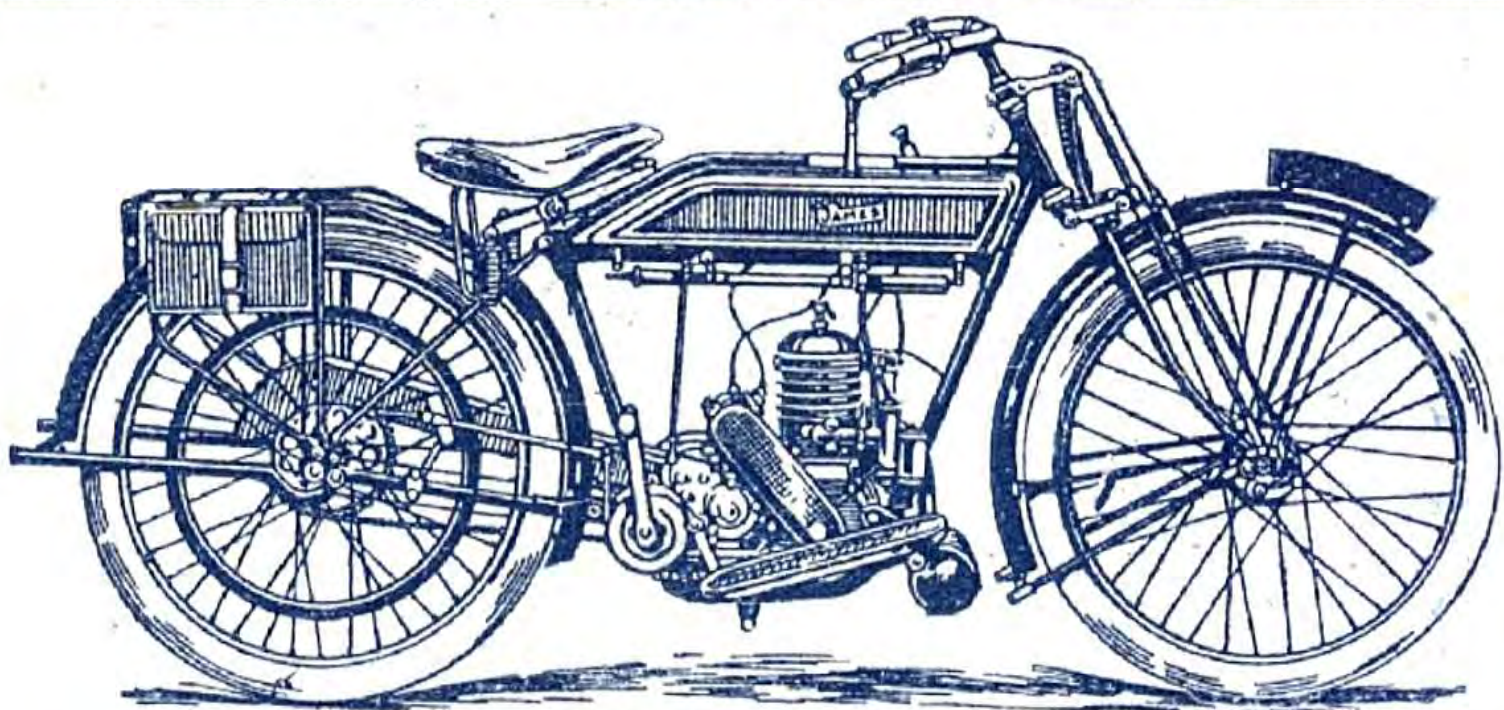


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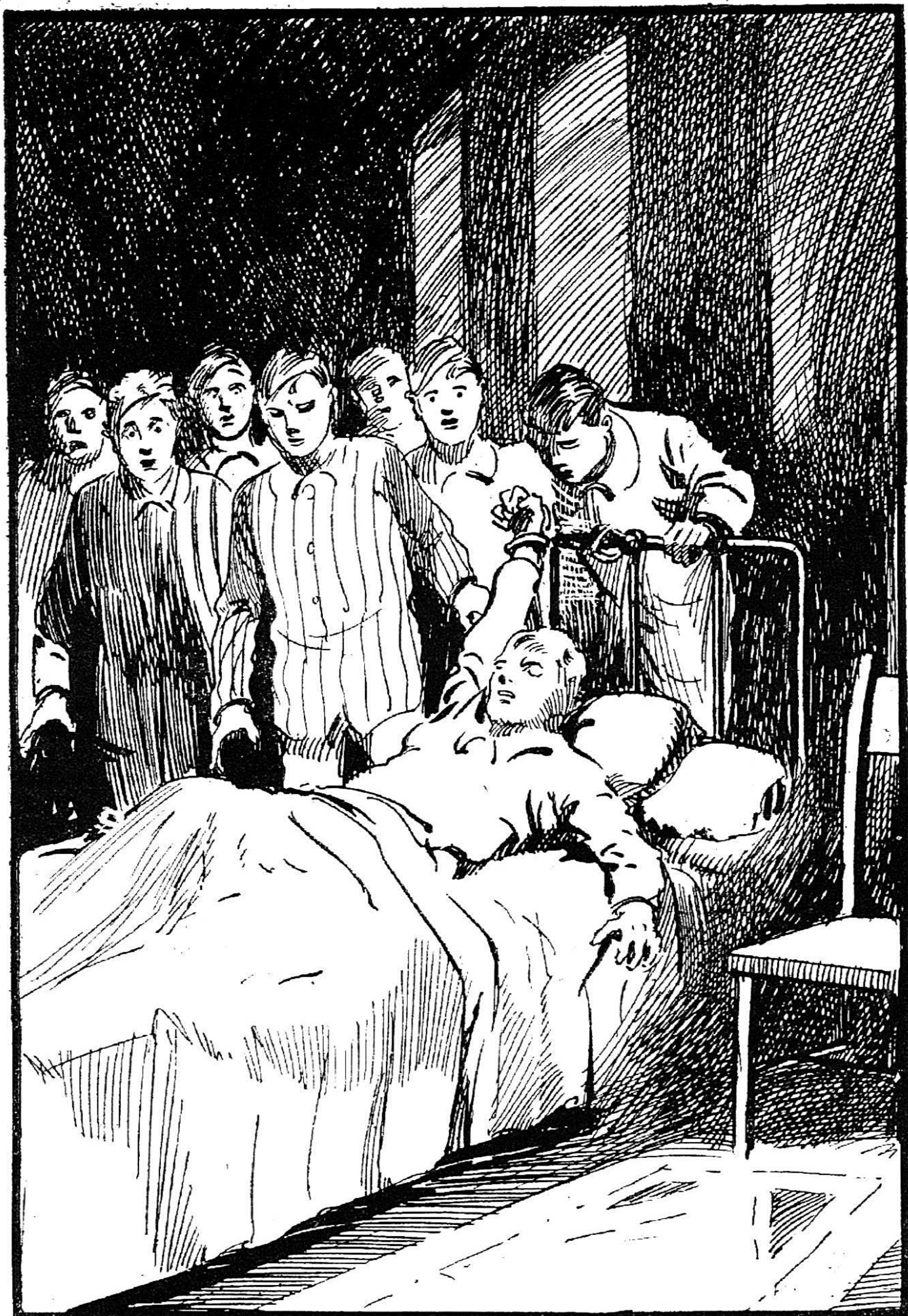
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THE DIE-HARDS OF THE REMOVE!

This Week's Splendid Story of ST. FRANK'S in which occurs the stirring Incident depicted above.



Buster rattled his hand up and down, causing the handcuffs to clink significantly. Several juniors left their beds and gathered round their leader in utter amazement.



The Remove at St. Frank's is in a state of civil war. John Busterfield Boots, the amazing new boy, has, with the aid of his friends, the Faithful Five, got himself elected captain. Not content with this, he has organised most of the fellows into a gang known as the Ku Klux Klan of St. Frank's. Only about a dozen juniors stand out of this; but they include Nipper. And now Nipper has organised arrival society, which he calls the Die-Hards. In this story the rival factions of the Remove get to grips, and Buster Boots has his hands pretty full. The second set of pictures in our colossal Footer Competition appears on page viii. of the Detective Story Section.

THE EDITOR.

(THE NARRATIVE RELATED THROUGHOUT BY NIPPER.)

CHAPTER I. HANDFORTH IS SMITTEN!

BOOM! Booom!
Church, of the Remove at St. Frank's, looked round at the window of Study D, in the Ancient House, as the gale boomed and shrieked round the angles of the old stone buildings.

"Whew! It's getting higher every minute," said Church soberly. "Looks like developing into a regular snorter. We'll have tiles and chimneys down during the night if this keeps on."

"Yes, it looks pretty bad," agreed

McClure. "Take a squint at the elms in the Triangle. They're swaying tremendously. I'll bet it's pretty bad at sea to-day. The waves must be terrific at Shingle Head."

Church nodded, and continued looking out of the window.

The famous chums of Study D were partaking of tea. It was by no means dark yet, and, indeed, the sun was still shining. But it was weak and watery and the sky looked pale and washed-out, with a few scurrying clouds hastening wildly into the west.

It was an October gale—rather more violent than usual and there was every indication that it would develop into a veritable hurricane. The juniors, as a whole, were not at all sorry. It was something unusual—and rather exciting. Therefore it was welcome.

Edward Oswald Handforth, who generally did most of the talking in Study D, was silent for once. Church and McClure couldn't understand it. Ever since their leader had come out of the class-room, he had been in this solemn, silent condition.

There was a dreamy, far-away look in Handforth's eyes. He sat at the table, hardly taking any interest in the meal. Church and McClure knew better than to bother him too much—he was inclined to be abruptly violent when in this mood. Without any warning he would probably lash out.

Handforth was absent-minded, too.

Several times during the afternoon he had surprised Mr. Crowell, the Form-master, by answering questions at random. And, upon coming to himself, he had turned violently red, greatly confused.

He was in the same condition of absent-mindedness now—only more so.

Another terrific gust of wind swept down upon the old school, and fairly shook the building. A great cloud of dead leaves came sweeping across the Triangle, and many of them were flung fiercely against the window of Study D. They rattled and hissed upon the panes. And the window itself shook in its frame. Outside, the trees swayed despairingly in the hurricane. A branch came tearing down with a crackling crash.

"My goodness!" said Church. "There goes one branch, anyhow—it'll be the whole tree next time. I say, Handy! What about that rabbit hutch you were making? You left it out in the open, you know, and there won't be much of it left by the time this storm's over."

Handforth took no notice of the words, and Church and McClure regarded him in astonishment. These moods were not very uncommon with him. He would become abstracted like this after he had been reading a thrilling detective story. He would declare that the author was all wrong, and the problem ought to have been solved in a totally different way. And he would dream about what he would do when he left school—when he became a celebrated investigator. For that was Edward Oswald's ambition.

But it was very uncommon for him to be as absent-minded as this. The rabbit hutch that Church had referred to was something of a joke. There had been an argument the previous day, and Church had scoffed at the idea of any fellow keeping rabbits. This had been quite sufficient for Handforth to immediately start the construction of a rabbit-hutch.

But he wasn't really interested, and he had left the task half finished. And now, to the surprise of his chums, he was slowly

and deliberately proceeding to spread some marmalade on a slab of cheese. Apparently, he mistook the slice of cheese for a piece of bread-and-butter.

"That's something new—eh?" grinned McClure. "I say, Handy, don't you think you'd better pay a bit more attention to the grub?"

Handforth bit into the cheese, and was sublimely unconscious of the unusual nature of his food. A moment later he was tipping some salt into his tea and Church thought it was time to interfere.

"Wake up, you ass!" he shouted, banging the table.

Handforth started.

"Eh?" he gasped. "What—what—"

He broke off, and lay back in his chair.

"Irene!" he said dreamily. "When you come to think of it, that's a ripping name!"

Church and McClure exchanged startled glances.

"Great Scott!" muttered McClure blankly.

"Blue eyes and bobbed hair!" said Handforth, as though talking to himself. "I never thought bobbed hair could look so jolly nice! I wish I knew what her other name was. Still, Irene is—"

The rest of his sentence trailed away into a mumble, and Handy stared at the opposite wall with that same dreamy expression. His chums grinned delightedly, and winked at one another with ecstatic joy.

Handforth had revealed the secret—quite unconsciously.

And a complete flood of light came to the assistance of Church and McClure. Now they knew what was the matter with him. His recent absent-mindedness—his extreme docility—was all explained.

In a word, Edward Oswald was smitten!

Irene, the fair, was the cause of all the remarkable changes which had occurred in the one and only Handforth. In a way, Church and McClure were not extremely astonished.

For they had met Irene, too—and there was no doubt whatever that she was a perfectly priceless girl.

They didn't know her other name. She was a pupil at the Moor View School, which had recently opened within a very short distance of St. Frank's itself. The Moor View School was really a private residence—a place which had hitherto been known as the Mount.

But, unexpectedly, about fifty young ladies had appeared upon the scene. They were all pupils of Miss Charlotte Bond, who was the principal of the school. And the girls were as fine a lot as one could wish to see—the majority being about fifteen years of age.

The establishment was high-class—indeed, exclusive. Only the daughters of very rich people could reside at the Moor View School. And it had been rumoured that many of the girls had titled parents. The

place was, in fact, every bit as select as St. Frank's itself.

Church and McClure were still grinning as they thought of the recent events.

The young ladies who had lately come into the neighbourhood had gained the impression that the Remove was a most undesirable collection of fellows. On the very first day of the girls' arrival, they had seen the Remove engaged in a free fight on Little Side.

And Miss Irene and two other girls had afterwards encountered some Remove fellows who had deliberately made fun of them. It was not surprising, therefore, that all the girls had gained a wrong impression.

The fault lay at the door of John Busterfield Boots.

The new captain of the Remove was the cause of all the trouble. The unspeakable

Boots had done a very great deal of damage to the prestige of the Remove, and it might take weeks and months to undo the harm that had been done.

Handforth had met Miss Irene a few days earlier, and he had been charmed by her sweet personality. She was, indeed, a most attractive young lady. But she didn't think much of Handforth.

For she believed that the chums of Study D had assisted Buster and Co. in the trick which had been played. Handforth was furious about this, but it apparently made no difference. He was smitten.

"Poor old chap!" murmured Church. "No wonder he's been so quiet lately. He hasn't punched a single chap for two days! But what an ass to go and let it out like that!"

"He can't help it!" breathed McClure. "We'd better go easy. Don't let him suspect we know, or we shall be slaughtered."

Handforth was quite unconscious of the conversation that was going on. Church and McClure were wise. It would be a fatal mistake for them to let Handforth know that they were aware of the truth. He would undoubtedly be very sensitive on the subject.

A tremendous gust of wind swept down and shook the window so violently that even Handforth was awakened out of his dream-like trance.

"What—what was that?" he asked, startled.

"The wind, of course," said Church. "You've been pretty well asleep for the last half-hour, Handy. What's the matter

with you?" he added, winking at McClure.

"Matter?" repeated Handforth. "Oh, nothing! I've been thinking."

"What about?"

"Oh, I—er— What's it got to do with you?" he snapped. "Can't I think now without you being so jolly inquisitive?"

He turned a rosy red, and Church and McClure eyed him with affected astonishment. But they knew why Handy had turned red. And they were secretly chuckling over the fact that they were in the secret. If Handforth had only known that he had given the game away!

Edward Oswald looked at his plate, and started.

"Who—who did this?" he demanded sourly. "I suppose you think it's a joke—to spread some marmalade on cheese?"

"You did it yourself, old man," said Church sweetly.

"My hat!" said Handforth, with a start. "The—the fact is, I've been a bit absent-minded, you know."

"Go hon!"

"Yes, I've been thinking about things," went on Handforth. "It's a bit stuffy in here. I think we'd better go for a walk."

"A walk?" echoed McClure. "A walk in this gale?"

"Which gale?"

"Great Scott!" yelled McClure. "Don't you know there's a hurricane blowing?"

Handforth looked out of the window in some surprise.

"That's funny—I hadn't noticed it!" he said. "But it's nothing much—only a breeze. I'm going for a walk—you chaps can stop here," he added carelessly. "I want to do some more thinking."

Church and McClure quickly made up their minds.

"You can't go alone!" said Church firmly. "I expect you're trying to think out some deep detective problem—eh?"

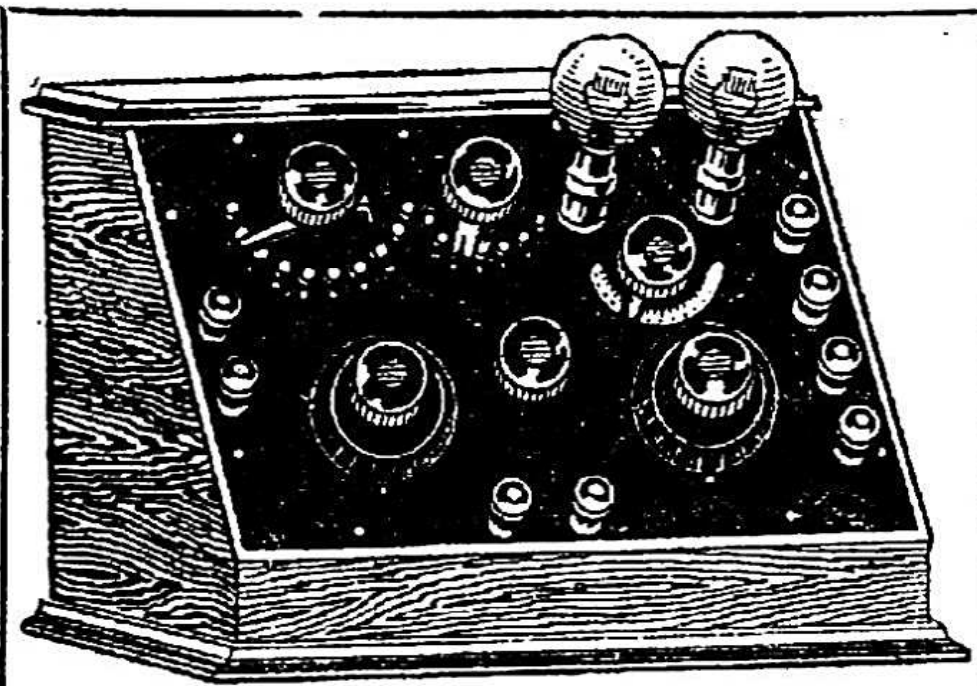
Handforth nodded eagerly.

"Well, not—not exactly, but I've got to be alone," he said vaguely. "I don't want you chaps bothering me. You needn't look at me like that—you're not coming! I—I'm just going up the road, towards the moor."

"Oh! In the direction of the Moor View School?" asked Church casually.

Handforth started, and went pink.

"Well, yes—I—I suppose so!" he said hastily. "But what's that got to do with you?" he went on, suddenly becoming fierce. "Not that I'm particular which way I go. Blow the Moor View School! Do you think



You can still win one of these!

I care a toss about it? Why should I be interested in the Moor View School? I don't care a snap about the girls!"

Handforth's pains to elaborate on the subject was significant enough, but he didn't realise this.

"Oh, well, if you insist upon going alone, you must go!" said Church. "But it looks jolly queer—going in that direction."

Handforth gulped.

"All right—come with me!" he shouted. "But if you dare to interfere with my thoughts, I'll jolly well slaughter you! I'm not going to be pestered and bothered when I'm thinking out an abstract problem."

Church and McClure said no more. They had gained their point, and they let well alone. They knew, of course, that Handforth was simply going out in the faint hope of catching sight of Miss Irene.

"There's no telling what a chap will do when he's in love," breathed Church. "Fancy going out in this gale—and expecting to see her! My hat! I've heard that lovers are optimistic, but this takes the bun!"

"A chap who's smitten will hang about for hours," whispered McClure. "And if he catches one second's glimpse of the fair young thing he'll consider that he's fully rewarded! Jolly queer, ain't it? But I never thought Handforth would make such an ass of himself!"

Edward Oswald glared at them.

"What are you chaps mumbling about?" he asked suspiciously.

"Oh, nothing! Just talking!" said Church.

They left the study, and having obtained their overcoats, they sallied out of the Ancient House. A terrific burst of wind came shooting along, and nearly lifted them off their feet. A hail of gravel stones, whisked by the gale, pelted their legs.

"I—I say!" protested Church. "We'd better chuck it, you know."

"Rats!" said Handforth firmly. "There's no telling—she might be out for a walk herself—"

"What?"

"I—I mean, anybody can go for a walk on an evening like this!" said Handy, in a roaring voice, evidently believing that a show of violence would cover up his mistake. Come on; don't argue!"

