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The **ST. FRANK'S**
APRIL FOOLS!

A screamingly-funny long complete yarn featuring the cheery Chums
of St. Frank's.

New Series No. 152.

OUT ON WEDNESDAY.

March 30th, 1929



The juniors stared at the notice board in startled amazement. It was only too true then. St. Frank's was now a girls' school!

Prepare Yourself For Plenty Of Laughs In This Side-Splitting Yarn!

The St FRANK'S APRIL FOOLS!



By EDWY SEARLES BROOKS

All smiles, as cheery and as chirpy as ever, Nipper and his chums of the Remove are back in good old England. They little realise what a shock is awaiting them at St. Frank's; for they've forgotten that there's such a day as April 1st—and Irene & Co., of the Moor View School haven't! Start reading this screamingly funny yarn now, chums.—Ed.

CHAPTER 1.

Good News on Good Friday!

“ONLY two days more!” said Tommy Watson happily.
 “Begad! I'm frightfully thrilled, dear boys—I am, really!” said Tregellis-West. “And it's rippin' to know that we shall be home for Easter Monday.”

“Rather!” agreed Nipper heartily.

The three famous chums of Study C were leaning over the starboard-rail on the promenade deck of the liner, St. Francis. The great ship was steaming sedately over a smooth, sunlit sea. On every hand stretched the wide expanses of the Atlantic—and somewhere ahead was England.

The three St. Frank's Removites were joined by Handforth and Church and McClure, and one or two other prominent juniors. Everybody was looking happy and eager. All eyes were agleam.

“Three days more, and we'll be home!” said Handforth joyously.

“Two days, Handy!” corrected Tommy Watson.

“Three!” insisted Handforth.

“How do you make that out?”

“To-day's Good Friday, isn't it?” demanded the leader of Study D.

“Of course it is!”

“And to-morrow's Saturday!”

“Go hon!”

“And the next day will be Sunday,” continued Handforth. “The ship will drop anchor in Caistowe Harbour early on Monday morning—so that makes three days—to-day, to-morrow and Sunday.”

“Rats!” said Tommy Watson. “I wasn't counting to-day. Fancy going into all that long rigmarole for nothing. I knew it all the time.”

There were many chuckles over Handforth's long-windedness. But nobody minded.

A cross word hadn't been heard for fully three days. Besides, wasn't it Good Friday? Hadn't St. Frank's officially "broken up" for the Easter holidays?

It was perfectly true that all the occupants of the School Ship were unable to take much advantage of their liberty; but, at least, there were no lessons to bother them. Holidays were holidays. During this great trip, which was now nearing its end, the normal school schedule had been adhered to whenever possible.

The St. Francis was on the last lap of her wonderful cruise round the world, and she carried half the school. All the normal occupants of the Modern House and Ancient House were aboard, and they were all ready to admit that they had had a wonderful time. They had been to South Africa, they had seen the Test matches in Australia, they had journeyed far into the Queensland bush, they had visited New Zealand, and had had the rare experience of passing through the heart of one of the worst cyclones the Pacific Ocean had ever known.

Then they had come through the Panama Canal, and had spent a most enjoyable time in Jamaica. Now they were nearing home, and splendid as the trip had been, there wasn't a fellow, senior or junior, who wasn't longing to see the trim shores and the green fields and hedges of old England.

And there could be no better time for such a homecoming. Spring! Bright skies and green landscapes, with everything fresh, and all the trees about to come into blossom.

Upon the whole, the school work had progressed very satisfactorily, and Nelson Lee, who was in full charge of the School Ship, felt that he would be able to make a favourable report to the governors. At times the boys had gone for many days without doing a stroke of work, but at other times they had laboured with a will, and so things had been more or less evened out.

On the same day as the actual school had gone home for the vacation, so the classrooms aboard the converted liner had "packed up." The boys were heartily glad of this, for the last two or three days of the voyage were free and easy, and they had plenty of time to make their plans for Easter.

Some of them were sorry that the ship wasn't getting in on the Saturday. It was rather a pity that she would not reach Caistowe until early on Monday morning. Half the day would be gone before the fellows could reach their various homes.

"Don't you believe it!" said Nipper, the Remove captain, as he heard some of the juniors talking in this strain. "There's just a chance that we shall get into Caistowe late on Sunday night. Anyhow, it'll be in the early hours of Monday morning—and there'll be a special boat train awaiting us. It'll leave Caistowe for London as early as eight o'clock."

"We ought to be in London by about ten, then," said Fullwood, with satisfaction. "By Jove! London! The very thought of it

makes me want to jump overboard and swim the rest of the way."

"It's a pity they can't go quicker," said Handforth sternly.

"Don't forget that we're a bit handicapped," said Church. "One of our propellers is a bit wonky after that storm, and there hasn't been any time to make proper repairs. We're lucky to be making the knots we are."

The truth of the matter was everybody was homesick. Dignified Sixth-Formers and grubby lags alike, they were all getting restive. This trip had been fine—but, by jingo, they wanted to be back!

"A special boat-train at eight o'clock, eh?" said Handforth thoughtfully, as he leaned over the rail. "That'll be all right for you fellows, but I'm not travelling to London by train."

"Going to walk it?" asked Travers politely.

"Church and McClure and I are going up to town by car," replied Handforth coolly. "In my Austin Seven, you know."

"Are we?" asked Church and McClure, in one voice.

"Of course we are, you asses! Didn't we arrange it?"

"Did we?"

"You jolly well know we did!" roared Handforth.

"First we've heard of it!" said McClure. "You arrange all these things in your own head, Handy, and then take it for granted that Churchy and I are capable of thought-reading."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The other juniors chuckled gleefully, and Handforth looked rather blank.

"Oh, well, what's the difference?" he said. "It's arranged now."

"Well, it can jolly well be disarranged!" said Church tartly. "You won't see me going up to London in your fatheaded Austin Seven."

"In my what Austin Seven?"

"Fatheaded!" repeated Church calmly.

"If you're asking for a thick ear, Walter Church—"

"My dear chap!" said Church, shocked. "You're not threatening me, are you? Have you forgotten it's Good Friday?"

"You—you— All right, I'll leave it until to-morrow!" said Handforth darkly. "To-day may be Good Friday, but to-morrow will be Bad Saturday! You chaps are coming with me in my Austin Seven, or I'll want to know the reason why."

"You'll easily know the reason why," said Mac. "We're going up by train. It's likely we're going to waste the whole day on the road with you, while you footle with your giddy car! There's a special train for us—and we're going to take it. We want to be home as quickly as possible. Our people will be expecting us."

Handforth argued in vain. Church and McClure, secure in the knowledge that the day was Good Friday, insulted their leader with perfect impartiality, and they had no fears for Bad Saturday. By the morrow

Handforth would have forgotten all about his lurid threats.

It certainly was a trifle unreasonable of him to expect his long-suffering chums to waste a lot of time by going to St. Frank's—which, of course, would be absolutely deserted—in search of the little Austin Seven. Far better to go up by train.

And so the argument continued, but Handforth remained as firm as a rock. It looked very much as though he would be compelled to take a solitary motor-ride on Easter Monday.



CHAPTER 2.

An Important Gathering!

GOOD Friday in London, at about the same time as the St. Frank's Removites were chatting on the School Ship's promenade deck, saw a gathering of quite a different kind—although in some respects it was similar.

Irene Manners, the pretty, fair-haired leader of the Moor View schoolgirls, was at home, welcoming Doris Berkeley and Winnie Pitt, who had just arrived, looking very slim and charming in their new spring frocks.

"You're the last to come!" said Irene cheerily. "Good egg! We're all here, now. Don't bother about your hats. Come straight upstairs."

"But what's the wheeze?" asked Doris, her dark eyes full of wonder. "Why this thushness, Renie? What's the meaning of the urgent call—on Good Friday, too? Is there anybody else here, besides us?"

"Wait and see!" chuckled Irene.

She ran upstairs, propelling her two chums in front of her. They knew her own special "den" well, for they had often visited her during previous vacations. The sound of many voices came to them as they reached the landing.

"My only hat!" said Winnie Pitt, as Irene opened the door of her "den."

The room was packed. Marjorie Temple and Mary Summers were sitting on the window-sill, looking somewhat precarious. Ena Handforth and Tessa Love were occupying the one easy-chair, and Violet Watson was having a sort of wrestling match with Sylvia Glenn. There were one or two other Moor View girls there, too, and it appeared doubtful whether the three latest arrivals would be able to squash in.

"Here they are!" announced Irene gaily. "All here now!"

Ironical cheers arose, and Doris and Winnie were given suitable greetings. They all managed to get in, and the door was closed again.

"Won't your mater cut up rusty about all this noise?" asked Doris.

"She can't," replied Irene coolly. "She's away. Father's away, too—in New Zealand,

as you know. At least, he was, but I believe he's flying across Africa by this time."

Irene Manners was the daughter of Mr. Hobart Manners, the world-famous aeroplane constructor and engineer—the man who had built the wonderful machine which had carried a party of the St. Frank's fellows across the Pacific.

"We're safe enough," continued Irene. "Martha, the housekeeper, is a dear, and she wouldn't dream of kicking up the dust."

"We're doing that!" laughed Mary Summers.

"And we're still waiting to know what all this means," added Marjorie Temple pointedly. "I was the first one to arrive and I'm simply *dying* to hear the secret. I'll bet you've got some wheeze for Easter Monday, Renie?"

"Out with it!" said Ena Handforth. "If you don't cough it up within two minutes, Renie, we'll go and pinch the gramophone out of the drawing-room, and put on a few fox-trots."

"Don't be so impatient," said Irene severely. "If this wasn't a special occasion—a very special occasion—I wouldn't have brought you here like this. There's a wheeze in my head—yes. I admit it. In fact, I think it's rather a good one."

"She's getting more like Ted Handforth every day!" said Doris sadly. "And that's funny, too, because Ted's been away for months. I expect she's pining for him."

Irene coloured slightly.

"Don't be silly!" she retorted. "And this isn't a time to start arguments, either. If you tell me this stunt isn't a good one, I'll admit I'm a chump."

"Go ahead!" said Winnie. "Let's hear it."

"Yes, buck up, Renie!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Well, to begin with, Monday will be Bank Holiday," said Irene.

"Really? Tell us something we don't know!"

"We're all at a loose end," continued Irene, unmoved. "At least, we haven't made any arrangements. None of us is going away with our people, or anything of that sort."

"When *will* you get to the point?" demanded Ena.

"Now!" replied Irene. "My cousin Dora is at St. Frank's, as you know. She's a nurse there, attached to the sanatorium, and it's a bit rough on her because one or two of the St. Frank's fags are a bit ill, and Dora's got to stay on over the holidays."

"That's the worst of being a nurse," said Doris. "You never know when you can be free. Still, it must be rather wonderful to be a nurse, all the same—and the uniform's ripping. Dora's a dear."

They all knew Dora, of course. Moor View School was only a few hundred yards from St. Frank's, and Irene had been very pleased when her cousin had been appointed to the sanatorium of the great Public School. But none of the girls could quite understand how

Dora came into the arrangement for Bank Holiday.

"Dora's awfully lonely, I've heard," said Irene. "There's nobody there, and it's dreadful. Even the Head is away—and all the other masters. The ordinary staff has gone."

"But there must be somebody in charge," said Winnie.

"Oh, there's Mrs. Poulter, of course, and one or two people like that," said Irene. "But practically nobody else. And there's poor old Dora all alone, with only one other nurse to keep her company. How about us going down on Easter Monday—to cheer her up?"

The other girls looked somewhat blank.

"Is that all?" asked half a dozen of them, in one voice.

"Well, you see——"

"Is this your wheeze?" demanded Ena ominously.

"The beginning of it," replied Irene, in no way perturbed. "Perhaps you've forgotten that the St. Frank's School Ship arrives in Caistowe Harbour on Monday morning."

"Eh?"

"The School Ship!"

"My only aunt!"

"With all the boys on board," said Irene casually. "Ted Handforth and Dick Hamilton and Archie Glenthorne and the others. And Caistowe, you may remember, is only about three miles from St. Frank's."

"The girl's got brains!" said Doris admiringly. "It's a wheeze, girls! That's what it is—a corker!"

"Rather!"

"I haven't half finished yet!" said Irene cheerfully.

"Go ahead, then!" said Doris. "Silence, girls! Let this child-wonder proceed! She hasn't been famous for wheezes in the past, and now she's making up for lost time all in one go."

"Donkey!" said Irene, frowning. "Do be quiet, Doris, and let me carry on. It seems a pity to me that we should let this opportunity slip past. It isn't merely a golden opportunity—it's jewelled in every hole. There won't be another chance for terms—perhaps never!"

"Oh, draw it mild!"

"It's a fact!" said Irene. "All those St. Frank's chaps have been away for months, and they happen to arrive back on Easter Monday, when the school is away—when there's a chance for us to be on the spot, and get our little schemes into operation. If the School Ship had returned in the middle of term, we couldn't have done a thing. Or if it had arranged to dock at Southampton, we couldn't have done a thing. Our chance has come because the ship will arrive in Caistowe."

"I may be dense," said Ena bluntly, "but I'm blessed if I can see what you're driving at!"

"I'm a bit mixed, too!" admitted Sylvia.

"Isn't it your idea that we should kill two birds with one stone, Renie? Don't you mean that we should go down to St. Frank's

to cheer Dora up, and meet the boys at the same time, to give them a welcome home?"

Irene gave her a pitying look.

"If I wasn't capable of a better idea than that, I'd eat my best silk stockings!" she retorted. "There's one thing that you all seem to have overlooked—one awfully, frightfully important point."

"What is it?" they chorused.

"Easter Monday falls on a funny day this year," said Irene, her eyes twinkling. "To be exact, it's the first of the month."

"What's funny about the first of the month?" asked Winnie, in wonder.

"And the month happens to be April!" said Irene calmly.



CHAPTER 3.

The Fair Plotters!

FOR about fifteen tense seconds scarcely a sound was heard in that crowded "den." Then Doris Berkeley gave a chuckle of sheer joy.

"Oh, my only hat!" she breathed. "It's the First of April on Monday! It's All Fools Day! And we'd all forgotten it—except Renie! She isn't human—she's a born genius! Think of it, girls!" she added dreamily. "Think of the vast vista of possibilities! All Fools Day—and us at Caistowe on the same morning as the School Ship gets back! It's too glorious for words! I may be steady on my pins at the moment, but my brain is reeling!"

"Do be sensible, Doris," said Irene. "We've got to have this thing thoroughly thrashed out to-day. There's an awful lot to be arranged—that's why I got you all together so early."

"We can work all sorts of dodges!" exclaimed Winnie eagerly. "The question is, how can we fool the boys? I can see lots of snags. They won't go to St. Frank's at all—being holiday-time. I expect there'll be a special train for them."

"Then we're done?" asked Mary blankly. "If they all come to London by train, we might as well stay here——"

"Wait a minute!" interrupted Irene. "I've thought of that. We can't work any April Fool dodge in London. If we do it at all, it's got to be done down at the school. And as the boys won't be going to the school in the ordinary way, we shall have to entice a few of them there."

"Entice them?" asked Marjorie.

"I don't think it'll be difficult," went on Irene lightly. "Just the crowd, you know. Dick Hamilton and Archie and Ted and Travers and some of those other Remove chaps. If we get too many into it, it'll be awkward. The game will get too big for us to handle. We only need a select few."

"Half a dozen will be enough, if it comes to that," said Doris. "If it's a jape against St. Frank's, and we work it, we'll have the

laugh of the boys all through the term. Oh, what a chance! We've never had one like it!"

"That's what I thought," nodded Irene. "The boys have been away so long that it's high time we came into the picture. And if we can fool them up to the eyes on the very day of their arrival back, it'll be a feather in our cap."

"Not merely a feather, but the whole bird!" said Doris promptly. "I wonder if she's got any more ideas, girls?"

"Well, I've got one," said Irene. "I think I know how the boys can be fooled. It'll sound awfully tall when you first hear it, but if we all work together, I think it can be done."

"We'll work as we've never worked before," said Winnie Pitt.

"Well, the first thing will be to send a wireless message to the ship," went on Irene. "Not exactly the first thing, though; we shall have to reserve that until Sunday, so that the message isn't delivered until then. We don't want the boys to have any opportunity of replying to it, and sending awkward inquiries."

"Awkward inquiries?" repeated Ena. "What do you mean? What kind of a message are we going to send 'em, then?"

"Sssssh!" warned Doris. "Let her carry on! She's in top gear, and just coming into the finishing straight. This wheeze has all the indications of being a real winner."

"We'll leave the wireless message until Sunday, as I've said," went on Irene. "I don't think there'll be any trouble in getting it sent, or delivered. The only thing is we must be careful to time it properly, so that it doesn't get delivered too early. Monday morning would be the best time of all."

"But why?"

"Yes! Let's hear what you mean, Renie."

"And to-morrow, of course, we shall have to go down to St. Frank's," said Irene.

"To-morrow!"

"Of course."

"All of us?" asked Winnie in astonishment.

"All of us!" insisted Irene. "If we don't go down to-morrow—and go early—we shan't have time to complete the preparations."

There was a breathless silence.

"What preparations?" asked Marjorie, at last. "Why should we go down on Saturday—when the ship isn't getting in until Monday?"

"Because there's a lot to be done," replied Irene. "Dora will help us for all she's worth, and I believe we can fix things up with Mrs. Poulter. The old girl might jib at first, but we'll win her round. If it's impossible, we can always lock her in a cellar, or something."

"I'm dizzy!" said Doris feebly. "What sinister plot have you got in your head, Renie? I didn't think you were capable of such a conspiracy. I can see all sorts of frightful possibilities. When you talk about

locking Mrs. Poulter in a cellar, it suggests that we're to pinch the school, or something."

"I'll tell you about it in a minute," said Irene, with a chuckle. "The question is, can all you girls come down to-morrow? Do you think your people will prevent you?"

"Well, they might make a few inquiries," said Violet Watson, shaking her head. "They'll want to know where we're going—and why. We shall need a cast-iron invitation from somebody, or we might be kept at home."

"H'm! That's a problem!" said Irene. "Aren't parents unreasonable? It's holiday-time, so why couldn't they let you go off for the week-end without asking questions?"

"Why not write to your cousin to-day?" suggested Doris. "She'll get the letter by the first post in the morning. Ask Dora to send us wires all round—one each—inviting us to go down to St. Frank's for the week-end with her, to keep her company over the holiday?"

"That's easy enough," replied Irene, nodding. "I was going to write a long letter to Dora, anyhow, and she'll send the wires all right. I think they'll work, too. I don't see how any of your people can object to your accepting a perfectly bona fide invitation of that sort."

"Bona fide?" murmured Doris. "Ahem!"

"Well, so it is, really," protested Irene. "There'll be nothing wrong in going to St. Frank's for the week-end, especially as we shall have Dora to act as official hostess."

"But where can we sleep?" asked one of the other girls.

"We'll leave that to Mrs. Poulter—she'll arrange all that," replied Irene. "It's a good thing she's there, really."

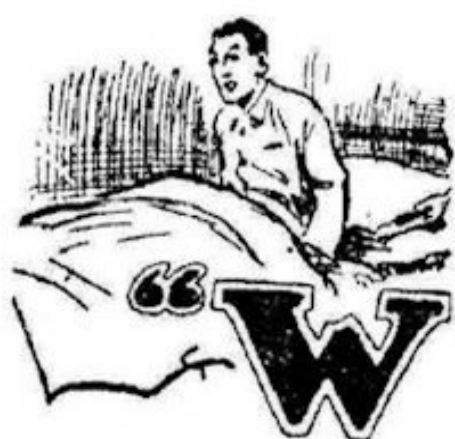
"But why couldn't we leave it until Monday morning?" asked Marjorie. "Isn't there a train early enough to get us down there—?"

"That's not the point," interrupted Irene. "Even if there was a train—which I doubt—we should be heaps too late if we didn't arrive until Monday morning. We shall have to be working all day to-morrow, and Sunday will be pretty well filled, too."

"But what shall we be doing all the time?" asked Winnie, in wonder.

Irene proceeded to tell them. They listened in blank astonishment at first, and for a time there was a storm of excited protest—a chorus of "Impossible!" and "It couldn't be done!" But as Irene proceeded to go into the more exact details of her plot, the other girls gradually recovered their breath; and before long the room was filled with gleeful laughter. Doris Berkeley simply couldn't contain herself. She fell into Irene's arms in a dazed condition.

"Renie, old girl, you've surpassed yourself!" she said, with tears of mirth in her eyes. "Oh, my hat! What a jape! If it only comes off successfully, we'll have the laugh over those St. Frank's fellows for the whole of next term!"



CHAPTER 4.

The Day of Days!

“WAKE up, Montie! Turn out, Tommy!” Nipper vigorously shook Sir Montie Tregellis-West and Tommy Watson; and they, sitting up in their beds, thoroughly aroused, found their leader over by the porthole. The little cabin was flooded with early morning light.

“Begad!” ejaculated Sir Montie. “Isn’t it frightfully early, dear old boy?”

“About six o’clock,” nodded Nipper.

“And it’s Monday!” yelled Tommy Watson. “Great Scott! I meant to be up at five this morning! Where are we? Still in the Channel?”

“Come and look here,” said Nipper calmly.

His two chums rushed to the porthole; and when they looked out they took a couple of breaths, and for a spell they were dumb. They beheld the familiar shores of Caistowe Bay, with the busy seaside resort looking picturesque and clean in the early morning sunshine.

“We’re home!” said Watson, at last. “Oh, my hat! Doesn’t it look glorious, you chaps? Never mind the South Sea Islands or the West Indies! There’s no place like old England, after all!”

