

READ HOW **HANDFORTH MAKES THINGS HUM** THIS WEEK!

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HANDFORTH'S FLAG DAY!

A Rollicking Long Complete Story
of the Famous Boys of St. Frank's.

New Series No. 23.

OUT ON WEDNESDAY.

October 9th, 1926.



There was an ugly glint in the mayor's eye as, accompanied by the policemen, he strode over to the hapless Handforth. It looked as though Handy was in for it this time, much to the delight of Forrest and Co., who were gloating over the proceedings from the window of the Japanese Cafe.

HANDFORTH'S FLAG DAY!



By EDWY SEARLES BROOKS

Flag Day for Handy means "Trouble Day!" You'll rock with laughter when you read all about it in this week's stunning long complete story of the Boys of St. Frank's.

CHAPTER 1.

FIVE SHILLINGS FOR CHARITY.

ARCHIE GLENTHORNE bolted back into the Ancient House like a rabbit. "Odds horrors and disasters!" he gasped feebly.

A moment earlier the genial ass of the St. Frank's Remove had lounged elegantly out of the Ancient House. But he took one look into the triangle, his monocle dropped out of his eye, and he executed a precipitate retreat. And he stood there, just in the lobby, utterly disconcerted.

"Hallo, Archie!" said Willy Handforth of the Third, as he strolled up. "What's the idea of this Swedish drill business? I haven't seen you move so quickly for weeks."

"Laddie, how absolutely frightful!" breathed Archie, with a hunted glance over his shoulder. "I mean to say, how frightfully absolute! Kindly allow me to escape! Out of the path, dash you!"

"Yes, but what's all the scare about?" demanded Willy. "For October, it's a glorious evening, the sun's shining, and tomorrow's a half-holiday. What more do you want?"

While speaking, Willy took a look out into the triangle, but he saw nothing to account

for Archie Glenthorne's fright. The triangle appeared to be deserted, save for three charming young ladies, who had just entered the gateway. Willy recognised them at once as Irene & Co., of the Moor View School.

"Hold on!" he said, grasping Archie's arm as the elegant Removite was about to escape. "What are you afraid of? What can you see that I can't? There's nothing out there to scare——"

"Good gad!" interrupted Archie frantically. "The dear girls are absolutely advancing to the attack! And here am I, dash you, literally in rags! A frightfully soiled collar, dusty shoes, and looking like a tramp!"

Willy grinned.

"Rats!" he said briefly. "Outside, you chump! Hi, Marjorie! If you want to grab Archie, you'd better come at the double! He's trying to escape!"

Willy swung the startled Archie round, and pushed him outside. And Irene Manners & Co. came up at the same moment, so there was no chance of further retreat. Archie inwardly groaned, and resigned himself to his fate.

There is a great deal of difference in a point of view. Willy considered that Archie

was dazzling from head to foot, and disgracefully dandified. But Archie himself felt that he was more like a tramp than a respectable schoolboy. But this was because he liked to wear the best of everything in the presence of ladies. It was a Tuesday evening, and he had expected no visitors. And so he was content to be shabby.

Of course, the truth was simple. Archie was elegant from head to foot. Not quite so polished, perhaps, as he would have liked, but, compared to the other members of the Remove, he was immaculate. He had peculiar ideas on the subject. Any suit that had not been pressed just prior to his wearing it, was, in Archie's opinion, little better than a rag. Any collar that had been worn for more than six hours was in the last stages of grubbiness.

"Hallo, Archie!" said the girls in one voice.

"What-ho! I mean, greetings, old dears!" said Archie unhappily. "Pray excuse the ghastly state of the wardrobe, and all that. I am frightfully sorry, but the fact is, I wasn't absolutely expecting——"

"But what's wrong with you, Archie?" asked Marjorie Temple smilingly.

"Nothing," said Willy, before Archie could reply. "At least, nothing that we can do. A West End brain specialist might do a bit of good if he took Archie under treatment, but even that's doubtful. He thinks he looks shabby and untidy, and tried to escape. I just collared him."

"Quite right, too," said Marjorie, nodding. "I'm surprised at you, Archie—you look simply splendid!"

"Oh, I say! I mean—— But, dash it——"

"Quite splendid enough for us, anyhow," put in Doris Berkeley briskly. "You're just one of the very fellows we wanted to meet this evening. It's a question of cash, you know. We mustn't ask you for anything, and we're not supposed to even hint at it. But take a look at this through your plate-glass window."

She smilingly held up a collection-box, and Archie started. He observed that all three girls were wearing these boxes hung round their necks. And they were also carrying bunches of artificial daisies.

"What's this—a new stunt?" asked Willy, with interest.

"Yes, it's Daisy Day," said Irene. "We're collecting for the Bannington Cottage Hospital, you know. We've had the whole day off, and we're just on the way home. So we thought we'd give you a look in at the death, as it were. There's still plenty of room in these boxes."

Willy looked thoughtful.

"Why don't they invite us to collect for 'em?" he asked indignantly. "You girls get all the luck! A whole day of it—excused from lessons! And all that you've got to do is go round, giving the glad eye to everybody, and rattling that giddy box!"

"You little wretch, we don't give the glad eye to anybody," said Irene coldly. "If you can't give us a contribution, go and find Ted. He won't let us escape without shelling out, I know!"

Willy sniffed.

"Sorry," he said shortly. "I can't bother Ted. I don't suppose he'd speak to me, even if I went to him. He's too high and mighty these days. You seem to forget that he's been elevated to the peerage."

"He's been what?" asked Irene in surprise.

"Well, anyhow, he looks upon himself as a peer among his fellows," said Willy. "He's the supreme Dictator—the Lord of the Remove—the King of the Castle. Actually, he's only the skipper, but that's a detail. He seems to regard the captaincy as an excuse for lording it over everybody. My hat! Poor old Remove!"

Willy walked off, and the girls looked inquiringly at Archie.

"Is this true?" asked Marjorie.

"Eh? I mean, which?"

"What Willy was saying just now about Ted?"

"As a matter of fact, dear old girls, I'm afraid there's a certain amount of veracity in the dashed statement," replied Archie, shaking his head. "There's no denying that the chappie had been shoving it across us somewhat heftily of late. I mean, the good old Remove is now a hotbed of seething activity and discontent. This dashed blighter has upset the good old works."

"Are you talking about Ted?" asked Irene coldly.

"Absolutely," said Archie. "I hate to refer to the chappie as a blighter, but only yesterday he barged into the good old study, biffed me off the lounge, and threw his weight about somewhat largely. I was obliged to dot him a considerable blow in the features, dash it!"

"We might have expected it," said Doris. "As soon as we heard that Ted had been elected captain, we said to ourselves, 'Now there's going to be trouble,' didn't we, Irene?"

"Yes, but what about this cash, Archie?", put in Marjorie sweetly.

"Oh, rather!" said Archie diving into his pocket.

And while he was generously stuffing a pound note into Marjorie's box, Willy had arrived at Study D, in the Remove passage. Chubby Heath and Juicy Lemon were with him, and they all paused.

"Now, leave this to me," said Willy calmly. "After all, those girls are right. The cause of charity is voicing its call. Can we ignore this lofty purpose? Not giddy likely!"

"Isn't this rather sudden?" asked Chubby Heath pointedly.

"Isn't what rather sudden?"

"This interest in charity," said Chubby.

"Charity," replied Willy, "is a wide term. I've always been interested in charity, my sons. And here we have a particularly deserving cause. In fact, we can say two deserving causes!"

Willy ignored a big placard on the door, which announced, in daubed lettering, that it was the "Captain's Office," and that, furthermore, there was no admittance except on business. The placard even stated that interviews could be granted by appointment only. And in spite of the fact that it was signed by the great Edward Oswald himself, Willy turned the doorhandle and marched straight in.

His major was sitting at the table, partaking of tea. Apparently Handforth had decided to live the simple life. Instead of tea, he was indulging in ginger-beer—out of the bottle. And he was eating buns from a bag. He started up, his alarm obvious.

"I—I thought I locked the door!" he mumbled thickly.

"You shouldn't think about locked doors—you ought to make certain by turning the key," retorted his minor. "Sorry to barge in, Ted, old man, but it's important."

"What's important?"

"Five bob!" said Willy briskly.

Handforth made a noise which resembled the last gurgle of an expiring fish. His face became red, he seemed to be on the point of choking, and he rose unsteadily to his feet.

"Get—outside!" he croaked.

"After I've got the five bob," nodded Willy.

By a tremendous effort, Handforth controlled himself.

"You—you young rotter!" he gasped. "Always bothering me for five bob! This time you won't get it! By George! I'm not going to be blackmailed by my own minor! Buzz off, blow you!"

Willy sighed.

"It's for charity," he explained patiently.

"Charity!" repeated Handforth, with deep suspicion.

"Charity."

"Yes, but what charity?"

"Why worry about trifles?" asked Willy.

"You've got plenty of cash in your pocket. You're not going to begrudge a mouldy five bob for charity, I suppose? They're going round with collection boxes, and I want to put something in."

"Something?" repeated Edward Oswald.

"Not a button, or a bent ha'penny, or anything like that? I know your little tricks, my lad—"

"Cheese it, Ted," interrupted Willy. "Brace yourself up, throw your shoulders back, and take a good dive into your cash pocket. Five bob, and you'll be rid of me. And, remember, it's for charity."

Handforth yanked out two half-crowns, and slapped them on the table.

"There you are!" he panted. "There you are, you—you disease! I'm always trying to

cure you, but you always break out again! Take it, and go!"

Willy seized the money, and grinned.

"Good old Ted!" he said heartily. "The old reliable!"

CHAPTER 2.

A MESSAGE FOR HIS LORDSHIP.



EDWARD OSWALD HANDFORTH frowned.

"Wait a minute!" he said curtly. "I want to have a word with you before you go, my lad! Don't you dare to breathe a syllable of what you've seen in this study."

"Seen?" repeated Willy.

"Yes—this," said his major, indicating the table.

"You can trust me to keep your guilty secret, old man," said Willy solemnly. "But it's the first time I knew that ginger-pop and buns came within the category of wicked vices. You can continue the orgy in safety. I won't breathe a sound of the dreadful affair."

"You—you funny young fathead!" snapped Handforth. "Anyhow, don't say anything. Understand? If I hear anything about it I'll never whack out another five bob as long as I live!"

Willy understood perfectly. Edward Oswald had not been captain of the Remove for long, and he had commenced his high-and-mighty activities by turning Church and McClure, his bosom chums, out of the study. A Form captain, in Handforth's opinion, needed a room entirely to himself. A man of such dignity could not be bothered with the idle chatter of feather-brained companions.

So Church and McClure were palmed off upon Hubert Jarrow, in Study J, and Handforth was left in undisputed possession of Study D. But he was finding, to his bitter cost, that the new order of things was not exactly an improvement. In fact, all Handforth's new innovations were recoiling upon his own head in the most disconcerting manner. The captaincy wasn't half such a catch as he had expected it to be. And the loss of his chums—although he had deliberately brought this about himself—was the worst blow of all.

When it came to anything practical like making tea, or frying kippers, or making toast, Handforth was about as useful as an elephant. He simply couldn't do such things. And tea in Study D was now a mere travesty. He couldn't go into Hall, and he couldn't admit that he was longing for his chums back. So he consumed buns and ginger beer in lonely solitude. It was only by an oversight that Willy had been allowed to enter and witness the tragedy.

Of course, Handforth was only skipper by accident. The Remove had japed him, and Mr. Crowell, the Form-master, had revealed

a singular lack of appreciation. He had, indeed, pronounced the election to be valid. And to the Remove's dismay, it had saddled itself with Handforth as its skipper.

There was one ray of hope. Dick Hamilton, the real captain, was away, but there was a chance that he would return within a fortnight or ten days. So the Remove waited—and Handforth, in the meantime, was doing his worst.

"Poor old Ted!" said Willy, shaking his head. "Ginger-pop and buns, eh? My only hat! You *must* be having a rough time of it! It isn't all honey to be a skipper. I'm one, and I know the ropes!"

"You?" said his major, with scorn. "You're only captain of the Third—and that's nothing! Mind what I've told you——"

"Why don't you do the big thing, and beg of Church and McClure to come back?" asked Willy. "I know it's a tall order. The poor chaps have escaped now, and they'll want a lot of persuading. But if you go about it in the right way, and appeal to them on bended knees, and with tears in your eyes, they might have pity on you."

Handforth frowned.

"That's enough!" he snapped. "I don't want any of your sauce, my lad! If Church and McClure come back, they'll come back at my pleasure! But a Form captain can't be bothered with other chaps in his study. Clear off—and keep mum."

"All right," grinned Willy. "By the way, can you give me change for this half-crown?"

He held it out, and his major looked at it darkly.

"What's this—another dodge?" he asked grimly. "Well, it won't work——"

"My dear chap, take the half-crown first, if you think I'm going to try any games," said Willy. "I just want change, that's all. It's quite good—I haven't exchanged it for a dud 'un. It's one of yours."

Handforth gave the necessary change, and Willy grinned and departed. Chubby Heath and Juicy Lemon were still outside.

"Got it," said Willy cheerily. "After all, there's nothing like charity, my sons. A bob for the Bannington Cottage Hospital, and four bob for me. Even as it was, I had to wangle the necessary change. Come on, let's go and do our noble duty to the hospital."

The other two fags chuckled, and they all went down the corridor to the lobby. The Moor View girls were still there.

"They're doing a roaring trade, by the look of it," remarked Willy, as he paused. "Pitt and Fullwood and De Valerie and all the other nobs. They seem to be shelling out well, too."

"They won't expect anything from us," said Juicy.

"I've got to give a bob, anyhow," declared Willy. "I told Ted it was for charity—and so it is. A deserving one, too, for us. After all, charity begins at home, you know. But we can easily spare a bob, and then go and make beasts of ourselves with the other four."

Willy strolled through the crowd of juniors, and put a shilling into Irene's collection box.

"That's from the Third," he said carelessly.

"What was it?" asked Reggie Pitt. "A bicycle washer?"

"A bob, you ass," retorted Willy, frowning.

"Yes, but what was the matter with it?"

"Don't be silly, Reggie," put in Irene. "It was quite a good one, by the look of it. Did you tell Ted that we were here?"

"Why, no," said Willy, with a start. "I got five bob out of him, but I forgot to mention that you girls were on the spot. Never mind—he'll soon get wind of you. Isn't he the Form captain? Isn't he the sleuth of St. Frank's? He's bound to be out soon."

But Handforth, as it happened, did not appear. He had rapidly finished his alleged tea, and had then gone off to the Common-room, for he was by no means certain that his minor would keep mum about the ginger beer and buns. And he wanted to provide himself with an alibi.

The girls had wisely dropped in at a very favourable time. Tea was just over, and the juniors were coming out to take advantage of the last hour or so of daylight. So they couldn't miss those collection boxes. And on the other side of the Triangle, Winnie Pitt, Mary Summers, Violet Watson, and a few more of the Moor View girls were devoting their attentions to the fellows of the other Houses. It was a kind of raid on St. Frank's.

"It's no good asking Willy to fetch his major," said Doris, during a lull. "We've done pretty well so far, but Ted is too good to be missed. He's bound to spring five shillings, at the least."

The girls had taken possession of the lobby, so that nobody could escape them as they came out. As it happened, a curious-looking junior came in—Cornelius Trotwood, of the West House. He was looking for his twin brother, Nicodemus, and the girls were upon him in a moment. Cornelius was skinny and thin, with a lean face and vacant-looking eyes. While his brother was alert and keen, Cornelius was the mildest fellow in the Remove.

"Really, I have already contributed," he said meekly, as three boxes were commended to his notice. "Miss Summers accosted me in the West House, and I have willingly parted with my mite."

"In that case, you're excused," smiled Irene.

"I refused? No, I have told you that I gave——"

"Yes, we know," interrupted Doris. "This poor chap's as deaf as a lamp-post," she went on in a whisper. "Better let him escape."

"I'm not sure he isn't Nick!" said Marjorie suspiciously.

"We'll tell him to fetch Ted," said Irene, nodding. "He's Corny all right—I can see it in his eye. We want you to tell Handforth that we're here, Corny," she added. "Do you mind finding him, and sending him out?"

"I beg your pardon," said the deaf junior. "Please tell Handforth that we're waiting," said Irene.

"Yes, I am very sorry," said Cornelius unhappily.

"Sorry?" said Irene. "Sorry for what?"

"I am sure it is aggravating for you to shout at me like this," went on Cornelius. "Unfortunately, I am slightly deaf—"

"Listen!" interrupted Doris, taking his arm. "Irene doesn't want to miss Handforth this evening, so please go and find him."

Cornelius looked very surprised.

"Really?" he asked, quite shocked.

"My goodness!" said Doris loudly. "Did you understand me?"

"Quite!" replied Cornelius. "You want me to find Handforth, and send him to Irene? Certainly. But, really, I mean, out here, in front of everybody—"

"Get off with you!" laughed Doris, giving him a push.

The deaf junior wandered away, shaking his head. The girls thought that he had got the message correctly, but apparently he hadn't. After going to Study D, and finding it empty, he wandered into the Common-room. And there was Handforth, laying down the law regarding the duties of a Form captain to a group of interested listeners. They were openly pulling his leg, although he couldn't see it. Open-mouthed, they were listening to his announcements, pretending to be hanging on his words.

"Ah, Handforth, I am glad you are here," said Cornelius, beaming. "I have a message for you."

"Don't interrupt!" said Pitt tensely. "Handy's just warming up. He's already told us that he's an uncrowned king, and—"

"I am sorry, but my message is important," interrupted Cornelius. "I have been sent by the young ladies. It appears that Miss Irene has loving intentions."

"What?" shouted Handforth, with a start.

"I am really surprised at the young lady," said Cornelius severely. "But Miss Doris has told me to inform you, Handforth, that Miss Irene wishes to kiss you this evening."

Handforth reeled.

"Great corks!" he gasped. "You—you don't mean they sent you to me with that message—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The other juniors were keen in their appreciation.



CHAPTER 3.

FORREST'S "GENEROSITY."

HANDFORTH glared round, very red in the face.

"Dry up, you cackling asses!" he snorted.

"Corny, you chump,

what's the idea of coming here with a dotty message like that?"

"Well, you don't show much appreciation, I must say," remarked Pitt severely. "A sweet young thing says that she wants to kiss you, and you—"

"But she didn't say it!" roared Handforth. "I don't believe it! The girls aren't here, anyhow—"

"Oh, yes, they are," interrupted Fullwood. "Didn't you know? They're selling daisies for the Bannington Cottage Hospital. Irene was asking for you five minutes ago, when I was out there."

"That explains it," nodded Pitt. "She got tired of waiting, so she thought that a kiss would do the trick—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You silly lunatic!" howled Handforth, as red as a beetroot. "Look here, Corny, blow you! Tell me exactly what Doris told you to say!"

"Really, there is no need to shout," protested Cornelius.

"What did she tell you to say?" barked Handforth.

"She said that Irene wants to kiss you this evening, and that I was to find you," said Trotwood minor. "I thought at the time that it was somewhat forward, but the girls nowadays—"

"Better go and take that kiss, Handy," suggested Fullwood, grinning.

"I don't believe it!" panted Handforth desperately. "By George! If somebody's spoofing me, I'll—I'll— As for this giddy chunk of wood, I'll pulverise him!"

Cornelius recoiled slightly under Handforth's glare.

"Really, it is unfair to blame me—" he began.

"I'm going out!" said Handforth darkly. "I'm going to find out the truth about this message! And if you've tried to spoof me, my lad, I'll grind you to powder!"

"Yes, you'd better speak louder," agreed Corny. "These other fellows are making so much noise—"

"I said I'd grind you to powder!" roared Handforth. "My hat! Why do they allow this chap to run loose? Go away, blow you, and leave me alone."

"Certainly," said Cornelius. "Exactly how much would you like?"

"How much?"

HANDFORTH says:— ++□

"Well, it wasn't exactly my idea, but I was just going to think of it, anyway. You'll know all about it soon!"

**Something good
is on the way.**

□++ DETAILS SHORTLY!

"If you really need a loan, I have no objection—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Help!" gasped Handforth. "He's too much for me."

He ran out of the Common-room, and paused before venturing to go to the lobby. He straightened his tie, and pushed back his hair with his hand. He was in a mortal funk. Was it possible that Irene had really sent that startling message? No, by George, Doris had sent it, and Doris was capable of anything! Yes, just the kind of thing she would delight in!

He hurried to the lobby, and found the girls busy with Sir Montie Tregellis-West, Tommy Watson, and two or three others. They greeted him with friendly hails.

"It's Daisy Day, Ted," said Irene invitingly.

"I say, wasn't it a bit thick, Doris, to send Corny with that message?" asked Handforth gruffly. "I mean, in front of all the chaps—"

"Why, that's just what Corny said!" interrupted Marjorie. "But why shouldn't that message be delivered in front of the chaps?"

"Well, I mean, if Irene really wants to kiss me—"

"What!" gasped Irene, nearly dropping her collection box.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, Ted, how could you?" asked Irene breathlessly.

