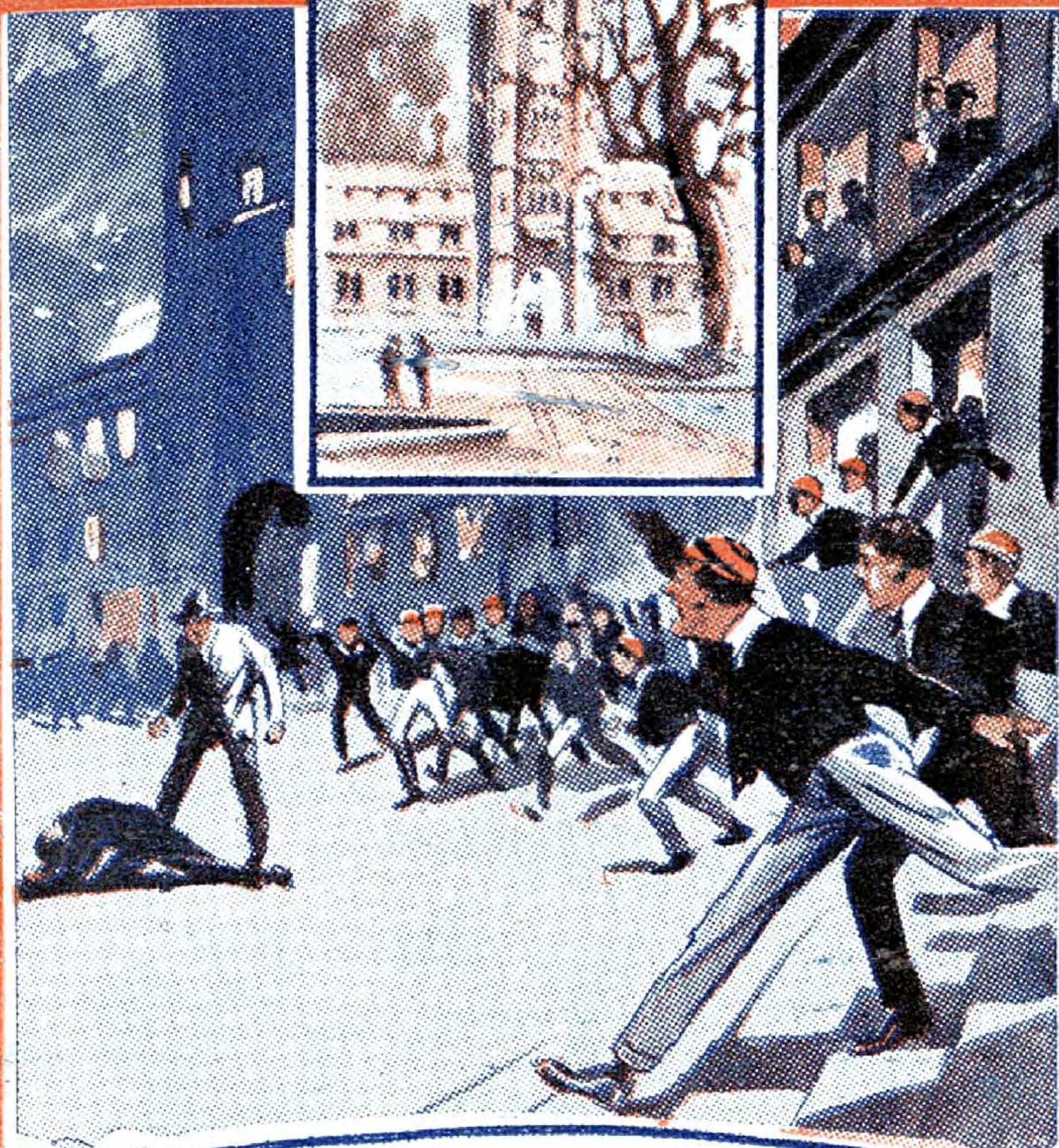


TWO GRAND LONG STORIES OF NELSON LEE!

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THE REMOVE TO THE RESCUE

This Week's Rollicking Complete Story of
ST. FRANK'S College



Before the unfortunate Handforth could dodge, the lady's umbrella descended with considerable force upon his back.



A Grand, Long Complete Story of School Life and Detective Adventure at St. Frank's College, introducing Nelson Lee as the Celebrated Schoolmaster Detective, Nipper, the Captain of the Remove, and the Well-known Juniors of St. Frank's. By the Author of "The Price of Folly," "The Clue of the Bent Spike," "The Mystery of the 6'10 Local," and Many Other Fine Stories.

(THE NARRATIVE RELATED THROUGHOUT BY NIPPER.)

CHAPTER I.

MYSTERIOUS BEHAVIOUR OF PHIPPS!

"THE evening, so to speak, is somewhat boisterous, if you grasp the old meaning," observed Archie Glenthorne, as he languidly adjusted his monocle. "I mean to say, the wind is dashed vigorous, and all that kind of rot!"

Archie addressed nobody in particular, as he lounged just outside the lobby of the Ancient House. Outside, the dusk was growing deep, and the October evening was exceedingly rough.

A powerful wind was blowing from the north-east, and practically all the junior studies had good fires blazing. For the north-east wind was chilly, and it whistled through every nook and cranny.

"Hallo, Archie!" exclaimed Reggie Pitt, as he came bustling in with a football under his arm. "Why didn't you come and join the practice?"

Archie looked mildly astonished.

"Dash it all!" he protested. "I mean to say, what? Practice, and all that! But, my dear laddie, it was quite imposs. ! After a chap has finished lessons he needs a considerable dose of the old dreamless to restore the tissues. I've been indulging in forty of the best, old horse!"

"Then you ought to be ashamed to admit it," said Pitt severely.

"What? That is to say, what?"



"Sleeping about the place when you ought to be taking good exercise," said Pitt reprovingly. "A good practice on the playing-fields would do you a lot more good than lolling about on a lounge!"

"Lounging about on a loll—I should say, lolling about on a lounge!" repeated Archie. "But my dear old scream, you've absolutely misunderstood. I mean to say, you've failed to grasp the good old trend! After a chappie has been bunging the old brain full of geography and what not and this and that—well, he feels somewhat used. In other words, he's a most frightful wash-out."

"Well, it's no use arguing!" chuckled Pitt. "I don't suppose you'll ever be much of a footballer, my son."

"Absolutely not," agreed Archie. "But, as I was just pointing out, laddie—as I was just commencing to explain. The fact is, I've had a jolly good dose of the shut-eye material. And now I'm feeling braced—absolutely braced! I mean to say, the good old air is somewhat keen!"

"It is!" agreed Pitt. "I'm going to change and get near the fire!"

"Good lad!" said Archie. "A sound scheme!"

He was about to turn away from the door, when he paused. Three figures loomed up out of the gloom. Voices sounded, too—one of them being loud and booming. Archie had no difficulty in recognising it as the voice of Handforth, the famous leader of Study D.

"Fathead!" it said scornfully. "What's the good of doing that? I'll show you the way to kick it properly. Just watch this!"

Slam!

There was the sound of a boot meeting a football. The next second something large and round came hurtling with fearful force into the lobby. It caught Archie beautifully under the chin, and he sat down with violence on the floor.

"Gadzooks!" he gasped. "Help! S.O.S.!"

"You ass!" said Handforth, coming in. "What did you do that for?"

Archie gulped.

"I mean to say!" he protested. "That is, I—I— Why, dash it all! Something happened, don't you know! Something absolutely happened! I'm in pain, laddie—I'm suffering!"

"Don't blame me!" said Handforth. "If you haven't got any more sense than to stand there just when I'm kicking at the ball, you ought to be boiled! Great pip! Look at your collar!"

"What?" gasped Archie, staggering up. "What? My only sainted aunt! It appears that a frightful disaster has occurred. In other words, when I flowed into the lobby just now, I was scheduled to get a considerable packet behind the ear!"

"But you got it in the neck instead!" grinned Church. "Poor old Archie! I told Handforth not to kick—"

"Do you think I care?" demanded Hand-

forth. "I suppose you'll blame me because Archie was idiot enough to stop the giddy ball with his face? Come on! I'm absolutely starving for something to eat!"

They passed on, and Archie supported himself by leaning against the wall.

"Now that, as it were, is something thick!" he murmured. "I mean to say, the chappie absolutely plugs me in the bally neck, and calmly staggers away! Not a dashed word of apology—not a good old syllable! I mean to say, it's really foul in three or four varieties!"

Archie felt his collar, and shuddered. It seemed to be gritty, and when he took his hand away, his fingers were covered with mud. There had been rain during the day, and the Triangle was not in an extremely dry condition.

"This is most bally!" exclaimed Archie. "And Phipps is away! Phipps, the really priceless chappie, is positively absent! Now what the dickens is a chappie to do? I mean to say, the position is most diff.!"

Archie looked round blandly. Phipps, his faithful valet, had gone into Bannington, and probably would not return until late in the evening. Archie had missed him greatly, and he was longing for the time when Phipps would return. For Archie was something like a lost sheep without his invariable batman.

His collar—usually so spotless—was now in a condition which made Archie shiver. He hadn't seen it, but he knew that the thing was a sight. And he was half afraid to go to his study to glance at the mirror. He felt that Phipps was required more than anything else in the world.

And then, abruptly, he brightened up.

A footstep sounded out in the dusky Triangle—quick and brisk. Archie moved forward, and the next second a form came dashing up the steps and into the lobby. Archie breathed a sigh of relief.

"This, as it were, is where the old load lifts!" he exclaimed blithely. "Phipps, my dear old priceless peach! You've absolutely turned up— What-ho! What-ho! Phipps! I mean to say— Kindly apply the brake, laddie! Gadzooks!"

Phipps, for some reason or other, took no notice of Archie.

He hastened through the lobby, and gave a quick, furtive glance over his shoulder, as though he were in fear that demons were after him. And Archie could see that the man's face was white. A startled, scared look was in his eyes. And he hastened into the passage, and vanished.

"Great Scott!" observed Archie blandly. "That, as it were, was fearfully strange! Phipps appears to be disturbed! The matter requires looking into. Absolutely! The young master must get busy!"

Archie awoke into a remarkable burst of activity. He went along the passage at a pace which was nearly a run—a most unusual thing for Archie. He was worried and disturbed.

Phipps was generally the most imperturbable of mortals. Nothing seemed to upset his equanimity. And he would remain cool under the most trying circumstances. To see him upset was something of a phenomenon.

Archie arrived in his study, and switched on the electric light.

"Nothing doing!" he murmured. "Phipps has flowed further on! We shall have to see what's in the wind. The dear old chappie was looking positively pipped! I mean to say, when a cove gets into that condition it's absolutely necessary to rally round in large chunks, and to exude quantities of cheer!"

Archie braced himself up, and pushed the bell.

Then he waited.

He waited quite a long time, but nothing happened.

"Dash it all!" he murmured. "What's this? What, as it were, is this? The chappie doesn't answer the young master's summons! Absolutely not! Archie, to be positively exact, is ignored!"

He frowned, jabbed the bell, again, and paced up and down. And still the time passed without any result.

Archie Glenthorne was probably the only junior in the Remove at St. Frank's who had so many luxuries. His study was not only a perfect dream of comfort, but he also had Phipps to wait upon him hand and foot. There was even an electric bell which communicated with the butler's pantry—for Phipps, in addition to being Archie's valet, filled the kind of honorary position as the Head's butler. Practically all his time was spent with Archie.

"I mean to say, this is somewhat disturbing!" murmured Archie, at length. "As soon as I caught sight of Phipps in the office I felt frightfully braced. But now the old tissues have grown limp again. The energy has oozed away—and, to be absolutely exact, I'm dashed limp. However, we'll try again! We'll tickle the bally push once more!"

Again Archie rang the bell. And, growing tired of pacing up and down the study, he allowed himself to sink gracefully into the soft lounge. And a moment later the door silently opened, and Phipps entered. He didn't glide in with his customary silence. As a rule, Phipps was something of a marvel in that way. He just appeared and disappeared as though he were some kind of sprite.

But on this occasion he entered with a bit of a stumble. And as Archie looked up, he saw that Phipps was still visibly pale. He was obviously ill at ease, and, indeed, appeared to be quite shaky. The expression in his eyes was not of that calm quietness to which Archie was accustomed.

"What-ho! What-ho!" said Archie. "So here we are, what?"

"You rang, sir?" said Phipps, in a low voice.

"Dash it all!" said Archie, adjusting his monocle. "That is, to say, dash it all with fearful emphasis! I rang, what? My dear old tulip, I absolutely shoved the old bell about fifty-seven times!"

"I'm sorry I was somewhat tardy, sir."

"Good enough, Phipps—you are forgiven!" exclaimed Archie. "I mean to say, it's only once in a blue moon that you get tardy. You gather the trend? In fact, I don't remember any other time when you've kept the young master waiting for such a frightful time. And now, laddie, to cut the cackle, and to get to the jolly old biz! What, as it were, is up? To be exact, what's wrong?"

"I do not understand, sir."

"What? I mean, what?" said Archie. "Oh, look here! Look absolutely here, Phipps! You don't understand! But that's sheer rot! You come dashing through the lobby, you whizz past me like a bally racing car, and take absolutely no notice of my cheery greetings. Then you come here and calmly tell me that you don't understand! My dear old sport, it won't do!"

"I am very sorry, sir!"

Archie looked at Phipps critically.

"You're in a frightful state, Phipps!" he said severely.

"Yes, sir!"

"You're an absolute wreck!"

"I am not feeling quite up to the mark, sir."

"Absolutely not!" said Archie. "I mean to say, what about the old composure? It's gone, Phipps—it's trickled away!"

"I'm not quite myself, sir," said Phipps, with set lips.

"Dash it all, you're absolutely somebody else!" agreed Archie. "I mean, it's not like you to turn several shades lighter in colour! It's not like you to stand there, trying to imitate one of those dashed table jellies!"

"I regret, sir, that—"

"Wait!" interrupted Archie, holding up his hand. "Wait! The young master has not finished his discourse. Now, Phipps, as man to man—that is to say, as chappie to chappie, what's the trouble? Confide in me, old horse, and you'll be absolutely all serene."

"I'm afraid I cannot say anything, sir," replied Phipps quietly. "I deeply regret that I should have upset you, and I will endeavour to improve. Just a little passing indisposition, sir."

Archie shook his head.

"Nothing of the absolute kind," he said sternly. "Look here, Phipps—look here! Gaze into my eye, and stand firm! This sort of thing won't do! A little passing indisposition, what? Rot, laddie—yards of rot!"

"Is there anything you require, sir?" asked Phipps imperturbably.

"What-ho!" said Archie. "I mean to say, what-ho! The influence of the young master is having effect! I mean to say,

Phipps, you're positively recovering the good old composure. But that makes no difference. I want to know what the trouble is—now, on the inst.!"

"Please do not press me, sir," said Phipps. "After all, it is merely a little matter of my own business, and I should not like you to worry yourself needlessly over a trifle."

"In other words, Phipps, you think I'm a frightfully nosey bouncer?"

"Not at all, sir——"

"Then you've got to cough up the old trouble, laddie."

Phipps set his jaw.

"I am sorry, Master Archibald, but I can say no more!" he declared firmly.

"What? What?" said Archie. "Well, dash it all! I mean, it's not usual for you to address me in that way, old onion! It proves that some shocking weight is upon your mind. A most frightful load is troubling the old bean, Phipps."

Phipps was silent.

"You look like twopence-ha'penny, old son," went on Archie. "I mean to say, the tissues appear to be at a shockingly low ebb. And I'm disappointed, Phipps. I'm suffering from large doses of sorrow."

"Is there anything I can do, sir?"

"Absolutely!"

"Very good, sir——"

"Tell the reason for the shaky hand and the shifty eye!" declared Archie. "Sit down, laddie. Make yourself at home. Dispense with all formalities for the moment. I know you, Phipps, and you know me. Take a chair, old fruit—take a couple of bally chairs! And open the floodgates to the widest extent!"

But Phipps remained quite firm.

"You will relieve me, sir, if you will let the matter rest," he said quietly. "There is really very little the matter, and I do not feel justified in burdening my little worry upon you. So if you require nothing, sir, I shall take it as a favour if you will let me go."

"Absolutely!" said Archie.

He stroked his chin, and then his face brightened.

"Well, I'll tell you what!" he went on. "A perfectly sound scheme has just occurred to me—— What? I mean to say—— Well, I'm bothered! In fact, I'm deucedly bothered!"

In some mysterious way Phipps had gone. He had taken Archie's "absolutely" as a sign of dismissal, and had glided out of the room with his usual speed and quietness. And when Archie gazed round he found himself alone.

"Well, there you are!" murmured Archie. "There's no doubt about it. The chappie's absolutely knocked in the most frightful degree. I mean, he's wilting away—withering like a bally leaf in the autumn blast! Gadzooks! Rather good, that! Nearly poetical, I mean to say!"

Archie shook his head doubtfully, and continued to think about Phipps. What had happened outside? That was the burning question. Why had Phipps staggered into the lobby as though he were in mortal fear of some pursuer?

It was a difficult question, and quite beyond Archie. He was convinced, however, that there was some deep trouble at the back of Phipps' agitation. And he wouldn't rest until he had arrived at the truth.

As it happened, the whole school was soon to know!

CHAPTER II.

THE FEMALE BATTLE-CRUISER.



"YES, the Fifth will soon be here!" said Reggie Pitt. "I understand that there'll be tons of fireworks this year. Let's hope we have a fine evening."

Pitt was with Jack Grey and two or three other juniors in the Triangle. They were on their way across from the gymnasium to the Ancient House. The wind was still blowing hard, but the sky was clear.

The glow of the sunset was still in the sky, and the Triangle was gloomy in the thick dusk. The gleaming lights from the various windows looked warm and cheery. And the juniors were anxious to get inside.

Tommy Watson and Sir Montie Tregellis-West and I were coming along from the College House at the same time. We had been on a peaceful mission to our rivals—mainly concerned with football. And I was feeling very satisfied, because I had fixed up several matters which were of great importance.

"Done any good?" inquired Reggie Pitt, as we met.

"Rather" I said. "Christine's sensible, for once, and he's agreed that it's only fair that the Remove First Eleven should be composed of Ancient House fellows in the main."

"Well, he's got to admit that his footballers can't be compared to ours," said Pitt. "We were just talking about the Fifth of November. It'll be here in three or four weeks, you know, and some of the chaps are already——"

"Hallo! Who's the lady?" murmured Tommy Watson.

Pitt paused, and looked towards the big main gateway. A figure had just appeared—rather indistinctly in the gloom, it is true, but we had no difficulty in recognising that she was a stranger.

"Come on!" I said briskly. "We'll see what we can do."

We went towards the newcomer in a clump, and as we approached, we politely raised our caps.

"Good evening!" I said. "Anything we can do, madam?"

The lady looked at me severely.

Now that we were at close quarters, I received something of a shock. She was attired somewhat loudly, in the very latest of fashion, with a fur wrap which looked good, but which was obviously cheap.

Her face was angular—with a long, pointed nose, aggressive jaw, and a straight slit of a mouth which seemed to run right across her face. Her eyes were of that intense type which seem to bore holes through anything.

Taken as a whole, the lady was large, although not plump. She was big and clumsy, and about forty years of age, as near as I could judge. I didn't care for her appearance at all.

"Oh!" she exclaimed. "Is there anything you can do? Yes, young man, there is! You can stop calling me madam, to begin with—"

"I'm awfully sorry——"

"That's enough!" she interrupted. "My name is Miss Arabella Pringle, and I guess I'm not standing any nonsense from you—or from anybody else! This place is St. Frank's College, isn't it?"

"Yes."

"So I thought!" she went on. "Now, I want to know something—and you've got to tell me. Is there anybody here named Phipps?"

"Why, yes, of course," said Tommy Watson. "Phipps is Archie Glenthorpe's valet. You'll find him in the Ancient House—er—Miss Pringle!"

"Oh, shall I?" she snapped. "And which is the Ancient House? As far as I can see, it's all ancient; the whole place is mouldy with age! Huh! And so this is St. Frank's College! Not much of a place!"

The fellows had not been particularly impressed with the strange lady's appearance. But her uncomplimentary remarks concerning the school finally settled things. She was regarded with hostility at once.

I was rather puzzled as to her native country, for I was quite certain that she was not English. Her talk was peculiar in many ways, and I came to the conclusion that she was Australian—not the good-class Australian, but quite the opposite. And why on earth was she inquiring after Phipps?

"Hallo! What's the trouble over here?" demanded Handforth, suddenly appearing on the scene. "Oh! I—I didn't know——"

"Don't you come interfering, boy!" exclaimed Miss Arabella Pringle severely. "And instead of standing there like a lot of young idiots, perhaps one of you can help me. I want to find Mr. Phipps!"

