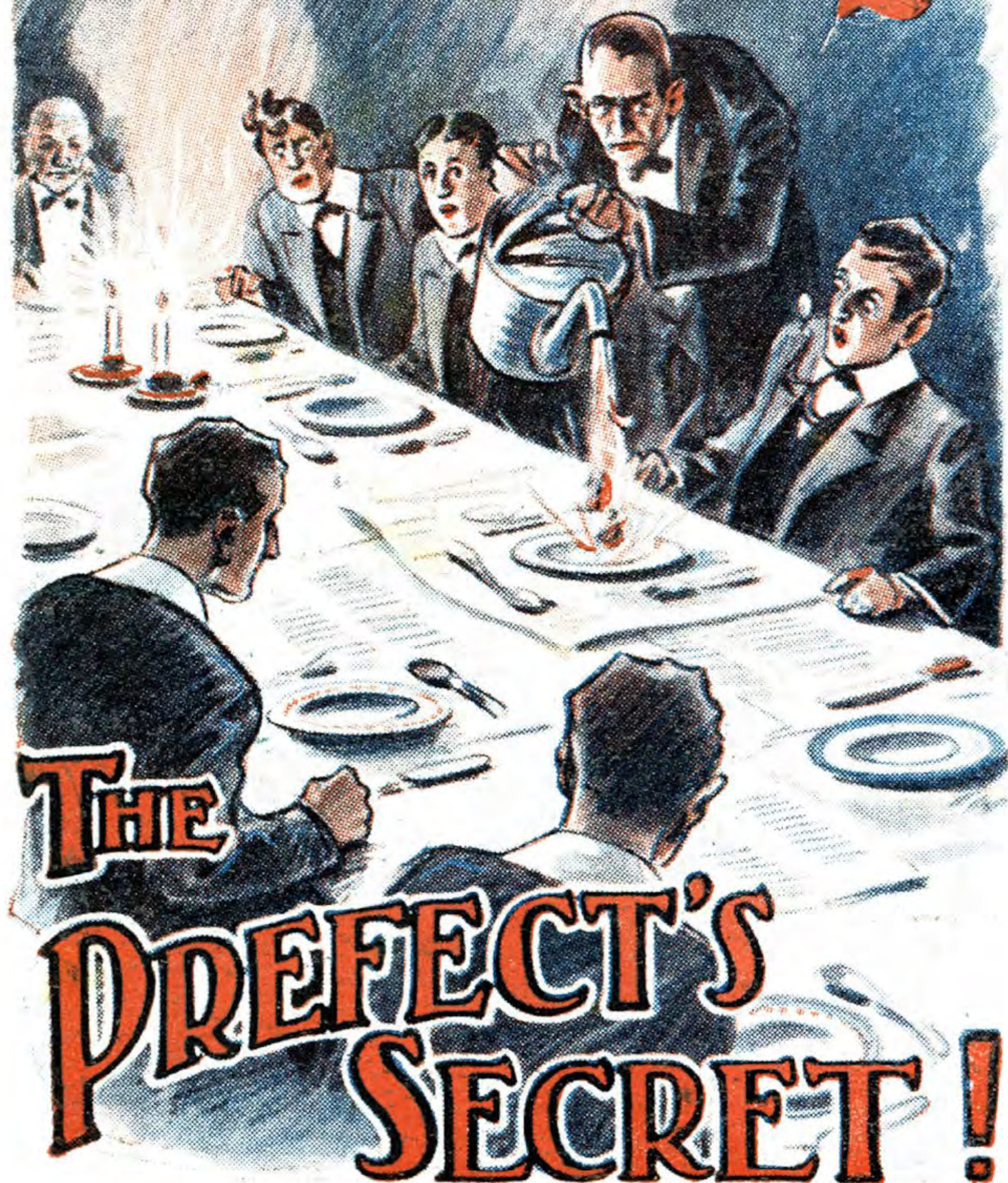


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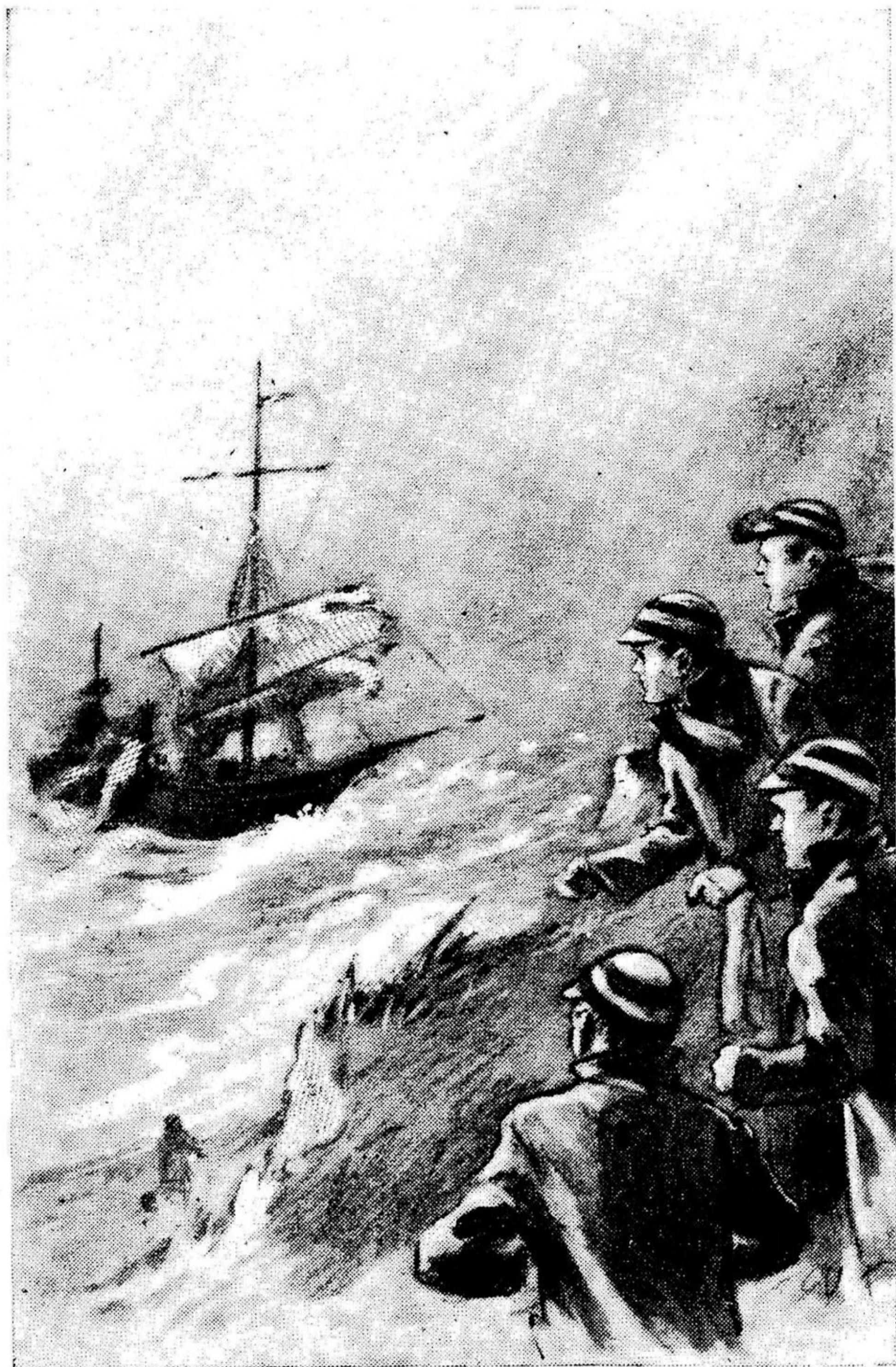
THE PREFECT'S SECRET!

A vivid long complete yarn of Schoolboy adventure, featuring Nipper, Edward Oswald Handforth, and many other favourite characters at St. Frank's.

New Series No. 134.

OUT ON WEDNESDAY.

November 24th, 1923.



The juniors collected on the edge of the cliff and looked down at the awe-inspiring sight. There, caught on the cruel fangs near Shingle Head, a fairly big sailing ship was being rapidly battered to pieces as the huge waves crashed against her hulk!

Fatty Fowkes—Wanted by the Police!

Thrilling Schoolboy Adventure Yarn!

THE PREFECT'S SECRET!



By **EDWY SEARLES BROOKS**

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

The Junior School at St. Frank's is not very concerned when it hears that Simon Kenmore of the Sixth has disappeared, for Kenmore is a bully of the worst type. But when it hears that Kenmore has been drowned, and that popular Fatty Fowkes of the Blue Crusaders, is responsible for the tragedy—then the Junior School is startled and takes a considerable interest in the matter.

CHAPTER 1.

Startling News!

"It's very rummy!" said Reggie Pitt thoughtfully. He was sitting in front of the fire in Study K, in the West House, at St. Frank's. Jack Grey, his bosom chum, was at the table, puzzling over a competition. It was Saturday evening, and outside the November air was chilly. It was very cosy here, in this little study.

"What's rummy?" asked Jack Grey, looking up.

"About Kenmore."

"Bother Kenmore!" said Jack. "Come and have a look at this, Reggie. I'm not sure whether this picture represents a lake, or whether it's only a pool of mud. That's the worst of these picture puzzles; they're not drawn clearly enough."

"You've got to work for your money, old man," said Reggie Pitt, with a chuckle. "But about Kenmore, though. I was talking to Corcoran, of the East House, just after tea, and he says that Kenmore hasn't been seen since yesterday evening."

"Well, who cares?" said Jack impatiently. "Kenmore is the biggest bully in the Sixth—and he's a disgrace to the East House. I expect he's sneaked off to the races somewhere—or he may have got marooned in the flood."

Reggie Pitt grinned. There had been a lot of rain that week, and the River Stowe had overflowed its banks extensively. Only that very afternoon the Fourth-Formers had been stranded on a big old houseboat that belonged to the Blue Crusaders Football Club. In fact, there had been quite a lot of excitement, for the houseboat had got adrift, and the Removites had only just saved the situation in time.

"Talking about that flood, reminds me of the Crusaders," said Reggie Pitt. "They beat the Devon Wanderers again, Jack. Three—two. The good old Crusaders are doing wonders."

At this moment there came a tap at the door, and Nicodemus Trotwood looked in. For once in a way Nick's face was expressive of acute excitement; and it was most unusual for this lean, lanky junior to reveal his emotions.

"I say, you chaps!" he said breathlessly.

"Have you heard?"

"Heard what?"

"About Fatty Fowkes!"

"We've heard nothing," said Pitt, staring.

"What about Fatty Fowkes?"

"He's over in the East House—in Corcoran's study!"

"Well, what about it?" asked Jack Grey, looking up. "Everybody knows that Corcoran is the owner of the Blue Crusaders Club. And Fatty Fowkes is the goalkeeper—"

"Yes, but Fatty is in a dreadful state!" interrupted Nick Trotwood. "He says that he killed Kenmore!"

Reggie Pitt and Jack Grey jumped.

"He says that he did—*what?*" ejaculated Reggie.

"Fatty is saying that he killed Kenmore!" repeated Trotwood. "That's why Kenmore hasn't been back since yesterday!"

"What rot!" put in Jack Grey incredulously. "Why, Fatty Fowkes is one of the finest fellows under the sun!"

"I know that," agreed Nick. "He says that it was an accident. Kenmore went to the houseboat, and he tried to bribe Fatty about to-day's match."

"Nothing surprising in that!" grunted Pitt. "Kenmore is rascal enough for anything!"

"Naturally, Fatty got wild with him, and punched him!" said Nick. "Knocked him overboard, in fact. He saw him swimming towards the bank, and then he went into the deck-house. He took it for granted that Kenmore had got ashore."

"And Kenmore hasn't returned!" said Reggie Pitt slowly. "H'm! Looks a bit serious, I must say! So Fatty thinks that Kenmore was swept away by the flood—that he *didn't* reach the bank and get ashore?"

"That's what it looks like," said Trotwood. "And it's pretty serious for Fatty, too."

Pitt and Grey were rather startled. Until now, they hadn't thought much of Simon Kenmore's mysterious disappearance from the school. It was only during that evening, in fact, that they had heard anything about it. Over in the East House the fellows had talked a bit, but had thought nothing of it. Kenmore was a Sixth-Former, and a prefect; it was assumed that he had taken French leave for once, and that he would ultimately turn up with some plausible excuse to lay before Mr. Barnaby Goole, his House-master.

Without delay, Reggie Pitt and Jack Grey left their study, went out into the cold Triangle, and crossed to the East House. In the lobby they encountered Nipper, the cheery captain of the Remove; and Nipper was looking very troubled.

"I shouldn't go to Corky's study, if I were you," he said thoughtfully. "There's a crowd of Fourth-Formers now, and there's no room. Besides, you can't do anything."

"What's the latest?" asked Reggie Pitt.

"Is it true about Fatty Fowkes?"

"Personally, I don't believe that Fowkes is guilty of anything discreditable," said Nipper

bluntly. "Kenmore tried to bribe him, and he knocked Kenmore down. Besides, young Willy Handforth swears that Kenmore was here—in the Triangle—last night, at seven o'clock."

"What difference does that make?" asked Grey.

"All the difference in the world," said Nipper. "Kenmore went to the Crusaders' houseboat at about half-past six. So if there's any truth in Willy's evidence—and I don't see why it shouldn't be true—then Kenmore must have got safely out of the water, and he came straight back to the school."

"Then it's all right about the Crusaders' goalie?" asked Reggie.

"That's just it," said Nipper, frowning. "We just heard that there's a warrant out for Fatty's arrest. It seems that a couple of men saw him biff Kenmore into the river. And now Kenmore's overcoat and cap have been found, floating in the flood!"

"Phew!" whistled Reggie Pitt, pulling a long face. "Then Kenmore is drowned?"

"It looks jolly serious!" said Nipper. "Still, there's nothing to prove that Fatty caused the chap's death. He might have fallen into the river afterwards. Anyhow, I'm relying on Willy's evidence, and I believe that Kenmore came here after the houseboat incident. And Corcoran and all the rest of us have decided to stand by Fatty Fowkes."

"We'll stand by him, too!" said Reggie promptly. "Why, it's ridiculous! Fatty's one of the best chaps in the world!"

Before long they learned that the big sixteen-stone goalie had been smuggled up to one of the box-rooms, and there he was kept in hiding. Willy Handforth and some other juniors hurried over to Bannington, to have an interview with Inspector Jameson, of the Bannington police.

Not that this did any real good—for the worthy inspector refused to take any notice of the fag's evidence. He did not regard Willy as a reliable witness. He preferred to believe that Willy had been mistaken—either about the time, or about the identity of the senior he had seen in the gloom of the Triangle. And it was certainly a significant fact that Simon Kenmore had not been seen by anybody else, and that he was still missing. It was doubly significant that Kenmore's hat and overcoat had been found floating in the Stowe.

Naturally, the headmaster was tremendously agitated when he heard the story. Dr. Stafford, in fact, called the school together, and advised everybody to take it very calmly. There was no actual proof that Kenmore was dead, and the Head urged the fellows to talk as little as possible on the subject. The mystery, he added, would be cleared up as soon as possible.

Lionel Corcoran and his fellow Fourth-Formers found it rather difficult to keep Fatty Fowkes hidden away in the East House. There was always the chance that somebody in authority would get to know, and then, of course, the unfortunate Fatty would be promptly seized, and handed over to the

police. The masters were not likely to take the same view as the juniors.

So it came about that on the Monday evening, after a somewhat hectic week-end, Fatty Fowkes was successfully transferred to the old ruined mill, on Bannington Moor. Only a few members of the Fourth and the Remove knew of this arrangement, and they had pledged themselves to stand by Fatty through this period of trial.

It was foggy on the Monday evening, and on their way back from the mill the juniors had a very curious experience. Nipper and Handforth and Tich Harborough—the new fellow in the Remove—were among the little crowd, and Corcoran was there, too.

The fog happened to lift for a moment, and in a clear moonlit patch the juniors caught sight of a figure. And they recognised Simon Kenmore himself! Kenmore—the prefect who was missing—who was supposed to be drowned!

Then the fog swirled round again, and Kenmore vanished as mysteriously as he had appeared.

This little incident, however, convinced the juniors that they were doing the right thing in standing by Fatty Fowkes. They were certain, in fact, that Kenmore was still alive, and that there was some deep mystery attached to him.

But what was this mystery? If Kenmore was really alive, why did he continue to absent himself from St. Frank's? Why did he allow Fatty Fowkes to hide away from the police—when, by coming forward, he could clear Fatty of the charge that was hanging over him?

The more the juniors thought of it, the more they became convinced that there was something fishy about the whole business!



CHAPTER 2.

The Old Man in the Fog!

IT was Kenmore, sure enough!" said Nipper confidently. "Well, you saw him—and we didn't!" remarked Tommy Watson. "I'm jiggered if I can understand what it all means. Kenmore vanishes on Friday evening, and then on Saturday evening we hear that he's been drowned—and now, on Monday, Kenmore shows himself, and then bolts again!"

"He didn't mean to show himself," said Nipper. "The fog just happened to lift, and we saw Kenmore in the moonlight. He must know that there's a warrant out for Fatty Fowkes' arrest. Why on earth doesn't he come forward and show the police that he's alive?"

"Perhaps you only saw his ghost, dear old boy?" suggested Sir Montie Tregellis-West dryly.

"Rats!" said Nipper. "Ghosts don't leave footprints in the mud."

"Bedad! That's true," admitted Montie. "I hadn't thought of that—I hadn't, really!"

The chums of Study C were in Bannington. The old High Street was very foggy on that Monday evening, and very few people were about—although most of the shops were brilliantly illuminated. Nipper & Co. had come into the town in order to make a few purchases—most of them being necessities for Fatty Fowkes.

The juniors had taken up their self-imposed task in a very wholehearted manner. They believed in their genial footballer friend, and they were thoroughly satisfied that he had done nothing discreditable.

The facts, indeed, were very simple.

Kenmore, for some reason of his own, had attempted to bribe the Blue Crusaders goalie; and Fatty had knocked Kenmore into the river. That was really all there was in it. It was only natural, perhaps, that the police should be after Fatty, for the evidence, on the face of it, looked rather black against him.

But Nipper & Co. were certain, in their own minds, that there was something deeper in this affair. Simon Kenmore was really alive, but he preferred to remain "dead." And it was easy enough for the juniors to imagine that Kenmore would have many good reasons for adopting such tactics. For the rascally Sixth-Former had always been in the habit of "sailing near the wind."

"What's going to happen to us if the police find Fowkes, after all?" asked Tommy Watson, rather uneasily. "We shall find ourselves in a nice pile of trouble, shan't we?"

"Not necessarily," replied Nipper. "Fatty isn't wanted on a murder charge."

"No?" said Sir Montie. "But I thought the police suspected him of having killed Kenmore?"

"You've got it wrong, Montie," said Nipper. "The police want to arrest Fatty Fowkes, and charge him with being concerned in Kenmore's disappearance. They can't charge him with causing Kenmore's death, because there's no evidence that Kenmore is dead."

"They found his hat and coat——"

"That's nothing," said Nipper. "The police can't make any murder charge, or manslaughter charge, until the body is found. That's one of the laws of the land. And as they're never likely to find Kenmore's body, this warrant against Fatty Fowkes is more or less trifling. So don't worry about the part we're playing in hiding him."

"If it's so trifling, wouldn't it be better for Fatty to give himself up?" asked Watson.

"No; that would be idiotic," replied Nipper.

"Thanks awfully!"

"Well, think it out!" said Nipper, with a smile. "Once the police get hold of Fatty, they'll keep him—it's doubtful if they'll even let him out on bail. It looks to me as if

Kenmore is playing some very deep game; otherwise he wouldn't have kept in the background, as he has done. And what guarantee is there that he'll ever come forward? Fatty Fowkes' position is pretty rotten, and the longer he can lie low, the better."

They completed their purchases, and then strolled leisurely towards the station. They had plenty of time for the train, and it was likely to be late in any case, owing to the fog.

Towards the end of the High Street the shops were only few and far between, and most of these were closed. So the road was dark, and when they started crossing it they found themselves momentarily lost.

"Fog's getting thicker, by the look of it!" said Tommy Watson, as he peered forward into the gloom.

"It seems to be thicker here—that's all," said Nipper. "Look out, you fellows! There's a red light ahead!"

"Begad!" ejaculated Sir Montie, coming to a halt. "They've been excavating the road, and there's some scaffolding here. Better go easy, dear old boys."

"They ought to have better lights than this!" said Nipper critically.

He was undoubtedly right. Just here the High Street was very dark; there was no lamp-post anywhere near. About a third of the road was barricaded off, but it had been done very crudely, with only one or two feeble red lanterns to give warning to the traffic. Not that there was much traffic in this fog.

Nipper pulled out a pocket torch, and flashed it on.

"Phew!" he whistled. "Have a look at this, you chaps!"

He was directing the beam of his torch just beyond the scaffold-pole barrier. There was an enormous cavity in the road—a huge trench, about four feet wide, and seven or eight feet deep.

While the three juniors were looking, they heard a stumbling footstep quite near by. A startled ejaculation followed, and they twirled round. They were just in time to see a bent old man colliding with the scaffold-pole. Crossing the road in the fog, he had apparently known nothing of the excavations.

"Look out, sir!" shouted Nipper warningly.

But, even as he uttered the words, he leapt to the other's assistance. For he could see in the dense gloom that the old man was in dire peril. The scaffold-pole had fallen from one of the trestles, and the old man had stumbled and was pitching forward.

Even as he was tumbling over the brink of that chasm, Nipper seized the back of his coat, and held him. Tommy Watson and Sir Montie arrived at the same moment, and they dragged the stranger back.

"Good heavens!" came a muttered voice. "What—what's happened?"

"It's all right, sir!" said Nipper. "They've been making a hole in the road here, and——"

"Good gracious! I didn't know!" panted the old man. "I might have been really seriously hurt."

"No doubt about that, sir!" said Watson bluntly. "This trench is seven or eight feet deep!"

