

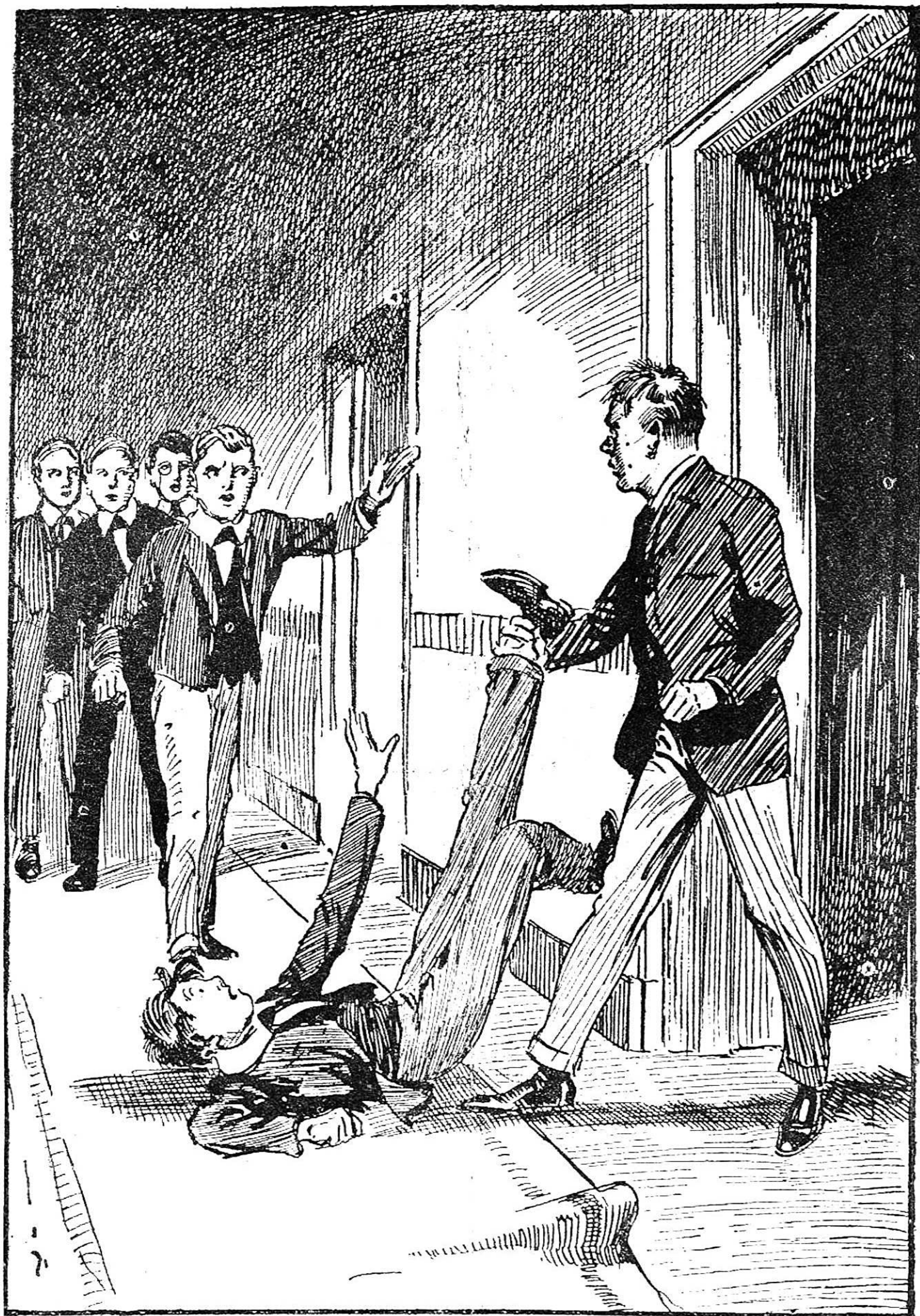
GREAT NEW BARRING-OUT SERIES JUST BEGUN!

THE **NELSON LEE** Library

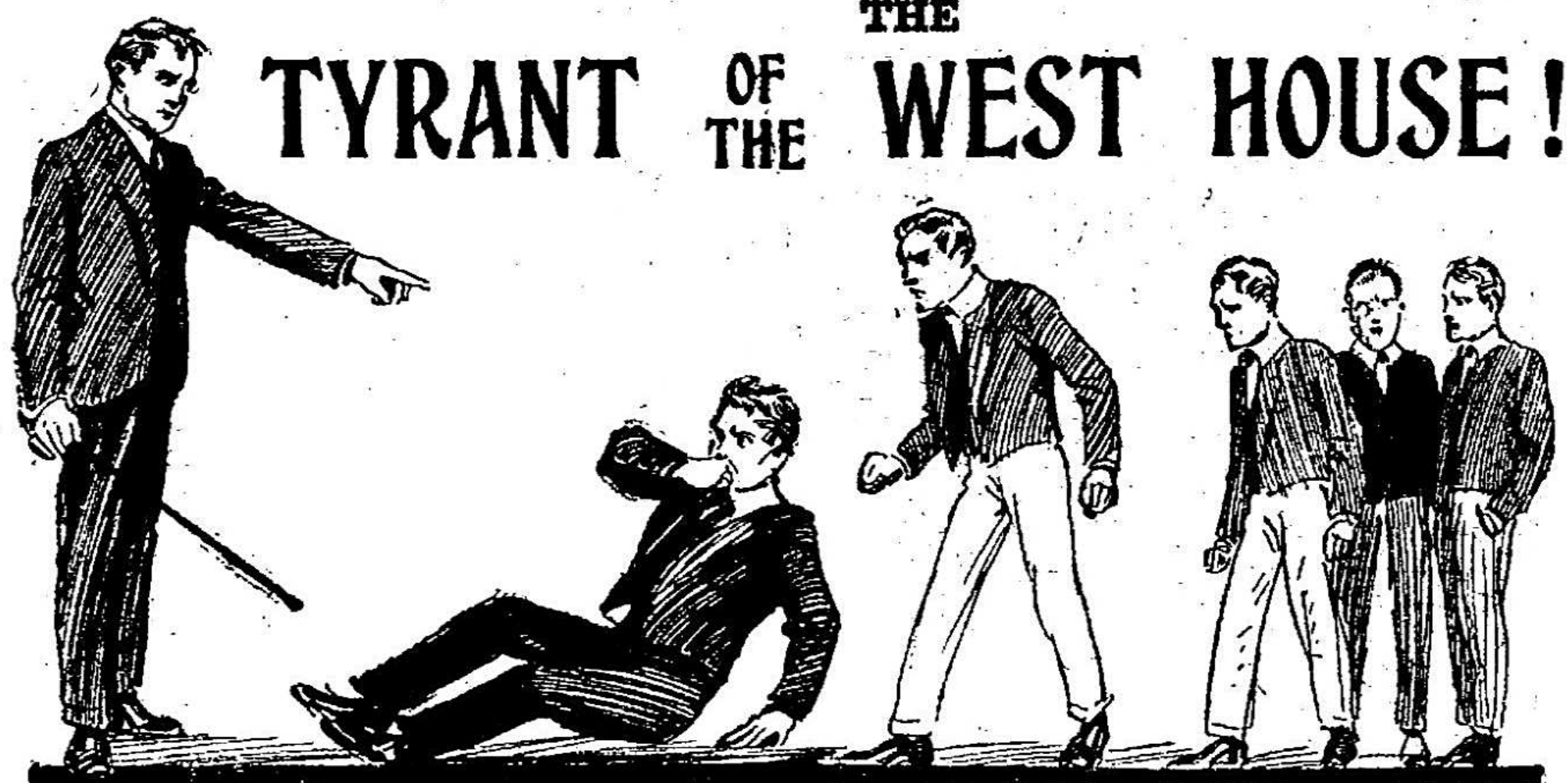


The **TYRANT of the WEST HOUSE**

The result of the transfer of the cads of Study A to the West House.
(See this week's rousing story.)



At that moment Reggie Pitt, Jack Grey, and Dick Goodwin came along to the end of the passage to find out what the noise was about.
"Stop that, Kenmore!" shouted Pitt angrily.



By EDWY SEARLES BROOKS

The West House at St. Frank's is seething with indignation at the cruel persecution introduced by the new House Prefect, Guy Sinclair. One of the worst bullies of the Sixth, Sinclair has a hold over Barry Stokes, the Housemaster of the West House. Mr. Stokes had been seen by Sinclair at a notorious London night club, and although he could easily clear himself, it would mean exposing the son of an old friend, and Stokes had given his word to the family not to do this. Thus, Sinclair has compelled Mr. Stokes to make him prefect of the West House in place of Arthur Morrow, and the Housemaster is likewise reluctantly obliged to lend his support to the tyranny imposed by Sinclair, who is now virtually dictator of the West House. The position is rapidly becoming intolerable for Barry Stokes; and Sinclair, by his mad rule, as you will read in this week's story, is heading for serious trouble in the West House.

THE EDITOR.

CHAPTER I.

KENMORE'S LITTLE JOKE.

WILLY HANDFORTH was in a hurry. He simply flew through the lobby of the West House, and vanished with a kind of swishing noise into the Junior corridor. Owen Major and Farman, who were coming down the stairs, merely received a blurred impression of an object skidding through the lobby under the impression that it was a skating rink.

At such a speed, Willy was compelled to negotiate the corner in an unconventional manner. In much the same way as an aeroplane, he developed a steep bank as he reached the bend, and pivoted round in a kind of spin. By a hair's breath he missed crashing into Clarence Fellowe, dodged with a phenomenal skill, and then tore off again in another burst of speed.

"Upon my word!" gasped Clarence. "It's too absurd! What was that freak that made that streak?"

He gazed down the passage in mild astonishment, but only saw a little haze of dust. The leader of the Third had vanished.

There was, of course, no real necessity for this frantic hurry. Willy was merely making for the Third Form quarters, in order to rake up Dicky Jones. It appeared that Dicky Jones had received a hamper that afternoon, and unless Willy arrived on the scene early there would be no chance of a share in the spoils.

It was nearly tea-time, and the West House was comparatively quiet. Most of the Remove fellows were still out on Little Side, putting in some football practice. There was an atmosphere of peace about the place.

As Willy negotiated a second corner in the same fashion as the first, a burly figure emerged from one of the studies, and a collision was inevitable. Willy realised the danger, but was unable to pull up in time. With the instinct of self-preservation, he ducked his head down, and butted the obstruction fairly in the middle.

There was a wild, wailing gasp, a crash that shook the very floor, and Willy found himself sprawling on the top of Simon Kenmore, of the Sixth. It was rather unfortunate that Willy's left foot was mingled with Simon Kenmore's face. It was obviously a time for swift thought.

Willy Handforth was never slow when it came to a matter of rapid decisions. Although Kenmore wasn't one of Willy's prefects—being the Head Boy of the East House—he was, nevertheless, an ugly customer. There was nothing to be gained by remaining on this tragic scene.

There was only one thing to be done—and that was to leap into the safety of obscurity in the smallest possible amount of time. Willy had no illusions regarding Kenmore's attitude over this accident. Kenmore, after the fashion of prefects, would come to the perfectly ridiculous conclusion that Willy was blame-worthy.

Unhappily, Kenmore's brain worked swiftly, too. And even while Willy was making a determined effort to extricate himself, Kenmore clutched one of his ankles. It was, more or less, an instinctive clutch.

For Kenmore was in dire agony. In a word, he was winded. Willy was not particularly big, but to receive the whole weight of him, head on, at the speed of an express train—well, it was devastating.

"Chuck it!" gasped Willy, when he found that escape was impossible. "Lemme go, Kenmore! What's the idea? You might have broken my neck—getting in my way like that!"

Willy worked up a plausible appearance of indignation. Kenmore lay on the floor, slowly recovering, but still unable to express the violent terms which sought an outlet.

"In fact, I'm not sure that I'm not crocked!" went on Willy warmly. "I've got a funny twist in my neck now! I've a jolly good mind to report you to the Housemaster!"

"By gad!" gurgled Kenmore blankly.

For a second, his surprise overcame his fury. It staggered him to find that Willy was actually putting the blame on other shoulders.

"You ought to have more sense!" snorted the Third Former, "standing there, and obstructing a chap—"

"You young demon!" roared Kenmore, now recovering rapidly. "Another word, and I'll smash you! What the thunder do you mean by hurtling round these corners like a charging buffalo? You nearly

smashed my ribs! As for that kick in the face—"

"Cheese it!" interrupted Willy indignantly. "How could I help my boot getting mixed up with your silly face? You shouldn't have such a face—it's all over knobs! A face like that would catch on anything!"

"You infernal young sweep—"

"Besides, why talk to me about your face?" went on Willy, in a pained voice. "I should think it's a subject you'd prefer to keep silent about. My hat! Haven't you ever used a mirror? Don't you realise what you carry about with you everywhere? Some of the chaps call it the Curse of St. Frank's! It's looked upon as a sort of ghost. Everybody's scared of it."

This sort of thing was not calculated to improve Kenmore's temper. But Willy was always fearless. Besides, he concluded—quite correctly—that he was booked for a severe five minutes. Whatever he said, Kenmore would tan him just the same. And it was a wonderful opportunity to say a few things about the prefect's face. Willy had long awaited this opportunity.

Kenmore dragged himself up, and maintained his clutch on Willy's ankle. This involved a certain upheaval. In short, Willy became inverted, and a choice collection of odds and ends rattled to the floor from Willy's pockets.

"Now, you imp of mischief!" panted Kenmore, "I'm going to tan you until you howl for mercy! You won't be able to sit down for a fortnight! If I had a cane here, I'd make it worse."

"Don't jaw so much!" said Willy. "Get it over!"

"I don't want any more sauce—"

"My hat! Your face looks even worse upside down!" interrupted Willy, aghast. "What's that thing sticking out in the middle? That thing with a knob on the end? And what are those chunks projecting out—"

Kenmore gave an inarticulate roar, and jerked Willy across his knee. At least, this was his intention. Kenmore shifted his position slightly, but how was he to know that a somewhat sticky caramel was immediately under his foot? He skidded ominously, and his foot shot from under him. The unfortunate prefect went over on his back with such a thud that all the breath was knocked out of him for the second time. And Willy didn't merely kick his face this time—he fairly trod on it.

"Don't blame me!" roared Willy. "You did that yourself! The best thing you can do is to let me go—"

"I'll murder you for this!" snarled Kenmore.

The bully of the East House lost control of himself. He had been furious before, but now he was maddened. In spite of his pain, he leapt to his feet, whirled Willy

round, and the fag's head came in violent contact with the opposite wall.

At that same moment Reggie Pitt, Jack Grey, and Dick Goodwin came along to the end of the passage to find what the noise was about. They saw the whole thing.

"Stop that, Kenmore!" shouted Pitt angrily.

"It's all right—I'm not hurt!" growled Willy. "I can take a biff on the head without howling, I suppose?"

Kenmore glared at the newcomers.

"Clear out of this!" he thundered.

"I think it's our business to tell you to clear out!" retorted Pitt. "You've got no authority in this House, Kenmore——"

"Haven't I?" hooted Kenmore.

"No, you haven't!" snapped Reggie. "And even if you had, you've got no authority over Willy—he's an Ancient House chap. We bar bullying on this side of the Triangle. You may be an East House prefect, but if you don't drop young Handforth within ten seconds we'll show you something!"

"Saved!" murmured Willy. "It reminds me of the films. The innocent victim freed from the clutches of the dastardly villain! I suppose you know you're a dastardly villain, Kenmore? Everybody else knows it, anyhow!"

Kenmore quivered with rage.

"Hear that?" he choked. "Do you think I'm going to stand that sort of cheek?"

"If you don't want to hear such views, you'd better act like a decent human being—not like a hooligan!" shouted Grey. "Drop that fag, or we'll make you! You've got no right here, anyhow!"

"You'll know better soon!" snarled Kenmore. "You'll all take two hundred lines for cheeking me!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Removites yelled at this little joke.

"Another cackle like that, and I'll make it three hundred!" roared Kenmore.

The juniors obliged with a second cackle.

"Three hundred!" yelled Kenmore. "And clear off before I make it more! As for this young demon, I'm going to deal with him on the spot! If you kids interfere, I'll have you flogged!"

With a vicious swing, he whirled Willy Handforth round, and delivered a heavy blow on the Third Former's rear. The pain was considerable, but Willy hardly noticed it. It was the indignity of the thing which pierced him to the quick. Shoved across a prefect's knee and smacked! This was getting beyond all human endurance.

It is probable that Willy would have taken drastic steps on his own account, but the Removites didn't let him. They swept down upon Kenmore, tore Willy away, and flattened the prefect on the floor.

"Outside with him!" said Pitt grimly. "Rescue, Remove! Call the chaps, Jack! We're going to eject this nuisance on his giddy neck!"

CHAPTER II.

GUY SINCLAIR'S PROGRESS.



EDWARD OSWALD HANDFORTH paused, alert.

"What was that?" he asked sharply.

"Sounded like a yell," replied Church. "None of our business, Handy. We don't want to get mixed up in any of these West House shindys. Come on—let's get indoors. It's nearly tea-time."

The famous chums of Study D had just passed through the West Arch, and were crossing the square towards the rear door of the Ancient House. The sound of shouts had come to their ears from the region of the West House. Church and McClure attempted to urge their leader on, but he refused.

"Listen!" he said tensely.

They stood there in the dusk, and the shout came again.

"Rescue, Remove!"

"There you are!" breathed Handforth excitedly. "What did I tell you? There's a row! A fight! By George, we're in this!"

"But it's a West House fight!" urged McClure. "They won't welcome us, even if we do butt in— Oh, my hat! What's the use?" he added, hopelessly, as Handforth streaked for the West House.

In the meantime, other Removites had answered the call. Solomon Levi, the Trotwood twins, Fatty Little, and Singleton all turned out. And by the time Handforth & Co. arrived on the scene, they found quite an interesting little episode in progress.

Simon Kenmore, grasped by a dozen strong hands, was being marched towards the exit. There was something grim about the attitude of the juniors. They took no notice of Kenmore's animal cries. He wasn't one of their prefects, so why should they care? Besides, he wouldn't dare to report the affair, because of his treatment of Willy.

"Want any help?" asked Handforth crisply, as he bustled up.

"Thanks all the same—no!" replied Pitt. "We can deal with our own troubles in the West House, old man. Don't start any of your rot, for goodness' sake."

Church and McClure smiled placidly.

"Well, we warned you, Handy," said Church. "We knew——"

"Rot!" snorted Handforth. "Do you think I take any notice of these idiots? They've got Kenmore, haven't they? I'll bet he's been up to some of his dirty work. We'll have a go at him when they've finished!"

Church and McClure simply couldn't understand this state of mind. But they were peaceful fellows, and could never appreciate their leader's unadulterated joy when he saw a scrap. Handforth lived for trouble. Unless there was trouble knocking about, he became broody and sullen. Two or three scraps a day made Handforth the cheeriest fellow in the Remove. It was quite immaterial whether they were his scraps or somebody else's. As long as he had a hand in them, he was content. It was strongly suspected in many quarters that Edward Oswald had Irish blood in him.

Kenmore was not merely angry now, he was alarmed. Willy Handforth, instead of being a victim, was watching the proceedings with considerable enjoyment. Indeed, he offered one or two suggestions. It was his opinion that Kenmore needed cooling. What was wrong with the fountain pool? Of course, the water would have to be changed afterwards, but that was only a detail.

Pitt and his men ignored Willy's brilliant suggestions, however. They were not bent upon a painful interview with the Head. They felt that honour would be satisfied if Kenmore was swiftly and violently ejected from the West House.

This part of the programme was carried out triumphantly.

Arriving at the outer door, Kenmore was swung up and down three times, and then the various grips were released. The prefect shot down the steps head first, and landed in a disorderly heap at the bottom. As he sat up, Guy Sinclair came into view from round the angle of the House. And Guy Sinclair paused and started.

"What on earth—" he began.

Simon Kenmore leapt to his feet, gesticulating.

"They've chucked me out!" he gasped. "Are you going to stand this, Sinclair? These young beasts have insulted me—"

"Steady!" interrupted Sinclair grimly. "I saw quite enough, Kenmore. These juniors laid hands on you, and that's an offence. It's a serious offence. They'll pay to the utmost."

The juniors crowded round indignantly. Sinclair was the head prefect of the West House—quite a recent innovation. The new term had only just started, and to the consternation of the Junior School, the popular Arthur Morrow had been deposed, and Guy Sinclair had been set up in his place. The juniors were still seething with anger about it. And, in its own dignified way, the Senior School was seething, too. Sinclair's appointment as Head Boy of the West House was the sensation of the term.

Reggie Pitt had every cause to feel antagonistic towards the new head prefect. A few days earlier, Sinclair had gone out of his way to victimise the junior skipper of the West House. Pitt had broken an obsolete school regulation—a rule that was

being ignored by everybody hundreds of times a day.

But Sinclair had thought fit to jump on Reggie, and had given him lines. It had resulted in a public flogging for Pitt, for he had been unwise enough to lose his temper, and had obstructed Sinclair while the latter was attempting to cane him.

The West House was still indignant over that affair, too. Reggie Pitt lost none of his influence as leader, for the whole school had sympathised with him in the flogging.

Sinclair had apparently started his regime in the West House on the lines of a dictator. Even in this short space of time, he had subjected the juniors to all manner of petty annoyances. Freedom that they usually enjoyed was denied them. Sinclair was raking up ancient rules that had never been officially in force. And it is always possible for a head prefect to make things very uncomfortable if he chooses to make the boys of his House stick to the letter of the school rules.