"Phipps!" echoed Handforth. "What the dickens do you want Phipps for?"

"Mind your own business, you insolent young rascal!" shouted Miss Pringle shrilly. "If you had any manners you'd offer to help me!"

"Manners?" repeated Handforth. "Well, I don't call it polite manners to talk like that! What's the matter with Phipps? I suppose you're his aunt?"

Miss Pringle screamed.

"How dare you?" she exclaimed, her voice rising. "How dare you? You—you impudent puppy! His aunt! Indeed! I'll show you whether you can insult me or not. How dare you call me his aunt?"

Slosh! Slosh! Slosh!

Before the unfortunate Handforth could dodge, the lady's umbrella descended with considerable force upon his back. Handforth howled wildly, and staggered away. He was more surprised than hurt.

"Great pip!" he gasped. "What—what was that?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I'll teach you to laugh!" shouted Miss Pringle fiercely. "You young rascals! I want to find Phipps; I want to get hold of the scoundrel and shake the life out of him! The deserter—the ruffian!"

"I think you must have made a mistake, Miss Pringle," I put in. "Phipps is quite an inoffensive little man, and I can hardly imagine him to be one of your friends. He is, in fact, a gentleman, and perhaps you are thinking of another man of a similar name——"

"No, I'm not!" interrupted the lady curtly. "I've seen him! And the cowardly wretch ran away! But I'll catch him—I'll have him yet. Eight years ago he deserted me—in Sydney, Australia! I'll teach him! I'll make him understand that he can't play about as he likes!"

The juniors were listening, open-eyed.

"Well I'm jiggered!" muttered Church. "Old Phipps, you know! This—this must be his wife! He deserted her eight years ago, she said!"

"Oh, my hat!"

"Great Scott!"

"Phipps—deserting his wife!"

"And the boulder never told anybody he was married!"

The story got about like wildfire. And by this time the Triangle was fairly well crowded. Juniors and seniors had come pouring out from all quarters; goodness knows how they had got wind of what was taking place. But St. Frank's was like any other spot when it came to a crowd; one would gather apparently from nowhere.

In less than five minutes scores of chaps were talking about Phipps—and the lady who had come from Australia to claim him after eight years. Anything of this nature was most unusual and out of the common, and the juniors hailed it with enthusiasm.

They dearly loved a bit of sensation.

"Where is he?" shouted Miss Arabella Pringle fiercely. "Can't you boys get away? I've never seen such inquisitive little urchins in all my life!"

"Urchins!" said Sir Montie blankly. "Begad!"

"If you can't tell me where the rascal is, let me pass!" went on the lady. "Tell me where I can find one of your teachers!"

"If you will calm yourself, miss, I will lead the way to Phipps!" I put in. "You

will easily be able to find him once we get into the Ancient House——”

“Then show me the way!” snapped Miss Pringle.

“Don’t you do it, Nipper!” roared Handforth. “Let her find her own giddy way! She’s a common person, and I don’t believe she knows Phipps at all! Phipps has got more sense than to mix with her sort!”

“How—how dare you talk to a lady in that way!” screamed Arabella. “You young puppy! Wait until I get at you!”

“You’ll have to wait a long while!” said Handforth tartly. “You’re not giving me any more swipes with that fourpenny gamp! Anyhow, a lady wouldn’t act like that, so I don’t mind——”

“This way, Miss Pringle!” I said hastily.

In a way, Handforth was quite justified in his attitude, but I could see that it would not improve matters if things came to a squabble out here. Besides, I was very curious to see if there was any truth in the lady’s assertion regarding Phipps.

We all knew him well; during our summer holiday adventures Phipps had proved himself to be a man, a hero, and a gentleman. To imagine that he had deserted this fearful person was unbelievable. In fact, I couldn’t bring myself to credit that he knew her at all.

So I wanted the matter settled.

I had half an idea that Miss Arabella Pringle was not absolutely a teetotaller. And I believe that she had primed herself up in readiness for this visit.

I pushed through the crowd, and she followed me. We entered the Ancient House, and passed through the lobby, and entered upon the Remove passage. And just at that moment, at the far end, a neat figure appeared.

It was Phipps, and he paused for a second to glance down towards us. Then he gave one dive, and vanished like a rabbit into Archie’s study. Evidently he had caught sight of Miss Arabella.

His action was significant.

The very fact that he had bolted proved that there was truth in the lady’s story. If she was unknown to him, Phipps would never have acted in that way. But, apparently, he knew her even better than we did, which accounted for his bolting. I was mildly astonished.

And Miss Arabella had not lost the incident.

She had just caught a glimpse of Phipps as he plunged through Archie’s doorway. She burst forward like a miniature tornado.

“There he is, the deserting scoundrel!” she shouted loudly. “I’ll teach him! At last I’ve found him; after eight years I have run him to earth!”

“Poor old Phipps!” said Pitt.

“Ha, ha, ha!”

The visitor was tearing down the passage for all she was worth, and without the slightest effort at ladylike behaviour. She

arrived at the door of Archie’s study, and at that very moment Archie himself appeared.

“What, as it were, is the giddy commosh?” he inquired mildly. I mean to say—— Gadzooks! Help, lads! Kindly assist me!”

Archie clutched at the doorpost as he gazed into Miss Pringle’s face.

And certainly it was enough to upset anybody with even less fine feelings than Archie.

Miss Arabella Pringle was hot; she was untidy, and she was angry. Her eyes blazed. Her lower jaw protruded, and there was such an air of determination about her that Archie half backed away.

“Let me pass!” shouted Miss Pringle fiercely. “That ruffian went into this room, and I’m going to get at him!”

“Absolutely not!” said Archie. “I mean, there’s some fearful mistake, old onion—— That—— that is to say, dear lady! There is no ruffian here. Not at all! Kindly remove——”

“Out of my way, you young idiot!” roared Miss Pringle.

Archie swayed under the blast.

“Gadzooks!” he breathed. “This—this is frightful! It seems that some trouble is brewing, and so on, and so forth!”

Before Archie could get any further the lady pushed him roughly aside and stalked into the study. Archie recovered himself, and grasped at me for support.

“This, don’t you know, is somewhat foul!” he observed faintly.

“It’s all right, Archie; Handforth got a lot worse than that,” I grinned. “And it seems that Phipps is booked for a pretty awful time.”

“What-o!” said Archie. “In fact, what absolutely-o! Daylight trickles through into the old brain-case! In other words, laddie, I can see things! Absolutely! Phipps, as it were, seemed to be fearfully worried——”

“That’s nothing to what he’ll be in a minute!” said Pitt.

The door was open and we were able to look right into the study. We lost all interest in Archie, for certain things were happening inside the room—things which interested us all greatly.

Miss Arabella Pringle was standing there, and there was a look of scorn and contempt on her face which was calculated to wither Phipps on the spot.

And Phipps did wither, to a certain degree.

He stood there, a mere ghost of his usual self. He looked quite scared as he clutched at the table. His face was pale, and it was only by an effort that he kept himself under complete control.

“Now, you villain!” shouted the lady. “Now I’ve got you!”

“Look—look here, Arabella!” said Phipps shakily. “Shut the door! There’s no need to let everybody know——”

“Oh yes there is!” shouted Miss Pringle. “There’s no reason why I should keep anything secret! I don’t mind if the whole

country knows! You deserter! You wicked wretch!"

"I say, we ought to do something!" whispered Pitt.

"Can't interfere between husband and wife!" said Church.

"Wife!" shouted Phipps, catching the word, and suddenly becoming rigid. "She's not my wife! It's all a mistake——"

"Is it?" screamed Miss Arabella. "You—you scoundrel! How you can stand there and say that makes me furious! How dare you try to deny anything? Eight years ago we met in Sydney; eight years ago you asked me to be your wife! I was young then, and I ought to have had more sense than to trust you! You proposed to me, and everything was settled. And then, without a moment's warning, you ran away—deserted me! You left me helpless——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It was!" agreed Arabella grimly. "And there'll be an unluckier one yet! I was in America a month ago, and I saw all sorts of reports in the paper about that idiotic expedition to the South Pole. And there, large as life, was a photograph of this deserting rogue! And the paper said that he was here, in this school! I came over by the first boat——"

"But, look here, Arabella——" began Phipps.

"Don't say a word to me, you heartless brute!" screamed Arabella. "I've got you now, and I'm going to keep you! I don't care about you, but I mean to make you pay! Yes, I'll force you to marry me, or else pay heavy damages for breach of promise! I've got all the proofs—I've got every-



Pringle had delivered one blow which lifted Handforth completely off his feet

"I—I——"

"Don't interrupt me!" shouted the lady. "Don't dare to speak! You deserted me! You left me in the lurch just when everything was all being prepared for the wedding. That was eight years ago, and I haven't caught sight of you until to-day! But I've got you now, you scoundrel, and I'm going to keep you!"

"Poor old Phipps!"

"He's done for!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Miss Arabella whirled round.

"Yes, you can laugh, you heartless young rascals!" she shouted. "But this is no laughing matter! For eight years I've been waiting to find this villain, and now I've got him! It was only by accident, too! He jilted me, and went off in a boat, and I never found a word about him until a month ago——"

"That must have been Phipps' unlucky day!" said Handforth.

thing! I'll teach you to go about jilting young girls——"

"Help!" moaned Pitt. "Young girls! Oh, my hat!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I'll teach you to laugh at me!" roared the visitor, raising her umbrella. "Go away—go away! If you dare to interfere, I'll——"

"Look out!" gasped Tommy Watson.

Miss Arabella was whirling her umbrella again. But Archie took no notice. This was his study, and he considered that it was time for him to assert his authority. For this unladylike person to invade it was positively ghastly. Something had to be done.

Archie strode into the study with a firm tread.

"I'm most frightfully sorry, and all that sort of thing, but it seems to me that things ought to be started!" he observed. "Kindly allow me to point out, madam, that this apartment is absolutely mine. I

mean to say, you're bally well intruding! It pains a chappie to say things like this, but it's got to be done! I shall be fearfully obliged if you will proceed to trickle forth!"

Swipe!

The lady made no verbal reply. She simply brought round one hand, and gave Archie a slap in the face which sent that astonished youth reeling backwards until he collapsed into the lounge. One cheek was burning.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Now you've got it, Archie!"

"Gadzooks and what not!" said Archie feebly. "This—this, as it were, is not only frightful, but poisonous! I mean to say, in a chappy's own apartment! The limit! In other words, the whole thing's dashed thick!"

Phipps turned to him, full of concern.

"I'm very sorry, sir!" he said, in distress.

"But—but I can't help——"

"Laddie, I sympathise!" interrupted Archie. "The fault is not yours, and the young master understands. But I shall be most fearfully obliged if you'll kindly cause the lady to trickle forth into the offing!"

Phipps looked helpless.

"Look here, Arabella!" he pleaded.

"Do be sensible! This room belongs to Master Glenthorne, and you've no right to come in here like this. If you want to talk to me, I'll take you into my own room——"

"So that nobody else should hear?" sneered Miss Pringle. "Never! I've come here to expose your villainy—to show you up before everybody! I don't mind who sees—who hears! I've got nothing to hide! You deserted me after promising marriage, and you've either got to marry me now or suffer the consequences."

Archie passed a hand wearily over his brow.

"This is where a chappie goes out and buys several yards of good rope!" he murmured. "Or he may be tempted by the river! Anyhow, it seems a pricelessly fitting moment for departing into other worlds!"

"If you would only take things quietly, Arabella, it would be a lot better," urged Phipps. "All this fuss is upsetting. We shall have trouble if you're not careful. Don't blame me——"

"There's plenty of trouble coming for you!" exclaimed Arabella loudly. "But if anybody dares to touch me, I'll soon give them a piece of my mind! I'm not going to stand any nonsense! I've come here to get my rights, and I sha'n't leave until I'm satisfied!"

"But look here——"

"Keep quiet, you wretch!" screamed the lady. "Don't dare to argue with me! Don't dare to say another word, or I shall get angry."

"I mean to say, what?" said Archie faintly. "Angry, don't you know. I had a distinct impression that the female battle-

cruiser was firing off her entire stock of artillery as it was!"

"Dear me! What is the trouble here?" came a voice from the doorway.

Miss Pringle twirled round, and found herself facing Nelson Lee.

CHAPTER III. PHIPPS CONFESSION.



NELSON LEE was looking grim and rather astonished.

He had heard the sounds of strife from afar, and wondered what the shrill, feminine voice could be. After a while he had come along to investigate, feeling that it was up to him to look into the matter.

"Glenthorne!" he said sharply. "Who is this lady?"

Archie looked round, and adjusted his monocle.

"Absolutely, sir," he said. "That is to say, I didn't know there was a lady here, old bean. Absolutely not!"

"Good old Archie!"

"You—you young puppy!" screamed Miss Arabella. "So you're not content with insulting me once, you've got to do it again. As for you, my man, I should advise you to leave here before you're hurt!"

"Oh, my hat!" murmured Tommy Watson.

"This is where the fireworks begin!" breathed Pitt.

For the strange lady to address Nelson Lee in that way was certainly sufficient to make the heavens fall. And the juniors out in the passage waited breathlessly for the guv'nor's reply.

"You will pardon me, madam, but I am the Housemaster of the Ancient House," said Nelson Lee curtly. "I must demand an immediate explanation of this scene. It is not usual for lady visitors to——"

"Don't you try to bully me, my good fellow!" shouted Miss Arabella. "I don't care who you are—it doesn't matter to me! I came here to find this cringing wretch, and I've found him!" she added, grabbing Phipps by the shoulder.

"Please—please let me explain, sir!" gasped Phipps, his eyes full of misery. "This—this lady is—is a friend of mine, sir! She came here to see me, and—and I—I——"

"It is a pity, Phipps, that you cannot see your friends in your own quarters," interrupted Nelson Lee.

"I couldn't help it, sir——"

"Oh, don't you talk!" interrupted Miss Pringle tartly. "I'll be responsible for anything that happens here! I entered this room, and I mean to have the whole matter out! I'm not going to put up with any nonsense——"

"Neither, for that matter, am I!" interrupted Nelson Lee curtly. "You have

caused a most unwarrantable disturbance, madam, and I must request you to leave the school premises at once."

"Oh, indeed!" shouted the lady fiercely. "I won't go! I won't go! Do you hear me? I won't leave the place for you, or anybody else——"

"Hold your tongue!" shouted Nelson Lee. Arabella brought up short, her mouth opened. She had hardly expected such a command as that. Nelson Lee could see quite well that Miss Pringle was no lady, and it would therefore be useless to adopt normal tactics. It was necessary for him to act drastically.

"Hold your tongue!" he repeated sternly. "Unless you leave St. Frank's at once, madam, I shall be compelled to adopt very severe measures."

"Oh, will you?" shouted Arabella. "It will pain me greatly to cause a disturbance, but I cannot allow you to remain here," said Nelson Lee. "If you will not listen to reason, there is only one course that I can adopt."

"Oh, I suppose you'll fetch the police, and have me turned out?" sneered Miss Pringle. "That's what you'll do, is it? Well, I don't care! I've found him now, and he can't escape me! I'll keep my eye open all the time, and I'll have him! As for you, I don't care——"

"You will please be silent!" interrupted Nelson Lee curtly. "This way, madam—you will permit me to escort you!"

There was no mistaking the gov'nor's tone. Even Miss Arabella seemed to have all the energy taken out of her. She was at a loss for a moment, and then she gave a shrill laugh, and accompanied Nelson Lee down the passage.

The juniors followed in a crowd, all talking together.

Out in the Triangle, Nelson Lee escorted the lady over to the gates, and she walked with a haughty, defiant air, as though she was doing all this of her own accord. She didn't seem to realise that she was being turned out.

"You haven't done with me yet!" she exclaimed, as she reached the lane. "So you needn't get thinking that! And that wretch indoors hasn't done with me, either! I'm going to make him——"

"I am not interested!" put in Nelson Lee. "Good-evening, madam!"

He bowed, and deliberately closed the big iron gates. Miss Pringle shrugged her shoulders with contempt, gave one sneering laugh, and strode away. Nelson Lee turned round and faced the juniors.

"Go indoors, boys, and don't make too much of this affair," he said quietly. "The lady was obviously in a temper, and I shall take care that she does not come here again."

"But what about Phipps, sir?" "He seems to be in for a bit of trouble, sir——"

"I do not think I am called upon to in-

terfere in Phipps' private affairs, boys," interrupted Lee. "But I shall make it quite clear to him that he must not allow friends of that kind to come here. That's all! You can go indoors."

The fellows dispersed, talking excitedly over the recent disturbance. And in the meantime Archie and Phipps were left alone.

The door was closed, and they were quite in private. Phipps stood in the centre of the room, a mere shadow of his former immobile self. His shoulders drooped, his eyes were heavy with anxiety and pain. And he seemed afraid to look over in Archie's direction.

Archie himself had been collecting his wits together. And now, feeling that everything was all right, he rose from the couch, and strolled over towards his valet.

"Phipps," he said, "I think a few yards of the good old explanatory stuff would come in somewhat handy, as it were. Kindly get busy!"

Phipps gulped a little.

"I—I'm very sorry, sir," he said quietly.

"Absolutely!"

"I much regret that this unfortunate scene should have happened in your study, sir——"

"Dash it all, laddie—I mean to say, dash it all!" put in Archie. "We know all about it. We're quite aware of that fact, that you're bally sorry, and this and that. As a matter of fact, I'm sorry. Kindly observe the young master's left cheek! The lady has a dashed heavy fist!"

"She's certainly inclined to be somewhat rough, sir."

"But, look here, Phipps!" said Archie. "I mean, hurling aside all caste, and all that sort of thing. Let's talk square—as one chappie to another chappie. What about it? What, I mean to say, does it mean?"

Phipps drew himself up.

"I feel, sir, that it is my place to ask you to accept my resignation," he said quietly. "After this occurrence, I cannot expect you to keep me on. And I further believe that it would be better for me to leave the school."

Archie looked absolutely dismayed.

"But, I say!" he exclaimed. "I say! I say!"

Archie paused, unable to think of anything else. He seemed absolutely at a loss for words. Then he grasped Phipps' sleeve, and clung to it.

"Impossible, old lad!" he said. "You can't do it!"

"You don't wish me to go, sir?"

"Absolutely not!"

"Thank you, sir!"

"Pray, don't be ridic. Phipps!" said Archie, with relief. "Gadzooks! You made the old heart thump like the very dickens! I can feel it now. It's buzzing about in the most shocking state of disorder! I mean to say, when a chappie gets a shock like that all his tissues bally well wilt!"

"I did not mean to disturb you, sir——"

But you did disturb me, Phipps, in large chunks!" said Archie. "My dear old scream, I couldn't get on without you! I mean, what should I do? I don't want you to get a frightfully swelled head, old lad, but the fact is you're a most dashed brainy cove, and I simply couldn't get on without you. If you desert me, Phipps, I shall fade like a plucked flower. Absolutely!"

"You flatter me, sir."

"What priceless rot!" said Archie. "Nothing of the absolute kind. But we're wasting time. It's up to you, Phipps, to reel forth a few hundred feet of explanation. Proceed. Who is the lady?"

"Her name is Miss Arabella Pringle, sir, and she is the daughter of a greengrocer in Sydney, Australia——"

"Gadzooks!" said Archie. "The daughter of a greengrocer, what? I mean to say!"

"There is nothing wrong with that, sir," said Phipps. "Some greengrocers, I expect, have quite charming daughters. Mr. Pringle, of Sydney, was an acquaintance of mine when I happened to be in Australia just before the war. As you know, sir, I have knocked about the world a good bit."

"Quite so," said Archie. "But I didn't know that you had got yourself mixed up in a frightful number of entanglements. I mean to say, a sweetheart in every port kind of thing—what?"

"No, sir," exclaimed Phipps firmly. "Not that, sir. This—this entanglement is the only affair of the kind that I have been unfortunate enough to suffer. I am not what you would call a ladies' man, sir."

"Absolutely not, old bird," said Archie. "That makes it all the more bally mysterious, don't you know. That is to remark, what about it. I mean, the female with the door-knocker face, Phipps? Was it possible that you—that you absolutely did the old fly-with-me stuff to the damsel?"

"Did I propose marriage, sir?"

"Yes."

"Well, I did, sir," admitted Phipps, in a low voice.

"My only sainted aunt!" said Archie, aghast. "But, laddie, what was the matter? Were you wearing smoked glasses, or what? Dash it all, you're not absolutely brainless Phipps!"

"No, sir."

"Then get on with the explanash!" said Archie firmly.

"If you insist, sir——"

"I insist absolutely and positively and absolutely!" exclaimed Archie. "As a rule I have a frightful horror of shoving into the affairs of other chappies. But this is different. And you've got to bring forth the stuff!"

