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THE

HAUNTED SCHOOLBOY!

*An exciting long complete story featuring the
Mystery Funk and the Boys of St. Frank's.*



"Hallo! What's this?" exclaimed Handforth, when he saw the white feather that was pinned to the door of Harry Gresham's study. Then, as he realised its significance, he roared: "The cads! What a dirty trick!" Harry Gresham just looked on ashamedly; he knew he deserved it!

The Funk of the Remove!The School Against Him!

THE HAUNTED SCHOOLBOY!



By EDWY SEARLES BROOKS

The Boys of St. Frank's in another enthralling long complete story of mystery and adventure.

CHAPTER 1.

THE WHITE FEATHER!

HARRY GRESHAM stared at the door of Study J. in the Remove passage of the Ancient House. He stared with startled eyes, and his heart almost seemed to miss a beat.

"Oh, the cads!" he muttered tensely.

He was probably the first junior down, and he had taken care to avoid any possible meeting with the other fellows. He wanted to be alone—and he had come to his study so that he could shut himself up. On such a fine May morning as this, hardly anybody would venture into the study passage. The appeal of the sunshine and the open air was strong.

His eyes glowed as he stared. It wasn't exactly the door which aroused these emotions within him, but something which was pinned to the door, at the level of his face. Only a small thing, too—a harmless object enough, in itself, but grimly significant in what it stood for.

A white feather!

Just that. An ordinary feather from an ordinary chicken, fixed to the door by means of a drawing pin.

Harry Gresham bit his lip as he continued to stare at that emblem. It was meant for him—it was like an accusing finger, pointing at him. Funk! That was what that white feather was saying to him! Funk! That was what it was meant to imply.

A footstep sounded at the end of the passage, and Harry Gresham glanced round hurriedly. Edward Oswald Handforth hove into view. The famous leader of Study D was whistling cheerily, if discordantly, and he was on his way to fetch his cricket bat. There was time for a knockabout on Little Side before breakfast-gong.

"Hallo, Gresham!" said Handforth, as he came up.

Gresham didn't reply. At that moment he had no desire to speak to anybody, Handforth least of all. Handforth was all right, but he was a noisy fellow, and Gresham longed for quietness.

As the two met, Handforth looked at the

new boy rather straightly. Handforth was always direct in his methods, for there was no subtlety in his composition. Tact was foreign to his nature. Any other junior might have just nodded to Gresham, and passed on. But Edward Oswald Handforth stood still, and stared.

"Feeling better after last night?" he asked bluntly.

Harry Gresham winced.

"Is it necessary to rub it in?" he asked quietly.

"Eh?" said Handforth, with a start. "Oh, sorry! Touched you on the raw, eh? Well, you mustn't think that I agreed with all that rot in the common-room. I was dead against it—Hullo! What's this?"

He had suddenly caught sight of the white feather, and he gazed at it in wonder. Its true significance did not occur to him.

"I suppose somebody thought it was the right decoration for my study," said Harry bitterly. "I'm not grumbling—I know I deserve it."

The one thing about Harry Gresham which saved him with all the decent fellows was that he admitted his faults—he never attempted to minimise his guilt. And he was such a thoroughly good sort in every other respect, too.

He had only been at St. Frank's this term, and he had already proved himself to be a cricketer of the most outstanding quality. He was a real discovery, and Edgar Fenton, the school captain, had put his name on the list for First Eleven practice. An honour such as this, in a junior's first term, was almost unprecedented. Harry was a true son of a famous cricketer father.

He was likeable, too. Nobody knew exactly why they were drawn to him, but it was an undeniable fact that he made friends wherever he went. His good-natured face was generally smiling, and his whole personality was infectious.

But he spoilt everything by being a coward! Even within this short space of time he had given ample proof of his fatal weakness. He was not only terrified into a quivering craven in the sudden event of peril, but he was even afraid of the dark! Left alone in a black place, he would imagine that all sorts of grotesque shapes were around him, and he would flee, screaming.

Things of this sort were apt to prejudice the rest of the fellows against him. And only the previous evening he had been frightened almost into hysterics by a fake ghost. Some of the ill-natured juniors had tested him, and he had failed badly. And on the top of this he had refused to fight Teddy Long, the Remove's outstanding funk.

He had certainly shown the white feather—and had earned the contempt and scorn of the entire Junior School.

"Maybe I deserve it," said Gresham. "All the same, a thing like that is dirty," and he nodded to the door.

Handforth examined the feather.

"It looks clean enough to me," he said critically.

"I didn't mean that," replied Gresham, smiling faintly. "You're an innocent sort of chap, aren't you, Handy?"

Edward Oswald stared.

"What are you getting at?" he asked suspiciously.

"Oh, nothing!" replied Harry in a dull voice. "But you surely know that a white feather stands for cowardice, don't you? If a fellow is a funk they say he is showing the white feather. It's just a——"

"By George!" interrupted Handforth, staring at the feather as though it had become alive. "So they've put this in your door, eh? The cads! The beastly worms! What a filthy, despicable trick!"

Harry looked at him rather warmly.

"Thanks!" he said quietly. "I was half afraid that you'd agree with it. After all, I did show the white feather yesterday, didn't I? There's no sense in denying an obvious——"

"Dry up!" interrupted Handforth curtly. "Whether you showed the white feather or not, there's no excuse for a dirty game like this! I'll bet Forrest's responsible—or Gulliver, perhaps, or some of those other rotters! I'll investigate this, and I'll discover——"

"Please!" broke in Harry earnestly. "For goodness' sake don't make a fuss about it, Handy! You'll only attract the attention of the whole school—and that won't be very nice for me, will it?"

"H'm! Perhaps you're right!" admitted Handforth. "Better keep mum, I suppose. All the same, it's a caddish business!"

"I oughtn't to be upset, though," went on Harry. "When a fellow acts like a coward he can't grumble when he's reminded of it."

Harry's heart was heavy. He knew that he was scorned and despised by practically everybody in the Remove. If he had had any doubts, they were swept away now—for that white feather was eloquent. A few of the more decent juniors—Dick Hamilton, Reggie Pitt, Fullwood, Handforth, etc.—were totally opposed to any sort of victimisation. They disliked cowards with the same whole-hearted contempt, but they did not believe in the policy of jeering and taunting.

In fact, these few juniors were rather drawn towards Harry Gresham because of the hostility of the majority. He was a coward, but there was no reason to treat him as though he were a criminal. In all ordinary matters, Harry Gresham was a likeable, generous sort of junior. And, when all was said and done, it was not the Remove's place to judge him.

"This has hit you pretty hard, eh?" said Handforth curiously.

"Yes," muttered Harry.

"Then why the dickens don't you find out who pinned the thing up, and smash him?" asked Handforth. "It's the only thing to do! Smash him. Challenge him to a fight—Oh, my hat!" he added suddenly. "I'd forgotten! You're not much of a fighter, are you?"

Harry bit his lip again.

"You're going out to play cricket, aren't you?" he asked abruptly.

"Eh? Oh, sorry!" said Handforth, realising that he had put his foot in it again. "Cricket? Well, no. I was, but I've changed my mind. I'm going to stick to you instead, Gresham."

"Stick to me?" repeated Harry, with a look of dismay.

"Through thick and thin!" said Handforth firmly.



CHAPTER 2.

JUST LIKE HANDY!

IT was characteristic of Edward Oswald Handforth to make up his mind like this at a moment's notice.

"Yes, through thick and thin!" he repeated. "It's a rotten trick, the way the chaps are treating you, Gresham. They've got a proper down on you, so I'm going to show them all that I'm your pal! You needn't thank me—my mind's finally made up!"

Harry broke off in the act of speaking. He hadn't been about to thank Handforth at all. In fact, this sudden expression of Handforth's friendship had knocked him all of a heap. He didn't want it, but it was utterly impossible for him to say so. It would be ill-natured to reject Edward Oswald's kindly overtures—for they were well meant. It never occurred to the tactless Handy that his attentions were also embarrassing in the extreme.

Harry was in a dilemma. He couldn't tell Handforth that he didn't want him, and yet his one desire at the moment was to be left alone. He entered his study, hoping that Edward Oswald would take the hint, and go. But Handforth was the last fellow in the school to take a hint. Shouting at him, in the plainest of plain language, was the only way of making him understand.

Handforth plucked the feather down and followed Harry into the study, and closed the door.

"I'm rather glad I got down before the others," he said genially. "I don't approve of all this rotting, Gresham. The fact is, I like you. You may be a funk, but you're a jolly good cricketer, and you're a decent chap in other respects. Why the dickens do you spoil everything by screaming like a kid in the dark?"

Harry was silent.

"Why are you scared to fight anybody?" went on Handforth, unconscious of the fact that his words were causing agony. "You've got to pull yourself together, Gresham. If you'll put yourself in my hands, I'll soon make you different!"

"Duncan's my study mate," said Harry quietly. "He's a good chap, Handy, and he's as decent to me as you are. It—it might worry him if he finds you here, you know. I mean, he's——"

Harry broke off, hardly knowing how to continue.

"If Duncan's worried, that's his own concern," said Handforth crisply. "In my

opinion, he's failed in his duty. He's your study mate, and he hasn't publicly stood up for you once."

"Alec's a good sort," said Harry quietly. "He's——"

He broke off again, for Alec Duncan himself entered the study at that moment. The New Zealand junior lifted his eyebrows when he saw Handforth, and he regarded the pair curiously as he noted their grave expressions.

"Hallo!" he said. "What's up?"

"Some low-down rotter stuck a white feather on the door of this study," replied Handforth, with a glare. "It was meant as a taunt at Gresham, and I've made up my mind to stand by him. If you don't like it, Duncan, you can lump it. Personally, I think you've been jolly weak."

"Weak?" repeated Duncan. "What on earth——"

"Yes, weak!" insisted Handforth. "Gresham is a jolly decent chap in most things. And just because he's a beastly funk the majority of the fellows turn away from him."

Duncan noted Harry's crimson face, and he frowned.

"Draw it mild, old man!" he protested.

"Don't forget Harry's here!"

"Eh? Can't I see he's here, you ass?"

"Well, I mean—— You might be a bit more careful——"

"Oh, don't pull him up, Alec," interrupted Harry. "It's just his way—he can't help being blunt. And, as I am a beastly funk, why should I worry about hearing it plainly spoken?"

Handforth turned red.

"Oh, corks!" he said. "Did I say you were a beastly funk, Gresham? Sorry! So that's why you tried to freeze me just now, Duncan? I wouldn't hurt anybody's feelings for worlds."

"Then you'd better go out to your cricket," said Duncan gruffly. "If you stay here, you'll hurt Harry's feelings every time you open your mouth! Be a good sort, and buzz off!"

This was a fatal policy to adopt with Handforth.

"Not likely!" he said. "I'm going to stand by Gresham—— By George!" he added hotly. "Look at that! Another of 'em!"

He pointed to the mantelpiece, and the other two followed his gaze. Propped against the mirror was a cabinet photograph of Sir Stewart Gresham—Harry's father. Sir Stewart was in cricketing flannels. At the base of the photograph reposed a white feather. Harry's face went pale.

"Oh, it's not fair!" he panted. "They can call me a coward as much as they like—but it's a blackguardly trick to insult my father!"

"I say, this is rotten!" muttered Duncan. "Look here, too—here's your grammar—with a feather stuck in the fly-leaf."

"By George, and there's another one pinned to that cricket bat in the corner!" said Handforth furiously. "The place is smothered with white feathers! The chaps who did this ought to be smashed to pulp!"

"I can't stop them from putting those white feathers against my property, but it's unjust to include my pater!" said Harry passionately. "He's one of the best in the world, and I'm—I'm unworthy of him! I don't know why I'm such a coward but I can't seem to help it. Something goes when I try to fight, or to brace myself up to a sudden crisis. I've tried to conquer it—I'm always trying—but it beats me!"

He sank on to the comfortable lounge, and averted his face. Alec Duncan looked acutely uncomfortable, and even Handforth's rhinoceros-like hide was penetrated. For a moment or two there was an uncomfortable silence.



CHAPTER 3.

SCRATCHED OFF THE LIST!

HANDFORTH was the first to break the silence.

"You're a rummy chap, Gresham," he said bluntly.

"Practically everybody likes you, but when you get scared over nothing, and refuse to fight with a beastly little cad like Long——"

"Shut up, Handforth!" protested Duncan angrily.

"Rats!" said Edward Oswald. "It hurts me to see a good chap like this being sneered at! Look at the way he played cricket! Everybody was praising him then—slapping him on the back, and congratulating him! And now they're shoving white feathers all over the place! By George! Why can't you pull yourself together, Gresham, and show the chaps what you're really made of?"

Harry looked up.

"I've shown them!" he replied bitterly.

"Rot! You're not going to tell me that you're made of jelly!" retorted Handforth curtly. "There's something wrong somewhere, that's all. Just a kink in your brain, perhaps. Most funks are worms of the worst type—like Long or Snipe. But you're not a worm, Gresham. You're a jolly good chap in most things, and I'd like to know why you bunked out of the common-room when Long challenged you to a scrap."

"I'd like to know that, too," said Duncan curiously. "You wouldn't speak to me last night, Harry——"

"What could I say" asked Harry tensely. "There's no explanation at all. So why should I invent one? I don't remember much what happened, if you want to know. I was all confused——"

"That's it!" interrupted Handforth triumphantly. "Those cads had just scared you out in the Triangle, and you were nearly in hysterics! Poor chap, I expect you were half dotty with the strain of it. Didn't know whether you were on your head or your heels, eh? Of course, that explains it—and, in my opinion, the whole thing's clear."

Handforth seemed very eager to find an

excuse for the new boy. Similar to the other fellows, Handforth had taken a strong liking to Harry Gresham, and now that the Remove had turned against him, Handforth was determined to be very nice. It was quite characteristic of him. He had a mania for doing the opposite to everybody else. Most of the juniors were dead set against Harry Gresham, so Handforth was all the more determined to stand by him. It was the breath of life to him to be different! And this white feather business had clinched matters.

"Come out with me!" he said briskly. "I want to show everybody that I'm your pal, Gresham! And the first chap who jeers will get my fist in his eye!"

"Oh, but really, I—I don't want——"

"Rats!" said Handforth, grasping Harry's arm, and pulling him to his feet. "Come on, my son! You, too, Duncan! If you're not staunch enough to stand by him now, I'll give you the licking of your life!"

Alec Duncan gave it up.

"Better humour him!" he muttered. "After all, he means well!"

"What's that?" said Handforth suspiciously.

"Oh, nothing!"

"You'd better not mutter things about me behind my back!" added Handforth with a glare. "I have enough trouble with Church and McClure—— By George! That reminds me! Why aren't those fatheads down?"

"That's it," said Duncan, nodding. "Go and rout them out!"

"I will!" said Handforth indignantly. "The lazy beggars ought to have been down long ago! I'll tickle them up—— Eh? By George!" he added, with a start. "So you want to get rid of me, Duncan, do you? Well, it hasn't worked!"

"Still, it was a good try!" said Alec.

"You—you funny ass!" frowned Handforth. "I've made up my mind to stand by Gresham, and you can go and eat coke! In my opinion, you've failed badly. You're his study mate, and you've done nothing to back him up! So it's my duty to take the affair out of your hands!"

"Well, of all the nerve——" began Duncan.

"Don't have a row over me, for goodness' sake!" interrupted Harry. "I'm miserable enough as it is, without you fellows quarrelling. I much prefer you to leave everything just as it is, Handy. I appreciate your motive, but some of the others might turn against you. And it's not fair that you should be dragged into my troubles."

Handforth laughed.

"Do you think I care if they turn against me?" he scoffed. "Let 'em! I'll take them one by one, and knock the stuffing out of them! When I start on a job, my lad, I finish it."

He fairly hauled Harry out of the study, and as they emerged, they ran into Walter Church and Arnold McClure—both of them looking rather lost. They were never much good when they were parted from their celebrated leader.



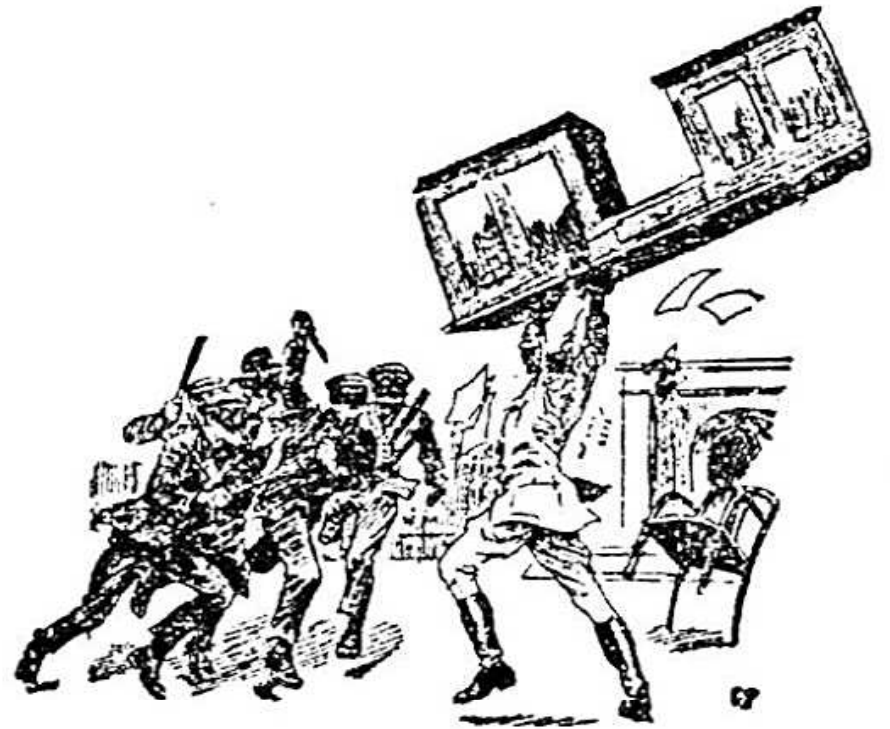
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"Oh, there you are!" said Church, hurrying forward. "We didn't know where you'd got to, Handy."

"Well, you know now," said Handforth.

"I say, what the dickens——" began McClure, and then stopped short.

He was looking at Harry Gresham rather doubtfully, and Church had fallen silent, too.

"Well?" asked Handforth ominously.

"Nun-nothing!" stammered McClure.

"Only—only——"

"Only what?"

"Well, you know, Gresham—— That is—— I don't want to be nasty——"

"If you're going to say anything beastly about my pal, I'll biff you over!" interrupted Handforth aggressively. "My pal, you understand! Harry and I are firm friends—and Duncan is coming along with us as a sort of makeweight. We don't really want him, but I haven't got the heart to leave him out in the cold."

"Well I'm jiggered!" said the amazed Duncan.

Church and McClure looked uncomfortable. "After last night, Handy, it's a bit risky," said Church. "All the fellows are talking about sending Gresham to Coventry. And I must admit he acted pretty funkily. Still, if he's your pal, he's ours. What do you say, Mac?"

"Of course," declared McClure.

Harry Gresham was more distressed than ever.

"I wish you'd all leave me alone!" he burst out miserably. "I'm not fooled! You're only doing this to—to make me feel better. Just out of kindness! It's nice of you, but I don't deserve it—and I don't want you to get into trouble on my account."

"If anybody gets into trouble it won't be us!" said Handforth aggressively. "Come on, Churchy—you, too, Mac! We're going to show the rotters what we think of their beastly white-feather business!"

They marched into the lobby, where a crowd of fellows immediately set up a yell. Handforth was arm-in-arm with Gresham, and he breathed defiance from every pore.

"Well?" he demanded. "Anybody got anything to say?"

"Chuck it, Handy!" said De Valerie. "You're only making yourself cheap by associating with that funk. Why, even Fenton hasn't any use for him."

"What do you mean?" asked Duncan quickly.

"Nothing much," replied Val. "Have a look at the First Eleven list!"

Handforth dragged Harry across to the notice-board, and Harry's heart sank as he looked at the list of players told off for First Eleven practice. His own name had a thick blue-pencil mark through it!



CHAPTER 4.

THE REMOVE OBJECTS!

ARRY GRESHAM felt utterly wretched. So his high hopes were already dashed to the ground! On the previous day he had gloried in the fact that he had been selected for the First Eleven practice—with the chance of playing in a really big match. All that was now killed.

"Who—who did this?" roared Handforth. "Fenton," said Hubbard. "He came in five minutes ago and shoved his blue pencil through Gresham's name. Quite right, too. Gresham's disgraced the Lower School——"

"I don't want any opinions from you, Arthur Hubbard!" thundered Handforth. "What a dirty trick! Gresham's good at cricket, isn't he? It's a mean, contemptible trick to victimise him like this! I'm going to see Fenton, and I'll give him a piece of my mind!"

"If you're simply asking for trouble, go ahead!" put in Owen major. "It's a bit risky for a junior to give a piece of his mind to the school captain! You'll get a twisted ear, Handy!"

Dick Hamilton—generally known as "Nipper"—came along at that moment, and his cheery face clouded over as he noted the glaring eyes, and the general air of hostility.

"What's all this?" he asked, looking from one to another.

"Handy's making an ass of himself again, that's all!" growled De Valerie. "Making an exhibition of himself by publicly parading Gresham as a little tin god! The rest of us are sick of him!"

"That's a whopper!" interrupted Duncan hotly. "Handy's only doing this to show that he disapproves of caddishness. Two wrongs don't make a right, and whatever we think of Gresham's behaviour, there's no need to make the man's life a misery."

"You hear what they're saying, Nipper?" roared Hubbard.

"Yes, and I agree," said Nipper.

"What!"

"Of course I agree," replied the junior captain calmly.

"Good man!" said Handforth.

"But what about last night?" demanded De Valerie. "What about Gresham bunking from that miserable funk, Long?"

Nipper sighed patiently.

"If all you fellows would think a bit, you'd have a bit more human nature in you," he replied cuttingly. "It's just possible—but only just, I'm afraid. You're a callous lot."

"Look here——" began Owen major.

"Last night Gresham was almost scared into hysterics," continued Nipper grimly. "I'm not excusing him for that—although it's possible he may have had reason. You drag the poor chap into the Common-room while

he's still shaky from the effects, and expect him to fight! It was only a trumped-up affair, after all—just to make him look ridiculous. I don't blame him for bolting out of it."

"Well I'm jiggered!" said De Valerie.

