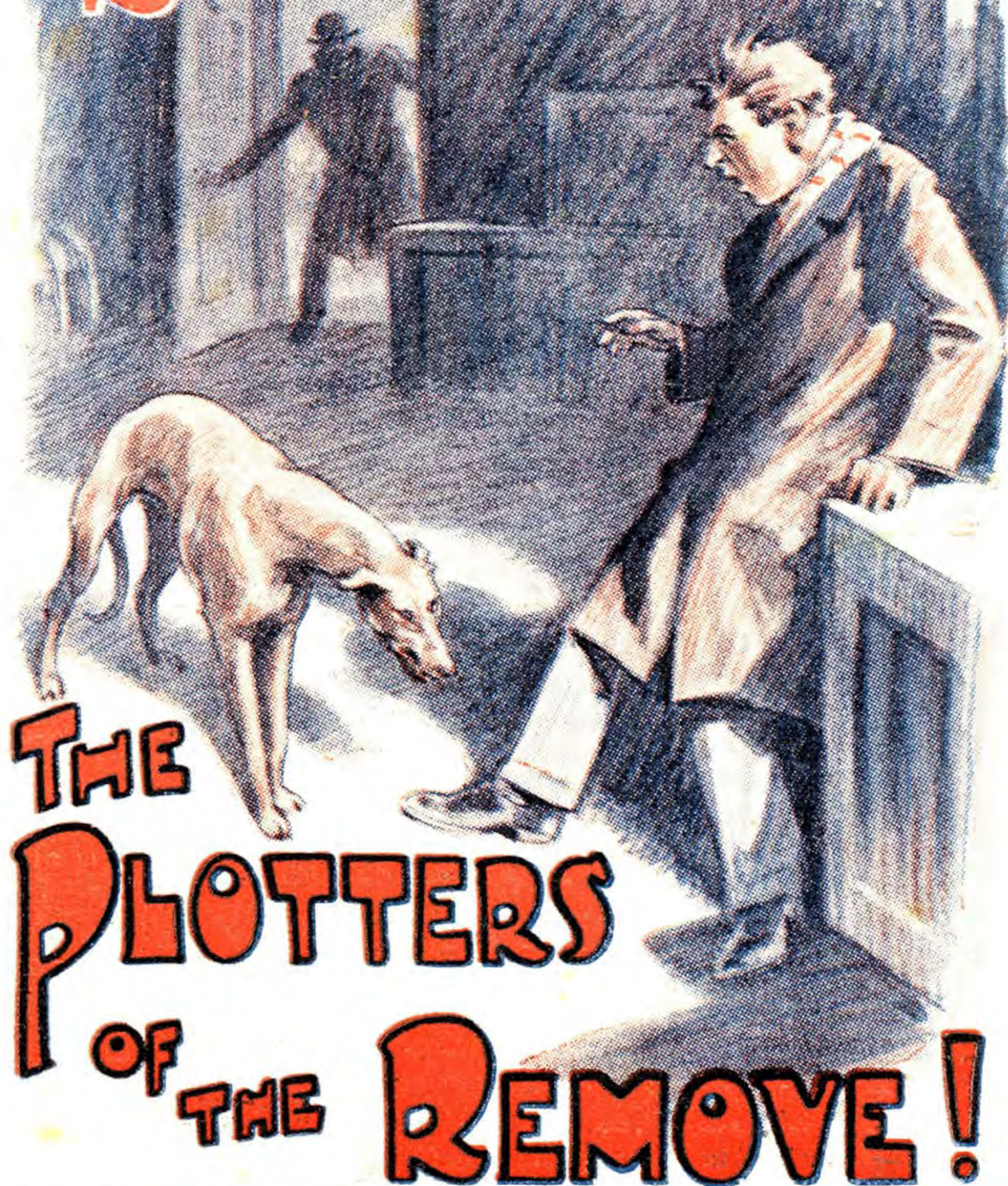


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THE PLOTTERS OF THE REMOVE!

Held at bay! A thrilling incident from this week's vivid long complete yarn featuring the cheery Chums of St. Frank's.

New Series No. 130.

OUT ON WEDNESDAY.

October 27th, 1928.



A goal seemed imminent, for the forward had the ball and there was only Handforth between him and the net ; and Handforth was stretched full length on the ground. Slam ! The leather sped true, but in some extraordinary way Handy slewed himself round without making any attempt to rise, and one of his legs shot upwards. The toe of his boot caught the leather and deflected its course !

THE PLOTTERS OF THE REMOVE!



By EDWY SEARLES BROOKS

(Author of the St. Frank's stories now appearing in "The Popular" every Tuesday.)

Bill Brice, the bookmaker, is determined to get possession of Lightning, Willy Handforth's pet greyhound, and he's not at all particular as to the methods he employs. Also he has three useful helpers in Claude Gore-Pearce and Co., the cads of Study A, who will not hesitate to do anything underhanded if there's a possibility of making some money. All readers will enjoy reading this superbly-written yarn.—Ed.

CHAPTER 1.

A Special Occasion!

"GOOD gracious me!"

Mr. Horace Pycraft uttered the exclamation as he came out of the East House doorway at St. Frank's. For a moment or two the acid-tempered master of the Fourth Form stared in amazement; then he adjusted his glasses, and turned his gaze upon Bob Christine, of the Fourth, who was standing on the steps, an arm's-length away from him.

"Christine!" said Mr. Pycraft sharply.

"Sir?"

"What is the meaning of all this, Christine?" demanded Mr. Pycraft, with an eloquent wave of his bony hand.

"This crowd, sir?" asked Bob Christine.

"Yes!"

"The fellows are getting ready to go to Bannington, sir," explained the Fourth-Former, with a grin.

"Indeed!" snapped Mr. Pycraft. "And is it usual for practically the entire Junior school to go to Bannington in a body?"

"No, it's not usual, sir," said Bob Christine coolly. "In fact, it's decidedly unusual. But to-day's a half-holiday, and——"

"I know perfectly well, Christine, that to-day is a half-holiday!" broke in Mr. Pycraft sourly. "Wednesday afternoon is generally a half-holiday, so it is quite unnecessary for you to give me this gratuitous information. I am asking you why so many boys are preparing to leave the school in a body."

Bob looked at his Form-master as though he were some kind of curio. He couldn't understand why Mr. Pycraft was so colossally ignorant. For days the entire school had been talking of the event that was due to take place that afternoon; and yet Mr. Pycraft

knew nothing about it. It wasn't merely strange; it was extraordinary.

Before replying, Bob cast his eye over the Triangle.

He saw scores of juniors out there in the late October sunshine. The Remove, in its entirety, was assembled near the Ancient House, with Nipper and Handforth and one or two other prominent fellows marshalling them into some semblance of order.

The Fourth was collecting, too, and Bob Christine was impatient to go, so that he could join his Form-fellows. And Willy Handforth, of the Third, was keeping a strict eye on his fags. The Third was present to a man, too.

"What does it mean?" demanded Mr. Pycraft impatiently.

"Hav'n't you heard about the football match, sir?" asked Christine.

"Football match? Which football match?"

"The one at Bannington, sir."

"I regret, Christine, that I do not take a particular interest in Junior football," said Mr. Pycraft, with sarcasm. "I must confess, too, that I do not remember such a fuss as this having been made previously over a Junior game. What is there special about it?"

"Oh, nothing much, sir," grinned Christine. "Nothing—except that the Junior Eleven is going to play Bannington Town."

Mr. Pycraft started.

"Bannington Town?" he ejaculated. "Upon my soul! But—but Bannington Town is a professional side."

"Yes, sir."

Bob Christine was more astonished than ever. Everybody had been talking about the forthcoming game against the professionals, but Mr. Pycraft knew nothing!

"I'm surprised that you haven't heard about it, sir," went on Bob patiently. "We challenged Bannington Town to a game, and the manager of the club, Mr. Billings, consented to the fixture—providing the Junior Eleven whacked the Reserves first."

"And did the Junior Eleven—ahem!—whack the Reserves?"

"Yes, sir—last Wednesday."

"Ridiculous!" commented Mr. Pycraft acidly. "In fact, the whole thing is most *infra dig*. St. Frank's is a great public school, and its Elevens should not play against these professionals. I do not approve."

"But the Head does, sir," said Bob Christine sweetly.

"Eh? Yes, yes, of course," said Mr. Pycraft, with a frown. "I confess I cannot understand the headmaster's—er—laxity. It will do the school no good. No good whatever."

"Oh, I'm not so sure about that, sir," said Bob. "If the Junior Eleven wins—"

"Do not be ridiculous, Christine!" interrupted Mr. Pycraft. "What nonsense! How can you schoolboys expect to beat these burly, rough-and-ready professionals? I understand that Bannington Town is in the Third Division of the League."

"That's right, sir."

"It is not even a first-class club," continued Mr. Pycraft irritably. "And yet you boys are willing to lower yourselves—"

"If you'll pardon me, sir, we're doing nothing of the sort," interrupted Bob Christine, with some heat. "There's no question of lowering ourselves. Perhaps you don't know much about League football, sir? Perhaps you don't know that doctors and clergymen play for some of the big clubs? Perhaps you've never heard, sir, that 'Varsity men frequently turn out in these League games?"

Mr. Pycraft grunted.

"There are certain people, Christine, who are always ready to make themselves look ridiculous," said Mr. Pycraft pompously.

The Fourth-Former nodded.

"Oh, yes, sir," he agreed, with a grin. "I know that, sir."

Fortunately, Mr. Pycraft did not detect the meaning of Christine's prompt acquiescence.

"Everybody is going along to see the match, sir," continued Bob enthusiastically. "It's a big occasion, you know. The Third and the Fourth and the Remove are going to a man. It has all been fixed up. Special meetings were called, and no absentees are allowed. The whole Junior School will be on the spot. Also the River House chaps have promised to come along—and a big crowd from the Bannington Grammar School, too. Yes, by Jove, and lots of the Moor View girls will be there—"

"Worse and worse!" said Mr. Pycraft sourly. "I am sure I don't know what our girls are coming to nowadays! They oughtn't to be allowed to enter a public enclosure in order to witness a rough, boisterous game of football."

To Bob Christine's relief, a number of his fellow Fourth-Formers waved to him at this moment.

"Hi, Christine!" roared John Busterfield Boots, the skipper of the Fourth. "Aren't you coming? Buck up, you ass!"

"Right-ho!" sang out Bob. "Coming now. Sorry, sir!" he added. "I've got to go."

Without waiting for Mr. Pycraft to make any comment, he ran down the steps, and joined the ranks of the Fourth. Mr. Pycraft, with his nose in the air—to signify his stern disapproval of the whole affair—turned on his heel and went back into the East House.

Not that Mr. Horace Pycraft's approval or disapproval was of the slightest importance.



CHAPTER 2.

The More, the Merrier!

USTER BOOTS grinned as Bob Christine joined him.

"I suppose old Pie-face made a few sarcastic remarks?" he asked cheerily.

"Blow him!" grunted Bob. "I'm fed up with him! Trying to make out that this match is *infra dig*—that the Junior Eleven is lowering itself by playing against the professionals."

"Which only proves old Pieface's mean-spiritedness," said Buster. "As you say, Bob—blow him!"

And Mr. Pycraft was dismissed from the conversation.

Nipper, the captain of the Remove, came up, accompanied by Handforth and Reggie Pitt.

"You fellows ready?" asked Nipper briskly.

"Been ready for ages!" replied Buster Boots. "Waiting for you Remove chaps, in fact."

"You fatheads!" said Handforth. "We've been waiting for *you*!"

"Well, never mind," chuckled Boots. "If we're all ready, we'll make a start. By Jove! This is going to be something special in games."

And he was right.

It was usual, of course, for a certain number of juniors to accompany the Eleven when it went off for an away match. If the match was very important, perhaps half the Remove would go along, with a good sprinkling of the Fourth.

But to-day was different. The entire Remove was going—to say nothing of the entire Fourth and the entire Third. It was a kind of edict. Some of the fellows had tried to get out of it, but they had been given to understand, by the others, that if they failed to turn up they would be required, later, to give full account of themselves. In other words, they knew perfectly well that they would be unmercifully ragged. So it was far safer to go.

The Junior School wanted to be completely united on this unique occasion.

For it certainly was unique. Never before had the St. Frank's Junior Eleven played in a serious match against a fully-fledged professional League club. Bannington Town was not merely a professional team, but a club in the Third Division of the English League.

True, Bannington Town was at the very bottom of the table.

It was for this very reason that the St. Frank's juniors were booked to play against them in this friendly match this afternoon. The season had started very badly for Bannington Town; they had not won a single match yet. They had not gained a point. At home and away they had lost every game that so far had been played. Their record was so pitiful that their own supporters had deserted them in droves, and the few supporters left did nothing but jeer at the players, which only made them lose heart, and play more badly than ever.

On their last appearance at home, some of the St. Frank's juniors had been present, and they had witnessed a very feeble display. Bannington had lost by five goals to nil, and they had thoroughly deserved their defeat.

And Vivian Travers, who was possessed of any amount of nerve, had had the

audacity to ask Mr. Billings, the secretary-manager, for a game. Rather to the surprise of the Removites, Mr. Billings had agreed—on condition that the Junior Eleven beat the Reserves.

Mr. Billings, of course, had taken it for granted that the Reserves would win easily against these schoolboys. But Mr. Billings had made a mistake. For when the match took place the Reserves were outplayed. And so the St. Frank's Junior Eleven had earned the right to meet Bannington Town.

It was all very friendly—and it had aroused tremendous enthusiasm amongst the townspeople. At St. Frank's it was looked upon more or less as a colossal rag. It was all done in a sporting spirit, and the Senior School was chuckling over the "nerve" of the Juniors.

The celebrated William Napoleon Browne, of the Fifth, had promised to present himself in the grand-stand with a host of his Form-fellows. And Browne meant it. Indeed, he was out in the Triangle now, marshalling his forces.

Practically the whole school had entered into the spirit of the thing. Only the Sixth-Formers held aloof; and no doubt many of these lordly individuals would have given much to see the game. But they felt that it was below their dignity to go to a mere Junior match. Some of the Fifth-Formers had the same idea, but Browne scoffed at it.

"Let us remember, brothers, that these young stalwarts of the Junior School are worthy of our support," he said stoutly. "They are about to embark upon an adventure that would place many a Senior Eleven in a state of nervous tension. Indeed, I do not hesitate to say that nine Senior Elevens out of ten would be decidedly jellified."

"It's like the Junior Eleven's cheek, if that's what you mean," said Chambers, with a sniff.

"Exactly, Brother Cuthbert," nodded Browne. "It is no exaggeration to say that the cheek of the Junior Eleven is admirable. I am all in favour of it. Cheek is a great asset in this world of ours. Without cheek one cannot progress far. You will have observed, no doubt, that my own supply of nerve is not entirely limited."

The Fifth had certainly observed it. William Napoleon Browne was a fellow of the most astounding audacity, and it was only natural, therefore, that he should wholeheartedly support the Juniors in this daring enterprise.

"Hurrah!"

"Good luck to the Junior Eleven!"

"Play up, St. Frank's!"

Cheers were ringing out, and the Junior Eleven grinned joyously. Nipper and his men were leading the way out of the Triangle, and all the others followed in marching formation. The Remove, the Fourth, and the Third. Browne and his companions preferred to stroll leisurely in the rear.

The idea was to catch the early afternoon train to Bannington. It was better than cycling, for the possibilities were greater.

Buster Boots, who was unofficially in charge of the "publicity department," had decided upon the train journey. As he explained, they would all march through the town from the station to the football ground—with the Junior Eleven in their footer rig, and with the rest carrying flags and banners.

There had been a parade once before, and it had been a big success. And as nothing succeeds like success, Boots decided to repeat the programme. But on this occasion there would probably be much more enthusiasm. Bannington had had a week in which to talk about the Junior's success over the Reserves, and it was quite certain that the townspeople would be eager to see this match against the First.

If any of the citizens were absent-minded, they would now be provided with a reminder—for the St. Frank's fellows were liable to make quite a lot of noise as they marched through the town.

In the ranks of the Remove there were three juniors in particular who regarded the whole thing as a sheer waste of time. These three, it is hardly necessary to add, were Claude Gore-Pearce and Albert Gulliver and George Bell, of Study A in the Ancient House.

"I'm hanged if I can see why we should go!" grumbled Gore-Pearce, for the twentieth time. "Why the deuce must we see a football match that we don't take any interest in? I vote we cut off as soon as we reach the enclosure—and pop into the Greyhound Racing Enclosure."

Gulliver shook his head.

"It'll be too risky," he muttered. "It can't be done, Gore-Pearce. We should get horribly scragged afterwards."

"Who's to know anything about it?" demanded the millionaire's son.

"Everybody!" put in Bell. "A lot of these chaps have got their eyes on us. They know we don't want to see the match—and so they're watching us all the time. We shall never be able to sneak off without being dropped on."

"I suppose you're right," said Gore-Pearce savagely. "Hang them! It's a pity they can't let people amuse themselves in their own way!"

Gore-Pearce & Co. considered that there was greater amusement to be obtained from the Greyhound Racing Arena; and the amusement, so far as they were concerned, consisted in having a little flutter on the dogs.

But there would be no greyhound racing for the cads of Study A that afternoon—unless they were willing to take the risk of being bumped and booted afterwards.

And as Gore Pearce & Co. hated being bumped and booted, they decided to stay with the crowd and watch the football match.

CHAPTER 3.

Schoolboys v. Professionals!



MR. SAM BILLINGS, the secretary-manager of the Bannington Town Football Club, rubbed his hands together with gleeful satisfaction.

"Look at 'em, Jock—look at 'em!" he said exultantly. "Like old times, eh?"

Jock, the trainer, nodded.

"I'm thinking, maybe, it'll be the turning-point," he said briefly.

"Then you're thinking right, Jock," declared Mr. Billings. "These schoolboys have done wonders. They beat the Reserves last Wednesday, and they put a new spirit into our boys. They'll play up to-day, Jock—they'll play up in the old style."

The trainer merely grunted.

"Yes, I know what you're thinking," went on Mr. Billings. "'They ought not to play against schoolboys, eh? Well, perhaps so—perhaps so. But, judging by last week's game, even our First Eleven will have a bit of a tussle if they're going to win. These youngsters are smart, Jock. But our own boys will play a good game to-day. I can feel it in my bones.'"

Mr. Billings and the trainer were standing just in the little alley which ran underneath the grand-stand—the passage which led to the dressing-rooms. From here they could obtain an excellent view of the big enclosure. It was filling rapidly, and the crowds were cheerful and smiling. It was a glorious autumn afternoon—just the weather for football—and the townspeople were coming in their hundreds and thousands.

"Gosh! This'll be a smack for those greyhound beggars!" said Mr. Billings, rubbing his hands together again. "We've got the crowd, and we've got to keep it! We're playing at home on Saturday, and we want all these people again—with lots more."

Mr. Billings was particularly pleased. It was the Greyhound Racing Arena which had dealt such a blow to the football club. The Arena was run by very questionable people; it was not under the auspices of the Greyhound Racing Association, or any other reputable body. It was an entirely independent syndicate, and there were lots of people who believed that the promoters were far from straight.

There was a meeting at the Arena this afternoon, and Mr. Billings' jubilation was easily understandable. In the past, the Arena had robbed the club of its crowds. But to-day the boot was on the other foot. It was the football club that was robbing the Arena. What was sauce for the goose was sauce for the gander.

But Mr. Billings did not forget that the St. Frank's fellows were largely responsible

for this welcome change. It was they who had aroused interest in the townspeople; they who had organised the publicity; they who had fixed up these matches. Mr. Billings' heart warmed towards the St. Frank's juniors.

At first he had looked upon that match against the Reserves as a kind of joke, never believing it possible that a second match would result. Now he was quite glad that the Reserves had been beaten.

For the Bannington people had "caught on." The enthusiasm of the schoolboys had spread to the general public. Everybody was eager to see this unique match—schoolboys against professionals.

Quite a large percentage of the crowd consisted of St. Frank's fellows, River House boys, Grammarians, and girls from the Moor View School.