"Oh, all right!"

Struggling against the wind, they crossed the Triangle, and passed out through the main gates into the lane. There was plenty of daylight left, for it was still quite early in the evening—in fact, only late afternoon.

Once in the lane, the wind was sweeping sideways across the path, and they were well protected by the high banks and hedges. The wind whistled over their heads, leaving the lane itself in comparative calm. Only the hoot and whistle of the wind, and the swaying of the hedges and trees, told them

of the tremendous forces of Nature that were loose.

"Why not go to the village?" said Church casually. "We can drop into a tuck-shop, and have some fresh pastry—"

"Rot!" interrupted Handforth. "Let's go this way—towards the moor. There's nothing like the moor on a wild evening like this—something grand to look at, you know."

"Yes, she'll look ripping!" said McClure.

"She!" said Handforth, with a start. "You—you—"

"The moor!" explained McClure innocently.

"Oh, yes, of course—of course!" said Handforth, with a slight gulp. "But what's the idea of saying 'she,' you ass? I thought you meant—"

"What? Thought I meant what?"

"Oh, there's no telling what dotty things you'll say!" replied Handforth, with confusion. "Come on; don't lag so much! I wish I hadn't brought you now! How the dickens can I think if you keep talking?"

His chums remained silent, for they were rather keen upon seeing what Handforth would do when the Moor View School was reached. There was no indication that the leader of Study D was thinking very deeply.

He kept a sharp look-out, turning every now and again to look back along the lane. Church and McClure knew the reason for his watchfulness, but they pretended to be solemn.

The gale was howling wildly as they turned the bend and came within sight of the girls' school. Handforth's eyes were eager. But there was not a single soul in sight. The lane was deserted.

Arriving opposite the gates, Handforth glanced casually along the drive to the school itself. He caught a brief glimpse of two girlish forms in the big porch, but the next moment they had gone.

"Pity about those girls," said Church regretfully.

"What's a pity?" asked Handforth.

"Why, they think we're a set of rotters," replied Church. "Remember that fair-haired girl? The one with the ripping blue eyes?"

"Rather!" said Handy, his face lighting up. "Irene, you mean?"

"Is that her name?" inquired McClure casually.

"Why, yes, I—I think so," said Handforth, suddenly becoming cautious. "Did she have blue eyes? As a matter of fact, I didn't take particular notice of her. As you chaps know, I don't care a toss about girls."

"Of course you don't," said Church stoutly. "But Irene's the prettiest girl I've seen for months! Dainty, with ripping dimples, and her voice is just like silver bells!"

"That's what I thought," agreed Handforth.

"You said you didn't notice her much!"

"Oh, well, a chap has to hear her voice, I suppose," said Handy, with exaggerated carelessness. "And she called us cads! Cads, you know! All through that rotten Buster! Let's turn back."

"I thought we were going to the moor?" asked McClure.

Handforth took no notice, but turned round and walked back along the lane. They had passed the school, and Handforth had no further interest in walking on. Miss Irene would not be in that bleak direction.

There were no signs of any girls at all as the three juniors passed the school a second time. Handforth sighed regretfully, and hastened his steps. He had suddenly realised that it was a pretty hopeless scheme. There was no chance of seeing Irene that afternoon.

The gale roared and buffeted as the Removites walked along.

"Getting worse every minute," said Church. "I vote we get in as soon as possible. I'm not nervous, but one of those trees might blow over any minute. And there's always the danger of a falling branch."

"Rats!" said Handforth snappily.

He was very short-tempered now. He was disappointed, and he walked faster. His jaunt had been for nothing, and it made him irritable. And then they turned the bend which brought the gates of St. Frank's into sight.

Edward Oswald came to an abrupt halt.

"My goodness!" he said thickly.

His face flushed, his eyes suddenly grew eager and intent. There, in the lane, stood a slight girlish figure! She was a young lady with fair hair—a young lady in silk stockings, short skirt, and a red woollen jumper, with a red tam-o'-shanter to match. Standing there, with the wind blowing her golden locks away from her face, she looked an exquisite picture of young, healthy girlhood.

"Miss Irene!" breathed Handforth dreamily.

But then his expression altered, and his eyes grew fierce. For Miss Irene was talking to somebody! She was talking to a St. Frank's fellow! And the fellow was no less a person than Archie Glenthorne!

Handforth's eager look vanished, and he turned almost green with jealousy.

CHAPTER II.

MISS IRENE'S PERIL!



A RCHIE GLENTHORNE had emerged from the Ancient House without the slightest expectation of meeting with any young ladies.

If the truth must be told, he had been thinking of Miss Irene more than once just recently. Her blue eyes had appeared before his mental vision on two



Handforth had lifted the girl clear from the ground. And now, with her face as pale as chalk, she lay in his strong arms.

or three occasions, and Archie had a vague idea that he was somewhat impressed. He was the only junior who had really met the Moor View girls on amiable terms—but this had been before the unfortunate misunderstandings.

Archie sallied out of the Ancient House because he was rather anxious about his study mate. Alf Brent had gone down to the village to post two or three letters, and had promised to be back within half-an-hour.

The time limit had expired, and Alf had not returned. Mysterious things had been occurring recently—particularly in connection with Archie and Alf. And the Genial Ass of the Remove feared that his chum had met with some disaster.

He had warned Alf about going alone, but Brent had insisted. He had declared that there couldn't be any possible danger in broad daylight. But as he hadn't returned, Archie was getting quite concerned.

He emerged from the gateway, the breath nearly knocked out of his body by the gale, and he started down the lane. But instead of seeing Alf's figure, he found himself gazing upon a slight feminine form.

Miss Irene was only a few yards distant, and walking briskly. She was alone, and apparently returning to the Moor View School with all speed. Archie felt himself growing rather warm as he stood there.

The first glance had told him that this girl was the one with the fair, bobbed hair—the one whom the others had referred to as Irene. Instinctively, Archie straightened his tie, and pulled himself more upright. It was too late for him to retreat, for Irene had glanced up, and had seen him.

"It appears," murmured Archie, nervously, "that it is necessary for me to indulge in the good old greetings! Dash it! Bally queer, but the old knees appear to be most frightfully wobbly! Most awk., dash it!"

However, he braced himself up, and as the girl drew level, Archie gracefully raised his cap, and bowed.

her face was rosy-cheeked and oval. There was nothing of the shy miss about this girl. Neither was she one of the "forward" variety. She was just natural.

And she looked straight at Archie as one boy might look at another—she gazed straight into his eyes. And there was a cold, frigid expression in her own glance.

All the marrow seemed to freeze in Archie's bones. Handforth had glared at him with ten times Miss Irene's intensity, but Archie had remained utterly unaffected.

This girl's glance, however, was shattering.

"I—I— That is, w— I should say, you—" Archie paused, realising that he was scarcely lucid. "What-ho! So there

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"Greetings, fair lady!" he said gallantly. "A priceless evening, what? Or, to be more exact, a somewhat foul evening! Absolutely!"

For a moment Miss Irene hesitated. She gave Archie one glance, and a flash of her eyes, and walked straight on. Greatly mortified, Archie regarded her retreating form. He had been deliberately snubbed. And it was very painful, because he certainly didn't deserve it.

But suddenly Miss Irene paused, hesitated for another moment, and then turned back. Archie's heart fluttered as the girl walked straight up to him, and looked him in the face.

Irene looked delightful in her red jumper. Her slim figure was trim and straight, and

you are, what?" he went on, managing to brace himself up. "Dashed priceless of you, Miss, Miss—"

"My name is Irene Manners!" said the girl frigidly.

"Really?" asked Archie, brightening up. "I say! Irene Manners, what? That, as it were, is a dashed priceless sort of name, don't you know! A name that trips off the old tongue smoothly, and all that sort of thing. Charmed to meet you, Miss Manners! Of course, we've met before—"

"Will you allow me to speak, please?" asked Miss Irene coldly.

"Oh, rather! Kindly dash into it!" said Archie.

"A few moments ago you raised your cap

to me," said Miss Irene. "You also wished me good-evening."

"Absolutely," said Archie. "You see——"

"Well you please understand that I don't want you to bother in future?" went on the girl. "And I should like you to tell all your chums that none of the girls of the Moor View School intend to recognise them. I hope I have made myself clear."

Archie went pale.

"Oh! But, I say!" he ejaculated, in great distress. "Really, old dear! I—I mean, really, Miss Manners! That's most frightfully hard lines! I mean to say, we're not so dashed unspeakable——"

"We regard all the boys of the Remove as cads!" said Miss Irene icily.

"Cads!" agreed Archie. "But, really! I should say, really! Allow me to point out that you're absolutely and positively off the old track! Most of the dear chappies are—are—— Well, they're dear chappies!"

"I don't want to argue with you," said the girl, still regarding him freezingly. "But do you call it gentlemanly to play mean and contemptible tricks? On the first day we got here we saw you all fighting in the playing fields. Why, it was dreadful!"

Archie gulped.

"But, really! Not all of us!" he hastened to explain. "For example, I wasn't there. It was Buster's doing. The foul blighter has been turning the bally Remove inside out, you know. Buster is a frightful beast!"

"Buster?"

"Absolutely," said Archie. "The ex-crescence who is at present captain of the Remove. Buster Boots, don't you know. He's a priceless worm, and all that. But the other chappies are rippers—Nipper and Handforth and Pitt, and all that crowd. We ain't all cads, dear girl!" he added reprovingly.

For a moment Miss Manners softened—then she tilted her chin.

"All the same, we don't want you to raise your caps to us," she said curtly. "Please remember that we are strangers. And if you are foolish enough to wish me good-evening again, I shall ignore you."

And with a firm set of her pretty mouth, she turned away and walked up the lane. Archie stood staring at her retreating figure, his temperature rising to such an extent that he was burning all over.

"I—I mean to say!" he murmured feebly. "That, as it were, was somewhat poisonous! Ticked off, by gad! Ticked off by a girl! I mean to say, how absolutely ghastly!"

Archie was more distressed than he could possibly imagine. Miss Irene had made a mistake—an awful mistake—And Archie had been unable to explain the situation to her.

Unfortunately, she had refused to listen. Being a perfectly human girl, and heir to all feminine characteristics, she was decidedly self-willed. And she had not allowed Archie to get a word in edgeways, as it were.

Miss Irene was by no means an angel. If she had been an angel, she wouldn't have been a pupil at the Moor View School. She was a very sweet girl—but she probably had her full share of faults.

And it must be said at once that she was quite unfair in refusing to give Archie an opportunity to tell her the exact facts. She and her companions had made up their minds that the Remove was no good, and there was an end of it. It was a decidedly feminine viewpoint.

And Archie felt helpless in the situation. An impulse seized him to dash forward and grab her firmly by the shoulders, and "tick her off" in turn. She deserved it. It would do her good.

But Archie didn't possess the pluck. He had the courage of a lion when it came to any perilous crisis, but in all matters regarding the ladies he was something like a freshly landed fish.

He was further dismayed by the instinctive knowledge that he was rather impressed by Miss Irene. He liked her all the better because she was at fault. Archie didn't care for the clinging, helpless type. There was something virile and spirited about Irene.

Archie started as he observed Handforth & Co. up the lane. He hadn't seen them before, for all his attention had been given to the girl. But they must have seen him talking to her!

"Dash it all, they'll chip me!" he muttered. "How frightful!"

The chums of Study D. in the meantime, were slowly advancing. Miss Irene was now walking towards them with her neat, crisp stride. And she was looking straight ahead, into the distance.

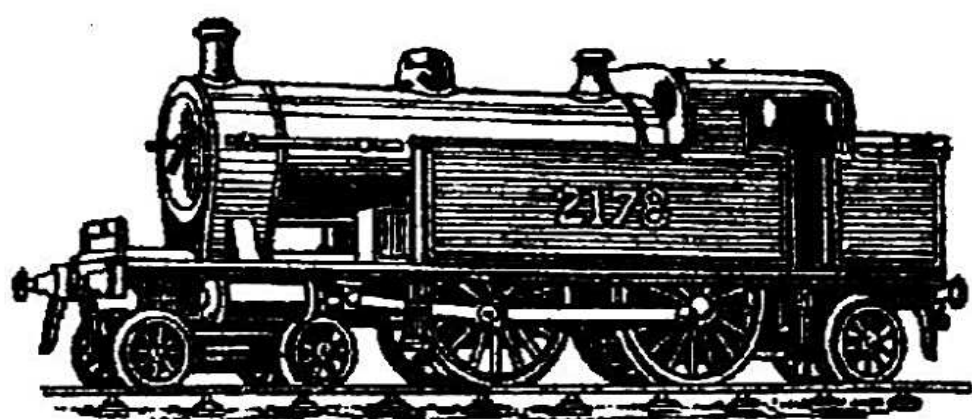
Handforth was very flushed and eager. The very thing he had hoped for had happened. He was not only catching sight of the young lady, but actually passing her in the lane—and, moreover, she was quite alone!

Handforth glared at Church and McClure, who were decidedly in the way. Church and McClure were beginning to get quite interested, and were wondering what their leader would do.

The gale was roaring overhead, causing the leaves and small branches to scatter themselves wildly over the lane. And it was as much as Miss Irene could do to keep a straight course as she walked along with the wind buffeting her from a side angle.

However, she managed to walk with considerable dignity, and without even glancing at Handforth. They all paused and raised their caps. Handforth smiled with friendly ease. At least, he thought he smiled with friendly ease. As a matter of fact, he looked extremely self-conscious.

And the chagrin of Handforth & Co. was complete as Miss Irene merely tilted her chin, and marched off. She gave them not even a single glance. She acted almost as though they had no existence.



This may be yours !

And Handforth gave a startled gulp. She had ignored him! She—the girl with the blue eyes—had absolutely passed by without even giving him a look! And he had been fooling himself that she was just the kind of girl to be impressed by his strong, manly appearance.

It was more of a shock than Handforth cared to admit. And Archie was still standing there—Archie, who had actually talked to her! In that moment, Handforth hated Archie like poison.

Irene had talked to that fatheaded duffer, but had ignored him. He emitted a low growl of fury.

"By George!" he breathed. "I'm going to smash that ass to smithereens!"

"Eh?" said Church, startled.

"Archie!" thundered Handforth. "I'm going to slaughter him!"

"What for?" asked McClure. "What's Archie done?"

"She talked to him—and she wouldn't look at us," hooted Handforth.

"Well, what of it?" grinned Church. "You're not interested in that flapper, I suppose? After all, she's only a silly school-girl——"

Biff!

"Yow!" howled Church wildly, as Handforth lashed out. "What's that for?"

Handforth didn't think it necessary to explain. In fact, he suddenly realised that his actions were very significant. He was revealing to his hitherto unsuspecting chums that he was interested in Irene. At all events, Handforth had believed them to be unsuspecting. He would have been startled if he had been told how much they knew.

"Oh, rats!" growled Handy. "Girls are all the same! Even the pretty ones! They always try to make a fellow look small!"

He said this in order to allay any suspicions that might have been aroused within the minds of Church and McClure. And he stood looking up the lane at Miss Irene.

She was walking with the same brisk stride, and Handforth mentally decided she was just as pretty from the rear as from any other point of view. Her figure was wonderfully graceful, and her walk was supple and good to see. Indeed, Handforth became almost dreamy as he stood there.

And the gale roared and hooted more wildly than ever.

A particular fierce whirlwind of air

came howling down from the meadows—a powerful burst of the storm that concentrated all its furies upon this section of the lane.

The hedges bent nearly double, and the trees creaked and moaned in anguish. Handforth's cap went flying, and Church staggered as he stood, nearly overbalanced. And then, just ahead came a crackling crash of sound, even above the wild voice of the gale.

The startled juniors saw a great tree branch sever itself from the parent trunk. It came crashing down, right into the lane—to fall on the top of Miss Irene Manners.

She realised her danger, and made a quick jump to the side of the road. But she was just a second too late, and she vanished amid the entangling meshes of the great branch.

CHAPTER III.

STOUT WORK BY HANDFORTH!



"G O O D Heavens!" shouted Handforth wildly.

In that one second he had gone pale to the lips. All his sentimental thoughts regarding Miss Irene vanished in a flash. After all, they were only trivial—insignificant. Just the harmless emotions of a schoolboy.

There was a girl in danger—in grave peril.

It mattered not to Handforth whether she was pretty, plain, or downright ugly. He would have acted just the same in any case. The one sheer necessity was to get her out of her predicament.

Without wasting a fraction of a second, Handforth rushed forward, half dreading that she was injured. Church and McClure, plucky enough, it is true, were too startled to move. They just stared.

Handforth, as he drew nearer, could see Miss Irene struggling vainly to save herself from the madly lashing branches of the great limb. And a second squall came hurtling down, hard on the heels of the first. Indeed, this squall was even more fierce and more terrible.

The whistling hoot of the gale was like something solid. It was terrifying—it almost stilled the senses. And Church and McClure became aware of a danger of which Handforth himself knew nothing.

The great tree itself was staggering!

The full might of the storm pressed against the thick foliage. Accompanied by a crackling roar, the whole tree sagged across the road, and commenced falling. Church screamed.

"Handy!" he shouted desperately. "Come back—come back!"

For the tree was falling right across the road—fully upon Miss Irene. It would thunder down, and crush to death both the girl and Handforth. For the latter was now running headlong into the heart of the peril.

But Handforth himself was aware of the danger now.

He didn't give a single thought to his own safety. His one grim determination was to drag the girl back—to extricate her from her helpless predicament, and to save her from this ghastly death.

Handforth acted in the only possible way—roughly.

This was no time for gentle methods. Five minutes earlier the very thought of laying hands upon Irene's sacred person would have caused him to feel faint. But now he crashed through the tree branches, and reached forward.

He seized Irene by the shoulders, got a firm grip under her arms, and simply yanked her out backwards. Overhead, like some smothering monster, the giant tree was crashing down.

The whole thing was over in ten seconds.

With his ears filled with a thousand sounds, Handforth staggered back with the girl in his arms. He tripped, floundered, and gave himself up for lost. But, by a superhuman effort, he managed to hurl himself clear.

Crash!

The mighty trunk of the tree thudded down within a foot of him and the girl. The impact was so terrific that the stones were sent flying from the road surface, and the whole ground shook.

That massive trunk had hurtled down upon the road only a bare two seconds after the pair had vacated the spot. Without the slightest shadow of a doubt, Irene would have been crushed to death if Handforth had not flown to her aid. For she could never have freed herself in time.

Church and McClure dashed up an instant later.

"Oh, thank Heaven!" gasped Church. "We—we thought——"

He couldn't express the fear that had been in their minds. They were intensely thankful to see Handforth safe. And there was the girl—lying in Handforth's arms!

Edward Oswald had lifted her clear almost without knowing it. The extremity of the peril had made all his self-consciousness vanish on the instant. He had lifted Miss Irene clear from the ground, and held her there.

She was a pathetic sight, now.

For the girl had fainted—and small wonder. In that moment she had believed herself to be doomed. She had just given one small scream, and had swooned even as Handforth pulled her clear.

And now, with her face as pale as chalk, she lay in Hand's strong arms. Her tam-o'-shanter was gone, and her golden hair waved in the fiercely buffeting wind. Her red jumper and her skirt were torn in several places, for she had been caught under that falling branch.

"Out of the way!" said Handforth grimly. "I've got to carry her to the Moor View School! She's injured—she might be dying!"

"Oh, my goodness!" breathed McClure fearfully.

There was every reason for Handforth's fear. The girl looked even prettier than ever in her sore distress, but Handforth had no thoughts for her beauty now. She had to be taken to a place where she could be cared for. The leader of Study D was a fellow of action. There was no room in his composition for sentimentality when it came to a crisis.

"We—we'll help you to carry her!" said Church quickly.

"No, you won't!" snapped Handforth. "Why, she's like a baby—as light as a feather! Blessed if I can understand why girls are so jolly strong! There's nothing in 'em!"

In this Handforth was slightly wrong. It was only the urgency of the situation that made the young lady seem light. As a matter of fact, she was no small weight to carry, and Handforth would have found this out if he had been compelled to take her all the way to the Moor View School.

But before he could start off, Irene opened her eyes.

"Oh!" she sighed. "What—what——"

She broke off, Irene opening her eyes wider as she saw that her own face was within a foot of Handforth's rugged countenance. With surprising alacrity she recovered. Probably any girl would have recovered as quickly, upon finding herself in somebody's arms.

As for Handforth, he nearly dropped her on the spot. While she had been unconscious, he was as bold as brass. But to suddenly find her looking straight into his eyes was staggering. His grip seemed to weaken, and it was only by a great effort that he retained his hold.