"So they threw you out, Kenmore?" he said slowly. "This is a matter for the Housemaster, but I'll deal with it personally. All you boys will stay exactly where you are," he added, glancing at the crowd.

"You can go and eat coke!" said Handforth truculently. "These chaps have had you inflicted on 'em—but you've got no control over me, Sinclair. None of your hanky panky!"

Sinclair frowned.

"All the same, I can make it hot for you!" he threatened. "You'd better not interfere. As for the rest of you, you'll take an impo. of five hundred lines each, to start with—"

"Look here, Sinclair, this is all rot!" said Pitt hotly. "We found Kenmore bullying young Handforth. He'd got the poor kid upside down, and was swinging him round so that his head bashed against the wall—"

"By George!" roared Handforth. "I didn't know this! You bullying rotter, I'll jolly well—"

"Keep that young fool back!" snarled Kenmore hastily.

"Cheese it, Ted!" said Willy. "Kenmore's a beast, but he was a bit wild. I happened to tread on his face, you know, and for some reason he lost his temper. It's a pity that these prefects should be so unreasonable—"

"You trod on his face?" repeated Edward Oswald, with satisfaction.

"Nothing to notice," replied Willy. "It would require a traction engine to alter a face like that! I'm a bit sorry for him, really—"

"You hear that?" roared Kenmore. "That's what I've had to put up with, Sinclair!"

"I don't want to hear any of this tittle-tattle," said Sinclair harshly. "And I'm not dealing with any of you Ancient House

youngsters. The rest will write five hundred lines for laying hands on a prefect."

"That rule doesn't apply when the prefect belongs to another House," retorted Pitt. "Kenmore shouldn't trespass——"

"Kenmore was not trespassing," interrupted Sinclair. "You'd better understand straight away that Kenmore is second prefect in the West House. Mr. Stokes appointed him this afternoon."

"What?" gasped Pitt, staring.

"Not so confident now, are you?" sneered Kenmore.

"It's ridiculous!" shouted Singleton. "You're an East House chap. My only hat! Has Sinclair dragged one of his pals across the Triangle? Have we got to put up with two of those East House rotters?"

"You'll report in my study at seven o'clock for a caning, Singleton," said Sinclair calmly.

"Hang it all, you can't——"

"Another word, and I'll make it a flogging!" interrupted Sinclair. "I shall require those five hundred lines before bed-time tonight. They'd better be well written, or I'll double the impo."

"We won't write them!" shouted Levi.

"That, of course, is your own concern," retorted Sinclair. "You all know the punishment for disobeying orders. Any more of this impertinence, and I'll gate the lot of you for a fortnight. If you don't like my way of maintaining discipline, appeal to Mr. Stokes."

Sinclair took Kenmore's arm, and they both entered the House. The juniors were startled and dumbfounded. It had been bad enough to have Guy Sinclair at the head of things. But now he had brought Simon Kenmore to support him—and Kenmore was notoriously the worst bully in the school.

Nobody appealed to Mr. Beverley Stokes, the Housemaster. Such a course, they felt, would have been futile. For Mr. Stokes would have been compelled to uphold the decisions of his head prefect, even though he personally disagreed with them.

Besides, there was something rather queer about old Barry Stokes this term. He was quieter, and more subdued. His usual cheery hail was lacking, and he seldom greeted his boys. Indeed, it was being felt that he went out of his way to avoid them.

Yes, things were decidedly strange in the West House.

CHAPTER III.

MORE EMIGRANTS.



NELSON LEE looked at the three juniors thoughtfully.

"You are quite certain you want to make this change, boys?" he asked.

"I suppose you are aware it is most unusual for juniors to transfer from one House to another in this fashion?"

Bernard Forrest nodded.

"That's all right, sir," he said. "Gulliver and Bell and I have talked it over, and we think we'd be more comfortable in the West House. Some of the fellows here don't seem keen on us, and we don't want to stay where we're not wanted."

"I appreciate that aspect of the matter," said Nelson Lee drily. "But it is hardly a question for me to decide, boys. You have my permission to leave the Ancient House, but Mr. Stokes may have a word to say. I don't think he is very keen on these transfers——"

"We shan't have any trouble there, sir," interrupted Forrest coolly. "In fact, Mr. Stokes has already invited us."

The schoolmaster-detective looked at Forrest keenly.

"Are you telling me the truth?" he asked.

"Yes, sir."

"Mr. Stokes has personally invited you into the West House?"

"Not personally, sir," admitted Forrest. "But Sinclair's the Head Boy over there, and he placed our request before Mr. Stokes. Only ten minutes ago, he told us that it was O.K."

Nelson Lee nodded slowly.

"I am afraid you are inclined to be rather untruthful, Forrest," he said. "However, since I am not your Housemaster now, I will drop the matter. I will have a word with Mr. Stokes about this later on. You may go."

"Thank you, sir!"

The cads of Study A left Nelson Lee's presence, and shook hands with one another out in the corridor. They were all looking pleased.

"I knew it would work," grinned Forrest. "Couldn't help working," said Gulliver. "Sinclair's on our side, and he wangled it for us. I believe old Lee is glad we're going. He didn't seem particularly cut up, anyhow."

This was the literal truth. Nelson Lee was indeed pleased to see the last of the three young rascals—but he was puzzled as to why Mr. Beverley Stokes should permit them to enter the West House. They were hardly the kind of boys a Housemaster desires under his roof.

"As far as I can see, we're going out of the frying-pan into the fire," said Bell. "What's the good of the West House? We shan't be any better off. There's Sinclair, of course, but what about Pitt? What about Trotwood and Singleton, and those other chaps? Stokes, too? Stokes is just as bad as Lee——"

"You ass, Sinclair and Kenmore are our pals, and they're practically in command," interrupted Forrest. "Fenton and Wilson are the chief prefects here, and they're as hot as mustard on smoking and study parties. Over in the West House we shall have a ripping time."

They went along to Study A without any further argument. It was in the middle of the evening, and most of the

fellows were industriously engaged in doing their prep. The Ancient House was comparatively quiet. True, the sounds of bumps and scuffles emanated from Study D, but these disturbances were so normal that the other juniors hardly noticed them. In fact, if they had been absent, one would have wondered what was wrong.

"Come on, we'll get this moving job done straight away," said Forrest briskly. "We've got Study T, over in the West House—everything's all fixed up. I vote we carry our books and things over straight away."

"Good egg!" said Gulliver. "We'll give these chaps a surprise! They'll look a bit sick when they find that we're leavin' the House for good!"

This, of course, was pure egotism on Gulliver's part. It was far more likely that the Ancient House would hold a special banquet, or something, to celebrate the occasion.

The Study A trio were discovered, ten minutes later, proceeding down the passage, piled up with books and other personal belongings. They were discovered by no less a person than Archie Glenthorne, whose monocle lost its grip at the unexpected vision.

"Good gad!" he said, staring. "I mean, what's the absolute idea? The old muscular department seems to be working overtime. If there is anything I can do, laddies, kindly warble the cheery word. Archibald is always ready to rally round. One word, and I'll summon Phipps!"

"You can clear out, Archie!" said Gulliver. "We're movin'."

"Moving?"

"We're clearing out of the Ancient House."

"Odds cheers and gladness!" ejaculated Archie, beaming. "Is this absolutely official, old article? I mean, not really? We've waited for this day for months, dash it, never dreaming that it would come true!"

Forrest & Co. scowled.

"Go and eat coke!" snorted Forrest gruffly.

"What-ho! At this joyous moment I could eat cinders!" smiled Archie. "But it's too frightfully good to be frightfully true. We can't be freed from the Ancient House blight so frightfully easily! I mean to say, you chappies have always been regarded as the skeleton in the good old cupboard. Something to be kept bally dark, as it were."

"You insultin' rotter!" roared Gulliver. "Are you tellin' us that we're not wanted?"

"Good gad!" gasped Archie. "Didn't you know?"

"What's all this row about here?" demanded Handforth, putting his head out of the doorway of Study D. "Hallo, what's this—a burglary?"

Handforth was looking somewhat dishevelled. Church and McClure, who came

out behind him, were even more dishevelled, but they looked quietly content. For once they had emerged triumphant from a study scrap. Handforth wasn't always victorious. Occasionally he found his chums more than his match.

But he never admitted it. On this present occasion he had heard voices outside, and had decided to use it as an excuse to end the hostilities. And he forgot all about the scrap when he saw the loaded cads.

"Can't we shift our things without a lot of busybodies pryin' an' spyin'?" demanded Gulliver tartly. "Thank goodness we shan't have to put up with your rot after this evenin'!"

"You're not going away, are you?" asked Handforth, staring.

"We're transferring into the West House," explained Forrest. "How many more times are we to tell you chaps?"

Handforth flushed with excitement.

"By George, these chaps are clearing out!" he roared. "I'll tell you what—let's get up a feed, or a concert! Let's help 'em to carry their things out! Come on! We'll soon empty their giddy study!"

"Leave our study alone!" snorted Forrest.

But the news got round in a very few minutes. Half the Remove fellows in the Ancient House entered into the spirit of the thing, and Forrest & Co. were helped valiantly in their moving job. In less than five minutes the rest of their belongings were shifted out, and dumped on Ancient House steps.

"Jolly good!" declared Somerton. "You needn't come indoors again now. Good riddance to bad rubbish!"

"Hear, hear!"

"It's no good trying to get back again, either," said Handforth grimly. "You've gone of your own free wills, and that's enough. Those West House chaps must be mad to admit you! By George, I wonder if they know?" he added. "We'd better give 'em a warning."

"You silly fool!" roared Forrest. "We've got official permission! Everything's fixed up with Sinclair—"

"Sinclair, eh?" said Dick Hamilton, with a keen look. "Now we're beginning to understand! Birds of a feather, eh? You think you'll have a soft time over there? Well, we're raising no objections."

Dick Hamilton—better known as Nipper—was highly pleased to see the last of Forrest & Co. As captain of the Remove, he had always considered that the Ancient House was unfortunate to have three such undesirables under its roof.

Forrest & Co. were not feeling exactly happy. The unqualified satisfaction of the Ancient House was a shock to them. They had never realised how unpopular they were. But an occasion of this sort brought it home to them with full force.

"Who cares?" snapped Forrest. "If they're glad to be rid of us—we're bubbling with joy to be rid of them!"

"So we're all pleased!" said Nipper cheerfully.

"All except those poor beggars in the West House," remarked Tommy Watson. "I'll bet they won't hold any joy celebrations."

CHAPTER IV.

NOT WANTED.



REGINALD PITT laid his pen down with a grunt.

"That's half of 'em, anyhow!" he said, with a certain gloomy satisfaction.

"My hat, we can never do it, Jack—there isn't time."

"Lucky beggar! I've only got two hundred of mine finished," growled Jack Grey. "I say, Reggie, can't we do something? Have we got to put up with this—this rotten tyranny without a fight?"

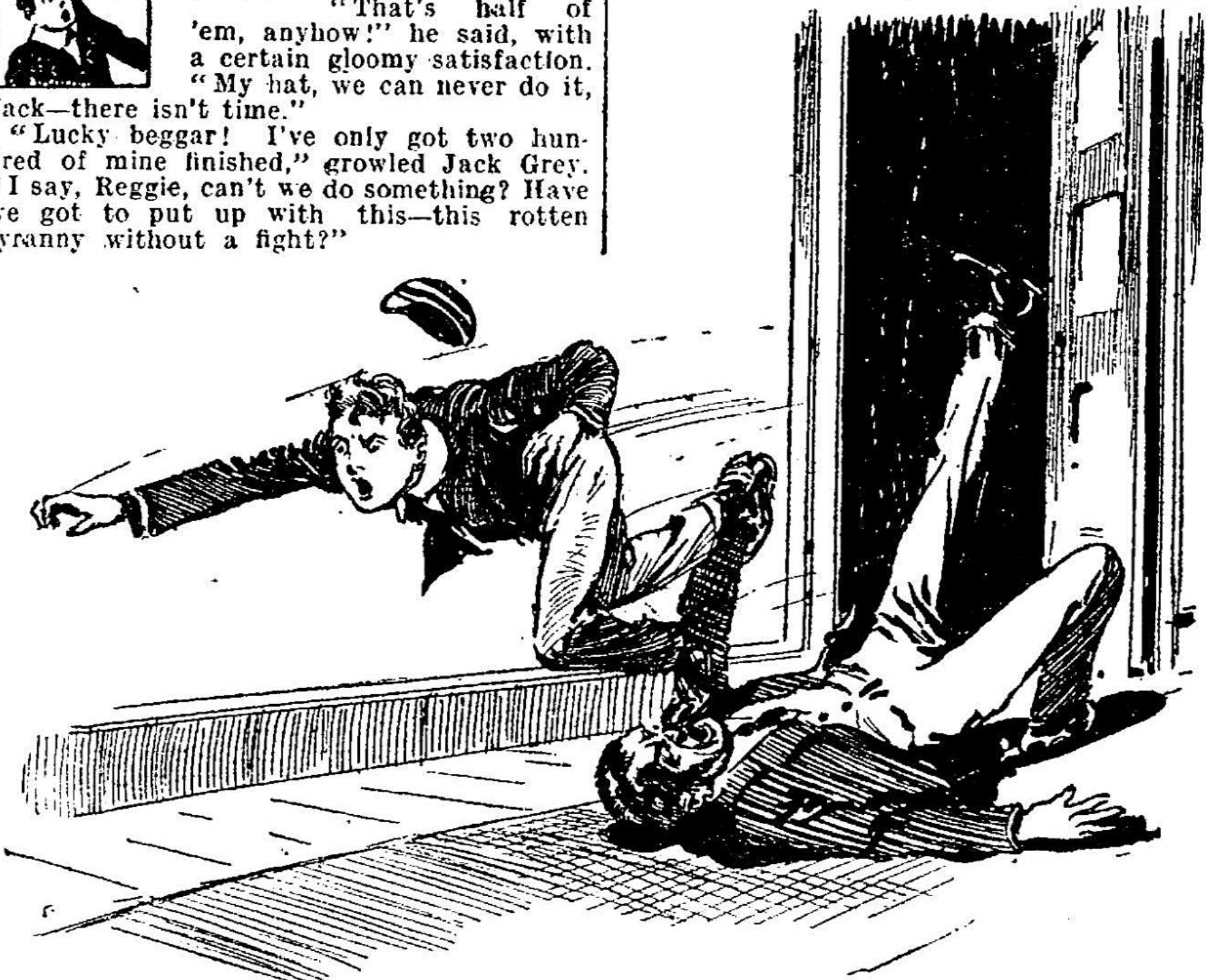
Jack Grey stared.

"My only hat!" he ejaculated. "Where's your spirit, Reggie?"

"Still here!" grinned Pitt. "My dear old ass, I simply mean that we've got to submit openly. In reality, of course, we'll fool these rotters, and prepare some elaborate scheme for getting our own back. There's nothing like throwing dust into the enemy's eyes. That's our policy."

Jack Grey's eyes began to gleam.

"You mean we'll fight?" he asked keenly.



And Willy found himself sprawling on the top of Simon Kenmore of the Sixth. It was rather unfortunate that Willy's left foot was mingled with Simon Kenmore's face.

They had been hard at work in their study in the West House. For they had learned that it was quite useless to ignore Guy Sinclair's impositions. He was head prefect, and he had to be obeyed. No matter how unjust the punishment, there was no getting out of it.

"We can't do better than submit," said Pitt quietly.

"That's not like you, old man."

"And submit tamely, too," went on Reggie. "Sinclair's all-powerful, and now that Kenmore's with him he'll get worse. We juniors had better swallow our medicine, and obligingly turn ourselves into worms."

"Not yet," replied Reggie. "As Nipper has often said, there's no sense in being in a hurry. Our only course is to bide our time. We'll give Sinclair plenty of rope, and see where it leads him. Then, when we've got to the breaking-point, we'll start something big."

Jack Grey leaned back dreamily in his chair.

"By jingo, I'm glad to hear you talk like that, Reggie!" he said softly. "We can put up with Sinclair's dictatorship comfortably if we know there's something exciting coming along. But it's a bit too early—"

He was interrupted by the arrival of Single.

ton. The Hon. Douglas was looking flushed and excited.

"Have you heard about Forrest & Co.?" he asked tensely.

"No," said Pitt. "What about 'em?"

"They're here!"

"Here? Where?"

"In the West House."

"Then kick 'em out!" said Pitt promptly. "Jack and I will come along and help. We always believe in joining these revels. Kicking Forrest & Co. out promises to be interesting."

"But you don't understand," said Singleton. "They've come here for good! They've planted themselves in Study T—"

"What's the matter with your hands?" interrupted Jack.

"Bother my hands!" growled Singleton. "Can't you understand that this thing is urgent?" He looked at his hands ruefully. "That cad, Sinclair!" he explained.

"You've had that swishing?" asked Pitt sympathetically.

"The awful rotter!" snorted the Hon. Douglas. Six fearful cuts! Look here—I'm all bruised and swollen! Six cuts just because I said something insulting about Kenmore!"

Singleton's hands were certainly inflamed. There was plenty of evidence here that Guy Sinclair had used the cane with vicious force. No Form-master of St. Frank's, no matter how angry, left such weals.

"The bullying cad!" said Pitt hotly.

"Oh, it's no good making a fuss—"

"Look here, Singleton, Reggie's got a policy," said Jack Grey. "We're going to stick Sinclair without a murmur."

"We can't do anything else!" said the Hon. Douglas bluntly.

"We're going to stick him, but we're going to get our own back later on," went on Jack. "Give him rope, you understand? Then, at the right time, we'll jump on him, and make him wish he'd never been born."

Singleton smiled dubiously.

"Sounds very pretty—but practice is a different thing to theory!" he replied. "We don't want to discuss that now, anyhow. What about Forrest and Gulliver and Bell? I tell you they're in Study T!"

Reggie Pitt rose to his feet.

"They won't be in Study T for long!" he said firmly. "So they think we'll accept them in this House, do they? What do they take us for? A dustheap? We'll soon put this matter to rights!"

"Like their nerve!" said Grey indignantly. "I expect they've upset Handforth, or somebody—and those Ancient House chaps have kicked them out. Well, it's no good looking for shelter under this giddy roof. We're a bit particular in the West House!"

"Rather!" agreed Pitt. "The Junior School is practically free of rotters here. Most of 'em are in Goole's House, on the other side of the Triangle. If Forrest & Co.

want new quarters, let 'em go there! They'll be in congenial company!"

The three Removites marched out of Study K, and found a number of other juniors in the corridor. Solomon Levi and Dick Goodwin were talking excitedly to Nicodemus Trotwood and the Onions brothers.

"We were just coming for you, Pitt," said Nick Trotwood.

"Well, I'm here," said Reggie.

"What about this beastly invasion?" demanded Levi. "By my life, have we got to stand these cads? They've carried a lot of their things into Study T, and the door's locked!"

"You're junior skipper, and it's up to you to get busy," added Nick. "It's bad enough to have Sinclair with us. We draw the line at Forrest & Co."

Pitt looked at the crowd keenly, and walked towards Study T. He tried the door, found it locked, and turned.

"You take a couple of fellows with you, Nick, and have a look at the window," he said briskly. "They're probably trying to get in that way."

Trotwood beamed.

"Speaking to me?" he asked pleasantly.

"Of course I am," said Pitt. "Make haste!"

"Make some paste?" repeated Trotwood. "What for?"

"Oh, my hat!" groaned Pitt. "It's Corny! Nick, push this twin brother of yours off the scene! I thought, I was talking to you!"

"Of course he is," said Cornelius mildly.

"Didn't you say that Levi's a Jew?"

"This deaf fathead will make me dizzy!" snorted Reggie.

"Yes, we do seem to be busy," said Corny, nodding. "But I can't understand what it's all about. If there's anything I can do—"

Fortunately, Forrest & Co. arrived at this moment, making all further planning unnecessary. They appeared from the lobby, each carrying an armful of personal belongings. They paused for a moment when they beheld the crowded passage, but then came on again.

"What's this? A meeting or something?" asked Forrest pleasantly. "Mind the way, you chaps—let's get by!"

The chaps effectively barred the corridor.

"Outside!" said Pitt briefly.

"What?"

"You've made a mistake," said Reggie.

"This isn't the Home for Dirty Dogs! It's a perfectly respectable schoolhouse. Funny you should make such a bloomer!"

"Look here, you facetious ass," growled Bernard Forrest. "We've come—"

"Exactly!" nodded Pitt. "Now you're going!"

"I tell you—"

"Sorry—we're not interested!" interrupted the junior skipper calmly. "Do you prefer to walk out quietly, or shall we carry you?"

"If you touch us——"

"Yes, I know," nodded Pitt. "It'll be rather awkward. We shall have to wash ourselves thoroughly afterwards. But as it'll be in a good cause, we shan't mind. Of course, if we carry you, we can't guarantee a maximum of comfort. It's quite possible you'll go out upside down."

Forrest & Co. glared furiously.

"Why don't you do something, Forrest?" demanded Gulliver. "This is our House now—we've got every right here. We're not goin' to be treated like this after we've honoured the West House by comin' into it!"

A howl of discord went up from the crowd.

"If it's all the same to you, we'll dispense with the honour," said Pitt agreeably. "And as talking seems to be about as much use as addressing old Corny, we'll act."

"You'd better be careful——" began Forrest hastily.

"Company, forward!" said Pitt with crisp tones. "All together—to the attack! Outside with 'em—and make it swift!"

The West House fellows needed no second bidding. They swept upon Forrest & Co. like an avalanche, and the cads of Study A received a vague sort of impression that they weren't exactly wanted. It could hardly be said that a brass band had been provided by the West House to welcome them.

CHAPTER V.

THE HOMELESS THREE.



