the City, Ludgate Circus and up Farringdon Street flew the little car, weaving recklessly in and out of the traffic lanes to the touch of Snub's deft hands on the wheel.

Until they reached the top of King's Cross Road their luck was in; but there a hold-up

made the young driver wriggle impatiently in his seat while precious time dragged by. The big clock tower at King's Cross said 7.43 when at last the two-seater shot past and into the clanging approach to St. Pancras Station across the way.

Two minutes to train-time. They were out of the car in a twinkling, Jenkins' head bobbing as he looked quickly around. For the first time in the journey he spoke.

"Nobby ain't here, sir. Mus' be inside. He'll stop 'em if he spots 'em!"

"If!" It came to Snub sharply that, after all, they might be on a wild-goose chase. He may not have heard Parsons' last words aright. The Scrapper's theory might be entirely wrong, and the jewel thieves might be scattering along to Liverpool by road.

There was no time for doubts, however. Alf Jenkins was already crossing the pavement. With Snub hard at his heels, he hurried into the station, threading his way swiftly but unobtrusively through the passing throngs. There was something silently vindictive about him—the droop of his shoulders and the sinuous, noiseless way in which he glided through made Snub think of a leopard slinking towards its prey.

Inside the station all was bustle, noise and confusion. A train had just come in, and two others were shortly to depart, the heavy jets of smoke from the latter dispersing far and wide. Passengers streamed from booking-hall to barriers, trolleys clanked, and above all rose the constant babel of human voices.

Heedless of the clamour, however, the two plunged deeper, their eyes peering eagerly in every direction as they sped towards the departure platform for Liverpool. The last-minute rush for the 7.45 was in full swing. The gates of the railed barrier were choked by a milling crowd, who passed slowly through and went flying along the platform for the nearest carriage the moment their tickets were clipped. A fine confusion was raging.

And in the midst of it Snub saw Red-eye Parsons and his confederates. The Scrapper had been right.

The burly gangster with the luridly-marked face was standing just inside the barrier with his back to the collector and the hurrying passengers. He was glaring through the rails like some caged wild-beast. While, a few yards away and frantically jerking a platform-ticket from a machine, stood the lean, wiry figure of Nobby Clarke of the Kittens!

"Oh!"

Flinging up his hand, Snub gripped Jenkins by the arm, pointed silently. Twenty yards of platform still stretched between them and Nobby, and they halted in their tracks. As in a nightmare they saw Parsons hunch his right shoulder curiously, saw Nobby Clarke stiffen, reel back and begin to fall. They were powerless to help or defend.

Like a tired child the Kitten sagged against the slot-machine and sank to the ground, his hand clutching feebly at his right side. Without another look Parsons had spun round and melted into a group of passengers, all racing wildly for the train as the guard's whistle shrilled its final warning.

The whole affair was over at breathless speed. There was no sound, for the gangster's automatic was silenced. No betraying flash either, as he had shot through his coat-pocket. He had warned Scrapper Huggins that he would plug any Kitten he recognised near him. And he had kept his word.

Filled with rage, Alf Jenkins hurled himself through shouting, bewildered people towards the barrier. But Snub's first thought was for the fallen Nobby, and he was beside the wounded man before any others had quite realised what had happened.

Tearing off his soft felt hat the boy slid it beneath Nobby's head and raised him slightly. At the touch the Kitten's eyes opened vaguely, fluttered, then widened with relief at sight of Snub's anxious face so near. He began weakly to stammer something, whereupon the youngster bent closer to listen, under pretext of unfastening his coat.

"It's you, sir. I—I'm sorry. Parsons got away. I only spotted him—minute ago. Must ha' been hidin'—in the buffet—till—till——" His head dropped wearily as he crumpled in a swoon.

"Don't worry, Nobby. He won't get far," whispered Snub, holding him in strong arms.

Already the keen youngster was planning ahead. Parsons had got clear. The Liverpool express was already steaming out. He had to get in touch with Scrapper Huggins and Thurston Kyle. The guv'nor first. His master, the Night Hawk, was the only one to deal with the situation now.

All the time he was thinking he was tearing Nobby Clarke's garments open, setting his teeth at sight of the ominous red stain growing larger and larger. He had barely got the Kitten's chest exposed, however, when through the gaping crowd thrust two policemen, who took charge at once. After a short examination they nodded significantly to each other, and one, standing up, touched Snub on the shoulder.

"Did you see him go down, my lad?" There was a curtly anxious note in his voice, for already some few minutes had passed since the shooting—valuable minutes for which he would have to account to his superiors later.

"Yes."

"See anything else—who shot him?"

"No," lied Snub calmly. "Just that he fell. I ran to him. I didn't see any policemen around anywhere—that's why I did it," he finished innocently, whereat the constable frowned.

"Can't be everywhere!" he snapped. "Well, you'll have to come along with me as a witness. Wait here!"

"What?" Snub's jaw dropped. Waste time giving statements in a police station? Not much. He jerked out his card-case and offered one to the constable, explaining at the same time. "I say, I'm in a beastly hurry. There's nothing I can do. You can only take this poor chap off in an ambulance. And here's where I live if you want me."

The officer looked stern and shook his head importantly.

"Can't help your troubles, my lad. This looks like attempted murder at least; and you're an important witness. You'll have to come with us!"

He turned his back on the boy promptly, leaving Snub completely at a loss for once. In spite of the Scrapper's fast and clever work, everything was conspiring to let Parsons make good his escape. Snub thought furiously.

He had to 'phone Thurston Kyle. His master would know best what to do. Perhaps he would follow Parsons at once and swoop down on him at the end of the journey in Liverpool at the first chance. It was the sort of exploit that would appeal to him immensely. Under his great wings that could hurl him through the air faster than airplane speed, the Night Hawk could eventually overtake even the Liverpool express—providing the train did not have too great a start.

"Too great a start"—that was the rub. The train had pulled out a bare thirty seconds after Nobby Clarke had dropped, with Parsons safely aboard, if only by the skin of his teeth. It would not touch full speed yet for some time, true; but—

"Blow this copper!" raged Snub inwardly, realising, however, that the officer was doing his duty.

In the midst of these exasperated thoughts, the lad became suddenly aware of his own felt hat thrust out towards him by a lean hand from the ring of people around.

"Your tile, mister? It was on the ground."

Snub's heart leapt at the voice. In the confusion he had forgotten Alf Jenkins, his partner in the chase. He turned to see the close-lipped Kitten regarding him with eyes that held not a trace of recognition. And, taking his cue from that stony look, he nodded carelessly.

Here, at least, was a messenger who would telephone Thurston Kyle—if only they could exchange words without the constable overhearing and asking awkward questions. Jenkins knew what he was doing, however. The moment he had returned from the barrier to find Snub tangled up with the police he had shrunk back into the crowd and bided his time.

As the felt hat changed hands he whispered hastily, his face a mask and the words slipping smoothly from the corner of his mouth.

"Parsons got aboard. They stopped me at th' barrier!"

None but Snub could possibly have heard.

"Oh, thanks!" said the lad loudly.

Without haste he put the hat on, shielding his face a little thereby with his hands.

"'Phone Mr. Kyle. Describe Parsons. Leave it to him!" he muttered, turning calmly as the policemen rose from Nobby's side.

An ambulance with clanging bells had driven into the station, and two attendants carrying a stretcher were pushing their way towards the wounded man. The constable who had spoken to Snub touched the boy's arm.

"Now then, mister. Follow me, please!" Snub shrugged and nodded. But when his eye drifted towards the crowd again, Alf Jenkins had disappeared.

The dour one was swaying rapidly away through the press to make a telephone call that would set Thurston Kyle, the Night Hawk, flashing through the darkness on an air trail in the wake of the Liverpool flyer.

Red-eye Parsons was not safe yet—by long chalks.

CHAPTER 4.

The Night Hawk Takes the Trail!

"**S**TRAWBERRY birthmark over left cheek and eye, two gold teeth, burly man, light suit, blue raincoat, the jewels in a leather satchel. Is that all, Jenkins?"

Alf Jenkins, as Thurston Kyle's calm, strong voice came to him through the telephone, spoke eagerly.

"Yessir. Travellin' with two other blokes. Reckon the train's been gone ten minutes, chief!"

"So. And you say he shot poor Clarke? Badly?"

"Well, they've run him off to hospital, sir. Mr. Hawkins has gone, too, like I said. Nobby looked mighty bad, Mr. Kyle!"

There was a little grim pause. Then:

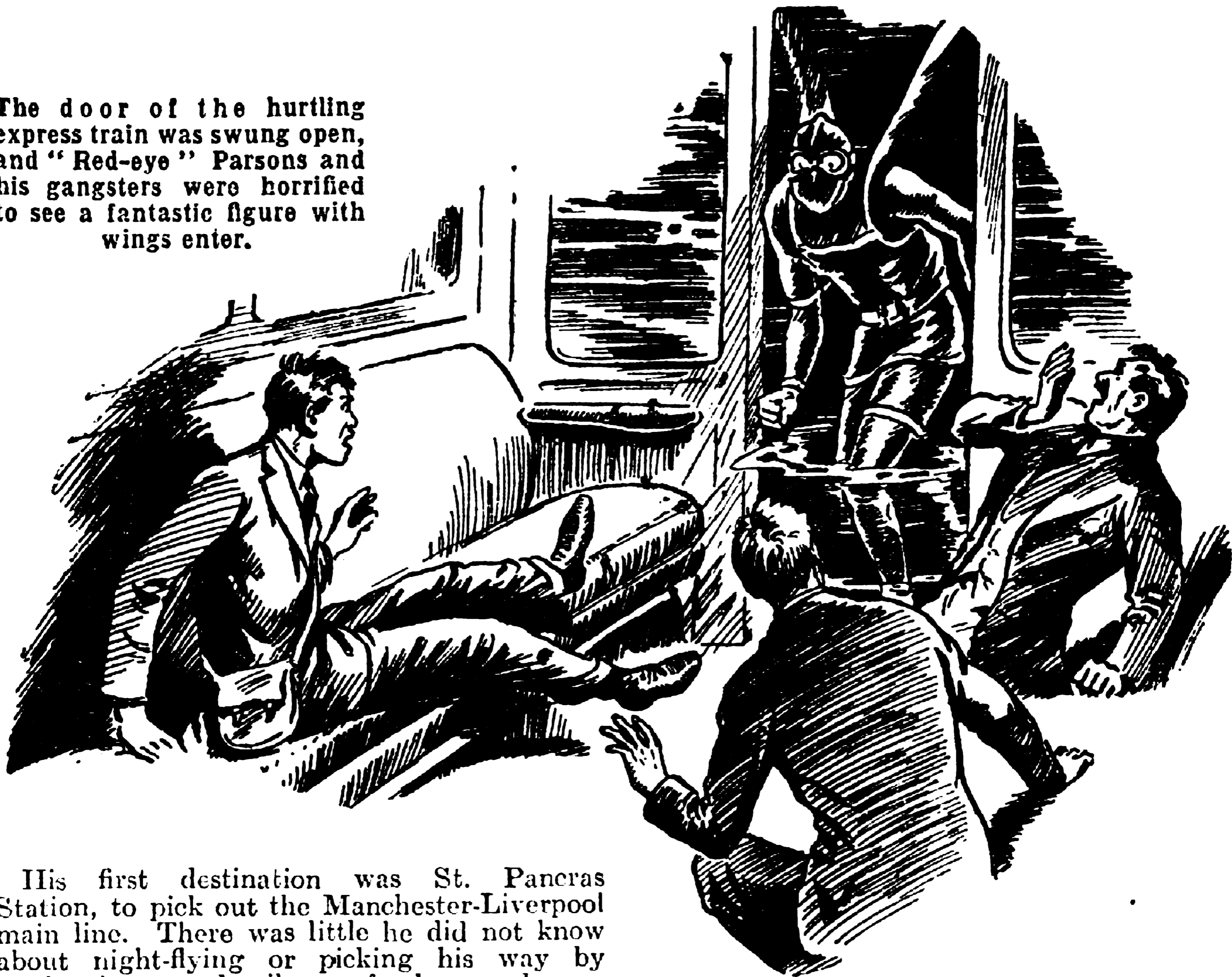
"Very well, Jenkins. I will attend to this Parsons fellow—at once. Go back now and tell the Kittens from me not to worry!"

Click! The 'phone went dead as the Night Hawk rang off abruptly. And so excited was Alf Jenkins for once that he almost smiled. Deep down in his throat he muttered: "Red-eye, me ole sport, you're soon going to cop a packet!" With that, he lifted the receiver once more to tell the startling tale of events to the anxious Scrapper in Whitechapel.

Meanwhile, in Hampstead, Thurston Kyle had become swiftly and efficiently active. He had been engrossed in a highly-interesting experiment, but he dropped it immediately, and, flinging off his laboratory smock, darted to his room to change.

In five minutes he strode back, a tall, lithe figure in his sinister flying-costume, helmeted and armed. In five more he was poised on the little veranda outside the laboratory, arms raised for the initial dive into space. Down he flashed, his mighty wings opening, swinging him high and gracefully into the air above the garden trees at once. With two slashing beats he swept into faster speed, settling his controls deftly as he sped through the night.

The door of the hurtling express train was swung open, and "Red-eye" Parsons and his gangsters were horrified to see a fantastic figure with wings enter.



His first destination was St. Pancras Station, to pick out the Manchester-Liverpool main line. There was little he did not know about night-flying or picking his way by roads, rivers, and railways, for long and careful experience had given him unerring accuracy in such matters. Like an invisible phantom of darkness he hovered about the great station for a minute or so, making sure of his track. And then, with a vigorous swirl of his pinions, he was off—off on the trail of the Liverpool express.

He judged that by now the roaring train had something like thirty minutes start—which meant she was perhaps twenty-five miles ahead, eating up the lines at full speed by this time. It would be a stern, hard chase for a while, he knew, although a sardonic smile of confidence curled his lips at the thought. In a run from London to Liverpool, his wings would give any train in the world twenty-five miles start and a beating.

His programme of attack he had yet to settle—plenty of time for that as he streaked along. But one thing was certain: he meant to get Red-eye Parsons, the man who, in little over an hour, had left eight Kittens to a flaming doom and desperately wounded another, besides stealing the men's jewels.

The Kittens had earned those stones worthily; risked their lives, fought and sweated for them. They were not to be robbed by a flash gangster if the stern Night Hawk could prevent it.

For over an hour he flew at brilliant speed, keeping a rigid course eighty yards above the gleaming metals that wound beneath him;

out of London, northwards into quiet Hertfordshire, a mysterious, avenging figure. Soon the glare of the capital was far behind. Suburban stations twinkled for a moment below and were passed.

Soaring higher, but keeping to the trail like a bloodhound, he hurtled on through the night sky above Bedford's bright ring of lights, and settled down onco more. On and on, his amazing wings smoothly devouring the air, the keen kiss of the wind spurring him to greater efforts.

Over the Bedfordshire hills, the glimmering Ouse, and the borders of Northampton he glided. A glance at his wrist-watch and a rapid calculation suddenly sent him shooting in a steep climb, higher and higher into the darkness, his powerful glasses sweeping the countryside ahead, dotted here and there with the faint lights of little towns and villages.

From the height he was speeding he could see three trains. They were miles ahead yet, and looked like long red caterpillars crawling along a gloom-enshrouded floor. He studied them carefully without losing pace.

One was heading towards him, probably London bound. Another, from its size, looked to be a small local, and as he scrutinised it he saw the train slow down to halt at a tiny wayside station. He smiled with keen satisfaction and settled his glasses

on the third, a long chain of lights flashing away from him in all the glory of a non-stop run.

That was his quarry. Clapping down his vizor and holding his arms loosely before him, he whirled into greater speed than ever, burning up the sky in mad, swooping drives.

Now he sank lower once more, hissing above the main line again, just clear of the little bridges that spanned it occasionally. Very soon the fleeing train had become more than a mere lighted streak: it was taking definite shape. By the time he was in the depths of Northamptonshire, in the midst of dark farming country, he was near enough to see the tail-light of the express. In another few minutes he was swooping along the track, a bare hundred yards behind.

At uncanny speed he lessened that short distance, swerving out of the backlash caused by the train's headlong passage, until suddenly the guard's van slid back beneath him and he was flattening out above the rippling tops of the carriages. He had caught up.

The first part of his breathless pursuit was over. The Liverpool express roared harshly beneath him with, somewhere in its many coaches, Red-eye Parsons and the Kittens' jewels. The Night Hawk glided lower than ever until the lights from the windows glittered fleetingly on his slashing wings.

The second and more difficult part of his task had arrived.

A STERN chase and a long one. As he sped beside the train like some enormous black bird, the Night Hawk smiled again in grim amusement. His plan of attack was settled at last, and he wondered what sort of shock the passengers in the express would have, could they but see him winging silently past their windows.

