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March 28th, 1931.

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FLOODED OUT

By

EDWY SEARLES BROOKS

CHAPTER 1.

Viscount Bellton—of
the Remove!

“HALLO! Look who’s here!” said Handforth, grinning

Mr. Crowell, the master of the Remove Form at St. Frank’s, frowned. He had just got his Form settled down for morning lessons, and he was a man who hated interruptions. The door of the class-room had just opened, and a boy of about fifteen had walked in. He was dressed in travel-stained Bedford-cord breeches, an open-necked shirt, with a coloured handkerchief tied round his neck.

“I shall be obliged, Handforth, if you will keep your comments to yourself,” said Mr. Crowell severely. “Well, young man,” he went on, turning to the new arrival, “what is it you want?”

“I guess I’ve come,” said the boy cheerfully.



AT ST. FRANK'S!

"I can see that you have come," agreed Mr. Crowell. "But the point is—why have you come?"

"Mr. Wilkes sent me."

"Oh, indeed!" said the Form-master. "Mr. Wilkes sent you. Let me see, young man, aren't you the boy who has recently come to reside at Edgemore Castle, with your father?"

"That's me, sir," agreed the new arrival.

"Skeets is my name."

"Skeets?"

"Sure thing!"

"But I was under the impression that your name was Bellton—to be exact, Viscount Bellton?"

"Aw, forget it, sir!" protested the other. "That title kinda makes me feel foolish. Pop figured that a bit more schooling would do me good; so he's fixed things up with the headmaster and with Mr. Wilkes, and here I am."

"Good old Skeets!" sang out Handforth.

"Welcome to the Remove!"

"Hear, hear!"

There was a regular chorus; the Remove permitted the young Viscount Bellton to know that his entry

into the Form was welcomed. It had been known for some days that Viscount Bellton was to enter St. Frank's as a pupil; but his casual, matter-of-fact arrival had rather taken the fellows by surprise.

"Silence!" shouted Mr. Crowell impatiently. "Good gracious! Is our work to be interrupted and even stopped altogether? Bellton, I am not sure that I can accept you as a pupil."

Viscount Bellton—otherwise Skeets—looked astonished.

"Gee! What do you mean?" he asked. "What's wrong with me?"

"You will kindly address me as 'sir,' when you speak!" said Mr. Crowell sternly.

"Oh, sure!" said Skeets. "Sorry—sir! Guess I'm still a bit strange around here."

"You are strange in more ways than one," agreed Mr. Crowell. "I have nothing against you personally, Bellton, but you must allow me to remark that your clothing is—well, decidedly unconventional."

"Hear, hear!" came an approving murmur from Archie Glen-thorne. "In fact, hear, absolutely, hear! I mean to say, this chap-pie may be sterling gold, and all that sort

The Plot that Sprang a Leak!



of thing, but his exterior decorations somewhat give me the pip!"

Mr. Crowell wheeled.

"Did I ask for your comments, Glenthorne?" he demanded.

"Eh? Comments?" said Archie, adjusting his monocle. "Oh, I see what you mean, sir! Comments, what? The fact is, Skeets is a priceless cove in himself. But I quite agree with you about his chassis coverings. All very well on the good old ranch, but——"

"That will be enough, Glenthorne."

"Perhaps you're right, sir," agreed Archie. "I must confess that words fail me."

The Remove was enjoying itself. This was far better than work. Skeets had come in at the right moment.

"I told pop that I should need some new clothes, sir," said the new boy. "But when I mentioned it to Mr. Wilkes, he laughed—said it didn't matter."

"Oh, indeed!" exclaimed Mr. Crowell. "So your Housemaster told you that your present—er—attire would be satisfactory?"

"Mr. Wilkes kinda likes it, sir," said Skeets. "He figures that open necks are sensible."

"I am very much afraid that Mr. Wilkes has—er—singularly unconventional ideas," said the Form-master, with some asperity. "I will have a word with him on this subject later. In the meantime, Bellton, you can take your seat. That one will do, at the end of the second row. Am I to understand that you have come to St. Frank's as a permanent scholar?"

"I figure so—sir."

"To which house do you belong?"

"No House at all, sir—I'm a day boy."

"Oh, indeed! A day boy," said Mr. Crowell. "It is something new for St. Frank's to admit day boys. However, we need not waste time by discussing that. You may take your seat."

So Viscount Bellton took his seat, and from that moment he was a fully-fledged Removite.

THERE had been quite a little excitement, recently, over the arrival of the Earl of Edgemore and his son at Edgemore Castle, near by.

On the death of the old earl, the inheritance had gone to a distant line; and the new earl, although a Rossiter—one of the oldest and noblest families of Sussex—was a man of decidedly unconventional ways.

Prior to inheriting the title and estates, he had run a small ranch—or farm—near Mosquito Bend, Saskatchewan, Canada. He and his son had done all the work of the farm, and they were true prairie types. "Roughneck" Rossiter was a he-man—a man who chewed tobacco, a man with rough hands and strong muscles. His son was a real chip of the old block. Their advent at Edgemore Castle had provided the whole neighbourhood with a first-class sensation.

For the new earl's first move had been to sack the entire castle domestic staff. The earl and his son were living in two or three rooms, doing their own cooking, washing and everything else. Their only "car" was a flivver orry, in which they went about selling produce from the estate. The new Lord Bellton was a man without an ounce of pride or snobbishness; he considered that money earned by his own labours was the only kind of money that counted.

The people of the district were shocked; many of the aristocratic families were scandalised. But the rancher-earl was such a genuine gentleman at heart—such a frank, honest man—that he was gaining popularity every day. And Viscount Bellton, who answered to no other name but Skeets, was a youngster who carried with him a breath of the open plains.

At first Lord Edgemore had scouted the idea of Skeets going to St. Frank's; but when he found that Mr. Wilkes could control Skeets with singular ease, he had reconsidered his decision. So the boy was here—in the Remove—much to the Remove's satisfaction.

"**Y**OU'RE one of us now Skeets," said Nipper heartily. "Put it there, old man! As captain of the Remove, I accord you a formal welcome."

They shook hands, grinning. Crowds of other Removites were pressing round, and Viscount Bellton was slightly embarrassed.

"Say, it's sure good of you fellers to make things so swell."

"Rats!" said Handforth, clapping Skeets on the back. "We can do with chaps like you in the Remove, my lad!"

"Speak for yourself," sneered Bernard Forrest.

"That's what I am doing," retorted Handforth, glaring. "What's the matter with you, Ugly?"

"It's a bit thick—that's all," said Forrest contemptuously. "What's St. Frank's coming to, admitting the sons of roughneck Canadian squatters?"

"I say, cheese it!" protested De Valerie. "Skeets is the son of an earl."

"The son of a tobacco-chewing impostor, you mean!" retorted Forrest. "Ask Carroll, here."

Eustace Carroll, another new boy in the Remove, was looking excited and angry. He was a very exquisite youth, very supercilious.

"You're having your hour, Skeets, or whatever you call yourself!" he said tensely. "But you know as well as I do that my pater is the real Earl of Edgemore—and I'm the real Viscount of Bellton!"

"I guess we won't start a fight over that," said Skeets quietly.

"No; but my pater's starting a fight!" snapped Carroll. "In the High Courts, too! And when the case comes off he'll prove his claim easily enough—and you and your beastly father will get kicked out! You'll

have to go back to your rotten Canadian farm, where you belong!"

"Just one more crack about my pop, and you'll be sorry," said Skeets, with ominous calmness.

"Just because your name is Rossiter, you think you're the rightful heirs!" shouted Carroll furiously. "But my pater's going to prove differently. I tell you, you'll get kicked out—you and your cattle-hand father!"

Crash!

Skeets' fist shot forward, and Eustace Carroll, howling, reeled back under the force of the blow.

"Good egg!" roared Handforth. "That's the stuff, Skeets! Smash him!"

Carroll made no attempt to answer that blow, but slunk off with Forrest & Co. The rest of the Removites, laughing scornfully, surrounded Skeets.

"Don't take any notice of the rotter—he's jealous!" said Handforth wrathfully. "You ought to have slaughtered him completely!"

"Aw, what's the use?" asked the young viscount. "I guess you're right—he's jealous. Pop tells me that the Carrolls haven't the faintest chance of proving their claim."

"It'll be a sorry thing for the district if they do prove it," said Nipper. "We don't want his sort about here."

The matter was temporarily dismissed. But everybody at St. Frank's, of course, knew that Eustace Carroll was claiming that he was the rightful Viscount Bellton. He had been boasting about it ever since his arrival. It seemed that his father was bringing an injunction, or a claim, or something. The matter was to be fought out in the High Courts. Meanwhile, the new Lord Edgemore was in possession of the castle—and, as the juniors truthfully remarked, possession was nine points of the law.

SKEETS' first day at St. Frank's was an enjoyable one.

The life was new to him, and he was delighted with everything. When afternoon lessons were over, and he was preparing to go home to the castle, a number of Removites gathered round him.

"Say, fellers, why not come along this evening and have supper with pop and me?" invited Skeets cordially. "We're going to do some exploring afterwards."

"Awfully decent of you to ask us, and we'd love to come—but it's impossible," said Nipper, shaking his head. "Old Wilkey is giving one of his famous lectures this evening, and we can't afford to miss it."

"Gee! I didn't know that you fellers were so keen on school lectures," grinned Skeets.

"We are not, usually," said Handforth. "Lectures, as a rule, are dry and dusty. But Mr. Wilkes is in a class to himself. He's not like an ordinary Housemaster; and when he gives a lecture, there's a fight for seats. Better than going to the pictures—and it's free, too. We chaps wouldn't miss one of Old Wilkey's lectures for quids!"

"Oh, well, some other evening, then," said Skeets, smiling. "But I was kinda hoping that some of you chaps would help. Pop and I are going to explore the dungeons. We're a whole heap interested."

Eustace Carroll, near by, heard the words with sulky resentment. What right had these impostors to explore the dungeons of Edgemore Castle? They were his dungeons—the Carrolls' dungeons. Eustace had no doubts on the point whatever; his father had convinced him, beyond all shadow of doubt, that the Carrolls were soon coming into the title and estates.

"Why don't you come over to Old Wilkey's lecture?" asked Nipper. "Put off the exploring trip until to-morrow. If you do, we can join you."

"I guess it can't be done," replied Skeets. "Pop's keen on this exploring trip, and he won't wait."

The juniors could well understand. The new earl and his son were still awed by the age and magnitude of their new home. Edgemore Castle was one of the finest Norman piles in Great Britain, and it was in a splendid

state of preservation. These newcomers, in spite of their unconventionalities, were very, very proud of their inheritance.

CHAPTER 2.

The Conspirators!

EUSTACE CARROLL, who had been sulky and moody all day, was missing at tea-time.

He had gone out alone, and at about five o'clock he was hanging about near the end of Bellton High Street, where the road from Bannington entered the village.

A small coupé soon came purring along, and it drew to a standstill opposite Eustace. This was the second occasion on which Carroll had kept such an appointment.

"Well, what is it, young 'un?" asked the man at the wheel. "Better get in, and we can talk."

Carroll climbed in. His companion was a scrupulously attired man. He was private secretary to Eustace's father.

"Well, that confounded prairie kid has joined the school, Mr. Gatfield," said Carroll grumpily. "That's why I rang you up and

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asked you to meet me here. I hinted at it earlier, but it's a cert. now."

"H'm. It's bad," said Mr. Gatfield slowly.

"Of course it's bad!" snapped Eustace. "Why tell me that? I'm doing the best I can to discredit these Canadian outsiders, so that the pater's cause will be helped when the case comes off. And now the son actually joins St. Frank's!"

"It's giving him a good standing, and that's just what we don't want," agreed the private secretary.

"He's only a day boy, of course—he goes home every evening——"

"Oh! A day boy, eh?" interrupted Mr. Gatfield, with sudden interest. "That's better!"

"How is it better? What difference does it make?"

"Well, perhaps your right," said Mr. Gatfield in some haste. "I don't suppose it does make much difference. But there's no need for you to worry, Eustace. Your father's case is a sound one, and he'll win. There wasn't any real reason for you to drag me over here this evening. The less we can meet, the better."

Eustace was, in many ways, an obtuse youth. His faith in his father was implicit. He believed that he had been sent to St. Frank's because it was a certainty that the Carrolls would come to live ultimately, at Edgemore Castle. He believed that his "job" of discrediting the rancher-earl and his son was helpful to the cause.

Little did Eustace guess that there was something else afoot—something sinister and deadly. Mr. Mortimer Carroll, millionaire, had not left his private secretary in this district for the mere purpose of inventing scandal about the rancher-earl.

"And that's all the news?" asked Mr. Gatfield slowly.

"It's bad enough, isn't it?" growled Eustace. "This infernal card is popular with the chaps. We want him to be just the opposite. For some extraordinary reason, they've taken a liking to him. A raw, common prairie brat like him!"

"There's no accounting for boys," said Mr. Gatfield gruffly.

"It sickens me to hear that fellow Skeets talking," went on Eustace disgustedly. "He and his rotten father have no right to the castle! Look at the way they're living! Like a couple of tramps, doing their own cooking and washing-up! What right have they to such a noble home?"

"True enough," agreed Mr. Gatfield. "Well, I'll be getting along——"

"And this evening they're going exploring," went on Eustace sourly. "They're going on a trip into the dungeons, I hear. By gad! They're as proud as peacocks because they think they own the place!"

"Yes," said Mr. Gatfield thoughtfully.

A look of sudden cunning had come into his eyes, and for some moments he was silent. Then, as Eustace Carroll was preparing to get out of the car, he spoke again.

"Anybody else going with them on this exploration trip?" he asked abruptly.

"No; Skeets invited some of the chaps, but they couldn't go because they're attending a lecture, or something," replied Eustace. "Look here, Mr. Gatfield," he added impulsively, "what's your own opinion? Honestly, do you think the pater will really become the Earl of Edgemore?"

"Within a few weeks, he will not only be the Earl of Edgemore, but you will be Viscount Bellton," replied Mr. Gatfield, without hesitation.

Eustace's eyes gleamed.

"Then I'll wait!" he said breathlessly. "I won't crow too much in front of the other chaps; my time will come later on."

WHILE Mr. Gatfield was driving back to Bannington, he became more thoughtful than ever. Eustace little realised that that scrap of information about the dungeons—imparted quite casually—was of paramount importance in Mr. Gatfield's eyes.

For Gatfield's mission here was not so innocent. Gatfield knew perfectly well that Mr. Mortimer Carroll, millionaire, had no real chance of winning that case in the High Courts. There was only one certain method of getting rid of this Canadian rancher and his son. And that method was—ugly.

However, Mr. Gatfield was a man without scruples; he had proved that by the way in which he was using his employer. As Mr. Carroll's private secretary, he knew all the ins and outs of the millionaire's life; he knew how Mr. Carroll had obtained his millions.

Apparently there was something shady in the past life of Eustace's father; and Gatfield had a hold on the man. Now he was out for big money—a fortune. A little clever manipulation, involving the elimination of these unwanted people from Canada, and the earldom would go to the Carrolls. And Mr. Gatfield would come into the tidy sum of twenty thousand pounds. In addition, he would have a hold over the new earl for the rest of the latter's life.

In Bannington, Mr. Gatfield put a call through, and he was soon talking to his employer.

"So the man has got his son into St. Frank's?" said Mr. Carroll, in a worried voice over the wires. "That's bad, Gatfield. This alone is giving the boy a good standing."

"And, what is more, the unconventional ways of these people are not only amusing the countryside, but the countryside is impressed," said Gatfield. "That plan of ours, sir, is a wash-out. Far better do as I suggested at first."

"In heaven's name, man, be careful!" came Mr. Carroll's voice. "Are you a fool, to talk like this over the telephone?"

"We've said nothing that matters," replied Mr. Gatfield calmly. "Have I your authority to— Well, you know what I mean."

Mr. Crowell surveyed the young rancher-viscount. " I am not sure that I can accept you as a pupil in that attire ! " he said severely.



" No ! " came the millionaire's agitated voice. " No, Gatfield ! Certainly not ! Never for a moment do I sanction it ! "

" But if something—happens ? "

" I don't know what you mean. "

" I think you do, sir, " said Mr. Gatfield smoothly. " I'm telling you that there'll never be another chance like this. "

" You must use your own judgment, Gatfield, " came the voice. " Once and for all, I tell you that I will be no party to what you have suggested. "

Mr. Gatfield rang off, smiling. There was a contemptuous twist of his lips. So easy for Mortimer Carroll to withhold his sanction; yet all the time he was passively granting it. For if something did happen, he would be ready enough to step into the earldom.

Leaving the telephone, the private secretary went along to the Wheatsheaf, in the middle of Bannington High Street. The Wheatsheaf was not such a palatial hotel as the Grapes; but, at the same time, it was a famous old hostelry, with a history reaching back far into the old coaching days.

A snooker match was in progress in the billiard-room when Mr. Gatfield entered. He took his place on one of the lounges next to a respectably dressed man who had the indefinable air of an indoor manservant about him.

" Evening, Leach ! " said Mr. Gatfield pleasantly.

" Good-evening, sir ! " said the other, with respect.

" Interested in this game ? "

" Not particularly, sir, " said Leach indifferently. " They're both pretty hopeless. They can't pot a colour to save their lives. "

" If you'd care to come with me, I might have something of interest to tell you, " said Mr. Gatfield. " But as it may be prudent for us not to be seen together, I'll leave first, and you can meet me at the corner of Walcott Lane in five minutes. "

Leach looked rather surprised.

" Is it about a job, sir ? " he asked eagerly.

" Yes, a job, " nodded Mr. Gatfield, rising.

When he reached Walcott Lane—a quiet by-road leading out of the High Street—he paused, and lit a cigarette.

He had been keeping his eye on John Leach fairly closely of late. The man might be useful ! He had formerly been head footman at Edgemore Castle, but he had been summarily dismissed by the new earl; and, in consequence of that dismissal, he had a grouch.

It was this grouch, in fact, which had first attracted Mr. Gatfield's attention. Leach had been going about uttering all sorts of wild, absurd threats against Lord Edgemore. A singularly useful man, Gatfield decided—and a man, moreover, who knew Edgemore Castle inside out.

Four minutes had scarcely elapsed before Leach came into sight. The surly, sullen expression had gone from his unpleasant face, and he was looking excited.

" Did you mean that, Mr. Gatfield, sir ? " he asked. " About a job ? I can get a good reference— "

"Never mind the reference," interrupted Gatfield. "Come with me, Leach. What I have to say to you must be said in private."

CHAPTER 3.

The Plot!

JOHN LEACH, very puzzled, asked no further questions. He accompanied Gatfield down the lane, and silence was maintained between them until they reached a little patch of open common, deserted and barren.

"You don't like the new Earl of Edgemore, do you, Leach?" asked Gatfield bluntly.

"Like him?" retorted Leach. "Me? After he pushed me off without notice, sir? I only wish I could get my own back on him!" he added vindictively.

"Perhaps I can help you," said Gatfield. "I think, Leach, that you know Edgemore Castle pretty well, eh?"

"Every inch of it, sir," replied Leach. "Why, I used to play about the castle when I was a kid. I know the place inside out—from cellars to roof. There ain't a hole or corner of Edgemore Castle that I don't know."

"Including the dungeons?"

"Why, yes, sir," said Leach, giving his companion a curious glance. "But why——"

"You know the dungeons intimately?"

"Of course I do, sir."

"Well, that will do for the moment," said Mr. Gatfield smoothly. "I'm going to be perfectly frank with you. For reasons which it is not at all necessary that you should know, I am anxious that the earl of Edgemore and his son should—meet with an accident."

Leach looked mystified.

"I don't understand, sir," he said.

"An accident," said Mr. Gatfield, "in which the pair will unfortunately lose their lives."

"Here, sir, what are you saying?" gasped Leach, turning pale. "Look here, Mr. Gatfield, I'm not the sort——"

"Hold your tongue, you fool!" interrupted the other. "I am being perfectly open and straightforward with you. There's no sense in beating about the bush. These two people from Canada are unwanted; they're a disgrace to the neighbourhood. You have no reason to love them, and——"

"Yes, sir; but, all the same, if you mean what I think you mean, I'm out of it," said Leach nervously.

Mr. Gatfield, who was prepared for this, was quite calm.

"You will understand, Leach, that this affair will be an absolute—accident," he said easily. "If it is engineered properly, there will be no suspicions against anybody. This pair from Canada are new to the neighbourhood—new to the Castle. If something nasty happens to them—apparently by accident—there can be no questions. You understand?"

You, being a man who is thoroughly familiar with the Castle, can be of use to me."

"Look here, sir, I'm going!" said Leach fiercely. "It's—it's murder you're suggesting!"

"You fool! Be careful what you say!" snapped Gatfield harshly. "And let me tell you this; if we do not come to an understanding, it will be perfectly useless for you to repeat any of this conversation. Nobody will believe you. It is merely your word against mine, and, as you have been uttering wild threats lately against the earl——"

"Maybe you're right about that," interrupted Leach. "But you can't drag me into a thing like this!"

"My idea is to do you a good turn, my man," said Mr. Gatfield. "Do as I want you to do, and I'll give you two thousand pounds."

"Two—two thousand pounds, sir!" repeated Leach incredulously.

"Yes. You see, Leach, I am prepared to make this game worth your while," murmured the private secretary. "Providing we can come to an understanding, I will give you one thousand pounds in notes this very night, and, having seen me seal them into a package, we will place the package, in your name, in the safe of the Grapes Hotel. I must safeguard myself to that extent—for you might be tempted to spend some of the money recklessly, and that would be disastrous, for it would set people talking."