"If you'd leave the fellow alone, instead of pestering him, I dare say he would appreciate it," went on Nipper, giving Handforth a direct look. "Why don't you be a bit sporting and forget yesterday?"

"We don't forget funks!" said Hubbard sourly.

A wild yell suddenly came from the Junior passage.

"Handy!" howled McClure. "The study!"

"Eh?" gasped Handforth, turning round. "What the——"

"Quick!" shrieked Mac. "The study!"

He ran down the passage like the wind, shouting all the way, and Church raced after him. Handforth, with visions of Study D in flames, or something equally disastrous, pelted after them. He tore in, and looked round breathlessly. The door closed with a slam behind him, and he heard the key turn in the lock.

"What the dickens——" he gasped. "There's nothing wrong with the study, you fatheads!"

"Who said there was?" asked McClure.

"You did!"

"No, I didn't!" denied Mac. "It was just a wheeze to get you away from Gresham. We've got to do drastic things like that with you, Handy. Ordinary talking isn't any good!"

Handforth took a deep, deep breath.

"Do you mean to say you've tricked me here?" he demanded.

His chums eyed him warily.

"Well, more or less," said Church. "Now, keep cool, Handy—keep cool! You heard what Nipper said, didn't you?"

"Yes, I did!" replied Handforth. "I agree with him, too."

"In that case we're safe," said McClure. "Nipper told you not to pester Gresham, and I'm glad you realise——"

"Pester him?" yelled Handforth. "Why, you—you——"

"Can't you see the poor chap is suffering?" demanded Church. "Why make things worse by converting him into a public exhibition? Stand up for him, if you like—but you needn't parade him about!"

"He was in an awful state of discomfort," said McClure.

Handforth looked at them in amazement.

"By George! Do you really think so?" he asked blankly.

"Certain of it," replied Church, nodding.

"Nipper's right, I dare say—and I'm quite willing to give Gresham a chance. But it's not nice to constantly remind him of yesterday."

At last Handforth began to see it, and Church and McClure breathed more freely. They had half expected a big row in the study, but there was really never any tell-

ing with Handforth. He cooled down, and eyed his chums approvingly.

"You're right!" he declared. "We'll leave Gresham alone for to-day—but if anybody insults him in my hearing I'll flatten their giddy noses. And when I find out who put all those white feathers about, I'll slaughter him!"

"What white feathers?" asked Church curiously.

And while Handforth was explaining, an ever-increasing mob of the lesser Removeites gathered in the Ancient House lobby, and held a kind of indignation meeting. The chief reason for this was because of a Junior Eleven notice. The list of players for the match against Bannington Grammar School on the Saturday had been put on the board, and Harry Gresham's name was included. It had not been scratched off.

There had been an inter-House match—just a trial game—and Harry Gresham had revealed startling prowess as a cricketer. And Nipper had naturally included him in the team for the first important fixture of the season.

On the previous day the Remove had been enthusiastic. But, with the swift changeability of schoolboys they had now turned rightabout. Harry Gresham was a funk, and his cricketing capabilities were forgotten.

"His name has got to be scratched off!" said Bernard Forrest indignantly. "We don't want cowards in the Junior team."

"Not likely!"

"We've got plenty of cricketers without funks!" said Doyle.

"Where's Hamilton?" roared somebody else.

"Anybody want me?" asked Nipper, as he entered from the Triangle.

The angry crowd faced him.

"You've got to cross Gresham's name off!" shouted Hubbard. "Fenton's done it, and you've got to do it! We're all of the same opinion!"

"Hear, hear!"

"We don't want cowards!"

"Cross his name off, Hamilton!"

Nipper looked at the excited juniors with perfect coolness.

"You're a fine lot of sportsmen, aren't you?" he asked, in a withering voice. "By Jove, hardly one cricketer among the lot of you! And you think you can dictate to me!"

"We're not standing Gresham in the team!" roared Gulliver.

"Not at any price!" went up a chorus.

"That's a pity!" said Nipper calmly. "As it happens, I'm Junior skipper, and I'm going to play the best available men. Gresham happens to be available, and he also happens to be the best. His name stands!"

"You're going to play him, in spite of what happened?" roared the crowd.

"His name stands!" repeated Nipper smoothly.



CHAPTER 5.

A JOB FOR ARCHIE!

AFTERNOON lessons were over.

Harry Gresham had spent one of the most miserable days of his life. Nobody had been actually hostile to him, but everywhere he went he met with cold, contemptuous looks—icy stares—and he had suffered the cut direct on twenty different occasions.

Fellows went out of their way to avoid passing him. They turned their backs deliberately when he approached. Many of the juniors looked upon all this as a sort of game—never dreaming of the agony they were causing their victim.

For Harry Gresham was not an ordinary funk. In most respects, he was one of the nicest fellows the Remove had ever sheltered. It was because of this, perhaps, that he met with such condemnation. The juniors felt that they had been swindled.

Funks like Teddy Long were simply ignored. They were no good, anyhow—they weren't even generous with their pocket-money or clever at games. They were just useless fellows, unworthy of attention. But Harry Gresham was different. He had seemed such an all-round sportsman that the Remove was shocked when it discovered that he was a coward. And, just as they had uproariously congratulated him, they now veered completely in the opposite direction.

Perhaps it wouldn't last long—these things generally peter out after a day or two. But at present Harry was feeling the humiliation intensely. And he was none the happier because he realised that he had earned the scorn of his fellows.

And now that lessons were over, he wanted to get away—to escape from the crowd altogether. And he wandered off without even telling Alec Duncan. Even Alec's kindly presence was not palatable to him just now. He felt that Alec would be sympathetic—and Harry feared sympathy almost as much as he feared contempt. Besides, there was the volcanic Handforth. Handy was bound to start something!

Harry went off for a long ramble. Most of the countryside was unfamiliar to him, and the May afternoon was beautifully warm and sunny. Harry succeeded in escaping, and he was soon in the meadows alone.

In the meantime, Nipper had chanced to meet Edgar Fenton in the Triangle. Fenton was the senior prefect—the captain of St. Frank's—and Nipper was a bit disappointed in him.

"I hear you've scratched Gresham's name off your list for First Eleven practice, Fenton," said Nipper, going straight to the point.

"Yes, haven't you seen the big blue mark?" asked Fenton.

"Of course I have—but I couldn't believe that you'd done it."

"Oh, why not?"

"Well, it didn't seem the sort of thing you'd do, Fenton."

"Look here, young man, what's the idea?" asked Fenton grimly. "I crossed Gresham's name off for a very obvious reason, and I shouldn't think you'd want any amplification. Two and two make four."

Nipper frowned.

"Gresham's personal courage is a matter apart from his cricket," he said quietly. "If ever a fellow deserved a chance in the First, Fenton, Gresham does. Didn't you see his cricket in the House match?"

"Yes, it was wonderful," agreed Fenton. "I've never seen finer for a youngster of his age."

"Then what's the idea of dropping him?" demanded Nipper. "I'm playing him against the Grammar School on Saturday."

"That, of course, is your concern," replied Fenton. "But I'm captain of the First, and I don't want him."

"But it's not fair!" said Nipper indignantly. "I thought you always boasted that you never allowed personalities to—"

"You young ass!" snapped Fenton impatiently. "You want plain speaking, so I'll speak plainly. This fellow, Gresham, is a funk. You needn't try to excuse him—I've heard more than enough to satisfy me. What's going to happen if he gets one of his panicky fits on the cricket-field in a big match? Supposing he's hit by a ball, and starts blubbing?"

"Oh, draw it mild!" protested Nipper. "He's not a baby."

"I can't take any risks of that sort in the First," said Fenton gruffly. "It doesn't matter so much in Junior cricket—but St. Frank's would be the laughing-stock of all the public schools if we played a man who blubbed because he was hit by a ball. No, I'm not taking the chance!"

Fenton walked off, and Nipper bit his lip. He had not thought of this point, and he was compelled to admit that there was something in it. Fenton could not be too careful.

"All the same, it's piffle!" growled Nipper to himself. "Gresham wouldn't act like that in a match! I can see Fenton's point of view—but there's such a thing as carrying caution to the length of absurdity."

He felt annoyed, and was in no way pleased when he observed groups of Removites and Fourth-Formers in various parts of the Triangle, excitedly talking. They were still discussing Harry Gresham's inclusion in the Junior Eleven.

"Trouble of sorts, I take it?" said Archie Glenthorne as he strolled out of the Ancient House, spotlessly attired. "The lads appear to be somewha' full to the brim. Sundry sportsmen have been dashing about like anything don't you know. I mean to say, I was barged into twice. It sort of puts a chappie off his stroke."

"They're a lot of cads!" growled Nipper.

"I'm not upholding Gresham for being a funk, but he's done nothing criminal. By the way these fellows are talking and acting, you might think he'd been round the studies, robbing cash-boxes!"

"Oh, rather!" agreed Archie. "You mean Gresham? The laddie who failed to come up to the good old scratch? I see what you mean! Personally, it's none of my jolly old business, but I regard ³⁰ as murky in the extreme when these bkghters harass the poor cove's life out of him!"

"There are still a few sensible ones left," growled Nipper.

"Oh, rather!" agreed Archie. "Dash it, I like the bloke. Gresham, I mean. Absolutely one of the right sort. I mean, his study is simply bulging with dashed good furniture and effects, and he always totters about in well-cut trousers. A stout lad, if you ask me! One of the absolute ones in every sense of the good old expresh. What-ho! Kindly observe the scenery, laddie!" he added, beaming. "A dashed fair vista, what?"

He raised his silk topper and waved it. Four or five smiling girls had just come in through the big gateway, and Nipper and Archie went out to meet them.

"Why, we couldn't have met anybody better," said Irene Manners, smilingly, as they shook hands. "We're going shopping, and we want some escorts."

"Absolutely on the mark, dear girls," said Archie promptly.

"Of course, strictly speaking, we're not keen on the escorts, but we want somebody to carry our parcels," explained Marjorie Temple, with a chuckle. "I hope you're game?"

"All correct," agreed Archie. "I mean game, what? Kindly give the good old orders, and we'll proceed to dash about, and place ourselves absolutely at your jolly old disposal."

Marjorie had given Archie one of her sweetest smiles, and the swell of the Ancient House, who had a specially warm spot for Marjorie, was quite unable to resist it. When he expressed his willingness to carry parcels, it was a sure sign that his deeper feelings were touched.



CHAPTER 6.

SPOOFED!

EDWARD OSWALD HANDFORTH started.

"Great Scott!" he muttered, aghast.

He had just dashed down the Ancient House steps, and not until he had reached the gravel did he observe the group of girls near the gateway. It was impossible to retreat now, for they had seen him, too, and were waving.

But Handforth felt that he was hardly in a presentable condition. Until this second he had not considered the point, but when Irene came into the picture his thoughts always flew to his personal appearance.



Archie gave a yell of dismay as he sat down on the freshly-sprayed tar with an awful squelch. Quite unconsciously, the dumbfounded workman raised the sprayer, and a stream of the hot tar descended over Archie in a black deluge!

And he was vaguely aware of the fact that he was not looking his best. His collar was crumpled, his trousers were dusty, his jacket had an ugly rent at the elbow, two of his waistcoat buttons were missing, and one of his ears was red, puffy, and felt about as big as a dinner-plate.

Not that there was anything unusual in Handforth's appearance. He looked like this, on and off, several times a week—sometimes twice a day. Nobody ever thought of questioning him; they simply knew that he had been having a little argument in Study D. This particular argument had concerned Harry Gresham. Handforth wanted to invite him to tea, and Church and McClure pointed out that Harry might not appreciate the honour. This little discussion had led to the change in Handforth's appearance. However, he consoled himself with the thought that he was looking as spotless as a fashion-plate compared to Church and McClure. He had left them sorting themselves out on the floor of Study D.

"Crumbs!" muttered Handforth. "They've seen me, and I can't get out of it. I suppose I'd better go over?"

He was relieved to find that the girls refrained from commenting upon his appearance. Possibly they accepted it in the natural order of things.

"Just in time, Ted," said Irene briskly. "We're going to the village, shopping, and Archie has consented to carry our parcels. Won't you come along and help?"

"Rather!" said Handforth readily. "Only too jolly pleased. We'll pop in the confectioners, too, and have some ice-creams."

"Who said Ted hasn't got brains?" remarked Doris Berkeley admiringly.

"He's a genius!" declared Irene, laughing.

"I'd like to come, but it can't be done," smiled Nipper. "Sorry, girls. Affairs of State, you know. I've got to get busy on Little Side with some of the lesser lights of the Junior Eleven."

"Oh, talking about cricket reminds me," said Handforth, with a start. "You've met Gresham, haven't you?"

"Gresham?" repeated Mary Summers. "Who's Gresham?"

"Why, Harry Gresham," said Handforth.

"Never heard of him," said Irene.

"Oh, that's too bad!" said Handforth.

"Gresham's a new chap, but I thought you had been introduced to him ages ago. I'll run along and fetch him. He's a corking cricketer—absolutely as hot as mango chutney! A jolly decent chap, too. You'll like him."

Handforth hurried off, and Nipper glanced after him with warm appreciation. It was

just like Edward Oswald's generous heart to think of a stunning wheeze like that. If all these grumbling juniors saw Harry on good terms with the Moor View girls, they would probably drop a lot of their uncalled-for resentment. Not one of them had the slightest cause to dislike Harry. Indeed, none of them had failed to accept Gresham's bounty when it came to a matter of tuck. He had spent pounds on them.

"Who is this Harry Gresham?" asked Irene interestedly.

"You've heard of 'Hat Trick' Gresham, haven't you?" asked Nipper.

"Who hasn't?" asked Doris, her dark eyes sparkling with enthusiasm. "He's Sir Stewart Gresham, the Hampshire amateur. Oh, is this boy his son?"

"Yes," replied Nipper, smiling. "And he's following in his father's footsteps, as the old song says. He's simply a wonder on the field."

"We shall love to meet him," said Mary.

Handforth, having dashed into Study J, glared aggressively at Alec Duncan, who was repairing a tennis racquet.

"Where's Gresham?" demanded Handforth.

"You needn't bite me," said Alec. "I haven't spirited him away!"

"I want him—at once."

"So do I. if it comes to that; but I can't find the bounder," said the New Zealander junior. "I expect he's about somewhere—in the Common-room, perhaps."

Handforth went out of the study as though he had been swindled, his face aglow with indignation. And his mood was in no way brightened when he ran full-tilt into his minor. The cheery leader of the Third Form was looking anxious, but he smiled all over his face as he caught sight of his major.

"Just the man I wanted to see!" he said crisply.

"Where's Gresham?" demanded Handforth.

"I don't know, and although it may pain you, Ted, I don't care," replied Willy smoothly. "At the moment, I'm not interested in Gresham. What I'm really interested in is the five bob in your pocket."

"Which five bob?"

"The five bob you're just going to hand me," replied Willy blandly.

Edward Oswald took a deep breath.

"By George!" he panted. "Are you starting that five bob stunt again?"

"It's nearly over!" said Willy. "You've only got to hand it to me, and the episode's finished. I'll pass out of your life until—"

"Clear off, you young ass!" said Handforth curtly. "You won't get five bob out of me. There's a limit to your demands. What about your own pocket-money?"

"I've spent three-and-sixpence on a new collar for Marmaduke," said Willy. "And Septimus needed—"

"I don't want to hear about your silly pets!" interrupted Handforth hastily. "I haven't got time to bother with you at all! I'm in a hurry!"

"All right," said Willy. "Give me five

bob, and I'll let you go!"

"You'll let me go?" gasped his major.

"Yes—for five bob," nodded Willy. "We're stoney in our study, and it'll soon be tea-time. You can't expect me to starve, can you? Be reasonable, Ted!"

Handforth fumed. He tried to dodge past, but Willy was as quick as a cat, and barred his way. And it was quite impossible for Handforth to land out with his famous right, for it was against all his rules to hit a fag. He would pull their ears or slap their heads, as befitting children, but he couldn't possibly slosh them.

"I've got nothing smaller than a ten-bob note," he said desperately.

"That's all right," said Willy. "It'll save me coming to you for five bob next time."

"I—I believe I've got some silver, after all," said Handforth hastily as he felt in his pocket. "Yes, half-a-crown and a two-shilling bit."

"Oh, well, I'll let you off the sixpence," said Willy generously.

"You—you—"

Willy deftly lifted the money out of Handforth's grip before the latter could be aware of it. He nodded his thanks, and went off, whistling cheerily. And Edward Oswald drew a deep breath, and marched out into the Triangle.

Owing to his unexpected interview with Willy, he had quite forgotten his mission indoors.

The girls watched him coming, and could see no trace of the promised Harry Gresham. And Handforth gave Doris a cue by a purely innocent remark as he came up.

"Well, here we are!" said Handforth brightly.

"Oh, how do you do!" said Doris, as she gravely shook hands with the air, and winked to the other girls. "We're awfully pleased to meet you, Gresham."

"Rather!" said Irene, smiling sweetly at nothing. "So you're the son of the famous Hat Trick Gresham, eh? Don't you feel very proud of yourself?"

Handforth jumped and looked round.

"By George!" he gasped. "I—I forgot—"

"Well, if you want us to, of course," said Doris shyly, as she continued to address her remarks to the thin air. "But do you think it right that we should call you Harry so soon?"

Nipper chuckled as he slapped at nothing.

"That's the way, Harry!" he said genially. "We're not formal here, you know. This is Irene—Irene Manners. And I'm sure you'll like Doris—"

"But—but—" began Handforth, his eyes bulging. "I can't see him!"

"Can't see Harry?" asked Doris in surprise. "But didn't you bring him, Ted? What's the matter with your eyesight? He can't see you, Harry," she added, turning to the atmosphere again.

The expression on Handforth's face was excruciating as he vainly attempted to see

Harry Gresham by his side. He twirled round, gasping, and when he looked again the girls were crowding in a circle, as though pressing round the imaginary Harry. And they were all talking at once.

"You must come up to our school, Harry," Mary was saying.

"And don't forget to bring Ted with you," added Irene.

"Do we often come?" said Doris, as though she were repeating a question. "Rather! Now that you're here we'll be down every day. I'm sure Irene doesn't want to see Ted any more now."

"What's all this—a new game?" asked Reggie Pitt, of the West House, as he strolled up.

"Handy's just introduced them to Harry Gresham," said Nipper, winking.

"Oh, I see," said Pitt, nodding. "How do, Harry? Eh? Yes, of course—just going over to Little Side now."

Handforth forced his way in among the girls.

"Where is he?" he panted. "I—I can't see him!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Irene couldn't keep it up any longer, and she burst into a shout of laughter.

"Good old Handy—always ready for a leg pull!" chuckled Pitt.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Handforth turned red.

"Why, Gresham isn't here at all!" he said indignantly.

in for. If you'll wait five minutes I'll——"

He hurried off without finishing his sentence, feeling that it was up to him to fetch Harry in the solid flesh without delay.

"Now's our chance," said Doris crisply. "If we wait for Ted to come out we shall be here half the evening. And we've got to get back fairly soon. You'll make our excuses for us, Dick?"

"Leave it to me," said Nipper, smiling.

The girls went on their way to the village, carrying Archie Glenthorne triumphantly with them.

"It's too bad on Ted," protested Irene dubiously.

"Of course, you're prejudiced," smiled Winnie Pitt. "We knew you'd say that, Renie. But didn't you notice Ted's condition?"

"I'm afraid he looked rather untidy," admitted Irene.

"Odd wrecks and derelicts!" ejaculated Archie Glenthorne. "Untidy, what? I mean to say, the old lad was absolutely a dashed scarecrow!"

So they went on their way, feeling that Handforth's exclusion from the party was all to the good. They knew that Archie Glenthorne was very sensitive, and he would have been exceedingly conspicuous against the grubby Edward Oswald.

Archie was quite serene now. He wanted to feel that he was doing this little favour entirely on his own. It was an honour to accompany the girls into the village, so that he could carry their parcels back. Lots of the fellows would have given much for the privilege.

And when Bellton was reached the noble Archie waited serenely outside the milliner's—not knowing that Irene & Co. were preparing a little fun at his expense. They had had a very special reason for not desiring Handforth's company. In this particular instance they wanted Archie entirely to themselves. The girls were apparently feeling in a japing mood this afternoon.

They emerged at last. Marjorie came first, carrying a large cardboard hat-box.

"What-ho!" said Archie, leaping forward and grasping it. "Kindly allow me, Marjorie, old carnation. Absolutely! Why, good gad, the old box is chock full of nothingness! I mean to say, it weighs about as much as a dashed air balloon!"

"It's my new straw hat," explained Marjorie.

Then Doris came with another box, and Archie promptly seized it. Irene followed, and then Winnie. Mary brought up the rear, and she was just in time to see the unfortunate Archie wrestling with the four hat-boxes.

"Oh, it's too bad of us!" said Doris, with twinkling eyes. "I'm afraid you'll think us a dreadful nuisance, Archie."

"Absolutely not!" said Archie stoutly. "The more the merrier, what? The weight is absolutely nothing. Everything, in fact, is all serene-o!"



CHAPTER 7.

MORE THAN HE BARGAINED FOR!

"SORRY I led, but we couldn't resist it!" chuckled Doris. "You said you were going to fetch Harry Gresham,

and when you came out and said, 'Here we are!' we just had to spoof you."

"I don't mind a bit," said Handforth feebly. "I love a little joke. But when you all started talking to the thin air, I thought I was going off my rocker!"

"I don't wonder at it," said Archie, chuckling. "Why, dash it, for a minute I absolutely thought the dear old lad was here. In spirit, as it were. One of those bally spectre things, don't you know? I must say the girls put it over somewhat pricelessly."

"After this, aren't you afraid to come with us?" asked Marjorie.

"Good gad, no!" said Archie. "I have a frightful sort of feeling that you'll attempt to pull the good old Glenthorne leg, but we'll risk it."

"Wait a minute!" said Handforth, gradually recovering. "I'll buzz in and fetch Gresham. It was Willy's fault, the young bounder! He made me forget what I went

"Sure you can manage them?" asked Marjorie.

"Rather!" replied Archie, as Mary placed her own hat-box on top of the pile. "What-ho! Let 'em all come, as it were! The old vision is somewhat impaired, but I trust that you will rally round and guide the good old wandering footsteps!"

Archie was not much of a lad for carrying parcels. He had all the boxes in his arms, right in front of him, so that they completely obscured the view. It never occurred to him to carry them by the strings.

