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HANDY'S
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HAND!"

A rollicking long complete yarn featuring the famous Chums of St. Frank's.

New Series No. 44.

OUT ON WEDNESDAY.

November 22nd, 1930.

Line Up Here, Lads, for a Feast of Fun at—

K. K.'s BIRTHDAY PARTY!

By
**EDWY
SEARLES
BROOKS**

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K. K. prepares the greatest jape of the term to celebrate his birthday—and finds himself the the one japed.
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CHAPTER 1.

Handy Falls for Flossie!

SHE was certainly pretty. As she set the tea-tray on the little Japanese bamboo table, she looked particularly dainty and attractive. She was slim, neat, and her brown hair fell in little curls about her ears. She was only about seventeen, and looked even younger.

Kirby Keeble Parkington, as he sat at one of the little tables with two other St. Frank's Removites, decided that the Japanese Café had scored another bull's-eye. Flossie, the new waitress, was a distinct acquisition. This café, in the middle of Bannington High Street, was always bright and cheerful. Flossie made it much brighter, and much cheerier.

"That little white cap with the green band set her hair off very well," remarked K. K. thoughtfully. "What colour are her eyes, Deeks—brown or blue? I can't quite be certain in this light."

Harvey Deeks grunted.

"If she'd come over to our table, and take our order, I might be able to tell you," he retorted tartly. "She's too jolly busy fussing round those Grammar School seniors."

"Ass!" said Parkington, grinning. "She won't come to this table, anyhow—our waitress is the one with the spectacles. If we had had any sense, we would have taken more care where we sat down."

"We didn't know there was a new waitress when we came in," grinned Clement Goffin.

The chums of Study K dropped the discussion at this point owing to the arrival of their own waitress, and they ordered tea and toast and fancy cakes. The waitress moved away, and at that moment there was a commotion in the doorway. K. K. did not even trouble to look round.

"That's Handy," he stated definitely. "You can hear his foghorn voice a mile away."

Parkington's chums glanced round and grinned. The three fellows who had just entered were Edward Oswald Handforth, Walter Church, and Arnold McClure, the celebrated trio of Study D in the Ancient House at St. Frank's. And when Handforth entered anywhere, everybody knew it.

"It's a potty idea!" he was saying loudly. "Where's the sense of coming in here for tea when we can be home in ten minutes? Tea in the study is a lot better—and cheaper. They charge too much here."

"Oh, come on out, then," said Church uncomfortably.



The girl in the cash-box was eyeing them coldly, which wasn't surprising, considering Handforth's outspoken comments.

"Not likely!" said Handforth. "Now I'm in, I'll stay in. Where's a table? Good egg! There's an empty one over by the window."

He commenced marching across the fashionable café, but before he had proceeded four paces he came to an abrupt halt. A waitress had just appeared from the service-room with a laden tray.

"My only hat!" ejaculated Handy admiringly.

It was the first time he had seen Flossie, and she struck him "all of a heap." The burly Removite was like that; he was liable to "fall" for any new, pretty face without a second's warning.

He had often expressed the view that the waitresses at the Japanese Café were unattractive. That unfavourable dictum no longer held good. Flossie was as pretty as a picture.

She had just the kind of curly brown hair which Handforth admired. (He also admired fair hair, and dark hair, and straight hair, and wavy hair, but this is by the way.) Her eyes were brown—he could tell that as she looked into his own, politely and mutely suggesting that he should get out of the way.

"Oh, I say! Sorry!" gasped Handforth, realising the position.

He jumped aside with such alacrity that he bumped into a table and upset a cup of

tea over the knees of a Grammarian senior. In the ensuing commotion Flossie went about her business.

"Sorry be hanged!" stormed the soaked Grammarian. "What's the idea of barging about the place like a startled rhinoceros? Can't you other kids keep this lumbering animal in his cage?"

ASTOUNDINGLY enough, Handforth took no notice of these insulting words; he was making his way to a table on the other side of the room, and it was left for Church and McClure to appease the injured party.

"What's the idea of this?" asked Church, after he and Mac had

managed to escape. "I thought you said you liked that table by the window?"

"This one's better," replied Handforth.

"Rot! It's not half the size, and the light's dim, and we shall have to wait hours before we get any service," said Church. "That window table——"

"My poor ass, can't you understand?" interrupted Mac wearily. "Handy has spotted that this is one of the new waitress's tables."

"Oh, my hat!" groaned Church. "He's smitten again!"

Handforth was still deaf. He had seated himself at the table, and he was looking across the room with dreamy eyes, following Flossie's graceful movements.

"You know, these girls are frightfully clever," he commented admiringly. "The way they juggle with those tea-trays and things is uncanny. They don't spill a drop, and they don't bump into anything. I'll bet I couldn't do it."

Any comment from Church or McClure seemed superfluous.

"By George! She's coming this way now," went on Handforth eagerly. "How's my tie, Mac?"

"Crooked," said Mac bluntly.

"What!"

"Dirty, too," continued the Scottish junior. "Your collar's smudged with mud, your face is grubby, and you look a sight. It's a pretty good thing there's only a weak light here."

Before Handforth could attempt to tidy himself up—and he wasn't half so bad as Mac made out—Flossie arrived, her pencil ready. She smiled sweetly, but distantly, upon the St. Frank's juniors.

"Tea?" she suggested helpfully.

"Bags of it!" said Handforth, with enthusiasm. "And lots of bread-and-butter, and poached eggs on toast, and veal and ham pie, and Welsh rarebit, and seed cake, and chocolate eclairs, and fancy French pastries——"

"Do you need all these?" interrupted Flossie, in surprise.

"Eh? All which?"

"Don't take any notice of him, miss," said Church, noting the look of "soppy" ecstasy on Handforth's face. "He doesn't know what he's talking about. All we want is a pot of tea for three and a few cakes."

"Thank you," said the girl, who was flushing furiously as she found Handy's stare—intended to be "sweet," but really rather frightening—fixed upon her.

"Handy gets taken like this now and again," explained Church apologetically. "He's all right, really, but when he gets these spasms all he can do is to stare at people. You may think he's rude, but he doesn't mean to be."

Flossie tripped away, and Handforth came to himself with a start.

"You silly asses!" he hissed. "I wanted to give her some special instructions about the tea——"

"And to keep her here as long as you could," nodded Church. "I know! But you're not playing those giddy games in this café, Handy. You've made yourself a laughing-stock already. Can't you see that everybody's grinning at us?"

Edward Oswald took a deep breath, and looked round. Church had exaggerated. Most of the people in the café were intent upon their own affairs, but it was certainly true that K. K. & Co., four tables away, were grinning like Cheshire cats.

"Behave yourself, Handy!" advised Parkington warningly. "And don't—oh, don't—forget Irene."

Handforth turned red.

"Why do they let these freaks into the café?" he asked sourly, addressing his chums, but speaking so loudly that everybody else could hear. "Hear, shove those rolls over, Mac. I'll show K. K.——"

"Don't be a hopeless chump!" protested McClure frantically.

But Handforth was not to be denied. The mention of Irene's name had "touched him on the raw." Everybody knew that he and Irene Manners were special chums, and her name was not welcome at this moment, when he was giving so much attention to Flossie.

Whizz!

Handforth hurled one of the rolls. Kirby Keeble Parkington adroitly ducked. The roll

shot past his ear, and struck an old gentleman on his bald head.

"You madman!" gasped Church. "You'll get us chucked out of here. Think of the good name of the school. All these Grammarians will yell with laughter if we're ordered out."

Handforth controlled himself.

"Well, I'm not standing any of K. K.'s rot!" he said darkly.

He leaned across for another roll, knocking a custard tart off another dish on to the floor in the process, and Mac only rescued the flower vase in the nick of time. Fortunately, Flossie now came along with the tray and the situation was saved, particularly as the old gentleman with the bald head was completely in the dark as to where the roll had come from.

"Oh, let me help you!" said Handforth eagerly.

He sprang up to take the tray from Flossie, and it was entirely his own fault that he trod on the custard tart. His foot skidded from under him just at the moment he took the tray, and the result was disastrous. He lurched, the tray went ceilingwards, and the milk jug and the hot water jug emptied their contents down Handy's chest. The tea-pot struck him on the head.

"Yaroooh!" howled Handforth wildly.

"Oh!" cried Flossie, terrified.

"Help! I'm scalded!" hooted Handforth. "I'm burnt!"

Tea-leaves were covering the top of his head like a patch, and many of them were oozing down over his face. Church and McClure sat and laughed unroariously. They watched Handforth's distress with the utmost pleasure.

"He asked for it—and he's got it," said Church calmly.

The girl was frantic.

"I'm so sorry!" she said, her voice full of concern. "But, really, I don't think it was my fault. If you hadn't taken the tray——"

"What is wrong here?" asked a stern, cold voice.

The manageress, a tall, stately lady in black, appeared on the scene. Flossie regarded her apprehensively.

"It wasn't her fault," protested Handforth anxiously. "I was taking the tray from her and I slipped. You mustn't blame this young lady at all!"

"He's right, ma'am," said Church. "It was his own fault entirely."

The manageress seemed to be satisfied that Flossie was not to blame; the commotion died down, and the mess was cleared up. Handforth retired to the wash-room and emerged, soon afterwards, fairly tidy. He found Church and McClure having their tea.

"This is all K. K.'s fault," said Handforth darkly. "Look at him over there—grinning like a hyena! Wait till I get him outside!"

"You can do what you like outside, but don't do anything here," said Church. "You've done enough damage in here. Look at this bill!"

"Five-and-six!" gasped Handforth.

"You've got to pay for those jugs and the tea-pot," explained Church.

"Not likely! It's an outrage! I won't pay —"

"If you don't, they'll dock it off Flossie's wages."

"Eh? Oh, well, that's different," said Handforth, cooling down. "I suppose I'd better pay, then. Where's the menu? I want to order something else."

He sat down, grabbed the menu, and signalled. A tall, angular, bespectacled waitress came forward. Handforth stared at her with comical dismay.

"They've put Flossie on to a fresh set of tables—until we've gone, I suppose," murmured Church, with a certain amount of relish.

"Well I'm jiggered!" said Handforth blankly.

He was so disappointed that he wouldn't wait for any tea, but paid the bill and walked straight out. K. K. & Co. had just preceded him, and they met on the pavement. K. K. wagged an admonishing finger at the leader of Study D.

"Flossie's a ripping girl, but you'd better go easy," he advised. "If Irene hears anything about this, she'll be green with jealousy."

"You—you silly idiot!"

"And she'll finish with you for good!"

"You're mad!" said Handforth, with a sniff. "Irene's too sensible—she's too good a pal—ever to get jealous."

"Don't you believe it," said Parkington sagely. "It's a good thing for you that Irene wasn't in this café to-day. Don't you realise that you made an absolute exhibition of yourself?"

"Nothing—absolutely nothing—could ever make Irene jealous," vowed Handforth fiercely. "And if you're looking for a thick ear, K. K.——"

"Not at all," interrupted Parkington sweetly. "My ears are perfectly comfortable as they are. Just bear in mind what I've said, Handy, and do try to curb yourself in future. Girls will be your downfall if you don't."

He went off chuckling, leaving Handforth nearly gibbering.

CHAPTER 2.

K. K.'s Brainwave!

CHURCH and McClure had some little difficulty in persuading Handforth to go home. They successfully edged him along to the garage, and they all got into Edward Oswald's trusty little Morris Minor saloon. Then Handforth thought it rather a good idea to go back to the Japanese Café to have tea. As he explained, he hadn't had any yet.

McClure looked at Church significantly.

"Grab him!" said Mac grimly. "He only wants to go back to the café so that he can see Flossie again."

Handforth turned red.

"It's not that!" he protested. "I mean to say—— That is—— Well, supposing you're right?" he went on defiantly. "Flossie is a jolly nice girl, and she may be off duty soon."

"What's that got to do with you?" asked Church, staring.

"Perhaps she'll let me take her to the pictures."

"And what are you going to say to old Wilkey when you get in hours late for calling-over?" asked Mac politely.

Handforth considered.

"Oh, well, perhaps it is a bit late," he admitted reluctantly. "On second thoughts, I'll leave it for another time."

Church and McClure said nothing, but they were relieved. Within a day or two Handforth would have forgotten all about Flossie. When they got back to St. Frank's they ran into K. K. & Co. in the Ancient House lobby. The three Red-Hots were still grinning.

"What's the joke?" asked Handforth aggressively.

"I was only thinking that your ideas about girls are a trifle off the mark," said Parkington. "Irene is a good scout—one of the best—but if she saw you flirting with some other girl she'd get jealous."

"No fear!" said Handforth stoutly. "In any case, I shouldn't flirt with any other girl. And what the dickens are you implying, you rotter? I don't even flirt with Irene!"

K. K. & Co. chuckled, and went their way. Once they were safely within Study K, Parkington closed the door and winked at his two chums.

"That gives me an idea," he said coolly. "About Handy and Irene, I mean. Where's that letter from Walton?"

"Walton-on-Thames, or Walton-on-the-Naze?" asked Deeks.

"Ass! Walton, of Carlton!" replied Parkington. "Don't try to be funny, Deeks. It doesn't suit you. You know as well as I do that Walton is the Fourth Form skipper at Carlton."

"We didn't even know you'd had a letter from him," said Goffin. "How are things going at the old place?"

"I meant to show it to you this morning, but I forgot," said K. K.

These three juniors, to say nothing of nine others in the Remove, had come from Carlton College in a body; and, forming themselves into a clique known as the "Red-Hots," they had lost no time in challenging the supremacy of Nipper and his followers, who called themselves the Old-Timers.

"Here it is," said K. K., as he sat down and took a letter from the table-drawer. "There's only one item of news that's really important. Listen to this: 'Remember how sorry we were when Baines went with you to St. Frank's? Well, old man, we've got a better chap than Baines now——'"

"Rot!" broke in Deeks. "Baines is the cleverest amateur actor of his age that ever happened. Even the Old-Timers admit it."

"Well, you needn't interrupt, and I'm asking you to believe what Walton says," said

K. K. "The main point of importance comes now: 'This new chap is named Gladwin, and to look at him you wouldn't think that he was even human—a soft, small, weedy-looking blighter. But the other day, in one of our shows, he took the part of a girl, and it's an absolute fact that half the audience thought he really was a girl. If I hadn't helped him with his make-up, I should have been diddled myself. All the visitors who saw the show were bowled over when Gladwin took his wig off at the end. He can make his voice sweet and gentle, and he acts marvellously. We shan't miss Baines so much after this, so you're welcome to him. Just to show you how clever Gladwin is, I'll tell you something else. He looked so ripping in his silk stockings and fashionable frock that we carted him out into the quad and introduced him to some of the seniors as my sister! And it's an absolute fact that they were spoofed up to the eyes. One chap told me he never knew I had such a pretty sister. He went as green as an olive when he discovered the truth.'"

"All very interesting, but what's this got to do with Handforth and Irene Manners?" asked Deeks patiently.

"Everything," replied K. K. "You may, or may not, have forgotten that it happens to be my birthday to-morrow."

"We haven't forgotten," said Goffin. "What do you think I borrowed that money from you for? Deeks and I are going halves in buying you——"

"Don't tell him now," interrupted Deeks hastily.

K. K. chuckled. It was like Goffin's nerve to borrow money from him in order to buy him a present!

"The only reason I'm mentioning my birthday is that it gives me a good and plausible excuse for inviting my cousin Pamela to St. Frank's," went on Parkington. "She'll come down for the afternoon, and her presence will be quite logical. I mean, why shouldn't a chap's pretty cousin visit him on his birthday?"

Deeks and Goffin became more interested.

"Your pretty cousin?" they asked, in one voice.

"I think she's coming on Wednesday," nodded K. K. dreamily.

"We didn't even know you had a cousin named Pamela," said Deeks.

"Neither did I—until a few minutes ago."

"Eh?"

"I've just invented her," explained the red-headed junior.

"You've done what?"

"I'm afraid you're both very dense," said K. K. "Haven't I just been reading out Walton's letter about this chap, Gladwin? If I can wangle it, he'll come over to St. Frank's on Wednesday afternoon, and he'll be introduced all round as 'Pamela Parkington.'"

"My only hat!" said Goffin, staring. "What a lark! But could it be worked? I mean, Walton may be exaggerating. He may have introduced this chap to the seniors in the darkness, or something."

"It's worth risking, anyhow," said K. K. "We haven't much time. To-day's Tuesday and it's my birthday to-morrow. The post goes within half an hour, and unless I write the letter at once it'll be too late."

"It's hardly giving the chap time," protested Deeks.

"It's a bit rushed, but Gladwin has evidently got all the clothes, so it ought to be easy," said K. K. "I'd better write to Walton, and I'll ask him to wire me if he's arranging it for me—then we shall know for certain."

Deeks and Goffin were impressed.

"You mean you'll ask this fellow, Gladwin, to come over to St. Frank's as a girl?" said Goffin dubiously. "You'll let him travel in his giddy disguise?"

"Why not?"

"He might get into trouble if he's bowled out on the way."

"If he's as good as Walton says, he won't get bowled out," replied K. K. "That's the whole idea of it—he arrives here in his girl's make-up, we meet him at the gates, and introduce him round as my Cousin Pamela. In particular, we shall introduce him to Handy."

"Hold on!" said Deeks. "How are you going to know him? You've never seen Gladwin, and you'll look a fine ass if you claimed some chance girl-visitor as your cousin, wouldn't it?"

"That's easy," replied K. K., grinning. "All I've got to do is to ask Walton to fix it. When a girl turns up wearing a red rose we shall know that she's a he."

"It seems a bit risky to me," commented Goffin.

"Nothing can be accomplished without risk," replied Parkington, as he unscrewed his fountain-pen. "The more risk there is, the more the interest. We'll have a private word with Gladwin, explain the wheeze to him, and get him to make love to old Handy."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Handy says that nothing could make Irene jealous," grinned K. K. "Well, Irene and some of those other Moor View girls are coming to tea to-morrow, as you know—my special birthday-party—and when Irene sees Handy and Pamela together—Well, if Irene doesn't get jealous, I'll eat my footer boots!"

CHAPTER 3.

K. K.'s Blunder!

THE more Deeks and Goffin thought of Kirby Keeble Parkington's idea, the more it impressed them. It was a corker! No football match had been fixed for the half-holiday, so there would be plenty of fellows about on whom to work the jape.

"It'll not only be a ripping wheeze against Handy, but against all the Old-Timers in general," said Deeks.

"Exactly," nodded K. K. coolly. "It's about time we jogged up the Old-Timers. Things have been getting slow, and unless we keep the Remove up to scratch it becomes dormant. The Red-Hots are the only live wires in this House."

"Hear, hear!" grinned Goffin. "It's just as well not to say that in the Common Room, though, or Nipper or Handy or Fullwood would give you a thick ear."

to work a particularly hot jape on the Old-Timers. It was a half-holiday at Carlton, just the same as at St. Frank's—could Walton be a sport and persuade Gladwin to rig himself out in his maiden attire and catch the two twenty-seven train?

Gladwin must wear a red rose so that K. K. could identify him. He must present himself at the St. Frank's gates, and K. K. would be on the

Handforth hurled the roll. K. K. ducked, and the roll hit a gentleman on his bald head.



"Assuming any of them were allowed to," said K. K., as he started his letter. "What's the date? Never mind—Tuesday will do."

Deeks and Goffin grinned when they saw the mode of K. K.'s commencement. He began his letter to Walton with "Dear Old Sweetheart," which was his usual method of beginning letters to his friends.

He did not go into any unnecessary details. He expressed great admiration for the unknown Gladwin's genius, and he explained that as to-morrow was his birthday he wanted

look out. All expenses incurred would be met by K. K. And if Walton and one or two of his pals cared to come along by a later train to see the end of the fun, all the better. Better not come by the two twenty-seven, though, or the Old-Timers would put two and two together. Everything depended upon Gladwin arriving alone.

And if Walton would send him a wire as soon as possible after the receipt of the letter, it would be gratefully received. For

until K. K. definitely knew that the wheezo was being worked, he couldn't gas to the other chaps about his "cousin's" coming visit. Still, if he didn't get a wire he would hope for the best, and would be on the look out at the appointed time just the same.

"I think that makes it clear from every angle," remarked K. K., as he signed the letter. "But if I know anything of Walton, he'll jump at this thing and send me a wire within an hour of getting the letter."

"I shall be jolly keen on seeing this merchant," grinned Goffin. "If he's better than old Baines, he must be good."

K. K. folded the letter, addressed the envelope, and then paused.

"While I'm at it, I might as well get another letter off my chest," he said thoughtfully. "Only about a couple of lines. I've just got time before the school box is cleared."

"You'll have to buck up," said Deeks. "Who's it to?"