Leach, breathless, tried to collect his scattered wits. The proposition was not so repugnant to him now. Two thousand pounds, to a man of his station, was a fortune.

There was silence for some minutes, and now a greedy light had come into Leach's eyes.

"Maybe—maybe you'll give me a hint of what's wanted, sir?" he suggested, in a low voice.

Gatfield smiled to himself. It would be a master-stroke if he got this man under his thumb. For if the commission was successfully accomplished, he—Gatfield—would receive twenty thousand pounds from his employer. And with Leach doing the actual work, Gatfield would be on velvet.

He had no need to fear Leach—because Leach, for his own sake, once he had entered the compact, dared not speak. And if anything went wrong with the plot—if foul play was suspected—Leach would be the first to suffer—and the last to extricate himself from the net. His wild threats against the Earl of Edgemore had placed him into Gatfield's hands, and Gatfield himself was on solid ground.

"There should be many ways, Leach, in which the plan could be accomplished," said Gatfield softly. "The Earl of Edgemore, as you know, is new to the neighbourhood. It is always so easy for a stranger, in a strange place, to meet with an accident. -A fall into the Moor quarry, for instance; an unfortunate plunge into the lake; anything of that nature might happen, eh?"

"But the risk, sir——"

"There'll be no risk at all if you are careful!" interrupted Gatfield. "I am not suggesting that we should do anything to-night. I doubt if we shall have the opportunity. The Earl of Edgemore and his son are alone in the Castle, and they are going on an exploration trip of the dungeons, I understand. I don't quite see how we can turn this information to profit."

Leach, half-turning, stared at Gatfield with an excited look in his eyes.

"Exploring the dungeons, sir?" he repeated.

"Yes."

"And you say they're alone, sir—nobody else in the Castle at all?"

"Yes, but——"

"It might be done, then, sir!" said Leach, his fevered brain fascinated by the thought of the prize. "By Heaven, sir, there'll never be another chance as good. Them dungeons are queer places to explore. Anybody might get lost in 'em—and shut in by accident!"

"Upon my word, Leach, you're right," said Gatfield eagerly. "You know these dungeons, eh?"

"Like I know my own right hand, sir," replied Leach. "But this new earl don't know the dungeons or he wouldn't go exploring. And, as I say, an accident might easily happen. There's something else, too, sir—something that even you don't know!"

"What is that?" asked Gatfield, struck by the man's tone.

"Listen to me, Mr. Gatfield, sir," said the ex-footman, bending nearer. "I'll tell you how it could be done. Yes, and easy—and safe!"

They talked.

THE new Earl of Edgemore, bluff and genial, sat back in his chair and filled his pipe.

"Well, Skeets, I'm figuring that you're anxious to get busy, eh?" he asked dryly.

"You bet I am, pop," said Skeets. "This old castle has sure got me excited. I'm all hot under the skin."

"I'm not saying that I haven't a similar kind of feeling," admitted the earl, nodding. "There's something fascinating about this old place, son. And it's ours—our birthright. Gee! Makes you feel kinda proud, eh?"

They were seated in the great kitchen at Edgemore Castle, and they had just finished their simple supper. A cheerful fire was blazing, the lights were glowing, and there was something homely in the scene. Outside, rain was pouring down in torrents; it had come on some little time earlier. A stiff wind was blowing, too—a regular March gale.

Alone in this great pile, the earl and his son were lords of all they surveyed, as it were. Yet they did not feel lonely. All their lives they had been accustomed to living on the prairie, miles from their fellow-men. Only the age and traditions of this noble castle affected them. They could feel it in their bones. They were awed.

"Pity some of the fellers couldn't come with us, pop," said Skeets, as he and his father rose from the table. "I guess they might have helped; they've explored the old dungeons before."

"So much the better, then, that we go alone," said the rancher-earl. "Half the pleasure, Skeets, of exploring is not knowing what's coming next. We don't want folks with us who know the ropes, do we? This is our castle, Skeets, and we'll do the sight-seeing."

"I guess you're right, pop," agreed Skeets, grinning. "Gee! I'm so excited that I'm all trembling."

Their preparations were simply. Armed with nothing but powerful electric torches, they set off.

They went down the great stone-flagged corridors, peopled with the unseen ghosts of cavaliers in fine raiment, of warriors in chain-mail and clanking spurs. The history of Edgemore Castle was a proud history, and as these two went about their task they felt, stirring in their blood, a thrill which linked them with the age-old past. They were of the breed of the Rossiters. The Rossiters of Edgemore who, for centuries, had lived and loved and fought and died within these walls. The Rossiters had been all-powerful in Edgemore when this place had been a feudal castle, and when the Lord of Edgemore had had his thousands of serfs.

"Gee, pop, I'm kinda scared!" muttered Skeets. "I mean, when I think of the men who must have been down here before us—some dying, perhaps in these dungeons."

"Yes, it's getting into my bones, too," admitted the earl. "But it makes you feel good, eh, Skeets? Say, what do you think about this? Look at these initials cut here—and a date. Gosh! What's this? 1513! That's going back a good way, Skeets!"

They were only at the entrance of the dungeons—for, beneath Edgemore Castle, there was an absolute labyrinth of passages and tunnels, stretching away in bewildering profusion.

CHAPTER 4.

Trapped!

OUTSIDE, in the wild night, a dim, dark figure crossed the park and approached ivy-covered walls. It was a figure of evil, with murder in its heart. John Leach, fevered by the thought of the great prize that would be his; fevered by his hatred for the Earl of Edgemore, was in the right mood for the work in hand.

He crossed one of the inner courtyards, taking care to step only on the paved pathways. Gatfield had warned him against leaving any footprints. He reached a small window, set deeply back in the solid stone wall. The window was protected by a massive iron grille, like the other lower windows of the castle.

But this grille proved no obstruction to Leach. With a gentle heave, he lifted it com-

pletely out of its socket, and set it down on the ground. He knew this trick of old. The window itself was easily opened, and Leach slipped through, closing the window after him.

He needed no electric torch. He was familiar with every passage, every corridor, every stairway. He padded forward gently, his rubber-soled shoes making no sound.

Down numerous corridors, past the armoury, dark and mysterious, leaving the old Norman chapel on his right. Finally, he arrived at Cromwell's Tower, and his heart leapt, when he saw that the great door stood half open.

During the War of the Roses, this part of the castle had been heavily bombarded and damaged. Later, in Cromwell's time, a new tower had been built, and thereafter had been known by Cromwell's name. It was the entrance to the Edgemore dungeons. There were other entrances, as Leach knew, but they were difficult, and for many years had been as good as sealed.

Leach was not so sure of himself now, but he did not hesitate. Creeping cautiously, he descended the worn old steps, feeling his way down a steeply sloping passage, after he had descended a number of steps. Now and again he paused, listening intently.

At last, vague and muffled, he heard a boyish shout. It came from somewhere ahead, somewhere in that labyrinth of underground passages.

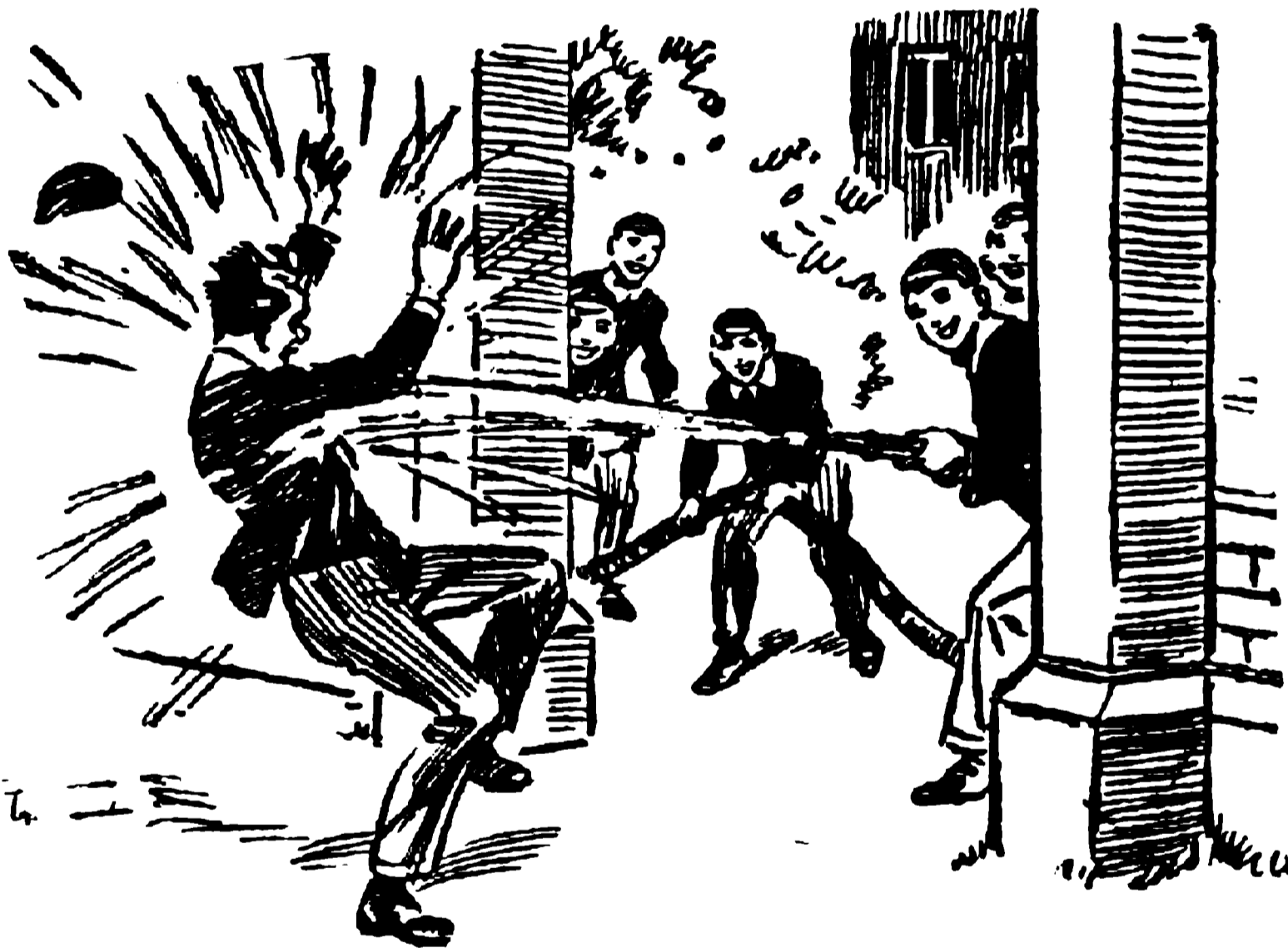
Leach padded on, his heart thumping hard.

"GEE, pop, it makes you think!" said Skeets breathlessly

"Sure, sonny," agreed the Earl of Edgemore, in a sober voice. "Our ancestors built these dungeons—and more of our ancestors, no doubt, perished in them."

They had been exploring for some time, and they were filled with a sense of awed pride. No thought of an enemy, lurking beyond the range of their electric torches, came to their minds. They had no reason to suspect treachery.

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They were entering whole-heartedly into their task. They had opened many dungeons already, and they had been fascinated by the old relics which were constantly coming before their notice. In some of the dungeons there were still the remains of rusty chains, and grim stakes fixed into the walls.

Skeets was rather puzzled after he and his father had descended another flight of worn steps, plunging still deeper into the bowels of the earth. They were obliged to crouch double, in order to squeeze their way through. This lower tunnel was not much more than four feet in height, and they were compelled to proceed with caution.

"I can't get this, pop," said Skeets, as they paused. "Those upper tunnels are kinda dusty and dirty—but this one looks clean. Even these dungeons have a swept-out look."

It was quite true. When they examined one of the dungeons, having opened a heavy door, they could see that it had recently had a sort of spring clean. It was just the same with the tunnel, outside. But the earl was not mystified for long.

"I think I know what this means, Skeets," he said, as they came before another great door. "Say! This looks more important than the others."

He pulled the great catches, and the door swung open heavily. Passing through, they found themselves in a big square dungeon, and here they could stand upright. They flashed their torches about them, and the walls were seen to be damp and slimy—yet clean.

"You see," continued the earl, "these lower dungeons were flooded for years. At least, so I understand. The late earl did a good deal of restoration work—quite recently, too—and one of his tasks was to drain out these dungeons, and restore them. I guess that's why they're looking so clean. The other dungeons, on the upper level, were never flooded, and so they weren't even touched."

Skeets shivered.

"Gee, pop, let's get out of this!" he said. "It sort of gets me! Can you imagine people being imprisoned down here—locked away for weeks and months?"

Subconsciously, he became aware of his father's sudden tense attitude. He looked round sharply, and found the Earl of Edgemoore staring fixedly at the great door.

"Say, pop——" he began.

"The door!" shouted his father abruptly. "Quick, Skeets! The door's closing on us!"

Skeets spun round, and his brain reeled. It was a fact that the great dungeon door was slowly closing. The same thought sprang into the minds of father and son; the door was swinging to by its own weight. They rushed across, feeling foolish as they did so—never suspecting for a second that there could be any real peril.

Clang!

Even as they arrived, the door closed with a thud and a metallic clang. When they

hurled themselves against it, it was immovable.

"Pop!" panted Skeets, white-faced.

"Keep your head, son," said the earl evenly. "Guess this door must have closed of its own accord. Nothing to worry about. We'll fix it, I guess."

But he knew, as he spoke, that his words sounded hollow. The door was seven or eight inches thick, and as solid as a sheet of armour plating; and the earl now remembered that the catches, on the outside, were of a spring type—enormous great metal catches which, not so long ago, had been rusted and useless, but which, in the course of the restoration work, had been rendered workable.

The door had closed—imprisoning these two in this dungeon like rats in a trap!

TREMBLING in every limb, John Leach stood out in the passage.

Success!

How childishly easy it had been for him to creep along that tunnel, to come upon that open door, and gently to push it to—as though it had been actuated only by its own weight!

Not a sound had he made—not an inkling had he given his victims that their plight was the result of treachery, and not accident.

A glow of triumph surged through Leach's veins, and he felt steadied. Taking an electric torch from his pocket, he flooded the door with the light. The catches had sprung right home. That door, from the inside, could only be shifted by dynamite.

He crept away, gloating.

SKEETS, his shoulder aching, stood away from the dungeon door.

"It's no good, pop—it's like a Bank of England vault," he said. "I guess we'll have to make the best of it. But, gee, it's a tough jam we're in!"

"I blame myself entirely," said his father angrily. "I was a fool, Skeets, not to make certain that that door was secure."

"It seemed all right, pop; it stayed open when we first came in."

"Sure it stayed open—but I guess it can't be quite true on its hinges," said the earl. "And it's a heavy door, Skeets; once it started moving it swung completely to, closing with such force that the catches worked. I was mad not to have propped it back."

Never for an instant did the pair realise the truth. They were certain, in their own minds, that their plight was due to their own carelessness. But they were only annoyed. In no way were they alarmed. The prospect of perishing here, as many others in history had perished, did not strike them.

Yet, if they never got out, what would the world think? There were plenty of people who would testify that the earl and his son had decided to go exploring alone. The St. Frank's fellows knew all about it. It would be assumed that they had acci-

dentally locked themselves in this dungeon. The plot was a masterpiece of simple cunning. Skeets took the matter-of-fact view.

"I'm figuring, pop, that we'll be here for twelve hours, at least," he said dolefully. "Gee! That's a tough break! How will we sleep in this damp place?"

The earl made no reply. He was wondering how they would breathe. As far as he could see, there was no ventilation—not a crack or a crevice. But he said nothing to Skeets of these thoughts.

"How do you get at the twelve hours, son?" he asked, smiling.

"Well, when I don't turn up at St. Frank's in the morning, I guess there'll be some inquiries," replied Skeets. "Say, it'll be a heap more than twelve hours, pop! They won't do anything until morning lessons are over. Then, maybe, some of the fellers will come along to make inquiries."

"And they'll find the castle closed—and they'll get no answers to their ringing and knocking," said the earl quietly. "I hate to give you a scare, Skeets, but it may be two days before we get out of this. And it's all my fault, for being so darned careless!"

"No more your fault than mine, pop," objected Skeets. "And, say, where do you get that two days' stuff? The fellers know that we're exploring, and I reckon they'll think things when I don't turn up. They're bound to come along, and make a search."

"I expect you're right," agreed his father. "Well, we'll just have to make the best of it."

But little did they know of the diabolical plot which was afoot.

CHAPTER 5.

The Master Stroke.

A FIGURE, plodding blindly through the pouring rain in the darkness, came suddenly face to face with another figure, which loomed up unexpectedly.

"Who—who's that?" panted Leach hoarsely.

"Don't be a fool!" came the voice of Mr. Stephen Gatfield. "What's the matter with you, Leach?"

"You—you startled me, sir!"

"Your nerves are cracking," snapped Gatfield. "Get a hold on yourself, Leach! Didn't we arrange to meet here?"

"I—I'd forgotten, sir," muttered Leach, clutching at Gatfield's arm. "We're alone, ain't we? Nobody else about?"

"Of course there's nobody else about," said the private secretary. "Whom did you expect to be about? The castle grounds and the park are completely deserted. Well? What have you to report? What has happened?"

Leach told him.

"Splendid!" commented Gatfield, a triumphant quiver in his voice. "You've done well, Leach."

"It was so easy, sir, that I can't hardly believe it."

"You're sure they didn't hear you?"

"Never knew I was anywhere near 'em, sir."

"And you are just as sure that the door is immovably closed?"

"It can be opened from the outside, of course—but from inside, a charging elephant couldn't shift it," replied Leach.

"And this is the correct dungeon—or one of the correct dungeons?" demanded Gatfield. "You waited until they went down to the lower level, didn't you? You didn't lock them in one of the upper dungeons?"

"Here, sir, I'm not a fool!" protested Leach. "Didn't we arrange things that way? I could have shut them in half a dozen of the other dungeons, but I kept back until they went down to the lower level, as we arranged. Curse this rain! I'm soaked to the skin!"

Gatfield laughed—unpleasantly.

"Never mind the soaking, Leach," he said. "You'll get a dry shirt when this affair is over. You don't seem to understand that this pouring, pelting rain is decidedly to our advantage. The harder it rains, the better!"

Leach started.

"You mean that stream in the gully, sir?" he asked, with a flash of understanding.

"Certainly," said Gatfield. "With the stream swollen, a breach in the brickwork will be set down as an accidental happening. Now, Leach, we must make the next move. But are you absolutely certain of your facts?"

"Yes. The old earl was restoring the castle for months, sir," said Leach eagerly. "Those lower dungeons were flooded for years, and one of the first things the old man did was to get experts in, and the experts found out that the flooding was caused by an underground stream of some sort."

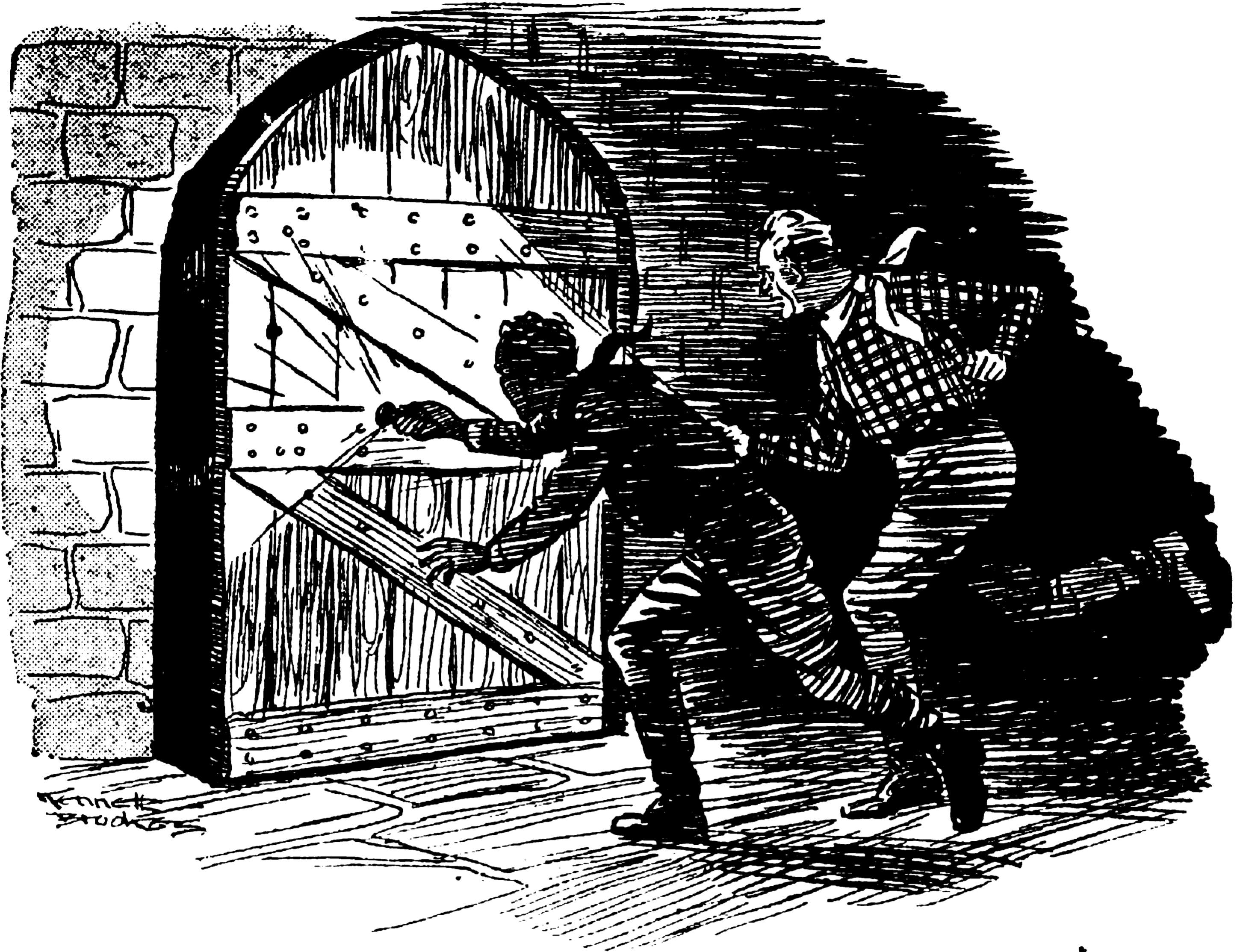
"Yes, I understand that much."

