

"GUNMEN AT ST. FRANK'S!"

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GUNMEN



St. Frank's school-boy frustrates Al Kapone — now the gunman is after his blood!

CHAPTER 1.

Handy's Helping Hand!

CHURCH and McClure, of the St. Frank's Remove, dropped off a bus at the end of Grosvenor Avenue, and hurried along that quiet residential thoroughfare. It was the first day of the new term at St. Frank's, and Church and McClure were calling for their celebrated leader, Edward Oswald Handforth.

"We're a bit early, but that's all to the good," remarked Church, as he looked at his

watch. "Twenty-past nine. We arranged with Handy to be here at half-past, but it'll take more than ten minutes to get him moving."

"We shall be lucky if we start by eleven," commented McClure.

These two youths were privileged. Instead of crowding into a train, like most of the other St. Frank's boys, they would travel down to the old school by car. For Handforth was the proud possessor of his own Morris Minor, and to all intents and purposes the three juniors had equal shares in it.

Rapid-Fire Thrills In This Exciting School Yarn!

at ST. FRANK'S!



by
*Edwy Searles
Brooks*

"Let's hope the ass has got over last night's hectic excitement," said Church, as they arrived at the gateway of Sir Edward Handforth's house. "It's a jolly good thing the new term starts to-day, Mac. It'll prevent the big idiot from making himself an even bigger idiot."

"If that's possible," said Mac, grinning.

They had no illusions regarding their blundering, headstrong chum; neither were they very particular in their choice of expressions when referring to him. They knew he was a chump—but they also knew that he was one of the best chaps in the world. Handy might be a blunderer and an ass; but

he was as straight as a die, and his heart was oversized.

Church and McClure went everywhere with Handforth as a matter of duty—a self-appointed duty. It was their special job to look after Handforth, to watch over him, and to see that he didn't kick over the traces.



Handforth did not always appreciate these attentions, but there wasn't the slightest doubt that they were necessary; and it was really astonishing to what a fine art Church and McClure had brought this task. Whilst apparently agreeing with everything Handforth proposed, they nevertheless wangled him into going their own way instead of his.

Sir Edward Handforth was duly appreciative of Church's and McClure's activities, and his big mansion in Grosvenor Avenue was an open house to them. When the front door was opened by Barton, the butler, they walked straight in as though they owned the place.

"Morning, Mr. Barton," said Church cheerily. "Got ever last night's spree yet?"

"I should hardly call it a spree, Master Church," said the butler coldly. "When a gang of American gunmen ride past the house and send a hail of machine-gun bullets at the windows it's not exactly my idea of a spree. I see by the papers that no arrests have been made. What are our police doing to permit such goings-on?"

McClure said he didn't know, and then, changing the subject, he asked:

"Is Handy down yet?"

The butler looked astonished.

"Master Edward?" he repeated. "Down? He's gone."

"Gone where?"

"He has already left for St. Frank's in his little car."

"That's rot!" said Church. "Sorry, Mr. Barton, but that's absolute rot. He couldn't have gone. We definitely arranged with him last night to call for him at half-past nine this morning."

"Master Edward is sometimes forgetful," said the butler feelingly, "and this morning he was particularly strange in his manner. Duc, no doubt, to last night's unusual events. He was down before seven, and Ellen tells me that he practically turned the kitchen upside down and brought the cook to the verge of giving notice."

"That's nothing fresh," said Church, looking worried. "Dash it, Mac, he couldn't have gone without us!"

"He can do anything," said McClure gruffly. "It's funny, though—he distinctly arranged to start at half-past nine. What time did he go, Mr. Barton?"

"I am thankful to say, Master McClure, that he left this house soon after eight," replied the butler fervently. "Until Easter, therefore, we shall have peace and— Yes, soon after eight," he ended up, recalling himself to the present.

"And he told you he was starting for St. Frank's?"

"He made some remark to the effect that he couldn't sleep, and that he might as well be off."

"Didn't he mention us?"

"I'm afraid not, Master Church."

"Didn't you remind him that we were coming?"

"I wasn't aware that you were coming," said Barton.

"Then the big ass has given us the slip, Mac," observed Church dismally.

"We shall have to go by train, after all," said McClure gloomily.

They made further inquiries. They sought out Ellen, the parlourmaid, who was by way of being a special chum of Handforth's; but Ellen could enlighten them no further. Master Edward, it seemed, had been strangely worked up that morning. She had even attempted to pump him—an art in which she was fairly efficient—but for once she had failed. Master Edward had gone off without having dropped a single hint as to his intentions.

"It's that girl!" said Church, with conviction. "What the dickens shall we do, Mac? Don't you think it would be a good idea to inquire at the Green Park Hotel?"

"And make ourselves look silly?" retorted the Scottish junior. "Not likely! Besides, didn't the papers say that Trixie Foster is still missing? What's the good of going to the Green Park Hotel?"

"I was only thinking that Handy might be there," said Church.

"If we start that sort of game we can chase all over London," said McClure, shaking his head. "The best thing we can do is to buzz to Victoria and catch that fast train—the one the crowd usually travels on."

They departed much depressed and worried. There was no certainty in their minds that they would find Handforth at St. Frank's when they arrived. They kicked themselves for not having arrived at Grosvenor Avenue at the break of dawn. Considering last night's extraordinary events, they might have expected that Handforth would do something imbecile this morning.

"He was smitten by that giddy American chorus girl," growled Mac, as they sat on a bus. "He brought her home, and then those Chicago gangsters came along with their machine-gun. Then Jake Diamond was killed in front of our eyes, and the next thing we knew was that his body had vanished, and the girl with it."

"Handy's probably gone out to find some clues," said Church bitterly. "I hope to goodness he doesn't get himself mixed up any more with those rotten crooks. He caused us enough trouble last night. It's no good looking for that girl, she's probably been kidnapped by Kapone, the gang leader."

"That's why he's gone off so early, I expect," said McClure. "There's not one chance in a thousand that he went straight to St. Frank's. Oh, well, we shall have to hope for the best."

BUT Edward Oswald Handforth had gone straight to St. Frank's.

He was not so much in the dark regarding Jake Diamond and Trixie Foster as his chums believed. In fact, it is

safe to say that Handforth knew more about those two people than did the police.

He set off in his Morris Minor with a look of burning excitement in his eyes. He had not forgotten Church and McClure; in fact, he had remembered them very, very clearly. And, knowing that it was quite on the cards that they would turn up a full hour before the appointed time, he had taken care to get off just after eight—thus circumventing them completely.

There were several reasons why he wanted to be alone on this trip. The main reason was that there was no room for them in the car, for the Morris was practically filled with luggage.

Handforth had not got up early that morning, as the household believed. He had been up all night. But one would never believe, to look at him, that he had had no sleep, or that he had driven his faithful little car for long hours during the night.

He had journeyed down to St. Frank's in the small hours with two passengers; he had arrived home, unnoticed, at about 5.30, before the cook's alarm clock had gone off. He had spent an hour stealing about the house, taking blankets from store-cupboards, and so forth. His Morris Minor was now packed with blankets and rugs, and he had even considered the possibility of taking a hair mattress from one of the beds.

He had only decided against this when he came to measure up the mattress and compare it with the size of the baby car's interior. He filled up some further space with a big oil-stove and a generous supply of fuel. Then, taking care that nobody should come out to see him off, he slipped away without the household knowing of what he had taken. Later, perhaps, the various things would be missed—but Handforth didn't worry about that.

His one aim now was to get to St. Frank's before any of the other fellows arrived. Even so, his task would be risky enough, for the school staff would be much in evidence, and no doubt many of the masters would have turned up. He would have to be very, very careful.

In a nutshell, Handforth was a good Samaritan. And a most remarkable good Samaritan at that; for he was rendering succour to Jake Diamond, a hunted New York gunman. Handforth had no particular liking for gunmen in general, and if there had only been Diamond to consider he would not have lifted a finger. But there was the girl.

It was for her sake he was doing all these extraordinary things.

He remembered sitting next to her at the Theatre the previous evening.

It wasn't until later that Handforth knew that Trixie Foster, the Pollicies girl, was Jake Diamond's companion. He was only vague in his knowledge of the facts. The pair had fled to London after some narrow escapes in New York. Jake Diamond was the leader of the "racket" in New York, and the notorious Al Kapone had invaded Diamond's territory and had declared war. Exactly what it was all about, Handforth did not know—and he cared still less.

Diamond had fled, seeking safety in London, only to find that his relentless enemies had followed him, and were as determined as ever to wipe him out. They had apparently killed him the previous evening.

