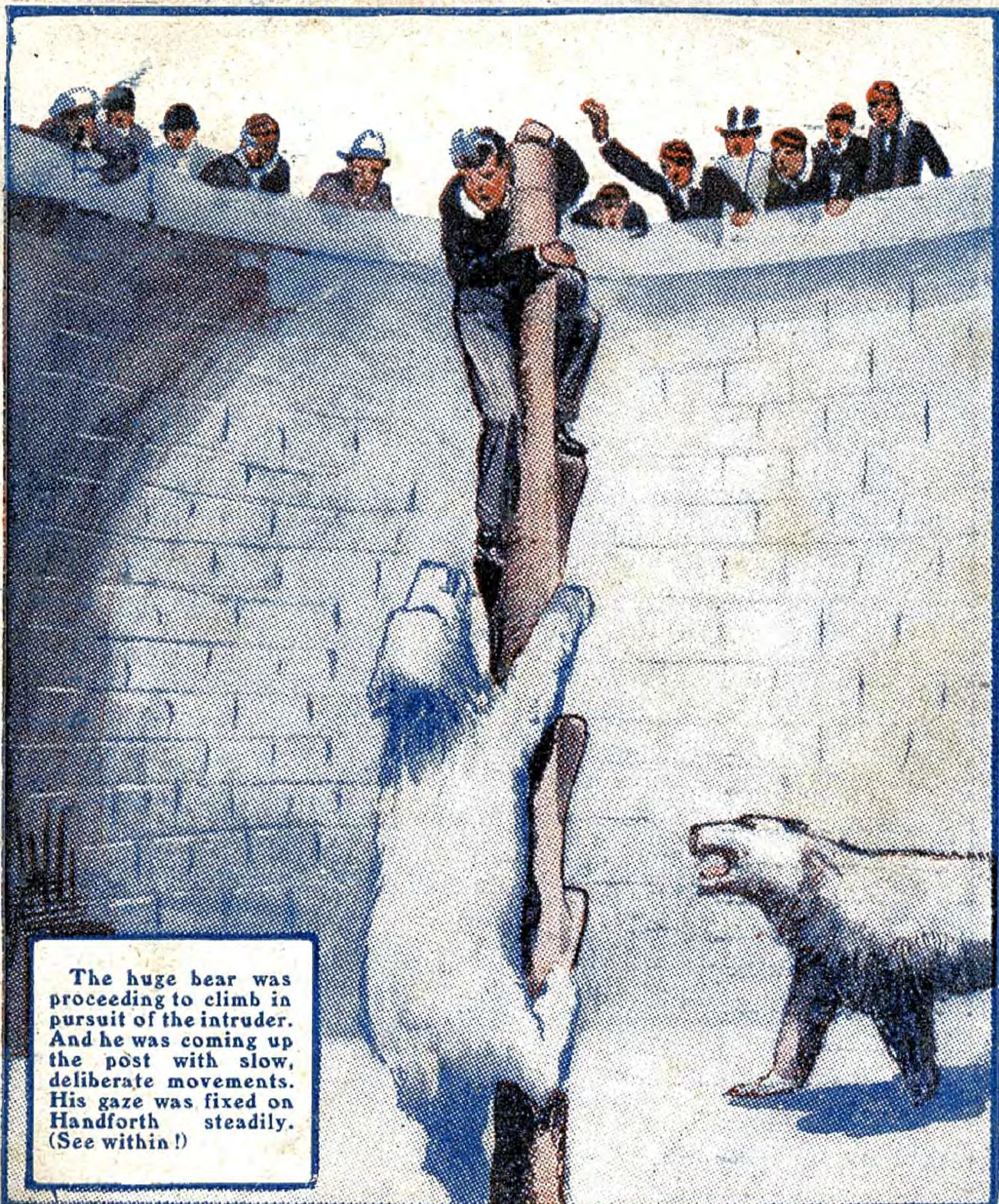


READ THIS WEEK'S SCREAMINGLY FUNNY HOLIDAY STORY!

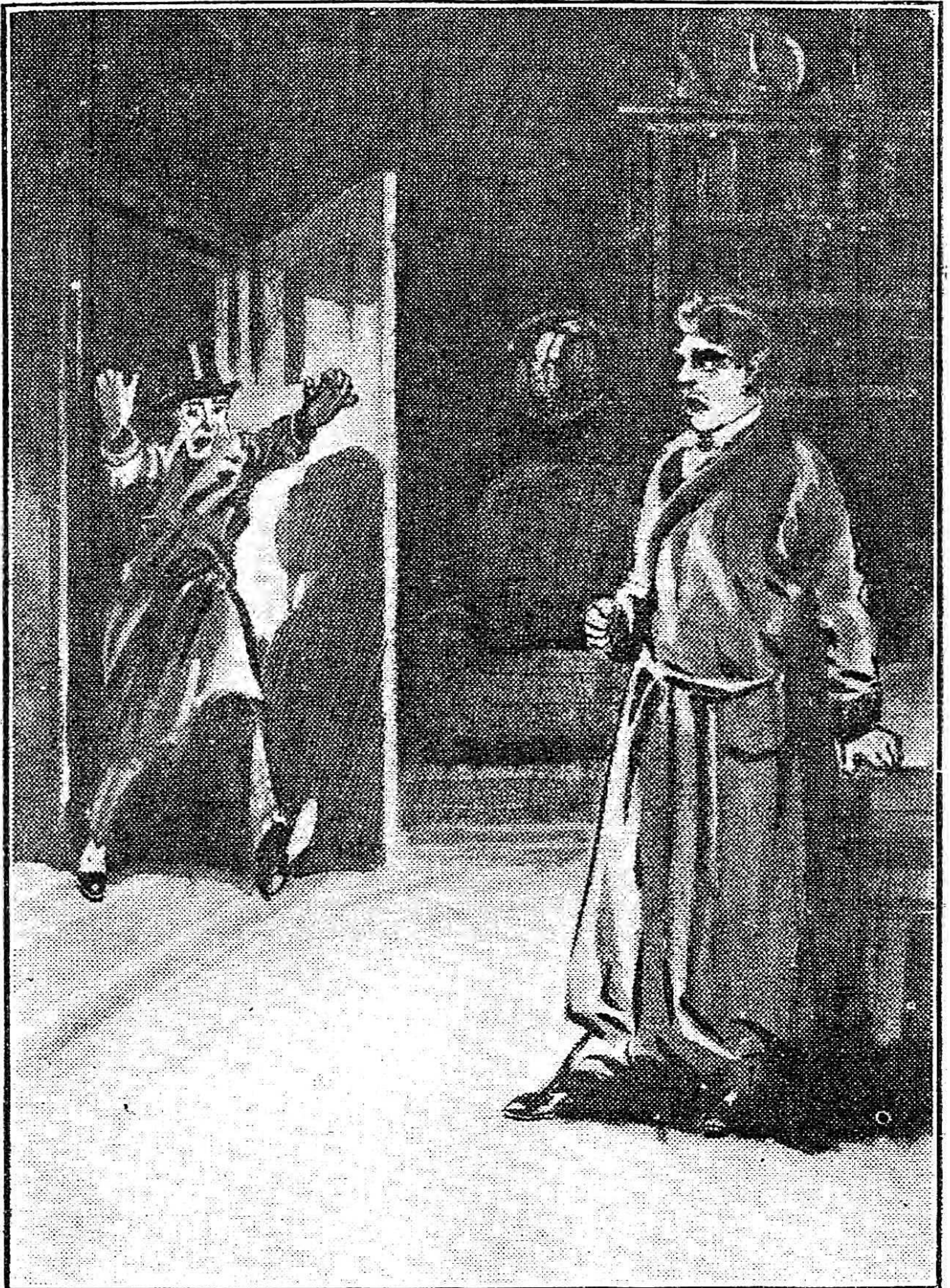
THE **NELSON LEE** 2<sup>D</sup>  
LIBRARY.



The huge bear was proceeding to climb in pursuit of the intruder. And he was coming up the post with slow, deliberate movements. His gaze was fixed on Handforth steadily. (See within!)

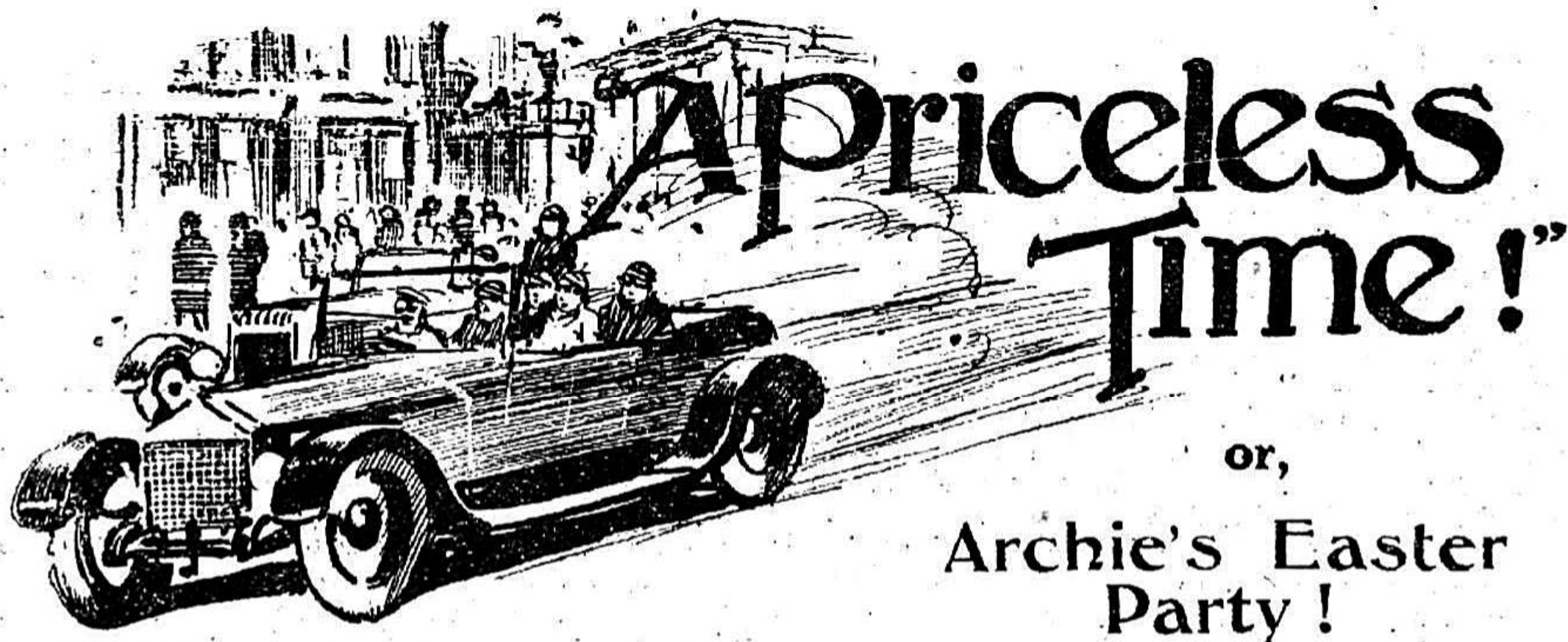
**A PRICELESS TIME; or, Archie's  
Easter Party** is This Week's Laughable Story of St. Frank's in  
London in Holiday Mood.





To Handforth's dismay, the newcomer was a stranger.  
"Is—is there any hope?" he gasped, breathing hard. "Mr. Lee—Mr. Lee! I want your help!"





or,

## Archie's Easter Party!

A Very Laughable Holiday Story of the Boys of St. Frank's on a visit to London. Handforth's adventures at the Zoo, Madame Tussaud's and as an amateur detective are screamingly funny. When you have read this story pass it on to your friends.

*(Related Throughout by Nipper.)*

### CHAPTER I.

#### EARLY BIRDS!

"LAZY young bounder!" said Handforth wrathfully.

The famous leader of Study D at St. Frank's stood in the doorway of the bedroom with a towel in his hands, with a red face, and with his hair standing out from his head like a mop.

Handforth, to be exact, was in the midst of his morning ablutions. And he had just come along to see if his younger brother was making a move. But Willy was apparently still in the arms of slumber. He lay there in his bed, with the sheets and blankets snuggled closely round him.

Edward Oswald and Willy were at home—at their father's house in London. And they had decided to get up extra early because Handy had arranged certain things. He wanted to be in good time.

"Get up, you blessed little slacker!" said Handforth warmly. "I'll give you just two ticks!"

But Willy gave no sign. And Handforth, crossing over to the wash-hand stand, seized a jug of icy-cold water. He had just been to the bath-room to indulge in his own toilet, for there he had the privilege of hot water out of the tap. But he evidently considered that cold water was good enough for Willy.

Swish!

With one swing, Handforth emptied the jug over the head of Willy's bed.

"Well, there's a silly thing to do!"

said Willy tartly: "You'll have mother on your track for that, Ted! You've made my bed in an awful mess!"

Handforth whirled round, gasping. His younger brother was just emerging from the big cupboard on the other side of the room, and there was a look of surprised innocence on Willy's face.

"What the dickens did you do that for?" he asked blandly.

"I—I thought you were in bed, you young idiot!" snorted Handforth.

"You shouldn't think; you ought to know!" said Willy reprovingly. "That's the worst of you, Ted; you're so jolly impulsive! One of these days you'll be doing some real damage!"

Handforth glared.

"You—you young rotter!" he roared. "You did that on purpose! You stuffed something in your bed so that I should be dished!"

"Of course I did!" said Willy.

"Why—you—you—"

"Didn't you tell me last night that you were so jolly clever you couldn't be spoofed?" asked Willy. "I thought I'd show you up. It's a very serious complaint, my lad, when a chap gets swelled head. Of course, you've had it for years; you were born with it. I'm blessed if I can understand why you were reared!"

Handforth gave one roar, and hurled himself at his younger brother. Of course, he didn't catch Willy. He never could. Willy was just about as elusive as a Will-o'-the-wisp. Handforth only succeeded in severely



barking his shins on the edge of the bed. By the time he looked round, Willy had whizzed down the passage.

Handforth just got to the bathroom door in time to hear the key turn in the lock.

"All right, my son!" he hissed through the key-hole. "When you come out I'll turn your face into a giddy pudding! I'll make you look like a door-knocker!"

"Then I shall be your double!" came Willy's voice.

"You—you——"

Handforth paused at a loss for words. His younger brother's retorts were always too much for Handy. He could never think of anything suitable for the occasion.

He waited outside the bath-room door for fifteen solid minutes, breaking the monotony now and again by hissing a few more threats through the key-hole. All this time he was only attired in an undervest and a pair of trousers with the braces hanging loose.

"Ain't you ever coming out of there?" he roared at last.

"My poor fathead!" said Willy along the corridor. "I've been out for over ten minutes! I'm dressed! I wondered what the dickens you were doing, nosing about the bath-room!"

Handforth went as red as a beetroot with wrath.

"How—how did you get out?" he snorted thickly.

"Well, I didn't drop through a crack!" replied Willy. "There happens to be a window in the bath-room, Ted. Ever seen it? There's a ledge outside which leads into the third spare bed-room——"

"Do—do you mean to say you crept along that ledge?" gasped Handforth faintly. "There's a drop of about thirty feet to the ground!"

"I wasn't ass enough to drop, was I?" asked Willy. "Now, do buck up, or you'll be frightfully late! Church and McClure will be here before long—although goodness knows why they're coming! I should have thought they would have avoided this house like a plague!"

"Why?"

"Because we've got the plague in it!" replied Willy calmly.

"The plague!" panted Handforth. "You—you don't mean——"

"I mean you, Ted!" grinned Handforth minor. "I'll bet Church and McClure look upon you as a plague, anyway! Poor chaps! My heart often bleeds for them!"

"I know jolly well your nose'll bleed in about two minutes!" yelled Handforth, exasperated. "I'm going to smash you up——"

"According to your calculations, I ought to have been smashed up at least six times this morning!" said Willy. "You're a queer chap, Ted. You're always going to do something, and never do it! So long!"

Handforth made a rush, but Willy calmly sat on the balustrade, and whizzed down stairs at about forty miles an hour. It was

fortunate for him that the hour was early. If Sir Edward—his father—had caught him at such tricks, sad things would have happened for Willy.

Down in the big hall Willy proceeded to make investigations in the sideboard. He found a glass barrel of biscuits, and he put this back—but not until the biscuits had been removed. Breakfast would soon be ready, but Willy had no patience. And he was in the middle of opening a drawer by the aid of his penknife, when the front-door bell rang.

Willy whizzed to the door before any member of the domestic staff could even think about getting into action. Church and McClure stood on the doorstep. They were smiling, and extremely cheerful.

"What-ho, without!" said Willy. "Enter, and mind you wipe your giddy feet! Just in time for breakfast!"

"Of course, we didn't come here for that——" began Church.

"Rats!" said Willy. "I'll bet you did! If I went to your place at eight o'clock in the morning, I should expect breakfast, I can give you my word! When Ted comes down you'd better look out for squalls. He'll probably scalp you instead of shaking hands."

"But what the dickens for?" demanded McClure.

Willy looked at him sadly.

"What's the good of asking me that question?" he asked. "Why does Ted scalp people? Not because he hates 'em—not because he wants the scalps! He does it as a sort of pastime!"

They all went into the superbly furnished dining-room, where there were signs of an early breakfast.

"You needn't be afraid; you won't see the mater or pater," said Willy comfortingly. "I don't suppose they'll be down till about nine. We're going to have brekker to ourselves. Special occasion, you know. It's holiday time, and we have privileges."

Church and McClure looked rather relieved. They had not been looking forward to the ordeal of meeting Sir Edward Handforth. He was a nice enough man, no doubt, but he was too reminiscent of Edward Oswald.

"I suppose you chaps are going straight off?" inquired Willy.

"Yes, to Gray's Inn Road," said Church.

"What are you going there for?"

"That's Mr. Nelson Lee's place, you know," put in McClure. "Nipper has particularly asked us to go over to-day, because he means to show us Mr. Lee's museum of crime relics."

"That ought to be gorgeous!" said Willy, with a sniff.

"It'll be jolly interesting, anyway," declared Church. "Why, Mr. Lee's museum is one of the finest collections of crime relics in London—in the world, in fact. After stopping there a bit, we're going on to



Pitt's place. I think Pitt's people have got something on for the afternoon."

"Don't think much of it!" said Willy, turning up his nose. "I shall probably turn up at Archie's place later to-night, so as to be ready to leave with the holiday party in the morning. I'd rather stop at home to-day, and read a book!"

And Willy marched over to the window, and stood looking out into the quiet West End thoroughfare.

The programme did not seem very exciting. Church and McClure only spoofed themselves into believing that it would be interesting to see a lot of crime relics. They were really going for Handforth's sake. He was as keen as mustard.

Edward Oswald arrived in the dining-room a minute or two later.

"Oh, here you are!" he said, glaring at his two faithful chums. "What's the idea of coming so jolly early? You might have waited till I got down, anyhow!"

"How were we to know you weren't down?" asked Church. "You distinctly said eight o'clock——"

"Never mind what I distinctly said," interrupted Handforth. "I'm wild! That young demon has been messing me about all the morning! Thank goodness he's not coming with us!"

"I wouldn't go if you paid me!" said Willy tartly. "As for Archie's party to-morrow, you can bet I shall be in on that. By what I can understand, it's goin' to be a pretty jolly affair, with a dance in the evening, and tons of good things to eat."

"You haven't been invited, you young bouncer!" snapped Handforth.

Willy smiled.

"That's was only Archie's carelessness," he explained. "Why, if I didn't turn up, Archie would be miserable all day!"

It was quite impossible to argue with Willy. So his elder brother wisely dropped the subject. But his chief reason for allowing Willy to go in peace was the arrival of breakfast at that moment. The juniors started on the food without delay.

"I'm jolly keen about this visit to Mr. Lee's place," said Handforth. "Nipper's going to show us all Mr. Lee's crime relics—wonderful things, too. Handcuffs, and revolvers that men kill people with. There's a dagger that was used to murder a Chinaman!"

"That ought to be charming!" said Church.

"All sorts of things like that," went on Handforth. "Clues by the dozen, you know. Naturally, these things interest me. It's not surprising that I should be as hot as mustard on the job."

"But why should it particularly interest you?" asked Church.

"Why!" snapped Handforth. "Why! Ain't I a detective? Haven't I made a special study of crime and criminal investigation?"

"Have you?"

"You—you blithering lunatic!" snorted Handforth. "You know jolly well I have! When I grow up, I'm going to be a bigger detective than Mr. Lee himself!"

"You might be bigger, but size isn't everything!" put in Willy. "A turnip's big, but it's not so nice as an orange!"

Handforth clenched his fists.

"Are you calling me a turnip?" he roared.

