

The "Fifth" at St. Frank's—Extra Long; Extra Funny; Extra Good!

HANDY'S FIREWORK FIASCO!

By
**EDWY
SEARLES
BROOKS**

CHAPTER 1. Preparing for the "Fifth"!

WILLY HANDFORTH, of the Third Form at St. Frank's, paused interestedly as he was passing through the Ancient House lobby. Three Removites were at the letter-rack, and the burliest of the three was about to open a letter.

"I'm just in time," said Willy, strolling up.

The burly Removite started.

"Just in time for what?" he asked coldly.

"It's no good your trying to hide that letter, Ted," said Willy. "I've already spotted the envelope, and I can see that it's from the pater. If there's any cash in there, I want my share—and I shan't be satisfied with five bob, either."

Edward Oswald Handforth sniffed.

"You'll get nothing out of this," he retorted. "It's an answer to a special letter I sent the pater last week, asking him for an extra tip of five quid for fireworks. This fiver's mine, understand? All mine! I'm pretty generous, as a rule, but for once I'm going to be hard."

"Well, go ahead and open the letter," said Willy, who wasn't at all sure that it contained a fiver.

"I'll open it when you've gone," retorted his major. "I've already told you that this fiver's mine, and it's going to be spent on fireworks for a special Remove display. So it's no earthly use your hanging round."



"That's final?"

"Absolutely final!"

"All right, I'll take five bob now and we'll call it square," said Willy, as he noticed the carelessly-stuck flap of the envelope.

"Good enough," said Handforth promptly, handing over two half-crowns. "Now, that's agreed, isn't it? You won't expect any share of what's in this letter?"

"Not even a smell," agreed Willy cheerfully.

Handforth grinned triumphantly at Church and McClure, the two other Removites who were with him. He was rather pleased



that five bob on spec."

"But there's no money in this letter at all!"

"That's your misfortune, not mine," said Willy. "Perhaps the pater's sending it on later—or he may be sending fireworks."

"By George! That's possible," said Handforth, eagerly looking at the letter. "All the same, it's a bit thick. I particularly wanted to select my own Roman candles and rockets and—Hallo, what the—"

His voice trailed away, and Willy looked sympathetic.

"No fireworks?" he asked.

"Listen to this," said Handforth thickly. "'No, Edward, I shall certainly not let you have any money for fireworks. I do not approve of the uncontrolled use of these dangerous playthings by schoolboys. In any case, it is a shameful waste of money to burn it in this useless fashion. A firework display, conducted as an exhibition by competent

with himself. For once he had definitely got the better of his wide-awake minor, and it was such a novel occurrence that he looked at his chums for their approval.

"Better open that letter," said Church bluntly.

Something in his tone wiped the smile off Handforth's face, and he quickly inserted his thumb under the flap and tore open the envelope. He hastily withdrew a double sheet of notepaper, but failed to discover any fiver.

"There's no money!" he ejaculated blankly.

"Willy could have told you that a minute ago," said McClure. "Why do you suppose he agreed to that five bob? In fact, any ass could have seen there was no money in that envelope; the flap was stuck down too carelessly."

"You—you young robber!" roared Handforth, glaring at Willy.

"Do you mean to say that you deliberately— Give me that five bob back!"

"Not likely!" retorted Willy. "A bargain's a bargain. I agreed to take

experts, is quite another matter. Surely there will be something of that sort at St. Frank's this year, as usual?"

"Of course there will," put in Church. "But all the chaps like to have fireworks of their own, too. Hasn't your pater got enough sense to see that?"

"There's more here," fumed Handforth, red with indignation. "Listen to this bit: 'No schoolboy should be allowed to handle fireworks of any kind. You, in particular, Edward, cannot be trusted with them. I positively forbid you to buy any fireworks of any kind. I would really much sooner trust Willy—' But that doesn't matter," said Handforth hastily.

"Good old pater!" grinned Willy. "I'm afraid he knows you too well, Ted. If you're feeling at a loose end on Wednesday evening, come along and look at the Third Form display; we'll show you something first class."