The Grammarians were inclined to pat themselves on the back over the whole affair. They maintained that it was largely their doing that the first game had taken place. For Nipper & Co., coming over to Bannington Grammar School for a game, had found the game "off," owing to a suspected case of fever amongst the Grammarians. It had only been a scare, however, and the Grammar School fellows had only been in quarantine for that one afternoon.

But during the afternoon the St. Frank's Junior Eleven had seen Mr. Billings, and had fixed up the match. However, as nobody took any notice of the Grammarians' claims, it didn't matter much. The main fact was that this game against the Bannington First Eleven was to take place, and the widespread interest was catching.

The schoolboys made a terrific noise as they marched through the streets and as they came to the football enclosure. They did not forget that the whole business was in the nature of a rag, and they made the most of it. Seldom had Bannington echoed and re-echoed to such shouts and noises.

But it was all good-tempered—all done in a sporting spirit; and the public caught the fever and joined in. People who seldom went to football matches came along to see this one; the ordinary supporters of the club rolled up in force. It was a Wednesday afternoon and early closing day in the town, so there were crowds of people off duty and available.

The greyhound racing people, in the Arena along the road, were dismayed and angry. They were startled to find that scarcely anybody came into the Arena. All the people were pushing through the turnstiles into the football enclosure. For the first time since the Arena had been opened, the attendance was paltry. Only a thin trickling of "sportsmen" entered, and these, for the most part, were hardened racegoers who never, in any circumstances, took an interest in football.

The ordinary Bannington crowds went to see the football match.

Naturally there was not such a big crowd as on a Saturday afternoon, for a good many of the factory workers were not free, but

by the time the teams appeared on the field, within five minutes of the kick-off, that big enclosure was at least three parts full. There must have been ten thousand people present.

On a Wednesday afternoon it was considered extraordinarily good to get a crowd of four or five thousand. And this was merely a friendly match—against schoolboys. It was not surprising that Mr. Sam Billings was filled with jubilation. It had seemed to him that his club was well on the road to bankruptcy. The gates had been terrible of late, and the club was in serious financial straits. To-day's crowd would put a different complexion on the ~~future~~ of the club. And if only the First Eleven gave a good display, the townspeople would have their interest reawakened, and henceforward the club would be supported as of old.

"Hurrah!"

"Play up, the Town!"

Roars went up from the crowds as Bannington Town appeared. Then another roar went up to greet the schoolboys. This second roar, perhaps, was the louder. Every St. Frank's fellow, every River House boy, every Grammarian, and every Moor View girl lifted up his or her voice. The cheering was tremendous, and a large percentage of the townspeople joined in. They were just as enthusiastic over the pluck and daring of these youngsters.

Everybody had long since ceased to laugh; everybody had dropped the idea that this match was going to be farcical. The schoolboys had proved themselves to be expert footballers, and the crowds knew that they were in for an afternoon of keen, clean sport.

There were not many people who were rash enough to bet on the result of the game! These schoolboys were full of surprises, and although their task seemed an impossible one, there was really no telling.

They had beaten the Reserves handsomely. What would they do against the First?



CHAPTER 4.

The Match!

TENSION was in the air.

Scarcely a sound came from the packed grandstand

and from the crowded enclosure. The referee stood in the middle of the field, watch in hand, whistle to his lips. The teams were lined up, ready, on their toes.

Then came the short, sharp blast of the referee's whistle.

"Hurrah!"

"They're off!"

"Go it, the kids!"

"Play up, the Town!"

The silence was broken by a storm of cheering and shouting. The game had started, and any stranger might have been excused from imagining that the occasion was a Cup-tie

struggle instead of merely a friendly encounter between a professional club and a Junior school team.

There was a very simple explanation for the tremendous enthusiasm.

Every schoolboy in the enclosure—and every schoolgirl, too—was cheering excitedly and boisterously. They had come in their hundreds to encourage the St. Frank's Junior Eleven. And the Bannington crowds were not long in "catching the fever." They followed the example of the young people, and they found themselves getting excited and noisy.

"Go on, Fred!"

"Shoot, Fred! Shoot!"

The St. Frank's fellows held their breath. Fred Hearne, the Bannington centre-forward, had neatly trapped the ball from one of the schoolboy half-backs, and now he was away. He was streaking down the field towards goal.

Handforth, between the posts, was dancing up and down, getting himself ready. Only one of the St. Frank's backs had the faintest chance of getting anywhere near the professional centre-forward, and he was making a valiant effort.

But he was a shade too late.

Hearne was through, with only the goalie to beat. A roar went up from the Town's supporters. This was the old style! This was the kind of stuff the crowds liked!

"Shoot, Fred!" went up a tremendous roar.

The centre-forward steadied himself, and then the leather left his toe, shooting wickedly at a tangent, and rising slightly towards the upper corner of the goal.

With the agility of a monkey, Handforth flung himself upwards and outwards, his hands outstretched. It was a superb effort, and he just got his hands to the ball in the nick of time.

"Oh!"

"Well saved, Handy!"

"Hurrah!"

The schoolboys yelled themselves hoarse, but during the next second their voices ceased. Handforth had only been able to beat the ball down feebly, and it was in play again, and Handy himself was sprawling on the ground, having fallen full length from the result of his effort.

"Shoot! Shoot!"

The Bannington inside-right had snapped up the ball, and there was an open goal in front of him, with Handforth full length on the ground.

Slam!

The leather sped true, but, in some extraordinary way, Handforth slewed himself round without making any attempt to rise, and one of his legs shot upwards. The toe of his boot caught the ball and deflected it.

A storm of applause burst out. The leather, shooting off, sped over the bar and dropped behind the net.

"Oh, well saved!"

"Bravo, Handy!"

"Corner! Corner!"

Everybody went wild for a second or two. It had been a really magnificent effort on Handforth's part. When he had been apparently completely beaten, he had managed to save the situation.

"Well done, Handy!"

The Bannington players were crowding round the goalmouth, and the wing man was preparing to take the corner-kick.

"Keep 'em out, Handy!"

"Play up, the school!"

There was a brief pause just before the corner-kick was taken. Everybody was now convinced that the schoolboys would be hopelessly beaten. They were overrun already; the professionals had sliced through their defence as a knife slices through butter, and the Bannington spectators, who hadn't seen any such movements from their favourites this season, were filled with new enthusiasm.

The more level-headed ones told themselves that it was only to be expected. These Junior schoolboys could never hope to put up an equal fight against a Third Division team. They were to be admired for their pluck in playing the match, but it was inevitable that they would be swamped long before the finish.

The St. Frank's fellows, of course, were of a different opinion. They were ready to wager all they possessed that nine professional goalies out of ten would have failed to save that situation of a minute ago. Edward Oswald Handforth, by that one piece of work, had covered himself with glory. Considering his natural clumsiness, his agility on the football field was astonishing.

The whistle blew, and the Bannington winger took the corner-kick. Over came the leather, curving slightly towards the goalmouth. Two of the Bannington forwards leapt up, and one of their heads reached the leather as it dropped.

"Goal! Goal!"

Excited shouts went up, but they were too previous, for Handforth was at it again! Out he came, both fists together, and, with a terrific punch, he cleared the ball well past the mob of players in front of the goalmouth. In a second Nipper had it and was speeding away.

"Well saved, goalie!"

"Good old Handy!"

Roars of applause went up, but the next moment they were changed to roars of fresh excitement. Nipper, with deadly accuracy, had passed out to Reggie Pitt, on the wing, and Reggie was away in one of those celebrated runs of his.

Up the field went the other forwards. In that moment the interest was transferred from one end of the field to the other.

"Pass, Reggie—pass, old man!"

Reggie Pitt took no notice of the shouts. He ran on, beat the opposing half-back as he charged at him, and then sent across a dropping centre. Nipper and Travers had run well up, but they were a shade too far behind the ball. The Bannington goalie came running out, and he just managed to



Lightning reared himself up and, barking excitedly, placed his two front paws on Willy. "Good man!" said Willy. "Catch!" He produced a chocolate biscuit and held it up temptingly.

clear, when the situation looked really interesting. After that, for about five minutes, perhaps, the play remained mostly in the middle of the field.

"Oh, they're doing splendidly!" said Irene Manners enthusiastically, as she sat in the stand with the other Moor View girls, and with a lot of Remove fellows and Fourth-Formers. "Your brother is topping, Winnie."

Winnie Pitt's eyes were shining.

"Just you wait!" she said confidently. "Reggie hasn't started yet."

William Napoleon Browne, who was only just behind, nodded in agreement.

"It is no exaggeration to say, brothers and sisters, that the school is putting the half-nelson across these professionals," he observed. "And I venture to predict that the result will be a very close one."

"Oh, but the school is bound to lose!" said Dora Manners.

"And is this your faith?" asked Browne sadly. "Sister, sister! I am grieved. Alas! You pain me beyond measure."

Dora Manners only smiled—for she was well accustomed to Browne's little ways.

Earlier, a good many of the St. Frank's fellows had chuckled heartily; they now knew why Browne had come to this match. For Dora Manners was here—and Dora was Irene's pretty cousin. Incidentally, Dora was a nurse on the staff of the school sanatorium, and it was a well-known fact that Browne was more or less interested in her.

"Oh, look—look!" cried Doris Berkeley, jumping up! "Oh, rats! I believe the Town's going to score!"

"Keep 'em out, Ted!" called Irene excitedly.

It was Fred Hearn again. The Bannington centre-forward had received a pass from one of his wing men, and now he sent in a shot that had Handforth in difficulties all the time.

He actually did manage to reach the leather, but one of the Bannington forwards was on the spot, and he slammed the ball into the net as it left Handforth's grip.

"Goal!"

"Well played, the Town!"

"Hard luck, St. Frank's!"

It was first blood to the professionals—but were the schoolboys downhearted?

They were not—not by any manner of means!



CHAPTER 5

Playing the Game!

ONLY another ten minutes—and then half-time!" said Church anxiously.

"And our chaps can't get the equaliser!" said McClure.

They were in the stand, with the other Removites. At times, they had both played for the Junior Eleven, but to-day Nipper had chosen his strongest force, and so Church and McClure were out of it. Not that they minded. They never questioned their skipper's decisions.

The game had been fast all along, and the schoolboys had fought desperately in order to recover the lost ground. But, in spite of their efforts, the score still stood one—nil.

Now, with only a few more minutes before half-time, the professionals were pressing again.

They were finding their task a much heavier one than they had anticipated. But for that previous match, of course, they would have laughed at the very idea of this schoolboy eleven giving them a real fight. They could not forget that the St. Frank's Junior Eleven had beaten the Reserves, thus proving themselves to be players of real merit.

And this game, itself, was an added proof. It was by no means a "walk-over" for the professionals. They wanted to do most of the attacking, but they found that this was out of the question. For the juniors were frequently the attackers on their own account, and then Bannington Town was compelled to concentrate upon defence.

Buster Boots, the burly skipper of the Fourth, was fit again this week, and he was playing in the centre-half position. He was an excellent pivot, too, and much to Fred Hearne's mild astonishment, he found it very difficult to shake off this persistent shadow. Buster Boots was everywhere, accepting passes from his backs, and always feeding his forwards; and very few of his kicks went wide.

When it seemed almost certain that the first half would end with Bannington leading, Buster sent out a long pass to his left wing, and Fullwood, who was playing in the outside position, engaged in a great race with the Bannington back.

"Go it, Fully, old man!"

"You'll win!"

Fullwood just managed to get there first, and then he was away like a streak. Deftly he passed to Bob Christine, and the latter, with rare unselfishness, punted the leather sideways to Nipper, who was well placed.

"Shove it in, Nipper, old man!" panted Bob breathlessly.

In a flash, Nipper could see that here was a glorious opportunity. And there was no time to waste—this was no occasion for playing fancy tricks in front of goal. The other Bannington back was swooping down, and even a second's hesitation might be fatal.

Nipper swerved slightly, and then kicked. It was a low, deadly shot, and the Bannington goalie was obliged to sprawl full length in order to tip the leather round the post.

"Corner!"

"Oh, well tried, Nipper!"

"Good man!"

There was much excitement while the corner kick was being taken. This task was Reggie Pitt's, and he made no mistake about it. The ball soared aloft, and then dropped into the crowd of players round the goal mouth. Up leapt Nipper, two or three feet in the air, and his head tipped the leather and deflected it. In vain the goalkeeper tried to get to it. The ball touched the upright, and then rebounded into the net.

"Goal!"

"Hurrah!"

"Good old Nipper!"

"Well kicked, Reggie!"

"Goal!"

All the schoolboys and schoolgirls in the enclosure went crazy with delight for a moment. They cheered themselves hoarse. The juniors had equalised!

But this first-half was not over yet. The game had only been going another minute when disaster loomed. The Bannington men, aroused by the loss of their lead, swept through the St. Frank's defences. It was really a splendid effort, and deserved the success it got.

The Town's inside left took a pot shot, and the St. Frank's back, rushing to clear, just failed to reach the ball. And his efforts only succeeded in blinding Handforth during that crucial instant. In all probability, Edward Oswald would have either punched or kicked the ball away, but, as it was, he failed to see it.

"Goal!"

"Well played, the Town!"

Handforth turned, and stared dumbly into the net. The ball was there, having whizzed past him like a bullet.

"Oh, my hat!" he said blankly. "How the dickens did that happen?"

The referee was looking at his watch as the teams lined up. Only another two minutes to go before half-time.

"Well, so long, you chaps!" said Gore-Pearce, who was sitting in a corner of the stand with Gulliver and Bell. "I'm going to slip out now—before the crowd."

"Where are you going to?" asked Gulliver, glancing round. "Here, chuck it, Gore-Pearce! You might as well wait until half-time now. St. Frank's might score again——"

"Yes," said Bell tensely. "There's only a couple of minutes."

Gore-Pearce looked at them in astonishment.

"Hang it, you're not interested in this rotten game, are you?" he demanded.

Gulliver glared.

"Yes, blow you, I am!" he said defiantly. "I didn't think I should like it when I came—but it's jolly good! You can say what you like, Gore-Pearce, but football isn't so dull as you seem to think."

"Oh, let him go!" said Bell impatiently. "By gad! Look at that, Gully! Travers has got it! He's away!"

"Hurrah!"

"Go it, Travers"

A mighty roar went up. Vivian Travers, of the Remove, had the ball at his feet, and he was fairly skimming over the ground in his race goalwards.

It was an individual effort, and a superb one.

Practically from the half-way line, Travers ran, and he tricked man after man; yells of laughter and excitement went up when he left his opponents standing—when he swerved round them, with the leather still under perfect control at his feet.

"Pass, Travers—pass!" roared Church. "Let Reggie have it!"

But Travers, who was in a better position to see, was not foolish enough to pass to Reggie Pitt—who would have been off-side. Travers went through on his own—clean through. Then he steadied himself, and took a shot. It was a long one—and the leather rose from his boot, soaring high. A kind of groan went up when it was seen that the ball would skim over the top of the crossbar.

Then, when the goalkeeper was convinced that there was no danger, a current of air seemed to catch the ball, and it swerved downwards. Instead of skimming over, it struck the crossbar with a mighty thud, and rebounded into play.

And Bob Christine was there—right on the mark.

Slam!

Bob's foot met the leather before it struck the ground, and it sped diagonally into the net like a bullet.

"Goal!"

"Hurrah!"

"Bravo, Christine!"

"We've equalised, Mac—we've equalised!" gasped Church, leaping up in his seat and dancing up and down. "Oh, well played, Travers!"

A moment later the whistle blew for half-time. The St. Frank's fellows and all their friends could hardly believe the glorious truth.

Two—two!

The score was equal! The St. Frank's Junior Eleven had held up its end. They had reached half-time, and the professionals were on an even footing with them. It was small wonder that the storm of cheering from the general spectators was as much for the schoolboys as for their redoubtable opponents.

It was a great game, in all truth!



CHAPTER 6

A Little Diversion!

CLAUDE GORE-PEARCE yawned.

"Disgusting!" he told himself sourly. "All this idiotic fuss

over nothing!"

He was pushing his way through the crowd—towards the exit. He was rather fed up with Gulliver and Bell, too. It annoyed him to find that his pals had become interested in the game.

Truth to tell, Gore-Pearce himself had more than once felt his heart beating more rapidly; he had more than once gripped his seat, and had followed the play with intense interest. But he had always stifled these feelings, telling himself that football was not worth the candle.

Now that half-time had come, he was quite certain that he hadn't been influenced by the game at all. And he meant to take full advantage of the interval. He was going across to the Greyhound Arena, to see how things were progressing there.

Moreover, he wanted to have a few words with Mr. Bill Brice, the bookmaker.

There was just a chance that he might be able to make a bet or two—and then he would be able to collect his winnings after the match was over. It did not occur to Gore-Pearce that he might not have any winnings to collect.

He forced his way through the crowds, rather contemptuous of their cheering and of their excitement. For the life of him, Gore-Pearce couldn't understand why everybody was so animated.

The more youthful members of the audience were filled with delight because the St. Frank's Junior Eleven had equalised—had shown these professionals that they were worthy foemen, so to speak. For to be equal at half-time was a remarkable tribute to the cleverness and determination of the Juniors.

The towns-people were enthusiastic because they had seldom seen Bannington Town playing such convincing football. This season, at all events, there had been no such display.

The players had fallen into a state of despondency; they had apparently lost all knowledge of how to score goals; and football crowds, without exception, go to matches in the expectancy of seeing goals scored. To-day they had had a feast of four, and they were feeling that they were being provided with their money's worth.

Bannington Town, too, had proved that goal-scoring was not a lost art. And these schoolboys were not to be sneezed at; they were clever, they were brilliant. But even the boys themselves were perfectly ready to admit that the St. Frank's Junior Eleven

was playing far above its usual form. The players had risen to the occasion, and they were doing wonders.

Gore-Pearce found himself out in the road at last, and he was rather crumpled and dishevelled after his forced passage through the crowds.

"Confounded nuisance!" he muttered savagely. "I can't get out of the confounded place without rubbing shoulders with hooligans and ruffians!"

Prejudice is a remarkable thing. Gore-Pearce was prejudiced against the football match, and so he regarded most of the respectable patrons as hooligans. Yet he would go into the Greyhound Arena, and rub shoulders with real out-and-out ruffians, and consider them good company.

Not that he rubbed shoulders with anybody in the Greyhound Arena to-day.

For when he arrived he found the place in an extraordinarily deserted state. There were a few people there, it was true—but the enclosures looked quite empty in comparison with the previous meeting. The bookmakers had small groups round them, but, for the most part, the various enclosures were nearly empty.

Mr. Bill Brice, the bookie, was in a sullen, savage mood.

"Hallo, Mr. Brice," said Gore-Pearce, as he approached the man. "Doing well?"

Mr. Brice scowled.

"Don't be funny!" he retorted curtly.

"Sorry! I—I didn't mean——"

"We've got a fat chance of doing well to-day, haven't we?" demanded Mr. Brice, waving an eloquent hand towards the empty enclosures. "This is what your pals have done, young gent! It's a pity that you school-boys can't mind your own business, instead of butting into things that don't concern you!"

"Well, hang it, you needn't blame me!" protested Gore-Pearce. "I didn't organise this football match!"

"I'm not saying you did," grunted Mr. Brice. "All the same, it was organised by your school. The Bannington people seem to have gone mad. Instead of coming here, as usual, they've gone to the match. We're doing rotten business this afternoon. There's only a handful here, and not any of them have got any money. Or, if they have got it, they won't risk it."

Things were certainly bad in the Greyhound Arena. All the bookies had been doing badly, and the promoters of the place were ill-tempered and uneasy. They were beginning to realise, indeed, that their success had been a "flash in the pan." Once the Bannington Town Football Club was re-established in the eyes of its supporters, the greyhound track would find itself neglected.

"I thought about putting a few bets on," said Gore-Pearce hesitatingly.

"Just as you like," said Mr. Brice. "But ready money, understand?"

"Of course," said Gore-Pearce.