Marjorie, who had rather a particular liking for Archie, wanted to make the suggestion, but the other girls nudged her into silence. This was rather a good joke on the elegant Removite.

"Now we'll get back home," said Doris briskly.

"Sure there aren't a few more packages to gather in?" asked Archie. "I mean, the old pockets are still empty, dear old things. And I dare say you could tie a few odds and ends round my neck, what?"

"I believe you're trying to be sarcastic, Archie," said Irene severely.

"Eh—I mean, what? Good gad, no!" protested Archie. "What I mean to say next. Shall we proceed to stagger?"

They went down the High Street, and Archie successfully concealed his consternation. He had certainly not bargained for any such affair as this. One parcel, yes—or even two. For Marjorie he would have carried three packages without a qualm. But when five enormous hat-boxes were piled upon him his usual equanimity vanished. He felt conspicuous. He had an idea that everybody was looking at him. But he had accepted the commission, and politeness forbade him to utter the faintest word of protest.



CHAPTER 8.

A STICKY BUSINESS.

DORIS BERKELEY suddenly came to a halt.

"Oh, we must get some stamps!" she said, as she glanced towards the post office. "Shan't be a minute, Archie!"

"Carry on, dear girls—carry on as though I were merely a good old beast of burden," said Archie Glenthorne cheerily. "I mean to say, take your time, and tarry here and tarry there. Archie will be waiting."

"Oh, don't trouble—you stroll on," said Irene. "We'll soon catch you up. You're a dear to help us like this, Archie."

"Absolutely!" agreed the Swell of the Remove.

Not only Doris entered the post office, but all the other girls, too. And Archie was left alone in the village street with those five huge hat-boxes in his grasp. It did not improve his feelings when several small

villagers gathered round him uttering comments. Their ages ranged from about five to seven, and their words had all the frankness of extreme youth.

"Good gad!" murmured Archie in dismay.

"Hats, them are," said one of the small villagers. "Poor chap, 'e can't 'elp it," said one of the other children. "It's them girls. 'E can't see where 'e's goin', an' 'e'll fall over in a minute."

"Yes, an' spoil all them nice clothes of 'is," said another.

This sort of thing was too much for Archie Glenthorne's delicate structure. The very thought of falling over gave him a pain. And he was suddenly reminded of the fact that he felt slightly unsteady. Not knowing what lay immediately ahead of him, he had the sensations of a blindfolded person.

"Odds life! A slight move is indicated," murmured Archie. "This sort of thing is apt to get on a chappie's nerves, dash it!"

Archie believed in being on the safe side, and he had had no intention of moving. But the personal remarks of the young rustics affected him so much that he decided to stroll down the village street. He had overlooked a very vital point.

Not twenty yards farther on, certain burly gentlemen were engaged in the task of giving the road a new coat. While a tar engine moved slowly onwards, a man at the rear operated a sprayer. Further valiants behind then covered up the soaking tar with finely-crushed granite.

Archie had given these worthies a wide berth on the way down, for the thought of getting a speck of tar on his immaculate clothing made his heart almost miss a beat. He had been careful, too, to protect the girls.

But in his present extremity he completely forgot these tar fiends. He strolled on, hoping to get away from the group of village children, and it only confused him the more when they persisted in keeping abreast.

"Better look out, mister," said one of his escorts. "You won't 'arf be in a mess if you walk there!"

"Hi!" came a shout. "Mind where you're goin', young gent!"

"Eh?" gasped Archie. "I mean, look here! What's all this dashed shouting and——"

"Stop, you young idiot!" came a violent roar.

The unhappy Archie gave a leap, and had visions of a motor-car, or a traction engine, bearing down on him. He adopted a course which seemed a sound sort of scheme at the moment. He took a wild leap sideways.

And nothing could have been more utterly disastrous.

After the fashion of these knights of the road, they had been tarring the surface in half-sections, and if Archie had walked straight on, all would have been well. But that sideways leap took him fairly and squarely into the region of the freshly tarred

surface. It was there in all its wet, horrid blackness.

And wet tar is not an ideal surface for gripping.

The unfortunate Archie's rubber heels skidded from under him as though he had been wearing roller skates. If the road had been smothered with lubricating grease it could not have been more slippery.

"I say! What the— Great gad!" howled Archie.

The five hatboxes went skywards like a number of balloons. By chance they all fell clear of the tar, and were rescued by the interested village children. As for the hapless Archie, Fate had dealt him a cruel blow.

Thud!

He sat down with a squelching, awful bump in the thick of the freshly sprayed tar. And his misfortunes were by no means over. They were, in fact, only just beginning.

The gentleman who was operating the tar-sprayer was, for the moment, confused. He had taken a pride in that patch of road, for it was quite spotless. And then Archie sat in the middle of it and came slithering forward like a human toboggan.

"Crikey!" ejaculated the workman.

Quite unconsciously he raised the sprayer, and the man at the back of the engine thoughtlessly kept on pumping. The full discharge from the whirling spray descended over Archie like a black deluge.

"'Ere, stop it!" gasped the workman, turning to his mate. "This 'ere tar's 'ot, an' the poor young gent—"

"Help!" howled Archie. "S.O.S.! Odds tragedies and disasters! I mean to say, good gad!"

Fortunately the tar was not hot enough to burn him. But his appearance was slightly marred. From head to foot he was black. Not ordinarily black, but horrifying, with a sticky, shiny, dripping blackness.

He staggered to his feet, but his shoes failed to hold, and after a number of extraordinary evolutions he almost turned a complete somersault, and landed flat on his face.

Two of the tar men came along to help him. They didn't hold themselves to blame in any way, and, in fact, they were rather annoyed at this interruption of their labours. It was just like these schoolboys to play about.

"Out of it, young gent!" said one of the men. "Come on—this way!"

Archie was assisted to the untarred side of the road. He was so dazed and bewildered that he didn't know whether he was on his head or his heels.

"I know what's the matter with you, young gent," said one of the men stoutly. "You're in a mess—that's what you are!"

"A nasty mess!" agreed the other, with a critical inspection.

"Help!" moaned Archie feebly. "Kindly dash off and fetch the good old ambulance! Where, I mean, am I? That is, I should

say, what? How about dashing for the family physician?"

Just up the street, Irene & Co. had emerged from the post office. Naturally, they expected to find the elegant Removite still waiting outside. Instead, they saw their hatboxes in charge of a group of children, and they saw Archie in the distance. At least, they saw a black thing, which they dimly recognised as Archie's figure.

"Oh!" cried Marjorie. "Oh, look at Archie!"

If anything had been needed to electrify the dazed junior into life, Marjorie had supplied it. For Archie heard her voice floating down the High Street, and he knew that he had been seen—he knew that it was impossible to conceal this dreadful accident from the Moor View girls.

"Something," breathed Archie, "has got to be done!"

Through a kind of haze he caught sight of a shop almost opposite. The proximity of that particular shop was next door to providential—for it was the modest establishment of the village tailor.

With one headlong dive Archie Glen-thorne burst through the doorway, turned round, and slammed the door after him.



CHAPTER 9.

HARRY'S FATAL WEAKNESS!

ARCHIE clutched at the counter and breathed a sigh of relief. At least, he had escaped from the public gaze. He was still

in a terrible plight, but at least he had found shelter. And where better than this? The tailor would probably be able to supply him with a new rig-out, and all might yet be well.

Hitherto Archie had regarded the village tailor with a lofty disdain. This unfortunate man was quite beneath the contempt of a schoolboy Beau Brummel, who patronised no tailor whose establishment was not situated in Savile Row.

But Archie's prejudices had vanished like magic. The Bellton tailor was a man of sound, solid worth. It was ridiculous to belittle him just because his shop was modest, and his wares shoddy and ill-cut.

"You can't come in here, sir—you can't come in here!" bleated the tailor, as he came dashing out of his workshop. "Good heavens! My shop! This tar—"

"Laddie, I'm in!" quavered Archie. "Kindly refrain from uttering paltry remarks concerning your dashed shop! What, dash it, about me?"

"You must get out, sir!" panted the tailor. "All this tar—"

"Listen to me, old cheviot!" said Archie earnestly. "I'm in a most frightful condish. Kindly cast the eyesight over the general

view, and take an opticful. I desire (a) a frightfully good bath; (b) a complete, new, dashed outfit, including overcoat as worn; and (c) various accessories, such as boots, hat, and so forth. Be good enough to rally round a chappie in distress and do the necessary."

"But, my dear young sir——"

"Money," said Archie, "is no object."

"But—but my mat—my lino—my counter——"

"You frightful blighter, I'll buy you a new shop!" shouted Archie. "Good gad, can't you realise that I'm in a most deuced predicament? Never, in the whole course of my life, have I been in a posish so blue at the dashed edges!"

He convinced the tailor at last, and he was escorted somewhere in the rear. And in the meantime, Irene & Co. had culled particulars of the affair from various eye-witnesses.

"It's all your fault!" said Marjorie, looking indignantly at her companions. "I didn't want to rag Archie like that——"

"That's right—blame us!" said Doris, with a toss of her head. "How did we know that he would take a tar bath?"

"We expected him to stop outside," put in Irene. "Poor old Archie! We can't go now, girls. We've got to wait until he comes out."

"Yes, rather—even if we get heavy lines," said Marjorie. "We've got to explain to Archie, and ask him to forgive us. Poor old chap! What a shock it must be to him!"

They wandered about in the High Street, waiting. They were quite patient, for they guessed that Archie would be a long time—and they were penitent, too. It was curious that their hat-boxes should be almost unmarred by the tar. Archie Glenthorne had caught everything, and the boxes had escaped all but a few spots.

As a rule, there was nothing much going on in Bellton High Street—nothing, that is, that could be regarded in the light of entertainment. The children, it is true, were greatly interested in the tarring, but the Moor View girls regarded these men with a prejudiced eye. They kept well out of their way.

However, their attention was soon attracted by a stranger—or, to be more exact, by the stranger's behaviour.

He was an itinerant tinker, apparently—a man with a donkey-cart, the latter incorporating a grindstone, an emery-wheel, and all the necessary implements of the tinkering trade. A coke fire was glowing merrily in a long iron pail, which hung at the rear.

But these things in themselves did not catch the keen eyes of the girls. They were watching the man himself—a skinny, unpleasant-looking rascal. He was sitting forward in the cart, urging his donkey on with uncouth shouts, and accompanying these admonitions with a lavish application of a heavy stick.

"Oh, the brute!" said Irene hotly.

"He ought to be locked up!" cried Doris. "That poor donkey! A whip is bad enough,

but it's shameful to hit an animal with a heavy stick!"

"And look how tired the poor thing is!" said Mary, with deep concern.

Although they were a good distance away, they could see all this quite clearly in the bright evening sunlight. The donkey was, indeed, worn out after a long, patient day. And this skinny brute, instead of helping the poor animal by walking, was riding on the little cart, and beating his long-suffering friend.

The girls were not only indignant, but furious. They all made a move up the High Street—instinctively hurrying to put a stop to this cruelty. But somebody else was of the same mind. A sturdy figure came out of a footpath, and ran up to the travelling tinker.

"Oh, splendid!" said Irene. "It's one of the St. Frank's chaps!"

"Must be a new boy," said Doris. "I haven't seen him before."

It was, in fact, Harry Gresham. His moody wanderings had led him across the meadows, through Bellton Wood, and then round by the footpath into the village. A good deal of his depression had gone, for the green countryside was looking delightful on this fresh May evening. It was impossible for anybody to walk through those meadows and remain gloomy for long.

And the first thing Harry saw on entering the village street was the tinker beating his donkey.

"Oh, you cad!" muttered Harry fiercely.

He had a great fondness for animals, and a single glance told him that this poor creature was not stubborn, but genuinely tired. It was the essence of brutality to beat him in this callous fashion.

Harry strode into the road, and subconsciously noticed that there was nobody about in the immediate vicinity. The little street appeared to be quite deserted. Harry did not see the girls, further up.

"Look here, my man, stop that!" he shouted hotly.

The tinker stopped it, and turned an evil, glowering face towards the schoolboy.

"Talkin' to me?" he asked bluntly.

"Yes, I am!"

"You've got a sauce, ain't you?"

"You're treating that donkey brutally, and you'd better stop it!" retorted Harry. "You ought to be ashamed of yourself, whacking the poor thing unmercifully like that."

"Lumme!" shouted the man. "I can't 'it me own blinkin' donkey without a blinkin' schoolboy interferin'! You mind your own business, me lad, or you'll git into trouble. An' quick, too!"

He lifted his stick again, and brought it down with cruel force on the donkey's hind-quarters. The unhappy little animal bucked somewhat, but it was so worn out that it could show very little spirit. The animal looked old, too—utterly weary of life.

Whack! Whack! Whack!

"I'm master o' this stubborn devil, an' I'll 'it 'im as I like!" snapped the man.

"You dangerous brute!" shouted Harry fiercely. "If you don't stop that I'll tell the



"We don't want Gresham in the cricket team. He's a disgrace to the lower school!" roared Doyle angrily. "If you don't drop him, Nipper, we'll get a new captain!" Gresham stepped forward and faced the angry juniors. "I'll settle it for once and all!" he said grimly. "I'll resign."

police! You ruffian, you ought to be prosecuted!"

The tinker leapt to the ground.

"Ho, so that's the tone, is it?" he shouted coarsely. "A brute, am I? I'll show you wot I do with saucy blokes like you!"

He whipped off his coat, and advanced towards Harry with a grim light in his eye—with a dangerous doubling of his knuckles.

And Harry Gresham experienced a sudden, devastating re-action.

A moment earlier he had been hot with indignation, his mind wholly occupied by this question of cruelty to the donkey. But now, unexpectedly, there was danger—the man was preparing to attack him!

And Harry Gresham's fatal weakness swept over him like some invisible flood. His bold spirit went. His blood seemed to turn to water, and his spine went limp.

"I—I—" he began huskily.

"I'll show yer!" rasped the tinker.

He leapt forward, a dangerous bundle of energy and sinew. In spite of his wizened condition, he was evidently a man of not temper and quick action. And Harry did not wait to continue the altercation.

With a gasp, and with a wild light of terror in his eyes, he turned on his heel and bolted.



CHAPTER 10.

SERVE HIM RIGHT!

RENE MANNERS opened her pretty eyes wider in sheer amazement.

"Did — did you see that?" she asked breath-

lessly.

"Yes, he bolted!" said Doris, with a flash of scorn. "Oh, the coward!"

"What a funk!" breathed Marjorie.

"Any of the other fellows would have knocked that man down!" said Mary hotly. "And this—this fellow simply ran for his life! And he looked such a decent sort, too. Whoever can he be?"

"Oh, they get all sorts," said Irene. "One of the new boys, of course. I wish I knew his name. I'd tell Ted about it."

"What are we going to do if that man starts beating the poor donkey again?" asked Irene.

"I know what we'll do," replied Doris promptly.

And down in that little footpath, Harry Gresham had come to a halt—appalled by his own frailty under stress. He knew that he had failed again at the crucial moment. He always told himself that "next time" he would be different. But when the next time came, his courage failed him just the same as it had always failed him in the past.

"Oh, you coward—you funk!" he muttered bitterly. "Thank heaven nobody saw, that's all! No wonder the fellows despise me! No wonder I've been chucked out of the cricket! I'm only a rotten worm!"

Harry never stinted his condemnation of himself. He knew his own failings, and he fiercely, angrily chastised himself. Unfortunately, this never did any good, for there was never any improvement. Scourge himself as he might, it was always the same.

For a tense moment, he thought of turning back, and accepting the tinker's challenge. Then he groaned. What was the good. When the moment came, he would only fail again, and perhaps there were people in the High Street now, who would witness his contemptible behaviour.

"No, I'm just an insect, that's all!" muttered Harry wretchedly. "I've got no more pluck than a rabbit! Not half so much!"

He was worried about the unfortunate donkey. But his mind, at least, would have been relieved on this score if he had taken the trouble to retrace his steps. For Irene and Co. were not the kind of girls to stand by, inactive, while any glaring cruelty was being perpetrated.

The tinker had donned his coat again, and was once more mounted on the barrow. And he proceeded to relieve his temper on the donkey.

"Get up, you lazy varmint!" he snarled, raising his stick. "Lumme, if you ain't enough to make a man cuss!"

Whack! Whack! Whack!

With even more force than before, the heavy stick descended. The little animal's flanks were puffy already, and these blows stung like hot irons. The donkey reared up, and hee-hawed hoarsely and feebly. Its ears were back, and it was revealing every signal of distress.

"That's done it!" said Doris Berkeley fiercely. "The brute! He's asked for trouble and he'll get it! Are you girls game to help me?"

"What are you going to do?" asked Mary breathlessly.

"We'll drag that wretch off his cart and punish him," replied Doris.

"Rather! Let's all join in!"

The Moor View girls were so indignant that they were ready for any action. Since Harry had failed, and there seemed nobody else to cope with the situation, it was up to them to act.

Irene & Co. were not just fluffy, helpless girls, pretty to look at and helpless in an emergency. They were pretty enough—but they were full of high spirits, too—and full of anger.

They swept down the High Street at a run, and wasted no time in remonstrating with the vicious tinker. They ran up to the donkey-cart, and seized the man strongly, and pulled him to the ground with one united heave. The fellow crashed in the roadway, amazed, startled, and scared.

"Ere!" he gasped. "What the——"

"You cowardly brute!" cried Doris.

"I'll 'ave the police on yer——"

"I wish the policeman would come!" interrupted Irene, with flashing eyes. "I'd charge you with cruelty, and have you arrested! But the policeman is never about when he's wanted."

"Bother the policeman!" said Doris briskly. "We'll take the law into our own hands. Come on—you two take his feet, and we'll grab his arms. Let's frog's-march him down the High Street!"

"Oh, splendid!" cried Mary.

These girls did not believe in half-measures. When it came to a pinch they could be as vigorous and determined as any of the St. Frank's fellows. And the contemptible tinker had absolutely no chance with them. They were strong and healthy—and knew quite a lot about self-defence. The man was grasped, turned face downwards, and lifted.

Then he was frog's-marched down the High Street, to the approval of many villagers—who had witnessed the latter part of the tinker's brutality.

"You young 'ussies!" he gasped frantically. "Lemme go! I'll 'ave the p'lice on yer for this——"

"Be quiet!" exclaimed Doris. "Or we'll gag you!"

As a matter of fact, the man hardly had sufficient strength to utter anything. He was being jerked up and down, and nearly all the breath was knocked out of his body. And even if the other girls had no direct objective, Doris Berkeley had. Her eyes were fixed upon a new stretch of tarred surface which had just been sprayed.

"If it's good enough for Archie, it's good enough for this wretch!" she said firmly.

"Are you girls game to carry on?"

"Oh, my hat! You mean to throw him in the tar?" exclaimed Mary.

"Well, doesn't he deserve it?"

"Yes, rather!"

"Then all together!" cried Doris. "One—two—three!"

Howling with fear and alarm, the tinker was heaved violently sideways by the deter-

mined girls. He slithered on to the fresh tar—much to the alarm and indignation of the gentleman with the sprayer, whose work had been marred twice in a single hour.

Plop!

The wretch rolled over, struggled, staggered to his feet, and fell again.

"Spray him!" ordered Doris. "Go on—spray him! He's been brutally beating his donkey, and if you don't spray him, we will!"

"Tain't likely, missy!" protested the tar man. "I might lose my job if I get playin' any o' them larks!"

"He's quite right, Doris—and I think the beast has had enough!" said Irene quickly. "And here's Sparrow coming!"

"I'm not afraid of him!" said Doris scornfully.

"No, but we can give this man in charge!" explained Irene.



CHAPTER 11.

NOT EXACTLY SWAGGER!

C. SPARROW, the village constable, came bustling up, agitated and alarmed. Events of this sort seldom came along to disturb the rustic calm of his day. And when they did come, he was unprepared for them.

"What's all this, young ladies?" he asked complainingly. "What's all this? You mustn't go chuckin' people into that there tar!"

"We've done it, and he's lucky to escape so lightly!" said Doris boldly. "And what's more, we give him in charge!"

"My heye!" said Sparrow. "You gives 'im in charge? What, has he been hinterferin' with ye?"

"He's been treating his donkey with awful cruelty, and he ought to be prosecuted!" said Irene quickly. "We don't ask you to believe us, either. Go and look at the poor thing, and you'll see the marks!"

"I'll be a witness to that!" said Mr. Binks, the confectioner, as he came bustling up. "That man was ill-treating his donkey in the most shameful manner, Sparrow. It's your duty to arrest him."

The tinker came up, a fearful spectacle.

"It's all lies!" he said hoarsely. "I wasn't hardly touchin' the blamed donkey! If these gals 'adn't interfered——"

"Now, then!" said the constable importantly. "That's enough of that! You'll come with me, my man, an' I'll 'ave a look at the hanimal! An' keep your distance, too!" he added sternly. "If you touch me with that tar, I'll run you in, anyhow!"

Doris made a motion to the other girls.

"I think we can slip out of it now," she said. "We've done our bit. We can leave the rest to old Sparrow and the shopkeepers

of the village. Miss Bond might get ratty if we're mixed up in a police case."

Doris was undoubtedly right, but they were all pleased, five minutes later, to see the donkey and cart being taken into the yard of the George Tavern. Mr. Binks came along, looking indignant, but relieved.

"That was wonderful of you young ladies!" he said appreciatively. "The fellow thoroughly deserved it. I—er—I like to see this spirit among the girls of to-day. Splendid! Your schoolmistress should be very proud of you."

"We didn't do anything, Mr. Binks!" said Doris uncomfortably. "What about that man? And how is the donkey?"

"I am rather afraid that the animal is in a bad state," said Mr. Binks. "They are going to get the vet. to have a look at him. Anyhow, he will be well cared for now. That wretched tinker has been taken to the lock-up, and he will probably get a month's hard labour for his cruelty!"

The confectioner bustled off to attend to his deserted shop, and Irene & Co. felt rather pleased with themselves. Their efforts had borne excellent fruit. And now their thoughts reverted to Archie Glenthorne.

"Isn't it about time Archie appeared?" asked Doris. "I say, what a sell if we've been waiting here all this time for nothing!"

"He hasn't come out of the tailor's," said Marjorie.

"He may have dodged out at the back," said Doris. "Just what he would do, when you come to think of it. He wouldn't dare to face the public in those tarry clothes of his. Still, we've used the time well, so we needn't worry."