It was tricky work now; dangerous; calling for all his cool nerve. So close did he fly that sometimes the tip of his right wing almost touched the swaying train. Sometimes, too, the monster plunged into a narrow cutting, so quickly that he had to swing steeply aloft, flitting above until the flyer emerged into an open track once more; at others the smoke trail changed direction at a sudden curve, and wrapped him in stifling fumes before he could swerve aside.

But, ruthless and resolute as ever, he stuck to the trail. Past each coach in turn he flew, peering in through the windows with fierce, deep-set eyes. At first, from what Jenkins had told him, he had hoped to find his men in the rear carriages, but soon it was evident that, once aboard, they had gone farther down the corridor to seats in front.

He was taking no chances of missing them, however. Into each compartment in turn his keen stare darted, looking for the man with the disfigured face. The rear of the train was searched and the dining-cars. Still no result. As the train rushed beneath a

little iron footbridge, he tilted over it recklessly and dived again to the coach he had been forced to leave, forging on to the next.

And in the next he found his prey.

The Night Hawk laughed softly. Persistence and the speed of his wings had been rewarded. The three men he sought were lounging in a compartment by themselves, with the door of the carriage closed. It was small wonder they had the place to themselves, for they looked too tough a trio for other passengers to remain with long.

Again the Night Hawk had to swing aside as another deep cutting surged up, but he was back again in a flash the moment the train came out. Two of the men were sitting in the far corner-seats, wrangling drowsily over something with a racing paper spread out between them. But it was the third member of the party who riveted Thurston Kyle's glittering eyes.

There was no doubt about him—Jenkins had described Red-eye Parsons too accurately for anyone to miss. The man lay full length on the seat, with his feet to the door; and the purple-red blemish on his cheek stood out startlingly in the glare of the electric lights. He had taken off his raincoat and tossed it up on the rack. Across his shoulder, with his podgy hands resting on it affectionately, lay the satchel containing the stolen gems.

Red-eye Parsons was drowsing. But he was taking good care of his villainously-acquired loot.

Rising above the train, the Night Hawk searched the darkness ahead. As far as he could make out in the gloom, no further obstructions existed for some way. Jamming his glasses back and settling himself in his controls, he dived again. His face was stern with eager anticipation.

Flicking alongside, he fung out a hand, grasped the door-handle, and turned it mightily. The door flew open wide; he folded his wings, after a last terrific drive.

Next instant a nightmare burst crashingly in on the Parsons gang.

The sudden opening of the door and the inrush of cold air had jerked them to attention. Even the sleepy Parsons blinked and raised his head. Before they could realise what had happened, however, in through the aperture plunged a great and terrible figure, silk-covered suit glittering fantastically in the light. Two blazing, goggled eyes glared down at them from a masked and helmeted face. A long arm with smooth-rippling muscles shot down, and the steel-curved hand fastened on the satchel round Parsons' shoulder, jerking him mercilessly upright.

From each of the gangsters in chorus, then, broke a shuddering scream that rose even above the roar of the train. Parsons, terrified to the soul, went limply down on his knees, vaguely clawing at the demon figure that towered above him. One of his

companions choked and fainted. The other, beside himself with terror, leapt frantically at the Night Hawk, fists beating the air. A terrible punch, squarely between the eyes, hurled him, shattered and unconscious, across the carriage, to topple in a distorted heap on top of his swooning confederate.

Startled by the throbbing yell, passengers in other carriages leapt to their feet and stepped wonderingly into the corridor. There was no time for the Night Hawk to waste. His strong hands sank into Parsons' body with a clutch that made the man moan hoarsely. Then, heaving him up like a child, the powerful avenger hurled himself and his burden backwards through the door, spreading his great wings wide as he did so.

And at that moment the forepart of the train dived thunderously into a yawning, black tunnel.

CHAPTER 5.

The Jewels Come Home!

FACED by a terrible death, the Night Hawk had but a few whirling seconds in which to act. The dark-looming walls of the tunnel seemed to pounce upon him out of the night.

The reverberating roar of the plunging express dinned furiously in his ears, the terrific gush of air from the tunnel beat him

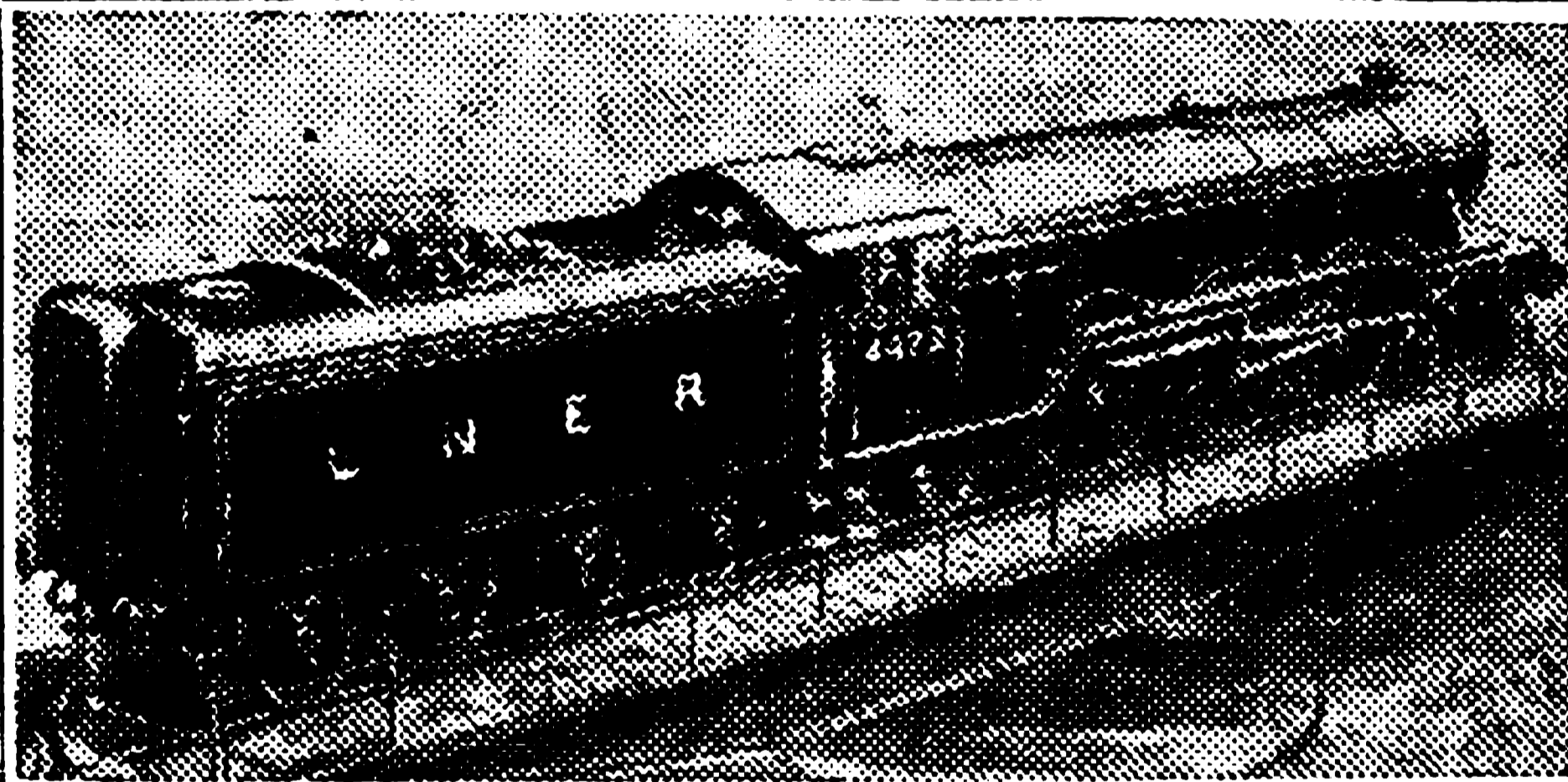
sideways. Instinctively he dropped his worthless passenger to save himself, slashing his wings with all their power as he was sucked inwards.

His outflung hands crashed against a great mass of brickwork with a force that jarred his wrists and tore his flying-gloves; the soles of his feet tingled as he fetched up against the tunnel wall. But for the wide, strong pinions steadying him so gallantly against the suction, he must have been dashed to a lifeless heap at once. It was a grisly, nerve-wracking moment.

Yet his amazing invention stood the strain splendidly, holding him back, saving him from an awful doom. The moment the pressure subsided a little, he launched himself backwards, away from the rough, unyielding stone, bit by bit until he was suddenly free. He side-slipped weakly for a yard or so, recovered and flung himself far out of danger in two strong and desperate strokes. By the time he had done so the rear coaches of the express had roared into the tunnel. Darkness came back to the world as the great arch swallowed the last lighted windows.

"Hah!"

A great sigh of relief expanded the Night Hawk's deep chest at last. The escape had been terribly narrow, and the bellow of the train and the grotesque glare of sliding lights had lent a curious ghastliness to the position. But he was safe and not too badly



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scathed; and his chilled-steel nerve had never faltered for a second.

Gradually the noise of the train grew fainter as it fled deeper through the tunnel, out the other side and onwards to its destination. In the brooding silence that followed the final rumble, soft as a falling leaf dropped the Night Hawk, searching for Parsons, the gangster he had dropped.

Had the man fallen clear of train and tunnel? Had he managed to scramble away by some miracle and drag himself off with his precious booty? These and other questions flashed through Thurston Kyle's mind as he flitted down to the track again, cruising slowly back to the mouth of the cavernous arch.

The darkness there was too intense even for his piercing eyes. To pick out an object from above was impossible. Folding his wings, he landed beside the metals, prowling cautiously ahead. At last, with a mutter of impatience, he was forced to drag out his electric torch and press the switch.

And the very first beam of light showed him at once all that was left of Red-eye Parsons.

Standing quietly above the huddled figure, the Night Hawk compressed his lips and stared down. The man lay less than a yard away from the steel lines, with the leather satchel still clinging round his body. He was not a pretty sight.

It was not necessary to examine him. He had passed far beyond all human aid. With firm hands, Thurston Kyle gathered him up, carried him off the permanent way, and laid him on the grassy embankment. Then he took up the satchel and opened it. The washleather bag was still there and the stolen jewels safe.

Thoughtfully he slung the straps over his own shoulders and stared at the silent heap before him again. His eyes were quiet, but there was no trace of pity in their depths, for this man had deliberately endangered the lives of nine men in his vicious attempt at banditry.

"Your crime has cost you dearly, my friend," was all Thurston Kyle murmured, and softly he turned away. In another moment he was aloft once more, flying smoothly away from the tunnel of death, back to London with the loot he had recovered.

At breakfast the following morning he saw in the newspapers a brief reference to the finding of Parsons' body. He had been identified quite easily, but as he was a well-known criminal of the smaller order, little attention was paid to the death beyond a coroner's inquest.

According to the papers, too, Parsons' companions had been taken off the train at Leicester and removed at once to hospital, in a state of collapse. The police theory was that the men had quarrelled over something, and during the fracas Parsons had fallen or been flung through the door to his death.

But a certain squad of men in London knew different. Scrapper Huggins' "net" and the dazzling flying of the Night Hawk had triumphed against odds. As the leader of the Kittens had said, Parsons had bitten off more than he could chew when he bucked that tough gang. He had paid for his ambition with his life.

THREE days later Snub, the Scrapper, and Alf Jenkins were admitted to a private ward in a London hospital, where little Nobby Clarke lay making a slow recovery. Parsons' bullet had missed his lung by scarcely an inch and broken a rib in transit. But skilful nursing was telling its tale, and Thurston Kyle himself had requested a world-famous surgeon to give the sturdy Kitten every attention.

"Yer see, chaps," mumbled Nobby, "I was lookin' fer the perishers in the booking-'all. But they must have got their tickets a'ready, and sneaked in another way an' hid in the buffet till it was near time to go. I got fed up at last, and went to the barrier to watch there—just in time to see 'em go through. O' course, I made a grab for a platform ticket to follow and nail 'em some'ow before they got to the carriages. But Red-eye must ha' been watchin' pretty sharp, too. I saw him the minute he saw me through the railin's. An' that finished it. Sorry, blokes!"

With grins and banter, they soothed him down, and very soon Nobby's pale face became very bright again as he listened to the tale of that exciting night, drawled out placidly by Snub and Huggins, and confirmed by occasional grunts and nods from Jenkins.

"An' havin' got the sparklers back, Nobby, lad," concluded the Scrapper at last, "I bunged 'em down to ole Donkmeyer right away and made him parker up like a li'l gent. Thirty thousand they fetched, me son; well over a thousand fer each of us, an' no questions asked. How's that?"

"Lumme!" remarked Nobby Clarke dizzily.

"An'," grinned the Scrapper, with a triumphant glance round, "it's all in the bank—in my name. When you bloomin' spendthrifts want your money, you can come to me. An' then you'll get it—perhaps!"

Disappointment clouded Nobby Clarke's eyes. At mention of his fortune, visions of a great and glorious "spree" the moment he was well had leapt before him. But, knowing Scrapper Huggins, those visions had vanished with sickening speed.

"Then I almost wish the Chief 'adn't got Red-eye Parsons!" he said mournfully. "You allus was stingy, Scrapper!"

Whereupon a nurse came in to stop the laughter.

THE END.

(If it's thrills you want, the Night Hawk always obliges. He's at it again next week—in another splendid complete yarn of whirlwind action entitled, "The House of Mystery!")



Jokes from readers wanted for this feature. If you know a good rib-tickler, send it along now. A handsome watch will be awarded each week to the sender of the best joke; pocket wallets, penknives and bumper books are also offered as prizes. Address your jokes to "Smilers," Nelson Lee Library, 5, Carmelite Street, London, E.C.4.

NO NEED FOR WORRY.

It was the local cup-tie, and the game was fast and furious. When Sloshem put on their thirteenth goal without any reply from their opponents, the Tincan Dribblers' captain turned to his goalie with a snort.

"Look here, my lad, that's the thirteenth goal you've let through!"

"It's all right, captain," said the goalie brightly. "Some blokes is superstitious, but I ain't."

(H. Winters, 80, Ruskin Street, Kirkdale, Liverpool, has been awarded a penknife.)

FITTING.

Mother (in despair): "I've washed this jacket for Tommy, and it's too short."

Maid: "Better try washing Tommy now, ma'am."

(S. Johnson, 76, Westmead Crescent, Erdington, Birmingham, has been awarded a pocket wallet.)

NO ADMISSION.

The Boss: "On your way to Mr. Smith's office you will pass a football ground."

Office Boy (hopefully): "Yes, sir."

The Boss: "Well, pass it!"

(C. Burr, 17, Stothard Street, Jarrow-on-Tyne, has been awarded a penknife.)

THE SAME—BUT DIFFERENT.

Husband: "How is the petrol tank, dear?"

Wife: "Well, the indicator says 'half,' but I don't know whether it means half-full or half-empty."

(D. Brooks, Craven House, Middleton, Derbyshire, has been awarded a book.)

TO BE EXPECTED.

Porter (to small boy crying): "What's the matter, sonny?"

Small Boy: "I put my ha'penny on the line so as the train would make it a big one, and now it's gone!"

Porter: "Well, sonny, what can you expect—that was the Scottish express."

(G. Logan, 35, Plemont Road, Liverpool, has been awarded a penknife.)

DRAUGHTY.

Pat and Mike were tramping, and owing to lack of funds, had been compelled to sleep in a field. In the morning Pat had contracted a violent cold.

"Well, what do you expect?" said Mike, and pointed to one corner of the field. "Look, you left the gate open!"

(R. C. Wood, North Parade Hotel, Aberystwyth, has been awarded a pocket wallet.)

BUT IT DIDN'T WORK.

Judge (sternly): "The next person who interrupts the proceedings will be ejected from this court."

Prisoner (in dock): "Hooray!"

(Miss F. Paddick, Newtown, Nr. Romsey, Hants., has been awarded a book.)

DOING HIS BIT.

Teacher: "Who did your sums, Teddy?"

Teddy: "Father, sir, but I helped him."

(S. Underwood, 9, Melody Road, Wandsworth, S.E.18, has been awarded a pocket wallet.)

THE RELAY.

"Hallo, old chap! Thought I'd just drop in and see you about that umbrella you borrowed last week."

"Sorry, old man, but I lent it to a friend. Were you wanting it badly?"

"Well, no, I wasn't. But the chap I borrowed it from last week says the owner wants it."

(G. Thorne, 9, Queen Street, Bristol, has been awarded a penknife.)

WHAT A HOPE.

Dear Old Lady (having stopped a fifty-miles-per-hour motorist): "Excuse me, but I think I dropped my handkerchief up the road there. Did you notice a pale pink one with the initial 'G' embroidered in one corner?"

(Miss M. Clark, Naumai, Broadribb

Street, Toowoomba, Australia, has been awarded a book.)

WELL, WELL!

Jones: "You know, I'm a wonderful fellow! If ever I undertake to do a job I always throw myself into it. Hence my success in all things."

Jenkins (bored at the other's swank): "Why not dig a well?"

(G. Wheable, 368, Cowley Road, Oxford, has been awarded a penknife.)