"Upon my soul!" muttered the other.

They could see that he was quite old—and very shaky. His wrinkled face had gone rather pale, too, and he had lost his hat. Nipper retrieved the latter from the muddy road.

"Thank you, boys—thank you, indeed!" said the old man. "My name is Blackwood. If you should, by chance, meet me again in happier circumstances, I should very much like to make your better acquaintance."

"We're from St. Frank's, sir," said Nipper, smiling. "My name's Hamilton—Dick Hamilton, of the Remove. These chaps are Watson and Tregellis-West. It's nothing, sir—we're all Boy Scouts, and we can look upon this as our day's good deed!" he added dryly.

"How about seeing you home, sir?" suggested Sir Montie.

"No, no! Certainly not!" said the old fellow. "It will be quite sufficient if you will convey me safely to the pavement. Good gracious! What a narrow escape! I am intensely grateful to you, boys! I haven't the slightest doubt that you saved my life!"

CHAPTER 3.

Simon Kenmore's
Brother!



FEW minutes later Nipper & Co. had parted with the grateful Mr. Blackwood, and they were inclined to smile over his exaggerated statements. At least, they preferred to consider them exaggerated. As a matter of fact, there was little doubt that they had really saved the old fellow's life. If he had tumbled down into that deep trench he might easily have killed himself.

By the time the juniors had caught their train they had completely forgotten the old chap, and the incident faded out of their minds. Yet, before long, they were to be reminded of it—and in a very remarkable manner!

When they got back to St. Frank's they found the fog a little clearer. Just inside the Triangle they beheld a stranger—a young man, rather tall, upright, and wearing an overcoat and a soft hat. He was carrying a suitcase, and he seemed a trifle uncertain as to his bearings.

Apparently he had just arrived, and it was more than probable that he had come off the same train as Nipper & Co. But they had delayed for a few minutes in the village.

"Anything we can do, sir?" asked Nipper politely.

The man turned, and looked at the juniors in a thoughtful way.

"That's very good of you, young 'uns," he said. "Yes, there is something you can do for me. I want you to direct me to the headmaster's house, if you don't mind."

"Nothing easier, sir," said Nipper. "Straight through Big Arch, then across Inner Court, and the Head's house will be straight in front of you. But we'd better go with you, sir," he added. "This mist is a bit confusing."

"Infernally confusing," agreed the other. "It was as much as I could do to find the school, in the first place. I suppose I haven't made a mistake? This is St. Frank's College, isn't it?"

"Begad, rather!" said Sir Montie.

They walked forward a few paces, and came within the radius of the light that streamed out of the East House doorway. Nipper & Co. looked at the stranger with polite interest. And as they could now see him in the glow from that open doorway they were immediately struck by something vaguely familiar in his countenance, although they were certain they had never seen him before.

He was a young man—not more than twenty five or twenty-six. There was a close-cropped moustache on his upper lip—quite a small one—and neat pince-nez rested on the bridge of his nose. He looked very studious and very grave.

"This way, sir," said Nipper.

"Just one moment!" said the other slowly. "Which is the East House?"

"This one, sir."

"And do you boys belong to the East House?"

"No, sir—we're Ancient House fellows," said Nipper, still puzzled as to why this stranger should seem so vaguely familiar. "We belong to the Remove."

"The Remove?" said the other. "Is that a Form?"

"Yes, sir."

"I was wondering if you were, perhaps, at all acquainted with my brother," went on the new arrival. "My name is Kenmore—Walter Kenmore."

"Oh!" said Nipper & Co., in one voice.

And the little mystery was explained. Indeed, now that the stranger had told them his name, they could easily detect the family likeness. But whereas Simon Kenmore of the Sixth had always been an unpleasant fellow, his elder brother seemed to be of a very different stamp.

He was slightly taller than the missing Sixth-Former, and his upper front teeth were prominent—whilst Simon Kenmore's were very even and very white. The bullying, dandified prefect had always taken a big pride in his teeth. Apart from all this, Walter Kenmore's voice was quieter—more evenly modulated. And just at present, of course, he was naturally grave.

"So you're Kenmore's brother, sir" said Tommy Watson, with frank curiosity.

"I am," said the other, with a slight nod.

"Are you going to stay at the school?" asked Nipper, with a glance at the visitor's suitcase.

"It all depends," said Walter Kenmore slowly. "I may only stop overnight—or I may remain at St. Frank's for some days. As you can well imagine, I am greatly concerned over the mysterious disappearance of my brother."

Just for a moment Nipper wondered whether he should tell Walter Kenmore anything about the rather mysterious incident that had happened earlier. Perhaps it would be as well to say nothing. It wasn't as though the juniors could bring any evidence to support their story. They were certain that they had seen Simon Kenmore in the fog; but, if they told such a tale, who would believe them? It was always Nipper's policy to keep silent until he could substantiate any statement that he might make.

"We're most frightfully sorry, sir," said Sir Montie, with concern. "Begad! It must be pretty awful for you, coming down here like this—it must, really! If there's anythin' we can do—"

"No; if you will just direct me to the headmaster's house, I shall be most obliged," said Mr. Walter Kenmore.

They accompanied him through Big Arch, and then across Inner Court, until finally they arrived at the doorway of Dr. Malcolm Stafford's residence. They left the visitor there, and went back into the Triangle.

"I wonder why he's come?" said Tommy Watson musingly.

"Well, it's natural that somebody should come," replied Nipper. "I believe Kenmore's people are abroad. Rather rummy about this brother, though."

"How is it rummy, dear old boy?" asked Tregellis-West.

"Rummy that he didn't know anything about the school."

"Why? He's a stranger here."

"That's why it's rummy," said Nipper. "You'd naturally think that Kenmore's brother would be an Old Boy; but he knows no more about St. Frank's than I know of Windsor Castle."

They approached the Ancient House, and then, suddenly, there was a scuffle of feet—many feet. The next moment they were completely surrounded, seized, and violently handled.

"Got 'em!" said a cheery voice. "Go ahead, you fellows! Bump them, and bump them hard!"

"Here!" ejaculated Nipper protestingly. "What's the idea, Corky, you ass?"

Lionel Corcoran, of the Fourth, grinned cheerfully.

"It's a fair cop, Nipper!" he said. "Awfully sorry, and all that sort of thing, but it is our painful duty to bump you."

Corcoran's companions were Armstrong, Griffith, Clifton, Simmons, Turner, Page, and

a number of other East House Fourth-Formers. In fact, there were about a dozen of them, and Nipper & Co. were helpless.

"I say—pax!" gasped Tommy Watson.

"Nothing doing!" said Armstrong briskly. "You Removites have been ruling the roost too long! It's the Fourth's turn now!"

And Nipper and Tregellis-West and Watson were whirled aloft, bumped hard; whirled aloft again, and bumped harder. It was a very painful business.

Since the coming of Lionel Corcoran, the Fourth Form had experienced a great revival. For many terms the Fourth Form had been a force that was hardly worth reckoning with—particularly the East House section. But Corcoran had already altered all that.

The youthful owner of the Blue Crusaders Club was a fellow of action—a born leader—and it was astonishing how the East House juniors had rallied to his banner, and how they were becoming instilled with vim and enterprise.

Nipper & Co., at least, were quite sure of Corky & Co.'s vim. For by the time the chums of Study C were allowed to go, they were aching in every limb, and they felt very sorry for themselves because they had been so unwary.

For, nowadays, it was a risky business to wander about unguardedly in the Triangle or in the Squares.

And Corky & Co., chuckling contentedly, returned to their own lair.



CHAPTER 4.

A Startling Revelation!

R. MALCOLM STAFFORD was both agitated and concerned as he sat opposite to his visitor, in his

comfortable, warm study.

"I need hardly tell you, Mr. Kenmore, that I am acutely distressed over the whole unfortunate episode," he said gravely. "The position is so unsatisfactory—so fraught with uncertainty. I wish I could give you some hope; but I am afraid that such a thing is impossible."

Mr. Walter Kenmore shook his head.

"My brother Simon is, I am afraid, an impulsive youth," he said. "I will not say he 'was,' for I do not like to assume anything so appalling. I prefer to believe that he is still alive."

"You have heard, of course, that your brother's overcoat and cap—"

"Yes!" interrupted Mr. Kenmore. "But surely the finding of those articles of clothing do not prove that Simon died? It is known for a fact that this footballer, Fowkes, had a quarrel with my brother. Simon was knocked into the river."

"It is all very distressing," murmured the Head.

"Is it not possible that Simon divested himself of his overcoat and cap in his attempts to swim ashore?" went on the other shrewdly. "That, at least, is how I look at it. I am certain that he is alive—and that his disappearance is capable of being explained. There are so many things that might have happened."

"I am very glad to find that you are optimistic," said Dr. Stafford slowly.

"He might have been pulled on to a barge, for example," continued Mr. Kenmore. "At this very moment he may be stricken with pneumonia, unable to communicate with any of us—delirious with the fever. There are so many possible explanations. My object in coming to St. Frank's is to make as many inquiries in the district as I can, and definitely to arrive at the truth."

"You wish to remain here—in the school?"

"I was hoping that you would permit me—"

"My dear sir," said the Head, raising a hand, "you are welcome to remain as long as you please—as my guest. I must confess that until I got your telegram I did not even know of your existence. I have been attempting to get into communication with your parents, but, so far, I have failed."

"My parents are abroad—big game hunting," said Walter Kenmore quietly. "I do not think there is any possibility of getting into touch with them for at least a month. Personally, I regard this as a very happy accident. I should not like them to be worried about this—this unsavoury episode. Indeed, I am hoping that they will never need to know anything about it."

"I trust you are right," said the Head fervently.

"I have only recently arrived from Switzerland," went on Mr. Kenmore. "I heard something of the story from a friend of mine at my club. Until then I had not taken the trouble to look at the newspapers."

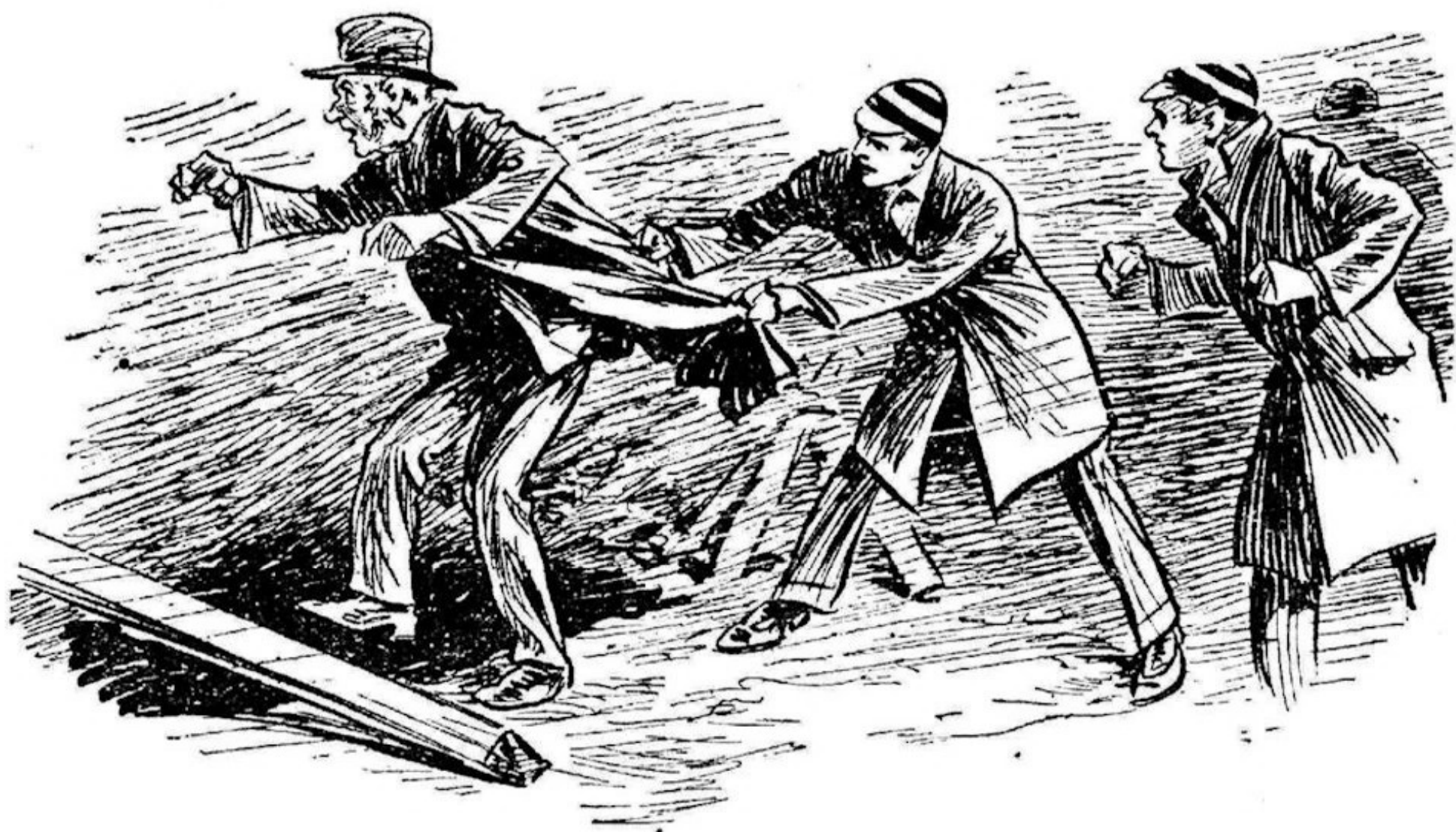
"I fear it was something of a shock to you."

"It was, indeed!" agreed Mr. Kenmore, nodding. "And I thought it advisable to come down at once—personally. I did not even communicate with the police. My first task was to see you, sir."

"Then I am afraid that it is a task that will be barren in its result," said Dr. Stafford reluctantly. "For I, Mr. Kenmore, can do nothing. I can give you no satisfaction of any kind. Your brother was here on Friday evening; he went out, and he has not been seen since. That is really all I know. We hear, from outside sources, that he quarrelled with a professional footballer in Bannington, and that he was knocked into the river. But even this information was very vague and very unsatisfactory."

Walter Kenmore rose to his feet.

"I felt that it was my duty to come to you first of all, sir; but now that this duty is performed, I am sure that it would be better for me to retire," he said quietly. "I am merely wasting your time—"



Unable to see ahead owing to the fog, the old gentleman was walking straight towards the hole in the road. "Look out, sir!" shouted Nipper warningly. He dashed forward, and even as the man was tumbling over, Nipper seized the back of his coat.

"Not at all," broke in the Head. "I shall be honoured, Mr. Kenmore, if you will stay under my roof——"

"I was afraid that your courtesy would lead you to make such a suggestion, Dr. Stafford," said the other, with a curious show of discomfort. "But, the fact is, I would really take it as a personal favour if you would allow me to occupy my brother's own quarters whilst I remain at the school."

"You mean, you would rather stay with Mr. Goole, in the East House?"

"No, not with Mr. Goole," said Walter Kenmore quickly. "That, indeed, would be a slight on yourself, sir. I mean, I would like to sleep in Simon's bedroom, and occupy his own study in the daytime, just as he occupied it. It is a mere whim of mine—but one, I think, that you will appreciate and understand."

"Oh, certainly—certainly!" said the Head. "A reasonable enough suggestion, Mr. Kenmore. By all means do as you wish. I will telephone Mr. Goole at once, and I will tell him that you are coming."

"Really, I don't want any special provisions made for me," said Kenmore's brother. "The only concession I should desire is that my meals may be brought to me in Simon's study. With no disrespect to Mr. Goole, I should prefer, just at this period, to be left alone as much as possible."

The Head promised that he would make it quite plain to Mr. Goole, and he was assured that the Housemaster of the East House would understand the position.

And so, when Walter Kenmore went to the East House, it was with the understanding that he should occupy Simon's study, and Simon's bedroom. Naturally, he presented

himself to Mr. Barnaby Goole, had a few polite words with that rather agitated gentleman, and then made his excuses. However, Mr. Goole insisted upon escorting Walter Kenmore to his brother's study, and he left him there.

For some moments after the Housemaster's departure, Walter Kenmore stood on the hearthrug, looking round the little room thoughtfully. Then he opened the door, passed out, and tapped on the panels of a door near by.

"Come in!" said a voice.

The visitor opened the door, and walked in. Guy Sinclair, of the Sixth, rose hurriedly to his feet.

"I didn't know——" he began.

"Please don't disturb yourself," said Walter Kenmore quietly, as he closed the door. "In order to make the position clear at once, I will tell you that my name is Walter Kenmore."

"Oh!" said Sinclair, staring. "Yes, I can see now."

"I resemble my brother?"

"Just a bit, sir," said Sinclair, who was rather taken aback.

"I think your name is Sinclair?" went on the other. "And I understand you were my brother's closest friend?"

"Well, that's so, I suppose," replied Sinclair. "We were pretty thick together—— That is to say, we were very friendly. I'm awfully sorry about your brother," he added. "The whole thing's an absolute mystery to me. Why on earth that fool of a goalkeeper should drown your brother——"

"You think he is drowned?"

"Well, what's the good of fooling ourselves?" asked Sinclair uncomfortably. "Isn't

it plain enough? And it's just as plain that Fowkes killed him."

Walter Kenmore walked to the door, turned the key in the lock, and then came close up to Sinclair. There was now a burning light in his eyes, and Sinclair backed away, rather alarmed and considerably disconcerted.

"Why, what's—what's the matter?" he asked huskily.

"Nothing's the matter, as far as you're concerned!" said the visitor, in a whisper. "I've fooled them all—and I've fooled you, too, Sinclair! Don't you know me?"

Guy Sinclair stared fascinatedly.

"Know you?" he gasped. "I—I don't understand!"

"Keep calm, for goodness' sake!" said the other. "I can't keep the secret from you, Sinclair—I've got to talk to somebody! Do you mean to say that you don't know me? I'm Kenmore!"

Sinclair nearly jumped out of his skin. For he suddenly realised, with a tremendous shock, that he was face to face with Simon Kenmore himself!



CHAPTER 5.

The Secret!

GUY SINCLAIR was speechless for a full minute.

He could only stand there, staring dazedly at his companion. Even now, he could hardly realise the staggering truth.

"But—but it's impossible!" he said. "You can't be Simon Kenmore! You're his brother—"

"I haven't got a brother!" interrupted Kenmore. "Walter is a myth—an invention! I've never had an elder brother. It's true that my parents are abroad, and that's why I can work this game; there's nobody in England who can come down and spoil it."

He had removed his pince-nez, and although he bore a slightly vague resemblance to Kenmore of the Sixth, he was yet so different that Sinclair stared at him in a baffled kind of way.

"But—but your moustache——" he began breathlessly.

"It's false!" muttered Kenmore. "I'll defy anybody to detect it, but it's false. It took me nearly a couple of hours to 'work it up.' You know thundering well, Sinclair, that I'm hot at theatricals."

This was perfectly true. Simon Kenmore, although several kinds of a rotter, had always been enthusiastic about amateur theatricals; in fact, he had been one of the ablest actors in the Sixth, and he had always appeared in the Senior School's dramatic efforts.

"And—and you look taller, too!" said Sinclair wonderingly.

"That's nothing—I've put an extra pair of rubber heels on my shoes," said Kenmore.

"And I suppose I look taller, too—mainly

because I appear older. It's an illusion, mostly."

Sinclair still looked at him in bewilderment.

"I can understand the moustache and the glasses, and I can understand you appearing to be a bit taller," he said. "But your teeth! You're—you're completely different! You're not Kenmore at all! You can't fool me——"

He broke off as his companion swiftly turned. For a moment he seemed to fumble with his mouth, and then he faced Sinclair again.

"Great gad!" gasped Sinclair.

For now, indeed, Simon Kenmore stood before him—Kenmore, with the even, white teeth—Kenmore himself, except for that little moustache. It wasn't merely a resemblance—it was Kenmore himself, beyond all doubt.

"It was only the teeth that made it possible!" said Kenmore gruffly. "I couldn't have hoped to fool everybody otherwise. But it's amazing how teeth change a fellow's appearance. Mine are as you see them—but Walter's are prominent."

"But—but how the thunder do you wangle it?" asked Sinclair.

Simon Kenmore made an impatient gesture.

"Why bother about such idiotic trifles?" he asked. "It's nothing—it's as simple as A B C. In fact, it's so simple that it's fool proof. You didn't know that I had false teeth, did you?"

"Ye gods, no!" ejaculated Sinclair. "False teeth, at your age!"

"What the deuce has age got to do with it?" snapped Kenmore, in his old way. "During the summer holidays I had an accident. I might as well be frank about it—I had a fight with somebody."

"Oh!"

"It was at a race meeting," went on Kenmore, frowning. "There was a welsher, and somehow I got mixed up with a race gang. Gad! They made mincemeat of me—about four of the hounds set on me that afternoon. They knocked my front teeth clean out."

"Great Scott!" said Sinclair, staring.

"Five of them!" went on Kenmore, reminiscently feeling his mouth. "Of course, I daren't come back to St. Frank's with that gap in my face. So, before the holidays were over, I had some false ones made, and nobody ever knew the difference."

"I didn't know, anyhow," said Sinclair.

Kenmore turned, deftly slipped the dental plate out of his mouth, and replaced it by another. In a flash, he was changed—his whole expression was altered. His facial conformity was changed. Those prominent front teeth caused his upper lip to bulge forward, and they had the effect, too, of even making his nose look broader.

"It's marvellous!" said Sinclair fascinatedly.

"Oh, leave them alone!" said Kenmore, with a show of impatience. "I was in Helmford this morning, and I got this idea about coming to St. Frank's—as an

imaginary brother. I went into a dentist's, told him that I was acting in an amateur play, and that I wanted some false teeth made. I said I wanted them by tea-time—and I got them. I gave instructions that they should be prominent teeth—and this is the result. There's nothing in it—it's perfectly simple and easy. Anybody who wears false teeth could have a set made like this, and change his appearance."