Perhaps they believed now that he was dead. But Handforth knew better. After going to bed at about midnight, Jake Diamond and Trixie Foster had stolen through his window and had sought his aid. They were clever. This generous schoolboy, so unversed in worldly matters, might very easily be persuaded to give them shelter—whilst every other hand was turned against them.

Diamond, it seemed, had escaped death by reason of the fact that he was wearing a bullet-proof garment. It was Trixie who had got him down a handy fire-escape after the alleged killing. The police believed that Kapone's gang was responsible for the disappearance of the "body."

Handforth might not have helped but for the fact that Trixie—as he now learned—was Jake Diamond's wife. If he refused her, the outcome might be tragic for her. Dragged into this underworld maelstrom, her life would be sacrificed.

It was for her sake that Handforth was now taking such desperate chances. The loss of a night's sleep meant nothing to him. He had taken the hunted Diamond to St. Frank's and had hidden him. The new term started, and he would be on the staff for a week or two.

He was on his feet now. He did not know how long he had watched the girl, but he knew that she was a powerful saloon girl.

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Trixie went with Handforth to the foot of the steps.

"Thanks a lot!" she murmured. "You're regular, big boy. I guess we'll be safe here until those Chicago rats are pulled in."

"I'm doing it for your sake, don't forget that," whispered Handforth. "And before long I'll get you free from this mess, too — completely free. You've no right to be mixed up with gunmen."

"Go to it, kid," breathed Trixie, pressing his arm.

He went up the vault steps unsteadily, thrilled to the marrow. This was the most novel situation he had ever encountered. Hiding an American gunman at St. Frank's!

Great was Handforth's satisfaction at the success of his plan. And great would have been his consternation could he have known of those furtive eyes which watched him as he emerged into the full daylight.

TEN minutes later Handforth was strolling casually about the Triangle, calm and contented. He had got his car round to the garage without exciting any comment. Now he was listening to the distant puffing of the local train as it pulled out of Bellton.

It was the first important train of the day—the one that had connected with the London express at Bannington. Crowds of fellows would certainly arrive by it. Well, he had beaten them. He had not only got to St. Frank's first, but he had fulfilled his risky mission. Jake Diamond and his girl-wife were safe.

"We've dished those beastly gunmen," murmured Handforth. "They'll be looking all over London, and they'll never dream what's really happened. In the end, I suppose they'll clear off back to America in disgust, or else get nabbed by Scotland Yard."



Church and McClure proceeded to sit on the battered Edward Oswald Handforth. "Now tell us the truth!" said Church wrathfully.

The first arrivals were Walter Church and Arnold McClure. They had wasted no time on the journey from the village. The tuckshop had not attracted them as it had attracted the others, and they had even run most of the way.

"Well, I'm jiggered!" ejaculated Church, as he turned into the gateway. "He's here!"

"Thank goodness for that!" said McClure. They hadn't expected it. A load was lifted from their minds. All the way from London they had been troubled by the conviction that they had left Handforth behind—involving himself in some desperate and preposterous tangle with that Follies girl and her gunmen associates. Yet here he was at St. Frank's, coolly sunning himself on the Ancient House steps. It is not too much to say that Church and McClure felt positively swindled.

"The big idiot!" growled Church. "We've been worrying over nothing all the time!"

They approached their leader with the necessary severity.

"You're a fine chap!" said Church, by way of greeting.

"What's the matter with you, Churchy?" asked Handforth. "How goes it? Did you have a good trip? Where's the crowd? Didn't a lot of the other chaps come?"

"A lot of the other chaps did come," retorted Church. "Nipper and K. K. and Travers and Archie, and heaps more—they'll be here in a minute. But Mac and I want to know what you've been having a game at."

"You've been up to something!" said McClure, giving Handforth a searching glance. "You're untidy—you haven't washed this morning—you're still wearing a dirty collar—and your eyes look as though you haven't had any sleep."

Handforth was startled.

"You see too much," he growled.

"Then you admit you've had no sleep?" asked Mac. "Look here, Handy, you know jolly well that you can't keep anything from Churchy and me. What have you been doing? Why didn't you wait for us?"

Edward Oswald was quietly confident. He had been expecting this catechism, and he was ready for it. It was perfectly true that, as a rule, he could not keep a secret; but he was determined that this should be the exception which proved the rule.

"Why didn't I wait for you?" he repeated. "I took a fancy to come down earlier, that's all. I knew you'd catch the train."

"But why come down early?" asked Church, staring.

"Can't I do as I like with my own car?" demanded Handforth aggressively. "I'm sorry if I upset you chaps. An arrangement, of course, is an arrangement. Strictly speaking, I ought to have waited for you. But I didn't. So what are you going to do about it?"

He assured himself that he used the necessary carelessness of tone that the occasion demanded. But he overdid it. There was something far too evasive and casual in his manner. In fact, his manner was such that Church and McClure were convinced that he had, indeed, been "up to something."

"You don't think you're fooling us, do you?" asked McClure tartly. "We don't live in the same study with you without knowing you. You're not the kind of chap to let his pals down for no reason at all—or because of a mere fancy."

"Not likely," said Church. "You started off early because you had a definite reason. And you're only wasting a lot of time by keeping it from us."

"If you're worrying about your fare money, I'll pay it," said Handforth coldly.

"That's something," said McClure, holding out his hand.

"You—you Scotsman!" roared Church. "We're not going to take his beastly money! I should hope we can afford our own railway fares! What we want to know is why he sneaked off and left us in the lurch."

"Wait a minute!" interrupted Handforth. "What do you mean by saying I sneaked off? You silly asses, I went openly. I'm not obliged to wait for you chaps. I felt like having a peaceful ride for once."

"After definite arranging with us to meet you at half-past nine," retorted Church. "Come off it, you ass! We know you better than that. Something happened after we left you last night—and you can't deny it."

"I do deny it!" roared Handforth. "I mean—Look here, you can mind your own beastly business?"

He pulled himself up short. Already he was falling into one of those traps which Church and McClure were so adept in laying. Fortunately, a crowd of other Removites appeared at that moment, and the argument was postponed. For as soon as Handforth was spotted he was swooped upon. Buster Boots and Bob Christine and Corcoran and a number of other Fourth-Formers came dashing up.

"Good old Handy!" sang out Boots. "You're still alive, then? Those gunmen haven't potted you yet?"

"Oh, cheese it!" said Handforth.

"We heard all about your adventures," said Bob Christine. "My only hat! You had a thrilling time last night, didn't you? You actually saw Jake Diamond murdered, didn't you?"

Handforth shuddered very effectively.

"I don't want to talk about it," he said, with truth.

"Don't want to talk about it?" asked Corcoran, staring. "You! Why, the other chaps who saw it have been talking of nothing else. We thought you'd be full of it."

"The sooner we forget that beastly affair, the better," said Handforth coldly. "We've got something better to talk about than American gunmen. Football, for example. What about our match with Redcliffe on Saturday?"

"Bother the match with Redcliffe!" said Christine.

They were just as puzzled as Church and McClure. It was extraordinary that Handforth of all fellows should be so reluctant to talk of his recent adventures. And therein he made a grave tactical blunder. Church and McClure now knew for certain that he was holding something back.

For everybody was eager to talk about the supposed murder of Jake Diamond except Handforth. The newspapers were full of the story. Scotland Yard was baffled. Jake Diamond's body had vanished, and the elusive figure of the Follies girl had vanished with it. It made a first-class story for the papers.

Al Kapone and his gang, it seemed, were lying low, and no arrests had been made. In fact, all the indications went to show that the whole affair would quickly die out and become forgotten.

But would it?

CHAPTER 3.

Handy Hits Out!

"LET'S get indoors," said Handforth casually.

He had moved aside from the crowd, and Church and McClure had gone with him. His tone was as suspiciously casual as ever.

"No need to go indoors yet," said Church. "There's nothing to do until dinner-time."

"We might as well light the fire in Study D," said Handforth.

"You hopeless ass! It's bound to be alight already," pointed out McClure.

"Look here, Handy, we've had enough of this beating about the bush. There was a rummy look in your eye two minutes ago, when somebody referred to the killing of Jake Diamond."

"I hate to talk about it," said Handforth, with a shiver.

"Well, you're going to talk about it, all the same," retorted Church, "and you needn't shiver like that—we know you're faking it."

"Just the same as you faked that shudder," nodded Mac.

Handforth was freshly startled. The perspicacity of his chums was disconcerting. He took refuge in assumed anger.

"You can go and eat coke!" he roared violently. "I'm not going to tell you anything I don't want to tell you. Understand? If you think I'm going to explain why I really came without you, you're dotty!"

"Oh!" said Church. "I thought you said it was a mere fancy?"