"Now, I ask you!" said Willy, turning to Church and McClure. "Did I call him a turnip? Why should I say such an insult?"

"Oh, if you apologise, it's all right," growled Handforth.

"I don't see why a turnip should be insulted!" said Willy thoughtfully.

Handforth didn't see the point, and breakfast was allowed to proceed without any further ructions.

And, shortly afterwards, the chums of Study D started off towards Gray's Inn Road. Long before they arrived Church and McClure were heartily fed up with the subject of crime, and relics, and museums, and everything connected with detection.

Handforth had been talking about nothing else ever since they had started. They were fairly sick of the whole range of subjects. They almost wished they had stopped at their respective homes. It was all very well to come out on a visit, but this was rather too much.

The trio arrived at Gray's Inn Road, and walked down it until they came to Nelson Lee's house. At the moment the famous detective was on the Continent, and would be for some days.

Nelson Lee, in fact, had taken advantage of his absence from St. Frank's—during the recent period when ladies had been in control. And he had gone off across the Channel on a particularly important crime case.

Handforth rang the bell loudly.

"I expect we shall find a whole crowd here," he remarked, as they waited on the doorstep. "Of course, Mr. Lee won't be present, and that's jolly good. He's one of the best, but we'd rather be by ourselves."

"You bet!" agreed Church.

The door opened, and a pleasant lady in a flowered overall stood in front of them. This was Mrs. Jones, Nelson Lee's house-keeper.

"Oh, good-morning, young gentlemen!" she said. "I dare say you'll be Master Handforth and Master Church and Master McClure."

"Got it first time," said Handforth.

"Master Nipper's hout just now," said Mrs. Jones.

"Hout?" said Handforth. "I mean out?"

"He ain't been gone long, Master Handforth," said Mrs. Jones. "He told me to ask you in, and would you wait up in the consulting room?"

"Oh, that's all right," said Church. "We don't mind waiting."

They were ushered upstairs, and then



went into the consulting room. Mrs. Jones retired, leaving the juniors alone.

"Well, that's rather the limit, you know," said Handforth warmly. "Nipper asks us to come here, and then goes out! The nerve!"

"Oh, I don't know," said Church. "He might have been called out on a case!"

"Case!" said Handforth, with a start. "But—but he wouldn't have a case to-day—so near the holidays, too! Besides, Mr. Lee's away—"

"That doesn't make any difference," said Church. "People come here at all times—even in the middle of the night. A detective has got to be prepared to get on the trail at a moment's notice. That's what you said coming along, anyway."

"Well, so he has!" declared Handforth.

"Perhaps somebody came here for Mr. Lee, and Nipper went off on the trail," exclaimed Church. "There's never any telling, you know. But we can make ourselves comfortable until he comes back."

"Of course," agreed McClure. "Let's have a look round the place. A jolly fine room, you know. Plenty of comfort, and all sorts of curious relics. Just look at this Zulu spear on the wall—"

"Here, I say!" interrupted Handforth. "Come and look at this!"

His chums went over to his side. Handforth was standing against an occasional table which stood in the corner. And he was having a look at a small leather-covered box which stood there. The lid was open, and Handforth was gazing into the interior.

"What is it?" asked Church.

"A make-up box, my son!" said Handforth. "Everything complete. Wigs, false moustaches, eyebrows, grease-paint, and all the rest of it! Not a theatrical make-up box, but a real detective's outfit!"

"Well, what about it?"

Handforth's eyes were glittering.

"What a chance!" he breathed. "Why not disguise ourselves, and spoof those fat-heads when they come back?"

Church and McClure were about to give their opinion on this dazzling scheme when the telephone-bell rang with rather startling abruptness.

## CHAPTER II.

### HANDFORTH'S GREAT CHANCE!



**C**HURCH looked round, and caught his breath in.

"My hat! It made me jump!" he said. "It's only the telephone. I'll answer it."

"No, you won't!" snapped Handforth. "It might be a client!"

"Client!" repeated Church. "Oh, yes! I'd forgotten that! Perhaps we'd better call Mrs. Jones—"

"You—you fathead!" breathed Handforth. "If it's a client, I'll do all the talking, and

it'll be good experience. Besides, I might be able to get hold of a case. There's no telling!"

Before the horrified Church and McClure could stop him, Handforth was at the telephone. The very thought of Handy interfering in one of Nelson Lee's cases was too terrible for words.

Edward Oswald put the receiver to his ear.

"Hallo!" he called, in gruff, businesslike tones. "Who's that?"

"Am I speaking to Mr. Nelson Lee?" came a voice.

"Yes!" said Handforth. "I mean, no! At least, this is Mr. Lee's consulting-room! If there's any message, I'm the man to take it! Or, if you want any case investigated, I'll soon pop round. Just say the word, and I'll buzz like the dickens. What is it—a burglary?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Handforth distinctly heard a laugh come across the wires.

"What's that?" he snapped curtly.

"My dear old prize ass, don't be so funny!" came the voice. "What put the idea into your head that I was a client? Don't you know me? Can't you recognise my sweet, dulcet tones?"

"Are you Nipper?" roared Handforth furiously.

"Great Scott! Don't burst the wires!" came the voice. "Have pity on the Post Office authorities, Handy. The poor, starving people have enough trouble with the telephone system as it is."

Handforth nearly dropped the receiver.

"You—you spoofing rotter!" he snorted.

I grinned—at the other end of the wire. As a matter of fact, I hadn't attempted to spoof Handforth at all. Such a thing had never entered my head. But he was so keen on making investigations that he had mistaken me for a client without even troubling to recognise the voice.

"Sorry, old man, but it was your own doing!" I chuckled. "I thought you'd be there by this time—that's why I rung up. Are Church and McClure—with you?"

"Yes," growled Handforth, who was sadly disappointed. "Of course they're with me. Why did you go off? An important case?"

"My hat, no!" I grinned. "Your mind seems to run on cases and clients, and all that sort of thing. I got up pretty early; and so I went round to Reggie Pitt's place. That's where I'm speaking from."

"But why did you leave us?"

"I found that Archie is coming along soon, and I decided to wait for him," I replied. "If you fellows can possess your souls in patience for a bit, we'll be along soon. Make yourselves comfortable. Take an easy-chair or two, and imagine yourselves at home."

"Thanks awfully!" said Handforth sarcastically. "Of course, I'm keen to see these relics, but it's a bit thick making us wait— But you needn't worry. We'll wait!"



Handforth rung off almost at once. A thought had come to him at the last moment. He had suddenly remembered that make-up box. And it struck him that this short spell of waiting would come in very handy.

But he had an idea that Church and McClure would be in the way.

"Nipper's round at Pitt's place," he said casually. "Now, I vote that you buzz there on a 'bus at top speed, and fetch him along here. I'll wait until you come back."

"Anything to oblige," said Church readily.

He and McClure were only too glad to go. If they remained, Handforth would only argue, and it might result in something even worse. If Edward Oswald was left by himself, he couldn't do much damage.

So Church and McClure hurried away.

"Good!" murmured Handforth exultantly. "Just what I wanted!"

It had all worked to his supreme satisfaction. In fact, it could not have been better if he had deliberately planned for this very end. He was alone in Nelson Lee's consulting-room!

That fact, by itself, was pretty wonderful.

But, best of all, there was a make-up box on the table—not a cheap, tawdry affair—not a theatrical outfit—but one of Nelson Lee's own. And Handforth fairly quivered with excitement.

"Gorgeous!" he breathed.

He took hold of the box, and carried it across to the central table. Then he sat down, and proceeded to make all sorts of experiments. He donned wig after wig, pausing now and again to have a look at himself in the mirror.

He tried to see how he would look in a false moustache and a beard.

He looked awful—but this was mainly because he put on a brown beard, and a sandy moustache. The two didn't match. After that Handforth rejected the whisker scheme, and started on something more modest.

After all, he was rather too young for whiskers.

"I don't reckon I'd pass!" he told himself. "The chaps would begin to suspect something. Now, these small moustaches—"

He tried one or two of them on, and at length was fully satisfied that one moustache in particular suited him to perfection. It was just a tiny wisp of an affair—a kind of smudge on his upper lip.

But it had a rather big effect. It changed the junior's appearance enormously. Then he got busy with other items of make-up—darkening his eyebrows, and making some faint lines upon his cheeks.

Upon the whole, Handforth did it remarkably well.

This, no doubt, was because he was only just commencing. Handforth was one of those unfortunate people who didn't know when to let well alone. After he had done the preliminaries, he was quite presentable.



Handforth gazed at himself in the mirror, and held his head on one side. "Not so dusty, for a start," he decided.

He had changed his appearance to a big extent; and, what was more, there was no effect of theatrical disguise on his face.

Of course, Edward Oswald was just the kind of fellow to make himself look old by a little touching up. He had a rugged countenance, and was bigly made, and could easily be mistaken for a man—taking his rear view. Now that his face was altered, he looked surprisingly older.

Handforth gazed at himself in the mirror, and held his head on one side.

"Not so dusty, for a start," he decided.

That was just his trouble. He considered he had started, when, as a matter of fact, he ought to have finished. As he was, he looked well. And he proceeded to make up his mind what other effects he would adopt.

"More darkening of the eyebrows, a little touch on the cheeks, and a wig!" decided Handforth. "Then I can get some of those funny things to shove in your mouth—to make people think you've got prominent



teeth. Rather a good wheeze. By the time I've done, the chaps'll never know me!"

Just then Handforth caught sight of Nelson Lee's old dressing-gown, hanging over the back of a chair. An idea came to him. He wondered how he would look in a dressing-gown.

He donned the garment, and then strode up and down in front of the mirror, gazing at himself. He decided that he looked the master detective to the life.

"Made for the part!" he murmured. "Why, it wouldn't take me long to start a giddy detective agency on my own! I'll jolly well do it, too, as soon as I leave school!"

He went back to the make-up box in order to ruin his appearance. He didn't think he was going to ruin it—his idea was to effect a general improvement.

If the other fellows had come in that moment they might have been deceived, but if Handforth was allowed to carry out his plans, they wouldn't be deceived for a minute. At the first glance they would see who this remarkable person was.

But Handforth wasn't allowed to proceed. He paused just in front of the make-up box, startled. For he heard footsteps ascending the stairs rapidly—hurried, unsteady footsteps they seemed to him.

"Great pip!" he gasped. "One of the chaps, I expect!"

He frowned heavily as it occurred to him that either Church or McClure might have returned. He cast round for some sort of hiding-place—he didn't want to be interrupted in the middle of this disguising.

But then, before he could really make up his mind, the door of the consulting-room burst open.

To Handforth's dismay, the newcomer was a stranger.

"Is—is there any hope?" he gasped, breathing hard. "Mr. Lee—Mr. Lee! I want your help!"

Handforth gulped. The man was looking straight at him, and in his eyes there was an expression of horror, and wild, hunted fear. But why was he looking at Handforth? The disguised junior felt rather flabby.

All this was so sudden—so unexpected.

The stranger was a rather elderly man, with a wizened face and straggling, iron-grey whiskers. He came further into the room, and held on to the table for support. Handforth was slowly recovering himself, and he could see that the stranger was nearly fainting with agitation.

"Here, I say," panted Handforth. "Pull yourself together, sir—"

"Mr. Lee!" pleaded the man. "Can you come? Can you help me? A dreadful thing has happened!"

But Handforth didn't hear the man's words. He stood there in a kind of daze, staring at the newcomer, fascinated.

Mr. Lee! This man had taken him for

Nelson Lee! That was the astounding, unbelievable fact which caused Handforth to nearly faint. And then, in a dreamy sort of way, he realised the truth.

It was the disguise!

The disguise, and the dressing-gown! And, after all, why not? Handforth was in Nelson Lee's consulting-room—he was in Nelson Lee's dressing-gown—and his very form and features were those of a detective! Handforth had known this all along.

And the junior was thrilled through and through by the thought. For all he knew, this would prove to be his great chance! As long as he could remember he had hoped against hope that he would be able to investigate a real mystery. And here it was, by pure chance, being thrown at him!

Only for a moment did he hesitate.

Should he disillusion this stranger, and tell him the truth? Or should he adopt the role of Nelson Lee, and carry out the investigation? What an opportunity! He would inquire into the mystery, bring the case to a successful conclusion, and cover himself with glory!

It was, indeed, a chance to prove that when it came to detective work, he was equal to Nelson Lee himself. He would be dotty to throw this chance away. It would be madness!

How thankful he was that Church and McClure had gone! It was the hand of Fate that had directed Handforth to send them away. And there was no danger of interruption, for Nelson Lee was abroad. He had a clear field. And he made up his mind.

"Er—exactly!" said Handforth, trying to steady his voice. "You want help—eh? Rather! I mean, state your case, sir, and I'll investigate the mystery, and bring about the capture of the criminal."

"Thank you, Mr. Lee—thank you!" said the other fervently. "My name is Jonas Appleton. I want you to come with me at once—without delaying a moment."

"Pardon me, Mr. Appleton," said Handforth, cooling down. "Before I can consent, I must know the nature of this inquiry. Have you lost a diamond ring, or what? Is it a forgery?"

"A forgery!" echoed Mr. Appleton, with a bitter laugh. "Would that it was! Mr. Lee, there has been murder!"

"Murder!" gasped Handforth. "Murder!"

"Yes!" exclaimed Mr. Appleton huskily. "And you must come on this investigation now; the matter is vital! What can the police do? They are useless—they are dunderheads! But a man of your ability will get on the track of the assassin and hand him over to justice!"

Handforth gave one gulp.

He had never believed for a moment that the case was so serious. But he was not the kind to back out—he never showed the white feather! No matter what the odds were, Handforth was a fellow to go forward!



"Mr. Appleyard," he said impressively, "I'm your man!"

"Thank you, Mr. Lee! Oh, thank you!" panted Mr. Appleton. "My name— But that does not matter! There is no time! Come!"

"Come?" said Handforth. "Where to?"

"I have a taxi outside!" said the client. "We will drive straight to the scene of the murder."

"By George!" said Handforth tensely. "Just wait two shakes, and I'll be with you! I can't go out in this dressing-gown!"

He dashed into the adjoining apartment, and hustled on his overcoat. He had already seen a soft hat. It was too sizes too large, but Handforth didn't notice this. He jammed it on his head, and rushed back.

"I am ready!" he announced dramatically.

### CHAPTER III.

#### THE SLEUTH ON THE SCENT!



**M**R. APPLETON nearly fell down the stairs in his haste—but mainly because

Handforth gave him a shove in the back. Handforth was so excited that it wouldn't

much matter if he broke his client's neck.

They hurried out through the doorway, and there, against the kerb, stood a taxicab. They rushed in, and Mr. Appleton leaned out of the window, and turned to the driver.

"No. 26, Baltimore Road, Bloomsbury!" he ordered.

The taxi started off, and Handforth did his utmost to compose himself. What would a real detective do? How would he behave in such an emergency as this? Handforth didn't want to make a mess of it at the very start. It wouldn't look well.

Then it occurred to him. He hadn't heard any facts about the murder! And he certainly ought to be primed up before reaching the scene of the crime. That was most necessary as a preliminary.

Handforth produced a big notebook, and turned over one or two pages with an important air.

"Now, Mr. Appleton!" he said. "Some facts, please—Great pip!"

Handforth gasped as he gazed at the page of the notebook in front of him. It contained several fearful-looking caricatures of a face, drawn in blue pencil. Some of his own work, and supposed to be speaking likenesses of Church and McClure. He hastily turned the page over, hoping that his client hadn't seen them.

"The murder—yes!" said Mr. Appleton, passing a hand over his brow. "I don't know the man—he is a stranger. But there he lies—on the floor! I found him this morning, when I entered the room. It is

horrible—horrible! I want you to find out what it all means!"

"Trust me for that," said Handforth firmly. "Now, by what I can understand, and putting two and two together, it seems to me that this crime was committed by a secret society."

"Good heavens!" said Mr. Appleton faintly.

"I will admit that the data is very scanty," said Handforth, trying to think of all the important words he could. "But you have interested me greatly, Mr. Appleton. This man was murdered in your kitchen, I understand. That leads me to suppose that the cook may be guilty—"

"Ah! The cook is the member of the secret society?"

"Possibly—possibly!" said Handforth mysteriously. "One never knows, my dear sir. These secret societies are jolly funny things to mess about with! I mean you never know when you might get a stab in the back!"

"But wait—wait!" said Mr. Appleton. "The murder did not take place in the kitchen. You are wrong, Mr. Lee. It occurred in the sitting-room. But we will wait until we arrive at the scene of the crime."

"Yes, that'll be a lot better!" agreed Handforth.

He was rather relieved. It was somewhat difficult to talk about clues and trails that he hadn't even had a look at. And he had sometimes read that a detective ought to keep an open mind. So he decided to sit back in dignified silence.

He had just sat back, and was getting comfortable, when the taxi pulled up with a jerk. Mr. Appleton sprang to his feet, and jumped out. Handforth looked up in surprise.

"Are we there?" he asked.

"Yes!" said Mr. Appleton. "This way, Mr. Lee—and please hurry!"

Only for a moment did Handforth's client pause, and this was to pay off the taxicab. Then he led the way through a gateway into an enclosed garden. A big house stood in front of the pair. The street was very quiet, and seemed to be a kind of big square, with an enclosed garden in the centre. It was a very peaceful spot.

Mr. Appleton let himself in with a latch-key, and Handforth followed. Then Handforth nearly fell out backwards through the open doorway. For there, in the hall, stood a police constable!

For the first time, Handforth realised—with a tremendous shock—that this affair was no joke. He realised that his own position might be a delicate one if the truth came out. It was one thing to masquerade as Nelson Lee with a private client—but quite another thing to deliberately deceive the police. Big trouble might follow.

But Handforth did not have to do any deceiving—Mr. Appleton did it for him.

"It's all right, constable—quite all



right!" he exclaimed. "This gentleman is Mr. Lee. You understand? Mr. Nelson Lee, the famous detective."

The constable stiffened, and saluted.

And Handforth felt enormously flattered. Without question—without one suspicious glance—he had been mistaken for the world-famous crime investigator. It was indeed a compliment to his half-finished make-up. But he felt enormously glad that the constable was not personally acquainted with Nelson Lee.

"A bad business, I understand?" said Handforth gruffly.

"Terrible, sir!" said the policeman. "Shocking, in fact! I do hope as you'll be

"Oh, sorry—my mistake!" said Handforth. "But we detectives get so absent-minded, you know. When we are on a case, my dear sir, we cannot pay much attention to mere names."

"Ah, yes," said Mr. Appleton. "I quite understand."

He led the way into a sitting-room at the back of the hall. The blind was drawn, and the apartment was in a state of gloom. There was something mysterious about that dim atmosphere.

But Handforth's confidence had returned. The constable had accepted him as Nelson Lee, and that was good enough! It never

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able to get on the track, sir. Of course, Scotland Yard might have to be told later, but—"

"No need to go to Scotland Yard," said Handforth hastily. "Leave it to me."

The constable was a big, burly fellow, six feet in height, and proportionately broad. Handforth felt insignificant beside him, and wanted to get out of his presence. In spite of his assumed easiness, he wasn't feeling at all comfortable.

"Will you kindly lead the way, Mr. Applejack?" he said, with dignity.

"Appleton, sir—Appleton," corrected the client.

occurred to Handforth that he was doing something of a very risky character. Investigating a murder was a grim business.

But Handforth had started now, and he was going on. But he almost began to wish that he had taken a few precautions to start with. This room made him realise the deadly nature of the affair.

Mr. Appleton pointed.

"There!" he said softly.

Handforth started. For on the floor lay the murdered man. He was face upwards, and he lay still and silent. He was a bearded man, and a handkerchief was half-drawn over his features. Handforth was ex-



tremely glad that Mr. Appleton went over and covered the body with a rug.

"The police are very careless," he muttered. "That is better—much better. Perhaps, Mr. Lee, you will look round and search for clues? I am afraid the police have not been successful—but a man of your capability will not find any obstacle."

Handforth smiled.

"Clues?" he said. "There are plenty here."

He went round the room with an exaggerated air of importance. He crouched over the table and chairs. Then, suddenly, he pounced upon an old felt hat which lay half-hidden in a corner.

"What is this?" he asked sharply.

"It appears to be a hat, Mr. Lee."

"I know that, fathead—I—I mean—can't I see it's a hat?" said Handforth hastily. "But is it yours? That's what I want to find out."

"I never wear a trilby hat," said the client. "No, it is not mine."

"Good!" said Handforth, with gloating triumph. "Then this hat is the property of the murderer. And here, inside, are the initials—'H. J.' They are the initials of the assassin."

"Splendid!" said Mr. Appleton.

He watched Handforth with great interest as the latter went round the room, seeking for further clues. Twice Edward Oswald paused against the body. Should he dare to take a look at it?

