

BUMPER XMAS NUMBER—52 PAGES

NELSON LEE

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Rival Ghosts!

A striking incident from the rollicking long Christmas yarn, featuring the cheery chums of St. Frank's, complete inside.

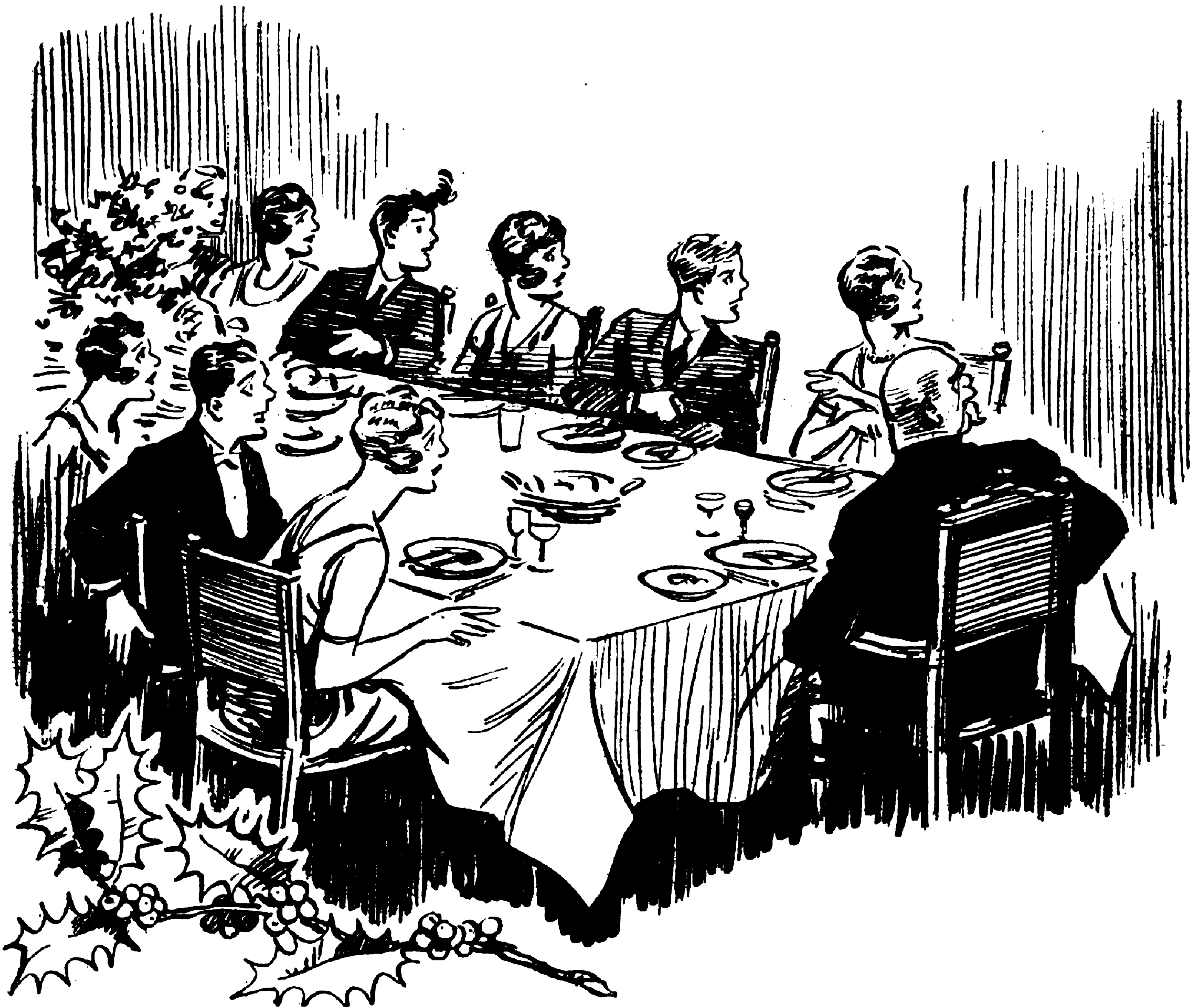
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OUT ON WEDNESDAY.

December 6th, 1930.

The Phantom Of The Grange!

By EDWY SEARLES BROOKS



CHAPTER 1.

Off For Christmas!

GROSVENOR AVENUE, London, W., was almost completely white as Church and McClure, of the St. Frank's Remove, stepped briskly along towards Sir Edward Handforth's home, which was situated about half-way up that quiet residential backwater.

"Looks like real Christmas here," remarked Church cheerfully.

"Wait until we get down into Kent," said Mac.

They had left the bus at New Bond Street a minute earlier. All along the main

arteries of the West End the traffic was churning its way through thick mud, and pedestrians were crowding along filthy pavements. Snow was descending steadily, and overhead the skies were leaden. It had been snowing for some hours now. The contrast in Grosvenor Avenue, where the traffic was so scarce that the snow had remained almost untouched, was very apparent. Church and McClure were vastly cheered. This was like the real thing.

They turned into the gateway of the big mansion, and a minute later they had been admitted into the warm, spacious hall by the butler.

"Is Handy ready?" asked Church briskly.

—Lively Long Complete Xmas Yarn!



"If you are referring to Master Edward, I'm afraid he isn't," replied the butler, with some bitterness. "Perhaps you young gentlemen would care to go up to his room?"

The young gentlemen did care. They forebore to ask the butler any questions; his tone had been sufficient to tell them that their burly, blundering chum had been creating havoc in the Handforth household.

Church and McClure were frequent visitors during holidays, and they virtually had the run of the house. So they knew exactly where to go after dashing upstairs. They found Handforth in his bed-room, only half-dressed, eyeing himself dubiously in the mirror.

"Hallo, you chaps!" he said as he glanced round. "What do you think of this giddy suit? I'm not so sure of it myself."

His chums weren't sure of it, either, but they weren't rash enough to say so.

"That suit's fine," said Church promptly. "Never seen you look better, Handy. When Irene spots you in that rig-out she'll dash into your arms and kiss you."

A TALKING PICTURE!

Thus does the phantom of Parkington Grange first make itself manifest. Weird and amazing; and thrilling, too, for the St. Frank's juniors in their efforts to bring the elusive ghost to book.

"Fathead!" said Handforth coldly. "We're going down to Parkington's place for Christmas, and lots of the girls will be there. So we've got to look smart. I thought about taking this suit round to the tailor's to have it altered. The bags don't seem to hang properly."

He glanced down at himself and it was a fact that one trouser leg was at least three inches longer than the other.

"My only hat!" said McClure, pulling out his watch. "Here you are, talking about having your suit altered, and we've only just got time to get to Charing Cross for the train! If you want those bags to hang properly why don't you take that silly kink out of your braces?"

"Eh? Which kink? Why the dickens didn't you tell me before?"

It was like Handforth to overlook a point of that sort. The left buckle of his braces had got hooked up, and when this was straightened out the trousers hung perfectly. He surveyed himself with pride.

"By Jove! That's better!" he said. "What's that you were saying about the train? We've got heaps of time, haven't we?"

"Look at this watch," said Mac. "The train goes at twelve-fifteen, and you can judge for yourself."

"Why, there's only forty minutes," said Handforth, in alarm. "Still, it won't take us long to get to Charing Cross."

"Won't it?" said Church. "The traffic's as thick as the dickens."

They succeeded in getting Handforth into the necessary state of haste. They had purposely come early, knowing full well that Edward Oswald would not be ready. He never was.

Like many other St. Frank's fellows, the three chums had been invited down to Parkington Grange, in Kent, by the burly, red-haired Kirby Keeble Parkington. By all appearances, the Christmas party at K. K.'s place was going to be a corker.

K. K., after all, was comparatively a new-comer in the St. Frank's Remove. As leader of the go-ahead party known as the Red-Hots he had firmly established himself and

was already one of the most popular boys in the school.

By inviting the celebrities of the Remove for Christmas he was consolidating that popularity, and the party would be all the more enjoyable because he had included Irene & Co., of the Moor View School, in the invitation. His people, it seemed, had given him a free hand to invite as many of his friends as he pleased.

"You chaps had better buzz downstairs and see about my suitcases," suggested Handforth, as he wrestled with his necktie. "Ellen will tell you where they are. Dash up here with 'em, and I'll have 'em packed in five minutes."

"Oh, my hat!" groaned Church. "He hasn't even packed yet!"

Dashing downstairs, they encountered Sir Edward Handforth, bluff and good-humoured. He wished them a merry Christmas, and presented them with a pound-note each.

"Take this as payment for your labours of to-day," he said dryly. "I am quite sure you'll have your hands full with my son. The sooner you get him away, the better. The whole house has been turned upside down this morning already."

"We'll have him off within ten minutes, sir," promised Church, grinning.

They cornered Ellen, the parlourmaid, only to discover that Handforth had already instructed the girl to put the suitcases in his bed-room cupboard. So up they dashed again, to find Handforth in a more complete state of undress than before.

"What's the idea?" roared Church. "We thought you'd be ready!"

"I've decided to wear the blue suit instead of this grey one," said Handforth. "It's a bit warmer, and—"

"While you're messing about with your suits we shall miss that train," broke in Mac wrathfully. "Lend a hand, Churchy! If he won't dress himself we'll jolly well dress him! He's no more idea of time than a lunatic."

"Look here, you silly asses——"

"Don't argue!" yelled Church. "We shall miss that train."

They purposely rushed about with frantic haste, for this was the only way of getting any action out of their leader. They fished out the suitcases, and found, to their joy, that the excellent Ellen had more than half packed them. While Handforth was completing his toilet—wearing the grey suit, after all—his chums finished the packing. Even then they were ready before Handforth.

"Come on!" said Church crisply. "We shall just do it!"

"Look here, I'm not going to be pitchforked out like this!" shouted Handforth. "I left a whole heap of things in the dining-room. Can't we go by the next train?"

"No, we can't!" retorted Church. "Didn't we all arrange with Parkington to meet him on the platform at Charing Cross? He wants us go down as one party. Dash it,

he's the host, and the least we can do is to fall in with his plans."

"We shall just about have time," added Mac hopefully.

Handforth grabbed one of the suitcases, whirled out of the bed-room, and thundered along the corridor like a charging elephant. He didn't waste time by descending the stairs in the ordinary way. He poised himself on the balustrade and slid. Unfortunately his father was coming upstairs at the same moment, and they met at the bend. Handforth didn't observe the obstruction until it was too late. Sir Edward was leisurely mounting, reading a letter whilst doing so.

"Hi! Whoa!" roared Handforth. "Look out, pater!"

The startled Sir Edward glanced up just in time to see his hopeful son hurtling at him like a meteor. Handforth tried to fling himself off the balustrade, but it was a hopeless effort. His feet caught Sir Edward in the middle of the chest, and everybody else in the house thought that an earthquake had happened.

The suitcase rose in the air as Handforth lost his grip; it descended triumphantly upon Sir Edward's head, burst open, and sprayed him with shirts, neckties, socks and collars.

"Good heavens!" gurgled the unfortunate man.

"Sorry, pater!" said Handforth lightly. "Pity you weren't looking where you were going."

He proceeded to scramble the shirts and collars and things back into the suitcase, and he had practically finished before the dazed Sir Edward could get to his feet.

"You—you dangerous young rascal!" he fumed. "Are you trying to make out that I'm to blame for this catastrophe? How dare you suggest that I should have been looking where I was going?"

"If you hadn't been reading that letter, pater——"

"It is my privilege to read letters when and where I please!" roared Sir Edward.

"What reason have I to suppose that human bodies will come hurtling down the balustrade with the speed of an express train? Confound you, Edward, I'm bruised in a dozen places. You're a dangerous idiot!"

"But I'm in a hurry, pater, and you don't seem to realise that I might miss my train," complained Handforth. "There's not another one for hours—and that would mean my hanging about at home until the middle of the afternoon."

Sir Edward pulled himself together.

"Go, then!" he said hoarsely. "Catch your train by all means."

The prospect of Edward Oswald remaining at home until the middle of the afternoon appalled him to such an extent that he successfully swallowed the verbal castigation he had been about to administer.

Handforth was joined by Church and McClure in the hall, who said nothing when they observed shirt-tails and necktie ends

obtruding from the suitcase. There wasn't time to do any re-packing now.

"Just like the pater!" grumbled Handforth. "Always makes a fuss over nothing!"

"But, dash it, you gave him an awful jolt," protested Church.

"What about the jolt I had?" retorted Handforth. "Well, what are you waiting for? We're ready, aren't we?"

"If you are, we are," said McClure hastily.

One of them threw Handforth's cap on his head, and the other bundled him into his overcoat. They opened the front door, and successfully manœuvred him outside. They had both conveniently overlooked the things that had been left in the dining-room. Unfortunately, Handforth remembered them at the last moment.

"Wait a tick!" he ejaculated, turning at the door. "I nearly forgot those other parcels. By George! There's a present for Irene among 'em, too."

He went across the hall like a track-racer, and blundered head-long into the dining-room just as the butler was coming out with a tray on which reposed an immense bowl of punch.

The collision was devastating.

The force of it not only drove the tray into the butler's chest, but it tilted the bowl at such an angle that its entire contents swamped over the unhappy man's face and shoulders. Worse followed, for he lost his balance, sat down with a thud, and the bowl perched itself on his head. Rings of lemon were festooned grotesquely over his chest and shoulders.

"It's a pity you can't give a chap room to pass, Wheezer," said Handforth indignantly.

It was just as well that Handforth failed to notice the punch stains on his wonderful new suit, or he would have been delayed. As it was, he hurried to the sideboard, grabbed his parcels, and retired. He left

the butler still sitting in the doorway in his misery.

The man was far too angry to trust himself to words. Bad as it had been to knock him over, Handforth had added insult to injury by referring to him as "Wheezer"—the butler being very sensitive on his unfortunate habit of heavy breathing.

"All serene! Ready now!" whooped Handforth as he dashed out.

Church and McClure were already outside, they having deemed it wise to get as far away from the scene of the disaster as possible.

"Look out!" warned Church. "There's ice on those steps—"

It was too late. Anybody else but Handforth would have remembered that there had been a frost in the night, and that snow was falling. But Handforth never troubled himself about such trifles.

He skidded on the top step, his legs went flying, and he descended the remaining steps in a series of somersaults.



Xmas Greetings

to all N. E. readers—
and sincere wishes for the jolliest,
happiest Christmas-tide you've
ever spent.

From The Editor.

CHAPTER 2.

The Gathering of the Clans!

"H A, ha, ha!" A shout of laughter went up from a number of boyish throats on the other side of Grosvenor Avenue.

Handforth, hurtling down those steps, provided a sufficiently comic spectacle to make a cat laugh.

"Hurt, old man?" asked Church, as he ran up.

Handforth was sitting up, blinking dazedly.

"What happened?" he gasped. "Who threw that bomb?"

"It wasn't a bomb, Handy," said Mac, in a kindly voice. "They say that accidents happen in threes, and as this your third you've probably finished for to-day. All your own fault, of course—for being such a blundering ass. It's a good thing you're not hurt."



"Not hurt?" howled Handforth as he struggled to his feet. "You funny idiot, I'm all broken up! I believe my spine's cracked, and I'm jolly sure that I've snapped my left leg in two places."

"That's no-

thing to a strong chap like you," said Church soothingly. "You don't usually make a fuss over such trifles, Handy. We've got to catch that train."

Handforth glared at them.

"It's all your fault for rushing me," he said accusingly. "And you make things worse by yelling with laughter when you see me come a cropper."

"Rot! We didn't laugh."

"Don't tell fibs! I heard you."

"It was those chaps over the road," said Church warmly. "And can you blame them? Who could help laughing when you come skidding down those steps and give a free exhibition of comic acrobatics?"

Handforth drew a deep breath, and looked across the snow-covered road. He beheld a party of five or six schoolboys. They were perfect strangers, and they were watching the proceedings in the Handforth front garden with interest.

"Oh!" said Handforth ominously. "They had the nerve to laugh at me, had they? I'll show 'em! By George! Grab some of this snow!"

Church and McClure were becoming desperate. The more they tried to hurry their leader, the more he delayed; and now he wanted to start a snowball fight.

"That train——" began Church frantically.

"Blow the train!" roared Handforth, making a huge snowball.

"But the bus won't get us there in time——"

"Who's going by bus?" interrupted Handforth. "There are plenty of taxis, aren't there?"

Whizz!

He hurled his snowball with extraordinary energy for a fellow who had a cracked spine and a broken left leg. More by luck than judgment he scored a bull's-eye. Two of the youthful strangers dodged, and the snowball struck a third fairly and squarely in the centre of the face.

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Church and McClure.

Hurry or no hurry, they were schoolboys, and a snowball fight appealed to them. But for that bull's-eye, the strangers might have walked away, still laughing. As it was, they took up the challenge with a whoop of joy. Within two seconds they were making snowballs at express speed.

Whizz! Whizz! Thud!

Snowballs hurtled back and forth across the road, and a few other pedestrians who were abroad paused to watch the fun. A taximan obligingly halted his cab so that he should not cross the line of fire.

Two snowballs thudded against the Handforth front door, and another, going wide, burst itself upon a window. Others were more deadly, and Handforth & Co. were soon smothered. But they, too, scored a number of direct hits, and the battle waged fast and furious.

"Come on—let's chase 'em!" yelled Handforth gleefully. "They're retreating already. Buck up, St. Frank's!"

Any further remarks were effectually blotted out by a snowball which burst on his face, and half-filled his mouth. It was at that moment that Sir Edward, exasperated by the commotion in his front garden, flung open the library window.

"Edward!" he thundered. "What is the meaning of this?"

"Just a little snow-fight, pater," explained Handforth superfluously. "Don't be a spoilsport—by George! That was a good hit, Churchy!"

Swish!

Another snowball from the enemy went astray, and the startled Sir Edward reeled back into the library, his features temporarily obliterated. When he appeared again, he came by way of the front door, and now he had a walking cane in his hand.

"Cave!" gasped Church, in alarm.

The enemy, scenting danger, had already bolted. Handforth & Co. grabbed their baggage, shot through the front gateway, and dashed up to the handy taxi.

"Charing Cross—quick!" yelled Handforth. "Buck up!"

As the taxi rolled off, Sir Edward raised his hands aloft.

"Thank heaven!" he murmured fervently.

HANDFORTH and Church and McClure sorted themselves out and cleaned themselves up during the taxi ride, and Edward Oswald received a shock when the cab at length turned into the busy, crowded station yard at Charing Cross.

"Look at that clock!" he gasped. "It's sixteen minutes past twelve!"

"I noticed it," said Church, nodding.

"Then we've lost the train by a minute!"

"We should have lost it if we had been asses enough to tell you the right time of departure," said Church coolly. "It just shows you, Mac, how brainy we were."

"We need to be brainy when we're getting Handy to a train," said Mac feelingly.

"What are you funny idiots babbling about?" asked Handforth, staring.

"The train doesn't go till twelve-thirty, that's all," explained Church, with a grin. "We thought we'd be on the safe side, and tell you twelve-fifteen. We've got comfortable time, now, to get on the platform and meet the crowd."

Handforth breathed hard.

"Why, you spoofing rotters, we needn't have hurried at all," he said indignantly. "I needn't have biffed my pater downstairs, or bowled Wheezer over, or anything."

Church and McClure did not argue. They were satisfied at having got their leader to the station in time. Luckily, Handforth did not press the matter, and within a minute they found themselves in the busy station, shaking hands with Nipper and Archie Glen-thorne and Vivian Travers and Tregellis-West and Ralph Lesslie Fullwood and other celebrities of the St. Frank's Remove.

K. K. Parkington was standing a little aside, chatting with a big young man and two very charming young ladies. Deeks and Goffin and Baines and Jepson and the other Red-Hots were vieing with the Old-Timers in making themselves pleasant to the Moor View girls.

"Hallo, K. K.!" said Handforth cheerfully. "We're here on time."

"Yes—and I'm still recovering from the shock," said Kirby Keeble Parkington. "I didn't expect you here until the train was practically moving out of the station—if then."

"I always believe in being in good time," said Handforth airily.

"Ahem!" coughed Church, whilst McClure grinned.

Handforth was looking politely at the big young man and the two girls. They weren't schoolgirls; both were probably over twenty. However, they were so charming that Handforth had to look more than once.

"Oh, sorry!" said K. K. as he noticed Handforth's inquiring glance. "This is my brother, Vincent, and his wife—and Miss Alice Hazlewood, my pater's new secretary."

Handforth & Co. doffed their caps with alacrity.

"Vincent—Beryl—these chaps are Handforth and Church and McClure," went on K. K., completing the introduction. "Three of the best."

"Well, this is a surprise, and no mistake," said Handforth. "You never told us you had a big brother like this, K. K.—and married, too!"

"I don't jaw about family affairs," said Parkington, with a smile.

His brother chuckled.

"Not married very long, young 'un," he said. "Beryl and I, as a matter of fact, have only just got back from our honeymoon. We only came along to the station to see Kirby and his friends off, and to wish you all a merry Christmas."

"Oh!" said Handforth, puzzled. "Aren't you two coming, then?"

"I'm afraid not," replied Vincent Parkington, with a curious glance at his bride.

Handforth & Co. were rather astonished to see that Beryl's pretty cheeks had become flushed. She looked quickly the other way, as though conscious of her embarrassment. There was something here the juniors did not understand.

"I'm awfully sorry that you are compelled to miss your Christmas at home, Miss Hazle-

wood," said Vincent, as though deliberately changing the subject. "I'm afraid my father is a rather self-willed man—a man who makes up his mind to a thing, and won't be frustrated. He could easily have done without your services until the new year."

"I think I shall be all right, thank you," said Alice Hazlewood, smiling.

"Don't forget what I've been telling you, Kirby," continued Vincent. "Miss Hazlewood was engaged by correspondence, and she hasn't met the pater, or any of our people. So she'll feel very strange down home for a bit. I want you to be her special pal, and show her the ropes."

"Nothing I'd like better," said K. K. gallantly. "Leave it to me, Miss Hazlewood."

"I'm afraid I'm a dreadful bother," said the girl apologetically. "Until this morning, I thought I was going to spend Christmas with my own people, down in Shropshire. Then Sir Trevor informed me by letter that unless I could start my duties at once he would have to obtain another secretary."

"Who's Sir Trevor?" whispered Handforth.

"My pater," explained K. K.

"Rats! When your pater came down to St. Frank's, not long ago, he was Mr. Parkington!"

"He's moved a rung up the ladder since then," grinned K. K. "Didn't you see it in the papers a fortnight ago? They've made him a baronet. One of England's great captains of industry, my child!"

"Oh, I see! Congratters, old man," said Handforth.

"It's tough luck on Miss Hazlewood, having to miss her own Christmas at home because of my pater's pigheadedness," remarked K. K.

"Your pater must be something like mine," said Handforth feelingly.

"That's nothing. All paters are very much alike," commented Parkington. He turned to his brother. "But look here, Vincent," he went on, noticing that Alice Hazlewood had moved away to talk with Irene Manners and Doris Berkeley, "why on earth aren't you and Beryl coming down for Christmas? I was asking you that when these chaps came up, and you didn't answer me properly."

"I told you we weren't coming."

"That's no answer."

"It's the only one you'll get, my lad."

"But I'm your brother!" protested K. K. indignantly. "And Beryl is my sister-in-law. Why can't I know?"

Handforth & Co., who felt that they had no right to be overhearing this conversation, tried to edge away, but it wasn't easy in that crowded place.

"Oh, why shouldn't we tell him, Beryl?" said Vincent suddenly. "He's bound to know as soon as he gets home. The pater will let it out quickly enough as soon as Kirby mentions my name."

"I am very glad that your brother has seen me, dear," said Beryl quietly. "Perhaps he won't believe the awful things your father may say about me."

"Awful things!" ejaculated K. K. "What the dickens—"

"Perhaps it's as well that you should be warned," said Vincent grimly. "If you hear the pater referring to a vixen, a designing fortune-hunter, a good-for-nothing, worthless adventuress, you'll know that he means Beryl."

"Great Scott!"

"In the pater's eyes she's everything that's bad," went on Vincent fiercely. "You can see for yourself what she's really like."

"Beryl's a topping girl—a wife any chap could be proud of!" declared K. K. stoutly. "Are you trying to pull my leg, Vincent?"

"I wish to heaven I were," replied Vincent ruefully.

"But what's Beryl done that the pater should be so set against her?"

"She has committed the fearful crime of appearing in the Gaiety chorus," replied Vincent bitterly. "Now she's acting for the talkies, and before long she'll be a star."