"But Corny came in and said that you wanted to kiss me this evening!" babbled Handforth, dimly realising that he had made a ghastly blunder somewhere. "Of course, I thought it was rather nice, but, at the same time—"

"But I didn't!" protested Irene indignantly. "Oh! I'm surprised at you, Ted!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"But—but Corny said—" began Handforth feebly.

"I simply told Corny that Irene didn't want to miss you this evening, and he must have got it mixed," exclaimed Doris, with a mischievous twinkle in her dark eyes. "But I must say he mixed it rather well!"

"Go on, Handy! Let's see you!" grinned De Valerie.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"An invitation's an invitation!" chuckled Watson.

Handforth felt dreadful. Now that it was too late, he knew, of course, that he oughtn't to have repeated that misquoted message at all. He had only made things a lot worse. Irene was still looking very confused, and Handforth himself was utterly out of countenance. And, fortunately, Bernard Forrest came along and provided a diversion.

"Hallo!" he said sneeringly. "More highway robbery!"

Forrest was several kinds of a cad, and he had come out to the lobby with Gulliver and Bell because they had told him of the daisy selling, and he felt in a mood to make himself unpleasant.

"What do you mean—highway robbery?" asked Doris curtly.

"Well, what else do you call it?" said Forrest sourly. "You shove those collection boxes under a fellow's nose, you give him a sweet smile, and in nine cases out of ten you click. It's all a kind of blackmail."

"Look here, you insulting rotter—"

"I'm not afraid to say what I think!" snapped Forrest. "This flower-selling stunt ought to be prohibited! It's sheer robbery, in my opinion. Anyhow, you won't get me to throw good money away."

It was clear that he had set himself out to be abusive.

"This money is for the local hospital, you cad," said Irene hotly.

"About ten per cent of it, perhaps," sneered Forrest. "The rest goes into the pockets of the officials as exes. Come on, you fellows," he added to his chums. "We're not falling for this. You can keep those collection boxes out of our way!"

He strode past, feeling thoroughly happy—as he always felt after he had made himself more than usually objectionable. But Handforth grabbed his arm, and yanked him back.

"Just a minute!" said Edward Oswald thickly.

"I hope you'll teach him a lesson, Ted," said Irene. "We didn't ask for any money, and his insults were all uncalled-for."

"Leave him to me," said Handforth, with a grim note in his voice. "Now then, you prize worm! I won't knock you down as you deserve, but I'll trouble you for a contribution. Sheel out quickly, my lad!"

Bernard Forrest glared, and tried to free himself. He had felt perfectly safe, or he would never have risked those words of his. There were three prefects chatting in the Triangle, and Mr. Goole, of the East House, was strolling quite near by, reading a book. So Forrest held himself secure, being convinced that nobody would knock him down under the very eyes of authority. But he had reckoned without Handforth.

"You idiot!" sneered Forrest. "Do you think I'm going to throw any of my good money away on this infernal—"

"That's enough!" roared Handforth. "I'll give you three seconds to put some money into this box, or I'll make you."

"Hang you!" snarled Forrest, wrenching himself free. "I wouldn't give a cent to this swindling charity! They're all in the same class—and I've got a better use for my money."

"You cad!" shouted a number of juniors.

Handforth acted drastically. With a deft movement of his foot he hooked Forrest's ankle, and the leader of Study A fell sprawling to the floor. Two juniors promptly sat on his feet, and another two held his head down. Handforth rapidly turned his trousers' pockets inside out.

"All right—let him get up!" he said, grinning.

Forrest struggled to his feet, dishevelled and alarmed.



While Forrest was being held down, Handy deliberately folded the pound note he had forcibly appropriated and deposited it in Irene's collecting box. "Here you are, Irene," he said. "This is Forrest's contribution to the hospital."

"Hi!" he shouted. "That's my quid you've got!"

"Your quid be blowed!" retorted Handforth, as he deliberately folded the pound note he had annexed. "This belongs to the Bannington Cottage Hospital. Here you are, Irene—in with it!"

He stuffed the note into the slot, and it vanished.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"That's my money!" hooted Forrest. "You burgling rotter——"

"I'm sure we all appreciate this generous spirit in one of our chaps," said Handforth warmly. "Jolly good of you, Forrest! There aren't many fellows who have been large-hearted enough to buy a daisy for a quid! Good man! We like to see this spirit."

"Why, you—you——"

"You've set us all a good example," said Handforth calmly.

"But—but——"

"My dear chap, you needn't be modest about it," went on Handforth, smiling. "After all, a quid is a quid. Think of the good that money will do. Of course, if you like to add another quid to it——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Bernard Forrest, seeing that his money had gone for ever, just managed to hold himself under control. With a choking snarl of rage, he pushed through the crowd and

escaped, followed by his chums, to say nothing of a derisive yell of laughter from the crowd.



CHAPTER 4.

BACK IN THE OLD QUARTERS.

HERE was no doubt that the Moor View girls had done exceedingly well at St. Frank's. By the time they left they hadn't a single daisy left, and their collection boxes were heavy. With the exception of Bernard Forrest's pound, all contributions had been willingly made. The girls departed happy.

"Of course, we like the sweet things to come, but you've got to admit they're a bit of a diversion," said Reggie Pitt soberly. "There's no time left for footer practice now. It's almost too dark. Still, we can't have everything."

"By the way, talking about footer, what about the team for to-morrow's game against the River House School?" asked Fullwood. "Hasn't our marvellous skipper made his selection yet?"

Pitt grinned.

"Oh, I expect we shall hear something during the evening," he said. "And there'll probably be a few sensational changes."

Handy's bound to make some drastic alterations. He can never be rational."

"But we don't want to mess the game up, you know," said Church anxiously. "It's our first big fixture—and we want to wipe those River House chaps off the giddy map! Look at the way they japed Handy—"

"They japed the whole Remove," growled Fullwood. "It was Handy's doing, of course, and we've got to get our revenge. And a good win on the footer field would lead up to it rather nicely."

"I'll go and see if Handy has made the list out yet," said Church.

As a matter of fact, he and McClure were rather anxious. They badly wanted to be included in the junior eleven, but Handforth was such an uncertain quantity that they had their doubts.

As it happened, they met their leader coming out of Study D.

"Have you got out the list yet, Handy?" asked Church carelessly.

"What list?"

"For to-morrow's match—"

"A fat chance I've had!" snapped Handforth curtly. "How can I get any peace in this study? How can a skipper think with chaps dodging up and down the passage every minute? I can't hear myself think in this beastly room!"

"But there's nothing much to decide, old son," said McClure. "The team is pretty well obvious—"

"So it may be—to you," interrupted Handforth. "But I'm not going on in the same slipshod way as Hamilton. The only way to ensure success is to reorganise the eleven altogether."

"I hope we're playing?" asked Church anxiously.

"I'm not going to give you any hints, but I can warn you there'll be no favouritism," said Handforth. "A captain has got to be absolutely impartial. That's his first duty. I'm going out now—out into the playing-fields—where I can mooch about in the dusk, and think without any interruptions. I'll announce the team later on, in the common-room."

He went off, leaving his chums unsatisfied.

"He's going to make a hopeless mess of it," growled Church. "Why the dickens hasn't he got enough sense to resign? He was never cut out to be a skipper. He's too extreme—too jolly drastic. Look at the mess of things he's made already."

"What's the good of looking at it?" snapped McClure. "I'm sick of the whole business. Let's have another look at the old quarters."

Church and McClure went into Study D. They were fairly comfortable in their new quarters, but they knew well enough that Handforth was spending a miserable time of it on his own—and this knowledge robbed them of any satisfaction. If Handforth wasn't comfortable, they couldn't be comfortable.

They had been unhappy ever since he had high-handedly ordered them out of their old home. As he had clearly admitted a minute ago, he wasn't satisfied even now. He couldn't concentrate in Study D, in spite of the fact that he had it to himself. So what was the good of them remaining in Study J?

"I'm fed-up with this rot," growled McClure, as he looked round. "Just because Handy's dotty, there's no reason why we should encourage him by being dotty, too. Let's shift back in here while he's out of the way, and go on as usual."

"He'll only biff us out again," objected Church.

"It all depends how we go about it," replied Mac. "Just a little tact, a touch of diplomacy, and we've got him on toast. My hat! If we can't wangle old Handy, who can?"

Church shook his head.

"But he's not old Handy now," he said. "He's somebody else. This beastly captaincy business has got into his head, and he's temporarily insane. We can't do the things we used to."

"Anyhow, we can try," said McClure grimly. "It's so jolly mad, you know! The poor old chap is pining away in here by himself. He wouldn't admit it for a thousand quid, but he's dying to see us back. But the whole term will go through without him saying a word—unless we act. You know what a mule he is."

"I do!" agreed Church, with feeling. "And I can imagine what he'll say when he finds us back again against his orders! 'The Form captain must have a room entirely to himself.' That's his giddy war-cry!"

"A room to himself, eh?" muttered McClure. "H'm! By jingo, I wonder—Look here, Churchy, he's already told us that the passage is too noisy for him. Why shouldn't the skipper have a special office to himself, right away from all the noise?"

"What are you getting at, you ass?"

"Well, there's a room down at the end of the passage," said McClure eagerly. "It's been empty for terms! It isn't a study, and it isn't a store-room; it's a kind of odd room. You know the one—right at the end. What's the matter with that for a skipper's den?"

"Nothing; but Handy's bound to object if we suggest it."

"You're probably right there," admitted McClure thoughtfully. "What we've got to do is to make him suggest it himself—then he'll say it's the real goods. I say, let's shift our things in here while he's out!"

"Risk it, you mean?"

"Yes. I'm fed-up with Jarrow's long-winded chatter," said McClure. "He's a good sort, but there's nothing like the old home. Great guns! Just have a look at this! Poor old Handy! I say, poor old chump!"

He had opened the cupboard door, and Church grinned.

"An empty ginger-beer bottle and half a bun!" he said. "The bun's fresh, too," he added as he felt it. "This must be the remains of Handy's tea. We suspected something of this sort, didn't we?"

"Good egg!" grinned McClure. "Let's rush our things in here, get the fire going, and make some more tea. It's a bit late for it, but when he sees the homely effect, he'll simply soften to pulp."

And Church and McClure worked like lunatics for about fifteen minutes. While Church lit the fire, and bustled with the tea, McClure dashed off to Study J and made five or six journeys with various goods and chattels. Within twenty-five minutes Study D was looking its old self. The two juniors had wrought an extraordinary change.

And Handforth, as it happened, was just coming in.

His mind was full of his "duties." Most of these were mere creations of his own imagination, for there was no real need for the skipper of a junior Form to take his appointment so seriously.

Half-way down the Junior passage, Handforth checked himself. A pained expression came over his face. Study D no longer had any fond lure for him. He remembered the cold fireplace, the barren aspect of the whole room, and the utter lack of comfort.

"Oh, my hat!" he muttered dismally.

He wasn't prepared to go to the common-room yet. He wanted to make his list out—to do

the thing properly, so that he could pin it up on the board with an air of importance. And as Study D was his office, there was nothing else to be done but to enter it.

More than once during the past hour he had wavered. Even he, famous for his obstinacy, had wavered. Would it be possible to make some sort of overtures to Church and McClure? Of course, he wasn't dependent upon the asses, but if they really wanted to come back, why should he be harsh? He tried to convince himself that he was thinking of their welfare—but an uneasy sprite whispered to him that his motive was a selfish one.

"No!" he muttered. "I've got to be firm!"

He opened the door of Study D and marched in, automatically feeling for the switch. Then he came to a dead halt, and stared.

"Hallo! What the——"

His words trailed away, and he rocked

slightly. A devastating odour of tea and hot toast assailed him—and he hadn't tasted tea since Church and McClure had left him!

"Just in time, Handy, old man," said McClure briskly. "Tea's a bit late, but those girls delayed things, you know. Got the sardines opened, Churchy? Good man! You can pour the tea out now."

Handforth closed his eyes and opened them again. Yes, the picture was still there. The Study D of yore, with a bright fire blazing, with the table spread, and with Church and McClure bustling about as only Church and McClure could bustle about.



CHAPTER 5.

THE INSEPARABLE THREE.

OR about ten seconds Handforth stood like a statue.

Then he closed the door behind him, walked across to the fireplace, and warmed his hands before the blaze. Although the October day had been warm, the evening had drawn in with a keen autumn chill.

"Sardines, eh?" he said, looking round. "Of course, you fat-heads *would* choose sardines on a cold evening like this! What's the matter with hot bloaters or sausages? This my tea? Huh! Like your nerve, Mac, to give me a cracked cup!"

He sat down at the table as though he had fully expected to find tea ready, and his chums in full possession.

Church and McClure exchanged significant glances, and, being youths of great wisdom, they accepted the situation.

"Sorry, old man," said McClure. "That's my cup, as a matter of fact. You take this one."

"Rats!" said Handforth happily. "I was only joking, you chump! What do I care whether the cup's cracked or not? Let's have some of that giddy toast, Church! By George, this tea's top-hole!"

For a moment, as Handforth had stood in the doorway, he had toyed with the idea of high-handedly ordering his chums out, and demanding to know, in the name of all that was nervy, why the dickens they had dared to install themselves again without his express permission.

But a waft of the hot tea, combined with a whiff of hot toast, had reduced him to a mere weakling. And now that he had sat down at the table, the die was cast. He couldn't possibly acknowledge, later, that he

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(Full particulars on page 36.)

had only accepted the position for the sake of tea. The best thing was to say nothing at all, and to let the entire matter drop. His chums were back again, and life was beginning to resume its rosy aspect.

And Church and McClure naturally remained silent. At least, silent regarding the mystery of their magical reappearance.

"More tea, Handy?" asked Church enticingly.

"Yes, by George—and you'd better make another pot!" replied Handforth. "I can drink about a dozen cups of this! I haven't tasted tea for days—I mean, let's have some sardines, Mac. You don't want to guzzle the lot, I suppose?"

The door opened, and Fullwood looked in. "Sorry to intrude, your majesty, but—" He paused, and stared. "Why, hallo! What's all this? A family reunion?"

"Outside!" roared Handforth. "I'm busy!"

"Yes, but look here——"

"Captain's orders!" said Handforth curtly. Fullwood grinned, appreciated the position, and retired.

"Likely we're going to put up with these silly interruptions!" said Handforth gruffly. "Lock the door, Church, old man. This study's too central for a captain's office. Nothing but noise from morning till night."

"Yes, you need something more secluded," said McClure. "It's a pity you can't have a special room—something like that empty one at the end of the passage. A Form captain needs a private office, and a study is a bit too public."

Handforth started.

"By George, what about that end room?" he asked brilliantly.

"Eh?" said McClure. "Which end room?"

"Why, that empty one," said Edward Oswald, without the faintest suspicion that he had had this suggestion put into his head. "The problem's solved, my lads! We can keep our study just the same as usual, but all official business can be transacted in the captain's office!"

"You mean that end room?" asked Church. "I say, what a brainwave!"

"Oh, I don't know," said Handforth modestly. "It just occurred to me, you know. We'll go along after tea, and inspect it. I'll take the notice down from outside this door, and shove it on that one. A special office, eh? That's the style!"

Church and McClure silently congratulated themselves. Their little scheme had worked perfectly. And if they were satisfied, Handforth was no less delighted.

As soon as the meal was over, they went along and inspected the end room—which, as they knew, was quite out of the usual traffic, and never visited by anybody, week in and week out.

It looked somewhat bare at first sight, but this didn't matter. An office wasn't necessarily a cosy place. The room was small, and there was no fireplace. But heat could be ob-

tained from the radiator. There was electric light, a small table, and a couple of chairs.

"Why, there couldn't be anything better for a captain's office," said Church enthusiastically. "What a chap you are for brainy ideas, Handy."

They went out, and returned to Study D. They spotted Bernard Forrest just as they were entering, and Forrest scowled.

"You owe me a quid!" he said viciously.

"I owe you a good hiding, you mean," retorted Handforth. "You ought to think yourself jolly lucky you got off so lightly, you insulting rotter! If those girls hadn't been on the spot I'd have pulverised you!"

"Don't be a fool!" said Forrest hotly. "These rotten flag days and things ought to be abolished! Anyhow, I'm going to write to the Bannington Hospital and get that quid returned. It was put in that box without my consent, and I'm not going to be robbed like that."

Handforth did not demean himself by replying. He slammed the door of Study D, and Bernard Forrest was alone in the corridor. He went to his own study, stamped in, and shut the door with a crash. Then he flung himself into a chair, and glowered at Gulliver and Bell, who were just starting on their prep.

"Still peevish about that quid?" asked Gulliver.

"I'm not peevish—I'm wild!" snapped Forrest.

"Well, it's no good being wild——"

"It wasn't your quid, was it?" snarled Bernard savagely. "That's the last cent I've got, you grinning idiots! And to see it dropped into the gutter like that—chucked into a giddy charity box—makes me boil! I'll make Handforth pay, you mark my words!"

He pulled out a packet of cigarettes, lit one, and smoked furiously. He was broke to the wide. All his worldly wealth had gone into that collection box, and his rage, perhaps, was understandable. For that had been the climax to several disasters.

At the previous week-end Bernard Forrest had been very flush. But on the Saturday he had ventured a pound on the "gee-gees," and had lost it. Then, on the Monday, he had plunged in order to make good his loss, and had met with even worse luck. To-day he had got down to his last pound, and had already decided to place this on a "certain winner" for the morrow. He had, indeed, made all arrangements to slip down to the village to give the money to a shady acquaintance. And that precious pound had gone to the Bannington Cottage Hospital!

To make things worse, Gulliver and Bell were broken reeds. They only had a shilling or two between them, and they wouldn't have lent this money to Forrest, even if he had asked them for it.

Gulliver and Bell were wonderful borrowers, but they were atrocious lenders.

So Forrest, on the whole, was feeling as bitter as gall against Handforth, and out of temper with the world in general.



CHAPTER 6.

A GREAT IDEA!

FORREST rose to his feet and paced up and down.

"It wouldn't have mattered at any other time," he snapped. "But I'd

kept that quid aside for Rock-a-bye-Baby in the two-thirty to-morrow. A cert—an absolute winner at seven to one! That's the price in to-night's paper, but it'll probably drop a bit before the race. I should have clicked five quid, anyhow. It wouldn't have been a risk on that horse—it would have been an investment!"

"That's what you said about Lime Juice in yesterday's three-thirty," jeered Bell.

"And we warned you about Lime Juice, too," Gulliver reminded him.

"You liar!" snapped Forrest. "You're always wise after the event, aren't you? That beast, Handforth, has robbed me of six quid. I can't get any cash to-night, and there's no chance of putting the money on to-morrow, even if I do get a remittance by the morning post. And that isn't likely, either."

"Hang it, it's a bit steep to say that Handy has dished you out of six quid!" protested Bell. "It was only a pound——"

"Yes, but that pound would have made another five on to-morrow's race," interrupted Forrest curtly.

"Perhaps!"

"No perhaps about it—I tell you that Rock-a-bye Baby is a cert," said Bernard, savagely kicking at the hearthrug. "I've been swindled—robbed! It makes it ten times as bad when I realise that that money went to a confounded charity!"

"Well, after all, you rather asked for it," said Gulliver tartly.

"Go and hang yourself!" snarled Forrest.

"That's what you'd better do—in your present temper!" snapped Gulliver. "Can't you let a chap get on with his prep? How do you suppose we can work with your beastly growls interrupting us?"

"I don't suppose you can work whether I interrupt or not," returned Forrest. "I don't suppose anything so silly!"

He flung himself into the chair again, and threw his half-smoked cigarette into the fire. He was fed-up with Handforth's high-handed methods. His cunning mind was busy with schemes to get revenge. But he soon dis-

missed them. It was better to leave Handforth alone. Besides, Forrest was wondering how he could raise some cash.

"Charity!" he grunted. "Going round with those infernal boxes, cadging shillings and half-crowns from everybody! Disgusting! It's a wonder to me that people stand it——"

He broke off, and sat forward.

"By gad!" he added. "I wonder—— H'm! It might be a bit risky—— And yet, I don't know! I say, you chaps! An idea has just hit me. We might be able to work something——"

He broke off again, and his face suddenly flushed. Gulliver and Bell were too busy with their prep. to bother about him. And for five minutes Bernard Forrest sat there, concentrating. The excited expression left his face, and was replaced by one of calm, cynical amusement.

"Listen, you fellows," he said genially. "We're going to raise some cash to-morrow. It's my idea, so I'll take eighty per cent of the receipts. You can divide the other twenty per cent between you."

"How can we get on with our prep.——" began Bell irritably.

"Hang your prep.," said Forrest. "I've got hold of a good stunt!"

His companions looked at him rather curiously. The change in Forrest was remarkable. His recent ill-humour had vanished. He was serene and cool—his old, confident self.

"What's the great brain-wave?" asked Gulliver, staring.

"Well, it's a case of poetic justice, in a way of speaking," grinned Forrest.

"I lost that quid in one of those beastly collection boxes, so I'll get it back by means of a collection box—with a lot more, as interest."

"What are you talking about?" asked Bell.

"To-morrow," said Forrest, "is Blue Flag Day."

"Is it?"

"Yes—in Helmford."