"Well, these people traced that stream, and they found that it flows on to the surface half-way through the park," continued Leach. "I can take you to the exact spot, in the big gully, where the stream goes underground—at least, where it used to go underground. But the earl had the place bricked up, and now the water rushes past that part of the gully and turns off into a new course, emptying itself into the Stowe."

"You are absolutely certain of this?" asked Gatfield sharply.

"Wasn't I here, sir—on the spot? Why, I even helped in some of the work."

"In other words, if we smash that brickwork down, the stream, now swollen, will roar into that old underground watercourse?" asked Gatfield. "And that means, in effect, that the lower dungeons at the castle will once again become flooded?"



They ran towards the closing door. Too late: With a clang it crashed to, and the bolts were shot home. The Earl of Edgemore and Skeets were imprisoned in the dungeon.

"Once that brickwork is pushed over, sir, the dungeons will be flooded within two or three hours," replied Leach. "And there ain't no escape, neither. By the morning, them two——"

He broke off, frightened by the thought.

"No need to dwell upon that, Leach," said Gatfield. "You have done your part—and you have done it well. We must now see about the essential move. This rain is helping us. From first to last, the occurrence will appear accidental. The new earl and his son exploring the dungeons—the accidental closing of the dungeon door. Then, on this wild night, the tragic breaking of the brickwork, and the consequent flooding of the dungeons. There won't be a trace of evidence against anybody. Never for a second will there be any suspicion of foul play. Leach, we're safe. Do you understand, man? Providing you keep calm, and keep your tongue still, you'll be all right."

The full horror of the plot was now clear. Gatfield was taking advantage of the late earl's restoration activities. He had spotted the possibilities at once—as soon as Leach had told him the facts. All that was necessary now was to add the master-stroke to the evening's infamous work.

The two men stood looking down into the gully. It was a wild, little-frequented corner

of Edgemore Park. Trees grew in profusion round about; there were dense bushes and ferns and clumps of rugged rock. Down below, in the gully, a stream rushed with a noisy, continuous roar.

In the summer-time it was a mere trickle, the very embodiment of the poet's babbling brook; but now, after all this rain, it had become a torrent. At one spot, at the end of the gully, the stream took a sharp turn, roaring round past the rock with a fury which was quite spectacular.

Gatfield stood there, his eyes burning with satisfaction. He would get twenty thousand pounds for this job—and for ever afterwards, as long as Mortimer Carroll lived, he would have a hold on the man! Leach was nothing—Leach was the mere tool. His two thousand pounds would be paid at once, and he would be disposed of. Yet Leach, tool though he was, was nevertheless the master-mind of this plot. For without Leach's knowledge, Gatfield could not have put the thing into execution.

"Is this water deep?" asked Gatfield suddenly.

"Not usually, sir," said the other. "I don't suppose it is now. A bit strong, of course, seeing that the stream is running so hard."

"We must go down and make sure," said Gatfield.

Their eyes were thoroughly accustomed to the gloom; they picked their way through the rocks and the ferns, and at last they were standing knee-deep in the rushing stream. The force was so powerful that they could hardly keep their feet.

"It's a rock bed, so we needn't fear tumbling in up to our necks," said Gatfield. "Let's have a look at that bricked-up portion. It ought not to be difficult to break it down."

It was safe, in this secluded spot, to flash on an electric torch, and Gatfield did so. The beam of light only accentuated the eeriness of the surroundings. Plunging along the bed of the stream, with the water rushing about their legs, the two men approached the spot where the stream turned. And here, built into the rock face of the gully, there was a mass of brickwork and concrete.

"I see," said Gatfield, nodding, with full comprehension. "Formerly this water rushed straight into the ground at this spot. But now, owing to the barrier, it takes a turn and flows along the new course."

"That's it, sir," said Leach, peering forward, and pointing. "You can see it plainly enough, can't you? If that brickwork is broken down, the water will pour back along its old course. Can't do anything else. And there's a mighty lot of water to-night, sir."

"Thousands of gallons a minute," nodded Gatfield, with satisfaction. "A miniature Niagara, Leach. Imagine this stream cascading along the old underground watercourse, flowing relentlessly. It will seep up into those dungeons—"

"Yes, sir," gasped Leach. "But—but don't let's think of that, sir! It don't do any good."

"You're right," agreed the other. "What we've got to do is to smash this wall down. And it has got to appear accidental."

Flashing his light round, he gave a little grunt as he espied, near the water's edge, a splintered and broken tree trunk. Evidently it had been swept down the stream, and had become jammed against the rocks. It was not a particularly big tree trunk—not much bigger than a hefty sapling.

"Luck is with us, Leach," said Gatfield gloatingly. "You and I can just about manage to heave that tree trunk. Come on! We'll see what we can do."

They ploughed their way through the water, and soon they had eased the trunk away from the rocks, and were holding it back on the surface of the rushing stream. It required all their strength.

"We can't lift this, sir!" panted Leach.

"No need to lift it," replied Gatfield. "Hold her steady, man! When I give the word, heave with all your strength and let her go. We might be successful at the very first attempt."

Leach saw the cleverness of the dodge. The tree trunk, end on, would be swept forcibly onwards by the surge of the stream—aided by the push which the two men would give. The end would crash right into the

brickwork and, with any luck, it would make a breach.

"Now!" said the private secretary tensely. They heaved. The water-logged trunk, surging drunkenly in the stream, swept down the gully.

Thud!

It struck the brickwork with terrific force, jammed, and swung sullenly round. Gatfield, plunging his way along the shallow watercourse, flashed his light upon the bricked-up portion. There was no breach, but two or three of the bricks were badly damaged.

Laboriously the trunk was hauled back, and this time it was sent on its deadly errand from closer quarters, the two men helping it.

Crash!

Again it struck, and more damage was done. Four times the conspirators were obliged to repeat this manoeuvre, until they were well-nigh exhausted—until their hands were torn and bleeding. But no traces would be left, for any blood-stains were instantly washed away.

"Not so easy as I thought it was going to be, Leach," said Gatfield savagely. "But we're getting on—we're winning!"

"Some of the bricks is down, sir," said Leach, in a hoarse voice. "Look! The water's rushing through already!"

It was easy enough now. Once the initial breach was made, the widening of it was merely a matter of minutes. Soon there was a great, gaping cavity, and the full roaring force of the swollen stream went cascading and rushing through.

CHAPTER 6.

Floods at St. Frank's!

THE Remove, chuckling, took its seats for supper in the Ancient House at St. Frank's. Most of the fellows had just come away from Mr. Wilkes' lecture, and they had enjoyed themselves immensely.

"There's no getting away from it, you chaps." Handforth was saying. "Old Wilkey is a giddy prize-packet! That lecture of his was worth two visits to the talking pictures!"

"Rather!" grinned Church. "I wish I could remember all his jokes."

The juniors were in high good humour—as they always were after "Old Wilkey's" lectures. Their Housemaster had a flair for that sort of thing, and he could get up on his "hind legs" and talk for two hours on end without repeating himself, and without creating a single yawn. Fellows would sit spellbound, fascinated by Mr. Wilkes' graphic descriptive talk, or tickled by his inimitable wit.

"Pity old Skeets couldn't be with us," said Nipper. "That's one drawback of being a day boy."

"Oh, I expect Skeets is having a good time at the castle," remarked Travers. "He and his father are doing some exploring to-night, aren't they?"

"It's not my idea of a good time, old thing, to grub about in dirty, dank, dungeons," said Archie Glenthorne, with a slight shudder. "I mean to say, think what a chappie might do to his clothes!"

"Skeets' clothes can't come to much harm," replied Travers.

"Good gad! You certainly spilled a mouthful there, laddie," agreed Archie.

The Remove went on with its supper.

"Easter soon," said Handforth, with satisfaction. "By George! We look like having a good time, too!"

"Not if this weather keeps on," said McClure, as a violent gust of wind rattled the dining-room windows.

"Rats! It's stopped raining already," said Handforth. "I had a look as we passed through the lobby. Besides, by Good Friday it might be as hot as midsummer."

"Optimist!" said Church.

"Oh, I don't know—Easter is generally warm and sunny," said Edward Oswald. "We're lucky that way. What about the earl's invite? Are we going to accept it?"

"Most of us are, I'll bet!" said Kirby Keeble Parkington. "It isn't often we get the chance of being the guests of a noble earl in a fine, historic castle."

It was a fact that Lord Edgemore, through Skeets, had invited the fellows to spend the forthcoming holidays at the castle. Skeets had mentioned it during the day, but quite casually. Anybody in the Remove was welcome—the Remove being Skeets' own Form. The earl had given Skeets permission to invite as many friends as he pleased; and Skeets, to be on the safe side, had included everybody in the Form.

So far, the thing was "in the air." Tomorrow, perhaps, when some of the Removites went over and saw the earl, the invitation would take more definite shape. But there were lots of fellows who were keen enough to accept. The Easter holidays, at Edgemore Castle, would be novel and enjoyable.

"We shall have to write to our people, I suppose," said Handforth. "It all depends what they're fixing up for us. Parents are awfully unreasonable sometimes—Hallo! What was that?"

He was not the only one who looked round from the table. Strange sounds were proceeding from behind the closed doors—the service doors, that is. In that direction lay the domestic quarters.

"Sounded like a scream to me," said Nipper. "One of the maids frightened by a mouse, perhaps?"

"What rot!" said Handforth. "Fancy being afraid of a mouse. Great Scott!"

The service doors had suddenly burst open, and Mrs. Poulter, the matron, came charging in, obviously panic-stricken. She was dishevelled, his face was flushed, and her usual placidity was non-existent.

"Mr. Wilkes, sir!" she exclaimed breathlessly. "Oh, Mr. Wilkes!"

Mr. Wilkes, at the head of the Sixth Form table, rose to his feet.

"What is it, Mrs. Poulter?" he asked, with mild disapproval. "Really, you know—"

"The water, sir!" gasped Mrs. Poulter.

"The—er—which?"

"Floods, Mr. Wilkes!"

"I must confess, Mrs. Poulter, that I hardly understand—"

"Through all the store-rooms, sir—and now the water's coming into the kitchens and sculleries!" cried Mrs. Poulter frantically. "You never saw such a thing, Mr. Wilkes!"

There was a mild sensation; and it is to be feared that the juniors, at least, were thoroughly pleased. Anything out of the ordinary routine was to be welcomed.

"Floods, by George!" said Handforth. "But I'm jiggered if I can understand, all the same. There hasn't been much rain. It's been pouring cats and

dogs for three or four hours, but what's that?"

"I wish you would keep quiet, Handforth," said Mr. Crowell tartly, from the head of the table.

Mrs. Poulter, slightly calmer, was recovering herself under Mr. Wilkes' steady eye.

"It was Ada, the kitchen-maid, who found it out first, Mr. Wilkes," said the matron, breathing hard. "Oh, I do wish you'd come down and look, sir! The cellars are completely flooded, and the water's getting into the store-rooms, ruining everything!"

"This is an extraordinary thing, Mrs. Poulter," said the Housemaster. "Have you ever been flooded like this before?"

"Never, sir, not even when there was a week's solid rain," said the matron. "I think a water main must have burst, or—or something like that. The maids have been trying to wipe up the sculleries, but they can't cope with it. It's over their ankles already!"

"I'd better come," said Mr. Wilkes.

He vanished, and the dining-room buzzed with talk. The Housemaster had an idea that Mrs. Poulter was exaggerating—that she was making a big fuss over nothing. But he soon changed his mind. When he arrived in the kitchen quarters he was staggered.

While he was still in the passage he felt his feet splashing into two or three inches of water. There were a couple of steps down into the big kitchen itself, and Mr. Wilkes paused before descending.

"BETWEEN OURSELVES!"

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NEXT WEDNESDAY.

"Sakes alive!" ejaculated Mrs. Poulter. "The water's risen five or six inches just while I've been in the dining-hall, sir! Look! It's over a foot deep in the kitchen!"

"It's coming up, ma'am!" said one of the maids, frightened. "We don't know what to do! It's—it's awful!"

"We must keep our heads, at all events," said Mr. Wilkes crisply. "There is no sense in getting into a panic."

"No, sir," said the girl.

"Does anybody know the source of this flood?"

"That's what we can't understand, sir!" replied the maid. "It's not coming from out of doors anywhere, and there can't be a burst water main, because the taps turn on all right. The water seems to be coming up from the cellar!"

The rapidity of the flood was the most extraordinary feature of the disaster; and it was small wonder that Mrs. Poulter was in very much of a panic. These were her quarters, and they were being rendered untenable.

Mr. Wilkes stood there, listening to the gurgling and swishing of the flood; and there was a new sound now—a violent hissing and roaring.

"What is that noise?" he asked abruptly.

"The kitchen fire being put out, sir, I think," ventured one of the maids.

"Is there anybody in the kitchen?" asked Mr. Wilkes sharply. "If so, they had better come out quickly. There may be an explosion—I don't know. What of the furnace?"

"That was put out five minutes ago, sir!" answered somebody.

Mr. Wilkes was more startled than he cared to admit. The furnace which supplied the radiators of the entire House was out! And the floods were rising perceptibly, even as he watched.

In the dining-hall supper was more or less suspended. Everybody was talking, and the masters and prefects made little or no attempt to quell the hubbub. There was a positive uproar when Stevens, of the Fifth, suddenly pointed to the open door.

"Look," he yelled, "the flood's coming in here now!"

"Great Scott!"

"My only sainted aunt!"

"Look at it!"

Masters, prefects, seniors, and juniors were on their feet. A flow of water had suddenly surged through the doorway, and it was sweeping across the floor in an ominous, relentless manner. It spread at an extraordinary speed, and within a few seconds many of the boys were dancing about and splashing in the water. It swirled and eddied under the chairs and tables.

"It'll be all over the ground floor of the House within five minutes!" said Fenton, of the Sixth. "Can't we do something?"

Mr. Wilkes reappeared, looking agitated.

"I require volunteers!" he shouted. "No, don't all speak at once, you fellows! A dozen will do, or a couple of dozen at most."

He had far more volunteers than he required. Everybody was anxious to help. Every available broom was grabbed, mops and pails were seized, and desperate efforts were made. But all to no purpose. It was soon found that the flood was rising far more quickly than it could be coped with. No matter how the boys tried to sweep the water out of the dining-hall and the passages, it conquered them.

The only thing they succeeded in doing was splashing the water over themselves and drenching each other in their efforts. Hand-forth with a mop was a fellow to be avoided; more than one junior stopped it with his face as Edward Oswald industriously attempted to sweep up the flood-water.

How the flood had begun was a mystery.

There was no known source from which it could have come. Outside the rain had stopped, and the stars were peeping from behind the scattered clouds. There wasn't a trace of flood out in the Triangle, or in the squares. The occupants of the Ancient House could have understood it if all the water was flowing in from somewhere outside. But it wasn't. It was seeping up from the cellars. The very foundations of the Ancient House were in danger!

HOW often it happens that the best laid plans go wrong at the most unexpected of moments!

Mr. Stephen Gatfield, congratulating himself upon the success of his device, thought he had executed a master-stroke in plunging that racing stream back into its old underground course.

But something else had happened—something utterly unforeseen—something which nobody at St. Frank's, at least, could possibly guess.

For only a portion of that stream was racing back along its old watercourse. Most of it had found a new outlet—a fissure deep underground. And all those millions of gallons of water, flowing so rapidly, were taking this new route—and flowing right beneath the Ancient House!

Trapped at this point, the water could find only one outlet—and that outlet was through the Ancient House cellars. Here it was coming to the surface, spreading throughout the cellars, the store-rooms, and the ground floor of the building. It was soaking into the foundations, sweeping away tons of soil, bubbling up, surging, a veritable deluge.

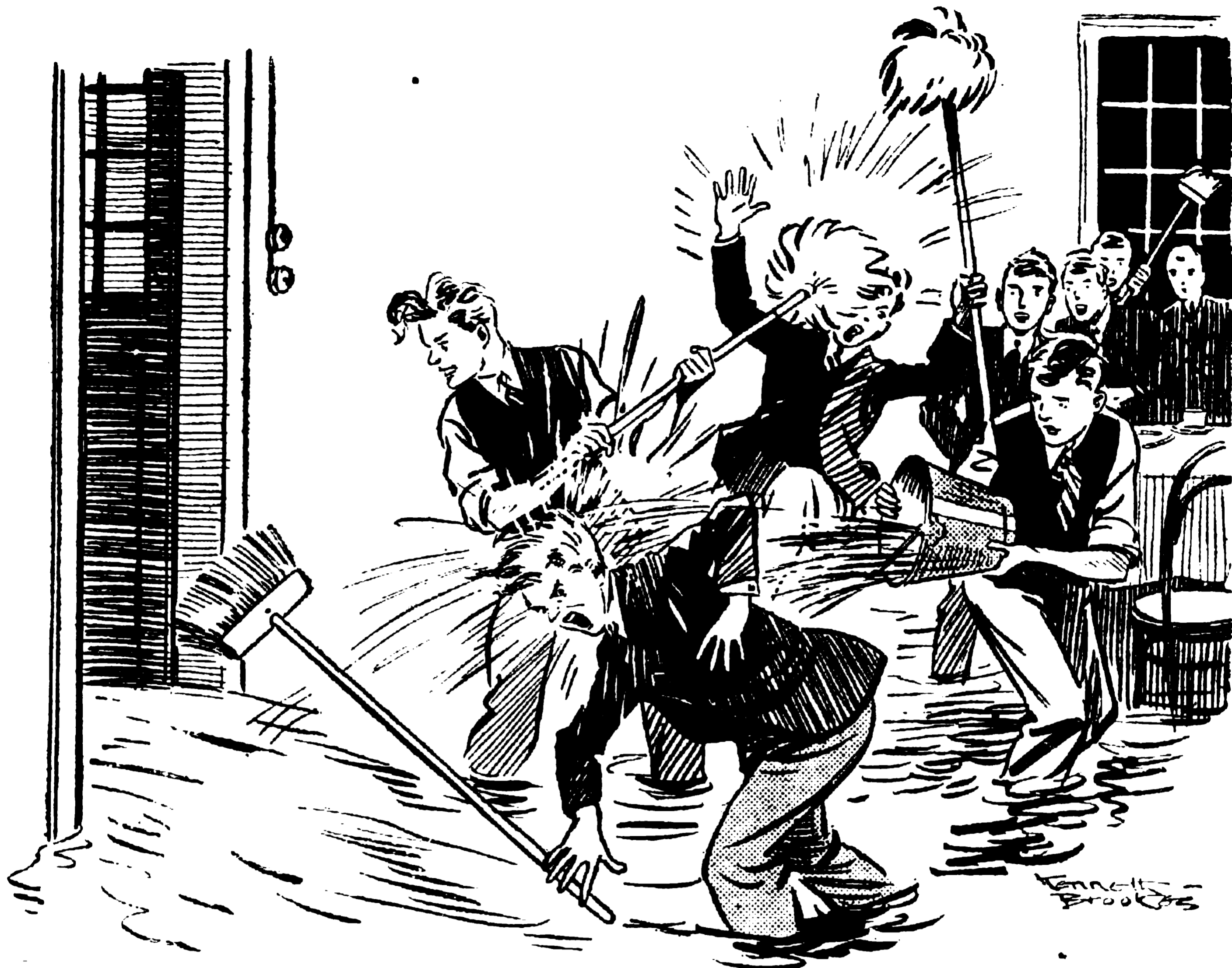
CHAPTER 7.

Washed Out!

"**P**OP!" said Skeets, in a strangely tense voice.

"What is it, son?" came the Earl of Edgemore's query through the darkness.

"What's that noise, pop?" asked Skeets. "Noise?"



Desperately the Removites attempted to mop up the flood waters and stem the flow, but in vain. Relentlessly the water rose higher and higher—

"Can't you hear something?" asked the boy. "Like—like a gurgle. There's no water around here, is there?"

"Impossible!" said his father. "Say, sonny, don't let this thing get you down. Of course there's no water around here. How could there be? Keep your chin up, Skeets!"

Yet, somehow, the earl's tone was not convincing. For he, too, had heard something unusual. They were taking a short rest, leaning against one of the walls—thinking deeply. They had been talking a lot during the past hour, and now a spell of silence had fallen. They were not unduly alarmed—or had not been until now.

Lord Edgemore had become aware of that queer, soft, gurgling noise even before Skeets had spoken. It had been vague and indistinct at first, and for some moments the earl had believed that his hearing was deceiving him. The silence of this dungeon had been like the silence of the tomb.

But now there was that soft, murmuring, insidious gurgle. It seemed to come from beneath the solid stone floor—far, far underground.

