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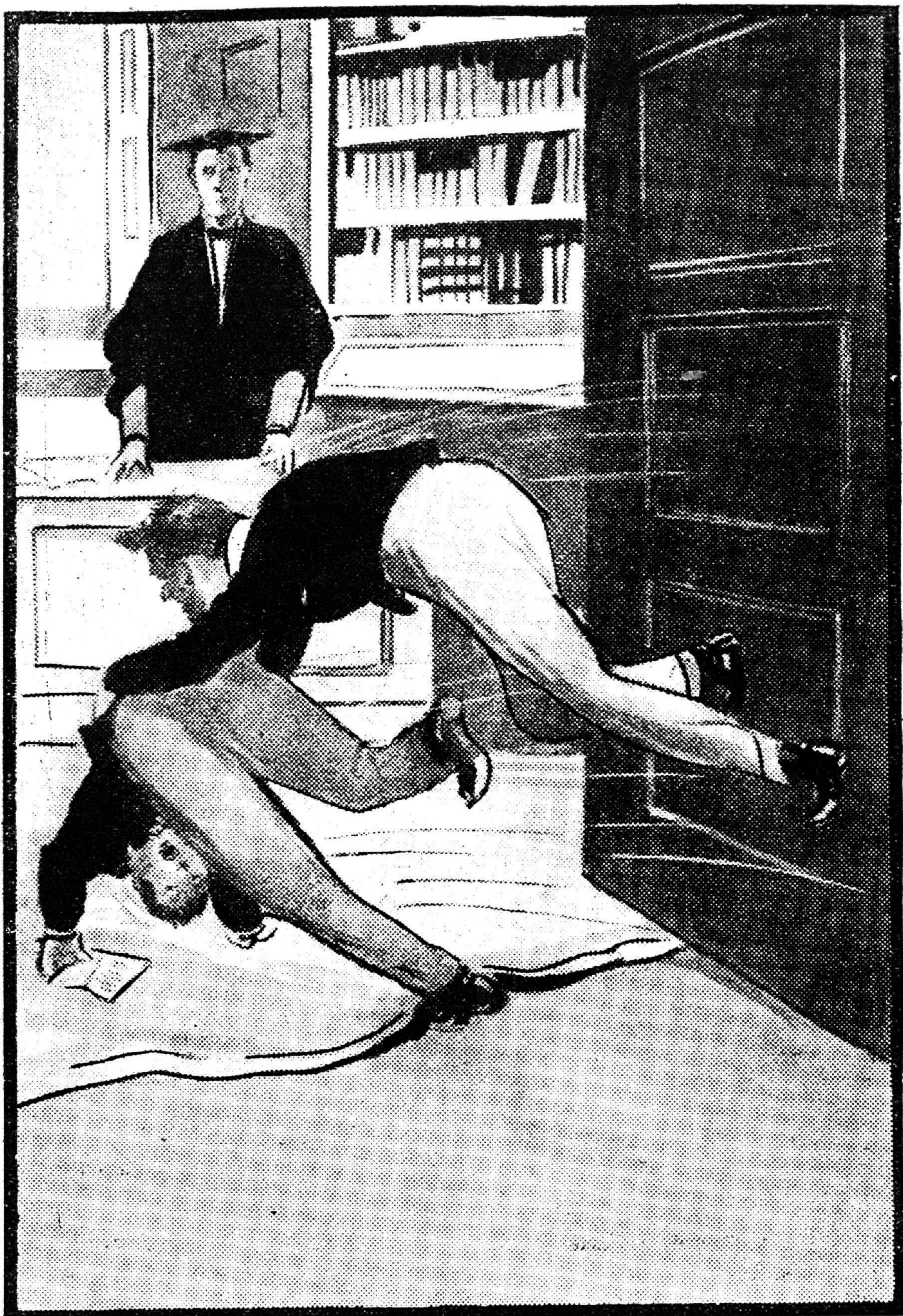
EVERY WEDNESDAY

April 15, 1922



THE MYSTERY OF HANDFORTH'S PATER!

A Rousing Story of St. Frank's Juniors in London.



Nelson Lee was astonished by the [vision of two Remove juniors charging into his study like bulls into a china shop.



THE MYSTERY OF HANDFORTH'S PATER!

A Splendid Long Complete Story of School Life and Detective Adventure at St. Frank's College, introducing NELSON LEE, NIPPER, and the Boys of St. Frank's. By the Author of "The Lost Schoolboys," "The New Page Boy," "The Fooling of Archie," and many other Stirring Tales.

THE STORY RELATED THROUGHOUT BY NIPPER

CHAPTER I. STARTLING NEWS!

"HANDFORTH'S pater!"
"Missing!"
"What rot!"

Several juniors gathered round Reginald Pitt in the lobby of the Ancient House at St. Frank's. Pitt had a newspaper in his hand, and the other fellows were eagerly trying to catch a glimpse of it.

They were the first members of the Remove to be down. For it was early morning, and the majority of the fellows had not yet appeared. The April day was somewhat dull, but quite mild.

The juniors had been discussing the coming Easter holidays—which would soon be at hand. And then Reginald Pitt had come along with an issue of that day's paper. He had obtained it from old Josh Cuttle, the school porter. Pitt didn't usually read the newspapers.

"It's true!" he exclaimed intently. "Just look here—in whacking big type! This looks pretty rotten, you know!"

"Let's have a squint, you ass!"

"There must be some mistake—it can't be Handforth's pater!"

"Of course it can't!"

Pitt had got the newspaper turned back at the centre page, where the most important items of the day were displayed.



And he pointed to the big lettering at the top of one column.

"Don't get excited!" he said. "It looks pretty rotten, I know—but there may be some mistake about it, after all. But Handforth's father is certainly involved. Look here—'Sir Edward Handforth Missing!' And then, just lower down—'Grave Rumours Concerning The Central and West London Bank.' And then it says that a crash is feared—although it advises people to keep their heads."

"My only hat!"

"But what's Handforth's pater go to do with that bank?"

"He's the managing director!" said Pitt.

"Oh, my goodness!"

"This'll be a bit of a shock for Handy," said De Valerie. "I can't quite believe it, you know! And I'm jolly certain I don't believe that Sir Edward Handforth is a wrong 'un!"

The juniors were excited and considerably concerned. And they were not the only fellows who had seen the report. Bad news generally travels fast, and seniors and juniors in all parts of St. Frank's had managed to get hold of newspapers, and were reading the report.

Those fellows who were inclined to be nasty-minded, did not hesitate to put the very worst construction upon the news. And, without a doubt, the whole affair was very significant.

The papers were very meagre in their reports. They merely stated that some startling rumours had been current in the City, and in financial circles generally, late the previous afternoon.

All these rumours concerned the Central and West London Bank. The managing director was Sir Edward Handforth, and the most sensational aspect of the whole case was that Sir Edward was missing. There had been ugly hints that Sir Edward had bolted.

It was certainly very strange that he was not to be found. And a run on the bank was almost inevitable. The fears of a crash were fully justified. The bank was not a member of a great organisation, but an independent concern—although hitherto it had been regarded as perfectly sound.

"I expect it's only a scare!" exclaimed Pitt. "I've seen things like this before—and they've all come to nothing. The worst part of the whole thing is that Handforth's pater is not to be found."

"Is there anything queer about him?" asked Armstrong.

"Well, it's queer in a way," said Pitt. "By what I can make out, he left his London house very hurriedly, yesterday morning, with the intention of going to his office. But he never turned up. And he hasn't been seen since. And he had with him some of the most vital books concerning the bank."

"Phew!" whistled Willard. "That looks bad!"

"Rotten!" said Hubbard.

"Pretty obvious, I should think!" remarked Gulliver, with a sneer. "All these big financier chaps are the same. Great men until they're found out! And then they come toppling down from their big pedestals!"

"That's it!" agreed Fullwood. "They'll probably collar old Handforth, and give him five or ten years' penial servitude!"

"Shut up, you cad!" said De Valerie hotly.

"Well, I've got a right to my opinion!" said Fullwood. "It'll be a nice thing if Handforth's pater turns out to be a swindler! We can't stick a criminal's son in the school. Handy'll get kicked out!"

"It's a pity you're not kicked out!" said Pitt. "Even if Handforth's father turns out wrong, it won't be Handy's fault. He's decent right through, in spite of his funny ways. Handy's one of the best!"

"Rather!" said the others.

"As for Fullwood, he deserves to be kicked out on his own merits!" went on Pitt; "although, if it comes to that, he hasn't got any! He's a cad to the backbone, and always will be!"

Ralph Leslie Fullwood, with a jeering smile, had walked off in the middle of this little storm. He had a feeling that the locality might become somewhat unhealthy for him if he remained. His two study chums, Gulliver and Bell, accompanied him.

"Dash it all, it's a bit thick!" said Bell. "I don't think you need have said that, Fully!"

"Why not?" demanded Fullwood. "The thing's as clear as daylight! Handy's pater has absconded with the bank's money, and when he's collared he'll be shoved in chokey! I say! Let's buzz upstairs, and be the first to break the news to Handy!"

"Bit too risky!" said Gulliver. "He might go for us!"

"Rot! He'll be too bowled over!" said Fullwood. "Besides, he couldn't do anything against the three of us! Come on! This is a ripping chance—we'll pile it on pretty thick, and make the rotter squirm!"

Fullwood and Co. didn't hesitate any longer, but hurried off upstairs so that they could be the very first to break the unpleasant news. They always took particular delight in doing anything caddish.

They entered the Remove dormitory, and found quite a number of fellows still there. Handforth was talking with Church and McClure, and they had just finished dressing. They had also finished an argument.

I was looking out of the window with Sir Montie Tregellis-West. We were, in fact, waiting for Tommy Watson, who had taken an unearthly time to dress this morning.

"Heard the news, Handy?" asked Fullwood pleasantly.

"What news?" said Handforth. "If you're trying to catch me, you rotter—"

"Not at all!" said Fullwood. "About your pater, I mean."

"My pater?" repeated Handforth. "Look

here, you can't spoof me! That game was tried on me on April Fool's Day, and I'm not having any more of it. So you'd better dry up, unless you're asking for a punch on the nose!"

"My dear chap, you don't understand," said Fullwood. "I think your father's name is Sir Edward Handforth, isn't it?"

"You jolly well know it is!"

"And he's the managing director of a bank, isn't he?"

"Of course he is!" said Handforth. "My pater's a terrific man in the City. He's all sorts of other things besides a banker. But what the dickens are you getting at?"

"Oh, nothing!" said Fullwood carelessly. "But your pater is mentioned in the newspapers this morning. He's missing!"

"Missing!" said Handforth, staring.

All the other fellows were listening now, including myself.

"Exactly!" said Fullwood. "Missing, you know. And the Central and West London Bank is totterin'—just on the verge of collapse. It seems that a fearful smash up is goin' to happen. It looks very much as though your pater has done a guy with the funds!"

Crash!

In one leap, Handforth crossed the space which separated him from Fullwood. That mighty bound was so unexpected that Fullwood, although ready to dodge, really had no time. Handforth's fist caught him fairly and squarely on the nose. He crashed over backwards into a writhing heap.

"Yow-yaroooooh!" he howled violently.

Biff! Slosh!

Quick as lightning, Handforth swiped Gulliver and Bell. They hadn't said anything, but the very expressions on their faces—the sneering look of triumph—had been enough.

"Yow-ow!" yelled Gulliver wildly.

"Gug-gug-gugh!" mumbled Bell, in dire agony.

All his front teeth were jarred, and he had bitten his tongue. He sprawled on the floor with Gulliver and Fullwood. The three cads, in fact, were in a heap, and they made no attempt to rise.

"They asked for it, and they got it!" I said. "Good for you, Handy! I've a good mind to kick the three of 'em out of the dormitory!"

"I'll do that!" roared Handforth furiously. "By George! The insulting cads! The miserable worms! I've seen better things than Fullwood crawl out of the ground after a shower!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Pitt appeared in the doorway, looking very grave.

"I thought as much!" he said grimly. "As soon as I noticed that those rotters had slipped off, I guessed they'd come up here! Have they been saying anything about your pater, Handy?"

"They told a lot of rotten lies!" said Handforth fiercely.

"It's the truth!" snarled Fullwood, sitting up. "Ask Pitt! He knows! He's got the paper in his hand! Keep back, you fool! Don't you touch me——"

He leapt to his feet with a gasp of fright, and boited like a rabbit. Handforth was about to charge after him, but Pitt pulled him up.

"Hold on, Handy—there's something in what Fullwood said——"

"Great pip!" gasped Handforth. "Do you want to be slaughtered?"

"Don't get excited—keep calm!" said Pitt quietly. "I've got some pretty rotten news for you, old man. It's up to you to take it pluckily."

Handforth was struck by Pitt's tone.

"What's the idea?" he demanded. "What are you getting at?"

Pitt made no reply, but handed the newspaper to Edward Oswald. He took it, stared at it, and then suddenly became rigid. A complete silence fell in the dormitory. Somehow, we all felt that there was something pretty serious in this.

"Good heavens!" muttered Handforth huskily. "It—it can't be true!"

"What's wrong, Handy?" asked Church, with concern.

"My pater, you know!" said Handforth dazedly. "Oh, it's rot! It's nothing but absolute madness. The—the dear old dad! There—there must be some ghastly blunder about it!"

Handforth had gone as white as a sheet, and I could see that he trembled as he stood. I had never seen him quite so shaken before.

"What's up, Handy?" I asked quietly. "Don't look like that!"

Handforth stared at me almost unseeingly.

"It can't be true!" he repeated, in a thick voice. "I simply won't believe it! I don't care if a hundred newspapers say a hundred different things every day for a year—even then I won't believe anything against my pater!"

"But what's wrong, anyhow?" I asked. "Don't take any notice of Fullwood and those other cads. You can rely on us, Handy. We won't believe anything rotten. We're your pals!"

"Begad! Rather!" said Sir Montie Tregellis-West. "Buck up, dear old boy. We're with you—we are, really!"

Handforth looked round as though he didn't hear us. He still clutched the newspaper, and then went over to the window, and read the report all over again. We looked at Reginald Pitt inquiringly.

"What's the trouble?" I asked, in a low voice.

"It seems to be pretty bad!" murmured Pitt. "There's something in the paper about Sir Edward Handforth being missing. He's the managing director of the Central and West London Bank—and the bank is a bit rocky, I think. There's some talk of a run on it, and all sorts of scares. And

they're hinting that Handy's pater is on the bunk!"

"Phew!" whistled Tommy Watson. "Scooted, you mean?"

"Something like that," said Pitt. "Of course, I don't believe a word of it—I've seen Sir Edward, and he's the very spit of old Handy. Big, blustering, pig-headed, but absolutely honest and straightforward."

"That's my opinion," I agreed. "At the same time, there must be some foundation for these rumours, or they wouldn't be in the papers. The most feasible explanation, in my opinion, is that some of Sir Edward's enemies are trying to injure his credit."

"Credit?" said Watson. "But surely he can pay for things?"

"You ass!" exclaimed Pitt. "Nipper means the word in a financial sense—you've always got to have credit, and that kind of thing—especially with a bank. The whole thing's pretty beastly for Handy, anyhow. All the cads here will be making rotten insinuations. Some chaps simply delight to make a mountain out of a molehill—especially if it's something unpleasant."

"But Handy's pater wouldn't have any enemies!" said Watson.

"Dozens!" I declared. "Every big City man has enemies. To be successful in finance a man has got to fight all sorts of money sharks, and crooks of that kind. It's no light job being a financier, or a banker."

I left the group and went over to Handforth.

"Cheer up, old son!" I said briskly. "No need to take it like this. I expect it's all a lot of exaggerated nonsense——"

"But—but the pater's missing!" muttered Handforth. "He left home to go to the bank yesterday morning, and hasn't been seen since! And he had balance sheets, and bank-books with him, too; important things that make the whole thing look horrible!"

"Is your father generally regular in his habits?"

"Regular!" repeated Handforth dully. "He's like a blessed clock! Never goes too fast, and never goes too slow! He hasn't missed a day from business for years, except when he's on holiday. And he always leaves promptly to the minute, and gets home at the exact time."

"Has he ever rushed away on a business-trip without leaving word?"

"Never in his life!"

"Well, there must be some reasonable explanation——"

"Of course there must!" said Handforth irritably. "But that doesn't make any difference to the fact that the pater's missing, does it? Oh, my only hat! What the dickens will the mater be thinking? She'll simply be dotty with worry!"

I nodded slowly.

"Well, old son, you can trust us," I said.

"We'll stand by you—right through. But

don't make too much of it. In the evening papers you'll probably read that your father has come back, and that everything is all serene. But, whatever happens, rely on us!"

"Thanks!" said Handforth simply. "It's jolly decent of you. But—but what can I do? What the thunder can I do?"

"Simply sit tight, and wait for further news," I replied.

Handforth paced up and down, and gripped his fists.

"I can't!" he roared suddenly. "You babbling fatheads! How can I sit tight? How can I wait? It's impossible—I must know something—I must find out the truth!"

"Steady, Handy——"

"I'm not going to stick down here in suspense!" said Handforth fiercely. "Not likely! I'm going up to London by the first train!"

CHAPTER II.

'PHONING UP THE MATER!



CHURCH grabbed Handforth by the arm.

"Look here, old chap, you can't do that!" he said. "You can't rush up to London just as you like. I don't suppose you could obtain per-

mission, in any case. It wouldn't be allowed——"

"Permission!" interrupted Handforth. "Who cares about getting permission? What does it matter in a case like this? If I can't get a pass to go to London, I'll jolly well take French leave! But I must go to the mater, and find out the absolute truth. It's—it's awful, learning about it first-hand from a rotten newspaper!"

Handforth marched away, and strode out of the dormitory. He was nearly beside himself with worry and anxiety. He still clutched the newspaper. Church and McClure hurried after him, and found him descending the stairs. A crowd of juniors were collected in the lobby, all talking in low voices. They looked at Handforth queerly as he came down.

"Talking about me, I suppose?" shouted Handforth hotly. "That's right—go on! Jaw away! I expect you're saying all sorts of beastly things about my pater! Do you think I care? Do you think I mind tuppence-ha'penny whether you gossip or not? You can all go and eat coke!"

"Here, I say, go easy, Handy!" said De Valerie. "We were just saying how rotten it is for you, and we're sorry. We know jolly well that your pater is as true as a die——"

"Rather!" said Jack Grey.

"As straight as a string!" put in Singleton.

"Hear, hear!"

Handforth melted somewhat.

"Oh! I—I didn't know that!" he growled. "I thought you were gloating, and all that kind of thing! Thanks! Jolly decent of you to back me up. But you needn't worry—the pater will shove all these lies down somebody's throat when he gets back!"

Handforth marched away down the corridor, and fairly flung himself into Study D. He wanted to be alone. The very presence of other fellows irritated him. And there he sat, deep in the easy chair, reading and re-reading the newspaper report.

Church and McClure came into the study very gingerly. They closed the door, and advanced into the little apartment.

Handforth suddenly looked up, and glared.

"Clear out!" he said curtly.

"Look here, Handy——"

"Clear out!" roared Handforth. "I don't want you!"

"But——"

"If you start arguing, I'll punch your nose, Arnold McClure!" snapped Handforth.

"Haven't you got any feelings? Can't you leave a chap alone when he's worried nearly out of his mind?"

"Dash it all, Handy, we've hardly had a word with you yet!" said Church. "We want to have a jaw about it, and tell you what we think. Personally, I reckon it's all rot to suggest that your pater is deliberately keeping away. I think he must have met with an accident."

"Of course!" said McClure quickly. "That's obvious. It's the only explanation. Perhaps he was run over, or something——"

"Are you trying to cheer me up?" demanded Handforth fiercely.

"I—I didn't mean that your pater is badly hurt!" said McClure. "Perhaps he was only just knocked down, and taken to hospital. Lots of chaps are bowled over by motor-cars, or 'buses, without being hurt much. When he recovers himself, he'll reveal his identity. And then there won't be any more mystery about his disappearance."

Handforth glared.

"Don't talk rot!" he said bluntly.

"Haven't you got any more brains than that? Do you think my pater goes about without his card-case, or pocket-book? And what about the books and papers belonging to the bank? His identity could have been established by them as easy as winking. No, there's something else—something more dramatic. I'm worried off my head about it."

"Of course you are, old son," said Church softly. "McClure and I understand. We'd like to do something if we could, but we're all so jolly helpless in a case of this kind. But do keep smiling!"

Handforth rose to his feet.

"I am sorry I was rotten just now!" he muttered. "You chaps are true blue. I know it! You'll stand by me whatever the other chaps say, won't you?"

"Rather!" said Church. "All the way through, Handy!"

The leader of Study D paced up and down for a few moments, and then glanced at his watch.

"It'll be breakfast-time soon!" he said. "My hat! And I was feeling so great this morning, too. And now this rotten business has come along to mess up everything. It's the disgrace of it all that makes me limp—the disgrace hovering over the family name! The pater may be as honest as the day, but there are always a lot of rotters who will try and make things out to look black. I've got to do something! I must!"