SLOW TEMPO.

Instalment Collector: "Look here, you're seven payments behind on your piano."

Purchaser: "Well, the company advertises 'Pay as you play.'"

Collector: "What's that got to do with it?"

Purchaser: "I like playing very slowly."

(G. R. Wildman, Poplar Farm, Podington, Wellingborough, has been awarded a pocket wallet.)

STOP HERE FOR A GOOD LAUGH!



GR-R-R-R!

Keeper: "Hey! Keep away from that man-eating lion!"

Small boy (indignantly): "Why? I'm not hurting him!"

(D. Moor, 34, Festing Grove, Southsea, has been awarded a handsome watch.)

The MYSTERY of

By
EDWY
SEARLES
BROOKS



CHAPTER 1.

The Figure in the Night!

TEDDY LONG was frightened; horribly frightened.

He crouched in bed, hugging the sheets and blankets tightly around him. Vaguely above the howl and whine of the boisterous March wind, he could hear the school clock chiming out the hour of midnight. And from the window the sound which had first awakened him was repeated.

Swoosh-tap! Tap-tap-swoosh!

It was an eerie, mysterious, ghostly sound. Teddy Long, who was the biggest funk in the Remove Form at St. Frank's, lay in his bed, transfixed with terror. There was something at the window—something horrible, something spectral. Teddy was sure of it, and he was a spineless wreck of humanity as he shivered in his bed, clutching nervously at the bedclothes.

The sound came again, accompanied by a doleful moan as the wind blustered round the Ancient House. Teddy Long, with a fascination over which he had no control, lowered the bedclothes a trifle and peeped over the top.

It was not entirely dark in the dormitory, for the moon, emerging from behind the scudding clouds, was shining into the West

Square. The window was clearly outlined to Teddy's popping eyes.

His heart nearly stopped beating. It seemed to him that a ghostly hand, with long, bony, skeleton fingers, was reaching across the glass, attempting to clutch hold of the window fastening.

A sound burst out from Teddy's throat—a half-choking scream. He had no control over it; he had uttered it without knowing it. Hubbard, who occupied the next bed, stirred uneasily and rolled over.

"It's coming in!" shrieked Teddy Long wildly. "Help!"

Hubbard sat up with a jerk, blinking.

"What was that?" he gasped. "My only hat! I thought I heard something! Must have been dreaming."

He yawned, shivered, and was about to fall back on his pillow when he saw Teddy Long. Teddy's knees were hunched up, his face was almost covered by the bedclothes; he was shaking like a jelly.

"I say, Long!" said

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Who is he? Why does he
"haunt" the monastery ruins?

Sensational discoveries by
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the MONASTERY RUINS!



Hubbard sharply. "What the dickens is the matter with you? Are you ill?"

The sound of Hubbard's voice partially brought Teddy Long to his senses. He was in touch once again with realities. He half sat up, and his face, appearing above the bedclothes, gave Hubbard a fright. It was a face of deathly pallor, and the moonlight exaggerated its expression of stark terror.

"Here! I say, chuck it!" said Hubbard uneasily. "What's up with you, you silly ass? Was it you who woke me up?"

"The window!" babbled Teddy, in a voice that was little more than a whisper. "Look!

trying to get in! Can't—can't you see it? Look at that awful arm, with the skeleton fingers——"

"Here, that's about enough of that!" interrupted Hubbard, leaping out of bed and going across to Teddy. "You're dreaming, you silly fool! There's nothing at the window!"

"There is! There is!" sobbed Teddy.

"I tell you there isn't!" insisted Hubbard angrily. "You've been scared by the wind, you nervous ass!"

Again the wind came whistling round St. Frank's with a fresh howl. At the same time that eerie sound was repeated.

Something — something's trying to get in at the window!"

Hubbard looked at the window, and he looked back at the frightened junior.

"You're mad!" he said gruffly. "You've been having a nightmare, or something. You silly fathead, you're making me feel all shaky!"

Arthur Hubbard was not exactly renowned for courage on his own account; but he was, nevertheless, a lion compared with the abject Teddy. He glanced across at the sleeping Core-Pearce, and was rather envious of him.

"What's the time?" he grunted irritably. "Past midnight, I suppose?"

"The window!" repeated Teddy Long faintly. "I tell you something's

Swoosh-tap-tap!

"Oh, crumbs!" muttered Hubbard shakily.

For a moment he was frightened on his own account; then, with an effort, he plucked up his courage and ran across to the window. One look out into the moonlight allayed his fears. He was so relieved, in fact, that he gave a contemptuous laugh.

"You hopeless chump!" he snapped, turning back to Teddy Long. "It's nothing! Only a piece of ivy."

"No, no! I saw a ghostly hand——"

"You'll see a solid fist in a minute—and it'll dot you one on the nose if you don't keep quiet!" interrupted Hubbard savagely. "I tell you it's only a piece of ivy—got adrift in the wind, I expect. It's scraping and tapping against the window as the wind blows it. If you don't believe me, come and look. Ghostly hand, indeed! You ought to be ashamed of yourself, you—you big baby!"

Teddy Long, reassured as much by Hubbard's presence as by the contemptuous words, stepped out of bed. His limbs were trembling, but he was gradually getting a grip on himself.

"Well, I'm jiggered!" he muttered as, at close quarters, he saw that the "skeleton hand" was in reality only a ragged length of ivy, which the boisterous wind had torn from the wall. "I—I say, you know, I'm awfully sorry!" he went on foolishly. "I thought it was something else, Hubbard! It gave me an awful scare! I say, what a rotten night!"

"There's nothing wrong with the night," growled Hubbard as he looked out of the window. "A bit windy, perhaps, but that's no reason why you should act like a silly kid——"

He broke off, his words trailing away. He was still looking out of the window, across the angle of the West Square. In the distance he could see a corner of the shrubbery, with the gaunt, jagged stones of the monastery ruins beyond. The moon was very bright just now, shining fully from between two banks of clouds, and the silvery light was bathing everything in its hard, cold radiance. The shadows were pitchy black.

And out of one of these shadows, near the monastery ruins, something had moved—a figure. Hubbard blinked, looked again, and he felt a curious, creepy-crawly sensation running up his spine.

"What's—what's the matter?" asked Teddy Long, in a nervous whisper.

"I don't know," muttered Hubbard. "Perhaps it's my imagination. Look! Can you see anything over there by the ruins?" He pointed. "A sort of figure——"

"Yes!" gasped Long. "You—you mean that thing that's moving slowly and—— Oh, look! It seemed to go right through that chunk of wall just then!"

Hubbard felt his heart thumping rapidly. He knew that it wasn't his imagination running riot. He was sure that he could see something. Yes, a figure; the ghostly, eerie figure of an old man, bent and twisted, dressed in long robes.

"He—he looks like a monk!" breathed Hubbard tensely.

"It's a ghost!" shrieked Long, his voice rising to a wild cry. "Didn't I tell you there was a ghost? It is a ghost, Hubbard!"

"Don't make all that noise, you idiot!" ejaculated Hubbard, startled.

But Teddy Long couldn't help it. His nerves gave way suddenly, and he uttered such a piercing scream of terror that Hubbard was as much frightened of Teddy as he was of the ghost, while Claude Gore-Pearce was awakened, and sat up in a state of bemused fright.

"What's the matter?" he asked hoarsely. "Who's making that noise? By gad!"

"It's Long!" shouted Hubbard, grabbing at Teddy. "Can't you be quiet, you chump? You'll wake the whole House!"

Teddy was babbling incoherently, and he took no notice of Hubbard's frantic urgings. Gore-Pearce was still only half awake, and very bewildered.

The moon went in just then, plunging the dormitory into sudden darkness. Hubbard, glancing out of the window, could no longer see the monastery ruins; they were blotted out in the dense shadows.

Then abruptly the door opened and the light was switched on. Nipper, the Remove captain, stood there, and behind him crowded Handforth, Church, McClure, Travers, and a number of other Removites.

"What's going on in here" asked Nipper briskly.

"Don't ask me!" snapped Gore-Pearce. "It was Long's screaming which woke me up. Look at him. Nearly fainting with fright. Said he's seen a ghost, or something!"

"What rot!" scoffed Handforth, forcing his way in.

At this point Biggleswade, of the Sixth, put in an appearance, and Biggleswade, usually the most genial of seniors, was quite irritable. One of his pet aversions was being roused out of bed in the middle of the night.

"What's this about a ghost?" he asked impatiently. "Clear out of my way, you kids! Who's seen a ghost? By Jove! Who's this? Long? You're looking pretty washed out, kid."

His tone altered. Teddy Long was as pale as a sheet.

"It—it came to the window at first," he sobbed. "I saw it there—a great skeleton hand, scraping on the glass——"

"Chuck it!" interrupted Biggleswade sharply.

"He's been imagining things," said Hubbard hastily. "It wasn't a skeleton hand—only a piece of ivy. It woke me up, and the thing did look a bit rummy until I found out what it really was."

"You're looking pale, too," said Biggleswade, eyeing Hubbard closely. "You ought to be ashamed of yourselves, both of you. A couple of strong, strapping chaps, acting like nervous infants!"

"I say, you know, go easy," protested Hubbard. "I wasn't scared by that bit of ivy. There was something else, Biggy. We—we saw a ghostly figure in the monastery ruins. A sort of monk, you know. That's what made Long scream like that."

"A monk—in the monastery ruins?" asked Nipper sceptically.

"The figure of a bent old man, wearing a long cloak," said Hubbard, shivering at the recollection. "Don't look at me like that, you chaps. I told Long he was a fool for imagining things; but we didn't imagine that figure in the ruins. There *was* something there!"

Biggleswade nodded.

"Of course there was," he agreed. "A lot of old stones, some bushes, and shadows. You kids have been seeing things. The best thing you can do is to get back to bed——"

"It wasn't a shadow!" protested Hubbard excitedly. "Look here, you chaps, I'm not imaginative. I'm not like Teddy Long. I don't see things that aren't there. I believe the monastery ruins are haunted, and——"

"Rot!" broke in Handforth. "Drivel! Teddy woke you up and scared you, and then you saw things, too. You're a fine pair, aren't you? Ghosts!" He snorted. "There's no such thing as a ghost!"

"Well, we're not going to have an argument on the supernatural at this hour of the night," said Biggleswade. "There's been enough disturbance already. You kids had better get back to bed—and look sharp!"

"I—I can't sleep any more to-night," wailed Teddy Long.

"Then keep awake—and keep quiet," said the prefect. "You'd better have this light on for the rest of the night, and then you won't get imagining things again. The rest of you juniors will get back to bed."

Biggleswade hustled them out, summarily dismissing the whole affair. He wanted to resume his own night's sleep.

CHAPTER 2.

The Legend of the Monastery!

"A MUG, that's what I was!" said Hubbard scornfully.

He and Gore-Pearce and Teddy Long were dressing. Rising-bell at St. Frank's had sounded some minutes earlier. The morning was bright, with sunny patches, although the high wind was as boisterous as ever. But now that full daylight had come, Hubbard was feeling very sceptical about that "ghost."

"You'd better not get scared again to-night, Long," said Gore-Pearce unpleasantly. "We're not going to have a screaming, hysterical baby in our dormitory. You woke me up at midnight, and I didn't get another wink until past three."

"Oh, I say, draw it mild!" protested Teddy Long. "You were asleep again after

five minutes. So were you, Hubbard."

"That doesn't make any difference," said Hubbard. "Why should we have our sleep disturbed by you?"

"We'll have to speak to the matron about it," said Gore-Pearce. "We'll get her to put Long in a special nursery, with one of those cots with wooden rails all round it. And he'd better have a nurse sitting beside him, holding his hand."

Hubbard grinned, and Teddy Long turned red.

"You can sneer all you like," he said, "but I know jolly well there *was* a ghost. I saw that skeleton hand——"

"Shut up about the skeleton hand!" roared Hubbard wrathfully. "It was only a piece of ivy. And as for that figure we saw in the ruins, I don't believe there was a figure. What with the moonlight and the wind, things are deceptive. We must have seen the shadow of a bush, or something like that."

"Those ruins are haunted!" said Teddy nervously.

"If you jaw any more on this subject I'll biff you on the nose!" threatened Hubbard. "We shall be chipped enough by the other chaps as it is. Dry up!"

He was quite right about the other fellows chipping them. When they went downstairs there were all sorts of sarcastic remarks. Many of the juniors inquired solicitously after Teddy Long's health, and even the obtuse Teddy could tell that they were pulling his leg.

"Give it a rest!" protested Hubbard. "Why jump on me?"

"Well, you said you saw a ghost, didn't you?" asked Handforth, grinning.

"I thought I did, but perhaps I was wrong," growled Hubbard. "It may have been a shadow."

"There's no 'may' about it," said Edward Oswald promptly. "Teddy Long scared you, and then you scared yourself."

There was a good deal of laughter over the incident; but Handforth, who was the biggest scoffer of all, had reason to change his tone soon afterwards. He happened to be in the West Square when the Housemaster's private door opened, and a trim, neat figure appeared. Vera Wilkes, the Housemaster's daughter, was looking thoughtful this morning. She had her usual ready smile, but somehow it was not quite so carefree.

"Morning, Vera," said Handforth, doffing his cap. "Lovely day."

"Yes, rather," agreed the girl. "Looks like keeping fine, too."

Kirby Keeble Parkington came up. He had a habit of coming up whenever Vera appeared, for K.K. had a special fondness for the girl. They were chums.

"I say," said Vera abruptly, "do you fellows believe in ghosts?"

"Ghosts?" repeated the juniors in one voice.

"Yes, ghosts."

"Of course not!" said Handforth. "What are you getting at, Vera? Have you heard anything this morning?"

"I've heard nothing," replied the girl. "I've only just come out."

"Well, go on," invited K.K., giving Handforth a curious glance. "What's that you were saying about ghosts?"

"I was only wondering, that's all," said the girl. "You may think me silly, but— Well, something rather funny happened in the night. I don't mean funny, really, but queer. Is it true that the monastery ruins are supposed to be haunted? When I asked father about it he laughed and said that there was some sort of legend—"

"The monastery ruins?" repeated Handforth, eyeing her closely. "What do you know about the ruins?"

"Nothing at all," said Vera. "Listen, you chaps. Don't laugh—don't think I'm a silly, imaginative girl. I'm a girl, but I'm not one of those frightened sort."

"Rather not!" agreed K.K. stoutly. "Well, last night—it was just a little after midnight—I got out of bed to stop my window rattling," said Vera, becoming thoughtful. "And I can swear that I saw a quaint figure moving about amongst the ruins—a bent old man, wearing a long cloak like a monk. I thought I was dreaming at first—"

"I say, cheese it!" protested Handforth. "You're kidding us, aren't you?"

"No, of course not."

"I mean, you've heard that yarn about Teddy Long and Hubbard?"

"What yarn?" asked Vera in surprise. "I don't know what you mean, Handy. I haven't heard any yarn. I've only just come out. I told mother and father about this figure as soon as I came down, and they laughed at me."

All the juniors were exchanging glances.

"Here, wait a minute!" said Parkington. "You say you saw a figure in the ruins,



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Vera. The figure of a bent old man, wearing a cloak like a monk?"

"Yes."

"Well, there must have been a figure there, after all," said K.K. firmly. "I know you wouldn't imagine things, Vera. Besides, there's somebody in the Remove who can corroborate the story. One of our chaps—Hubbard—saw that figure, and we thought he was yarning. I mean, we thought he had imagined the whole business."

The rumour soon got round, and Hubbard himself, very excited, asked Vera exactly where she had seen the cloaked figure.

Their accounts tallied exactly. Independently, from two different windows, in widely separated parts of the Ancient House, they had seen that figure in the monastery ruins. It was out of the question to suppose that they could have imagined the apparition. Vera's evidence was conclusive.

"Well, it's rummy," said Handforth, scratching his head. "It seems that Hubbard must have been right."

"I knew I was right all the time!" said Hubbard excitedly. "Only you chaps kept scoffing so much that you made me think I was wrong. We've often thought that the monastery ruins were haunted—and now we know it!"

"Rot!" said Handforth. "How do we know that the figure you saw was a ghost?"

"If it wasn't a ghost, what was it?"

"It might have been anything," said Handforth vaguely. "A cow, for example. Cows do wander out of their meadows now and again."

"Are you suggesting that Vera Wilkes would mistake a cow for a man in a long cloak?" asked Hubbard, staring.

"Rats! I was talking about you," said Handforth. "You're capable of mistaking a gooseberry tree for the animated mummy of Tut-Ank-Amen if you happened to see it in the moonlight!"

"Oh?" said Hubbard coldly. "Well, Vera saw that ghost, too. Perhaps you're right about its being a cow——"

"Not likely!" interrupted Handforth. "If Vera saw the figure in the ruins, it proves that the figure was really there!"

Hubbard felt bitter about it. The fellows had scoffed at his own story, telling him that he was an imaginative ass and that he was seeing things. Yet the self-same story from Vera Wilkes was instantly believed, and Vera was only a silly imaginative girl! Hubbard was very peeved about it.