"Say, pop, you can't kid me!" said Skeets abruptly. "There is something funny going on!"

He switched on his torch as he spoke, and flashed it round. At first he saw nothing unusual. The door was closed, as before, and there was nothing else but the bare walls and the arched stone roof and the uneven, cobbled floor.

"Gee! That's funny!" said Skeets softly.

"Best put that light out, son," advised the earl. "There's nothing—"

"Great Scott!" ejaculated Skeets, suddenly running to one corner of the dungeon. "Say, look here, pop! What do you know about this? There's water here!"

"Water!"

The earl strode over and, bending down, they both stared at the oily-looking, scummy, black liquid which was seeping up from between the stones. It was moving slowly, insidiously, spreading almost imperceptibly.

"This is mighty funny, isn't it?" asked Skeets, not without a catch in his voice.

"I guess there's no need to be alarmed," replied his father. "This dungeon is sure damp, at the best. It's a rough night, Skeets, and it's raining hard. I'm figuring that some of the water must have trickled down through the ground. It won't be much. A little more dampness won't hurt us."

"But it's spreading, pop," said Skeets breathlessly.

"Nothing—nothing at all," replied the earl. "Put that light out!"

In the darkness they continued to wait—listening to that grim, insidious gurgling. And the Earl of Edgemore knew perfectly well that the water was rising relentlessly, just the same as it was rising near the door, too.

The situation was becoming—ugly.

AND there was another ugly situation, running parallel with this one—and attributable to the same cause. Mr. Gatfield, when he had made that breach through the brickwork in the gully, had not anticipated such a sequel as this.

There wasn't a panic in the Ancient House—but it was very near to one.

The boys, finding their efforts to conquer the rising floods useless, were compelled to give up the task. They wandered aimlessly about through the water, not knowing what to do.

Edward Oswald Handforth, irrepressible in any circumstances, created a diversion by jumping into a bath-tub which happened to be floating about. Grabbing hold of two mops, he propelled himself along, thoroughly enjoying the trip until a torrent of water came cascading down the flight of stairs which led up to one of the upper passages.

Apparently the water had forced itself up inside the foundations, finally to burst its way through one of the walls. Like a waterfall it gushed down the stairs on top of Handforth and the other juniors, who had been watching Handforth's antics in amusement. With yells of alarm they all made a bee-line for the upper regions.

The water was spreading at an alarming rate now. Once fairly unleashed, it roared throughout the passages of the ground floor. Common-rooms and studies were washed out almost before anybody could get there to protect their belongings.

Within twenty minutes, there was over a foot of water in every corridor and study. Crowds of fellows had escaped upstairs, and many were changing into dry socks. The prefects did their best to keep order, but they had a heavy task. In spite of them, confusion reigned.

Boys of the other Houses, hearing what was going on, came across in excited numbers, to stand outside looking on. For the water was now pouring out of the Ancient House, flooding into the Triangle and making rivulets.

Mr. Nelson Lee, the headmaster, was quickly on the scene. But he could do no better than Mr. Wilkes. As to the explanation of this flood, it remained obscure.

"There's no need for you kids to get the wind up," said Biggleswade, of the Sixth, as he stood amongst a crowd of Removites on the upper landing. "The whole thing will be over in about an hour, I reckon."

"How do you know?" asked Handforth excitedly. "The floods might get a lot worse yet!"

"Most unlikely," said Biggy, shaking his head. "There's been such a lot of rain that the cellars have got flooded, that's all. And now that the rain has stopped, the water will soon go down."

"Well, it might—but there's nothing certain," said Harry Gresham. "I say, what a mess up! I'll bet my footer-boots are ruined—I left 'em in the study."

Travers was coming upstairs.

"This is a funny business, you know, dear old fellows," he was saying. "Water is coming up through the drains now—bubbling up two or three feet into the air like geysers. This flood is underground somewhere. Anybody might think there was a stream flowing under the school!"

"But what are we going to do?" complained Hubbard. "We can't go to bed with the House like this! Why doesn't somebody do something?"

"Grumbling won't make matters any better," said Biggleswade gruffly. "If you kids can't—Hallo! What on earth—"

Something had fallen on his head, and it bounced to the floor. Biggleswade was astonished to see a two-inch scrap of plaster. He looked up, and saw a fracture in the ceiling. Cracks were radiating in all directions in the plaster.

"Well, I'm hanged!" said the prefect, startled.

Even as he spoke, several other pieces of plaster fell, and there was a stampede amongst the fellows who were standing immediately beneath. A moment later a great patch of plaster fell on the floor with a resounding thud, sending up an enormous cloud of dust.

"Great Scott!"

"The ceilings are falling!"

"Look!" shrieked Gore-Pearce. "Look at that crack in the wall!"

There was a minor panic now amongst the juniors who were standing near by. In one of the walls—an outer wall—an enormous jagged crack had revealed itself, stretching from floor to ceiling. At the base it was nearly two inches wide, and some of the fellows were ready to swear that it gaped even more as they looked at it.

"Hi! One of you kids had better dash downstairs and tell Mr. Wilkes or the Head!" yelled Biggleswade. "This is getting serious!"

He was thoroughly alarmed himself now, although a minute earlier he had been slightly amused. Like many of the others in the House, he had believed that the flood would soon subside, and that everything would be normal. Things were now beginning to take on a dramatic aspect.

Somebody came rushing up from downstairs, splashing and sogging as he ran.

"I say!" he gasped. "There's an awful smell of gas down in the lower passages! There must be a terrific leak from the kitchens!"

"What?"

"One of the mains must have gone, I suppose," said this bearer of evil tidings. "And there's something else, too! Half the Common-room ceiling has fallen!"

"Oh, my hat!"

The odour of escaping gas now became apparent on the upper landing. Juniors were running about frantically, shouting excitedly. Prefects and seniors did their best to keep order, but all their efforts were useless.

Downstairs, Nelson Lee, grave of face, was talking with Mr. Wilkes. They had just come from the Common-room, where the ceiling had fallen. They had heard that plaster had fallen upstairs, and that cracks were appearing in the walls.

"This is very grave, Mr. Wilkes," Nelson Lee was saying. "We must get the boys out at once—every one of them. Every human being in this building must be got out."

"I was thinking exactly the same thing," said Mr. Wilkes. "This is disastrous, Mr. Lee."

"I don't suppose for a moment that there is any real danger," said the Head. "But there might be—and we cannot afford to take chances. Obviously, this flood beneath the school has weakened the foundations. That is the explanation of the cracks in the walls, and the falling ceilings."

"Good heavens! You mean that the House itself is in danger of collapsing?" ejaculated Mr. Wilkes.

"It might be—and until expert surveyors and others can come here and make a thorough examination, the building must be vacated," said Nelson Lee briskly. "Come, Mr. Wilkes, we must give these orders—and see that they are immediately carried out."

Within three minutes the fellows were streaming out into the open Triangle, more excited than ever. Masters and prefects, out there, were preparing to call the roll. The servants were also included in this exodus.

The smell of gas in the flooded building was now very pronounced, and almost before the last occupant had left the electric light suddenly snapped out. The meter, probably, had ceased functioning owing to the flood—or one of the cables had become severed. At all events, the plunging of the House into darkness was sensational enough.

And it proved the wisdom of Nelson Lee's prompt move. A number of windows had cracked, proving that some of the walls were being badly strained, and that the foundations were sagging.

"All boys will stand clear of the Ancient House," Nelson Lee was calling out. "I am not suggesting that the building will collapse, but—"

Crash!

As he was speaking a portion of the coping fell away and dropped with a splintering, explosive crash on the Ancient House steps. A yell of alarm went up, and a stampede followed as everybody rushed to the other side of the Triangle. Many of

the boys thought, at that moment, that the entire Ancient House was to collapse in a heap of ruins.

"Thank heavens, sir, we got the boys out in time!" muttered Mr. Wilkes. "If anybody had been on the steps just then they would have been killed."

Lee nodded as he stood looking at the darkened House. He was puzzled—and very worried.

This unexpected flood was something that had never occurred in the history of the school; and until the affair was cleared up, until the building was pronounced safe, it would have to be shut off from the rest of the school.

CHAPTER 8.

Dungeon Doom!

THE roll-call was satisfactory.

Every occupant of the Ancient House was accounted for, and everybody stood out there in the Triangle, cold and half-frightened, knowing not what to expect next.

"Listen to me, everybody," said Nelson Lee, as he stood on the Modern House steps. "We're in a difficulty, and we must do the best we can."

There was a hush; everybody listened intently.

"I do not anticipate that the damage to the Ancient House will be serious," continued the Head. "As far as I can ascertain at the moment, the flood is getting no worse. But the foundations are affected, and there may be a collapse. Looking at things in the rosier possible way, I do not think the building can be occupied inside a fortnight—and before then the Easter holidays will have commenced."

"Oh!"

"During the holidays, no doubt, the slight damage can be repaired, so that when the school reassembles the conditions will be normal," continued Nelson Lee. "What we have to deal with, however, is our immediate problem. The only thing for it is for all you Ancient House boys to crowd into the other Houses. It will be a bit of a squash, I am afraid, but at such short notice there is no alternative."

"We'll never get 'em all in!" murmured Boots, of the Modern House. "It'll mean sleeping three in a bed!"

"We don't want those giddy Removites over on our side!" objected one of the other Fourth-Formers.

"Well, you needn't think we want to come," said Handforth, glaring. "We Remove chaps will go in the West House, anyhow."

Nipper, hit with a brain-wave, pushed his way forward.

"I say, sir!" he exclaimed eagerly. "May I make a suggestion?"

"Go ahead," invited Nelson Lee.

"Well, look here, sir; things are going to be beastly awkward if we've all got to crowd into the other Houses," said Nipper. "How would it be if the Remove went along to Edgemore Castle?"

There was a sensation amongst the Removites.

"I mean, including the West House Remove chaps, too," continued Nipper, before the Head could make any comment. "By the West House chaps clearing out, they'd make room for lots of our seniors. You see, sir? With the Remove at Edgemore Castle, there'd be heaps of room for all the others, and there wouldn't be any confusion or congestion."

Nelson Lee could not help smiling.

"I quite see your point, young man," he said. "But in this difficult position we require practical suggestions—not hare-brained ideas of this kind. I'm sorry, but——"

"Hold on, sir!" protested Nipper. "It's an awful cheek of me to talk like this, but there are heaps of rooms at Edgemore Castle—dozens and dozens of bed-rooms that aren't being used!"

"Very likely," said the headmaster. "But there is the Earl of Edgemore's permission to seek——"

"No, sir!" said Nipper. "The Remove has already been invited!"

Nelson Lee gave Nipper a hard, quick look.

"Indeed?" he said, half interrogatively.

"Rather, sir!" said Nipper. "Lord Edgemore has told Skeets—that's his son—that he can have as many Remove fellows as he likes at the castle for the Easter holidays!"

"By George! That's true!" shouted Handforth excitedly. "And Skeets invited the whole giddy Form. I say, sir, we've all been invited to go to the castle!"

"And it's only a few days to the holidays, sir, and it would be an easy way out of the difficulty," said Nipper. "Lord Edgemore's a sport, and he won't mind our piling on him without notice. We can get there in ten minutes; and think how the whole position will be eased!"

Nelson Lee did not have to think long. He knew the Earl of Edgemore, and he was quite certain that his lordship would forgive the unceremonious descent upon him. The circumstances were exceptional—and the boys, in any case, could tumble in anywhere and look after themselves until the morrow. And then the earl would be able to make proper arrangements.

It was certainly an excellent way out of the difficulty.

"I must say, Mr. Lee, that I regard this suggestion of Hamilton's as a good one," said Mr. Wilkes. "It will mean giving the Remove boys some few days' extra holiday, but I cannot see how that can be avoided."

"All right, boys—you can do this," said Nelson Lee. "The Remove will form up,

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and it will march to Edgemore Castle at once. I do not think it will be necessary for any prefect to accompany——”

He was drowned by a roar of cheering, and the Remove, wildly excited, prepared to leave. The Fourth-Formers and the others were feeling very fed up. They had to keep at school until the official breaking-up day, but the Removites were having an extra holiday!

SO it came about that the Remove, light-hearted and happy, soon set out on the march for Edgemore Castle.

It is to be feared that they regarded the flooding of the Ancient House with glee. The prospect of descending upon the Earl of Edgemore, and living at the castle for some time, was alluring.

The flood was the main topic of conversation as the juniors marched along. Excited as the fellows were at going off on this unexpected trip to Edgemore Castle—little did they realise how Fate was taking a hand in this game!—they were worried and uneasy about the Ancient House.

The disaster was so unexpected—so dramatic. Nobody could think of any likely explanation.

There were all sorts of conjectures—all sorts of fears. Many of the fellows were certain that the Ancient House would collapse, and that it would be a heap of ruins by the morning. They were wondering about their belongings.

“It’s not a bit of good indulging in all this guesswork,” said Nipper, after a while. “We shall have to wait and see how things go on. It all seemed worse in the darkness and in the sudden alarm. Let’s keep to the job in hand—and that’s getting to the castle, and finding a doss for the night.”

As they crossed the park they saw that all the windows of the castle were in total darkness. There was nothing unusual in this, for the great old pile was deserted save for the earl and Skeets, and they were probably in one of the rooms on the other side of the big, straggling edifice.

The Remove marched up the drive, singing lustily. The fellows saw no reason why they should take this affair seriously. They were enjoying themselves. When they mounted the great steps somebody pulled the bell and set it clanging noisily. But there was no answer. Ring as they might, nobody came to the door to let them in.

“I don’t like this, you fellows,” said Nipper, frowning. “We know that Skeets and his father were going to explore the dungeons this evening, but surely they wouldn’t still be down in the dungeons?”

“There’s no telling,” said Handforth. “I’ll bet that’s where they are. What are we going to do—stick out here until they choose to come up?”

“Not likely!” said Travers. “Can’t we break in somewhere?”

“Wouldn’t that be a bit thick?” asked Nipper dubiously. “We’ve been invited here, I know, but breaking in—— All the same,

it might be excusable. We shall only catch cold if we stay out here in this wind.”

But breaking into Edgemore Castle—unless one knew the ropes as John Leach knew them—was not such an easy matter!

“**E**ASY, son—easy!” said the rancher-earl, his calmness masking the agony in his voice. “I guess we’re in a tight fix, but we’ll keep our chins up!”

“Look, pop!” panted Skeets. “It’s getting higher and higher as we watch!”

The trap, which had seemed so harmless at first—merely involving a long wait until they were rescued—was now becoming a horror.

There was water in the dungeon—water which reached almost to Skeets’ middle. The coldness of the flood had numbed the boy’s legs until he could hardly feel them. He stood side by side with his father, back to the wall, watching the swirling, eddying black water as it rose.

Things had become really ugly now.

That first sign of flooding, in no way alarming, had soon altered. The water had come seeping up rapidly, flowing across the floor. What was worse, water had oozed in from beneath the great door, proving that the passage outside was flooding in just the same way. Inch by inch, the water had risen, and with it came a steady gurgling and swirling. It was rising all the time.

Again and again the imprisoned pair had hurled themselves against the door—until the earl, realising the futility of it, had sternly told Skeets to desist.

“It means the end, pop!” whispered Skeets, as he clung to the earl. “Gee! Ain’t that a shame? Just when we were sitting so pretty, too!”

“Don’t talk like that, sonny,” said the earl hoarsely. “We’re not finished yet.”

“Aw, shucks! What’s the good, pop?” asked Skeets. “You know as well as I do that we’re trapped. Gee! Trapped like rats! It won’t be more than an hour before this water is over our heads. And even if we swim, what then? It’ll be up to the ceiling next, and—and——”

“Don’t!” muttered his father.

For the earl, too, had foreseen what would happen. What hope was there for them? They were alone in that great rambling castle, and there was not one chance in a thousand that anybody would come. By the morning they would be dead—drowned in this murky dungeon, far, far beneath the castle.

“I can’t just figure it out,” said his lordship slowly. “I understood that these dungeons had been restored. Why are they flooding to-night?”

“Just our luck, pop—after we let that door close on us!” groaned Skeets. “To think that we did this ourselves! Doesn’t it make your flesh creep, pop?”

“It was my fault, son—not yours!” said his father wretchedly. “I ought to have had more sense than to leave that door to itself.

But what's the good of talking now? The harm is done. All we can do is—wait."

"I guess you're right!" muttered Skeets. "And we shan't have to wait long at that!"

CHAPTER 9.

Remove to the Rescue!

THE Remove, denied admittance, was rather at a loss. "It's so strange," said Nipper, frowning. "I can't believe it possible that Skeets and his father would be down in the dungeons all this time. It's getting late now, and Skeets has always boasted of the early hour at which he went to bed."

"Well, we're not going back to St. Frank's," said Handforth flatly. "What would be the good of that? We're here now, and we'll stick here!"

"And camp outside on the steps, I suppose?" asked De Valerie sarcastically. "How do you think we're going to get in? This castle is like a fortress. Every window is barred!"

"Not the upper windows."

"All right," said De Valerie. "You climb up and get in one of the upper windows."

"If you want somebody to climb, I'm pretty handy at that sort of thing," said Stanley Waldo, of Study I. "I'll have a shot, if you like."

"Good man!" said Fullwood. "What asses we were not to think of it before. Waldo's a giddy human fly. He could get into a prison—or out of one, if it came to that."

Without waiting for any of the others to pass comments, Waldo ran round to one of the great buttresses, and a moment later was climbing with amazing agility. The son of Rupert Waldo, the celebrated Peril Expert, he inherited many of his father's amazing qualities. Climbing the side of a house was child's play to this agile junior—as he now proved.

The others watched him in the gloom, awed. He mounted higher and higher, gaining foothold and fingerhold where any ordinary fellow would certainly have slipped. Presently Waldo not only reached one of the upper windows, but he forced the catch and got inside. A cheer went up as he did so—a cheer of enthusiasm and relief.

"Hang on!" sang out Waldo. "I'll be down in a tick, and I'll soon have that door open!"

He was as good as his word. The waiting boys soon heard the bolts being shot, and

With his waterproof torch Waldo located the bolts which locked the dungeon door. On the other side, the earl and his son were nearly all in. Would the St. Frank's juniors be able to rescue them,



then one of the great iron-studded doors swung back, and the Remove poured in.

"Skeets!" yelled Handforth, at the top of his voice. "Hi, Skeets!"

Others took up the call, and they spread themselves in all directions. But there came no reply.

In the kitchen they found the remains of the evening meal; the fire had died down almost to nothing, proving that the rancor earl and his son had been absent for some hours.

Upstairs it was the same; the bed-rooms occupied by the pair were empty. They had been gone for hours—and yet they were not in bed! Neither were they in any of the other rooms of the castle, or they would certainly have come out to inquire the reason for all this din.



"There's only one thing for it," said Nipper, as the crowd collected together in the great hall. "They must still be in the dungeons. We'd better buzz down there and see what's up. Perhaps they've met with an accident, or something."

"By George!" roared Handforth. "In that case, this visit of ours will be pretty handy."

"It certainly looks unpleasant," said Travers, shaking his head. "I don't mind admitting, dear old fellows, that I've got the wind up to a slight extent."

Many of the other fellows were feeling the same. This gloomy old castle was affecting them; they felt so alone, so isolated from the rest of the world. And the total absence of its owner was alarming. They had expected everything to be so different; a hearty wel-

come, a rousing invitation to make themselves at home.

"Come on—the dungeons!" said Handforth briskly. "I can lead the way—I know how to get there. The best entrance is through Cromwell's Tower."

All the fellows were eager to participate—mainly because nobody wanted to be left behind. Penetrating into the dark and mysterious dungeons was not a pleasant job; but, at least, the juniors would all be together.

"By Jove! Look at this!" said Nipper, when they reached Cromwell's Tower. "The door's standing open! So they must be down here! Have any of your fellows got lights?"

"I've got an electric torch!" said Handforth promptly.

"So have I," said Nipper. "We'll lead the way."

Only a few of the others had torches, and they were soon out. With Nipper and Handforth leading, they went trooping down the narrow stone stairs, and they were soon spreading themselves out through the grim old underground tunnels.

At first they found nothing suspicious. They paused occasionally, shouting; but no reply was received. Then suddenly Nipper caught his breath in, and his face had turned deathly pale.

"Look here!" he said hoarsely.

He was standing at the top of a flight of steep steps which led down into utter blackness. Some distance below swirled the dark, scum-covered waters of a flood!

"What—what's that?" asked Tommy Watson, with a catch in his voice.

"The lower dungeons are down here—those dungeons that the old earl restored," said Nipper quietly. "Don't you remember? He had men working here for weeks and months. These lower dungeons had been flooded for years. And they're flooded again now."

"Recently flooded, too!" ejaculated Parkington, flashing his own torch downwards. "Don't you see? The water's rising even as we look at it!"

"Great Scott!" shouted Handforth, horrified. "Do—do you chaps think that Skeets and his pater were trapped down here—caught in this flood?"

"It looks a bit like it," said Nipper. "And that's an explanation why the two are missing. I say, let's shout! Keep quiet, you fellows, and we'll all shout at once when I give the signal. And after that, listen for a reply."

There were only about a dozen Removites close at hand, for this tunnel was narrow, and the majority of the other fellows were spread out beyond. Nipper held up his hand, and then gave the signal.

With one accord, the nearest boys let rip a tremendous yell. Then, breathless, they waited.

"LOOKS as if it's the end, pop," muttered Skeets wearily.

He was swimming almost mechanically now; he could hardly feel his legs at all. Feebly he swung his arms, just managing to keep himself afloat. Subconsciously he knew that his father's arm was supporting him; and the Earl of Edgemore himself, with black despair in his heart, fought on.

