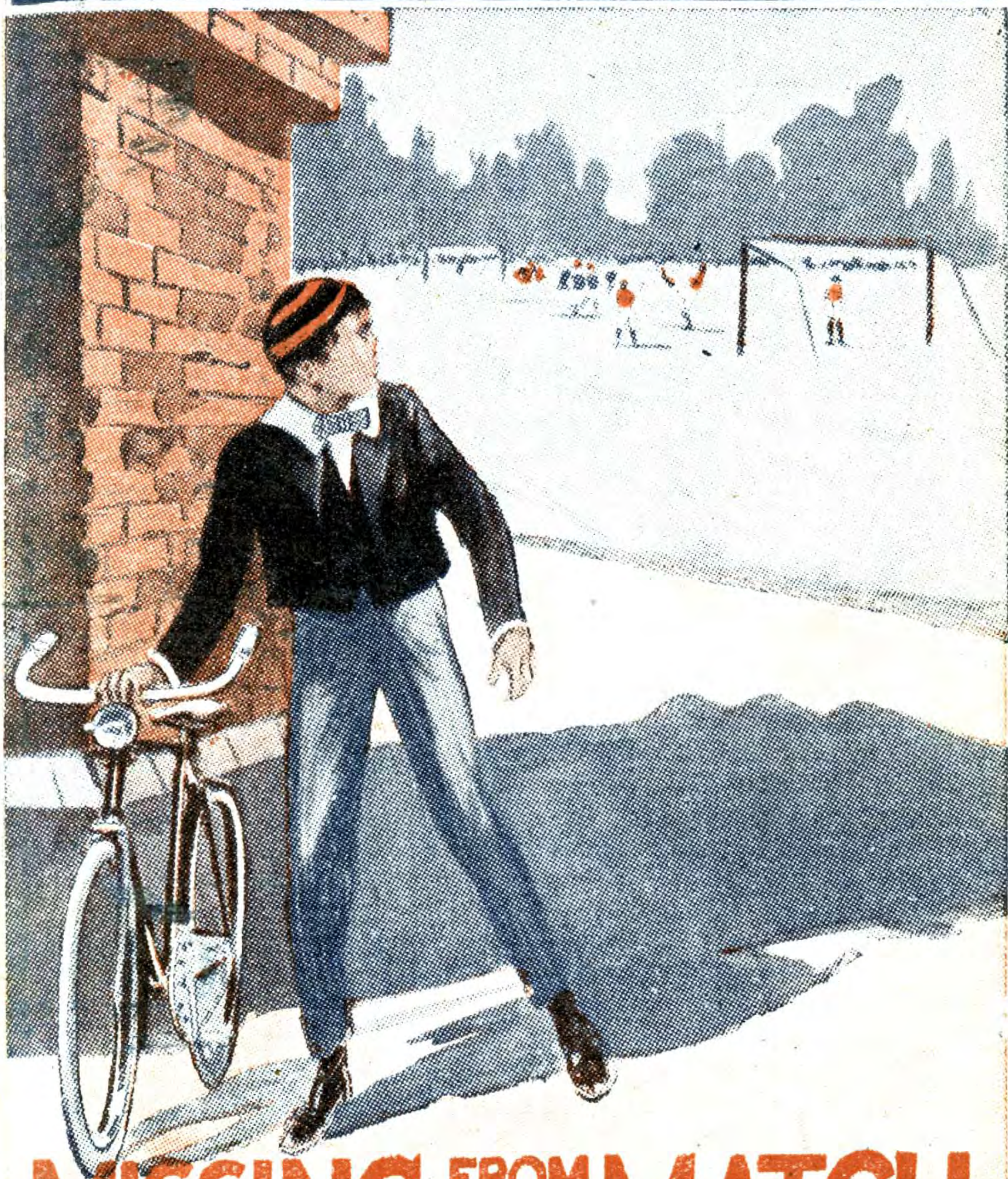


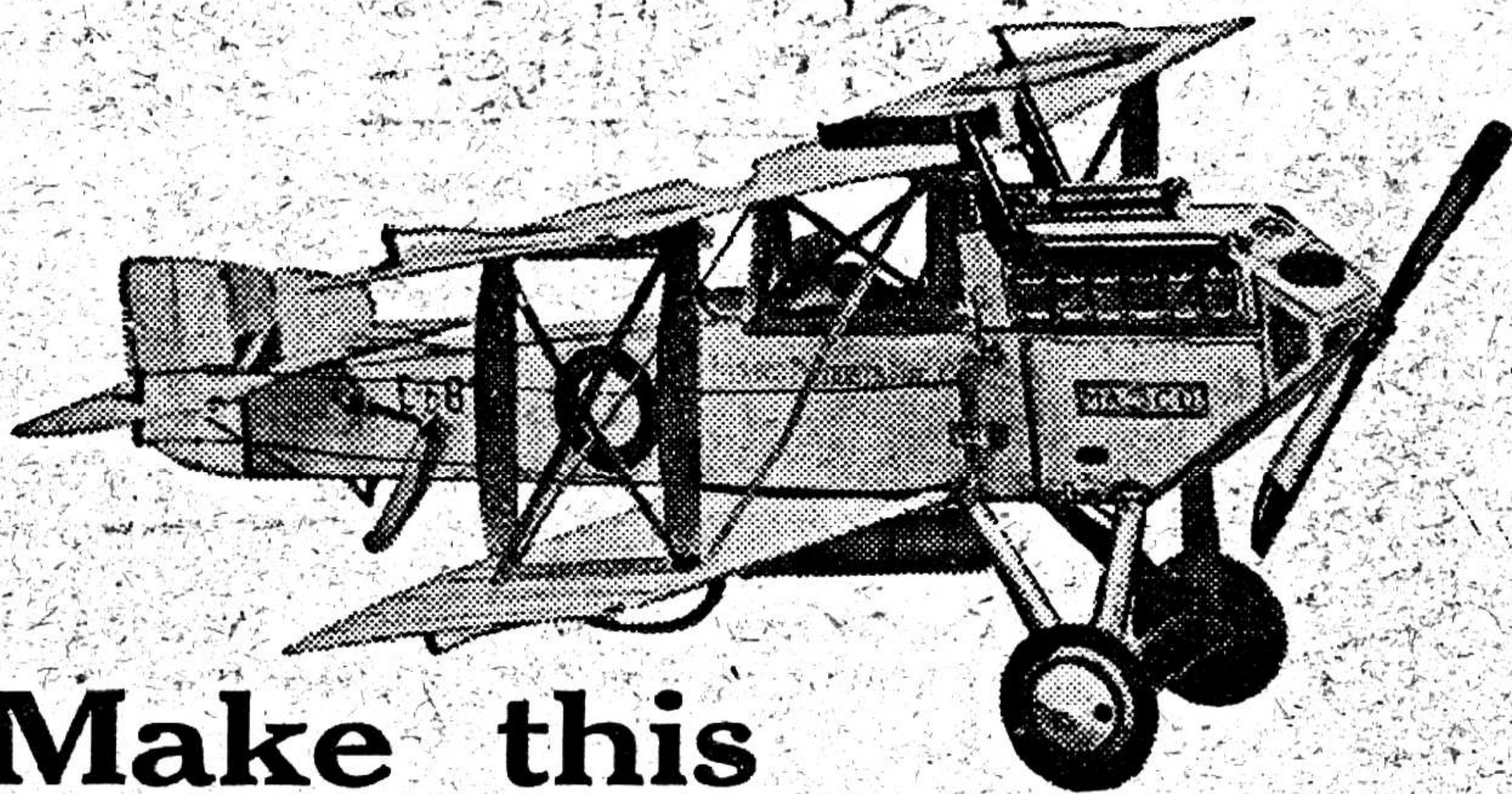
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**(THE NARRATIVE RELATED THROUGHOUT BY NIPPER.)**

## CHAPTER I.

### THE BREWING STORM.

"**H**ELP! Help!"

Reginald Pitt came to a sudden halt and jumped from his bicycle. The cry had come to his ears quite distinctly, and his heart leapt within him as he recognised the appealing tones of a girl's voice.

He looked about him anxiously. It was evening, and this part of the country was very lonely and quiet. Pitt, on his way home from Bannington, had chosen to make for St. Frank's along the quiet country lanes. It was his intention to pass through the little hamlet of Edgemore, and get to the school from the rear, so to speak.

And now, as he was riding smoothly along, he heard this cry. The fact that the River Stowe was near at hand instantly caused him to gaze in that direction. But his view was partially obscured by willow trees.

"Help!"

The appeal came again, this time more urgently, and in a more frightened tone. Reginald Pitt threw his bicycle down, and dashed through a gap in the hedge, and crossed over a short strip of meadow.

He burst through the willows and stood upon the river bank, staring anxiously up and down. And then he saw the reason for the alarmed cries. Practically

level with him a neat little rowing boat was drifting swiftly down the river on the current. And in it was seated a figure he at once recognised—the dainty figure of a young girl, who was looking about her with terrified eyes.

Pitt instantly knew her—she was Miss Sylvia Tarrant, and she lived with her grandfather, Mr. Grahame Tarrant, at the Mount—a big old house only a comparatively short distance from St. Frank's.

Miss Sylvia knew quite a few of the St. Frank's juniors, and they all regarded her as a regular sport. Pitt did not think of these matters just now; he could only see that the girl was in great peril.

The boat was drifting quickly, and, quite obviously, was out of control. Miss Sylvia had lost the oars, and she was quite unable to stay the boat's progress. And, borne by the current, it was rapidly driving down towards the weir!

Once over that treacherous point the boat would collapse, throwing Miss Sylvia into the foaming water. Something had to be done—and done quickly.

Reginald Pitt did not hesitate.

"All right, Miss Sylvia!" he yelled. "Hang on tight!"

He raced down the river bank as hard as he could go, tearing his jacket and waistcoat off as he did so. Within a minute he was much lower down than

the boat, and he judged that he would be able to carry out the plan he had in mind. In any case, there was no time for hesitation—no time for thinking of alternative schemes. There was not another soul in sight, and if Pitt did not go to the girl's rescue she would certainly drift over the weir.

Pitt plunged into the river.

He was a fairly good swimmer—not one of the best in the St. Frank's Remove, but, nevertheless, he was active enough in the water. And he struck out powerfully against the rapidly flowing current.

He found that his boots and clothing hampered him a great deal. But he set his teeth grimly, and plunged on. The boat was sweeping down upon him; Miss Sylvia sitting in it, clasping her hands with excitement and terror. It was touch and go whether Pitt would be able to help her.

But the junior gathered all his strength together, and reached the centre of the river at the crucial moment. Only a hundred yards away the weir roared and boiled. The din of it filled Pitt's ears as he swam.

He waited one second, and then half threw himself out of the water.

His reaching hand grasped the gunwale of the boat. He clung on fiercely, and did all he could to divert the boat's course out of the current—towards the bank. With set teeth, and with every ounce of his strength, he persevered.

The girl sat there dumb with the anxiety of the moment. And, inch by inch, the boat was forced out of the current. It grew nearer and nearer to the bank—at the same time drifting down towards that deadly trap.

For a brief minute or two it seemed that all Pitt's efforts would be in vain. It was like struggling against hopeless odds. But then, when it seemed that he had used his strength to no purpose, the boat glided into smoother water. Its nose stuck into the bank.

Miss Sylvia was ready. Lightly she leapt ashore, turned and grasped the boat, and held it there.

"Oh, quick!" she panted. "You must get out—Oh!"

She ended up with a little cry of terror. For she saw that Reginald Pitt was in a bad way. He had worked with fierce energy until the boat was at the bank—until the girl was ashore. But now his strength seemed to ebb away.

For one second he released his hold of the gunwale in order to work his way along.

The current seized him and took him out of reach. He struggled hard, his pale face working as he fought against the river. But in spite of all his efforts, he was swept back. Then he was caught squarely in the current and flung headlong over the weir.

Sylvia Tarrant screamed aloud and stood transfixed with horror. Pitt had saved her, but in doing so, had brought disaster upon himself. The girl ran sobbing along the bank—below the weir.

For a moment she could see no sign of Pitt. He had vanished in that boiling swirl of water. Was it possible that he would never come to the surface again? Had he perished—had he gone to his death for her sake?

And then Miss Sylvia gave a little shriek of relief.

She had caught sight of something just out there in the calmer water below the weir pool. It was a face, white and drawn. Two feeble arms were beating against the current. Pitt was still conscious, and still struggling.

The junior hardly remembered what took place. He was dazed and exhausted. He only knew that he was struggling against death. But foot by foot, he grew nearer to the bank.

At last he reached it. Two strong young arms grasped him and hauled him on to the grass. And Pitt lay there, utterly spent, as pale as a ghost. Miss Sylvia bent over him, crying with mingled relief and terrible alarm.

"Oh, Pitt!" she sobbed. "I—I thought you were going to be killed! It was brave of you—absolutely splendid! I shall never forget this!"

Pitt didn't even hear the words.

Just for a moment the girl remained wondering what she should do. Pitt's stillness frightened her. And he lay there so pale and drawn. Then suddenly, Sylvia gave a little cry.

She darted off and sped up the bank towards the boat which lay higher up the stream.

Arriving, she forced open a little locker in the stern, and fumbled about among the contents. Then she brought to light a flask. She shook it eagerly, and could hear that the flask contained a quantity of liquid.

She ran swiftly back to the spot where

Pitt lay. Then, kneeling down in the grass, she unscrewed the stopper of the flask, and lifted Pitt's head from the ground. A moment later the junior spluttered feebly and coughed.

Sylvia had forced a gulp of brandy down his throat. The effect was quite astonishing. Pitt rapidly recovered, and two little spots of colour came into his cheeks. He opened his eyes and looked at the girl dazedly.

"Why, hallo!" he muttered. "What—what—"

"You mustn't speak," interrupted Sylvia. "Quick—take some more!"

"No—no—"

But she wouldn't hear him, and she placed the neck of the flask to his lips and tilted it up, holding his head firmly so that he could not get out of it. A quantity of the fiery spirit poured down Pitt's throat before he could force the flask away from him.

"There, that's better!" said Miss Sylvia.

"Ugh! It's horrible!" spluttered Pitt disgustedly. "What—what is that awful stuff? My throat's absolutely burning!"

