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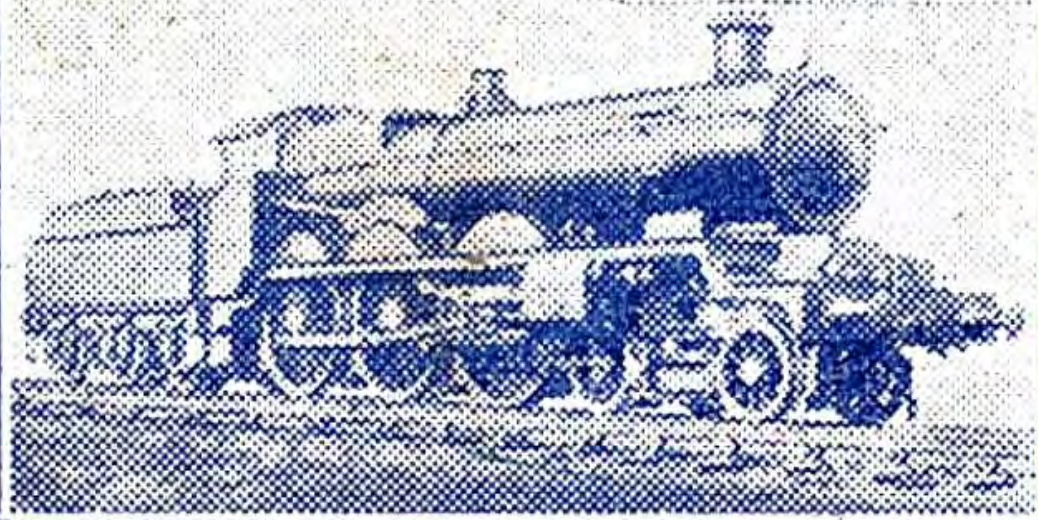


A Stirring Incident from this week's St. Frank's story:—

THE HOUSE OF A THOUSAND EYES!

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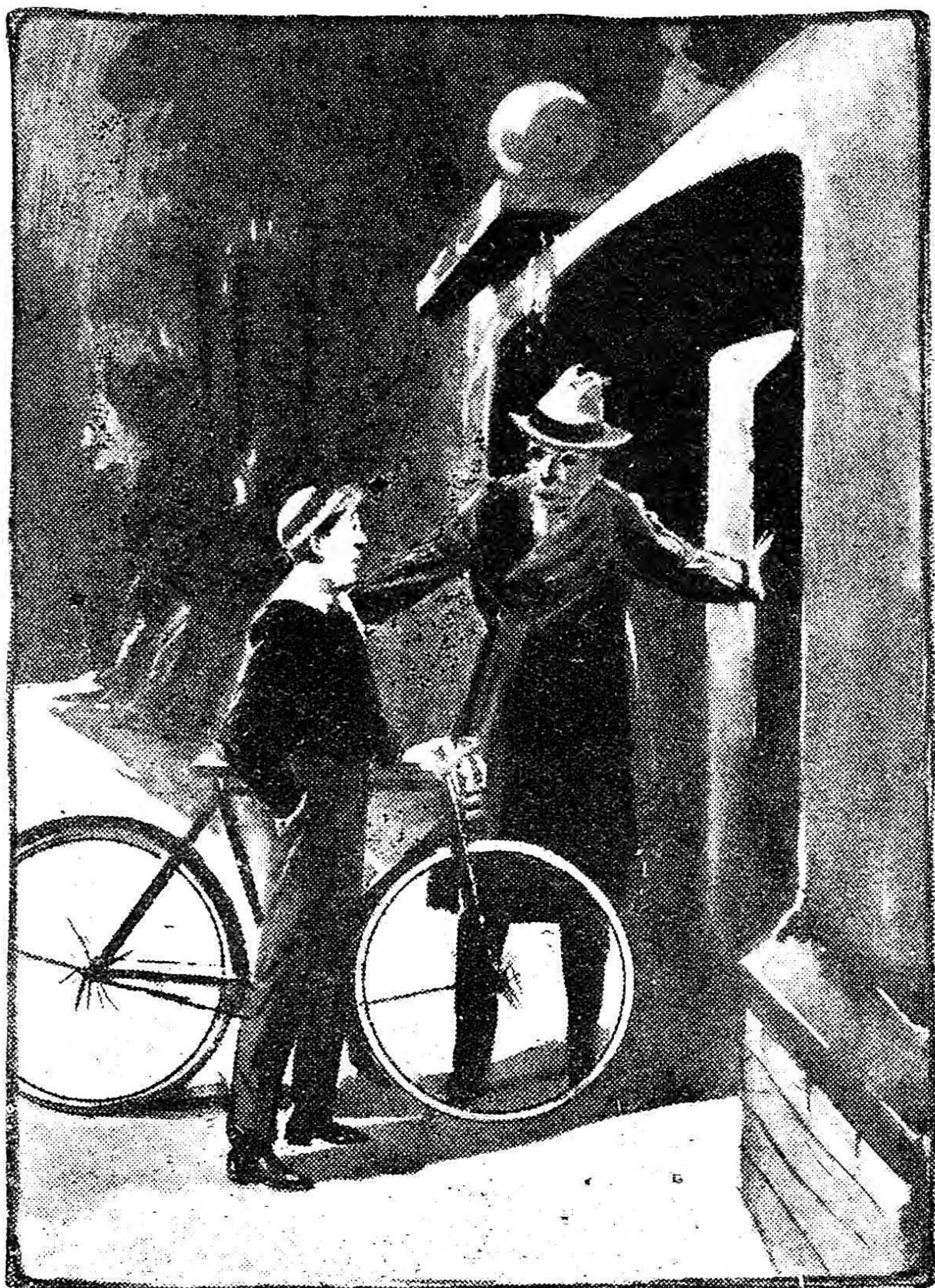
(See announcement inside)

No.
392.

Dec. 9,
1922.

THE RED-HAIRED PICKPOCKET!

One of This Week's Thrilling
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"I don't know whether I ought to come in, sir," said Willy. "I'm supposed to be back at the school soon——."



The HOUSE of a Thousand EYES !

A gripping story of St. Frank's College, introducing a mysterious personality, known as Dr. Grimes, a naturalist and collector of moths and butterflies. Dr. Grimes is a recluse, and no one knows anything about this strange gentleman until Willy Handforth, through unusual circumstances, finds himself an unexpected visitor at the naturalist's house.

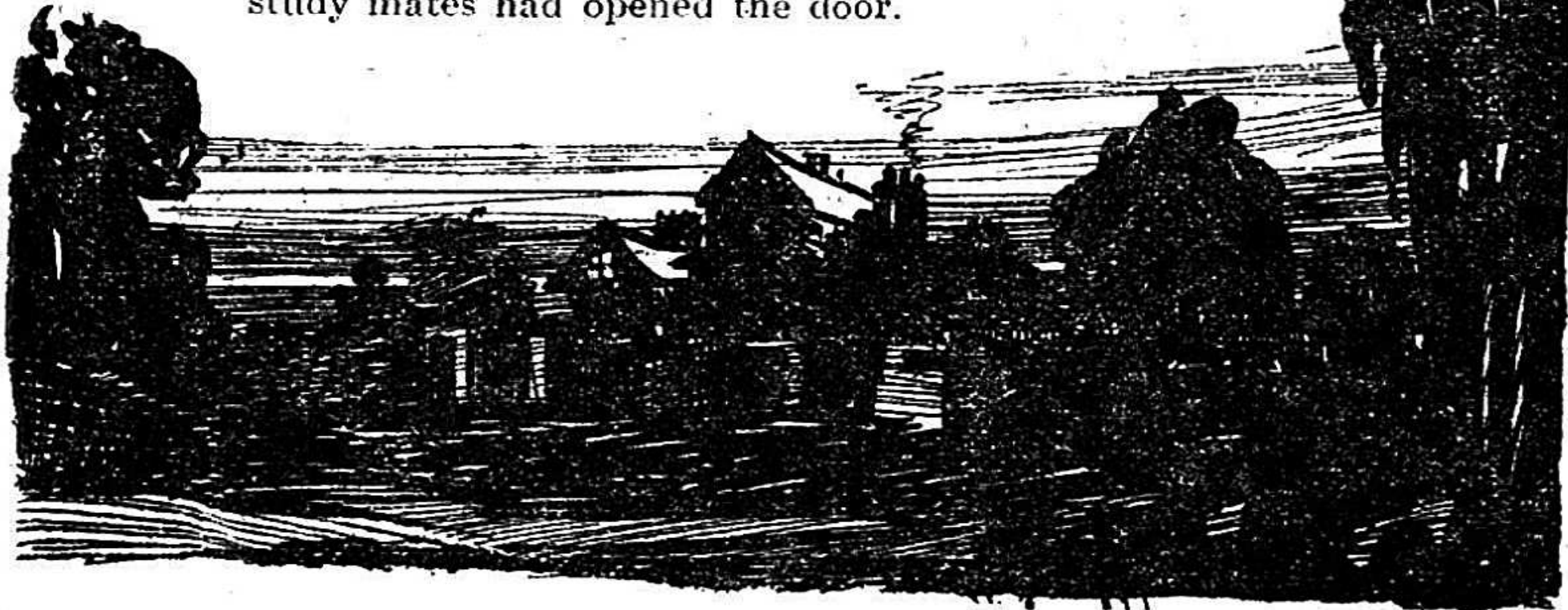
The Narrative Related
Throughout by Nipper.

CHAPTER I.

WILLY'S BUSY EVENING.

"**G**REAT pip!" Owen minor, of the Third Form at St. Frank's, paused in the doorway of Willy Handforth's study. His mouth was open, and his eyes staring. And certainly there was sufficient reason for him to be rather startled.

Handforth minor was bending over the study table, so engrossed in some strange occupation that he was utterly oblivious of other things. He didn't even notice one of his study mates had opened the door.



Willy shared this little apartment with Owen minor and Chubby Heath. Except for about fourteen unholy rows daily, the trio got on very well together.

"My only hat!" panted Owen, staring blankly.

There, hanging from the electric light globe, was something which dangled on a fine thread. And it was only a few inches above Willy Handforth's tousled hair. It hung there, sinister and horrible.

The thing was an enormous spider.

Owen minor was scared. He had never seen such a spider in all his life. It was a great, massive, hairy affair, covered with fur, and simply horrifying to look upon.

He had fears for Willy's life. And, finding that his yells were futile, Owen minor did a very valiant thing. He dashed into the study, grabbed at the fine thread, and the spider swung away.

"Got it!" roared Owen.

"Eh? What the dickens——"

Willy looked up, and then he let out a terrific yell.

"Hi! Leggo!" he roared. "You—you silly ass!"

Ziff!

Owen minor's reward for saving his study chum was to receive a punch on the nose which sent him staggering across the study in a wild career. He finally collapsed over the coal box, and sat in the fender, and one of his hands unfortunately entered an empty saucepan, which had recently contained something which was alleged to be coco-nut ice.

"Yaroo!" roared Owen minor wildly.

Willy Handforth had seized the spider as it hovered between safety and destruction. And now it was lying peacefully on the study table, and Willy gazed at Owen with aggressive contempt.

"You funny fathead!" he said tartly.

Owen minor was not in a position to answer in a very adequate manner. He was engaged in disentangling his hand from the saucepan. That frightful mixture—which Chubby Heath was guilty of concocting—was as sticky as treacle. Owen's hand clung to the saucepan. But he succeeded in getting it free at length. He gazed at his fingers as though they were contaminated.

"You—you rotter!" he said thickly, as he got to his feet. "That's all I get for saving your life!"

"For doing what?" asked Willy.

"That spider——"

"It's dead, you dummy!" said Willy.

"It's about as dead as the inside of your giddy napper!"

Owen minor stared at the table in horror. "But—but you haven't squashed it!" he said. "It was hovering over your head, and I was expecting it to bite every minute. And all you can do is to slosh me on the nose as soon as I try to save you!"

Handforth minor took a deep breath.

"I don't want to be personal," he said deliberately, "but how the dickens you ever escaped from Colney Hatch is a mystery to

me! That spider's a West Indian thing—it came from Jamaica, or Malta, or somewhere like that! It's been dead for ages! It's a specimen!"

"Then what the dickens is it doing in this study?" demanded Owen.

"It's mine—I bought it!"

"Bought it!" yelled Owen. "You paid good money for a rotten thing like that!"

"Rotten!" retorted Willy sourly. "It's a prize specimen, my lad! It's got one leg missing, and half its head's gone, but that's nothing! I bought it off one of the Bannington Grammar School chaps. At least, I gave him a couple of beetles for it."

Owen minor looked round miserably.

"And have we got to put up with this kind of thing in our study?" he asked. "I say, Willy, it's getting a bit thick, you know! Draw the line, old man! You can't keep on like this."

"What do you mean?"

"We shall be finding snakes in the coal-scuttle next!" complained Owen minor, as he thoughtlessly placed a hand on the table.

"Only yesterday——"

"Look what you're doing, fathead!" snapped Willy. "Take that filthy paw off the table! Great Scott! You're smothered in glue, or something! Only about half an inch off my best ladybirds, too!"

"Well, it was your own silly fault—pushing me in the fender like that!" said Owen minor. "I'll jolly well push Chubby's nose when he comes in, messing up our saucepan! That rotten cokernut ice of his will hang about the study for weeks! No wonder it tasted rotten! We'd been cooking kippers in the saucepan only an hour before he used it. One of the chaps found a part of the backbone in one chunk!"

"Do you think I care anything about cokernut ice?" demanded Willy impatiently. "Can't you see I'm busy? Clear out, you disturbing fathead! And go and wash that muck off your hands!"

"Are you going to be here long?" asked Owen, glaring.

"Yes; all the evening."

"What about doing my prep.?"

"Blow your prep.!"

"I can tell you, we're getting a bit fed up with your blessed insects!" grumbled Owen minor. "We can't come into the study without finding spiders all over the table! Only yesterday we found a tadpole in the condensed milk!"

"That was Chubby's fault, because he put the tin in the wrong cupboard!" said Willy. "How do you expect me to keep my specimens in order if you put things in the wrong places?"

"And what about Tuesday?" asked Owen minor.

"Well, what about it?"

"Didn't I come in here directly after morning lessons and find three beastly grasshoppers buzzing round in the sardine tin?" asked Owen minor, with righteous indignation. "As if that wasn't enough, as soon

as I shoved my footer boots on. I squashed about a dozen earwigs!"

"Oh, you're always grumbling!" said Willy. "A fellow can't have a hobby now without his study mates kicking up a fuss! But I'm boss here, and I'll do as I jolly well like! If you chaps touch any of my specimens, I'll slaughter you! I'm going to fetch some slugs in to-morrow!"

"Slugs!" roared Owen.

"Of course!" said Willy. "A chap's got to have all kinds of specimens. I've got my eye on a jolly good adder, too. It's a beauty, and it's alive! I'm going to train it to be a pet!"

Owen minor breathed hard.

"We don't mind standing grasshoppers and tadpoles and beetles!" he said. "But if you bring any rotten adders in here, we'll jolly soon clear out!"

Willy nodded.

"That's why I'm going to bring the adder in!" he said calmly.

Owen minor was quite lost for words. He stood there, gazing at his study leader as the latter bent over a horrible-looking mass of beetles and grubs and other horrors of the earth.

To Owen minor they seemed to be too ghastly for words. But, judging from Willy's expression, he loved every one of them. The fact of the matter was, Willy Handforth had suddenly developed a craze.

Without any warning, which was rather unfair to his chums—he had sprung all sorts of insect surprises on them. He had been reading a book written by a naturalist, and it had so impressed him, that he had immediately turned into a naturalist himself. And, nowadays, all Willy's spare time was occupied in grubbing about for any new specimens he could dig out.

The worst part of it was, he brought everything into the study. He scouted the idea of using an outhouse. His chums complained bitterly and continuously, but they might just as well have appealed to the four walls.

Unfortunately, they were not in a position to seize Willy's specimens, and consign them to the dustbin. Such a course would have been possible, but very unsatisfactory.

In the first place, Willy would fish them out of the dustbin again, and in the second place, Owen minor and Chubby Heath were not particularly fond of going about with both their eyes closed up, with swollen noses, and with thick ears. Of two evils, they chose the lesser—and Willy's specimens remained in the study.

Strictly speaking, the Third Formers had no studies. But Edward Oswald Handforth's younger brother, who was a remarkably alert young man, had converted a number of disused boxrooms into an equal number of studies.

They were small, but they enabled the lads to have a certain amount of privacy. Furniture, of course, was of a rough-and-ready order. Willy's study was the most

luxurious of all. It contained a table made from a large packing-case, two stools, a chair without a back, and a couple of soap-boxes. Pocket-money in the Third would not run to furniture of the ordinary kind.

However, odd bits of cloth had been utilised in a cunning way, to say nothing of green paint—which Josh Cuttle, the porter, had mysteriously missed for some weeks past. He was still wondering where it had got to.

For Willy Handforth to start a collection of beetles and moths and butterflies was rather disconcerting. But when he added spiders to it, and talked of bringing in a few slugs, and a tame adder, Owen minor thought it about time to protest.

Not that this would do any good.

"I say, look here," began Owen. "About these beastly insects. Can't we do something about it? I mean, wouldn't it be a good idea to take up stamp collecting instead?"

"A beauty!" said Willy abstractedly. "Just look at the legs! There's only one broken, and——"

"I was talking to you!" interrupted Owen minor tartly.

"Oh, my hat!" groaned Willy. "It's still here!"

"What is?" asked Owen.

"It's still standing about with a messy hand and a grubby face," went on Willy. "I'm talking to you, fathead! Clear out! I'm disgusted with you—standing there with a face all over soot!"

"Didn't you push me in the fender?" roared Owen indignantly.

"I can't help your troubles!" said Willy. "If you're idiot enough to fall into the fender, that's your look-out. I don't want to be bothered! Are you going to buzz off?"

"Yes—when I'm ready!"

Handforth minor opened the door, pushed back his sleeves, and clenched his fists.

"Going?" he said suggestively.

Owen minor went. It was just as well to go peacefully, because if he objected he would arrive in the passage on his neck. In the ranks of the Third, Willy Handforth was king.

His word was law—he ruled with an iron hand. Yet, although he was very hasty with his fists, he was extremely popular, nevertheless. Most of the lads knew how to deal with him, and escaped his wrath.

But Chubby Heath and Owen minor were in something like the same unfortunate position as Church and McClure of the Remove. They had to stand Willy constantly, and to see their faces in an absolutely normal condition was rather rare. If one didn't have a thick ear, the other would have it.

But Willy compensated for these drawbacks by being generous to a degree. If ever he had any pocket-money, it belonged to everybody in general. And he was always

full of excellent wheezes for hoodwinking Mr. Sunchiffe, the Third Form master.

Willy had invented a wonderful system of duplicating lines. If a fellow had to write fifty lines, he only needed to write about twelve, and the job was done. He allowed everybody to enjoy the benefit of this wonderful contrivance, which consisted of four pens being tied together in a line. Unfortunately, the pens wouldn't always write properly, and all sorts of trouble followed.

But Willy had other ideas, too. And, on the whole, the Third Form had bucked up considerably since Handforth minor's advent.

It was generally admitted, however, that things were now getting a bit too thick. This insect collecting business was rather getting on the nerves of the other fags. Fellows were always complaining—and it was nothing unusual for a few stray frogs to be found wandering in the passage.

It wouldn't have been so bad if Willy had collected only dead specimens. But he had fairly got the craze, and there was no stopping him.

He was just getting interested in some choice-looking ants, when the door opened, and two fags came in. They were Chubby Heath and Lemon.

"I say, Willy!" said Heath. "We've heard——"

"Clear off!"

"It's about——"

"Scoot!"

"I tell you——"

"Your voices worry me!" snapped Willy. "Another word, my son, and you'll get biffed!"