"Only to the Moor View girls," replied Parkington, as he drew another piece of paper towards him. "An invitation to my special tea-party to-morrow."

His chums stared.

"Why go to the trouble of writing a letter and spending three-halfpence on a stamp when they've already been invited?" asked Deeks.

"I like these things to be done properly," replied K. K. "Vera has promised to come, and she said that she'd tell Irene and Doris and one or two others, but that's only a second-hand sort of invitation."

Vera Wilkes was the daughter of Mr. Alington Wilkes, the Housemaster of the Ancient House at St. Frank's, and she was Parkington's special girl chum. She was a Moor View girl, but as St. Frank's was so near she lived in the Ancient House with her parents. K. K. was sure that she had passed on his "invite," but he wanted to confirm it. It was absolutely essential to the success of his jape that Irene Manners should come to St. Frank's.

"Blessed if I know how to begin!" he murmured, as he paused. "'Dear Irene' sounds too ordinary; 'Dear Miss Manners' is too stiff; and I don't care much for 'Dear Old Girl.'"

"Why not begin 'Dear Old Sweetheart,' in your usual affectionate manner?" asked Deeks sarcastically.

"Good idea," said K. K., grinning.

He began the letter boldly in the suggested manner.

"You ass!" gasped Deeks. "I was only ragging you."

"All the same, it was a good suggestion," chuckled K. K. "If Irene happens to show that letter to Handy, he'll turn yellow. We want to get as much fun out of this jape as possible. Now, let me see"

He didn't take long over that letter; a few characteristically cheery lines, asking Irene and her chums to be at St. Frank's for tea on the morrow. He mentioned no names, but merely asked Irene to bring

"the crowd" with her. He added that his father had supplied him with special funds for the occasion, and that the party would be tip-top.

"Well, that's done," he said, as he finished up with a flourishing "K. K." "Better not to have invited any particular girls, as I don't quite know what Vera may have said. I'll leave it to Irene, and the more she brings, the merrier!"

As he was addressing the envelope a commotion sounded in the corridor. The next moment the door of Study K burst open and in barged Edward Oswald Handforth.

"I want you, K. K.!" he said aggressively.

K. K. finished addressing the envelope, looked up, and screwed the cap on his fountain-pen.

"Good old Handy!" he said, chuckling. "What I admire about you is your direct methods. No wasting of time by knocking at doors, or waiting to be asked in. You always get straight to the point."

"I didn't come here to listen to your jawing, but to ask you what the dickens you mean by sticking that notice on the board!" roared Handforth.

"What notice, darling?"

"You know what notice I mean—and don't call me 'darling'!" shouted Handforth wrathfully. "Do you mean to say you didn't do this?"

He strode forward and planked a sheet of exercise paper on the table with such force that he knocked the table clean over. The contents were scattered in all directions. K. K. rose to his feet and sighed.

"Is all this absolutely necessary?" he asked mildly.

"Before I've finished I'm going to tip you over just as I tipped that table over!" retorted Handforth. "What do you mean by sticking things like that on the board?"

K. K. picked up the exercise paper and read the printed words on it:

"NOTICE.

"On and after Tuesday the Japanese Café in Bannington is strictly out of bounds for E. O. Handforth, of the Remove, owing to the presence there of a certain charming person to whom the said E. O. Handforth is particularly susceptible.

"(Signed) ONE WHO KNOWS."

Parkington sighed.

"A pity," he commented.

"What's a pity, you idiot?"

"A pity I didn't think of this myself," replied K. K. "Because, if I had, I should have worded the notice much more brainily. I'm frightfully sorry, but you've come to the wrong stable."

"Didn't you write that?"

"Not guilty, my lord."

"Somebody told me that you must have done it," growled Handforth.

"But I didn't, and I'll trouble you to knock somebody else's study table over," replied K. K. "If you want to avoid this sort of thing, you mustn't publicly fall in

love with pretty waitresses. Why jump on me? Everybody in the Remove knows of your love for the fair Flossie."

Handforth swallowed hard.

"If you say you didn't do it, I'll believe you," he said thickly as he took possession of the notice. "But I'm jolly well going to find out who did do it! And I don't want any funny remarks from you, you red-headed ass!"

He charged out, and Decks closed the door.

"Now we can clear up," he said tartly. "Whenever that blundering idiot comes into a chap's study he creates havoc. Why didn't you chuck him out on his neck, K. K.? Goffin and I would have helped."

"Oh, he can't help it," said Parkington as he put the table the right way up. "By Jove! What about these letters?" he added in alarm. "Blow Handforth! What's the time? I don't want to go down to the village!"

"It's just post-time now," said Goffin, looking at his watch.

K. K. grabbed the folded letters, and Decks the envelopes.

"Who's got any stamps?" asked K. K. "You have, Goffin? Good man! Give me Irene's envelope, Decky."

It is well said that "too many cooks spoil the broth." This particular broth was very much spoilt by the fact that Decks mixed up the envelopes, and by the added fact that K. K., in his hurry, did not trouble to make certain.

The letter for Irene went into Walton's envelope, and the letter for Walton went into Irene's. K. K. stuck them up, dashed down the passage, and arrived at the lobby-postbox just as one of the under-porters was clearing it.

"Good egg!" said Parkington, with relief. "I thought I'd missed it."

And all unconscious of the blunder made, he went back to his study to discuss with his chums the plans for the following day.

CHAPTER 4.

The Moor View Plotters!

"**L**ETTER for you, Renie," said Doris Berkeley. "It's in a boy's handwriting, too—and it's not Ted's."

It was the next morning, and breakfast was not yet ready at the Moor View School. Irene Manners and Marjorie Temple were in their study, and Doris had just entered. These three girls were close chums.

"What's the idea?" asked Irene. "Trying to kid me?"

She took the letter with a sceptical look on her pretty face, but was convinced when she saw the handwriting.

"Funny!" she replied, frowning. She opened the envelope, and her face cleared as she saw the signature at the foot of the letter. "K. K.," she said. "Why, it's

from that red-headed fellow, Parkington—Vera's chum."

"Inviting us to his tea-party, I suppose?" said Marjorie. "It's his birthday to-day, you know."

"It's a pretty long invitation, then," commented Irene.

She started reading, and the bewilderment on her face caused the other girls to eye her curiously. The further she read, the greater became her astonishment. At last she paused, long before she had finished.

"I can't understand it," she said wonderingly. "I don't believe this letter's for me at all."

"It's like his nerve to begin 'Dear Old Sweetheart,' in any case," said Doris.

"That's nothing—only his way," replied Irene. "In fact, it makes me believe that this letter must have been meant for a boy. He keeps referring to Carlton, too. Carlton's his old school. It can't possibly be for me."

"Well, it's addressed to you," said Marjorie, looking at the envelope again. "So there can't be any harm in reading it."

This time Irene read it aloud, and her chums listened with growing glee. For it suddenly occurred to them what had happened.

"The careless ass must have put your letter into the wrong envelope," said Doris, laughing. "This is meant for a Carlton chap. And it stands to reason that a Carlton chap must have got your letter."

"There's nothing in that," said Irene. "My letter could only have been a line or two, inviting us to the party; K. K. wouldn't have any other reason to write to me. But this one is worth its weight in gold. Don't you understand the game?"

"Not quite," said Marjorie. "Who's this boy, Gladwin? And what's all that about his dressing up as a girl?"

"Why, it's clear enough," said Irene, her eyes twinkling. "This fellow, Gladwin, is a clever actor, and he has been dressing up as a girl in one of the Carlton plays. K. K. wants him to come over to St. Frank's to spoof the Old-Timers."

"Oh, my goodness!"

"What a frightful nerve!"

"K. K.'s got nerve enough for anything," said Irene. "Let's get this clear. Gladwin is to come to St. Frank's this afternoon, and K. K. will introduce him to everybody as his cousin, Pamela. But he's never met Gladwin, so Gladwin must wear a red rosette to avoid any mistake. And look! K. K. won't even give up hope if there's no telegram."

"What difference does that make?" asked Marjorie. "Naturally there'll be no telegram, because the boy this letter is addressed to will never get it. And the wretched spoofer will never turn up."

Irene's blue eye were mischievous.

"Why shouldn't the spoofer turn up?" she asked gaily.

"Eh?"

"And the spoofer won't be wretched, either," continued Irene. "Oh, girls, this is too good a chance to be missed!"

"A chance for what?" asked Doris eagerly. "What are you driving at, Renie? How can we do anything?"

"I'll tell you how," replied the fair Irene. "We're on velvet. That Carlton fellow hasn't got this letter, so we know for certain that nothing will happen from the direction of Carlton—and that leaves us a clear field."

"Don't forget that your letter must have got to Carlton," said Doris.

"It won't seem at all important, and the fellow who receives it will know there's been a mistake," replied Irene. "He'll probably write to K. K. and ask for an explanation, but K. K. can't get a letter until Thursday morning, so we needn't worry about it at all. Our jape will be over before then."

Irene's chums were startled.

"How can we work a jape?" asked Marjorie breathlessly.

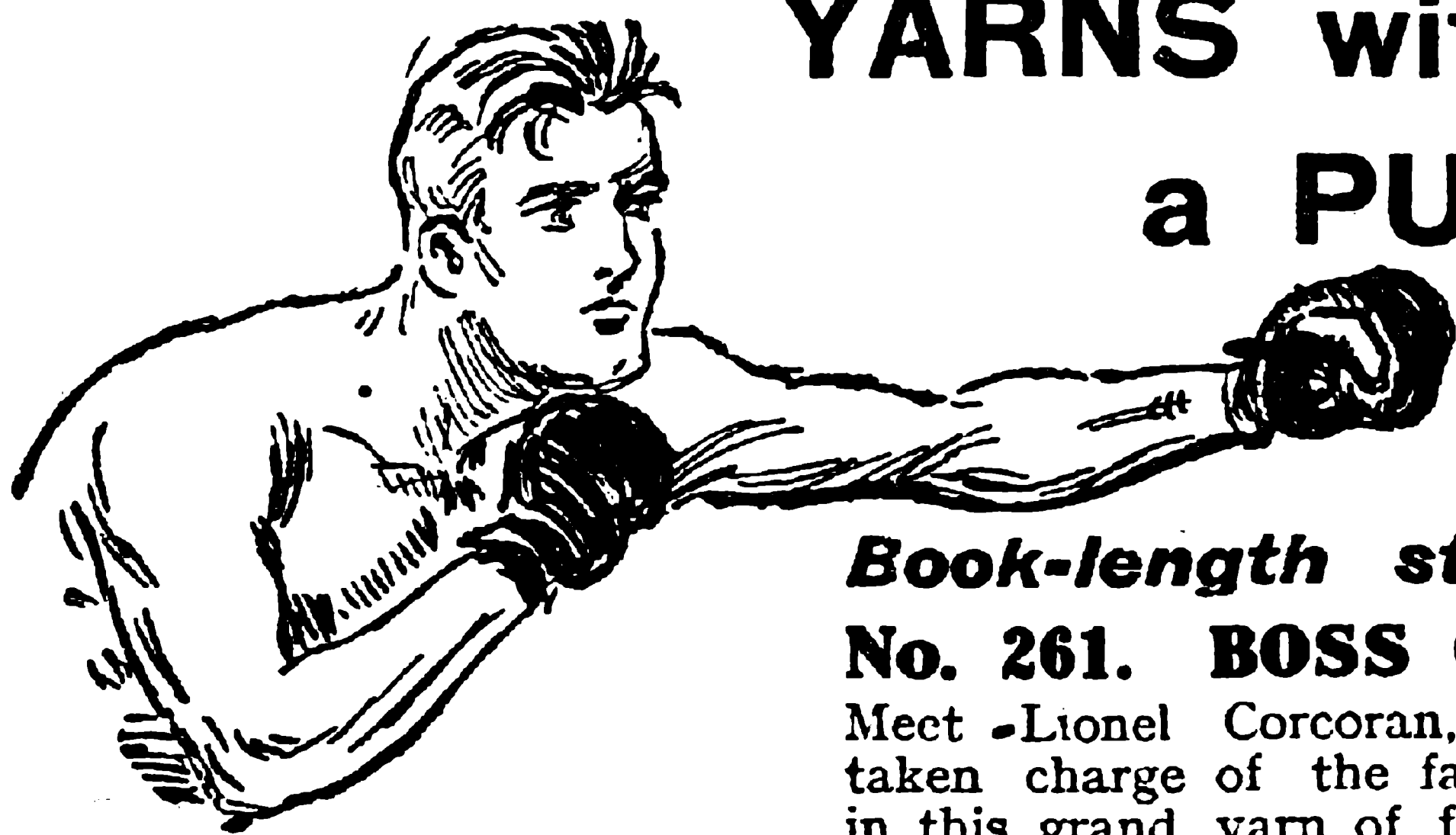
"You haven't forgotten Muriel, have you?"

"I'm still a duffer," said Marjorie impatiently. "I'm blessed if I can twig what you mean."

"My dear thickhead, nobody at St. Frank's knows about Muriel yet, and it was our plan to take her along to K. K.'s party so that we could introduce her," explained Irene. "But Muriel will get there much earlier now—if she agrees to the wheeze."

Muriel Finch was a new girl at the Moor View School; she had only arrived on the previous Saturday, and Irene hadn't yet had an opportunity of introducing her to their boy friends. And Muriel was something special.

She had soon proved herself to be a girl of exceptional spirit; she had successfully ragged her Form-mistress, much to the glee of the other girls, and she had already perpetrated one or two other minor japes.



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"It's—it's too daring," said Marjorie, open-eyed. "And I don't quite see how Muriel can——"

"Why, it's as simple as A.B.C.," interrupted Irene eagerly. "K. K.'s never seen Gladwin, so when a girl turns up, wearing a red rose, he'll immediately think that she's the one he's looking for! But instead of being a boy in disguise, it'll be Muriel."

"My goodness!" ejaculated Marjorie. "But will Muriel agree?"

"Of course she will," declared Irene. "She's a regular daredevil. In fact, she *must* agree! Have you forgotten what K. K. has said about me in this letter?"

"About you?" asked Doris wonderingly. "I didn't see your name."

"It isn't mentioned, but he says that he wants to work a jape on Ted Handforth," said Irene, her eyes gleaming with determination. "He says that Ted Handforth has a special girl friend, and Gladwin must make love to Ted, so that the girl friend will get jealous. Did you ever hear such nerve?"

"My hat! You're the girl friend, of course," agreed Doris, with a little whistle. "So that's the idea, is it?"

"I'll teach him to play games like this," said Irene indignantly. "Well, he won't get any laugh out of me."

At this juncture Doris went out to fetch Muriel. She was back within a minute, and she not only brought the new girl, but Phyllis Palmer and Winnie Pitt and Ena Handforth and Betty Barlowe, and one or two more of the Moor View leading lights. The noise in Irene's study was deafening as all the girls demanded explanations and asked for details.

Muriel Finch was the quietest of them all. She was of almost the same build as Irene herself—slim, graceful, and remarkably attractive. But where as Irene was fair, Muriel was darker, her eyes being brown and her hair chestnut, with a slight inclination towards the auburn.

"Oh, look!" cried Irene breathlessly. "I'd forgotten Muriel's hair. It's just the right colour. Everybody will take it for granted that she's K. K.'s cousin. Her hair isn't so red, but it's a lucky coincidence."

"If it's all the same to you, I'd like you to stick to facts," said Muriel coldly. "My hair's chestnut, and any girl who says that it's red——"

"Cheese it, Muriel!" interrupted Irene hastily. "You'll understand what I mean in a minute. There's a chance here for you to do something big—something that's simply too gorgeous for words."

"A jape?"

"Yes. We want you to go to St. Frank's this afternoon and pretend that you're a boy in disguise. Only one or two chaps will take you for a boy—all the rest will think you're a girl."

"It sounds promising," said Muriel, laughing.

"You've heard us speak of Ted Handforth, haven't you?" continued Irene. "You'll have to make violent love to him."

"Still more promising," said the new girl. "If it's only for a spoof, I'll make love to anybody."

Irene flashed a triumphant glance at her study chums.

"What did I tell you?" she asked gleefully. "Didn't I say that Muriel would come up to the scratch?"

"She doesn't know all the facts yet," said Marjorie.

Muriel listened eagerly as Irene once again read out that letter. The other girls were equally enthralled. And when Irene proceeded to explain the full magnitude of the proposed jape, the girls fairly shrieked with laughter.

"Do it?" said Muriel gaily. "You bet I'll do it!"

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CHAPTER 5.

Ready for the Fun!

WILLIAM WESTBURY WALTON, the junior captain of Carlton College, gave an exclamation of satisfaction as he took a letter out of the rack that same morning—at about the same time, in fact, as Irene Manners was planning her great jape.

"This is good," he remarked, addressing Edward Mallins and Arthur Foster, his study chums. "Letter from old K. K. No mistaking his scrawl."

Walton opened the letter, and read it with slight astonishment.

"Only a few lines," he said. "He doesn't mention Gladwin, or any of the other things I wrote to him about. In fact, it's an invite."

"That sounds fairly good," remarked Mallins.

"We ought to be boiled," continued Walton. "It's K. K.'s birthday to-day, and we've forgotten all about it. He's asked us to go to St. Frank's to a special party."

Here was an unlooked-for turn! Walton, contrary to Irene's assumption, had not realised that this letter was not intended for him. And that, of course, made all the difference. Irene was not to know that the letter also began, "Dear Old Sweetheart," in K. K.'s characteristic way. She had naturally supposed that it would begin: "Dear Irene," and that Walton would thereby know that an error in posting had been made. Not that this development would affect Irene's plan in any way other than unconsciously to assist it.

Walton could not be blamed for accepting the letter at its face value. For this is how it ran:

"Dear Old Sweetheart,—You know it's my birthday to-morrow, of course, and I'm giving rather a special party in consequence—any old excuse is good enough for having a spree. I want you to bring all the crowd—the whole bunch—and I can promise you that you'll have a good time. Quite a lot of chaps here are coming to the party, and we ought

to enjoy ourselves thoroughly. My pater has supplied me with special funds for the occasion, and the whole 'do' will be tip-top. I know that you won't disappoint me, because unless you come, and unless you bring the whole crowd, the party won't be a success.

"Cheerio!"

"K. K."

There wasn't a word in that letter to tell Walton that it had really been written to a girl, and not to himself. It applied equally well to K. K.'s Carlton ex-schoolfellows.

"Well, it's jolly decent of him, I must say," remarked Mallins. "It's not a great distance, anyway."

"We shan't even need to get special leave," said Walton. "It's a half-holiday, and we can easily be back before calling-over. Just like K. K. to invite the whole crowd. He always does things thoroughly."

Foster looked dubious.

"Wouldn't that be too tall an order?" he asked.

"Too tall, be dashed!" replied Walton. "Look here, he says 'Bring the whole crowd—the whole bunch.' And he tells me that his pater has supplied special funds. I expect he's giving his party in the Lecture Hall, or somewhere like that."

This certainly was a development which would add greatly to Kirby Keeble Parkington's embarrassment. For there was a special significance about that word "crowd" where Carlton was concerned. In writing it, K. K. had meant Irene and her own particular friends, but at Carlton the entire Fourth was known as "the crowd." It was merely a Carlton practice. Naturally, therefore, Walton assumed that K. K. was inviting him to bring along the whole Form.

Walton was a fellow who believed in action. He called the Fourth together immediately after breakfast, told the Fourth of the invitation, and the Fourth promptly accepted it.

"All we've got to do," said Walton, "is to hire one of those double-decker buses. It'll hold us all easily, and I know how to get one at a special cut rate. It won't cost us more than a few bob each, and it'll be a regular sprce. For old times' sake, what? Good old K. K.!"

"Yes, rather!"

"Let's go!"

"I'll speak to old Farry about it," continued Walton. "I'll tell him what's in the wind, and ask if we can't have a late pass, just to be on the safe side."

Mr. Horace Farrington, the Housemaster of High House, was agreeable when Walton put the matter to him. As the whole Fourth was going in a motor-bus, there couldn't be any harm. Mr. Farrington's only stipulation was that the "crowd" should come back intact. Any boy who failed to do so would be punished.

"Well, that's that," said Walton joyously, after he had reported to his chums. "Now I think we'll send K. K. a wire, just to let him know that we're really coming."

Fate must have guided William Westbury Walton's hand when he wrote that telegram—a fate which had apparently made up its mind to do its worst for K. K. on this momentous birthday of his.

Walton's wire ran as follows:

"Good wheeze. O.K. Many happy returns. Coming.—WALTON."

WHEN Kirby Keeble Parkington received that message he had no idea of its true purport, for it applied just as well to the subject he believed it to refer to, and as he had been expecting a telegram in any case, its arrival occasioned him no surprise. He showed it to his chums.