Naturally the story spread throughout the school during the day. Everybody was talking about the ghost of the monastery ruins. Kirby Keeble Parkington made a thorough investigation. The mere fact that Vera had seen the ghost was sufficient excuse for K.K. to busy himself. He spent a couple of odd hours in the school library, delving into the history of St. Frank's.

"It seems that there is a ghost of the monastery," he said mysteriously, that evening, in the Common-room. "Gather round, children, and listen."

"Dry up, K.K.!" advised Nipper. "There's been too much talk of that ghost already."

It was dark, and the wind was howling round St. Frank's more boisterously than ever. Nervous juniors were seen to cast their eyes at the dark windows; and they edged nearer to the cheerful glow of the fire.

"Yes," said K.K., ignoring the Junior skipper's advice, "I've been looking up the records. It says that in the old days, when the monastery was flourishing—somewhere in the region of the twelfth century—a certain Friar Gregson was set upon by wolves——"

"Wolves? interrupted Handforth, staring.

"They had wolves in those days," explained K.K. "Well, some minions of the local feudal lord were ordered to do Friar Gregson in. It seems that the old boy had offended the feudal lord in some way. Anyhow, these minions came on the scene with their wolves."

"Trained wolves, I suppose?" asked Nipper sarcastically.

K.K. referred to his notebook.

"I took some jottings," he explained. "Here we are. Listen to this: 'It is said that the unfortunate friar, emerging from the cloisters to discover the identity of the strangers who were without, was attacked by the three savage wolves—vicious animals which had been captured by the Baron de Bryskett, and kept in captivity and half starved. Too late, the friar attempted to withdraw behind the wicket; the wolves were upon him.'"

"Wicket?" asked Handforth. "Were they playing cricket, then?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"My poor chap, you don't understand," said K.K. patiently. "The man who wrote this chronicle knew nothing about cricket. He meant a wicket gate. Don't interrupt! 'The wolves tore the unfortunate friar limb from limb. And it is said that the ghost of the worthy man still haunts the old monastery. It was in the spring of the year that this sinister tragedy took place; and on certain nights, every spring, the ghost of Friar Gregson is to be seen!'"

"My only sainted aunt!" said Handforth, impressed. "It's nearly springtime now."

"Such visitations are rarely seen, for the ghost is harmless; the phantom of the friar is to be seen wandering amongst the ruins at the hour of midnight. It is recorded that this spectral figure appears for several nights in succession about the middle of March—then to disappear entirely until the following year.' Seems pretty conclusive to me, you know."

K.K. folded his notebook, and replaced it in his pocket. Handforth was flushed, and a gleam had entered his eyes.

"So the ghost appears night after night—for several nights!" he said. "I say, what about keeping watch?"

"Not me!" said K.K. "I'm not scared, but where's the sense of losing sleep in order to see a mouldy old ghost?"

Handforth dragged Church and McClure off to Study D soon afterwards; and Harvey Deeks and Clement Goffin, K.K.'s study chums, closed in on K.K. suggestively.

"What's the idea, old man?" murmured Deeks. "You didn't fool me. That page of your notebook from which you were supposed to be reading was blank."

"Was it?" asked K.K. blandly.

"You made up that rot as you went along," said Goffin.

"Perhaps I did, sweetheart," admitted Parkington. "But nobody believes me except Handy—and you don't need any telling that he'll believe anything. Wasn't his leg made to be pulled?"

"I say, is this a jape?" asked Deeks eagerly. "Are you getting up something against the Old-Timers?"

"I fancy," murmured K.K., "that Handforth will keep watch to-night."

"And we're going to spring on him with a fake ghost, or something?" asked Goffin. "By Jove, that's a good idea!"

"It's a rotten idea," interrupted Parkington. "I don't see why we should lose any of our beauty sleep. But if Handforth cares to spend half the night in the monastery ruins, let him!"

CHAPTER 3.

Handforth Investigates!

PARKINGTON, who was something of a wag, was rather amused by the situation. It was his idea to chip Handforth unmercifully on the morrow, when Handforth showed obvious signs of having had precious little sleep.

Vera was K.K.'s chum but K.K. was a practical, level-headed fellow. He didn't believe in this ghost theory at all, although he had professed to do so. In fact, he was quite convinced that both Vera and Hubbard had been deceived by a quaintly-shaped shadow. It is so easy to mistake shadows in the moonlight for mysterious ghostly figures.



Teddy Long was tipped upside down, and from new and yet all dated twelve

Anyhow, he had set Handforth off—and that was something. In Study D, Edward Oswald was telling Church and McClure what he intended doing.

"We'll wait until after lights-out," he said briskly, "then at about eleven o'clock, we'll dress ourselves, slip out, and take up our stations in the shrubbery. We can watch the ruins at close quarters from there. And when the ghost appears——"

"But how do you know the ghost will



is pockets rained a number of half-crowns, all brand
ars back. It was decidedly "fishy."

appear?" interrupted Church, in a tired voice.
"My dear chap, it'll be a waste of time.
There's not a chance in a thousand that the
thing will show itself a second time."

"What about the legend?" demanded
Handforth. "Doesn't it distinctly say that
the ghost appears night after night?"

"Oh, help!" groaned Mac. "You don't
mean to say that you believe that rot of
K.K.'s? Can't you see that he was only try-
ing to be funny? I don't believe there ever

was a Friar Gregson, or a
Baron de Bryskett, either."

"Well, whether there was
or not, we're going to keep
watch to-night!" said Hand-
forth obstinately. "We'll
say nothing about it to the
other chaps, and if we make
any discoveries we shall get
the glory."

"Far more likely to get a
cold," said Church bluntly.

However, they knew better
than to attempt to dissuade
Handforth from his purpose.
That was one way to make
him more determined. Their
only hope was that he would
drop off into a deep sleep
after lights out, and keep on
sleeping until the morning.

Their hopes rose high
when, at bed-time, Hand-
forth announced his inten-
tion of taking a little nap.
As he said, nothing could
be done until eleven o'clock,
and they might as well have
the benefit of their beds
until then. He was soon
fast asleep.

"We're all right now,
Mac, old man," murmured
Church, with relief. "He's
well off."

"Thank goodness!" said
the Scottish junior.

Outside the wind was
howling eerily. It was a re-
petition of the previous
night. Church and McClure
went off to sleep with the
moaning of the wind still in
their ears. They were
both in agreement that it
was not the kind of night to
go ghost-hunting.

They had been too opti-
mistic, however. The last
chimes of eleven had not
sounded before their
shoulders were being shaken.
Edward Oswald Handforth
was out of bed, brisk, deter-
mined, eager.

"Buck up, you chaps!" he was saying.
"Eleven just striking. Come on!"

His chums sat up, dismayed.

"Well, here's a swindle!" said Church, in
disgust. "We thought you were going to
sleep like a top until the morning!"

"When I make up my mind, I make it
up thoroughly!" replied Handforth. "I
woke up twenty minutes ago, and I've been
waiting for the hour. Hustle out!"

"But look here! Is it really worth it?"
asked McClure earnestly. "Don't believe
K. K.'s rot! There's no ghost, Handy——"

"Are you going to get out willingly, or
shall I yank the clothes off you?" demanded

Handforth. "Or perhaps you'd like me to tip the water-bottle over you?"

Church and McClure got out. They dressed grumpily. It saved a lot of argument and pain.

Creeping downstairs, they paid a short visit to the cloak-room, where they donned overcoats, mufflers, and caps. Then they slipped out of the window of Study D, crept across West Square, dodged through West Arch, and were soon picking their way through the blackness of the shrubbery. Just beyond, the monastery ruins stood out starkly in the moonlight. The three juniors took up their stand amid the trees, where they were quite invisible, and yet could observe the ruins closely.

"Burr! It's cold!" whispered Church, after a while. "Good thing we put on our overcoats and mufflers!"

"We're nearly an hour too soon," grumbled McClure. "It's hardly a quarter past eleven—and the ghost won't appear until after midnight. Even if it appears then—which it won't!"

Handforth's chums regarded this vigil as a waste of time and sleep. Even Handforth himself, after another twenty minutes had elapsed, was troubled with inward doubts—doubts which he would never have expressed.

It was no joke crouching there amongst the trees. The three juniors grew colder and colder. They couldn't move about to keep warm, for by so doing they would have revealed themselves. The wind blew bleakly, and it whistled and moaned through the ruins to the accompaniment of all sorts of uncanny effects. Now and again the moon would tuck itself completely behind heavy banks of black clouds, and the ruins would be nearly blotted out in the gloom. But when the moon shone openly, the silvery light was bright and crystal clear.

Midnight chimed at last.

This was the witching hour, and the whole of St. Frank's, except for these three juniors, slept. Even Church and McClure, sceptical as they were, felt a certain thrill. Would they see something, after all? Handforth, eager-eyed, optimistic, waited breathlessly.

Nothing happened.

After about five minutes, he gave a grunt of disappointment. Church and McClure were not at all surprised; they had expected this frost. They shared Parkington's opinion—that both Vera Wilkes and Arthur Hubbard had seen a shadow, and mistaken it for a human form. After all, it was ridiculous to suppose that the ghost of a monk—

"Look!" breathed Handforth suddenly, his voice tense. "Can—can you chaps see what I can see?"

He was staring at a far corner of the ruins, and Church and McClure, with a cold grip clutching at their hearts, followed the direction of his gaze. They jumped. There was something there!

A bent figure, apparently that of an old man, dressed in a drab, greyish robe which reached nearly to his ankles. The face was

hidden by the cowl or old wide-brimmed soft hat over his head, which flapped in the wind. The figure moved slowly, almost painfully, amongst the crumbling, ivy-grown masonry. It made no sound—not even the scrape of a boot, nor the shifting of a loose stone.

The three juniors watched, fascinated. A small cloud passed over the face of the moon, bringing a shadow. The apparition, penetrating into the heart of the ruins, seemed to disappear—gradually passing out of sight into the very ground itself!

"There you are!" whispered Handforth excitedly. "What did I tell you? We didn't come for nothing, after all!"

Church and McClure were as much astonished as they were scared. For, frankly, they were both feeling just a little frightened. There had been something so sinister, so phantom-like, about that figure.

"It's vanished! The earth opened and swallowed it up!" murmured Church uneasily. "I say! I—I wish we hadn't come!"

"Rot!" said Handforth. "That figure wasn't any ghost! You can't fool me!"

"Not—not a ghost?"

"Of course not!" said Handforth. "It was solid—or I'm cross-eyed! Didn't you see its shadow, cast by the moon? Ghosts don't make shadows at all. At least, so I've heard. In any case, there aren't such things as ghosts. So it must have been human. My sons, somebody is up to some crooked game, and we're going to find out what it is!"

Handforth's practical attitude did much to steady Church and McClure. They felt rather foolish.

"But—but who would come to these ruins at dead of night?" asked Church. "Besides, didn't we see it vanish into the solid earth?"

"Idiot!" retorted Handforth. "Have you forgotten the stairs which lead down into the vault?"

"My only hat!"

"That's where the figure vanished—down into the vault," went on Handforth. "Come on! We're going to follow, and, if necessary, we'll confront the 'ghost' and ask him what the dickens he's doing here."

He broke cover as he spoke and ran into the ruins. Sure enough, the very spot where the figure had vanished was the black opening in the ground which marked the top of the circular stone steps that led downwards into the old monastery vault.

"I say, hold on!" urged Church. "Hadn't we better go easy, Handy? I believe you're right about that figure. It wasn't a ghost at all!"

"I know I'm right!"

"Yes, but in that case it's human—and it may be desperate," said Church. "How do we know who the man is? He may be an escaped convict from the big prison over the moor. Or he may be a tramp, or a—a gipsy. He might be an ugly customer!"

"Supposing he is? There are three of us, aren't there?" retorted Handforth, staring. "I should hope that the three of us will be equal to one man! Come on! We're going to probe this mystery to the bottom! We're

going to find out who this chap is, wandering about our ruins as if he owned them!"

They crept down the worn old steps in single file, Handforth leading the way. They were all armed with electric torches, and they used them freely. Church and McClure were half expecting some sort of attack, but it did not come. At length they reached the vault, and flashed their lights here and there amongst the pillars, casting long, mysterious shadows. It was cold and damp down there; not a sound shattered the complete silence.

The boys could almost hear their own hearts beating. They crept round, exploring every corner, every crevice. But there was not another living soul in the place.

"Well, that's rummy!" said Handforth, scratching his head. "Where the dickens did the blighter get to? I know! He must have gone along the old tunnel which leads to the quarry workings."

He crossed the vault as he spoke. There was a tunnel leading from the vault, penetrating far underground, and joining up with the ancient, deserted workings. But as soon as Handforth reached the entrance he paused, a startled look in his eyes.

"Hallo! Look at this!" he whispered. "This is where the true detective instinct comes in handy! The man couldn't have come this way, or he would have left his footprints. And there's not a sign of a footprint here."

Just in the tunnel entrance there was a big, damp patch of earth, wet in places, caused by the drippings from the top of the tunnel. And that patch of earth, stretching from wall to wall and reaching for several yards into the tunnel, was bare of any recent footprints. The patch was too big to allow for the possibility of the man having jumped across.

"It's jolly queer," said Church uneasily. "He certainly couldn't have come this way. In that case, where is he?"

It was an amazing and baffling mystery.

CHAPTER 4.

Teddy Long's Discovery!

THE three young ghost-hunters were thrilled.

Even Handforth, practical though he was, felt a certain crackling sensation in his hair. He had an awful urge to keep looking over his shoulder; but he fought it down.

"There must be some explanation!" he muttered, frowning. "What about that hidden passage which leads from here to the Ancient House cellar?"

"Nobody could have gone in there," said Church. "You remember what happened when those American gunmen came to St. Frank's, some time ago? The Head had that passage blocked up."

They went across to the secret door in the stone wall. Right across it, clamped

immovably to the wall, there were great battens of strong wood. Nothing human could have passed that way.

"There's no other exit at all," said Church shakily. "He couldn't have gone down the tunnel, and he couldn't have come through here; he didn't pass us on the stairs. And yet he's not here!"

"Let's—let's get out into the open!" said McClure, trying to speak carelessly.

Handforth raised no objections. He wanted to get out into the open, too. The old vault was getting on his nerves. There was something horribly uncanny about this affair. If that figure had been human, how had it vanished?

Hurriedly they mounted the stairs and emerged once again into the welcome moonlight. They retired into the shrubbery to discuss the matter.

"Well, we all saw the figure, and we know that it went down into the vault," said Handforth, frowning. "That's the queer part of it."

"I—I suppose it couldn't have been a ghost, after all?" asked Church. "Dash it, I've never believed in ghosts, but after this——"

"Did that figure actually go down those steps, after all?" put in McClure dubiously. "We saw it vanish, but——"

"Look!" gasped Church in a frightened, shaky voice.

The others followed his pointing finger, and then uttered gasps of incredulous amazement. Emerging from the vault up the stairs came that bent, cloaked figure. And yet when they had left the vault it had been empty!

The whole experience was so uncanny that the Removites could only stand there as though rooted to the ground, staring fascinatedly. In the moonlight they were uncertain as to the solidity of the apparition. Was it real, or was it merely a phantom? There was certainly a shadow on the ground, as the figure moved slowly out of the ruins. Then a black cloud moved across the moon, casting the ruins into an intense gloom.

Handforth sprang into activity, and he crept after the ghost. He fancied he saw something moving in the meadow beyond the ruins, near the hedge bordering the lane, but when he reached the spot there was nothing. Overhead there was now a great bank of cloud, and it was difficult to see for more than a few yards in any direction. The wind howled and whistled, and raindrops came pattering down.

Handforth returned to his chums, breathing hard, his brain in a whirl.

"It's—it's gone!" he panted huskily. "I thought I caught sight of it for a moment, but then it vanished again!"

"Let's get indoors!" said Church. "I'm scared!"

"What!"

"You can call me a funk if you like, but I'm scared!" said Church in a whisper. "It

was a ghost, Handy—the ghost of an old monk!"

And Edward Oswald Handforth did not deny it.

THEY got back to bed and slept fitfully until the morning.

When they got up, Church and McClure looked haggard and worn out. Their adventure of the night had shaken them; they were as convinced as ever that they had seen an occult manifestation. But Handforth, with the sunlight to dissipate all false impressions, was back at his original theory.

"It wasn't a ghost!" he declared, as he dressed. "How could it have been a ghost, when there aren't such things as ghosts? Somebody's up to some monkey business, and I mean to find out the truth!"

Church and McClure soon spread their story, and perhaps the most surprised fellow in the Remove was Kirby Keeble Parkington. At first, he thought that they were trying to pull his leg.

He had only trotted out that "legend" as a bit of fun, hoping that Handforth & Co. would spend a fruitless vigil. To learn that they had really seen something was a bit of a shock for K.K. His joke had fallen rather flat. Instead of Handforth & Co. being the laughing-stock of the Remove, they were the centre of all attention.