"Cheese it, Willy!" protested Heath. "We want to tell you——"

Crash!

Willy's fist came out, and Chubby Heath sat down violently in the passage, wondering how many teeth remained in his head.

"Yow-ow!" he groaned. "You—you silly ass! That's what we get for trying to do you a favour!"

"We came here to tell you something!" said Lemon. "We thought you might like to know that——"

"I'm right in the middle of sorting out some ants!" interrupted Willy sharply. "Don't bother, you fatheads! It's a very intricate piece of work, and I'm not going to have you chaps messing me about!"

"Oh, all right!" said Lemon. "Blow you! I won't tell you now!"

"Good!"

Lemon strode out, and Willy looked after him.

"A fine sort of chum, ain't you, Juicy?" sneered Willy. "You've got something specially decent in the way of news, and yet you won't tell me anything about it! I'll jolly well punch your nose if you don't speak out!"

Lemon gasped.

"But you said you didn't want to hear it!" he exclaimed faintly.

"Never mind what I said. I do want to hear it!" snapped Willy. "But, mind you, if it's something silly I'll pulverise you!"

"Well, as a matter of fact, it is something silly!" replied Lemon, hovering in the doorway. "It's about some beetles—but I thought you might like to know."

"Beetles!" exclaimed Willy sharply.

"Yes."

"Well, choke it up!"

"You know that little second-hand shop just as you go into Caistowe?" asked Lemon. "It's only a tiny place, with a dusty window, filled with old bits of china and stuffed birds——"

"I know it!" said Willy. "Don't be so long-winded! What are you trying to get at?"

"Dick Jones and young Kerrigan were over in Caistowe this afternoon," explained Lemon. "They happened to see a small glass case in that window. It's full of gloriously coloured beetles—about a dozen of 'em. They're tropical specimens, I think, and the lot's going for five bob!"

"My hat!" said Willy eagerly. "Are you sure?"

"Positive!"

"Tropical beetles!" said Willy dreamily. "That's just what I've been longing for. English beetles are all right, but you get so fed-up with them. But look here, if you're trying to pull my leg——"

"Fathead! It's true—honour bright!"

That, of course, was good enough for Willy. If a fellow said "honour bright," it settled all arguments. He made all sorts of enquiries about the beetles. How many were there? How big was the glass-case? Were the specimens in good condition?

He couldn't get any very definite answers. But he was certainly determined to have that glass case. There was, however one serious problem to be solved. At the moment, Willy possessed sevenpence-halfpenny.

A frantic whip-round in the Third only resulted in the production of another fivepence, including six farthings.

This was not exactly satisfactory. So something else had to be done. And it only took Willy about five seconds to make up his mind.

"It's too late to get the things to-night, anyhow," he said. "I'll buzz over to Caistowe directly after dinner to-morrow—good thing it's a half-holiday. And I'll trot along now and interview Ted."

Willy was a fellow who believed in doing things at once. There was no sense in delaying matters. So, about five minutes

later he marched confidently into Study D, in the Remove passage.

Handforth and Co. were busily engaged in doing their prep. Edward Oswald laid his pen down with a sigh as he saw the identity of the visitor.

"My hat!" he said testily. "As soon as we get sat down, this young ass blows in! I don't care what you want, Willy, you won't get it! Close the door after you, because there's a draught!"

Willy closed the door—with himself inside.

"Just a little matter concerning cash," he remarked calmly. "It'll only take about a minute, so I sha'n't worry you for long."

"You won't!" agreed Handforth grimly. "And if you think you're going to borrow some money off me——"

"Just a little matter of five bob!" said Willy.

"Oh, well," said his brother, thawing. "That's not so bad. But what do you want five bob for?"

"I'm going to buy something," replied Willy vaguely.

"Well, I didn't expect you wanted five bob to chuck down a drain," said Handforth tartly. "But I've been hearing rumours about you, my lad. They say that you've been spending money on moths and beetles and butterflies!"

"Something like that," agreed Willy. "In this case I want to buy some beetles."

Church and McClure grinned as Handforth deliberately returned two half-crowns to his pocket.

"You won't get any money for beetles out of me!" he said firmly. "Why, you cheeky young ass! Of all the nerve! Expecting me to advance tin to squander on filthy things like beetles!"

Willy held out his hand.

"I don't want to be sick!" said Handforth, with a shudder. "Don't hold that ghastly-looking paw in front of my eyes! I'll bet you haven't washed it for a week!"

Willy pushed his hand a little nearer.

"Five bob!" he said briefly.

"You—you young ass!" roared Handforth. "If you don't take that thing away——"

"As soon as I get five bob!" said Willy.

Handforth hesitated. He was trying to decide whether he should rise in his wrath, and administer a well-deserved thrashing or whether he should get rid of this grimy person by shelling out the five shillings. Willy, seeing his advantage, thrust his hand still nearer. It was the last straw.

Handforth gave a curious gulp, and turned pale.

"Great pip!" he breathed. "Here you are—take it. And go! For goodness' sake, buzz off!"

He flung the two half-crowns on the table, and Willy casually picked them up.

"That's the way!" he said severely.



Willy expected to see a still form lying on the ground, some distance below. But instead, the man was only about six feet from the cliff top, hanging there in the most precarious position imaginable.

"And the next time I come to borrow any tin, don't be so long about it! That's one of your main faults, Ted—you always waste such a blessed lot of time!"

And, with this remark in lieu of thanks, Willy departed.

CHAPTER II.

INTRODUCING DR. RYLAND GRIMES.



DIRECTLY after dinner the following day Handforth minor set out from St. Frank's on his bicycle. To be more exact, he set out on his brother's bicycle. But

Handforth didn't know anything about this.

Willy went on the principle that if he got the bike first, there couldn't be any argument about it—especially if he was well away before Handforth discovered it. He knew quite well that his major had decided to go into Bannington, and so he had lost no time in rushing out to the bicycle shed.

There can be no question that Willy displayed a large amount of cunning in this manoeuvre. It so happened that the Remove left the dining-hall before the Third, and Willy had got quite alarmed.

However, Handforth and Co. were out in the Triangle when Willy came out. So Handforth minor strolled up, and asked his brother why he was keeping a stray dog locked up in Study D. He added that stray dogs sometimes have a habit of tearing up valuable exercise-books, to say nothing of chewing football boots by way of a change.

Handforth, all unsuspecting, rushed off like lightning, and Church and McClure followed leisurely. They met Handforth in the lobby, and the expression on the latter's face confirmed their suspicions.

"Where is he?" demanded Handforth thickly.

"Your young brother?"

"I don't know where he inherits his qualities!" said Handforth, with a glare.

"I've never known such a born criminal in all my life! He tells me there's a stray dog in the study, and there's absolutely nothing! It was a lie—deliberately told, just to spoof me!"

"Well, I thought—— I mean, really?" said Church hastily. "What a young bounder! But it was hardly a lie. He didn't say there was a stray dog there. He only asked you a question."

"That makes no difference!" snapped Handforth. "When I get hold of him I'll skin him alive! One of these days he'll come to a bad end! He's obstinate, he's pig-headed, and he's always fighting! There's nobody else in our family like that!"

"Oh, nobody!" said Church sarcastically.

They went outside, and for some little time there was an extraordinary noise proceeding from the bicycle-shed. But as Handforth's voice was easily recognised, nobody took much notice.

As a matter of fact, the chums of Study D were trying to solve the problem of how three fellows could get to Bannington on two bicycles. Church and McClure were

rather battered about in the course of this argument, and they knew for a fact that one of them would have to be left behind, or walk. The loss of Handforth's bicycle was nothing to him—because he could use either Church's or McClure's. At the same time, it was exasperating.

In the meantime, Willy was riding serenely along, totally unaware of the dreadful doom which awaited him on his return. He was certainly expecting a row of some kind, but this caused him no concern. He regarded his elder brother as something of a nuisance, but never worried about him.

He mentally resolved to tick Handy off pretty severely later on. The front brake wanted adjusting, the back brake was clicking somewhere, and the bottom bracket was atrociously loose. How on earth could any bicycle run properly with so many defects? Willy would tell his brother sharply what he thought of him.

Considering that Willy had borrowed the bicycle by means of a subterfuge, and without any kind of permission, this ticking-off process would be rather like adding insult to injury. But Willy thought it a good idea.

However, he arrived in Caistowe all right, and he was delighted to find that the case of beetles still remained in the window of the little second-hand shop. His eyes gleamed as he examined them.

The specimens were well preserved, and many of them were highly coloured. Handforth minor was thrilled with the true collector's emotion, and his one desire was to possess those beetles.

"Cheap as dirt!" he muttered. "Five bob! Why, they're worth a quid, at least! All the same, I'll try to beat 'em down a bob!"

And, with this cheerful object in view, Handforth minor entered the shop. An elderly woman appeared from a rear doorway after a few moments, wiping her hands on an apron. The junior informed her that if he could have a closer look at the case of beetles he might be disposed to purchase them.

So the beetles were fetched out, and Handforth minor cast a critical eye upon them.

"A bit mouldy!" he observed.

"They didn't ought to be, young, sir!" said the woman. "They've been kept dry enough——"

"I don't mean exactly mouldy!" interrupted Willy. "That's just an expression. Still, they're rather old and battered about. And I'm not sure that they're exactly the kind that I want. I suppose five bob is the lowest price?"

"I couldn't take no less, young gentleman."

"How about four bob?" asked Willy. "You know, we St. Frank's chaps don't have too much pocket money, and even pennies are scarce nowadays. Besides, these

beetles aren't quite as good as they might be."

The good lady hesitated for a short time, and then observed that she couldn't take anything less than four-and-sixpence. A little further haggling followed, and Willy diplomatically placed four shillings on the counter, trusting that the sight of so much money would tempt the lady to close the deal. Willy had taken good care to change his brother's two half-crowns into smaller money. He had anticipated a move of this character.

In the end, the shopkeeper agreed to take four shillings—mainly in order to get rid of her persistent customer. For Willy talked on and on, and disparaged the beetles so much that he seemed to be doing her a favour by taking the things away at all. She had an impression that the beetles were about as much good as an empty jam-jar, but not quite so valuable.

So everybody was satisfied, particularly Willy.

"Good!" he murmured, as he got outside the shop. "That leaves me a bob to buy a tin of salmon with. Used cautiously, it ought to last two or three days. Besides, I expect salmon will be rather good sort of grub for the slugs!"

The case of beetles was not particularly large, and he slipped it into his overcoat pocket with comparative ease. It was a square, flat box, with a glass top, and fixed to the base within were eight beetles, ranged in rows.

Willy remounted his bicycle, and started off on the return journey. He realised that he would need to go with a certain amount of caution when in the neighbourhood of Bellton and St. Frank's. For it was quite possible that his major would be knocking about somewhere. And Willy considered that it would be far better for Handforth to be knocking about than to be knocked about by him.

But, as it happened, he was not destined to reach St. Frank's yet awhile.

He had travelled just over a mile of the return trip, and was nearly half way on the journey to Bellton, when his attention was attracted by the figure of a man rather high up to the right of the lane. The formation of the country just here was somewhat curious.

The lane rose up sharply. On the left there was a flat stretch of meadowland, but on the right there was a wood, bearing away from the very border of the lane. Being winter time, it was quite possible to see between the trees, for they were not at all closely set.

Willy had already explored many of the woods round about—for he had been out paperchasing with the Third Form hounds, and he had also been on the look-out for specimens.

And he knew that just beyond this rising hill there was a steep, sharp gully. This gully was quite invisible from the lane, and

one came upon it suddenly, almost without warning.

At one point the side of this gully was like a cliff, descending sheer for fifteen or twenty feet. And there was a choice collection of rocks, too.

Handforth minor idly wondered what would happen if the stranger pushed on and lost his foothold. And the junior had hardly had time to give the matter a thought when he heard a sudden cry of alarm.

He looked up again—quickly, with a fast-beating pulse. And he was just in time to see the man throw up his arms and vanish like a figure in a Punch and Judy show. But for the gravity of the situation, Willy would have laughed. The man seemed to disappear so abruptly.

As it was, Willy jumped off his bike in a flash.

He didn't care what happened to it—and the machine crashed over and fell into the ditch on the other side of the lane. Handforth minor broke through a gap in the hedge, and the next moment he was tearing away up the rise. His heart was in his month, for he believed that the unfortunate man had met with a serious accident.

There was not another soul in sight. He was the only person who could possibly be of any assistance. He hurried through the trees, and then arrived at the very edge of the sharp gully.

"Great pip!" he muttered.

He leaned over just at the section where the man had vanished. He expected to see a still form lying on the ground, some distance below. But, instead, the man was only about six feet from the cliff-top—hanging there in the most precarious position imaginable.

For the tails of his thick overcoat had caught on a sharp projection of rock. And in this way he was held—suspended in mid-air. But at any second the coat might give way and precipitate its owner to the rocks below.

To a young man the prospect would not have been grave. He might, indeed, have escaped with nothing worse than bruises, for the distance was not very severe. Moreover, just below the spot where the man was hanging the cliff was not quite sheer, after all.

But this stranger was elderly—well over sixty, at least. He was a small old fellow, attired in black, with masses of snowy white hair, and an intellectual, clean-shaven face. His spectacles were all anyhow, and nearly falling off.

Willy took in the situation at a glance.

"Hold on, sir!" he exclaimed. "I'll soon have you safe and sound."

The junior was quite certain that if the old gentleman slipped, he would go down to certain death. The shock of such a fall would undoubtedly be fatal to a man of his age. He would never be able to withstand it.

As far as Willy could see, there was only one possible thing to do.

He would have to climb down the cliff, and then gradually hoist the old gentleman up, inch by inch, until he was able to pull himself over the edge of the gully. But this was by no means an easy task.

And it said much for Handforth minor's pluck that he essayed the task without a second's hesitation. There was only this one course.

And so he took it.

He glanced rapidly up and down, and found that there was a spot, a few yards to the left, where he could swarm down without quite so much peril. All the same, a hasty step would mean a very nasty fall.

The junior lowered himself over the edge, and then slipped down, foot by foot. In a few moments he reached a point which was several feet below the level of the unfortunate old gentleman.

Clinging to little corners of rock, digging his toecaps into every available crevice, Willy edged his way along. And at length, he arrived at the spot where the other was hanging.

"Here we are—soon be all serene now, sir!" said Willy cheerfully.

"Brave lad—brave lad!" said the old gentleman in a husky voice. "But be careful—I'm not so young, and one slip and it will be the finish! Brave boy! And so young, too!"

Handforth minor gradually took up the weight of the old gentleman. And then, inch by inch, he edged him away, so that his coat-tails became disentangled. At last the old gentleman was quite free—but now the real peril commenced.

If Willy made one false step, both he and the old gentleman would crash down to the bottom of the gully. They were crouching on the face of a cliff, over six feet from the summit.

And the only possible hold was to be obtained from little crevices and ledges. But the junior did not flinch. He made certain of every step before he took it. He was as cool as ice.

And Willy did not know the meaning of the word fear. He was just like his elder brother in that respect. He was absolutely lion-hearted, and didn't care what odds he faced.

In fact, he felt a kind of thrill at the very danger in this adventure. And it was doing him good to realise that he was saving this luckless old gentleman's life. How fortunate that Willy had been in sight at the time! Had he passed a minute earlier he would have seen nothing—and the old fellow's life would have gone.

Hardly uttering a word, Willy hoisted the old gentleman up inch by inch. He did not make the mistake of hurrying himself, and at every fresh secure hold, he paused for a few seconds and rested himself.

He was thankful that the old gentleman

was small and slightly built. He was, indeed, scarcely any bigger than the junior himself. He was one of those wizened, white-headed old chaps who looked very studious and thoughtful—and Willy set him down as a professor.

At length they had gained such progress that the old man was able to reach out and grasp the actual summit. But Willy wasn't satisfied with this. He continued his gradual hoisting process, although he was well nigh spent with the exhausting work.

"Just a little further—two inches—an inch!" panted the old gentleman. "Splendid splendid! My dear lad, you're wonderful! How thankful I am that you saw my predicament and came to my aid."

"That's all right, sir!" gasped Willy. "Up we go!"

He gave another hoist, and this time the old man was able to take hold of a spaling which grew near the edge of the cliff. And he hauled himself up out of the danger zone. But, unfortunately, in making a heavy pull upwards, he allowed one of his feet to thrust itself out.

Willy was hardly prepared for this. The stranger's boot caught him a sharp blow on the jaw, and he instinctively put a hand to his face on the instant. As he did so, a piece of rock crumbled under his foot.

"Look out!" roared Willy. "Whoa! Oh, my goodness!"

Frantically, he tried to save himself—but it was too late.

He lost his grip with his hands, too, and then he fell down—slithering over the rocks, and crashing right down to the very bottom of the gully. He lay there, just visible from the top—utterly still and crumpled up.

"Great Heaven above!" muttered the old gentleman huskily.

It was impossible for him to go down direct. But he could see that by making a short detour he could reach the bottom of the gully with comparative ease. And although the old fellow was badly in need of a rest—for he was quite puffed—he hurried away at once.

And at length he commenced the descent, scrambling, slithering, and displaying great agility for one so old. But the stranger was greatly perturbed about the accident which had occurred to his young rescuer.

At last he was at the base, and he hastened round a chunk of rock, and came within sight of Handforth minor.

To his infinite relief, the junior was sitting up, looking rather dazed and rubbing his head in a rueful manner.

"My hat!" said Willy. "That was pretty rough going! I was all knocked sideways for a minute! I thought I was in for a big packet!"

The old gentleman ran to his side, breathing wheezily.

"Brave lad—brave lad!" he exclaimed. "I owe you my life—and it is only by a

miracle that you escaped terrible injury! I am proud of you, my boy—more proud than I can say!"

CHAPTER III.

THE ROOM OF WONDER!



WILLY was still rubbing his head.

"I don't know about being brave, sir," he said. "There was nothing much in it—the cliff was safe enough until I had that skid. Still, I'm not hurt

much. Just a bruise or two."

The old gentleman bent over him.

"Let me be quite certain," he said, with concern. "Let me make sure that you are only suffering from a few superficial abrasions. I am a doctor, and I shall soon find out the position."

Willy was suffering from a rather nasty graze on the back of his left hand. His right foot was numb, and there was an ugly cut on one of his knees. The white-haired old stranger examined him in true professional style.

"A doctor, eh, sir?" said Willy. "That's rather lucky, isn't it?"

"I cannot agree that the circumstances are lucky," said the old gentleman. "Considering how nobly you worked for my safety, it is an extraordinary piece of bad luck that you should have suffered in this way. My name is Dr. Ryland Grimes, and I live quite close to here."

"It's a funny thing how you came to skid down the gully, sir."

"Most remarkable—most remarkable!" agreed the other. "As a matter of fact, I was thinking deeply at the moment, and almost before I knew what had happened, I felt myself falling. Unfortunately, I am somewhat absent-minded. I must check myself—yes, I must certainly check myself."

"My name's Handforth, sir—Willy Handforth," said the junior. "I am from St. Frank's College, you know. Everything all serene? I'm not particularly crocked, am I?"

Dr. Grimes rubbed his hands together genially.

"I am delighted to say that your hurts are quite trivial," he said. "At the same time, my boy, you must come home with me. I will bandage your hand and give you some ointment for the bruises."

"Oh, it doesn't matter, sir," said the fag.

"I insist—Dear me!"

Dr. Ryland Grimes broke off, and Willy could see that his gaze was fixed upon the case of dead beetles, which was projecting out of the junior's pocket. A pang of great alarm seized Willy. Frantically he tore the case out of his pocket.

"Well I'm blessed!" he gasped. "Not even cracked!"

By some extraordinary chance, the small glass-topped box had come through the

ordeal without any harm at all. And Willy looked at the gaily-coloured beetles with great joy and satisfaction.

"This is most curious—I might say, most remarkable!" exclaimed Dr. Grimes. "Is it possible, my boy, that by any chance you are interested in collections of this kind?"