"It's brandy!" said the girl. "Brandy is the best thing—"

"I didn't want any, Miss Sylvia—honestly, I didn't!" protested the junior. "If you'd left me alone I should have come round. Oh, my hat! It's revived me all right, but I hate the taste of it!"

Miss Sylvia nodded.

"Of course you do," she agreed. "Brandy's awful stuff, but you've taken it as a medicine, and most medicines are awful. Oh, Pitt, I don't know how I shall be able to thank you for saving me like this. I should have been drowned if you hadn't pulled the boat to the bank."

"That's all right!" muttered Pitt, sitting up. "I'm better now, Miss Sylvia—I'm practically myself, in fact. How on earth did you get into such a mess? What about the oars?"

Pitt struggled to his feet, looking a somewhat sorry spectacle. He was rather unsteady at first, but his strength was rapidly returning. He shivered slightly in the cool evening breeze.

"You'll be awfully angry with me," said Miss Sylvia demurely. "I—I don't know how it happened. But, you see, I was just rowing, when one of my oars

slipped out of my hand. I tried to grab it—"

"Failed; and the other oar slipped away, too?" asked Pitt.

"Yes! How did you know?"

"Oh, things generally happen like that," replied the junior. "Anybody's liable to lose their head—"

"But I didn't lose my head!" interrupted Miss Sylvia indignantly. "It all happened in a flash. The silly old rowlocks are worn, and the oars wouldn't hold in properly. And there was I, sitting in the boat, and I simply couldn't do anything to get myself ashore. And I kept drifting down towards the weir."

"I see!" said Pitt. "So you thought you might just as well sing out?"

"I didn't think for a moment that anybody would hear me," said the girl. "Whichever way I looked I couldn't see any sign of a living soul. Oh, Pitt, I was frightened! And it was jolly brave of you to dive in like that."

Reginald Pitt looked uncomfortable.

"Nothing of the sort!" he mumbled. "I just saw you in trouble and so I did the only thing possible. You don't suppose I'd stand on the bank and look at you? How about your oars?"

"I think they drifted into the lilies and reeds higher up the river," replied the girl. "I say, you won't tell anybody about this, will you?"

"Not if you don't want me to."

"If my grandfather heard about it he would get terribly wild," went on the girl. "He wouldn't let me come on the river again—and that would be frightful. You won't talk about it, will you?"

"I won't breathe a word to a soul," said Pitt willingly.

"Thanks ever so much!" said Miss Sylvia gratefully. "You're a brick! You don't know how glad I am that everything's all right."

Pitt licked his lips distastefully.

"How on earth did you get that brandy?" he asked.

"Oh, my grandfather put it in that locker," she replied. "Of course, he doesn't drink, you know, but he said it would be a wise precaution to have some brandy on the boat in case of accidents. Wasn't that lucky?"

"I'm not so sure about that," said Pitt. "It hasn't made me feel very

bright, anyhow. My head's all buzzing. Still, it revived me, so I oughtn't to grumble."

They walked up the river bank towards the road. Miss Sylvia replaced the flask in the locker, and then turned to her rescuer.

"Now you'd better hurry to the school as hard as you can go," she said firmly. "Thank goodness your jacket and waistcoat are dry—you won't look like a drowned rat when you walk in—"

"You needn't worry about that, Miss Sylvia," interrupted Pitt. "I shall be able to slip up to the dormitory and change in less than no time. Nobody will see me, and I sha'n't breathe a word to a soul about this little affair. You can trust me."

The girl looked grateful.

"That's awfully good of you, Pitt," she said. "As I said before, it'll save me from a frightful ragging from granddad if you say nothing. It's a bit rough on you, of course, because I'd like to tell everybody how brave you were—"

"My hat!" interrupted Pitt. "I'm glad I promised! I don't want this talked about—I don't want to become a giddy hero! There was nothing in it, anyhow, and I'm jolly certain I'm not going to yarn about it."

"Then you'd better buzz off straight away!" said Miss Sylvia.

It was a habit of hers to speak in this slangy fashion, and her grandfather was constantly being shocked by Miss Sylvia's vocabulary. But, in spite of her free and easy ways, she was a very nice girl.

"I can't leave you like this," said Pitt, shaking his head. "I've got to find those oars—"

"Don't be silly!" she interrupted. "They're only a few dozen yards up the river, just in the reeds, and I can get them easily."

"We'll both go and look," said Pitt. "The exercise will do me good."

They walked quickly along the bank, and within five minutes they came to the spot where both the oars were visible amongst the water-lilies. But they were some few feet from the bank, and Pitt grinned.

"Now, how would you have got them?" he asked.

"I should have waded in, of course," replied the girl promptly.

"That's just like you!" chuckled Pitt. "But I'm wet already, and so it doesn't matter."

He soon recovered the oars and carried them ashore.

"That's better than you getting yourself soaked," he said.

"You duffer!" laughed Miss Sylvia. "Just as if I should have done that! How long would it have taken me to slip my shoes and stockings off? The water isn't deep. But you really must go. Pitt—you'll catch a dreadful cold."

Pitt only waited a few minutes longer. He carried the oars down to the boat, and saw Miss Sylvia safely on board. Much to Pitt's discomfort, she thanked him more profusely than ever as they shook hands. The junior didn't enjoy being thanked; it made him most uncomfortable.

At last he got off, jumped on to his bicycle, and continued his journey to St. Frank's. He was not feeling very grand now, for his head felt rather thick, and he was aching considerably.

However, the exercise of cycling thoroughly restored his circulation—and it wasn't at all cold that evening, anyway.

As Pitt rode along he thought of all the queer things that had been happening to him of late. His eyes gleamed with satisfaction as he remembered the football match he had played in that afternoon—he was even now on his way back from it.

Bannington versus Helmford United!

Reginald Pitt, of the Remove, had actually played outside-right for Bannington in this League match. It was an experience which probably no other schoolboy had ever encountered.

He had not only played in this League match, but he had performed wonders. In fact, it was generally recognised that his efforts had won the game for the home team. But Pitt was not playing as himself. To the Bannington football crowd he was known as Abdullah, and his real identity was completely concealed beneath a disguise of dark brown dye.

But why should Pitt indulge in these fantastic deceptions?

The explanation was quite simple. His parents were in grave trouble, having been swindled out of every farthing they possessed by Simon Raspe, a

scoundrelly financier, who had been Mr. Pitt's business rival.

The crash had come unexpectedly—with appalling force. And Pitt's father and mother had found themselves turned out of house and home, and left without a farthing, metaphorically speaking. Pitt's fees at St. Frank's had already been paid, and so the junior had come this term as usual.

It had been a miserable time for him at first, knowing in what straits his parents were, and being unable to help. Then this opportunity had come—the opportunity to play professional football for the enterprising Bannington Club. For Bannington had only recently been promoted into the English League, and now they were fighting hard with vim and vigour to gain further promotion into a higher division. If energy and determination was of any use, the club would succeed.

Pitt had only played in a trial game at first—just for a joke, having been invited to do so by Tom Howard, the cheerful young Bannington inside-right. And Pitt had performed such wonders in that game that he had been requested by the manager, Mr. Page, to lend his services for a Reserve match.

In this game, too, he had played wonderful football. Mr. Page did not consider his age—he only knew that this schoolboy was something of a genius at football. And the manager had entered into an arrangement with Pitt for the latter to play in the first team fixtures whenever possible. And Pitt was receiving six pounds a week for his services.

Six pounds! And he was able to send all of this to his parents. He would never have deserted his own Eleven had things been well at home. But he considered his parents before the school.

And thus quite a lot of strife had been started. Unable to explain anything—for he kept this matter a strict secret—he had had several unpleasant arguments with his study chum, Jack Grey. Only that afternoon Jack had asked Pitt to go out with him, and Pitt had been compelled to refuse, without giving any explanation. This had left a most uncomfortable feeling between the pair.

Pitt remembered this now, as he rode along. He felt quite safe—he knew that nobody guessed that Abdullah, the new winger of the Bannington Club, was

really himself. But it hurt him keenly to keep his own chum in the dark. Yet he could not bring himself to tell even Jack Grey of his parents' sore need, and of his own efforts to help things along.

"Oh, there's no need to worry," he told himself. "Everything's bound to turn out all right in the end. If only Mr. Leo can succeed in unmasking Simon Raspe— But that's almost too much to expect."

However, deep within him, Pitt was hopeful. He knew that Nelson Lee was working on the case. The famous schoolmaster detective knew most of the facts, and he had promised Pitt to do everything within his power to obtain proofs of Simon Raspe's guilt, and to expose the man in his true colours.

Nelson Lee had already met with some little success, for he had convinced himself of Raspe's guilt. His one object now was to obtain evidence. But this seemed a difficult proposition.

Pitt arrived at St. Frank's in the dusk, and managed to get up to the dormitory without being seen. It only took him a few minutes to change into his Etons—for he had been wearing a Norfolk suit—and then he went downstairs.

He had a nasty taste in his mouth, and his head ached, but he felt no symptoms of a coming cold, and he was sure that he had contracted no chill. He went straight to Study E, and entered.

The little apartment was empty, and Pitt's eyes gleamed with satisfaction. He wanted to be alone just now.

## CHAPTER II.

### THE BREWING STORM!

JACK GREY came into the lobby of the Ancient House, and noticed that Handforth and Co. were standing at the foot of the stairs, chatting. At least, Handforth was chatting, and Church and McClure were listening. This was generally the state of affairs with the famous trio of Study D.

"Seen anything of Pitt?" asked Jack, as he paused.

"No!" replied Handforth. "Rats to Pitt!"

"Hasn't he come in yet?"

"How the dickens should I know?" demanded Edward Oswald impatiently.

"My hat! Do you think I spend my time watching Pitt and seeing what he does? I don't care if he's in or out!"

"All right—keep your hair on!" said Jack.

He passed along into the Remove passage, frowning slightly. He had particularly asked Pitt to go out with him that afternoon, and Pitt had refused, and, furthermore, Pitt had refused to say why he wouldn't come. Jack Grey didn't quite like it.

Strictly speaking, there ought to have been a football match that afternoon—against Redcliffe College Junior Eleven. But the Redcliffians had wired, postponing the match until the following Wednesday. This had caused great disappointment in the Remove. Pitt was the sole exception.

He had been enormously pleased, for he had been able to play his professional match, and would still be ready to fill his own position in the Junior Eleven against the Redcliffe stalwarts.

It was this little incident which had caused the strained feeling between Pitt and Grey. Jack couldn't see any earthly reason why Pitt should refuse to go out with him. He didn't know that Pitt would have missed the Redcliffe match if it had been played that afternoon!

Jack went along the passage and entered Study E without warning. He was wearing rubber soles on his boots, and Reginald Pitt did not even receive a moment's grace before Jack entered.

"Hallo! So you're here!" exclaimed Grey, as he closed the door.

Then he stood staring. For Pitt was acting rather curiously. He had been sitting at the table writing. And he scrambled his letter up, and he stuffed it into his pocket. And Grey's quick eyes did not fail to observe that Pitt also tucked a number of currency notes into his pocket.

From Jack's point of view, this was significant. Why was Pitt so secretive? Why did he act like this? And, anyhow, where had he obtained so much money? Jack knew for a fact that Pitt had only possessed a few shillings that morning.

The idea that Pitt had earned the money never occurred to the other junior. It couldn't occur to him, because it would seem preposterous. In any case, if Pitt had got hold of all that

cash in a straightforward way, he wouldn't fly into a panic and scramble it into his pockets as he had just done.

And so misunderstandings are created.

Pitt himself was merely writing to his father, and he was getting the money ready to post off—by registered letter, that evening, if possible. And he couldn't tell Jack a word about it, for by doing so, he would give the whole show away. And it was his chief desire to keep the knowledge of his parents' dire straits from every fellow at St. Frank's.

"Finished?" asked Jack sarcastically.

"What—what do you mean?" asked Pitt. "I—I was just writing a few lines, you know, but I can do it later on. Did you have a good time this afternoon?"

"Yes, thanks, and you had a good time, too, by the look of it," replied Jack Grey pointedly. "You seem to have made a pile of money, somehow or other. You had quite a lot of quids there."

Pitt could have kicked himself for being so careless.

"Money?" he repeated. "Oh, that!"

"Yes, that!" retorted Jack. "There's no need for you to look so jolly innocent! And you needn't think I'm going to cross-examine you. It doesn't interest me where you got the money from, or what you're doing with it. We're on different terms to what we were before the holidays. If you like to have secrets, you can have 'em! That's all I've got to say."

Pitt frowned uncomfortably.

"Look here, Jack, there's no need for us to be squabbling always. Hang it all, it's not necessary for me to tell you everything—"

"I don't want you to tell me a single word," interrupted Jack curtly. "Keep your secrets—you're welcome to 'em. I don't suppose they'd bear the light of day, anyhow."

Pitt looked up sharply.

"What do you mean?" he murmured, his cheeks reddening.

"Oh, nothing!"

"Yes you do!" snapped Pitt. "I'm not going to have you saying things like that! What's your idea? Won't bear the light of day! I think I've got a right to demand an explanation of that remark!"

Jack Grey shrugged his shoulders.

"Well, you've been acting jolly mysteriously lately," he growled. "You won't explain—you won't tell me anything, and you leave me absolutely in the dark. So I can't help thinking things, can I?"

"What do you mean—thinking things?"

"Oh, you ought to know," said Jack uncomfortably. "I've simply been putting two and two together——"

"And making about four hundred, I suppose, instead of four?" demanded Pitt.

"I've made out what's fairly obvious, I think," replied Jack quietly. "When a chap's secretive and sly it generally means that he's doing something that he wouldn't care for his pals to know about. You've been secretive, and you've gone off on your own without letting me know——"

"But there was nothing shady in it," interrupted Pitt quickly.

"Then why can't you tell me?"

"I can't—that's all. I thought you weren't going to question me——"

"I'm not questioning you!" snapped Grey curtly. "You asked me to explain what I meant, and I'm just doing it. And I think there must be something pretty wrong with you to explain this conduct. You go out on your own, and you won't explain a thing, and you come back with lots of money. What does that mean?"

"It might mean hundreds of things."

"Well, I can't see it," said Jack. "I've got my own idea, and I'll keep it. This jaw won't make things any better."