"Very good, sir," said Phipps. "Perhaps it would be as well, as I should not like you to be under any misapprehension over this matter. It seems that the whole trouble cropped up owing to the publicity given to our expedition to the Antarctic regions."

"Absolutely," said Archie. "We had all sorts of wonderful things happen on that trip, old dear, and our dials decorated various illustrated papers for weeks. And this lady, it appears spotted your handsome clock."

"Yes, sir," agreed Phipps. "Most unfortunate sir."

"The result of a guilty past and all that sort of rot."

"Not a guilty past, sir," declared Phipps quietly. "I have nothing whatever to be ashamed of, sir. It happened in this way. I was in Sydney in 1914, sir, just before the war. I had one or two friends there, and an acquaintance or two. Mr. Pringle, the greengrocer, was one of the latter."

"A fairly poisonous cove, I take it."

"I really knew very little about him, sir," replied Phipps. "He was in a big way of business, with a good many shops. But I did know that he had a daughter of about thirty, who was still single—and never likely to find a husband. I had not met the lady then, and had no desire to do so. But one day Mr. Pringle gave a party in his house, and I was invited."

"The plot, as it were, begins to thicken somewhat," said Archie. "Go ahead, laddie. I am listening with every bally ear."

"Well, sir, at this party I was introduced to Miss Arabella——"

"And you still felt fit afterwards?"

"I will admit, sir, that I was rather unsettled at first," confessed Phipps. "The lady's voice jarred on me, sir. However, owing to circumstances which I could not avoid, I sat down to supper by the lady's side."

"A frightful predic, Phipps," said Archie. "I sympathise, old boy. No doubt your appetite was absolutely ruined?"

"To a certain degree, sir," said Phipps. "More particularly as the lady continually talked to me. She would not give me a moment's peace, but continued her efforts unceasingly."

"How perfectly atrocious!" said Archie.

"I can well understand, sir, that Miss Arabella was attempting to impress me," said Phipps. "And after the meal, evidently considering that we were very well acquainted, she took my arm and clung to me constantly."

"My dear old chappie, that was truly horrid!" said Archie. "I mean to say, you were in a most difficult posish. A fellow can't do the impolite thing at a party, and if a lady attaches herself to him—well, it's deucedly awk!"

"It was so in this case, sir," agreed Phipps. "I really didn't know what to do. Miss Pringle was exceedingly gushing, and she appeared to imagine that she had made an impression. My one desire was to escape. But, under the circumstances, I was quite unable to get free from the lady's clutches."

"I can scarcely imagine a more putrid posish!" exclaimed Archie.

"Well, sir, Mr. Pringle served wine after—"

wards, and I partook of some," continued Phipps. "It is not my usual habit to indulge freely, but on this occasion I felt somewhat reckless. I wanted to do anything in order to escape from the torments of Miss Pringle."

"And so as it were, you imbibed freely but not wisely?" observed Archie.

"Even now, sir, I cannot understand precisely what happened," said Phipps. "On former occasions I had taken a great deal more wine without any noticeable effect. But at this party I regret to say that I became extremely fuddled."

Archie gazed at Phipps with horror.

"But, dash it all," he said, "you can't mean to assure me, Phipps, that you absolutely became soaked—in other words, in a blotto condition?"

"No, sir," said Phipps firmly. "I was not soaked. I am inclined to believe that some kind of a sleeping draught was mixed with my wine—quite harmless, I must admit. It was possibly added as a practical joke."

"The blighter who did the trick, Phipps, was no joker," said Archie. "In fact, he was a particularly fearful kind of bounder. No doubt you suspected the old buster of a greengrocer—Mr. Dingle?"

"Mr. Pringle, sir," said Phipps. "No, sir, I did not actually suspect him, and I cannot even say with certainty that the wine was tampered with. I do know, however, that for a period of two hours I had practically no recollection of what took place."

Archie shook his head.

"This, Phipps, is shocking!" he said severely.

"Yes, sir."

"You plainly admit that you were the worse for drink."

"Well, hardly, sir."

"At the same time, laddie, it looks suspiciously like it!" said Archie. "However, it is not for me to say anything. You have always been absolutely topping as far as I know, and so we'll let it go at that."

"I do not think I have ever been intoxicated in my life, sir," said Phipps. "And I am quite convinced that on this occasion some trick was played upon me. I have a hazy remembrance of being at the party, and a strong knowledge that Miss Pringle was constantly with me."

"How fearful!"

"And it seems, sir, that during this curious condition I became reckless," said Phipps. "In other words, I proposed to the lady."

"Good gadzooks!"

"At least, so I am told—or, rather, so I was told," went on Phipps sadly. "There were at least three witnesses—Mr. Pringle and two of his friends. They congratulated me—much to my dismay."

"My dear old lad, it's a wonder you didn't sink through the bally floor."

"I remember controlling myself with an effort, sir, and asking for an explanation."

said Phipps. "I was then told that I had proposed to Miss Arabella, and she had accepted me. Not having any distinct recollections of that unfortunate period, I was quite unable to deny the thing."

Archie breathed hard.

"The thing gets worse and worse!" he declared. "But, Phipps, I quite realise how dashed fearfully you were treated. Absolutely. I mean to say, when a chappie comes to himself and learns that he's proposed to a human weapon of war, he naturally feels somewhat awful. And what did you do?"

"It so happened, sir, that on the following day I met an old friend from a ship which had just come into port," said Phipps. "For a week I was compelled to keep constant company with Miss Pringle. I shall never forget that week, sir."

"It must have been like a bally nightmare."

"Worse, sir—far worse!" said Phipps, with a shiver. "All sorts of preparations were being pushed ahead for the wedding. I simply couldn't back out of it, because everybody assured me that I had actually proposed. My only remedy, therefore, was to flee."

"Absolutely!" said Archie. "Good lad! Stout work! The scheme, in fact, was thoroughly sound. I presume, therefore, that you gracefully flowed away into the next hemisphere?"

"That, sir, is the literal truth," replied Phipps. "I slipped off quietly one night, and left Sydney behind me. The ship was bound for London, and by the time it arrived the war had started, and it was not long before I was on active service. I fervently hoped, sir, that I should never see anything of Miss Arabella Pringle again. And as the years went by I was convinced that I had completely escaped."

"I can quite understand the fearful shock you had when you saw the lady this evening," said Archie. "Dash it all, it was enough to make a chappie sit up, and howl for assistance."

"I had almost forgotten her, sir," said Phipps. "Naturally, I resolved never to visit Sydney again. It was most unfortunate that my photograph should have been published, together with other details, in various newspapers."

"That's the penalty of fame, old son!" said Archie. "The lady, it appears, was in the United States and so she buzzed across the ocean blue like a bally destroyer on the track."

Phipps nodded.

"Yes, sir, and she's here!" he exclaimed delectfully. "Really, sir, I am at a loss. I can't think what to do for the best. She will insist upon me marrying her—and it's quite certain that she will have plenty of documentary evidence with her. If I refuse, it will mean that an action will be brought against me, and probably she will win—and

secure heavy damages. It will consume my entire nest egg, sir, I am afraid."

"Of course, that's most horrible to contemplate," said Archie. "I mean to say, the publicity—and all the rest of it. It means, Phipps, that we've got to shove our beans together, and evolve some masterly scheme."

"I don't see what can be done, sir," declared Phipps. "I think it would be better if I went away. I might be able to slip off, and get across to France or South America."

"Imposs., Phipps," interrupted Archie. "I can't spare you, laddie—and it would be out of the question to bunk. You've got to face it out. But you can leave it to me without a qualm. The young master will see you through."

"You're very kind, sir," said Phipps. "But I'm very much afraid that you can do nothing."

"Just wait a bit!" said Archie. "Leave me alone, Phipps, and I will proceed to turn the old brainbox inside out. In other words, I'll get hold of some frightfully decent idea—something that will settle the whole question, and make things rosy. Cheer up, Phipps—it's all serene!"

But Phipps didn't cheer up. He left the study, looking very gloomy indeed. And Archie lounged on the big Chesterfield and puckered his brows.

"Now this is where I've got to do a fearful amount of rallying round!" he muttered. "I mean to say it's imposs. to think of old Phipps being shoved through it. Something's got to be done—and it's up to me to use the old brain!"

And Archie thought deeply.

CHAPTER IV.

ARABELLA'S BROTHER!



PHIPPS paced up and down the Triangle moodily.

He had gone out into the chilly air in order to cool his fevered brow. The wind was whistling round the old school buildings gustily. And the evening was now practically dark.

The lights from the windows gleamed brightly, but they had no attraction for Phipps. He wanted to be out there alone—he wanted to think. And, certainly, he had a great deal to think about.

How he was going to escape from Arabella he didn't know—and he couldn't imagine. It seemed to him that the best possible policy was to slip quietly away. Phipps wasn't a quitter as a rule, but when it came to a matter like Arabella, his natural courage oozed away.

He was ready to face any kind of man, but a woman was beyond him. And a woman like Arabella fairly made him shudder. And so he paced up and down, thinking deeply, and frowning with worry.

And while he was doing this he suddenly became aware of a big, burly form in the gloom. It had only appeared during the last few moments, and had apparently come from the small gate which was especially provided for the use of masters.

The burly form evidently saw Phipps at the same moment. For it came across, and peered forward.

"I'm looking for a fellow named Phipps!" exclaimed the form. "If you can direct me, I reckon I shall be obliged."

"What do you want?" asked the valet. "I'm Phipps!"

The stranger started, and then peered forward closely. At the same moment he took Phipps by the shoulder and turned him round so that the light from the school windows fell upon him.

"Gosh darn me, so you are!" he exclaimed. "Phipps—Dickie Phipps, as they used to call you—although I don't believe your name's Dick at all. I s'pose you remember me, don't you?"

Phipps had been struggling with his memory for a moment or two. At first he had not connected this burly stranger with Arabella. But now, all at once, he remembered the man.

"Why, you're Jim Pringle!" he said huskily.

"Sure!" agreed the Australian. "That's me—Jim Pringle!"

"What do you want?" demanded Phipps harshly.

Here was a fresh shock. It had been bad enough to know that Arabella was on the scene, but for her brother to be with her was something like a disaster. Jim Pringle, as Phipps remembered, had been a gentleman much addicted to prize-fighting. And by the look of his form, he had developed into something very formidable. He was younger than Arabella—about thirty-three or four—and in his prime.

"What do I want?" repeated the man. "Say, you've got a damn nerve, ain't you? If you don't know what I want, I don't reckon I'll tell you!"

"Look here, I'm not going to be bullied and blackmailed," said Phipps firmly. "I left Sydney because I didn't mean to marry your sister, and I don't mean to now. I never really proposed marriage to her—"

"Cut that out!" interrupted the other. "I know what you did, and I'm going to see the rights of it. But it's up to you. You marry 'Bella, and things will be smooth. See! If you don't, we'll make you pay! A chap who jilts a girl is a low down dog, and he generally has to pay through the nose."

Phipps breathed hard.

"I didn't jilt your sister!" he declared. "That night when you say I proposed to her—"

"You were drunk, eh?" said Jim Pringle coarsely. "But that's no excuse. We heard you, and there's plenty of witnesses who'll swear to it. But there's no need to go to lengths like that. I came up here now

because I want a private talk with you Understand?"

"You're having it," said Phipps.

"Is it safe out here?"

"Of course it's safe," replied Phipps. "In any case, I won't take you into the school. Bella caused enough trouble without you making things worse. If you want to talk, talk here."

Jim Pringle grinned.

"Bella's a rare excitable one!" he remarked. "I daresay she caused a pretty decent row, didn't she? Well, I'm not surprised. After all these years she's found you, and you can take it from me that she won't let you slip away. But that's not what I want to talk about."

"Then why have you come?"

"See here, Dickie, there's no reason for us to quarrel!" said Pringle, lowering his voice.

"After all, Bella's a bit too old for marrying now, and I suppose she'll be an old maid. You're about the only chance she's got, and she means to hang on. Do you get that?"

"I understand exactly," said Phipps coldly.

"It'll either be an action in the law-courts, or we'll settle on the quiet," went on Pringle. "Now that's what I want to talk about. If you're prepared to meet us, all well and good."

"Oh! So you mean to get money out of me?" asked Phipps hotly.

"Yes—one way or another!" replied Jim Pringle, with grim emphasis. "If you let it come to an action, you'll have to pay a darn sight more than otherwise. So it's up to you to be reasonable."

"If you think you can threaten me, you've made a mistake," replied Phipps. "I'm not afraid of any action. Even if your sister started one, she couldn't prove anything, and she certainly couldn't get any money out of me. I'm afraid of Arabella herself, and I don't mind admitting it."

The other grinned.

"She's a bit of a handful!" he said, with relish.

"She'll hang about here and make my life a misery!" went on Phipps. "I sha'n't be able to get out; I sha'n't be able to move! Pestered by a woman like that, a man can't call his soul his own. I had enough of it in Sydney for that week. It'll be twenty times as bad now."

"It will!" agreed Jim. "So it'll be worth your while to square things. Look here, Dickie, there's no sense in beating about the bush. You give Bella two hundred pounds, and she'll hop off back to Australia. See? We'll both go, and you won't see no more of us. It'll save all publicity, and there won't be any action."

"Blackmail, eh?" said Phipps curtly.

"See here, I'm not standing words like that!" snapped Jim Pringle. "Don't you call me a blackmailer! I'm simply suggesting a way in which this matter can be settled out of court. Will you agree?"

Phipps thought for a moment.

"Where do you think I can get two



Pringle was held down by the juniors—Handforth and Church sitting on his chest. Then Fatty Little came puffing up, and he took a seat on Mr. Pringle's head.

hundred pounds from?" he asked. "I'm a valet—a gentleman's servant—"

"You can drop that stuff!" put in Pringle. "It don't cut no ice, my lad. I know more about you than you think I do. You've a nice little nest-egg—three or four hundred quid, I daresay. You're a bachelor, and you've got no need for that money. Bella only wants a couple of hundred—"

"She won't get it!" interrupted Phipps curtly. "Even if I had such a sum, I wouldn't part with it for her! Not a pound—not a shilling—not a penny! Do you think I'm going to be forced into parting with money for nothing? You can go back to her and say that I defy her to do her worst!"

Jim Pringle looked very grim.

"You'd best think it over careful!" he said roughly.

"I've thought it over already."

"Oh, have you?" said Jim. "Then let me tell you something else. I've come with Bella, because I mean to see the thing settled. You've got me to reckon with, my fine feller! Any more of your lip, and I'll knock you flat!"

"I was expecting that!" said Phipps bitterly. "Failing in your infernal blackmail, you'll use threats. Well, they'll have no effect on me. And our little chat has proved quite clearly that you've simply come here for the purpose of extorting money. You've failed. You won't get a cent!"

Pringle caught Phipps by the shoulder.

"By glory!" he snarled. "You've got a nerve! You call me a blackmailer to my face, do you! Take that, you low-down dog!"

Crash!

Phipps had utterly no chance against this

hulking ruffian. He stood over six feet, and was proportionately broad. Phipps knew a bit about boxing, but he was quite a lightweight. Against Jim Pringle he had utterly no chance.

He gave a gasping cry as he staggered back. His nose was bleeding profusely, for that blow had been a heavy one. The next moment, before he could even recover, Pringle's other fist came round, and caught him behind the ear.

Crash!

Phipps went down with a heavy thud upon the muddy ground. His head was singing, his brain seemed in a whirl. But he wasn't going to stand this kind of treatment without making some effort to retaliate.

"You cowardly brute!" he shouted thickly.

Biff!

He sailed in like a whirlwind, and his fist caught Pringle on the point of the jaw. The latter hardly felt the blow, but it enraged him even more. He gave a bellow of tremendous fury.

And then Phipps saw stars.

Blow after blow was rained upon him. He went down, half dazed and stunned under the brutal attack. And it so happened that at that very moment Handforth and Co. emerged into the Triangle.

They had come out, as a matter of fact, to settle a little argument. Handforth was looking very aggressive, and he made his way across to the gymnasium. He was about to show Church and McClure how easy it was to knock the pair of them out within a space of five minutes with only one hand. And Church and McClure were equally determined to knock Handforth out. Here was a chance which didn't often occur. They could go for him to their hearts' content, and he would have no excuse for drastic retaliation. He would only be able to use one hand against the pair of them. Certainly they would have gloves on, but they could still do a good deal of damage.

But they had hardly got into the Triangle before they caught sight of the two figures just on the other side.

The lights from the various windows showed the figures up, more particularly as somebody had recently entered the junior laboratory, and the powerful half-watt electric lamps were casting a brilliant light outside.

"By George!" said Handforth. "What's the scrap?"

He had just seen Phipps go for Jim Pringle. And then the Australian let fly. The three juniors witnessed the cowardly attack. They saw Phipps go down, half stunned, and moaning slightly.

He lay on the ground, shielding his face with his arm.

"Get up, hang you!" snarled Pringle. "Get up!"

He delivered a kick which caused Phipps to groan. And Handforth and Co. glanced at one another, their faces flushed. To see anything of that nature was like showing

a red rag to a bull. Handforth pushed his sleeves up, and clenched his fists.

"The coward!" he shouted. "Kicking a man when he's down! By George! Come on, you chaps! Hi! Rescue, Remove! Hi! Rescue!"

Handforth's voice burst out like a cyclone, and the message was effectively broadcasted throughout the Ancient House. There was hardly a junior study which failed to receive the words.

In the meantime, Jim Pringle heard that famous voice. He turned, startled, aware for the first time that he was being watched. His first instinct was to escape, and he set off at a heavy run towards the spot where he imagined the little gate to be.

But this was his first visit to St. Frank's, and he had rather lost his location in the gloom. He found himself facing a blank wall, and there seemed to be no sign of the gate.

And Handforth and Co. charged up in his rear.

The next second Handforth grabbed Pringle's shoulder, and twisted him round.

"You bullying cad!" roared Handy. "Take that!"

Biff!

Handforth's fist—nearly as large as Jim's—planted itself with tremendous force upon the man's nose. Handforth had a special partiality for noses, and he was capable of putting terrific weight behind his punch.

A glow of enthusiasm passed through him as he felt his fist strike this particular nose. It was a large one, and it was almost as much as Handy's knuckles could do to cover it. It provided a much better mark than Handforth was accustomed to. And a scrap was always dear to him.

"You—you rotter!" he roared. "We'll teach you to act like a cad! Come on, you chaps! Grab him!"

Jim Pringle recovered from his surprise.

"You—you infernal young puppies!" he snarled.

Then he charged forward.

Handforth didn't exactly know what happened. He dimly remembered picking himself up from a spot about five yards away. It seemed to him that all his ribs were broken, and he sat there, in a puddle, gasping.

As a matter of fact, Pringle had delivered one blow which lifted Handforth completely off his feet. And Church and McClure, observing the fate of their leader, hung back. Nobody could blame them.

Handforth staggered up dazedly.

"You—you funks!" he roared. "Why don't you wipe the cad up?"

"He's—he's too big!" protested Church. "We can't—"

"Thank goodness!" said McClure. "Here come some of the others."

I had hurried into the Triangle to see what the trouble was about. Tregellis-West and Watson were with me, and Pitt and De Valerie and Levi and a number of others came up behind. We were just in time to

see Phipps rising unsteadily to his feet. I ran to him.

"Great Scott!" I exclaimed. "What's happened?"

"It—it's all right, Master Nipper," muttered Phipps. "Nothing much, sir!"

I stared at him, aghast.

He was fearfully knocked about; his lip was cut, his nose was terribly swollen, and still bleeding. One of his ears had swollen up to an immense size, and there was an ugly scratch across his forehead. He was smothered with mud from head to foot, and he was obviously in great agony.

"What on earth have you been doing?" I asked blankly.

"Hi, you asses, come here!" roared Handforth. "Come and collar this beast before he gets away. He half-murdered Phipps just now, and then kicked him after he was down! Buck up!"

I turned grimly, and the other fellows hurried across.

Jim Pringle was standing with his back towards the high school wall. At this point it was particularly high, and only an active youngster could climb it. It was too much for Jim's burly figure.

"Stand back, you young whelps!" he snarled. "If any of you come near me I'll brain you! I'm Jim Pringle, a heavy-weight champion——"

"Pringle!" yelled Pitt. "My hat! Arabella's brother!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Collar the rotter!"

"Grab him!"

"We'll teach him to kick a chap when he's down!"

The man's very attitude was sufficient to incense the juniors. But he looked a formidable task, and the fellows hung back.

"Come on—one rush'll do it!" I said grimly. "We've got to get him!"

I hurled myself forward, bending low at the same moment. The other fellows came along behind. Just as I reached the man he brought round his fist, and I dodged.