"It's all right, Miss Irene!" he said gruffly. "You're injured. I'm going to carry you home——"

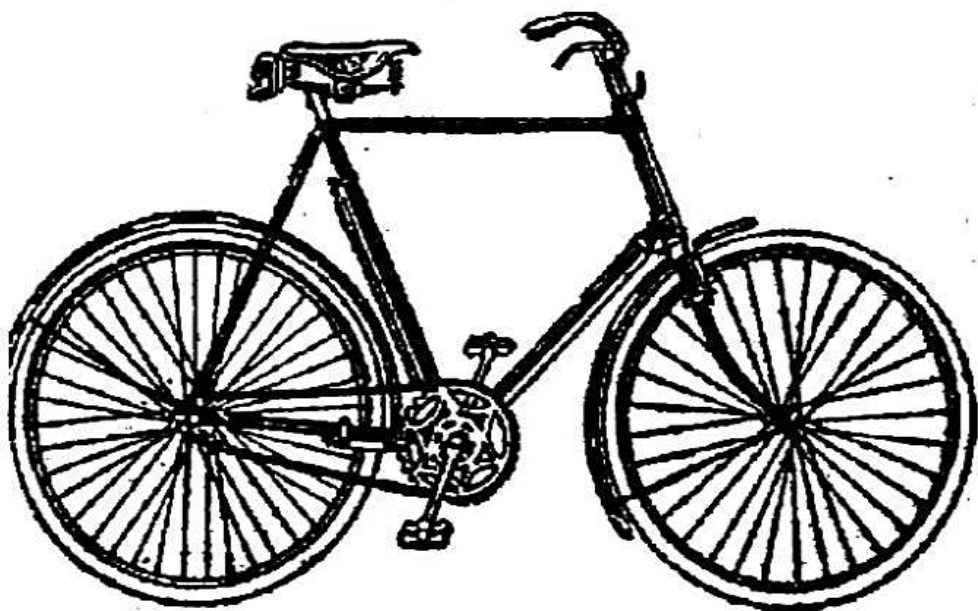
"Indeed, you're not!" interrupted the girl. "Please set me down at once!"

"But—but——"

"I insist!" she said firmly.

Handforth was as weak as any other fellow would have been in the circum-

Well worth winning!



stances. The command was imperious. Very gently, he set the girl upon her feet, but maintained a steady hand upon her shoulder.

"It's all rot!" he growled. "You fainted just now, and that great branch fell right on the top of you! I expect you're injured—those branches must have bruised you frightfully."

The girl winced as she tried to walk.

"I—I believe my foot is hurt," she admitted. "Oh! I—I don't know what to say to you! And I feel so mean, too—you're one of the boys I called a cad a few days ago!"

"Yes, that was a bit offside!" said Handforth. "Still, no need to make a song about it! It was Buster's fault—he ruined everything. You'll let me help you back to the school, won't you?"

"Yes, if—if you want to!" she said softly.

"We do want to!" said the three juniors, in one voice.

"Thanks ever so much!"

"Who told you to butt in?" demanded Handforth, glaring at Church and McClure. "Like your giddy sauce! Now then, Miss Irene, you've got to lean on me, and the quicker we go the better. Church, you'd better rush for the doctor——"

"Oh, no, no!" interrupted the girl. "Don't be silly! I don't want a doctor! I've only got one or two scratches. I'm not hurt at all, really."

"You'd have been killed but for Handy," said Church.

"Dry up!" hissed Handforth fiercely.

"Handy?" repeated Irene, looking at Edward Oswald. "Is that your name?"

"I'm Handforth—Edward Oswald Handforth, of the Remove," said the leader of Study D. "I say, I didn't try to play a trick on you the other day. That was Buster's doing. I was mad about it——"

"I'm quite sure you didn't try to play any tricks—Handforth," said the girl quietly, looking straight at him. "And I want to thank you ever so much for being so brave."

"Oh, draw it mild!" muttered Handy, flushing.

"Oh, it was wonderful—really and truly it was!" went on Irene, her eyes lighting up. "I thought I was going to be killed, and I went all faint. Then I heard you, and you caught hold of me and dragged me clear. I shall never forget it—never! And I called you a cad! You do forgive me, don't you?"

"Forgive you!" said Handforth, with a gulp. "I—I say, of course I do. And as for pulling you away from that tree, it was nothing at all. Come on! We'll get a move on. It's getting dark!"

Irene's left ankle was paining her a little, but, escorted by Handforth and Co., she had no difficulty in reaching the Moor View School. She shook hands warmly with all three juniors as she turned to enter the gateway. Handforth had positively refused to go inside. The thought of being sur-

rounded by dozens of girls had made him feel quite faint.

"I say, Miss Irene, you won't say anything about this, will you?" asked Handforth uncomfortably.

"Indeed I shall!"

"Great Scott!" gasped Handy. "Don't—for goodness sake! There'll be an awful lot of talk, and—and you know what the chaps are! I—I expect you girls are the same! Everybody will think—will think——"

He paused, blushing furiously, unable to explain.

"You silly!" laughed Irene. "Just as if that matters. I want to tell everybody how brave you were, and I want to let the girls know that the Remove isn't all composed of nasty boys. But if you really want me to keep it a secret——"

"I do—rather!" said Handforth eagerly. "Say the branch fell on you, and let it go at that. You won't be telling a lie."

The girl's eyes softened.

"I knew you were brave—and now I know you're modest," she said frankly. "I think we shall be good friends, Handforth. All of us," she added, glancing at Church and McClure. "Oh, I'm so glad!"

She turned, and hurried towards the schoolhouse, limping slightly. She vanished in the gloom of the big porch. And Handforth uttered a long sigh of sheer happiness.

"Isn't she gorgeous?" he breathed. "My hat! What a girl!"

Church and McClure grinned.

"She's certainly a good sport," agreed Church. "We never expected anything like this, did we? Just fancy! Coming out for a bit of a walk, and meeting Miss Irene! You were great, Handy!"

"Eh?" said Handforth, glaring.

"The way you dashed to the fair damsel's rescue," said Church. "She was a goner, sure enough, until you dashed in. We thought you were booked, too. Thank goodness it turned out O.K."

"And it's good to know that she's changed her opinion about us," remarked McClure. "Of course, she'll tell all the other girls, and they won't be so jolly uppish any more. But there's no telling with girls," he added reflectively. "They're a queer crowd. You never know how to take 'em."

"And—and I held her in my arms," said Handforth absently.

"Eh?"

"I carried her——" Handforth paused, and started. "What the dickens are you asses grinning at?" he roared violently. "Come on! Let's get back!"

And the chums of Study D marched briskly back towards St. Frank's. Handforth didn't care a rap for the gale and the whirling leaves. He was grateful for it. For the gale had been the means of introducing him to Miss Irene.

And she was his friend—she had said so! There was only one fly in the amber—



The Faithful Five had never worked so hard before. Long after the other fellows had gone down to prayers they were sawing away, attempting to set their leader free!

Archie Glenthorne! Archie had been talking to Irene. Well, if Archie dared to address her again— But Handy calmed himself, sure of his own position.

He walked on air, as happy as the proverbial king.

CHAPTER IV.

THE DIE-HARDS IN A BAD WAY!



WHAT-HO! What-ho!" said Archie Glenthorne, peering into the gloom. "In other words, tally-ho and yoicks! Who goes there—what?"

Handforth and Co. materialised out of the dimness.

"Oh, here you are!" exclaimed Handforth aggressively.

"Absolutely," said Archie. "I'm waiting for the dear chappie—Alf, to be exact. You haven't run into the old scream, by any chance? Dashed queer, don't you know. He ought to have been back——"

"Never mind, Alf," interrupted Handforth fiercely. "I want to have a word with you, my lad!"

Archie adjusted his monocle, and peered forward.

"Dash it all! Why the furious tone, old lad?" he asked mildly. "I trust I haven't displeased you in any way? I mean to say,

you sound frightfully dangerous. There's a kind of growl in the old voice——"

"Did you see what happened up the lane?" demanded Handforth.

"Absolutely——"

"What?"

"I—I mean, absolutely not!" stuttered Archie. "Gadzooks! You're getting me hot and bothered! What, as it were, is the big idea? Up the lane? I'm sorry, laddie, but I fail to grasp the trend. The brain department closes early, don't you know?"

"Then you didn't see that tree fall across the road?" said Handy.

"Not to notice it, old bird," replied Archie. "I'm sorry, and all that, but I'm dashed puzzled."

He couldn't make out why Handforth was questioning him so closely. Archie had seen Miss Irene pass the chums of Study D, but she had been out of vision round the bend when the tree crashed down. Handforth was relieved.

"That's all right, then," said Edward Oswald. "Now, look here, Glenthorne! What were you saying to Miss Irene?"

"Eh? Why, dash it, you mean what was she saying to me!" protested Glenthorne. "I regret to tell you, old darling, that the dear girl was decidedly crisp. I'll even go so far as to say that she was frightfully unkind."

"What do you mean, you ass?"

"Why, she absolutely told me to my bally face that if I dared to address her

again she would give me the bird!" said Archie sadly. "Me, don't you know. She positively refused to recognize me!"

Handforth grinned with delight.

"Good!" he said heartily.

"What? I mean to say, dash it!" objected Archie. "Good, what? I call it verging on the ghastly! What, as it were, have I done? Why should I be shunned and spurned? Why should the whole Remove be shunned and spurned? For the dear girl positively declared that we're all the bally same!"

"Oh, did she!" said Handforth, with a start! "But, of course, that was before it happened?"

"Before what happened?" inquired Archie mildly.

"Nothing!"

"Upon my word! How, may I ask, can nothing happen?" demanded Archie. "I can understand something happening, but —"

"Oh, never mind!" interrupted Handforth airily. "I haven't got time to waste over you, anyhow. As for Miss Irene —"

"Pardon me, old lad, but it sounds dashed familiar to refer to the young lady by her Christian name," interrupted Archie reprovingly. "I mean to say, it isn't done. Absolutely not! The priceless girl is Miss Manners."

"Miss Manners, eh?" repeated Handforth. "Irene Manners! By George! That's a ripping name, when you come to think of it!"

"Absolutely," agreed Archie. "But I'm dashed upset. The tissues, in fact, are feeling washed out and limp. It's a frightful pity that these girls should think so badly of us."

"They don't," put in Church. "Don't you worry, Archie, that's all over now. It was all a misunderstanding, and there's no need to think any more about it. Blessed fuss over nothing, in my opinion!" he added, with a sniff.

Handforth and Co. marched into the gateway, and were nearly blown into the Ancient House, accompanied by sundry leaves and a cloud of grit. Archie remained outside near the gateway.

His thoughts were now divided between Miss Irene and Alf Brent. Archie was sorely troubled over both of them. He was worried about Alf, and greatly pained concerning Miss Irene Manners. It was very seldom indeed that the elegant junior had been "ticked off" so severely by any young lady.

And it was all the more distressing because he hadn't deserved anything of the sort. The words of Handforth & Co., however, gave Archie some slight encouragement. He was not permitted to ponder over the subject much longer, in any case, for a figure suddenly loomed up from the lane.

It was Alf Brent.

Alf was not quite himself. His collar was missing, his tie was smothered in mud.

His neat Eton suit was crumpled and torn. And Alf himself was filled with a suppressed rage.

"So here you are — what?" said Archie brightly. "Welcome, laddie! Dashed glad to see you, and all that! I've been waiting for hours, don't you know? But kindly allow me to remark that you look rather poisonous."

Alf Brent gave a snort.

"I'm wild!" he said fiercely. "I'm raving!"

"Dash it all —"

"Those — those cads!" went on Alf, his voice quivering with heat. "They got me, Archie — got me in broad daylight, and took me into the wood!"

"Gadzooks! You — you mean Buster and his frightful crowd?"

"Of course; but they were all dressed up in white gowns and hoods — just like those pictures you see of the Ku Klux Klan," exclaimed Alf grimly. "But let's come indoors, I want to get cleaned up. Then I'm going to see Nipper, and ask him what he's going to do."

"A sound scheme, dear boy," approved Archie. "In fact, a priceless wheeze!"

They went indoors, and parted in the lobby, Alf hurrying upstairs to wash and change. Archie went to the luxurious study which he shared with Brent, and languidly rested himself upon the soft lounge.

"Good!" he murmured. "Just time to have forty of the best — what? A dashed restorative to the old nerves, and so forth!"

He closed his eyes and composed himself for sleep. But sleep wouldn't come. Archie found himself thinking of the various events which had been recently taking place in the old school.

Of course, John Busterfield Boots was an outsider — an absolute cad, and all that sort of rot! Archie assured himself upon this point in the most decided terms. Boots was the cause of all the recent trouble.

Buster was a College House junior. Ever since his arrival at St. Frank's, at the beginning of the present term, he had been asserting himself in no uncertain manner. Having gained the leadership of the Monks, he had not been content with that.

Buster was now the captain of the whole Remove. He had ousted me from my position, and I was no longer a power. But there was nothing of the disappointed ex-leader about me. I was sure of my ground, and felt convinced that Buster's supremacy was only a passing phase. His success had been built upon such fragile supports that they would never carry him far.

Indeed, at the present moment, his chief reason for popularity was that he had inaugurated the Remove Recreation Club. And this precious institution was nothing more nor less than a meeting-place for indulging in mild gambling. There was a danger that the gambling would not always remain mild.

It was not very surprising, perhaps, that the majority of the Remove fellows had succumbed to Buster's soft words. They had listened to him, soaking in his pernicious ridiculing of so-called mollycoddles.

Buster's doctrine was to the effect that any fellow who believed in clean football and healthy amusements was a soft nincompoop. In order to live fully, a fellow had to indulge in such delightful pastimes as card playing for money, roulette, and so forth.

And this Recreation Club of Buster's was a very complete affair. It had the full official sanction of Mr. Stockdale, the Housemaster of the College House. Needless to say, Mr. Stockdale was under the impression that the club was perfectly harmless and innocent.

Most of the fellows were excited about it. It was something novel—something that they had never even dreamed of. They were ready enough to listen to Buster's scoffing talk when he declared that there was nothing wrong in it. He ridiculed the idea of the roulette table being wicked.

After all, the fellows only played in sixpences and shillings. What harm was there in that? And why shouldn't they have a little fun—particularly as it was so safe and easy?

Buster was a remarkable talker. He had such a way with him that he could convince plenty of the fellows that black was white. Even such juniors as De Valerie, and Jerry Dodd and Owen major and Singleton—and fellows who were normally quite decent and above board—even these were convinced by Buster's ready tongue. They fooled themselves into believing that everything was quite all right, and that they were merely being good sports.

And that was the position in the Remove at present.

Over seven-eighths of the fellows were held fast under Buster's sway. And it was not merely by his Recreation Club that Buster gained such support. Certain juniors had absolutely refused to come under his jurisdiction. These, needless to say, were all Ancient House boys. The Monks backed Buster up solidly.

Those Fossils who were opposed to the new skipper were being subjected to a kind of terrorism. John Busterfield Boots had his own crowd—the fellows who called themselves the Faithful Five—had formed a kind of Ku Klux Klan. Their first victim had been Fatty Little.

They had persecuted him, terrorised him, and had finally compelled him to break away from the Die-Hard Party.

This latter was a small Opposition which had been started by me. It had come into being suddenly—dramatically. At first I had never dreamed of opposing Buster or questioning his authority as Remove captain.

But upon the occasion of the opening of the Remove Recreation Club I had found it necessary to put my foot down flatly and

determinedly. Under no circumstances could I countenance this gambling house, even though it was camouflaged under the guise of a harmless club.

So, on the spot, I had called for supporters. I had asked all the sensible, far-seeing juniors to rally to my support. I had asked them to show their disapproval of Buster's insanity by breaking away from him entirely. But I had been somewhat disappointed to find that only eleven fellows rallied to the call. The others were all under the hypnotism of Buster's personality.

There were twelve of us altogether—twelve fellows who had marched out of the club on that first night as a protest. And we had called ourselves the Die-Hards, and we were hoping that we should gain further supporters.

But Buster had been active.

The original twelve consisted of Tregellis-West, Watson, Pitt, Grey, Handforth, Church, McClure, Archie Glenthorne, Fatty Little, Alf Brent, Somerton, and myself. But now that Fatty Little had been forced into submission, there were only eleven of us left.

In short, the Die-Hard party was in a bad way.

For Archie Glenthorne and Alf Brent were now being victimised, and there was every indication the Die-Hards would be reduced to nine. Then, indeed, Buster would triumph—and I should be in danger of losing my remaining supporters.

I did not blame Fatty for deserting us.

Buster's methods were cunning. The rotters and the weaklings supported him because he appealed to their baser natures—and the worst of a fellow is far readier to spring uppermost than the best in him. One's baser nature is generally the more susceptible to beguiling words.

But those fellows who had wills of their own, and were ready to oppose this tyrant—this self-styled Boss—were subjected to constant and persistent tyranny and persecution. Buster was a fighter, with a boxing ability second to none in the College House, and he ruled with a rod of iron.

Fatty, keen enough to support me, had been reduced to a state of jumpy nerves by a succession of ill-natured, petty persecutions. On the top of this—just when his will power was sapped of all its strength—he had been captured by the Ku Klux Klan.

This latter was another of John Busterfield Boots' ideas. The St. Frank's "branch" of the Ku Klux Klan consisted of the Supreme Six—Buster and his clique. They had captured Fatty, and threatened him with added persecution, to say nothing of clipping off all his hair, unless he consented to leave the Die-Hard Party. And Fatty, being only human, had succumbed.

And now, to-day, all sorts of extraordinary things had been happening to Archie Glenthorne and Alf Brent. They had met with

a series of distressing misfortunes right from the moment they arose. There was no doubt that Buster and his allies were again busy.

And this time they meant to take two.

According to the previous arrangement, Archie and Alf would be pounced upon during the evening. They were both jumpy and nervous, after the events of the day, and were beginning to think that the game wasn't worth the candle. In other words, their morale was sadly affected. This, of course, was just Boots' object.

Alf came into the study after he had washed and dressed, and found Archie still reclining on the couch, deep in thought. He had not been able to indulge in his usual "forty of the best and brightest."

"I don't know," said Alf gruffly. "What's the use?"

"Eh?" asked Archie, starting. "What? I mean to say—"

"What's the use?" repeated Alf. "Blessed if I can see any sense in holding out, Archie. Buster's a rotter, but we needn't mix with him and his gang. Goodness knows I'm not a quitter, but there doesn't seem any hope for us by sticking to the Die-Hards."

"But, my dear old carrot!" protested Archie, adjusting his monocle, and gazing at Alf in a startled way. "But, my dear old tulip! I mean to say, Nipper's at the helm, don't you know! Nipper, the laddie with the bulging scheme-box! He's bound to do things soon! He's the Chief of the Die-Hards—"

"I know that," said Alf. "But what's Nipper done?"

"Eh? Well, give the chappie a chance, dash it!"

"He's had plenty of time," growled Alf. "Look at Fatty! He's left us, and I don't blame him. It isn't worth going through all this persecution, just to belong to a miserable minor party that hasn't a mite of power."

"Well, of course, there's something in that," agreed Archie thoughtfully. "Now you come to put it so dashed concisely, I've got to agree, old bird."

They were certainly low in vitality! Buster's plan was working well!

And then I bustled briskly into the study.

"Oh, here you are," I said, in a crisp voice. "Glad you're both still alive and kicking! Come on!"

"Come on—where to?" asked Brent.

"Common-room," I replied. "It's empty, except for our gang. Buster and his crowd are in the precious Club. We're holding a full Die-Hard meeting—the whole eleven of us."

"Absolutely!" said Archie brightly. "Is this where we do things, laddie?"

"Got a scheme against Buster?" asked Alf, in an eager voice.

"Not exactly; but we're going to see that you two fellows are kept guarded," I replied grimly. "After what's happened to-day I'm not taking any chances. But you needn't worry—I've got plenty of schemes. Trust me, children, and I'll pilot the party to victory. And we'll soon have members galore."

"What," said Archie, "did I tell you?"

He and Alf accompanied me to the Common-room, where Handforth and Co. and the rest of the Die-Hards were waiting. They were all grim and determined.

"All right; nothing's happened," said Reggie Pitt. "We're all safe here, and Buster can't do a thing."

CHAPTER V.

THE CUNNING OF BUSTER!



HANDFORTH was not looking very satisfied.

"I don't agree with this," he said gruffly.

"It's almost like an admission of weakness—all of us crowding together in a clump. Why not go on in just the usual way? Why not go to our own studies?"