"Eh? Did I say that?" blustered Handforth.

"And now it comes out that there was a real reason," went on Church. "Did you hear that, Mac? My only topper! I wonder——" He broke off, and looked at Handforth with positive apprehension. "Have you got that girl here?" he gasped.

Handforth jumped a foot into the air.

"What!" he gasped.

"You have!" yelled Church.

"Don't shout, you idiot!" hissed Handy.

"He's got that girl here—Trixie Foster!" said Church, pale with consternation. "My hat! Why didn't we think of this before? That's why he left us behind! He brought that girl down in his car!"

Handforth gladly seized the opening.

"I didn't!" he said fiercely. "I came down alone! Didn't I tell you before that I came down alone, that I wanted a peaceful journey? I didn't bring that girl!"

He turned red with guilt. It suddenly occurred to him that he was telling a lie, and he hadn't meant to tell a lie. He was referring to his second journey—the journey

that Church spoke of. But it was an undeniable fact that he *had* brought the girl down.

"You can think what you like," he went on breathlessly, vainly attempting to square his conscience. "When I left home at eight o'clock this morning the only living thing in my car was myself."

This sounded suspiciously like an evasion.

"And you picked Trixie Foster up later, I suppose?" asked Church promptly.

"No, I didn't," retorted Handforth, on safe ground now. "I came down the whole way alone. So the sooner you get those potty ideas out of your head, the better."

A fresh uneasiness beset him. He was beginning to feel trapped. His chums, quite unconsciously, were edging him through the shrubbery—or if they were doing it consciously, they only did so with the idea of privacy. But they were getting uncomfortably near to that "hide-out."

"We don't want to jaw out here," said Handforth hurriedly. "It's cold. We might just as well go indoors."

"And have the whole Remove passage listening-in?" asked Church. "It's more private here. Mac and I are going to get the truth out of you, Handy. You might as well understand that at once. We've had enough of your shilly-shallying."

"Too much," agreed McClure.

Handforth looked at them in astonishment. They were using just that tone which he himself was so fond of employing, and their expressions, too, were aggressive. The great Edward Oswald began to feel rocky.

"A lot of fuss over nothing," he said sourly. "Fancy thinking that I brought that girl down to St. Frank's! What an idiotic idea! She's nothing to me, is she? Besides, didn't she disappear after Jake Diamond was shot?"

"If you didn't bring her down to St. Frank's, you helped her in some other way," said Church. "The very tone you're using is too careless to be genuine. Even if you don't tell anybody else, you ought to tell us——" He broke off abruptly, staring at the ground. "What's this?" he ejaculated, in wonder.

"Eh?" gasped Handforth. "I—I don't see anything."

For an instant he thought he had dropped something—one of his parcels, perhaps.

"Look here, Mac—a car track!" said Church, pointing to a soft spot. "A small Dunlop tread! Just the kind of mark that a Morris Minor leaves."

If Handforth had kept his head then, his chums might have abandoned this line of inquiry. But he gave himself away completely.

"You're mad!" he said frantically. "Come away from here! Come on—both of you!"

**Watches,
Wallets and Penknives
to be won by "N.L." readers
for good jokes.
SEE PAGE 18.**

What absolute rot ! Why should I bring my Minor to a place like this ?"

He grabbed them violently, but they resisted.

"Hold on !" said McClure, in a hard voice. "So you did bring your Minor behind the shrubbery, Handy ! That's another fishy thing ! Let's go and have a look in the ruins, Churchy ! There might be another clue there."

Church was already moving towards the ruins.

"Don't go in there !" panted Handforth frantically. The situation was becoming desperate, and he was filled with alarm. "Come out of here !" he hissed, as he rushed after his two chums into the ruins. "Do you hear me, you rotters ? Come out of here !"

"Not until we've had a look round !" shouted Church, more suspicious than ever.

"Don't yell !" pleaded Handforth, in agony.

"Why shouldn't we yell ?" asked Church, staring at him in astonishment. "Surely this is the safest place in the whole school to yell in ? You haven't got somebody down in the vault, I suppose ?" he added sarcastically.

Handforth reeled.

"Nunno ! I—I mean, in the vault !" he repeated, fighting for time. "Have you chaps gone completely off your rockers ?"

But Church was giving him a sharp inspection. That chance shot of his had gone right home. There was no mistaking the alarmed glance which Handforth cast at the stone stairway, half hidden amid the crumbling masonry.

"Handy, old man, what in the name of mystery have you been up to ?" asked Church. "Who have you got down in that vault ?"

"I'm suspicious, but I daren't think it's true !" said Mac, dumbfounded.

Handforth clenched his fists.

"I've had enough of this !" he said aggressively. "Who do you think you are, to badger me and ask all sorts of idiotic questions ? Take that, Walter Church !" Slish ! "And you take that, Arnold McClure !" Slish ! "I'll show you who's boss of this combination !"

Now they knew. Whenever Handforth resorted to violence it was an open admission of defeat. Unfortunately his slishes, usually so accurate, failed to find their marks. Church and McClure were ready for them—expecting them—and to dodge was simple.

To make matters worse they waited for no further onslaught, but sailed in on their own account. The startled Handforth found himself backing away on the defensive. He took care to back towards the stairway.

"All right !" he panted. "If you want a fight, I'll give you one ! Perhaps it's the best way out of the mess !"

A load was lifted off his mind. Whenever he was worried a good old scrap brought him relief. That is to say, it usually did. On many an occasion his unfortunate chums had suffered black eyes and swollen noses for no better reason than that it afforded Handforth relief.

But this time their blood was up. Handforth's attitude angered them, and they went all out. The fight, half-hearted at first, developed into a real "mill."

Biff ! Crash ! Thud !

It was Church and McClure who were doing the damage. Handforth, wildly anxious and guilty of conscience, had no real stomach for the fight ; and when a fellow is in that condition his battle is lost. It took Church and McClure about two minutes to force Handforth back, trip him up, and get him flat. Then they proceeded to sit on him. His nose was bleeding slightly, his right eye was puffy, and his lip was cut.

"Now !" panted Church. "You're down, Handy ! Are you going to tell us the truth ?"

Handforth took refuge in indignation.

"You—you traitors !" he said bitterly. "Turning on your leader ! What sort of a fight do you call this—two against one ?"

"In nine cases out of ten you can whack the pair of us, and you know it !" retorted Church. "It's the tenth case that marks the difference. The times when you can't fight because you know you're in the wrong."

"Why argue ?" said McClure. "Push him aside, and let's go down into the vault."

"No, no—wait !" groaned Handforth. "I'm whacked—I'll admit it, you rotters ! You've won !"

"We've won, Mac !" sniffed Church. "He's giving us news !"

"I'll come clean, big boy ! I—I mean, I'll tell you everything !" gasped Handforth. "But don't go in that vault, or you might get bumped off !"

"Going dotty ?" asked Church, staring.

"This beastly American slang gets hold of a chap," complained Handforth. "I almost said 'hot dog' not long ago."

"Never mind hot dogs, or cold dogs, either !" said McClure. "Have you got that American chorus girl down in this vault ? It seems too awful to—"

"Too awful be dashed !" interrupted Handforth defiantly. "She is there, and you can both go and eat coke ! You can go chase yourselves ! I—I mean— She's there, and I'm glad I'm helping her !"

"But—but it's unthinkable !" exclaimed Church, aghast. "Handy, are you absolutely crazy ? How can you keep a girl down in a cold, damp place like that ? And what will people say—"

"People won't say anything, because they won't know," interrupted Handforth, cool and calm now that the cat was out of the bag—and intensely relieved, really, that he had somebody to talk to about it. "As for the place being cold and damp, I'm not so thoughtless as all that. There's a big oil-stove down there, and blankets, and food—"

"So that's why you brought your Minor round here ?" broke in McClure, fascinated. "You had it full of things ! Oh, Handy, what have you been up to ? Can't you understand that it's simply impossible to hide this girl at St. Frank's ? You'll get sacked in a minute if the beaks find out !"

"They won't find out unless you give me away," said Handforth. "And don't worry about her so much—she's not alone. Her husband's with her."

"Her husband?" yelled Church.

"Jake Diamond," said Handforth coolly.

CHAPTER 4.

The Hidden Menace!

FOR a moment Church and McClure stared in incredulous disbelief.

"That's rot!" said Church, at length. "Jake Diamond's dead!"

"About as dead as I am," retorted Handforth. "Look here, you inquisitive rotters, Jake Diamond and that girl came to me last night after I'd gone to bed. They're in danger of their lives. They're hunted by those Chicago gunmen. What could I do but help them?"