"I'm a bit of an amateur naturalist, sir," said Willy proudly.

"Good gracious me!" exclaimed Dr. Grimes. "It so happens, my dear lad, that I am an entomologist of many years' experience. I have studied insects from every corner of the world. I am also interested in other forms of zoology."

Willy stared.

"Well, that's queer, sir!" he said. "Birds of a feather, eh?"

Dr. Grimes smiled.

"An old bird and a young bird, my dear lad!" he exclaimed, rubbing his fingers together. "Splendid—splendid! I am always greatly interested in a lad who shows an aptitude for natural science. I insist upon your coming home with me—I really insist."

"But I'm all right, sir—honestly."

"It makes no difference," said Dr. Grimes. "You must come, and I can assure you that you will be very greatly interested in my collection—which, I am proud to say, is one of the very finest in the whole country."

That settled it.

The prospect of seeing the old entomologist's collection was so enticing that Willy simply could not resist it.

He had hesitated because he was dimly conscious that the name of Dr. Ryland Grimes seemed somehow familiar. And he had remembered soon afterwards that he had heard some queer stories about the old fellow. The country people who lived round about had all sorts of queer stories to tell about Dr. Grimes.

He was popularly supposed to be a mysterious old man—a really sinister character. And he lived shut up with a servant—who was nearly as old as Dr. Grimes himself—in a house known as The Cedars. So it was only natural that Willy should hesitate before agreeing to accompany the old naturalist home. But now that he had heard about the collection, Willy couldn't resist.

He concluded that all the stories were mere rumours—without any foundation in fact. After all, Dr. Grimes seemed a really jolly old chap, and he was bearing up extremely well after his mishap.

Willy himself felt rather full of aches and pains, but when he got walking, they wore off a bit. And the pair were soon going along quite contentedly together. And as they walked they chatted on matters concerning beetles, butterflies, moths and so forth. They were kindred spirits. They had a bond in common, and they were naturally drawn to each other.

True, Willy had only just started in the game, but that made him all the more eager to learn all he could from such an experi-

enced man as Dr. Grimes. It was a chance that he really couldn't afford to miss. He would be able to pick up all manner of things from the old fellow.

At last they arrived at the road, and Willy recovered his brother's bicycle, and found that no damage had been sustained. Certainly, the oil had poured out of the lamp container and made a mess of the lamp generally, but this was not a matter to worry over. Edward Oswald would be the one to worry.

Wheeling his bike, Willy accompanied Dr. Grimes along the lane until they arrived at a gateway which was almost concealed among thick evergreen trees. It was a small gate, and it was locked—for Dr. Grimes brought out a key and inserted it in the door before opening it.

Again a little quail came over Willy.

"I don't know whether I ought to come in sir," he said. "I'm supposed to be back at the school soon—"

"Nonsense—nonsense!" said the old fellow. "Your hand badly needs bandaging, and I must really insist. Come on, my boy! I want you to come in, just to please me. I have taken quite a liking to you, Willy. A favourite name of mine, by the way."

Willy smiled.

He too, had taken a liking to Dr. Grimes, and he scouted all the rumours as being utterly ridiculous. There was nothing to be afraid of in going into The Cedars. In any case, what possible harm could Dr. Grimes do him? After saving the old chap's life, he wouldn't be mean enough to turn on him.

So they passed inside.

The gate was locked behind them, and then they passed along a laurel bordered pathway towards an old-fashioned house which was nearly hidden among the trees. Willy could not help admitting to himself that the house did look sinister and strangely mysterious.

They arrived at the big main door, and Dr. Grimes entered. As he did so, another man appeared from a doorway. A thin, shrivelled up individual with a crinkled face, and a thin beard; he did not look very attractive.

"Sakes alive, doctor!" he said, staring at Willy. "What next—what next? It's the first time within five years that you've had a stranger, sir!"

"Quite so, Mordant!" said Dr. Grimes genially. "But it so happens that this stranger saved me from a most unpleasant death half an hour ago."

Mordant appeared to be a kind of butler, by his dress, and Willy took an instinctive dislike to the shrivelled up old man. This was hardly to be wondered at, for Mordant was regarding Willy with open suspicion and disapproval.

"A boy!" he muttered. "A young school-boy! It's bad, sir—very bad! I'll be more comfortable when he's outside—out in the road, with the gate locked upon him!"

"Perhaps—perhaps I'm intruding, sir!" said Willy doubtfully.

"My dear lad, nothing of the sort—nothing of the sort!" exclaimed Dr. Grimes cheerily. "You must take no notice of Mordant. He is my servant—rather eccentric in his behaviour, but invaluable. He dislikes all strangers, particularly boys. But this is my house, Willy, and I do as I please in it."

"As long as I'm not butting in, sir—"

"Be quite comfortable!" interrupted the old entomologist, rubbing his hands together. "Ignore Mordant completely—hang your cap on the stand, and then we will spend a quiet hour together. I can assure you that you will be greatly interested. We shall get on well in one another's company."

Willy was beginning to feel slightly more at his ease. Mordant was still looking at him suspiciously, and the old fellow's brow was drawn down in a severe frown.

As Dr. Grimes moved towards one of the doorways which led out of the hall, the manservant started, and looked round.

"Not there, sir!" he exclaimed sharply. "You're not going to take the boy in there?"

"That, Mordant, is precisely my intention!" said the doctor genially.

"But—but you have always said, sir—"

"I have always said that I would never allow a stranger to pass this threshold," interrupted Dr. Ryland Grimes. "But the events of this afternoon have resulted in a complete reversal of my decision. This boy, at all events, will be welcome whenever he honours me with his presence."

Willy put his hands in his pockets, and looked at Mordant with fine unconcern.

"See?" he said calmly.

"This young man must always be admitted without question, and without delay!" went on the doctor. "To his bravery I owe my life. Furthermore, he is greatly interested in the same hobby as myself. It will delight me to show him my specimens, and to assist him in his own pursuits."

Willy suddenly felt that he had become much more important in the world, and he was rather glad that he had decided to come, after all. It pleased him to hear this old servant being ticked off so thoroughly.

Dr. Grimes laid a hand upon the junior's shoulder.

"I am a lonely old man, my boy," he said softly. "For years I have shut myself off from my fellow beings, finding contentment among my relics and specimens. I had made up my mind that no interruptions should ever bother me, or disturb my meditations. But after what has happened this afternoon, I find that I have been a very selfish old curmudgeon, and it is time I made an alteration. I like you, Willy, and we shall get on famously."

"You bet, sir!" agreed Willy, with a lofty glance at Mordant.

They passed through the sacred doorway—much to the mortification of the old man.

servant, who stood there in a crushed kind of attitude. Willy was certainly beginning to enjoy the affair now.

There was an element of novelty about it—and a touch of mystery which rather appealed to him.

And a moment later he paused, gaping with wonder.

He had hardly known what to expect to see within the apartment. It seemed that he was a much favoured person, for no other stranger had ever been allowed to cross the threshold. Obviously, then, the room beyond was not of an ordinary character. There was something mysterious about it.

But now they were inside.

And Handforth minor stood there, staring dumbly.

The room was a large one—a vast apartment which seemed to occupy half the floor space of the house. There were windows on two sides, but every other inch of wall space, up to a height of seven or eight feet, was occupied with glass-covered specimen cases. There were tables, stands, and other pieces of furniture—and every one contained objects of wonderful interest to Willy.

"Oh!" he exclaimed, in a kind of gasp.

In the first flash, he was somewhat startled, for it seemed to him that thousands of living eyes were staring down upon him from every corner of the room. The eyes of strange-looking animals—the eyes of snakes and lizards and toads and frogs. The eyes of countless insects. For, whichever way he looked, there were glass cases filled with insects of every description, and almost every form of minute zoology. That great room was a kind of living menagerie for all things small.

But there was nothing living, as Willy soon discovered. All these things were stuffed—highly prized and extremely valuable specimens. The smaller cases were filled with insects of every description, and from every part of the world.

And, at last, Willy found his voice.

"It's—it's wonderful, sir!" he exclaimed breathlessly.

"I am gratified that you are of that opinion!" exclaimed Dr. Grimes, who was evidently enjoying himself tremendously.

"Good gracious me! Never did I realise that I should find such enchantment in revealing my treasures to a mere boy! You are interested in insects, and such like—eh?"

"Interested!" echoed Willy. "My only hat! I've been grubbing about for specimens for weeks, sir, and there's nothing I love better than this! Why, these—these things must be worth thousands!"

"I have never troubled to estimate their worth, my lad!" said the old man. "Many of them were obtained with my own hands—in fact, the majority. I have travelled in every part of the world, and this is the result of my wanderings. Some will say that



The stranger's boot caught him a sharp blow on the jaw, and instinctively Willy put a hand to his face. As he did so, a piece of rock crumbled under his foot.

I spent my time foolishly—but I love my insects, Willy. I love my insects better than all the animals."

He went over one of the glass cases in an affectionate kind of way.

"Beetles!" he said genially. "Ah! I rather fancy you are particularly keen on beetles—eh? Here is one that will interest you. Do you see him? This big fellow, sitting on his throne in the middle?"

"Aren't they glorious, sir!" breathed Willy, gazing into the glass case with enormous interest. "Great pip! That's a whacking great bounder!"

"Quite so—quite so!" said Dr. Grimes. "That is the *Golianthus cacicus*."

"He's a beauty, sir!" said Willy. "That's a lovely one, just higher up, too—that one with the brown stripes, and the whacking great feelers."

"Ah, you mean the *Acrocimus longimanus*."

"Yes, I expect that'll be the one!" replied Willy. "And look at these little grey bounders, all covered with spots—"

"Very interesting specimens," nodded Dr. Grimes. "That beetle is termed the *Monochamus versteegi*."

Willy nodded.

"Of course, strictly speaking, I haven't got the names so that I can rattle 'em off like that, sir," he said. "I know that some of 'em have the most terrific names—enough to tie a chap's tongue into little knots."

The doctor laughed.

"Such as *Stephanorrhina guttata*—you will find him up in the right-hand corner—he has blue back and white spots. Then there is the *Rhynchophorus ferrugineus*—the rather curious looking chap with the pointed nose. And I dare say you will be interested in the *Psolidognathus friendii*, to say nothing of the *Anoplognathus viridaenea*—the little beauty with the greenish back. Then, again—"

"Yes, sir!" said Willy hastily. "Those long words are apt to make a fellow feel a bit weak. My hat! I'm blessed if I know how you can reel them out like that. It's a mystery to me."

"After all my years of study, it would be rather remarkable if I could not remember the names of my pets by heart," smiled Dr. Grimes. "Probably you are interested in butterflies, too?"

"Rather, sir!"

The doctor moved across to another specimen case, and in a very short time Willy Handforth was deeply engrossed in gazing upon numbers of gorgeously coloured butterflies, including the Red Admiral, the Swallow Tail, the Silver-washed Fritillary, and the Camberwell Beauty. In fact, there were so many that Willy's brain almost reeled, and he longed for the time when he would be able to possess a few specimens of a like nature.

There was no mistaking his tremendous delight.

His eyes sparkled, and every other moment or two he uttered exclamations of wonder and joy. Dr. Grimes looked on, enjoying

Willy's pleasure almost as much as the lad himself.

The time slipped by at an amazing speed. Willy had an idea that he and his new friend had been in that remarkable room for about an hour. Then, suddenly, he realised that lamps were burning, and that all was dark outside.

And he was brought to a full realisation of the time by the arrival of Mordant and a tea-tray, containing bread-and-butter, cakes, and a pot of fragrant tea. Dr. Grimes rubbed his hands at the sight.

"Somewhat late, but that does not matter—eh?" he smiled.

"Late, sir?" asked Willy, staring. "It's only about half-past four, sir, isn't it? Oh, it's dark—"

"The time, Willy, is nearly a quarter to seven," chuckled the doctor.

"What!" gasped the junior. "But—but I thought—"

"Never mind—never mind!" said the old entomologist. "What does it matter?"

"But—but I must be in by half-past seven, sir, for calling over!" exclaimed Willy. "Well, I'm jiggered! I'd no idea the time had flown so quickly. It's laid me all of a heap, sir!"

"However, I dare say you will be able to manage a cup of tea and some bread-and-butter," said the doctor. "Sit down, Willy; and after tea I will give you a few specimens to take home with you. I have plenty, so I can easily spare a few for my rescuer."

"Oh, honour bright, sir?" asked Willy breathlessly.

The prospect of owning some of Dr. Grimes's specimens was overpowering, and Willy wouldn't have cared if he was booked for a thousand lines when he got back. He settled down to the tea with a will, finding that he was hungry.

And while he was busily engaged in eating bread-and-butter and cakes, he noticed a little volume lying on the other side of the table. It simply had the one mysterious word "Katsu" printed upon the cover.

He suddenly grinned, and Dr. Grimes looked at him inquiringly.

"Oh, nothing, sir," said Willy. "I was just a bit tickled about the name on that book. I thought it was about some kind of sauce at first—ketchup, I mean. Only the p's missing."

Dr. Grimes looked round sharply, and his smile vanished for a second. He picked up the volume, and quickly placed it in a drawer.

"It is not a volume that will interest you, my lad!" he exclaimed. "It is my intention to present you with a number of moths and butterflies. I will show them to you as soon as we have finished."

Willy wondered why Dr. Grimes had changed the subject so quickly—but, after all, it was no business of his. And he forgot all about it a few minutes later. For the specimens which were presented to him nearly sent him frantic with joy. And on

the top of this, Dr. Grimes produced some silver out of his pocket.

"How about a little pocket-money?" he inquired smilingly. "I don't know much about boys, but I believe they have certain uses for loose silver—eh? I don't want to offend you, Willy, but you will quite understand that my only thought is to please you."

Willy was rather dazed as Dr. Grimes pressed ten shillings into his hand—just a little trifle to carry him on for the week. Willy didn't refuse. He had too much sense. Besides, he was nearly broke.

"And you must promise me that you will come here whenever you feel lonely—when ever you feel that you would care to examine more of my prizes," said Dr. Grimes. "You will always be welcome, my lad; and you have not seen a hundredth part of my collection yet."

"I'd just love to come again, sir!" said Willy eagerly.

"Then come—any time you wish," said the doctor. "But you must give me your solemn promise that you will not say a word to your fellow schoolboys. You must not tell them where you have been, or anything about my little gifts to you."

"But why not, sir?"

"Because I do not wish to be bothered with hosts of youngsters," replied the other. "Good gracious me! If this news gets about, I shall be surrounded by youthful collectors, and my life will not be worth living. No, Willy, I've taken you into my confidence, and I rely upon you respecting my wish."

"All right, sir—I promise," said Willy. "I understand just what you mean, and I'll keep as mum as an oyster. Thanks awfully, sir!"

Five minutes later he was out in the road, hardly able to believe that the thing had really happened.

CHAPTER IV.

THE GRIM SECRET.



WILLY arrived at St. Frank's only just in the nick of time for calling over—after he had ridden hard along the cold, frosty roads. Still, he had managed it, and that was all that mattered.

And the very instant the Third was free he found himself surrounded by numbers of excited, inquisitive fags. They swarmed about him like a collection of wasps. The air fairly buzzed.

"My hat!" said Willy. "What's the matter? What the dickens are you all jawing at once for? Don't get excited—"

"We want to know where you've been!" said Chubby Heath.

"Little boys should be seen and not heard!" replied Willy.

"You—you—"

"Besides, what's it got to do with you?"

asked Handforth minor. "Have I got to come here and account for all my movements? I've been out. And I've enjoyed myself in the most top-hole manner."

"Did you go to Caistowe?" demanded Owen minor.

"Yes."

"Get those beetles?"

"Yes—but they're not half so good as the moths and butterflies I picked up later on," said Willy calmly. "Have a look at these." He produced his other specimens, and the fags gazed at them with wondering eyes. They were not very experienced in such things, but they could easily tell that these specimens were of an extra fine quality, and absolutely perfect in condition.

"Where the dickens did you get them from?" asked Chubby Heath, staring.

"Oh, somewhere!" replied Willy evasively.

"You—you bounder!" exclaimed Owen. "Don't be so secretive!"

"Oh, there's something else!" put in Willy. "How do you like the look of this?"

He pulled out four half-crowns and showed them round.

"Ten bob!" gasped Chubby. "My goodness! I thought you were broke!"

"It only shows that you mustn't take things for granted," replied Willy. "It's no good me having that money unless you chaps know about it. So I thought I might as well show it round. So you're all in the secret now, and it's no good asking any questions."

"In the secret?" repeated Owen indignantly. "Why, you fathead, you haven't told us any secret yet. Where have you been all this afternoon and evening? Why didn't you come back to tea? How did you get those butterflies? Who gave you ten bob? And what about that bruise and the graze? In other words, what the dickens have you been up to?"

Handforth minor clutched at the wall.

"Any more questions?" he asked faintly. "You're getting me down weak. If you go on like this I shall break down and babble out the whole dreadful story. Spare me from that. Oh, have pity on a weak youth!"

And grinning hugely, the leader of the Third strolled away leaving his chums very unsatisfied, and as curious as ever. In fact, they were ten times more curious than they had been originally.

And Willy hadn't gone far up the passage before he ran full tilt into the very person he wished to avoid more than any other. Needless to say this person was Edward Oswald Handforth.

The leader of Study D sprang forward like a kangaroo.

"Got you!" he exclaimed darkly, as he grabbed Willy by the arm. "What's all this I've been hearing?"

"Some rot, I suppose!" said Willy.

"Where have you been all the afternoon?" asked Handforth, with a paternal kind of importance. "Out with it, my lad!"

No excuses, no evasions! And what the thunder do you mean by pinching my bike? You're going to be slaughtered for that later on. But we'll leave that for the moment."

"Life has some consolations," said Willy, with a happy sigh.

"You—you young rotter!" breathed Handforth. "Look here! No nonsense! I want to know——"

"I'm awfully sorry about the bike," said Willy. "But how was I to know that you wanted to use it? You ought to tell me these things——"

"We'll put aside all questions about the bike for the time being," said Handforth grimly. "What I want to know is—where have you been to all the afternoon? Come on, my lad—let's have it!"

"I thought those fatheds in the Third were inquisitive enough, but you take the biscuit!" said Willy. "I don't want to get your rag out, but there's nothing doing."

"What do you mean?"

"What I say!"

"You cheeky little bounder!"

"Oh, don't go over all that again!" groaned Willy. "Why not give it up? You know you can't force me to speak if I don't want to. So what's the good of trying? I went out on private business this afternoon, and——"

"And got yourself bruised and grazed?" broke in Handforth. "I suppose you fell off my bike?"

"Perhaps!"

"Eh?"

"There's no telling!" said Willy calmly.

He was certainly an exasperating young beggar, and Handforth glared at him in a manner that suggested that an act of cannibalism was intended. But Willy stood this with perfect stoicism.

"Anything else?" he asked.

"Yes, there's a lot else," replied Handforth. "I sha'n't be satisfied until I know what you've been doing with yourself this afternoon. You're younger than I am, and it's my duty to look after you and see that you don't get into any mischief. I don't allow you to go out to mysterious places without telling me about it."

"What a pity!" said Willy. "So in future I shall have to go out without your permission."

"If I tell the pater——"

"It's no good saying that—you're not a sneak!" interrupted Willy. "I know you, Ted—and the most you'll do is to punch my nose. That'll do a lot of good, won't it? Chuck it, old man, and let's say no more about it."

It was as much as Handforth could do to keep his temper. Indeed, he would have fallen upon Willy without further delay, only it happened that Nelson Lee hove in sight at that crucial moment. And Handforth minor was enabled to stroll easily away as though he had been in no danger whatever.

There was a slightly strained feeling in the Third that evening. But it was completely forgotten by the following morning. The fags were not possessed of very long memories. And Handforth minor was left in peace.