I shook my head.

"When you talk about an admission of weakness—you're right," I said. "We are weak, and there's no sense in trying to make believe anything else. Buster's party outnumbered us so heavily that we shouldn't stand an earthly chance unless we clung closer together."

"And have we always got to do this?" asked Tommy Watson.

"Not always, but until we gain a few more members, anyhow," I replied. "I'm afraid you fellows are a bit impatient. Buster's got the upper hand, and it's no good trying to fool ourselves. The chances are that he'll make a big effort to get hold of Glenthorne and Brent this evening—"

"He'd better try it on!" growled Handforth.

The door of the Common-room opened, and we looked over in that direction quickly. Although the rest of the Remove had gathered in the Recreation Club, there was a constant suspicion that a raid was imminent.

But the newcomer was only Tubbs, the pageboy.

"Sorry to disturb you, young gents," said Tubbs. "But I'm just lookin' for Master Glenthorne—"

"What-ho!" said Archie. "Here we are, old scream!"

"Mr. Crowell wants to see you in his study, sir," said Tubbs.

(Continued on page 15.)

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(Now read on.)

FOUND AT LAST!

A quarter of an hour later, Mark Rymer, hatless and breathless, rushed into the Geyser House Hotel, at the end of the valley, and gasped out the startling news that his "manservant, John Andrews," had suddenly turned giddy on the edge of the Champagne Pool, and had fallen in.

A rescue party was instantly organised and despatched to the scene of the "accident." Their search, however, proved barren of result; and at half-past six next morning the professor resumed his journey.

Rotorua was reached on Wednesday night, and Auckland on Thursday. The Sonoma, from Sydney to San Francisco, arrived at Auckland on Friday night, and left, with Mark Rymer aboard, on Saturday.

On the following Tuesday week, after a voyage of ten days, the steamer arrived at Honolulu, the capital of the Sandwich Islands. Here the professor transhipped into a local steamer, and on the following

evening he landed at Hilo, on the island of Hawaii, and found himself within fifty miles of Lord Easington's missing heir!

IT was late in the evening when Mark Rymer went ashore at Hilo, so he decided to put up for the night there, and proceed to Kalapana next day. As luck would have it, there was a third-rate hotel just opposite the landing-stage, and as soon as the professor had engaged a bed there, and had satisfied his hunger, he interviewed the proprietor.

"Do you know a firm of planters in this island of the name of Pryde & Co.?" he asked.

The proprietor removed a corn-cob from his mouth, and expectorated through the open window.

"I should say," he replied, with a well-marked American drawl.

"I am given to understand," continued the professor, "that the head of the firm is a wealthy Englishman, named Mortimer Pryde."

"That's so," said the Yankee. "Least-wise, he ain't exactly the head of the firm—he's the firm itself."

"You mean that he is the sole proprietor of the concern?"

"Yep."

"Married?"

"Widower."

"Any children?"

"One daughter—a regular daisy!"

"Where is his estate?"

"Kalapana."

"Where's that?"

"It's a small seaside town on the south-east coast."

"Far from here?"

"Forty miles by road; twenty-five as the crow flies."

"How can I get there?"

"Ride, drive, or walk."

"No trains?"

The Yankee laughed.

"I guess not!" he said. "We ain't arrived at railroads yet."

"Does Mr. Pryde live at Kalapana?"

"No. I reckon yew'll have heard of Kilauea?"

The professor nodded his head. Kilauea is the largest active volcano in the world. To be strictly accurate, Kilauea is the name of the crater, and the name of the volcano is Mauna Loa.

"Waal," continued the Yankee, "Kilauea is about twelve miles inland from Kalapana, and Mr. Pryde's estate is between the two. His house is half-way up the mountainside."

"Do you know his manager?"

"Dick Seymour?"

"Yes. What's he like?"

"Tall, broad-shouldered, dark-brown hair and moustache, good-looking, strong as an ox."

"Where does he live?"

"On the outskirts of Kalapana. Going to see him?"

"I think so."

"Waal, when you get to Kalapana, jest ask the first man you meet to show yew Dick Seymour's bungalow, and ef he ain't blind he'll do it."

"I suppose I can't get from here to Kalapana and back in one day?"

"Yew might, but I reckon it'd be a tight fit. I guess if I were yew, I'd stay the night there."

"Is there an hotel in the place?"

"Jest one—the Stars and Stripes."

"Then I'll take your advice and stay there. I should like to start from here first thing to-morrow morning. You can loan me a horse?"

"Why, cert'nly! What time would yew like him brought around?"

"Nine o'clock sharp. Breakfast at eight."

"Right yew are!" said the landlord, as he replaced the corn-cob between his lips. "I'll see yew fixed up!"

He was as good as his word, and at nine o'clock next morning the professor started out on his forty-miles ride.

It was six o'clock in the evening when he reached the little seaside town, where he stabled his horse at the Stars and Stripes, and engaged a bed for the night.

"What a lovely view you have!" he remarked, as he joined the landlord on the wooden verandah in front of the hotel. "That's Kilauea, isn't it?"

"It is, sorr," said the landlord, who hailed from the Emerald Isle.

"And to whom does that estate belong?" inquired the professor, pointing to a long vista of sugar-canes, banana-trees, and rice-fields, which extended from the outskirts of the town to the foot of the volcano.

"To Mr. Pryde, sorr. 'Tis wan av the foinest istates in the oisland av Hawaii, and the man phwat owns it is worth ivery cint av a couple av million dollars. And there's no wan but a slip av a girl to inherit it!"

"Does he manage the estate himself?" asked the professor, who wished to find out where Dick Seymour lived, without appearing too inquisitive on the point.

"Not intoirely. He laves the greater part av the management to a broth av a bhoy from Austrailyer. A lucky young chap is Dick Seymour!"

"Dick Seymour? Is that the manager's name?"

"Yes, it is. He hadn't a cint to call his own whin he landed in Hawaii eighteen months ago. Aud luk at him now! He's manager av the istate, and gets a thousand dollars a year, wid an illigant house to live in, and a couple av natives to wait on him 'and and fut. That's his house; ye can just see the roof over beyant thim trees on the far side av that wood. See it?"

"Er—yes—I think so," said the professor, pretending to stifle a yawn.

He had got the information he required, and he now wished the landlord to understand that he was not at all interested in his gossip, and had only been listening out of politeness.

"I think I'll go for a stroll before I have supper," he said. "I should like to have a look round the town before it's dark. Expect me back about nine o'clock."

He nodded to the landlord and sauntered away.

As soon as he had turned the corner of the road he quickened his pace, and struck out in a bee-line for the house whose roof he had seen "over beyant thim trees on the far side av that wood."

A quarter of an hour's walk brought him within full view of the house, which proved to be a wooden bungalow, surrounded by a miniature plantation of screw-pines and candlenut trees.

As he paused to take stock of the place, a tall and athletic young fellow emerged from the door and stood for a moment on the verandah, with the golden light of the setting sun shining on his handsome face.

Quick as thought the professor concealed himself behind the trunk of a neighbouring tree.

Scarcely had he done so ere a small Hawaiian boy, who had been lying asleep at the foot of the tree, scrambled to his feet with a whimper of fear.

"Aloha!" (Love to you.) "Don't be frightened," said the professor, patting him on the head. "Me no going to hurt you—savvy? Here's a nickel for you." He thrust a coin into the youngster's hand. "You speakee English?" he asked.

The dark-hued laddie nodded his head. "Then tell me who that gentleman is," said the professor, pointing to the tall figure standing on the verandah.

"Dat Massa Seymour," said the boy.

Mark Rymer's arm dropped limply to his side, and he trembled from head to foot. Every nerve in his body tingled with excitement; every artery pulsed and throbbed as though it would burst. For quite ten seconds he stood and gazed at his intended victim in a silent, gloating triumph. Then two words burst from his twitching lips in a low hiss:

"At last!"

MARK RYMER OVERHEARS AN INTERESTING CONVERSATION.

BLISSFULLY unconscious of the glittering eyes which were watching him, Dick Seymour gazed across the serried rows of sugar-canes in the direction of Kilauea.

On one of the lower slopes of the famous volcano, now bathed in golden sunlight, and distinctly visible from the verandah of Dick's bungalow, stood a large stone house, built in the style of an English country mansion, and approached by a winding

carriage-road, which zig-zagged up the mountain-side and terminated at the entrance-gates. This was the residence of Mr. Pryde and his daughter, and as Dick gazed long and earnestly at its sun-reflecting windows, a self-reproachful sigh rose to his lips.

"It's wrong of me; I know it's wrong," he muttered to himself. "I oughtn't to go, yet I can't resist the temptation."

He placed one hand on the verandah-rail, and vaulted over into the garden. A moment later he had passed through a rustic gate, and was striding through the sugar-canes in the direction of the road above mentioned.

Like a cheetah stalking his prey, Mark Rymer glided after him. He thought that Dick was going to Mr. Pryde's; and he flattered himself that he had only to shadow Dick until he saw him enter the house, and then select some suitable spot where he could lie in wait for him, and shoot him as he returned to his bungalow.

The professor's calculations proved to be wrong, however. Dick was not going to Mr. Pryde's. About half-way up the road which led to the house was a little grove of palm-trees. The road had been cut through the very heart of this plantation, and was bordered on each side by a perfect jungle of trees and bushes. Upon reaching this spot Dick halted and consulted his watch. Then he planted himself with his back to one of the trees and fell into a reverie.

"Humph! That's the idea, is it?" mused Mark Rymer. "Waiting for somebody—eh? For whom, I wonder? Miss Pryde? Very likely. Dr. Irving said he was in love with her. M'yes! I think I see how matters stand. Master Dick has arranged with his employer's daughter to meet him here at a certain time, and he has turned up too soon. Now, if I could only creep a little nearer to him, so as to get a clear view of his head—"

His hand stole into his pocket in search of his revolver. Then a blasphemous imprecation burst from his lips. He had left his revolver at the Stars and Stripes Hotel!

For a moment he was literally beside himself with rage and mortification. Then a murderous gleam leaped into his eyes, and an expression of savage determination crossed his face.

"I'll not be beaten!" he hissed between his clenched teeth. "Revolver or no revolver, I'll not let such a golden opportunity slip. I have my knife. A dose of cold steel will do the trick as effectually as a dose of lead!"

He left the road, made a wide detour along the mountainside, and ultimately reached the little palm-grove. With every nerve astrain, he then commenced to crawl on his hands and knees towards the spot where Dick Seymour was standing.

A yard or two behind the tree against which Dick was leaning was a rounded boulder of solidified lava. Upon reaching this boulder, the professor paused and whipped out his pocket-knife. Having opened the biggest blade, he grasped the knife in his uplifted hand, and was just about to leap upon his unsuspecting victim from behind, when the measured tread of approaching footsteps fell on his ears. With a smothered oath, he hastily concealed himself behind the block of lava, and no sooner had he done so than the well-dressed figure of a somewhat portly gentleman hove in sight.

Dick had heard the footsteps, too, and had awakened from his reverie with something like a guilty start.

"Good-evening, sir!" he said, raising his hat, and addressing the new arrival, who was none other than Mr. Pryde.

"Good-evening!" said the latter gravely. "I thought I should find you here."

Again Dick started, and his sunburnt cheeks turned just a trifle redder. Before he could find his tongue, however, Mr. Pryde walked up to him and laid his hand, not unkindly, on his shoulder.

"I don't think I've been a bad friend to you, Dick," he said.

"You haven't, indeed, sir," said Dick. "You've been the best friend I ever had."

"Then don't you think you owe me something in return?" asked Mr. Pryde.

"When you came to Hawaii, eighteen months ago, you were penniless. I gave you employment, and in less than a year I promoted you to be manager of my estate at a salary of two thousand dollars a year. I do not claim any credit for that, for I shouldn't have done it, of course, if I hadn't thought you were worth the money. At the same time, I do think I had a right to expect that you would treat me in an honourable and straightforward fashion. Can you look me in the face and say that you have done so?"

Dick hung his head and made no reply.

"You know my position, and I think you know something of my ambitions," continued Mr. Pryde. "I am a rich man—richer, perhaps, than you think—and all that I have will one day be my daughter's. Is it unreasonable on my part, then, to expect my daughter to make a brilliant match—to marry a man whose wealth and position are at least equal to her own?"

Dick still remained silent.

"I am not going to tell you how I have discovered your secret," continued Mr. Pryde. "Suffice to say that I have learned to-day for the first time that for several months past you have been making love to Nellie, and have been in the habit of meeting her without my knowledge."

"I refused at first to believe it, but when I spoke to Nellie on the subject she frankly confessed that such was the case,

and that she had promised to meet you here this evening.

"Now, considering all that I have done for you, do you honestly think that your conduct in this matter has been that of an honourable and self-respecting man?"

At last Dick found his tongue.

"No, sir," he said, looking his employer full in the face; "I have acted like a cad—like an ungrateful scoundrel! I have no excuse to offer, except the excuse that to see Miss Pryde is to love her. But I ought to have been content to worship at a distance, and in silence. It was rank folly—it was worse than foolish, it was wicked to dream of winning her."

"I must have been mad to think of such a thing. But you have brought me to my senses. Do not misunderstand me. I do not mean that you have cured me of my love for Miss Pryde. That can never be. But you have opened my eyes to the base ingratitude and presumption of which I have been guilty. You have also made me realise how impossible it is for me to remain in your employment. If I were to remain here, not all the promises in the world could restrain me from showing Miss Pryde how much I loved her. I must go away, at once and for ever!"

"I am glad to hear you say that," said Mr. Pryde. "As you truly say, it is impossible that you should remain here after what has happened; and if you had not suggested going away of your own accord, I should have felt it my—my painful duty to ask you to accept a quarter's salary instead of a quarter's notice. Even though you have relieved me of this responsibility, and have practically taken your own discharge, I shall still be prepared to pay you—"

"Not a cent!" said Dick firmly. "Please do not add to my humiliation by offering me money."

Mr. Pryde bowed.

"Just as you like," he said. "I had no thought of humiliating you when I made that suggestion. If you will not allow me to help you with money, you will perhaps allow me to help you in some other way. Where will you go when you leave here?"

"I neither know nor care," said Dick recklessly.

Again Mr. Pryde laid his hand on the young fellow's shoulder.

"Don't talk like that, Dick," he said. "I should never forgive myself if you were to go to the bad. I should feel that I was morally responsible for your ruin. I admit that I think you have been to blame in making love to Nellie without my knowledge, but with that exception I have never seen anything in your conduct since you came here which had been that of an upright, fearless, and thoroughly honourable English gentleman. I don't think I ever came across a young fellow for whom I conceived a greater liking; and I don't

OUR DETECTIVE STORY SECTION

mind telling you, candidly and frankly, that if only you had a decent income and an assured position, there is no man in the world to whom I would more willingly give my daughter than yourself."

Dick drew himself up to his full height, and looked his employer squarely in the face.

"You mean that?" he asked, with eagerness.

"Every word of it," said Mr. Pryde earnestly.

"If I come to you in a couple of years, and show you that I have an income of,

"Where will you go?"

"To New York, I think. In the Sandwich Islands there is no scope unless one has capital. In new York it is different. A young fellow with brains and pluck can always be sure of coming out on top there."

Mr. Pryde smiled grimly, and shook his head.

"I'm afraid you've a lot to learn about New York," he said. "However, I don't wish to discourage you. On the contrary, I should like to help you. I know several prominent business men in New York, and



So sudden was the attack that before Dick realised what was happening he was lying on his back, and Mark Rymer was scuttling across the boulder-strewn plain with the fleetness of a hunted hare.

say, twenty thousand dollars a year, you will permit me to renew my suit for your daughter's hand?"

"I will. In the meantime, however, there is one condition I must impose."

"Name it."

"During those two years you must give me your word of honour that you will not attempt to communicate with Nellie, either by word of mouth, or by messenger, or by letter, or by telegram, or by any means whatever."

"I accept your condition."

"You will leave Hawaii?"

"At once."

shall be only too delighted to give you one or two letters of introduction."

"It's very good of you, sir," replied Dick, "but I would rather you didn't I would much prefer to do things entirely on my own, so to speak."

"It will be a hard, uphill fight, Dick."

"All the more credit if I win through, sir. Good-bye! I'm grateful for all your many kindnesses in the past, and for the hope you have given me to spur me on in the future."

"Shan't I see you again before you leave Hawaii?"

"No, sir. You will not see me again

until I come to claim the fulfilment of your promise. If I do not claim it in two years' time, you will know that I have gone under. Once more, good-bye!"

He raised his hat, turned on his heel, and strode away up a narrow, winding footpath that led towards the mountain summit.

For a few moments Mr. Pryde stood gazing after him. Then, with a wistful sigh, he slowly walked in the direction of his house.

"THE HOUSE OF FIRE."

MARK RYMER waited until Mr. Pryde was out of sight, then he glided from his hiding-place, and once more started out in stealthy pursuit of his intended victim.

By that time, however, Dick had disappeared round a turn in the winding footpath, and when next the professor caught sight of him he had gained the summit of one of the lower slopes, and was heading straight for the crater of Kilauea, which is not the usual cone-shaped hill, but an enormous oval pit, two miles in length and a mile and a half in width.

The walls of this pit are fully five-hundred feet in depth, and at the bottom is a lake of liquid lava, which is in a continual state of seething agitation. At night the cloud of vapour which hangs over this gigantic cauldron begins to glow, and lights up the walls of the pit with a weird effect.

Standing on the edge, one looks into a sea of flame and molten lava that boils and bubbles in odd and ever changing shapes.

Rising from the midst of this fiery lake are over fifty tiny craters, each of which is perpetually sending forth jets of lava, or spitting out flame and smoke.

Jutting out from the sides of the pit—which is known to the natives by the name of "Hale-mau-mau," or "The House of Fire"—are a number of circular rocky ledges, and by cautiously descending these it is possible for the adventurous traveller to make his way to the very edge of the boiling pool, and to stand quite close to the fiery jets.

On the north side of the crater are the Government road from Hilo and a handsome modern hotel, known as "Volcano House."

On the south side is a rocky, boulder-strewn plain, as lonely and desolate as the desert of Sahara.

As Kalapana lies to the south of Kilauea, it followed that Dick Seymour reached the crater by way of this plain.

By that time the sun had sunk to his rest, and darkness had descended with that startling suddenness which is peculiar to tropical climes.

Upon reaching the edge of the pit, he

folded his arms across his chest and gazed into its lurid depths with an air of deep dejection. Exactly why he had come he could not have explained; yet, nevertheless, he was conscious of a certain sense of consolation in gazing at the ceaseless agitation of the bubbling lava, which seemed to him to be fitly matched by the whirling turmoil which was raging in his brain.

When Mark Rymer perceived him standing thus, his thin lips parted in an evil smile.

"Verily, the Fates have delivered him into my hands!" he mused. "One push, and my task will be ended. Not only will Dick Seymour's fate be sealed, but I shall also be spared the trouble of disposing of his body. Kilauea will do that for me, and will hold my secret till the crack of doom. At the same time, I may just as well be prepared for emergencies."

Once more he whipped out his pocket-knife and opened the blade. Then he dragged himself in snakelike fashion across the boulder-strewn plain, hiding behind the boulders when the eerie light glowed brightly, and resuming his advance when the light died down again.

Inch by inch he lessened the gap between himself and Dick, till at last there was less than a couple of yards between them. Then, scarcely daring to breathe, he rose to his feet. But even as he did so, Dick spun round on his heel with a startled gasp, which was changed an instant later to a cry of alarm, as the professor, with a panther-like bound, sprang towards him and aimed a lightning blow at his heart.

With matchless presence of mind, Dick lashed out with his fist, and struck up the professor's arm. Nothing daunted, the latter dropped his knife, and grappled with his rival at close quarters.

For a moment they reeled and swayed on the very brink of the smoke-enshrouded crater. Then an ear-splitting yell of fear rang out, and an instant later, locked in each other's arms, the two men overbalanced themselves and vanished into the pit.

Though not a sound escaped Dick's lips—for the yell of fear had been uttered by Mark Rymer—he was none the less certain that his doom was sealed; that he and his unknown foe must meet death together in the lake of fire, five hundred feet below.

Happily, however, he was wrong in his surmise. They were saved from destruction by the fact that, as already mentioned, the inner walls of the crater bristled with numerous ledges, one of which fortunately projected from the walls of the pit, about twenty feet below the spot where the two men had overbalanced themselves. The consequence was, that instead of plunging into the lake of lava, they fell on to this projecting ledge; whereupon Dick loosed his grip on the professor's throat, clutched him by the coat-collar with one hand, and

anchored himself to the ledge with the other.