"I say!" ejaculated K. K., gazing at Beryl with more admiration than ever. "You've been so jolly secretive about your wedding that I didn't know Beryl was so clever."

"It's all rubbish—arrant nonsense!" went on Vincent angrily. "Just because she's had the 'audacity' to go on the stage, she's unfit to mix with us! Did you ever hear of such old-fashioned, bigoted ideas? Still, it's the pater all over."

"Why not go down and face him?" asked K. K. warmly. "He can't have seen Beryl, or he couldn't have such fantastic ideas."

"He hasn't even seen her photograph," growled Vincent. "I took him some once, but he wouldn't look at them. That was before we were married. He forbade me to have anything to do with her, and told me never to mention her name to him again. Well, that settled me—and Beryl and I got married at once."

"Jolly good luck to you!" said K. K. approvingly. "I'll bet that gave the pater a shock!"

"I sent him the news by letter, and you should have seen what he wrote back to me!" replied Vincent. "He's cooled off a bit since then, and he even had the grace to ask me to come down for Christmas."

"Then why not go?"

"I said 'me'—not 'us,'" replied Vincent. "There's never been a Christmas at Parkington Grange without every member of the family being present, and he didn't want this Christmas to be an exception. So he relented to the extent of asking me to go down by myself."

"If you can't take Beryl with you, you're right in staying away."

"Either I go with my wife, or not at all," said Vincent grimly. "The pater's obstinate—unreasonable—impossible. I've asked him to see her—just for five minutes—but he won't. He's made up his mind that she's no good, and I can't shift him."

K. K. looked rather glum.

"I'm awfully sorry to hear it, Vincent," he said. "I hope Beryl won't believe that

I'm against her, too. Just wait until I see the pater! I'll tell him that I've seen her, and that she's a ripping girl."

"I thought of all sorts of desperate ideas—but I chucked them up," went on Vincent with a shrug. "I thought about getting her into the house under a false name, as one of the ordinary guests."

"Why not?" asked K. K. eagerly. "That seems a brainy idea."

"It seemed so to me, too, at first," replied Vincent. "But there are many snags. If he happened to find out who she is before he really had a chance of knowing her, he'd be more furious than ever—and would have a genuine foundation for his accusations."

"Yes, it's difficult," admitted K. K. reluctantly.

Handforth, who had not been able to avoid hearing, had a sudden inspiration.

"What about Miss Hazlewood?" he suggested brilliantly, with a grin. "Why shouldn't your brother's wife go down as your pater's new secretary, K. K.?"

"Do dry up!" said K. K. severely.

But Vincent Parkington had flushed; a sudden excitement gleamed in his eyes.

"Ye gods! That's an idea!" he said breathlessly.

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CHAPTER 3.

The Christmas Plotters!

EDWARD . OSWALD HANDFORTH looked up in surprise. He had made the suggestion in his usual impulsive way, without much hope that it would come to anything. But, as was frequently the case with Handforth, he sometimes had flashes of genius without even knowing it. He would spend hours—days—trying to think out a new jape, and would produce a wild and woolly idea which had no earthly chance of success. Then at some odd moment he would unconsciously say something which Church and McClure would instantly recognise as a brainwave.

"You don't think that wheeze is any good, Mr. Parkington, do you?" he asked, staring. "I wasn't really serious."

"Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings—" murmured Vincent. "Where's Miss Hazlewood? There's no time to be lost. I mean to put this to her at once."

"You—you mean you'll try it on?" asked K. K.

His brother was evidently a man of quick decisions; or perhaps he realised that the train would be going in a few minutes. At all events, Miss Alice Hazlewood was dragged into the discussion.

"Would you like to go home to your own people for Christmas, Miss Hazlewood, be certain of your job for the New Year, and do me a favour at the same time?" asked Vincent briskly. "It's really awfully important to me—"

"I think I know," interrupted the girl. "I couldn't help hearing most of what you were saying just now."

"My father has never seen you, neither has he seen my wife," went on Vincent. "No need for me to be long-winded about it. If my wife could go down in your place, and have the use of your name for a week, the oracle might be worked. Beryl would be in close contact with my father from the very first minute. As his secretary, she would have a marvellous opportunity of making him know her as she really is."

"But there's no time——" began Miss Hazlewood hesitantly.

"There's time for you to say 'yes' or 'no'—and that's all that matters now," replied Vincent.

"Be a sport, Miss Hazlewood," urged K. K. eagerly.

"I think I'll say 'yes,' Mr. Parkington," smiled the girl.

And so it was arranged.

When the train steamed out of the station Vincent Parkington accompanied the St. Frank's juniors; and Miss Hazlewood remained behind with Beryl. Vincent's wife, in her capacity as Sir Trevor Parkington's secretary, would follow later.

A TRAIN steamed into the little station of Steeple Marlowe, in the very heart of rural Kent. Snow was descending thickly. The carriages disgorged a large crowd of happy schoolboys and schoolgirls. They were overjoyed at the heavy snowfall. This was something like Christmas!

K. K. Parkington's guests had arrived. They found a fleet of vehicles awaiting to take them to their destination—several small, cosy saloon buses, and an extra van for baggage. K. K. himself went about superintending things with a proprietary air.

The party arrived after dark, and they found Parkington Grange brilliant with gleaming lights. The immense panelled hall was homely, with a crackling log fire burn-



The case flew from Handforth's grasp as he whizzed down the balustrade, and burst open on his pater's head.

ing in an enormous old-fashioned grate. Sir Trevor himself was there to welcome his young guests.

He made a point of shaking hands with one and all, with special words of greeting for each. He proved to be a bluff, genial man, with merrily twinkling eyes. The boys and girls liked him at once—and found it difficult to believe that he could be so hard-hearted with regard to the daughter-in-law he had never seen.

"Well done, Vincent! I'm mightily pleased you have had the good sense to come," said Sir Trevor, as he clasped his son's hand. "You know that you are welcome here, boy. As for the rest, this is Christmas-time."

"I understand, pater," said Vincent quietly.

He understood that his father was anxious—even eager—to receive him on the old footing, and to have him at home. But

Vincent knew perfectly well that if he attempted to broach the subject of Beryl, he would be gruffly silenced. Once before his father had told him never to mention her name in his presence—and he had meant it.

"I had begun to fear that you weren't coming," continued Sir Trevor. "I am glad you changed your mind. Blood's thicker than water, and at this time of the year it is right that we should be together."

Vincent was strongly tempted to mention his wife, for a surge of hot indignation came over him. However, he said nothing, for he realised that by doing so he might spoil everything.

Beryl turned up about two hours later. She came alone, and was taken by the butler straight to Sir Trevor's library—a quiet, nervous girl, conscious of the fact that she was about to commence her duties in a strange household. The festivities meant nothing to her; she was not a guest, but a paid employee.

"Miss Hazlewood, Sir Trevor," said the butler, announcing her.

"Come in, Miss Hazlewood—come in," said Sir Trevor breezily, as he rose from his desk. "Upon my soul, I'm glad to have you here. My papers are in a terrible muddle, and I must have somebody to straighten them out."

He took her hand and gave her a quick approving look up and down.

"I do hope, Sir Trevor, that I shall be satisfactory," said Beryl.

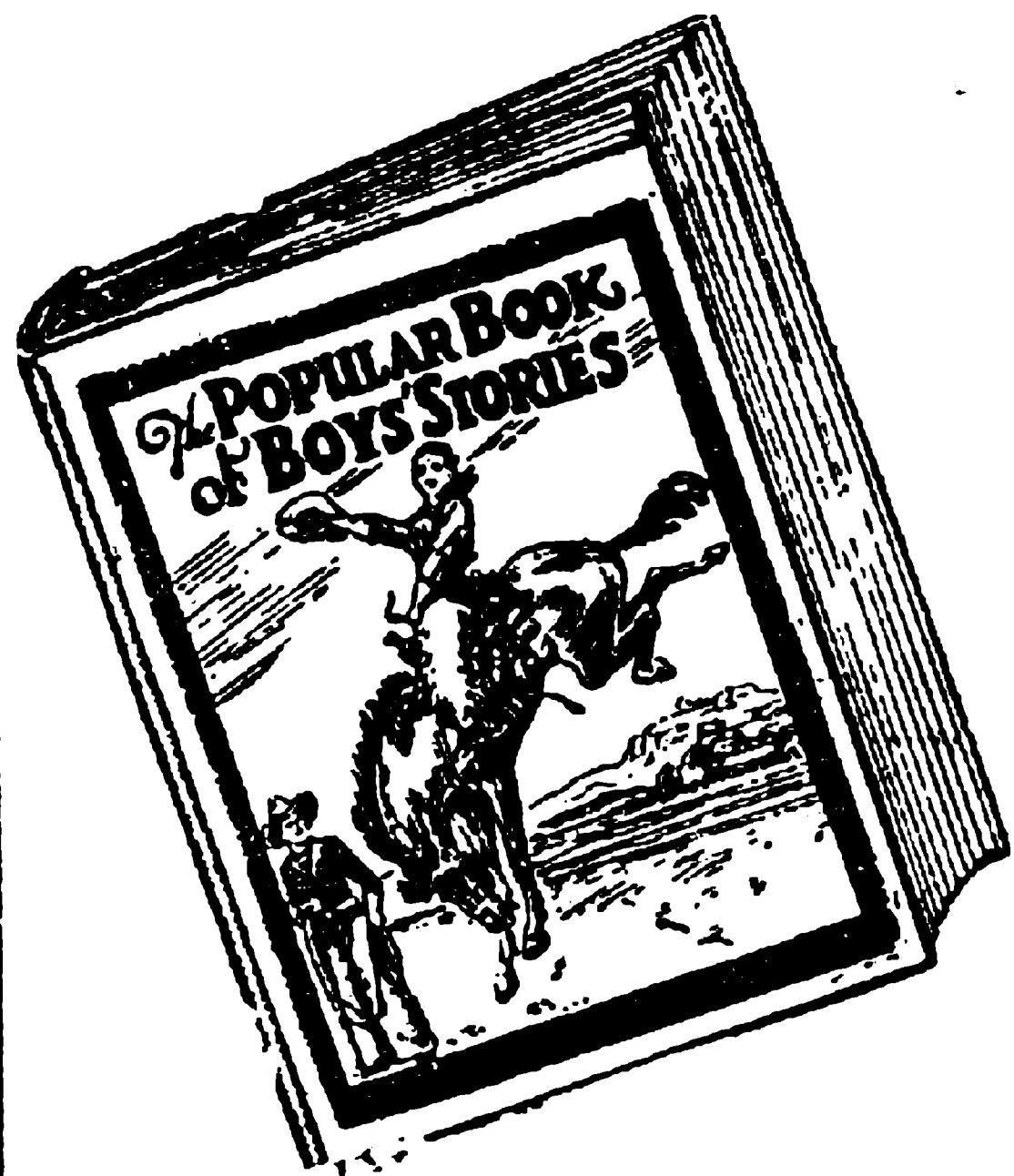
"I haven't the slightest doubt that you will, Miss Hazlewood," said Sir Trevor. "Lord Castlemere wrote me very glowingly with regard to your secretarial abilities, and your other references were equally promising. Yes, I think we shall get along famously."

For a week or two Sir Trevor had been worrying about his secretary. The girl he had employed formerly had suddenly taken it into her head to get married to the vicar's son, and he had lost her unexpectedly. For over a fortnight Sir Trevor had been wrestling with his own affairs—which he hated.

Thus, Beryl's arrival lifted a load off his mind. In his great City office Sir Trevor was the master mind, controlling, guiding, directing. But here, at home, all business connected with his household irritated him. He preferred to leave such matters mainly to a responsible deputy. It was more than ever necessary now that he had so many guests to entertain.

As for Beryl, after the first crucial interview, she lost her feeling of nervousness, and she settled down to enjoy this extraordinary Yuletide comedy. For here she was, the girl whom Sir Trevor had refused to meet, quietly sitting next to him as his secretary.

The situation was certainly piquant.



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CHAPTER 4.

The Legend of
Parkington Grange!

"CONGRATERS,
K. K., old
scream!"
Archibald Win-
ston Derek Glenthorne
beamed benevolently
upon the red-headed
Removite as they met in
the great hall after
changing.

"What's on your mind, Archie?" asked K. K.

"A priceless Christmas party, by the look of things," said Archie. "I venture to predict, old torchlight, that this house-party will be a frightfully huge success. I mean to say, there's everything. Restful surroundings, a genial host, sweet young things tripping hither and thither, and all the rest of it."

"Archie's right," said Handforth, bustling up. "We're going to have the time of our lives here, K. K. I understand that there's a prospect of some good tobogganing?"

Parkington laughed.

"If this weather keeps on, we'll be as well off as they are in Switzerland," he replied. "There are the most glorious slopes in the park—long, steep ones, where we can get terrific speed runs. The pater's got men sweeping the lake practically hour by hour, so that the ice won't get spoilt."

"That sounds good," said Handforth eagerly.

All the St. Frank's fellows, in fact, had arrived at the conclusion that their holiday at Parkington Grange would be one long round of enjoyment. Christmas parties were unknown quantities; sometimes they turned out enjoyable, sometimes they bored one to tears.

"Hallo, youngsters!" said Vincent Parkington cheerily, as he joined the group round the great fireplace. "How are your appetites?"

They looked at him curiously. His tone was remarkably buoyant.

"Everything all serene, Vince?" asked K. K. softly.

"As far as I know, it's working like a dream," murmured Vincent, a far-away look in his eyes. "She's in, boys—she's passed as O.K. All we've got to do now is to sit tight and let things develop. Caution is the watch-word."

"The pater doesn't suspect anything?"

"My dear young ass, he's falling over himself with joy because his new secretary is proving so efficient," replied Vincent. "But let's talk of graves, of worms, and epitaphs."

"Eh?"

"Shakespeare, old man," said Vincent kindly. "Merely another way of suggesting that we should change the conversation."

"For goodness' sake don't recite Hamlet to us!" retorted K. K.

"I promise I won't—but that bit happened to be out of Richard II, if you'll par-



don my correcting you," said Vincent. "They don't seem to teach you much about the classics at St. Frank's."

In the meantime, Sir Trevor had gone into his library to receive a very welcome surprise. He found Beryl quietly busy. In one brief hour, working alone, she had

obtained a full grasp of her duties, and as her abilities were by no means confined to acting, she had made good use of her time.

"If you will let me know, Sir Trevor, who takes letters to the post, I will see about the dispatch of these three immediately you have signed them," said the girl. "Then there is the question of these cheques."

"Good gracious!" ejaculated Sir Trevor, jamming his pince-nez on his nose. "You don't mean to say you've typed those letters already, Miss Hazlewood? Splendid!"

He was amazed at his good fortune in securing so efficient a secretary. He did not know that Beryl, in addition to film acting, occasionally knocked off a short story, and she was an expert on the typewriter.

"Oh, sorry, pater," said Vincent, as he suddenly appeared in the doorway with two or three of the St. Frank's fellows. "I didn't know anybody was here."

This was quite true. Vincent had come to show K. K. exactly where some old records of the Parkington family were to be found, and he had thought that Beryl was upstairs, dressing. The situation was awkward. But it only embarrassed Vincent. His father was glad he had come.

"It's quite all right, Vincent," he said briskly. "Come in! I'm very pleased you have turned up. I want to introduce you to Miss Alice Hazlewood, my new secretary."

"Delighted!" murmured Vincent.

K. K. and Nipper and Deeks and Handforth had very great difficulty in keeping their faces suitably straight. This was certainly rich! Vincent being gravely introduced to his own wife!

They shook hands distantly, Beryl acting her part to perfection. And even if Vincent was slightly self-conscious and awkward, his father put it down to the young man's natural nervousness upon meeting such a charming girl.

"We're all glad you've come, Miss Hazlewood," said Vincent cheerfully. "My father hates any kind of secretarial work, and without you here he might have been like a bear with a sore head."

"Oh, come, Vincent," protested Sir Trevor.

"It's a fact, pater," insisted Vincent.

"I've noticed a change in you already."

"I dare say you have, for I don't mind admitting that I feel a great deal more content," said Sir Trevor. "Miss Hazlewood, I am sure, is going to prove a very able right hand. Oh, yes, those letters, Miss Hazlewood!"

He signed them briskly, and Beryl slipped them into their envelopes and quietly vanished.

"An amazingly capable girl, Vincent," said Sir Trevor, as the door closed. "She hasn't been in the house an hour, and she seems to know exactly what to do. Efficiency positively exudes from her. A very charming, capable, delightful young person."

And he gazed almost defiantly at Vincent, as though daring Vincent to dispute the statement.

"I think she's a real discovery, pater," agreed Vincent gravely. "But need we discuss your secretary at the moment? You haven't dressed yet, and——"

"Yes, yes, of course," interrupted Sir Trevor. "I shall have to hurry."

He bustled off, and Vincent turned a flushed face to the boys.

"Ye gods and little fishes! It's working!" he breathed tensely.

"Like a giddy dream!" grinned Handforth.

"The pater's 'fallen' for Beryl already," chuckled K. K.

"He seems so jolly keen on her that it might be a good wheeze to spring the truth at once," said Handforth. "Then you and your wife, Mr. Parkington, could spend Christmas happily together."

Vincent shook his head, and K. K. gave Handy a pitying look.

"Just like you, you ass!" he said. "You suggest a bright idea, and then want to spoil the whole thing by rushing matters. If the pater knew now, he'd fly into a fearful rage. Beryl hasn't grown on him enough yet. We've got to give her a couple of days at least—perhaps a week—so that she can sort of take root. Time enough, then, to spring the bombshell."

K. K. turned the old books over with interest.

"I told you that Vincent would be able to put his hand on these," he said briskly. "I'll soon show you whether there's a legend connected with this house, my children!"

Vincent had gone, and the boys had the library to themselves.

"A legend, eh?" said Handforth. "Does that include a ghost?"

"My poor infant, you surely don't suppose that an old mansion like this would be without its ghost?" asked K. K. scornfully. "Of course there's a ghost!"

"Ever seen it?" asked Deeks, thrilled.

"Well, no," agreed K. K. reluctantly. "I can't say that I've actually seen it. Between you and me and this desk, I don't believe it's ever really walked. But that's no reason why it shouldn't walk this Christmas."

Nipper gave him a straight look.

"There's something moving in that head of yours, K. K.," he said shrewdly.

"I admit it, laddie," grinned K. K. "If we can only dig up this legend, and talk about it freely, we'll get everybody on the jump for the ghost. And that ghost might

be able to help things along. Anything for old Vince!"

"But how could a ghost—and a spoof ghost at that—help matters?" asked Deeks.

"I don't know yet, and it doesn't much matter," replied K. K. "We can think of that later. The main thing is to look up the records, get the story fixed in our heads, and then casually spread it. Later on, we might get a chance to produce the ghost and spring it on Sir Trevor."

"It sounds promising," commented Nipper.

"Imagine the phantom suddenly buttonholing the pater in one of the dark corridors as he's coming upstairs from the billiard-room—after everybody else has gone to bed," went on K. K. "The accusing finger, the sepulchral voice—'Avaunt, hard-hearted knave! What manner of man dost thou call thyself, for bringing misery upon thine own son? Beware! Take thy son's wife to thy heart, or thou wilt be haunted by me for evermore!' That sort of stuff, see?"

"Sounds even better," grinned Nipper.

"On the quiet, the pater is a bit superstitious, and that ought to help us," continued Parkington. "He doesn't actually believe in spiritualism, but he's dabbled a bit in it, and he swears that the ghost legend is the real thing. So he ought to be a pretty easy victim to spoof. And it's all in a good cause."

They went through the old records with intense eagerness.

"It's all here," said K. K., as he turned over the musty leaves. "The ghost is a gay Cavalier—the ghost of one, Sir Rufus Parkington, who went down fighting at the bottom of the grand staircase when the old mansion was besieged by Roundheads."

"Is that really a fact?" asked Handforth.

"Absolutely authentic history," replied K. K. "Sir Rufus is one of the heroes of our family. He was only a knight—not a baronet—and that's why two or three hundred years went by without another title in the family. He put up a terrific fight against the Roundheads, and killed eight or nine of them before he was struck down, and with his dying breath he gasped out that if ever the Roundheads returned to the Grange, he would haunt them or their descendants."

"But he didn't keep his word?" asked Handforth, disappointed.

"Lots of our people say he did," replied K. K., becoming serious. "As long as the Grange remained in the possession of the Cavaliers, Sir Rufus's spirit slumbered. But as soon as a Roundhead stepped within the walls, his ghost appeared."

"I suppose that's why the ghost hasn't walked much?" asked Nipper politely. "There have been so few Roundheads in the house that Sir Rufus has had a thin time of it."

"Nowadays, of course, it's all a question of chance," replied Parkington. "Take these present guests, for example. Some of us may be descended from Cavaliers, others from Roundheads. And if there's only one

Roundhead descendant here, the ghost is liable to walk. That's why the phantom is only seen during festive occasions, when there are lots of visitors."

"I suppose the ghost is particularly prone to show himself at Christmastide?" chuckled Deeks.

"Rather," replied K. K. "As a matter of fact, it was on Christmas Eve that the Grange was besieged and Sir Rufus went down fighting."

And they dipped further into the annals of the past.

CHAPTER 5.

The Voice From the Past!

THE St. Frank's fellows, ably assisted by the Moor View girls, put in some very excellent work before the gong sounded for dinner.

Confidentially chatting here and there, whispering to this guest, murmuring to that guest, they subtly spread the suggestion that the ghost of Sir Rufus Parkington might walk this Christmas.

There was scarcely a guest who hadn't heard the rumour within the hour; and, being a rumour, it was soon exaggerated. There were guests who whispered that the ghost had actually been seen, and there were other guests who even swore that they had encountered queer shadows in the darker corridors. In a word, the entire house-party was talking about the ghost.

Sir Trevor, when the rumour got to his own ears—which was inevitable—was thoroughly annoyed.

"I expect the youngsters are mainly responsible for all this nonsense," he said as he stood with Vincent. "It's extraordinary how boys love a ghost story. There's not one chance in a thousand that there will ever be any occult manifestation. This is the very last thing I desired, Vincent. I wanted nothing to mar the whole-hearted gaiety of my guests."

"I don't think it is very seriously marred," said Vincent dryly. "In fact, I have a suspicion that they rather enjoy the thrill."

Sir Trevor grunted.

"That's just it—the thrill!" he said curtly. "These people are too ready to look upon such matters as a mere thrill. But our family ghost, Vincent, is our own private affair. In a way, that legend is sacred to us. It concerns me deeply to find that it has been blazoned about in this way."

"You don't really believe in the ghost, do you, pater?" asked Vincent wonderingly.

"That is a difficult question to answer," replied Sir Trevor. "I have never

seen the ghost, and I do not suppose I ever shall. But there is more in these matters than we can understand, Vincent. Some people possess that occult power which enables them to sense the presence of the unknown."

"Well, there goes the gong," said Vincent, glad of the interruption. "Let's discuss something more cheerful."

He had given his father several opportunities of referring to Beryl, but not one word had he uttered. And Vincent was not only hurt, but grim. Sir Trevor's attitude was intolerable. He actually believed that Vincent had come home in obedience to his wishes, leaving his bride in London. Sir Trevor seemed to think that this was the natural thing to do. That he should be content with such a farce was a slight upon Vincent, and the young man looked eagerly forward to the moment when he would bring his father down from his high perch.

A word of tolerance on the subject of Beryl would have made all the difference. How easy it would have been for Sir Trevor to take Vincent by the shoulder and say he was sorry his principles forbade him to receive his actress wife, and that he hoped Vincent would understand? But, no. Not a word. Sir Trevor ignored her existence utterly and absolutely.

The knowledge that Beryl was here all the time cheered and comforted Vincent, yet he found it difficult, as he sat down at the great festive board in the banqueting-hall, to stop himself from looking across at his wife and smiling. The one hardship in this situation was that he was compelled to treat her almost as a stranger.

The guests were having a great time. This was, indeed, a real Yuletide party. It was Christmas Eve, and as they all sat round the table they could hear the waits outside. There were gay decorations everywhere, the lights were soft and mellow, and here, as in the great hall, a seasonable log fire was crackling and blazing. Sir Trevor was the perfect host—genial, kindly, and full of jokes.