As it happened, Archie Glenthorne was in the tailor's fitting-room at that moment, and he was in a condition of acute distress. True, he was clean, and most of the tar had been successfully removed—only a vague, persistent odour of it hovering about him.

It was the suit of clothes which filled him with such horror. The tailor had supplied him with one out of his stock—a brand-new, ready-made suit. Unfortunately, it was the only suit, which the tailor had for sale, and it was a tweed of a pronounced check pattern. This was bad enough, but worse had followed when Archie tried it on. The abomination was about four sizes too large, and it hung upon Archie's elegant figure in great folds.

"Somewhat imposs., what?" he said feebly.

"My dear young sir, it is splendid!" declared the tailor. "Cheap, too. Only three guineas, and——"

"That, of course, explains all!" said Archie, with a shudder. "I mean to say, three guineas. Good gad! I pay three guineas for a dashed waistcoat."

Earlier, he had viewed the suit with complete pleasure. Anything had seemed good to his eyes when he had been smothered in tar. But now that he was feeling more like himself, he wanted to wait until complete

darkness fell, so that he could steal up to the school like a thief in the night.

But the village tailor was a man who believed in the quality of his own wares.

"I can assure you, Master Glenthorne, that the suit is most becoming," he declared. "You need have no fear that you will be very conspicuous. The tweed is, perhaps, somewhat too heavy for this May weather, but that is only a trifle."

"Absolutely!" said Archie. "The good old tweed is somewhat priceless, laddie. But when it comes to the cut—absolutely not! Odds nightmares and futuristic visions! The chappie who cut this dashed suit is nothing more nor less than a criminal. I mean to say, the blighter couldn't even cut a cabbage! Kindly observe the good old legs!"

The tailor was becoming rather impatient.

"The suit is quite good," he said coldly. "I will admit it is somewhat too large, but I have had no time to prepare for this emergency. You have told me that you only want to get to the school in it—"

"Absolutely!"

"Then, my dear young sir, there is nothing whatever to worry about," said the tailor. "It is quite possible that you will meet nobody at all—nobody, that is, of note. Why not take the chance?"

The tailor continued in this comforting strain, and at last Archie began to think that his appearance was less poisonous than he had supposed. His host had taken good care to keep him well away from the mirrors.

And so, at last, Archie had plucked up his courage, and passed out into the High Street. He assumed an air of careless leisureliness, but unfortunately he exaggerated it. It was quite a good idea to refrain from haste, as that would attract attention. But, by adopting a walk that amounted to a swagger, he unconsciously made things infinitely worse.

"Quick!" breathed Irene, clutching at Doris Berkeley's arm. "Can you see what I can see?"

"Oh, my goodness!" said Marjorie, in horror. "It's Archie!"

The other girls nearly burst into a roar of laughter, but Doris checked them.

"Don't!" she pleaded. "It's bad enough for the poor old chap as it is!"

Archie had not even looked in their direction, and they now had a full sight of his rear view as he walked down the street. He was a perfect scream. His jacket was so long that it descended half-way to his knees, and his trousers were gathered in huge folds round his ankles. And that careless swagger of his gave him an excruciating effect of an imitation Charlie Chaplin.

Archie Glenthorne—the dandy of the Remove—the most exquisitely-dressed junior at St. Frank's—walking down Bellton High Street in this fantastic rig-out!

Irene and Co. were real heroines to suppress their mirth.



CHAPTER 12.

THE WOES OF ARCHIE!

HERE we are, Archie!"

"Eh? What? I mean, what?" ejaculated Archie Glenthorne, spinning round, aghast. "Why,

odds shocks and surprises! I thought you priceless old things were—"

He broke off as he caught sight of their hat-boxes.

"Don't you bother about these, Archie," said Marjorie quickly, as she caught sight of Archie's eye. "We'll carry them—you've had enough trouble already. We're awfully glad you managed to get rid of that tar."

Archie felt a sense of relief stealing over him. Apparently, the girls hadn't noticed anything unusual in his appearance. He thought it just as well, however, to make sure.

"Oh, rather not!" he protested. "Kindly allow me to grasp the good old headgear. The hats, if you know what I mean. I trust, dear souls, that this foul suit does not offend too much?"

"What foul suit?" asked Doris innocently. "Oh, look, girls! Archie's wearing another suit now!"

"Why, so he is!" said Irene. "I like the pattern!"

"It looks showy—bold and vigorous!" said Mary, nodding.

Archie beamed.

"Dear old damsels, you may not realise it, but you've removed a frightful load from the old mind," he said happily. "Frightfully ridic. of me and all that, but I absolutely thought that I was second cousin to a scarecrow. In fact, I had made up my mind to write to my solicitors, and get them on the track of the miscreant who cut this suit. I mean to say, I was going to have him shoved in gaol as a public menace!"

"It's not so bad as that!" said Marjorie unguardedly.

"Then—then it's bad to a certain degree, what?" asked Archie, in a hollow voice.

"Don't be silly," said Doris hastily. "Why, you ought to be only too pleased to get a new suit in Bellton, Archie. Well, come along! It's past tea-time, and we shall get into trouble if we don't hurry."

The girls refrained from making any further remarks about the clothing, and Archie was so interested in their bright chatter that he even suspected that he was looking almost normal.

Phipps rather spoilt things. Phipps was Archie's valet, and it was one of his duties in life to keep his young master in check. Archie had an excellent eye for a cut, but he was liable to run riot on patterns and colours. It was Phipps' duty to see that Archie was always turned out to perfection.

So the unfortunate man's agony can be imagined when he turned a bend in the lane, on his way to the village, and came face to

face with Archie without the slightest warning. If Phipps had only seen his young master from a distance, he might have steeled himself, but as things were, he had no chance.

He turned the bend, saw Archie, and the effect was significant. Phipps leapt a foot into the air, as though some unseen enemy had dug a pitchfork into him. Then he reeled and covered his eyes with his hand.

"I mean to say!" protested Archie. "Phipps, old lad! I trust the old liver is functioning breezily? Why, good gad! What on earth—I mean, as it were—"

He broke off, confused. For Phipps, averting his eyes, was staggering past like a man in a trance. He knew that it was his duty to seize Archie, and hide him under a hedge, or cover him with a sack, but he was so thunderstruck that all initiative had deserted him. His one desire was to get away from this horror.

"Well, that's dashed funny!" said Archie, frowning. "I mean to say, did you observe the dear old soul? Absolutely white about the gills! I mean, quivering like a dashed jelly! The chappie gave me one look and wilted!"

"I don't think Phipps is well," said Doris gravely.

They managed to drag Archie on, and were greatly relieved when the gateway of St. Frank's loomed into sight. Here their responsibility ended.

And here, also, ended Archie's peace of mind.

The girls had rather delicate feelings, and they had done their utmost to save the grotesque Archie from any possible embarrassment. But the St. Frank's fellows were not troubled by any such qualms.

They caught sight of Archie; they rubbed their eyes, they looked again, and then they yelled.

The Triangle echoed with uproarious laughter.

By a mischance, which Archie later regarded as the cruellest blow Fate had ever dealt him, the Triangle was crowded with juniors. And at such an hour this sort of thing was outrageous, since all the juniors should have been in their studies, partaking of tea. Archie didn't know that a few indignation meetings were going on. Not only the Remove, but the Fourth had raised its voice, and Harry Gresham was the root cause of the trouble. Harry's name was down on the list of players for the match against Bannington Grammar School, and the Junior School didn't seem to think much of it.

But Archie's sudden appearance caused a diversion.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Great Scott! What is it?"

"Oh, my only hat!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Archie Glenthorne came to a frozen halt, and noticed that Irene & Co. were looking alarmed and confused. He groped for his eyeglass.

"Good gad!" he breathed huskily.

"What's the idea, Archie?" asked Brent, running up.

"Laddie, is there anything absolutely wrong with the good old appearance?" asked Archie, clutching at his study-mate. "Alf, old cauliflower, kindly tell me! Do I look becoming? Am I, so to speak, there?"

"You silly ass, you're a freak!" gasped Alf Brent.

"A freak?" moaned Archie. "Odds horrors! I see what you mean. Absolutely a freak, what?"

"What on earth have you been doing?" demanded Brent. "You—the looking-glass of fashion—the mould of form! What's the idea of coming here dressed like a comedian? Where did you get that suit of reach-me-downs from?"

"Reach-me-downs?" gurgled Archie feebly.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The crowds were collecting round, and the unhappy Archie suddenly realised the truth. The girls had kindly refrained from letting him know! Just like them, of course, decent sportsmen and all that, but it rather hit a chappie in the good old midriff when the real truth oozed out.

He broke through the yelling throng, and raced for the Ancient House. Now he understood Phipps' averted gaze! He didn't stop running until he reached his bed-room, and then it took him a solid half-hour to even partially recover from the shock.

"Absolutely one of those evenings!" he murmured dismally. "Odds gad, it'll take me a month to get over this poisonous episode!"

In the meantime, the fellows had dispersed to their studies for tea—Archie's arrival having effectively broken up the numerous meetings. Irene & Co. were about to continue their journey to their own school, when Handforth spotted them.

"Just going, Ted," said Irene, smiling.

"No fear!" retorted Handforth firmly. "Not until you've been introduced to Harry Gresham! He is here now, and if you come with me I'll do the honours."

"Oh, well—" began Irene doubtfully.

"It won't take us a minute," interrupted Doris. "And that'll be a lot quicker than arguing with Ted. You know how he keeps on if he's thwarted."

Handforth grinned.

"Yes, I stick at things," he agreed. "Either you come indoors now, or I won't give you any peace. Harry's one of my special pals, and you'll like him immensely."

They gave it up, and accompanied him indoors. And Edward Oswald flung open the door of Study J. and Irene & Co. passed in.

"Harry, old son—meet the girls!" said Handforth genially.

Harry Gresham rose to his feet, and turned. Irene and her chums gave him one smile of polite greeting, and then their faces became straight. There was a dead silence. They looked at Harry coldly.



Harry Gresham's attention became fixed—horrified. There were two eyes looking at him through the window—baleful and unblinking. Then the awful Thing raised itself, reaching out bat-like wings and scraping with its claws on the glass.



CHAPTER 13.

HANDY BLUNDERS AGAIN!

HARRY GRESHAM scented the sudden feeling of iciness. Perhaps he was more than usually sensitive. But these girls had never met him before, that he knew of, and he dimly wondered why they had so abruptly changed their expressions.

"I—I'm glad to meet you!" he stammered awkwardly.

"How are you?" said Irene, bowing stiffly.

"Hallo! What's wrong?" asked Handforth, blundering into the situation with all his usual lack of tact. "What's the matter? This is Harry Gresham—my new pal. Harry, this is Irene Manners. Why the dickens don't you shake hands, you awkward ass?"

Harry turned red.

"I—I— Yes, of course," he muttered helplessly.

It wasn't his place to offer his hand until Irene offered hers. He knew enough of etiquette to be clear on that point. And Irene had made no attempt to proffer her dainty hand.

"I think," she said, "we've seen your friend before, Ted."

"Eh?" said Handforth. "I—I didn't know —"

"It was in the village," said Doris coldly.

"Oh!" breathed Harry, his colour heightening.

"Yes, but—but there's no need to be so jolly stiff!" burst out Handforth in astonishment. "I've told Harry that you are the nicest girls on record—without any silly formalities, or anything! And now you spoil everything by acting as though you'd all got cramp!"

The situation was becoming intensely embarrassing, and everybody noticed it except Handforth. Harry Gresham simply didn't know what to do. He stood there looking like a fool, and feeling like a fool.

And Doris felt just a little pang of remorse.

"If you are Ted's friend, I am pleased to meet you," she said, looking at him curiously, and extending her hand. "I think there must be some mistake somewhere. How do you do?"

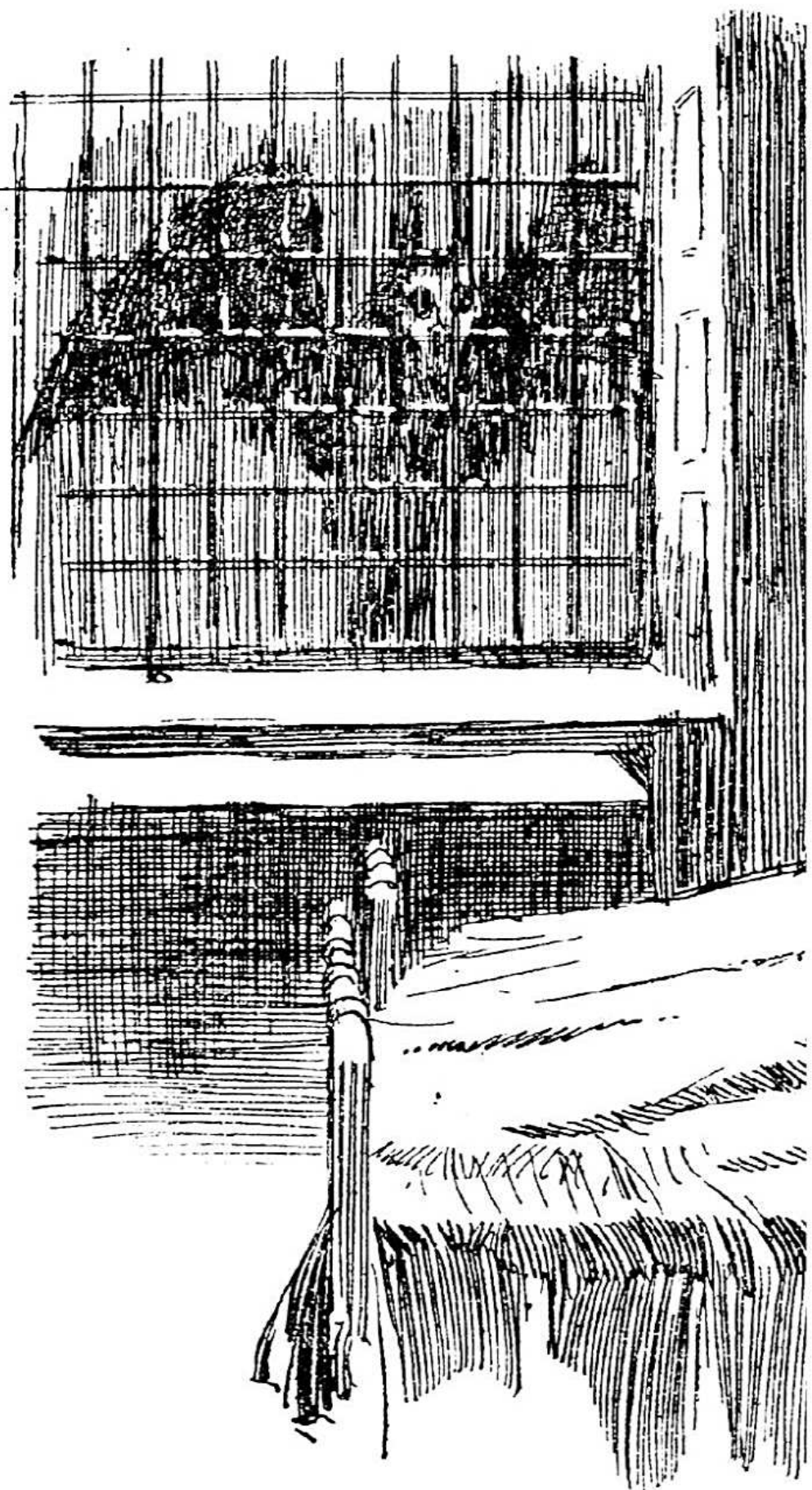
Harry took her hand convulsively.

"Pleased—to meet you!" he mumbled, almost incoherently.

The other girls took their cue from Doris, and shook hands. This, at least, relaxed the tension slightly. But Irene & Co. could not forget what had happened in the village. This was the boy who had run away like a coward from the contemptible tinker!

"Well, we must be going," said Irene, smiling in her most frigid way. "Good-bye!"

They all nodded, and passed out of the study. Handforth was so startled by the whole business that he stood there, gaping. Harry sat down, quivering from head to foot.



Harry Gresham's attention became fixed—ho—baleful and unblinking. Then the awful its

"What's the giddy idea?" demanded Handforth amazedly.

Alec Duncan spoke for the first time.

"You're a wonderful chap, Handy, for doing just the wrong thing!" he said grimly.

"The wrong thing?"

"Couldn't you see there was an awkward situation?" demanded Alec. "Why the dickens didn't you make some off-handed excuse, and take the girls away? My hat! You're the limit!"

"The—the limit?" gasped Handforth blankly.

"Oh, don't make a fuss, Alec!" muttered Harry, in misery.

"Yes, but what's the matter?" shouted Handforth. "Why did the girls go all stiff and frozen?"

"Because—because——" began Harry.

"Clear off, Handy!" broke in Duncan roughly. "You mean well, but you're the



two eyes looking at him through the window eaching out bat-like wings and scraping with

World's Worst Blunderer! You can't open your mouth without putting your foot into it!"

"Into my mouth?" said Handforth, staring.

"You—you hopeless idiot——"

"I'm not a contortionist!" roared Handforth. "If you're trying to pull my leg, you funny New Zealand fathead, I'll biff you! Who do you think you're talking to, you—you slab of frozen mutton?"

Alec Duncan grinned.

"We're not going to start a scrap, old man," he said good-temperedly. "As I said before, you mean well, and so we'll excuse you. Hadn't you better go out and escort the girls to the gates? What's become of your wonderful manners?"

"Oh, crumbs!" gasped Handforth, with a start.

He dashed out, and found the passage deserted.

Irene & Co., as a matter of fact, were just then crossing the Triangle, and they were looking very thoughtful and unhappy. They were such nice girls that any kind of unpleasantness upset them.

"I can't understand it," said Irene, her blue eyes filled with wonder. "Such a nice looking boy, too! How can he possibly be such a coward?"

"I hate cowards!" said Mary simply.

"We can't have made a mistake—I'd know him anywhere," said Doris. "And Ted, too! He's friendly with this new chap—and Ted loathes funks like poison! What can it mean?"

"It beats me!" said Marjorie.

"All the same, I'm glad I shook hands with him," said Doris. "He's Ted's friend, and——"

"Yes, I was a little beast at first," confessed Irene contritely. "I'm glad you egged us on, Doris. But it was such a shock, you know—I hardly knew *what* to do!"

Handforth came tearing up.

"I say!" he gasped. "Why the dickens did you treat Harry like that?"

"Is he really your friend, Ted?" asked Irene bluntly.

"Of course he is!"

"Do you know that he's—well, a coward?"

"Eh?" said Handforth, with a start. "I—I— Look here, how did you know? Who told you?"

"You admit he's a coward, then?"

"I'm jiggered if I know whether he is or not!" said the large-hearted Handy, in distress. "The chap's a mystery! Ordinarily, he's absolutely one of the best. He's generous, and he's brainy, and as for his cricket, it knocks spots off everything! But now and again he goes all sort of funny, and gets the wind up over nothing."

Irene briefly told him what had happened in the village.

"And we can't stick funks," she added quietly.

"Just like him!" said Handforth miserably. "He's all right till it gets to the last pinch—and then his nerve gives way. He was decent enough to go for that brute bald-headed, wasn't he?"

"Well, yes," admitted Doris.

"His nerve only failed him when the man started to attack," continued Handforth. "By George! I'll get to the bottom of it before I'm done! There's something rummy about the chap—something unnatural! He's a good sort—he's true blue—or I'm a giddy Dutchman."

Irene looked at him warmly.

"You're a good chap, Ted," she said, smiling at him rather affectionately. "And when you stand by anybody, you mean it, don't you? If we treated your friend badly, we'll all apologise to him later on. He's such a nice boy that it's dreadful to think of him really being a coward."

The girls went at last, and Handforth felt slightly better. He stood at the gate until

Irene & Co. had turned the bend, and then he came back towards the Ancient House with a grim, set expression on his determined face.



CHAPTER 14.

IN THE BLOOD!

HURCH looked out of Study D as he heard a familiar footstep in the passage.

"Oh, here you are, at last!" said Church tartly, as Handforth appeared. "I suppose you know that Mac and I have been waiting for over ten minutes?"

"What have you been waiting for?" demanded Handforth.

"You, of course!"

"Me?"

"Isn't it tea-time, you chump?" said Church.

"Tea!" snorted Handforth, with disdain. "Don't talk to me about tea! There's something more important to be done. You chaps can amuse yourselves by swilling tea and gorging buns if you like—but I'm busy."

He laid his hand on the door-knob of Study J.

"My hat!" said McClure, appearing. "He's still at it! Still pestering that poor chap, Gresham."

"Give him a rest, Handy!" urged Church.

"Rats!" said Handforth. "If you start interfering——"

"Oh, have your own way!" said Church. "Let's begin, Mac."

They retired, and shut the door. Handforth turned the handle of Study J, and strode forward. Unfortunately, the door was locked, and Handforth banged his nose upon the upper panel with a dreadful thud.

"Hi!" he gasped. "What the—— Who locked this door? Hi, Gresham, you idiot! Unlock this giddy door!"

"Oh, go away, Handy!" came Duncan's impatient voice.

"I'll give you two seconds to unlock the door!" roared Handforth. "I want to have a talk with Harry! Come on—look sharp! You don't want the lock busted in, I suppose?"

A key turned, and the door opened. Handforth marched in, nearly knocking Alec Duncan headlong.

"Now, my lad!" said Handforth, gazing at Harry. "What's all this I hear about the village?"

Harry looked at him dully.

"Whatever you've heard, it's true," he said. "If it's something about me being a rotten funk, you can count on it as gospel!"

Duncan closed the door, and grasped Handforth's arm.

"Handy, be a sport!" he said earnestly. "This isn't the time for having a row, or arguing. Harry is feeling just about desperate, and you're not the kind of fellow to comfort him."

"You fathead, that's just what I've come for!" roared Handforth.

"Oh, my goodness!" breathed Alec. "Can't you be a real friend, and leave him alone for a bit?"

It was like knocking one's head against a brick wall.

"If I left him alone, I shouldn't be a friend," retorted Handforth curtly. "I've just heard that Harry acted like a coward in the village. He didn't see the girls, but the girls saw him——"

"I know it, old man," interrupted Duncan. "Harry's just been telling me."

"Oh, he's told you, has he?"

"Yes."

"He's told you about that man and the donkey?"

"Yes, and he's feeling bad," said Alec. "And after the way the girls treated him, he's more upset than ever."

"The girls were quite right," interrupted Harry miserably. "They saw me acting the funk, and what else can I expect from them? They look such ripping girls that I was ashamed to raise my eyes to theirs! They treated me a lot more kindly than I deserved."