Their plight was desperate indeed.

The water had risen, and had continued rising. At last it had reached their necks, and they had been compelled to commence swimming. Deeper and deeper had grown the flood, and although the earl's electric torch had still functioned, he had deliberately flung it away. Far better that Skeets should not know of the dreadful narrowness of their margin of safety.

But the earl himself knew that the roof was not far above their heads now—and with the flood still rising it would be a matter of minutes before they were completely engulfed.

"It's tough, son—darned tough," muttered the rancher. "Guess we'd best have stayed back in Canada, eh? Our inheritance has proved nothing but a curse to us—a death-trap! Yet it was our own fault—my fault! Sonny, sonny, what have I done?"

"Gee, pop, it wasn't your fault," murmured Skeets. "I guess we'd best give in, eh? What's the good of keeping on like this? There's no hope—"

"Am I mad?" interrupted his father suddenly. "Listen, Skeets! Heavens above, boy, I thought I heard something! A shout in the distance!"

Skeets, his heart leaping, endeavoured to keep still in the icy water.

"I'm figuring, pop, that our ears have got kinda tricky," he whispered.

"No, no—listen!"

For a brief moment they remained still, and then Skeets felt something very much like an electric shock pass through him. Dimly, from the distance, came a great shout. It was muffled and indistinct, but Skeets, nevertheless, could tell that the shout had been uttered by his Form-fellows of St. Frank's.

"They've come, pop—they've come!" he panted. "They're going to save us!"

With one accord they shouted—shouted as they had never shouted in their lives before.

"THEY'RE not here—they can't be here!" muttered Church, with a shiver. "Oh, my hat! I believe they're dead! Something horrible has happened!"

"It's this flood," said Nipper. "Don't you think it's queer, you chaps, that there should be a flood here, too? We've been driven out of St. Frank's because of a flood—and we come here to find these dungeons—"

"Listen!" gasped K. K. "I thought I head something then! Let's shout again!"

They did so, and then waited breathlessly.

"Help! Dungeon! Help!"

Like a call from the very bowels of the earth, the dim cries came to the eager, excited boys.

Handforth jumped, and the pallor of his face was succeeded by a hot flush.

"They're down there!" he bellowed. "Hi! Hold on, Skeets! We're coming!"

"Hurrah!"

"Dry up, you chaps!" said Nipper. "We won't help them like that. We've got to find out where they are. Let me shout."

He went plunging down, descending into the water until it reached his neck. Flashing his light ahead, he could see that the flood, farther down, was practically up to the level of the tunnel roof.

"Skeets!" shouted Nipper. "Where are you?"

"Dungeon—left-hand side of tunnel!" came the fevered reply. "Water nearly up to roof!"

"Waldo—Handy—K. K.—Travers!" shouted Nipper. "You're the best swimmers, I think. Come on! Only three or four of us are needed. The rest stay there. Somebody had better dash upstairs to the kitchen and get the fire going thoroughly—see about some hot water, and get some blankets!"

"I'll attend to that!" panted Tregellis-West.

Valiantly the rescuers plunged down into the flood, and they swam desperately. Even as they did so, they realised that it might be touch and go.

Nipper, leading, paused after a while, and shouted again.

"Here—this dungeon!" came a call, near at hand.

"The tunnel slopes down here!" ejaculated Nipper. "The water's nearly up to the ceiling. We shall have to dive for it!"

"I'll have a shot," said Waldo coolly, who was well in the lead.

Once again his remarkable powers came in useful. Diving like a fish, he located the great metal catches of the dungeon door with his waterproof torch. Then down dived Nipper, and both of them tugged at the bolts.

The Remove captain was soon obliged to go up for air, but Waldo remained under water, pulling with all his mighty strength at the locks. He shifted them, rose for air, then dived again, and began heaving against the door.

Only Waldo with his enormous strength could have accomplished the feat. Pushing, straining, his lungs almost bursting with his great efforts, the door at last began to swing slowly open.

CHAPTER 10.**The School at the Castle!**

THE EARL OF EDGEMORE, well wrapped up in blankets, his face reflecting the glow from the roaring, open fire in the great kitchen stove, looked at the crowd of boys with a smile on his rugged face.

"Well, young fellers, there's nothing much I can say—but I guess you know what I feel," he said simply.

"Me, too," muttered Skeets huskily.

They were both in front of the fire, restoring their numbed circulations. Nipper and Handforth and many other fellows were wrapped in blankets, too, and others were busying themselves with hot coffee and food.

The rescue had been accomplished without much difficulty—after that dungeon door had been forced open.

Well night spent, the pair had been carried out of the flood, and assisted to this part of the castle. Skeets, as he felt the warmth flooding through his veins, was deluded into the belief that the whole ghastly occurrence had been a nightmare only.

"There's nothing to thank us for, sir," said Nipper. "We found you missing, and we suspected that something was wrong when we spotted the flooded dungeons. What we did was practically nothing."

"Mighty nice of you to put it like that, sonny," said the earl. "But I know what you did for Skeets and me, and I shan't forget it."

"What happened, sir?" asked Handforth, in wonder. "How did you manage to get trapped like that?"

"It was an accident, I guess," said Skeets.

"Accident—nothing!" growled his father. "It was my fault, boys."

"But look here, pop—"

"My fault entirely!" insisted the earl, in harsh self-condemnation. "I was careless; I didn't make sure that the door would not swing to of its own accord."

Nipper looked puzzled.

"The door of that big dungeon, sir?" he asked. "You say it swung to—of its own accord?"

"Yes," replied Lord Edgemore. "That's how we were trapped! Then the flood came. No need for me to tell any more. If Skeets and I had dreamed that there was any danger of a flood, we should not have risked the trip."

"There's something funny about that flood, sir," said Nipper, frowning.

"Funny?"

"Part of our school is flooded, too—that's why we're here."

"I was wondering how it came about that you boys arrived on the scene so handily," said the earl. "So part of your school is flooded? Young fellers, that was providential—can't you see that? Providential—because it caused you to come here."

Knowing nothing of the foul play, neither the intended victims nor the rescuers could realise how, far from being providential, the

rescue had come about by the very designs of the plotters. It was they who had caused the flood—a flood which, unwittingly, had wrought such havoc in the Ancient House.

The earl listened with interest as the boys told him.

"So we thought it a good idea, sir, to come over to Edgemore Castle," concluded Nipper.

"Skeets says we are welcome here—that you invited all of us to spend the Easter holidays. I dare say we took a lot for granted, and perhaps it was rather like our nerve."

"Say, I'd be a low-down piker if I begrudged any of you the hospitality of my home after what you've done," said the earl. "Young fellers, you're welcome to stay here as long as you like—as my guests. I'm sure proud to have you here."

"Thanks awfully, sir."

"Gee, fellers, everything's turned out all right," said Skeets happily. "Is it on the level that you're staying here for the whole holidays?"

"Rather!" said Handforth. "And we'll have some good times, too. No need to worry about silly floods, or those beastly dungeons. We'll soon forget this affair."

Lord Edgemore was so grateful to the boys that he would have granted anything they wished. Apart from that, however, he was glad to have them under his roof. He liked them—they were his friends.

"I'm puzzled about all that water," he said, during supper. "Where did it come from? The old earl diverted the stream which caused the original flooding—"

"I say," interrupted Nipper, "I wonder if something happened to that stream, sir? Perhaps that would account for the flooding at St. Frank's, too! It might not be a bad idea for some of us to go along to that big gully and have a look at the place where it was bricked up!"

"Wait until the morning, lads," said Lord Edgemore, shaking his head.

The fellows were ready enough to agree to this; they were tired out, and their relief, following so closely upon their anxiety, had resulted in a certain amount of reaction.

So the school at the castle, making anything do for this first night, went to bed.

IN the morning, none of them was any the worse for the adventure. Skeets and his father, perhaps, were stiff and aching, but they were tough prairie types, and they had not come to much harm.

Nipper and Handforth and several others set off across the park in the early morning sunshine, brisk and eager. When they arrived at the gully they stared down into it—and much was explained.

"See that?" asked Nipper, pointing. "Look at that brickwork—it's collapsed!"

"My only sainted aunt!" said Handforth excitedly. "The stream's running into the solid rock—going underground!"

"The whole thing's simple—now we've seen this," nodded Nipper. "That's why those dungeons were flooded! And per-

haps some of the water found another course, and arrived at St. Frank's. I'll bet those surveyor chaps who go to the school will have to come along here and investigate. Anyhow, once this brickwork is made good—and that won't take long—the dungeons will be clear again."

While they were out, they decided to run along to St. Frank's and take this important piece of information to Nelson Lee. They were relieved, upon arrival, to find the Ancient House looking very much its old self. The cellars and the basement were still flooded, and the whole of the ground floor was several inches under water; but the flood had subsided a good deal, and was still going down.

A more optimistic view was taken now. Nobody felt that the building would collapse. Many walls were cracked, and would require shoring up, but after a week or two, no doubt, the Ancient House would be normal.

Meanwhile, the Remove could get along at the castle, and the Remove was in high glee this morning because, owing to the mishap, it had two or three days extra holiday. That, from the Remove's point of view, was distinctly to the good. So while the rest of the school worked, the Remove made merry as guests of Lord Edgemore.

Later—some time after breakfast—Nipper happened to go with Travers to Cromwell's Tower. They went through a small, unfrequented corridor, and it was when they were half-way down this that Nipper suddenly paused.

"What do you make of this, Travers?" he asked, bending down.

There was a little hollow in the stone-flagged floor just here—a hollow which had become covered with a film of mildewy-looking substance. This corridor was hardly ever used, yet right in the middle of that depression there was a clear, unfamiliar footprint.

"That wasn't made by one of our chaps," said Travers.

"Nor Skeets—nor his father," said Nipper. "This is the impression of a rubber-soled shoe, Travers. Doesn't that strike you as being—funny? Who's been here, wearing rubber-soled shoes?"

Travers looked at him.

"What are you getting at, dear old fellow?" he asked bluntly.

"I don't know—but I'm jolly suspicious," said Nipper, staring Travers straight in the eye.

"Suspicious—of what?"

"Foul play, if you want to know," replied Nipper.

"Great Samson!"

"Look here, Travers, keep this to yourself—because it may be only a mare's-nest," continued Nipper. "But I've explored those old dungeons before, and I know the very dungeon in which Skeets and his pater were trapped. And I can swear that that heavy door would never swing to of its own accord. I can't help having a horrible

feeling that it was deliberately, maliciously closed on them!"

"But by whom?" asked Travers, amazed. "I say, you can't make accusations like that! Who would try to murder them in such a way?"

"I'm just as puzzled as you are, and at first I decided to say nothing," replied Nipper grimly. "But the finding of this footprint makes a difference. Somebody has been in this castle—recently, too, Travers. Who made this footprint?"

"There's that brick wall in the gully, too," went on Nipper. "For the life of me, Travers, I can't see how that could have broken in by accident. All these things are vague and inconclusive if taken alone, but together they look nasty."

"What do you suggest, then?" asked Travers, staring.

"Nothing, for the moment—but after this we'll keep our eyes open," said Nipper. "Just you and I, old man. I may be wrong—I hope to goodness I am. But while we're staying in this castle, we'll be on the look-out, just in case anything else suspicious happens."

IN Bannington, Mr. Stephen Gatfield and John Leach, triumphant at first over their assumed victory, were cast into dismay when they learned of the latest development.

The Earl of Edgemore and Viscount Bell-ton alive and well, going about as usual—and a whole crowd of St. Frank's juniors at the castle! It was a staggering shock for the conspirators.

If they had any consolation at all, it was the fact that they had left no evidence. Yet the failure of their plan, which they had thought so cast-iron, threw them into confusion. And now matters were infinitely more difficult, for the castle was overrun with schoolboys.

"We've failed, Leach—but we're still safe," said Gatfield grimly. "Another opportunity will come soon, and we must be on the look-out. And the next time, my friend, we'll make no mistake!"

But, unknown to the plotters, at least two of those schoolboys at Edgemore Castle were on the alert—watching, waiting. And their alertness, perhaps, would make all the difference!

THE END.

(How Stephen Gatfield hatches another plot against the rancher-earl and his son; how the Chums of St. Frank's once again clash with the scoundrel, makes thrilling reading in next Wednesday's superb school yarn, entitled: "The Peril of the Moor!")

Look out also for "Between Ourselves," the first of Edwy Searles Brooks' breezy chats with readers of the Old Paper.)



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.

THE LIMIT.

A school teacher received the following note from the mother of one of her pupils:

"Dear Madam, Please do not give our Charley any more sums like that one yesterday: 'How long would it take a man to walk forty times round St. Paul's Cathedral?' This caused my husband to lose a day's work, and on top of this you marked the sum wrong."

(E. Baker, The Cottage, Wrexham Road, Chester, has been awarded a handsome watch.)

CAN YOU BEAT IT?

Magistrate: "Prisoner, did you steal the rug?"

Prisoner: "No, your worship. A lady gave it to me, and told me to beat it—and I did."

(O. Vince, 13, Racton Road, Fulham, S.W.6, has been awarded a penknife.)

IRISH.

The following notice was posted outside an electric station in Ireland:

"Beware. To touch these wires means instant death. Anyone found doing so will be prosecuted."

(R. Hodgson, 12, Talbot View, Burley, Leeds, has been awarded a pocket wallet.)

MUSICAL MOTORS.

Old Lady (to motorist who is very energetically turning starting-handle of his car): "Here's a penny, my man. Now will you play one of those latest dance tunes, please?"

(H. Frost, 25, Park View Road, Tottenham, N.12, has been awarded a book.)

HIS MISTAKE.

"My shaving water wasn't very warm this morning," complained the boarder.

"Shaving water, indeed!" exclaimed the landlady indignantly. "That was your early-morning cup of tea!"

(E. Dodd, Innisfree, Gordon Avenue, Bognor Regis, has been awarded a pocket wallet.)

TRUTHFUL TREVOR.

Trevor: "Mr. Smith, will you lend dad the garden fork?"

Mr. Smith (deploring absence of the word "please" in request): "Haven't you forgotten to say something?"

Trevor: "Oh, yes! And dad said 'if the old miser refuses, ask Mr. Robinson.'"

(K. Clarke, Lynwood, Talbot Street, Brierley Hill, Staffs, has been awarded a penknife.)

COULDN'T THROW FOR TOFFEE!

Father (severely): "When that boy threw things at you, why didn't you come and tell me, instead of throwing them back at him?"

Small Son (scornfully): "Tell you! What would have been the good of that? Why, you couldn't hit the side of a barn."

(R. H. Ibbett, 31, St. Stephen's Square Norwich, has been awarded a book.)

MORE IMPORTANT.

Taxi-driver: "Help! The brakes are gone—I can't stop the cab!"

McDougall (inside cab): "Hoots! Then for guidness' sake, mon, stop the fare meter!"

(R. Westaway, 16, Virginia Road, Green Lane, Thornton Heath, has been awarded a pocket wallet.)

A CLEVER CLASS.

Uncle: "And so you are top boy in natural history, Freddy?"

Freddy: "Yes, Uncle. Teacher asked how many legs an elephant had, and I said five."

Uncle: "But it has only four."

Freddy: "Yes, but all the other boys said six."

(W. G. Overee, 8, Oriental Street, Poplar, E.14, has been awarded a penknife.)

ON THE SPOT.

A leopard had escaped from a circus, and immediately the manager wired the village police: "If

you see a leopard, shoot it on the spot."

Back came the reply: "Which spot?"

(J. Boorman, Mill Farm, Higham, Nr. Colchester, has been awarded a book.)

ASKING FOR TROUBLE.

Teacher: "If I saw a boy beating a donkey, and stopped him, what virtue should I be showing?"

Bertie: "Brotherly love, sir."

(E. Piper, 14, Robinson Road, Mapperley, Nottingham, has been awarded a book.)

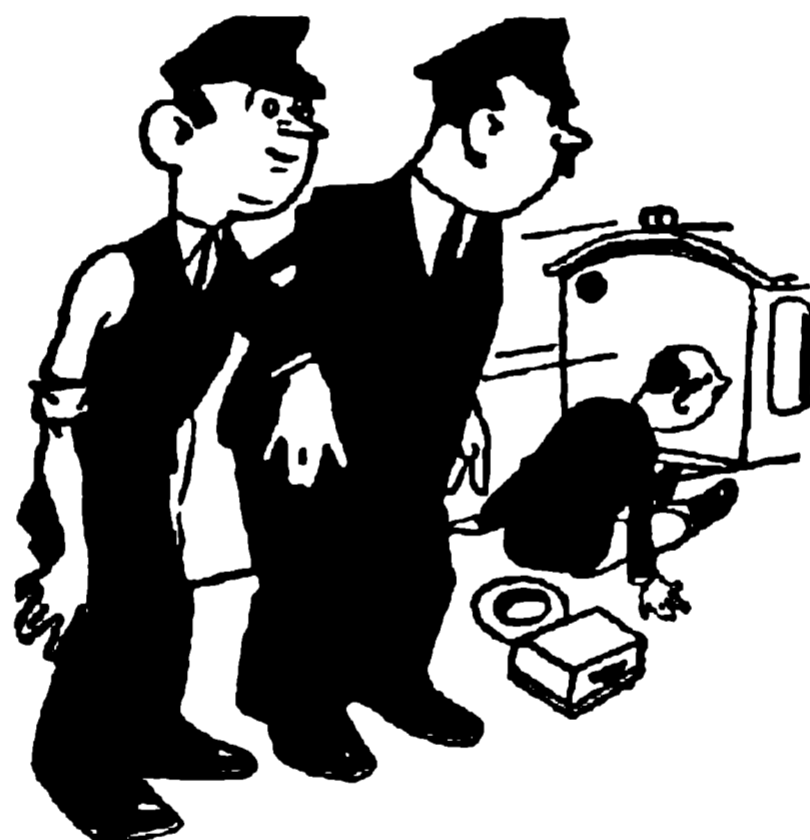
POOR PAPA!

A motorist called at a small shop.

"I want something funny and grotesque for a car mascot," he said.

"Father," shouted the small boy in charge, "you're wanted!"

(E. Lloyd, The Flats, Bournheath, Nr. Broms grove, has been awarded a penknife.)



ELUSIVE.

"Was he trying to catch the train?" asked the station-master.

"He did catch it," replied the porter. "but it got away again."

(C. Booth, 36, Cross Street, Heath End, Pelsall, Staffs, has been awarded a pocket wallet.)

By
JOHN
BREARLEY

The LOST

CHAPTER I.

A Spaniard Gets His Nose Pulled!

THE short Spring afternoon that had bathed Paris in bright but chilly sunshine was drawing to a swift close as Thurston Kyle and his young assistant, Snub Hawkins, left their hotel in the Place Vendôme and sauntered across the wide pavement, filled as usual with fashionable idlers.

The famous scientist had been making a brief stay in the French capital, combining pleasure with business. An important conference, with representatives drawn from practically every country in Europe, had been recently held at the Sorbonne, and the function not having lasted as long as expected, he and Snub had lingered on in the gay city for two or three days holiday before returning to England.

This evening they were motoring to Dieppe to catch the night boat from there to Newhaven. Thurston Kyle's grey touring Daimler, with the

luggage all aboard, stood before the hotel, guarded by a hefty and magnificent commissioner.

Surveying the powerful car with an affectionate eye, Snub hoisted the collar of his heavy coat higher and began drawing on his leather driving gauntlets. It was going to be parky driving to the coast to-night, he was thinking; the roads of North France would be slippery with frost soon after sunset. Then he turned quickly as a surprisingly eager exclamation of greeting, tinged with sharpest astonishment, burst from his master.

"Good heavens! Señor Juan Alvarida! Can it be possible?" Thurston Kyle, with hand outstretched, strode quickly back across the pavement to intercept one of the passers-by. "Señor Alvarida—here in Paris! This is indeed a pleasant surprise," he smiled courteously.



EXPLORER

The man addressed, a stalwart, elegant Spaniard, with the clear-cut, swarthy features of his race, looked up hurriedly—and stopped dead. Had the friendly greeting been a blow across the face instead, its effect could not have been more extraordinary. He looked down at Thurston Kyle's hand, seeming to shrink within himself as from some deadly thing; and only by an obvious effort did he succeed in dragging his eyes up again to meet those of the scientist.

They were dark, brilliant eyes, a shade too small, perhaps, and too close together; but chiefly remarkable at the moment on account of their utterly terrified expression. For a long moment they stared fearfully at Thurston Kyle, and the latter saw recognition in their depths—as well as overmastering fright. But when the man controlled his thin lips sufficiently to speak at last, his words were a blunt rebuff. He looked at the scientist as though the latter was some presumptuous stranger.