BERNARD FORREST sat up with a dazed expression on his face, and Gulliver

and Bell sorted themselves out from amongst his legs. Bell pulled a couple of pen-holders out of his neck. Gulliver extracted a ruler from his collar.

"Well," said Reggie Pitt, "you're out!"

"And you'd better stay out!" said Jack Grey. "No rubbish dumped here!"

Forrest & Co. were in a somewhat dishevelled condition. They were at the bottom of the West House steps, and all round them lay books, slippers, and all manner of other intimate belongings.

"You wait!" breathed Forrest, picking himself up. "By gad! You wait until Sinclair hears about this."

Reggie Pitt shivered from head to foot.

"Sinclair!" he breathed huskily. "The name fills me with jellified horror! Something like the ogre in the pantomime!"

"You can sneer!" roared Forrest. "But Sinclair's going to make you suffer for this! We're West House chaps. We've had per-

mission to transfer—and we demand to come in!"

"Sorry, nothing doing," said Nick Trotwood.

"We've got every right——"

"Opinions differ," interrupted Pitt. "And when it comes to a question of right, we rather fancy that we're the chaps to decide. You say you're West House fellows, and we say you're not. Are they West House fellows, you chaps?"

"No!" roared the crowd in the doorway.

"Will they ever be West House fellows?"

"Never!" chorused the crowd.

"So there you are!" said Pitt, shrugging his shoulders. "You see, Forrest, it's no good. The vote's against you. You're absolutely in the minority. Why not try the East House? In a moment of absent-mindedness, Goole's lot might possibly let you sneak in."

"They admitted a stray mongrel yesterday," said Jack Grey. "They're awfully kind-hearted over there!"

"They'll even recognise tramps, at a pinch," said Singleton. "You ought to stand quite a good chance with the East House. Take our advice and try it."

Forrest & Co. were nearly speechless.

"And that," said Pitt, "is that!"

He led the way back into the lobby, and the discomfited cads had the mortification of seeing the door closed in their faces.

"Kicked out!" muttered Bell. "The beasts! The rotters! Where's Sinclair? He'll slaughter them for this! He distinctly told us we could go into the West House—and these miserable worms——"

"Don't get excited," interrupted Forrest harshly. "We'll put this right soon. In the meantime, we'd better take these things back into the Ancient House. It's cold out here—looks like rain."

They collected up their goods and marched back to the Ancient House doorway. They were relieved to find it open and deserted. All three of them were in vile tempers. It wasn't very gratifying to realise that they were wanted in neither House. For once, Forrest & Co. had been plainly given to understand that their room was preferred to their company.

"Come on—we'll get rid of these things, and then find Sinclair," said Forrest between his teeth. "There's going to be a fuss to-night. Those idiots can't do as they like!"

"But Sinclair's in the West House," muttered Gulliver. "And we can't get in."

"We can go to his study window," said Forrest grimly.

They mounted the steps of the Ancient House, but before they could set foot into the lobby half a dozen purposeful forms appeared from apparently nowhere and barred the way.

"No admittance to poisonous insects," said Handforth curtly.

Forrest & Co. started back, dumbfounded. "Get out of the way!" bellowed Forrest passionately. "This is our House—I mean, it was our House——"

"But it's not your House now—and never will be again!" interrupted Handforth. "What's the idea of bringing all that truck back? I thought you were going to send the West House into hysterics of joy by living there?"

"The cads chucked us out!" snorted Bell. "Ha, ha, ha!"

Handforth & Co., Nipper, Fullwood, and Russell roared with appreciative amusement. It struck them as being distinctly good.

"Fine!" grinned Nipper. "I always had a good opinion of the West House."

"They chucked us out, and now we haven't got anywhere to go!" hooted Gulliver. "We can't stand here with these things in our arms all the evening! Let's come inside, you cackling fatheads!"

"Go and eat coke!" retorted Handforth. "We've biffed you out once, and we'll biff you out again! You're welcome to come in if you like, but you'll go out at an awful speed. We're quite ready to oblige."

Forrest & Co. backed down the steps, breathing with pent-up fury. They nearly collided with a tall senior who was approaching out of the gloom. William Napoleon Browne paused and looked mildly interested.

"Ah, one of your little amusements, I presume?" he asked. "Forgive me for interrupting the proceedings, brothers, but the doorway appears to be somewhat congealed with the populace. Am I right in assuming that you have collected to welcome me?"

"These beasts won't let us in!" snorted Gulliver.

Browne eyed the crowd in the doorway with renewed interest.

"I am prepared to acknowledge that we are all animals, but the term 'beasts' is scarcely apt, Brother Gulliver," he remonstrated. "Furthermore, I am compelled to inform you that I approve of their sentiments with a lusty heartiness."

"We kicked them out," explained Handforth.

"Alas! I wish I had been here to assist!" sighed Browne. "Curiously enough, it has been the passion of my life to kick these three centipedes into the abyss of the infinite. Why, indeed, are they with us? It is a solemn thought. One wonders why these creatures are allowed to emerge from their warrens."

Browne passed up the steps, and was allowed through the cordon. But it closed again, and the situation became a deadlock. Forrest was calmer now—with a grim, vicious calmness.

"All right!" he snapped. "We'll make you rotters pay for this one day. Come on,

Gulliver! Bring those things, Bell! We'll get back to the West House."

They retreated, followed by a song of triumph from the Ancient House crowd. The West House door was still securely closed. Forrest & Co. set their things on the top step, and Forrest shook the door and hammered at it. It suddenly opened, and Guy Sinclair stood there.

"What's this confounded noise?" he demanded sharply.

"Thank goodness!" said Forrest. "Look here, Sinclair——"

"Oh, it's you fellows!" said Sinclair, changing his tone. "Well, you needn't make all that din——"

"Those cads in there kicked us out!" yelled Gulliver. "They bolted the door on us."

"Yah! Sneak!" came a howl from within.

"So they kicked you out, did they?" said Sinclair curtly. "Who were they, Forrest? I want to know the names."

"They were all in it," said Forrest gruffly. "But there's no need to make a fuss, Sinclair. We don't want to get anybody into trouble. Let it drop. We only want to get in, and be left in peace."

But Sinclair was not inclined to take this view. He turned and eyed the crowded lobby—for most of the West House fellows were there. Forrest & Co. entered, looking somewhat uneasy.

Bernard Forrest had realised that it would be good policy on his part to make light of the affair. It was no recommendation to enter a new House by getting the fellows into trouble. Whatever the personal feelings of the newcomers, it was better for them to pretend to forgive.

But Guy Sinclair was not letting this opportunity slip.

"I'm glad I caught you red-handed at this contemptible persecution," he said curtly. "It seems to me you juniors are doing your utmost to make trouble. Well, I'll supply all you ask for."

"That's all rot, Sinclair," said Reggie Pitt. "These three fellows belong to the Ancient House. They planted themselves in Study T, and we chucked them out. Can't we do that without being dropped on?"

"Forrest and Gulliver and Bell have transferred into the West House," retorted Sinclair. "No, it's not unofficial. It's been arranged with Mr. Lee and Mr. Stokes. So I don't want any objections."

"Life isn't worth living this term!" said Grey hotly. "We juniors can't do a thing without being pounced on. Last term we had a bit of freedom. But we're like a lot of convicts now!"

Sinclair smiled pleasantly.

"You'll have plenty of freedom if you obey my orders," he replied calmly. "That's all I want—nothing more. Obey

me in everything, and you'll come to no harm. That's simple enough, isn't it?"

"In other words, we've got to look upon you as a kind of King Emperor?" asked Pitt sarcastically. "Or, better still, a modern edition of Simon Legree?"

"What about Nero?" suggested Singleton bitterly.

Guy Sinclair scowled.

"That's enough!" he shouted. "By thunder! You kids have got a darned lot too much to say! Look here! These three are members of this House for good! If you touch them again, or interfere with them in any way, I'll bring my hand down with a thud! That ought to be enough!"

He strode off, and Forrest & Co. grinned with complete triumph.

CHAPTER VI.

THE CHEERIO CLUB.



"WELL, what about it now?" asked Forrest coolly.

"Goin' to kick us out again?" jeered Gulliver.

"I don't think!" grinned

Bell.

Their arrogance and self-importance filled the West House juniors with burning indignation. But for Reggie Pitt, half a dozen fellows would have flung themselves forward to the attack.

"Steady!" growled Pitt. "There's no sense in asking for trouble through a megaphone! Leave the rotters alone!"

"But they've insulted—" began Singleton.

"They're always insulting somebody or other—it's second nature to them," interrupted Pitt. "Mr. Stokes himself has sanctioned their transfer, and that ties our hands. We can't pit ourselves against our Housemaster."

"Old Barry Stokes ought to have known better!"

"We can't blame Stokes," said Pitt. "Like the other Housemasters, he probably leaves most of the routine work to his prefects. And Stokes doesn't know Forrest & Co. as we do. He thought it was just a detail."

The newcomers were not flattered by this open discussion. One might have thought they were beyond the pale.

"That's about enough!" said Bernard Forrest. "You've heard what Sinclair said. So you'd better not attempt to interfere with us. You needn't worry—we've no desire to associate with the crowd. We're exclusive."

"As it happens, we've got exactly the same sentiments," said Reggie Pitt curtly. "You fellows are here under sufferance. As

long as you behave yourselves, we might be inclined to stand you. But if you throw your weight about—well, we shall have to take you in hand, Sinclair or no Sinclair."

"Go and eat coke!" said Forrest sourly.

He and his chums marched to Study T and took possession. Somehow, they didn't feel quite so satisfied as they thought they would. It was hardly a triumph. They were in the West House, certainly, and they had a friend at court in the shape of Sinclair. But it was impossible to forget that the other juniors resented their presence.

"Hang them!" growled Forrest. "What do we care? After all, one House is as good as another. The grub's just as good here as in the Ancient House, too. And we're not those idiots who madly stick to their own House because of sports. I should hope we're above that sort of rot."

"Of course we are," agreed his chums.

In cold truth, they were unable to appreciate the fine feelings of loyalty which bound a fellow to his own particular House. Guy Sinclair was head prefect here, and Guy Sinclair was a sport. Forrest & Co. had no thoughts beyond this.

"We can do practically as we like now," said Gulliver gloatingly. "Sinclair is a regular sport—he'll probably let us play cards in the study, and smoke, and won't say a word."

"There's something rummy about this business," remarked Forrest.

"Something rummy?"

"Stokes, I mean," went on Bernard. "He seems to be out of the picture. Old Sinclair has got the reins fairly in his own grip, and he's bossing the whole show. Well, we don't want to make inquiries. We're here, and I fancy we shall have the time of our lives."

They set about getting the room straight without further delay, and within half-an-hour the barren look had departed, and Study T was beginning to take on a homely aspect.

Guy Sinclair dropped in shortly afterwards, and nodded genially.

"All comfy?" he asked.

"Yes, thanks," said Forrest.

"Good! Of course, you needn't take any notice of those unpleasant young bounders," said Sinclair, nodding towards the door. "They're a miserable set of prigs, at the best. Ignore them. Don't incite any disturbance, if you can help it. I don't want to be bothered every minute of the day. Still, if they drop on you—let me know."

"Not report to Stokes?"

"Good heavens, no," replied Sinclair. "I'm the head of this House. Never forget that! I promised you fellows a good time over here, and I meant it. But you've got to keep mum. I think I can rely upon you to keep a secret, can't I?"

"Rather!" said the three, in one voice.

"All right—then you can come to that club to-night."

"You mentioned something about a club before," said Forrest keenly. "By gad, Sinclair, what's it going to be? A real sporty club? Cards, smoking, and all that?"

"We're calling it the Cheerio Club, and you can bet we'll have some good times," replied Sinclair pleasantly. "This is just between ourselves, of course. I'm a prefect, and you fellows are juniors—but when there's nobody else about we can cut that sort of stuff."

"Rather!" said Forrest, nodding.

"You'd better realise, though, that your own safety depends upon complete silence," went on Sinclair. "If a word about this Club leaks out, you'll be in the cart—all three of you. I shan't get into trouble. I'm Head Boy, and as safe as houses. You'll be the scapegoats—and it'll mean the sack. It'll mean the sack in two ticks. See?"

Forrest & Co. saw, and said so.

"That's all right, then," went on Sinclair, turning to the door. "You know the place? Upstairs—top landing—first door on the left. Don't come earlier than half-past ten. And remember what I've said."

He went out, and closed the door behind him. Forrest & Co. exchanged excited, triumphant glances. They had hardly dared to hope that things would actually materialise as they had expected. But Sinclair had just invited them to become members of the Club—and it was official."

Nobody else knew of this secret club. Indeed, it had only been formed during the last day or so, and had not even held a meeting yet. But Guy Sinclair and Simon Kenmore had been making quite a number of preparations.

The three rascally Removites had been invited into the West House because Sinclair needed them—they were just the type he required to swell the membership of his new club. Parkin, of the Sixth, and Grayson and Shaw, of the Fifth, were also transferring into the West House. In a word, Sinclair was going the whole hog—he was inviting all his undesirable friends into his domain.

And the West House could do nothing.

For Guy Sinclair, in the powerful position of head prefect, was practically the sole director of the House. Mr. Beverley Stokes knew absolutely nothing of these underground intrigues. When the Head Boy of a House happens to be an out-and-out rascal, there is plenty of opportunity for questionable practices. And Guy Sinclair was unscrupulous to a degree.

When Forrest & Co. went up to bed, they had lost all their feelings of anger. After all, what did they care about Pitt and Singleton and Goodwin, and the other fools

of the Remove? Why should they worry? They had transferred into the West House so that they could have a good time. And there were just as many goody-goodies in the Ancient House, so what was the difference? This difference. Edgar Fenton was in control of the Ancient House, and the popular St. Frank's captain was a head prefect who maintained a kindly discipline, and who saw that the few uncertain fellows had no opportunities of indulging their questionable fancies. But in the West House, with Sinclair at the helm, there would be plenty of scope for the "sports." Being one of these gentry himself, Sinclair would naturally be easy-going.

Long after lights-out, Forrest & Co. remained awake. They heard ten o'clock strike, and still they waited. At a quarter-past they slipped out of bed and dressed. By this time the other Remove dormitories were quiet and still. Indeed, even the senior dormitories had settled down for the night when the half-hour boomed solemnly out.

"Come on!" said Gulliver eagerly.

"Don't want to be too excited," murmured Forrest. "Our policy is to seem indifferent and careless. If we don't, those seniors will adopt a condescending air that makes me sick. We're as good as they are—so we'll let 'em see it."

"That's the wheeze!" agreed Bell, grinning.

They crept out of the little dormitory, and found the corridor dark and deserted. Wearing only slippers, the rascally trio proceeded to the upper stairs, mounted them, and noted a gleam of light beneath a door on the left.

These upper rooms were called attics—and they were, indeed, attics. But they were big, comfortable rooms with picturesque sloping ceilings. Most of them were used as storage apartments, and were generally kept locked.

Forrest tapped lightly upon one of the doors, and waited.

"All right—only us!" he murmured, as the door opened.

They were admitted by Simon Kenmore, and they received a very pleasant surprise. They had pictured a rather bare, cold room, but were prepared to face this in view of the promised "sport."

In reality, the club-room was agreeable in the extreme—and fitted the name of the Club to perfection. There was an air of cheer about the place. Several lights were gleaming, a big fire burned in the grate, and there were three or four comfortable lounges round the walls. A soft carpet occupied the floor, and there was a side-board with sandwich dishes, bottles, and various other types of refreshment.

"By Jove!" said Forrest. "This is the real thing!"

CHAPTER VII.

A HIGH OLD TIME.



PERIODICALLY, in the history of St. Frank's, certain sets of sportsmen had started illicit clubs, where gambling could be indulged in, where smoking and drinking could be enjoyed without fear of the "beaks." But seldom had a club presented such a promising start as this.

Simon Kenmore chuckled as he observed the expressions on the faces of the three juniors. Kenmore was attired in a gorgeous dressing-gown and slippers, and not content with a cigarette, he had sported a most wonderful holder. It was nearly a foot long, and all colours of the rainbow.

"Pretty good, eh?" he asked genially.

"I should think it is pretty good!" said Forrest. "Why, I'd no idea you had a place like this! No chance of Stokes' dropping on us, I suppose? Or old Pagett? He sleeps in this House, doesn't he?"

"You're right," agreed Kenmore. "Pagett does sleep—like a log! Besides that, he's miles away down one of the other corridors. And Stokes is the same. We're as safe as houses up here."

"Care for a drink?" asked Grayson, of the Fifth.

"Hallo! You here, too?" asked Gulliver.

"You bet!" said the cad of the Fifth. "Shaw and I are still in the East House, but we're shifting over here this week. Just a bit of trouble with Goole, I fancy. He's worried about so many of us changing. But Sinclair will wangle it in the end."

"Sinclair's a sport," agreed Kenmore. "He's gone down to fetch Parkin—he wants to transfer, too. No wonder Goole's got the wind up."

Forrest & Co. were relieved by the friendly tone of the seniors. They had feared that they would be received with an air of condescension, as though a great favour were being bestowed upon them. But the seniors were as friendly as possible. In the privacy of this Cheerio Club they tacitly acknowledged that all the members were equals, irrespective of age.

Kenmore was particularly chummy, and his attitude was noticeable—for, as a rule, he was a morose, uncouth sort of fellow. The influence of the cigarette, and a recent cocktail, had had their effect.

"What was that about a drink?" asked Forrest.

"Come over to the bar!" grinned Grayson.

"You juniors had better go a bit easy," warned Kenmore doubtfully.

"Cheese it, old man!" said Gulliver.

They went to the sideboard, and Grayson poured out some cocktails. They were

more or less innocuous, consisting of orange juice, vermouth, and only a trace of spirits. But the eyes of Forrest & Co. sparkled.

"Tanner each," said Grayson calmly.

"Eh?" ejaculated Forrest, withdrawing his hand.

"You don't expect free drinks, I suppose?" asked the Fifth Former. "If there's any profit, it goes into the club funds. I'm cashier."

"I pity the club funds, then," said Forrest, grinning. "All right—we'll pay up. It's a confounded swindle, though."

Within five minutes they were thoroughly enjoying themselves, and Guy Sinclair had appeared—also attired in his dressing-gown. This was a free-and-easy club in every respect. Forrest & Co. made up their minds to come in dishabille themselves on the next occasion.

"All here?" asked Sinclair amiably.

"Haven't you brought Parkin?" asked Kenmore.

"The ass didn't seem very eager—he's a bit of a hooligan," said Sinclair, with a frown. "He's your pal, Kenmore—you advised me to elect him. But I must say he's an uncouth beast. More like a labourer than a St. Frank's senior. He said he'll come later."

"Just like him!" grunted Kenmore.

"Well, the Club's officially open," declared Sinclair. "I'd just like to say a few words about the rules. Oh, you needn't look surprised. We've got to have rules, the same as every other club. First of all, we pledge ourselves to eternal secrecy."

"That's settled," said Forrest, nodding.

"There's another strict point," went on Sinclair. "We always finish at one a.m. to the minute. That's hard and fast. No overstepping the mark."

"Supposing we're in the middle of a game?" asked Shaw.

"It makes no difference—we quit at one sharp," replied Sinclair firmly. "We can always leave the game open for the next night. If we don't make a rule of that kind, some of you fellows will want to stick here until three and four o'clock. And the club would be dead within a week."

"Why?"

"You're an ass, young Bell, to ask a question like that," retorted Sinclair. "Some of the Form-masters would have something to say when you chaps started falling asleep at all times of the morning and afternoon. No, we've got to finish at one. That's hard and fast."

Forrest nodded.

"Even then we shan't be asleep much before two," he said. "It'll be a bit strenuous. Only five or six hours' sleep—"

"We seniors can stay in bed later, of course," nodded Sinclair. "And you juniors needn't be very particular, either. No need to turn out with the rising-bell. As long as you're down for breakfast, it'll do."

"Good egg!" grinned Forrest. "Thanks awfully, Sinclair."

"Rot!" said Sinclair. "We're all friends here. Of course, you juniors ought to consider yourselves lucky to be admitted at all. I hope you'll appreciate the honour."

Bernard Forrest grinned.

"We do!" he said coolly. "All the same, you'd be in a bit of a mess without us, wouldn't you?"

"What the deuce—"

"Cheese it, Sinclair," chuckled Forrest. "There's not much fun in a club with only four or five members. And we're good for any sort of gamble that you fellows can conjure up, I'll bet. Even as it is, we're a man short. We can't make up two tables with only seven."

"Guy Sinclair gave the juniors a keen look, but knew that they were right. The club would, indeed, be a weak sort of affair without those three Removites to swell the membership. And Forrest had thought it just as well to mention the fact that they all understood one another. These seniors weren't going to fool themselves! All the same, the Removites appreciated the advantages of having a "sportsman" for a head prefect.

"Well, let's start," said Kenmore impatiently. "It's nearly eleven—we've only got two hours. What's it going to be? Nap? Poker? Any old thing—I don't care."

"You kids have got some money, I suppose?" asked Sinclair.

"We have, but we shan't need it," replied Forrest. "We've come here for the special purpose of relieving you of some. We're not mugs, you know. I'll bet we can play cards better than you can."

Sinclair shook his head.

"I shouldn't be surprised!" he admitted. "Some of you juniors are a darned lot too knowing! Well, I suggest Bridge."

"Oh, rot!" protested Gulliver. "Bridge isn't excitin'."

"Let's have a real gamble—somethin' like Pontoon," suggested Grayson.

"No fear!" said Kenmore. "There's nothing to beat Auction Bridge. And you can lose quite enough at it, my sons. We don't want to make the stakes too high. Let's say half-a-crown a hundred to start with."