"Three cheers!" said Gulliver sarcastically. "I should think you'll steer clear of Helmford, won't you? You must be fed-up with flag days, according to what you were saying ten minutes ago."

"To-morrow afternoon I shall be in Helmford—and so will you chaps," said Forrest. "What's more, we shall be selling flags, and collecting the dibs."

His chums stared.

"Are you off your rocker?" asked Bell blankly.

"To-morrow," replied Forrest, "will be our flag day."

"What the dickens——"

GLENTHORNE says :—

"They're absolutely top-ping—frightfully top-hole, if you know what I mean. Odds surprises and excitement—I shall have to get old Phipps to rally round with the nourishing beverage—the jolly old tea. A chappie needs somethin' sustaining at a time like this."

GREAT NEWS SOON!

"Eighty per cent for me, and twenty per cent for you chaps," continued Bernard calmly. "Ye gods! Why on earth didn't I think of this before? It's a bigger cert than the gee-gees! They robbed me of that quid through one of those blinking collection boxes, so I'll get it back in the same way."

"You're mad!" said Bell, aghast. "You're absolutely crazy! Why, you idiot, they could shove you in chokey for that! You needn't ask us to help in it, either."

"Not likely!" agreed Gulliver. "And you can't very well hold a flag day on your own. Do you mean that we can go to Helmford, sell flags, and then keep all the money we collect?"

"Exactly," said Forrest. "It'll be easy."

"What about the flags?"

"We can make 'em."

"Make flags?"

"My dear lunatic, nothing easier," said Forrest. "We've only got to get a supply of those drapery pins—the sort that look like miniature hatpins—and a supply of blue paper, and we'll have the flags made in a couple of hours."

"But—but it's absolutely impossible!" protested Bell. "If we were spotted, or if the Head found out anything about it, we should get the sack."

"And be arrested, too!" said Gulliver nervously.

"You fellows haven't got any backbone—you're afraid to take a chance," said Forrest harshly. "You jellified weaklings! There's no risk in this thing at all—it'll be sheer velvet from the first minute. We've only got to get three cigar boxes, black them over with some of that quick-drying enamel, and tack some blue ribbon to them, and they'll look the real thing."

"And spend the afternoon in Helmford, selling flags?"

"Exactly."

"Not for me, thanks," said Bell. "I'd look a fine fool, wouldn't I, if somebody asked me what I'm selling the flags for?"

"Shut up, Forrest!" growled Gulliver. "Bell's right! We should all look fools if people asked us questions of that sort."

"My dear man, we've only got to say it's for charity."

"But supposing people ask which charity?" demanded Bell.

"I'm sick of your objections," snapped Forrest. "People *don't* ask those questions. A flag day is taken for granted. It's market day in Helmford to-morrow, and the town will be packed. When people see us with blue flags and collection boxes, they'll simply imagine that we're collecting for some local charity. There's no danger at all."

"But there might be inquiries——"

"There might be an earthquake!" interrupted Forrest. "There might be a sensible word pass your lips! There might be a civil war! Any of these impossible things might happen—but they won't!"

"Look here——"

"I'm looking—and I can see a couple of

miserable funks!" retorted Bernard Forrest bitterly. "I get an absolute brain-wave, and all you can do is to raise every objection under the sun! Can't you understand, you hopeless idiots, that this is the idea of the century?"

"But supposin' we're collared?" persisted Bell. "Just supposin'? Hang it, isn't it better to be prepared for the worst?"

"Look here, you've seen plenty of flag days, haven't you?" said Forrest. "Have you ever noticed anybody making inquiries? People just take a flag, and put something in the box. They don't go up to a flag-seller and say, 'Is this charity genuine, or is it a fraud?' No, they naturally take it for granted, and plank their money down. And people buy flags because they don't like to be seen without one, and to save themselves from being pestered by another flag-seller. Not five per cent of the people care a hang about the charity. They just want to protect themselves."

"My gad, you're right there!" agreed Gulliver. "I've done it myself!"

"So have I!" admitted Bell.

"Well, there you are," said Forrest calmly. "We'll simply paint the words 'Blue Flag Day' on the boxes. The chances are that we shan't be disturbed during the whole afternoon, and after we've raked in the shokels we can quietly vamoose. Nobody will think anything more about it, and there you are!"

"But supposing we *are* disturbed?"

"There you go—supposin' again!" said Forrest impatiently. "My dear chumps, the very fact that we're St. Frank's chaps will be our protection. Nobody would dream that we would get up a spoof flag day. That's just where we're safe! And if the worst comes to the worst, and some officious blighter wants to know too much, we can always say that it was a little charity stunt of our own, and hand the boxes over to one of the local hospitals. I tell you, we're safe, whatever happens. And there's not one chance in a thousand that there'll be a single inquiry. With luck, we ought to rake in six or seven quid in each box."

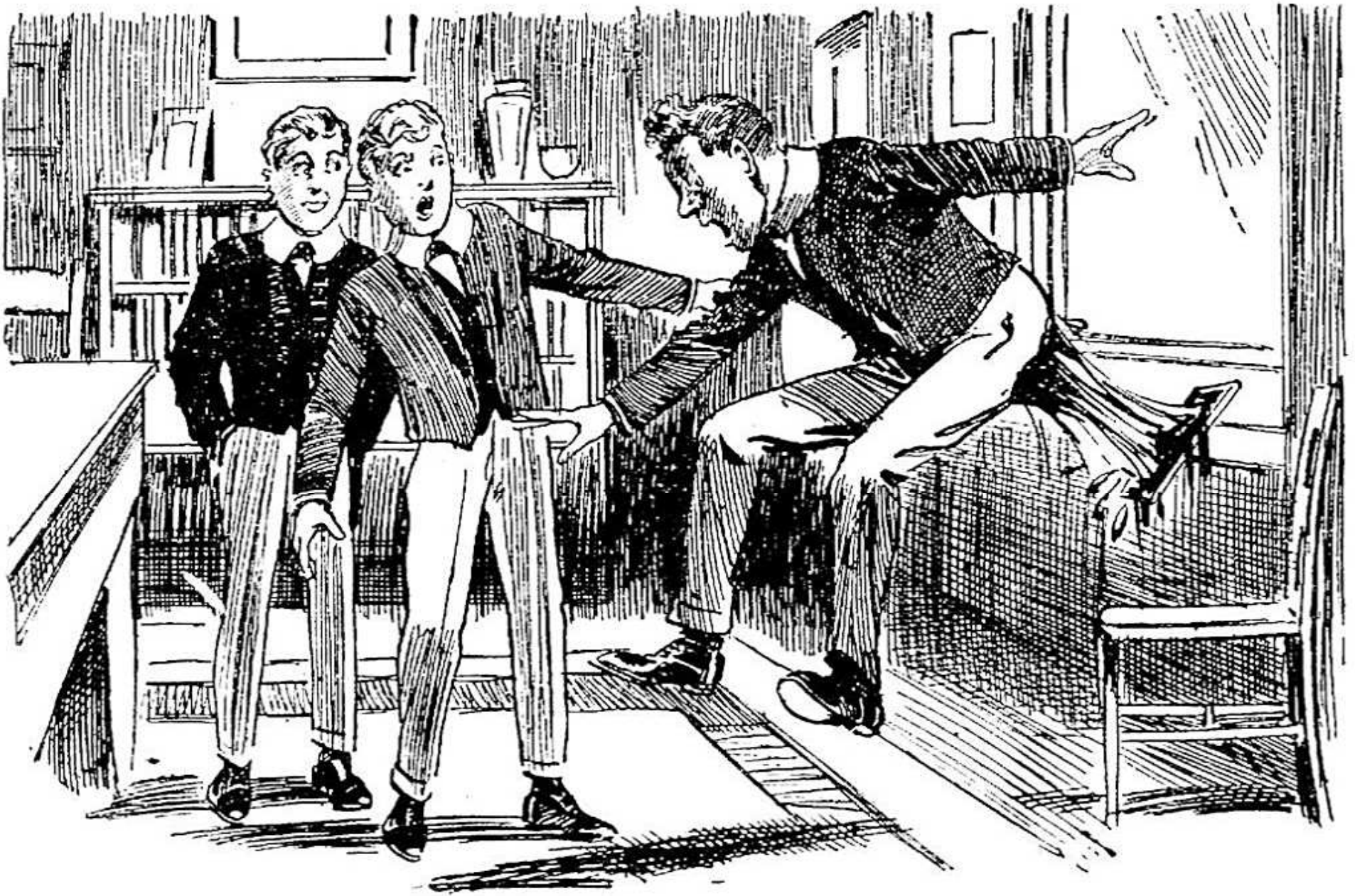
"And we keep our own takings?" asked Bell eagerly.

"No, we jolly well don't!" retorted Forrest. "This is my idea, and you chaps will have to be satisfied with twenty per cent. Hang it all, it's money for nothing!"

"Yes, but won't it be jolly near the edge?" asked Bell uneasily.

"Well, thank goodness I've got no scruples of that sort," said Bernard Forrest. "Why shouldn't we raise a bit of capital? By gad! Look at the time! If I dash to the village now, I shall just get there before the shops close. I've got to buy those pins, and a supply of blue paper, and some gum. We can find some old cigar-boxes in the lumber-rooms. Oh, I shall have to buy some blue ribbon, too."

He hurried off, full of the great scheme. Gulliver and Bell discussed it in lowered tones, and eventually came to the conclusion



"Hi, you ass!" hooted Church. "You're sitting on my toffee!" But the warning came too late, for Handy had already deposited his full weight in the hot, sticky conglomeration. With a pained expression on his face, he leaped about four feet in the air. "Ow!" he yelled. "Something bit me!"

that it was as safe as houses. Bernard Forrest was right. The chance of any inquiry regarding the genuineness of the "Blue Flag Day" was extremely remote.

"And, after all, it's a dead easy way to raise the wind," declared Gulliver. "Forrest's a deep beggar! He's got enough nerve to burgle a bank! If there's any hitch, he'll wangle us out of it all right, I'll bet."

"But I'm wondering about the honesty of it," said Bell dubiously. "Dash it all, I'm not particularly squeamish, but this thing seems to be more like highway robbery."

"Rats! We shall be collecting money for charity," grinned Gulliver. "Can't we make ourselves into a charity for once? And where does the robbery come in? We don't compel anybody to buy a flag, and we shan't take any subscriptions without providing a flag, so we're just getting paid for our work in making 'em."

And with these specious arguments they quelled the still small voice of conscience, and convinced themselves that the affair would be perfectly above board in every way.



CHAPTER 7.

HANDFORTH DOES IT AGAIN!
ALPH LESLIE FULLWOOD chuckled.

"Heard the latest about Handy?" he asked as he came into the Common-room, full of excitement.

"Why spoil our evening?" asked Tommy Watson plaintively. "I'm just enjoying a game of chess with Montie, and you barge in with news about Handforth! Blow the silly ass!"

"He's got Church and McClure back in his study," said Fullwood. "They're as thick as thieves again."

"Well, thank goodness!" said De Valerie. "Those two chaps are the brains of Study D, if you ask me! Now that they're with Handy again, he'll be a bit more rational. They act as a kind of brake, you know."

"Well, here's Handy, anyhow," said Clive Russell, as the door opened.

"Complete with brake!" grinned Reggie Pitt.

There were several West House juniors in the company, having come over to ascertain if Handforth had made any decision regarding the morrow's team. As a rule, there was never any fuss about a junior fixture. The Eleven was chosen days beforehand. But Handforth, as usual, liked to make a mystery of it until almost the last moment.

"Now then—now then!" said Edward Oswald curtly, as the fellows crowded round. "Out of the way! I don't allow you chaps to swarm round me like wasps round a jam-pot! Buzz off!"

"Have mercy, O Rajah!" said Pitt, in an awestruck voice. "Spare us from the chopping block, and we will remain your slaves! For the moment, we overlooked your importance."

"Don't be a howling ass!" said Handforth tartly.

"It's all right, you chaps—we've got the Eleven," said Church. "Mac and I don't know what it is yet, but Handy's going to pin the list on the board now. So gather round at a respectful distance, and hold your breath."

There were many chuckles as Handforth marched to the Common-room notice board, and pinned up a sheet of foolscap. Then he stood back, and waited for the effect. For several seconds there was a strained silence.

"What's this?" asked Pitt, at last. "To-day isn't the first of April, Handy!"

"He's mad!" said Watson breathlessly.

"Clean off his chump!"

"This is a joke!"

There were all sorts of comments, but Handforth stood there, serenely contented by the sensation he had caused. This was exactly what he desired! After all, it was a skipper's place to give his Form a gentle shock now and again.

His Eleven for the River House match was as follows:

Boots; McClure, Burton; Kahn, De Valerie, Church; Grey, Tregellis-West, Handforth, Fullwood, Pitt.

"That's the team," said Handforth. "I meant to make a good few changes, but you fellows are such a narrow-minded crowd that I decided to be pretty mild. Anyhow, my decision's final."

"I wonder what Boots will say?" asked Reggie Pitt. "My dear idiot, he's a forward—not a goalkeeper!"

"He's a strong, hefty chap—too clumsy for the forward line," replied Handforth firmly. "A fellow needs to be clumsy and ungainly to be a good goalie!"

"That explains why you've been such a success in goal," said Fullwood.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Handforth started.

"Rot!" he said hastily. "I was an exception—and, anyhow, the forward line is my true position. So from to-morrow onwards I shall always lead the attack. I am playing centre-forward, and if any funny fathead likes to make any objections, I shall be pleased to hear 'em! And after that I'll smash the funny fathead to a pulp!"

"Then you'd better smash us all!" shouted Watson. "You hopeless ass, you'll be no good as centre-forward! You're a defender—and always have been! You'll simply mess the game up if you go on like this."

"I'm the captain——"

"Of course you are—and you ought to know better."

"Up till now I've been goalkeeper, and I've seen our forwards frittering away their chances of scoring," said Handforth curtly. "I've seen them doing fancy work when they ought to be shooting. So I'm going to show everybody how goals really ought to be scored."

"You'll simply give the game away, Handy," said Pitt, shaking his head. "Be

advised by your uncle, and wake up! A dream's all very well while it lasts, but sooner or later you've got to come back to realities."

Handforth remained perfectly calm.

"I've wanted to play centre-forward for terms," he replied serenely. "Hamilton wouldn't listen to me—Pitt wouldn't listen to me. But now I'm the skipper—and I've been listening to myself! As you all know, the captain's word is law. So you can save your breath and look cheerful. There's the Eleven—and that's how it'll remain."

"But——"

"But nothing!" interrupted Handforth curtly. "Any member of the team who raises an objection will have his name struck off the list!"

Handforth's autocratic rule was absolute. As King of the Remove, he was a law unto himself. And the rest of the Form was simply helpless.

"And remember," he said, "that's final!"

He walked out of the Common-room with the air of a sergeant-major, and nearly collided with John Busterfield Boots, of the Fourth. Buster gave him a curious glance.

"Hallo!" he said. "Why this steely eye? Why this square-set jaw?"

"These fellows object to everything I propose—but I'm the supreme chief, and I'm not putting up with any nonsense. They're not even satisfied with the Eleven I've chosen for to-morrow!"

"Am I in it?" asked Boots quickly.

"Yes," replied Handforth. "You might not be exactly pleased——"

"Don't mention it!" grinned Buster. "I can assure you that I'm delighted. I had a horrid fear that you would overlook my amazing abilities. Thanks awfully, old man."

He went into the Common-room, smiling.

"What's all this about Handy being unable to choose a good Eleven?" he asked. "You fellows are too jolly critical! Handy's got sound judgment, in my opinion. He knows the right men to select!"

"We're not grumbling about the men," said Reggie Pitt. "Have you seen the list by any chance?"

"Not yet," said Boots. "But I understand that I'm playing."

"So you are—you're down as goalie."

"Goalie!" yelled Buster. "You funny ass, I'm centre-forward!"

"You may be centre-forward in your House team, or in a Form game, but to-morrow you're going to be shoved in goal," growled Fullwood. "Handforth's edict! The order of the dictator!"

Buster Boots rushed to the list, and looked at it.

"But this is mad!" he shouted. "Of all the fatheaded, idiotic—— Great Scott! Handy's put himself down as centre-forward! He's pinched my job!"

"And given you his!" nodded Pitt.

Boots breathed hard.

"Of course, we're not going to stand it, I suppose?" he asked fiercely.

"What else can we do?"

"This funny idiot may be your skipper, but he's not mine, thank goodness!" retorted Buster. "He's not in the Fourth——"

"That doesn't make any difference," interrupted De Valerie. "The Remove captain is also the skipper of the Junior Eleven—as you know, Buster. He's got power to select his team from both the Remove and the Fourth, and his word is law. I thought you said that Handy was a good judge?"

"I hadn't seen this!" breathed Boots. "I'm going to kick up a fearful dust——"

"Just as you like, of course, but it'll kybosh you out of the team completely," said Pitt. "Handy gave us fair warning. Anybody who raises an objection will be carved out of the team and his place filled by somebody else. So you can please yourself."

Buster Boots looked round helplessly.

"And are you fellows going to stand this?" he asked. "Are you going to let this—this raving lunatic lord it over you? He's set himself up as a dictator. He thinks he's a kind of emperor, and he looks upon the rest of us as slaves! Isn't it about time you knocked him off his perch?"

"There's no need to get excited," said Pitt. "Handy's election was more or less of an accident, and Mr. Crowell won't allow another election. So what can't be cured must be endured. Personally, I reckon this game to-morrow ought to be interesting—out of the usual rut."

"Easy enough to say that—you're playing in your usual position!" growled Boots. "Of course, I can keep goal all right, but Handy will make a hopeless mess of the centre-forward position."

And the discussion continued fruitlessly. For Edward Oswald Handforth was indeed the supreme ruler, and once he had made up his mind, it was useless to argue. A Form captain had absolute powers regarding the selection of a football team. His word was law.

It had always been one of his pet theories that he would make an ideal centre-forward. But, somehow, no skipper had ever appreciated the force of the argument, and Handforth had always failed in his dream. But now he was his own captain—and he could play in any position he chose!

Not that Handforth was the sort of fellow to put his own personal desires before the welfare of the school. He genuinely thought that he was acting in the best interests of the game.

And as he had never been allowed to play

in the centre-forward position, who could say that his idea was not right? Handforth was a fellow of surprises.

Handforth loved the limelight. A goal-keeper occasionally had it focused upon him, but the centre-forward was the fellow who had all the opportunities. And Edward Oswald Handforth was determined to show St. Frank's exactly what he could do in the goal-scoring line!



CHAPTER 8.

A HITCH IN THE PROGRAMME.

WHEN Bernard Forrest returned from the village, he found that Gulliver and Bell were finishing their prep. They regarded him eagerly as he entered the study with a small parcel.

"Got everything?" asked Gulliver, his eyes gleaming.

"Oh! You seem a bit more interested now!" said Forrest, closing the door. "Been thinking things over, eh?"

"Yes, old man, and you're right," agreed Gulliver. "As far as Bell and I can see, there won't be any risk at all. Anyhow, we're quite ready to help you with this flag-day stunt. But we rather think that it

ought to be on a fifty-fifty basis."

"You rather think that, do you?"

"Yes," said Bell.

"Then you'd better rather think something else!"

"But look here, Forrest, you'll get half the takings, and we'll get the other half divided between us——"

"I shall get eighty per cent of the takings," interrupted Forrest curtly. "If we collect ten pounds, say, I shall take eight, and you chaps will get a quid each. Strikes you as being uneven, eh? But what about the idea? I thought of it, so I get the bulk of the cash. And if you don't like to agree on those terms, you can do the other thing. Wellborne and those other River House chaps will be only too willing to help me if I ask them——"

"Oh, we'll help, blow you!" growled Bell.

Forrest stowed his parcels in the cupboard and locked the door.

"I've got everything—pins, paper, gum, ribbon, and enamel. We can find some cigar-boxes in the lumber-rooms."

..... Have you got YOURS yet ?



..... Apply to the Chief Officer

"Yes, but why lock the stuff up?" asked Gulliver.

"Because it's too confoundedly risky to take any chances," replied Forrest. "This scheme of ours is just a harmless little gamble. But some of these other chaps might think differently—you know how narrow-minded they are. And if a master twigged our game, we should get the sack. So we've got to go pretty easy."

"What about making the flags, and preparing the boxes?" asked Bell. "I thought we were going to do that to-night?"

"So we are—but not here," replied Forrest, shaking his head. "It'll be safe to wait until after lights-out, and do the job in our bed-room. Everything will be quiet then, and we can afford to lose a couple of hours' sleep for once."

Gulliver looked alarmed.

"It'll be riskier than ever in the dorm," he objected. "Somebody might drop on us in the middle of the job, and we can't hide up a lot of papers and pins and things at a second's notice."

"Perhaps you're right," admitted Forrest thoughtfully. "We've got to be careful—Wait a minute! There's that little room—Yes, by gad! The very place!"

He went out without saying anything more, and walked to the end of the corridor. He opened the door of the odd room which, curiously enough, Edward Oswald Handforth had already selected for his private office. And it was a further coincidence that Handforth should come along at the same moment in order to inspect the room, with a view to making his final plans. But, after all, it was a perfectly natural chance.

