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HANDFORTH'S GIRL CHUM !

An enthralling long complete yarn of school, mystery and adventure,
introducing the cheery chums of St. Frank's.

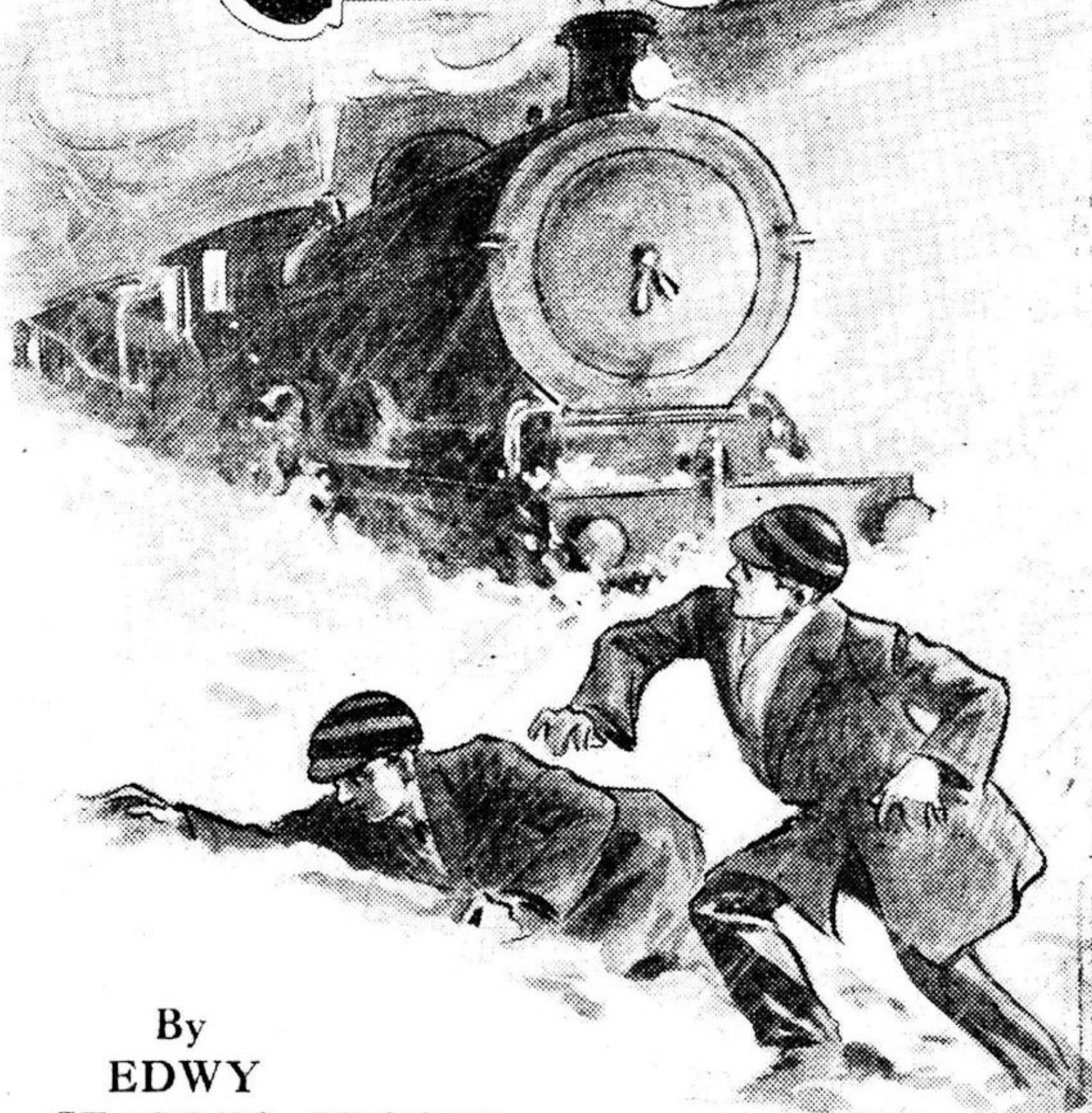
New Series No. 187.

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THE FIRST YARN OF AN AMAZING NEW SERIES !

HANDFORTH'S GIRL CHUM !



By
**EDWY
SEARLES BROOKS**

CHAPTER 1.

The Blizzard!

"**G**REAT Scott!" ejaculated Tommy Watson, in blank amazement. It took a lot to startle this stolid Removite as a rule, but he was now positively dumbfounded. Sir Montie Tregellis-West and Nipper, who were with him, stared into the raging night with equal astonishment.

"Begad!" said Sir Montie, adjusting his pinc-nez. "It seems to me, dear old boys, that we're goin' to have a frightfully rough passage on the way home."

"Who'd have thought it?" asked Nipper, as he stared out.

They were standing in one of the exits of the Bannington Palladium, and they could hear the voices of Handforth, Archie Glenthorne, Travers and several other Removites

INTRIGUING—MYSTERIOUS—EXCITING—THRILLING !

Willy Handforth has always professed to scorn girls, yet when Molly Dare comes to stay at St. Frank's he finds his opinion changing. And when Willy learns that Molly is in danger—terrible danger—he is the first to do all he can to help his new girl chum.

just behind them. A party of the juniors had been to the pictures this evening, and they were all coming out in a bunch.

When entering the Palladium they had known that the weather was rough. Snow had been coming down, and the wind was high. Still, it had not been particularly bad, and they had never doubted that they would be able to make the return journey to St. Frank's in comparative comfort.

Owing to the snow there had been no football that afternoon—it was a half-holiday—so the fellows had made an early start for Bannington, and after a mid-afternoon tea at the Japanese Café, they had patronised the talkies. It was now about six-thirty in the evening, and they reckoned to be back in good time for calling-over.

But they had assumed that the weather conditions would remain about the same, and the weather conditions hadn't. The wind had increased to a hurricane, and the snow



was whirling down in blinding, devastating flurries. In fact, a blizzard of terrific intensity was raging.

Many of the good people of Bannington were surprised that evening, on emerging from the Palladium. It is easy enough to go into a great place of amusement of that type, and to forget all about the weather in the enjoyment of the programme. To emerge from the warm, comfortable interior and to find this blizzard in full swing was very much of a shock.

The wind was howling with a deep, threatening roar which took one's breath away. It was like a chill blast from the Arctic itself, carrying myriads of snowflakes.

"It wasn't half so bad as this when we came in," said Watson, in a startled voice. "My only sainted aunt! How're we going to get home?"

Handforth came bustling forward

"What's the matter with you chaps?" he asked. "Why don't you go out? You're not afraid of a bit of snow, are you?"

"Come and look at this, Handy," said Nipper.

Handforth and Travers and the others crowded into the exit door, and they stood staring out into the wild night. Nobody else, as it happened, was leaving the theatre just at that moment, and the St. Frank's fellows had this passage to themselves.

"Well, well," said Vivian Travers, with a sigh. "This looks bad, dear old fellows. I'm afraid we're going to have a bit of trouble in getting home."

"Well, I'm jiggered!" said Handforth. "I've never seen it snowing so hard before! And this wind is like something solid. Hallo! Look at that hat whizzing down the road! Somebody's in trouble."

A moment later there was a dull, shivering crash, and the boys could see fragments of something lying on the pavement on the opposite side of the road.

"Chimney-pot," said Nipper, nodding. "This looks cheerful, my sons!"

"Let's hope there aren't any trees across the road," said Church anxiously. "My only hat! I don't believe we shall be able to ride our bikes, you know. It'll make us hours late for calling-over."

"Well, we shall have a good excuse," said Handforth. "That's one thing, isn't it? Come on! No good standing here looking at it! Let's make a dash to the garage!"

THERE was a big garage at the back of the Palladium for the benefit of patrons, and the juniors had left their bicycles here, as usual. Handforth and Church and McClure, of course, had come over in Edward Oswald's celebrated Austin Seven.

"I don't think we'd better chance it," said McClure.

"Chance what?" asked Handforth.

"Well, all this wind and snow——"

"Rot!" interrupted Handforth. "You don't think I'm afraid of the weather, do you? My Austin Seven will go through anything—and get there, too!"

"What about the other chaps?" asked Church.

"Don't bother about us," said Harry Gresham. "We've got our bikes, and we'll come along as quickly as we can. You fellows get off in your car—but mind that it doesn't blow off the road."

"You can't be too careful with those Austin Sevens," said Travers gravely. "A gust of wind might come along, Handy, and lift you up into the telegraph wires, car and all."

"Fathead!" said Handforth, with a snort.

HANDFORTH & CO. started off, and long before they had got to the end of the High Street they realised that the blizzard was even worse than they had believed. Bannington was apparently deserted; scarcely a soul was to be seen any-

where. One side of the brightly-lighted High Street was nearly clear of snow, but the other side was so smothered that the pavement had already disappeared, and the snow was piling up menacingly against the shop windows in great drifts. The wind was shooting and howling down the street with terrific force.

It was a head wind, too, bringing with it millions of tiny snowflakes, each one apparently as hard as a hail-stone, for they rattled noisily against the Austin Seven's windscreen. The wiper was going, but it was of very little use, for the snow collected so quickly that Handforth could hardly see where he was driving.

"If it's bad like this here, what's it going to be like out on the open road?" asked Church. "I tell you, Handy we'd better chuck it up and go by train."

"You can go by train if you like—but I'm sticking to my Austin!" said Handforth obstinately.

"We shall have to stand by him, Churchy," said McClure. "If we get out, all his ballast will be gone, and he'll blow over in two ticks. Even if we get marooned somewhere on the road, we can walk home. It'll be rather fun, you know, in all this snow."

"Yes, I suppose it will," admitted Church cheerfully. "By jingo! Real Christmas weather, eh? It's not so many days before we break up for the holidays!"

"Good old Christmas!" said Mac.

They were by no means certain that they would reach St. Frank's in safety, but they felt that it was up to them to see Handforth through. They couldn't very well desert him here and allow him to go on alone. Indeed, it is doubtful if Handforth would have stopped. So it was a matter of Hobson's choice with them.

Their fears were justified regarding the condition of the roads outside the town. As soon as Bannington had been left behind, they encountered the full fury of the blizzard. Later it was to transpire that such a blizzard had not been experienced in the southern counties for many, many winters.

Not only was the snow coming down with incredible intensity, but the wind which carried it was of gale force. It was a veritable hurricane and chimney-pots and slates and tiles were being flung everywhere. Great trees were crashing down, and telegraph wires were carried away on every main road and railway line. Fortunately, there were no trees across the Bannington road, although a number had been blown down in the near vicinity.

The Austin Seven struggled on gamely. At first it caught the full fury of the wind head on. This wasn't so bad, although Handforth found that he was compelled to keep the throttle hard down in order to maintain any kind of speed. And as long as he kept to the centre of the road, everything was all right. The snow was being drifted into great banks on one side, leaving the road itself comparatively clear.

"Go home by train, eh?" said Handforth with a sniff. "What's the matter with this, you chumps? The old car is doing fine!"

"Wait until we get down into one of the dips—or until we make that turn just by the seven-barred gate," said Church. "We shall get the wind across us broadside then—and it won't be so easy!"

"I wonder how the other chaps are getting on?" said McClure.

"Never mind them," replied Handforth. "I don't suppose they'll be able to ride in this wind, but a trudge won't do them any harm."

JUST then the little car gave a wild lurch, swerved and staggered. Then, after a moment, she plunged on again.

"What happened?" asked Church.

"Goodness knows! We must have struck a drift," said Handforth, peering forward. "And I thought the road was clear, too."

It was very difficult for him to see. The headlamps were gleaming, but the windscreen was so snow-covered that the visibility was terribly bad.

They had gone down into a little dip, and the snow was thick on the road here. Seven or eight inches thick, and the Austin was ploughing through it valiantly, although her speed was greatly lessened.

The road took a turn just against the seven-barred gate, and now, indeed, the full fury of the storm could be felt. There was a rise here leading up to the bridge across the railway, and the wind, at full force, was shooting down with demon violence.

A sudden devastating gust came along.

Handforth wrenched at the steering-wheel, to negotiate the bend, but nothing happened. He felt the car lifted bodily. It was a startling, bewildering sensation.

Literally, that gust of wind caught the sturdy little Austin in its grip and toppled her clean over. Fortunately—at least, it proved to be fortunate in the present circumstances—the car was heading straight for a ditch at the same moment, and when she

overturned she rolled into a thick mass of drifted snow. The little car was practically buried.

Handforth was flung out of the driving seat, and Church and McClure were somersaulted over on top of him. They felt that their last moment had come. But when they pulled themselves out they found that they were hardly hurt. Merely a minor bruise or two.

The engine had stopped, and there was complete silence except for the whistling and hooting of the wind, and the continuous patter of the snowflakes on the side screens.

"Where are we?" ejaculated Handforth dazedly.

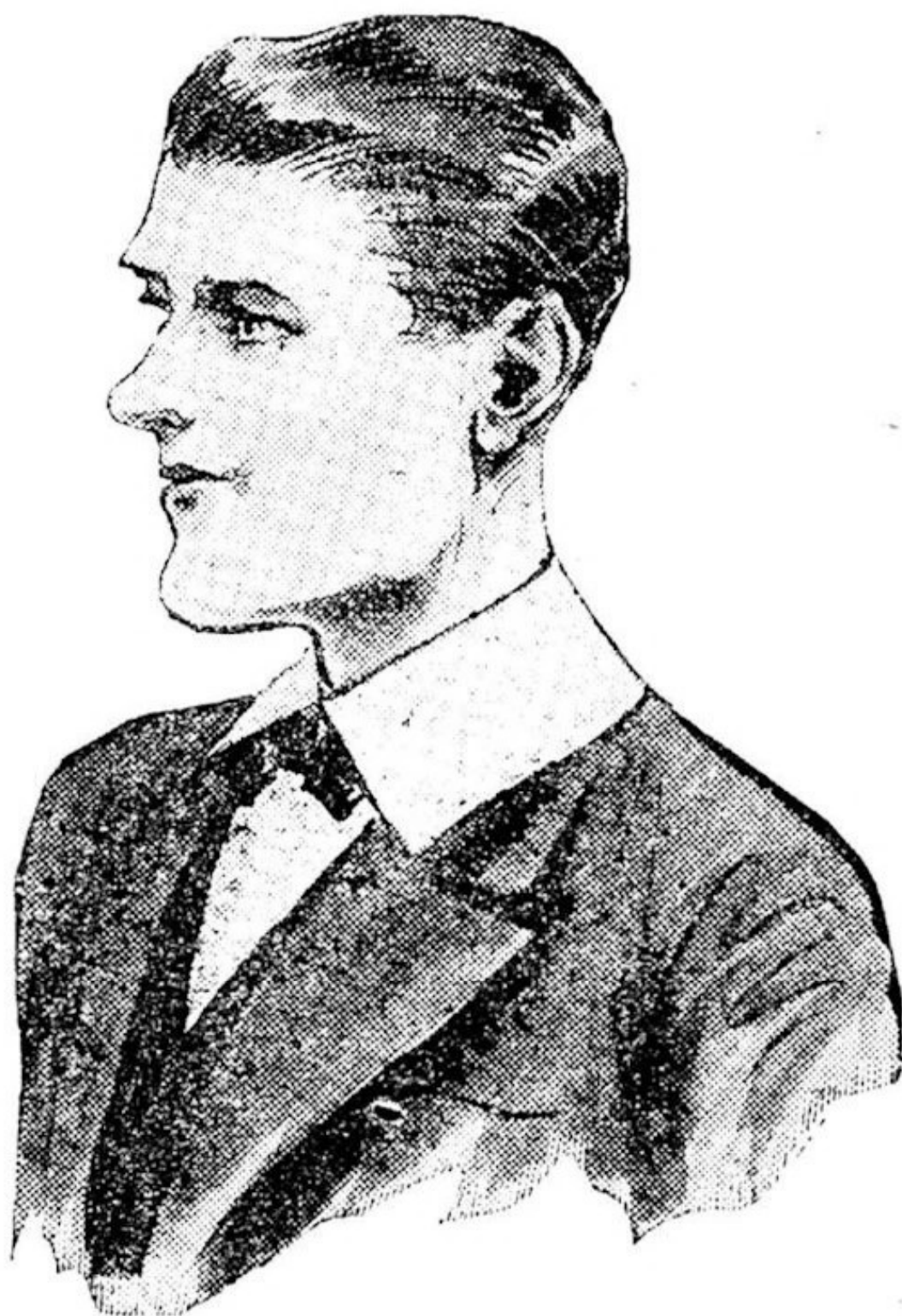
"On our side, I think," gasped Church. "My only hat! We're completely over, Handy!"

"My car!" gurgled Edward Oswald in dismay.

The car was on its side, deep down in the thick snowdrift. Handforth was the first to struggle out after he had managed to open one of the doors. He found himself plunging about in snow that was three or four feet thick. Church and McClure followed him, and their breath was nearly taken away as the full force of the gale caught them.

"This is a fine mess!" bawled Handforth,

WHO'S WHO AT ST. FRANK'S.



LIONEL CORCORAN.

The go-ahead, enterprising skipper of the Fourth Form. Interested in all sports, and is the owner of the Blue Crusaders F.C., which plays in the First Division of the English Football League.

"Well, it's your own fault!" snorted Church. "We told you not to come! My hat! We might have been killed!"

"Rot!" said Handforth. "We only went over gently. I've never known such a gale in all my giddy life! Lifted us clean off the road, you chaps!"

"Well, thank goodness we had something to fall into!" said Mac.

THEY stood there looking at the derelict car.

It was nearly buried in the snow, and the flakes were coming down so rapidly that there was every prospect that the Austin would be completely buried before very long.

The car had gone off the road and had dived down into the ditch—which, fortunately, had been full of drifted snow. Thus the fall had been lessened. There had been no actual crash.

"Better leave her here and walk the rest of the way," suggested Church, shouting to make himself heard.

"Not likely!" retorted Handforth. "I'm not going to leave my car here!"

"How are you going to get her out?" asked Mac. "We can't do anything, Handy."

"We've got to do something!" replied Handforth frantically. "By the morning she'll be buried—and the radiator will burst and the engine will get frozen. I tell you, we've got to pull her out to-night!"

He was thoroughly alarmed. Where his faithful Austin Seven was concerned he was generally in deadly earnest. He had a great fondness for the little car, and to leave her buried in this snow was unthinkable.

HOWEVER, help soon arrived. Gleaming lights showed through the flurries of snow, and presently two motor-cyclists arrived on the spot. They proved to be Nipper and Travers. They had had an exciting ride so far, but had met with no mishaps.

"Well, well!" said Travers, as he stood astride his machine, inspecting the Austin. "We rather thought that this would happen, dear old fellow. Hard cheese!"

"Thanks for your sympathy, but I'd rather have a little help," said Handforth coldly. "Can you chaps lend a hand?"

"Two each, old man," said Nipper. "But do you think we'll be able to lift the car out? An Austin isn't very big, but there are only five of us and I doubt if we can do it. She's half-buried in that drift."

"The other fellows will be coming along soon," said Travers, glancing back along the snow-swept road. "Better wait till they turn up I think."

"We can do it without them," replied Handforth.

But they couldn't. They tried. They wrenched and they heaved. But the Austin Seven was securely buried in the snowdrift.

The juniors were already ghostly-looking, smothered as they were with snow. It collected on their caps and on their shoulders, and they found it necessary constantly to brush the snow from their faces. It was being driven along by the high wind like powdered chalk.

"It's no good, Handy," said Nipper, breathing hard. "We can't even shift her."

"How about one of you chaps riding back to Bannington for help?" suggested Handforth. "If you could get a lorry—"

"Here come the other chaps!" sang out Church.

They arrived in a half-spent condition, having fought almost every inch of the way against the blustering head wind. The newcomers included Tommy Watson, Sir Montie Tregellis-West, Gresham, Jimmy Potts and Fullwood.

"It's no good—we can't ride," said Fullwood. "As soon as we get on we're blown off. We've had to trudge all the way. So Handy's gone into the ditch, has he? I'm not surprised!"

They all laid their bicycles down, and they all exerted their strength. The result was satisfactory. The Austin Seven was heaved bodily out of the drift and set on her four wheels in the centre of the road.

"By George! Thanks awfully, you chaps!" said Handforth gratefully. "She doesn't seem to be hurt, does she? Not even a wing bent."

"Better hold her down," advised Travers. "If you don't, she'll blow away again."

Handforth spent some little time in switching on the lights, starting the engine and running the Austin backwards and forwards for a few yards. He wanted to assure himself that everything was in running order. He seemed to have an idea that one of the wheels might fall off, or that the main shaft was buckled, or the back axle bent.

However, his fears were groundless, for the valiant Austin was unharmed.

IN the meantime, some of the luckless cyclists had continued on their way—walking. It was impossible for them to ride, for the wind was truly devastating. And every now and again, too, the snowdrifts would extend right across the road. It was quicker, in the end, to walk and to push the bicycles.

There was a moon somewhere behind the snowclouds, and occasionally a fleeting glimpse of it could be seen as the clouds thinned. There was no indication, however, of any cessation of the storm. It seemed to be growing wilder and more alarming every minute.

Tregellis-West and Watson had been the first to walk on, and they paused for a moment or two on the top of the railway bridge to look back. They could see Handforth's Austin manœuvring on the road.

"The car's all right," said Watson. "Handy's a silly chump, anyhow. He ought

to have left it in Bannington. There's no knowing what trouble he'll get into before—"

"I say! Begad!" ejaculated Sir Montie, in a curiously tense shout. "Look here, Tommy, old boy!"