"My dear chap, you can only wait——"

"Wait!" interrupted Handforth. "Wait for what? I'm not going to, by George I can't stick this indecision any longer—this suspense! I'm going to rush straight to Mr. Lee and put the whole thing before him. Then I'll catch the morning train to London."

"But look here——"

"It's no good, I've made up my mind!"

"Mr. Lee won't—— Oh, the ass!"

Church broke off as Handforth vanished through the doorway. There was a grim look on his somewhat aggressive face, and he strode straight down the corridor, and then went on until he came to Nelson Lee's study. He didn't hesitate. He rapped on the door with firm knuckles.

"Come in!" came Nelson Lee's voice.

Handforth entered, and found the House-master of the Ancient House seated at his desk, reading the morning newspaper. Nelson Lee placed it aside at once. He nodded to Handforth.

"I was half expecting you, my boy," he said. "No doubt you have come to me with reference to the report in the paper this morning?"

"Yes, sir," said Handforth. "It's all rot!"

Nelson Lee smiled.

"That's right, Handforth!" he said cheerfully. "Of course it is! That's just the spirit to have. I have met your father, and I'm quite convinced that the suspicions are unfounded and ridiculous."

"Thanks awfully, sir!" said Handforth. "I don't know why the pater is missing, but there must be something badly wrong——"

"Not necessarily," interrupted Nelson Lee. "There may be a hundred and one reasons why your father failed to turn up at his office yesterday. The rumours concerning the bank may be merely an echo of some idle talk put into circulation by your father's enemies; for it is quite certain that he must have a number. Every successful business man is surrounded by others who are jealous, envious, and ever ready to do him a bad turn."

"That's it, sir," said Handforth. "But it's rotten, isn't it? I mean, for me. And

I'm anxious, too. I want to know all the details——"

"That, my dear Handforth, is only natural," said Nelson Lee. "But you will know all the details in good time. You must not become impatient. Try to go about in just the same manner as usual——"

"Oh, but that's impossible, sir!" put in Handforth. "I want to go to London!"

"Good gracious!"

"I've come here to ask your permission, sir!"

"Indeed!"

"You won't object, will you——"

"Most certainly I shall, Handforth!" said Nelson Lee firmly.

"But look here, sir——"

"My dear boy, your request is quite ridiculous!" said Lee. "What on earth could you do if you did go to London? You surely do not suppose that you could find your father? You do not imagine that you could improve the position in any way? You must try to be reasonable, my boy."

Handforth looked rather blank.

"But—but I must go, sir!" he exclaimed. "It's terribly important, you know! I can't rest at St. Frank's while this horrible cloud is hovering over the family! I've got to go and see the mater! She must be in a terrible way, and it's up to me to comfort her!"

Nelson Lee kept his face straight with difficulty.

"I hardly think, Handforth, that your mother will require you for that purpose," he said gravely. "At a time like this, you must realise that you would really be more worry than help."

"Never, sir!"

"In any case, Handforth, it is quite out of the question," went on Lee. "Now, I don't want you to think that I am hard, or heartless, because that is certainly not the case. If I could see any real reason for your journeying to London, I would give you my permission at once. But the situation does not warrant anything so drastic. Even if you went, you could do absolutely nothing. It is far better for you to wait here."

Handforth looked grim.

"All right, sir!" he said. "I'd better go, then!"

"There is no immediate hurry——"

"If you won't give me permission to buzz up to London, there's no sense in my bothering you, sir!" said Handforth. "I don't want to make myself a nuisance! I'll clear out at once!"

Nelson Lee looked at Handforth rather straightly.

"Just one moment, my boy!" he said. "You have given yourself away, I imagine."

"Given myself away, sir?"

"I have no doubt that you are contemplating the very foolish policy of leaving the school without permission," went on

Nelson Lee. "I observe, Handforth, that you have given a guilty start."

Handforth was very red.

"Nun-nothing of the sort, sir!" he stammered. "I—I wasn't thinking about—I mean, you—you——"

"It would be most unwise for you to take French leave," said Nelson Lee. "You would merely get yourself into trouble here, and no doubt get yourself into further trouble in London. Before you go out of this room, Handforth, you must give me your word of honour that you will make no attempt to run off to London!"

Handforth gave a kind of gulp.

"All right, sir!" he said quickly. "I'll give you my word of honour that I won't try to run off to London!"

"Now, now, Handforth!" said Nelson Lee reprovingly. "You mustn't try any quibbles of that sort!"

"Quibbles, sir?"

"That is what I said," replied Nelson Lee. "You agreed rather too promptly. You must not run off to London, or go by train, or by any other means! In plain words, Handforth, you must give me your word that you will remain at St. Frank's!"

Handforth was done.

"But—but I must go!" he said lamely.

"You must do nothing of the sort!" said Lee. "And now, about that little promise. Come along, you must give it, Handforth."

"I—I don't see why I should, sir!" said Handforth rebelliously. "If you don't give me permission to go, I'll jolly well bunk—I—I mean—that is to say, I—I——"

"Under any ordinary circumstances, Handforth, I should punish you for speaking in that way," broke in Nelson Lee. "But now I will overlook it. If you are so very anxious to talk with your mother, I suggest that you speak to her on the telephone. That would save all the trouble of going to London."

"The—the telephone, sir?" said Handforth eagerly.

"Certainly!"

"May—may I use it, sir?"

"I would not have suggested it if the idea did not meet with my approval," said Nelson Lee. "It is quite a simple matter to put through a trunk call to London, and you will be able to learn all the details you wish. For you to travel up to town would be most unnecessary."

"Now that you put it like that, sir, I believe you're right!" said Handforth. "And I'll give you my word that I won't buzz off. I'll stick at St. Frank's. May I use the telephone now, sir?"

"Perhaps it is rather too early yet," said Nelson Lee. "Your mother may not be prepared to receive telephone calls, Handforth!"

"Why, it's past nine, sir!" said Handforth. "The mater's always up in good time—she can't jolly well sleep after seven!"

Rheumatism, or something! You know what maters are, sir! And she's bound to be on the go this morning, looking for news!"

"In that case, Handforth, you had better get connected at once—the line will probably be clear at this early hour," said Nelson Lee. "You may use this instrument here."

"You're a brick, sir!" said Handforth. "Why, it's quite likely that the pater's home by this time. Perhaps he's turned up, and everything is all serene!"

"Let us hope so, my boy."

"Rather, sir!" said Handforth. "I know the telephone number of our house, and I'll get busy at once."

"By all means do so, Handforth," said Nelson Lee. "I will leave you in private, and return in about twenty minutes."

"Thanks, awfully, sir."

Handforth appreciated the thoughtfulness of Nelson Lee in thus leaving him alone to talk with his mother. Lee, as a matter of fact, had been thinking more about Sir Edward Handforth than the leader of Study D imagined.

And the detective did not like the look of things.

He had no actual suspicions about Sir Edward, but he was certainly of the opinion that the banker's disappearance was not merely a simple matter that could be lightly explained.

There was something more in it.

And Lee had an idea that there would be some rather dramatic developments in the very near future.

Handforth sat down at the schoolmaster-detective's desk, pulled the telephone instrument towards him and applied for the number he required. And in a surprisingly short space of time he found himself connected.

The trunk lines were comparatively clear—for the big business of the day had not yet commenced. Handforth recognised the voice of his father's butler, and he knew that he had got the right number.

"Why, is that Master Edward?" asked the voice, after Handforth had stated his identity.

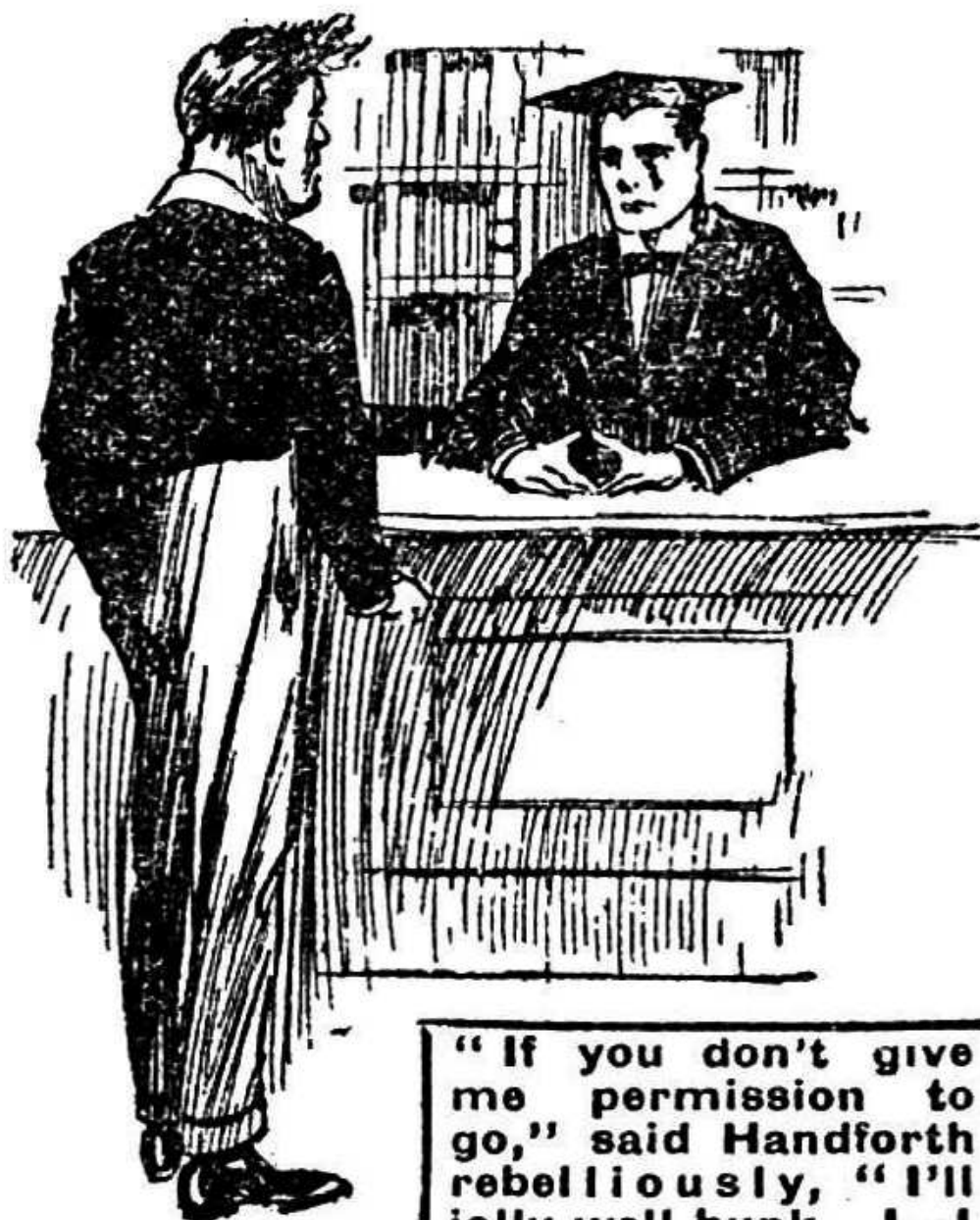
"Yes, of course it is!" said Handforth. "What's the matter with the 'phone? I can hardly hear a giddy word! I want to speak to the mater."

"I will bring her ladyship at once, Master Edward."

Handforth waited, somewhat irritable because the telephone sounded buzzy and the voice at the other end of the wire was faint. Practically the whole of Handforth's telephoning experience concerned local calls to Bannington—in which cases, of course, the line was short and hearing good. This was the first time he had talked over a really long distance.

"Hallo!" he shouted. "Hallo! Anybody there? I say— Oh is that you, mater? Hallo!"

"Why, it's Edward!" came a feminine voice over the 'phone. "Where are you speaking from, Edward?"



"If you don't give me permission to go," said Handforth rebelliously, "I'll jolly well bunk. I—I mean——"

"St. Frank's, of course!" said Handforth. "I simply had to do something, mater! I'm so jolly worried! I've been reading the report in the newspaper this morning. Is it all wrong, or what? Is the pater there?"

"Something terrible has happened, Edward," came Lady Handforth's voice in agitated tones. "I'm sure I don't know what to think! I'm worried almost to the point of distraction! Your father is not here, Edward, and I haven't seen him or heard from him since yesterday morning!"

"Great pip!" said Handforth. "Then it's true?"

"It is quite true that your father is missing. I don't know what to do, Edward. I'm nearly almost off my head with grief. I'm sure that something dreadful has happened to him! And we get no news—no word whatever!"

"I say, that's awful!" said Handforth. "Haven't you done anything, mater?"

"What can I do, Edward?" asked his mother. "I only know that your father left home in the usual way to go to his office. But he didn't arrive, and nobody seems to know anything."

"Haven't you told the police?"

"Oh, my boy! Of course I have. I've been to Scotland Yard, and I've done everything that I possibly could. Your father has never done anything of this nature in all his life, and I know that there must have been some terrible accident. And, on the top of all this worry, there are these dreadful rumours that all is not well with the bank."

"But they are not true, mater!"

"I trust with all my heart they are not!" said Lady Handforth. "I have been con-

stantly in communication with your father's secretary and the manager of the bank. They know even less than I do. But it is really very serious about the bank."

"There won't be any trouble, will there, mater?"

"I don't know, Edward—I hardly dare to think about it," came the agitated voice. "But your father's secretary is very strange in his manner towards me. He will give no definite answers."

"Perhaps he is up to some rotten game, mum!" said Handforth suspiciously. "Perhaps he's done something to the pater—"

"Don't be so ridiculous, Edward!" interrupted his mother. "Mr. Whittaker is as honest as the day. The reason he doesn't like to answer me is because he wishes to spare me from further worry. That is why I fear the worst. I believe the bank will meet with shocking disaster unless your father returns at once."

"You—you mean there'll be a smash?"

"The very thought appals me, but I cannot help thinking that it will happen!" said Lady Handforth tearfully. "Oh, Edward! How terrible that would be! I simply couldn't live in England after that! I should never lift up my head again! And—and your father! He doesn't come—he doesn't write—and he doesn't send any word at all! I don't know what I shall do!"

Handforth looked rather scared.

"That's all right, mater—don't you worry!" he said briskly.

"Oh, my dear boy, how can I help worrying?" asked Lady Handforth. "I could never have dreamed that so much could happen within twenty-four hours. I've had more worry in this little period that I can ever remember. It isn't as though your father was in the habit of going off without leaving a word behind. He has never done such a thing. It's too terrible, Edward!"

"But mater! You don't think— You—you don't believe—"

"That your father has run away?" asked Handy's mother. "No, no! Never! It isn't true, Edward—it couldn't be true! All these rumours are lies—terrible, terrible lies! Your father has been worried recently about one or two business matters, but his position is sound. And even if such was not the case, he would never run off in this way. Your father is not a coward—he has always faced his troubles like a man—and overcome them!"

"Dear old pater!" said Handforth fervently. "Rather! He's met with an accident, or something. Oh, I don't know! But it'll all come right before long, mater—you mark my words! How would it be if I came up to London? If you say you want me, I might get permission—"

"No, no, Edward!" said Lady Handforth. "Much as I love you, dear, you couldn't improve matters by coming here. You are out of everything at St. Frank's. And it is better that way. Stay where you are, my

boy, and wait for further news. Never lose your trust in your father!"

"You can leave that to me, mater!" said Handforth. "I know dad's all right, and I'll stick up for him against a thousand! But if you want me at any time, just ring up St. Frank's, and I'll buzz along!"

There was very little more to say, and soon afterwards Handforth bade his mother good-bye, and hung up the receiver. And his worst fears were confirmed. The newspaper report was true—in all details.

Sir Edward Handforth had mysteriously disappeared, and there was no trace of him. And valuable and vital balance-sheets and books, belonging to the Central and West London Bank, had disappeared at the same time. The facts were significant, and, indeed, seemed to point to only one conclusion.

The bank was rocky, and Sir Edward had bolted.

This was the obvious explanation—but Handforth cast aside the mere thought as being ridiculous and impossible. As his mother had said, Sir Edward was the kind of man to face trouble boldly. He was not a quitter.

And, upon the whole, Handy felt a little better. And when Nelson Lee came back he reported practically all that he had said over the telephone. Nelson Lee listened gravely.

"Your mother has given you some excellent advice, my boy," he said. "Try to go on just the same as usual, and take no notice of ill-natured boys who sneer at you. Your father will refute these evil suggestions sooner or later."

"You believe in him, don't you, sir?" asked Handforth quickly.

"Implicitly, my boy," replied Nelson Lee. "I have every faith in Sir Edward. He is the last man in the world who would run away from trouble. Not that I believe any trouble to exist. A scare has been caused, and if your father's bank gets into difficulties it will be solely because of this mysterious occurrence. Once a panic sets in it is a terribly difficult matter to deal with it."

Handforth did not receive much comfort from this—but it was the truth. And there was no sense whatever in putting it aside.

How was this strange matter to end?

CHAPTER III.

WAITING FOR NEWS.



MR. CROWELL adjusted his glasses and glanced round.

"H'm! Handforth appears to be absent!" he said.

"I think he's out in the Triangle," said Hubbard.

Morning lessons were just about to commence. The Remove had gathered together in the Form room in the usual manner. But there was one absentee—Edward Oswald Handforth.

He had come in to breakfast, in the dining-hall, but had eaten practically nothing. And there had been something missing at the Remove table. As a general rule all sorts of arguments and squabbles went on at Handforth's corner of the table. Now and again a nose would be punched. But this morning all had been quiet. Handy had sat there like an image, hardly saying a word, and looking unutterably miserable. Church and McClure had caught the complaint from him, and their own faces were as long as fiddles.

After breakfast Handforth had marched up and down the passages; he had gone into the Triangle, round the playing-fields—and, in fact, had kept on the move the whole time. Church and McClure had followed him about at a distance—full of sympathy, and anxious to do anything to cheer him up.

Mr. Crowell removed his glasses and polished them.

"So Handforth is in the Triangle?" he said. "What is he doing there? Surely he must have heard the bell?"

"Oh, he's just mooning about, sir," said Owen major. "His pater seems to be in trouble, or something."

"Ah, yes, to be sure!" said the Form master. "I read the report in the newspaper this morning. Most unfortunate. I am quite sorry for Handforth. But there is no reason why he should mope about. That will only make matters worse. He had far better confine himself to work and do his best to forget his troubles. They will probably blow over very quickly."

"Handforth seems to be bowled right over, sir," said Church.

"I am quite surprised," said Mr. Crowell. "I always regarded Handforth as a particularly strong-minded boy. I imagined that he would be almost indifferent to his father's worries."

"I don't think you understand him yet, sir," I said. "Handforth is a bit of a blusterer, but at heart he's as tender as a girl. If anything goes wrong he's soft in a minute. Handforth is one of the best, sir."

"Hear, hear!" echoed several juniors.

"That is all very well, Nipper," said Mr. Crowell, "but I cannot allow Handforth to neglect his work. You will please go out into the Triangle and tell him to come in at once. Under the circumstances I shall not punish him for being late."

I went out and hurried along the passage until I reached the lobby. I could see Handforth pacing up and down outside, with his hands thrust deep into his trousers pockets.

I went up to him and tapped him on the back.

"Heard anything?" asked Handforth eagerly.

"Sorry, old man, I haven't," I replied. "Lessons, you know."

"Lessons?"

"Yes. Mr. Crowell wants you to come in," I said. "He says it won't do you any good to mope about out here—"

"I—I can't come in!" said Handforth huskily. "I couldn't stand it, Nipper! All the chaps staring at me—just as though I'd done something wrong. And what would be the good? I couldn't work—I can't think of anything! All I want is to hear some news about the pater."

"Of course," I said. "I quite understand that. But, after all, you can't chuck up lessons and do exactly as you like. Better come in, old son."

"I won't!" declared Handforth. "Never! I'm not coming—and I don't care what the consequences are! Tell old Crowell to go and eat coke! I can't rest until I hear something more about my father!"

"Oh, all right," I said. "Just as you like. But I advise you to come in, Handy."

"Thanks all the same, but I'm staying out here," said Handforth. "Do you think there'll be any evening papers down yet?"

I grinned.

"Hardly!" I said. "It's not much after ten."

I left him there, knowing that it would be a hopeless task to persuade him to come in. Once Handforth had made up his mind, wild horses wouldn't drag him from his decision.

Mr. Crowell looked rather grim at first when I told him. But then he nodded to himself, and told me to go to my place. He made no reference to the matter, and we proceeded with morning lessons.

When we were dismissed, the general conversation naturally turned upon Handforth and his father. And most of the fellows were anxious to find out what Handy had been doing all the morning.

At first there was no sign of him, and a search was made. He was nowhere in the school.

"The silly fathead must have bunked!" said Church, in alarm. "He's gone up to London, after all! He must have taken the 11.19 train!"