He rebelled at the thought, but it would look very peculiar if he did not examine the remains. After all, it was one of the first things that a detective would do. And he suddenly made up his mind.

"I think, Mr. Appleton, that I will examine the dead man," he announced, his voice trembling slightly. "I may pick up some valuable clues."

Mr. Appleton said nothing, but stood back, with horror in his eyes.

Handforth knelt down, and pulled the rug back with a sweep. He gazed at the pale face of the murdered man, and it was all he could do to hold back a cry. The eyes were open, staring at him in a fixed kind of way. But, now that he had started, the thing had to be done.

He swiftly examined the body—at least, he told himself that he examined it. As a matter of fact, he simply gave it a casual glance, and then pulled the rug back into position. He sighed with relief.

"No, no clues," he announced. "Nothing at all, Mr. Appleton. But I am sure that I shall get on the track soon. There must be some way—"

He paused, for at that moment he had caught sight of a piece of paper in the hearth. He hurried over to it—not because he thought there might be something valuable in that paper, but because he wanted to get away from the body. And here was an excellent excuse.

He unfolded the piece of paper, and then started.

"A cypher letter!" he exclaimed excitedly. "This—this might prove to be the whole key to the mystery."

"Amazing!" said Mr. Appleton. "I do not remember the letter being there when I came into the room earlier."

"That's nothing," said Handforth. "A detective sees a lot more than other people, Mr. Appleton. A detective has to see more than other people. It's his work."

He gazed at the cypher letter, and was rather dismayed. It was such a jumble that he was very much afraid he would never be able to elucidate it. And this is what he saw:

"RETFA GNIOD BOJ NIOJ EM TA DLO  
ELBATS TA MOTTOB FO DROFLIW  
SWEM. LLIW EDIH UOY YLEFAS IITNU  
EUH DNA YRC REVO. GNIRB EHT TOOL.  
HSALE YRRAH."

"I shall have to take this home, and consult my cipher-book," said Handforth, trying to give an adequate excuse for not elucidating the cipher on the spot. "When I can give it full attention—"

"Would it not be possible to read the message now, Mr. Lee?" asked Mr. Appleton anxiously. "It might be of the very greatest importance to the whole investigation. I have heard that you are singularly clever with every kind of cipher."

"Oh, rather!" agreed Handforth. "Now, let me see. This was undoubtedly dropped by the murderer. Of course, this isn't English—it looks more like Russian. Or it might be Bulgarian."

"Quite possibly, but—"

"Great Scott!" roared Handforth suddenly. "Look! Do you see? That last word! I happened to glance at it quickly, and I suddenly spotted that it is 'Harry.'"

"'Harry!'" repeated Mr. Appleton. "But surely you are mistaken?"

"Not at all," said Handforth. "Don't you see, it is— No, perhaps not! Just leave me alone for a moment, please."

He stared at the cipher eagerly—intently.

"I have solved it," he announced, with triumph. "I can read this message right through—from the first word to the last."

"Is it possible?" gasped Mr. Appleton. "But how—how—"

"That, of course, I cannot explain," said Handforth. "You will quite understand, my dear sir, that there are such things as professional secrets. Let it be sufficient that I have solved the mystery."

After all, it was a very simple business—for Handforth had merely noticed with a sudden flash of remarkable genius that the words were quite ordinary ones—spelt backwards.

And with only a few moments' glance, Handforth could now read the message in the correct way. This, of course, is what he saw:

"AFTER DOING JOB JOIN ME AT OLD



STABLE AT BOTTOM OF WILFORD MEWS. WILL HIDE YOU SAFELY UNTIL HUE AND CRY OVER. BRING THE LOOT. FLASH HARRY."

Handforth's mind was in a whirl. The thing was clear—as clear as daylight. This note had been dropped by the murderer, and it was from a confederate—who had agreed to hide the assassin. Even at this moment he was skulking in the old stable. Handforth had only to find "Wilford Mews" and he would know exactly what there was to be known. Indeed, it was quite possible that he would capture the murderer himself.

And that thought thrilled him through and through.

All his doubts and fears vanished. When he had first entered the house he had had plenty of confidence—but there had always been a haunting kind of fear—but only semi-conscious—that he would make a hash of things. But now he had discovered something definite—something so positive that he could not make any blunder.

Handforth fairly gloated. He would go at once—he would get on the trail. As for the murderer, Handy didn't fear this rascal in the least. The famous leader of Study D was utterly fearless.

"Mr. Appleton, I must go," said Handforth briskly. "I am sorry, but it is necessary for me to leave on the instant."

"Good gracious! You are on the track already?"

"Yes; I am on the track already!" exclaimed Handforth, his voice fairly gloating with victory. "I have every hope of returning within a few hours—and I shall bring with me the murderer."

Handforth got out into the hall, and there was the constable still on duty. The amateur detective glowed within him. Apparently, some special men were being sent from Scotland Yard. But Handforth was on the job first—and he had a clear field.

"By the way, constable," he said casually. "Speaking to me, Mr. Lee?" said the man, saluting.

"Yes. Ever heard of Wilford Mews?"

The policeman smiled.

"Why, sir, they're just round the corner—not a stone's throw away," he replied.

"Well, I'm jiggered!" said Handforth excitedly. "I—I mean, indeed! Just round the corner, eh? That's very interesting!"

"Kind o' stables, sir," remarked the policeman. "If you go out of the front door, and then go to the bottom of the back garden, you'll find a door which leads out into a side lane. Well, Wilford Mews are just to the right—not more than a score of yards."

"Thank you—thank you!" said Handforth. "It was quite unnecessary for you to have troubled yourself with all that talk. Do you think I want to go there?"

Handforth left the house, feeling that he had thrown dust into the constable's eyes.

And there, just coming up the garden path, were Church and McClure! Handforth came to a dead stop.

A huge wave of alarm surged over him. Why had these idiots come? How had they got there? They would ruin everything. And now—just when he had got fairly on the track!

But, after all, he might be able to use them as his assistants. All big detectives had assistants. Why shouldn't he have a couple?"

He went up to his chums quickly, and grabbed their arms.

"Look here, you chaps—not a word!" he breathed tensely.

"Eh?" gasped Church. "What—what is the matter, sir?"

"We—we don't quite understand, sir!" said McClure, staring at Handforth.

Edward Oswald gave a kind of gulp, and recovered himself with a huge effort. In the excitement of the moment he had overlooked the fact that he was disguised.

And his chums didn't know him!

## CHAPTER IV.

### THE END OF THE TRAIL!



**H**ANDFORTH fairly glowed with delight and triumph.

His own chums—and in the full daylight they hadn't recognised him! It was a magnificent tribute to the masterful cleverness of his make-up. But this was no time for self-congratulation.

"My boys!" he said, gruffly. "Come with me!"

He spoke in a masterful way, and went round to the rear of the house—following the instructions of the constable. When they arrived in a secluded little patch, surrounded by bushes, Handforth turned.

"Now, you asses!" he breathed. "Don't you know me?"

"Oh! We'd better yell for help!" said Church nervously. "This—this man's going to kidnap us, Mac!"

"Please, sir—" began McClure.

"Don't be dotty!" interrupted Edward Oswald. "I'm talking in my own voice now—can't you recognise it? I'm Handy!"

"Handy!" gasped Church and McClure.

They stared at him open-mouthed.

"Pretty wonderful, isn't it?" asked Handforth. "But there's no need for you to stare like that—I'm not a ghost. I disguised myself in Mr. Lee's place, and now I'm on an investigation. It's a murder case, you know, and pretty important. As soon as I spotted you, I decided to take you as assistants."

Church and McClure looked dumbfounded.

"I—I never thought you were so jolly clever, Handy!" breathed Church. "It's amazing! Whoever would believe it? We went back to Gray's Inn Road, you know, and we saw Mrs. Jones. She said that somebody went out, and we naturally thought she meant you."



"It was me!" said Handforth.  
 "Yes, but it's you, and not you, in a way!" went on Church. "We just came along here to see—"

"Never mind explaining now!" interrupted Handforth curtly. "I'm on the track of a murderer, and I want you fellows to help. Of course, you'll be no good—but a detective must have an assistant. I'll be a bit different, and have two."

"Well, of course, you need two!" said McClure thoughtfully.

"You—you fathead!" snorted Edward Oswald. "I don't need any, strictly speaking. But it looks well."

In his heart, he deeply regretted that he had brought the two juniors into the affair. It was his own fault, of course, for he had given himself away. If he had remained quiet, they would never have known him.

But now that they did know, the only thing was to take them along.

As quickly as possible, Handforth explained the situation. Church and McClure listened with bated breath.

"But—but ought you to do it, Handy?" asked Church doubtfully. "I mean, you're not Mr. Lee, really, and it seems a bit like deception—"

"Mind your own business!" interrupted Handy gruffly. "I'm conducting this case in a thoroughly masterful manner. Mr. Lee will only obtain glory. I shall be willing to give him all the credit!"

It was only with difficulty that Church presented himself from fainting into McClure's arms. The idea of Handforth giving any credit away was rather too much all at once.

"But we can't waste any more time," went on Handforth. "By a series of remarkably clever deductions, I elucidated the mystery of the cipher. I'm not boasting, but it was a pretty amazing performance. Ciphers are hard things to elucidate!"

Handforth seemed to like that word, and he used it repeatedly. And he kept on talking while the trio made their way to the bottom of the garden, and passed out through the gateway.

Here, turning to the right, they soon found themselves in the Mews that the constable had directed them to. The investigation, as far as Handforth was concerned, was turning out to be surprisingly easy.

But he didn't think so.

"Footprints!" he ejaculated suddenly. "See 'em? I don't mind betting that these footprints were made by the murderer!"

He pointed excitedly, and Church and McClure were dubious. They may not have been such marvellous detectives as Handforth, but it struck them that no reasonable murderer would walk up and down about fifty times in the thickest patch of mud in the whole yard.

"I think you're wrong, Handy!" said Church. "There are dozens of footprints there. They must have been made by the grooms from all these other stables. Besides, the murderer wouldn't wear hob-nails!"

But Handforth was not listening. He was



Handforth nearly fell out backwards through the doorway. For there, in the hall, stood a police constable!

creeping forward, bending low. He remembered that the old stable was at the bottom of the Mews—according to that cipher message.

And now he continued on his way down, and at length came to an open doorway. The place was a stable. There were other stables near by, to say nothing of coach-houses and garages. But these were all locked up and quiet. Besides, they weren't at the bottom, as this one was.

Handforth entered, and looked round cautiously.

His first feeling was one of disappointment. The stable was empty. There was a little pile of rubbish over in one corner, but it was altogether too small to conceal a hidden murderer. There was the manger, too, but this was rather shallow, and at the first glance Handy saw that it was empty.



"Nobody here!" he said blankly. "The bird has flown!" exclaimed Church. "How rotten! Just when we were on the track, too! Of course, he might be somewhere near by. There's no telling what a murderer would do!"

Church looked up, and his gaze became fixed on a corner of the ceiling. Handforth gazed that way, too, and he gave a violent start. There was a kind of ladder fixed to the wall, and a hole at the top.

"A loft!" he breathed. "The fearful scoundrel is up there! This only proves how necessary it is for a detective to keep his eyes open. If I hadn't been jolly smart, I should have missed that loft!"

"Well, I saw it first, you know," put in Church.

"You—you rotter!" snorted Handforth. "You saw it first? Didn't I distinctly say—"

"Shush! We shall give ourselves away!"

Handforth suddenly became quiet, and tiptoed his way across to the ladder. Then he commenced creeping up with elaborate caution. The fact that the ladder creaked in a most noisy manner didn't seem to worry him.

"Better rush it!" said McClure, from the bottom.

But Handforth took no notice. He continued his way up slowly—realising, at the same time, that he was in a position of dire peril. How easy it would be for the murderer to crash something on to his head as he bobbed up into the loft!

But detectives always have to take such risks!

Handforth wasn't going to back out now. He continued his way upwards—and then, at the last moment, he popped up into the loft like a jack-in-the-box.

"I arrest you on the charge of murder!" he shouted dramatically.

He stared round, expecting to grapple with the desperate ruffian. But there was nobody there! The loft was absolutely empty—at least, nothing could be seen except a few stray wisps of straw, an odd sack, and a kind of wooden box. This latter was lying in the corner.

Handforth gave a grunt of disgust. He had worked himself up to this pitch, fully anticipating a fight for life with the murderer. And yet there was not a soul in the place. It was one of those keen disappointments which all detectives have to contend with in big cases.

"Well, it doesn't matter!" growled Handforth. "I shall get the rotter sooner or later. By George! It's queer, though! If that message was right, Flash Harry ought to be here, and the murderer as well! And what about the loot? Not a sign of it. Not a—"

He paused, staring at the box in the corner. The loot! Was it not possible that the men had cleared off in a hurry—leaving their booty behind in this deserted stable?

Possible—it was almost a certainty! Handforth had read about such things. And it simplified the case to a tremendous degree.

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All he would have to do would be to wait—lie in ambush until the rascals returned. Then he would pounce out. He would make one swoop, and capture the whole gang! By this time Handforth was quite certain that he would soon be dealing with a gang.

But the first thing was—the loot!

He crossed over to the box, picked it up, and was again aware of a keen sense of disappointment. The box was rather light—but it occurred to him that the spoils might consist of banknotes, and he cheered up a bit. Or diamonds—diamonds don't weigh very heavy.

He struggled with the box, and tried to open it. Then he dropped it with a crash to the floor. For he had suddenly caught sight of something else. There almost at his feet, lay the return half of a railway ticket! He picked it up with a gasp of victory.

"Golder's Green!" he murmured tensely. "Flash Harry must have come from Golder's Green, and that's where the murderer has gone to! I shall have to follow the trail to Golder's Green at once!"

"Eh?" said Church, coming up through the hole.

"Don't bother—don't bother!" snapped Handforth. "I'm on the track! I have discovered new data, and before long I shall elucidate the whole mystery, and bring my investigations to a successful conclusion!"

"Get away, you boys!" whispered Church dramatically.

But Handforth didn't notice the sarcastic remark. He was staring at the box. And he now saw that in its fall to the floor the lid had come open. Quickly, he bent down and pulled the box open. The lid fell off, revealing the fact that the interior was absolutely empty except for one small slip of paper.

"Great heavens!" said Handforth.

"What is it—blood?" gasped McClure, in horror.

Handforth didn't even hear him. He seized the paper, unfolded it, and gazed at the few words that were written upon it. Then he frowned.

"Ah!" he said. "This seems to be a trick—probably a kind of false clue to lead me astray!"

He examined the paper again, and this is what he saw:

"What's the date to-day? Think carefully, and be prepared next year!"

Church and McClure came up, looking puzzled, and stared over Handforth's shoulder.

"The date?" said McClure. "Why, lemme see. Yes, of course! It's the first day of April to-day! I remember looking at the calendar."

"It's All Fool's Day!" yelled Church.

And then he and McClure went off into shrieks.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

They fairly rocked, and held their sides as they roared. Handforth gazed at them coldly—and not without pity.

"What's the matter with you, you cackling idiots?" he demanded sourly.

"Don't—don't you see?" gurgled Church. "You've been fooled!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" howled McClure.

"Fooled up to the giddy neck!" sobbed Church. "Oh, my goodness! This is the scream of the century! Handy, the great detective, dished and diddled in a huge First of April jape! Poor old Handy—Yow! Yaroo!"

Crash!

Church thudded to the floor, holding his nose. His hilarity was rather ill-timed, for Handforth was in a dangerous proximity. And the wonderful amateur detective was looking wrathful.

"You—you cackling baboons!" he said witheringly. "Isn't this the kind of thing that all detectives have to contend with? Fine assistants, I don't think! Instead of helping me to get on the right trail, all you can do is to yell like a couple of Cheshire cats!"

"But—but you've been fooled!" stammered McClure.

"Don't I know it?" growled Handforth. "That murderer is smart!"

"The—the murderer!" said McClure, half choking.

"Of course," said Handforth. "This is where I score, you know. I've read about things like this—Sexton Blake and Nelson Lee have often had to deal with similar setbacks. That cipher business was a dud. The murderer knew it was the first of April, and so he thought he'd put the detectives off the scent. His idea was to send me to Golder's Green. But I'm not going. My plan is to get on the right track!"

"The—the right track!" gurgled Church feebly.

"Yes—and the next time I sha'n't be taken in by a silly April fool joke!" snorted Handforth. "I'll slaughter that murderer when I collar him! Trying to be funny! A murderer ought to have more serious thoughts!"

Handforth stormed down the ladder, leaving Church and McClure holding one another up in the loft. It seemed to them that the joke was over. But Handforth took it all seriously.

The amateur detective strode back towards the house with grim, rapid strides. He found the front door slightly open, and he pushed his way in—determined to brush past the constable without a word. He didn't want to be questioned just now.

But the constable was not there.

"Oh!" muttered Handforth. "Well, that's good! The chap was only in the way—police-men ain't any good in a big investigation."

He decided to go straight into the room of death. He would have another look round, and this time he would get on the right track. He reached the door, and opened it.

The blind was now up, and Mr. Appleton was sitting in front of the fire, eating roast chestnuts. For some remarkable reason, he



had discarded his side-whiskers. The constable was sitting opposite, laughing uproariously, and the corpse sat between the other two—also eating chestnuts with relish.

Handforth stared, his eyes goggling.

"What—what the— My only Aunt Jane!" he gasped hoarsely.

"That's right—come in!" said the corpse cheerfully. "Plenty of chestnuts, old man. Pull your chair up, and join the feast!"

"But—but—but I—I—I—"

"No need to stutter like that, Handy!" said the corpse. "How did it go? Did you find the awful murderer?"

The expression on Handforth's face was too much for Mr. Appleton and the deceased. They tried to keep their faces straight, but couldn't. And the next moment they were howling with merriment, and the constable joined in with loud roars. The laughter, in fact, was tremendous.

And Handforth, dimly at first, began to realise that something was wrong. Then it dawned upon him that there was more trickery about this business than he had ever realised.

"You—you screaming rotters!" he hooted. "What's the idea?"

The corpse proceeded to remove his beard, and stood revealed as Reggie Pitt, of the Remove. Mr. Appleton made one or two changes, removing a wig, and several other things. And Mr. Appleton became Nipper, in other words, myself. Handforth gazed at us aghast.

"What—what does it mean?" he breathed faintly.

"It happens to be the first of April, old son!" I gurgled. "Oh, my hat! It's the finest jape we've ever wangled! Good old Handy! You bit every time the bait came within reach!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Poor old master sleuth!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Handforth gaped at us in a kind of trance.

"You—you mean it was all spoof?" he panted, clutching at the table.

"Spoof—of course it was spoof!" said Church, coming through the doorway.

"Ha, ha, ha!" howled McClure.

Handforth was surrounded by yelling juniors.

"But—but the murder!" stuttered Handforth. "I—I thought—"

"My dear old ass, it's the first of April, and we thought we'd have a little game with you!" I explained, when I could find my voice. "If you'll stand there and listen, I'll explain."

Handforth didn't stand, he sat down, limply.

"Of couse, it was all arranged," I grinned. "We faked it out days ago—we planned all the details. Can't let the first of April go without japing somebody. And you were our chosen victim!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" cackled the late corpse.

"Go on—go on!" said Handforth thickly.

"Well, there's not much in it," I chuckled. "We arranged to be away from Gray's Inn Road when you arrived this morning, and left the make-up box handy so that you'd be tempted. Church and McClure were ready to make some excuse for going off, but you helped the scheme by sending them away yourself!"

"You—you plotting bounders!"

"Then I rolled in, as Mr. Appleton!" I proceeded. "Of course, this is Reggie's place. We're at No. 59, Duncan Square, where Pitt's people live. The family's out, and so we thought we'd take advantage of the fact. You weren't really supposed to meet Church and McClure in the garden, but that made it all the better. Oh, Handy! You're too funny for words!"

Handforth felt very faint. He wanted to get up and knock us all down, but he didn't feel physically capable of the feat. He had been spoofed—fooled! And he had simply asked for it all along the line!

Now that he came to think of it, Willy had fooled him that morning, when Handy had emptied the jug over the bed. If he had had his wits about him, he would have remembered the date.

"Wait!" said Handforth, pushing back his cuffs. "Just wait! I'm going to smash every one of you for this!"

"No, you're not!" I chuckled. "You're a sport, Handy, and although the joke was against you, you've got to admit it was a good 'un. Own up! Can't you see the funny part of it?"

Edward Oswald looked from one to another of us, glaring coldly.

"I'll admit it was a good joke—you dished me properly!" he growled. "But I'm blown if I can see anything to cackle at! Silly, I call it! It's a pity you haven't got something better to do!"

And he turned away in a huff, while we yelled afresh. But we knew our Handy. Within half an hour, he came round, and was soon grinning with the rest of us.