"The ideal spot!" gloated Forrest, as he came out and switched off the light.

"The ideal spot for what?" demanded Handforth, in his rear.

Forrest spun round.

"Mind your own business!" he snapped, momentarily alarmed. "Confound it, Handforth, there's no need for you to come creeping up—"

"Say that again, and I'll knock you down!" interrupted Handforth grimly. "And you'd better not interfere with this room, either—it's mine!"

"Yours?"

"It will be to-morrow, anyway," snapped Handforth. "I'm going to make it into my office, so if you've got any idea of using it, you can bury it!"

Forrest yawned.

"Rats!" he said. "Why should I want the beastly room?"

He went off, and left Handforth rather puzzled. And when Forrest got back into Study A he was scowling.

"The interfering busybody!" he muttered. "A fellow can't move a yard without that nosy hound butting in!"

"Handforth, you mean?" asked Bell.

"Yes, I do mean Handforth!" growled Forrest. "I just went along to that end

room—you know, the one that isn't used—and I hadn't been there two ticks before Handforth barged in, and said that he's going to pinch the room for an office."

"Office?" repeated Gulliver. "What's he want an office for?"

"Oh, I can't be bothered with his crazy ideas," said Forrest curtly. "It doesn't matter to us, anyhow. He's not going to use the room till to-morrow, and we shall have done with it by then."

His chums looked their surprise.

"We're going to use that room to-night—after lights-out," went on Forrest. "It's the very place for us—no chance of being disturbed there. Within two hours we can finish the job, and be back in bed. And no possible traces left in our study, or our bed-room."

"You're full of brainy ideas," said Bell admiringly.

In the meantime, Handforth was in Study D, looking suspicious. Church and McClure were there, and Church was making some toffee. He felt that it was necessary to engineer some homely effects, in order to make Handforth appreciate life to the full.

"There's something rummy about it," said Handforth firmly.

"Oh, that's nothing," said Church. "I hadn't got quite enough butter, so I used a chunk of sausage-fat. The peppermint flavour will drown all that, though."

"Peppermint flavour?" repeated Handforth absently.

"Yes, I'm making some mint toffee," explained Church.

Handforth started, and frowned.

"I can't be bothered with your childish rot!" he said coldly. "And it's like your nerve to turn this study into a sticky kitchen! I was thinking about Forrest. There's something rummy going on."

"That cad's always doing something rummy," said Church.

"Yes, but I found him looking in that end room," frowned Handforth. "I believe the beggar is thinking of some dodge or other. But if he thinks he can pinch that room, he's made a mistake. I'm going to give the fellows a surprise in the morning."

"You're full of surprises, old man," said Church, as he poured the toffee neatly into the lid of a biscuit tin. "But what's this special one for the morning?"

"I shan't tell you yet," replied Handforth. "I trust you, but there's always the chance that you might drop a hint. So we'll wait until bed-time. I'll tell you up in the dormitory."

He paced up and down with an abstracted expression in his eyes, and then prepared to sit down on one of the chairs near the window.

"Hi!" howled Church wildly.

"What the—"

"Look out, you ass!" hooted Church. "My toffee—" Oh, help!"

It was too late. Handforth, totally unaware

of the fact that the tin lid was on the chair, sat down heavily in the freshly poured out toffee. And then he leapt about four feet into the air, with streams of hot toffee stretching like chewing-gum from his rear.

"Ow!" he howled violently. "Something bit me!"

"My toffee!" roared Church indignantly. Handforth ran round the room madly.

"Your toffee!" he yelled. "Why, you—you silly cuckoo! I'm burnt! What the dickens do you mean by shoving your beastly toffee on the chairs? I'm absolutely scorched! This is what comes of allowing you idiots to live in the study again!"

"All my toffee ruined!" said Church hotly. "Two pounds of it—and now it's all spread over your bags! It's a pity you can't look before you sit down! My hat! You've messed it all over the tablecloth now, and—Don't lean against that wall, you ass!"

Handforth, breathing hard, went out of the study, and the amount of toffee he managed to distribute in various parts of the House was astonishing. He left several blobs of it in the lobby, he brushed against the banisters up the staircase, and rendered them sticky and awful. And when Church and McClure went up to bed, soon afterwards, they made further discoveries.

"Why the dickens didn't you come in to supper?" asked Church.

Handforth, who was undressed, started.

"Supper?" he repeated. "My hat! I forgot all about it!"

"Well, it's too late now——"

"I've got more important things on my mind than supper," growled Handforth. "I can't be bothered with trifles. Besides, I've had enough toffee to last me for about ten years! My bags are ruined, and that messy stuff is still all over me. I'm as sticky as a leaky treacle tin!"

McClure was staring in front of him with horrified eyes.

"My pyjamas!" he breathed hoarsely.

"What's the matter with 'em?" asked Handforth.

"You—you careless ass!" roared McClure. "You've shoved your beastly bags on my bed! Oh, my goodness! Look here!"

He flung Handforth's sticky trousers on the floor, and held up his pyjamas. They were liberally smeared with toffee. The counterpane of the bed was also bespattered with globules of the horrid stuff.

"This isn't a time to make a song about nothing," said Handforth curtly. "Get undressed, and we'll put the light out. As soon as the prefect's been round, we'll slip our dressing-gowns on——"

"Oh, will we?" said McClure aggressively.

"No, we won't!" said Handforth.

"Eh?"

"We won't!"

"But you just said——"

"I've changed my mind," interrupted Edward Oswald carelessly.

"Thank goodness!" said Church. "Perhaps we shall get some peace."

All the same, he and McClure were rather curious about Handforth's mysterious behaviour. There was really nothing in it. Edward Oswald had merely made up his mind to prepare his new office after lights-out, so that it would come as a big surprise to the Remove on the morrow.

But as Bernard Forrest & Co. had also planned to do a little flag-making in that very same apartment, at the very same hour, there was liable to be an interesting clash.



CHAPTER 9.

FORREST'S DESPERATE MOVE.

"UT of it—and look sharp!" said Handforth briskly.

He was standing over McClure's bed, flashing the light from an electric torch into McClure's eyes. It was well after lights-out, and St. Frank's had settled down for the night.

"Wasser matter?" asked McClure mumbly.

"Time to get up!" said Handforth.

"Why, it's all dark!" said Mac, sitting up in bed and blinking. "You silly ass, what's the idea of—— Oh," he added, as recollection came back, "you said something about us putting our dressing-gowns on and going downstairs or something, didn't you?"

"Never mind what I said—get up!" ordered Handforth. "Captain's instructions!"

McClure glared.

"Captain's instructions my eye!" he retorted. "No skipper has any power in the middle of the night! It's a bit too thick, Handy, when you expect us to obey your crazy orders after lights-out!"

"Crazy orders?" repeated Handforth.

"That's what I said!"

"You insubordinate rotter——"

"Oh, all right!" growled McClure hopelessly. "What's the use? I'll get up, blow you! Where's my dressing-gown? Goodness knows what your game is, but I'll lend a hand!"

He started climbing out of bed, but Handforth stopped him.

"On second thoughts," he said, "I don't want you!"

McClure was justly indignant.

"Well, if this isn't a bit thick!" he protested. "First you say you'll want us, and then you say you won't! Then you wake me up out of a ripping dream, and order me out, and then you tell me to stop where I am! You're worse than the giddy weather clerk!"

"I'm not a weather clerk—I'm a Form captain!" said Handforth gruffly. "And it's my privilege to change my mind as often as I like. I don't want any criticisms from

you. Go back to sleep, and stay asleep! I'm going to fix up my new office——"

"My hat!" ejaculated McClure. "You meant to drag us out——"

"You needn't ask any questions, because I shan't answer them," interrupted Handforth coldly. "This mission of mine is a secret one—and I've come to the conclusion that I can handle it better alone."

McClure wisely said nothing. As Handforth had unconsciously revealed his object, Mac was satisfied. There was nothing startling in this night expedition. Without a hint of some sort, McClure might have followed his leader—for Handforth's chums always felt that it was rather up to them to keep a weather-eye on him, and look after him.

Handforth went out of the room without another word. As a matter of fact, he was rather annoyed with himself. He had intended getting busy on this office job not later than eleven o'clock. As Form captain, he was naturally a responsible party, and he had not hinted to his chums that they should wake him at eleven. If a Form captain couldn't attend to a trifle of that sort, who could?

But at eleven o'clock Handforth had been in a sound doze, and when he awoke he found that the time was just after one. But the possibility of abandoning his programme never occurred to him. Once he had made up his mind to a thing, he went through with it.

In the meantime, there was a scene of business-like activity in that end room of the Junior passage. The electric light was switched on, and a heavy curtain was pulled over the window to blot out every ray. The door was locked, and Forrest & Co. were hard at work.

In fact, they had practically finished.

On the mantelpiece were three cigar-boxes, although they no longer resembled cigar-boxes. They were provided with slots, and were enamelled a glossy black. All trace of their original character had vanished. Each box was adorned by a strap of blue silk ribbon, with little rosettes at the side. And the words, "Blue Flag Day," were painted on the front of each.

Forrest had used a kind of black enamel that is generally sold for the purpose of painting motor-car tyres—an enamel with a good gloss, which is, nevertheless, capable of drying within a minute or two.

At the table, Forrest & Co. were conjuring with thick blue paper, gum, and scissors. They had already made something like five hundred flags, and their fingers were sore, and their eyes heavy.

"Nearly finished now," said Forrest, with a yawn.

"Thank goodness!" muttered Gulliver. "I'm fed-up."

"Yes, but isn't it worth a bit of trouble?" asked Forrest, with satisfaction. "Those boxes are like the genuine article—and no-

body would suspect these little flags of being home-made."

"By gad, you're right there!" admitted Bell, nodding.

The cads of Study A had done their work excellently. The flags, after all, had been very simple to make. Strips of blue paper had been cut off, and then snicked into inch lengths. A touch of gum, and each inch-scrap had been fixed to a pin, and transformed into a tiny blue flag. Once the process was in full swing, the production of the flags had been swift.

"Well, there's the last one, thank goodness," said Bell, as he pushed the gum-pot away. "What's the time? Half-past one, by gosh! I say, we shan't get any giddy sleep!"

They were all feeling very happy, however. Gulliver and Bell had been very dubious at first, but the ease with which the stock-in-trade had been made gave them great confidence. And they felt assured that the flag-day would be an unqualified success.

"You've only got to work it out," said Forrest. "With luck we ought to sell these five hundred flags. Let's say sixpence each—most people put in sixpence, at least, and lots of them are good for a bob or a half-crown. But we'll reckon an average of sixpence, to be on the safe side. What do we draw?"

"Give me a paper, and I'll calculate——"

"Paper be hanged!" growled Forrest. "Five hundred sixpences—two-and-fifty shillings. That's twelve-pounds-ten, my lads! What's the matter with your mental arithmetic? We can count on fifteen quid as a cert, and if we click that amount I'll be generous, and waive the percentage basis, and give you a fiver between you."

"Good man!" said Gulliver eagerly.

"Rather!" agreed Bell. "Well, let's clear up the mess and get to bed."

This job was quickly done, and all the cut portions of paper and the gum and the enamel were tucked into a small attache-case. The flags were still sticking in the table, like a forest of blue.

And then a creak sounded out in the passage. On the instant the three rascally juniors gazed at one another in sudden alarm.

"What was that?" muttered Bell huskily.

"Sssssh!" hissed Forrest. "Quiet, you fool!"

In one stride he reached the door, and was about to touch the electric light switch. He was afraid that a gleam might betray them through the keyhole. But who could this unknown prowler be, at half-past one in the morning?

The door handle shook, and Forrest jumped.

"Gad!" he breathed, in dismay.

Gulliver and Bell were paralysed with fright. A master! Their game would be bowled out, and it would mean the sack! Even Forrest had a pang of terror, but he managed to stifle it.

"What the dickens——" came a voice. "By George! What's the matter with the rotten door?"

"Handforth!" breathed Forrest, with mingled relief and fury.

Before he could take any further action, the door opened. It opened with a force that sent Handforth blundering headlong into the apartment. He had put his shoulder against the door, under the impression that it was merely sticking. And Handforth's shoulder was a hefty proposition. This, in conjunction with the fact that the lock was weak, did the trick.

"Great Scott!" gasped Handforth, in amazement.

Until that very second he had had no suspicions. Sleuth though he was—or professed to be—he had taken it for granted that the room was empty, and he hadn't even noticed the gleam of light. So the presence of Forrest & Co., and the full beam of the electric light, came as a shock to him.

It is needless to say that Forrest & Co. were equally shocked.

"Of all the infernal luck!" said Forrest, with a laugh. "Of course, you *would* barge in Handy! We might have expected it!"

He gave his chums a swift, meaning glance—a glance which they knew well. It told them to stand firm and say nothing. It told them to pull themselves together, and to affect an air of nonchalance. Forrest had himself in hand, and he was determined to avert catastrophe.

If the newcomer had been a master or a prefect he could have done nothing. The cat would have been out of the bag, and the catastrophe would have been beyond all human aid. But Edward Oswald Handforth was a different subject to deal with. There were many possibilities.

"What's all this?" asked Handforth, looking round. "Great guns! What on earth are all these flags? And what are you chaps doing here at this hour of the night?"

Bernard Forrest smiled.

"I suppose we shall have to explain, you chaps?" he said regretfully. "We can't even do an act of charity without Handforth butting in!"

wouldn't give the time to a starving man!" Bernard Forrest was looking very serious now.

"Hold on, Handforth," he said quietly. "I'm not the kind of chap to ask for praise, or to expect any merit. But you've misjudged me."

"Oh!" said Handforth. "How?"

"Over that incident about the daisy collection," said Forrest. "I had a good reason for putting no money in the box—and another good reason for pretending to be sarcastic about flag days."

"Pretending?" repeated Handforth incredulously.

"Yes—pretending!" said Forrest.

He had adopted a rather injured tone, coupled with a quiet dignity. Gulliver and Bell, who were nearly scared out of their wits, listened with dull astonishment. Was it possible that Bernard was attempting to wriggle out of this situation? It was! Forrest, in fact, was intent upon throwing dust in Handforth's eyes—not such a very difficult matter, after all, since Edward Oswald was the King of the Chumps when it came to a question of leg-pulling. Quite an ordinary fellow could spoof him, and Forrest was a past-master in the art of deception. True, Handforth was a naturally suspicious of him, but Forrest had sufficient faith in his glibness of tongue to nullify this.

His one object was to satisfy Handforth that everything was genuine, and to extract a promise from him that he would keep mum. If he could

only do that, everything would still be all serene. For Handforth, of course, would have forgotten all about the affair by tomorrow. Forrest had no wish to see fifteen pounds or so fade into a mere dream.

He had an argument ready to his tongue—a cunning argument which might fool Handforth, but which was not likely to fool anybody else. Forrest was in a desperate situation, and he knew it. Unless he scotched this interfering boulder on the spot, it might lead to untold trouble!

"I came down here to get this room ready for my office," said Handforth curtly. "What's all this foolery? What are these dotty flags? What do you rotters think you're up to? Some fishy business, I'll bet—"

"It's a bit rough that you should suspect us of fishy business without the slightest cause," said Forrest bitterly. "You've dropped on us by surprise, Handforth, and I rely on you to keep quiet. The fact is, we've been preparing to do some charity work tomorrow."

WILLY says :—+++++++

"It's just the thing I'd have done myself—just what's needed, in fact. Of course, it'll come as a bit of a surprise—but won't there be a rush!"

!All about it—

++++++VERY SHORTLY!

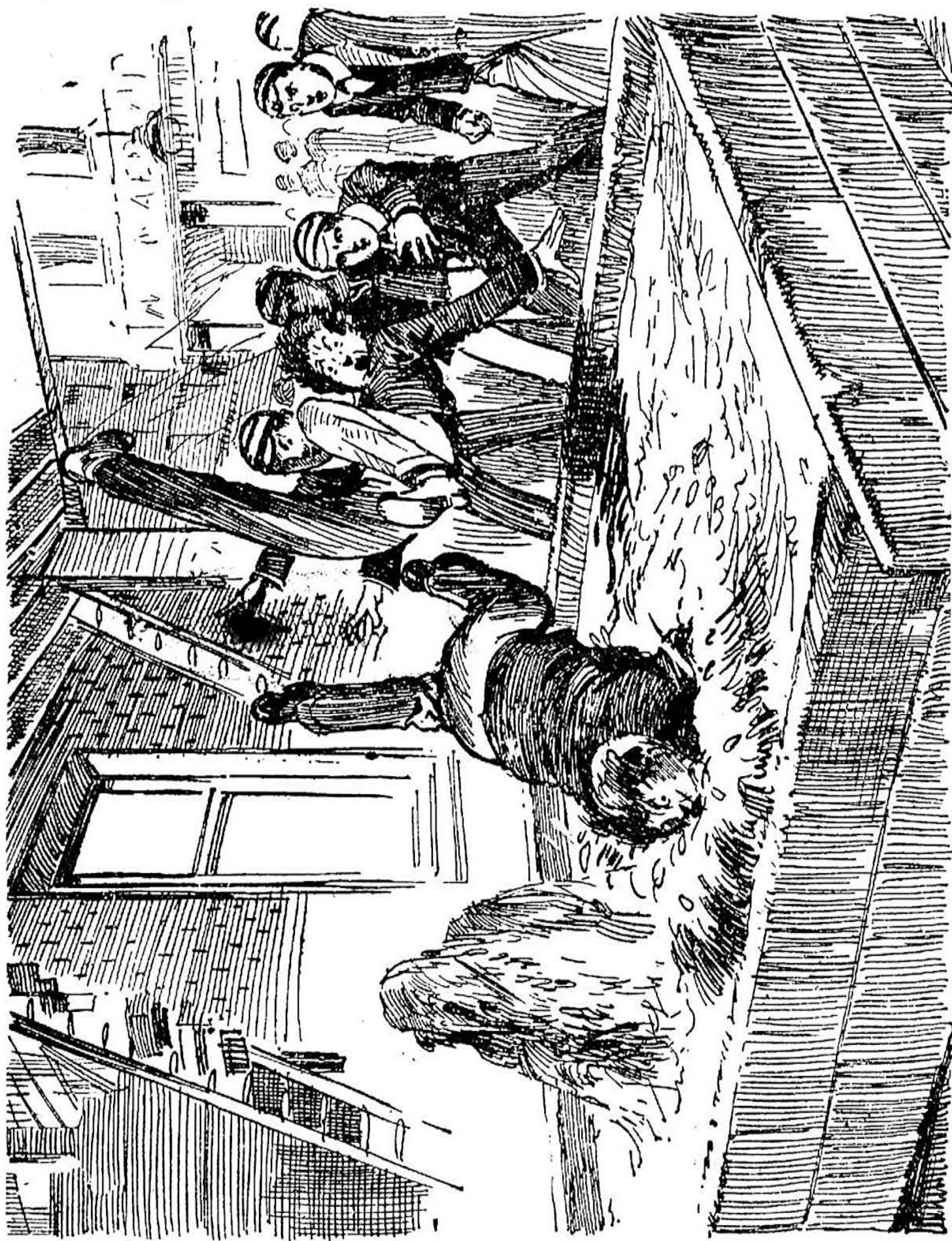
CHAPTER 10.

A JOB FOR THE SKIPPER!

"CHARITY?" repeated Handforth suspiciously. "My hat! You're a fine chap to talk about charity, when you refused to put any

money into that collection box! You





Willy and Co.'s methods were short and sharp. Forrest and Co. were sent hurtling, one after the other, into the sticky mass of liquid mortar. It was light enough punishment for the offence they had committed.

"Charity work!" echoed Handforth. "What rot! You can't fool me——"

"It seems a bit queer, eh?" went on Forrest. "Well, I don't mind admitting that I only agreed to it just to please the mater. In fact, I was rather forced into it. If I hadn't promised, I should have my remittances cut off for the whole term."

"Then there's a fat lot of credit due to you!" said Handforth tartly.

This was a master stroke of Forrest's. Quickly realising that even Handforth wouldn't credit the original statement, he had brilliantly consolidated it by that reference to his mother. Handforth swallowed the tale whole. Lots of fellows at St. Frank's were inveigled into unpleasant duties by the influence of fond mothers—and by the fear of having their tips stopped! Even Handforth had suffered this minor tragedy.

"Well, we won't talk about credit," said Forrest quietly. "Perhaps I shouldn't have agreed if there hadn't been any snags roped to it. Anyhow, the mater badly wanted me to get a couple of chaps, and to help on Blue Flag Day—that's to-morrow."

"Blue Flag Day?" repeated Handforth. "Never heard of it!"

"It's a local stunt."

"For charity, I suppose?"

"Of course."

"Which charity?" demanded Handforth imperially.

"The Bannington Cottage Hospital," replied Forrest.

Gulliver and Bell, who were listening with a growing sense of relief, turned pale. Surely Forrest had killed everything now!

"The Bannington Cottage Hospital?" repeated Handforth incredulously. "Don't talk rot! What about Daisy Day? That was for the Bannington Cottage Hospital. Do you mean to say they're holding a Daisy Day on Tuesday, and a Blue Flag Day on Wednesday? I don't believe a giddy word of it!"