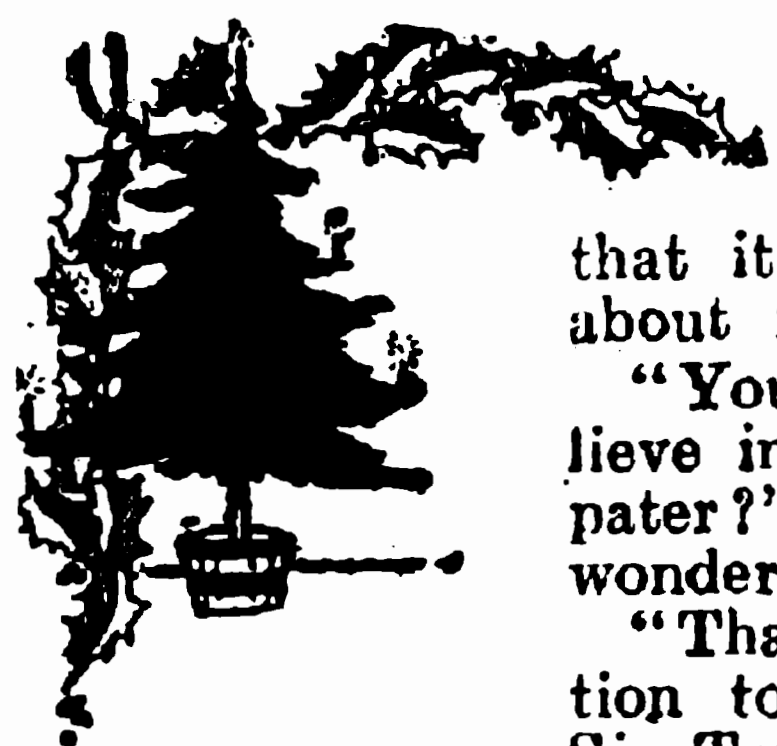
The fun was fast and furious as the meal proceeded. It had not got beyond the fish course, however, before something occurred to still the gay chatter. Vivian Travers was the first to notice the peculiarity of the great picture which hung on one of the panelled walls.

"Look over there!" murmured Travers, nudging his left-hand table neighbour, who happened to be Phyllis Palmer. "Isn't there something rummy about that picture, Phyl?"

The girl glanced across curiously.

"You mean the old painting of the Cavalier?" she asked. "My goodness! Don't the eyes gleam strangely? I don't think I noticed that before."

"They weren't like it five minutes ago, I'll swear," said Travers uncomfortably. "By Samson! There's something—something uncanny about those eyes."



He was fascinated by them, and it was significant that that life-sized painting—a precious Old Master—should be a portrait of Sir Rufus Parkington, the famous ancestor of the Parkington family who had died in defending his home.

The picture, like others on the walls, was in comparative shadow. The lights of this great room were concentrated on the enormously long table, which stood centrally, leaving great bare spaces all round. For the banquetting-hall was as big as a St. Frank's class-room. To the guests, the walls were even more shadowy, since they were beyond the range of the lights.

Travers found himself staring fascinatedly at that painting. The eyes of Sir Rufus were not the dead eyes of a picture—amazingly life-like though the master-painter had made them. They burned with a living fire. They seemed to glow out of the picture with a sinister, even vindictive, force.

"Oh!" murmured Phyllis. "I'm sure they're getting brighter!"

Jimmy Potts, on her other side, was attracted, and then Irene Manners, and others. At last Sir Trevor noticed the sudden stilling of the chatter on one side of the table, and it was hardly necessary for him to ask the cause. He himself followed the direction of those half-scared looks, and he could not avoid the start he gave.

"Upon my soul!" he ejaculated huskily.

Was it imagination, or were the eyes of the Cavalier looking straight at him? His exclamation drew the attention of all, and an absolute silence fell—broken only by the distant sound of the waits' band as it went off through the snow.

"The picture's alive!" murmured somebody in fear.

But even this comment did not break the spell. No other word was spoken, and all eyes were turned upon the painting of Sir Rufus Parkington. And then, at that dramatic moment, came the shock.

"It is well that ye should all cease your festivities," came a deep, accusing voice. "I thank you, ladies and gentlemen, since it is my desire to speak with my descendant, Sir Trevor Parkington."



The snow-fight waged fast and furious when Sir Edward Handforth poked his head angrily out of the window—to receive a snowball full in the face.

There were a few horrified gasps; but, in the main, the guests were too dumbfounded to show much emotion. That voice had come from the picture—the painted image of the dead and gone Sir Rufus Parkington!

"What—what is this?" asked Sir Trevor hoarsely. "Who spoke? Who is playing this absurd joke?"

A mocking laugh sounded, and one or two of the ladies tried to stifle their little shrieks. There was something in the quality of that laugh which terrified them. And as it sounded, the eyes of the picture positively glittered.

"A murrain upon ye, Sir Trevor Parkington, for the curmudgeon that ye are," came the phantom voice, floating out into

"Ay, 'tis well that ye should pause for words," came the mocking voice. "Ye may silence the living, Sir Trevor, but 'twill test your powers to silence me. Ye stand there, a host who is but half a host—a father who is but half a father. Once again, a murrain on ye, Sir Trevor, for the plaguey thing ye have done."

"Crumbs!" breathed Handforth, startled.

Everybody heard that comment, and had the situation been less tense it might have raised a laugh. But the ghostly tones which had filled the room were so impressive that Handforth's interruption was hardly noticed. Sir Trevor was still standing, still staring at the great painting—still half-stupefied.

"Consider well, Sir Trevor, before ye let this thing go too far," went on the phantom voice. "Your son is here, and at a word from you so can your son's wife be here. Cast out the prejudice in your heart, and remember that this is Christmas—the time of good will towards all mankind. No peace will be yours unless ye relent. Take warning, Sir Trevor! This house is not complete—yet. Beware!"

In some queer way the voice had lost a great deal of its power towards the end of that speech; the last word, indeed, came only as a faint whisper before dying away eerily, mysteriously.

"Look!" panted Travers, tightening his grip on Phyllis's wrist.

With the dying away of the voice, so the glow had gone from Sir Rufus's eyes. And gone, too, was the spell. Many of the gentlemen guests sprang to their feet; ladies screamed. The St. Frank's boys and the Moor View girls loosened their hitherto spell-bound tongues.

"This is some trick!" shouted Sir Trevor furiously.

He sent his chair back with a crash and strode across to the painting of Sir Rufus. Vincent, startled and uncomfortable, was with him, to say nothing of two or three other men. Servants hung about, pale-faced.

"Extra lights!" ordered Sir Trevor hoarsely.



the room so clearly that not one word was lost. "What manner of man are ye to deny your son the right of bringing his wife to the home of his ancestors?"

Sir Trevor nearly choked.

"Silence!" he croaked. "I will not listen—"

Groups of electric light on the walls came to life, and the shadows were dissipated. Sir Trevor stood in front of the great painting, looking at it with deep suspicion. He had half-expected to find a lurking figure behind one of the old pieces of antique furniture, but nothing human was visible—and it was certain that no trickster had had the opportunity of getting away.

"This is extraordinary, Sir Trevor," said one of the other guests curiously. "The most impressive occult demonstration I have ever—"

"Not so occult as you seem to imagine, Mr. Gillman," snapped Sir Trevor. "I don't believe this nonsense. Somebody has been tricking us."

"But that voice could not have come from anybody at the table, or from the servants, either," protested Mr. Gillman. "Permit me to know better than you, Sir Trevor. My chair was the nearest to this picture. There was no living thing within a dozen feet—and it was the picture itself which spoke. That I'll swear."

"Hear, hear!"

"Certainly it was the picture which spoke."

"Mr. Gillman is right."

The guests were becoming excited now, and Sir Trevor waved his hands.

"Then there is some secret device concealed here," he declared. "In these days of microphones and loud-speakers, it is easy enough to produce ghostly effects."

"That's all very well, pater, but microphones and loud-speakers can't cause the eyes of a painting to glow with life," said Vincent, who was very startled. "Did anybody else see the peculiarity of the painting's eyes?"

"Yes, of course," said Mr. Gillman quickly. "We all saw. And as the voice died away, so the glow died from the eyes. I am convinced that we witnessed an occult demonstration of the most unique kind."

Sir Trevor seized the great picture and swung it clear of the wall. Somebody else obligingly struck a match and held it aloft. The result of that examination was significant. The matchlight revealed long-standing cobwebs, which stretched and broke as the picture was pulled further away.

"No trickery here, Sir Trevor," said somebody. "This picture hasn't been moved for years."

"So I see—so I see," muttered Sir Trevor, more startled than ever.

He even got up on a chair and gazed closely at the eyes of the painted face. They seemed to look at him with mocking amusement. But they were the eyes that the master-painter of long ago had placed on that canvas with his brush. There were no secret devices here; no faked eyeholes, with secret panels in the wall behind.

By now, Sir Trevor was becoming almost convinced. And with that change of attitude, so his anger went. He seemed to shrink into himself, so to speak; he was subdued.

Still seated at the table, Beryl was trying to look unconcerned. Yet she, of course, had been more affected than any other person in that great hall—for that phantom voice had made definite references to her. What a mercy it was that she was spared the curious glances of her fellow guests! How thankful she was that her real identity was unknown! As Miss Hazlewood, she attracted no attention whatsoever. Once she caught her young husband's eye, and she found some of the St. Frank's fellows giving her a quick glance, too, but that was all.

"This is staggering, indeed," said Sir Trevor slowly. "My first impression was wrong. There could have been no trickery here. No living thing was near this painting, and there is no concealed loud-speaker or other device."

"What of these panels, Sir Trevor?" asked one of the other guests, as he tapped the wall. "I suppose there's no possibility of a secret passage, or a hidden chamber?"

"My dear sir, secret passages in old mansions are generally the invention of scatter-brain storytellers," said Sir Trevor impatiently. "There are no secret passages here. I am deeply sorry to disappoint you, but I do not know of one secret passage in the whole of this establishment—although the house was built, I believe, when secret passages were popularly supposed to be a part of the architects' stock-in-trade."

"I was only making the suggestion," said the guest, abashed.

"This wall is three feet thick, and the ball-room is on the other side," said Sir Trevor gruffly. "I happen to know what I am talking about, because the electricians found it necessary to penetrate the wall recently when some re-wiring was done. I hate to confess it, but this particular wall, imposing as it seems with its decorative panelling, is composed of nothing but rubble within. Our ancestors were not particular as to their materials—but their work, nevertheless, lives. No, there's no secret cavity within this wall."

"Then what is the explanation of that ghostly voice?" asked Mr. Gillman. "An astounding occurrence, Sir Trevor. With your permission, I will write a paper on the subject, and send it to the 'Occult—'"

"I trust you will do nothing of the sort, sir!" interrupted Sir Trevor sharply. "I should not like this extraordinary incident to be made the subject of any publicity."

Vincent almost smiled. He could understand his father's reluctance. That phantom voice had said some very frank and outspoken things. And Sir Trevor, now that the first excitement was over, was remembering those things very vividly.

CHAPTER 6.

The Warning Whispers!

"JOLLY good, old man," murmured Harvey Deeks admiringly.

"Eh?"

"I don't know how you worked it, but it was clever," said Deeks.

(Continued on page 18.)

The Phantom Of The Grange!

(Continued from page 16.)



In the temporary confusion, Deeks had managed to leave his place, and he was now whispering to Kirby Keeble Parkington. But Parkington only stared at him with absolute mystification.

"You're wrong," he murmured. "I did nothing."

"But that voice?"

"Nothing to do with me," said K. K.

"I'm as puzzled as you are."

"What!" gasped Deeks incredulously.

"But—but I thought— Do you mean to say that that manifestation wasn't caused by our chaps?"

"We'll talk about this later," whispered K. K. "All I know, my child, is that our own private ghost isn't due to walk until midnight. We don't know a thing about this Voice. I'm beginning to think it was the real ghost."

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

He went back to his own place, vastly ill at ease. Until now, he had been chuckling inwardly, marvelling at K. K.'s ingenuity. Many of the other St. Frank's fellows had been similarly amused. When they discovered that this happening was no part of K. K.'s programme, they sat up with a jolt.

Their serenity vanished. It hadn't been a trick at all. K. K. was as mystified as anybody! What, then, could it mean? Uneasiness grew, and many were the sidelong glances that were directed towards the fateful picture.

Dinner, which had commenced so promisingly—so jovially—almost fizzled out. Sir Trevor sat silent and moody at the head of the table, lost in thought, a deep frown on his brow. One or two of the ladies had retired. The other guests spoke in low, subdued voices. The food, somehow, had lost its savour.

"Come, come! This won't do!" growled Sir Trevor, pulling himself together with a start. "We mustn't allow such a trifle to upset our festivities. I apologise, ladies and gentlemen, for my ancestor's rude and uncalled-for interruption. If there is any logical explanation of that Voice, I shall discover it, never fear—and I shall let it be known to you all. In the meantime, let us forget it."

And he did his best, during the remainder of the meal, to revive the spirit of the party. It was a poor effort, however, since he himself was very obviously forcing his good-humour. He was thankful enough when the meal was over, and when he was permitted to get away to his own library.

"THERE isn't any explanation—that's just it," said Handforth excitedly. "It wasn't any of K. K.'s trickery. And who else would work such a

wheeze? By George! It was the real ghost!"

"Let's go and look at that picture for ourselves!" suggested Church.

They were not the only investigators. Others were examining the picture; not that their efforts bore fruit. The picture revealed nothing; and there wasn't a secret device of any kind along the whole of that panelled wall.

Vincent was lucky enough to get a word with Beryl in a quiet corner of the great landing. They had met quite by chance, and now stood casually chatting, outwardly keeping up the pretence that they were comparative strangers.

"Oh, Vincent, I wanted the floor to open, and swallow me!" confessed the girl, in a whisper.

"You needn't have felt like that, old girl," murmured Vincent. "In this household you are Miss Hazlewood, so nobody will even notice you."

"All the same, that—that Voice was talking about me!"

"And what the Voice said was straight and to the point," went on Vincent dryly. "The pater is to have no rest until he has relented. Somehow, I think he is far more affected than he admits. Those words have sunk in deeply."

"Do you really think it was the—ghost?" breathed Beryl.

"I'm hanged if I know what to think—but I do know that things have been helped along very nicely," replied Vincent. "Keep it up, Beryl! You've already got the pater dippy over you. A day or two of this, and he'll come round like a charm. But it mainly depends upon you, and— Oh, by the way, Miss Hazlewood, I think my father was asking about you a minute or two ago."

"I'm just going to the library, Mr. Parkington," said Beryl promptly.

A couple of guests had appeared in the distance, and although there wasn't a remote chance that Vincent and Beryl could be overheard, it was just as well to be on the safe side. The girl went downstairs, turned into one of the wide corridors, and made for the library.

"Keep stout your heart, Mistress Beryl," came a soft voice in her ear.

"Oh!" cried the girl, swinging round.

Her eyes opened wider. There wasn't a soul in the corridor save herself. It was well-lighted, too, and there were no recesses in which a trickster might lurk. Besides, that voice had sounded right in her ear.

"Where—where are you?" whispered Beryl, yet feeling that she was foolish to ask such a question of the thin air.

"Always ready to serve you, sweet lady," came the reply, so close to her that she spun round again. "Your secret may be kept from others—but not from me. Your scheme

is good, and well planned. Already Sir Trevor falters."

The girl wondered if she were dreaming. The voice had gradually faded away as though the speaker had been walking away from her. Yet there was nobody—nothing in the corridor.

Beryl found herself hot and confused and just a little alarmed. Such an experience was startling. Whence had come the Voice? The uncanny part about it was that the words had been whispered right into her ear; and it was the same Voice as had spoken from the picture. The unseen phantom of Sir Rufus was abroad!

Entering the library, Beryl did her best to conceal her agitation. Plucky and resolute though she was, those words, coming from nowhere, had startled her very considerably. She found Sir Trevor standing with his back to the fireplace, smoking. He looked at her gratefully as she came in.

"I'm glad you've come, Miss Hazlewood," he said gruffly. "Not that I want you to do any work. It is my desire that you should make yourself perfectly at home. Your footing is to be even more intimate than if you were one of my guests. The Grange is your home, Miss Hazlewood, and I want you to treat it as home."

"Thank you, Sir Trevor," said Beryl quietly.

"Not, of course, that you are being treated in any way different from my late secretary," continued Sir Trevor. "We are homely people, Miss Hazlewood, and we stand very little on ceremony. Now, tell me—what do you think of that extraordinary incident during dinner?"

"I don't know what to make of it, Sir Trevor," replied Beryl cautiously. "We all heard the Voice, didn't we? Yet there doesn't seem to be any explanation to account for it."

"Deucedly uncanny," growled Sir Trevor. "And the words, too! Cursing me roundly—a murrain is a kind of curse, Miss Hazlewood—for taking up a strong and righteous attitude with regard to Vincent's wife! It's intolerable! From the very first I have said that I won't have that wretched chorus girl in my house, and I shall stick to my principles."

Beryl pretended to look bewildered.

"I don't think I quite understand, Sir Trevor," she remarked.

"You know that my son has married a chorus girl, don't you?" asked the other, frowning upon her. "Heavens! What makes him choose a person like that when there are so many nice girls in the world? If only you had come earlier—Well, never mind! I certainly won't have Vincent's wife under this roof. I've taken my stand, and I shall stick to it!"

"Perhaps she isn't so bad as you seem to think, Sir Trevor?"

"What!" Sir Trevor looked at her as though she were demented. "Isn't she a chorus girl?"

"I don't think all chorus girls are bad," she murmured.

"Miss Hazlewood, you must permit me to know better than you," said Sir Trevor. "You have had the advantage of a sheltered life, and you know nothing of these worldly matters. Without even seeing this wretched woman, I know—I positively know—that she is unworthy of the name of Parkington. By gad! I'll see to it that she never crosses my threshold! If once she gets within my doors, I'll—I'll renounce my title!"

Beryl was inwardly amused. At the same time, she was beginning to understand Sir Trevor much better. He wasn't the flinty-hearted old boor she had pictured to herself. The situation could be explained in a nutshell. He simply did not understand. It was he who had led a sheltered life. Completely wrapped up in his business and his home, he had never interested himself in other matters.

"Well, I needn't detain you," he went on kindly. "Don't let that dinner incident upset you, Miss Hazlewood. I'm not at all sure that it wasn't some clever trickery. And I'll find out, too!"

A faint sound of mocking laughter came from the other side of the room.

"Good heavens! What was that?" asked Sir Trevor blankly.

"I—I think somebody laughed!" faltered Beryl.

Sir Trevor strode across the room, opened the door and looked up and down the corridor. But there was nothing. He could find nothing to account for that ghostly laugh.

"Fool!" came a soft voice. "Think ye that ye can see the invisible?"

Sir Trevor jumped. The Voice was against his ear. Beryl, who had followed him to the door, heard it, too, and she instinctively clung to him. Sir Trevor put a fatherly hand on her shoulder.

"It's all right, my child—don't be frightened," he said. "You heard that voice just now?"

"Yes, Sir Trevor."

"I'm beginning to believe that the ghost of the Cavalier is abroad," muttered the baronet. "There is no method by which that voice could have been produced by mechanical means, and there is no living soul here except us. You'd better get back to the others, Miss Hazlewood, and don't upset yourself."

She went, puzzled more than ever—but happier in another sense. Very clearly, Sir Trevor had shown her that he regarded her as a girl of intelligence and refinement. When the climax came, it was impossible that his old prejudice could remain. He had even hinted—But Beryl dismissed the thought. Perhaps Sir Trevor had only been polite.

Left alone, Sir Trevor lit another cigar, then re-examined the library. The thing was inexplicable. He went to the door and looked out again. The long, stately corridor was empty. Sounds of music came drifting from the ball-room, where the young

people were dancing and making merry, but here all was quiet.

"Look well, Sir Trevor," said a voice, loud and taunting, quite near him. "But well as ye may look, I shall remain unseen. Be sure that I am always near—watching—listening."

The baronet caught in his breath.

"Where—where are you?" he panted hoarsely.

"Were I solid, the reach of your hand would touch me," came the reply. "Arrogant blockhead! I heard well your paltry words to Mistress Hazlewood. Rid yourself of such blind prejudice, my friend! For just as long as you maintain this stony-hearted attitude, so I shall continue to haunt you!"

The mocking laugh sounded again, drifting away down the corridor eerily. Sir Trevor, shaking visibly, went back to the library, and wondered if the attitude he had taken regarding Vincent's wife was as just and as reasonable as he had believed.

CHAPTER 7.

The Rival Ghosts!

"**H**ERE we are!" said Kirby Keeble Parkington briskly.

Candle in hand, he had climbed up a narrow stairway, and had entered a great barn-like attic where great oak rafters stretched overhead. Deeks and Goffin and Baines and Fiske and Haddock followed him. The six St. Frank's Red-Hots were on to a job.

"Ugh! A creepy, spidery place," murmured Deeks, looking round.

"Scared?" asked K. K. scornfully.

"A bit," admitted Deeks, with defiance. "Dash it all, after that affair during dinner anybody could be excused for feeling scared. Besides, lots of people say that they've heard the Voice since."

"Rumours," said K. K. coldly.

It was about 11 p.m., and the majority of the guests had retired. All the boys and girls had gone to their respective rooms, and only a few of the elders remained downstairs—playing bridge or billiards. The upper part of the great house was quiet and still.

This particular attic was isolated. Even the four candles which the juniors had brought with them did little to dispel the gloom. The attic was enormous, the shadows black and impenetrable where the oaken beams came down to meet the floor. Lying about in odd disorder were boxes, trunks, chests, and all the litter which finds its way into the average country house attic.

"There's one of those old chests full of old-time costumes, as I was telling you downstairs," said K. K., as he looked round.

"If we can't find a suitable rig-out for a cavalier, may I be sunk a hundred fathoms."

"Talking about that Voice," said Deeks uneasily. "It's all very well for you to scoff, K. K., but that Voice isn't any part

of our wheeze. At least five people have said that they've heard whispers in the corridors—distinct whispers when there's been nobody within twenty yards of them."

"Imagination!" retorted K. K. "They heard that Voice during dinner, then they heard one or two rumours, and they could easily kid themselves that whispers came to them. Anyhow, what's the good of discussing that now? We're here to get busy on this job, aren't we?"

"All I meant was," said Deeks, "what's the good of our messing about like this if the real ghost is at work?"

"Pardon me, my lad, there's no messing about here, and dry up about ghosts!" snorted K. K. "Baines is going to rig himself out as a Cavalier, and appear before Sir Trevor. That's the programme. Don't forget that speech we rehearsed, Baines. You've got to tick him off until he's quivering like a half-set table jelly."

"Leave it to me," grinned Baines, the amateur actor of the Remove.

The other boys peered apprehensively into the black shadows. This ghost business was all very well, but it had its drawbacks. It was nearly as frightening for the tricksters as the tricked. At any moment they expected to hear eerie whispers coming from the black recesses. The candlelight was limited. Long, fantastic black shadows were cast over the floor and on the rafters, and once, when K. K. suddenly moved, Goffin uttered a startled yelp.

"Look!" he gasped. "There's—there's something——"

He broke off, nearly choking. It had only been K. K.'s shadow, fantastically elongated, passing in front of a sheet-covered wardrobe which had evidently been discarded and put up here out of the way.

"You're as nervous as a set of schoolgirls," said K. K. tartly. "In fact, schoolgirls wouldn't be half so jumpy. Let's get on with the washing." He opened one of the big chests and whistled. "Hallo! What's this?" he asked sharply. "Who's been sleeping in my bed? Who's been eating my porridge?"

"Going scatty?" asked Goffin politely.

"Somebody's been here before us!" replied K. K. "Look how these things have been turned over! By Jove! I wonder if that ghost voice is a trick, after all? Somebody's up to something squiffy, anyhow."

"Rats! These things might have been disturbed years ago," said Haddock.

"There's fresh candlegrease here," replied K. K. "Besides, I spotted the marks on the trunk where the dust had been disturbed as soon as I tried to open it. Well, never mind. We shall be up here all night unless we start something."

They soon found a suitable costume—the rich garb of an old-time cavalier, complete with top-boots and a splendid plumed hat.

"It may not be absolutely the right thing for a real cavalier, but it looks good," commented K. K. "Come on! I've got the

A burly policeman barged up. "What do you want, Handy?" asked the Jester. "How did you know who I was?" demanded the indignant "bobby."



bags, you can collar the coat, Baines, and somebody else can take the hat. And don't forget all that lace stuff. You can dress up in our bed-room."

THE Red-Hots were not the only ghost impersonators that night.

In one of the other bed-rooms, Edward Oswald Handforth was eyeing himself critically as stood in front of the long mirror. He had donned a pair of red-velvet knee-breeches which, in the main, were sound. There were one or two moth-eaten spots, but they were hardly noticeable.