“No fear!” agreed Sir Montie. “It’s a frightfully rippin’ piece of scenery, dear old boys—it is, really. Let’s get dressed like lightnin’, and dash out on deck.”

The School Ship had come up the Channel the previous night, and so none of the eager schoolboy passengers had really seen the shores of England yet. They had beheld twinkling lights here and there; but this morning they were actually at anchor in Caistowe Harbour. The voyage was over. They were home.

When Nipper was only half-dressed, he dashed out into the passage and thumped upon the doors of the other state-rooms—and within a minute practically all the Remove fellows were rushing into their clothes. Nobody felt inclined to wait until the rising-bell sounded—although it had been arranged that it should clang out half an hour earlier than usual this morning.

“What rot!” said Handforth indignantly, as he looked at his watch. “It’s five past six, you chaps! I meant to be up long ago!”

“Never mind that, Handy,” said Church, as he feverishly leapt into McClure’s trousers. “You’re always making arrangements to be up early, and then sleeping on. Let’s get outside. We’re in Caistowe! We’re home—and it’s Easter Monday! Hurrah!”

“By George!” roared Handforth. “I’ll race you!”

He grabbed Church’s trousers, and moved into them so forcibly that there was an ominous rending sound.

“Go easy!” grinned Church. “All your other togs are packed, you ass! There’s no need to be so jolly violent!”

“They’re ruined!” said Handforth blankly. “There’s a tear here as big as a house! Hallo! What the dickens— Why, they’re not my bags at all! No wonder they busted—they’re too small for me!”

He removed them completely, and McClure gave a howl of dismay.

“They must be mine!” he gasped. “You—you hulking great hippopotamus! What the dickens do you mean by ruining my bags?”

“They’re not ruined!” said Handforth. “It’s only a trifle. Don’t make a fuss over a tiny tear like that!”

“You said it was as big as a house!”

“That’s when he thought they were his, old man,” said Church, grinning. “I dare-say somebody will lend you a safety-pin or two.”

“Great Scott!” said McClure abruptly. “They’re not mine, after all! They’re yours, Churchy!”

“Don’t be silly!” said Church. “I’ve got mine on!”

“They must be mine!” said Mac excitedly. “What’s the matter with you chaps? Take my bags off, Churchy, you fathead!”

In the end, they got things sorted out—although Church was inclined to regard the laughter of his two chums as asinine. He couldn’t see the joke at all. Incidentally, Handforth & Co. were positively the last fellows out, solely owing to their over-hasty methods.

The decks were soon crowded. Everybody was talking and cheering. Until this moment they had not quite realised how eager they were to see the home shores. And here they were at last!

If the School Ship had actually docked, everybody would have been swarming over the side long ago, permits or no permits. But the big vessel was in the harbour, and the tender, which was to take the boys ashore, wouldn’t put in an appearance until after breakfast.

Caistowe was certainly looking unusually fine this morning. There was the sweeping bay, with the hotels standing out prominently on the marine parade, and over to the left the cliffs of Shingle Head, with the green fields beyond.

“They can keep their giddy tropical jungles!” said Tommy Watson. “This beats everything. And what a glorious day, too!”

Biggleswade, of the Sixth, came along, looking cheery and smiling. In fact, there wasn’t a frown on the whole ship.

“Where’s that young ass, Hamilton?” he asked, as he barged into the crowd of juniors. “Oh, there he is! Here, Hamilton, I’ve got something for you.”



Swish! Miss Dobson operated the syringe with vigour. A fine cloud of spray came hissing from the nozzle, enveloping the dismayed juniors in a choking pungent mist.

"For me?" said Nipper, turning away from the rail.

"Telegram," said Biggleswade. "It's like your giddy nerve to have wireless telegrams addressed to you. And what do they think I am—a messenger? Hope it isn't bad news," he added briefly.

Nipper took the wire in wonder.

"But when did this come?" he asked.

"Some time in the night, I believe," replied the prefect. "The wireless operator gave it to Mr. Norton, and he passed it on to me."

Biggleswade strolled away, and the juniors crowded round Nipper.

"Well, I'm jiggered!" ejaculated the junior skipper.

He had opened the telegram and had read it. There was now an expression of pleasure on his face, mingled with bewilderment and uncertainty.

"Something serious?" asked Tommy Watson with concern.

"No fear," replied Nipper. "Listen to this—I'll read it out: 'Dick Hamilton, Captain, Remove. Welcome home. Afraid we shall not see you until new term. Detained at school. Not allowed out. All just dying to see you again. Roll on new term. IRENE & Co.'"

"By George!"

"My only sainted aunt!"

"It's from the girls," said Fullwood. "I say, it's jolly decent of them to remember us

like this, and to send us a wire. I expect they mean to include the whole Remove, don't they?"

"I think that's the idea," said Nipper.

Handforth was very red, and he gave a snort of indignation.

"Well, it's a bit thick!" he protested. "That wire's from Irene—and it isn't even addressed to me. What rot! Let me have a look at it, Nipper. Isn't my name mentioned anywhere?"

"Why should it be mentioned?" asked Nipper. "Don't you understand, old son, that it was addressed to me because I'm the Form captain? It's not a personal telegram at all. It's to all of us."

Handforth took it and frowned more heavily than ever.

"I think Irene ought to have addressed it to me," he said sternly. "And I'm not even mentioned. All the same, it's jolly decent of them to send us a welcoming wire."

"But what does it mean?" asked Harry Gresham, looking puzzled. "That's what I can't understand."

"Eh?"

"Why are the girls still at school during the holidays?"

"By George! That's true!" said Handforth. "There's something rummy about this, you chaps. 'Detained at school—not allowed out.' What do they mean?"

"Perhaps they've been naughty girls," said Travers, shaking his head.

"Don't be an ass!" said Nipper. "They wouldn't be detained at school over the holidays unless there was something seriously wrong."

"We were hoping to see them in London, too," said Fullwood regretfully. "I meant to dash straight round to Reggie Pitt's place. In fact, I was hoping that he and his sister would meet the train. I wonder if Winnie is detained at school, too?"

"And they're 'just dying to see us' again," said Handforth happily. "That's rather good, you chaps. They're anxious for the holidays to end, so that we shall be back and— By George!"

He broke off, and his eyes were gleaming.

"I shall see them this morning!" he went on excitedly. "I've just thought of it. I'm not going on the train with the rest of you fellows. And while I'm at St. Frank's, getting my Austin Seven, I'll pop along to the Moor View School and give the girls a treat."

"Now I come to think of it there's not much fun in going straight up to London," said Fullwood. "Why dash off by that special train? Wouldn't it be a lot better to have a look at St. Frank's first?"

"I was just going to suggest the same thing," said Nipper stoutly. "Considering that we're so near, it would be a shame to go on our holidays without giving the old school a look over. We can easily catch a later train from Bannington."

"Absolutely!" said Archie Glenthorne. "Odds brainwaves and wheezes. I mean to say, a fruity scheme, laddies. I'm absolutely longing to gaze upon the good old bricks and mortar again, to say nothing of the priceless old ivy and the dashed cloisters and the playing fields, and what not."

"Let's all go!" said Fullwood eagerly. "We're not compelled to travel on the special train. Let's go to St. Frank's and say 'how d'you do' to the old place."

"Hear, hear!"

"Very plausible, dear old fellows, but it won't wash," said Vivian Travers blandly.

"Eh?"

"For the love of Samson! You don't think all this sounds convincing, do you?" said Travers. "Why, you're not even fooling yourselves."

"What do you mean?"

"You're probably keen on seeing the old school again, but you're ten times keener on walking straight past it and saying 'Hallo' to the Moor View girls," chuckled Travers. "And I'm with you, dear old fellows. As we're so near it would be churlish to dash off to London without even acknowledging the wire."

"You're right," said Nipper. "The best way to acknowledge it is to go there in person. I think it's jolly fine of the girls to be so frank, to say that they're anxious to see us again. Why wait until the new term starts?"

"Why, indeed?" said Travers. "Let's go straight away."

The majority of the Removites were distinctly opposed to the proposition. They considered that it was a dotty idea. It was Easter Monday, and their first day in England for months. Far better get straight home.

But Nipper and Handforth and Archie and Fullwood and a little group of others were all in favour of the visit to St. Frank's and, incidentally, the Moor View School. There were a dozen or more by the time the party was made up, and they took no notice of the generous chipping that the other fellows indulged in.

"I think we ought to go, you know," said Handforth, as he chatted with Church and McClure. "I don't quite like that wire, you chaps."

"What's the matter with it?" asked Church.

"It's mysterious," replied Handforth promptly. "Why should the girls be kept at school over the holidays? And not only kept at school, mark you, but they're not even allowed out. They can't even come to Caistowe, a mere distance of three miles, on Bank Holiday, to meet the boat!"

"It does look a bit funny," admitted McClure.

"Funny! It's mysterious, I tell you!" said Handforth. "In fact, I consider that it's my plain duty to go along to investigate."

"Oh, my hat!"

"If there's anything rummy at the Moor View School, I'll soon expose it!" continued Handforth darkly. "Perhaps the headmistress is a tyrant, or something like that. We've had some queer headmasters at St. Frank's before now, so what's to prevent the girls from having a queer headmistress? And we're so out of touch with home affairs that anything might have happened."

Even Church and McClure agreed that that telegram from Irene & Co. was intriguing, and that it was completely out of the question to go on to London without making a little investigation.

Little did the Removites guess how beautifully they were falling into the trap. In the general excitement of the occasion they had only remembered that to-day was Easter Monday. Nobody bothered about the date, which perhaps was unfortunate, considering the special significance attached to the First of April!



CHAPTER 5.

Into the Trap!

HANDFORTH stamped about with vigorous enthusiasm. "By George, it's fine to feel the solid ground of England under your feet again!"

he said heartily. "Come on, you chaps! Shall we hire a bus or go by train?"

"Train, of course," said Nipper. "No need to go to needless expense, Handy. There's an early train to Bellton, unless they've altered the times, and if we hurry up we'll just catch it."

There had been a big rush. Scarcely any of the juniors had waited to have any breakfast. It was only a little after seven-thirty, and Nipper had led a deputation to Mr. Nelson Lee, who was in charge of the School Ship.

There had been no difficulty. Nelson Lee had promptly given his consent to the proposal—and there was no reason why he should not do so. It was holiday time, and if these junior boys preferred to make a preliminary visit to St. Frank's, and then go home at their own expense by a later train, it was entirely their own concern. They could go on the special train if they wanted to—but there was no compulsion.

Nipper and the others went ashore before the tender arrived. They had prevailed upon one of the ship's officers to let them go in a launch that was unexpectedly putting off for the quay. So they practically abandoned breakfast, and took advantage of the opportunity.

And here they were, on the Caistowe front, feeling as fit as fiddles, and bubbling with enthusiasm. The St. Francis looked very fine as she lay at anchor in the harbour, but the juniors hardly gave her a glance. They were far more interested in the familiar scenes ashore.

Yet, although these scenes were so familiar, they were extraordinarily good to look at again. Only people who have been abroad for many months can fully appreciate the joy of seeing Old England once again; and these juniors were all similarly affected.

They had landed "light." They carried no baggage, since it seemed unnecessary that they should take any such impedimenta with them. Their trunks would go straight to London, and would be delivered in the ordinary way. It was far better for them to be free and unfettered.

Nipper was right about the train. There was one which left Caistowe just before eight—a local crawler which didn't run any further than Bannington. As a general rule, the juniors laughed these locals to scorn; but this morning they looked at the little train with affectionate regard.

"We shan't be long now!" said Handforth contentedly. "Only one station to Bellton—and then we'll be at the Moor View School in ten minutes."

"You mean St. Frank's?" grinned Church.

"No, I don't!" said Handforth. "I mean the Moor View School."

"But we're supposed to be going to St. Frank's—to see the old place again."

"You can suppose it if you like—but I'm going to see Irene!" said Handforth frankly. "And why not? Those girls are in trouble

of some kind. They're bottled up at school by a tyrannous headmistress. They're prisoners!"

"Here, steady!" ejaculated McClure. "That's only guesswork on your part, Handy. You mustn't say things like that until you're sure."

"Anyhow, the matter needs investigating," said Handforth decisively. "We'll certainly give a glance at St. Frank's as we go by, but why make such a fuss? We know the place, don't we? Just because we've been away for a few months, are we expected to dash up to the school and kiss it?"

"You're far more likely to kiss Irene!" said Church tartly.

"Why, you—you—"

Handforth broke off, his indignation subsiding. After all, it wasn't a bad idea of Church's. He dreamily considered the possibilities.

"Perhaps the girls will invite us to breakfast?" said Tommy Watson hopefully, as they were waiting for the train to start. "I'm as hungry as a hunter. I only grabbed a single slice of bread-and-butter before we came away."

"Breakfast!" said Handforth, staring. "Who cares about breakfast?"

The very thought of it was distasteful to him. He was far too excited to bother about food. When, at length, the train chugged out of the station, all these newly-returned schoolboys had eyes for nothing else except the good old familiar scenery. It was quite ordinary scenery, and at normal times they would not even give it a glance. But just now they thought it was the finest they had ever set eyes on.

As soon as the train had left Caistowe Station a slim figure appeared from the ladies waiting-room. It was, in fact, the figure of one of the Moor View schoolgirls—one of the lesser lights. She dashed along the platform, ran into the booking-office, and dodged into the public telephone-box.

Within a minute she had got her number.

"That you, Renie?" she said breathlessly.

"Yes," came Irene's voice over the wires. "Any news?"

"Rather! They've bitten!"

"Oh, good egg!"

"I've been scouting for the past hour," went on the girl in the call-box. "At first, I thought the whole thing was going to fizzle out. Then a crowd of chaps came ashore in a launch."

"They didn't spot you, did they?" asked Irene anxiously.

"No fear! I took good care of that," said the other. "They've just left on the local train—I waited until they got into the station before I dodged into the waiting-room. Now it's up to you girls to get busy."

"Trust us!" chuckled Irene gleefully. "Who's there? I suppose Ted Handforth's amongst them?"

"As large as life, and as noisy as ever!" laughed the scout. "And there's Dick

Hamilton and Archie and Ralph Fullwood and Travers and lots of others. The whole thing is working like a dream. If they suspected anything they wouldn't have gone, would they?"

"No, I think they're spoofed all right," replied Irene happily. "Well, cheerio! I'll buzz off and tell the others. We want to be absolutely ready for 'em when they arrive."

In the meantime the local train was just pulling up in Bellton Station. The boys tumbled out on to the well-known platform, and looked about them with keen eyes. It was a picturesque little station, and all the more beautiful just now because of the spring weather. Everything was green, fresh, and delightful.

"By Jove! I almost wish it were the beginning of term," said Nipper breathlessly. "These world trips are jolly fine, you chaps, but we don't want them too often! This is worth quids and quids!"

"Yes, rather!"

The juniors passed out of the station, noisy and eager. They rather wondered if there would be any changes in Bellton, but, of course, there was none. The village High Street was exactly the same as of yore.

"Well, I'm jiggered!" said Handforth. "Old Sharpe, the ironmonger, has still got those mouldy rat-traps in his window!"

"And why not?" asked Church, grinning. "Everybody knows that these village shopkeepers don't change their window settings from one year's end to another. To hear you talk, people might think that we'd been away for ten years!"

"And if we *had* been away for ten years, I'll bet those rat-traps would still have been there!" retorted Handforth. "My hat! Everything's exactly the same. I believe they're the same giddy currant-buns in the tuckshop window, too!"

"Old Binks is careful with his buns, dear old fellow," said Travers. "He dusts them every morning, I've heard."

They were greeted with a cheery nod here and there from the village folk as they walked through. Strangely enough, however, none of these people seemed inclined to cheer or to fall into their arms. Returning home from abroad like this, the juniors had a vague idea that they would be hailed with enthusiasm. But the worthy inhabitants of Bellton regarded the schoolboys' return with singular indifference. A casual nod, it seemed, was considered sufficient greeting.

"The girls will be different, anyhow," said Fullwood cheerfully. "You can't expect these country people to show much excitement."

"My dear old chap, we've only been away three months," grinned Nipper. "It seems longer to us, but people at home look upon it as a mere trifle."

When they got through the village they hurried their footsteps. The spring day was getting pleasantly warm, for the sun was

mounting into a sky of cloudless blue. A gentle breeze was stirring the fresh new leaves in Bellton Wood, and all nature seemed gay.

"Wonder how the Blue Crusaders have been getting on?" remarked Travers thoughtfully. "Rather queer that Tich didn't turn up at Caistowe. Even though it's holiday-time, Tich must still be with the Blues—and they're in their new quarters in Bannington now."

"I've been thinking the same thing," said Nipper, with a frown. "Tich Harborough is a Removite, and it's funny that he hasn't shown up. Still, we left pretty early, and I dare say he's in Caistowe now, greeting the other chaps."

"And what about Reggie Pitt and Grey and Castleton and Corcoran and Armstrong?" asked Handforth severely. "Dash it, they might have had the decency to run down to Caistowe to welcome us home!"

"Isn't that a bit unreasonable, old man?" asked Nipper. "Pitt and the others are on holiday, and there was really no reason why they should come down from London. I expect the whole crowd has arranged to meet the boat train at Victoria. They don't know that we've deliberately missed it."

"You've hit it," said Jimmy Potts, nodding. "By Jove! And that accounts for Tich Harborough, too. I expect the Blues are playing away to-day—there's always a big game on Easter Monday—and he naturally couldn't be in Caistowe. Perhaps it's a London fixture, and Tich will be with the rest of the chaps to see the train in?"

"Well, they won't see us," grinned Handforth. "The girls are the only ones who were thoughtful enough to send us a welcoming wire, and it's only right that we should look them up without delay."

"But the cires are a bit different, Handy," said Nipper. "There wasn't any need for Pitt and Tich and the rest to send us wires, as they've probably arranged to meet the train. But Irene & Co. couldn't. Rummily enough, they're kept at school, and can't even leave the premises, by the look of it."

Handforth frowned.

"You're right about it being rummy!" he said grimly. "It's more than rummy—it's sinister. I tell you, there's something mysterious about the whole business. Either the girls are under the heel of a tyrant, or else they've been up to some tricks and have had their holiday cancelled as a punishment."

"Well, we'll soon know," chuckled Nipper. "All the same, I fancy your shots are a bit wide of the target, Handy."

The juniors had nearly reached the gateway of St. Frank's by now. They were already opposite the high wall which enclosed the Triangle, and the sight of the familiar grey stones filled them with eagerness. They hurried on, and then halted in a big group outside the closed gates.

"My only sainted aunt!" ejaculated Nipper, staring.

They had all expected the gates to be closed and locked—since it was only natural that the school should be shut up. They had also expected the Triangle to be deserted and empty.

But the Triangle was not deserted and empty. Over by the Ancient House steps two or three figures were carelessly leaning against the old stone balustrade, sunning themselves. Near the gymnasium there were two others, whilst a considerable group came strolling through Big Arch—these latter dressed in white, and carrying tennis racquets.

And they were all Moor View School girls!



CHAPTER 6.

Something Like a Surprise!

“GREAT Scott!”

“Good gad!”

“The girls—here!”

Nipper and Handforth and the others

uttered very startled exclamations as they beheld that astonishing scene behind the closed gates. They were astounded. They had expected to see Irene & Co. that morning, it was true; but to find the girls here, instead of at their own school, was not merely surprising, but bewildering.

The boys had intended to just glance in at St. Frank's on their way past, purely out of an affectionate regard for the old school. Their real objective, as they did not hesitate to confess, was the Moor View School for Girls. They had long since forsaken the farce that they were merely anxious to pay their respects to the grey walls of St. Frank's.

Yet here were the girls—strolling leisurely about the Triangle as though they lived in the place! One might have imagined that they owned it! There wasn't the least appearance of the girls being there as visitors. It was so startling that for some moments the Removites could do nothing but stare.

“Here, come on!” ejaculated Handforth suddenly. “Let's go in! Hi, Renie! Here we are!”

“What-ho!” sang out Archie. “Cheerio, and all that sort of thing!”

They all started shouting then, and the girls promptly cried out in unison, and came running towards the gates.

Handforth was the first to get the gates open, and he went pushing through, the others following in a surging crowd behind.

“No, no!” shouted Irene Manners, in alarm, as she came running up. “Don't come in! Oh, you mustn't come in!”

“Keep out, you boys!” cried Doris Berkeley earnestly. “For goodness' sake go back into the road while you're safe!”

“Eh?” gasped Handforth blankly.

“Please—please!” pleaded Irene, running up.

She looked extraordinarily attractive—in Handforth's eyes particularly—as she stood

there. The girls were not in their regulation school costume, but were wearing either white tennis outfits, or else they were dressed in their new spring frocks. Anyhow, they looked charming.

“By George!” said Handforth breathlessly. “It's—it's ripping to see you again, Renie!”

He grabbed her by the shoulders, pulled her towards him, and kissed her enthusiastically.

“Oh, Ted!” ejaculated Irene, startled.

“I don't care!” roared Handforth recklessly. “I haven't seen you since Christmas, and, by George, I've just realised what I've missed!”

“A dashed priceless scheme, laddie!” said Archie, seizing Marjorie Temple, and kissing her before she could realise his intention. “What ho! The good old salute! How goes it, Marjorie, old bean?”

The other fellows were shaking hands vigorously—with Doris and Winnie and Mary and the others. They weren't quite so reckless or so daring as Handforth and Archie. Meanwhile, the girls were looking dismayed and alarmed. Their expressions were so filled with consternation, in fact, that the boys were beginning to get over their first moment of exuberance and were noticing this really remarkable welcome.

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"But what's the matter?" asked Nipper, looking from one girl to another. "Why are you so scared? Aren't you pleased to see us?"