For more than a minute they remained in this position, neither of them daring to move, and both more or less dazed.

Dick was the first to recover his scattered wits. He dragged himself into a sitting posture, and slowly passed his hand over the professor's face, which he had not yet seen, and which he was still unable to see by reason of the darkness.

"Big nose, high-domed forehead, deep-set eyes, no moustache," he murmured to himself. Then, aloud: "Who are you, and why did you attack me?"

There was no reply. The professor's brain was rapidly recovering its customary alertness, and he realised that if he spoke he would furnish Dick with a means of recognising him in the future.

"You won't speak—eh?" growled Dick, as he slipped his hand into his hip pocket. "Very good. Perhaps this will assist you to find your tongue."

He whipped out a revolver, and clapped the muzzle to Mark Rymer's head.

"Unless you answer me before I have counted three," he began—but ere he could complete his threat his voice was drowned by a short, sharp, deafening explosion, which appeared to take place in the centre of the molten lake, and which was followed by an ominous, sullen, booming roar.

"The lava is rising! There's going to be an eruption!" gasped Dick, leaping to his feet. "Quick! There's not a second to be lost! Follow me!"

He thrust his revolver into his pocket, and began to climb up the rugged side of the pit, swinging himself from ledge to ledge with the agility of a squirrel.

Mark Rymer lost no time in following suit, but, as events turned out, their panic-stricken haste proved entirely uncalled for, for by the time Dick reached the crater's mouth the booming roar had died away, and the seething, bubbling lava, which had risen some forty or fifty feet, was slowly sinking back to its former level.

As soon as Dick realised that the danger was over he once more whipped out his revolver; and the instant Mark Rymer scrambled out of the pit, Dick pounced upon him, seized him by the lapel of his coat, and thrust the revolver into his face.

"What's your name?" he said.

"John Smith!" said the professor, in a low, sullen voice, as unlike his own as he could possibly make it.

"Where do you come from?" was Dick's next question.

"Hilo."

Dick shrugged his shoulders.

"You're lying!" he said curtly. "I don't believe a word you've said. However, we'll soon find out whether you're speaking the truth or not. Right about face—quick march!"

"Where—where are you going to take me?" stammered Mark Rymer, holding back and pretending to be overcome with terror.

Dick pointed to the distant lights of the hotel on the north side of the crater.

"I'm going to take you to Volcano House," he said. "The proprietor is a Hilo man, and he knows everybody in that neighbourhood, so that if you—"

His sentence ended in a startled cry, for at that moment Mark Rymer suddenly dropped on his knees, grasped his captor by the ankles, and jerked him backwards off his feet!

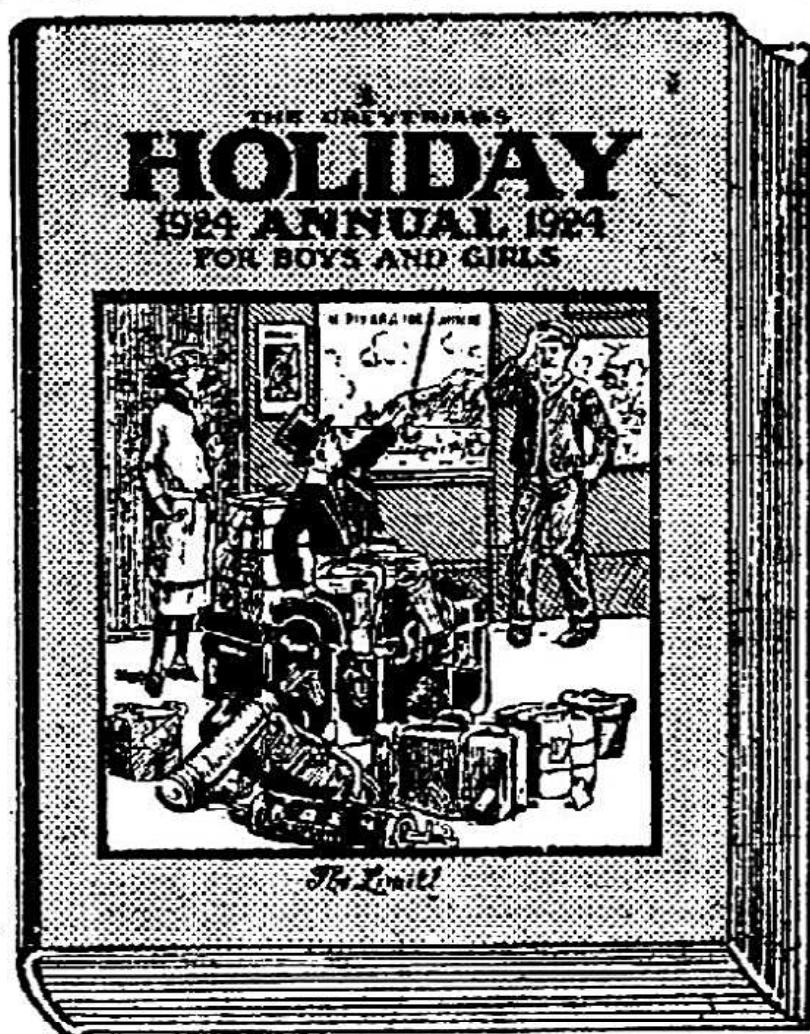
So sudden and unexpected was this novel form of attack that Dick Seymour was completely taken by surprise, and before he had realised what was happening he was lying on his back, and Mark Rymer was scuttling across the boulder-strewn plain with the fleetness of a hunted hare.

Fuming with chagrin, Dick scrambled to his feet, and dashed away in hot pursuit. By that time, however, the darkness had swallowed his assailant up, and although, just at first, he was able to keep on the professor's track by following the sound of his flying footsteps, the time soon came when the footsteps were no longer audible, and further pursuit was impossible. Under these circumstances Dick had no alternative but to abandon the chase, and, with his brain in a whirl of bewildered conjecture as to the meaning of this mysterious attempt upon his life, he struck out at a swinging pace in the direction of his bungalow.

(Another Long Gripping Instalment Next Week.)

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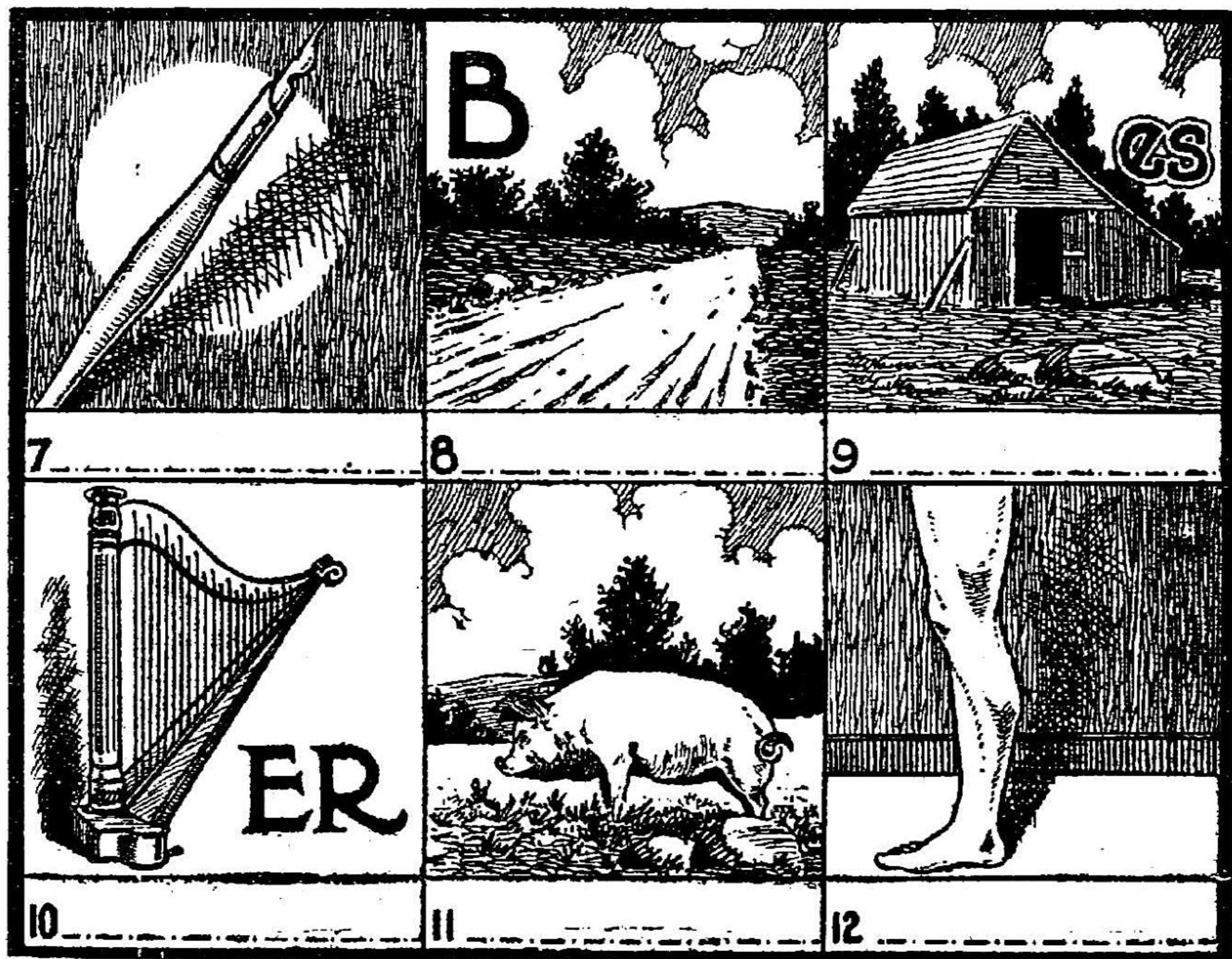
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SECOND SET!

SECOND WEEK!



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Which must be strictly adhered to.

1. The First Prize of £100 will be awarded to the competitor who sends in the correct, or nearest correct solution of all eight sets of the pictures, according to the Editor's official solution.
2. The Second Prize of £50, and the others in the splendid variety of prizes, will be awarded in order of merit.
3. All the prizes will be awarded. If two or more competitors tie, however, the prize or prizes, or their value will be divided, and the Editor reserves full rights in this respect.
4. No solutions may be sent in until all the sets of the pictures and the necessary coupon have been published. Full directions will then be given.
5. The names under the pictures must be written IN INK.
6. Employees of the proprietors of this journal are not eligible to compete.
7. Entry to this competition is on the full understanding that the Editor's decision is final and legally binding throughout.

Readers of the "The Champion," "Boys' Friend," "Union Jack," "Boys' Realm," "Pluck," "Magnet," "Young Britain," "Gem," "The Popular," "The Rocket," and "Boys' Cinema," are also taking part in this Contest, so that additional attempts may be made with the pictures from these allied journals.

ALL YOU HAVE TO DO.

is to write IN INK in the allotted space under each of these puzzle - pictures the name of the Footballer which you think the picture represents. Thus with No. 1. in the first set (see page X.) the picture clearly means BALL. In the same way you have to discover the names indicated by these other six pictures. In all, there will be EIGHT SETS OF PICTURES, so keep your solutions until the other sets appear.

DO NOT SEND YOUR
ENTRIES YET.

THEIR NAMES ARE ALL HERE.

The following list of names will aid you in making your solutions.

Ashurst Anderson, Armstrong, Aitken, Adams, Amos, Alderson, Allen, Armitage, Archibald, Ashmore.

Brett, Broadhead, Blyth, Boreham, Blackburn, Bradford, Bassnett, Brittain, Blair, Ball, Barkas, Birrell, Bradley, Barnes, Bulling, Burton, Branston, Buchan, Blake, Bowser, Bishop, Barras, Braithwaite, Bullock, Bliss, Bateman, Best, Bagge, Barson, Broadhurst, Broad, Bolam, Brelsford, Blenkinsopp, Beedie, Birch, Bellamy, Bainbridge, Bowen, Burnham, Boyle, Blackwell, Bennie, Ballantyre, Buchanan, Bamber, Byers, Banks, Brooks, Blood, Baker, Bird, Bromilow.

Cockle, Crosbie, Cross, Clennel, Cameron, Chedgoy, Cock, Chadwick, Clough, Curry, Cookson, Cope, Cook, Crilly, Chaplin, Collier, Crockford, Campbell, Crown, Chance, Chipperfield, Crompton, Charlton, Conner, Craig, Cosgrove, Cherrett, Crossley, Carter, Clarke, Cotton, Cunningham, Cairns, Clunas, Connolly, Cassidy, Carr, Cowan, Chapman, Chambers, Clay, Cresswell.

Dunn, Dickson, Dorrell, Dawson, Davies, Donaldson, Dinsdale, Dimmock, Duckett, Duncan, Dominy, Davison, Duckworth, Dockray, Danskin, Dreyer, Denoon, Denyer, Duffus, Dunlop, Dixon, Doyle, Doran, Dale.

Emerson, Evans, Ellerington, England, Ellis, Edelston, Edgley, Eggo, Elliot, Edge, Edwards, Emmett, Ewart.

French, Ferguson Ford, Forshaw, Flood, Fletcher, Flint, Feebary, Fleming, Fleetwood, Flynn, Fox, Foxall, Fort, Forbes, Fowler, Fazackerley, Findlay, Featherstone, Forsythe, Frame, Fyfe, Finney, Forster, Fitton, Fairclough, Fern.

Grimshaw, Gill, Gilchrist, Gough, Gillespie, Grimsdell, Gittins, Gibson, Graham, Goldthorpe, Grundy, Gallogley, Gibbon, Gomm, Gregory, George, Getwood, Groves, Greig, Gardner, Gallagher, Glancy, Greenshields, Gourlay, Goodchild.

Howarth, Haworth, Hampton, Harrow, Harland, Hopkin, Hudspeth, Harris, Hamill, Hill, Hardy, Hamilton, Hawes, Handley, Hufton, Hine, Hughes, Heap, Higginbotham, Hoddinott, Hebden, Hilditch, Howson, Hunter, Hayes, Hutchins, Hannaford, Harrold, Howie, Henshall, Hodges, Halstead, Hugall, Hogg, Henderson, Harper, Hulton, Hillhouse, Hair, Hart Haines, Hole.

Irvine, Islip, Iremonger, Irwin.

Jennings, Jack, Jackson, Johnson.

ANOTHER OPPORTUNITY FOR THOSE WHO MISSED LAST WEEK! SEE BELOW.

Kirton, Kelly, Kneeshaw, Keenor, Kay, Knowles, Kane, Keenlyside, Kidd, Kilpatrick, Kean.

Linfoot, Longworth, Low, Lindsay, Little, Lonsdale, Lockhead, Longmuir, Lea, Lievesley, Lane Lockett, Legge, Lofthouse, Lenny, Lyner, Lawson, Lambie, Lacey.

Moss, Mort, Moscrop, Meehan, Maitland, Mitchell, Murphy, Morgan, Milton, Mercer, Marshall, Magee, Moore, Martin, Mills, Mason, Mew, Matthews, Moule, Myers, Marsden, Middleton, Maidment, Mehaffy, Mee, Moody, Musgrove, Malcolm, Morton, Manderson, Meiklejohn, Muirhead, Moffat, Mutch, Meredith, Marriott, Mackie, Menlove, Mitton, Marks, Marsh, M'Intyre, M'Neil, M'Kinlay, M'Nabb, M'Intosh, M'Donald, M'Call, M'Grory, M'Cluggage, M'Candless, M'Coll, M'Lacklan, M'Stey, M'Lean, M'Alpine, M'Kenna, M'Inally, M'Nair, M'Minn, McBain, McCracken.

Nuttall, Neesham, Neil, Needham, Nash, Nisbet, Nelson.

Osborne, Ormston, Orr, O'Hare.

Pym, Pringie, Price, Parker, Poole, Pater-son, Pearson, Penn, Plum, Page, Preston, Probert, Pagnam, Peel, Potts, Palmer, Prouse Puddefoot, Pender, Pape, Peacock, Pantling, Partridge, Peers.

Quantrill, Quinn.

Robson, Rollo, Raitt, Richardson, Rawlings, Ruffell, Robbie, Rigg, Radford, Ridiey, Reay, Ramsey, Robb, Ritchie, Ranskin, Reed, Rooke, Roe.

Spiers, Smart, Stephenson, Seddon, Sewell, Smelt, Smith, Scott, Siade, Spencer, Seymour, Spavin, Sampy, Seed, Storer, Stage, Shea, Steele, Simms, Smailes, Symes, Stur-gess, Sayles, Spottiswood, Scattergood, Sinclair, Stuart, Sayer, Sutcliffe, Salt, Summerfield, Shaw, Sillito, Sneddon, Som-merville, Shone, Streets, Sampey, Stannard, Skinner, Sage.

Townrow, Turnbull, Tremelling, Thain, Troup, Tunstall, Tresadern, Tonner, Thoms, Torrance, Tompkin, Titmuss, Tempest, Tim-mins, Thorpe, Templeton, Townsley, Toner.

Urwin.

Voysey, Vizard, Vallis, Voisey, Vigrass.

Womack, Walsh, Weaver, Wilding, Whit-ton, Wadsworth, Woosnam, Woodhouse, Walters, Walden, Watson, Wainscoat, Wood, Williams, Winship, Wolfe, Whitehouse, Whalley, Whipp, Wolstenholme, Waterall, Worrall, Williamson, Weston, Wigglesworth, Ward, Webster, Whitehurst, Waddeil, Wright, Wilson, Wren, Widdowson, Wylie, White, Welsh, Walker.

York.

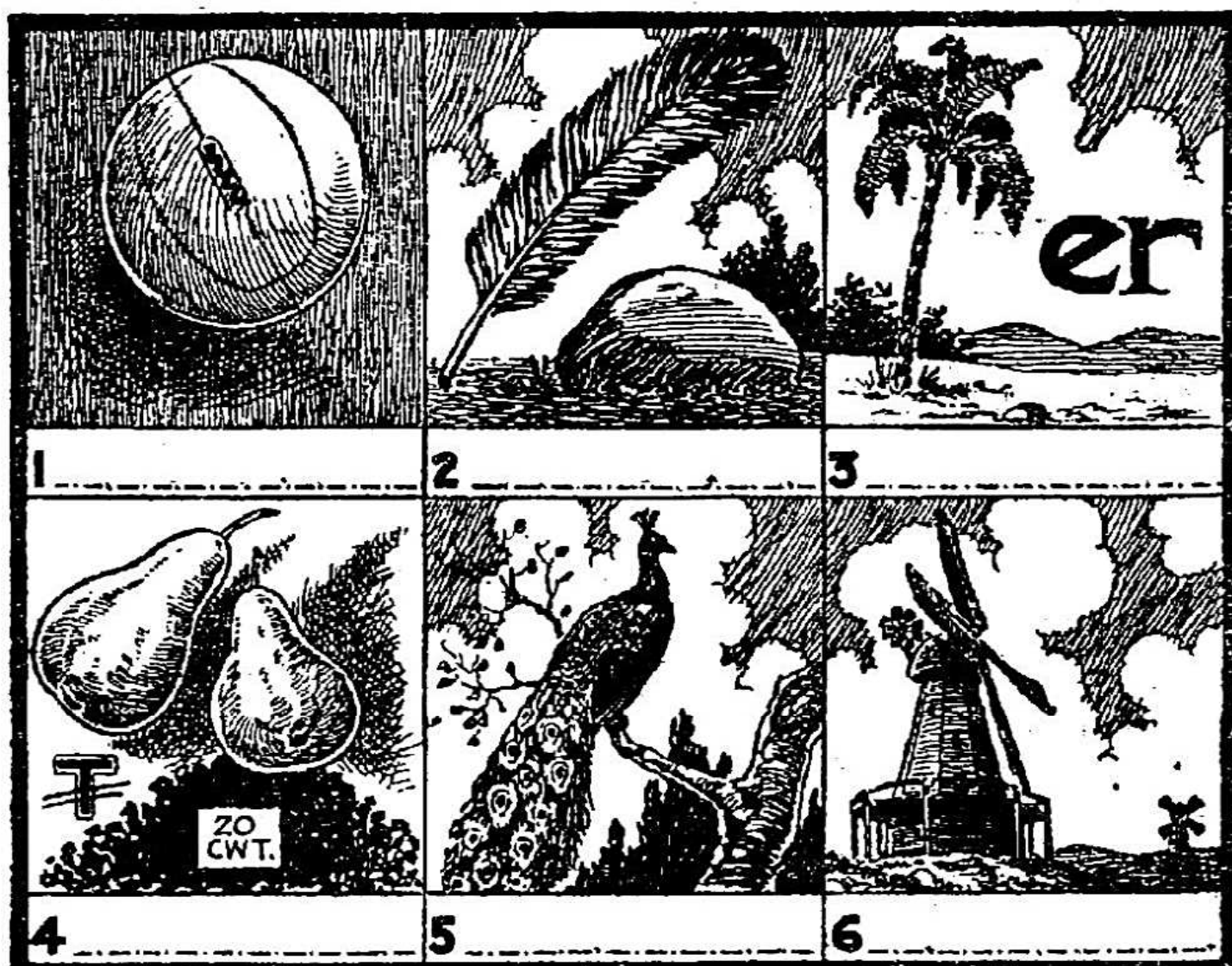
FIRST SET—Specially reprinted for new competitors.