The fist whizzed past my head, and I knew that if it had struck me I should have been knocked out for about an hour. But the next second I was at his legs. I managed to obtain a ju-jitsu grip.

Pringle's burly form heaved up, and he crashed over on his face with a tremendous thud.

"On him!" I gasped.

The fellows needed no bidding. They were swarming over the man like mice over a piece of cheese. And Jim Pringle, for all his strength, was unable to cope with the onrush.

He was held down—Handforth and Church sitting on his chest, two or three fellows on his arms, and about four on his legs. Then Fatty Little came puffing up, and he took a seat on Mr. Pringle's head.

Fortunately, the man was lying face downwards, and he gurgled frantically. Fatty's weight was driving his face down into the

gravel, and his position was by no means comfortable.

A moment or two later we all obtained firm hold. About a dozen of us held the man all over, and then he was lifted up, and frogmarched round the Triangle.

"You young demons!" he snarled thickly. "Lemme go! If you don't lemme go, I'll half kill you, you—you——"

He uttered a string of oaths, and—flop!

Without warning he was dropped into a puddle, and Fatty again sat on his head—this time with even greater force. Then the prisoner was again raised.

"Every time you swear we'll do that!" I said grimly. "So you'd better look out for yourself! We'll teach you to come here kicking people! Your sister only made us laugh, but you seem to be a different proposition!"

Pringle didn't swear any more—once was enough for him. Besides, he was feeling rather used up. Twice he was taken round the Triangle—until, in fact, the fellows were tired.

And then, as a kind of grand finale, Jim was sent hurtling with terrific force into the well-filled basin of the fountain.

Splash!

He descended below the surface, and all the fellows jumped clear of the splashes. Mr. Pringle floundered helplessly about in the icy water. And the fellows looked on with keen enjoyment.

"By jings!" said Jerry Dodd, who had helped in the good work. "That's the stuff to give him, I reckon! I'm an Australian myself, but I don't claim this darned piece of scum as a fellow-countryman! There's good and bad everywhere—an' this feller seems to be all bad!"

"Of course!" I said. "We've got rotters who are just as bad as Pringle—heaps of them in London! And everybody can't be good in Australia!"

Pringle raised himself out of the water, staggered on to dry ground, and then zig-zagged across the Triangle in an endeavour to escape. But he needn't have worried. The juniors had done with him—they had given him his lesson, and they allowed him to crawl away.

Phipps was still standing near by, and by now he had partially recovered. It pleased him immensely to see Arabella's brother treated in such a manner. But Phipps was in such pain that he could not appreciate anything much.

"Thank you, young gentlemen!" he said thickly. "It—it was very good you to take my part like that. I am much obliged!"

"That's all right, Phipps; we couldn't do anything else," said Pitt. "And if that ruffian ever troubles you again, just tell us. We'll attend to him all right."

"Rather!"

"Just let him show up again, that's all!"

Phipps went indoors, declining assistance. And in the lobby he ran across Archie Glen-

thorne—the very last person he wanted to meet. Archie stopped dead in his tracks, and gazed at Phipps with open horror.

"What the—I mean to say!" he gasped. "Phipps! My dear old scout, what evil has befallen you? Your nose appears to be about as big as a pound of steak! You're a frightful sight!"

"I—I have met with a little trouble, sir," said Phipps. "I shall be glad if you'll let me pass, sir."

Archie offered no objection. He was too startled to stand in Phipps' way. And a moment later we all crowded in, and Archie heard the details. He looked somewhat blank.

"But, I mean to say, this is frightful!" he declared. "The chappie can't move, don't you know! These bally people will make his life a misery! I'm frightfully glad that you rallied round so decently, old sons."

"My dear chap, we had to!" I said. "We couldn't see Phipps treated like that without taking some kind of action."

Archie nodded.

"Dashed good!" he exclaimed. "Stout work, laddies! And it's up to me to think out some brainy notion. As a matter of fact, I've nearly got it. By the morning I shall be singing slightly with happiness. I mean to ruminate during the night, and the result will be bally good!"

"Let's hope so!" grinned Pitt. "But we've always been taught that nothing comes from nothing—so where do you expect to get the idea from?"

Ha, ha, ha!"

But Archie was too lost in thought to notice the joke. He walked on, more firmly determined than ever to think out some scheme to rescue Phipps from his predicament. In fact, it was up to Archie to rally round to a fearful extent.

CHAPTER V

THE FLIGHT OF PHIPPS.



"GADZOOKS!"

Archie sat up in bed, and gazed at the clock rather dazedly. It was twenty minutes past his usual hour for rising, and he was still alone in his little bedroom. This was an extraordinary circumstance, for Phipps usually went like clockwork. He always came into Archie at the same precise moment every morning.

And yet it was now twenty minutes after the time, and Phipps had not appeared! What could it mean? Why was he so late? Archie felt vaguely uneasy, and at last he threw the bedclothes aside, and went to the window.

The morning was fine and bright, although still blustery. Archie went to the door, opened it, and glanced outside. There

was no sign whatever of Phipps coming. The passage was nearly deserted.

From a distance, along the passage, he could hear the voices of the fellows as they dressed in the Remove dormitory. But there was no sign of Phipps.

"This is somewhat tremendous!" observed Archie. "No Phipps—just when I have got hold of a fearfully brainy scheme! I suppose the chappie is so frightfully sore that he hasn't been able to get out of bed. In other words, he's still indulging in large chunks of the good old dreamless!"

Archie went back into his bedroom, and proceeded to dress.

"I mean to say, this is too foul for words!" he murmured. "It's up to me to drape a few garments round the old person and then sally forth. I must find Phipps! I must impart the glad news into the laddie's ear!"

Archie dressed with quite unusual rapidity. He was rather astonished to find that Phipps was really quite unnecessary. Dressing, after all, was a very simple business, and it was not at all essential that Phipps should be on hand to render assistance.

"Of course, under any ordinary circs., I should now be indulging in a little song!" murmured Archie. "When a chappie massages the good old spine with a bally rough towel he generally sings more or less. But this morning I feel depressed. I mean to say, the old tissues are not fully restored."

Archie's great scheme was a triumph—in his own opinion. It really amounted to very little. He was determined to tell Phipps to defy the Pringles openly, and to give them a dashed good ticking off, don't you know. He was also going to suggest that Phipps should apply to the police for protection.

It was, after all, up to the police to see that peace was kept. And Phipps would have a perfect right to demand protection if Arabella started her nonsense again, or if her brother tried any more of his bullying tricks.

And so Archie soon dressed, and then he sallied downstairs. A glance into Phipps' room had shown him that it was empty, thus proving that Phipps was already down. Archie strolled along the Remove passage, turned into his own study, and then looked round.

"Dashed queer!" he murmured, frowning.

The blind was still down, the cinders of the evening's fire still marred the grate. Everything was untidy.

"And this, of course, was remarkable. Phipps was one of the tidiest men under the sun. He always kept Archie's study spotlessly neat and clean. Archie had never come down to find such a state of affairs before.

"My only sainted aunt!" he murmured. "Something appears to be wrong. That is to say, Phipps would never do a thing like

this willingly. Absolutely not! He's absolutely failed!"

He went across, and rang the bell. And then, a moment later, he came to a halt. There, in the very middle of the table, was an envelope. It was propped up against a book, and upon it was written "Master Archie Glenthorne," in bold writing.

Archie seized it, pulled up the blind, and then tore the envelope open. He extracted a note.

"Well, I'm bothered!" he murmured. "What, as it were, is this?"

He glanced through the words, which were brief.

"Gadzooks!" he muttered blankly.

He stared at the letter again. And this is what he read:

"Dear Master Archie,—I am very sorry to leave you in this abrupt manner, but I feel that it is impossible for me to remain at St. Frank's under the existing circumstances. It is not usually my way to take to flight, but with that woman in the district I really cannot remain.

"One day I hope to return, and shall then be greatly honoured if you will consent to take me back into your service. I am only leaving now because I feel that if I remain I shall only bring trouble upon yourself.

"With renewed regrets, and thanking you for your numerous kindnesses,—Your obedient servant,

"PHIPPS."

Archie read the note through about four times before he fully mastered it.

"Why, dash it all, the chappie's bunked!" he exclaimed, aghast. "He's absolutely fled, leaving the young master in the lurch! I mean to say, this is poisonous! This is absolutely too thick to be stirred!"

He wandered about the study like a lost sheep. All sorts of hopeless matters occurred to him. Who would make the fire? Who would clear up? Who would get his tea, and do the hundred and one other little jobs which were constantly cropping up?

Without Phipps, Archie would be as helpless as a baby. Certainly, he could get another valet, but even this would be very difficult—and Phipps was a valet in a thousand. He was a most exceptional manservant, and Archie felt that he would not be able to get on with anybody else.

Archie, in fact, was quite staggered. And for the first time he began to realise that he had been actually quite fond of Phipps. He didn't blame the man for running away.

Anybody was liable to do a thing like that with Arabella on the track.

But it was rather upsetting that Phipps should have gone just when Archie had his scheme all ready.

"This is a few thousand miles beyond the limit," declared Archie, addressing the fender. "Gadzooks! An idea! I'll get

Mr. Lee on the job! I'll ask him to find him, and bring him back. Absolutely!"

Archie hurried to the door, and just as he got out in the passage I came by with several other fellows. We were all talking together, for we had just heard some startling news.

"What-ho! What-ho!" said Archie. "Kindly allow me to interrupt, dear old lads. I am now on my way to Mr. Nelson Lee—"

"You'll have to go a long way!" I interrupted. "The gov'nor's in London!"

"In London!" repeated Archie blankly.

"Yes; he was called away yesterday evening," I replied. "Went up on some business connected with some stolen bonds from a big London bank. Anyhow, he isn't here. Why do you want him?"

"The fact is, laddie, I was going to ask the dear chappie to get frightfully busy on finding Phipps. The lad has vanished in the night!"

"Vanished!" echoed Reginald Pitt.

"Absolutely!"

"Do you mean he's run away?"

"Absolutely twice!" said Archie. "He's scooted—trickled off!"

"Phipps has scooted!" I exclaimed slowly. "And the Head's bureau was burgled last night and a hundred and fifty quid was stolen—in currency notes! And they're saying that there was a handkerchief found in the room with Phipps' name on it!"

"What!" gasped Archie. "But, I mean—"

He paused, absolutely startled.

"I say!" said Pitt. "You don't mean to suggest that Phipps took the money, do you? He wouldn't dream of a thing like that, Nipper!"

"Of course he wouldn't!" I agreed promptly. "I never suspected anything of the sort, old son. But it seems to me that Phipps might get into trouble—that's all. But we shall have to wait and see."

A good many of us had been startled by the news which had been heard that morning. It was an absolute fact that Dr. Stafford's study had been entered during the night.

The place was in a state of disorder, the window had been found forced, and open, and the Head's private bureau was smashed. A large number of notes—obtained from the bank in readiness for the monthly wages of the household—were missing. There had undoubtedly been a burglary.

And the school was agog with the news.

Less than half an hour later Tubbs, the Ancient House pageboy, approached Archie, and told him that he was wanted in the Headmaster's study. Archie went at once, for he was vaguely uneasy.

And when he was ushered into Dr. Stafford's presence, he found the Head looking very grave and solemn.

"I understand, Glenthorne, that Phipps left a note in your study?" said the Head, without any preliminaries.

"Absolutely, sir!"

"Have you got the note with you?"

"Yes, sir."

"Let me see it."

Archie produced the note and handed it over to the Head. Dr. Stafford glanced through it quickly, frowning as he did so. He knew, of course, that Phipps was missing—he had heard this from several quarters already. But it had just come to his ears that a note had been left behind for Archie. The Head looked up after reading it through.

"This is very significant, Glenthorne," he said. "I should like to question you. I understand that Phipps was in some kind of trouble?"

"Well, as a matter of fact, he was, sir," replied Archie. "The poor chappie was in the throes, as you might say. Absolutely mizzy, and what not!"

"I fail to understand you, Glenthorne," exclaimed the Head. "I very much regret that Mr. Lee is not here at the moment, for he would very soon probe this matter to the bottom. However, the police are on their way. Tell me, what was the nature of this trouble that Phipps found himself in?"

"Well, to tell the absolute truth, sir, Phipps was in a frightful mess connected with a very persistent lady from Australia," said Archie. "A dashed unfortunate business, old bean—er—that is to say, sir!"

"Let me hear all the details!" said the Head.

Archie explained as fully as possible.

"H'm! So that is the position—eh?" said Dr. Stafford, at length. "Dear me! I'm very much afraid that Phipps is responsible for this robbery—"

Archie started forward.

"Oh, but that's imposs., sir!" he protested. "I mean to say, the very idea is absolutely ridie! Phipps wasn't that kind of chappie. He never burgled a place in his life, don't you know!"

"Perhaps not, but here he found it necessary to leave the neighbourhood as quickly as possible—owing, of course, to his unfortunate entanglement with this questionable person. So he seized the money from my bureau, for the purpose of aiding his flight. Really, the matter is quite simple!"

Before Archie could reply, Inspector Jameson, of the Bannington police, was ushered in.

With his notebook and pencil handy, the inspector proceeded to take jottings as the Headmaster gave him all the details. The inspector grew more and more grim as he proceeded.

"It seems to me to be a clear case of burglary, sir," he exclaimed. "There can be no doubt that this man, Phipps, is the culprit. I should like his description, and I will have it circulated without any delay. We'll soon have him, sir!"

"But look here, old lad!" said Archie,

touching the inspector on the chest. "Look here! In fact, pay attention!"

"I have no time, my boy—"

"The matter is important!" said Archie, grasping the inspector's top-coat button. "You mustn't think that Phipps did this. Phipps bunked because he was afraid of the frightful female. He wasn't in need of money—"

"My dear lad, it is quite useless for you to retain any hopes regarding Phipps' innocence," put in the Head gently. "It is known that the man had trouble—it is also known that he had every reason to flee in haste from the school. He admits as much in that note to you."

"Absolutely, sir, but—"

"Phipps needed money to assist him on his journey," went on the Head. "He also bungled the affair rather badly, for he left a handkerchief near the bureau—a handkerchief which clearly bears his name in one corner—a laundry mark. There can be no doubt that Phipps is guilty!"

Archie looked round helplessly.

"But Phipps wouldn't do it, sir!" he declared. "I mean to say, he wasn't the kind of lad to indulge in pushing bureaux to bits! Absolutely not! Besides, how could he know that the money was here?"

"A good point, Glenthorne, but the answer is even more conclusive," said Dr. Stafford. "It so happened that Phipps went to Bannington yesterday afternoon, and I entrusted him with the task of getting a large sum in cash from the bank."

"Gadzooks!" said Archie blankly.

"This is a very important matter, sir," said the inspector sharply.

"Quite!" agreed the Head. "I have always trusted Phipps in every way—he has served as my butler, as you know. And he drew the money from the bank yesterday afternoon for the monthly payment of wages—a sum of one hundred and forty-five pounds. He brought it to my study, and he saw me put it in the bureau."

"Oh, did he?" said Jameson, jotting a note down. "That settles it! No ordinary housebreaker would risk his liberty on an off chance. But Phipps knew that the money was here, and Phipps has gone! I shall lose no time in—"

The telephone bells buzzed sharply.

"Excuse me a moment!" said the Head. "Hallo! Yes, yes! This is St. Frank's College. Quite so—you are speaking to Dr. Stafford now."

The Head listened for a moment.

"Oh, indeed!" he went on. "Colonel Glenthorne? Yes, yes, of course! I recognise your voice now, colonel. Splendid! I beg your pardon? Phipps is there? In your house?"

"What's that?" exclaimed the inspector sharply.

"It appears that Phipps is at Colonel Glenthorne's place, near Bannington," said Dr. Stafford. "One moment. Yes, yes, I am still here, colonel," he added, speaking

into the telephone. "You say that Phipps arrived early this morning—before the household was awake? Dear me! That is most peculiar! Indeed! Thank you, colonel—thank you! The matter may be of great importance. I really cannot explain now—but I shall ring you up very shortly, and go into full details. Please pardon me for being so scrappy. I will explain later."

The Head rang off, and turned to the inspector.

"I have some important news for you, Jameson," he said. "Indeed, the matter is most significant. Phipps arrived at the colonel's house early this morning. And he is making active preparations for leaving by the first available train to London. He is starting out even now."

it all, if Phipps really took the money, he wouldn't be lounging about in Bannington now! He's absolutely asking to be collared! The chappie would be miles away!"

Dr. Stafford shook his head.

"No doubt Phipps believed himself to be quite safe," he said. "But you may be sure, Glenthorne, that if Phipps is innocent, he will not suffer!"

Archie nodded vaguely.

And he was staring fixedly at a certain part of the bureau—at a sharp corner, where the wood had been splintered. He looked at this portion very closely. And then, tremendously worried, he took his departure.

Outside, he met some of the other fellows, and imparted the news.

We all did our utmost to cheer Archie



And then, as a kind of grand finale, Jim was sent hurtling with terrific force into the well-filled basin of the fountain.

"I mean to say, that's rather tremendous!" murmured Archie.

The inspector acted promptly.

He at once rang up the police-station, and instructed two men to proceed without delay to the station, and to detain Phipps, and take him to the police-station. The inspector gave an accurate description of the valet. Then he hurried off himself.

"There can be no doubt, Glenthorne, that Phipps is guilty," said the Headmaster. "It is quite useless for you to worry your head about the matter. After all, the man is only a valet, and you will easily be able to procure another. After his excellent work during the holiday expedition, it is very sad that Phipps should so ruin his character. But these things will happen."

"I don't believe he did, sir—absolutely not!" declared Archie. "And it seems to me that something ought to be done. Dash

up, but it was no good. He wouldn't be cheered. No matter how we tried to comfort him, it was useless. He was absolutely miserable.

And then, less than half an hour later—just as breakfast was about to be served—I heard that Phipps had been arrested. And, what was more to the point, the sum of one hundred and sixty pounds in notes had been found on him!

CHAPTER VI.

ARCHIE ON THE TRACK.



ARCHIE GLENTHORNE stood in the Triangle, gazing dully before him.

He had just heard the news. Phipps — arrested! Phipps—in the hands of the police. And the missing money, together

with some extra notes, had been found on him.

"Of course, the whole thing's absolutely wrong!" Archie said. "Absolutely wrong and absolutely fearful! The chappie didn't do it—I bally well know it! And I've got to get fearfully busy, and rally round like the dickens!"

It was all very well to talk like this, but when it came to rallying round it really seemed that very little could be done. Archie couldn't very well go to Bannington, and get Phipps released from custody. He wanted to do this at first, until I pointed out that all his efforts would be useless. The police would never release their prisoner at this stage—unless, of course, Archie was able to produce positive proof that Phipps was clearly guiltless.

It was breakfast-time, but Archie had not gone in.

He didn't want any breakfast. He couldn't eat any. He had no appetite. He only wanted to walk about the Triangle with his hands in his pockets. He had never been quite so miserable before. Every now and again he screwed his monocle into his eye, and at regular intervals it would fall out.

He had the Triangle quite to himself, since breakfast was proceeding. And then two figures appeared in the gateway. Archie glanced up, and stiffened visibly as he recognised them.

They were the figures of Arabella and Jim Pringle!

"Gadzooks!" murmured Archie.

He stood there, firm and resolute. He determined, on the spot, to tick the pair off in no uncertain terms. As a matter of fact, all the juniors had been half-expecting that Arabella would appear.

And this was the first time that Archie had felt the slightest touch of satisfaction. They had come for nothing! For their intended victim had flown, leaving them in the lurch.

The pair came up, and Archie sallied towards them.

"I'm afraid there's nothing doing, old dears!" he said pleasantly. "I gather that you are having tremendous hopes of interviewing old Phipps?"

"We don't want any talk with you, my lad!" said Jim Pringle roughly.

"We want to see Mr. Phipps!" said Arabella.

The brother and sister were very much subdued this morning—quite changed to what they had been on the previous evening. Jim's experience with the juniors had evidently had good effect.

"Well, you won't see Phipps to-day," said Archie. "As a matter of absolute fact, he's not here."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that Phipps has gone!"

"Gone?"

"Absolutely!"

"Gone where?"

"Gone for good, old son!" replied Archie. "That is to say, he got frightfully restless, and thought a change of air would do the old tissues a large amount of good. So he packed up his old kitbag, and all that sort of thing, and shoved off into the next landscape."

Jim Pringle scowled furiously.

"I knew it!" he snapped. "What did I tell you, Bella? I knew that ugly little brute would trick you in the end! I said it was no good coming up here! By gosh! If I catch him, I'll—"

"Gadzooks!" said Archie.

He had gone quite pale with sudden excitement.