He sauntered off, leaving his major speechless.

"Well, it's no good making a fuss, Handy," said McClure. "There'll be plenty of fireworks

HANDY'S HOME-MADE FIREWORKS

"WORK" A FIRE AT ST. FRANK'S!

without yours, to say nothing of a whacking great bonfire and plenty of guys. I hear that K. K., by the way, is thinking of making an effigy of you. Like his nerve!"

Fortunately Handforth had not heard.

"So the pater forbids me to buy any fireworks!" he said, suddenly finding his voice. "He thinks he can stop me, does he? He thinks— Oh, my only hat!"

He was looking at the letter again, and there was a note of dismay in his voice.

"What's the matter now?" asked Church.

"My pater says he's coming to Bannington to-morrow to make a political speech, and he'll be here in the morning," replied Handforth blankly. "You know what a pig-headed man my pater is! If he finds I've got any fireworks, he'll bone them! And he's staying over the Fifth, too!"

"That seems to settle it, then," said McClure, with relief.

Handforth's chums had been worrying for some days. They knew what a careless, reckless fellow Handy was, and all his talk about buying five pounds' worth of fireworks had seriously alarmed them. Much as they sometimes desired to slaughter him, they really had no wish to see him blow himself to bits.

"Settled, is it?" said Handforth darkly. "I can't buy any fireworks, but I can make some."

"Make some!" yelled Church.

"Why not?" asked Handforth, enthused by this sudden brainwave. "The pater says I mustn't buy any fireworks, but making them is a different thing."

"It is," agreed McClure grimly. "You silly ass, you'll kill yourself if you try any dotty games like that! You can't be trusted with explosives and gunpowder and all that. Anyhow, you won't make 'em in Study D," he added firmly.

"He won't make 'em at all," said Church. "He's only bluffing."

BUT Handforth wasn't bluffing. The very instant morning lessons were over, he vanished. Church and McClure, missing him, commenced a hasty, frantic search. They feared the worst. Going down the Remove passage, they made desperate inquiries.

"What's the good of asking us where Handy is?" said Nipper, the genial Remove skipper. "In any case, I thought that you fellows were his keepers!"

"He's escaped," said Church gruffly. "I believe the silly ass is making fireworks somewhere."

"Then the farther away from St. Frank's he is, the better," grinned Kirby Keeble Parkington. "Handy's dangerous enough with a packet of penny squibs, so goodness knows what he'll do if he makes some fireworks of his own!"

"It's his pater's fault," growled Mac. "Sir Edward has refused to let him buy real fireworks, so the chump has decided— Hallo, what's the matter here?" he added,

his train of thought interrupted as he glanced into Study H. "Where's all the furniture? - Somebody having a spring clean?"

Vivian Travers and Jimmy Potts, who shared Study H, were standing in a perfectly bare room. Even the carpet had been removed.

"We got fed up with our old furniture and effects," explained Travers coolly. "The couch was moth-eaten, the table was rickety, and there wasn't a chair fit to sit on. And when the bookcase started falling to pieces last week, we decided that something ought to be done."

"Lucky bargees," said K. K. enviously. "Their people have given them permission to order a whole lot of new stuff from the Phoenix Furnishing Company in Bannington, and they're going to settle the bill."

"About sixty quid, roughly," said Potts casually. "We're going to surprise you fellows, I can tell you! A real Brussels carpet, big chesterfield, mahogany bookcase, easy-chairs, and all the rest of it. We chose the stuff on Friday, and it's coming in this morning."

"It isn't fair," complained Church indignantly.

"Rats!" said Tr

right formula for making these squibs."

"My only hat!"

"They're miles better than the squibs you can buy," continued Handforth, waxing enthusiastic. "Red fire, with green explosions, and an occasional burst of blue. It's all to do with the ingredients."

"But you can't make your silly fireworks here!" protested Church.

"I'm doing it, fathead!"

"A prefect might come along any minute—"

"Let him come!"

"We want you in the Remove passage," urged Mac. "Travers and Potts are having a lot of new furniture in their study—"

"Blow Travers and Potts!"