Gulliver and Bell felt that their fears were justified. Forrest, the ass, ought to have invented some fictitious Helmsford charity. What madness could have possessed him to make such a blunder? But Forrest was quite cool.

"What do I care whether you believe it or not?" he asked tartly. "This Blue Flag Day is quite a different thing—organised by my mater and a lot of other ladies. It's for a new ward, or something—a scarlet fever annex, or some such rot. So they're calling it Blue Flag Day, and they're holding it immediately after Daisy Day so that it'll be one go. My hat! Don't some of these big London hospitals carry on for two days? Of course they do!"

Handforth wavered.

"And now, perhaps, you'll apologise for bowling me over to-day, and pinching a quid of mine?" went on Forrest indignantly.

"Apologise to a mean rotter like you?"

"Not so mean!" snapped Forrest. "I promised the mater I wouldn't breathe a word of this collection stunt to anybody



Willy and Co.'s methods were short and sharp. Other, into the sticky mass of liquid mortar. It was lig

except Gulliver and Bell. Well, hang it, after arranging to collect money for the hospital all to-morrow afternoon, I thought that I was doing my bit! I didn't see any particular reason to support Daisy Day. No chap is expected to do too much."

Gulliver and Bell were numbed by this brilliance.

"H'm!" said Handforth grudgingly. "Of course, that makes a difference. Why didn't you tell us this before?"

"Haven't I explained that I'd already promised the mater?"

"Are you so strict about your promises?" asked Handforth pointedly.

"Hang your rotten insinuations!" retorted Bernard Forrest hotly. "If you want to know the absolute truth, I kept mum for another reason. I didn't want to be the laughing-stock of the school! I didn't want the fellows chipping me and my pals for going round with blue flags! A man likes to keep that sort of thing quiet!"



Forrest and Co. were sent hurtling, one after the other, as a punishment for the offence they had committed.

"You fathead, there's nothing disgraceful in it!" growled Handforth.

"I know that; but it's a bit of a come-down," said Forrest. "Flag-day stunts are all very well for girls, but it's different for a chap. I had to agree for my mother's sake, or the pater would have left me flat. I even had to write to the giddy hospital, and arrange things. They sent me these beastly

"Oh!" said Handforth, looking at the flags, boxes, and all these flags!"

Gulliver and Bell were too startled to even think.

"So I thought it was rather a good idea to put 'em in this room, where nobody comes," went on Forrest. "And, naturally, you barge into the middle of it!"

"But why do it at this time of night?"

"Don't you want to know a lot?" asked Forrest tartly.

"I'm Form captain—and that's enough for you!" said Handforth, with dignity.

"How the thump could I unpack these

flags and boxes in the study?" asked Forrest impatiently. "The parcel came this evening, and I smuggled it away. Remember spotting me coming out of this room?"

"Yes," said Handforth. "You were saying that it was just the very place—the ideal spot, or something like that."

"Of course I was," agreed Forrest readily. "I wanted a place to unpack the stuff, so that we could get it ready for to-morrow. It's all arranged. I've written to the hospital, and the hospital's written to me—and there's no getting out of the infernal business!"

That last touch was very clever.

"You rotter!" snorted Handforth. "Is that the way you talk about charity?"

Forrest was inwardly gloating. He had provided a perfectly plausible explanation—quite on the spur of the moment, too. He had covered every point, and he had even made Handforth feel rather guilty for having taken that pound-note. Naturally, argued Handforth, Forrest wouldn't care to contribute to the hospital when he was planning to put in a half-holiday at collecting.

It was all very astute. Handforth's first suspicions were completely gone. He was satisfied that the affair was completely above-board. There were the boxes, and there were the flags, and it never occurred to Edward Oswald that they had been manufactured on the spot!

Forrest had cunningly explained that he and his chums were doing this "charity stunt" under pressure from his mater, and that was a sound argument. If Forrest had tried to make out that he was interested in charity himself, he would have ruined his case. Besides, that these young rascals could be contemplating a spoof collecting campaign never occurred to the innocent Handy.

"Well?" asked Forrest patiently. "Satisfied?"

"Of course I'm satisfied," growled Handforth. "At least, I'm satisfied that you rotters have been forced into this flag-selling business, and can't get out of it! But you needn't tell me that you're doing it for love of charity!"

Forrest grinned.

"We wouldn't dream of telling you a thing like that," he said calmly. "We can't spoof you, old man—you're too smart for us. These maters are a trial, you know!"

"It's a disgraceful thing that you should be allowed to insult charity by raising money," went on Handforth indignantly. "Three outsiders like you! I'm not sure that I oughtn't to forbid it, as Form skipper!"

"Happily, you're not empowered to interfere with us on a half-holiday," said Forrest coolly. "And this is a private matter, too. We trust you to keep it mum. We don't want to be chipped up hill and down dale. Is it a go?"

"Is what a go?" asked Handforth absently.

"Will you promise to keep the secret?"

"Of course," said Handforth, with a start. "And, by George, there's something else I'll promise, too!"

And, thereupon, he delivered his bombshell with devastating effect.



CHAPTER 11.

FORREST GETS DISHED!

EDWARD FORREST was feeling victorious.

Gulliver and Bell were equally filled with satisfaction. They could quite easily see that Handforth was fooled—that he believed every word of Forrest's cunning, plausible story. He took it for granted that those collection boxes were genuine and that they had been sent, with the flags, from the Bannington Cottage Hospital. And it followed, therefore, that Handforth would go away and keep the affair to himself.

Forrest had little fear of complications. He knew, of course, that Handforth was always liable unconsciously to give the game away, but in this case it didn't matter. Having promised to keep quiet, he would only give a hint at the most, and nobody would be able to understand what he meant. Besides, there wouldn't be any Blue Flag Day in Bannington, and the others—if they heard anything about the story—would simply regard it as some more of Handforth's rot. Helmford was twenty miles away, and it was most unlikely that any St. Frank's fellows would be there on the morrow. The town was at a safe distance, and Forrest intended carrying out his original plan, without the slightest alteration. By his quick-witted explanation he had averted disaster.

At least, so he thought.

"Yes, there's something else," said Handforth firmly.

There was a new light in his eye. It was as though he had suddenly received an inspiration. His accusing air had gone, and it was replaced by an authoritative confidence. He exuded importance, like a local mayor presiding over his council.

"Something else?" repeated Forrest.

"Yes," said Handforth. "I don't approve of this business."

"Don't approve?" repeated Forrest sharply. "Look here——"

"As Form captain, I'm going to put my foot down on it!" said Handforth, bringing his fist down with a thump on the table. "This idea of collecting money for the scarlet fever ward is a jolly good one! But the idea of you selling the flags is a rotten one!"

"Oh, is it?" snorted Forrest.

"A mouldy one!" insisted Handforth. "Why, for two pins, you shady bounders

would smash open the giddy boxes, and bone the collection!"

Gulliver and Bell turned pale. Just after they had thought themselves safe, Handforth had hit upon the very core of the whole scheme! Very fortunately, he had done so in his characteristically unconscious manner.

"I can stand a few things," said Forrest angrily, "but if you're going to make filthy insinuations of that sort——"

"Of course, we can't expect your mater to know what you're like!" went on Handforth coldly. "Maters never do! For example, my own mater never gives me credit for having any detective ability—and the pater's worse! And I don't suppose your people have the faintest suspicion that you're a smoking, gambling, shady sort of cad!"

"Confound you——"

"When you're at home, you're naturally on your best behaviour," went on Handforth, deftly touching the spot. "Your mater probably has an idea that you're perfectly honest and decent—capable of being trusted with collecting boxes! It's a jolly good thing for the Bannington Cottage Hospital that I know your real character!"

"You insulting rotter!" shouted Forrest, now genuinely angry.

"So I'm going to take charge of this flag-day stunt myself," went on Handforth. "As captain of the Remove, I regard it as my duty."

Forrest gave a violent start.

"You're going to take charge of it yourself?" he gasped.

"Exactly!" said Handforth coolly.

"But—but——"

"I've made up my mind, and there's an end of it," said Edward Oswald, with a grim air of finality. "I'm the captain, and this is my job! Understand? If the Remove is going to do any collecting for charity, I'm going to have a hand in it! As Form captain, I simply can't get out of it!"

"But, hang you, I've made arrangements——"

"I can't help your troubles. As Form captain——"

"But I tell you my mater fixed it all up——"

"As Form captain——"

"Blow you and your Form-captain twaddle!" roared Forrest. "What the dickens does it matter whether you're Form captain or not? What's that got to do with it? You seem to think that a Form captain is more important than——"

"That's enough!" said Handforth curtly. "According to my lights, a skipper is the governing mind of his Form! And if there's anything big on the board, it's the skipper's duty to handle it!"

"But this flag-day idea isn't big——"

"It's too big for you to tackle," said Handforth firmly. "It's too risky, too. Those boxes must be handled by honest chaps! Why, if you have 'em, half the money will be on the four-thirty race before the

ANSWERS

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afternoon's out! I know your little ways, you betting rotters!"

Forrest winced at this second bullseye.

"Look here, Handforth, cool down," he said earnestly. "Don't you understand that you can't butt in like this? It's a private matter between my mater and the hospital authorities. They've appointed me and my pals——"

"Then they didn't know what they were doing!"

"And they can't alter it now," went on Forrest. "Be a reasonable chap, and clear off to bed. You might get into trouble if you're seen selling these blue flags in Bannington without official authority!"

This was a perfectly true statement. Forrest & Co., of course, were planning to raid Helmford with those collection boxes. Why, if Handforth went on with this mad idea, the whole game would be wrecked! After having had a Daisy Day yesterday, the townspeople would naturally jib a bit at a flag day the very next afternoon—and for the same charity! Besides, there would be inquiries at the hospital, and perhaps by the police——

"By gad!" said Forrest slowly.

A sudden idea had come to him. He would try to choke Handforth off, but if he failed, if he was dished out of this money he so badly needed—well, he would be able to get his revenge! Handforth was walking blindly, deliberately, on to the road that led to expulsion!

"There's no chance of my getting into trouble," said Handforth easily. "You've got the hospital's authority, haven't you?"

"Well, of course."

"Then what does it matter?" said Handforth. "Three St. Frank's fellows have agreed to help in the collecting and flag-selling. The hospital ought to feel pleased if three honest fellows are sent instead of three young crooks! Church and McClure will help me to-morrow afternoon."

"But it's our job!" said Gulliver desperately.

"You clear out of it, Handforth!" panted Bell.

"Leave him alone!" said Forrest, giving them a warning glance. "He's as obstinate as a mule. Look here, Handforth, are you going to drop this thing or not? I'm not so keen on it, I'll admit, and if you'll take it over, I shan't shed many tears. But my mater might raise a shindy, so I'd rather carry on according to programme. Don't make yourself so confoundedly objectionable!"

That last remark was a mistake, and Forrest immediately regretted it.

"You can talk until you're blue in the face—but you won't make any difference," said Handforth. "I'm going to take Church and McClure with me on this flag-selling stunt to-morrow afternoon, and you three beggars can amuse yourselves as you please. As form captain, I've got my duty to perform. I'm not going to let any slur be cast

on the Remove! I can't risk it. You're too jolly shady! So I'm selling these flags."

"Oh, all right, hang you!" snapped Forrest savagely. "Have your own way!"

"But——" began Bell, in alarm.

"What's the use?" snarled Forrest. "You know what a mule he is! All right, Handforth, we'll leave these flags and things here. Since you've taken the whole business over, I wash my hands of it."

"Good!" said Handforth, with satisfaction.

"We'd better get to bed, you fellows," went on Forrest, glancing at his chums. "This is what comes of planning to do a decent thing! 'Give a dog a bad name, and——' I'm fed-up!"

He stalked out, followed by Gulliver and Bell, leaving Handforth in just that condition of uncomfortable regretfulness that Forrest had aimed at. Handforth was feeling that he had robbed the cads of Study A of a chance of doing a good act.

"You're mad!" muttered Gulliver, as they went upstairs.

"Am I?" breathed Forrest. "You fool, what else could I do? Handforth wouldn't budge—he'd made up his pig-headed mind, and the only thing was to give in!"

"But we shall be sacked——"

"You mean Handforth and his pals will be sacked!" interrupted Forrest viciously. "The beast has dished us out of that money, so we'll make him pay! They'll go collecting to-morrow, and be found out. Even if they sneak—which isn't likely—we can swear that we know nothing about it."

"By gad!" said Bell breathlessly.

"How can Handy prove anything?" went on Forrest in a gloating voice. "He found us alone, at dead of night—there aren't any witnesses. My mater doesn't know a thing, so if he tries to get corroboration, he'll fail. We'll simply say it's a lie from beginning to end. He and his chums will be found with the goods—attempting to hold a spoof flag-day—and it'll be the sack, even if it isn't something worse!"

"Then we might have got the sack?" asked Gulliver.

"No, you idiot!" retorted Forrest. "We were going to do it in Helmford, where we should have been safe. But Handy is going to hold this flag-day in Bannington, and he'll walk straight into the trap!"

CHAPTER 12.

WHAT HANDFORTH OVERLOOKED!



"H, rot!" said Handforth gruffly.

He had been thinking for a few moments, and he shook himself. He looked at the flags and at the neat collection boxes. "Forrest can sneer all he likes, but I wouldn't trust him out of sight with a steel

safe, let alone these flimsy boxes!" he went on. "As Form captain, it's my duty to take charge of the affair personally. It's rather a good idea, and, strictly speaking, the whole Form ought to take part in it. By George! Why not? Why not get the crowd out?"

But a moment later he shook his head.

"H'm! Hardly time enough," he decided. "We've only got these three boxes, and these flags, too. But, by George, we can organise a huge flag-day later on, for some other charity. Just the kind of thing a Form captain can arrange with success. I shall have to think of it!"

He came out, after switching the light, and locked the door. With a little wangling he made it hold securely. Then, with the key in his dressing-gown pocket, he went along to Study D, another idea having occurred to him.

"I'll drop a couple of lines to the hospital," he declared. "I'll tell 'em that I'm doing the flag-collecting business instead of Forrest & Co. That'll make it all square."

This was certainly a wise precaution—far wiser, indeed, than Handforth realised at the moment—and he stuck up the letter and dropped it in the lobby box. It would go out by the first post, and, being local—would probably be delivered by midday, or in the evening, at least.

Then Handforth went upstairs and callously shook Church and McClure out of their well-earned slumbers.

"Hallo!" said McClure dully. "Oh, corks! That giddy electric torch again! I say, Handy, what's the idea?"

"I want to talk to you," said Handforth.

"What's the time?" yawned Church, sitting up.

Any reply from Handforth was unnecessary, for the school clock chimed at the moment, and boomed out two solemn strokes.

"Two o'clock!" gasped Church. "My only hat!"

"It's one of Handy's new games," said McClure bitterly. "He woke me up about half an hour ago, and told me to dress. Then he told me not to dress! Now he's disturbed the pair of us! What do you want us to do, Handy? Get dressed, and go for a ride in your Austin Seven?"

"I don't want any sarcasm," said Handforth grimly.

"Well, it's a bit thick," said McClure with a snort. "That's all I can say! It's a bit thick!"

"I went downstairs to fix up my office," said Edward Oswald. "But instead of that, I've made some fresh plans for to-morrow afternoon."

"Good!" said Church, with relief. "That's better than to-night!"

"We're going out flag-selling in Bannington—in aid of the Bannington Cottage Hospital," continued Handforth briskly. "I'm just giving you fair warning, so that you can't raise any objections to-morrow."

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McClure shook his head.

"You're dreaming, old man," he said. "A flag-day?"

"Yes!"

"In aid of the Bannington Cottage Hospital?"

"Yes!"

"But, you chump, they've had a Daisy Day to-day."

"I don't care what they've had to-day," said Handforth. "As a matter of fact, it was yesterday. This flag-day is something special—something to do with the promotion of scarlet fever."

"Hospitals are always trying to spread scarlet fever," said Church. "It's one of their little hobbies, I understand. I suppose all the flags will be infected with bacteria, just to carry on the good work?"

"If you're trying to be funny, I'll soon settle your hash!" said Handforth curtly. "This is a special flag-day, as I said before, and I've got all the necessary collecting boxes, and all the flags. But, mind you, it's a secret, so keep mum. We don't want everybody jawing. We'll slip off in the afternoon, and sell flags. I mean to show the hospital what the captain of the St. Frank's Remove can do!"

Handforth never thought of explaining to his chums exactly how he had arranged the affair. It didn't occur to him that they might be interested. He generally left them in the dark like this, and they didn't press him, because he always explained in full later on, without knowing it. To ask him any questions at the moment would be fatal.

It was rather unfortunate that they only knew the bare facts now. Otherwise they might have had a few suspicions. Without Bernard Forrest's plausible way of putting it, they would probably have smelt a rat.

"And you've fixed this all up just now?" asked Church incredulously.

"Yes."

"Since half-past one?" said McClure.

"Exactly!"

"I suppose you've been over to the hospital—"

"Never mind where I've been!" interrupted Handforth gruffly. "I've made my plans, and I'm giving my orders! And, as Form captain, I expect complete obedience."

"You mean you expect complete obedience as yourself," growled McClure. "Being skipper is only an exaggeration of your usual ramheaded methods. In my opinion, you've been dreaming."

"You hopeless ass, I've got the boxes downstairs!" snapped Handforth. "The flags, too."

Church suddenly started.

"And we're going flag-selling to-morrow afternoon?" he asked.

"Yes—or, rather, no!"

"What do you mean—yes, or, rather, no?"

"We're going flag-selling to-day—this afternoon!" explained Handforth.

"You're quite sure?"

"Of course I'm sure, blow you!"

"I mean, you're sure it's fixed for this afternoon?" insisted Church.

"You—you exasperating ass! Haven't I told you twenty times!" roared Handforth.

"It's all fixed for this afternoon—positively!"

"And that's final?"

"Yes, it is!"

"Oh, well, I only wanted to know," said Church. "Because there's something you've forgotten. If you'll let me remind you, old man—"

"I don't want reminding!" said Handforth sternly. "I'm Form captain, and I don't need any reminders from anybody!"

"Great Scott!" gasped McClure. "Of course! I know what Churchy's getting at. To-morrow afternoon! You ass, Handy, we can't go flag-selling to-morrow afternoon—or this afternoon, as you keep saying!"

"Why worry?" asked Church. "He doesn't need reminding!"

Handforth got into bed and grunted.

"I don't want any more arguments," he said coldly. "I've told you the thing's settled—and it is settled. I'm not going to alter my plans!"

"But if you'll only listen——"

"I don't want to listen!"

"But, honestly, old man——"

"Dry up!" ordered Handforth.

"But this is important——"

Whizz!

Something shot through the darkness and caught Church on the side of his head. Handforth's slipper rolled to the floor, and that settled it. Church and McClure snuggled under the bedclothes, and allowed their leader to enjoy his victory.



CHAPTER 13.

TOO LATE!

LANG—clang!

Handforth woke up with a start, and sat up in bed. Church and McClure were nearly dressed, and the bright sunlight of the early October morning was streaming through the window. During the last few days there had been a kind of Indian summer, and the weather was unusually fine.

"My hat!" ejaculated Handforth. "What's the time?"

"That's the second bell," said Church, glancing round.

"The second bell!" roared Handforth, leaping out. "What about our footer practice? Why didn't Tubbs come and call me at half-past six?"

"How should I know?" asked Church. "Tubbs is a rummy chap for a page-boy. It may be because you told him not to."

"By George, so I did," said Handforth,

with a start. "Well, why didn't you fellows wake me up when the first rising-bell went?"

"Well, you had a bad night," explained McClure. "Nightmares and things, you know. We thought you could do with the extra sleep."

Handforth glanced out of the window, and frowned.

"Lovely morning, too—just the weather for practice," he said regretfully. "Well, it'll be fine for our match against the River House. I'm going to show Brewster and his lot how to score goals!"

"You need to show 'em something!" growled McClure. "After the way they spoofed you, the Remove owes the River House a good old lesson! What about your promise to lead the Remove on to victory after victory?"

Handforth frowned.

"The first one is coming this afternoon," he retorted.

"You're quite sure it'll be this afternoon?"

"Yes."

"You really mean this afternoon?"

Something vaguely stirred in Handforth's memory. This repeated reference to the afternoon was irritating.

"You fathead, of course I really mean it!" he snapped. "I'm going to play centre-forward against the River House."

"We always knew you were a marvellous chap, Handy, but this is simply brilliant," declared McClure enthusiastically. "It's nothing short of genius! So you're really going to carve yourself in two?"

"Carve myself in two?" repeated Handforth, staring.

"Well, if you don't, how on earth are you going to play in the River House match, and sell flags in Bannington?" asked McClure blandly. "Churchy and I have been trying to puzzle it out, but I expect you've got something up your sleeve."

Handforth leapt like a startled stag.

"Great jumping corks!" he breathed. "This afternoon! That—that flag-selling business! And—and the River House match! By George, I'd forgotten all about the match!"

"Well, of course, it's only a trifle," said Church. "A mere football fixture is so insignificant that it naturally slipped the memory of a brilliant Form captain like you!"

Handforth didn't even hear the slur.