And he was staring fixedly at a portion of Jim Pringle's coat. It was an ordinary lounge jacket of thick tweed, and the colour was a rather unusual kind of green. Intermixed with it were shreds of light brown—a most peculiar mixture. And just at this particular spot there was a distinct pluck.

It was not a tear, and probably Jim knew nothing about it, for it was just against the left-hand pocket. The broken ends of the wool stuck out, but only a person with sharp eyes would have noticed the pluck at all. Archie did so more by accident than anything else.

"My only sainted aunt!" he breathed to himself. "This frightful rascal is the chappie who purloined the old Fishers! Absolutely! This bounder grabbed the notes, and then legged it!"

In that flash, Archie had come to the conclusion that Jim Pringle was the man who had taken the money from the Head's study. It was rather startling. But there was every reason for Archie's conclusion.

He was by no means the ass he was supposed to be. And just now all his wits were on edge, for he was doing his utmost to rally round Phipps in large chunks. And that pluck in Jim Pringle's coat set him thinking.

He remembered the sharp edge on the bureau, where the woodwork was smashed. There, clearly and distinctly he had noticed a couple of shreds of wool. The shreds were greenish and brownish in colour. Surely, there was something significant in that fact?

Archie was firm in his belief—in fact, that the piece of wool had been plucked from Jim Pringle's jacket. And this clearly proved, in turn, that Pringle had been in the Headmaster's study. He had certainly not gone there lawfully—which was clear evidence that he had visited the study in the night.

This was how Archie reasoned it out, and quite cleverly, too.

And he realised that it was up to him to act quickly. There was nobody else there, and so he either had to act himself, or let the matter slide. And the latter, of course, was quite unthinkable.

"That is, I—I mean to say!" he said vaguely.

"What?" said Pringle.

"I was just about to suggest, old lad, that you should come inside," said Archie. "To be exact, I'd be fearfully obliged if you'd both enter my study. I've got something to say in private, you know. Absolutely!"

"What do you mean, boy?" asked Arabella.

"About Phipps!" said Archie. "You see, the chappie was my valet. I shall be positively lost without him. And it seems that it's up to me to square things up—what? That is, I'd like to have it settled."

The pair exchanged glances.

"Money, and all that!" added Archie cunningly.

"All right; but we can't stay long," said Jim. "We might as well see what the young gent wants, Bella."

At first they had been inclined to be slightly suspicious, but Archie had made this all right by his vague reference to money. He had made the pair believe that he was willing to make them a substantial present if they went away. And so the trio entered the Ancient House.

One point worried Archie slightly.

If Pringle had stolen the money, why had he come to the school now? Surely, it was somewhat mad to come back to the scene of his crime the very morning after it had been committed?

But a moment's reflection told Archie that this, after all, was just what Pringle would do. The scoundrel had deliberately attempted to put the blame on Phipps. He had, as a matter of fact, picked up Phipps' handkerchief in the Triangle during the previous evening, during the scrap.

And he had also heard, probably, that Phipps was arrested. News travels very rapidly in such a small village, and by this time the whole of Bellton was talking about the burglary and the arrest of Phipps.

It was an act of sheer bravado on Pringle's part to come to the school—and he also realised that it would make him safer. For he, of course, would pretend to know nothing about it. No suspicion would attach itself to him. If he cleared out of the neighbourhood with his sister without warning, that fact alone might bring suspicion upon them.

It was far better policy to visit the school, learn that Phipps had gone, and then go. In that way everything would look straightforward and above-board. It was for that reason that the pair had now arrived.

As they passed through the lobby the juniors came out from breakfast. I was there, and looked at Archie in astonishment as I saw that he was leading the Pringles towards his study.

"What's the idea, Archie?" I asked grimly.

"The fact is, old lad, I've just a little business to attend to," said Archie. "Kindly allow me to pass, dear old tulip!"

We stood aside as the three went into Archie's study. Then the door was closed, and we looked at one another.

"The rotter!" said Handforth wrathfully. "Why, he's absolutely pally with them! Look here, I vote we barge in, and chuck the rotters off the school premises! Who's with me?"

"I am!"

"Same here!"

"Count on me!"

"Hold on—hold on!" I interrupted sharply. "We can't do that sort of thing, my sons. Besides, I dare say Archie has a very good reason for doing this. He is not a fool, you know. And he dislikes Pringle more than anything else, I should say."

As a matter of fact, I had been thinking rather deeply. And I had a few suspicions, too, regarding Mr. James Pringle. I had come to no definite conclusion, because I had seen no real evidence. But I could not bring myself to believe that Phipps was actually guilty.

And if he was innocent, who had really committed the burglary? Obviously, somebody who wished Phipps to suffer. Somebody who had taken the notes with the deliberate intention of putting the blame on to Archie's valet. And Pringle was about the only fellow who fitted the bill.

Archie, in the meantime, was facing the pair.

"Now, young man, get it out quick!" said Jim.

"We haven't much time to spare," put in Arabella. "I'm sorry I treated you roughly last night, young man. I was excited, and didn't rightly know what I was doing."

"Don't mensh!" said Archie. "The fact is, I'd like to get to the bottom of this business. Absolutely the bottom, to be precise. And I might as well say at once that I've come to some dashed interesting conclusions."

"What are you getting at?" demanded Pringle.

"This, laddie!" replied Archie. "Last night, when it was dark, you broke into the school and lifted a large assortment of notes from the Headmaster's bureau. You frightful microbe! You bally worm! You can do as you dashed well like, but I've had the pleasure of ticking you off to your face!"

Jim Pringle started back, his cheeks blanching.

"You infernal young fool!" he gasped. "Do you think I know anything about that burglary? It was Phipps who took the money!"

"Absolutely not!" said Archie.

"Look here—"

"There's a priceless clue here!" went on Archie, pointing to the pluck in the man's coat. I saw some shreds of that stuff sticking to the bureau. What? I mean to say,

the police will be most deucedly interested when I tell them!"

"You fool, Jim!" gasped Arabella. "I knew you'd make a mistake. You oughtn't to have done it——"

"Keep your infernal mouth shut!" snarled Jim.

"Too late, laddie!" observed Archie calmly. "The lady, as it were, has blown the jolly old gaff! It's no good denying it now. You took the cash, and you've got to reel forth into chokey. I don't know whether you've ever had a stab at it, but it ought to be a frightfully topping experience."

"You're mad!" panted Jim hoarsely.

"I shall now proceed to call the chap-pies," said Archie. "After that you'll be held by about a thousand different hands, and then go off——"

"Lock that door, Bella!" snapped Jim quickly. "Lock it—quick!"

At the same moment he grasped Archie in his bear-like arms. The elegant junior attempted to shout, but a hand was clapped over his mouth, and he only succeeded in uttering a queer kind of gurgle.

Of course, he had been very unwise in exposing his hand in this way. But Archie was not experienced in this sort of thing, and he considered himself to be perfectly safe in his own study, with the passage and the lobby and the Triangle swarming with fellows. He reckoned that it was only up to him to sound the S.O.S., and the pair would be collared.

Actually, things were very different.

Before he could struggle, he was held so tightly that he could hardly move. Jim Pringle was tremendously strong, and he used his strength viciously now. He dragged down the tablecloth, and told his sister to tear it into shreds. She did so, much to Archie's dismay. The tablecloth was an expensive one, and to see it ruined in this way cut Archie to the quick. He didn't care about the cost, but it pained him to see a good article wantonly ruined.

As soon as it was in strips, Pringle proceeded to bind his victim up. He did this so thoroughly that Archie was as helpless as a trussed chicken. One thick strip of cloth went completely round his face, forming an effective gag.

By rallying round Phipps, Archie had found a large packet of trouble!

CHAPTER VII.

THE RACE!

REGINALD PITT looked across the Triangle thoughtfully.

"I wonder why they came?" he said. "I think we ought to buzz inside, and interview Archie.

We'll demand an explanation."

"Rather!" said Jack Grey.

Arabella and her brother had just gone. They had, in fact, walked out somewhat

hurriedly, although they had obviously been at some pains to hide the fact that they were in haste.

I had already gone indoors, and I noticed that Handforth and Co. had dashed in first. And when I arrived in the passage, I found the trio outside Archie's door. Handforth was hammering vigorously on the panels.

"Open the door, you rotter!" he shouted. Thump! Thump! Thump!

There was no answer.

"Look here, what's the idea of locking yourself in like this?" demanded Handforth wrathfully.

Silence.

"By George!" said Handy. "If you don't open it jolly quickly, I'll break it down! Archie! You rotter! Why don't you answer?"

Bang—thump—bang!

I hurried up.

"Look here, don't make all this noise!" I exclaimed sharply. "You'll have about a dozen prefects down on us in a minute, to say nothing of a few masters. Stop it, Handy!"

"The rotter won't open this door!" said Handforth warmly.

"Well, it's his own door!" I said. "Let me have a try."

I rapped vigorously.

"Archie!" I shouted. "Don't be an ass, you know. Open the door, and let us in. We're not going to try any tricks!"

Still there was no reply.

"If you ask me, it's jolly queer!" said De Valerie. "He went in there with those two Australian rotters. They came out alone, and hurried out. And as soon as we went to the door we found it locked, and couldn't get any reply."

I bent down, and examined the keyhole.

"Yes, it is queer!" I agreed. "The key isn't here! If Archie locked the door himself from the inside, he must have taken the key out. But he wouldn't do that——"

"Perhaps that beast of a Pringle hurt him!" suggested Church quickly. "A quarrel, or something. And they came out, and Pringle locked the door behind him, and took the key!"

"That's just what I was thinking," I said grimly.

We hurried outside, and went round to Archie's window. But, as I had half expected, the window was tightly closed and the catch was pressed home. It was a new, patent catch which could not be opened with a pocket-knife. And we stared through the glass closely.

"He doesn't seem to be in the room at all!" I exclaimed, with my nose to the glass. "It's empty—— Why, hallo! By jingo! I just saw something move under the lounge."

"Stand back!" shouted Handforth.

He wasn't the kind of fellow to stand on ceremony. He picked up a big stone, and crashed it against the glass. The pane splintered to fragments, and a moment later Handforth pushed his fist through the open-



ing and pulled the catch over. Then he raised the lower sash.

We piled into the study, quite regardless of any inquiries that might follow. The main thing was to see if anything had happened to Archie. We dragged the lounge from the wall.

And there, behind it, was Archie's form, trussed up with great effect by large lengths of the torn tablecloth.

"By George!" said Handforth. "He's been murdered!"

"You fathead!" I snapped. "He's alive—"

"How can he be; he doesn't answer!" said Handforth excitedly. "Can you see any blood anywhere about? We'd better look for the weapon—"

"You hopeless duffer!" I exclaimed. "There's nothing wrong with Archie; he's only bound up! You can't expect him to speak with about a yard of tablecloth wrapped round his head. Quick! Lend a hand!"

We grasped the unfortunate Archie, and pulled him out of the corner. Then three or four pocket-knives got busy, and he was released from his bonds.

"That's better!" I said. "Now then, Archie—cheer up! You're safe now, and you don't seem to be hurt much."

The gag had just been removed, and Archie was spluttering.

"I mean to say, dashed poisonous!" he gasped. "When a chappie is attacked and wrapped in his own bally tablecloth it's time to make a few hundred energetic protests! Absolutely the limit, if you grasp the old trend!"

"Why, he's not hurt at all!" said Handforth indignantly. "Not even scratched! It's a fraud!"

"I'm frightfully sorry, old bean, but I wasn't absolutely anxious to be carved up!" said Archie. "I sincerely trust that you have captured those awful blighters!"

"They walked out ten minutes ago!" said Pitt.

Archie staggered up.

"You mean to say—that is—Absolutely?" he gasped. "The awful bounders have legged it?"

"Yes!"

"This is too shocking for words!" exclaimed Archie. "I mean to say, that Pringle chappie lifted the Fishers from the Head's bureau—"

"You know it—for a fact?" I interrupted quickly.

"Absolutely!"

Archie told us all the facts as he knew them, and although he knew the time was precious, he was exasperatingly long-winded. He couldn't speak in any other way. It was just his method of speech.

But at last we knew the truth.

"My hat!" I exclaimed grimly. "So that scoundrel is the real culprit!"

"Absolutely twice!" said Archie. "I mean to say, the chappie's nothing more nor less

than a foul piece of work! And poor old Phipps is languishing in chokey, probably feeding off skilly, and all that sort of stuff!"

"Don't you believe it, Archie!" I said. "Phipps is all right, and he'll be out of the police-station when we take this information. But the first thing is to get hold of Jim Pringle."

"Absolutely!"

"By jingo!" I went on. "What about the morning train for London? It's nearly gone—due in about ten minutes! It's ten to one that those rotters will go on that train! We've got to get to the station first!"

"But that's impossible!" protested Pitt.

"Yes, it seems so, but there's no telling!" I exclaimed. "The guv'nor's car is round at the back—his splendid racer. We can get to the station in two minutes, once we've got the car out. Come on!"

"Good idea!"

"Hurrah!"

It was nearly time for lessons, but nobody thought of that. We would easily be able to explain later, and I was quite sure that the Head would excuse us all when he knew the truth.

And it was really most important that we should waste no time.

Jim Pringle probably had the money on him, and that, in itself, would be almost sufficient evidence. But if he got to London before being arrested, he might have time to get rid of the notes, and his suit as well. And then it would be very difficult to bring any actual proof against him. It was far better for him to be caught with the goods, so to speak.

And by dashing away now we stood quite a good chance of success.

We rushed round to the garage at terrific speed. Arriving there, I gave one glance at the guv'nor's racer, and found that it was in good trim for immediate use. It was kept well supplied with petrol and oil, and ready for the road.

I jumped into the driving-seat, started her up, and within a few moments we were speeding across the Triangle.

Archie and Pitt had succeeded in getting in beside me. Handforth and Co. were clutching on at the rear. Tommy Watson and one or two others were hanging desperately to the steps. The car was loaded, but, being a racer, she was quite capable of carrying this amount, and even more.

"Hold on!" I sang out. "If you want to keep alive, hang on like grim death!"

"All right—we're safe!"

"Let her go!"

I was just a bit anxious, but a glance behind assured me that the fellows were safe. They all had a firm hold, and there was no fear of them being hurled off by a sudden bump in the road.

We shot out through the gateway, and then streaked down the lane towards Bellton.

The car simply hurtled down like some huge rocket. She streaked at tremendous pace, for I opened the throttle, and we did

distance at about forty miles an hour. The way we went through the village caused the inhabitants to gasp. But I had had a good deal of experience of driving at high speed, and I had no fear of meeting with any disaster.

"Train's in!" I roared, as we swept up to the approach.

"Oh, gadzooks!" gasped Archie. "We're too late!"

The train was not only in, but she had just gone. As we drew up, we saw the last carriage disappear from the end of the platform. The train had gone, and was now on her way to Bannington. And Jim Pringle and his sister were undoubtedly there, en route for London.

If I had had any doubt on the matter, this doubt was dispelled at that very second, for I caught a glimpse of a head projecting out from one of the carriage windows. It was the head of Jim Pringle.

"Good!" I exclaimed tensely. "They're on the train!"

"But, dash it all!" said Archie. "Good, what? Personally, laddie, I think it's frightfully bad! They're on the old train—and the train's gone! In other words, sweet one, we're absolutely dished!"

"No, we're not!" I declared. "This train has to wait in Bannington for another train from the other line. A part of it is joined up there. This train gets in first, and generally waits about ten minutes before leaving for London. Passengers don't have to change, but there's a delay, all the same."

Archie stared.

"But, dear old stick, it can't be done!" he protested. "I mean, even if the train does have to wait, we can't get to Bannington before it leaves!"

"Can't we?" I said grimly. "We'll see! Hold tight!"

I opened the throttle again, and we shot round from the station approach, and a few moments later we were speeding along the main Bannington road.

I've driven rapidly a few times, but on this occasion I fairly let the old bus fly. We scooted along that road at nearer fifty miles an hour than forty. Fortunately, there was practically no traffic at that early hour, and so we had a clear road.

I didn't slacken speed until we were actually in the streets of Bannington. Then I was compelled to do so, of course. But even when we were in the High street itself I allowed the car to dash forward at about thirty.

And we shot up towards the booking-office of the station, and as the racer came to a standstill, we jumped off from all sides. Handforth went over in the mud, but was up again in a moment. And he was actually the first to tear past the startled ticket collector on the platform.

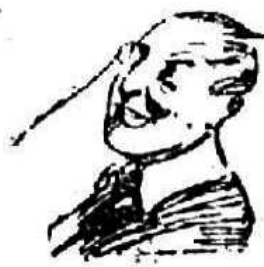
"Hi, steady there, young man!" shouted the collector. "You're too late!"

We took no notice, but shot past him in a flood,

The train was against the platform—but the guard was waving his flag, and he had just blown his whistle!

CHAPTER VIII.

ALL SERENE!



"THERE he is!"

Handforth let out a terrific bellow as he caught sight of a face at one of the windows. And in his excitement he nearly punched a perfectly innocent stranger on the nose.

At the same moment, as I ran up the train, I came to an abrupt halt. A well-known face was looking at me in a scared kind of way—the face of Arabella Pringle. Once having seen that face, it was quite impossible to forget it.

"Here we are!" I yelled. "Come on, you chaps."

Heads were now appearing from every compartment—the guard was rushing up, flustered and angry. For, at the last moment, he had been compelled to stop the train from going out.

I tore open the door of this compartment, and dashed in. Jim Pringle was there, white-faced and scared. He was just about to open the opposite door, with the desperate idea of making a dash for freedom along the track. His sister lay back in her seat, nearly fainting. When it came to a pinch she was like any other woman—and she couldn't stand the strain.

"Stand back!" shouted Pringle hoarsely. "If you touch me——"

But I was already dragging at his coat. The next moment Handforth and Co. were in the compartment, too. We all seized the man's jacket, and we gave one tremendous heave. He came out upon the platform in a rush, fell sprawling, and in a moment we were on top of him.

"Look after Arabella!" I shouted.

"I've got my eye on her!" said Tommy Watson breathlessly.

"Gadzooks!" gasped Archie. "This, as it were, is somewhat exciting! Stout work! Hold him, laddies! Keep the frightful ruffian down!"

Jim Pringle had practically no chance of escape. We sprawled on him in such a way that all his struggles were of no avail. And then the guard came up, and the station-master was hurrying along towards the spot.

"What's the meaning of this, you confounded young rascals?" shouted the guard. "Stopping my train just as she was going out——"

"Get that woman out of there," I exclaimed. "She's this man's sister, and his accomplice. Montie, dash off and fetch the police!"

"Begad!" said Sir Montie. "I'll fly, dear old boy."

He whizzed off, and then the station-master came.

"Good gracious me!" he exclaimed

amazedly. "What's all this? What's the matter? You boys are from St. Frank's College, aren't you? What does this mean? Let that man go at once!"

"Likely!" snorted Handforth. "He's a burglar! We're just teaching the police their business. They've arrested the wrong man, and so we've got the right one for them."

The excitement was still at its height when Archie gave a shout. Sir Montie Tregellis-West was hurrying up the platform accompanied by two constables. By a sheer piece of luck he had come across them just outside the station. They had been off duty at the time, but this made no difference. A policeman is always liable to be called upon to use his authority.

"Hurrah!"

"Here come the police!"

"Priceless!" said Archie. "Loud cheers, old dears."

The station-master hurried up to the police as they approached.

"I don't know why these boys have called you, but I shall probably prosecute them for obstruction," he said hotly. "They've held up this train for over five minutes, and they're still playing their confounded jokes."

"We'll see to it, sir," said one of the constables.

They bustled up, looking important.

"Now, my lads, what's the meaning of all this?" demanded one of the officers.

"You can't play about in this way—Why, it's Master Nipper! Morning, sir! Anything the matter here?"

I was rather pleased at the change in the man's tone. Having spotted me, he probably believed that the affair was not a practical joke, after all. I nodded to him at once.

"I want you to arrest these two people—their name is Pringle, and they're brother and sister," I explained. "Pringle is wanted on a charge of burglary at St. Frank's, and both he and sister have attempted blackmail and conspiracy."

"Is this square, Master Nipper?" asked the constable.

"Yes, of course."

"Here we are!" roared Handforth suddenly. "Notes—scores of 'em."

He had been diving his hand into the man's breast pocket, and he now produced a large bundle of currency notes. These were handed over to the police. Jim Pringle by this time was nearly insane with rage.

But he gave up the struggle as soon as he thought the game was up.

"Coming quietly?" asked one of the constables.

"I don't know what these young demons have been playing at!" panted Jim. "I've done nothing—it's all a lot of foolery."

"If that's the case, we'll square it all at the police station," said the officer. "As it is, I am afraid you must come with me. Tomlin, see after the woman."