"You're a genius!" said Sinclair admiringly. "Gad! I've always known that you were a tricky customer, Kenmore, but this beats everything! You could stay on here for a year, and nobody would ever guess the truth."

"That's what I thought—when I saw myself in the mirror," nodded Kenmore. "But for goodness' sake let's stop talking about teeth! Besides, it's risky. If anybody comes, I'm Walter Kenmore—just having a polite, formal chat with you about my missing brother."

Sinclair made a hopeless gesture.

"I'm all at sea!" he confessed. "Have you gone mad, Kenmore, or what? What's the idea? What do you mean by pretending to be dead, and then coming here, masquerading as an imaginary brother?"

"I dare say it seems mad to you—but you'll understand soon," replied Kenmore slowly. "I've been forced into it, Sinclair. I've had to disappear. Do you understand? I'm afraid of the police!"

"You!" gasped Sinclair. "Afraid of the police!"

"Yes, confound you."

"But what have you been doing?"

"Nothing," said the prefect. "That's just the trouble! I'm in danger of being arrested for forgery—and I didn't do it!"

Guy Sinclair whistled.

"Forgery!" he whispered. "Phew! That's serious! And what about Fowkes? Do you realise that Fowkes, of the Blue Crusaders, is in hiding? Do you know that there's a warrant out for his arrest—for being concerned in your disappearance?"

Kenmore breathed hard.

"Yes, I know all that—I know everything!" he said distractedly. "That's one of the main reasons why I've come back—here. After the way Fowkes knocked me into the river on Friday evening, I've no reason to love him. But I don't want him to be arrested for something he didn't do. So I've got a scheme—I've thought it all out, in every detail. I've got to prove that I'm alive—that Simon Kenmore is alive, you understand. But I'm going to do it in such a way that everybody will think that he's out of reach."

"I'm in a fog!" confessed Sinclair helplessly.

"Well, listen to me for a minute or two!" said Kenmore. "I'll just explain the position. You know Matt Page, the bookie?"

"Of course I do," said Sinclair. "The Bannington man. He'll all right. Best

bookie in Bannington. Sound and solid—always pays. He's had a good bit of our money!" he added regretfully.

"Do you remember I had a winner about three weeks ago?" asked Kenmore. "Matt Page paid me by cheque—for eight pounds."

"Yes—I remember."

"Do you remember what I did with that cheque?"

"Not exactly," said Sinclair, puckering his brow. "I know you were very bucked to get it, and— Oh, yes! We'd been having a bit of a flutter with some of those men in the Wheatsheaf, hadn't we? Playing billiards and poker?"

"That's right."

"There was a chap named Jim Point, or something—"

"Sam Pointer."

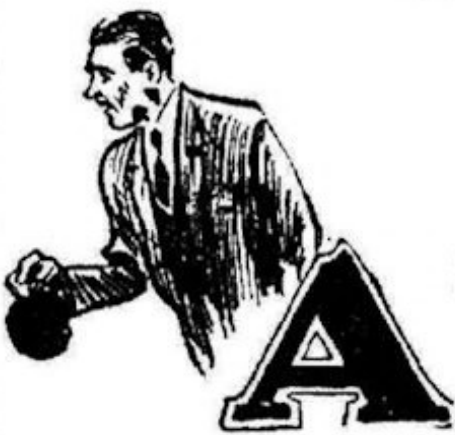
"That's right—Sam Pointer!" said Sinclair. "He cleaned you out, didn't he? Yes, and you gave him that eight quid cheque, and some loose change as well. I've got it now! Well?"

"If I could get hold of Sam Pointer, I'd like to wring his neck!" said Kenmore savagely. "But he's not a Bannington man—he only came down for the races. I don't know where to get hold of him—the crook!"

And there was such a world of ferocity in Simon Kenmore's voice that Sinclair looked at him in very real alarm.

CHAPTER 6.

Simon Kenmore's Dilemma!



AFTER a few moments Kenmore became calm again.

"Last Wednesday evening I was at the Wheatsheaf," he said. "You remember, I went over to Bannington that evening."

"Did you?" said Sinclair. "What about it?"

"I was playing snooker with some of those Crusader fellows—Hankin and two of his pals," went on Kenmore. "Matt Page came up to me, and said he wanted a few words in private. I can tell you, Sinclair, I nearly had a fit. He accused me of forgery."

"But why on earth should he?"

"He showed me that cheque—that eight quid cheque!" said Kenmore, lowering his voice. "But it wasn't for eight quid. It was for eighty. I had endorsed it, don't forget, but there had been a 'nought' added after the figure, and a 'y' had been cleverly written in after the 'eight'. So, by those two trivial alterations, the cheque was changed for eight pounds to eighty pounds!"

"By gad!"

"Pointer did it, of course!" said Kenmore harshly. "I gave him the cheque, endorsed and everything. It was an open cheque, too—so I suppose he took it to the bank, got the

cash, and cleared out. Matt Page only got it back from the bank, in the ordinary course, last Wednesday."

"But, hang it, he doesn't think you forged it, does he?"

"That's just the trouble—he does!" said Kenmore. "And why shouldn't he?" He gave the cheque to me, and, although I told him about Pointer, he laughed at me. Called me a young crook!"

"But I can prove it!" said Sinclair excitedly. "I'll go and see Page, and tell him I saw you give the cheque to Pointer——"

"That won't do any good at all!" broke in Kenmore. "Page won't believe you; he'll think it's a put-up job. No; he's as hard as nails. He told me that unless I had the money for him by Saturday evening he'd go to the police and show them the cheque; and give me in charge for forgery."

"Great Scott!"

"So you can understand what a rotten position I was in!" muttered the prefect. "I raked up ten quid, and made bets all over the school——"

"Gad, that's right!" said Sinclair, nodding. "We all wondered what was the matter with you towards the end of last week, Kenmore! You got odds of ten to one, didn't you, that the Blue Crusaders would lose on Saturday? Everybody was cackling at you—said that you'd gone mad."

"I believe I was mad!" replied Kenmore dully. "I was mad to suppose that Fowkes would accept a bribe. Yes, I tried to bribe him."

"So—so that explains——"

"Of course it does!" said Kenmore impatiently. "My idea was to make bets with that ten quid of mine, with odds at ten to one. Don't you understand? If the Blues lost, I should rake in a hundred quid. Then I could have paid Matt Page quite easily on Saturday evening, after the result of the match had come through. But when I put the proposition to Fowkes he knocked me down—and I fell into the river—hang him!"

"And everybody thinks you're drowned!" said Sinclair, staring.

"That's the trouble!" grunted Kenmore. "If I show up and prove I'm not dead Fowkes will be at once freed from suspicion. But what is Matt Page going to do? Can't you see? He'll drop on me like a load of bricks—and have me arrested for forgery! He swore that he'd do it if I didn't pay by Saturday night!"

"Ye gods!" breathed the other. "You are in a mess!"

"I got out of the river without much trouble," said Kenmore. "I even came back to St. Frank's, but I don't think anybody saw me, and I only stopped to change into dry things, and then I went out again."

"Why did you do that?"

"What else was there for me to do?" asked Kenmore, frowning. "I knew that the Blues would win, and that meant that I shouldn't collect any money. And it meant, too, that Page would carry out his threat."

"Where did you sleep on Friday night, then?"

"To tell you the truth, I went to London!" said Kenmore. "It occurred to me that I might borrow the money from some man I knew in London. I went up by the last train, but when I got to the man's address I found the house locked up. I walked about all night, and had an hour or two's sleep in a railway station waiting-room in the early morning."

"Hadn't you got any money?"

"Nothing to speak of—only enough to get me a bite to eat," replied Kenmore. "And, of course, I had my return ticket. I went to that man's house again in the morning, but it was still locked up. I expect he's away on holiday somewhere—South of France, probably. Anyhow, there was nothing I could do. I came back again, although I didn't arrive until after dark, in the evening. Then I heard the result of the Blues' match. I learned that the Crusaders had beaten Devon Wanderers again."

"And that meant that your bets were down," nodded Sinclair.

"I was frantic!" said Kenmore huskily. "Don't you see? It was my last chance! I daren't come back here—because I was afraid that Matt Page would come and give me away. I was pretty dotty, because I put my overcoat and cap into the river, over Bell-ton Bridge."

"What the deuce did you do that for?"

"I thought somebody would find them—and I was hoping that Page would hear about it, and think that I had committed suicide," grunted Kenmore. "I wanted to put the wind up him, the rotter! Why can't he take my word? I didn't forge his rotten cheque, and he ought to have believed me."

"I'll see him for you, if you like——"

"No, you won't!" interrupted Kenmore. "I've got a better plan than that. You see, on Saturday evening I heard that there was a warrant out for Fatty Fowkes' arrest—for murdering me! Naturally, I hadn't dreamed of anything like that, and it bowled me right over."

"Well, it does look pretty bad against Fowkes, doesn't it?" said Sinclair. "You disappeared on Friday evening, you know, and then you spent Friday night in London, and nobody knew anything about it——"

"Yes, I know," said Kenmore testily. "And I want to get Fowkes out of that hole. I've got a scheme, too."

"What is it?"

Simon Kenmore was silent for a few minutes, during which he looked thoughtfully into the fire. Then he turned his gaze on his companion again.

"The main thing is to put Matt Page right off the track," he said. "When that's been done, I've got to find Sam Pointer."

"But he may be hundreds of miles away."

"I can't help that—I've got to find him!" said Kenmore fiercely. "What's more, I've got to force a confession out of him—and make him tell Page the truth. Whether Page

prosecutes him or not doesn't matter to me. But I've got to clear my own name. Then, when Page is satisfied, he won't threaten me any more, and I can come back to St. Frank's."

"But how the deuce are you going to 'disappear' in the meantime—and yet make people believe that you are still alive?"

"You'll find that out—to-morrow!" said Kenmore. "I've written a letter, and I've addressed it to you. I posted it in Caistowe this evening, before I came here. But I shan't tell you what's in it, because I want you to be surprised in the morning—and then, perhaps, you'll act naturally, as though you don't know anything about what's happened to-night."

"You might be a sport!" complained Sinclair. "I'm all in the dark!"

"You won't be in the dark to-morrow," replied Simon Kenmore. "I got hold of

some money by pawning my watch; that's how I got this new overcoat and hat, and the suitcase. And the teeth, too. But what with these things, and a couple of nights' lodgings in Helmford, I'm stoney again. I want you to lend me something, Sinclair."

"All I've got!" replied Sinclair promptly.

"I'm downright certain that I shall be able to locate Sam Pointer in Helmford," continued Kenmore.

"He's a race-track loafer. He was only in Bannington for the races, if you remember. Well, there are some steeplechases at Helmford next week. Pointer is bound to be there—and that's when I'll collar him. In the meantime, I've got to lie low; and in order to lie low I've got to put an end to the hue-and-cry after—well, after myself. In the morning you'll see how I'm going to do it."

And more than that Kenmore would not say.

While he and Sinclair chatted in the latter's study, the Remove and the Fourth were discussing the arrival of "Walter Kenmore," and, although there was a good deal of conjecture about the missing Sixth-Former's elder brother, nobody had the faintest suspicion of the real truth.

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CHAPTER 7

The Fateful Letter?

UGUSTUS PARKIN, of the Sixth, caught his breath in with a gulp, and then uttered a startled ejaculation.

"Well, I'm hanged!" he said excitedly.

Parkin belonged to the East House, and at the moment he was in the lobby, standing in front of the letter-rack. It was the next morning, and Parkin had got down very early, for he was expecting a remittance from home. And, being hard up, he badly needed it.

However, there was no letter for him, and in desperation he had been looking through the other slots in the letter-rack. Now he was holding a letter in his hand, and staring at it in a blank sort of way.

"What's wrong?" asked Grayson, of the Fifth, as he came up with Shaw.

"Look at this!" said Parkin breathlessly.

He thrust the letter under Grayson's nose, and both Grayson and Shaw looked at it curiously.

"Are you mad?" asked Grayson at last. "There's nothing to go dotty about in that letter! Besides, it's not yours, Parkin! It's addressed to Sinclair."

"But look at the handwriting!" ejaculated Parkin.

"Anything special about it?"

"It's Kenmore's, that's a l l!" said Parkin. "I don't suppose you'd know it, you fellows being in the Fifth. But I tell you this is Kenmore's handwriting!"

"What!" yelled Grayson and Shaw, in one voice.

"It's a fact!" said Parkin excitedly.

"Great guns! And it was posted last night—in Caistowe! Look at the postmark!"

"Then—then Kenmore's alive!" said Shaw. "That fellow Fowkes didn't kill him at all."

"You seem disappointed!" remarked Grayson.

"Don't be an idiot!" growled Shaw. "But if Kenmore's alive, what the deuce is he up to?"

At this point Guy Sinclair came hurrying into the lobby. He had meant to be down earlier, and now he was rather startled to find all these seniors collected round the letter-rack. He was still more startled when Parkin held out that letter to him.

"Look here, Sinclair—it's for you!" said Parkin. "It's a letter—from Kenmore!"

Sinclair was fairly taken aback.

"It can't be!" he managed to say. "Everybody knows that Kenmore is drowned."

Considering that he had been talking to Kenmore only five minutes earlier, this was rather a good showing on Sinclair's part. He acted even better when he took the letter, glanced at it, and violently started.

"Yes!" he gasped. "This—this is Kenmore's writing all right!"



"Open it, and see what it's about!" advised Parkin eagerly.

"Hang it, you're a bit nosey, aren't you?" snapped Sinclair.

"Rot!" said Parkin. "Everybody in the school is talking about Kenmore's disappearance. If this letter clears it up, you ought to explain. It's your duty, Sinclair!"

Guy Sinclair was as curious as any of the others to open the letter, for Kenmore had not given him any hint as to its contents. He tore open the flap, took out the sheet of note-paper, and opened it.

And this is what he read:

"Caistowe.

"Dear Sinclair,—Just a line to let you know that you mustn't take any notice of all this rot about me being drowned. I've heard the rumours, of course, and I want you to show this letter to the police, so that Fowkes can be cleared of that preposterous charge. I have private reasons of my own for not coming back to St. Frank's.

"I had a quarrel with Fowkes on Friday evening—quite a personal affair—but I got out of the river easily enough. I'm fed up with St. Frank's, and I've decided to clear right out. I dare say you'd call it a whim, but there it is. I'm sick to death of the same old grind at St. Frank's, and I don't care a hang about the 'Varsity. I want to see something of the world, and you'll probably be interested to know that I've obtained a berth on board a sailing-ship—which is due out on the tide from Caistowe this evening.

"So, by the time you get this letter, I shall be out to sea. I'm bound for the Sunny South, old man—first port a few thousand miles from here. No need to worry about me, but you might do me a favour and let the Head know, and it would be just as well, too, to show this letter to the police, so that the charge against Fowkes can be withdrawn.

"That's about all. I'll probably send you a card from Peru, or the Hawaiian Islands, or somewhere like that. But don't expect it for a good few months. So-long, old man, till we meet again.

"SIMON KENMORE."

Sinclair felt his heart beating rapidly as he read this precious epistle. He was by no means a dullard, and he could easily tell the full extent of Kenmore's game. It was a shrewd game, too.

This letter would naturally set all the headmaster's fears at rest; and it would just as positively cause Inspector Jameson, of the Bannington police, to tear up his warrant for Fatty Fowkes' arrest. There couldn't possibly be any charge against Fowkes in face of this letter from Kenmore himself.

And as the ship had left Caistowe on the previous night, it would be quite impossible to get in touch with Kenmore—or with the ship. Which was just as well, for Kenmore wasn't on it at all! But everybody would

think he was, and thus the trick would be done.

Sinclair was rather breathless at the astuteness of it. The hue and cry would die down, Fatty Fowkes would be left alone, and Kenmore would calmly live on at St. Frank's in the rôle of his elder brother! For he could easily get permission from the Head to stay on for a week or so. Kenmore's object was obvious. He wanted to get free board and lodging while he was waiting for the Helmsford races; furthermore, it was practically certain that Sam Pointer would read the reports in the newspapers, and he would naturally think that he had nothing more to fear. With Kenmore out of the way, he would be safe. And so Kenmore, in his disguise, would be easily able to jump on him by surprise, and then wring that confession from him.

"What's all the excitement about?"

Sinclair started. It was Lionel Corcoran's voice, and Corcoran and Armstrong and a few other Fourth-Formers had just appeared in the lobby.

"You kids can clear off!" said Parkin, frowning. "There's a letter here from Kenmore—"

"Kenmore!" yelled the juniors.

"He's not dead at all!" said Grayson, grinning. "There's a lot of spoof about it! What does he say, Sinclair? Be a pal, and tell us!"

"There's nothing much in it!" said Sinclair. "Kenmore had bolted to sea, that's all."

"Great Scott!"

"Bolted to sea?"

"That's what he says!" replied Sinclair. "He sailed last night from Caistowe— But look here! I'd better take this to old Goole. It's important!"

Sinclair hurried off before any more questions could be put to him. Kenmore had definitely instructed him to take the letter straight to Mr. Barnaby Goole, the House-master. That was the first step; afterwards the matter would be taken out of Sinclair's hands.

Naturally, the news spread like wildfire. The juniors were all talking about it in next to no time, and they could hardly believe it. When Nipper heard about it, however, he was struck by the fact that this new development was quite logical. He and some of the other juniors had seen Kenmore on the previous evening, and they knew that he was alive. Kenmore must have sailed from Caistowe after that chance meeting.

"Let's dash off to the old mill!" suggested Handforth excitedly. "We'd better tell Fatty Fowkes about this! He needn't be in hiding any longer—"

"Hold on!" said Nipper. "No need to be in a hurry."

"Why not?"

"We've got to see what the police will do first," replied Nipper. "They may not take the same view, you know. Better wait until something definite is settled. We don't want to raise Fatty's hopes for nothing. So we

won't tell him anything—until we know for certain."

And the others agreed that this, perhaps, was the best policy.



CHAPTER 8.

Inspector Jameson is
Cautious!

MR. BARNABY GOOLE, the Housemaster of the East House, looked up in mild astonishment as Guy Sinclair came jumping into his study.

"Really, Sinclair, is this—necessary?" asked Mr. Goole tartly.

"I'm sorry, sir——"

"And so you should be sorry, Sinclair!" said the Housemaster. "How dare you rudely break in upon my privacy without even knocking on the door?"

Mr. Goole was a mild man as a rule—he was a vegetarian—but he disliked these rude interruptions.

"It's this letter, sir!" said Sinclair breathlessly. "It's from Kenmore!"

"Oh, indeed!" said the Housemaster, with a start. "A letter from Kenmore! Show it to me!"

He took it, and read it rapidly, his colour rising.

"Well, bless my soul!" he ejaculated, at length. "How extraordinary!"

"Kenmore's not dead, sir!"

"So it seems!" nodded Mr. Goole. "I am extremely gratified to find that Kenmore is still alive, and that the footballer, Fowkes, is innocent. But I must remark that Kenmore has acted in a foolish way. A very foolish way. He is not a mere junior, with wild ideas about the sea. He is old enough to know better!"

"Well, I think so, too, sir," said Sinclair cautiously. "But there's no telling what some fellows will do, you know."

"You are quite right!" agreed Mr. Goole, with a touch of grimness in his voice. "I have been a schoolmaster for a sufficient number of years, Sinclair, to understand that there is never any knowing what some boys will do! However, I really suppose I had better place this before the headmaster?"

"That's what I was thinking, sir," nodded Sinclair. "And there's Kenmore's brother, too. Don't you think he ought to be told first?"

"By all means," said Mr. Goole, ringing a bell.

And very soon "Walter Kenmore" came into the study. Mr. Goole gravely showed him the letter, and Kenmore gravely read it through. Only Sinclair could appreciate the farce of it.

"I am extraordinarily relieved to see this!" said Kenmore, in a soft, fervent voice that brought him a glance of admiration from Sinclair. "It has taken a great load off my

mind, Mr. Goole. So Simon has been fool enough to run away to sea? Well, that's better than being drowned! What in the world can have possessed him?"

"I think it's very possible that he was in some trouble!" said Mr. Goole bluntly. "Without wishing to upset you, Mr. Kenmore, I would like to say that your brother was never a reliable scholar. I have had a great deal of trouble with him—a great deal."

"I am sorry about that," said Kenmore, inwardly vowing that he would "take it out" of Mr. Goole when he got the opportunity.

"Well, we will go to the headmaster!" said Mr. Goole, rising to his feet.

They hurried off to Dr. Stafford, and the Head, when he read the letter, was as much relieved as Mr. Goole. It really seemed that the mystery was cleared right up. How those two staid masters would have been astounded if they could have known that the very writer of the letter was standing before them!

"It is, of course, gratifying to find out that Kenmore is unharmed," said the Head, frowning. "I am relieved—and yet, at the same time, I am positively alarmed."

"What are you alarmed about, sir?" asked Kenmore.

The Head looked up.

"Surely, Mr. Kenmore, you know what my position is?" he asked. "Your parents, before they went abroad, placed your brother in my care. In a manner of speaking, I am his guardian. What am I to say to your mother and father? And what will they say to me? This boy must be brought back! He must be found, and forced to return."

"But that's impossible, sir!" said Kenmore quickly.

"Indeed!"

"He distinctly says that the ship sailed from Caistowe last night——"

"There is such a thing as wireless, Mr. Kenmore," interrupted the Head. "This ship must be recalled."

"Perhaps you have not read the postscript, sir?" said Kenmore steadily.

The postscript was overleaf, and even Sinclair had not read it at his first glance at the letter. It was quite brief, and it merely stated that the boat was a sailing ship, and that it would probably take many, many months on its voyage—and that it had no wireless. Dr. Stafford was very agitated when he read this.

"Then we are helpless!" he ejaculated, in alarm. "If this ship has sailed, and she has no wireless, it will be impossible to recall her. What on earth am I to do, Mr. Kenmore?"

"The only thing you can do, sir, is to let the young fool go his own road!" said Kenmore promptly. "He has chosen to do this, so why not let him do it?"