"This afternoon!" he said hoarsely. "But I've got to play! So have you chaps! The whole game will go to pot if we don't. And yet we've got to sell flags, too. Oh, crumbs! What's to be done?"

McClure grinned.

"Pretty simple, isn't it?" he asked. "That flag-selling affair's only a nightmare, so we can easily cut it out—"

"It's not a nightmare!" roared Handforth. "I wrote a letter to the hospital, promising to take two fellows with me into Bannington this afternoon. It's all fixed."

His chums were aghast.

"Is this true?" demanded Church in amazement.

"Yes—I posted the letter last night!" said Handforth, with deep concern. "I gave my definite promise! I forgot all about the match— You rotters!" he added fiercely. "Why didn't you remind me? I told you all about this flag-selling at two o'clock in the morning! Why didn't you tell me?"

"We didn't try, did we?" said Church bitterly. "And you didn't chuck a boot at my head, did you? Don't you want us to obey orders? You told us to shut up, so we shut up!"

Handforth sat down on the edge of his bed and groaned.

"Here's a fix!" he muttered. "Here's a go! I've heard of chaps being on the tusks of a dilemma, but I've never been in that beastly position myself!"

"I suppose you mean the horns of a dilemma?" asked Church.

"What do I care?" snapped Handforth. "What's the difference between a tusk and a horn? You're always quibbling over trifles! Here am I, booked to play in that match, and I've promised to sell flags! It's like the nerve of those silly hospital people—holding their blessed flag-day on our half-holiday!"

"But it can't be true," argued McClure. "They had a flag-day yesterday—"

"It wasn't a flag-day—it was a daisy-day!"

"Who's quibbling now?" roared McClure wrathfully. "No hospital in its right senses would do a dotty thing like that! You must have made a mistake, Handy."

"I never make mistakes!" said Handforth, with dignity.

"Not even when you forget important football fixtures?"

"You needn't rub it in!" muttered Edward Oswald dismally. "By George, I made a ghastly bloomer there! But I gave my word—absolutely in writing—and I've got to keep to it. There's only one solution," he added, with a ray of hope. "We shall have to postpone the match."

"That'll be easy," said Church. "I can see Fullwood and Pitt and the rest chuckling with delight at the very suggestion. As for Brewster, he'll go mad with joy!"

"It can't be done, Handy," said McClure. "A fixture's a fixture, and if you can't play, you'll have to choose another man. Why not let Boots play centre-forward, and put Oldfield in goal?"

"I shall have to find men for your places, too," said Handforth.

"WHAT?" howled Church and McClure.

"Of course," said Handforth. "You're in this flag-selling affair with me. I've given your names—and promised your services. We can't break our word."

"Our word?" breathed Church thickly.

"Well, it amounts to the same thing," said Handforth. "I'll try and postpone the match, and if that won't work, I'll fit an extra game



"Won't you support the hospital?" asked Handforth, fully expecting to get at least ten bob from this opulent-looking gentleman. Mr. Alderman Tobias Crump, J.P., nearly exploded. "I shall do no such thing!" he barked. "What's the meaning of this, eh? There's no Flag Day to-day! This is a fraud!"

in to make up for it. I'm not going to be dished like that!"

"But are you sure about this flag-day?" asked McClure earnestly. "Let's make some inquiries, Handy, old man. How did you get to know of it?"

But Handforth refused to answer any questions. He further insisted upon silence from his chums. Under no circumstances were they to explain to anybody why they were missing the match.

"We shall only be chipped," growled Handforth. "After all, selling flags for charity is a lot more important than playing footer against that River House crowd. It's in a good cause—and a Form captain ought to do all he can for good causes. It's his duty."

Handforth was too miserable to say much else, and his chums were left in a state of uncertainty and suspense. Even now they had an idea that the flag-day was a myth, and that they would still play in the match.

But this idea was completely killed after breakfast, when Handforth crawled into Study D and announced that the rest of the team, in one solid voice, had turned him down.

"The rebellious rotters!" he said indignantly. "They insist upon playing, and I find that I can't forbid the match!"

"But you're Junior skipper, aren't you?"

"Yes, but this is a school fixture," said Handforth dismally. "The River House is

involved, too, and it's one of the rules that as long as we can get up an eleven, the game has got to be played. So I'm dished! I've made out a new list."

Neither Church nor McClure wanted to hear the fresh names. They had lost all interest in the River House match. The prospect before them was murky. Instead of footer, an afternoon in Bannington, selling flags! And this—this frightful catastrophe had been deliberately engineered by their own Form skipper!

"Why did we come back into Study D?" moaned Church. "Mac, let's rake up all our pocket money, and send telegrams and things to Dick Hamilton!"

"What do you want to send telegrams to Dick Hamilton for?" asked Handforth.

"As soon as he comes back you get the boot!" replied Church. "He's our proper skipper, and we shan't get any peace until he's back! Life's gradually deteriorating into a long round of agony with you as captain!"

"Flag selling!" said McClure, taking a deep breath. "Like—like girls! Who ever heard of chaps selling flags, and shoving collection-boxes under people's noses? Why, it's—it's kiddish!"

"It's for charity," said Handforth, with dignity.

He walked out of the study, and spent a very unhappy morning in the class-room. He had a desk entirely to himself—set in front

of all the other fellows, and right beneath Mr. Crowell's eye.

Handforth had deemed this to be a brilliant idea when he had first suggested it. It was befitting the status of a captain that he should be apart from his fellows—in splendid isolation. But it was one of those theories which fall to pieces in practice. Handforth's isolation wasn't splendid in any sense of the word. In fact, it bristled with drawbacks. He could hear all sorts of whispered comments going on about him, but retaliation was impossible.

If he so much as turned his head, Mr. Crowell wanted to know why he was neglecting his lesson. If he lifted up his desk lid and made threatening grimaces behind the shelter of it, the Form tittered, and Mr. Crowell promptly accused him of being funny. Life in the Form-room, indeed, was becoming tragic—for Handforth. The rest of the Remove rather liked it.

Nobody knew why he had changed his mind about the match. He had refused to give any explanation, and after the first shock of surprise, the Remove had given up bothering. After all, Handforth had always been a fellow of extraordinary actions. But to deliberately abandon his place in the first big game of the season was beyond all rational explanation. The general opinion was that the captaincy was sending him off his rocker.

And so the team set off for the River House School—and Handforth & Co., from the window of Study D, watched it depart. Handforth hadn't the heart to go out and wish them luck. This position was of his own making, and he was feeling crushed. In fact, he was looking so forlorn that Church and McClure's wrath vanished, and they became genuinely sympathetic. They were always rather affected when their rugged leader was unhappy.

Ten minutes later they set off in Handforth's Austin Seven for Bannington, and a big suitcase at the rear contained the necessary impedimenta for the afternoon's business.

But the afternoon's business was destined to be slightly different from the arranged programme.

CHAPTER 14.



BLUE FLAG DAY BECOMES BLACK!

HANDFORTH looked up and down the High Street with satisfaction.

"Well, there's one thing—we're the first on the job!" he said. "There's nobody else selling flags, so we shall get all the customers."

"I don't believe it is a flag day," said Church uneasily.

"Neither do I," agreed McClure. "There's something wonky about it."

Handforth silenced them with a look. And

some of his looks were capable of silencing a thunderstorm.

The High Street was fairly deserted, for although it was market day in Helmford, it was early closing day in Bannington. And it struck Church and McClure as very peculiar that a flag day should be held at a time when the town was more or less empty.

Still, this was Handforth's affair, and what was the use of arguing, anyhow?

The Austin Seven was parked near by, and within three minutes the juniors were ready for action. With the black collection boxes slung round their necks, they looked business-like. The top of each box was literally bristling with the tiny blue flags.

And, exactly as Forrest had anticipated, practically every pedestrian shied upon the approach of either Handforth or his chums, dropped something shyly into the slot, and escaped. Nobody thought of asking questions.

Bernard Forrest gave a snort of disgust.

"I knew it!" he said savagely. "They're all dubbing up!"

The cads of Study A were seated in the upper window of the Japanese Café—a big, bay window, which overlooked the entire High Street. They had ensconced themselves there in order to watch the proceedings, without being observed themselves.

"The idiots!" said Bell. "This can't go on for long!"

"Don't you believe it," retorted Forrest. "Even here—in Bannington—after that Daisy Day yesterday, the public will simply pay up like lambs! And not a question asked! Just think of the clean-up we could have made in Helmford!"

His frown vanished, and he grinned.

"Well, never mind, it's just as well to hold a dress rehearsal," he continued. "We'll have our flag day next week. It'll give us more time to prepare, and we can fake up some really showy flags and good boxes. And Handforth is going to get it in the neck to-day!"

Bernard Forrest was leaving nothing to chance.

Handforth & Co. were fairly on the job now, so Forrest's course was clear. He left Gulliver and Bell in the café, and dodged across the High Street to the post-office. Then he entered a telephone-box, and rang up the Bannington Cottage Hospital.

"Hallo!" he said, when a voice sounded. "Is that the Cottage Hospital?"

"Yes," said the voice. "This is the principal, Dr. Williams, speaking."

"Oh, good!" said Forrest. "I think there's something you ought to know. I'm a St. Frank's fellow. You know, sir, from St. Frank's College."

"Yes?"

"Three of our fellows are holding a spoof flag day," said Forrest calmly.

"They are doing what?" asked Dr. Williams in surprise.

"They're selling flags in the High Street,

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and getting people to drop money into their boxes," explained Forrest. "They're using the name of your hospital, too, and I think it ought to be stopped. It's a fraud, you know."

There was a pause, and then Dr. Williams spoke.

"Is this a practical joke, young man?" he asked severely.

"The flag day, or this call of mine?"

"Both!" said the doctor.

"I don't know about the flag day; it looks to me like an attempt to raise some cash on the crook," said Forrest easily. "There's no joke about this call, though. If you don't like to believe me you needn't. Please yourself. I'm just giving you the tip, that's all."

"And who are you?" asked Dr. Williams.

"Sorry, but I'd rather not say," replied Forrest. "I don't want to get any cheap publicity, if you don't mind. But it seems like a dirty trick to me, so I thought I'd tip you the wink. These three fellows are selling flags in the name of charity, and it's

not exactly square. The idea is to steal off at the end of the afternoon, and hook the takings."

"Thank you," said Dr. Williams coldly.

He hung up before Forrest could say anything else, and Bernard frowned. It was fairly evident that the principal of the Bannington Cottage Hospital regarded the warning as a spoof one. But it was quite likely that he would institute a few discreet inquiries.

Forrest came out of the post-office and glanced up the street. Handforth & Co. were in various strategic positions, and quite a number of people were going about with the little blue flags on their lapels.

Handforth was not in the best of moods. So far, he had only sold three flags, and it seemed to him that his "customers" had dropped into the box nothing more substantial than a few odd coppers. Church and McClure, on the other hand, were doing well. This was a fine state of affairs for the captain of the Remove.

If it came to that, the whole thing was a come-down.

Handforth had been very enthusiastic in the night. It had seemed to him that it was essentially a job for an important fellow like himself. But he had forgotten all about the football match then, and his enthusiasm was now greatly reduced. He kept getting mental pictures of the footer ground at the River House School. By George! The game hadn't started even yet! And here he was—the skipper—mooching about with blue flags in the High Street!

Another point which worried Handforth was the absence of any other flag-sellers. He had taken it for granted that Bannington would be swarming with volunteers, and that he and his chums would be just three of many. But not another flag-seller was within sight.

"What is this affair, my boy?"

Handforth started at the sound of a pompous voice and looked round. He recognised the stout, florid man who had accosted him—a prosperous-looking individual with a somewhat haughty air. It was Mr. Alderman Tobias Crump, J.P.—no less a person than the Mayor of Bannington!

Handforth brightened up. Thank goodness those other fatheads hadn't collared the mayor, anyhow! He would be good for ten bob, at least. And Handforth felt that it was a point of personal honour that he should collect the most money.

"Blue Flag Day, sir," said Handforth.

"Indeed!" said Mr. Crump, frowning. "I knew nothing of a flag day!"

"We can't know everything, sir."

"But this is very singular," said Mr. Crump suspiciously. "Why was I not informed? No flag day can be held in Bannington without the Council's permission. An extraordinary oversight! For which charity are you collecting?"

"The Bannington Cottage Hospital, sir."

"What?" shouted the mayor, startled.

"The Bannington Cottage Hospital, sir," repeated Handforth.

"I heard you, boy—I heard you!" ejaculated Mr. Crump. "But this is a most extraordinary business! The Bannington Cottage Hospital held a widespread collection yesterday. We have yet to learn the results of Daisy Day! And now, on the very next afternoon—Come, come! You cannot know what you are talking about!"

Handforth was rather annoyed.

"All right—you know best!" he said tartly.

"I tell you this collection is for the Cottage Hospital, and the least you can do, sir, is to buy a flag."

"I shall do no such thing!" retorted the mayor. "I am by no means satisfied that you are in a position to sell these flags. I think you belong to St. Frank's College, eh?"

"Of course, sir."

"And does your headmaster know of this?"

"Not that I'm aware of, sir," growled

Handforth. "We don't tell the Head of everything we do. 'Come on, Mr. Crump, buy one of these flags——'"

"Certainly not!" snapped Mr. Crump. "Most decidedly not! I must make inquiries—I must see if this is allowable! Upon my word! Blue Flag Day! I must confess I have never heard of it!"

He walked off, more suspicious than ever, and Handforth stared after him in indignation.

"Mean old screw!" he muttered disgustedly. "By George! There's a mayor for you! Questioning my rights to sell flags, too! I'm not sure that this town is worth all this giddy trouble!"

He thought of the football match again, and his spirits drooped. From the window of the Japanese Café Forrest & Co. were watching with added interest.

"Good old Crump!" grinned Forrest. "On the mark like a bloodhound! Now we shall see a few fireworks, my lads!"

"What do you think he'll do?" asked Bell breathlessly.

"Make inquiries, find out if it's unofficial, and split to the Head," said Forrest, with cool satisfaction. "Handforth will find himself in about fifteen knots, and it'll mean the sack."

"He might sneak on us!" said Gulliver uneasily.

"Let him!" retorted Forrest. "Where's proof? We'll deny everything, and say we've never even heard of the flag day. I can tell you, Handy will have a job to wriggle out of this! Here he is, with his two chums, selling flags for a spoof charity with spoof boxes! The thing's obvious. It doesn't matter what he says, the Head will draw his own conclusions. Down comes the chopper—and exit that aggressive rotter!"

CHAPTER 15.



THE ARREST OF THE INNOCENTS!

MR. ALDERMAN CRUMP stood outside the post-office with a deep frown on his face. He was watching the activities of Handforth & Co., and he became more and more suspicious.

"Very peculiar," he murmured. "Very peculiar indeed. I don't like the look of it at all. Merely three boys—and early closing day, too. And yesterday the hospital—Ah, of course! An excellent idea! We will soon make quite sure of this."

He puffed into the post-office, swept behind the big barrier, and pompously used the telephone behind the counter. Mr. Crump saw no reason to squash himself into a box. Besides, why spend twopence?"

"Oh, is that you, Dr. Williams?" he said. "Mr. Crump speaking——"

"Good-afternoon, Mr. Mayor," said the doctor agreeably.

"I am rather anxious to clear up a little point," said the mayor. "Is the hospital holding a flag day to-day, by any chance?"

"No," said Dr. Williams. "This is rather strange——"

"You assure me that you know nothing whatever of a flag-selling campaign?" demanded Mr. Crump. "There are three boys in the High Street with little blue flags, and one of them positively assures me that he is collecting for the Cottage Hospital. Is it possible that he lied?"

"It is not only possible, but a fact!" said the doctor angrily. "Please take immediate steps to have them stopped, Mr. Crump. This is most disturbing. It will do the hospital a lot of harm if it is allowed to continue——"

"You may be quite sure that it will not continue!" barked Mr. Crump fiercely.

"Curiously enough, a St. Frank's boy rang me up not more than ten minutes ago, but I thought it was a practical joke," continued the doctor. "I did not even deem it worthy of an inquiry. He informed me that three St. Frank's boys were holding a fake flag day, with the object of raising some money for themselves. It seemed so ridiculous that I really took no notice."

"Let me tell you, sir, that it is perfectly true!" said the mayor. "The unscrupulous young reprobates! This is a most serious affair, Dr. Williams! Indeed, there is only one course that I can take!"

"You will inform their headmaster?"

"I certainly shall, but I shall meanwhile inform the police," said the mayor angrily. "An affair of this sort will bring disrepute upon the town. Heaven only knows what these Public schoolboys will do nowadays! It is nothing short of actual fraud!"

The mayor hung up, and turned, bristling with battle.

He stormed out of the post-office, snorted furiously as he caught sight of Handforth selling a flag to an elderly lady, and then he made a bee-line for the police-station. By the look of things, Handforth and Co. were on the verge of a bother.

"Ah, Inspector Jameson, the very man I need!" puffed the mayor, as he ran into the inspector on the very steps of the police-station. "Please come with me at once. I wish you to arrest three schoolboys!"

"Good gracious!" said Inspector Jameson.

"At least, you must bring them to the police-station, and question them very closely," amended the mayor. "An actual arrest may not be necessary. There are three of them—selling flags here in the High Street."

"That's not very serious, is it, sir?"

"Upon my word, inspector, I cannot understand your attitude!" exclaimed Mr. Crump angrily. "These boys have no authority to hold a flag day—the flags are their own, and it is a deliberate swindle on the public. A

new idea, apparently to raise some cash. A fraud, and in the name of charity!"

Inspector Jameson pulled a long face.

"Oh, that's different, sir," he admitted. "So that's what they're doing, is it? The young scoundrels! We'll soon find out what their game is! Leave this to me, sir!"

Church and McClure, finding business slack, had drifted together for a moment to exchange notes. They were more uneasy than ever, for it seemed that they and Handforth were the only flag-sellers in the town.

"This is a fine go!" growled Church. "The match is just about starting, and we're stuck here on this beastly job! I can't understand it, even now."

"Neither can I," said McClure. "Where did Handy get these flags? Who gave him his authority? The giddy things look home-made to me——"

"I say, look at that!" interrupted Church in alarm.

They stared across the road. The mayor, Inspector Jameson, and a constable were approaching Handforth with a purposeful air and grim faces. From the Japanese Café, Forrest & Co. were watching with gloating enjoyment.

"What did I tell you?" breathed Forrest. "Now they're in for it!"

"You cunning bounder!" muttered Bell. "They're caught red-handed!"

"Serve 'em right!" said Forrest savagely. "They shouldn't interfere."

Handforth was rather surprised when the inspector halted in front of him, and placed a heavy hand upon his shoulder. It was an unconscious movement on the inspector's part, but it was highly significant.

"Now, young man, what's this?" he asked grimly.

"What's what?"

"You're not allowed to sell flags in the street like this," continued the inspector. "But perhaps you've got some authority? What is this collection in aid of?"

"The Bannington Cottage Hospital."

"You're sure of that?" asked the inspector ominously.

"Of course I'm sure!" snapped Handforth. "What's the idea of all this questioning? Anybody might think I was doing something wrong!"

Church and McClure came running up.

"What's the matter?" asked Church breathlessly.

"How do I know?" said Handforth. "We can't put ourselves out to help a deserving charity without getting into trouble, it seems. It's all Mr. Crump's fault. It must be awful to have a suspicious mind!"

"Upon my word!" said the mayor indignantly.

"I wish we'd gone to the football match!" snorted Handforth. "If this is all the thanks we get for coming here——"

"It won't do, Master Handforth," interrupted the inspector gruffly. "I didn't expect this of you! I always thought you were

honest. You know as well as I do that there's no flag day for the Bannington Cottage Hospital. Come on—admit it! You can't keep up this pretence."

"Oh, my hat!" breathed Church, aghast.

"I think we had better get along to the police-station," said the mayor uncomfortably.

"There are—ahem!—several people collecting, and we do not want a scene. We can question the boys better in the police-station."

"Yes, come along," said Inspector Jameson curtly.

Handforth staggered.

"You're—you're arresting us?" he gasped.

"Yes, sir," said the mayor sternly. "Inspector, do your duty!"

"It's all right, Mr. Crump—they'll come without any trouble," said the inspector, who rather disliked the mayor's pomposity. "Now, boys, you'd better come. This matter must be fully inquired into."

Handforth, dazed and bewildered, walked unsteadily towards the police-station. Church and McClure were numbed with apprehension. They weren't in so much danger—for Handforth would promptly confess that he had led them into it. But they felt horrified for the safety of their leader.

And as they entered the police-station, watched by a gathering crowd of inquisitive idlers, Forrest & Co. lounged out of the Japanese Café. Their plan had succeeded in every detail, and they were feeling very pleased with themselves. At last they would be rid of the aggressive Handforth!

"This—this is mad!" panted Edward Oswald, when he found himself in the charge-room. "This is a genuine flag day! At least, I thought—Great guns!" he muttered. "Did those—those cads spoof—Oh, my goodness!"

"What cads?" asked Church quickly.

"One moment—one moment!" interrupted the inspector. "Who is responsible for this unfortunate affair?"

"I am," said Handforth promptly. "These chaps were only obeying my orders. I'm Form captain, and I thought it was my duty to take charge of the flag day."