"Sixty quids' worth of new stuff!"

"I don't care if they're having six hundred quids' worth," said Handforth coldly. "You're only trying to get me away from this firework wheeze. Clear off! Wait a minute, though. Just watch how these squibs go off!"

"You're mad!" gasped Church, backing away. "It's bad enough to make them here, but it's sheer insanity to let them off. Where are you getting the powder from, in any case?"

"Powder!" repeated Handforth scornfully. "You mean gunpowder? My fireworks are made with special chemicals, my sons. I haven't experimented in 'Stinks' for terms without learning a few things about chemistry."

He coolly picked up a brown paper cylinder which was tied at one end, and screwed up at the other. He struck a match, and lit the screwed-up end, grinning amusedly at his chums' alarm.

"Nothing to be scared of, you chumps," he said. "These are only parlour fireworks. Watch! I can hold it in my hand all the time."

The home-made squib suddenly burst into activity, and Church and McClure—who knew exactly how much reliance to place upon Handforth's word—made a dive for the door. They were only just in time.

Bang-sizzzz—zurrh!

The squib was not so harmless as Handforth imagined. It suddenly leapt out of his hand, exploded in mid-air, whizzed towards the ceiling, exploded again, and sent a shower of red fire over its manufacturer.

"Hi! I'm burnt!" howled Handforth, leaping about wildly.

Little curls of smoke arose from his hair, and there was a pungent odour mingled with the acrid chemical smoke.

"Smells as if somebody's shoeing horses!" said Church.

"I'm not a horse, you idiot!" snorted Handforth. "Oh, crumbs! Half my hair's burnt off. There must have been something wrong with that particular squib. I'd better show you another."

But Church and McClure had seen enough. They fled.

CHAPTER 2.

A Costly Demonstration!

OUTSIDE the Ancient House stood a motor-van, and an interested crowd of juniors had gathered round, watching the two men in green aprons as they hauled out various articles of furniture.

"That new stuff for Study H," said Church, as he came up with McClure.

The Phoenix Furnishing Company was delivering the goods, and the Removites looked on enviously. Vivian Travers and Jimmy Potts had not exaggerated. Their new goods and chattels were tip-top.

Later, after the van had gone, parties of fellows went along to inspect the study. It was a picture: soft carpet, handsome rugs, mahogany table, the easiest of easy chairs, and so forth; and everything brand, spanking new. Even William Napoleon Browne and Stevens and Chambers and other

also had viewed the study by this time, Handforth & Co. were the only visitors. Travers got to his feet very promptly.

"Well, we might as well get it over," he said resignedly. "We've been expecting you, Handy. Don't sit on the table too heavily, will you? These chairs are made to sit on, and not to throw at people. In other words, dear old fellow, go easy."

Handforth grinned.

"I don't blame you," he said indulgently. "We're all the same with new stuff. When I got my Morris Minor I wouldn't let anybody breathe on it, and if a chap dared to touch it I biffed him. Now they can crawl all over it for all I care—and it doesn't hurt it a bit."

"Well, don't crawl all over this furniture," said Potts pointedly.

Handforth's inspection was brief.

"Jolly good," he announced, after one swift glance round. "And now," he added brightly, "I've got something to show you."

He pulled some brown-paper cylinders out of his pocket, and Church and McClure jumped.

"Not here, Handy!" gasped Church, aghast.

"This is just as good as our own study," retorted Handforth.

"Better," said Travers, with conviction.

"He doesn't mean in that way!" yelled Church. "Here, chuck him out! That's a home-made fire-work he's got, and——"

"Don't take any notice of these half-wits," interrupted Handforth coldly, as he struck a match. "These squibs of mine are guaranteed. They wouldn't hurt a fly."

"Come on, Jimmy!" shouted Travers. "Out with him! We're not taking any chances with our new furniture!"

"Not likely!" agreed Potts.

They rushed at Handforth, but at that moment the squib commenced its operations. A shower of harmless red fire spurted from the open end, accompanied by lots of smoke and a gentle hissing. It was quite a pretty effect.