Arabella was a wreck, and she proved no trouble. And, in a long procession, with



Archie stopped dead in his tracks, and gazed at Phipps with open horror.

crowds of excited sightseers behind us, we moved out of the station. And the London train was enabled to go on its way.

Owing to that tremendously speedy journey from the school, we had been able to catch the Pringles before they had made their escape. But for Nelson Lee's racing car we should never have done it.

Archie nudged me as we walked along.

"Laddie, many thanks," he murmured.

"In fact, large assortments of gratitude!"

"That's all right, Archie—"

"I mean to say, you absolutely did the trick!" said Archie. "Dashing across the landscape and all that sort of rot! Kindly allow me to express—"

"Wait until later, old man," I put in.

"We don't know that everything's all right, yet. I expect it will be, but there's many a slip, you know."

As we went down the road from the station the crowds increased, and, finally, when we arrived at the police headquarters, it seemed that half the town was looking on.

There had already been some excitement that morning, owing to the story that Phipps had been arrested. He, too, had been taken into custody on the station platform. It was rather remarkable that there should be two such arrests within a couple of hours.

Only a few of us were allowed to enter the police station. The crowd was kept back, but the juniors followed the two policemen and their prisoners into the charge-room. And we were just in time to

see Inspector Jameson hurrying along from a passage. He was looking rather worried.

But his expression changed as soon as he caught sight of us.

"Upon my soul!" he ejaculated. "What's all this?"

"These young gentlemen gave these people in charge for burglary and conspiracy, sir," said the constable, saluting. "I wouldn't have taken no notice of them, sir, but it was Master Nipper who gave the charge."

The inspector looked at me quickly.

"Who are these people, Nipper?" he asked. "I think you have sense enough not to try any practical jokes upon the police—"

"This is the man who burgled Dr. Stafford's study last night," I said. "He was arrested mainly owing to the smartness of Glenthorne."

"Dash all!" said Archie. "I mean to say, what priceless rot! But how about Phipps? Perhaps I shall be able to see the dear chappie?"

"It is quite probable that Phipps will be released from custody almost at once," said the inspector. "I am glad you have come in, my boys. And we shall soon be able to see if this man is the culprit. A new fact has come to light—one which has simplified matters very considerably."

"How do you mean, inspector?" I asked.

"It seems that the notes which Phipps obtained from the bank yesterday were new

issue," replied the inspector. "The bank knew their numbers, and if the notes found upon this man correspond, it will be direct proof of his guilt."

"But what about the notes found on Phipps?" I asked.

"They are not the same," growled Jameson.

"Hurrah!"

"Good old Phipps!"

"The sun shines again, laddies!" exclaimed Archie blithely. "The clouds, as it were, have burst asunder, and all that sort of rot! So the notes which Phipps had were not of the same variety that were stolen from the bureau?"

"The numbers are quite different, my lad," said the inspector. "That fact alone did not absolutely clear Phipps from suspicion—but I must admit that I began to have a few doubts. We have discovered that Phipps obtained his money from his own room at Col. Glenthorne's."

"Absolutely!" said Archie. "Phipps has still got a den there, you know, and a bally fat cash box."

We watched with tremendous interest while the notes were handed over to the inspector. I could see at once that they were new ones, and if Jim Pringle had been a professional crook he would have known that it was very risky to take them. But, of course, he had believed that Phipps would

(Continued on next page.)

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be accused, and so he had accepted the risk.

The inspector was not long in announcing the result.

"Splendid!" he exclaimed, smiling. "Yes, these are the notes—the numbers tally in every particular. I am very grateful to you boys for having captured this pair so smartly. I very much doubt if we shall be able to hold the woman for long, but the man is certainly guilty."

"Hurrah!"

"Good business!"

Archie grasped the inspector's top button.

"And this, I take it, means vast consignments of freedom for old Phipps?" he asked eagerly. "That is to say, the dear laddie will be able to leg it away?"

"Yes," smiled Inspector Jameson. "It is quite impossible for us to hold Phipps any longer, and I regret exceedingly that he has been so troubled."

"I wonder how Pringle committed the burglary?" said Watson.

"Nothing in it!" I replied. "He broke open the Head's window, and got in that way. Probably he didn't expect to get much—or there is just the possibility that Phipps may have mentioned that he had got money for the Head yesterday afternoon. I think it's far more likely that Pringle did the thing by chance, meaning to put the blame on to Phipps. Everything went in his favour—Phipps clearing off in the night, and other things. Anyhow, it's all right now, so there's no need for us to worry."

"It'll come out at the trial, anyhow," said Pitt.

And then, a few moments later, Phipps appeared.

"This, to be exact, is where we let things fly a bit!" exclaimed Archie. "I mean to say, it's time to open the vocal chords, and to burst into song. Laddies, we will sing somewhat!"

Phipps was smiling as he came up.

"I'm very much obliged to you, young gentlemen, for coming to my help!" he said gratefully. "I was sure that I should be released sooner or later, but I hardly hoped for such quick deliverance as this."

"You frightful bounder!" exclaimed Archie, grasping Phipps by the shoulder.

THE END.

"Dashing away like that, in the middle of the night, and leaving notes and what not lying about! I mean to say, it absolutely turned me up!"

"I'm sorry, sir."

"Absolutely!" said Archie. "And I require about forty-five explanations," went on Archie severely. "I mean, what was the huge idea of trickling away on the quiet?"

Phipps looked rather shame-faced.

"As a matter of fact, sir, I simply couldn't remain in the neighbourhood while that woman was about," he confessed. "It was too much for me, sir. I had to get away. Of course, I knew nothing about the burglary."

"Naturally not!" said Archie. "But there's no need to worry, old dear. The frightful ruffian is booked for a long spell of chokey, and I don't think his sister will bother you any further. I mean to say, even if she is released, she'll think this district is dashed unhealthy!"

"Yes, I think you're right, sir," agreed Phipps. "So it appears that everything will be all right now. The incident is closed. I am indeed, thankful, sir, and I owe you a big debt of gratitude."

"That, sweet one, is not worth mentioning!" said Archie. "Kindly change the old sub. What about it? That is, what about trickling forth and whizzing back to the good old precincts of St. Frank's?"

"We shall go at once," I put in. "Come on!"

"Your jacket, sir, is considerably ruffled, sir," said Phipps. "I might also point out that the necktie does not match the shirt."

"No?" said Archie, startled. "Gadzooks! I thought it was rather a priceless combination, don't you know. But it only shows, old horse, how absolutely necessary it is for you to be constantly hovering about in the offing."

"Quite so, sir."

Phipps had become himself again. He had recovered his usual calm, and by the time we had arrived back to St. Frank's all was peace once more.

The Headmaster, of course, excused us all for dashing off as we had done. But it was many a day before we forgot Phipps and his affair with the one and only Arabella!

Editorial Announcement.

MY DEAR READERS,—I have two very pleasant surprises for you next week. The first is to do with our long complete story, which, when you know the title, you will find it difficult to wait until next Wednesday for its appearance. It is called "Handforth Minor!" and is a laughable account of the arrival at St. Frank's of Handforth's younger brother.

A PROBLEM STORY COMPETITION.

The other surprise is my definite decision to run a competition in connection with next week's detective-problem story, entitled, "The Return of Sir Roger Beverley's Nephew!" Full particulars of the prizes to be offered and the conditions of the competition will be published next week.—Your sincere friend,

THE EDITOR.

Nipper's Magazine

EDITED BY NIPPER,

Oct. 21, 1922.



PODGE & MIDGE

THE DEADLY DUD DETECTIVES
BY BOB CHRISTINE



No. 1.—THE CASE OF THE SPOTTED SPIDER.

AUTHOR'S NOTE.—Most readers of the "Mag" will remember Messrs. Podge and Midge, the extraordinary detectives who visited St. Frank's some months ago in connection with a case concerning Jerry Dodd, of the Remove. I have taken the liberty to imagine how they conduct their investigations, and if this series suddenly comes to an untimely end, and I disappear from my usual haunts, you will understand that I have probably been arrested under the law of libel.—B.C.

CHAPTER I.

THE MYSTERY OF PONDER'S END.

THE taxi-cab skidded to a standstill, the door opened, and the stranger was shot out on to the pavement of Findem Avenue. Exactly opposite was a big brass plate fixed in the centre of a



He took out an enormous magnifying glass, and viewed the stranger by its aid.

big oaken door. The brass plate, in fact, was half as big as the door itself.

And on the brass plate were the engraved words, in immense red lettering: "Podge and Midge, Ltd. The Deadliest Sleuths on Earth. Specialists in Crime. Cases Executed at Shortest Notice. Inquire Within. Cash or Deferred Payments."

"At last—at last!" muttered the stranger feverishly.

He pressed the bell push, and a few seconds later the door was flung open by an extraordinary looking individual. He was an extremely small man, and he was attired in loose clothing which seemed to hang about him in folds, as though he were a kind of human clothes airer. His face was thin and perky, with a sharp nose, not entirely unlike a beak.

"I am Mr. Midge!" he exclaimed, in a thin, piping voice. "Do you wish to see the firm on business, or are you the man from the gas company?"

"I want to have a murder investigated!" cried the other.

Before he could say anything further the big door slammed, and the stranger was startled to find the hall rapidly going skywards. It took him some moments to realise that a lift was fitted just inside the door. Then he was shot out, and found himself in the consulting-room of Messrs. Podge and Midge.

Mr. Podge, the senior partner of the firm, rose from his chair, and the floor seemed to sag in the middle. For Mr. Podge was gigantic—not merely tall, but so broad that if he entered a telephone box, the post-office people would inevitably have to send a van along to clear up the wreckage.

He was attired in light grey tweeds, a glaring red waistcoat, and all his exposed portions of flesh seemed to ooze out in pink folds. He took out an enormous magnifying-glass, and viewed the stranger by its aid.

"Your business, sir?" he asked, like an engine letting off steam.

"I want you to come at once. My name is Wilfred Winkle," said the other quickly.

"You must come at once to investigate the

mystery of Ponder's End! Murder—horrible murder! Come with me without delay, and you may charge your own fee!"

"We allow ten per cent. discount for advance payment," said Mr. Podge crisply. "Or, if you prefer it, we supply our services on the instalment system."

"Anything you like," shouted Mr. Winkle, "but come!"

CHAPTER II.

THE FACE AT THE DOOR.

Mr. Podge looked about him in astonishment. The Firm, accompanied by Mr. Winkle, had just stepped out of the taxicab. They were in Henrietta Street, Covent Garden, and the air was full of the scent of ripe oranges, petrol fumes, and mouldy cabbages.

"But this is not Ponder's End!" puffed Mr. Podge. "Have you dared to fool me?"

"Ponder's End!" echoed Mr. Winkle. "Ah, yes! A natural mistake! I wanted you to look into the mystery of Ponder's end. I didn't say that I should take you to Ponder's End!"

"I am puzzled!" piped Mr. Midge. "Let me ponder!"

"This is distressing!" shouted Mr. Winkle. "Time is so short, and we are wasting it. The murdered man is named Joshua Ponder, and I want you to find out how he came to his end!"

Mr. Podge nodded.

"Of course!" he agreed. "I understood that from the first. The firm of Podge and Midge never blunder! Failures are unknown to them! Come! Let us enter! We will soon probe the mystery to the bottom!"

They entered a building near by, and as Mr. Podge walked up the stairs they creaked and groaned as though in agony. A door was flung open. They entered the room. There, on the floor, lay the murdered man.

The Firm examined the remains. And just then the face of a villain looked in at the door—a face that was convulsed with hatred.

"Trapped!" it hissed triumphantly.

CHAPTER III.

SPOTTING THE SPOTTED SPIDER.

Not for a moment did Mr. Podge flinch. Mr. Midge, however, gave a shrill cry, and leapt to the door. It refused to budge.

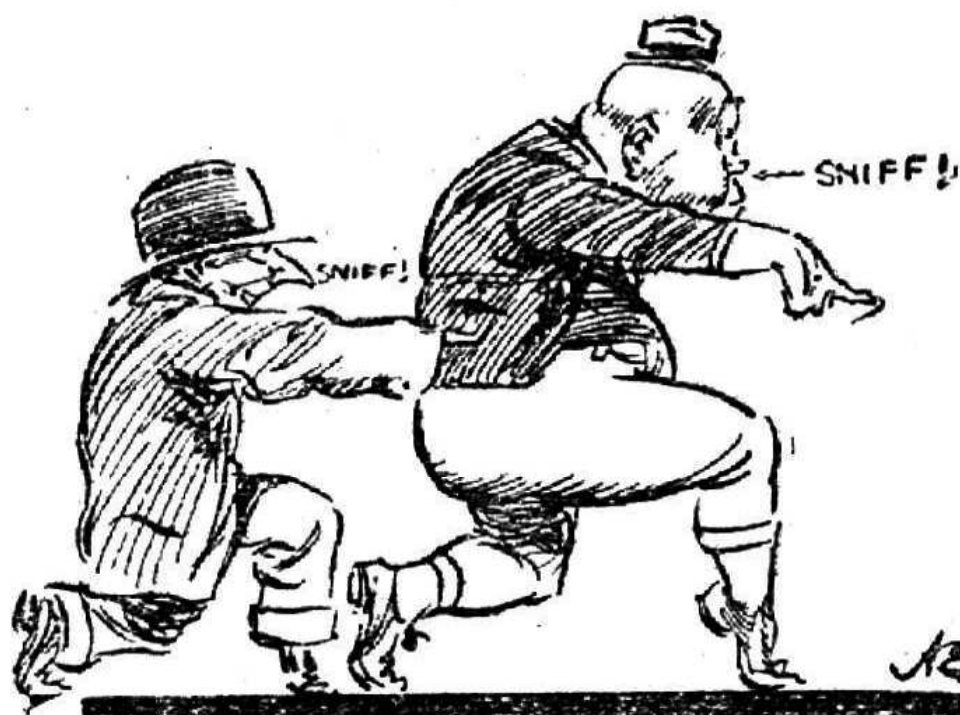
"Locked!" screamed Mr. Midge. "We are doomed, Mr. Podge!"

"Have no fear!" declared Mr. Podge. "Leave this to me! I always succeed! But what is that? Good heavens!"

He pointed with a quivering finger to the waste-paper basket. Slowly crawling out of it was an enormous spider. It was hairy, and covered with spots. The Firm gazed at it, horrified.

"The murderer!" shouted Mr. Podge. "This is what caused Ponder's end!"

Without a second's pause he hurled himself at the spider. And the spider ceased to exist. Mr. Podge's weight simply crushed it to nothing.



Still sniffing they passed out of the room.

CHAPTER IV.

NABBED THROUGH THE NIFF!

Mr. Wilfred Winkle entered the room, pale and trembling.

"Have you found any clues?" he asked hopefully.

"Within five minutes I shall have the murderer!" declared Mr. Podge calmly.

"You are indeed clever!" said Mr. Winkle. "The gentleman was my uncle—avenge him! But what are you doing?"

Mr. Podge was sniffing the air sharply, and Mr. Midge was doing exactly the same. Then, still sniffing, they passed out of the room, went downstairs, and emerged into the street.

Mr. Podge gave a cry of triumph. There, standing against the kerb, was a barrow, filled with bananas. A dark-skinned man was selling the fruit, and he paid no attention to the Firm. He was an Italian, with fiery eyes.

But Mr. Podge clapped a hand upon the man's back.

"I arrest you for the murder of Joshua Ponder!" he cried victoriously.

"Donner und blitzen!" screamed the Italian. "Mein Gott! Collared! Nabbed!"

CHAPTER V.

THE VILLAIN'S END.

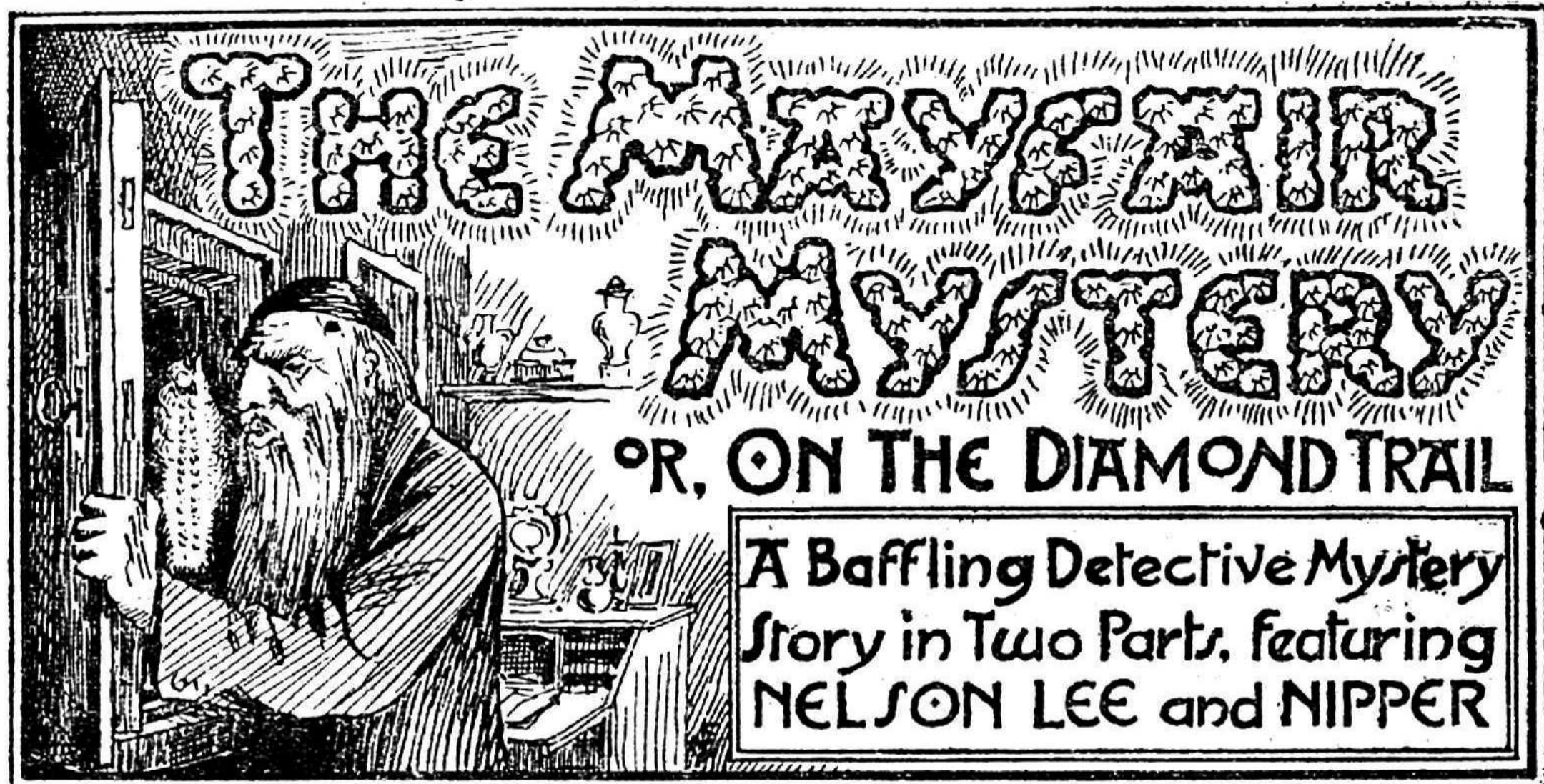
The Italian murderer was tried, sentenced, convicted, and hanged. He went to his last account without repenting.

CHAPTER VI.

MR. PODGE EXPLAINS.

"Quite an easy case!" said Mr. Podge, as he endorsed a huge cheque for Mr. Winkle. "The miscreant confessed before he dropped out of this world. It seems, Mr. Midge, that the Italian had always supplied Mr. Ponder with three bananas for lunch. Daily, he provided the fruit. But on that fatal occasion Mr. Ponder rejected one banana, saying that it was bad. Cursing in Italian curses, the wretch departed, but returned with a spider which he had found in a banana crate. Do I need to explain more?"

"I am a great detective!" he said. "The Italian reeked of garlic. Need I say more?"



Brief Summary of Part One.

During a reception at the Mayfair residence of the Duchess of Saxe, Mr. John Houghton, a private detective, is found shot dead in the duchess's bed-chamber, and a valuable diamond necklace is found to be missing. Nelson Lee is present at the reception, where he becomes acquainted with Lord Deerhurst. The famous Gray's Inn Road detective offers his assistance, and eventually traces the necklace to a pawnbroker's named Lazarus. But Lee is robbed of the necklace by a gang of roughs. Meanwhile, Deerhurst, who has had experience in the Secret Service, is tracking a suspected gang in the East End. Then Nipper is put to watch the pawnbroker's shop. Later, an attempt is made on Lee's life at his lodgings. Deerhurst comes on the scene in the nick of time and saves the detective's life. He tells Lee that Nipper has been caught and is held prisoner by the gang at a house in the East End.