"There's that matter of a tenner you owe me, too," went on the bookmaker, with a

sudden stare. "What about it, Mr. Gore-Pearce? I'm not a philanthropist. I can't afford to——"

"Yes, but I thought we were going to make some arrangement about your dog? I thought that tenner was squared——"

"Squared!" burst out Mr. Brice furiously. "Why, you young fool, what are you talking about?"

"Here, steady——"

"When I went to get my dog, I wasn't allowed to take him!" went on Brice harshly. "Do you think I'm going to pay ten pounds for nothing?"

Gore-Pearce was silent. He remembered how Mr. Brice had come to St. Frank's, and how the bookie had claimed the injured greyhound that Willy Handforth, of the Third, was restoring to health.

The dog had been run over nearly a fortnight earlier, and Mr. Brice had kicked him into the ditch for dead. Willy, coming along, had rescued the poor animal, and had nursed it back to life and health. Willy claimed that the dog was his, since he had saved its life—after its owner had given it up for dead.

It was Gore-Pearce who had given Mr. Brice the information concerning Domino, his supposedly dead greyhound. A sort of bargain had been struck, but Mr. Brice had met with no luck. For Willy Handforth had not only refused to part with the dog, but Mr. Nelson Lee, the Housemaster of the Ancient House, had bluntly told Mr. Brice that he could go about his business. If he wanted to get his dog back, he could bring an action. Mr. Brice had gone off, in a tearing rage. He knew well enough that he could bring no action; for in a civil court the whole truth would come out. He would be compelled to admit that he had left the dog dying in a ditch. It was certain that the Courts would decide that he had forfeited all rights to the animal, and that he had acted in a particularly brutal and callous way. That sort of publicity was not to the liking of Mr. Bill Brice—particularly as he was thinking of starting a greyhound-training establishment. Such publicity, indeed, would ruin him.

"Look here, Mr. Gore-Pearce," said the bookmaker suddenly. "I want a word with you."

"All right," said Gore-Pearce. "You can have it."

"I want a word in private," continued Mr. Brice. "We can't talk here—too many people about. It's important, too. Yes, and there might be something in it for you, young gent. There's just a chance that I'll let you off that tenner, and give you some more money, too."

"Why, what's the idea?" asked Gore-Pearce, staring.

"You'd better come to my lodgings, after the meeting," said the bookmaker, lowering his voice. "We can talk more privately there. Besides, I haven't the time now. The next race starts in a few minutes. Is that settled? Will you come?"

"Yes, if you like," said Gore-Pearce. "I'll bring Gulliver and Bell with me, too."

"They're your pals, aren't they?"

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The NELSON LEE School Story Library.

"Yes."

"All right, then—bring them along," said Mr. Brice. "Now, don't forget—24, Heaton Street. That's where I'm lodging. Do you know it?"

"Heaton Street?" said Gore-Pearce. "Yes. Number 24? What time shall we get there?"

"About five o'clock," replied Brice.

He was obliged to give his attention to some of his customers then, and Claude Gore-Pearce wandered away, wondering what could be in the wind.

CHAPTER 7.

Honours Even !



"YOU'VE been a long time," said Gulliver, staring.

Gore-Pearce had just slipped back into his seat, and he was watching the game with a tired expression on his face. He was contemptuous, too, because Gulliver and Bell seemed quite excited over the match.

"You've missed some topping play," said Bell. "The second half started nearly a quarter of an hour ago. No more goals scored yet, but there was one narrow shave. Hand-forth only just—"

"Oh, cut it out!" interrupted Gore-Pearce sourly. "I'm not interested."

So Gulliver and Bell ignored him, and gave their attention to the game. It wasn't often they watched football, and they were now finding that the game was quite attractive. Trained in the right way, Gulliver and Bell might easily have become almost decent. Under good influences they would probably have dropped a lot of their caddish ways. Unfortunately they were very weak, and while Gore-Pearce remained their leader they were not likely to change their habits. Gore-Pearce was gradually getting worse; he was becoming a regular young rascal.

The game, if anything, was faster than ever.

Both teams had taken the field for the second half, refreshed and determined. The Junior Eleven had done so well that they were eager to carry on with the good work. And Bannington Town thought of its prestige. The team would never recover from the shock if these schoolboys won the match.

At the beginning, the professionals had believed that they would have a walk over. True, they had known—from the previous match against the Reserves—that the schoolboys were "hot stuff." But weight would surely tell in the long run, and the professionals also assured themselves that their superior knowledge of the game would make them easy victors.

Unhappily, the St. Frank's juniors had an exceptionally fine knowledge of the game,

too, and, unlike many school teams, they were not ragged. They played scientific football. And their youth was more or less in their favour, since they were able to keep going at a hot pace without noticing any ill effects.

There was one very satisfactory feature of the game.

Sportsmanship was paramount. There was never the slightest indication of a foul; there was never any questionable play. Both teams played cleanly and sportingly.

With twenty minutes of the second half gone, Bannington put on a huge spurt. Again and again they had tried to score, but even when they had beaten the Junior backs they found themselves up against the mighty Handforth. And Handforth, in goal, was a giant.

Twice during this second half he had thwarted them; he had played a magnificent game. His aggressive methods had endeared him to the crowds. More than once he had rushed out with apparent recklessness, but his judgment had always been sound. He had taken awful chances, but the results had justified his methods.

But even Handforth was not superhuman.

When the Bannington Town forwards forced their way through once again, and when Fred Hearne had a glorious opening, Handforth found himself "up against it."

The Bannington centre's shot was a real beauty. It sped towards the goal like a cannon ball, and Handforth, with a roar, managed to get his fist to it.

"Hurrah!"

"Well saved, Handy!"

"Corner!"

Again Handforth had saved the situation. The leather went skimming behind the goal-line, and the corner-kick was taken.

Handforth managed to get to the ball as it dropped, but he was unfortunate enough to punch it to the foot of the Bannington outside-right. It only needed a slight tap for this player to get the leather into the net.

"Goal!"

Three—two!

"Rats and blow!" said Handforth gruffly. "I can't be in two places at once, can I?"

"Hard cheese, old man," said Nipper. "You're doing wonders, so you needn't grumble at yourself. Keep it up!"

And the struggle went on. Twice more Handforth was called upon to make big efforts, and he did not fail. The Bannington players were going all out to increase their lead. They wanted to make this victory a decisive one.

But the Juniors, too, were equally grim. They played the game of their lives, and now and again they would take the play into the Bannington half of the field, and then the excitement would increase.

But, in spite of all their efforts, a goal did not materialise. The forwards could not break through the rock-life defence.

"Only two minutes to go!" said Church tensely. "Oh, well, it's all over now—bar shouting."

"Our chaps have done jolly well, too," said McClure. "If it comes to that, they never expected to win, did they?"

The referee was glancing at his watch, and a large number of spectators were beginning to walk towards the exits. Then, with only a minute to go, an interesting situation arose.

The Bannington inside-left was nearly through when he was pulled up for off-side, and when the free-kick was taken by Buster Boots, he sent the leather soaring far up the field, and Reggie Pitt, in a flash, was on it. During the whole of this half Reggie had been more or less bottled up. He had been a marked man, and never once had been able to get clear away on one of his brilliant runs.

Perhaps the professionals thought that the game was over, and perhaps they relaxed their vigilance somewhat. At all events, Reggie was away, and a mighty roar went up.

"Hurrah!"

"Go it, Pitt! You're through, old man!"

"Centre! Centre!"

But Reggie Pitt, as he sped like lightning over the turf, saw that none of his fellow forwards were well placed. And this was no time for hesitation, no time for waiting.

When everybody thought he was about to pass, he swerved suddenly in towards the centre of the field, and now he was running clean up towards the goal, making a fine individual effort.

"Shoot! Shoot!"

Reggie needed no telling. He shot. On the run he kicked, and the ball swerved in an arc as it left his toe. It went clean across the mouth of the goal, and there was something deceptive about the leather's flight.

It seemed to the goalie that it was going right past and then out of play. But that swerve was deceptive. The ball seemed to curl in, and before the goalie could reach the upright the leather skimmed against the post and rebounded into the net.

"Goal!"

"Hip, hip, hurrah!"

"Well played, Reggie!"

"Goal!"

Everybody seemed to go mad. When all hope had been lost, the schoolboys had equalised.

Three—three!

And that, of course, was the end of the game. Less than thirty seconds later, just when the ball was in play again, the referee blew the final whistle. The cheers that went up from the great crowds were heard over the whole of Bannington.

It was a perfect end to a perfect game.



CHAPTER 8.

Better Times Ahead!

THE result was eminently satisfactory. In their wildest dreams the members of the Junior Eleven had not believed that they would escape defeat. They had told themselves that they would do their utmost to escape a humiliating defeat. Now they had equalised! Playing against these professionals, they had finished on level terms.

It was a result that caused general delight.

Even the Bannington Town supporters were pleased. Their favourites had not won the game, but at least they had played with vigour and brilliance. Not once this season had Bannington Town given such a satisfactory display. And the schoolboys had provided a game that had been thrilling from start to finish.

"Well played, the boys!"

"Hurrah!"

"Bravo, St. Frank's!"

"Well done, young 'uns!"

The teams met with a tremendous ovation as they came off the field. Everybody in the grandstand was standing up, waving, shouting, and generally behaving excitably.

In the visitors' dressing-room, Mr. Sam Billings, the secretary-manager, was waiting. His rugged face was flushed and his eyes were sparkling. Nipper and his merry men were looking tired but cheerful as they trooped in.

"Well done, boys—well done!" said Mr. Billings heartily. "Upon my word, you've done wonders. And I'm very greatly in your debt."

"Well, we had a decent game, sir," said Nipper cheerfully.

"It wasn't so bad," said Handforth. "I can't understand how the beggars scored three times, though."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Good old Handy!"

Nipper clapped Handforth on the back.

"If you hadn't been a first-class goalie, old son, the professionals would have scored a dozen times," he said. "You kept goal like a master."

"We shall have to keep an eye on our Handy," said Travers, with a nod. "Unless we're careful, he'll be snapped up by one of the First Division clubs."

"And you're not far wrong, young gentleman!" said Mr. Billings. "I've seen some good goalkeeping in my time, but, hang it, I've seldom seen better than I saw this afternoon! Bravo, Master Handforth! We're all proud of you!"

Handforth didn't like it at all. In his own opinion he had done nothing whatever to be praised. On the contrary, he had made a mess of the whole game. Handforth, at

heart, was extraordinarily modest. It was only when he had nothing to boast about that he was inclined to boast.

"I expect the directors will send you a special letter of thanks," said Mr. Billings, as he glanced at Nipper.

"A letter?" repeated Nipper. "What for?"

"You're the captain of this team, and so the letter will be addressed to you," replied the manager, with a smile. "Perhaps you don't realise, young gentlemen, exactly what you have done. Bankruptcy was staring this club in the face, and your efforts have put a different complexion on the whole situation."

"Oh, you mean the publicity, sir?" said Handforth. "Well, that was Buster Boots' doing. Not that I couldn't have done better—"

"Rats!" grinned Buster. "And as for the work I did, Mr. Billings, I'd like you to forget it."

"Well, you won't be able to prevent the directors from sending you a letter of appreciation," said the manager genially. "The confidence of the public has been restored—largely owing to the enthusiasm and sportsmanship shown by you young gentlemen. Personally, I'm quite convinced that from now onwards the club will do better and better. It did my old heart good to hear the crowds cheering and shouting. So far this season we've heard little else but groans and hoots."

"You've got a big match on Saturday, haven't you, sir?"

"Yes," said Mr. Billings. "One of the biggest yet. And after what's happened to-day, there's a certainty that the ground will be packed. The public will come in force. And I know that my boys will play with ginger and determination. They'll want to show the public that they can win. Yes, young gentlemen, we've turned the corner."

Mr. Billings could hardly contain himself. He was bubbling with inward excitement and satisfaction.

As soon as the Juniors had dressed, Fred Hearn and his colleagues came in, and offered their congratulations on the game. They were a fine, sporting lot, these professional footballers. They were still smiling at the thought of the game, but they were full of quiet admiration, too. They respected this Junior schoolboy team which had given them such an excellent game—such a stern tussle.

Outside, the police were having some difficulty in regulating the crowds. Lots of people insisted upon waiting outside the gates, in order to cheer the Junior team as it came out. The Grammarians and the River House fellows—and the Moor View girls, too—were all lined up, eager and cheerful. Every available St. Frank's fellow was also on the spot.

The departure of the Junior Eleven from Bannington was liable to be noisy. There was to be a second procession through the town, and this would be all to the good. The more publicity the better.

There were three St. Frank's fellows, however, who did not remain with the crowd. Claude Gore-Pearce and Gulliver and Bell slipped away as soon as the game was over, and, much to Gore-Pearce's satisfaction, nobody tried to stop them.

"Well thank goodness!" said the cad of Study A, when he and the others were clear of the throng. "I was half afraid that those fatheads would stop us. I'm sick of the whole silly business."

"Yes, but it was a good game," said Gulliver.

"Hang the game!" retorted Gore-Pearce. "There's something more important in the wind than football. We've got to go and see Brice, the bookie."

"I thought you saw him at half-time?" said Bell.

"So I did."

"And put some bets on, eh?" grinned Gulliver. "Does that mean that you've got something to come? Good egg! I didn't know that you had backed a winner."

"I haven't—yet!" replied Gore-Pearce coolly. "But I rather think I shall back a winner this evening."

"How can you?" asked Bell. "There aren't any races this evening."

"I wasn't talking about the races," said Gore-Pearce. "There are other kinds of winners you can back, Bell, my lad!"

Gulliver was looking dubious.

"I don't think we'd better have anything to do with that fellow," he said. "I don't trust him, you know. We don't know much about him—he isn't a local man—and he won't care what trouble he lands us into. Take my advice, Gore-Pearce, and have nothing to do with him."

Gore-Pearce grunted.

"You don't understand," he said. "Brice has got something on in connection with that dog of his. You know, the animal that young Handforth has got hold of."

"I don't think we ought to have anything to do with it," said Bell bluntly. "You know what happened last time, Gore-Pearce. Brice came to the school, and he was nearly kicked off the premises by Mr. Lee. Besides, didn't Mr. Lee tell him, point-blank, that he couldn't have the dog?"

"Mr. Lee was talking out of the back of his neck!" said Gore-Pearce contemptuously. "He knows jolly well that the dog really belongs to Brice, and that legally he can claim him."

"Legally be blowed" said Bell. "Young Handforth saved that dog from dying, and, in a way of speaking, the dog belongs to him. I don't see how the deuce Brice can claim him, anyhow—because Brice left him for dead, in the ditch. You can't get away from it. It's like Brice's nerve to expect young Handforth to give the dog up, after caring for him as he has done."

"And he daren't bring a legal action, either," added Gulliver. "He knows jolly well that the story would do him a lot of harm. It would look nice, wouldn't it, if it

was published in all the papers? 'Prominent Bookmaker Kicks Greyhound Into Ditch, Wounded and Dying.' That's the sort of thing that would be in the papers! No wonder Brice daren't bring an action!"

Gore-Pearce nodded.

"Of course he daren't bring an action," he said. "That's the reason he's come to me. He's got something else in his mind, and there's no reason why we shouldn't find out what it is. There might be something in it for us—a good bit of cash. And my policy is to make hay while the sun shines."

Bell shook his head.

"I'm blessed if I can understand you, Gore-Pearce," he said, staring. "Your pater is a millionaire, and you can generally have as much money as you like, and yet you take risks like this."

"Rot!" said the leader of Study A. "There aren't any risks at all. Besides, I can't always get as much money as I like. My pater may be a millionaire, but he doesn't whack out tenners just as I want him to. And I don't believe in neglecting the chance of making some extra cash."



CHAPTER 9.

The Plotters!

NUMBER TWENTY-FOUR, HEATON STREET, was a house in a rather old-fashioned row, in a more or less respectable quarter of Bannington.

"I say, supposing we're spotted going in?" asked Bell uneasily, as he and the others approached the house.

"Well, supposing we are?" said Gore-Pearce, staring. "What of it?"

"We might get into trouble," said Bell.

"Don't be an idiot," retorted Gore-Pearce. "How the deuce can we get into trouble for visiting somebody? We're going into a private house—not a pub."

They went to the door of No. 24, and knocked. It was exactly the time of the appointment, and when the door opened, a stoutish lady stood there, wearing a big check apron over her dress.

"Is Mr Brice in?" asked Gore-Pearce briskly.

"Step inside, young gentlemen," said the woman. "Mr. Brice told me that you might be coming. He asked me to show you straight to his sitting-room."

They went in, and a minute later, after passing up the stairs, they walked into an old-fashioned sitting-room, where the atmosphere was hazy with cigar-smoke, and where Mr Brice paced up and down with a heavy frown on his brow.

"That's all right, Mrs. Winter, thanks. Hallo, boys! Sit down. Make yourselves at



Chattering with enjoyment, Marmaduke the monkey squatted on Gore-Pearce's shoulder and played with that unfortunate individual's hair. "You little wretch!" panted Gore-Pearce. He backed away desperately, knocked something over, and lost his balance. Then he became aware of a snake—a black, squirming snake—wriggling up to him. . . .

home. This is my friend, Mr. Ross. Herb, these are the schoolboys I told you about."

There was a second man in the room—a thin, shifty-eyed individual. He rose to his feet and nodded casually to the visitors.

"How do?" he said shortly. "Well, Bill, I'll be going. See you later."

Mr. Ross passed out, and closed the door after him. Gore-Pearce & Co., after lighting cigarettes, proceeded to make themselves at home.

"Pretty good digs., on the whole," remarked Gore-Pearce, as he looked round.

"Never mind the digs.!" said Mr. Brice. "Now, look here, my lads! I'm going to talk business with you. Understand? And the less time we waste, the better."

"Well, we're ready," said Gore-Pearce.

"About that dog of mine—Domino," went on Mr. Brice. "I want him. He's mine, and I'm going to have him, too! By thunder, I'm not going to be thwarted by a silly schoolboy!"

"Meaning young Handforth?"

"Yes, meaning young Handforth!" said Mr. Brice, with a scowl.

"But isn't the case rather more difficult than that?" asked Gore-Pearce mildly. "What about Mr. Lee? He's the House-master, you know. He clearly gave you to understand that you could only get the dog

by legally claiming him—and I don't think you'll do that, Mr. Brice."

The bookmaker scowled again.

"There isn't time," he replied savagely. "I can't mess about with legal action."

"Of course not," nodded Gore-Pearce. "Besides, look how bad it would appear! In a law court, all the facts would come out, wouldn't they? And I don't think it would do you any good if the story of Domino's injury came out in the papers. After all, Mr. Brice, you kicked him into the ditch —"

"That's about enough of that!" broke in the bookmaker harshly. "I don't want any taunts from you, young man!"

"I wasn't taunting!" said Gore-Pearce.

"I'm going to clear out of Bannington," went on the man. "This greyhound track is losing its popularity—rapidly. There's no money to be made here now. I'm going further afield. In fact, I'm going north. And when I go I want to take Domino with me. That's why I've brought you youngsters here. I want to strike a bargain with you."

"But what can we do?" asked Gulliver, staring.

"I'll tell you soon," replied Mr. Brice. "You can thank your fellow schoolboys for all this trouble," he added sourly. "The greyhound track was doing pretty well until

your precious pals started this football stunt. But I'm not a fool. I don't stick to a sinking ship."

"When are you going, then?" asked Gore-Pearce.

"To-night," replied the other. "By to-morrow morning, I shall be well away—and I want to have that dog with me."

"I don't see how it can be done," said Gore-Pearce, shaking his head. "It's no good going to the school, because Mr. Lee has already said that you can't have the dog. And if you bring a legal action, it'll take weeks—perhaps months."

"Haven't I already told you that I'm not thinking about any legal action?" demanded the bookmaker. "There's another way—a quicker way. That dog is mine—and you young gentlemen know it."

"Yes, he's yours right enough," agreed Gore-Pearce.

"Well, supposing the dog 'escapes' during the night?" said Mr. Brice, leaning forward towards the Removites, and lowering his voice. "Eh? Supposing he gets away? Supposing he is missing in the morning?"

"By gad!" said Gore-Pearce.