"Everything is all serene," he commented calmly. "Didn't I tell you that Walton would regard it as a good wheeze. He's fixing it."

"But he says 'Coming, Walton,' doesn't he?" asked Deeks. "You didn't ask Walton to come himself."

"He's not coming, ass! That's only his way of putting it, to save unnecessary expense," replied K. K. "Of course, he means that Gladwin is coming. Quite apart from the expense, he didn't want to be too explicit, in case somebody else spotted the wire. He gives me credit for some sense, I hope."

And K. K. dismissed the matter from his mind. Gladwin was coming—it was officially confirmed—and the afternoon promised to be thoroughly enjoyable. The next step was to pave the way for the fictitious Pamela's arrival.

"Many happy returns, K. K.," remarked Nipper cheerily, as he happened to meet Parkington in the lobby. "Hope you've had tons of presents from your doting relatives."

"I haven't done so badly, thanks," replied K. K. "New footer boots, half a dozen records for my gramophone, a silk scarf, and sundry quid notes. By the way," he added carelessly, "I hope you'll be on hand this afternoon?"

"I shall be at your party, if that's what you mean," smiled Nipper.

"No, I mean earlier than that," said K. K. "My cousin will be arriving in the middle of the afternoon, and I'd like you to meet her. Jolly ripping girl. Not a direct cousin, you know—two or three times removed, I believed."

"Is she coming alone?"

"Yes, of course; she's coming to my party."

"Then she must be a bit older than the girls you generally favour," said Nipper, grinning. "Children of five or six don't travel alone."

There were some chuckles from a few other Old-Timers who were within earshot. Parkington was known to have special soft spot in his heart for children. He laughed with the others.

"No, my Cousin Pamela is just about my own age," he explained. "Quite a nice-looking girl, too, and a regular sport."

"At school somewhere?"

"I suppose so," replied K. K. vaguely. "As a matter of fact, I don't know a great deal about her, except that she's a very nice girl. I'll have to introduce you to her this afternoon."

"I'll make a point of being handy," promised Nipper.

Handforth, who was just coming downstairs, butted in.

"What's that you're saying about me?" he asked suspiciously.

"I've got something more important to do than talk about you, old scout," replied Nipper. "I was merely telling K. K. that I shall be handy this afternoon, so that he can introduce me to his cousin."

"You'd far better be yourself," said K. K. gravely. "Being Handy is risky where girls are concerned."

Edward Oswald turned red. His recent activities at the Japanese Café were not forgotten, and he was constantly being chipped.

"Come on, you Old-Timers," he bawled. "Are you going to stand there and listen to this Red-Hot ass running me down?"

"He didn't run you down, and we haven't the slightest excuse for bumping him," replied Nipper.

"He's merely telling us that his pretty cousin is coming this afternoon. Cousin Pamela."

Handforth calmed down.

"I've met these cousins before," he said tartly. "Chaps boast about their cousins, and tell us what to expect, and when the cousins arrive they're hopeless. I don't believe in any of these pretty cousins until I see 'em!"

"Then I hope you'll be going out this afternoon," said K. K. "I'm warning you, Handy, that Pam is under my wing while she is here, and I won't have any rot from you. You can fall in love with Flossie, but don't you start falling in love with Pam!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

K. K. walked off with his chums, and Handforth almost frothed at the mouth.

"Couldn't have been better, children," murmured K. K., out in the Triangle.

"Handy's arrival was opportune. We needed somebody else to do our announcing, and he'll do it. Within an hour half the school will know that my Cousin Pamela is coming."

MEANWHILE, at the Moor View School, Vera Wilkes had arrived as usual. And Vera, who was rather fond of K. K., was a bit startled when she heard the news. Irene & Co. simply bombarded her with it, and all she could understand, at first, was that a colossal jape was being got up against K. K.

"But is that quite fair?" she protested. "On a chap's birthday, at least, he ought to be excused."

"It's his own fault," replied Irene.

Handforth charged into Study K. and banged the offending notice on to the table with such force that the table crashed over.



"In fact, it's his own jape, and he oughtn't to grumble if he finds it turned against himself."

She went into further details, and Vera grasped the full significance of the situation. Being a high-spirited girl, she was soon laughing merrily. She could see all the possibilities.

"Well, that's different," she chuckled. "If K. K. was rash enough to ask this Carlton fellow to come disguised as a girl, it'll serve him right if Muriel spoofs him."

"It would be better if we could only send him a telegram," said Doris thoughtfully. "But it can't be done. We don't know anybody at Carlton who'd send it for us, and it must be sent from Carlton, or K. K. would twig."

"It doesn't matter," replied Vera. "He says he won't give up hope even if there isn't a wire, but will be on the watch. As for that letter which went astray, there's nothing in that."

"Do you know what was in the letter?" asked Irene eagerly.

"K. K. had a word with me this morning," nodded Vera. "He said he'd written you a few formal lines, inviting you to bring the crowd to his party. He said he wanted to make it official."

"That's good to hear," said Irene, with some relief. "We thought that that letter wasn't important, but it's just as well to know. The Carlton fellow who gets it will only send it back by post, so we shan't get any interruptions this afternoon. In other words, the stage is all set."

This jape, from the girls' point of view, was notable for its simplicity. There was nothing to prepare. All Muriel had to do was to memorise the main features of that letter, and to keep in mind the all-important fact that K. K. & Co. thought she was a boy in disguise.

She would change her clothes after dinner—for she couldn't arrive at St. Frank's in her Moor View uniform—cut across the fields to the village, and walk up to St. Frank's as though she had just come from the station.

After that she merely had to be herself. Acting wasn't even necessary. The more she looked and behaved like herself, the more would K. K. & Co. believe that they were witnessing brilliant acting. It was so extremely easy, indeed, that it was almost too good to be true.

"There's only one flaw," said Irene, as they reviewed their plans. "We don't want to let anything interfere with the success of the wheeze. K. K. might take it into his head to meet that train."

"Goodness!" said Muriel. "That would put paid to it."

"No fear!" replied Irene. "We've only got to cycle over to Bannington with you, and see you on the train there for Bellton. Or you can ride over by yourself. You're old enough to catch a train. I've looked up the two twenty-seven from Carlton, and it stops at Bannington at three-nine. All you've got to do is to get into the local, which arrives at Bellton at three-twenty. And if K. K.'s there, so much the better."

"I'll cycle over alone," said Muriel, nodding. "If any of the boys happen to see us together they might recognise me afterwards, and we don't want to take any chances."

"The only sad feature about the whole business is that we shan't be on the spot to see the fun," said Doris mournfully. "You'll be at St. Frank's by half-past three, and we're not expected until tea-time."

"What does that matter?" asked Irene. "We can get there early, can't we? K. K. will never dream that there's any connection between us and his supposed cousin, and he'll be only too pleased if we do turn up unexpectedly. In fact, we're *not* going to miss the fun. We'll casually stroll in at about a quarter to four."

"It'll suit K. K. all the better—particularly as you've got to get jealous when Muriel makes love to Ted Handforth," chuckled Doris. "Oh, Muriel, you don't know what you're in for!"

IF any of the St. Frank's fellows happened to spot a girl cyclist some little time after dinner they did not give her a second glance. She wore a long, shabby macintosh, a dowdy hat which came far over her face, and big spectacles that completed the "disguise."

Muriel Finch took no chances.

Her precautions, as it happened, were unnecessary, for she didn't see a St. Frank's boy during the whole of her journey. In Bannington she "parked" her bicycle, shed her macintosh, hat and spectacles, and donned the smart hat which she had taken in a parcel on the carrier.

When the three-twelve local left Bannington a remarkably attractive, smartly-dressed girl, with a red rose on her coat, sat alone in one of the compartments.

CHAPTER 6.

A Red-Hot Surprise!

KIRBY KEEBLE PARKINGTON looked at his watch in a thoughtful way.

"Just three o'clock," he remarked. "She ought to be here in less than half an hour."

"She?" grinned Deeks.

They were in the Triangle, near the fountain, and before replying K. K. gave a cautious look round.

"Yes, she," he repeated in a low voice. "Didn't I warn you, just before dinner, that we've got to be jolly careful? One slip of the tongue, and the whole wheeze will be out."

"But, dash it, we're all alone here," said Goffin.

"That doesn't matter; we may not be alone when you make the next slip," retorted K. K. "And we can't go wrong if we make up our minds that Gladwin is a girl, and that his name is Pamela Parkington."

"You're doing it yourself now," said Deeks tartly.

"Only to drive it into your thick heads that we must be careful," said Parkington. "But, look here, if we're going to jaw like this we might as well be walking to the station. By Jove, that's a point, too," added K. K. suddenly. "A point I'd overlooked. Come on!"

At the gates they ran into Fullwood and Travers.

"Looking for your fair cousin?" asked Travers politely. "Don't you think it would be better if you met the train?"

"Ass! We're going to the station now," replied K. K. gruffly. He was angry with himself. "I was a chump not to think of this before," he went on when they were out of earshot. "I only decided in the nick of time. You heard what Travers said? It's so jolly easy to make these mistakes."

"I can't see any mistakes," said Deeks.

"It's a question of—er—psychology, or something," said K. K. vaguely. "We know that a Carlton chap is coming, and it's quite good enough to meet a Carlton chap at the gates. But if I really had a Cousin Pamela, would I meet her at the gates? Of course not! I'd do the right thing, and meet her at the station."

"My hat! That's true," said Goffin, with a whistle. "You can't be too careful, can you?"

A Moor View girl, acting as scout, was at that moment hurrying back to the Moor View School, and great was the satisfaction of Irone & Co. when they heard her report. How near to shipwreck their plot had come was realised when they remembered that Muriel had only gone to catch the local train as an afterthought.

As things were, K. K. & Co. were absolutely spoofed.

THE local train came rattling into the little station, and one or two doors opened. The three Red-Hots eyed the alighting passengers eagerly. K. K. was immensely bucked at this happy inspiration of meeting the train. On the way up to St. Frank's he would have a chance of giving Gladwin his instructions.

"My only sainted aunt," breathed Goffin faintly.

He was staring at a girl who had just alighted from the end carriage. She was the only girl, in fact, to leave the train. The other passengers were nondescript—the vicar, a gaitered farmer, two elderly ladies and a sailor. This girl was the only one who remotely answered the necessary description.

"It's impossible!" muttered Deeks blankly.

K. K. thought the same. The girl was walking up the platform towards them; her walk was the last word in grace. She was altogether dainty and charming, and it was inconceivable that she could be a boy in disguise. Her auburn hair peeped from beneath her fashionable hat, nestling round her ears in fascinating waves. Her face was delicately moulded, with a small mouth, dimpled cheeks, and finely-shaped nose. In fact, she was really one of the prettiest girls the juniors had ever seen.

They were aghast. Not one of them had the nerve to speak to her in case they should make an appalling blunder. This couldn't be Gladwin, of Carlton—telegram or no tele-

gram! It was too impossible. Even K. K., with all his assurance, decided to wait for her to make the first move. This creature was so utterly feminine that she couldn't be a boy. That ass Gladwin must have missed the train. He might be clever, but he couldn't possibly fake himself up—

At this point K. K.'s thoughts jumped the rails. There was a red rose on her smart coat! He had been so startled by her general appearance that he hadn't even looked for this token of identification. Could it be a coincidence? After all, red roses are pretty common, and girls often wear them. What a chump he had been not to have decided upon something more distinctive.

The girl made for the exit, passing close to them. If she felt any embarrassment at their combined stares—and they were certainly staring most rudely in their mystification and indecision—she didn't show it. But something else happened. As she passed them her left eyelid flickered. She had winked! Not another sign did she give—not a smile—not a hint of recognition. But that wink, coming on top of the red rose, was enough.

"It is!" breathed K. K. dazedly.

"Wait a minute!" gasped Deeks. "You can't be absolutely sure—"

But Parkington wasn't listening. He had followed the girl out through the booking-office, and he plucked up courage—and it needed courage, in spite of his conviction—to touch her on the arm.

"Miss Pamela Parkington?" he asked breathlessly.

He held himself ready to be snubbed. Even at this point he still couldn't believe it. But the girl smiled immediately, giving a glimpse of her dazzling white teeth.

"Why, yes," she replied sweetly. "You're a St. Frank's boy, aren't you? I'm looking for my cousin Kirby."

"I'm Parkington—Kirby Keeble Parkington," said K. K., his amazement growing. "My only hat! It's—it's marvellous!"

"So you're my cousin Kirby?" asked the girl cheerfully. "Well, that's all right, then. Now we know one another. I didn't want to speak too soon in case I made a bloomer. How goes it, Parkington?" She held out a slim, daintily-gloved hand, and K. K. took it like a fellow in a dream. It wasn't a boy's hand at all. "Walton asked me to wish you many happy returns," added the girl as they shook.

"Come here!" breathed K. K., dragging her out into the open yard. "Deeks, Goffin! Did you ever see anything so uncanny? I can't believe my own eyes!"

"Don't be a chump," said the girl, with a touch of impatience. "You were expecting me, weren't you? I'm wearing that red rose you asked for. What more do you want? Be careful, or you'll give the game away."

"You—you can't really be Goodwin!" said Deeks sceptically.

"Trying to catch me?" asked the girl, with scorn. "I thought my name was Gladwin."

"I—I'd forgotten," said Deeks—which was true. And her pronouncement of the right name clinched the matter.

"Well, it's the most brilliant piece of make-up I've ever seen!" said K. K., all his old reassurance reasserting itself.

They walked across the station yard, and drifted into the road. Everybody else had long since disappeared, and they had the highway to themselves. Deeks and Goffin kept giving her sidelong looks.

"How the dickens do you do it?" asked Deeks incredulously. "I'd like to see you in your ordinary togs! You must be a small sort of chap."

"I'm not particularly big," admitted Pamela.

"But you've made yourself so thundering pretty!" said K. K. "I've seen a few pretty girls in my time, but you've got 'em all beat. Congrats, old man! It's an absolute triumph!"

MURIEL FINCH had thoroughly enjoyed the first few minutes of the encounter, but for all her nerve she was now feeling more than a little embarrassed. She hadn't bargained for these St. Frank's fellows making such frank statements regarding her looks. Not that she resented them. Being a girl, she wouldn't. But it was hard work to keep her colour from

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rising. She wasn't accustomed to such outspoken admiration.

She felt that she had successfully passed the initial test. The danger was that these fellows would twig that she really was a girl. Their first indications had shown this all too plainly. But that peril was now over. They had accepted her as Gladwin.

"No wonder Walton went into such ecstasies over you," continued K. K. enthusiastically. "Baines is a pretty clever chap at make-up, but he can't hold a candle to this."

"Your make-up is so jolly good that I can't take my eyes off you," said Deeks.

"Well, I wish you would take them off," said Muriel promptly. "We're coming into the village, and people will think you're awfully rude. You've got to look upon me as a real girl, don't forget. You wouldn't stare so unmannerly if I were."

"That's right enough," said K. K. "Control yourselves, you asses. Oh, my dear old sweethearts! This jape is going to be ten times better than I ever dreamed of. Not a chap at St. Frank's will guess the truth."

Muriel smiled mischievously.

"I think I can make them believe I'm a girl," she said, with a chuckle.

"That voice of yours!" put in Goffin. "It is a girl's voice—and the most topping girl's voice I've ever heard!"

"Can't you dry up?" asked Muriel. "What's the good of my getting up in this rig-out unless I can carry it off? I don't want to boast, but ever since I've been quite small



Jokes from readers wanted for this feature! If you know a good rib tickler send it along now—and win a prize! A handsome watch will be awarded each week to the sender of the best joke; all other readers whose efforts are published will receive a pocket wallet or a penknife. Address your jokes to "Smilers," Nelson Lee Library, 5, Carmelite Street, London, E.C.4.

WHAT A WATCH!

Bertie: "Sailors must be very tiny, dad."

Father: "Indeed! What makes you think that?"

Bertie: "Well, it says in this book that a sailor fell asleep on his watch."

(B. Reedman, 48, St. Margaret's Road, Peterborough, has been awarded a penknife.)

STICKY!

He was hopelessly lost on the moors in the thick fog. Imagine his joy on seeing a post with a sign on it. He laboriously climbed up the post, struck a match, and read:

"Wet paint."

(B. Windley, The Corner House, Broomfield Road, Chelmsford, has been awarded a pocket wallet.)

A PLEASANT CHAT.

Judge: "Now, just what passed between yourself and plaintiff?"

Defendant: "Well, your honour, there were two pairs of fists, one turnip, a dozen bricks, and a lump of coal."

(A. Hooper, 18, Oxford Road, Islington, N.1, has been awarded a penknife.)

A GREAT HELP.

Small Boy (watching porter trying to lift an enormous trunk): "Can I help you?"

Porter: "What can you do?"

Small Boy: "Well, I can grunt while you lift."

(W. Bryant, 13, Chester Road, Felixstowe, has been awarded a pocket wallet.)

EASY MONEY!

Tommy: "I found a NELSON LEE this morning, Jack."

Jack: "What are you going to do with it?"

Tommy: "Read it, of course, and then let you read half of it so that you will pay me a penny to read the other half!"

(H. Gardner, 131, Winston Road, Stoke Newington, N.16, has been awarded a penknife.)

SWINDLED!

A fellow took a very dilapidated car to a garage for repair.

"How much did you pay for this 'bus?" asked the mechanic.

I've always been able to make people believe that I'm a girl, and not a boy."

Parkington and his chums did not see the hidden truth in this remark.

"We'll call in at the confectioner's and buy you a few chocolates—just for the sake of appearances," said K. K. "There might be one or two chaps in there, too, and we can start the fun."

Muriel didn't object to being supplied with some chocolates, and she readily assented. But there were no St. Frank's fellows in the confectioner's, and the girl was rather glad. She was still feeling a little at sea.

"Look here, you'd better explain things," she said, after they had left the village behind. "We shall soon be at Frank's, I suppose, and I want to know just what I've got to do."

"You're right," said K. K., nodding. "Once we get to St. Frank's we mustn't breathe a word to you that'll let the cat out of the bag. Well, all you've got to do is to be pleasant to everybody in general, and particularly pleasant to Handy."

"Who's Handy?"

"I'll point him out when we get there, although you can't mistake him—a big, hulking chap, with a rugged face, and a mop of hair."

"Something like you?" asked Muriel.

"Don't be funny, you cheeky ass!" said K. K. "He's not a bit like me! He may be as big, but he's clumsy and untidy. He falls in love with pretty girls as a matter of

course. They've only got to smile at him, or give him a word of encouragement, and he goes off his rocker."

"Would it have any effect if I winked at him?"

"Effect?" said K. K., grinning. "He'd wobble at the knees. What a scream it'll be, you chaps—seeing Handy go all soppy over a girl who isn't a girl at all! What a shriek when we tell him the real truth later!"

"He'll die of mortification," grinned Deeks. "And we shall die of laughing!"

Muriel appreciated the joke; but she felt that the positions, later, would be reversed.

CHAPTER 7.

Cousin Pamela!

"THERE'S one thing I want to know," said Muriel. "In that letter of yours to Walton you said something about making somebody jealous. How does that work in?"

If K. K. had had any remaining doubts—which he hadn't—this remark would have dispelled them.

"I've been telling you," said K. K. "Handy is frightfully susceptible, and as it's my birthday, some of the Moor View girls are coming to my party. Moor View is a girls' school just up the road."

"Here, I say!" exclaimed Muriel, apparently startled. "Is that quite safe? I

"As a matter of fact," replied the owner, "a friend gave it to me for nothing."

The garage man shook his head. "You've been swindled!" he said.

(W. Cox, 29, Gospel End, Sedgley, Nr. Dudley, Staffs, has been awarded a pocket wallet.)

HE KNEW!

Morning lessons began with a spelling test.

"Now then, Willie," said the teacher.

"Spell 'felt.'"

"F-e-l-t," replied the young scholar.

"Correct," praised teacher. "And what is felt, Willy?"

"Father's slipper," replied the young boy mournfully.

(Madge Heywood, "Madgecroft," Toothill Lane, Batley, Yorks, has been awarded a penknife.)

GENEROUS.

An Aberdonian shoemaker went to his lawyer about his will. He instructed his legal adviser as follows:

"I'm leaving two thousand to Willie Tamson at Inverskin. He used to be an apprentice with



THE OPTIMIST!

First steeplejack: "I'll jump you across 'ere for a tanner, Bill."

Second steeplejack: "Righto! An' the loser pays for a swell tea as well."

H. Wright, 222, Warmwells Lane, Marchay, Nr. Derby, has been awarded a handsome watch.)

me, ye ken. I'm leaving fifteen hundred to Jock McTavish at Killmarnock, anither of my apprentices, and five hundred to——"

"Wait a moment," gasped the lawyer, "Surely you haven't all that money to leave?"