Handforth looked at him queerly.

"I'm blessed if I can get to the bottom of you, Gresham," he said. "You're too jolly deep for me! Any other fellow would have excused himself, and would have tried to make out a sort of case in his defence. But you don't!"

"What's the good of faking up a defence when there isn't one?" asked Harry. "I acted like a coward, and there's no getting away from it. Two and two make four. They always have done, and they always will do. I'm a rotter, and there's an end of it!"

"And that's how he keeps on," said Alec. "You can't argue with him, of course. It's impossible to argue with a chap who admits his faults before you can scrag him."

"There's trouble brewing," said Handforth darkly. "A whole crowd of fatheads are making a fuss over Saturday's match. They're giving Nipper no end of a twisting, I hear. What you've got to do, Harry, is to stand up for your rights, and tell everybody to go to the dickens! All the chaps know how frank you are about your little failing, and they ought to have the sense to forgive you."

"They're a mean, caddish lot!" said Alec hotly.

"Why can't you explain things?" asked Handforth, turning to Harry. "Why can't you pull yourself together, and fight down this beastly funkiness? You've got it in you!"

"I haven't—I haven't!"

ANSWERS

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"Rot!" said Handforth. "Rubbish! Piffle! A chap like you, with your shoulders, and your straight eye— Rot! You've only got to brace yourself up, and you'll forget these silly—"

"I've tried!" interrupted Harry tensely. "I tell you I've tried until I'm sick of it! Ever since I was a kid I've tried!"

"Then you've got to try again—only try harder!" said Handforth flatly.

"What's the use?" muttered Harry. "It's in the blood!"

"In the blood?"

"Yes!"

"What the dickens—"

"I was born a funk, and it's no good fighting against a thing like that!" said Harry fiercely. "Some chaps are born with a marvellous ear for music, aren't they? Some are born with a longing to travel. Well, I was born with a lot of rags instead of nerves! I'm all right until it comes to a certain point, and then I peter out."

The other two juniors looked at him with frank curiosity.

"So you don't fight?" asked Handforth.

"Don't fight!" echoed Harry bitterly. "Oh, my goodness! Haven't I been fighting and fighting and fighting ever since I can remember? It's all so hopeless, you fellows! Oh, I wish I could make you understand. But I can't—so what's the good? I've tried to make my pater understand, but he wouldn't! Nobody can understand but me!"

He turned aside, a great lump in his throat.

"You see?" whispered Alec, looking at Handforth.

"I'm jiggered if I do!" said Edward Oswald. "I don't believe a word of it!"

"Oh, I say!"

"I'm not hinting that Gresham is trying to fool us, but I'm jolly certain that he's fooled himself!" continued Handforth. "It's only a question of determination. That's all! Determination can do all sorts of marvellous things, if only a chap will have enough—enough determination!"

"It sounds easy," muttered Harry, looking up again. "Perhaps you're right, Handy—and it just amounts to the fact that I haven't enough determination. That's all there is in it. I wish you'd give it a rest now, old man. It's decent of you to be so concerned about me, but—but— Well, I'm rather fed up with the subject of myself."

Handforth looked at him strangely.

"You're a rum chap!" he said, shaking his head. "We want to help you, but you won't let us. But, by George, if there's any trouble to-night about your inclusion in the Eleven I'll—I'll—"

He didn't finish his sentence, but stalked out of the room and made his way across to Study D, where he proceeded to indignantly accuse Church and McClure of faithlessness because they had started tea without him.



CHAPTER 15.

HARRY SETTLES IT!

HUMP!

Dick Hamilton looked up from his prep. as a loud bang announced the arrival of a visitor at the door of his study. A mumble of voices sounded, and Sir Montie Tregellis-West placed his pen down, and adjusted his pince-nez.

"Sounds like trouble, dear old boy," he murmured.

"I'm ready for it!" replied Nipper. "Come in!"

The door opened, and eight or nine juniors piled into the study until it was practically full up. The leaders appeared to be Timothy Armstrong, of the East House, with a following of Removites and Fourth-Formers like Hubbard, Doyle, Marriott, and Griffith.

"Well, what can I do for you?" asked Nipper politely.

"We want to see you, Hamilton," said Armstrong, with a glare.

"Well, you can have a good look, if you like," said Nipper obligingly. "I'm on view from five to seven daily. There's no charge for gazing your fill. Take a good eyeful!"

Armstrong frowned.

"We didn't come here to listen to cheap humour!" he said. "You're the captain of Junior cricket, Nipper, and so we want to have a thorough understanding with you!"

"Go ahead!" said Nipper ominously.

"It's about Gresham," put in Hubbard.

"Who's doing the talking?" roared Armstrong, turning on him.

"Well, get to the point," said Hubbard.

"Oh, it's about Gresham, is it?" said Nipper. "Curiously enough, I had already made that startling deduction. Well, I always thought you were a set of feather-brained fatheads, but I never suspected you of being cads."

"Cads!" roared Armstrong.

"Yes, if you've come here to demand Gresham's exclusion from the team," said Nipper. "Perhaps I'm misjudging you—if so, I'll apologise. Perhaps you've come here to urge me to play Gresham permanently—"

"Rats!" interrupted Armstrong. "We represent three-quarters of the Remove and the Fourth, and we've come here to demand that Gresham shall be excluded from the Junior cricket. The chap's a cad and a coward, and he's a disgrace to the Junior School!"

"Hear, hear!" said the other members of the deputation.

"Go it, Armstrong!"

"Gresham's not wanted!"

"Rather not!"

"We bar funks!"

Nipper picked up his pen and smiled.

"Well, so long," he said calmly. "See you later!"

"What do you mean—see us later?" roared Armstrong. "Aren't you going to do anything?"

"Yes," said Nipper. "As soon as you chaps have gone, I'll get on with my prep."

"Aren't you going to cut Gresham out of the team?" yelled the deputation.

"I'm not!" snapped Nipper. "By Jove, you fellows have plenty of nerve, haven't you? Who are you, anyway? Not one of you has ever been worth his salt at cricket, and you have the absolute nerve to come here and dictate my job to me."

"You're the Junior skipper——" began Armstrong hotly.

"I know I am," interrupted Nipper.

"Well, aren't you going to act?"

"It may be news to you, but at St. Frank's the cricket skippers have got a certain amount of authority in choosing teams," said Nipper sarcastically. "I'm using my authority now. Harry Gresham's name is down on the list for Saturday's match, and Harry Gresham's name stays down. I've said this before, so it's stale news. But if it'll please you, I'll repeat it to-morrow, and again on Friday."

"Then you won't take any notice of us?" yelled Hubbard. "You're going to play that frightened kid in spite of our disapproval?"

"Gresham is one of the best cricketers the Remove has ever known," rapped out Nipper. "My job is to pick the best men—and to leave personalities out of the question altogether. Are you going to let me get on with my prep, or must I get up?"

The deputation seethed.

"All right!" shouted Armstrong. "You'll hear more about this!"

"And so will you!" snapped Nipper. "I'm calling a Form meeting for half-past seven, in the small lecture hall. Everybody must turn up, or suffer the usual consequences. This question about Gresham is going to be settled to-night—once and for all!"

"All right, we'll leave it until the meeting," said Armstrong, simmering down. "But you needn't think you'll get a majority of votes in your favour. Gresham has got to go! And the sooner he leaves St. Frank's altogether, the better!"

"Hear, hear!" said the others.

They filed out, and Sir Montie sighed.

"It's frightfully disturbin', dear old boys," he said sadly. "They're not bad chaps in the main, but they're a thoughtless, selfish lot. It's a dirty trick, having such a down on the fellow. His cricket is good, anyhow!"

"What are you going to do at the meeting?" asked Watson curiously.

"You'll see," replied Nipper.

Long before seven-thirty, the Junior lecture hall was almost full. Nipper had had a word with Buster Boots, the captain of the Fourth, and the Fourth Form had arrived in full strength, too.

As the half-hour chimed, Nipper strode into the big room.

"Ah, everybody here?" he said cheerfully. "Good!"

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"Yes, even Gresham's here," sneered Bernard Forrest.

"Kick him out!"

"We don't want him with us!"

"Stop that!" shouted Nipper angrily. "You all know that a Form meeting must be attended by everybody without exception. Only illness, or a master's permit can excuse a chap from missing a Form meeting. If you start any row about Gresham being here, you'll be worse cads than I first thought!"

There was a silence. Dick was quite right, and John Busterfield Boots heartily supported him. A Form meeting was an important occasion, and everybody was supposed to attend.

"We want votes taken!" shouted Armstrong loudly.

"Hear, hear!"

"All right!" said Nipper. "Hands up everybody who has played cricket against Bannington Grammar School!"

About twenty-five hands went up, and Nipper nodded.

"Now, you cricketers, how many of you vote for Gresham's dismissal from Saturday's team?"

About five hands went up, wavered, and then went down again.

"Good!" said Nipper. "A unanimous vote to keep Gresham in. That's settled, and the meeting's over."

A perfect yell of wrath went up from all the others.

"What about us?" snorted Hubbard.

"We haven't voted yet!"

"And why should you vote?" asked Nipper. "Gresham is a cricketer, and the whole subject is one of cricket——"

But he wasn't allowed to proceed. The lecture hall became filled with angry shouts. Fellows were thoroughly excited, and the situation was beginning to look rather tense.

"It doesn't matter whether we've played cricket or not!" roared Doyle. "As a matter of fact, I'm in the team. We bar Gresham on principle—he's a disgrace to the Lower School, and if you don't give in, Nipper, we'll get a new captain!"

"All right!" shouted Nipper hotly. "Get one!"

And then Harry Gresham stepped forward, and faced the angry mob.

"I'll settle it once and for all!" he said grimly. "I'll resign!"

shakily. "Everybody is against me—or nearly everybody—and it's not fair that you should have to put up with this sort of thing on my account. I want you to accept my resignation from the Eleven. That ends the whole argument, doesn't it?"

"If you've made up your mind not to play?"

"I have!"

"Then there's nothing more to be said, of course," replied Nipper. "I'm sorry you've done this, Gresham, because I was just beginning to enjoy myself. If these idiots had wanted a new skipper, I was perfectly willing to stand down."

"That's why I chipped in," said Harry. "It's not fair that you should be forced out of the captaincy because of me. I'm not worth it. So please count me completely out."

He turned on his heel and strode out of the room.

"By George!" said Handforth contemptuously. "You miserable rotters! I suppose you're feeling pretty pleased with yourselves now?"

Somehow, there weren't many expressions of triumph and satisfaction. Harry Gresham's resignation had taken the wind out of their sails, and the rank and file was beginning to feel a bit sorry for its unjustified animosity towards the new fellow. They had never dreamed that he would resign, and his action had cut the ground from under their feet.

The meeting broke up rather gloomily, the malcontents feebly pretending to be satisfied. Not one of them realised exactly what that little speech had cost Harry Gresham.

His heart and soul was in cricket, and it had been his dearest wish to play for his school. His cup of joy had been filled to the brim when he had learned that he would have his chance so soon. His father had been particularly anxious for him to get on well at cricket. It was a kind of family code with the Greshams.

And now, of his own free will, he had thrown away that chance. The Junior school was against him, and all his former joy had turned to bitterness. What satisfaction could he get by playing, when he knew that eighty per cent of the juniors were hostile?

That eighty per cent felt—and looked—a bit sick during the rest of the evening. Now that they had got their way, they were finding that the fruit was rather sour. They felt mean, and one or two of them had the decency to feel ashamed of themselves.

However, Harry's action had brought peace, and that was a good result.

Nipper went to Study J almost immediately after the meeting. He found Harry preparing to get on with some work. His face was rather pale, but he was quite calm and self-possessed.

"You shouldn't have done that, Gresham," said Nipper earnestly. "Of course, you took the matter right out of my hands. I'm captain, and I don't allow any interference from



CHAPTER 16.

JUST NOBODY!

THE uproar ceased as though by magic.

"What's that?" shouted Armstrong, at last. "You'll resign?"

"Yes," replied Harry.

"Don't you be an ass!" said Nipper. "I want you for the team, Gresham. I'm not going to be dictated to by——"

"It's not that," interrupted Harry rather

these senseless idiots who can't even play marbles!"

"But they were going to chuck you out of the captaincy," protested Harry.

"They could have chucked," growled Nipper. "I'm not scared by their paltry foolishness. I was just in the mood for some fighting. It's rotten, the way they're treating you. They couldn't act worse if you had been found stealing things!"

"They've had plenty of cause to despise me," said Harry quietly. "There's nothing unjust about it. I can't grumble——"

"But, my dear man this is purely a matter of cricket," interrupted Nipper.

"I know it is, but they don't see it in that light," said Harry unhappily. "They know I'm a funk, and they don't like me. Well, I suppose I shall have to carry on as best I can. Why worry about me, anyhow? I'm nobody—nobody at all!"

Nipper shook his head.

"We haven't heard the last of this yet," he said grimly. "If there's any way in which I can help, Gresham——"

"No thanks!" said Harry hastily.

"Too many helpers already, eh?" smiled Nipper. "Yes, you're quite right—you'll probably be a lot happier if you're left alone. But count on me if you're in any trouble, old man."

"Thanks," muttered Harry gratefully.

Nipper's help was so different to Handforth's, and Harry Gresham could not help comparing the two. Handforth was full of good intentions, and he was eager enough to help. But his attentions were far more embarrassing than helpful. Nipper, on the other hand, made Gresham realise that he was a staunch friend—and Nipper had hardly said a word.

That night Harry went to bed miserable, and with a heaviness within him which weighed him down like something solid. Alec Duncan tried to cheer him up, but it was all in vain.

The next day hardly anybody took any notice of the new fellow. He wasn't actually sent to Coventry, neither was he barred. His treatment was far worse—for the majority of the fellows just ignored him. They treated him as though he didn't exist.

Just nobody! That was the position Harry Gresham found himself in now. He wasn't persecuted, but he had a clear, vivid understanding that he was held in contempt.

And his depression was so obvious that even Handforth lost a good deal of his enthusiasm. It wasn't very easy to work up any kind of liveliness with a fellow who persisted in maintaining a dogged gloom.

And so Saturday came—only to prove a farce. It was raining in the morning, but it cleared up just before the opening of the match. Then more rain came and washed out the whole fixture. After all the fuss about this match there was something rather ironical in this blow from the weather clerk.

Naturally, the whole school was feeling dispirited after that wash-out. The evening had settled down with more rain, and a cold, blustery wind was blowing. It felt more like March than mid-May.

But if Harry had been dispirited before, while the school was in the happiest of moods, he was now the prey to every kind of gloom. He went to bed that night with a curious feeling of foreboding. Alec Duncan had very little to say. Alec was tired, having been out cycling most of the evening, and he soon fell asleep. But Harry lay in his own bed, staring uneasily into the darkness. Every rattle of the window caused him to start up. He was nervous. The darkness oppressed him.



CHAPTER 17.

THE HAUNTED SCHOOLBOY!

EVERYTHING was wrong.

Harry Gresham's thoughts were bitter in the extreme. He was out of the cricket now—definitely.

Most of his fellow juniors only just tolerated him. And they made no pretence of hiding their opinions. And there was Mr. Addison, too. Mr. Addison was another of Harry's worries.

Only that night Harry had been obliged to part with five pounds—half of a tenner which his pater had sent him a few days earlier. Sir Stewart Gresham was very anxious for his son to be popular—knowing his peculiar weakness—and he thought that if Harry was supplied with plenty of pocket-money, this factor would outweigh the other. But at St. Frank's a fellow was judged by his pluck, not by his purse.

Mr. Hubert Addison was the headmaster's private secretary—a temporary assistant, really, because Dr. Stafford was not feeling quite himself this term.

But Mr. Addison was a man of excellent family—although this was no guarantee of his honesty. He was, in point of fact, extorting money from Harry Gresham, for he apparently knew something to the discredit of the Gresham family. At all events, he had several times referred to the family skeleton, and Harry was paying dearly so that the secret should be kept.

What with everything combined, the unfortunate boy was feeling more than usually wrought up to-night. The wildness of the weather affected him, too. A pitch dark night, and the wind moaning about the building, and the rain pattering against the window panes, had always had a big effect upon him. At such times he was nervous, jumpy, and sleepless. And now he lay in his bed with wide-open eyes, listening to Duncan's even breathing—listening to the moaning of the wind.

He was thinking, too. He was thinking of Mr. Addison, of the farce of his present

existence. He was thinking of those incidents which had turned the fellows against him. Was it right for him to grumble? He had brought everything on himself, and——"

His thoughts jarred, for the wind suddenly thudded against the window, and then went howling along the wall of the Ancient House. Harry caught his breath in, and stared at the darkness across the room.

No, it wasn't darkness. Outside, there was a little moonlight. At intervals, the moon would come sailing out from between the swiftly-moving clouds. And then the West Square would be palely illuminated. Some of the beams would come slanting into Harry's dormitory.

Somehow, he felt uneasy—much more un-

weird and uncanny mingled with the low whining of the wind. It was like something scratching against the window-pane.

Harry sat up, startled, his heart thumping heavily against his ribs.

The school clock suddenly chimed the hour of midnight. It was an eerie hour, too!

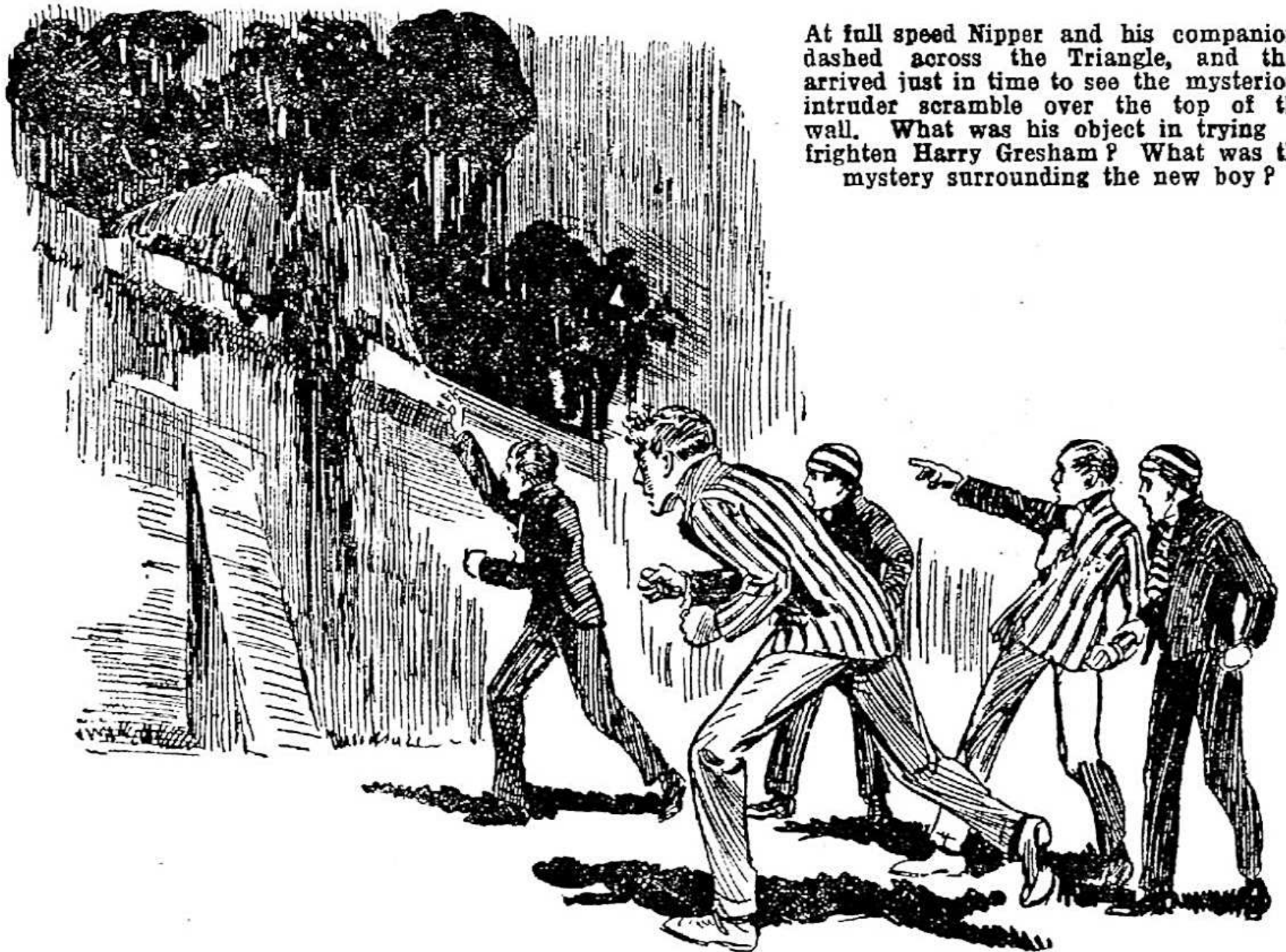
"What—what was that?" muttered Harry feverishly.

Scrape, scrape, scrape!

It came again, and for a moment Harry felt a wild desire to bury himself beneath the sheets. But he fought against it. That was what a child of five would do.

So he still sat there, tense and rigid.

He envied Alec Duncan, for the latter was breathing regularly and evenly on the other



At full speed Nipper and his companions dashed across the Triangle, and they arrived just in time to see the mysterious intruder scramble over the top of the wall. What was his object in trying to frighten Harry Gresham? What was the mystery surrounding the new boy?

easy than usual. Sleep was out of the question. If Alec Duncan had not been in the room, he would have turned on the electric light. Or, at least, he would have pulled the blind down. He always had a sort of horror of seeing something at his bedroom window. It was a childish fancy, of course, and Harry despised himself for it.

That was why he never objected when Alec pulled the blind up before lights-out. The New Zealand junior was a great believer in fresh air, and he always wanted the blinds right up, and the window well open.

Scrape, scrape, scrape!

It was a new sound—one that had not come to Harry's ears before. It seemed

side of the dormitory. The moon came out from behind a cloud, and the whole window, with its open lattices, was illuminated. It stood out boldly from the surrounding blackness of the room.

Then, suddenly, Harry gave a jump.

"Oh!" he muttered. "Oh!"

There was a black shape at the foot of his bed!