"Who's to know?" said Mr. Brice. "This kid, Handforth, can think what he likes, but he won't be able to prove anything, will he? For all he knows, the dog may have got out of his own accord, see? Any dog is liable to escape from his kennel during the night. Well, there'll be a search, and they won't find the dog."

"But they might find you," said Gulliver.

"They won't find me!" replied Mr. Brice. "I'm clearing out of this district to-night, as I've just told you. I'm going north. By the morning I shall be hundreds of miles away. And I shall only race the dog on northern tracks for a bit. Oh, no, my fine young friends! Once I'm away, there won't be much chance of this infernal kid finding out where I am. He can't take any action against me, because he knows that the dog is mine, and on top of all that, he'll have no proof that I was near the school. To all intents and purposes, the dog will have bolted during the night."

"It's a bit thick, isn't it?" asked Bell dubiously.

"Thick?" repeated Mr. Brice. "What the thunder do you mean?"

"Well, stealing the dog——"

"Stealing!" roared the bookmaker angrily. "You'd better be careful what you're saying, young 'un!"

"Well, I mean——"

"A man doesn't steal his own property!" proceeded Mr. Brice. "That dog is mine, and if I take him I shall only be taking something that belongs to me. Of course, if Domino belonged to this schoolboy, it would be a totally different thing. To take him away would be a criminal action. But, as

the matter stands, there'll be nothing crooked in it at all."

"How do you propose to get hold of the dog?" asked Gore-Pearce curiously.

"That's where you young gentlemen come in," replied Mr. Brice promptly. "I want you to help me."

"I thought so," said Gore-Pearce. "You can't do much without us, can you, Mr. Brice?"

"I dare say I could—but I want to be on the safe side," said the bookmaker. "I suppose you know where the dog is kept, don't you?"

"Yes."

"Good! That makes it a lot easier," said Mr. Brice. "Now, look here, young gentlemen, get this into your head—and get it good! This dog is mine, and all I want you to do is to get him quietly out of his quarters, and hand him over to me. I don't suppose it will take you more than five minutes. He's my dog, so there won't be any thieving about it——"

"Yes, we know that," interrupted Gore-Pearce. "We know that he's your dog, Mr. Brice, and we shan't have any scruples about it. If you were asking us to help you in a theft, it might be different. But even as it is, the thing is a pretty tall order——"

"Rubbish!" interrupted Mr. Brice. "There's nothing in it. You know where the dog is kept, so it won't take you long to slip down at about midnight, and take him out of his kennel."

"But why drag us into it?" asked Gulliver. "Why can't you do it yourself?"

Mr. Brice looked impatient.

"Because I can't do it myself," he replied. "Even though the dog is mine, if I get into your school, I shall be housebreaking. And that's a criminal offence. I shall be liable to arrest if I'm caught. Can't you understand? I'm not a burglar; I can't get into your school unlawfully. It doesn't make a ha'porth of difference whether the dog is mine or not—I'm not justified in housebreaking."

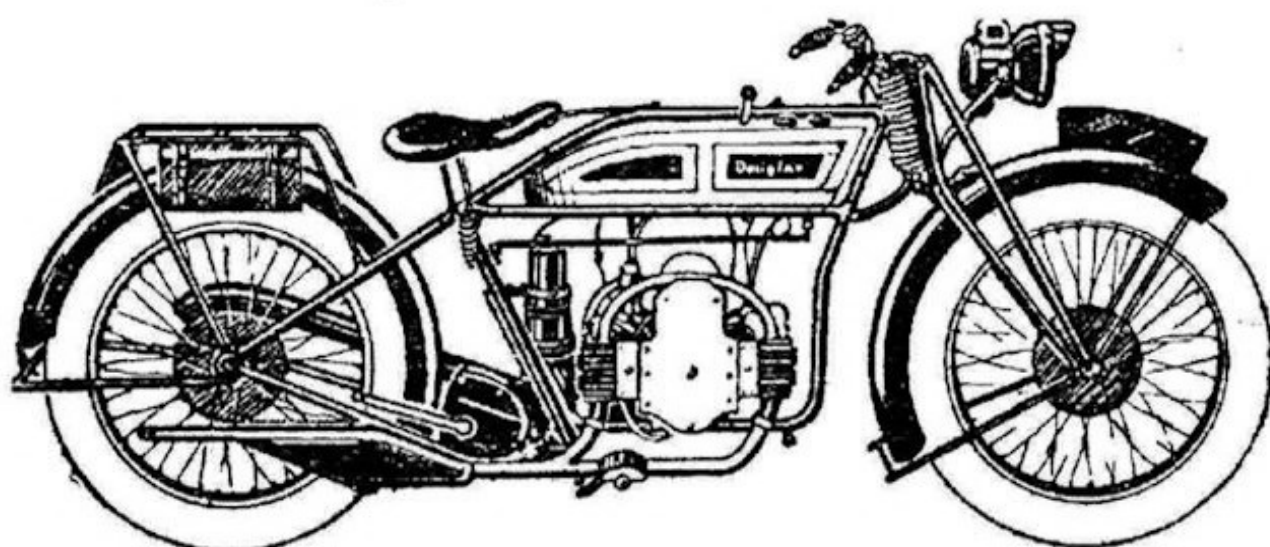
"That's true enough," said Gore-Pearce, who was now beginning to see the lie of the land. "Of course you couldn't risk it, Mr. Brice. It wouldn't be worth the candle."

"The dog is valuable, but I'm not going to risk a stretch of imprisonment for him," said the bookmaker, with a grunt. "Now, with you young gentlemen, it's quite different. You live in the school, and if you're found out of your bedrooms at night, there won't be much said. All you'll have to do will be to bring the dog out to me, hand him over, and then the thing is finished. I shall drive off, and, when the morning comes, this Handforth kid will think that the dog has escaped. Simple as A B C."

And Mr. Bill Brice rubbed his hands together with satisfaction. He did not notice the glint of cunning in Claude Gore-Pearce's eye!

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CHAPTER 10.

The Bargain!

CLAUDE GORE-PEARCE saw many possibilities here.

"Naturally, you can't break into the

school, Mr. Brice," he said slowly. "As you say, the game wouldn't be worth the candle. So you want us to get the dog out of his kennel, bring him outside, and hand him over to you. That's it, isn't it?"

"Yes, that's it," agreed Mr. Brice.

"And how much do you propose to give us for this little service?"

"A fiver," replied the bookmaker promptly.

"Each?"

"Well, yes—a fiver each," said Mr. Brice, after a moment's hesitation. "And that's being generous."

"Nothing doing," Gore-Pearce said briefly.

"Sorry, Mr. Brice, but it isn't good enough." The bookmaker scowled.

"What do you mean—not good enough?" he snapped. "You needn't think that you can take advantage of me like this! I was going to suggest a fiver between the three of you to start with, but I decided that I'd make it a fiver each. That's fifteen quid altogether. Very likely the dog isn't worth more. He's had an accident, and I'm taking a big risk. I'm hanged if I'll give you more than a fiver each!"

"In that case, Mr. Brice, we might as well be going," yawned Gore-Pearce. "Fright-

fully sorry, and all that, but there it is. We're not interested."

"Oh, but I say——"

"We're not interested!" repeated Gore-Pearce calmly.

The bookmaker was red with anger.

"Well, and what do you think the job is worth?" he demanded harshly.

"Twenty quid for me, and ten each for these chaps," replied Gore-Pearce on the instant.

"Why, you young fool, that's forty quid."

"Wonderful!" murmured Gore-Pearce.

"But, then, of course, you often do mental arithmetic, don't you?"

"Forty quid!" repeated Mr. Brice hotly.

"Don't be such a young idiot! The dog may be only worth a tenner! I can't tell until I've had him properly examined. No, confound you, I won't pay it!"

"Then what will you do?" asked Gore-Pearce amusedly. "Go away without the dog?"

"I'll find somebody who is more reasonable."

"You'll have your work cut out," said the cad of the Remove. "There aren't many fellows who would be agreeable to this shady business——"

"Shady!" roared the bookmaker.

"Yes, shady," insisted Gore-Pearce. "Gulliver and Bell and I are willing to help you, if you'll make it worth our while. We know there's nothing dishonest in the thing—the dog is your's, and that puts us square. But what about the risks?"

"Risks?" sneered Mr. Brice. "There would be risks for me—yes—because I'm an outsider. If I got into the school, I might

be discovered, and I should be on the premises unlawfully. But with you it's different. You live there, and——"

"We live in the school, yes," agreed Gore-Pearce. "But this dog is kept outside, in an outbuilding. I won't tell you which one, because you might take advantage of the information."

"You don't trust me, eh?"

"We might as well be perfectly frank," nodded Gore-Pearce coolly. "No, Mr. Brice, we don't trust you. And I don't suppose you trust us, either. So that makes it fifty-fifty. At the same time, we don't want to get heated do we? Let's discuss this thing in a cool, level-headed way."

Gulliver and Bell admired their leader's smoothness, his cool effrontery.

"You young hound!" said Mr. Brice harshly. "I know what your game is! You think you've got me in a cleft stick, don't you? I'm afraid to go to anybody else, eh?"

"Well, aren't you?"

"Look here!" burst out the bookmaker. "I'm willing to spring another fiver. I'll give you ten pounds, and your pals a fiver, each——"

"Double that, and we'll agree," interrupted Gore-Pearce. "You say there's no risk, Mr. Brice. That's just where you're wrong. There's a tremendously big risk. And if you're going to make this game worth our while, we want something more substantial in the way of a reward."

"But, hang it, where does the risk come in?" demanded Mr. Brice impatiently. "That dog belongs to me, and all I ask you to do is to bring him out——"

"At midnight," nodded Gore-Pearce. "That means that we've got to get out of our own House, go to this outbuilding, and smuggle the dog away. I suppose you know there's more than a chance that we shall be spotted and collared?"

"Not if you go carefully."

"It doesn't matter how carefully we go, dogs are dogs," said Gore-Pearce. "Dogs are liable to bark and create a noise. What's going to happen to us if we're found?"

"Nothing. Can't you say that you heard a funny noise, or something, and went out to have a look round?"

Gore-Pearce shook his head.

"That would be a bit too thin," he replied. "This outbuilding is kept locked; we should have to force a way in through a window, and that might set the dog off——"

"Well, that's nothing," said Mr. Brice. "Dogs are always liable to bark. Nobody would take any notice. Besides, I'm going to suggest that you should take a chunk of meat to keep the dog quiet while you put him in a sack."

"That's a good idea, I'll admit," said Gore-Pearce. "But we were talking about risks, Mr. Brice. Perhaps you don't understand the situation. If we're found out of our House at midnight, we're breaking bounds."

"You're doing what?"

"We're violating one of the strictest rules of the school," said Gore-Pearce. "With

luck, we might get off with a public flogging. But there's more than a chance that we should be sacked from the school."

"H'm!" grunted Mr. Brice. "There's that, of course."

"You hadn't thought of it before, had you?" said Gore-Pearce. "Well, we've got to think of it, Mr. Brice. The question is, is this game worth while? Is it worth the risk? For twenty quid, I might be willing to think of it, and I believe that my pals would back me up for a tenner each."

"Yes, rather!" said Gulliver and Bell promptly.

They knew that Gore-Pearce had been grossly exaggerating. There was certainly a chance of being discovered, but as they wouldn't be leaving the school premises there was very little risk of a flogging or expulsion. They might be gated for two or three weeks, or sentenced to a Housemaster's caning, but a worse fate was not likely to overtake them.

Mr. Brice suddenly made up his mind.

"Well, I'll admit that I hadn't thought of these possibilities," he grunted. "All right, then. I'll agree to your terms. Twenty pounds for you, Master Gore-Pearce, and a tenner each for your friends. That's a bargain."

"Good enough," said Gore-Pearce smoothly. "Done!"

"At exactly midnight I'll be outside the school—just a little distance along the lane in my car," said the bookmaker. "At midnight, as near as you can judge it, bring the dog out to me."

"That's simple enough," said Gore-Pearce. "How about the money? Do we touch any of it now?"

"No, you don't!" retorted the bookmaker. "You don't touch a penny until the dog is handed over!"

"Well, perhaps you're right," said Gore-Pearce. "Payment by results, eh? Well, we won't fail you, Mr. Brice. We'll be there at midnight, or as near as we can hit it. And when we hand the dog over, you'll whack out the forty quid?"

"On the nail!" said Mr. Brice.

They went into a few details, and then, fifteen minutes later, the cads of Study A took their departure. The bargain was sealed. They went, highly satisfied.

Perhaps they would not have been so satisfied if they could have heard Mr. Brice talking, two or three minutes later.

The thin individual, Mr. Herbert Ross, had entered the sitting-room soon after the juniors took their departure.

"Well, have you fixed it?" he asked, as he shut the door.

"It's all settled," replied the bookmaker. "As far as I can see, there won't be any hitch. We'll leave here soon after eleven, in your car. Herb, and at midnight we shall have the dog in our hands."

"How much did those young cubs want?"

"Forty quid!"

"Gosh!" said Mr. Ross, staring. "You didn't agree to it, did you?"

"I did!" grinned Mr. Brice. "Of course I agreed to it. But you don't think I'll pay, do you?"

"Well, I rather thought you had a few brains left," said the other.

"Pay?" sneered Mr. Brice. "Not likely! If they had agreed to my fiver proposal, I should have whacked out the money. As it is, they can whistle. They won't get a red cent. Leave it to me, Herb. After I've got hold of my dog, these kids can go to the deuce!"

And Mr. Brice laughed very contentedly.



CHAPTER 11.

Willy's Dog!

WELL, that's that!" said Claude Gore-Pearce calmly.

"By gad! You've got a nerve!" said

Gulliver admiringly.

"Never knew anything like it!" said Bell.

Their leader laughed.

"Well, I wasn't going to agree to his measly fifteen quid," he said. "There won't be much risk, of course, but we might as well have a decent bit of cash for our pains."

"Do you think it'll be easy to work?" asked Gulliver.

"Easy as winking," replied Gore-Pearce. "Before I go to bed, I'll take a stroll into the outhouse and have a look round. I'll find out exactly where the dog is kept, and then we shan't have any trouble when we go to the place at midnight."

While Gore-Pearce & Co. were making their plans, there was much jubilation at St. Frank's. Everybody was delighted with the success of the Junior Eleven. Even the Senior School was feeling pleased about it.

William Napoleon Browne went from Common-room to Common-room, and from Senior Day-room to Senior Day-room, giving graphic descriptions of the game, and gently hinting that the Senior Eleven couldn't possibly have done any better than Nipper and his stalwarts. In fact, Browne distinctly hinted that the Senior Eleven was over-rated, and that the juniors could easily knock spots off them if only they could have the opportunity.

The Senior School listened amusedly, for Browne was an entertaining fellow. Moreover, it was well known that he had a strong partiality for the juniors.

In the Remove studies there were many tea parties, and the guests were numerous. The majority of these guests were Irene & Co., and her friends from the Moor View School. Even the Third kept it up, indulging in a big feed in the Form-room.

As soon as this feed was officially over, Willy Handforth strolled out and had a look at the evening. A high wind was blowing up, bringing masses of scudding clouds from the north-west.

"There's going to be a big blow to-night," said Willy, as he looked at the sky.

"Well, there's nothing in that, is there?" asked Chubby Heath. "We expect gales in October."

"I'd better go along and see that my pets are all snug," said Willy briskly. "And Lightning needs his exercise, too. Coming, you fellows?"

Chubby Heath and Juicy Lemon shook their heads.

"We'll be getting on with our prep., if you don't mind," said Juicy.

"Go ahead, then," nodded Willy. "I'll join you later."

He went round to the rear of the Ancient House, cut across the private lane, and entered the long building which was known alternatively as the Bicycle Shed and the Pets' Quarters.

The end of the building was almost solely confined to the various pets of the juniors. Willy Handforth was the owner of about fifty per cent of all the pets that were kept. He made a hobby of this sort of thing.

Just inside the doorway of the building, he paused, and gave a short whistle. Instantly there was a little scuffling, and then an alert greyhound appeared, wagging his tail joyously.

"Good old Lightning!" said Willy. "Come on, old chap. What about a little walk?"

Lightning was quite agreeable. He frisked about energetically and happily.

It was difficult to believe that this active, healthy dog was none other than Domino, the poor creature that Mr. Brice had callously left in the ditch, less than a fortnight earlier.

There was an astounding difference in the dog now.

Willy's treatment had been highly successful. Lightning had practically recovered from his injuries, and he was getting better daily. And Willy, who had an uncanny power over all animals, had not been slow in teaching his new pet a few tricks.

"That's about enough of it, my lad!" said Willy, as Lightning continued to leap round him. "How about sitting down for a bit?"

Lightning obediently sat down, and his tail skimmed to and fro across the ground.

"That's better," said Willy. "Now, I've got something in my pocket for you. I dare say you'd like it, eh?"

Lightning wagged his tail harder than ever.

"Pocket!" repeated Willy sternly. "You can't tell me you don't know what I mean, you fathead!"

Lightning reared himself up, placed his two front paws on Willy's chest, and then leaned over and thrust his nose into one of Willy's jacket pockets.

"Wrong one!" said Willy, grinning.

Lightning tried the other, his eyes agleam. Then he withdrew his long nose, raised his head, and barked.

"Good man!" said Willy. "Catch!"

He produced a large chocolate biscuit, and Lightning deftly caught it.

"That's a special treat, mind," said Willy. "You mustn't have too many rich things like



As Nipper, bouncing a ball, led his team on to the field, a great roar of cheering went up. In the stand the St. Frank's supporters and the Moor View School girls shouted enthusiastically, and the Bannington townspeople joined in the ovation, too.

that, Lightning, or you'll soon get out of condition. By jingo! You're doing well, old son. By the end of another week you'll be as fit as a fiddle."

There was a marvellous understanding between the pair. No matter what Willy said, the dog seemed to understand. He obeyed Willy in everything—without a second's hesitation. And if Willy had become attached to his new pet, the attachment was mutual. Never before had Lightning been so happy. He was blindly, deliriously in love with his young master.

"Now we'll give you a lesson or two, old man," said Willy cheerfully. "What about that stunt we tried last night? Come along. We'll have a go—"

Willy paused, and frowned. A figure had come into sight from the gateway which led from the West Square; and the figure was that of Claude Gore-Pearce.

"Wait a minute!" said Willy, giving Lightning a pat.

Gore-Pearce strolled up, and he looked casually at Willy and the dog as he passed. He went into the shed doorway, hesitated, and then turned back. He stood regarding Willy in the same casual way.

"Well?" asked Willy bluntly. "What do you want?"

"Nothing," replied Gore-Pearce.

"Good! Then you can take it, and buzz off!" said Willy.

"I'll buzz off when I like!" said Gore-Pearce, strolling nearer. "So this is your dog, eh? Does he bite?"

"Bite?" repeated Willy. "I should think he does!"

"Eh?"

"You give him a bone—and hear him!"

"You young ass!" said Gore-Pearce, with a grunt. "I mean, does he bite anybody who goes near him?"

"It all depends upon the person," replied Willy. "Nipper or Pitt or any of those chaps could go near him, and he would be as friendly as you like. But if you went near him, Gore-Pearce, he would probably take a chunk out of your carcase. I dare say he'd bite you with the keenest pleasure."

"You silly young idiot!" frowned Gore-Pearce.

"Lightning is a pretty clever dog," went on Willy. "He knows people by instinct. Look at him now—look at the way he's eyeing you. Go on, Lightning. Growl at him."

Lightning glanced at Willy, then he bared his teeth and growled, transferring his gaze to Gore-Pearce again.

"Here, look out!" ejaculated the cad of the Remove. "Hold him back, you young fool! He looks dangerous!"

Willy roared with laughter as Gore-Pearce backed away in alarm.

"My dear ass, you needn't get the wind up," he said, grinning. "Lightning won't touch you unless I tell him to. Of course,

he knows that you're a suspicious character—he can tell it without the slightest trouble. There's something about you he doesn't like—and, of course, he's a good judge."