It was impossible to doubt the evidence of three witnesses. They could not all have imagined the apparition. Church and McClure were frank in their opinion that they had seen an authentic ghost; Handforth discredited the theory.

"But, my dear fellow, if the figure was solid how do you account for its disappearance?" asked K.K. "You say it went down into the vault and you followed? Yet there was nobody in the vault?"

"We must have missed him, somehow," said Handforth.

"That argues that the man knew that you were coming and that he deliberately concealed himself," said K.K. "But where could he have concealed himself?"

"Then again, if he was human, why did he come up so openly?" asked Harry Gresham. "You say that you came to the surface, and that you were discussing the affair when the figure re-appeared? If it was a real man he wouldn't have re-appeared like that, knowing that you were on the watch."

"That's what we've been telling Handy," said Church. "It *was* a ghost! I'm convinced after this, and I don't want to do any more ghost-hunting, I can tell you!"

Everybody was thrilled by the story; it went through the Remove, the Fourth, the Fifth, and even into the Sixth. The entire school was discussing the situation.

Handforth thoroughly enjoyed himself. He loved being in the limelight, and he was willing to stand all day, the centre of a

big crowd, answering questions and expressing his opinions.

Teddy Long, thoroughly brave in the daylight, and as curious and inquisitive as ever, was attracted to the monastery ruins by morbid curiosity. There was nothing to be afraid of in the morning sunlight.

He went there early—immediately after breakfast. Not that he had any intention of going down into the vault; the offer of twenty pounds, cash down, would not have induced him to take any such chance. But he felt quite courageous as he prowled about amongst the ruins, thrilled to the marrow.

And Teddy made an extraordinary discovery.

He had passed beyond the ruins, where clumps of bushes grew. Farther on there was a meadow. According to Handforth & Co.'s story, the figure had appeared from this direction, and had vanished in the same way. And it was just where the bushes were thickest that Teddy made his discovery.

Something glinting on the ground caught his eye. He gave a gulp when he saw that it was a coin, a shining half-crown!

He pounced upon it eagerly. Teddy was never well supplied with pocket-money, and the little he did have was very quickly spent in the school shop. By mid-week he was always stony. Half-a-crown to him was wealth.

"Good egg!" he chortled. "I'll bet Handy dropped—"

He broke off, gasping. His eye had caught another glint, and diving down he picked up another half-crown.

Then he positively went frantic with excitement. For there were others. Scrambling about on hands and knees, to the detriment of his trousers, he found no less than fourteen half-crowns. Search as he would, however, this was the total amount of the treasure.

He stood amid the bushes, breathing hard, his face flushed, his little eyes glittering with greedy triumph. Fourteen half-crowns—thirty-five shillings in cash!

He turned them over in his grubby hands. It was curious that all the coins should be brand new. Examining one of them closely, he noted the further curious fact that it was twelve years old. And—quite astounding, this—the other thirteen coins bore a similar date.

But to Teddy, who was obtuse, this meant nothing. Teddy paid no attention to the fact that the coins were new, yet old. They represented money—and money to him was money. Thirty-five shillings—riches—affluence.

Teddy firmly believed in the axiom: "Finding keepings." But, being an extremely foolish youth, he had many Removites talking about him within ten minutes. For Teddy made a bee-line for the tuck-shop, and he swanked in as though he owned the place. He ordered cakes and pastries, and in a sudden burst of generosity and because he knew



Handforth's eyes goggled when he saw that the sole of Teddy Long's boot coincided with the plaster-of-Paris footprint in his hand.

it would cause a sensation, he invited sundry juniors who were hanging about to join him.

"My treat!" he said carelessly. "Come on, you chaps! Order anything you please!"

"And who's going to pay?" asked Jimmy Potts politely.

"I am!"

"What with?" asked Jimmy.

"Money, of course!" said Long. "I've—I've got heaps of money! Had a big remittance from my people this morning."

"Oh!" said Fullwood, with interest. "I don't want to call you a fibber, Long, but before we accept your invitation we'd like to see the colour of that money of yours."

Teddy pulled out a number of half-crowns, and displayed them in his palm, chinking them up and down.

"Is this good enough for you?" he asked triumphantly. "I've got lots more in my pocket. Come on! Order what you like!"

The word soon got round, and Nipper and K.K. and Handforth and others came into the tuck-shop to witness the phenomenon.

"There's no question about his money," grinned Fullwood. "He says that he had a remittance from his people this morning, but it's my private opinion that he has been burgling a bank."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"The funny thing is, his money seems to be all brand new," said Jimmy Potts.

"Let's have a look," said Nipper, going up to Teddy Long.

"Not likely!" said Teddy, who was beginning to get a bit nervous. "Mind your own business! It's a pity if I can't stand treat —"

"Here's some of the money, Master Nipper," said Mrs. Hake from the other side of the counter, and not without some uneasiness. "I hope it's quite all right. I don't often get new money like this."

She handed over two of the half-crowns, and Nipper and Handforth and some others gathered round, examining them with interest.

"Funny!" said Nipper, frowning. "They're twelve years old—and yet they're as new as when they first came from the Mint. Do you mean to say, Long, that your people sent you this money?"

"Yes!" lied Teddy defiantly.

"They sent this silver?"

"Yes!"

"Come off it!" said Handforth. "You awful fibber! You can't make us believe that your people sent silver through the post!"

What have you been up to? Where did you get this money from?"

"The best thing we can do is to tip him up and see if he has any more," suggested K.K.

Teddy was grabbed, overturned, and in spite of his yells of alarm, held in an inverted position. New half-crowns seemed to roll from every pocket, and there was a scramble for them.

"Great Scott!"

"He's all over money!"

"Silver, too!"

By this time the other Removites were thoroughly suspicious, and they were startled when, upon examination, all the new half-crowns proved to bear the same date. There was something very, very strange about this windfall of Teddy's.

"Now, look here, Long, you'd better tell the truth," said Nipper quietly. "This money was never sent to you by your people. Where did you get it? You'd better 'come clean,' as the Americans say, or you'll find yourself in serious trouble."

"It's mine!" roared Teddy indignantly. "You've no right to take my money like this! If my people care to send me new half-crowns, what business is it of yours?"

"All these half-crowns are twelve years old," said Nipper.

"What of it?" asked Teddy excitedly.

"I could understand your people sending you some new half-crowns as a present," said Nipper. "Such a thing isn't entirely improbable; but it's too thick to suppose that they would get over a dozen half-crowns all dated the same year and all twelve years old. You got these somewhere else."

Teddy was feeling desperate.

"Well, what if I did?" he asked defiantly. "I found them! They're mine!"

"Oh, you found them?" roared Handforth. "Why—why, you burglar! They're not yours just because you found them!"

"They say 'findings keepings'—"

"Oh, do they?" interrupted Handforth. "And who are 'they,' anyhow? Where did you find these half-crowns?"

"In—in the bushes near the monastery ruins," almost sobbed Teddy, who was too flustered to tell any more lies. "You rotters! This money's mine! I—I was looking through the ruins to see if I could find any traces of the—the ghost, and I found these half-crowns!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The statement seemed so utterly fantastic—and Teddy Long was such a notorious liar—that nobody believed it.

CHAPTER 5.

Handforth on the Track!

FOR one thing, Teddy Long was not the kind of fellow to go searching for ghosts; and for another thing, the very idea of those half-crowns being loose on the ground, in the monastery ruins, was ridiculous.

"Come on, my son, that won't do!" said Nipper. "You'll have to think of something better—and you'd be wise to think of the truth."

"It is the truth!" howled Teddy.

"Well, we'll keep this money for the time being—until you choose to be frank about it," said Nipper. "What do you say, you chaps? I don't want to do anything high-handed, but I'm the Form captain—"

"You're quite right, old man," said K.K. "Stick to it until Long tells the truth."

"What about my money, Master Nipper?" asked Mrs. Hake, with some concern.

"Oh, that's all right—I'll settle that," said Nipper, smiling. "So it's my treat instead of Teddy Long's."

Teddy continued to protest the truth of his statement; and Handforth, with a new excitement in his eyes, dragged Church and McClure out of the tuck-shop. He gave them no rest until he had whirled them into the shadows of the shrubbery.

"Listen, you chaps!" he panted. "I've just thought of something! A theory!"

"Oh, my hat!" said Church, in despair.

"Those new half-crowns put the idea into my head," went on Handforth breathlessly. "That figure we saw wasn't a ghost, after all! Didn't I say, from the first, that it wasn't a ghost?"

"What was it, then?" asked McClure patiently.

"A coiner!"

"A what?" yelled Church and McClure, in one voice.

"Ah, that's given you a surprise, hasn't it?" exclaimed Handforth triumphantly. "Yes, my sons! A coiner! Somewhere down in the vault, or in the quarry workings, there's a coiners' den! There's a gang of coiners at work—and Teddy Long happened to stumble upon some of their dud half-crowns."

Church and McClure were speechless. If ever there was any mystery, Handforth generally sprang to one of two conclusions. Either the unknown criminals were coiners, or they were smugglers. In this particular instance, however, there did seem a little common-sense in his theory. But if he expected Church and McClure to gaze at him in blank amazement and admiration, he was disappointed.

"A coiners' den?" repeated Church, grinning. "Cheese it, Handy! Those half-crowns were sound enough."

"You bet they were!" agreed McClure. "I rang one of them on Mrs. Hake's counter, and I'd give it a written guarantee."

"And Mac ought to know whether silver is good or not—he's Scottish," nodded Church.

"You're both dotty!" said Handforth coldly. "Those half-crowns must be duds. See how everything fits! Coiners at work underground—a secret agent who comes and fetches—" He suddenly broke off, his eyes gleaming. "I've got it!" he panted. "I can forgive you chaps for being sceptical. These coiners are brainier than others of their tribe; they're making *genuine* money."

"How can it be genuine money if it's dud?" asked Church.

"I don't mean genuine in that way—the casts have to be forged, of course," said Handforth. "But these coins are made of real silver, the same as ordinary currency."

"That's a brainy idea," said McClure, nodding. "Yet I'm jiggered if I can see the sense of it."

"Can't you?" retorted Handforth. "Then I'll tell you. Silver, my sons, is as cheap as butterscotch just now! I was reading it in the paper the other day. The price has slumped terrifically, and a gang of crooks, getting hold of a lot of silver, could make coins at a huge profit."

But Church and McClure, who knew nothing about the current price of silver, were as unconvinced as ever.

"Well, anyhow, we're going to investigate the ruins!" said Handforth firmly. "Come on, my lads! It was like Long's cheek to go there first!"

"You hopeless ass, you don't really believe that he found those half-crowns in the monastery ruins, do you?" asked Church, staring. "That was only a silly yarn of his."

"Well, we'll see!" replied Handforth.

He urged them on, advising them to walk carefully in case they ruined any possible footprints. Remarkably enough, not five minutes had elapsed before he gave a shout of triumph and pounced. Under a bush, near the crumbling ruins, he found two half-crowns precisely similar to Teddy's. Church and McClure were frankly amazed.

"My only sainted aunt!" said Church, staring. "Then Long must have told the truth!"

"I wonder how he managed that?" asked McClure, scratching his head.

"It's all becoming clear," muttered Handforth, as though speaking to himself. "That figure we saw wasn't a ghost at all, but a member of the gang, dressed up to look mysterious. The rotter was careless, and dropped some of the counterfeit coins in the grass here. We're hot on the scent already!"

Handforth's next move was to hurry down into the vault, and he nosed about like a hound on the trail. He only met with disappointment.

The vault was innocent of all clues. It was impossible that the coiners' den could be in the quarry workings, and that the coiners had been using the tunnel as an entry. For the floor at the entrance of the tunnel was muddy for some little distance, yet there was no sign of a recent footprint.

"Oh, let's get back into the daylight!" said Church impatiently. "You pretend to be a detective, Handy, and yet your reasoning is all boss-eyed."

"What do you mean—boss-eyed?"

"Well, if these coiners—and I don't admit that there are any coiners—have a workshop in the old quarry, they'd naturally use the exit on the moor," argued Church. "They'd never take the risk of coming to St. Frank's and trespassing on private property. Besides,

what about this muddy ground here? You can see for yourself that there's not a footprint. The figure we followed last night never came into this tunnel."

"Where did it go, then?" demanded Handforth.

"I'm not sure it wasn't a ghost," growled Church. "And in that case there's no reason to look for footprints. Ghosts don't make footprints."

"Ghosts be blowed!" snorted Handy. "The figure was a real man—and a coiner, too."

However, he had to confess that the discoveries in the vault were nil. So he went up into the ruins again, and grew vastly excited when he came upon a clear, well-indented footprint in the soft earth, just behind a clump of evergreen bushes.

"You see this?" he asked tensely. "A ghost, eh? By George! There's character in this footprint! Look at the worn heel, the patch on the sole, and the curious indistinctness of the toe, proving that the wearer of this shoe walks a great deal on his toes, wearing the leather considerably."

"But how do you know——" began McClure.

"We've got to take a cast of this footprint," interrupted Handforth eagerly. "No good leaving things to chance. Other chaps might come along soon and trample over it. It's the footprint of one of the criminals, and it may be the vital link of evidence which will convict the whole gang."

"Oh, my aunt!" said Church, feeling helpless.

The footprint was certainly informative. The person who had made it had obviously stood by that bush for some time. The imprint of his other foot was not visible, as there was an ancient paved path just near. So the fellow had stood with one foot on this paved path, and the other on the soft ground.

"I know what to do," said Handforth suddenly. "I was reading about it in a book once. We'll adopt scientific methods. Who's got some plaster-of-Paris?"

"What on earth——" began Mac.

"We'll take a cast of this footprint—so that the police can produce it in court," continued Handforth. "By George! When I do a thing, I do it properly!"

Leaving Church and McClure to guard the footprint, and threatening all sorts of punishments if they interfered with it, he hurried indoors. He found some plaster-of-Paris, and when he appeared again he was armed with a bag of the stuff, an enamel bowl, and a jug of water, to say nothing of a wooden spoon.

It was Church and McClure who actually mixed the plaster, Handforth looking on and kidding himself that he was directing the operations. Carefully the plaster was poured into the footprint, and at this period of the proceedings the last bell for lessons was clanging urgently.

"We'd better hurry, Handy," said Church. "You know what old Crowell is if we're late."

Handforth grunted. With bitterness, he reflected that it was a cruel world. Here he was, an enthusiastic amateur detective, hot on the chase, and he was compelled to go indoors for lessons! Any appeal to Mr. Crowell, the Form-master, would be futile, for Mr. Crowell, in such matters, had a heart of stone.

"I've a good mind to cut lessons!" said Handforth rebelliously.

"Don't be an ass!" said McClure. "You can't do anything until this plaster is set—and it'll take some time. By the time lessons are over it will be as hard as a rock, and then you can continue your investigations."

"Perhaps you're right," admitted Handforth reluctantly.

HE was inattentive during lessons, and although he earned three separate impositions of fifty lines each, he did not care. Mr. Crowell had a few caustic remarks to make on the subjects of ghosts in general, and the apparition of the monastery ruins in particular. He advised the Remove to ignore all the rumours, and to dismiss the whole preposterous story from their minds.

"A fat lot he knows!" said Handforth after lessons. "He thinks it's all an imaginative yarn. But we know better. He'd be surprised if I told him about the coiners' den, wouldn't he?"

"Surprised isn't the word," agreed Church. "I can think of a much better one!"

But Handforth was not listening—which was just as well. He dashed off to the monastery ruins, and, sure enough, that plaster-of-Paris cast was set as hard as rock.

It was really a beautiful cast—clear cut in every detail. When it had been lifted out of the footprint, even Handforth was astounded. Every nail-mark was clear, the patch on the sole, the worn rubber heel, even including a trace of the maker's name, and there was a curious round spot near the toe-cap which Handforth was puzzled over for a bit. In the end he concluded that the wearer of the shoe had trodden on a large tack of some kind, and the tack had become embedded in the leather.

"By George! It's a masterpiece!" he declared. "The footprint of the crook!"

He carried it into the Triangle, and was soon surrounded by a crowd. Everybody admired the plaster-of-Paris cast; everybody praised Handforth for his smart piece of work. Whether they were serious or whether they were pulling his leg was another matter.

"Yes, this is the footprint of the criminal," said Handforth impressively. "Teddy Long was right when he said that he found those coins near the ruins, because I found two more. There's a gang of counterfeiters at work——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You can laugh!" went on Handforth, glaring round. "I know what I'm talking about! Those half-crowns are dated twelve

years ago, yet they're brand-new! Doesn't that prove they're duds?"

"It certainly looks a bit fishy, dear old fellow," admitted Travers.

"And this footprint," said Handforth, displaying the cast again, "this footprint is a valuable clue. I'm going to hand it to the police! One day it will lead to a conviction——"

"Hold on a minute, Handy!" said Hubbard, pushing forward. "Let's have a look at that!"

He examined the cast closely, grinning, and Handforth frowned.