"And you honestly thought it was genuine?" asked the inspector.

"It is genuine!" retorted Handforth.

"You see?" snapped the mayor. "Upon my soul, inspector, what is the meaning of this attitude on your part? The boy is guilty. He is merely attempting to wriggle out of his outrageous misdemeanour—"

"I'm not!" shouted Handforth.

"Well, we shall see," said the inspector curtly. "The Bannington Cottage Hospital knows nothing whatever of this collection, and it is idle for you to pretend that you believed it genuine. A very serious case, young man! I suppose you realise that this is absolutely fraudulent, and against the law?"

"He didn't know!" panted Church frantically.

"Didn't know!" echoed Inspector Jameson. "That story won't do! Let me have a look at one of these boxes—H'm! Just as I thought! You see this, Mr. Crump? A cigar-box!"

"Appalling!" said the mayor, aghast.

"Cigar-box!" said Handforth, feebly.

"Come, come, confess and be brave about it," prompted the inspector. "These are merely painted cigar-boxes, and it is quite clear that you have faked them up yourselves. A little idea to raise some easy money, eh? I am afraid you've got yourselves into a nasty mess, boys."

"A—a nasty mess?" breathed Handforth.

"I shall inform your headmaster by telephone at once, and in the meantime you must remain here," continued the inspector. "I am not sure that you will not be brought before the magistrates to-morrow and charged. You had better understand that this is very grave."

"A reformatory will be the right place for them!" snapped the mayor viciously.

Church and McClure were simply beyond words, and Handforth, with his brain reeling, felt that the end of the world was near at hand. There was something dreadfully real about Inspector Jameson's gravity. And Handforth realised, with a stunning shock, that he had absolutely no proof of his innocence. Forrest & Co. had intended working this dodge! He saw it now—and they had tricked him into adopting it!

It was the end!

CHAPTER 16.

A NARROW ESCAPE!



WILLY HANDFORTH touched the stopping button of his Silent Two, and the fearsome-looking vehicle came to a halt. Willy's

Silent Two was a car of his own manufacture. It looked like a powerful track racer, but it wasn't. Its motive power was provided by Chubby Heath and Juicy Lemon, who operated pedals from their seats beneath the imposing bonnet.

"Come out, you chaps!" said Willy briskly. "And the rest of you had better stop, too. There's something fishy here!"

The Silent Two was accompanied by a dozen cyclists, all members of the Third. Willy & Co. were out in force, and Willy had spotted his major being marched into the police station with Inspector Jameson's hand upon his shoulder.

"Something fishy?" repeated Chubby Heath, climbing into the open.

"Ted!" said Willy, briefly. "Trouble!"

He was not a junior to waste words. He gave a sharp order, and in a few moments the entire Third Form contingent bore down upon the police station and invaded it. Willy went straight to his major.

"What is it, old man?" he asked, quietly.

"We're arrested!" gasped Handforth.

"That's nothing—we'll soon get you out of it," said Willy, crisply. "All right, inspector, don't mind us. We just popped in to find out what it was all about."

"Upon my soul!" roared the mayor. "How—how dare you? Get out of here at once, you young rascals! This—this invasion is outrageous!"

"No, it isn't Mr. Crump," said Willy. "My major's in trouble, and I've got to find out what it is."

"The best thing you can do, young man, is to leave quietly," said the inspector, who was more diplomatic than Mr. Crump. "These three boys have been organising a fraudulent flag day, and I am about to ring up the headmaster of your school—"

There was a slight commotion, and a stranger came hurrying in—a refined, elderly gentleman with pince-nez.

"The boys are here?" he said anxiously.

"Ah, Dr. Williams, your arrival is fortunate—" began the mayor.

"Very fortunate," agreed Dr. Williams. "There is some mistake here. These boys have certainly been acting without authority from the hospital, but there is no question of a fraudulent collection, as I at first feared."

"My letter!" gasped Handforth, with a jump. "Oh, crumbs! I'd forgotten all about it! Of course, that proves—"

"Letter?" broke in the inspector sharply.

"The boy is quite right," said Dr. Williams. "When I heard that this collection was taking place—particularly as I had had information from one of the St. Frank's boys over the telephone—I was deeply concerned, and I feared a deliberate swindle!"

"And so it is a swindle!" shouted the mayor stubbornly.

"I am sorry to contradict you, Mr. Crump, but it is nothing of the sort," said Dr. Williams, coldly. "Five minutes after you telephoned me, a letter was delivered—a letter which was despatched from Bellton by this morning's post. It is from the boy, Handforth."

"May I see it?" asked the inspector.

"Certainly. I have brought it on purpose for your perusal," said Dr. Williams. "Of course, there can be no question of these boys' excellent intentions. That letter informs me that they are planning to sell the flags this afternoon, and that they will hand the collection-boxes to the hospital this evening."

"Oh!" said the mayor. "Indeed!"

"Yes, sir, indeed!" snapped the doctor. "And we can hardly suspect the boys of fraudulent intentions after they have sent me a letter hours before the actual collection started. I am, however, still at a loss, although I suspect the affair to be a practical joke."

The inspector was reading the letter.

"You say that one of our chaps 'phoned you, sir?" asked Handforth, recovering his coolness. "Who was it?"

"The boy would not disclose his identity."

"I'll bet it was Forrest!" said Handforth grimly. "The cad—"

"Forrest?" repeated Dr. Williams. "That is the name you mentioned in the letter. In that epistle, you tell me that you have taken the collection out of the hands of Forrest and his two companions."

"Oh!" said Church, slowly. "Oh-ho! So that's what happened last night, Handy? You surprised those cads preparing for this stunt, and you took it over? Why, you chump, they fooled you properly!"

"Fooled me?" breathed Handforth.

Explanations, of course, were almost needless. Dr. Williams was perfectly satisfied that the affair was a joke, and he would not hear of the school being rung up and the headmaster informed. He smilingly took possession of the collecting boxes, and thanked the boys for their efforts—although, of course, the hospital had expected no such contribution.

The mayor wisely vanished, and Handforth & Co. were escorted out of the police-station, after being good-naturedly chipped by Inspector Jameson.

"Well, my hat!" breathed Church. "That was a narrow escape!"

"Rot!" snapped Handforth. "We got out easily enough!"

"Yes; but only because of that letter!" pointed out McClure, with a shiver. "Just think what might have happened without it! We shouldn't have had an atom of proof, Handy! It would have looked as black as night. The sack would have been certain—and a reformatory possible!"

"By George, yes!" muttered Handforth hoarsely. "It *was* a narrow escape!"

"Some protecting genius must have made you write that letter, Ted," said Willy, thankfully. "But, I say, you've made a pretty nice mess of things, haven't you? Left the team in the lurch for the sake of nearly getting the sack!"

"Another black mark!" growled Church. "Handy's record as skipper is growing inkier and inkier! He's always doing things for the best, and he's always getting it in the neck! Poor old Handy!"

"I don't want any of your 'poor' old Handys," said Edward Oswald tartly. "Forrest was going to work this swindling dodge! I messed up his game, and so he palmed it off on to me! And he informed, too! That means that he deliberately tried to get us the sack!"

"Leave Forrest to us," said Willy brightly.

As a matter of fact, Forrest & Co. were still in the offing, so to speak. They had been hanging about, curious to find out how things were progressing. Forrest knew nothing of that letter of Handforth's, so he believed that his plan had succeeded.

But he didn't believe it for long!

Willy & Co. swooped down upon the Study A trio without warning. No questions were asked. Willy's methods were drastic. Just
(Continued on page 44.)

THE ST. FRANK'S LEAGUE

THE CHIEF OFFICER'S CHAT

All LETTERS in reference to the League should be addressed to the Chief Officer, The St. Frank's League, c/o THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY, The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4. Any enquiries which need an immediate answer should be accompanied by a stamped and addressed envelope.

Correspondents Wanted

Crowded Out!

I CANNOT say much this week because so many members want to correspond with each other. Accordingly, I am devoting practically the whole of this page to our ever-growing popular feature. Members who wish to correspond with fellow-members should send in their requests to the Chief Officer at the address given above. Notices should be as brief as possible—just stating the necessary requirements, and quoting membership number with member's name and address. Every effort will be made to publish notices as soon as possible after they are received, and members should bear in mind that as we go to press three weeks in advance, they must not expect their notices to appear for at least a month after they reach this office. Should members receive begging letters from dusky merchants of the Gold Coast, they are advised to ignore such communications.

Miss Edith Bowman, 6, Beaconsfield Street, Princes Avenue, **Liverpool**, wishes to correspond with readers anywhere.

H. R. Jobbins, 35, Fife Road, Canning Town, **London**, E. 16, wishes to communicate with two chums in New Zealand and Australia; age about 16.

Albert Marsh, 3, Thrush Street, Walworth, **London**, S.E. 17, wishes to correspond about cricket, football, stamp collecting and scouting with a Leagueite in South Africa.

R. G. Bishop, 117, Little Ealing Lane, South Ealing, **London**, W. 5, wishes to correspond with readers in the British Empire on stamp collecting, photography, camping and cricket.

J. Smith, 38, Brooksby's Walk, Homerton, **London**, E. 9, wishes to hear from members who would like to join a Christmas Club.

Norman Eyre, 43, Melville Road, **Coventry**, wishes to exchange stamps with members abroad.

Solomon Arkin, 55, Mount Street, Cape Town, **South Africa**, wishes to correspond with members anywhere in the British Empire, excluding South Africa; special interest, stamp collecting.

G. Moseley, 9A, Kirby Road, **Blackpool**, wishes to hear from members in his district.

Reginald Edwards, 82, Malt Mill Lane, Blackheath, nr. **Birmingham**, wishes to hear from members in his district.

T. Treadwell, 39F, Sutton Buildings, City Road, **London**, E.C.2, wishes to hear from members in his neighbourhood.

James Lloyd, S.B., T.T.H., c/o S. West, 41, Trinity Square, **London**, E.C.3, wishes to hear from readers.

Miss Alice Gardner, 96, Station Road, **Ashington**, wishes to hear from readers.

F. Slann, 46, Park Street, **Hereford**, wishes to hear from members in his district.

George Jennings, 22, Peel Street, **Ipswich**, wishes to hear from members in his district.

L. F. Hawkins, 16, Grove Place, **Ealing**, W.5, wishes to hear from readers in his district.

B. H. Wood, 12, Estcourt Avenue, Headingley, **Leeds**, wishes to hear from readers in his district.

Glyn Hamer, Pant yr Eirin, Groes Wen, nr. Taff's Well, **Cardiff**, wishes to hear from readers in Australia and India; subjects; stamps, sports, and birds' eggs.

Gerard Mercer, 1, Sweden Grove, Waterloo, **Liverpool**, O.O., wishes to start a second S.F.L. Club in districts of Waterloo, Crosby and Seaforth only. Write for details. No member of first club need join. Gerard Mercer wishes to correspond with American philatelist.

Ernest Rowe, 1, Pridmore Road, **Coventry**, asks members in his district to communicate.

Stephen Molyneux, 283, Wallgate, **Wigan**, wishes to correspond with A. Young, of Hythe, whom he thinks is an old acquaintance.

H. R. Jobbins, 35, Fife Road, Canning Town, **London**, E.16, wishes to correspond with readers in New Zealand and Australia.

Edna Charley, 22, Gresham Street, Stoke, **Coventry**, wishes to correspond with members.

A. V. Oxley, 33, Balfour Road, Highbury, **London**, N.5, wishes to hear from members in his district.

D. Harman, 20, Villiers Road, Oxhey, Watford, **Herts**, wishes to hear from members in Hertfordshire.

G. McGill, 17, Haslemere Avenue, **Hendon**, N.W.4, wishes to hear from members in the Hendon and Golders Green district.

N. L. Gibson, c/o Farmers' Trading Co., Cambridge, **New Zealand**, wishes to hear from readers who have the first issues of the "Nelson Lee Library," which they are willing to sell.

A Gripping Yarn of Detective Adventure!

THE GREEN EYE!

*A Clever Story of
NELSON LEE & NIPPER*



CHAPTER 1.

FIVE SECONDS' DARKNESS.

"BY gad, sir! It's disgraceful! The old country's going to the dogs, and the Dorset police are a set of incompetent nincompoops!"

Colonel Mannington Bruce's face purpled with indignation, and his lean, hard fist banged the table until the crockery rocked. Nipper nearly choked with suppressed laughter, but their host, Sir James Mull, tried the soft answer that turneth away wrath.

"My dear Bruce," he said, "it's hardly fair to condemn the police, considering they haven't a ghost of a clue to work on. The fellow who's doing these burglaries seems to have an uncanny knowledge of—"

"Uncanny rubbish, sir!" Bruce barked, glaring defiance across the table. "What's your opinion, Lee—you don't look exactly a fool, sir!"

"Thanks," Nelson Lee drawled dryly, "but I don't yet know enough to express an opinion."

He thought it unnecessary to add that Sir James Mull had brought Nipper and himself specially from London to investigate the epidemic of thefts that had broken out in and round Blandford. They had only just arrived, to find Mull and Bruce finishing dinner; until he knew all the circumstances of a case it was never Nelson Lee's way to talk.

"Um—you're a stranger," Bruce grunted. "Well, sir, I return from India a week ago to find some fellow walking into our best houses and simply pocketing anything he takes a fancy to." His voice rose as his temper deepened. "In my own club, sir—the Blandford County Club—three chaps have been robbed of valuables worth thousands! And what happens—what'd you think these confounded Dorset police do?"

He glared at Nipper, and Nipper felt bound to answer.

"I don't know, colonel," he murmured.

"Then hold your tongue, sir!" Bruce snapped. He slewed round on Lee again. "Nothing happens! These wooden-headed bluebottles sit round twiddling their thumbs, looking about as spineless as last year's jelly!" He shook a huge fist under Lee's nose. "But I'm not a jelly, sir! If that fellow tries any tricks with me, I'll not wait for the police!"

"What'll you do?" Lee asked, his eyes twinkling.

"Shoot, sir!" Bruce barked. "Teach him manners with a gun—that's my way!"

"Then it's a dangerous way—in England," Sir James smiled. He refilled the colonel's glass, pushed a box of cigars nearer and generally did

his best to soothe the fiery military man. "But what about that green diamond, Bruce? You promised to bring it along to-night, and I'm sure Lee will be interested in it."

The choleric colonel simmered down and became almost amiable.

"It's here, Mull," he said, placing a small oval case on the table, but keeping it tight under his podgy fist. "A rare stone, Lee, d'you know anything about green diamonds?"

"I know there are three green diamonds in the world," Nelson Lee answered. "One is owned by Lady Carslake, another by Hiram K. Hoschen, and the third disappeared when Prince Alexis of Russia was killed in '17."

"You're right, and I believe it's the Russian stone I've got here," Bruce replied. "It was presented to Alexis by Czar Nicholas, and was known as 'The Green Eye of Kalla.' It was stolen from a Buddhist temple two hundred years ago, and by some strange chance it dropped into the hands of a begging fakir in Afghanistan. I bought it from him last fall for five hundred rupees, but it's worth three thousand guineas if it's worth a penny!" He opened the case, and held up a stone that sparkled like green fire in the light from overhead. "Look at it—the beauty! There's not another stone in the world—"

Crash!

The room plunged into darkness, and the electric cluster smashed down on the table in the twinkling of an eye! The glass bulbs burst with the roar of a miniature bombardment, and the colonel suddenly uttered a bellow like that of a mad bull! As the others started to their feet in alarm, something crashed into the table and sent them flying—and in that second, they heard a shrill snigger and the curtains were torn aside!

"The diamond—it's been snatched from my hand!" Bruce yelled.

But the words were not out of his mouth when the French window was flung open with a force that shattered the panes, and a dark form hurtled through into the night-wrapped garden!

Bang! Bang!

Bruce, true to his word, fired twice at the vanishing form, then Nelson Lee flicked on an electric torch and sprang for the broken window.

But he reckoned without the raging colonel. Even as Lee took a flying leap through the window, Milligan barged heavily into him, and the pair went rolling about in the shrubbery.

"You confounded idiot!" Bruce spluttered; but Lee flung him aside and, with Nipper at his heels, raced to the garden wall.

They shone their torches in every direction, they searched every inch of the place and examined the lane behind Mull's grounds; but the fellow might have been a ghost for all the trace he had left, and at last they returned disconsolately to the house.

"Smartest bit o' work I've seen for many a day, guv'nor," Nipper said admiringly. "That chap grabbed the stone and vanished like smoke in less than five seconds!"

"A very carefully planned coup," Lee agreed frowningly. "It's plain enough that he knew the stone was to be shown to-night, and it's equally clear that Bruce or Mull have been talking."

"I'd give odds on the colonel," Nipper grinned. "Talking seems to be his pet hobby."

"It is, so keep a guard on your own tongue, young 'un," Lee warned.

"Oh, chuck it, guv'nor!" Nipper grumbled. "I'm not in the habit—"

"I know you're not," Lee cut in. "But if we get on the trail of the thief, and let Bruce know where that trail is leading, he'll talk and frighten the chap away long before we can get near him. Now, here we are—"

They heard Bruce bellowing like an angry rhino long before they reached the dining-room, and when they climbed through the window, Nipper had hard work to keep a straight face. The place was now lighted by half a dozen candles, and, whilst Mull and a shocked butler were trying to straighten the wreckage, Bruce was vowing fire and vengeance on the whole world!

"It's an outrage, Mull!" he fumed, striding up and down the room like a caged lion. "I'm your guest, and you allow me to be robbed in this bare-faced manner! You've no system, sir, or this couldn't have happened!" He swung round as Lee and Nipper entered the room. "As for you, sir, I'd have had the hound only for your blundering idiocy!"

"Don't be an ass, Bruce!" Mull exclaimed. "You know these chaps as Lee and Hamilton, but when I tell you they are Nelson Lee and Nipper, the famous criminologists, you'll see that your remarks are both silly and offensive."

"We'll let that go," Lee said quickly. "I'm trying to understand how that fellow knew the stone would be shown in this room to-night. Did you mention the fact to anyone, Bruce?"

"Certainly not!" Bruce snorted.

"Did you, Mull?" Lee then asked.

"Not to a soul," Sir James replied. "I met Bruce at the club this morning and invited him up to dinner. Later on, a crowd of us were chatting about the jewel robberies in this district, and it was then that Bruce mentioned his green diamond and said he'd bring it along to-night."

"Then a score of chaps knew about it from the start," Lee said, in disgust. "As some of them were bound to talk, that score might have grown to a hundred by afternoon."

"What about the electric lights, guv'nor?" Nipper said, examining the smashed bracket. "Looks to me as if the wires have been cut earlier on, then loosely joined and all ready to be pulled down at any moment."

Nelson Lee pointed to a long white cord fastened to the fallen bracket.

"That cord, plugged along the ceiling, would be invisible," he said. "It held the loosely joined wires, and the other end was hidden behind this window curtain. The moment Bruce showed his diamond, the fellow cut the cord and the whole thing crashed down on the table."

"Nonsense!" Bruce snorted. "Why all that

trouble, when he could have switched the lights off far more easily?"

"Because the switch is on the opposite wall, and away from any cover," Lee explained patiently. "In this window recess, he was hidden and ready for his getaway at any moment."

"Pardon, sir, but you're right," the butler suddenly exclaimed. "A chap came this afternoon to examine the meter. Said he was from the lighting company, and 'fore he left he found something wrong in here. Messing about for an hour, 'e was, but I never guessed the game 'e was up to."

That sent Bruce off the deep end again. But Nelson Lee took no notice, for a draught from the open window stirred the candles and one dancing beam suddenly flashed on something half hidden by the fallen curtain. In an instant he was down on hands and knees, and, a moment later, he held up a cheap, horn-handled penknife.

"Does this knife belong to any of you?" he demanded, and nodded satisfaction when all three disclaimed ownership.

"Then our thief must have dropped it in his hurry," he said. "This horn handle holds no finger-prints, unfortunately, but it might have other secrets." He glanced up at Nipper. "Young 'un, bring my case from the car."

During Nipper's absence, Nelson Lee opened the two blades, nodded again, but made no comment. When Nipper returned with the fitted case that always accompanied them out of town—it was packed with weird instruments—he curtly ordered the youngster to rout out and fix the microscope.

Whilst Nipper held the beam of his torch steadily on the knife, the great detective eyed the open blades through the powerful magnifying-glasses. He saw now that the edge of the biggest blade was stained with deep brown marks, and he was about to remark on these when Bruce again butted in.

"You're wasting time, Lee!" he said hastily. "I'll warrant there's a score of footprints outside, and you ignore those while you fool about with a penknife!"

Lee took his eye from the lens and glanced up at the fuming colonel.

"A man clever enough to work this coup won't care how many footprints you find," he snapped. "The garden has already told me he was wearing pumps with wool socks over them, and you can be very sure they would be destroyed the moment he got safely away."

"You don't know that—you're just guessing blindly," Bruce argued. "Anyway, I've no opinion of the Blandford police, but I'm going to report my loss to Sergeant Tuttle and see what he can do for me."