Gore-Pearce scowled, and moved away. He decided that it would be safer for him to come back later—after Willy had put his pet away. Somehow, he didn't quite like the look of Lightning. And as Gore-Pearce returned to the Ancient House he was considerably troubled. This dog was by no means a crock, and his teeth looked businesslike.

Claude Gore-Pearce had an idea that his task for the night would not be so simple, after all!

CHAPTER 12.

Doubts!



As the evening advanced, the wind became stronger and stronger. Towards bed-time, a regular gale was



As Nipper, bouncing a ball, led his team on to Frank's supporters and the Moor View School ground.

blowing, buffeting and booming round the old grey buildings of St. Frank's. In the lobbies, and in the corridors, the wind could be heard whistling and whining. It was going to be a wild night.

Gore-Pearce was very ill-tempered.

By a piece of bad luck, he had encountered Mr. Crowell, his Form-master, and Mr.

Crowell had remembered that Gore-Pearce owed him a couple of hundred lines.

It was an old debt, and Gore-Pearce had got out of it on several occasions. But he didn't get out of it now. For Mr. Crowell, thoroughly exasperated, carted the junior off to his own study, and made him sit down and write the lines under his very eye.

By the time Gore-Pearce had finished, it was supper-time. Thus he was prevented from going outside to make the little investigation that he had decided upon. By now, the pets' quarters were locked up, and it would be a risky business to venture out there

in his rotten study and do those rotten two hundred lines. I couldn't get away from the rotten place!"

"Rotten!" said Gulliver and Bell, grinning.

"And I couldn't go out to the pets' quarters, either," went on Gore-Pearce, with a grunt. "I don't even know where that confounded dog is kept. Not that it matters much," he added thoughtfully. "The kennel is bound to be somewhere handy, and I shall soon locate it. The trouble is, that beastly dog seems to be savage."

"What rot!" said Bell uneasily. "Everybody says he's as docile as a kitten!"

"Well, anyhow, I shall fetch a chunk of meat with me," said Gore-Pearce. "I dare say he'll be easy to handle. And while he's eating the meat, we can chuck a blanket over him and get him helpless."

"What if he barks?" asked Gulliver.

"Let him bark!" retorted Gore-Pearce. "Haven't you heard the gale? It's roaring round the Houses like a blizzard. Jolly lucky for us, too. We couldn't have better weather for the job. The dog can bark as much as he likes and nobody will hear him."

In this, Gore-Pearce was probably right. This gale had come very conveniently; it was a big help. A still, calm night would have been all against the enterprise; a wild, blustery night was the very thing.

At bed-time the cads of Study A retired to their bed-room, and they got completely undressed in readiness for the night. When the prefect came round for lights-out, he found Gore-Pearce & Co. very sleepy.

"Well, we diddled the rotter all right!" said Gore-Pearce, after the prefect's footsteps had died away. "Now we must keep awake for a couple of hours before we shove our things on!"

"Why not have a doze?" suggested Bell, yawning.

"Too risky," replied Gore-Pearce. "This is going to be a profitable job, and we don't want to take any chances. It means fifty quid for us."

"Fifty?" repeated Gulliver. "I thought the figure was forty?"

"Fifty."

"How do you make that out?" said Bell. "Didn't you arrange with Brice to give you twenty quid, with an extra tenner each for Gully and me?"

"Yes."

"Well, that's only forty."

"Brice apparently forgot all about the tenner I owe him," grinned Gore-Pearce. "But after to-night's work, that'll be squared. So it'll be a cool fifty quid, all told."



roar of cheering went up. In the stand the St. slastically, and the Bannington townspeople joined o.

now. He couldn't make the excuse that he had reckoned upon—that of making an adjustment to his bicycle.

"Where the deuce have you been all the evening?" asked Gulliver, as Gore-Pearce entered Study A.

"That beast Crowell got hold of me!" said Gore-Pearce savagely. "Made me sit

"By gad, so it will!" said Gulliver.

"Strictly speaking, you fellows ought to be jolly grateful to me," continued Gore-Pearce. "You've done nothing, and, by what I can see, you're not likely to do anything. The whole job is in my hands."

"We're going to help, aren't we?" asked Bell.

"Well, I dare say I shall find something for you to do," said Gore-Pearce. "One of you can go to the car, and the other one can keep watch. I shall have to get the dog, I suppose. Can't trust you fellows."

There was a long pause.

The gale was getting higher; it was shooting through the West Square like a thousand demons, howling and shouting and shrieking. The window rattled violently now and again, and more than once there was a quick flurry of rain on the panes.

"It's a rotten night!" said Gulliver, at length.

"It's a jolly good kind of night," said Gore-Pearce. "I'm glad to hear this wind—yes, and the rain, too. I thought we should have to take some risks, but with weather like this we shan't take any."

There was another pause.

"I say," said Bell, breaking the silence. "I suppose the whole thing is all right?"

"What do you mean—all right?" asked Gore-Pearce.

"Well, it seems a bit squiffy to me."

"Getting the wind up?"

"No, of course not!" growled Bell. "But but—Well, hang it! I'm not any too particular, I know, but it seems to me that this business is a bit crooked."

"That's what I've been thinking, too," said Gulliver uneasily.

Gore-Pearce snorted.

"Crooked!" he repeated hotly. "Look here, you rotters, are you trying to make out that I'm dishonest, or something?"

"Nun-no!" gasped Bell. "Still, at the same time—"

"If that dog didn't actually belong to Brice, I wouldn't have anything to do with the game," said Gore-Pearce curtly. "But you know as well as I do that young Handforth hasn't any right to the animal."

"Lots of chaps say that he has a moral right," remarked Gulliver. "He saved the dog's life, and so the dog belongs to him."

"We can't bother about moral rights," sneered Gore-Pearce. "Legally, the dog is Brice's. So it's all rubbish to talk about this affair being crooked. We're simply going to let the dog out, and when the morning

comes everybody will believe that the brute escaped."

"But supposing we're collared?" asked Bell.

"Confound you!" snapped his leader. "Look here, you two! If you're funky, I don't want you with me! You can jolly well stay here, and I'll keep the whole forty quid for myself."

"No fear!" said Gulliver, in alarm. "We'll help!"

"Rather!" ejaculated Bell.

The prospect of losing their share of the spoils alarmed them, and they did not utter any further grumbles or doubts.

"It'll be easy enough to wangle," said Gore-Pearce, after he had calmed down. "When Brice has gone, we can go back to the shed and leave the window open—and we can leave it in such a way that it will appear that the wind has blown it open. I tell you, this gale is lucky."

And, feeling that good fortune was with them, Gore-Pearce & Co. waited, listening impatiently to the chiming of the school clock—listening to the hooting and howling of the gale.



CHAPTER 13.

On the Job!

"HANK goodness!" muttered Gore-Pearce.

Faintly, intermingled with the noises of the wind, he had heard the school clock chime out the half-hour. A glance at the luminous dial of his watch verified the time. It was just eleven-thirty.

"Come on, you fellows," murmured Gore-Pearce. "Time we were getting dressed."

No answer came from the other two beds in the little dormitory. At St. Frank's the Removites were accommodated in many separate bed-rooms—two or three fellows in each. It was a very convenient arrangement—especially when such an adventure as this was on the programme.

"Gone to sleep, eh?" grunted Gore-Pearce, as he shook his chums. "Wake up, you asses! It's a fat lot of good relying on you chaps!"

Gulliver and Bell started up into wakefulness.

"Hallo!" gasped Bell. "What the—Who—who's that?"

"Don't get windy!" snapped Gore-Pearce. "It's only me!"

"Oh, my hat!" breathed Bell. "I—I was dreaming—"

"I don't want to hear your rotten dreams!" said his leader. "It's half-past eleven and time that we were on the job. Buck up!"

Gulliver and Bell scrambled into their clothing, and they listened apprehensively to the howling of the gale. It sounded very mysterious—very eerie.

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Somehow, now that the moment had arrived, they did not fancy venturing out into the blackness of the autumn night. When they had first heard of this plan, during the afternoon, they had thought of it with perfect equanimity. A tenner each for doing practically nothing!

Now they were inclined to hold the opinion that they would be well earning the money.

But then, Gulliver and Bell were not made of very stern stuff. They had always been more or less funky, and, if the truth must be told, they were rather afraid of the dark. And when the dark was accompanied by a boisterous, whining wind, they were doubly nervous.

Claude Gore-Pearce was no hero; but, at the same time, he was made of rather sterner stuff than his followers. Indeed, if this had not been the case, he would not have been capable of leading them. They would have been three of a kind.

"Ready?" came Gore-Pearce's voice out of the blackness.

"Yes," said Gulliver hesitatingly. "I—I say!"

"Well?"

"I suppose it's all right, isn't it?" asked Gulliver. "I—I mean, supposing one of the masters hears us—"

"Oh, dry up!" snapped Gore-Pearce. "You're not going to start wailing again, are you? If you don't want to come, you can stay behind. But you won't get a cent!"

Gulliver and Bell decided to go.

"You'd better bring one of the blankets, Gully," said Gore-Pearce. "I've got that chunk of meat here—yes, and the electric torch, too. We don't need anything else."

The conditions were all in their favour.

Creeping out of their bed-room, they found the corridor black and deserted. Although they crept along on tiptoe, this precaution was hardly necessary, for the whole Ancient House was filled with the sounds of the wild night. Windows were rattling, and occasionally the very walls shook as a particularly heavy gust struck the building; and all the time the gale howled and shrieked outside.

It was striking the three-quarters as Gore-Pearce & Co. crept out of their study window, on the ground floor. The West Square was as black as pitch, and they could hardly see their hands in front of their faces.

"This is easy," grinned Gore-Pearce, as he and his companions stood outside. "Better close the window, in case it blows to. We can easily open it again when we come back."

Like three shadows, they crept along the West Square, forcing their way against the heavy wind. Every window was dark; not a light was gleaming anywhere. The whole of St. Frank's was asleep.

The West Gate, of course, was locked, but it did not take the three juniors long to scramble over the wall and to drop into the little private lane. The door of the big shed was locked, too, and Gore-Pearce crept along to one of the windows. The shed ran along-

side the lane, so the programme was now quite easy.

It was only necessary to force a window and to get inside. Then the dog could be secured, carried down the lane in the blanket, and delivered to the waiting men in the car—who would be out in the road. Nothing could have been more simple.

"We're safe enough here," said Gore-Pearce calmly. "This window will do. Now, Bell, you can hold the light for me. It won't take me long to force the catch."

"Do you think it'll be safe to switch the torch on?" asked Bell, as he took it.

"Safe as houses."

"But it's jolly dark to-night, and——"

"I know that, you idiot!" interrupted Gore-Pearce. "But we're protected here. There's this opposite wall. It shields us from every window. Besides, you can hold the torch close, so there won't be any beam of light. But go easy—don't switch it on until you've pointed it at the window. No need to let the beam go into the air."

Bell was very cautious. He held the bulb of the torch close to the window and then pressed the switch. A beam of light shot out and illuminated the window. Gore-Pearce immediately got to work.

He took a screwdriver out of his pocket, and forced it between the two sections of the window. Bell held the torch, and Gulliver stood looking on. All three of them were compelled to crouch against the wall, for the wind was shooting down the lane with such velocity that they were half blown away.

No alarming sounds had come from the interior of the shed yet.

Not even a bark, not a movement. Either Lightning was sound asleep, or else he was not a good watchdog. If it came to that, he wasn't supposed to be a watchdog. He was a greyhound, trained for racing. The chances were that he would make no outcry at all. On the other hand, perhaps he was growling all the time, but owing to the noise of the wind his voice had not penetrated.

"Got it!" said Gore-Pearce, after a brief struggle.

Snap!

Something gave, and a moment later the window was open. The wind caught it with full force, and it jerked violently out of Gore-Pearce's grip.

Crash!

The woodwork of the window—which was of the casement type—struck against the torch which Bell was holding, and the next second the trio were plunged into inky darkness. Gore-Pearce uttered a savage exclamation.

"You fool!" he snapped. "What the deuce have you done?"

"I didn't do it!" protested Bell. "The window blew on to me, and my hand's half crushed. Why couldn't you hold it?"

Gore-Pearce breathed hard. He wanted to blame Bell for the mishap, but he knew he was mainly responsible. He had carelessly

let go of the window, and the wind had done the rest.

"Oh, well, it's no good growling," he said. "You'd better find that torch. Where did it fall?"

"Just here, somewhere," said Bell, bending down and fumbling about on the wet ground. "I felt it touch against my foot, and— Here it is."

He picked the torch up and pressed the switch. Nothing happened. The blackness remained complete. Bell pressed the switch again, and jerked the torch up and down.

"My hat!" he said at last. "The rotten thing won't work!"

"What!" snapped Gore-Pearce. "Give it to me!"

He took the torch, and the truth was obvious to him a second later.

"Confound it!" he snapped savagely. "The bulb is busted!"

This was an unexpected setback, and the eads hardly knew what to do. Curiously enough, at that moment the moon came out from behind a bank of heavy black clouds, and now it shone fitfully through little rifts of lighter clouds.

"Well, I couldn't help it," said Bell defensively. "I didn't drop the torch. It was knocked out of my hand——"

"Oh, it's no good growling," said Gore-Pearce. "We shall have to use matches."

He felt through his pockets, and then discovered that he had no matches on him.

"Hang it!" he snapped. "I've left my match-box indoors on the dressing-table."

"Well, I haven't got any matches," said Bell.

"Neither have I," muttered Gulliver. Gore-Pearce grunted.

"Just our rotten luck!" he snapped. "If I had had a box of matches on me, you fellows would have had plenty, too. As it is, we haven't got a vesta between the three of us."

"Listen!" said Gulliver.

The school clock was chiming out midnight.

"I expect the car's outside in the road waiting," said Gore-Pearce irritably. "There isn't time for us to go back for matches. Look here, we shall have to rely upon the moonlight."

"We're not going into the shed, are we?" asked Gulliver nervously.



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"Keep your hair on!" said Gore-Pearce. "You can go along to the gate and see if there's any sign of the car. You, Bell, can stay here on the watch. I'll go and get the dog."

And Claude Gore-Pearce prepared for the task.



CHAPTER 14.

A Few Mishaps!

HE smashing of the electric torch was a real disaster for the schoolboy plotters.

It had deprived them of their only means of dependable light. At the best, the moonlight was only fitful and watery; not many beams would penetrate into the outbuilding.

At the same time, Gore-Pearce felt sure that he would be able to accomplish his task successfully. He wasn't very nervous about the dog. He had a big chunk of meat with him, and this would be an excellent protection. While the dog was eating the meat, it would be easy enough to fling the blanket over him, and make him captive.

"Well, buzz off!" he said, looking at Gulliver. "Tell Brice that I shan't be long—about five minutes, I expect."

"All right," said Gulliver.

He hurried away, and Bell held the window open while Gore-Pearce climbed cautiously through. The moon had come out from behind the cloudbanks now, and was likely to shine for a minute or two. It was Gore-Pearce's opportunity.

"Shan't be long!" he muttered, as he vanished into the gloom. "You stay there, Bell."

"Right ho!"

"If you hear any suspicious sound, or anything, give me the tip."

While Gore-Pearce was cautiously picking his way into the shed, Gulliver was hurrying down the little private lane. He arrived at the gates, and climbed over them. A short distance up the road there was a blackish kind of blob. Something was standing there, but there was no lights on it.

Gulliver went forward nervously. He could see, as he approached, that the "something" was a motor-car. It was a car of the touring type, but the hood was up.

"That you kid?" came a voice.

Gulliver felt more comfortable.

"It's all right, Mr. Brice," he said breathlessly. "Shan't be long."

There were two men standing near the car—Mr. Bill Brice and Mr. Herb Ross.

"We've been here nearly ten minutes," said the bookmaker tensely. "I switched my lights off, just to be on the safe side. Well? Where are the others? Haven't they got the dog yet? It's gone midnight."

"Gore-Pearce is getting him now," said Gulliver. "He won't be long. He told me to tell you that he'd be about five minutes. We had a bit of a mess-up."

"Oh?" said Mr. Brice. "What happened?"

Gulliver related the incident of the torch, and Mr. Brice grunted.

"Just like your silly carelessness," he said. "This might mess up the whole game. How the thunder can that boy do anything without a light? The moon's no good."

"Well, he said he could manage," replied Gulliver.

Personally, he was feeling quite relieved. His part of the job was done.

But Claude Gore-Pearce's, on the other hand, had not yet commenced.

He told himself that it would be a comparatively easy task to entice the dog out of his kennel with a piece of meat, and after that it would be all plain sailing. But Gore-Pearce soon discovered that theory is one thing and practice another.

He got through the window all right—there was no difficulty about that—and when he moved away from the window into the body of the building, the fitful moonbeams served to guide him. He assured himself that he would be outside, with the dog, in "no time."

But the building was a long one, and, as soon as Gore-Pearce had moved away from the window and had taken several cautious strides into the darkness, he had an idea he was losing his bearings. He knew that most of the pets were kept down at the end of the building, and it was here, presumably, that he would find Lightning, the dog. Or Domino, as Gore-Pearce preferred to call him. Domino was Mr. Brice's dog, and the cad of the Remove told himself that he was doing no wrong in taking part in this questionable business.

It wasn't very much good pausing to listen, so that he could get his bearings by sound. The wind was howling round the building so fiercely that Gore-Pearce half expected the roof to fall to pieces at any moment. The gale fairly hooted as it came swinging round the outer walls, rattling the windows and causing the whole structure to quiver. All other sounds were drowned in that tumultuous roar.

"Confound!" muttered Gore-Pearce, pausing.

He didn't quite know where he was, and when he looked round he couldn't find the window by which he had gained admittance. Everything was gloomy and subdued. The moon had gone behind another cloud, and very little light was coming into the building.

Gore-Pearce hesitated. He realised that he had made a mistake in coming into this building without a light. It would have been far better if he had sent Gulliver or Bell back to get some matches. He felt that much time would have been saved.

But it was too late now. He was inside, and he had better go through with it. It would mean more delay than ever if he changed his plans.

Then, after he had progressed another few paces, the moon again came out from behind the clouds, and Gore-Pearce thought he detected a movement close against one of the walls. He bent forward, peering, his chunk of meat held ready.

"Good boy—good boy!" he said softly. "It's all right—good old boy!"

He was certain he could see a movement now. A sensation of great relief came over him. His task had not been so difficult as he had feared, a few moments earlier. He could now see—for his eyes had become thoroughly accustomed to the gloom—that there was a sort of big cage standing here.

Of course, this was just like Willy Handforth's stunts! Instead of keeping the dog in a kennel, he had put him into a cage. It was quite a large cage, so the greyhound was in no way hampered in his movements. Indeed, he was hopping about in his cage now, as Gore-Pearce could dimly see.

He fumbled with the catch, half expecting to hear the dog growling at him. But this did not happen. Then, at last, he found a sort of bolt. He pulled it back, and opened the door of the cage—taking care to hold his piece of meat handy.

"Good boy!" he whispered. "Come on, Domino! Here you are! Have a go at this!"

He didn't quite like the silence. He had been expecting Domino to bark—or, at least, growl. True, it was difficult to hear much, above the howling and roaring of the wind. But he was at very close quarters—

There was a sudden movement within the cage, and Gore-Pearce felt a pressure against the door, which he was still holding. He dropped the meat on the floor, and backed away. Perhaps it would be better, after all, to let the dog come out, and then he could throw the blanket right over him as he was eating the meat.

And then—thud!

Something came hurtling through the air—straight at him. He only saw a dim, shadowy form, almost intangible in the gloom; and in that flash he knew that it was no dog!

As a matter of fact, he had released a whole pile of trouble from that cage—in the agile, mischievous person of Marmaduke, the monkey!



CHAPTER 15.

Monkey Tricks!

MARMADUKE, the monkey, had been an interested spectator for some time.

His eyes were better than Gore-Pearce's, and, in spite of the gloom, he had watched the intruder's progress with a certain amount of doubt and uncer-

tainity. He had even chattered excitedly now and again, but Gore-Pearce had been unable to hear the little monkey's voice on account of the buffeting of the wind.