"You see?" said Handforth triumphantly. "Stand back, you fatheads! In half a tick this red fire will change to green!"

"Let it change out in the passage!" yelled Travers.

Bang!

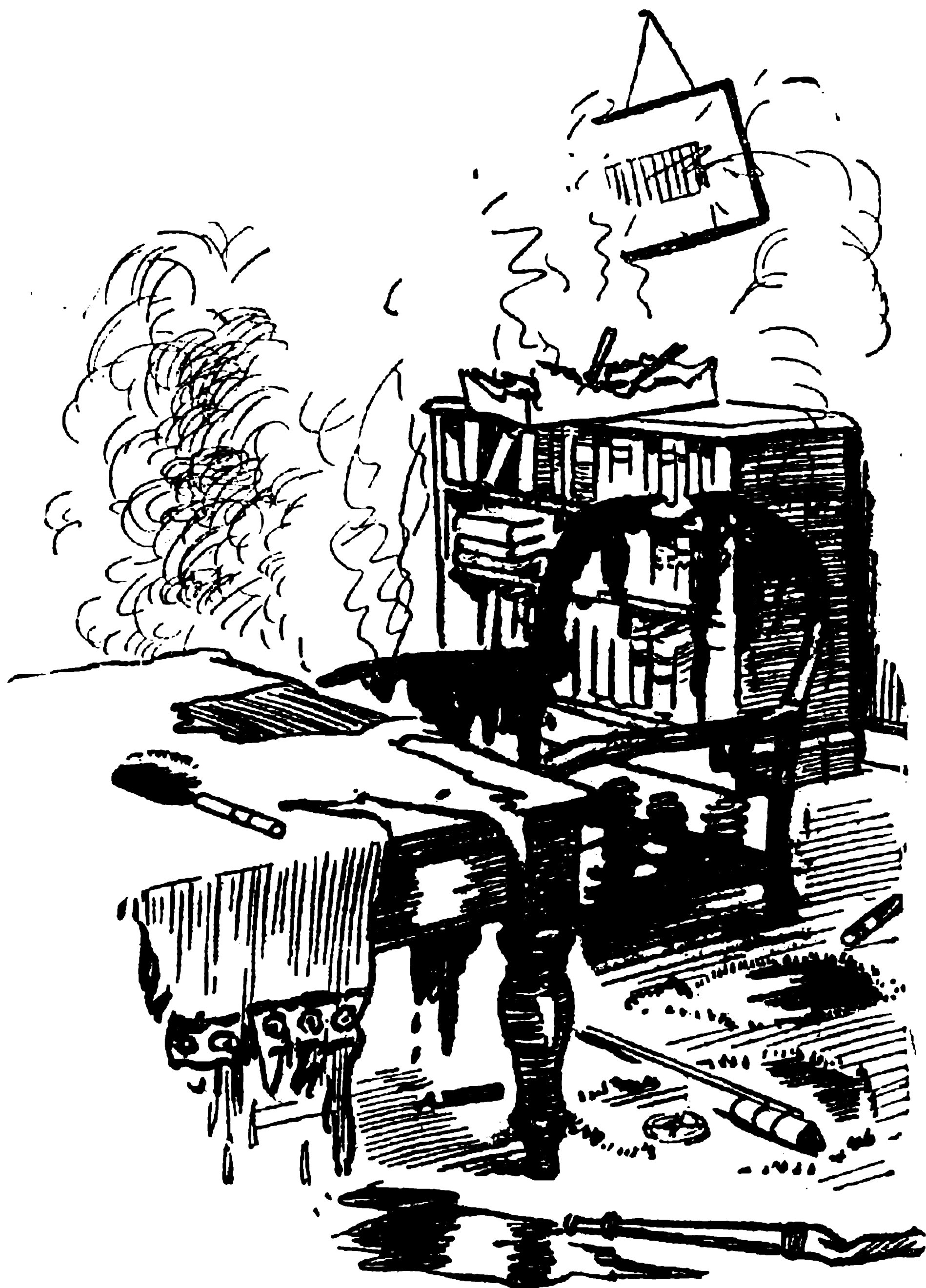
The change didn't come exactly as Handforth had anticipated. The squib gave a violent explosion, twisted in his hand, and leapt upon the new plush tablecloth, liberally bespattering it with green fire.