"Why, what's the matter?" asked Watson, turning.

He found Sir Montie staring down over the parapet. Far below there was the railway line, at the foot of the deep cutting, but it was difficult to see with any distinctness owing to the continuous vista of white snow.

"I saw it!" said Tregellis-West huskily. "This is serious, Tommy—it is, really!"

"What's serious?" demanded Watson, staring. "What did you see?"

"Look!" replied Sir Montie, pointing. "The line's blocked. About a thousand tons of snow, more or less, just slithered down the embankment. There's a green signal showing just along the line, and there must be a train coming! It doesn't look at all healthy, dear old boy!"

CHAPTER 2.

An Old Friend—and a New One!

TOMMY WATSON felt his heart give a big jump.

"It's the evening train—the local!" he ejaculated with a gasp. "You know, Montie—the one that gets into Bellton soon after seven!"

"Just what I was thinking," said Montie. "Don't you think we ought to do something about this? I hate to be pessimistic, but —"

"Hi!" bawled Watson, cupping his hands over his mouth. "Quick, you chaps! Nipper! Handy! Travers! Hi! Come up here, quick!"

The wind carried Watson's voice to the other juniors, and they could detect the note of alarm in his tone. Many of the boys left their bicycles in the snow and they came running up. In spite of their haste, however, Handforth & Co. were the first to arrive in the Austin.

"What's wrong?" demanded Edward Oswald.

"There's been a landslide—an avalanche of snow, rather!" shouted Watson. "It's fallen all over the railway line—and there's a train coming!"

"My only hat!" ejaculated Handforth, scrambling out.

He rushed to the parapet and looked over. Almost at once he was joined by Nipper and Travers and Gresham and the rest. At first they could see very little owing to the gloom and the whirling snowflakes.

"He's right!" said Handforth at length. "Can't you see? There's no sign of the line at all! What's going to happen if the local plunges into this snow?"

"I should say there'll be a nasty bump," commented Travers.

Nipper looked round quickly.

"One or two of you stay here, in case any other traffic comes along," he said quickly. "The rest of us will dodge round and get down the embankment. We'd better have a look at this at close quarters. I believe the cutting is half-choked with this fallen snow. There might be some real danger."

"The train's signalled!" said Church in alarm. "We shan't be in time!"

"That's just it," nodded Tregellis-West. "The signalman has given the line 'All clear.' He didn't know about this blockage. It only just happened. I saw it, you know."

"Well, let's go down and make absolutely sure," said Nipper. "Wait a minute, though. Bring your bicycle lamps with you. We shall need some light."

A MINUTE later the juniors were slithering and sliding down the steep, snow-covered sides of the cutting.

They carried bicycle-lamps—of the acetylene type mostly. And when they got down to the permanent way they were staggered.

The whole track, for a distance of fifty or sixty yards, was entirely blocked. An enormous mass of snow had evidently collected on the sides of the cutting, and this had suddenly fallen, slumping right down on to the permanent way. The snow was piled up, nine or ten feet high, and it formed a formidable obstacle.

"Some of us had better run down the line," said Nipper quickly. "If we flash our lamps, the driver will probably see and obey the signal. We've got to stop that train!"

"Come on!" yelled Handforth.

THERE was every reason for the school-boys to feel alarmed.

They realised the terrible gravity of the situation. The line blocked with snow—and a train due at any moment now! Something would have to be done quickly. The juniors did not waste a moment—but even then they were too late to avert the catastrophe.

For as they started off down the line they suddenly beheld little gleaming points of light approaching, and there was a ruddy, lurid glare from the open fire-box of the oncoming engine.

"Look out, you chaps!" shouted Nipper. "Stand well clear!"

"Hi! Stop! Stop!" bellowed Handforth, wildly waving a bicycle-lamp. "Oh, my hat! The driver isn't taking any notice!"

"There isn't time now, anyhow!" shouted Church. "Keep back, Handy!"

There was a wild scramble. The juniors went scudding up the sides of the cutting. There was nothing that they could do now. The train was upon them!

All the Removites stared with bated breath as the engine came clanking noisily under the bridge. They caught a glimpse of the locomotive as it snorted past, followed by the lighted carriages. Then there was a sudden jarring, thudding confusion of sounds as the engine plunged headlong into the obstruction.

It was a real thrill for those watching boys.

The engine seemed to vanish. Clouds of snow were sent fountaining skywards, to be carried by the wind like sea-spray. The locomotive rocked madly, jumped the rails, and the clatter as it ran along the sleepers was devastating.

It was all over in a moment. There came the jarring shriek of metal and the splintering of woodwork and glass. Then, in a second, the train was at a standstill, steam hissing out from a score of different points. Shouts and screams filled the air.

It was all very terrifying at first—but after the initial moment or two it could be seen that the train had really come to very little harm.

The engine was derailed, the front luggage coach was half-telescoped, but the passenger coaches appeared to be quite unharmed. The lights were still gleaming in them, and doors were being flung open by the frightened passengers.

Not that there were many passengers. The juniors on the embankment, watching, could see very few people in the compartments. Just one or two here and there. There were never very many people on this mid-evening local train—and to-night, perhaps, there were fewer than usual, owing to the wildness of the weather.

Handforth & Co., running down to the train, scrambled on to the footboard of the nearest carriage. Some of the other fellows were racing up towards the engine.

"Oh, auntie, you're hurt!" came an alarmed childish voice. "You're cut, auntie!"

"It's nothing, darling!" said another voice.

Handforth wrenched open a door, and he took in the situation in a glance. There were two passengers in this compartment—a young lady and a child. One of the windows on the further side had shattered, and the girl was trying to staunch the blood from a nasty little jagged cut just above her wrist on the right arm.

"Let me look, miss!" said Handforth quickly. "Here, Churchy! You, too, Mac! Lend a hand!"

The girl gave them a quick, appreciative glance.

"It's not much, really," she said. "I don't think you need bother—"

"We're experts in first-aid, miss," said Handforth briskly. "Boy Scouts, you know."

"We tried to stop the train, but we hadn't the time," said Church. "Great

Scott! We thought there was going to be a terrible smash!"

It seemed warm and comfortable in this compartment after the coldness and wildness of the winter's night. The light was cheery and comforting. And while Handforth quickly prepared to render first-aid, he gave the young lady a swift scrutiny.

He was something of a judge of feminine beauty and he at once decided that this girl was a "stunner." He judged that she was out of her teens, and she was small and dainty and remarkably pretty.

Her companion was a child of perhaps twelve—a really sweet little girl, with a very pleasant face and curly hair. Her eyes just now were filled with alarm.

"It's all right, miss," said Handforth, as he busied himself with a handkerchief. "We'll soon have this cut bound up, and it can be properly attended to later."

"It's very good of you," said the girl. "The injury is only slight. I'm so thankful that Molly wasn't hurt. We might both have been very badly cut."

They could hear the commotion outside. The guard was stalking up and down with his lantern, and some of the men passengers had jumped down on to the permanent way and were going forward to inspect the damage. The line, of course, was now definitely blocked, since the engine was derailed. It would need a breakdown gang to shift all this, and it would probably be morning before another train could pass through.

A cheery hail came from the open doorway. "Any help wanted in there, Handy?" sang out Nipper.

"No thanks," replied Handforth, turning. "Don't you think three of us are enough?"

"There's nobody seriously hurt," said Nipper. "One or two people shaken up and suffering from shock, but nothing more. The engine-driver had a narrow escape—Why, what the—Hullo! Well, of all the—"

He broke off, leapt into the compartment, and stared at the young lady with delighted recognition in his eyes.

"Why, it's Nipper!" said the girl, smiling. "You don't know how pleased I am to see you!"

Tregellis-West and Watson had climbed up, too, and the compartment was now fairly full. All the fellows were looking at the girl wonderingly.

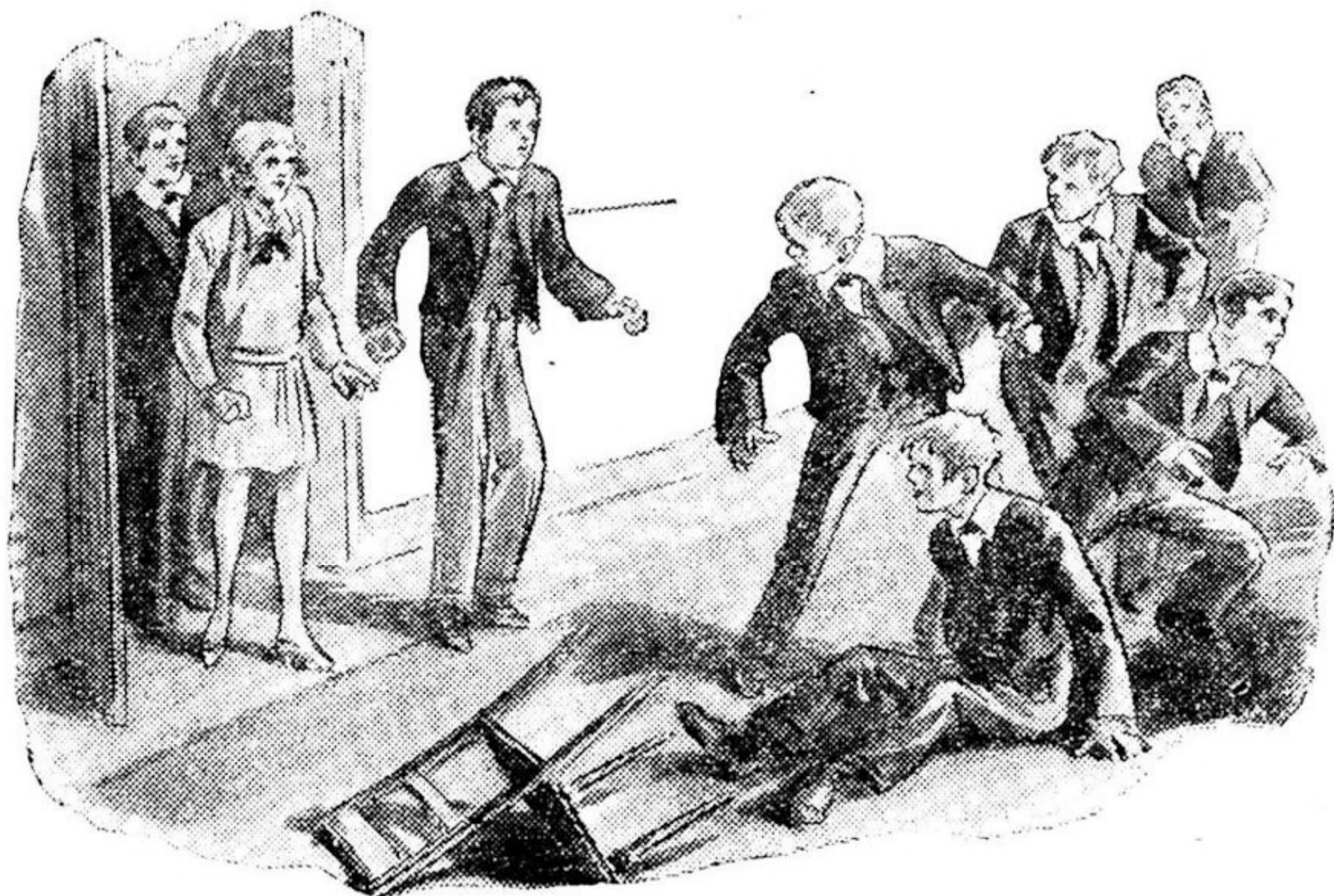
"A friend of yours?" asked Handforth, in surprise.

"I should say so!" said Nipper, as he pushed forward and took the girl's hand. "Oh, I say! You're hurt, Miss Eileen!"

"It's nothing much," smiled the girl. "My hat!" murmured Handforth.

"Well, you're a fine lot!" said Nipper, his eyes twinkling. "Do you mean to say that you don't remember Miss Eileen Dare?"

"By George!" shouted Handforth, flushing. "Of course! We met her once before, didn't



Standing in the Common-room doorway, Molly looked on at the scene with interest. Eric Gates was on his back in the middle of the floor, struggling fiercely with Bobby Dexter and Owen minor.

"Chuck it, you fatheads!" shouted Chubby Heath. "We've got a visitor!"

we? I knew I'd seen her somewhere, but she looks different. Fashions, I suppose."

"This is Miss Eileen Dare, the most famous lady detective in the world," said Nipper. "She's one of the gov'nor's best friends—"

"Oh, come, Nipper," interrupted Eileen. "You mustn't talk so absurdly. And is this quite the right time? We seem to be in trouble here, and there might be some other people who want help."

THE St. Frank's fellows knew Miss Eileen Dare by repute, even if they did not know her personally. Some of them, at least, had met her before. More than once she had acted as Nelson Lee's lady assistant, and she was a girl of exceptional detective ability.

One would never imagine, to look at her, that she was so extremely capable and keen. She was small and dainty. Her eyes were deep brown; they were full of wonderful charm, and yet at the same time there was an extraordinary keen look about them. Her hair was dark and slightly wavy, little wisps of it straying from beneath her hat. Her complexion was delicate and healthy, and it needed no artificial improvements. It was the complexion of an open-air girl. And her sweet, delicately-formed mouth was noticeable for the rich colour of the lips. There was something about that mouth, too, which hinted that it could be resolute when it liked.

Eileen's qualities were well known to Nipper. They did not merely consist of beauty and daintiness. She was an extremely athletic girl, and in consequence her limbs were lithe and supple, and she walked with a graceful ease which was a delight to watch.

She could ride and swim, she could shoot and do almost everything, in fact. She drove her own car with remarkable skill, and recently she had joined an aeroplane club and had passed with flying colours as an expert pilot.

There was something vital and compelling about this little lady, and yet, withal, she was the essence of daintiness and sweetness.

I DON'T think you've met my companion, have you?" she asked, smiling at Nipper. "This is Molly Dare—my niece."

Nipper's eyes opened wider.

"Your niece?" he repeated. "Why, Miss Eileen, I didn't know you had any relatives, except Aunt Esther."

Eileen laughed.

"I didn't know I had a niece myself until quite recently," she replied. "I'm quite sure that you'll like Molly."

"How is Aunt Esther, by the way?" asked Nipper.

"Oh, she's just the same as ever," replied Eileen. "We still live in our comfortable little place in Chelsea."

"But what are you doing down here—on this train?"

"Molly and I are coming down to St. Frank's—to spend a week with Mr. and Mrs. Stokes."

"By Jove! That's good!" said Nipper eagerly. "Did Mr. Lee know anything about it?"

"Of course."

"I'll rag him no end when I get back to St. Frank's," said Nipper wrathfully. "Fancy not telling me!"

"Perhaps he wanted to give you a little surprise?" smiled Eileen.

Molly was beginning to look impatient.

"Well, I hope you boys are going to do something," she said in a direct way. "The train's stuck, isn't it? And you haven't told us yet how you came to be here."

There were a few words of explanation, and then the fellows prepared to depart.

"You'll have to come with us, Miss Eileen," said Nipper. "It might be hours before they send a relief train, and we're not going to leave you stuck here in this cutting."

"But it's so wild outside," said Eileen. "It's still snowing hard, and I'm thinking about Molly."

"I don't mind the snow," said the child.

"No need to worry at all," put in Handforth. "I've got my Austin Seven up on the bridge, and we'll soon have you out of this cutting. And once you're inside my little car we'll be at St. Frank's in no time."

"That's a good idea," said Nipper, nodding. "What do you say, Miss Eileen? Better than waiting here, anyway."

"I'm game," replied Eileen Dare.

THEY were confronted by the guard as they were moving away from the derelict train.

"What's this, young gents?" he asked, looking at them closely. "Beg pardon, miss, but you'd best not try to get up this cutting. The snow's thick up there, and mighty bad on the roads, too."

"These boys are going to escort us, thank you," said Eileen.

"Best stay here, miss," said the guard. "It might mean an hour or two of waiting, but—"

"Rats!" interrupted Handforth, although he didn't mean to be rude. "This young lady is Miss Eileen Dare, the famous lady detective! Do you think she's scared of a bit of snow?"

The guard opened his eyes.

"All the same, miss, I shouldn't take no risks," he said. "It's mighty rough out to-night. Lucky we wasn't smashed up, runnin' into this drift like this."

They managed to get away from him, and they all went climbing up the snow-smothered slope. Eileen scorned any assistance, and she proved to be as active and agile as the boys. Nipper and Handforth, between them,

helped Molly, and in a very short time they were all on the road.

"We'd help all those marooned passengers if we could," said Nipper, "but perhaps it's better that they should remain in the train. There's warmth and light there, anyway. And a rescue train is bound to come along sooner or later. But as you're going to St. Frank's, Miss Eileen, and as we're going there, too, you might just as well come along with us."

"It's really awfully good of you," said the girl detective.

Church and McClure readily gave up their places in the Austin Seven. Not that this was really necessary, as they soon found. Church sat in front with Handforth, and McClure squashed in at the back with Eileen and Molly.

Nipper and Travers went in advance on their motor-bicycles, to make sure that the road was clear, and then Handforth came in the Austin Seven, driving very cautiously. The wind was as wild as ever, but there was not so much snow now. Occasionally the moon would ride out from behind the scudding clouds, brilliant and clear, and the pale light revealed a countryside which was entirely white, with many fallen trees, telegraph wires in hopeless confusion, and with great snowdrifts everywhere.

ST. FRANK'S was reached in safety, and even now the hour was comparatively early. The juniors were late for calling-over, of course, but that was only a detail. They had an excellent excuse, and there would naturally be no punishments.

Handforth drove triumphantly up to the West House, and, as it happened, Mr. Beverley Stokes was standing there, wrapped in his overcoat. He had just come from the station, and he had just heard that there had been a mishap up the line.

"Here you are, Mr. Stokes!" sang out Handforth, as he opened the door. "Your visitors."

"Barry" Stokes, as he was affectionately called by his boys, sprang forward. One glance inside the car told him the truth. He looked intensely relieved.

"Why, this is splendid, Miss Dare," he said. "I've been worrying tremendously about you."

"You really needn't have done," replied Eileen, as she climbed out. "These boys have been very useful."

They all wanted to go indoors with the visitors, but Nipper was the only privileged one—he being such an old friend—and soon he was standing in Mr. and Mrs. Stokes' cosy sitting-room, in the West House. Nelson Lee came, too, to renew the old acquaintance. It was a jolly little gathering.

"Well, considering everything, I think you are extremely lucky, Miss Eileen," said Nelson Lee, when he had heard all. "This is one of the wildest nights that we can remember. I am very thankful that you have got here safely."

"I'm glad for Molly's sake," replied Eileen. "I think she's tired after her long journey——"

"Oh, but I'm not!" interrupted the child indignantly. "If you're going to send me to bed, Aunt Eileen, I shall never forgive you! This is the first time I've been in such a big school as this, and I want to have a look round—and I want to be introduced to lots of the other boys, too. I think they're real sports."

It was very evident that Miss Molly Dare had a will of her own!

CHAPTER 3.

Pulling Willy's Leg!

NATURALLY, there was a great deal of excitement in the Common-rooms that evening.

Even the seniors were thrilled when they heard of the train smash. Not within living memory had there been an accident on this local line, barring an occasional derailment of a goods truck, or something comparatively trivial like that.

Then, too, there was the advent of Miss Eileen Dare. There weren't many fellows who hadn't heard of this wonderful girl detective. And to know that she was in the school as a visitor was thrilling in itself.

Some of the Removites happened to run into Willy Handforth in the Junior passage of the Ancient House.

"Heard the latest, Willy?" asked Travers in a solemn tone.

"You fellows get all the luck," replied the cheery leader of the Third Form. "We wanted to go out, but old Suncliffe wouldn't let us. Said the night was too wild."

"Nothing would be too wild for you," replied Travers. "I'm afraid that your Form-master under-estimates your abilities, dear old fellow. Rather a pity you weren't with us, because I am sure you would have immediately fallen for Molly."

Willy stared.

"I'd have done—what?" he asked coldly.

"Molly," said Travers, "is a charming girl."

"Do you think I care a snap about girls?" demanded Willy with a sniff. "Blow 'em! I've got something better to do!"

Chubby Heath and Juicy Lemon, who were

with him, grinned joyously. Edward Oswald Handforth came up just then, too, and there was a general epidemic of grins.

"Talking about that young lady and the little girl?" asked Handforth. "By George! You've missed something, Willy! Of course, the kid was rather ugly—all teeth, and that—but that's only a detail."

"All teeth?" repeated Travers, pained. "I'm surprised, Handy, that you should slander Molly in such a way."

"Molly?" said Handforth. "I thought you were talking about that young woman farther down the train. She was booked for Caistowe, I think, and she had a little girl with her. Just Willy's type. Grubby and untidy and cheeky!"

"Fathead!" said Willy in an icy tone.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The other juniors yelled with laughter.

"I wasn't talking about the Caistowe-bound people," said Travers. "I was referring to Miss Eileen Dare and her charming niece. Willy, dear old fellow, you really ought to make Molly's acquaintance. She's a ripper. Demure, beautiful, and altogether charming. You'll like her immensely, I'm sure."

"You can go and eat coke," said Willy.

"She's just the sort of girl for you, my lad," said Jimmy Potts. "About a year younger, and just as childish."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Willy did not even deign to reply this time. He snorted, and moved off down the passage with Chubby Heath and Juicy Lemon.

"Silly asses!" grunted Willy, as he turned into his own little study. "I suppose they think they're being funny."