"Somehow, I had an idea that your opinion of me was better than this," said Pitt bitterly. "Of course, I see what you're driving at. You think I've been gambling, or putting money on horses, or something of that kind."

Jack Grey shrugged his shoulders.

"A chap can't pick up a bunch of notes in the road," he said briefly.

Pitt compressed his lips, and for a second it seemed that he was about to make a hot retort. But suddenly he laughed and crossed the room. He took hold of Jack Grey by the shoulders and looked him straight in the face.

"Dash it all, Jack, you can't mean all this," he said softly. "We're chums

—you and I. It's not right that we should have these rotten misunderstandings. And you've been talking out of your hat!"

Pitt could see how things were drifting. In a few brief flashes of his brain he had considered the position. He had to choose—now. There was no sense in letting this go on.

He could keep silent and lose his chum's friendship. Or, on the other hand, he could explain, and the air would be cleared. And Pitt had come to a decision. He would tell Jack Grey everything. After all, it would be best, and perhaps only the right thing. He could trust Jack to understand.

"Oh, don't rot!" said Jack gruffly.

"I'm not rotting," exclaimed Pitt. "You've been making a mountain out of a molehill, old son, and I'm just going to show you that you're several kinds of a duffer."

Just a second or two more and the air would have been cleared. But the perversity of fate stepped in and altered the whole matter. He had placed himself in Jack's shoes, and had realised that his chum was to be forgiven for having suspicions. And Reginald Pitt was the last fellow in the world to keep up a quarrel.

"You old ass!" he said softly, pressing Jack's shoulders and smiling in his face. "Do you think I'm going to let us have a row? Of course not! And you'll soon be biting yourself for suspecting me——"

"Phew!" interrupted Jack abruptly.

"What's the matter?"

The other junior pushed Pitt away.

"You've been drinking something!" he said suspiciously. "Your breath smells like a giddy distillery!"

Pitt's face suddenly hardened.

"You—you don't think——" he began.

"Oh, what's the good of denying it?" demanded Jack bitterly. "Do you think I don't know the smell of spirits? I'm not surprised. I expect you've been in company where spirits are swigged as a matter of course!"

Every atom of Pitt's good humour vanished. His eyes became cold, and he stood back from Jack Grey, with his mouth firmly set. Grey realised that his own remark had been decidedly caustic.

"I say, I didn't quite mean that," he muttered.

"If you didn't mean it, why did you say it?" asked Pitt sharply. "You think I've been drinking, don't you?"

Jack didn't answer.

"Don't you?" repeated Pitt persistently.

"Hang it all, there's no thinking about it—I know!" said Jack. "But I'm not asking any questions—I'm not going to pump you. You can go and eat coke—you can mix with your own shady pals as much as you like!"

"If it'll give you any pleasure, I'll admit straight away that I have been drinking," said Pitt grimly. "I had a good old swill of brandy. Wouldn't you like to know who gave it to me?"

"No, I wouldn't!"

"Wouldn't you like me to tell you who this shady companion was?"

"I'm fed up with the whole thing!" snapped Jack Grey. "Goodness knows, we've had enough of it. And if you're thinking of spinning me a yarn, you had better keep it to yourself."

"Spinning a yarn?"

"Yes—you wouldn't dare tell me the truth," said Grey hotly. "And yet the truth is as obvious as that picture on the wall. You've been out this afternoon with some betting chaps, and you've been gambling or backing horses."

"Good!" said Pitt. "Go ahead!"

"And it's as clear as daylight, too, that you've been drinking—and you've won some money," said Jack angrily. "You've chucked me aside, and you've palled up with these rotters. That's good enough for me—you can go your own way, and be hanged to you!"

Pitt clenched his fists.

"You're a marvellous detective," he said contemptuously. "These deductions of yours are simply astounding! According to you, all my movements of the afternoon are as clear as crystal."

Jack Grey didn't answer, and Pitt tried in vain to keep down the boiling rage within him. For Jack to jump to these conclusions was preposterous—ridiculous. And all thoughts of explaining the true position vanished from Pitt's mind. Never would he tell his chum the truth if he suspected such things.

The opportunity had gone, and so the whole matter got worse, instead of better. The two study chums were at

loggerheads—they were at cross purposes. Pitt could have explained all, if he had chosen.

But he didn't choose.

And he could hardly be blamed. Since Jack Grey thought these things, he could keep on thinking them. Pitt was furious now, and he did not make any further attempt to bottle himself up.

How simple the whole thing was. He had attended the football match in Bannington—he had pulled Miss Sylvia out of the river on the way home, and Miss Sylvia had revived him with that pull of brandy, which he certainly hadn't wanted, although he knew it had done him good.

And Pitt suddenly remembered that he couldn't explain that part, anyhow. He had given his word to the girl that he wouldn't tell a soul. And Pitt's word was good. Under no circumstances would he refer to that incident by the river.

And neither would he tell Jack how he had spent the afternoon—neither would he explain how he had come into possession of that money. The facts were straightforward and simple. From first to last, Pitt had acted honourably—indeed, he had performed an extremely plucky action at the risk of his own life.

And for this he was suspected of consorting with shady characters! He was suspected of gambling and drinking! Not merely by a casual acquaintance, but by his own study chum!

Was it to be wondered at that Pitt's heart was heavy, that his soul was filled with bitterness? And was it surprising that he lost his temper? Taking everything into consideration, he could hardly have done anything else.

"I don't want to say anything more," exclaimed Jack suddenly. "I've told you what I think, and there's no reason why we should keep it up. Do you deny it?"

"No!"

"Do you admit I was right?"

"No!"

"Then what—"

"I don't admit anything, and I don't deny anything!" shouted Pitt furiously. "You can think what you like. Do you think I care? You've manufactured all this yarn about me, and you can spread it throughout the school, for all I care!"

"Steady on——"

"You're not going to shut me up, and I'll say what I like!" roared Pitt. "I'm a gambler—I'm a cad! I'm a chap who goes with bookies, and I drink spirits! That's your opinion of me—and you can keep it!"

"I shall!" shouted Jack, suddenly blazing up. "I've got brains of my own, and I can put two and two together. And you can't throw dust in my eyes. I know what rotten games you've been up to!"

"That's settled it, then!" snorted Pitt. "We won't say any more——"

"Won't we?" broke in Jack Grey fiercely. "I'll say this, anyhow. I don't want to have anything to do with you until you've got some of your old decency back. You're not fit to be in the Remove just now—you've forfeited all right to be allowed in the same society as decent chaps!"

"Have I?" shouted Pitt. "You think that——"

"I think you're a cad and a black-guard!" said Jack Grey hotly.

Crash!

Pitt's fist shot out and Jack Grey received it on his mouth. He staggered back gasping, and then charged forward. This squabble had certainly come to something pretty serious. But Pitt had been unable to restrain himself any longer. It was a terrible pity that these two should break out into open warfare like this. But that they should do so was perfectly natural.

"You—you rotter!" panted Jack.

He flung himself upon Pitt, and the next moment they were fighting fiercely. They went for one another hammer and tongs. The table went over with a crash, and the pair struggled in the centre of the room.

And just at that moment it so happened that I was coming along the passage with Tommy Watson and Sir Montie Tregellis-West. We paused as we heard the significant sounds of strife, and Tommy Watson grinned.

"There's no need to inquire into this," he chuckled. "Study D is the storm centre, I reckon. Handforth and Co. at it again!"

"My dear chap, Handforth and Co. are out in the Triangle," I said. "Why, my only hat! All that noise is coming from Study E!"

Sir Montie looked shocked.

"Dear old boys, it ain't possible," he said. "Begad! It can't be that Pitt and Grey are havin' a scrap—it's impossible! Such a frightful state of affairs couldn't exist—they couldn't really!"

"We'll soon see," I said shortly.

I strode forward, opened the door of Study E, and marched in. Then I went staggering back, for Pitt blundered into me, having just received a fierce punch on his nose which caused the blood to flow.

Without taking any notice of me, he charged forward.

Jack Grey was looking the worse for wear. His collar was crumpled, his mouth was bleeding, and one eye was blackening. And the next second he and Pitt were going for one another tooth and nail.

"Great Scott!" I gasped.

"Begad!" said Sir Montie. "We must stop this, dear old boys."

"A fight!" yelled somebody in the passage.

In a second, it seemed, study doors flew open like magic, and the passage became crowded with excited juniors.

"A fight! A fight!"

"Go it, ye cripples!"

"Who's scrapping?"

"Stand back, you asses!" I shouted. "Lend a hand, Tommy; we've got to stop this before it gets any worse!"

We charged into the study with De Valerie and Levi and Burton and one or two others. And in a moment, Jack Grey and Reginald Pitt were dragged apart. They struggled fiercely to get free.

"Lemme go, you idiots!" gasped Pitt. "I'm going to smash him——"

"I mean to give him the hiding of his life!" panted Grey.

"Steady on—steady on!" I interrupted. "What's the matter with you? Fighting! You chaps! Fighting like a couple of kids! I thought you'd more sense than to create all this din!"

"Pitt's a cad and a blackguard, and I'm showing what I think of him!" said Grey breathlessly. "He's been out on the razzle this afternoon—and he's been drinking, too! Drinking whisky, or brandy!"

"What?" yelled De Valerie.

"Oh, believe it—I don't care!"

snapped Pitt harshly. "You can all believe it! D'you think I care?"

"There must be some mistake," I said quietly. "You've made a bloomer, Grey. Pitt's not the kind of chap to go on the ran-dan, or to drink. I expect you've simply made a whole bust-up over nothing."

"Ask him!" said Jack thickly.

"Is this all true, Pitt?" I inquired, turning to him.

"My dear chap, you can think what you like," replied Pitt, now icily calm. "Jack believes it, and I don't care what anybody else thinks. I'm not denying anything that's being said, and I'm not admitting it either. You can just believe any old thing you like. I'll never tell a soul where I went this afternoon, or what I did."

And Reginald Pitt strode out of the study, pushed his way through the crowd, and left the juniors staring after him.

Jack Grey calmed down, too. And he refused to say anything.

Much to the disappointment of the Remove, the whole thing fell through. But everybody knew that Jack Grey and Reginald Pitt, once inseparable chums, were now at bitter enmity with one another.

Pitt's brave efforts to help his parents were certainly leading him into piles of unsuspected trouble.

### CHAPTER III.

#### WHAT HANDFORTH KNEW.

**E**DWARD OSWALD HANDFORTH smote his clenched fist into his other palm.

"Yes, by George!" he exclaimed. "There's something fishy about it!"

That remark was meant entirely for himself. Handforth was standing on the Ancient House steps, and he was oblivious to everything. It was Monday evening, and Handforth had been rather thoughtful during the past day or two. Something, evidently, was on his great mind.

"I beg your honourable pardon?"

Hussi Ranjit Lal Khan paused as he came out of the Ancient House, and looked inquiringly at Handforth. The latter took no notice. He hadn't even heard.

"Jolly fishy!" he repeated firmly.

"I must acknowledge that I am in total ignorance of your conversational capabilities," said the Indian junior. "I beg of you, Handforth, to explicitly explain what your words are intended to convey. May I crave that you should be eloquently communicative?"

Handforth turned and looked at Hussi Khan frowningly. He regarded the Indian junior as though he were some strange zoological specimen. Then he waved his hand impatiently.

"Go away!" he exclaimed, with testy arrogance. "You worry me! Your face gives me a pain! Can't you see I'm thinking?"

"But, my most absurd Handforth, you addressed me," said Hussi Khan softly. "You distinctly and unquestionably committed yourself to an extraordinary remark concerning matters of a fishy nature. It is only politeness on my part to——"

"Oh, my hat!" groaned Handforth. "I've never known such a long-winded chap in all my life! How many dictionaries have you swallowed?"

The Indian boy raised his eyebrows.

"But you are indulging in humour?" he suggested. "It is ludicrous and singularly frightful to suggest that I should have swallowed a dictionary. Such an object is of considerable bulk, and quite impossible to masticulate and digest. Your honourable speech is most inordinately precarious."

Handforth couldn't help grinning.

"How on earth you remember all these words beats me," he said. "And the way you mix 'em up is worth quids to listen to. I'm afraid your command of the English language is a bit shaky, my dusky son of India."

"But you are quite wrong," said Hussi Khan quickly. "I must insist upon being ridiculously clear on this point. My knowledge of English is not only superfluous and superficial, but tremendous and insignificant!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Handforth.

"Your hilarity is inappropriately misplaced," said the Indian junior frowning. "I must explain that I pride myself upon being an English scholar of enormous and inconsequent exaggeration. My knowledge of this outrageous language is so fearfully inconsistent that I am capable of conversing incoherently with the greatest of ease."

"That's what I've always said," agreed Handforth promptly. "But I'm beginning to feel a bit faint, so I hope you'll excuse me."

"The reason for your indisposition is extraordinarily obvious," said Hussi Khan. "You are overwhelmed by my incalculable inability to express myself in glorious phrases. My knowledge is overpowering. My English is imperfection itself! I must respectfully suggest that——"

But what Hussi Khan proceeded to respectfully suggest, Handforth did not wait to hear. He fled into the lobby and went straight to Study D, where Church and McClure were already busy at their prep.

They looked up with pained expressions as Handforth charged in. He wasn't in any hurry, but this was just his usual method of entering. He kicked the door to with a slam, and moved across to the window.

Incidentally, he jerked McClure's elbow, and caused a beautiful blot upon the neat page which McClure was filling up. Then he bumped against the table, and the ink-well wobbled for a moment, and then toppled over, pouring its contents upon Church's exercise book. And Handforth did all this quite unconsciously; he merely walked across the room in his usual way.

"You clumsy ass!" howled Church.

"Look what you've done!" roared McClure. "An hour's work ruined!"

"Eh?"

"Look what you've done to the ink——"

"Oh, don't bother!" said Handforth impatiently. "I've never known such chaps for grumbling. I'm blessed if you're not always making a fuss over nothing. Don't worry me now, because I'm thinking."

Church and McClure wisely restrained themselves. An argument would only have ended in complete destruction to all the work they had done. At present it was only partially ruined.

Handforth sat down near the window and gazed absently into space. After a while he turned and looked at his chums thoughtfully.