"They ought to have been green," he said judicially.

"Green would have suited you better," agreed Church.

"It's the only colour that does suit him," said McClure wearily.

Handforth missed the point.

"Oh, I don't know—blue looks pretty well on me," he said. "But this red velvet is a bit startling."

"Considering that you're planning to play a ghost, what's wrong with that?" asked Church. "The more startling the better."

"Green, in the moonlight, would look altogether more weird and ghostly," replied Handforth. "Still, it's not worth going up to the attic again. Where's that funny-looking waistcoat, Mac?"

"Look here, why not chuck it?" asked McClure desperately. "Don't be a silly ass, Handy! If you go charging into Sir Trevor's bed-room in that rig-out, he'll spot you in a minute."

"I want him to spot me," said Handforth coldly.

"I mean he'll twig who you really are," said Mac. "And if you open your mouth, he'll recognise your voice before you've said a couple of words. What's the good of asking for trouble like that? Dash it all, you're a guest in this house, and it's a bit thick to barge into the host's bed-room—"

"About my mouth," interrupted Handforth, ignoring the latter part of McClure's speech. "Do you think I'm ass enough to impersonate the ghost without disguising my voice? Listen to this!"

He struck an attitude.

"Beware, Sir Trevor!" he said in a thick, strangled tone. "I, Sir Rodney Parkington, stand here to accuse you of being a rotter! Take your daughter to your heart, or I'll appear before you nightly until you're ninety-one! Go to her room now, knock on her door and beg for her forgiveness."

"We mustn't let him go, Mac," said Church in despair.

"What was wrong with that?" asked Handforth indignantly.

"Everything!" snorted Church. "Do you call that disguising your voice? Any fool could tell it was you—only you sounded as though you were talking through a sponge. And what do you mean by calling yourself 'Sir Rodney'? The cavalier's name is Sir Rufus."

"What's the difference?" asked Handforth sourly.

"Not much—only you'll never convince people that you're Sir Rufus's ghost if you give yourself another name," replied Church. "And what's the idea of telling Sir Trevor to go to his daughter-in-law's bed-room? You silly ass, she isn't supposed to be in the house at all!"

"By George! I'd forgotten that," admitted Handforth. "I'll cut that bit out."

"Do the big thing and cut it all out," urged McClure.

But it was obvious that Handforth was determined to carry on. His chums had been arguing with him ever since they had come upstairs. They had heard K. K. talking about that chestful of old clothes in the attic, and Handforth had immediately decided upon action.

Cunningly enough, K. K. had casually made some mention of Baines playing the ghost on Christmas night—and he had done so on purpose to put Handforth off. The famous leader of Study D, therefore, thought that he had the field to himself to-night, which was Christmas Eve.

Church and McClure thought of using force. Vincent's cause would not be furthered by Handforth's well-meant but blundering efforts. It was far more likely that he would give the whole show away. It was really marvellous how Handforth could say the wrong thing without realising it.

But Church and McClure were wise in their generation. They decided to wait. There was no need to risk black eyes and swollen noses at this early stage. They could wrestle with Handforth at the last moment, if necessary. But before it got to that stage he would probably give himself away to some of the other fellows.

At last he had completely dressed himself, and, admittedly, he looked picturesque. His kit included a long, flowing black wig, with ringlets falling over his shoulders. He was very satisfied with himself.

"I'm going over to the window," he said. "As soon as I have pulled the blind up, you switch off the juice, and we'll see how I look by moonlight."

"There may not be a moon," said Church tartly.

However, there was—half a one. It was almost concealed behind scudding clouds, but sufficient light came through the window to reveal the figure of the cavalier. Church and McClure were forced to admit that the effect was eerie. And it was even more eerie after Handforth had smeared himself with some colourless phosphorous stuff which he had obtained surreptitiously from the village earlier on.

"If only you'd appear like that, Handy, the wheeze might succeed," said Mac. "The trouble's going to start when you open your mouth."

"The trouble's going to start now unless you stop talking rot," retorted Handforth. "What's the good of a ghost unless he speaks? Now, you stay here. I'll go alone."

He thought he went alone, but Church and McClure followed at a safe distance. Their idea was to drag Handforth back at the last minute if he should succeed in getting to Sir Trevor's door—which was doubtful. So far, Handforth had made no inquiries with regard to the host's bed-room, and it was quite likely that he hadn't the faintest idea where it was situated. It was like him to forget such a point until the last minute.

Church and McClure were right. Handforth, as he progressed slowly down one of the corridors, was thinking of what he should say rather than where he was going. He had a vague idea that Sir Trevor slept at the front of the house; but it was very vague.

He reached the end of the corridor and turned into another, where there were lattice windows at intervals all down one side. The moon happened to be in that quarter, and the pale light was filtering through weakly.

It was at this point that Handforth realised the necessity of knowing just where to go. He paused, irresolute. And at that very moment another figure appeared in sight at the further end of the corridor, fully visible, but vague and ghostly in the moonlight.

Handforth jumped about a foot into the air.

"Who—who's that?" he asked hoarsely.

He wondered for a tense second if he was the victim of some illusion. Were there mirrors in this corridor? For that figure, some thirty feet away, was a replica of himself—a cavalier with plumed hat, ringlets, flowing coat and top boots!

In a word, the two ghosts were face to face!

CHAPTER 8.

The Curse of Sir Rufus!

IF the one ghost had been startled, the other was no less so.

Conway Baines, proceeding towards Sir Trevor's bed-room, turned into that moonlit corridor with confidence. And there stood Handforth, at the other end, pausing irresolutely, knowing nothing of the fact that he was walking away from Sir Trevor's bed-room instead of towards it.

Baines spotted him while he was standing perfectly still, and the effect was hair-raising. Baines was not an easily-scared junior, but there had been a lot of talk of ghosts, and when he saw that Phantom Cavalier he was half-frightened out of his wits.

"Who—who's that?" came a hoarse inquiry.

For once Church and McClure were wrong. Handforth's voice was quite unrecognisable, but this could be accounted for, perhaps, by the fact that he did not attempt to disguise it. He was so scared that his voice hardly rose above a whisper, and Baines not only failed to catch the words, but he did not even know that they had been uttered by the other ghost.

He pulled himself together with an effort. Handforth did the same. He wasn't going to be frightened off by a silly spectre! He strode on, and Baines, with a prickly sensation running up and down his spine, did the same.

"Avaunt, knave," said Handforth in a hollow voice. "What doest thou here in my domain? Buzz off, curse thee!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Much as they tried, Church and McClure failed to choke back their laughter. They had a shrewd idea that the other ghost was one of K. K.'s crowd; and in another second they knew it.

"Handy, you—you ass!" came Baines' startled voice.

Handforth recognised it, too.

"Away, base fraud!" he thundered. "What folly is this, that thou, a fake, should dare to tread my walk? For I am the ghost of Sir Rupert Parkington—I mean, Sir Rufus Parkington. Clear out of it, blow you!"

Baines snorted.

"Are you kidding yourself that you've disguised your voice?" he asked sourly. "You silly ass, Handy! Now we know who bagged that clobber from the old chest! You're messing up the whole show!"

"Hi! Clear off!" yelled Handforth. "I mean, avast! That is to say, avast! Take that, you fathead!"

Crash!

Baines took a powerful drive on the nose, and the next moment the rival ghosts were rolling on the floor, and Church and McClure and K. K. & Co. were dashing up from opposite directions.

"Separate 'em!" said K. K. briskly. "Of all the frosts! If anybody can be trusted to mess things up, it's Handy! What asses we were not to arrange this thing with all the other chaps; then there couldn't have been any misunderstanding."

The rival ghosts were separated, and held apart.

"Cheese it, Handy!" protested K. K. "You don't want to fight, do you? Remember you're a guest in this house!"

"Well, I'm the only ghost," growled Handforth. "I've made up my mind to spoof your pater, and——"

"Look!" interrupted Deeks in a frightened voice. "What's—what's that down at the end of the corridor? Oh, my hat! Keep quiet, you chaps!"

They all turned and stared. Sure enough, there was something visible—a whitish, indistinct shape, hovering uncertainly in the faint moonbeam! It seemed to come towards the boys, who stood motionless and silent.

"Away, foolish ones!" said the Voice. "Think ye that this folly is of any help? I am the only ghost of Sir Rufus Parkington, and I need no help from mortals. I beseech ye to leave this in my hands."

"It's a trick!" shouted K. K. excitedly.

He dashed down the corridor to the spot where the Voice had sounded. There was nothing visible. He paused for a moment, staring about him in mystification. And then the Voice sounded right against his left ear, although there was nothing on that side of him except the empty corridor and the closed window.

"Nay, bold youth," came the faintest of whispers. "Follow if you will, but ye shall not see me. Once again, I beg that ye shall leave this matter to me."

"Where are you?" asked K. K., bewildered.

"I'm here—always," whispered the Voice. "Get ye back to bed, and sleep well. I am dealing with Sir Trevor this night."

Parkington was not exactly frightened, but he was stirred to the marrow. This spirit of Sir Rufus was rather terrifying; it was intangible, a voice with-



out a body. And one never knew when it was present. Even now the words grew fainter and fainter, passing down the corridor towards the great staircase.

K.K. was a levelheaded fellow, and he knew perfectly well that the corridor was empty. Yet he could have sworn that somebody had passed down it, uttering those words. He wondered if there was a secret passage, running parallel—but he dismissed this thought. The Voice had not been separated from him by panels. It had sounded actually in his ear.

"What is it?" asked Goffin, running up.

"He's gone—this way," muttered K.K. huskily.

They ran to the staircase, and halted at the top. Was it imagination, or did they hear the stairs creaking? Yet the moonlight, falling on the stairs, revealed them empty. As they held their breath, they could hear deep breathing, and even a low chuckle or two, descending the stairs to the hall.

"Here, I say, this is a bit too much for me," muttered Goffin, trembling. "Spook ghosts are all very well, but this is a real ghost. Somebody went down those stairs just now, K.K. We heard him, but we saw nothing!"

"It's decidedly mysterious," said K.K. tensely.

The rival ghosts decided, in the circumstances, to abandon their project. What good could they expect to do in opposition to this vague, intangible Voice? Moreover, they were all feeling jumpy. Midnight was at hand, and it was hardly the hour to be wandering about in these dark, shadowy corridors.

SIR TREVOR PARKINGTON turned over in bed as the hour of midnight struck. He switched off his bedside light, and prepared to sleep. Then he sat up abruptly. His door had silently and slowly opened—although he knew quite well that he had securely closed it.

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"Well?" he asked sharply. "Who is that?"

"A word with ye, Sir Trevor," came a soft whisper.

Sir Trevor's teeth closed with a snap. A trick! Ghosts might pass through solid doors, but

they did not open them! The baronet was out of bed in a flash, and he tore across the room.

Breathing hard, he looked up and down the wide passage, switching on the room lights at the same moment. He was startled to find himself alone. He felt foolish. He had been half asleep, and—

"Foolish one, think ye that I fear the light—I, who am invisible?" came a mocking inquiry. "I will but detain ye a minute."

"Good heavens!" ejaculated Sir Trevor, aghast.

As before, the Voice was next to him, right in the doorway. The experience was no less terrifying because it was familiar. Indeed, Sir Trevor found himself shaking in every limb. The mystery of this Voice was staggering. Sir Trevor was gripped by the fear of the Unknown.

"I must be mad," he muttered. "It's only a trick of the imagination. I'm hearing voices that don't exist."

"Conscience, my friend, plays us queer tricks, 'tis true, but it is not your conscience which speaks now," came the whisper. "It is I, Sir Rufus Parkington. Know ye that I have been watching, and that my patience is ebbing. Ye are a hard man, but your hardness is more prejudice than injustice. Once ye remove that stumbling block, 'twill be easy."

"This—this is intolerable," panted Sir Trevor, staring wildly about.

"Yet I am but commencing my haunting of ye," said the Voice sternly. "Midnight has tolled, and thus 'tis Christmas Day. If you and your son's wife are not reconciled before midnight tolls again, then my Curse shall be on ye for ever, and never will ye know peace again."

Sir Trevor was shaken. He knew he was alone, yet he had to speak.

"Do you think you can force me, you—you interloper?" he panted.

"Faith, that is a strange word," came the quick answer. "I an interloper? I, Sir Rufus Parkington, your ancestor? 'Tis my concern for the good name of Parkington that has impelled me to come out from my long rest. Ye shall not besmirch that name, Sir Trevor."

"I besmirch it?" stuttered Sir Trevor. "It is my son who has besmirched it, by marrying a good-for-nothing woman—"

"Hold thy bitter tongue," interrupted the Voice curtly. "What know ye of this wench? A man who speaks without knowledge of his subject is but a fool. I go now, Sir Trevor, but bear in mind what I have said. Ye have until another midnight."

The Voice trailed away. Sir Trevor walked unsteadily to the bed, and sat down.

"One last word," said the Voice, close to his ear. "Sleep well, Sir Trevor, for the morrow must bring its decision—and ye will need all your wits."

"Go—go!" panted Sir Trevor hoarsely. "Leave me alone!"

The knowledge that he could not escape that Voice appalled him. Out in the corridor there might have been trickery—although by now he felt convinced that there was not. But this time the words had sounded in his ear, on his very bed, with the full bed-room lights flooding the apartment.

Sir Trevor Parkington slept only fitfully that night.

CHAPTER 9.

The Haunted Baronet!

THE youthful guests were full of noisy glee and laughter as they tramped out into the snow and sunshine after breakfast the following morning. It was Christmas Day—and what a Christmas Day! Crisp, hard snow, a blue sky, and a nip in the air which made one feel good to be alive. Parties were setting off with toboggans, skates, and other implements of winter sports.

"This is the stuff to get up a whacking great appetite for the Christmas feeds," grinned Handforth, as he pulled a toboggan. "We're going to have some rare sport this morning, you chaps. Isn't your pater coming out, K. K.?"

"Soon," replied Kirby Keeble Parkington thoughtfully. "I believe something's beginning to work," he added in a low voice. "I don't know how it's happened—because we've done nothing—but the pater looks different this morning. Sort of subdued."

"This Christmas grub is a bit hard on a man," nodded Deeks.

"It's not that—it's something on his mind," replied K. K.

Standing at the library window, Sir Trevor watched the merry parties as they went trailing off across the snow-covered lawns and grounds.

"It's good to see them enjoying themselves," he muttered. "I suppose I shall have to go out, too, although I don't feel like it."

"Aren't you feeling well this morning, Sir Trevor?" came an anxious inquiry.

Sir Trevor started and turned. He had forgotten that his secretary was in the library.

"I am sorry, Miss Hazlewood," he apologised. "It isn't often I talk to myself like that. Thank you, I'm quite well. But

there's certainly something wrong with my memory. What are you doing here, on Christmas morning?"

"There is my work——"

"Stuff and nonsense!" broke in Sir Trevor gruffly. "I meant to have told you at breakfast-time. You'll do no work to-day, Miss Hazlewood. Didn't I tell you to regard yourself as one of the family? This is Christmas Day. You've got to go out and enjoy yourself. You can skate, I suppose?"

"A little," confessed Beryl.

"Then go and put your warmest things on, get your skates, and have a good time," growled Sir Trevor. "But you need an escort, eh? If my son isn't otherwise engaged, I'll get him to take you to the lake. He'd better not be otherwise engaged!" he added grimly.

Vincent wasn't; he had purposely hung about after the others had gone, hoping that he might be able to get a quiet word with his young wife. To find her thrust upon him as a skating partner was more than he had hoped for.

"Go and enjoy yourselves—both of you," ordered Sir Trevor. "What an infernal pity it is, Vincent, that—H'm! It's no good thinking that way now, though. Be careful of the narrow end of the lake. I don't think the ice is quite sound there."

"Aren't you coming along, pater?" asked Vincent.

"Later, old man—later," promised Sir Trevor.

He did not show up until the morning was well advanced, and then he only came out as befitted the duties of a host. He did not feel like skating, or, for that matter, any other enjoyment. He was not haunted by that Voice now, but by the memories of last night.

He was not a superstitious man, but he had a profound belief in the occult, and he was deeply impressed by what had happened. A hard-headed man, difficult to convince, he knew that there are people always ready to fake up spirit manifestations, and at first he had been suspicious. But now the conviction was upon him that his famous ancestor had really been talking.

He was thinking of Sir

Rufus now, as he skated mechanically over the lake. Ordinarily, he enjoyed skating, but to-day his mind was too full of other things. He was troubled by doubts. Had he been fair to Vincent? The thought worried him. Now that he came to look at matters in the right perspective—impelled to do so by the memories of that Voice—he saw that perhaps he had been unreasonable and harsh. He would see the girl once—just to convince himself that she was unfitted to bear the name of Parkington. After Christmas,



perhaps, he would get Vincent to arrange a meeting. He would meet the girl somewhere in London, at a place where there would be no fear of other people seeing her.

Thinking thus, with occasional recollections of that ghostly Voice, Sir Trevor did the very thing he had warned his son against. He was skating mechanically, without thought or heed of his direction, and already he was skimming over that dangerously thin ice at the narrow end of the lake.

Subconsciously, perhaps, he turned in that direction because he would be alone. He

was not in the mood for the noisy, cheery shouts of the young people. And it so happened that practically all the members of the house-party were at the far side of the lake, watching an impromptu skating competition which had been organised between the boys and girls.

Vincent Parkington, gallantly escorting his father's secretary, was skating with her in mid-lake, enjoying himself hugely. He had not reckoned upon such luck as this. He was enabled to have the first private chat with her that had yet been possible. She had told him all her news, and he had told her all his.

"I'm really frightfully braced," said Vincent. "Somehow, Beryl, I think things are coming out all right. Pater's different to-day, and I believe he's different because he's been thinking about you."

"You mean, thinking of me in the abstract—not as myself," smiled Beryl.

"The sooner we can make him change his opinion, the better," vowed Vincent. "I'm all impatient to get the thing over. I want to introduce you to everybody in your real name—to let them see that I'm not such a fool as they think. Oh, I'm not deaf! I've heard the murmurs, and seen the sidelong looks! I'm the young idiot who has married a worthless chorus girl. Gad! How I shall enjoy their discomfiture—particularly the pater's."

She laughed at his enthusiasm.

"When you've finished talking like an excited schoolboy, I'd like to point out that I'm feeling chilly," said Beryl. "I meant to have brought my wrap, but I left it in the hall."

"Why didn't you tell me before?" asked Vincent. "Half a minute. I'll dash across to one of those boys on the bank, and ask him to fetch it."

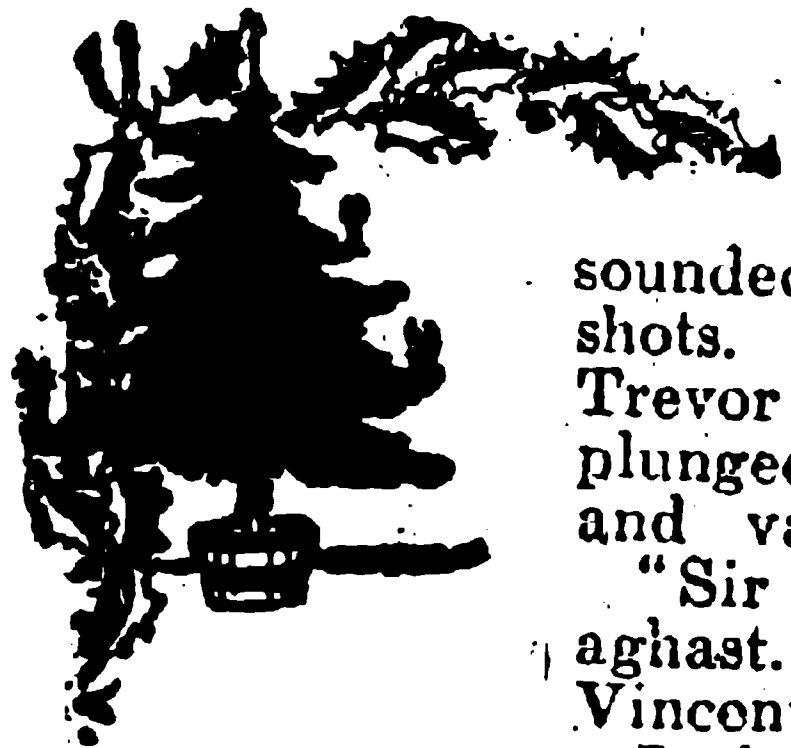
He skated off, leaving Beryl leisurely gliding in the centre of the lake. With nothing to do, she now observed Sir Trevor, and her eyes opened wider with alarm.

"But that's the narrow end!" she murmured. "He warned us— Oh!"

Even as she was looking at him, she heard a faint crack. Sir Trevor himself



With difficulty Beryl held up the drowning man until rescue was at hand.



swung round, as though aware of some danger.

Two more cracks sounded, almost like pistol shots. Next moment Sir Trevor Parkinson plunged through the ice and vanished.

"Sir Trevor!" she cried aghast. "Vincent—Vincent!"

In her alarm, she forgot that, as Sir Trevor's secretary, she had no right to call Vincent by his Christian name. Fortunately, nobody was near at hand to hear her. In that same second, too, Beryl made up her mind.

She fairly flew over the ice, remembering a chance remark Sir Trevor had made the previous evening when talking of skating. He had said that he could not swim! She saw him now, struggling helplessly in a patch of black water.

Without a second's hesitation, the girl skated at full speed off the edge of the broken ice and plunged in. She came up quickly, and shook the water out of her eyes. One glance told her where Sir Trevor was, and a couple of powerful strokes took her to his side.

"It's all right, Sir Trevor," she said breathlessly. "Don't struggle. I can hold you until help comes."

"Good heavens! Miss Hazlewood!" panted the baronet. "You should not have been so rash! Thank you, my dear—thank you! Upon my soul! I believe I was going down just before you came to my help."

He did not know that his fair rescuer, being a film actress, was required to be an adept at all sports and athletics, and that physical fitness was an essential feature of her job.

Not that these facts detracted from her plucky action. Strong and fit as she was, Sir Trevor was a big man, and this task was almost too much for her, in that icy water. Only by calling upon all her resources of strength and courage did she support him until help arrived.

It wasn't long in coming—for Vincent, from the distance, had seen. Many of the St. Frank's fellows saw, too, and there was a general stampede towards that treacherous ice. Nipper and Handforth and a number of others, with great presence of mind, rushed out a ladder which had been lying by the lake side—placed there by Sir Trevor himself as a precautionary measure in case of accident.

It was Vincent who edged his way along the ladder and reached the well-nigh exhausted pair. Beryl was nearly done, but her little mouth squared itself when Vincent suggested that she should come out first.

"Take your father, please," she said, with difficulty.

"But you—"

"I'm all right," panted Beryl. "Oh, don't waste time."

It was a ticklish, difficult business getting Sir Trevor's heavy frame out of the water, for he was so benumbed with cold that he could hardly help himself. But at last it was done, and when Beryl was brought to safety she, too, was paralysed by the cold.

Excitement ran high. Fellows had dashed indoors for blankets, and these were at hand. The victims were wrapped in them, placed in the cars which had been brought up, and driven swiftly to the house. The doctor from Steeple Marlowe arrived soon after, having been hastily summoned.

"Nothing the matter with them at all," he declared, when he came down and was plied with questions. "Thanks to the prompt measures taken I don't think the two patients have even caught a chill. They're both strong, and they'll easily throw this off. They'll be down presently."

"That's jolly good!" was the general comment.

But neither the host nor his secretary appeared at luncheon, although the party was merry because it had been told that Sir Trevor and Miss Hazlewood would certainly be fit by tea-time.

They came down in mid-afternoon, the doctor insisting that they should partake of something hot and stimulating. So they met in the library, where steaming cups of beef extract were awaiting them.

"Miss Hazlewood, I've been dreading this meeting," said Sir Trevor quietly. "What I am to say to you I don't know. I cannot thank you in adequate terms, because there are no such terms. You saved my life this morning—"

"No, Sir Trevor," said Beryl quickly. "I only happened to be near by. Others would have come—"

"They would have come too late," he interrupted. "Quick as you were, I was nearly gone. I owe my life to you, and it is for you to say how I can make you any adequate return. It is, of course, impossible for me ever to liquidate my debt, but there may be some way—"

"Please, Sir Trevor!" pleaded Beryl. "There is nothing I want. All I ask is that you should forget it completely." She laughed. "Why, we are both unharmed, and the whole affair was only a trifle."

"It depends upon the point of view. Miss Hazlewood," said Vincent who, with K. K., was also present. "I feel the same as pater. You were simply marvellous. I can't say how much I admire you."