"Money!" said the shoemaker. "Who's talking about money? It's boot tacks."

(R. McCoombs, 42, Agate Street, Canning Town, E.16, has been awarded a pocket wallet.)

LOCAL KNOWLEDGE.

The motorist was lost. Before him stretched three roads. Noticing a yokel approaching, he pulled up his car and questioned him.

"Can you tell me where these roads lead?" he inquired.

"Oh, aye," said the countryman slowly. "That road goes to my 'ouse, t'other do go to Varmer Brown's and this 'un keeps going straight on."

(A. Lloyd, 26, Bedesman's Place, Bedford, has been awarded a penknife.)

mean, having these real girls mixing up with me?"

"You'll be as safe as houses," promised K. K. "With this make-up, they'll accept you as one of themselves without a murmur. The main idea is for you to 'fall' for Handy, and make him 'fall' for you—which will be as easy as falling off a form. Handy's particular girl chum is Irene Manners, and I want her to be jealous."

"Why? Have you got anything against her?"

"Not at all. I'm only doing this to get a laugh on Handy," explained K. K. "Handy swore that nothing on earth could make Irene jealous. I just want to see what'll happen when you get busy on him! Poor old Irene will go as green as a June apple!"

"Look out!" said Goffin suddenly. "We've turned the bend, and there are one or two chaps hanging about the gates."

"Yes, from this minute we've got to act our parts," said K. K. "Don't forget that your name is Pamela, and that mine's Kirby."

"Hadn't you better take my arm?" asked Muriel. "It would look more cousinly, wouldn't it? But don't forget—no kissing!"

"You may look as pretty as a picture, Pam, old girl, but knowing the inner facts as I do I'm taking no chances," promised K. K. dryly. "I wouldn't kiss you for a quid!"

Muriel inwardly chuckled. Little did K. K. realise what a chance he was missing!

Arm-in-arm, they arrived in the gateway, Deeks and Goffin near by. Nobody was near the gates at the moment, but groups of fellows were dotted about in the Triangle. K. K. waved a hand towards the imposing school buildings.

"Here you are, Pam," he said proudly. "This is St. Frank's. Not a bad old pile, eh?"

Muriel gazed with the requisite admiration.

"What a wonderful old place," she said enthusiastically. "And you live here, Kirby? You work here and play here? I think you're terribly lucky. Which is your own particular House?"

"Over here—the Ancient House," said K. K., with more pride than ever. "The finest House in the school. These others may look very much the same, but they can't hold a candle to the Ancient House."

He noticed that heads had been turning for some little time, and all eyes were now upon them. Without any appearance of deliberately doing so, he drifted towards Nipper and Archie Glenthorne and Travers, who were chatting near the fountain.

"Oh, hallo, you chaps," he said, as though he had suddenly noticed them. "Pam, meet some of the fellows in my Form. This is my cousin, Pamela—the girl I was speaking about this morning."

"Awfully pleased to meet you," said Nipper, raising his cap.

An epidemic of cap-raising followed. Other juniors drifted up as though drawn by a magnet. One look at Muriel was enough. She was a stunner. They wondered how K. K. could possess such a pretty cousin.

Archie Glenthorne was beaming upon the fair visitor, and now he turned his monocle in K. K.'s direction.

"Allow me, dear old scream, to take charge of Cousin Pamela," he said brightly. "A spot or two of doing the sights wouldn't come amiss, what? I mean to say, I'm absolutely on hand to tackle the good old job."

"Thanks all the same, Archie, but I'll show Pamela the sights myself," replied K. K. "She's looking at a few now," he added coolly.

"Good gad! You're not referring to me, by any chance?"

"You and the other Old-Timers," nodded Parkington. "My cousin will have to go a long way before she sees any funnier sights than you Old-Timers!"

Nipper smiled twistedly.

"Perhaps your big, red-headed cousin hasn't explained to you that we're sort of rivals, Miss Pamela?" he asked. "We say all sorts of insulting things to one another, but they don't mean much. If it comes to a question of sights, K. K. and his two first lieutenants would want a lot of beating."

Muriel glanced at K. K. and Deeks and Goffin.

"They would," she agreed promptly. "When they met me at the station I wondered what freak show they had come from. I was prepared for my cousin, of course—so he wasn't so much of a shock—but his two friends rather bowled me over."

There were many chuckles from the Old-Timers. This ripping girl was not only exceedingly pretty, but she possessed a sense of humour. K. K. grinned sheepishly, but inwardly he writhed. Deeks and Goffin promised the disguised Gladwin a severe bumping later—in their own thoughts. It was like his beastly sauce to take advantage of this situation to poke fun at them. They couldn't retaliate without giving the whole show away. Muriel was beginning to thoroughly enjoy herself. Her position was unique. She could be as frank as she pleased, and the japers would be helpless.

"Come along—I'll take you indoors and show you my study," said K. K. suddenly. "You'd like to see my study, wouldn't you, Pam?"

"Rather," said the girl. "But I'd prefer to see the footer field and the gymnasium, and places like that."

"I'll show you them later," replied K. K. grimly.

He wanted to get this disguised Carltonian alone for a moment! He wanted to tell him, straight from the shoulder, that if any jokes were to be made, they were to be made against the Old-Timers. The sooner that point was settled, the better. He took Muriel by the arm, and at the same time he dug his knuckles forcibly into her back.

"Oh!" she gasped, startled.

"Odds jumps and shocks!" ejaculated Archie. "Has something bitten you, old thing? I mean to say—"

"I—I think my cousin gripped my arm rather too tightly," said Muriel, recovering herself. "He's such a rough fellow," she added, beaming upon K.K. sweetly. "I forgive him, of course."

"Let's go to my study," said K.K. hurriedly.

He fairly pulled Muriel away from the crowd, and before they were half-way to the Ancient House steps she tried to disengage herself.

"Why can't you keep your beastly knuckles to yourself?" murmured Muriel, speaking as she thought the real Gladwin might have spoken. "You've dug a hole in my back!"

"I'll speak to you indoors!" breathed K.K. thickly.

As they were mounting the Ancient House steps Edward Oswald Handforth came out. He wasn't looking where he was going, which was no novelty for him. He was speaking over his shoulder to Church and McClure, who were following.

"Blow K.K.'s cousin!" Handy was saying. "I'm not going to waste time by hanging about here for her. Who wants to see K.K.'s cousin, anyhow? If she's anything like him, she must be a horrible sight."

Church and McClure, who could see Muriel, were horrified.

"Shush, you ass!" hissed Church in agony.

Handforth, to make matters worse, halted on the top step and faced Church. What little chance he had had of seeing Muriel was now at an end. Church and McClure could only make frantic signs to him.

"I'm not going to be shushed by you, Walter Church, or anybody else!" said Handforth aggressively. "And don't stand there gibbering like a monkey! What's the idea of all these secret signs?"

K.K. took advantage of the situation. He pressed Muriel's arm.

"This is Handy!" he whispered.

"Oh! The fellow you spoke about?"

"Yes."

"Leave him to me," whispered the girl confidently.

"You're both dotty!" Handforth was saying, regarding his mute chums in amazement. "And as for K.K.'s cousin, she's not worth bothering over. She's bound to be a gawky, awkward hulk of a girl, with a face like a door-knocker. If she's in the Parkington family, she can't help it."

"Thanks ever so much," said Muriel gently.

Handforth spun round as though he had been stung. He gazed at the vision with mingled horror and awe. Susceptible as he was to feminine beauty, this sudden sight of Muriel's loveliness knocked him cold. She looked particularly pretty as she stood at the bottom of the steps arm-in-arm with K.K. Handforth hadn't had the faintest idea of her presence until this moment. Flossie, the waitress, faded into insignificance against this radiant dream of young girlhood. For a moment or two, indeed, Hand-

forth could only goggle. Then he pulled himself together, and the colour flooded to his face.

"I—I say!" he babbled. "I'm awfully sorry, you know! I didn't know anybody was here."

"You ought to be sorry, too," said K.K. indignantly. "This is my cousin Pam. What do you mean, you insulting rotter, by saying that she looks gawky and awkward, and that she's got a face like a door-knocker?"

Handforth nearly fainted. He had only just realised that those rash words of his referred to this vision, and that she had overheard them! Church and McClure waited dumbly for the fireworks. Extraordinarily enough, however, the girl didn't seem at all offended.

"Aren't you going to introduce me, Kirby?" she asked. "Isn't this boy one of your friends?"

"Well, yes, in a way," replied K.K. reluctantly. "Handy, meet my cousin Pamela. Pam, this is Handforth, of the Remove. But he's got to apologise for those rotten things he said before he goes any further."

"By George, rather!" gasped Handforth. "I apologise——"

"But why?" asked Muriel sweetly. "There's no need to."

"Didn't—didn't you hear what I said about you?" asked Edward Oswald, gazing at her beauty with open admiration.

"But you hadn't met me then," said the girl. "You wouldn't say the same things now, would you?"

"Great Scott, no!" replied Handforth impulsively. "I think you're marvellous! I've never seen anybody so gorgeously pretty—I—I mean— Oh, my hat!"

"Then why apologise?" asked Muriel. "It was only natural that you should picture me as something gawky and plain, considering that this boy is my cousin. You had him in your mind's eye, and you moulded me on the same framework. But Kirby is really the only one in the family who is so like a gorilla. The rest of us are quite normal."

Parkington writhed with inward fury.

"Let's—let's go to my study," he said thickly.

Handforth barred the way, however.

"By George, that's awfully sporting of you, Miss Pamela," he said eagerly. "Thanks in chunks for forgiving me. There aren't many girls who would be so understanding. As you say, I only had K.K. to go on. I hope we're going to be friends."

"Of course we are," promised Muriel. "You remind me a bit of Kirby, you know," she added reflectively.

"Eh?"

"Your face and your figure," said the girl. "There's a certain similarity——"

"But—but you just called K.K. a gorilla!" ejaculated Handforth, whilst the listening juniors chuckled with glee, voting that Cousin Pam was worth her weight in gold.

"Ah, but there's a big difference," said Muriel, her voice soft and tender. "I didn't

say you were like a gorilla, did I? You're big like Cousin Kirby, and your face is rugged and rough. But you've got that certain ruggedness which girls go crazy over. You remind me of—of the great open spaces—particularly your face."

Handforth found his heart thudding wildly. The others who were listening marvelled at this girl's nerve. Unquestionably, she was pulling Handforth's leg—and just as unquestionably, Handforth didn't know it.

"I—I say!" he burst out. "Do you really think so?"

"You'll be at my cousin's party, won't you?" asked Muriel. "Do please try to sit next to me. I shan't enjoy myself a bit if you don't."

K.K. succeeded in pulling her indoors, and Handforth was left with tumultuous feelings on the Ancient House steps. The prettiest girl he had ever seen—and she had "fallen" for him!

It was so marvellous that his brain was reeling.

CHAPTER 8.

A Cooler for the Red-Hots!

KIRBY KEEBLE PARKINGTON closed the door of Study K with a significant thud.

"You hold this door, Deeks!" he ordered. "You stand by the window,

Coffin, and keep your eyes skinned. Now, you blighter, I want a word with you!"

He glared at Muriel aggressively. Muriel herself was more than startled, although she didn't show it. She hadn't bargained for this situation, and she realised that it was tricky. At any moment it might be necessary to disclose her true identity—and she didn't want to do that.

"What's the matter?" she asked defensively. "You don't mind a bit of fun, do you? I thought you expected me to do some spoofing?"

"You can spoof the Old-Timers all you like—but not us!"

"How do I know the Old-Timers from the others?"

"You know that we three aren't Old-Timers, anyhow—and so far you've done nothing but give the Old-Timers a laugh at our expense!" replied K.K. grimly. "And you needn't keep up that sweet girlish voice in here, either!"

"I—I think I'd better!" said Muriel quickly. "I—I might get out of the way of it if I didn't. Besides, somebody might overhear. Let's go out again."

"We're going out after I've warned you that any more of your rot will mean the order of the boot," said Parkington gruffly.

Muriel suddenly realised what the real Gladwin's feelings might have been in



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these same circumstances, and she acted accordingly.

"In any case, you're a fine set of rotters!" she went on, feigning indignation. "I come here especially to help you, and you talk about giving me the boot. That's a fine return for all the trouble I'm taking!"

"We'll get along fine if you only reserve your fun for the other chaps," growled K.K. "What you said to Handy was first-class—all that stuff about his face reminding you of a wide open space. Your first remarks weren't so good. In future, my son, you stick to the point."

"We'd better be getting out again," suggested Deeks nervously. "The chaps will be wondering."

"All right—we'll go," agreed K.K. "And don't forget, Muriel, what I've told you."

"I won't forget," said the girl, relieved.

"You'd better take off your coat and your hat, too," went on K.K. "You don't want to look as if you're just going away."

Muriel shed her travelling coat, and revealed a charming, well-cut frock. She took off her hat and patted her hair automatically—K.K. & Co. looking on with grinning admiration.

"Blessed if he doesn't do it just like a real girl!" said Goffin.

Muriel remembered herself.

"I—I like to be thorough," she said hastily.

"How the dickens do you manage to make your hair look so natural?" asked Deeks, in wonder. "I'd swear it wasn't a wig."

He playfully took hold of Muriel's wavy hair at the rear and jerked at it.

"Oh!" she shrieked.

"What the dickens——" began Deeks.

It was a tricky moment, and Muriel knew it only too well.

"You silly fathead!" she said wrathfully.

"You don't think I'd come here with a loose wig, do you? This hair's stuck on, and you hurt me."

"That's a new wheeze," grinned K.K.

"So you use spirit gum, or something, to keep your giddy wig on. Well, I must say you've done the thing thoroughly."

HANDFORTH, meanwhile, was in a kind of a daze.

Church and McClure had joined some of the other Old-Timers, bent upon learning all they could about K.K.'s surprising girl cousin. Handy remained in the lobby, and a few of Muriel's words were drumming through his brain. He had the kind of face that girls went crazy over! His presence reminded that sweet young thing of the great open spaces! And she had said that all her enjoyment of K.K.'s party would be ruined unless he sat next to her!

"By George!" he breathed, when he came to himself.

He seemed to have been standing there ages, and now he moved off towards K.K.'s study, having a vague idea that the fair visitor had been taken there. He approached

slowly, wondering what excuse he could offer for butting in.

"... this hair's stuck on, and you hurt me," came the voice of K.K.'s cousin, in a tone of anger—a tone which made Handforth jump.

"... new wheeze," K.K. was saying. "... spirit gum, or something ... wig on."

Handy only heard a few disconnected words, and they meant nothing to him at the moment. He was too angered at the thought of K.K. doing anything to make that sweet girl angry. Edward Oswald braced himself and stalked up to the door.

"Can I come in?" he asked, after he had entered.

"It looks like it," said K.K. composedly. "We've just been showing Pam our study, you know."

In a subconscious way, Handforth felt that he had interrupted a tense situation. Deeks and Goffin had both jumped, and they wore scared, guilty looks. Handforth was mystified, but the fact that Muriel's eyes were upon him bereft him of all other thoughts.

"I was—I was wondering if your cousin would care to see the school?" he asked hopefully. "I mean, I'm doing nothing——"

"Thanks awfully," interrupted Muriel, running up to him and slipping her hand through his arm. "It's all right, Cousin Kirby, I'm sure this boy will look after me safely. Let's go and see the sights," she added, giving Handy's arm an affectionate hug.

"Yes, rather!" said Handforth, with gulp.

He expected K.K. to protest; but K.K. didn't. He carried Muriel off, much to his own satisfaction—and much to the satisfaction of K.K. & Co. But the two satisfactions were of a different breed.

"I hope I shan't be bothering you too much," said Muriel, as they went down the corridor. "It's really sweet of you to be so kind."

"But—but you're the one who's being sweet!" vowed Handforth stoutly.

"Do forgive me, but I don't think I caught your name," murmured the girl.

"Handforth—generally called Handy."

"Oh, but haven't you a Christian name?"

"Why, yes," said Handforth faintly.

"Two. Edward Oswald."

"Then I'm going to call you 'Ted'," said Muriel, remembering Irene's instructions. "You don't mind if I call you 'Ted,' do you?"

"Mind!" repeated Handforth, delirious with happiness. "I think it's perfectly marvellous that you should look at me at all!"

"How can I help looking at you?" she murmured. "You're so big—so strong! I do hope you'll like me a little."

Words failed the bewildered Handy. And as he triumphantly swept Muriel down the Ancient House steps he was so stunned by her nearness that he didn't see anybody in the Triangle—he didn't even know that the Moor View girls had arrived. Nipper and Travers and Fullwood and the crowd in

general watched in vague wonder. K.K.'s cousin wasn't losing much time! Nor was Handy!

K.K. & Co., who had followed, were in high glee.

"Good egg!" murmured Parkington. "The girls are here already—an hour before I expected 'em! This is where we see the balloon go up, my children! Wait until Irene spots Handy's capers."

"He's giving her plenty of cause for jealousy, anyhow," chuckled Deeks.

It Handforth had known of Irene's presence, he might have been more cautious; but he was in such a dream-like condition that he and Muriel might have been entirely alone in the world. She was grasping his arm closely as he led her off towards Inner Court, bent upon making a complete round of the sights.

Irene was standing with Doris and Marjorie close by, chatting with Travers and one or two others. But Irene only gave Handforth and Muriel one glance, and then she serenely continued her conversation. K.K., who was watching, frowned. This wasn't what he had expected. Where was that startled look he had anticipated; that flush of indignation; that frown of anger?

He waited a bit, and when Handforth emerged through Big Arch again he was "well away" with Muriel. They were laughing gaily, and their arm-in-arm grip was tighter than ever. They went off round the angle of the Modern House. K.K. saw Irene glance in that direction but still she didn't show any sign of concern.

"This is dashed funny," said K.K., disappointed.

Was it possible that Handforth was right, after all? He had said that nothing could make Irene jealous—and surely she would never have more acute cause than this? K.K. strolled over towards her and raised his cap.

"Many happy returns," chorused the girls.

"Thanks," said K.K. "I'm jolly glad you came so early, girls. This is a pleasant surprise. You'll have to meet my Cousin Pamela."

"We'd love to—when she's free," said Irene, smiling.

"That ass, Handforth, has got her in tow," said K.K. "Didn't you see them?"

"I expect K. K.'s cousin is gawky and plain, with a face like a door-knocker!" Handforth was saying—and swung round to find the object of his remarks just behind him!



"Yes, of course," replied Irene. "Your cousin seems to be an awfully pretty girl, K.K. I don't blame Ted for escorting her round."

"You—you don't blame him?" asked Parkington blankly.

"Whatever were you doing to allow him?" asked Doris. "She's your cousin, isn't she? If I were a boy, and I had a cousin like that, I wouldn't let anybody else run off with her. Ted's stolen a march on you, K.K."

"He was so keen on Pam that I hadn't the heart to deny him the pleasure," said K.K., with a sidelong glance at Irene. "You know how 'soft' he is about girls. He took one look at Pam, and he was lost."



"Good old Ted!" chuckled Irene. "Isn't that just like him?"

K.K. lost his composure for once.

"Aren't you jealous?" he asked bluntly.

"Jealous?" repeated Irene, giving him a frigid look. "What do you mean? Why should I be jealous?"

"Well, you—you don't seem to care a toss about Handy escorting my cousin over the school," said Parkington feebly.

"Why, in the name of all that's mysterious, should I care?" asked Irene, her blue eyes opening wider. "Why shouldn't Ted make friends with your cousin? Isn't she a nice girl?"

chums, who took it all with a matter-of-factness which stamped them as hardened japers.

Handforth, finding that he was out of it, decided to run indoors for a minute. He wasn't sure that his collar was clean, or that his tie was neat. It was only at such times as these he thought of these details. On the Ancient House steps he ran into Deeks and Goffin, who gave him sour looks. Deeks and Goffin were a bit fed-up. They could see no further humour in this situation.

"Out of the way, my sons!" said Handforth briskly. "What's the idea of littering up the steps? I'm in a hur .!"

"Of course," gasped K.K. "I—I didn't mean——"

"I think Ted has shown fine taste," said Irene stoutly. "As for my being jealous, I wish you wouldn't make such ridiculous remarks. Ted may be a chum of mine, but there's nothing silly about our friendship."

Kirby Keeble Parkington felt crushed. Deeks and Goffin were thoroughly disgusted. All their plans had come to nothing. Here was Irene Manners as cool and as unperturbed as ever! She didn't mind!

"What's the use?" asked Deeks tartly, as he and Goffin wandered away to the Ancient House steps. "Any chap who believes that he can understand girls is as mad as a hatter! Nobody understands girls!"

"And never will!" agreed Goffin, with a sniff.