"Awfully pleased—dreadfully pleased," replied Mary breathlessly. "Oh, but you should have listened to us! You should have kept out in the road!"

"Kept out in the road!" ejaculated Nipper, in amazement.

"Yes! All of you!"

"But why?" asked a dozen voices.

"It's too late now," said Doris tragically. "You're all in, and you've all been in contact with us. I don't think there's much chance of any of you catching the measles, but you can never tell!"

"Measles!" howled Handforth.

"And you kissed me, Ted!" said Irene, blushing.

"I meant to, too!" replied Handforth promptly. "It was worth the measles, anyhow!"

"But—but you don't mean to say——" Nipper paused, a flood of understanding coming to him. "My hat! So that's why you wanted us to keep outside?" he asked. "All you girls are quarantined, eh?"

"They're which?" said Handforth, staring.

"Dear old fellows, we're nicely in the cart, by the look of it," said Vivian Travers coolly. "The danger of measles stalks broadcast through the precincts of St. Frank's, and in our enthusiasm to greet the fair damsels we took no heed of the warnings. It's a black outlook."

"So you're all quarantined—all kept behind closed gates?" said Nipper, taking a deep breath. "And that explains your wire."

"We didn't like to say too much in the telegram," said Irene gently.

"Of course not," agreed Nipper. "I say, what rough luck! No holidays—and unable to move out of the school premises!"

"And now we're in the same cart!" ejaculated Church, in dire alarm. "Great Scott! We can't even go home now! We can't see our people!"

"Crumbs!" said McClure dazedly.

Nobody noticed the quick glance of thorough understanding which passed between Irene and Doris. All the girls, for that matter, were hugging themselves with untold glee. Without telling even the tiniest and most innocent fib, they had hoodwinked the Removites. So far, the jape had developed amazingly well—and it was only just starting.

It wasn't long before the next move came. One of the boys started it, and the girls had been waiting for the opening.

"But look here!" said Nipper, with an abrupt expression of bewilderment. "I can't understand this! There's been a case of measles, hasn't there?"

Irene was prepared for this one.

"It's all ridiculous!" she said, with a show of indignation. "We warned you about coming in because it's a strict order, but there's no need for it at all, really."

"Yes, but there's something else," said Nipper. "If you girls have been kept at school because of a case of measles, what the dickens are you doing here—in St. Frank's?"

"Odds puzzles and mysteries!" said Archie, with a start. "Absolutely! I've been wondering the same dashed thing myself, and I've been waiting for some genius to moot the good old point."

"By George! Of course!" said Handforth, looking round. "I'd forgotten that for the minute! What are you girls doing in our school?"

"Quarantined with measles, too!" said Travers severely.

Irene & Co., gathered in a large circle round the schoolboys, affected expressions of such genuine surprise that it was impossible to guess that they were acting.

"Didn't you know?" asked Irene wonderingly.

"Know what?"

"About our school?"

"What about your school?" asked Handforth.

"Oh, but you must know!" put in Doris incredulously. "Surely Reggie Pitt or some of the other boys wrote and told you about it all? You're just trying to spoof us!"

"We're not!" said Nipper. "We've heard nothing startling about your school—or about St. Frank's, either."

"Well I'm blessed!" said Irene. "No wonder you're so startled! I say, girls, this is going to be a bit of a shock for 'em, I'm afraid!"

"Poor chaps! I'll bet it will!" said Winnie, shaking her head.

"But what's going to be a shock?" demanded Handforth.

"Oh, it was too bad that you should have been left in the dark!" protested Irene, with greater indignation than ever. "Fancy you not knowing that St. Frank's has been changed into a girls' school, and that——"

"Wha-a-a-at!"

It was a united yell from all the boys.

"Of course!" said Irene coolly. "We're in possession now——"

"Changed into a girls' school!" shouted Nipper. "Do you mean to say that—— Oh, rot! Sorry, girls, but it won't wash."

"Rather not!" said Fullwood, grinning. "That's a bit too steep, you know. St. Frank's a girl's school! Why, you might just as well talk about the House of Commons being changed into a lunatic asylum."

"What about us?" demanded Handforth, who was the last to recover his voice. "If this is your school now, Irene, where do we come in? What about next term?"

"We don't know, of course," replied Irene gravely. "I dare say your Governors are making some arrangements about where you'll go. It's a funny thing you haven't heard about it from Mr. Lee, or even by letter from Reggie Pitt or some of the other boys who were here. Do you honestly mean to tell us that you knew nothing about it?"

"Not an absolute thing, dash it!" said Archie stoutly. "I mean, absolutely not a dashed thing!"

"That was too bad!" said Marjorie.

Nipper grinned. —

"Come off it, girls!" he said. "We weren't born yesterday!"

Here was the danger point—the vital moment. As Irene had previously told her fellow-plotters, there was one great risk in this jape. There was the possibility that the victims would not swallow the yarn during the first moment or two. If the jape failed, it would fail now.

The girls were well prepared, however. They were ready for this emergency, and not by a sign or a look did they reveal their inward consternation. It would be a dreadful shame if the thing fizzled out before it had fairly got started.

Yet the girls knew well enough that this story *was* decidedly perpendicular, and it was only natural that the boys should refuse to swallow it. The only thing to be done now was to convince them, and to do so with all haste, before they could have time to think too deeply.

"Don't you believe us?" asked Irene in a tone of wonder.

"Of course we don't," replied Nipper promptly. "St. Frank's a girls' school, eh? We'll believe you if you tell us that the Governors are a lot of old women, but we'll never believe that the pupils are a lot of girls."

"You're very sure of yourself!" said Mary Summers indignantly. "And why shouldn't we have St. Frank's? We were a bit sorry for you at first, but you scoff at the news so much that you don't deserve any pity."

"Yes, but—"

"Why do you suppose we're here, during holiday time, unless we belong to the school?" went on Mary coldly. "Do you think we like being here on Easter Monday? I'm surprised at you, Dick. You'll tell us next that we've been telling you whoppers."

"Not at all," said Nipper hastily. "But we can't believe—"

"Didn't you see the new board outside?" broke in Winnie Pitt.

"The new board?"

"Yes!"

"We didn't see any new board," said Handforth.

"You must be dreadfully unobservant, then," said Irene. "I'm surprised at you, Dick," she added, looking at Nipper. "You're usually so observant!"

Nipper laughed.

"I was so keen on getting a squint into the Triangle that I never thought about looking for any new boards," he confessed. "And what about it, anyhow?"

"Go and look at it," said Mary coldly. "I don't like the way you've taken it for granted that St. Frank's is too good for us.

This is our school now, and please remember that you're our guests!"



CHAPTER 7.

Another Shock!

NIPPER was still smilingly incredulous

"We're prepared for revolutionary changes in these days," he admitted, "but for St. Frank's to be changed from a great Public School into a girls' academy would be no revolution, but a sheer impossibility."

"Oh, would it!" flashed Irene. "Are girls so insignificant, then?"

"I didn't mean anything like that," protested Nipper. "We've only got back to-day, and—"

"And that's why you've been taken so much by surprise," broke in Mary. "You know perfectly well that you've been away since Christmas, that you've been out of touch with St. Frank's, and yet you act like this when we tell you what's been happening. It's too bad!"

Clang, clang!

They all turned as a bell rang.

"Quick!" gasped Irene. "You boys get outside. There's just a chance that you won't be quarantined if you're not spotted by Miss Dobson. But if she does see you, it'll be all up."

"Who's Miss Dobson?" asked Handforth, staring.

"Oh, don't ask silly questions!" cried Irene. "Quick! Into the road—all of you! That was the bell for morning inspection, and Miss Dobson's bound to get on the war-path. She's our new headmistress, and she's a terror!"

The juniors found it impossible to argue for the girls were hustling them towards the gates. They were virtually turned out, and Irene herself seized the heavy wrought-iron gate and closed it with a clang.

"Oh, thank goodness!" she breathed. "You're safe. Even if Miss Dobson does come, she can't prove that you've been inside!"

There was such a world of relief and sincerity in the girl's tone that Nipper had an uncomfortable feeling of doubt. He looked at the other girls. They were all flushed and excited, and all grave. Was it possible that there really was something in this extraordinary story?

Irene quickly read those signs of change in Nipper's eyes, and she began to hope. Nipper was the hardest nut to crack; if he could be made to believe the story, the others would be easy.

"Pretend to be just chatting with us!" she whispered urgently. "And when Miss

Dobson comes don't admit that you've been inside——"

"Great Scott!" interrupted Handforth, with a yell. "Look at this, you chaps! I've just spotted it!"

"Oh, my only sainted aunt!" breathed Church.

The others all looked, too. There was a huge board fixed to the school wall, just beyond the great gatepost. It was new and artistic, with all the lettering in gold. The Removites stared at it in bewilderment and stupefaction. For this is what they read:

**"ST. FRANCES' SCHOOL FOR
YOUNG LADIES**

"Boarders Only

"Up-to-Date Curriculum

"University Preparation

"CHARLOTTE DOBSON, Principal."

The boys could hardly believe the evidence of their eyes. Nipper even closed his eyes and opened them again, as though prepared to see the thing vanish. But there it was, a fixture—a finely executed board, glorying in all its newness.

Nipper was doubly amazed. For he could not possibly understand how he had missed seeing it as he and the others had approached the gates. Generally, he was observant. He wasn't to know, of course, that the board had been fixed up while he and the other juniors had been kept engaged in the Triangle. The fastenings had been prepared in advance, and the board had been merely hitched on.

"Well, I'm jiggered!" said Handforth breathlessly. "Then—then it's true! St. Frank's has been changed into a girl's school!"

"Oh, my hat!" muttered Church dizzily.

Amazed glances were being exchanged by Travers and Potts and Fullwood and the others. The very presence of the Moor View girls on these premises was significant—it was proof positive, in a way, that they were actually in residence. And how could they have been in residence if they were not really a part of the school?

The boys remembered, too, how they had been surprised at the non-arrival of Reggie Pitt and the other stalwarts of the Modern House and the East House. They had tried to make themselves believe that these juniors had gone to Victoria, to meet the boat-train in. Wasn't it far more likely that they had left St. Frank's for good? It was perfectly true that the School Ship had been away for so long that all the boys had lost touch with home affairs.

"It's too much!" muttered Fullwood huskily. "Oh, crumbs! St. Frank's a girls' school. I shall wake up soon!"

"It's about time some of you woke up!" said Doris tartly. "My hat! There's no need for you to be so thunderstruck."

Before any of the boys could make any further remarks, hurried footsteps sounded from the direction of the porter's lodge. And then Josh Cuttle himself appeared—bowlegged, clean-aproned, and solemn-visaged.

"Come ye back inside, young gents!" said the porter mournfully. "There was going to be trouble if I let you go. And why was there? Because you was inflicted with measles!"

"No, no!" cried Irene. "Don't be silly, Josh! The boys are all right. They're outside, in the road——"

"They was outside now, but they wasn't outside a minute ago!" interrupted the porter. "I was sorry to disappoint ye, missie, but orders was orders."

"Oh, don't be mean, Josh!" said Mary Summers earnestly.

"There was times when a man must be firm!" said Mr. Cuttle.

He flung open the gate, and gazed at the boys in a sad, contemplative way.

"Come ye in, young gents," he said. "I saw ye inside, and once you was inside it was too late for you to be houtside. Why was it? Ask me! Because you was quarry-mined!"

"Rats!" said Handforth excitedly. "We're not quarantined! We're outside now, anyhow!"

"But you was comin' hinside, Master 'Andforth!" declared Josh Cuttle firmly. "You young gents wasn't thinkin' of gettin' me into trouble, was you?"

"We'd better go in, you chaps," said Nipper. "It's quite likely that somebody else has spotted us, too. Besides, we can't go away like this. We want to know more."

"You bet we do!" said Travers, nodding.

They were both relieved and agitated to see Josh Cuttle. Here was somebody they knew well—somebody really belonging to the St. Frank's staff.

They all crowded into the Triangle. Josh Cuttle closed the gates with a clang, and put his back to them.

"Look here, Cuttle!" said Nipper, grasping the porter's arm. "You say we're quarantined?"

"Miss Dobson was strict about horders," said Mr. Cuttle. "None of the young ladies was to go houtside the gates, and if anybody was to come hin, they was to stay hin!"

"Then—then it's all true?" asked Handforth dazedly. "The girls are here for good—they belong to the school?"

Mr. Cuttle looked at him with a gloomy eye.

"There was changes in the old school, Master 'Andforth," he said darkly. "You and the other young gents was here, and now you was gone. And who was here instead of ye? Ask me! These 'ere young ladies! That's who was here! And, mark my words, there was trouble brewing!"

The juniors looked at Josh Cuttle rather dazedly, then they turned and gazed at the



No longer was Study D untidy and disordered. Now there were frilly curtains at the windows, flowers on the table, and pretty pictures hanging on the wall. But Handforth and his two chums did not appreciate the artistic effects. "Awful!" said Handy, with feeling. "I wonder who's converted the place into this horror!"

girls again. Then it was all true! Here was Cuttle, the porter, verifying the story!



CHAPTER 8.

Being Convinced!

IRENE MANNERS drew herself up rather stiffly.

"Perhaps you'll believe us now?" she said in a chilly voice. "But we don't take it as a compliment! It's a pity you couldn't believe us at first!"

"They'd rather believe the porter!" said Doris scathingly.

The boys began to look rather uncomfortable—and yet, inwardly, Irene & Co. were still a wee bit doubtful. The main success of their great jape depended upon the initial fooling of the boys, and it had really seemed that they were not going to be fooled. But Irene & Co., by their perfect acting, were dispelling the last few lingering doubts that troubled the schoolboys.

"Cheese it, you girls!" said Nipper. "Don't talk like that! The whole thing has bowled us over, and we simply couldn't

believe it. If we've offended you, we apologise."

"Rather!" said Handforth promptly. "We're most awfully sorry, Renie! But when we heard that St. Frank's has been changed into a girls' school, we couldn't believe it!"

"Absolutely not!" put in Archie. "I mean, a frightful sort of shock, what? Perfectly priceless for you, dear old damsels, but dashed poisonous for us. Absolutely! Here we are, as it were, all dressed up and no dashed place to go!"

The girls thawed, and once more they were smiling.

"That's all right," said Irene brightly. "No need to say any more about it. Of course, it must be awful for you boys. You didn't know a word about it, did you?"

"Not a thing!" said Fullwood. "It's knocked us all of a heap!"

"Sideways, laddie—absolutely sideways!" said Archie.

"It's a grand old school, and we shall love to be here!" said Doris enthusiastically. "We never dreamed we should have such luck!"

"But when did it happen?" asked Church, wide-eyed. "How long have you been here?"

"Not very long," said Irene. "But when the new term begins——"

"And how did it happen?" put in Handforth. "I mean, why? The school governors must be off their heads!"

"Must they?" said Irene, with a return of chilliness.

"I—I mean, it's so startling!" said Handforth hastily. "I've never heard of a boys' school being changed into a girls' school before."

"That doesn't mean to say that it can't be done," retorted Irene. "It's a perfectly natural thing, in my opinion. A school is a school, and it doesn't much matter whether it accommodates boys or girls. I dare say your governors have got other plans for you."

"It beats me!" said Nipper frankly. "For one thing, St. Frank's is a huge place—and, without any offence, the Moor View School is only small. Why, there aren't enough of you girls to fill one House."

"That's what I've been thinking," said Travers, nodding. "And there are five Houses here—and four of them boarding Houses."

Doris chuckled.

"Of course, you're puzzled, aren't you?" she asked sweetly. "But you mustn't think that the Moor View School is alone in this change."

"Not alone?"

"Well, couldn't two or three girls' schools combine?"

"Oh, I see!" put in Handforth. "So that's the explanation, you chaps! Two or three girls' schools have joined forces, and they've bought St. Frank's. They're going to make it into a big——"

He was interrupted by a startled exclamation from across the Triangle. Glancing round, the boys beheld the familiar figure of Mrs. Poulter, the matron of the Ancient House. She was hurrying towards them, her ample face expressive of alarm and consternation.

"Oh, dear! What are you boys doing in here?" she coughed, as she came up. "It's too bad of you, young ladies! You shouldn't have let these boys come in. You know perfectly well that measles is a very catching complaint——"

"But we didn't let them come in, Mrs. Poulter," protested Irene. "They came in before we could stop them."

Mrs. Poulter wrung her hands.

"I'm sure I don't know what we can do!" she said in distress. "I'm very pleased to see you all again, young gentlemen. You're looking bronzed and healthy, too."

"We're all right, Mrs. Poulter," said Nipper. "It's awfully good to see your smiling face again."

"But I'm not smiling, Master Hamilton—and haven't any reason for smiling," said Mrs. Poulter, in a worried voice. "I don't know what to do with you young gentlemen! You've no right here now."

"But we didn't know that St. Frank's was changed into a girls' school!" protested Handforth.

"It's a pity them masters of yours couldn't tell you a few useful things!" said Mrs. Poulter tartly. "Didn't know, indeed! But there! What's the good of my saying anything?" And she shrugged her shoulders helplessly.

The Removites looked at one another significantly. Here was another proof of the staggering change that had taken place in St. Frank's. Mrs. Poulter, the kindly old House matron, was corroborating the statements made by the girls.

Amazingly enough, throughout the whole bluff, not a single fib had been uttered—and even Mrs. Poulter framed her sentences with great caution. Not that the boys noticed this. How could they guess that the staid House-dame was in the plot?

"It's a pity you came in, young gentlemen," said Mrs. Poulter. "Not that there's any real danger of measles. But Miss Dobson is a rare one for sticking to orders. When she finds out that you're on the school premises, she might not like it."

"Not like it!" echoed Irene. "The chances are she'll go off the deep end!"

"Cave!" whispered Doris suddenly. "She's coming!"

"Oh, my goodness!"

"Look out, you boys!"

The girls spoke in startled tones. And, glancing round, Nipper & Co. beheld a new figure approaching from the direction of Big Arch. This, evidently, was the redoubtable Miss Charlotte Dobson, the headmistress of the new St. Frank's!



CHAPTER 9.

A Regular Terror!

"WHAT-HO!" murmured Archie Glenthorne. "Clear the decks for action, laddies! Unless I'm frightfully mistaken, the enemy approaches!"

"We're not going to bolt, anyhow!" said Handforth bluntly. "We'll stand our ground!"

"It's the only thing we can do," said Nipper. "Hang it all, Miss Dobson can't compel us to remain in the school. We didn't know anything about measles when we came."

They regarded the approaching lady with interest. She was not very tall, but she appeared to be angular, and there was no doubt that her face was formidable.

Miss Charlotte Dobson was a primly-attired individual—a middle-aged lady, it seemed, with a stern, relentless expression on her face.

She looked rather like an old-time suffragette, and let it be said at once that this

lady was not one of the schoolgirls in disguise. Irene & Co. knew well enough that they would never have fooled the boys with any such devices. Irene's motto had been—"Do it thoroughly, or not at all." The alleged Miss Charlotte Dobson was a complete and utter stranger to the St. Frank's fellows—and she was, moreover, really and truly middle-aged.

"Girls! Stand back!" commanded Miss Dobson, as she bustled up. "How dare you associate with these boys after the strict orders I have given!"

"They came in, miss, and we couldn't stop them," said Irene.

"And why did they come in?" demanded Miss Dobson sternly. "What are these boys doing here? Who gave them permission to enter?"

"But it's our old school, ma'am," said Handforth defensively. "We belong here!"

"You belong here? Nonsense!" said the lady, her tones becoming more acid. "Do you imagine that St. Frank's is still a boys' school? Have you not been informed of the recent developments?"

"We didn't know anything until we arrived, ma'am," said Nipper.

Miss Dobson frowned.

"Somebody appears to have been very careless," she said sharply. "Girls, go indoors at once! I am very angry over this unfortunate business. These boys must now be quarantined."

"But that's impossible!" protested Handforth. "We only arrived in England to-day, and we missed the boat-train at Caistowe on purpose to come here. We're all going up to London by a later train. Our people are expecting us, ma'am."

"Then I am afraid that your people must continue to expect!" said Miss Dobson, fixing a pair of grim eyes upon the startled Edward Oswald. "You are not going to leave this school—until I give you permission to leave."

"But there's no danger, surely?" asked Nipper. "We shan't carry the measles out with us—"

"If you remain here until all possibility of danger has been obviated, you will certainly not carry any germs away with you," said Miss Dobson grimly. "You will regard yourselves as quarantined."

"But we've arranged to go home!" said Johnny Potts, in dismay.

"Yes, rather!"

"Absolutely!"

"We're not going to stay here, ma'am!"

Miss Dobson stiffened as she heard the protesting chorus.

"Silence!" she commanded, in a terrible voice. "How dare you? Good gracious! How dare you question my authority? Has nobody told you what position I occupy in this establishment?"

"You're the headmistress, aren't you, ma'am?" asked Nipper.

"Very well, then!" snapped Miss Dobson. "I am amazed that you should have the

audacity to question my orders. It is very fortunate that there is only a few girls in the school at the moment. The West House is empty, and you will be segregated in that building."

"Segregated?" gasped Handforth.

"Yes, young man—segregated!"

"Oh, my only sainted aunt!" breathed Handforth faintly.

Miss Dobson turned to the others, and gave them a swift, comprehensive glance.

"You will all follow me!" she commanded.

"There is something that must be done—at once! There must be no risk of infection. Come with me!"

"Yes, Miss Dobson, but——"

"Follow me!" commanded the lady. "And do not dare to argue!"

"Oh, help!"

The juniors gazed at one another in dismay. It was, indeed, impossible to argue with this forceful lady. She marched off towards Big Arch, and the juniors, after a moment's hesitation, followed. They caught a glimpse of Irene & Co. in the Ancient House lobby, and all the girls were looking positively scared.