"Impossible!" declared McClure. "He told us that he had promised Mr. Lee that he wouldn't do anything of that sort. And Handy wouldn't break his word—Why, there he is! Just coming in!"

They hurried across the Triangle to the gateway. Handforth had just ridden in on his bicycle. The very expression on his face was enough to tell his chums that he had nothing good to report.

The sun was shining now, and the morning was quite glorious—but Handforth was depressed in the most marked manner. He looked at his chums glumly as they came up to him.

"Nothing!" he said dismally. "Not a word! No papers—no news of any sort! I'm feeling rotten!"

"Where have you been to?" asked Church. "Bannington."

"You'll get into a row about this, Handy," said McClure. "Missing lessons altogether! Mr. Crowell's bound to report you to the Head—"

"Do you think I care?" demanded Handforth fiercely. "Let him report me! What does it matter? I've a jolly good mind to go straight to the Head, and ask him if I can go to London! I'm nearly dotty with suspense! I've bought half-a-dozen newspapers, but there's nothing in 'em! Oh, it's awful!"

Church and McClure didn't say anything. They could have told Handy before he left that his search for news would have been barren. It wasn't likely that any further newspapers would be out in a sleepy place like Bannington until the evening.

Handforth left his bicycle with Church—fairly pushed it into the latter's hands—and then strode on towards Study D. He was going down the passage when he came face to face with Archie Glenthorne, the genial ass of the Remove. Archie was attired with all his usual splendour. His neat figure was encased in a well-cut lounge suit of grey worsted. His silken socks were of gay colours, and he wore glittering brown shoes. He was spick and span from top to toe. A monocle finished him off.

"What ho!" he observed genially. "I mean to say, yards of sorrow, and so forth! Pray accept the old sympathy, dear lad!"

"That's all right, Archie!" growled Handforth.

"I understand that the posish is somewhat foul?" went on Archie. "That is to say, large supplies of trouble, and what not? In other words, old top, I have heard certain frightful rumours to the effect that the dear old pater has, as it were, done the old vanishing stunt."

"He's missing!" said Handforth. "I don't know what to think, Archie—"

"I mean to say, keep the old spirits up, and all that," interrupted Archie. "My dear old sportsman, there's no need to convert the old frontispiece into an imitation of a fog! Gloom, in fact, is not required. Totally unnecess, if you know what I mean. The dear old dad will turn up again. Bright and smiling, like the summer's morn, he'll trickle into the landscape, and proceed to astonish the lads of the village."

"I hope so!" said Handforth. "I'm frightfully worried, Archie."

"Absolutely!" agreed Archie. "In the same circs., laddie, I should probably be just about fit for the loony house by this time. The old bean isn't made for hard work, you know. Built for comfort before speed, and all that sort of rot! That is to say, the old works in the top storey are decidedly rusty, and only get busy at intervals; and the slightest jar shoves them all out of gear."

"Are you talking about your brains?" asked Handforth.

"Absolutely!" replied Archie. "Every time, old chappie! I mean to say, I'm worried. I'm positively becoming thin, don't you know! The old suit is flapping about in the most frightful manner. I can't bear to see one of the dear lads surrounded by

several tons of anxiety. Makes me go completely off my stroke, you know. In fact, I'm feeling positively pipped!"

"On my account?"

"Exactly—that is to say, yes!" said Archie. "In other words, absolutely! I feel for you, old tulip! The old heart thumps away, and bleeds, and all that sort of stuff! I want to do something—I want to make things hum, and so forth! Anything to bring back the jolly old smile!"

Handforth responded with a weak grin. It was the first time he had smiled during the whole morning, and Archie felt rewarded. He was the only fellow who had brought a smile to Handforth's face since he had heard the news.

Handforth felt warmed towards the genial Archie. He was many kinds of an ass, and was considered to be somewhat brainless by most of the Remove fellows. But there was not the slightest doubt about Archie's attitude. He was full of deep concern for Handforth.

He put his words into peculiar phrases, and expressed himself somewhat remarkably; but the feeling was there, and Handforth knew that Archie was sincere. There was not an ounce of falseness in his whole composition. He was as simple as he was amusing.

"You're decent, Archie—jolly decent!" said Handforth. "Thanks awfully for your tip. You've bucked me up a lot, and I'll try and do a bit of smiling. But you don't know how worried I am!"

Archie beamed.

"I mean to say, rather!" he observed. "The fact is, laddie, I'm so concerned that I've caught the bally complaint myself! I'm worrying in the most dashed way! I positively expect to find grey hairs spouting before long! I can't bear to see a chappie wallowing in trouble!"

"Let's hope it'll be all right soon!" said Handforth.

He passed on before Archie could say anything further, went into Study D, and sat down. And Archie stood out in the passage, shook his head, and sighed.

"Something, as it were, must be done!" he murmured. "This, in fact, is absolutely the time when Phipps is required. The walking brain has got to get busy. Phipps, the unfailing, must exercise the old attic!"

And Archie lounged along to his own study, languidly strolled in, and pushed the electric bell. Then he reclined back in an easy-chair and waited. He nearly dozed off, and lay there with closed eyes.

"You rang, sir?"

"What ho! What ho!" exclaimed Archie, sitting up. "The old genie has staggered in! The fact is, Phipps, you're a bit of a marvel! You simply appear, as it were! One moment you aren't, and the next moment you are! Most extraordinary! Never knew anybody like you, old lad!"

"Thank you, sir."

"Not at all!" said Archie. "That is to say, not at all! In fact, absolutely not! Thanks utterly unnecessary, Phipps. Simply a plain statement of the good old facts! And now, and all that, what about it?"

"What about what, sir?"

"The idea, Phipps—the stunt—the brain wave!"

"I fail to understand, sir."

Archie screwed his monocle more firmly home.

"Dash it all!" he protested. "I mean to say, dash it all. What's the matter, Phipps? What's wrong with the old gear-box? Hardly seems to be oiled this morning. Running deucedly sluggish, and all that kind of rot!"

"I hardly think so, sir," said Phipps. "But you have failed to explain the nature of the idea you require me to suggest."

"Gadzooks!" exclaimed Archie. "How dashed ridic.:! Godzooks twice! I mean to say, the old memory slipped a cog, as you might put it. Quite right, Phipps—quite, as it were, right! The idea? Absolutely!"

"You desire me to assist you in some little difficulty, sir?"

"You've hit it, Phipps—you've coshed it fairly on the old head!" said Archie, nodding. "Zing! Positively got it! A difficulty, what? Absolutely a teaser! One of the one-and-only ones! It concerns the dear chappie with the voice that reminds you of the pater's yacht!"

"I beg your pardon, sir."

"Fog-horns, and all that!" explained Archie.

"You evidently mean Master Handforth, sir?"

"He, so to speak, is the very lad!" agreed Archie. "Handforth! The poor old tulip is in the most foul kind of trouble. The whole position is not only rotten, but decayed. And something's got to be done, Phipps!"

Phipps shook his head.

"I scarcely think this is an occasion where we could be of any assistance, sir!" he said.

"You think not?"

"I do, sir."

"But, I mean to say, not really?" asked Archie. "Not really, dear lad? Surely, we can do something? Something, as it were, to relieve the situash.? Handforth has lost his pater. Or, to be more exact, his pater has lost himself! Something like that. What we've got to do is to find him!"

"I'm afraid it is out of the question, sir," said Phipps.

Archie frowned. Phipps was his man—his valet—and he always relied upon Phipps to supply the most direct way out of any difficulty. It was only by a concession on the part of the school authorities that Archie was allowed to have his man there. And Phipps had plenty to do.

"Out of the question, what?" said Archie. "But, I mean, this is dashed surprising! You're not suggesting, Phipps, that the old supply had run out? You don't mean that the scheme factory has closed down?"

"Not at all, sir."

"Then what, may I ask, is the trouble?"

"It is hardly a trouble, sir," said Phipps. "I am merely suggesting that this case is not one where we could be of service. The London police, I believe, have the case thoroughly in hand, and are doing their utmost to locate Sir Edward Handforth. It is hardly fitting for us to interfere."

"Well, that's putrid!" said Archie. "I mean to say, a rotten disappointment, Phipps! I was hoping to help the poor old chap! I wanted to buck him up, and all that kind of rot. But you think there's nothing doing?"

"I do, sir."

"We can't rally round?"

"Not at the moment, sir."

"I'm cut up, Phipps—I'm wounded!" said Archie sadly. "Just as I was hoping such deucedly big things, too! It seems that we can't shove out the glad hand, and stuff of that description?"

"At present, sir, the plan is impossible," said Phipps firmly.

"Then the only thing is to carry on in the same old way," said Archie. "You'd better roll forth, Phipps, and attend to the daily duties."

"There's nothing you require, sir?"

"Absolutely not!" said Archie. "Nothing, that is, except a small quantity of good old dreamless! Kindly give me the dig in the rib department when the gong peals forth!"

"Yes, sir."

And Phipps withdrew, silently and unobtrusively.

And while Phipps was stealing down the passage—this, by the way, was quite his natural method of walking—Church was hurrying to Study D. He burst in quickly, and found Handforth still sitting in the easy-chair.

"I say, Handy——"

"Oh, don't bother!" growled Handforth, looking round.

"But it's important——"

"Nothing's important now!" said Handforth. "Nothing matters! And for goodness sake leave me alone! Be a good chap, Church, and buzz off! You know jolly well I'm dotty!"

"Of course I do!" said Church promptly. Handforth glared.

"Dotty with worry, I mean, you fathead!" he snorted. "Don't try any of your rot now, because I don't feel like it! Just one word, my son, and your nose will be flattened into your blessed face! I only need starting off, and then I'll make things hum!"

McClure arrived, and Handforth groaned.

"You, too!" he said, between his teeth. "Clear out! Do you hear? Go away! I don't like the look of you! I want to be alone!"

Handforth was repeating some of his old characteristics, and Church and McClure were rather disappointed. They had been

thinking that, for a spell, things would be somewhat easier for them.

"What's the trouble?" asked McClure. "Are we barred out of our own study now? Can't we be in here if we like?"

"No, you can't!" roared Handforth.

"Hold on a minute!" said Church. "I've got something to tell you——"

"I don't want to hear it!"

"Something important!" went on Church. "Jolly important, in fact! It might mean all the difference to you, Handy. Just listen to me for a tick, and I'll explain all about it!"

"I don't want to listen!" snapped Handforth. "Clear!"

"Well, look at this——"

"And I won't look at anything, either!"

"But it's a letter——"

"A what?" yelled Handforth, jumping up excitedly.

"My hat!" gasped Church. "Don't jump at me like that!"

"Did you say a letter?" roared Handforth.

"Yes, I did——"

"Where is it, you babbling idiot?" asked Handy. "Keeping me waiting like this! Why the dickens couldn't you tell me——"

"Haven't I been trying to tell you all the time?" snorted Church, somewhat irritated.

"You wouldn't let me speak——"

"Where's the letter?" bawled Handforth.

"I found it in the rack—it must have come by the second post!" said Church. "I expect it's been in there for hours. I only happened to spot it by accident. Didn't you look in the rack this morning?"

"Of course I didn't!" said Handforth. "We hardly ever get letters by the second post, and it never struck me. Besides, I was in Bannington! Lemme see it! Give it over here, you exasperating fathead!"

Church pulled a somewhat crumpled letter out of his pocket, and before he could even hand it across the table, Handforth grabbed it with one swoop. He glanced at it, jumped nearly a yard into the air, and yelled.

"Great Scott!" gasped McClure. "He's gone mad!"

"Don't you understand?" roared Handforth excitedly. "It's—it's from the pater!"

CHAPTER IV!

DECIDEDLY STARTLING!



CHURCH and McClure looked at Handforth in a rather startled way. Handforth himself was gazing at the letter with blazing eyes.

"It's from the pater!" he repeated, in a strange voice.

"Look, you chaps! And—and it was posted last night, too; hours and hours after he had disappeared! News at last! Hurrah!"

Handforth danced up and down madly.

"Steady on, you ass!" said Church, grabbing him. "Don't go off like that! You may have made a bloomer! I don't suppose it's from your father at all! It might be something else——"

"You fathead! Do you think I don't know my pater's fist?" demanded Handforth. "Great pip! And I've been worrying like the dickens, too! I might have known that everything would be all right!"

"But you don't know it!" put in McClure. "Everything may be all wrong!"

Handforth forced himself to be calm, and examined the letters more closely. He could see that the envelope had been scrawled very hurriedly, and another fact which struck him as being very-peculiar was that the writing was done in pencil—just ordinary black-lead pencil.

"Jolly queer!" said Handforth. "I've never known the dad to write in pencil before—he always uses a pen!"

"My hat! What does that matter?" said Church impatiently. "I thought you wanted to hear things from your father? And all you can do is to mess about, looking at your own name on the envelope!"

"I'm examining it thoroughly!" said Handforth. "But I suppose I'd better open it at once."

As a matter of fact, Handforth was rather afraid to open it. He hoped against hope that it would contain good news, but he had a peculiar feeling that such would not be the case.

And, at last, he inserted his thumb under the flap, and tore it open. He withdrew a small, jagged-edged piece of notepaper. It was the quarter of an ordinary sheet, and on one side of it was some writing in ink. On the other side were several lines of pencilling—the latter obviously being the message. The ink writing was a mere scrap, without beginning or ending. It was thus quite clear that Sir Edward had written to his son very hurriedly, using a scrap of an old letter.

"What the dickens is it?" asked Church curiously.

But Handforth was reading, and the letter was shaking in his hand. When, at last, Handy looked up, there was an almost dazed expression in his eyes. He suddenly sat down in the easy chair, going limp.

"Well, I'm jiggered!" he muttered huskily.

"What is it, you ass?"

"Tell us, Handy!"

Handforth still looked blank. Then he gazed at his two chums, and his eyes gleamed with sudden excitement.

"I knew it!" he hissed. "I knew it!"

"Knew what?"

"I was sure of it from the start!" went on Handforth. "The pater's met with foul play. He's in the hands of crooks! And it's all lies about him running away because the bank is in Queer Street! It's a plot against him, a rotten, villainous plot!"

Church and McClure regarded their leader anxiously.

"Do be sensible, Handy!" urged Church. "You—you don't look very well, you know! All this excitement is too much for you——"

"In the hands of villains!" repeated Handforth. "My only aunt!"

Church and McClure were getting impatient, and they were quite excited, too. The totally unexpected arrival of this letter had been drastic enough, but to hear Handforth going on it seemed that something of an exceedingly strange nature had taken place.

"What does the letter say?" asked Church grimly. "We don't want to pry into your affairs, Handy, but I think we have a right to know something about this!"

"Rather!" agreed McClure.

Handforth stood up, practically himself again.

"I'll tell you!" he said grimly. "My pater had been kidnapped by a gang of ruffians, and is being kept a prisoner somewhere, he doesn't know where it is!"

"Then how did he post the letter?" asked Church.

"He didn't post it!" said Handforth. "He wangled it by somebody else, just like him! As cute as a giddy fox! The pater's all there, I can tell you! What we've got to do is to get on the scent, and rescue him!"

"But where is he!" yelled Church.

"He doesn't know!"

"You—you hopeless ass!" said Church desperately. "If he doesn't know where he is, how could he tell you anything about it? You'd better not take any notice of that letter, Handy, some cad is trying to fool you! I shouldn't be surprised if Fullwood has done it as one of his special practical jokes!"

Handforth looked at Church pityingly.

"You funny fathead!" he said, with withering scorn. "You slab-sided lunatic! Do you think I don't know the pater's handwriting by now? And do you think Fullwood could spoof me? Read the thing, and then you'll understand!"

Handforth dropped the letter on the table, and Church and McClure seized it. They had been waiting for this opportunity all the time, and now that they had got the letter they read it through with great interest.

It was certainly startling. It was not particularly legible, having been scrawled at a great rate, and there was little of it. But the words it did contain were to the point.

It ran in this way:

"Dear Edward,

"Show this to Mr. Nelson Lee. I want him to help me. Have been kidnapped by Howard Riddeil and John Westlake—enemies. Don't know where I am. Brought here blindfolded by car.

"Somewhere in London. Car drove straight



"Don't you understand?" roared Handforth excitedly. "It's—it's from the pater!"

in garage adjoining house. Smelt fresh paint. Gate was smashed in entering. House on hill. 'Bus service passes. 'Buses appear to go uphill only—none going other way. Attempt to smash me and bring ruin.

"Don't know whether can post this. Will try to get it out somehow. Get Mr. Lee to investigate. Any fee. Urgent.

"Your father.

"P.S. Mr. Lee will tell district by postmark. Urge him to search until he loca——"

The postscript broke off in the middle of a word. This made it fairly clear that Sir Edward had found great difficulty in writing the note at all. And he had been compelled to abandon it just at the finish. But he had succeeded in his main object, he had managed to get the letter posted.

And it contained a surprising amount of information.

"Great Scott!" said McClure. "This, this can't be true, surely? There must be something wrong about it! It sounds like one of those bits from a giddy story! It can't be right, Handy——"

"It is right—I know it!" said Handforth. "The pater's been kidnapped, and he's held a prisoner. That's the very idea! They're holding him until the bank goes smash!"

Until he's ruined and discredited! The rotters—the villains! I'll show 'em something!" "You'd better take this to Mr. Lee at once!" said McClure excitedly.

"Rather!" agreed Handforth. "That's what I'm going to do!"

"I don't believe Mr. Lee will take it in!" said Church. "It's a bit too tall, you know. Why, it seems that your father was kidnapped in a motor-car by two men, and taken, blindfolded, to a house somewhere in London. Of course, he couldn't know exactly where the house was, as he couldn't see."

"Exactly!" said Handforth. "That's just it! But he was cute enough to notice that the garage had been freshly painted, and that provides a good clue. Then—then there's the smashed gate."

"Yes, and the house is on a hill," put in McClure. "That bit about the 'buses ought to be another good clue, too. By the way, what's the post-mark? That's jolly important!"

Handforth started.

"I chicked the envelope in the fire!" he gasped.

"Fathead! There isn't any fire!" said Church.

He dived into the grate, and rescued the envelope from the fireplace. Smoothing it out, he examined the post-mark.

"Streatham!" he cried. "There you are, as clear as anything!"

"Good egg!" exclaimed Handforth. "Streatham! That's where this house is, with the 'buses going past it only one way! I say, the pater was pretty smart, eh? He hadn't got the faintest idea where he was, but he's practically told us! It ought to be dead easy to locate a house on a hill with a smashed gate, and a freshly-painted garage!"

"Well, I shouldn't think it will take long," said Church. "Although, of course, in a place like Streatham, there are bound to be tons of 'bus routes, and plenty of hills, too. There might be hundreds of houses with freshly-painted garages. These things aren't as easy as they seem. Besides, why did your pater write to you instead of the police?"

"Because Mr. Lee's here!" said McClure.

"Rats!" put in Handforth. "He did it because he knows I'm jolly keen on anything like this. He can trust me! The police would only make a mess of it——"

"It's all very well to talk like that, Handy, but it won't do," said Church. "Why, if he wrote this last night, and addressed it to Scotland Yard, it would have arrived early this morning. Why did he send it right down here, into the country? That's what I can't understand."

Handforth looked thoughtful.

"It does seem a bit rummy!" he admitted. "But still, I expect the pater had a good reason, or he wouldn't have done it. And that's not important, anyhow. We can wait till we hear all the facts. The main thing

is that the letter is here, and that we knew the truth. We'll soon get him out of the clutches of this rotten gang!"

"We will?" repeated McClure.

"I don't mean you!" said Handforth. "Mr. Nelson Lee and me! We'll do it! We'll buzz off at once, directly after I've shown him the letter. I'll go straight to Mr. Lee's study now——"

Handforth broke off suddenly, and then looked excited.

"No, I won't!" he added.

"Won't what?"

"Go to Mr. Lee!" said Handforth. "I'll jolly well rescue the pater on my own! I don't see why I should bring Mr. Lee into it, he'll only collar all the credit, and I sha'n't even get mentioned! Yes, by George! I'll do it myself!"

"Go to London and rescue your pater?" gasped Church.

"Yes!"

"You—you hopeless ass!" said McClure frantically. "You can't do that, Handy! It's impossible——"

"Can't do it?" interrupted Handforth. "Why not?"

"Course you can't!"

"What's to prevent me?" went on Handy, waxing enthusiastic. "I've always been keen on detective work, and here's a real chance! A chance that only comes once in a lifetime! I'll rescue the pater, and show everybody what I'm made of! I can easily follow up these clues, and do the whole trick!"

His chums regarded him dazedly.

"You—you don't mean it!" panted Church.

"I do!"

"But—you can't!" shouted McClure. "It is mad! You'll make a hopeless muddle of it, Handy! Supposing anything goes wrong? It needs an experienced detective for a job like this! And what are you going to do even if you do locate the house. How are you going to rescue your father?"

"I shall go in and smash those two rotters to pulp!" said Handforth.