"Well, you know, it might be a good idea for us to have a look at this girl," said Chubby Heath thoughtfully. "Don't forget that she's the niece of Miss Eileen Dare——"

"I don't care if she's the niece of the Shah of Persia!" interrupted Willy. "She's a girl—in fact, a mere child. Do you think I've got any time to waste on a kid like that? Girls are no good. They're too soft."

"Well, I suppose there are some exceptions," murmured Juicy.

"There are no exceptions!" retorted Willy firmly. "I can't be bothered with girls—"



The Ghost!

With a clanking of chains the ghostly figure stalked down the corridor the figure of an old Roundhead whose face was awful to

behold. The St. Frank's juniors, as they watched it, felt their hair stiffen the ghost of Travis Dene was on the prowl!

Read all about this gripping incident—only one of many—in next week's grand special Xmas St. Frank's yarn, chums, It's entitled:

"The Ghost of Travis Dene!"

never could! They make me feel tired. I've never yet met a girl worth admiring, and I don't suppose I ever shall."

"I suppose you're right," said Chubby sagely. "After all, girls are an awful nuisance, aren't they?"

The fags were just at that age when they really had no use for girls whatsoever. Juicy Lemon was surprised, therefore, when Chubby drew him aside some little time later. Willy had gone off to see after his pets, and his two faithful chums were alone.

"Come to think of it," said Chubby solemnly, "it wouldn't be a bad idea for Willy to get smitten with this Molly person."

"What the dickens do you mean?" asked Juicy, staring.

"Well, I've just seen her, as it happens," replied Chubby. "She's with some of those Remove chaps—Nipper's introducing her round. Willy's going straight to the Common-room after he's finished with his pets, isn't he?"

"That's what he said," replied Juicy. "He told us to wait for him there."

"Well, why shouldn't we go and collar Molly and take her to our Common-room?" asked Chubby brilliantly. "How's that for a wheeze?"

"Rotten!" said Juicy.

"What do you mean? Willy is awfully keen about doing the right thing, and he'll be as polite as the dickens to the girl," chuckled Chubby. "Won't it be worth quids to see him talking to her and making himself agreeable? And, you never know—he might get smitten on the spot."

"Not Willy!" said Chubby, shaking his head. "Not in a thousand years!"

"His major is keen on the girls, anyhow—and it might be in the blood," said Chubby. "It's worth trying, my son!"

"Well, it'll be a bit of fun to have this kid in our Common-room," agreed Juicy, with a chuckle. "But how are we going to wangle it? She might not want to come. And even if she does come she might bring Handy with her—and that would be too awful for words! When Handy gets into our Common-room he generally starts throwing his weight about."

"Leave it to me," said Chubby.

THEY were fortunate.

They found Molly Dare in Study C, with Nipper and Tregellis-West and Watson. Edward Oswald Handforth was not interested in the child. She was too young for him—she was a mere kid—and after a few words with her he had hastily beat a retreat.

Nipper was now showing Molly the various points of interest in the Ancient House.

"Here we are!" said Chubby brightly, as he and Juicy presented themselves.

"Do you want anything?" asked Nipper.

"Yes, we want Miss Molly."

"You want me?" asked Molly, opening her blue eyes wider. "Whatever for?"

"We want to introduce you to our pal, Willy Handforth," replied Chubby. "He's the

leader of the Third Form, you know—and a regular good sport. You'll like him tremendously."

"I shouldn't go if I were you, Miss Molly," said Nipper. "These fags are preparing a rag, I expect."

"Oh, I say!" protested Chubby. "We only wanted to take Miss Molly to our Common-room and introduce her to Willy."

"Do you think I ought to go?" asked Molly dubiously.

"Well, of course, it's up to you," grinned Nipper. "You're taking a big chance in going among these Third-Formers, but I expect that you'll be able to hold your own."

"I'll go," said Molly, smiling.

"Good man!" said Chubby heartily. "I mean, good girl! No, I don't mean that, either! I mean, bravo! Let's be getting along," he added, in some confusion.

There was something singularly self-possessed about this small girl. She was two or three years younger than any of the Moor View School girls; and, in comparison, she looked a mere child. She was demure, and she was gentle, yet there was an air of complete coolness about her which rather put Chubby and Juicy off their stroke. And now that they came to look at her closely, they could see that she was indeed pretty.

She chatted enthusiastically about St. Frank's as they led her towards the Third Form Common-room. She was almost overwhelmed by the size of the place, and by its general bustle and life. This was the first time, it seemed, that she had ever visited a great boys' school of this sort, but she was in no way put out of countenance by the fact that she was in the midst of so many boys.

There was a kind of free fight going on in the fags' Common-room when Molly arrived. Chubby and Juicy were alarmed, and they stood in the doorway, flabbergasted. Molly stood there, too, looking on with interest.

Eric Gates—known in the Third as "Soppy"—was on his back in the middle of the floor. Bobby Dexter—otherwise the "Cherub"—was sitting on Eric's head. Owen minor was engaged in the task of pulling off Eric's shoes. And Eric was protesting vigorously.

"Chuck it, you fatheads!" shouted Chubby Heath. "We've brought a visitor!"

Bobby Dexter glanced round, and his jaw sagged.

"Great pip!" he ejaculated blankly.

The fags sprang from Soppy as though he had become red-hot. He was left floundering on the floor, one shoe off and one shoe on. He sat up dazedly.

"You fatheaded idiots!" he howled. "You dotty chumps! Gi' me that shoe back!"

"Shut up!" roared Chubby. "Can't you see that there's a young lady here?"

Eric stared at Molly for a second in sheer fright, and then he scrambled to his feet.

(Continued on page 14.)

YE GOOD OLD RAGS!



*Drastic indeed were schoolboy "rags" in the "good old days." Those of to-day are very mild and innocuous in comparison. Read what **BUSTER BOOTS** of the St. Frank's Fourth, has to say about this interesting subject.*

I'M afraid the rags we have nowadays are not much compared with what they must have been years ago. There's a legend at St. Frank's of what the boys of the school did to one Simon Snaithby, an unpopular master of St. Frank's.

This must have occurred somewhere in the seventeenth century, when the pupils of St. Frank's weren't so gentle and well-behaved as they are now. Snaithby was a tyrant, a bully, a cad, and everything he shouldn't be. He was always down on the juniors, and was never happy except when he was lamming them.

The seniors did not have much to do with him, but it is on record that one beefy senior gave Snaithby a thrashing for assaulting his young brother. And, frightened to tell the Head, Snaithby set-to to take it out of the juniors.

The juniors, however, had stuck just as much as they could, and were ready for open revolt. One wise junior persuaded them not to do anything so drastic, but to go carefully. This boy, whose name was Charles Rowell, had hit upon a stunning wheeze, which he promptly related to the others. This struck their fancy, and they agreed to carry out Rowell's plan.

Two or three days later, Snaithby set out for the village, the day being a holiday, to pay a surreptitious visit to an inn, which he was in the habit of haunting secretly. At a lonely cross-roads about a mile from the school gates, he was pounced upon by a number of masked and cloaked figures. Screaming in terror, the rascal was yanked through the hedge, across a field and into a barn, where he was forced to sit upon a wooden stool.

His mysterious assailants then proceeded to tar and feather him, after which they garbed him in rags taken from a scarecrow. In vain did the old rascal plead and threaten, but

his mouth was gagged and his hands were tied behind him. This done, he was dragged off to the village and placed in the stocks there, the masked figures abdicating with the key to the padlock that secured him.

It was two hours before the bounder was released, everyone thinking it was some vagrant instead of the well-known Simon Snaithby. After that fearful experience Simon Snaithby departed from St. Frank's—quickly. No one was sorry to see him go, and the Lower School went about for a week afterwards with intensely innocent faces.

THERE was one rag—or, rather, it was a dirty trick—that a Fifth-Form fellow played on the Head. According to the St. Frank's History this was in 1842, and the Head was a kindly old gent called Dr. Oliver Hooper, and the dirty dog in question was Master William Bent. Bent was addicted to drinking, gambling, and generally being a bold, bad blade. It was on one of these jaunts that the Head copped him as he was sneaking over the wall, and the next morning gave him a public flogging, which wasn't Bent's idea of a good time.

His revenge consisted of dressing himself up as a dear old lady, arriving at St. Frank's and pitching sob-stuff yarns about being left in a cruel world by her hard-hearted son, Dr. Oliver Hooper. After thus blackening the worthy doctor's name, the dear old lady would beat it into thin air. However, one day, when Master Bent turned up at the school disguised as the old lady and started his tricks, a carriage drove up containing Dr. Hooper's real mother. Bent's confidence oozed away, and under a stern questioning he confessed wretchedly to his crime. And the next morning Bent was publicly expelled.

HANDFORTH'S GIRL CHUM!*(Continued from page 12.)*

"Sorry!" he muttered, turning red. "I—I didn't know!"

"Well, you know now!" said Chubby sternly. "Here's a nice state of affairs! We bring Miss Molly to see our Common-room, and we find it upside down! You ought to be jolly well ashamed of yourselves! You'll give Miss Molly the impression that we're always biffing one another about like this."

"But aren't you?" asked Molly with a twinkle in her eyes.

Chubby coughed. As a matter of fact, there was generally a row of some kind going on in the Third Form Common-room. Chubby thought it advisable to change the subject.

"Anybody seen Willy?" he asked, looking round. "He said that he was coming here after he'd finished with his pets."

"We haven't seen him," said Owen minor, looking at Molly.

She was introduced all round, and the fags shook hands and muttered something to the effect that they were awfully pleased, or jolly glad. They looked neither.

And then Willy came along.

Knowing nothing of Molly's presence in the Common-room, he was a bit careless in his entry. Not only was he whistling in a peculiarly shrill fashion, but he thought it advisable, for some obscure reason, to enter the room with his eyes tightly closed.

"Don't touch me, you chaps!" he said. "I'll bet you my Sunday boots that I can walk straight across to the fireplace in one go. And I won't trip over the fender, either!"

"Go ahead!" said Chubby, holding up his finger to the others.

Willy, with his eyes screwed up, advanced into the room, and Chubby, with a sudden movement, thrust the startled Molly full into Willy's path. Before she could even dodge, Willy collided with her.

"Here, chuck it!" he protested. "That's not fair, butting in my way! Clear off, you fatheaded cuckoo!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled the other fags.

Willy experienced a shock. His hands encountered two slim shoulders, enclosed in some soft, silky material. He must have known, in a flash, that he was touching something very different from a fag. He opened his eyes, gasping.

"Oh, I say!" he ejaculated, hastily backing away. "My only sainted aunt!"

"No, she's not your aunt—this is Miss Molly Dare," said Chubby cheerfully.

Willy gulped.

"You rotters!" he said, glaring round. "Why didn't you tell me? I'm really awfully sorry, you know!" he added, looking at Molly. "I didn't know——"

"It's quite all right," said the girl, smiling. "Are you Willy Handforth?"

"Yes, I——"

"I'm Molly Dare," said the girl simply. "I've heard a lot about you—from your brother."

"I'll bet he didn't say anything that was good," replied Willy. "You mustn't take any notice of Ted, you know. He's prejudiced. He doesn't appreciate me in the least."

"It's very wrong of him, I'm sure," said Molly gently.

Willy gave her a close look. He wasn't sure whether she was making fun of him or not.

"We knew that you would like to meet Miss Molly, so we brought her along," said Chubby solemnly. "In fact, Willy, you spoke so interestedly about her, and expressed such a keen desire to meet her, that we couldn't do anything else."

"Why, you—you—— Oh, rather!" said Willy, pulling himself up with a jerk. "I'm tremendously pleased! I hope these chaps have been behaving themselves, Miss Molly?" he added. "If not, perhaps you'll tell me, and I'll punch them on the nose!"

"I shouldn't like you to do anything of that sort," said Molly. "So you're the captain of the Third Form? Don't you find it a responsible position?"

"Responsible isn't the word," replied Willy with a sigh. "You've no idea what a life I lead! Well, if you've had a general look round we'll escort you back to the West House if you like. I dare say Mrs. Stokes is wondering what has happened to you."

It was clear that Willy was anxious to get rid of this fair visitor. After the first introduction he was displaying a lofty indifference towards her. His very politeness was icy.

In fact, he forced himself to be cold. After his first inspection he found that Molly was remarkably easy to look at; she was quite different from what he had expected. A child, of course, but a ripingly pretty girl.

Willy felt vaguely and strangely nervous; and for him to feel nervous was a phenomenon. His one desire was to get rid of her, so that he could comfortably punch the heads of Chubby and Juicy. He knew, in a flash, that this was their work—and that they had done it deliberately to jape him.

He promised himself a warm five minutes with his chums after Molly had been safely escorted back to the West House.

HOWEVER, he was saved the trouble of escorting Molly personally.

For just then Reggie Pitt, Jack Grey, Nick Trotwood, and Dick Goodwin, of the West House Remove, arrived on the scene.

"Oh, here you are!" said Reggie cheerfully, as he came into the Third Form Common-room. "We've been looking for you everywhere, Miss Molly. Your aunt wants you back in the West House, if you don't mind. Dinner-time, you know."

"I've been so interested in everything that I'd forgotten all about dinner," said Molly.

"It's awfully good of you to come over like this. You shouldn't have troubled."

She allowed herself to be taken away, and when the footsteps of her escort had died away, Willy deliberately closed the door. Then he turned and glared at Chubby Heath and Juicy Lemon.

"Well, what do you think of her?" asked Chubby in a careless voice. "A regular ripper, eh? Didn't we tell you that she's just your mark, Willy?"

"You rotters!" said Willy thickly. "I'm going to smash you up now—both of you!"

"Here, steady!" gasped Juicy Lemon. "What's the matter? We've done nothing, you ass! You ought to be jolly pleased with us for bringing Molly along—"

"If I had wanted to meet Molly I could have met her!" interrupted Willy grimly. "I hate being compelled to bang your heads together, but it's got to be done. You know jolly well that I don't care about girls—and if you think you can force me—"

"Hold him!" yelled Chubby. "You ass, Willy, we only did it as a joke! Can't you take a joke? We thought you were more of a sportsman!"

Willy hesitated.

"I'm a sportsman, I hope," he said gruffly. "All right, then—if you only did it as a joke I'll overlook it. But if there's any more rot of that kind I'll slaughter you."

"I say, look here!" ejaculated Owen minor. "She's left her bag behind!"

It was on the table—a soft, silky thing, with a tortoise-shell clasp.

"My hat!" said Chubby, picking it up. "Who'd be a girl? No pockets, and only a giddy thing like this in place of 'em!"

"It must be awful," said Bobby Dexter wonderingly. "I'm jiggered if I can understand why girls can't have pockets in their clothes the same as us. Fancy going about with a bag like that!"

"Girls' frocks are too flimsy for pockets," said Willy with a sniff. "You leave that bag alone, Cherub! You young ass, you're not going to open it, are you? Give it to me!"

He took it, and glared at the other fags.

"I'm going to take this bag to the West House straight away," he said. "Nothing's safe with you chaps!"

He went towards the door, and there were some chuckles.

"Well, what's the matter now?" Willy asked, looking round.

"I notice that you're taking the bag yourself," said Chubby Heath. "And you don't like girls, eh? I believe you're smitten!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

There was a general roar of laughter. Willy snorted, and hurried out of the room.

But he wasn't taking that bag over to the West House personally because he was "smitten." Willy wanted to be quite sure that the bag arrived safely. He had a remarkable lack of faith in his fellow fags. They were quite capable, in his opinion, of emptying an inkpot into that bag, or of stuffing some nutshells into it, or something like that.

Willy dashed out of the Ancient House, and found the Triangle thick with snow. The wind was howling as fiercely and as wildly as ever, and the snowflakes were whirling down in bewildering masses. By the time he got to the West House he was smothered, and he was compelled to shake himself vigorously in the lobby.

There was nobody about, and he made his way to Mr. and Mrs. Stokes' private quarters. There was a big baize door dividing this private part of the house from the rest. Willy opened the baize door, went through, and he approached the sitting-room door.

By this time, no doubt, Molly had arrived; but he rather hoped she would be upstairs, tittivating herself for dinner. At least, Willy tried to convince himself that he didn't want to see her again. Yet, strangely enough, he knew that he would be rather disappointed if she *was* upstairs.

He was about to tap on the door when he paused. He could hear Molly's voice—and, somehow, it was raised in an unusual way, and there was a note of acute alarm in it.

"Oh, auntie, I've done my best to seem bright and cheerful, but it's such an effort," came Molly's voice.

"There, Molly, you mustn't talk like that," said Eileen Dare. "There's nothing to be alarmed about."

"I'm so frightened, auntie," came Molly's



voice again. "I can't help feeling that those horrid men will find me, and try to—"

"Hush, Molly! You foolish girl, you mustn't talk like that," said Eileen. "There's no danger here, at St. Frank's. Everything will be quite all right."

Willy went hot and cold all over. Without any such intention, he knew that he was an

eavesdropper. He had heard something that was certainly not intended for his ears. And he was vaguely uneasy.

He bit his lip, moved forward, and tapped loudly on the door.

"Come in!"

Willy went in, and found Eileen Dare and Molly over by the fireplace. Both of them were looking unconcerned, but Willy had no difficulty in seeing that Molly, at least, was forcing herself to act. He took one glance at her eyes, and he was startled.

"You left your bag behind," he said briefly.

"Oh, thank you," said Molly, her voice a little husky. "I'm so sorry that you've been troubled like this."

"It's all right, no trouble at all," replied Willy cheerfully. "I thought I'd better bring it straight along. Good-night, Miss Molly—good-night, Miss Dare."

He went out, whistling, but by the time he reached the lobby he was not whistling. He could not forget the terrified tone of Molly's voice, neither could he forget the fear that lurked in her clear, blue eyes. He had seen it there unmistakably as he had given her that glance.

What did it mean?

Until now he had supposed that Molly Dare was just like any other child—that she was carefree and happy. Who were the mysterious men she had referred to? And what was the danger that was lurking over her?

CHAPTER 4.

The Man With the Scar!

JUST a minute, young 'un!" Willy Handforth paused. He was near the bridge which crossed over the River Stowe at the end of the village.

It was the next morning, and the sun was shining brightly on a white world.

Willy was doing a job of fagging for one of the Sixth-Formers, and he didn't mind it the least. It was rather fun trudging down to the village through the snow. The blizzard had gone, and although there was still a comparatively high wind, it was a mere whisper compared with the hurricane of last night. There were only one or two clouds in the sky, and the air was brisk and healthy. It was good to be out on such a morning as this.

The roads were not so bad as Willy had expected. The high wind had drifted the snow up against the hedges, and into the ditches, leaving the roads mostly clear.

As Willy had approached the bridge he had seen a big saloon car standing there. It wasn't a car belonging to anybody in the district. And the fag, noticed, too, that it bore a London number.

There were two men inside, in the front seats. They were smoking and talking, and they had watched Willy fairly closely as he

came along. Now, rather to the fag's surprise, one of them opened a door and addressed him.

"Lost your way?" asked Willy.

"No, it's not that, sonny," replied the man, in an agreeable voice. "We want to ask you a few questions, that's all. . . Care to come inside?"

"Well, I'm in a bit of a hurry——"

"Never mind that," said the man. "There's five shillings for you if you answer my questions."

Willy was intrigued. He wondered why these men should be willing to give him five shillings for answering a few questions. Willy, let it be remembered, was a remarkably keen youngster. He promptly hopped into the car and closed the door. He did not like the look of these men in the least—and it was for this reason that he had so readily agreed to the proposition. He vaguely suspected that they were up to no good, and it would be just as well to make sure.

The man who had spoken to him was clean-shaven, lean, and there was an ugly scar extending right across his face. Perhaps it was an old war wound, but, somehow, Willy hardly thought this. The man did not look the type who had seen service.

His companion, who was at the wheel, said nothing. He sat there, smoking. He was more broadly built than the man with the scar, and he was clean-shaven, too. But his face was fatter, and he had a bloated look about him which Willy instantly hated.

"A pair of tough customers," he mentally decided. And Willy, after all, was a good judge of character.

"We just happened to be passing through," said the man with the scar. "You had a bit of a train wreck here last night, I understand?"

"It wasn't a wreck," replied Willy. "Nobody was hurt much."

"And some of you boys tried to save the train, didn't you?" went on the man, trying to make his voice genial. "I saw it in this morning's papers. Smart youngsters, aren't you?"

"I wasn't there," replied Willy. "It was the Remove chaps who helped."