"I knew it!" said Handforth bitterly. "Didn't I tell you that Irene & Co. had got a new headmistress, and that she was a tyrant?"

"But you didn't know that she was headmistress of St. Frank's, did you?" said Church, in a mournful voice.

"And now we're going to be segregated!" said Handforth. "Oh, my hat! We shan't be able to use our arms for days!"

"Our arms?" asked McClure, staring.

"Yes, fathead!" said Handforth. "I shall tell Miss Dobson that it's all rot! I've been segregated already—when I was a kid!"

"You silly ass! You mean you've been vaccinated!" said Church.

"Well, it's the same thing, isn't it?" demanded Edward Oswald impatiently.

"No, it isn't!" said Church. "You're thinking of inoculated, I expect. Where's your English? Segregated means to be separated from the others. Don't you understand? Miss Dobson means that we're to be kept in the West House, away from everybody else. That's all."

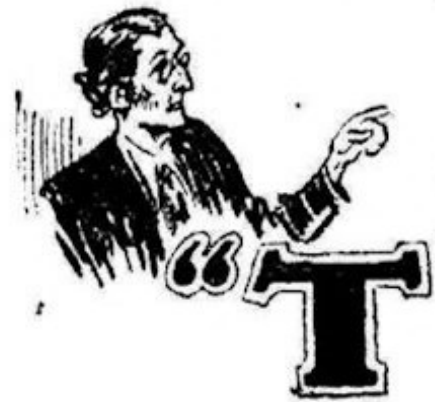
An expression of relief came over Handforth's face.

"By George!" he breathed. "I thought she meant that she was going to vaccinate us, or something!"

"It's bad enough being shoved into the West House—instead of going home," complained McClure. "I wonder how long she'll keep us there. If it comes to that, how can she keep us there? She's got no authority over us."

"She has, old man!" put in Nipper, glancing round. "She's the headmistress, it seems, and while we're on the premises we shall have to obey orders—especially as there might be danger of us carrying the infection outside the school."

Apparently the St. Frank's juniors—even including the alert Nipper—had now thoroughly and completely had their last doubt dispelled!



CHAPTER 10.

Precautionary Measures!

THIS way!" said Miss Dobson briskly. "But that's the sanatorium, ma'am!" said Fullwood.

Miss Dobson, who had led the way across Inner Court, and was now near the sanny, gave Fullwood a severe glance.

"I know perfectly well that this building is the sanatorium," she replied. "Do you think I don't know where I am, young man? Follow me, all of you!"

They gave one another hopeless glances, and accompanied the lady into the "sanny." They nearly ran into Dora Manners—Irene's pretty cousin—who was looking fresh and businesslike in her nurse's uniform.

"Why, whatever is all this for, Miss Dobson?" asked Dora, her eyes opening wide in wonderment.

"These boys have entered the school premises without authorisation, and it is necessary that they should be disinfected!" said Miss Dobson curtly.

"Good gad!"

"Disinfected!"

"Oh, my hat!"

The boys were startled, and they found Dora looking at them and giving them her silent sympathy. By this time they had completely forgotten to look for any signs of acting. Yet Dora was acting her part, just the same as all the other girls.

"Do you really think it necessary, Miss Dobson?" she asked doubtfully. "With the girls, perhaps——"

"It makes no difference!" interrupted Miss Dobson. "These boys may have been in the open air all the time, but they have been in close contact with the girls. I do not believe in taking any chances. They shall be disinfected at once."

She marched them upstairs into a big, barren apartment, where the walls were white-enamelled, where the lino was spotless, and where there were sinks and sinister-looking surgical appliances.

"Now!" said the lady.

She faced the boys, and waved an imperious hand.

"Stand in a line against that wall!" she commanded. "No nonsense, now! Please do as you are told. And if there is any dodging or ducking, I shall be very angry!"

She seized an enormous syringe—a fearsome-looking instrument of brass, with a rose at the end of it. In fact, it looked suspiciously like a garden syringe; and this wasn't very surprising, because it *was* a garden syringe.

But it happened to be a patent contrivance, and so elaborate that there was not much danger of the juniors having any suspicions.

"Now!" said Miss Dobson triumphantly.

Swish!

She operated the syringe with vigour, and a fine cloud of spray came hissing from the end of the instrument. It wasn't an ordinary rose, but a tiny affair which sent the liquid from the syringe into a cloud of vapour. It enveloped the boys in a choking, pungent mist.

"Hi! Whoa!" gurgled Handforth. "Steady—— What the——"

The spray caught his throat, and he gurgled and gasped. The others were equally affected—and in their consternation they did not realise that the "disinfectant" was merely ordinary rose-water.

"That will do!" said Miss Dobson at last. "I am now satisfied that there is no danger of any of you catching the measles."

The lady was justified in this conviction!

"Go at once!" she went on. "Be ready to obey my next orders when I shall give them. And make no attempt to escape from the school premises. The consequences might be serious for you if you defy my orders."

She pointed to the door, and the boys were only too glad to reel out and to get into the open air once again.

"Phoo!" gurgled Nipper. "Oh, thank goodness! It wasn't so bad as I had expected."

"Disinfectant!" said Handforth blankly. "You might think we were a lot of sheep, with foot and mouth disease, or something. I say, let's bolt now that we've got the chance."

"We can't do that," said Nipper. "Miss Dobson told us——"

"Blow what she told us! We're not under her orders!"

"All the same, we don't want to get the girls into trouble, do we?" asked Nipper thoughtfully. "They might be blamed if we bolt."

In the Triangle, Winnie Pitt was skipping across from Big Arch to the Ancient House lobby, and her face was flushed and her eyes merry.

"Here they come!" she announced breathlessly. "Oh, girls, I can't last out much longer! My sides are absolutely aching!"

"So are ours!" gurgled Irene. "They're spoofed up to the eyes. Every one of 'em—even Dick!"

"Yes, they've swallowed it whole!" chuckled Mary Summers. "Isn't it too gorgeous for words?"

"Good old Aunt Sophie!" said Marjorie. "I must say, Sylvia, that your aunt is a brick."

Sylvia Glenn, fair-haired and pretty, nodded.

"Aunt Sophie wasn't on the stage for ten years for nothing!" she replied confidently. "But she's a brick, all the same, for coming down here and helping us with this iape."

Those St. Frank's chaps have been dished beautifully."

"And they're going to be dished even more soon!" murmured Irene dreamily. "Oh, girls! We shall be able to laugh at them throughout the whole of next term!"

"But we can't laugh yet!" warned Doris. "Look out! They're coming! Let's scoot off, so that they can't ask us awkward questions."

When the juniors arrived opposite the Ancient House they found that they had the place to themselves. Nobody was within sight, not even Josh Cuttle, the porter. The girls had apparently been marshalled indoors somewhere, and the spoofed boys were at a loose end.

But not for long!



CHAPTER 11.

Handforth Means Business!

CRUMBS! Look at this!" said Ralph Leslie Fullwood, in startled voice.

They had got into the Ancient House lobby, more by force of habit than anything else. They were Ancient House fellows, and they had almost forgotten that they had been instructed to go into the West House.

Fullwood was looking at the notice boards. At first glance they seemed to be the same as usual. Then the other juniors noticed that the boards were changed.

There were two now, and over the top of one was a sign—"Hockey Notices." The other one was—"Netball Notices."

"Hockey and netball!" said Nipper sadly. "No more footer and cricket, you chaps. It's a girls' school now, don't forget."

"I can't believe it, you know!" said Tommy Watson. "It's like a—a frightful dream. St. Frank's—a girls' school! What about us? Where are we going to next term?"

"Goodness only knows!" said Handforth hopelessly. "Anyhow, I'm going along to Study D, just to have a look at the old room. By George! To think that it's now being occupied by girls!" he added, his voice quivering with indignation. "Girls!"

"No need to speak so contemptuously, Handy!" protested Church.

"I'm not contemptuous!" retorted Handforth. "Girls are fine—in their right places. But Study D is no place for girls! It's my study—mine!"

He went rushing off down the passage, his heart beating more rapidly as he felt his feet on that good old lino. After being away from the school for months, it was grand to be back again. But not like this.

"I knew it!" gasped Handforth, as he

flung open the door of Study D and looked in. "Oh, help! They've ruined it! Good old Study D! Absolutely spoilt!"

Other people might have thought different. Study D, usually so untidy and disordered, was now a model of daintiness.

There were some lovely frilly curtains at the window; the mantelpiece was draped artistically with cretonne; there were flowers on the table, and hanging on the wall, on hooks, were a few articles of feminine attire—jumpers, gym dresses, and sports coats. There were rugs on the floor and pretty little pictures on the walls.

"Awful!" said Handforth, with feeling. "I wonder who's done all this? Who's converted the place into this horror?"

"Better go easy, Handy!" said Church, in a low voice. "For all you know, it may be Irene's study."

"By George!" said Handforth, dazed. "She wouldn't like it if she heard me running it down, would she? But, honestly, you chaps, did you ever see anything so ghastly?"

"Never!" breathed Church and McClure, in the merest of whispers.

It was the same in Study C and all along the passage. The boys were no longer doubtful. This amazing change was authentic. St. Frank's was a girls' school. They were not looking for proofs now; they were only filled with a great and growing curiosity regarding the changes that had been made.

Handforth & Co., left alone in Study D while the other fellows went to their own rooms, were nearly dumb with the shock of it all. Then slowly a grim expression crept into Handforth's face. His jaw became set and his eyes obstinate.

"I'm clearing out!" he said thickly. "I can't stand this any more, you chaps!"

"Yes, let's get out into the Triangle," said Church. "Out there, anyhow, everything looks the same."

"I mean, I'm clearing out altogether!" said Handforth. "I can't stand St. Frank's like this. It's ruined! We'll make a bolt for it, you chaps!"

"But we can't!" protested McClure. "Miss Dobson warned us——"

"Blow Miss Dobson!"

"But the girls might catch it hot if we bunk," said Church. "We're quarantined, don't forget!"

"I'm not quarantined, and I'm not going to be quarantined!" snorted Handforth. "I'm not going to be segmented, either!"

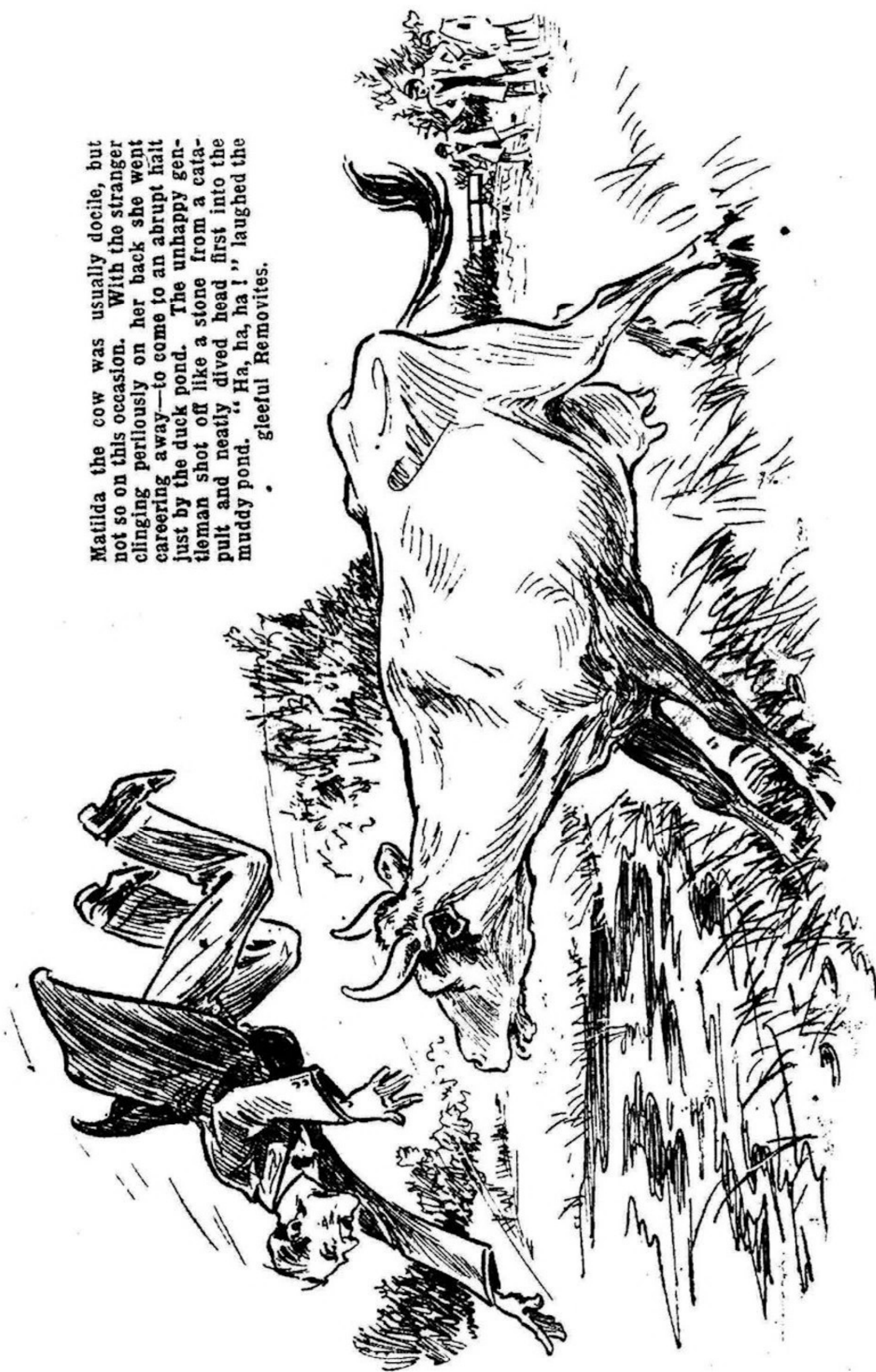
"Segregated," said Mac.

"Segregated, then!" growled Handforth. "They won't catch me on those fatheaded things! By George! My Austin Seven is in the garage. Come on, my sons! We'll get her out and make a dash for freedom!"

"But the girls——"

"They won't be punished for what I do!" argued Handforth. "It's all rot! If I thought there was any danger of them

Matilda the cow was usually docile, but not so on this occasion. With the stranger clinging perilously on her back she went careering away—to come to an abrupt halt just by the duck pond. The unhappy gentleman shot off like a stone from a catapult and neatly dived head first into the muddy pond. “Ha, ha, ha!” laughed the gleeful Removites.



getting into trouble with Miss Dobson, I wouldn't go. But there's no danger."

He cautiously went out into the passage, and his chums followed him. They, too, were anxious to get away from St. Frank's. They had no desire to be bottled up in the school for days, perhaps for a week or two. If they could only get away in the Austin Seven, they would be able to arrive home that day—and they badly wanted to get home, after their months of voyaging abroad.

So the chums of Study D crept down the corridor, intending to sneak out by means of the rear door. Fortunately, they passed nobody on the way, and there was still no sign of the girls.

"What was that?" breathed Church abruptly.

They all stopped. Some strange, mysterious knocks could be heard, coming apparently from beneath them.

Thud, thud, thud!

Then immediately afterwards there was a scuffle from one of the other passages, a whisper of girlish voices.

"Quick!" gasped Handforth. "Come on!"

They rushed to the rear door, got out, and sped like the wind towards the garage.



CHAPTER 12.

The Prisoners in the Cellar!

THANK goodness!" said Doris Berkeley breathlessly. "Oh, I thought Ted was going to make some of his wonderful investigations!"

"A good thing he didn't!" said Irene. "Bother those other boys! They'll give the game away, I'm afraid. What are we going to do?"

"Better go down and see what's happening," suggested Mary Summers uneasily. "Perhaps they're escaping!"

The girls were collected round an angle of the passage. They had seen Handforth & Co. scoot out of the rear doorway, and they were relieved.

Thud, thud, thud, thud!

"There they go again!" said Doris. "Come on! Some of the other chaps may hear those noises, and then we shan't be able to work off the rest of the jape. Might as well go the whole hog now we've started so successfully."

There was something very brisk and businesslike about these girls. They were proving, indeed, that when it came to a really

first-class, gilt-edged jape, they were every bit as ingenious and as enterprising as their schoolboy rivals.

How extraordinarily efficient Irene & Co. really were was obvious from the fact that the unfortunate Reggie Pitt and a group of other St. Frank's juniors were even now imprisoned in the cellar, and bound hand and foot, too!

Irene and Doris went down into the cellar without any delay to investigate the cause of those mysterious thuds. They switched on



the light, went down the steps, and found that Castleton, of the West House, had worked his way across the cellar. He was industriously thudding on a wooden partition with his feet.

"So that's the wheeze, is it?" said Irene briskly. "We shall have to do something about this, Doris."

"Of course we shall," said Doris. "The climax of the joke is due within about ten minutes, and we can't have everything spoilt by these chumps."

"Look here, Doris, old girl, hasn't there been about enough of this?" asked Reggie

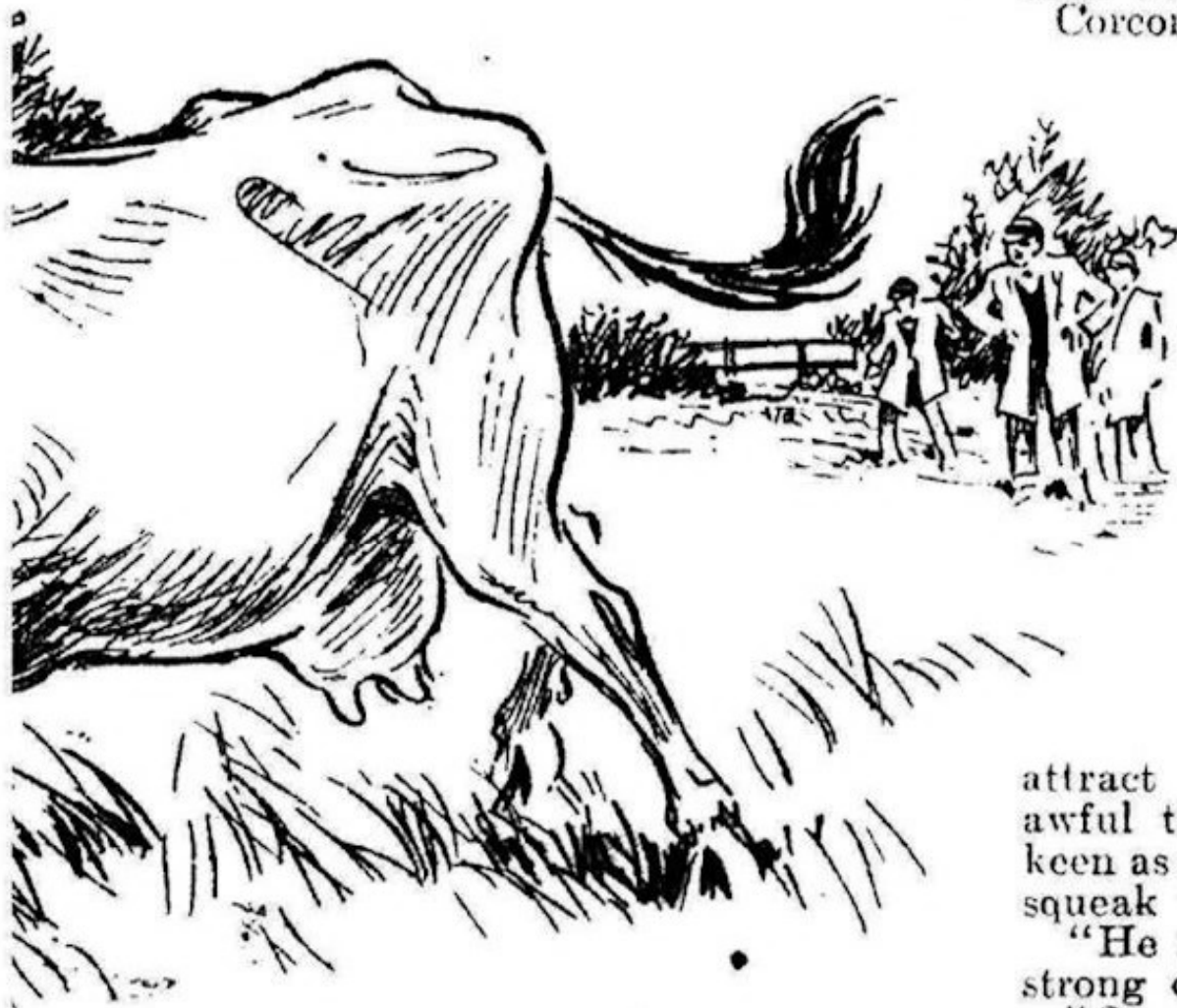
Pitt complainingly. "A jape's a jape, but —"

"Sorry, old thing, but you'll have to wait a bit longer," interrupted Doris sweetly. "It's entirely your own fault, if it comes to that. There was really no need for you to be roped up."

She looked from Reggie Pitt to Alan Castleton, Tich Harborough, Jack Grey, Lionel Corcoran and Timothy Armstrong. These were the unfortunate prisoners!

"You haven't explained things yet!" said

Matilda the cow was usually docile, but not so on this occasion. With the stranger clinging perilously on her back she went careering away—to come to an abrupt halt just by the duck pond. The unhappy gentleman shot off like a stone from a catapult and neatly dived head first into the muddy pond. "Ha, ha, ha!" laughed the gleeful Removites.



the Hon. Tom Harborough bitterly. "What the dickens does it mean? We go to Caistowe to meet the School Ship, and we're lured to St. Frank's and locked in a cellar!"

"And by girls, too!" said Lionel Corcoran sadly. "We'll never be able to hold up our heads again."