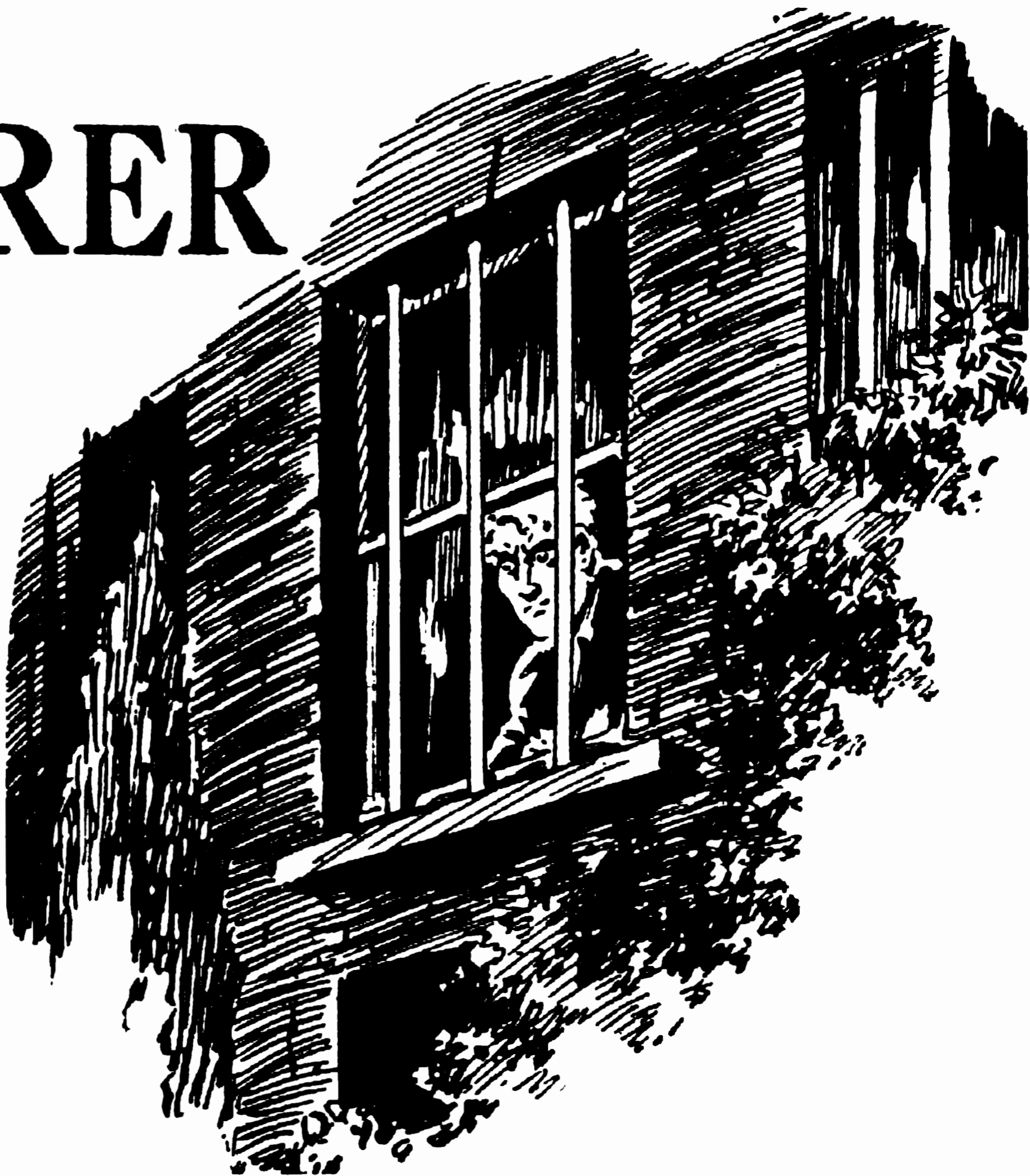
"A surprise to me also, monsieur!" he said icily, in French. "Although not so pleasant. Who are you? I do not know you, I think!"

A quick frown flickered across Thurston Kyle's face, but it was hidden immediately behind an amused and puzzled smile.

"I think you do, senor. My name is Thurston Kyle—you remember me now, do you not? I had the pleasure of meeting you in London, on the eve of your departure for the Congo wilds with my friend, Sir John Alan. I did not know that the expedition had returned. Was it successful? Did you reach the Lost City of Nagir? And how is Sir John?"

He paused with a fresh smile, confident now that the other man would remember him, even if he had seemed temporarily to have forgotten his name. It was hardly Thurston Kyle's usual custom to ask questions so eagerly of mere acquaintances; but, as a very old friend of Sir John Alan, the celebrated explorer and antiquarian, he was particularly anxious to hear news of him.

For Sir John had left England some eight months before on an extremely dangerous and daring expedition into



the wilds of the Congo: through crocodile swamps and matted forests inhabited by hidden tribes, to whom white men or any others were natural prey. The object of the mission had been to discover, if possible, the truth concerning the rich and ancient city of Nagir, supposed to be one of the lost outposts of the old Egyptian Empire.

A wealth of legend and myth had grown up about the place; but its existence had never yet been proved, although many lives had been sacrificed in repeated attempts. The last expedition to tackle the difficult problem had gone out in 1918, and to this day nothing further had been seen or heard of its members. Their fate was just one more of the impenetrable mysteries locked away in the dark heart of Africa.

Sir John Alan, however, wedding vast experience to undiminished bravery, had planned this latest expedition; and, in the face of stern opposition from his friends—Thurston Kyle foremost among them—had departed. And with him, as his second-in-command, had gone Senor Juan Alvarida, a Spanish patrician of old hidalgo stock and a man whose reputation as explorer and fearless big-game hunter had recommended him to the English leader.

Since then, nothing had been heard of the party—in fact, fears were growing rapidly that they, too, were lost. Thus it had come as a

**guard the lost explorer; but they
lose their snap when up against
the Night Hawk's**

WINGS

tremendous shock to Thurston Kyle to meet the Spaniard, here in this fashionable quarter of Paris, when nothing about the return of the expedition had appeared in any of the newspapers as far as he had seen.

But his surprise became greater still next moment. The first look of wild fear had faded from Alvarida's eyes giving place to one of insolent disdain. He twirled a thin black moustache arrogantly between thumb and forefinger as he replied again

"Is this some joke monsieur? My name is not Alvarida, as you appear to think, or anything resembling that. Neither do I know this Sir John of whom you speak. While, as for an expedition to the Congo—" He shrugged and his lip curled. "Allow me to pass on, monsieur!"

Thurston Kyle stiffened at the biting tone. His piercing eyes lost their pleasant expression and narrowed instantly studying the Spaniard's every feature with a closeness that made the other wince. Nor did the scientist move aside as requested. His great figure, larger than ever in the heavy motoring coat he wore, blocked the man's path squarely.

"I fear I do not understand you, señor!" he said coldly. "If my acquaintanceship is distasteful to you, I apologise and will remove myself. I merely stopped you in instinctive surprise at seeing you in Paris, when I thought you far away in the wilds of the Congo. And having done so, I naturally hastened to inquire after my friend Sir John——"

The Spaniard's bronzed face went suddenly pale with anger. He took a step forward, so violently that the movement attracted the attention of others on the pavement, and immediately a few stopped and turned their heads.

"Caramba!" he rasped. "Must I keep telling you? I do not know your friend, Sir John. I have never been to Africa—never. And my name is *not* Alvarida. Now let me pass, or——"

His high voice, with its hint of abuse and a threat, carried far, attracting still more attention. In a moment the two men—tall, excited Spaniard and taller, imperturbable Briton—were the target of curious stares from a little, interested Parisian crowd. The sight of two foreigners working up towards a wrangle was one that promised entertainment.

Under his impassive exterior, Thurston Kyle was beginning to grow hot with indignation and amazement. Like most Britons, he hated a public scene, and would willingly have turned away to his car with a shrug and let the matter drop. But something warned him this would be a mistake.

That the man before him was Juan Alvarida he was willing to swear. He could imagine no reason for anyone with such a high reputation furiously denying his own name, and for a second, seriously wondered if the expedition among the Congo fever-swamps had affected Alvarida's health and memory. He had heard of such cases before. And that being so, it was all the more reason to inquire after the well-being of the man's leader, Sir John Alan, too.

He laid a friendly but detaining hand on the Spaniard's shoulder.

"Señor, be patient, I beg!" he said courteously, sinking his voice. "There is some

mistake here, I feel sure. Eight months ago, almost to this day, I sat opposite you throughout a banquet given at the Royal Explorers' Club in London. That banquet was a farewell to yourself and Sir John Alan; to mark your departure, with a large and well-equipped party, in search of the lost City of Nagir!

"I know you are Juan Alvarida, the famous Spanish hunter and traveller. Even though you have grown a moustache since I saw you last, I recognised you at once, for I never forget faces!" He smiled with charming railery. "Now, señor, own up. Am I right or wrong?"

The Spaniard smiled in answer. But it was a smile of bitter contempt, dark, insulting. He eyed Thurston Kyle from head to foot with a look that made the watching Snub bristle.

"I will tell you what you are, monsieur," he said deliberately, his voice raised for the benefit of the listeners around. "I think you are a trickster of some sort. A confidence man, as the Americans say, eh? I deny emphatically all that you have said. Or perhaps"—twisting his lips with smiling mockery—"you are just an obstinate fool, what?"

A flush of wrath darkened Kyle's handsome face at that, sweeping aside his previous resolution.

"No; I am not a fool—rest assured of that," he replied distinctly, his piercing eyes boring into the shifty ones before him. "But what are you, señor, I cannot quite think. I shall make it my business to find out—at once. Meanwhile, I tell you to your face that you are Juan Alvarida, who accompanied my friend to the Congo. And for some reason you are deliberately misleading me."

"Liar!"

The word was hurled back at him with a passionate venom that brought a gasp from the watching crowd. The anger on Thurston Kyle's face gave way slowly to a suave, mirthless smile.

"So? The pot calls the kettle black, eh?" he drawled in a voice of softest silk. "Well, my friend, you need two lessons before conversing with gentlemen. One in truthfulness, the other in politeness. I will give you the second one right now. Like this!"

Quick as lightning, his left hand came up and seized the Spaniard's prominent nose in a grip that made the man yell with pain. Backward and forwards at arm's length, Thurston Kyle rocked his prisoner, smiling coldly at the other's futile efforts to get free. He threw him away at last with a force that sent him into the laughing crowd, and stood ready to deal with reprisals.

But there was none—at least, not in blows. The moment Alvarida recovered his breath, he burst into a torrent of Spanish abuse, holding his injured nose the while. At the ludicrous spectacle, the Parisian crowd roared afresh with happy laughter, which only spurred him on to more frenzied efforts. He confined himself to words, however—Thurston Kyle looked too formidable a proposition for violence.

At length, with a final curse, he stopped and faced his smiling opponent with bulging eyes and heaving chest. Between clenched teeth he ground out:

"Very well, señor, this does not finish here, you understand? You will regret this!"

Thurston Kyle, shrugging, turned away.

"When you please, Señor Alvarida," he smiled politely, and strode to his car. A French gendarme, bustling up too late, was met with a courteous whispered explanation and a note slipped into his ready hand that dissolved his official frown to smiles and an instant salute. Then, as he turned to move on the merry on lookers, Thurston Kyle nodded to Snub, who let in the Daimler's clutch.

The last they saw of Alvarida he was darting into the hotel, his face distorted with rage and fear.

CHAPTER 2.

A Savage Attack!

OUT of fashionable Paris, through Montmartre and the northern suburbs Snub drove gaily, chuckling inwardly from time to time at thoughts of the scene outside the hotel. The sun began rapidly to sink, twilight was shrouding the countryside when at last he hit the long straight roads outside the city and began to make speed. After ten minutes or so, however, he dropped back to a more cautious gait. His prophecy concerning night-frost had come true with a prompt severity typical of the climate; and before very long the road beneath the tyres was like silvery glass.

As they glided through a little village, perhaps twenty miles or more on their road, Thurston Kyle broke silence for the first time. He had been sitting beside Snub, deeply engrossed in his own thoughts ever since leaving the hotel. A sudden quiet laugh, half-amused and half of annoyance, made the boy glance momentarily sideways.

"Well, that was quite an adventure, eh, lad? Very undignified, though, I'm afraid—brawling in the streets of Paris. Tut!"

"I'd have slung the blighter into the gutter, gov'nor," growled Snub instantly. "Calling you a liar in front of all those grinning people."

"But I wonder what was behind it?" pursued his master; and his voice was so grave that again Snub snatched his eyes from the road in front to glance at him. "That man was undoubtedly Juan Alvarida, John Alan's lieutenant—as sure as my name is Thurston Kyle. Yet John is still somewhere in the Congo, as far as I know. If the expedition had returned the fact would have been in all the papers—and, in any case, I should have heard of it immediately, for John Alan was my friend and I helped to finance his party."

He shook his head doubtfully while Snub sat tight. He knew that his master had kept up a strange, intermittent friendship with Sir John Alan, the explorer, ever since their student days, but this was the first he had heard that Thurston Kyle had backed the famous expedition to Nagir.

"For Alvarida to be in Paris to-day, he must have left Africa at least a fortnight ago," went on Thurston Kyle pensively. "Possibly more. For a fortnight, at least, then, an important member of the Alan Expedition has been in touch with civilisation, yet the world is still waiting for news of the party. Gad, it's very

strange: there's a deep mystery some where. I could almost believe that man was not Alvarida. Only, I know he is."

Snub, swinging quietly round a bend, had a shrewd idea.

"Maybe he proved a wash-out, sir, and Sir John gave him the bullet before starting for the interior? If that's the case Alvarida might be ashamed to own up and he's lying doggo in Paris for a bit till things clear."

Thurston Kyle considered the theory, but shook his head after a while.

"No; somehow I think there is more in it than that. The moment we reach England I shall call on Sir John's daughter Margaret, and ask if she has heard any news. He has left her down in Reigate in charge of an old aunt—I have her address at home. Failing that, I shall call at the Royal Explorers' Club. And then, Snub, if nothing has been heard of the party, I shall return to Paris immediately, find this Alvarida, and get the truth from him."

Snub's hand hovered instinctively over the brake.

"Why not go back now, sir? Blighter may bunk," he said pithily. His master smiled.

"I think not. I shall cross to Paris by the afternoon Air Mail to-morrow if necessary, so he will not have time to get far. In any case, I shall trail him. It is difficult to vanish in this land of France without leaving a trace, my boy. But I must be sure first that I am making no foolish mistake."

Snub sighed and sent the car ahead. He had enjoyed Paris and was not looking forward to returning to England for a few more days. But what had promised to be a little adventure that would prolong the holiday looked like petering out.

The Daimler was travelling at a fair speed down a long and rigidly straight road now, bordered by ploughed fields to one side and a high dark plantation on the other. A few stars and a slender moon cast a faint light on the frosty-white highway, showing, far ahead, a little stone bridge crossing one of the interminable canals of France. Save for that, nothing could be seen; no vehicles, pedestrians, anything, to mar the emptiness of the stretch.

The sight increased Snub's mood of humorous woe. It was just his luck, he reflected, that when everything was ripe for madcap joyous speeding, the road should be like glittering ice. Blow it! Then he looked back sharply and listened as a sound came to him above the purr of his own engine.

"Golly, gov'nor, listen to this chap behind us! Why, the reckless——"

Thurston Kyle, too, looked back. A racing car was coming up behind them, some way off yet, but moving at whirlwind speed, despite the dangerous frost. Its blazing headlights were full on and the deep musical song of its motor, opened right out, grew louder with every second. Whoever was at the wheel could certainly drive. Snub set his jaw abruptly and trod on his own accelerator.

"By gosh, frost or no frost, I'm not bein' shown up by this bloke," he snorted: and the great Daimler, leaping suddenly into top speed, fairly swept down the road towards the little bridge.

Thurston Kyle leaned back, smiling. He knew his young assistant was a driver second to none, and knew, too, that the boy would be upset if ordered to slacken down again. Fields and plantation became mere dark blurs as the long car streaked past.

But the one behind would not be denied. Its driver must have sensed the Daimler's instant challenge and piled on more speed still. Hand over hand it caught up until its lean bonnet was but a few yards behind Snub's back axle and its headlights bathed the English car in brilliant light.

Faster—still faster! The canal bridge was coming close—leaping towards them. To his amazement Thurston Kyle heard something whine shrilly past his ear next moment, and fancied he caught the sound of a sharp report from the pursuer. He looked back. And his eyes became steel points.

For even as he turned a tongue of bright red fire leapt from the midst of the headlight glare, and this time the whine of a bullet past his head was unmistakable. Thurston Kyle's face grew savage.

"Duck, Snub—for your life!" he shouted harshly, his hand tearing at the buttons of his motoring coat to get at the gun in his hip pocket. Before he could do so, however, the roaring car behind swerved dizzily, out and in again—came ranging alongside in a blinding burst of speed.

Up and up crept the bonnet—both cars were hurtling straight for the bridge. There came a third bullet, at point-blank range, but either the terrific speed spoiled the gunman's aim or he did not intend to kill—that way. The slug missed both bent heads in the Daimler by inches and smashed home against the triplex windscreen with a crash. Then the pursuing car streaked into the lead—twenty yards from the bridge—and deliberately pulled over.

Unable to help himself, Snub swung giddily off his course to avoid a collision and tried to brake. Thurston Kyle's gun came out at last, chopping down for an answering stream of lead. And, in that whirlwind-split-second, the treacherous frost-bound road took charge!

The instant Snub eased on his brakes, he remembered the peril—took his foot away, tried to hold the Daimler to its course. Too late. The zipping tyres, squealing furiously, slipped from the road and the great car plunged drunkenly aside. Another shot from the attacking stranger, now roaring over the bridge, slammed into the windscreen. With a despairing gasp, the boy lost control entirely.

Crash-sh! Brr-rang-g!

To the uproar of bursting tyres and buckling steel, the Daimler zoomed through a low paling beside the bridge. A blow as from a giant hand knocked it sideways and wrenched the big wheel from Snub's grasp as the left wing hit a concrete pillar. Like some wounded monster, the Daimler broke free, tottered in a nerve-wracking stagger on the brink of the canal—and fell.

Just for one breathless second, Thurston Kyle had a vision of dark muddy waters rising to meet him. The next he was flung from his seat as the car turned sideways. He plunged headlong into the canal, striking out by blind instinct the moment the icy water engulfed him. A titanic splash and a mad vortex tossed him about

like a cork beneath the surface when the leaping Daimler, heavy with luggage and driven by terrific momentum, hurtled past him and into the canal farther out.

With a frenzy born of rage and desperation, he battled his way above water again, glaring round in search of Snub. Ten feet away, in the centre of swirling waves, were the rear wheels of the car, sticking out of the shallow canal and still feebly revolving. Hampered though he was by his heavy coat, he battled towards them with all his superb strength, groping round and staring everywhere. A dark, motionless blur rising to the surface beyond the car made him gasp with relief and plunge into mightier strokes than ever.

Before he could reach the lad, Snub had sunk again. But Thurston Kyle's iron grip had him before he had gone two feet under, and fairly tore him to the surface. Holding the youngster's limp head clear of the tossing, mud-filled waves, he turned on his back and began slowly, but doggedly, to fight his way back to land.

Short though the distance was, it was a terrible fight, for his saturated coat moulded itself to his limbs and body in a dragging, leaden embrace, and Snub's light weight was increased twenty-fold by the same cause. Foot by foot, but each more laborious than the last, Thurston Kyle ploughed through, setting his teeth fiercely against the numbing cold. His kicking feet touched soft bottom at last, slipped, took hold again; his clutching free hand grasped at something solid near the bank, and he braced himself for a final herculean effort.

Then out of the darkness above him came the very last sound he had expected in that lonely corner of France. The sound of a clear girlish voice, anxious, frightened—and calling him by name in English!

"Mr. Kyle! Mr. Kyle! Hold on—I can help you!"

There came a faint splash as the girl waded in, and Thurston Kyle felt two hands fasten on the shoulder of the unconscious Snub and haul away gallantly. With a heave of his own arm, he hoisted the boy higher out of the water.

A moment later, all three, rescuers and rescued, were safe on the bank.

SOMEWHAT dazedly, Thurston Kyle cleared the dregs of canal mud from his eyes and peered at his strange new ally, dropped so uncannily out of the night.

In the starlit darkness he made out a youthful, slim figure, in leather coat and beret, straight as a wand from well-poised head to dainty but water-soaked shoes. He held out his hand quietly and felt it taken in a firm grip.

"Thank you!" he said simply. The girl gave a breathless, anxious laugh.

"Oh, it was nothing. Thank goodness I—but let us see to the poor boy first!"

Hoedless of her soaked shoes and stockings, she went down beside Snub. Thurston Kyle following. In silence, the oddly-assorted pair examined the lad by the light of the torch the girl pulled from her pocket. While they were doing so, the tough youngster spluttered, opened his eyes and gazed vaguely at his master. He tried to sit up—only to clap a hand to his side

and crumple back again. Thurston Kyle patted him gently.

"Lie still, dear lad. You are quite safe. Are you in pain?"

"Yes—a bit, guv'nor!" gasped Snub, biting his lip. "Feels like—my ribs. I was chucked clear when the car went over—but the steering wheel—jammed me—before—ouch!"

Thurston Kyle's touch was as light as a woman's when he bent to examine his assistant closer, but for all that Snub could not resist an occasional growl of pain. His master straightened at last and rebuttoned his garments carefully.

"Two ribs, I'm afraid, young 'un!" he said, with forced cheerfulness. "It's back to Paris and a doctor for you, my lad, if I can get you there. Think you can stick it?"

"Yes, sir. But how——"

He stopped, looking up in amazement as the girl's voice struck in softly. It was the first time he had noticed anyone else there besides Thurston Kyle.

"My car is on the bridge," she said quietly. "It's only a two-seater with a dickey, but it's fast and——" She glanced significantly towards the dim wreckage of the Daimler in mid-canal. Thurston Kyle spoke with quick gratitude.

"My dear young lady, your kindness to two strangers is——"

He broke off abruptly, bending his brows closer as the girl laughed with a little mischievous lilt. Were they strangers? The pretty voice, agitated though it had been, had sounded curiously familiar all through; and though he had only vaguely registered the fact at the time, he remembered now with sharp astonishment that she had called him by name when he was struggling in the canal.