Church and McClure felt rather faint. They knew Handforth well, and they could tell by his tone now that he was in earnest. And it was alarming. For Handforth to imagine that he could do this job on his own was too ridiculous for words.

He would simply mess up everything from start to finish.

"Look here, Handy, you can't do it!" gasped Church. "You can't, you know! Your pater particularly urges you to tell Mr. Lee, that's the very reason he wrote to St. Frank's! It would be ghastly to let him down——"

"Who's talking about letting him down?" demanded Handforth. "It's all rot! I know what I'm doing, and you chaps have got to keep mum! Understand? You mustn't breathe a word!"

"But—but Mr. Lee must know!" insisted Church. "It'll be too awful if you try this

game on single-handed. Do be sensible, Handy! It's no good playing about! Mr. Lee will know exactly what ought to be done, and he'll do it properly, too. Take the letter——"

"It's no good talking!" interrupted Handforth. "My mind's made up!"

It was, too. Church and McClure knew it. They were quite appalled at the prospect. Handforth had always fancied himself as a detective; but he was about the most hopeless duffer at the game one could possibly imagine. If he went off to his father's assistance alone, it was safe to bet that he would make a terrible hash of the whole business. And, instead of rescuing his father, he would probably succeed in getting himself into worse trouble.

Church looked at McClure, and McClure at Church. They couldn't let their hot-headed leader proceed with his plan. It was obviously out of the question. It was up to them, therefore, to step in and do something. But Handforth was a difficult fellow to handle.

"You've made up your mind?" asked Church.

"Yes, I have!"

"Didn't you promise Mr. Lee that you wouldn't bunk off?"

Handforth started.

"Oh, this is different!" he said, after a moment. "The circumstances thoroughly justify me in going. I told Mr. Lee that I wouldn't bolt up to London just on the off-chance of finding out anything. But this is a direct appeal from the pater, and I've got to answer it!"

"It's an appeal to Mr. Lee, not to you!" said Church bluntly.

"I don't care about that!" replied Handforth. "I'm jolly determined to carry the thing through off my own bat. It's no good talking—it's no good arguing! I've made up my mind!"

"But, Handy, listen!" pleaded McClure. "Just think! Isn't it better to be on the safe side? Isn't it only right that you should do the very best you can for Sir Edward? Supposing you go off, and there's a hitch? Who will there be to carry on?"

"If I'm on the job, there won't be any hitch!"

"It won't be anything else but hitches!" snapped Church. "You're mad, you're absolutely dotty! It's your plain duty to take that letter to Mr. Lee?"

"I'm not going to!"

"Is that final?"

"Absolutely!" said Handforth.

"All right, I'll take it myself!" roared Church desperately. "I don't care what you do afterwards!"

With one swift grab he seized the letter out of Handforth's fingers, and then he bolted for the door. Handforth gave one bellow, turned the table over with a crash, and rushed after his chum. But McClure pushed out his foot, and Handforth crashed over.

Church sped into the passage.

"Come back, you—you rotter!" howled Handforth wildly. "You wait! I'll break you into bits! You rotter, you traitor! If you don't stop I'll slaughter you!"

He had picked himself up by this time, and was dashing away in pursuit. McClure brought up the rear, excited and full of admiration for Church's lightning-like move. It had been the only course to adopt.

Church had seized his opportunity, perhaps the only opportunity that would come. By hook or by crook, he meant to place that letter in Nelson Lee's hands. Left to Handforth, the whole thing would fizzle out. It was vitally necessary that Nelson Lee should know the truth, and that he should see Sir Edward's letter as well.

Church went like the wind.

Juniors got in the way here and there, but he dodged them all. And Handforth came charging after him like an enraged bull.

"Hallo! Same old Handy!" grinned Pitt, as he stood back. "He's recovered sooner than I expected. Go it, Church, you'll win!"

"Stop him!" roared Handforth desperately.

But Church was not to be stopped. He came near to disaster, however, at the bend of the passage. He ran full tilt into Tubbs, the pageboy. Tubbs went flying over backwards, and Church came an awful cropper.

Still clutching the letter, he regained his feet and dashed on. But even this slight delay had given Handforth the opportunity of overtaking him. And just as Church arrived at the door of Nelson Lee's study, Handforth's fingers closed over the fugitive's shoulder.

In the nick of time Church succeeded in turning the handle and flinging the door open. Even as he did so the awful thought came to him that Nelson Lee might not be in the study. If this was the case it would be all up—for Handforth would recover the letter, and there would be no further chance of regaining it.

But Nelson Lee was there.

Starting up, he was astonished by the vision of two Remove juniors charging into his study like bulls into a china shop. Church tripped on the mat and sprawled on the carpet. And Handforth fell on the top of him in a heap.

To say the least this was a most unusual manner for juniors to arrive.

ANSWERS
EVERY MONDAY....PRICE 2:

CHAPTER V.

OFF TO LONDON.



NELSON LEE started up, very angry. "Good gracious!" he exclaimed hotly. "What is the meaning of this? Handforth—Church! How dare you charge into my study in this disgraceful fashion? Stand up at once!"

The two juniors, scared by Nelson Lee's tone, scrambled to their feet, and stood at attention. Handforth was glowering, but Church, in spite of his dusty, dishevelled appearance, had a triumphant expression on his hot and perspiring face. Handforth jabbed him in the back.

"Gimme that letter!" he hissed fiercely.

"What did you say, Handforth?" demanded Nelson Lee.

"Non—nothing, sir!" gasped Handforth. "I—I mean—only—only—"

"Come, come!" said Lee sharply. "That won't do! You can each write me five hundred lines for this disgraceful behaviour. You are lucky to escape so lightly—"

"But—but you don't understand, sir!" put in Church quickly. "It's most important, sir—and I only came in like that because Handforth was trying to stop me. There's something here that you've got to see, sir!"

Church held out the crumpled letter.

"That's—mine, sir!" said Handforth quickly.

"What is it that you have got, Church?" asked Nelson Lee.

"A letter, sir—"

"It's my letter!" shouted Handforth. "That rotter has no right to show it to you, sir—"

"Is that letter Handforth's, Church?"

"Yes, sir!"

"Then give it to him at once!" said Nelson Lee.

"There you are!" said Handforth triumphantly. "I'll show you—"

"But—but you've got to read it, sir!" gasped Church in desperation. "You don't understand! The letter belongs to Handforth, but it's from his pater, and it contains startling news, sir!"

"Whatever it contains, Church, if the letter belongs to Handforth he has a perfect right to retain it!" said Nelson Lee. "If you do not give it to him at once—"

Church shot his last bolt.

"You must read it, sir—everything depends on it!" he said earnestly. "The letter was written by Sir Edward, and it was addressed to Handy. But Sir Edward particularly asks Handforth to show the letter to you, because he wants help. Handforth wasn't going to do it, so that's why I rushed here with it!"

Nelson Lee regarded the two juniors closely.

"That of course, alters the matter con-

siderably," he said. "You had better give the letter to me, Church."

"It's private, sir, and it's mine!" shouted Handforth.

"Is it from your father?"

"Yes, sir."

"Does he request you to show me this letter?"

"In—in a way, sir!" replied Handforth.

"I wanted to go to the rescue on my own, and it's all through Church that this happened. It's not necessary for you to come into the thing at all!"

"We will see about that!" said Nelson Lee quietly.

He felt perfectly justified in reading the letter after what he had heard—and of course, he was justified in every way. He took the letter, glanced through it rapidly, and then frowned. Handforth was expecting him to show signs of excitement, but Nelson Lee remained disappointingly calm.

"Close the door, Church," he said, looking up.

Church did so.

"Now, Handforth, this seems to be very peculiar," went on Nelson Lee. "Is this letter really from your father?"

"Yes, sir."

"There is no practical joke about it?"

"Of course not, sir—it's absolutely genuine!"

"You are positive of the handwriting?"

"Positive, sir!"

"Where is the envelope?"

"I've got it, sir—it's here," said Handforth producing it.

Nelson Lee took it, glanced at the postmark, and then regarded the two juniors once more.

"This letter appears to be one of the very highest importance," he said. "It is, indeed, vital. Do I understand, Handforth that you intended going to London alone—without consulting me?"

Handforth looked uncomfortable.

"I—I wanted to rescue the pater on my own, sir," he said. "I could do it easily, and then everybody would be ready to admit that I'm a jolly good detective! It's a chance in a million!"

Nelson Lee shook his head.

"A very foolhardy idea, Handforth," he said. "I can quite understand your attitude, but your own common sense ought to have told you that this is not a matter for a schoolboy to deal with. Church did quite right in bringing the letter to me, and I cancel the punishment."

"Thank you, sir," said Church.

"I—I didn't mean any disrespect to you, sir," said Handforth sheepishly. "But—but you know what I mean. Think how ripping it would be if I rescued the pater all on my own—"

"Quite so," interrupted Lee. "But there is another side to the question, Handforth. Think how disastrous it would be for your father if you failed—as you most probably

(Continued on page 25.)

MORE LEAVES FROM "A BAD BOY'S DIARY!"

NIPPER'S MAGAZINE

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THE MONASTERY RUINS, ST. FRANK'S.



UNDER THE TABLE.

I DON'T know wot makes Susan always in such a awful hurry bout the males; won would think she'd dye if she don't get her letters inside of 5 minnits after the male comes in.

I've got to leve off my game of marbles or wotever I'm about, an' go rite off to the post-offis—if she's spoiled one game for me she has 3 hundred.

Ime sick of post-offises. So to-day she sent me like I always have to go. I was in a grate hurry.

I had agreed to meet Tommy Tilden behind his father's barn to buy his new jack-nife, wot his Uncle Ben give him when he went away, an' I was afrade he'd sell it to some other boy.

So thare was just 1 letter for Sue, wich didn't seme of much consekwnce, a little pink thing, so I thought Ide read it, and if it didn't amount to nothin' Ide thro' it away an' not bother to go back home with it.

The postmaster an' some other fellers laufed wen they see me tare it open. You never see such a letter; the paige was small but writ all over, an' then over backwards an' round the egges.

I couldn't stop to read such stuff. I gave it back to the postmaster to kepe till some of the folks come after it, an' now thare's no end of a fuss.

As useyal Ime the culprit. Just because the postmaster he has a sister wich is a very old made, an' she had the

curosty to read Sue's letter, an' the girl wot wrote it to her ast for fun, "Are those bottles o' hare-die coming threw the male yet for Miss Hornblower?" That's his sister.

She got mad as a hornet, an' let out she read the letter, and now you never seen such a skrape. She is mad at Susan, Susan is mad at her, they are both mad at me.

Girls is always cross bout something. I'm most discurrighed about bean a good boy. I shall be awful glad wen I'm grone up.

I don't think I'll ever marry, thogh. Boys wot has sisters knos too much. Them girls when they come down-stares late in the afternoon ain't the same I see up-stares cuttin' round in their rappers with a little nob of hair on the back of their heads an' their crimpin'-pins a sticking out like horns, a washing their faces in butter-milk, an' a asting me to bring 'em up the morning paper.

I wonder wot they do with all those morning papers? Maybe they're makin' a scrap-book. I've got one—it's nicer than a diry, full of funny things.

I cut the pictures out of papa's books in the library to paste in. He does not know it yet. It makes my scrap-book awful nice.

You'd laugh to see one I got out of a paper yesterday. It was a boy under a table. He'd bin pinchin' his sister's bow's leg under it with the suggar-tongs. Every-buddy was jumping up—such a sell.

I'll do it too. Mister Prim is comin' here to dinner to-morrow. I heard papa tell mamma he was goin' to try to get him to buy that house an' lot on Smith street. He's such a stick—just the one to try it on.



I got the pye an' sliped out.

Cook was dreadful crost 'cause she had to get up a nice dinner. She wouldn't make me a turn-over, nor let me in the kitchen wen the things was round.

That made me mad. Sez I, I'll be even with you, you crost old thing. I said I was goin' over to Johnny's, but I didn't, I hided in the pantry hind the door.

Purty soon she comes in with one o' them Washington pies, which is so delishus wen they're just made, all jelly inside, an' layers of cake frosted on to the top, an' she slams it down, and mutters to herself:

"There, I hope that'll suit Mrs. Peticker-ler!"

Then she went out. I kep' still as a mouse till she was gone. There is a window in our pantry. I put the pye under it on the shelf, climbed on the shelf, got the pye, an' sliped down an' out.

I hid it in the wood-shed, went an' got Johnny, an' I tell you we had a good time. When it was all gone I wiped my mouth an' went into the parlor whare they ware.

"Georgie," sez mamma, sweet as sugar, "you may go an' play with Johnny till we've had our dinner."

"Agreed," sez I.

But I had other plans. I got under the table in the dining-room; the cloth come down all around; I had the sugar-tongs, an' a fork, an' a bunch of white grapes wich I took of the top of the apurn, an' I fixed myself cumfutable.

They come out an' took their setes. Mister Prim he said grace; he wore shoes, so I jabbed him in the ankul softly, just enuff to make him think a spider bit him.

Mr. Prim is a dreadful polite man; he wouldn't reche down to find wot it was for the wurd, an' I tickled him like it was a insect crawling up an' down; he'd move his foot an' jerk like he had St. Vitus' danse, but he didn't let on.

Dinner lasted a awful long time, but I didn't care, I wasn't hungry, I'd et too much pye, an' then I herd the girls a whisprin to mama, who sez:

"I'm awful mortified, the cat has et the dessert. You'll have to make out, Mr. Prim, on iskreme, an' frute, an' coughy."

So pa and Mr. Prim they talked about the property. He said he'd take it at that price. While they was a talking.

"Do you keep dogs?" sez the visitur.

"Nary a dog," sez pa.

"I thought there mite be one under the table," sez he.

"O no," sez pa.

"Will you have calfy o' lay?" sez mama, "or calfy nowar?"

"Calfy nowar" sez Prim.

He's frightfully fashionable. Just then I cot him by the caff of the leg with the pincers, an' I give 'em a good squeeze.

"Ouw — wow — wow!" sez he, a jumpin' up.

The cup went smash inter the glass pickel dish, the coughy spilt on to the table-cloth, the cup and sawcer an' dish wur broke—such a time! I

know I turned pail. I hadn't meant to pinch so hard, but the mischief was done!

"I'll have hidrafobia, I kno I will!" yelled Mr. Prim. "Confound your dog! Send for the doctor fur to cut it out. I've allus had a pursentment I'd die of hidrafobia, an' now I'm bit—I'm bit!"

"O lord, my leg. Send fur the dockter quick, or it 'ill be to late. O, how horrible it will be to die of that dred disese hidrafobia! O, ow!"

The girls they all jumped up on chares an' skremed. I wished the floor would open and let me drop into the seller, but it didn't.

Pa opened the door to drive the mad dog out, cot up a chair an' poked, an' poked, an' cried "git out!" till he was tired.

All of a sudden a thot seemed to come into his mind—he stooped down, raised the table-cloth, and looked.

"It's only that confounded boy! Georgie come out here! What possest you to do a thing like that, you little imp! I'm very angry with you. Come out here! Go to your room, sir, and remain until I have time to attend to your case. You shall be severely punished, sir."

"Well, well, friend Prim, better to have a trick played off on you by a bad little boy, than to have hidrafobia, eh? Sit down, sit down. Get off those chares, girls. Wife, pore another cup o' coughy for our gest."

But that ole stick was mad as hops, an' took his hat and left. They say papa's lost the sail, and I'm to blame, as ever.

Wot would you do if you was such a boy? I got a awful licking, too. I fele very lo-spirited to-nite, dear diry. Evry-buddy is down on a feller if he does the lesta thing. You'd think he'd committed murder.



"Ouw — wow — wow!" sez Mr. Prim, a-jumpin' up.



SCHOOLBOY HOWLERS.

Being a series of humorous stories about scholars of various schools throughout the country.

Elementary French.

In a few of the London Board schools, elementary French is taken as a specific subject. It is acknowledged by masters to be one of the hardest subjects to teach.

One day, a local manager visited a school where French was taken, and, by permission of the master, he put a few questions to the lads to see how they were progressing.

After some preliminary remarks, he asked—

"What is the French word or term for 'home'?"

"Please, sir," responded one of the lads, "they ain't got none; they have to say *shay more*."

"Quite right," said the manager; "and now, the next boy tell me, what is the French for 'king'?"

"Why, sir," answered the urchin—who, though smart, had been irregular in his attendance, "they ain't got a word for that neither!"

"Indeed," said the manager, "why not?"

"Because," answered the lad, 'cutely, "because the French don't have no kings!"

All That King Alfred Had to Learn.

The master of a Lancashire school was giving his lads a lesson from English history dealing with the early life of King Alfred. He related to them how the little prince's teacher or governess was his own Royal mother, and how the lady used to read or recount the history of those who had gone before him. The master further informed the lads that Alfred was a diligent and persevering pupil, and carried away the prize offered by the lady to that one of her sons who should first be able to read a certain book or scroll of history.

"Now, my lads," concluded the dominie, "surely this should prove an incentive to

you; for remember that the young prince had nothing like the advantages that you now possess—printed books, numerous pictures, pens and paper, and every facility possible or necessary."

"Yes, sir," ventured to put in one of the lads, as he pointed down to the first half-dozen pages of his book, "but look what a wee bit o' history there was for Alfred to learn! Just nowt but the Druids, the Romans, and the comin' o' Christianity!"

Doncaster and Butterscotch.

The following incident took place in a British school at Doncaster. The master was taking a third standard class in the geography of England. As there was a manager present—a local manufacturer who was much respected in the place—the schoolmaster directed most of his questions to the subject of "towns and their industries."

"What is the chief industry of Leeds?" he asked.

"Cloth," answered one of the lads.

"And Sheffield?"

"Knives and forks."

"And our own town—Doncaster?"

"Butter-scotch, sir."

Now, although the master expected "the Racecourse" for answer, he could not but confess with a smile that the Royal Doncaster butter-scotch had certainly a more than local celebrity. As for the manager (who happened to be the butter-scotch manufacturer), he was so taken with the lad's answer, that he promptly drew a half-crown from his pocket and made him a present of it.

A schoolmaster was taking some of his pupils round the Zoo. He asked one boy which of the animals he liked best.

"Well, sir, I liked the elephants, the kangaroos, but, best of all, the 'dangerous'!"

The master could not understand what the boy meant, and asked him to show where these new animals were kept. The boy then led the master to a cage, and pointed to a notice displayed thereon: "THESE ANIMALS ARE DANGEROUS!"



HOW TO BE HAPPY THOUGH MISERABLE.

By JOSH CUTTLE.

THERE was times when things was quiet. There was nothin' doin'. You woke up of a mornin' and the weather was neither hot nor cold. Why was it neither hot nor cold? Ask me! Becoz it were one of those lukewarm kinder days with the air all muggy and damp, and nothin' seems to 'appen. Then we was miserable.

Everyone 'as Got the 'Ump.

We was miserable becoz there was nothin' out of the ordinary to rouse our spirits. Life was monotonous. Everyone 'as got the 'ump. We goes on with our work jist the same as usual, wishin' it was arternoon when it was mornin' and evenin' when it was arternoon.

When There's Nothin' to Liven You Up.

On them dreary sorter days the noos-papers was allus gloomy. There was no murders, no fires, no-railway axidents to liven yer up; on'y siety weddin's, pro-seshuns, and sich-like. 'Oo wants to read about weddin's and pro-seshuns when we was down in the dumps? Ask me! Why, on'y them people with no sense of feelin'!

Wot the Public Wants.

I meant no 'arm against the noospapers with wot I said jist now, for it ain't their fault if noos is scarce. When there was a tragedy, the papers was full of it. Why was they full of it? Ask me! Becoz they know wot the publick wants. If folk took no pleasure in readin' murder cases, great wars, earthquakes, the papers would never publish them tit-bits.

How Some People Was Born to be Miserable.

There was people as had everything money could buy 'oo was allus miserable,

and there was poor people as was surrounded with miseries and was allus 'appy. Why was this? Ask me! Becoz the man born with the silver spoon in 'is mouth 'ad no vissitoodes, no ups and downs in life, like the man 'oo 'as to earn 'is living by the sweat of 'is brow.

A Cure for Low Spirits.

When you feel run-down in 'ealth, wot you really want is something that'll make your flesh creep. For hinstance, go to the nearest 'orspital and ask to see an acquaintance of yours in the axident ward as was run over and 'ad 'is face bashed in. I 'ad some experience of an axident ward myself. Got knocked down by a tram in London. I was 'arf-way acrost the road, when I sees a fat old party come to grief in front of a motor-'bus. I sez to myself, "'Ere's something worth watching." As luck would 'ave it, the 'bus swerved and never touched the old lady. While I was standing gazing at 'er, disappointed-like, a tram coming the other way caught me in the back, and I was taken on a stretcher to the General 'Orspital.

Where Everyone Was Cheerful.