Sinclair, hearing this, vaguely wondered how Kenmore would explain things, later on, when he was free to appear in his true colours again. But Kenmore had this all planned. He would simply arrive with a glib story to the effect that the ship had unexpectedly put in at another English port, after a spell of

bad weather. He would explain that he had decided to come back to St. Frank's, after all. It would all be very simple.

But Kenmore's plans were not to run so smoothly as he had believed.

For, as luck would have it, Inspector Jameson turned up in the middle of that conference in the Head's study. The inspector had called for the purpose of getting some details about the missing senior.

The Head was very glad to see him, and he immediately thrust the letter into the inspector's hands. And the worthy police officer immediately threw a spanner into the works.

"This clears things up considerably," he said. "I'm glad, sir—very glad. Naturally, the warrant against Fowkes will be withdrawn—as soon as this letter has been verified."

"Verified?" repeated Kenmore sharply.

"Indeed, yes, sir," said the inspector, glancing at him. "You surely don't expect that we can take this letter for granted?"

"But why not?"

"Simply because it would be very foolish to do so," replied the inspector bluntly.

"But really, inspector, is there any reason why you should discredit Kenmore's letter?" asked Dr. Stafford, in a mild voice. "He states, quite clearly, that he is sailing from Caistowe on a ship——"

"The police need something rather more definite than this, sir," broke in the inspector. "The position will remain absolutely unaltered until this particular ship has been found—and until the boy himself has been identified. How do we know that he actually sailed on the ship? He makes the statement in this letter, but that is no proof."

"True!" admitted the Head. "I really hadn't thought of that."

"But the police must think of these things, sir," said the inspector pompously. "I shall take immediate steps to have the ship intercepted."

"Splendid!" said the Head. "By all means go ahead, inspector. Kenmore must be taken off the vessel. He must be brought back. You agree, Mr. Kenmore, do you not?"

Kenmore remained calm by an effort.

"Of course!" he said. "Naturally, that would be best."

"You see, inspector, the boy's parents are abroad, and I am practically placed in the position of a guardian," continued Dr. Stafford. "The boy must be taken off that ship, and brought back to St. Frank's. I only hope that you will be successful in your efforts."

Inspector Jameson folded the letter, and placed it in his pocket-book.

"I'll keep this," he said. "And you needn't worry about my success, Dr. Stafford. The ship only left Caistowe last night, and that means that she is in the Channel to-day. I don't think there will be much trouble in identifying her, and in getting the boy taken off. We'll set the wireless to work."

"But she has no wireless!" put in Kenmore.

"Other ships have wireless!" said the inspector. "And there are plenty of them in the Channel! Of course, it may run into a bit of money," he added, looking at the Head. "I don't know whether you're prepared——"

"Certainly, certainly!" said Dr. Stafford. "Do not spare any expense, inspector."

"Then I'll go straight ahead," said the police officer. "I'll get into touch with that ship as quickly as possible. In the meantime, Fowkes will be arrested if he is caught. The warrant cannot be withdrawn until the boy has been actually recovered—until the police are satisfied that he is alive. This letter, in itself, is convincing to us from a private point of view—but it won't do as evidence. We must get that boy!"

And the inspector bustled away, full of enthusiasm to probe this new line of inquiry.



CHAPTER 9.

Doubts!

SIMON KENMORE looked savage and angry.

He and Sinclair had got back to the latter's study, and while Sinclair was looking more or less bewildered, Kenmore was acutely alarmed.

"The old fool!" he muttered. "The confounded old fool!"

"Who do you mean—the Head?"

"The Head's an old fool, too—but I was referring to Inspector Jameson!" snapped Kenmore. "Why does he want to verify that letter? It was clear enough, wasn't it?"

"Not for the police, evidently," said Sinclair.

"But why not?" insisted Kenmore. "Why search for that ship?"

"I suppose there is a ship?"

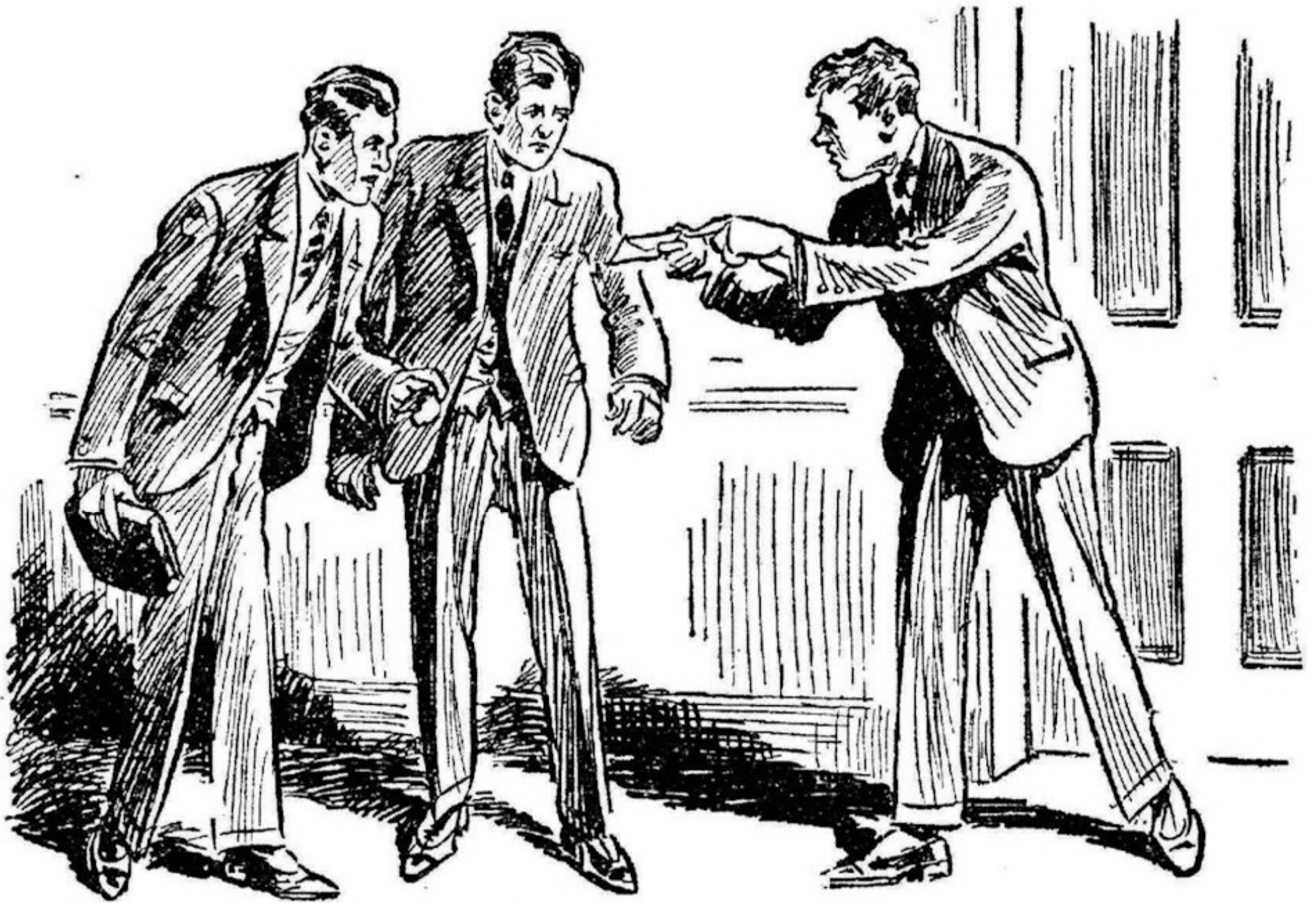
"Of course there is!" said Kenmore. "I made certain of that before I wrote the letter. A sailing ship named the *Travis* went out of Caistowe last night—bound for South American ports."

"Phew! It'll be pretty rotten for you if the inspector succeeds," said Sinclair, staring. "What the dickens will happen when they find out it is all a bluff?"

"Well, they can't prove anything—that's one consolation," said Kenmore, cooling down. "They'll only assume that I didn't get on the ship, after all."

"That'll be a fairly easy assumption!"

"Well, I mean, they'll think that I changed my mind and went on another boat, perhaps," frowned Kenmore. "I'm an idiot to worry!" he added. "I didn't say what the boat was in the letter. It might have been any kind of ship. There are all sorts



Parkin thrust the letter under the noses of the astonished Grayson and Shaw. "Look!" he shouted. "This letter is from Kenmore!" There was good reason for Parkin's amazement, for Kenmore was supposed to be dead!

of sailing ships leaving Caistowe. They can't get in touch with them all. The inspector's a pompous old beast, and he was only trying to be important. I tell you, Sinclair, the wheeze will work."

"Well, I hope so."

"It's bound to work—I've thought it all out!" insisted Kenmore. "There's a big wind to-day, and the Channel will be tremendously rough. They'll never get in touch with that old hooker. And after to-day she'll be out of the Channel, and in the Atlantic. Then it'll be altogether too late—and, naturally, they'll give it up. They'll have to withdraw that warrant for Fatty Fowke's arrest, and Matt Page won't do anything because he'll think I'm out of his reach. Oh, yes, it'll be all right."

Kenmore cooled right down, and assured himself, again and again, that his scheme would work. He would be able to stay at St. Frank's until the next week, and he could mark time. Then, when Sam Pointer was off his guard, he could pounce.

In the meantime, there was a good deal of talk in the junior quarters.

"Everything's all serene now!" Handforth was saying. "It's clear enough what's happened. Kenmore admits in his letter that Fatty didn't hurt him, and the rotter ran away to sea. Good riddance to him! I'll bet those East House chaps are glad!"

"Rather!" said Church, nodding. "Kenmore was always a bit of a beast."

"Different from his brother!" said Tommy Watson.

"Well, good old Fatty is safe now, anyway," remarked Tich Harborough, with satisfaction. "I don't see any reason why we shouldn't tell him about this. Then he can join the other Crusaders, and snap his fingers at the police. They're bound to tear up that warrant now."

"Just what I think!" said Handforth. "Why leave Fatty in suspense? The police know that Kenmore is alive, and——"

"They don't know it!" interrupted Nipper. "Eh?"

"You heard what I said?"

"But you're talking rot!" protested Handforth. "Of course the police know it! Inspector Jameson has seen that letter."

"And Inspector Jameson doesn't regard that letter as evidence," said Nipper. "The only proof of Kenmore's existence will be the production of Kenmore himself. The inspector is going ahead straight away—and he means to find that sailing ship."

"But supposing he can't locate it?" asked Tich, in dismay.

"Then it'll be pretty bad for Fatty Fowkes!" said Nipper. "If Fatty were to show himself now, he would be arrested at once. He would be held on suspicion—and the police wouldn't release him until Kenmore turned up. And it might be weeks before they get in touch with that boat!"

"Weeks!" ejaculated Handforth, staring. "My dear chap, they may have to wait until the ship puts into port," said Nipper. "Then they'll probably communicate with the captain, by cable, and they won't release Fatty until then. It's far better to keep the chap in ignorance of all this—in case something comes unstuck."

"I believe you're right," agreed Tich Harborough slowly. "There's no sense in raising his hopes, only to have them dashed to the ground immediately afterwards."

They were pleased they had come to this decision, for in the afternoon Inspector Jameson turned up again.

Kenmore, who was on the alert, met the inspector in the Triangle, and he tried hard to conceal his agitation behind a show of eagerness.

"Any news, inspector?" he asked keenly.

"Nothing much," replied Inspector Jameson. "However, I have definitely established the fact that only one sailing ship put out from Caistowe last night. She's the *Travis*, bound for Buenos Ayres."

"Oh," said Kenmore.

"Can't get in touch with her yet, though," went on the inspector, with a frown. "She's got no wireless, and there's a heavy sea running in the Channel."

"Why trouble about it?" asked Kenmore, with a show of impatience. "That letter to Sinclair proves clearly enough that my brother is on board that ship. You shouldn't take too much notice of the headmaster, you know. If the young idiot wants to be at sea, let him be at sea. That's what I say, inspector."

The police officer nodded.

"I'm inclined to agree with you, sir," he grunted. "The boy's causing us a lot of trouble. But, you see, the position is awkward. We've got to establish the fact that your brother is alive—and the only way to do that is to intercept the *Travis*, and have the boy brought back. Moreover, Dr. Stafford is most insistent that he should be brought back. I'm not at all satisfied with the way things are going," the inspector added abruptly.

"What do you mean?" asked Kenmore, his heart beating more rapidly.

"I mean that Fowkes' conduct is very significant!" said Inspector Jameson. "Why is he evading arrest?"

"Because he knows he's innocent!"

"That's all very well," said the inspector. "I'm telling you plainly, Mr. Kenmore, that if we lay hands on Fowkes, we shall hold him in custody. Your brother is still missing, and there's nothing but that letter to prove that he's really still alive; and I don't place too much reliance on such letters. I mean to get at the boy himself."

"But—but you say that you can't even get in touch with this ship."

"Not at the moment—but we'll get in touch sooner or later," nodded the inspector. "I'm going to see the headmaster now. Would you care to come along, too?"

Kenmore went—not because he wanted to, but because he felt that it would look peculiar if he did not do so. And the scheming Sixth-Former's hopes were falling. He felt that he would like to choke this energetic inspector of the police.

It seemed very probable that his whole plan would fall through!



CHAPTER 10.

A Pressing Invitation!

LIONEL CORCORAN glanced significantly at Armstrong and Griffith.

The three chums of Study No. 12 had been within earshot while Inspector Jameson had been talking to "Walter" Kenmore, and, without eavesdropping, they had heard everything. If the inspector chose to talk like that in the open Triangle, it was only natural that others should hear him.

"Nipper was right!" said Corky thoughtfully. "It was better not to tell Fatty anything about this business."

Timothy Armstrong nodded.

"Yes, rather!" he agreed. "You heard what the inspector said? If they collar Fatty, they'll hold him in custody."

"And they'll continue to hold him until they've got hold of Kenmore, proving that he's really alive," said Corcoran. "We'd better await events before we give Fatty any hope."

"Let's go and tell Nipper and Tich, and those other Remove chaps," suggested Griffith.

None of the other Removites were in evidence, however. It seemed that Nipper had called a meeting of the entire Form, in the Ancient House Common-room. Afternoon lessons were just over, and the short November day was closing in—blustery, squally, and with every prospect of a gale developing.

There was a good deal of animation in the Junior Common-room. Reggie Pitt and all his merry men from the West House had come over, and the meeting was a full one. The only absentees were Gore-Pearce and one or two of his cronies. But as these rotters didn't count, their absence was not noticed.

"What's the idea?" asked Reggie Pitt politely. "Why drag us over here, Nipper?"

"Because there's something I want to tell you," replied Nipper briskly. "And as it affects the whole Remove, I thought that a Form-meeting would be the best thing."

Edward Oswald Handforth gave a snort.

"I expect it's about football?" he asked. "I've been questioning you until I'm tired, but it doesn't make any difference. What's all the mystery about?"

"There's no mystery, old man," said Nipper gently. "But I don't believe in

wasting a lot of breath, and in telling a thing three or four times over. We're all together now, so I can get busy."

"Thank goodness!" said Handforth tartly.

"First of all, I want to tell all you fellows of something that happened in Bannington yesterday evening," said Nipper. "It's not much—only a trifling incident, to my mind—but it has an important bearing on what I'm going to say afterwards."

"He's talking in riddles," growled Handforth.

However, the Remove listened with interest while Nipper told of that little episode in the fog, when the chums of Study C had saved the old man from falling into the road excavation.

"There was really nothing in it," concluded Nipper. "But the old boy seems to think that we saved his life."

"Well, I suppose you did, in a way," said Pitt.

"Oh, absolutely!" remarked Archie Glen-thorne. "I mean to say, if the dear old lad had side-slipped into the cavity, he would probably have broken a few bones. And, I mean to say, it's a frightfully serious thing when an old cove of that sort gets smashed up. Not much chance of recovery, what?"

"That's true enough," said Fullwood. "But what is all this leading to?"

"Yes, get to the point, Nipper, you ass!" said Handforth impatiently.

"I'm coming to it now," grinned Nipper. "Just before afternoon lessons I got a letter; it came by the midday post. As a matter of fact, it's an invitation for the whole Remove."

"What?"

"An invitation for dinner—to-night!" said Nipper.

"Great Scott!"

"I didn't say anything about it, because there was really no need," continued Nipper coolly. "I didn't see any reason why you fellows should be put off your stroke for afternoon lessons."

"Well, well!" said Travers. "You're not telling us, dear old fellow, that this old man has invited us all to dinner!"

"It seems that he's a pretty big sort of pot," said Nipper. "Sir Victor Blackwood, of Bannington Grange. Here's his letter. It's addressed to me, and he repeats his expressions of gratitude, and he says that he will be highly delighted if I can bring all my friends to dinner this evening, at the Grange."

"Good egg!"

"Begad! I rather thought the old boy was a sportsman!" said Sir Montie.

"Yes. But, hang it," protested Reggie Pitt, "we can't all pile on him like that, Nipper! There's a limit, you know! I dare say he's expecting about half a dozen."

"Don't you believe it!" said Nipper. "Here's what he says in the letter: 'Bring all your Form-fellows. I have an idea that there will be between twenty and thirty of you, and I am arranging accordingly. And you may promise them that there will be a very special feast'—"

"That sounds rather good!" said Fatty Little, licking his lips.

"Rather!"

"Good old Sir Victor!"

"That's what I call doing the thing in style!"

"Hear, hear!"

"He wants us to be there at about seven o'clock," continued Nipper, "and he promises us a high old time. Of course, you can see how it's happened. He's got this bee in his bonnet that we saved his life, and he wants to make some sort of return. Well, I don't see why we shouldn't accept the invitation, and have a spree."

"But can it be done?" asked Pitt dubiously. "Shall we be able to get leave?"

Nipper grinned.

"I've had a little chat with the Head," he said coolly.

"What?"

"You see, Sir Victor mentions in the letter that he is also writing to the Head, and I thought it just as well to go and have a little interview," proceeded Nipper. "I found that the Head had got the letter in front of him. I explained what had happened, and he graciously assured me that the whole Remove would be granted a special pass for this evening. As long as we're back by bed-time, there'll be no questions asked."

"Well, I'm jiggered!" roared Handforth. "And you kept this to yourself all the afternoon?"

"Well, why not?" asked Nipper blandly. "Old Crowell would have been very upset if we hadn't done any work in the Form-room this afternoon!"

"You cunning bounder!" said Tich Harborough. "I suppose you're right, though. We shouldn't have done much work if we had known about this earlier."

"Exactly!" nodded Nipper.

There was a great deal of excitement in the Remove—and everybody voted that the Head was a brick. And the Remove decided that Nipper was a corker for having arranged it so neatly. It was generally decided that tea would be missed—so that everybody would have an excellent appetite for the coming feast.

And in the middle of all this animation Corky & Co. arrived.



CHAPTER 11.

Remove Only!

WHAT'S all the excitement?" asked Lionel Corcoran, in astonishment.

"Fourth - Formers!" yelled somebody. "On them, you chaps!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Down with the Fourth!"

There was a rush for Corcoran and Armstrong and Griffith. But Corky held up a warning hand.

"Cheese it!" he protested. "You're not going to pounce on us like this, are you? There are only three of us!"

"Rats!" roared Handforth. "You had the nerve to come into our quarters, and you're going to get chucked out on your necks!"

"Rather!"

"Grab them, you chaps!"

"Pax!" howled Corcoran. "I've brought some news about Kenmore!"

"Oh!"

And Corcoran explained what he and his chums had overheard in the Triangle, shortly before. He added that it would be far better, in the circumstances, to let things rest just as they were, and Nipper agreed with this point of view.

"Inspector Jameson is evidently suspicious of something," said Nipper. "He doesn't quite take that letter of Kenmore's for granted."

"But it's genuine enough, isn't it?" asked Tommy Watson.

"I suppose so—no reason to doubt it, that I can see," said Nipper. "But you know what these police are—they must have solid evidence."

"Well, there's nothing for us to worry about," remarked Tich. "By the time we get back from Bannington this evening I dare say that ship will have been located, and Kenmore will have been taken off. Then, tomorrow, Fatty will be free to go back to the Blues."

"What do you mean—after you get back from Bannington?" asked Corcoran.

"Oh, we're invited out!" said Tich airily.

"Invited out?" said Armstrong. "All of you?"

"All of us!" said Handforth, with relish. "Naturally, you Fourth-Formers are clean out of it! We've been invited to dinner—at Sir Victor Blackwood's place—Bannington Grange. Jealous, aren't you?"

The Fourth-Formers looked a bit bewildered.

"If there's a big feed on, or anything like that, wouldn't it be a good wheeze to bury the hatchet?" suggested Corcoran. "There's nothing like a big party, you know, for having plenty of fun."

"Nothing doing, old man!" grinned Nipper. "This is exclusively a Remove invitation. You Fourth-Formers aren't even mentioned."

There were many eager voices ready to tell Corcoran & Co. of that invitation from Sir Victor Blackwood. The Fourth-Formers listened, and their faces became more and more rueful.

"I say!" protested Armstrong. "Be sports, you know! We might as well go with you!"

"Oh, all right, then!" said Nipper, with an air of resignation. "You can come with us, if you like."

"Eh?" said Handforth, with a start.

"Why not let them come, Handy?" asked Nipper.

"The whole Fourth Form?" said Corky.

"The whole Fourth Form—if it wants to!" nodded Nipper. "Where's the sense of being disagreeable?"

There was an immediate roar, in which indignation was the chief emotion, and Handforth went red.

"It's all rot!" he shouted. "I don't want to be unsociable, or anything like that, but Sir Victor distinctly mentions the Remove in his invitation; besides, he says that he's preparing for twenty or thirty guests. It'll mess everything up if all these silly Fourth-Formers crowd into the party!"

Nipper raised his eyebrows.

"Crowd into the party?" he said mildly. "Who's suggesting that the Fourth-Formers shall be in the party?"

"Why, you just said that they could come!"

"So they can come," agreed Nipper promptly. "And why not? There's nothing to stop them coming, if they want to. Of course, they mustn't expect to be admitted into Bannington Grange——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

There were many yells of laughter, and Handforth looked relieved.