"But—but——"

Handforth cut short the protestations by explaining everything in detail. They were dumbfounded when they learned that Jake Diamond was, indeed, really alive; and, in a measure, they were relieved. The situation was not so bad as they had supposed. It was Diamond who was responsible for that girl—not Handforth.

"Good old Handy!" said Church softly, when they had heard all. "People don't often come to you for help in vain, do they? It was just like him, Mac, to rally round and lend a hand!"

"That girl was in distress," said Handforth tensely, "and I did it for her—not for Diamond. He's a scoundrel, of course—a rotten gunman. But I can't help her without helping him. It makes me boil when I think of such a ripping girl being married to a crook like that!"

"Are you sure she isn't fooling you?" asked Church earnestly.

"Be yourself!" said Handforth with scorn.

"What?"

"That's American for telling you not to talk rot," explained Handforth. "Not that it really applies in your case, because if you're yourself you're bound to talk rot. Trixie isn't pulling any wool over my eyes, my sons. She's sure regular. All we've got to do is to keep Jake Diamond and his wife here until we hear that Kapone and his gangsters are either arrested or have cleared out of the country."

"You don't know what you've let yourself in for," said Church with conviction.

"Rats! It won't be for more than a few days," declared Handforth optimistically.

"Why in the name of wonder didn't you tell us all this at first?" Church wanted to know. "We shall be able to help you."

"You'll keep it dark, then?" asked Handforth eagerly. "You'll lend a hand?"

"What else can we do?" said Church. "We'll help right enough. Mac and I can keep watch while you're visiting the vault, and we can take turns, too."

"Yes, and that reminds me," said Handforth. "Do you think we can manage to get a lot of straw from the barn during the evening? Blankets are all very well, but——"

"Shush!" whispered McClure suddenly. "I thought I heard——"

He broke off, startled. The face and figure of an unexpected vision caught his eye. Trixie had appeared from the vault steps, and both Church and McClure felt strangely embarrassed.

"It's all right, boys," whispered the girl. "I guess I've heard enough to tell me that you're all 'in' on this lay. But listen! It'll be a tough break for Jake and me if you spill the beans. We don't want all the other boys crashing in on us."

"It's an absolute secret!" said Handforth eagerly. "These two chaps are my special chums. They had guessed things, so I was forced to tell them the rest."

"Gee! You English kids are sure regular!" murmured Trixie. "I had a hunch that you were still here, big boy, and when I heard voices I crept up."

"It's not very safe," said Handforth anxiously.

"Jake's feeling kind of mean," explained the girl. "This lying low has got his goat, I guess. Jake ain't the guy to quit, and if it wasn't for me he would have stayed in the big town. He's gone off exploring a tunnel."

"He'd better be careful," warned Church. "That tunnel down there leads into a disused quarry, and he might get lost."

"Anyways, I figured on skipping up here and spilling a bibful," said Trixie. "Listen, kids! It's not exactly cream in the can with me and Jake."

"Not what?"

"When I married that egg I thought he was on the level," continued the girl softly. "We do things kind of slick in the States. We even hustle when we get married. You meet a guy one night, and get married to him next day."

"Didn't I tell you?" asked Handforth, looking at his chums.

"When it was too late, I found that Jake was a gang leader," said Trixie, her voice full of regret. "I figured on giving him the air, but he's not that kind of a guy. What's his he holds. Get me? But when I'm out of this jamb, I'll give Jake the gate and go back to the stage. I almost hate him. But I'm afraid of him, for he'd sure croak me."

"I say, you're in an awful fix," said Handforth sympathetically.

"You do your stuff, boy friend, and everything will be swell," promised Trixie. "When we've settled this hash we'll go places and do things. We'll put on the Ritz, I'll tell the world."

"Oh, rather!" said Handforth feebly.

"And don't forget to watch out good," warned Trixie. "Those Chicago rats are liable to get on to us almost any minute. If you see any suspicious-looking guys hanging around, you'd best give us the tip. We shall have to quit, and quit fast."

"But they can't track you down here!" protested Handforth.

"Be yourself!" retorted Trixie. "Those birds can smell fifty miles. It ain't so easy to give those buzzards the run around."

She nodded to them in general and vanished.

"There you are!" breathed Handforth. "Didn't I say that she was a victim? She married Diamond without realising what he was—and now she's scared stiff of him."

Church and McClure were not so easily convinced.

"Are you sure that she isn't hand-in-glove with Diamond?" asked Church dubiously. "For goodness' sake be careful, Handy! It may be a plant."

"A what?"

"How do you know that these people aren't planning to rob the school?" went on Church, warming to his subject. "They fooled you into thinking that they're in distress, and you've brought them down here in secret. It's risky. What will you say if you wake up to-morrow morning and find the school ransacked and those birds flown?"

Handforth looked at him pityingly.

"You think that?" he asked incredulously. "You think that after seeing that girl?"

"The trouble with you, Handy, is that you're smitten every time you see a pretty face," said McClure dourly. "Still, I don't see what else you can do but keep the game up now you've started it. All I hope is that it won't last long."

The clanging of a bell warned them that it was dinner-time. And it was just as well that they should get away from the vicinity of the monastery ruins. There was nothing further they could do until the evening, anyhow.

"We're too late to change now," said Church with regret. "I hate going about in these togs. I'm never free and easy until I've got out of 'em."

They were dressed in Etons, and they wore toppers. It was one of the St. Frank's regulations that all scholars should arrive at the school on the first day of term in Etons and in toppers. Having arrived, they could change into more comfortable things as soon as they liked.

"Listen, boy friends," said Handforth impressively. "I mean, just a word of warning, my lads! From now on we'll dismiss this subject completely. Walls have ears, and if the slightest hint of this affair gets out, the whole school will know what we've been up to."

"What you've been up to, you mean," said Church tartly. "You're a fine chap to warn us! It's our job to warn you! For two pins you'd start gassing about that girl in sight of Teddy Long."

"It wouldn't matter if he wasn't within hearing."

"If Long's within sight, he's within hearing," said Church with conviction. "He's got elastic ears—they can stretch yards. So we'd better be careful. One word of this, and it'll mean the sack for the three of us."

"Yep, the Head will sure give us the air," agreed Handforth. "So I guess we'll keep our traps shut and make it snappy. Oh, blow! That American slang is getting hold of me!"

They emerged into the Triangle, and the subject was tacitly dismissed. Nobody was about, for the bell for dinner was a summons which was not lightly ignored. They had almost reached the Ancient House steps when Handforth's topper emitted an extraordinary "plonk" and flew off his head, to fall several yards away.

"Here, I say!" roared Edward Oswald, spinning round. "That's a bit thick! Who threw that stone?"

"Funny!" said Church, looking round. "There's nobody about."

"Chuckling stones like that is a dirty trick!" said Handforth indignantly, as he retrieved his topper. "I might have been hit on the face."

"Somebody with a catapult, I expect——" began McClure, puzzled.

"Look at this!" interrupted Handforth, in a startled voice.

He was examining his topper, and Church and McClure were dumbfounded to see two holes near the top, one on either side. They had been drilled as neatly as though a brace and bit had been used.

"A bullet!" panted Church, aghast.

"Wha-a-at?" gurgled Handforth. "I—I never thought—— I mean, I thought that somebody had used a catapult."

"No catapult could send a stone fast enough to cut holes in your hat!" pointed out Church. "I tell you, it was a bullet! Somebody's trying to pot you, Handy! Those Chicago gunmen!"

"Rot!" snorted Handforth, but without much conviction. "They don't know anything about what I've done——"

"They know that you helped Trixie and Jake Diamond last night," interrupted Mac shrewdly. "Didn't they send a hail of machine-gun bullets into your own home? Even if they know nothing about Diamond, they may have come here to get their revenge on you."

Handforth was still looking at those neatly-drilled holes.

"But there wasn't any shot!" he protested. "We didn't hear a thing."

"That's true," admitted Church.

Handforth put the hat on his head again, and he had hardly removed his hand before the topper went flying again, just as before. It was lifted clean off his head, to thud down on the Ancient House steps.

And when they came to examine it there were two more holes through it!

This time there could be no doubt that a bullet had been the cause, for Church distinctly heard a "phut" against the Ancient House wall, and on running up he discovered the stonework visibly chipped. Yet there had been no report, and it was impossible to say from which direction the bullet had come.



There was a soft thud, and Handforth's topper was knocked off his head. When he came to look at it he saw that a bullet had passed clean through the hat!

"I say, this is awful!" panted Church. "They mean to kill you, Handy!"

Handforth had turned pale. An experience of this sort was rather terrifying. He remembered, too, that many American gunmen carry pistols with silencers attached.