"Look out!" bellowed Potts. "You've ruined our new tablecloth!"

"Great Scott!" gasped Handforth. "I can't understand——"

Another minor explosion sounded. With impish abandon, the squib leapt off the table, soared through the air, and dropped into the open top of a big cardboard box which stood on the bookcase.

Unfortunately nobody was looking at the squib at that moment. The tablecloth had burst into flames, and all hands were required at the pumps, so to speak. The fire



was soon subdued, but the tablecloth was ruined. There was a hole in it as big as a tea-tray, and the beautiful mahogany of the table was blistered and scorched.

"Look what you've done!" roared Travers furiously. "Why, you—you——"

"I say, I'm sorry!" babb

"It fell on the floor, I believe," said Potts, his face red with wrath. "It's burnt out now, anyhow, so we needn't bother. Look at this tablecloth—and the table! You'll have to pay for this, Handy!"

"Of course," agreed Handforth earnestly. "Dash it all, I wouldn't try to get out of it. I'll buy a new tablecloth, and——"

An ominous hissing interrupted him, and they all stared round at the bookcase. Travers and Potts jumped wildly.

"Our fireworks!" gasped Sir Jimmy.

He got no further. The ominous hissing changed into a series of quick-fire explosions, and Travers was obliged to back away at the double. The box was suddenly alive. Crackers and other fireworks were leaping in all directions.

Bang—bang—sizz—bang!

It was deafening and bewildering. Within the space of two seconds the entire room was full of vicious, spurting, flaming fireworks. Roman candles and squibs and rockets were going off with terrific effect.

"The door!" gurgled Church hoarsely.

A red star shot out of a burning Roman candle and struck him on the shoulder, spraying its molten fire in every direction. A rocket, screaming and hissing, dived between Travers' legs and shot across the floor, leaving a trail of yellow fire in its wake. It struck the wall, rebounded, and exploded with a terrific bang. Big catherine wheels were whizzing round the room, and Handforth let out a wild yell of alarm as one spun past within an inch of his nose.

Already the room was full of choking smoke, and it was as much as the five juniors could do to find the door and get out. They staggered into the passage, half-blinded and half-choked, and Travers slammed the door shut. Inside the room the explosions were increasing, until they almost resembled the shattering rattle of machine-gun fire.

"What's wrong here?" shouted Nipper, rushing up. "Hi, you're on fire, Mac!"

The back of McClure's jacket was glowing red where an exploding rocket had struck it, and at that moment the cloth burst into flames. Nipper beat the fire out with his cap as Mac tore his jacket off.

"Thanks!" he panted. "I might have been badly hurt."



"You'll have to pay for all this furniture to be replaced," said Mr. Wilkes to Handforth, "and in addition you will write me two thousand lines!" Handforth tottered. The chopper had descended—heavily!

"Quick!"

"Fireworks?" asked Handforth, nearly choking.

"That box!" yelled Travers. "There's a couple of quids' worth of fireworks in there, and that rotten squib of yours——"

By this time crowds of fellows had arrived on the spot from both directions. The passage became packed with shouting, excited juniors. In Study H the fireworks were still exploding continuously and deafeningly.

"What's happened?" went up a yell.

"Fireworks—let off by accident—room full of smoke and flying rockets and things!" gasped Travers. "Don't go in there—you'll only get choked. Wait till it dies down a bit."

"But the room may catch fire," pointed out Nipper quickly.

Pushing his way through the crowd, he flung open the door. A great billow of choking smoke came out, followed immediately by a hissing, blazing rocket, and a few squibs and jumping crackers. There was a stampede away from the immediate vicinity, and the excitement increased.