I was not much 'urt, but them three days in the 'orspital was a treat I never expected. I could 'ave stayed there a month. Every quarter of an hour someone as 'ad just been run over was brought in to keep me company. Screaming and howling went on all night; it was 'eavenly! I noticed that the doctors and the nurses was cheerful, like myself. Why was they cheerful? Ask me! They allus 'ad something appening. They was in the centre of things. No need for them to push their way in a crowd to see a street axident, as I 'ave done many a time. I don't mind saying as I felt like asking the doctor wot tended me if there was any likelihood of a vacancy as door-keeper at that 'orspital.

How to Get 'Appiness.

But I ain't grumbling with my job at St. Frank's. Wherever there was boys there was trouble. Take my trip and look for trouble, and you will allus get 'appiness.

THE GREAT FIRE.

By Cecil De Valerie.

EXPERIENCE teaches us," said Timothy Tucker, "that prevention is better than cure. Therefore I fail to understand your objections to the installation of an organised fire brigade."

Most of the chaps didn't mind, but it was rather a surprise to them to find that Mr. Crowell took it up enthusiastically. He even offered to be captain.

Handforth wanted to be captain, too. McClure suggested he should challenge Mr. Crowell to fight for the captaincy, but Handforth said the master was not up to his weight.

A few days after the suggestion had been taken up, the Ancient House section of the St. Frank's fire brigade turned out for practice. We had a long length of hose fixed on a small manual engine. We had half-a-dozen canvas shutes to fix to the landing windows on each floor, and we found an old disused dinner-bell which we temporarily placed in a wooden box near the steps.

"Now, the first thing, boys," said Mr. Crowell, when we lined up in the Triangle, "is organisation. Each of you must have a particular job, a particular post to take up, and on the sound of the bell you must immediately take up your positions."

"Right-o, sir!" said Handforth. "I'll take the hose. I'll fix it to the hydrant; then I'll ring the bell, and after that I'll help the chaps to slide down the shute. When that's over, I'll——"

"You'll allow me to continue, perhaps," went on Mr. Crowell mildly. "We have here the canvas shutes. We will take them up to the landing windows and have a—ahem—rehearsal. Then we will unwind the hose and affix it to the hydrant. The water is not on, but it will be good practice. Now then, my boys, come along!"



Mr. Crowell led the way into the Ancient House, and very soon we had the shutes fixed up. Everyone wanted to be the first to descend, except Montie.

"It would spoil my trousers utterly, begad!" he protested. "It would, really! If you don't mind, sir, I think I'd like to wait for the fire!"

"If no one will risk it, I don't mind going!" shouted Handforth, above the laughter that followed Sir Montie's remark. "I don't want to boast, but it's quite easy to me! Look out, you asses!"

Handforth pushed his way to the shute and climbed on to it.

"It's as easy," he said, as he began to slide down, "as falling off a—my hat! Ow! Wow!"

At about six feet from the ground there came a ripping noise, and the canvas split. Handforth reached the gravel with a bump; then he sat up and rubbed himself.

"You—you clumsy—someone must have let go! Oh, my arm!"

"Dear me, I hope the boy is not hurt!" said Mr. Crowell, from the window. "But he should have been more careful with his feet. He must have hobnails in his boots!"

Handforth was not anxious to have another try, and, after most of the others had descended in safety, Mr. Crowell led the way to the hydrant.

The hose was unwound, and Handforth grasped the nozzle.

"You needn't examine it so closely. Handforth," said Mr. Crowell. "Aim it at the—— Goodness gracious!"

As Handforth grabbed it, a stream of icy water jetted out. Someone must have turned it on at the main. The gush of water took Handforth under the chin, and he did a graceful somersault on to his back.

"Ooosh! ooosh!" he remarked several times. "Oshee-oshee-shee!"

"My dear sir," said Timothy Tucker, who had been standing just behind Handforth, and was nearly sent flying, "don't leave hold of the hose, or we

shall all be drowned! Don't drop it, I say! Hold——"

It is impossible to say whether Handy heard. At any rate, he did not heed Tucker's good advice. He dropped the nozzle as though it was red-hot. Tucker, in trying to spring out of the way, caught his foot in the hose-pipe.

The result of this unexpected move on his part was that he overbalanced and fell flat on his face, while the nozzle was jerked from the ground and began to spray Church and McClure.

"There was water and there was trouble!" interrupted a voice. "And why was there water? Ask me!"

Josh Cuttle had just appeared, and at sight of so much confusion his face almost wore a smile. He almost grinned the next moment. He pointed towards the Ancient House windows.

"There was water," he continued, "and there was fire! And fire do a man's heart good!"

And looking in the direction of the study windows, everybody saw a thin column of smoke coming forth.

"My—my hat!" shouted Handforth. "It's Study D! Come on to the rescue!"

He darted off, followed by several other chaps, whilst Mr. Cuttle picked up the hose and squirted a jet of water at the study window. The window was open, and the stream of water gushed on to Fullwood, who was in the act of lighting a cigarette.

"Oh, my—oooosh! ooosh!" he gurgled; and then the force of the water knocked him to the floor.

Gulliver sprang to shut the window, but he was not quick enough. He joined Fullwood. It was at that moment that Handforth rushed in.

"Just in time!" he roared.

In a few seconds the struggling nuts were picked up and carried to the landing windows. Then, one by one, they were pushed down the canvas shute.

That is the last that has been heard of the fire brigade, but Fullwood and Co. are very careful to keep the window shut when they want a quiet cigarette.

ANNOUNCEMENT.

Timothy Tucker has requested us to state that he will give a lecture on Thursday evening next, at 8 o'clock sharp, in the Lecture Hall. The subject will be: "Why the Anthropoid Ape is More Advanced than Man." We advise everybody interested in this subject to attend. We will report the lecture next week.

THE GENIAL ASS!

By BOB CHRISTINE.

Archie, the knut, the priceless old bean,
At St. Frank's has arrived—absolutely!
He's a sport if you know what I mean,
And he's planned things deucedly cutely!
He's come to the school with a chappie
To attend to his wants, don't you know!
He's certainly frightfully happy,
And he reckons St. Frank's a great show.
The name of this man, to be quite exact,
Is a short one, you know—simply Phipps.
A chap with brains, unlimited tact,
Though he's probably partial to tips!
Now, Archie is perfectly priceless;
Quite one of the ones—oh, well, rather!
He's dapper and glitters with brightness—
Just the op. to his pepp'y father!
His study is rich and quite topping.
A dream of delight, and all that rot!
Soft lounges, and so forth, to flop in,
And carpets for the old pedals, what?
Of course, as it were, he's short of brains;
He admits it himself, and all that!
But he's a sport and never complains,
And to Archie we raise the old hat!

THE EDITOR'S DEN

IMPORTANT!—Correspondence to the Editor of this Magazine should be addressed to the Editor, The Nelson Lee Library, The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4.

Editorial Office,
Study C, Ancient House,
St. Frank's.

MY DEAR CHUMS,
Next week the Bad Boy will give an exceptionally amusing account from his Diary of his experiences as an amateur conjuror. Most of you have watched with admiration the wonderful gentleman who can produce such things as rabbits, scores of silk handkerchiefs, etc., from an apparently empty hat. It was just such a performance which the Bad Boy went to see with his father, with the result that he determined to amuse his friends by a similar performance in the back parlour. As to how far the Bad Boy succeeded in imitating the nimble conjuror at the show you will read under the title of "THE LITTLE CONJUROR."

The cover sketch will be a special drawing of Fatty Little for the Easter Holiday Number.

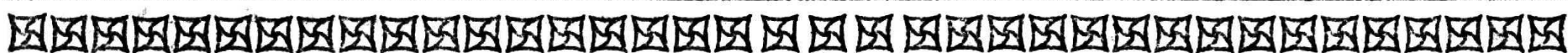
Handforth is writing another Trackett Grim story, called "The Case of the Pinched Painting!"

With best wishes for a Happy Easter,
NIPPER (The Editor).

WHO'S WHO at ST. FRANK'S

JAMES LITTLE.—The son of Mr. Henry Little, a man of immense bulk, and "Fatty," as he is known to the boys of St. Frank's, is simply a smaller edition. Like his father, Fatty abounds with abundant good-nature, and no really decent fellow can help liking him. In appearance, he is the opposite of his study-mates, the Trotwood twins. Jimmy Little has a large, round, smooth, pink face which never fails to wear a jolly expression. Fatty's eyes are small, but twinkle merrily; his Eton suit is the largest ever made for a boy. Jimmy's figure closely resembles a barrel, and his arms are quite as fat as an ordinary fellow's thigh; his collar is a seventeen, and his neck fills it. Although he weighs fourteen and a half stone, he is barely five feet in height. In spite of such elephantine proportions, however, Little is always astonishingly active, and can be as nimble on his pins as a kitten when he chooses. On the other hand, his immense bulk comes in very useful now and again, for it renders him impervious to all injuries from the ordinary

junior's fists. Fatty is quite good at fisticuffs, and is fairly well up in the world of footer and cricket. He has tried his hand at goal-keeping, but without any great success. All his other characteristics are in some way or another connected with food, for Fatty simply lives to eat. He has an appetite many times larger than that of the ordinary junior of his age, and though he is allowed thirty shillings a week, it rarely ever lasts him more than five minutes, and is invariably expended on provender. Little is naturally scrupulously honest in all things appertaining to money or personal property, but when it comes to eatables, he is not so particular. James Little has been known before now to sink all his principles for the sake of a jolly good feed. James Little first arrived at St. Frank's in No. 228 of the Nelson Lee Library, entitled "The Fat Boy of St. Frank's." He also appeared prominently in the next story, entitled "Back to the Old Home," No. 229; and later on in "The New Year Heroes," "St. Frank's at 'Appy 'Ainpstead," and "Fatty Little's Hunger Strike."



ONE DAY of FATTY LITTLE'S DIARY.

AS IMAGINED BY HAROLD DOYLE.

MONDAY.—Got up feeling fit and hungry. A bit of a keen wind in the air—probably the reason for me having more appetite than usual. Got down in good time, and popped into Mrs. Hake's shop for a snack. Had half a dozen buns, a few jam tarts, several doughnuts, and an assortment of cakes. Cash ran out, so I had to wait for brekker. Nearly starving!

Had a miserable breakfast. Nothing to eat except bread-and-butter, sardines, porridge, some biscuits, and cheese. Nick Trotwood not quite well, so he let me have his grub. Finished Armstrong's, too, and had a few biscuits and three slices of bread-and-butter from Watson. Felt rotten afterwards. Empty as anything. Morning lessons a slavery. Almost collapsed.

Dinner pretty decent. Trotty still unwell—biliousness, I believe. I got him to keep

mum. His dinner was served with the rest, and I managed to transfer it to my plate. Only just a bit peckish afterwards.

Got through afternoon lessons somehow. Mr. Crowell didn't see the biscuits I was eating. Tea was rotten. No cash, so I went into Study C. Nipper and his crowd let me stay. Only had eggs, a loaf, three cakes, and some teacakes. So I went into Pitt's study. Managed to finish up all right with salmon, kippers, and tinned beef. Only one loaf left, so I was a bit short.

Supper ghastly. Nothing to eat except the ordinary stuff. Trotty recovered, and scoffed all he could get. Wanted some of mine—to pay for the dinner! Not likely! Told him to eat coke.

Went to bed feeling half-starved. They never give us enough here!

(Continued from page 16.)

would fail. It is very foolish to take any chances in such a matter as this. This letter is evidently quite genuine. Sir Edward's disappearance is explained, and there is not a single moment to be lost."

"What are you going to do, sir?"

"I am going up to London by the afternoon train," replied Nelson Lee. "Sir Edward has particularly requested me to waste no time, and I have no intention of doing so. I will attempt to get him out of his present predicament."

"But ain't I going, sir?" demanded Handforth indignantly.

"Under the circumstances I shall let you come," replied Nelson Lee. "But you will quite understand, Handforth, that this affair is entirely in my hands, and that you will only be required to help in case of extreme urgency. Do not tell any of the other boys about this letter."

"Why not, sir?"

"It would not matter very much if the news became known, but it is better to keep it as quiet as possible for the present," said Nelson Lee. "You will go and get yourself ready for departure, Handforth."

"I think I'll ring up the mater, sir, if you don't mind—"

"Much as I would like to relieve your mother's anxiety, I do not think it would be advisable to communicate with her just yet," interrupted Lee. "Lady Handforth may be slightly incautious in her natural joy and excitement. We do not want your father's enemies to be in any way warned. It wouldn't matter so much down here—but if any hint of this got out in London the result would probably be bad for Sir Edward. We must be very careful."

Handforth and Church went off soon afterwards. Nelson Lee re-read Sir Edward's note, and then paced up and down for a short time. He was more than ever convinced that this thing was sound and honest. He couldn't quite understand how Sir Edward had managed to get the letter into the post—being a prisoner—but there would no doubt be an explanation of that later.

Church and Handforth, in the meantime, had gone back to Study D.

"After all, I suppose it's better that Mr. Lee should know," said Handforth briskly. "Come to think of it, I shouldn't have known my way about very well. And I'm going up to London, anyhow."

Church glared.

"That's just like you, Handy," he growled. "You jolly well ought to apologise. Chasing me like that, and threatening all sorts of things—and now you admit that I was right all along!"

"Any chap is liable to make a mistake—"

Handforth broke off and stared down the passage. A large knot of fellows were gathered together, and McClure was ex-

citedly talking to them. Church glanced at Handforth quickly.

"Clurey's been spreading the yarn!" he said in dismay.

And McClure certainly had. Not knowing that Nelson Lee wished the story to be kept secret, McClure had improved the shining hour by relating the sensational news. I was among the first to hear it. And I hurried straight off to Nelson Lee's study.

"What's all this the chaps are saying, sir?" I asked quickly.

"About what, Nipper?"

"Why, about Handforth's pater," I replied. "McClure says he got a letter from Sir Edward—at least, Handy got it—and Sir Edward is imprisoned in a cell, or a dungeon, or something—"

"Confound it!" interrupted Lee, frowning. "So McClure spread the story without delay? Well, it cannot be helped—and it's too late to do anything now. He didn't know that the matter had to be kept quiet."

"Then it's true, sir?" I asked.

Nelson Lee showed me the letter and explained the circumstances. I was feeling somewhat excited.

"You're taking Handy to London, sir?" I said. "Oh, but look here! I can go as well, can't I? It wouldn't be fair to leave me behind, sir—it wouldn't be playing the game! This case looks like being one of the good old-fashioned sort!"

It was a bit of a job, but at last I succeeded in getting permission to go. And I hurried off to prepare.

In the passage I met Archie.

"Ah, the very chappie!" said Archie, regarding me with approval. "Dear lad, I was waiting for you. Lying in the old ambush, and all that! How about it? How about this kidnapping business?"

"You mean Handforth's father?"

"Absolutely!"

"Well?"

"I mean to say, talking about this yarn?" said Archie. "Is it the truth, or a bit of a joke, or what? I'm simply asking for the facts, don't you know. A bally good reason, of course. I'm not the chappie to be inquisitive, and so forth. What about it?"

"Yes, it's genuine enough," I said. "No spoof about it, Archie. Mr. Lee is going off to London as soon as possible, and Handforth and I are going with him. The thing's absolutely straight."

"Then, as it were, the bank trouble," said Archie vaguely. "Moonshine, what?"

"I don't understand."

"That is to say, rumour and what not?" asked Archie. "The jolly old bank is sound, and that sort of rot?"

"As sound as a bell!" I replied. "But I expect the officials are going through the very dickens of a time—especially if there's a run. The whole affair appears to be a plot on the part of Sir Edward Handforth's enemies. But, of course, we can't know any details until later."

"Good enough!" said Archie. "Abso-

lutely! This, I mean to say, is the time when we've got to rally round and push out the helping hand. The glad fist, if you know what I mean."

"Of course," I said. "You'll probably read in the papers to-morrow that Sir Edward is O.K., and that everything is all right at the bank. So-long, Archie—can't stop any longer."

"Dash it all!" protested Archie. "I mean to say, not going? Not trickling on the old way, what?"

But I was already trickling, and Archie looked after me somewhat thoughtfully. Then he went straight to his study—moving with rather unusual energy. Upon arrival he found Phipps in the luxurious apartment.

"Always on the spot when you're wanted—absolutely!" remarked Archie. "A most deucedly handy chappie, Phipps! Have you heard the news? Have you, as it were, gathered in the old information?"

"Regarding Sir Edward Handforth, sir?"

"Absolutely!"

"I have heard certain reports, sir," said Phipps. "I gather from these that Sir Edward has unfortunately met with some serious trouble, and is, in fact, at present in the hands of some unscrupulous persons."

"Amazing!" said Archie. "The way you get these things pat, don't you know, is quite staggering, old bean! But that is just the posish. Handforth's pater has

caught a considerable quantity of trouble, as you say. Yards of it. And he's in the hands of some frightful ruffians."

"Rumours concerning the bank, therefore, are quite unfounded, sir," said Phipps. "I am very pleased to hear that, sir. Matters will be much easier for Master Handforth now."

"Oh, rather," agreed Archie. "I mean to say, absolutely!"

"Might I make a suggestion, sir?"

"Absolutely! Go straight ahead, laddie!"

"We have learned, sir, that Sir Edward has fallen into evil hands," said Phipps. "This information is, in a way, quite exclusive. We are more fortunate than Sir Edward's own colleagues in London."

"I suppose we are, don't you know?"

"And it is quite possible, sir, that matters in London are taking a serious turn," went on Phipps. "The bank officials, and other influential people, not knowing the truth, are probably suspecting strange things. This, of course, is what Sir Edward's enemies intended."

"Oh, rather!" said Archie. "I don't quite gather the old trend, but we'll let it pass. We'll allow it to skate by. Proceed, fair one! Your voice soothes me. It's dashed lulling, so to speak!"

"I was about to suggest, sir, that we get

(Continued on next page.)

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in touch with your father's stockbrokers in the City," said Phipps. "Messrs. Street and Street are well-known to you, I think, sir—"

"Absolutely!" interrupted Archie. "Strictly speaking, there's only one of the bounders left—a chappie named Jonathan Street, I believe. He's the pater's what-d'you-call-him, who wangles things up in the City, on the bally old Stock Exchange. A frightfully clever cove!"

"So I understand, sir," said Phipps. "Mr. Street, being in the run of things, would probably know exactly how the affairs of the Central and West London Bank stand at the moment. We could telephone, sir, and make a few inquiries. We should then be in a better position to—"

"I've got the idea!" put in Archie. "I've fairly grasped it, Phipps! And it is, I may say, a deucedly sound scheme! One of the best, old lad! Proceed with it! Carry it out! I mean to say, get busy on the old job!"

Phipps retired, and returned after an interval. Archie was reclining in his easy-chair, nearly asleep.

"I have succeeded in getting through, sir," said Phipps. "Mr. Street would prefer to speak to you, if you would not mind going to the telephone."

"A bally fag, of course," said Archie. "Frightfully inconsiderate of the old buffer. Dragging me out of the refreshing slumber, and what not! Well, leave me to it, Phipps!"

Archie was led to the telephone in the prefect's room, and when he got to the instrument he found that Mr. Street, the stockbroker, was at the other end of the wire.

"Hallo! Hallo! I mean to say, anything doing?" asked Archie languidly. "Are you there, and all that sort of thing?"

"I think I am talking with Master Archibald, eh?" came a voice over the wires. "Good! I just wanted to make sure. Where are you speaking from, my boy?"

"Why, the old place where they shove lumps of knowledge into a chappie!" said Archie. "St. Frank's, don't you know. But that's quite beside the point, old tulip. I should like to know if you happen to have any information concerning Sir Edward Handforth?"

"None whatever!" replied the stockbroker. "I presume, Master Archibald, that you were ringing me up in connection with your father's business—"

"Absolutely not!" interrupted Archie. "Nothing doing, as it were, in that line at all! About Sir Edward. What price the old bank? How goes it in that direction? Still smiling, and so forth?"

"The Central and West London Bank is in a very serious way, my boy," said Mr. Street. "So serious, indeed, that the situation looks hopeless. As it happens, I can tell you quite accurately how matters stand,

for my chief clerk has just been in communication with the bank."

"That's perfectly priceless!" said Archie. "Kindly proceed, old walnut! What, to be brief, is the precise posish?"

"At the present moment, Master Archibald, there is a run on the bank," replied Mr. Street. "By all I can understand, the officials have sufficient cash to meet all requirements for to-day—until closing time. At present, however, there is very little hope that the bank can save a crash in the morning. Funds are running low, and unless a miracle happens, the bank will smash to-morrow."

"I mean to say, that's rather frightful, what?" said Archie.

"It is certainly very serious indeed," replied the stockbroker. "However, these things will happen—and it seems fairly certain that Sir Edward Handforth knew well in advance that the trouble was coming."

"Absolutely not!" said Archie. "The old lad is the victim of some frightful plotters, and all that sort of thing. It's up to us, Mr. Street, to rally round. What about providing the cash, and so forth?"