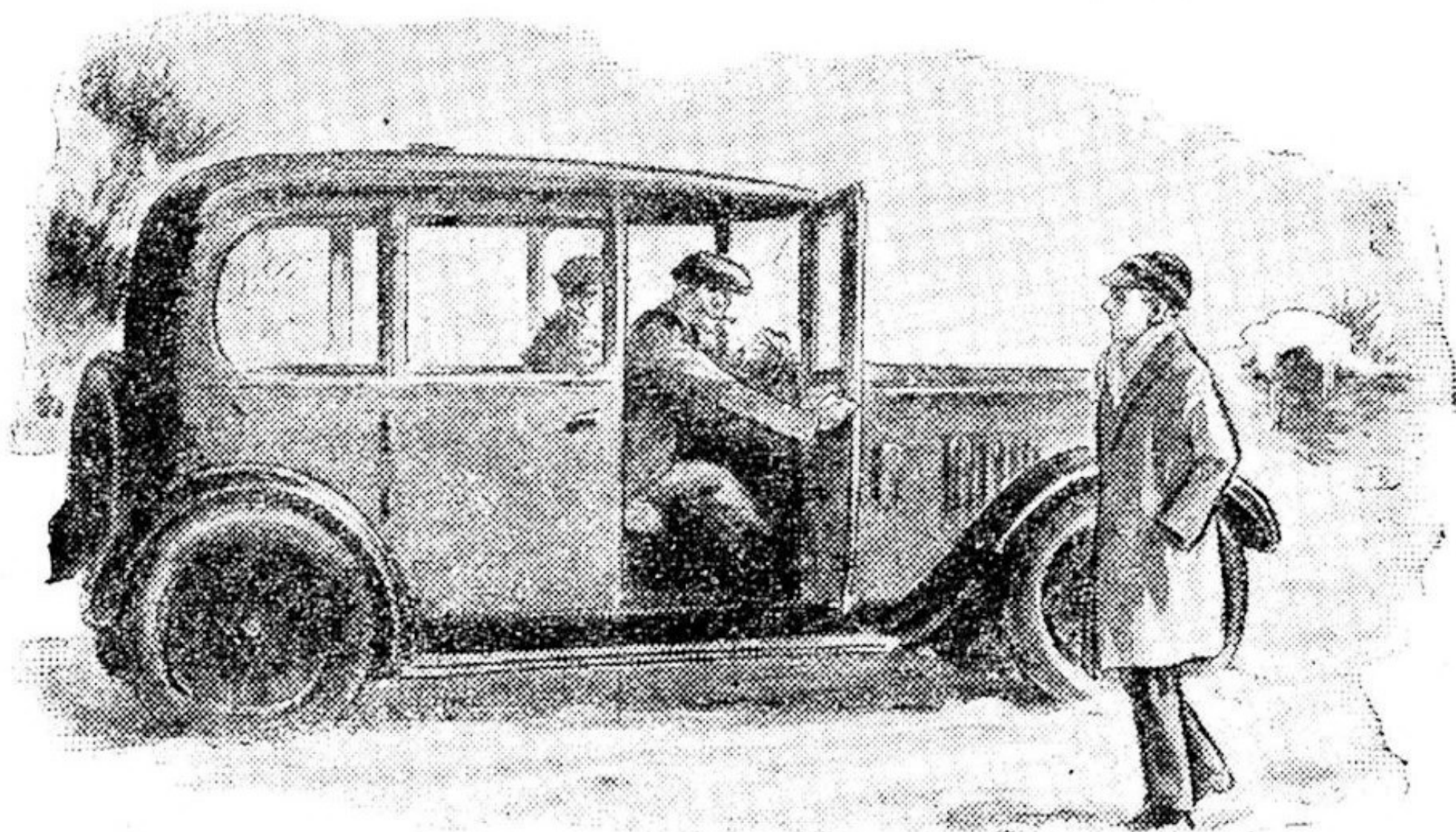
"Well, anyway, you've had a bit of excitement down here," continued the man chattily. "I see that Miss Eileen Dare was on the train."

Willy, without moving a hair, became instantly on the alert.

"Miss Dare?" he repeated, as though he had never heard the name before.

"Miss Eileen Dare—the well-known lady detective," nodded the man with the scar. "She and her niece were travelling in that train. We read all about it in the paper this morning. Wasn't she escorted from the train by some of you St. Frank's boys?"

Willy looked stolidly stupid. He could, when he chose, make himself singularly dense. The man, looking at him, set him down as a very ordinary sort of junior schoolboy, per-



"Come inside," called the man in the car to Willy. "We want to ask you some questions—and there's five bob for you if you answer them!" Willy was intrigued. Why was this man willing to give him five shillings merely for answering a few questions?

haps on the dull side. Never had he made a greater mistake!

For Willy Handforth was keyed up to a high pitch now. These two men were strangers—and they were inquiring after Eileen Dare and Molly. It was only natural that Willy should immediately recall those words he had inadvertently heard—those words uttered by Molly. She had said that she was frightened—that she was scared of the "horrid men." And here, in this motor-car, were two horrid men! The connection was palpable, and Willy, on the instant, put himself on his guard.

"I wasn't there," he said, shaking his head. "I heard some of the chaps saying that there was a girl on the train—a girl with a little child."

"That's it," nodded the other. "Do you know what became of them?"

"That girl and the child?" asked Willy. "Yes."

"They went on to Caistowe, I think, when the train was relieved," replied Willy. "Anyhow, that's what I heard."

"Caistowe?" said the man with the scar. "Where's that? A seaside place, isn't it?"

"Rather!" agreed the fag. "Just along the coast, you know. Only three or four miles away from here."

He was glad that Edward Oswald had mentioned a young woman and a child who were on their way to Caistowe. He now deliberately confused them with Eileen Dare

and Molly. His object was to put these men on a wrong trail.

"Miss Dare didn't stay in Bellton, then?" asked the scar-faced man.

"Oh, no," replied Willy. "I don't think so, anyway."

"You haven't seen her at St. Frank's?"

"St. Frank's?" repeated Willy woodenly.

"Miss Dare hasn't been to your school, by any chance?"

"Oh, I say!" protested Willy. "Haven't I just told you that the young lady and the child went on to Caistowe? I'm sure they did. But I can't tell you who they were, or anything about them. They may not have been Miss Dare and her niece at all. How should I know?"

"You don't seem to know much, do you?" asked the man tartly.

"Well, you see, I wasn't there," said Willy in a plaintive voice.

"Well, here's your five bob, and don't tell anybody that we've been questioning you," said the man with the scar. "Just in case you're curious, I'd better mention that we particularly want to find Miss Dare. We've got an important case for her, and it's necessary that we should locate her."

Willy got out of the car, jingling the money that had been given him. His acting was good. He seemed half-scared and nervous, and he had maintained his attitude of stupidity all along. But when he got into the High Street, out of sight of the car, he

allowed his normal keen expression to reassert itself. He frowned in a worried way.

"I don't like it!" he told himself. "There's something squiffy about all this. These men are crooked—or I'm a Zulu. I only hope that I've put them off the scent."

He rather thought that he had succeeded. Probably the men would carry on towards Caistowe, and would make inquiries there.

It was certainly significant that these men should appear on the scene so soon after Molly Dare had expressed to her aunt that she was frightened. It was as obvious as daylight that the men were looking for the pair.

All sorts of questions arose in Willy's active mind. Was it a real fact that Eileen and Molly had come to St. Frank's merely for a week's stay with Mr. and Mrs. Stokes? Wasn't it more likely that they had come in order to seek sanctuary from some danger?

AND while Willy was pondering thus, during the execution of his errand, the two men in the car were looking thoughtful and dissatisfied.

"According to that kid, the girl has never been at St. Frank's at all," said the driver. "He'd have known if she was there."

"I can't understand it," replied the man with the scar. "We heard that Miss Dare and the kiddie went up to St. Frank's last night. If so, where is she now? This youngster says that they went on to Caistowe."

"He didn't seem to know much, either one way or the other," replied the driver. "Here's another youngster coming now. Perhaps he'll tell us."

It was fortunate for these men—and unfortunate for Willy's little game—that the junior who now approached should be Teddy Long of the Remove.

For Teddy Long was a fellow without any particular scruples, and when it came to a matter of discretion he had none. Furthermore, he was naturally stupid. Willy had only pretended to be stupid, but Teddy *was* stupid.

"Just a minute, young 'un!" said the man with the scar, opening the car door.

"Eh?" ejaculated Teddy, as he was about to pass. "Speaking to me?"

"Yes," said the man. "You're a St. Frank's boy, aren't you?"

"Yes, sir."

"Do you happen to know where I can find Miss Eileen Dare?"

"Rather!" replied Teddy promptly. "She's up at St. Frank's."

A gleam came into the man's eyes.

"Oh," he said, "she's up at St. Frank's, is she? Anybody with her?"

"That little girl—her niece," replied Teddy, beginning to feel important.

"Come inside," said the man. "If you'd like to earn five shillings, young 'un, by answering a few questions—"

"Five bob!" said Teddy eagerly. "Rather! I'm on! I'm so broke that—"

"Never mind that!" interrupted the man with the scar. "Come in here, and answer a few questions. Here's five shillings to begin with—and if you tell me what I want to know, I'll give you another five."

Teddy Long entered the car with alacrity. The door was closed, and then he gazed at the two strangers. It didn't matter to him who they were, or what was the object of their curiosity. There was ten bob tacked on to this thing, and Teddy was after it!

"Miss Dare arrived last night," he explained. "She was in that train smash, you know. She's staying with Mr. and Mrs. Stokes. Her niece, Molly, is up at the school, too."

"You're quite sure of this?" asked the man with the scar.

"Sure? Of course!"

"You've seen them at the school?"

"Everybody's seen them," replied Teddy. "Why? Do you want them for something? If so, why don't you come—"

"Never mind that!" interrupted the stranger. "We have our reasons—and we shouldn't be paying you this money unless we wanted a certain amount of—well, secrecy. You see, Miss Dare is a very famous person, and her idea is to get away for a little holiday."

"Yes; that's why she's at St. Frank's," nodded Teddy.

"I'm a lawyer," continued the man with the scar. "A client of mine is very anxious to secure Miss Dare's services, and she has refused to consider the case. Well, I want to persuade her that it would be to her advantage to accept the commission, and so I'm anxious to get in touch with her."

"If you come to the school, I'll take you straight to Mr. Stokes' House," said Teddy willingly.

"No; I'd rather arrive unannounced," replied the man glibly. "I'm afraid that Miss Dare will misunderstand, and perhaps refuse to grant me an interview. So it is necessary, you see, to use a certain amount of tact."

Teddy Long was easily spoofed. He swallowed this yarn whole.

"I shall await my opportunity," continued the man. "So what I want you to do, young 'un, is to give me a few details regarding the school. You say that Miss Dare is staying in Mr. Stokes' House?"

"Yes," replied Teddy. "That's the West House."

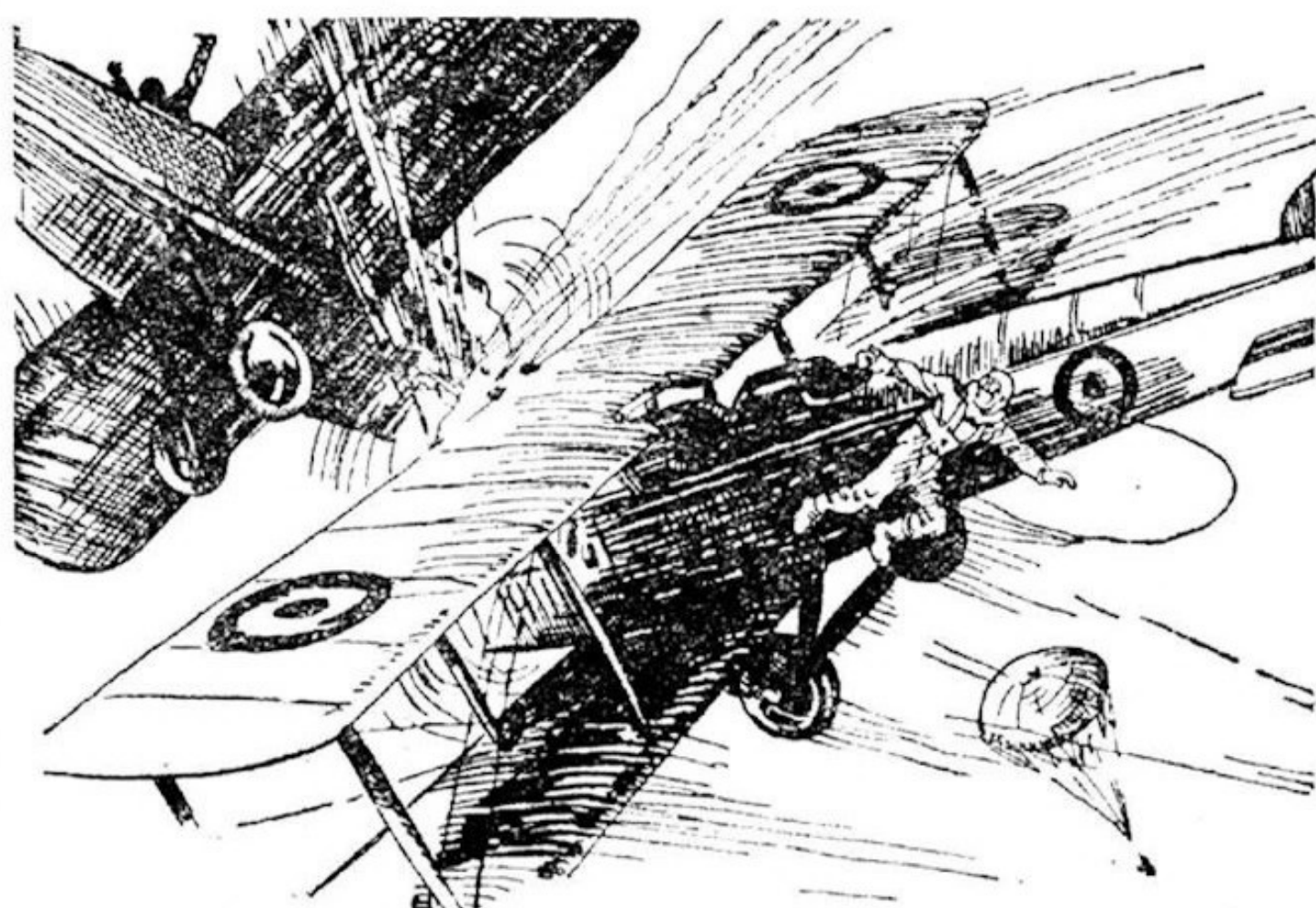
"Can you tell me how to distinguish this particular House from the others?"

"Nothing easier," replied Long. "When you go into the Triangle, the main door of the West House is on your left-hand side—the first door as you go in. West Arch is a bit farther along, and then there's the main door of the Ancient House."

"The West House is the first one—on the left-hand side?" said the man with the scar, nodding. "Right! You don't happen to

(Continued on page 20.)

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HANDFORTH'S GIRL CHUM!

(Continued from page 18.)

know which is the window of Mr. Stokes' sitting-room—the room where Miss Dare is most likely to be in?”

Teddy Long stared.

“Sitting-room?” he repeated. “But you’re not going to get in the window, are you?”

“If Miss Dare refuses to see me, I may be compelled to adopt somewhat unconventional methods,” replied the man, who was ready with his answer.

“Oh, I see,” grinned Teddy knowingly. “You lawyers are up to all sorts of tricks, aren’t you?”

“That’s enough!” said the man coldly. “I don’t want any comments from you, young man!”

“Oh, sorry!” ejaculated Teddy. “Well, let me see—Mr. Stokes’ sitting-room, eh? Yes, the window’s on the side, overlooking the Chapel.”

And he gave the precise details, much to the satisfaction of the scar-faced man. Teddy gave other details, too—details that were wormed out of him quite easily. And when the cross-examination was over he was handed another five shillings.

“I’m giving you this extra money, young ’un, because I want you to keep quiet about this,” said the stranger. “You understand?”

“Yes, rather!”

“If Miss Dare knows that I am looking for her, she will probably give orders that I am not to be admitted,” continued the other. “She is reluctant to accept my client’s case, since she has made up her mind to take a holiday. So it is essential that secrecy should be maintained.”

“I get you!” grinned Teddy, with a wink. “You can trust me all right!”

The man with the scar looked at him dubiously. Teddy was obviously a young ass.

The chances were that he would go back to St. Frank’s and blurt out the whole affair. But there was a way in which to silence him.

“I shall probably see you again later,” said the stranger. “And if I succeed in securing Miss Dare’s services, I shan’t forget you.”

“You—you mean that you’ll give me some more money?” asked Teddy eagerly.

“A pound,” nodded the man.

“A pound—in addition to this ten bob?” gasped Long.

“Exactly,” replied the man. “But you won’t get it if you breathe a word of what has passed between us. I shall know—directly I approach Miss Dare. So, you see, it’s up to you to keep the promise you have just made me.”

“That’s all right,” said Teddy Long, taking a deep breath. “I’ll keep as mum as an oyster.”

And for once in his life he meant it!

And as he walked back to St. Frank’s he was inwardly excited. He congratulated himself upon his luck. But never once did he guess that he had been pumped—and pumped successfully. Neither did he guess that those two men were bent on mischief!

CHAPTER 5.

Molly Dare’s Peril!

WILLY HANDFORTH stood in Nelson Lee’s study in the Ancient House.

The bell for morning lessons was just ringing, and he had had time to tell his Housemaster about the little incident near the village.

“And that’s all, sir,” he concluded. “I thought I had better tell you about it.”

“I have always known you to be a boy of sound commonsense, Willy,” nodded Nelson Lee. “It was right of you to come to me like this.”

“Well, I thought it was rather rummy, sir.”

“These men, you say, asked if Miss Dare was at St. Frank’s.”

“I pretended to misunderstand them, sir,” said Willy. “I mixed Miss Dare and her niece up with two other people who were on that train, and who went on to Caistowe. I made the men think that Miss Eileen Dare and Miss Molly had gone on to Caistowe in the relief train.”

“Why did you do that?”

“Oh, I don’t know, sir—only I thought that those two chaps looked a bit fishy!” replied Willy. “I didn’t see any reason why I should satisfy them.”

“What were these men like?”

“One of them had a big scar across his face, sir—an ugly-looking beggar,” replied Willy. “I didn’t see much of the other, but I didn’t like the look of him. They struck me as being wrong ’uns. What does it mean, sir?” he added earnestly. “Is Miss Dare in any danger?”

Nelson Lee laughed.

“You mustn’t get such notions into your head, Willy,” he replied good-naturedly. “How can Miss Dare be in any danger here?”

“That’s not an answer, sir,” said Willy, shaking his head. “You’re just trying to put me off.”

“I am glad you said ‘trying,’ my boy,” remarked Lee dryly. “I think it is only fair to tell you that these men are—well, they’re two of Miss Dare’s professional opponents.”

“You mean they’re crooks, sir?”

“I didn’t exactly say that,” replied Nelson Lee. “However, there is nothing for you



THE ST. FRANK'S QUESTIONNAIRE!

Here are twelve testers for you, chums—questions which refer to St. Frank's and its members. Give them the "once-over," jot down the answers to those which you know, and then compare them with the correct list which will be given, together with another set of questions, next week.

- | | |
|---|--|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What is the name of the castle owned by Reggie Pitt? 2. Who are the occupants of Study S in the West House? 3. Who are Joan Tarrant's two bosom pals in the Moor View School? 4. How many Remove studies are there in the Ancient House? 5. Are Etons compulsory at St. Frank's? 6. What are the colours of the Moor View School? 7. What is the name of the master-forgery whom Nelson Lee once hunted down? 8. Is Bellton on the main line of the Southern Railway, or on a branch line? 9. Where is Sir Edward Handforth's London house? 10. What is the name of Willy Handforth's pet squirrel? | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 11. Why are the juniors of the River House School known as "The Commoners"? 12. Who is the ventriloquist of the Remove? |
|---|--|

ANSWERS TO LAST WEEK'S QUESTIONS:

1. Ezra Quirke is the boy who gained a reputation at St. Frank's as a mystic, and now lives at Market Donning with his aunt. 2. Tom Burton. 3. Dr. Molyneux Hogge, M.A. 4. Bannington 688. 5. Clarence Fitzgibbon, the son and heir of Sir Cyril Fitzgibbon, Bart. 6. Sessue Yakama, the Japanese boy, is alone in this study at present. 7. Edgar Fenton. 8. Ernest Lawrence. 9. The River House rotters are known as "The Honourables" because the three leaders are the Hon. de Vere Wellborne, the Hon. Bertram Carstairs, and the Hon. Cyril Coates. 10. Joe Catchpole, who lives at Pellton's Bend. 11. The College House. 12. The Priory ruins are on the Earl of Edgemore's property, near the hamlet of Edgemore.

to worry about, Willy. And I know that I can rely upon your discretion. The less you talk about that little incident, the better. You understand?"

"Of course, sir," said Willy. "I shan't do any talking."

"It is just as well that you deceived those men, because it is now possible that they will not bother Miss Dare," continued Lee. "Well, Willy, I think you had better be going. The bell has ceased ringing, and Mr. Suncliffe will be impatient. Thank you for coming direct to me in this way."

Willy looked at Nelson Lee in a very straight way.

"I wish you'd tell me the truth, sir," he said reproachfully. "You know jolly well that those men are a couple of rotters, and that they're up to mischief. If there's anything that I can do to help—"

"I am afraid there's nothing," interrupted Lee. "As for Miss Dare being in any danger, you can dismiss that thought at once."

Willy went, thoroughly dissatisfied. It was all very well for Nelson Lee to make light of the matter, but he—Willy—knew very well that there was some mystery behind it all. He had not forgotten those terrified words of Molly's—but, of course, he had not said anything to Lee regarding that little bit of unintentional eavesdropping.

NELSON LEE was looking very thoughtful after Willy had gone. Before he could do anything, there came a tap on his door, and Eileen Dare entered.

"I hope I'm not troubling you, Mr. Lee?" she said, as she stood in the doorway.

"Not at all," replied Lee, rising to his feet. "Please come in, Eileen."

She entered, and there was a worried look on her pretty face.

"I am dreadfully sorry about this, Mr. Lee," she said, placing a morning paper on the desk. "There's a report of that train accident here, and my name is mentioned."

"Yes, I know," said Lee.

"It is the very last thing I desired," continued the girl detective. "As you know, my idea was to bring Molly down to St. Frank's, where we would have a quiet time. Before leaving London, I took special measures to leave an impression that Molly and I had gone North. This newspaper report has ruined everything!"