(Now Read On.)

PART TWO.

I.

NIPPER captured by the gang of crooks! He was in the clutches of those scoundrels, and in peril of his life! It was what Nelson Lee had feared, yet the news was none the less a blow to him. But he did not show it. He was cool and collected, and his brain worked swiftly.

"Where is this house?" he asked.

"In Stepney," Lord Deerhurst replied.

"What part?"

"In Manilla Street, near the river. It is a—"

"That will do," Nelson Lee interrupted.

"I only wanted to know how far we had to go."

Stepping to the telephone, he rang up and called for Scotland Yard, and conversed briefly with somebody. Then he took a loaded revolver from a drawer of his desk, and slipped it into his pocket. The drink had pulled Lord Deerhurst together, and he was pacing to and fro, a gleam of anxiety in his eyes.

"What have you fixed up with Inspector Lennard?" he inquired.

"He is coming along at once with eleven plain-clothes men, in four cabs," Nelson Lee answered. "I daresay they will arrive in less than a quarter of an hour. Meanwhile, tell me your story. I had been wondering what had become of you. How did you discover where the gang were living?"

"It has been slow work," Lord Deerhurst replied. "It wasn't until to-night that I ran across Ginger Smith, one of the gang, and shadowed him to a tall, old tenement house in Manilla Street. There was no light burning in any of the halls, so I took the risk of creeping noiselessly upstairs after him to the third floor. He went into a room near the landing, and I listened from outside of the door. I couldn't see who were in the room, but there must have been at least three men, and I could dimly hear their conversation."

"They were speaking of Nipper, you said."

"Yes, Lee; they spoke of your boy first. They had lured him into a trap, it seems, and they were discussing what was to be done with him. One was for killing him, and the others were for keeping him a prisoner until they had found fresh lodgings. At length they started talking of you. It appears they have been afraid you would get on their track, and when I learned that Larry Burke had gone to your chambers a little while before with the intention of shoot-

ling you, I slipped quietly down and out, and picked up a cab and came on here as fast as I could. And I wasn't any too soon."

"No, Deerhurst, you were not. That scoundrel was getting the better of me. What a pity he escaped!"

"Yes, he will go back to the others and report his failure."

It will make no difference if he does," said Nelson Lee. "He must know that he has eluded pursuit. It won't occur to him that he may have been followed from the Gray's Inn Road to Manilla Street."

"That's true," Lord Deerhurst assented.

"Moreover, I want this man Burke to get back before we reach there, so we will be able to arrest the lot of them."

"I hope we do. But I am worried, Lee. I am afraid we shall find the crooks gone, though they will have no reason to be alarmed by Burke's failure to kill you. By heavens, I hope we won't be too late!"

"I think not. Don't worry. You seem to be desperately anxious that the gang should be caught."

"So I am. It would be a heavy blow to me if they were to escape."

"A heavy blow for you, Deerhurst? Why?"

"In—in the interests of society, Lee, of course. I am certain that all the men are concerned in the theft of the necklace, that they are as guilty as Monty Drake; and I want to see them convicted, and sent to penal servitude for long years."

Nelson Lee was slightly puzzled. He could not understand his friend's vehement remarks. Lord Deerhurst sat down, lit a cigarette with nervous fingers, and rose to his feet again. He was in a fever of impatience.

"The police ought to be here," he said.

"They won't be long," Lee replied. "By the way, I haven't told you yet that while you were working in the East End, Inspector Lennard and I recovered and lost the Duchess of Saxe's diamonds."

Lord Deerhurst stared. "Who had them?" he asked.

"A pawnbroker of the name of Lazarus, at Hackney. I suspected him because he used to have dealings with the gang of crooks. He made a confession, stating that he advanced a thousand pounds for the necklace to a man who was a stranger to him. I am pretty sure, though, that the man was a member of the gang, and that Lazarus knew him. Unfortunately, we had not gone far from the shop when four or five masked men attacked us suddenly from a dark doorway, knocked us down, and got away with the jewels. They were certainly some of the crooks. I daresay they saw us enter the pawnbroker's place, and suspected what our object was. They would have recognised me, for I was not disguised."

"Then the gang have the diamonds now?"

"No doubt they have. As yet they wouldn't have tried to dispose of them again, after I had traced and recovered them."

"Well, I'm glad to hear that," said Lord

Deerhurst. "If the necklace is found in their possession it will clearly prove their guilt, and——"

"Here are the police," Nelson Lee interrupted. "Come along."

Four closed cabs had just stopped down in the street, and a few moments later they had swung round and turned into Holborn, with Lord Deerhurst and the detective seated in the leading one with Inspector Lennard.

Nelson Lee, who had spoken only a few words of explanation to the inspector on the telephone, briefly told him the whole story. Inspector Lennard nodded cheerfully.

"It will be a fine thing if we arrest the gang of crooks," he declared. "Monty Drake, the murderer, will be one of them, of course, and I daresay we shall recover the Duchess of Saxe's diamonds again."

Swiftly the four cabs glided through the City and on to the heart of the East End, and off to the left into the district of Stepney, where they stopped in a gloomy and quiet thoroughfare.

The occupants, who numbered fourteen in all, got down here. They had not much farther to go. The chauffeurs having been told to wait for them, they moved rapidly on towards Manilla Street, and as they drew near to it a confused clamour floated to their ears.

Wondering what it meant, they quickened their pace, and on turning the corner, they saw diagonally opposite to them, within fifty or sixty yards, a tall dwelling that was on fire.

"I believe that is the house!" said Lord Deerhurst.

"Good heavens, I hope not!" Nelson Lee exclaimed.

II.

LORD DEERHURST was right. It was the dwelling to which he had traced the crooks. The fire had started at the rear of the basement, and the ruddy glow of the flames could be seen. The entrance door was wide open, and smoke was drifting from the hall.

Two policemen were with difficulty holding back the crowd that had gathered, and on the pavement to right and left were groups of people, men and women and children, who had fled in haste from the house.

Dashing across the street, Nelson Lee and his companions pushed through the throng to the open space, and Inspector Lennard spoke to one of the constables.

"Is everybody out?" he asked.

"Yes, sir, I believe so," the constable replied.

"Have the fire-engines been sent for?"

"They will soon be here, sir. I rang the nearest alarm several minutes ago."

Nelson Lee was talking to one of the women, who told him that she had rooms on the second floor, and that some men who lodged above her had hurried down the

stairs just as she left her apartment. There were four or five of them, she said, and she was sure they hadn't a boy with them.

Lee was pale with apprehension. He had no doubt that Nipper was on the third floor, either dead or a prisoner.

"My boy is up there, Deerhurst," he said, "and I'm going after him. Will you come with me?"

"Certainly I will," Lord Deerhurst readily assented.

"I'll come, too," Inspector Lennard declared.

"No, you stay here," Nelson Lee replied.

"Two of us will be sufficient. I think we can get through all right, for the smoke isn't very dense."

With that, in spite of the remonstrances of the policemen, he darted into the burning dwelling, followed by Lord Deerhurst. They felt, rather than groped, their way to the lower staircase. Up they went in darkness, now grasping the wall, and now clutching the banister; and not until they had reached the first floor did they breathe, when they inhaled pungent wisps of smoke that set them coughing.

"By Jove, that nearly choked me!" gasped Lord Deerhurst.

"It won't be so bad above," Nelson Lee replied. "I think not."

They continued the ascent, still feeling their way, and breathing once or twice through handkerchiefs which they held to their faces.

And at last they came to the third floor, where they were relieved to find the smoke less dense. They paused on the landing, and Lee took an electric-torch from his pocket and flashed it on.

"Here we are," he panted. "Where is the door?"

"There it is," Lord Deerhurst said huskily. "The second on your left. That's where I stood listening."

"It is locked, and those infamous scoundrels have taken the key with them, leaving Nipper to his fate!"

"We must break in, Lee. Be quick."

They heard the clanging of fire-engines as they bore their weight against the door. At the second attempt they wrenched it from its fastenings and sprang into a sitting-room that was comfortably furnished. There was nobody here, but at one end of the room was another door.

Nelson Lee dashed to it, and, finding it unlocked, he flung it open, and he and his companion entered a bedroom, where the flare from the torch revealed a double bed and a couple of cots.

"Ah, there he is!" Lord Deerhurst exclaimed.

On one of the cots, bound and gagged, lay Nipper. He was conscious, and when the cords had been cut from his wrists and ankles, and the bandage torn from his mouth, he rose to his feet without assistance.

"I'm all right," he said, as he clasped his master's hand. "They didn't do me any harm. My word, guv'nor, how glad I was

to see you! I never dreamed of your coming. I knew the building was on fire, and I thought I should be burnt to death. It was those crooks who——"

"It's no time to talk of that, my boy," Nelson Lee broke in. "How are we to get out of the house? That is the question."

"I'm afraid we can't leave as we came," said Lord Deerhurst. "Wait, and I'll see."

He hastened into the adjoining room, and when he returned to the bedchamber, shortly afterwards, he shut the communicating door.

"The smoke is pouring up faster and thicker," he said. "The hall is black with it. It is impossible for us to go down the stairs."

"And, on the other hand, if we stay where we are," Nelson Lee quietly answered, "we shall be suffocated before the flames can be extinguished."

Were they indeed in a death-trap? They gazed silently at one another for a moment. From Manilla Street, far below, rang the shrill voices of the crowd, the shouting of constables, the grind of wheels, and the clatter of hoofs.

The sound of shattered glass, and the violent thud of water bursting from the nozzle of a hose, showed that the firemen had got to work at last. But they had only begun, and the flames must have made considerable headway by now.

"Look at that, guv'nor," Nipper bade.

From every crevice of the floor, and from under the door that led to the sitting-room, smoke was curling thickly, in waves that dimmed the light of the electric-torch. Lord Deerhurst pointed to a window that was at the end of the bedchamber.

"There are enough sheets here to make a long rope, Lee," he said; "if they were torn to strips and tied together."

Nelson Lee shook his head. He knew there would be no time for that. He stepped to the window, and, raising the sash, he looked out. He called the others to him, and they were cheered by what they saw.

They were at the rear of the tenement-house, and almost directly beneath them a stout gutter-pipe, supported by brackets, ran down the wall to the flat roof of another building of some kind that was of a much lower height.

"Here is a means of escape for us," said Nelson Lee, "and a safe one, I believe. The pipe looks as if it was comparatively new. You go first, Nipper," he added, "and mind you are careful."

"Right-o, guv'nor. It will be as easy for me as for a cat."

With that, swinging himself out of the window, the lad worked his way along the edge of the sill and reaching for the gutter-pipe, he got a grip of it with both hands.

He was in a perilous position, hanging in space, but as he had often done the same thing before he was not in the least nervous.

The frail support did not even crack with his weight. He went steadily and nimbly down, clutching the pipe with hands and

knees, and pressing his toes against the rough surface of the wall, until he landed on the top of the building below.

"All right, guv'nor!" he called.

Lord Deerhurst went next, at the detective's bidding, and by the time he had safely accomplished his descent the smoke was so thick in the bedchamber that Nelson Lee felt as if he was choking.

But the fresh air revived him when he had lowered himself from the window and grasped the pipe, and a few moments later he joined his companions.

They hurried over to the opposite side of the flat roof, and, as they had expected, they found another gutter-pipe stretching beneath them. One by one they climbed down by it to a narrow alley, where they bore to the right, and emerged in a street that was a continuation of the one in which they had left the cabs.

Forty yards or so brought them to Manilla Street, and they stopped at the corner of it. A number of yards to their right was the tenement house, with smoke pouring from every window. Several constables were keeping the people back, and firemen were pouring water into the basement. They must have nearly extinguished the flames, for not a glimmer of light could be seen.

Lord Deerhurst went to fetch the inspector, and Nelson Lee and the lad, having crossed Manilla Street, walked along the side thoroughfare until they came to where the four cabs were waiting; and shortly afterwards Lord Deerhurst arrived with Inspector Lennard and his Scotland Yard men, who were greatly relieved by the good news they had heard.

"Trust you to get out of a scrape, Lee!" exclaimed the inspector. "We had given you up for lost. We were sure you and his lordship had been suffocated by the smoke. So you found and rescued Nipper! Those scoundrels left him helpless?"

"Yes, they abandoned him to his fate," said Nelson Lee. "He was bound and gagged on a bed."

"How did he get into trouble? Has he told you?"

"No, Leonard, I haven't heard yet. It was due to carelessness, I imagine, that the lad——"

"It wasn't anything of the sort," Nipper indignantly interrupted. "I wasn't a bit careless. While I was on duty to-night, after dark, two men who looked like suspicious characters slipped furtively into Solomon Lazarus' shop. I was pretty sure that they were members of the gang of crooks, and when they came out, a quarter of an hour later, I shadowed them from Hackney to Manilla Street on foot. They must have suspected that they were being followed, but I don't see how, guv'nor. They entered the tenement-house, and I waited for a little while. Then I crept through the open doorway into the hall, and at the same instant the two men jumped on



Nipper went steadily and nimbly down, clutching the pipe with hands and knees.

me, and one of them hit me a stunning blow."

The lad paused.

"I was half-dazed," he continued, "and while the men were carrying me upstairs they pressed to my face a wet cloth that smelt of chloroform. My senses swam, and I knew nothing more until I found myself lying bound and gagged on the bed. There was a lot of noise in the street, and when smoke drifted into the room, and I heard the clanging of a gong, I was sure the house was on fire. And so it was."

"The crooks must have discovered that you were after them, and they set a trap for you in the dark hall," said Nelson Lee. "That you fell into it was not your fault. And now tell me if you heard any of the conversation while the two men were with Solomon Lazarus?"

"Not a word," Nipper answered. "I didn't venture as far as the shop. I waited near the mouth of the court."

"Weren't the crooks talking when they came out to the street?"

"They were grumbling to each other, guv'—"

nor. That's what it sounded like to me. I wasn't close to them."

Nelson Lee smiled.

"Grumbling?" he repeated. "I dare say they were, and I can guess why. They took the diamond necklace to the old Jew, and asked him to send it to the Continent to be sold, and to meanwhile advance them more money on it. And Solomon Lazarus refused, very naturally, since Inspector Lennard and I had forced him to give up the jewels not long before. He was probably afraid that I was keeping him under surveillance, and told the men so. And, by the way, my boy, that would account for the crooks suspecting that somebody might have followed them from Hackney."

There was a gleam of perplexity in Lord Deerhurst's eyes.

"Then you believe, Lee, that the gang still have the necklace?" he said.

"I don't doubt that they have," Nelson Lee replied. "They certainly did not leave it with Lazarus. And now let us be off, Lennard," he added. "There is nothing more to be done to-night."

The whole party got into the cabs, which swung round, and glided in the direction of the Commercial Road. Nelson Lee and Nipper were in the leading one, with Lord Deerhurst and the inspector.

Nipper having been told of the daring attempt on his master's life, and of the information Lord Deerhurst had brought to the Gray's Inn Road, the situation was discussed.

All were agreed that by now Monty Drake and his accomplices had disappeared from Stepney, and would seek a fresh hiding-place in some other part of the East End. It was a logical conclusion. It was to be presumed that, knowing the firemen would be the first to enter the tenement-house after the flames had been extinguished, the crooks would have been afraid that their prisoner would be found suffocated in one of the rooms they had occupied, or that Lee and Lord Deerhurst had succeeded in escaping with the lad from the rear of the building, and that therefore they would not dare to return to their lodgings.

"If it hadn't been for that fire the gang would have been arrested to-night," Lord Deerhurst said bitterly. "It is a great disappointment to me. We'll get them yet, though. I'll go back to the East End to-morrow, in disguise, and try to get on the track of the crooks again."

"A number of my men will be doing the same," declared Inspector Lennard. "We'll

see who succeeds first, your lordship. And what about you, Lee?" he continued.

Nelson Lee hesitated for a moment.

"I shall have Nipper assist in the search," he replied. "As for myself, I will pay a visit to Solomon Lazarus to-morrow. I am certain he hasn't got the diamond necklace, but I would like to know what conversation he had with the two men who called at his shop to-night. And after that I shall probably await developments, Lennard, while I give my attention to one or two obscure points in this case."

III.

FOR several days, as keen as hounds, Lord Deerhurst and Nipper, and some of Inspector Lennard's best sleuths, scoured the East End for the gang of crooks, trying in vain to pick up the lost scent. Meanwhile, on the morning after the fire, Nelson Lee had paid a visit to the pawnbroker at Hackney, and had been informed that the two men whom Nipper had shadowed from there to Stepney had brought the diamond necklace to Solomon Lazarus, that they had asked for a further advance of five hundred pounds on it, and that the pawnbroker had stubbornly refused to have anything more to do with the jewel. That Lazarus did not know who the men were—as he declared—was not to be credited.

But Lee was satisfied that his other statements were true, and he departed with the cheering conviction that the Duchess of Saxe's diamonds were still in the possession of the crooks.

Since then he had not taken any part in the search, which was still going on. As was his habit when he was at leisure, he had tramped for miles about London, in out-of-the-way nooks and corners; and he had sat for long hours in his chambers, smoking pipe after pipe, while he brooded over certain matters.

What he had told Inspector Lennard on the night after the fire, that there were one or two obscure points in the case to which he meant to give his attention, was literally correct. And it was those points, which appealed to him from a deductive basis, he had been pondering over. They baffled him, and yet he was disposed to think that there was something sinister behind them.

"It is no use puzzling my brains any longer," he reflected early one evening, as he was sitting by the fire waiting for supper. "I dare say I am wrong in attributing importance to such trivial things. At all events, I would be better employed in helping in the search for the crooks."

On a table at his elbow was a copy of an evening paper he had brought in with him. He had not looked at it yet. He picked it up, and, glancing at the front page, his attention was drawn at once to a small paragraph. It ran as follows:

"No clue to the whereabouts of Mr. Hil-

ANSWERS
EVERY MONDAY—PRICE 2:

bert Vane, who has been missing for a considerable time, has yet been discovered, nor have any inquiries been made regarding him by friends or relatives. The police do not hold the opinion that he may have committed suicide, or met with foul play, as in either event his body should have been found by now."

It was a mysterious affair. A week or more ago a fuller account of it had been in the newspapers, and Nelson Lee had read it. At that time Mr. Hilbert Vane, who lived in a set of expensive chambers in Carlos Mansions, just off Mount Street, Mayfair, had been missing for a couple of days.

He was a gentleman of about thirty-three, of independent means, and he moved in the best circles of Society. He had always been of a cheerful disposition, and apparently had no worries of any kind.

He had gone from his chambers one night, in evening-dress, to a dance at the Savoy Hotel, where he had been in his usual good spirits, and had danced with some acquaintances. He had left the hotel alone between one and two o'clock, and since then he had not been seen or heard of.

It was to be presumed that he would have picked up a cab to return to Carlos Mansions, but the inquiries made of chauffeurs had been futile.

Nelson Lee had been slightly acquainted with the missing man. He had been introduced to him by Lord Deerhurst on one occasion, and he had subsequently seen him at receptions in the West End.

He had not heretofore given much thought to the matter, but now, having read this small paragraph, his interest was keenly roused. An amazing deduction, such as only his shrewd and analytical brain was capable of grasping, had occurred to him.

It had flashed to his mind, of a sudden, that there might be a connecting link between the disappearance of Hilbert Vane and the obscure points in the case of the stolen diamonds.

Rising from his chair, he refilled his pipe, and paced the floor for a little while, his brows furrowed with conjecture.

"I must look into this," he said to himself. "I certainly shall, and without delay."

Less than an hour later Nelson Lee left the house, and took a cab to Carlos Mansions, where he knew a porter of the name of Jephson. He had a talk with him, and when he came away he had gleaned some information about the missing gentleman. He was an intimate friend of Lord Deerhurst, but apparently he had no other friends, and no relatives, for nobody had called on him, and he had never received any letters. As for the night of his disappearance, it was the second night after the theft of the Duchess of Saxe's diamond necklace.

IV.

It was not much that Nelson Lee had learned from Jephson, yet he was satisfied that he had not had his trouble for nothing. He was inclined to feel that his slender theory, almost incredible though it was, had been strengthened by the information he had gleaned at Carlos Mansions.

Having turned into Mount Street, and crossed to the opposite side of it, he stopped in front of the residence of Lord Deerhurst, and rang the bell, on the vague chance that the young nobleman might be at home.

He was right. The servant who opened the door stated that her master was in, and led the visitor straight to a room at the rear of the dwelling.

Lord Deerhurst, who was seated in a lounge-chair by a blazing fire, in a smoking-jacket and slippers, jumped up and shook hands with the detective.

"I am glad to see you, Lee!" he exclaimed. "I was just thinking of you. How did you know I was at home?"