She flushed, and Sir Trevor glared at his son.

"It's too late for that sort of thing, you young idiot!" he said gruffly. "I wish to Heaven Miss Hazlewood had come to the Grange before you tied yourself up with that—that— In wonder's name, boy, why couldn't you have chosen a wife like this girl?"

Beryl flushed more deeply than ever—but partly with exultation, although Sir Trevor had no suspicion of this.

"I am sorry, Miss Hazlewood," he went on. "I didn't mean to embarrass you like that. But I'm a blunt man, and I feel deeply on this subject."

K. K., near Beryl, suddenly bent closer to her and whispered. His eyes were gleaming with a mischievous light which the St. Frank's Old-Timers knew so well. Beryl nodded eagerly. Sir Trevor, busy drinking his steaming beverage, did not witness the incident.

"Perhaps there is one way in which you can discharge your debt, as you call it, Sir Trevor," said the girl steadily. "Your reference to your son's wife has given me the opportunity of speaking."

"What can you have to say about her?" asked Sir Trevor coldly.

She went over to him.

"It's Christmas-time," she murmured. "It's the time when we should forget and forgive—and be kindly. To please me, Sir Trevor, will you ask your daughter-in-law to join the party?"

"Good heavens, no!" replied Sir Trevor, horrified. "Ask her to come down here—to my own home? This is impossible——"

"Yet you said, not long ago, that it was for me to name my own reward," said Beryl reproachfully. "Are you so prejudiced, Sir Trevor? It is all I ask. Let your son bring her here, so that she can be in time to join in the festivities this evening. Let her come on Christmas night."

Sir Trevor, trapped, spluttered and snorted for a moment or two, and then ruefully laughed.

"Well, I brought it on myself," he said. "By gad, you womenfolk are infernally clever! I told you to name your own reward, and now I can't get out of it. All right, Miss Hazlewood—I give in. Vincent," he added, glaring at his son, "you can bring her."

"Pater, you'll never regret it," said Vincent breathlessly.

"That's to be seen," growled Sir Trevor. "Remember, I'm not weakening. Unless she meets with my approval, she goes out of this house immediately after breakfast tomorrow."

CHAPTER 10.

The Unmasking!

EXCITEMENT ran high in the great ball-room that evening.

It had long since been known that Vincent Parkington had been given permission to bring his "forbidden" young wife to the Grange, and for hours he had been absent. Now, to add to the general expectancy, an element of mystery had developed.

It was a carnival ball that evening, with all the guests in fancy costume and masked. The rumour had gone round that Vincent had been seen and detected within the last ten minutes. Appropriately enough, his costume was that of a gay cavalier.

And what could Vincent's arrival mean? Only that he had brought his wife with him. She was here—somewhere in this ball-room. Effectually masked, her identity remained hidden.

"My sons, this is going to be worth quids," breathed K. K. gleefully as he confided to some of the other fellows. "The stage is all set."

Vera Wilkes and Irene and one or two others joined them.

"Do tell us what's happening," urged Vera. "Be a sport, K. K."

"How the dickens did you know me?" asked K. K., disappointed. "I rather thought this jester get-up was a good disguise."

"Your fool's cap doesn't fit quite closely enough," chuckled Vera. "And your hair, K. K., is rather distinctive."

"There's always something," said K. K. "Wait until I get hold of Deeks. The ass told me that my hair was all hidden."

A burly figure, dressed as a policeman, barged up.

"What's going on here?" he asked in a thick, disguised voice.

"News of Vincent's wife, Handy," said K. K.

"Who told you who I am?" demanded Handforth indignantly.

"No power on earth could disguise your famous outline," replied Kirby Keeble Parkington. "Besides, not five minutes ago, I saw Mickey Mouse come up to you, hold out a paw, and rook you of five bob. Two and two, my child. Nelson Lee himself couldn't have done better. In a flash I knew that Mickey Mouse was Willy, and that the policeman was you."

"Well I'm dashed!" said Handforth disgusted.

"Oh, can't you boys argue some other time?" asked Irene impatiently. "We want to hear about Beryl."

"She's here," murmured K. K. "Of course, she's been here all the time, and when Vincent went he only pretended to catch the train for London. If you'll look round the ball-room you'll see a fair maiden dressed as in the days of yore—Cromwellian period, I believe, to match the cavalier. She's not really a maiden—she's Mrs. Elder Brother."

"Oh, let's look!" cried Vera.

They soon detected Beryl. Her costume was too gorgeous for words, and she wore it with an exquisite distinction which marked her out from most of the others. Not a soul—except those in the know—associated that fair lady with Vincent's wife.

Sir Trevor himself was on edge. He knew that Beryl had arrived and, still convinced that she was a woman unfitted for his son, he was dreading the meeting.

Vincent approached his father as the latter stood watching one of the graceful old-time dances.

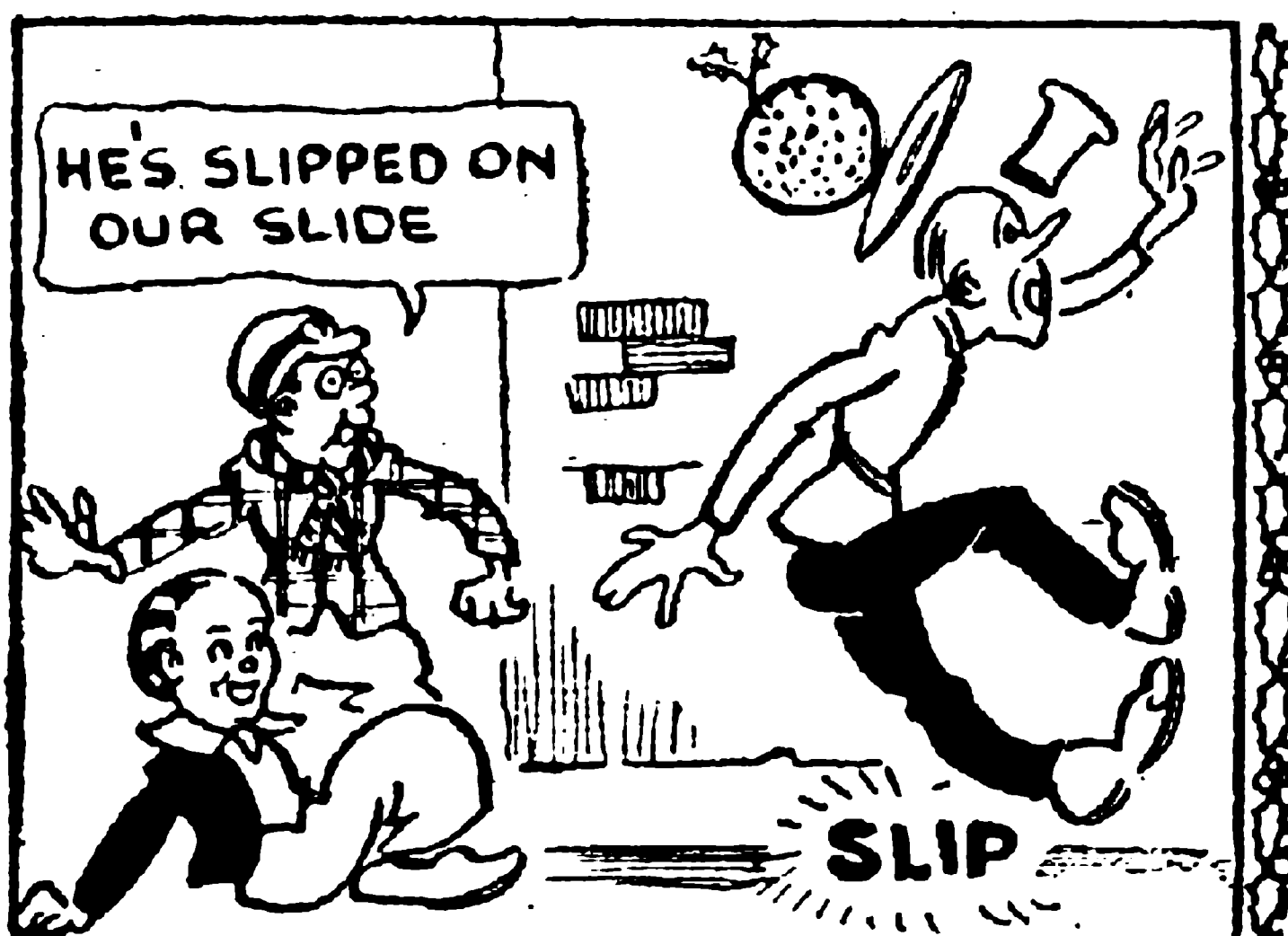
"Pater, I'll leave it to you," said Vincent. "Shall we wait until the unmasking,

(Continued on page 50.)

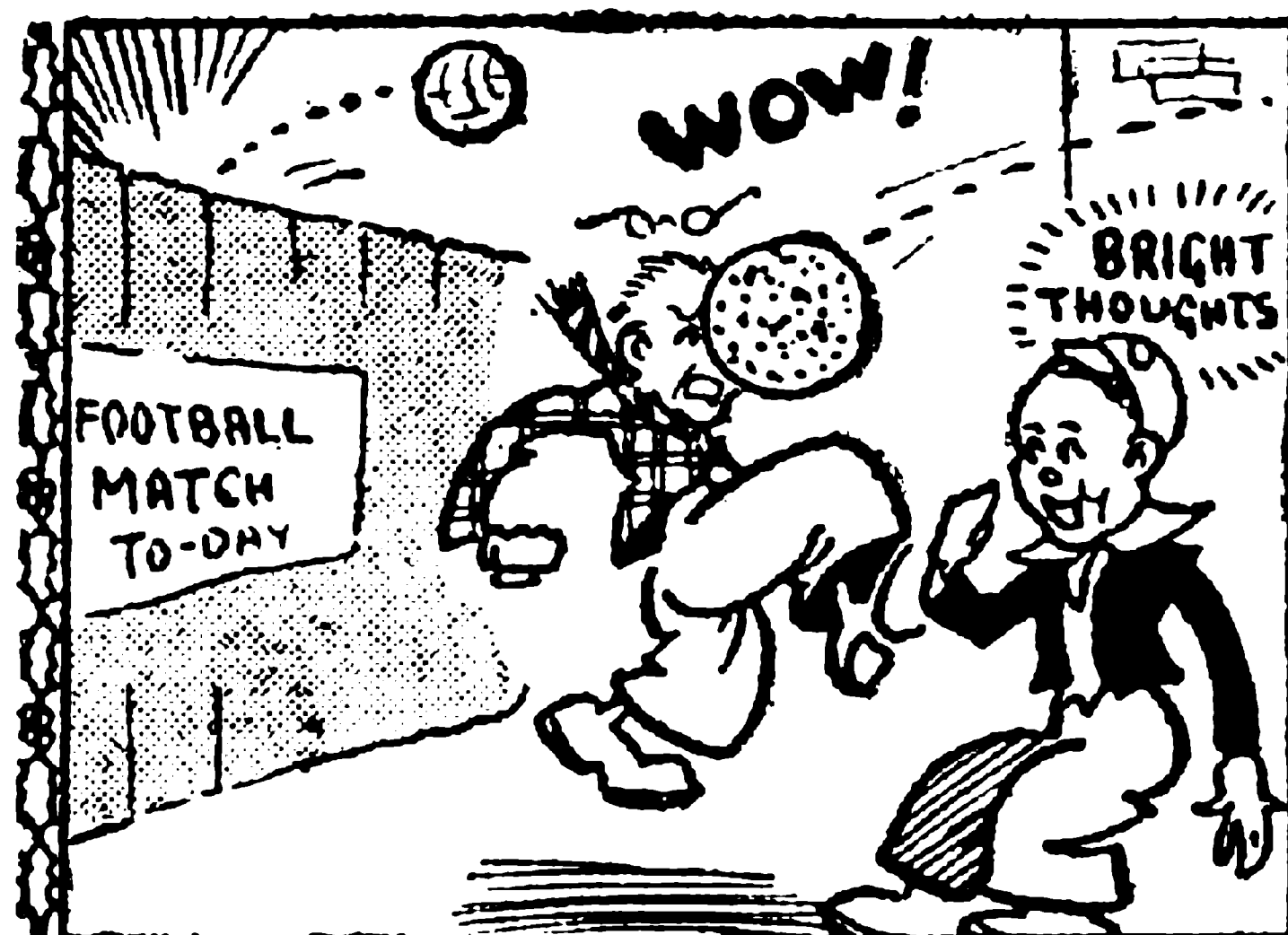
THE JOYOUS CAPERS OF WEE WILLY WINKLE



Wee Willy and his pal were thinking of giving the footer match a look in when up pops a nasty slice of work, and pushes Willy off the landscape.



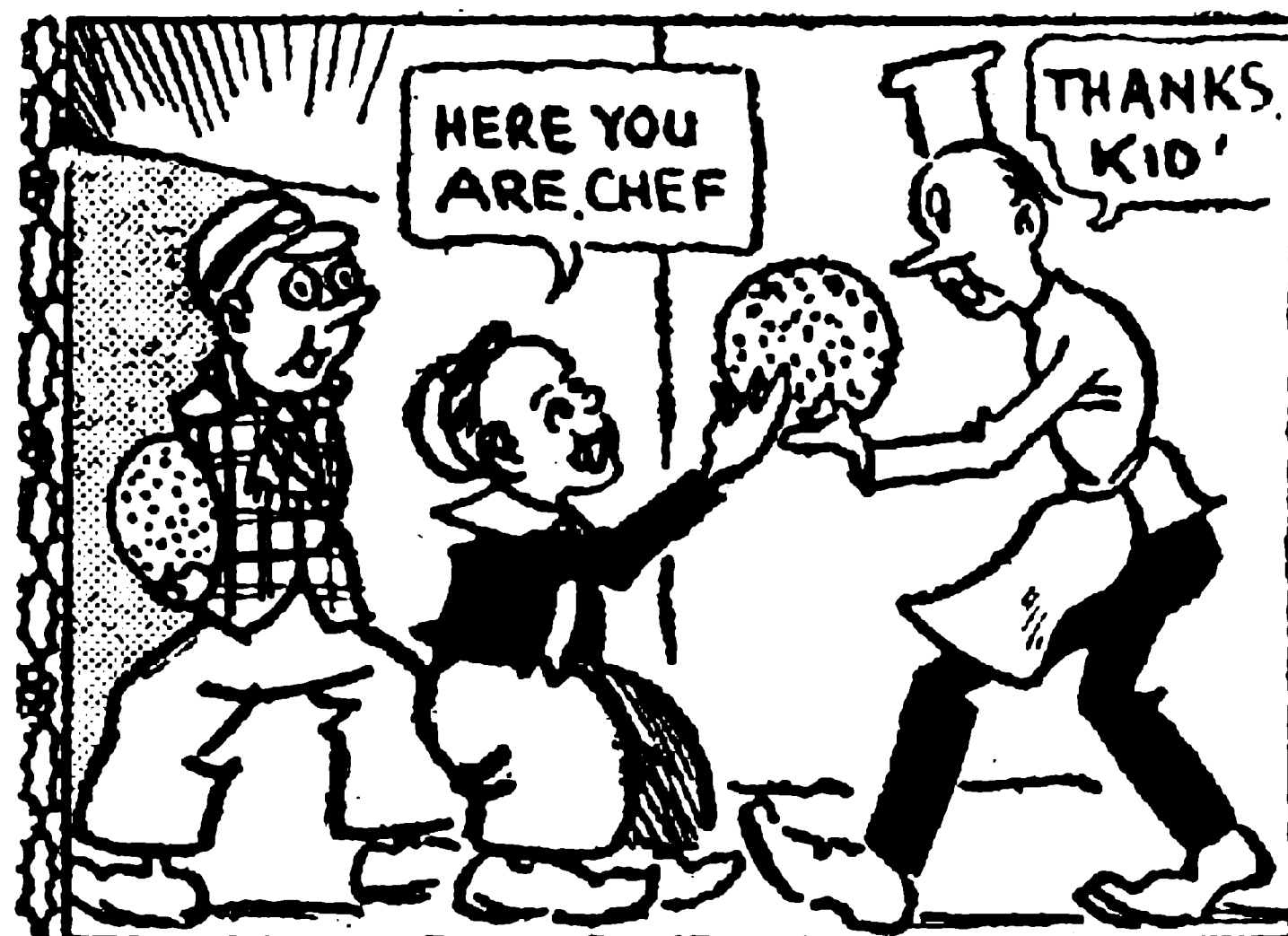
Willy didn't like his phizz pushed about like that, so he was jolly pleased when old Nasty, the chef, slipped up on the slide they had just made.



Bang! went the chef, and bonk! went the pud, clean off the plate and into Willy's pal's optic. At that moment a football bouncing over the fence gave Willy a brain-storm.



Grabbing some paints from his pocket, he swooped for the football, and with a few deft dabs made it into a real-life pud. Then up came the chef, looking for his property.



"This yours?" asks Willy, gracefully holding out the painted football. The chef, being short-sighted, didn't see the difference. "Thanks, kid!" he said, and turned to go.



But at that moment up dashed the footer team after their ball, and when they saw the chef with it—oh, what larks. Poor chef got an eyeful, and Willy got the pud.

Are You A Christmas Prize-Winner ?



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.

A GOOD REASON.

Mistress (to Mary the maid who is making preparations for Xmas party) : “Why are you polishing up the silver with Master Jack’s copy of the ‘Nelson Lee’ ?”

Mary : “Because, ma’am, I heard Master Jack say that his ‘Nelson Lee’ brightened things up so much.”

(*F. Vigars, 11, Fore Street, Redruth, Cornwall, has been awarded a handsome watch.*)

HE COULDN'T TELL A FIB.

Barrister (cross-examining witness) : “You seem to have plenty of intelligence for a man in your position.”

Witness : “If I wasn’t on oath I’d return the compliment.”

(*N. Moore, 111, Henderson Avenue, Belfast, has been awarded a pocket wallet.*)

JUST SO !

Pat (in aeroplane for the first time) : “Mike, why is this ‘plane flying upside down ?”

Mike (also in ‘plane for the first time) : “Oh, I expect we’re on a long flight and the driver wants to save the tyres.”

(*W. Kitchener, 3, Claremont Cottages, Biggleswade, Beds., has been awarded a penknife.*)

HIGH JINKS.

Tommy : “In New York they have buildings twenty storeys high.”

Sammy : “Gee ! What a time we could have sliding down the banisters !”

(*G. Lindsay, 4, Murrayfield Gardens, Edinburgh, has been awarded a pocket wallet.*)

OUT OF PLACE.

It was Christmas Eve. The storm raged ; waves swept over the struggling vessel. The skipper, a fighter to the last, decided that the time had come

to send up distress rockets. Some moments later a nervous passenger approached the bridge and in an apologetic voice said :

“I know it’s Christmas, and please don’t think I’m a killjoy, but is this quite the time for fireworks ?”

(*H. Tessier, 130, Battersea Bridge Road, S.W.11, has been awarded a pocket wallet.*)

A SPECIAL DIET.

The sword-swallower was feeling seedy, so had visited a doctor.

“Hum !” said the medico after he had made his examination. “What is your vocation ?”

“I’m a sword-swallower.”

“I shall have to put you on a special diet ; no more cavalry swords or daggers. Just try some small dessert knives to keep up your strength.”

(*J. Crook, 20, Pilling Street, Norden, Nr Rochdale, has been awarded a pocket wallet.*)

THE ONLY WAY !

A squad of new recruits had been taken out to the rifle range for their first try at marksmanship. They knelt at two hundred yards and fired. No hit. They knelt at a hundred yards and fired. No hit.

“Tenshun !” roared the sergeant. “Fix bayonets ! Charge ! It’s your only chance of ever getting anywhere near the target.”

(*E. Mellor, The Bungalow, Cryers Lane, Nr. High Wycombe, Bucks, has been awarded a penknife.*)

SCIENTIFIC.

Father : “Now I want to put a little scientific question to you, my son. Why does the steam come out of the spout of a kettle when the water boils ?”

Son : “So that mother can open your letters before you get them.”

(*W. Berry, 9, West Avenue, Village Deep, P.O. Box 1064, Johannesburg, S. Africa, has been awarded a penknife.*)

A TOUGH TURKEY.

Butcher (to customer) : “You want a turkey ? Why, you haven’t paid for the one you had last Christmas yet.”

Customer : “Well, you see, my husband sprained his wrist so badly when carving it that he hasn’t been able to write out a cheque.”

(*R. Hatcher, 10, Princes Avenue, Tolworth, Surrey, has been awarded a pocket wallet.*)

A BIG BANG.

Foreman : “Send in young Clancy. I saw him smoking alongside a load of explosives a while ago, and I’m going to fire him.”

Rafferty (mournfully) : “Well, sorr, here’s part of his hat.”

(*A. Goldes, 37, Bastion Street, Bloemfontein, S. Africa, has been awarded a pocket wallet.*)



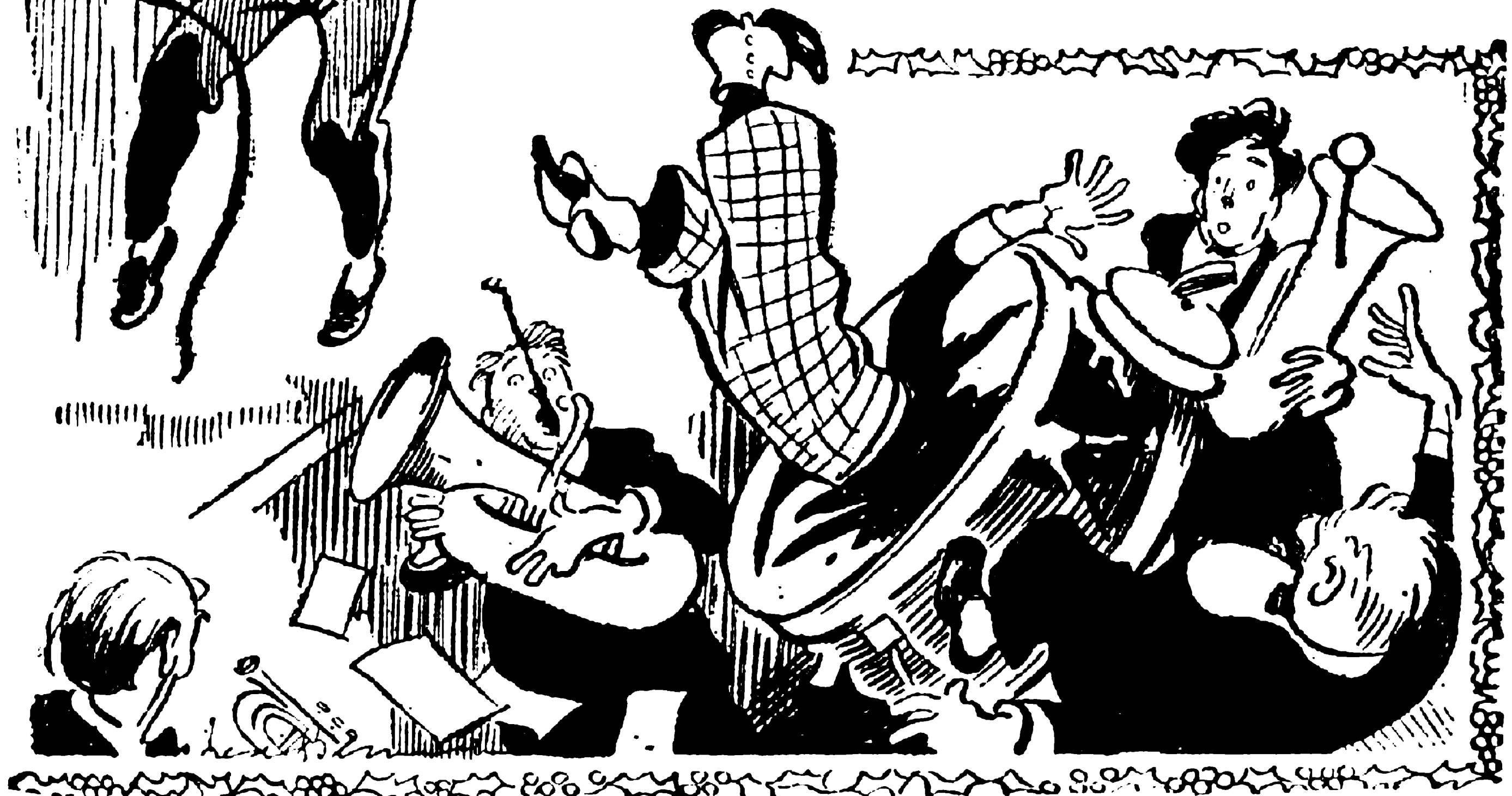
A black and white illustration of a boy in a striped shirt and shorts, holding a long, thin object (possibly a stick or a small animal) and looking towards a large, stylized plant. The scene is framed by a decorative border.