Even the butler of the Pitt household, who had played the part of the policeman, could be heard going about his duties, bursting into occasional minor explosions.

We considered that the morning had been very well spent.

(Continued on page 15)

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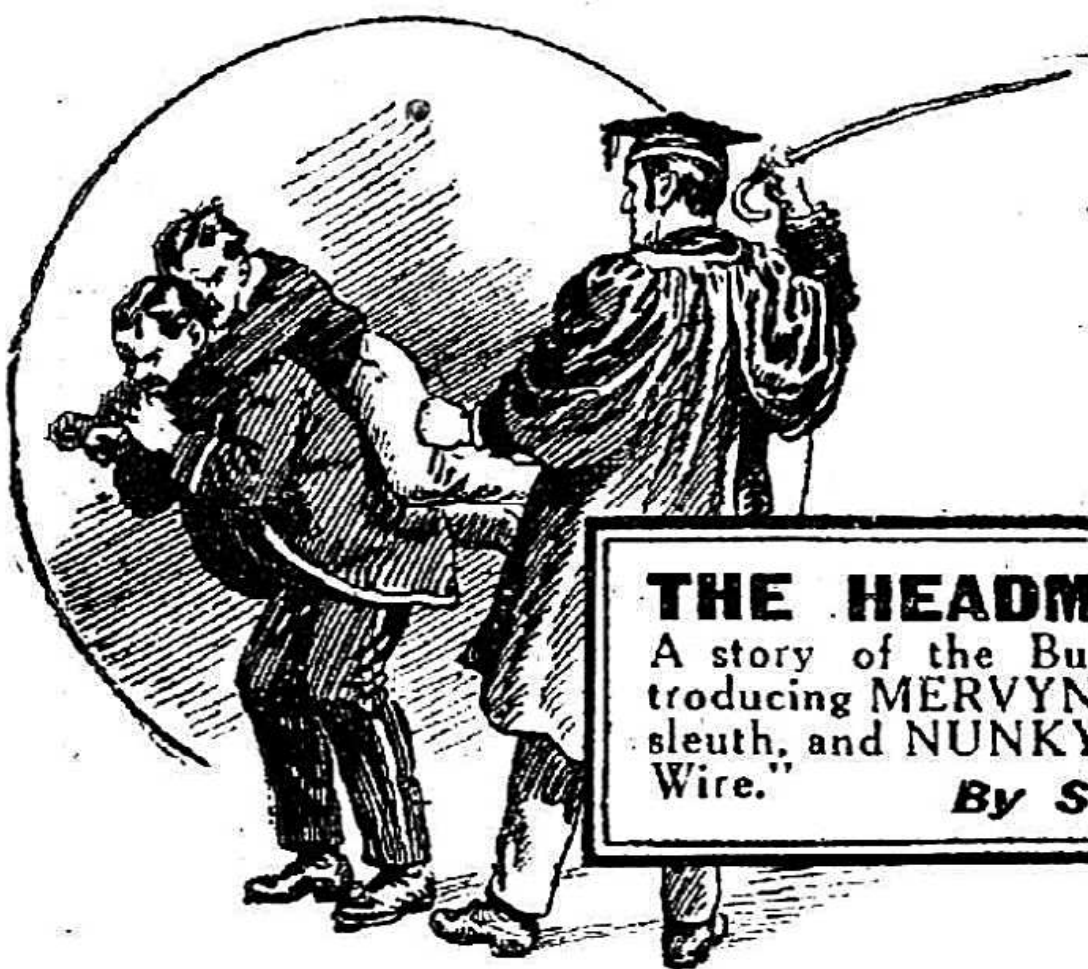
CONTAINS TWO OF THE VERY BEST COMPLETE DETECTIVE STORIES.

# OUR DETECTIVE STORY SECTION

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March 31, 1923



## THE HEADMASTER'S SECRET.

A story of the Bullies of Margrave College, introducing MERVYN HUME, the wonder newspaper sleuth, and NUNKY, the plucky office boy of "The Wire."

By S. ROSSITER SHEPHERD.



**W**ILLIAM WHITEHEAD, otherwise known as Nunky, sauntered slowly from the School House of Margrave College where, for the purpose of obtaining an insight of the bullying methods practised at certain public schools he had been staying as a member of the Lower Fourth.

None of the other juniors were, of course, aware of his true identity. Already Nunky had interfered in no uncertain manner with some of the brutalities and horseplay indulged in by certain hulking members of the form towards juniors smaller than themselves, or juniors too highly strung and nervous to take their own parts.

And for this interference he had paid dearly. In company of the boy he had rescued from the clutches of the Form bully he had been waylaid at the back of the chapel by a mysterious organisation of the Lower School known as the Black Klan Klick.

And then, in the old crypt beneath the ruined Margrave Abbey, the two had appeared before a sort of court, the chief of which had sentenced them to hang suspended by the arm from a dormitory window, until they were dropped into a blanket held below and tossed until they howled for mercy.

Before the execution of the sentence Nunky

had informed the Head of the proposed punishment to be inflicted on him; but for some reason not apparent, the Head had refused to look into the affair and had dismissed the junior with the information that he did not believe his story.

Moreover, Nunky had been promised that should he come with any more such tales he would be severely punished. The sentence had therefore been carried out.

But the story of all these happenings had found its way into the "Daily Wire," who were conducting a campaign against bullying in public schools, much to the mystification and consternation of those who had been concerned in it.

And Dr. Spinx, the Head of Margrave, had found no difficulty in tracing the informant of the "Wire" to the red-headed Fourth Former.

But, curiously enough, Dr. Spinx had refrained from punishing the junior for the information he had given to the paper. Instead, he had left him to the tender mercies of the rest of the Form, who were soon in full possession of all the facts of the case.

Nunky guessed, and rightly, too, that his sufferings at the hands of the form bullies would be infinitely worse than any the Head



might inflict upon him. Nor, as events were to prove, was he wrong.

But it was not for himself that he feared. His concern was mostly on account of Waterbury, a frail, timid junior who had endured with him the blanket-tossing ordeal. One boy had already attempted suicide in order to evade the persecutions of the Margrave bullies, and it looked uncommonly to Nunky as though Waterbury would be the next—unless something was done.

"But so far, during classes that day, 'Walnut' Watkins and Co., the Form bullies and leading spirits in the Black Klan Klick, had had little chance of interfering with him. It was not until after tea as Nunky was leaving the School House that the first sign of the coming storm manifested itself.

No sooner had he appeared and commenced to stroll unconcernedly across the Close than he was greeted with a chorus of wild yells.

"There he is."

"Sneak!"

"Boo!"

Nunky affected to disregard these howls and made his way towards the school gates. But he had not proceeded more than a hundred yards or so when he found himself surrounded by angry and excited juniors.

"What did you get from the 'Wire'?"

"Do you think that's frightened us?"

"Yah!"

Bonsey, one of "Walnut" Watkins' precious pals, tilted the red-haired youth's cap over his eyes. But suddenly swinging round, Nunky caught that unpleasant youth fully on the point of the jaw with his bunched fist.

A yell went up from the assembly followed by a rush of many feet, and in a few moments Nunky found himself battered and bleeding on the gravel of the Close, with some half-dozen juniors sitting on top of him.

"Get him out of the gates," yelled the voice of "Walnut" Watkins. "Run him down the lane. We'll give him write to the papers. Just a little towing to go on with. We'll see what else can be done later."

"Hear, hear!"

In no very gentle manner the red-headed junior was dragged to his feet. Rough hands gripped each of his shoulders, and, aided by the application of many boots from the rear, he was dragged at a run through the school gates into the lane beyond.

Clear of the school the juniors brought him to a halt and formed themselves into a ring around him to prevent his escape.

"Now," demanded Watkins, flourishing a copy of that day's "Wire" in his face. "This story couldn't have got into this rag unless you put them wise to it. I suppose you thought it would put the wind up us. You thought when the Head saw it we should all get sacked; but that was where you backed a loser, my pippin. And now you're going to suffer for it—"

"I should advise you to chuck your bullying games," advised Nunky stoutly, "you can do what you like with me, but you've got

to leave that kid Waterbury alone. 'It 'im any more, or me either, and you'll know all about it. There'll be another story in the paper, you can take my word for it."

"Do you think they are going to believe all you tell them?" demanded Watkin with a sneer. "You might take them in once, but not a second time. Who the blazes are you, anyway? Do you think the 'Wire' is going to take the word of an illiterate guttersnipe against that of gentlemen?"

Nunky flushed.

"Let go me 'ands," he exclaimed. "I'll show you whether I'm a guttersnipe."

A roar went up from the assembled juniors, and before he could fully realise what was happening Nunky was being propelled down the lane towards a horsepond at the side of the road.

He was suddenly jerked to a standstill, hoisted from his feet, and then sent whirling through the air over the green and stagnant water of the pond.

Splash!

Right into the centre of the pond he fell, the slimy waters closing instantly over his head. But fortunately the pond was not deep and eventually he managed to crawl to the bank, up which he climbed, soaked to the skin, his eyes and ears full of filth and mud.

But when he had sufficiently recovered himself to take stock of things again, he found that he was alone. A distant sound of laughter told him that the bullies of the fourth had returned to the school.

Angry and shivering, the red-headed office boy of the "Wire" dragged himself out of the pond and doubled back to the school. He made his way to the Fourth Form dormitory, where he obtained a bath and a change, and afterwards went down to his study.

Here he procured paper and pen, and for the next twenty minutes was busily engaged in making out a full report to Mervyn Hume of the sequel to the first story which had appeared in the "Wire."

Nunky had been sent by Hume to find out the extent to which bullying went on in public schools—and he had found out. Although he had helped the famous newspaper sleuth in many cases, this was the first time Nunky had been called upon to play a lone hand, and he admitted to himself that he would not be sorry when it was all over.

The report completed, Nunky picked up his cap and started out down the Fourth Form passage to post it. He congratulated himself that there was not a junior in sight. But his congratulations were premature. For even as he turned at the end of the passage to descend the stairs he was accosted by "Walnut" Watkins himself.

Watkins regarded the letter Nunky held in his hand with suspicion. It was evident he had guessed its destination, as well as its contents. He placed his finger to his lips and emitted a shrill whistle, whereupon a number of his cronies who had evidently been purposely lurking in the vicinity emerged from their hiding places and joined him.



"Letter for the 'Wire'?" asked Watkins, feeling secure in the presence of his pals. "Going to tell them we ducked you in the pond, I suppose? Well, that's just what I have been expecting. We've been waiting to see if anything like that was coming off. Now hand over that letter."

"Rats!" retorted Nunky, glancing uneasily at the juniors gathered round him. "My letters ain't nothing to do with you." "Give me that letter," demanded Watkins again.

"Rats, I——" At a sign from their leader one of the juniors twined his legs round those of the red-headed youth and brought him with a crash to the ground. Nunky put out his hands to save himself, and the precious letter fluttered to the floor, where it was quickly pounced upon by Bonsey.

A moment later, the Fourth Form bullies with the letter intended for Hume safely in their possession, fled up the passage, followed by loud shouts from the unfortunate Nunky. But search for them afterwards as he might, Nunky could find no sign of them, and already it was too late to write another report in the hope of catching the post.

But if "Walnut" Watkins and Co. thought they had beaten the boy from the "Wire" they were wrong, although they had determined to keep an eye on the red-headed youth and intercept any letters addressed to the "Wire" or any other newspaper.

To say that they were furious at the contents of the letter they had taken from him in the passage would be to put it very mildly indeed. They were more than furious—and not a little alarmed.

And that night, unknown to Nunky, a special meeting of the Black Klan Klick was called, at which it was decided that once and for all Nunky should be taught the lesson of his life, or in other words, that he should be bullied so unmercifully and his life made such a misery that he would be only too glad to drop his campaign against them for fear of further reprisals.

But had the leaders of this select little society known the red-headed youth better they would have realised that such a hope was foredoomed to disappointment.

Nunky was greeted with a few catcalls that night when he entered the dormitory, but no attempt was made to interfere with him. Nevertheless, by the very quietness of the juniors he guessed something was in the wind, but exactly what it was he did not know.

But the following morning when he went to his study to collect his books after breakfast he knew. For there in the middle of the mantelpiece, written in white ink on black paper, was a note similar in appearance to one he had received once before, just prior to his capture by the Black Klan Klick, as the mysterious organisation of the Lower School called themselves.

Nunky quickly ripped open the envelope and withdrew a sheet of black paper on which he read:

**"PREPARE FOR THE MORROW.  
THOU SHALT NOT MOCK  
THE BLACK KLAN KLINK.  
THE HAND OF VENGEANCE  
IS  
DRAWING NIGH."**

Nunky stared at the paper, not without a certain amount of apprehension. For he already knew what the secret organisation of the Lower School was capable of. With a shrug of the shoulders he tore the letter into tiny fragments and threw them out of the window. It then occurred to him that possibly Waterbury, the principle victim of the Margrave bullies prior to his arrival might also have received such a note, even as he had on the previous occasion.

Nunky knew that after his last terrifying experience at the hands of the Black Klan Klick, Waterbury would be scared stiff if he should find such a note in his study. Leaving his own apartment Nunky knocked at the door of the next study which was shared by Waterbury with two other juniors.

But receiving no response he opened the door and peered inside the room. It was empty, but on the mantelpiece, where it had evidently been placed during breakfast was a note similar in appearance to that which Nunky had found in his own room.

"Same sort of thing that I've got," murmured Nunky stepping inside the room. He opened the letter and found his suspicions were correct. "Well, there's no need to frighten the poor kid with this," he continued. "If they are going to put 'im through the mill with me, I suppose they'll do it. So 'e might as well wait till it does come off instead of being worried all day about it."

And so saying, Nunky tore the missive into pieces and threw it, like he had done his own, out of the window into the Close.

The bell went for morning lessons, and he made his way to the Form room. The day passed off uneventfully. Nothing concerning the pending ragging was said to Nunky, however. For that matter the juniors avoided him, and he could get no inkling as to what was in the wind.

The warning he had received had certainly said "Prepare for the morrow," but apparently the arrangements of the secret organisation had had to be altered.

That evening Nunky met Waterbury in the Close. The junior did not as yet know of the fate hanging over him, and Nunky did not enlighten him. But for some reason or another the junior seemed curiously apprehensive.

It seemed from what he said that "Walnut" Watkins and Co. had been seen leaving the school with planks of wood which they had taken to Bennet's Field, through which ran the River Swale.

More than this, Waterbury had gathered that something of a secret nature was going



to happen there, which was going to teach a certain "someone" a lesson. Who that "someone" was he did not know, although he had made a pretty accurate guess, and was worried in consequence.

Nunky assured the nervous and highly strung junior that neither of them need worry about further interference from the Black Klan Klick, and made his way into the School House again, his brain working furiously. He was certain in his own mind that Bennet's Field was where the threatened reprisal of the Fourth Form bullies would take place.

Even assuming he could post a letter that night it would not be in time to reach Mervyn Hume before the morning. And Nunky had determined that Hume should witness the next outrage of the secret society of the Lower School with his own eyes. But how could he warn him in time?

Then he remembered the telephone in the prefects' room. If no one was there he would ring Hume up and tell him of what was happening. Fortunately, the room was empty, and locking himself in Nunky succeeded in getting Hume, to whom he told the events of the past day and concluding with the news he had received from Waterbury about the mysterious preparations proceeding in Bennet's Field.

"Very well," said the great newspaper sleuth before ringing off. "You carry on and don't let any one know you have been able to communicate with me. I don't quite know what I shall do as yet; I must think it over. Good-bye."

And having made his call without discovery, Nunky left the prefects' room and returned to his study in no very comfortable frame of mind. He did not like the sound of Bennet's Field, and what fresh devilry his enemies could possibly be up to puzzled him not a little.

The following evening Nunky sought out Waterbury and invited him to accompany him to the village, which was about two miles from the school. His idea in doing this was to get Waterbury out of the way for the evening as much as anything. Waterbury accepted the invitation, and together the two juniors set out. But all unknown to them their movements were observed by several pairs of eyes, and presently some half-dozen juniors followed behind them, always careful to keep out of sight themselves.

Nunky and his companion were passing along that part of the road which ran by Bennet's Field, when they were suddenly set upon by several juniors. So swift and sudden was the attack that it was not until after they were rendered powerless, with their hands tied behind their backs, that they recognised their assailants as "Walnut" Watkins and Co.

"Got you neatly this time, my pippin," grinned the leader of the form bullies.

"Weren't expectin' to see little us, were you? Not even time for you to kick. Jolly smart, that."

Loudly protesting, Nunky and his companion were led across the field to the river bank, where a number of other juniors were congregated, every one with the mark of the bully clearly written across his face.

"'Ere, what's the idea?" demanded Nunky, eyeing with a mixture of mystification and apprehension a number of heavy wooden planks and some coils of rope lying on the bankside. "What are yer going to do with those planks?"

"Yus, what are yer going to do with those planks?" mimicked one of the assembly turning to Watkins with a grin. "The red-headed gent wants to know."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"He'll know soon enough," replied Watkins viciously. "Go on, you fellows, string them together. Three planks to each to each raft. We'll teach these sneaking cads a lesson."

Within a few minutes the planks had formed into rafts, well-roped together and capable of supporting the weight of a man. Nunky and Waterbury watched these preparations with a cold, sick feeling. Slowly it was beginning to dawn on them exactly what the Margrave bullies intended to do to them.

"Let me go, let me go, you beastly rotters," implored Waterbury piteously. The juniors ignored this request, however, although it must be admitted that there were some among them to whom it went slightly against the grain to bully a boy who was so genuinely and obviously terrified.

"Come on," roared Watkins at length. "Get a move on, you fellows, and strap these pippins down. We haven't got all day."

"Half a mo'," objected a tall fair youth named Princely. "I think it's a bit too thick. Look at young Waterbury. He's half dead with fright already. Suppose we let him off—give him a good hiding instead, and only send young carrots over? What do you say?"

"Rats!" retorted Watkins angrily. "The kid is swinging the lead, that's all. He's going over the top, and the best of luck."

Kicking and struggling, Nunky and Waterbury were then strapped, face upwards, to the rough, wooden rafts. Their hands and feet were secured at each corner with stout pieces of rope, and the whole was then lifted to the river bank and pushed out into the stream. As the rafts splashed into the water the assembled bullies sent up a cheer. By now Waterbury's face was marble hued, and his teeth were chattering with fear. Again and again he begged the bullies to release him, but all his supplications were met with harsh jeers.

"Watkins," shouted Nunky, "let the kid off an' I'll make yer a promise. 'Ow would ya like ter be in 'is place. Look at 'im! He'll go off into a fit in 'arf a minute."

"Well, what's the promise?" demanded



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Watkins, pausing for a moment. "Will you write to the paper again and say that what you told them before was all bosh?"

"No, I can't do that, but if yer lets the kid off I'll promise not to bash yer when this is all over—"

"You—you—I'll blessed well show you, you cheeky hound. I'll—I'll—" Words failed the Fourth Form bully, and plucking a tuft of grass and earth from the bankside, he aimed it deliberately at the face of the helpless junior on the raft.

Squelch!