"I wonder how they got hold of your name?"

"I dare say it was the railway train guard," replied Eileen. "He knew who I was—the boys were talking. And just because of that the newspapers made a ridiculous fuss. Look at this head-line.



The toboggan, with Molly astride it, whizzed down the slope at a terrific speed. It leapt off the track, shot upwards, and Molly was sent hurtling through the air, to plunge headlong into a deep snowdrift. "You rotters!" gasped Willy to his two chums as they raced to the rescue. "This is all your fault!"

'Famous Girl Detective's Narrow Escape.' And here's another. 'Miss Eileen Dare's Adventure in the Blizzard.' They've made far more fuss of me than of the accident."

Nelson Lee nodded.

"Well, that's only natural," he said. "You mustn't forget, Eileen, that you are rather a famous young lady. The newspapers saw a story here, and they quickly seized upon it. It is unfortunate, but I do not think there is any reason to be alarmed."

"But there is!" said Eileen quickly. "It is quite likely that those men will get to know exactly where I am, and my whole object in coming down to St. Frank's will be frustrated. They are dangerous men, Mr. Lee."

"And yet I think you can set your mind at rest," said Lee. "This is a big school, remember, and those men would hardly dare to take any drastic steps in so open a manner. I am satisfied that Molly will be in no actual danger."

"I only hope that you are right," said Eileen quietly.

AFTER morning lessons there was a great deal of bustle amongst the juniors. The snow, of course, ruled out football practice completely. But there was plenty of other sport to be obtained. Tobogganing, for example, was very much to the fore.

Over on the slopes of the St. Frank's Golf Links there were any amount of ideal spots for tobogganing, and there was a regular rush as soon as lessons were over.

Not all the fellows were lucky enough to own toboggans—indeed, only a comparative few of them did so. Nevertheless, there was the prospect of plenty of good sport, toboggan or no toboggan. Revelling in the snow itself was satisfying enough.

Willy Handforth and Chubby Heath and Juicy Lemon had a toboggan of their own. It wasn't much of an affair to look at—but there was no doubt that it would be effective in practical use. Willy & Co. had constructed it a few days earlier, on the first hint of snow. Willy believed in being prepared.

"Plenty of time for some first-class sport before dinner," said Willy briskly as they set off, dragging the toboggan behind them. "It'll give us a jolly good appetite, too."

Just as they were passing the West House, a slim, agile figure emerged. It was Molly Dare, and she ran eagerly up to the three fags, her face glowing with pleasure.

"Going tobogganing?" she asked. "Can I come, too?"

Willy looked at her in some alarm, and he



The toboggan, with Molly astride it, whizzed down the slope, shot upwards, and Molly was sent hurtling through the air. "You rotters!" gasped Willy to his two chums.

was amazed to find that his heart was beating a trifle more rapidly than usual. This was ridiculous! He tried to regard Molly calmly. She certainly *did* look ripping in her thick woolly coat. And those stout shoes of hers were businesslike and sturdy—not the silly kind of shoes that girls mostly wear. Her flushed cheeks and her sparkling eyes were good to look at.

"Do you mind?" she asked breathlessly.

Chubby Heath and Juicy Lemon grinned widely, and Willy, catching sight of them, gave them a cold look.

"Mind?" he repeated, smiling at Molly.

"No jolly fear! We're only too pleased!"

"I knew you were a sport, Willy," she said.

As Molly went off with the fags Eileen Dare turned to Nelson Lee. They were watching from one of the windows.



a terrific speed. It leapt off the track, to plunge headlong into a deep snowdrift. to the rescue. "This is all your fault!"

"You think she'll be all right, Mr. Lee?" asked the girl detective.

"What possible harm can come to her?" smiled Lee. "She is with all these boys—and I don't believe for a moment that she can be in any danger. Far better for her to go. The sport will do her a world of good."

THERE were many grins amongst the fags when they beheld Molly walking side by side with Willy Handforth. It was rather fun to see these two together, particularly as Willy had so recently expressed an utter and absolute indifference towards girls.

Not that Willy cared. Not, in fact, that he could have altered the situation. Molly had asked to come, and it had been impossible for him to refuse.

"This is a bit thick, you know," muttered Chubby miserably, as he and Juicy Lemon fell behind. "Think of it! Willy being smitten by a silly kid like this!"

"You could have knocked me down with a feather!" said Juicy with a sniff.

"Thank goodness she's only here as a visitor," said Chubby Heath. "She can't stay long, and then, perhaps, Willy will become more normal again. Great Scott! He's as bad as his major!"

Never before had Willy entertained the slightest interest in any girl. Indeed, even now he repeatedly told himself that he didn't really care a jot about Molly. It was like her nerve to butt in. Yet, at the same time, he found himself enjoying her company. She wasn't quite the same as other girls; she was brighter and more sensible. There was no nonsense about her—no silly giggling. Her blue eyes, when they were turned upon him, made him go all hot; and it was a new sensation for Willy. He wasn't sure whether he liked it or not.

"Look here, we won't go on to the links with the other chaps," he said, stopping suddenly. "There's a nice slope here, and nobody seems to be using it. Better than being with the crowd."

They had gone to the end of the first meadow, and the St. Frank's golf course was some little way farther on. But here, having climbed a slope, they stood looking back. There was a big expanse of snow stretching down towards the lane.

"What's the good of this?" asked Chubby, staring. "We want to get up on the downs, where there are some really steep hillsides. This gentle slope is no good. We shan't get up any speed!"

"We don't want too much speed," replied Willy.

"Eh?"

"You heard what I said."

"Yes, but— Oh, I see!" said Chubby, a grin overspreading his features. "You think that Molly—"

"Never mind what I think," snapped Willy. "We're going to stop here. And if you don't like it, you can go and join the others."

"Well, you needn't jump down my throat," said Chubby complainingly.

Already there was a big difference in Willy. But for Molly, he would have scorned this gently sloping meadow. He would have regarded it as "soft." Something more exciting, more thrilling, would have been found. But just because Molly had come he found it necessary to choose a safe slope like this!

Chubby and Juicy were disgusted. They could see that their whole enjoyment would be spoilt.

"Let's have a try, anyway," said Willy briskly. "Plenty of room on this toboggan for all of us."

He took his place on the front, and Molly, agog with glee, sat behind him. Then Juicy got on, and Chubby hesitated.

"Givo us a shove off, and then jump on," said Willy, glancing round. "And make it a good shove, too. We don't want to stick halfway."

"We shan't even get a start!" said Chubby tartly.

But they did get a start.

In fact, Chubby and Juicy were astonished at the speed the toboggan gathered. The snow was ideal, crisp and powdery, and there was plenty of it, and after the first few yards the toboggan, with its heavy load, gathered way. It went shooting and hissing down the slope, towards the hedge at the bottom.

With rare skill, Willy turned the toboggan in a gentle curve so that it ran alongside the hedge for some little distance before coming to a standstill.

"That was gorgeous!" said Molly breathlessly.

"Not bad, eh?" grinned Willy.

And Chubby and Juicy were compelled to admit that the sport was first-rate. They even realised, with some little surprise, that it was far better for them to toboggan here than to join the crowd.

THEY had half-an-hour of splendid fun. After three or four fully-laden trips, the toboggan was taken in turn. Chubby Heath went first, and then Juicy had his turn. After that Willy sent his chums together, so that he was left alone with Molly. He didn't quite know why he did it, and Chubby and Juicy were rather surprised.

It was significant, however, that when they returned to the starting-point, dragging the toboggan, Willy sent them off again. He was chatting with Molly amiably now, and he was discovering that she was every bit as sensible as a boy. This surprised him immensely.

In fact, he was compelled to acknowledge to himself that although she was a year younger than Chubby and Juicy, she was undoubtedly many years older in common-

sense. He began to regard Chubby and Juicy as a couple of idiotic infants. They had never had any brains, anyhow.

At last, for the sake of appearances, Willy was compelled to take a solo trip. Yet he didn't like leaving Molly with his chums. They were such asses that they would probably offend her in some way; and it was quite likely, too, that they would be uncomfortably blunt regarding their leader.

And in this he was quite right. No sooner had he gone than Chubby turned to Molly, and looked at her with frank curiosity.

"You're a bit gone on Handforth minor, aren't you?" he asked, with delightful directness.

"I think that Willy is a sport," replied Molly enthusiastically.

"You don't know him!" said Chubby, shaking his head.

"What do you mean?"

"He's a terror, really," replied Chubby. "He's on his best behaviour with you, but —"

"I hope you're not going to talk against him," interrupted the girl. "Is that quite fair, behind his back?"

Chubby flushed.

"Oh, dash it, I'm not talking against him," he protested. "Willy is my pal—and Juicy's pal, too. He's one of the best. He's true blue. We'd do anything for him."

"Rather!" said Juicy without hesitation.

"But we don't think he's the kind of chap for you—that's all," continued Chubby. "You ought to see him when he gets wild! He rules the Third with an iron hand."

"I expect the Third needs it," nodded Molly.

"Eh? Why, he punches anybody's head at the slightest provocation," said Juicy. "If I did something that he didn't like, he'd punch mine."

"That's fine!" smiled Molly.

"What do you mean—fine?"

"I like to know that Willy is so useful with his fists," replied the girl calmly. "What's the good of a boy unless he can fight? I'd just love to see a really splendid fight between Willy and one of you other boys."

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

They couldn't say any more just then, because Willy arrived back, flushed and breathless. He had had a good run down, and he had hastened on the way up the slope.

"It's gorgeous!" he declared. "Now then, Molly, it's your turn."

Her eyes sparkled.

"You are a sport, Willy!" she declared. "You mean that you're going to let me go down alone?"

"Why not?" asked Willy. "You're not made of glass, are you? We've all had a solo run, and now it's your turn. What's the good of a girl unless she can do the things that a boy can do?"

(Continued on page 26.)

THE POPULAR
Every Tuesday 2d



Handforth undertakes to answer, in his own unique fashion, any question "N.L." readers care to submit to him. But, although of a certainty the results will be amusing and entertaining, the Editor takes no responsibility for their veracity.

Write to Handforth, c/o the NELSON LEE LIBRARY, to-day.

"BILLY" (Workop) informs me that while he was away at the briny he was bitten either by a crab or a lobster, but he is not sure which. How can he find out? S'easy! Just you try out this little scheme, "Billy"; it can't fail. Toddle along to your nearest fishmonger and ask him to show you a live lobster and a crab. Stick your left finger or your left big toe in the crab's mouth, or claws or whatever they bite with, and at the same time place your right finger or your right big toe in the what I said before of the lobster. Then wait until they bite you. You will, of course, immediately recognise one of the bites as similar to that which you experienced when you were away. All you've got to do then is to ask the fishmonger to tell you the identity of the brute that did the deed.

G. O. A. LIDGETT (England). What's the idea of calling me "Andonious," you chump? That strikes me as being a potty name; about as potty as its owner—I mean, its originator must be. Your baffling problem is merely silly: "How did the milk get into the coco-nut?" How the dickens do I know? I'm not a coco-nut!

LEONARD MACKIE (????) So you think I'm the prettiest boy in the Remove, do you; and that Arnold McClure is the best fellow in the Remove? Regarding the first, all I'm capable of saying is that you can thank your lucky stars you didn't tell me your full address, otherwise actions would have spoken louder than words by this time. Mac is all right, admitted, but unfortunately he saw your letter—it fell on his bread-and-jam during tea-time—and now he's become conceited. He actually had the cheek to tell me to go and eat coke just now when I ordered him to wipe up the ink I unfortunately upset on the floor.

"ROB ROY" (Glasgow). It's a waste of a stamp to write to me, is it? Then it's

a waste of space for me to reply to you here—and that's that!

"BOZ" (Tottenham) asks if a cat has kittens in a farmyard will they be ducks. Most certainly! Why, only the other day, when Irene Manners and I visited Joe Catchpole at Farmer Holt's place, we saw some kittens, and Irene said they were "ducks." She also stated that they were "dea(e)rs."

"NOSEY." Reading your letter, I can quite see why you've called yourself nosey, "Nosey." You're quite correct when you say that I'm never as smart as Archie Glenthorne. But, you see, I have no ambition to look like a tailor's dummy, thank you!

V. STAVELEY (Blackpool) asks what I would do if Stanley Waldo came into Study D and challenged me for the leadership. I can't tell you here, old man. Waldo might see what I was writing—it's my opinion that fellow can see through brick walls—and I don't want him to know my plans.

"SOCCERITE" (Chelsea) says he has a great admiration for my goalkeeping abilities; that he is contemplating becoming a goalie himself, and he would like me to give him some advice on the subject. I'm always willing to oblige, old man. Goalkeeping is easy—just remember that all you've got to do is to keep the ball out of the net. Follow that tip and you can't go wrong.

"PERPLEXED" (Plymouth) asks me whether a tomato is a fruit or a vegetable. I don't know and I don't care. Churchy squirted one in my eye at tea-time yesterday, and now I've no interest in the wretched things. Do I like bananas? Yes—except when I slip on the skin of one.

EDWARD OSWALD.

HANDFORTH'S GIRL CHUM!*(Continued from page 24.)*

Molly placed herself on the toboggan, and Willy prepared to give her a shove off. Chubby and Juicy prepared, too—without Willy knowing anything about it. Consequently, when the toboggan started on its run, it started in real earnest. Chubby and Juicy had given a terrific heave.

"You fatheads!" yelled Willy. "Who told you to interfere? My only hat! She's going at about fifty miles an hour!"

"Do her good!" said Chubby with a grin.

Willy was relieved to hear Molly's delighted peal of laughter as the toboggan went shooting down on its way. There was now a regular run cut in the snow, and the sport was even better than it had been at first.

However, that extra shove had made all the difference. When the toboggan reached the turn, just near the hedge, it failed to negotiate it. Perhaps the speed was too great, or perhaps Molly was not quite capable of controlling her clumsy steed.

At all events, the toboggan leapt off the track, shot upwards, and Molly was sent hurtling through the air, to plunge headlong into a deep snowdrift against the hedge.

"You rotters!" gasped Willy. "I'm going to slaughter you for this!"

"But—but we didn't know!" gasped Chubby. "Fancy her not being able to turn the bend! Just like a girl!"

Willy was relieved a second later, for Molly emerged from the snowdrift, laughing merrily. Obviously, she was quite unhurt. In point of fact, she had enjoyed that spill. It added to the excitement, and it was rare fun.

She was ploughing her way out of the drift when she happened to glance upwards over the top of the low hedge. And there, staring at her, was a face!

It was the face of the man with the scar!

CHAPTER 6.**Willy on the Job!**

THE change that came over Molly Dare was positively startling.

A second earlier she had been a merry, laughing young girl. Now, in a flash, every scrap of colour left her cheeks, and a sob of terror arose in her throat. Her eyes were filled with fear.

She screamed, turned, and ran.

She ran blindly, and Willy & Co., who were approaching from the top of the slope, gazed at her in amazement. For they had seen nothing of that face which had appeared for a second over the top of the hedge, and thus they could have no clue as to the reason for Molly's sudden terror.

"The man with the scar!" shrieked the girl wildly.

"Great Scott!" gasped Willy.

Molly was running off across the meadow—running away from the three fags. Evidently she did not know which direction she was taking; her terror was so great that she just ran blindly.

"What happened?" asked Chubby, with a gulp. "Look at her! She's scared out of her wits!"

"She must have seen something!" replied Willy. "Come on! We've got to get hold of her and— Ye gods and little fishes! Look where she's going! There's the river just over there, and she's making straight for it!"

"I'd forgotten the river!" ejaculated Juicy frantically.

It was easy to understand how he had forgotten. For the river was coated with a thin film of ice—and on the top of this there was the snow. A stranger in the neighbourhood, therefore, would not even know that the river was there.

"Quick!" said Willy tensely. "We've got to pull her up before she gets to that bank! She won't know the difference, and she'll go through!"

They all yelled at the top of their voices, but Molly Dare took no notice. She still ran on, and it was obvious that she was in the grip of a fearful terror.

As Willy was running, he remembered Molly's words: "The man with the scar!" She must have seen him! And Willy's suspicions regarding that incident in the village were now doubly acute. He had guessed, from the first, that that man was an enemy of some kind, but he had set the man down as an enemy of Eileen Dare. It seemed that Molly was involved, too.

As fast as Willy & Co. ran, they found it impossible to overtake Molly before the river bank was reached. They yelled again, shouting their warning, but Molly, still running on, still in the grip of that blind fear, took the bank at a leap. If she thought anything at all—which is doubtful—she mistook the snow-covered ice for a lower level of the meadow. At all events, she ran straight on. Then there came a sudden shriek. The ice gave way on the instant, and she plunged through.

Willy & Co., arriving on the bank, saw a black, ugly gap in that broad white surface. The water was stirring sluggishly, but there was no sign of the girl.

"She's gone!" sobbed Chubby. "Help! Help!"

Willy did not even pause. In his stride, he dived into the river. It seemed as though paralysis seized him during the first moment. The icy coldness of the water gripped him, and the breath was taken out of his body.

He dived straight under, coming up a little farther beyond, his head smashing the thin ice and sending it in all directions. He was frantic with alarm. There was no sign of Molly—

He caught sight of something just under the water, and he dived again. This time he came up clutching at Molly's coat, and to his untold relief he saw that her head was

above water. She was breathing heavily, gasping, and there was a wild fear in her eyes.

"It's all right, Molly," panted Willy. "Nothing to be scared of. We'll soon have you out."

Chubby and Juicy helped valiantly. They reached over, caught hold of Molly, and lifted her out of the water. A moment later Willy was beside them.

"I'll take her!" he said quickly.

"No, no—you mustn't!" panted Chubby. "You've done enough, old man! Juicy and I will—"

"No, you won't!" interrupted Willy. "The exercise will do me good—it's what I need. You fellows run on ahead and get hold of Mrs. Stokes. Tell her to have a bed all ready—with warm blankets and hot-water bottles, and things."

"But—"

"Don't argue—get on with it!" said Willy grimly.

His chums recognised his tones, and they went off like a couple of hares.

Willy took Molly in his arms and followed, walking firmly and steadily. He knew that this exertion would keep his circulation going, and the chances were that he would not suffer any serious consequences. He was a hardy youngster, anyhow.

He was glad that most of the other fellows were busy tobogganing farther afield. He did not want an audience just now.

"You mustn't carry me like this," whispered a husky voice in his ear. "I can walk, Willy—really! I'm all right now."

"No, you're not," said Willy. "You're going to be carried."

"I—I didn't know the river was there," faltered Molly. "I didn't know anything—I just ran."

"Why were you so frightened?"

"I saw him—the man with the scar!" breathed Molly. "He was looking over the hedge at me! I don't seem to remember much after that."

"Don't try to remember," urged Willy. "You'll be all right soon. Mrs. Stokes will soon have you undressed and wrapped in warm blankets."

EILEEN DARE was with Mrs. Stokes when Willy arrived.

They were, in fact, on the West House steps, and Handforth & Co. and Travers and a few other Removites were in the vicinity, too.

"Great Scott! What's happened?" asked Edward Oswald. "What's my minor been doing?"

"He's saved Molly's life—that's what he's been doing," said Chubby Heath, breathing hard. "Dived in the river and rescued her!"

"I thought something bad would happen if you silly fags went tobogganning!" said Handforth sternly. "You're too jolly reckless!"

Molly was taken by Mrs. Stokes and Eileen and she was swiftly carried indoors: In a warm bed-room, where a fire was glowing, Molly was stripped and rubbed vigorously with warm towels. After that she was wrapped in hot blankets and placed in a big easy-chair in front of the fire.

Eileen Dare went to the door then, opened it, and beckoned to Nelson Lee and Dr. Brett, who were waiting outside with Mr. Beverley Stokes. All three men entered.

"She's all right," said the doctor, after an examination. "I don't think she's even caught a chill. Young Handforth did well to bring her in so quickly, and the precautions that you have taken, Miss Dare, have saved her from any ill-consequences."

"I'm so relieved," said Eileen gratefully.

A tap sounded on the door.

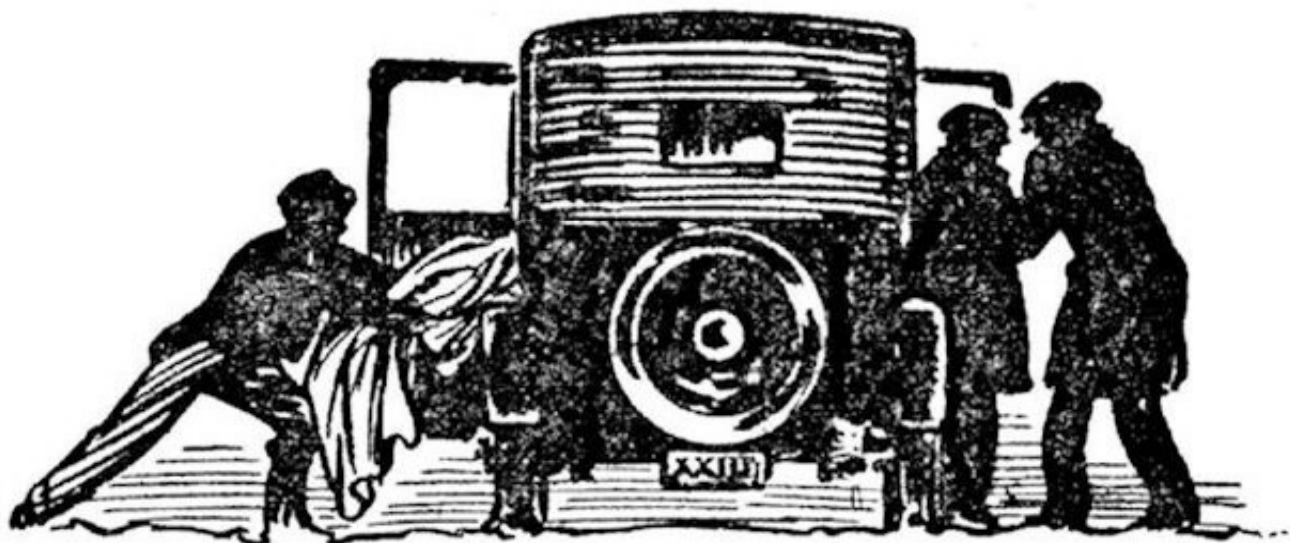
"Come in!" called Mrs. Stokes.