"I didn't know it," Nelson Lee replied. "I thought possibly you might be, though, and as I happened to be in the neighbourhood, I called."

"You have been taking one of your tramps about London, I suppose?"

"Yes, as I had nothing else to do."

"Well, sit down, and we'll have a chat. I am bored with myself."

Nelson Lee dropped into a chair, and glanced around him.

It was a charming room he was in. Two silver lamps glowed under shades of delicate mauve. An old French cabinet was filled with rare spirits and liqueurs, and on an onyx table was a box of huge cigars, labelled Carolina Coronas, which could not have cost less than forty pounds a hundred.

Lord Deerhurst was smoking one himself, and he pushed the box towards the detective.

"Try these," he said. "You'll like them."

They were silent for a moment. Nelson Lee lit his fragrant Havana, and Lord Deerhurst filled a glass from a crystal decanter, and poured a few drops of soda into it.

"A snug little room, this, isn't it?" he continued. "The old stuff belonged to my father. It was only a whim that brought me home this evening. Three or four days of slumming it, dressed like a tramp, and having my meals at cheap and nasty eating-shops, mingling with all sorts and conditions of people, got me fed-up. I longed for a taste of luxury, for decent food, and a bed with clean sheets on it. And here I am. But only for the night. I'm going back to the East End again in the morning. I dare say your boy, Nipper, and Inspector Lennard's men are still working there."

"Yes, and without success, so far," said Nelson Lee.

"They are wasting their time," Lord Deerhurst replied. "I have the advantage of



Lord Deerhurst threw open a door that led to a garden at the back of the house, and both men heard the rapid patter of footsteps from outside.

them. Through the experience I got when I was doing work in the slums for the Secret Service, and the acquaintances I made, I shall run the crooks to earth in the end."

"Have you had any luck as yet?"

"I have a clue, Lee. From what I learned yesterday, by keeping my ears open while I was in a public-house in the Whitechapel Road, I have good reason to believe that the gang are lodging somewhere in Wapping. They are lying low, but I expect to find them shortly. Then I will send you a wire, or ring you up on the telephone."

"The sooner they are caught the better, Deerhurst, for they have the diamond necklace."

"Have they? I thought they might have taken it back to Solomon Lazarus."

"No, I went to see Lazarus, and he told me that two men—they were the same who were shadowed to Manilla Street by Nipper—had brought the diamonds to him again, and he refused to have anything to do with them. I am certain that he spoke the truth. He would have been afraid to lie to me."

The subject was dropped. Leaning back in his chair, Nelson Lee puffed at his cigar, and absently watched the smoke wreathing up to the ceiling.

"By the way, what do you think of the mysterious case of disappearance?" he remarked, in a careless tone.

Lord Deerhurst looked up sharply.

"What do you mean?" he asked.

"I am referring to your friend Mr. Hilbert

Vane," said Lee.

"You will remember that you introduced him to me once. He had chambers in Carlos Mansions yonder, and a week or so ago he went to a dance at the Savoy. He left the hotel at an early hour of the morning, in evening-dress, and hasn't been seen or heard of since."

"He was absolutely a queer sort of chap," Lord Deerhurst murmured, his gaze bent on the detective. "His people lived in Yorkshire, I believe. I was at Eton and Oxford with him, and after we left the 'Varsity I didn't see him again until several years ago, when I ran across him in Piccadilly. He had a flat in the West End. He told

me his parents were dead, and he had inherited a decent income, and at my suggestion he took a set of chambers in Carlos Mansions. Of late he seemed to have some worry on his mind, and it is my opinion that he went a bit wrong in the head after the dance at the Savoy, wandered down to the Embankment, and threw himself into the river."

"And what of his body?"

"It was carried straight out to sea, as a strong ebb-tide was flowing at the time."

"It was you who introduced Hilbert Vane into Society, I think?"

"I did, Lee. I introduced him to several of the right kind of people, and he was soon taken up. I liked the fellow, and was very sorry to hear of his mysterious disappearance. He may turn up alive, but I greatly doubt if—"

"Hark!" Nelson Lee interrupted. "What's that?"

It was a shout from somewhere close by, and the next instant there was a shrill noise, a blast from a police-whistle. Springing to his feet, Lord Deerhurst threw open a door that led to a garden at the back of the dwelling; and as he and Lee stood there they heard a second shout, and the rapid, heavy patter of footsteps from the other side of a wall that was at the bottom of the garden.

The steps faded to silence. Once more the whistle shrilled, from the direction of Mount Street, and silence fell again.

"A constable has been chasing a thief, I imagine," said Nelson Lee.

"No doubt," Lord Deerhurst assented. "I wonder if he has caught him?"

Lord Deerhurst shut and fastened the door, and then he and the detective hastened through the house to the front door, and stepped out to the porch.

All was quiet, but a policeman was approaching to the left, and a few seconds later he stopped at the doorway.

"Good-evening, my lord," he said, touching his helmet. "I suppose you heard me blowing my whistle."

"Yes, Taylor, we did," Lord Deerhurst replied. "What did it mean?"

"There was a burglar in your garden," said the constable.

"In my garden?"

"He wasn't exactly in, my lord. He would have been if it hadn't been for me, though. I saw him slip into the mouth of the narrow passage yonder that runs at the rear of the houses, and I crept after him as quietly as I could. It was so dark that I didn't think he would see me, but just as he had climbed to the top of your garden wall he got a glimpse of me, and dropped down. He took to his heels, and I took after him, blowing my whistle. I chased him for some little distance, and lost sight of him. There were none of my mates in the neighbourhood, else the fellow might have been caught."

"What was he like, Taylor?"

"He was a tall man, and he appeared to be well dressed. That's all I can tell you."

"Well, I dare say he won't come back."

"Not to-night, my lord. You can be sure of that."

The constable, who had not recognised Lee in the dim light, pocketed a tip that was given to him, touched his helmet again, and moved on.

Lord Deerhurst and the detective returned to the hall, and Nelson Lee took his hat and overcoat from the stand, and put them on.

"It is a rather curious affair," he said, in a puzzled tone. "Perhaps the gang of crooks have learned that it was you who traced them to Stepney on the night of the fire, and this man was one of them."

Lord Deerhurst gave a start, and changed colour.

"I can't think so," he declared. "The gang could not have discovered that I was helping in the search for them. If the fellow was one of the crooks, it was you he was after, not me. He followed you here from the Gray's Inn Road, hoping to get a chance of killing you. That is what I believe."

Nelson Lee nodded vaguely.

"Perhaps you are right," he said. "The gang are certainly very anxious to be rid of me. I'm not afraid of them, however. I am always vigilant, and always armed. I'll be off now," he added. "Get on with your task in the East End, Deerhurst, and let me know promptly if you succeed. Good-night!"

V.

A COUPLE of days had passed since the detective had called at Carlos Mansions to inquire about Hilbert Vane, and to-day, tired of his long and futile search in the East End, Nipper had come home late in the afternoon, with the intention of staying until the morrow.

It was a dark night, and the lamps in Grey's Inn Road glowed like opals through a pale mist. Supper was over. The lad was comfortably settled on a couch, and Lee, a pipe in his mouth, was seated by a writing-table.

On the table were an open letter and an evening paper, on the front page of which was a small paragraph that had been marked with a blue pencil. The letter was from Lord Deerhurst, who had written it at his residence in Mount Street. It had been delivered by a messenger half an hour ago, and it ran thus:

"My dear Lee,—I have hurried home from the East End, to keep an important engagement, immediately after locating the gang of crooks. They are at the Blue Boar, a public-house in the Wapping High Street, on the river side. There can be no doubt of it. The information I got is reliable. I telephoned at once to Scotland Yard, and I hadn't time to stop at your place, but I dare say that by now Inspector Lennard and some of his men have arrested the gang. I presume you will hear from the inspector to-night, and I will call on you in the morning.—Hastily yours,

"DEERHURST."

The paragraph in the newspaper was as follows:

"Sir Francis Trent, the chief of the Foreign Office, is giving a reception to-night at his residence in Curzon Street, in honour of the Sultan of Panjang, whose native state has just become a British protectorate. The sultan is immensely wealthy, and it is expected that he will wear the famous pink moonstone, of priceless value, which he displays only on state occasions. Numerous guests have been invited to meet him."

Nipper was in the dark, as he had expressed it. Only Nelson Lee knew—or believed he knew—what link there was between the letter and the paragraph. He had carefully considered them, and had decided on a bold step, of which he had not yet spoken to his young assistant.

"Lord Deerhurst ought to have telephoned to you, instead of to the police," said the lad, after a pause.

"No, not at all," replied Lee, who was still in an absent mood. "He knew that more prompt action would be taken if he first informed Scotland Yard of his discovery."

"I don't see why you are so interested in that paragraph in the paper. It can't be

merely because you think Lord Deerhurst is going to Sir Francis Trent's reception."

"No. There is a stronger reason."

"Well, guv'nor, I wonder what luck Inspector Lennard and his men have had."

"I don't suppose we shall have to wait much longer, my boy. The inspector has had ample time to go to the East End and return to Scotland Yard. He will either ring me up, or he will come with the news. It is past nine o'clock now, and at any minute

Nelson Lee paused.

"Here he is now, I dare say," he remarked.

A cab had just been heard to stop below. The hall-door was opened and shut, and footsteps ascended the stairs; there was a rap, and Inspector Lennard walked into the consulting-room.

"Hallo, Lee!" he exclaimed. "I am so glad to find you at home. Have you heard from Lord Deerhurst?"

"Yes; he sent me a note from Mount Street," Nelson Lee replied, "saying he located the gang of crooks, and had informed you by telephone."

"That's quite right," the inspector declared. "His lordship's information was correct. I hastened to the public-house at Wapping at once, with a dozen of my men, and we found the gang of crooks there. They were in an upper room, having supper, and we took them by surprise, and arrested them after a brief struggle."

"You got all of them?"

"Yes, every one. We caught the lot, Lee. There were five of them in all, the old gang. Monty Drake and the Bantam, Ginger Smith and Larry Burke, and Pat Mullingar."

"And what of the Duchess of Saxe's diamond necklace, Lennard?"

"We discovered it in an adjoining bed-chamber. It was concealed under a mattress."

"That was fortunate," said Nelson Lee. "You have done a good night's work. And where are your prisoners?"

"We brought them to Scotland Yard for the present," Inspector Lennard replied.

"Did Lord Deerhurst tell you on the telephone that Drake was with the gang?"

"No; he seemed to be under the impression that there were only four of them. He didn't mention Drake."

"Have the men made any statements, Lennard?"

"No; I haven't been able to get anything out of them. They are in a sullen and vindictive mood. By the way, though, Monty Drake wishes to see you."

"He said that, did he?"

"Yes, and he was very earnest about it. He begged me to bring you to Scotland Yard as soon as I could. He wants to tell you something before eleven o'clock to-night, something urgent. But I have no idea what it is."

"Indeed? Perhaps I can guess what, Lennard."

As Nelson Lee spoke he smiled, and softly rubbed his hands together. He appeared to be pleased, and so he was; for he had carried his deductions so far, and had so much faith in them, that he was not surprised to hear that Monty Drake urgently wished to see him to-night, and as soon as possible.

"Very well," he said, to the inspector. "Nipper and I will drive down to Scotland Yard with you, and I will have a talk with Drake. And then, Lennard," he added, "the three of us will go on to Lord Deerhurst's residence."

"To tell him of the capture of the gang?" asked the inspector.

Nelson Lee shrugged his shoulders.

"I shall have more than that to say to him," he replied, "unless I am very greatly mistaken."

VI.

AT half-past eleven o'clock that night Nelson Lee and Inspector Lennard, and Nipper, got out of a cab at the top of Berkeley Square, and walked along Mount Street to the residence of Lord Deerhurst.

A maid-servant answered the rap at the door, and, knowing who the detective was, she admitted the late visitors to the house. At Nelson Lee's bidding, she fetched two other servants, and when he had held a short conversation with the three of them, they went quietly upstairs.

Lee and his companions then entered the library, which was in darkness; and a few seconds later they were concealed behind a heavy curtain, in a deep alcove that was at one end of the room, and held a figure in ancient armour.

Inspector Lennard and the lad were utterly bewildered. They had no idea why they were hiding here, and they wanted to know. But Nelson Lee would not enlighten them.

"You are going to have a sensational surprise, I am pretty sure," he said. "That is all I will tell you now."

The time dragged monotonously. Cabs and cars rolled by at frequent intervals, and now and again a constable passed, flashing his lantern. The hour of twelve struck from a clock somewhere in the neighbourhood, and at length, when another half-hour had elapsed, a cab stopped outside.

"Here he is!" murmured Lee.

The cab went throbbing away, and the creaking of a latch-key was heard. The front door swung open, and clicked shut. Footsteps came along the hall, and paused. The door of the library opened, and the dusky figure of a man entered the room, visible to the hidden watchers. The next instant the electric-light was switched on, and there was Lord Deerhurst, in evening-dress. He drew from his pocket a large, oval-shaped jewel, of a milky-white colour,

tinged with pink; and as he was holding it in the palm of his hand, gazing at it in rapture, Nelson Lee slipped out from behind the curtain, followed by Nipper and the inspector.

"We've got you," said Lee. "Don't try to resist!"

Lord Deerhurst uttered a startled exclamation, and let the jewel drop. And then, realising that he was hopelessly trapped, by a strong effort he retained his self-possession, and stood looking calmly and haughtily at his captors.

Only the pallor of his face and the glitter in his eyes showed what a staggering shock he had received.

"I must admit that this is a total surprise to me," he said.

"I thought I was clever, Lee, but I am no match for you. I perceive you have been working in the dark."

"Not entirely in the dark," Nelson Lee replied, in a tone of irony. "I had the benefit of several clues which you dropped, and led me to form certain deductions."

"Clues? What were they?"

"I don't care to speak of them at present, my lord."

With that, Lee picked up the jewel.

"This is the Sultan of Panjang's moonstone, of course?" he said.

"It is," Lord Deerhurst assented.

"How did you contrive to get it?"

"By simple sleight of hand, as the sultan was passing out of Sir Francis Trent's residence to get into his car."

"It is not the first theft of the kind you have committed. You have been a professional crook for years, Deerhurst."

"I have been. I am a victim of fate."

Inspector Lennard and the lad, who were more than startled by the knowledge that the young nobleman was a thief, ran their hands over him, and took from a hip-pocket a loaded revolver.

Then the inspector quickly and deftly jerked his wrists together, and snapped a pair of fetters around them, and at the touch of the cold steel Lord Deerhurst flushed with indignation.

"You might have spared me this indignity," he said bitterly, to Lee.

"I am sorry," Nelson Lee coldly replied.

"I dare not run the risk of giving you a chance to escape."



While he was gazing in rapture at the large oval-shaped stone, Nelson Lee slipped out from behind the curtain, followed by Nipper and the inspector.

"Is it so serious as that? All you can prove against me is the theft of the Sultan of Panjang's moonstone."

"Indeed? What of the Duchess of Saxé's diamond necklace?"

"You are talking absurdly, my dear Lee. You know you are."

"I know that you stole the diamonds. Moreover, Deerhurst, you will be charged with the wilful murder of John Houghton, the private detective."

"Charged with—with murder——"

Lord Deerhurst's voice choked. There was fear in his eyes now—fear and consternation, and conjecture. Nelson Lee tapped him on the shoulder.

"Come, Deerhurst," he bade. "We are going to Scotland Yard now, and you will probably appear at Bow Street to-morrow. I haven't told you yet that the gang of crooks were all arrested at Wapping this evening," he added. "But there were five of them, not four."

Lord Deerhurst stared blankly.

"Five of them?" he repeated, as he was led from the room. "Five? So that's how I was trapped! By heavens, I've had my suspicions, and they were right!"

VII.

IN an upper room of the big building on the Embankment Inspector Lennard was seated at his desk, and Nelson Lee and Nipper were sitting on a bench, with Lord Deerhurst between them. They

were waiting there, and they knew, all of them, that there was shortly to be a very sensational scene.

"Here he comes, guv'nor!" the lad whispered, at length.

Footsteps were heard approaching. The door was opened, and two constables entered the room with Monty Drake, who was handcuffed. He moved forward, a savage glitter in his eyes, and at sight of him Lord Deerhurst gave a quick start. He had been prepared for this, yet he grew very pale, and for an instant showed intense agitation.

"There he is!" Monty Drake loudly declared, pointing to his fellow-prisoner. "There's Pug Maxley!"

Pug Maxley! So Lord Deerhurst was the former leader of the gang of crooks, the man who was believed to have been killed abroad! Inspector Lennard and Nipper glanced at each other in stupefaction.

"As for the theft of the Duchess of Saxe's diamond necklace, that was done between us. I was waiting in the garden beneath the bedchamber, and after Deerhurst had shot the detective, Houghton, who had interrupted him at his work, he threw the jewel-case to me, and slipped downstairs, and was in the ballroom for several minutes before the crime was discovered. The next day I took the necklace to Solomon Lazarus, at his shop at Hackney, and raised some money on it. Mr. Lee, they thought you might suspect that Solomon Lazarus had it; so they shadowed you to his place one evening, and while you were on your way back they attacked you, and robbed you of the jewels. It was afterwards that we settled on our plans. I happened to know that Lord Deerhurst was going to-night to the Foreign Minister's reception to steal the Sultan of Panjang's pink moonstone, and, if we hadn't been arrested at Wapping, we should have gone to his residence in Mount Street, waited for him to return, taken the moonstone, and killed him for his treachery, and he would have richly deserved it."

Lord Deerhurst had listened calmly to Monty Drake, with scarcely a sign of emotion, though he knew he was in the shadow of the gallows.

"I have nothing to deny," he said, with a shrug of the shoulders. "Fate has been against me, and you have brought my career to an end. But I will tell you this. I will never be hanged."

He rose from the bench as the constables returned, and, with a defiant glance at the detective, he was led away. The door swung shut behind him, and Nelson Lee turned to the inspector.

"It has been a very interesting case, and a mysterious one," he said. "Various incidents, however, enabled me to solve the mystery. Link by link I was led to suspect that Lord Deerhurst's anxiety to assist me, and have the gang arrested, was due to the fact that he was Pug Maxley, the former leader of them; that his friend Hilbert Vane was Monty Drake, and that the two of them

were working together; that Deerhurst had tried to murder Monty Drake because he mistrusted him, and that he was not aware that Drake had survived, and had gone back to the old gang. And I was also convinced that it was Lord Deerhurst's intention to attend Sir Francis Trent's reception to-night, and attempt to steal the Sultan of Panjang's famous moonstone. I was right in every respect, as you have learned from Monty Drake's lips. I will drop in to-morrow, Lennard, and fully explain to you how I arrived at my deductions."

Nelson Lee paused, and glanced at his watch.

"Come along, Nipper," he added. "It is time we were going home to bed."

There was a veiled meaning in the words uttered by Lord Deerhurst when he left the room at Scotland Yard, for the next morning he was found dead in his cell. He had died of a swift and powerful poison, which must have been concealed on his person, and had been overlooked by the constable who searched him.

It only remains to be said that the Duchess of Saxe and the Sultan of Panjang, in gratitude for the restoration of their valuable jewels, forced upon Nelson Lee substantial rewards, which he shared with Inspector Lennard and his men; and that Monty Drake and his accomplices were sent back to penal servitude for their connection with the stolen diamonds, Drake receiving a much heavier sentence than the others.

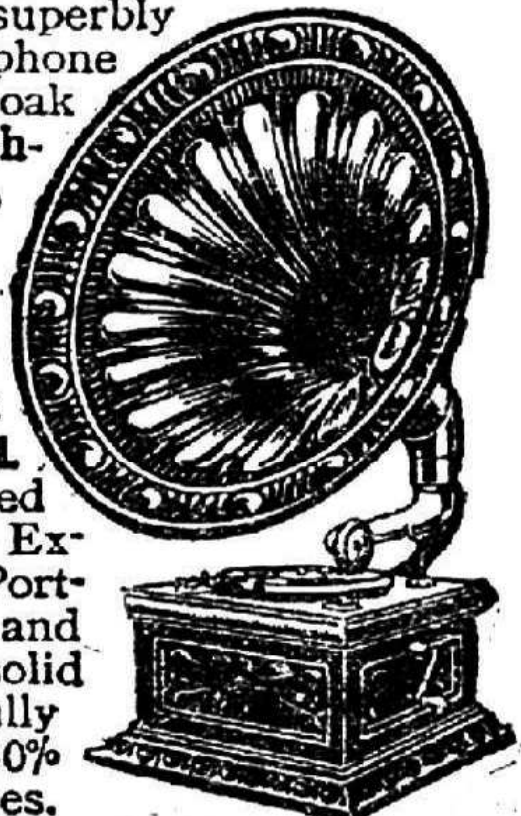
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