"Keep your dirty hands off it!" he said. "I don't want you chaps messing about——"

"Wait a minute!" interrupted Hubbard. "I believe I can help you, Handy. In fact, I'm sure I can! I know who the criminal is!"

"What!"

"I recognise that footprint," said Hubbard, pointing dramatically.

"You—you recognise it?" gasped Handforth.

"Especially the round spot near the toe," nodded Hubbard. "That's where the criminal trod on a drawing-pin—the drawing-pin is still embedded in the sole."

"But—but—— Great Scott!" ejaculated Handforth. "How—how do you know this criminal so well?"

Hubbard made a grab at Teddy Long, who was hovering nearby.

"Criminal, step forward!" said Hubbard sternly.

He yanked Teddy's left foot up, and the sole of his shoe was clearly displayed. A yell of laughter went up when it was seen that Teddy Long's shoe and the plaster-of-Paris cast were identical—the worn heel, the patch on the sole, the drawing-pin—everything!

"Send for the police," said Travers promptly. "Upon my Samson! The criminal's here amongst us, and we didn't know it!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Poor old Handy collapsed like a punctured tyre.

CHAPTER 6.

The Midnight Watchers!

AFTER the fiasco of the "fatal footprint"—as the Removites facetiously termed Handforth's great discovery—Edward Oswald was considerably subdued.

However, there were other aspects of this matter—more serious aspects. Nipper, for example, gave it his attention; and so did Kirby Keeble Parkington, Travers, Fullwood and a few other kindred spirits.

"There's no denying," said Nipper in the Common-room that evening, "that the whole business is rummy. We shouldn't have believed Long or Hubbard; but Vera corroborated their yarn. Then Handforth, last night, saw this mystery figure."



Nipper & Co. rushed out from their hiding-places and pounced upon the "ghost." A short struggle and he was held down, helpless.

"We're not sure even now that it wasn't a ghost," said Church bluntly.

"Ghosts don't drop half-crowns all over the place," said Nipper. "That's the queerest part of the whole mystery. Where do these half-crowns fit in?"

"They're coiners," said Handforth firmly. "It stands to reason——"

"Well, anyhow, we're going to help you to-night, Handy," said Nipper, with some haste. "We won't definitely accept the coiner theory yet. There's no certainty that the Mystery Man will return, but it's on the cards that he might. So we're going to help you to keep watch."

"Did I ask you to?" demanded Handforth. "Rats! I don't need any help! I'm conducting this investigation——"

"Well, whether you asked us or not, we're going to help you," said Nipper serenely. "We want to get to the bottom of the mystery. We'll station ourselves in various strategic positions, and we'll keep a close watch on the ruins from every angle."

Handforth, who wanted to conduct the investigation entirely off his own bat, objected. His objections were promptly over-

ruled, and he was told, impolitely, to go to the dickens.

ELEVEN-FORTY-FIVE chimed out solemnly from the big St. Frank's clock-tower.

It was less windy to-night, and the moon was half-hidden behind a filmy mass of light clouds. The monastery ruins looked eerie and gaunt with the pale, diffused radiance of the moon bathing the old ivy-covered walls. The breeze whistled softly through the crumbling arches and round the stout old buttresses. Not a living creature was in sight.

Yet actually at least a dozen Remove fellows were on the watch, stationed at various strategic points. They had been on duty now for a full hour. Some of them were beginning to get fed-up. An hour seemed a long, long time when standing perfectly still, unable to communicate with one's neighbour, or even to cough.

It was at about ten minutes to twelve when the watchers were rewarded. A figure, appearing unexpectedly from behind one of the ruined walls, moved forward cautiously

into the heart of the big, roofless space which had once been the monastery refectory.

The watchers experienced a thrill. They knew in an instant that this figure was no ghost. His feet had gritted on some loose stones, and, quite apart from this, the figure was not at all the kind of figure that they had been expecting. Handforth and Church and McClure were, in fact, puzzled.

This was no bent old man, wearing a long, mysterious cloak. The fellow was a burly, rough-looking customer, with a greasy peaked cap worn over one ear. He moved about stealthily, even uncertainly, as though not sure of his bearings.

The fact that he was solid and real was re-assuring to the schoolboy watchers. Here was somebody they could deal with in a practical manner. There was no question that the man was trespassing on private property; he could have no lawful purpose in these ruins at the hour of midnight.

The juniors, without hesitation, pounced.

The man uttered a startled oath as he saw figures leaping out of the ruins and dashing at him from all sides. Before he could even attempt to escape the attackers were upon him; he was bowled over, rolled on his back, and sat upon.

"Now, my beauty, perhaps you'll tell us what you're doing here?" said Nipper crisply.

"'Ere, stow it, young 'uns!" gasped the prisoner, still shaky with startled surprise. "What's the bloomin' game?"

"That's what we want to know," said Handforth. "What are you doing here in these ruins? Who are you, anyhow?"

"I think I can tell you that, dear old fellows," said Travers, as he took a close look at the prisoner. "Am I wrong in identifying this gentleman as Mr. Daniel Wicks?"

"You know a lot, don't you?" snarled the captive, struggling.

Travers was right. Nipper had also recognised the fellow instantly. He was Dan Wicks, a ruffianly sailor who had been recently sentenced to prison for assaulting an old man who lived in a cottage just outside Bellton. None of the St. Frank's had actually seen him, but Wicks' photograph had been published in the "Bannington Gazette" at the time of the police court proceedings.

"'Ere, young gents, let me get up!" pleaded Wicks in a whining voice. "I give you best—you're too many for me. You'll give a bloke a chance, won't you?"

"A chance to do what—burgle the school?" asked Fullwood.

"Stow it, kid!" protested Wicks. "You've got me all wrong. I ain't long out o' quod—an' you know what that means to a man. How do you suppose I can get a job? I want to earn an honest livin', but people won't let me."

"This is beside the point, Mr. Wicks," said Nipper. "You haven't told us why you came

here. What did you expect to find in these old ruins?"

A cunning look came into the man's eyes.

"Find?" he repeated. "I didn't expect to find nothin'."

"Then why did you come here?"

"Only to fix my nets up on the quiet, where I could be safe."

"Your nets?"

"Look, young gent," said Wicks, pulling some netting out of one of his capacious pockets. "Snares, see? I'm only after rabbits. Poachin', if you want to know," he added sulkily. "That ain't no crime, is it—to a man who can't get an honest job? I was afeared to do the work out in the open—the moon's too bright."

"But there aren't any rabbits in these ruins," said Handforth suspiciously. "What's the good of poaching here?"

"I was only goin' to get my snares ready, young gent," growled Wicks. "Don't ye see? Then I'd 'ave slipped over into Farmer Holt's medders, an' got busy. Lumme, 'ave a 'eart! You ain't got nothin' against me. Supposin' you do fetch the p'lice. What can you prove? You'd best let me go, or you might find yourselves in trouble."

His manner was becoming truculent as he regained his confidence.

"Oh, we're not going to have you arrested," said Nipper curtly. "You'd better clear off, and I should advise you not to come round here again."

The others, at a glance from Nipper, let the prisoner go. He went quickly enough, muttering his thanks. Handforth was quite indignant about it.

"You're mad!" he said breathlessly. "What the dickens do you mean by letting the fellow go like that? You didn't believe that potty yarn of his, did you? I'll bet he's one of the coiners——"

"Do dry up about coiners, Handy," said Nipper. "As a matter of fact, I didn't believe Wicks' yarn about poaching. But what charge could we make against him? His story was thin, but we had to let him go—giving him the benefit of the doubt. There's just a chance that his appearance here was a mere coincidence. Anyhow, we'd better get back to our posts."

"What for?" asked Handforth.

"To watch for the 'ghost,' of course," replied Nipper. "What about the bent old man? Where does he come in? He may arrive, or he may not. Anyhow, we've decided to keep on the watch until one o'clock—and we'll get back to our posts."

The others were agreeable, and Handforth, of course, had to consent also. It was better for them to get to their stations without delay—for this had the additional advantage of putting an end to Handforth's protestations. He couldn't very well talk to himself.

Handy was still simmering with indignation when he caught sight of something moving slowly near the end of the ruins. It was the figure of the mysterious monk. A bent old man, wearing a long robe and a cowl—no, not a cowl, but a quaint old hat

with a floppy brim. The watchers could see this now, at close quarters.

Handforth wanted to spring out and confront him; but he held himself in check. All the fellows had agreed to await a signal from Nipper. If Nipper ordered an attack, all well and good; if no signal came, they were to remain silently on the watch.

The old man walked towards the steps which led down to the vault. He hesitated for a moment, commenced descending, and vanished.

The whole affair was becoming more and more perplexing. This was no ghost. Even Church and McClure were convinced by now. The old man was a human being—real flesh and blood. The moonlight was playing tricks to-night; moreover, the boys' hiding-places were closer at hand.

A tense minute passed, and then Nipper stepped out. The others sprang after him, and clustered round.

"What now?" breathed Handforth eagerly.

"Get back to your stations," murmured Nipper. "We don't want to do anything premature—and spoil the whole game. There's some mystery here that needs a bit of explaining. I propose that two of us creep down into the vault after that old chap. No sense in the whole crowd going."

"I'm with you!" said Handforth promptly.

To save argument, Nipper consented. The others reluctantly went back to their hiding-places.

Cautiously Nipper and Handforth crept down the crumbling old steps into the vault. But when they arrived they were alone. The vault was empty. The mysterious old man had vanished.

CHAPTER 7.

The Mystery Man!

"BY Jove! This is rummy!" said Nipper, in a soft voice.

He and Handforth had made a round of the vault; they had examined the floor, the walls, and the entrance to the tunnel. There seemed absolutely no possible way in which the old man could have disappeared.

"Just like it was last night!" murmured Handforth uneasily. "I say, you know, what does it mean?"

"He couldn't have gone along the tunnel—for he couldn't have helped making foot-prints in this soft earth," said Nipper. "Either he's a ghost—which I don't believe—or there must be another way out of the vault."

"But there isn't—it's blocked up," said Handforth.

"That exit is blocked up, but these old vaults are queer places," said Nipper. "How do we know that there isn't another secret tunnel, leading somewhere else?"

"By George!"

Handforth's imagination ran riot again. He was thinking of his coiners' den. Perhaps that den wasn't in the quarry workings

at all—but somewhere close at hand, behind a secret door!

However, he wasn't allowed to think deeply on the subject; for Nipper decided upon an immediate retreat. They ascended to the ruins again, whispered their report to the others, and once more took up their positions.

They waited tensely now.

Five minutes elapsed—ten minutes. Then the old man reappeared, coming up the steps slowly, painfully, and puffing with wheezy noisiness after his exertions. No ghost this!

At least three of the watchers were enabled to get a close view of the intruder. He passed so close to them that they could have touched him. But they were cautious, and they remained hidden. The old man knew absolutely nothing of the truth. He went away, sublime in his confidence that nobody had witnessed his movements.

NIPPER emerged after a full five minutes, and the others, impatient by now, quickly joined him.

"What's the idea?" burst out Handforth. "Why all this delay? The man's gone now!"

"That's what we wanted," nodded Nipper. "We've given him a chance to get quite out of earshot."

"But why didn't you pounce on him, you ass?"

"Where was the need?" retorted Nipper. "Why pounce on the poor old chap, and give him the fright of his life? We know where to find him when we want him—if ever we do. And we stand a lot better chance of clearing up the mystery if we work in secret. There's no sense in our showing our hand."

Handforth was bewildered, but Travers and Fullwood were not.

"We recognised him, too, Nipper," said Fullwood eagerly. "It was old Sam Markham, of Rose Cottage."

"What!" ejaculated Handforth.

Nipper nodded.

"I recognised him at once—he passed so close to me that I couldn't help spotting him," he replied. "You know old Sam Markham, the pensioner? A queer old boy. lives all alone since his wife died, about six months ago. A sort of hermit, doing his own washing and cooking and everything. The people down in Bellton say that he's a harmless old chap, and there was a good deal of sympathy for him two or three weeks ago."

"Great Scott!" exclaimed Handforth, with a violent start. "I remember now! Dan Wicks!"

"We're getting on," smiled Nipper. "Old Sam Markham was the man Dan Wicks assaulted. There was a bit of a mystery about it at the time, and nobody ever knew the real truth. Wicks went to old Sam's cottage, and there was a fight. People came along and found the old man lying on his own doorstep, with Wicks threatening him. Somebody called Sparrow, the bobby, and Wicks was arrested."

"Then it couldn't have been a coincidence, Wicks being here to-night," said Travers.

with conviction. "Dear old fellows, the mystery deepens! That yarn Wicks told us about setting snares was moonshine."

"Of course it was," agreed Nipper. "It seems pretty obvious that Wicks knew the old man was coming here, and he arrived first so that he could assault him again. Yet that's hardly likely. Why assault him here? There's something behind all this that's like a jig-saw puzzle."

"And you let him go!" said Handforth accusingly. "Why, if we had collared him we should have forced the truth out of him!"

"The same as we forced the truth out of Wicks?" asked Nipper tartly. "No, old man, we were wiser to let them both go."

"What now?" asked Edward Oswald.

"Back to bed," said Nipper crisply.

"Eh?"

"We can leave the rest of this investigation to another time," continued the Remove skipper. "It's pretty clear that nothing further will happen to-night. To-morrow we'll make a few inquiries—strictly on the q.t.—and we'll see if we can't get to the bottom of the mystery."

However, at Handforth's suggestion, a search of the vault was made immediately. Nothing was found—no secret doors, leading to a hitherto unknown hidden chamber. The more the juniors investigated this astonishing mystery, the more they were baffled. But even Handforth was compelled to admit—now—that his theory of a coiners' den was very wide of the mark.

IN the morning, the schoolboy investigators kept their discoveries to themselves. Nipper thought it better that the school, as a whole, should be kept in ignorance of the latest developments. Even Handforth kept his own counsel—largely owing to the constant vigilance of Church and McClure.

They had discovered a good deal, but it had not helped them. There were no ghosts, it was true. But what earthly reason could old Sam Markham have for coming to the monastery vault? And why should the ruffianly Dan Wicks be mixed up in the affair?

Old Markham was harmless enough; he was so poor that he was compelled to live on the old age pension. The mystery of the new half-crowns remained unsolved. But it seemed more than likely that the poor old fellow was going wrong in the head—that he was wandering about at night, unaware of his movements. Perhaps that assault, from the effect of which he had only just recovered, had something to do with it.

What with morning lessons, and the fact that there was an important Junior XI match on that afternoon, the Removes had very little time to devote to the mystery that day. Immediately after dinner the footballers started off for Bannington, for the Saints were to play a return match against the Grammar School.

Handforth and Church and McClure went over in Handy's Morris Minor.

"Don't forget your footer boot, Handy," said Church, as they drove off.

"Footer boot?" repeated Handforth absently. "Bother the footer boot! I'm thinking about old Sam Markham, and I can't understand——"

"Footer's more important this afternoon, old son," interrupted Church gently. "You've got to have that left boot of yours repaired; the sole is coming adrift, and it's got to be stitched. You can't go on the field like that."

"By George, you're right," admitted Handforth, coming back to realities. "Well, it won't take long."

Several other juniors had offered Handy the loan of spare boots, but Edward Oswald had refused. His own boots were old and dilapidated, but they were comfortable. They gave him confidence. He wasn't superstitious, but he had a feeling that if he wore any other boots, he would go off form.

So in Bannington High Street a halt was made outside a shoe repairer's, whilst Handforth went in to have the stitching attended to. Church and McClure remained seated in the Minor.

"He won't be long; they'll only take about five minutes to do that job," said Church. "It's a good thing we started off in plenty of time——"

"I say!" interrupted McClure in a low voice. "Don't stare too closely, but isn't that chap Dan Wicks?"

Church started and looked. Next to the boot repairer's there was a public-house, and the Morris was drawn up against the pavement, practically opposite the public bar. Dan Wicks had just emerged.

In full daylight the juniors could see that Wicks was even more ruffianly in aspect than they had first believed. Two or three other men—kindred spirits, no doubt—followed him out. They all paused on the pavement, lighting cigarettes. They were quite unaware of the two schoolboys, who were sitting well back in the little saloon car, so close at hand.

"Well, that's fixed, then," Wicks was saying, as he prepared to part with his companions. "Don't forget, eleven o'clock sharp to-night."

"We got you, Dan," said one of the other men. "We meet here?"

"That's it," replied Wicks. "We can easily walk it in under the hour, and that'll be just about right. So-long!"

The conversation was not exactly enlightening, but it was at least suggestive. When Handforth came out of the boot shop some minutes later he found Church and McClure looking flushed and excited. They told him of what they had seen and heard.

"By George!" said Handforth excitedly. "Eleven o'clock to-night," mused McClure thoughtfully. "And they're going to walk somewhere that they can easily do under the hour. Doesn't that seem a bit suspicious,



Old Sam Markham, cornered in the monastery vault, was menaced by four men. "Come on, you chaps!" yelled Handforth; and he and his chums rushed to the rescue.