"Too tame!" said Forrest. "I suggest five bob."

"You're pretty swift, aren't you?" asked Sinclair, frowning. "Five bob a hundred, eh? It's easy enough to lose a thousand points in one rubber if you're reckless in

calling. That means fifty bob for the losers. Still, I'm game!"

"Well, I suggest Pontoon," insisted Gulliver.

In the end, Gulliver and Grayson and Shaw settled themselves to Pontoon, and the other four devoted themselves to Auction Bridge—the most fascinating of all card games, if played with a due sense of proportion.

The Cheerio Club was now officially open—indeed, in full swing.

Half an hour passed, and there was still no sign of Augustus Parkin, the missing Sixth-Former. It was becoming evident, in fact, that he had decided not to turn up. Parkin was always a fellow of uncertain moods.

The Bridge players were firmly settled, and thoroughly enjoying themselves. It so happened that Forrest and Bell were opposed to Sinclair and Kenmore, and the juniors were already ahead on points. Consequently, they were in high feather.

At the other table, the three Pontoon players were getting rather fed up. It was tame, particularly as Shaw was very hard up. Cautiousness availed him nothing, for he lost with every turn of the cards.

"Rats to that dirty dog of a Parkin!" grunted Gulliver. "There'd be some life in the game if we had four. We could play Bridge, too. I believe it's better than Pontoon, after all."

"Pontoon's all right, if there's plenty of cash knocking about," remarked Grayson. "We want somebody with plenty of money. The game's a frost when you're playing with threepences and sixpences."

"What price old Pippy?" grinned Gulliver.

"Who's old Pippy?"

"You know, Lord Pippinton—that new chap in the Remove," said Gulliver. "He lives in this House, too. A proper chump. Goes about bulging with currency notes. Filthy with the stuff. Gad, if we had him up here we'd make our fortunes!"

Grayson looked thoughtful.

"I've heard of Lord Pippinton," he said, with a gleam in his eyes. "We need fellows with cash. I say, why not get him up here? Let's ask Sinclair."

CHAPTER VIII.

INTO THE NET.



"THREE hearts!" said Bernard Forrest calmly.

"Confound you and your rotten hearts!" snorted Kenmore. "That's the second time you've messed up my diamond call, Forrest!"

"Can't help it," said Forrest. "It's all in the game."

"Hang you, four diamonds!" growled Kenmore warmly.

"Double four diamonds," said Bell.

ANSWERS

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"There you go again, Kenny—letting us in the cart!" said Sinclair, with a frown. "Why on earth didn't you let them get their hearts? We'll be down four hundred points—a quid!"

"You'll be lucky to scrape out with only a quid loss!" grinned Bell.

Grayson came over to the other table, and Kenmore brushed him away.

"Don't interrupt!" he snapped. "These beastly juniors are wiping us up! We're hundreds of points down—"

"All your fault, Kenmore, for falling into the trap," said Sinclair. "You shouldn't let yourself be forced up—"

"We've got to call sometimes, I suppose?" roared Kenmore.

"Don't get excited," said Sinclair curtly. "Well, Grayson? Fed up with your own game?"

"No, I just came to ask something," replied Grayson. "Gulliver suggests fetching Lord Pippinton up here—that new kid in the Remove. He sleeps in this House, you know."

"Then let Gulliver suggest something else!"

"Oh, but look here, Sinclair—" began Gulliver.

"We're not having any outsiders in this club," interrupted Guy Sinclair sharply. "It's no good—you needn't argue. I'm the president, and—"

"But, my dear man, Pippinton is the most frightful chump under the sun!" urged Gulliver. "He wouldn't breathe a word if we swore him to secrecy. An' he's easy game. You don't seem to realise he's a walking bank! He never goes about with less than a hundred quid on him!"

"I don't care—" Sinclair paused, and looked thoughtful. "A hundred quid?" he went on slowly. "Now I come to think of it, I've seen him flashing notes about, too. And he's certainly a hopeless ass. Tempting, but we've got to be careful—"

"I thought you were safe?" interrupted Kenmore. "I thought you didn't care a toss for Stokes, or anybody else? And even if Pippinton blabbed, you could deny it all. There's no danger."

Guy Sinclair nodded.

"Yes, by Jove, he's rolling in money," he said musingly. "But we shall have to get him up here without anybody else knowing. He's a fool, but I think we could rely on him to keep his word. If we can extract a promise from him to keep his mouth shut, we can be certain— Yes, all right. We'll try it, anyhow. Go down and fetch him."

"Good egg!" said Gulliver eagerly.

"Wait a minute!" snapped Sinclair. "He sleeps in the same dormitory with young Singleton. Be jolly careful that you don't wake the young beggar. We don't want Singleton to know anything about it."

"Rely on us," said Grayson.

He and Gulliver and Shaw went off at once. They had scarcely believed that Sinclair would sanction the proposal. But,



The prefect landed in a disorderly heap at the bottom of the steps. As he sat up, Guy Sinclair came into view from round the angle of the House.

somehow, the head prefect seemed indifferent as to the consequences. He had established himself so firmly as the ruler of the West House that he was doing almost exactly as he pleased.

Gulliver had accompanied the two Fifth-Formers downstairs, and they easily located the dormitory occupied by the Hon. Douglas Singleton and Lord Pippinton. Sinclair, in fact, had given them directions, for they were all newcomers in the West House.

Creeping in, they found the two juniors soundly asleep. Singleton was snoring placidly, and was not liable to be aroused by a few slight sounds in the bed-room. All the same, there was a distinct chance that Lord Pippinton would speak loudly if aroused, so the three marauders took no chances.

Whilst Grayson smothered the schoolboy peer's head with a pillow, the others lifted him completely out of bed, sheets, blankets, and everything. With scarcely a sound, they swept him outside into the passage and dumped him on the floor.

Singleton still slept, and the door was softly closed. On the floor lay a heap of

writhing bedclothes, and Lord Pippinton's head emerged from the mass, tousled and untidy.

"It's all right!" whispered Gulliver. "We're not goin' to hurt you."

"That's frightfully good," said Lord Pippinton, relieved. "By Jove! Where are we? A sort of kind of new game? I don't quite gather the scheme, but it's probably all right."

"We didn't want to wake Singleton," explained Grayson. "We're going to take you to the Cheerio Club, Pippinton. A spree, you understand."

"Spree?" said his lordship.

"We're going to give you a good time."

"Oh, rather!" said Pippy. "All the same, it doesn't strike me as being absolutely top notch. What's the matter with the bed? The springs appear to have vanished, or something equally horrible."

"You're out in the passage, you ass," whispered Gulliver. "I say, we can't take the chap upstairs like this," he added. "Where's his dressing-gown? And what about his money?"

"Where's your dressing-gown, Pippinton?" asked Grayson.

"Yes!" said his lordship.

"And your money?"

"Oh, rather!" said Lord Pippinton.

"The idiot's still asleep!" snorted Grayson, giving his lordship a severe shake. "Dressing-gown—money! Where are they?"

Pippy came out of his trance. He was perfectly awake, but he was generally in one of those conditions resembling semi-coma. He was just the same during lessons. Mr. Crowell had given him up as a bad job long since. The Form-master simply let Lord Pippinton carry on with his work without bothering to question him or to guide him. The task was altogether too strenuous. But a good old shake would generally arouse Pippy into a momentary sense of cold realities.

"Money?" he repeated, with a wince. "Dash it! Here, I say! Everybody's always talking to me about money! The one fearful thing I bar! All I want is rest—to be left alone. Dash it, I'm tired!"

"You hopeless idiot, where's your money?" hissed Grayson.

"If you must have it, it's on the dressing-table," said Lord Pippinton resignedly. "Take it, but don't bother me. I shall be fearfully glad to lose the stuff! A bally nuisance! And so, I mean, are you chaps!"

Gulliver was already creeping into the bed-room again, and he had no difficulty in finding Lord Pippinton's wallet on the dressing-table. A cautious search brought a dressing-gown and a pair of slippers to light, and Gulliver emerged once again.

Within two minutes his lordship was hustled into the dressing-gown, and the sheets and blankets were bundled into the bed-room. Then the trio of young rascals carried their prey off.

Lord Pippinton opened his eyes wide when he was introduced into the Cheerio Club. He was a rather comical sight in his gorgeous dressing-gown, and wearing odd slippers—one of his own, and one of Singleton's. Gulliver hadn't had time to be too particular. His lordship's excessively fair hair was standing up in wisps, and there was an expression of mild astonishment on his somewhat vacant features.

"Hailo!" he observed. "A sort of gathering of sorts, I take it? A kind of family circle? Cards, and so forth?"

"Just a little club of our own," said Sinclair, who had interrupted his game to greet the new arrival. "You'll always be welcome here, Pippinton, but you'll understand that you'll have to keep your mouth shut."

"Oh, rather!" nodded old Pippy.

"That's thoroughly understood, isn't it?"

"Eh?"

"You'll keep this a secret, won't you?"

"The idea seems rummy, but if you say so I'm a sportsman," replied Lord Pippinton, nodding. "But it's no good getting me on these frightful things, you know," he added, indicating the cards. "Aces and kings, and all that stuff, what? I've heard of the chaps. You shove the beastly things up your sleeve, don't you? At least, so I've always understood."

"My hat!" breathed Kenmore. "It's a shame to take the money!"

"Feel like a game?" asked Sinclair.

"Eh? Who? Me?" said Pippy, with a start. "Oh, I see! So these dashed cards are used to play games with? I always thought so, but I wasn't absolutely sure. I'm a sportsman, but I don't know a thing. I shall only spoil the good old harmony."

"We'll soon teach you," said Grayson briskly. "Of course, you understand that we play with money? And you might lose some, too."

Lord Pippinton brightened up.

"Lose some?" he repeated. "That sounds absolutely top notch! Lead me to it, old boy! I've always wanted to lose money, but nobody would let me. This thing strikes me as being good."

"It's a miracle!" murmured Bernard Forrest. "I've heard of these chaps, but I've never met one before! Poor beggar! He ought to be chained up!"

Lord Pippinton entered into the game of Pontoon with much enthusiasm. It was a case of an innocent lamb led to the slaughter. His lordship was about the simplest fellow in the Remove, easy-going, amiable, and utterly devoid of mistrust. He had always gone through life with the vague idea that everybody was pretty decent. Even when he began to lose money at a startling speed he had no suspicion of being fleeced. He was rather keen on the thing. This money was always worrying him, anyhow.

He happened to be a millionaire in his own right, and he had no idea of the value of solid cash. It was something of no

worth, since he could always get plenty of it. As for suspecting that he was doing wrong, the idea never entered his fair head.

And the sportsmen of the West House gloated over the amazing ease with which this lamb was being fleeced. It was really too good to be true.

CHAPTER IX.

REGGIE PITT'S DISCOVERY.



LORD PIPPINTON'S guardian angel was not off duty, however. Fate could never allow this thing to go on. It was against all reason. And it so happened that there was another wakeful junior in the West House that night.

By the best of good fortune, that junior was Reggie Pitt.

He was not wakeful by chance, but by very reason of the unusual events which had recently taken place in the upper corridor. Reggie was not a very light sleeper. On the other hand, he was not a heavy one. Owing to healthy exercise and a good constitution, he slept like a top.

But something disturbed his slumbers to-night.

At first he was aware of a mysterious thud or two, and was only half aroused. But when the thuds continued, he became more wakeful, and sat up in bed, listening. Jack Grey was breathing regularly on the other side of the little dormitory. All was silence.

"Must have been my fancy!" murmured Pitt, yawning.

The bed was comfortable and warm, and he appeared to snuggle down again with that feeling of exquisite ease which one experiences after awakening. But just before he laid his head on the pillow he heard another mysterious thud.

"Rummy!" he muttered, frowning.

He listened attentively. It seemed to him that the strange, indistinct sound was coming from somewhere above. But that was out of the question. There was nothing above except the attics, and they were empty and deserted. Nevertheless, the thuds continued in a most peculiar way. Sometimes a series came, and then one or two isolated thuds.

As a matter of fact, Simon Kenmore was the culprit.

Kenmore was exasperated over that game of Auction Bridge. He and Sinclair were losing—losing points to two mere juniors! And when Kenmore became exasperated, he always displayed nervousness. Its present form was taking the shape of leaning back in his chair, and tapping impatiently with one heel on the floor.

And as that particular attic happened to be over Reggie's dormitory, the mysterious thuds were the result. Guy Sinclair had warned the members of the Cheerio Club to be careful when walking to and fro, for Sin-

clair knew that the junior dormitories were beneath. He had even obtained a soft carpet in order to nullify the chances of footsteps being heard. But Sinclair was so engrossed in the game that he didn't even hear Kenmore's tapping.

"There's somebody up there, I'll guarantee," Pitt told himself as he sat in bed, listening. "But who? It must be past midnight! What on earth can be the explanation?"

After a few minutes he decided to make a brief jaunt to the attics. Reggie Pitt was the kind of fellow who hated anything mysterious. He always wanted to find out the reason for an unaccountable happening. It occurred to him that a cat might have got trapped upstairs, or some explanation equally simple.

Reggie only waited to put on a bath-robe and some slippers. Then he crept out without awakening Jack Grey, and turned in the direction of the upper staircase. The West House was completely still. At that hour even the most wakeful master had extinguished his light.

Pitt began to feel some doubts. In fact, he felt rather an ass. The stillness was so supreme that he had half a mind to turn back. There was a bit of a wind outside, and perhaps those thuds had been caused by an ill-fitting window-frame in one of the attics.

"Of course, I'm a proper duffer," he murmured. "A chap always exaggerates every sound in the middle of the night. I shan't tell anybody about this, or they'll chip me—"

His thoughts received a jar. Something had caught his eye near the floor, against one of the other dormitory doors. It was something white. He bent down and tried to pick it up, but it resisted.

"Hallo! Something rummy about this!" muttered Pitt. "A corner of a sheet—jammed into the door, too! Singleton's bedroom. Some of those asses must have been larking about."

He quietly opened the dormitory door and peeped in. The blind was up, and a shaft of moonlight was streaming into the room, and the object it revealed to Pitt's gaze was a dishevelled bed. A bed which had been depleted of its coverings, and which was unoccupied. And on the floor, just inside the room, lay a heap of bedclothes.

"Lord Pippinton's bed," Pitt told himself. "Singleton's asleep, but where on earth has that fathead got to? No sign of him!"

The affair was becoming more mysterious than ever. Pippinton was not merely out of bed, but missing altogether. And it needed no acute process of deduction to realise that Pippy had left under unusual circumstances. It wasn't like the schoolboy peer to throw his bedclothes into a heap on the floor.

For a moment Pitt hesitated. Should he awaken Singleton? Perhaps not. Anyhow, he would have a look round first. There was just a chance that Pippy was bilious, or something, and had fled to one of the bath-

rooms for water. There was no sense in making a mystery out of nothing.

Pitt closed the door again and went to the bath-rooms. Lord Pippinton was conspicuous by his total absence. And then Reggie wondered if that mysterious thudding could be connected with the affair.

"Great Scott!" he breathed as a thought came to him. "A rag! Some fatheads have locked old Pippy in one of the attics! That's about it! A pretty low-down sort of joke, anyhow!"

He hurried upstairs without any further hesitation, but stopped short as he reached the top. A light was gleaming from beneath one of the doors, and Pitt grew deeply suspicious. There could be no innocent explanation of this business!

He didn't hesitate. He grasped the handle of the door and turned it. The door opened at once, Grayson having failed to re-lock it after returning with the lamb. The members of the Cheerio Club were so fearless of interruption that they had grown careless on the very first night.

"What the— Great Scott!" ejaculated Pitt blankly.

He stood there, staring. Eight pairs of eyes were upon him, and for a second or two there was complete silence. The room was well lighted. It was warm, and filled with tobacco smoke. And the tables, each with its four sitters, told their own story.

Almost at the same moment seven of the occupants rose to their feet, to the accompaniment of startled exclamations. Lord Pippinton remained in his place, mildly astonished, but thoroughly at ease.

"Another member of the good old throng," he observed. "Pitt, by Jove! Come and join in the festivities, old boy! The most priceless thing that's ever happened in my young life. I've lost absolute pots of money."

"Shut up, you fool!" hissed Forrest.

"Yes," said Pippy. "I mean, what? Fool? I don't exactly see—"

"What the thunder are you doing here, Pitt?" demanded Guy Sinclair, striding over towards the door. "Who's the blockhead who left this door unlocked?"

"I—I thought I'd fastened it again," stammered Grayson.

Sinclair closed it viciously, but in silence. Then he turned to Reggie Pitt with a calm, grim manner. The others were agitated, alarmed. But after a moment of fear, Sinclair was himself again.

"You fellows seem to be having a hectic time," said Pitt quietly. "So this is what the West House has come to!" he added contemptuously. "Well, it's not my business. We all amuse ourselves somehow, I suppose."

"How did you know about this?" demanded Sinclair.

"I didn't know," replied Pitt. "Something woke me up. I thought I'd come along and have a look round. As I said before, it's not my business what you fellows do.

But I'm going to take Pippy away with me."

"That's very interesting," snapped Sinclair.

"You can't tell me that he joined you of his own free will," went on Pitt. "He's a member of my Form, and he's incapable of looking after himself. It's a filthy trick to impose on the chap like this!"

"You'd better go easy!" threatened Kenmore roughly.

"I've no need to be careful," retorted Pitt. "I've seen a few disgraceful things in my time. But when it comes to prefects indulging in this sort of blackguardism, there's a limit. Pippinton is coming with me—or there'll be trouble!"

CHAPTER X.

PIPPY'S MISSING THIRTY POUNDS.



GUY SINCLAIR took a deep breath. "That's enough!" he rapped out.

"Clear!"

"Look here, Sinclair—"

"Get out!"

"I'm getting out when I please," retorted Pitt. "You may be my head prefect, Sinclair, but these are unofficial hours. You can go and hang yourself! Now give me a thousand lines!"

"You young cub—"

"Spare your breath," interrupted Pitt. "I don't want to continue this argument. You can gamble all night if you want to. That's your concern. But I'm hanged if I'll return to bed, knowing that you've dragged an innocent chump into your net! Pippy doesn't know right from wrong. He's as harmless as a fly."

He turned to Lord Pippinton.

"Are you enjoying this, Pippy?" he asked sharply.

"Eh?" said Pippy, startled. "Talking to me? Enjoying it? Enjoying which?"

"This card-playing."

"Well, as a matter of fact, it struck me as being somewhat prime," said his lordship mildly. "I mean, jolly, and all that."

"You hopeless ass, don't you know this sort of thing is against all the school regulations?" asked Pitt. "Don't you know you can get sacked for it?"

"Sacked?" repeated Pippy. "Oh, I say! But Sinclair, you know—he's here! I thought everything was sort of kind of in order. I mean, how is a chap to tell? Head prefect, if you know what I mean."

Pitt looked at Sinclair grimly.

"I knew it!" he said. "The poor beggar hasn't the faintest idea that he's doing wrong."

"He's not doing wrong!" shouted Sinclair.

"Not in your eyes, perhaps," snapped Pitt. "You seem to be lord and master of the West House these days, Sinclair. But

you wouldn't like the Head to know about this business, would you?"

Sinclair started.

"You young hound!" he gasped in alarm. "You wouldn't—"

"I'm not going to sneak, if that's what you mean," interrupted Pitt quietly. "You're the Head Boy of the West House, and you're responsible for what goes on here. So I can't do much, can I? Pippy, collect that money of yours, and come with me."

"Come with you?"

"Yes."

"Just as you say, old boy," agreed Pippy obligingly. "A bit of a pity, though. There's still a lot of this beastly money left. I was hoping to distribute some more of it. It's a queer thing. These chaps won't take it unless the cards turn up in a rummy sort of way. Of course, it's all double Dutch to me. Bally interesting, though!"

"The chap doesn't even know that he's gambling!" growled Pitt, inwardly boiling. "You rotters! Yes, I'm talking to you as well, Sinclair! I don't care if you're the head of the whole school! I'm going to tell Stokes about this!"

"You rotten sneak!" panted Gulliver, shivering.

"I shan't give any names, so you can prop up your knees!" said Reggie, with contempt. "In fact, I shan't mention this affair at all—but I'll ask Mr. Stokes to keep his eye on Pippinton, and see that he isn't caught in another trap of this sort. It's nothing more nor less than highway robbery!"

Sinclair controlled himself with difficulty.

"Tell Stokes—and you'll get the sack!" he threatened. "I mean it, Pitt! Confound you and your interfering habits! Breathe a word of this to Stokes—or anybody else—and I'll see that you're sacked! I can do it, too—you'll have no chance against the word of a head prefect if it comes to a show down."

"I shan't forget it," replied Pitt quietly. "Yes, you can work the thing, Sinclair—you seem powerful enough for anything. At the same time, your threats are powerless to stop me. I'm Junior Captain, and I'm responsible in a way for what goes on in the Junior School. And I'm not afraid of you—not a bit!"

Reggie felt like bursting into a furious tirade, but he held himself in check. He hated to appear in the light of a preacher. And he thought it better to escape before matters became critical.

He grasped Lord Pippinton by the shoulders and propelled him to the door. And they were outside, on the stairs, before the members of the Cheerio Club could stop them. Pitt had half-expected Sinclair to follow, but nothing happened. They reached the lower corridor alone.

"The cads!" muttered Pitt fiercely. "Pippy, they're no good—they're a set of rotters! Take my advice, and have nothing

more to do with them. What possessed you to go to that den?"

Lord Pippinton was distressed.

"But I didn't know the thing was so frightful," he protested. "I mean, is it? It struck me as being—"

"Never mind about that," interrupted Reggie. "Sinclair may be our head prefect, but he's a blackguard. He's even worse than I suspected. Promise me, Pippy, that you won't go to that place agin."