For a few minutes, Marmaduke had had half an idea that Willy had come along for some purpose or other. True, it was unprecedented for his young master to disturb him in the middle of the night; not that Marmaduke would have minded in the least. Being disturbed was one of his favourite recreations. Marmaduke had always held the view that he was left alone far too much. He needed more company, and it didn't matter a toss to him whether the company came in the middle of the day, or in the middle of the night. Marmaduke was indifferent about this.

It didn't take him long to discover that the visitor was a stranger to him—and a questionable stranger at that. Whether Marmaduke sniffed Gore-Pearce on the wind, so to speak, or whether he instinctively knew that he was unfriendly, is a question that cannot easily be settled. But there is not the slightest doubt that Marmaduke felt that here he was face to face with a hostile force.

The monkey, being in a cage, was at a decided disadvantage. Never in his wildest dreams—taking it for granted that Marmaduke was capable of dreaming—did he hope to be released. Even Willy was more or less chary about letting him out of his cage. Which, in Marmaduke's opinion, was ridiculous.

For Marmaduke was particularly interested in this great, slim, long-limbed animal that had recently joined the Honourable Order of Pets. Marmaduke had inspected Lightning very often through the bars of his cage, and he had spent long hours of conjecture, sitting pensively in his cage, wondering, perhaps, what chances there would be of having a bit of fun if he was granted the opportunity of investigating Lightning's sleek coat.

However, Marmaduke was a friendly little beggar, and he had been formally introduced to Lightning, and gradually Marmaduke was becoming accustomed to Lightning's presence.

But this affair in the middle of the night was totally unlooked-for.

And when Marmaduke suddenly found his cage opened, he could hardly believe the evidence of his own senses. This was too good to be true. He was probably dreaming, and would wake up, soon, to find himself in a corner of his cage. But, no. Without doubt, the door was open.

And Marmaduke, who was, perhaps, more entitled to the name of "Lightning" than the greyhound, skimmed out to freedom in a split section of a second.

"Good boy!" came a hoarse, whispered voice. "Here you are, old man! Have a go at this!"

But Marmaduke treated the meat with lofty indifference. It had no appeal to him. He was far more interested in Claude Gore-Pearce. It was true that Gore-Pearce had released him from the cage, but Marmaduke had no gratitude in his heart. He had a



Gore-Pearce & Co. shook their fists in rage as they watched the car disappearing down the road. Bill Brice had "stung" them properly!

feeling that Claude Gore-Pearce was up to mischief, and his main idea, therefore, was to show this stranger that he strongly disapproved of his presence.

With this idea in mind, Marmaduke leapt upon Gore-Pearce's chest, swarmed up on to Gore-Pearce's shoulder, and grabbed two handfuls of Gore-Pearce's hair.

This was good; this was first-class. Marmaduke enthusiastically proceeded to indulge in a few gyrations round Gore-Pearce's head—still clinging tightly to the hair.

"Help!" gasped the cad of Study A, thoroughly startled and bewildered. "Why, what the deuce— Great gad! Go away, confound you! What the— How the— Help—help!"

Gore-Pearce was not merely startled—he was unnerved. It only took him a couple of moments to realise that he had unwittingly released Marmaduke, the monkey. Until then, he had completely forgotten Marmaduke's existence, so engrossed had he been in his task.

But it was impossible to forget Marmaduke's existence any longer. Marmaduke had a way of compelling attention. One way, as he was now showing, was to grab people by the hair.

"You—you little demon!" gasped Gore-Pearce, trying to pull himself together. "Get off! By gad! If you don't get off—"

He tried to clutch at the monkey, but he might just as well have attempted to clutch at a sunbeam. When Gore-Pearce's clutch arrived, Marmaduke wasn't there. He leapt from shoulder to shoulder, and the more excited Gore-Pearce got, the more Marmaduke enjoyed himself.

Incidentally, it may as well be mentioned that Lightning was an interested spectator. The greyhound, being a peaceful animal, had not displayed much hostility upon Gore-Pearce's entrance. He had growled once or twice, but he had remained inactive. Now, however, he left his kennel, and stood some little distance away, wondering what he should do in these circumstances. Upon the whole, he decided that he had better stay where he was, and look on. The fact of the matter was, Lightning was just a little uncertain about Marmaduke. If Gore-Pearce had been alone, he might have taken some sort of action. But Marmaduke was an unknown quantity, and Lightning was all for caution.

"Bell!" screamed Gore-Pearce. "Where the deuce are you, you fool? Come here—quick! I've let this rotten monkey out! I can't get rid of him!"

Bell, who was at the window, some considerable distance away, peered in, startled and alarmed. He could hear Gore-Pearce's gasps, but he didn't know what was happening. The wind was whistling round his ears, confusing all other sounds. He had a general sort of idea that Gore-Pearce was having a terrific tussle with the greyhound.

Gore-Pearce had completely forgotten his original errand.

His one desire, at the present moment, was to get rid of this clinging monkey. It would have been different, perhaps, if Marmaduke's embrace had been affectionate. It wasn't. It was decidedly hostile. To make matters worse, Marmaduke kept on putting his little face close to Gore-Pearce's, and the snapping of his little teeth made the junior's

blood run cold. At any second he expected to have his nose bitten off. Not that Marmaduke would have done anything so ill-mannered as this. Willy had given him a very strict upbringing.

"You—you little wretch!" panted Gore-Pearce. "Let go of my hair, hang you!"

He backed away, blindly and desperately. Crash!

In the darkness, he knocked something over, and, at the same second, he lost his balance. He went flying, and he found himself sitting directly in a moonbeam, which came streaming in from another window.

There was a cage near to him. The front of it was smashed, and Gore-Pearce realised that he had created this havoc in his fall.

Something cold—icily cold—touched one of his hands. With a clutching sensation at his heart, he altered the direction of his gaze. He saw a snake—a black, squirming snake—wriggling past him on its way into the very heart of his clothing!

With a wild, desperate yell, Gore-Pearce leapt to his feet and ran, and so violent was his action that Marmaduke was jerked from his hold. The monkey dropped to the floor.

Crash—crash!

Gore-Pearce had met with another disaster. Blundering in the darkness, he had collided with a number of bicycles, and had sent them all flying. Now he was sprawling full length amidst a number of spinning wheels, and pedals and handlebars were digging into his anatomy at various quarters.

"Oh!" groaned Gore-Pearce. "Oh, my only hat! I'm hurt—I'm injured!"

The shock, however, had calmed him to an extent. Painfully, laboriously, he picked himself up and tried to sort himself out.

The wind hooted and howled, and, through it, he could faintly hear the chattering of Marmaduke, as the monkey danced up and down, excited and entertained.

Gore-Pearce came to the conclusion that this job was worth a lot more than twenty pounds!



CHAPTER 16.

Gore-Pearce's Tangle!

THE unfortunate Claude was so flustered that he did not know which way to turn. Moreover, he was hurt. By now he had almost forgotten his original programme. His main desire was to escape from this terrible place.

Then, from somewhere above, mysterious and unaccountable, came a hollow, raucous sort of voice.

"Fathead!" it said contemptuously.

"Eh?" gasped Gore-Pearce, so startled that his voice was cracked.

"Go and eat coke!" said the voice from above.

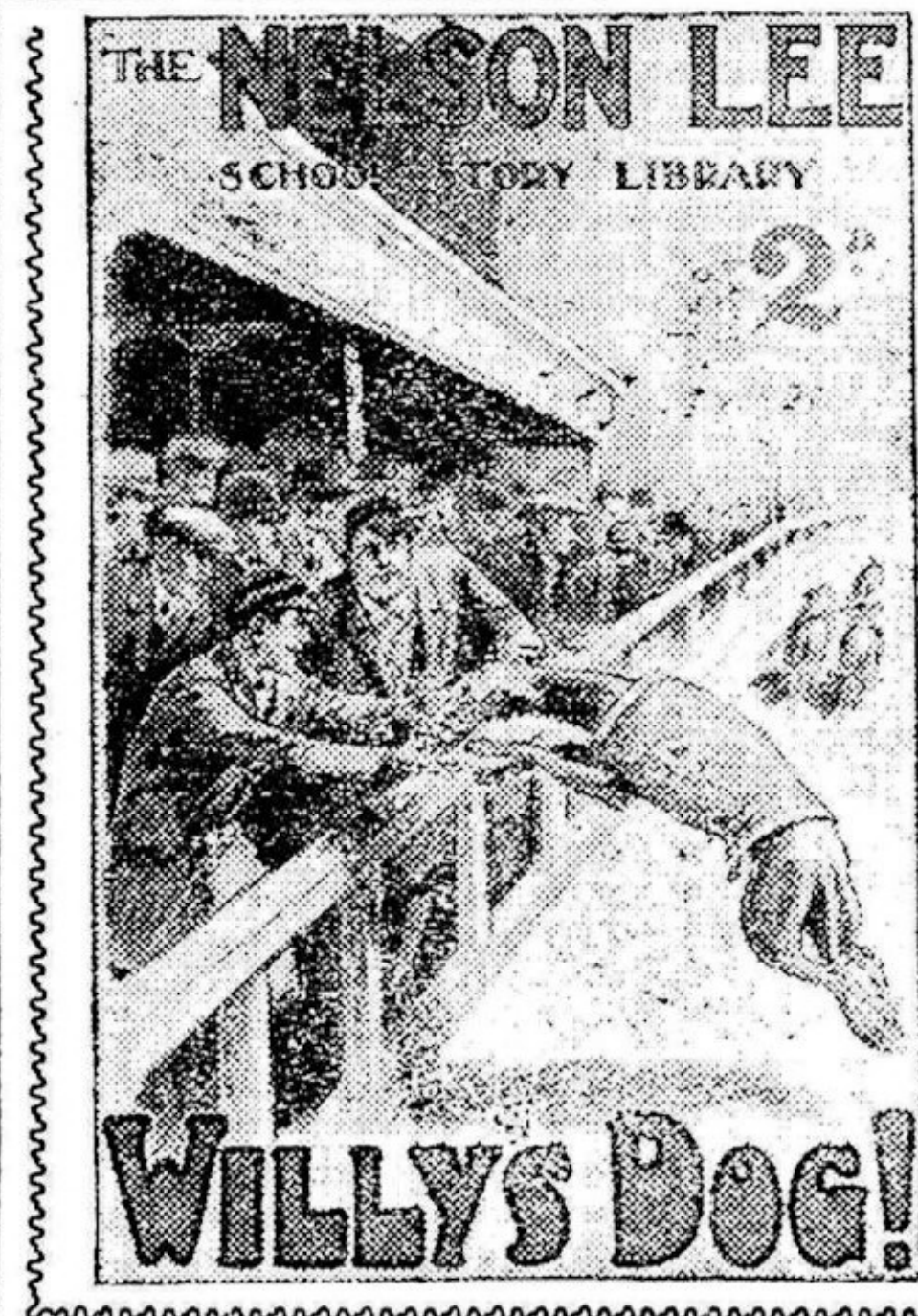
The voice was unnatural; it was thick and mysterious. Gore-Pearce, nearly startled out of his wits, stared upwards into the blackness.

"Who are you?" he asked hoarsely. "Who—who's there?"

"Another word from you, my lad, and I'll dot you in the eye!" said the voice, with a peculiar, guttural sternness. "Oh, rats! I hate prep!" it added, in an inconsequential way. "Cheerio, old bean!"

"Great Scott!" ejaculated Gore-Pearce blankly.

NEXT WEDNESDAY!



"Grub!" said the voice. "Grub—grub—grub! Shove the kettle on, fathead, and don't jabber so much!"

At this point two things happened. Marmaduke, who was becoming impatient, gave a leap at Gore-Pearce, landed on his shoulder, and then careered onwards and upwards on to one of the wooden cross-bars that supported the roof. Then came a sudden fluttering of wings and a wild, screeching, raucous cry.

It was such an unearthly cry, in fact, that Gore-Pearce nearly fainted. It was like the scream of a soul in torment. Then, with a sudden shock of relief, he realised that that guttural voice and the screech had proceeded from Priscilla, the parrot.

The little mystery was explained. Not that Gore-Pearce felt any happier. Marmaduke, on the other hand, was full of enthusiasm.

He had an old score to settle with Priscilla. Only the previous day she had stood in front of his cage, and had not only called him a fathead in a withering voice, but she had also told him, in a most unladylike way, to go and boil his head. On the top of all that, she had pecked at his fingers to such purpose that he could still feel the pain.

This was certainly an occasion for reprisals.

There came a terrific din from above, the fluttering of wings, the screeching of the parrot, the scamperings of Marmaduke. Now he was chattering wildly, too. He was

“WILLY’S DOG.”

Poor Willy!

Bill Brice, the scoundrelly bookmaker, has got Lightning, and Willy is properly in the dumps. Usually so cheery and always ready for a joke, he now goes about with a long face and is interested in nothing—not even football!

Willy has vowed to get back Lightning, and he means it. But how is he to go about it? He doesn’t know where Brice has gone. That’s where Gore-Pearce comes in—Gore-Pearce who helped Brice to get the greyhound in the first place, and who, having been “stung,” is now breathing vengeance against the bookmaker.

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chasing the parrot with tremendous enjoyment.

In the meantime, Bell concluded that it would be a pretty good idea if he did something. It never occurred to him to enter the shed and to go to his leader’s assistance. Wild horses would not have dragged him into the mysterious darkness of this place.

No; his only alternative was to fetch help. And, as far as he knew, the only help that he could fetch was out in the road. He had shouted once or twice, but he had received no reply from Gore-Pearce. Then that terrible screech had come, rising above the shouting and roaring of the wind.

Bell, it must be explained, thought that the screech came from Gore-Pearce, and he had a general sort of idea that Gore-Pearce had met with a sudden and violent death. The greyhound, no doubt, had got him by the throat!

So Bell, frightened into a condition bordering on hysteria, flew down the lane like mad. And the faster he ran the greater became his terror. He imagined the greyhound leaping after him through the darkness, like the “Hound of the Baskervilles.”

When he arrived at the gate he was still unharmed, however, and how he scrambled over into the road he never knew. But he managed it somehow, and then he went tearing up the road, shouting madly.

Gulliver, running towards him, had his heart in his mouth.

“Keep quiet, you fool!” he panted. “Is that you, Bell? What’s the matter? Confound it! Don’t make all this noise——”

“Help! Help!” gabbled Bell. “Gore-Pearce has been killed!”

“Wha-a-at!” gasped Gulliver.

Mr. Brice and Mr. Ross came along, and they seized Bell, shook him, and held him tightly.

“That’s about enough of it!” snapped the bookmaker. “Pull yourself together, kid! Good heavens! What’s the matter with you? Stop it, I tell you!”

Bell went all limp, and he positively whimpered with fright.

“What’s happened?” demanded Mr. Brice harshly.

“Gore-Pearce!” breathed Bell. “He’s—he’s dead! I—I heard his last screech! That—that dog got him by the throat and killed him!”

“It can’t be true!” said Gulliver huskily. “Oh, what shall we do? What shall we do? We’d better shout for help! We’d better waken the school——”

“Wake up yourself!” snarled Mr. Brice, alarmed and disturbed by this unexpected development. “Keep calm, confound you! The boy must be mad! No greyhound could kill anybody!”

“But—but I heard his scream!” babbled Bell.

“Come on, Herb!” said Mr. Brice sharply. “We can’t wait here any longer. We’d better go along and see what’s been happening.”

“Better be careful,” said Mr. Ross. “We don’t want to be collared on these premises, do we? It’s a bit too risky——”

“Nonsense!” broke in the bookmaker. “With all this wind, none of these sounds have carried to the school. We’re safe enough! Anyhow, we’ve got to find out what’s happened. We can’t leave it like this.”

Without any further argument, Mr. Brice strode down the road. He pushed Bell in front of him, and Gulliver followed, alarmed and frightened. Mr. Ross, after a moment’s hesitation, joined in.

He decided that if the worse came to the worst he could easily make a bolt for it, and get away in his car before he was recognised. It was his car, anyhow, and if Brice was fool enough to get himself caught it was his own concern.

They climbed the gate, and then went along the private lane. At last they arrived

at the long outbuilding, and Mr. Brice stuck his head through the open window.

"You there, boy?" he asked sharply.

"Help! Help!" came a frightened voice.

Mr. Brice grunted.

"Dead, eh?" he said contemptuously.

"The kid's as much alive as I am! Yes, and he's messed the whole thing, up, too! I might have expected it!"

Gulliver clutched at the bookmaker's arm.

"Did—did he answer?" he asked in a shrill voice.

"Yes, you young fool!" said Mr. Brice.

"I don't suppose he's hurt at all."

He heaved his heavy body through the window, and when he got inside he pulled out an electric torch and switched it on. Mr. Brice was now reckless. He was fed up with all this waiting, all this delay.

With a firm stride, he walked forward, and Gulliver was now with him. Bell had remained outside with Mr. Ross. The latter was keeping a wary eye on the school premises. But there was no reason for alarm; St. Frank's was completely black. Not a light showed anywhere, and apparently nobody had been disturbed.

In the building, Mr. Brice took in the situation at a glance.

It was quite an interesting situation, too. He found Claude Gore-Pearce in a corner, frightened and helpless. In front of him stood Lightning, the greyhound, keeping him there—bottling him up in that corner!

The greyhound's teeth were bared and he was looking rather dangerous.

Mr. Brice acted promptly.

He snatched up the blanket which Gore-Pearce had brought, threw it over the dog, and within five seconds the unfortunate animal was helpless.

Mr. Brice was a man of action!



CHAPTER 17.

Marmaduke's Night Out!

MARMADUKE, the monkey, was not missed, because Mr. Brice knew nothing of Marmaduke's existence. And Claude Gore-Pearce was far too frightened to remember the little animal.

But Marmaduke, to tell the truth, was exceedingly busy at the moment.

He had decided, upon due consideration, that he was wasting his time by making unavailable attempts to pull Gore-Pearce's hair out by the roots. Besides, it wasn't particularly thrilling.

Marmaduke saw no reason why he should not take full advantage of his liberty.

As far as he could remember—and his memory, no doubt, was very short—he had never been out of his cage at midnight before. It was quite a novel adventure. He had noticed, too, that a window stood open.

Better and better!

Not only was he free from his cage, but he could get out of the building altogether, if he was so minded. And Marmaduke, being a monkey, certainly was so minded. As soon as he spotted the open window he made a sort of spitting noise at Priscilla—which was very rude of him—and gave up the argument.

He decided that a little exploring would not come amiss. In a dim sort of way, too, his instincts told him that all this was not quite right. There was something decidedly amiss to-night.

Marmaduke was a clever little beggar, but even Willy would not have been rash enough to declare that Marmaduke was capable of reasoning. So it was probably instinct that caused the monkey to make for a window of the Third Form dormitory, in the Ancient House, after he had got outside.

Marmaduke was well aware of the fact that his young master slept behind that particular window. He had seen Willy there on many occasions, and Willy had taken him into the dormitory, too, more than once. Indeed, on one celebrated night Willy had taken Marmaduke to bed with him, much to the indignation of the other occupants of the dormitory.

Candidly, Marmaduke was disappointed.

When he got outside, he discovered that the conditions were by no means as cheerful as he had anticipated. He had had a sort of general idea of racing round for a bit, climbing trees, and dodging over walls.

He reached the top of one wall all right, but after he had been practically blown off it he decided that it was time for him to find Willy. He began to feel very cold and lonely. He was, in fact, disgusted with the weather conditions.

The wind was howling, and it was making him shiver. The air was very bleak, and now and again a few spots of rain fell. Marmaduke began to regret that he had ever ventured out. It was much warmer and cosier in his little cage.

However, he was out now, and it was ridiculous to think of going back without paying a surprise visit to Willy.

The monkey ran along the ground in the West Square, leapt at the ivy, and in about five seconds he was on the window-sill of one of the windows of the Third Form dormitory. The window itself was closed, but above there was a small section, something like a fanlight, which was partially open. With a single leap, Marmaduke reached the opening and squeezed through.

This was better—decidedly better. He dropped to the floor, and paused for a moment to take stock of his surroundings.