"We asked you to give us your word of honour that you wouldn't try to escape—and you refused," said Irene firmly. "If you had agreed we shouldn't even have locked you in, but, as it was, we had to bind you up and put you down here. It's all your own fault."

"Our own fault!" said Reggie indignantly. "Great Scott! That's a good one!"

"Of course it was your own fault," said Doris calmly. "You shouldn't have butted in, just when we were getting ready for our big jape."

"But we didn't butt in!" protested Castleton. "We didn't know anything about your wretched jape."

"Oh, well, it's no good arguing," murmured Irene coolly. "If you had given us your word not to escape, you wouldn't have suffered this misfortune. As things are, we're compelled to keep you prisoners. After taking so much trouble, we couldn't let you ruin everything, could we?"

Reggie Pitt drew a deep breath.

"You girls are as dangerous as any of the fellows nowadays," he said feelingly. "In fact, more dangerous! We can't call you the names we'd like to—and we can't scrap with you, either. But just you wait! We'll get our own back for this!"

Irene and Doris laughed merrily.

"Splendid!" cried Doris. "That's just what we want, Reggie! We're showing you boys that we can do as much japing as you can—and if you work off a stunt on us, we shall welcome it with open arms."

Corcoran, the schoolboy owner of the Blue Crusaders Football Club, could not help grinning.

"Well, let's get down to brass tacks," he said in his cool way. "When are we going to get out of here? We're just as anxious to see Nipper and Handforth and the others as you are, and we've been diddled out of it! How much longer are you going to keep us prisoners?"

"Until our victims either jump to the truth, or until the jape has run its course," said Irene sweetly. "We've got to hurry off now, but we don't want you to make any more thudding noises. You might attract Nipper's attention. We've had an awful time with him, you know. He's as keen as mustard, and it was only by a narrow squeak that we spoofed him."

"He must be very dull to-day!" said Armstrong of the Fourth.

"Or else the girls are very sharp!" chuckled Pitt. "I'm rather inclined to think that the last one is the right explanation."

"Well, are you going to kick up any more noise?" asked Doris pointedly. "Will you promise us that you won't kick, or—"

"Sorry—can't be done!" said Pitt promptly. "No promises, girls! We're going to get out of here as soon as we possibly can, and if we can spoil your jape, we'll do it. No ill-feeling, you know, but we're St. Frank's chaps, and our pals are being fooled. It's up to us to help 'em if we can!"

"Good old Reggie!" smiled Doris. "That's the spirit! I should have been awfully disappointed if you had given us your word that you wouldn't make a noise or try to escape!"

The girls proceeded to secure an extra rope round Castleton, and to tie him to a heavy upright post, so that he could not get near that wooden partition again. The others were tied in the same way—all round the post.

And thus they were left, whilst the two girls tripped upstairs to see how things were going on.



CHAPTER 13.

Poor Old Handy!

“**A**NYTHING doing?”

Irene asked that question as she and Doris encountered Ena Handforth and Tessa

Love and Sylvia Glenn, in the rear lobby in the Ancient House.

“Yes, rather!” smiled Handforth’s sister. “Ted has just gone out to the garage to find his Austin Seven.”

“Ha, ha, ha!”

The other girls went into a shriek of merriment—which, however, they quickly controlled.

“For goodness’ sake, dry up!” urged Irene. “If the other boys hear us, they’ll suspect things! So we were right, Ena! You said that Ted would try to escape in his Austin Seven, didn’t you?”

Ena nodded coolly.

“I know Ted!” she replied. “And the poor fellow believes that he got out unnoticed. A hippopotamus could have done it more quietly.”

“I say, let’s creep up and see what Ted and his chums are doing!” suggested Doris, her dark eyes twinkling, her pretty face flushed with merriment. “Oh, my goodness! I shall be awfully disappointed if we get there too late! Ted’s face will be worth pounds and pounds to watch when he sees the Austin Seven!”

“Come on!” said Irene gleefully.

They hurried off, and, in the meantime, Handforth & Co. had just arrived at the school garage. Handforth was congratulating himself upon the manner in which he had escaped notice; and Church and McClure were wondering how it was that they had performed this miracle. Yet, in their excitement, they suspected nothing.

“Well, we’re here!” said Handforth tensely. “We’ve only got to get the car out now, and we can be off within five minutes!”

“What about the others?” asked Church.

“Blow the others! It’s a case of every man for himself!”

“Well, it’s better than being quarantined by that Miss Dobson person,” said McClure feelingly. “I hope to goodness your Austin is all right, Handy!”

“What do you mean—all right?” said Handforth, staring. “Of course it’s all right!”

“But you haven’t touched it since Christmas,” Mac pointed out. “The tyres may be down, and perhaps there’s no petrol in the tank. Isn’t it likely, too, that the radiator has been emptied?”

Handforth brushed aside these trifles.

“I left my Austin Seven in perfect condition, and with plenty of juice in the tank, too,” he said. “If the tyres are a bit slack, who cares? Come on! Let’s get her out!”

They found the doors closed, but not locked. This was lucky—at least, it seemed to be lucky. Handforth swung one of the doors open, and the sunlight of the April day flooded into the garage.

“Lend a hand!” said Edward Oswald urgently. “Yank open that other door, Churchy!”

But Church had jumped nearly a foot into the air.

“My only hat!” he ejaculated, in a strangled voice.

He was staring into the garage—fixedly, and in a horrified manner.

“Help!” gurgled McClure.

They were both standing transfixed now, and Handforth stared at them in amazement.

“What’s the matter, fathead?” he demanded. “What the dickens— Eh? Why, what the— My Austin Seven!” he added, in a kind of frenzy.

He went positively pale as he gazed at the thing which stood within the garage—which stood on that very spot where Handforth had left his precious little Austin Seven car.

Undoubtedly the object now in the garage was an Austin Seven—indeed, Handforth’s very own Austin Seven, if one could judge by the colour of the bodywork, the upholstery, and so forth. But then, the Austin Seven is a popular car, and it is not particularly easy to tell one from another.

Handforth tried to speak, but the words choked in his throat, and he only achieved a kind of gurgling gulp, while his face grew redder and redder after that first touch of pallor.

“Oh, Handy!” muttered Church.

The Austin Seven was a caricature of a car. The mudguards were bent and twisted, and extraordinarily rusty. The radiator was battered, and there was an enormous dent in the middle of it. The tyres were on the wheels, it was true, but only just on. They were hanging in shreds, and in one or two places the inner tubes were ominously bulging out.

The windscreen was cracked in a dozen places, and the body itself was dented, crumpled, rusty, and disreputable. The remains of the hood were hanging in forlorn tatters over the rear; and the upholstery was

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mouldy in places, and escaping from several huge rents in others.

"Somebody must have borrowed it, Handy!" said McClure, with conviction.

The remark had the effect of restoring Handforth's voice; and when it came forth it was like the explosion of a dynamite charge.

"My Austin Seven!" he hooted. "It's ruined! It's wrecked! It's nothing but old iron!"

Church and McClure reeled under the effect of that blast, just as though a hurricane had struck them.

"Dry up, Handy!" urged Church. "The girls will hear us! Perhaps Miss Dobson will hear—"

"My Austin!" howled Handforth wildly. "Look at it!"

He leapt nearer, and if he had any lingering doubts they were dispelled when he caught sight of the licence-holder—a special little gadget of his own. There was a piece of red tape tied round the steering-wheel at a certain spot, too—another of Handforth's weird and wonderful driving ideas. He had tied that tape on himself, and it was just the same now, except that it was a bit dirtier and a bit more ragged.

And there was the big Indian ink stain, on the back of the driver's bucket-seat—a reminder of a little argument that Handforth had once had with Church.

When Handforth had last seen his Austin Seven it had been a trim little car, neat and clean, and he had been very careful when he had stowed the "bus" away.

Now he beheld—this!



CHAPTER 14.

The Distinguished Visitor!

EDWARD OSWALD HANDFORTH became frenzied.

He ran round the Austin Seven, shouting at the top of his voice, pulling at the hood, opening and shutting the battered doors, and generally behaving like a lunatic. His Austin Seven had been his favourite possession.

And now he found this wreck—this grotesque, battered, twisted mass of rusty old iron. There was a tragic expression on his face.

Church suddenly uttered an exclamation.

"Oh, crumbs! I told you so, Handy!" he ejaculated. "Your yelling has attracted the girls! Here they come—half a dozen of 'em!"

"I don't care!" stormed Handforth. "My Austin Seven's a wreck! Look at the wheels! The spokes are all falling out! Look at the radiator! It's as full of holes as a sieve!"

Irene & Co. found it very difficult to keep their faces straight as they came hurrying up. They pretended to be concerned and curious.

"Whatever's the matter, Ted?" asked Irene wonderingly. "What are you shouting about? You'll have Miss Dobson down on you!"

Handforth turned, sobered by the sudden appearance of the girls. He stood there, breathing hard, his rugged face aflame with indignation, his hair tousled and untidy.

"Who's done this?" he asked hoarsely.

He pointed to the battered wreckage, and the girls regarded it in affected astonishment.

"My hat!" said Doris. "This isn't your little Austin Seven, is it, Ted?"

"Yes, it is!" panted Handforth.

"It's not so neat as it used to be," remarked Irene critically.

"Neat!" howled Handforth. "It's—it's a wreck! I'll bet it's just as bad inside, too!"

He seized one of the rusty bonnet-fastenings, unhitched it, and raised the battered flap.

"The engine's gone!" he gurgled.

Church and McClure, bending over, could hardly believe their eyes. It was true enough—the Austin Seven's engine had completely vanished! There was nothing under that bonnet but a lot of twisted bits of iron, sticking out here and there!

"It's too bad, Ted!" said Doris. "While you've been away somebody must have been using your car."

Handforth seemed to be fighting for his breath.

"What do you girls know about this?" he demanded suspiciously. "By George! You haven't been doing anything with my car, have you?"

Irene became stiff.

"Well, I like that!" she said indignantly. "Are you trying to suggest, Ted, that we've spoilt your silly old car? We haven't touched it!"

"As far as we knew, your Austin was as good as ever," said Ena Handforth. "And what's the good of making a fuss, Ted? You always were a chap to start shouting over trifles."

"Trifles!" howled Handforth, glaring at his sister. "If you girls didn't do this, who did?"

"We're not supposed to know, are we?" snapped Ena coldly. "Bother you and your silly car! We haven't been at St. Frank's long, as you ought to know."

Handforth walked round the wreckage again, his expression becoming more and more determined.

"I'm going to see Miss Dobson about this!" he declared at last. "By George! There's going to be a row, too! She's in charge of this school, and she's responsible! I'm not going to be messed about—"

"Hallo!" broke in Doris. "Listen, girls! There's a car coming into the Triangle!"

They all stood still, and even Handforth listened. They could distinctly hear the purr

of a big car. Indeed, they caught a glimpse of the vehicle—a sumptuous saloon—as it turned into the gateway.

"It must be Sir James!" said Irene excitedly.

"Sir James?" repeated Church. "Who's he?"

"Haven't you heard of Sir James Hill?" asked Irene. "Isn't he one of the St. Frank's governors?"

"Bother the governors!" said Handforth impatiently. "I want to see Miss Dobson—"

"But you can't see her now!" broke in Marjorie. "I believe that Sir James Hill has come to St. Frank's especially to have a consultation with Miss Dobson. It isn't fair of you to accuse our headmistress of damaging your car, Ted. Why don't you speak to Sir James?"

Handforth started, and a gleam came into his eyes.

"By George, Renie, you're right!" he ejaculated. "Thanks for the tip! Yes! Sir James is the chap to talk to—he's one of the governors!"

"One of your governors—not ours!" said Irene.

"All the better!" said Handforth. "Come on! Quick, you chaps! Let's grab him before he can get away!"

The chums of Study D went tearing off—the saloon car having conveniently come to

a stop in the middle of the Triangle in the meantime. And Irene glanced at her companions, and they all burst into soft chuckles.

"Spoofed again!" breathed Doris happily. "Oh, Renie, you're a genius! This last bit is going to be the funniest of all!"



CHAPTER 15.

More "News"!

S

IR JAMES HILL appeared to be a man of pompous demeanour. He was sitting in the rear of

the car, looking about him with an air of proprietorship that was positively aggressive. He was a biggish man, and nature had generously provided him with one or two spare chins. He possessed a bristling grey moustache, and a big cigar was sticking out of the corner of his mouth.

Handforth, racing into the Triangle, collided with Nipper and Travers and Fullwood and the other St. Frank's juniors.

"What's the hurry, Handy?" asked Travers mildly. "Where's the fire, dear old fellow?"

"There's no fire, fathead!" retorted Handforth. "I'm going to speak to Sir James!"

Travers glanced at the big car.

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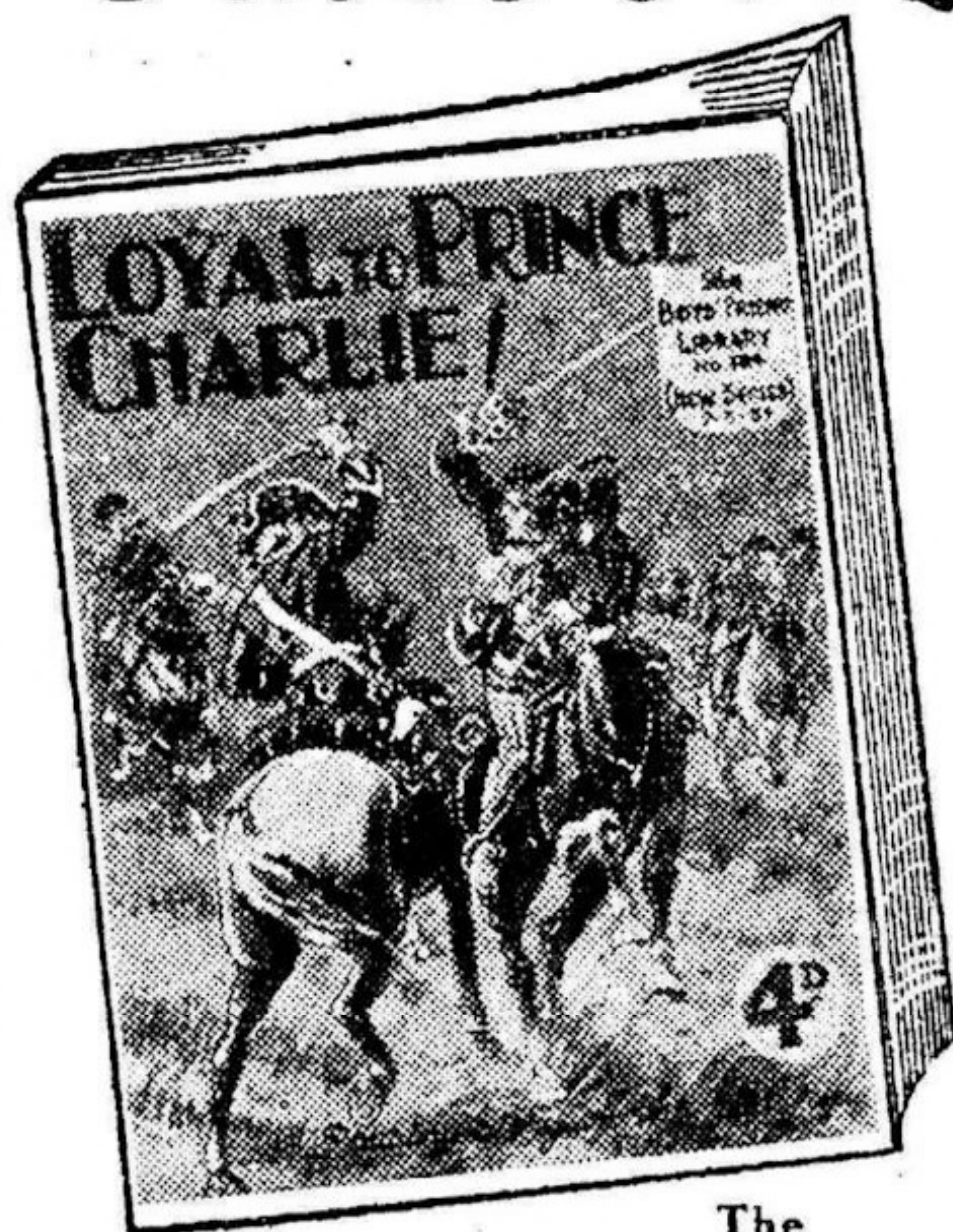
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"Friend of yours?" he asked.

"No, he jolly well isn't!" snorted Handforth. "He's Sir James Hill, one of the governors! He ought to be able to tell us something about the school. Besides, there's my Austin Seven! I'm going to have a new one for it! They're not going to swindle me out of my car!"

"One of the governors, eh?" said Nipper, seizing upon the only important point. "You're right, Handy! He'll probably be able to tell us what's going to happen to the school."

"But we know what's happened to the school!"

"We know that the girls are here," said Nipper, "but we don't know where we're going to next term, do we?"

They all hurried towards the car, which was just gliding off again—now making for the direction of Inner Court—but the liveried chauffeur soon brought the car to a standstill as he found himself virtually surrounded by the excited schoolboys.

"Drive on, Judson—drive on!" came the pompous command from Sir James. "Good gracious! What are these boys doing here? Isn't St. Frank's a girls' school now?"

All those juniors heard the words—and, subconsciously, they were struck by the significance of them. Here was one of the St. Frank's governors admitting that St. Frank's had been changed into a girls' school! There couldn't be any doubt that the awful thing had really happened.

Handforth wrenched open one of the rear doors.

"You're one of the governors, aren't you, sir?" he demanded aggressively.

"Boy!" thundered Sir James. "How dare you? Have you not been told that I am Sir James Hill?"

"Yes, sir—and I've been told, too, that you're a St. Frank's Governor, down here to have a talk with Miss Dobson!" said Handforth. "We're St. Frank's chaps, sir—and we want to know what all this means!"

"Cheese it, Handy!" muttered Nipper. "No need to be so noisy! You'll only offend the old boy!"

Sir James, with a grunt, was getting out of the car. He now stood on the gravel of the Triangle, looking down at the juniors with distaste and pomposity.

"Never mind Handforth, sir—he's excited!" said Nipper. "We want to know about the school, sir."

Sir James frowned.

"This is not your school, is it?" he asked. "Surely you boys must know that there has been a change——"

"Yes, sir—we've been told," said Nipper.

"Very well, then! What are you doing here?"

"We came off the School Ship this morning, sir," put in Fullwood. "We never dreamed that there had been any alterations at St. Frank's, and it knocked us all of a heap."

"Ah! The School Ship!" said Sir James

Hill, shaking his head. "So you boys landed this morning, eh? You are members of the party that went abroad?"

"Yes, sir."

"A most expensive trip—a most costly business," said Sir James gravely. "Indeed, there is every reason to economise now. Is it very surprising, boys, that the St. Frank's Governing Board should decide to dispose of the school property?"

"Surprising, sir!" ejaculated Nipper. "I should say it's amazing!"

"Nonsense, boy!"

"And it's so—so unexpected, too, sir!" put in Handforth. "St. Frank's is a fine old place—with a great history, and with traditions. It's a terrible thing to sell it—and to make it into a girls' school!"

"I am astonished that you boys should be so old-fashioned," said Sir James impatiently. "And it is distressing that you should be so dissatisfied. You have just come home from a world trip—a wonderful trip. Gad! I was never so lucky when I was at school!"

"We're not grumbling about the trip, sir—it was wonderful!" said Nipper. "It was really top-hole. But it's a shock to find the old school transferred into other hands!"

"What difference will it make to you?" demanded Sir James, in surprise. "You have had your turn, and now it will be the turn of the rest of the school. I think you know, do you not, that the other half of St. Frank's is to go on a world tour in the School Ship?"

"Yes, of course, sir."

"Starting within a week, the ship can be well clear of British waters——"

"Within a week, sir!" broke in Nipper. "But we thought that the School Ship wasn't to make another trip until next winter!"

"You mustn't believe all that you hear, young man," said Sir James, with a wave of his hand. "And how do you expect the school authorities to withstand this expense? This school is too big for merely half the boys—much too big."

"But they'll be coming back ultimately, won't they, sir?" asked Travers mildly.

"Ultimately—yes," said Sir James. "But in the meantime there is no reason why economy should not be practised. You have heard, no doubt, that the school premises have been disposed of?"

"Yes, sir—the girls have told us."

"You have heard that St. Frank's has been purchased by a combine of girls' schools, eh?"

"A combine, sir?" said Handforth. "Oh, that explains it, then! I thought St. Frank's was a lot too big for the Moor View girls alone! I suppose two or three girls' schools are joining together, and they're going to have a House each, or something like that?"

"It is not for me to discuss such matters with you, boy!" said Sir James coldly. "In any case, it is not my business to discuss it with anybody. What will you say when I tell you that the school Governors have already acquired a fine building for the accommodation of you boys and your companions?"

"Where are they shifting the school to, sir?" asked Nipper eagerly.

"Have you not heard that Bannington is to be the new——"

"Bannington!" shouted all the spoofed juniors.

"Yes, Bannington."

"Well, that's not so bad, you chaps," said Handforth, glancing at the others. "I thought they were going to shift us to some place hundreds of miles away, perhaps. By George! I wonder if the school Governors have got hold of Bannington Grammar School? It's not such a bad place——"

"I can assure you, my boy, that Bannington Grammar School has not been acquired," interrupted Sir James. "Perhaps you know that there is a big building just outside the town—a very fine municipal institution?"

"A what, sir?"

"There is no reason why it should not make a splendid school," said Sir James thoughtfully. "I dare say much of it will need to be converted—but that is for the contractors."

Nipper frowned, looking puzzled.