Willy came in—changed, and looking none the worse.

"How is she, sir?" he asked anxiously.

"I am glad to tell you, Willy, that she is little or none the worse for her adventure," said Nelson Lee. "But you mustn't stay here now."

"It was awfully good of you to save me, Willy," said Molly, a warm light in her eyes. "I went right under—under the ice. I thought I was never coming up again. I shall never be able to thank you."



"I don't need any thanks," growled Willy. "I'm only too glad that everything's all right."

Nelson Lee led Willy outside, and he looked at the fag steadily.

"Tell me, Willy—what happened?" he asked.

"She fell in the river, sir—"

"I know that," interrupted Lee. "And I do not imagine for a moment that she fell into the river through any fault of yours. She went tobogganing with you, but I have sufficient faith in you, Willy, to know that you would look after her."

"Thank you, sir," said Willy. "She had a solo run, and we gave her a push off. It was rather too much of a push, and when she got to the bottom of the slope she capsized. That was nothing, though—it didn't hurt her. But suddenly she jumped up,

screamed, and ran away in terror. She shouted: 'The man with the scar!' and went on towards the river."

"Did you see any man?"

"No, sir; but she told me that she saw the man looking over the hedge at her," said Willy. "That's why she was so scared. She couldn't tell the river was there because it's covered with ice and snow. But, of course, it's unsafe, and she went clean through."

"And you dived in and saved her," nodded Nelson Lee. "Well done, Willy! By the way, did any of the other boys see this man with the scar? Did they know that he had been looking over the hedge?"

"Not that I know of, sir," replied Willy. "Molly told me as we came along, but the other chaps didn't hear—and they didn't see anything, either."

"It is just as well," said Lee slowly. "And I want you, Willy, to promise me that you won't mention anything about this."

"I'll promise if you want me to, sir," said Willy readily. "But what does it all mean?"

"I'm afraid I cannot tell you just now," replied Lee. "It is obvious to you, however, that Molly is in some danger. If I had known that anything of this sort would happen I would not have allowed you to take her out this morning."

"It's that blighter with the scar on his face," said Willy wrathfully. "I knew there was something fishy about him as soon as he stopped me in the village. He's a crook, sir! A beastly rotter—and if I catch sight of him again I'll—I'll——"

"You'll do nothing," broke in Lee, seizing Willy by the shoulder. "Understand, young man?"

"But, sir——"

"You'll do nothing," repeated Lee. "I don't want you to get yourself into any trouble, Willy. Have nothing to do with that man—or his companion, either."

"You might tell me who they are, sir—and what their game is," said Willy earnestly. "I'd like to help, if I can."

"I am afraid there is nothing that you can do," replied Lee, shaking his head. "In fact, Willy, I should like you to forget the whole incident. Let it be supposed, by most of the school, that Molly met with an ordinary mishap in consequence of the toboggan overturning."

"That's a bit difficult, sir," said Willy. "Chubby and Juicy saw her running away, screaming with fright."

"But they did not see the man with the scarred face," said Lee. "Let them wonder—but do not give them any further information."

"Well, one thing's certain, sir—those men know that Molly and Miss Eileen are at the school," said Willy. "And they're up to mischief, too. If you like, sir, I'll form the Third Form into a kind of bodyguard. We'll take it in turns to watch and guard over Miss Eileen and her niece."

Nelson Lee smilingly shook his head.

"I appreciate your thoughtfulness, Willy, and I thank you," he said, "but I do not think any such measure as that is necessary."

And, much to Willy's dissatisfaction, he was compelled to be content with that. Nelson Lee would not give him the slightest inkling as to the identity of the two mysterious men; neither would he explain why they were so interested in Miss Eileen Dare and Molly.

Willy felt a bit peeved about it.

"So I can't help, eh?" he muttered to himself, as he went away. "All right! We'll see about that!"

DR. BRETT insisted upon giving Willy an examination, and Willy was relieved when the doctor stated that he would not be required to go to bed. The brisk exercise and exertion, immediately following the immersion, had nullified any ill effects that might have resulted.

There was, of course, a good deal of talk in the Junior School.

It was generally believed that Molly had fallen into the river because of some mishap to the toboggan. Chubby and Juicy had freely said that Molly had been frightened by something, but nobody took much notice.

That evening a hard frost set in, and there was some prospect of further revels on the morrow. The wind had completely died down by now, and there was every promise of a fine, moonlit night.

Molly had not been seen again, and although Willy had casually popped into the West House once or twice he had been unable to catch sight of Eileen Dare or Mrs. Stokes. And he hardly liked to go up to the Housemaster's private quarters and to ask to see Molly.

Chubby and Juicy were thoroughly alarmed. There was a great change in Willy. He ignored them—he even seemed to dislike their company. They were more than ever convinced that their celebrated young leader was "smitten."

At bed-time Willy was very quiet. Some of the fags started kicking up a noise in the dormitory, but he soon stopped it. Many of the other fags wanted to chip him. They were keen upon asking him what it was like to be in love—but they refrained from any such rashness. Willy's right was too famous.

They misunderstood him, of course.

He was thinking about Molly, it is true—but in a very different way from what they believed. Willy was anxious about the girl. He knew that she was in danger of some kind. Those mysterious men were bent upon some evil. And although it was obvious that Nelson Lee was on the job, Willy was still dissatisfied. He was irritated because his own offer of help had been turned down.

AT a quarter past ten every fag in the Third Form dormitory in the Ancient House was asleep—with the exception of Willy. Willy had other plans in mind. As the school clock chimed out the



"Keep your hands just where they are," commanded Nelson Lee grimly. "Turn round and march before me ——" He broke off then, for suddenly one of the men jerked his wrist. A small glass bomb broke against Nelson Lee's face, and next moment his legs seemed to sag and he fell into the snow in a crumpled heap.

quarter-hour he slipped out of bed, pulled some clothes on, and tiptoed silently out of the dormitory.

Everything was quiet outside in the corridor. He passed along it, reached the staircase which led upwards towards the attics, and mounted them. He slipped noiselessly into one of the attics, closed the door, and gave a murmur of satisfaction.

"Well, that's all right," he muttered. "Nobody's spotted me, and I shall be safe here."

The moonlight was coming into the little room, and he quickly donned his thick overcoat—which he had brought up there before bed-time. He put his shoes on, too. Then he sat himself at the window on an upturned trunk.

His vigil had commenced.

This box-room window overlooked the West Square, and Willy had taken the trouble to find out which West House window belonged to Molly's bed-room. He could see a faint glow in it now, on the other side of the curtains. All the other windows were dark, except two. One of them, he knew, belonged to Eileen Dare's bed-room, and the other was occupied by Mr. and Mrs. Stokes.

But it was Molly's bed-room in which he was interested. This particular attic gave a good, clear view of that window on the other side of the square.

Willy did not like the look of things at all, and he had resolved to keep watch to-night. It was all very well for Nelson Lee

to say that he needed no help, but Willy had a sort of hunch that his own assistance might be needed.

Anyhow, there would be no harm in him sitting up like this and keeping watch. At the worst, it would only mean the loss of some hours' sleep. He had determined that if nothing happened by three o'clock in the morning he would go back to bed.

Exactly what he expected to happen he could not even tell himself. He didn't know. And when he came to analyse his motives and his feelings, he was rather startled. Would he have done anything like this for anybody else? Was it because of Molly that he was so interested?

He was afraid to answer the questions. He only knew that this was the very first time in his life that any girl had interested him. Of course, Molly was different—totally and absolutely different from any of the other girls.

But *was* she?

Willy was freshly startled. Wasn't it something in him which made her seem different?

"Oh, well, what does it matter?" he muttered impatiently at length. "She's a girl and she's in danger. It's up to me to help her if the need arises."

It spoke volumes for his determination and his strength of will that when midnight arrived he was as alert as ever, and he was not even feeling sleepy. He had made up his mind to keep this vigil, and he was keeping it faithfully.

The light in Molly's window had now gone out—and the other lights were extinguished, too.

St. Frank's slept.

The night was singularly quiet—after the roar and howl of the recent blizzard. The moon was shining clearly, casting black, impenetrable shadows. Sitting at his window, Willy could see almost every inch of the West Square. There was only one strip where the shadows were deep and mysterious. He watched this curiously—he watched it, growing wider as the moon moved.

As one o'clock approached he began to think that his fears had been groundless. Perhaps all this mystery was not so menacing as he had thought.

After all, he didn't know anything about Miss Eileen Dare's circumstances. Perhaps the man with the scar was a relative of some kind—some unwanted cousin, or somebody like that. Yet Willy found it difficult to believe this. He could not forget Molly's awful terror.

It wasn't until one o'clock boomed solemnly out from the school tower that something happened. Then Willy became on the alert. Was it imagination, or had he seen a movement amid the deep shadows, near West Arch?

He forgot the fact that he was feeling cold and chilled. He bent nearer to the window, watching intently.

His heart jumped. There was a movement there!

Two figures were creeping stealthily forward, tip-toeing, progressing inch by inch.

And they were making straight towards Molly's window!

CHAPTER 7.

The Men of Mystery!

A GLOW of satisfaction swept over Willy Handforth.

He wasn't pleased because these rascals had come. He was pleased because he had anticipated their move. His vigil had not been in vain. He would be able to warn—

His thoughts ceased abruptly. For just then something happened which was quite unexpected.

The two men had nearly got beneath Molly's window. And now, from one of the deeper shadows a third form suddenly appeared. It came out quickly, and there was something gripped in one of its hands.

At the same second, Willy pushed open the attic window and leaned out.

"Hands up!" he heard somebody say, in a grim, cold voice.

It was the voice of Nelson Lee!

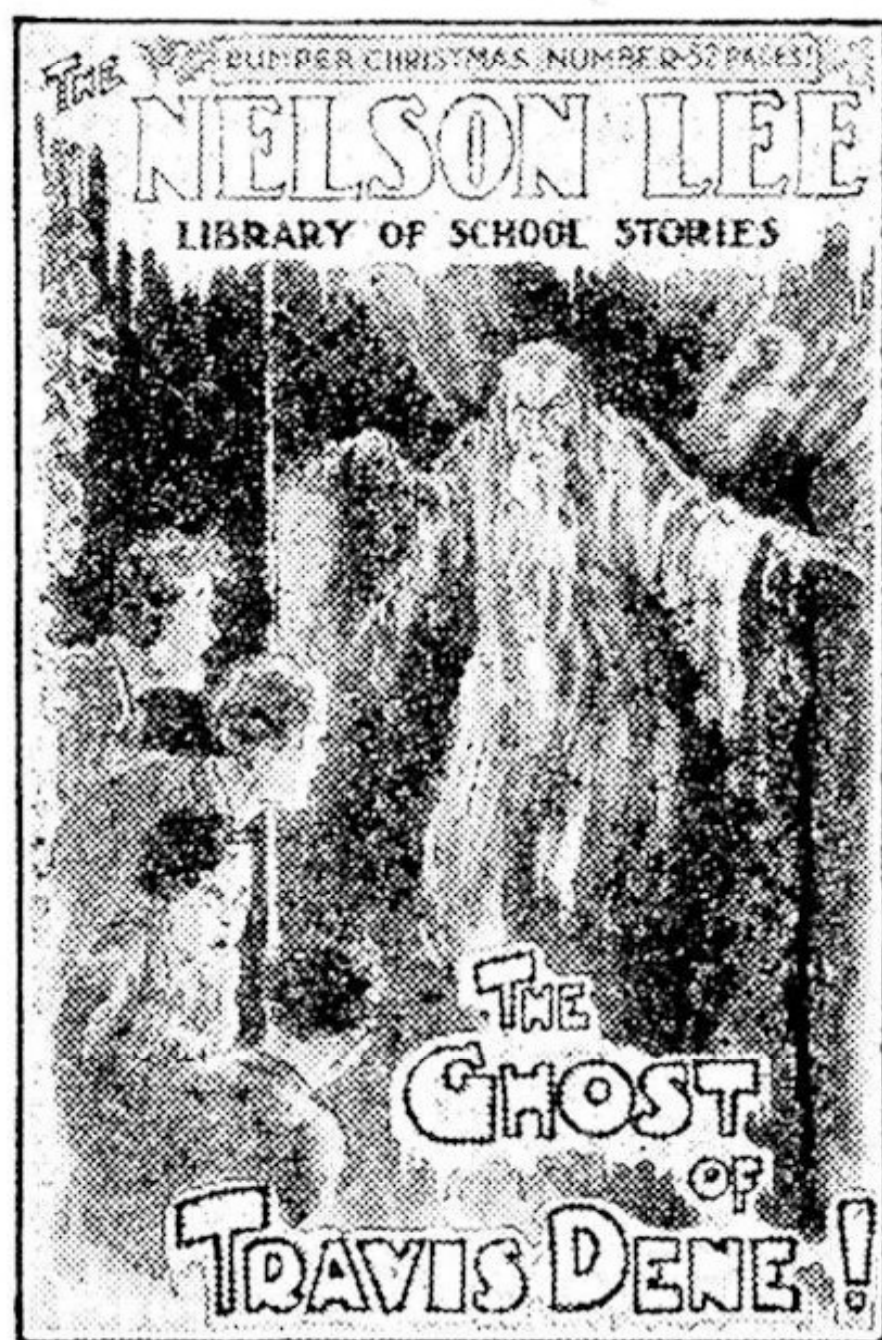
Willy caught his breath in sharply. He was surprised—and relieved. Until this moment he had not known that Nelson Lee, too, was keeping a vigil! No wonder Lee had told him that his own services would not be required.

He heard startled exclamations from the two men. They were completely surprised, and they raised their hands on the instant. They stood there, facing Lee, baffled.

"Keep your hands just where they are," came Lee's quiet, calm voice. "Turn round, and march before me—"

He broke off, for at that second one of the men jerked his wrist. It was all over in a flash. Willy thought he saw something glint in the moonlight. The next second there was a tinkle of broken glass—a mere whisper of sound. And in the same moment Nelson Lee's knees seemed to sag and he fell into a crumpled heap in the snow.

COMING NEXT WEEK! ~~~~~



"He's all right!" came a muttered comment from one of the men. "Better leave him here. And we must work fast."

Willy felt incapable of action for a moment. The thing had happened so abruptly—so unexpectedly. A moment ago Nelson Lee had been in command of the situation; now he was lying unconscious on the ground.

What had happened?

Willy had no difficulty in guessing. One of those men had held something in his hand, and in spite of the menace of Lee's revolver he had flung it.

A glass bulb, probably, containing a deadly gas. The bulb had broken on Nelson Lee's face, and he had inhaled the poisonous fumes.

Those two men were working quickly now—totally unconscious of the fact that there

was a witness of the entire scene. A ladder was swiftly produced from the black shadows, and hoisted up against the window of Molly's bedroom. It was quite a low window, on the first floor. The ladder reached it without difficulty.

One of the men began cautiously to ascend.

"My only sainted aunt!" breathed Willy, coming to himself with a start.

HE knew that it was time for him to act.

Nelson Lee had been on the watch, and Lee had acted boldly. But he had met with disaster. In spite of all his

Willy's brain worked like lightning, and within the space of three seconds he had made up his mind what to do.

He scudded downstairs like a hare, and it was the work of a moment for him to unbolt the main door. He ran out, and found the Triangle deserted. He flew across to the school wall, leapt over, and a gulp of satisfaction came into his throat.

Standing there, some little distance down the lane, was a saloon car, without any lights. Willy had counted upon this being the case. He had expected to find the car there. How else could these men escape with their victim?

Willy's first move was to creep forward, and to take a quick look into the car. It was empty.

Good! There were only these two men to deal with, then.

He pulled out a big clasp-knife, and without hesitation he plunged it into the wall of one of the tyres. There was a sharp, noisy, rush of air. The ballon tyre became completely deflated.

If Willy had attempted to plunge that knife through the tread he would probably have failed. But the walls of a tyre are thinner, and can be quite easily penetrated.

Willy went to the next tyre, and treated it in the same way. He repeated his tactics with the other two—until all four tyres were flat on their rims.

"They can't get far like this!" he muttered gloatingly.

He dodged back across the road, crouching in the snow behind a big pile of stones. He had heard the sounds of the approaching men. His hiding-place was dark, and he could look out with a fair amount of safety. He beheld the two men approaching, and one of them carried a great bundle in his arms.

"They've got her!" breathed Willy fiercely. "By jingo! This is awful!"

But this resourceful tag was not baffled.

He knew that he could not rely upon any help. The school still lay asleep—and Nelson Lee, no doubt, was unconscious in the West Square. If Willy shouted for help he might do more harm than good. It was certain, indeed, that he would be attacked and probably "laid out."

So he waited, watching with eager, intent eyes.

One of the men opened a rear door of the car, and the bundle was lifted in and placed on the rear seat. The men closed the door, and went round towards the front of the car.

And here Willy took a chance.

Without making a sound, he crept forward, bending low. He reached the side of the car, and it was the work of a second for him to open the door. The two men were on the other side, just against the driver's door. They were talking in low voices, and one of them was lighting a cigarette. Evidently they believed that they had plenty of time, and that everything was all right.

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precautions, he had fallen a victim to these mysterious men. And now, in spite of him, they were continuing with their task.

It was obvious to Willy that it was their intention to kidnap the girl.

And what could Willy do?

If he tackled these men single-handed he would certainly go under. If he aroused the school there would be a long delay, and before anything could be done those men would have escaped—probably taking Molly with them. Indeed, if there was a commotion of any kind they would throw precaution to the winds and they would go all out to achieve their object. And perhaps in the confusion and noise they would succeed.

Expecting to be challenged every second, Willy reached into the car, dragged the bundle towards him, and he felt that it was warm. He gripped firmly, drew it towards him and clasped it. Then with excessive caution he closed the door again, and padded round to the back of the car.

"Done it!" he breathed exultantly.

He could hardly believe that it was true. Right in front of these men's eyes, he had rescued Molly!

He crouched at the rear of the car, not daring to make any other move. He was hoping that the men would get in and drive off without discovering their loss. It would be too risky for him to run with his burden, for it was almost certain that he would be heard and chased, and he would stand utterly no chance.

Then, at that moment, something else happened.

A figure came climbing over the wall, and Willy recognised Nelson Lee.

There was a shout from the men, and with one accord they leapt into the car, slamming the doors after them. The engine sprang into life, and the car jerked forward.

Nelson Lee came running along from the school wall, staggering slightly.

"It's all right, sir!" gasped Willy, meeting him. "I've got her!"

"Good heavens!" ejaculated Nelson Lee, amazed. "Willy! What on earth— You—you mean—"

"Yes, sir!" panted Willy. "I managed to get her out of the car before they drove off—and they didn't spot me, either!"

But Nelson Lee was staring down the road. The car, after swerving and skidding, had come to a halt. One of the men had got out and was staring down at the tyres.

"I did that, sir," said Willy. "I jabbed my knife into the tyres, you know."

"Wait here!" said Lee grimly.

He ran towards the car, and Willy caught a glimpse of the detective's revolver. Not that Lee was able to use it, for the man had leapt back into the car, and a moment later the saloon car was in motion again. It went tearing furiously down the lane, bumping and rattling. The men were desperate now, and they were running the car on flat tyres, regardless of the damage that might be caused. Their only object was to escape. Of course, they were under the impression that Molly Dare was in the back. They had not yet discovered the full truth.

Nelson Lee came back and joined Willy.

"Aren't you going after them, sir?" asked the fag. "What about getting out your car and giving chase? You're bound to overtake them—"

"I don't think so, Willy," said Lee. "They will soon find that the girl is not there, and they will be more anxious than ever to escape. They will drive madly. No; it will be better for me to hurry indoors and to telephone the police. Not that they will be of much avail. Those men are certain to

abandon the car very shortly, and they will escape. Come, let me have the child."

Lee took the bundle into his arms, and he carefully drew the blankets aside and looked at Molly's face. It was peaceful and calm, and had retained its normal colour.

"Is she in a bad way, sir?" asked Willy anxiously.

"No; I imagine that she has been given a dose of the same gas that laid me low," replied Lee. "It is evidently harmless stuff—for I am feeling no ill effects. Thank heaven you were so prompt, my boy! You have done wonders!"

"I asked you to let me help, sir," said Willy reproachfully.

"Perhaps I was unwise not to accept your offer," acknowledged Lee. "However, we must not stand here talking."

THEY walked back towards the school gates, Lee giving Willy a key so that he could unlock them.

"I am glad that nobody has been aroused," said the schoolmaster-detective. "How was it, Willy, that you happened to be on the spot so handily?"

"I was watching from one of the attic windows in the Ancient House, sir," said Willy.

"Watching? Do you mean watching the girl's window?"