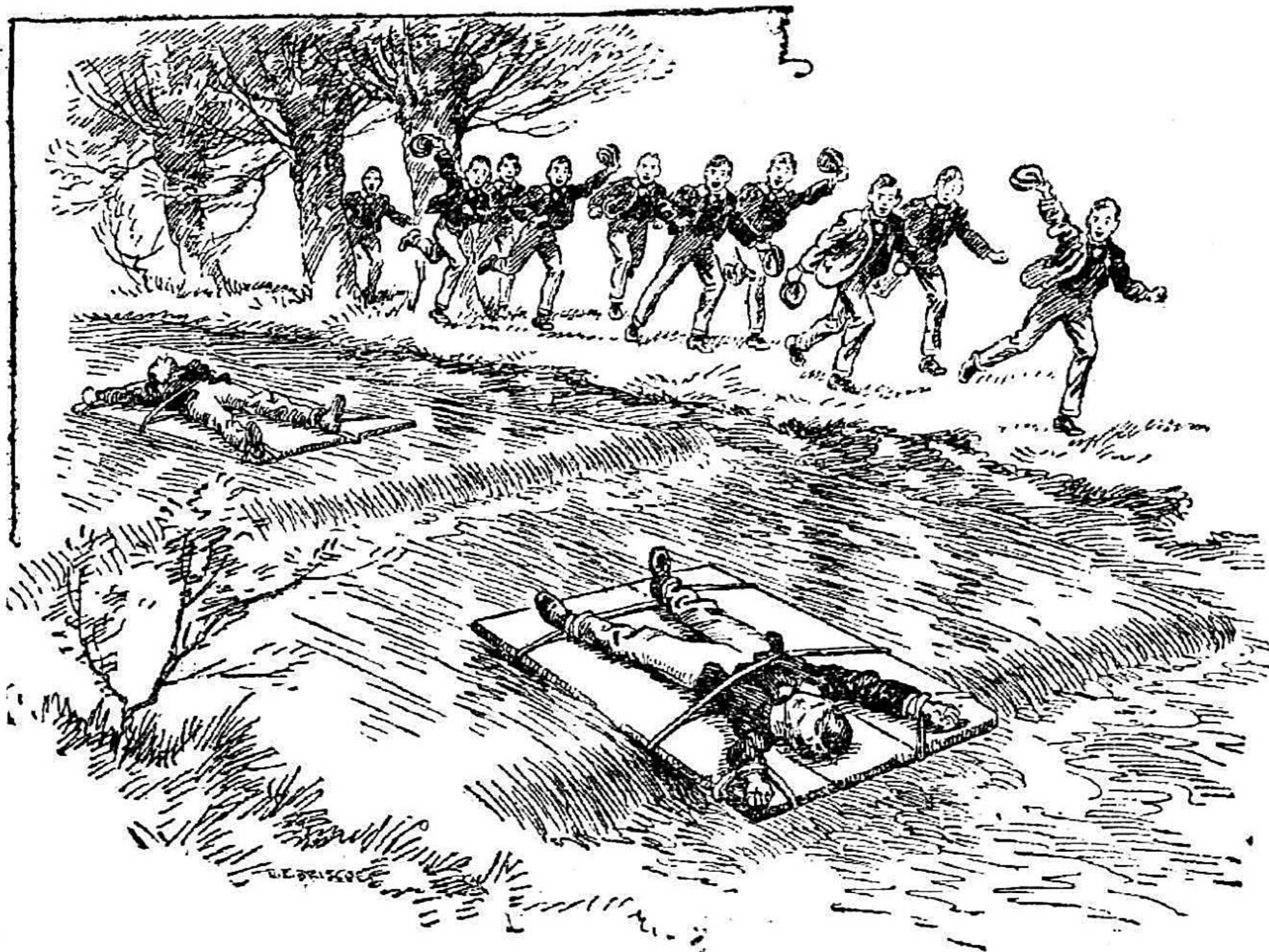
the next field. After a time the raft on which Nunky was strapped commenced to forge ahead, making directly for the small chute further along the river.

Meanwhile, on either side of the bank, waving their hats in the air and shouting at the tops of their voices streamed a crowd of Watkins' pals, and their bullying friends from some of the other forms, who had come out to see the evening's "sport."

"Ten to one young Carrots wins."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Over the top and the best of luck."



The swish, swish slowly became a prolonged hiss, and Nunky felt the raft beneath him give a slight jump, and the next moment shoot suddenly forward at a considerably accelerated speed.

The tuft of grass caught Nunky squarely on the face, filling his eyes and nose with soft, damp earth. Watkins, having thus relieved his feelings somewhat, he gave each of the rafts another shove and they were at once caught up and carried away by the current.

The river was not very deep, but it flowed fairly swiftly, and some hundred yards from where the rafts entered it, was an artificial concrete incline which dipped to about twenty-five degrees, converting the stream at this point into a small water-chute, and so carrying the water down to a lower level in

At this point Nunky's raft became caught in some weeds, and after twisting round two or three times came to a standstill. The raft on which Waterbury was strapped soon caught up with it, and that too was held back from its rush to the water chute. Both rafts were too far in the middle of the stream to permit any junior from disentangling them from the bankside.

So, led by Watkins and Bonsey, the Margrave bullies proceeded to pluck tufts of grass from the ground which they aimed in an almost continuous stream at the rafts in an endeavour to loosen them.



Splash, splash, splash!

Fast and furious came the turfs and within five minutes both the rafts and their passengers were hardly recognisable. They were covered with mud from head to feet and soaked to the skin with water.

Tiring of this pastime and determined that the two hapless juniors should not miss the punishment intended for them the juniors ceased their fire while one of them peeled off his boots and shoes and waded out into the stream. He found, however, that the water came well above his knees, but nevertheless, he continued to wade out until he managed to grip the edge of the raft on which the boy from the "Wire" was strapped.

He tugged at it two or three times in an endeavour to loosen it from the grip of the weeds, but without success.

"Stick it," shouted his cronies from the bank. "Give it a good pull, and it's sure to come loose."

The junior did as requested. He pulled at the raft for all they was worth. But unfortunately for him, and Nunky, he pulled just a little too hard with the result that he lost his balance.

Splash!

With a wild shout the junior fell forward into the river right across the end of the raft. The raft instantly capsized, immersing the boy upon it in the muddy waters. But the junior who had caused the trouble, fearing lest his action should imperil the life of his victim at once struggled to his feet, and made another wild clutch at it.

Once again he clutched too hard, and with another loud splash the raft capsized again, thus reverting to its former position with Nunky uppermost. The wash of water occasioned by the capsizing of Nunky's raft had the effect of loosening the other raft, and together the two continued their passage down the river straight for the chute.

Meanwhile, the junior who had caused the capsizing did not come off as well as after his first immersion. The second time he fell backwards, his arms and head becoming entangled in the weeds. He struggled furiously to free himself, taking great gulps of the muddy water in doing so. At last, after an almost super-human effort he succeeded, and his head and shoulders covered with the slimy weeds he came to the surface spluttering and blowing and feeling not a little frightened.

He scrambled to the bank where many hands were outstretched to haul him ashore. Wringing his sodden clothes as best he could he joined in with his comrades in a race after the two rafts which were now some distance down the river.

Slowly they drifted along, Waterbury almost too humbled with horror to shriek or call out. And Nunky was only a little better. There was, he realised, small chance of either of the rafts capsizing of their own accord, but that was small consolation at the best.

Once over the small chute the water was

only about a foot deep and the raft would in all probability drift into the bank and stay there until someone came to the rescue. But Nunky did not know this, since, being a newcomer to the school, the surrounding countryside was still unfamiliar to him. Nearer and nearer drifted the rafts until faintly to the ears of the boy from the "Wire" came the swish, swish of the water feathering over the concrete chute. Louder and louder grew the noise, and the raft commenced to move with the swirl and eddy of the stream. Nunky gritted his teeth and waited, for he knew not what. Even now he could hardly believe that Watkins and Co. would be either foolish enough or cowardly enough to permit the two helpless victims to shoot over the miniature rapid.

The swish, swish slowly became a prolonged hiss, and Nunky felt the raft beneath him give a slight jump, and the next moment shoot suddenly forward at a considerably accelerated speed.

It was over the chute.

Then followed a splash as it shot into the lower water. And a second later another splash announced that the raft on which Waterbury was strapped had also arrived. The two rafts continued to sway for a while and then slowly drifted into the bank on the right.

At the same moment there came a loud shout followed by a cry of alarm from Walnut Watkins and Co., who in the excitement occasioned by the passage of the raft over the rapids, had failed to notice another party of Margrave fellows quietly approaching them. But now they found themselves surrounded and outnumbered by about two to one.

The new arrivals, led by a prefect named Robinson, wasted no time in words, but waded into the bullies in no uncertain manner. But Watkins and Co. were not of the stuff of which heroes are made, and five minutes later, their eyes changing colour, and their noses looking much the worse for wear, they were retreating towards the school as fast as they could go, half of the new arrivals in hot pursuit.

Meanwhile, the other half had clambered down the bank, and with the aid of pen-knives had succeeded in cutting from the rafts the two unfortunate victims. Waterbury and Nunky were quickly dragged to the grass above, where they were surrounded by a group of juniors, who regarded them with anxious faces.

It was some moments before Waterbury, who had gone off into a faint, came to, and blinked inquiringly around him.

"W-what-where—" he began uncertainly. But he was cut short by Robinson.

"You are all right now, youngster," said the prefect kindly. "We didn't hear until a short while ago what these cads were up to. And as soon as we did, we collected a few more chaps and came along to the rescue. How are you feeling now? Better?"

Waterbury nodded.



"Right, then. Come along back to the school and get a change. You'll catch your death of cold otherwise. I will look into this business. We know that a lot of bullying goes on in the Lower School, but it's not very often we can catch anyone at it. Things are kept awfully dark as a rule. As a matter of fact, it was quite by chance that we found out what young Watkins and Co. were up to this evening. Come along. Let's get back!"

And half an hour later, Nunky and Waterbury, still considerably shaken by their terrible experience, were both seated in the prefect's study in the Sixth Form passage, enjoying a tea at Robinson's expense—an experience that very rarely came the way of a member of the Lower School.

The day following the ragging in Bennet's Field, London was startled by a story which appeared on the front page of the "Daily Wire," and which was announced by placard all over the country.

The story described in detail the adventure that had befallen the two Margrave juniors, and was signed over the top by Mervyn Hume. There was no doubting the veracity of it, for the name of Hume, the great crime investigator of the "Daily Wire," was known everywhere, and stood as a guarantee for the accuracy both in letter and in spirit of anything that appeared beneath it.

The "Wire's" investigation into the extent to which bullying was practised at certain public schools, following the attempt of a Margrave scholar named Moreland to commit suicide, had aroused universal interest among all classes.

And only the previous week the "Wire" had published another story which told at some length of the experience of two Margrave juniors—Nunky and Waterbury—at the hands of the school bullies. This story had concluded by stating that unless the matter was looked into by the proper authorities—namely, the Head of Margrave, that the next week the name of the school would be disclosed.

But this threat had, curiously enough, as we already know, had little apparent effect. And now, for all the world to see, the "Wire" had carried out its threat, giving details of the latest piece of horse-play, together with the name of the school in question and that of the Headmaster.

The appearance of the story was greeted by a storm of protest from the public, many parents who had sons at Margrave immediately taking steps to remove them with all possible speed.

Other papers copied the story, and that same day the gates of Margrave were besieged with newspaper reporters, all of whom desired to interview either the head or the two boys whose names had been mentioned in the story.

But the Head persistently refused to see anyone, and as for the two juniors, they

had both been taken away by Mervyn Hume that morning before any news of the story in the "Wire" had reached the school.

The public demand for an inquiry into the matter was followed by a meeting of the school Board of Governors at the school. And to this meeting both Mervyn Hume and Nunky were summoned to tell of what they knew.

Hume did not mention, however, that Nunky had been specially sent to Margrave at his suggestion for the express purpose of making investigations. This might have prejudiced his evidence in the eyes of the governors, who might have regarded it purely as a newspaper "stunt." Instead, they were allowed to think, as did the rest of the school, that he was an ordinary scholar who had been sent to Margrave in the ordinary way.

In a clear voice, Nunky told the astounded meeting of all that had happened to him since his arrival at the school. He told them of how he had appealed to the Head for protection, and how the Head had affected to disbelieve his story; of how, after the blanket-tossing incident and the first story in the "Wire," the Head had refused even then to look into the matter, but had left him to be dealt with by the juniors against whom his allegations had been brought.

At the end of this recital, Waterbury was called, and corroborated almost word for word all that Nunky had said. So amazing were these statements that some doubt still existed in the minds of the governors as to whether they had been correctly informed.

That any of the juniors at Margrave could be either foolish enough or cowardly enough to tie two of their schoolfellows to a raft and send them over a rapid, seemed too staggering.

"Gentlemen," said Hume, seeing the turn affairs were taking, "if you want further evidence than what you have been told is an actual fact and not exaggerated in any way, I am prepared to give it to you."

"This is so serious a matter, Mr. Hume," replied the chairman, "that any other evidence you may have, I am sure we shall be only too pleased to consider."

Hume nodded, and signalled across the room to where a clerk, who had been taking notes of the proceedings, was standing. The clerk seemed to understand what was required of him, and immediately pulled down the heavy window blinds, excluding almost every ray of light from the room and plunging it into darkness.

"One moment, gentlemen," replied Hume to the protests of the mystified school governors. "Darkness is necessary for the production of my evidence." As Hume finished speaking, there came a slight hiss from one end of the table, and the next moment a beam of white light shot across the room on to one of the blinds, thus using it as a screen.

Then came the faint hum of a motor and



a sound of whirring spools, and the next moment, across the circle of light on the blind, appeared a flickering picture of Bennet's Field, with the River Swale flowing placidly through it.

"A cinema!" murmured a voice from out of the dark.

The faces of the governors in the reflected light from the improvised screen appeared puzzled and tense, and as the film unwound itself their expressions became angry.

For clearly on the screen could be seen advancing towards the river a group of boys, between them Nunky and Waterbury. In the edge of the picture could be seen the planks of wood which the juniors made into rafts, and on to which they strapped their victims.

On and on flickered the film until the scene changed and showed a raft, with a boy strapped to it, bump at the top of a miniature water chute, and then shoot forward to the level beneath.

More than that, the film revealed what human eyes had missed. And that was the figure of Dr. Spinx on the extreme left of the picture, at a distance of about a hundred yards away. The Head was seen to pause and glance in the direction of the river, and then appeared suddenly to turn and retrace his steps towards the school, as though he had no desire to be seen or to interfere.

The film concluded with a number of figures creeping up behind the bullies, and then flickered out.

Hume clicked his fingers, and the window-blinds shot up, the school governors staring at the portable cinema projector on the end of the table, which Hume was folding preparatory to replacing it in its case.

"That, gentlemen, is my evidence," said Hume quietly. "And now I may as well inform you that the boy Whitehead was sent to Margrave at my suggestion to keep his eyes open for just the sort of thing you have witnessed, and to report to me.

"From him I gathered that some bullying practices were coming off in Bennet's Field, although the boy did not know the nature of them. Only that he was to be a victim. But that was enough for me, and I determined to obtain something stronger than verbal evidence. I therefore came to Margrave and stayed, hidden, in Bennet's Field all that day behind a wooden fence. I had with me a film camera and an operator, and together we cut apertures through the fence at intervals in order that we could get a clear view of any part of the field. The result you have just seen."

A dead silence followed Mervyn Hume's statement.

"Send for Dr. Spinx," said the chairman, addressing a clerk. "Tell him we must see him at once."

But when the clerk returned some time later, he reported that Dr. Spinx had fled from the school, his room being left in a state of great disorder, and a bag and a

change of clothes was missing. The last seen of him was by the school porter, who had obtained a cab for him, and to whom he had said he was leaving Margrave for good.

One surprise seemed to be coming after another, each a little more sensational than its predecessor. It was some moments before the worthy school governors realised the full import of this information. But when they did, the chairman addressed the clerk once again, and this time ordered him to bring back Watkins, Bonsey, or any others of that company he could find.

When the juniors arrived they were cross-questioned as to the part they had taken in the affair that afternoon. But, like the liars they were, they flatly denied having had anything to do with it. But when they were confronted with the irrefutable evidence of the film, they changed their tune and commenced to whine for mercy.

The chairman ordered them to be detained in another room until he sent for them again. There were still one or two little points he wanted clearing up. Turning to Hume, he said:

"I suppose, Mr. Hume, you cannot tell us any reason why the late—er—Head walked away from the river when he saw what was going on? You remember in the picture—"

Hume smiled.

"I thought, gentlemen," he said, "that you would like to be informed or enlightened on that point. There are several other points as well which I am in a position to clear up. While my assistant has been at the school I have not been idle. The boys were able to do more or less what they liked with the late—er—Head, because—well, because he was not the Head at all!"

"Not the Head at all!" echoed the startled chairman. "Pray explain yourself, Mr. Hume."

"I mean exactly what I say," returned Hume. "The man who has recently fled from Margrave was not the real Head, neither was his name Spinx. The real Dr. Spinx was in South Africa at the same time that the man who called himself Spinx was. But the real Dr. Spinx was said to be dying of a fever. And the man who came here in his place was able to do so by stealing the papers and credentials of the real Dr. Spinx."

"But—but, my dear sir, this suggestion of yours is—is—well, to say the least of it, Mr. Hume, it is most extraordinary!"

"More than that," went on Hume. "The man who impersonated the real Dr. Spinx is no other than Francis Leishman, a well-known South African convict. The boys in the other room had some inkling that he was not the man he was supposed to be—he possibly left his correspondence lying about or did not take proper care of it—and they therefore took advantage of this know-

(Continued on page xii.)





# THE BLACK MASK

Grand New Serial  
Detective Story of  
Nelson Lee and  
Nipper.

**I**T was a quarter to four o'clock when the boat from Newhaven slipped between the towering white cliffs of the French coast, swerved to the right, and, as if by magic, found itself in a spacious harbour that was dotted with various craft.

Here was Dieppe, and here, in marked and abrupt contrast to the solitude of the Channel, were noise and bustle, the confused tramp of feet, and a clamour of voices in a strange tongue.

Jarvis Carey and Alphonse Lefroy, each carrying a bag, were amongst the passengers who went ashore. A few yards brought them to the Customs building. They walked slowly into it by one door with admirable sang-froid; and by another door, their luggage having been chalked without inspection, they walked out to the platform where the train for Paris was waiting.

And as they were moving towards a compartment they had the shock of their lives, for they suddenly perceived that they were surrounded by French policemen in full uniform, and at the same instant a hand was clapped on the shoulders of each from behind. They turned sharply, and an oath burst from Jarvis Carey's lips.

"Nelson Lee!" he gasped. "Nelson Lee and Nipper!"

"You didn't expect to see us, did you?" said Lee with a grim smile. "You thought you had entirely destroyed the letter from Saul Shadrach which you burnt in the grate at your lodgings in Canton Street, last night, but you were wrong. I found a charred scrap of paper, with the Jew's signature on it, and I called on your friend Shadrach this morning."

There was a brief struggle, and a desperate one. They fought savagely in a fury of rage. But they were helpless against such odds. Exhausted by their strenuous efforts, they soon had to yield. Fetters were locked on their wrists, and they were dragged into a waiting-room.

One of the policemen shut the door on the crowd that had collected, and Nelson Lee, who had Alphonse Lefroy's bag, carried it to a table. He felt the weight of it, opened it, and thrust his hands deep into the contents of it.

Then, taking a knife from his pocket, he

slashed it across the length of the bottom of the bag. He had judged that it had a false bottom, and he was right. For on to the table fell a glittering heap of necklaces and bracelets, rings and brooches.

"Ah, here we are!" he said. "Here are the stolen jewels."

"Yes, the stolen jewels," said Nipper. "But where is Olive Brent, guv'nor?"

Nelson Lee shook his head gravely. "Yes, where is she?" he replied. "To find the girl, if she should be alive, will be our next task. And if we find her, Nipper, it will be a very interesting story she will have to tell us."

## CONCLUSION.

**I**N spite of repeated interrogations at the police-stations that evening, Alphonse Lefroy and Jarvis Carey could not be induced to open their lips. They were sullen and silent, stubbornly refusing to make any statement whatever. They would not speak of the French maid, of Miss Olive Brent or of anything else; probably, because they hoped that there was not sufficient evidence to have them expedited to England, which was far above being the case.

Thinking that the men might possibly be able to throw some light on the disappearance of Mr. Matheson's ward, Nelson Lee had another interview with them the next day, and tried again, with no better success, to persuade them to make a full confession.

Meanwhile, through his influence with the French police, he had got permission to retain the jewels; and that night, leaving the prisoners to await extradition proceedings, he and Nipper travelled back from Dieppe to London.

They arrived home early in the morning, slept for a couple of hours, and had a late breakfast; and at twelve o'clock they drove in their car to Scotland Yard, picked up Inspector Lennard, and drove on to Coburg Square.

Douglas Matheson had not as yet heard anything of the missing girl. Lee gave him the jewels, and told him all that had occurred; and then, at the detective's re-



quest, Mr. Matheson sent for the French maid.

The young woman calmly entered the library, and turned pale at sight of the little group, but she quickly controlled her emotion.

"I have some interesting news for you, mademoiselle," Nelson Lee said to her. "The two men who robbed Miss Brent—the thief and his accomplice—were arrested at Dieppe the day before yesterday, and the stolen jewels have been recovered. There they are, on the table."

"The two men?" Diane Merode faltered. "What men?"

"Alphonse Lefroy, the waiter, and a professional crook of the name of Jarvis Carey."

"I—I haven't any knowledge of them. I never heard of them."

"Be careful what you say. You may not have known Jarvis Carey. Possibly you did not. But Alphonse Lefroy was an intimate friend of yours—more than a friend."

"That is true, sir, I will admit. I can assure you though, that—that I—"

"It will be useless for you to deny your guilt. Utterly useless. I saw your aunt, Madame Bonnard, and she told me a great deal. And now, mademoiselle, let us have your confession."

The maid burst into tears and sank down on a couch. She was so agitated that she could not speak coherently at first.

"Oh, what a fool I've been!" she sobbed, when she had partly regained her composure.

"I'll tell you everything, sir! Alphonse Lefroy led me into it. I cared for him, and we were engaged to be married. He had a lot of influence over me. He learned of Miss Brent's jewels, and kept urging me to help him to steal them until, at last, I consented. I met him in town on the day when I came up from the country with my mistress, and we made our plans. I was to leave the kitchen door unlocked that night, and drug Miss Brent with a powder which Alphonse gave me, so she should be asleep when he slipped into her bedchamber to take the jewel-case from the cupboard."