"Yes, there's something queer about it!" he exclaimed. "I can't quite make out what it is, but I mean to investigate. And once I get on the job, it won't be long before there's something done!"

"What are you talking about?" asked Church.

Handforth glared.

"I'm not going to answer any questions," he replied tartly.

"Who wants you to?" demanded Church. "I'm blessed if you haven't been going on like this for days. You keep on talking about something queer and fishy, and when we mention a word you say that you won't answer any questions."

"I mean it!" said Handforth.

"All right; but you'd better keep this queer thing to yourself," said Church. "We don't want to keep hearing about it. Something must have happened on Friday, I suppose."

"How do you know that?" asked Handforth sharply.

"Well, it's fairly obvious," replied Church. "It was on Friday evening that you tried to spoof us with that giddy disguise of yours. My hat! It was glorious the way we dished you."

McClure chuckled, and Handforth snorted.

"You'd better not start sneering," he said darkly.

"We're not sneering," put in McClure. "But Church is right. You've been rummy ever since last Friday evening. That's when you smashed your bike up trying to chase us. And I can't understand why you didn't commit slaughter when you arrived home. Something must have happened that we didn't see."

Handforth nodded.

"Exactly," he said. "Something did happen—something queer, too."

"Oh!" said Church. "Then we're right?"

"I'm not going to tell you anything!" roared Handforth. "Friday evening! What rot! You can pump me all you blessed well like, but I'm not going to explain. I don't want this talked about all over the school."

"We shouldn't talk——"

"I'm not going to give you any chance," interrupted Handforth grimly. "No, my sons, I sha'n't tell you a word about what happened in Raspe's garden. I'm keeping it absolutely to myself."

McClure nodded.

"Well, after all, it's best," he said

carelessly. "A secret's not much good if it's shared by three or four. Of course, you chased us down the road and fell into the garden of Thornton House——"

"How did you know that?" demanded Handforth, starting up.

"My dear chap, we—we do know it, that's all," said McClure. "And Thornton House belongs to a man named Simon Raspe. Something must have happened to you while you were in that garden."

Handforth quite failed to realise that his chums were leading him on. They knew his little ways, and they also knew it would be quite useless to ask him any pointed questions. But by affecting complete indifference it was quite likely they would gain their object.

"I haven't said I was in Raspe's garden," exclaimed Handforth curtly. "And I'm not going to tell you again that I won't be questioned. I'm not standing any bunkum of that kind, my lads!"

"All right, we'll get on with our prep.," said Church. "My dear old Handy, we don't mind what you saw, or anything. All we want is a little quietness so that we can continue our work."

"I'll be quiet when I like!" retorted Handforth. "And as for this fishy business, you won't get a word from me—not a word! You'd probably promise to keep it mum, but I can't trust you. As likely as not you'd let it out without knowing anything about it."

"Well, that applies to you, too," said McClure.

"To me?" snorted Handforth warmly. "Why, you silly ass, are you suggesting that I might let the cat out of the bag? I've got a better control of my tongue, thank goodness. And this secret remains a secret—locked in my keeping. When the right time comes I'll tell you everything about Raspe and that other chap, and what a scare they got."

"Oh, they were scared?" said Church casually.

"Scared!" said Handforth. "By George! They were absolutely bowled over! Thought I was a chap named Lockwood, who had escaped from prison——" Handforth pulled himself up with a jerk. "Didn't I tell you not to question me?" he roared.

"My dear old son, we haven't questioned you," grinned McClure. "What do we know about a convict named Lockwood? How do we know that Mr. Raspe and another chap mistook you for the convict?"

Handforth regarded his chums suspiciously.

"Were you watching over the wall?" he demanded.

"No, of course not!"

"Well, you seem to know all about it," said Handforth grimly.

"Marvellous!"

"And you can say what you like, and ask what you like, I've finished," went on Handy. "You understand—finished! As for Pitt being mixed up in it, that's a matter I shall investigate, although, mark you, it's as clear as a bell to me that this chap Raspe is several kinds of a scoundrel, and he must have ruined Pitt's pater. I shall make it my business to investigate."

Church grinned.

"And you're keeping the whole secret to yourself?" he asked.

"I am!"

"Well, I must say, it's a rummy way to keep it," said Church. "You might as well tell us the whole thing now, Handy. Do you really mean to say that Simon Raspe ruined Pitt's pater, and mistook you for a convict named Lockwood?"

Handforth stared blankly.

"How—how did you know all this?" he gasped.

He was quite astounded, never realising that he had been giving the whole show away all the time. In many respects, Edward Oswald Handforth was quite astute, but in other ways he was astoundingly simple.

"Never mind how we got to know it," said Church. "But, look here, if any queer business happened on Friday evening, you ought to tell somebody about it—Nipper for example. He understands these things better than we do——"

"What?" snorted Handforth. "Tell Nipper? Don't you think I'm capable of inquiring into a mystery and fathoming out the truth? You ass! Just as if Nipper could do any better!"

And Handforth slung his books on the table and dismissed the subject. Church

and McClure finished their prep. shortly afterwards, and sauntered out. They went to me in the lobby.

"That's the chap we're looking for," said Church.

"Well, you've found me, and I'm at your service," I said cheerfully. "What's the trouble? No row with Handy, I hope?"

"No."

"Good!" I said. "We've had enough rows already—Pitt and Grey are still at loggerheads. They won't speak to one another, and they're looking as miserable as a couple of out-of-work navvies."

"As a matter of fact, we want to talk about Pitt, too," said McClure. "Is there anybody in Study C?"

"No, Tommy and Montie are in the Common-room," I replied. "If this thing is private, we'd better go along to the study at once."

We went, and Church lost no time in telling me of a certain little incident which had taken place on the previous Friday evening.

He explained how Handforth had led McClure and himself a dance, taking them along a quiet country road, and leaving them alone on some pretext. Then Handforth had reappeared attired like a convict—fondly imagining that his disguise would completely deceive his chums.

Of course, it didn't, and Church and McClure had fled on their bicycles, with Handforth in full cry. But Handforth had come a terrific cropper at a sharp corner, being unable to stop himself. Apparently he had gone clean over into the garden of a big place known as Thornton House, and which was the residence of a Mr. Simon Raspe.

"Goodness knows what happened," said Church. "But we know for a fact that Handy heard something. He's been mysterious ever since. We've got a few things out of him. For example, Raspe has done something to Pitt's people, and he's in fear of a convict named Lockwood."

I looked at Church and McClure thoughtfully. I knew, of course, that Simon Raspe had swindled Mr. Pitt out of all his money and property, and I further knew that Raspe lived near Bannington. But to learn that Handforth had discovered any of these secrets was somewhat disconcerting.

I got all the information I could out of Church and McClure—which wasn't much, after all. Then I came to a decision. I went straight to Study D, which, of course, was next door, with Church and McClure. Handforth was still there, and I thought it would be as well to be diplomatic.

"Busy, Handy?" I asked.

"Not particularly. Why?" he asked.

"Well, I'd like you to come along to the gov'nor's study with me," I replied. "I've got to put some information before him, and your presence will help me. Besides, you might offer some suggestions. I know you're brainy about detective work."

That, of course, did it. Handforth was perfectly willing to come, and we marched along to Nelson Lee's study without further delay. The gov'nor was in, and I explained to him forthwith that Handforth had some news concerning Simon Raspe.

"Oh!" said Nelson Lee. "Concerning Simon Raspe, eh? You had better tell me everything, Handforth."

Handforth looked bewildered, and stared at me.

"How—how the dickens did you know I knew anything about Simon Raspe?" he demanded. "It's a secret, and I'm keeping it to myself. I mean to investigate, and root out the secret of this mystery."

"Come, come, Handforth," said Nelson Lee. "I think you had better tell me all you know. Keeping the matter to yourself will do no good. I particularly ask you to take me into your confidence."

Handforth was rather mollified.

"As you put it like that, sir, I'll tell you what I know," he replied. "It's my belief that Raspe is a rotter, and there's that other chap, too. His name's Stretton, I think. They're a pair of giddy crooks; and they ruined a man named Lockwood, and sent him to chokey."

Little by little, Nelson Lee got to know what had actually happened. He learned how Handforth, dressed in convict garb, had dropped into the garden of Thornton House, and how Simon Raspe and Stretton had momentarily mistaken him for Lockwood, a man who was now in prison.

"By what they said, sir, I believe that Lockwood could expose them both

if he only escaped from prison," said Handforth. "And they mentioned something about ruining Mr. Pitt, too—and he must be Pitt's pater, I suppose."

"Yes, it is quite probable," said Nelson Lee. "Well, Handforth, I don't want you to talk about this at all. Be very careful. Don't refer to the matter in front of any of the other boys."

"Oh, I'll be as mum as an oyster," said Handforth. "You can trust me to keep quiet."

Handforth went out, and Nelson Lee shook his head doubtfully.

"I'm not quite so sure, Nipper," he said. "Handforth has all the best intentions, but I am afraid he is a blunderer. It was just like him, for example, to get mixed up in this Raspe business. I don't want a word of that breathed about the school."

"Of course not, sir," I agreed. "How are you progressing, guv'nor? Do you think you'll ever be able to prove that Simon Raspe is a swindler?"

"I have every hope, Nipper, of placing Raspe within reach of the law, and I have every hope of recovering Mr. Pitt's fortunes," replied Nelson Lee. "We cannot expect a matter of this kind to progress very swiftly. We must take our time, and, above all, we must give our man no inkling that we are on his track."

"Handforth seems to have found out something new, anyhow," I put in. "About this convict, Lockwood, for example. Who's he? Where does he sit in? I haven't heard his name before."

"Yet Mr. Lockwood is closely connected with the whole plot," said Nelson Lee. "I remember reading the account of the trial in the newspapers—I have been looking up all the old files, in fact. Lockwood was Mr. Pitt's private secretary—or, I should say, his business secretary."

"Oh, he was a crook?" I asked. "Probably in Raspe's pay——"

"Not at all, Nipper," interrupted Nelson Lee. "Mr. Lockwood is an innocent man, and he was convicted on a trumped-up charge. Raspe only went to that extreme because he was afraid of Lockwood. The unfortunate man is now in prison, but I shall make it my business to obtain his release at the earliest possible moment. He had no

chance against the astute Raspe with all his money."

"Well, it's a queer business," I said. "It seems complicated at first, but it isn't really. It simply amounts to this, in one sentence: Simon Raspe swindled Mr. Pitt out of his fortune and sent Lockwood to prison on a false charge. And now we're trying to get enough evidence to bring out the truth."

"That is it in a nutshell, Nipper," said Nelson Lee. "As you say—very simple. But the getting of this evidence is not quite such an easy matter. And it will do no good to hurry, or the bird will fly. We must go warily, and pounce when the time is ripe."

"But the time isn't quite ripe yet?" I asked.

"Not quite, Nipper—not quite!" replied Nelson Lee smoothly.

And that was all I could get out of him. But I knew that he was well on the job, and I fully anticipated that events would begin to move swiftly before long. As it happened, Nelson Lee was even then preparing the next step.

Late that night when all the fellows were in bed, Nelson Lee quietly left the school. He went on his bicycle, and he made straight for Thornton House, up a quiet lane, not far distant from Bannington.

He arrived at Simon Raspe's residence shortly before midnight. Everything was dark except for one window on the ground floor. And this, as Nelson Lee was well aware, was the window of Raspe's library.

He did not approach. Instead, he dropped gently over the garden wall, and made his way through the trees to a little brickwork affair which looked like an old, disused well. Lee had been here before, and he knew his ground. This object which looked like a well was really the entrance to an ancient brick passage which led right into the library. Reginald Pitt himself had discovered the passage by accident.

On one occasion, Nelson Lee had attempted to get into Raspe's library by this means. He had actually done so, only to find that a savage dog was kept in the room—presumably every night.

Lee was not quite sure whether Raspe knew of the existence of the tunnel, but Lee was inclined to believe that Raspe was in ignorance of the fact.

In any case, the knowledge was not of much use to Nelson Lee, for he could not enter the library, owing to the presence of the dog.

However, this tunnel was useful in another way, for Leo could creep along and arrive at the secret doorway, and it was quite likely that he could listen advantageously to any conversation that took place.

On this present occasion he disappeared into the tunnel and remained underground for perhaps half an hour. When he emerged he did so like a ghost, quickly got out of the garden, and once more mounted his bicycle.

And he pedalled slowly back towards St. Frank's with a tiny gleam of satisfaction in his eyes.

He had done nothing, but he had obtained certain information which, he believed, he would be able to put to excellent use later on when the right time arrived.

He had a somewhat blustery journey home, for a fairly high wind was springing up. But Nelson Lee was in a very good humour, even if the wind wasn't, for he knew—he absolutely knew—that he would be able to expose Simon Raspe very shortly for the base scoundrel he was.

#### CHAPTER IV.

##### FOOTBALL UNDER DIFFICULTIES!

**W**HOA! What the—— Great pip!"

Handforth staggered drunk-ly, and his cap was lifted from his head and went sailing away across the Triangle. He stood there, gasping for breath, with the wind fairly hissing into his teeth.

It was Wednesday morning, and St. Frank's had awakened to find the atmosphere in a turmoil. The wind of Monday night had increased greatly on Tuesday, but now it had become a heavy gale.

And it was whistling and shrieking round the angles of the old buildings with tremendous force. Handforth, going out into the Triangle, was nearly lifted off his feet by a powerful gust.

It was only with great difficulty that he recovered his cap, and he had to fight his way back to the Ancient House doorway. The wind was coming with extraordinary fury, sweeping across the

Triangle and raising the dust in clouds. Pebbles of considerable size were lifted up by the gale.

"My hat! It's jolly blustery," said Tommy Watson.

"If it goes on like this, St. Frank's will be blown down!" gasped Handforth. "Great guns! I've never known such a wind! Some of these old chestnuts will be toppling over before long."

It was rather curious that he should say that just then. For a loud crashing sound made itself heard. And the juniors, staring across the Triangle, saw one of the big elm trees which bordered the playing fields topple over as though it had been a mere sapling.

"Great Scott!" said Tommy Watson. "Did you see that? What a gale! Not much chance for us this afternoon."

"What do you mean?" asked De Valerie.

"Why, we're playing Redcliffe," replied Tommy. "Think of it! Football in this gale! Why, as soon as the ball is kicked it'll sail off into the next giddy county!"