"A municipal institution, sir?" he repeated. "I don't seem to remember it. Do you mind telling us just where it is? We're awfully keen on knowing where we're going to, sir."

Sir James Hill nodded.

"Of course—of course," he said, in a more kindly voice. "Being St. Frank's boys, you are naturally interested. Well, I am convinced that the Bannington Union buildings will——"

"Bannington Union!" gasped Nipper, with a violent start.

"Certainly!" said Sir James. "What of it?"

"But—but—— My only sainted aunt!" breathed Nipper faintly. "Oh, crumbs! The Bannington Union—being converted into a new school for St. Frank's! Help!"

Handforth was looking bewildered.

"I say, what rot!" he protested. "We're not going to join a Union!"

"You fathead!" yelled Church. "Don't you know what the Bannington Union is?"

"Eh? What is it?"

"It's the workhouse!" said Nipper tragically.

was swallowed whole. Nipper himself did not suspect.

Why should he? How could he believe that Sir James Hill, this pompous man, elderly and staid-looking, was a spoofer?

"The workhouse!" gurgled Handforth faintly. "By George! Of course! They call workhouses Unions, don't they? But—but——"

"What on earth is the matter with you boys?" demanded Sir James, with a snort. "Good gracious me! One might think that I had said something startling."

"Well, haven't you, sir?" asked Nipper. "When you tell us that we're going to be shifted into the Bannington Workhouse——"

"Rubbish!" said Sir James. "When you put it bluntly, like that, it naturally seems alarming. But have I not already hinted that the workhouse is being converted? At least, one must assume that the work is already in hand. The new term begins next week, and everything must be ready for the school."

"The workhouse!" said Handforth dizzily. "Why, it's—it's unheard-of!"

"Fiddlesticks!" laughed Sir James. "It cannot be unheard-of, boys, because you are hearing of it now. The Bannington Union is a fine place! A magnificent range of buildings! A little alteration here and there, and there is no reason why the school should not go on as smoothly as heretofore."

He puckered his brows, as though a thought had suddenly occurred to him.

"By the way, you boys will probably be journeying to London later on in the day?" he asked. "I take it that you came to St. Frank's on your way home, as it were?"

"Yes, sir," said Nipper. "But we didn't expect to find all this upheaval!"

"In this world, young man, we sometimes get what we do not expect," retorted Sir James. "I think it will be as well if you all go to Bannington at once, and report to the Union."

"Report, sir?"

"Yes," said the big man. "Go to the Bannington Union without delay. Tell the superintendent that I have sent you, and ask him to show you your new quarters."

"But—but we can't leave St. Frank's, sir," said Tommy Watson. "We're segregated."

"You're what?"

"I mean, quarantined, sir."

"Quarantined? Rubbish!" said Sir James. "What is this nonsense?"

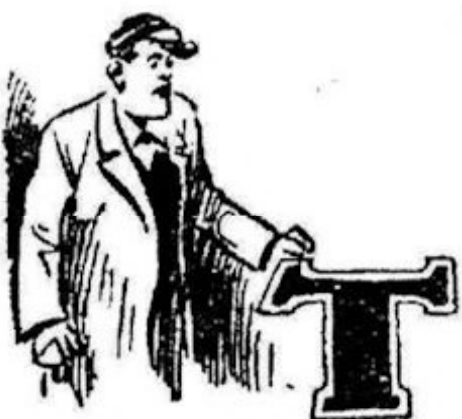
"There's been a case of measles, sir——"

"Oh, that!" said Sir James, with an impatient wave of his hand. "A mere rumour, boy. A false alarm. There is utterly no reason why you should be quarantined. You are at liberty to leave these premises just when you like. In fact, I insist upon you leaving at once. You will obey my orders and go to the Bannington Union and report yourselves to the superintendent."

"But Miss Dobson said——"

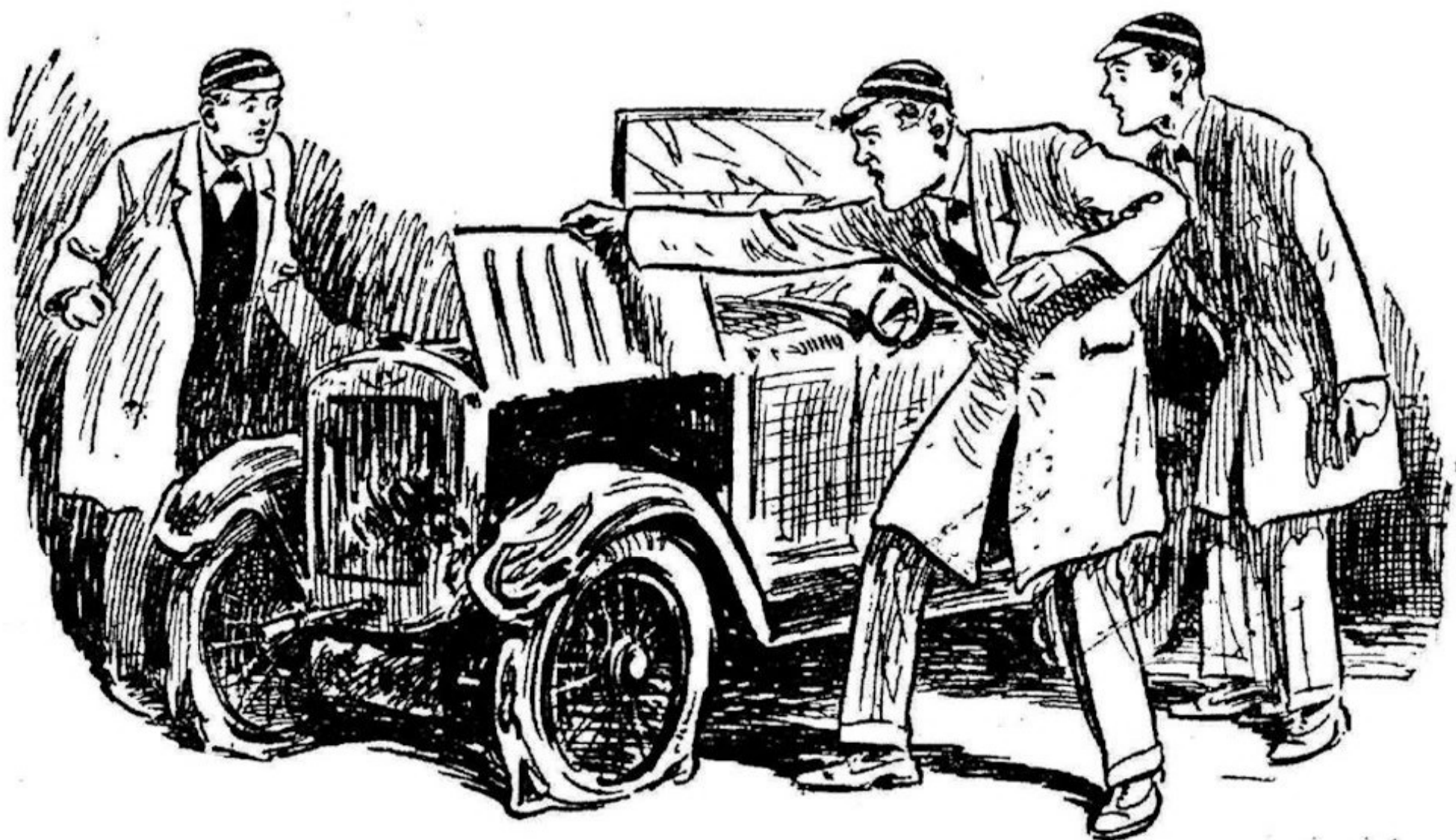
CHAPTER 16.

Ordered to Report!



TO say that the St. Frank's fellows were startled would be putting it much too mildly. They were staggered. They were well-nigh stupefied.

And so cleverly had the girls worked up their great spoof, step after step, that even this utterly preposterous piece of nonsense



Handforth raised the battered flap of the still more battered Austin Seven. Next moment he uttered a terrific roar. The car's engine was conspicuous only by its absence!

"Without any disrespect to the lady, I do not care a toss what Miss Dobson said!" broke in Sir James pompously. "I have given you these orders, and you will carry them out. If you fail to report, I shall probably hear of it, and your punishment will be severe!"

He produced a notebook, opened it, and glared from junior to junior.

"Your names!" he snapped. "I do not intend to have any mistake about this!"

They gave him their names, one after the other, and Sir James jotted them down. Then he closed the book with a triumphant snap and restored it to his pocket.

"Good!" he said, nodding. "Now you may go. And if you fail to report as I have ordered the consequences will be very serious for you."

He stepped into his car and waved a hand to the chauffeur.

"On, Judson!" he said curtly. "I have wasted enough time already."

The big car glided off, vanishing through Big Arch. The boys were left in a group in the Triangle, gazing at one another with bewildered, horrified expressions.

Before they could make any comments, however, there was a rush of light feet, and Irene and Doris and the other girls came swarming round. They were all looking eager and flushed.

"Well?" asked Irene breathlessly. "Have you heard any news?"

"Tell us!" urged Sylvia.

Handforth looked round in a dull sort of way.

"News!" he repeated hoarsely. "I should think we have heard some news! We're all going into the workhouse!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Irene & Co., in spite of all their good intentions, could not refrain from bursting into a shriek of laughter. Handforth's expression was altogether too much for them. Fortunately, the laugh was misunderstood by the boys.

"But it's true!" said Fullwood quickly. "You needn't laugh like that, you girls. I tell you it's true!"

"True!" exclaimed Irene, becoming serious with an effort. "We—we thought you were joking!"

"I wish we were joking!" said Nipper gloomily. "But Sir James has told us that the St. Frank's governing board has acquired the Bannington Union premises. It's a big building, I know, but isn't it bad luck for St. Frank's? Great Scott! To think that we're going to live in a workhouse!"

"It's too absolutely amazing for words!" said Archie Glenthorne. "Good gad! I mean to say, odds tragedies and disasters! They'll probably feed us on skilly, or something of that kind!"

"Don't be an ass, Archie," said Nipper. "We shall have the same food as we've always had, and the place won't be a workhouse any longer. It'll be a school. At the same time, it's bad luck for St. Frank's, and we shall be the laughing-stock of Bannington."

"And these girls have got our school!" said Handforth rebelliously. "It's too thick!"

"We don't mind the change in the least," said Irene sweetly.

"Well, let's be going," said Tommy Watson, with an air of resignation. "We might as well get it over."

"But you can't leave the school!" said Doris. "Miss Dobson has ordered you to stay here."

"And Sir James has ordered us to report to the workhouse!" said Fullwood. "We're going to make a dash for it while we've got the chance."

"A good idea, too!" said Doris, nodding. "Miss Dobson might keep you back if she gets to hear of this. Why not dash off while you've got the chance?"

The St. Frank's boys agreed—and dashed off!



CHAPTER 17.

Nearing the Climax!

DONE it!" panted Reggie Pitt triumphantly.

He breathed hard as he fell back against the pillar in the cellar, and rubbed his wrists. The ropes that had recently bound him were lying in his lap. He had done the trick; he had liberated his hands.

"Good egg!" said Jack Grey eagerly. "Buck up, my son! Get your ankles free, and then help the rest of us. It's about time we got out of this beastly cellar."

Reggie only took a short breather, then he attacked the ropes round his ankles, and it did not take him long to fully liberate himself. Within a minute all the others were free, too—a pocket-knife having come in very useful.

"Now!" said Alan Castleton, breathing hard. "Now for those girls!"

"That's the worst of it," said Pitt. "We can't go for them as we'd go for a crowd of chaps. If Brewster & Co., of the River House School, had japed us like this we could have slaughtered them. But we can't slaughter girls!"

Tich Harborough groaned.

"That's what I've been thinking," he said. "We shall be helpless; we shall just have to let them laugh at us."

"Well, anyway, we're free," said Lionel Corcoran, "and that's something to be thankful for."

"We aren't out of the cellar yet," put in Armstrong. "The door's bound to be locked."

"Who cares for locked doors?" said Corky. "Come on! If we get out quickly we may be in time to spoil the last part of the jape. And that'll be a kind of revenge in itself."

They experienced no difficulties in getting out of the cellar. The door was locked, it was true, and they soon gave it up as a bad job. But there were one or two handy

gratings in that cellar, and they soon conquered one of these. One by one they squeezed out and found themselves in the open air.

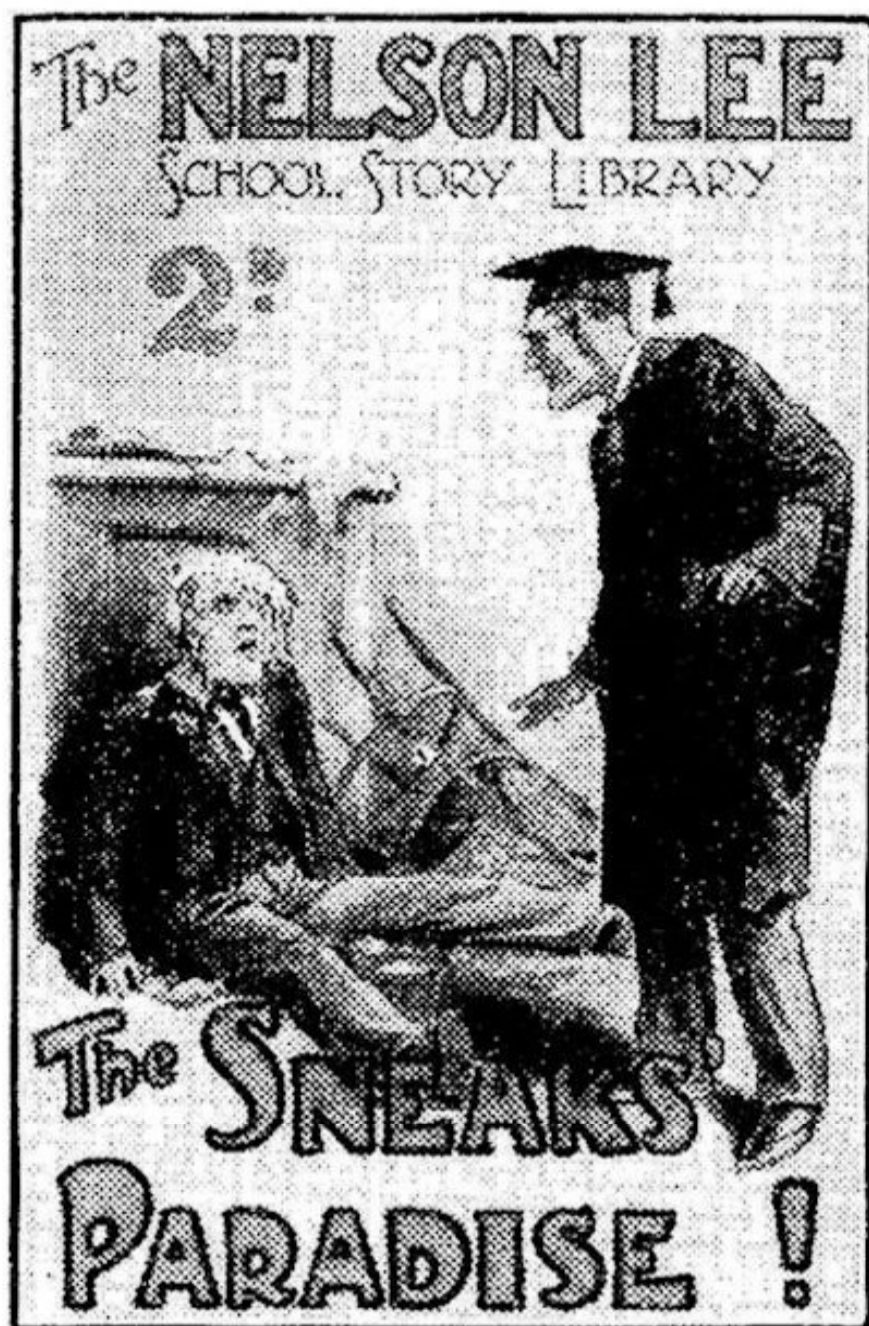
From the Triangle came the sounds of silvery laughter—loud, long and continuous.

"The joke must be going well!" said Reggie Pitt grimly.

"All right—let's go and spoil it!" said Castleton.

They hurried into the Triangle and found Irene & Co. near the fountain, fairly shrieking with merriment. There was nobody else in sight, not even "Miss Dobson" or "Sir

COMING NEXT WEEK!



James Hill." Dora Manners, however, had joined the schoolgirls, and she was just as hilariously affected as her younger companions.

"Oh, goodness!" cried Doris Berkeley suddenly. "Those boys have escaped!"

The laughter ceased, and all the girls turned and looked at the approaching juniors.

"It doesn't matter," said Irene, wiping the tears from her eyes. "We were going to release them, anyhow. Thank goodness they didn't get out earlier!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Another outburst of laughter sounded, and when Reggie Pitt and his companions came up they found the girls going off into fresh spasms.

"Very funny!" said Corky. "A wonderful joke!"

"We've never had such a marvellous First of April jape before!" said Irene breathlessly. "Oh, to think of it! Dick and Ted and the others were spoofed up to their eyes!"

"Travelling abroad seems to have dulled their wits!" remarked Armstrong, with a sniff.

"I don't believe it!" said Reggie Pitt. "Don't forget they came straight ashore, and when they got to St. Frank's they were prepared to hear that a few changes had

"THE SNEAKS' PARADISE!"

Sneaking allowed! Sneaking encouraged!

Such is the extraordinary state of affairs at St. Frank's.

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been made. Besides, these girls must have done the thing properly!"

"Thanks!" chuckled Doris. "I certainly do think we wangled everything very nicely."

"It's all according to the point of view," said Reggie coldly. "By Jove! If you were boys we'd make mincemeat of you!"

The girls shouted with laughter again.

"We don't want to take an unfair advantage of you," said Irene merrily. "We know you can't 'slaughter' us, as you call it, but you can at least get your own back by japing us. We challenge you. I'll bet you won't be able to fool us as gloriously as we have fooled you!"

"But you haven't fooled us!" said Reggie. "You've fooled the other chaps."

"Same thing," chuckled Irene.

"And where are they, anyhow?" demanded Castleton, looking round. "What have you done with 'em?"

"You're too late," said Doris. "They've gone."

"Gone?"

"Yes; we sent them to the workhouse."

"The—the what?" yelled Pitt & Co.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It's a fact!" said Irene, her blue eyes sparkling with joy. "Honest Injun, boys—we've sent them to the workhouse!"

"Oh, draw it mild!" protested Jack Grey. "You couldn't have done a thing like that! They wouldn't go!"

"But they've gone, all the same," said Doris. "Oh, my only aunt! I shall never know how I prevented myself from screaming with laughter. They all went—to the workhouse! They're going to report themselves!"

"But why?" asked Pitt in amazement.

"The Bannington Workhouse is going to be their new school!" said Irene gravely.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The other girls shrieked again.

"And do you mean to say that Nipper and the chaps swallowed that yarn?" asked Pitt, staring.

"They swallowed it whole," replied Irene dreamily. "They were spoofed up to the eyes—spoofed as they've never been spoofed before. Girls, I rather think we can pat ourselves on the backs."

"I rather think we can," agreed Ena Handforth. "We've made proper April fools of those boys, and they'll remember this Easter Monday as long as they live!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Reggie Pitt glanced quickly at his companions; then he turned to Irene.

"Now, Renie, be a sport!" he urged. "Honest Injun—have you really sent those chaps to the Bannington Workhouse?"

"Yes—honest Injun!" chuckled Irene. "And they went, too."

Pitt turned to the others.

"Come on!" he said briskly. "There's just a chance that we shall be able to prevent them from this final blow! If we're lucky, we shall just catch a bus!"

And while Irene & Co. continued to shout with laughter, Reggie Pitt and the other boys streamed out of the Triangle and went running at top speed down the lane.

CHAPTER 18.

April Fools!



HERE we are!" said Nipper dubiously. They had arrived at the great range of red-brick buildings which comprised the Bannington Union. Passing through a big gateway, the school-boys now stood in front of the main build-

ing—a solemn, depressing-looking place with a severity about the architecture that was positively melancholy.

"Horrible!" said Handforth, with a shudder.

"Yes, it is a bit awful, isn't it?" muttered Church. "And to think that we've got to come to school here—instead of St. Frank's! It's—it's unbelievable!"

Nipper shook himself.

"Now and again I wonder if it can really be true," he said. "It's so—so outrageous, you fellows! But there was no reason why Sir James Hill should have told us wrong. He ought to know what the Governing Board has decided."

Vivian Travers nodded.

"Dear old fellows, after the Governing Board has disposed of St. Frank's so that it shall become a girls' school, anything is possible," he said. "If the governors are capable of that, they're capable of anything!"

"Absolutely," said Archie Glenthorne. "I mean to say, it's absolutely enough to make one wilt at the good old knees, what!"

"Well let's get it over," said Nipper.

They mounted the steps, and stood in a group outside the great main door. Nipper pulled a big bell, and presently the door was opened by an elderly man, who regarded the schoolboys with suspicion.

"We've come to report!" said Handforth bluntly.

"You've come to do what?" said the man, staring.

"We'd like to see the superintendent," said Nipper.

"What's this—one of your jokes?" asked the man. "There's no superintendent here."

"But we've been told——"

"I reckon you've come to the wrong place, young gentlemen," said the man. "I suppose you know that this is the workhouse, don't you?"

"Yes, we know that," said Nipper. "And we want to see the superintendent——"

"Well, there isn't a superintendent—not here, anyway."

"Rot!" said Handforth. "This is our new school!"

The man, who was evidently an official of some kind, started back, and then frowned heavily.

"That's about enough!" he snapped. "I thought you were trying to be funny when I first saw you! The best thing you can do, young gentlemen, is to get off these premises. Your new school, indeed! What do you think I am—a mug?"