Handy? Perhaps they're going to the ruins again."

Handforth heard, but he did not appear to hear; he gave a violent start.

"By George! I've got it!" he said breathlessly. "Wicks is going to meet those men at eleven o'clock to-night, and they're going to walk somewhere that'll take nearly an hour. My sons, they're going to the monastery ruins!"

"Is that all your own idea?" asked McClure sarcastically.

"There's some dirty work afoot," went on Handforth, hot with excitement. "Don't you see? Wicks isn't taking any chances to-night; he's getting these other ruffians to help him. It seems to me, my sons, that the climax will come to-night. There's some mischief brewing."

"Well, forget the mischief for now," said Church practically. "It's nearly time for the match, and the Grammarians are waiting for you."

But Handforth was so thrilled by this latest discovery that football seemed of minor importance. As a matter of fact, he nearly "sold" the game. During the first fifteen minutes of play he was pre-occupied, and if it hadn't been for the desperate efforts of Church, who was one of the St. Frank's backs, the Grammarians would have scored.

Handforth did nothing to avert the disaster.

"What's the matter with you, you big ass?" asked Church indignantly. "Are you the goalie, or am I? If I hadn't got to the ball just then, in the nick of time, Westcliffe would have scored!"

"I—I didn't see what was happening," confessed Handforth, flustered.

"Well, wake up—do your job!" said Church. "Look out! They're throwing in from near the corner-flag, and it might be dangerous!"

After that, Handforth came to his senses, and he thrust all thoughts of old Sam Markham and Dan Wicks from his mind. He devoted himself to the game.

Largely owing to Handforth's brilliant work in goal, St. Frank's managed to force a draw. Hitherto, the Grammarians had beaten every visiting side. The Saints were well satisfied. A draw, on the Grammar School ground, was a good performance. The team went home jubilant.

Handforth, with Church and McClure in the Morris Minor, had once again become thoughtful, and there was a keen light of determination in his eyes.

"Kippers for tea," said McClure with satisfaction. "Scotch kippers, too."

"It's a pity you can't think of anything better than kippers!" said Handforth with

scorn. "Have you forgotten our responsibilities? We're going to do some investigating, my sons."

His chums, who were hungry after their healthy, boisterous exercise, looked dismayed. They had been looking forward to kippers ever since they had left the footer field.

"I say, cheese it!" protested Church. "If you want to do any investigating, do it after tea."

"Who said anything about getting on the job before tea?" demanded Handforth. "I mean to-night. We have tea before eleven o'clock to-night, don't we?"

Church and McClure looked relieved. The prospect of kippers again occupied their minds.

"You chaps have got to keep mum about Wicks," went on Handforth. "Understand? Don't say anything to the others about what you overheard."

"Why not?" asked Church. "I thought we were going to tell Nipper?"

"Well, we're not," said Handforth. "We'd far better keep this to ourselves. We don't want those chaps butting in to-night and messing up our own detective work. We're going to make a capture on our own."

"Oh, crumbs!" moaned McClure helplessly.

"WHAT about to-night, Handy, sweetheart?" asked K.K. genially.

It was evening, and Parkington had happened to meet Handforth in the Junior passage. Handforth tried to look indifferent.

"Well, what about to-night?" he retorted. "Do you think it's worth while keeping watch again?"

"Why bother?" said Parkington. "I've been having a chat with Nipper and Travers and the rest, and I don't quite see why we should lose any more sleep over this silly business."

"Yes, it does seem silly," admitted Handforth.

"So we'll give it a rest," said K.K. "The chances are we've been making a mystery out of nothing. After all, what do we care about old Markham?"

"You're right," said Handforth stoutly. "The old boy is harmless enough. If he wants to prowl about the ruins, let him."

And Handforth walked off, leaving K.K. with the impression that he, too, had lost interest. But in Study D Handforth's eyes were gleaming.

"I believe K. K. and Nipper and the others are trying to choke me off," he confided to Church and McClure. "I'll bet they're planning to keep watch to-night, and their wheeze is to edge me out of it."

"Can you blame them?" asked Church absent-mindedly.

"Eh?"

"I—I mean, they can get along without us, can't they?" asked Church hastily.

"If they think they can choke me off, they're mistaken!" snapped Handforth. "I'll tell you what, my sons! Instead of getting up at a quarter to eleven to-night, we'll get up at a quarter past ten! We'll creep out, and we'll take up our positions before any of the other chaps! We'll diddle 'em like that!"

"But the other chaps may not be coming out at all," protested McClure. "I say, this is getting a bit thick! We've lost a lot of sleep two or three nights in succession—"

"And you're going to lose some more to-night," interrupted Handforth. "Don't forget Dan Wicks! He's coming with his beastly pals—and we want to be ready!"

CHAPTER 8.

The Fight in the Vault!

HANDFORTH was as good as his word. He routed Church and McClure out at 10.15, and, in order to save a lot of bother, they dressed themselves and crept out with him.

The conditions were very unfavourable to start with. The moon had hardly risen yet, and the night was pitchy black. Dense clouds obscured the stars, and there was scarcely a breath of wind. So the juniors were compelled to go very cautiously, lest they should make some sound which would attract attention. For, as yet, hardly any of the masters were in bed.

However, they succeeded in getting to the ruins without mishap. They took up their positions, crouching behind handy buttresses, half concealed by ivy, in close proximity to the vault entrance. Here they waited, silent and still, growing colder and colder.

This game was becoming monotonous, and had it not been for the expectation that something particularly exciting was to happen to-night, Church and McClure would have stayed in their beds, in spite of Handforth.

But Wicks was evidently a desperate character, and the idea of Handforth being on this job single-handed filled his chums with apprehension. Far better for them to be on the spot, to lend a hand if necessary. And there was an uncertainty about Nipper and Travers and the rest. Perhaps they were coming out to-night, and perhaps not.

The minutes dragged endlessly.

It seemed ages before the school clock chimed out the hour of eleven, and epochs seemed to pass before the half-hour chimed, and then the three-quarters. The chums of Study D by this time were cramped and stiff. But for once Handforth was determined, and during the whole time he had scarcely uttered a sound.

Just after a quarter to twelve something happened. A soft footstep sounded at the edge of the ruins, and then a figure appeared.

The moon had risen well by now, and, although screened by the clouds, it was shedding sufficient light for the boys to see quite clearly.

Handforth tensed himself, but he need not have troubled.—The arrival was not Dan Wicks but old Markham, labouring along wheezily, enveloped in his great old-fashioned overcoat, with its many folds, resembling a monk's gown. The old man disappeared down the vault steps.

"Come on!" breathed Handforth eagerly. "We'll make sure of it this time!"

"Make sure of what?"

"Why, instead of waiting for five minutes to pass, we'll follow him at once," murmured Handforth. "We've lost him twice already, and there's no reason why we should lose him again. If we follow right on his heels——"

"Cheese it!" breathed McClure suddenly. "Somebody else coming!"

They crouched back into the deep shadows. The sound of stealthy footsteps could be heard, the sound of heavy breathing. Then, one by one, several figures appeared round one of the crumbling, ivy-covered walls. The foremost was Dan Wicks, and the others—three of them—were the men Church and McClure had seen in Bannington. Clearly the four had been watching the ruins from some distance, and had followed old Markham.

"This way!" came Dan Wicks' whisper. "Follow me, and you can't go wrong. And don't forget—spring on the old swab when I give the word!"

The others muttered their agreement, and all four vanished.

Handforth & Co. were in a quandary.

"I say, what the dickens are we going to do?" whispered Handforth, after a short pause. "Did you hear what that brute said? They're going to attack old Markham!"

"We'd better give the alarm," said Church. "Let's dash indoors and——"

"Not likely!" interrupted Handforth. "Why, it would be five or ten minutes before anybody came out. We've got to go to the old man's help now!"

"There's nothing like being game, Handy," said Mac steadily. "You're game right through. But what chance should we have? Three of us against those four toughs!"

"Not afraid, are you?" snapped Handforth.

"Don't be an ass!" said Mac, turning red. "I'm trying to be sensible, that's all."

"Then follow me, and fight like the dickens as soon as we get down into the vault," said Handforth recklessly. "Don't forget that we have all the advantage—the advantage of surprise. We can get in some stout blows first, and that'll do the trick!"

He ran for the vault steps as he spoke and commenced descending. There was no help for it. Church and McClure were obliged to follow. They felt that they were going to certain disaster, but, in face of Handforth's rashness, there was no alternative. They could not possibly let him go to the slaughter single-handed.

Before they were half-way down to the vault they heard frantic, feeble cries in old Markham's voice. The attack had begun!

"Come on!" gasped Handforth. "You silly idiots! This is all your fault for wasting time up at the top—instead of dashing down straight away! We may be too late!"

With Church and McClure tumbling on his heels, he burst into the vault. And such was the noise in there that the men knew nothing of Handforth & Co.'s arrival at the moment. The boys beheld an extraordinary scene.

Dan Wicks and his companions were concentrating the lights from four electric torches on

old Sam Markham, who was standing with his back against a narrow slit-like opening in one of the solid walls—an opening of which Handforth & Co. had known nothing until now.

"No, ye don't!" the old man was shouting in a trembling voice. "You'll only get past if ye kill me! You're a coward, Dan Wicks—as I allus knew ye to be! A scut an' a thief!"

"Stand away from that opening, dad!" snapped Wicks. "We don't want to hurt you—but if you're obstinate——"

"On the ball, you chaps!" roared Handforth abruptly. And he sailed in with tremendous excitement and vigour.

Crash!

As Wicks turned, startled, Handforth's right caught him on the point of the jaw,

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and the man went reeling back, yelling with agony and surprise. The next moment Church and McClure were mixed up in it, too.

They put up a terrific scrap.

Wicks, during the first few moments of the affair, was more or less helpless. That right-hander of Handforth's had been a real beauty, and Wicks was all but knocked out. So Edward Oswald was able to devote his full attention to the other men.

He rushed recklessly at one of them who was just getting in a smashing blow at Church. Church went down, but at the same moment Handforth produced that right of his again, and the fellow sagged back with a curse of pain. But he was a tough customer, and the next moment he had recovered and was charging at Handforth like a savage, kicking and clutching.

Old Markham, standing near the little slit in the wall, was helpless. He seemed to be dazed by the noise and turmoil.

As long as the three schoolboys were on their feet, all was well. They not only defended themselves, but they attacked, and they were so determined about it that even these ruffianly men had all their work cut out. But when one of the trio fell, the end came swiftly.

It was McClure who went down first. In attempting to dodge a vicious kick from one man he ran hard into the whirling elbow of another, and he received a stunning blow on the side of his head which caused him to stagger to the wall, all but senseless. He fell to the floor in a heap.

"We've got 'em now, fellers!" shouted Wicks, who was now on his own feet. "The darned young cubs! This is the second time they've interfered!"

He dashed in, and Handforth, turning to receive the attack, was unable to protect himself against the savage kick of another man. A heavy boot caught him on the shin, and he sagged at the knees, reeling. Then Wicks' clenched fist, swinging in, found contact with Handforth's right eye, and the valiant leader of Study D went over, to roll far across the vault and lay still.

Church, still fighting, was quickly subdued. Two blows, aimed by two men, caught him at the same moment, and he collapsed. The plucky juniors were strewn all over the place. They had done well—but the odds had been hopelessly against them from the start.

"Young lubbers!" snarled Wicks, with an oath. "Well, that's settled 'em! Now we'll deal with the old man!"

Advancing upon Markham, they did not beat about the bush. They seized him roughly, and Wicks, swinging his fist cruelly, felled the poor old fellow with a single blow.

"This ain't no time for gentle methods!" he snapped. "We don't know but what some o' them other boys are up an' ab. at. Curse the kids! Even in the middle o' the night we ain't free of 'em!"

He entered the secret chamber beyond the narrow slit in the wall, and a gloating, exul-

tant shout came from him as he flashed his torch to and fro.

"It's 'ere, boys!" he shouted. "Come an' look at this! By hokey! This was worth fetchin' wasn't it? Three-quarters for me, an' a quarter divided amongst you fellers!"

The other men crowded through. Presently they came out again, carrying small but heavy bags, apparently made from old sacking.

Almost staggering under their loads, they made for the steps which led out of the vault.

CHAPTER 9.

The Climax!

"SOMETHING'S going on, I believe," said Nipper, rather anxiously.

He and Tommy Watson and Tregellis-West were crouching in the shrubbery, their gaze fixed upon the monastery ruins. Fairly close at hand, K. K. Parkington, Deeks and Goffin were in similar hiding. Travers, Potts and Fullwood were not far off.

They had come on the watch some little time ago, and, so far, they had seen nothing suspicious. They had arrived just after Handforth & Co. had descended into the vault.

Nipper had an idea that Handforth & Co. were on the job, but Nipper was not very keenly interested in Handforth just now. He fancied that he had heard faint, muffled sounds, as though coming from the bowels of the earth. And he half guessed the truth—that something dramatic was going on in the vault.

"We'd better be moving, I think," murmured Nipper, after another short wait. "I can't help feeling that—"

"Shush!" murmured Watson. "Look!"

Figures were appearing out of the ruins. Four men had emerged from the vault, and the watching boys could see that they were carrying heavy burdens. They went off rapidly, breaking through the bushes and vanishing towards the neighbouring meadow.

"Better let 'em go," murmured Nipper. "We don't want to force a fight out here, in the open. It would rouse half the school."

He gave a signal a minute later, and K.K. and Travers and all the others gathered round, looking excited.

"Come on—down into the vault," said Nipper briskly.

"But those men——" interrupted Parkington.

"Let 'em go," put in Nipper. "We don't want to be bothered with them."

They all went racing down into the vault. When they arrived they were considerably startled. Handforth and Church and McClure were gradually recovering. Handforth was sitting up, holding his head and uttering threats in a bleary kind of voice. Church and McClure were staggering about

(Continued on page 40.)

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The Mystery of the Monastery Ruins!

(Continued from page 38.)

dizzily, and old Sam Markham was sitting near the door of the secret chamber, moaning piteously.

The new arrivals, to their relief, found that none of the injured was in a serious way. Handforth & Co. soon recovered now that these other fellows had arrived.

"Those—those men!" gasped Handforth. "Did you see 'em?"

"Yes—and we let them go," said Nipper.

"Let them go!" babbled Handforth. "But—but——"

"On the whole, it was better," said Nipper. "We're thinking more of Mr. Markham. Thank goodness he's not injured. Buck up, Mr. Markham! There's nothing to worry about."

The old man looked up with tear-dimmed eyes.

"I dessay ye mean well, young gents—but it's too late," he said tragically. "That cur of a stepson o' mine has robbed me of all I possess!"

"It may not be as bad as you think, Mr. Markham," said Nipper gently.

"Aye, but it is!" panted the old man. "Don't I know? For forty years I've been savin' money—silver! Aye, ye may stare, boys! But it's been a whim o' mine to keep my savin's in silver. I don't trust banks—never did."

"That was mistaken of you, Mr. Markham," said Nipper. "If you had trusted a bank this thing wouldn't have happened."

"I kept all the money in my cottage—hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of pounds!" went on the old man piteously. "Then, when my old girl died—God rest her soul—I was alone. Folks say harsh things about her and me, an' mebbe they're right. We never did hit it, especially with regard to that worthless son o' hers."

"He's a scoundrel!" growled Handforth.

"Ay, as big a scoundrel as ever lived," agreed the old man. "But old Minnie would never believe it. He was her son—an' he was everything that was good. Just afore she died, she wrote to 'im. I didn't know it at the time, but I found it out when Dan came to see me. Yes, wrote to 'im an' told him that I'd been 'oardin' silver in my cottage for the best part o' my life. Told him to come 'ome and claim it. He showed me the letter. When I died, she says, that money will be rightfully his."

"Well, perhaps that's true, Mr. Markham," said Nipper gently.

"Ay, but while I live it's mine!" retorted the old man with a touch of fierceness. "Leastways, it was," he added, with a groan. "Dan come to my cottage close on three weeks ago, an' demanded some o' that money. I tried to throw him out, but he attacked me. That's why 'e was arrested an' sentenced to a month's hard labour."

Nipper exchanged quick glances with the other fellows.

"I think that's where you were mistaken, Mr. Markham," said Nipper. "Dan Wicks only got fourteen days in prison. Now you come to mention it, I believe the local paper made a mistake in printing the report, and said that Wicks had received a month's sentence. But they were wrong. I found it out to-day from Inspector Jameson, of the Bannington police."

The old man had a tragic look on his face.

"Then—then that explains it," he muttered. "I thought I was safe from Dan for another ten days, don't ye see? I knew he'd come back arter he got out o' prison. I knew 'e'd come for that silver. So I came up 'ere night arter night, carryin' a bag. I'm an old man, an' I can't carry much at a time."

"You've been bringing your silver here to hide it?" asked Travers, with interest.