De Valerie grinned.

"Yes, it'll be a bit difficult to keep the ball under control," he said. "Still, that's no reason why we should give the game up. It ought to be rather interesting, and it'll certainly be novel."

"I expect Nipper will abandon it," said Tommy.

But I didn't. The match against Redcliffe College had already been postponed once, and I didn't see how it could be postponed any further. On Saturday we should be playing the River House School, and on the following Wednesday we had a House match fixed up. If we did not play Redcliffe this afternoon, we should have to wait several weeks before another opportunity came.

"If the Redcliffe chaps come along, we'll play 'em," I declared. "Of course, it's quite likely they'll stay at home. If so, we shall be dished. But I'm not going to postpone the match."

I was standing in the lobby, and just then Pitt appeared. He had been looking very serious and thoughtful during the past few days. His rupture with Jack Grey had not improved his temper, and he was still inclined to be somewhat short. The quarrel had not been patched up.

"What do you think of it?" I asked.

"Speaking to me?" said Pitt.

"Yes. What do you think of the wind?"

"It seems pretty stiff," said Pitt. "Still, there's no reason why we should worry about it. We can't make it lie down, can we? And there's no reason for abandoning the match this afternoon, as some of the chaps are saying. There are only two things that can really stop a football match—a fog or a flooded ground."

"That's right enough," I agreed. "So we'll go ahead with it."

Many of the fellows, however, were dubious. Personally, I was rather afraid that Mr. Crowell would forbid the match, or it was quite likely that the Head himself would step in and make out that there would be a risk of trees falling, or something of that kind.

However, we need not have worried. Nothing was said during the morning, and after dinner the Redcliffe fellows arrived. It was now quite certain that the match would take place.

The wind, instead of dying down, had increased considerably. It was the strongest gale that anybody at the school could remember. The wind roared with overpowering force, and it was only with great difficulty that the fellows could keep their feet as they crossed the Triangle. A gust would come along which would send them staggering forward, although they used all their strength to resist.

And, on Little Side, the fury of the gale was terrible. It was a clear stretch of ground, and had no protection whatever. The wind howled across the wide expanse like a million furies. The football, just tossed on the ground, was lifted up and sent careering across to the other side of the field.

"It'll be a farce!" said De Valerie. "We can't call this a game at all; it'll be impossible to play. We sha'n't be able to keep the ball on the field for more than a minute at a time."

"Well, it'll be a change, anyway," chuckled Bob Christine.

I was putting the same team into the field that had beaten Bannington Grammar School, and I was fairly hopeful of a win to-day. The eleven was composed as follows: Handforth; Yorke, Burton;

Church, Talmadge, Somerton; Christine, Grey, myself, Tregellis-West, Pitt.

The Redcliffe fellows were a big set. Upon the whole, they were older than the St. Frank's juniors, for the Redcliffe junior eleven were chiefly composed of members of the Upper Fourth, and the Upper Fourth at Redcliffe was of about the same age as the Fifth at St. Frank's.

With regard to age, therefore, the Redcliffe junior team practically consisted of seniors, from the St. Frank's standpoint. And they had every advantage. Redcliffe had not only won every game this season, but they were quite confident of knocking us into the middle of next week.

And, without a doubt, the visitors were a formidable-looking crowd. They were very smart, well built, and powerful. Lexton, the captain, was a very tall fellow, and he always played centre-half for his side. He looked upon this game as something of a joke, and was quite confident that he would take his men back to Redcliffe after having beaten us by about ten goals to nil.

"Still, it's a fixture, and we like to oblige," said Lexton airily. "Strictly speaking, you chaps are too young for us, and it's really a come-down for a team like ours to play kids."

"Size doesn't always count," I remarked. "And it's not always wise to speak too soon, Lexton."

I did not like to point out that his words were not at all in good form, but I was quite determined that we would do our best to make these bragging bounders look small. The Redcliffe fellows had always been the same. They had always seemed to imagine that they were conferring a great favour upon St. Frank's by coming at all.

Fenton, of the Sixth, had consented to referee the match, and he was grinning as he came upon the field.

"How many footballs have you got?" he asked dryly.

"One, of course," I said. "How many did you expect?"

"Well, you'll need about a dozen in reserve," said Fenton. "The first time the leather is skied, it'll sail off like a balloon and probably drop into the channel."

"Oh, it won't be so bad as that!" I grinned. "We have got two or three



The colonel made a peculiar choking noise in his throat, his face went purple, and clutching wildly at the table, he fell to the floor in a limp heap.

extra ball, anyhow, and I'm putting some of the fags all round the ground, so they can recover the ball if it sails off."

The wind was blowing straight across the ground at present, from goal to goal, so it was clear that the side that won the toss would have all the advantage; and it was just our luck that we should lose the toss.

"This will mean a terrible fight," said Church, just before we started. "We shall never be able to get the ball up into the Redcliffe half at all."

"Yes, and if we do shoot for goal, the wind'll carry the ball back and put it in our own net," grinned Christine. "Still, it'll apply just the same to the Redcliffe chaps in the second half."

Fenton blew his whistle, and the game commenced.

We had a greater number of spectators than usual, for the seniors were not playing this afternoon, and it was the only match. Moreover, it promised to be of exceptional interest.

The gale was howling with fearful rage across the ground. Every now and again twigs and branches would come sailing on to the field, torn from the trees, and it was quite difficult to run against the wind.

On the other hand, it was not exactly easy to run with the wind behind us, for we were carried along too fast to be comfortable. However, we should probably accustom ourselves to the conditions after a bit.

The first few minutes of the game were ludicrous. The ball was passed by Talmadge to Christine, who at once contrived it. At least, this is what he intended. Instead, the leather rose high, was caught by the wind, and it went shooting back over our heads and passed right over the goal-line.

"My hat!" said Christine blankly. "That won't do! I thought it was going in the giddy goal!"

"Corner!" said Fenton, pointing. "You've started well, my sons!"

"How the dickens could I help it?" demanded Christine.

But the corner kick was of no advantage to Redcliffe. The kick was taken, and the leather was sent well into the field to allow for the wind. But, in spite of this, the kick was badly judged,

for the ball went high out of reach, and was carried over the line.

Haudforth took the goal kick, and he used enough energy to burst the football. But in spite of his powerful kick, the leather seemed to stop dead only a few yards away, and then it came bounding back.

Pitt rushed in, although, strictly speaking, it was not his place to do so. He obtained the ball, and went off against the wind as hard as he could run. And he kept the leather at his feet! Pitt had realised that it was quite useless attempting to play in the ordinary way. Passing the ball from one player to another served no good purpose.

And so Reginald Pitt tried different tactics.

He even knew it would be useless to shoot for goal at any normal distance, for the ball would be stopped by the wind and carried back. There was, therefore, only one thing to be done; and Pitt did it.

He raced up the touch-line, in spite of the wind, and tricked three opponents with perfect ease. After playing against professionals, it was child's play for him to make circles round the Redcliffe backs and half-backs.

I thought he was going to pass to me, and I was tremendously afraid that I should never get the ball, although I placed myself in such a position that would allow for the force of the wind.

Pitt took no chances. Instead of passing to me, he ran behind the Redcliffe left back, worked his way right close to the goal, and then deliberately came to a halt.

The goalkeeper was flustered. He hesitated, and then ran out. Pitt simply dodged to the left, ran in a few feet, and took the ball into the net with him. As a piece of individual cleverness it was a remarkable performance.

"Goal!"

"Hurrah!"

"Goal!"

The crowd fairly yelled, and Pitt was thumped on the back and his hand was shaken, and he smiled easily.

"Nothing to make a fuss about," he said. "If we're going to get goals in this match, it's got to be done that way. The long-passing game is impossible, and even short passes are

risky. We've got to adapt ourselves to the conditions."

"Good man!" I said approvingly. "You're the only chap on the field who realised it."

Pitt's effort had put heart into the whole team, and there was no doubt that he was a born genius at football. Nobody else could have so quickly adapted himself to the difficult conditions.

The Redcliffe fellows were quite astounded. They seemed to think that they had been taken off their guard—that we had played a trick on them, and they re-started the game with the firm determination to equalise on the spot.

They didn't.

Again and again they tried, and they certainly played excellent football. But where Pitt had succeeded, they failed. They played football as it is usually played, and they failed to make full allowance for the high wind.

Consequently, their kicking was wild and erratic. On three separate occasions within seven minutes—seven minutes of brilliant play—they had an open goal before them, with our backs and half-backs whacked, and with only Handforth to beat. And yet they did not score.

The first time the ball was sent driving towards the goal with all the force that Lexton could command. He kicked too hard, and the leather, assisted by the wind, sailed six feet over the top of the cross-bar.

The second shot went wide, and the third was badly judged, and Handforth cleared with ease.

And then, such is the glorious uncertainty of football, Redcliffe scored in a totally unexpected manner. In clearing, Burton accidentally placed the ball at the foot of a Redcliffe forward. He kicked for goal at once, almost at random. The leather simply rolled into the net, and Handforth did not even see it.

"Goal!"

"Oh, my hat!"

"Buck up, St. Frank's! Get another!"

But this unexpected success gave the Redcliffians heart. It gave them energy and determination to try for a bigger success, and they played powerful, forceful football.

Five minutes later, Lexton scored after a praiseworthy individual effort. Nothing could stop him. Handforth was fairly beaten, and he was not to be blamed, and the St. Frank's fellows were almost beginning to lose heart.

It was nearly half-time now, and the wind was just as bad as ever, sweeping across the ground, and making normal football an impossibility. From the point of view of a spectator, it was probably interesting, but we were not particularly in love with it.

It was one long struggle all the time—a fight against the wind. And when at last half-time arrived, we were well-nigh played out. We were only too glad to get to the pavilion for a few minutes' rest.

"We're one down, but we've got plenty of time to make things hum," I said cheerfully. "We only need two goals to win."

"My hat! We're likely to get 'em!" growled Christine. "And what if Redcliffe score again? We shall be whacked to the wide!"

"Well, we've got the advantage of the wind in this half," I said. "That ought to help us a lot. I rather think the Redcliffe chaps have played their best in this match. They ought to be easy to deal with now, although I'll admit their defence is jolly strong."

"It's like a giddy stone wall!" growled Jack Grey.

Five minutes later the second-half commenced, and it promised to be even more exciting than the first. The Redcliffe team soon showed us that they were devoting all their efforts at defence. There was not much chance of their scoring, and they knew it. So all they wanted to do was to keep their own goal intact. If they could succeed they would win.

I came to the conclusion that they were not very good sportsmen, in spite of their good play, for at every opportunity they kicked out. This was quite an easy task with such a wind.

Once or twice when the opportunity came they forced their way up the field against the wind. But their efforts petered out in front of our goal. And we had to adapt ourselves to the new conditions now.

In the first-half our only hope was to kick with all our strength. But in this half the lightest touch would send the

ball careering down the field towards the Redcliffe goal.

After a spell of mid-field play, during which the tussles had been numerous, Talmadge managed to get the ball out, and he passed it over to Sir Montie. The latter steadied himself and kicked.

As he explained afterwards, it was his intention to pass the ball to me. He certainly had no idea of scoring. But the ball, caught by the wind, curved round and sailed serenely under the cross-bar. The Redcliffe goalie tried in vain to stop it. The shot was as unexpected to him as to anybody else.

"Goal!"

"Oh, good old Montie!"

"Go it, St. Frank's!"

"Begad!" said Sir Montie blankly.

"How frightfully extraordinary! I was simply passin' to you, Nipper, old boy! I had no intention of tryin' to score—I hadn't, really!"

"That's all right, my son," I grinned. "It doesn't matter what you were trying to do, we've equalised. We've got about sixteen minutes left, and if we're lucky we'll get the winning goal."

But goals in such a wind were difficult. Time after time, Grey and I and several others attempted to score. But in every case the leather was carried off by the gale. Judgment was almost impossible. No matter how carefully we kicked, making all allowances for the wind, an extra gust would come along and spoil everything. Either that, or the wind would die down for a second just at the crucial moment.

It seemed that the game would be a draw, and most of the fellows were only too eager to hear the whistle go. They wanted the game to end. But the only player on the field who seemed fresh and active was Reginald Pitt. The way in which his perfectly placed centres had been wasted was cruel. Time after time he had centred the ball with astonishing judgment.

And now, with only two minutes to go, he decided that he would make an effort on his own. He left his proper position and chased the ball almost into the left wing. And from here he sent in a shot which made the leather rise slightly, and then it went towards the Redcliffe goal at terrific speed.

The visiting goalie jumped at it and sent it flying back. But Pitt had

followed up his kick, and he fairly threw himself at the leather as it was punched out. He got his head down, and the next second there was a mighty roar.

"Goal!"

"Pitt's done it!"

"Oh, good man!"

Reginald Pitt's effort had come off, although he himself had hardly expected it would. And then, before the game could settle down again, Fenton blew his whistle. The match was over and St. Frank's had won.

And this fierce gale which had hindered us so much, continued, and was the cause of a curious little incident not entirely unconnected with Reginald Pitt and his affairs.

## CHAPTER V.

COLONEL SKINNER IS VIOLENT.

"**B**LESS my soul! Outrageous—positively outrageous!"

The neat two-seater car came to a halt, and the man behind the wheel glared ferociously at the obstacle which barred his further progress. All round the gale whistled fiercely and with noisy gusts through the trees and hedges, the lane itself being strwn with twigs and whirling leaves.

The scene was a quiet one only a short distance from the main Bannington Road, and this little incident was happening on the same afternoon as the Redcliffe match at St. Frank's—but somewhat later.

"The infernal impudence!" stormed the man in the car, leaving his seat and getting out into the road. "By gad! I shall make a serious complaint about this! Rank carelessness—that's what it is! Criminal carelessness, by gad!"

He was a somewhat fiery-looking individual, the man who had climbed out of the car. Somewhat stout in build, with a red, fiery face, and bristling, white moustache, he was evidently of a military bearing. And now he strode up and down, his moustache working furiously.

There was certainly some cause for his annoyance, for right across the road a tree had fallen, completely barring all further progress. The tree was not a very big one, but sufficiently large to prevent the motor-car going forward.