A Watery Introduction!

"I SEE the pantomime is going to be 'Jack and the Beanstalk' this year," remarked Ginger Jones as he and Fatty Hart and Billy Baxter strode leisurely through the village on Saturday afternoon.

His two friends nodded. Every year during Christmas week a touring company took over the Bynville Cinema and ran a pantomime. The annual affair caused a great deal of excitement in the village, for the producers always made a point of engaging some local talent to perform in the show.

This year, as Ginger had said, the pantomime was to be "Jack and the Beanstalk," and for several days there had been posters all over Bynville advertising the fact.



"My Uncle Jack is one of the scene-shifters," announced Fatty Hart modestly.

Billy Baxter frowned. More than once lately Fatty Hart had shown signs of getting too big for his boots. The effect on Ginger, however, was different.

"You don't say, Fatty!" he exclaimed, and there was so much surprise and admiration in his voice that Fatty blushed a little. "Did you get any tickets?"

Fatty nodded.

"For the first house on Christmas Eve," he explained, causing Billy's frown to deepen. It certainly looked as if Fatty was usurping his place as the most important member of the trio. "But I could only get two tickets," added Fatty gloomily.

Nothing was said for a second or two after this. The fact that Fatty Hart had only two tickets naturally caused some awkwardness. Who was to use the second ticket? He couldn't offer it to Ginger without offending Billy, and if he invited Billy then, of course, Ginger would be annoyed at being left out.

It was Billy himself who solved this tricky little problem.

"That's all right, Fatty," he said, yawning widely to show his unconcern. "You and Ginger can use those tickets. Or would you rather be with me in a box?"

His pals stared.

"What do you mean, Billy?" inquired Fatty, feeling that Billy was about to spring one of his usual surprises. "Have you got a box for the pantomime?"

Billy grinned.

"I should say I have! I've only got to ask Jimmy or Sam and I can get as many seats as I like!"

Fatty Hart gasped. He had thought it almost a miracle to be able to get two tickets for the pit. And here was Billy Baxter boasting that he could get any number!

"Who are Jimmy and Sam?" asked the ever-suspicious Ginger.

Billy Baxter did not condescend to waste his breath enlightening Ginger's awful ignorance. Instead, he pointed to a large poster they happened to be passing at that moment. It was an announcement of the forthcoming pantomime at the Bynville Cinema, and Fatty Hart and Ginger Jones learned that Mr. James Potts was the producer and Mr. Sam Dubbs was the principal comedian.

"Meaner say you know them?" asked Fatty huskily.

"Oh, they are very old friends of mine," said Billy airily. "I used to invent a lot of jokes for Sam and show him how to do funny step-dancing."

His pals were dumbfounded by this revelation; but Ginger wasn't fully convinced.

"If you know them so well and you're so good at step-dancing," he pointed out, "why don't you act in the pantomime yourself?"

Billy eyed Ginger witheringly.

"That's a bright suggestion, Ginger

Jones," he said scornfully. "I suppose you would think it pretty smart to do a hard-working actor out of his job?"

In the face of this argument Ginger had to admit that Billy had sound reasons for not going on the stage. The matter might have rested there, for Fatty and Ginger could have used the tickets and Billy could easily have explained his absence later by saying that he was behind the scenes during the performance. But circumstances were at work to put Billy in an awkward fix.

They presently reached the High Street, and as they walked along the main thoroughfare they saw Sam Binns running in their direction.

"What's the hurry, Sam?" asked Ginger Jones as their schoolmate came puffing up to them.

"Haven't you heard?" gasped Sam. "They want two boys for the Christmas pantomime at the cinema!"

Sam Binns didn't wait to enlarge upon this information, but set off speedily in the direction of the Bynville Cinema. The three pals stared after him.

"By gosh, Ginger," suggested Fatty Hart hopefully, "wouldn't it be great if we could get those jobs?"

"Why shouldn't we?" responded Ginger, and Billy could see from the look in his friend's face that there was trouble in store. "We'll get Billy to use his great influence for us."

"Will you, Billy?" asked Fatty eagerly.

Billy hesitated, but even his quick imagination could find no way out of the business.

"I won't make any promises," he said cautiously, "but we'll see. Maybe I can do something for you."

When they reached the Bynville Cinema some minutes later they found a large crowd of applicants for the jobs gathered at the side entrance. This was awkward for Billy, and he had some difficulty in putting off Ginger's suggestion that with his influence they could easily get in at the front entrance.

"Can't be done," said Billy firmly. "I'll put in a word for you, but otherwise you'll have to take your chances with the rest."

This was reasonable, though Ginger wasn't exactly satisfied. But Billy gave him no chance to express his doubts. With a nod to Fatty, he started to elbow his way through the crowd.

There were many protests, but the three pals managed to clear a passage for themselves. They reached the entrance just as the door was opened by a tall commissioner.

"No rushing now!" he ordered, as the crowd surged forward. "One at a time is plenty!"

"All right, Jimmy," responded Billy, darting under the other's outstretched arm. "I want to see Mr. Potts."

"Hi, come back!" yelled the doorkeeper; but Billy was already inside, and the com-

missionaire had enough on his hands keeping the others from rushing the door.

Meanwhile Billy Baxter was walking along the passage towards the manager's office. He was in a dilemma. After all, what could he do? Nothing he could say to Mr. Potts, the producer, would influence him to engage Fatty and Ginger for the pantomime.

And in any case, was it advisable to have his two pals in the pantomime? It seemed to Billy that it might make them so cocky that he wouldn't be able to impress them with his own importance.

Billy decided, therefore, that his best plan was to get clear of the theatre, lie low until the interviews were over, and then express his regrets to Fatty and Ginger.

Accordingly he turned down another passage that led to the front of the theatre. From somewhere he could hear voices, a piano playing, and someone singing. He guessed that the company was rehearsing.

Suddenly Billy stopped and sniffed.

"Something burning," he muttered.

He walked on, and, turning a corner, found the cause of the trouble. A carelessly thrown cigarette had set fire to some refuse, and this, in turn, had reached some thick curtains which were smouldering dangerously.

Billy sprang promptly to action. The usual theatre fire buckets were lying handy. He knocked the cover off one and dashed the contents towards the curtains. At the water shot through the air the curtains parted and a little man stepped into the passage. He received the full contents of the bucket in his face.

"Ouch!" he yelled.

"Look out!" cried Billy. "Those curtains are on fire!"

Billy lifted a second bucket and again dashed it toward the burning curtains. Unfortunately the man did not catch the warning. He was advancing threateningly towards Billy, and effectively stopped the contents of the second bucket.

"Hi!" he bawled. "Lemme got at you!"

Billy recognised the man as Sam Dubbs, the principal comedian. He also recognised that Sam Dubbs was an angry man and would not wait to hear explanations. There was only one thing to do in the circumstances. Billy turned and ran.

He could hear Sam Dubbs coming after him, and this caused Billy to run all the faster. He sped along the passages heedless

of his direction. Suddenly a door opened and another man stepped into the

passage.

"Stop that boy, Mr. Potts!" shouted the comedian.

But this advice came too late. Unable to stop himself, Billy ran into the producer and bowled him over. For a moment or two

both of them sprawled on the ground, but before Sam Dubbs could make up the intervening distance Billy had regained his feet and was dashing for the back entrance.

Capture seemed inevitable. Billy had two pursuers behind him and before him loomed the commissionaire who, warned by the shouts of Sam Dubbs and Mr. Potts, prepared to stop him. But Billy wasn't caught yet. He took the commissionaire on the run, diving for his legs. With a yell the big man stumbled forward, trying wildly to retain his balance. He fell into the arms of Sam Dubbs and Mr. Potts, and the three of them fell in a heap on the ground.

This gave Billy time to escape. He quickly opened the door, and, to the astonishment of Fatty and Ginger, he shot past them and vanished down the street as fast as his legs would carry him.

Billy the Optimist!

DURING the rest of the day Billy did some hard thinking, and it seemed to him that his reputation would suffer a shock unless he put forward a sound explanation of his sudden exit. He decided to pass it over lightly. Unfortunately there were complications. When he met his pals that evening they had news for him.

"We got the jobs, Billy!" announced Fatty eagerly.

Billy yawned.

"Oh, yes?" he said off-handedly. "Jimmy said that he would take you on since you were pals of mine."

Fatty swallowed this willingly enough, but Ginger had the usual suspicious look in his eyes.

"Did you notice the fun this afternoon?" put in Billy hastily, as Ginger was about to ask a question. "I was showing Sam a new act. He thought so much of it that he wanted me to act with him. So don't be surprised if I appear in the show on Monday night."

"By golly!" said Fatty enthusiastically. "It would be dandy if we were all in the pantomime together, wouldn't it?"

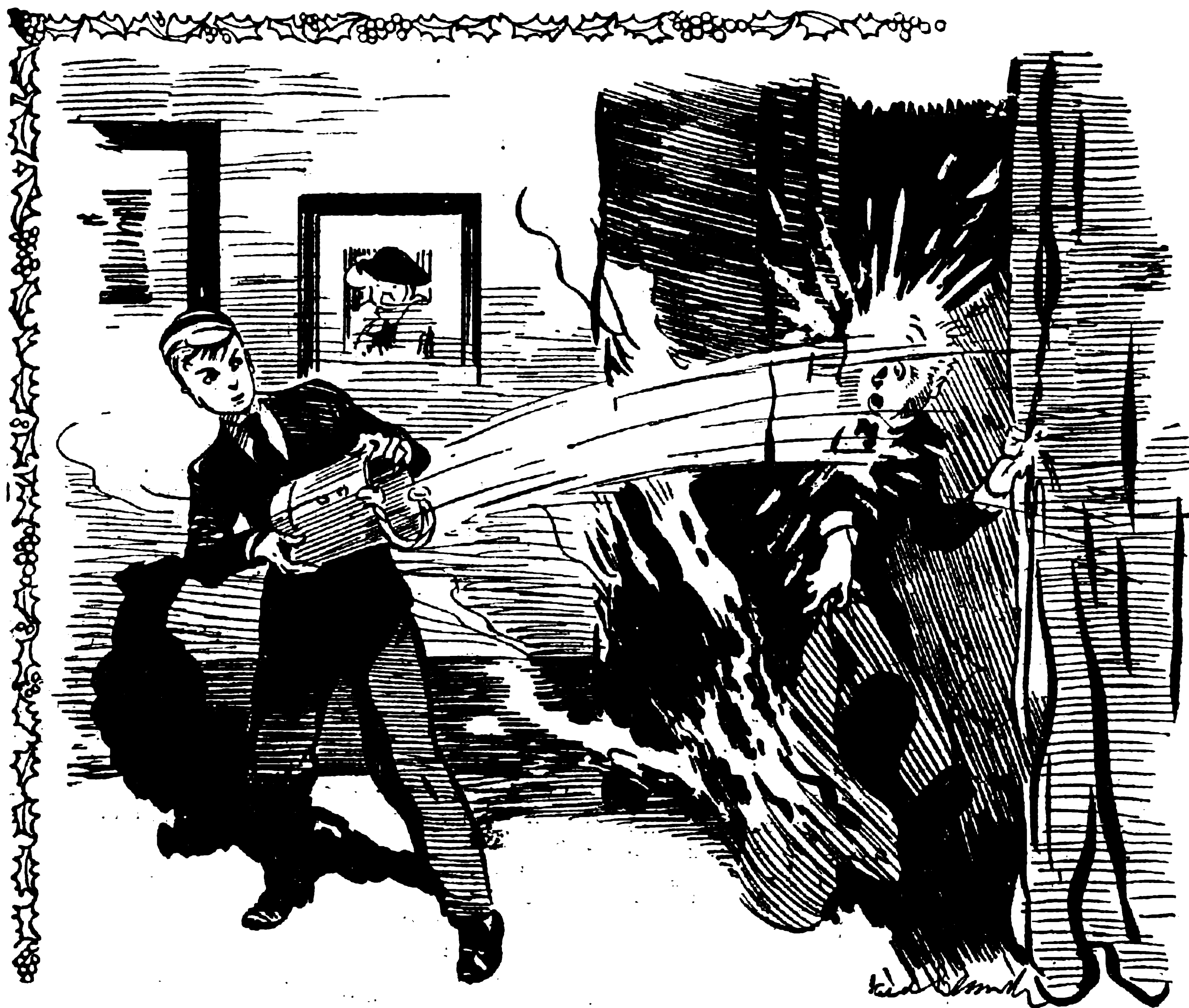
Billy agreed, but it seemed to him that this was going to be the most miserable Christmas he had ever spent in his life. The only possible way to save his reputation was to act in the pantomime himself.

But how could he do it? That was the question. Even in ordinary circumstances it was difficult, but after that little affair at the theatre it was impossible to believe that Sam Dubbs or Mr. Potts would give him a part in the show.

"Nevertheless," opined Billy grimly, "it has got to be done!"

Once he had formed the resolution to appear in that pantomime by hook or by crook, Billy Baxter felt easier in his mind. Monday found him his old boastful self once more.





Billy hurled the pail of water at the burning curtain—and succeeded in swooshing the contents into the face of Sam Dunn, the principal comedian.

"That's nothing," he said scornfully when Fatty and Ginger, who were a couple of pages in the pantomime, told him about the rehearsal. "You'll get some real surprises at the proper show to-night."

That evening Billy had formed a plan. It was going to be hard lines on Fatty, but Billy was desperate. He found it easy to slip past the stage-doorkeeper, and once inside, he made his way quickly to the dressing-room where Fatty and Ginger were changing.

"I say, Fatty," said Billy apologetically, "I'm afraid I've got bad news for you. Sam and Jimmy have been worrying about my part in the show. They haven't got anything written for me yet, so I've got to take your part as a page and make my own gags as I go along."

It was a bitter blow for poor Fatty, but such was his loyalty to his pal that he handed the page suit over without a grumble.

"Don't you worry, Fatty," urged Billy. "You'll have your part back on Christmas Eve, when your ma and dad come to see the show. They only want me in the pantomime to-night so that they can be sure it will have a good start."

The two pages were not due on the stage until about midway through the performance in a comedy scene with Sam Dubbs. When they were both dressed, however, the pals decided to watch the performance from the wings. At least, Fatty and Ginger decided it. Billy didn't want to leave the room until it was time for their act.

"No harm in watching, is there?" asked Ginger.

"Course not!" declared Billy. "Let's go."

The stage was being set for an acrobatic act when they reached the wings, and Billy became so interested in the arrangements that he forgot his fears of meeting Sam Dubbs or Mr. Potts. It gave him a sudden start, therefore, when Ginger whispered in his ear:

"There's your friend, Sam Dubbs, Billy!"

Billy turned hastily to find the principal comedian and the producer engaged in conversation only a few yards away. Mr. Potts looked at them, and, seeing the two pages, he nodded casually. Billy would have liked to let it go at that, but he knew that he would have to do something to impress his two friends.

He waved his hand.

"Hallo, Jimmy!" he called. "Hallo, Sam!"

A Pantomime Success!

THE comedian and the producer turned and stared in amazement at Billy Baxter. For a moment neither of them recognised him, then Sam Dubbs uttered a shout.

"Hi!" he yelled. "I want you!"

"Don't I know it?" said Billy to himself, determined, all the same, that Sam Dubbs wasn't going to get him.

He looked about for a way of escape. There was only one way. That was the stage.

The curtain was just rising and the acrobats were preparing to make their entrance when Billy Baxter dashed past them on to the stage. It was his intention to cross to the other wing and make his escape along the passages on that side. But this was frustrated. Half-way across the stage Billy saw that the opposite wing was blocked by actors and actresses.

"Surrounded!" gasped Billy.

Desperately he looked around him. No escape! He looked up and saw a complicated arrangement of ropes far above him. He saw something else, too: a rope leading down to the stage. The lower part visible to the audience was disguised to represent Jack's beanstalk. Billy quickly made for it and started to pull himself up hand over hand.

By this time, while Mr. Potts stood wildly in the wings groaning that the show was being ruined, Sam Dubbs had followed Billy on the stage. As Billy climbed the stage beanstalk the comedian attempted to stop him. But Billy wasn't going to be stopped. As Sam Dubbs stretched out his hands to grip him, Billy swung the rope, and his swinging body caught the comedian full on the chest. Sam Dubbs staggered back, tripped over the footlights, and fell head-first into the big drum.

There was a yell of delight from the audience, who thought it was all part of the show.

Meanwhile Billy discovered that by climbing the rope he would merely come within reach of the stage-hands who worked the ropes. So he swung in mid-air for a time, while Sam Dubbs, thoroughly enraged at the treatment he had received, climbed back to the stage.

"Come down here!" he bawled.

"Come and get me!" grinned Billy.

Sam Dubbs started to climb the rope, whereat Billy Baxter swung violently until the two were swaying backward and forward towards the audience.

"Hi, stop it!" gasped Sam Dubbs. "I'm not an acrobat!"

"That's all right," retorted Billy, with a

grin, "neither am I. So we're both on the same boat—I mean rope!"

Just then something happened. They were about to swing forward when the beanstalk arrangement that had been secured to the rope gave way under Billy's weight. He clutched wildly for the rope, missed it, and shot through the air. The audience gasped.

Billy wasn't hurt yet, though. He had noted the acrobat's trapeze about eight feet above the stage, and now his hand instinctively shot out toward it. He felt it in his hand and gripped tightly.

The force of his flight sent him flying out over the audience, and he made the backward swing as Sam Dubbs was coming forward. The pair crashed heavily in mid-air, lost their grips, and fell backward against the blackcloth. There was a loud clatter of falling scenery, and Billy and Sam Dubbs, both rather dazed, sat among the wreckage.

"Curtain!" yelled Mr. Potts frantically, and the curtain dropped to hide the scene from the audience. The producer rushed on the stage tearing wildly at his hair. "You've ruined the show!" he groaned, shaking his fist at Billy. "Why did you run on the stage?"

"Why did you chase me?" countered Billy.

"We only wanted to thank you for saving the fire on Saturday afternoon," explained Mr. Potts. Billy gasped at this simple explanation of the chase, and his heart sank as he realised what a proper mess he had made of things. He had ruined the Christmas pantomime!

It was at this moment that they became aware of loud roars and the heavy stamping of feet from the other side of the curtain. It sounded as if the audience was wrecking the hall.

"What's that?" gasped Mr. Potts anxiously.

"They're yelling for the young fellow, sir," explained a stage-hand excitedly. "They thought that it was part of the show, and they want more!"

It took Mr. Potts some time to digest this unexpected turn of events. Billy Baxter had been a success!

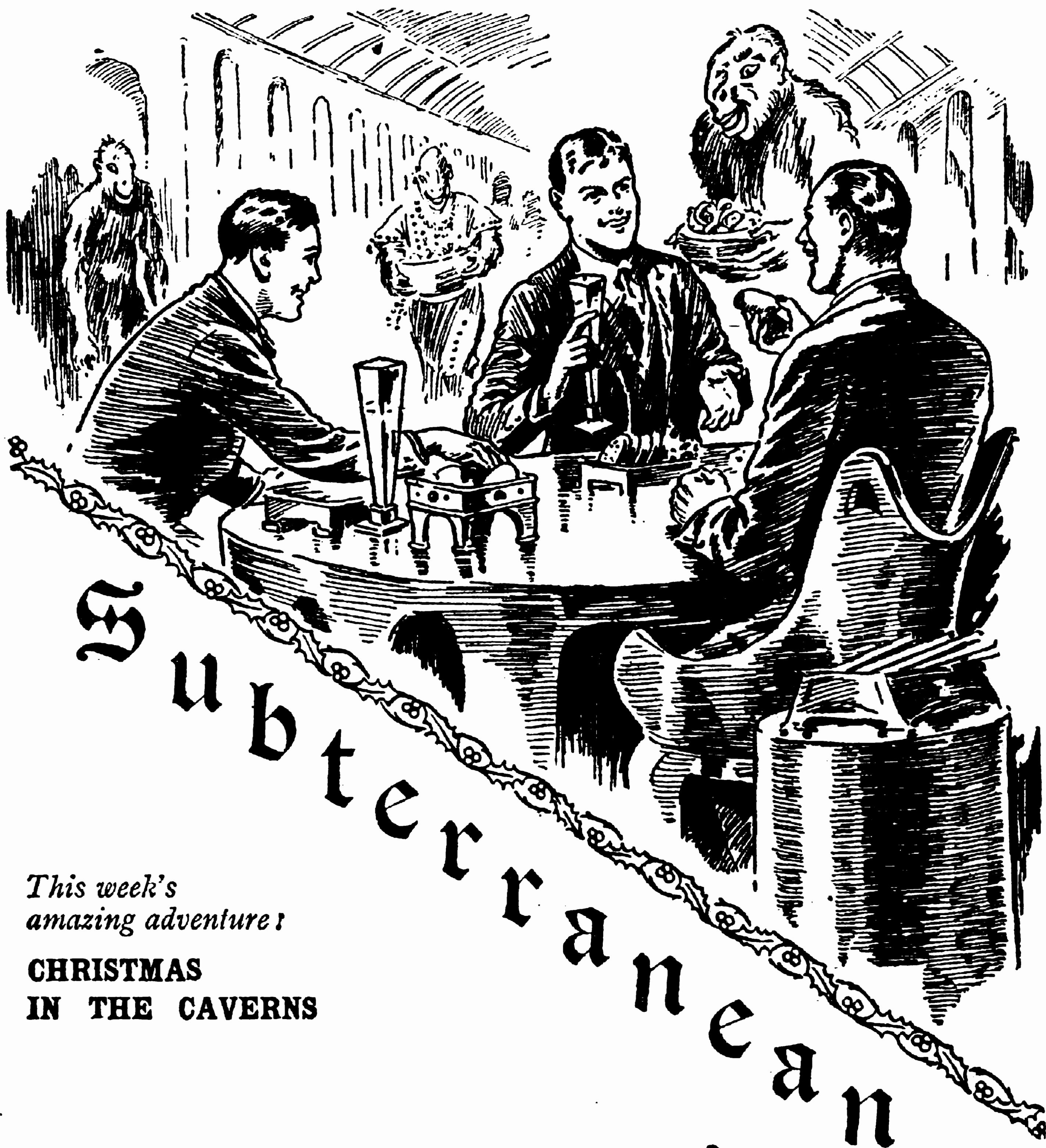
"Clear the stage!" bawled the producer hoarsely; then, to Billy: "Could you do that little act at every show?" Billy nodded. "Quick, then! Take your curtain!"

"Goshoo!" chortled Billy Baxter, as the curtain rose and he bowed to the audience amidst thunderous applause, cheers, and hand-clapping. "This is going to be a merry Christmas!"

And it certainly was.

(Look out for the return of an old favourite next week: Bull's-Eye Bill—and he's scoring more goals than ever!)

An Amazing Yarn Which Is As Unique As It's Exciting!



*This week's
amazing adventure!*

**CHRISTMAS
IN THE CAVERNS**

Castaways!

The Chasm of Darkness!

"MY eyes must be playing tricks!" gasped Professor Patterson.

"No fear, uncle!" replied Roddy Patterson. "That's light—and a dashed strong light, too!"

"But it's impossible!" put in Spud Thompson, the third member of the trio. "Here we are, miles below the earth, staggering along caves where no one has trodden before—and we see lights!"

The three explorers stood transfixed. Of

all the curious things that had happened to them since they had delved into this labyrinth of caves beneath the crust of the earth and been cut off from again reaching the surface by the actions of Jefferson Jetby, their enemy, and his gang, this surely was the strangest!

They had been puzzled at first by the fact that the air in the caves had proved to be fresh—until the professor had discovered that, in addition to curious ventilating shafts caused by the passages between the caves,

there were also hitherto unknown minerals which gave off oxygen emanations and purified the air.

But they had never expected to find light in the bowels of the earth, and it was so surprising that Roddy switched off the electric torch which he carried. Far ahead of them they could see the underground passage winding to a spot that was brilliant with a blueish kind of light.

"Looks like lightning, doesn't it?" said Spud.

"And that, apparently, is what it is," answered the professor. "There are curious minerals in these caves, and it is possible that some sort of electric rays leap continuously from one to another, thus forming a kind of incandescent lighting. Let's get a move on boys, for—"

He did not finish his sentence, but there was no need to do so. Both Roddy and Spud knew that they were being tracked through the caves by Jefferson Jetby and his gang.