"If you absolutely think so—"

"I do think so!"

"Then, old boy, here's my word," said his lordship firmly. "You know, honour bright, and things of that sort. Clapsed hands, what? Never again, Pitt, old dear. That's sort of fixed."

"Good! How much money have you lost?"

"Lost? I've lost nothing," said Pippy, in surprise.

"How much money did those fellows win at cards?" asked Pitt patiently. "How much of your money did they win?"

"I haven't the faintest idea."

"But surely you know how much you started with?"

"Really, you can't expect me to count the bally stuff?" asked Pippy, pained. "It's bad enough to have it fouling my person. Oh, wait—wait! Something seems to be stirring! Duggy counted it before getting into bed. I remember now—Duggy absolutely counted it. Fifty-three pounds."

"You had fifty-three pounds?"

"In the good old wallet," nodded his lordship.

Pitt took the wallet—which Pippinton had fortunately brought away with him—and swiftly counted the contents. A stream of moonlight was coming through one of the corridor skylights, and he could easily see. He fairly gasped as he ended the counting.

"Twenty-one!" he ejaculated, aghast. "They've rooked you of thirty-two quid, Pippy! Great Scott! This is horrible!"

Lord Pippinton simply couldn't understand it.

"Horrible?" he repeated curiously. "Thirty-two quid? But, you don't seem to understand! I can get plenty more to-morrow! I've only to write to the bank. They're frightfully obliging."

Pitt gave it up. Lord Pippinton was incapable of realising the enormity of the Cheerio Club's offence. He hadn't any idea that he had been fleeced.

The fellow's almost tragic simplicity startled Reggie Pitt. It would be a big handicap to him in a Public school until he learned some of the tricks and wiles of the hardened sets. Indeed, Pitt doubted if Pippinton would ever change. He wasn't a fool—and yet, on the other hand, he was by no means brainy. He just drifted through life with a perfectly serene amiability. In a word, a thorough chump.

"You're dangerous!" said Pitt gruffly. "You're a direct invitation to these rotters to burgle you! For goodness' sake keep your

money padlocked, or pay everything by cheque, or something like that. And get back to bed, Pippy. It's nearly one o'clock."

"Excuse me, old boy, but there seems to be a load on your mind," said Lord Pippinton anxiously. "Is anything really the matter?"

"You wouldn't understand," said Reggie, frowning. "Go back to bed, and forget all about that affair. And perhaps you'd better not say anything to Singleton. Let it be a secret."

He managed to get the schoolboy peer into bed, and then he went back to his own dormitory. But it was quite a long while before he slept. He had a feeling that Guy Sinclair and the others wouldn't worry in the least over the recent disturbance. That was the extraordinary part of it.

"Sinclair seems to be doing just as he likes," muttered Pitt, puzzled. "He doesn't care a snap for Stokes, and he's flaunting every rule and regulation of the school. And nobody can touch him! By Jove, he said he'd be dictator in the West House—and he is!"

CHAPTER XI.

UNDER SINCLAIR'S THUMB.



MR. BEVERLEY STOKES looked up with a worried frown.

"Yes, come in, Pitt," he said impatiently. "It's all right—although I wish you wouldn't bother me at this early hour of the morning."

"Sorry, sir," said Reggie. "It'll do later—"

"No, as you are here, let's get it over," said Mr. Stokes. "What is it? Nothing much, I hope?"

"I am afraid it is, sir. It's about Sinclair."

The Housemaster looked at Pitt sharply. Breakfast hadn't been over long, and Pitt had taken the opportunity to see Mr. Stokes at the earliest moment. For he was determined to take action.

It wasn't sneaking. Guy Sinclair was the head prefect, and it was his duty to set an example for every other boy in the House. He had not only countenanced the rooking of Lord Pippinton, but he had probably shared in the spoils. Pitt had no intention of letting the scandal go on. He felt responsible, in his capacity as Junior Captain.

"About Sinclair, eh?" said Mr. Stokes testily. "Hang it, Pitt, I don't want to hear complaints about Sinclair! It isn't the thing. You know that as well as I do. He's your head prefect—"

"I'm sorry, sir; but this is rather important, and I think you ought to know," interrupted Pitt firmly. "I don't see why you should defend Sinclair before I've even started. The fellow's a wrong 'un."

"That's enough, Pitt!"

"Look here, sir, what's the idea?" asked Reggie bluntly. "We've always looked upon you as a pal, sir, but this term you're so different! Poor old Morrow is chucked out of the head-prefectship, and this cad of a Sinclair is shoved in his place! You've even allowed Kenmore and Shaw and Forrest and that other riff-raff to transfer here. I mean, it's a bit thick, sir! Some of the chaps don't know what to think at all."

Barry Stokes looked angry for a moment, then he set his lips and sighed.

"You needn't worry, Reggie," he said quietly. "I know exactly what I'm doing. No doubt Sinclair's appointment strikes you as being strange, but— Well, you don't expect me to discuss these things with you, do you? Let it rest at that."

"Just as you like, sir," said Pitt, puzzled. "But I've got to tell you about Sinclair. He's after Pippinton's money."

Mr. Stokes stared.

"What do you mean—after Pippinton's money?" he demanded.

"Well, sir, I happen to know that Pippinton lost over thirty pounds last night," replied Pitt. "Sinclair and those other cads fleeced him. I think it ought to stop, sir, Pippy's such a simple chap, you know. He doesn't realise what these bounders are after—"

"Wait a minute, Pitt," said Mr. Stokes. "You're telling me that Pippinton was fleeced of over thirty pounds. How?"

"I'd rather not say, sir."

"You can't give me any details?"

"No, sir."

"In other words, Pitt, you bring me an unsubstantiated suspicion, and expect me to believe it?" asked Mr. Stokes harshly. "I can't listen to these rigmaroles! You can go!"

Reggie Pitt was startled. This wasn't Barry Stokes at all. Hitherto the young Housemaster had been famous for his geniality and good-comradeship. He had been one of the boys himself—hearty, sporting, and immensely popular with every section of his House.

His sudden burst of anger was so unexpected that Reggie hardly knew what to say. He had never known Mr. Stokes to break out like that before. It was all the more remarkable because Pitt had given no cause for it.

"Steady, sir!" he said indignantly. "I don't think you ought to press me for details. I only came here to give you the tip—"

"Well, I can't listen to these ridiculous yarns," interrupted Mr. Stokes curtly. "The best thing you can do is to go. And don't repeat that nonsense to anybody else. Pippinton is quite old enough to look after himself, without you taking on the rôle of guardian."

Reggie flushed.

"That's not fair, sir," he protested hotly.

"Well, fair or not, I've told you what I think," growled Mr. Stokes. "Don't let me

hear any more about it. You can go, Pitt."

"But, hang it all, sir—"

"You can go, Pitt."

Reggie glared, nearly lost his own temper, and then strode out of the study without another word. It is to be feared that he closed the door with unnecessary violence. Indeed, it can only be described as a slam.

"He's mad!" muttered Pitt irritably. "Clean off his rocker. Ye gods and little fishes! Upholding Sinclair, and refusing to hear a word against him. What's the world coming to?"

He marched off with a glowering face, and was still looking warlike when he passed through the lobby to the outer door. Guy

for, Sinclair. It's easy enough to drop on a chap when you're lord of all you can survey. Blow you, and blow your lines!"

He felt in a reckless mood, and he jerked himself free before Sinclair could stop him. Then he went out into the Triangle to cool off in the crisp January air.

"Young cub!" muttered Sinclair savagely. "He probably thinks he's escaped, but he hasn't. He's the worst of the whole crowd, and I'll make him suffer. I shall have to be careful after last night's business, too!"

Morrow greeted him as he turned into the senior passage, and it was not a particularly friendly greeting.



"What's all this row about out here?" demanded Handforth, 'putting his head out of the doorway of Study D. "Hallo! What's this—a burglary?"

Sinclair was just coming in, and he looked at Pitt sharply.

"Hallo!" he said. "Going to fight somebody?"

"Mind your own business!" snapped Pitt, pushing past.

"Hold on, young 'un—hold on!" said Sinclair, grasping the junior's shoulder. "That's not the way to speak to your head prefect. I'm an easy-going chap, and I'll give you a chance to put things right. Either you'll apologise or take two hundred lines."

"More persecution, eh?" said Reggie fiercely. "That's about all you're cut out

"Stokes wants you—at once," he said briefly.

"Stokes can wait!" retorted Sinclair.

"That's your concern, of course," said Morrow. "What's the exact nature of the blackmail, Sinclair?"

The head prefect started.

"What do you mean—blackmail?" he rapped out harshly.

"Nothing, only everybody's remarking on the fact that you seem to twist Stokes round your little finger," said Morrow bitterly. "Anyhow, he wants you. That's all I've got to say to you, Sinclair."

He walked off with dignity. Morrow was a thoroughly decent sort—indeed, the most popular senior in the West House. He and Frinton had been deposed by Mr. Stokes in favour of Sinclair and Kenmore. And practically the whole body of the Senior School was behind them. Sinclair was head of the West House, but his supporters were few. He ruled by force, and not by friendliness.

Not that Sinclair minded. He rather enjoyed the sensation of isolation. It made no difference to his power. And it afforded him all sorts of opportunities for being unpleasant. And Sinclair's chief source of amusement was to be unpleasant.

He kept Mr. Stokes waiting for a quarter of an hour, and then condescended to go to the Housemaster's study. He dispensed with the formality of knocking on the door, but marched straight in.

"Ah, splendid!" said Mr. Stokes. "Yesterday you kept me waiting twenty minutes, Sinclair. To-day it is only eighteen. You are improving."

"No need to be sarcastic, sir," said Sinclair, dropping into a chair and spreading himself out comfortably. "Well, anything important?"

"Not at all," said Mr. Stokes. "Sit down, Sinclair. Make yourself thoroughly at home."

"That's what I am doing, thanks," yawned Sinclair.

This was one of those moments when he enjoyed himself to the utmost. He had received a bit of a jar at Morrow's mention of blackmail, but had soon recovered. After all, Morrow could know nothing, and it was only to be expected that the House should comment upon Mr. Stokes's powerlessness.

For what was the exact truth.

For the time being Barry Stokes was powerless to exercise his rightful authority. By a cruel stroke of chance, Sinclair had seen Mr. Stokes in London's most notorious night club on New Year's Eve. The Smuggler's Lair had an evil reputation, and the Housemaster had visited this disreputable resort in the small hours.

Actually his visit was the outcome of a good-natured promise. He had gone there at the request of a Mr. Rodney Lambert. He had sought Mr. Lambert's son, and had indeed succeeded in getting him out of the place. A pure act of kindly generosity.

But there had been a fight, for young Lambert had been nearly intoxicated. Sinclair had not only witnessed this fight, but had possession of a flashlight photograph which some companions of his had taken at the moment.

One word of that story would set the school humming. It would undoubtedly reach the ears of the Headmaster, and there would be an inquiry. Sinclair would

probably be questioned, but he would be able to produce that photograph. Naturally, he would deny that he was ever in the club himself. The photograph would be quite sufficient.

But the helplessness of Barry Stokes lay in the fact that he had given his word of honour to Mr. Lambert and his son that he would keep his lips absolutely sealed regarding the whole incident. Thus, if an inquiry were held, he would be in the intolerable position of enforced silence. And this silence alone would be enough to condemn him.

As though Fate had not dealt a severe enough blow, Mr. Stokes realised that it had played him another scurvy trick. Young Lambert, as private secretary to a wealthy peer, was in the South of France, and Mr. Stokes did not know his address. And Lambert's father had gone to New York.

There was only one solution to the problem. Mr. Stokes would have to obtain a release from that promise. Until he received that release he was under Guy Sinclair's thumb. For he dared not take the chance of that story being circulated.

Not only his career depended upon this silence, but the happiness of his wife. And as long as Guy Sinclair kept within a certain limit, Mr. Stokes was prepared to suffer the indignity. He was consoled by the thought that he was guiltless, and that his own time was coming.

Indeed, he had ceased to worry. Whatever the fellows thought of him now, they would change their views when the truth came out, as Barry was determined the truth should. It was only a matter of biding his time.

CHAPTER XII.

SINCLAIR'S LATEST.



GUY SINCLAIR stretched himself and yawned again.

"Well?" he asked casually. "What's the trouble?"

"Before I mention the trouble, Sinclair, you'll get out of that chair, and stand at attention," said Mr. Stokes grimly. "Your insolence is getting beyond all endurance, and I'll have no more of it."

"That's interesting!" said Sinclair, without moving.

Mr. Stokes rose to his feet, and stood over the prefect.

"You heard what I said?" he exclaimed quietly.

"I'm not deaf!" drawled Sinclair.

"By Jove, you infernal young reptile!"

snapped Mr. Stokes. "Now then—out of it!"

Sinclair received the surprise of his life. With one terrific heave he was hauled out of the chair, and sent flying backwards across the study. Barry Stokes was an athletic man, and his strength was considerable. Sinclair only saved himself from falling by sheer chance.

"Any more of that tone, Sinclair, and I'll thrash you within an inch of your life!" panted the Housemaster. "Once and for all, I've had enough of that overbearing attitude of yours."

"You'd better be careful," said Sinclair. "I've only got to say a word, and that story——"

"You can keep your threats to yourself!" interrupted Mr. Stokes. "As long as your bread is buttered on the right side, Sinclair, you'll say nothing. I have sent for you to ask about Pippinton."

Guy Sinclair straightened himself. He was scared. He had certainly got the Housemaster under his thumb, but it was pretty evident that he couldn't do exactly as he liked. His mean spirit prompted him to make Mr. Stokes pay for what had just happened.

"What about Pippinton?" he growled.

"I have learned that you—I will mention no other names—have extracted a large sum of money from the boy," said Mr. Stokes. "I don't need any actual proofs; I can use my own judgment. I am ready to believe it. It's got to stop, Sinclair."

The head prefect glared.

"It's all a yarn!" he blustered. "I've done nothing to Pippinton. I haven't touched a cent of his money. In any case, it's my business, and not yours. Who told you?"

"I'm not going to discuss this with you, Sinclair," retorted Mr. Stokes. "I'm just giving you a warning. Don't interfere with Pippinton again. The boy's very simple and innocent. Indeed, I shall make it my business to take his money and keep it in my safe. You can go."

Barry Stokes was indeed sure that Reggie Pitt's information was authentic. The expression on Sinclair's face at the mention of Lord Pippinton was enough.

"I want to know who told you!" growled the prefect.

"And I shan't tell you," retorted Mr. Stokes. "I don't intend to say anything further. You can go, Sinclair."

There was something about the young Housemaster that urged Sinclair to take his departure. He left the study in an ugly mood. Of course, Pitt was the informer. Sinclair had no doubt on this point. It was obvious, however, that Pitt had given no details. All the same, he would pay!

For a moment Sinclair thought of working a "frame-up," as the result of which

Pitt would be expelled from the school. But he very soon dismissed this idea. Whatever Pitt had said to Mr. Stokes, there was no danger for Sinclair. The Housemaster was in no position to take action. All he could do was to give warnings, and Sinclair would naturally ignore them.

No, he would exercise his power in a different way. It would be rather a pity to dispose of his victim so summarily. He could always get Pitt expelled if he wanted to. For the present there would be more sport in persecuting him. Guy Sinclair's spirit was a mean one.

He came across a group of juniors in the lobby and frowned when he saw that the junior skipper was not among them.

"Where's Pitt?" he demanded.

"No good asking us," said Doyle. "Better find him!"

"None of your cheek!" rapped out Sinclair savagely. "Go and find Pitt, some of you, and send him to my study. If he doesn't arrive within five minutes I'll give every one of you a hundred lines!"

He strode off, and the juniors glared.

"That's the sort of thing we're getting nowadays!" snorted Dick Goodwin. "By gum! Life won't be worth living soon. He'll give us those lines, too, unless Pitt turns up."

"He's like a feudal baron," said Owen major aggressively. "Lord and master of all he surveys. Why can't we have Morrow back? This term seems to be—Hullo! Here's Pitt!"

Pitt and Grey came in together, both looking cheerful. Reggie was a genial youth by nature, and he had soon forgotten his recent annoyance. He possessed a temper, but it was a quick one.

"Sinclair wants you," said three or four juniors, in one voice.

"Rats!" said Pitt. "He can go and eat coke!"

"But look here," roared Doyle. "He's going to give us a hundred lines each unless you're in his study within three minutes. He'll do it, too. There's no justice about Sinclair. The man's an absolute beast!"

Reggie Pitt grumbled.

"Oh, all right!" he said. "I'd better go, I suppose."

He went to Sinclair's study, and entered. Guy Sinclair was alone, and he told the junior to close the door. There was a dangerous expression about the prefect's eyes.

"Did you tell Stokes about that party?" he asked bluntly.

"No, I didn't," replied Pitt.

"Don't tell lies to me——"

"I'm not telling lies!" snapped Reggie. "You'd better be careful, Sinclair. You can drop on me to your heart's content;

I'm powerless to stop you, but you're not going to call me a liar!"

"I'll call you what I like!" sneered Sinclair. "You've been to Stokes, and you've told him about that affair last night, you miserable little sneak. And you set yourself up as an example of righteousness—"

"If Mr. Stokes knows about that party, one of your own pals have told him," interrupted Pitt grimly. "I haven't said a word. It's not my business. You can play cards all night, for all I care."

Sinclair looked suspicious.

"Did you tell him anything about that young fool, Pippinton?"

"Certainly I did," replied Pitt quietly. "That wasn't sneaking. I advised Mr. Stokes to look after the chap. He's as helpless as a baby; he needs protection of some kind."

"That's enough!" said Sinclair. "I don't need to ask you any more questions—I've heard all I want to know. Mind you, I shan't care a toss if you tell Stokes everything, but you'll suffer for it."

"Don't worry," said Pitt. "I'm not interested in you and your squiffy parties. Anything else?"

"Yes, there is," replied Sinclair. "You're gated for a week."

Reggie Pitt started.

"Gated?" he ejaculated. "Look here, Sinclair! That's all rot! We've got a match with Bannington Grammar School on Saturday afternoon—away from home, too. I'm junior skipper—"

"I don't care who you are!" interrupted Sinclair pleasantly. "And I don't care for your silly matches. You're gated for a week."

"What for?" asked Pitt, glaring. "You've got no right to drop on me—"

"I'm your head prefect, and you'll obey!" said Sinclair. "Don't forget what happened a few days ago. You ignored me—and you've had a public flogging. Would you like another experience of that sort?"

Pitt shrugged his shoulders.

"Oh, I know it's useless!" he growled. "We juniors can't do anything against you. We shall have to alter that fixture. Or the Grammarians might agree to come over to us—"

"It won't make any difference," broke in Sinclair calmly. "I am adding something to that gating, Pitt. You're confined to the House for the week, too. Move a yard outside the doors of the West House, and I'll give you a swishing. You'll get a swishing every time you disobey."

Pitt found his temper rising again.

"But this is unheard of!" he protested. "Chaps are often confined to gates, but it's ridiculous to bottle a fellow up in his own House for a week! You're mad, Sinclair!"

"All the same, you're confined to the West House for a week," said Sinclair with

an evil smile. "Something new, eh? Something unheard of? You'd better go out and spread the news! You won't be the only one! I've got a tough job with you kids, but I'll subdue you in the end."

CHAPTER XIII.

THE INQUISITION.



REGGIE PITT looked angry.

"You can't enforce a punishment of that sort, Sinclair," he protested hotly. "What about lessons? Have I got to miss school for a week?"

"What do you mean?"

"Well, the School House is situated at the top of the Triangle, as you ought to know," growled Pitt. "If I'm confined indoors, how the dickens am I to get to the class-room? And what about the gym?"

Sinclair considered for a moment.

"You'll only go to the School House when the bell rings," he replied. "And as soon as lessons are over, you'll come straight back here. Unless you're indoors within three minutes you'll get that swishing. Every other part of the school property is out of bounds—including Little Side and the other Houses. Have I made that perfectly clear? If you behave yourself during the week, I'll be lenient. Otherwise the punishment will continue for a fortnight. Now you can get out!"

Pitt didn't trust himself to speak. This was something entirely new in punishments. It meant that he was virtually a prisoner—and that was a serious business for a junior captain. He was not only barred from playing in football matches, but he couldn't even practice. It was an outrageous imposition.

Outside in the passage, Pitt ran into a group of other juniors. Dick Hamilton was there, to say nothing of Handforth & Co. The Ancient House fellows had come along to find out what the trouble was.

"Has that beast been dropping on you again?" demanded Handforth. "We wouldn't stick him at any price in the Ancient House—"

"Don't be an ass, Handy!" interrupted Nipper. "If Sinclair were our head prefect, we should be compelled to stick him. A fellow in that position is more or less an autocrat. Fenton, of course, is a thoroughly decent sort—and so is Morrow. Why on earth Mr. Stokes chucked Morrow out in favour of Sinclair is a mystery."

"We've given up the problem long ago," growled Pitt. "Do you know the latest? I'm confined to the West House for a week."

"You mean gated?"

"Worse than that," snorted Reggie. "I can't even go out of the door!"

There was a yell of indignation and astonishment. Pitt described the punishment in detail, and his listeners were filled with something akin to consternation.

"It's outrageous!" shouted Jack Grey. "Sinclair seems to have got his knife into you properly. You're not going to obey that order, I suppose? Mr. Stokes wouldn't uphold it."

Pitt's eyes gleamed.