"You spoofing ass!" he growled. "You've been pulling our legs! You mean, the Fourth-Formers can come to Bannington, but they can't join the party?"

"Exactly."

Lionel Corcoran sniffed.

"I thought there was a catch in it somewhere!" he said, with regret. "Oh, all right, then! Blow you! Go and have your feed! I don't suppose it will be a particularly gorgeous one."

"The fox and the sour grapes!" grinned Travers. "You can't come to the feed, dear old fellow, and so you run the feed down. Well, well! We Removites don't mind a bit!"

Corky & Co. took their departure, and before long the whole Fourth was talking about the Remove's luck. It was generally voiced, in the Fourth, that it was decidedly "thick." If Sir Victor Blackwood had had any sense, he would have invited the entire Junior School.

"It's merely one of the injustices of this sad world!" sighed Corcoran. "Chance places Nipper and those other chaps in Bannington High Street so that they can prevent a perfect stranger from falling into a hole in the road—and, presto, the whole Remove is invited to a swell feed! Is that what you call just?"

"It would be just if we had been invited, too!" said Buster Boots, of the Modern House.

In the meantime, the Removites were busily preparing themselves for the occasion. It was, indeed, an exceptional event. For it was very seldom that the entire Form was given a permit to stay out of bounds until bed-time.

Prep that evening was decidedly hurried. The Removites got through their work frantically, and then they dashed upstairs to change. Naturally, they got into their "Sunday best," and when they emerged into the Triangle, to join forces, they were very immaculate, and very clean.

It was a fine, moonlit evening, with only an occasional group of ragged clouds scurrying

across the sky. The wind was high—a regular gale, in fact.

In spite of this, however, all the fellows had decided to go on their bicycles—mainly because there was no train suitable. The early evening train would have landed them too early, and the next train would be too late; and as they didn't want to walk, and as the roads were bone dry, cycling seemed to be the order.

Handforth & Co., of course, were ready with the Austin Seven. Tich Harborough and Vivian Travers, had their motor-bikes—and Nipper had a motor-bike now, too. In fact, Nipper's machine was the envy of all the other Removites, being a powerful racing model, capable of excessively high speeds. Not that Nipper was ever reckless when riding.

The bulk of the juniors got off first—that is, the push cyclists. Handforth, and the lucky ones with motor-bikes, would easily overtake them long before they got to Bannington.

Crowds of Fourth-Formers stood about in the Triangle, in their overcoats, looking on, and making jealous comments.

But it was no good. They were out of this treat—distinctly and positively out of it!



CHAPTER 12.

Bannington Grange!

“WOA! Steady, Dobbin!” said Handforth coaxingly.

A gust of wind, sweeping broadside

across the road, had nearly knocked the wheel of the Austin Seven out of his hands. The little car swerved giddily, and Church and McClure and Archie Glenthorne gasped.

“Go easy, Handy!” said Church. “There’s no particular hurry!”

“Absolutely not!” said Archie stoutly. “I mean to say, have a care, laddie!”

“Rats!” said Handforth. “It was only the wind. I’m not driving fast.”

It had been Handforth’s suggestion that Archie should accompany them—for Archie was exceedingly neat in his very best clothing, and he had been heard to express grave doubts about using his bicycle. So Handforth, in the goodness of his heart, had invited him into the Austin Seven.

And now Handforth, with that same goodness of heart, was feeling a little sorry for the Fourth-Formers.

“Hard cheese on those chaps, you know,” he said. “Naturally, they couldn’t come with us—too many of ’em. All the same, they must feel pretty rotten.”

“Why, you were the loudest of anybody to kick up a fuss when Corcoran suggested that the Fourth should go with us!” said Church, in wonder. “And now you’re sorry for the chaps!”

“Oh, well, I daresay they’ll get over it,” said Handforth.

He triumphantly shot past a group of cyclists, who sent up a loud yell as the Austin Seven sped past.

“Wait for us, Handy!” sang out somebody. “Don’t forget the arrangement!”

But Handforth hadn’t forgotten. It had been previously agreed that whoever got to Bannington Grange first was to wait for the others. Nobody was to go in in advance. They had been invited in a body, and so they would present themselves in a body.

Before the start there had been a little confusion as to where Bannington Grange was exactly situated. Nobody seemed to know the house. Then Nipper remembered having seen some drive gates just on the outskirts of Bannington, on the Caistowe road, and a consultation of the Ordnance map proved that Bannington Grange was situated here.

The juniors then understood why they were not familiar with the place. For they very seldom used the road which led from Bannington to Caistowe. If they went to Caistowe from St. Frank’s, they went through Bellton.

Now, in order to reach their destination, they had to enter Bannington, reach the main cross roads, and then turn. It did not take them long, after that, to reach the top of a sharp hill, and to find themselves at the drive gates.

Handforth & Co., in the Austin Seven, arrived only a few moments after Nipper and Tich and Travers, on their motor-bikes.

“Better wait here, I suppose?” said Handforth, as he climbed out, and turned up the collar of his overcoat. “I say! There’s a pretty stiff breeze blowing!”

“Regular gale!” said Tich, nodding.

“I bet it’ll be nearly half an hour before those other fatheads turn up!” went on Handforth, looking down the road. “Not a sign of them yet!”

“Well, give them a chance, old man,” smiled Nipper. “And be thankful that you haven’t had to pedal against this wind. Plenty of time yet—we’re early.”

Handforth turned, and inspected the drive curiously.

“H’m! Pretty gloomy-looking place,” he commented. “Where’s the Grange, anyhow? I can’t see any lights.”

“We’d better prop this gate open, and then get along to the house,” suggested Travers. “We needn’t go in; we can wait about near by, until the others come up.”

So this was the plan they adopted. After securely wedging the gate, they proceeded up the drive, which was full of black, mysterious shadows. There were tall trees on either hand, and they were blowing about wildly in the gale. Presently, they turned a bend, and came within full view of the Grange.

It was an old, gaunt building, standing quite alone, although there were dark clumps of trees close at hand, on every side. The garden, it seemed, was a mere wilderness—but



Something big and heavy lumbered out of the shadows, and the juniors, to their utter amazement, saw that it was a cow. "This is Cissie, my pet!" explained Sir Victor. "Come, Cissie!" he added, and the cow walked up to the table.

not much of this could be seen, owing to heavy laurel hedges which grew round the front drive, concealing most of the other garden property from view.

The house was of Tudor style, and it rose gaunt and sinister against the background of the night sky. Only one feeble light was showing in all that great building—and this was from the fanlight over the front door.

"Rummy!" said Handforth, frowning. "Doesn't look very inviting, I must say! I hope it's a bit more cheery inside!"

"You can never tell with these old country houses," said Nipper. "I expect the main reception hall is at the back, and that's why we can't see any lights. Anyhow, this is Bannington Grange—no question about that."

"Where's the moat?" asked Tich, peering forward. "Isn't this a moated grange? It looks ghostly enough to be one!"

Any further discussion was difficult, for at that moment the rest of the Remove arrived—noisily. With a great sounding of cycle bells, the juniors came pedalling into the drive, and when, at last, they joined the first arrivals, they dismounted and looked about them in some considerable surprise.

"Ugh! The place gives me the creeps!" said Tommy Watson, as he surveyed the dismal-looking building.

"Never mind about that," said Nipper briskly. "I don't suppose it'll give you the creeps once you're inside. Is everybody here?"

"All of us!" sang out Fullwood. "There aren't any stragglers. We came in a clump."

"Good enough!" said Nipper. "Shove your bikes against these laurel hedges, and put all the lamps out. Then we'll present ourselves at the front door en masse."

"I suppose this really is Bannington Grange?" asked Harry Gresham dubiously.

"Of course it is!" said Handforth. "What did you think it was?"

"Well, I don't know," said Gresham. "But after Sir Victor Blackwood had invited us all here for a merry feast, I expected something a bit brighter than this!"

"Same here!" remarked Jimmy Potts.

"Oh, well, it's no good standing about here in the wind, jawing," said Nipper. "We'd better get indoors. It's just on the stroke of time, so we shall be punctual."

He led the way up the wide steps of the old house, and all the other juniors grouped themselves behind. After a little trouble Nipper found an enormous handle, near the side of the great door. He pulled it, and, dimly and vaguely, they could hear the clanging of a bell far away within the building. And that note had a solemn, eerie sound.

Even Nipper was beginning to feel just a bit dubious. They had all come here expecting gaiety and lightheartedness—and they found this gloomy building, with the wind whistling and moaning round its many angles. It wasn't at all the kind of place they had expected.

They waited, but no sounds came from within the old building. Only the shrieking of the boisterous wind, and the sighing of the trees, came to their ears!



Something big and heavy lumbered out of the s
"This is Cissie, my pet!" explained Sir Vi



CHAPTER 13.

A Strange Dinner Party!

HANDFORTH suddenly uttered an ejaculation.

"By George!" he said, with a catch in

his voice. "I've got it!"

"Got what?" asked Church.

"I'll bet we've made a mistake!" said Handforth. "That invitation wasn't for this evening at all! Where's that letter, Nipper? I'll bet we're invited for to-morrow night—or one day next week! That explains why everything is so dark——"

"Not a bad theory, old man, but it happens to be wrong," said Nipper. "The invitation is for this evening. I made absolutely certain of that. In fact, I rang up Sir Victor, and told him that we should be com-

outlined against that mysterious background.

"My only hat!" muttered Handforth.

"This is Bannington Grange, isn't it?" asked Nipper steadily. "Sir Victor Blackwood lives here, I think?"

"Ay, young sir, that's right enough!" said the man who had opened the door. "My master bids ye welcome. Enter, all!"

"Thanks!" said Nipper. "All serene, you chaps!" he added, in a cheery voice, as he turned. "Come on! Pile in!"

"Good egg!"

"Let's get in out of the cold!"

"Hear, hear!"

The juniors pressed up the wide steps, and they soon found themselves in the lofty hall of the Grange. It was a big, wide hall, with a straight staircase leading upwards on one side, and with a balcony running right along the back. There were oak panels, but it was difficult to distinguish anything clearly, owing to the fact that the only light was provided by a single candle, which guttered and smoked on a small table in the very centre of that big space.

The hall was all shadows, and there were cutting draughts sweeping through the place, whining under the doorways, and occasionally causing the candle flame to go blue, until it was nearly on the point of extinction.

The man who had let the juniors in was standing near the candle. He was an extraordinary-looking man—lean, leathery, with a big hump on his back, and with a hatchet-face that seemed positively forbidding in that flickering candle light. His eyes were deeply sunken, and he had a great hooked nose, and ears that stood out widely from the sides of his head.

"I am the butler!" said the man, fixing his burning eyes upon the juniors. "My name is Tombs, should you desire to address me."

"Tombs!" said Handforth, with a shiver. "My only sainted aunt!"

The guests were all astonished at this strange reception. Tombs, the butler, was so mysterious—so menacing in his aspect. As they peeled off their overcoats and scarves he took them, one by one, and flung them contemptuously into a heap in a corner. One or two of the fellows were inclined to protest, but the others silenced them by looks. After all, it was hardly the thing to question the management of their host's household.

Now that the juniors were growing accustomed to the dim light, they could tell that the hall was in a very dilapidated state.



juniors, to their utter amazement, saw that it was a cow. "ssie!" he added, and the cow walked up to the table.

ing. He was delighted, and said that everything would be ready for us."

"That settles it!" said Reggie Pitt. "The party is to-night, you chaps."

"Well, it's jolly queer, then!" said Handforth, frowning. "Where's that bell?"

But before the big handle could be operated again there came the sound of heavy bolts being shot back, followed by the clanking of a great chain. Then the door swung slowly open, revealing a dim, ill-lighted hall. A bent, misshapen figure stood there, vaguely

Some of the panels had been torn down, revealing the bare walls; along one side of the hall there were piles of planks, and even heaps of mould and sand. Of furniture there was practically none; nothing except that small table in the centre, resting on an insignificant mat. The floor otherwise was bare and cold.

Thud, thud, thud!

Sounding dully from somewhere upstairs came a mysterious beating. It continued monotonously for a few seconds, and then dramatically ceased.

"Look!" whispered Church, clutching at Handforth's arm.

He was staring at Tombs, the butler. The old man was looking up towards the top of the staircase; his eyes were alight with terror, and his hands were shaking as though he had the ague.

"What—what was that?" asked Castleton, with a catch in his voice.

"Come!" said Tombs suddenly. "You are ready, young sirs? Then come—come! I bid ye follow me."

"Listen!" panted Harry Gresham.

Thud, thud, thud!

"What is it?" asked two or three juniors. Tombs raised his voice.

"Come, I tell ye!" he said hoarsely. "Sir Victor awaits his guests!"

He picked up the candle, and strode away towards the back of the hall, leaving all else in darkness. The juniors crowded after him, their hearts beating rapidly, their minds filled with misgiving and vague alarm.

"I don't like this place!" muttered Jimmy Potts, grasping Travers' arm. "There's something—something squiffy about it!"

"For the love of Samson!" breathed Vivian Travers. "I'll admit it's the rummiest dinner party I've ever been to, dear old fellow! Well, well! We live and learn, don't we?"

None of the fellows felt inclined to remain in the hall after the butler had departed. Those at the rear found it necessary to grip themselves hard—for there were shadows behind them—shadows, and inky blackness. The wind whistled down the staircase, caught them round the necks, and now and again it felt as though icy hands were clutching at them.

They soon found themselves in a great corridor, oak-panelled like the hall, and where the draught came shooting down in boisterous gusts. Tombs found it necessary to shield the candle flame with his cupped hand.

After reaching the end of this long corridor, he halted and stood aside near a pair of big double doors.

"Enter all!" he said, with a kind of gloating note in his voice. "My master is waiting! And the feast is ready!"



CHAPTER 14.

Further Surprises!

SOME of the juniors hung back, hesitating. Their one desire was to get out of this place, to mount their bicycles, and to pedal at full speed back to St. Frank's.

"Ah, my boys—my dear boys!" said a genial, cheery voice. "Welcome to Bannington Grange! I am indeed delighted to have you here—to cheer me up amid my gloomy surroundings."

A new figure had appeared in the doorway—a figure familiar to Nipper and Tommy Watson and Tregellis-West. He was an elderly man, dressed in an old suit of dress clothes. His face was beaming with benevolence.

"Sir Victor!" said Nipper quickly.

Sir Victor Blackwood chuckled.

"My young friends who helped me so nobly in the fog!" he said. "Splendid! And you have brought all your Form-fellows? Good—good! Nothing can have pleased me more! But come in! Do not stand out in this draughty corridor. Come into the warmth and comfort beyond these doors."

"Rather, sir!"

"Thanks, awfully, sir!"

The Removites pressed forward, glad enough to find that Sir Victor Blackwood was really here. Many of them had begun to doubt it! They had been getting all sorts of wild notions into their heads. But now these were dispelled.

They went into the great dining-hall, through the big doorway. But if they expected to find warmth and comfort, as Sir Victor had intimated, they were disappointed. For when they got inside they beheld a gloom that was even deeper and more awesome than any they had yet experienced.

It was a tremendous apartment, this dining-hall, and it lay in complete and utter darkness, except for a small patch of light in the very centre, where two candles were burning at each end of the long table.

"Be seated, my young friends!" said Sir Victor boisterously. "There are places for all at my hospitable table. I am an old man—a lonely man—and therefore you must excuse certain limitations that will be apparent in the menu. But Tombs, my butler, is an excellent cook in his way, and I am assured that he will give us of his best."

"Well, we're going to have a feed, anyhow!" murmured Fatty Little, with relief.

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Frankly, the youthful guests were at a loss.

Their host was geniality itself, and it was exceedingly bad form to make any complaints. They had accepted this invitation, and it was up to them to be on their best behaviour. They were guests under Sir Victor Blackwood's roof, and they did not forget their manners. They were all anxious to make comments, but even Handforth held himself in check.

They seated themselves round the long table, and many of the juniors were startled to find that they were called upon to sit on rough boxes. There were a few chairs, but not nearly enough to go round. The other seats were plain deal boxes, packing cases, and similar remarkable things.

From a distance the table had seemed fairly satisfactory, but at close quarters the guests received another shock. For, instead of a tablecloth, the festive board was covered with many sheets of newspaper! And the table itself was made up of a number of rickety trestles.

There were knives and forks in plenty, but they were old and battered and dull. Many of them, indeed, were of the poorest possible quality.

There was no carpet on the floor—nothing but the bare boards. And as for warmth and comfort, there was none. No fire, no heat of any description. That great hall was as cold as an open-sided cowshed. Vaguely, in the background, were two or three doorways, and the wind came whistling through, shooting across the floor, causing the candles to flicker and gutter.

Sir Victor sat at the head of the table, and as soon as all the juniors were seated he rubbed his hands together with gleeful satisfaction, chuckling deeply.

"Ha, ha!" he exclaimed gloatingly. "This is wonderful! A crowd of young people at my festive board! My dear boys, you cannot imagine the pleasure this gives me!"

"Well, it hasn't given us much yet!" murmured Handforth, shivering.

"For once my loneliness is relieved!" continued Sir Victor, bending forward and looking round at his guests. "Such open faces! Such expectancy! Ah! You are looking forward to the feast, eh? Good! I will warrant that the feast will be a surprise to you, one and all! I can guarantee, my young friends, that it will be——"

Thud, thud, thud!

As those mysterious sounds came from somewhere overhead, Sir Victor Blackwood broke off in his speech, and a wild, fearful look came into his eyes.

"Is anything the matter, sir?" asked Reggie Pitt quickly.

"No, no!" panted Sir Victor, clenching his fists tightly. "Nothing—nothing! What do you mean, boy? What can be the matter—here?" He bent forward, and his voice became fierce and hard. "I tell you, there is nothing the matter? Nothing whatever! How dare you ask such a foolish question?"

"I—I'm sorry, sir!" said Pitt, taken aback. "I didn't mean——"

"There, there!" said the host, his face breaking into a genial smile again. "Let's say no more. Everything is quite all right!"

He clapped his hands.

"Tombs, Tombs!" he shouted boisterously. "Where are you, you old slowcoach? Bring in the feast, Tombs! We are waiting, and we are hungry!"

"Master, I am here!"

The voice of Tombs came from the blackness at the back of the dining hall, and the hunchbacked butler came shuffling forward, carrying a great pile of soup plates.

He went round the table, placing a soup plate in front of each junior, and it was noticed that all these plates were of different design, and many of them were cracked and chipped.

"Excellent!" beamed Sir Victor. "We are starting, boys! Come, Tombs, the soup! Cannot you see that we are impatient?"

Tombs vanished into the gloom, only to reappear again after a moment or two. And now the startled guests could see that he was carrying a great zinc watering-can, from which clouds of steam were arising!

Never in all their experience had the St. Frank's juniors seen soup served up in this extraordinary fashion!



CHAPTER 15.

The Feast!

"GOD gad!" ejaculated Archie Glenthorne, aghast.

Archie was one of the most polite fellows under the sun, but for the life of him he could not repress that ejaculation. His monocle had dropped out of his eye, and he was staring bleakly at his soup plate. Tombs had just filled it, and was now passing on to another junior along that side of the table.

"I mean to say—what?" gurgled Archie feebly.

He dipped the spoon hesitatingly into the soup, and there was a fascinated expression in his eyes. All along the table other juniors were uttering murmurs and gasps.

"Go ahead, boys!" invited Sir Victor cordially. "Do not wait for me! Surely there is no need for us to be formal? You are hungry, and so you can proceed."

But the guests did not feel inclined to proceed. They gazed at their steaming plates in consternation. For, unless their eyesight was defective, and their sense of smell warped, their plates were filled with steaming hot water, on the top of which floated, in a forlorn kind of way, a few odds and ends of potato-peelings!

"Great Scott!"

"We—we can't drink this stuff!"

"What is it, for goodness' sake?"

"My only topper!"

If the juniors had been uneasy before, they were now positively staggered. It had been amazing enough for Sir Victor to have his soup served out of a watering-can; but it was startling to find that this "soup" was nothing but hot water.

"Come, come, boys!" shouted Sir Victor. "Let the feast begin!"

"But—but what is it, sir?" burst out Handforth.

Sir Victor frowned.

"When I was a boy, I was taught that such questions were the very essence of bad manners at the table of one's host!" he said severely. "But since you appear to be curious, I will inform you that this liquid is Tombs' special vegetable soup."

"Help!" gurgled Reggie Pitt.

One or two of the fellows dipped their spoons into the hot water, and then took sips. They hardly knew what else to do. At their host's table they could not refuse to partake of the food that he provided; but it was something of an ordeal. They found that the hot water was insipid and brackish, and it had more than a suggestion of a fishy taste, too.

Suddenly there was a great commotion in the darkness, at the end of the big apartment. Everybody started up, looking round

—glad enough to have some excuse for leaving that appalling "soup."

"What's that?" shouted half a dozen voices.

Crash! Thud! Bang!

The floor seemed to shake. Something enormously heavy was moving out of the shadows at the end of the room—a bulky, mysterious object. At the same time, the juniors became aware of a heavy breathing, as though some great animal had got loose.

"Quick! Let's bolt!" gasped one of the juniors, in a frantic voice. "I've had enough of this!"

"Foolish boy!" thundered Sir Victor. "Are you afraid of a mere pet? Tombs, why did you allow Cissie to come in?"

"Cissie!" babbled Handforth, as he stared.

For he had just caught sight of Sir Victor's pet. The beast had lumbered forward towards the table, and Handforth and the other juniors were stupefied to see that it was a cow! A big, brown cow, that seemed far more confused than any of Sir Victor's guests.

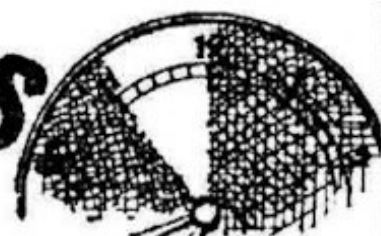
"Come, Cissie!" said Sir Victor soothingly. "Good girl—good girl! I am afraid you are too early. There are no pieces for you to pick up just yet!"