On they hastened towards the brilliantly-lighted spot where the passage ended. They had almost gained it, and then— The light went out and they were plunged into darkness, all the more profound because of the previous brilliance.

"My hat!" gasped Roddy. "What the dickens has happened?"

He blundered on for a few steps, then switched on his torch. As he did so, he stopped dead and uttered a cry of warning. For a moment he stood petrified, hardly daring to breathe. For he was on the brink of a vast precipice, so deep that the light of his torch was lost in the profundity of the chasm.

"Back!" he yelled, and the others halted where they stood. Another step and they must have pitched headlong into the depths beneath.

Crack!

At the same moment the vicious report of a revolver rang out, and something whizzed past Roddy's ear. He started and swung round. Crack! Again the revolver spoke, and again the whizz of the bullet was distinctly heard.

"Jetby and his gang!" gasped the professor. "They're after us, boys! We're cornered! Put out that light, Roddy!"

Before them lay the precipice; behind they were menaced by Jefferson Jetby and his scoundrelly men. Either way, it seemed, death lay in wait for them. Roddy snapped out the torch as another bullet whizzed close by his ear. Then the firing ceased.

But it would only be a matter of moments before Jetby's men, who had torches, lit up the scene! Somehow or other the subterranean castaways must get away from their present precarious position. In those brief moments that had preceded the dousing of the torch, Roddy's sharp eyes had caught sight of something. Between the wall of the mighty funnel-shaped cave into which

they had emerged, and the brink of the precipice, he had seen a ledge.

It was but a couple of feet wide—but it might lead to a way of escape. Roddy's hand shot out and rested on Spud's shoulder.

"Catch hold of me, Spud!" he whispered. "Get the professor to catch hold of you, and then follow me in single file! Keep one hand on the side of the wall—there's just the slightest chance!"

Carefully picking his steps, he turned sharply to the left. One hand touched the wall of the cavern at his right, the other was on the button of his torch. For a second he switched on the torch, just sufficiently long to allow him to get his bearings. The explorers had a glimpse of the narrow ledge on which they were standing, with the precipice dropping away from it on one side.

To their ears came the blundering footsteps of Jetby and his men. Before long they would reach the end of the passage. Roddy and his companions commenced the arduous task of feeling their way along the narrow ledge, with the chasm on one hand and the smooth, precipitous rocks rising above them on the other.

A false step and they would be plunged to doom beneath. Their hearts beat quickly. Inwardly Roddy felt glad that they were in darkness, for had they been able to see the depth of the precipice that yawned to the side of them they would certainly have been seized by dizziness and fallen from the ledge.

Cautiously they moved onwards. Then suddenly Roddy gave a groan. The ledge had come to an end!

Before him he could feel solid rock. He snapped on his torch for a moment and was filled with despair. He was face to face with an expanse of smooth, rocky walls which could not possibly be negotiated by human beings.

At the same moment a torch flashed on from behind, and a cry of triumph came ringing through the cavern. Jetby and his men had reached the ledge. There was no going back. The three explorers were trapped!

"Flat on your faces!" yelled Roddy, suiting the action to the words. The others followed his example, and they were just in time.

Crack! Crack! Crack!

Jetby's gang had drawn revolvers and were firing into the darkness. The bullets whizzed above the heads of the crouching explorers, spattering on to the face of the rock.

The City of the Cavern.

RODDY snapped off the light of his torch as he dropped, and blackness enfolded him and his two companions. A slight turn in the ledge hid them, for the moment, from their pursuers, but Roddy knew that it would not be for long. Jetby and his men would soon negotiate the corner, and then—

Roddy's heart seemed to give a sudden leap.

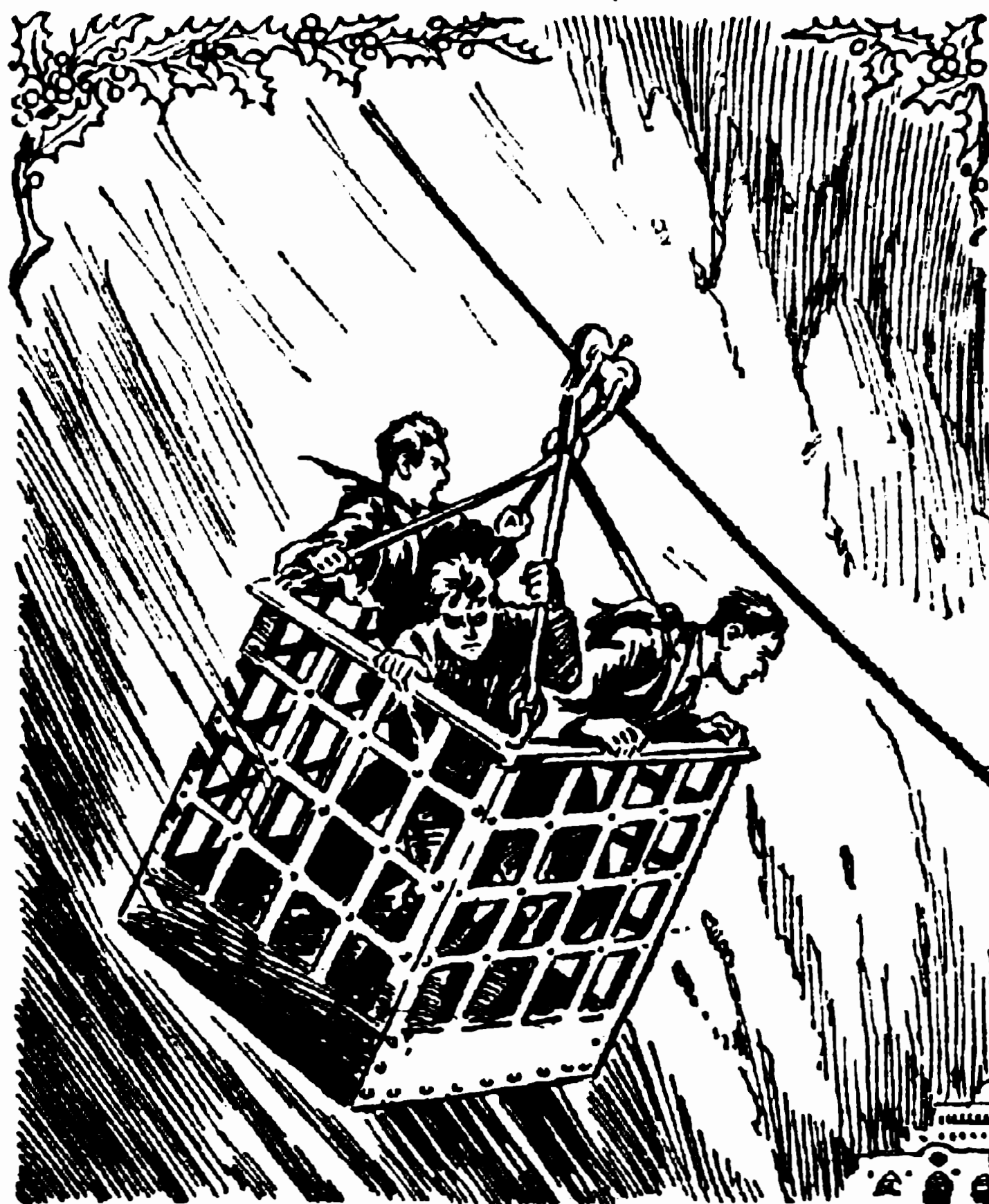
He had dropped with one arm hanging over the brink of the chasm, and his fingers clutched at something. It felt like a rope—a wire-like cable that was fastened to the side of the rock. His fingers closed about it, and he could tell that it stretched out taut from the spot below where he crouched on the ledge.

Despite the fear that he might betray their actual position to Jetby, Roddy

example and lowered themselves over the edge. Roddy caught their feet and guided them into the cage as they dropped.

All three were now in the cage. They were just in time. From above came a howl of rage as Jetby, leading his men, turned the corner of the ledge—and found nothing! He flashed his torch around, and its beams lit up the cage, hanging there from the cable over the chasm, and its three occupants.

The next moment he whipped out a clasp-knife from his pocket and bent down.



Down, down, hurtled the cage containing Roddy Patterson & Co.—down into a marvellous underground city!

switched on the torch. A cry rose to his lips. Below him, fastened to the rock wall, was a wire-like cable which stretched into the darkness. And something hung suspended from this cable!

Roddy investigated further. It was a curious open-topped cage which was suspended there, tethered to the rock wall. It hung from a pulley arrangement on the cable, in somewhat similar fashion to the way a cage hangs from an aerial ropeway. How it had come there Roddy did not wait to think. The great thing was that it seemed to promise a way of escape.

In a flash he was over the brink of the precipice, lowering himself by his hands until he hung there by his finger-tips. Then he dropped. For a moment his heart was in his mouth. Suppose he missed the cage?

He was brought up with a jerk. He had fallen right inside the small cage.

"Uncle! Spud!" he cried hoarsely. "Drop down here!"

He turned his light and shone it on the ledge above. Spud and the professor, crawling to the edge, looked down with amazement. Then, realising that hope had come to them at the very moment when all seemed lost, they promptly followed Roddy's



"So you think you'll escape, eh?" he chuckled. "Not if Jefferson Jetby knows it!"

Dropping on his face, he crawled to the brink of the pit and began hacking at the strands of the cable with his knife.

"Quick!" yelled Roddy. "Let the cage go!"

He jumped to the rope-like substance that tethered the cage to the wall. It was a matter of moments now. None of the explorers had the faintest inkling of where



the cable stretched; they only knew that it went down into unfathomable darkness.

With Jetby hacking away at the cable, Roddy pulled at the tethering rope. At last it was free, and he threw it aside. With a

sudden swoop, the cage started on its downward journey.

Down, down they went at terrific speed. Roddy and his companions reeled back, and had it not been for the lattice sides of the cage they would have been jerked out of the cage, and into space.

Sw-oo-ooo-osh! Down through the darkness they hurtled. The pin-point of light which showed where Jefferson Jetby lurked on the ledge seemed to leap away from them, and then was gone. Nothing but blackness, so deep that it could almost be felt, stretched around them on every side.

The whizz of the pulley on the cable and the sharp rush of air almost deafened them. They could do nothing but cling on desperately and wait for—they did not know what!

On, on, down, down, with such rapidity that they could hardly breathe. Then gradually the speed was checked. The swaying cage jerked them backwards and forwards until they felt dizzy.

And then suddenly everything was lit up as the curious lightning they had seen previously flashed on again, momentarily blinding them. Slowly they became accustomed to the light, and for the first time they began to see where they were.

They hung suspended over a pit that was hundreds of feet deep below them—despite the fact that they had already dropped a tremendous depth! The professor gave an incredulous cry.

For there, in the depths of the pit, was a city! Great towering turrets rose to meet them. Wide streets were thronged with little black dots that scurried here and there. As the intrepid trio hurtled nearer their amazement increased.

"A city!" gasped the professor. "A city of Troglodytes—cave dwellers who have never seen men, and whom men have never seen!"

With a rush the cable-cage swept on, dashing along between towering buildings which rose on either hand, until, right in front of them, the explorers saw the wall of the largest building of all. Still the cage hurtled onwards, and Roddy and his companions cowered back. But part of the seemingly solid wall was a cunningly-contrived spring door. As the cage struck it, the door swung open to allow it to pass,

and then swung closed again with a crash.

The cage shot on to a platform, stopped—and the explorers found themselves in the centre of the greatest hall they had ever seen in their lives.

They had come at last to the City of the Troglodytes!

Christmas Underground!

"GOSH!" gasped Spud. "Am I seeing things, or what?"

The hall was packed. Strange two-legged creatures jostled each other and surged like a living sea around the central platform on which the cage had come to a halt. Speedily Roddy and the others scrambled out from the cage and gazed around them in amazement.

The platform was circular in shape, and steps led down from it all the way round. As the explorers, wondering whether the troglodytes were hostile or otherwise, hesitated, three creatures who seemed to be the leaders of the curious horde, advanced.

Roddy could not repress a gasp of astonishment as he looked at them. Outwardly they had the semblance of men. They walked erect on two legs which, however, were more like the legs of kangaroos than of men. They had two arms, also, but these were long and hairy, and reached down below their knees, like those of gorillas. Their faces were hideous in the extreme. They were somewhat reptilian, with tremendous mouths and slobbering lips. Their eyes were in the sides of their heads, and in place of a nose they had curious bone-like projections.

As the three troglodytes advanced, Roddy's hand went to the revolver which he had taken from Jefferson Jetby on a previous occasion, and which he carried in his hip-pocket. The professor noticed his movement.

"Careful, Roddy!" he cautioned the boy. "Let us wait and see what happens first. They may be friendly."

Surprised as the boys were to see the troglodytes, the inhabitants of the Earth City were equally surprised to see them. They advanced cautiously, and when they were about ten yards from the adventurers, they halted.

These three men were garbed in long, curiously-fashioned robes, which glittered as they stood there, and which, the boys eventually discovered, were ornamented with jewels dug from the bowels of the earth—rubies, topaze, sapphires, amethysts, and others unknown to humans.

Not all the Troglodytes, however, were thus attired, for the great majority of them wore nothing, being covered with black, matted hair. The explorers guessed, rightly, that these three were people of importance, and this impression was heightened when they threw back their robes and revealed the fact that beneath them they wore a kind of armour, fashioned out of a strange black

metal that glittered like highly-polished steel. It was their eyes, however, which struck the adventurers most. They were like cats' eyes; large and deep-set. They gleamed with a greenishness which told that, like a cat, they could see in the darkness of the caverns.

As the three Troglodytes showed no signs of advancing farther, the professor turned to the two boys.

"The next move is up to us," he said quietly, and then he extended his arms before him, palms upward to show that they carried no weapons.

A grunt came from the Troglodytes as the boys followed the professor's example. Then the Earth Men placed their right hands upon their breasts, flung their left hands into the air, and bowed deeply.

"Evidently a gesture of welcome," whispered the professor. "We had better do the same thing."

Together the three of them made their "salaams," and a mighty roar came from the Troglodytes—a roar which showed their pleasure.

One of the Troglodytes took a step forward and began to speak. What he said the adventurers could not gather, for his voice was harsh and grating. As he ended, the professor began to talk. He spoke in English, which, of course, was equally as unintelligible to the Troglodytes as their speech had been to the boys.

But, from the gestures which accompanied it, the Earth Men gathered that the strangers had come to their city from above—and that they came in peace.

They answered with gestures that evidently meant that the explorers were to follow them. They did so, and marched down the steps of the circular platform, with the crowd parting to allow them to pass, calling out strange words as they went.

Through the hall they marched, in the wake of the three Troglodytes, passing out from it into a labyrinth of passages of wonderful architecture and design. They were conducted to a tremendous apartment, and there their guides left them. In one corner of the apartment a tiny cascade of water gushed from the wall into a pool.

"Evidently a bath of sorts," said the professor. "Come, boys, let us wash off some of the grime we have collected."

Nothing loth, the boys prepared to make themselves as respectable as they could, and while they were busy Spud had a sudden thought.

"My hat!" he cried. "Have you forgotten what to-day is?"

"No," answered the professor, with a smile. "I had not forgotten. But I had hesitated to remind you boys of it. If my reckoning is correct, to-day should be Christmas Day! And while the people above us are celebrating, we are here—deep in the bowels of the earth!"

At that moment came the noise of a gong, and a Troglodyte presented himself at the door of their apartment. By gestures he indicated that they were to follow him. They obeyed—to find themselves shown into a long apartment where, on a metallic kind of table, a meal had been set for them.

What the food was they knew not, but they were almost famished, and they set to without delay. Spud suddenly laughed aloud.

"This is great!" he said. "I reckon it's the strangest Christmas dinner any of us ever had."

"Yes," answered Roddy, tucking away a slice of something that appeared to be roast fungus of some sort. "And here we are, with all complete. A Christmas dinner—and no skeleton at the feast!"

"Don't be so sure!"

The boys wheeled around as the harsh, grating voice came from the doorway. Roddy gave a cry.

"Jefferson Jetby!" he gasped.

"Yes," said Jefferson Jetby, advancing into the room, with a revolver in each hand covering the trio. "I guess you don't seem pleased to welcome me—but this time, I reckon, I've got the whip hand, and Jefferson Jetby's going to be king o' this articular little outfit!"

THE END.

(More thrilling adventures await the Subterranean Castaways in next Wednesday's exciting yarn.)

THE RETURN OF BULL'S-EYE BILL!



You all remember Bill, of course. He was the cheery lad who thought nothing of scoring a dozen goals in one match.

In response to the request of many readers, Bill is returning to the NELSON LEE next week—in another series of corking footer yarns.

Look out for the opening story, lads,

Next Wednesday.

Christmas Fun!



Warming Up Your Guests.

YOU'RE holding a Christmas party, are you? Hurrah!

And you'd like a few suggestions to help make it a real live success? It shall be done, laddies. Let's get together and trot out some bright wheezes which will keep your party alive from the word "Go!"

We'll assume that practically all your guests have arrived. A real lively game is indicated—to get them warmed up and feeling thoroughly at home. O'Grady? Just the thing. It's a simple game, and tons of fun to be had from it.

One of the party appoints himself O'Grady—preferably somebody who knows the game well—and the remainder line up in two rows. The idea is for the chappie representing O'Grady to rattle out a series of commands. Those prefaced with the words, "O'Grady says" have to be obeyed; those without the two words should be ignored. Thus: "O'Grady says attention." Everybody stands to attention. "O'Grady says left turn." Everybody turns to the left. "Quick march." In this case everybody should remain motionless. Anybody who obeys has to drop out of the game. And so on, until only one person is left, who is proclaimed the winner. And the quicker O'Grady snaps out the commands, and the more he mixes them, the greater the fun.

A Few "Turns."

After the first game a little dance will not come amiss—starting with a Paul Jones, thus giving everybody the chance of becoming thoroughly acquainted with each other. You can't beat a good old Paul Jones for this.

A few hints for your Xmas Party which will help to liven it up and make it go with a zip!

Following the dancing, with everybody feeling hot and ready for a breather, you can put on a few turns.

One of your pals is sure to fancy himself as a conjurer who can produce "hen fruit" out of his pocket. Let him do his stuff. If he produces the egg, well—good egg! If he doesn't, well—it's jolly fun watching him make a mess of things. And some of your girl guests can play the piano or the violin; others can sing. Ginger knows a really funny monologue. Don't let 'em back out.

"Jimmy Green."

Everybody now feeling happy and contented; ready for a few more games. Then jump to it. How about "Jimmy Green"? The fellow who is selected as Jimmy has to go out of the room while the game is explained to the rest of the gathering. All that is needed is a blanket—and a short stick. Jimmy is called in and has to lie *completely under the blanket*. Alongside him another fellow similarly deposits his carcass complete with stick—but Jimmy doesn't know that. Jimmy is now told that he is going to be whacked—softly, of course; don't forget to impress that upon him—with a stick, and it's up to him to discover the culprit.

After receiving a whack he pokes his head from under the blanket—and finds himself gazing at a circle of innocent-looking boys and girls, all with their hands behind their backs. He either says he doesn't know who was responsible, or he might make a rash guess; is promptly told that he is wrong and to try again. Back goes his head under the blanket; another whack; another guess, and so on until Jimmy gives it up; and then

the fellow alongside confesses that he's the guilty one. While Jimmy has been lying under the blanket the other fellow has brought his hand containing the stick from under the covering and administered the whacks, then withdrawing it hastily from view again. Whereat poor Jimmy Green looks his name!

The Missing Tail!

Another really amusing game which will keep everybody in roars of laughter is "Donkey." A drawing of a donkey, without a tail, is necessary; also a length of string or ribbon tied to a pin. The guests are then blindfolded one by one, and, pin in hand, they have to guess the spot where the tail should be. The results, more often than not, are a scream. Some people will persist in placing the donkey's tail on the moke's nose! Why, they're donkeys themselves for doing such a thing; and that's just what you call 'em!

Heave-Ho!

Then there's "Tug-o'-War." A game for the fellows only, this; the girls might be charry of squatting on the floor and crump-

ling their frocks. For such a procedure is necessary. The principle of the game is almost the same as ordinary tug-o'-war, save that firstly the participants park themselves on the floor and exhibit their heaving powers sitting down. Secondly, the "rope," which consists of a stout walking-stick or a length of piping, is held only by the leaders of the respective teams. The said leaders should be hefty fellows with a powerful grip.

At the word "Steady!" the leaders take a grip of the "rope," whilst behind them the members of the teams form a chain by clasping the fellows in front of them round the waist. At the word "Haul!" both teams pull back. The big idea is to keep the human chain intact. The leader of the team who is forced to relinquish his hold of the "rope" lets his side down and thus loses the match. But if the team behind him back him up, quite a prolonged tug-o'-war will result.

The girls needn't be left out of the fun. They can take sides and shout words of encouragement to the two teams. They can also be umpires. Ordinary tug-o'-war is exciting, but this indoor form of the sport is even more exciting—and certainly more amusing.

Christmas Greetings!

By THE EDITOR.

issue of the NELSON LEE. A bumper number containing a bumper programme.

A MERRY CHRISTMAS

to all my reader-chums!

Christmas!

What pictures that one word conjures up in the mind's eye. In all parts of the globe Christmas is celebrated: in Australia under blue skies and a sweltering sun; in Northern Canada amid dazzling white snow; with picturesque pomp and splendour in Japan and China; to the booming of drums and the war cries of painted warriors in the South Sea Islands.

And in England—

I can picture to myself the old familiar scene we all of us know so well: the family gathered round the Christmas table; the sizzling turkey, the steaming Xmas pudding; laughing boys and girls pulling crackers; holly and other decorations adding to the festive atmosphere. Everybody happy. Christmas, the time of good will and rejoicing.

How we all look forward to Christmas, young and old. I know jolly well that I enjoy it now just as much as when I was a boy like you.

Here's wishing you your very happiest Christmas, lads—that includes you, girls—and I hope you get plenty of presents, too!

And now a few words about next week's

"HANDY, THE CONJURER!"

is the title of next Wednesday's story featuring the cheery Chums of St. Frank's. Good old Edward Oswald Handforth, more amusing, more aggressive, more blundering than ever, is well to the fore. He keeps K. K. Parkington's Christmas guests in high spirits; and he'll keep N. L. readers in fits of laughter.

"THE DEATH GRIP!"

There are detective stories *and* detective stories. This magnificent yarn, introducing Nelson Lee and Nipper in 'tec harness, is one which you will unhesitatingly vote as being of the highest quality. The ingredients of a successful detective story are mystery, suspense and action. "The Death Grip!" embodies all those—with a few surprises and thrills galore into the bargain. In other words, a super yarn, and one not to be missed.

Next week's NELSON LEE also contains many other splendid features, including the first of a corking new series of footer yarns introducing your old pal, Bull's-Eye Bill, another exciting adventure of Roddy Patterson & Co., the Subterranean Castaways, and more absorbing chapters of David Goodwin's popular serial, "Knights of the Road."

Don't miss a good thing, lads; order next week's issue IN ADVANCE.

THE EDITOR.

Knights of the Road!



By
DAVID GOODWIN

Face to face with Vane Forrester. Exposure for Dick—and the prospect of arrest by the King's Riders!

Face to Face.

A LITTLE before five o'clock that evening, Dick Forrester and Dr. Trelawney arrived at Basing Hall almost together. They were shown into the large dining-hall, where Sir Henry welcomed them heartily. Two other governors of the school, and half a dozen other guests were there, and Sir Henry's description of them as "jolly dogs," certainly fitted them to a hair.

Dick made himself so agreeable, and amused the company so much, that he soon became the life of the party, and even Dr. Trelawney threw off his scholarly air and began to grow lively.

"There is one more to come," said Sir Henry; "a gentleman who called to-day to see me about something, and as I was too busy to stop I asked him to join us. Plague me if I can remember his name! Oh, here he is!"

The curtains were swung apart, a servant announced "Mr. Forrester, of Fernhall," and Vane swaggered into the room.

Sir Henry presented him to several of the guests, who welcomed him, yet looked at him a little askance. His heavy, dark face and gloomy manner were out of place in that jovial assembly.

Suddenly Vane met Dick's eyes, and the elder man started violently and changed colour. He could hardly believe his senses.

"Mr. Fernhall—Mr. Forrester!" said Sir Henry, waving them towards each other. Vane stared at the young highwayman blankly, too petrified to speak. Dick looked at his uncle with a cool, ironical smile, and made a low bow.