Handforth reappeared at that moment, sailing through East Arch with Muriel. Unfortunately for his plans—for he hadn't half shown her round the school yet—K.K. descended upon him. If Irene wasn't going to be jealous, what was the good of allowing this Carlton genius to remain in Handy's company?

"Pam, old girl, I want to introduce you to some other friends of mine," said Parkington, taking her free arm. "They're girls from the Moor View School. Sorry, Handy, but I shall have to trouble you to release the clutching hand."

"Rats!" said Handforth. "I'm showing your cousin round the school."

But there was no help for it. Muriel herself disengaged her arm, and she was solemnly introduced to her own school-

"You're dashed peppy, aren't you?" asked Deeks. "I suppose you're bucked because K.K.'s precious cousin has been giving you the glad eye? My hat! K.K.'s cousin!" he added.

It wasn't so much his words, but the tone, which brought Handforth to a standstill.

"What about K.K.'s cousin?" he demanded aggressively. "If you dare to say a word against her, you rotter, I'll knock your nose into the middle of your forehead! What do you mean by saying she gave me the 'glad eye'?"

"Oh, you're a mug!" said Deeks, with a sniff. "You don't even know when your leg's being pulled. She's been deliberately flirting with you—Hi! Here, what the dickens——"

Handforth had grabbed Deeks by the collar.

"Say that again, and you won't wake up until next Saturday!" roared the leader of Study D. "Pamela's the nicest girl I've ever met! And you're either going to eat your words, or——"

"Whoa!" gurgled Deeks desperately. "Hold on, Handy! Leave me alone! Pamela's not a girl at all!"

Handforth was so surprised that he postponed his violence.

"Not a girl?" he repeated. "You silly idiot——"

"Don't, be an ass!" interrupted Deeks. "It's a jape. K.K.'s cousin is a Carlton chap, in disguise. A chap named Gladwin. Came over here especially to pull your leg, and to make Irene jealous. Cousin Pamela is a boy!"

Handforth nearly sagged at the knees. He didn't believe it for a moment, and his knees only sagged because he was staggered that Deeks should make such an absurd and preposterous statement. Goffin felt rather guilty about this slip of Deeks'. The time wasn't ripe for Handy to be told—for once Handy knew the whole school would know. However, Handforth was obviously unconvinced. He went indoors, so startled that he hadn't even punched Deeks' nose; and Deeks and Goffin thought that no harm had been done.

But Edward Oswald's memory was at work—and events, from that moment, were not to go quite according to K.K.'s programme. Parkington had planned all sorts of interesting developments where the disguised Gladwin could be utilised. But Parkington didn't know that Deeks had "spilt the beans"; neither did he know that a heavily-laden double-decker bus was speeding ever nearer to St. Frank's!

CHAPTER 9.

Rough on Muriel!

IN Study D, Handforth paused as he was setting his tie straight. He was thinking of those things that Deeks had said.

Pamela a Carlton chap in disguise! What rot! Why, anybody with half an eye could tell that she was a real girl—and a

stunning girl at that! There wasn't a fellow breathing who could act with such consummate perfection.

He remembered the grip of her small hand on his arm; the softness of her voice; the sparkle in her dark eyes; the perfume of lily of the valley—or was it wallflower?—which clung about her. And this topping girl was no girl at all, but a boy in disguise! Of all the idiotic piffle——

It was at this point that Handforth jumped. From the very first he had thought it amazing that K.K.'s cousin—a perfect stranger to him—should say such sweet things to him. It was natural, in a way, that any girl should like him; but, after all, Pamela had been a bit swift. Was it possible that—— Then another thought hit him so squarely amidships that he canted to starboard, and clung to the mantelpiece for support.

He remembered that scrap of conversation he had heard through the door of Study K. Pamela had been saying that her hair was stuck on, and that somebody had hurt her. Stuck on! A significant phrase. Again, K.K. had said something about spirit gum, and now that Handforth searched his memory he recalled that there had been some mention of a wig.

All these facts formed a significant train of evidence. Handforth tottered afresh. Great guns! Was it possible—horror of horrors!—that he had made a frightful ass of himself? What would happen when the Red-Hots disclosed their jape?

Handforth's mood suddenly changed. That girl was a Carlton chap! He drew himself up grimly and charged out of the study. He'd soon settle this!

His first sensation of incredulity was nullified by the recollection that this sort of trick had been played before—and played successfully. A fellow named Graham, of the River House School, had once spoofed everybody at St. Frank's by appearing in girl's attire. Even Reggie Pitt, of the West House, had done it. The thing wasn't an impossibility at all.

As luck would have it—and bad luck for Muriel—he ran into her at the corner of the passage. What was more, she was alone. Handforth, always impulsive, seized her arm in a firm grip, and a spasm of doubt shook him as he felt that slim, unmuscular limb.

"Oh, don't!" cried the girl. "You hurt me, Ted!"

"Perhaps I hurt you as much as K.K. did when he pulled your hair?" retorted Handforth, in a rush.

She looked at him with widely-opening eyes.

"Oh, no! It's no good giving me that innocent look!" went on Handforth grimly.

"I've bowled you out, my lad! You're not a girl at all—you're a spoofer from Carlton!"

Muriel was dumbfounded, and she didn't know what to say.

"How—how did you know?" she managed to ask. "Who told you?"

This was enough for Handforth—it was a direct admission.

"So you confess it, eh?" he said thickly. "By George! What a chump I've been to let you lead me on! You're going through it, my lad! First of all, we'll have that wig off!"

He made a grab at her hair, seized a handful and pulled. Muriel shrieked. Her shingled hair was thick, and Handforth's grip was powerful.

"Don't!" she cried. "What will people think if they see you?"

"I don't care what they think!" retorted Handforth. "I'll jolly well tell 'em the truth about you! K.K. said that wig was stuck on pretty hard, and he was right, by George! So you're a girl, are you?" he added ominously. "A pretty, soft-voiced, dark-eyed damsel! All right! I'll give you something to do that no girl has ever done before, and we'll see how you like it!"

Muriel was terrified—as well she might be.

"Listen!" she panted. "I am a spoofer, I'll admit, but I'm not a boy! I'm one of the Moor View girls——"

"That's good!" broke in Handforth with a roar. "Just what a Carlton fat-head would say! Why, you silly ass, you've given yourself away more than ever!"

"But I am a girl!" insisted Muriel frantically. "I am! Can't you see?"

"I can see a Carlton ass in a jolly clever make-up!" retorted Handforth. "As for that Moor View fib of yours I've got you waxed. Why, you chump, I know every girl at Moor View—by sight, anyhow! So don't try any more of those whoppers on me."

He pulled her forcibly down the passage, her resistance useless.

"If you don't let me go I'll scream for help!" she panted.

"Oh, will you?" growled Edward Oswald.

He wasn't going to be swindled like that. With a sudden movement, he lifted her in his arms and ran towards the rear door. It occurred to him that this Carlton chap must

be frightfully skinny, for he carried Muriel with ease. He succeeded in getting to the garage unobserved. He bundled her down in front of his Morris Minor, and pushed some dirty rags into her hands.

"Now then," he ordered, "clean this car!"

Muriel's first sensation was one of relief. She had feared something much worse than this. But perhaps this was only the beginning.

"Thank goodness nobody saw us," she said breathlessly. "There's still time for me to explain, if you'll only listen. I tell you I am a girl—really a girl. Look at my hair closely if you don't believe me."

"I've had enough of your rot!" retorted Handforth. "You're not fooling me with that wig any more. Clean this car! To start with, you'll crawl underneath it and wipe all the oil off the crank case."

He was enjoying himself. He'd teach this Carlton spoofer something!

"I won't!" panted Muriel. "You can't make me——"

"I'll give you ten seconds," interrupted Edward

Oswald. "Are you going to crawl under this car of your own accord, or shall I push you under?"

Muriel crawled under. The look in Handforth's eyes warned her that he was in no mood for being trifled with, and she had no desire to be bundled unceremoniously under the car by force.

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"Somehow, the jape wasn't going so well now. With dirty oil dripping into her face, she attempted to clean the crank-case. The car was only a small one, and there was scarcely room for her to move.

"You can come out now," said Handforth, his voice more cheerful. "There's a lot of oil on the cylinder-head here, and you can clean it off."

She crawled out with relief, and Handforth roared with laughter. Her dainty frock was ruined, her hair was tangled, and her pretty face was smudged with dirt and oil.

"Good egg!" chuckled Handforth. "When you've finished this job I'll take you along and show you to the chaps."

Muriel was beyond anger. She realised, too, that it wouldn't be fair to be angry. This burly junior's mistake was a natural one. She bent over the opened bonnet and commenced to clean the upper part of the engine.

"Do it thoroughly, or I'll swipe you," ordered Handforth. "I'll teach you Carlton japers to come here with your giddy larks!"

"I wish you'd listen to me!" said Muriel, as she worked. "I don't blame you for what you've done, but I'm not a boy—honestly. I can explain the whole thing—"

"Dry up, and get on with that work," said Handforth, giving her a push and causing her head to proceed farther into the interior. "The only explanation I want is from K.K. He's had a hand in this pie."

"Oh, please!" pleaded Muriel suddenly. "My hair's caught in something. When you pushed me just now—"

"Rats! If your hair's caught, take your wig off."

"Oh, why are you so stubborn?" cried Muriel. "Can't you see it's caught? Even if it is a wig, please help me."

She tried to pull herself free, but quite a lot of her hair had got entrapped between the fan and the fan-belt. Handforth gave a grunt of impatience and bent over.

"Serves you right for sticking that wig on," he commented.

He bent over the radiator and examined the entangled hair closely. He pulled it, and was startled to find that the girl's scalp looked genuine. He ran his fingers down the hair and felt the scalp itself. It was warm! Something seemed to stop dead in Handforth's interior.

His brain was numbed, too. He could only stare at that hair in dumbfounded stupefaction. Partially recovering himself, he freed the entangled strands. Then, as Muriel raised herself upright, he took her head in his hands and gave it a close inspection. He fell back a pace, all the colour leaving his face.

"It's—it's real!" he stammered. He fell against the car limply. The fearful devastating truth hit him like a blow between the eyes. "Oh, my only sainted aunt!" he breathed. "Then—then you are a girl!"

His distress was so evident that she smiled ruefully.

"Well, I'm glad you've found it out at last," she said. "Better late than never, you know. At least, I escaped that swipe."

"But—but look what I've done to you!" groaned Handforth. "You'll never forgive me for this! Oh, I'm most awfully sorry! I—I never dreamed—"

"Don't be silly," interrupted the girl. "Perhaps there hasn't been much real harm done, after all. But it's a pity you didn't listen to me at first."

He listened now. He heard about the letter which had miscarried, and he heard how Irene & Co. had plotted to turn it to their own account.

"You see, I'm a new girl at Moor View," said Muriel. "I only came on Saturday, and the other girls thought this would be a good way of introducing me to you St. Frank's fellows. That's why you didn't believe me when I told you the truth."

"I was a blithering idiot not to see for myself," said Handforth, full of contrition. "Any fool with half an eye could see that you were a real girl, and a jolly pretty girl at that."

"I'm afraid I'm not very pretty now," said Muriel, laughing. "How can I get indoors without being seen? If only I can get to Vera's room, I can get cleaned up and borrow one of her frocks."

"Oh, I say, are you game enough to keep this secret?" asked Handforth breathlessly. "I say, you're an awful good sport, you know! You've taken it like a brick."

Luckily, Muriel was able to run across West Square without being seen, and once she had got into Mr. and Mrs. Wilkes' private quarters the rest was easy.

And Handforth, going indoors to get himself tidied, realised to the full what a true sport Muriel Finch really was. How easily she could have made him the laughing stock of the entire school—and yet how generously she had forgiven him!

CHAPTER 10.

A Few More Guests Drop In!

"YOUR cousin seems to have vanished, K.K.," remarked Nipper, as he strolled up to Parkington in the Triangle.

K.K. was chatting agreeably with Vera Wilkes and Irene Manners, and he glanced round with a grin.

"I expect Handy's trotted her off again," he said slyly.

Irene didn't move a hair.

"Well, it's about time Handy gave some of us chaps a chance," said Nipper. "Your cousin's too nice to be collared exclusively by Handy."

"You'd be surprised how nice she is," replied K.K. genially. "In fact, I can safely promise you that you'll get the surprise of your lives before long. Pamela is a caution."



Under the impression that Muriel was a boy, Handforth watched his victim at work under the car, and he laughed uproariously when she emerged covered with grease and oil.

Travers, who had strolled up, gave K.K. a curious look.

"Is there something about her we don't know of?" he asked.

"Just you wait a bit," grinned Parkington. "But if Pam doesn't prove the sensation of my party, you can call me a goat. By the way, I shall have to be getting indoors pretty soon. It's getting towards tea-time, and there's a lot to be done."

"While you're doing it, I want to find your cousin," said Travers. "Potts and I want to show her our new study furniture, and to tell her how that ass Handy set fire to the study a fortnight ago."

"My dear chap, you can tell her anything you like," replied K.K. obligingly. "And if you find Handy, you'll probably find her. I really believe that Handy's smitten. But I'm afraid he's in for a big shock later on," he added vaguely.

"Mightn't somebody else be in for a shock?" asked Irene sweetly.

"I don't understand," said K.K.

"You wouldn't—but you will soon!"

And Irene, laughing, went off with Vera who, for some reason, seemed to be on the point of exploding. Kirby Keeble Parkington was mystified, and a sense of uneasiness crept over him. The first suspicion that something had gone wrong crossed his mind. These girls, ever since they had arrived, had been acting strangely—almost as though they were bottling up some huge joke. The complacent way in which Irene had watched

Handforth's "flirtation" was significant in itself. However, K.K. was not allowed to dwell on the subject, for Langley and Bonner, of Study M, called his attention.

"Come and look at this, K.K.," sang out Bonner. "There's a whacking great motor-bus coming up the lane."

"What of it?"

"It's filled with chaps—and it seems to me they're all wearing Carlton caps," said Bonner excitedly.

"What rot!" said K.K.

At the same time, he recognised that Bonner ought to know a Carlton cap when he saw one; for Bonner, like K.K., was an ex-Carltonian. The leader of the Red-Hots started strolling over towards the gates.

The motor-bus in question appeared at that moment, and turned lumberingly into the Triangle. K.K. halted in his tracks, staring.

"What's—what's this?" he asked feebly.

But he knew without being told. The yelling, cheering mob on the huge double-decker motor-bus was known to him. He recognised a dozen faces in the first glance—Walton, Mallins, Foster, and lots of others. The Carlton Fourth! Not merely a few members of it, but the whole crowd!

"Many happy returns, K.K.!" went up a general chorus.

"Ye gods and little tadpoles!" gasped Parkington. "Who the dickens asked this mob to turn up?"

Deeks and Goffin had joined him now, and they were staring with equal amazement. Hitherto they had been afraid to approach him, fearing his wrath upon hearing of Deeks' indiscretion. However, they had just seen Handforth and "Pamela" together again, and the manner in which he had been fussing over her seemed to indicate to them that he had taken no notice of Deeks' revelation.

"It's the crowd!" said Deeks blankly. "Well I'm blessed!"

William Westbury Walton pushed through the crowd and grabbed K.K.'s hand. In the meantime, the other Carltonians spread over the Triangle, and the St. Frank's fellows looked on in wonder.

"Well, dash my eyes!" said Walton enthusiastically. "K.K., you old blighter, how goes it? We've come, you see."

"Yes, I can see that," replied K.K. "Awfully pleased to see you, old man."

"We got your letter, and we've brought the whole crowd, as you suggested," said Walton. "I want you to meet Gladwin, too—that chap I told you about."

Gladwin, a slim, small-featured, fair-haired youngster, came forward, grinning.

"What's the idea?" asked K.K. wonderingly. "Trying to spoof me the instant you get here. You know jolly well that Gladwin came on the two-twenty-seven train."

"He couldn't have done, because he's here," replied Walton. "And I must say, K.K., that you don't seem particularly pleased. You seem surprised. Dash it all, you were expecting us, weren't you? I sent you a wire."

"Expecting you!" yelled K.K. "Why the dickens should I expect you? I never invited you here—although you're thundering welcome, just the same."

"Never invited us!" ejaculated Walton. "What about your letter?"

"That was only about Gladwin."

"You're mad! You never even mentioned Gladwin's name in the letter!" retorted Walton.

He produced the letter in justification of his statement. K.K. looked at it like a fellow in a dream.

"But—but this wasn't for you at all!" he gasped, something of the truth dawning upon him. "I sent this to Irene!"

"I don't know anything about your Irenes, but I do know that this letter was addressed to me," said Walton. "What have you been having a game at, K.K.? Aren't we wanted here? It's a bit thick—"

"Wait!" said Parkington, horrified.

The full truth had come to him. If this letter had been received by Walton, then it stood to reason that Walton's letter must have gone to Irene! Like a flash, he understood the Moor View girls' mysterious behaviour since their arrival. They had been up to something! His gaze fell upon Gladwin, and he experienced a fresh shock.

"This—this is Gladwin, the actor chap?" he asked.

"Of course."

"Then who's the girl who came on that train, wearing a red rose?" asked Deeks frantically. "At least, not a girl, but a chap in disguise."

"You're talking double Dutch," said Walton, bewildered.

"Listen, sweetheart, something's gone wrong," said K.K. tensely. "The letter I really wrote to you went astray. I asked you to send Gladwin here dressed as a girl and calling herself 'Pamela Parkington,' the idea being to spoof the chaps."

"First we've heard of it," said Walton.

"Of course it is—but here's the point," continued K.K. "Pamela Parkington arrived—red rose and all. She called herself Gladwin to us in private, and made out that she'd come from Carlton."

Walton whistled.

"It seems to me," he said, "that you've been making a mess of things. We get here to find that we're not really invited, and that you were expecting Gladwin only. You ought to be more careful, old horse. Somebody's been having a nice old game with you!"

"I know it," said K.K. sadly. "And I know who worked it."

He was looking at Irene & Co., who were approaching. "Cousin Pam" was with them—curiously enough in a different frock—and all the girls were finding it impossible to conceal the merriment in their eyes.

"Oh, by the way, K.K.," said Irene, very sweetly, "I think you made a mistake when you introduced this chum of ours. Let me introduce her again. K.K., this is Muriel Finch, a new girl at Moor View."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The other girls could contain themselves no longer, and they shrieked with laughter. Parkington made a gurgling noise in his throat.

"This is my birthday, all right," he said at last. "No wonder we thought this make-up was so marvellous. I can't expect you ever to forgive us for all the things we said to you—"

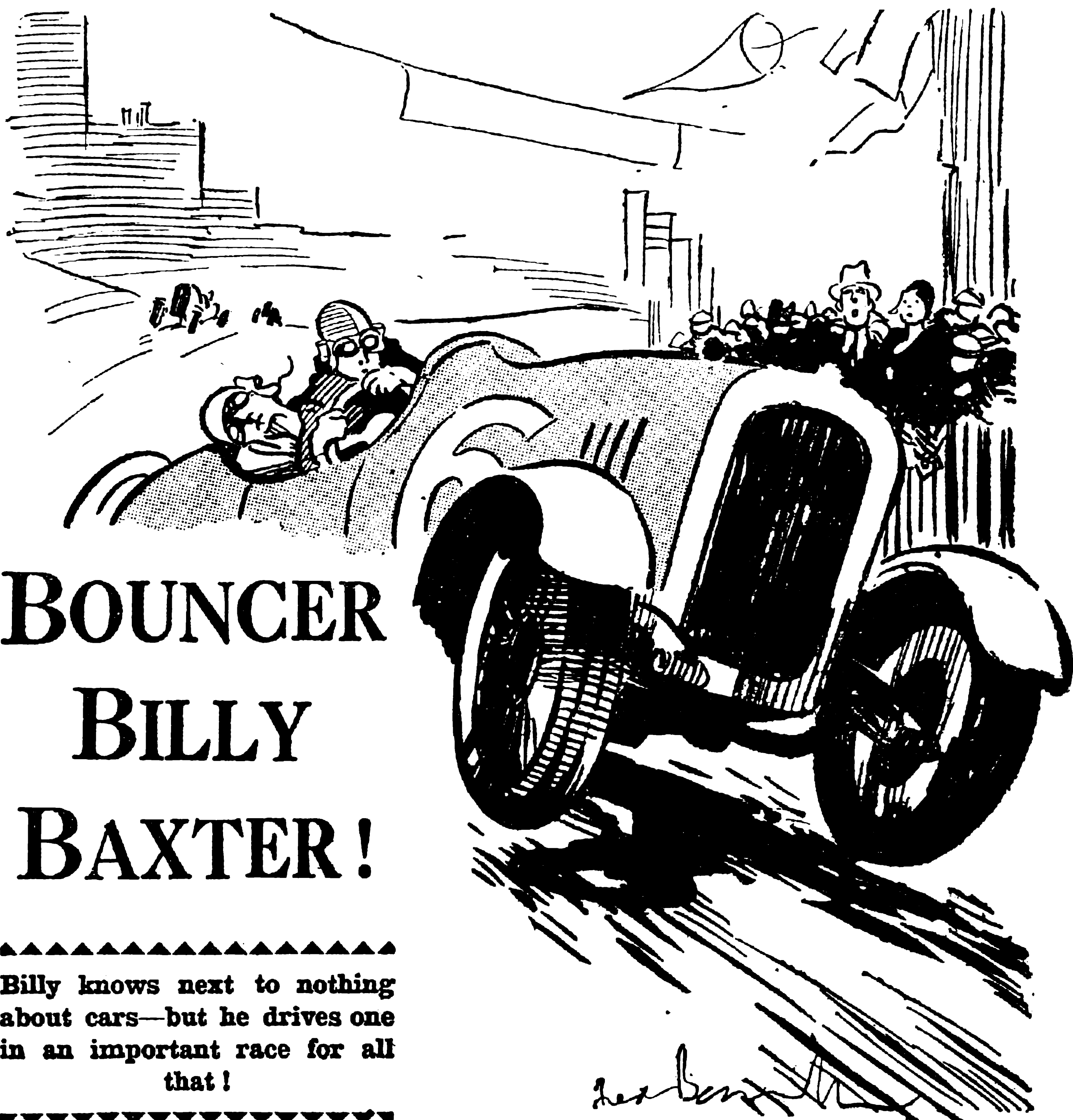
"You were forgiven long ago," laughed Muriel.