"No, I'm not going to obey it," he replied grimly. "Sinclair's threatened to swish me if I go out of doors, but I'll risk it. I'm

Handforth apparently meant it, too. When he got a certain idea he always wanted to execute it on the spot. Church and McClure were quite in agreement that most of Handforth's ideas deserved execution, but not in exactly the same way. Foolishly, they advised him to give up the idea. And that, of course, was the one way of making him proceed with it.

"Rot!" he snorted. "I'm going to see Stokes. Not now, but after lessons. I'll think out the speech in the meantime. Why, by the time I've done, these West House chaps will be in clover."

"More likely in the soup!" growled

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hanged if I'll stand this sort of thing! I'm not a worm!"

Handforth clapped him heartily on the back.

"Good man!" he exclaimed. "That's the way to talk! I'll go and speak to Stokes myself, if you like. By George! That's a good idea! I'll tick him off! Leave it to me, you chaps, and—"

"Thanks all the same, but we can deal with this," said Grey.

"But you can't talk to old Stokes like me," urged Handforth. "I'm a disinterested spectator. I can put the thing to Stokes clearly. Don't worry! I've got it well in hand."

Church. "They don't need your help, Handy. It's only interference—"

"Only what?" roared Handforth.

"Well, you know what I mean!" said Church hastily. "How would you like a West House chap to interview Mr. Lee? It's not our business. We're not supposed to butt in."

But it was useless to continue the argument. Handforth was determined. He went out into the Triangle, looking very thoughtful, and in his own mind he already saw Sinclair deposed and Morrow reinstated. Handforth had an amazing amount of faith in his own powers—a faith which was in no

way lessened by repeated rebuffs. He always came up smiling.

Reggie Pitt had come out into the Triangle, too—openly ignoring Guy Sinclair's order. He had the whole Remove behind him. It was felt that something ought to be done in a test-case of this sort. Sinclair would grow worse and worse unless a halt was called.

"He'll probably swish me, but I'm prepared for that," said Pitt, as he stood near the fountain, deliberately displaying himself. "But if I come out of doors twenty times a day, he can't cane me continuously, can he? And he can't keep me locked up, either."

"That's the best policy," agreed Nipper. "When a prefect subjects a chap to arrant persecution, the best thing is to ignore him. You've got the whole Form behind you, Reggie, and you can count on the Ancient House to back you up."

"Thanks," said Reggie. "That's everything. Sinclair can't fight against the whole Form. He'll find himself in Queer Street if he does!"

"By Jove, here he comes now!" murmured Tommy Watson. "Look out for squalls!"

Guy Sinclair was crossing from the West House to the East House, accompanied by Parkin, a rough, untidy-looking senior with a shock of unruly hair. He looked more like a prize-fighter than a St. Frank's senior.

Sinclair paused for a moment as he caught sight of Pitt, and he scowled. But he walked straight on without taking any other notice. And as he vanished into the East House a chortle went up.

"Good egg!" grinned Nipper. "He was afraid to start anything! Keep it up, Reggie—go ahead as though nothing had happened. I don't believe in defying the lawful school authority, but this is different. Sinclair's given you a punishment that isn't official. He can't enforce it—he daren't."

"It looks promising, anyhow," agreed Pitt, with a chuckle.

"The rotter's squashed," declared Jack Grey. "He thought you'd knuckle under, but as you haven't he'll have to sing small. I'll bet you won't hear another word about that fatheaded order."

The school bell rang a few minutes later, and the juniors trooped into the junior wing, and started the day's work in the Remove Form-room.

Mr. Crowell had some little difficulty with Handforth. Edward Oswald was so deeply engrossed in something that he had no time for such insignificant trifles as geography and history. As a matter of fact, he was planning out his line of action with Mr. Stokes.

After receiving two small impots, however, followed by a brisk cut on each hand, he concluded that there wasn't any real necessity to prepare his speech at all. His very personality would be sufficient to convince Mr. Stokes. The thought of failure never entered Handforth's head at all.

Within a quarter of an hour of the interval, the door opened, and Sinclair stepped in. Mr. Crowell regarded him with a frown. Sinclair was not one of his favourites. And he had heard rumours about the recent happenings in the West House.

"Well, Sinclair, what do you want?" he asked curtly.

"Shan't keep you a minute, sir," said Sinclair. "Pitt is wanted by Mr. Stokes. I'll take him away, if you don't mind. He'll be back within five minutes."

Mr. Crowell looked across at Reggie.

"You had better go, Pitt," he said impatiently. "I detest these interruptions, but they cannot be helped. Don't be longer than is necessary."

Pitt left his place and joined Sinclair. The other juniors glanced at one another significantly. Apparently that incident was not finished with, after all.

Outside in the deserted passage, Guy Sinclair was looking triumphant. He had taken a cane from the little hook in the wall, and he swished it.

"Hold out your hand!" he said briefly.

"What for?" asked Pitt. "You told Mr. Crowell that Mr. Stokes—"

"Never mind what I told Mr. Crowell," interrupted Sinclair. "I'm not obliged to explain anything to you. I suppose you think you can ignore my orders just as you please? You'd better understand, once and for all, that I won't be defied. Hold out your hand!"

Pitt had an impulse to defy Sinclair further. But he refrained. Perhaps it would be better, after all, to give Sinclair the impression that he was cowed and beaten.

"All right!" he muttered. "You've got me this time!"

He received six vicious cuts—delivered with all Sinclair's strength. By the time it was over, Reggie was pale with the agony of it, and his hands were puffed and crimson. Sinclair was panting hard.

"Now get back to your Form-room!" he snarled. "And when lessons are over, come straight into the West House, or you'll get another dose! I'll swipe you until you're raw if you don't obey me!"

He turned on his heel and walked away. And Reggie Pitt, composing himself, returned to the Remove class-room. He looked very calm, but his eyes were glittering with a dangerous light.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE FAIR VISITOR.



"GOOD gracious, Pitt! Has something happened?" asked Mr. Crowell, staring.

"You are looking quite pale—"

"It's all right, sir," said Pitt quietly. "May I go to my place, sir?"

"One moment, my boy," said the Form-master. "Of course, I don't wish you to answer if the matter is private, but you are looking positively weak— Dear me! Your hands, Pitt! Show me!"

Reggie reluctantly held his palms forward. "Upon my word!" ejaculated Mr. Crowell sharply. "Who has done this?"

"Sinclair, sir."

"You have been very severely caned, Pitt," said Mr. Crowell. "Your offence must have been grave. But I understood Sinclair to say that Mr. Stokes required you."

"Sinclair dealt with me himself, sir."

"It's a beastly shame, sir!" snorted Handforth, standing up. "Sinclair's confined Pitt to the West House for a week! And just because Pitt was out in the Triangle with us he's given him this swishing."

"Is this true, Pitt?"

"Yes, sir."

"Extraordinary!" said Mr. Crowell, startled. "I was not aware that such a punishment as confining a boy indoors was in force. Sinclair appears to be doing very much as he pleases. You may sit down, Pitt. Unfortunately, this affair does not come within my scope, so I can do nothing. But I shall certainly have a word with Mr. Stokes."

"So shall I, sir!" declared Handforth.

"Indeed!" said the Form-master. "I think you had better consider the point carefully, Handforth. Greatly as Mr. Stokes values your opinion, I doubt if he would welcome the interference of an Ancient House boy. You had far better be cautious."

"That's all right, sir—rely on me," said Handforth confidently. "This is a case where strength is needed. I've got it. Within two hours, Sinclair's going to be kicked out of the head prefectship."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Remove enjoyed the joke hugely, but Mr. Crowell did not seem to appreciate the point. In fact, he became very severe, and threatened the whole Form with detention unless they behaved themselves.

Lessons were over at last, and the juniors streamed out into the crisp air of the Triangle. Reggie Pitt was surrounded by a crowd, including a number of prominent Ancient House fellows. Pitt was feeling much better now. His hands were sore, but the dreadful sting had gone.

"Don't you go indoors!" said Handforth firmly. "Stay out here, Pitt! I'll go and see Mr. Stokes straight away—"

"Cheese it, Handy!" interrupted Nipper. "You'll only make matters a lot worse. Perhaps you'd better go straight in, Reggie," he added. "You don't want to risk another swiping with your hands in that condition—"

"I'm staying out here," interrupted Pitt quietly. "Sinclair won't intimidate me by his beastly inquisition. I'm going on exactly as though he hadn't given any order at all. It's one of his own invention, anyhow."

"Why not go and ask Stokes if it's allowable?" suggested Grey.

"By Jove, I will!" declared Pitt. "I don't believe in appealing to the House-master over every little thing, but this is different. If Mr. Stokes bans the punishment, Sinclair will be in the wrong."

He wasted no further time, but hurried into the West House, promising to return with the official news. The Ancient House fellows waited in the Triangle for the result. They were just as interested as any of Stokes' men.

Pitt reached the Housemaster's study, tapped, and entered. Mr. Beverley Stokes was at his desk, and he was looking unusually pleasant. Just for a brief spell, he was almost his old self again.

"Sorry to trouble you, sir—" began Pitt.

He paused abruptly, and felt self-conscious. He had just noticed that he and Mr. Stokes were not alone. Over by the window was a young girl of about fifteen—but quite a stranger to Reggie. She was slim, graceful, and quite the prettiest girl Pitt had ever seen. In fact, when she looked across at him he completely lost the thread of the words in his mind.

"I—I beg your pardon, sir—" he stammered. "I—I thought you were alone. Awfully sorry—"

He paused again. The girl had wonderful chestnut hair. It was bobbed, but there were some fascinating curls about her ears. And her eyes were dark and sparkling. There was a smile on her face, too—a friendly smile which reduced Reggie Pitt to mere helplessness.

"That's all right, Pitt," said Mr. Stokes. "Oh, Mary! This is one of my staunch helpers—Reggie Pitt, the junior sports captain. Pitt, let me introduce you to my niece, Mary."

"Thanks awfully—I mean, pleased to meet you, miss," said Reggie. "Frightfully sorry for butting in like this."

"How were you to know?" asked the girl, shaking hands. "I say, I'm pleased to meet you, you know. So you're the junior sports skipper? Don't you play outside-left for the Junior Eleven?"

"That's me," confessed Pitt.

"How ripping!" said Mary eagerly. "I shall see you playing in the match against the Grammar School, shan't I? I am staying here for three or four weeks. Isn't it jolly at St. Frank's? I only got here

this morning, but I know I'm going to love it. Marjorie Temple, at the Moor View School, is a friend of mine, and she told me all about you."

"You're quite famous, Pitt," smiled Mr. Stokes.

"Oh, I say, what rot!" protested Reggie, flushing. "Well, I'll see you later, sir, if you don't mind."

"A nod's as good as a wink to a blind horse," smiled the girl. "I'll buzz off, uncle. See you at lunch-time. And if you're late you'd better look out for yourself!"

She passed out of the study, and Pitt felt a great deal more light-hearted. He didn't exactly know why. He had met plenty of girls before. He was quite friendly with Irene & Co., of the Moor View School—but they had never made much impression on him. Mary, to his mind, was so different. He was still thinking of her when Mr. Stokes gently tapped his desk.

"What is it, Pitt?" asked the Housemaster.

"Oh, sorry, sir!" said Reggie, starting. "I say, sir, what a ripping girl your niece is! She seems an awfully good sort."

"She not only seems so, Pitt, but she is," smiled Mr. Stokes. "What's this? Impressed already—after a couple of minutes? I say, Reggie, you'll have to be careful, you know."

"Oh, chuck it, sir!" growled Pitt, flushing again. "I really came here to ask you about Sinclair—"

"Again?" cut in Mr. Stokes sharply. "Hang it all, Pitt, I don't like to be curt, but you shouldn't come running to me—"

"Honestly, sir, I'm not!" interrupted Pitt earnestly. "But Sinclair has confined me to the West House for a week. It doesn't seem to be a school rule at all. He can't do that, can he, sir?"

"Do you mean you're confined to gates?"

"Worse than that, sir—I mustn't even go out of doors," growled Pitt. "I couldn't believe it at first, but Sinclair swished me for disobeying. If you can only step in—"

Mr. Stokes frowned. He looked very worried, in fact.

"Do me a favour, Pitt, and put up with it," he said quietly. "I don't altogether uphold Sinclair in these freak punishments, but you must remember he is newly appointed. I should hate to carp and criticise so soon. He will probably shake down before long. Be a sport, Reggie, and say nothing more about it."

Pitt looked at him strangely. Barry Stokes was suggesting that he merely wanted to give Sinclair a chance. But there was more in it than that. Reggie was quite convinced that there was something peculiar behind all this intrigue. And, somehow, he liked his Housemaster as much as ever. A suspicion was forming itself in his mind that Mr. Stokes was helpless. His hand was being forced against his will.

"Oh, all right, sir," he said readily. "Sorry I have troubled you about it. It's a bit rough on me, though—I shan't be able to play in the Bannington match on Saturday."

Barry Stokes looked more worried than ever.

"That's two days ahead, Reggie," he replied. "You never know—perhaps the conditions might be different then. I would override Sinclair's edict if I could—but it's only fair to give the fellow a chance."

"Exactly, sir," said Pitt. "I'll stick it, then."

He went out of the study in a very thoughtful mood.

CHAPTER XV.

GOING STRONG!



EDWARD OSWALD HANDFORTH wrenched himself free.

"Lemme go, you fatheads!" he said tartly. "There's only one way to end this rot—and that is for me to see Stokes! I'm the only fellow who can handle him! Just you wait until I come back!"

Handforth & Co. were in the West House lobby, and Church and McClure were very anxious. In spite of all their endeavours, their leader was determined to embark upon his hopeless enterprise.

"Look here, Handy—"

"Think for a minute, old man—"

"It's no good!" interrupted Handforth firmly. "I've made up my mind, and that's enough! You know me when my mind's made up!"

"Mules aren't in it!" snorted Church.

"Nothing but nitro-glycerine would push an idea out of your giddy head!" roared McClure, exasperated. "All right—go to Mr. Stokes! And he'll report you to Mr. Lee, and then you'll get it in the neck!"

Handforth didn't wait to slaughter his chums on the spot. He decided that he would perform that necessary duty when he returned—when he brought back the news that Guy Sinclair was kicked out of the head prefectship.

He marched straight towards the Housemaster's study, and his jaw was set in a grim line. It was not likely he was going to let his chums crow over him! The thought of failure never entered his head.

He swung round a corner of the corridor with such a purposeful stride that he collided with somebody before he could check himself. There was a little gasp, and the somebody hopped about wildly on one foot.

"Oh, clumsy!" she exclaimed, in agony.

"Great pip!" gurgled Handforth.

He backed away, gulping. A girl in that quarter of the West House was about the last person in the world he had expected to meet. And what a girl! Even when she was hopping about on one foot she left

Handforth absolutely flabbergasted with admiration.

Mary Summers ceased her jig, and set her dainty foot to the floor. She regarded Handforth with a very severe look—but not without a twinkle in her dark eyes. Possibly she had exaggerated the pain slightly.

"And who do you happen to be?" she asked politely. "Now that you've nearly crippled me, I don't suppose we need a formal introduction. My name's Mary Summers. I'm Mr. Stokes' niece. Staying here for a few weeks. Arrived this morning."

She spoke quite cheerfully, and Handforth found a curious obstruction in his throat.

"I—I—I—" He paused, realising that his remarks were scarcely lucid. "That is, how are you? I say, awfully sorry I stamped on your foot just now! Did—did I hurt you much?"

"I thought it was a steam-roller," said Mary, nodding.

Again Handforth found himself tongue-tied. The way she was looking at him was positively bewildering. Not that Mary made the slightest attempt to use any of her feminine wiles. She just looked at him in quite her ordinary way. But she happened to be a remarkably pretty girl. Handforth felt weak at the knees, and generally jellified.

For a second, a vision of Irene Manners floated before his mind. Irene was his particular favourite. But Irene was at the Moor View School—and Mary was on the spot. Edward Oswald was very susceptible.

"How—how awfully jolly!" he managed to blurt out.

"What, your foot being like a steam-roller?" she smiled.

"No! Rather not!" he panted. "About—about your staying at St. Frank's, I mean! I say, that's ripping! By George! I've just thought of something! I belong to the Ancient House, you know!"

Mary breathed an exaggerated sigh of relief.

"Then I shan't stand much risk of being trampled on again," she said. "I'll bet you're one of the Remove footballers?"

"Me?" gasped Handforth. "I'm goalie! I'm Handforth!"

Mary opened her eyes wider—much to Edward Oswald's confusion.

"Handforth, eh?" she nodded. "I've heard about you, too! I'm awfully glad you've introduced yourself. Of course, within a day or two I shall know everybody. I think it's awfully jolly being in a boys' school!"

She gave him another friendly smile, and went off down the corridor, limping with exaggerated actions—just to impress upon Handforth the enormity of his offence. But as soon as she turned the next corner, she



In reality, the club-room was agreeable in the extreme—and fitted the name of The Cheerio Club to perfection.

"By Jove!" said Forrest. "This is the real thing!"

ran lightly on without a trace of a limp and chuckling gleefully. Evidently, Miss Mary Summers was quite determined to enjoy herself at St. Frank's.

Church and McClure, in the West House lobby, waited for the return of their leader with glowering expressions. They were thoroughly gloomy. They couldn't help feeling that they would be involved in Handforth's punishment. For he would obviously be punished. In fact, Church darkly hinted that he would probably get the sack.

And then Handforth appeared. Church and McClure started, and stared. There was something rummy about Handforth. He came into the lobby in a dreamy condition, as though walking in a trance.

And yet he hadn't been swished. His condition was not due to physical pain. On the contrary, there was an expression of blissful joy on his rugged features—a soft, gentle smile.

"My only hat!" said Church blankly.

They rushed at their leader, and grabbed him.

"Well?" demanded McClure. "What's happened?"

Handforth gave a violent start. He had no intention of telling Church and McClure what had happened. He wasn't quite sure himself what had happened. But he had a deep, vague suspicion.

"Eh?" he gasped. "Oh! Clear off!"
 "What about Stokes?"
 "Stokes?" said Handforth. "Don't bother me with silly questions!"

"Haven't you seen him?"
 "No, I've seen somebody else!" breathed Handforth softly. "By George! She's absolutely stunning! Why, I've never seen such eyes before! Lashes half-an-inch long!"

"Eyes?" gasped Church. "Lashes? What the—"

"He means a girl!" roared McClure. "But he couldn't have met a girl in the West House, here! I say, Handy, have you been having visions, or something? You might let your pals into the giddy secret!"

But Handforth didn't even hear. He was walking dazedly out of the West House. Even when he tripped headlong down the steps, and came an awful cropper at the bottom, the dreamy look still remained in his eyes.

Not five minutes later, Church and McClure ran across Mary Summers. In a flash, they understood. They agreed that she was awfully nice, but they happened to be less susceptible to feminine charms.

"Oh, corks!" groaned Church, after the girl had gone. "We're going to have an awful time with Handy now! He's smitten! He ought to be boiled—forgetting all about Irene like this!"

"There's no accounting for lunatics!" said McClure tartly. "We shall have our work cut out for weeks now. The best thing we can do is to lump our money together, and buy a strait-jacket! Or it might be a good idea to pad the walls of Study D! The poor chap's gone—clean gone!"

In the meantime, things were moving in the West House.

Two or three prefects were hurrying round with orders for every West House Remove fellow to gather in the junior common-room. Sinclair's orders. Reggie Pitt was over in the East Square with two or three other juniors when the injunction reached them.

"More trouble!" said Pitt, with a grimace. "It looks as if you fellows are going to be involved, too. I'm sorry——"

"Rats!" interrupted Grey. "I'm glad we're involved! It's a dirty trick that you should be jumped on every time."

"Rather!" declared Singleton. "If that cad is out for trouble, he'll find it. We're not going to stand much of his rot!"

They went straight indoors, and found the junior common-room already crowded. They were practically the last in, and the room was filled with excited talking.

Then Guy Sinclair arrived, accompanied by Kenmore. Both prefects were carrying canes—and Sinclair swished his suggestively.

"Good!" he said crisply. "All here? I've called you together because I want you

to witness something. There's nothing like an object lesson. Pitt, stand out here."

Reggie stood out, and faced the head prefect quietly.

"What's this?" he asked. "More vindictive persecution?"

CHAPTER XVI.

TROUBLE IN THE AIR.



"YOU'D better not give me any lip!" snapped Sinclair curtly.

"I'm going to cane you for disobeying orders. I'm going to give you ten slashes! After that perhaps you'll learn a bit of sense!"

"Chuck it, Sinclair!" shouted Grey hotly. "You can't swish Pitt again now!"

"Can't I?" sneered Sinclair.

"No, you can't, you brute!" roared Grey. "His hands are already swollen from that caning you gave him this morning! You'll cripple him if you go on at this rate! Are we going to stand it, you chaps?" he added, appealing to the crowd.

"No fear!" roared a dozen angry voices.

"Stop it, Sinclair!"

"Yah! Cad!"

Guy Sinclair started back scowling. Kenmore whistled his cane ominously, and looked anxious to start work. Left to himself, he would have gone ram-headedly into the crowd, slashing right and left.

But Sinclair was not so hot-blooded. His nature was more callous. He kept himself in check, and his scowling increased.

"That's about enough!" he rapped out. "Grey, you'll stand aside for punishment! Pitt, hold out your hand!"

Reggie Pitt nodded.

"You're the head prefect, Sinclair, and you've got me in a corner," he said grimly. "The last time I opposed you, you engineered things so that I received a public flogging. I'm not going to give you that satisfaction a second time. I'll take the cane."

"I thought you'd get more sense!" jeered Sinclair.

But the other fellows had something to say. They pressed forward, and Pitt was swallowed up in their midst.

"Now cane him!" yelled Johnny Onions. "You rotten cad! We're not going to let you ride over us like a tyrant!"