But what was an acquaintance of his doing here—on the banks of a lonely French canal? It also dawned on him suddenly, from her remarks and general manner, that she must have been following——

His flood of thoughts came to an abrupt stop. As though she knew what was passing in his mind, the girl twitched her flashlight away from Snub, held it up and framed her white but



The car crashed over the bridge parapet, and Snub and Thurston Kyle were flung into the dark canal below.

smiling face in the beam. Thurston Kyle gave a gasp of surprise. Then:

"Margaret! Margaret Alan—John Alan's daughter!"

"Right first time, Mr. Kyle!"

For a moment silence followed. Small wonder that the girl's voice had struck a chord of memory—he had known her since she was a child, and had last seen her the day the Alan Expedition left England. In fact, the scientist had half-promised John Alan to visit his daughter at Reigate, where she was staying with her aunt, but pressure of work had prevented him from doing so.

Margaret Alan! He knew her as a keen and capable young lady, a sportswoman to the fingertips, and as self-reliant as any boy. But to see her smiling in the glow of an electric torch in this spot, of all places, completely bewildered him.

Only for a moment, however. Then his wits returned to their usual cool poise. There was mystery here with a vengeance. First Sir John Alan's lieutenant sighted in Paris when he should have been in the Congo, and now his only

daughter appearing as if by magic after a murderous attack on a dark highway. He gripped Margaret Alan's hand again.

"My dear girl, this is amazing. What on earth are you doing here? I thought you were in Reigate!"

Margaret shook her head.

"I've been in Paris for a week—alone!" she said quietly. "I have so much to tell you, Mr. Kyle—I could not believe my luck when I saw you outside the Hotel Metropole in the Place Vendôme this evening."

"What? You saw us? Then did you see——?"

"Yes. I saw you pull Juan Alvarida's nose good and hard!" smiled Margaret with a grim satisfaction that made Snub chuckle feebly. "That's why I followed you!"

Thurston Kyle's lips tightened.

"Then I was right. That fellow was Alvarida?" he jerked.

The girl nodded emphatically.

"Of course he was. He's grown a moustache, but goodness, I saw him too many times before he left England with dad to make a mistake. He—he's the reason I've come to Paris. I—oh, I am so worried about dad, Mr. Kyle; and—and——"

Her grey eyes began to gleam suspiciously and there was a hint of tears choking her voice, telling of mental strain and anxiety. Thurston Kyle patted her shoulder and snapped briskly into action.

"Do not worry. I am entirely at your service!" he said, with old-fashioned courtesy. "Now we must get away quickly. Will you start up your car, Margaret? I'll bring Snub. You drive—I'll sit behind. We will report the car smash in Paris, for I must get Snub back to the Metropole without delay. After that—we will talk!"

Heartened by the deep calm voice, the girl turned without a word and climbed lithely back to the road, Thurston Kyle following with Snub in his arms, to where a powerful sports car was drawn up by the bridge. The damage wrought by the Daimler's staggering drive was plain to see: but of their vicious assailants in the racer there was no sign, of course. Dark stillness was everywhere. They must have gone on, or returned to Paris by a different route.

As comfortably as the narrow space allowed, the injured Snub was placed in the seat beside the fair driver—a fact that didn't seem to worry him a bit—and Thurston Kyle clambered up behind in the dickey. Margaret Alan let in the clutch.

All the swift way back to Paris Thurston Kyle sat revolving the bare facts of the Alan mystery in his mind.

No need to go to England now for news of his old friend's expedition. Something was clearly wrong somewhere. Why had Juan Alvarida refused to admit his identity? And had that savage motor attack been anything to do with him, too? Thurston Kyle compressed his lips sternly.

CHAPTER 3.

Margaret's Thrilling Tale!

"AND now, my dear—the full story, if you please!"

Cigar in hand, Thurston Kyle leaned back in the armchair of the comfortable room at the Hotel Metropole, which he had left only a short but exciting while ago, and smiled at Margaret with grave, kindly eyes.

The two had just finished a light, hot meal, and Thurston Kyle was dressed in garments borrowed from the maitre d'hotel while his own were being dried and pressed. He had given a guarded report of the disaster to his car, and obtained a promise that the police would bring back his submerged baggage at once, and also endeavour to trace the scorching racer which had caused the "accident." While Snub, with one rib fractured and the other badly bruised, lay bandaged but comfortable in another room.

Seen in the brightness of the room, instead of on the dark canal bank, Margaret Alan was undoubtedly a striking girl, with corn-silk hair that looked like a burnished helmet when tucked close to her neat head. It was not her prettiness that counted so much with the observant scientist, however, as the striking likeness to Sir John Alan, her father. She had the same steady grey eyes and, under their natural softness, her lips and chin were firmly resolute. Altogether, as Snub had whispered, she looked a "pretty stout troop."

At Thurston Kyle's invitation, she came to the point with almost masculine directness.

"I'll start right at the beginning of this stunt, Mr. Kyle!" she said, in her soft voice, with its touch of schoolboy slang. "From where dad left England. But, first of all—don't laugh at me—I always detested Juan Alvarida from the moment dad introduced me. I'm telling you this so you won't think what I've done since seems utterly mad. He was—oh, I don't know. I just mistrusted and disliked him in spite of his reputation and everything!"

Thurston Kyle smiled inwardly at this typical piece of feminine intuition, but nodded calmly.

"Well, I had letters from dad right up till the day he was leaving M'Bolo, where he'd landed on the Congo coast, for the interior. And somehow, they didn't sound right. He spoke vaguely of little unforeseen troubles, which, knowing dad, worried me lots. Because he doesn't moan about anything—ever. But what worried me most of all was that I got the impression Alvarida was behind all the pin-pricks—although, you bet, dad didn't say so exactly. Then, of course, the letters ceased when the party took to the Bush.

"Months passed; and the next thing I heard was nearly a fortnight ago. Some friends of ours came down to Reigate—they'd just arrived from Paris. And, Mr. Kyle, they swore they'd seen Alvarida, whom they'd met at our house, strolling as large as life in the Champs Elysees here!"

"Ah!"

"Well, of course, auntie and I laughed at first—thought they'd made a mistake. After

a while, our friends agreed that perhaps they had, for the man they saw had worn a moustache, and Alvarida was clean shaven 'cept for side-boards when he was in England. So the matter dropped, although they stuck it out that the resemblance was—terrific!

"But I couldn't get it out of my head. The idea stuck like glue—and the more I re-read dad's letters, the bluer I became. I thought I was being a silly ass—fanciful and so forth—until at last I could stand it no longer. I didn't say anything to auntie, who is a darling, but so old-fashioned. I drew most of the money dad had left me and came here to make sure. Because if the second-in-command of the Alan Expedition was walking round Paris—where was my dad and the rest of the crowd?"

"That was a week ago. Since then I've fairly haunted all fashionable Paris—Place Vendôme, Place de la Concorde, the Champs, everywhere. You see, I know what Spaniards are—I lived with dad in Madrid for over a year. You can always find them promenading where the best crowds are—they just love it. It's a national trait!"

Kyle nodded, marvelling at the young girl's insight, for she was perfectly correct.

"I made a guarded inquiry at the French Sureté, but the police there couldn't help—no Spaniard named Alvarida was registered there—and I was getting gradually fed-up. But still I had that feeling something was wrong. And it was!" She clenched a small fist. "For to-day, just after lunch, I saw Juan Alvarida strolling leisurely past the Louvre!"

"Well done!" Thurston Kyle's eyes glowed with the exclamation. Already Margaret's iron determination had gone right to his own resolute heart. "And then?"

"I followed him like a lost dog, you bet!" replied Margaret promptly and quaintly. "He took a cab after a while, but fortunately I had my car. The taxi took him down to Vincennes, to a long boulevard near the Bois—all old detached houses standing in their own grounds. Of course, I marked the house he entered, cruised past and parked the car round the corner. Then I pussyfooted back!"

"It was a lonely, gloomy-looking hole—big iron gates, thick shrubbery beyond. No one was about so I peered in through the bars. And after about five minutes of that, I saw—" her grey eyes became hard and frosty as she leaned forward with dramatic emphasis—"dad!"

There was a stunned silence for a moment. Then:

"Wha-at!" Thurston Kyle almost leapt to his feet. "You saw your father? John Alan is here in Paris—too?"

"Yes." The girl nodded slowly. "I saw a face looking out from a top window first—a window with iron bars to it, Mr. Kyle. For a moment I couldn't see the features plainly until the man moved so that the sun shone fully in upon him. And it was dad!"

She clasped her hands anxiously.

"But, oh, Mr. Kyle something dreadful has happened to him! His hair seemed grey, and his poor face—it was sunken and sad; no, desperate, rather. I couldn't be mistaken.

though; it was dad all right. A prisoner in the hands of that Spanish beast I never trusted!"

Thurston Kyle put out a firm hand to soothe her down.

"Steady, my dear girl! You have done splendidly. Don't break down yet!"

The girl's red lips tightened in a big effort at self-control, and she nodded.

"No, I won't. Well, I almost screamed out to him. I think I would have done, but for one thing, and that was an enormous dog—the ugliest, most awful mastiff I have ever seen. He must have slunk from the shrubbery while I was staring at the window, and when I did see him eventually only the iron gates separated us. Mr. Kyle, that dog was a killer. He'd have torn me to pieces if he could. As it was, the moment our eyes met he gave a terrific howl and flung himself full weight at the gates. The howl—it was more like a roar—must have given the alarm, for I saw dad suddenly snatched back from the window and—and Alvarida's face appear instead!"

Carried away, she stopped to gasp for breath, but rattled on once more immediately:

"But he didn't look down and see me; I didn't give him the chance. The instant I saw him, I was off. I ran like a hare to the next house and hid in the front grounds, and when the coast was clear I bolted off again to my car."

Thurston Kyle drew quietly at his cigar. Outwardly, he was as cool as ice, but behind his mask-like face his thoughts were running riot. Not only Alvarida here, but Sir John Alan, too—a prisoner! Then what had happened to the lost expedition? What of the other members of the party—Foster, Sir John's assistant; Hendricks, from the British Museum; and Professor Langdale, the Cambridge historian and antiquarian, to name only the chief white men?

"What then?" he rapped.

"I was in a perfect whirl!" confessed the girl. "I stopped the first gendarme I met, described the house, and asked what it was. He smiled, shrugged, and would have passed on, but I stuck to him. At last, with another laugh, he said it was a private asylum! Dr. Leclerc's Home for Mental Cases, and violent ones at that!"

"Good heavens!"

"Yes, that's what I said!" nodded Margaret naively. "It put me deeper in the rut, too. I thought of racing off to the Sureté, but I didn't. I'm fed-up with French police, anyway. They surround foreigners with red tape and only smile politely if you're a girl."

"Then, what had I to go on when it came to dealing with the officials? Nothing; only that I'd seen a man I thought was Alvarida, a famous explorer known to be on the Congo, and another man I thought was my father, also supposed to be with the same expedition. They'd have laughed at me for a skittish English flapper!"

Again Thurston Kyle nodded. Her suspicions would have sounded very thin to official ears, he knew. But he believed the girl implicitly. Margaret's next words surprised him, however.

"So I made up my mind to cable you, Mr. Kyle," she said. "Dad told me always to get

in touch with you any time I needed advice, and you'd be sure to help."

Thurston Kyle bowed.

"So I did. You'll find my cable when you get home. Meantime, I coasted and hung around the beastly asylum till Alvarida came out again.

"That was about an hour before you met him. I followed him back to central Paris, wishing I was strong enough to tackle the swaggering ape myself, but keeping quiet so long as I could follow him without being suspected. Then you and Snub, whom I thought were in England, came out of the Metropole right across his path, and I nearly fainted!

"I saw you recognise him, saw him insult you. I was among the crowd. Then you—you pulled his nose—a lovely sight—and turned away. I was going to run to you, then, but I didn't. I saw the ghastly evil in his face when your back was turned, so when he dived into this hotel, I followed, thinking to find out his plans for you. Also, I didn't want him to see me with you at all, in case he really took fright!

"I'd noticed your luggage labelled 'Dieppe,' and would have stopped you on the road by wire. So had he. He dived into a telephone booth in the vestibule; I slid into the next one. Then he called up a Vincennes number, and I listened. He was too far gone with fury to care about precautions, and fairly bellowed, so I heard enough!"

"Ah!"

Thurston Kyle's voice was soft, although he guessed what was coming, and Margaret saw that he did. She nodded.

"Quite right. He ordered out three men in a Hispano to get after you and down you. That was enough for me. I bolted from the booth and set out after you in my car; but, although she's fairly fast, she can't live with a Daimler on an open road, even though the frost slowed you down. Nor can she beat an Hispano. Alvarida's car flashed past me with its three men when I was a good two miles behind you and fairly hummed into top speed. Then I came to that long, straight stretch where the bridge was and—*and* saw it all!" She shrugged. "I was too late to warn you, but, thank goodness, I was in time to help afterwards!"

Slowly, Thurston Kyle rose to his magnificent height and looked down at the flushed girl with admiring gaze.

"You are a very brave girl!" he said, in a tone that made her eyes shine.

For some minutes he paced the room, studying the situation from all sides. It was a queer tale, a mixture of boyish pluck and resource and girlish hesitation at the crucial points. But Margaret had achieved her object.

He had no doubt that the girl was right, and that secret disaster had overtaken the Alan Expedition some time back; while the Spaniard, Alvarida, was behind it all. Thurston Kyle spoke gently, but with a certain icy force behind his words.

"I made a mistake in pulling Alvarida's nose," he drawled at length. "I should have wrung his neck! Perhaps I will before the night is out!"

CHAPTER 4.

Kyle's Bewildering Promise!

MARGARET sprang to her feet. "Oh, you will help? But I know you will!"—seeing Kyle's raised eyebrows. "What I mean is, how?"

Thurston Kyle stared at her reflectively for many long minutes through his cigar smoke. At last he said abruptly:

"Can you, by any lucky chance, fly a 'plane?"

The strange question took Margaret aback. Yet she recovered at once and tossed her golden head.

"But, of course, Mr. Kyle. Dad made me learn when I left school. Why, I hold a Croydon certificate!"

"That's great!" Thurston Kyle's voice was curiously thrilling. "I have a plan, but it needs someone with a 'plane, and as poor Snub is out of action——"

"I can do it!" gasped Margaret eagerly.

Just as eagerly, Thurston Kyle waved her back to her seat.

"Right! Now listen carefully to what I have to say, and remember"—he held up an impressive finger—"I must trust you never to tell the full story of what will happen to-night to a soul. You understand?"

Margaret nodded dumbly, and then a tense silence fell on the room, broken only by the scientist's deep, quiet voice as he outlined a plan that left her completely breathless. At the finish, he turned to a writing desk and scribbled a hasty note.

"You have got everything straight? Yes? Very well, then, take this at once to the British Embassy here and insist on finding the man to whom this note is addressed. He is a friend of mine who will spare no effort to help you. He will get you a 'plane, a two-seater. Fly away from Paris as though heading for England; then turn and wheel back. Make the Eiffel Tower your landmark, and keep cruising above the city in a circle. And, whatever you do, be in position at two thousand feet above Paris at two a.m. Is that clear?"

"Y-yes. And—dad?"

"I will bring your father—up to you!" was Thurston Kyle's shattering promise, at which Margaret crumpled in her chair.

"You'll bring dad to me—in mid-air?" she gasped. "But——"

Thurston Kyle raised his hand.

"No questions—just rely implicitly on me!" he smiled. "I want to get him away from Alvarida secretly—my way. Let him disappear literally into thin air. No police fuss, either. We can deal with the Spaniard when we have discovered the mystery behind all this!"

He took the girl firmly by the hand, and all the deep kindness hidden beneath his cold exterior shone in his dark eyes, sending a thrill of comfort and cheer into her worried heart.

"Come; I will see you to a taxi. Do as I say, Margaret, and do not worry. And remember—Eiffel Tower—2,000 feet above Paris—two a.m.!"

He bowed with courteous dignity and opened the door.

THURSTON KYLE'S first act, when he had seen the plucky girl into a taxi, en-route for the British Embassy, was to order a car. He spoke a few brief words to Snub that made the youngster grin at first, and then growl sulphurously because he was missing the fun; and after that, he drove down to Vincennes, a suburb in the south-east of the city.

Finding the boulevard and the grim house in which John Alan was held captive was easy, for Margaret had described it vividly. He parked his car and strolled quietly along in the shadow of overhanging trees till he came to the great iron gates, and peered through. Everywhere was dark and silent.

Brief though his pause was before the gates, it was sufficient to show him a glimpse of the terrible guardians inside. As he looked, stealthy movements caught his eye. Three dogs stole out of the dense shrubbery beyond the gates—huge, savage mastiffs, their great heads and powerful bodies more ominous than ever in the poor light. They must have scented a stranger near at hand, for they stopped all at once. Their baleful eyes gleamed through the gloom towards the man at the gate; then, with a lithe bound, each charged forward, baying furiously. At the same moment a face appeared at one of the barred windows—the haggard face of Sir John Alan.

Thurston Kyle went.

Forty minutes later saw him at the great flying field of Le Bourget—the Croydon of Paris. He found he had missed the night liner to London by half an hour, but, with his passports and papers all in order, he had no difficulty in chartering a special plane. The pilot, a keen, bright-eyed Frenchman, spurred by the lavish tip Thurston Kyle pressed on him, promised to break all records for the trip. Right well did he do it!

Across the dark fields and bright towns of Picardy and Artois roared the speedy flyer, till the dark Channel lay beneath, dotted with the lights of passing ships. Then came Lympne, a brief stop, and up and away again across Kent until the great beacon at Tilsey Hill flashed its warning and a minute later Croydon, in all the brilliance of its floodlights, lay beneath. There, after a smiling parting with his dashing pilot, Thurston Kyle took car for Hampstead at once.

His dark old mansion, in its wide grounds, looked grimmer and lonelier than ever when he let himself in through the wicket-gate, but he was smiling now with quiet enjoyment. Going straight to his room, he took off the borrowed clothes and changed to his sinister, close-fitting flying costume; strode into the laboratory and



Two thousand feet above Paris, the Night Hawk dropped his rescued friend gently into the aeroplane.

took out his great wings. There followed a busy fifteen minutes during which he filled a flask with brandy, his pouch with raisins and tabloid food—and buckled his gun belt round his waist.

At the expiration of that time he stepped silently through the tall French windows, a great mysterious figure, with the wonderful wings tapering behind him. Thurston Kyle, scientist and traveller, had disappeared. He was the Night Hawk once more—ready to tackle the long, weary flight back to Paris and the difficult, adventurous task that lay before him there.

It was one o'clock when he reached Paris again. An hour to find the Mental Home from the air, and drag Sir John Alan, his old friend, from that grim and unlegalised prison.

Locating the place was more difficult work than flying over well-known London; but the first part of his task was made easier by the fact that a long wide thoroughfare, starting from the

Louvre of Paris, splits the city in twain and leads directly to Vincennes, with its woods just beyond.

The Night Hawk followed this route until he came to the suburb itself, and there he flitted fantastically above the darker side avenues sinking lower than the housetops, safe in his invisibility. It was, however, with a sigh of satisfaction that, swirling over a group of high buildings, he found himself surging at last down the Rue Henri—in which the mastiff-guarded Asylum lay!

He patted his guns firmly, although he did not intend using them unless forced to do so, and drifted down on the mansion. High trees and bushes filled the smaller garden in front and the far larger one behind, wrapping the rambling Gothic house in mystery and black loneliness. In the front of the house, at least, not a light was to be seen.

With a skilful flicker of his wings, he slid below the level of the high arched roofs, searching for the heavily-barred window at which John Alan had appeared for so short and dramatic a moment. He found it, and peered through. The chamber was a cell. And it was empty.

The Night Hawk bit his lip with fierce vexation.

Was he too late after all? Had Alvarida taken fright and removed his captive to a safer spot already? Thoughts of Margaret's bitter disappointment and the promise he had made to the gallant girl cruising patiently in a 'plane somewhere high up above him, made him launch himself clear of the house again and begin a swift flight round the Asylum. He intended to satisfy himself that Sir John Alan was not inside, if he had to go in himself and shoot his way out afterwards.

As he tilted gracefully round a corner to the back of the house, he saw, for the first time, a light. The glow came from a window high up in the west wing of the place, partly hidden by a frowning, ivy-clad gable. In a flash he was hovering before it, peering in through his goggles. A slow, cold smile curled his lips for a second, then vanished, leaving them set in a straight, dangerous line.

He had found Juan Alvarida again, and he had found Sir John Alan, of the lost Expedition.

CHAPTER 5.

The Avenger!

WITHIN the brightly-lit room, which was obviously no cell, but a tastefully-furnished study, the elegant Spaniard lounged back in an armchair, staring with cruel, smiling eyes at his captive through the smoke of a cigarette. Sir John stood before him, with wrists knotted behind his back.

Hanging above the window, the Night Hawk listened hard to the murmur of voices. His ears becoming attuned to them at last, he was able to pick out the words clearly. Alvarida was speaking in musical English; and for the first time the Night Hawk noticed something else about the man. Across his knees lay a long, thin, vicious whip. A blue automatic gleamed on the padded arm of his chair.

" Know what we want, old fool!" he was drawling. "Why will you be so obstinate?"

Have I not convinced you yet that I will not be trifled with? Tell me of the Priests' Treasure you found in Nagir—and where you hid it. And then——"

"And then you'll kill me right away!" sneered Sir John weakly but fiercely. "No, thanks. You treacherous, cowardly scum! You cause trouble throughout the expedition, you desert with all our arms and stores when the Nagirines become too hot for us and leave brave men to their deaths! What a fool I was to have been taken in by your smooth tongue, you cur. And now, when, despite your villainy, we won through to the Lost City, you expect me to tell you the secret we found there? You money-grubbing gutter-pup, go to blazes!"