Two evenings later, however, on a particularly unpleasant night, Willy mysteriously disappeared directly after tea. In fact, he went before tea, because there was practically nothing to eat in the study—and Owen minor and Chubby Heath had done all that was necessary to the food before Willy had a look in.

However, he didn't mind. He casually mentioned that he was popping down to the village, and, as Archie would have said, he billed off. And no more was seen of him until a minute before calling over.

He came back looking flushed, well pleased with himself, and it was a noticeable fact that some money jingled in his pocket. Yet he had gone forth penniless. What could it mean?

Of course, Willy had paid a second visit to Dr. Ryland Grimes. He had enjoyed himself immensely, revelling in the thousand and one specimens which the old entomologist took keen delight in showing him.

Dr. Grimes had sent Willy off with five shillings—and Willy was a junior who didn't believe in refusing good sound silver when it was offered to him. Money was none too plentiful in the Third at the best of times.

Chubby Heath and Owen minor happened to be in the Triangle as Willy had calmly walked in. It was just beginning to drizzle.

"There he is!" said Chubby. "The awful bounder!"

They converged upon the truant.

"Where have you been to again?" demanded Owen minor.

"Same place!" replied Willy smoothly.

"You—you rotter!" exclaimed Owen. "What's the wheeze? Why can't you tell us where you've been to, instead of keeping up all this silly secrecy?"

"He's got some money, too!" declared Chubby. "Didn't you hear it just now? He was stony when he went away."

"Broke to the wide!" agreed Willy. "Queer, isn't it?"

"It's downright suspicious to my mind!" said Heath darkly.

"Better tell the police," said Willy. "I suppose I must have been committing a burglary of some kind. And look here! What do you think of these? Jolly pretty, aren't they?"

He opened a cigarette box and revealed two wonderful butterflies of glorious colouring. The other juniors looked at them in a kind of awe. They secretly envied Handforth minor and his collection of insects, for most boys sometime or other have a love for owning such things.

"They're beauties, ain't they?" asked Chubby.

"First class!" agreed Willy. "You may

(Continued on page 15.)

EVERY WEEK—TWO GRAND COMPLETE DETECTIVE STORIES



CONTAINS TWO OF THE VERY BEST COMPLETE
DETECTIVE STORIES.

OUR DETECTIVE STORY SECTION

No. 1. PRESENTED WITH "THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY."

Dec. 9, 1922

The Red-Haired Pickpocket



JIMMY ILES was "some dip." That was how he would have put it himself. In the archives of the New York Central Detective Bureau the description was less concise, but even more plain: "James (Jimmie) Iles, alias Red Jimmie, alias, etc. . . . expert pickpocket."

And Red Jimmie, whose hair was flame coloured and whose indomitable smile flashed from ear to ear on the slightest provocation, would have been lacking in the vanity of the under world if he had not been proud of his reputation at Mulberry Street. Nevertheless, fame has its disadvantages, and though he was on friendly terms with the headquarters staff individually, he hated the system that had of late prevented his applying his undoubted talents to full profit.

England beckoned him—England, where he could make a fresh start with the past all put behind him. Do not make a mistake; Jimmie had no intention of reform. But in England there were no records, and consequently the police would not be allowed points in the game. It would be hard, therefore, if an energetic, painstaking man could not pick up enough to keep him in bread and butter.

Behold Jimmie, therefore, a first-class passenger on the s.s. Fortunia—"Mr. James Strickland" on the passenger list—a suit in the Renaissance style of architecture built about him, the skirts of his coat descending well towards his knees, his peg-top trousers roomy and with a cast-iron crease. Behold him explaining for the fiftieth time to one of his sometime "stalls" the reason that had driven him from God's own country.

"I'm too good natured. That's what's the matter with me. The bulls are right on to me. If I carried a gun or hit one of 'em, like Dutch Fred, I might get away with it sometimes. But I can't do it. They're good boys, though they've got into a kind of habit o' pulling me whenever they're feeling lonely. I can't go anywhere without a fourt' of July procession of sleut's taggin' after me—Holy Moses, there's one there now. How do you do, Mr. Murray? Say, shall we find if there's a saloon?"

Detective-sergeant Murray grinned affably. "Not for mine, Jimmie old lad. I've got that kind of lonesome feeling. Won't you see me home?"

Jimmie thrilled with a tremor of familiar apprehension. "Honest to Gawd, I ain't done a thing," he declared earnestly. "You're only jollying, Mr. Murray?"

The officer laughed and vanished. Jimmie decided to make himself inconspicuous till the vessel sailed. Luckily for his peace of mind, he did not know that the Central Office was paying him the compliment of a special cable in order that he might receive proper attention when he landed.

Jimmie was "good" on board, though more than once he was tempted. It was not till he was on the boat-train from Liverpool to London that he fell. There was only one fellow-passenger in the compartment with him—a burly, prosperous man of middle age, whom Jimmie knew from shipboard gossip to be one Sweeney, partner in a Detroit firm of hardware merchants. There was a comfortable bulge in his right-hand breast pocket—a bulge that made Jimmie's mouth water. He had no fear but that he could reduce that swelling when he chose. The only trouble was "the get-away." He had no "stalls" to whom to pass the booty. He would have to lift the pocket-book as they got out at Euston, if he did it at all. It was too risky to chance it before.

Five minutes before the train drew in at Euston, Sweeney began to collect his hand baggage. He patted his breast pocket to make sure that the pocket-book was still there. Jimmie felt pleased that he had restrained himself. He brushed by Sweeney as the train drew up, and as he passed on to the platform, he knew the exultation of the artist in a finished piece of work. The pocket-book was in his possession.

Not until he had reached his hotel and was safe in the seclusion of his own room did he examine the prize—having first ordered a fire in view of eventualities. There was a bunch of greenbacks and English notes totalling up to forty pounds—not a bad haul. Also there were a score or so of letters. Jimmie dropped the pocket-book itself on the fire, and raked the coals round it. Then he settled himself to read the correspondence before consigning it to the flames. Waste not, want not; and although Jimmie held rigidly to the line of business in which he was so adept, he was not averse to profiting from the by-products. One never knew what information might be in a letter. Jimmie had more than once gained a hint which, passed on to the right

quarters, had earned him a "rake off" from a robbery that was decidedly acceptable.

There seemed, however, nothing of that kind here. The letters were merely ordinary business jargon on commonplaces of commerce, and half a dozen or so introductions which a business man visiting Europe might be expected to carry. One by one the flames consumed them. Then he came to the last one and hitched his shoulders as he read. It had been printed in pencil, evidently at some trouble.

"Dear Sweeney,—We are not going to be played with any longer. If you are in earnest you will come over and see us. The Fortunia sails on the seventeenth. The evening following her arrival, one of us will wait for you between ten and twelve at the Albert Suspension Bridge, Battersea. You will make up your mind to come if you are wise. We can then settle matters. —O. J."

A man may be a pickpocket and retain a certain amount of human nature. A crook who is in business for profit rarely has opportunities to consider romance. If there is anything in the nature of a show, he usually plays the part of the foiled villain. So if he has a taste that way he indulges in fiction, the theatre, or the cinema, so that he can safely gratify his natural sympathies on the side of virtue. Jimmie was fond of the cinema. Often he had been so engrossed by the hair-raising exploits of a detective that he had totally neglected the natural facilities afforded by darkness and entertainment.

Now, however, he was suddenly plunged into an affair that promised real life melodrama. The printed characters, the mysterious appointment late at night, the ambiguous threat, were something for his imagination to gloat over. His fertile brain wove fancies of the Black Hand, the Mafia, and kindred blackmailing societies which the Sunday editions of the New York papers had painted crimson in his mind. He thrust the letter into the fire, and went out in search of one, Four-fingered Foster, sometime an associate of his in New York, now established a snug little business, "bunco steering," in London. Foster had been notified in advance of his coming.

He found his four-fingered friend established under the role of an insurance agent at a Brixton boarding-house, and Foster was willing and anxious to show the friend of his youth the town. So thoroughly indeed did they celebrate the reunion that ten o'clock had gone before Jimmie recalled the note. He swallowed the remnants of some poisonous decoction while they lounged before the tall counter of an American bar, near Leicester Square.

"Say, Ted," he remarked, his pronunciation extremely painstaking. "Where's Albert Bridge?"

ANSWERS
EVERY MONDAY...PRICE 2?

"Search me," answered his friend.
 "Who's he? What's your notion?"

"It's a place," exclaimed Jimmie. "I gotta get there. Got a—hic—pointment."
 "We'll go get a cab," said Foster, staggering away from the bar. "Taxi driver sure to know."

Jimmie grabbed him by the lapel of his coat. By this time he had made up his mind that the Black Hand had got its clutches on the prosperous Sweeney, and he had a fancy that he might play the part of hero in the melodrama. Friendship was all very well, but it could be stretched too far.

"Scuse me, Ted." He rolled a little and steadied himself with one hand on the bar counter. "Most particular—private—hic—pointment."

"Aw—if it's a skirt——" Foster was contemptuous.

Jimmie did not enlighten him. His wits never entirely deserted him. He moved uncertainly to the door, explained his need to the uniformed door-keeper, and soon was flying south-west in a neat green taxi.

The driver had to rouse him when he reached his destination. Jimmie paid him off and began to walk under the giant tentacles of the suspension bridge, his blue eyes roving restlessly about. It was very lonely. He passed a policeman, and then a stout man came sauntering aimlessly along. Sweeney did not seem to recognise Jimmie, and Jimmie did not wish to attract his attention yet. Apparently the Black Hand emissary—Jimmie was sure it was the Black Hand—had not yet turned up. Out of the corner of his eyes he saw Sweeney standing absently near the iron rail gazing down on the swirling, blackened waters beneath. The pickpocket passed on.

He had gone a dozen paces when a thud as of a heavy hammer falling upon wood brought him about with a jerk. He had recognised the unmistakable report of an automatic pistol. Into his line of sight came a vision of Sweeney, no longer on the pavement, but in the centro of the roadway. He was on his knees, and while Jimmie ran, he fell forward. There was no sign of an assailant.

Jimmie knelt and raised the fallen man till the body was supported by his knee. There was a thin trickle of blood from the temple—such a trickle as might be caused by a superficial surface cut. The American loosened the dead man's collar.

It had all happened in a few seconds, and even while he was trying to discover if there was life remaining in the limp body, the constable he had passed came running up.

"What's wrong here?" he demanded.

Jimmie, satisfied that the man was dead, laid the body back gently, and brushed the dust from his trouser-knees as he stood up.

"This guy's been shot," he said. "The sport that did it can't have got far. He must have been hiding behind one of the bridge supports."

The constable placed a whistle to his mouth in swift summons. Then he in turn knelt and examined the dead man. Jimmie stood by, his hands thrust deep in his pockets, his eyes searching every shadow where an assassin might still be in hiding.

The deserted bridge had suddenly become alive. In the magical fashion in which a crowd springs up in places seemingly isolated, scores of people were concentrating on the spot. Among them were dotted the blue uniforms of half a dozen policemen.

Jimmie had given up any idea of being a hero, but he still saw the tragedy with the glamour of melodrama. He watched with interest the effective way in which the police handled the emergency. A sergeant exchanged a few swift words with the original constable, and then took charge. The crowd was swept back for fifty yards on each side of the murdered man. Jimmie would fain have been swept with it, but a heavy hand compressed his arm and detained him.

The sergeant gave swift orders to a cyclist policeman. "Slip off to the station. We want the divisional surgeon and an ambulance. They'll let the Criminal Investigation people know."

A murder, whatever the circumstances, is invariably dealt with by the Criminal Investigation Department. The uniformed police may be first engaged, but the detective force is always called in.

"Now, Sullivan, what do you know about this?"

The constable addressed straightened himself up.

"I was patrolling the bridge about five minutes ago," he said. "I passed him"—he nodded to the dead man. "He was walking slowly to the south side. I didn't pay much attention. A little farther on I passed this chap"—he indicated Jimmy—"but I didn't pay any particular attention. I had just reached the other end when I heard a shot. I ran back, and found the first man being supported by the other, who was searching him. There were no other persons on the bridge to my knowledge."

Jimmie's mouth opened wide. He was thunderstruck.

"Searching him!" he ejaculated. "Say, cap."—he was not quite sure of the sergeant's rank—"I never saw the guy in my life before. I was taking a look around when I heard a shot. I was just loosening his clothes when this man comes up."

He was too paralysed to put all he wanted to say into coherent shape. He was sober enough now. A man confronted with a deadly peril can compress a great deal of thinking into one or two seconds. Jimmie could see any number of points that told against him, and he strove vainly to concoct some plausible explanation. The entire truth he rejected as seeming too wild for credit.

"Better keep anything you're going to say for Mr Whipple," advised the sergeant.

"Two of you had better take him to the station."

With his head buried in his hands, Jimmie sat disconsolate on a police-cell bed. He was filled with apprehension, and the more he considered things, the more gloomy the outlook appeared. For an hour or more he waited, and at last he heard footsteps in the corridor. A face peered through the "Judas hole" in the cell door, and then the lock clicked.

"Come on!" ordered a uniformed inspector. "Mr. Whipple wants to see you."

"Who's Mr. Whipple?" demanded Jimmie drearily.

"Divisional detective-inspector. Come, hurry up!"

There were places in the United States where Jimmie had been through the "sweat-box," and though he had heard that methods of that kind were barred in England, he felt a trifle nervous. He preceded the inspector along the cell-lined corridor, through the charge-room, and up a flight of stairs to a well-lighted little office. Two or three broad-shouldered men in mufti were standing about. A youth seated at a table with some blank sheets of paper in front of him was sharpening a pencil. A slim, pleasant-faced man was standing near the fireplace with a bowler hat on his head and dangling a pair of gloves aimlessly to and fro. It was his eyes that Jimmie met. He knew without the necessity of words that the man was Whipple. He pulled himself together for the ordeal of bullying that he half expected.

"I don't know nothin' about it, chief," he opened abruptly and with some anxiety. "I'm a stranger here, and I never saw the guy before."

"Take it easy, my lad," said Whipple quietly. "Nobody has said you killed him yet. I want to ask you one or two questions. You needn't answer unless you like, you know. If you can convince us that you were there only by accident, and had no hand in the murder, so much the better. But remember you're not forced to answer. Everything you say will be written down. Give him a drink somebody. Now take it quietly, old chap. What's your name?"

His voice was soothing, almost sympathetic. It gave Jimmie the impression, as it was intended to, that here was a man who would be scrupulously fair. He drank the brandy which someone passed to him, and for an instant his old, wide-mouthed smile flashed out. The spirit gave him a momentary touch of confidence.

"That's all right, boss. James Strickland's my name. I'm from New York. Come over in the Fortunia and landed this morning."

"What are you?"

"Piano tuner." The trade was the first one that occurred to Jimmie. "Over here

to see if there's an opening," he rattled glibly. "Trade's slack the other side." The shorthand writer's pencil scratched rapidly over the paper. Whipple's face was expressionless.

Question succeeded question, each one quietly put, each answer received without comment. Jimmie was becoming involved in an inextricable tangle of lies. Had not the horrible fear still loomed over him, he might have avoided contradictions, extraordinary improbabilities, and constructed a connected, if false, story. And he could see, not in his interlocutor's face, but in the faces of the others, a scepticism which they scarcely troubled to conceal.

The catechism finished, Whipple began drawing on his gloves.

"That will do. You will be detained till we have made some more inquiries."

Jimmie shuddered.

"You don't really think I done this, boss? You aren't goin'—"

"You're not charged yet," said Whipple. "You're only detained till we know more about things."

It was poor consolation, but with it Jimmie had to be content. He was taken below, and Whipple turned an inquiring face on one of his sergeants. The man made a significant grimace.

"Guilty as blazes, sir," he said emphatically. "What did he want to tell that string of lies for?"

"I don't know," said Whipple thoughtfully. "You'd be thrown a little off your balance, Newton, if you were suddenly up against it. He's a liar, but he's not necessarily a murderer."

Newton grunted, but ventured no open dissent till his superior had gone. He was a shrewd man in dealing with the commonplaces of crime, but he lacked subtlety, and accordingly despised it. "The gov'nor's too kid-gloved," he complained, with asperity, to the uniformed inspector. "What's the use of mucking about? The bloke's a Yankee crook. He admits he came over in the Fortunia, and he says he don't know Sweeney, who came over in the same boat. Why, he must have been laying for him. He must have shadowed him till he got a fair chance. Mark me, when we've traced those notes we took off Strickland, we shall find that they were originally paid out to Sweeney. Waste of time finicking about, I call it."

Now some of this reasoning had been in Whipple's mind, but he liked to feel the ground secure under his feet before he took an irrevocable step. There was no hurry—at any rate for the twenty-four hours during which he was entitled to detain Jimmie on suspicion without making a charge. But there were certain points on which he was not entirely satisfied.

He was on hand at Scotland Yard early next morning. The report of the tragedy was in the morning papers, but they had

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given it little prominence. From their point of view it was of little news value—just a shooting affray, with a man detained. This was the view the superintendent of the Criminal Investigation Department, to whom Whipple had come to report, took of it.

"Straightforward case, isn't it, Whipple?"

"There are one or two queer points about it, sir. I must admit it looks rather bad for Strickland, but somehow I don't believe

precipitated crash his firm. His business unsound for years. Insurance company informs us recently increased life premiums for half-million dollars. Suspect fraud. Request you will make stringent tests of identity, alternatively suspect suicide.' That's signed by the Detroit Chief of Police."

The superintendent stretched out a hand and took the cablegram. He read it through twice with puckered brows.

"That's a queer development," he ad-



Jimmy knelt and raised the fallen man till the body was supported by his knee. There was a thin trickle of blood from the temple—such a trickle as might be caused by a superficial surface cut.

he did it. I can't say why, but that's my impression."

"You must be careful of impressions, Whipple. They carry you away from the facts sometimes."

"I know that. Well, the facts are these: Sweeney, the dead man, was the president of a hardware company at Detroit. I sent a cable off last night. He had come over partly on business, partly on pleasure, and was held in very good repute there. About five minutes ago I got this fresh cable." He smoothed out a yellow strip with his hand and read: "'News Sweeney's death

mitted. "I don't see what they're getting at. If the murdered man is not Sweeney, that hypothesis assumes that Sweeney got someone else to impersonate him and that the second person knew he was to be killed. That's ridiculous."

"So I think, sir. There's more to the suicide end. The divisional surgeon says that the dead man's temple was blackened by the explosion of the pistol. That shows that the weapon, when it was fired, was but a few inches from his face. Of course, when I saw the surgeon I didn't know what this cable tells us, but luckily I put the

point to him. There was no weapon found. I asked him if, supposing that Sweeney had killed himself, he could have thrown the pistol into the water, after pulling the trigger—it was a distance of several yards to the parapet of the bridge. He was emphatic that it was impossible."

"Then it comes back to murder after all. Yes, it's certainly curious about the insurance. Who's the chap you've got in?"

Jimmie would have been interested in the reply, even had he been less vitally concerned. It would have shown him how vain were his hopes of cutting away from his record.

"A little red-haired chap with a big mouth, who gave the name Strickland—a Yankee pickpocket, Jimmy Hes, or Red Jimmie. You'll remember, sir; New York cabled us he had sailed."

"Yes, I remember. We ought to have something about him then."

"We have. I spent part of last night picking it up. The Liverpool men spotted him in a compartment of the boat-train, alone with a man who fills the description of Sweeney. Sergeant Fuller, who was on duty at Euston, saw him when he arrived and took the number of his cab. He was not with Sweeney then. We found the cabman early this morning. He had driven him to a little hotel off the Strand. The hotel people remember him because he wanted a fire in his bedroom—a fire this weather! He went up there and stayed for over an hour. Then he went straight out."