"But, my dear boy, you don't seem to understand!" said Mr. Street. "Nothing short of a hundred thousand pounds would be any good whatever—and even that sum would only tide matters over temporarily—perhaps for an hour or two. You see, the bank is in a very unfortunate position. The disappearance of Sir Edward with the books and the balance-sheets has aroused distrust and suspicion, and the bank has utterly failed to obtain credit or support."

"That's rather deuced!" said Archie. "I mean to say, all the other bank merchants in the City have failed to come up to the scratch, what? They've left the old thing in the lurch, so to speak?"

"It was really the only thing to be done," said Mr. Street. "With all the facts so suspicious, nobody but a fool would deposit money in the Central and West London Bank. But why are you so keen on this matter, Master Archibald? What interest does it hold for you?"

"Well, you see, there's a chappie down here—I mean to say, dash it all!" said Archie. "Too much bally fag, don't you know! Yards of explanation required, and the old vocal chords aren't capable of the bally strain! Sorry, old bean, but there it is! Absolutely! Toodleoo! See you anon!"

And Archie rang off, leaving Mr. Street to think anything he liked. Archie had got the information he required, and he was satisfied. He went straight back to his study, and found Phipps there. He explained what he had learned.

"It seems, sir, that nothing can be done," said Phipps.

"Oh, rot!" declared Archie. "That is to say, rot! I might even say, most dashed rot! This, Phipps, is where we glitter! We shine,

and what not! Kindly trickle forth and gather the old lads together."

"The old lads, sir?"

"Absolutely!"

"There are a good many old lads here, sir—"

"Oh, rather!" said Archie. "Sorrow, old dear! I mean to say, the idea is this. Absolutely! Roll round, and collect up Tregellis-West, Singleton, and that other chappie—the dear lad who owns the bally island in the river—the cove we rallied round when he was trying to locate large quantities of bullion!"

"You mean Master Willard, sir?"

"Absolutely!" said Archie. "The old memory seems to have an inkling that he used to be called Martin, but we'll let that pass. Kindly slither off and bring the dear boys round."

Phipps departed, but returned in a short space of time with the Hon. Douglas Singleton, Sir Montie Tregellis-West, and John Willard. Archie adjusted his monocle, and regarded them with approval.

"The millionaire corps, what?" he observed. "The lads with the large supplies of wealth! Pray take a number of chairs, dear old sports! Roll about, and make yourselves comfy!"

"What's the idea, Archie?" asked Singleton.

"The fact is, dear lads, it's up to us to rally round Handforth's pater," said Archie. "I've been using the old bean terrifically, don't you know. The top storey, in fact, is fairly humming. We, as it were, have got to save the situation, and all that kind of rot!"

"What's the ass talking about?" grinned Willard.

"Begad! It's no good askin' me, dear fellow!" said Sir Montie. "I haven't the faintest idea!"

"It's this way, my dear old tulips!" said Archie. "I gather that you are all somewhat rolling in the right kind of stuff? In other words, you are decidedly flush of the good old yellow material. Rich, and all that. Large quantities of quids, if you know what I mean."

"Oh, I see!" said Singleton. "Well, that's known to everybody, isn't it? Montie is a millionaire, and Willard has just come into a tremendous fortune of his own, and I happen to be wallowing in wealth myself."

"Absolutely!" said Archie. "That, laddies, is just it. I may not be exactly wallowing, but there is always a good supply of the old coin in the offing, so to speak. The dear old pater reeks of the stuff, if you know what I mean. Doesn't bally well know what to do with it, and so forth. I've just got to get busy in the right way, and I can touch for any old amount!"

"That's pretty evident!" said Willard, glancing round the luxurious study.

"Oh, rather!" agreed Archie. "Now, what about it?"

"What about what, you ass?" demanded the Hon. Douglas. "Why the dickens don't you get to the point? We're all right—that's taken for granted. In fact, we're the financial centre of the Remove, so to speak. I'm not particularly brilliant, but I can pretty well guess that you are thinking of raising some cash?"

"Absolutely!" said Archie. "You've hit the old scheme!"

"How much?"

"A hundred!" said Archie.

"That ought to be easy enough——"

"I mean to say, a hundred thou.!" added Archie. "Slightly diff., don't you know, but there ought to be no troub. To begin with, laddies, a hundred thou. That is to say, twenty-five thou. each. How does it go? In other words, proceed with the chat, and gasp out the opinions!"

Singleton grinned.

"This is a joke, I suppose?" he asked. "I may be millionaire, but I'm not in the habit of whacking out twenty-five thousand at a time. Besides, there are guardians to consult before I can grab a big sum—solicitors, and all sorts of idiots. I expect it's the same with Montie and Willard."

"Begad! Rather!" said Tregellis-West. "My uncle—Lord Westbroke—is in charge of my money——"

"Dash it all!" interrupted Archie. "I mean to say, dash it all! These are matters that can be adjusted, and all that. Guardians may be a bally nuisance, but they can be wangled. Now, laddies, to proceed. The sum of one hundred thou. must be raised by the morning, and it's up to us to fix it."

"But what on earth for?" asked Willard blankly.

"Well, I mean to say, Handforth's pater!" said Archie. "The dear old buffer is up against it. Fairly and squarely rolling in misery, and what not. And the dear old bank is tottering. Positively crumbling, and all that kind of rot! It's up to us, darlings, to shove out the good old assisting fist!"

Light dawned upon the gathering.

"Oh, I see what you mean!" said Willard. "You want us to raise a hundred thousand so that we can lend it to the Central and West London Bank?"

"Not, so to speak, at all!" replied Archie quickly. "Quite ridic., in fact. No question of lending, old fruit! We simply withdraw large quantities of specie from one bank, and yank it into the Central and West London. Deposit it, as it were. You grasp the old scheme? Perfectly simp., and all that. And this deposit will do things. That is to say, save a most foul catast.!"

The three juniors were now looking quite interested and serious. They had realised that Archie was in earnest. And they learned that Archie had communicated with London, and was in possession of the chief facts. They themselves, of course, knew that Nelson Lee was hurrying off to rescue

Handforth's father from a gang of criminals.

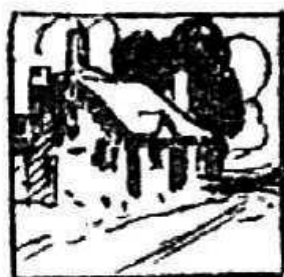
"But will a hundred thousand stave off the catastrophe?" asked Singleton doubtfully. "It seems a lot of money to us, but it's a mere drop in the ocean to a bank. I doubt if it would be much good."

"Oh, I think it would!" said Willard. "I'm game, anyhow. There's practically no risk about it, because the bank is certain to be all right as soon as Sir Edward gets free. And if we can help him by depositing this money, it'll be rather good. And that hundred thousand might just tide matters over until things are straightened. Anyhow, there's no fear of losing it."

"Absolutely not!" agreed Archie. "I mean to say, safe as houses, and all that!"

CHAPTER VI.

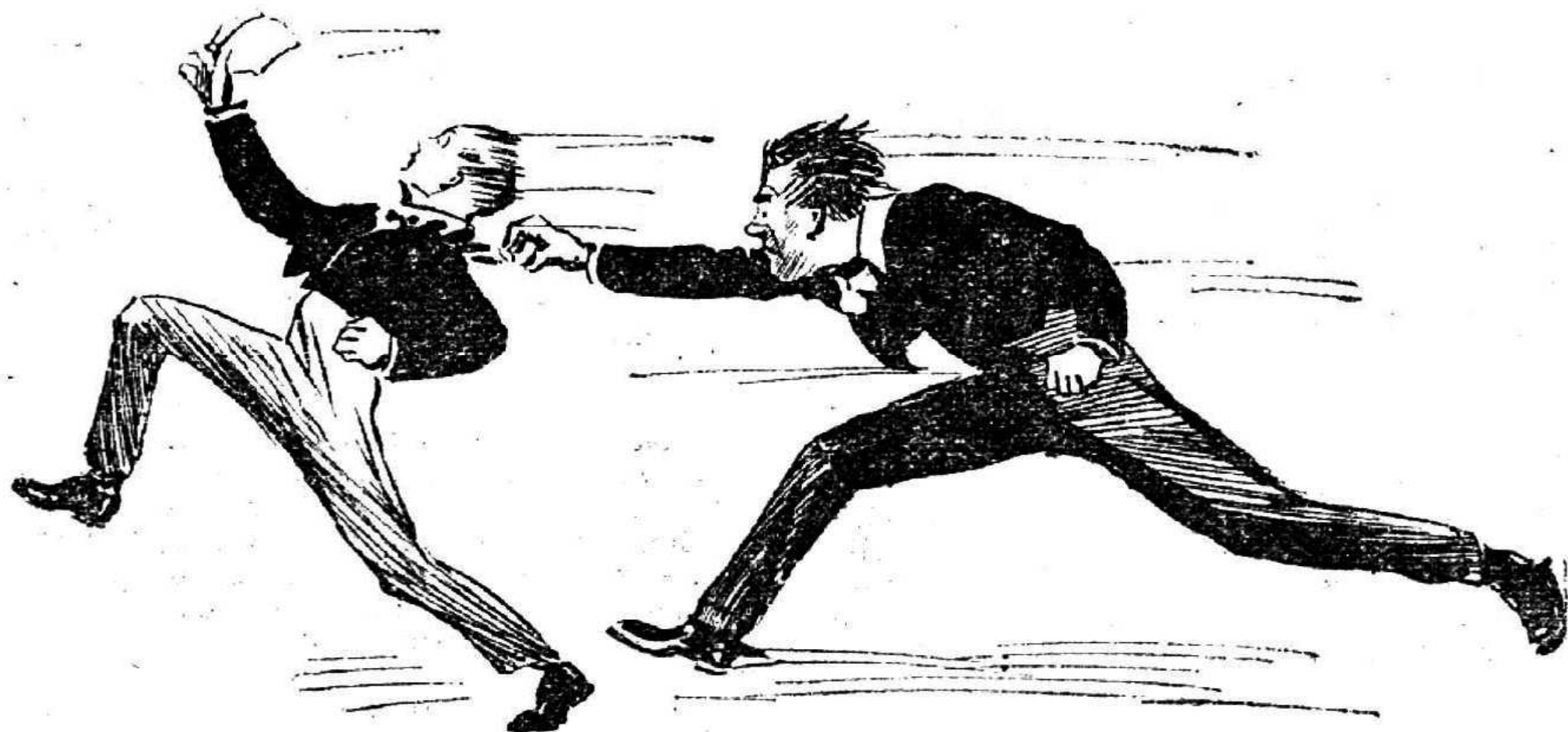
THE HOUSE ON THE COMMON!



NELSON LEE stepped out of the taxi, and Handforth and I followed him. It was evening, and we had just arrived in Streatham, after an uneventful journey from St. Frank's.

The gov'nor dismissed the taxi at once, for he had decided to walk from this point. We were just opposite the Streatham Public Library—the most central portion of that district.

"Well, here we are!" said Handforth. "It ought to be jolly easy to locate that house,



Church went like the wind. Handforth came charging after him like an enraged bull.

I take it, laddies, that you agree? That is to say, you consent to the old proposish?"

"Begad, rather!" said Sir Montie. "Anythin' to help old Handy, you know! I'm quite keen to arrange the thing—I am, really! An' it would be quite rippin' if we could do some real good."

And so the four juniors came to a definite decision. Without any delay they would communicate with their guardians, and arrange about the money. Archie, of course, would have to go over to Glenthorne Manor, at Bannington. Willard would have to speak to Dr. Stafford—for the Head was his guardian. And Montie and Singleton despatched long wires without delay.

Archie Glenthorne was feeling decidedly pleased with himself. As he remarked to Phipps, "the old tissues were somewhat flabby," and needed a good rest. And after so much exertion, Archie proceeded to slumber.

But he had fixed things up—and was hopeful that everything would be all serene.

sir! I suppose we're going to walk about now, looking for a place with a freshly-painted garage and a broken gate?"

Nelson Lee shook his head.

"I'm afraid that would be rather a waste of time," he said. "Our first task, Handforth, will be to find an omnibus controller, and to put a few questions to him. His replies, I fancy, will narrow down our search to a confined area."

Both Handforth and I were rather excited. Handforth, particularly, was full of eagerness and impatience. He had hardly been able to contain himself on the train, knowing that his father was in danger, and in need of help.

Looking at the position seriously, I could see that a great deal depended upon us. If we rescued Sir Edward at once, it would still be possible to save the bank from smashing. We had learned that the officials had succeeded in tiding matters over for that day. But they were anxious regarding the morrow.

I had suggested that Nelson Lee should publicly announce that Sir Edward was in the hands of kidnappers, and would be rescued at the earliest possible moment. This would probably put a stop to the run on the bank and ease the situation. But the gov'nor rejected the idea.

"It wouldn't do, Nipper," he said. "Once a bank is in the position of the Central and West London, there is only one possible way of saving it—and that is to raise enough money to pay every claim. And Sir Edward's colleagues find it impossible to raise money owing to the suspicious disappearance of the managing director. A story to the effect that Sir Edward is in the hands of kidnappers would not be believed. It would be regarded with suspicion—and taken as a mere ruse to tide things over. There is only one possible way to save the crash. And that is to rescue Sir Edward, and rush him straight to London. His presence alone will be sufficient. He will produce the books and the balance-sheets, prove that there is no fraud, and it will be a simple matter to raise money and restore credit."

"I expect you're right, sir," I said. "So we can't do anything at all until we rescue Handforth's pater and show him round, as it were?"

"Exactly!" agreed Nelson Lee. "The posi-

tion has been somewhat aggravated by the fact that the Central and West London Bank is an independent concern, and some of the big amalgamations would probably be glad to see it wiped out. The officials, therefore, find it almost impossible to obtain support. There is only one man who can avert the disaster—and that is Sir Edward himself."

And so we were in Streatham, determined to locate Handforth's pater at the earliest possible moment. No matter what delays we encountered—no matter what obstacles came in our path—our one and only task was to find the banker and take him to the City.

We walked along Streatham High Road for some little distance, and then came in sight of a 'bus controller just at the junction near St. Leonard's Church. Here the London County Council trams branch away in two directions—one set of rails continuing down the hill to the common and Norbury, whilst the other set of rails carried the trams along Mitcham Lane to Tooting.

"There don't seem to be many 'bus services about here, sir," I remarked. "It ought to be pretty easy. So far, I've only seen 59's and 34's—Half a minute, though! There's one just coming round that corner—it's a 49. That makes three services."

(Continued on page 31.)

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(Continued from page 30.)

"Yes," said Nelson Lee. "It has come along Tooting Bee Road from Balham and Clapham Junction. By what I know of Streatham I am fairly convinced that the 49 route is the one we're after. But the 34 and the 50 pass along the main road the whole way, where there is obviously a return service."

We stopped in front of the bus controller, and Nelson Lee questioned him.

"A service that goes one way and not the other, sir?" he said. "Why, there ain't one like that! They must go both ways! Wait a minute, though! There's the 49 route—Ealing Broadway and West Wickham. They go up the south side of Streatham Common and come back down the north side. That's the only service hereabouts that don't use exactly the same road all the time."

"Thanks!" said Lee. "I'm much obliged."

We passed on and Lee nodded.

"Just as I thought, Nipper," he said. "But it was as well to make sure. There can be no shadow of doubt that Sir Edward Handforth is imprisoned in a house on the south side of Streatham Common. The thing is obvious."

"Rather!" said Handforth eagerly. "It's wonderful, sir!"

"If you mean it is wonderful that your father gave us such excellent clues, I agree," said the famous detective. "My own part has been trivial. With such direct indications to guide us we should have been poor trackers if we could not locate the house. Your father, Handforth, was surprisingly shrewd."

"Oh, you can't beat the pater when it comes to cleverness, sir!" said Handforth loyally. "And fancy him managing to remember those things, and put 'em in a letter! And yet he hadn't got the faintest idea what district of London he was in, what the house was like, or—or anything."

"The cleverest piece of work of all was undoubtedly getting the letter posted," said Nelson Lee. "We have yet to learn how Sir Edward accomplished the move. It was the one clue of importance—since the postmark provided us with the district. The rest is childishly simple."

We were now walking down the hill towards Streatham Station. A bus coming along at that moment, we boarded it and went the short distance to the Common. The bus stopped opposite the Greyhound Hotel, and here we alighted.

"We ought to have gone a bit further on, sir," I said.

It was only a few yards, however, to the south side of the Common, and we walked briskly. The road here rose sharply, for both sides of the Common went steeply upwards.

There were houses on our right, and the open grassland on the left. We looked at the houses keenly and interestedly as we walked along. Most of them were fairly

large and detached and modern. They were all eminently respectable.

Just about half way up the hill, however, we paused—our search at an end. We were looking at a house very similar to the others, but with double gates opening upon a shallow carriage-drive to the front door. Adjoining the house was a garage. And the whole building was glaringly bright, having just been decorated from the ground to the roof.

And the upper gate was fixed in position with a number of rough wooden bars—obviously a hasty repair. To add the final item of evidence the clear tracks of a big motor car lay on the ground. It was equally evident that the car had been taken out that day, for the tracks were fresh.

Nelson Lee walked on up the hill, and Handforth gave a snort of impatience.

"What's the idea, sir?" he demanded, rushing up. "The pater's in there! We've got to rescue him! It's no good messing about—"

"You will kindly allow me to deal with this matter, Handforth!" said Nelson Lee grimly. "I am not in the habit of messing about, and I intend to act in the best possible way for your father."

"But—but— You're walking away, sir!"

"Quite so, Handforth," said Nelson Lee. "We must consider the best method of proceeding—and it would not be very satisfactory to our cause to stand outside the gate and show ourselves."

"What do you intend doing, sir?" I asked.

"Well, I think the best method will be to take matters into our own hands," replied the guv'nor. "I do not think it would be quite wise to apply to the police just at the moment—we don't want any delays. We will therefore go boldly up and take our chance."

"Good idea!" said Handforth. "There's nothing like force, sir!"

We went back, entered the gateway, and proceeded to the front door. I saw Nelson Lee glance keenly at the windows. And then I noticed, with a bit of a shock, that there were no shutters up. What did this mean? Nelson Lee rung the bell hard, and I noticed that he kept one hand inside his overcoat pocket. The guv'nor was not willing to put up with any nonsense. He had made up his mind, and was determined to carry the thing through.

So much depended upon finding Sir Edward quickly that there was absolutely no time to waste.

The door was suddenly opened, and we found ourselves being examined by an undersized man of about forty, with a sallow complexion and stooping shoulders. He was obviously a servant of some kind.

"Is your master at home?" asked Nelson Lee briskly.

"Er—no, sir," replied the man. "I am afraid the master is out of town."

"Who is your master?"

"Mr. John Westlake, sir," replied the

man. "He went away this afternoon, sir—scarcely an hour ago. Important business in the country, sir."

Lee looked at the man keenly. He believed that this was the truth. Westlake—one of the men mentioned in Sir Edward Handforth's letter—had left for the country that very afternoon. What did it mean?

"Where has Mr. Westlake gone to?" asked Lee.

"I cannot tell you, sir——"

"I think you can—and I think you will!" interrupted Lee curtly. "Now then, my man—I don't mean to harm you, but you've got to do exactly what you're told. Boys, seize him!"

The man started back in dismay, but before he could make any outcry, or any attempt to dodge, Handforth and I rushed at him and held him tightly. We were both strong chaps, and he simply had no chance against us.

Nelson Lee closed the door and turned to us.

"Hold him there while I look round!" he said crisply. "Keep him tight!"

I was rather disappointed at this, but there was nothing else for it. Nelson Lee quickly entered the two front rooms, one after the other. They were empty. In the same way he went over the whole house.

It was absolutely empty except for this one man. Nelson Lee did not like this at all, and when he came down he was looking grim. Before questioning the servant, however, he went back into one of the front rooms. The first glance had told him that this was the apartment which had been occupied by Sir Edward.

There were various indications to prove this—the shutters, for instance, had only been lightly thrown back, whereas those in the other front room were secured by special fastenings, and had apparently not been used for years.

Nelson Lee stood in the centre of the room, looking round him keenly. It was a big room, well furnished, and was a kind of dining-room and study combined. There was a handsome secretaire standing against the inner wall, with an electric standard lamp near by.

Lee noticed that there was a writing-pad lying carelessly on the desk. And as he glanced at this he suddenly compressed his lips. He picked up the pad and examined it closely.

Some faint indentations were visible on the paper, which although of excellent quality, was rather spongy in texture. By holding the pad at an angle Lee was able to distinguish the indentations as writing. It was quite evident that something had been scrawled upon the top sheet with a blunt pencil, and the sheet had then been removed—leaving the impressions beneath.

"This is remarkably fortunate," murmured Nelson Lee. "I think I can read this quite clearly—'Elliott, East View, Thorpe Road, Skegness, Lincs. Prepare for three.

Arrive about nine.—WESTLAKE.' H'm! Evidently a telegram."