"You won't tell me?"—very softly.

"Never—never, I say. You've tortured me since you and your scum caught me when I struggled back from the bush—the only survivor of my party—till even M'Bolo grew too warm for you. Now you've smuggled me to Paris—lodged me in a lunatic asylum and given me the same treatment. Well—get on with it. I'll die with the secret of the Priests' Treasure, even as I would have died if the Nagirines, and the renegade dog who leads them, had caught me!"

Face devilish with rage, Alvarida leapt up without more ado and swished at Sir John spitefully with the whip. Outside, the Night Hawk pulled a gun. But, with the muzzle levelled, he changed his mind and sped to the next dark window.

Click! The window-catch yielded softly to his skilful pressure and he stepped inside. This room was no cell, either, but a living-room like the one he had just left. He folded his wings and tiptoed to the door, opening it carefully. Nobody was in sight. The Night Hawk flung himself into the next room.

"Take that, then. And that—and that——"

Beside himself with uncontrollable fury, Juan Alvarida was flailing the whip down on Sir John, missing more often than not through sheer blindness of malice. He flung round with a passionate yell as the door opened.

The cry died in a choking quail of fear at sight of the dread impassive phantom standing there with grimly-folded arms.

Half-bereft of his senses, the Spaniard tottered slowly back; the whip dropped from his hand. He backed cringingly away until his knees came into contact with the armchair and, as if by instinct, he grabbed at the gun lying there. There came a swift movement from the Night Hawk, a flat report from his hip, and Alvarida's weapon was flicked from bullet-numbed fingers. He collapsed with a strangled moan.

With lithe speed, the Night Hawk closed the door and locked it. A heavy table was whirled against the panels for extra strength; and after that, he turned silently to the awe-stricken explorer and in two deft slashes freed his wrists. No sooner had he done so than Alvarida, with a scream that ran through the house, recovered and leapt straight at his enemy's throat.

A left like a rapier-stroke laid him writhing on his back. Then the Night Hawk reached for the whip. . . .

(Continued on page 40.)

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THE LOST EXPLORER

(Continued from page 38.)

Not until Thurston Kyle's right arm was fired did the rhythmic, whistling strokes cease, and by that time Alvarida was a mere crumpled heap. The whip was bent across a muscular leg and the fragments tossed contemptuously across the room.

"That is repayment for what you did to me, my friend!" said Thurston Kyle quietly at last. "I will decide on your further punishment when I have heard Sir John Alan's story. What that will be—guess!"

"Who—who are you?" The whisper made the Night Hawk turn quickly to see Sir John staring at him with bewildered eyes. He smiled, and held out a leather-gloved hand. With the other hand, he lifted his flying-vizor. The explorer almost reeled beneath the fresh shock.

"Thur——" he gasped; but the Night Hawk's hand across his mouth checked the betraying words. With a last disdainful look at the groaning Spaniard, Kyle pressed his lips to his friend's ear and whispered tensely for some seconds. Sir John began to walk unsteadily towards the window.

Back in the room, Alvarida roused sufficiently to drag himself up on one elbow, and watch the escape of his long-guarded prey. Between clenched teeth he poured out a torrent of foul abuse in Spanish.

"Keep your curses, Alvarida—they'll return a hundred-fold yet!" mocked the Night Hawk. "Remember what I say. This is not the end. Au revoir!"

Sick with pain, fear, and baffled rage, the Spaniard let his head drop forward in a Latin gesture of utter despair. When he raised it again, Sir John was in the Night Hawk's strong arms and was being whirled through the window.

CHAPTER 6.

The Mystery of Nagir!

IN a long rapid climb, the Night Hawk spiralled aloft, holding the weak figure of his friend securely. Beneath him, within a few minutes, all Paris lay spread out like a cluster of beautiful jewels, gathered about the winding Seine. He glided smoothly away under widespread wings to where the enormous Eiffel Tower jutted brightly into the night sky for nearly a thousand feet. His watch said 2.1.

A minute late. But, after another and more rapid climb, he found Margaret Alan and her two-seater 'plane just the same.

Yarr-rr-rr-r! The girl pilot came droning round in a leisurely circle.

Slashing suddenly into full speed, the Night Hawk hurtled towards the sound at a pace that made Sir John grit his teeth. From Thurston Kyle's free hand flashed his torch in a staccato flicker, telling the girl that all was well. She flattered her 'plane out and dropped to a minimum speed, as previously ordered. But not until something that looked like a colossal bird swept a bare feet above her top wing,

bearing a man in its clutches, did she realise fully that the strange, handsome scientist, her father's friend, had somehow kept his uncanny promise.

Coming round in a beautiful wind-slicing sweep the Night Hawk glided back lower still, until he was almost resting on the sloping fuselage. His arms released their burden. Sir John had just time for one half-gasp; the next instant he was lowered gently into the passenger's cockpit. A leather coat and a rug lay folded there; the Night Hawk's arms reached down, assisting him to buckle the safety belt. Finally came the flask of brandy and pouch of food, and Sir John lay back in his padded seat with the air of a man whose tired brain can register miracles no more.

Then a clean, triumphant voice rose above the motor roar and the whine of struts, close to Margaret's ear.

"Head for England now. Well done—well done. I will see you—at Reigate!"

With a swerve and a sudden revving of the snarling engine, Sir John Alan, the lost explorer, was flown towards home and safety by the daughter whose pluck and wit had tracked him to his prison.

Above them, a powerful invisible guardian, flew the grimly-smiling Night Hawk.

His thoughts as he flew were busy with the snatches of conversation he had overheard between Sir John and the Spaniard, Juan Alvarida. He sensed a bitter tale somewhere—a tale that would have to wait until Sir John recovered somewhat.

The Alan Expedition to Nagir had been wiped out, apparently, by the Spaniard's treacherous action in deserting with the arms and stores at the crisis of the journey. In spite of that, however, it was plain that the British explorer, and perhaps some of his friends, too, had got through to the Lost City of the Congo, and there found a vast treasure.

What had Sir John meant by *Priests' Treasure*? And who were the Nagirines; and the "renegade dog" who was their chief?

Little though the Night Hawk guessed, as he sped smoothly to England in the wake of Margaret Alan's 'plane, finding the answer to these questions was soon to involve him in some of the most desperate adventures of his career.

The careless pulling of Juan Alvarida's nose in the Place Vendôme was to start him on a long hectic trail of battle, fierce enough to satisfy even his wild heart.

Not only him, but young Snub also, confined to Paris for a week at least. And last but not least, his cheery squad of rough diamonds, Thurston Kyle's Kittens.

On sea, burning beach, festering jungle, and amid the ruined temples and palaces of the mysterious lost city of Egypt those adventures awaited them—in pursuit of the *Priests' Treasure of Nagir*!

THE END.

(Another full-of-thrills Night Hawk yarn next week, chums, entitled, "The Menace of Nagir!" Crammed with exciting action throughout. Order your copy in advance!)

Breathlessly-Exciting Serial Story by Popular LADBROKE BLACK.



Opening chapters re-told on page 42.)

The VALLEY of HOT SPRINGS

Eric to the Rescue!

AT Eric's statement that he was going to try and corner their opponents from the rear, Jackson nodded approvingly.

"Just ask old Funny Face to throw me a few of the cartridges he's sitting on, will you?" he called back. "I've only got one in my gun."

Danny was rather reluctant to comply with this request, when Eric repeated it to him. It was clear he didn't completely trust their companion, in spite of the solemn bargain they had made. It was only under pressure that he consented to part with a dozen rounds.

"And, mind you, Jackson, I'll have all you don't use off you when this scrap's over," he shouted. "Now then, Mr. Eric, what do you want me to do?"

The youngster hastily sketched his plan.

"What's going to happen to the gov'nor?" Danny objected. "It's asking for trouble to leave him!"

The Kick of An Elephant!

That's what Eric's fist felt like when it socked into the jaw of the rebellious captain of the guard.

The professor was fuming and furious, and with some reason, Eric felt, for Danny had him firmly gripped by the collar.

"Uncle, you'll have to stay here and keep on firing to hold their attention, while Danny and I work round to their rear," the boy said.

"If you'll tell this infernal, meddlesome old fool to take his hands off me, I will perhaps be able to give considered attention to what you are saying," the professor roared.

A wink from Eric made Danny release his hold. The professor shook himself, muttered something about discharging his henchman there and then, and finally insisted on Eric repeating his proposals. The necessity for caution was fortunately shown by an arrow which pierced the sleeve of the professor's fur coat as he moved incautiously from the cover of the house. He dropped instantly to the ground, and with the butt of his gun cuddled against his shoulder, began firing.

"Come on, Mr. Eric!" Danny whispered. "He'll be happy and good now. Which way do we go?"

The inner ring of houses built around the central geyser numbered some three hundred in all. The little lanes which separated them radiated like the spokes of a wheel from a common centre. By covering a quarter of the perimeter of this circle, and then moving cautiously towards the geyser, Eric was at last able to catch a glimpse of their opponents.

They were some sixty of the mail-clad guards, and they were lined up with their bows behind the wall of the ruined house. A figure, visible half-way up the wall, peering through a gap in the great blocks of stone, was clearly the observer who was directing the firing. Even as the ambush came into Eric's view, he saw the man at the observation-post make a signal, and instantly another flight of arrows was discharged.

Danny was whistling ecstatically through his teeth. Eric treated him to a friendly grin.

"Where can we get them best, do you think, Danny?"

Danny, cautiously raising his head, took a rapid survey of their surroundings.

"The nearer we keep to the waterworks the better chance we shall have to plug 'em, Mr. Eric. Them rocks there seem the very thing."

He pointed to two huge twin boulders that stood almost on the edge of the geyser. Between them was a space into which they could both crowd. Nodding his agreement, Eric crawled forward on hands and knees. Presently they were lying side by side in the shelter of the rocks.

"We'd better give them two rounds rapid, and then independent firing, Mr. Eric," Danny whispered. "You give the word."

"Fire!" said the youngster.

They emptied both their barrels. At that distance the heavy duckshot of their sporting cartridges was incapable of doing much harm. It was the sounds of the explosion and the sting of the shot which pierced the fur trousers the guard wore that proved effective. Panic seized upon them. Some of them flung themselves at the wall and began to clamber over. The sharp report of an automatic rang out, and two of them fell backwards.

Now the panic turned into a stampede. The men scattered, flinging aside their weapons, scurrying like rabbits. Eric and

Danny continued firing for some minutes until there was nobody left to fire at.

"Looks to me as if the war's over, Mr. Eric. I'm going back to find the gov'nor."

Wriggling through the gap in the rocks, they walked slowly across the open. Two of the guard lay there behind the wall with bullet wounds through their forehead.

"That guy Jackson is too good a shot for my liking!" Danny muttered. "Look, he's got these blokes, Mr. Eric, just where he plugged the Angekok—right in the middle of the forehead."

The boy turned away and began to climb the wall with the intention of joining his uncle. His head had almost reached the level of the summit when Danny caught him by the leg and pulled him back.

"Not with Jackson there getting a bull every time, Mr. Eric. We'll give him notice first that we're friends."

The precaution seemed quite unnecessary to Eric. As if to illustrate his meaning, Danny took off his fur cap and raised it above the level of the wall at the end of an arrow. Instantly there was the sound of a shot and the cap went flying twenty yards away.

"You see, Mr. Eric? That guy can't miss. That's why I'm going to have the revolver off him to-night. It ain't safe. Better give him a hail."

Eric shouted out at the top of his voice, and a few moments later they were joined by the professor and Jackson.

"I want to know what is the meaning of all this," the professor protested. "These were the guards, and according to the information given me by that very intelligent young woman, the guards are consecrated to the service of the Angekok. This looks to me like a revolt, and a revolt may have very serious consequences."

He pulled irritably at his beard. Jackson, after watching him for a moment, smiled grimly.

"It doesn't need much thinking about, professor. Imatuk, or whatever his name is, is at the bottom of this. He wants to jump my job. You've seen him, and I haven't—not to notice, anyway. He wasn't round here, was he?"

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 captured by the Angekok, or ruler of the valley, but he is killed by Jackson, who assumes his place of office. They make an enemy of Imatuk, captain of the guard, and later, when on a tour of exploration, are attacked by hidden foes.

(Now read on.)

He addressed the last remark to Eric and Danny, who both shook their heads.

"Looks like a carefully worked out plan. He gets a bunch of his fellows to fall in with his plans. He sees us come out here, and he has these lads of his waiting for us to make sure we don't get back. Meanwhile, he does—what does he do?"

He glanced quickly at the professor, and then answered his own question.

"I'll bet a thousand quid he's away back in our quarters at this moment, trying to make a vacancy in the Angekok's job with the end of a spear. I give you best, professor. That tip of yours about hiding the ceremonial duds was the goods. We'd better step lively."

Not one of the members of the privileged military caste, who occupied the bigger houses about the central geyser, showed themselves. There on the plain, a quarter of a mile away, the great pyramid temple stood basking in the sun, standing out against the walls of the glacier. Not a human being moved on the plain across which they had to pass. The main entrance to the temple was on the south side, but, as they had already discovered, admission to the Angekok's private apartments was on the northern side. Here, they had learned, a guard was mounted day and night. They had seen the men in their resplendent mail on duty when they had left on their morning's expedition. Now, as they turned the corner of the pyramid, they saw that the post was vacant.

"It looks funny to me, Mr. Eric," Danny whispered.

Instinctively they all halted. Jackson's curiously white face was twitching. Even the professor was looking about him uneasily.

"Imatuk's at the bottom of this," said Jackson shortly. "We've got to handle him now, or he'll handle us." He snapped some cartridges into the empty barrels of his revolver.

"Let's get it over!" he snapped. "It's Imatuk or me, and we'll settle it right now!"

Danny put a restraining hand on the professor's arm as he would have led the way along the edge of the pyramid to the doorway, which stood exactly in the centre.

"You leave it to Jackson. This shooting-up business is his line. And, look here, if you ain't got your notebook all in a muddle!"

With extraordinary skill he had picked the professor's pocket of his notebook. As he did so, he winked at Eric, and the boy, taking the hint, hastened to follow Jackson, while the professor, forgetting everything in his anxiety about his notes, was kept occupied by Danny.

The two were still talking and arguing when Eric and Jackson reached the doorway. There they paused and listened. No sound reached their ears.

"Like a cemetery," Jackson whispered. "If we're going to tumble to what they're after, we'll have to go right in."

Noiselessly they made their way down the arched stone passage, and came to a halt again at some curtains of skin which gave

admission. They knew, of the Angekok's apartments. Stooping down, they listened. Dimly they reached their ears a faint murmur of voices. Jackson lifted the curtain and peered into the passage beyond.

"There's something going on," he whispered. "but what it is beats me."

There was a clank of metal and then a voice, so muffled that it was but a murmur.

They slipped into the inner passage. Following the direction of those sounds, they crept cautiously forward. Soon they were outside the room where they first had been taken the previous day—the room where the late Angekok had fed them before arranging for their sacrifice to Tormansuk.

Jackson halted outside the hangings which covered the inner doorway of the room. His whole figure was very tense. With his left hand he motioned to Eric to remain quiet.

The voice from the room beyond—a man's voice—now rose to a storm of passionate anger. Then there was silence for a moment. Eric felt his heart beating painfully against his ribs. What was going to happen?

Even as he asked himself that question, from the room beyond came a girl's voice—a voice that he knew—followed instantly by a shrill scream as of somebody in agony.

(Continued on next page.)

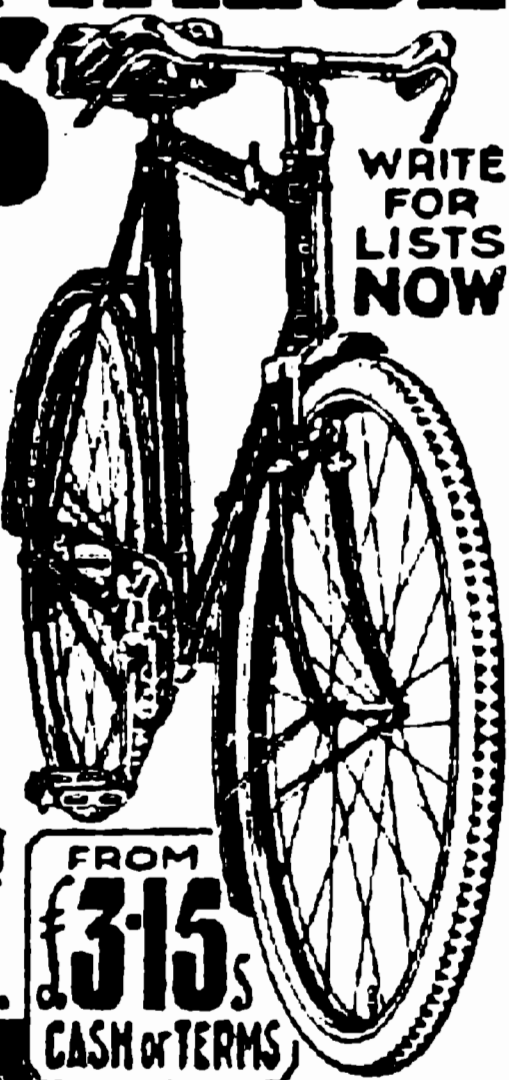
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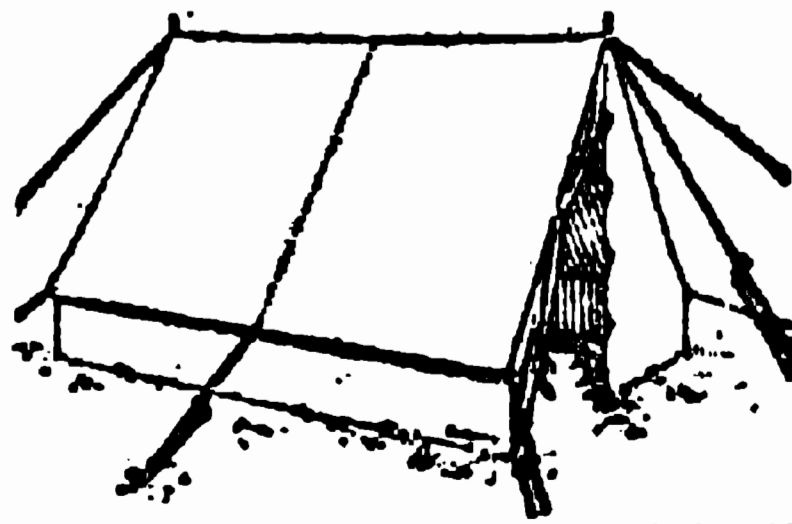
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All Eric's nervousness vanished in a moment as he recognised that voice. It was the girl with golden hair—the Daughter of the Sun—the friend who had tried to save him. Recklessly the boy sprang past Jackson and hurled himself through the curtains!

The Killer!

THE room seemed filled with figures as Eric sprung across the threshold. In the subdued light of the hanging lamps, he saw six tall men in golden mail. There was a girl, too, dressed in furs with the flat face and the squat figure of the Esquimaux. Eric recognised her as one of the attendants.

Standing at the head of the table, her face convulsed with passion, she was pointing at another figure who, he now saw, was lying stretched in front of her. For a fraction of a second that other figure was hidden from him by the man who was standing at the opposite end of the table to the girl. As if roused by his abrupt entry, the man shifted slightly, turning his head, and Eric caught a glimpse of a girl with golden hair and a white, tortured face.

He recognised her as the Daughter of The Sun. Eric paused, hardly believing what he saw. She was stretched on the table. Her arms hung over the sides, her wrists bound together with stout leather thongs. These thongs were twisted, and in the central loop the head of a spear was thrust. Even as he watched, he saw one of the guards, who held the spear, give it a turn. The effect was to drag the girl's arms closer together. In the position in which she was lying, that pressure had the effect of almost dragging her limbs from their sockets.

Again that scream came from the girl's lips. Eric saw red. Without a word, he launched himself at the man at the end of the table. It was Imatuk, the captain of the guard.

Tense with fury, Eric leapt at him. His right fist caught the man on the mouth, and as he staggered back, the boy's left made contact with the captain's jaw. The next moment he had caught him by the throat and together they went to the ground.

Eric was quite unconscious of what happened during the next few moments. He had the man by the throat—he was looking down into his dark eyes; he was lifting his head and banging it savagely back against the stone floor.

And then, abruptly, the man broke his grip and, twisting round, sought to get the boy underneath. Eric saw Imatuk's right hand fumble for the weapon he carried at his waist, and instantly he seized his adversary's wrist. Looking up, the boy saw one of the guards standing above him with levelled spear, evidently waiting to drive its point home to his neck.

Suddenly there was the sound of a revolver shot. The spear dropped harmlessly from the man's hand as he toppled backward. At that moment Eric managed to get his right arm round his opponent's neck, driving his knee at the same time into the other's stomach with all his force. Possessed as he was by a white-hot fighting fury, he was only dimly aware of what was happening in the room. There were a succession of shots, a clatter of mail, but still he fought on.

And desperately Imatuk fought back. With a sudden outburst of strength he broke his young assailant's grip, rolled over and pinned himself on top of the youngster. His hand grasped the long dagger lying on the floor beside him. With horrified eyes, Eric watched him raise it and prepare to bring it plunging downwards.

(Eric is in a tight corner. Will he be rescued in time or— Don't fail to read next week's enthralling instalment, chums.)

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