"At nine o'clock Tamplin, of the West End, saw Four-fingered Foster in the Dewville Bar, Coventry Street, with a red-haired American whom he thought was being strung. The Grape Street people recalled this when the tape report of the murder came over to them. I sent a man to rake out Foster, and sure enough his red-haired pal was Jimmie. Foster said they had parted in the Strand about eleven o'clock. Jimmie said he had an appointment at the Albert Bridge—Foster thought with a girl."

"Those are pretty well all the facts, except this: when Jimmie was searched at the police station there were found on him three five-pound notes. These notes had been issued to Sweeney by a bank at Detroit before he left. I have the man's own statement here, sir, if you'd care to look at it. It's a string of lies."

His chief waved aside the document and fiddled with his pince-nez as he considered the problem for a while. "You're right to go easy, Whipple, but don't overdo it. There's almost enough evidence as it is to hang Red Jimmie. Intuition is good, but a jury won't be interested in your psychology. They'd sooner read a book."

"Very good, sir." The detective-inspector went away, still far from satisfied. In view of the evidence now accumulated, he would have been inclined to believe Jimmie guilty

had it not been for the singular news of Sweeney's smash and the insurance. Coincidence is a factor in criminal investigation work, but this was straining it. If Sweeney had been murdered, the crime had come just right to provide for his family.

"There's some point that I've overlooked," he murmured to himself. "I can't quite place it."

He went back over the Albert Bridge to the police station, but no inspiration came to him. There was a bundle of reports awaiting him in his office, but after a casual glance he flung them aside and went down to the cells. He wanted to see Jimmie alone.

Jimmie looked up with pitifully haggard face as the door clanged behind the detective. Whipple nodded cheerfully and sat down.

"Jimmie," he said familiarly, "wouldn't you like to give me the straight griffin? I've heard from New York. You'd better let me know exactly what happened. What passed between you and Sweeney in the train coming down from Liverpool?"

Jimmie, seeing that it was useless to bluff his interlocutor, then related all that had happened since his arrival in England.

"And you want me to believe this yarn that you've been sitting thinking out, do you? Ah—don't be a fool."

Jimmie was utterly unstrung, or he never would have allowed himself a resort to violence which, even if it were successful, must have been futile. He thought he saw that he was still disbelieved, and had leapt at the detective's throat with a mad idea of escape. Whipple side-stepped quickly, stooped, and the pickpocket felt himself lifted and flung to the other side of the cell.

"Don't be a fool, Jimmie," repeated Whipple mildly. "Even if you did knock me out, you couldn't do anything. The cell is locked on the outside, and even I can't get away till I ring. Sit down again quietly—that's right. Now tell me one other thing: Did you notice anything in particular when you got on to the bridge last night?"

The other rubbed himself tenderly.

"Nothing in particular," he answered. "There was a smell of paint—that's not much good."

"Isn't it!" said Whipple, and pressed the bell that summoned the gaoler.

Two men sauntered on to the Albert Bridge. Whipple had got an idea, and though he had yet to test it, he was convinced that he was on the right track at last. He nodded as he saw the fresh green paint on the rails, and kept his eye fixed on them till he had passed a dozen yards by the spot where the murder had been committed. Then the two crossed to the other side of the bridge. The inspection of not more than three yards of the rail had

taken place when Whipple halted and gave a satisfied chuckle.

"We're on it, Newton," he declared. "Look here."

He pointed to some marks on the fresh paintwork. Across the top of the upper part of the rail, and continued downwards on the outer side, the paint had been scraped away. On the river side there were a couple of irregular bruises on the paint.

"Kids been playing about," said the sergeant with decision. "I remember in the flat murder case we got mucked about by a lot of marks on a doorway. Some bright soul thought they were Arabic characters. It turned out they were boy scout marks."

The detective-inspector laughed.

"All right. Seeing's believing with you. I'll have a shot at this my own way, though. You might go and 'phone through to the river division. Ask 'em to send a couple of boats up here with drags."

Newton spat over the rail into the tide.

"You'll not find anything with drags," he said, and with this Parthian shot, went to obey his instructions. Whipple remained in thought. Once, when there was a lull in the traffic, he paced out the distance between the marks on the rail and the place where Sweeney had been killed.

"I'm right," he declared to himself; "I'd bet on it."

Within twenty minutes two motor-launches were off the bridge and Newton had returned. Leaving him to mark the spot where the paint had been rubbed on the rail, Whipple went down to be picked up off a convenient wharf. A short discussion with the officer in charge as to the effect of the tide-drift, and they were in mid-stream again.

Then the drags splashed overboard and they began methodically to search the bed of the river. When half an hour had gone, Whipple was beginning to bite his lip. A drag came to the surface with whipcord about its lines. A constable began to unwind it. The detective leaned forward eagerly.

"Steady, man, don't let it break whatever you do."

They pulled the thing attached to the string on board and steered for the bank, Whipple in the glow of satisfaction that comes to every man who sees the end of his work in sight. He went straight to the police-station telegraph room.

"Whipple to Superintendent C.I.," he dictated. "Inform Detroit police Sweeney's insurance void. Absolute proof committed suicide. Details to follow."

Later, in his own office his stenographer took down to be typed for record:

"Sir,—I respectfully submit the following facts in regard to the supposed murder of the man Sweeney:

"I first gained the impression that it was suicide from the doctor's report that

the explosion of a pistol had scorched the dead man's face, showing that it had been held very closely to his head. This impression was strengthened by the fact that Iles, the American who was found by the body and at first suspected of the murder, could, if his motive was robbery, have attained his end more simply without violence. He is known to the New York police as an expert pickpocket. I need scarcely add that the knowledge that Sweeney was practically a bankrupt before he left the United States and had insured himself very heavily, disposed me still more to the theory of suicide. If Sweeney had it in his mind to kill himself, it was indispensable to his purpose (since practically all life insurances are void in the event of suicide) to make the act appear (1) as an accident; (2) as a murder. He chose the latter.

"Unfortunately for himself, Iles picked Sweeney's pocket on the journey to London. Whether the latter discovered his loss before his death it is impossible to say with certainty. I believe not. Among the documents which Iles found was a letter in printed characters (which, with others, he burnt) demanding an appointment on the Albert Bridge, and conveying indirect threats. It is my belief that this letter was written by Sweeney himself, with the idea that it would be found on his body and confirm the appearance of murder. I considered very fully the various means by which Sweeney might dispose of a pistol after he had shot himself. Only one practical way occurred to me, and this was confirmed by an examination of the bridge rail, which had been newly painted. There were the paint stains on the dead man's clothes, and Iles had said he noticed him looking over the rails.

"It seemed to me that if the butt of a pistol were secured to a cord, and a heavy weight attached to the other end of the cord and dropped over the rail of the bridge before the fatal shot was fired, the grip on the pistol would relax and it would be automatically dragged into the water. The river was dragged at my request, and the discovery of an automatic pistol tied by a length of whipcord to a heavy leaden-weight proved my theory right. . . . With regard to Iles, I shall charge him with pocket-picking on his own confession, and ask that he shall be recommended for deportation as an undesirable alien. . . . I have the honour to be your humble servant,

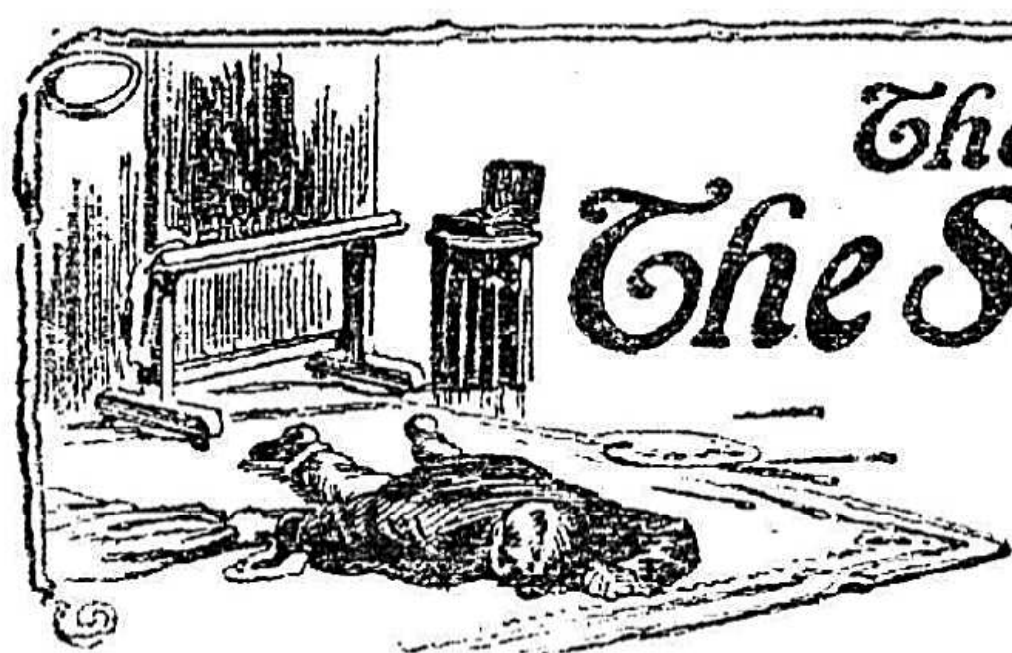
"LIONEL WHIPPLE,

"Divisional Detective-inspector."

"All the same, sir," commented Detective-sergeant Newton, "it looked like being that tough. He's in luck that you tumbled to the gag."

"That's right," agreed Whipple smilingly. "It's luck—just luck."

THE END.



The Case of The Studio Murder

From the Memoirs of the Celebrated
Detective, CARFAX BAINES.

CARFAX Baines was enjoying a pipe in Villiers Street one January evening, when the postman brought him a letter bearing the New York postmark. It contained a draft for one hundred guineas as a retaining fee, and an urgent request that he would come over to New York at once and investigate the Matchett murder. The writer was George Tollington, a criminal lawyer, of New York City. Baines knew the man by reputation, and he had heard vaguely of the Matchett murder. After reading up the case that night, from a file of back papers, he decided to take it in hand.

He immediately booked a passage on the next boat to New York, arriving there at the beginning of February. The lawyer's clerk met him, and took him to rooms which had been engaged for him at the Metropolitan Hotel. An hour later Baines presented himself at the offices of Mr. Tollington, in Lower Broadway, and was received by the lawyer in a private consulting-room. The door was locked, and the two men proceeded at once to business.

"My dear sir, how can I thank you?" exclaimed Mr. Tollington. "My client, an absolutely innocent man, will be put upon his trial in a week. His wife is now lying very ill, and her husband's conviction—which is a certainty as matters stand at present—will kill her. So there are two lives at stake, Mr. Baines. You must do what the best detectives in New York have failed to accomplish—find the real murderer of Arthur Matchett."

"I hope I may succeed, but I fear that you exaggerate my skill."

"No; you have solved more difficult problems. I sent for you when all other resources were exhausted. But you are familiar with this case?"

"Fairly so. I have read it up as far as possible. I was in Russia at the time it happened, and had been back in London only two days when I received your letter."

"Have you formed any opinion?"

"The evidence looks black against Mr. Arblast," said Baines.

"Yes; terribly so," admitted the lawyer. "But I, who have known the man for years, am certain that he is guiltless. Suppose I repeat the facts briefly. My client, Gordon Arblast, is junior partner in the prosperous firm of King and Arblast, im-

porting merchants. He is wealthy and well-connected, married to a beautiful and devoted woman. Both he and his wife have been for years on friendly terms with the murdered man, Arthur Matchett, who, I need hardly tell you, was one of our leading American artists. The crime was committed in the evening of the 9th of last December, and a couple of hours earlier Gordon Arblast returned to New York from an extensive business trip to Japan and other Eastern countries; he had been absent for the better part of a year.

"Matchett's studio was on the top floor of a house in Eighteenth Street, and his landlady was a widow, Mrs. Wood, with two half-grown children and a limited income. She had one other lodger, who was out of town at the time of the murder. On the evening in question, about twenty minutes to six o'clock, Mrs. Wood heard the sound of a fall upstairs. She thought nothing of it until, some five minutes later, in the lower hall, she met Gordon Arblast. He brushed by her and hurried into the street. She knew him well by sight, but she had not been aware that he was in the house; it transpired subsequently that one of the children had admitted him. Almost immediately after Arblast's departure, the servant took a cup of tea up to Matchett, and discovered the crime. The artist lay dead on the studio floor, with a deep wound in his back that had penetrated to the heart. One hand was clutching a lay figure, dressed as a woman, that he had been using as a model for the painting on which he had been engaged. Mrs. Wood had seen him alive at five o'clock, and she declares that nobody but Arblast could have been in the studio afterwards. My client was there, and you know why."

"Yes," assented Baines. "I understand that the subject of the canvas on which Matchett was working was the reading of the death-warrant to Mary Queen of Scots, that Mrs. Arblast had been sitting for the part of the Queen, and that the picture had been much talked about in the Press. The Public Prosecutor's theory—that Arblast was jealous of his wife—looks very ugly. And the statement made by the accused doesn't help matters, by any means."

"In what condition is the studio now?" asked Baines.

"Precisely as it was on the night of the

murder; nothing has been disturbed. You can see it at any time."

"Yes, I shall want to, Mr. Tollington. And I am anxious to hear the accused man's story, from his own lips, as soon as possible."

"We will go at once," said the lawyer. "I have already arranged for an interview."

A cab conveyed Mr. Tollington and the detective to the prison in a few minutes, and on producing their written authority a warder promptly led them to the cell occupied by Gordon Arblast, a handsome man of forty, whose face showed how keenly he felt his position. He had been expecting his visitors, and his eyes gleamed with hope and gratitude when he shook hands with Carfax Baines. In a firm voice, which faltered as he went on, he repeated the story that was ridiculed by the police and the public.

"I had been absent for nearly a year," he said, "when I landed at Vancouver early in December. I intended to stop there for a couple of days, and wrote to my wife to that effect. Then, thinking to surprise her, I changed my mind and came on by the first train. I reached New York during the afternoon of the 9th, and in the train I read in several papers notices of Matchett's new picture. They mentioned my wife's beauty, and how well she portrayed the character of Mary Queen of Scots. I felt rather pleased than otherwise, for I had given her permission to sit to Matchett, who was a very old friend. But when I got home, and learned from the servant that my wife had gone to the studio and had not yet returned, I admit that I was a trifle jealous, as well as disappointed. I walked rapidly to Eighteenth Street—I live within a mile of it—and I found one of Mrs. Wood's children standing at the door listening to the music of a hurdy-gurdy. I slipped past her, mounted the stairs, and opened the studio door. I shall never forget that sight. It is true, as the police say, that for an instant I believed the lay figure to be my wife. But my eyes were immediately riveted upon Matchett, who lay on the floor——"

Arblast's voice broke, and he paused for a moment, overcome by the terrible recollection.

"The poor fellow was prostrate, with one hand touching the figure," he continued



The policemen clutched him, and then he seemed suddenly to realise the situation. He fought like a tiger with surprising strength.

hoarsely. "I rushed up to him and touched him. He was warm, but quite dead—bleeding from a wound in the back. I looked for a weapon, but could find none. Then I saw blood on my hands! I realised the frightful position I should be in if I was discovered there, and the thought of it seemed to turn my brain. I fled down the stairs and into the street, and I have no remembrance of seeing Mrs. Wood. When I reached home my wife was waiting for me—she had been shopping with her sister, who always accompanied her to Matchett's studio. Then the police came—I was arrested, like a common felon! But before God, gentlemen, I am innocent! I have told you the truth, the whole truth!"

"I believe you," said Baines. "Cheer up, my dear sir, and hope for the best. I want to ask you a number of questions. To begin with, how did you know that it was a quarter past six when you left the studio?"

"Because it wanted a minute or so to that time when I entered. There was a clock on the wall."

"Do you remember where?"

"No; my agitation was too great. But it must have been in front of me."

Baines jotted this down in a book, and for half an hour he continued the conversation, making various pointed inquiries. Then, after a few encouraging words to the prisoner, he and Mr. Tollington took their departure.

OUR DETECTIVE STORY SECTION

That night, in the lawyer's office, Baines studied the medical testimony and other evidence offered at the inquest held on the dead artist, but it told him little that he did not already know. But among Matchett's correspondence was a letter which caused the detective to think.

After lunch he consulted a New York directory, and then went alone to the house in Eighteenth Street. Mrs. Wood had been notified of his visit, and she and the servant—the latter a middle-aged woman—accompanied him to the scene of the tragedy.

The studio was a type of the kind one would expect a well-to-do artist to have. Baines made a keen, brief survey of the room. He noted particularly a large clock on the wall immediately to the left of the door, a gilded mirror on the opposite wall, and to the right a gallery extending the width of the studio, with a staircase leading to it. He examined the spot where Matchett had fallen—dark stains of blood were still visible; and directly overhead was the huge skylight. The detective pointed to it.

"Was that open on the night of the murder?" he asked.

"Yes, it was raised a couple of feet," replied Mrs. Wood. "The weather was close, and Mr. Matchett had allowed his fire to get too hot."

"And that clock, and the mirror—have they always been where they are now?"

"They haven't been moved for a year, sir," answered the servant. "I am sure of that, for I cleaned the studio regularly for the poor gentleman."

"Ah, then perhaps you can tell me if Mr. Matchett possessed a curious old dagger—a very heavy and dangerous weapon. If it had a name he might have called it the Mogul."

"The Mogul!" exclaimed the servant.

"That's just what I heard him call it once. If you look up there, sir, you'll— Why, no, it's gone! That is queer. It always hung in the gallery, right below the rail." She pointed to the exact place.

"You didn't miss it before?" asked Baines, with a peculiar smile.

"No, sir. I've only been in the studio once since."

"Do you remember when you saw it last?"

"I dusted it a couple of days before Mr. Matchett was killed," the woman replied.

Having ascertained that Mrs. Wood knew nothing whatever of the missing weapon, Baines ascended to the gallery, opened a small door at one end, and found himself on a narrow balcony in the open air. This looked down on a small garden that adjoined the house in the rear, and also partly on the east side. The gallery extended to the outside corner of the studio, and the detective easily drew himself on to the roof, which sloped towards the north. He crept across it, closely scanning the tin covering and the edges of the skylight, to the west side. Several feet below him, and with no space between, was the flat roof of the

next house; a trapdoor was cut in the middle of it. He had seen as much as he wanted, and there was a glitter in his eyes—a sign that meant victory—when he returned to the gallery and went downstairs.

"I suppose Mr. Matchett often stepped out to the balcony for a breath of fresh air," he said.

"Yes, sir, he did," the servant replied.

"And the door leading to it might have been unlocked on the night of the murder?"

"Very likely, sir."

Baines turned to the landlady.

"I believe your next neighbour on the left is a Mr. Samuel Masterson," he said.

"Can you tell me anything about him?"

"He is what they call a collector—he has heaps of swords, and knives, and such things, which he keeps in a glass cabinet."

"Was he acquainted with Mr. Matchett?" inquired the detective.

"Yes; they used to pay each other visits. The last time Mr. Masterman was here was a month before the murder."

A few more questions satisfied Carfax Baines, and he went back to his hotel in a pleasant frame of mind. His time was fully occupied during the two succeeding days, and he saw nothing of the lawyer. Then at eight o'clock on the evening of the third day he met Mr. Tollington by written appointment at the latter's office.

They took a cab to Eighteenth Street, and walked to Samuel Masterson's house, where they were met by two policemen in plain clothes. An elderly woman answered the ring at the bell, and a brief word of explanation silenced her suspicious inquiries.

The whole party brushed by her, and a light guided them to a comfortably furnished library off the rear of the hall. No one was there, and Baines immediately approached a large, glass-fronted cabinet that stood across the room. He opened the door—the key was in the lock—and ran his eyes over the couple of score of antique weapons that were arranged neatly on shelves. He quickly found and seized what he wanted—a long dagger of chased steel, with an enormously heavy blade, and a small handle studded with sparkling jewels.

"The Mogul!" he exclaimed. "With this Arthur Matchett was killed!"