"He was to have come after midnight, and at ten o'clock I brought the two bottles of stout to Miss Brent's room. I opened both, and dropped the powder into one of them. The other I took to my own bedchamber, as I supposed, but it must have been the wrong one. My mistress came home shortly before twelve o'clock, and when I had spoken a few words to her in her bedchamber I went to my room, drank the bottle of stout I had taken there, and fell asleep almost as soon as I got into bed. I remember nothing more until I awoke the next morning and saw you and Mr. Matheson. And what I told you then was the truth. I have no idea what happened after I went to bed. I can't account for Miss Brent leaving the house with the jewels, unless it was because she heard Alphonse moving in the kitchen. I know I have been very wicked, sir, but if you and Mr. Matheson will forgive me, I'll

be honest after this, and will never again be tempted to—to—"

Diane Merode's voice choked, and with tears struggling down her cheeks, she begged for mercy. Lee and Mr. Matheson glanced at each other, and shook their heads gravely. There were no extenuating circumstances. The crime had been deliberately planned, and no leniency could be shown.

"I am sorry, mademoiselle," said Nelson Lee, "but you will have to accompany the inspector."

Further appeals were of no avail. The wretched maid, still weeping, departed with Inspector Lennard. Nipper went with them, and the three got into the waiting car and drove away.

And not long afterwards, while Mr. Matheson and the detective were discussing the mysterious disappearance of Olive Brent, the bell rang. There were footsteps in the hall, the library door was opened, and the missing girl walked into the room, looking pale and ill.

"Here I am, Uncle Douglas!" she cried. "I couldn't come before! I lost my memory the night I escaped, and wandered about the streets until I dropped from exhaustion. It was not until this morning that my memory returned, and I found myself in the Samaritan Hospital at Hackney. I told the doctor and a nurse who I was, and they let me go home in a cab. I've had an awfully bad time. I will tell you and Mr. Lee all about it. I—I was so afraid that—"

The girl swayed like a reed. Nelson Lee caught her as she was falling and carried her to the couch, where she lay in a swoon.

It was the reaction, the joy of being at home again, that had caused Olive Brent to faint. In a quarter of an hour she had fully recovered, and was sitting up on the couch, listening to Nelson Lee. He related all to her—everything that had occurred since her disappearance; and then she told her story—the story of the night of mystery.

"I was very tired and drowsy when I returned from the theatre," she began. "I didn't want the stout the maid had left for me. I undressed and got into bed, leaving the jewels on the table, and some time later I was roused by a creaking noise below. I jumped up and opened the door, and distinctly heard somebody moving at the back of the house. I was sure it was a burglar, and that he was after the jewels. I closed the door quietly, and switched on the light and stood thinking. I was terribly frightened. I had no revolver; no weapon at all. I could not get to the telephone, and it would have been useless to call to Diane. What was I to do? Shout for the police from a window? No; there wasn't likely to be a constable in the neighbourhood at that hour."

"But suddenly an inspiration flashed to my mind, and I acted on it in almost less time than it takes to tell you. I must deceive the man, contrive to have him arrested. There was no time to be lost. If the trick



was to succeed I could not wear the clothes I had worn at the theatre, so I dressed myself hurriedly in what else I could lay my hands on, including a large hat and a grey cloak. Darting to the bed, which was in shadow, I arranged the covers to look as if somebody was lying beneath them, and put a yellow veil on the pillow, to resemble a bunch of fair hair. And, at the last, thinking the burglar might know me by sight, I tore a narrow strip from a black silk skirt,

calmly as I could, in a low tone: 'Hush, or you will waken Miss Brent! You can see what I'm doing here. Am I the first female burglar you've laid eyes on? You've come too late. This is my game. But I'm willing to share the plunder with you if you take me to some safe place.'

"The man was deceived, Mr. Lee," she continued. "He believed I was a thief who had broken in. He nodded and crept back to the door, beckoning to me. I followed



Then, taking a knife, the detective slashed it across the bottom of the bag. He had judged that it had a false bottom, and he was right. For on to the table fell a glittering heap of jewellery.

snipped two holes in it with a pair of scissors, and bound it across my eyes for a mask.

"I was ready, and not an instant too soon. Footsteps were approaching. The door was pushed open, and a young man glided into the room. I was standing by the table, putting the scattered jewels into the case. The man had a revolver, and he pointed it at me. 'Who the dence are you?' he whispered savagely. 'What are you doing here?' I lifted a warning finger, and replied as

him, carrying the jewel-case in my hand, and we went quietly down the stairs and out of the house by the kitchen and round to Coburg Square. I meant to stop the first person we met, constable or not, and hand the burglar over to him. But another man, as it happened, was waiting round a corner for my burglar, and just as we turned it my mask slipped off, and the man I was with recognised me and called my name. He attacked me at once, striking me on the head with some weapon, and I knew nothing more



until I came to my senses, bound and gagged, in a wretched room in that house in the East End. I was a prisoner there for some days, Mr. Lee; and, finally, on the night of the police raid you have told me of, I got my limbs free and climbed out of the window, and——"

Olive Brent paused again. "You know the rest," she added. "It is no wonder, considering what I have suffered, that I lost my memory."

"Your story is what I expected to hear," said Lee. "The mutilated skirt, and the bits of black silk I picked up on the floor in your bedchamber, indicated to me what you had done, and what had befallen you; and other clues as well. You are a very

plucky young lady, Miss Brent. Not a girl in a thousand would have shown such courage and strategy under similar circumstances."

"So that is the explanation of the mystery," said Douglas Matheson. "I will admit, Olive, that I thought Lester Halford had persuaded you to run off with him, and take the jewels with you. I wroged the poor fellow. He was greatly upset when he learned at Bournemouth of your disappearance."

Olive Brent blushed. "I often thought of Lester when I was a prisoner with those men," she replied. "He is very fond of me, and perhaps I shall change my mind and promise to marry him."

THE END.

(Continued from page viii.)

ledge, and did more or less as they liked, knowing full well that Leishman would not interfere with them, because—because he was afraid of them."

"Afraid of them! But, Mr. Hume, how can you substantiate your extraordinary statement? How can you prove——"

Mervyn Hume strode silently to a door in one side of the room, and swung it open. A second later a tall, elderly, bronzed gentleman stepped into the board-room.

"Allow me to introduce Dr. Spinx, M.A." said Mervyn Hume quietly. "Dr. Spinx who was reported to be dying of fever in Africa, but who recovered."

A tense silence followed.

"I have heard what Mr. Hume has told you, gentlemen," said the bronzed man, in a quiet, well modulated voice, "and I can only add that what you have been told is only too true. I am the real Dr. Spinx, and the man who was here in my name was an infamous imposter."

It was Mervyn Hume who prevented the

true facts of the case from finding their way into the Press. But Hume did not neglect to make it clear to the public that the matter of the Margrave bullying had been satisfactorily cleared up. There were quite a number of decent fellows at the school, and since the bogus Head, who appeared to be behind all the trouble, had gone, the matter was allowed to drop.

As for "Walnut" Watkins and Co., at Hume's special request, they were not expelled as the governors intended they should be but a week later, before the whole of the school, each boy was hoisted on to the back of the school porter, where, with many yells for mercy, they each received twelve strokes with the birch at the hands of the real Dr. Spinx, who had since been engaged in the place of the man who had impersonated him.

It was the first public flogging Margrave College had witnessed for many a long day, and it was one not soon forgotten by the bullies of the school.

THE END.

## NEXT WEEK!

A Grand, Long Complete Mystery Story  
of ABEL LINK, the famous detective,  
entitled:

# ABEL LINK'S QUEST!

It is a story of the exciting adventures that  
befall a lad employed in a city office.



(Continued from page 14)

CHAPTER V.

HOLIDAY FUN!



ARCHIE GLENTHORNE adjusted his monocle, and gazed at the sky with serene enjoyment.

"What ho!" he observed gaily. "What ho! 'Tis morn! Yards of sunshine, bags of ozone, and everything is bally well blooming! In other words, old lads, we're going to have a priceless time!"

"You bet!" said Cecil De Valerie. "This party of yours, Archie, is a great wheeze. We couldn't have anything better for a Bank Holiday. There's nothing like being in London on Easter Monday!"

"Absolutely not!" agreed Archie. "I mean to say, moving along with the jolly old throng, what? Gadzooks! I'm dashed if that wasn't poetry! Moving along with the jolly old throng! Rather fruity, what?"

"Not so bad, but it's too bad to spring a thing like that in the early morning, Archie," said Reggie Pitt, shaking his head.

"Sorrow, old darling—yards of apology!" said Archie. "But, the fact is I'm feeling so dashed bucked that the old brain is buzzing like one o'clock! I mean to say there's something in the air that makes a chappie feel rather duncedly braced! What ho! I observe fresh arrivals in the offing! What about staggering down and welcoming the dear ones?"

Archie and one or two more were standing in the porch of Colonel Glenthorpe's house in Portland Place. And two or three juniors of the Remove were just coming along—to join the party.

It was Easter Monday morning. Contrary to all expectations, the sun was shining brightly, the air was mild, and there was every promise of a perfect day.

Yet the fellows had made up their minds that it would rain. It generally does rain on a Bank Holiday. And it's as well to be prepared for the worst. When the best comes it's always more welcome.

Archie's little party was quite a select one, including Handforth and Co., Pitt, De Valerie, Fatty Little, Tregellis-West, Watson, and myself. Counting Archie, there were twelve of us altogether.

And before another twenty minutes had elapsed, the whole party was complete, and ready to set out. Standing against the kerb, all ready for departure, were two big motor cars. They were the property of Archie's father, who was a sportsman, and who had consented to let Archie use them for the day.

And we were just about to set off.

"Now, laddies, what about it?" exclaimed Archie, gazing round. "I mean to say, here we all are blithe and gay, and ready for the

day's doings! Where, as it were, shall we start?"

"What about going to a restaurant?" asked Fatty Little.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Dash it all!" protested Archie. "I mean, dash it all! Pray don't be quite so dashed fearful, dear old onion! I mean to say, we've only just had breakfast. Hardly time for the inner man to start knocking on the door, what? Wouldn't it be better to wait a few hours?"

"Hours!" yelled Fatty. "I'm nearly starving——"

"All right—starve!" said Pitt. "If you're going to kick up a lot of fuss about eating, my fat beauty, we'll expel you from the gang! We'll feed at the right time."

"Absolutely," said Archie. "Now, I suggest that it would be rather priceless to do a terrific lot of dashing about. You grasp the idea? First of all we'll whizz here, and then we'll whizz there, and we'll do this and that! Absolutely paint the town red, so to speak. Revelry, and what not!"

"That's the idea!" I grinned.

"Good," agreed Archie. "In fact, bally good! Now, the pater suggested the jolly old Tower of London as a kind of start. What about it? Shall we trickle? Shall we do some buzzing?"

Handforth sniffed.

"Is that what you call painting the town red?" he demanded tartly. "Revelry! In the Tower of London! I don't jolly well think! Far better to go to Hampstead Heath, and try the swings and roundabouts!"

Archie recoiled.

"But, dear old cherry!" he protested. "I'll admit the scheme is somewhat ripe and luscious, but don't you think it's over-ripe? I mean to say, rotten? Doesn't it strike you that Hampstead Heath on a Bank Holiday is rather on the low side?"

"Low?" repeated Handforth. "My dear ass, Hampstead Heath stands on high ground——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Absolutely!" agreed Archie. "But, dash it, I was hardly referring to the jolly old geographical position. What I mean to say is——"

"Great pip!" gasped Handforth blankly. "Look! Look there!"

He gave one bellow, and Archie staggered. Handforth was pointing with a quivering finger to the gateway, and his voice rose to a roar of wrath. But there was nothing much to see. Only Willy, calmly opening the gate and walking in.

"Hallo, you chaps!" he said brightly. "Ready? About time, too! Don't stand here gassing—let's be off!"

"Gadzooks!" said Archie, adjusting his monocle. "Welcome, dear one! At the same time, I must be allowed to remark——"

"That's all right, Archie—no need to apologise!" interrupted Willy calmly. "I



know you meant to give me an invitation, but you forgot it. Good enough! I'll overlook it this time. Where do we go first?"

"You—you cheeky young sweep!" I grinned. "I'm blessed if you haven't got nerve enough for anything! Who told you to come here?"

"Oh, don't start!" said Willy. "I can see that Ted's getting himself ready for an explosion, but he might as well save himself the trouble. This is Archie's party—not his. And Archie's my best pal!"

"Absolutely!" agreed Archie. "I mean, welcome, don't you know! The good old flowers in May sort of stuff! Let's be trickling forth——"

"If—if that cheeky young rotter comes I'll stay behind!" roared Handforth threateningly. "Understand? I'll stay behind!"

"Good! Willy, you've got to stay in the party!" said Pitt.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Handforth very soon found that his threat did not cause the dismay he had imagined. And, as Willy had said, he was worrying himself over nothing. If Handforth minor made up his mind, the matter was settled.

"Oh, all right!" grunted Edward Oswald at last. "Have it your own way! But if anything happens, don't blame me!"

"Anything happens?" said Church.

"We number thirteen, all told—that's all!" said Handforth significantly.

Archie started.

"My only sainted aunt!" he exclaimed. "Thirteen! But, really! I mean to say, absolutely really! Thirteen! That's supposed to be a rather dashed unlucky number! Or isn't it?"

"My dear old priceless fathead!" said Willy. "Who on earth put such a dotty idea into your napper? Thirteen? One of the luckiest numbers that was ever thought of! The party's bound to be a success with me in it!"

"You really think so?" asked Archie doubtfully.

"I know it!"

"But, thirteen, don't you know——"

"As lucky as you like!" said Willy. "Come on! All you chaps follow me, and we'll be off! We'll start with taking a run to the Crystal Palace!"

Willy was giving his orders as though he was the host. But he didn't really mean it—it was only his little way. He was soon given to understand that he was quite welcome, but he had better keep his cheek to himself. And Archie insisted upon settling the problem.

"The Tower of London!" he announced.

Everybody groaned, but it couldn't be helped. After all, it was Archie's party, and we couldn't very well give him our orders. But the fellows resolved to leave the Tower of London as early as possible.

We did.

We spent about an hour there, and although the visit was very interesting there was nothing startlingly exciting about

it. Once again we entered our two cars—filling them up.

"What's the next move?" asked Pitt.

"Well, dear old lads, I've been thinking," said Archie. "It struck me that it would be a somewhat priceless scheme to flow along to Madame What-do-you-call-'ums, and view the jolly old wax thingummy-jigs? Doesn't it hit you as being a rather juicy one?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I suppose you mean Madame Tussaud's?" I grinned.

"Absolutely," said Archie. "Without any disrespect to the lady, I must remark that the name is decidedly poisonous. I mean to say, a dashed fearful name to engrave upon the old plates of memory, what? Well, how goes it? Do we—or don't we?"

"We do!" said Pitt. "Away, fairy coaches, and waft us into waxland!"

"We ought to get some fun there!" chuckled Jack Grey. "It'll be rather surprising if Handy doesn't stir up some trouble."

And so off we went to Madame Tussaud's—that famous waxwork show, situated in close proximity to Regent's Park. Being a Bank Holiday, the great building was thronged with people when we arrived.

It had been very interesting coming through the sunlit London streets, filled with cheery-faced people, all with thoughts of merry-making. The very weather made Londoners smile to-day.

Within the waxwork show we proceeded to make the round of all the exhibits. But we broke up into different parties. It was safer—for the thirteen of us could hardly crowd along in a bunch.

Handforth and Co. went their own way, much to the dismay of Church and McClure, who would have preferred to be with somebody else. They instinctively felt that Edward Oswald was going to put his foot in it. And the instinct of Church and McClure was generally correct.

"Not so bad!" commented Handforth after a while. "In fact, these waxworks are decent on the whole—but it's a bit slow for my liking. I vote we clear out soon, and——"

He broke off, his eyes gleaming.

"By George!" he went on. "I'd nearly forgotten. Of course, we've got to visit the Chamber of Horrors! That ought to be rather good—and instructive, too."

"Instructive?" said Church.

"You bet! Murderers! Forgers!" exclaimed Handforth with relish. "Burglars by the dozen, you know—Charles Peace and Crippen, and all those sort of chaps! Henry the Eighth, and——"

"Henry the Eighth wasn't a murderer, you ass!" said McClure.

"Oh, well—he's here somewhere," said Handforth. "I vote we get down to the Chamber of Horrors straight away. Wait a tick, I'll ask this Bobbie. He'll give me directions."

A constable was standing near by and Handforth tapped him on the arm.



"We want to get to the Chamber of Horrors," he said. "How do we find it?"

The constable made no reply—which was hardly surprising, considering that it was a waxwork. Church and McClure were deceived for a moment, but when no reply came they jumped to the truth. It was a really remarkable fake.

"The Chamber of Horrors!" repeated Handforth. "I say, buck up!"

Still the policeman made no reply.

"Deaf?" roared Handforth sarcastically.

Church and McClure were holding their sides, and all sorts of other visitors in the vicinity were looking on and listening with keen enjoyment. Handforth was not the first one who had addressed that "policeman."

"Look here, constable, you're paid to be polite!" snorted Handforth. "I'm blessed if I'll be ignored like this! I'll take your number—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The crowd couldn't wait any longer. A yell of laughter rang out, and Handforth started round. He was surprised to see himself surrounded by a whole crowd of grinning faces.

"Why, what the—"

"Better ask the policeman some more questions!" said Church, breathless with laughter. "He's got a soft heart—he'll soon melt!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Melt?" said Handforth. "I'll punch his silly nose! Why, what— Oh, my only topper! He—he ain't real!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You silly cackling asses!" roared Handforth, turning as red as a beetroot. "I suppose you think that's funny? You ought to be jolly well boiled for not giving me the tip."

"But—but only a few minutes ago you were saying that you could spot these wax figures as easy as winking!" gurgled Church. "We thought we'd let you find it out for yourself."

Handforth strode off—not daring to go for Church and McClure as he would have liked. He couldn't very well punch their noses in a place like this. But he soon recovered.

And by this time they had found the entrance to the Chamber of Horrors. Having paid their extra admission money—not without a growl from Handforth—they descended.

A good few juniors were already there, and the horror department was crowded in any case. The chums of Study D were much interested, but Handforth, as usual, was full of criticism.

"Jolly good; a ripping show, in fact," he declared. "At the same time, anybody with half an eye can tell that they're made of wax. It hits you in the face!"

"Oh, I don't know," said Church. "Some of these are jolly clever. Look at that murderer in the recess, for example. Look at

the glint in his eye! It fairly gives me the shudders to see him!"

"He looks real enough," agreed McClure.

"Rot!" said Handforth. "I'd pick him out as wax anywhere. Look at him; just look at the awful set of his features!"

Handforth proceeded to read the inscription. The murderer was really above, on a kind of stand. But, unfortunately, Handforth proceeded to gaze straight at a perfectly harmless old gentleman who was sitting just against the inscription. He had one of those folding camp stools, and was taking a bit of a rest, for this corner was rather quiet.

"Shush, you ass!" muttered Church, horrified. "Don't—"

"If you think I'm not going to state my opinion you're wrong!" said Handforth aggressively. "I've paid my money, and I'm not going to be shut up! Anybody can see that this figure is made of wax!"

"But—but—"

"Look at his face!" said Handforth, to the absolute consternation of his chums. "A murderer's face in every line. The cruel, wicked lips! The thin nose—"

"Dry up, you idiot!"

"I tell you that this chap's one of the worst assassins of the whole crowd," went on Handforth. "In fact, he's good. I've got to admit that the exhibit is splendidly done—"

The exhibit suddenly looked at Handforth and glared.

"Boy!" he thundered. "Are you referring to me?"

Handforth staggered back.

"Why, I—I thought—"

He paused, words failing to come. The awful nature of the position was too much for him. He had been calmly standing there, calling this peaceful old gentleman a murderer!

And only ten minutes earlier he had done just the opposite! There was not much doubt of the excellence of the waxwork show—for Handforth was completely dished. But he was always an impulsive fellow, and never took much trouble to make certain.

"I—I'm awfully sorry, sir!" he gasped faintly. "I thought you were a murderer! I—I mean I thought you were made of wax—"

"That makes no difference whatever!" stormed the old fellow. "Your ridiculous mistake may be a compliment to the management, but it is a distinct insult to myself! How dare you mistake me for a murderer. Upon my soul! How dare you?"

Whack! Whack! Whack!

"Yaroo!" howled Handforth wildly.