"They don't mean to kill me," he said, with unexpected shrewdness. "A man with an aim like that could have plugged me if he had wanted to. I'll bet it's just a warning, a hint that I'd better keep out of their affairs."

He fairly leapt up the Ancient House steps, and was startled to find himself face to face with the headmaster himself.

CHAPTER 5.

Hands Up, Handy!

MR. NELSON LEE, the celebrated detective, was no less celebrated in his capacity of headmaster of St. Frank's. Since his appointment to that post the great school had progressed as never before. But just at this minute he was far more the detective than he was the schoolmaster.

"Let me see that hat, Handforth," he said sharply.

"It's—it's only my topper, sir," blustered Handforth, whipping it behind him.

"I know perfectly well that it is your topper, but let me see it."

"Somebody's been having a lark, sir," explained Handforth. "Throwing stones, or—or something. It doesn't matter, sir."

Nelson Lee was still holding out his hand, and Edward Oswald was compelled to obey. He watched apprehensively as the Head turned the hat over in his hands. Handforth had a feeling, too, that another bullet might come along at any second. He had his back to the open doorway, and a curiously creepy sensation was running up and down his spine.

"Do you know how these holes were caused?" asked Nelson Lee suddenly. "Have you any suspicion, Handforth, as to the culprit?"

"How should I know, sir?" hedged Handforth. "Some silly trick, I suppose. The chaps knew that I was mixed up with those American gunmen in London, and some practical joker might have tried to scare me."

"I doubt if there is any such practical joker in this school," replied Nelson Lee.

"These holes might have been caused by air-gun pellets."

"By George, yes, sir!" ejaculated Handforth eagerly. "I hadn't thought of that."

"But it would need to be a very good air-gun—and fired at close range," continued the Head, glancing over at the opposite windows. "If anything of this nature happens again, Handforth, you had better come straight to me and report. Don't forget!"

The three juniors were glad enough to escape. Nelson Lee had remembered Handforth's connection with the gunmen, too, but he was reluctant to believe that the American crooks could be in any way connected with this startling incident. Knowing nothing of Jake Diamond's presence at the school, Lee was naturally at a disadvantage.

He was justified in scouting the probability of the gangsters journeying down to St. Frank's for the express purpose of taking pot-shots at Handforth's topper. They weren't likely to be interested in a school-boy. The obvious explanation which leapt to Lee's mind was that some foolhardy and reckless japer was playing tricks with an air-gun.

Yet even this explanation was unsatisfactory. Lee was thoughtful and disturbed as he went on his way.

IT wasn't until dusk that anything fresh cropped up.

There were no lessons to-day, of course, and the afternoon had been spent in getting settled down, reporting to Form-masters, interviewing prefects, getting things ship-shape in studies, and so forth. There were special feeds, too, and newcomers were constantly arriving—with the consequent exchange of yarns about the good times they had had over the Christmas holidays.

Handforth did his best to carry on in the usual way, and not many fellows noticed that he was hardly his cheerful, happy-go-lucky, boisterous self.

He heard the rumour just before tea. Somebody, it seemed, had seen a mysterious figure lurking about near the school. It was the expression "lurking" which attracted Handforth's attention. He made inquiries. Stanley Waldo, of the Remove, was the fellow who had spotted the stranger.

Handforth sought Waldo out in Study I, which he shared with Fullwood and Russell. If there was one fellow in the whole of St. Frank's capable of spotting a watcher who was expressly guarding against being spotted, that fellow was Stanley Waldo.

Whilst everybody else would fail to detect the fellow, Waldo would see him. For Stanley, like his celebrated father, the Peril Expert, was endowed with super faculties. Not only was his hearing abnormal, but his eyesight was so extraordinarily acute that he could see things in the distance which were quite invisible to the normal eye.

"Hallo, Handy!" said Fullwood, as Edward Oswald barged in. "Have you come

for tea? It's just ready, and you're perfectly welcome. Clive, old son, make room for the guest of honour. We want to hear all about that machine-gun raid on your home, Handy."

"Rats!" said Handforth. "There's been enough gassing about that already. I came here to see Waldo."

Waldo obligingly stood up.

"Take a good look," he invited. "I'm not often as smart as this."

"Fathead! Somebody says that you spotted somebody somewhere," said Handforth, not very lucidly. "Didn't you see a figure lurking somewhere?"

Waldo sat down again, pretending to be pained.

"It's really amazing how these things get about," he said complainingly. "I just happened to catch sight of a stranger, and I just happened to mention the fact to somebody, and there's a whole mystery made out of it."

"It may be more important than you think," said Handforth darkly. "That chap may be a gunman."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It's all very well to laugh——"

"You've got gunmen on the brain, old son," grinned Fullwood. "A day or two at St. Frank's will bring you back to the normal, I hope."

"Well, I'd like to know what you saw, Waldo," said Handforth stubbornly. "What sort of a chap was he? And where was he? What was he doing?"

"Well, he hadn't a black mask on his face, and he wasn't holding guns in his hands," said Waldo solemnly. "Frightfully sorry to disappoint you, old man, but I'm renowned for my truthfulness. The fellow I saw was eminently respectable in appearance; he was wearing a dark overcoat and a bowler hat."

"Oh!" said Handforth.

"I happened to spot him in that clump of trees just on the other side of the lane," continued Waldo. "It struck me as rummy, because he was obviously trying to conceal his movements. He didn't even know that I saw him, and I don't think anybody else noticed him."

"A man in a bowler-hat," said Handforth slowly.

"Decent-looking chap, square jaw, clean-shaven," went on Waldo, ever ready to oblige. "I came to the conclusion, in the end, that he was waiting for a girl. One of the maids came out of the East House at about that time, dressed ready for a walk, so the conclusion was pretty obvious."

Handforth laughed with forced carelessness.

"It's a pity there's such a lot of gassing over nothing," he said, as he walked out.

But when he got to Study D he whipped the door to and put his back against it. Church and McClure were busy. One was pouring out the tea, and the other was making toast. They regarded Handforth in mild astonishment.

"What is it now?" asked Church patiently.
 "There's a detective here!" hissed Handforth.

"We know it," said Church.

"You know it?"

"Mr. Lee is the most famous detective——"

"I don't mean him, you idiot!" interrupted Handforth. "There's a Scotland Yard man hanging about! They must have got on the track of Jake Diamond—and at this very minute Trixie may be under arrest!"

"Pipo down, big boy!" said Church. "That's the right expression, isn't it? What a chap you are for getting excited over rumours!"

"I've just spoken to Waldo—he's the chap who saw this man—and there's no mistake about it," said Handforth impressively. "A man wearing a bowler hat and a dark overcoat—a man with a clean-shaven face and a square jaw! If that doesn't spell Scotland Yard detective, what does it spell?"

"Scotland Yard detectives haven't all got square jaws," said McClure.

"Don't quibble!" frowned Handforth.

"I'm going out to do a bit of scouting. If the Yard has got on the track of the truth, Jake Diamond and Trixie will be arrested."

"And a jolly good thing, too!" said Church, putting two humps of sugar into each cup.

"But we've promised to help——"

"You've promised—not us," said McClure pointedly. "And you promised to give that pair the wheeze if their enemies got busy, or to tip them the wink when Kapone's gang was arrested or deported. You never agreed to hide them away from our own police."

"That's true," admitted Handforth. "I suppose it would be a pretty serious business if I hid them away from the police, wouldn't it?"

"Aiding and abetting a felony," said Church promptly. "Sit down and have your tea, and forget the whole thing. In any case, I don't suppose the chap was a detective at all."

Church and McClure were purposely casual in their manner. Inwardly, they were alarmed. They did not want Handforth to go scouting about in the dusk, for they could not forget that sinister incident of the topper.

They had almost convinced themselves that some crazy idiot with an airgun had played that trick, but there was still a doubt in their minds. It was true that Handforth had marched about openly during the afternoon, and it was equally true that nothing had happened; but——

"Not a detective?" said Handforth grimly. "Why was he lurking, then? Why was he watching the school? I've got to do the right thing, my sons. If that man's a detective, I want to talk to him and find out exactly what he's after. And if he can satisfy me that Jake Diamond has broken the law, I'll tell him all I know. I never promised that gunman that I'd hide him

from the police. I'm in a rummy position, and I want to know just where I stand."

Before Church and McClure could stop him he was off. His ideas of right and wrong were rigid, and even his fascination for Trixie did not stop him now. If there was a warrant out for Jake Diamond's arrest, and the police wanted him, they should have him. He wasn't going to have it on his conscience that he had hidden a crook away from the police, and helped him to elude justice.