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"Oh, my goodness!" murmured Fullwood. "I generally allow Cissie to come in at the end of a meal and wander round the table, picking up any pieces that might have fallen," explained Sir Victor cheerfully. "But I am really afraid that Cissie is a nuisance this evening." He wagged his finger admonishingly at the cow. "You surely know your manners better than that, Cissie, my girl! Away with you! Back to your basket!"

Tombs came to the rescue and shoo-ed the cow out of the room—and away into the dismal shadows. They could hear the animal lumbering down a corridor.

"A pity—a great pity!" exclaimed Sir Victor. "The soup is cold now, and we cannot partake of it. Tombs—Tombs! Where are you, man? Clear these plates away! Let the next course be served!"

But Tombs was evidently busy with Cissie, the cow.

"Confound the man!" said Sir Victor, frowning. "Wait, my boys! I shall not be long! I will bring the next course in myself."

He left the table and shuffled away through one of the draughty open doorways. Immediately after he had gone there was a buzz.

"Mad!" said Handforth huskily. "Mad as a hatter!"

"This place is a lunatic asylum!" exclaimed Castleton. "I believe Tombs is mad, too! What the dickens shall we do, you fellows?"

"Well, we'd better hold ourselves ready to bolt—if necessary!" said Nipper. "There's not much doubt that Sir Victor is dotty—although, goodness knows, there was no sign of it last night, when we saved him from that trench in Bannington High Street! Who on earth would ever believe that he would invite us to a feed like this?"

"Feed!" wailed Fatty Little. "Do you call this a feed? I didn't eat any tea—so that I should have a big appetite! And now I'm starving!"

Thud—thud—thud!

"Listen!" said Tich Harborough. "There's that rummy knocking again! There's somebody upstairs, you chaps! This is a regular house of mystery, if you like!"

"I don't like it at all, dear old cheese!" said Archie Glenthorne. "Absolutely not! I mean to say, it makes a chappie go sort of wonky at the kneecaps!"

"Shush! Sir Victor's coming back!"

They fell silent as they heard the shuffling footsteps of the host, and a moment later Sir Victor returned, accompanied by Tombs. They were both carrying enormous trays, and then they proceeded to place plates in front of the schoolboy guests.

"Ye gods and little fishes!" gurgled Reggie Pitt. "What—what's this?"

But he needn't have asked. Each plate contained a couple of kippers' tails and a small dog biscuit! The second course of this remarkable feast was, if anything, a considerable degree worse than the first!

But before anybody could even make a pretence of eating, a new sound came to their ears. It floated down from somewhere upstairs—somewhere in the distant recesses of the old building.

A low, moaning sound, terrifying and eerie. Then, abruptly, it changed to a wild, piercing shriek!



CHAPTER 16.

The Mystery Deepens!

"WHAT'S that?" shouted Handforth, leaping to his feet.

"Somebody's being murdered!" gasped

De Valerie.

"Listen—listen!"

Over half the fellows were on their feet now, and their faces had turned pale. Their eyes were alight with consternation, and even fear.

"Hold!" thundered Sir Victor Blackwood. "Stay where you are, boys! Do not move! Have you forgotten yourselves? Have you overlooked the fact that you are my guests?"

"What's happening upstairs, Sir Victor?" asked Nipper bluntly.

"That is my business—and not yours!" snapped the old man.

"That's all very well, sir!" said Handforth. "But somebody is being tortured upstairs! And we want to know what's going on! As for this feed, it's a fake! What do you take us for—dogs?"

"No, by gad!" shouted Sir Victor. "You are not dogs! You are not old enough to be dogs! You are puppies—insolent puppies! Where were you brought up? What of your manners? You are here, at my table, and——"

"But we're not going to eat dog biscuits!" shouted Handforth excitedly. "And you don't suppose that we'll eat those kippers' tails, do you?"

"Humour him, old man—humour him!" murmured Pitt. "You'll only make things worse if you get his rag out!"

There was, indeed, something very dangerous-looking about Sir Victor. His eyes were burning, and a good many of those juniors were half-scared out of their wits. They wished, with all their hearts, that they were outside, under the open sky. Yet how could they get out? The corridors were inky black, and perhaps they would lose their way if they made a sudden rush.

"There, there!" said Sir Victor, with sudden calmness. "Forgive me, boys! I am sorry! I lost my temper—and my own manners are even worse than yours. Come! Let us continue the feast."

He gave a signal to Tombs, who was hovering in the background, and the butler went round the table and planted something fresh on each plate. It was a little bunch of horrid-looking meat, stuck on a stick.

"Cats' meat!" gasped Harry Gresham.

This, in fact was exactly what the meat was! The juniors gazed at it distastefully—disgustedly.

"Look here!" said Handforth in a grim voice. "We've had enough of this, you chaps! We're not going to eat kippers' tails and cats' meat!"

"Not likely!" went up a general chorus.

"Sir Victor is making fools of us!" continued Handforth indignantly. "We've done our best to humour him up till now—but I'm blowed if I'll eat cats' meat to humour anybody!"

"Hear, hear!"

"He's mad!"

"We'd better get out of here while we're still safe!"

"Silence!" bellowed Sir Victor. "Sit down, all of you! I invited you to my festive board, and you shall eat of my viands!"

Thud—thud—thud!

As those sounds came mysteriously from the upper quarters, Sir Victor Blackwood paused, and he shrank back. Then a scream sounded—a loud, long, terrifying scream. It came from upstairs, too.

"Come on!" roared Handforth. "We've got to look into this! This—this madman has got some prisoners up there, and they're being tortured! Rescue, Remove!"

"Hurrah!"

Thoroughly excited, and glad enough to take any sort of action, the boys swarmed towards the big double doorway. They took no notice of Sir Victor's shouts, and Tombs, who tried to bar the way, was rudely pushed aside. Nipper and Handforth and Travers had grabbed at the candles, and now they led the way out into the big, draughty corridor.

Handforth's candle went out at once, but the others kept alight.

"Stop—stop!" panted Sir Victor. "Do not dare to go upstairs! I forbid it! This is my house, and I will not be disobeyed! Go upstairs at your peril!"

"That proves it!" yelled Handforth. "There's something upstairs he doesn't want us to see! Come on! Don't take any notice of him!"

They went swarming along the corridor, and by the time they got to the big hall the last of the candles had gone out. They were in darkness—except for some moonbeams which came streaming through the windows.

Indeed, they soon found that the moonlight was fairly strong, and, once they had grown accustomed to the gloom, they could see their way about fairly distinctly. But, in the moonlight, the old house was more mysterious and eerie than ever.

"Listen!" shouted Nipper. "Those shrieks again! Come on, Remove! There's something terrible happening in this house!"

"Wait!" shouted Travers. "I've got an idea! What about our bicycle lamps? Wouldn't it be better to grab a few, and light them? Then we shall be able to see what we're doing,"

"No, no!" replied Nipper. "Never mind about the lamps! We can see in the moonlight—and I've got an electric torch on me."

He had an idea that the bulk of the fellows would remain outside, once they reached the open. They would not care to come back into this house of mystery. So with a rush Nipper and a number of others went pelting up the wide stairs, Nipper switching on his torch as they did so.

There came a sudden creaking and splintering of wood.

"Look out!" howled Handforth.

The stairs seemed to sag, and then they dropped away from under the juniors.

For a second it seemed that there was going to be a big disaster. But the whole section of the staircase came to a jolting stop, and the boys only received a bit of a shock.

"The house is falling to bits!" gasped Reggie Pitt.

"And we can't get upstairs now—because there's a big gap!" said Fullwood. "I say, let's clear out!"

"No fear!" roared Handforth. "We can't clear out until we've rescued those poor beggars upstairs! They're being tortured, or something!"

They found that they could climb over that gap in the stairs. There seemed to be no danger of a further crash, and, swarming up, the juniors succeeded in reaching that wide balcony. They had forgotten all about Sir Victor Blackwood and Tombs by now. Nobody knew what had happened to those strange old men.

Running and shouting, they went along the upper passages, searching the rooms, and seeking to find an explanation of those terrifying screams and mysterious thuds.

To their intense amazement, they found every room empty—barren of furniture. The moonlight streamed into most of them, and Nipper, in any case, had his powerful electric torch, which he was using to advantage.

From room to room went the juniors, and before long they had covered every inch of the upper floors. And they discovered nothing—absolutely nothing!

For all those upper rooms were empty and deserted. There was nobody there to account for the shrieks or the thuds. What could it mean?



CHAPTER 17.

The Voices in the Night!

"WELL I'm jiggered!" said Handforth breathlessly.

"There's only one possible explanation!" ejaculated Nipper. "There's a back staircase, and while we were searching the front part of the house Sir Victor and Tombs



The hunchback looked very sinister and mysterious in the flickering light as he greeted the schoolboy guests. "I am the butler!" he said, fixing his burning eyes upon the juniors. "My name is Tombs, should you desire to address me!"

must have come up the back stairs and carried their victims off."

"My goodness!"

"What shall we do now?"

"Get out of here!" said somebody. "It's—it's giving me the horrors!"

"We're not going out until we've solved this mystery!" roared Handforth. "Look here! Half of us had better go down the back stairs, and the other half by the front. We'll search the whole house—and we'll keep on searching until we have captured those lunatics! They're mad—both of them!"

"Listen!" gasped Tich, suddenly.

Nearly all the juniors were standing on a wide landing, where there were two great windows overlooking the front of the house, and where the moonlight came streaming in. They all caught their breath in as Tich shouted, and there was a tense pause.

"There's somebody laughing!" muttered Fullwood. "There are voices out there—outside in the grounds."

"Listen!" urged Nipper.

Now they could hear it more clearly—loud, prolonged, hilarious laughter. Yet there was nothing insane about that sound—nothing strange or uncanny. It was just a continuous yell of boyish laughter.

"What the dickens——" began Nipper.

He caught his breath in sharply, dashed to the nearest window, and flung it open.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Poor old Remove!"

"Ever been spoofed, you fellows?"

"Spoofed!" gurgled Handforth faintly.

At those windows the Removites stood staring down. They were looking at the weed-grown gravel, in front of the wide steps. And they could see crowds of figures down there—figures which they easily recognised as belonging to Lionel Corcoran and Buster Boots and a number of other Fourth-Formers of St. Frank's.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ever been had?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Poor old Remove!"

The laughter was louder than ever, and Nipper clutched at the window-sill, his brain reeling.

"Dished!" he murmured giddily. "Oh, my only sainted aunt! Dished and spoofed! It's a jape, you chaps—and we swallowed it whole!"

"A jape!" said Handforth dazedly. "But—but what about those screams we heard? And all those thuds?"

"Come on!" shouted Reggie Pitt. "Let's go down and get an explanation."

With a rush the juniors poured off the landing, with Nipper in the lead. Most of the Remove fellows were feeling intensely relieved—and calmed. The shock of this disclosure had hit them like a blow; but, at the same time, they could not help feeling relieved. All the horror had gone out of the atmosphere now. All the mystery had been dispelled. Bannington Grange was not such a house of terrors as they had believed!

Somehow, they got down the stairs, nearly tumbling over one another in the process, and then the whole flood of Removites swept out into the moonlight, and down the steps. A warning yell went up.

"Look out, Fourth!" shouted Corcoran. "They're coming for us!"

"Let 'em come!" roared Boots. "We're here in full force!"

But the Removites were not warlike; they were only after information.

"You tricky bounders!" ejaculated Nipper breathlessly. "You've dished us!"

"Exactly!" grinned Corky. "A little bit of revenge, my sons, for the way you marooned us on the houseboat last week."

"Great Scott!"

"Things are pretty even now," continued Lionel Corcoran coolly. "Well, my sons, what do you think of it? Not bad for a jape, eh? I'll bet we put the wind up you!"

"Kats!" roared Handforth. "We weren't scared!"

"Cheese it, Handy!" grinned Nipper. "We have got to give these Fourth-Formers best—for once. We may not have been exactly scared, but, by Jove, a good many of us were windy!"

"Spoken like a man!" chuckled John Busterfield Boots.

"But how did you do it?" asked Nipper. "What about Sir Victor——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

A loud roar went up at the mention of Sir Victor's name.

"Sorry, old man, but there's no Sir Victor," explained Corcoran gently. "His name's Blackwood all right, and he's a very respectable old boy; but he happens to be the caretaker of this place."

"My hat!"

"The caretaker!"

"Great Scott!"

"You see," said Corky, "this old house is mine."

"Yours!"

"Or, to put it more accurately, it belongs to the Blue Crusaders Club," said Corcoran, nodding. "The place has been empty for years, and I bought it for the club soon after the players came to Bannington. At the rear it overlooks the Stronghold, and it's only a minute's walk right down into the enclosure. Very handy, you see, to be used as a club-house."

"Oh!"

"Strictly speaking, the workmen are here, making all sorts of improvements and alterations," continued Corky. "Really, it's quite bright and cheery. But we made it as gloomy as possible, with only a few flickering candles, and we left all the doors open so that there were plenty of draughts."

"And gave us kippers' tails and cats' meat for a feed!" roared Fatty Little indignantly.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Somehow, we thought you wouldn't really sample the feast," said Bob Christine, with a chuckle.

NEXT WEDNESDAY!



"It was easy enough to wangle," said Corcoran. "I happened to meet old Blackwood, you know, and when he told me how you fellows had saved him from that trench, I got an idea. So I concocted that letter and spoofed you——"

"And spoofed the Head, too!" said Nipper, with a start.

Lionel Corcoran shrugged his shoulders.

"What does it matter?" he said calmly. "The Head will never know, will he? Personally, I reckon that old Blackwood played his part well. The butler is really named Jackson, and that hump on his back is a lot of padding. He's the foreman of the job, and one of the best of fellows."

"But these shrieks—and thuds?" asked Handforth.

"Oh, we made those," grinned Corky. "While you were sitting down to the feast we were doing the effects outside—getting

that cow ready, and the hot water, and all the rest of it. Some of us went upstairs and thudded on the floors, and the shrieks were pretty realistic, weren't they?"

Nipper impulsively thrust out his hand.

"Shake, Corky!" he said warmly. "I'm jiggered if you're not a credit to St. Frank's!"

"Thanks!" grinned Corcoran. "No ill feeling, is there?"

"Rather not!" said Nipper. "You're the kind of japer we like, and the Remove hereby formally admits that it has been done brown!"

"THE ROTTER'S AWAKENING!"

As a Sixth-Former at St. Frank's, Simon Kenmore was a rotter and a bully, treated with scorn and contempt by the Junior School. Now, in his rôle of "Walter" Kenmore, he finds himself the hero of the Junior School; cheered by the fellows who hitherto have loathed him—and who would still loathe him if they knew he was not Simon Kenmore's brother, but Simon himself!

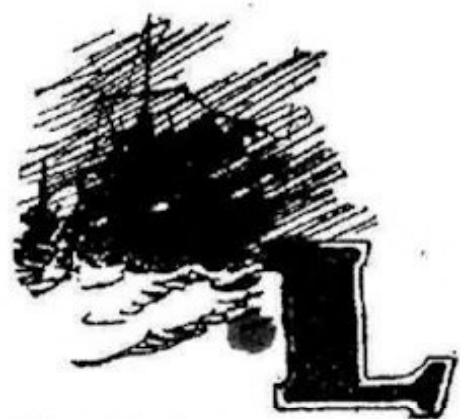
Kenmore realises that; realises, too—sub-consciously at first, perhaps—that he doesn't want to be loathed. He wants to be liked, to be cheered. In brief, a great change is slowly coming over Simon Kenmore!

Next week's powerful yarn will grip readers. They will follow Kenmore's adventures breathlessly. And they will chortle over the Fourth Form's discomfiture when the Remove "puts it across" them with the funniest jape of the term!

"WHAT'S WRONG WITH THE ROVERS?"

Another thrilling instalment of this popular serial which introduces Nelson Lee and Nipper—as detectives!

ORDER IN ADVANCE!



CHAPTER 18.

The Signal Rocket!

NELSON CORCORAN warmly shook Nipper's hand.

"That's the kind of sporting spirit I like!" he said enthusiastically. "And I'm jolly certain that the whole Remove is with you, Nipper!"

"Yes, rather!" said a number of voices.

"We give you best!" growled Handforth. "You bounders! Of course, I had a bit of a suspicion that it was a spoof——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Good old Handy—always wise after the event!"

"Chuck it, Handy, old man!" said Nipper. "We were all fooled, and we might as well admit it. But, by Jove, these Fourth-Formers needn't think that they are going to be let off lightly! The Remove will have its revenge!"

"Good egg!" grinned Corky. "We're perfectly willing to take all the revenge that you fatheads can give us!"

Blackwood, the caretaker, and "Tombs" now appeared, and they were laughing heartily. There was a general feeling of relief. It was all over, and there wasn't anything sinister in the affair. Indeed, now that the Removites knew the truth, they wondered how it was that they had "swallowed" all those remarkable happenings.

"Well, what about our feed?" asked Reggie Pitt ruefully. "We didn't have any tea so that we should have good appetites—and now we're as hungry as hunters."

"Great pancakes!" groaned Fatty Little. "No hunter was ever as hungry as I am!"

"Well, let's get back to St. Frank's—and raid the school shop," said Nipper. "If it's closed, we'll burgle it! We're hungry enough for any dark deed!"

"Hallo, look over there!" ejaculated Boots suddenly. "Somebody must have got some fireworks, left over from the Fifth."

He pointed, and many of the other juniors looked. They just caught a glimpse of a rocket in the sky, two or three miles away, and, as they stared, it was immediately followed by another.

"We're not interested in fireworks!" said Handforth. "Let's get back to St. Frank's and——"

"Here, wait a minute!" said Nipper quickly. "These aren't ordinary fireworks, you fellows! They're signal rockets!"

"What!"

"Signals of distress!" said Nipper. "Don't you understand? They're over at Caistowe! There must be a ship on the rocks!"

"My only hat!"

"There's a wreck!"

In a second all the recent excitement was forgotten, and now another excitement took its place. But this time it was real! This was no jape!

"Look!" went up a shout.

Another rocket had appeared, showing clearly for a moment in the night sky. The wind howled boisterously, and the moon was now being partially obscured by scudding rifts of ragged clouds. It was indeed the kind of night when one might expect a shipwreck.

"I say," shouted Handforth suddenly, "let's go!"

"Yes, rather!" went up the cry.

"It's early yet—and we've got permission to be out until bedtime!" went on Handforth excitedly. "Why not go round by Caistowe, and have a look at the wreck? Perhaps we can help, too!"

"Good idea!" said Corcoran promptly. "Come on, the Fourth!"

"Hurrah!"

"Remove to the rescue!" bellowed Handforth.

The Removites took up the cry as heartily as any of their rivals. Corcoran had "wangled" a pass for himself and his companions, and they, too, were not due back at St. Frank's for some little time yet. So the whole crowd enthusiastically adopted the idea of cycling home by way of Caistowe. It was only a mile or two further round, and they were on the Caistowe road, anyhow.

In a very short time bicycle lamps were lit, and the cyclists were speeding off. Handforth & Co. piled into the Austin Seven, and Nipper and Travers and Tich and Corcoran got their motor-cycles going. There was a regular stampede.

The motor-cyclists were first in Caistowe, with Handforth close behind. Here they learned that the wreck was somewhere near Shingle Head, the treacherous promontory just beyond Caistowe Bay. All Caistowe was agog, and people were moving off towards the cliffs, to go and watch the wreck. It was rumoured that the lifeboat had already set out.

"Let's wait for the other chaps!" said Nipper.

Presently the big body of cyclists came along, and they were told to take the cliff road. The ordinary road from Caistowe to Bellton went inland, but there was a smaller road which wound its way along the top of the cliffs, meandering round into Bellton in a leisurely sort of way, and skirting Holt's Farm.

So, without any more delay, the Remove and the Fourth took the cliff road, and very soon the juniors arrived at a spot almost opposite the wreck. In the moonlight they could see everything very clearly.

Bicycles were flung down, and the juniors collected along the cliff edge, watching with rapidly-beating hearts.

From this point of vantage they could see the full magnificence of the scene—a truly awe-inspiring sight.

The sea was rough—tumultuous and angry. As far as the eye could see, the surface of the Channel was whipped up into white caps, and the wind was lashing the tops of the waves clean off and converting them into mist.

The tide was coming in, and the force of the breaking waves was tremendous. They thundered with mighty crashes on the rocks, each wave breaking and sending the spray high into the air. All along the foreshore the sea was converted into creamy foam, with here and there a black, ugly rock sticking out of the swirling whiteness.

And there, caught on the cruel fangs near Shingle Head, a fairly big sailing-ship was rapidly being battered to pieces. She was heeling over, her mainmast gone, her foremast broken about halfway up, and with the rigging making a confused entanglement over the wreck. As each mighty roller came, she heaved, and at times the juniors could even hear the grinding and shrieking of

metal, as her hull grated and jarred upon the rocks.

Down at the foreshore there were crowds of people—coastguards, lifeboat men, and lots of the fisherfolk from Caistowe.

"There's the lifeboat!" shouted Church, pointing. "Look, you chaps! She's coming back, too!"

"Let's go down!" shouted Handforth. "Come on, Remove!"

With one accord all the juniors commenced scrambling down the steep cliff. It was not exactly a precipice here, and there were many winding paths which led down to the beach.



CHAPTER 19.

The Wreck of the Travis!

THE beach was alight with waving lanterns, and there was a general hum of excited talk.

Nipper and Corcoran, who were two of the first juniors to get to the beach, were rather surprised when they ran into Inspector Jameson, of the Bannington police.

"Hallo, sir!" said Nipper breathlessly. "I didn't expect to see you here!"

The inspector turned.

"No?" he said, in a grim voice. "You may be quite sure, young man, that I shouldn't be here unless I had a very specific reason. This ship is the *Travis*."

"What!" ejaculated Handforth, as he came up. "The *Travis*! That's—that's the ship that Kenmore ran away to sea on, you chaps!"

"My only hat!"

"I'm afraid that young Kenmore's dream of running away to sea is over!" said Inspector Jameson gruffly. "He'll be lucky if he escapes with his life, by the look of things!"