THE Remove came nobly to the rescue when it understood the position. It wasn't the Carlton Fourth's fault that it was there, and something had to be done. K.K. hadn't provided for such a crowd, so there was a big whip round and a lavish, impromptu feed was celebrated in the Lecture Hall—Kirby Keeble Parkington being the host, and Muriel Finch the guest of honour.

So his birthday party was a success, after all—and it was a birthday he wasn't likely to forget for a long, long time!

THE END.

(Next week's rollicking long complete yarn featuring the cheery Chums of St. Frank's is entitled: "Travers' Trouble 'Treasure!'" Don't miss it, lads.)



BOUNCER BILLY BAXTER!

**Billy knows next to nothing
about cars—but he drives one
in an important race for all
that!**

Billy Drives a Car!

“LOOKS as if Fatty has something on his mind, Billy,” remarked Ginger Jones, with a grin. “Maybe that rich Australian uncle of his has died at last.”

He and Billy Baxter were walking along the High Street at the time, and they had just spotted Fatty Hart coming in their direction. And Fatty certainly looked pleased about something. He was so swelled with importance that his waistcoat buttons were threatening to fly off at any moment.

"Hallo, boys!" he greeted them, in what he imagined was an off-hand manner such as Billy Baxter usually adopted. "Nice weather we're having lately, ain't it?"

"Stop your fooling, Fatty," advised Billy

Baxter coldly, for he felt that Fatty was going to poach on his preserves by boasting about something. "Get it off your chest."

Fatty's jaw fell.

"How do you know, Billy?" he asked disappointedly. "Has somebody been telling you?"

"We're good at guessing," explained Billy. "Come on. Out with it all, Fatty."

Assured that his great news was not yet known to his friends, and that it would be his privilege to spring a surprise on them, Fatty recovered some of his high manner.

"I suppose you know about the motor road-race on Saturday?" he inquired carelessly, and was rewarded with nods of assent. "Well, my cousin Tom is driving in **that** race. He's living with us now!"

"Get away!" cried Ginger Jones admiringly. "Is that right, Fatty?"

"It's a positive fact," said Fatty stoutly. He was rather disappointed, though, for contrary to his hopes, Billy Baxter was showing no signs of astonishment and envy. In fact, Billy was taking the news so calmly that it was with some difficulty that he managed to suppress a yawn.

"Is that all?" he said in that nonchalant manner which Fatty had tried to assume. "I thought you were going to tell us something really exciting. Why, I've never heard of your cousin Tom before, and I know a lot about motor-racing. That race on Saturday is a sure thing for my old friend Josh Dunning."

Fatty and Ginger gazed at their pal in a way that gave no doubt about their complete surprise. And no wonder. For who hadn't heard of Josh Dunning? He was a crack driver, a record smasher, the most famous racing driver in the country. And here was Billy Baxter claiming him as his old friend!

"Do you know Josh Dunning, Billy?" asked Fatty hoarsely.

Billy laughed scornfully.

"Know Josh Dunning? Of course I do! Wasn't it me who showed him the proper way to hold the steering-wheel? That's the whole secret of motor-racing. If you know how to hold the steering-wheel properly the rest is so simple——"

"Garn!" interrupted the disbelieving Ginger Jones. "If you know so much about cars, why didn't you tell us before?"

This was an awkward question to answer, and Billy, with a feeling that perhaps he had bitten off more than he could chew, contented himself with shrugging his shoulders.

"All right, Ginger," he said. "If that's how you feel about it we'll say no more."

The three pals continued on their way along the High Street in silence. Billy's attitude had succeeded in raising doubts in Ginger, while Fatty, though disappointed that he could not lord it over his pals, was finding it hard not to believe Billy.

After all, the mere fact that Billy hadn't mentioned his motor-racing prowess before wasn't proof that he knew nothing about it. For Billy was always springing some surprisingly new accomplishment on his friends.

They had gone about fifty yards along the street when suddenly Fatty Hart uttered an exclamation and pointed a trembling finger across the road. Following the direction of his finger, Billy and Ginger saw a smart-looking two-seater pulling up outside a barber's shop. From it descended a young, cheerful-faced man.

"See who that is?" said Fatty excitedly, as the young man passed into the shop. "That's Josh Dunning!"

"Of course it is," put in Billy Baxter, recovering quickly from the shock. "Didn't you see him nod to me?"

But neither Fatty nor Ginger had seen Josh Dunning nod to Billy Baxter, and they had been watching the racing motorist pretty closely. This caused Ginger to gloat. It wasn't often that he got Billy into a position so weak that there was no way of wriggling out of it, but it seemed as if he had succeeded this time.

"Is that so, Billy?" said Ginger in his most dangerous voice. "He nodded to you, did he? And he's a great friend of yours, is he? And you can drive a car, can you? Well, prove it!"

"How?" asked Billy, wondering what was on Ginger's mind.

Ginger pointed to the two-seater.

"Take me and Fatty for a run in Josh Dunning's car!"

This was a staggering blow to Billy, and some seconds passed before he recovered sufficiently to protest against such an unfair demand.

"Don't be a fathead, Ginger," he said. "Josh has no time for joy-riding. He's probably in a hurry."

Ginger grinned.

"Well, he'll be at least two minutes in the barber's shop, and I only want a short run. Just to prove that Josh is your friend and that you can drive a car."

It was the triumphant grin on Ginger's face rather than the challenge in his voice that roused Billy.

"Oh, come on, then!" he said, and to the great surprise of Ginger and the great joy of Fatty, he headed towards Josh Dunning's car.

What Billy Baxter knew about driving a motor-car wouldn't have filled a page in a small note-book, but he had a hazy notion that you pressed switches and pulled levers. And with Fatty and Ginger tucked into Josh Dunning's car beside him, he found switches and levers in plenty.

The next thing was to find the ones that worked the machine, and after experimenting a little, the car, to his own surprise, suddenly jerked forward and set off along the High Street at the casual pace of a slow-going snail.

This suited Billy all right, but Fatty and Ginger craved something more exciting. They urged Billy to put on more speed, and Billy, taking a chance with a foot lever, pressed the accelerator.

The result was disconcerting, for whereas at slow speed he had only to keep a firm grip on the wheel to steer a straight course, he now found that the car persisted in a zig-zag course from side to side of the street.

Billy tried to stop the car before he did some serious damage, but although he pressed all the switches and pulled all the levers, the machine refused to come to a halt. He managed, however, to slacken the speed, and deciding that there was nothing else for it, he mounted the pavement and brought the radiator lovingly against an electric light standard.

As the three pals were stepping out of the car, Josh Dunning himself came dashing up.

“Here, you kids!” he said irately. “What’s the idea?”

“It’s your steering gear, Josh, old man,” said Billy carelessly. “You’ve been jerking it again and loosened all the nuts.”

Thereupon Billy nodded to his pals, and, leaving the dumbfounded Josh Dunning staring blankly after them, the three friends set off rather hastily along the High Street.

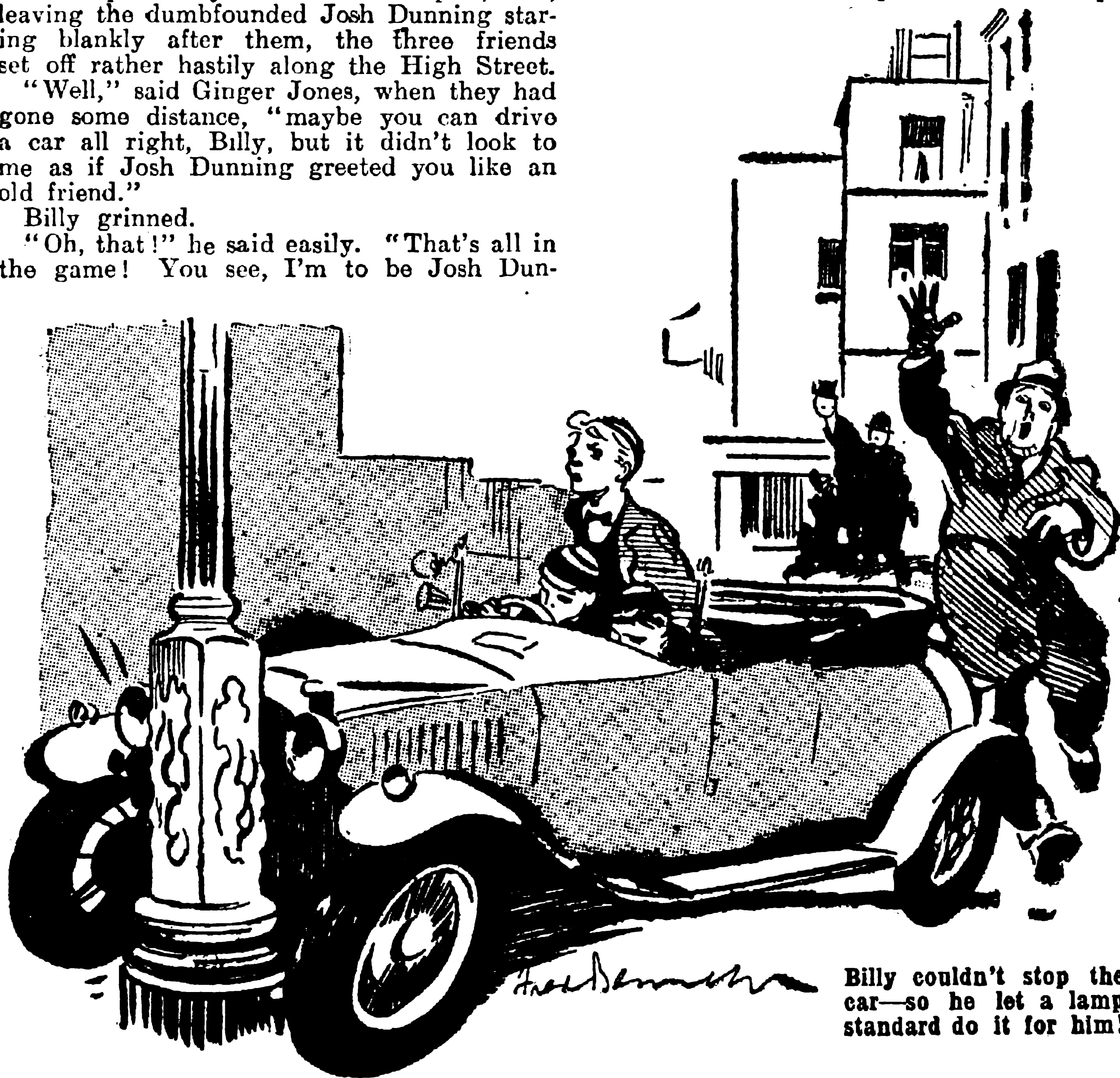
“Well,” said Ginger Jones, when they had gone some distance, “maybe you can drive a car all right, Billy, but it didn’t look to me as if Josh Dunning greeted you like an old friend.”

Billy grinned.

“Oh, that!” he said easily. “That’s all in the game! You see, I’m to be Josh Dun-

ling news to oneself, and, after all, Fatty and Ginger were only human. They just happened to mention the fact to Sam Binns on Friday afternoon to see the astonishment on his face, and by the evening the whole village knew that Billy Baxter was going to be Josh Dunning’s mechanic in the big race.

This was awkward for Billy. He had believed that he could explain to his two pals



Billy couldn't stop the car—so he let a lamp standard do it for him!

ning’s mechanic in the race on Saturday, and he doesn’t want anybody to know.”

“Why not?” asked Ginger suspiciously.

“Well, you see,” explained Billy, “the mechanic is an important man in the race, and a good one makes all the difference. If some of the others knew I was to be his mechanic, they’d probably try to dope me, or something, to injure Josh’s prospects!”

Billy, the Mechanic!

FOR once Fatty and Ginger did not immediately broadcast Billy’s latest feat, for Billy had impressed upon them the need for secrecy in case there should be an attempt to prevent him racing.

But it’s a hard thing to keep really start-

ling news to oneself, and, after all, Fatty and Ginger were only human. They just happened to mention the fact to Sam Binns on Friday afternoon to see the astonishment on his face, and by the evening the whole village knew that Billy Baxter was going to be Josh Dunning’s mechanic in the big race.

He had small hopes of succeeding, but there was nothing like haying a shot at it. Towards midday on Saturday, therefore, he made his way to the grounds where the race was to start and finish.

He had no difficulty finding the special little hut where Josh Dunning’s machine was garaged, but it was rather a problem what to do next. He couldn’t go up to Josh Dunning and ask him for a job as his mechanic. Even if he had all the qualifica-

cions, that little episode with Josh's two-seater would bar him from a job.

"I'll nose around, anyway," decided Billy hopefully. "Maybe something will turn up."

He nosed around so successfully that in a short time he managed to slip into the hut unnoticed and conceal himself in a corner behind some petrol tins and spare tyres. There he awaited developments. And things began to happen just when Billy judged it to be near the time for the race to start.

It was the arrival of Josh Dunning that caused Billy to sit up and take notice. With him came a little man whom Billy guessed to be the real mechanic. After a look over the engine Josh gave instructions.

"Give her a last glance over, Bill," he said, "and get her tuned up. I'll be back in five minutes."

"Better have a cup of tea and a sandwich first, Josh," advised the mechanic.

"Have it ready for me," said Josh, as he left the garage.

Billy saw the mechanic giving the car a careful examination, and he watched him closely as he started the engine into a soft purr. When this was done the mechanic produced a small luncheon basket, which he set upon an upturned box quite near Billy's hiding-place, and poured himself out a cup of tea from a flask.

The mechanic enjoyed his meal quietly, and with two sandwiches eaten and half of his tea consumed, he rose and sauntered casually to the door. It was at this moment that Billy saw two things which gave him an idea. The first was a coil of rope hanging on the wall, and the second was an open petrol tin on the floor.

"The very idea!" muttered Billy.

In a flash, while the mechanic's back was still turned, Billy poured one or two drops of petrol into his teacup. Then he waited hopefully.

Bill the mechanic returned slowly to his unfinished meal, and with the absent-minded air of a man whose thoughts are on other things, he lifted his cup and gulped down the contents. The effect was startling.

"Ouch!" yelled the mechanic, dropping the cup hurriedly. "I'm poisoned!"

He fell into a fit of coughing which presently had him so weak that he had to support himself against the wall.

Now was the time for Billy to act. He reached for the rope from the wall, and, making a noose, slipped it over the mechanic's head. The man was too helpless to resist, and in a matter of seconds Billy Baxter had him trussed and gagged and hidden behind the spare tyres. He found a pair of overalls, and these, together with the mechanic's goggles, he donned, and seated himself in the car.

Hardly had he done this when Josh Dunning entered the hut.

"Everything all right, Bill?" he inquired, hardly glancing at the "mechanic," but setting briskly about the tea and sandwiches.

"All set, Josh!" answered Billy gruffly, as he pretended to be tinkering about with the controls.

Billy Drives Again!

IN the meantime, Billy's schoolmates had rallied round to watch Billy in his new rôle of racing mechanic, and Fatty Hart and Ginger Jones had fought their way into excellent places near the starting-point. As each car came out and took up its allotted place they carefully scanned the occupants in search of Billy Baxter.

"Here comes Josh Dunning!" cried Fatty Hart suddenly as a long grey car marked Number Six came slowly along the track.

Neither Fatty nor Ginger, however, paid much attention to the great Josh Dunning. They were too intent on the mechanic. Was it, or was it not Billy Baxter? In a moment their doubts were set at rest. As the car passed, the goggled mechanic raised a hand in salute.

"Good old Billy!" yelled the delighted mob of Billy's friends.

"Your fame seems to have got around, Bill," grinned Josh Dunning, as he manoeuvred the car into position.

"Oh, just some kids I know, Josh," responded Billy Baxter in a deep, husky voice.

At first rather timorous, his old confidence was gradually coming back to him. He had been watching Josh Dunning closely as he drove the car, and Billy, always optimistic, felt sure that he was now capable of handling it just as expertly as the famous Josh. But what worried him was that he didn't know the duties of a racing mechanic. Suppose Josh Dunning lost the race through his ignorance?

However, the thing had been done, and there was no use having regrets at this stage. Besides, his thoughts were soon interrupted by the signal for the start of the race, and in a few minutes, the roars of the engines drowning the cheers of the crowd, the cars were off for the first lap.

The full distance of the race was one hundred miles in laps of ten miles. The first lap passed uneventfully. Josh Dunning was content with fourth position, and performed none of that reckless corner-taking for which he was famous.

Keeping his eyes and ears open, Billy Baxter managed to get a fair idea of his duties as Josh Dunning's mechanic. It seemed to be an easy job. Unless some mechanical defect occurred while they were on the road, all he had to do was to keep Josh posted about how the others were running. Billy found this so simple that before long he was giving Josh Dunning advice.

"Shove her up another five, Josh!" he shouted as they entered the sixth lap. "Number Eleven is moving up steadily."

Too late Billy realised that in the excitement of the moment he had spoken in his

natural voice. He hoped that with the roar of the engine in his ears, Josh Dunning would not detect the difference. But Josh did. He turned his head sharply and stared at Billy.

"Who——" he began, then suddenly recognised his new mechanic. "You! What the dickens are you doing here? Where's Bill?"

"He was taken ill unexpectedly," explained Billy truthfully. "Asked me to take his place and save the race."

At this moment Number Eleven shot past amid a cloud of dust and flying stones, engine screaming. Josh Dunning forgot about Billy then. The race was the thing—and Josh was driving to win.

His hands tightened about the steering-wheel; his foot stamped down on the accelerator. The car shot forward with a roar. A corner raced to meet them, and round they went in a tremendous skid. Josh was famed for his daring driving, and he lived up to his reputation now. Billy felt his hair standing on end as they hurtled onwards.

On the seventh lap they caught up with Number Eleven, which was being driven by Fatty Hart's cousin, and passed into third place.

It was during this lap that the accident occurred. A car, which was actually a lap behind, was running about ten yards in front of Josh Dunning's machine. Suddenly it swerved and crashed into the bank at the side of the road. There was a loud explosion and several parts of the damaged machine shot across the road.

"Look out, Josh!" yelled Billy, ducking his head.

His warning came too late. Billy felt the car he was in jolt and swerve wildly. Raising his head quickly, he found Josh Dunning leaning over the steering-wheel, blood streaming from an ugly gash in his head.

"Here's a go!" groaned Billy, as he realised that the driver had been knocked unconscious.

Fortunately they had just entered a straight part of the course, and although the car wobbled badly, Josh Dunning's body kept the wheel fairly steady. But it was clear that unless Billy did something to avert it, there would be a crash.

Billy did something. Leaning over, he took a firm grip of the wheel, and with his shoulders pushed the unconscious driver aside. His position was cramped and un-

comfortable, while he felt the wheel shaking in his hands, but he had the machine more or less under control.

During this time they had naturally lost much ground, and Number Eleven was well ahead and almost out of sight. Meanwhile, Billy's pals had been getting anxious, and a wild cheer rang out when they saw his predicament as he shot down the straight for the eighth lap.

"Come on, Billy!" yelled Ginger Jones. "Show 'em how to drive!"