"Yes, sir," replied Willy quietly. "I had an idea that something might happen. I've been up there ever since about half-past ten, and when I saw those two men creeping into the West Square I knew that I hadn't wasted my time."

"Bravo, Willy!"

"Then you butted in, sir, and I had an idea that everything was all right," continued Willy. "But when they threw that gas thing at you I knew that it was up to me to do something—and to do it quickly."

"Why didn't you arouse the school?"

"I knew there wouldn't be time, sir. So I scudded downstairs, got outside, and punctured those tyres. Then I grabbed Molly while the men weren't looking and took her out of the car. I'm jiggered if I know how I did it—and even now I can't understand why they didn't see me or hear me. Lucky, wasn't it, sir?"

"I'm not so sure that it was lucky," replied Lee. "You have acted with singular courage, Willy, and I am very pleased with you."

"Do you think she'll be all right, sir?"

"Mercifully, I think that she will awaken in the morning and know nothing whatever of what has happened," replied Lee. "This gas is of a peculiar quality; it produces almost instantaneous unconsciousness."

"You went down pretty quickly, sir."

"Something struck me in the face—see, there are one or two small cuts on my cheek—and the next moment I was down," said Lee. "But the effects soon wore off. If you had not been on the alert, however, I should have been too late. I do not doubt that the

men used precisely the same gas with Molly."

"The rotters!" said Willy wrathfully. "It's awful, sir! Who are they, and why do they want to kidnap a jolly fine girl like Molly?"

"I am afraid I cannot explain matters now," replied Lee. "These men must have administered the gas while Molly slept—and thus she knew nothing. They simply wrapped her in the bedclothes, just as she was, and carried her down."

"And if she's put back to bed, and the clothes smoothed out, she won't know anything?" asked Willy. "By jingo, that's a good idea, sir!"

"I shall trust you, Willy, to keep your mouth shut," said Lee. "The less said about this unfortunate business, the better. And Molly herself must on no account have the slightest inkling of what has happened."

EILEEN DARE was aroused as soon as Lee and Willy got into the West House.

She came out in her dressing-gown,

looking very charming in spite of her ruffled hair and startled eyes. Nelson Lee quickly explained what had happened, and the girl detective listened with growing consternation.

"I cannot understand it," she said. "Oh, Mr. Lee, I blame myself for this! I sleep very lightly, and I was sure that I would awaken if anything was wrong. Yet I knew nothing! Those men must have worked like shadows!"

"They did," nodded Lee. "They drugged Molly in her sleep, and so, of course, they made no sounds. I want you to take the child and put her back to bed—so that she will know nothing."

Eileen obeyed. And when she returned she found Nelson Lee and Willy in the passage.

"It's all right," whispered Eileen. "She's getting over the effects of the drug—but she knows nothing. Even if she awakens now she will merely think that she has had, perhaps, a dream."

They told her what had happened, and she was greatly alarmed.

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"After this, Mr. Lee, I shall have Molly in my own bed-room," she declared. "Oh, those dreadful men!"

"Who are they, sir?" urged Willy. "You, Miss Eileen! Won't you tell me? I mean, haven't I earned the right to know?"

"Yes, you certainly have, Willy," replied Eileen gently. "Just now, however, I think it would be better if I said nothing."

"But those men will cause more trouble, miss," said Willy. "And now that they know you and Molly are here they'll have another try. Why don't you go to some place in secret—somewhere— By jingo! I've got an idea!"

"I'll warrant it's a good one," said Nelson Lee dryly.

"My pater's place, near Bury St. Edmunds, sir!" said Willy, his eyes gleaming. "Travis Dene—that's what it's called, you know. Why not come to Travis Dene for Christmas?"

"Oh, but you cannot invite me like this," said Eileen. "It is very good of you——"

"Nobody will know, and Molly will be safe!" interrupted Willy. "I'll fix it with my pater and mater! We're going to have a big party there, too—and if only you and

Molly could go there on the quiet, who's to know? These rotters will be diddled!"

"Upon my soul, it is certainly an excellent idea," said Nelson Lee, looking at Eileen.

"But can it be arranged?" asked the girl detective doubtfully.

"Leave it to me!" grinned Willy. "If I can't wangle it, then I'll give up all hope of ever wangling anything again!"

THE fact of the matter was, Willy had grown to like Molly Dare quite a lot, and he had firmly made up his mind to do everything in his power to help his new girl chum.

Incidentally, Christmas at Travis Dene promised to be particularly interesting—and exciting, too!

THE END.

("The Ghost of Travis Dene!" is the title of next Wednesday's grand special Christmas yarn, chums. Snowflights, ghosts, mystery, thrills all go to make this the best Christmas story you've ever read. And to avoid disappointment order your copy of the enlarged Christmas number of the Old Paper without delay!)

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Sid Cole, 22, Globe Terrace, **Grays**, Essex, would like correspondents anywhere.

Miss Lena Douthwaite, 52, Hastings Street, Hendon, **Sunderland**, wants girl correspondents.

Miss Ida G. Locke, Ferndale, **Liss**, Hants., wishes to hear from girl readers.

GOSSIP ABOUT ST. FRANK'S



Things Heard and Seen By EDWY SEARLES BROOKS

I'M often surprised by the extraordinary favourites of some readers. I sometimes get letters telling me that Dick Goodwin or Tom Burton or some junior like that is somebody's favourite character. And yet these chaps, and others like them, are hardly ever to the front. So I can't quite understand why they should be favourites. Here's Leslie H. H. Rickson, of London, S.E.17, assuring me that Reggie Pitt is his favourite. Yet Reggie doesn't come into the stories a quarter so much as lots of other fellows. I can only assume that such juniors as Pitt and Goodwin and Burton are particularly favoured by some readers because these readers have fond memories of the series in which they were featured. It's a case of absence making the heart grow fonder. I dare say all those readers who regard Handforth as a silly chump would begin to look upon him as their favourite character if he dropped out of the stories for a month or two.

* * *

I COULD write a St. Frank's story if I chose about juniors and seniors who would be absolute strangers to everybody. Readers would open the Old Paper and see strange, unfamiliar names, and they would wonder what on earth was the matter. There are so many chaps at St. Frank's that it's sheerly impossible for me to bring a half, or a quarter, or even an eighth of them into any one particular story. If I did make a drastic change like this, just for the fun of it, I doubt if the move would be popular. So those readers whose favourites consist of the more or less obscure characters will have to wait patiently—and hope for the best!

OUR READERS' PORTRAIT GALLERY



Ernest Walton

THINGS are getting a bit more exciting at St. Frank's just now. What with Nelson Lee and Nipper just escaping death at the hands of their Chinese enemies, and one thing and another, the old school is having more than its share of thrills. And by what I can see, there's not likely to be much change. Miss Eileen Dare's presence at St. Frank's just now looks like leading to something unusual in the way of excitement. I cannot help think-

ing that there is something behind her apparently casual visit to Mr. and Mrs. Stokes. They've said nothing to me, of course, but I've heard of what has recently happened, and I've already related it. And I'm confidently expecting that there will be some startling developments in the very near future. I have an idea that the majority of readers will be pleased. This is the age of thrills. And if readers would care to send me their opinions, I shall be pleased to comment upon any letters that seem to call for such treatment. Would readers prefer me to relate the easy-going school adventures, and miss out the thrilling incidents, or would they prefer me to concentrate on the thrills? Send me a line now,

chums. Here's the address: Edwy Searles Brooks, Editorial Office, NELSON LEE LIBRARY, Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4.

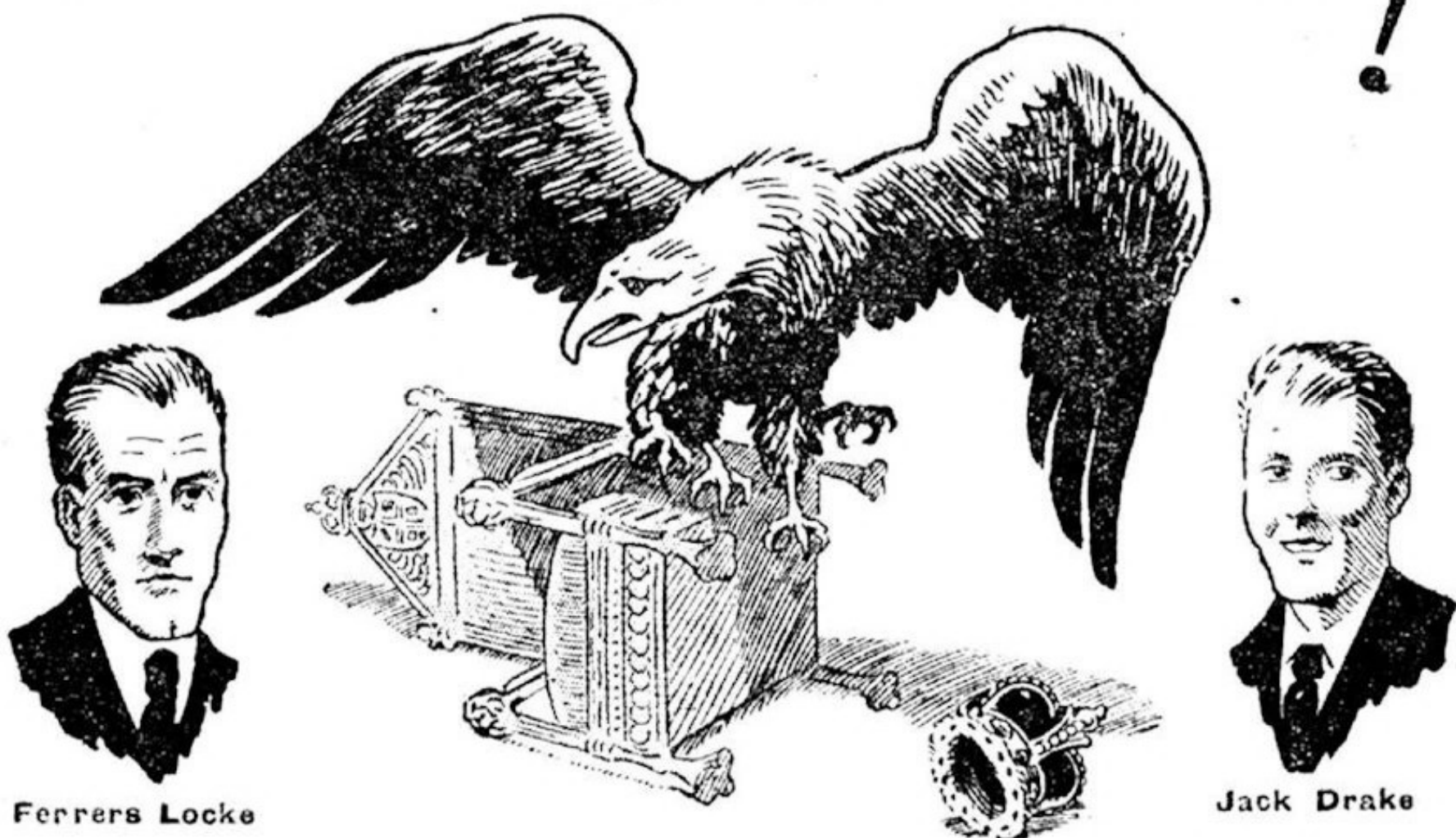
* * *

ERNEST WALTON, of Pudsey, near Leeds, whose photograph is seen this week, is 24 years of age, and he has been a reader for a good many years.

EDWY SEARLES BROOKS.

Here's the **SECOND INSTALMENT** of our **THRILLING NEW DETECTIVE SERIAL, CHUMS!**

The **FOUR-LEGGED EAGLE!**



Ferrers Locke

Jack Drake

Troubled Waters!

FERRERS LOCKE was smiling, but inwardly he was excited. He had been quick to realise that the only clue he had got was the name "Ferdinand," and that in this, moreover, rested the connection between the beautiful young lady and the fire at Hinton Terrace.

"Madam," he said politely, "please request the gentleman to remove the dagger. I heard you utter the name of Ferdinand, and I think I can help you. I was the last person to leave the burning house."

The statement caused amazement. The stiletto wavered; the lady gasped. She stared at Locke doubtfully, opened her mouth to speak, then checked herself. For an appreciable time there was dead silence between them, and it was the man, not the lady, who eventually broke that silence.

"Was another—man in t'at house, m'sieur—when—you left?" he asked almost breathlessly.

"No, there was not," replied Locke. "Supposing I make myself clear? Four men left that house before we did, and one of that four was struggling as if he were being taken away against his will. That much I have found out already."

The lady was holding a dainty handkerchief to her mouth.

"Who are you, m'sieur?" she asked, as if she feared to hear the answer to her question.

Locke gave her one of his cards. She stared at it and then gave a start of surprise.

"A man was murdered at Charing Cross Station, barely an hour ago," said Locke.

"He was wearing a ring engraved with a four-legged eagle. This gentleman carries a similar one. That house—the captive—you, madam—are all connected in some way with this outrage, and the police——"

"No, no!" she cried. "Not the police. The baron was not murdered. He gave his life for his——"

The man stopped her with a sudden gesture. He spoke to her softly in that same unintelligible foreign language that Locke had heard in the burning house. It was obvious that they were speaking of the detective, for they kept glancing in his direction, as if anxious to study him without causing him embarrassment by staring. The lady seemed undecided, but at last she acquiesced to the wishes of her companion, and he turned to Locke, replacing his stiletto as he did so.

"I will not leave a stone unturned until I have restored the kidnapped King to his country!" So says Ferrers Locke, little realising the immense difficulties and perils that are soon to beset him on all sides!

"M'sieur," he said, "I not have much English, but perhaps we may be of the service to each other. Hein? If we talk together somewhere—private, m'sieur—"

Locke nodded agreement. He turned to Jack Drake.

"Buzz along, Jack, and find out who owns that brown Buick, then join me at Baker Street."

"Right-ho, guv'nor!" said Jack, and disappeared down the street at a sharp trot.

Locke entered the car.

"I suggest we go to my flat in Baker Street," he said.

The man spoke to the chauffeur through the speaking-tube, and the car moved silently, majestically, out of Hinton Terrace.

Not a word was spoken during that drive, and Locke wasn't sorry. He welcomed the chance to study the grand lady and the soldierly foreigner. As near as he could make out he had stumbled into some foreign intrigue, and yet something seemed to tell him that the case was far more important than that.

The lady was in trouble—her eyes had told Locke that much—yet she still carried herself with a grace that was almost regal in its dignity. She was plainly yet stylishly dressed, and her sole ornaments were a wedding ring and a gold band engraved with the four-legged eagle.

"I'm getting very familiar with that bird," Locke told himself grimly. "Four times I've seen it to-day. On the murdered man's ring, on that tunic in number twenty-four, on the man's hand opposite me, and now she wears it. What's the answer?"

There was no answer then, but when the three of them were in Locke's study at Baker Street, the detective began to get the solution he wanted.

"I saw the crime at Charing Cross," he said, "and my assistant was within inches of capturing the murderer. I followed up the only clue found on the unfortunate victim—a slip of paper bearing the address at Hinton Terrace—but the inhabitants of that house not only got away, but covered their tracks by blowing the place up. And I have an

idea they wanted to blow me up as well.

"I am interested in this case. There are several peculiar features—notably this four-legged eagle. The murdered man wore the same ring, monsieur, as you do. That is the connection. I do not know what that eagle means, but I dare say I shall find out before long. Although not actually employed to solve the mystery, I intend proceeding with the case. On the other hand, if you need my help—"

"Yes, yes, m'sieur," broke in the man. "If you will have the goodness to have patience with me for one moment. Yes? This lady is—Queen Zita—her Majesty, Queen Zita of Abronia!"

Locke started perceptibly. It wasn't often he was taken aback, but for the moment he was overcome by surprise. That simple statement put so many things which before had been shrouded in mystery in a new light. Forgetting his manners, he stared at the queen.

"Then," he said in a quiet voice, "Ferdinand—they called him Ferdinand—is the King of Abronia—Ferdinand of Abronia?"

She nodded her head ever so slightly.

"The king has been kidnapped," she said shortly.

Locke rose to his feet and bowed courteously.

"Your Majesty," he said, "if I can help I am yours to command."

"The general, he will explain," she said, and with a gesture invited him to be re-seated.

"Yes, I will explain, m'sieur," said the man. "My name is Morina—General Morina of the Abronian Army. My English is bad. Your pardon, m'sieur. But we are distraught, is it not? The throne of Abronia is coveted by the stepbrother of his Majesty. This stepbrother, his name is Carlos—Prince Carlos of Abronia. He plots. He plans, and they kidnap his Majesty and bring him to this country. The wickedness is to kill the king and to succeed to the throne of Abronia."

THE OPENING CHAPTERS IN BRIEF.

FERRERS LOCKE, the world-famous London detective, and his boy assistant, JACK DRAKE are travelling on the Underground when they witness the murder of a foreigner. There is nothing to identify the victim; only a slip of paper bearing an address in Lambeth, and a signet ring, on which is engraved the figure of a four-legged eagle. "That four-legged eagle is the crest of the royal house of Abronia!" Locke informs Jack. They both go along to the address at Lambeth, and find that it is occupied by more foreigners, who succeed in capturing them. Locke's and Drake's captors leave the house, taking with them another man, who obviously goes against his will. This man's name is Ferdinand. They have left a bomb, and this goes off, but, fortunately, neither Locke nor Jack are injured. They escape from the burning house just as a luxurious limousine drives up containing a lady and a gentleman, both foreigners. The former looks at the flaming house in terror. "Ferdinand! My poor Ferdinand!" she mutters. Immediately Locke flings open the door of the car—and finds the gleaming blade of a stiletto pressed against his waistcoat. It is held by the man, and Locke sees that on one of his fingers is a signet ring bearing the figure of a four-legged eagle!

(Now read on.)

"But, M'sieur Locke, they not kill King Ferdinand yet. For why? The crown of Abronia is but a bauble unless Prince Carlos also inherit the fortune of Ferdinand of Abronia. So they keep the king a prisoner and torture him, to make him sign a will in the favour of Prince Carlos. I make it plain, m'sieur?"

"Perfectly clear," said Locke.

"But in Abronia we say nothing. We let no one know what is happen. We say the king is ill and cannot see anyone. The doctors know the secret and call at the palace, and the public believe. And the brave—so bold—Baron Rehmann goes to find what they have done with his Majesty. The baron finds them here in London, and he finds how they torture him to make him sign the will. But he cannot rescue the king, and he cannot call in the police, for if the news becomes public here, then also it becomes public in Abronia, and the party of Prince Carlos, they declare civil war; and war, m'sieur, is terrible.

"So her Majesty and I come to London to plead with Prince Carlos, but he moves from that house and the bold Baron Rehmann has to look for him again, and at last he find them at that house just burnt down. And her Majesty say to the baron, 'Go and talk to Prince Carlos. Tell him I come to plead with him. And if he refuses to see me, then we will not temporise any longer. We will threaten him with the Scotland Yard, but we will not go to the police. Instead, we will secure the services of the famous Monsieur Ferrers Locke!'"

Locke was on his feet in a flash.

"D'you mean to tell me," he cried, "that when the baron was murdered on the escalator at Charing Cross he was on his way to my flat in Baker Street?"

"Exactly," said the general. "Rehmann must have been scorned by Prince Carlos, and he was going to talk to you, m'sieur, but one of Prince Carlos' friends followed him and killed him. M'sieur, Prince Carlos has three friends working with him here. The prince, m'sieur, is the big man—so big—cruel! He has the moustache."

"I've met him," said Locke.

"Then his friends, m'sieur. One is lithe, slim, clean-shaven, with a mole above the right eye. He is the Grand Seigneur, or Count, of Perilla."

"And he murdered Rehmann at Charing Cross," said Locke.

"For the rest, m'sieur, there is Major Patens, of the Cavalry, and the Duke of Silene."

"And you want me to rescue his Majesty?" said Locke.

Queen Zita rose to her feet and faced him.

"M'sieur Locke," she said, "we, personally, can do no more. You can accomplish everything. Rescue King Ferdinand from Prince Carlos, and restore him to Abronia without publicity, and any reward you ask shall be yours. It is to save war—to save

the slaughter of thousands of innocents—but you understand?"

"I understand," said Locke. "Your Majesty may rest assured I will not leave a stone unturned until I have restored his Majesty to his country—and to you."

She proffered her dainty hand. He bent over it, kissed it, and then she departed. General Morina stood stiffly erect for half a second, gripping Locke's hand.

"For the queen!" he said. "Rehmann did not die in vain."

Then he was gone, leaving Locke to pace to and fro in his study.

He was not long undisturbed. Jack Drake brought the news that the brown Buick was the property of a Levant merchant named Isaac Mossman, who lived at Riverwell Court, on the Thames, near Ditton.

Inside ten minutes Locke was at the wheel of his powerful touring car, speeding out of London and heading for Ditton. The great car ate up the miles, and soon the City was left behind, and the Thames Valley lay stretched before them.

The sun had already gone to rest behind the poplars in the west, and the shadows were dark and deceiving. The detective pulled up to inquire the way to Riverwell Court, and he received fairly detailed instructions.

Locke let out the clutch, the car sped past a church, navigated successfully an S bend, and came out unexpectedly on a narrow bridge, with the water beneath gurgling over the weir in a foaming torrent. Locke wrenched over the wheel, for drawn athwart the bridge was the brown Buick.

The detective jammed on both brakes, but it was too late.

Crash! With a metallic roar the car containing Ferrers Locke and Jack Drake struck the Buick, tilted horribly, and they were both flung headlong into the foaming white torrent of the weir!