IT IS NOT TOO LATE

to enter this Compe-tition to-day. Here is the set of pictures published last Wed-nesday. New Compe-titors can therefore start right away.

To aid readers we explained last week that the first picture here represents the name **BALL**.

Now get on with the other solutions in the same way!



(Continued from page 14.)

"By gad!" said Archie, startled. "That's rather frightful, don't you know! I mean to say, hauled on the old carpet, what? On the mat, and all that sort of stuff!"

"Mr. Crowell tells me to find you, Master Glenthorne, and bring you to his study quick," went on Tubbs. "'Tain't nothing agin you, young gent."

"Nothin' agin me?" repeated Archie. "I—I mean—"

"'Tain't my business, Master Glenthorne, but I did 'appen to 'ear Mr. Crowell sayin' something to Master Morrow, who was in the study just then," went on Tubbs. "Seems like Mr. Crowell's heard from your father, sir. He's got a letter there, and some banknotes, I believe—"

"What-ho!" said Archie, with relief. "That, of course, is somewhat diff.! The pater mentioned something about sending a ripping subscription to some bally fund or other. Laddies, I must away! Kindly allow me to trickle forth, and—"

"Wait a minute, Archie," I interrupted. "You're not going alone!"

"Eh? But—"

"You've got to have a guard!"

"Gadzooks!"

"Buster's the kind of fellow who takes advantage of a sudden opportunity," I continued grimly. "He's probably got an ambush ready, and before you get to Mr. Crowell's study you'll be pounced upon and dragged away!"

"That, of course, would be poisonous," agreed Archie. "So you suggest taking a few measures—what?"

"Yes; five of us will go with you as a bodyguard," I replied. "Pitt, you'll stay here with three more and look after Brent. I don't suppose for a minute anything will happen in these few minutes, but it's just as well to be on the safe side."

Reggie Pitt nodded.

"Wise words, O chief!" he said. "Go ahead!"

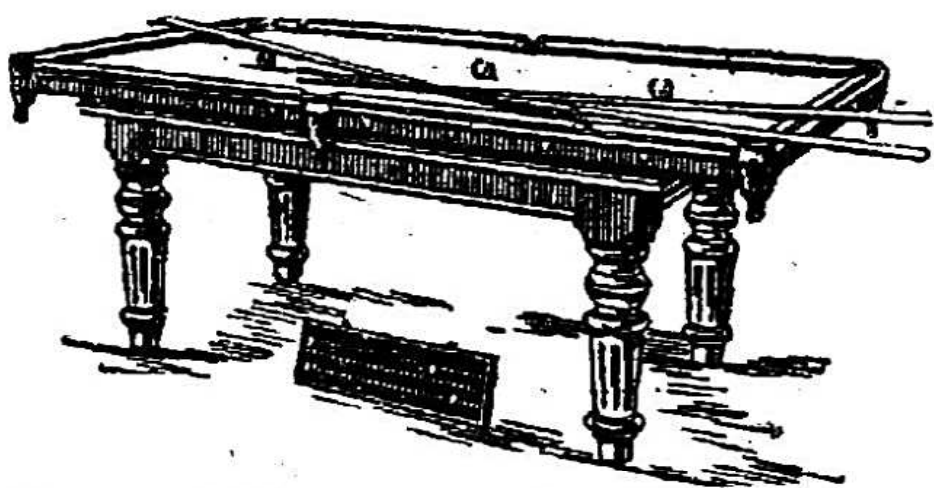
My precaution, although probably unnecessary, was better under all the circumstances. It wasn't likely that Buster Boots would have an ambush ready for Archie Glenthorne, but it was just as well to take due precautions.

And so we sallied out of the Common-room, Handforth leading the way, and the rest of us surrounding Archie as though he were some royal personage in danger of a bomb outrage.

And thus we proceeded along the corridor until we reached the corner. Mr. Crowell's study was round the bend. We paused at the corner, and found that the coast was quite clear. Our suspicions, after all, were unfounded.

"Go on, Archie; we'll stay here," I said, in a soft voice. "I don't suppose Mr. Crowell will keep you long, and we'll be waiting so that we can escort you back. Can't march straight up to the door."

Archie nodded



Your skill may make this yours!

"Dear old chappie, I must be allowed to remark that your brain is frightfully concentrated," he declared, with admiration. "I mean to say, a good old escort back—what? Priceless! Remain here, dear old tulips, and Archie will soon be back in the fold. Absolutely!"

The elegant junior set his tie a little straighter, brushed a speck or two of dust from his jacket, and marched up to the door of Mr. Crowell's study. After a preliminary tap he entered, and closed the door behind him.

Handforth gave vent to a grunt.

"We're having a fine time, ain't we?" he asked sarcastically.

"Don't growl!" I exclaimed. "We couldn't let Archie go alone. He had to be protected—"

"But, you ass, there's nothing to protect him against!"

"No, but we weren't sure of that, were we?" I said. "You don't seem to realise one thing, Handy, but you've got to get it firmly in your head. We're in the minority."

"The what?" said Handforth, staring. "Ass! We're in the passage!"

"You—you funny ass!" I said, glaring. "This isn't the time to joke! We, the Die-Hards, are absolutely outnumbered, and the only possible way to meet with any success is to keep constantly on the alert."

"Oh, well, I suppose you're right!" said Handforth. "But I don't see any fun in this. I think we ought to start something drastic. Why not go to the giddy club and smash up that roulette table? Now, that would be something sensible! Go to the place, and create havoc—"

"All in good time," I said. "But you fellows never seem to realise that it's the most fatal mistake of all to act before the time is ripe. All the Remove fellows are under Buster's sway just now. Give them time to escape from his influence! It won't last long—his kind of leadership is only temporary. I'm playing a waiting game—"

"Hear, hear!" agreed Handforth. "We're waiting all right! I wonder how much longer that fathead's going to be? Once Archie starts jawing, he goes on for ages!"

He looked round the corner, but there was no sign of Archie emerging from Mr. Crowell's study. And then came a sharp

footstep in the corridor behind us. And we heard a cough, too—a well known cough. In that instant I knew something was wrong, and I turned red with sudden anger and alarm.

Twirling round, I came face to face with Mr. Crowell!

"Well, boys, what are you doing here?" inquired the Form-master pleasantly.

"What is this—a deputation?"

"Where's Glenthorne?" roared Handforth.

"Good gracious! What is the matter with you, Handforth?"

"It's all right, sir; nothing to worry about," I interrupted. "But, you see, we thought Glenthorne was in your study with you. We were waiting for him here. Somehow, we made a mistake."

"Undoubtedly," replied Mr. Crowell, as he walked forward. "I have just returned from Bannington, and gave no instructions for Glenthorne to be sent to my study. However, he may have come to see me of his own accord. I will soon tell you, boys."

As Mr. Crowell opened the door of his study, we gazed at one another significantly. One or two of the fellows were rather bewildered, but there was nothing mystifying in this affair to me. I knew just what had happened—I knew how we had been tricked.

Mr. Crowell turned his head, smiling.

"You were mistaken, boy—Glenthorne is not here. If there is anything that I can do——"

"It's all right, sir, thanks," I interrupted. "It's not important."

The Form master nodded, and closed his study door. Handforth and the others looked at me in consternation.

"But—but Archie went in there!" breathed Watson amazedly.

"An ambush!" I said curtly.

"Ambush?"

"Of course," I declared. "Oh, what an idiot! But how was I to know? How was I to guess that those cads would bring Tubbs into their rotten schemes? Buster and his gang must have been waiting inside Mr. Crowell's study—knowing that old Crowell was out. Archie walked straight into the arms of the enemy."

In spite of my anger, I could not help feeling a twinge of admiration for Buster. For the cunning of this scheme was great. As we hurried down the corridor we suddenly caught sight of Tubbs. But he instantly took to his heels.

"Hi! Come here!" roared Handforth.

"Oh, let him go—he couldn't help it, poor kid!" I said. "I expect Buster threatened him with all sorts of awful things if he didn't do as he was told. The main thing is to get back to the common-room and prevent anything happening to Brent."

We hurried to the Remove common-room and burst in. It was a shock, but not altogether a surprise, to find Reggie Pitt and the other guards sorting themselves out,

and rubbing various bruises. One of the windows stood wide open, and there was no sign of Alf Brent.

"They've got Brent, too!" yelled Handforth.

"It wasn't our fault!" said Pitt, with concern. "By jingo! A whole crowd of chaps swept down on us, headed by Armstrong. We were outnumbered four to one. And while the rotters kept us busy, Brent was shoved through the window. And the crowd vanished immediately afterwards."

I gritted my teeth. Buster's activity was startling. In spite of all our precautions—in spite of all the steps that we had taken to safeguard the pair—they had been taken from under our very noses! And now, no doubt, they were in the hands of this so-called Ku Klux Klan. As far as I could see, the Die-Hard Party had lost another two members!

And I was right. Without having much hope, the nine of us hurried out into the Triangle. There was just a possibility that we might spot some of the Monks. But no. The Triangle was nothing but blackness—a roaring, gale-swept area, where the leaves and the gravel dust whisked up in continuous eddies. The gale was dying down somewhat, but it was still very powerful.

And after we had roamed round a bit, we saw the hopelessness of our quest. When just as we were returning into the Ancient House doorway, two figures came staggering out of the wild darkness.

They were Archie Glenthorne and Alf Brent. Archie did no talking—somehow, he didn't seem capable of it, but Brent told us, in a dull, heavy voice, that he and Archie had left the Die-Hard Party.

Something had happened to them—but they would not say what. They couldn't give any details. I knew, of course, of the terrorism that John Busterfield Boots was capable of, and I didn't blame the two juniors for their attitude.

There was one satisfactory feature about the case. Brent and Archie had absolutely refused to support Buster. They had promised to leave the Die-Hard Party, but would remain neutral.

In any case, they were lost to me. The Die-Hards now numbered nine only! I was very grim—and very thoughtful. Something would certainly have to be done! Instead of going backwards, we should have to go forwards!

CHAPTER VI.

THE NEXT VICTIM!



JOHN BUSTERFIELD
BOOTS grinned amiably. "Well, that's that!" he said, as he dusted his jacket. "Pretty quick work, eh? Two more of the bounders gone, and another success for us. I'll bet Nipper's feeling pretty rotten!"

"My hat, rather!" grinned Percy Bray. "Poor chap! He and his giddy Die-Hards! If you ask me, they die jolly easily! Once they get into our power, they knuckle under like scared rabbits!"

Three members of the Supreme Six were chatting together in a corner of the Recreation Club. This was situated in the old laboratory annexe, just behind the cloisters, where everything was quiet and still. At least, it was quiet and still usually. At present the wind was howling and moaning loudly.

Buster Boots and his chums had just come in, after attending the little matter involving Archie Glenthorne and Alf Brent. The two Die-Hards had been dealt with very drastically. Their treatment had been even worse than Fatty Little, and they were not to be blamed in the slightest degree for becoming neutrals. After all, they hadn't turned traitors.

"It's not a bad idea to take them in pairs," said Denny.

"Best idea we've struck yet," agreed Buster. "We've got nine more to deal with—five raids, to be exact. We'll take Nipper last, all by himself. Why, by the end of the week we shall have squashed this Die-Hard Party out of existence!"

"Good!" said Bray. "Who's going to be next?"

"H'm! Let me see," mused Buster. "Church and McClure? No—Handforth will probably be difficult just now, and he's bound to be lively. Tregellis-West and Watson? No—we'll take them at the last, next to Nipper. I think it'll have to be Pitt and Grey."

"Just what I was going to suggest," nodded Denny.

"There's one alteration I'm going to make," continued Buster, in a low voice. "We'll do none of the usual persecution tomorrow. No sniping with pea-shooters, and all that sort of thing."

"Why not?" asked Bray. "That's all part of the treatment!"

"I believe in having plenty of change," said the Remove captain calmly. "And don't forget that we shan't always have the luck that we had this evening. The further we go, the more these chaps will take precautions. And we don't want to give them any inkling as to who the next two victims will be."

"Do you think Pitt and Grey will knuckle under?" asked Denny dubiously.

"I don't think—I know!" replied Buster. "I shall force them to obey my will. You needn't worry—I'm absolutely confident."

And the great J.B.B. strolled away, and stood looking on at the big central table—where roulette was being played feverishly and excitedly. It was rather a pitiful game, when you came to look at it seriously.

The fellows were playing for sixpences and shillings—some for halfpennies and pennies. There was a certain hectic excitement about it, but it only lasted while the game was

on—afterwards came the reaction. Quite a number of the juniors had been slacking noticeably at their work of late.

But the juniors fooled themselves into believing that this was enjoyment. Later on, perhaps, when they came to their senses, they would realise the utter foolishness of their actions.

And in the meantime, while the Remove was pretending to enjoy itself, the Die-Hards were holding another meeting. The nine of us had gathered together in Study C. And I was conscious of the fact that many of the fellows were looking impatient and indignant. Handforth, of course, was talking—growling and grumbling about my inactivity. And even Pitt and Grey were looking at me in rather a queer fashion.

"Don't you think it's about time we woke up, old man?" asked Reggie Pitt quietly.

"Is that meant to be a little friendly jibe?" I smiled.

"Why, no, but——"

"All right—we won't start any arguments!" I said smoothly. "But here we are, the entire Die-Hard Party—nine of us. We've lost three of our members, and we've got to look the facts in the face."

"It's all the fault of being so jolly peaceful!" snorted Handforth. "I don't believe in this watching and waiting game. It doesn't pay—and this has proved it! The further we go on, the less powerful we get! What's the good? How the dickens do you suppose that we can fight against that great crowd?"

"We're not going to," I replied.

"Not going to?"

"No—there's only one plan for us to adopt, and we shall go ahead with it," I said. "We shall attack Buster Boots, and nobody else."

"Nobody else?" repeated Pitt.

"Buster made the mistake of going for the comparatively harmless fellows in our party," I continued. "Instead of making his attacks upon me, he went for Archie and Fatty Little and Brent. Brent's a good man, of course, but Archie and Fatty were mainly ornaments."

"I don't see what you're trying to get at," growled Handforth.

"Why, just this," I explained. "Buster has left our party with all the most important fellows untouched. Therefore, when you say that we're weakened, you're wrong—we're as strong as ever we were. In a matter of brute force, twelve is hardly any better than nine. But this won't be a fight of brute force—but of brains."

"And the brains of the Die-Hard Party are still intact, eh?" grinned Pitt.

"Exactly," I replied. "I have just been waiting to see how far Buster would go—to find out what his plan was, and how he would put it into execution. Handy doesn't believe in the waiting game, but I do. It's always safer in the end—and it

gives us a bigger advantage—bigger than you realise!"

"How?" demanded Handforth gruffly.

"Why should I tell you the obvious?" I said. "My dear chap, think! Buster has the impression that we're all trembling with fright—wondering who the next victim is going to be. He thinks we're helpless. But it would be rather a surprise for Buster if he knew that next victim marked down for treatment was—himself!"

"Himself?" breathed Pitt, his eyes gleaming.

"Precisely!" I said calmly. "We've let things go on nicely—until Buster has been lulled into a sense of complete security. But to-morrow Buster will go through such a dickens of a time that he'll begin to wish he'd never dreamed of this persecution stuff. What's sauce for the goose, my sons, is sauce for the gander!"

"You—you mean——"

"I mean that Buster won't find his own medicine at all palatable," I said grimly.

"Particularly when he gets that medicine in a much more concentrated form. Look here, you chaps—I'm getting a bit tired of you accusing me of inactivity and slackness. There's been a method in my attitude all the time. If you'll only trust me, we'll kill this terrorism once and for all—we'll kill it within twenty-four hours!"

The Die-Hards looked at me eagerly, and with renewed enthusiasm.

"By gad!" said Somerton. "You're deep, you know—jolly deep!"

"It's not a question of deepness, it's simply a matter of judgment," I replied. "To you fellows it seems I was waiting an unnecessarily long time. But that was just a part of my plan to egg Buster on. You've generally noticed, haven't you, that I always wait a good bit before doing anything decisive?"

"Well, yes," said Reggie.

"But in the end I generally meet with success, don't I?" I went on. "Why? Simply because I do take my time. Don't forget, my sons, that nothing lasting or permanent can be accomplished in haste. That doesn't apply merely to this sort of thing, but to everything of importance in life. To do a job thoroughly, you've got to put your heart and soul into it, and you've got to take time. Then it's done properly."

"The lecture will be over at nine!" grinned Church.

"Oh, dry up—I'm not lecturing," I growled. "I'm simply trying to show you fellows that my system is the only good one. We're going to make reprisals. What happened during the Great War? When the Germans came and bombed England, the British did nothing for weeks and months. And the Germans kept on bombing us. But at last—when the British did start on the job, they did it thoroughly!"

"But what's that got to do with us?" said Handforth, staring.

"On an insignificant scale, we're about

to adopt the same tactics," I replied. "But we're not going to make Buster's bloomer. Instead of going for the smaller fry, we're aiming at the top. It's Buster himself who'll suffer to-morrow. In fact, Master Boots will get something of a shock."

The Die-Hards regarded me eagerly and intently.

"What's the programme?" asked Pitt crisply.

For a full half-hour I talked. Then I invited suggestions from the others. Many came, particularly some wild and woolly ones from Handforth. These, needless to say, were not adopted.

At bedtime we went to the dormitory as usual, but there was no sleep for nine fellows belonging to the Ancient House. At eleven o'clock I crept out of bed, and aroused the others.

Our party consisted of six—and we mysteriously vanished.

It was not until two-thirty that we returned. We had been absent for three and a half hours, and returned tired, weary, but thoroughly satisfied with our work. We felt that the loss of a little sleep would be amply repaid on the morrow.

After all, revenge is very sweet!

And the morrow would be Buster's own little birthday!

CHAPTER VII.

THE BITER BIT!



CLANG—clang—clang! "The rising bell clattered out its usual unwelcome note in the College House. The fellows in the Remove dormitory rolled over, yawned, stretched,

and the majority of them snuggled down for an extra snooze.

It was getting wintry these days, and many of the mornings of late had been very chilly indeed.

John Busterfield Boots turned over, and sat up. At least, he made a move to sit up. But, somehow, it seemed that his right hand was caught against the bedrail, at the top. It was Buster's favourite sleeping position to lay on his back with his hands above his head, clasped there over his red locks. Sometimes his hands would grasp the bedrails for a change.

"What the dickens——" began Buster.

As he moved his right hand there was a clang of metal. Dinly, he remembered arousing himself into a half wakeful position on at least two occasions in the darkness. He had had an impression that somebody had been holding his wrist. But he must have been dreaming. He certainly hadn't been aroused.

But now, fully awake, he twisted round, and stared up at his hand curiously. And then his eyes bulged out. His face became red with anger and amazement.

"Who did this?" he roared suddenly.

It was most unusual for Buster to roar—he generally kept calm and cool. But the circumstances at the present were such that it would have been rather surprising if he had used a normal voice.

For his right hand was securely fixed to the bedrail—not by string or rope, but by means of a glittering steel handcuff!

John Busterfield Boots was manacled to his own bed!

He grabbed at the handcuff, and pulled it hard. But it was securely locked, and so strong that all Buster's efforts were useless. It was not the regulation type of police handcuff, but something more delicate in construction, but probably stronger.

"I say, old man, what's the trouble?" inquired Percy Bray, from the next bed.

"I'm handcuffed to the top rail!" shouted Buster.

"You're what?"

"Can't you see, you idiot?" snapped J.B.B. "Look at this!"

He rattled his hand up and down, causing the handcuff to clink significantly. Bray jumped out of bed, and ran across. Denny and Crooks and a few others followed Bray's example. They gathered round their leader's bed in utter amazement.