"Not likely!"

"Silence!" thundered Sinclair. "I'll give you one chance! Stop all this nonsense, and bring Pitt out of that crowd, or I'll make you suffer! I'm not going to be defied by you kids!"

"You're being defied already!" snorted Nick Trotwood.

"Yah! Go and fry yourself!" hooted Fatty Little. "I'll jolly well biff you out

of the common-room if you try to touch Pitt. Great pancakes! Aren't we going to do something, you chaps?"

The excitement was growing rapidly, and Kenmore was thoroughly alarmed. Sinclair was alarmed, too, but he didn't reveal it. But he realised that he would have to modify his original intentions.

"Silence!" he snapped. "I'm head prefect of this House——"

"Worse luck!" howled a dozen voices.

"I'm head prefect of this House, and when I give an order, that order's got to be obeyed," went on Sinclair. "Pitt has defied me twice. He's confined to the House for a week. If any of you youngsters say one single word to him during that week you'll share his punishment."

"Great Scott!" gurgled Grey. "That's another new one!"

"Sent to Coventry by official orders!" shouted Trotwood. "Is that what you mean, Sinclair?"

"That's exactly what I mean," replied Sinclair savagely. "By my orders, Pitt is sent to Coventry! During this next week he mustn't put his foot outside the West House. And if I see anybody speaking to him—or if I hear any reports that he has been spoken to—the culprits will be confined to the House for a week, too."

"Good old Pitt!" roared everybody in the common-room in one voice.

"We haven't got to speak to you, Reggie!"

"We're all dumb, Reggie!"

"Don't you worry, old man—we'll jaw you to death!"

This open defiance startled Sinclair. He had never given the juniors credit for so much spirit. Right on top of his order the juniors were talking to Pitt in one, solid volume of sound! It was an exhibition of sheer mutiny.

"Very well!" grated Sinclair. "You've asked for it—you'll get it! Every boy here is confined to the House for a week!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

A perfect roar of derisive laughter went up.

"I mean it!" thundered Sinclair. "This makes it all the simpler. The first boy I see out of doors I'll tan until he can't stand! You'd better realise that I'm in deadly earnest!"

He turned on his heel, and strode out of the common-room. Kenmore, after a moment of hesitation, followed. Kenmore was thoroughly disappointed. But Guy Sinclair realised that he was playing with fire, and that he had far better let the flames die down a bit.

"The nerve!" panted Jack Grey, after the prefects had gone. "If things go on at this rate we shall be nothing but slaves before the week's out. We're not going to take any notice of that idiotic order!"

"Not likely!"

"Sinclair can boil himself!"

"I say!" yelled Owen major. "Let's all go out into the Triangle in a body! That'll show him!"

"Hear, hear!"

"I'd like to see him caning the whole lot of us afterwards!" grinned Doyle. "Come on—let's do it now! When these fellows get too big for their boots we've got to defy 'em! Hurrah for the Remove! Down with tyranny!"

"Britons never will be slaves!"

The excitement was at fever pitch. Reggie Pitt walked over to the door, closed it, and put his back against it. His very action cooled a great deal of rising indignation.

"Just a minute!" said Pitt. "I'm junior skipper in this House, and I think you ought to listen to me for a minute."

"Go ahead, Reggie!"

"Well, take my advice, and obey Sinclair's order."

"WHAT!"

"Take my advice, and obey Sinclair's order," repeated Reggie. "It doesn't sound cheerful, I know. But we've got to think of Mr. Stokes."

"Stokes is worse than Sinclair!" snorted Doyle.

"We're not sure of that," said Reggie quietly. "Besides, he's got visitors, and we don't want to get a bad name. And there's another thing. Sinclair's the head prefect, and his authority is good. If we openly defy him, the Head will get to hear of it, and then there'll be real ructions. It'll end up in a wholesale flogging, or something."

"But what CAN we do?" demanded Grey hotly.

"Submit!" retorted Pitt. "Wait a minute! No yells! The scheme is to humble ourselves, and pretend to be beaten. Do that, and I'll guarantee that we shall stand more chance of winning in the end. It'll give me an opportunity to think out some scheme."

The Remove fellows were excited, but common sense won the day over impulse and excitement. Gradually, the fellows cooled down. Reggie Pitt talked to them quietly and earnestly.

Something was brewing!

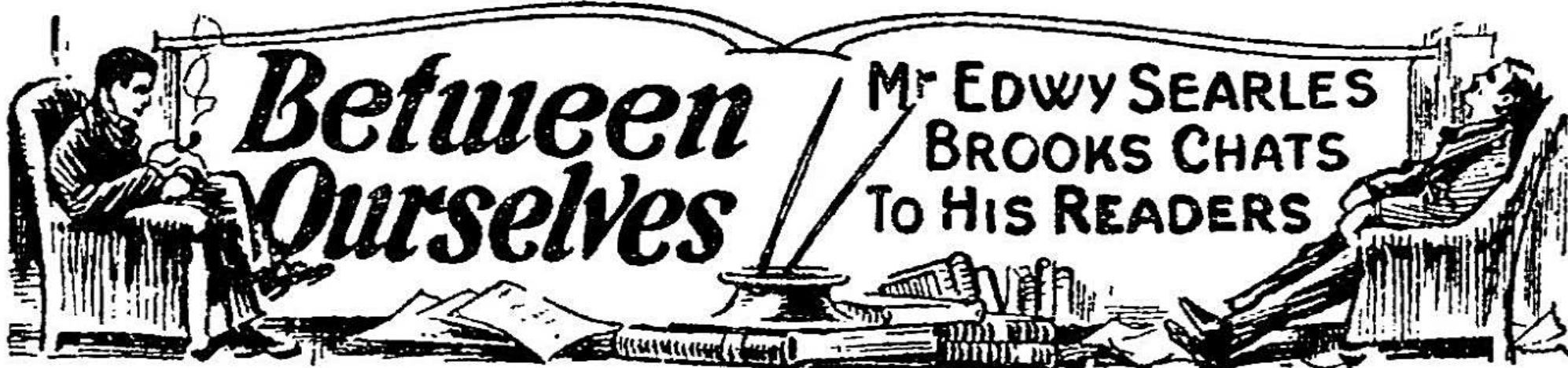
Guy Sinclair had appointed himself dictator of the West House, but the Remove had decided to have something to say in the matter!

THE END.

NEXT WEEK!

"THE SCHOOLBOY DESPOT!"

Another Powerful Story of this Splendid New Series.



MR EDWY SEARLES BROOKS CHATS TO HIS READERS

NOTE.—If any reader writes to me, I shall be pleased to comment upon such remarks as are likely to interest the majority. All letters should be addressed to EDWY SEARLES BROOKS, c/o The Editor, THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY, The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4. Every letter acknowledged below has been personally read by me, and the starred ones (if any) are of special merit. I thank each writer most heartily, but I am reluctantly compelled to confine my replies to letters of general interest.—E. S. B.

Who said "Barring Out"? I am forming the opinion that lots of you readers must be regular fire-eaters. Whenever you hear that a barring-out is in the wind, you hungrily sniff the air, put your ears back, and in next to no time you're well away. Just between ourselves, you know, it's terrible! And the more violent the rebellion, the better you like it! I suppose it must be something in the blood. When it come to brass tacks, we're a war-like lot. To the average fellow, there's nothing quite so thrilling as when he gets home that "right" on the other fellow's jaw.

Take Handforth, for example. He'd rather go to penal servitude than give a promise not to use his fists for a month. Yet he's one of the best chaps out, really. It only shows that it isn't always safe to judge people by their listic prowess. Lawrence, of the Modern House, is one of the most peaceful cliaps in the world. He's as amiable as anything, yet he could lick three ordinary juniors with one fist. And I'll guarantee that you readers who are most fond of these barring-out series are as peaceful as— Well, as peaceful as I am. And I'm the most inoffensive fellow you'd meet in a month of Sundays. If you don't believe me, ask the Editor.

Talking about Handforth and Lawrence, though, reminds me of something. I've had quite a few letters, criticising me for bringing Handforth into the stories too much. I've had other letters complaining that Lawrence is never heard of nowadays. Well, that's just the point. Now we're on this subject, let's thresh it out completely. It's a one-sided argument, anyhow, because it'll be weeks before I hear your side of it.

How can you expect Handforth to be out of anything that's going? He's such an aggressive beggar that he butts in everywhere. I'm always trying to subdue him a bit, but it's no good. As soon as ever I think I've succeeded, up he bobs again. But Lawrence, on the other hand, is so unobtrusive that we often hear nothing of him for months. When he does come into the limelight, I've got to drag him in by force. He's quite a modest chap, really, whereas Handforth isn't really alive until he's got the spotlights full on. There's his minor, too. You wouldn't believe what a terror he is. He's even more trouble than Edward Oswald. Many times I've said to myself, "No, I'm hanged if Willy's coming into this story. He had a good showing last week, and he ought to be satisfied." And, as sure as I'm alive, before I know where I am, the young beggar's in! The fact is, he won't be kept down. He simply refuses! It doesn't matter what I do, or how much I wangle things, Willy worms his way through all my defences, and then goodness knows what mischief he's up to! It's all very well for you to write to me on this subject, but you haven't got any idea of my worries. It's a constant battle. I'm always trying to push the prominent characters into the background, so as to give the others a chance. Now and again I succeed, and then I pat myself warmly on the back.

Even such important fellows as Buster Boots and Bob Christine and Timothy Armstrong find it hard to show themselves. So what chance is there for Larry Scott, or Hubert Jarrow, or Sessue Yakama? They're all at St. Frank's—they've been there all the time—and you've got to take them for granted. Why, if I told you about EVERYTHING that happened at St. Frank's you'd never be able to read it all! For that matter, I shouldn't be able to write it. I should need about two "Monster Libraries" every week.

Supposing I took some of you chaps at your word? Supposing, by a superhuman effort, I held Handforth down for a whole week? I'll bet you wouldn't like it. You'd write me and say, "What's become of Handforth?" And if I left Willy out— But what's the good of saying that? I couldn't

(Continued on page iii of cover.)

DINGO, THE TRACKER.



A STORY OF AUSTRALIAN ADVENTURE

By a Popular Author

CHAPTER I.

A LEAP FOR LIFE.

THE moon had risen, and her silvery light streamed over the park-like lands of Southern Australia. The distant sea was aglow. On a scarp, rising a thousand feet above the silent sea, stood a black, one of the aborigines of Australia. He was known as Dingo the Tracker. What his real name was few knew, and none cared.

He was a tall, spare young fellow, and seemed to be all sinews and muscle. His eyes were large and black and brilliant.

So silent was the night that the beating of a kangaroo's tail on the sod a mile away was audible. It was the only sound that the tracker heard, yet he was listening for another—a sound that might mean death to him.

A gang of bushrangers, whose secret he had learnt, were on his trail, and Dingo knew no mercy would be shown him, for he had run more than one of their number down where the police had failed.

The black was standing on the brink of a precipice. Beneath him the cliff was sheer for a hundred feet or more, and at its base lay a deep pool, whose waters from that height looked as black as those of some deep well, for the moonlight did not reach them.

Suddenly Dingo's head was thrown back, and a fierce light came into his eyes. He had heard a sound so slight that it would have been inaudible to the ears of a white man. It was the thud of horses' hoofs upon the springy turf, and the riders were coming that way, although intervening bushes concealed them from the tracker's view. He knew that they were

on his trail, and would surely track him down.

Some moments elapsed; then round the outskirts of the coppice a dozen horsemen rode at a furious pace. The next moment they reined in, dismounted, and rifles were unslung.

Dingo knew that death lay there, for those miscreants would never miss their aim, and his form was an easy mark in the moonlight.

He turned and cast one swift glance down the height. It seemed to be a leap to death, but it was his only chance, and must be taken without a moment's hesitation.

Raising his arms above his head, he dived down from the fearful height, and above the shriek of the air in his ears he heard the rifle volley; but the gang had fired too late.

Downwards rushed the tracker's lithe form, and then he plunged into the deep water, remaining beneath the surface for so long that it seemed to a lad, who was watching from the bushes, that the daring fellow must have struck the bottom and met certain death.

This lad now sprang forward, although he must have known that it was a perilous thing to do, for no man would have taken a dive like that unless there were great danger behind him.

Ere the boy reached the pool Dingo's head rose, and with a few swift strokes he gained the rocky side; then, struggling out, he seized the lad by the arm, and almost flung him into the bushes, while he dropped beside him.

"You silly boy, Tom! Why you come at all? And why stay in de open? Hark!" Revolver-shots rang out. The balls whizzed

into the bushes on all sides, but it was only by chance that the tracker or the lad could have been hit, for they were invisible from the height.

"I came to meet you, Dingo," observed Tom. "I meant to sleep out with the dingoes and kangaroos. It's jolly in the wilds—a lot better than in the stuffy cottage. I say, have you come from the gold-diggings?"

"No. I said I would come, and I came from town. Must go straight to de diggings."

"Think father would be savage if I came with you?"

"As mad as tipsy bushrangers!"

"But he doesn't get tipsy."

"I know it, Tom, lad; but he gets mad when you vex him much, and he would be much vexed if I took you all dat way. Madder still if you got shot!"

"Not he. He'd be sorry then!" exclaimed Tom, raising his sturdy form, and peering through the bushes, so that he could catch a glimpse of the gang on the brink of the height. "I wish I had a rifle, then those brutes should not have all the firing. But why must you reach those diggings?"

"Come away, Tom, boy," exclaimed the tracker: "and don't show yourself as we go. It's got to be quick. I tell you all about it when we are safe."

Again he took the lad's arm, and pushed him onwards, keeping him well covered with his own body. The faithful black had taught the lad all he knew about the bush, and would have given his life for Tom any day.

"We safe now, Tom!" exclaimed Dingo, when they were sheltered by the trees. "Now just you listen as we walk. You know de bushrangers don't like me at all, so when I see 'um coming I sneak into an inn, and landlord never know. So I hide and listen, and dey talk and drink. Talk very low, but I hear quite plenty. See? And dis is what I learn. Your fader is going to run his gold, and dey are going to stop him, and shoot as much as is required, and more dan he will need. See, Tom, boy? Your fader is a good man, so I just go and warn him, and you stop in de cottage till we come wid wagon and de gold. See?"

"No. I'm the proper one to go."

"Ho, ho, you silly lad! You quite a little boy! Just you stop at home. I'll see you to it now, and get a horse."

"May as well get two, Dingo, because I'm coming with you, whether you like it or not."

"Goorooh! Dere must be madness in de family, after all!" gasped Dingo.

But he made no attempt to dissuade the plucky youngster, because past experience had taught him that it would merely be wasting time.

After all, Tom was only going to his father's aid—perhaps to save his life.

CHAPTER II.

A RACE TO THE RESCUE.

I T was five miles to the settlement. The tracker set the pace at a swinging trot, and never once did he slacken speed, although occasionally he glanced at his young companion to make sure that he was going well.

He had taught Tom to run in a manner that few lads of his age could have equalled; and it was not until the lights of the settlement appeared in view that they slackened speed.

The cottage where Tom dwelt with an old servant was outside the settlement. It belonged to the lad's father, who had made his pile at the diggings, and it had been a grazing farm.

"We easy catch a horse," observed Dingo. "Take no time."

"No; and it will only take twice as long to catch two of them," said Tom.

"I won't take you. So dere!" cried Dingo.

"All right!" exclaimed Tom. "You can go alone—and so will I. I'll race you there, and whack the bushrangers hollow! It's a race for life, you know—my father's life. Do you think I'll skulk in that cottage with the old woman while he is facing death? You don't know me!"

"Should know you in all dese years. Your fader will be mad."

"I'd rather he was savage than that he thought me a miserable coward; and that would be the only thing to think if I didn't go to his aid in time of need."

"We can't get de police," mused Dingo. "Take too long, and dey don't like me. Wouldn't believe a word what I say. No, we must help ourselves dis time. Come and catch two horses. You always get your way with me."

"Because you take such silly views."

"Goorooh! Hark at de child talking! You wait till you grow an old man like me, Tom, boy. You ain't got a mighty experience yet."

"You are not so jolly old, either, Dingo!" exclaimed Tom. "Sometimes you want to act like a child."

"Ho, ho! Dat's when you don't agree wid my opinion. Well, here we are, and yonder are de horses. Get me a rifle and revolver, and I get two horses."

"So will I get two rifles, Dingo," declared Tom. "My aim mayn't be as true as yours, but it's jolly well straight enough for bushrangers who want to attack my father, and so they will discover!"

He captured the best two horses, and by the time he had bridled and saddled them Tom appeared with the weapons.

"Good!" exclaimed Dingo. "Mount, Tom boy! We have far to ride to-night; but we have de moon, and our mounts are fresh, so we shall go plenty far."

"Think the gang will start at once?" inquired Tom.

"May look for me a bit around de pool; but dey are only ignorant white men, and cannot follow a trail."

"We must get in front of them, you know. My father's life may depend on it, for I'm jolly certain he'll fight for his gold."

"Ho, ho! Trust to him for de fighting. Mind you, I have fought by his side, and seen him. A big man, your fader, and plenty strong. Goroooh! He make sparks fly out of foe, and foe fly after de sparks. Ho, ho! A fight on a moonlight night wid your fader is grand."

"Don't be so bloodthirsty, Dingo! Fighting is wrong, you know."

"Gooroooh! What's de boy talking about? It's wrong on de oder side—and right on yours. Ride on, Tom, and if we meet our foes to-night, let 'um beware!"

As Dingo dashed onwards his eyes grew fierce, and he gazed around the beautiful country as though he hoped the foe were there; for although he was a staunch friend, he was a very fierce enemy, and the criminal who defied him had little chance of escape. No bloodhound on the scent was surer than the tracker.

Had it not been for the anxiety concerning his father, Tom would have enjoyed that wild gallop. He had learnt to ride when a child, and had two good tutors in his father and Dingo. There were few men in that wild part who could ride with a surer seat than that boy; none who were more daring.

"Mind de rabbit-holes, Tom!" exclaimed the tracker, as they sped onwards at a pace that caused the night wind to whistle in their ears.

"Right you are!" exclaimed Tom. "The horse knows how to dodge them!"

Leaving the pool to the south, they struck inland, while Dingo's eyes scanned the open ground and the dark shadows beneath the trees. It was certain that the gang would lie in wait for him. They were aware that the tracker knew their plans, and their success depended on them stopping him before he carried the news to the diggings.

Several miles were covered at breakneck pace, and they were rounding a clump of trees when Dingo gave the order to rein in.

Both horses were pulled up sharp, and from the trees came red flashes, while bullets whistled past the riders.

The tracker quickly returned the fire, then wheeled his horse round, so that it was between Tom and the foe.

"Ride for your life, Tom!" he cried. "We must run de gauntlet!"

"Hurrah!" cried Tom, bringing his whip down with a crack that caused his horse to spring forwards.

Then on the daring riders dashed at wild pace.

Rabbit-holes were unheeded now. A fall would have been fatal, but their lives depended on their speed. The gang were firing shot after shot, but the range was considerable, and although many of the

bullets came very close, neither horse nor rider was touched.

"Ride for yonder trees, Tom!" exclaimed Dingo, glaring back at the foe, who had now stepped into the open, and were taking steady aim. "Once we reach 'um we are safe."

Not fifty yards separated them from the clump when Dingo reeled in his saddle.

"Ride on!" he shouted, and then fell sideways, and was dragged along the ground by the stirrup.

Twice Tom's whip descended, and as his horse sprang forwards he grasped the reins which had fallen from the tracker's hands; then, with all his strength, he tugged at them, pulling the terrified horse on its haunches.

Now he sprang to the ground, and, standing over his fallen comrade, levelled his rifle at the foe.

It was a repeating rifle. Tom had six shots to fire, and, although so young, there were few men whose aim was surer, for his father and the tracker had trained him in the use of the rifle. It was a necessary accomplishment in these wild parts.

Tom drove the miscreants to cover, and they fired from the bushes; but the range was very great, and they were chary of exposing themselves to take accurate aim. The lad was firing rapidly, while they were not armed with repeating rifles.

Presently they ceased firing, and Tom quickly reloaded. He gazed at his fallen friend, and a pang of sorrow shot through the lad's breast. Dingo had always been such a true comrade to him, and more than once had saved his life at risk of his own.

While the fight had lasted the lad had only felt rage against the miscreants who had struck his comrade down; but now he felt deep grief and desolation, for he believed that Dingo was dead.

The moonlight streamed on his rigid face, and as Tom gazed upon it a mist came into his eyes, and a stifled sob shook his frame.

But this was a time for action and not for grief, for now he saw six mounted men dash from the bushes and gallop towards him, shouting fiercely, and firing as they came.

Taking careful aim, Tom fired at the leading horseman. He would not fire at the horse, although that would have been the surest mark. The man's left arm dropped to his side, and the horse swerved so that he nearly fell.

Uttering a fierce cry, the horseman drew his revolver, and fired shot after shot at the daring lad.

Tom's rifle was soon empty. He drew his revolver. Then another rifle flashed over his shoulder, and, turning, he saw that Dingo had risen, and although his body swayed from side to side, he appeared to take good aim.

The gang wheeled their horses round; then, uttering fierce cries, galloped towards the thicket, while the man whom Tom had struck turned in his saddle, and, shaking his right

fist, uttered fierce threats against the brave lad.

"I thought that you were killed, Dingo," murmured Tom.

"Goorooh! No! Plenty of life in me yet, Tom! De ball had nearly sped its course, I expect. Caught me in de head. Brought up big bump, and brought me down. To catch horse plenty easy, den on we go."

The young man and boy were under fire the whole time they chased the horses, but neither of them was hit, and, leaping into their saddles, they once more galloped onwards.