Here was a fresh piece of excitement for the juniors. By an extraordinary chance, the wreck was the *Travis*—the very ship that Simon Kenmore had run away to sea on! It appeared that the vessel had been beaten by the gale, and, in attempting to run back into harbour, she had been driven on the cruel rocks off Shingle Head.

"This is jolly fine, you fellows!" said Handforth, as he turned to the other juniors.

"What's jolly fine?" asked Church, staring. "You've got rummy ideas, haven't you, Handy?"

They were positively leaning against the gale, and it was necessary to shout, in order to make themselves heard.

"I didn't mean that!" said Handforth. "It's rotten about the wreck—a good ship smashed right up! But it's jolly fine for Fatty Fowkes, and the Crusaders!"

"How is it?" asked McClure.

"Why, Kenmore's on this ship!" said Edward Oswald. "He'll naturally be

rescued with the crew, and then everything will be all right for Fatty. Don't you see?"

"By Jove, yes!" said Mac. "I hadn't thought of that!"

So it seemed that this tragic doom of a stout ship was to have at least one good result. According to Simon Kenmore's letter, he had sailed on the *Travis*, and as soon as the police satisfied themselves that he was really alive the warrant against Fatty Fowkes would be withdrawn. So the juniors, who had come here merely to join in the excitement of watching the rescue efforts, now found that they had a personal interest in this wreck.

Meanwhile, rumours had reached St. Frank's, and Kenmore, hearing them, was in very much of a panic. Yet he felt that he was safe. There would be no suspicion against him—in his present guise of "Walter." There would be no need for him to bolt, and thus complicate matters further. Commonsense told him that his only policy was to face it out.

He and Sinclair were hurrying towards Shingle Head, Sinclair being in a fine state of agitation.

"She's the *Travis*, sure enough!" he was saying. "I heard it from two or three people in the village! She's on the rocks, Kenmore, and goodness only knows what will happen now!"

"Perhaps all the crew will be drowned!" said Kenmore huskily. "In that case, many of the bodies might not be recovered—and everybody will think that I went down with the others. That's awful! How could I ever dream of anything like this coming?"

"Well, it's no good making wild guesses!" said Guy Sinclair. "We'd better wait until we get to the scene. I'm worrying about what you'll do——"

"I'll do nothing!" interrupted Kenmore savagely. "Can't you understand, confound you, that I'm Walter Kenmore? I'm not supposed to know anything about that letter—at least, I didn't have any hand in the writing of it. I shall simply say that my brother must have changed his mind. It's easy enough. But that's not the point. I thought that wheeze was cast iron, and now it looks like being ruined."

They arrived at the beach at last, and while they were standing there, fighting against the wind and staring out over the tumbling waves, Inspector Jameson came along.

"Bad business, Mr. Kenmore!" he said gruffly. "I only hope that your brother will be amongst the saved."

Kenmore started.

"Yes, yes!" he said huskily. "Thanks, inspector! But the young idiot ought to have known better! You're sure this is the ship he sailed on?"

"It must be!"

"But he didn't mention the name of the ship in his letter——"

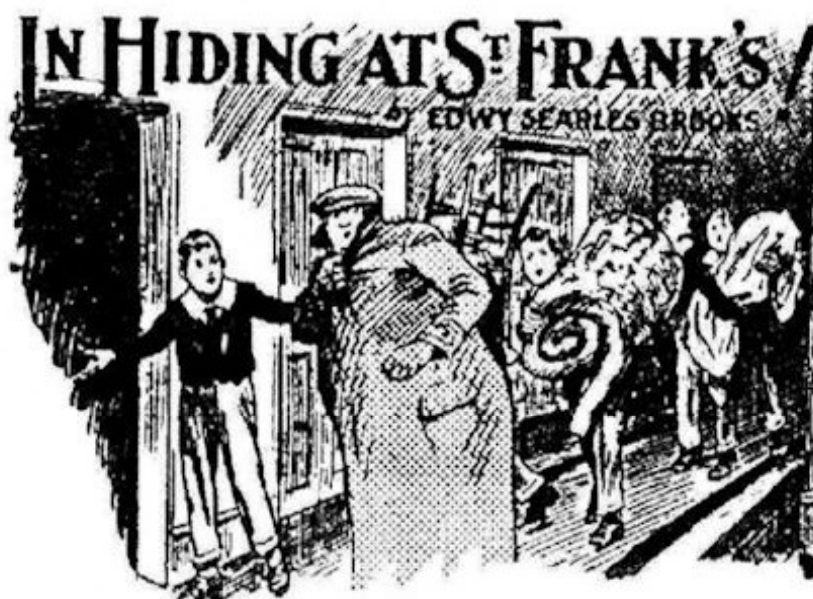
"This is the only vessel that sailed from Caistowe last night!" interrupted the inspector. "In fact, it is the only ship that has sailed this week. So there is no room for doubt. Your brother is certainly on board the *Travis*."

Kenmore remained silent, and he watched the groups of St. Frank's juniors, who were

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NOW ON SALE.

PRICE TWOPENCE.

eagerly offering their help. They wanted to assist with the life-saving apparatus—and they were even ready to volunteer for lifeboat duty. But it was quite unnecessary for the juniors to take part in any of these proceedings. For there were plenty of men—stout-hearted, strong men—who were on the spot.

"Here comes the lifeboat!"

"Hurrah!"

Men in oilskins were waiting, ready to plunge out into the surf and to assist the lifeboat when it came surging up on to the shingle. There was a tense period of suspense, whilst everybody watched the insignificant cockle-shell—as it looked—striving to reach the shore with its precious cargo.



CHAPTER 20.

A Surprising Disclosure!

"**T**HEY'VE done it!" shouted Handforth exultantly. "Hurrah!" "Stand back, boys—stand back!"

The beach was filled with shouts. At last the lifeboat had been dragged up on to the shingle, some scores of men assisting in this task. The boat was heavily laden, and her crew had had considerable difficulty in manœuvring her into position. For there had been grave danger of the craft capsizing amidst the great breakers.

But now she was being dragged well up on the beach, the white foam swirling round her in a fury of spume.

Inspector Jameson was a patient man. He waited in the background until the survivors had been landed, and he watched while they were helped up the beach to a sheltered spot where hot beverages had been prepared, and where there was a great roaring bonfire.

"Everybody's saved!"

The cry went round and spread rapidly. It was soon definitely established. The officers and crew of the stricken ship had been all rescued. Even the ship's cat had been brought ashore. And, except for one or two minor injuries, nobody was really hurt.

There was great jubilation—great cheering and shouting.

The *Travis*, out there on the rocks, was being rapidly pounded to fragments by the mighty force of the incoming sea. Indeed, the lifeboat had only performed its duty in the nick of time; for, soon after the crew had been taken off, the *Travis* had heeled right over and had broken her back.

Her skipper was a bluff, rugged-faced old fellow of about sixty-five—grizzled and lean. He was active enough, and he refused the assistance that was offered to him.

Inspector Jameson, at the right moment, made himself known to the master of the *Travis*.

"I think you are Captain Gates?" he asked crisply.

The skipper, who had been attending to his men, looked round. A large number of St. Frank's fellow's were crowding about, and Kenmore was there, well within hearing.

"That's my name, sir!" said the skipper, nodding.

"I am Inspector Jameson, of the Bannington Police!" said the officer. "I am very sorry to worry you at a time like this, Captain Gates, but there's a little matter that I should like to take up with you."

Captain Gates stared.

"What do the police want with me?" he asked aggressively.

"A young fellow named Kenmore joined your ship yesterday, before you left Caistowe, I understand," said the inspector. "He is really a senior scholar at St. Frank's College and——"

"You don't know what you're talking about!" interrupted the skipper gruffly. "There's no new hand amongst my crew."

"No new hand!" said the inspector sharply. "But this boy——"

"I reckon you've made a mistake, sir!" said the captain. "Last night I sailed with my usual crew. I haven't signed on a new hand for over six months."

"Great Scott!" ejaculated Handforth dazedly. "Did you hear that, you chaps? Kenmore wasn't on the ship at all!"

"Perhaps he was a stowaway?" suggested somebody.

Captain Gates caught the words.

"Stowaway?" he repeated, with a loud laugh. "What's all this nonsense? There's been no stowaway on my craft. No, sir. Somebody has been telling you a yarn, I take it. This boy you speak of never came aboard the *Travis*."

The inspector compressed his lips, and glanced at Kenmore.

"This is awkward, sir!" he said steadily.

"I—I hardly know what to think!" said Kenmore, trying to remain calm. "But you saw that letter, didn't you, inspector? Simon distinctly said——"

"Yes, of course!" interrupted Inspector Jameson. "But I've had my doubts all along the line. This proves it. That letter was a fake!"

"A—fake!" gasped Kenmore. "But I know my brother's handwriting——"

"I'm not so sure that you do, sir!" said the inspector ominously. "Anybody with a little cleverness could easily have copied your brother's handwriting."

"Yes, I dare say that's true," admitted Kenmore, hardly knowing what else to say.

The inspector moved off, still surrounded by a number of juniors.

"What do you make of it, inspector?" asked Nipper keenly.

(Concluded on page 44.)



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.



JAMES W. COOK.

HERE'S your photo at the top of this page—James W. Cook (Poplar)—and I am sure there are many hundreds of League members who will be most interested to see such an enthusiastic Leagueite as yourself. I appreciate your desire that I should be more intimately associated with the League and its members; but I am so busy nowadays, what with the regular "St. Frank's" stories and the "Blue Crusader" yarns in the "Boys' Realm" (which are quite long, and which I am now writing every week), that I simply haven't the time to spend on such a pleasure, much as I would enjoy it. So I must content myself with the kind of intimacy that can be obtained through these columns and through the post.

* * *

There is a great deal of truth in what you say—George Seaman Hunnable (Mistley)—about my stories failing to please everybody. As you remark, when I write some yarns that will be just exactly what you want, then some other readers will bombard me with letters saying that the stories are the very kind they least like. I can give you my word that my job is a regular brain-twister. I often wish I had a supply of ice every week, so that I could have a chunk handy to cool my fevered brow!

* * *

It's always cheering—Dora Cantor (Krugersdorp, South Africa)—when I learn that the Old Paper has been of some help to readers. You tell me that owing to your correspondence with League members you have obtained some fine pictures and books from other lands, thereby enabling you to get well up in Regional Geography. I can say exactly the same thing, for I have received hundreds of informative letters, newspapers, periodicals and books from our overseas readers—and the more I get, the more I want. We're never too old to learn. And I'm always grateful to those who add to my knowledge. People who profess that they know everything, and are too superior to learn more, are generally those who know practically nothing.

Here are the titles you ask for—Arthur J. Moody (Stratford, New Zealand): 502, THE SCHOOLBOY DRUDGES; 503, THE PHANTOM PROTECTOR; 504, UNDER THE LASH; 505, THE MARK OF THE SAVAGE; 506, AFTER LIGHTS OUT; 507, THE HOODED UNKNOWN; 508, NIPPER TAKES THE REINS; 509, THE MOAT HOLLOW MUTINY; 510, THE SCHOOLBOY MUTINEERS; 511, THE SIEGE OF MOAT HOLLOW. That snapshot of yours is going in my album, and my exchange photograph has been sent to you. But it's really a snap of a farm wagon and horses, isn't it? I can only see you by using a magnifying glass. So if you want to appear on this page you'll have to send me something that more resembles a portrait. You wouldn't like a couple of horses to appear up in this right-hand top corner, labelled "Arthur J. Moody," would you?

* * *

What's the idea—Reg. T. Staples (Walworth)—in giving me such a knotty problem as to define the words "personality" and "character"? I have a suspicion that you want the whole page to yourself—and it would take me at least the whole page to give you a proper definition. Besides, you've done it so well yourself that I don't think you need any help from me. With regard to your dilemma about the girl readers. Yes, I've been puzzled about this, too. Why is it, I wonder, that such an enormous number of girls read Our Paper? Here's a chance for the girls to drop me a line and enlighten me. If they rise to the bait, Reg., I'll let you know the result later on. Meanwhile, don't do me out of my weekly treat—I wouldn't miss your letters for anything.

New Readers Can Start This Magnificent Football and Detective Serial To-day !

What's Wrong with the Rovers ?



*The earth might have opened and swallowed up James Ridley, for all the traces that can be found of the Northmouth Rovers' ex-chairman. What **has** happened to him? That's the big mystery Nelson Lee and Nipper have to solve—that's the big mystery which gives Nipper a chance to play for a professional team!*

The Clue !

ON the Tuesday following the match in which he had so distinguished himself, Nipper and Nelson Lee had lunch at Mr. Colton's house. The presence of their host's pretty niece precluded any talk about the subject uppermost in the minds of the three male members of the party, but in any case Nipper did not want to talk, for Nelson Lee had warned him that they must proceed cautiously, and that at present Colton was not to be told that the car they had seen in his drive on the Thursday night belonged to the manager of the football club of which he was a director.

Nipper, who had been to the ground that morning for practice, had taken a theodolite with him. He had only the vaguest idea as to how one used the instrument on the re- tripod, but it looked well, and might disarm suspicion, if by any chance suspicion had been aroused.

Both Colton and his pretty niece congratulated him on his display on Saturday.

"Dick had never received proper support from Barter," said Clarice, "but I believe you two would settle down splendidly together."

And Nipper noticed that the girl gave an almost defiant glance at her frowning uncle.

Edward Colton might forbid the young amateur International to visit his house, but he could not prevent the girl thinking about him, and Nipper shrewdly suspected that they were either meeting or corresponding.

When the meal was over they withdrew to Colton's comfortable study for a short chat before he left to go to the offices of the big shipping firm he controlled, but they had scarcely settled down before a maid knocked at the door.

"Please, sir, there's a police-inspector asking to see you," she said nervously.

"Show him in here," said Colton, and turned to the detective. "Shall I tell him who you are, Mr. Lee?"

"No," replied Nelson Lee promptly. "Not yet."

A thick-set man in plain clothes was ushered into the study. He carried a brown-paper parcel under his arm, and his face was grave as he laid his bowler hat upon the table and glanced at the two men and the boy seated by the fire.

"I am afraid I've rather bad news for you, Mr. Colton," the inspector said. "But first of all, could you swear to the overcoat that your friend Mr. Ridley was wearing when he left you on the night of his disappearance?"

"Certainly I could," replied Colton. "It

was a light, fleecy overcoat, with a peculiar pattern of green and blue running through it. I remember that I remarked to Ridley that it looked very light for such a chilly night, but he said though it was light it was extremely warm."

"Is this the coat?" asked the inspector dramatically, and having unfastened his parcel he held up a grey overcoat.

Edward Colton gave a startled cry.

"That is the coat Ridley was wearing!" he gasped. "I would swear to it anywhere. The second button is loose, and I noticed that as he was leaving. Good heavens, man, how did you get this?"

"It was found by a furze bush, close to the edge of the cliff at Grainger's Gap," replied the inspector. "An unemployed man found it, and honestly brought it to the police-station. Of course, we identified it at once. We have always borne in mind the possibility of suicide."

Colton angrily challenged that, but the inspector stood by his opinion that James Ridley had taken off his overcoat and jumped from the cliff into the sea. Colton demanded to know why a man intent on drowning himself should remove his coat? The policeman admitted that he did not know, but it was a very usual thing.

Nelson Lee did not join in the discussion. He had risen from his chair and crossed to the table, and was apparently examining the coat as many people examine some gruesome relic of a tragedy. But Nipper saw how keen his chief's eyes were, saw him produce that powerful magnifying glass from his waistcoat pocket whilst the inspector's back was turned. Then he apparently lost all interest in the coat, strolled back to his chair, and lit his pipe.

"Well, Mr. Colton," said the inspector, preparing to depart, "I only wish I could agree with you, but one must face facts. This proves that James Ridley was at

Grainger's Gap. Why should he seek such a lonely spot, save to throw himself over and drop a hundred feet sheer into the sea? How lonely it is you can imagine by the fact that this coat has been lying there a fortnight before being found. I was afraid it would be a shock to you, and though we have sent a boat out to try and recover the body, the chances are that the powerful currents that set off the coast have carried it out to sea."

The inspector carefully folded up the coat, accepted the cigar that Mr. Colton offered him, and left the house.

"This is terrible, Mr. Lee," said the director, pacing up and down the room, horror in his bulging blue eyes. "I'm afraid the man's right, but Ridley was not the sort of man to take the coward's way even if he were desperate, and so far as I know there was no motive for suicide. It is true he had quarrelled with his nephew, and was worried about the club, but he was a man of wealth, and his speech, mysterious as it was, certainly led me to believe that he was on the verge of an important discovery. What do you think of it?"

Nelson Lee rose to his feet.

"At present I've a quite open mind," he said lightly. "The discovery of that coat proves nothing so far, but Nipper and I will take a survey at Grainger's Gap this afternoon, and I think I shall have something more definite to report afterwards."

Little Mr. Colton came to an abrupt halt.

"My dear Mr. Lee, the discovery of the coat at least proves that poor Ridley went to Grainger's Gap!" he exclaimed.

The famous detective shrugged his shoulders as he replied.

"If it did, I should be inclined to agree with the inspector. But I don't believe that Ridley went to this lonely spot on the cliff. Come on, Nipper, we've got a good deal to do whilst daylight lasts."

WHAT'S GONE BEFORE.

NELSON LEE, the world-famous detective, and his assistant, **NIPPER**, have promised to assist

EDWARD COLTON, a director of Northmouth Rovers—the famous football club which is now doing badly in the English Football League—in clearing up the mystery surrounding the disappearance of James Ridley, the ex-chairman of the club. Colton thinks Ridley has been murdered, and that

DICK RIDLEY, the ex-chairman's nephew, and amateur International centre-forward of the Rovers, is concerned in the affair. Colton was the last man to see James Ridley before his disappearance, and the ex-chairman had told him that he was on the point of making a great discovery concerning the Rovers. Nipper signs on as an amateur for the club. He is now known as Nick Parr, and Nelson Lee has taken the name of Mr. Nelson; they are supposed to be surveyors. Following investigations, Lee suspects Bert Barter and Mr. Minter, centre-half and manager of the Rovers respectively, of being concerned in the mystery. Certain of Dick Ridley's movements also seem suspicious. Owing to Barter being unfit, Nipper plays for the Rovers in a First Division match, and scores the winning goal. After the game he is congratulated by Stephen Langton, the club's new chairman, who is known as the "Bat," owing to his aerial activities. Langton asks Nipper one or two searching questions, which cause the lad to be on his guard.

(Now read on.)

Nipper was as bewildered as the director of the Rovers, but he knew it was hopeless to attempt to question his chief.

With the theodolite and a huge tape measure, they drove in a taxi along the cliff road to a point within a mile of the chasm in the steep cliff known as Grainger's Gap, and, telling the driver to wait, they set off for the furze bushes. The turf was soft after rain, and showed impressions of heavy feet; evidently the police had been to look at the scene of discovery of the clue.

Nelson Lee and Nipper followed the track after the detective had examined it, and came to the conclusion that the police had had the man who found the coat to guide them. Near the cliff they set up the theodolite, and scarcely had they done so before they heard an ever-increasing drone, and saw an aeroplane flying towards them at a very low altitude; so low that Nipper instinctively ducked, so low that he saw a gauntleted hand waving, had a glimpse of a hawk-like face under a leather airman's helmet. Then, with a roar, the 'plane was rising, looped clean over, came down until it seemed but inches above the grey, tumbling sea, and went flying into the grey haze.

"By Jove!" gasped Nipper. "That was the Bat! I thought Stephen Langton was only keen on night flying, but he can handle a machine!"

"I rather wish he had not been handling it this afternoon!" was the detective's somewhat grim comment, as they walked to a big furze bush near the edge of the cliff, a bush encircled by heavy footmarks. "It may be pure coincidence, or it may be something else—and I'm inclined to think that it's something else. Nipper, your excellent play on Saturday is the cause of this latest discovery!"

His young assistant stared at him blankly.

"What do you mean, guv'nor?"

"I'm not quite sure yet, Nipper, but I'm perfectly certain that the overcoat taken to the police never laid under this bush, or any other bush around here, for a fortnight. There were traces of gravel in the texture, but no chalk. Here it is all chalk. The coat was damp, but it was damp with sea water, and the sea does not reach to a cliff standing a hundred feet above it. You've heard of mischievous youngsters who plant a faked parcel for the unsuspecting wayfarer? Well, this coat was a plant, and I want to see the man who found it!"

Nipper was scratching his head as they walked back to the waiting taxi. The man who had planted the overcoat must know what had become of James Ridley, and if they found him they went a long way towards solving the mystery.

Nelson Lee dismissed the cab near the Town Hall, and entered the police station which adjoined the big building.

"My friend, Mr. Colton, wants to make a reward to the man who found Mr. Ridley's coat and brought it to you," said Lee. "Would you mind letting me have his name

and address, so that I can go and see him?"

"No objection to that, sir," said the sergeant at the charge desk. "The man is John Wilson, living at 4a, Reekson's Rents, but you won't be overwise to go and see him there. It's a tough neighbourhood, and it's beginning to get dark. Our men go down there in couples."

Nelson Lee laughed as he replied:

"Oh, I don't look like a millionaire or a policeman in disguise, so we'll carry out our errand! By the way, sergeant, as a surveyor, I noticed a thing that may be useful to you."

"What's that, sir?"

"The subsoil at Grainger's Gap is chalk!"

The detective left the sergeant staring blankly after him. At the doorway a young policeman directed them to Reekson's Rents, and, a little shyly, asked Nipper if he would be playing in Saturday's away match.

"Hope so!" said the youngster, a little flattered at being recognised. "Barter's arm is still in a sling, and Jones is still in bed with a bad chill."

By the time Nelson Lee and Nipper reached the slums behind the gas-works, beside the murky, gloomy river, it was almost dark. Reekson's Rents were certainly uninviting. A furtive-eyed man gazed at the visitors, and slipped away into the shadows; a slatternly-looking woman directed them to number 4a. There was a fight going on in the house next door, for there came the sound of angry voices and the thud of heavy blows. Nipper was convinced that danger threatened from the shadows behind, and wondered why on earth his chief had not written to the man, asking him to meet him.