For a few minutes the military-looking gentleman stalked about, apparently unable to make up his mind. His coat-tails whistled in the wind, and, now and again he found it difficult to keep his balance. Then he stuck a pair of pince-nez on his nose, and glared up the road.

"Ha! I thought as much!" he snorted. "A house! Well, the only thing is to compel the owner of this property to remove that confounded tree. I'm hanged if I'll be prevented from reaching Caistowe because this idiot allows his trees to fall over the public highway. Never heard of such impudence!"

And he stalked off towards Thornton House—close against which he had been compelled to halt his car. The tree was in Mr. Simon Raspe's property, and it was quite likely that Raspe himself was unaware of the fall.

The fiery old gentleman with the white moustache stalked up to the gateway, passed inside, and then made his way to the front door of the house, which stood well back from the road.

The wind was howling round the building with such tremendous force that it seemed likely that something might happen at any moment. Indeed, even as the visitor arrived at the door, a tile came clattering down upon the gravel terrace.

"Bless my soul!" snorted the stranger. "This man is a positive menace to the neighbourhood, with his loose tiles and falling trees. Huh! It's about time somebody woke him up, I fancy. By gad! I'll do that!"

He seized the knocker and slammed it down with such terrific force that the very door quivered and shook. And he waited there, storming up and down the step until the door was opened—as it presently was by a butler.

"Who the deuce are you, sir?" roared the visitor, glaring.

"Really, sir, I don't quite——"

"Don't stand there staring at me like a fool!" snorted the other. "My name is Skinner, sir—Colonel Skinner! I presume you're a servant, eh? Who's your master? Out with it, my man! Who lives here?"

The butler looked offended.

"My master is Mr. Simon Raspe," he said stiffly. "I see no reason why you should create this disturbance, sir!"

"Disturbance be hanged!" roared Colonel Skinner. "I've come here to make a serious complaint, and if I don't get some satisfaction I shall go straight to the police—you understand? The police! Do you think I'm going to be delayed and humbugged about by your master's confounded trees? Where is he—where is this Mr. Gasp?"

"Raspe, sir," said the butler. "At present the master is in the library, and I don't think he can be disturbed——"

"You impudent ruffian!" shouted Colonel Skinner fiercely. "How dare you stand here arguing with me? How dare you? Go and tell your master I want to see him at once—tell him I demand to see him! And, what is more, I won't be kept waiting! Go on, don't stare at me as though I were about to eat you!"

"I will take your message to the master, sir, but I cannot guarantee that he will see you now," said the butler, maintaining his dignity with difficulty. "I think you said the name was Colonel Skinner?"

"Yes, you dolt, I did!" retorted the Colonel curtly.

The butler turned and passed down the hall, leaving the colonel on the step. Somehow, Mr. Simon Raspe's butler did not feel quite justified in admitting this fiery visitor into the house.

Within two minutes he returned.

"Well?" barked the colonel.

"I regret, sir, that Mr. Raspe cannot see you this afternoon," said the butler, with obvious relish. "He further desires me to request that you should restrain your voice, as he is somewhat disturbed."

Just for a moment, Colonel Skinner was too overcome to speak. His face puffed out and turned red, his eyes bulged, and his moustache fairly bristled. When his voice came, it arrived all at once, in a thunderous roar.

"Bless my soul!" he stormed. "You—you dare to tell me that this Raspe fellow won't see me? Confound your impudence! Stand aside, you infernal idiot! Do you hear me? Stand aside!"

Colonel Skinner pushed his way into the hall, and the butler hardly knew what to do. But he was somewhat incensed by this peppery visitor's attitude, and he attempted to bar the colonel's progress.

"How dare you?" roared the colonel. "Take your hands off me, you scoundrel! You'll get the sack for this, I can assure you!"

"You can't come in, sir——"

"We'll see about that—we'll see about that, by gad!" thundered Colonel Skinner. "Now, my friend, I'll show your master I'm not the kind of a man to be brow-beaten and foiled. You understand? I've come here for a certain purpose, and I'm going to see this man before I move another yard!"

The colonel, indeed, was a forceful gentleman, and the butler really had no chance. He was pushed aside, and went staggering. And before he could recover, Colonel Skinner had marched down the hall, and had flung open the door of the library with a crash which could be heard throughout the house.

Simon Raspe leapt to his feet. He had been seated at his desk, writing, and he had distinctly heard the noisy altercation outside. But never for a moment had Raspe supposed that the visitor would force his way into the house.

Mr. Simon Raspe was an unhealthy-looking individual—fat, greasy-looking, and with baggy eyes and unpleasant complexion. His nose was singularly sharp, considering the flabby fatness of his face.

"Ho! So here you are!" shouted Colonel Skinner, striding into the room and slamming the door behind him. "What the deuce do you mean, sir, by refusing to see me? How dare you send your servant out to——"

"One moment, Colonel Skinner!" rapped out Simon Raspe. "I rather fancy that is your name?"

"Yes, it is, and——"

"Let me speak!" roared Raspe. "This is my house, and you have forced your way into it like any common blackguard! Allow me to tell you, Colonel Skinner, I will have nothing to say to you—nothing whatever! I have never experienced such a piece of impertinence in all my life!"

The colonel flung his hat down on Raspe's desk with considerable force.

"By gad!" he shouted. "Let me tell you, sir, I don't allow any man to call me a blackguard! You'll either apologise on the spot, or I'll knock you down!"

Simon Raspe stepped back a pace or two.

"What is the meaning of this intrusion?" he demanded coldly. "Perhaps I was somewhat hasty, and I regret my remark. But I cannot possibly consent to hold any further conversation with you. Kindly leave my house at once."

He reached forward to touch the bell, but Colonel Skinner gave two strides and jerked his hand away.

"I'll go when I've finished!" he snorted fiercely. "Not before, sir! You understand that? Not before! I demand to know what the deuce you mean by allowing your infernal trees to fall over the public highway? How do you expect me to keep my temper when you——"

"I can't help the wind blowing a gale, can I?" shouted Simon Raspe. "If one of my trees has fallen it is no concern of mine——"

"No concern of yours!" thundered the colonel. "Bless my soul! Are you mad, sir? Have you gone off your head? Here am I, absolutely stranded—unable to proceed a yard. Do you expect my motor-car to leap your confounded trees like a steeplechaser? Or do you expect me to clear the road myself? I demand that you send your servants out at once to remove the obstruction!"

Raspe eyed his visitor coldly.

"And I refuse to take orders from you!" he retorted.

"You refuse!"

"I do!" retorted Raspe curtly. "If you had come to me in a gentlemanly spirit I should have raised no objection. But I positively have no intention of clearing the fallen tree away at your dictation."

"I shall go to the police——"

"Very well, go!" shouted Raspe furiously. "The police will not help, I can assure you. It will be better for yourself and everybody else, Colonel Skinner, if you curb that absurd temper of yours and behave more like a gentleman and less like a lunatic. The sooner you leave my house the better. I will not be brow-beaten and bullied on my own premises!"

Colonel Skinner fairly boiled over.

"How dare you?" he raved. "Good gad, sir how dare you? Your trees fall

across the road and block the whole highway, and you have the utter audacity to insult me! Either you consent to remove that tree at once, or I'll give you the thrashing of your life!"

"I will hear no more——"

"I may be double your age, but there's plenty of life in me!" shouted Colonel Skinner. "I came here to demand satisfaction, and I shall get it! Upon my soul! I have never been so enraged in all my life! I—I—I——"

The colonel made a peculiar choking noise in his throat, his face went purple, and he staggered drunkenly. He clutched wildly at the table, and then fell to the floor in a limp heap.

Simon Raspe caught his breath in and cursed.

"The infernal old fool!" he muttered shakily.

It was only too obvious what had happened. Colonel Skinner's fury had been such that he had fallen into a fit—apoplexy, by the look of it. The strain had been too much for him, and he had collapsed.

Simon Raspe hardly knew what to do. But it was quite certain he did not want doctors or the police swarming round his house. He almost felt faint as the thought struck him that the colonel might be dead.

With shaking hands he bent down and felt the old gentleman's heart. It was beating hard, and his respiration was laboured. Raspe knew quite enough to see at once that the colonel was in a kind of fit.

He looked round him quickly, and half-reached for the bell. Then he changed his mind and swiftly passed out of the room. He wanted cold water and a sponge, but he decided that it would be better if the servants knew nothing about this unfortunate affair.

Three minutes later he returned, and dabbed the colonel's forehead with a wet sponge. At first this treatment had no effect, but after a while the old chap showed some signs of returning consciousness.

Then, suddenly, he sat up, and snorted.

"What the—bless my soul! Confound you, sir!" he gasped. "Take that infernal sponge away! How dare you?"

"Calm yourself—calm yourself!" said Raspe sternly. "You had a fit, Colonel

Skinner, and if you agitate yourself you will go off into another. Perhaps you would care for a drop of brandy to pull you round?"

The colonel struggled to his feet.

"An excellent suggestion!" he muttered. "Yes, by gad, a drop of brandy would set me up! Thank you—thank you! Ah, that's better! Upon my soul! I seem to have been causing you some trouble, sir?"

"You have!" replied Raspe shortly.

"My temper—my infernal temper!" growled Colonel Skinner. "I hope you will forgive me, sir, if I have been in any way insulting. That's the worst of me—I lose my temper, and I'm hanged if I know what I'm talking about. I came to see you about something, I believe. What was it—what the deuce was it?"

"The gale has blown one of my trees——"

"Of course—of course! Bless my soul, yes!" said Colonel Skinner. "One of your infernal trees—— Ahem! I mustn't start again, must I? That's the worst of me—I can't control myself! And you can't control the gale, eh? Of course not—of course not! Most unreasonable of me—infernally absurd, in fact. An old fool—that's what I am—a confounded old fool!"

And Colonel Skinner grabbed his hat from the desk, and stalked unsteadily out of the room. He passed the butler in the hall, and stormed out of the house. When he got back to the road he found his motor-car still there.

He started up the engine, reversed the car, and went back towards the main road. Then he opened up the engine, and went speeding along. In order to reach Caistowe it was necessary for him to make a detour through Bellton.

And it so happened that I was just leaving the station as Colonel Skinner's car came by. I had come down to inquire about a parcel which Sir Montie was expecting. And I was rather surprised to hear a hail.

"Hi, boy!" roared a voice. "Come here! D'you hear me?"

I saw that the fiery old stranger in the car had pulled up, and he was glaring at me. I went up to the car, and raised my cap.

"Speaking to me, sir?" I asked politely.

"Yes, confound you. I was!" snapped

Colonel Skinner. "Which is the way to Caistowe?"

"Why, the first turning on the left—"

"Well, jump in here, and show me!" he snorted. "Don't stand there gaping! Do as I say—d'you hear? By gad! Are you deaf? Or are you merely a fool? You certainly look it, by gad!"

I thought it better to humour the old fellow, and I stepped into the car. As I did so, he opened the throttle and let in the clutch with a swoop which nearly knocked me backwards. I flopped into the seat with a fearful jar.

"Great Scott!" I gasped.

"Ha! Now I've got you!" said the colonel gloatingly. "I know you—I know who you are! Nipper's your name—you're supposed to be a kind of assistant to an addle-pated buffoon who calls himself Nelson Lee!"

"Look here, sir," I said grimly. "What's the idea of this? Yes, my name's Nipper, and I don't see any reason why you should insult Mr. Lee. You're a perfect stranger to me——"

"Nonsense!"

"You're a perfect stranger——"

"Fiddlesticks!" roared Colonel Skinner. "Rubbish! You know me as well as I know you! And of all the blind young dolts you're about the worst specimen I've ever come across!"

By this time we had proceeded some distance up the Caistowe Road, and were in a quiet spot. The colonel brought the car to a standstill, and glared at me. I glared at him, too. For I was becoming highly incensed.

"Look here, sir. I've had enough of this——" I began.

"My dear Nipper, you are singularly obtuse to-day!" interrupted Colonel Skinner smoothly. "You surely do not mean to say that my little effort at disguise has completely fooled you?"

I gasped.

"Guv'nor!" I said faintly. "Well I'm jiggered!"

I stared at Colonel Skinner in blank amazement. I tried to detect any tiny flaw in his facial appearance. There was none. He was an absolute stranger. And yet the voice was that of—Nelson Lee!

"Splendid, Nipper!" he chuckled. "You mustn't take any notice of my

little joke. I was merely testing the efficacy of my disguise. If you are deceived, then I am satisfied—for your eyes are extremely keen."

"But—but it's staggering, sir!" I panted. "What does it mean? What have you been up to? My hat! It's simply marvellous!"

Nelson Lee chuckled again.

"I have done some important work this afternoon, Nipper," he said. "I did not intend to tell you about it until later—but, meeting you against the station, I thought it would be a good opportunity. I may as well tell you that this disguise took me three hours to perfect, and I shall not be able to remove it without a great deal of hard work."

"I can believe that all right, guv'nor," I said. "That moustache looks absolutely real, and there's not an atom of grease paint on your face, and I can hardly believe that you're wearing a wig——"

"The wig is sealed to my head, and there are hundreds of separate hairs fixed on at the joins," interrupted Nelson Lee. "My fiery colour is the result of a dye, and not a grease paint. This disguise had to be as perfect as it humanly could be—because I was compelled to be seemingly unconscious for several minutes in Simon Raspe's library. I could not afford to take any risks. An ordinary disguise might have been detected upon close examination."

I stared at Nelson Lee eagerly.

"What—what have you been doing, sir?" I asked.

In a few sentences Nelson Lee told me how he had stormed his way into Raspe's library. By adopting this peppery old colonel's disguise, such a course had been made possible. In no other way could he have been certain of getting into the room he wanted.

"But what did you do there?" I asked breathlessly.

"I opened Raspe's safe, removed a package of papers, and placed them in my inside pocket," replied the guv'nor calmly. "When Raspe came back he had not the slightest inkling that I had moved an inch. And these papers, Nipper, will probably prove the last link in the chain, and I shall be able to place Simon Raspe in the dock for conspiracy, fraud and robbery."

"My hat, you've been going the pace, sir!" I exclaimed. "What a first-class

stunt! Raspe doesn't suspect anything — Oh, but what about when he goes to the safe? He'll see that the papers are missing. And, anyhow, how did you open it so quickly?"