Lee took no notice of that. He was carefully tapping the handle of the knife over a sheet of white paper; then, as the irate colonel stumped from the room and banged the door noisily, Lee looked up with a smile.

"Now, Mull, I can speak without all Blandford knowing the clues I've found," he said. "The blade of this knife has been carefully cleaned, but tell me what you think of it, Nipper."

Nipper stared intently through the microscope. "Looks to me as if it's been used for cutting plug tobacco," he said. "But it's a deeper colour than most tobacco, guv'nor, almost as if the chap's been slashing tarred rope."

"It's tobacco all right, young 'un, stuff strong enough to dope an elephant," Nelson Lee smiled. "Magnified, the stain shows slightly lighter in patches. That means the tobacco has been matured in molasses, and it tells me the

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stuff is probably a ripe plug called 'Warhead.' "

Mull opened his eyes at this, for the ways of a scientific detective were new to him. But more surprising things were to follow, for Lee now reached for the white paper on which he had tapped the dust from the knife, and this dust he gently shook on to the 'stage' of the microscope.

After a long examination, he looked up with twinkling eyes.

"Besides smoking 'Warhead' plug, the owner of this knife had strong sporting inclinations," he said. "He often goes about in a black and white sports jacket, but his taste in clothes is far more expensive than his taste in tobacco. He likes a game of golf occasionally, and he's not above a bit of shooting when it comes his way."

"Crikey, guv'nor!" Nipper gasped. "You've only got to give us the chap's name and address, and the case is finished!"

"You're either a champion guesser, or a wizard!" Mull said. He stared through the lens, and shook his head. "I can only see two spots of fluff, a dozen black specks, and a few tiny white lumps. Now, what are you getting at?"

"The fluff is black and white wool of the finest quality," Lee explained, with a smile. "The black specks are powder from a cartridge, the

white lumps are chippings from an enamelled golf ball." He placed the tell-tale slide in an envelope and sealed it. "Those bits have worked into the knife from the fellow's pocket—I suppose you've no idea whom the clues might apply to, Mull?"

Sir James shook his head.

"Then there's nothing more we can do to-night," he said. "To-morrow, young 'un, you can hunt the Blandford tobacco shops, while I have a lazy day at your club, Mull."

"Bruce will be pleased—to see you lazing, guv'nor," Nipper grinned. "He'll expect you to go tearing about the town, looking for the thief with a gun in each hand."

Nelson Lee actually winked.

"The gallant colonel is going to help us immensely," he said. "But not a word—for the present."

CHAPTER 2.

NIPPER MEETS A CYCLONE.

THE tale of Bruce's stolen diamond was all over the town early next morning. The police were frenziedly trying to pick up clues, the old colonel was ordering them about as if he owned them, and everyone

knew that the great Nelson Lee was on the job.

But Lee was about the calmest man in Blandford, and woefully disappointing to those who looked for some dramatic action on his part. It was after eleven o'clock when he strolled into the County Club with Sir James Mull—and, once there, he refused to do anything but read the morning papers and gossip!

Nipper, however, was early at work. Leaving Mull's house immediately after breakfast, he began a tour of the tobacco shops, and a weary job it proved for nearly three hours. Quite a number of places stocked "Warhead," but not one could tell him of a regular customer for that full-strength plug—and it was almost the last shop in the place that brought him luck.

He walked into it behind a burly, bearded chap, whose blue jersey and reefer coat stamped him as an old sailorman right away. To Nipper's interest, the fellow asked for: "The usual, matey," and "the usual" was a three-ounce plug of "Warhead"!

As he turned to leave the shop he saw Nipper and started. His mouth opened to speak, and he half lifted a clenched fist; then, mumbling something under his breath, he slouched out of the place and away.

"Rum lad, that," Nipper chuckled. "Thought he was going to land out at me. What's got him, mister?"

The chap behind the counter grinned.

"He's Sam Burge, and as surly a brute as we have in Blandford," he answered. "Comes up here twice a week for his 'Warhead,' and just grunts for it like you heard him."

"Must give his missus a time, if he scowls like that at home," Nipper said, fishing for information.

"He ain't got no missus, thanks be," the shopkeeper replied. "He lives all alone in Acacia Cottage, the end of this road." He laughed, and leaned chattily on his counter. "I happens to own that cottage and the one next door, and I don't suppose there's two rummier tenants in England than Burge and his neighbour."

"How d'you mean?" Nipper asked, with more interest than the shopkeeper suspected.

"Why, there's him and John Carden, livin' alongside each other and hatin' one another like poison. They both live alone, and you'd think they'd chum up for the sake of company like. But no, Burge has his morning stroll till twelve, and Carden won't step out of the house for fear o' meeting him. I tell yer, young sir, it's a reg'lar comedy a-watchin' 'em like I do."

Nipper nodded, bought a box of matches and cleared out of the shop as quickly as he could.

"Crikey! So Burge lives alone, and takes a morning stroll, does he?" he muttered, hurrying along the road. "My hat! What a chance, if only I can get inside."

He hadn't the least doubt that Burge was the fellow they wanted, for his start of fear and mode of living alone made his guilt appear certain.

Nipper soon reached the cottage, which proved to be a semi-detached house with a strip of garden back and front. In broad daylight the lad had to be doubly careful, but after banging on the front door and getting no reply, he thought it safe to try the back of the house.

The back garden was well suited to his purpose, for only a low wall separated it from the river, and it was quite free from prying neighbours. The next thing he noticed was a kitchen window open three or four inches, and in just as many seconds he had opened it still further and climbed over the sill.

The breakfast dishes still littered the table, and Nipper's nose wrinkled at the dirt and dis-

order of the place. But he was there to find the green diamond, or some real proof that Burge had stolen it—and quite suddenly he saw the proof and jumped for it!

"My hat!" he gasped. "If the silly ass hasn't left his footgear lying about for anybody to find!" He lifted the soil-crustured socks and pumps from beneath a tattered couch. "Gosh, this is enough to get him put away—"

A hand dropped like lead on his shoulder, and he swung round with a jolt that made his senses swim! The swarthy, bearded face of Burge was within three inches of his own, and the fellow's eyes glinted murderous rage!

"You young hound!" Burge snarled. "So you were following me, an' you've found more'n what's good for yer health, me hearty! What d'yer mean, sneakin' into a man's 'ouse?"

He punctuated each word with a shaking that set Nipper's teeth rattling like castanets, until Nipper jammed the shoes in his face, ducked and twisted free, and sprang round the table.

"You can simmer down, Burge," he said defiantly, edging towards the open window. "The game's up, and the more fuss you make now, the longer sentence you'll get."

"I ain't gettin' no sentence!" Burge hissed. "If I'm caught, it'll be for something worse than stealin', an' you won't be here—come away from that winder!"

Nipper sprang for the open, but the brute snatched a heavy cruet from the table and flung it straight at the lad's head! Then he sent the table spinning into Nipper's path, up-ended it in his face, and edged round to get a fresh hold on his victim!

But Nipper wasn't waiting. The fellow's threats and glaring eyes made him wonder if Burge was quite sane—and, leaving the question unanswered, he tore the door open and sprinted down the lobby for all he was worth!

A single glance showed that the street door was bolted top and bottom and could never be opened in time. Even as he hesitated, a steel poker whizzed past his ear, splintered a panel of the door and dropped with a clang at his feet!

As he turned, Burge swooped on him with arms outstretched and a tigerish grin of victory on his face. But Nipper dodged beneath the arms, swung his fist to Burge's chin, then sprang for the stairs as a last refuge.

Burge thundered after him before he was a third way up, but Nipper reached the landing with a stride to spare. Jumping for a bed-room door, he banged it in the brute's face and groped swiftly for the key.

But his luck was out and the keyhole empty. Against the sailor's enormous strength he was helpless, and he felt the polished doorknob turn slowly in his hand, in spite of all his efforts to hold tight.

Then Burge applied his shoulder, and Nipper had barely time to spring back a pace when the door crashed on its hinges. The fury of the man's charge sent him staggering into the room, and before he could recover his balance Nipper thudded with a right and left on his jaw that sounded like the slaps of a spade on wet clay!

But that only increased Burge's rage, and with a bear-like growl, he sprang for Nipper with hands groping for throat-hold. Nipper knew now that he was fighting for his life. In a flash, he dropped on one knee as Burge charged, grabbed the fellow's insteps and heaved with every muscle in his body!

It was an ideal tackle, and the heavy sailor flew over Nipper's head with a yell of rage and fear. He landed in the middle of the bed with a force that shook the room, and before he

could gather his scattered wits Nipper tangled him in the bedclothes and streaked for the door!

Two hair-raising leaps carried him to the foot of the stairs, and another five seconds saw him racing down the garden path to freedom. Even then he was barely in time, for Burge took the whole flight in a whirlwind leap and only paused when he saw that Nipper had safely reached the high road.

Thinking quickly as he ran, Nipper decided he had better 'phone the guv'nor before taking any further action. His proper course, perhaps, would have been to report to the police, but Nelson Lee's way was to finish a job himself and not go round asking anyone for help.

In less than a minute he had found a call office and was through to the County Club. Nelson Lee was soon at the other end of the wire, and Nipper began to blurt out his tale.

"I've found the chap, guv'nor—a sailor living alone in Acacia Cottage, end of High Street," he said. "I got into his house, spotted the socks and shoes he'd worn, and then he nabbed me. The beggar's half mad with rage at gettin' bowled out, and— What's that? Does he wear a sports coat and play golf? Crikey! I dunno, but I tell you I've got proof certain that he's the Blandford thief!" He listened to Nelson Lee's crisp orders, and his eyes opened with amazement. "You want me to wait an hour—then come and tell my tale openly at the club? Gosh! Don't you understand, guv'nor? The chap knows I've found him out, and he'll be making a getaway at this moment!"

He listened again, shouted a disgusted "Right-oh!" and rang off. "Gosh!" he muttered. "I found the chap, nearly had me head knocked off for me pains, and now the guv'nor's content to play about while Burge clears off with the spoil!"

But orders were orders, and though Nipper felt absolutely fed up at the guv'nor's indifference, he was forced to face an hour's inactivity when every second counted!

CHAPTER 3.

THE END OF SAM BURGE!

NIPPER waited the hour out, but not a second longer. Giving his name to the hall porter, he was taken at once to the club smoke-room—and there he found Nelson Lee lounging back in a comfortable arm-chair. Sir James Mull sat facing him. Colonel Bruce, a police-sergeant, whom Nipper guessed was Tuttle, and a stranger who looked like a fashion plate, completed the circle.

"The police, Tuttle, are a set of dunderheads!" Bruce was growling, as Nipper entered. "Why don't you do something—you pack of asinine porpoises?"

Tuttle coloured, and wriggled uncomfortably.

"You're hardly fair, sir," he rumbled. "We haven't a clue to go on—we've hunted the town high and low."

"Then hunt again, and find your clues, you—you mutton-headed muddler!" Bruce snapped. He would have said a lot more, but Lee spotted Nipper and beckoned him forward.

"Ah! Nipper, I was wondering where you had got to," Lee said, and Nipper guessed then that no mention must be made of his 'phone call. "Now, you were hunting the tobacco shops for a fellow smoking 'Warhead,' were you not?"

Nipper stared.

"I was, and I jolly well found him," he answered. "But where he's got to now, guv'nor—"

"We'll hear your story, please," Lee said coldly.

"Well, I found the chap in nearly the last shop on my list," Nipper began. "A surly-looking beggar he was, named Burge—"

"Sam Burge, d'you mean?" Tuttle interrupted. "Him that lives in Acacia Cottage—a sailorman?"

"That's the fellow," Nipper admitted. "And a sour-tempered sweep he is!"

"There now, Mr. Carden," Tuttle exclaimed, turning to the well-dressed stranger. "You've always hated Burge, and it looks as if you were right in saying your next-door neighbour was a scamp."

"Wouldn't put anything past Burge," Carden agreed laughingly. "But I don't understand—I've only just entered the club—what's it all about, Tuttle?"

Tuttle took the horn-handled knife from his pocket—he had claimed it from Lee as one of his "exhibits."

"This here knife was discovered after someone had stolen the colonel's diamond," he said importantly. "It was found that the blade held the stains of 'Warhead' 'baccy, and this boy 'as been lookin' for th' chap as smoked it."

"I see," Carden said, slowly and quietly.

"We'll have your story, Nipper," Lee said, smiling at Tuttle's way of ignoring his work with the microscope.

"I found Burge actually buying the stuff, learned where he lived, and got into his house," Nipper continued. "But he must have recognised me from last night, and was waiting for me." He then told of his finding the socks and shoes worn by Burge, and of the desperate fight that followed. "I got away by the width of my whiskers, guv'nor, but I'll be surprised if Burge is waiting for any more visitors."

"And we're sitting here like fools!" Bruce snorted. "Your duty's plain, Tuttle; get out and arrest the fellow, you idiot!"

"We'll all go," Carden said, jumping to his feet with a grin. "I'll be glad to see the last of Burge—always had the idea my next-door neighbour was a wrong 'un."

Five minutes later, Tuttle was banging on Burge's door, as if he meant to knock the house down. There was no answer, of course, and when Nipper mentioned how he had got into the place, a rush was made for the rear.

Tuttle, Bruce, and Carden dashed into the kitchen, but Nelson Lee signed to Mull and Nipper to wait.

"The house is empty," he said. "But look at the bottom wall of the garden—the creeper's torn to bits and someone has departed that way, in a very great hurry."

"The beggar hasn't tried to hide his trail," Nipper murmured. "He's got away, as I expected, — guv'nor, and I can't understand why—"

He shut up as Bruce and the others came from the house to say it was empty, and a move was made to the end of the garden. Looking over the low wall, they stared down at the sluggish River Stour—and there they saw a sight that brought cries of alarm from every lip.

Still fastened to a staple in the wall, they saw an overturned boat! A yachting cap had caught on the lowest branch of a tree that dipped to the water's edge, and a coat had floated back to a mud patch lower down the river!

"Um—so that's the end of Sam Burge," Tuttle muttered. "Y'see what's happened, gen'l'men—he's been makin' a mad dash to escape, an' 'e's slipped from th' top of this 'ere wall. Over—"

(Continued on page 43.)

HOW TO JOIN THE LEAGUE

ST. FRANK'S LEAGUE APPLICATION

FORM No. 52.

SECTION

A

READER'S APPLICATION FOR MEMBERSHIP.

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 that I have introduced "THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY" and THE ST. FRANK'S LEAGUE 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 the Membership Number assigned to me, and Membership Badge.

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."

(FULL NAME)

(ADDRESS)

INSTRUCTIONS.

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. 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, bearing the same number, are needed. 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 that each pair of forms bears the same date and number.

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THE GREEN EYE!

(Continued from page 41.)

turned th' boat, 'e has, an' 'e's gone under for sartin'!"

"And taken my diamond with him!" Bruce hooted. "We've got to drag the river, Tuttle—wake up, man!"

"But it's running water, colonel," Tuttle protested. "E might ha' drifted a mile or more, by now."

"Can't help that!" Bruce snapped. "We'll drag the Stour and find Burge—if we take a month to do it!"

"Quite a good idea," Nelson Lee agreed. "You'll help, Carden, as Burge was a neighbour?"

Carden hesitated.

"Y-yes, I suppose so," he growled, evidently not relishing the job.

Nipper marvelled still more over the operations that followed, but he knew better than to question the gov'nor's actions at such a time. Dragging nets were sent for, and volunteers obtained, but Nelson Lee seemed to take a vicious delight in pushing Carden forward for all the heaviest and dirtiest jobs during the hours that followed.

Bruce hounded the weary gang on until dusk made the work doubly difficult. Then Carden, whose scowls had been growing as the hours passed, hung down his end of the net and rounded on the colonel.

"You can drag the rest of the rotten river yourself, Bruce," he snarled. "I've had enough—and I'm going home to a bath and bed." And, in spite of all Bruce started to say, he turned sulkily away.

"Bruce, be guided for once, and shut up!" Lee whispered. He hurried after Carden, and said aloud: "We're all tired, Carden—you've no objection to us resting and having a pipe in your house for a minute or so?" Giving him no chance to refuse, Lee turned quickly to the others. "Come along, you fellows, I've something to say to you in Carden's place."

They were all very tired, and hardly a word was spoken until they were in Carden's little sitting-room. Then Nelson Lee turned to Tuttle.

"Now, sergeant, lend me that knife a moment," he requested.

Tuttle surrendered the penknife found in Mull's dining-room, and all eyes turned on Lee.

"We all know about the tobacco stain, but it will be news to most of you that this penknife held a second and more important clue," Nelson Lee said quietly. "Strange, isn't it, Carden, how often a brilliant scheme is ruined by one tiny flaw?"

"What d'you mean, Lee?" demanded Carden.

"I'm talking about the blade-sheath of this knife—the metal lining that the blades snap into," Lee drawled. "When I examined the knife last night, I shook out a quantity of dust from the sheath—the scourings of a man's pocket! I examined them under a powerful microscope, Carden."

"Well?" Carden whispered, with dry lips.

"The dust told me that the owner of this knife wore a black and white sports coat, played golf, and went shooting," Lee said, slowly and distinctly.

"What's all this to do with me?" said Carden.

"Only that I've traced the fellow—one hears such a lot of gossip in the club smoke-room," Lee drawled. His voice suddenly became sharp and challenging: "But it's getting dark, Carden—light that lamp over your head!" he rapped out.

Carden's breath came like the sound of a thin whistle; but, after a moment's hesitation, he struck a match, jumped on a chair, and made as if to light a lamp of crusted, coloured glass.

Then he suddenly tore the thing away from its holding and took a flying leap from chair to door! His move was so totally unexpected that not a soul in the room moved—except Nelson Lee!

The great detective had been watching him like a hawk, and Carden had barely two seconds start before Lee was through the door and after him. Those in the room heard a shot and the sound of a fierce struggle; then, as they streamed out to the open, they saw Carden and Lee tossing on the grass—but Lee was on top and busily wrenching a smoking revolver from Carden's hand!

With four men piling on him, Carden's struggles came to an end. He was hauled back into the room—then Colonel Mannington Bruce could hold his peace no longer.

"I don't know what game you're playing, Lee," he fumed. "But Carden's my friend, and I hope you can justify your high-handed actions."

"I hope I can," Lee smiled. "Anyway, Nipper, see if you can find the coat I'm looking for, in Carden's bed-room—and a hidden way from this house to the one next door!"

Nipper was about to leave the room when a hoarse growl from Carden brought him to a stand.

"You needn't trouble to go," he snarled. "Hang you! The game's finished, and I might as well admit that the coat's there, and that the wardrobe hides a sliding panel opening to next door."

"Gosh, gov'nor!" Nipper gasped. "Then Carden and Burge have been working the thefts together?"

"There's no such fellow as Burge," Lee answered quietly. "In plain English, Carden and Burge are one and the same person—and I'm afraid Blandford has been badly spoofed!"

"Preposterous!" Bruce snapped. "We've all seen Burge, and we all know Carden well enough."

"But have you ever seen them together?" Nelson Lee asked.

"You're right, Lee!" Mull cried suddenly. "Carden would never leave his house while Burge was about—said he hated the fellow too much to look at him!"

"He's fooled us nicely, and I looked upon you as the biggest ass in England," Bruce admitted ruefully. "But I haven't got the diamond back yet—"

Nelson Lee lifted the coloured lamp and pointed to a big green gem set amongst stones of many shades and tints.

"There's your green stone, and the other jewels stolen in Blandford will also be here," he said. "A clever hiding-place, for few would suspect an old lamp of holding stones worth thousands."

"But I say, gov'nor," Nipper protested. "As you know all this, why let us spend the afternoon dragging that beastly river?"

Lee's eyes twinkled.

"Well, young 'un, Carden arranged the sad accident, so I thought it only fair to let him look for the body," he answered.

Carden's opinion of that was more forcible than polite; but when the heavy hand of Sergeant Tuttle dropped on his shoulder, he suddenly became very quiet!

THE END.

(More mystery, thrills and surprises in next week's gripping yarn of NELSON LEE and NIPPER—*"THE SLEEPING MYSTERY!"* Order your NELSON LEE LIBRARY in advance!

HANDFORTH'S FLAG DAY!

(Continued from page 35.)

across the road a new building was going up, and there was a huge pool of ready-mixed mortar in full sight—a great mass of the stuff, three or four feet deep.

"Justice always provides a way!" said Willy happily.

Forrest and Gulliver and Bell, one after the other, were sent hurtling headfirst into the sticky, liquid mortar. They vanished, and emerged in the most appalling condition. But it was a light enough punishment considering their vicious, contemptible trick.

"That's that!" said Willy calmly, as his major came up. "No, Ted, don't trouble! They've had their dose! Take my advice, and buzz off to the River House School, and watch the match."

"The match!" said Handforth, with a start.

"Yes, rather," said Willy. "It only started ten minutes ago, and if you hurry, you'll still see most of it."

Handforth turned to his chums with gleaming eyes.

"Come on!" he said tensely. "See most of it, eh? By George! We'll do more than see!"

As it happened, that match was destined to lead to a series of events which would eclipse everything that had gone before. The present episode was over, and Edward Oswald Handforth had gone a further step in his whirlwind career as Captain of the Remove!

THE END.

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