"I didn't think it would do no 'arm," said the old man gruffly. "I lived in these parts as a boy, an' many's the time I've explored these 'ere ruins. I knew of this little secret cubby-'ole, although I don't think nobody else knew of it. I thought it would be a good idea to put my silver in 'ere, where it would be safe. That scamp Dan would never 'ave found it if he 'adn't come spyin' round, an' me thinkin' that he was still in prison!"

Now they could understand the meaning of his nocturnal visits. Labouring under the delusion that his stepson was safely behind prison bars, he had been carrying his miser's hoardings of silver to the vault, hoping to get it safely out of Dan Wicks' way.

"Well, you're a fine lot of fatheads, I must say!" said Handforth scornfully. "You saw those men getting out of this place—you must have seen that they were carrying something. Yet you didn't stop them!"

"We thought it better to let them go," said Nipper quietly. "Now, Mr. Markham, you were all wrong in not putting your money into a bank. Hoarding silver—or any kind of money for that matter—isn't the right thing to do. After what's happened, I think you ought to give us your promise that you'll put all your money into a bank."

"But it's gone—the money's gone!" wailed the old man.

"It's gone—but it's not far away," replied Nipper. "All your silver is safely in our Housemaster's safe."

"Boy, what are ye saying?" asked old Markham, clutching at Nipper's arm. "Ye tell me that my money's safe?"

"Every coin of it," replied Nipper. "You see, when a few coins were found in the ruins, I suspected something of the truth."

"You—you suspected?" gurgled Handforth.

"It seemed to be a hobby of yours, Mr. Markham, to collect brand-new coins," continued Nipper, ignoring the startled Handy.

"And why not?" asked Markham. "New coins is heavier, ain't they? But I don't

(Continued on page 44.)

An Exciting Serial Story of Amazing Adventure by LADBROKE BLACK.

The VALLEY of HOT SPRINGS



(Opening chapters
re-told on page
42.)

A Jolt from Jackson!

THE professor was clearing his throat. Evidently he had something up his sleeve, for he began to speak again, turning at the end of every sentence to Jackson, and making a little obeisance.

Suddenly, to Eric's astonishment, all the figures in that fur-clad circle sank on their hands and knees and bowed their heads to the ground. The guards, as if taking their instructions from the professor, stirred and came to life, rushing back to assume their former position on the inner rim of the circle. There they stood at attention.

"What have you been saying to 'em, professor?" Jackson inquired, hardly moving his lips.

"There's no time to explain now," the professor retorted irritably. "I'm going to dismiss the people."

Danny nudged Eric.

Jackson's bombshell causes a sensation—but it doesn't explode with the desired effect.

"Gosh, ain't the gov'nor the goods?" he whispered. "He's got 'em eating out of his hand!"

It seemed no more than the truth, for in response to a few more sonorous sentences all the people rose, and in silence save for the shuffling of their fur-clad feet upon the stones, began to pour towards the exit. Within a quarter of an hour only the gold-mailed guards were left.

"I think this would be an opportune moment for you to raise your hand, Jackson," the professor remarked, in his ordinary tone. "I'm not quite clear what the effect of that signal will be, but I had occasion to observe that the late Angekok always employed some such signal. At any rate, we cannot remain here."

Jackson raised his hand, and the guard moved forward at the double and formed up in two files behind him.

"We will now proceed to your apartment," the professor remarked.

Imperturbably, as if to the manner born, Jackson began slowly to move across the vast hall. Except that his stature was some six inches less than the late occupant of the office, he carried himself impressively and with dignity. The professor fell in behind him, and Eric and Danny brought up the rear of what might be called the advance guard.

As they approached that curtain of skins, two of the soldiers ran forward and drew them apart. The next moment they were passing in single file down that very corridor which, less than an hour ago, they had traversed as prisoners on their way to the sacrificial fires.

Soon they were in the Angekok's apartment. Danny had taken off his fur cap, and was mopping his perspiring forehead with a rather dirty handkerchief. Jackson had seated himself on the Angekok's chair, and was disengaging himself from the magnificent helmet he was wearing. The professor, after some search, had found a golden jug full of water, which, remarkably, had escaped from the rough-and-tumble, and was cooling his parched throat. Eric, in a kind of dream, replaced the tumbled table, then, picking up the stool he had used as a weapon, he sank down on it, with a sigh. None of them spoke. Now that it was all over—now that they had been rescued miraculously from a dreadful death—the inevitable reaction had set in.

The professor was the first to break the strained silence. He had put down the golden jug, and had been frantically searching through his pockets, his face growing more exasperated every moment.

"Some infernal scoundrel has taken my pipe and tobacco!" he exclaimed testily.

Danny rose and took from his pocket an old briar and a pouch.

"When you was telling the tale just now, guv'nor, to them heathens in the hall, you took out your handkerchief in a hurry. I saw you drop your pipe and pouch as you did it, and, thinking you might be wanting them, I picked 'em up."

The professor glared at him for a moment, and then, with a snort, took the two articles from him and began to fill his pipe. When

he had at last got it going to his satisfaction, he seated himself on the table and looked at Jackson.

"I must congratulate you, Jackson. Your behaviour showed both courage and initiative, though I am still at a loss to understand how you managed everything so opportunely."

"I rumbled that Angekok, professor, and I just slipped away and hid myself in a little niche in the passage which I happened to notice. I hadn't parted with my gun, you see, and I thought it might be useful. As for the Angekok—well, that was easy. Of course, I'd meant to spring his job as soon as I set eyes on him."

The professor took the stem of his pipe from between his lips and stared at him.

"Perhaps you will have the goodness to explain exactly what you mean?" he said sharply.

A curious smile twisted Jackson's lips.

"Well, you didn't think I was here for my health, did you? You can have all the science stuff, professor. I'm here for the gold and platinum, and the best way to get it—the only way—was to jump that fellow's job!"

He stretched his arms and yawned.

"I reckon I'm the boss here now, and what I says goes. You three are right off the map. The Valley's mine—for keeps!"

His little bloodshot eyes scanned the faces of his three companions.

"Got anything to say about it?" he inquired.

The Partnership!

DANNY had a lot to say about it. It took him a good five minutes to say it, and the listeners gathered the fact that Danny was not kindly disposed towards Jackson.

"I ain't saying you haven't saved our lives, because you have," the ex-pugilist finished. "But don't you come the big noise over us, or talk to the guv'nor like that, because you'll be looking for trouble, my lad. We've played up to you with this Angekok business, but that don't mean that the Valley and all that's in it is yours for keeps, because it ain't. Maybe we'll let you have a share and maybe we won't."

Jackson merely grinned.

HOW THE STORY BEGAN.

ERIC DENNING, a cheery, adventure-loving youngster, lives with his uncle,

PROFESSOR DENNING. The professor, absent-minded and interested in nothing save his studies, is expecting a visit from John Peters, an Arctic explorer who has discovered a narwhal's horn, on which is written in Runic writing the key to tremendous treasure, in Greenland. The horn arrives, but not Peters. For Peters is dead—murdered by one of a gang of scoundrels, the leader of which is

BOSS MAUNSELL. Maunsell attempts to capture the narwhal's horn, but is frustrated, largely owing to the activities of

DANNY, the professor's man-of-all-work and an ex-pugilist. The professor deciphers the writing on the horn, and he and Eric and Danny travel to Greenland, and start out for the Valley of Hot Springs. They capture Maunsell, who has been trailing them; he gives his name as Jackson. Passing through a tunnel in the glaciers, they arrive at the mysterious valley. They are made prisoners by the Angekok, or ruler of the valley, and are about to be sacrificed when Jackson, who has been missing, arrives on the scene. He is forced to kill the Angekok, and, after the professor puts over a great bluff, assumes his place of office.

(Now read on.)

"I'll knock your silly face off if you look at me like that!" Danny went on truculently, half-rising to his feet. "You've got it all wrong. You ain't nothing without the professor. You can't talk a word of this lingo. A nice sort of Angekok you'll be, trying to play the part without knowing the words."

"I've got a gun!" Jackson remarked grimly.

"But there ain't more than one cartridge left in it," Danny interrupted quickly. "I've counted. And I've got the cartridges in my pocket. You can plug one of us, but it'll have to be me or Mr. Eric, because you can't do without the gov'nor."

The professor jumped to the ground.

"What Danny has said, though it might have been expressed better, is in substance, perfectly correct. You have assumed the position of Angekok with all the ritual I was able to invent on the spur of the moment. The people of the Valley have undoubtedly accepted you. But your authority is a purely nominal one, and you cannot communicate with the people except through me, and I certainly shall not be a party to any proposal that places in your hands the indisputed right to dispose either of the mineral wealth of this region or its objects of scientific interest."

Jackson fingered his chin.

"No good trying to pull the bluff, I suppose," he said calmly. "You've found the weak spot, professor. But I can learn the language, and when I have learned it I shan't have any more use for your services."

"I'll learn you something that goes along of a thick ear!" Danny exploded.

Jackson raised his hand.

"I'm just showing you the cards I hold. I'm a reasonable man. Up to now I've been your prisoner. Cut that out. Let me in as a partner, and we'll share and share alike. How does that go?"

"Now you're talking sense," Danny muttered.

"What do you say, professor?" Jackson inquired.

"I say the proposal seems reasonable. For myself, what I chiefly desire is an uninterrupted investigation of this astonishing region. In the interests of science, which with me are paramount, I am willing to waive all other considerations. I accept your proposal. When we leave here, whatever gold and platinum we are able to take with us, shall be shared among us equally, it being understood, however, that this agreement does not affect my right in any way to pursue further investigations into the murder of my friend, Mr. John Peters."

"That's a cinch, then," Jackson broke in. The professor's last words had caused him a pang of uneasiness at first, but now he was relieved. Very obviously, Professor Denning did not know that he—Maunsell, alias Jackson—was guilty of that crime. "Now we understand one another," he went on. "We're partners as long as we're here.

What we'd better get down to now is—how we're going to carry on?"

That certainly was a problem. They were now the supreme authority in the Valley of Hot Springs, and not one of them had the slightest idea how that authority functioned. They didn't know who controlled the guards, or whether the religious side of the Angekok's office was shared by any other priest. They were sublimely ignorant of the customs of the people over whom they had to rule. It was clear that they might commit a thousand mistakes, any one of which might prove their undoing with disastrous results. It was Eric who put forward a solution to this difficulty.

"Those girls who brought in the food," he exclaimed. "If Jackson were to summon them, my uncle could question them."

The boy was conscious that Danny was looking at him with a rather suspicious eye. Somehow he managed to stifle the blush that rose to his cheeks. Inwardly, Eric admitted to himself that he was keen to see again the girl with the lovely face and the golden hair who had tried to warn him of the dangers by which they were beset.

He was considerably disappointed at the way in which his uncle took his suggestions. Instead of summoning that retinue of girls, the professor darted to the inner doorway and, pulling aside the curtains, disappeared from view. Nearly an hour elapsed before he returned, packed with information.

The Angekok, it appeared, nominated his successor. There was no priestly caste whose votes raised one of their number to the office of supreme authority. The late occupant of the position having failed to nominate anybody for the vacancy, an unforeseen difficulty might have occurred, had it not been for Jackson's prompt action.

"I understand that having assumed the symbols of office, nobody will presume to question your authority," the professor remarked. "At least, that was what I gathered from the very intelligent young lady with whom I have been conversing. You may have noticed her among the attendants, Eric; a girl with rather remarkable Scandanavian features."

Eric made a sound which he hoped suggested that in a kind of general way, among a crowd of much more interesting exhibits, he had observed the person his uncle was describing.

"Her name is Daughter of the Sun—at least, that is the translation," went on Professor Denning. "She tells me that the only dangers we need apprehend may come from the captain of the guard. It was generally believed that the late Angekok intended to nominate him as his successor, and having been thwarted, he may be inclined to resent the new regime. We shall have to watch this man—whose name is Imatuk—very carefully if we are to avoid trouble."

(How Eric & Co. clash with the captain of the guard is told in next week's enthralling instalment.)

The Mystery of the Monastery Ruins!

(Continued from page 40.)

understand, young gent! Ye ain't foolin' me, are ye?" he added piteously, the greed of the miser in his eyes.

"As a matter of fact, I got my guv'nor—Mr. Nelson Lee, who happens to be a famous detective—to look into the matter," said Nipper coolly. "He and I came down here together, and it didn't take Mr. Lee long to locate this secret chamber."

"My only Uncle Josiah!" ejaculated Handforth.

"As soon as we found the bags of silver we took them indoors and deposited them in Mr. Wilkes' safe," went on Nipper. "And my guv'nor promised to let me carry on alone—or, that is, with some of these other fellows to help me. Mr. Lee thought it better to keep it all quiet, rather than have the publicity of a prosecution. He thought that you would like it better, too, Mr. Markham."

"Heaven bless ye, young gent!" muttered the old man brokenly. "It's taught me a lesson. Ay, arter this I will put my money in a bank."

"But, look here, those ruffians went out of here carrying bags of money!" said Handforth, staring. "Mr. Markham told us—"

"Not bags of money, Handy," said Nipper

gently. "Travers and K. K. and I put our heads together, and we thought that we might work a wheeze. We got lots of old iron washers, and we filled Mr. Markham's bags with them. I'm afraid those rogues are going to get a bit of a shock soon!"

The juniors led old Sam Markham indoors, where Nelson Lee and Mr. Wilkes were awaiting them in the latter's study. There the old man was shown his hoard of money—securely stowed away in the House-master's safe. His gratitude was almost more than he could express. The next day the money was deposited in the Bannington bank.

And next day, too, Mr. Daniel Wicks was observed in Bannington with a very black eye, a much swollen nose, a patch of plaster on his chin and his arm in a sling. Very obviously he and his rascally confederates had discovered how they had been duped by the St. Frank's boys; and the confederates had not been elated at the discovery—Dan Wicks bore testimony to that!

THE END.

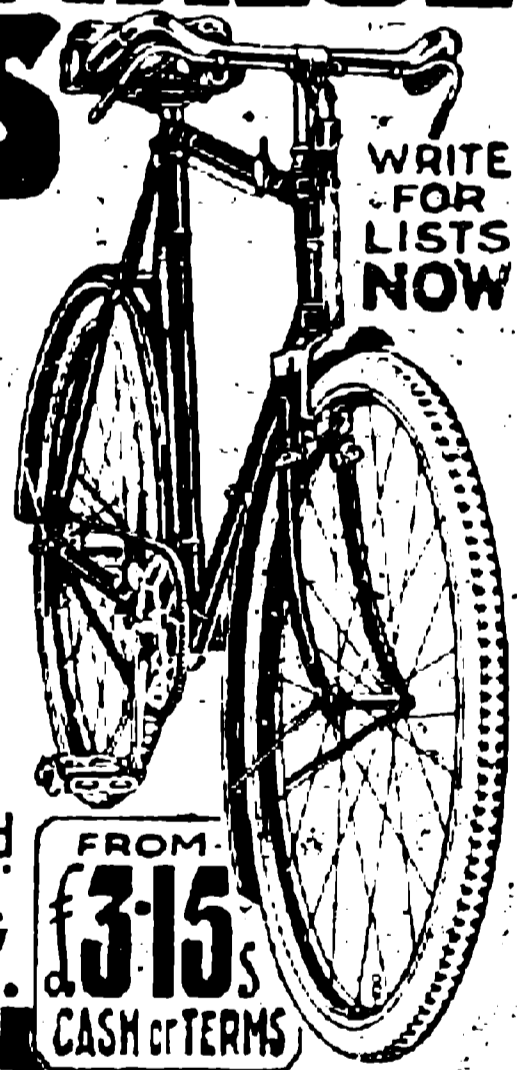
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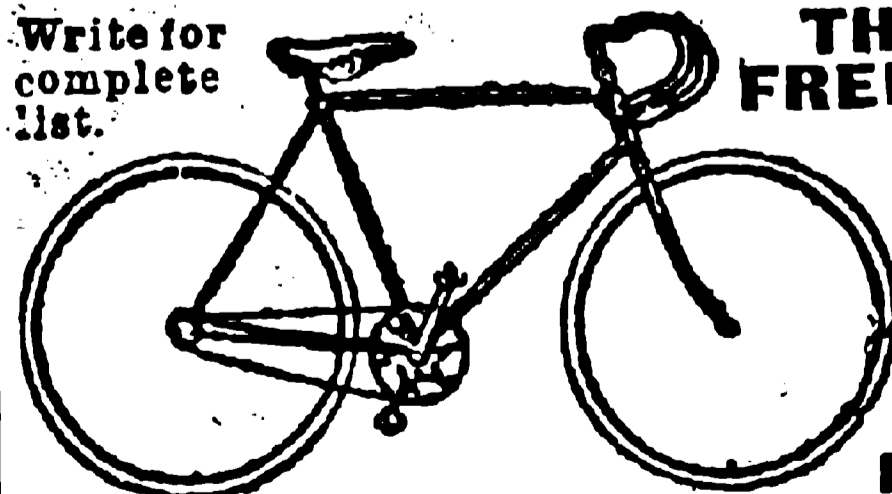
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