Just then Samuel Masterson entered from an adjoining apartment. He was a lean, old man of about sixty, with a white beard and moustache, and clad in a velvet dressing-gown. His face flamed into colour, and his sunken eyes flashed dangerously. He rushed savagely at Baines.

"Stop, thief!" he cried. "Put that down! If you must rob me, take anything else!"

The policemen clutched him, and then he seemed to suddenly realise the situation. He fought like a tiger, with surprising strength. He broke loose, and tried to reach a pair of crossed swords on the wall; but his captors were too quick for him, and again they seized him.

"I know what you want," he moaned. "Have pity on me! It was an accident. I did not mean to do it! I was watching him from the skylight, and the dagger slipped—"

"This?" asked Baines, holding up the weapon.

The prisoner nodded.

"Yes, that—the Mogul! Ah, how I coveted it! And it has cost blood—blood! But I would not have let the innocent suffer. I was waiting for the result of the trial, and then—"

"Can it be possible that this old man is Matchett's murderer?" exclaimed Mr. Tollington.

"Yes and no," replied the detective. "It was an accident, as you have heard him say. But I will explain everything in a moment."

A cab was summoned, and the two policemen drove away, with Samuel Masterson in custody. Then the lawyer and Baines entered the house next door and went up to the studio.

"Now I will tell you what happened on the evening of the 9th of December, at least according to my theory," said Baines. "For a long time Masterson—who is a bit dotty, I fancy—had coveted that dagger from his collection until the desire drove him to crime. Matchett would not sell it; he bought it some years ago at a native bazaar in Benares, and he called it the Mogul because it had once belonged to one of the Kings of Delhi. It was a very ancient and valuable weapon. From the trap at the top of his house it was easy for Masterman to gain the studio roof, and no doubt he frequently crept to the skylight and looked down, watching for his chance.

"It came on that fatal night, when Matchett left the studio for a few moments. Masterson crossed the roof from the balcony, got across to the gallery, and took the dagger from its place on the wall. On his way back he stopped to reconnoitre at the open skylight. The stolen weapon slipped from his hand, and falling verti-

cally, by the weight of the blade, it struck Matchett and pierced him through to the heart. Horrified as he must have been, Masterson was loth to lose his prize. He returned to the studio, recovered the dagger from the wound, and got safely away before Gordon Arblast came on the scene. And I have discovered a curious thing about the time—but move a couple of feet, and I will show you. There, that's it. Now look in the mirror yonder. What do you see?"

"The reflection of the clock!"

"Exactly! The face of the clock reversed! And that is what Arblast saw—not the clock itself. When he entered the studio the right time was a quarter to six, but by the mirror it appeared to be a quarter past the hour."

"Wonderful! Wonderful!" exclaimed Mr. Tollington. "My dear sir, how did you do it all? How did you get the first clue?"

"Very easily," replied Baines. "I was thoroughly convinced of Arblast's innocence, and therefore I knew that somebody else must be guilty. I found among those letters of Matchett's one from Masterson, offering a stiff price for the Indian dagger, which he described as the Mogul. I made inquiries about the writer, and learned that he was a queer old chap, with a hobby for collecting antique weapons. Mrs. Wood's servant remembered the Mogul, but did not know what had become of it. I examined the roof of the studio, and found a faint trail of scratches on the painted tin. For a couple of nights I shadowed Masterson, and sat near him in a cafe, where I heard him mumbling to himself in a manner that confirmed my suspicions."

It may be said, in conclusion, that the detective's theories were absolutely verified by a written statement that was subsequently found in a desk in Masterson's house; he had intended to send it to the authorities in the event of the accused man's conviction. Gordon Arblast was released, and Samuel Masterson, whose weakened intellect became wholly impaired while he lay in prison, was sent to Bloomingdale Asylum.

THE END.

COMING NEXT WEEK!

Handsome Photo Plate of G.N.R. LOCO., 3-CYL. EXPRESS.

THE MAN WITH THE PALE BLUE EYES!

A Thrilling Complete Story of Scotland Yard

THE CASE OF THE AFGHAN RING!

Introducing the distinguished Detective—CARFAX BAINES, in an Exciting Mystery Story of Afganistan.

GREAT WESTERN RAILWAY EXPRESS LOCOMOTIVE

No. 4041. "Prince of Wales."

(See this week's Photo Plate.)

ON several lines, the six-coupled express locomotive, with a leading bogie, is found to be absolutely indispensable for hauling passenger trains at high rates of speed over severely-graded roads.

This week we present a photo plate of a modern G.W.R. Express Locomotive, No. 4041. "Prince of Wales."

The first engine of this type, No. 40, named "North Star," was built in 1907 as an Atlantic or 4-4-2 type, but owing to insufficient adhesion was, later on, converted to a 4-6-0 and re-numbered No. 4000. When the G.W.R. inaugurated long distance non-stop runs, engines of the City and Country 4-4-0 type were used, but owing to the trains becoming heavier, more powerful engines were required. To this end larger engines were built.

After No. 40 had appeared, a series of ten locomotives, named after the Stars, followed. These proved so successful that another series soon followed bearing the names of the various Orders of Knighthood. Then came another series, named after Kings and Queens, being followed by the Princes and Princesses. Another series now in course of construction is known as the Abbey class.

The engine illustrated herewith, has four high-pressure cylinders, two inside the frame and two outside, the former driving on to the leading pair of coupled wheels, whilst the latter drive the middle pair. The

cylinders are 15 in. diameter, with a 26-in piston stroke. The diameter of the driving wheels is 6 ft. 8½ in., and that of the bogie wheels 3 ft. 2 in. The boiler is the well-known "coned" or "taper" type, which has given such good results on this line that it has been adopted as standard. The diameter at the smoke-box end is 4 ft. 10 15/16 in., widening to 5 ft. 6 in. at the fire-box end, thus affording ample steam space just where it is required. The length is 14 ft. 10 in. A "Swindon" superheater is fitted, thus increasing the engine's capacity for doing work and also its efficiency. The fire-box is 9 ft. by 5 ft. 9 in., and 4 ft. wide, and this, with the heating surface of tubes and superheater, gives a total of 2124.50 square feet. The boiler is pressed to 225 lb per square inch.

Another feature is the "top feed," which is fitted now to all modern G.W.R. locomotives, its success having justified its becoming a standard fitting. A new type of triple sight feed lubricator, designed at Swindon, for the cylinders and regulator has been provided, and has given excellent results. Screw-reversing gear is also provided, and the vacuum brake is applied on the engine and tender.

These engines were built at the Swindon Works of the G.W.R. to the designs of Mr. G. J. Churchward, M.I.C.E., M.I.M.E., late Chief Mechanical Engineer to that Company, and are engaged in hauling some of the heaviest and fastest booked trains in this country, including the world-famous Cornish Riviera Limited Express, running non-stop from Paddington to Plymouth, a distance of 226 miles, this being the longest distance non-stop in the world. These engines run freely, and some remarkable performances have been recorded.

STORY VOTING COMPETITION.

A Magnificent Working Model of a Steam Locomotive, complete with railway track, by Messrs. Bassett Lowke, Ltd.,

MUST BE WON

in a simple competition beginning Next Week.

All you have to do is to vote for the next seven St. Frank's stories, placing them in what you think is their order of merit. A census of opinion of all competitors will be obtained, and the competitor whose individual opinion most nearly corresponds to the general opinion will be presented with the above prize.

A coloured photo plate of this model engine will appear on the cover of our next issue.

(Continued from page 14.)

not know it, but these specimens are worth about ten bob each. In fact, they may be worth quids. They're butterflies from Africa—perfect examples!"

His chums stared at him.

"But where the dickens did you find them?" demanded Owen.

"Ah!" smiled Willy. "That would be telling!"

"You couldn't have bought 'em—you haven't got as much money as that to chuck about," said Chubby Heath. "I wish you'd tell us, Willy. It's a bit thick keeping your chums in the dark like this."

"Yes, I suppose it is," said Willy. "But most of us have to put up with thick things now and again."

He walked into the Ancient House with the utmost confidence and serenity. It was not until later on in the evening that Edward Oswald learned about this second mysterious absence.

Handforth was on the trail like a shot. He searched for Willy high and low—sublimely unconscious of the fact that Willy was following behind him everywhere he went. Consequently Handforth had no luck. His young brother was as elusive as a will-o'-the-wisp.

At last, however, Handforth sighted him. And then it was too late, because Mr. Suncliffe was gathering the Third together so that he could march them up to bed. Handforth couldn't very well question Willy under these conditions.

So he stood there looking on, and Willy grinned cheerfully in return.

Edward Oswald was greatly exercised in mind over these goings on. It wasn't mere curiosity now. He learned all about the money and the butterflies. And it seemed impossible to him that his young brother could be acting in a straightforward way. There was something behind it all.

And Handforth was worried.

A couple of days afterwards he was worried even more. For Willy once again disappeared in the same mysterious fashion.

This time he didn't wait for tea—he vanished immediately following afternoon lessons. A couple of Remove fellows had seen him going out of the gateway, but nobody knew his movements since then.

For hours Handforth haunted the Triangle, but there was no sign of Willy returning. Calling over came, and Willy was absent. And then, just as Handforth was really beginning to get quite alarmed, his younger brother walked into the Ancient House as calm as ever.

"What-ho, Ted!" he said cheerily. "How goes it?"

Handforth gulped.

"Well, upon my word!" he ejaculated.

"You—you young rotter! Why weren't you here for calling over?"

"Ask me!" said Willy.

"I am asking you!" roared Handforth.

"Then what's the answer?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

A few other juniors were looking on, and they yelled. It was always very entertaining to listen to a chat between Handforth minor and Handforth major. Edward Oswald tried to bore holes through his brother with his glare.

"Look here, Willy, I don't want any rot!" he said thickly.

"Then if you stop asking questions you won't get any," said Willy. "So that's simple enough, isn't it? Sorry, old son, but there'll be nothing doing if you start shooting questions at me. I've got nothing to tell."

"If you don't tell I'll ask Mr. Lee to question you!" said Handforth grimly. "You're up to something that isn't good for you!"

Willy grinned.

"Do I look bad on it?" he asked.

"It's not a question of physical suffering," replied Handforth. "You're doing things that are harmful to the morals of a young fag. When you're at school like this you've got to remember that there's only one path to tread. I'm watching over you all the time, and——"

Willy glanced at his watch.

"The lecture begins at nine sharp!" he observed, looking round.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"The lecture begins now!" roared Handforth. "Don't forget that I'm talking to you for your own good——"

"I'm feeling rotten on it!" said Willy. "It's not doing me good—it's doing me harm. What's the good of you watching over me all the time if you can't find out what my game is? The fact is, Ted, you always watch in the wrong direction. I think you must have been born with a blind eye or something."

Handforth nearly choked.

"If you weren't my brother I'd—I'd pick you up and smash you to fragments!" he said, with a slight amount of exaggeration. "I'd punch you until your nose vanished! I'd make you black and blue!"

"Whenever there's an argument all you can do is to make all sorts of lurid remarks about black eyes and thick ears," said Willy. "Supposing you go ahead? It's not exactly good form for a fellow to swipe his own major, but if you go for me I'll give my right swing a trial."

"You—you little fathead!" sneered Handforth. "You couldn't hurt a fly!"

"I dare say I should get the worst of it—but there'd be two stretchers needed at the end of the scrap!" remarked Willy. "But why waste time in words? You won't wipe me up, and you know it. And I won't answer any of your questions. So we seem to be going round in a kind of circle."

It was as much as Handforth could do to contain himself. His minor seemed to read his very soul. For Edward Oswald certainly would not fight Willy. Such a thing would

be condemned by everybody, and Handforth would be set down as a bully.

And, as talking to Willy was absolutely useless, Handy was rather at a loose end. But although failure had crowned his efforts so far, he was grimly determined that Willy's secret should soon be his.

And when Handy really got started on a thing he was a stayer!

CHAPTER V.

HANDFORTH ON THE TRAIL!



McCLURE grunted. "What's the good of harping on it?" he demanded impatiently. "It won't do any good, Handy. And I don't think your young brother is the kind of kid to get into any serious mischief."

"Of course he isn't!" agreed Handforth. "He's one of us—one of the Handforth's—and it's impossible for him to do anything wrong. At the same time, there's no telling! A kid of his age is liable to be led away!"

"By all I've seen of Willy, he's the one to do most of the leading!" remarked Church. "Oh, he's got all the confidence in the world; and between you and me and the coalbox, he seems to regard you as a necessary nuisance!"

Handforth glared.

"If you think I'll stand that, you've made a bloomer!" he exclaimed calmly. "Take that!"

Biff!

Church uttered a roar as Handforth's fist thudded against his shoulder. The blow had been directed at Church's face, but long experience had enabled Handforth's chums to acquire an almost miraculous faculty of dodging. They instinctively knew when trouble was coming.

"That's for calling me a necessary nuisance!" roared Handforth.

"You—you hasty fathead!" gasped Church. "I didn't call you anything of the sort! I simply said that Willy treated you with a disgraceful amount of liberty. As your young brother, he ought to heed your words, and obey you in every respect. You're a year or two older than he is, and have a right to expect humbleness and humility from a kid in the Third."

The remark was diplomatic, and Handforth cooled down.

"That's just my argument!" he said gruffly. "Of course he ought to treat me with respect. It's all very well for the fellows to say that I'm making a fuss over nothing—but I'm not. Willy is getting mixed up in some business that might lead to trouble!"

"How do you make that out?"

"How do I make it out?" repeated Handforth. "Why does he come back here every other night with money in his pocket, and

with valuable beetles and earwigs and cockroaches?"

"Cockroaches ain't valuable," said McClure. "They're a pest!"

"Don't quibble!" snapped Handforth. "When I say cockroaches, I mean butterflies, and things of that sort!"

"How do we know what to say, when you—"

"Don't argue!" bawled Handforth, exasperated. "The fact remains that Willy is an obstinate little mule! I can't imagine who he takes after!"

"I can!" exclaimed McClure.

Happily, he made the remark under his breath, and so there was no trouble.

But Handforth was looking grim and determined. Questioning Willy was about as much use as asking a chimpanzee to sing "Home Sweet Home." The process only succeeded in making Handy ill-tempered with everybody.

And so he came to a positive decision.

"I'll tell you what I'll do!" he declared suddenly. "I'll watch!"

"You'll which?"

"I didn't say 'which.' I said 'watch'!" retorted Handforth. "I'll watch and wait! And sooner or later my chance will come. And then I shall swoop down like a hawk from the sky—like an eagle from the mountain-tops!"

"I read that in a book yesterday evening!" said Church.

"Do you think I care whether you read it?" roared Handforth. "That's what I'm going to do, anyhow. Both you chaps know that I'm jolly smart at detective work—"

"Oh, my hat!" groaned Church. "He's got it again!"

"For goodness' sake don't start that now, Handy!" pleaded McClure.

"Both you chaps know that I'm jolly smart at detective work," repeated Handforth deliberately. "And I'm not going to waste any more time. I mean to hang about, and watch that young boulder morning, noon, and night! And the next time he goes out, I'll follow him!"

"It ought to be interesting," said Church casually. "I wish you luck!"

"And don't forget that you chaps'll have to help," said Handforth. "When I'm off duty, you'll have to take my place. One of us has got to be stationed in the Triangle every minute of the time after lessons. Then we shall be able to catch my minor as soon as he bunks off."

Church and McClure rebelled at the idea.

"Not likely!" said Church warmly. "What if it's raining?"

"We've all got mackintoshes!"

"If you think I'm going to waste my time like that, you've made a mistake!" said McClure. "Why the dickens should we worry ourselves about Willy? We put up with a good few things from you, Handy, but there's a limit!"

Naturally, an argument followed. Sounds of strife and violence came from Study D. And shortly afterwards Handforth emerged,

flushed and triumphant. Church and McClure were definitely engaged as his understudies. They felt that it would be better to agree than to risk further fistie encounters.

The next evening was very cold and blustery, and there was a trace of snow in the air. By tea-time—when most of the juniors were snug and warm in their studies—the snow was increasing to such an extent that the whole Triangle was covered with a fine, powdery film of whiteness.

The wind cut like ice, and it howled mournfully round the angles of the Ancient House. And there, stamping up and down in a state of misery and rebellion, was Church, of the Remove.

He was just underneath the stark old elm-trees, and he was doing half an hour of sentry-go before tea. Handforth was due to relieve him in a few minutes. So far there had been no sign whatever of Willy.

"Blessed if I know why we stand 'it!'" muttered Church fiercely. "All the ass can do is to think of a rotten idea, and he drags us into it! I'm jolly well going indoors, and I'll tell Handy to eat coke! And if he starts any rot, I'll punch him—"

Exactly where Church was going to punch his leader was not disclosed, for just then a small form emerged from the Ancient House in a furtive kind of way. It dodged down the steps, and paused for a moment.

Church caught his breath in, and looked keenly.

"It's Willy!" he muttered. "Well, I'm jiggered!"

It seemed altogether remarkable that Handforth minor should appear now—just when he was required to appear. Such things don't usually happen, and Church was rather flabbergasted.

The figure was certainly that of the Third Former. He was attired in a thick overcoat, with a warm woollen muffler, and with his cap pulled tightly down over his head.

And as he turned for a second, Church saw the fag's features.

"Yes, it's Willy—no doubt about it!" muttered Church.

For a moment he thought about hurrying up, and asking the Third Former where he was off to. But before he could come to any actual decision, Willy suddenly cut off towards the gateway, and vanished.

"That's done it!" breathed Church.

He dashed at full speed indoors, tore along the passage, and then burst into Study D. Handforth and McClure were just settling down to tea. They looked up, rather startled, as Church crashed in.

"He's gone!" gasped Church.

"What?"

"Your minor—just bunked out of the Triangle!" said Church. "I was standing on watch, and he didn't see me, and—"

"Why didn't you follow him, you fat-head?"

"Oh, yes, that's likely, isn't it?" snapped Church. "You expect me to stick out there

on the watch, and then follow your minor—"

"You—you dummy! There's not time for arguing!" exclaimed Handforth. "We've got to rush off on the trail. Understand? This is a chance to find out where that young bounder slips off to. And we're not going to let the chance go by. Come on!"

His chums were inclined to object, but Handforth did things in such a whirlwind fashion that almost before they knew it they were out in the cold, snowy air, with the wind whistling cuttingly round them.

"Oh, what's the good of this?" demanded McClure. "It's an absolute waste of time. Willy went five minutes ago. We can't tell which direction he took, and it'll be like looking for a needle in a haystack."

"Will it?" said Handforth grimly. "What about these?"

He pointed to the ground, which was entirely covered with a thin film of powdery snow. And there, perfectly distinct, a trail of footprints led towards the gates. It was a solitary trail.

"There's been nobody out here since, as you can see!" exclaimed Handforth tensely. "And there's scarcely any chance of a soul being in the lane—or even in Bellton itself. Anyhow, we shall be able to follow these footprints until further orders."

"But—but—"

"Rats!" said Church. "There's no time for argument! This is what detective training does! You can't teach me anything about detective work!"

"Nobody can teach you anything!" growled McClure.

However, they were compelled to go.

And so, a few minutes later, they were hastening down Bellton Lane, with Handforth flashing the light of his electric torch upon the roadway. As a trail, the footprints were absurdly easy to follow.

Nobody else had used the lane, and the thin film of snow on the ground was just in the right condition to take footprints. The small impressions of Willy's boots lay on the ground, clear and well-defined.

In the village the trackers met with one or two momentary checks. The trail became confused in places, for here and there people were moving about. But there was really very small difficulty in keeping to the right track.

It soon became clear that Handforth minor had not paused in the village. He had gone straight on, evidently towards the station. The forked roads lay just ahead—one road leading to Bannington and the other to Caistowe.

"All this fuss over nothing!" muttered Church. "The kid's only popped into Bannington to buy something—or to go to the pictures, perhaps. Never known such a fuss!"