Then, chattering excitedly, he took a look round.

Everybody in the Third Form dormitory was asleep. Some of the sleepers were snoring gently, others were silent. One fag, however, was snoring in the most atrocious

manner. The noise was not unlike that of a miniature sawmill.

The culprit was Eric Gates, an extremely simple youth, and the bane of Willy Handforth's existence. In the Third, Gates was regarded as being only half human; none of the fags had decided what the other half of him was. He generally answered to the name of "Soppy"—which, in itself, was an indication that there was something wrong with his mental condition. Otherwise he wouldn't have answered.

Marmaduke decided that Gates' snoring was most entertaining. He rather liked it. He hopped on to Gates' bed, then he hopped on to Gates' chest.

Marmaduke chattered gaily.

He squatted there, gazing at Gates' open mouth with his beady little eyes, and he chattered with glee again. He put out a paw, and patted Gates on the mouth—with the idea, no doubt, of discovering how that peculiar noise was made.

But Marmaduke suffered a disappointment. Gates' mouth closed, and the snore ceased. After waiting in vain for a few moments for the entertainment to recommence, Marmaduke hopped on to the next bed.

This one was occupied by Bobby Dexter—otherwise known in the Third as "The Cherub"—and Bobby, being a light sleeper, sat up, blinked, and caught sight of Marmaduke in the pale moonlight.

Bobby gave a wild gasp, which changed to a yell of startled fright. In that dim light Marmaduke's face looked eerie and mysterious. But if Bobby Dexter was startled, so was Marmaduke.

He gave one tremendous bound, and landed upon Willy Handforth's chest—just as the latter was sitting up, aroused by the Cherub's yell.

"Hallo, what the— Great Scott!" gasped Willy, wakeful in a second. "Marmy! What the dickens are you doing here? How did you get out?"

"Help!" howled Bobby Dexter. "There's—there's something horrible in the dormitory! Put the lights up, somebody!"

"Dry up, you fathead!" snapped Willy. "It's only my monkey!"

But by this time half the other fags were aroused, and a considerable din arose. Bobby Dexter, who was still only half awake, was yelling at the top of his voice, other fags were leaping out of bed, shouting, and crowding round him. Some of them thought that Bobby was having a fit.

"Can't you idiots dry up?" demanded Willy, in alarm. "You'll have the masters down on us!"

"But—but what's happened?" asked Chubby Heath breathlessly. "What's the time?"

"My hat!" said Juicy Lemon, shivering. "Listen to the wind!"

"Blow the wind, and bother the time!" said Willy. "Marmaduke's here! There's

something rummy about this! How did he get out?"

Before any of the others could answer this riddle the dormitory door opened and several figures appeared.

"Cave!" panted Chubby Heath.

"What's all the noise in here?" asked a voice. "What's the matter with you kids? Is anything wrong?"

Willy felt relieved. The voice belonged to his major. And Edward Oswald Handforth was accompanied by Church and McClure—and by Nipper and Travers and Fullwood.

"What are you fags doing out of bed?" asked Nipper wonderingly. "I heard some shouts, so I thought I'd come along to see if anything had happened. Handy and these other chaps were disturbed, too——"

"I don't wonder at it!" interrupted Willy. "It was that fathead, Dexter. We shan't call him 'Cherub' any more. He's more like a rhinoceros!"

"But what was he yelling about?" asked Handforth, pushing forward. "If you kids think it's funny to wake us up in the middle of the night——"

"Oh, dry up, Ted!" said Willy. "I'm worried. Look here!"

Handforth peered forward and found Marmaduke in Willy's arms.

"Well?" he demanded. "What of it? It's like your nerve to come to bed with that beastly monkey——"

"Don't be an ass!" snapped Willy. "I left Marmaduke in his cage. And now I wake up to find him here—in the dormitory! How did he get here? How did he escape from his cage? Something must have happened!"

Edward Oswald sniffed.

"You didn't fasten the cage up!" he said promptly.

"Of course I fastened the cage up!" retorted Willy. "I always do. I'm not careless like you, Ted."

"Why, you young ass——"

"It must be the wind," put in Nipper. "There's a tremendous gale blowing, and——"

"By jingo! I hadn't thought of that!" said Willy, in fresh alarm. "Great Scott! The place must have been blown down! All my pets are in danger! Perhaps some of them have been killed. Quick! My clothes!"

He dived into some of his clothing, and his expression was now grim and strained.

"You're not going out, are you?" asked his major, staring.

"Of course I am!" replied Willy. "I've got to see what's happened to my other pets. If that place has blown down——"

"If you're going, I'm going, too!" said Handforth gruffly.

The other Removites decided that it was quite a sound scheme. Within a few minutes they were all hurrying into their clothes, preparatory to sallying out on an investigation.



CHAPTER 18.

No Luck for Gore-Pearce!

EASY!" said Mr. Bill Brice, with a grunt. He heaved the blanket, containing Lightning, over his shoulder. The greyhound was quite helpless, although he struggled considerably. He was wrapped in the folds of the blanket, and escape for him was impossible.

Brice had acted very decisively; he had wasted no time. Within another few seconds he was out of the building, much to Mr. Ross' relief.

"Got it?" he asked, staring at the bundle.

"Of course," said the bookmaker. "No good relying on these silly kids."

Gore-Pearce came blundering out of the window, in Brice's wake.

"But you don't know what happened!" he exclaimed hoarsely.

"I know you made a mess of it," said Mr. Brice curtly. "But we needn't stay here talking. There's no time to lose. We'd better get off these premises—while we're still safe. Come on, Herb."

The two men hurried down the little lane, and they breathed more freely after they had got out into the open road. They were safe now. It didn't matter who came along; they could not be accused of breaking the law.

Now that the affair was over, Mr. Brice was cool and contented.

He had got the dog—that, after all, was what he had come for. He and Mr. Ross got to the waiting motor-car, and the unfortunate Lightning—or Domino, as the bookmaker preferred to call him—was transferred into a special pen that had been prepared for him at the rear of the car.

"There you are, my lad!" said Mr. Brice. "You'll be safe enough there. By thunder, he looks pretty good, too, Herb! Frisky as you like."

"Frisky!" shouted Gore-Pearce excitedly, as he clung to the side of the car. "I should think he is frisky! He held me up in that corner and wouldn't let me get away! I thought he was going to bite me—"

"I was a fool to let you take the job on," interrupted Mr. Brice contemptuously. "I might have expected you to make a hash of it. Ready, Herby?"

"Yes, if you are."

"I'm ready," said Mr. Brice. "Start the engine, and we'll be off."

Gore-Pearce had rapidly recovered. He was still bruised and battered from the result of his adventure, but he forgot these minor hurts. After Marmaduke had gone, the greyhound had looked very menacing, and Gore-Pearce had backed into the corner—and thereafter had been afraid to move.

"Look here, Mr. Brice," he burst out, "what about the money?"

Zurrrrh!

Mr. Ross pressed the electric starter, and the engine sprang into life. At the same second the sidelights came on.

"Money?" said Mr. Brice, staring. "What money?"

"You've got the dog, haven't you?" said Gore-Pearce. "What about our bargain? You promised to pay forty quid—"

"Forty fiddlesticks!" interrupted the bookmaker, with scorn. "My arrangement with you boys was that you should bring the dog out to me."

"Yes, but—"

"But, nothing!" interrupted Mr. Brice. "In the end, I had to come and fetch the dog myself—and run the risk of being found on the school premises. By gosh! You've got a nerve, haven't you?"

"But—but we opened the shed!" protested Gore-Pearce, alarmed at the bookmaker's tone. "I should have brought the dog out, too, if it hadn't been for the mishaps—"

"I can't help your troubles!" said Mr. Brice curtly. "All clear, Herb! Let's go!"

Gore-Pearce clung to the running-board, and Gulliver and Bell hung about in the rear, excited and angry.

"Look here, Mr. Brice, play the game!" snapped Gore-Pearce. "I'll admit things went a bit wrong, so I'm agreeable to taking half the money."

"You'd better get off that running-board!" said Mr. Brice. "You won't get a cent! You've done nothing, so you'll get nothing!"

"But you've got the dog!" roared the cad of Study A.

"Yes; I've got the dog!" agreed Mr. Brice, with a grin. "And you've got nothing!"

The car gave a jerk, and Gore-Pearce was obliged to jump down.

"Wait a minute," he howled. "You swindling rotter! After all the trouble we've taken—"

"Good-night!" chuckled Mr. Brice.

The car gathered speed, and Gore-Pearce & Co. were left in the middle of the road, nearly speechless with rage. They watched the car's red rear light as it vanished into the distance. Within a minute all sounds of the engine had been drowned in the buffeting and whistling of the gale.

"Jolly clever, aren't you?"

It was Bell who made that remark, and Gore-Pearce recovered his voice. He spun round, and he glared at Bell furiously.

"You rotter!" he panted. "Why didn't you help me? It was your fault! You were at the window, and you didn't come in to lend a hand—although you must have known that I was in a mess! Those rotten pets of young Handforth's clawed me all over, and—"

"Oh, it's no good growling," said Gulliver. "We've been dished. Brice is a swindler. He's left us flat!"

"The rotter!" panted Gore-Pearce. "The sneaking, swindling, tricky beast! I don't

believe he meant to pay us, anyhow! He's leaving the district, and he's got that dog, too! By gad! We've been the mugs all along!"

"Speak for yourself!" said Bell sourly.

In all probability they would have had a regular scrap on the spot—but for the fact that they suddenly heard voices coming on the wind.

"Great Scott!" gasped Gulliver. "Somebody has been aroused! Oh, my goodness! We shall be collared!"

They ran to the gate, and were just in time to see several figures, ghastly and mysterious in the dim moonlight, gathering round the outhouse. One or two of the figures were holding electric torches.

"Quick!" said Gore-Pearce breathlessly. "We'll dodge round to the main wall, and get into the Triangle. It's our only chance!"

They ran like mad, and when they arrived at the Triangle, after scrambling over the wall, they found everything quiet. It was easy enough to get through West Arch into the West Square. Luck was still with them.

They got indoors through their study window, crept upstairs, and reached their bedroom without having met a soul. But it had been a narrow speak.

"Thank goodness!" said Gore-Pearce, with relief. "Well, we've got back safely, and nobody will ever know that we were out of our beds during the night!"

But there was really very small satisfaction in this reflection. The cads of Study A had had all their work for nothing; they had taken all the risk, and Mr. Bill Brice had gone off with the prize.

Without question, the bookmaker had made mugs of his young acquaintances. And in Claude Gore-Pearce's heart there was a bitter, gnawing desire for revenge!



CHAPTER 19.

Willy's Vow!

EDWARD OSWALD HANDFORTH grunted.

"Why, it's a swindle!" he said, with a note of indignation in his voice. "The building hasn't blown down! It's standing as solidly as ever!"

"Did you want to see it in ruins?" asked Church, grinning.

"Of course not!" frowned Handforth. "But we're wasting our time. I expect a window blew open, and— Here, steady, you young ass! Mind where you're going!"

Willy had brushed past him, and a moment later Willy was in the shed. He had nimbly climbed through the window, and now, with an electric torch gleaming, he was making a quick examination.

It was obvious that there had been something more than an accidental blowing open of a window. Nipper had arrived at this conclusion, too, and so had Travers. They were all inside, and all held electric torches.

Marmaduke's cage was open, and Septimus, the snake, was wriggling about in a corner. The snake's cage had been smashed.



ASK YOUR NEWSAGENT FOR THIS!

The amazing incident on the much-reduced cover opposite is only one of many occurring in the grand long complete yarn of footer and adventure, featuring the famous Blue Crusaders, and written by EDWY SEARLES BROOKS. The Crusaders' genial, giant goalie, Fatty Fowkes, has a large amount of gold to get rid of, and when the town run a flag day he is besieged by pretty young collectors. But behind Fatty Fowkes' spending of so much gold there is a mystery that will grip you from start to finish.

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Priscilla, the parrot, was dodging about overhead, making personal remarks.

"He's gone!" said Willy huskily.

"Eh? Who's gone?" asked Edward Oswald, staring round.

"Lightning!"

"Phew!" whistled Nipper. "You don't think——"

"Brice!" snapped Willy, his eyes gleaming with fury. "That scoundrel, Brice! Isn't it as clear as daylight? Brice has been here, and he's pinched Lightning! Oh, the brute! The burgling hound! He's taken my dog!"

"Yes, but legally, the dog really belongs to Brice——" began Fullwood.

"He doesn't—he doesn't!" broke in Willy. "The dog is mine! I saved his life, and he's mine!"

"Morally, yes," said Nipper. "But legally——"

"What do I care?" asked Willy bitterly. "I saved Lightning's life, and he was a pal! And now that brute has taken him away. And if he ever *had* any legal right to the dog, he's lost it now! He burgled this place, you chaps! He broke in like an ordinary thief!"

"That's true enough!" said Nipper. "The trouble is, we can't prove anything. It will be impossible to bring home the guilt to Brice—even if Brice is found."

"He's taken my dog!" said Willy dully. "Look! Here's a piece of meat on the floor—which Lightning didn't touch. I expect they tried to induce him to eat it, so that they could get him easily."

"They?" said Handforth. "There weren't two or three of them, were there?"

"Oh, I don't know!" replied Willy. "I don't care! But I expect Brice had somebody with him. And they've taken my dog! Oh, let's try to find out which way they went? We might be able to overtake them."

Nipper said nothing, but he was quite convinced that there was no hope. They went back to the window, and a very brief examination proved that it had been forced. Clear evidence that maurauders had been there. Not that any further evidence had been necessary.

None of the juniors had the faintest suspicion that three of their own Form-fellows had taken a hand in that night's disgraceful events. Nobody guessed that Gore-Pearce & Co. were involved. The cads of Study A, considering all the circumstances, had had a lucky escape.

Within five minutes, the investigators were out in the road, and it wasn't long before

they found further definite traces. There had been a little rain, on and off, and the clear tracks of a motor-car were found.

"Look at this!" said Nipper, focusing his light upon a little pool of black oil. "This is good enough, Willy. We needn't waste any more time. Brice had a car with him, and it stood here. Here's the oil that dripped during the wait."

"Yes," said Willy, very quietly. "And, of course, we can't do anything. The car may be ten miles away by this time. We don't know how long Marmaduke messed about before he came into the dormitory. Brice may have been gone some time now."

"Just what I was thinking," said Nipper. "I'm afraid we shan't be able to trace him, either. It's a pretty rotten position, Willy," he added, looking at the fag with sympathy. "We haven't any direct evidence, so we can't give any information against Brice. And, as you know, that dog really belonged to him——"

"I don't know it!" interrupted Willy. "I'll never admit it! The dog is mine—I saved his life, and he's mine. I nursed him back to health, after I'd found him dying in a ditch. If it hadn't been for me, the poor old chap would have pegged out. What do you mean by saying he isn't mine?"

Willy's voice was fierce, and Nipper felt uncomfortable.

"Of course he's yours, old man," he agreed. "We all know it—and we all acknowledge it. But the law is a funny thing, and——"

"I don't care anything about the law!" said Willy. "Law or no law, I'm going to get my dog back!"

"Cheese it, you young ass!" said Handforth. "Lightning has gone, and you'd better resign yourself to the fact."

"I won't!" insisted Willy. "He's my pal—my chum! And I'm going to get him back! I don't know how, but if I don't have him back within a week, I'll—I'll never believe in justice again."

After securing the Pets' Quarters, they all went back to bed. They decided that no good purpose would be served by telling anybody in authority. There would only be an inquiry, and they might get themselves into trouble.

Lightning was gone—he had been taken away by Bill Brice, his former owner.

And Willy Handforth, as he tossed wakefully in his bed that night, repeated his vow.

He would get Lightning back—he didn't know how, but he would not rest content until he and his dog were re-united!

THE END.

(When young Willy Handforth makes a vow like that, he generally carries it out, even if he has to surmount all sorts of difficulties. And he certainly meets with many difficulties when he starts to get on the track of Bill Brice and his greyhound, Lightning. But Willy is made of the right stuff. He just carries on, optimistically hoping—and then help comes in a startling and most unexpected way. Don't miss reading next week's gripping yarn, entitled: "WILLY'S DOG!")



E. S. BROOKS.

BETWEEN OURSELVES!

OUR AUTHOR CHATS WITH OUR 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: EDWY SEARLES BROOKS, c/o The Editor, THE NELSON LEE SCHOOL STORY LIBRARY, The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4.



FRED. J. POTTER.

THE whole idea of having a reader's photograph opposite mine—Reg. T. Staples (Walworth)—is to make this page more pally; more really "between ourselves." And as you are one of my most regular correspondents, with an un-failing fund of subjects to write me humorously upon, you're the one chap I want to see up in the Readers' Gallery. So I shan't be content until you send me your photograph, together with your permission to inflict it upon other readers.

If you would "dearly love to read some of the old series," as you put it—E.W.C. (Stourport)—you can easily do so by placing a regular order at your newsagent's for "The Popular." Lots of the earlier adventures of Nipper & Co. are appearing in that cheery companion paper of ours.

Thanks for your painting—George S. Hunnable (Mistley). At first I thought it was a photograph of yourself, until I compared it with your proper picture. I'd better not tell the other readers, had I, that your painting is one of a pug dog? So I'll keep it dark, old man. Anyhow, it's a jolly good painting, and all joking aside, it's quite life-like. Right-ho! I've ticked your photograph as a possible one for publication, and you needn't be afraid that I shall mix it up with the painting. I'd very much like you to send me those snaps, as I'm keen on photography, too.

You can always be certain—B. Anderson (Lenton, Nottingham)—that I do actually read your letters. I read all letters—carefully, and with great interest. You seem to have done good work in introducing the Old Paper to non-readers, and I have no doubt that you will carry on the good cause.

As you are a member of the St. Frank's League—Norman Soo (Leicester)—you had better write to the C.O. for his advice on that films question. He's always ready to help Leagueites with information. Apparently you don't know that a series of St. Frank's stories about China has already appeared in the Old Paper.

Perhaps you don't know—Fred J. Potter (Biggleswade)—that the earlier adventures of Nipper & Co. are appearing in "The Popular" every week? Thanks for permission to publish your photo. It appears above.