Nipper, shielding his face, entered the study, followed by Handforth. They both became aware of a lurid yellow glow through the smoke, and as the smoke partially cleared, owing to the opened door, they saw the worst. The carpet, table, and the chairs were burning merrily, and flames were leaping up half-way to the ceiling.

"My only sainted aunt!" gurgled Handforth feebly.

This was no mishap, but a genuine disaster. Unless something was done promptly the room would become a raging furnace, and the fire would spread down the passage.

"The hose—quick!" shouted Nipper.

Somebody dashed to the corner of the passage and dragged the fire-hose from the ledge which was set in the wall. Another junior was ready with the brass turncock.

"Let her go!" yelled Nipper.

The hose became alive, and the Remove skipper directed a hissing stream of water into the burning study from the doorway. Clouds of acrid, evil-smelling steam arose as he swept the hose round the room again and again, thoroughly saturating everywhere and everything. The flames were soon quelled.

The hose was turned off, and Handforth dashed through the ruins to the window, which he threw open. Within a minute or two the brisk wind had cleared the steam and the smoke away, and crowds of fellows stood looking at the scene of destruction.

Every scrap of furniture was ruined. The carpet was burnt in a dozen places, the table was a charred wreck, the easy-chairs were half-burnt, and springs were sticking out grotesquely, the bookcase was blackened and charred.

Edward Oswald Handforth was struck dumb. He could only stand there staring like a fellow in a dream. His precious squib was responsible for this havoc!

CHAPTER 3.

The Chopper!

VIVIAN TRAVERS and Jimmy Potts were speechless, too, but in a different way. Handforth said nothing because his mind was numbed by the enormity of this catastrophe. Travers and Potts were speechless because the English language contained no words adequately to express their fury.

"Well, it's a good thing we put the fire out," said Nipper practically. "Fortunately there's not much damage."

Travers found his voice.

"Not much damage?" he howled. "What about all our new furniture?"

"That's ruined, of course—every scrap of it," said Nipper. "But the fire might have spread with serious consequences. As it is, no great harm has been done."

Travers and Potts failed to agree, and said so very heatedly. It was just as well that Mr. Alington Wilkes came pushing through the crowd at that moment. A strong, firm hand was needed here, and the Housemaster of the Ancient House, for all his queer appearance, was a man of infinite resource and tact.

"Well, well!" he said, as he adjusted his glasses and looked round the study. "There seems to have been a little—accident!"

"The room was on fire, sir, so we got the hose and put it out," explained Nipper.

"Very commendable," nodded Old Wilkey. "I can see that someone had excellent presence of mind. The fire has been confined to a few paltry articles of furniture."

of your Form-fellows," said Old Wilkey. "I'll get one of the porters, or Tubbs, to come along here and clear up this mess in the passage. You boys had better disperse and go about your usual occupations."

Within half an hour the Remove passage was looking normal, and all traces of the disaster were removed. Travers and Potts made the best of things. It was good to know that Mr. Wilkes was on their side, and his assurance that their loss would be made good completely satisfied them. It would only be a question of waiting a few days.

Edward Oswald Handforth was not so philosophical. He could see no silver lining to this black cloud. The morrow loomed ominous and sinister.

"The pater will slaughter me!" he said miserably, as he stood talking to a group of sympathetic Removites in the lobby. "It would be bad enough ordinarily, but he strictly prohibited me from using fireworks. What's he going to say when he finds out

that I made some of my own, and that I set fire to that study?"

"It's not what he'll say, but what he'll do," said K. K. sadly.

"Rot!" growled Handforth. "He can't do anything."