Nelson Lee judged that the wire had been written out for the servant to take it to the Post Office and despatch. But the words were clear enough—although most people would not have been able to read it as rapidly as Lee had done.

Without a doubt the words were those of a telegram which had been despatched earlier that day. The "three" would probably be Westlake, Sir Edward Handforth, and Howard Riddell—the latter being the other enemy that Handy's pater had referred to.

The whole thing was clear, as far as Lee could judge. For some reason of their own, Westlake and Riddell had become alarmed, and they had removed their prisoner to a more distant place. This was an unfortunate complication, and one that Lee had not looked for.

"Skegness!" he murmured, frowning. "Rather a long way off. But the only possible way is to get down there as soon as possible and get Sir Edward out of the hands of these men."

Lee turned and went back into the hall. We were still holding the weedy servant. He had caused no trouble whatever, and seemed to be thoroughly scared.

"You've made a mistake, sir!" he said nervously. "I don't know who you are to come pushing your way into this house, but my master will be seriously annoyed when he hears about it."

"Your master has gone to Skegness, I think?"

"Yes, sir. I——" The man broke off, looking scared. "No, sir," he added quickly. "I—I don't know where Mr. Westlake has gone to. He simply left for the country—the South Coast, I think, sir."

"It's too late now, my man," said Nelson Lee. "Your first reply has convinced me. Nipper, run out as quickly as you can and find the nearest policeman. Bring him back with you."

"Right, sir!" I said briskly.

I hurried off. Handforth looked rather startled, and the prisoner had turned as white as a sheet.

"A—a policeman!" he muttered. "What for? You—you can't touch me——"

"Why not let him go, sir?" asked Handforth eagerly. "Didn't you say that my pater's been taken to Skegness? That's a tremendous way away, and we don't want to waste any time."

"We shall not be wasting time, Handforth, by placing this fellow in safe keeping," said Nelson Lee. "If we were to leave him to his own devices he would at once telegraph a warning to his master."

"By George!" said Handforth. "I hadn't thought of that, sir!"

Fortunately, I found a policeman near the Greyhound, and although he was a bit suspicious at first I took him along with me. Nelson Lee had no warrant for the arrest of

our prisoner, but he agreed to accompany us quietly to the police-station. Once there, Nelson Lee explained all the facts to the superintendent, and the man was detained "on suspicion" while inquiries were made.

So far we had been successful. But it was decidedly disconcerting to learn that the birds had flown—right up into Lincolnshire! It altered everything. It would now be impossible to get Sir Edward back by late evening.

"We've got to do something, sir!" said Handforth desperately. "Why not wire up to the Skegness police and have those two rotters arrested and the pater set free?"

"Quite impossible, Handforth," said Nelson Lee. "We have had Westlake's man detained, and that is all to the good. But we could not possibly expect the Skegness police to arrest Mr. Westlake and Mr. Riddell on information supplied through a telegram—or even by 'phone."

"Then what's to be done, sir?"

"There is only one course to adopt," said Nelson Lee grimly. "We shall proceed at once to Scotland Yard, and with the evidence in our hands I fancy we shall have no difficulty in obtaining the necessary warrants. We shall then leave, accompanied by Scotland Yard detectives, and rescue your father, and arrest these two men. But we must waste no time."

"I suppose we shall go by train, sir?" I asked.

"Yes—and probably return by car, traveling during the night," replied Nelson Lee. "It is most important that Sir Edward should be in London in the early morning. It's going to be a race, boys, but we'll do it. I think you ought to go home, Handforth and stay with your mother—"

"Not likely, sir!" snorted Handforth indignantly. "I say, that letter was addressed to me, you know, and it's only fair that I should see the thing through!"

Nelson Lee consented readily enough, and in a very short time we left Streatham. We had done everything possible there. There was some satisfaction, at least in knowing that Sir Edward's clues were accurate, and that we had got squarely on the right track. Westlake had been somewhat careless in drafting his telegram. But then, of course, he had no idea that his house would be entered and searched.

While Nelson Lee went to Scotland Yard, Handforth and I paid a flying visit to his home—after arranging to meet the gov'nor at Liverpool Street Station in time for a fast evening train.

Lady Handforth was delighted to see her eldest son, and her relief was immense when she heard Handy's news. And yet, at the same time, she was filled with a new anxiety. It was splendid to know something definite regarding the missing banker. But it was disconcerting to learn that he was in the hands of rogues.

However, Handforth and I told her not to worry. Nelson Lee was on the job, and

everything would soon be all serene. And so, after a somewhat hasty meal, we rushed off to Liverpool Street, and arrived on the departure platform, to find Nelson Lee waiting there.

He was accompanied by Chief Detective-Inspector Lennard, of the C.I.D., and three plain clothes men. Nelson Lee had arranged about the warrants, and the Chief Inspector was coming down to execute them.

It was some time since I had seen his cheery face, and we chipped one another a good deal until the train started. The journey to Skegness was somewhat tedious, and practically nothing was said regarding our mission. Nothing could be gained by talking about it. Our only course was to wait until we arrived, and then get into swift action.

Handforth and I slept most of the way, and when we finally steamed into Skegness the hour was late in the evening, and the sleepy little seaside town was dark and quiet. Most of the inhabitants were in bed.

One of the station officials directed us to Thorpe Road, and we found that we had quite a nice little walk in front of us. However, we were glad of it after the long train journey.

Upon turning into Thorpe Road we found that it was a new thoroughfare quite near the beach, with detached bungalows dotted about at intervals. And the one we were looking for proved to be the only bungalow with a lighted window. There was no hesitation and no delays.

Nelson Lee, with the Scotland Yard men, walked straight in. The three plain-clothes detectives stationed themselves at the back and sides of the bungalow. Lee and the chief inspector hammered upon the front door. And Handforth and I hovered in the background, watching. After a short pause the door was opened by a man.

"What's all this?" he asked.

"I think I am addressing Mr. Westlake?" said Lennard.

"Yes, that's my name—"

"I am an official from Scotland Yard, and I have here a warrant for your arrest," said the chief inspector briskly. "It is my duty to warn you that anything you say may be taken down and used in evidence at a later date."

The man started back, and then laughed harshly.

"What nonsense is this?" he snapped angrily. "Good heavens! What, what—"

Click! Before the man could make any attempt to struggle or fight, Lennard had slipped the bracelets over his wrists. A shrill whistle brought the other Yard men on the scene. And Mr. Howard Riddell was arrested without difficulty in the front room. It was a surprise for him. He had been dozing in an easy chair, with a glass of whisky near at hand. The capture of the two men had been effected promptly and neatly.

There was a further arrest as soon as the

house was searched, for a man was found upstairs in bed, a servant named Eliot, who apparently looked after the bungalow during its owner's absence.

And in another apartment we came across Sir Edward Handforth. He was only half dressed, and he had been reclining on a big Chesterfield. His wrists were enclosed in handcuffs, and escape for him had been rendered impossible. For the window was heavily boarded over, and the door was fitted with two extra Yale locks.

"Thank Heaven you have come, Mr. Lee!" he exclaimed warmly, as he shook the gov'nor's hand. "Another day of this and I should have gone mad. By George, those confounded scoundrels shall pay dearly for this outrage! They shall suffer the extreme penalty of the law!"

"Didn't do so bad, did I, pater?" asked Handforth.

"You have done splendidly, my boy—splendidly!" said Sir Edward. "But I rather fancy that Mr. Lee is the chief mover, eh? I cannot tell you how ghastly the whole affair has been. My business—all my affairs! They have been growing from bad to worse owing to my unexplained absence."

Sir Edward was very concerned when he heard of the position of the Central and West London Bank. His anxiety was increased a hundredfold, and he wanted to rush off without a moment's delay.

"You must not be impatient, Sir Edward," said Nelson Lee. "One of the Scotland Yard men will presently be back with a hired motor-car, and then we shall set off to London at once. It is quite impossible to move now. There are no trains to-night, and——"

"But what about my car?" demanded Sir Edward. "Confound it all, I was brought here in it! These infernal rogues had the audacity to use my own car for their purposes! Isn't there a garage here?"

"The point, after all, is quite a small one," said Nelson Lee. "So far as I can see, there is no accommodation for a car, and I have no doubt that your limousine was taken somewhere into the town. It can be recovered later."

"Of course—of course," said Handforth's pater. "Well, Mr. Lee, I am overwhelmingly obliged to you for all you have done! It's splendid—splendid! So you received my letter all right?"

"Your son brought it to me as soon as he got it——"

"Rather!" put in Handforth. "I was going to do the job on my own, pater, but I thought it better to let Mr. Lee have a look in!"

"Cheeky young rascal!" said Sir Edward gruffly. "Well, well! Let us be thankful that things are shaping better. These two men, Mr. Lee, are utterly unscrupulous. Both Riddell and Westlake are money sharks—scoundrels who operate in the City,

and steal and swindle at every opportunity. I smashed one of them—Riddell—some months ago, and Westlake was receiving attention from me. It was my plan to expose him in his true colours, and drive him out of the City."

"And he attempted to stop this by kidnapping you?"

"Exactly!" said Sir Edward. "He knew that he was doomed financially, and so he took the bull by the horns, and made this attempt to ruin me. If he had succeeded, he would have lined his own pockets, and made his own position secure. I should have been discredited, and unable to carry on my campaign. Even now I may find myself in deep waters. If the bank crashes——"

"There is practically no danger of that," said Nelson Lee. "We shall have you at the bank long before opening time, Sir Edward. It would be quite useless to 'phone or wire. Only your actual presence will have the necessary effect. There is just one little point I should like to ask you. How did you manage to despatch that letter to your son?"

"Ah, yes!" said Sir Edward. "Quite simple, Mr. Lee—absurdly so, in fact. The whole business was surprisingly easy, from the very start. I left home as usual in my own car, taking with me books and balance-sheets and other papers, documents that were urgently needed by the directors. Westlake, being in the swim, probably knew this and seized his opportunity. I didn't notice it at the time, but my own chauffeur was substituted by a man in Westlake's pay. I didn't even look at the fellow as I got in the car. Why should I? Doubtless they paid my own man a good sum to sacrifice his job, and clear. Infernal scoundrels! Well, everything went all right until we suddenly stopped. I was wondering what the reason could be when both doors opened, and two men jumped in."

"Westlake and Riddell?" asked Lee.

"Precisely!" said the other. "Westlake jammed a revolver into my chest and told me to keep quiet. Well, hang it all, what could I do? The rascal was serious, and I knew it. I didn't see any particular reason why I should sacrifice my life for nothing. I was blindfolded and bound."

"And then taken to Streatham, dad?" asked Handforth.

"I didn't know where I was taken to!" said his father. "But I kept my wits on the alert. As the car drove in the gateway, the gate swung back, and it was slightly smashed. Then we drove straight into the garage, and I could distinctly smell fresh paint. I remembered these details."

"That was very astute of you, my dear sir," said Nelson Lee approvingly.

"A mere detail!" said Sir Edward. "Well, I was taken into the house by a door at the rear, and handcuffed. Then the

bandage was removed, and I found that I was in a closely shuttered room. Westlake was there, and he told me that I should be kept a prisoner until all my affairs went to ruin. He added that I should be quite free to tell any story I chose after being released, for I should certainly not be believed. And then came my opportunity."

"You mean about the letter, pater?" asked Handforth.

"Exactly!" said Sir Edward. "Westlake, you see, was writing letters at a desk on the other side of the room. And I lay in a chair, apparently in a collapsed state. The man regarded me contemptuously, and had no suspicions. But, while I had the opportunity, I scrawled a few lines on an old scrap of paper, and put it in a stamp embossed envelope. I always carry a few about with me. And I noticed that Westlake was using these Post Office envelopes, too. They are, of course, in very general use. But it was certainly a stroke of luck."

"Undoubtedly," agreed Lee. "It was also smart of you to seize the chance."

"Having scrawled the address," proceeded Sir Edward, "I arose in pretended wrath and stormed over to Westlake. And while I raved at him, I managed to slip my letter between three of his own—which lay in a pile on the corner of the desk. It was all very difficult, seeing that my hands were manacled. If Westlake had been suspicious I should never have succeeded. Indeed, I did not even hope for success. But you can imagine my feelings when Westlake rang for his man, and handed him the letters to post."

"And why didn't you write to Scotland Yard, pater?" asked Handy.

"Be sensible—be sensible!" snapped his father. "I knew the servants would post the letters, and servants are generally inquisitive. What would he think if one was addressed to Scotland Yard? He would have brought that letter back to Westlake! But seeing one merely addressed to my son at school, he would have no qualms, thinking, perhaps, that a scheme was on foot to kidnap my son as well. As it happened, Westlake found out about the letter this afternoon, and nearly went mad with rage. Within half an hour we had left the house, and were on our way here, Skegness."

"I must congratulate you, Sir Edward, upon your wonderful cleverness," said Nelson Lee heartily. "Your rescue has been mainly brought about by your own efforts. And we are in time to avert the threatened disaster."

Half an hour later the four of us were speeding through the dark night towards London—Sir Edward Handforth, Nelson Lee, Handy and myself. The Scotland Yard men had been left behind to deal with the prisoners.

"We had urgent business in town!"

CHAPTER VII.

ARCHIE AND CO. TO THE RESCUE.



THE Central and West London Bank was a somewhat imposing building in Lombard Street. There was one branch establishment in Knightsbridge, but this was only a minor affair compared to the Head office.

The time was just after nine o'clock, and Lombard Street was wearing a most unusual aspect. There were crowds and crowds of people, queued up in front of the bank, and extending down the thoroughfare for a surprising distance.

Large numbers of police were in attendance, and in the distance crowds were watching the proceedings. Lombard Street itself was closed to traffic. For there was a run on the bank, and the panic-stricken depositors were filled with despair and rage. The name of Sir Edward Handforth was spoken by thousands of lips every minute, and he was reviled and cursed.

For the general public had taken the obvious for granted. It was believed that Sir Edward had absconded with a fortune, and that the money would never be recovered. And excitement ran high.

The bank had succeeded in meeting its liabilities up to closing time the previous day. But now the position was desperate. Within an hour, at the most, the funds would give out, and then there would be no alternative but to close the doors.

That, of course, would mean a smash—ruin utter and complete. And even if things were restored later on, and the bank paid in full, the stigma would always remain. And the bank, as a concern, would be wrecked.

The crowds were becoming rather unmanageable, and the police had all they could do. When people get into a panic on an occasion like this they require a great deal of holding back.

And then, just at about a quarter past nine, a taxicab came bowling along Cheapside. It contained four cheerful individuals with large smiles. One was Archibald Winston Derek Glenthorne, and the others were the Hon. Douglas Singleton, John Willard, and Sir Montie Tregellis-West. On the floor of the taxi lay a big leather handbag, and the bag was evidently filled.

"Jolly good!" said Singleton. "We've got the cash, and now we're going to the rescue! The bank ought to be saved!"

"Absolutely!" agreed Archie. "The succouring angels, what? The priceless old fairies, and all that sort of stuff! What-ho! What-ho! This, laddies, is where we slide in and distribute the old pieces of eight!"

"Well, anyway, we shall deposit the money in the bank," said Willard. "And a hundred thousand ought to be pretty useful."

at a time like this, I should think. It's a jolly good thing we decided on this course, because nothing's been heard of Sir Edward Handforth yet. It was a great idea of Archie's."

"Absolutely!" agreed Archie. "I mean to say, the old brain box doesn't often get properly going, but when it does, things happen. Absolutely! I'm a most dashed sharp chappie on schemes at intervals!"

The juniors had learned from Lady Handforth only an hour earlier that nothing had been heard of Sir Edward. They had succeeded in their own plans fairly easily. For, after all, they were the four richest fellows at St. Frank's. They had guardians, but the whole matter had been pointed out, and it was considered perfectly safe to deposit money in the unfortunate bank.

The taxi came to a stop some distance before it reached the Mansion House, and Willard looked out. Then he whistled.

"Phew! I say, there's a terrific crowd!" he said. "We shall never get anywhere near! Half London seems to have collected up here this morning! Our hundred thousand doesn't look like going far!"

"Dear fellow, it'll be enough to tide over," said Sir Montie. "Even if it isn't, there's no question about the cash being lost. I think we had better get out an' walk. The situation seems rather desperate begad!"

They paid off the taxi, and marched quickly along to Lombard Street. Here they were pulled up by a police sergeant, who informed them that there was no admittance.

"I mean to say, rank piffle, and all that!" exclaimed Archie. "Kindly move the old carcase, laddie! We wish to proceed to the rescue!"

"It's no good, young gents——"

"The fact is, you fail to grasp the old situash!" said Archie. "The lads of the village. I mean to say, us—or, rather, we—— Well, there you are! We have arrived! Absolutely! We have rolled up with several cartloads of bullion! Relieving the old tension, and all that kind of rot!"

"I ain't got time to mess about with you!" said the sergeant. "'Op it!"

"Dash it all!" exclaimed Archie. "I mean to say, dash it all! 'Op it, don't you know! Deucedly undig!"

Singleton and Willard, between them, managed to make the sergeant understand, after a time, that they had brought a large supply of money. The man in blue was very suspicious at first, but he decided, in the end, to escort the juniors to a side entrance of the bank. He felt that it was his duty to look further into this matter.

They gained admittance through the closely guarded door, and soon found themselves in an ante-room. There was another delay, and, at length, a tall elderly gentleman hurried in. This was Mr. Robinson, Sir Edward's secretary.

"What is all this bother about?" he asked impatiently. "Here am I, nearly worried out of my life—— Why, good gracious, you are boys from St. Frank's! What are you doing here?"

"Absolutely!" said Archie. "Specie, don't you know!"

"What?"

"Nuggets and so forth!" said Archie vaguely. "In other words, old tulip, we've blown in with the right stuff! Considerable doles of filthy lucre, if you know what I mean!"

"You have brought some money?" asked the secretary impatiently.

"Absolutely!"

"My dear boys, we can't be bothered this morning!" said Mr. Robinson. "You don't seem to understand that the position is absolutely desperate! Another hour and there'll be a riot, for we shall be compelled to close the doors."

"I knowed they was up to no good!" growled the sergeant.

"This, as it were, is dashed putrid!" observed Archie, adjusting his monocle. "I mean to say, rather foul, what? The good old fairies are presented with the shivering shoulder! We have arrived with the needful in time of famine. We have trickled in during the lean period. And we receive nothing but the glassy optic! Deucedly rotten!"

"What on earth are you talking about, my boy?" demanded the secretary irritably. "You have brought some money? Well, do you imagine that it will serve any good purpose? We need tens of thousands——"

"Absolutely!" said Archie. "The stuff! Positively here!"

"Tens of thousands?" snapped the secretary.

"Well, old lad, ten, at least!"

"Ten pounds?" shouted Mr. Robinson.

"Absolutely!" replied Archie. "That is to say, absolutely ten thousand times! In other words, we have slithered in with the good old hundred thou.!"

Mr. Robinson staggered.

"You—you have brought a hundred thousand pounds?" he gasped huskily.

"Twenty-five thou, each!" replied Archie. "Absolutely fresh and hall-marked! The genuine material! Guaranteed not to go rusty!"

"This—this is beyond a joke——"

"Of course it is!" interrupted Singleton. "There's no joke about it. This money is all here, a hundred thousand pounds, in cash. My friends and I have brought it here to deposit with the bank, hoping that it might be of some use in tiding over the present difficulty! We're doing it for Handforth's sake. Handforth, you know, is one of the chaps at our school. His pater is the managing director of this bank."

Mr. Robinson, pale to the lips with excitement, grabbed at the handbag and opened it. He took out bundle after bundle of

notes. A very brief examination told him that they were genuine.

"Thank Heaven!" he exclaimed hoarsely. "A hundred thousand! This—this will keep us going for the time being, and Sir Edward is even now on his way to the bank! He will be here almost within the hour!"

"That dear old lad, is frightfully bucking news!" said Archie.

The secretary hurried off, telling the boys to follow him. And a few minutes later they were with the manager, who was nearly distracted. The bank had reached the end of its resources, and the order was even then going forth for the doors to be closed.

Truly, succour could not have come at a more opportune time!

Nearly mad with joy, the manager rushed pell-mell into the body of the bank. He banged bundle after bundle of notes upon the wide counter. And the overworked clerks stared in astonishment. But there was no time to lose. Within three minutes the money was being paid in a steady stream.

The bank was meeting all demands!

And, in the meantime, a big landaulette was rushing through the suburbs, careless of all speed limits. Nelson Lee was at the wheel. He was driving with great skill, and the progress of the car looked foolhardy and reckless to those in the streets. But great issues were at stake.

The car should have arrived two hours earlier. But a breakdown had occurred owing to a faulty engine—the car was a hired one—and it had been Nelson Lee who had made the necessary repair.

And now, when all hope seemed lost, a last dash was being made. Sir Edward sat

with Handforth and me, looking grim and overwhelmed with worry. And then, at last, the bank was reached.

Sir Edward Handforth's arrival meant just the difference between success and failure. Once on the spot, with every evidence that he had been forcibly detained, the banker had no difficulty in obtaining treble the assistance he really needed. And by noon the crisis was over.