It seemed to his startled mind that the thing was moving—growing bigger—creeping over the bed preparatory to attacking him! He could even distinguish a kind of hump on the back—a grotesque——

"Go away!" shouted Harry hoarsely. "Oh—oh!"

His nerve had deserted him, and he crouched back against his pillow, his face deathly white. His eyes were staring—staring fixedly. What was this monstrous thing which crouched there?

Then a filmy cloud passed from the face of the moon, and the light entered the dormitory more brightly. At the very same moment Alec Duncan roused himself up in bed, disturbed, doubtless, by Harry's hoarse cry.

"Hallo!" he mumbled sleepily. "Anything wrong?"

He caught sight of Harry's rigid figure.

"Great Scott!" he ejaculated. "What on earth—"

"That—that shape!" gasped Harry, pointing.

Alec bent forward.

"That thing?" he asked. "You mean my jacket?"

"Your jacket!" gasped Harry.

"Of course it's my jacket, you chump!" growled Alec. "I hung it there while I was getting undressed. Why the dickens don't you get to sleep? Full of fancies again, eh? You're the limit!"

He was very sleepy, and he snuggled down again, and pulled the bedclothes over him. Harry had lain back, too, and he was filled with utter contempt for himself. He was trembling violently, and he felt like laughing aloud in his relief.

Alec Duncan's jacket!

Just an ordinary article of clothing, hung on the bedpost—and he had mistaken it for some shapeless horror of the night!

"Oh, you fool!" he muttered savagely. "You pitiful idiot!"

All his former condemnation of himself returned with treble force. Scared by a coat on the bedrail! Who was he to grumble because the fellows ignored him? He was no better than a frightened infant!

Scrape, scrape, scrape!

Harry sat up in bed again, shaking. Where did that sound come from? Common-sense told him that it was just a caprice of the wind—a twig of ivy, or— No, that wasn't possible, because he had satisfied himself, more than once about the ivy. And there were no loose twigs outside this window. At home, once, he had been scared by a sprig of loose creeper, and since then he had always made sure that no such event could occur again.

Then what was this scrape? How had he heard—

There it was again.

Alec was asleep again by now. He was a healthy youngster, and it only took him a moment or two to fall back into a condition of peaceful slumber. His breathing was regular and steady again.

"Oh, it's only my fancy!" muttered Harry fiercely. "My kiddish, beastly fancy! What's the good of Alec telling me to fight against a rotten blight like this? I'm a funk—and nothing can alter me!"

Scrape, scrape, scrape!

That unaccountable sound was getting on Harry's nerves to such an extent that he felt

desperate. His nerves were on edge. He only had to look round the room and he could see fantastic shapes everywhere. He knew that they were merely the figments of his own fevered imagination—but they, nevertheless, seemed to have the power of scaring him.

Light! He needed light! Unless he had light he would start screaming. It would only be necessary to get out of bed, and turn the switch, and the room would be flooded with light. Anything to get rid of this awful pall of mystery—

Again Harry's thoughts were interrupted. How could he get out of bed? He daren't even attempt it! Something might clutch out at him from under the bed, and seize his bare ankle! Reason told him that nothing could possibly be under the bed, but reason had fled. Terror had him in its grip. He was haunted by a thousand different fears!

His attention became fixed on the window.

What was that?

Something was crouching there, on the window-sill! It was moving! It was rising slowly—

"Fool!" panted Harry. "You'll go crazy if you don't grip yourself!"



CHAPTER 18.

IN THE NIGHT!

HERE was nothing at the window, of course, Harry told himself. He knew there wasn't. Only a minute before, when the moon had been fully out, he had seen the square sharply outlined. It was a bit dull now, and the wind was beating against the lattice. The moon suddenly came out again, and Harry gulped.

Was it his imagination? Was his mind giving way, or what? But there *was* something on the window-sill—a black thing, crouching there like a horrible spectre.

Yes, and it was moving, too! It was rearing itself up, inch by inch, higher and higher! Or was it only his fancy? Was he looking at something which didn't actually exist?

Harry was in such a condition that he couldn't tell.

Often, he had seen awful things—only to realise, a minute or two later, that his imagination had played him false.

"I'm going mad!" he muttered. "I knew I should, in the end! There's nothing there but a creature of my own crazy brain! I can't stand this. I've got to have a light in the room. I don't care what Alec says. I can't stand— Oh!"

His attention became fixed—horrified. There were two eyes looking at him—two baleful, unwinking eyes. They seem to be dead flat, and he dimly remembered having seen them at other times—once in the darkness beyond Big Arch.

And that awful thing was rearing itself up now. It was spreading over the whole window, reaching out bat-like wings, and clutch-

NEXT WEDNESDAY!

"HANDY CURES THE COWARD!"

Good old Handy!

He wasn't wrong about Harry Gresham, after all!

Handy and Nipper and a few of the others always did believe that there was something mysterious about the new boy, and that he wasn't a rotter at heart.

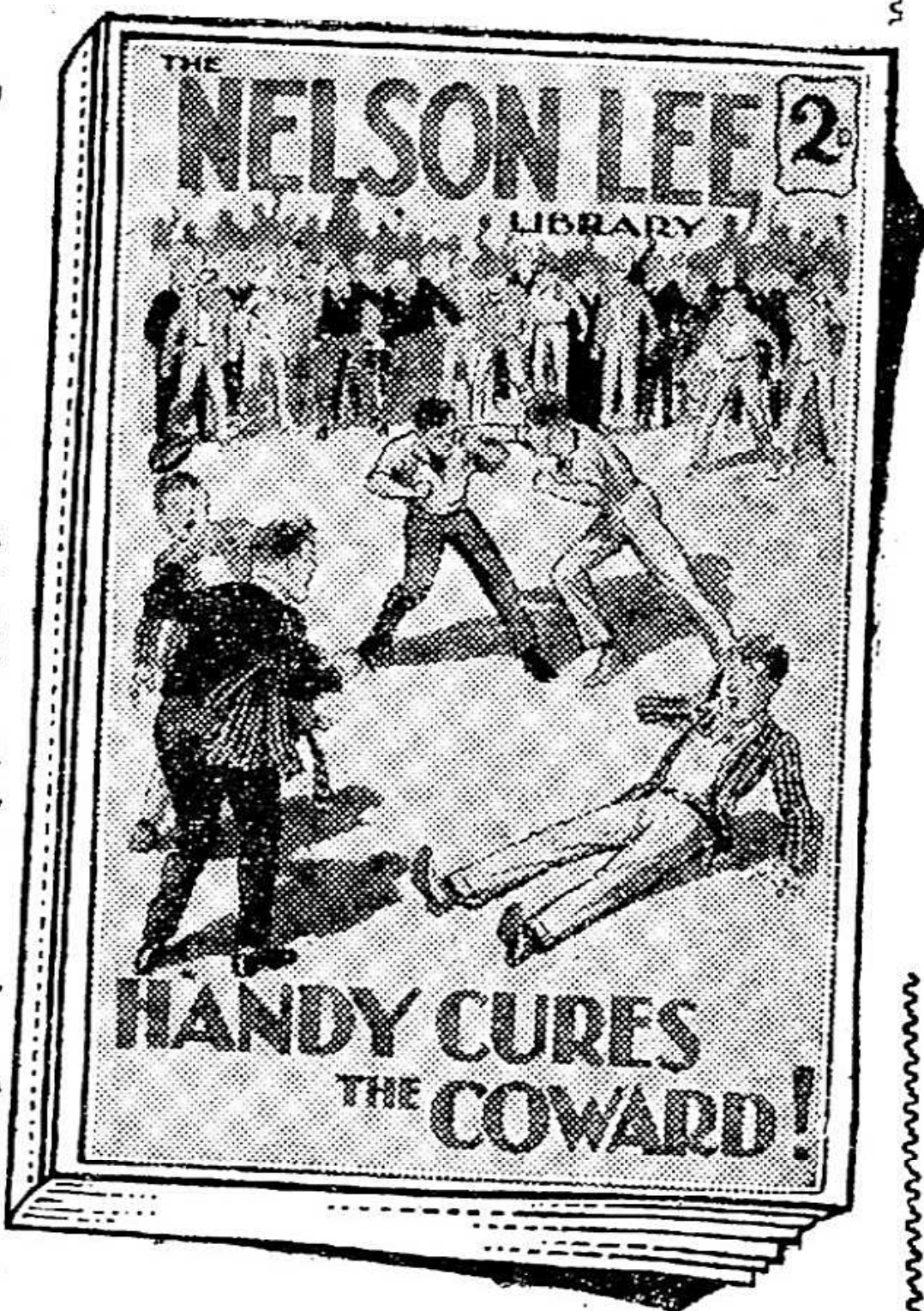
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ORDER IN ADVANCE!

ing at the frame. He could hear the scraping of its claws on the glass.

Or was it only his fancy?

"Take it away!" he screamed suddenly.

It was an entirely involuntary cry. A moment before he had resolved to hold himself in check, to refrain from any wild out-cry. His own voice startled him—for a split second he hardly knew that he had caused that desperate sound.

And then he shouted again.

"I'm going mad—mad!" he panted hoarsely.

To move was impossible. He dared not get out of the bed, even. There was that Thing there—spreading out over the window like a fan—with those baleful eyes apparently watching him, and gloating over his terror.

Was it imagination?

Could this terrible apparition be a mere creature of his brain?

And then the window was slowly, persistently opened! That couldn't be imagination! He could see it moving. And the Thing was creeping in—coming towards him—

"Help!" shrieked Harry. "Help!"

He was filled with one desperate desire—to

get away—to escape from this horrifying monster of the night. He leapt out of bed, and his foot caught in a twisted knot of sheets. With a terrific thud he struck the floor and rolled over, dazed.

Alec Duncan was sitting up in bed, thoroughly alarmed.

"What's wrong?" he gasped. "Harry! What the—"

He dived out, and saw Harry Gresham's prostrate form on the floor. In a moment, he was on his knees, helping to lift Harry up.

"Take it away!" breathed Harry fearfully.

"Easy—easy!" said Alec, alarmed. "There's nothing to be frightened of, you ass! Great Scott! All this shouting—"

"The window!" croaked Harry.

Duncan stared round at the window, and saw nothing to alarm him.

"There's nothing there!" he said softly.

"My dear chap—"

"But—but—"

"Of course there's nothing."

"It was coming at me—an awful thing like a bat!" babbled Harry. "It wasn't imagination, Alec—I tell you it wasn't imagination! The eyes! Those horrible, flat, baleful eyes!"

"Hush!" whispered the other junior.

"I saw the window opening, too!" muttered Harry. "That—that horrible Thing was entering! It may be there now—perhaps it's in the room somewhere. Oh, you can't understand——"

"Pull yourself together, man, growled Alec. "I tell you there's absolutely nothing. You must have dreamed it—you've had a nightmare."

He jumped to his feet, and went to the window.

The moon was shining clearly, and West Square was looking serenely calm and peaceful. Not a light was showing anywhere, and there was scarcely a sound above the lulling sigh of the wind.

"Yes, you had a nightmare——" began Alec.

The door opened, and Nipper hurried in.

"Hallo! You fellows awake?" he said sharply. "Did that screaming come from here?"

Alec Duncan drew a deep breath.

"Oh, don't make a fuss!" he said. "Harry had a nightmare, that's all!"

Handforth came in, followed by Church and McClure and Tommy Watson.

"Oh cheese it!" said Alec, irritated. "For goodness sake don't pile in like this! We shall have a master down on us, or a prefect, and then there'll be lots of beastly explanations. I tell you that Harry had a nightmare."

"Then it must have been a pretty bad one!" said Nipper grimly. "I've never heard such an awful scream!"

"I didn't hear it," said Handforth. "But something woke me up, and then I heard a yell—— Why the dickens can't somebody put the light on?"

A switch was turned, and the room became flooded with electric light. Most of the juniors were rather dazzled, but Harry, at least, felt a sense of security and comfort.

"Come along!" said Alec gently.

Harry was helped on to his bed, and it was found that he had a nasty bruise on his elbow, and a big bump on the side of his head.

"You must have come an awful cropper!" said Handforth.

"I—I don't seem to remember," muttered Harry.

"Of course you don't," nodded Alec. "You were asleep, and you had a nightmare, and the fall woke you up. You fell out of bed, that's all. Nothing to be alarmed about."

"I thought somebody was being murdered!" said Church indignantly. "And it's only this chap in a nightmare!"

"You sound as if you were disappointed," growled Alec. "Sorry you didn't find Harry murdering me, but perhaps he'll do better next time."

Church coloured.

"I—I didn't mean——" he began.

"But if he has a few more nightmares like that, he'll probably injure himself seriously," went on Duncan. "When I found him on

the floor he was babbling about something at the window—a great bat, with awful eyes, or some such nonsense. It's marvellous what you can see in a nightmare. Pull yourself together Harry, old man!"

Harry Gresham hesitated. For a moment he thought that it would be as well to let the juniors labour under their delusion. They couldn't blame him for having a nightmare could they? But his innate sense of honesty forbade him to take advantage of this opening.

"It wasn't a nightmare," he said shakily, his eyes big and wild. "I was awake all the time!"

"Awake!" said Handforth, staring.

"Yes, awake!" muttered Harry. "I haven't slept a wink since lights out, and I saw that Thing at the window—I didn't dream it! I tell you I saw it—I saw it!"



CHAPTER 19.

THE MYSTERIOUS MARK!

EVERYBODY stared at him.

"You saw it?" repeated Nipper sharply.

"Yes, I did!"

"Don't believe him!" interrupted Alec, in a gruff voice. "If he saw anything, it was only in his imagination. Why, I was awake a minute later, and there was nothing at the window."

"Did you go and look out?" asked Nipper.

"Yes, of course."

"Immediately?"

"Eh?" said Alec. "Well, not immediately. I went to Harry first, and tried to get him up off the floor."

"How long was it before you went to the window?" asked Nipper keenly.

"About a minute, I should think—perhaps two."

"Two minutes," muttered Nipper. "Gresham, are you absolutely certain that you saw something really there?"

"Oh, I don't know," replied Harry unsteadily. "I thought I knew just now, but I'm beginning to wonder. If Alec went to the window, and saw nothing, I must have imagined it."

"Of course you did!" said Handforth severely. "Stands to reason. Nobody could have got down from this window in that time. It's a good bit from the ground, and the ivy isn't strong enough for anybody to climb up. Besides, who'd climb? It's after midnight, and there wouldn't be any japers about now. Besides, you're too unpopular to be japed."

"I wasn't thinking of that," said Harry quietly.

"Don't be such a tactless ass, Handy!" growled Church in a whisper. "Why do you want to remind the chap of a thing like that?"

"Eh? I—I didn't mean——"

"Tell us what you saw, Gresham," said Nipper.

"No; I don't want to."

"Why not?"

"You'll only laugh."

"No, we shan't," replied Nipper. "I've seen fellows badly scared more than once, but I've seldom seen one with such an awful look in his eyes as you had just now. You've got a terrific imagination, Gresham, and if you go on like this, you'll have to see a doctor."

"Or a brain specialist," said Handforth thoughtlessly.

"Can't you dry up?" hissed Church, glaring.

"Oh, my hat!" murmured Handy. "I—I'd forgotten!"

"Well, I saw an awful Shape," said Harry. "I expect it was only my fancy, really. It must have been. Alec saw nothing, and he was awake almost at the same time. It was a huge thing—like a human sort of bat, with outstretched wings. I could see the ears, too, and those eyes—those terrible eyes!"

"Nightmare!" said Handforth firmly.

"I tell you it wasn't——"

"Rot! I've had nightmares, and I know what they're like!" declared Handforth, in a stubborn voice. "I've never seen human bats with funny ears, but this thing has all the trade marks of a nightmare. What the dickens did you eat before you came to bed!"

Harry was feeling stronger, now, and his wild agitation had gone. In the presence of all these fellows he was beginning to feel ashamed of his weakness. The bright light, too, had helped to steady him. He was thankful that nobody else in the House had been awakened.

Nipper strolled over to the window, and stood looking out. West Square was as quiet as ever. The moon was shining out of a clear patch of sky, and somewhere in the distance a cock was growing—several hours before its time. There was certainly nothing of an alarming character here.

Nipper was aware that Handforth was putting Gresham through a kind of cross-examination. It was quite impossible for Handy to let an opportunity like this slip through his fingers.

Then Nipper's attention became fixed on the stonework of the window-sill. He leaned over, and pursed his lips.

"Rummy!" he murmured. "Jolly rummy!"

His keen eyes had detected two marks on the outer edge of the stonework. They were so faint that no other junior would have seen them. But Nipper had a special aptitude for seeing things.

He bent down closer, hoping that the other juniors would not disturb him for a moment. A suspicion was in his mind, a rather grim thought. Unless he was vastly mistaken,

those two marks had been caused by the top end of a ladder!

"By Jove!" he murmured. "There's something behind this—something pretty deep, too!"

His heart warmed towards Harry Gresham. Perhaps everybody had been gravely misjudging the chap. He was even misjudging himself, for he believed that he had imagined that bat-like creature.

And Nipper felt sure that he hadn't!

Ladder marks! The imagination can do a lot, but it cannot cause the marks of a ladder to impress themselves on a stone window sill.

"Anything there?" came Tommy Watson's voice.

Nipper turned.

"No, it seems all quiet," he said. "We'd better be getting back to bed, you fellows."

"Blessed if I can make head or tail of this funny chump," said Handforth, in rather an exasperated voice. "He reckons that he fancied the whole thing. If so, it's a swindle. I thought we might get on the track of something interesting."

"Cheese it, Handy!" growled McClure. "You're always thinking about getting on the track. I thought you were giving your giddy detective powers a rest! Don't start inflicting them on Gresham, unless you owe him a grudge!"

"Look here, you ass——"

"Now then, Handy, no rows now, in the middle of the night!" said Nipper severely. "We'll leave Gresham with you, Duncan. I'll come back in half a jiffy with a couple of candles. You'd better stick them on the mantelpiece, and keep them burning. It's too conspicuous to use the electric light!"

"But why candles?" asked Handforth, staring. "Great Scott! You don't mean to say that Gresham can't go to sleep without a light in the room? What do you think this dormitory is—a nursery?"

Handforth was pushed out of the room before he could make any more disconcerting remarks. The others followed, and a minute later Nipper returned with the promised candles. He lit them, and stuck them on the mantelpiece. Harry Gresham gave him a grateful look.

"Thanks awfully," he muttered.

"Rats!" laughed Nipper. "Take my advice, old man, and try to get some sleep. Alec, be a good pal, and keep awake for a bit. And don't talk. Don't let him dwell on what has just happened."

Duncan looked at the Junior captain rather curiously.

"Why, do you think——" he began.

"Never mind what I think," whispered Nipper, as he passed him. "But there's something fishy about this! Watch him, Duncan—watch him! And try to make him sleep!"

Nipper went out, leaving the New Zealand junior completely mystified.



CHAPTER 20.

THE MIDNIGHT PROWLER!

TOMMY WATSON shook his head dubiously.

"There's something wrong with that chap, Nipper," he said. "He's not dotty, or anything like that, but he's— Well, he's queer. I don't think his people ought to have sent him to St. Frank's at all."

"I'm wondering if we guess the real truth yet," said Nipper thoughtfully.

"What do you mean?" asked Watson.

"Well, I'm not so sure about this imagination stuff," replied Dick. "It looks squiffy to me. Gresham may have some funny ways about him, but there's a limit to the imaginative powers, after all."

The pair were back in their dormitory. Sir Montie Tregellis-West was fast asleep, having been undisturbed. And his chums had no intention of awakening him.

"I say, what's the idea?" asked Watson, as he prepared to climb into bed. "What the dickens are you getting dressed for?"

"I'm going to pop out," said Nipper calmly.

"Pop out!" repeated Watson, with a blank stare.

"Yes, but you needn't bother," said Nipper. "I'm curious to have a look at the gravel underneath the window of Gresham's dormitory."

"You ass, leave it till to-morrow—"

"It may be too late, then," interrupted Nipper. "There's no time like the present, my son. I shall probably be back within ten minutes."

"Rats! I'm coming with you," said Watson, hastily donning his own trousers. "If you're going out, I'm going out! But I'm jiggered if I can understand what the dickens you're driving at!"

They quietly stole out of the dormitory, and they prepared to break bounds. In a way, it was quite a serious breach of the rules, and it would lead to a heavy punishment if discovered. But Nipper felt that the circumstances justified the risk.

They had hardly moved six yards down the corridor, however, before another dormitory door softly opened, and three other figures stole out.

"Shush!" hissed one of them. "Not a sound, you chaps! If we're collared, it'll mean a swishing— Hi! What the—"

"It's all right—only us!" whispered Nipper. "I wish you wouldn't make such a noise, Handy! Where are you fellows off to, anyway?"

Handforth breathed with relief as he recognised the voice.

"I thought we'd have a look round," he said cautiously. "I'm not altogether sure that Gresham imagined everything to-night. Some fatheaded ass has been trying to jape him— just out of ill-natured malice, I expect. I'm off to track him down!"

"I suppose you know who he is?" asked Watson, with sarcasm.

"Armstrong, of the East House," said Handforth promptly.

"How do you know?" asked Nipper.

"Never mind how I know," retorted Handforth loftily. "It's my business to know things! I—I mean—"

"It's only a guess!" said Church, exposing the amateur sleuth as a fraud. "That's just like Handy's marvellous deductions! He suddenly looks at Mac and me, and says: 'I'll bet Armstrong did this!' And within two minutes he's made up his mind that Armstrong is the only possible culprit!"

"It's all rot!" said McClure. "Gresham imagined the whole thing."

Nipper did some quick thinking. At all costs, the impulsive Handforth must be prevented from raiding the East House, and visiting his wrath upon the innocent head of Timothy Armstrong. For Nipper, of course, knew perfectly well that Armstrong had had nothing to do with the affair. On the other hand, Handforth would probably want to accompany Nipper on his own inquiry.

There is a wise old saying to the effect that it is better to choose the lesser evil of two. Nipper turned to Handforth, and took his arm.

"Never mind about Armstrong," he said softly. "You come with me, Handy. I think I'm on the track of something really mysterious. This thing wasn't a jape, but a deliberate, malicious attempt to scare poor Gresham almost out of his wits. I want to see if I can find a clue."

"I'm your man!" said Handforth eagerly.

Church and McClure were rather relieved. They had had no wish to be dragged into an adventure which would inevitably lead to a public flogging. But they could not have left Handforth to go alone. With Nipper in charge of the case, their qualms vanished.