"But don't you know about it?" asked Church.

"No, I don't!" shouted the man angrily. "You and your practical jokes! You can't work this stuff on me!"

"But it is our new school!" roared Handforth. "St. Frank's is going to be transferred——"

"Transferred to the workhouse, eh?" nodded the man. "Well, you can tell that yarn to the Marines!"

He slammed the door, and the boys looked at one another in bewilderment.

"Ye gods and little fishes!" breathed Nipper, nearly turning pale. "I wonder—I wonder——"

"What?" demanded the others.

"It's fishy, you chaps!" said Nipper hoarsely. "This fellow know nothing about the arrangement. And if there was any truth in the story, he must have known. I tell you there's something fishy——"

"Look!" yelled Tommy Watson suddenly.

"Begad!" ejaculated Sir Montie, adjusting his pince-nez. "Reggie Pitt and some of the other chaps!"

They all ran down the steps. Hurrying up from the gates came a group of juniors—Reggie Pitt, Jack Grey, Tich Harborough, and the rest.

"Good old Reggie!" shouted Nipper enthusiastically. "By Jove, I'm glad to see you, old man!"

"Same here!" panted Reggie, gripping Nipper's fist and shaking it hard.

For some moments there was a regular orgy of hand-shaking and back-slapping.

"But what are you doing here?" asked Nipper at last. "We half-expected to see you at Caistowe——"

"We came to Caistowe, too—to meet your giddy boat!" said Pitt. "But we were collared by the girls."

"Good gad!"

"Collared—by the girls?"

"Yes!" said Corky sadly. "One of the girls saw us in Caistowe and told us that we were urgently needed at St. Frank's. She pretended to be sort of hysterical, and begged us—pleaded with us—to go back with her to St. Frank's. We went."

"Well?" asked Nipper ominously.

"We found Irene in the Triangle, and asked her what she was doing there," said Pitt. "She was crying—or pretending to—and in a sobbing voice she asked us to go into the Ancient House, one at a time. Like fatheads, we went."

"I can guess the rest!" said Nipper. "I suppose you were collared?"

"One by one!" said Reggie. "I'm ashamed to admit it—but we were beautifully tricked. The girls couldn't have captured us in a body, and so they wangled it with rare skill. One by one we were grabbed, roped up, and chucked into the cellar!"

"By George!" said Handforth, breathing hard.

"Then—then you were in the cellar all the time—while we were at St. Frank's?" asked Jimmy Potts breathlessly.

"Of course," said Reggie. "You've been spoofed, my lads—spoofed up to the eyes!"

"What!"

"Of course you have!" went on the West House Junior leader. "You don't think the

girls have really been transferred to St. Frank's, do you? You don't think that St. Frank's is going to be transferred to this workhouse?"

"But—but—but——"

Handforth paused, words failing him.

"It's all a jape!" said Reggie. "Irene & Co. have achieved a triumph—and it's no good trying to say anything else! It's the jape of the year, and they're justified in going into hysterics with laughter!"

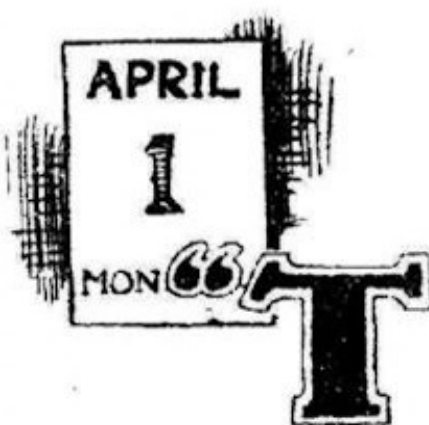
"A jape!" breathed Vivian Travers. "Upon my Samson! And we never guessed it! Dear old fellows, these girls are foemen worthy of our steel!"

"We thought it was a bit thick, from the very first," said Nipper, aghast. "Great Scott! And we fell into the trap like simpletons! I dare say we should have suspected things if a crowd of boys had worked the wheeze, but we didn't give the girls credit for so much trickiness!"

"That's where you were wrong," said Pitt, shaking his head. "These girls are as full of mischief as a cartload of monkeys. Perhaps you've forgotten the date, too?"

"The date?" said Nipper, with a start. "It's Easter Monday."

"Yes—and it's the First of April, too!" said Pitt pointedly.



CHAPTER 19.

A Little Mistake!

THE First of April!" yelled all the spoofed juniors, in one solid voice.

"Of course!" said Reggie, grinning in spite of himself. "Surely you hadn't forgotten the date?"

"Fatheads — idiots — imbeciles — block-heads!" said Nipper breathlessly.

"Are you talking about us?" demanded Handforth, with a start.

"I'm talking about all of us, including myself!" growled Nipper. "We're a set of prize dummies! April Fools' Day! And we never realised it—we never gave it a thought!"

"Those girls gave it a thought, though!" said Tich Harborough, with a sigh.

"By Jove!" grinned Nipper. "Let's be frank, you chaps—let's give the girls credit. They worked this jape amazingly well—and they deserve praise."

"Praise?" roared Handforth, red in the face.

"Yes—praise!" said Nipper calmly. "Now that I know the truth, I can hardly realise

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that I was idiot enough to swallow the yarn. But it was done so naturally—so perfectly—that all my doubts were dispelled. There's a new menace here, you fellows—and we shall do well to take this as a warning."

"A new menace?" asked Reggie Pitt.

"Yes!" said Nipper. "Until now, these Moor View girls haven't worked off any japes on St. Frank's. They've started in first-class style, and in future we shall have to be on our guard! And, by Jove, we'll have a terrific revenge for this! We'll give them some of their own medicine when the new term starts!"

"Jape them, you mean?" asked Handforth eagerly.

"You bet!" said Nipper. "We've got to wipe out this stain! But, for the present, let's give credit where credit's due. Irene & Co. have achieved a triumph. Good luck to 'em!"

"Hear, hear!" said Corcoran. "Supposing we go back and find out a few details?"

"Yes, rather!"

A moment later the whole body of school-boys moved out of the Workhouse grounds—glad to shake the dust of that place from their heels—and they set off back for St. Frank's. Although they had been bewildered and indignant to start with, they were now yelling with laughter. They were so relieved that they could afford to chuckle over the completeness of their downfall. Without doubt, Irene & Co. had scored a tremendous victory!

"They did everything so perfectly, you know," said Nipper smilingly. "Miss Dobson, for example. Who is she? Not one of the girls disguised, I'll swear! And Sir James Hill? The girls didn't take any risks—they made certain of things!"

"Sir James Hill?" said Handforth, with a start. "But he's one of the Governors!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You ass!" said Church. "It's as clear as daylight that Sir James Hill is only a spoof! He was working in with the girls—helping them!"

"Oh, my hat!" said Handforth blankly.

By the time the boys arrived in Bellton Lane they were in a state of high, good-humour. They were returning to St. Frank's to congratulate Irene & Co. upon their successful jape. They also wanted to mention, quite casually, that when the new term started the girls would find it necessary to "look out." For Nipper was determined to even things up at the earliest opportunity.

Up the lane, they overtook a sombrely-attired gentleman who was walking slowly and who paused now and again to inspect the scenery. He regarded the juniors curiously as they approached.

He was a grave-looking gentleman, with a lined, clean-shaven face—a studious, thoughtful face. The chin was very determined, the eyes were hard and purposeful.

"One moment!" he said peremptorily.

The boys stopped, looking at the stranger suspiciously.

"You are St. Frank's boys?" asked the man.

"Yes, sir."

"What are you doing here?"

"Just going up to the school, sir."

"On Easter Monday?" asked the stranger. "I should like to know your names! I am your new headmaster—"

"Not likely!" roared Handforth suddenly.

"Look out, you chaps! This is another spoofer! But we're not going to be fooled this time! What about chucking him into the ditch?"

"Yes, rather!"

"On him!"

Without exception, the boys took it for granted that this stranger was another of Irene & Co.'s helpers. The girls were attempting to bring off a final "leg-pull"—and the juniors were not having any.

With tremendous enthusiasm they hurled themselves upon the stranger and bore him to the ground. He went over with a thud, and found the boys swarming all over him as they yelled with laughter.

"Stop!" he shrieked. "Have you gone mad? You young scoundrels! Release me!"

"Certainly—when we've done with you!" grinned Nipper. "And you can tell Irene that—"

"Here, quick!" shouted Handforth. "Bring him into this meadow! Here's Matilda!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The juniors remembered Matilda—a stolid cow who was generally to be found in that particular meadow. At the moment Matilda was looking blearily over a gate, watching the crowd of boys with a kind of bored interest.

"Let's set him on Matilda's back and give her a slap!" shouted Handforth enthusiastically.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

It seemed to be an excellent scheme. Before the stranger could guess what was happening, he was whirled over the gate, placed astride the old cow, and Matilda was slapped very forcibly in the rear quarters.

She was a docile animal as a rule, and she had never been known to move faster than a mere walking pace. But perhaps all this noise and commotion had startled her out of her usual apathy. At all events, the juniors no sooner jumped away than Matilda bolted across the meadow at full speed.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The boys howled with merriment. The stranger, clinging perilously to Matilda's back, was being jogged up and down as the cow lumbered away.

And it was sheer bad luck which caused Matilda to halt abruptly at the end of the meadow. For there was a duck-pond just there—and the unhappy gentleman, shooting off like a stone from a catapult, went head first into the duck-pond, and vanished into the mud!

"And that's that!" said Handforth complacently.



CHAPTER 20.

A Shock for Nipper & Co.!

HA, ha, ha!" A storm of gleeful laughter greeted the schoolboys as they went crowding into the Triangle. Irene & Co. were over by the Ancient House, looking very charming in the sunlight. They were all holding their sides with laughter.

"Pax!" said Irene, as their victims came up.

"You needn't worry," said Nipper. "We're not going to start any violence, you're girls, and so you're safe."

"We thought you might be so furious that you'd forget a mere detail like that," said Mary Summers, with a chuckle. "Strictly speaking, we don't deserve to be immune, do we?"

"You jolly well don't!" said Nipper. "And you're not immune, either. We'll get our own back for this stunt of yours. However, we'd like to offer you our congratters, girls. You were wonderful! You spoofed us brilliantly!"

"I don't think we told many fibs, either," laughed Irene. "In any case, it's All Fools' Day, and anything is permissible. Do you admit that we fooled you legitimately?"

"You fooled us as we've never been fooled before," said Travers frankly. "Well, well! It only shows what girls can do nowadays! There's no holding 'em!"

Irene & Co. shrieked with fresh merriment as they were told how the boys had gone to the workhouse, and how they had actually made inquiries.

"We never dreamed it would come off so splendidly," said Irene. "Good luck to Aunt Sophie."

"Odds shocks and staggerers!" said Archie, with a start. "Aunt Sophie! Good gad! You don't mean to say that my Aunt Sophie has been mixed up in this?"

"It's another Aunt Sophie, Archie," chuckled Doris. "It's Sylvia's aunt. She used to be a famous actress, you know, before she married—and she's just as good an actress now, of course. She made a wonderful 'Miss Dobson,' didn't she?"

"My only hat!" said Nipper. "So that's it?"

"And Sir James was Aunt Sophie's husband—my Uncle Robert!" said Sylvia Glenn sweetly. "They're sports, both of them. They motored down here this morning especially to help us, and they entered into the spirit of the thing with gusto. We'll introduce them to you later. Mrs. Poulter's preparing a big feed for all of us."

"Just so that we can bury the hatchet properly," laughed Irene.

"Yes, but we shan't bury it very deeply!" said Handforth darkly.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And what about the Notice Boards, and the studies, and——"

"Why, we've been down here since Saturday, you silly!" said Mary Summers, smiling at Nipper. "We've been working like niggers, too! We painted that board outside. Not a bad piece of work, is it?"

"It's marvellous!" said Nipper frankly.

"We didn't want you fellows to suspect anything, so we did it thoroughly," explained Irene. "We knew how cute you are, and if the wheeze was to succeed we had to be jolly careful."

"But look here!" broke in Handforth excitedly. "I've just remembered something! We can forgive you girls for spoofing us and for making April fools of us, but, dash it, there was no reason for you to make my Austin Seven into a wreck!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Irene & Co., with one accord, burst into a fresh paroxysm of merriment.

"It's no laughing matter!" said Handforth indignantly. "My car's ruined! I don't call it a joke at all——"

"Oh, Ted!" gasped Irene. "You surely don't think we did that to your Austin, do you? Your little car is perfectly safe in another shed!"

"What!"

"We spotted that wreckage outside a garage in Bannington," laughed Doris. "It was exactly the same colour as yours—the same model—so we arranged for the garage men to bring it here."

"But it's got my licence-holder on it!" said Handforth, with mingled relief and bewilderment. "And—and——"

"We faked it up—so that you would be certain that it was your old bus," explained Irene.

"You didn't forget any details, did you?" asked Nipper. "My only hat! When these girls work a jape, you fellows, they work it thoroughly! Let this be a lesson to us!"

"I'm glad you admit that you can learn something from us," said Mary happily.

A sudden shout came to their ears, and they beheld the stranger who had been pitched into the duck-pond by Matilda.

"Here's another of your helpers!" grinned Nipper. "Who's this one—another uncle?"

The girls looked startled.

"We don't know who he is!" said Irene. "We've never seen him before!"

"Oh, come off it!" put in Reggie Pitt. "He told us he's our new headmaster—and we know jolly well that there's no new headmaster. Dr. Stafford was a bit seedy towards the end of the term, but——"

"And—and you threw him into the ditch, or something?" asked Irene faintly. "Oh, boys—you've done it now! This gentleman isn't one of us at all—we don't know him!"

"Wha-a-at!"

The juniors were dumbfounded—and they received the shock of their lives. They had blundered!

(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. Ad 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.



OSWALD BRIGHAM.

I HOPE—Oswald Brigham (Norwich)—that you are always as good as you look in your photograph, which appears this week. But I hae ma doots. In fact, I haven't the slightest doubt that you're really a terror. In reply to your letter, I can safely say that I enjoyed every line of it. You certainly have my permission to make your next one just as long. About sixteen pages, wasn't it? And considering that this is only the latest of scores, you've done jolly well. No, the River Stowe, opposite St. Frank's, is not deep enough for the passage of Atlantic liners. Fancy asking such a question! St. Frank's is built of grey stone—granite, in fact—and not of lath and plaster, as you apparently imagine. I believe you've been trying to pull my leg, my lad!

What an industrious fellow you are—Jack Fairhall (Melbourne)—for sending me all those weather reports, so carefully prepared in your own handwriting. Unfortunately they came to hand after I had written most of the Australian stories, so I was unable to utilise the valuable information they contained. I've stored them away for future use. Thanks for all the trouble you have taken, and for your enthusiasm. I hope the Australian series pleased you and your friends. If they didn't, write and tell me so. The kind of interest that you display is a reminder that I must keep myself up to the mark. I should feel dreadfully guilty if I ever let you down.

I was pleased to learn from your letter—"D.H.S." (Willesden)—that in your school-days you got three cuts for reading one of my stories during lessons. Hallo! That seems to be a bit wrong. I've been looking at the wrong bit. What I mean to say is, I'm pleased to learn that, after your headmaster confiscated the Old Paper, he told you that it was "fine, clean, and straightforward literature." Yes, I certainly am proud of it, and I may as well tell you that lots of other schoolmasters have advised their boys to read the Old Paper—although, of course, not during lessons. Hope those three cuts didn't hurt you much. But I must add that you deserved 'em, even though you were reading my story. When I was at school, I never got

caned for reading stories during lessons. I was too jolly careful! If I had allowed myself to be found out, I should have deserved three cuts, too.

* * *

Jack Mason, who arrived at St. Frank's as "The Boy From Bermondsey"—Bertie Evans (Swansea)—is still at the old school. Perhaps you don't know that he turned out to be the son of Sir Crawford Grey? So now he is always known under his correct name of Jack Grey; he is Reggie Pitt's best chum, and they share Study K in the West House.

* * *

Tich Harborough shares Study H, in the Ancient House, with Travers and Potts—Julius Herman (Tarkastad, South Africa)—and although he hasn't played for the Remove yet, he will certainly do so. I don't seem to remember a Sixth-Former named Jesson in my stories. Perhaps I am wrong (I can't remember everything, you know), and I wish you would tell me the number and date of the last story in which you saw his name mentioned. You say that other Sixth-Formers have disappeared, too, leaving the Sixth sadly depleted. Please let me know who these fellows are, because, frankly, I can't understand it. They must have left the school without my knowledge. Very careless of the Head not to keep me informed!

* * *

I'm awfully bucked—Mick Sullivan (Sydney)—to find that you're still alive, and eating mangoes, and getting bitten by ants and things. Considering that you have been touring so much, I think that your record of twelve letters in the year is splendid. I expect you to resume the weekly ones, according to promise, when you get home.

NEW READERS CAN START THIS FINE SERIAL NOW!

RIVALS OF THE BLUE CRUSADERS!



by
**EDWY
SEARLES
BROOKS.**



Popular Rex Carrington's in a tight corner. He owes money to Burke, the Bannington Speedway manager, and yet he's crooked for footer and he's vowed he won't go on the dirt track again. How's he to get the money?

A Shock for Mr. Burke!

MR. PETER BURKE was glowing with a sort of vindictive satisfaction as he made his way back to Bannington, after that dramatic meeting with Rex.

Deep down within him he had a vague inkling that he had over-reached himself—that he had gone a little too far—but he brushed this uncomfortable thought aside. It wasn't really a thought, anyhow. It was more or less subconscious.

It was true that Rex Carrington had not displayed the startled consternation that Mr. Burke had expected. Yet nothing could alter the fact that the Blues' centre-forward was now a crock, so far as football was concerned, although he was sound enough for dirt-track racing. Therein lay the cause of Mr. Burke's satisfaction.

"He'll come to us before long," the track manager told himself. "Can't do anything else. He'll be no further good on the field for the rest of this season, and he knows he's hot stuff on the track. I've done the right thing."

When he reached the Speedway, he lost no time in seeking out Mr. Julian Harding, the owner of the track. If Mr. Burke had been wise, he would have moderated the telling of his story; but he was so satisfied with himself that it never occurred to him that his employer might not be pleased.

"Well, Mr. Harding, we've got him!" announced Burke gloatingly, as he entered the office.

"Got him?" repeated Mr. Harding. "Got whom?"

"Carrington, of the Blues."

"Oh!" said Mr. Harding. "Well done,

Burke! I was half-afraid the lad wouldn't listen to persuasion."

"He listened to the kind of persuasion I handed out!" said Mr. Burke, as he put his hat on the desk and sat down. "The young fool was obstinate. Best man we've ever come across—and capable of earning pots of money, too. Pots of money for us, and pots of money for himself. Yet he was crazy enough to want to stick to the rotten football club."

Mr. Harding frowned.

"You mustn't blame Carrington for his loyalty, Burke," he said shortly.

"Loyalty of that kind is idiocy," retorted Mr. Burke. "Carrington is the star man of the Crusaders—the goal-getting centre-forward. His popularity in this town is established, and as he's so smart on the track he'll prove the best draw we've ever had. The crowds will flock here to see Carrington alone. We shan't be able to hold 'em."

Mr. Harding nodded, his face expressive of satisfaction.

"You've done well, Burke," he said approvingly.

"Thank you, sir—and I hope you'll remember my good services when you find that the enclosures need enlarging," said Mr. Burke smugly.

"I'll see to it, Burke, that you get a reasonable percentage on the increased takings," replied the owner. "When is Carrington coming? Have you arranged for him to race on Saturday? I shall have to see him, and get him to sign—"

"Better leave that to me, I think," interrupted Burke. "The boy needs tactful treatment. He's a bit sore at present—mentally

and physically. The young fool jibbed, and I was compelled to use—diplomacy.”

“Indeed! What kind of diplomacy?”

“The best kind,” said Mr. Burke, with a grin. “He was obstinate—absolutely as hard as nails. Wouldn’t shift an inch. Driyelled about sticking to the Blues until the end of the season. And that’s no good to us, sir. We want him now, and I’ve made sure that we shall have him now.”

“How can you be so sure—if he is determined to stick to football?”

“Because I’ve crocked him for football,” replied Burke vindictively.

“You’ve done what?”

“Crocked him,” repeated Burke. “Oh, nothing much! He’s no good to the Blues—but he’s just as useful for the track. He was so obstinate that we practically came to blows this morning, and in pretending to fall over I jabbed my umbrella through his foot.”

“Good heavens!” said Mr. Harding, startled.

“A brainy scheme, eh?” went on Mr. Burke, utterly failing to see the danger signals in his egotistical self-satisfaction. “You see, he won’t be able to kick a football for weeks, but he’ll be limping about by this evening, and his thoughts will naturally turn to the Speedway. That foot won’t prevent him from riding a motor-cycle. He’ll come to us—”

“Wait a minute, Burke,” interrupted the other, his voice suddenly harsh. “Do I understand you to say that you deliberately thrust your umbrella into Carrington’s foot—that you did this thing for the sole purpose of forcing Carrington to desert the football club?”

Peter Burke looked rather startled.

“Well, what’s the matter?” he asked defensively. “Wasn’t it a good idea? I did it on the spur of the moment—without any kind of premeditation. The opportunity came, and I took it. We’ve got the man now. And, mark you, it was the only way to get him. Now that he’s crocked for football, he’s bound to come to us—but as long as he was sound he would never have come.”

Mr. Harding compressed his lips. His face had become hard, and Burke did not quite like the look of him. There was something uncomfortable, too, in Mr. Harding’s silence.

The latter opened a drawer, took out a cheque-book, and rapidly filled in one of the leaves. He tore it out of the book with a fierce tug, and tossed it across the desk.