The old gentleman's umbrella descended upon his back with fearful force. Handforth dodged, and the old fellow followed. A few seconds later Handforth was tearing out of the Chamber of Horrors as hard as he could go.

He had had enough of Madame Tussaud's!



## CHAPTER VI.

## UP THE POLE!



"**H**A, ha, ha!" Archie Glen-thorne's party laughed uproariously, as it came out of the big waxwork exhibition. Handforth was already outside, near the two waiting motor-cars. He was looking hot, flustered, and rather breathless. He was also sore.

"Handy, you'll be the death of us one of these days!" groaned Reggie Pitt, as he held his heart. "Oh, my hat! I can't breathe properly! It's a wonder that old gent didn't give you in charge!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"How the dickens was I to know he wasn't made of wax?" snorted Handforth indignantly. "He was sitting as still as a giddy statue, and his face was like parchment!"

"Then you ought to have known it wasn't wax!" argued Pitt. "If his face was like parchment——"

"Oh, don't quibble!" snorted Handforth. "I was fed up with the Tower, and now I'm fed up with this giddy place. Let's go somewhere else. Hampstead Heath! That's what I said at first."

"But, laddies, pray consider!" interrupted Archie gently. "I mean to say, Hampstead is a fearful distance away——"

"No, it isn't," I grinned. "Only a short run in the cars."

"Well, I mean the Zoo is nearer—what?"

"Oh, yes, the Zoo's a lot nearer," I admitted.

"Good—absolutely good!" said Archie, beaming. "Then, dear old lads, how about the good old Zoo? Just round the bally corner, as it were. How many votes for oozing in that direction?"

"Oozin' favour of it?" asked Reggie, grinning.

When we had finished with him he was rather breathless and much battered. Puns were all very well, but that one was just beyond the limit. Anyhow, it was decided that we should go to the Zoological Gardens, in Regent's Park.

We arrived, and again left the cars outside. The only fellow who was dissatisfied was Fatty Little. He wanted to have some more grub; he had spent practically all his time in Madame Tussaud's in the restaurant, and yet he wasn't satisfied.

Still, we didn't take much notice of Fatty; he was always after food, from morning till night, and we were quite accustomed to his moans. None of the other fellows had par-

taken of grub yet; we had decided to return to London for lunch. Archie had some tables booked at a famous restaurant, and we were going to do the thing in style.

But we had plenty of time to look round the Zoo.

The irrepressible Handforth was to the fore again. Indeed, in a way this was distinctly one of his special days. He took Church and McClure aside as we all walked down the neat pathways of the gardens.

It was quite possible to talk privately, although the place was packed. Being a Bank Holiday—and a fine day into the bargain—the Zoo was crowded. All sorts and conditions of people were there. People in the latest fashions, people in their Sunday best, and children by the hundred.

It was so crowded, in fact, that Handforth could speak to his chums without any fear of anybody else knowing. There was so much talk going on that his own loud tones were practically drowned. And at the present moment Handforth was speaking in one of his stage whispers.

"It's a good thing we've come here, after all," he said impressively. "It'll give me a good opportunity of putting something to the test."

"What do you mean?" asked Church.

"The monkey-house!" said Handforth darkly.

"You're going to make a test there?"

"Yes, rather!"

"I suppose you want to see if they'll recognise you?" asked McClure.

"You—you funny ass!" snapped Handforth. "If the place wasn't so crowded, I'd punch your nose! No; I'm not going to see if the monkeys recognise me!"

"It goes without saying!" murmured Church.

"What?"

"I said, what were you saying?" replied Church innocently.

"I'm going to make a test in the monkey-house!" repeated Handforth firmly. "Ever since the holidays began I've been learning ventriloquism! I meant to keep it a secret until we got back to St. Frank's. But there's no reason why you chaps shouldn't know."

"Ventriloquism?" said Church dazedly.

"Yes!"

"You?" breathed McClure. "You?"

"Well, what about it?" demanded Handforth. "Don't stare at me like a dead fish, you ass! Yes, me! I can ventriloquise rip-pingly, too! I can chuck my voice anywhere."

"You can!" said Church, with conviction. "It's strong enough, anyway!"

"I can do what I like with it!" said Handforth impressively. "I've mastered the whole secret of ventriloquism. I shall probably be a bit strange to it at first, but I'll be as right as rain after the first word or two. And we'll have some fun in the monkey-house!"

**GET THE CHAMPION**

*The Tip-Top Story Weekly.*

**Every Monday—Price Twopence.**



"Fun!" breathed Church. "You bet we shall! By the way, when did you start learning ventriloquism?"

"Oh, about a week ago."

"A—a week! Who taught you?"

"I taught myself! I bought a threepenny handbook!"

It was much as Church and McClure could do to keep their faces solemn. If Handforth had been learning ventriloquism for a week—and obtaining his lessons from a threepenny handbook—the results were liable to be rather remarkable. In their hearts they wanted to warn him.

They wanted to tell Handy that it would never do; he was certain to make a hopeless mess of it. But what would be the good of saying that? He wouldn't take any notice, and would probably get wild. Besides, there would be a great deal of fun to be got out of the whole business.

Handforth was very impatient to get going. He visited all sorts of animals, including the giraffe, and the zebra, and the rhinoceros. And there was no doubt that we were all greatly interested.

And, at last, we arrived at the monkey-house.

And this was quite a large place, considering, and there were a great number of exhibits, cage after cage being occupied by various members of the monkey tribe. Some of them were most amusing to watch.

And there was no doubt that the monkey-house was one of the most popular parts of the Zoo. It was well filled, and the children were particularly delighted.

Handforth was a bit disappointed, for he hardly knew how to get to work, with such a crowd as this. But at last, up one end of the big place, there was a cage with one solitary monkey in it. It was very quiet and docile, and attracted practically no attention. The crowds were interested in the more sprightly members of the monkey tribe.

Looking in this somewhat isolated cage was a small gentleman with thick hair—a gentleman who appeared to be a college professor, or some such learned individual. He was studying the animal with rapt attention.

"The very chap!" breathed Handforth.



The old gentleman's umbrella descended upon Handforth's back with fearful force. Handforth dodged, and, a few seconds later, he was tearing out of the Chamber of Horrors as hard as he could go.

"Eh?"

"The very chap to start on!" said Handforth. "Stand clear, you fatheads! Don't butt in, or you'll ruin everything! Just listen to me, and you'll hear something funny."

"My hat! There's no question about that!" murmured Church.

They stood aside. In fact, they were only too glad to be isolated from their leader. They didn't want anybody to know that he was really with them.

"Grrrr! Woof!" growled Handforth, in a deep, rumbling voice. "How do you do? I seem to recognise your face!"

The voice came clearly and distinctly from Handforth, although he had intended that his voice should be thrown into the cage. Somehow or other it didn't throw properly. There was something wrong.

One or two people passing by paused, looking at Handforth curiously.

Handforth pretended to be interested in the next cage, and he decided to make another attempt. After all, he couldn't expect to be absolutely successful at the very first trial.

He cleared his throat and re-started.

"You—whiskers!" he growled. "I'm talking to you, old funny face!"

He waited, rather anxiously. He expected to see the learned gentleman gaze with startled amazement at the monkey. But the learned gentleman didn't even change his expression. Church and McClure were disappointed, too. They wanted to see what would happen to Handy.



He wasn't throwing his voice at all—and he had a dim knowledge of this himself. But he had stated that he was going to practice ventriloquism, and he had to do it. He couldn't let his chums have the laugh of him.

He was just about to start for the third time, when a small child went up to the learned gentleman, and plucked at his sleeve.

"Please, is that a monkey in there?" asked the child, pointing.

The gentleman looked down, and bent low.

"What did you say, my dear?" he asked, producing an ear-trumpet.

Church and McClure fell against one another. Handforth had been experimenting with somebody who was as deaf as a post! It was a distinctly bad beginning. Handforth considered that he had been swindled. But he brightened up considerably a few moments later.

For another gentleman appeared on the scene—this time a gaily-attired coster. He was in cheerful spirits, judging by the expression on his face. He wore a loud check suit, with bell-bottom trousers, brown boots, and a huge tie of startling colour. A bowler-hat was cocked at a rakish angle on his head.

Handforth regarded this prize with glee. And he was particularly delighted when the coster paused in front of the cage and looked at the monkey with interest. The monkey gazed unblinkingly. He was evidently a very lazy specimen. He rubbed to the extent of scratching his left ear.

"How goes it, matey?" said the coster. "Feelin' all right?"

Here was Handforth's chance.

"Yes, old darling!" replied the monkey. "I seem to recognise you as my long-lost brother! Why not come into the cage?"

"Oh, my goodness!" muttered Church blankly.

For, under no stretch of the imagination, could anybody believe that the voice had really come from the monkey. It proceeded straight from Handforth's mouth. And the coster turned to the junior and stared.

"Talking to me, mate?" he asked.

"No, fathead! It was me who spoke to you!"

The coster stared more than ever.

"Yes: I said it was you!" he replied. "And look here, my lad, I don't allow no cheeky kids to use them terms! What's the bloomin' idea? Trying to be funny, or what?"

Handforth wanted the ground to open and swallow him. He was in a most awkward position. He suddenly realised that his voice wasn't throwing as it ought to. And, instead of the coster being staggered to hear a monkey talking, he was mildly surprised at Handforth. The latter decided to have one more try. He was desperate.

"Can't you hear me, funny face?" he said, in an unnatural voice. "I'm the one who's talking—the monkey in the cage. Can't

you hear me? I thought you were one of the family!"

The coster gazed at Handforth blankly—then he slowly turned and looked at the monkey. Handforth was quite unconcerned and aloof, judging by the expression on his face.

The gentleman in the loud check suit grinned.

"Hi, mate!" he said, beckoning.

One of the keepers came up.

"I reckon you've let one of your monkeys escape," said the coster blandly. "That's 'im—standin' there, agin that cage!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Church and McClure yelled—and so did Pitt and Grey and a number of others who had come up during this scene. They couldn't help appreciating the coster's calmness, and the way in which he handled the affair.

As for Handforth, he fled. He couldn't do anything else. As a ventriloquist he had been a distinct failure. And all he wanted to do was to get as far away from the monkey-house as possible.

Ten minutes later Church and McClure found him gazing over into the bear-pit. This was constructed in such a way that there were no rails—although the place was safe enough from the point of view of the public.

"Oh, here you are!" said Church. "The fellows are wondering——"

"Don't talk to me!" snorted Handforth. "I'm fed-up!"

"Well, that's no reason why you should snap at us!" complained McClure. "We didn't tell you to become a ventriloquist. If you like to go and make a chump of yourself——"

"Dry up!" broke in Handforth. "I don't want to hear any more about the subject! As for that book—it was a rotten swindle! And so is this bear-pit! Not a bear to be seen!"

"I expect they're feeding," suggested McClure.

"They've no right to be feeding!" growled Handforth unreasonably. "At least why couldn't they feed here? Haven't we paid to see the animals? I'm going to stop here until—— Whoa!"

Handforth made a clutch at his head, but his cap was suddenly whisked off by an eddy of the breeze. The article of headgear was carried away on the wind, and it dropped just beyond the parapet, and nearly on the edge of the peculiarly constructed bear-pit.

"Oh, blow!" growled Handforth.

He climbed over the stone wall, with the intention of getting his cap back.

"Here, Handy—come back!" yelled Do Valerie, running up.

"Eh?" said Handy, turning.

It was rather unwise of him to do so, for he slipped at the same moment. The next he gave a yell, and, to the consternation



of all the onlookers, he fell right down into the pit!

But there was no need for worry. Handforth was made of tough material. And although he was rather bruised, he picked himself up intact. He gazed round him somewhat dazedly.

"My goodness!" he exclaimed. "How the dickens—"

And then he let out a wild yell.

From an unseen corner a huge bear was coming out at him—a massive brute, that evidently meant business. Edward Oswald gave one gasp of horror, and found that there was absolutely no way out of the pit.

And the bear was lumbering on deliberately.

At the last second Handforth received a glimmering of hope. There, just near him, was a high pole—with steps on it. It was the pole that was supplied for the purpose of the bears themselves.

Handforth leapt at it, and climbed like mad to the top.

## CHAPTER VII.

### HUGGINS FROM 'OXTON!



"HELP—help!"

It wasn't Handforth who made that appeal for assistance—he was already too occupied at the top of the pole.

But from all sides of the bear-pit people were shouting. Several women screamed, and the majority of the children looked on with sheer delight—believing that this was all a part of the show.

Other people were attracted to the spot, and in a very short time the crowds were clamouring to obtain a look. I had succeeded in getting quite near, together with nearly all the other members of Archie's party.

We watched, dismayed!

"We've got to do something—we must!" exclaimed Watson, desperately. "Handy might be killed in two minutes!"

"Begad, yes!" said Sir Montie.

"I mean to say, the laddie appears to be in a foul predicament!" said Archie, with concern. "Up the pole, what? Gadzooks! I didn't exactly mean up the pole, you know, but there he is—clinging to the jolly old post, with Mr. Bruin on the track!"

"What an ass!" groaned Pitt. "What made him fall over? I've never known such a fellow—he's always in trouble of some kind!"

In the meantime, Handforth was getting desperate.

He had reached safety at the top of the pole—but only temporary safety. The huge bear, instead of remaining on the ground and looking on, was proceeding to climb in pursuit of the intruder. And he was coming up the post with slow, deliberate move-

ments. His gaze was fixed on Handforth steadily.

"I say, you chaps—rescue!" roared Handforth wildly.

"Hold still!" I shouted. "Church has gone to find one of the keepers—and all sorts of people are after help, too!"

"This—this rotten thing 'll have me in two seconds!" yelled Handy. "Do you think I'm going to be hugged to death while everybody looks on? I'm not part of the show!"

And then he gave a yelp, for something soft touched his foot. He gazed down in horror, and found that the bear was nearly upon him. Handforth clenched his fists mechanically.

There was only one thing to be done.

Suddenly bending low, Handforth brought his fist back, and punched the bear on the nose with tremendous force.

"Take that!" he roared. "Clear off, you smelly boulder!"

The bear looked at Handforth in mild surprise. And then, instead of eating him up on the spot—as most of the children had hoped—Mr. Bruin slowly and calmly descended. He wasn't hurt much, but his dignity had been greatly ruffled.

It was bad enough for this intruder to enter the pit at all—but to add injury to insult was even worse. And the crowd looked on, wondering.

"Well, good gracious me!" said one old gentleman. "Remarkable! Astounding courage! Just imagine the youngster having the audacity to punch the animal on the nose! Wonderful!"

And just then a keeper came running into the pit, with two others close behind. They collected round the bottom of the big pole.

"What are you doing up there?" demanded the first keeper angrily.

"What am I doing?" snorted Handforth. "I'm manicuring my finger-nails," he added sarcastically. "I always come here for that job!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The tension relaxed, the crowd roared.

"Look here, young gent., there's no need to be funny!" said the keeper. "I'll trouble you to come down straight away. You needn't worry about the bear—he's harmless. Wouldn't hurt a fly. But that makes no difference to your dropping in this pit. You know as well as I do the public isn't allowed—"

"Allowed!" roared Handforth "I fell in, you silly ass!"

"Then you'd best fall out again—and lively!" retorted the keeper. "We don't want any commotion."

"You can reckon you're lucky!" added one of the others.

Handforth succeeded in getting out—escorted by the keepers. He was greeted by the juniors in a mixed kind of way. Some of them grinned, some roared, and others abused him for being a silly idiot.

"I don't want to hear any of that sort of stuff!" interrupted Handforth "I'm all



right—I wouldn't have cared if half a dozen bears had come on the scene!"

"No, but if that one had been fierce——"

"Fierce!" repeated Handforth. "Why, it was a terror!"

"But the keeper said he was harmless," remarked Church.

"Do you think I take any notice of that?" asked Handforth pityingly. "The keeper only said that to stop the crowd getting into a panic! That bear was one of the most dangerous animals in the Zoo. Why, if I hadn't been smart, I should be dead by now!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I don't want to boast, but I can safely say that I dished that bear pretty well!" said Handforth firmly. "And now I think we'd better buzz out. Everybody seems to be staring here! I can't go anywhere without the crowds peering at me!"

"That's because you're getting famous," grinned De Valerie.

And there was some truth in the remark. Handforth had already made himself exceedingly conspicuous at the Zoo. He received a bit of a shock when he found that a number of urchins were hovering in the rear—a kind of following who eagerly awaited Handforth's next performance.

But, as it happened, some other incident occurred at about this time which brought about our early departure from the gardens. And Archie Glenthorne was the central figure.

Archie was going down one of the narrower paths—under a kind of low bridge. This particular path was crowded with people, going in both directions. Reggie Pitt and Jack Grey were with Archie, but just before getting to the little archway they became separated, owing to the movements of the crowd.

"Gadzooks!" gasped Archie. "What ho! I mean to say——"

Somehow or other, he got quite hustled about in the crowd. He was dressed all in his best—elegant from the tip of his shiny topper to his brilliant boots. Anybody could tell that Archie was the wealthy scion of a noble house. He revealed it in every inch of him.

And if there was one thing he hated more than another it was to be hustled.

Archie was not a hustler. He loved life to be calm and peaceful. He liked to go along an even path and take his time. But he wasn't allowed to now. He got pushed about, and jerked here and there, and was finally expelled out of the crush like a pip out of an orange.

"S.O.S.!" he murmured faintly.

Pitt and Grey were not looking at him, and did not go to his assistance. They were gazing after another figure which had darted suddenly out of the crush, and was running—running swiftly up the path.

This other figure was that of a boy of about fifteen, rather shabbily attired in a ready-made tweed suit. He was thick-set, fair-

haired, and rather freckled. But it was impossible to gain many details of his appearance in such a short time.

He suddenly came to a halt, and stood in front of a smart, well-dressed man. He pulled him round, and spoke to him breathlessly. At this particular portion of the path the crowd had thinned out.

Crash!

Reggie Pitt and Grey did not know what the boy had said, but the well-dressed man suddenly brought his fist round, and struck the youngster in the face. In a second the pair were fighting. They went at it hammer and tongs. The boy clung to his adversary with great determination.

"Good man!" said Pitt approvingly. "I say, we'd better go and lend a hand! Where's Archie?"

"Here I am, dear old bird!" exclaimed Archie faintly. "I mean to say, I've been pushed about. Some awfully frightful chappies positively shoved me up and down and dashed me hither and thither."

"Can't help your troubles, Archie," said Pitt. "Look at that chap up the path. He's getting it in the neck. Rescue, St. Frank's."

"Oh, absolutely!" agreed Archie.

He pulled himself together, and ran forward with Pitt and Grey. The juniors were thoroughly in sympathy with the shabbily dressed youngster. It was the man who had started the attack—and the boy was game.

He was so game, in fact, that he was still fighting with desperation, although he was getting the worst of the battle. Handforth and Co. had arrived by now, and I was there, together with the rest.

And the St. Frank's chaps shouted with indignation as the well-dressed man proceeded to hold the youngster and kick him viciously on the shins. Other people stood by, looking on—in the helpless way that people will.

"The—the rotter!" snorted Handforth. "Grab him!"

But Pitt and Grey had already done so. Then we all came up, and the pair were separated. The man was swearing furiously—and in a common voice. His tones did not match his appearance.

And before we could make any sort of inquiry, two constables came hurrying upon the scene.

"That's all this—what's all this?" demanded one of them.

"About time you came!" snarled the man. "This infernal young reptile attacked me without any provocation——"

"I never!" shouted the boy hotly. "It was 'im wot 'it me fust!"

"Of course it was!" declared Pitt. "We saw it!"

"Mind your own confounded business!" snapped the flashily-dressed man.

"Now then—stop this!" commanded the constable sternly. "Unless you can put an end to this sort of thing, I shall have



to put you outside the gardens. Can't have any rowdyism here!"

The man pulled himself together.

"All right—I won't make any charge," he said thickly.

"I should say you wouldn't!" shouted the boy. "That's right—hold him! That bloke's a thief. I see'd him pinchin' a pocket-book out of a young gent's coat. That's 'im—a bloomin' pickpocket!"

"You little rat! What the——"

"Picking pockets?" said one of the constables sharply. "Look here, young 'un, are you sure of this?"

"Course I'm sure of it," said the boy. "A big crockerdile pocketbook it was—one o' them swell ones. It come out o' the pocket o' that young gent, standin' over there."

He pointed at Archie.

"What!" said Archie. "I mean to say—absolutely imposs.!"

"Fact!" said the freckled boy. "I seed 'im!"

"I never touched the boy—I'm not a thief!" raved the flashy man.

"Have you lost a pocketbook, young gentleman?" asked the policeman, looking at Archie, and speaking in a polite tone. "I'll have to get this thing squared up, you know. Can't let it rest at this."