They stole downstairs like shadows and got out into the West Square by means of the window in Study C. Nipper had enjoined complete silence, and they crept along to the spot which lay immediately below the window of the dormitory occupied by Gresham and Duncan.

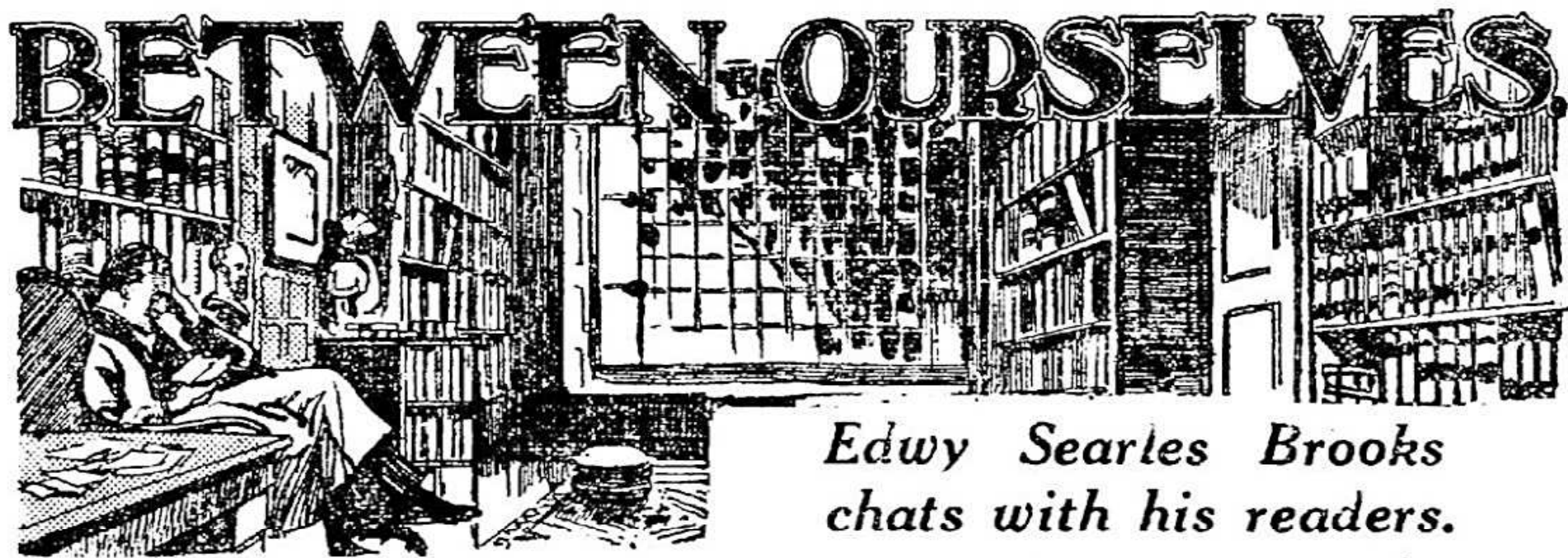
Nipper pulled out a powerful electric torch, and directed the beam of light close to the ground. There were no footprints discernible on the hard-trodden gravel, but there were two others marks which instantly confirmed Nipper's earlier suspicions.

"By Jove!" he breathed. "Look here!"

They peered down.

"Don't you see?" asked Nipper. "Those two little depressions! A ladder was standing here not long ago! Gresham didn't imagine that fantastic figure—he actually saw it! Ghosts don't find it necessary to use ladders, so it stands to reason that we're on the track of something solid! There's somebody working on the quiet—with the idea of putting the breeze up Gresham. There's more in this than meets the eye, my lads."

(Continued on page 36.)



*Edwy Searles Brooks
chats with his readers.*

NOTE.—If any reader writes to me, I shall be pleased to comment upon such remarks as are likely to interest the majority. All letters should be addressed to EDWY SEARLES BROOKS c/o The Editor, THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY, The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, LONDON, E.C.4. Every letter will have my personal attention, and all will be acknowledged in these columns. Letters of very special merit will be distinguished by a star, thus*, against the sender's name. Communications which indicate writer's age are naturally easier for me to answer.—E.S.B.

ALAN THORPE* (Sydney), S. G. Thornton (Longreach, Queensland), Stanley Cawiron (West Kensington), H. F. Evans (Carmarthen), Paolo Zuccarelli (East Grinstead), Reginald Lock (Gunnislake), Constance Branton (Grange Town), Edmund Clowes (Brondesbury Park), George Rogal* (Manchester), William Arthur Rowe (Leicester), "Eve" (Southport), Ralph Sewell* (St. Ives), "Confused" (Wednesbury), Maurice Stodel (E.I.), Teddy R. Browne* (Durban), Joseph Kerr (Dungannon), Terence Sullivan (Hastings), G. Povah* (Streatham Hill), S. Jacobs* (Streatham Hill), Arthur Reginald Mott* (Balham), Peter Setford (W.2), Ethel Ormerod (Accrington), Jack Greaves (Gt. Yarmouth), Hubert C. Tilley* (Oakham), Kenneth Petrie* (St. Lambert, Canada), J. Levett (London, E.), Roland C. Beacham (Redditch), H. Savage (Camberwell), "W. S. B." (Oldham), S. H. Yeo* (Wallasey), "A Reader" (Glasgow), Arthur J. S. Hand (Shrewsbury), Bert Clifton (Birmingham), D. Pack (Hove), Gladys Marjorie Bowen* (Birmingham), Sydney Oldham (Stockport), B. Le Cocq (Alderney, C. I.).

You are not the only reader, Alan Thorpe, who places William Napoleon Browne at the head of the list as favourite character. Thanks muchly for your information about Sydney, and if ever I do decide to pay a trip to Australia, I shall certainly let you know, and shall expect to find you waiting for me, as you kindly suggest, at the Orient Wharf. Your mention of a yellow cab reminds me of America.

Jolly good luck to your club, S. G. Thornton. You Australian fellows are pretty lively. A club of 24 members is first-rate. You are doing splendidly and all power to your elbow.

I say, Reginald Lock, what's the big idea? You ask me to send you an autographed photo of myself, but you have only sent me a visiting card, with a horrid, blurry-looking smudge on it, alleged to be your thumb-print. Nothing doing old son! I don't send my photograph in return for thumb-prints. If you send me a proper photograph of yourself—even a snapshot will do—then I will comply with your request. By this time you ought to know I have offered to send my autographed photo to everybody who sends me a photo of himself or herself.

And that leads me to make a little diversion here. I have had one or two letters from girl

readers, and they seem to imagine that it will be useless for them to send me their photos, as I should not regard them as eligible. Of course, that's all tommy rot. A reader is a reader, and I will cheerfully send my dial to any reader, whatever sex or age, who wants one—always providing, as I have said, that I get a photograph first in exchange. That's fair, isn't it?

I am sorry that your mother is opposed to you having your photograph taken, — No, I won't mention the name of this correspondent, in case his friends chip him about the matter. But the reader himself will naturally know that I am addressing him. And I cannot send you my photograph unless you send me one of yours—as that would not be fair to all the other readers. If I started doing that sort of thing, you might spread it about, and then I should get all sorts of other requests. Your only way is to get your mother to raise her ban. Or why not get a friend to take a snapshot of you? Of course, with your mother's permission.

With regard to that Sectional Map of St. Frank's and District, Ralph Sewell, I'm afraid I haven't much cheering news for you. You may remember that the Chief Officer mentioned, a week or two ago, that there was no prospect of the map coming along for some time. And this, I'm afraid, is the truth. That map depends entirely upon me, for I am the only one who can get out all the details. And I am so tremendously busy that I cannot see any possible way of applying myself to this work for quite a long time to come. In the meantime, some of the enthusiastic readers may take the C.O.'s advice, and get out some maps of their own. I should be quite interested to see some of these efforts, by the way. So if you, Ralph, or anybody else, get out a map, don't forget to put in every single geographical detail that you can discover in the stories. As for my age, you have only to send me your photograph, and I'll send you mine in return—one that has only just recently been taken. And then you'll be able to judge just how old I am.

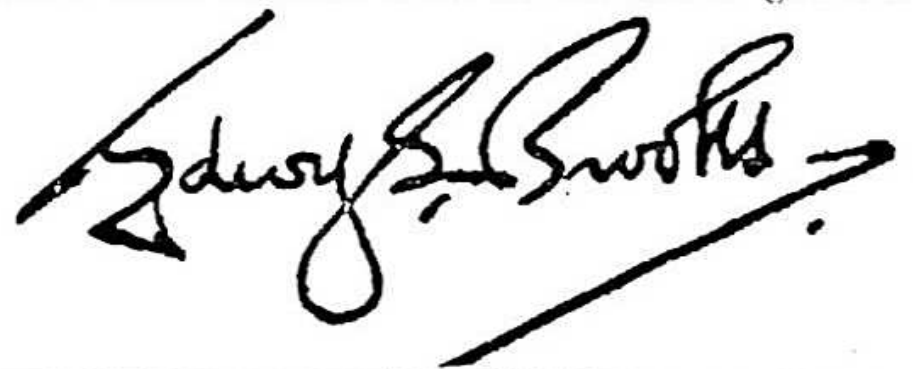
You certainly do seem to be prejudiced against your own sex Ethel Ormerod. At least, you're prejudiced against Irene & Co., in my stories. But how can it be an insult to your sex when I cause Winnie Pitt to cry because she has quarrelled with Fullwood? Don't girls cry at

(Continued on next page.)

all nowadays? Is the modern girl so hard that she has lost the power of sobbing when she is unhappy? Personally, I think it is quite natural that a warm-hearted girl should cry if she has quarrelled with one of her best friends. Your reference to that Christmas story—where Irene & Co. are prominently featured in a jape with the St. Frank's fellows—is not very flattering to me. "Piffle! That isn't the word for it. Putrid is nearer the mark." Thanks very much, Miss Omerod. I ask for plain criticism, don't I? Anyhow, I don't bear you any malice for speaking so bluntly. But was that story so bad as all that?

If you don't mind, S. H. Yeo, I am going to print a few extracts from your letter to me. It was a very good letter, and I should like some more of the same sort. So don't "keep putting it off," as you say. Let me hear from you again soon, old man. In your letter, you say this: "The Northeastrian series was, I think, the best I have ever read. All your stories are good, in fact, the best there are published in weekly papers." Very nice. I had read as far as that, and I was beginning to feel in a nice, warm glow. Then I came upon the next bit: "I think the most ridiculous cricket story I ever read (I hope you don't mind me saying it) was 'The Boy From the Bush.' I suppose it is possible for a fifteen-year-old schoolboy to score 161 in a Test Match, and for the same boy to skittle the Australian wickets. But, I ask you, is it probable? In my opinion it is so improbable that I have termed 'The Boy from the Bush' as utter bosh." Aren't you a little bit rough on me, old man? I am perfectly willing to agree with you

that the idea of a fifteen-year-old schoolboy scoring 161 in a Test Match is very, very unusual. But how do you think the readers would like it if I made this particular schoolboy an ordinary average cricketer? Where would be the fun in the story? In the past there have been young cricketers of really amazing abilities—quite capable of doing the things that I described in that story. But in real life such youngsters never get the opportunity to show their prowess in a Test Match. But in a St. Frank's story I can make it possible—and have done so. That, in my opinion, is where the interest comes in. So I am rather hoping that you will alter your opinion. At all events, I always try to avoid the introduction of "utter bosh" into my stories. Later on in your letter you say this: "Up to now my letter has been very varied, containing, I think chiefly criticisms. But, behind it all, I want you to realise that I regard you as the best school story writer I know." So what can I say now? As a matter of fact, S. H. Yeo, that letter of yours is a particularly good one—for it contains kindly criticism and caustic criticism. In other words, you tell me exactly what you like and say exactly what you don't like. That's what I want to know from all readers in general.



THE HAUNTED SCHOOLBOY!



(Continued from page 34.)

They stole quietly out of the Square, and passed through West Arch. The Triangle lay ahead, and as Nipper softly stepped out, he caught his breath in.

"Quick!" he whispered. "There's something moving over there!"

For an instant they distinctly saw a black shape near the main gates. Their hearts bounded. There was something grotesque about that unknown marauder.

But Nipper waited not a second. At full speed, he dashed across the Triangle, and the others followed. They arrived just in time to see the mysterious thing vanish over the top of the wall. They were up in a second, hot on the chase. But by the time they got into the lane, the scene was deserted.

"It's no good!" muttered Nipper. "He must have dodged through the other hedge, whoever he is. It'll be like looking for a needle in a haystack. But we saw him—and we know that he was no phantom!"

So they returned to the Ancient House, with positive proof that something very fishy

was afoot. And in future, they would keep a keen eye on Harry Gresham! The unfortunate chap wasn't to be blamed to the extent that at first seemed warranted.

Nipper looked into Harry's bed-room just before returning to his own dormitory.

"Gresham, old man," he said, "you can get to sleep without fear now. You didn't imagine that awful 'Thing.'"

"I did!" muttered Harry. "I must have done!"

"Outside, we found the marks of a ladder—and we chased the beastly trickster himself," said Nipper. "Somebody's having a low-down game with you, Gresham; your imagination isn't so vivid as you believe!"

Harry sat up in bed, his eyes staring.

"Then—then it's not so bad as I thought?" he asked tensely. "Oh, but you must be mistaken! There's nobody who would deliberately frighten me like that—for nothing!"

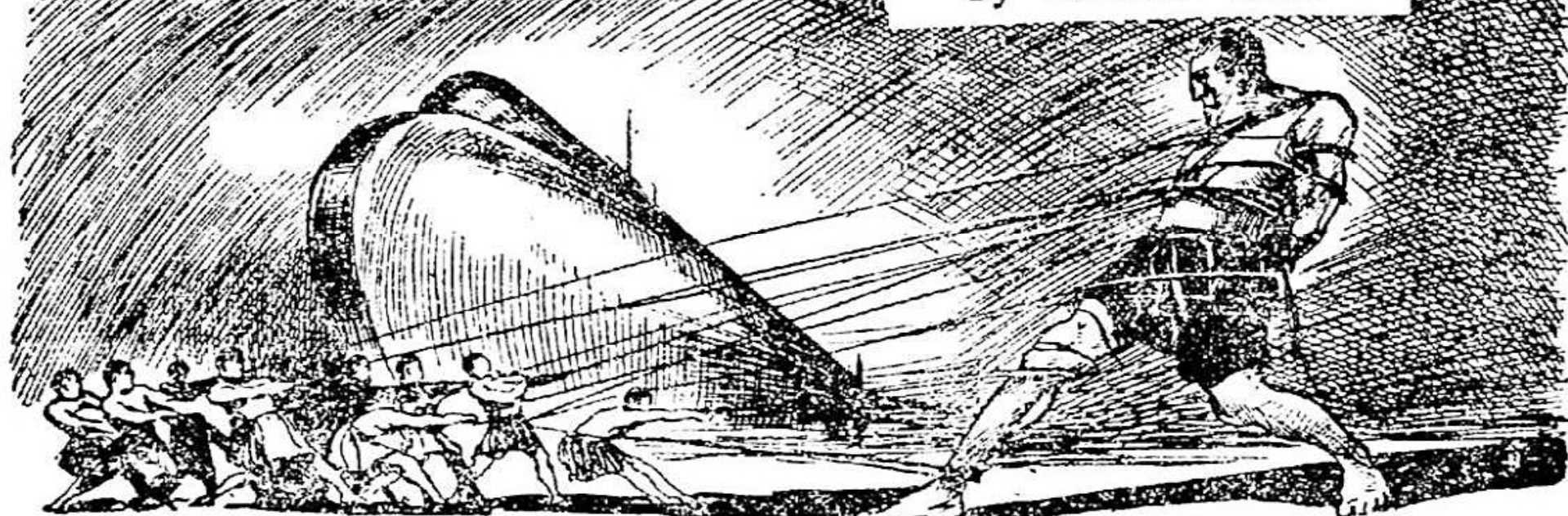
Nipper patted him on the shoulder.

"Anyhow, you go to sleep," he advised. "There's a mystery here, and we shan't be satisfied until we've cleared it up."

And five minutes later Harry Gresham dropped off into a peaceful sleep. Nipper's news had given him a real gleam of hope—and, somehow, he was already feeling strengthened and hopeful.

THE END.

(Who is this mysterious man, and what does he hope to gain by frightening Harry Gresham? Again, what is the secret of the new boy's cowardice? You'll find everything explained in the concluding story of this grand series next week. Don't miss it!)

Doomed to Die!***Our Wonderful Adventure Serial!*****The BURIED WORLD!****By LIONEL DAY****INTRODUCTION.**

Jim Maitland lives in a small shop in Stag more. A mysterious man named Stanislaus Cripps owes money to the shop, and Jim determines to collect it. He climbs over the wall of Widgery Dene—Cripps' estate—and drops into the grounds. There he finds an amazing machine which is something between a submarine and an airship. Mr Cripps is on board and Jim asks him for the money. The man refuses to pay, and before Jim realises it he finds the machine in the air! It travels half over the world, then dives into the ocean. It reaches the bottom and then instead of resting on the bed continues going downwards! It is then floating on the surface of an underground river, and Mr Cripps explains that there must be a sort of leak in the ocean bed and they are being sucked down to the centre of the earth. They stop the machine and come on deck. But as they appear they are captured by several

amazing giants who fall on them from the shore. Jim escapes and later saves the life of a little man called Masra. In return Masra and his daughter Tinta let him live with them. Jim finds himself among a colony of dwarf men who are called the Kru people. They are at enmity with the Giants. Jim, accompanied by Masra and Tinta, rescue Mr Cripps. To do this Masra has to desert from the Kru people. The four set out on a journey to the Cave of Fire, where dwells He-Whose-Name-May-Not-Be-Spoken, the mysterious personage who rules the Kru. After completing part of the journey, Cripps and Jim go on alone and eventually find themselves in the presence of He-Whose-Name-May-Not-Be-Spoken. The latter claims to be 10,000 years old, and in order to prove his marvellous powers, he bathes in a column of fire!

*(Now read on.)***Bathing in Fire!**

LOOKS to me, boy as if he's recharging himself like an accumulator that's run down," said Stanislaus Cripps. "I must have been wrong in my hasty diagnosis of that column of fire. It's electric—a sort of St. Elmo's light on a big scale. He couldn't monkey about like that in a real fire—unless, of course, he's got the receipt from Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego."

The column of fire was only a few feet from the open end of the rocky chamber in which they were seated, and both Jim and Stanislaus Cripps realised that their original estimate of its quality had been mistaken.

It was not some volcanic emanation generated in the bathosphere, and forced through the rocky floor of the tunnel. It was more like an electric wave, and the sharp crackling sounds that came from the body of the column as HE laved his body in that mysterious fire appeared to support this theory.

HE seemed to be literally soaking himself in that mysterious light. They could see him drawing the air into his lungs in great gulps like someone indulging in breathing exercises. And

then the column of fire had passed, and HE was standing there, unscathed, unmarked, with a new radiant effulgence shining in his eyes and face!

Like a highly-trained athlete who has fed and rested, who feels all his energies renewed, HE sprang at a bound up the steps and stood in front of them. It may have been an hallucination, but it seemed to Jim that his beautifully moulded flesh glowed and glittered and sparkled.

"That, O Shining One, is the Secret of Life!" HE exclaimed, and his vibrant melodious voice was full of a note of triumph.

"Very interesting my dear sir," Stanislaus Cripps exclaimed. "Do you understand the nature of that column of fire? I am anxious to get at the scientific explanation of the phenomena."

"It is the spirit of life!" HE answered.

Stanislaus Cripps made an impatient gesture with his gauntleted hand.

"Come, come my dear sir," he exclaimed. "You mistake your audience. I'm not one of the Kru people. I am Stanislaus Cripps—a scientist of some standing—and those sort of boggy explanations don't cut any ice with me."

HE treated him to a measuring stare.

"You are full of pride and vanity, but what is your puny knowledge worth when laid in the balance of the unsolved mysteries of life? That is the vital force—the fire that renews, the secret of everlasting existence!"

"I know what sort of charlatan talk," Stanislaus Cripps growled. "You discovered this column of fire by chance, and somehow or other lighted upon its extraordinary properties. But you can't explain it, and you hide your ignorance by using such nonsensical terms as 'the spirit of life,' and 'the vital force.' That's the sort of bunk they chuck about in the offices of a Bond Street palmist!"

Jim saw again that strange dimming of HE's eyes, by which alone he seemed to express the human emotion of anger.

"For countless ages I have lived here, O Shining One. Twice daily have I performed the rite which you have just witnessed, renewing my body and my strength without the need of food. And you dare to tell me that I do not understand what I am talking about?"

"It's quite clear, sir, that you've made a discovery of first-class importance," said Cripps. "I'm not denying that. It would be foolish to do so. What I say is that you've wasted your time shockingly—that with all these opportunities to observe and note and deduce, you've discovered absolutely nothing about the nature of this column of fire."

Somehow Jim got the impression that Stanislaus Cripps was no longer regarding HE with scientific detachment. The vehemence of his tone suggested personal rancour. HE dropped gracefully into his fantastic chair, and sat there with his arms folded.

"I wait to be instructed," HE said at last, with a wintry smile. "Doubtless you, who have lived such a short while, have much to tell me?"

"A great deal, my dear sir, but as we should have to begin with the very elements of science, I'm afraid I have neither the time nor the inclination even to commence the task. We should be better employed if you were to answer the questions I am about to put to you!"

"You Shall Die!"

C RIPP'S cleared his throat like a public lecturer.

"By a process of telepathy, which you have naturally developed to a very high state during your prolonged existence, you direct the domestic activities of the Kru—the remnant of the people who were projected into this underworld with you at the time of the great catastrophe. That is quite understandable."

"Freed from the necessity of eating any food, you have developed your mental processes to such a high extent that you can see things happening at some distance away, which would be concealed from ordinary eyes."

"For example, you saw the destruction of the unfortunate Kru man by one of my oxygen cartridges though you were quite unable to explain how it happened. There are some obvious gaps in this reasoning, but when I get down to the proper study of the matter, I have no hesitation in saying that I shall be able to fill them up."

Somehow, it seemed to Jim that Stanislaus Cripps was deliberately stripping HE of all his supernatural grandeur. He was reducing him to an ordinary human being, and that clouded look on HE's face suggested that HE was far from pleased.

"What opportunities do you think, O Shining One, you will have of studying these matters?" HE inquired.