But one fact stood out beyond all the others. At the most critical time of all, Archie Glenthorne and Co. had come to the rescue. It was they who had saved the bank. It was their money which had carried things on.

And, towards the evening, we all collected at Sir Edward's home. Handy's pater was looking worn out and tired, but his gratitude was unbounded.

"Boys, I don't know what to say!" he exclaimed. "That I should be saved by four junior schoolboys is amazing enough, but it is the truth. My gratitude is more than I can possibly express—"

"I mean to say, not at all, ness!" put in Archie uncomfortably. "Dear old, lad, we grasp the idea. Kindly cease the old flow! Everything is positively chirpy, and all that kind of rot! The time has come, in fact, to celebrate!"

And we certainly had a most enjoyable evening. But Handforth's pater insisted upon us remaining for some days. Now that we were in London, we could stay on. The Easter holidays would begin in a day or so, in any case.

And Nelson Lee agreed.

We had had some excitement, but we little knew what fresh adventures were in store for us over the holidays!

THE END.

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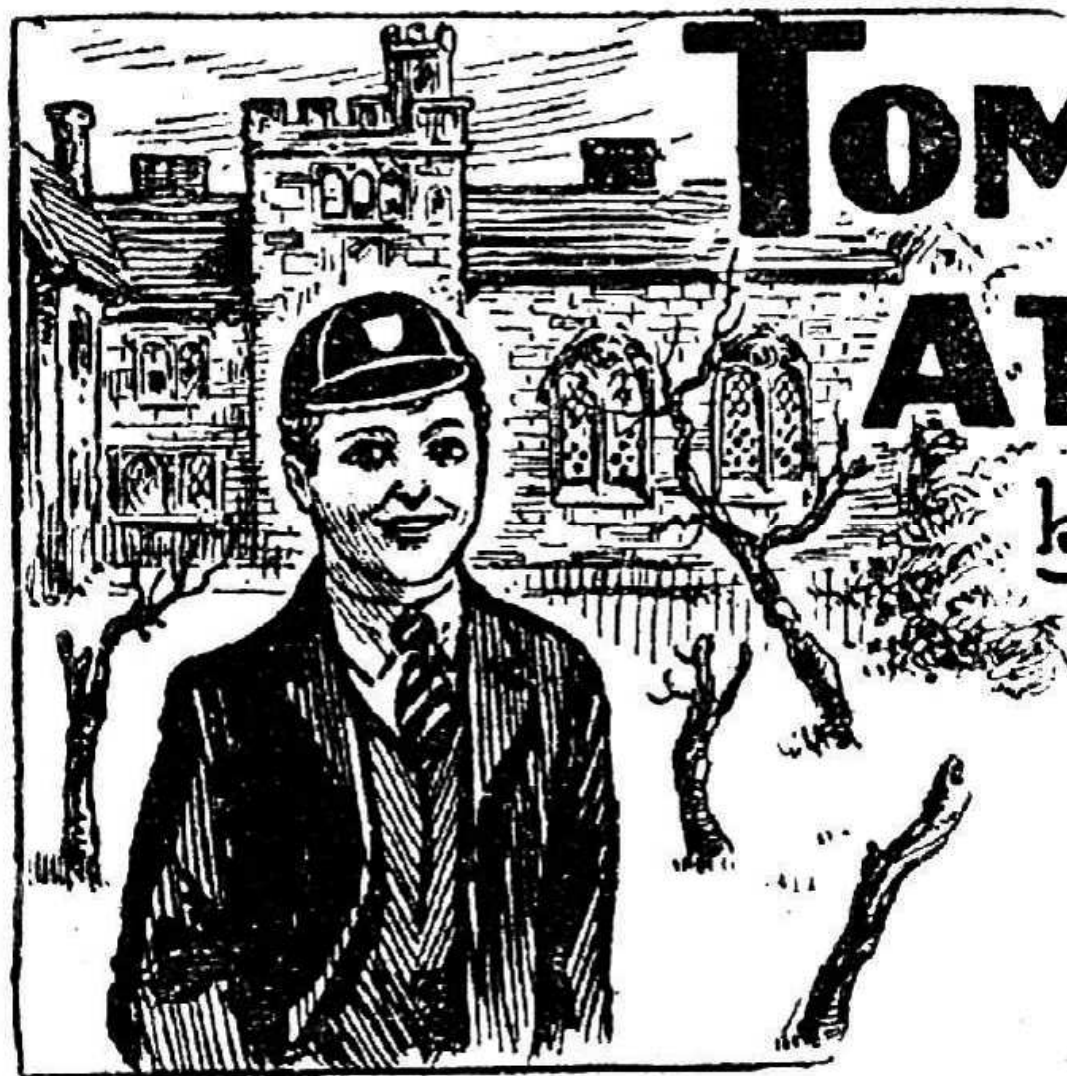
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Since Tom came to Mr. Wrasper's school, both the principal and Foster Moore—the usher—have tried to get rid of the boy. Solitary confinement takes the place of corporal punishment. By scheming, Moore takes the place of the Head, who remains on at the school as the usher. Tom learns a few unsavoury facts about Moore, and the ex-usher tries every desperate means to get the boy out of the way.

(Now read on.)

CHAPTER XLVIII.

Foster Moore Returns Unexpectedly.

WHAT'S to be done now?" "Hanged if I know, Sam! I'm going in to see old Wrasper now. You'd better come with me. He won't mind."

A few minutes later they entered the study. Mr. Wrasper was seated there, his face pale and anxious. He motioned the boys to sit down; then, addressing Sam, said:

"Smith, this has been a bitter disappointment. You are in Tartar's confidence, and you know what we hoped for to-night, and how cruelly those hopes have been dashed to the ground!"

Sam nodded, and Mr. Wrasper went on:

"The police-inspector is inclined to pool-pool Tartar's story of what he saw last night. He seems to think that Tartar has either invented the story, or that he is the victim of hallucination. He asks why those two men should have hidden in such a place?"

"Tom could have told him," said Sam.

Mr. Wrasper looked at Tom curiously.

"Tartar," he said, "have you anything more hidden from me?"

"Anything I haven't told you, sir, only

concerns myself," said Tom. "The inspector doesn't believe my story, but soon I may show him that I've neither been dreaming or lying. I'd rather not say anything more just now, sir."

"Very well, Tartar," said Mr. Wrasper sadly. "I believe your story, and I firmly believe that Moore has succeeded in getting those two men away. Now, boys, it is time you went to bed. Good-night!"

He shook hands with them, and they left the study.

"It's no good worrying," said Tom, as he and Sam went to their dormitories. "Foster Moore may have beaten us to-day, but the game isn't finished yet!"

Tom was a long time getting to sleep that night.

The disappointment he felt was so keen that it lay upon him like a great sorrow.

But he did not despair.

Foster Moore, by his cunning, had triumphed for the time, but it would not be for ever. In the common course of things it did not seem possible that such a man could triumph.

It was not until mid-day that Wooden Jerry put in an appearance at the school. Mr. Wrasper asked him for no explanation just then; nor did the serving-man proffer any.

As a matter of fact, he had been brought before the local magistrates on the charge of drunkenness. Taking into consideration, however, the fact that he had already been locked up in a cell for over twelve hours, the chairman of the bench had merely given him a lecture, and discharged him with a caution.

Wooden Jerry was in a very shaky condition indeed as a result of his previous day's libations and his night in custody. On reaching the school, he made no attempt to do any work, but, entering his sleeping-quarters, threw himself on his bed. In a few minutes he was snoring loudly.

When the boys assembled for afternoon school, Mr. Wrasper made the welcome announcement that, provided they worked well and behaved themselves, studies would end an hour earlier than usual, that is to say, school would close at four instead of five.

So everybody worked with a will, and class after class got through its work like well greased machinery.

Four o'clock was at hand, and the boys were putting away their books when the door opened, and Foster Moore appeared.

He had returned before he was expected.

That was evident by the shadow that passed over the face of Mr. Wrasper.

But it was soon gone, and he became quiet and composed, waiting for Foster Moore to speak.

Moore's face looked dark and angry. He had the appearance of one hunted or haunted, and there were lines and creases on his forehead and at the corners of his eyes not usually seen there.

His sudden appearance had a chilling effect upon the boys.

He drew out his watch, glanced at it, then addressed Mr. Wrasper.

"Why are the boys getting ready to go?" he asked harshly.

"Afternoon school is just finished," replied Mr. Wrasper.

"Nonsense! It is only just four o'clock. You seem to have made a mistake of an hour."

"I have made no mistake," said Mr. Wrasper. "I have given the boys an hour off. It won't hurt them, and I need it."

"You will continue the school until five," said Foster Moore.

"You may do so if you wish," replied Mr. Wrasper, "but I shall not."

As he spoke he closed his desk, locked it, and put the key in his pocket.

The old green colour came into the face of Foster Moore. The light of anger leaped into his eyes. With difficulty he restrained his temper, and addressed the boys.

"You may go now," he said; "but to-morrow afternoon I shall keep you here an extra hour to make up for this idleness."

The boys got out with all speed, fearing that Moore might change his mind again.

When the room was cleared, and the door closed, Moore addressed Mr. Wrasper in a low, tense tone.

"Wrasper," he said, "I warn you not to run against me! It'll be the worse for you if you do!"

"I haven't run against you," was the calm reply. "You left me in charge of the school for a few days, and you have returned unexpectedly—owing, I suppose, to the sudden recovery of your sick relative."

"Never mind my relative!" snapped Foster Moore.

"I don't, but the police evidently do!" returned Mr. Wrasper quietly.

"The police!" gasped Moore. "What do you mean?"

"I mean that they were curious to know who the relative was to whose sick-bed you had been called."

"Have—have the police been here, then?"

"They have! They came last night."

"What for?"

"To enter the 'solitaries,' and arrest Powner and Diggles. Unfortunately, however, those two ruffians were no longer there."

"But how did the police know they had been there? Who told them that Powner and Diggles were——"

Foster Moore broke off abruptly, and bit his lip with vexation. He had given himself away completely. All the same, however, he tried to cover up his mistake.

"What nonsense!" he went on, with a feeble laugh. "So the police came here in search of Powner and Diggles—eh? By jove! it's too funny! Who can have hoaxed the police with such an extraordinary story? Those two scoundrels hiding in the 'solitaries' of your—of my school! Ha, ha, ha! Most amusing thing I've ever heard of!"

And turning on his heel, Foster Moore departed from the schoolroom.

"It's all true, then!" muttered Mr. Wrasper to himself. "Tartar saw those two ruffians right enough—he did not invent the story! And Moore took them away in the night. But where has he taken them to? Where?—where?"

CHAPTER XLIX.

Pubsey Wrasper Confides in Tom.

ALL the following day, Foster Moore went about with a gloomy, apprehensive face. Even in the schoolroom he fell into an abstracted state, seeming sometimes to be quite oblivious of everything around him. Tom, watching him closely, knew that Moore was enduring tortures of anxiety and dread.

And Tom himself was none too easy in his mind. The fact that Posh Powner had got away was disquieting; for, with the revengeful poacher at large, further violent happenings were more than possible.

That Foster Moore had succeeded in getting Powner and Diggles aboard some ship, to take them out of the country, Tom could not believe. The speedy return of Moore to the school seemed to indicate a failure in that direction. Anyway, there had been no time for him to visit any seaport, arrange for the pair's passage, and get back to the school so soon.

From Foster Moore the thoughts of Tom turned to Mr. Wrasper. Hitherto, Tom had had no cause for liking the old head of the school. But lately Mr. Wrasper had been a changed man. Misfortune seemed to have wrought a complete difference in him. Without being lax in his duties, he was now kind and considerate to the boys, the majority of whom hoped that he would one day again rule over the establishment.

Tom wondered how the change had come about; but was unable to solve the mystery.

Some light, however, was destined to be thrown on the matter that very evening. It came about in this way:

Foster Moore had carried out his threat to keep the boys at their lessons until six o'clock, in order to make up for the hour granted them by Mr. Wrasper on the previous day.

Just after six o'clock, as Tom was leaving the classroom, Pubsey Wrasper waylaid him and asked if they could go somewhere for a quiet talk.

"It's about my father," explained Pubsey.

"Right you are!" agreed Tom good-naturedly. "I'll meet you in the wood in about half-an-hour's time. Go to the hut where Diggles used to hang out. No one will disturb us there."

After a hasty tea, Tom sauntered across the football field, and, thinking he was unobserved, clambered over the low fence into the road, on the other side of which lay the wood.

But he had been seen by two boys—Jonah Worrey and Chucks, who had been dogging him.

As Tom disappeared over the fence, Jonah turned eagerly to his crony.

"You're a better scout than I am," he said with artful flattery. "Follow him, and see where he goes to!"

Chucks nodded, and darted forward. Jonah hurried back to the school, and making for Foster Moore's study, tapped at the door.

"Come in," the dreary voice of Moore called out.

Jonah entered and found the schoolmaster seated at the table. Before him was a glass of whiskey and water.

"Oh! it's you, is it?" he growled.

"Yes," replied Jonah, as he took a chair. "I've come to say that Tartar has gone off somewhere."

"Why didn't you follow him?"

"I sent Chucks."

"Why did you do that? You ought to have gone yourself."

"Chucks is light and nimble," said Jonah sullenly.

"And you are heavy and clumsy," said Foster Moore, "but you are wrong to trust Chucks or anyone else."

"I don't trust him," muttered Jonah.

"He is your spy, and if he hears anything of importance he holds it as well as you."

"Well! I wish it was all over, one way or the other," said Jonah sullenly. "It wouldn't matter how it ended as far as I am concerned."

"You talk like a young fool!" cried Foster Moore angrily. "My ruin would be yours."

Then suddenly he rose from his seat and put his two hands on the boy's shoulders.

"Ah!" he said, "it's a weary life, isn't it? But all may be well ere long. If I can get hold of sufficient money I will go right away across the sea and try to forget that I've ever lived such a life as I've lived the last month or two."

There was a full minute's silence, broken by Jonah asking abruptly:

"What's become of Powner and Diggles?"

Foster Moore shook his head.

"I don't know," he said. "I got as far as Widlington Junction with them in the train, and as there was to be five minutes wait there, I decided to alight for refreshment. 'Don't leave you seats,' I said, 'I'll bring you something.' When I returned to the compartment the pair were gone."

"Gone!" exclaimed Jonah.

"Yes—vanished completely. I looked into all the carriages, but there was no sign of them. So, of course, I let the train start again without me, and went into the town. I searched the streets of Widlington thoroughly, and visited

every public-house, but could learn nothing of the pair."

"What can have become of them?" said Jonah, musing.

"I don't know," replied Foster Moore, dismally. "And now, Jonah, you had better go. The role of master and pupil we must play on for awhile."

He gave the boy a gentle push, and Jonah with his heavy brows knitted, walked slowly from the room.

Whatever may have been the tie between them, there was little or no affection on his side.

Meanwhile, Tom and Pubsey had met in the hut which Diggles had used as a hiding-place.

It was neglected and open now, so far as the door and windows were concerned, to wind and rain.

The former had fallen to the ground, where it lay rotting away, and the latter hung upon the hinges.

Inside there was a gathering of dead leaves and other wood rubbish blown thither by the breeze.

Pubsey was standing in a mournful attitude when Tom came in.

"I am glad, yet sorry, Tartar, that you are come," he began nervously. "I want to tell you what I know, and yet I doubt if I ought to do so."

"Then don't tell me if it goes against your feelings," replied Tom.

"It isn't that," said Pubsey. "My feelings don't count. It is what my father and mother might think. I overheard them talking together last night."

"But you oughtn't to have listened."

"I know that," replied the youth, with tears in his eyes, "and I assure you it was only for their sakes I did so. They were talking about how my father lost the place to Moore."

"The school, you mean?"

"Yes. My father, I may tell you, was not always a schoolmaster. He had money, and got rid of it."

"Lost it?"

"Yes, or threw it away—gambling," said Pubsey. "There, Tartar, I've blurted it out, now, so I may as well tell you everything. It was to get rid of his vice that my father took this school and lived a quiet life for a time. Then came Foster Moore to spoil everything!"

"Tartar," went on Pubsey, looking cautiously around, "I don't like to speak of it, for it seems such a shameful thing, but I know you won't chatter. Foster Moore found out my father's weakness, and encouraged it."

"What drink is to some men, so has a pack of cards or the rattle of the dice been to my father, although it will never be so any more. He has had a lesson he cannot forget. Foster Moore lured him on to gamble, and cheated him. They used to play at night in the study, after everybody else had gone to bed. My father, losing and losing, desperately tried to recover what he had lost, and all went."

"What a miserable infatuation!" Tom exclaimed.

(Continued on page iii of Cover.)

(Continued from page 40.)

"Yes," said Pubsey, sadly. "He lost, and gave Moore bills, and when the time came to meet them he could not do so. Then came a mortgage on the school, on the house, on the furniture, and as you know, the final transfer."

"That Moore cheated," said Tom, "I haven't the slightest doubt; but who is to prove it?"

Pubsey sighed.

"That is what I fear cannot be done," he said.

Tom was about to say something more, when a sound outside caught his quick ear.

He held up his hand as a signal to Pubsey to be still.

They were both quiet, and then a very distinct sound of somebody outside moving stealthily about was heard.

In a moment Tom was out, and had pounced upon Chucks, who was stealing away on tip-toe.

"Oh, don't hurt me," he said. "I was sent here to listen."

"Come inside," said Tom, "and don't give me any trouble. I'm not in the humour to stand it!"

"I'll come quietly," said Chucks, beginning to cry.

"There, don't snivel," said Tom; "nobody's going to hurt you. Now, then, tell me who sent you here."

He planted Chucks against the wooden wall of the hut, and took up a standing position before him. Pubsey guarded the doorway.

"It was Jonah Worrey," replied Chucks. "He told me to follow you here."

"And listen?"

"Yes."

"Have you done such a thing before?"

"Very often," replied Chucks, with a sob.

"And told him everything?"

"Of course; that is what I had to do."

"And what have you overheard to-day?" asked Tom.

"Everything," replied Chucks. "I don't want to lie about it. Everything you said."

Tom reflected a moment before saying anything more.

Chucks kept his eyes fixed upon him like a prisoner who is expecting a heavy sentence from a judge.

"Well," said Tom at last, "you can go back and tell Jonah Worrey if you like, but if you do there will be no end of a row one day, and you will have to take your share in it."

Chucks began to cry now in real earnest, and Tom let him get rid of a few tears before he spoke again.

"Of course, Chucks," he said, "you are not obliged to tell anything."

"I won't!" returned Chucks eagerly. "I am sick of being Jonah's spy. He never gives me anything except growls for my pains."

"You needn't lie, you know," said Tom; "all you have to do is to say that you will tell nothing."

"Then I won't say a word," replied Chucks.

"That will do, then," said Tom, "only mind you don't break your word with me. Now you can go."

Chucks was immensely relieved to find that no punishment was in store for him, and after repeating his assurance that he would be silent and defy Jonah Worrey, he sped away.

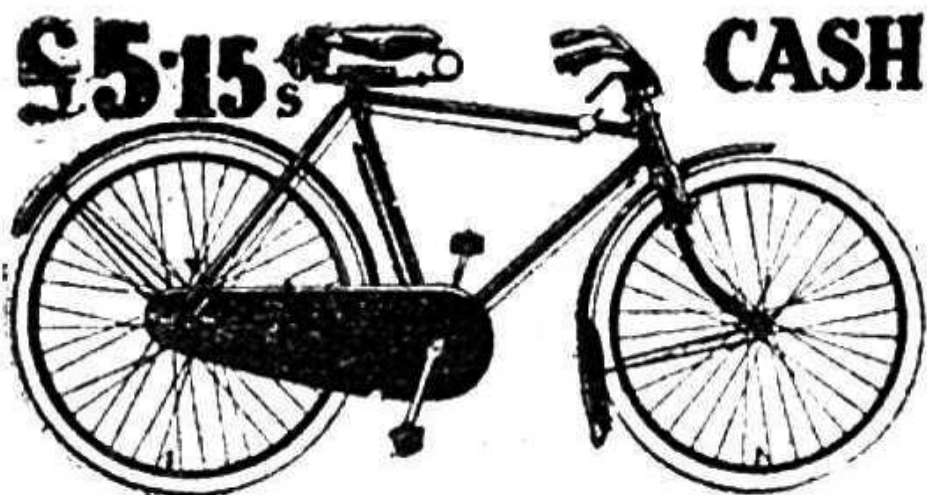
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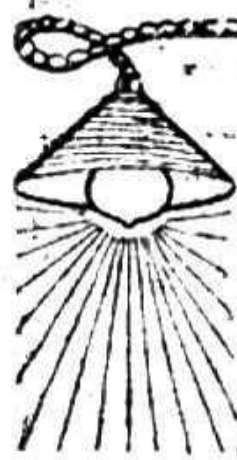


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