"Come, these hang-dog servants of mine are a long time serving dinner!" cried Sir Henry. "Let us broach another bottle or so while we are waiting."

While this pleasing interlude was going

on, Vane slipped quietly away. Dick, perfectly cool, paid no attention beyond smiling to himself slightly, and just as the banquet was ready, Vane sidled back into the room. Not a word did he say. He did not even look in Dick's direction.

Sir Henry and all the guests went into the dining-hall, and Dick, often as he had dined with country gentlemen upon his travels, sat down to such a feast as he had not seen for many a long day. The fare was admirable, the cooking perfect. There was not a better judge of wines in all England than Sir Henry, and the feast proceeded with jest after jest and story after story. Dick was tacitly voted the most amusing young dog that ever put his knees under the mahogany, and the only man there who seemed out of place was Vane Forrester, who sat mum in his seat, silent and ill at ease. Presently he glanced towards the door, and half rose from the chair.

"Clear the table!" ordered Sir Henry. "Bring on the walnuts and the burgundy, you rascals!"

"Sir Henry," cried Vane, springing to his feet. "I have to thank you for a most pleasant feast. And now I have a surprise in store. You have been merry enough, ecod, you and your guests—now listen to a jest of mine! A rare jest, by my faith!"

"A jest? Why, let's have it!" cried Sir Henry, for all the table were looking at Vane.

"A jest with a sting in the tail!" said Vane. "That free-tongued youngster who sits on your right hand is the most notorious and red-handed outlaw in England! A highwayman, sirs—a highwayman! Richard Forrester himself!"

A stupefied silence fell upon the table.

"Enter, lads!" cried Vane, waving his arm. "Here is your man!"

Two fully-armed King's Riders strode into the room, and saluted Vane.

"Seize that knave there!" shouted Vane, pointing to Dick. "Bind him fast!"

The Tables Turned!

"**W**HAT is the meaning of this?" demanded Sir Henry angrily, springing up from his chair. "Stand back there, you great

oaf!" he ordered, turning to the sergeant of the Riders, who was advancing to seize Dick. "Do you hear me?" he added, so fiercely that the man hesitated and came to a halt.

"'Od's blood, what are you about, Sir Henry?" screamed Vane. "I do assure you the knave is a common robber, and there is a price on his head! I pray you let the men do their duty. I brought them here for the very purpose."

"Ha! You did?" said Sir Henry, in a voice of thunder, his usually jolly face alight with anger, and he turned again to the riders. "How now, you dogs? Who gave you leave to tramp into my house, as though it were your barracks, without so much as a by-your-leave? Do you know that I can have you 'broken' for this?"

"I—I crave pardon, sir!" stammered the sergeant. "Mr. Forrester commanded us here. I thought it was by your orders."

"You commanded?" cried Sir Henry to Vane. "You dare to bring armed men into my dining-hall, and insult my guests? Blood and hounds! Out with your sword, sir! Make room there, gentlemen!"

And, whipping out his long blade, the old fire-eater, beside himself with fury, rushed forward to meet Vane.

"I am no fighting man, sir!" cringed Vane, skipping behind a chair. "I appeal to the company! Plague on it, sir! You cannot mean to shelter a felon?"

"Felon!" cried Sir Henry. "Who says he is a felon? What is your word worth, you, whom I never saw in my life till to-day? I have no knowledge of his offence; and if he were a highwayman twenty times over, he's a gentleman—which is more than I can say for you. You shall either draw, and face me, or my servants shall fling you from the house!"

"I fight for no felon!" cried Vane, drawing his sword and flinging it on the ground. "I appeal to the company if I have not done my duty before the law."

"'Od's wounds, sir!" said Sir Adam Vincent, another governor of St. Anstell's. "'Tis none of my quarrel, but if you want my opinion, you are as impudent a fellow as I ever met! 'Tis a breach of common decency

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. Dr. Trelawney, the headmaster, discovers the secret, but because he is indebted to Dick for a service he takes no action. Vane Forrester visits the school, and demands the custody of Ralph, but the Head refuses, whereat Vane goes to Sir Henry Stanhope, chief governor of St. Anstell's. Sir Henry, in a hurry, will not listen to Vane's story, but invites him to dinner that night—a dinner to which Dick and the Head have already been invited!

(Now read on.)

to behave so in your host's house, without leave or warrant!"

"And so say all of us!" chorused the others.

"I tell you that man is Dick Forrester, the notorious highwayman," cried Vane. "And his young brother Ralph, who is my ward, is at St. Anstell's School, and the Doctor refused to give him up!"

"I care not if he be fifty times an outlaw!" said Sir Henry. "He is my guest, and my house is my castle. You and your Riders have no right to set foot in it, sir; you yourself are only here at my invitation, which you have grossly abused. Summon the servants, there!"

"Bravo, Vane!" said Dick, with a quiet laugh. "You are providing a very pretty after-dinner entertainment!"

Vane lost all control of himself, and his fury overcoming his fear at the taunt, he struck Dick across the face. The blow was half guarded, and was a light one; but the young highwayman's eyes blazed as he leapt up, his hand flashing to the rapier which hung at his side.

"Hold!" cried Sir Henry, springing between the two antagonists. "That is enough. Sheath your sword, Dick. Sergeant, arrest this man for assaulting a citizen!"

"Nay, let me—" began Dick, struggling to get at Vane.

"Peace, boy! Remember that you, too, are my guest. This is the best way, believe me. Lay hands on him, men of the Riders! The offence is now yours," said Sir Henry to Vane Forrester, "and you shall answer for it. Away with him to Hutton, and he shall answer to the magistrates in the morning for striking a private citizen. Do you hear, men?"

"Aye, sir!" said the sergeant, with alacrity. And, fearing they were going to get into trouble for their unwarrantable entry into Sir Henry's house, the men hastened to obey his order. Vane was dragged, bawling and protesting, out of the room.

"Hark to his bellowing!" said Sir Henry, shaking with laughter. "Pink me, the rogue has no more dignity than honesty! Come, gentlemen, we're well rid of the fellow. Do not let this little matter damp us."

"I greatly regret, sir," said Dick, rising from his seat, "that I have been the cause of this disturbance in your house, and I think it will be only fitting for me to make my apologies and leave you."

"Not for one moment!" cried Sir Henry. "No apology is necessary, and run me through the body if I let you go till the evening's finished! We'll make a night of it!"

"Hear, hear!" cried the rest of the company. And, filling their bumpers to the brim, they pledged Dick with an uproarious toast.

"But I ought to warn you that the man

spoke the truth," protested Dick. "I am indeed the highwayman, Richard Forrester."

"All the better!" cried the jovial old baronet, who was flushed with excitement and old port. "Gentlemen, here's another toast! Long life to Dick Forrester, the jolly highwayman, and the best company ever a man had at his board! Rabbit me, I ask no man's leave as to what guests I should shelter under my roof!"

Dick sat back again in his chair with a laugh, for he saw they had no mind to part with him.

"This is mighty fine, gentlemen, but what will be the upshot of it?" he said. "Vane Forrester will not be long in the cells, and what will be said when it is known you arrested him and let me go free?"

"He had no right to bring his confounded Riders marching into my house without a warrant, and a warrant he never had," snorted Sir Henry.

"Nay, that I'll swear to!" cried Sir Adam Vincent. "For I am chairman of the magistrates' bench this week, and I have issued a warrant to no man. To come and dictate whether a boy should be given up to him from St. Anstell's! If I were the chief governor of the school, like Stanhope, I would have spitted him through the ribs!"

"Ah, there's the rub, by your leave, Sir Adam!" said Dr. Trelawney. "You will agree, by what you have seen of him, that our young guest is well able to take care of himself. But 'tis a different matter for his brother, a boy of fifteen, who is in my care."

"Why, what then?" cried Sir Adam. "The boy has committed no crime?"

"Nay, he has not; but it is a perilous affair for him to be known as the brother of an outlaw. And this man, Vane Forrester, is his guardian, and demands that he be given up. Indeed, he has demanded it of me already and I refused. He came here to-night to put the matter before Sir Henry and force me to obey."

"Egad! He'll have time to think it over in Hutton cells!" chuckled Sir Henry. "But what does he want of the boy?"

Dr. Trelawney turned to Dick; but the young highwayman, though he saw the need, hesitated to lay his family history before a roomful of strangers. Trelawney, seeing this, did it for him. In a few sentences he told the governors of Vane's persecution, his attempts to murder Ralph and ruin his brother, and how he had so far been thwarted.

"Is this so, sir?" said Sir Henry, turning to Dick.

"It is the truth," said Dick, "though I should not have intruded my private affairs on you. I can look after myself, as the doctor says, but I own I am troubled about my young brother."

"I wish I had broken that black-hearted

(Continued on page 48)



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Knights of the Road!

(Continued from page 46.)

villain's neck!" cried Sir Henry. "Did you ever hear such infamy, Vincent?"

"He ought to be hanged by the heels!" growled Sir Adam. "But, look you," he went on more gravely, "there is danger in the wind. If this knave is truly the boy's guardian, we cannot prevent his taking him away. I am a governor of the school and a magistrate, but if I refuse this Vane can go to Chancery and force me to give the order."

"And that means death for my brother," said Dick, "if once he is in Vane's clutches."

"What is to be done?" said Sir Henry.

"Here is my plan," said Dr. Trelawney. "Suppose the boy had one of the school foundation scholarships, entitling him to be kept and taught at St. Anstell's independently of anybody? It would be an obstacle to throw in the path of Vane's claim. With your help, gentlemen, in such a case, I think the school could refuse to deliver him up."

"Egad, that might well be!" exclaimed Sir Henry. "But how is the lad to win such a scholarship?"

"By your leave," said Trelawney, drawing a paper from his pocket. "The boy is above the average in wits when he chooses to work, so I have been keeping his nose to his desk of late for this very purpose. He made marvellous progress, and even this day I put him to the test, and the scholarship is his. Now, gentlemen, if you will but put your signatures to it, confirming the boy by your authority as a Foundation Scholar of St. Anstell's, I warrant we shall have a fair chance of keeping Vane Forrester at bay."

Dick leaped to his feet.

"Doctor," he cried, "you have shown us all the way! A thousand thanks to you!"

"The very thing!" cried Sir Henry. "A master-stroke! Come, Vincent and Bailey, put your names to this screed, and a spoke in the wheel of Vane Forrester!"

Cooking His Own Goose!

THE three governors signed the scholarship deed on the spot, and Trelawney, with a grim smile, put it back in his pocket.

"It comes into effect to-morrow," he said, "and if we can but hold Vane Forrester off till noon his chance of lifting his young nephew from St. Anstell's will be gone. And that delay, thanks to the blow which led to his arrest, we have already gained."

"Though, beshrew me," said Sir Adam, "now the port is out of my head, I fancy he will make it hot for some of us. But we must hold him at all costs overnight. Who the mischief is this?"

The curtains were thrown back, and a small, breathless figure ran into the room. It was Ralph!

"You young rascal!" cried the doctor. "How dare you leave the school—eh, sir! It's long after 'lights out!'"

"I know, sir," panted Ralph. "I'll take my flogging for it. But I let myself out of the dormitory window to see if I could find Dick."

"What is it, young 'un?" cried Dick, starting up. "Anything wrong?"

"I came to tell you about Vane, Dick! He's after us both. But I saw him a few minutes ago in the hands of the King's Riders! What does it mean? Who arrested him?"

"He was arrested by my order, youngster, for striking your brother in my house," said Sir Henry.

"Then if someone does not hasten after him, he will be free again while you are all sitting here at wine," said Ralph urgently. "Four of his ruffians have come to his aid, and are trying to rescue him. The two Riders are making a brave stand, but they were well-nigh overpowered when I saw them!"

"By the black rood!" exclaimed Sir Henry, springing up and hauling on the bell-rope. "We must see to this. Hi, there! Have the beasts saddled and brought here instantly! To horse, gentlemen, and set this matter straight!"

The guests leaped to their feet and ran to the door, Vincent and Bailey at their head, while Sir Henry hurried off to summon his men and give his orders. In less than two minutes Stanhope, Vincent, Bailey and Dick were mounted and ready.

"Here, young 'un," cried Sir Henry to Ralph, "you come with us and show us the way—that'll save time in talking!" And gripping Ralph under the arm, he swung the boy up in front of him in the big hunting-saddle and set spurs to his horse.

"Down by Burton's Spinney!" cried Ralph in high delight. "That was where I last saw them!"

Away swept the four men into the night, their horses' hoofs thudding softly on the snow-covered ground. Dick rode up alongside Sir Henry.

"Now mind, Dick Forrester, you're to keep out of this fray!" cried the baronet. "We'll deal with the rascals ourselves!"

"Oh, plague on it, I must have a slap at them!" protested Dick.

"Nothing of the sort! I know best, sir! If you mix in it you'll crab the whole thing, and make it the worse for us. At any rate, don't join in unless we need help badly."

Dick was forced to see the reason of this, and reluctantly he agreed. But with his disappointment was mingled triumph. His new friends were men of influence—two of them magistrates—and Vane was bringing himself within reach of the law by his actions.

"Yonder they are!" cried Ralph, pointing to a knot of dark figures struggling together at the edge of the spinney.

(Continued on page 50.)

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Knights of the Road!

(Continued from page 48.)

"Push on, lads!" cried Sir Henry. "The Riders are hard pressed. Charge!"

A wild thrill of exultation filled Ralph as the horses swept on and he felt the wind whistling in his ears. He saw the two Riders, one with an arm hanging useless by his side, standing over Vane's handcuffed form and fighting stoutly with two huge ruffians whom Ralph knew well to be paid followers of his uncle's. The other lay disabled on the ground. And just at that moment two more ruffians came running up.

"Down with 'em! Ride 'em down!" shouted Sir Henry. "Give them the butts of your whips!"

There was a howl as the horsemen flung themselves on the ruffians; two of Vane's men were bowled head-over-heels. A third was felled by Sir Adam's whip, and the last took to his heels and bolted into the woods.

"You scoundrel!" cried Vane to Sir Henry, beside himself with rage at being thwarted just as he had hoped for freedom. "This is more of your work, is it? You are in league with that brat and his outlaw brother, and you think to ride over me with a high hand!"

"Are these your men?" said Sir Henry, pointing to the captives, and paying no attention to Vane's accusations.

The Squire of Fernhall checked himself, and hesitated a moment. He saw the trap.

"Nay," he cried, with an oath, "they are but honest fellows who, finding a gentleman in the hands of King's Riders for no cause, did their best to help him. It is blackmail, and no less!"

"He lies, Sir Henry!" said Ralph coolly. "Those men are paid ruffians of his; I know them well."

"You have cooked your goose this time, Mr. Forrester of Fernhall," said Sir Henry dryly. "Sergeant, take him to the cells, and these ruffians with him. My men will accompany you, and guard against any further attack."

The prisoners were marched off, Vane in their midst, a guard of Sir Henry's servants, who had arrived on the scene of the struggle, taking charge of them.

"A very pretty brush," said Sir Henry to Dick as they rode back. "Your uncle has fouled his own nest with a vengeance this time. Be ready to give me your aid, and I think to-morrow we may rid ourselves of Mr. Vane Forrester of Fernhall!"

(Another rousing instalment of dramatic interest next Wednesday, lads.)

The Phantom of the Grange!

(Continued from page 29.)

or will you consent to meet my wife now?"

"Now, in Heaven's name!" replied Sir Trevor promptly.

To his amazement Vincent, with a word of apology, robbed a Georgian buck of his fair partner—a girl Sir Trevor had already admired for her grace.

"Impossible!" muttered the baronet.

They came up, and the dance proceeded.

"Pater, I think I'm going to surprise you," said Vincent. "Thanks to Miss Hazlewood, my wife is here, and it is for you to judge whether she shall remain. Beryl, this is my father."

Beryl slipped off her mask and stood before Sir Trevor, composed and just a trifle defiant.

"I hope you will forgive me, Sir Trevor, for the little deception," she said quietly.

Sir Trevor's eyes grew larger.

"What—what nonsense is this?" he asked, gazing in amazement from one to the other. "You are Miss Hazlewood, my secretary! Vincent, have you gone mad? Where is your wife?"

"This is my wife, pater," said Vincent. "You only thought she was Miss Hazlewood—that's the deception Beryl just referred to. Miss Hazlewood is at her own home in Shropshire. We arranged it with her."

Sir Trevor nearly burst a blood-vessel.

"Then—then you've been here all the time?" he spluttered. "You've been pretending— And I thought— Good heavens,

boy, you never told me that your wife was such a charming girl as this!"

"You never gave me a chance to tell you," said Vincent.

St. Frank's fellows and Moor View girls were crowding round, eager to witness the climax of the little plot which they themselves had furthered. And it was a sheer joy for them to see Sir Trevor's dumbfounded amazement.

"Am I so dreadful?" asked Beryl, still defiant.

"My child—my child," muttered Sir Trevor brokenly. "If I had only known! So you are really Vincent's wife? You—the girl who saved my life at the risk of her own! The girl who, in such a short time, endeared herself to me!"

He took Beryl and kissed her.

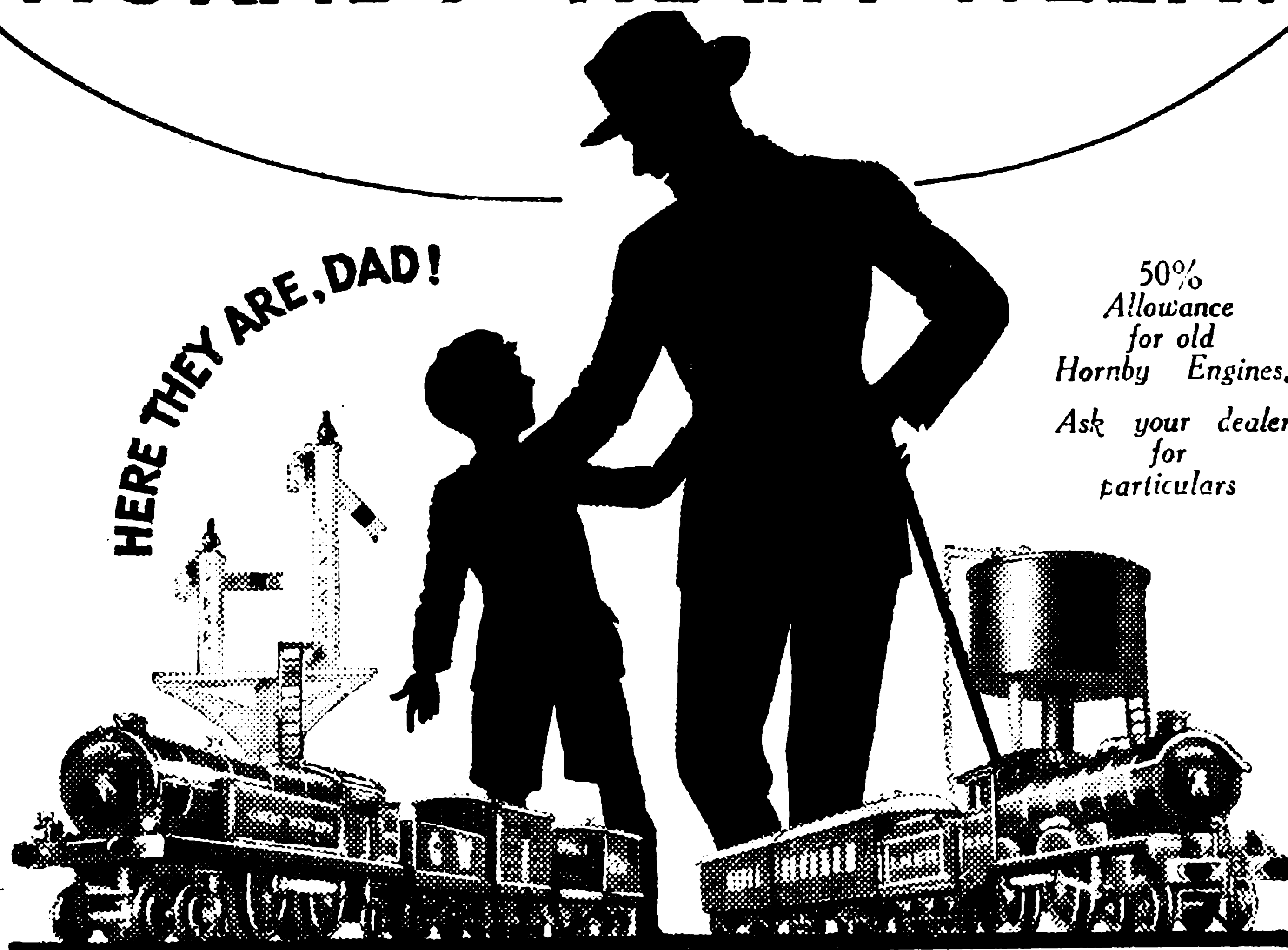
"From this moment I want you to forget everything that has passed," he said quietly. "This is your home as much as mine. I am proud to have you as my daughter. And now I want to introduce you to all the rest of my guests."

Followed hectic minutes for Beryl. The St. Frank's juniors sent up a lusty cheer, and she was showered with congratulations from Irene & Co.

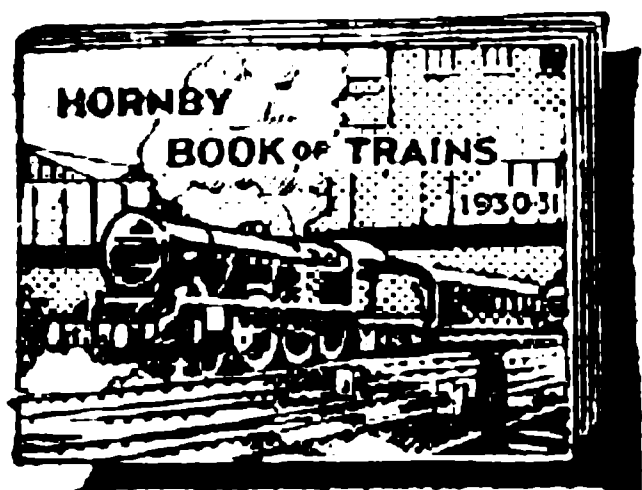
"EVERYTHING'S turned out all right, but there's one thing I can't understand," said K. K. later, as he discussed the satisfactory climax with a crowd of other chaps. "Nobody's been able to explain that mysterious voice."

(Concluded on page 52.)

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OLD SWAN

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The Phantom Of The Grange!

(Continued from page 50.)

"I think I can," said Nipper calmly.

"What!"

"It's not so mysterious," grinned Nipper. "It was my idea," he added modestly, "but I couldn't have done a thing without the help of good old Nick here."

Nicodemus Trotwood, of the Remove, also looked becomingly modest.

"Nick—with his ventriloquism!" gasped K. K.

"I thought it all out, and it seemed to me that if we could only get Sir Trevor into the right mood he would consent to receive Vincent's wife," said Nipper. "Of course, we didn't reckon to spring the climax until about a week, but that falling through the ice business gave you the opportunity, K. K., of hurrying things up."

"You old fraud!" said Handforth, glaring at Nick Trotwood. "You even fooled me!"

"Sorry, but Nipper and I thought it better to keep it under our hats," said Nick. "It was easy enough for us to work the thing. A bit of luminous paint on the eyes of that Old Master—"

"But those eyes only glowed for a while," said K. K.

"A special kind of paint," grinned Nipper. "It doesn't show up until it's been on half an hour, and then it only glows for a couple of minutes before it fades out. Nick merely

waited until the eyes glowed, and then he threw his voice."

"Jolly brainy dodge," said K. K. admiringly.

"I've been creeping about the corridors like a giddy thief," explained Nick. "I've been hiding round corners and in recesses, chucking my voice about. It's a good thing I can throw it a long way, so I was always pretty safe. Somehow, I don't think it would be wise to tell Sir Trevor the truth about it."

"Where ignorance is bliss, what?" grinned Kirby Keeble Parkington. "But what about that shadowy ghost we saw last night?"

"That was a bit of muslin with some luminous paint on it," said Nick. "We only showed it for a tick because we were afraid you'd twig. You see, we didn't want you to spoil things with your dud ghosts. That Unseen Voice was more effective than anything else."

"Well, you've helped famously," said K. K. gratefully. "Vincent's as happy as a mouse with a piece of cheese. Beryl is all serene with the pater, and it looks like being a Merry Christmas for everybody in general."

"Looks like it?" repeated Nipper. "My son, it is a Merry Christmas."

THE END.

(Next week's St. Frank's yarn is entitled: "Handy, the Conjuror!" And as a conjurer Handy is the world's greatest scream.)

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