"Who did this?" demanded Buster hotly. "Somebody in this dormitory, of course! If it's a joke, I don't see the point! Get the key, somebody, and let me free! Come on—don't waste any time!"

The juniors looked at Buster, and looked at one another in consternation and surprise.

"But—but we don't know anything about it," protested Bray.

"Somebody does," retorted Boots. "He's better own up quickly, too!"

By this time nearly all the other Monks were aroused, and they collected round Buster's bed in a great throng. There was a considerable amount of excitement, too. And the one concrete fact which emerged from all the talk was that nobody possessed a key to fit the handcuffs.

Nobody came forward and owned up to playing this practical joke. Buster, in fact, could obtain no satisfaction whatever.

"It's no good, old man—it wasn't a fellow of this dormitory who handcuffed you like that," said Crowe. "Why, you ought to know that nobody here would dare to do that! Must have been one of the Fifth Form chaps."

"Or perhaps one of Nipper's gang!" said Percy Bray.

"Don't be a blithering fool!" snarled Buster. "How could any of Nipper's crows get in here? And don't stand gaping at me like that! Do something! How do you suppose I'm going to get dressed?"

"Goodness knows," said Bray.

Buster was able to sit on the edge of the bed, but he could not move away from the vicinity without taking the bed with him. And, as Bob Christine pointed out, Buster



Buster Boots started round, gasping. As he leapt to his feet the chair came with him. For some reason it was stuck securely to his trousers.

couldn't very well go down to prayers and take his bed along with him.

There was a roar of laughter at this, and Buster fairly writhed. If there was one thing he detested more than another, it was ridicule. But here he was—the skipper—the Boss of the Remove—held up to ridicule before the whole Form! The position was, indeed, positively humiliating.

And as the minutes passed, the situation became really serious. By a sheer effort of will power, Buster forced himself to remain calm. All sorts of grim ideas for punishment passed through his active brain. When he discovered the culprit, he would make the fellow wish he'd never been born!

At this early period of the day, Buster did not suspect the Die-Hards of any trickery. But the object of the little preliminary was gained. The great John Busterfield Boots was made a laughing stock in his own dormitory.

He was held up as a butt before his own supporters. Handcuffed like this, to the bed, he couldn't get away—he couldn't even dress. During the first few minutes it had seemed almost trivial. But as the time passed, Buster quickly realised that the situation was frightful.

To break the steel manacle was out of the question, and to unlock it seemed impracticable. How could he unlock it without the key? And how could he find the key when everybody professed ignorance?

"Something's got to be done!" snarled Buster, when most of the other juniors had hastily dressed. "What's the time?"

"Quarter to eight!" said Bray.

"Prayers in a quarter of an hour!" said Buster. "And I'm chained here like this! By Jimmy! Haven't you got any sense? Can't you think of something?"

The Faithful Five, who were fluttering round Buster like lost sheep, gazed at one another for inspiration. Until this minute even they had not fully realised the delicate nature of the situation.

"Why, I—I suppose we shall have to tell somebody!" said Crooks.

"Tell somebody!" yelled Buster.

"One of the masters——"

"You—you madman!" snarled Buster.

"What else can we do?" demanded Crooks, turning red. "If you think we can set you free, you'd better think again! It requires a giddy locksmith for this job! We'll have to go and tell Mr. Stockdale, and he'll telephone to the ironmongers in Bannington. Old Sharpe, in the village, is no good. It'll be hours before he gets you free, Buster."

Buster breathed hard.

"You've got about as much sense as a rabbit!" he said thickly. "Do you think I'm going to have Mr. Stockdale talking about this? Do you think I'm going to have the whole school grinning at me? If this gets out all the fags will howl—the Fifth will yell—and the Die-Hards will yell, too."

"But—but what can we do?" asked Bray helplessly.

He gazed at that steel manacle. It was locked so loosely round the bedpost. It seemed such an easy, simple matter to set Buster free. But it wasn't! The bed might have been smashed by a sharp blow, but this would be worse than useless, for the handcuff would still be fixed to Buster's wrist. It would be an improvement, perhaps, but the Captain of the Remove couldn't walk about in that state.

"Look here!" snapped Buster tensely. "Go down to the carpentry room, and grab some big files, and shoot back here as quick as you can. It's the only way—I've got to be filed free."

"But—but that handcuff's made of steel——"

"We can't help that; must do something!" snorted Boots. "Bring a hacksaw, too, and a portable vice. Buck up!"

It is unnecessary to go into painful details.

The Faithful Five had never worked so hard before. They smuggled all the tools up into the dormitory, and long after the other fellows had gone down to prayers, they were sawing away, attempting to set their leader at liberty.

It was eight o'clock by the time they had fixed up the apparatus, and prayers had begun. It was a quarter to nine by the time John Busterfield Boots was free. Breakfast had been on the go for fifteen minutes!

Buster's wrist was in no way hurt, but his whole arm ached from the stiff attitude he had been compelled to adopt. By means of files, hacksaws, etc., the awful handcuff had been removed.

"By Jimmy!" snarled Buster, as he rushed into his clothes. "I'll find out who did it! And then he's going to pay!"

And when the Supreme Six walked into the dining-hall there were some inquiries at once. And the unfortunate juniors all received two hundred lines for being late. And they had to scramble through their breakfast at lightning speed.

But if John Busterfield Boots thought he was going to get some rest, he had made a mistake. During the latter part of his quick meal, he had found it almost impossible to sit still. For some reason he was intensely irritable. And this irritation grew worse and worse.

He found himself itching all over—a horrible, maddening sensation which was unlike anything Buster had previously experienced. He went straight out of the dining-hall, and dashed towards his own study. But before he got there he changed his mind, and rushed upstairs.

He said nothing to the others, because he didn't want to have any fresh ridicule. For Buster had begun to suspect. He had heard of such a thing as itching powder. And the rapid development of this complaint of his was significant.

He couldn't keep still for a moment, but he was quite convinced that he had contracted no illness. And that affair of the handcuff had put the idea into his head that he was being victimised by somebody.

Buster ran like mad into the nearest bathroom, and flung off his clothes. Even then he got no relief. He was in a terrible state, and couldn't keep still for a second. In sheer desperation, he filled the bath, and plunged into it.

And after a thorough scrub, from head to foot, relief came.

Twenty minutes later, Buster went downstairs—wearing clean things, and having donned a different suit. He was absolutely certain, by now, that his first surmise had been correct.

He went into Study Q, and found Bray looking out of the window.

"Where the dickens have you been, old man?" asked Percy. "Just look out here. The whole Triangle's strewn with twigs and branches. That gale was pretty severe, you know——"

"Hang the gale!" snarled Boots, dropping into his armchair.

"No need to snap my giddy head off!" said Bray. "What's wrong, Buster? Why did you fly upstairs like that?"

"Look here, Percy. I'm not going to tell the others, but I'll tell you," said Boots. "I can't explain it, but some blithering idiot is having a game with me!"

"What on earth do you mean?" asked Bray, staring.

He whistled when he heard about the itching powder.

"I can't understand it," he said, at length. "Who on earth could be doing it? Everybody on this side is under your control; there is not a chap who would dare to play tricks of that kind."

"We don't know, but we're going to find out!" growled Buster. "What's that on the mantelpiece?" he added curtly.

"Oh! A letter for you!" said Bray, taking it down. "I found it in the box ten minutes ago. Bellton post-mark. I didn't know you knew anybody in the village."

"I don't!" said Buster curtly.

He tore open the envelope, and removed a smooth piece of card. In the centre of this, in printed characters were the words: "RETRIBUTION IS AT HAND." Buster caught his breath in sharply.

"By Jimmy!" he breathed. "I've got it!"

"Eh?" Got what?"

"The Die-Hards—Nipper and his gang!" shouted Buster, jumping up. "Why, what the—Great Scott!"

He started round, gasping. As he leapt to his feet, the chair came with him. For some unearthly reason, it was stuck securely to the seat of Buster's trousers.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE TORMENTING OF BUSTER!



"WELL, I'm jiggered!" said Bray blankly. "Can't you do something?" hooted

Boots glaring.

Percy seized the chair, and gave it a firm tug. It came away all right, accompanied by a tearing, ripping sound. The complete seat of Buster's trousers was left on the chair. J.B.B. looked rather terrible. And Bray, for the life of him, couldn't help bursting into a cackle of laughter.

"You—you fool!" snarled Buster. "Funny, isn't it?"

Fairly quivering with rage, he examined the chair. It had a leatherette top, smooth and polished. To the casual touch it was quite normal. But by allowing his finger to rest on the surface for a moment, Buster found that the leather became sticky.

"My only hat!" he muttered. "This—this chair was prepared! Clue of some kind! Can't you understand, you ass? The rotten stuff was painted on, and it dried."

"But—but—"

"The Die-Hards!" shouted the skipper. "This is Nipper's doing! The handcuff—the itching powder—the letter—and now this—this rotten chair stunt!"

"Well, I'm hanged!" said Bray. "I—I say, Buster, Nipper's pretty smart, you know! These dodges are better than any that we thought of."

"Are they?" snarled Buster. "Don't stand there talking rot—go upstairs and get me another pair of trousers! I can't go out like this, can I?"

Bray hurried away, and Buster was mortified when the other members of the Supreme Six marched in. It was impossible for Boots to conceal his discomfiture, for the juniors obtained a clear view of his rear.

"What the dickens—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Had a dog at you, old man?"

Crash!

Crooks went down, howling. The next second Denny staggered, too. And after that the juniors didn't see anything funny in the situation. Buster quickly explained. He didn't like his own medicine at all! He had never realised, in fact, what it was to be tormented in such a way. And the day was only just beginning!

"But—but when could Nipper have done all this?" asked Crowe doubtfully. "I don't see how—"

"I don't care what you see, or what you don't see!" hissed Buster. "This note's enough for me! Can't somebody poke that fire? The confounded room's getting full of smoke! What's wrong with the rotten chimney?"

For some unaccountable reason, the fire had begun to belch forth volumes of smoke into the room. And all efforts to make the chimney draw were unavailable.

Crash!

Without warning of any kind a big picture on the other side of the room fell to the floor. There was no glass in it—and it wasn't hurt. But the sudden shock was enough to give Buster another violent start.

"Who did that?" he shouted thickly.

"It—it fell down of its own accord!" stuttered Crooks. "I—I saw it! I say, there's something queer about all this!"

Boots snatched up the picture, and examined the string.

"By Jimmy!" he breathed. "Look at this string—rotten! It's been soaked in some chemical of some kind. The fibre rotted, and that caused the picture to fall!"

He looked round uncertainly, half expecting some other startling incident to happen. These things coming, one on top of the other, were decidedly nerve-racking. Buster, in fact, was undergoing exactly the same treatment that he had planned for Fatty Little and Archie and Alf. But the things that were happening to Buster were much more refined—much more subtle. There was nothing crude about these stunts.

Bray returned with another pair of trousers, and Buster quickly donned them.

"I don't know how they managed to do all this, but I'll find out!" he said, going to the cupboard. "What's the good of asking you idiots to do anything? That fire wants a sheet of newspaper in front of it. I'll soon have it going."

Buster opened the cupboard door, there was a lightning thud, and a gloved hand shot out and struck him with such force in the chest that he reeled over with a sickening crash.

"Good Heavens!"

"What the——"

The Faithful Five stared at the cupboard. There, quivering in the air, was a long chunk of wood with a padded boxing glove at the end of it. It was held, somehow, by a powerful spring. The opening of the cupboard had released it, and Buster had been taken completely by surprise.

He was nearly foaming at the mouth as he picked himself up.

He had no words—he could hardly speak at all. That cupboard arrangement had been fixed up like a Jack-in-the-box, and it wasn't so much the force of the blow, but the unexpectedness of the whole thing. And before Buster could properly get over the effect Percy Bray happened to lean on the table rather heavily.

He did so, preparatory to sitting down on the corner.

Crash!

The table, for some remarkable reason, collapsed, taking Bray with it. The four legs splayed out in every direction. Bray sat up, gasping.

"What happened?" he asked faintly.

"Confound them!" hooted Buster.

"They've—they've——"

He broke off, gasping, as Bray rolled off the edge of the collapsed table. As he did so the table appeared to obtain life of its own. It leapt up, and resumed its former innocent appearance.

"Great Scott!" gasped the Faithful Five.

They examined the table, and found that the four legs had been sawn off, hinged, and were provided with powerful springs. The table, in fact, was now very similar to the trick tables one sometimes sees on the stage.

"This—this is too much!" muttered Buster harshly.

Thud!

Something fell down the chimney like a stone, bringing with it such a quantity of soot that the fireplace was smothered. Buster stared at a big chunk of brick, and noticed that a string was tied round it.

There was a label on that brick! Buster felt rather faint as he grabbed at it. These tormenting incidents, coming one after the other, were tearing his nerves to shreds. He had treated Fatty Little to a system of intensive persecution. But Buster was getting the same treatment with five hundred per cent interest. It was his own game, played more skilfully.

He seized the label on the brick, and looked at it:

**"BEWARE—AT ELEVEN O'CLOCK
PRECISELY!"**

"Look—look at this!" panted Boots, swallowing hard.

He jumped round wildly as Crowe happened to kick one of the fire irons. It was a sure indication of his nerves. He thought something else was going to happen. The Faithful Five read the words on the label, and looked grave.

"Eleven!" said Bray. "But we shall be in the class-room then!"

"Perhaps—perhaps they're going to do something even there!" said Denny, not without relish.

Buster looked at his supporters with concern. He could see that they were affected by this business. His position was so helpless that he didn't cut much of a figure as a powerful leader. It was this knowledge that made him grind his teeth with rage.

Hitherto he had been supreme. He had always maintained a cool and calm front—a quiet, reserved dignity. But under the present circumstances it was impossible. He was thankful, indeed, that the rank and file of his supporters did not know. But this made no difference to his own condition.

When the bell for morning lessons rang a moment later, Buster was already looking haggard and worn. He was on the jump. He constantly expected something else to happen. And the very fact that it didn't, was, if anything, all the more trying.

"Well, after all, you've got to hand it to Nipper that he's pretty cute," said Webb cautiously. "He's taken a leaf out of your book, Buster, and improved upon your own methods."

"Oh, has he?" shouted Buster roughly. "That's all he's good for—imitation! He couldn't think of anything himself, could he? And I'll get even before I've done!"

There was a sudden violent explosion in the corner.

"What's that?" shrieked Buster, jumping a yard into the air.

"Goodness knows!" panted Crowe, white to the lips.

A haze of smoke hung in the corner, but there was no explanation for the sudden, deafening report.

"I—I happened to tread on a loose board just now!" muttered Bray. "I was going over to get my books. Why, my hat! This board's all loose—it wasn't loose before!"

"It's been faked!" exclaimed Buster, shivering in every limb—partly from rage, and partly from nervousness. "That's it! The first chap who happened to tread on that board caused the spring to go! There's some kind of firework arrangement fixed underneath! The—the dangerous idiots! They might have set the place on fire."

But a swift examination revealed an ingenious system of wires. They were so arranged that they set off a percussion cap. This latter was fixed inside a tin box just beneath the floorboard. It was quite safe and harmless.

Still shaky, the Supreme Six went to the Form-room. Buster's friends were not so jumpy as he was. For, after all, the brunt of all this persecution was directed at Boots himself. And the Faithful Five could not help thinking that Boots was getting far better than he had given.

"Nipper took a long time to wake up—but now he's started, he's going to cause a lot of trouble!" murmured Crooks to Denny, as they went along the passage. "Shouldn't be surprised if this is only just the beginning."

"Looks like it," said Denny. "What's going to happen at eleven?"

"Goodness only knows!"

They went into the Form-room, and Buster sat down in his seat very gingerly. He remembered, probably, that he had tampered with Fatty Little's seat a day or two earlier. But, no, the seat was quite firm. Buster opened his desk and made a quick examination of the contents. Nothing had been touched there.

Buster gave me a fierce, venomous look. But I met it with an expression of complete indifference and mild astonishment—as though I wondered what on earth was biting him.

And then Mr. Crowell came in, and lessons commenced.

Half an hour hadn't elapsed before John Busterfield Boots was soundly caned in front of the whole Form. This was a ghastly experience. The skipper being caned in front of his own supporters!

But Buster deserved it. From the instant lessons began he had been inattentive, abstracted, and didn't even attempt to do his work. After warning him several times, and giving him a hundred lines, Mr. Crowell lost patience. He had Buster out in front of the class, and caned him.

"I hope, Boots, that you will profit by your punishment!" said Mr. Crowell tartly.

Buster crawled back to his seat and looked grim. He had noticed that many fellows were grinning. Previously, they had always regarded him as a fellow of great power—they had not dared to grin at him. Buster had wit enough to realise that once his influence waned it would be all up with him.

He watched the clock incessantly. Twenty to eleven! He tried to work. Quarter to eleven! For the life of him, he couldn't concentrate upon his lessons at all. He had an awful fear that something terrible—something big—would take place at the stroke of the hour.

This nervous tension was a hundred-fold worse than any actual shock.

And this, of course, had been my object. There is nothing so bad in this world as suspense. By letting Buster know in advance that something was going to happen at eleven o'clock, he was in a state of absolute torment.

Seven minutes to the hour!

Mr. Crowell, looking up, saw Boots' gaze fixed fascinatedly upon the clock.

"Boots!" said the Form-master sharply.

Buster jumped violently.

"Ye-es, sir!" he gasped. "Great goodness! You—you startled me, sir!"

"Indeed!" snapped Mr. Crowell. "What is the matter with you, boy?"

"Nun-nothing, sir!"

"Then don't let me catch you acting in this ridiculous way any more!" commented the Form-master. "Keep still, Boots! Good gracious! Why do you keep fidgetting about in that absurd fashion?"

Buster muttered something under his breath, and by a sheer effort of will forced himself to attend to the lesson. And the time was now four minutes to eleven!

CRICKET COMPETITION RESULT.

£300 Awarded!

In this competition twenty-one competitors correctly forecast the order in which the seventeen County Cricket Clubs finished up at the end of the season. The First Prize of £100 has therefore been divided among:—

Rosa Acworth, 8, Crieff Road, Wandsworth; G. Bees, 80, Old Street, Clevedon, Somerset; Leslie S. Brown, 16, Fufham Street, Beeston, Leeds; Arthur J. Collison, 70, St. Olave's Road, East Ham, E.6.; B. Cook, 17, Greenhill Avenue, Allerton, Liverpool; L. F. Dalby, 7, Spring Road, Ipswich; H. Edwards, Westminster Bank, Fishponds, Bristol; W. Fincher, 16, Bishop Street, Wolverhampton; William Hibbert, 9, Hardwick Street, Hunslet Carr, Leeds; Arthur F. Jones, 60, Beversbrook Road, Tufnell Park, N.19; J. Kirk, 2, Weetwood Terrace, Far Headingley, Leeds; Wm. Milnes, 30, Dolly Lane, Newtown, Leeds; L. Oakley, 215, Warwick Road, Sparkhill, Birmingham; S. S. Perkes, 37, Back Street, Dudley; F. G. Pickwick, 9, Cicely Road, Peckham, S.E.15; Arthur E. Tomlinson, The Common, West Hallam, Nr. Derby; Charles Walter, 10, Curzon Road, Maidstone, Kent; Robert Ward, Old Post Office, Pontrhydyrun, Nr. Newport, Mon.; Miss D. Welch, 103, Chesterfield Road, Bristol; A. N. Wells, 95, College Avenue, Gillingham, Kent; F. Whittington, The Cambria, Cambria Road, Loughboro' Junction, S.E.5.

So many competitors qualified for the third and fourth grades of prizes that division amongst them of the amount offered was impracticable. The Second Prize of £50, the Third Prize of £30, and the one hundred and twenty prizes of one pound each have therefore been added together and divided among the one hundred and sixty-seven competitors whose lists contained two errors each.

We regret that pressure on space precludes our publishing the names and addresses of all these competitors, but a list may be seen at the Fleetway House, London, E.C.4.

SOLUTION.

Order of teams in the championship will be published next week.

The Die-Hards, who had been watching Buster more closely than they had been watching their work, were secretly delighted at all the signs. Boots was quite unnerved—that was obvious.

And it gave us all exquisite pleasure to see the tyrant suffering in this way. A little more of this, and he would lose all control. By the end of the day, indeed, I was hoping for a big result—a permanent result.

Eleven o'clock!

Boots stared at the clock-face feverishly. Then he glanced at the door, at the windows, as though expecting some dreadful thing to happen. And suddenly he gave a wild shriek, and leapt up.

"Yarrah!" he howled violently.

Mr. Crowell, who was at the blackboard, dropped his chalk and spun round.