But Billy was certainly not enjoying himself. His whole body was being jolted violently, and when rounding corners he shut his eyes and trusted to luck. By his very recklessness he gained on those in front, so that when he started on the ninth lap he was lying third, Number Eleven being in the lead.

Then Billy recollected Josh Dunning pressing his foot on a lever to increase the speed, and, following his example, Billy stepped on the accelerator. The result surprised him. He shot forward like a bullet from a gun.

The last lap found Billy lying second and almost on Number Eleven's tail. For the final ten miles the two cars settled down to a neck and neck race. Billy gained a little at each corner, but lost ground on the straight.

"Well, here goes!" he muttered, as he rounded the final corner on two wheels and flashed into the straight. As he did so he pressed hard on the accelerator. With a roar the car surged forward into the lead. Number Eleven found the pace too hot, and gradually fell back. Billy passed the flag a winner by two seconds.

Twenty minutes later Josh Dunning regained consciousness and found the car still speeding along the road, completing another lap, and Billy Baxter clinging desperately to the wheel.

"Did we lose?" asked Josh weakly.

"We won the race twenty minutes ago," gasped Billy. "I say, Josh, how—do you—stop—this—dashed car?"

Josh told him, and a few minutes later Billy Baxter brought the car to a halt in front of the grand-stand, where the Mayor was waiting to present him with a cup.

"No," said Billy, as the newspaper reporters crowded round the car, "I'm not a professional driver. I only did it to oblige my old friend Josh Dunning."

THE END.

More About Breezy Billy Next Wednesday

BILLY BAXTER ON THE FILMS!

A succession of thrills and laughs



SUBTER- RANEAN

The First Adventure: **THE KINGDOM OF CAVES!**

The Hate of Jefferson Jetby!

THREE shadowy figures stood peering down into unfathomable darkness. The beams from their electric torches showed the precipice which dropped away from the ledge on which they stood, and then the light was lost in the depths of the abyss. For a while none of them spoke, and then Roddy Patterson broke the silence.

"Whew!" he said. "If we hadn't halted in time——"

He broke off and the eldest of the three answered him.

"Yes, Roddy," he said. "As I told you, the dangers that lie ahead of us are legion. A false step, and all is over. But if we win through—then, boys, wealth beyond our greatest dreams may be ours. I am certain that in these caves, which penetrate for untold numbers of miles down into the depths of the earth, is to be found the greatest radium deposits which have ever been discovered. But these caves will not yield up their treasures lightly, and both of you must be prepared for—anything!"

Roddy turned to his chum, "Spud" Thompson.

"What do you think about it, Spud?" he asked.

Spud, a freckled-faced, lanky-legged youngster of about Roddy's own age, grinned widely.

"I think this is the greatest stunt I've ever heard of," he answered. "I reckon your uncle's a sport to bring us with him on this expedition into the caves, and I'm all for pressing on as quickly as possible."

Some two hours previously Professor Patterson—who was Roddy's uncle, and the scientific leader of the expedition—and the two chums had delved into a crack in the side of a

mountain in the Pyrenees. It was the professor who had discovered that the crack led to a vast series of wonderful caves, linked together by fissures and rifts in the rock, and also that, according to the gaseous emanations which came from the pit on whose brink they now stood, there was radium to be discovered in the depths.

him up, and the three tugs told him that his chum, too, had landed safely.

Roddy prepared to follow him, and then swung round, gazing back along the dark fissure in the rock by which the adventurers had gained this place. For something had moved in the darkness, something that was now shuffling towards Roddy.

"Who's there?" he demanded.

There came no reply, and Roddy caught hold of the rope and prepared to slide down it.

CASTAWAYS!

The three explorers had brought food and supplies with them. Each had a waterproof haversack strapped on his shoulders, and their clothes were made of especially strong fabric, to withstand the constant rubbing against the rocky walls of the passages which led deep down, vanishing no one knew whither—perhaps extending to the very centre of the earth!

The first part of the journey had presented no great difficulties. With their torches flashing ahead, the boys and the professor had walked through tremendous caves, from the roof of which giant stalactites hung down, while stalagmites of grotesque shapes rose from the ground to meet them.

And now they had come to the pit, which they must descend. Quickly the professor began to uncoil a length of strong rope which he had carried, while Roddy and Spud, anxious to get to the unknown adventures which lay before them, occupied themselves with the task of wedging an iron bar between two stalagmites.

Before long the rope was made fast to the bar, and the end of it thrown over into the pit, vanishing into the blackness beneath. Then the three exchanged glances.

"I will go first," said the professor, and, hanging his torch on to a button of his coat, he tested the rope and then prepared to slide over the brink of the underground precipice. "Wait until I reach the bottom, and then, if all is well, I will give three tugs on the rope, to show that it is safe for you to descend."

The next minute he had gone, swinging himself over and sliding cautiously down the rope. Roddy and Spud flung themselves flat on their chests and peered over the brink. They saw the professor slide swiftly down, the light of his torch shining feebly as he receded from them, until at last it was the merest pin-point of light far below them.

A moment of anxiety passed, and then three tugs came on the rope. The professor had landed safely at the bottom. Roddy turned to his chum.

"Down you go, Spud!" he said. "When you're safe, I'll follow."

They made their torches fast to their coats in the same manner as the professor had done, and Spud went over the edge. Roddy watched him until the darkness swallowed

Even as he did so, a clear-cut voice came out of the darkness.

"Stop!" it cried. "Stay where you are! I've got you covered, and if you try to escape, I'll fire!"

The next moment a beam of light flashed into Roddy's eyes as the newcomer switched on his torch. Roddy turned so that his own torch shone into the darkness, and gave a start as he saw the figure of a man, revolver in hand, approaching him stealthily.

"Who are you, and what do you want here?" he demanded, and a sneering laugh came from the stranger.

"Your uncle knows me well enough," he answered. "He thought he had thrown me off the track, but he hasn't. Now, you young cub, come away from that rope. I'm going down there, and I've got a score to settle with your precious uncle when I meet him! It'll be man to man down there, and I guess you're never likely to see your uncle again."

Roddy's brain worked furiously. He remembered now that his uncle had told him of a former partner—a man whose criminal proclivities had led to a speedy dissolution of the partnership. He remembered, too, the man's name.

"Jefferson Jetby!" he gasped, and the snarling smile of the stranger told him that he had guessed correctly.

"Aye," he answered, "Jefferson Jetby! And if there's treasure down there, Jefferson Jetby's going to have his share. Stand aside!"

The revolver glinted menacingly in the light of the torch. Roddy could see that the scoundrel would shoot unless something was done quickly. Roddy was prepared.

"Look!" he yelled, assuming a gaze of terror, and pointing over into the darkness behind Jetby. "Take care!"

Jetby, startled for a moment, glanced round. That moment was long enough for Roddy. With a spring he caught the rope, and before Jefferson Jetby could realise that he was being hoaxed, Roddy was over the brink and sliding desperately down the rope.

The next second, however, he gave a groan. In his haste the rope had become entwined around his leg, forming a loop, and he was pulled up sharply. At the same moment the evil face of Jetby peered over the ledge above.

A knife flashed in the light of the torch, and Jetby, with cool devilry in his maniacal

eyes, placed the edge of the knife against the rope.

"You've been too clever this time, kiddo," he said, and slashed at the rope.

A cry of horror rose to Roddy's lips. The rope, cut by the razor-like edge of the knife, parted, and the next moment the lad was hurtling, head downwards, into the yawning chasm beneath.

Trapped!

THE world swam around Roddy. Frantically he flung out his arms, although he knew that nothing but a miracle could save him. With his leg still tangled in the rope, he fell—fell—

How deep the chasm was he could not guess, but he knew that it was too deep for him to survive such a fall. He would crash to death upon the rocks beneath. A chuckle from the scoundrel above echoed and re-echoed round the walls of the chasm.

Then, so suddenly that it seemed that it must jerk his leg from its socket, Roddy was pulled up sharply. For some moments he could not tell what had happened, and then he found himself swinging, like a pendulum, upside-down, his leg still entangled in the swaying rope. Desperately his arms went out again, and he clutched at something.

At first he imagined that he had caught hold of another rope, and he wondered how that could be, for only one rope had been lowered into the abyss. Then, as his brain cleared, he realised that he had been miraculously saved.

Almost half-way down the abyss was a jutting point of rock, and when the top part of the rope had been cut, and Roddy had hurtled downwards, this jutting rock had held the middle of the rope—held it securely. The lower end of the rope, having been made fast by the professor and Spud, had held tight, and Roddy had thus been checked in his headlong descent.

Gasping for breath, Roddy pulled himself to a perpendicular position, and then, making his end of the rope fast so that it would still be held by the jutting rock, he slid to where, on the solid rock, the professor and Spud were awaiting him.

Their faces were white and tense, and their relief was great when Roddy, little the worse for his adventure, dropped from the rope and joined them.

"I heard all!" gasped the professor. "Boys, we are in a serious position. That man—Jetby—is an unscrupulous adventurer of the worst type. If the radium should fall into his power, it will be used to further his criminal purposes."

"If it does!" said Spud. "But I guess we're three against one, and——"

"Jefferson Jetby never works alone!" said the professor grimly. "He has dogged our steps alone, but his gang will not be far away, and before long they'll be at our heels like a pack of wolves. We'll be hunted in these caves, boys, until——"

"Until we sock Jetby good and hard!" said Roddy. "Well, let him come on—we'll be ready for him." He sent the light of his torch around him, and gave a whistle. "Jehosaphat! Why, we could hide here for months and Jetby couldn't find us!"

The chasm had ended in a cave, mightier than any they had yet seen. The gigantic hall in which they found themselves must have been the result of some tremendous cataclysm which had happened in the dim ages, long ago. Worn away by the unceasing flow of some long-lost subterranean stream, a vast strata of rock had collapsed, forming a cavern in the bowels of the earth.

As they stood there and gazed at the wonders around them, a voice of thunder smote on their ears. It was the voice of Jefferson Jetby, far above them, and the echoes of the place had increased it a hundredfold.

"Are ye there, Patterson?" the voice demanded.

"What do you want?" shouted back the professor.

"Halves, Patterson—halves!" came back the voice of thunder. "I don't know what your game is, Patterson, but there's treasure here; or ye wouldn't be so anxious to come here. Quick, say the word—is it halves, or else——"

"Or else—what?" demanded the professor.

"War, Patterson!" yelled Jetby, with a chuckle that made the boys' blood run cold. "War to the knife, wi' no quarter given and none expected! What's it to be?"

It was Roddy who answered. Cupping his hands, he roared back up the chasm:

"Then it's war, Jefferson Jetby!"

The next moment he sprang back—just in time!

Crash!

A rock dropped with the force of a thunderbolt alongside him, narrowly missing him, but coming so close that he felt the rush of air as it clove its passage downwards. Jetby, even while he had pretended to make terms, had been balancing a massive rock on the brink of the precipice, and had launched it over, thinking to crush the three explorers beneath.

"Cut for it!" yelled Roddy. "The scoundrel means business!"

Crash, crash, crash!

It was evident that Jetby *did* mean business. As fast as he could pick up rocks he was hurling them down into the abyss, hoping that they would hit the target that the blackness hid from his eyes.

The boys wasted no time. Scrambling over the mass of rocks which formed the floor of the cave, they hurried on. Presently the crashes of the falling rocks ceased. Jetby had discovered that his tactics were unavailing. But the professor knew him too well to imagine that he would not return to the attack before much time had passed.

In the meanwhile, the intrepid trio hurried on through the cave which opened out before them. They had little time to waste in surveying the wonders of the place, for, when they were at last obliged to call a halt to

give their aching limbs a rest, the echoes of the cave carried to their ears the sound of scrambling footfalls.

“There is more than one pair of footsteps there,” said Roddy, listening intently. “Jetby’s come down the chasm with a rope or a rope ladder, and he’s brought his gang with him. Come on; we’ve got to find some hiding-place!”

They tore on through the darkness of that subterranean vault. But in the vastness of the cave they knew that the reflected light from their torches would betray their presence to their pursuers. Yet they dared not switch out their torches, for to do so was to court disaster.

Suddenly Roddy gave a cry.

“There’s a passage in the rock there!” he cried, pointing to a spot where, about ten

blind alley. A solid wall of rock cut off further progress. They were trapped!

A mocking cry came from the cave below, and the voice of Jefferson Jetby yelled out triumphantly.

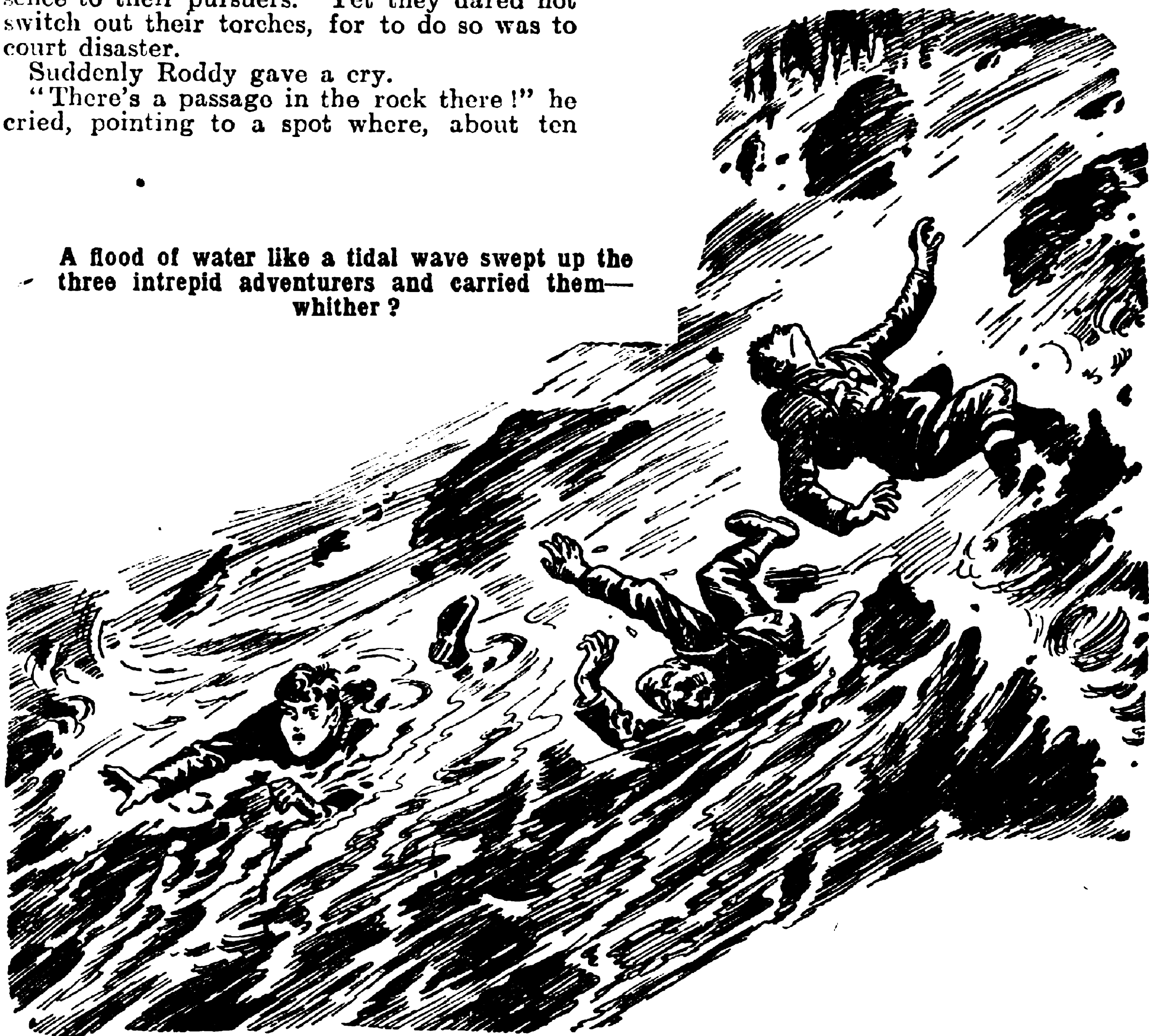
“We’ve got ’em, boys!”

“Have you?” gasped Roddy, and gritted his teeth.

They were back on the ledge of the fissure now. Scuffling sounds came from the darkness. Jetby’s men were clambering up to the ledge. A head appeared.

Roddy’s foot shot out. There was a thud,

A flood of water like a tidal wave swept up the three intrepid adventurers and carried them—whither?



feet from the floor of the cave, a fissure in the rock wall showed up darkly. “Let’s go into it!”

Leading the way, he scrambled up the wall and gained the ledge of the fissure. Hard on his heels came the others, while Roddy swung the light of his torch to show them the way. As he did so a cry echoed through the cave. They had been sighted! But they gained the fissure and dashed into it.

“Out with your torches, boys!” cried the professor. “Put them in your haversacks. I’ll keep mine ready. Now, on we go!”

Scrambling over the rocky ground, they hurried along the passage. Then suddenly they came to a halt. The passage was a

a howl of pain, and the man dropped back into the cave beneath. At the same time Spud dealt with another of the gang in a similar manner.

“Keep back, Jefferson Jetby!” warned Roddy, but a snarl from the ruffian answered him.

“It’s war to the knife,” he reminded Roddy. “And we’ve got dynamite here. Bring it up, boys,” he ordered the gang. “We’ll blow up this part of the cave and the three of them with it!”

Helplessly Roddy and his two companions watched Jefferson Jetby’s ruffians as they proceeded to pile the cases of dynamite

against the cave wall and run back a wire to a safe distance.

In a moment or two the rocks would crash down with overwhelming force upon the three adventurers!

The Deluge of Doom!

“**R**EADY?” asked Jefferson Jetby.

“All ready!” replied the ruffian who handed him the charger that would fire the dynamite.

Jetby juggled with it, and then turned to where the professor and the boys stood helplessly on the ledge.

“This is where you pass out!” he said, and pressed the plunger.

The next moment it seemed that the whole of the earth had split in two. A blinding flash leaped up in front of the three intrepid adventurers and a deafening crash sent them reeling backwards, dazed and semi-conscious.

Crash! Bang! And then—a noise more dreadful: the noise of rushing, surging waters. A wall of water seemed to leap into being from nowhere, dashing into the cave from behind the solid rock where, for centuries, it had remained pent!

Like a tidal wave it swept on, picking up mighty rocks as though they had been driftwood. The professor and the boys found themselves caught in the rushing torrent, submerged, and borne—whither?

THE water surged into the eyes and ears of Roddy, twisting him round like a straw in a mill-race. Fighting desperately, he was carried along, and then—

It seemed that the bottom had dropped out of the earth, for he fell into space, and the water continued to hammer down upon him. A mighty splash, and Roddy found himself in water again, and he struck out with all the strength of which he was capable.

After a while he felt his hands touch a rock, and he clung to it. Dashing the water from his eyes, he climbed up on to the rock out of the raging torrent. He remembered the electric torch in his haversack, and he dragged it out and pressed the button. To his relief the torch sent out a shaft of light, and, as it did so, a glad cry reached his ears.

“Roddy!”

It was Spud’s voice.

Roddy could see now where his chum was. Thundering down from above came a mighty waterfall, and it was down this that the boys had been carried. But had the professor also escaped? Even as the question flashed across Roddy’s brain, there came a hail, and both boys turned to see the figure of the professor making his way towards them.

In a few moments they were all together, but their situation was desperate. It was evident that never again could they return by the way they had come. They were alone, deep in the bowels of the earth!

“Well,” said Spud at last, “we’ve got grub enough in our haversacks to last us a few days, at any rate.”

“Boys,” said the professor, in a broken voice, “I have led you to your doom. Nothing remains for us now but a lingering death.”

But the irrepressible Roddy refused to be downhearted.

“Death be jiggered!” he cried. “While there’s life there’s hope! Here we are, monarchs of all we survey! Kings of the centre of the earth! Who cares a hoot about the people above? We’ll start a new life down here in the kingdom of caves!”

And solemnly the two chums and the professor shook hands.

THE END.

(Prisoners in the centre of the earth—menaced by the scoundrelly Jefferson! Amazing adventures await the intrepid trio in next week’s enthralling yarn.)



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Knights of the Road!

By DAVID GOODWIN

In which the treacherous Marquis of Malmaison becomes a "higher" personage in the land!

The Marquis Mastered!

"SO these are the knaves you told me of!" cried Turpin, wiping the tears from his eyes. "Never did I see oaken boxes danced to such a tune. Know you what to do with them, Dick? Ecod! I will show you a jest that will make your sides crack!"

"What, then? Let us have it!" grinned Dick.