"Hi, Handy!" shouted Church urgently. "He's gone, the ass! Oh, my hat! We'd better go after him, Mac!"

"I'm already on my way," said McClure, dashing for the door.

He was startled when he came face to face with a tall, loose-limbed individual in baggy flannel trousers and an old Norfolk jacket—a man with a straggly moustache and an everlasting twinkle in his eye.

"Cheese it, old chap!" protested this apparition. "Mind what you're doing with my pet corn! What's the hurry?"

"Sorry, sir!" gasped McClure.

Mr. Alington Wilkes was the Housemaster of the Ancient House, and, as such, he was not a man to be lightly pushed aside. It was impossible for the two juniors to dash past and thus ignore him.

"We—we're in a hurry, sir!" said Church. "Handforth ran out, and we want to fetch him. Tea's ready, and—and——"

He broke off, realising the impossibility of giving any adequate explanation.

"He'll come back," said Mr. Wilkes genially. "Gone to the shop to get some sardines, perhaps. Hallo, hallo! What's that I see on your table? Why on earth will you young idiots indulge in these atrocious, indigestible horrors? They ought to be banned by Act of Parliament"

He stepped up to the table, and selected a chocolate éclair from a dish. Church and McClure watched him in silent agony. They both realised how impossible it was to run off.

"H'm! Atrocious, indeed," said Mr. Wilkes, as he took a bite, "but delicious, nevertheless. I suppose I'm an idiot to be tempted; but Mrs. Hake certainly does fill them up with the most dreamy Devonshire cream. Mmmm! I'm afraid I shall have to have another."

It was one of Mr. Wilkes' favourite dodges to drop into a study at tea-time and indulge in an "atrocious" or two. The fellows liked his free and easy good-fellowship, and welcomed it. On this particular occasion, however, Church and McClure failed to appreciate the presence of their distinguished guest.

HANDFORTH, in the meantime, had only paused to slip on his overcoat and cap, and now he was out in the lane. He was vaguely surprised by the fact that his chums had not yet come to drag him back.

(Continued on page 17.)



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GUNMEN AT ST. FRANK'S!

(Continued from page 15.)

He plunged through the hedge, and penetrated the small thicket to which Waldo had referred. Not that there was much chance of the "lurking stranger" still being there.

Handy went through the thicket, round it, and finally came to the conclusion that he was wasting his time. Ass! He ought to have gone straight to the monastery ruins! It would be just as well to make sure that Jake and Trixie were still there. If their hiding-place had been "twigged" the watcher would be hovering about the ruins, not here.

Handforth was just moving off in that direction when he thought he heard a slight sound behind him. He turned sharply—just in time to see two dim figures materialising out of the surrounding gloom. For an instant he thought they were Church and McClure—until he realised they were too big.

"Here, what the——" he began.

"Cut it out, sonny!" came a soft, grim voice. "Stick 'em up—an' keep 'em up! Spill one squawk, and you'll have the night air whistling through your vitals!"

Something hard and round was pressed into the middle of Handforth's back!

CHAPTER 6.

The Third Degree!

TO Handforth the shock of feeling that gun muzzle against his back was hardly greater than the shock of seeing that one of the men was dressed in a dark overcoat, a bowler hat, and that his face was square-jawed and clean-shaven. It was this man who had spoken. So he wasn't a detective—but one of those Chicago gunmen!

"What—what do you want?" asked Handforth huskily, instinctively clenching his fists. "You're only bluffing. You wouldn't fire that revolver."

"Listen, kid," said the man in the bowler. "Remember that fancy hat of yours being plugged around noon?"

"Great Scott! Then—then it wasn't a joke!" gasped Handforth.

"Sure it was a joke," said the other. "But it wouldn't have been a joke if I'd plugged that bonthead of yours instead of your carnival roof! You know a heap more than is good for you, cutie. I guess you'll take a walk with us."

"I'm scared of this kid, Ed," came a whisper from the other man. "He's sure a reckless young guy, and he's liable to yell any minute."

"It'll be his last yell if he does!" said Ed curtly. "Leave him to me, Pietro. Listen, kid. This gun is tricky. The safety catch is kind of loose, and if you make any sudden move there'll be one mutt less in the world. Do as we say, and everything will be jake.

Now, are you gonna be a sap, or will you take a walk?"

There was something so menacing in the man's tone that Handforth was convinced. He was not ashamed of himself when he realised that he was scared. It came as a violent shock to him to realise that Scarneck Al Kapone's gang was down here at St. Frank's. And he had been fool enough to believe that he had tricked them!

"All right!" he muttered. "I'll—I'll go!"

"The kid's got sense," said Ed. "Well, let's be moving. And listen, young feller. We're taking the lane, and we're walking like we are pals. Get me? Take his other arm, Pietro. If we should happen to meet anybody on the road, just act natural. And remember—this gun will be at your back the whole time. Any false move on your part, and you'll be bumped off. You'll get it in the works."

"Where are you going to take me?" asked Handforth breathlessly.

His captors did not satisfy his curiosity. They moved out of the meadow, forced their way through the hedge, and took to the lane. That a warning was necessary was proved by the fact that they passed somebody within a minute. Handforth felt the hard object pressed firmly into his back.

"Remember!" came a whisper.

Handforth remembered. For one hare-brained, reckless moment he thought of yelling and punching out at the same time, but mercifully he realised that he would stand no chance. These were the men who had sent a hail of machine-gun bullets into his home. They weren't the kind of men to hesitate.

The figure that passed along the lane was a girl. In the gloom, Handforth did not definitely recognise her, but with a sudden thudding of his heart, he believed that she was Irene Manners, of the Moor View School—his own chum.

Yet he dared not utter a sound. The menace of the gun pressing in his back was too acute.

IT'S no good, Mac—he's gone!" said Church desperately.

They were standing in the Triangle, capless. They had escaped from Mr. Wilkes after what had seemed an age—but which, in reality, had only been a few minutes. Mr. Wilkes, perhaps, had sensed that the two boys were unusually perturbed over something, and he had discreetly retired—never dreaming the actual cause of their worry.

"It's no good looking for him," said McClure helplessly. "He might be anywhere. And if we go to the ruins, it'll be risky. As far as I can see, all we can do is to wait."

"I don't like it!" muttered Church. "I'm not so sure of that detective. Handy's too jolly fond of taking things for granted. How does he know the man is a detective? He may be one of those rotten gangsters."

"We're getting gangsters on the brain," said the Scottish junior impatiently. "I don't believe——"

"Look! There's somebody at the gates now!" interrupted Church.

They ran across the Triangle, disappointed to see that the figure was that of a girl. At close quarters they recognised her as Irene.

"That's funny!" she said. "The very chaps I wanted to see!"

"Awfully sorry, Irene, but——"

"What's Ted up to?" asked Irene bluntly.

They thought she was referring to his neglect in not having called upon her that day. As a rule, his first task on the opening day of term was to dash to the Moor View School and say "Hallo!" to Irene.

"It's all right," said Church vaguely. "Ted's coming round after tea, I believe. We'll tell him that you came——"

"What's the matter with you?" interrupted Irene in wonder. "You both seem on edge. I saw Ted only three minutes ago in the lane."

"Oh, you saw him!" ejaculated Church.

"That's what I want to ask you about," went on the girl. "I can't understand it. He was with two strange men."

"With two men!" said Mac in alarm. "What sort of men?"

"I couldn't see them very distinctly, but the whole thing struck me as being funny," replied Irene. "They were arm-in-arm, and although I'm pretty sure that Ted recognised me, he didn't say a word. He walked

straight past, and the men were just as silent. I—I felt quite queer. It was so unnatural."

"This is awful!" said Church hoarsely. "Look here, Irene, it's no good beating about the bush. You know as well as I do that Handy has mixed himself up with those American gunmen—you were at his home last night."

"Oh crumbs!" breathed Irene. "You—you mean——"

"I believe those two men you saw were American gangsters!" interrupted Church. "They've got him, Mac!"

"If we're quick we might save him!" said McClure, cool and businesslike. "Sorry, Irene, but we must dash off! We want to tell Nipper and K. K. and some of the other chaps. This job is too big for us to handle alone. Thank goodness you spotted Handy with those men—it may make all the difference!"

HANDFORTH, meanwhile, was not taken very far.

His captors walked him past the lighted buildings of the Moor View School, and very soon they were out on the bleak moorland beyond, from which the girls' school took its name. Fairly close by was an old ruined mill, which was familiar to the St. Frank's boys. Handforth suspected at once that he was being taken to it—and he was right.

Once within the half-ruined edifice the door was closed, and the beam from an



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.