For the second time Nelson Lee hammered on the door to make himself heard above the din next door, then a grubby-looking man appeared.

"Jack Wilson?" this man said. "Yes, that's right. Come in!"

The door closed behind them, and the man turned up the flickering gas-jet in a battered wire cage.

"Jack! There's two blokes to see you! Here he is, gents!"

A man came along a narrow, dilapidated passage, and only with difficulty did Nipper repress a start.

The man coming towards them was the rat-faced spy who had tracked Colton to their London hotel!

The Scrap by the River!

IT required all Nipper's self-control to hide his feelings as the rat-faced man they had seen on the train with Bert Barter came along the gloomy passage, eyeing them furtively. Nipper's first thought was that his chief was clearly on the right track; his second was that if this man suspected their identity, their position would be anything but pleasant.

"Is your name Wilson?" asked Nelson Lee.

"Yes, sir," replied the man, in a whining voice.

"You are the man who found an overcoat on the cliff, and very honestly took it to the police?" went on the detective.

"Yes, sir. I've always been brought up honest, though I have to live in a district like this. I hope I done right about that coat. I thought it must have belonged to some poor bloke what had done hisself in."

Nipper was certain that the man was feigning the uneducated speech, and Wilson's shifty eyes travelled questioningly from one to the other of his visitors, as though trying to read their thoughts.

Nelson Lee took a pound note from his case.

"It was just by luck I happened to come across it," the man replied. "Being out of work and fed up, as you might say, I went for a bit of a walk along the cliff, feeling I wanted to get away from everything. At what they call Grainger's Gap, I saw a nice-looking overcoat, all wet with rain, folded up and lying partly under a furze bush. It gave me quite a turn, sir! And then I thought of that poor gentleman who had been connected with the football club, and was missing. Being cold and hungry I was tempted to keep the coat, but I told myself it was my dooty to take it to the police, and I did so. I don't know how to thank you for that money, sir."

"Oh, don't thank me, thank Mr. Colton!"



Nipper used his theodolite with good effect, while Nelson Lee made a nasty mess of his assailant's face, and sent him toppling into the river.

"You did quite right, Wilson," he said. "I am a friend of Mr. Colton, the ship-owner in this town, who was a great friend of Mr. Ridley. He was too busy to come and see you himself, so he asked me to come and give you this reward for your honesty in taking the coat to the police, and perhaps affording some clue as to the fate of his friend."

The detective spoke with such sincerity that Nipper himself almost believed the story; and he saw a puzzled light in the shifty eyes of the rat-faced man as he took the note and murmured his thanks.

"He would be greatly interested to hear how you came to find the coat," went on Nelson Lee, "for it seems strange that it should have lain there so long."

Do you know if the police have found the body?" asked Lee.

"No!" came the prompt reply, and then he added hastily: "not that I know of, sir."

"Oh, well, we'll be getting off. If you want a job you'd better apply to Mr. Colton. I'm sure he'd do anything he could for you!" said the famous detective.

The grubby-looking man, who had been an interested spectator, shuffled along to the door and opened it.

"Good-evenin' to you, gents," he said, as they went out.

"Walk in the middle of the road," said the detective, in a low voice, to his young companion.

Two men loafing near a flickering street

lamp at the entrance to Reekson's Rents glanced at them suspiciously, but made no move. The detective and his assistant came out into Wharfside, a long, dreary, cobbled street, with shops and dirty-looking lodging-houses on one side, and the murky river on the other. A drizzling mist had come in from the sea, and Nelson Lee crossed over to the river side.

"Keep your eyes and ears open, Nipper," he warned. "I've a pretty shrewd idea we've been marked, and— Look out!"

There was a sudden rush. Two men were upon the detective, and a big man aimed a blow at Nipper's head. The boy ducked, backed, and used the theodolite he had been carrying.

He did not use it in the way prescribed by schools of surveying. The instrument on the folded tripod was about two feet six long, and as big as a large telescope. Nipper swung it round with all his force behind it, and hit the burly man in the shabby, blue jersey a terrific blow on the side of the head that sent him crashing down on the wharf near the gas works.

Splash!

Nelson Lee had made a nasty mess of a man's face, and sent him toppling into the river. They heard a hoarse shout in the mist, and the creak of oars in rowlocks as a boat moved somewhere down below.

And the third man was running away as fast as his legs could carry him.

Nelson Lee peered down into the river.

"Come on," he said abruptly, "they've picked up my sportsman. I thought I might have to go in and fetch him out. Leave your bird to be called for by his friends. We're better out of this!"

Nipper, who had been standing ready with his theodolite in case it should be needed again, reluctantly followed his chief. They walked rapidly on past the gas works, and were soon out of the danger zone, for now shops on the other side of the road were more numerous and better lighted, and some distance ahead brilliantly-lit trams were crossing the swing bridge over the river.

"What does it all mean, guv'nor?" asked Nipper, as they came out by the Town Quay, and the need for caution was over.

"I should very much like to know!" said the detective quietly. "I felt convinced that the coat had been deliberately placed on the cliff quite recently, certainly long after Ridley's disappearance. Now I'm quite convinced that it was never placed there at all, but that this man, who for the moment calls himself Wilson, soaked it in sea water, and took it to the police with the plausible story that he told us."

"But where did he get it?"

"That can only be deduced, Nipper. If Ridley had been murdered, the chances are that the overcoat would be with the body wherever it was. I refuse to credit the suicide theory, and a man suffering from loss of memory and wandering about, would be extremely unlikely to discard his overcoat at this time of year. That leaves the ques-

tion of kidnapping, and if our rat-faced friend had a hand in that, and wished to put people on the wrong track, it would be easy enough to get the coat, and pretend to have found it on the cliff."

Nipper's eyes were open wide.

"Do you mean he's holding Ridley prisoner somewhere?" he asked.

"No, but I think he's in with the people who are," replied Nelson Lee. "He hasn't the brains to kidnap a man as cleverly as that. But we know he's friendly with Bert Barter, and we know Bert Barter tried to get at Colton, and that they went to the house in Minter's car. We've linked up Wilson with the missing man, and we've also linked him up with the Rovers. On the face of things a football team has caused the disappearance of one director, and made an attempt upon another. The situation is decidedly interesting, but, I fully admit, also bewildering. I wish I knew where Langton came in."

Nipper whistled.

"Crumbs! Do you suspect the chairman?"

"I should like to know if it was mere coincidence that he was flying over Grainger's Gap this afternoon," said the detective. "I should like also to know whether that attack by the river was just an ordinary footpad affair, or whether it was an attempt to prevent us becoming a nuisance to certain members of your football club. I'm inclined to think that Mr. Wilson, being in with a gang of toughs, does the dirty work for the man behind this mystery, and if he guesses our real job here, he will not be at all particular with regard to his methods."

"Aren't you going to tell the police?" asked Nipper, as his chief ascended the few steps leading to the cosy entrance of the Harbour Hotel.

"No, it would mean either disclosing my identity or being laughed at, and neither appeals to me. When we've had dinner we'll go and see Colton."

They had nearly finished that excellent meal when a waiter approached the great detective, who had been somewhat silent and thoughtful during the meal.

"Mr. Colton has just telephoned to ask if you will go to his house as soon as possible, sir?" the waiter informed Lee. "He says he has something very important to tell you!"

"All right!" said Nelson Lee, and Nipper, who had been wondering what his chances were of going to Midbury to play against the City, was brought back to the detective side of his strange job in Northmouth, which was so far proving more enthralling than any ordinary holiday could have been.

"I wonder what's up now?" the lad said, and his chief, calmly helping himself to biscuits and cheese, shrugged his shoulders.

"Colton plunges off the deep end on the least provocation!" he said. "But, of course, the message may be a trap, and we shall act on that assumption. We'll go now."

They left the cosy coffee-room, and donned hats and coats.

"Taxi, sir?" asked the hall-porter.

Nelson Lee nodded.

"Tell the man to drive to the Theatre Royal."

Nipper was grinning.

"I hope it's a play with thrills, guv'nor! We want a bit of excitement; it's so dull up here!"

The detective laughed softly as they got into the taxi the porter had summoned, but he was alert as the cab turned into the main street. They were not being followed. Alighting at the theatre, they mixed with the people crowding the box office, and then slipped out and got a tram to a road close to where Mr. Colton lived.

As they walked up the drive Nipper heard a rustling sound behind a big bush just ahead of them, and touched his chief on the arm.

"There's someone behind that bush, guv'nor!" he said in a low voice.

Nelson Lee glanced at the bush without appearing to do so, and his searching eyes noted a movement that was not made by the wind, and there was a shadow in the moonlight that was not made by the large laurel bush alone.

"Take no notice, Nipper," the detective ordered, "but the moment we are opposite the bush, make a dash for it. There may be gun work!"

That was not exactly cheering, but Nipper certainly preferred the idea of taking a sporting chance rather than walking on and perhaps getting a shot in the back.

"Now!" whispered his chief.

The detective and his assistant moved quickly—very quickly—relying on the element of surprise to get them upon the bush before the man concealed behind it could either fire or take to flight.

As they dashed upon the bush there came a startled cry in a girl's voice, and the next moment they stood confronting Colton's pretty niece, and Dick Ridley, the Rovers' International centre-forward!

A Startling Discovery!

AT the sight of the young couple standing confusedly before them in the moonlight, Nelson Lee broke into a short laugh.

"I hope you'll excuse us," he said, "but after that affair with those fellows in the car the other night, I suppose our nerves are rather on edge. You see, it's something of an ordeal for a very ordinary surveyor and his assistant to be pitchforked into sensational adventures, and when we noticed someone hiding behind the bushes, we not unnaturally suspected another attack upon your uncle, Miss Colton."

"Oh, I quite understand," said the girl, with flushed cheeks. "I don't know what you must think of us, but you see uncle has forbidden Di—Mr. Ridley to visit the house. We had arranged to meet here, and feeling terribly guilty, we bolted behind the bush. You won't make trouble, will you, Mr. Nelson?"

The detective smiled reassuringly at her.

"We shall have forgotten this meeting by the time we reach the house," he said.

Dick Ridley was frowning.

"I'd much sooner they told him and be hanged to him!" he burst out. "I hate all this deception, and there's no earthly reason why Colton should make such a dead set against me. I know I am benefiting by my uncle's disappearance, and that Colton regards me with suspicion, but I tell you honestly I'd cheerfully give all I possess to have this mystery cleared up."

"Well I understand the police have got an important clue," said Nelson Lee casually, though his eyes were narrowly watching the big young footballer. "We'll get on to the house, and you can rely upon me using the utmost discretion."

The girl thanked him, but Dick Ridley shrugged his broad shoulders. As they moved on, Nipper turned to his chief.

"That chap is either absolutely innocent or the coolest card we've ever struck, guv'nor!"

"I think that exactly sums up the situation, Nipper!"

A maid took them to Mr. Colton's study, and they found the director pacing the room in front of the fire.

"I'm glad you've come, Mr. Lee, for I have something that I think is important to tell you," said Colton, after he had greeted Nelson Lee and Nipper. "As you know, I am the sole executor of my friend Ridley's will, and this afternoon I had an interview with my bank manager. Both the Ridley's banked there, too, and though it was against rules, he allowed me to see their accounts, knowing that I am so anxious to get to the bottom of this affair. There was nothing in my friend's account to afford any help, but in young Dick Ridley's account I found food for thought. For some time past he has been paying out large sums, and a week before the disappearance of his uncle his account was overdrawn. Then, three days before James Ridley visited me and then disappeared, Stephen Langton paid Dick Ridley the sum of one thousand pounds!"

There was a strange silence in the comfortable study, broken by a low whistle from Nipper.

What was the connection between the big young footballer now out in the grounds with pretty Clarice Colton, and Stephen Langton, the wealthy amateur airman whose night flying had earned him the nickname of the "Bat"?

Why had the chairman of the Rovers paid Dick Ridley the large sum of a thousand pounds?

(There can be no doubt that this mystery in which Northmouth Rovers is so extraordinarily implicated is one of the most baffling problems Nelson Lee and Nipper have ever struck. So far many clues have come to light, and many people are suspected, yet the mystery is still a long way off solution. Look out for more amazing developments in next week's gripping instalment.)

HOW TO JOIN THE LEAGUE

ST. FRANK'S LEAGUE APPLICATION FORM No. 101.

SECTION

A

READER'S APPLICATION FOR MEMBERSHIP.

I desire to become enrolled as a Member of THE ST. FRANK'S LEAGUE, and to qualify for all such benefits and privileges as are offered to Members of the League. I hereby declare that I have introduced "THE NELSON LEE SCHOOL STORY LIBRARY" and THE ST. FRANK'S LEAGUE to one new reader, whose signature to certify this appears on second form attached hereto. Will you, therefore, kindly forward me Certificate of Enrolment with the Membership Number assigned to me, and Membership Badge.

SECTION

B

MEMBER'S APPLICATION FOR MEDAL AWARDS.

I, Member No..... (give Membership No.), hereby declare that I have introduced one more new reader, whose signature to certify this appears on second form attached hereto. This makes me (state number of introductions up to date) introductions to my credit.

SECTION

C

NEW READER'S DECLARATION.

I hereby declare that I have been introduced by (give name of introducer) to this issue of "THE NELSON LEE SCHOOL STORY LIBRARY."

(FULL NAME).....

(ADDRESS).....

INSTRUCTIONS.

INSTRUCTIONS.—Reader Applying for Membership. Cut out TWO complete Application Forms from Two copies of this week's issue of THE NELSON LEE SCHOOL STORY LIBRARY. On one of the forms leave in Section A, crossing out Sections B and C. Then write clearly your full name and address at bottom of form. The second form is for your new reader, who fills in Section C, crosses out Sections A and B, and writes his name and address at bottom of form. Both forms are then pinned together, and sent to the Chief Officer, The St. Frank's League, c/o THE NELSON LEE SCHOOL STORY LIBRARY, 5, Carmelite Street, London, E.C.4.

Member Applying for Bronze Medal: It will be necessary for you to obtain six new readers for this award. For each new reader TWO complete forms, bearing the same number, are needed. On one of the forms fill in Section B, crossing out Sections A and C, and write your name and address at bottom of form. The other form is for your new reader, who fills in Section C, crosses out Sections A and B, and

writes his name and address at the bottom of the form. Now pin both forms together and send them to the Chief Officer, as above. One new reader will then be registered against your name, and when six new readers have been registered, you will be sent the St. Frank's League bronze medal. There is nothing to prevent you from sending in forms for two or more new readers at once, providing that each pair of forms bears the same date and number.

Bronze medallists wishing to qualify for the silver medals can apply in the same way as for the bronze medal, filling in Section B. Every introduction they make will be credited to them, so that when they have secured the requisite number of readers they can exchange their bronze medal for a silver one.

These Application Forms can be posted for 3d., providing the envelope is not sealed and no letter is enclosed.

A FEW OF THE ADVANTAGES OF JOINING THE LEAGUE.

You can write to fellow members living at home or in the most distant outposts of the Empire.

You are offered free advice on choosing a trade or calling, and on emigration to the colonies and dependencies.

If you want to form a sports or social club, you can do so amongst local members of the League.

You are offered free hints on holidays, whether walking, biking, or camping.

You can qualify for the various awards by promoting the growth of the League.

If you want help or information on any subject, you will find the Chief Officer ever ready to assist you.

NOTICE!

The St. Frank's League has now attained such proportions that we are compelled to discontinue the offer of gold medals in connection therewith. The silver and bronze medals will still be available, however, as heretofore, to those who qualify for them in accordance with the rules.



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 School Story Library," Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4.

Adventure Books.

A READER at Manor Park asks me to give the names of a few authors who have written of adventure and romance. This correspondent is a staunch admirer of Sir Walter Scott, a fact one is glad to hear, since the great historian has not as many supporters these days as he ought to possess.

I should recommend my chum to read some of the stories of Stanley Weyman and Seton Merriman, or go back to the elder Dumas. The latter's tales of French history are founded on what really occurred, because in his early days he was employed in the library of the Duke of Orleans, and had the priceless opportunity of reading the official records of his country. There is a lot of fine adventure, too, in Victor Hugo.

A writer who blended fact with fiction was G. A. Henty. He wrote of lands he had seen, for he had roughed it up and down the world as the war correspondent of the "Standard" newspaper. He knew a lot of Africa, and he had been through the Carlist Wars in Spain. Talking about Africa, I wonder if this correspondent has ever read H. M. Stanley's "Darkest Africa?" It is a book to fascinate anyone with a liking for the romance of the trail.

Brief Replies.

Sid. G. Gross, 23, Wellington Road, Norwich, is doing well with his Wellington Correspondence Club. Write to him about it. L. N. Williams, 7, Woodberry Down, Finsbury Park, London, N.4, is a very keen photographer, and is willing to help beginners.

Here's news from Wallace Lawler, 11, Pheasant Street, Lowesmoor, Worcester, who says that the members of his Music Club are all N.L. readers to a man, and stand like stalwarts round the S.F.L. standard. He wants more musicians in his district to come in. This club is doing jolly well. Wandering minstrels should drop a line to the address given above. Any keen musician will be made welcome. There's a lot of undiscovered musical talent knocking around.

Some can tickle the fiddle, others make great play on the drum. Good luck to the Lawler Band!

J. B., of Parkstone, asks when the day begins? The fact is the day never ends, but just moves on its rounds. It is always day somewhere.

CORRESPONDENTS WANTED.

The Burton-on-Trent S.F.L. Winter Club is now in full swing, and new members are invited to attend at the Glebe Schools, Stanton Road, Staplehill, any Friday evening. The club is well equipped with games, there being billiards, table-tennis, darts, draughts, etc.

Donald N. Warr, 602, Stratford Road, Sparkhill, Birmingham, wants to hear from readers interested in rabbits; requires back numbers N.L.L., new series.

Reginald Jones, St. John's House, Kew Road, Richmond, Surrey, offers clean numbers N.L.L., from No. 12, new series, to date.

A. Cowan, 75, Jerningham Road, New Cross, London, S.E.14, wants N.L.L., Nos. 78 and 80, new series.

Israel Herr, P.O. Box 3116, Johannesburg, Transvaal, South Africa, wants N.L.L. from 1915 to 1917; he offers Nos. 131 to 568, inclusive. Also wishes to correspond with readers, 19 years and up.

S. Buckingham, 2, Arlington Road, Ashford, Middlesex, wants members for the International Correspondence League.

J. M. Greaves, 93, Clarendon Park Road, Leicester, would like to secure, in good condition, N.L.L. Nos. 61 and 62, new series. Also wishes to correspond with readers interested in drawing, motor-cycles, etc.

E. McPherson, 99, Elgar Road, Reading, Berks, wants N.L.L., new series, Nos. 15, 19, 22, 24, 28, 29, 33, 56; old series issues offered.

Miss Isobel Highmet, 14, Hillside Street, Edinburgh, wishes to correspond with girl readers anywhere.

(Continued on next page, column 2.)

THE PREFECT'S SECRET!

(Continued from page 34.)

"Make of it!" repeated the police-officer. "Why, in my opinion, this is proof positive that young Kenmore is dead."

"Dead!" echoed Kenmore hoarsely.

"I'm sorry to be so blunt, sir—sorry to give you a shock!" said Inspector Jameson. "But it's no good blinking at the facts. Your brother didn't write that letter, and he has never been on this ship. In my opinion, the letter was a forgery—and it was obviously sent by somebody who is trying to save Fowkes."

"What!" shouted a number of juniors.

"There, there—you might as well go back to your school!" said the inspector. "This business is assuming a very serious turn."

Nipper drew a deep breath as he dragged some of the other fellows away with him.

"Thank goodness we didn't say anything to Patty!" he exclaimed. "We should have only raised his hopes for nothing! The police will be hotter after him than ever!"

"Poor old Patty!" said Corcoran. "But the inspector is all wrong! We saw Kenmore, alive——"

"I know it!" interrupted Nipper. "Willy Handforth saw him, too. But the police won't believe it. Where is Kenmore? That's the question! He has completely vanished, and that letter from him—whether it was a spoof, or whether it was genuine—only makes the whole situation more complicated."

But it was only complicated to those who were not "in the know." For Simon

Kenmore was here, on the beach! And his precious little scheme had gone to destruction in the wrecking of the *Travis*.

The whole position remained very much the same.

Fatty Fowkes would be compelled to remain in hiding, and Simon Kenmore could do nothing else but keep up his pretence.

The St. Frank's fellows wended their way back to the old school, puzzled and worried. It had been an exciting evening—but, if they had only known it, there was plenty more excitement coming along!

THE END.

(Yes, there certainly is plenty of excitement coming, as all readers will agree after they have read next Wednesday's grand yarn, which is entitled, "The Rotten's Awakening!" Don't miss this stunning story, whatever you do, thumbs!)

CORRESPONDENTS WANTED.

(Continued from previous page.)

Richard Potesta, 292, King's Road, Kingston, Surrey, wishes to correspond with readers interested in football.

H. Carlton, 20, Ashburnham Grove, Greenwich, London, S.E.13, wants to buy complete set of N.L.L.'s containing the Northestia series.

Frank Birch, 15, Rodda Street, Coburg, Melbourne, Victoria, Australia, wishes to correspond and exchange match brands with readers anywhere; all letters answered.

R. D. Chamberlin, 36, Grange Road, Erdington, Birmingham, wishes to hear from readers interested in his printed magazine.

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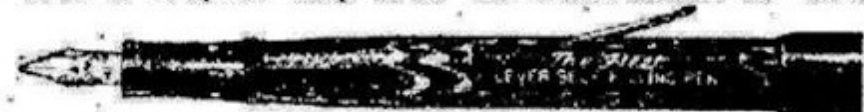
MAGIC TRICKS, etc.—Parcels, 2/6, 5/6. Ventriloquist's Instrument. Invisible. Imitate Birds. Price 6d. each, 4 for 1/-.—T. W. HARRISON, 239, Pentonville Road, London, N.1.

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