"As I intend to honour you with my presence for some time—until I have arrived at the true

scientific explanation of this phenomena—I shall have plenty of opportunities. For example, I have already solved one matter which puzzled me. You were able to project your voice into the Hall of the People, which, at a rough estimate, must be situated some nine or ten miles above this place. Rock, of course, is a great conductor of sound, and with your body highly charged with electricity, you are able to broadcast your voice in the same way as the British Broadcasting Corporation distribute music to listeners-in at very much greater distances."

HE leaned forward with a little start of what almost seemed like excitement.

"You say that you can speak across the void? O Shining One, you are saying the thing that is not!"

Stanislaus Cripps made an impatient gesture with his gauntleted hand.

"Done it for years, my dear sir! One of the toys of science! Even the boy here, with a few scraps of wire, could make a wireless apparatus quite as effective as yours. But we need not waste time with such matters. Naturally there must be a limit to the period of my visit, and there is much information that I wish to accumulate."

"I understand that you exerted yourself to save the remnant of your people who were hurled into this buried world at the time of the great catastrophe," continued Cripps. "Why did you permit the evolution of the Falta? They are abnormalities that should have been wiped out."

"For the sake of the Kru themselves, I permitted the Falta to live and develop. Combat and fear are necessary to the healthy growth of people. The Kru would have become soft, luxurious, undisciplined, were not the shadow of the Falta always at their door."

Jim could hear Stanislaus Cripps groan like one who listens to sentiments which he regards as barbarous and iniquitous.

"Quite wrong, my dear sir—an exploded theory that man must feel insecure if he is to survive! And I suppose it is due to the same curious lack of intelligence that you permit these outrageous rites, with one of which we had to interfere? I refer to the attempted barbarous execution of the very charming girl who accompanied us on this journey."

HE sprang to his feet. Jim turned away his head, for the fires emanating from those eyes was something he had never experienced before. It shook him to the very foundations of his being. It seemed almost as if Stanislaus Cripps' wonderful metal were not proof against that magnetic influence.

"O Shining One, I have listened to you with patience. No one has dared to speak to me as you have spoken to me, to question my word and my authority! Am I to debate with you the administration of my law? You say you have come here for knowledge. Perhaps you will get the knowledge, but of what service will it be to you, seeing that you can never pass with it out of here?"

"I shall return by the same way I came," Stanislaus Cripps replied. "In due course, when I have accumulated all the information I require, I shall return in my flying submarine to the Outer World. I am quite prepared to give you a lift, my dear sir, if you would care to accompany me. A change to our world might have a very refreshing effect upon your mind."

HE pointed a finger that seemed to vibrate with the terrific vital force with which he was possessed.

"You puny fool! You will never leave here! Already the food you brought with you is nearly exhausted. If you could make your way to the gate, no Kru will open it for you, and the secret is unknown to you. You will perish here miserably. You cannot steal the flame of life, for to

do so you must remove your shining covering and then—"

HE stared at Stanislaus Cripps with that wintry smile on his beautiful face that somehow suggested incalculable age.

"We shall be at your mercy," Stanislaus Cripps interrupted in a calm voice. "My dear sir, I quite appreciate that fact. But I have no intention of doffing this diving-dress. As for making our way out of this place, that remains to be seen. Now let us return to the subject we were discussing. Before we part, my dear sir, I should like to impress upon you how barbarous and unscientific are the methods by which you seek to maintain order among the Kru!"

Cripps crossed one leg over the other, folding his gauntleted hands over his knee.

"Just consider the perfectly absurd crime for which you would have sacrificed that very charming girl, Tinta. To prevent the Falta sacrificing one of the Kru to their very unpleasant idol, you promulgate a ban forbidding the Kru to leave the Inner Cavern a few days before the rite is due to be celebrated. The precaution, I admit, is a reasonable one. It displays a human interest in the welfare of the Kru, which does you credit. But to make death the punishment for disobedience, when seven days' imprisonment with, or without, the option of a fine, would be more than a sufficient penalty, is barbarous and cruel!"

The effect of his measured words on HE were remarkable. HE raised his hands above his head as if calling down maledictions on Stanislaus Cripps. A string of words in a language which neither of them understood poured from his lips. From between the open palms of his hands, flashes passed backwards and forwards. An aura as of flame seemed to emanate from his body. Then of a sudden he began to speak in the Kru tongue.

"You O Shining One, who have dared to tell me what I shall do and what I shall not do—you shall see how I value your advice! You shall see it, before you die miserably of starvation on the path that leads to the closed gate. Is my justice and my law to be set aside, to be held as a subject of debate and discussion between He-Whose-Name-May-Not-Be-Spoken, who is Lord of the Living Flame, Master of the Under World, and a puny mortal whose life is but a moment?"

The Summons!

"THAT seems to have got him on the raw, boy!" Stanislaus Cripps muttered to Jim in an aside. "I thought, if I tried long enough, I should find a way of galling his outrageous self-satisfaction. Boy, he's just a prig with a secret that he doesn't even understand!"

It was clear that Stanislaus Cripps had taken a violent dislike to HE. But Jim was not thinking of these personal animosities; in his ears was the clang of the swinging slab of stone, as it had closed behind them when they had set out on their journey to the Cave of the Fires; in his mind was the thought of perishing, miserably trapped in that underworld.

"Oh, Mr Cripps, don't make him angry!" he whispered. "How shall we get out of here again?"

"There's more ways of killing a pig than by cutting its throat, boy!" Stanislaus Cripps retorted. "Anyway, I'd sooner die than give this fellow the satisfaction of thinking he can get across with his cheap parlour magic!"

HE had turned away from them, and was standing on the edge of the platform, his hands still raised above his head, a glowing, radiant figure.

"You shall see my justice that you scorn!" he cried. "You sought to stand between me and her on whom I have passed judgment. You shall see how He-Whose-Name-May-Not-Be-Spoken deals with her!"

He made a pass in the air with his hands.

"You who broke my law—you who were rescued from the sacrificial stone by these Shining Ones—come hither that the justice of He-Whose-Name-May-Not-Be-Spoken may be performed on you!"

That melodious, vibrant voice went, echoing through the vaulted roof. Then his arms fell to his side, and, with that wintry smile upon his lips, he turned and seated himself again on his fantastic chair.

Jim could hear his heart pounding against his ribs. What was this terrible thing that was about to happen? How could he force Tinta to come to that place? And if she came—if, by his strange power, he could draw her there—what was to be her fate?

He forgot his own desperate situation—he forgot everything in this thought of the girl whose loyalty and companionship and friendship were more to him than life itself.

"Mr. Cripps," Jim stammered.

"Quiet, boy!" the other retorted. "The time for talking is over. He is doing what he would call a big magic, I suppose. This, he reckons, is about the last round between us, and he thinks he holds the winning punch. We'll see, boy. Keep cool and don't get excited. I've still got a few cards up my sleeve!"

More Magic!

A STILLNESS as of death pervaded the great cavern, and in that profound silence the time passed so slowly that every second seemed a minute and every minute an hour. Heavier and heavier upon Jim's heart and brain there weighed the gloom of a tragic foreboding. Tinta was in danger, but the nature of that danger and how it was to come upon her was hidden from him!

Suddenly HE, still with that wintry world-old smile upon his lips, stirred in his chair. He glanced at Jim.

"The boasting Shining One still comforts himself with the thought that he can perchance pit himself against my power; but the other—him you call boy—is afraid. He knows that nothing can withstand me. He fears the coming of my judgment! Look, O Shining Ones, and I will show you your thoughts!"

He drew his hands apart, palm open, and instantly that ball of flame appeared, and in the heart of it there formed gradually a vision like the picture on a cinema screen.

"Look, O Boastful One!"

They both stared into that strange picture. There was Stanislaus Cripps himself, with HE lying at his feet. On Stanislaus Cripps' face there was an expression of sublime condescension. The picture faded and another took its place—a representation of the thoughts that had been passing through Stanislaus Cripps' mind during that long silence.

The scene was a big public hall, packed with grey-haired, grave-looking men, who were all gazing with an air of reverence at a platform on which stood the figure of Stanislaus Cripps. He was in evening dress, with a somewhat flamboyant flower in his buttonhole. One hand was stroking his red beard and there was a smile of infinite pity on his lips for the poor unfortunate ignoramuses in the body of the hall.

Stanislaus Cripps half rose to his feet.

"Confound it all!" he exclaimed. "This is too much!"

HE'S mocking voice answered him.

"Dream your dreams, O Shining One! May they comfort you in the hour that is coming, when you will know what it is to hunger and thirst, and there is none to give you either food or water!"

Jim heard Stanislaus Cripps sniff. Then, as if ashamed of the excitement and interest he had betrayed, he settled himself again on the edge of the couch.

"And, now, him you call boy—look!" went on HE.

Out of the heart of the flaming ball appeared the sweet face of Tinta. She was smiling—a smile of infinite love and friendship. Jim's own figure appeared by her side. He was holding her hand—saying something to her. And even as he was speaking, a great shining hand appeared and touched the girl upon the forehead. Jim saw her give a convulsive start; her features grew rigid; and then, swiftly out of her face there passed all semblance of life!

"He knows—he fears—he understands!" came the voice of HE. "He has given his heart to this girl who dared to disobey my law. You shall see justice done!"

"Steady, boy," came Stanislaus Cripps' warning voice as Jim, almost mad with despair, made as if to spring at HE. "A lot can be done by waiting."

"Still dreaming of that which is impossible, O Shining One?" HE exclaimed mockingly. "But the time of dreams draws to an end. Lo, even now she on whom I must do justice draws near!"

Even as HE uttered the words, from down the rocky corridor came the sound of metal-clad feet. Instinctively both Jim and Cripps turned their eyes in that direction.

There, coming towards them, but still half a mile away, looking curiously small in perspective, were Tinta and Masra. The girl was walking with her figure absolutely rigid, her eyes staring straight in front of her, while behind her was Masra in his shining armour.

"Patience. O Shining Ones, and you shall see!" HE exclaimed. "Death is so near yourselves that you cannot mind to see another die!"

They sat spell-bound as slowly those two figures approached the rocky chamber. HE had sunk back in his chair with his hand half covering his face. Nearer drew Tinta. Jim could see that she was like one walking in her sleep, her eyes absolutely expressionless. Now she paused at the foot of the rocky stairs.

"I am here, O He-Whose-Name-May-Not-Be-Spoken!"

Her voice was curiously monotonous. All trace of her soft, merry tones had vanished. Masra had dropped on his knees, and had buried his face in his hands.

HE stirred like one whose attention has been drawn to some trifle of no particular importance.

"You are she they call Tinta! I have brought you here, Tinta, that these Shining Ones may see the justice that I mete out to those who disobey my law. Before the coming of the light, when the Falta prepare their sacrifices, there was issued at my command a ban forbidding any of the Kru to leave the Inner Cavern. You heard that ban, Tinta?"

"I heard it, O He-Whose-Name-May-Not-Be-Spoken!"

"And you remained in the Inner Cavern, Tinta?"

"No, O Lord of the Spirit of Life. One they call Krim—who came from the world of the sun, and was made blood brother with my father according to our rites—had a message sent him by the Thing-That-Makes-Light, telling him that his friend had been taken prisoner by the Falta and was about to be sacrificed. He went to aid him, and I went with him, my father also."

"You speak truth, Tinta. Because he was

your father's blood brother and you loved him, you left the Inner Cavern after the ban had been announced." HE'S voice had grown suddenly sweet and melodious. "For his sake you broke the law!"

"It is even as He-Whose-Name-May-Not-Be-Spoken has said."

"And what is the reward for them who break the law?"

Tinta's frozen lips moved, but for a moment no sound came from them. Then she uttered one word in a voice so low that it was hardly audible.

"Death!"

"True, Tinta. There is no use trying to evade the law. Come and receive your punishment!"

Slowly the girl began to ascend the stone steps. Now she had reached the floor level. At that moment Masra, in spite of the terrors which possessed him, jumped to his feet and, clearing the stairs at a bound, caught Tinta in his arms.

"They shall not take you, Tinta, or if He-Whose-Name-May-Not-Be-Spoken will show no mercy, he must take me too!"

Jim could see that Masra was struggling with all his strength to lift Tinta in his arms and force her back into the tunnel, but for some mysterious reason he was unable to move her.

"Come!" exclaimed HE'S cold voice. "Come!"

The Last of "He"!

AS HE uttered that command, the girl, with supernatural strength, thrust her father aside and began slowly to advance towards the fantastic chair on which that terrible being was seated.

Jim could no longer contain himself. He could not sit there and watch while this girl, who meant so much to him, was stretched dead before his very eyes.

But even as he meditated a violent assault upon HE, Stanislaus Cripps had sprung to his feet. At one stride he had placed himself between HE and Tinta.

"Now listen to me, my dear sir," his voice boomed. "I can stand a lot, but there are limits. I wish you no harm—in fact I imagine that the information you have at your disposal after such a prolonged existence might, if properly sifted and collated, prove of some minor benefit to the world at large—but the trifling advantages that might accrue to humanity would be quite outweighed by any violence done to this child."

"In short, my dear sir," added Cripps, "if you intend to use any of your monkey tricks—if you are proposing to pass some of the extremely powerful current you generate in your own body into the body of this child, thereby causing her death—I may as well tell you at once that there's nothing doing!"

HE sprang to his feet.

"And do you think you can withstand my power, O Shining One? I grow impatient. Away—my justice cannot wait!"

Tinta was still slowly moving towards the chair. Now she was standing immediately behind Stanislaus Cripps. He turned swiftly and put his metal arm about her waist as if to stay her further progress.

"Cut it out, you lunatic," he cried, "or, by Heaven, I'll put an end to your life!"

Ignoring this threat—obviously believing himself immune from any danger from Stanislaus—HE slowly approached the girl, who was struggling wildly and raised his hand.

"An inch further and I shoot!" Stanislaus Cripps exclaimed.

He had drawn his revolver and was standing there—a very squat, square-shouldered figure in his shining armour, looking indeed like a

medieval knight with Tinta in the rôle of distressed maiden.

"O Shining One," HE mocked, "do you think your toys can frighten me who have bathed in the Fire of Life? I will do my justice while she yet remains in your arms!"

HE stretched out his hand swiftly. The tips of those beautiful fingers had come within an inch of Tinta's forehead, when there was an ear-splitting report. Jim staggered horrified to his feet.

All about him there was fire and a light so vivid that it almost blinded him. Lightning flashed from floor to ceiling, and the crackling of those giant sparks sounded like thunder. He had a vision of HE standing there one moment and the next dissolved—there was hardly any other word for it—into a myriad flashes of light!

He was vaguely conscious of Stanislaus Cripps, still with the smoking revolver in his hand, flinging Tinta on the ground, and lying on top of her, as if shielding her with his body.

For several appalling seconds the electrical disturbance was continued. Then abruptly it died away, leaving that rocky chamber empty save for the unconscious figure of Tinta, and her father, and Stanislaus Cripps and Jim. He-Whose-Name-May-Not-Be-Spoken had vanished—vanished like a piece of paper in a flame.

An Alarming Discovery!

STANISLAUS CRIPPS rose slowly to his feet. For a moment he looked dully at the smoking revolver in his hand—and then he opened the breach and, taking out the empty cartridge, let it drop with a rattle on the floor. He gave a shake of his shoulders.

"That's the end of that fool, boy!" he exclaimed. "Homicide isn't much in my line. I might have killed, even with satisfaction, some of those solicitors' clerks, process servers and bailiffs who bothered me at Widgery Dene; but this cold-blooded business is distinctly out of my line. But he asked for it and he got it!"

He sniffed truculently.

"The pig-headed fool! I've always heard that old men get cantankerous and self-opinionated, and if a man lives as long as he did, the qualities become abnormally exaggerated, I suppose. I gave him fair warning, but he just wouldn't listen. And now we have lost, boy, entirely through his own fault, one of the most interesting specimens of mankind that the world has any record of. And there were still a large number of questions that I wanted to put to him."

But Jim was not listening to this discourse. He had dropped on his knees by Tinta's side, calling out her name.

For a while she lay there motionless, so that a horror seized upon the boy that she was dead. Then, quite suddenly, she opened her eyes. For a moment she stared dazedly up at his helmeted figure, and then, perhaps, glimpsed his eyes through their lenses, for she suddenly smiled.

"Krim, oh, Krim—where am I? And where is Masra, my father?"

"You're quite safe, Tinta," Jim stammered. The sudden relaxation of the terrible strain he

had been through rendering his words almost incoherent. "And Masra is here with you!"

"Hallo, little girl! Come round, have you?" Stanislaus Cripps broke in. "None the worse, I hope?"

Tinta rose to her feet. It was clear from the look of amazement that crept into her face as she glanced round that strange rocky chamber, that she was unconscious of ever having seen it before.

"Where is this place you have brought me to?" she exclaimed, "and how did I come here?"

"You were brought here by the will of He-Whose-Name-May-Not-Be-Spoken."

A look of horror leapt into Tinta's eyes.

"I remember. I was sitting talking to Masra when I heard his summons that none may disobey. I have broken the ban—I was to die!"

"That's all off," Stanislaus Cripps retorted in a cheerful robust voice. "You see, my dear, he brought you here in a state of hypnosis—but there, you don't understand that word—you were asleep and yet you could walk—see? He was going to kill you. A horribly cold-blooded person he was. So I had no alternative but to kill him. He is dead. You have nothing to worry about, Tinta."

She looked at him incredulously.

"Dead?" she whispered.

"Quite dead!" Stanislaus Cripps boomed. "His passing was swift and, I trust, painless. It created one of the most interesting electrical disturbances I have ever witnessed. I was frightened that you might be struck. So I did my best to shelter you with my armour."

He was interrupted at that moment by someone clutching his feet. Looking down he saw that Masra had crawled to the spot where he was standing, and was abasing himself before him.

"O Hairy One O Slayer-Of-He-Whose-Name-May-Not-Be-Spoken, what is there that I can do? How can I show my gratitude to you? You have given me back my little flower, you have plucked her from death at the hands of the Terrible One!"

"That's all right, Masra. Glad to have been of service to you and Tinta. But don't crawl about there man, like a worm. We're serious human beings who've got to think of our future!"

He flung himself into the chair that had lately enfolded the radiant form of HE.

"How much food is there left, Tinta?" he demanded.

"Enough for one march!" she answered.

"HE was right then. Extraordinary gift that of his, boy. Might have been turned to some real use had he survived. We've got one day's ration, and it's the better part of four days' journey to the gate! It's going to be a problem of endurance, boy. The longer we stay here the hungrier we shall be, so we'd best be moving!"

(One day's ration for a four days' march! Things still look bad for the intrepid adventurers, even though they are rid of HE. Next week's fine instalment teems with thrills—don't miss it on any account! Order your next week's NELSON LEE LIBRARY now!)

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HOW TO JOIN THE LEAGUE

ST. FRANK'S LEAGUE APPLICATION FORM No. 72.

SECTION

A

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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 Membership 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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These Application Forms can be posted for $\frac{1}{2}$ d., providing the envelope is not sealed and no letter is enclosed.

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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 St., London, E.C.4. Enquiries which need an immediate answer should be accompanied by a stamped and addressed envelope.

A Successful Club.

CONGRATULATIONS must go to John Draycott Cope, 30, Main Street, Stapenhill, Burton-on-Trent, for his admirable St. Frank's League Cricket, Football, Swimming and Social Club. The headquarters are in the basement of a house lent by Mr. Richardson. Mr. Cope is secretary, and is backed by a strong committee. The subscription is within the means of anyone. Non-swimmers will get instruction by an expert. Cycling jaunts will be arranged. Cricket and football are in capable hands. The club is a model of what a club should be.

Camping.

Judging from many letters to hand, Leagueites contemplate some good camping trips this summer. In reply to questions, there is no difficulty in obtaining permission to pitch a camp so long as the site is left as found—without litter.

A Gadget from New Cross.

G. E. Relton, 62, Billington Road, New Cross, sends me a specimen of his safety-pin attachment for the League Badge. I am bound to admit this notion is downright smart.

The Humble Tanner.

A query reaches me from a trusty reader in Birmingham concerning the meaning of the word "tanner." We all of us know this useful item. The term is traced to the Italian word "denaro," a small coin, and also to "tawno," which is Romany for "little one." But so long as there are lots of tanners we won't grouse!

For the Holidays.

E. T. S. (Bristol) tells me that you can travel between Penzance and London by bus. Going north, it is possible to reach the town of Berwick-upon-Tweed by the same useful vehicle. This is not a bad way of seeing the country. The fares are comparatively light, and these long-distance omnibuses are most comfortable.

Those Advertising Pictures.

Jimmy, of Stamford, is much taken by poster art and the magazine sketches, and

as he has a rare taste for drawing, he wants to get work of this sort. He may do so, but he will have to reconcile himself to a gruelling time of it mastering "line" and technique generally. The amusing sketches on the hoardings may look as if they were dashed off, but they mean a sight more hard work than can be told about in a paragraph here.

A Damaged Cricket Bat.

A reader in Hereford asks what he is to do about his cricket bat, which has become a bit cracked and bruised. He inquires if he could have the blade planed at a sports shop. The right operation to make the bat thoroughly serviceable is called binding, and a sports equipment establishment will do this for him readily enough.

(CORRESPONDENTS WANTED)

Geo. W. Collins, 71, Peabody Estate, Clerkenwell, London, E.C.1, wishes to hear from readers interested in chemical experiments; also wants to purchase a decent-conditioned typewriter, preferably a Smith Premier No. 10.

Ian C. Black, 4, Oakland Road, West Jesmond, Newcastle-on-Tyne, wishes to correspond with readers (especially Scouts) interested in Pitman's shorthand.

Charles John Mead, 18, Ambrose Road, Clifton Wood, Clifton, Bristol, wishes to get in touch with members in his district.

Harry Rhodes, 86, Tranmere Road, Earlsfield, London, S.W.18, is forming a club, and would like to hear from readers interested, in the Wandsworth, Tooting, and Earlsfield area.

HOW TO GET YOUR SILVER MEDAL.

All holders of BRONZE MEDALS who have qualified for SILVER MEDALS (see instructions on Application Form opposite) and wish to exchange their medals for the higher award, should send their bronze medals, accompanied by a stamped addressed envelope, to the Chief Officer the St. Frank's League, c/o the NELSON LEE LIBRARY, Gough House, Gough Square, London E.C.4. The SILVER MEDALS will then be sent to them.

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