"On Monday night, Nipper, I went along that handy little tunnel in Raspe's garden," said Nelson Lee. "When I arrived at the library, I found that Raspe was having a talk with his accomplice, Stretton. Their conversation was not particularly attractive, but I learned two things. One, that the papers concerning the Pitt swindle were in the safe—and, two, that the word required to unfasten the combination safe lock was 'Distilled.' That was quite sufficient for me, and I left at once. I thought out this little scheme, and put it into operation. All I wanted was to be left alone in Raspe's library for two or three minutes, and this plan enabled me to do so. I may mention that I have left a dummy package in the safe, which, I fancy, will deceive Mr. Raspe very nicely."

And then I began to realise the wonderful astuteness of Nelson Lee's plan. Raspe had no suspicions about the apoplectic old colonel who had visited him about the fallen tree. Nelson Lee had been quick to see the gale as a pretext for his forced entry.

And I knew that everything was going on smoothly. Nelson Lee was well on the trail, and he was pitting his wits against those of Simon Raspe. Without the slightest doubt the guv'nor was winning.

## CHAPTER VI.

### AT CROSS PURPOSES.

**R**EGINALD PITT was uneasy and uncomfortable.

It was Saturday morning, and dinner would soon be ready. The gale had completely died down, leaving the weather crisp and clear. And, during the afternoon, there was to be a match with the juniors of the River House School. It was confidently anticipated that the Remove would beat Brewster and Co. with comparative ease.

The River House heroes were in winning form, but they were very dubious about Reginald Pitt. They had heard of his exploits, and his inclusion in the St. Frank's team made victory for them well nigh impossible. The St. Frank's junior

Eleven would certainly prove too hard a nut to crack.

And this was why Reginald Pitt was so uneasy.

Everybody was relying on him to play. The whole Remove was expecting him to do particularly well this afternoon so that the River House would be whacked to the wide. And Pitt couldn't play.

He was torn between his duty to the Remove, and his duty to his parents. For he was expected to turn out, in the character of Abdullah, for Bannington. The professionals were playing the return match against Helmford United—at Helmford. If Pitt played for Bannington it would mean six pounds to him—six pounds to send to his parents, who were in sore need of the money. If he played for St. Frank's, he would not get a farthing. And Pitt felt that his duty lay with the professional club, for his parents urgently needed the money.

To speak of this matter to anybody at St. Frank's was impossible. And Pitt hardly dared ask exemption from the River House fixture. It would mean all sorts of questions which he could not answer.

And so, when St. Frank's turned out to meet the River House School, Pitt was missing. As he stole stealthily away on his bicycle from the school gates, he noticed, with bitter feelings, that the match was already in full swing.

Well, it was done now, and he had to go through with it. Afterwards, there would be a row—Pitt knew this well enough. But he was already at bitter enmity with his own study chum, and he didn't care much about the others.

He presented himself at the Bannington Club grounds, and found that the Eleven would shortly be starting off for Helmford. Mr. Page, the manager, had been a bit doubtful as to whether Pitt could play, but there was no mistaking his satisfaction when Pitt announced that he was ready to go.

And so Pitt went.

It did not take long to don his simple make-up—merely the application of a brown dye, which made him look singularly like an Arab or an Egyptian. The other members of the team were frankly pleased that Pitt was playing. For he had displayed wonderful form the previous week, when Helmford United had been entertained on the Bannington ground.

it was really owing to Pitt's play that Bannington won—and it was far better to take out the same team for the return match.

Helmford was only twenty odd miles away, and it was reached in good time. Pitt took the field cheerfully. He cast all thoughts of St. Frank's aside. For the time being he became a professional, and he gave his sole attention to this League match. And what a match it turned out to be.

Bannington had already taken two points away from their rivals. They were hopeful of getting one more—they certainly did not expect to do better than draw at Helmford. They thought they would be lucky to do so.

But Pitt played even better than before.

And his extraordinary vim and energy spurred on the other members of the team to do better things. They played football of the finest description, working together like clockwork, and without the faintest suspicion of misunderstanding.

They entered the field a perfect piece of football machinery. And, so powerful was their attack, they scored within the first five minutes—a disaster for Helmford which the latter never recovered from.

Certainly, the home team worked desperately to please their own supporters, and to win this match. At half time they had equalised—both sides getting two goals. Five minutes after the resumption of play Helmford scored again. The home supporters cheered themselves hoarse—but they were premature.

For, from that minute, their idols went to pieces. Bannington were all over them, and scored three times before the final whistle, making the total score three-five. It was a magnificent effort.

Pitt scored two of the goals for Bannington, and it was owing to his perfect centring that one of the other goals had been gained. It was another victory for Abdullah, the wonderful Bannington outside-right, who was already being commented upon in the football columns of many London papers.

Bannington's success was sensational, for Helmford had been regarded as their masters. And yet Helmford had surrendered all four points in these two matches.

Pitt was the hero of the hour among the Bannington players. Freely and

frankly, without any trace of jealousy, they acknowledged that he was the best forward in their line—and they had some good forwards, too.

Mr. Page was overjoyed, and he pressed Pitt insistently to play in every future match, if it was at all possible. The whole team was in winning form now, and a change might break the spell.

Pitt promised that he would do his best, and when he left the Club grounds, after removing his disguise, he was accompanied by Mr. Page and a friend of the latter's. This friend, as Pitt well knew, was Mr. William Siggins, a prominent bookmaker in Bannington. He was not a bookmaker of the beery, pub-haunting type, but quite gentlemanly.

It was rather unfortunate that Pitt should have been in the company of the two men just then. But he had left the football ground without thinking much—and, after all, it was growing dusk.

He arrived back at St. Frank's fully prepared to face a storm. But he did not expect to find the turmoil which actually took place. He put his bicycle away, and then slipped into the Ancient House.

By ill-luck he ran into a crowd of juniors.

"Here he is, the rotter!"

"Grab him!"

"Hi, steady on——" began Pitt.

"Where have you been to?" demanded De Valerie angrily. "Why weren't you here for the match this afternoon? The River House drew with us—and we ought to have whacked them into a cocked hat!"

"It's your fault, Pitt!" shouted Armstrong.

"Where did you sneak off to?"

"Why did you desert the team?"

"Oh, it's no good asking him," said Gulliver sneeringly. "We all know what he's been up to. What did he have a row with Grey for? Because he's been ~~gone~~ the pace, an' actin' the sport. He hasn't got time for football—an' I don't blame him either!"

"You dry up, Gulliver!" shouted Handforth. "I'll bet Pitt's got a good explanation. Now then, my son, out with it!"

"Where did you go this afternoon?" asked Singleton.

"That's my business!"

"What?"

"I can't tell you anything—I missed the match, and that's all there is about

it," said Pitt grimly. "I want to save you all the trouble I can, so I should advise you not to ask any questions. They won't be answered!"

"You—you rotter!" roared De Valerie. "You left the team in the cart—you deserted us without saying a word, and now you refuse to give an explanation."

Pitt shifted his feet uncomfortably.

"I'm sorry," he said quietly. "There are reasons—private reasons—why I can't tell you anything."

"Oh, that's different," said Singleton. "If—"

Before he could get any further there was a slight commotion, and Owen major and Griffith came charging into the lobby, hot and breathless. They took in the situation at a glance.

"Oh, he's here, is he?" shouted Owen major. "The rotter! The bounder! We've found out why he deserted the Eleven this afternoon."

"You've found out?" shouted De Valerie.

"Yes!"

"What do you mean?" asked Pitt sharply.

"You cad!" roared Owen major. "We saw you with Siggins, the bookie, and that other man! You've been up to some rotten tricks—attending a race meeting, I expect. There was one at Helmford this afternoon—"

"You saw him with a bookmaker?" inquired Handforth blankly.

"Yes!"

"I don't believe it!" said Edward Oswald. "Look here, Pitt, why can't you say something? Do you deny that you were seen with Siggins, the bookie?"

Reginald Pitt clenched his fists.

"I've got nothing to say," he replied grimly.

"There you are—he admits it!" yelled Owen major. "Now you think we were mistaken? Do you think he'd refuse to say anything if he hadn't been with that rotten bookie? The rotter has been to the races—there's no other explanation."

Tremendous indignation was aroused, and I came on the scene in the middle of the excitement. Pitt said nothing—he was pestered with all sorts of questions, but he would not commit himself to any answers.

At last, under pressure from me, he denied that he had been to a race-meeting, and earnestly declared that his actions during the afternoon had been of a straightforward character.

But of what use was this statement?

He would give no explanation—he would not describe any of his movements. And, most significant of all, he would not deny that he had been in the company of William Siggins. And the result was obvious.

Scarcely one fellow in the Remove believed Pitt's denial. It was taken for granted that he had been up to shady games, and was bowled out. To the juniors the evidence was absolutely clear.

And now Pitt was not only at open enmity with Jack Grey, his study mate, but he was scorned by the whole Remove. His bare word was not accepted. Nothing he said was believed.

He stood self condemned. He had deserted the Remove Eleven when it needed him most, and the juniors were whole-hearted in their expressions of opinion. And now Reginald Pitt was not trusted—he was looked upon with contempt.

But he defied the lot—he didn't care.

He was at open enmity with the whole Remove, and he was the only one who knew that they were at cross purposes. But his tongue was tied—he could say nothing. His plan to help his suffering parents was costing him dearly.

But steadily, Nelson Lee was working up his case against Simon Raepe, the cause of all the trouble. At present the horizon was dark and gloomy, with no trace of a rift in the clouds.

And many another storm was to break before Reginald Pitt once more found himself in the full sunlight of the Remove's esteem.

THE END.

NEXT WEEK'S STORY:

**THE INTERRUPTED MATCH, or,  
Arrested On the Field.**

# The Ghosts of Marsh Manor



BEGIN TO-DAY THIS THRILLING NARRATIVE OF

THE GREAT DETECTIVE OF GRAY'S INN ROAD.

## INTRODUCTION.

NELSON LEE, the great detective, as Mr. Herbert Drake, B.A., secures a post as games master at Marsh Manor School in order to investigate strange visits of ghosts at the school. His young assistant, NIPPER, comes to the school as Barton, a backward boy. Unless the ghost can be laid, the Head, the REV. OCTAVIOUS CHARD, will be obliged to close down the school. Lee suspects Monsieur VILOTTE, the French master as being implicated in the ghostly manifestations. ADOLPHE MALINES, JULES TROCHON, and MADAME TROCHON, Belgian refugees and friendly neighbours of the Head, are found to be living on the hospitality of INGLEY-CHARTERIS, known by Lee to be a financier of ill-repute. The mystery deepens, and Lee finds that he is up against some very desperate and clever criminals, including SOL CLITTERS, the notorious forger, who, learning of the famous detective's presence at the school, plots to murder him. Vilotte is to do the deed, but is cleverly foiled by Lee, who puts the French master under lock and key and compels him to write a letter to Charteris saying that Lee has been killed. Lee disappears and awaits developments.

(Now read on.)

## CHAPTER XIII.—(Continued).

### The Mystery Deepens!

"I 'VE thought of that," said Clitters. "Now we must hustle. But until old Chard informs the local police there'll be no trouble, and my advice is, get a move on him while he's in the mood, before he gets his courage back."

"I have thought of something else," interposed madame. "Poor Antoine is very highly strung. Suppose he has the brain fever, and suppose he talks?"

"He always did talk," growled her husband, who hated Vilotte. "But no one pays attention to the babbling of a sick man. Besides, he has not got brain fever yet."

"For all that, there's something in what madame says," interposed the American. "Don't lose time. Turn on a couple of ghosts to-night, and, as you're so confident

that they've not spotted your line of retreat, put the fear into the family. Let one of them be bloodstained, and the other make weird noises, until one of the dormitories goes stark, staring mad. You've got a lot of fools to deal with now Nelson Lee's gone west. I suppose there's no chance of their discovering the passage from Vilotte's quarters to Lee's. You know how they turn a sick room upside down."

"Ah, it is not in the bedchamber," grinned Adolphe Malines. "I would bet a hundred thousand francs that, even if the table were cleared away, no one would think there was anything movable about the floor."

"That being the case," said the stockbroker, "I will push off, for I'm duc in town to-day. It's been a near thing, but the luck's on our side, and there's no reason why we shouldn't run this happy little home until we're all of us millionaires."

They shook hands all round, and Trochon would have opened another bottle of wine to celebrate the event. But Adolphe Malines had already disappeared into the inner room, and the American was preparing to follow him. So the immaculately dressed man, whose money had made that strange household possible, stepped back into his sumptuous car, a choice flower in his button-hole and a feeling of keener satisfaction in his heart than he had experienced since the coming of "Mr. Herbert Drake, B.A." into the dull life of Marsh Manor.

By a strange irony of chance the window of the late science-master's room looked out upon the high road, and Nelson Lee and Nipper watched him go.

"Something tells me," said the great detective, "that we shall be successful this time. The principal difficulty will be to let none of them escape. It will be easy enough to arrest Charteris at his own house, but Sol Clitters is as slippery as an eel. Whatever you do, Nipper, don't stir outside the grounds. Keep with Tom, Dick, and Harry when you're not supposed to be doing your lines."

"You needn't be afraid of me, guv'nor," grinned the boy. "But what line are you going to follow?"

"The line of least resistance as usual."

replied Lee. "This change of quarters has been a good thing, because it brings me right on top of the whole business without the length of a corridor intervening. Ghosts would seem to be like policemen, and have their special beat. Ours always crosses this end of the passage."

"And you've doctored your door?"

Nelson Lee nodded.

"I've hinged one entire panel, and I've decided to take strong measures, in view of that murderous attempt last night."

"Do you mean you're going to fire?"

"Yes—fire to wing, not to kill. It will cause a tremendous commotion, no doubt; but Mr. Chard approves the idea, and here he comes to tell us about his interview with Charteris."

The evenings were beginning to draw in, and when it came to locking-up time, Boyle, the butler, brought the keys, as usual, to his master, who was standing in front of the fire in his private dining-room.

Monica and Joan had already retired, and Mrs. Chard left the room as Boyle entered it.

"Everything all right?" said the Rev. Octavius, taking the keys and dropping them into his side pocket.

"I've seen to it all, sir," said Boyle.

"And you've taken the supper-basket upstairs?"

"Yes, sir."