"Absolutely not!" said Archie. "I mean, no chappie has buzzed along and touched any of my property. Dash it all, I should know. A foul blighter of a pickpocket couldn't come along and—— Why, great absolutely Scott! I mean to say, great gadzooks! Help!"

"Well?" asked the policeman, as Archie fumbled in his breast-pocket.

"The dashed thing's gone!" said Archie.

"There y'are!" said the freckled boy triumphantly. "Wot did I say? Think my eyes ain't no blinkin' good? This 'ere bloke took your pocketbook. I seed 'im nick it."

"Well, dash it all," murmured Archie. "I mean, how awfully frightful, and how frightfully awful! That is to say, how frightfully fearful! I mean, a pickpocket, don't you know. Rather steep, don't you know."

"What was your wallet like, young gent?" asked the constable.

"Oh, a rather decent thing!" said Archie.

"A kind of priceless affair. The pater gave it to me as a present. It's kind of long, and yet, don't you know, it's dashed broad. Made of that ripping leather stuff——"

"Be lucid, you ass!" said Pitt.

"Oh, absolutely!" said Archie. "Anything, as it were, to oblige. The pocket-book was one of those crocodile things, with 'A.W.D.G.' embossed on the outside—my bally initials, you know. I think there are about a dozen fivers, to say nothing of thirty quid in currency notes——"

"Close on a hundred pounds, sir," said

the policeman, with more respect than ever. "Oh, and it's missing?"

"Absolutely!"

"Look here, my man, the best thing you can do is to come quiet," said the constable, turning to the flashy man. "There's no sense in making a fuss. You were seen——"

"You confounded fool! I never touched the pocketbook!" shouted the man desperately.

There was a short scuffle, and the second policeman produced a fat pocketbook out of the man's jacket pocket at the side. We all recognised it as Archie's at once, and the police knew that there could be no mistake—for the initials were clearly to be seen.

Five minutes later the prisoner was taken off, and Archie's property had been restored. Glenthorne was still a bit flustered.

"Dashed fearful!" he said. "I mean, a thing like that puts a chappie off his stroke. The poisonous brute! Oh, by the way! What about the dear chappie who rallied round so nobly? I'd jolly well like to grab him by the flipper, and exude a few hearty thanks!"

Pitt came running up at the moment.

"I'm glad that chap's been hauled off by the police," he said. "The dirty coward! Didn't you see what happened just now?"

"No," said Archie; "I——"

"Why, just as the police were taking their prisoner away, he reached out and aimed a kick at the kid that caught him fairly on the ankle. Bowled him clean over!"

"The absolutely absolute bounder!" said Archie indignantly. "I mean to say, how frightfully caddish! Kindly lead me, 'old darling. I'd like to have a word with the good Samaritan chappie."

He soon arrived in a quiet little back-water, where the freckled boy was sitting on a seat, surrounded by the St. Frank's juniors. He was obviously in pain, and he was holding his ankle with both hands. And now that we could get a good look at him, we could see that he was not so shabby as we had at first believed. It was not the age of his clothing that gave him the appearance, but the atrocious cut.

His suit was obviously one of those cheap, ready-made affairs—the very sight of it caused Archie to wince. The boy was also wearing a flannel shirt, and his boots were thick and clumsy. He was clearly one of the "lower classes," but probably none the worse for that.

His freckled face was frank, cheerful, and open. His hands were big, and he was clumsy in all his limbs.

"No need to make all this 'ere fuss," he said, grinning. "I ain't 'urt much, mates. A kick on the hankle ain't anythin' to snivel at."

"The hankle, what?" said Archie. "I—I mean to say, the jolly old ankle? Kindly allow me to thank you in a few large bursts. Laddie, it was perfectly priceless"



of you to rush about like that after my property."

"Oh, that's all right, matey," said the freckled boy.

"Absolutely!" gasped Archie, rather startled at the form of address. "But, I mean to say, dashing about and fighting feightful coves. A somewhat strenuous biz, when you come to think of it. What can I do? I'm in a somewhat awk. posish. I don't want to offend you, old darling, but what about it? It strikes me that something ought to be done."

"It's bein' done," said the boy. "That bloke's bin nabbed."

"Oh, rather!" agreed Archie. "Nabbed, what? A priceless term—absolutely! But what I mean to say is, how about the old reward? Shall we say twenty, or fifteen, or what? Just as you like, laddie."

"Twenty wot?" asked the boy, staring. "Why, doubloons, old darling—quids, don't you know—"

"Garn!" interrupted the freckled boy. "Don't you be funny, Glass Eye! I don't want your blinkin' money!"

"No, perhaps not!" said Archie hastily. "Sorrow! No offence—"

"I reckon it 'ud take more than that to offend me, matey," grinned the boy. "Thanks, all the same, but it's all right. You've got your pocket-book, and it ain't necessary to say no more."

"Absolutely not!" said Archie firmly. "I mean, I think it was pricelessly priceless of you to dash about like that. I'd like to know your name. I think you're a somewhat stunning stunner."

"My name's Alf!"

"How foul—I mean to say, how absolutely topping," said Archie hastily. "Alf, what?"

"Alf 'Uggins," said the boy.

"Great absolutely Scott!"

"From 'Oxton," added Alf.

"Oh, of course! I mean to say, rather," said Archie brightly. "'Oxton, don't you know. I must admit, old darling, that I'm not acquainted with 'Oxton, but the name seems slightly familiar. I presume that 'Oxton—"

"Hoxton, you ass!" muttered De Valerie. "Hoxton!"

"Oh, absolutely!" stammered Archie, rather confused. "I've got it, laddie! Hoxton, of course. So this dear old pal has come all the way from Hoxton, what? A positive ripper! I mean to say, just fancy! Trickling right down from Hoxton to scrap with that foul pickpocket."

"Don't you kid yourself, mate!" grinned

Alf Huggins. "I didn't come from 'Oxton for that. I've bin goin' round the Zoo, 'avin' a good old squint at the hanimals."

"Ah, yes!" said Archie. "The hanimals—I mean—"

He paused, rather out of his depth. The conversation was getting beyond him. And all the rest of the juniors stood looking on, considerably amused. Archie was glad when somebody else carried on the conversation.

"How's your ankle?" asked Pitt.

"Oh, right as ninepence!" said Alf Huggins, jumping up. "Ow! Oouch!"

He sank down again on the seat with a gasp, and he went pale.

"It ain't quite right yet, blowed if it is!" he gasped.

"It seems to me, dear old chap, that it's up to us to do the right thing," said Archie firmly. "I mean, we can't jolly well allow you to whizz back to 'Oxton—that is, Hoxton—in this fearful condish. I should like to take you home in the old car. How about it?"

"Wot!" said Alf, staring. "'Ave you got a blinkin' motor-car?"

Archie coughed.

"Well; not absolutely!" he replied. "I mean to say, the dashed thing doesn't blink! It seems that you are in a frightful condish of helplessness. You won't take any reward—so what about a good old lift? Dash it all, I must do something! Noblesse oblige, don't you know!"

"Oh, well," said Alf, "if it's to oblige you, I dessay! Besides, it ain't much good stoppin' 'ere, is it? I can't do no more walking about, an' it'll be a horful job gettin' on trams!"

"Good!" said Archie, with relief. "Distinctly good. Laddies, we'll buzz off to Hoxton. The thing's settled—absolutely fixed."

"What, all of us?" grinned De Valerie.

"Absolutely," said Archie. "We might just as well take the dear laddie home in state, as it were. That is, of course, if Alf doesn't mind. I shouldn't like to offend the—"

"Keep your 'air on!" said Alf Huggins cheerfully. "It don't matter to me 'ow many of you come. Bring the bloomin' lot, an' I'll introduce you all to my old dad. The more the merrier."

And five minutes later we were setting out for Hoxton—highly amused at this unexpected development.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### ONE OF THE NEW RICH!



ALF HUGGINS was frankly delighted with the huge car in which he presently found himself seated. The experience was obviously a new one to him, and he revelled in it.

Of course, the boy was quite out of his

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element with the St. Frank's crowd—he was so obviously part of a different strata of life. But this, in a way, made it the more interesting for the juniors.

Under ordinary circumstances they would not have taken much notice of him. But he had certainly done Archie a very great service. And, surprisingly enough, he had refused to take any reward.

This was a clear indication of his character. And although Archie positively shivered to be near the "frightful bounder," he was nevertheless warmed towards Alf. He had done Archie a good turn, and Archie did not forget that kind of thing.

The other juniors looked upon the whole thing as a piece of fun.

It was rather a rich idea to be going to Hoxton, to take this common boy home to his own cottage. Most of the fellows had an idea that Hoxton was a terrible district of squalid slums, with ragged urchins all over the place, and with street brawls going on at every corner.

So they were rather astonished when the car pulled up in a quiet, respectable Hoxton thoroughfare, where everything was peaceful and astonishingly at rest. Alf was pointing to a small, old-fashioned workman's cottage, with ivy clinging to the walls.

Outside the front window there were some flower-pots, and the curtains behind the small panes of glass were extremely neat and spotlessly clean.

Archie sat in the car, smiling serenely.

"Well, here we are—absolutely on the spot!" he observed. "I feel, dear old chap, that it isn't enough. I've brought you home, but wouldn't it be a rather priceless idea if you accepted a couple of jolly old fivers?"

"Wot I did, I did 'cos it was right!" said Alf quietly. "I see the bloke pinch your wallet, an' so I went arter 'im, that's all. Lumme! I ain't one of them kind wot wants payin' for doin' every little thing!"

"No, of course not," said Archie hastily. "In fact, dear old sportsman, you appear to be one of the absolute ones, if I may say so!"

"So if you want to do somethink else, I'd like you to come indoors, an' meet my dad!" said Alf. "An', talkin' about money, I shouldn't advise you to offer 'im none."

"Oh, absolutely not!" said Archie.

"Y'see, my dad's come into pots just lately," said Alf, in a confidential whisper.

"Pots?" repeated Archie vaguely.

"You bet your life!" said the freckled boy. "Pots of it! I ain't goin' to say no more; I don't s'pose the old man would like it. Y'see 'e ain't 'ad much afore, an' 'e ain't rich all of a sudden like, 'as kind of took 'im on the 'op. But he's keepin' 'is 'ead all right."

We were now beginning to understand why Alf had refused the money. If his father had come into some kind of fortune, the family was obviously in a good position.



The coster turned to Handforth and stared.

"Talking to me, mate?" he asked.

"No, fathead! It was me who spoke to you!"

The coster stared more than ever.

Archie didn't quite care for the prospect, but he at once consented to go indoors, and to be introduced to "the old man." Alf was just able to hobble, and when he got to the gate he turned round.

"You'd best all come in!" he invited. "Tain't no good sittin' out there! Like as not, ma will give you somethink to eat!"

"Oh, good!" said Fatty Little promptly.

"Greedy bounder!" grunted one of the others. "All you can think of is grub! If a pig offered you a go at his trough, you'd accept!"

Fatty Little allowed the deadly insult to pass—and it was just as well that Alf didn't hear the thoughtless remark. For it almost sounded as though Alf's place was little better than a pig's trough.

"Of course, it's a bit degrading going in here," murmured Church. "Still, we can't very well get out of it."

Most of the juniors would have preferred to remain outside; but after Alf had expressly asked them to enter, they couldn't very well offend him by refusing to enter.

Alf went in first, and Archie followed a few seconds afterwards, with the rest of the fellows crowding in behind. The front door



opened straight into the parlour, after the style of old-fashioned cottages. It was neat, clean, and surprisingly stuffy. By the time we were all inside there was hardly any room to close the door.

"Won't ma be surprised!" chuckled Alf, as he hobbled through a door at the rear. "Just wait 'ere 'arf a tick, and then I'll come back agin. Won't keep you a jiff!"

He vanished, and was as good as his word.

Before we could start any conversation, Alf reappeared, and held the door wide open.

"It's all right, mates!" he grinned. "Come into the kitchen—more 'omely! Dad's sittin' in 'is chair, but don't take no notice of 'im. An' ma's busy with the dinner."

frightfully good for the jolly old constitution," Archie had once declared, "but they are dashed harmful to a chappie's social standing—if you know what I mean?"

By a huge effort, Archie mastered a terrible feeling at the pit of his stomach, and entered the kitchen. He inwardly decided that the whole affair was becoming poisonous in the extreme.

But it was quite impossible to dash out. With a smiling face, but with inward agony, Archie shook hands with Mr. and Mrs. Huggins. The rest of the juniors bowed—or pretended to do so. And they stood looking on and breathing with difficulty. Their one hope was to get outside as soon as possible.

"That's all right, young sir; don't mention it!" exclaimed Mr. Huggins, as Archie

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"How perfectly priceless!" said Archie. And then he staggered slightly, and swayed. He was just passing into the kitchen, and his sensitive nostrils were suddenly struck by the strong odour of frying onions—to say nothing of shag tobacco smoke, mingled with the faint suggestion of stale kippers. The mixture was nearly enough to make Archie faint on the spot.

He was on the point of giving way, but he bore up bravely. Onions were one of his pet aversions. He couldn't bear them in any shape or form. And the fried variety was the very worst.

"Onions, dear old lads, might possibly be

was explaining. "My boy's one of the best! He ain't never done no 'arm, an' he's as honest as the day. 'E don't want no reward, neither!"

"'Tain't likely!" said Alf.

"Y'see, young gents, I've come into a bit o' money just lately," said Mr. Huggins confidentially. "An', wot's more, I'm goin' to send my boy to school—to a proper school."

"That'll be rather ripping!" said Archie. "And now I think we'll trickle forth——"

"Not one o' them Council schools!" went on Mr. Huggins. "I ain't sayin' a word agin 'em—the Council schools are fust-class.



But I want to send my boy to one o' these ere real swell places."

"Where he'll git a real, good eddication," put in Mrs. Huggins proudly.

Although he kept trying to escape, it was impossible to do so. Mr. Huggins insisted upon talking about himself. Until just recently he had been a foreman bricklayer—and looked it, every inch of him. A thick-set man, with great gnarled hands, rugged features, and a complexion like bronze. He was weatherbeaten and wrinkled, and he had a moustache like a brush—clipped off flush with his top lip. Mrs. Huggins was fat, and fearfully common in her talk and manners, but a kindly, motherly soul, nevertheless. In their own sphere they were two of the very best. But the St. Frank's juniors were like so many fish out of the water in this atmosphere.

It was not until half-an hour later that we actually got outside.

Alf came and saw us to the gate, and waved to us as we went off. And we could not help liking him a bit. His cheerful face and his good nature made it impossible for us to do anything else.

But Archie sank back among the cushions of the car, and heaved a sigh of enormous relief.

"Of course, it's all dashed fine, and what not; but I mean to say!" he murmured. "Rather perpendicular—what? Sleep, and all that sort of thing! In fact, dashed near the limit!"

"Too jolly thick, I reckon!" said Church. "And those onions——"

"Gadzooks!" gurgled Archie. "Don't, laddie—don't! Have pity on a cove who is wilting away. I must say that I'm feeling most frightfully frightful! I need something to brace up the tissues! Oil and water—what?"

"That ought to taste nice!" said Handforth.

"Dash it all!" protested Archie. "I mean, those fearful people in the cottage! Don't you see—oil and water! They won't mix, you know! Something like we chappies and Alf's people."

"Oh!" said McClure. "We don't mix—and that's a fact! Thank goodness we shall never have to!"

And while the two luxurious cars were rolling away, Alf Huggins hobbled back into the cottage, and burst into the kitchen.

"Well, dad, what do you think o' that?" he grinned. "All them fellers was from St. Frank's College."

"Yes, so you sez at fust——"

"And they'd get a bit of a shock if they knowed wot was comin', wouldn't they?" exclaimed Alf, his face flushed with anticipation, and his eyes sparkling. "Lumme! I reckon I'll give 'em a bit of a surprise when I turn up at the blinkin' school—as a new boy!"

And Alf Huggins sat on the corner of the table, and laughed with genuine glee.

It appeared that there was a considerable shock in store for St. Frank's!

THE END.

## Editorial Announcement.

My Dear Readers,

Your introduction this week to Alf Huggins, the bricklayer's son, whose family fortunes have developed with a rapidity out of all proportion to his social status, will enable you to follow with some feeling of sympathy his coming adventures at St. Frank's. It has been hinted, at the close of the above story, that Alf is shortly to be sent to St. Frank's, though, as yet, and until he makes his appearance at the old school, his newly-made acquaintances have not the faintest inkling of the bricklayer's intentions. Undoubtedly, Huggins senior was impressed by the Remove juniors, and now that he could afford it, there was no reason why his son, Alf, should not have the advantages of a good education like these boys. It was only human. He had heard of St. Frank's before, and it seemed to him that he could not do better than send Alf to this school, since he had already made friends with some of the boys.

### THE NEW SERIES.

But Alf is a cockney with a very pronounced accent—not that this is anything against him, for, as we have seen, he

possesses many fine qualities. At a big public school he would be sure to meet with a certain amount of prejudice and ridicule. There are snobs at St. Frank's as there are anywhere else, and it is probable that Alf will have a rather lively reception when he arrives at the school. This will be fully described in next week's story: "ALF HUGGINS ARRIVES; or, The New Boy at St. Frank's." It is the first story of a rousing new series, featuring the trials and struggles of a boy of humble origin, and how, by sheer grit and force of character, he fights his way into popular favour.

### NEXT WEEK'S DETECTIVE STORY SECTION.

In the Detective Story Section next week, I am publishing one long, complete mystery story, entitled: "ABEL LINK'S QUEST!" It is a story full of surprises and exciting situations, dealing with the extraordinary adventures of a lad in a City office, and how Abel Link, the great detective, helps him out of a tight corner.

THE EDITOR.





## Nelson Lee's Rooms in Gray's Inn Road

This week, since the famous Juniors of the Remove are up in London and pay a visit to Nelson Lee's rooms in Gray's Inn Road, our artist's general view of them, as seen from the street, is of special interest. The rooms are situated on the second floor in the left-hand corner of the main block. From these modest headquarters the great detective has directed

some of his greatest triumphs in criminal investigation. It would take too much space to recite all the exciting events that have taken place in those apartments, much to the terror of Mrs. Jones, the landlady, who, financially, had every reason to be satisfied with Nelson Lee, even though her nerves are not what they used to be.



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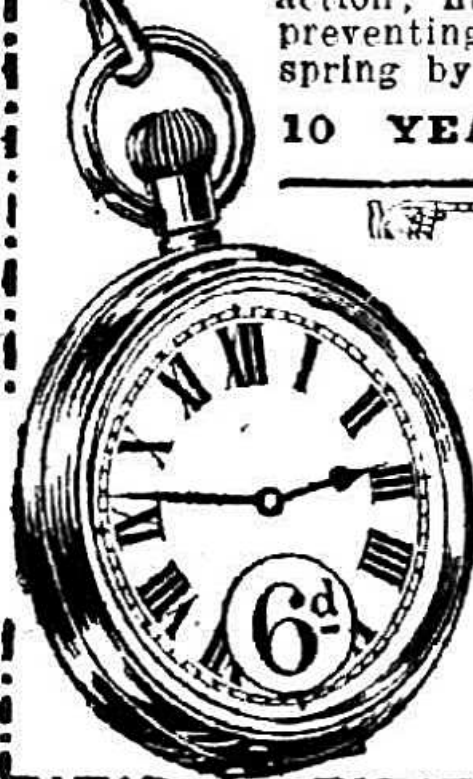
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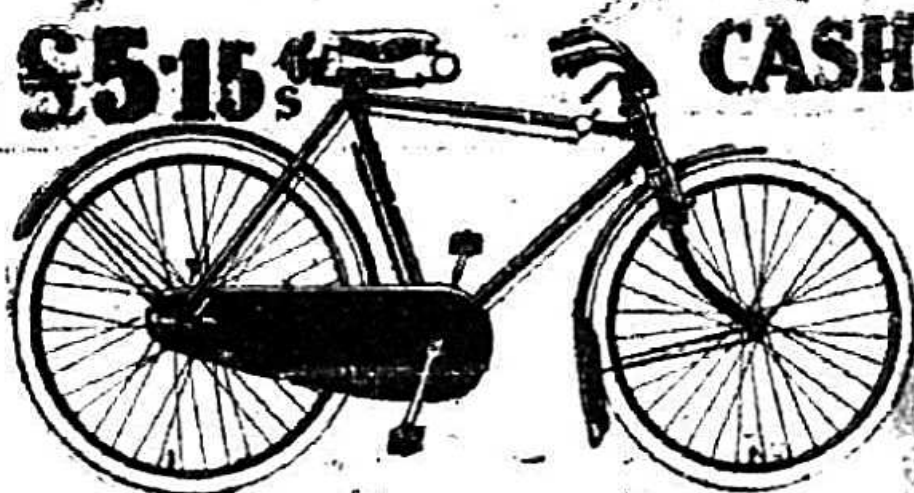
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