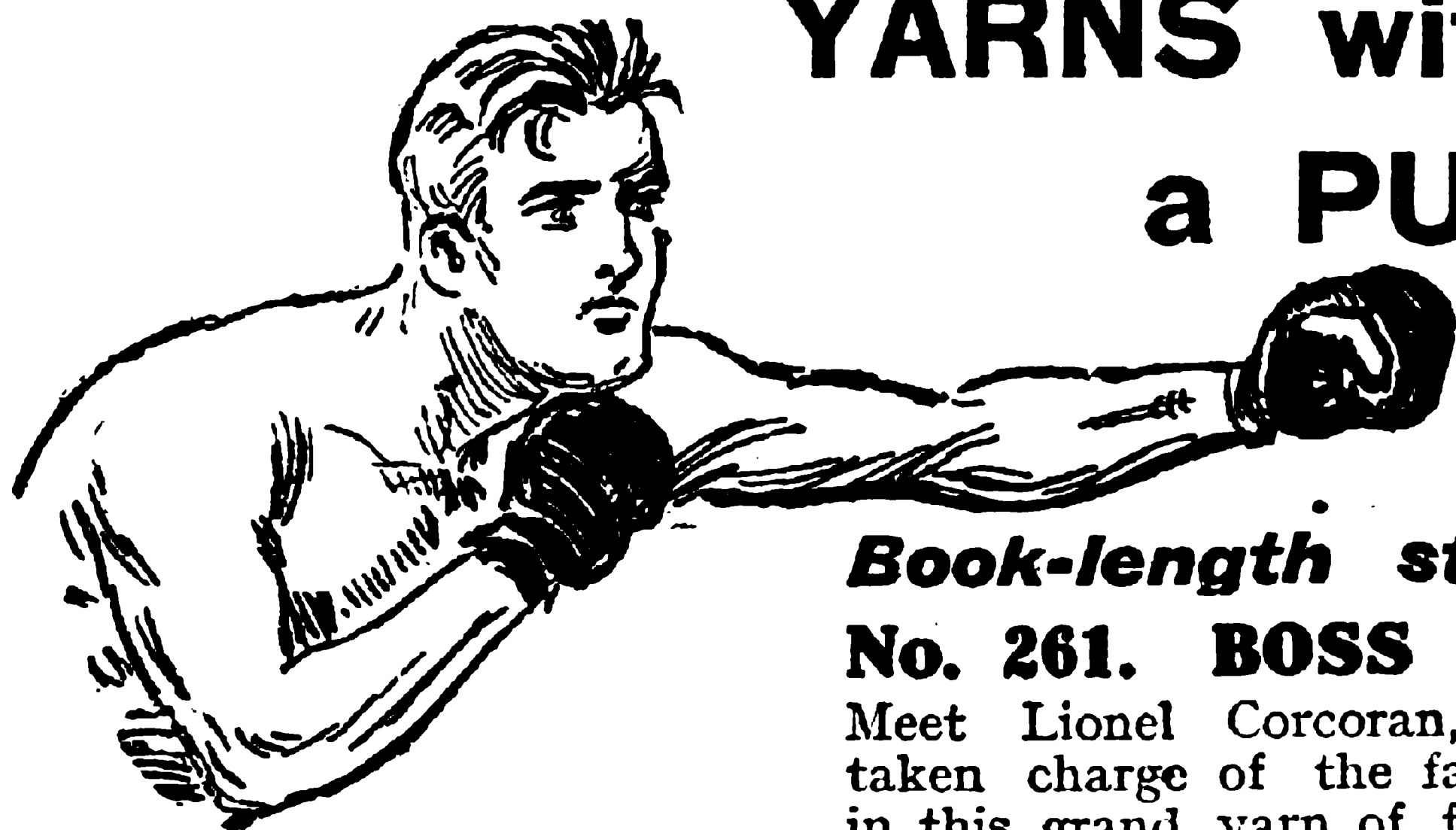
"He can give you a pasting."

"That doesn't worry me," retorted Handforth, with a groan. "If he lams into me, I shall take it gamely. But you don't think my pater will be satisfied with that, do you? He'll have to buy new furniture, and that'll cost him over sixty pounds. He'll make *me* pay that."

"How can he?" asked Deeks. "You haven't got sixty pounds."

"He'll stop my pocket money," explained Handforth, in a hopeless voice. "I shan't get another penny all this term, or next term, or the term after, either. That's how the pater will take it out of me."

"He's not such a hard nut as all that," protested Church. "Why, Sir Edward's one of the best. He's as generous as you are—and that's saying a lot, Handy."



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