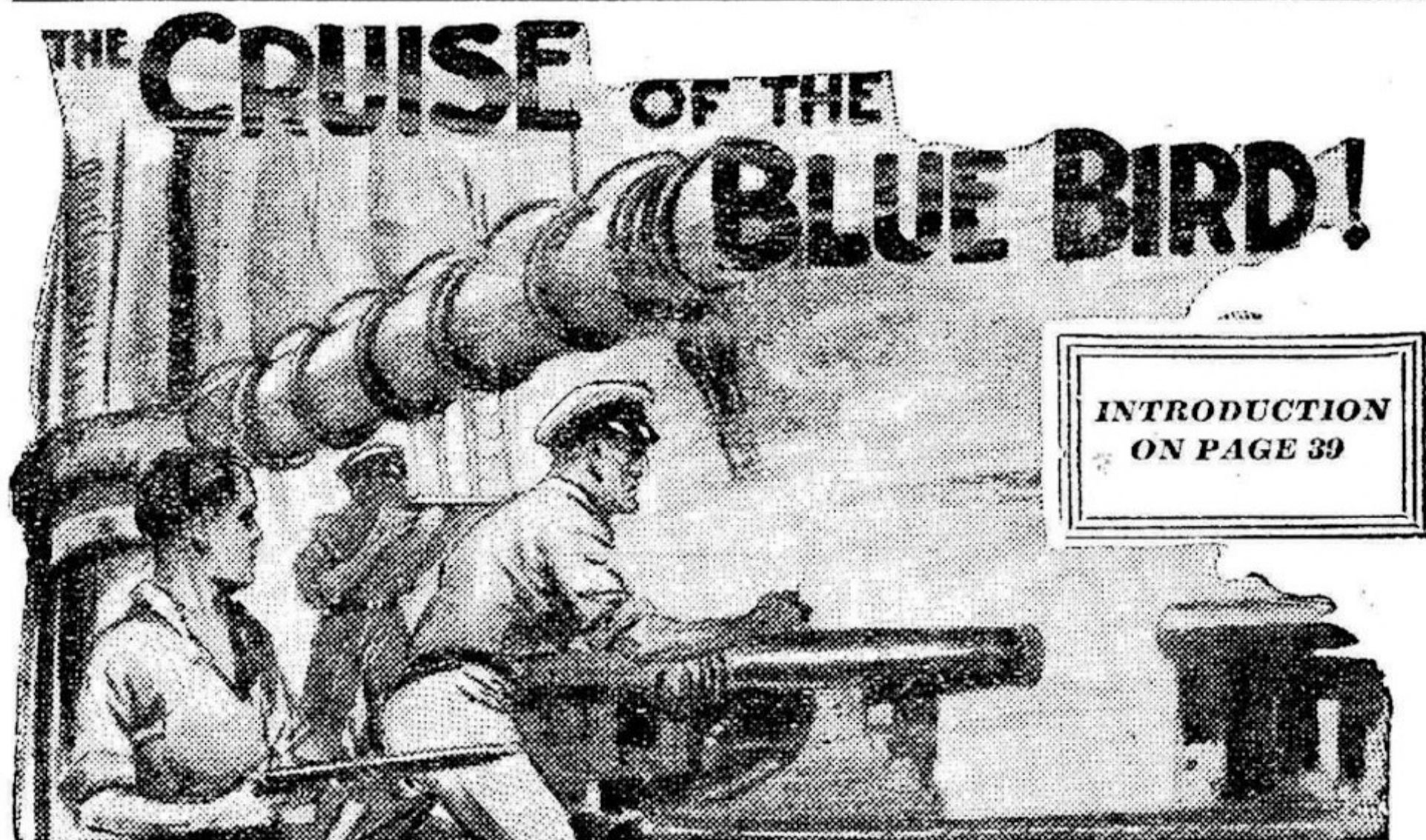
You can very easily continue your French studies—Albert Edward Thomson (Glasgow). It is quite easy for you to subscribe to any French journal you please. You can either give your order through an ordinary news-agent, or send your subscription direct to the publisher, and have the periodical mailed to you. Yes, we have quite a number of French readers.

Yes—T. H. Ellerker (Leamington Spa)—I have already written a series of St. Frank's stories with South America for a background. The party went up the Amazon, and had all sorts of adventures.

I don't think it would be possible for you to get the Old Paper from No. 1 to 114—Tony Di Salvo (Eastbourne). You see, the majority of these numbers are now out of print. There's a ghost of a chance that you might be successful if you join the St. Frank's League, and advertise for the back numbers. But as they're so scarce now, I hae ma doots. Still, there's nothing like trying.

You bet there's a boy inventor at St. Frank's—Lionel H. G. Ditton (St. Leonards-on-Sea.) Dick Goodwin, of the Remove, is a regular terror when he gets fairly on the go. And even young Hobbs, of the Third, is pretty hot stuff; although his inventions are generally on the crude side. And then, what about Willy Handforth, with his "Silent Two" motor-car?

COUTTS BRISBANE'S GREAT SERIAL COMES TO A SMASHING CONCLUSION THIS WEEK!



By COUTTS BRISBANE

Captain Manby and his cheery Blue Birders will soon be enjoying the peace and fortune they so thoroughly deserve, but before then they experience one of the most awe-inspiring adventures they've yet encountered.

A Narrow Escape!

"I REGRET that I have to take this drastic action, the more since our nations have been comrades in arms," went on the French lieutenant, "but doubtless my Government will waive the claim when the circumstances are made clear. But you understand that I must do my duty."

Captain Mauby smiled, but there was a steely glint in his eyes. Perhaps, very strictly speaking, he had trespassed, though the French claim to the island was shadowy. But in the circumstances, to arrest the ship and confiscate the cargo was a monstrous thing even to suggest. If it were done it would mean utter ruin, for even if the French Government should eventually decide that the claim should not be pressed, the hungry colonial lawyers of Papeete would have found some way of getting the greater part of the value of ship and shell.

Mr. Sinclair, standing by, had heard everything. He was hot with anger, but he was cool enough, none the less, to

watch for a sign and interpret it aright when it came. Manby's hand, hanging at his side, rose slightly as he glanced forward towards the group of men gathered at the winch in readiness for getting up the anchor. He wiggled a finger jerkily up, then twirled it and nodded imperceptibly. Then he laughed.

"I don't know about the legality of your claim, lieutenant," he said easily. "But, judging by the activity of that volcano, we would do well to get a good distance away. Still, we have time for a glass. I have a bottle of old Chambertin."

He motioned towards the cabin. The lieutenant glanced at him keenly. He was in two minds whether to go or not. Then he thought of something. He would have up a guard of his men and so make certain. Captain Manby read the thought, for it was exactly what he would have done himself if the case had been reversed. His fist clenched. In another moment it would have connected with the lieutenant's jaw—but in that moment the volcano put in its word with no uncertain voice.

A broad flash of red flame spurted to the sky, and with a tremendous roar the whole top of the cone blew off. Huge fragments of rock tossed far aloft, shrieked through the air, and came raining down upon the island and lagoon. One enormous chunk splashed into the water within a cable's length of the Blue Bird, deluging her deck with spray, while others pitted the water, and—

"Oh, mon Dieu, my ship!" screamed the lieutenant.

Something huge and red-hot, trailing fire like a meteor, whined down from on high and dropped squarely on the stern of the gunboat with a crash that echoed above the rumble and roar of the volcano. The vessel shivered, then heeled over to the terrific shock; a flare rose from her, and she began to settle down at once, for the terrible missile had driven clean through decks and plating.

"She is doomed! My beautiful Cayman!" screamed the lieutenant, and leapt to his boat, bellowing orders. "Row! Row!" he yelled. "My captain, help me to save my men!"

"We're coming!" roared Manby. "Forward there! Up with it! Sinclair, the motor."

But Sinclair was already tumbling down the hatchway. As the anchor came home the motor started, and he reappeared, running to the controls by the wheel, which Manby had taken. The Blue Bird began to move, gathering way.

"She's got it. The Cayman will never leave the lagoon. By Jingo, I doubt if we'll leave it ourselves," growled Manby. "My hat, the lava is coming this way at last!"

It was. No narrow trickle, but a broad stream of fire was pouring down the hill, straight towards the remaining stretch of bush and palm grove, which was already on fire in several places—and straight

towards the lagoon. When it arrived there, the result of such a mass of molten lava falling into the water would be an explosion, which most probably would settle the fate of the Blue Bird.

There was still time for escape, if she made straight for the lagoon mouth without loss of a moment. But it never occurred to Manby to desert the gunboat's crew. The unfortunate Cayman was sinking by the stern. Men were tumbling into the lieutenant's boat and another which had been lowered. Several were running about the decks distractedly. The lieutenant and another officer came out of a cabin beneath the bridge, hustled the stragglers before them and got into the boats, which pushed off as the Blue Bird came up.

"Come alongside and come aboard!" bel- lowed Manby, and, as they made fast, put the helm over, steering for the mouth of the lagoon. "Get sail on her, Mr. Sinclair," he said quietly. "We may do it yet, but it'll be touch and go. Ah, now the bombardment starts in real earnest!"

As the French sailors came scrambling aboard, a fresh discharge of stones came whizzing down from the sky. They splashed in the water and rattled on the decks. Several men were hit. Sinclair, shouting orders from the deck, was knocked down, half stunned, but scrambled to his feet again. Big Timo took a blow on the shoulder that left his arm temporarily useless.

"How many are you?" shouted Manby, as the French lieutenant with two other officers came up the side, the last to quit the boats.

"Thirty-nine, my captain, all told."

"Tell as many as can to get below. Cast off your boats. They are slowing us."

"It is done. And there goes my gallant vessel." The lieutenant pointed tragically. The gunboat's bows tilted up and up.

WHAT'S ALREADY HAPPENED:

CAPTAIN MANBY is skipper of the schooner Blue Bird, which is bound for the Malea atolls, in the Southern Pacific. He is accompanied by his son

JACK MANBY, and his nephew

NED SUTTON, two adventure-loving boys. From a native Captain Manby has learned that in these atolls is an uncharted island—supposed to be practically inaccessible—the lagoon of which is full of pearl shell. The captain is successful in finding this unknown island; and to his surprise discovers that it is inhabited by a number of French castaways. At first they are friendly, but later, when Captain Manby finds out what they really are—shipwrecked convicts—their attitude

changes and they capture the Blue Bird and its valuable cargo. When the captain retakes the schooner he finds that the convicts, with the exception of three, have died after eating some bad food; while later two of these perish during a storm. The remaining Frenchman, Achille Servet, is taken on as a cook. On the island the volcano is in a violent state of eruption, and Captain Manby is about to sail when a French gunboat comes on the scene. Apparently this island belongs to France; and the captain of the gunboat informs Manby that he will have to arrest him and his ship, and confiscate his cargo of pearls and shell because it has been taken from French territory!

(Now read on.)

she was sliding down into the lagoon. A puff of steam blew her engine-room hatch off, and then with a last wavering shudder, she disappeared. Tears glistened on the lieutenant's cheeks.

"I sympathise, my lieutenant," said Manby. "But—it's a race, eh? We may go the same way in a minute."

The sail was on the schooner now, and the motor doing its best, but in the light fitful gusts blowing now this way, now that, she made but slow progress, laden as she was with the addition of the gun-boat's crew to her heavy cargo.

On came the lava stream. The further edge of the bush exploded into flames as the burning mass drove through it like a ploughshare. Then the palms began to go, rocketing to the skies in pillars of flame. The smoke did not this time mask

the oncoming river of fire, but drifted away to the south, so that everyone aboard the schooner could plainly see the final disaster that threatened them.

And now the lava was nearly through the grove. Now it had reached the three convicts' huts. They flared up. A little more and the stream of death would reach the beginnings of the beach, and move more quickly down the incline to the water.

The wind freshened, then came a hot blast from the glowing lava stream that swirled out over the lagoon with a sudden shriek. The Blue Bird's flapping sails filled. She entered the mouth of the lagoon, slid through, turned northwards as the skipper put the helm over—and as he did so the air was filled with a mighty rush of steam, a hissing explosion tore the



As the volcano erupted, a mighty blast of air struck the Blue Bird, heeling her over. At the same time a huge wall of water appeared and crashed over the schooner's bows.

waters of the lagoon asunder and sent them rolling forth in a great wave. The lava stream had reached the lagoon!

It had been touch and go. If the schooner had been but a bare half minute later, she would have been caught in the narrow break of the reef and smashed like an eggshell on one side or the other! As it was, the wave burst forth and passed harmlessly a little way from her stern, while a fresh gust drove her clear.

"Mon Dieu! But the luck is with you, my captain," burst out the French commander. "And with us also that you should be in the lagoon. Perhaps it is a dereliction of duty, but I think that you will agree with me if I say that I know nothing of your cargo or where you got it, eh?"

"I think that the moment has come to open that bottle of Chambertin, and for us all to make each other's better acquaintance," said Captain Manby. "Come in here. Be seated. I will be with you in a moment."

The Final Eruption.

AH MOY glided up to him as he motioned the French officers into his cabin. Ah Moy was wearing a mysterious smile.

"You looker alongee galley, cap'n," he murmured.

Manby looked. A yellow-faced person in a pigtail was solemnly busy with potlids.

"Me makee," observed Ah Moy cheerily. "Makee piecee Flenchman into piecee Chinee boy. Othlah Flenchmen not knowing Achillee, eh? Now fletchee piecee wine?"

"Well, I'm hanged! For ways that are dark but effective, recommend me to the heathen Chinee!" muttered Manby. "Here's the key of the locker. Hurry up!"



Up aloft, Jack and Ned hung on for life. They saw the deck of the schooner disappear under the swirling waters.

The eruption continued with unabated violence. The island was now shrouded in steam and smoke, above which flared the immense torch of the volcano. The wind freshened, the Blue Bird drew rapidly away to the northward, and by midday had left the island some twenty miles behind her.

Jack and Ned had gone aloft for a last look at the island, where they had spent so many stirring days, and had had the narrowest escapes from death that were ever likely to happen to them. Malea was visible as a vast mushroom of smoke with a scarlet heart, on the horizon. The continuous rumble that had gone on ever since the early hours of the morning came over the waves.

Suddenly, as the boys stared, the

mushroom of smoke was pierced by a tremendous sword of flame. Then slowly the immense cloud began to disperse.

"I believe—it has—blown up!" said Jack in an awed voice. "If it has—"

"Hard over! 'Bout ship!" The voice of Captain Manby pealed along the deck below. He, too, had been watching, and he had interpreted the signs aright.

The ship came about smartly, only in time before a mighty blast of air struck her, heeling her over. Then the whole world seemed to shake, the ocean to shiver as the roar of that tremendous explosion smote across the billows.

A wall of water appeared, travelling with terrific velocity. On it came. The bows of the Blue Bird rose to it gallantly.

"Hang on all!"

Looking down, while they hung on for life, the boys saw the decks disappear under swirling water. For a long thirty seconds it seemed as though the schooner were doomed. Then with a shiver and a shake she bobbed up like a cork, rode down the long back of the wave like a duck, scuppers streaming as tons of water fell away from her, rose and rode a

second, a third and a fourth wave, each smaller than the last, and so as the sea subsided again, came about on her course, with all hands still aboard her.

"I think," said Captain Manby, wiping salt water from his eyes, "I think that France has lost a bit of territory."

And that was so, for, when later a survey was made by Trotter and Coombes, they found that nothing remained of the island but a wilderness of rocks.

But Captain Manby didn't learn that for some time later. At the moment he was glad to have escaped so lightly, and made haste for the nearest port. Two days after, however, a British cruiser hove in sight, and, being signalled, took on board the officers and crew of the Cayman.

The Frenchmen parted with their preservers on excellent terms—and half an hour later Achille Servet resumed his natural complexion. After that there was nothing worth mentioning till they reached Sydney. There Achille Servet, provided with a sum of money by Manby, slipped ashore unostentatiously. A few minutes later Ah Moy, wearing his usual smile, requested permission to go ashore.

"Wantee slendee lettah alongee man," he explained. "Siendee piecee parcel alongee dear fader."

He dropped into a shore boat, carrying a tightly packed parcel, and was soon lost to view. Two hours passed, during which several steamers sailed on the tide. Another hour went by and still Ah Moy did not return. But Achille did. He came aboard, wild-eyed, and on the point of hysteria, so excited that he was beyond prudence.

"My pearls!" he shrieked. "My beautiful pearls! They are gone!"

"What pearls?" demanded Manby.

"They were those that Benoist carried, that we fished up on the island. He had no further use for them, so I took them. And now I find them gone from their box and this—this worthless thing—was in their place!"

And with a gesture of disgust, he displayed a ball of red sealing-wax—the same ball which, away back on Malea, had one evening been appropriated by one of Benoist's fellows in mistake for the famous red pearl that now reposed in the captain's safe.

Manby looked at the thing and repressed the inclination to burst into laughter. He hadn't troubled to inquire about what had become of any pearls the French convicts might have found, for he had had a great deal more than enough of his own. Yet there was something

funny in this fellow, who was confessedly a thief, howling about his loss. Manby smiled slightly as he replied:

"I'm sorry that this has happened to you, Achille, aboard my ship—the more so because it deprives me of the services of the best cook I ever had. But you still have the money I gave you. Take my advice and say no more about it—except if you think you can catch Ah Moy. But at least two steamers on which he might have shipped have gone out on this tide."

"The Chinaman? I might have known it! I will have his life for it!" howled Achille, and, dropping back into the boat which had brought him, departed, to be seen no more.

He never caught Ah Moy. The wily one had covered his tracks too well for that. But nearly a year later, after Captain Manby had realised the fortune that shell and pearls brought him, Mr. Sinclair, who now commanded and owned the Blue Bird, arrived one evening at the captain's house—set amidst a wealth of greenery on the heights above Brisbane—with a large packing-case.

"This apparently came in to-day," he explained. "It was delivered aboard the Blue Bird, but—well, you see."

In large, weird-looking letters were printed the words:

"Too Hon. Mistaire Jackee and Hon. Mistaire Neddee, with the Hon. Captin Manby, Schooner Ship Blue Bird at Brisbane, Queenies Land. One each."

The case was opened in hot haste. Inside were two smaller ones, and from these Jack and Ned, after removing a multitude of wrappings, extracted two model schooners wrought in silver, each an excellent model of the Blue Bird, sailing upon a sea of methers o' pearl. On each was a scrap of paper inscribed respectively: "To Jackee from Ah Moy," and "To Neddee from Ah Moy."

"Good for the yellow darling!" exclaimed Manby. "It shows, at least, that he's not ungrateful."

"And that he has a wonderful memory," added Sinclair. "Every detail is perfect."

"And—I think—that he has a sense of humour," said Ned, and lifted from the deck of his model—a ball of polished red sealing-wax!

THE END.

(A serial, featuring Nelson Lee and Nipper—as detectives! That's what you want, isn't it, lads? It's starting next week; an amazing story of football and detective adventure, entitled "What's Wrong with the Rovers?" Don't forget; the opening instalment appears in next Wednesday's issue!)



Our Weekly Pow-Wow

By
The Editor.

Your Editor welcomes letters from all his readers: send him one now. Address it to: The Editor, "Nelson Lee Library," Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4.

Our New Serial!

JUST a few words about our new serial, "What's Wrong with the Rovers?" which is starting next Wednesday. As you know, it's a football and detective adventure yarn, with Nelson Lee and Nipper as the heroes. I've had umpteen requests for a serial on these lines, and in this yarn I really think I have delivered "the goods."

Take a word of warning, lads. There's sure to be a rush for the N.L. next week when it's known that Nelson Lee and Nipper have turned detectives once more, so order your copy NQW.

Detectives At Their Work.

A question that often reaches me is how a fellow can become a detective, and it is a jolly difficult one to answer, for in the generality of cases the detective just happens. He most likely serves in the regular police, and then, thanks to outstanding cleverness and strength of character, he is promoted to a place in the detective section.

If you have been robbed and ask the police what about it, they will send along some quiet, civil-spoken gentleman who does not seem to have anything special to mark him out. This detective, however, though he looks just ordinary, and would be passed in a crowd without notice, is a live wire. He asks questions which would never have occurred to one. He sees daylight in some puzzling matter where everybody else is hopelessly in the dark. He just notices things—and this is real life, not highly coloured film business. The detective nearly always has a sense of humour—and he wants it badly often enough, say in those cases where he is expected to nail a likely clue after listening to the excited talking of a crowd of nervy people, each one with a different story to tell of what happened in a burglary, or as regards some mysterious disappearance.

How It's Done!

London, like all great centres of population, is daily seeing the most brilliant performances in the way of crime detection. The investigator may be called in to discover the criminal who has robbed some recluse, re-

ported in the neighbourhood to have much wealth hidden away. But the tracker does not jump to the easy solution of the neighbours, who perhaps have a "down" on somebody in the district who was known to visit the miser. The "tec" watches that point, but very frequently he gets on the trail of his quarry because of some secret chapter in the life of the victim.

The League.

Among a few, a very few, I am glad to say, supporters of the League, there is, I happen to know, a feeling that we do not have enough about the work of the League. But this impression is soon realised to be a wrong one. The St. Frank's League is doing well. It goes on quietly, and its principles, which cannot be beaten, soak in. So don't let anybody get thinking that the S. F. L. is not pressing on just because one week there is no form in the paper. That's a detail. Thousands of supporters of the N. L. are keeping the League well in view.

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C. J. Robinson, 139, Wakefield Street, Adelaide, South Australia, wishes to correspond with readers anywhere, especially India and Holland. Age 17½.

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CORRESPONDENTS WANTED

(Continued from previous page.)

Lloyd Clipperfield, 46, Fairley Way, Chess-hunt, Herts, wishes to obtain the copy of N.L.L. containing the story entitled "Handforth's Triumph."

Percy Vincent, 114, Hancock Road, Alum Rock, Birmingham, wishes to hear from readers interested in his club; he also offers a valuable stamp album containing a thousand stamps.

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