HOW AWFUL!

A gentleman was perturbed to see a little boy crying. Going up to the youngster, he asked him the reason for the tears.

"Well, sir," replied the boy between sobs, "farver's invented a new kind of soap, and every time a customer comes into the shop I gets washed as an advertisement."

(J. Crockford, 156, The Parade, Island Bay, Wellington, New Zealand, has been awarded a handsome watch.)

LOOKING AHEAD.

Scot (showing friend round new home): "And what do you think of the place?"

Friend: "Fine! But why nail on the wall-paper?"

Scot: "In case I have to move."
(E. Joyce, Gord Boys' Home, West End, Woking, has been awarded a penknife.)

EXTRAORDINARY.

A hunter was showing off his collection of trophies to a group of visitors. He was rapturously explaining how he secured the various exhibits.

"See that elephant?" he asked. "I shot that in my pyjamas."

"Coo!" murmured the flapper. "How ever did it get in them?"

(A. Turner, 61, Stringes Lane, Willenhall, Staffs, has been awarded a penknife.)

"'EAR, 'EAR!"

Boss (to youthful office-boy): "Can't you hear the telephone bell ringing? What are your ears for?"

Office-boy: "Pen-racks, sir."

(D. G. Cameron, 18, Shakespeare Terrace, Sunderland, has been awarded a pocket wallet.)

PUTTING IT MILDLY.

Fond mother to her son's headmaster: "And what profession do you think my boy should follow?"

Headmaster (tactfully): "Well, madam, I think he would make a good caddie on a miniature golf course."

(N. Bateson, 4, Rutland Street, London, S.W.7, has been awarded a pocket wallet.)

electric-torch shone out. For the first time since the encounter the hard object was removed from Handforth's back. In the torch-light he caught a glimpse of a wicked-looking automatic pistol.

"Up that ladder!" said the square-jawed man, pointing.

Handforth knew the place by heart. He shinned up the ladder quickly, opening the trap-door above him. Behind him followed the gangsters, one of them again pressing his gun into the small of the schoolboy's back.

Edward Oswald found himself in a quaint circular room with an uneven floor and a low roof. A table stood in the centre of the room; on it was a candle, burning fitfully in the neck of a bottle, and two automatics. Behind the table stood a big man. He looked a typical American gangster.

"What the heck does this mean?" asked the man harshly.

"Pipe down, Al—this kid's the one we want," said Pietro.

Handforth started. Al! Then the third man was Scarneck Al Kapone, the notorious Chicago racketeer!

"So this is the kid?" said Kapone slowly. "Well, cutie, don't be scared. We're not going to croak you. But you'd best come clean with the story. I guess you've been monkeying around with things that don't concern you, and a guy that does that is likely to get his fingers burnt."

Handforth was deceived by Kapone's easy manner.

"I don't know what you mean," he blustered. "It's a bit thick when your men dig guns in my back—"

"Forget it!" interrupted Kapone. "We wanted you here—and you're here. I guess you thought you'd fool us, eh? But we've been wise to your game, sonny. We saw you tote all that junk from London and unship it at your school. And it looks darned suspicious. What are you up to?"

"That's my business!" said Handforth defiantly.

"And ours!" said Al Kapone. "You know where Jake Diamond is, don't you? Come clean, sonny! I guess we don't want to hurt you. We don't croak children. Say your piece, and we'll let you go."

It was clear that the gang leader was utterly contemptuous of his young prisoner. Ed and Pietro were not so sure, but they said nothing. Kapone would find out for himself quickly enough.

Handforth was struck by one significant point. The fact that he had been captured, so that he could be questioned, was enlightening. These crooks might suspect, but they didn't know! Obviously, they hadn't seen him taking Jake Diamond and Trixie Foster in his car; they had only seen him leaving London with that car-load of blankets and stuff.

Putting two and two together, they had come to the conclusion that Handforth was helping the pair—as he had obviously helped Trixie the previous night when they had "shot up" his home. But again they didn't

WHAT A NUISANCE!

Teacher: "Tommy! Find the lowest common multiple."

Tommy: "My hat! That blessed thing lost again?"

(*C. Jarman, 33, Forster Street, Warrington, has been awarded a pocket wallet.*)

SOLD.

Firm's representative: "I sold a thousand musical instruments, sir."

Boss (beaming): "Pianos?"

Firm's representative: "No, sir. Gramophone needles!"

(*E. Davies, 34, Mill Road, Salisbury, has been awarded a pocket wallet.*)

WATCH THIS ONE.

"What kind of dog have you got there?"

"That's a watchdog."

"What makes him spin round in that fashion?"

"Oh, he's merely winding himself up."

(*A. Gawn, 76, Lion Street, New Kent Road, London, S.E.17, has been awarded a pocket wallet.*)

DOUBLE MEANING.

Friend: "How is your master this morning?"

Servant: "Well, they

made an X-ray of his brain this morning, and they found nothing there."

(*D. Clement, 24, Albury Drive, Aspley Estate, Nottingham, has been awarded a penknife.*)

SO REALISTIC.

"Excuse me, mum," said the street artist, "but I wish you would keep your cat in the house. I've drawn a salmon four times, and every time the cat has licked it out!"

(*W. Young, 80, Albion Street, Rotherhithe, S.E.16, has been awarded a penknife.*)

CRUSHING.

It was towards the end of a theatrical performance when one man turned to another and said:

"Look here, you've sat on my silk hat and ruined it!"

The other looked at the silk hat. It was indeed a wreck.

"I am sorry," he said. "This is too bad; but," he added, "it might have been worse."

"How might it have been worse?" demanded the first man angrily.

"I might have sat on my own hat!" was the reply.

(*J. Seammell, 84, Mitcham Road, East Ham, E.6, has been awarded a penknife.*)



know. They only suspected. This reflection gave him much confidence.

If he succumbed to their threats, and told all he knew, they would go straight to that vault and shoot up Jake Diamond—and perhaps Trixie, too. So Handforth resolved that he must keep his mouth shut, whatever else he did.

"Well, get to it, kid!" said Kapone impatiently. "You've got the story—spill it."

"What story should I know?" scoffed Handforth. "My hat! I always had an idea that you American crooks were clever, but now I know! What's the good of coming down to a place like St. Frank's? Can't I bring some stuff in my car for some friends without your getting a lot of idiotic ideas?"

"Say, young 'un, you'd best not try that line of bull with me," said Kapone grimly. "I'll give you one more chance. Out with that story! Shoot!"

"I'm jiggered if I'll tell you anything!" retorted Handforth. "What is there to tell, anyhow?"

"Best third-degree him, chief!" said Pietro impatiently. "This kid's got sand, and he won't be easy to squeeze."

"It'll be curtains for him unless he tells me what he knows about that sap Diamond," said Kapone, gripping Handforth's arm. "Listen, baby! Know what the third degree is?"

"A form of torture, isn't it?" asked Handforth calmly.

"You said it!" agreed Kapone, and then added grudgingly: "Say, you're sure a little wise-cracker, ain't you? You ain't scared a bit, sonny. Well, we'll see if we can't alter that. Boys, you'd best hold him—and hold him good."

Handforth was not afraid of the gun now, and he would have fought desperately if he had had the chance; but the other men were on him before he could lift a hand. They wrenched his arms behind him, forced him across the uneven floor, and flung him into a ramshackle chair. They held him there so that it was practically impossible for him to move. Kapone came slowly over and stood directly in front of him.

"Go it!" said Handforth, with reckless abandon. "Three against one is your idea of a scrap, I suppose?"

"I'll hand it to you, kid, that you ain't yellow," said the gang leader. "Now, let's get together. You know where Jake Diamond is, don't you? We won't say anything about the girl—she's of no account, anyhow. Jake's the guy we want. So come across!"

"I've told you already that I'm not going to speak," growled Handforth. "You can't scare me like this. How should I know where your crooked pals are? What have I to do with Jake Diamond?"

"You're stalling," snapped Kapone. "Hold him, boys. Now, kid, one last chance before we get busy on this third degree stuff. Will you come clean with that information?"

"You can go and eat coke!" retorted Handforth defiantly.

Al Kapone clenched his right fist. Then suddenly, without warning, his arm swung down and his knuckles crashed upon Handforth's neck and throat.

CHAPTER 7.

St. Frank's to the Rescue!

THE agony was so intense that Handforth went dizzy. The dimly-lighted room swam before his eyes, and it seemed to him that his neck was torn open. For some seconds it was as much as he could do to get his breath. He was choking. When his vision again became normal, and his throat felt less tortured, he saw that Al Kapone was standing over him just the same as before.

"You—you coward!" he panted thickly.