"Boots," he thundered, "why did you make that extraordinary noise?"

"Something bit me, sir!" yelled Boots, dancing about with pain.

"Something bit you?" repeated Mr. Crowell. "What do you mean?"

"I—I don't know, sir," stammered Buster. "But something came up through my seat, and it felt like a red-hot iron going into me."

Mr. Crowell, who had had extensive experience of fellows putting tacks on other fellows' seats, hurried to Buster's place and examined this particular seat with care. He found nothing—no sign of any tack.

"I have no doubt, Boots, that you regard this as quite a good joke," snapped Mr. Crowell sourly. "It is so good, indeed, that you will pay for it dearly. You will write me five hundred lines, and I shall require them by this evening. And if there is any further disturbance from you this morning, I shall take you to the House-master to be flogged."

Buster sank back in his seat gingerly, and knew that he had made an absolute fool of himself. All this nervous tension! All this fear of something awful! And then just a mere prick in the leg!

But that was just the subtlety of the whole scheme. It hadn't been the shock itself, but the fear of it. Buster was nearly a nervous wreck, and by the time lessons were over, he had only slightly recovered. For there was the constant dread that he would only escape from the classroom to run into further mysterious troubles.

Indeed, even as he was walking down the passage, in the midst of the Faithful Five, Tubbs appeared, carrying an orange-coloured envelope.

"Telegram for Master Boots," he announced importantly.

"For—for me!" muttered Boots. "Oh, it must be from home!"

He tore it open and stared at the flimsy form. The wire had been dispatched from Helmford—the town twenty-five miles away

from St. Frank's. Buster knew nobody in Helmford, and his worst fears were confirmed. The telegram simply said:

"Be ready! At midnight your time will come!"

"What is it?" asked Percy Bray anxiously.

John Busterfield Boots allowed the telegram to be taken from him. The Faithful Five read it with startled expressions.

It certainly did seem that the tide had turned!

CHAPTER IX.

THE WITCHING HOUR OF MIDNIGHT!



EXACTLY how he got through the afternoon, Buster didn't quite know.

It was made all the more nerve-trying because nothing whatever happened. A few mysterious things had occurred during the interval before dinner, and the interval after dinner. J.B.B. had been kept on the jump all the time.

But there was not the slightest indication as to the source of these peculiar manifestations. The majority of them seemed to happen naturally, and without any premeditated purpose. But, as a matter of fact, I had made full arrangements well in advance. For example, it had been quite an easy matter for me to telephone to one of the Helmford College fellows, and to get him to dispatch that wire.

Mr. Crowell was so exasperated during the afternoon by Buster's inattention that the Remove captain got further lines. And as soon as lessons were over for the day, the great J.B.B. retired to study Q.

But it was with great caution that he sat down on the couch. He was afraid of everything. He wouldn't have been particularly surprised if the ceiling had fallen in on him. The Faithful Five gathered round him like physicians in consultation.

"How do you feel?" asked Bray sympathetically. "Better, old man?"

"No, I don't feel better!" snarled Buster. "There's nothing wrong with me, anyhow! Mind your own infernal business!"

"You've had a pretty rotten day——"

"I'm starting things moving to-night!" declared Boots, recovering a ghost of his former aggressiveness. "Yes, by Jimmy! We'll grab Pitt and Grey, and we'll give them such a time they'll wish they'd never seen St. Frank's at all! We'll get some straps, bind the cads up, and whip them until they howl. Then we'll tar and feather 'em!"

"I say, go easy——"

"It's the only way!" snapped Buster. "There's no sense in dealing lightly with these cads! We've got to retaliate!"

"Yes, and then they'll retaliate back!" pointed out Bray. "You see what's happened already. You started this persecution stunt, and the Die-Hards have beaten you at your own game!"

"Beaten me?"

"Well, yes!" said Bray boldly. "Might as well admit the truth, old man! You're going through a rotten experience, and you can't deny it. And what's going to happen if you treat Pitt and Grey as you suggest? Why, these Die-Hards will probably start on us next—not you alone! The best thing, in my opinion, is to drop this terrorism stuff altogether!"

Buster curtly sent out the information that the club was not to be opened that evening. It was a foolish move of Buster's, and he soon realised it. For, in his determination to persecute Reggie Pitt and Jack Grey, he antagonised his own supporters.

But he always had his own way—he never gave in. Having taken up a firm stand, he couldn't withdraw without revealing weakness. So, although he made a blunder, he adhered to it. As a net result, a large number of fellows reviled him as a rotten captain. Previously they had been full of praise.

Buster, in fact, was having a pretty



As Buster opened the door there was a lightning thud, and a gloved hand shot out and struck him with terrific force!

"It doesn't pay!" agreed Crowe and Denny, nodding.

"Oh; so you're afraid of your rotten skins?" exclaimed Buster harshly. "Well, if you don't obey me, I'll finish with you for good! Understand? I mean this, and I'm going through with it!"

"What about the club?"

"The club won't be opened this evening—we shall be too busy!"

"The other chaps will kick up a fuss," said Percy.

"Let 'em!"

The other fellows did kick up a fuss. Fullwood & Co., and Armstrong, and a host of others were mightily indignant when

ghastly time. There was a gnawing worry at the back of his mind. What was going to happen at midnight? How could anything happen?

By that time the Remove would be in bed and fast asleep. And surely the Die-Hards couldn't hope to effect a raid on the Remove dormitory in the College House? They wouldn't stand an earthly chance.

But if it wasn't a raid, what was it?

Buster thought of all sorts of schemes to safeguard himself. He remembered that farce of the morning—the eleven o'clock stunt. A very simple contrivance. Just a tiny hole bored in the seat, with a spring attached to it fixed beneath. Pitt, who sat

behind Buster, had merely jerked a thread, releasing the spring, and plunging the pinpoint into Buster's anatomy. Another jerk of the thread had pulled the apparatus away completely, leaving no trace.

Was this midnight affair to be something of the same kind?

The very uncertainty of it all made Buster grit his teeth with helplessness. But he had something to occupy himself with in the evening, and he felt slightly better. He made full plans for the capture of Pitt and Grey. He gathered his Faithful Five and twenty other followers. The idea was to make a determined raid upon the common-room, or any other place where the Die-Hards gathered. It was certain, in any case, that the insignificant Opposition Party would cling closely together.

But again Buster's plans were foiled.

Percy Bray was sent out spying. He came back with bad news. The nine Die-Hards were together all right, but they had taken the precaution to place themselves sedately in the small lecture hall, next to the school library.

"Well, we can get them there, can't we?" asked Buster curtly.

"Too much noise," said Crooks, shaking his head. "It's not far from the Head's study—"

"But that's not all," interrupted Percy Bray. "Those beasts have got old Leblanc with them—he's lecturing on French!"

"What!" snarled Buster savagely.

He crunched his teeth, but that didn't improve matters in any appreciable degree. Buster went along to the small lecture hall to have a look for himself. And, sure enough, Monsieur Jacques Leblanc was holding forth vehemently and with much flourishing of hands.

It was absolutely impossible to raid the Die-Hards while a master was present. Buster was full of bitter fury. He reviled the Die-Hards for taking shelter behind a master. It was a mean, caddish trick—an admittance of defeat.

But just at about supper-time—five minutes before the bell was due to ring—Crooks came in with the startling information that Monsieur Leblanc had just come home from Bannington.

Buster gave a bellow of rage, and dashed to the small lecture hall. He arrived just as the supper-bell rang. The Die-Hards were there, and Monsieur Leblanc was just peeling off his little black moustache, and removing a curly wig.

"Hallo, Boots!" I said sweetly. "Anything wrong? You look sick!"

Buster nearly fainted. All the evening he and his supporters had been spoofed! Holding themselves ready to attack the Die-Hards, they had been fooled! For Monsieur Leblanc of the lecture hall was just me. And the disguise wasn't at all perfect, either. But in the dimness of the half-

lighted room I had played the part with ease.

And now it was too late to nab Pitt and Grey. The bell had rung, and the Monks had to go over to their own House. Prefects were already stalking abroad, in order to round up the stragglers.

Buster nearly choked as the Die-Hards yelled with laughter. They had calmly been doing their prep, writing letters, reading books, etc., and generally enjoying the evening. And Pitt and Grey, the marked-down victims, were untouched!

Up in the Remove dormitory, in the College House, Buster and the Faithful Five were talking in tense tones.

They were alone. The rest of the juniors were at supper. The Supreme Six were missing theirs, so that they could have a quiet talk. And Buster was nearly foaming at the mouth with rage and helplessness.

"Well, you can't get away from it, old man," said Bray. "This is Nipper's day! It's the first time he's really started anything, and he's had one long series of successes!"

"Yes, and something else is going to happen at midnight," said Crooks.

"I suppose you think I'm done, eh?" demanded Buster thickly. "You think I'm going to allow this foolery to affect me?"

"Hasn't it affected you?" asked Webb innocently.

"You fool!" hissed Buster. "Of course it hasn't!"

"Sorry!" said Webb. "My mistake!"

"At least, only temporarily!" added Buster, realising the absurdity of his denial. "As soon as I've had my revenge, I shall be top dog again! But we've got to get over to-night. Just wait until to-morrow, and I'll get busy! As far as I can see, these rotters are planning to make some kind of a raid at twelve o'clock."

"How do you know it'll be a raid?" asked Percy.

"I don't know, do I?" said Buster in exasperation. "That's just the darn trouble! I don't know what's going to happen! But look here! None of us are going to sleep until after midnight! The rest of the chaps mustn't know, because it isn't good for a leader to be in a belittling position. Thank goodness I can trust you fellows."

"We're with you, old man!" said the Faithful Five loyally.

"Good! Then we shall have to keep a watch until after midnight," declared Buster. "Who's game to slip out at about eleven, and remain on guard in the corridor?"

"Leave that to me," said Percy Bray.

"All you'll have to do is to keep watch, and give me the tip in case anything suspicious happens," said Boots. "We can't afford to leave that corridor unprotected."

There are two or three alcoves where you could easily crouch. Two other chaps will remain on guard at the windows. And I'll hold myself in readiness to fight!"

And so the arrangements were made in full.

But, at the same time, every member of the Supreme Six had a vague fear that something might go wrong. They were guarding against something they didn't know of. Perhaps it was merely a trick—a scheme to keep them awake. In all probability nothing would happen at all at midnight. But the nerve-tension was there all the same.

By eleven-thirty the Supreme Six were jumpy and nervous, and John Busterfield Boots was in a pitiable condition. He was in such a state that he would be ready to scream if a board suddenly squeaked. The horrible uncertainty was more than trying.

Percy Bray, outside in the corridor, kept his eyes open and his ears on the stretch. He crouched back in the alcove most of the time, a dim figure in his striped pyjamas and flowery dressing-gown.

Now and again he ventured to creep cautiously to the head of the stairs, and listen. But all was silent. There was no trace of any disturbance—no indication of any unwelcome marauders.

And so the minutes passed in the same agony of suspense.

It was within a minute of midnight, and Buster was looking at his watch. Like a cat on hot bricks, he paced up and down the dormitory. He couldn't keep still in bed. He was suffering the same as he had suffered that morning—only twenty times worse.

And then, abruptly, the door opened.

"What—what's that?" gasped Buster hoarsely.

"Only me, you ass!" said Bray. "Quick! I just heard something out here."

The other members of the Faithful Five crept forward.

"No—don't leave your posts!" whispered Bray. "For all we know, they might be getting in through one of the windows. Don't be so jolly nervous—there's nothing to worry over. Come out here, Buster, and listen."

John Busterfield Boots gritted his teeth, and slipped through the door. Any activity was better than that tension. He closed the door softly behind him, and Percy Bray grabbed him fiercely by the neck, and pulled him over backwards. The next second he was pounced upon by half a dozen dim, active forms. They carried him off swiftly and silently, his struggles futile—his attempts to shout, with a rug over his face, impossible.

In spite of every precaution, Buster was a prisoner!

And Percy Bray chuckled quietly to himself. He whispered to one of the dark figures, and, strangely enough, his voice now sounded like Reginald's Pitt's!

CHAPTER X.

THE END OF THE TERROR!



"GOOD!" I murmured softly. "That's the style! In with him!"

John Busterfield Boots was carried swiftly into a box-room further along the corridor, and the door was closed. The box-room was dark, except for a single candle which burned on a shelf.

No light penetrated outside, for the door itself was protected with heavy curtains. In one corner lay Percy Bray himself—unceremoniously bound up in a blanket, and carefully gagged. The blanket was to keep him warm, for otherwise Percy was in a state of nature. Reggie Pitt was wearing Bray's distinctive pyjamas and dressing-gown.

Pitt's disguise, in fact, amounted to this simple attire, and nothing more. He was the same size as Bray, and in the gloom of the corridor his features had been invisible. Pitt had mimicked Bray's voice and intonation to perfection. Buster had never guessed.

Bray, of course, had been captured ten minutes after he had gone on duty—for all the Die-Hards were lurking about the corridor. We had gained admittance soon after ten—long before Buster had suspected any activity.

And now the Remove Boss was helpless in our power.

His feet and hands were quickly tied, and he was allowed to sit in the chair. We stood around him, and I removed the muffler from his face.

"Better not shout," I suggested. "One or two prefects sleep in this corridor, I believe, and we don't want any trouble."

"You fool!" snarled Buster. "I shan't get into a row—you're the fellows who'll suffer!"

"Pardon me, but allow me to point out your little mistake," I said sweetly. "If any prefect or master comes along, we shall all be in the same boat. Quite apart from that, it is very much against your interests to raise an alarm. I don't think the Remove, as a whole, would praise you up to the skies for falling into a trap like this. Not much of a position for a strong leader, eh? Not exactly calculated to make the chaps respect you?"

Buster ground his teeth in vain.

"Well?" he demanded harshly. "Do your worst!"

"Apparently, you have an idea that we intend to threaten all sorts of awful things, and perform a few dirty tricks," I remarked. "But that's quite wrong, Buster. We have simply got you into this position because we mean to stop your game! We mean to put an end to terrorism!"

"Oh!" growled Boots. "How?"

"You cad!" snorted Handforth. "You've had a pretty rotten time to-day, haven't

you? How do you like it, eh? How do you like your own treatment?"

Buster scowled.

"You couldn't think of any new idea, anyhow," he sneered.

"No—we improved upon yours," I said calmly. "We don't intend to waste time, Buster. Sleep's a very necessary item, and we want to get as much of it as possible. We had a short night last night—and I think you'll understand why. Two short nights will spoil our beauty!"

"What do you want?" demanded Buster fiercely.

"I'm going to talk to you squarely!" I retorted. "Now, look here, Buster, are you going to put an end to this tyranny—this Ku Klux Klan stuff and the reign of terror?"

"No!" said Buster. "I'm going to do as I like!"

"Are you going to fight fair?" I went on sternly. "Do you realise that you've been fouling all along the line? Do you call it a fair method to keep the chaps under your control by sheer tyranny and despotism?"

"You're mad!" panted Buster.

"No; I'm quite calm," I replied. "And I'd just like to know your views, because our own actions will depend upon them. Are you going to allow your supporters to leave you, if they feel, of their own free will, that they would rather come under my banner?"

"No, I'm not!"

"You mean that you'll continue to hold them under the terror?"

"If you like to put it that way—yes!" said Buster. "I'm in power now, and I mean to keep in power."

"Then you only expect to remain in power by practising these methods of tyranny and torture?" I asked sternly. "In other words, Boots, you're a rotten sportsman! You're afraid to fight fair because you know you'll lose!"

"Think what you like!" muttered Buster.

"We have two parties in the Remove," I went on quickly. "Your party and mine. The Die-Hards are only nine in number, but there are three fellows, at least, who would come back to us instantly if the terrorism was stopped. And you know as well as I do that we should gain other supporters, too. And if you really want more, we'll give you more!"

"What do you mean?"

"My dear man, it's simple," I said coolly. "As a rule, I'm not a fellow to start anything quickly, and without full consideration. I've allowed you to run on for over a week, watching and observing. But now I've made full preparation, and I'm ready."

"Ready for what?"

"Anything!" I replied crisply. "Let me make myself clear. The Die-Hards have proved to-day, I think, that they are

capable of giving better than they receive. If it means more, we'll beat you at every turn. There won't be one reign of terror—but two reigns of terror!"

Buster laughed openly.

"All right—go ahead!" he said. "I'm not afraid of you!"

"There is another point that I wish to make quite clear," I continued. "A week or two ago you had a fight with me, and you won. As you know, I was just recovering from a severe cold, and I was in bad condition. But now I'm fit."

"What—what do you mean?" asked Buster, starting.

"I mean that you have two chances," I said. "Either you'll give me your solemn word of honour that all terrorism in every shape and form ceases from this minute—or you'll be taken straight into the dormitory, and we'll fight as we stand—barefisted! The winner will have the control after that!"

Buster nearly choked.

"You—you mean cads!" he snarled.

"Is that what you call mean?" I asked quietly. "I'm giving you a fair chance—an opportunity to stop this tyranny without your supporters knowing a word about this affair. Give me your promise, and we'll go quietly away. On the other hand, the whole Remove will hear of this night's work, and on the top of it you'll be compelled to fight me in front of your own crowd!"

A gleam came into Buster's eyes.

"I suppose you're thinking that your pals will pounce on us and kick us out, eh?" I went on. "Don't you believe it—don't be so optimistic! When I tell them what the game is they'll be perfectly agreeable. They won't be at all averse from witnessing a fight. Now—I'll give you two minutes to decide."

I turned away, and talked with the other fellows. And Buster sat there, clenching and unclenching his fists, and swallowing hard. He knew that he was beaten—he knew it!

For it was more than he dared do to face me in the Remove dormitory. I was fit now, and Buster was quite certain that I should succeed in knocking him out. He was nervous and jumpy after his long day of tension.

And for him to be knocked out in front of all his crowd would be absolutely fatal. His power would vanish like the morning mist before a summer's sun. A beaten man can never lead.

On the other hand, there was still a chance for him. Already schemes were beginning to take shape in his mind. If he agreed to end the tyranny he would still be captain. The Remove, as a whole, would know nothing of this affair. And in his usual cunning way, he might be able to make capital out of

(Continued on page 30)

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(Continued from page 28)

his capitulation. He made up his mind suddenly.

"I agree!" he said curtly.

"Good!" I exclaimed. "I thought you wouldn't be obstinate. You see, Buster, we've got you on the end of a piece of string, and you know it. Now, I'm taking the risk of accepting your word. But although you've been a bit of a tyrant, I still think you've been a bit of a tyrant, I respect your own word of honour."

"Thanks!" said Buster sourly.

"Repeat, after me, these words!" I said:

"I, John Busterfield Boots, give my faithful and solemn word of honour that from this moment onwards I shall not attempt to coerce the Remove by any methods of persecution, or tyranny, or terrorism."

Boots repeated the words firmly.

"Now, again," I went on: "Furthermore, I hereby release Fatty Little and Archie Glenthorne and Alfred Brent from any oaths they may have taken. I permit them to return to the Die-Hard Party without prejudice."

Buster looked at me sharply and vindictively, but repeated the words.

"And when I give my solemn word of honour, I keep to it," he added quietly. "An oath is an oath, Nipper, and my word is good. All this repeating of words is theatrical rot. From this moment onwards there won't be any more tyranny, and you can be satisfied on that point. The Die-Hard Party will be able to start on an equal footing with my own party. And here's my hand on it—honour bright!"

I took his hand warmly.

"Good for you, Buster!" I said, with approval. "Then it's settled. 'Nuff said!"

Three minutes later John Busterfield Boots and Percy Bray slipped back into their own dormitory, and the Die-Hards melted into the darkness. And as we returned to the Ancient House I felt a glow of triumph within me.

The end of Buster's reign was within sight.

There was no question whatever that his throne was crumbling beneath him. Fighting fairly, Buster would have no chance whatever.

And I was vaguely pleased with his unexpected frank attitude. Some of the others thought that he had been acting—but I didn't. Somewhere below the surface there was some good in John Busterfield Boots. And a little of that good had come out spontaneously.

Would he ever change? Would he find himself, and become decent?

I wondered!

THE END.

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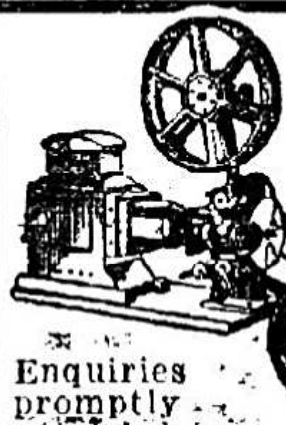
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