“There you are, Burke,” he said curtly.

“Why, what’s this, sir?” asked Burke, picking up the cheque. “I didn’t expect you to pay anything straight away—”

“That cheque represents a month’s wages!” interrupted Mr. Harding. “Take it, Burke, and get out!”

The track-manager started to his feet.

“But—but—” he began.

“Get out!” thundered his employer. “You infernal rogue! I am amazed that you should have the audacity to come to me with such

a confession of trickery and brutality. I don’t want such men in my employ!”

Peter Burke was so startled that for a moment or two he could hardly speak. He had expected Mr. Harding to congratulate him—and all he had got for his pains was the sack!

“But I tell you I did the right thing!” he protested hotly. “Carrington wouldn’t listen to reason—”

“I warned you from the first, Burke, that I wouldn’t put up with crooked methods!” broke in Mr. Harding harshly. “We needed that boy, and I was ready to entice him away from the football club. That was business. But this—this is rank villainy. I’ve had my suspicions of you for a long time, and I’m very glad that you were fool enough to be so candid with me.”

“You can’t give me the sack like this!” shouted Burke furiously. “My contract with you still holds good—”

“Your contract with me ceased two minutes ago!” roared Mr. Harding. “It provided for termination at any time upon your receiving a month’s advance wages. There’s your money—and there’s the door!”

Peter Burke, stunned by this unexpected shock, stared dumbly in the direction of Mr. Harding’s pointing finger. He went out in a daze—and with an evil hatred burning within him!

Rex on the Track!

FATTY FOWKES breathed a sigh of relief.

“Well, anyway, you can walk!” he said thankfully.

Rex Carrington was hobbling in the West Square at St. Frank’s, progressing with the aid of a stout stick. His foot was bandaged, and he was wearing an over-size slipper. Walking under these conditions, was not so very difficult.

“It’ll be heaps better within a couple of days, Fatty,” he said. “I dare say I shall be able to get along without this stick, too.”

“Yes, but when will you be fit for play again?” asked the big goalie, in a gloomy voice. “Good glory! What a mess! We never needed you so badly—and you’ve got to go and get umbrellas stuck through your feet!”

“Only one foot, Fatty!”

“I’m jiggered if I can understand you!” said Fatty coldly. “You knew what Burke was—and yet you gave him the chance of—of maiming you! Now we’re without our centre-forward—and old Piecan was ready to kiss and be friends, too!”

“Yes, it’s funny how things happen,” admitted Rex. “He suspended me this morning, and then thought better of it. Now it’s too late. I can’t play for the club, even if I want to. I don’t suppose I shall be any good for the rest of the season.”

Fatty grunted.

“So you’ll chuck the club and go on the dirt track, eh?” he asked bitterly. “It

doesn't make any difference now. You might as well earn some big money while you can. That foot won't stop you from racing."

"I'm going to the Speedway—but not to race!" said Rex Carrington grimly. "I'm going there now, in fact—and by the time I've finished with Burke he'll look like a gorilla."

"Where's the sense in doing that?" asked Fatty impatiently. "You'll only get yourself into a brawl, and that won't do the Blues any good. You know how people talk and exaggerate. It might hurt the club."

"Don't worry about that," retorted Rex. "I won't do anything in public, Fatty—but I'm going to give Burke the hiding of his life. Yes, and I'll tell Harding what I think of him, too."

"Harding?"

"He's the owner of the Speedway, and I dare say as big a scoundrel as Burke himself," said Rex. "He must be, or he wouldn't let Burke adopt such tricks."

Rex refused to listen to Fatty's urgings. He hobbled away into the Triangle, and came upon Tich Harborough just near the Ancient House steps. The schoolboy winger was talking to Lionel Corcoran, and a crowd of Remove boys was near by.

"Heard the latest, Rex?" sang out Tich. "Corky says that the Stadium is practically ready for us. I don't mean for the general public, but our own quarters. So we're shifting out of St. Frank's within a day or two."

"We need to shift, too," said Corcoran. "It's getting near to Easter, and all those chaps will be coming back from their world trip. Can't have you footballers in the place then."

Rex did not seem very interested.

"I want one of you to lend me a motor-bike," he said. "Yours'll do, Tich."

"You're welcome to it—if you don't use it on that race-track," said the Hon. Tom. "How's the foot? And what are you doing about Burke? You ought to have him arrested for maliciously injuring—"

"That's no good," said Rex. "I can't have him arrested. There's no evidence. So I'm going to give him a thrashing."

"Ye gods and little fishes!" ejaculated Lionel Corcoran. "He's going to ask for more trouble now. He's crooked, and we're at our wits' end about the team, and now he wants to get six months for assault. Piecan's a bit grey already, but at this rate he'll be as white as Methuselah within a week!"

"I'm awfully sorry, Corky," said Rex earnestly. "I didn't mean to bring these troubles on the club. And you can rely upon me not to do anything idiotic. But I must get my hands on that infernal Burke!"

And Rex limped off, leaving the others looking after him in a doubtful sort of way.

A few minutes later he came roaring back astride Tich's motor-cycle. He pulled up beside the crowd of footballers and juniors.

"Look here, Rex," began Fatty Fowkes, "you'd better give up this crazy idea. We all know Burke's a thorough rotter, but you'll only get yourself in trouble if—"

Rex shook his head.

"There's no need for you to worry, old man," he said. "I know what I'm doing. I'm determined to get Burke, and when I do—well, he'll be sorry for himself!"

And he shook his fist significantly.

Then, before the protesting Fatty could say anything further, Rex had put in the clutch and he was roaring away through the gates of St. Frank's on his way to Bannington.

The Opening Chapters in Brief.

ULYSSES PIECOMBE—more commonly known as Piecan—manager of the Blue Crusaders—is worried. Not because the Blues are doing badly—on the contrary—but because a dirt track has just been opened nearby. The players, however, seem unperturbed. Especially

REX CARRINGTON, the Blues' brilliant centre-forward. Rex is keen on dirt-track racing, and he enters for some of the races. His clever riding considerably impresses

PETER BURKE, manager of the Speedway. Burke, indeed, asks Rex to chuck up footer and become a dirt-track rider, but Rex refuses. The Speedway manager is all the more determined to get Rex. Curly Hankin, of the Blues' Reserves, helps him in his scheming. Burke invites Rex to his house. They play cards, and the centre-forward finds himself in debt to the extent of one hundred and fifty pounds! He writes out an I O U. Piecan forbids Rex to ride at the Speedway, but the footballer defies him—with the result that he is suspended indefinitely without pay. Just after this happens, Burke visits Rex and suggests that if he chucks footer and goes in for racing only, he—Burke—will tear up the I O U. Rex, already suspended from footer, furious at the Speedway manager's treachery, knocks him down. Burke retaliates by sticking the ferrule of his umbrella through Rex's foot, and then walks away. A few minutes later Piecan appears and tells Rex that his suspension is rescinded—but it's too late. Rex is completely crooked for footer for weeks to come!

(Now read on.)

As Mr. Burke had believed, his injured foot did not seriously inconvenience him, as far as riding a motor-cycle was concerned, although to play football with it was, of course, absolutely impossible.

When Rex arrived at the Speedway he found the place deserted. But Mr. Julian Harding was in his office, and Rex arrived unannounced.

"Oh, you're here, are you?" said the footballer grimly.

"Come in, Carrington," said Mr. Harding, looking at Rex with a steady eye. "I'm sorry to hear about that unfortunate incident with Burke this morning. Sit down. I hope your foot isn't too badly hurt?"

Rex looked at him contemptuously.

"Very solicitous, aren't you?" he asked. "I dare say you're feeling satisfied, Mr. Harding. You and your rotten manager. But, by Jove, your dirty plot has failed! I've finished with this Speedway——"

"Don't excite yourself, Carrington," interrupted Mr. Harding quietly. "I don't blame you for coupling me with Burke's activities. The assumption is a natural one. But it happens to be wrong. I hope you'll accept my keen regret that that unfortunate incident should have occurred."

Rex was rather nonplussed by the other's sincere tones.

"I want Burke!" he said bluntly. "The hound bolted while I was helpless on the ground, and I'm going to give him the hiding of his life!"

"He deserves it," said Mr. Harding, nodding. "But you won't find him here, Carrington. I've sacked him."

"What!"

"He was foolish enough to boast of his crooked treachery, and I had no alternative but to dismiss him," said Mr. Harding. "Come, come, Carrington! Don't look at me so suspiciously. I'm not a man of Burke's type."

Rex sat down, all his temper evaporating.

"I'm sorry, sir," he said. "I—I thought—— Well, I'm glad to know that you've sacked the brute. He's made a fine mess of things for me, sir," he added bitterly. "I've been at loggerheads with my manager, and now I'm crooked. And all through Burke."

"If I can do anything to compensate you, Carrington, I will certainly do so," said the owner of the Speedway. "You say you're crooked?"

Rex nodded.

"Yes, sir," he replied. "I shan't be able to play football for two or three weeks."

"And yet you can walk?" asked Mr. Harding. "There's really nothing to prevent you from earning a living by track-racing——"

"So that's your game, is it?" shouted Rex, flaring up. "You want to take advantage of Burke's rotten games——"

"Why *will* you get so excited?" broke in Mr. Harding. "Don't misunderstand me, Carrington. I have never been a party to anything crooked, and won't be now. But since you are incapacitated from playing football, why should I not take advantage of your freedom? You are a born track-racer, and you can help me—and help yourself at the same time—by joining the Speedway."

Rex was silent.

"As for persuading you one way or the other, I shall do nothing of the kind," continued Mr. Harding. "You are welcome to race if you want to, and I'll leave it at that. If you prefer to go back to football when you are well enough I shall not try to influence you. But while you are crooked, surely I am not a rogue for desiring your services?"

Mr. Julian Harding's honest frankness was so palpable that Rex was quickly convinced that he had misjudged his character. And, after all, there was a lot of sound commonsense in Mr. Harding's suggestion.

In fact, by the time Rex took his departure he had come to a definite arrangement, and Fatty Fowkes was justifiably amazed when the injured footballer got back to St. Frank's.

"You've joined the Speedway?" gasped Fatty blankly.

"Only temporarily—until I'm fit for football again."

"But it's—it's rank disloyalty to the club!" shouted the sixteen-stone goalie. "Good glory! You go to Bannington to slaughter Burke and to have a row with Harding, and you come back in this mood. Did you kiss Harding good-bye?"

"Don't be an idiot, Fatty," said Rex. "Harding's straight."

"So straight that his shadow looks like a corkscrew!" said Fatty tartly.

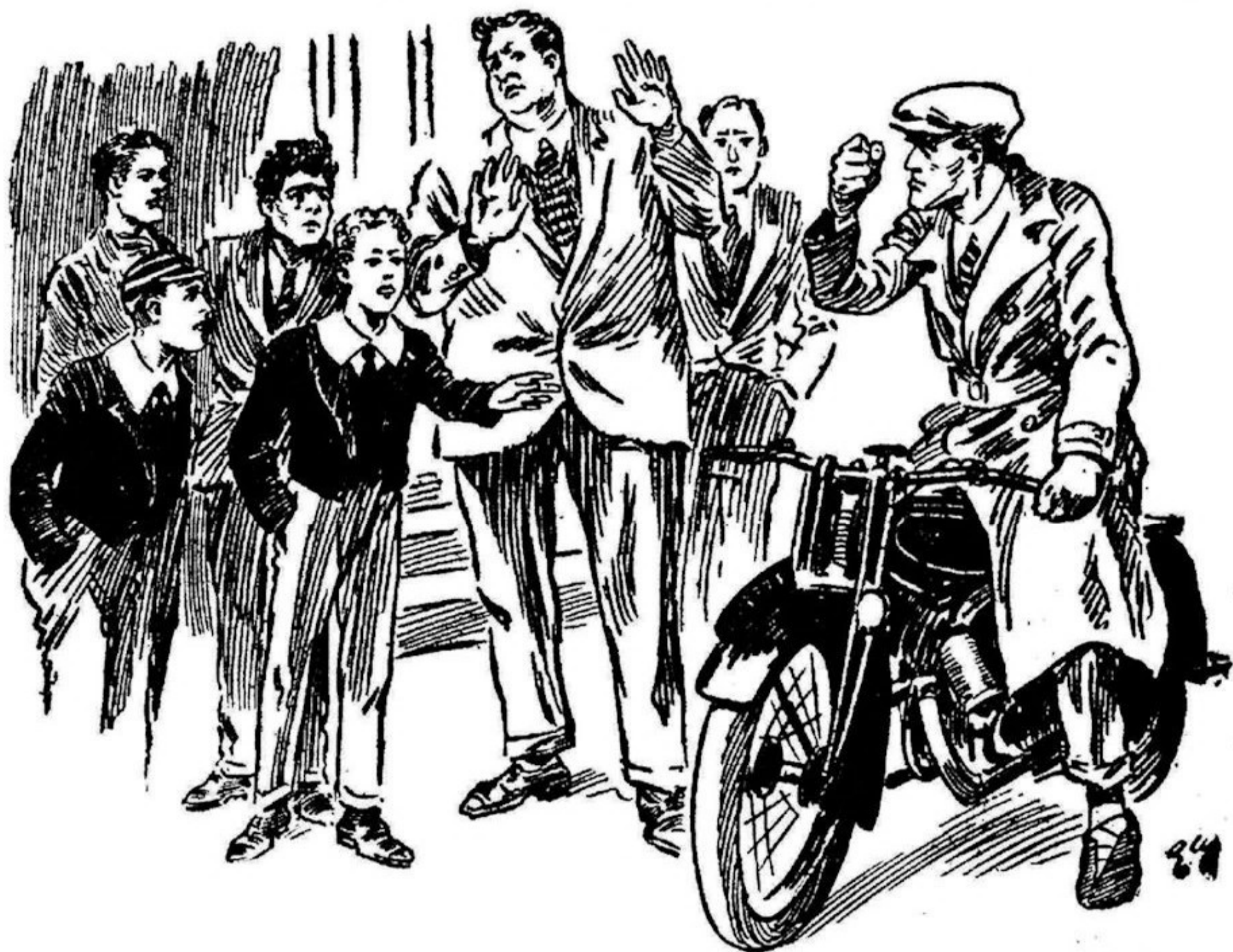
"I tell you he's straight!" insisted Rex. "And I don't see any harm in doing some track-racing while I'm recovering from this injury. It'll help to pass the time quickly, and keep me generally fit, too."

"Wait until Piecan hears!" said Fatty darkly. "He's ready to forgive you now, Rex—but when he hears this he'll be as mad as a hatter. It's the thin end of the wedge—and it doesn't matter whether Burke has been sacked or not. His rotten tricks have succeeded."

Fatty Fowkes was undoubtedly right. For Rex Carrington, by force of circumstances, was leaving the Crusaders and seriously accepting the position of star racer at the rival Speedway!

Lost Without Rex!

MR. ULYSSES PIECOMBE had very little to say when he heard the news. Perhaps he felt that it was better to keep his feelings to himself—knowing, as he did, that Rex was perverse and awkward by nature.



"When I get hold of that hound, Burke, I'm going to give him the thrashing of his life!" said Rex grimly, and he shook his fist significantly. A few moments later he was roaring on his way to the Bannington Speedway.

Besides, what was the use? Rex was no good for football now, so his immediate activities interested Mr. Piecombe but little. The manager had other worries. He was at his wits' end to know what to do for Saturday's match.

The Blues had got back into their winning streak, and the club's promotion hopes were rosy—until Rex had started all this disruption. Russell, the Reserve centre-forward, was in strict training—but Mr. Piecombe was not very hopeful.

There had been consultations with Lionel Corcoran and John Smart, the trainer. Andy Tait was to be centre-forward, in Rex's place, in the away match on Saturday—and Russell was to fill Andy's place at inside-left. On paper, the team looked all right, but Mr. Piecombe had his doubts.

He knew how easy it was for a winning combination to lose its form utterly and completely if one man was dropped and the forward line re-shuffled. It was improbable that the Blues' attack would be as virile and as energetic as before. Rex had led the forwards brilliantly—had held them together—and inspired the whole line. Andy was a fine player, but he lacked this genius for magnetising his fellow-forwards.

Without Rex, the Blue Crusaders were frankly in a mess.

And so it proved—on Saturday. They played at Leverhampton, in the Midlands. The Wanderers were too good for the Blues. The game was a hard-fought one, and although the famous Crusaders put up a valiant defence, their attack was feeble. As Mr. Piecombe had suspected, Rex's absence made all the difference. The re-adjusted forward line was ineffective.

Fatty worked like two men, and he kept his goal intact until the last minute of the game—arousing enthusiasm from the Leverhampton spectators by his brilliant display. In the last minute, however, when there was a scramble in front of goal, Fatty was accidentally jabbed in the ribs by one of his own backs—Ben Gillingham—and in the mêlée George Scott, the other back, put the leather over the goal-line, conceding a corner.

The kick was taken amid terrific excitement, and Fatty, still in pain from that unexpected jab, mistimed his jump by a mere second. His fingers got to the ball, but failed to hold it. So Leverhampton Wanderers won—and one more nail was thrust into the Blues' coffin. Their hopes of promotion were dwindling.

(Their hopes are likely to dwindle a lot more, too, for Rex will be unable to play for many weeks to come. Look out for another thrilling instalment next Wednesday, chums!)

HOW TO JOIN THE LEAGUE

ST. FRANK'S LEAGUE APPLICATION FORM No. 103.

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, leaving 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 medalists 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 id., provided the envelope is not sealed and no letter is enclosed.

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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 issue 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, and him one now. Address it to: The Editor, "Nelson Lee School Story Library," Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4.

Easter!

HURRAH! Easter, the first holiday of the year, is almost here. Before another issue of the *Nelson Lee* appears you will have had your hot cross buns on Good Friday and enjoyed yourselves on the river, in the country, at the seaside, or whatever you intend to do on Bank Holiday Monday.

At last, I hope you'll be able to enjoy yourselves. Of course it all depends upon that very suggest gentleman, the Clerk of the Workmen. This gentleman has a nasty habit of spoiling our little plans and joys. However, he's given us a hefty dose of Arctic weather recently, so we'll all hope that when Easter does come he'll make up for this forgetfulness and treat us kindly.

Anyway, whatever happens, whatever you do, I hope all our numerous readers have a jolly good time.

Something Good Coming Next Week.

And after all your activities you'll have a pleasant "rest cure" in next Wednesday's issue of the *Nelson Lee*. The long awaited yarn in this number will be the opening story of an amazing new series.

No longer, however, will you find Dr. Mahedia Stafford occupying the position of headmaster at St. Frank's. This popular gentleman has temporarily left the scene, and in his place is Dr. Marmont Nichols. And Dr. Nichols, in his way, is a trouble. What else can we do when he becomes "working"?

Excuse, wouldn't you ask, in terms of attendance?

Yes!

Of course, unless there is a change of the headmaster at St. Frank's, obviously, no, it's going to cause trouble for what else can happen when he's gone like Toddy, Lenny and their friends start trying to make the most of the Head?

You haven't mentioned the subject of that. You mustn't think Dr. Head's a lot of a wrong 'un when he's actually sticks up for the others. Oh yes! Actually Dr. Nicholson's looking kindly just now. On

topically, he hasn't done the usual dance of of the Nelson & Co. Good Friday is too cutting for that!

This new series promises to be one of the most amusing that you've ever read. The unusual theme has been cleverly treated by Eddy Scott's Reader, and the result is a number of stories that will appeal to all readers. The first yarn, entitled, "The Snake's Paradise" is coming next week. Order your copy now, please, to save the disappointment.

The Editor.

CORRESPONDENTS WANTED.

Karl Whittingham, Radcliffe Road, Moss Blackley, Manchester, wants correspondents in New York and New Zealand; interested in sports.

Albert G. Bartlett, 35, Leaside Road, Rotherham, Nottingham, wants correspondents in Australia interested in cricket.

J. W. Buncher, 18, Hockley Street, City, near St. Paul, Coventry, London, S.E.5, offers £5 per week, £100.

John Blair, Melrose Road, Tickenham, Auckland, New Zealand, wants correspondents in the British Empire.



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The FRANK'S APRIL FOOLS!



(Continued from page 35.)

The stranger came up, a grotesque figure, with the mud clinging to him. Only for a moment did he pause opposite the startled crowd of schoolboys and schoolgirls.

"I shall remember you!" he said ominously, as he looked at the boys. "You young hooligans! At the moment I have no jurisdiction over you, but when the new term commences I shall have you brought before me and your punishment will be grave!"

Nipper sprang forward.

"We apologise, sir!" he said earnestly. "We had no idea who you were, sir, we thought that you were just playing a trick on us!"

The stranger hesitated, some of his anger subsiding.

"There can be no excuse for such conduct," he returned curtly.

"Are—are you really our new headmaster, sir?" asked Handforth.

"I am!" said the stranger. "And when the new term starts at St. Frank's, you will find that many changes are to be brought into effect!"

He walked on, leaving the boys intrigued by that vague statement.

It was a certainty that this stranger was speaking the truth. He had come down to St. Frank's to take up his residence—to be in readiness for the new term. He was the new headmaster of St. Frank's—Dr. Malcolm Stafford being, for some reason, superseded.

But it was impossible for Nipper & Co. to know any of the details.

However, they dismissed the unhappy subject from their minds, and gave themselves up wholeheartedly to enjoying the rest of Easter Monday with Irene & Co. before returning home for the remainder of the holidays.

As for the next term—well, there were indications that it would be more than usually interesting! THE END.

(A new headmaster for St. Frank's! A Head who has intimated that he's going to bring about changes! That's the kind of yarn you like, isn't it, chums? And that's why you'll specially enjoy the new series which is starting next week with the story entitled: "The Secret Paradise!")

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