By Nelson Lee's advice, the butler, a hard-headed little man, verging on sixty, had been taken into their confidence, and he it was who surreptitiously carried food to the voluntary prisoner in Mr. Williams' room, who, in his turn, had undertaken to feed that other prisoner after the school had gone to bed.

"I'm sorry to say, sir, that two of the maids are getting very timid," said Boyle. "I've pooh-poohed the whole thing, and kept them sensible up to now; but I'm afraid the disappearance of Mr. Drake will put the tin hat on things."

"I hope not, Boyle," replied his master seriously. "Do your level best for the next two or three days. We don't want trouble in the kitchen on the top of everything else we're going through."

"Indeed, no, sir," said the butler. "But I must say that if my own nerves weren't pretty tough, it's enough to give one the creeps. Of course, now we know that criminals are at the bottom of it, you and I can understand within a little; but the maids is another matter sir, and there we're dealing with ignorant people."

Boyle lingered some while longer in conversation, and Mr. Chard walked with him to the baize door, which he securely bolted on the inside.

As a rule, the butler carried a lighted candle, for the narrow passage leading to the servants' stairs was black as pitch. But whether he had forgotten it on that occasion, or whether he felt it incumbent upon him to support what he had said about strong

nerves, matters not, and he climbed the staircase to the top floor, making no sound in his soft slippers.

At the head of the staircase the passage ran at right angles, lit by a lamp which it was Boyle's duty to extinguish as he passed it on his way to his own room; but he had no sooner placed his foot on the rush-matting that carpeted the passage and blown out the light, than a gigantic figure loomed up on his left, and he found himself face to face with the White Abbot!

"Good Lord!" exclaimed the man. "Now, you villain, I've got you!"

But before he could utter another word a terrible hand gripped him by the throat, another plucked him off his legs, and, pressed against his captor, in a bear's hug that bereft him of all power of motion and unable to make a sound, the unfortunate butler felt himself hurried away along the arm of the passage that led in the direction of the north-west wing!

Down below, Nelson Lee, watching at his hinged panel, thought he caught an exclamation, and darted out to the foot of the servants' staircase.

Everything was silent as the grave. The light, which he knew all about, was not burning, and the butler had evidently performed his usual task in the customary way.

"I must have been mistaken," muttered Lee, and he went back to his room.

Next morning Mr. Chard received a crowning blow, which for a moment almost shook his confidence in Lee's judgment.

Boyle, the butler, had disappeared, and the female servants came clamouring to Mrs. Chard and gave notice in a body!

When Mr. Chard came into the great hall to read prayers his face was white and stern, and, looking down from the raised platform, he was conscious of an electrical feeling in the air, almost a sense of mutiny, and realised that the news was already known.

"Silence!" he said. "I have an announcement to make to you all," and the shuffling of feet and the fidgeting ceased like magic. "We have discovered the scoundrel who has been disturbing the peace of this establishment."

And all the eyes turned up at him were wide open with expectation.

He paused a moment, to let his words sink home, and knew that he had made a decided impression.

"You have been very good, boys. You have stood by me in a way that has touched me deeply. I want you to maintain the same attitude until Saturday morning. I shall have a great surprise for you then. I may even produce the ghost for you to look at in broad daylight, here on this platform. You will be pleased to hear that I have had a communication from Mr. Drake, which entirely explains what seemed to be a most extraordinary action on his part. Everything connected with this strange business is extraordinary, and you will say that it reads like a romance when I tell you about it. Now then, until Saturday morning you must

be patient. The lesson for to-day is from the sixteenth chapter of Matthew, beginning at the first verse.

No one there knew how devoutly the reverend gentleman hoped in his heart that he would be able to keep faith with his hearers, but he felt it very necessary at that point to stiffen the school and put some backbone into it. All the same, when prayers were over, he realised that he was sadly in need of backbone himself.

"Barton," he said, pausing with his hand on the door, "bring me your imposition as far as you have gone after breakfast," and he went out.

"Why couldn't he tell us now?" said Tulk.

"Don't believe he knows himself; it's all bunkum!" sneered Gurling contemptuously.

"I know one thing," was Seymour's comment. "If Nelson Lee had only come down the whole business would have been settled long ago. What a pig he must be not even to reply to us."

"Perhaps he never got your letter," suggested Barton.

"It would have been returned from the Dead Letter Office if he hadn't," retorted Gurling.

When school began Nipper and the great detective, whose eyes were twinkling with merriment at his late admirers' estimate of himself, were closeted with the Headmaster in Lee's new room, and Mr. Chard was speaking.

"There's one thing I don't understand, Mr. Lee," he said. "Why, with Vilotte in your hands, and the knowledge that Ingleby-Charteris is the associate of would-be murderers, why, in the name of goodness, haven't you struck before? What are you waiting for?"

Nelson Lee puffed slowly at his pipe, and regarded the speaker through his half-closed eyelids.

"I have two reasons, one of which, at least, will appeal to you, Mr. Chard," he replied. "The first of these reasons is that every one of these scoundrels must be taken red-handed. It's quite plain to all of us that, posing as refugees and under the cloak of scientific investigation, the Belgians are turning out forged Treasury notes in immense numbers. Another batch, to the value of three million pounds sterling, will be ready for exploitation at the end of this week, and Clitters is to sail with them, for America a few days later. When we pounce we shall pounce to some purpose. But there is my second point, and you must bear with me, Mr. Chard. I have made it a rule throughout my career never to allow a mystery to go unsolved, and how these

people get into this house undetected time after time is a thing I mean to get to the bottom of. They have kidnapped Boyle—they may even have murdered him, though I hope not—but how do they do it?"

"That seems to me to be immaterial," said the Headmaster rather testily. "While you are laying traps into which they do not fall, and discovering passages which they do not use, my livelihood is on the verge of going to pieces. Ninety per cent. of the boys will write home on Sunday—I cannot prevent them—and on Tuesday morning I shall receive notice of their removal. I cannot blame the parents. I should do the same thing myself."

"So should I," said Lee. "But, just as you asked the boys to bear with you this morning, as Nipper tells me, I will ask you to extend the same degree of patience to us. Saturday morning will see the end of your troubles."

"You are certain of that?"

"As certain as anyone can be of any human happening," replied Lee, in a firm tone, adding, with a smile: "If you are not satisfied then, sir, I will retire gracefully, and you may call in the police."

"Very well, we will leave it at that," said Mr. Chard. "And I pray Heaven you may be right! By the way, Mr. Lee, what about the invitation for a musical evening at my house, which the Belgian refugees accepted for to-morrow night? I don't know what was in the back of your mind, but suppose they don't turn up? Will it seriously affect your plans? They might think it was a plot to arrest them wholesale."

Nelson Lee smiled.

"If I told you my real object, you would probably not consent to be party to the undertaking," he said. "However, they will come. And it is very necessary that they should, because it is of vital importance that they should not entertain the slightest idea that you have any suspicion regarding them. They would be gone like a covey of partridges if they thought you had connected them in any way with this ghost-walking."

Nipper returned the pressure of his master's foot under the table and Mr. Chard left the room, a little more satisfied than when he had entered it, but not very much so. Even historic associations and oak-panelling and all the thousand charms of that grand old house failed to compensate for the dramatic discomforts of living there.

## CHAPTER XIV.

### A Shot in the Dark.

TO Mr. Chard, Lee's manner continued to appear calm, deliberate, and resourceful, but inwardly the detective's soul was filled with exasperating doubt. For once in his life he had been foiled, and nothing but complete success would satisfy him, he knew. He had given the Headmaster a time limit, but things had not developed

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on the lines he expected, and it was now Thursday morning.

As he sat reviewing the position, with a gloomy frown, the feeling was forced upon him that somehow he had bungled by allowing himself to be cooped up in those two rooms, thus limiting his personal sphere of operation. And yet it was a position that had been none of his seeking.

The Belgian ruffians must continue to believe that he was dead, and he was going to risk his reputation on the playing of one card. If it turned out trumps it meant certain victory, and he longed for Friday night to come.

He had several interviews with Nipper at odd moments during the day, and when that young gentleman left him for preparation Lee laid his hand on the boy's shoulder.

"I'd almost forgotten," he said; "but I have arranged with Mr. Chard that all the dormitory doors shall be locked to-night."

"Oh, but I say, Chief!" exclaimed his assistant. "What about me, if anything happens?"

"I don't think it at all likely that anything will happen to-night," replied Nelson Lee. "At any rate, it can't be helped. Your turn comes to-morrow, and you'll want all your strength and cuteness for the thing you've got to do."

"Yes, I know, Chief; but—" "Never mind about the buto," old fellow," replied Lee, with a reassuring smile. "Sleep the sleep of the just. And now slip downstairs like greased lightning, or the chamber-maids will see you. I've to feed Vilotte before they appear on the scene."

Nipper rather enjoyed prep., because Mr. Chard supplied him with several interesting books, by way of improving his "backward education," and on that particular night he quite lost himself in Macaulay's History.

As a matter of form, Lee went to the hinged panel he had prepared in the door, and watched as usual. The noise from the dormitories subsided, Mr. Jackson obeyed his instructions by locking the boys in, and sought the peace and seclusion of his own chamber with many yawns, but there was no ghost.

Lee was just closing the panel when a quiver ran through him from head to foot.

Round the corner of the servants' lobby the White Abbot had suddenly appeared in view, and stood there, listening!

Nelson Lee had never been so near to him before, and, stilling his own breath, took in every detail of the figure. The white cowl, pulled forward, completely hid the face within it, but he saw that the coarse flannel robe, belted at the waist by a knotted cord, shone with that peculiar light given off by phosphorus.

The main thing that struck him was that the figure, of which he had caught a glimpse before, had been much more big and burly than this man. But as his fingers sought the door-handle, and he braced himself to dash out and seize the intruder, the monk began

to move along the corridor in the direction of the east wing!

Nelson Lee instantly changed his plan. himself was wearing a dark suit which would blend well with the universal gloom of the old house after nightfall, and, as every door was deeply recessed, there were opportunities of following the masquerader and tracking him to his lair.

Drawing the automatic-pistol which always reposed in his side-pocket, he opened his own door and looked out. The figure was pausing

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outside the first dormitory, obviously listening before it passed on to the next.

"So," thought Lee, slipping across the passage, and sheltering in the opposite doorway, "your object to-night is not to frighten. I think I know what you're hoping to do."

The monk moved noiselessly forward to the third floor, and Lee, gliding like a shadow in his wake, took refuge in the entrance of dormitory No. 2.

At the far end of the corridor were the two studies, side by side, the one he had so recently vacated, the other which led to the bed-room where their prisoner was housed.

"I thought so!" whispered Nelson Lee, as the white figure came to a stand at Vilotte's door, and, grasping the handle, glanced sideways down the great staircase three strides away to the right.

Blake gathered himself together for a sprint, but, as ill-luck would have it, Mr. Jackson, uncertain whether he had locked the third dormitory after all, chose that moment to emerge from his room, and gave a gasp of amazement.

The White Abbot turned, clutching the skirts of his robe as he did so, saw Lee's figure spring from its concealment to intercept his retreat, and, firing at random, darted down the staircase as the readiest means of escape.

Lee heard the bullet whistle a foot above

his head as he dashed after him, and fired at the whisk of the white robe just disappearing at the bottom of the steps.

In another moment he would have precipitated himself in pursuit, but he suddenly changed his mind, and tore back along the corridor.

It seemed almost physically impossible that the fugitive could have traversed the hall below and mounted the other staircase there in the time, but while Lee was only five strides from the west wing the white figure dashed by, loosing a second bullet, which scored a great scar along the panelling.

As Lee reached the end of the servants' lobby he saw the apparition already at the head of the staircase, and fired again.

"Got him this time!" he cried grimly.

The shining white figure had subsided on to the ground, and lay there in a heap. And as Lee heard the green-baize door open he repeated the words over his shoulder, in a tone of high exultation:

"Got him this time!"

"You don't say so!" cried the Headmaster, starting to run.

"No, I don't now!" exclaimed Lee bitterly. "The snake has only shed its skin!"

And he held up the monk's robe to view.

"By Jove, I must have hit him, though!" he cried the next moment, examining the bloodstains that streaked the white flannel.

*To be continued.*

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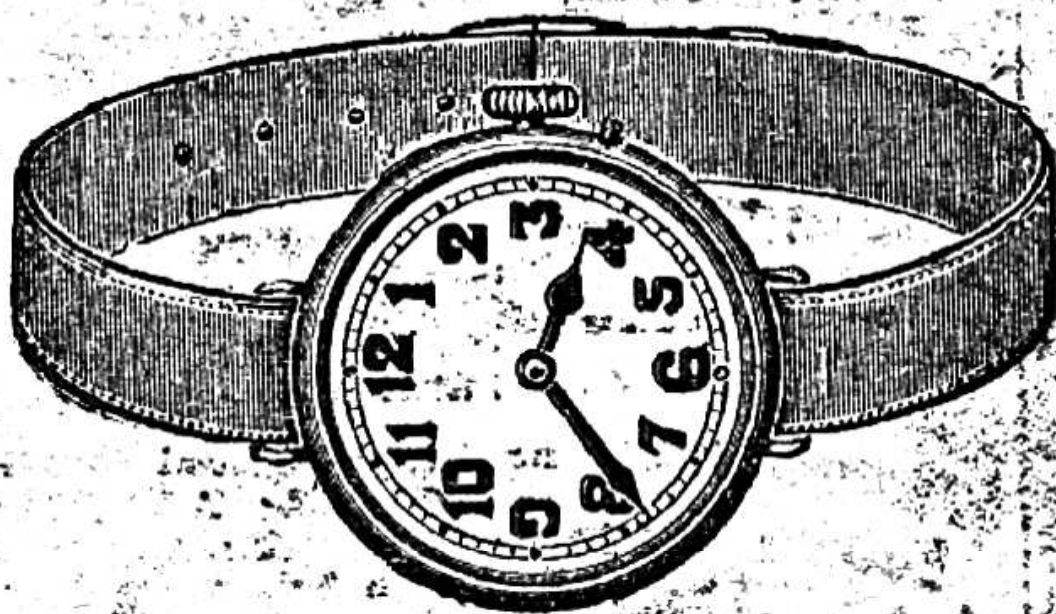
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