Church was beginning to regret that he had acted so impulsively. Mature consideration had led him to conclude that it would have been far better if he had men-

tioned nothing about Willy's appearance in the Triangle. But it was too late, now, to alter things.

"Bannington—eh?" said Handforth, as they reached the cross-roads. "Look at this! The footprints go right off towards Caistowe. We can't mistake them, because there's only one other pair of bootmarks on the road—and they're coming from the opposite direction—with hobnails, too!"

Handforth was right. He seemed to think that he had made some wonderfully clever deduction—although, of course, there was nothing in it. The dullest witted novice could have seen that Willy had taken the Caistow Road.

And so the three Removites set off briskly in this direction. Now and again, under trees, or at exposed corners, the road would be bare of snow. The trail would thus be lost for the time being. But it always appeared a bit later on—showing that Willy had been making straight for the seaside town.

However, before reaching even the outskirts of Caistowe, Handforth and Co. were rather startled to find that the trail had vanished. They had been passing along a dark patch, with thick trees on either side. But now they were on the open road again, with the snow laying at their feet. There were no footprints whatever.

Handforth halted.

"Hallo!" he exclaimed keenly. "What's the meaning of this? The young bouncer must have turned off somewhere!"

"How could he?" asked Church. "We haven't come past any by lanes. I shouldn't be surprised if we've overtaken him, and he heard us coming. So he dodged into the hedge."

This certainly seemed a likely explanation, but it did not prove to be the real one. For when Handforth and Co. went back, they found that Willy had turned off just against a kind of doorway which was set well into a heavy wall—and almost invisible from the road. Evergreens overhung the doorway in thick profusion.

"Well I'm jiggered!" said Handforth. "He went in here!"

"Marvellous!" murmured Church.

"He went in here!" went on Handy. "And the door's locked, too! I seem to remember this place, somehow——"

"You've passed it often enough!" put in McClure. "There's a house just a little way back. It's called The Cedars."

"Old Dr. Grimes' place?"

"Yes!"

"Great pip!" said Handforth blankly. "Old Grimes! He's got a terrible name, you know. People say he's a miser, and all sorts of queer yarns are told about him. And Willy went in here! Oh, my hat!"

"Well, there's nothing to be scared about," said Church. "Grimes may have a queer reputation, but you know what gossips these country people are. I don't suppose there's anything in all that talk."

"But—but why should Willy come here, anyhow?" demanded Handforth.

"Blessed if I know!"

"It won't be long before I've discovered the truth!" snapped Handforth grimly. "I mean to investigate this matter thoroughly. I don't like the look of it. I'm worried!"

"But what are you going to do?"

"Get inside, and sniff round a bit."

"That ought to be easy!" said McClure sarcastically, as he pulled up his coat. "Ugh! This wind's like ice! How are you going to get in Handy? The door's locked, and the wall's tremendously high——"

"No wall will keep me from having a look round!" interrupted Handforth firmly. "You chaps give me a hoist up. I'll get on your shoulders, Church. Then, while I'm looking round, you two will stay out here on the watch. I don't suppose I shall be very long."

It was quite useless for Church and McClure to argue. The only thing was to let him have his own way. And the sooner it was done the better. Church and McClure saw no reason why they should make a mystery out of the affair. As far as they could see, there was nothing in it.

Handforth got over the wall all right. Assisted by his chums, he hoisted himself to the top, hovered there a moment, and then dropped down. He landed in the middle of a laurel bush with a crash, but the howling wind made it impossible for the sound to have been heard near the house. And Church and McClure, outside, crouched in the shelter of the doorway, and pulled their overcoats more tightly about them.

Handforth disentangled himself from the laurel bush, and soon found that he was on a kind of path. The house lay just in front of him, looking grim and sinister on that rough, blustery night. One or two of the lower windows were dimly illuminated.

"Heaven only knows what's happening to the kid!" muttered Handforth anxiously.

There was no foolery about this expedition of Edward Oswald's. He was genuinely worried and concerned about his young brother. And he had a kind of foreboding that something grim and mysterious was in the wind.

He couldn't get away from it, and he felt that he had to make some kind of an investigation. Probably the fag himself had no idea of danger, but was allowing himself to be imposed upon in some way. Whatever the explanation was, Handforth meant to get at it.

This was not one of Handy's usual "investigations." The safety of his own brother depended upon it, in his opinion, and the leader of Study D. was more serious than he had ever been in all his life.

He considered that it would not do much good if he approached the house in the ordinary way. Such an idea had never occurred to him, in fact. The only way was to creep round the house, and attempt to

find an opening. And so the junior got to work.

He was very lucky. After only about five minutes' searching, he came upon a small window, set in a kind of recess. It was at the side of the house, and all was darkness.

This particular window, much to Handforth's delight, was unfastened. There were a few remnants of wire gauze hanging about the edges of the frame. Probably the place was a kind of larder or storeroom.

Handforth made certain of this a second later, for a flash of his electric torch revealed one or two bowls, a ham hanging from a hook, and other domestic articles.

Not that these things interested him. The window was very tiny, and at first glance it would seem impossible that such a big fellow could squeeze through it. But Handforth did so, after a struggle.

He was quite convinced that the door of the storeroom would be locked on the outside. But it wasn't. He passed through into a passage, where the air seemed warmer and more comfortable.

All was dark, and Handforth crept along, beginning to feel a few qualms for the first time. It suddenly occurred to him that he might get into serious trouble if Dr. Grimes did not believe the explanation of his entry. But, after all, what did it matter?

Handforth was the most reckless fellow under the sun, and he never cared much for his own safety. He was still creeping along when he paused, holding his breath.

A voice had come to his ears—faintly and indistinctly. Then he noticed a glimmer of light from beneath a doorway further along the passage. Handforth crept up, with his heart beating faster.

He arrived opposite the doorway, and stood there listening with his ears stretched.

"Yes, to-night!" a voice was saying, in a gloating tone. "How easily he was trapped—how delightfully he fell into the net! And to-night the boy undergoes the great experiment! If he dies, failure will be terrible—but if he lives, the world will know of a new wonder!"

Handforth stood there, and he felt queer all over. A kind of faintness came to him as the realisation of those words flooded into his mind.

It was his brother they were talking about! They were going to make some horrible experiment upon Willy!

CHAPTER VI.

THE TERRIBLE TRUTH!



EDWARD OSWALD HANDFORTH gripped himself firmly.

"Oh, it's rot!" he muttered. "I must have been mistaken!"

No other sound had come from within the room—at least no voice. But he heard somebody moving about. And



"He went in here!" continued Handy. "And the door's locked, too. I seem to remember this place, somehow——"

it was quite obvious to him that there were two men there.

He wondered what to do. Should he suddenly break in and confront them, or should he wait a bit longer, and listen? Handforth did not consider himself to be an eavesdropper. This was pure detective work, and it seemed to him that he had hit upon something very big.

He would have been interested under any ordinary conditions. But, considering that his own brother was involved, his interest was ten times the greater. He finally decided to stay there, and to listen.

It was a wise decision.

For, almost at once, the voice started again. Although Handforth didn't know it, it was the voice of Mordant, the wizened, old servant of Dr. Grimes.

"Ah, Roscoe you don't know how cunning the doctor is!" came Mordant's voice. "And the way he's trapped this boy is a masterpiece. Yes, a masterpiece! Not a breath of suspicion did the youngster have!"

"Quite so—quite so!" said another voice.

That second voice made Handforth shiver as he stood. It was almost inhuman in its rasping coldness.

"Listen, Roscoe! I will tell you everything!" went on Mordant. "Oh, you will be interested—very interested! Dr. Grimes first met this lad while he was out for a walk some days ago. And from that moment he has been gradually edging him to the net—nearer and nearer! I thought the doctor meant to pounce two nights ago, but he refrained. The time was not ripe.

But he has pounced now—and the lad is doomed!"

"Good!" said the other. "Very good!"

"Ah, but you do not know what this great experiment is to be," continued Mordant gloatingly. "In a way, Dr. Grimes had been working the confidence trick. And he has worked it with all his cunning and cleverness. At first he brought the boy home, spoke nicely to him. He gave him insects—butterflies, beetles, and moths. The boy was overjoyed, and promised to come again. That was the first step."

"Clever—clever!"

"Ah, you know the right word, Roscoe!" chuckled Mordant. "Yes, it was clever. Having gained the boy's full confidence, Dr. Grimes again succeeded in getting him here to-night. Have you ever heard of a science known as Katsu? No, of course you haven't. It is Japanese—and these Orientals who practice Katsu claim that they can restore the dead to life by the means of this wonderful science."

"Quite so—quite so!"

"For months the doctor has been experimenting," said the old servant, in a voice that quivered and quavered with excitement. "He has tried this Katsu on rabbits and guinea-pigs, on rats and mice! He has deliberately killed them by means of suffocation, or some such method—thus destroying no vital centres of nerve or blood-vessel. Then, by means of Katsu, he has restored his victims to life. In every case but two he was victorious."

There was a short pause, and Handforth felt his hair almost standing on end with growing horror. At first he could not quite understand the purport of Mordant's story—but now he was beginning to suspect, and his thought alarmed him.

"Yes, he was victorious!" went on the voice. "But, after all, what was the good of experimenting on animals? It led nowhere! Dr. Grimes determined to obtain a human subject. And so, as this boy came into his life, he determined that here was the subject he required. And at last the hour has come. To-night—at once—my master will make his greatest experiment. He will suffocate this boy, till death is certain. And then, with this marvellous Katsu, he will bring the youngster back to life. If he succeeds, his name will be the most famous in all the world, and science will benefit in the most wonderful way. The great test with the human life will be made to-night!"

Handforth felt sick with absolute horror. He did not know Dr. Grimes personally, but he had heard much about him. The country people declared that he was insane—that he was a harmless, crazy, old man.

But was this right?

It seemed that the villagers were only swayed by their own gossip. Dr. Ryland Grimes was a scientist—a medical man.

Apparently he had retired, and while engrossed in the hobby of entomology, he was really as keen as ever upon performing some dangerous experiment.

Katsu! Handforth seemed to remember the word. He had seen something about this extraordinary Japanese science in one of the leading monthly magazines. And Mordant was speaking the truth. The Japs actually did believe that they could restore human life after death.

Dr. Grimes had got the craze, and he was turning to Willy Handforth as a means of proving his theories. The St. Frank's fag was to be used as a kind of sacrifice!

If the experiment failed, Willy would never recover. If it succeeded, he might come to life again; but, even so, it was surely impossible for the junior to become his normal self once again.

Such an experiment was liable to affect him for life.

And Edward Oswald stood out there, dumb with the horror of it. He could understand everything. But, as the old man had said, Willy had been tricked into coming to this place. He had received presents of moths and butterflies, and so, he had come back—time after time. And at last, now that the time seemed to be ripe, the doctor was about to show his hand. The mask was thrown aside, and he would reveal himself in his true colours.

Handforth didn't blame Willy for this disastrous affair. The boy had walked into the trap innocently enough, without realising what terrible dangers awaited him.

But he was a young ass, all the same.

He ought to have known that it was risky to come repeatedly to a house of this kind, and to make a friend of a man like Dr. Ryland Grimes. But Handforth had really no time to think of much else.

For he suddenly realised that the minutes were slipping away.

According to the gloating voice behind the door, the experiment was to be made almost at once—indeed, perhaps Dr. Grimes was already in the middle of it. It was ghastly—it was terrible!

Handforth determined to act without delay.

He had no weapons, but he trusted to his fists to see him through.

And as the voices had ceased within the room, he determined, then and there, to enter, and trust to luck. He gripped the handle firmly, turned it, and swung the door open with a sudden wrench.

For a second he was almost dazzled by the light. It was, after all, only the comparatively dim illumination from an oil-lamp. But after the pitchy darkness, it rather blinded him. But he grew accustomed to the light in a few seconds.

He found himself in a small, cosy room, with a fire burning cheerfully in the grate. One glance round showed Handforth that the room was empty. A door on the other side stood half ajar.

Handforth stood there, hesitating.

And then a shrivelled-up old man appeared from the half-open door. He looked at Handforth in a dazed kind of way at first, then his brows came down in a frown of anger, and his lips drew tight.

"What are you doing here?" he demanded harshly.

"I've come for my brother, you murderous old rotter!" replied Handforth curtly. "I heard all you were saying to that other man, and I know about this experiment! Dr. Grimes—"

"Good heavens!" muttered Mordant, in a tone of horror. "You know? You have been listening? Foolish boy! You can do nothing now—it is too late! Dr. Grimes is preparing to commence his operation!"

Handforth gulped with sudden relief.

"Then—then he hasn't started yet?" he demanded.

"Not yet—not yet," replied the old manservant. "But no time will be lost, and under no circumstances must the master be disturbed. You young rascal! How did you get in? How did you get into this house?"

"Never mind how I got in! I'm going to put a stop to this devilry!" snapped Handforth curtly. "And if you think you're going to keep me here, you've made a mistake. My hat! There's my young brother in there—about to be killed, so that he can be brought to life again! D'you think I'm going to allow that?"

"Dr. Grimes must not be disturbed——"

"Rot! I'm going to disturb him!" declared Handforth hotly. "It's—it's nothing better than murder! Horrible, cold-blooded murder! Supposing he can't bring Willy back to life?"

"He can—he will!" replied Mordant. "Dr. Grimes is clever—very clever! He can do anything like that! His skill is marvellous!"

"Then he can try it on you!" retorted Handforth.

"Ah, that would be useless! Quite useless!" said the old man. "My age is too great—my bones are old—my muscles are flabby and worn. The subject must be young—young and healthy. Have patience, my boy—wait! You have nothing to fear." Handforth was goaded into a fury. The calm, matter of fact way in which this old man was talking exasperated him. One might think that the experiment was to be made upon a sheep. Mordant did not consider the question of human life. He simply looked upon the affair as an experiment, and nothing else.

But Handforth was not going to stand it. He rolled up his sleeves.

"Now, I don't want to be violent, but I'll give you just ten seconds!" he said grimly. "It's not my way to fight an old man. But my brother's life is at stake, and I'll punch your nose without any qualms

if you don't lead me straight to Dr. Grimes. Understand?"

Mordant backed away, shuffling, and with furtive eyes.

"You cannot see the doctor now!" he exclaimed sharply. "He must not be disturbed! This great experiment is about to commence! Within twenty minutes it will be started—Dr. Grimes is even now making his preparations!"

"You—you callous old ruffian!" said Handforth. "Thank goodness we've got twenty minutes. Now, are you going to lead the way or not? You'd better answer quickly, because I'm——"

"I shall not move from this room!" said Mordant curtly.

"All right—we'll see!" Handforth clenched his fist and advanced.

"No—no!" gasped the old servant. "Wait! You are a hasty young man! I will do as you say—I will lead you to Dr. Grimes."

"Good!" said Handforth curtly. "Buck up!"

Mordant turned, and passed out of the room, with Handforth close at his heels. They went along the passage, and Mordant paused in front of a heavy door. He looked round, with a finger to his lips.

"Go quietly!" he warned. "The doctor must not be disturbed by any sudden noise. Go very, very quietly!"

He opened the door, and Handforth took a step forward. Then he paused, for all beyond the doorway was darkness. And for a second Handforth suspected that he, too, was being led into a trap.

His suspicions came too late.

The old manservant gave a sudden, rasping cry of triumph. He gave Handforth a fierce shove in the back. Vainly, the junior attempted to save himself. But there was no time.

He plunged forward.

And, to his horror, instead of alighting upon a solid floor, he met nothing but the thin air. He plunged down and down. Then, with a crash, he struck a hard, brick floor, and rolled over. He was bruised and shaken, and for a few moments, he lay there dazed.

In a bewildered kind of way, he saw a dim light above. Then a door closed with a slam, and he was in pitch darkness.

He had been trapped!

And this was the result of his investigations! He picked himself up, aching and sore. But he was only bruised, after all. And Handforth was the kind of fellow who could stand any amount of bruises.

He was filled with a wild, horrible alarm. He didn't know what to do. Trapped like this, he was helpless. The dreadful experiment on his brother would go on, and it would be impossible to prevent it.

This mad doctor was about to murder Willy in the crazy belief that he would be able to restore his life afterwards!

CHAPTER VII.

THE RESCUE PARTY!



THE situation was a terrible one.

And Edward Oswald Handforth, trapped in that cellar, felt as though he could beat his bare fists against the stone walls. He had to do something. It was impossible to remain there, idle and helpless. And his first move was to feel for his electric torch.

He found it, and then groaned. In falling down into the cellar he had smashed the little electric lamp to atoms. No light came when he pressed the switch. He stood there, breathing hard.

"Dished!" he muttered. "Oh, my goodness! And—and Willy is up there, with that horrible old man getting ready to kill him! I've never felt so helpless in all my life! Something's got to be done. We can't go on like this! But what? How the dickens can I help?"

He racked his brain for an idea.

And then, with a sudden gasp of triumph, he remembered that he had two or three loose wax vestas in his little ticket-pocket. He felt for them feverishly, found them, and hastily struck one against the wall. The little wax taper flared up, illuminating the cellar in a flickering, eerie kind of way.

There, five or six feet above the level of the floor, was the door. There was a kind of ladder, fixed to the wall, which led up to it. The match went out, and Handy groped his way to the ladder and climbed up. But when he got to the top, he knew that the effort was useless.

For the door was locked and bolted on the other side. And it was quite impossible to attempt any violence. A sudden dash at the door with his shoulder was not practicable, for he could gain no purchase or leverage.

He climbed down again, and stood upon the cellar floor thinking hard. He struck another match, and this time looked round more thoroughly. Then he caught his breath in. For up one of the far corners was a kind of hole in the stone roof—a square shaft which seemed to lead upwards. He went across to it quickly, the match still burning.

Then, as he looked up, all his former hopes were revived. At the top of the little square shaft there was a round iron grating. The thing was a coal shoot, or some such device.

Anyhow, Handforth didn't care what it was. He only knew that here was a possibility of escape. The one serious question was whether he would be able to squeeze up the shaft.

He wasted no time in speculation.

The match went out, and Handforth wormed his way up the shaft, and then commenced forcing himself upwards. It was a tight squeeze—and only grim perseverance

could bring success. In Handforth's present frame of mind, he was ready to attempt the impossible—and this was by no means impossible.

So he succeeded.

It seemed to him that the job took him fifteen or twenty minutes. As a matter of fact, he wormed his way up the shaft in less than three. And he was tremendously relieved when he found that the iron grating at the top lifted as soon as he put his head against it.

One or two fine snowflakes blew into his face, and Handy thought he had never felt anything more delightful. After being trapped, knowing that his brother was in such sore straits, this freedom seemed twenty times more delightful.

To pull himself right out was only a matter of moments, and then he found that he was comparatively near to the spot where he had first entered the house. The window of the little pantry was only a few yards away.

Handforth stood up, breathing hard.

What was to be done now?

There was no sense in wasting time—he had to act at once, without a second's delay. For a moment he thought about entering the building by means of that window again, and doing the whole thing on his own.

But this would have been very unwise.

With Church and McClure so near at hand, it would have been madness itself to risk getting captured a second time. The three of them would be able to rescue Willy without much trouble.

Time was valuable, but the other juniors had to be fetched.

So Handforth whizzed off like lightning, dashing among the laurel bushes, blundering along in the darkness, until he reached the wall. He didn't exactly know how he scrambled up.

But at last he did so, and dropped over.

"Hello—here he is!" came a whisper out of the darkness.

Church and McClure came up to him.

"Where the dickens have you been all this time?" demanded Church. "We're frozen to the marrow, you ass! All this messing about—"

"My brother's going to be killed!" interrupted Handforth, his voice hard and deadly serious. "This Dr. Grimes is going to make an experiment on him! I was collared and shoved down a cellar! But I escaped!"

"What!"