"We must be in front of the gang now!" exclaimed Tom, turning in his saddle. But he could see no pursuers. "They are not even following."

"I wish dey were!" exclaimed Dingo grimly.

"Want to get shot again?"

"Goorooh! No! One big lump plenty to go on wid. Too much lead in a napper spoil all de brilliancy ob intellect; besides, it makes a man top-heavy. Ho, ho! Makes him tumble on his head each time he falls! But, don't you see, all de gang ain't dere, and while dat little lot are fooling around in trying to stop us, de rest get plenty start, and reach de wagon before us."

"I say! That won't do. We have got to stop that, you know."

"Den we must ride, and ride. We shall not spare our horses, and we shall not spare ourselves. A hundred and fifty miles in de saddle feels rader tiring; but we must do a great deal more. Rein in a bit, Tom. We are going too fast for such a ride!"

"You think some of the gang are ahead of us?" inquired Tom anxiously.

"Where else are dey? Not in de coppice. De wagon must come through Grey Gulch, and dat's where de attack is likely to be made."

At any other time Tom would have thoroughly enjoyed that ride. There was a spice of peril about it that was very attractive to him. But now he thought only of his father's peril, and quite forgot his own.

CHAPTER III.

ON THE TRAIL.

ALL through the night they rode, and it was not until the grey light of another day appeared in the Eastern heavens that they drew rein.

They had reached the wagon track which led in an almost straight line to the diggings.

Dingo sprang to the ground, and gave his reins to Tom. Then, approaching the track, he went down on his hands and knees, and Tom waited anxiously.

He knew that the tracker was trying to discover if the gang had passed, and had the lad not known the wonderful skill pos-

sessed by Dingo, he would have considered his task an impossible one, for many hoof-prints and footmarks were there.

For quite five minutes Dingo continued his scrutiny, then he leapt to his feet and raced back to the horses.

"On—once more, Tom!" he cried, leaping into his saddle. "It is a race for life! De gang—twelve of 'um at least—have passed!"

"A race for life—my father's life! Come on, Dingo! We won't lose a single instant! Have they passed here long since?"

"Not an hour! Captain Hearn, de leader of de gang, is wid 'um. I know his horse's hoof-marks. Dey have a bloodhound."

"But you could not see its footprints, surely?"

"Goorooh! No. I smell him. De scent of a bloodhound is much like a lion, and different from small dogs."

"Do you think our horses will hold out until we reach Grey Gulch?" inquired the lad.

"Tom, I fear not. We can only do our best."

"That best has got to be success. We'll have to ride till our horses drop, and then go on on foot."

"Good! But, Tom, boy, I wish you hadn't come. 'cos dere's going to be some mighty hard fighting, and boys ought not to be in a fight, and so I tell you. See?"

"Rats! A boy who won't fight for his father's life ought to be shot!"

"Goorooh! He's a lot more likely to get shot when fighting!"

Mid-day the sun was streaming down with fearful power. The tracker and the lad were terribly thirsty, and their flasks were long since drained, but there was not the slightest chance of replenishing them.

The worn-out horses were flagging, so that it was almost impossible to urge them on.

"By dark we shall reach Grey Gulch!" exclaimed Dingo.

And he had scarcely uttered the words when Tom's horse pitched forwards, and lay where it had fallen, completely exhausted.

"Seems jolly cruel to ride a horse like that!" exclaimed Tom, rising. "Still, there was no help for it. My father's life depended on our speed."

"A little rest and he will recover, Tom," declared Dingo, examining the poor brute. "Dere is no rest for us. By day and night we must go on. See! Leave the horses here, and we run on."

The bridles were removed; then, leaving the two horses to roam at will, Dingo set up a rapid pace, and Tom kept up as well as he could.

It was a terrible struggle for the plucky lad, but he was determined not to impede the tracker, and so, although his tongue was so parched with thirst that it cracked in places, he uttered no word of complaint.

By his own feelings, Dingo knew what a fearful trial the run must be to the lad; but he also knew that each minute might

make the difference between life and death, and so he continued his pace.

"Dere you are, Tom!" he exclaimed, pointing to a clump of bushes where bracken grew.

It was nearly a quarter of a mile from the wagon track, but the tracker had left that long ago, fearing to stumble on the gang, who, he believed, could not be very far ahead.

Tom sank into the bracken. A small stream trickled from the rocks, and he greedily drank the water, while he plunged his hands into the pool it formed.

Beside the great ravine, known as Grey Gulch, the trees and bushes grew in wild profusion. It was a gloomy-looking place, where great grey stones rose up on either side, between which dipped the wagon track; and many a crime had been committed there by Hearn, the leader of the gang. It was a place well suited to the evil purpose of the bushrangers, for there was plenty of cover on either side of the track, and woe betide those in a wagon that tried to pass, while the bandits were concealed amongst the towering rocks that lined the way.



Twice Tom's whip descended, and as his horse sprang forward, he grasped the reins which had fallen from the tracker's hands; then, with all his strength, he tugged at them, pulling the terrified horse on its haunches.

Dingo watched in silence, but he would not touch the water until Tom's thirst was quenched.

"Grey Gulch is close," said Dingo. "It is still day, and we must wait till night to get through. Bushrangers will be on both sides, and in daylight we cannot pass 'um. Sleep for a bit. See! I keep watch!"

It is doubtful if the lad could have kept awake had he tried. In a few moments he was sleeping deeply, and a smile came over Dingo's face as he watched.

Tom's sleep was not of long duration. The tracker awoke him as soon as it was dark, then on they went once more; but this time on foot.

The track descended in a steep decline; so steep that it was scarcely safe to go down it at more than a walking pace with a heavy wagon. At the bottom of the hill was a sharp bend, and then a rise until the heights on either side were passed.

It was at this bend that the bushrangers invariably lay in wait for their victims.

Now, Dingo knew that it would be impossible to traverse that pass. The moon had risen, and although there were black shadows in the gulch, no man could have passed along it without detection. He also felt quite certain that the bandits were already in hiding there. Yet he must reach

the further end of Grey Gulch before the wagon, for once it entered the narrow pass, the doom of all within it would be sealed.

Making a circuit, he pushed his way through the bushes, keeping at such distance from the pass that he trusted the sound he and Tom made would not be detected by the bushrangers.

He had proceeded some little distance when he suddenly stopped, for they heard the baying of the bloodhound. Rumour asserted that the fierce brute had torn to pieces more than one hapless man who had dared to offend its fierce master; and the name of Hearn, and his bloodhound, was dreaded throughout the land.

The baying soon ceased. No doubt the hound had been silenced by his master. Dingo hurried on, and then the rumble of wagon wheels became audible.

"Wait here or follow slowly, Tom boy," said the tracker, and away he darted, tearing through bushes, and leaping over great boulders, and the speed at which he went was like the wind. Tom could never have kept up with him.

He reached the top of the gulch, then with a few bounds, leapt down the rugged side, and grasped the reins of the two leaders. There were four horses harnessed to the wagon, and they were coming along at a rapid trot. Dingo was flung backwards, but he retained his hold.

"Hands up, or I fire!" shouted a stern voice, in a tone of alarm.

"Hold, Jim Brough!" cried the black. "I'm Dingo de Tracker. Dere's foes ahead! Hearn and his men. Dey hold de gulch!"

"Ah! Spoken just in time, Dingo, my friend," cried a burly man, of middle age, springing from the wagon. He was Tom's father, and the owner of a rich mine.

"We came to give you warning," said Dingo; and then in a few words he told what had happened.

"And now," he concluded, "I'll track Hearn the Bushranger down. See! He shall lead his men no more. Ho, ho! Where de police have failed de tracker will succeed, or Hearn will have anoder life to answer for. And you must take de boy, Jim Brough!"

"You should not have brought him, Dingo," answered the miner.

"I know it, and told him so. Gooroo! He is as pigheaded as his fader, and as stupid!"

"What!"

"Now you can 'what' at me, Jim Brough. When you have had my experience you will be a wiser man, see?"

"I see you are a boy, with no experience at all, except at tracking. I'll admit you are good at that. As for being obstinate, that I never was; only when I am in the right!"

"Ho, ho! Go on! You are always in de right according to your own opinion. But here comes de boy. Mind him while I track down de leader of de gang."

"Well, before you start, Dingo, listen to me," exclaimed James Brough. "We are not far from the diggings. I shall send a messenger back to get assistance, and then we shall give the gang a big surprise. I'll attack them from the top of the gulch, so that when we open fire you will know what is occurring. Tom, you will have to go to the diggings so as to be out of the way!"

Tom did not like this arrangement at all, and when his father had greeted him and supplied them with food, Tom tried to turn him from his purpose, but it was of no avail. The miner knew that the gang would fight fiercely, and he had no intention of allowing his son to run into needless danger.

Dingo saw how disappointed the lad was, and as was his custom, intervened on his behalf.

"Your fader is quite right, Tom," he said. "It won't do at all to let you risk danger. Now if you come with me dere will be no danger at all, and dat is what your fader wishes. See?"

"I don't see at all!" growled the miner. "You spoil the lad, and quite unfit him for the sort of life that he will have to lead when he gets a little older. I suppose you want to go with Dingo, Tom?"

"If you won't let me stop and help you fight!"

"Then be off with you. I know Dingo won't let you get into any danger that he can avoid; at the same time, there will be risk in capturing such a man as Hearn!"

"Wrong again!" muttered the tracker, hurrying away, and motioning to Tom to follow.

They gained the thicket, and then Dingo turned.

"We have a waiting job, Tom," he whispered. "We will allow de attack to be made, and den we shall see how to act. Follow me, and do not speak a word, or make a sound, for it would be death to be found here, and your fader does not want you to die."

Then with a movement so stealthy that he scarcely made a rustle, Dingo crept through the bushes towards the spot where he knew the enemy lay in wait.

CHAPTER IV.

TRACKED DOWN.

DINGO gained a spot quite close to the top of the gulch, and here he waited until the night was well advanced. Then the rumbling of the wagon became audible, and the tracker

looked surprised. It was passing along Grey Gulch, and presently the bushrangers opened fire.

The next instant another volley rang out, and fierce shouts followed it. The miners had sent the wagon along the pass, having first emptied it of its precious burden. No driver was with it, but the miners hoped the bandits would not fire at the horses. Their object was to draw the enemies' fire, and learn their exact position from the flashing of the rifles.

Two parties of miners were on the top of the pass on either side, and they were pouring in a fire from which the bushrangers had no cover, for their foes were above them.

The surprise was complete, and as the gang of miscreants came clambering up the height, they were met by a galloping fire.

"Goorooh! By de sound of tings dey have caught it dis time, Tom. You make men fierce when you rob 'um of hard won gold. We must wait for daylight to run de leader down; but I shall do it. It is long since time his villainies ceased."

By the sound of the firing it was evident that the miners were chasing their hated foes across the country; but Dingo was in no hurry. He knew that he would strike Hearn's trail sooner or later, and then he would never leave it until he had run him down.

Towards morning the firing ceased, and then the tracker commenced his operations.

Telling Tom to wait amongst the bushes, he commenced his search, making a circuit round the top of the pass, so that he crossed the trails of all who had fled from it on that side, and he guessed the leader would be amongst them, for it was from that side that the chief attack would be made upon the wagon, because if he had got round the bend it would have come in that direction.

Dingo spent two hours over the tracking, and then, rising to his feet, he beckoned to Tom, who raced towards him.

"See! One hoof-mark on de softer ground, and it was made by Hearn's horse!"

"Sure?"

"Yes. I would know it anywhere!"

"I don't know how you can tell it from this print, Dingo; but then I don't know how you can scent a bloodhound, and the one seems about as wonderful as the other to me."

"I may teach you to learn a horse's hoof-mark, if dere is peculiarity about it; but never shall I teach you to follow a trail by scent. All black men cannot do it. Tom, boy, you pledge your word to me you will not enter in dis fight."

"Don't you go so fast, Dingo. You are getting a jolly lot too conceited," said Tom,

shifting from the point. "You haven't caught him yet!"

"Goorooh! De boy wants to fool de old experienced tracker; but come, and if you dare to interfere, den comes de trouble!"

All through the day Dingo followed the trail, and in some parts it was so indistinct that he went down on his hands and knees.

Tom became very anxious as night came on; but Dingo showed no signs of hurry. He knew that it would be useless, for the leader of the gang was mounted, and the only chance of capturing him was when he stopped.

"We must wait for de moon now," murmured Dingo, stopping. "I can see de trail no more."

"There's a light yonder," said Tom, pointing ahead.

"So! Dat will not be far from the wagon-track, and it is de inn. I know it, Tom. It is possible he may be dere. Wait, and I will see!"

He sped onwards towards the light, and as he approached it went down on his hands and knees and crept towards the little window, and listened intently.

Two men were talking, but he could not tell from the words whether one of them was the dreaded bushranger. Presently the voices ceased, and Dingo ventured to raise himself.

One glance was sufficient to convince him that the man he wanted was there; but he knew that he would be fully armed.

Now the tracker could have shot him down, and there could be no doubt that it would be no more than he deserved, but Dingo had a code of honour that was far above such a deed as that.

He stepped back from the open window; then, taking a run, he leapt through the small opening with the skill of an aerobat, and he landed almost on top of the miscreant.

Hearn was flung backwards, and his chair was smashed to splinters; then the two struggled on the floor, and a terrible struggle it was.

Hearn's strength was prodigious, but Dingo twined his lithe form round him, and he could not draw a weapon. The tracker had got him by the throat, and the grip was choking him.

"Surrender!" cried Tom, rushing into the place, and levelling a revolver at him.

They bound him hand and foot, and Dingo grinned when he saw that he was helpless.

That work brought Dingo a hundred pounds, the price placed upon the bushranger's head, and when the little party made their way to James Brough's cottage, more good news awaited them, for the two abandoned horses had found their way back.

THE END.

AS SIMPLE AS A B C.

ST. FRANK'S LEAGUE APPLICATION FORM No. 29. Jan. 16, 1926

SECTION

A

READER'S APPLICATION FOR MEMBERSHIP.

Being a regular reader of "THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY," I desire to become enrolled as a Member of THE ST. FRANK'S LEAGUE, and to qualify for all such benefits and privileges as are offered to Members of the League. I hereby declare myself to be a staunch supporter of "THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY" and THE ST. FRANK'S LEAGUE, and that I have introduced Our Paper to one new reader, whose signature to certify this appears on second form attached hereto. Will you, therefore, kindly forward me Certificate of Enrolment with Membership Number assigned to me.

SECTION

B

MEMBER'S APPLICATION FOR MEDAL AWARDS.

I, Member No..... (give Membership No.) hereby declare that I have introduced one more new reader, whose signature to certify this appears on second form attached hereto. This makes me..... (state number of introductions up to date) introductions to my credit.

SECTION

C

NEW READER'S DECLARATION.

I hereby declare that I have been introduced by (give name of introducer) to this issue of "THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY," which I will read with a view to becoming a regular reader of this paper.

(FULL NAME)

(ADDRESS)

IMPORTANT.—Complete and post off this form before the next issue of THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY is on sale. Otherwise the form becomes out of date and useless.

INSTRUCTIONS.—**Reader Applying for Membership.** Cut out TWO complete Application Forms from Two copies of this week's issue of THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY. On one of the forms fill in Section A, crossing out Sections B and C by running the pen diagonally across both Sections. Then write clearly your full name and address at bottom of form. The second form is for your new reader, who fills in Section C, crosses out Sections A and B, and writes his name and address at bottom of form. Both forms are then pinned together and sent to the Chief Officer, The St. Frank's League, c/o THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY, Gough House, Gough Square, London, E.C.4.

Member Applying for Bronze Medal: It will be necessary for you to obtain six new readers for this award. For each new reader TWO complete forms are needed, and these must be taken from copies of the latest issue of THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY at the time when the forms are sent in. On one of the forms fill in Section B, crossing out Sections A and C, and write your name and address at bottom of form. The other form is for your new reader, who fills in Section C, crosses out Sections A

and B, and writes his name and address at the bottom of the form. Now pin both forms together and send them to the Chief Officer, as above. One new reader will then be registered against your name, and when six new readers have been registered, you will be sent the St. Frank's League bronze medal. There is nothing to prevent you from sending in forms for two or more new readers at once, provided the forms are taken from the latest issue of the THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY at the time when the forms are sent in.

Bronze medallists wishing to qualify for the silver or gold medals can apply in the same way as for the bronze medal, filling in Section B, which has been revised for this purpose. Every introduction they make will be credited to them, so that when the League reaches the required number of members, they can exchange their bronze medal for a silver or gold one, according to the number of introductions with which they are credited.

These Application Forms can be posted for ½d., providing the envelope is not sealed and no letter is enclosed.

(Continued from page 32.)

leave Willy out, even if I tried. The young rascal wouldn't let me.

And now, after wandering on like this, and getting you all into a state of sheer exasperation, I suppose I'd better dig into a pile of letters, and trot out a few answers. First of all, we'll have the acknowledgements: Dennis B. (Nottingham), C. B. L. (London, W.C.), Lionel Moxom (Rochdale), J. Nande (Beaufort West, South Africa), Alfred Davies* (Liverpool), L. Scott (Cape Town), John Gerald Dodd (Birmingham), Solomon Arkin (Cape Town), Fred Griffin (Nottingham), A. C. Thorpe (Harrogate), A. Jones (Swansea), George Lister (Wolverhampton), Frank Mitchell (Birmingham), G. Desmond Richardson (Burton-on-Trent), A Loyal Reader (Longton), William A. Mann, Jr.P (Ballinling, Perthshire), Stuart Nichols (Bristol), J. Butcher (Withernsea), Leagueite 499 (Twickenham).

Let me assure you at once, Dennis B., that the picture which appeared in the heading of "My American Notebook" is NOT a portrait of myself. That gentleman is supposed to be an American, a kind of type—in short, Uncle Sam. And Uncle Sam is no more like a real American than John Bull is like an average Briton. An alleged portrait of myself appeared in No. 455—September 20th, 1924. I say "alleged," because I am afraid that photograph flattered me to a perfectly wicked extent. You see, the Editor took one look at the original, sadly shook his head, and decided that he couldn't risk it. So he instructed his Polishing Department to rub it up a bit and make it look human. By the way, I sincerely hope—joking aside now—that you have made a complete recovery, and that you are now back home.

I don't believe you, J. Nande. You say that you have been a regular reader since 1922, and that you know all the characters by heart. Yet, at the end of your letter, you ask me this question: "Does the League hold good for Overseas readers?" Great Scott! And you call yourself a reader since 1922! You're not a reader at all—you're a skipper! You must have skipped the Chief Officer's League chats for weeks on end, or you wouldn't ask me such a question. Didn't he give you Overseas readers a chance of becoming special Foundation Members? Didn't he invite you to offer yourselves as Organising Officers? And now you want to know if "the League holds good for Overseas readers"! 'Nuff said!

Of course, I'm not surprised about that South African chap. People generally go about with their eyes closed, and they read without grasping the import of the printed word. I'll bet some of you have suddenly noticed, for example, a highly-coloured poster on the hoardings—a poster that stands out and hits you. And after that you see it everywhere. No matter where you go, the thing haunts you. Yet, strangely enough, that same poster was displayed on

the hoardings for days before you noticed it. You must have seen it hundreds of times, but it was an appreciable period before you CONSCIOUSLY saw it. It's the same with these League notices. You see them week after week, but, you bounders, you don't take the trouble to digest them! If you did, the League membership would have reached ten thousand months ago.

You're quite right about Willy, Alfred Davies. When he first came to St. Frank's, he just pushed Owen minor out of the captaincy of the Third, and usurped his place. That's Willy all over. Even I couldn't stop him from doing it, the cheeky young beggar! But I think we all admit that the Third has no cause to regret the change. Owen minor's all right, but he doesn't possess the leadership qualities of Willy.

No wonder the League's a bit slow, L. Scott! You say that one of your friends would like to become a member, but he can't—because, instead of buying his own copy of Our Paper, he borrows yours! I don't think the Chief Officer wants a member of that kind, anyhow. He can't be much of an enthusiast if he refuses to buy his own copy!

My birthday, Fred Griffin? Of course I'll tell you—why shouldn't I? It's nothing to be ashamed of. Quite confidentially, and just between ourselves, the date of my birthday is exactly the same as Archie Glenthorne's.

Here, you're a bit sharp on me, aren't you, J. Butcher? I'll confess that I made Singleton refer to his father in a recent number—and I'll confess, also, that when he first came to St. Frank's he said that his father was dead. Thought you'd tripped me up, eh? But you surely know that lots of guardians are called "father" by their wards? Why, if we took these things literally, imagine what huge families Uncle Rex, Uncle Caractacus, Aunt Sophie, and all the rest would have! I think I've wriggled out of that pretty neatly, don't you?

All right, Leagueite 499, I'll bring Sir Montie Tregellis-West and Tommy Watson into the limelight a bit. But, you see, they're in the same fix as those other chaps I mentioned on the other page. They're always trying to get a look in, but with Handforth and Browne and Archie and Willy knocking about—Well, what hopes? But I dare say they'll make a determined attempt before long, and bob up again like they did in the Moat Hollow series. You can't keep a good man down, you know.

E. S. B.

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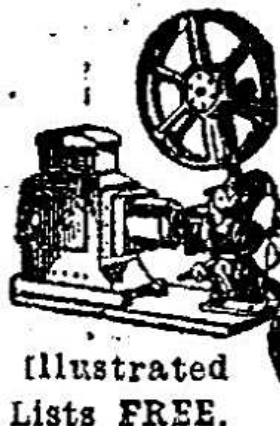
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