"Why," said Turpin, with a wink, "I propose we build a fire there on the hearth, and do you take yonder old iron kettle in the corner and fill it with oil from the cellar—for I know there is a barrel there—and we will boil it, and pour it into yonder chests though a hole in the lid, all hot! For thus, I call to mind, did Ali Baba with his forty thieves, and many a time I have wished I might see such sport!"

At this the prisoners, who had been listening anxiously, burst forth into fresh howls and lamentations.

"For the love of mercy, good sir!" came the bellowings, muffled inside the chests. "Do not torment poor retainers who were paid to do their master's bidding. Boiling oil—oh, monstrous! Have pity!"

"Come, Dick, fill the kettle," cried Turpin; "and we can pass the time with a little pistol-practice at yonder chests while it is boiling!"



"I'll bring back my lord with me, too," said Dick, grinning. "It shall be his part to build the fire and fill the kettle."

Such a bullaballo did the captives raise when Dick went out, that it was plain they really thought the fate of the Forty Thieves was to be theirs. However, Turpin amused himself with the retainers till Dick came in again, driving Malmaison before him at the pistol's point. The peer's face was the colour of a fish's stomach, and his fat legs shook beneath him.

"So, my lord marquis," said Turpin, sitting on a corner of the table, "you have arranged a little entertainment for our benefit? We are in your debt for a very pretty jest, which I shall take leave to call the 'Three Oak Chests; or, the Wicked Highwayman and the Marquis in the Cupboard'!"

Turpin's eyes were light, but there was a terrible gleam in them as he bent them on Malmaison. The peer shuddered.

"I call to mind," said Turpin, "that we arranged a little matter together not long ago, which turned out very profitably—at least, for you; up to the present I have not noticed any share of the profits coming my way."

"I have it all read for you," said Malmaison hoarsely. "I swear you shall have it—I meant to pay you, Turpin! I—I was going to give you my note of hand!" stammered the marquis, as Dick clapped the pistol to his head and rapidly searched the man's pockets for his promised fee. "I vow I was, upon my honour!"

"Your note of hand?" cried Turpin. "You knave, you promised it in notes or gold! What has he on him, Dick?"

"Nothing here save a dozen or so guineas in a purse!" exclaimed Dick. "Not a thing else about him!"

"I might have known it!" exclaimed Turpin, jumping off the table. "I smell double treachery here, Dick! Keep him there, and we will soon find out. Which of these chests is the one with the single rascal in it?"

"Yonder," said Dick, pointing it out.

"We shall get from this fellow the truth, which my lord dare not tell," said Turpin, lifting the hasp. "Come out, you knave!"

He flung back the lid and hauled the retainer out by the scruff of the neck, knocking the weapon out of his hand and snatching the knife from the man's belt. Then, forcing the fellow back against the wall, Turpin clapped a pistol to his ear.

"Now, my gay ruffler," said the highwayman, "tell me exactly what your orders were, or I blow you to kingdom come! Why hasn't my lord the gold about him? The truth, now! A lie will be your death warrant!"

"Spare me, sir!" quavered the man. "'Twas none of my doing! Nay, I will tell! We were to have winged you with a bullet, and bound you fast!"

"I know that, dog! What of young Master Forrester here?"

"My lord was to pretend to write the petition for a free pardon for him at the table here. While Master Forrester read it, we were to fall upon him and bind him, likewise, thus securing both for the gallows!"

"A very pretty plan, my lord," said Dick contemptuously, his eyes glittering as he watched the trembling marquis. "Come, Turpin, what shall we do with this noble cut-purse?"

"Why," said Turpin coolly, hauling the retainer back into the chest and fastening the lid on him again, "he deserves death; but, since you have these foolish scruples about shooting a prisoner, I suggest throwing him down the well and letting him take his chance there."

"Spare me!" shrieked the marquis hoarsely. "You will not murder me? I am a man of great position; highly placed. There will be a hue-and-cry after me!"

"Highly placed, by the powers!" cried Dick, with a laugh. "Come, Turpin, there is sense in what he says. We'll place him higher than Haman! A well is no place for a marquis. Why not tie him to the vane of the tower?"

"Very well thought of!" cried Turpin. "If height is what he craves, let him have it in full measure!"

They swung Malmaison up by the heels and shoulders and bore him, protesting in terrified tones, up the dark, stone staircases, till they came out upon the square turret of the tower, whence all the county lay shimmering below them in the moonlight. They brought with them the rope with which Turpin was to have been bound, and they lashed the fat marquis to the vane-post and weather-cock that crowned the little spire in the tower's centre, and left him there, grieving in loud wails against his fate, though surprised that his life was spared.

And the two comrades mounted and cantered away through the woods, leaving my Lord Malmaison to await the rising of the sun.

Vane Forrester Reappears!

"**D**ICK FORRESTER has bound me in honour. I would not try to escape the obligation even if I could. But how, in the name of all the powers, am I to stop that young tale-bearer's mouth?"

Dr. Trelawney, the venerable Head of St. Ansell's, sighed as he walked up and down his study, an anxious frown on his face. There came a knock at the door.

"A note for you, sir," said a serving-man, bringing a small sealed letter on a salver. "It was brought by a gentleman on a tall, black horse, who rode away without leaving his name."

As soon as the servant had gone the doctor tore open the missive, and as he read it his brow cleared, and the anxious look gave way to a grin.

"Dirkley is out of the running," ran the note; "he will not trouble you again. Some

greenwood friends of his have taken him away in a caravan, and I gave them my blessing. They will make a gipsy of him—perhaps a man. Who knows? I think you will agree he is no loss to St. Anstell's.—Yours, R. F.”

The doctor gave a chuckle, and thumped the table with his hand.

“That young rider is hard to beat!” he exclaimed. “I wonder what hand he had in the affair? And to think his life, and perhaps his brother's, hung upon the words of that treacherous little rascal Dirkley! Aye, the school is well rid of Dirkley. He was the worst influence for the boys that ever I had in St. Anstell's.”

The doctor put Dick Forrester's note in the fire and watched it burn.

“I cannot fail a man who saved my silver, and then my life,” he mused, watching the note blaze. “Yet, to think that it is my duty, from the law's point of view, to give him up to the magistrates to be hanged! We are treading on dangerous ground. Very sure I am, none the less, that Dick Forrester is more sinned against than sinning.”

“And this young brother of his—I should be loth to lose him. There isn't a higher-couraged or more gallant boy in the school. What was it his brother said about this uncle who is trying to get hold of him? He hinted a great danger. There is some mystery here, and I can do little to help, unless I know what the trouble is. I'll see the boy.”

He rang the bell and summoned Ralph, who arrived in a stock and collar that looked none the better after a four-handed boxing-match, composed of Conyers, Hilton, Asheton and himself, in which Ralph had just been embroiled.

“Come here, Fernhall,” said the doctor. “I have something to say to you, and I want you to be perfectly frank. You understand there is some trouble connected with your stay here—some danger, too, I may say.”

Ralph became grave.

“Yes, sir,” he said; “but my brother——”

The doctor held up his hand.

“Stop!” he said. “I have nothing to do with that. I wish to hear nothing about it.

There is another matter. I understand you have an uncle——”

Ralph's lips tightened and his eyes flashed.

“Yes, sir,” he said dryly, “I have an uncle.”

“Quite so,” said the doctor. “It has been suggested that you are in some danger from that direction. Now, what does that mean? My boy, you must tell me everything, and it may be I can help you. Come, Ralph, tell me the whole truth.”

“I will, sir,” he said. “My uncle is Vane Forrester, now in possession of Fernhall, which should rightly belong to my brother. My father was weak in health and in mind before his death, and Uncle Vane was in constant attendance on him. I am telling you the plain facts. My father died while in Uncle Vane's hands, and when the will was proved it gave the estates to Uncle Vane himself.

“How my brother was outlawed by Vane Forrester's influence after a mad prank in which he rode off with Turpin on one of the coach-horses, you already know. It is certain that Uncle Vane wants to put us both out of the way, to prevent any claim by us on the estates. My uncle took me to Duncansby School, near Durham, where he left me in charge of the schoolmaster Callard.”

“Duncansby!” muttered the doctor. “I have heard of it. Go on.”

As clearly and as briefly as possible, Ralph told the story of the horrors he had endured at the hands of Callard, and how Dick was no more than in time to save his life. The doctor's usually calm temper became heated to boiling-point as he listened.

“The very fact of your being sent to Duncansby is enough,” he said, when Ralph had finished. “It condemns the sender. That vile place should be swept from the face of the earth! Your uncle must fear you both greatly to take such means. This man who enjoys your estates, and is responsible for the outlawing of your brother, very obviously wishes to rid himself of you by fair means or foul. You have found a haven from him here.”

“I hope so, sir,” said Ralph. “But he will leave no stone unturned to find me, and

HOW THE STORY STARTED.

DICK FORRESTER learns upon the death of his father that all the vast estates and fortune, with the exception of a hundred guineas, have passed into the hands of his rascally uncle, **VANE FORRESTER**. The latter refuses to give the boy his money, and, appointing himself guardian, states his intention of sending Dick and his brother, **RALPH FORRESTER**, to Duncansby School—a notorious place in the north of England. Travelling by coach, Vane and the two boys are held up by **DICK TURPIN**, the famous highwayman. Dick joins forces with Turpin, while Ralph goes on to Duncansby. He has a terrible time there, but is eventually rescued by his brother—now a notorious highwayman with a price on his head—who takes him to St. Anstell's College, where he is known as Fernhall. Dirkley, the school sneak, discovers the secret. He tells Dr. Trelawney, the headmaster, who, however, because he is indebted to Dick for a service, takes no action. Dirkley himself is carried away by gipsies at Dick's request. The young highwayman receives an offer from the Marquis of Malmaison to betray Turpin, but turns the tables and imprisons the marquis' hirelings in some oak chests.

(Now read on.)

get me into his hands again. He is my legal guardian."

"That is a danger, and a grave one," agreed Trelawney. "He can claim you, with the law on his side."

"What I fear most, sir, is that when he has me he will use me as the bait to trap my brother. It is the one snare that Dick would fall into; he would never think twice about the danger."

"Your uncle is now a man of influence and wealth, my boy."

"Is he to take me away from here, to rid himself of me at his will?" said Ralph desperately. "Would the law give me up to him?"

"It would, indeed," said the doctor, shaking his head gloomily. "As to your own complaints, you can prove nothing against him. Aye, the law would deliver you up to him as we throw a bone to a dog!"

"But I am in your charge here, sir!"

cried Ralph. "I am under your care. Can you do nothing to keep me from him?"

The doctor shook his head.

"I see no way," he said, "though I would do everything that I could to prevent it. The best thing we have to hope for is that he does not come to claim you. He lost trace of you at Duncansby, of course, and I see not how he will find out where you are. He may think you dead."

"Aye!" cried Ralph. "True, sir, it is unlikely he will ever find me, and until he does—"

A double rap sounded on the door. The doctor answered, and a servant entered.

"Mr. Vane Forrester, of Fernhall, sir," he said, "desires speech with Dr. Trelawney!"

(Vane Forrester—at St. Anstell's! Has he discovered that Ralph is at the school? And, if so, what will happen? Dramatic developments—and surprises—in next Wednesday's corking instalment of this absorbing serial, lads.)

CORRESPONDENTS WANTED

Sydney Dyer, 5, Melville Street, Jeppe Extension, Johannesburg, Transvaal, South Africa, wants correspondents. Scouting, sports, stamps, etc. Age 17.

Robert P. Llewellyn, 29, Irvine Street, Wallsend, N.S.W., Australia, wishes to correspond with readers.

Joe Salter, 21, Ferris Street, Annandale, Sydney, N.S.W., Australia (aged 13), wants foreign and English stamps. Will exchange N.L.L.'s.

P. Blackstaff, 122, Torriano Avenue, Kentish Town, London, N.W.5, wants to get in touch with an amateur dramatic company.

Miss E. Hoggarth, Plantation Hall, Bingley Road, Heaton, Bradford, Yorks, wishes to hear from Girl Guides overseas.

Bobbie Garrett, 121, Glenister Park Road, Streatham Vale, London, S.W.16, desires correspondents interested in cricket and sports generally, also stamp-collecting.

Eric R. Hill, 12, Regent Street, Oxford, wants correspondents interested in stamps and coins, in South Africa, Australia, and Canada.

Wilfred Chapman, 6, Helen Street, Dawdon, Seaham Harbour, Co. Durham, will welcome letters from readers who are interested in first aid, music, woodwork, sports, scouting. He also wishes to hear from K. M. Staples, of Normanton.

Donald Bryan, 14, Kelburn Street, Caulfield North, S.E.7, Melbourne, Victoria, Australia, wants a correspondent interested in dirt track racing and motor-cycling.

Herbert Boot, 55, Dame Agnes Street, Nottingham, asks for pen-friends anywhere.

Albert Hopkins, 28, Glengowan Road, Toronto, 12, Ontario, Canada, wants correspondents.

W. L. Lawler, Worcester Boys' Club, Waterman's Hall, Worcester, will welcome members into this club.

Gordon L. Eddey, Box 99, Cleveland, Johannesburg, Transvaal, South Africa, wants to hear from stamp-collectors.

R. I. Holt, 40, Cobden Street, Loughborough, Leics., wishes to correspond with a reader keen on wireless.

D. W. Patience, 15, Sidmouth Street, Reading, wants French and German correspondents, also readers in British Empire; ages 15-17.

William Gibb, 5, George Street, Huntly, Aberdeenshire, N.B., wants correspondents anywhere; age 14; speaks French.

Ted Lewis, 8, Garton Street, Hamilton, Victoria, Australia, asks for pen-friends.

Elgar Pahl, Murrayville, Victoria, Australia, wants correspondents in England and Northern Europe.

Wm. Hughes Edmunds, 7, Kimberley Avenue, Seven Kings, Ilford, Essex (age 18), would like to hear from racing cyclists anywhere, especially Holland and France; also wants stamp correspondents abroad.

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(Continued on page 44.)

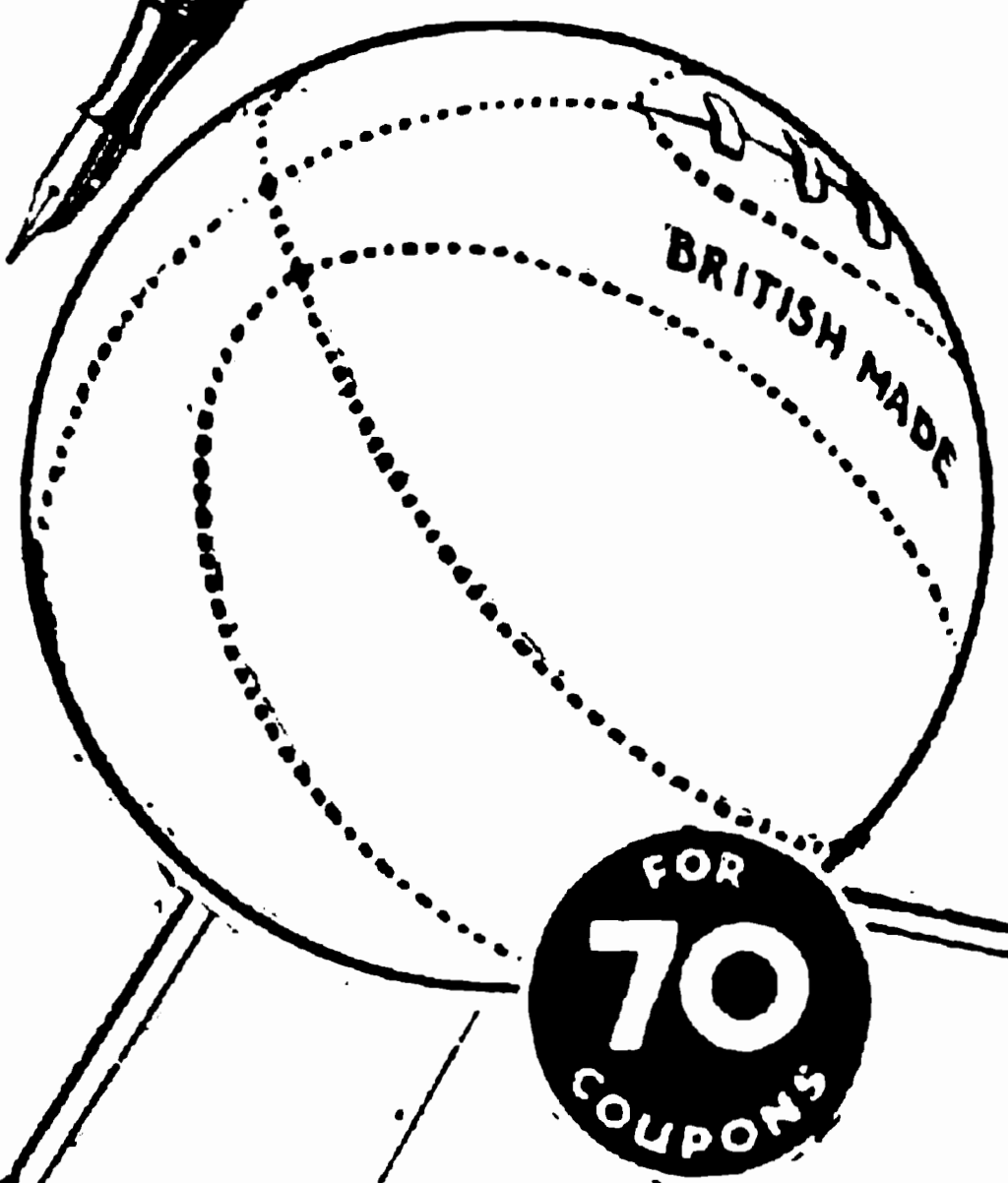
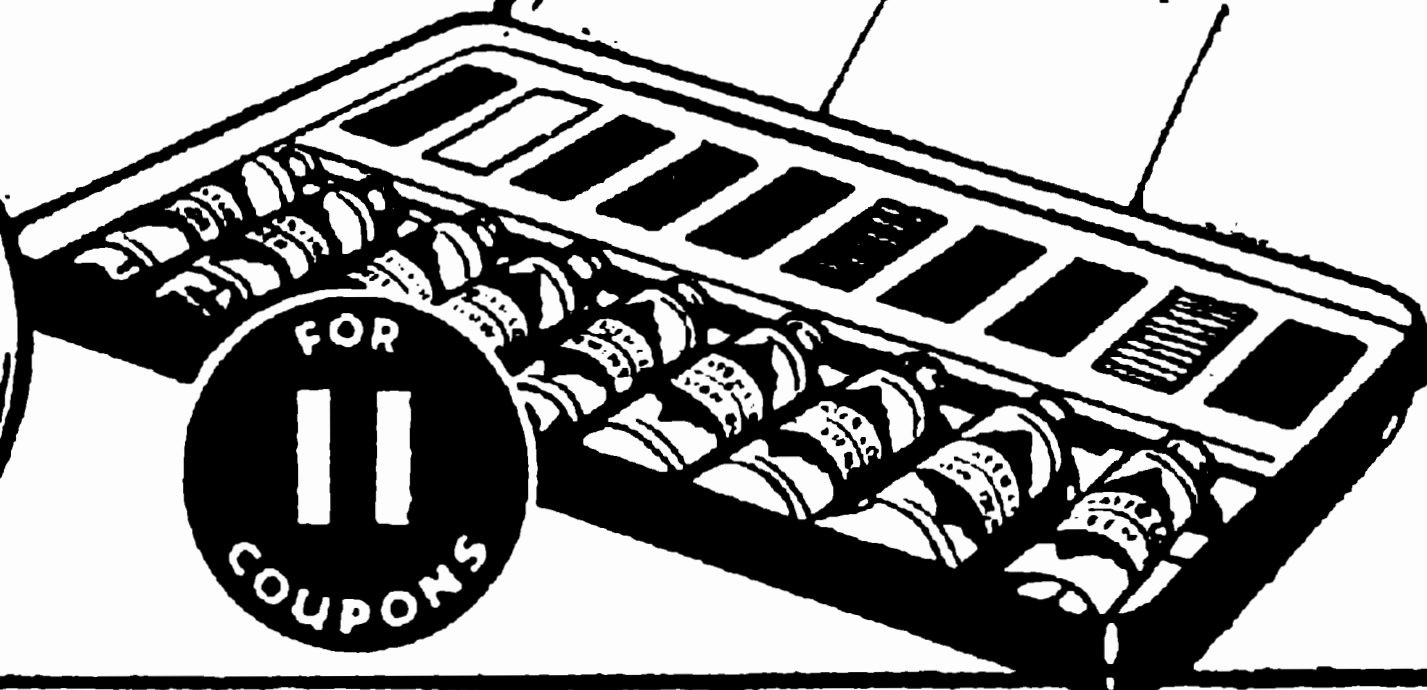
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(Continued from page 42.)

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