"Don't try to pull our legs—"

"It's true, you chaps—it's true!"

There was something in Handforth's voice which Church and McClure had not heard before. They peered at him curiously in the gloom, and they could faintly see that his face was set and drawn, and that nearly all the colour had gone out of it.

"But—but it can't be true!" gasped

Church. "I mean about your minor, Handy. You can't mean—"

"Listen!" interrupted Handforth curtly. "There's not a second to waste—but listen!"

And, as quickly as possible, he told his story.

Church and McClure were staggered.

"Oh, there must be some mistake about it!" said McClure at last. "No man in his right senses would do a thing like that!"

"But is he in his right senses?" demanded Handforth. "This old doctor may be rational enough to talk to, but he is dotty on this one subject of Katsu, or whatever they call it."

"That's right enough!" agreed Church. "I've heard of men like that. They don't realise what they're doing, you know, but—but we can't break into the house, Handy. Don't forget there are three men there—old Grimes—and the two chaps you heard talking."

"If it came to a fight, we'd never win!" said McClure. "About the best thing we can do is to dash into Caistowe for the police!"

"No—no. There's no time!"

"But we must!" insisted Church. "Think Handy! Your young brother's life is at stake! If we get into this house by ourselves, we might all be collared—and then goodness knows what would happen. The only thing, in my opinion, is to dash away for help!"

Even Handforth, anxious as he was, realised the force of his chum's argument. And at last he agreed to go for help.

But luck was with them.

They had hardly started—in fact, they had only taken about two steps—when they saw several twinkling lights appearing round a bend. There were six lights altogether—bicycles, obviously.

"Hurrah!" roared Church.

They dashed up, and a moment later the three juniors were in the midst of the cyclists. It was a wonder they weren't bowled over, for they rushed up without any care.

The six cyclists practically fell off their machines. And to the intense delight of the chums of Study D, they saw familiar faces. For the six newcomers were all Remove fellows from St. Frank's.

They were Reginald Pitt, Jack Grey, De Valerie, Levi, Somerton and Tom Burton.

"What the dickens is all this about?" demanded Pitt. "What's the idea of charging into us like this? And how did you chaps get here?"

"We want your help—now!" panted Handforth. "I've found out where my minor has been going to recently—"

"You've probed his guilty secret?" grinned De Valerie.

"The poor kid's about to be killed!" gasped Church. "Old Dr. Grimes has got him in his house, and he means to make an experiment on him! In fact, we may be too late!"



He plunged forward, and, to his horror, he met nothing but thin air. Down and down he plunged.

The six juniors looked at Handforth and Co. very clearly. Their faces were clearly illuminated by the bicycle lamps. And it could be easily seen that Handforth and Co. were not attempting to spoof.

Their faces were drawn and haggard.

Handforth, indeed, looked deathly pale, and there was a light of despairing anxiety in his eyes. The juniors had never seen him look like this before. And they needed no telling that this affair was something very much out of the ordinary.

"Look here, Handy. We're ready to do anything you want!" said Pitt quietly. "If it's serious, we're the chaps for the job—"

"It is serious—deadly serious!"

"But you said something about your minor being killed," said De Valerie. "That's rot, of course. He may have got himself into trouble, but there's no need to exaggerate."

"I'm not—I'm not exaggerating," insisted Handforth. "Listen!"

It took him about one minute to give the brief details.

"Swab my maindeck!" exclaimed Burton dazedly. "It—it sounds like some piece out of a melodrama! That—that man must be

as mad as a hatter! Souse me! What shall we do?"

"Go inside and rescue Willy!" replied Handforth. "Come on!"

"Wait a minute!" put in Pitt. "We passed a police-inspector on a bike not far down the road. Two of us had better whizz along on our bikes for him. He was only going at about four miles an hour, so it'll be easy enough to overtake him."

"Good!" said Handforth. "We'll need the police here!"

There was no argument about who should go. All the juniors realised the importance of speed, and when Pitt suggested that Tom Burton and Grey should go after the inspector, they went off at once.

The others collected in a group.

The first thing was to get into the grounds of The Cedars. And, one by one, the fellows hoisted one another up, and dropped on the other side of the wall. At last the seven Removites found themselves on the right side of the wall, with the house rearing up in front of them against the gloomy skyline.

"There's no sense in wasting time!" exclaimed Handforth. "The best thing to do is to go straight to the front door, and then we'll break it in, if we can't get any answer!"

"Good!"

"There's nothing like force in a case of this sort!"

"Come on!"

And the rescue party advanced towards the house with the grim determination to rescue Willy, dead or alive.

CHAPTER VIII.

IN THE NICK OF TIME!



COINCIDENCE is a remarkable thing, and it was certainly lucky in the extreme that party of juniors from St. Frank's should have been going in the direction of Caistowe at that particular time.

Yet, after all, even more remarkable coincidence frequently occur in everyday life.

It was not often that the St. Frank's juniors went to Caistowe—especially on such a wild, blustery evening. As a matter of fact, a special lecture was being held at the Caistowe Town Hall that evening by a famous professor from London, and so the juniors had formed a party for the purpose of hearing the lecture.

And as it was for only one night, they could not put it off because of the snowy weather. Thus, it was solely because of this Caistowe lecture that the juniors had come along at such an opportune time.

And now they were within the grounds of The Cedars.

They crept on towards the front door, Handforth leading the way.

Before they actually arrived, they noticed a few chinks of light gleaming from a big

window some little distance further along. The curtains, apparently, had not been properly drawn.

"Hold on!" whispered Pitt. "Why not have a look in that window? We might be able to see something between the chinks of the curtain. There's no telling, you know! And it'll only take a tick."

"Good idea!" said De Valerie.

Handforth didn't like to agree at first, but the others crept away, and so he was compelled to go with them.

The window, as they could see upon close inspection, was a large one—French doors, to be exact. There were heavy plush curtains behind them, but in one or two places there were small gaps, through which light streamed out into the darkness of the night.

"Now, go easily!" whispered Pitt. "We don't want to be heard!"

They approached on tiptoe. Handforth was now leading, and he pressed his face close against the cold glass.

Yes, there was certainly a chink there, and the leader of Study D caught his breath in sharply as he made out one or two objects in the room.

"Good heavens!" he muttered huskily.

"What—what's the matter?"

"It's like a nightmare!" panted Handforth.

The others crowded round.

They could see a section of the opposite wall of the room. And from that wall eyes gleamed down—all sorts of eyes. They seemed to fascinate the watchers. Then Pitt, who allowed his gaze to stray, uttered an exclamation.

"My goodness!" he murmured.

He could just see the lower half of a couch—a kind of lounge. And, upon this couch, were two legs, fully stretched out. Without any question at all, they were the legs of Willy Handforth.

And they were absolutely still.

"Look—look here!" whispered Pitt.

Handforth was already looking, and he groaned aloud as he saw that still figure.

"We're too late!" he muttered miserably. "He's dead—Willy's been killed already! And that murderous scoundrel has put him on the couch there, thinking that he'll be able to bring him back to life."

"No—no!"

"It can't be as bad as that, Handy!"

"Of course not!" said Pitt. "There's no need to jump to conclusions, Handy. I expect the doctor's only just started. If we break in now, we shall just be in time!"

"Oh, good!" said Church. "I was thinking—"

He paused, for at that second a figure had crossed the room, thus coming into the line of vision. It was the figure of Dr. Ryland Grimes. The old fellow was carrying something in his hands which gleamed and glittered. He passed over towards the couch, and went out of view.

"Did—did you see that?" breathed Church.

(Continued on page 26)

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(Continued from page 24)

"See what?"

"Old Grimes! He just went across the room!" said Church tensely. "And he was carrying a kind of medical instrument in his hand—like they use in hospitals. Quick—quick! We shall be too late!"

"Oh, my hat!"

Handforth was desperate, and he had no intention of wasting time. He took a step back, raised his foot, and sent it crashing through the glass of the French windows.

The noise was tremendous.

"Open this door—open this door!" shouted Handforth desperately.

"Good gracious me!"

The voice came from within, and the figure of Dr. Grimes appeared there. He pulled the curtain aside, and stood fully revealed in the opening. He was looking startled, and he peered out into the gloom.

"What—what is all this?" he asked, his voice shaking.

"You know what it is!" shouted Handforth. "You—you murderous old rotter! You've got my young brother here, and you're practising this Katsu business on him!"

"Katsu!" repeated the doctor, in a choking voice.

"Yes!" shouted Handforth. "Open the door! We know all about it—I heard your servant talking! You've trapped Willy here, and you're going to suffocate him, so that you can try to bring him to life again. If you've done my brother any harm, I'll—I'll—"

"Good heavens!" muttered Dr. Grimes.

He glanced round him quickly, pulling the curtains to, as though afraid that the juniors should see within the room. Then he turned back, and his face became convulsed with anger.

"You're all mad!" he exclaimed harshly. "Go!"

"Not likely!" rapped out Handforth. "We know that Willy is here, and we're going to save him from your demoniacal game! If you don't open this door at once, we'll smash it in!"

"You—you impudent young puppies!" snapped Dr. Grimes. "I am master here, and I will have the law on you for trespassing on my property. I have done no harm to your brother—I never intended any harm. He is safe!"

But all the other juniors were fully convinced now.

They had had a lurking fear that Handforth had found a mare's nest. But Dr. Grimes' attitude was eloquent enough. He had not denied the accusation. And he was filled with alarm.

"Open the door, or we break it in!" exclaimed Pitt tensely.

"If you dare——"

"Come on!" roared Handforth.

Again he kicked at the door—this time at the woodwork. It shook and shivered under the powerful drive. But it did not

come unfastened. Dr. Grimes started back, as two or three fragments of glass fell.

"You—you young wretches!" he panted. "You destructive ruffians! Very well—very well! I will open the door for you."

"Then be quick about it!"

Dr. Grimes fumbled with the catch, and then pulled a bolt. The door swung open, and the juniors flooded into the room. Dr. Ryland Grimes took care to stand well back.

At first the St. Frank's fellows were startled at the appearance of their surroundings. Hundreds of specimen cases, with their life-like stuffed occupants, with the eyes gleaming down from every quarter. It was all very strange and extraordinary.

But Handforth had no time to look round him.

His sole attention was given to the couch. And there lay the still form. But now a great gulp rose in Handforth's throat. For the form was lying as still as death, and over the upper part of it a white cloth had been placed, covering head and shoulders.

"Oh!" panted Handforth. "He—he's there!"

Dr. Grimes stood in front of the couch.

"Don't touch him!" he exclaimed, his voice hard and grim. "Don't dare to lift this cloth! You were talking about an experiment, my boys. What would you say if you learnt that this very experiment was half through?"

"You—you mean that Willy is dead?" asked Church huskily.

"I forbid you to touch the body—I—I mean——"

"Then he is dead!" shouted Handforth despairingly.

He pushed Dr. Grimes aside, and tore off the covering. Willy Handforth lay there, still and silent. His face was set in perfect repose, his eyes were closed, and there was no pallor on his cheeks.

"Willy!" exclaimed Handforth huskily.

"What's the matter, old son?" asked Willy calmly.

He opened his eyes, grinned, and sat up.

"You seem to be making a blessed lot of fuss!" he went on. "You can always be trusted to put your blessed hoof into things, Ted! Never saw such a blundering ass in all my puff!"

Handforth staggered.

"You're—you're alive!" he shouted.

Willy grinned.

"What rot!" he said. "Alive! My dear chap, you don't seem to understand. I'm dead—absolutely as stiff and cold as Rameses the Fourth! Dr. Grimes is just going to put the fluence on, and bring me back!"

"You—you young spoofer!" exclaimed Pitt breathlessly.

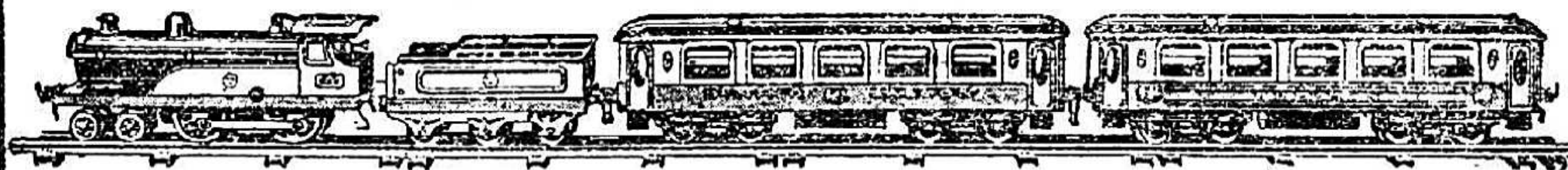
"Spoofer!" repeated Willy. "Well, it was your idea about the cat's meat stuff—Katsu, or whatever you call it! As soon as I heard that you expected to find me defunct, I thought I'd oblige. So, although I

(Continued on page 28)

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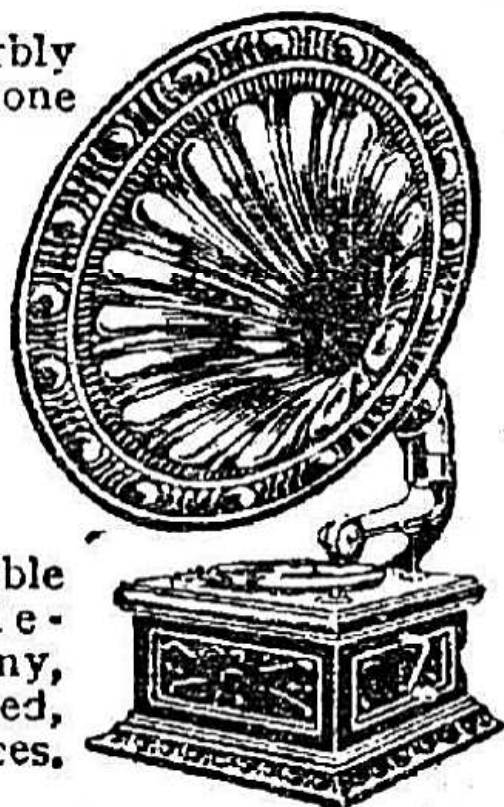
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(Continued from page 26)

"seem alive, I'm really as dead as about five doornails! Dr. Grimes, you might do the necessary, and bring me back to life!"

"Now, it seems to me that you boys have been labouring under a very grave misapprehension regarding my character," said Dr. Grimes genially. "But I assure you that I am not the vile monster you have apparently taken me for. Neither do I blame Willy's brother for accusing me. Under the circumstances he was possibly justified."

"Justified!" echoed Handforth. "It's true! I heard these men talking——"

"Come!" interrupted the doctor. "We will go to them at once!"

He led the way out of the room, and all the juniors followed him in a group. They passed down a wide passage, and then Dr. Grimes suddenly paused, and held a finger to his lips.

"Quietly—quietly!" he whispered. "Listen, my young friends!"

They all collected round a door which was closed. And as they held their breath, they heard a voice from within.

"Yes, Roscoe, the doctor's not going to be interrupted!" came the voice of old Mordant. "We've got that young man in the cellar, eh? He won't escape from there, Roscoe. Oh, no! And the experiment can go on!"

"You bet!" said Roscoe.

"There you are!" exclaimed Handforth loudly. "What did I tell you? They're the same two men who were talking before. They think I'm still in the cellar!"

"Wait!" said Dr. Grimes.

He opened the door suddenly. And all the juniors saw into the room. There was Mordant, the wizened old servant. He was seated in front of a big cage, and within the cage, stolidly sitting on a perch, was a parrot.

The parrot looked up, and gave a squawk.

"There you are then!" it remarked, by way of greeting.

"A parrot!" yelled Pitt.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"But—but——" Handforth paused, gasping.

"Yes, my young friend, a parrot!" said Dr. Grimes. "It is a great pity you did not come to my door in the usual way, in order to make your enquiries. If you had done that, all would have been well. It is my own fault, I fear, for making Willy promise that he would not divulge our little secret. Am I right in assuming that you followed him, as you were concerned regarding his mysterious night jaunts?"

"Yes, sir!" said Handforth feebly.

"But—but about the Katsu, sir?" he asked. "I don't understand!"

"First of all, I will explain that Mordant is not an ordinary manservant," exclaimed Dr. Grimes. "He is a medical man of great skill. But drink was the cause of his downfall. He and I were students at the same

hospital, forty years ago. I came across him ten years back—a derelict. He was penniless and a pitiful wreck."

"Oh!"

"So I took him in. I cured him of his craving for drink, and since then he has been as faithful to me as a dog," said Dr. Grimes. "But the influence of his drunken years left his mind just a little weak. He is the most harmless old fellow in the world. But, being a medical man, he understands much. It was he who purchased the volume on Katsu, the Japanese science of restoring life. I took it away from him."

"Why, sir?"

"Because I found that Mordant becomes obsessed with the wild fancies," said Dr. Grimes. "Similar things have happened before. At one time he was mad on Spiritualism, and became quite convinced that ghosts walked about in every passage. With regard to Katsu, he read the volume, and firmly believed—in spite of all my denials—that I had experimented on animals, and that I was only waiting for a human subject."

"Well, I'm blessed!" said Handforth blankly.

"So, my dear boy, when your young brother came here, Mordant believed that he was to be the victim," smiled Dr. Grimes. "He got it firmly fixed in his head, and I had to be severe with him—although, as you have seen, it was of little use."

"You asses!" said Willy. "Dr. Grimes is one of the dearest old gentlemen in the world! I've had a glorious time here, looking at his specimens, and all the rest of it! Just like you, Ted! It's a pity you can't mind your own giddy business! I can look after myself all right!"

"You—you young rotter——"

"Now, now!" smiled Dr. Grimes. "No quarrelling, please. The affair is over, and I shall be delighted if you boys will remain here as my guests for an hour or so. With regard to Mordant, this little affair has convinced me that he is getting beyond hope. I shall take pains to have him cared for elsewhere."

But it had been a rather dramatic business, in spite of the somewhat humorous ending.

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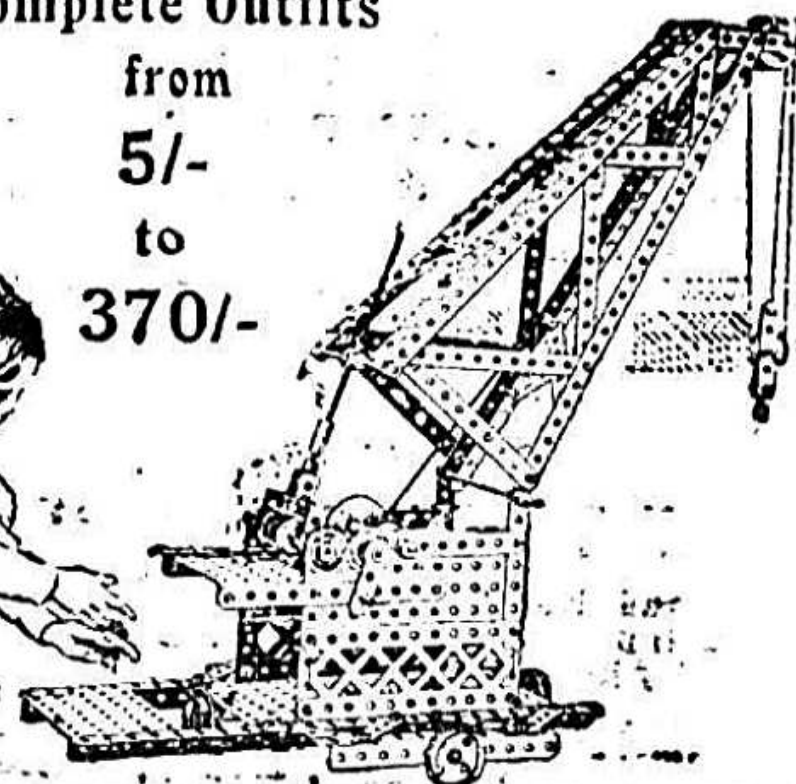
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