A Shock for Locke!

TO Jack Drake it seemed that the world was spinning round and round, and that metallic crash still rang in his ears as he was plunged into the icy waters of the weir. He had been flung clear of the car, but what about Ferrers Locke?

Jack went down—down into the cold depths. The strong current tore at his limbs, and he was swirled this way and that. The water roared in his throbbing ears and sucked at his arms and legs; his lungs felt as if they were bursting. Fiercely he struggled to free himself of the weeds that were entwined around his legs; he clawed at them frantically. They came away in his hands and he shot up to the surface and broke water.

It was dark. The moon was hidden behind a bank of clouds, but what light there was gleamed on the foaming surface.

Jack trod water, gazing about him for a sight of Locke, but could not find him. He saw that he was being swept along like a straw. He turned and tried to swim towards

the bank, but the current was far too strong for him. It buffeted him, roared in his face, overwhelmed him, swept over his head and thundered in his ears as he went under again.

Once more Jack fought his way up to the surface, and this time he made no attempt to combat the stream. He realised that it was a matter of life and death for him now. He allowed the current to carry him whither it would so long as he had a chance of gaining the bank eventually.

And then, amidst the smother of spume and foam, he saw Locke swimming strongly athwart the stream. Jack yelled at him.

"Here we are, guv'nor! You all right?"

Locke grinned, but he was far too wise to waste his breath shouting. He swam on past Jack, and it looked as if he were deserting

him. His strong hand caught Jack's jacket and hung on grimly. The water tore at Jack's limbs, hissing horribly, gurgling, sucking at him, as if enraged at being robbed of its victim.

Locke hauled Jack up—up—until he had managed to grab the tree. The bough cracked ominously beneath the weight, but Locke edged along it to the bank, with Jack following cautiously. And a moment later they were lying on the grassy bank, panting from their exertions.

"A near thing, guv'nor," said Jack fervently.

He did not thank his employer for saving his life. His gratitude, however, was just as real, and Locke knew it. The detective was grim as he eyed the tumbling stream.



Ferrers Locke flung open the door. Outside stood a man in whose hand flashed a naked sword!

Jack to save his own skin. Anyone else would have thought so, but Jack Drake never gave it that interpretation. He merely waited, wondering what Locke meant to do, struggling all the time to keep pace, as far as possible, with the detective.

Locke was not only stronger than Jack, but he was bigger, bulkier, and could fight that current better; whereas Jack, being of smaller build, was tossed helplessly about in the maelstrom.

But Locke knew what to do, and did it. He swam on ahead, edging all the time towards the northern bank, until he came to an overhanging tree. He reached up and crooked his arm over a low branch. Then Jack came along, carried by the swift current rather than swimming, and Locke grabbed at

"A nearer thing than you realise, Jack," he said. "I've had to swim for my life more than once, but never in a stream like that one."

"Swimming!" exclaimed Jack. "That wasn't swimming. Seemed to me more like being emptied down the sink. But I was scared stiff in case you couldn't get clear of the car."

A smile appeared on Locke's face, and as swiftly vanished. He shrugged his shoulders, then rose to his feet, refusing to discuss the matter further. They had been in danger and had escaped it. There was nothing to be gained by holding an inquest—only time to be lost.

"Get what water you can out of your clothes, Jack," he said. "Then we'll call on

"Mossman. I fancy he'll be surprised to see us."

Jack glanced about and saw, some distance behind him, the lights of a large house. He grinned at Locke.

"Trust you, guv'nor," he said, "for landing on the right side of the river."

They set to work and squeezed the water from their clothes as best they could, but for all their labours they presented a sorry spectacle when they finally proceeded up the sloping lawns towards the big house.

The moon was beginning to peep over the bank of clouds. Looking back towards the tumbling river, the detective and his assistant could see that a small crowd had gathered on the bridge that spanned the weir. Men were poking in the water with long poles.

"Looking for our bodies!" said Jack.

Ferrers Locke nodded grimly, but said nothing. He led the way boldly up to the big house and round to the main door. He jangled the bell and waited, as calmly as if he had just stepped out of a taxi instead of having crawled, half drowned, out of the river. And water oozed, even then, from his boots as he stood on the step.

Bolts were drawn back, the hinges creaked and the door opened. A villainous-looking footman eyed them dubiously.

"Mr. Mossman at home?" asked Locke.

"Who are you?" countered the footman gutturally.

"Another blinkin' furriner!" thought Jack.

"My name is Locke," said the detective bluntly.

Drake gasped. He reckoned it was madness for Locke to blurt out his name like that. The footman started violently, and he began to close the door.

"Sorry, sir," he said huskily. "Mr. Mossman has not yet returned from—"

But Locke's foot was over the step; he thrust the footman back into the brilliantly-lighted hall, and himself entered. Jack brought up the rear and closed the door.

"Where is he?" snapped Locke.

The footman shook his head. He couldn't speak because Locke's hand was on his throat half throttling him, but his eyes roved towards a door, and Locke knew where to find the man he sought. He released his captive and strode to the door, flung it open and stood upon the threshold of the room, with Jack close behind him.

That room was a library, sumptuously furnished. The walls were covered with rows and tiers of books, but whether they were real or sham the visitors could not tell and hardly cared. At a large table sat an obese, swarthy, oily-looking man. His hair was jet black, sleek and smoothed down on his head. His features were large and fleshy. He looked as if he fed and washed and lived exclusively on olive-oil.

"Who—what d'you want?" he cried, startled. "Who ze dickens are you?"

His English was splendid, but the accent revealed him as a foreigner.

"Mr. Mossman, I believe?" said Locke, as he strode across the heavy pile carpet, oozing water out of his boots.

"Zat is my name," said Mossman. "Who are you?"

"Ferrers Locke!" snapped the detective. "Sorry I can't offer my card. They're rather wet at the moment."

Mossman paled beneath his swarthy complexion, but he recovered himself. He frowned slightly.

"I didn't know it had been raining," he said, feigning ignorance. "In any case. Mr. Locke, I don't know you at all, and you have no right to come forcing your way into my house. I shall have you arrested!"

"Oh, no, you won't!" said Locke. "I know I have no search-warrant, but you don't want the police drawn into this. Besides, I believe you do know who and what I am. If not I'll soon tell you. I am a detective, and I want to know what that Buick car was doing left unattended on the bridge just now, and blocking the road."

"What Buick?" asked Mossman. "I don't know what you're talking about!"

Ferrers Locke strode to the table and tapped upon the polished surface with his fingers irritably.

"You are wasting my time as well as your own," he said. "I have not come down here on a wild-goose chase. I knew where to come and why. Ever since Prince Carlos rented that house in Hinton Terrace a brown Buick was constantly arriving and departing from Hinton Terrace. These things, Mr. Mossman, do not pass unnoticed in London. I traced you as the owner of that car."

Mossman was recovering his composure. He leant back in his chair and calmly lit an enormous cigar.

"What about it?" he inquired insolently.

"Simply this!" said Locke. "I am engaged in restoring King Ferdinand of Abronia to his people. There need be no violence nor enmity. Just a matter of negotiation, you understand?"

Mossman smiled mysteriously, and shook his greasy head.

"I understand, so far," he said. "But you are wrong if you zink I have captured King Ferdinand. I am on ze ozer side, Mr. Locke. I am ze enemy of zis Prince Carlos, and I will prove it to you—"

"Look out, guv'nor!" hissed Jack Drake.

Locke spun round. A door on the other side of the room was slowly opening, and immediately the detective's hand went to his hip-pocket. But it was not a man who appeared; it was a lady—a tall, stately lady, dressed entirely in black, and heavily veiled. She lifted her veil and Locke gasped at the sight of her face. He recognised her.

"The queen!" he faltered. "Queen Zita of Abronia!"

"Exactly!" sneered Mossman. "Do I lie?"

The Impostor!

LOCKE frowned as he stared at the queen. He had left her in London in the care of General Morina. He and Jack Drake had not wasted much time in getting down here to Mossman's house, yet the queen had arrived first. That wanted a deal of explanation. And, seeing that what little evidence he had collected convinced Locke that the captive King of Abronia had been whisked away from Hinton Terrace in Mossman's car, the presence of Queen Zita in Mossman's house was puzzling, to say the least.

The queen smiled graciously at Locke.

"I hardly expected to see you again so soon, Mr. Locke," she said. "Do you bring me good news?"

Drake was scowling. He was out of his depth, and he seemed to sense just how far Locke was puzzled. It looked to Jack as if Ferrers Locke had made a bad mistake—and yet making bad mistakes was not a habit of Locke's.

The detective bowed to the queen.

"I cannot bring you good news yet, madam," he said. "The case has barely begun. But I share your surprise at meeting again so soon."

"Maybe I should have told you," she explained. "General Morina considered it was not safe for me to remain in London, so I came here to the house of our loyal friend, Mr. Mossman!"

Locke turned and regarded Mossman coldly. The latter had a gloating smirk of triumph on his fleshy features.

"If I have misjudged Mr. Mossman," the detective said, "I beg his pardon. I certainly thought he was one of your enemies, madam."

"He is my best friend," said the queen.

"You are too good, madam," said Mossman, bowing obsequiously.

Locke made no comment. He approached the queen, bowed and proffered his hand.

Jack Drake frowned at the sight. If that lady was really a queen, Locke had no right to offer his hand. However, the queen stretched out her hand in acceptance, and it was her left hand. Locke held it in his for a moment. He stooped and kissed it politely. When he straightened he was smiling grimly.

"All the same for that," he said, "I think I'll search this house now I'm here!"

Mossman's jaw sagged. He slumped down in his chair.

"Search the house!" he echoed foolishly.

"Really, Mr. Locke," said the queen, "I think you might accept my assurances of Mr. Mossman's loyalty."

Locke smiled down at her.

"I beg to differ!" he retorted. "For I know you are not the queen! You are an impostor! And King Ferdinand is in this house, and I mean to find him!"

The woman screamed a warning. Mossman grabbed a heavy glass paper-weight and made to throw it at the detective, but Jack Drake fairly flung himself across the room.

He sprawled across the table and grabbed Mossman's arm. The missile fell short and dropped on the pile carpet behind Locke.

The detective leaped towards the door. He flung it open, then halted in his tracks, grim, and undecided what to do next. For on the threshold stood a man—the man who had murdered Baron Rehmann on the escalator at Charing Cross. And he stood there, very stern and erect, a naked sword in his hand!

(Another enthralling instalment of this fine serial will appear in next week's special enlarged Christmas number. There's sure to be a great demand for this bumper issue of the Old Paper, so order your copy NOW, chums!)

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All applications for Advertisement spaces in this publication should be addressed to the Advertisement Manager, "The Nelson Lee Library," The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4.

The ST. FRANK'S LEAGUE CORNER!



*The Chief Officer Chats
with his Chums.*

*Here's his address if you want to
write to him: The Chief Officer, "The
Nelson Lee Library," Fleetway House,
Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4.*

Prolific!

THIS week an extremely interesting letter has come to hand from Conrad H. Basson, a very enthusiastic League-ite living in East London, South Africa. Conrad has twenty-seven pen friends, all obtained through the NELSON LEE LIBRARY, and at the moment he is feeling particularly bucked because he has received a letter from a fellow-reader in far-off Japan.

Yet even now my South African chum is not fully satisfied. He is still on the look-out for fresh correspondents, and would like to hear from readers in Holland, Nigeria, Liberia, Tanganyika, Egypt and Gibraltar. Conrad is seventeen years of age, and, by the way, he is fully conversant with the Dutch language.

My chum also informs me that he has been made secretary of the African branch of the English and Colonial Correspondence Club, and so any readers living in Africa who are desirous of joining this exceptionally well-

organised and enterprising club should apply to him at the following address: 84, Longfellow Street, East London, South Africa.

Incidentally, Conrad has just qualified for his silver medal, which has now been sent to him. Congratulations, old man! It is enthusiastic readers such as you who have helped to make the St. Frank's League what it is.

News from New Zealand!

R. J. CURRIE, a staunch League-ite who hails from Wairarapa, New Zealand, sends me a budget of information, one item of which will particularly interest those readers who have written me saying that the recent School Train series, featuring the Boys of St. Frank's, was absurd and impossible.

My New Zealand chum points out that only recently a party of wealthy New Zealand farmers from the South Island toured the North Island by train. The party inspected factories and "did the sights" of many important towns during the day, and lived and travelled on the train by night—just like the St. Frank's fellows.

Thanks very much for your letter, R. J. Currie. And I hope that those readers who were so sceptical are now convinced that the series in question was not so impossible as they imagined.

THIS WEEK'S WINNING LETTER

DEAR CHIEF,—Although I have only lately joined the St. Frank's League (as you can see by my membership number) I am already making use of its many wonderful advantages.

There seem to be, I am sorry to say, very few League-ites around this district, but I am doing my best to improve the situation by introducing as many of my chums as possible to this great organisation of ours, and I hope that within a few months or so Milton Regis will be able to boast a fair percentage of members.

Sportsmanship seems to be the secret of the League's success, and it is this sense of responsibility and duty that is winning for us a greater and firmer bond of friendship between nations. Every member realises this, I am sure, and is acting up to it.

Such a world-wide brotherhood as the St. Frank's League should never lack membership.

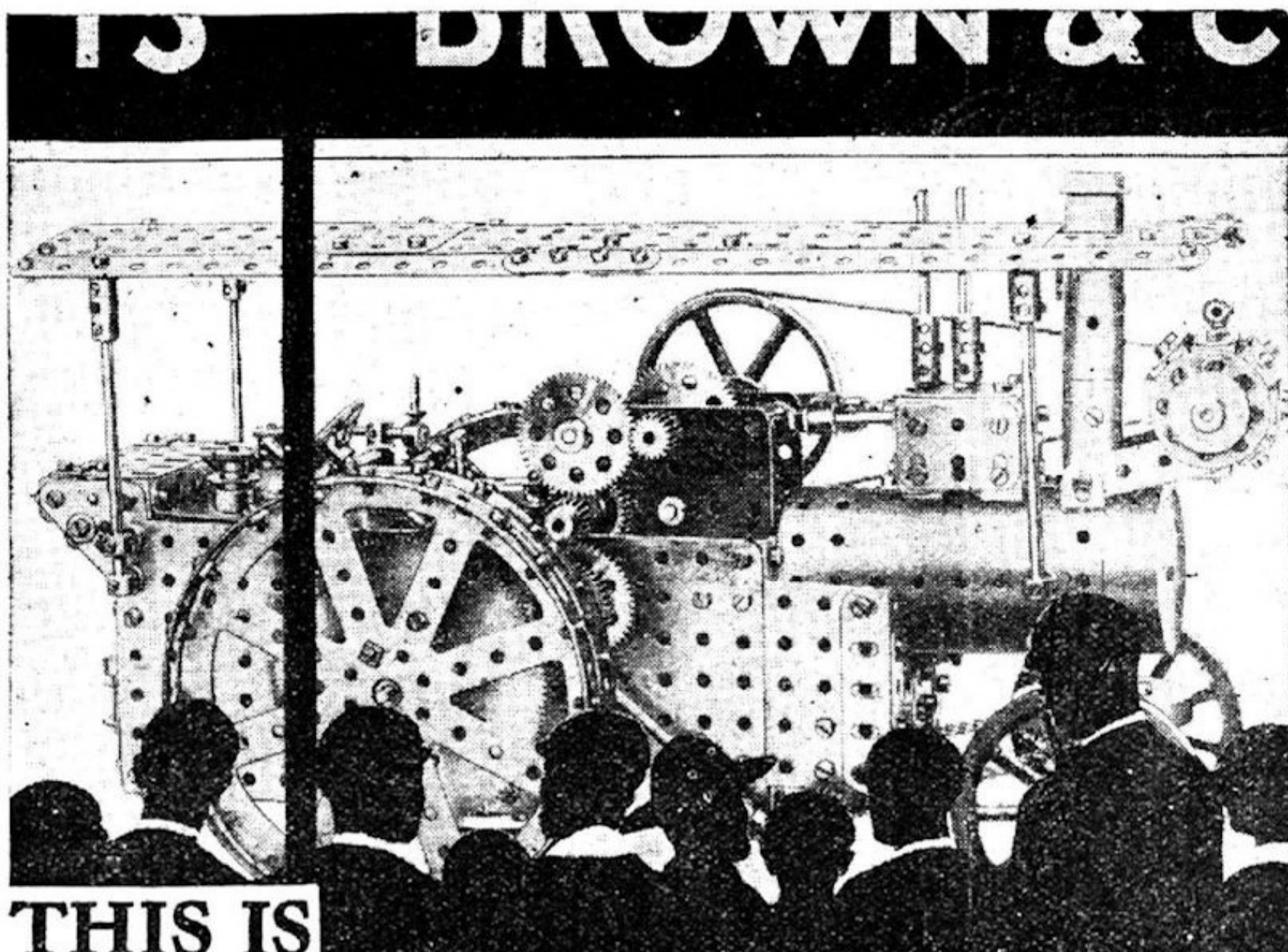
Wishing the League the best of success and good luck.

(Signed) ALFRED T. GOLDING
S.F.L. No. 10,042.

(For this interesting letter Alfred T. Golding, of Milton Regis, Kent, has been awarded a useful pocket wallet.)

**Enlarged Xmas
Number!**

I WANT to take this opportunity of saying a few words about next week's special Bumper Xmas number of the NELSON LEE LIBRARY. A bumper number it is, too, in all truth. Enlarged to 52 pages, it contains many additional topical features—and the price is the same! A glance on page 31 will give you an idea of the many attractions contained in this wonderful Christmas issue.



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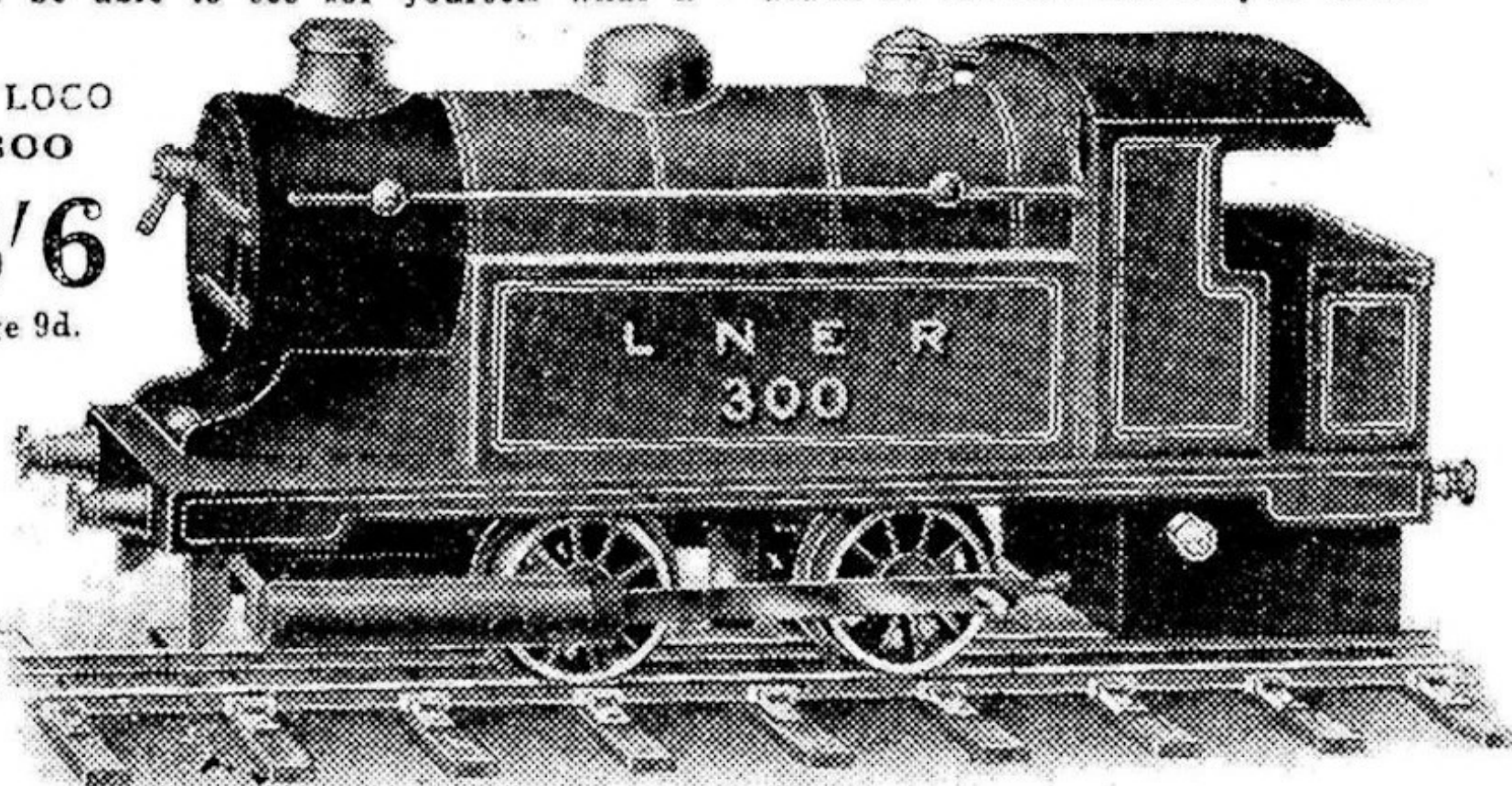
difference Steam does make to a model railway. See the realism—the long non-stop runs with heavy coaches—the power!

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