"Don't blame me for that little stunt, sonny—it's only one that I've borrowed from the police," said the gang leader.

"You're a liar!" retorted Handforth, who was boiling with fury. "That sort of savagery isn't used by our police!"

"Gee! This boy is tough!" said Kapone, in surprise. "Listen, kid! What I did just now was a sample—see? Hold him tight, boys. Come across with that Jake Diamond dope, or I'll tickle you again in the same spot. And the next time it won't be so gentle."

He held his fist ready, and Handforth found himself staring at it fascinatedly. Inwardly, he was frightened, but not for worlds would he have shown it. That first blow had been agonising enough. A second punch on the same spot would be torture of the most excruciating kind.

"Give him the works, boss!" said Ed impatiently. "The kid's tough—he can stand it. I guess it's the only way to make him split!"

Kapone's fist drew back, and for one desperate second Handforth thought of supplying the necessary information. Why should he suffer this torture for the sake of a gunman—a fellow who was probably as brutal and as murderous as this crook before him? Then he thought of Trixie, and realised that she would probably be shot to death at the same time. No, he couldn't do it. A surge of defiance swept over him.

"Go on!" he panted. "Hit me again! I don't care!"

He closed his eyes in readiness.

NIPPER, Kirby Keeble Parkington, Vivian Travers, Archie Glenthorne and a number of other Removites listened with dismay whilst Church and McClure gave them a few of the details.

Handforth's chums had dashed round after parting with Irene, and had got the fellows to assemble in the lobby. Tea tables had been hurriedly abandoned. At this hour the

school was quiet. Only those whom Church and McClure needed were aware of what was in the wind.

"Don't waste time!" Church was urging. "Irene saw Handy going up the lane with two strange men, and I'll bet all I've got that they were American gangsters! They've got old Handy!"

"Which way did they go?" asked Nipper briskly. "And how long ago? If we're quick we might save him!"

"Why not ring up the police?" asked somebody.

"Absolutely!" chimed in Archie. "Good gad! Haven't we got a priceless detective of our own on the premises? I mean to say, there's Mr. Lee——"

"If we waste time by going to Mr. Lee, or by ringing up the police, it'll be too late!" interrupted Nipper. "Churchy and Mac are right. We've got to move—and move fast."

Practically all these boys were aware of the circumstances. They had been involved in that hectic adventure in London; they knew that Handforth had incurred the enmity of the Chicago gangsters. So it did not really surprise them to learn of this latest incident.

What they did not know was that Handforth had brought Jake Diamond and his wife down to St. Frank's. They were astonished, therefore, that these gunmen should have taken the trouble to follow a mere schoolboy. However, this was a point which did not receive much consideration in the excitement.

Church and McClure were true to their impetuous leader. They kept his secret; they said nothing about those refugees in the monastery vault. It wasn't really necessary. Their main concern was for Handy. Irene had definitely said that the men had been walking with Handforth up the lane, in another direction altogether from the monastery ruins. So it might not be necessary to bring Jake Diamond into the affair at all.

The boys set off at the double, and after the first flush of alarm they began to appreciate the trickiness of the situation.

"We shall have to be jolly careful, you chaps," warned Nipper, as he ran. "If Handy is really in the hands of gunmen, they'll be tough customers. We don't want any tragedies."

"But surely these cheery blighters wouldn't pull their guns on a party of schoolboys?" asked K. K.

"These gangsters aren't any too particular," retorted Nipper, "and they're so used to loosing off their guns that they do it as a habit. Much as we want to help Handy, we're not keen on stopping any bullets."

"Are we going in the right direction?" asked Travers.

"We only know that they came up the lane," groaned Church. "I'll admit it's a hopeless sort of chase, but what else could we do?"

"Let's reason it out," said Nipper shrewdly. "What is there up the lane, here, which deserves investigation? We'll assume that those two men were taking Handy away for a reason."

"They'd hardly go for a walk for the fun of it," said Travers.

"Exactly. So they were going somewhere," argued Nipper. "Well, there's no barn along this lane—not near it, anyhow—and the only house is Moor View. And they wouldn't go there. It only leaves the moor."

"A brainy scheme of elimination, what?" said Archie, as he trotted with the best of them. "I shouldn't have thought of that, you know. It just shows you what training does, what?"

"What is there on the moor?" went on Nipper. "It's any odds that the beggars had a car waiting, and that Handforth is miles away by this time. The only other alternative is the old ruined mill."

"They might have gone in there!" said Church breathlessly.

The would-be rescuers were already well past Moor View, and the misty, black expanse of the moor stretched mysteriously before them. It was quite dark now. There was no moon, and the stars were obscured by heavy banks of high cloud. There was no sign of a car on the moorland road; no indication of life. Across the country came the occasional flash of the revolving beam of the Shingle Head lighthouse. A bleak wind was blowing its bitter way across the moor.

"It seems pretty hopeless," murmured Nipper. "Still, we'll try. We've seen nothing yet—and the mill looks as deserted as ever. Now, you chaps—remember! Not a sound. If Handy is in the mill, our only chance of rescuing him is to creep up quietly."

A low exclamation suddenly came from Stanley Waldo.

"We're on the right track," he breathed. "There's a light in the mill!"

"You're dreaming," said Travers, staring.

The old ruin was only just visible, standing out gauntly against the gloomy skyline.

"It's not a bare light," whispered Waldo, looking intently. "It's only just a dim suggestion. They must have got some sack-ing over the window, or a blanket. Can't you see that peculiar glow?"

Waldo's eyesight was almost uncanny in its penetrative power. The others could see nothing at this distance. As the other fellows had often said, Waldo's eyes were like binoculars. But his word was good enough.

They were thrilled. So those men had brought Handforth to the mill! They were in there now, or that light would not be there. And they were obviously doing something shady, or they wouldn't attempt to conceal their presence.

Like shadows the Removites approached the gaunt ruins of the mill, their hearts thudding with anticipation.

S CARNECK AL KAPONE hesitated as he looked down at the defiant figure of Handforth, who sat rigid, with closed eyes, waiting for the blow.

"Gosh!" he ejaculated. "The kid's sure got grit!"

"Soak him, Al!" said one of the others. "Knock his block off!"

"I'm running this party!" snapped Kapone. "I'm not so sure that this kid will squeal, and we don't want to put him to sleep. This Adam's apple stunt is sure good with a bunch of tough eggs, but this kid might crumple."

"Be yourself, chief," said Pietro. "He's tough as leather."

"I guess we'll try something different," said the gang leader slowly. "Stand him up and bring him into the middle of the room."

This was done, and Handforth looked more defiant than ever.

"Kid, I'm sure mad at you," said Kapone, eyeing him steadily. "But I guess I'll be easy. I don't want to be too hard on you. I'll give you a square deal, and I'll sure say that you English guys are different from what I've always thought."

"What are you trying to do—fool me?" asked Handforth suspiciously.

"Not on your life!" replied Kapone. "You know something that I want you to tell me. Sooner or later, sonny, you'll speak. Try a sample of this!"

Without warning he raised his foot and hacked at Handforth's shins. The kick was so unexpected that Handforth nearly collapsed with the excruciating agony of it.

"That's a soft one—to be going on with," said Kapone gently. "In exactly twenty seconds by my watch there's another one coming to you. Think fast, stupid!"

"You—you brute!" roared Handforth furiously.

Kapone, watch in hand, was ready.

"Sixteen—eighteen—twenty!" he said.

He kicked again, and this time Handforth was ready for it. He steeled himself, and although the kick was so violent that it broke the skin, he uttered no cry of pain.



"Come on, Remove!" yelled Nipper, and launched himself through the trap-door at Al Kapone. In a few moments a fight between the boys and gangsters was waging fast and furious.

"Go it!" he panted thickly. "You're enjoying yourself, aren't you?"

"It'll be your knee-cap next time," said Kapone evilly. "And, believe me, when a guy gets kicked on the knee-cap he knows all about it! You've got another twenty seconds to think."

He started counting again, and so intent was he upon his watch, and so busy were Ed and Pietro holding Handforth, that none of them noticed the furtive opening of the trap-door. A face peeped up, and the next second



the trap-door was flung back with a crashing thud.

"Come on, Remove!" yelled a voice. "We've found him!"

Nipper sprang into the room like a monkey, and with one lunge—a continuation of his original movement—he made a clean dive at Kapone's legs. The action was so quick that the big man had had no time to avoid the rush. His legs were swept from under him, and he fell with terrific violence. Ed and Pietro, startled, momentarily relaxed

their grip on Handforth. Instinctively their hands leapt for their guns.

Crash!

Handforth was not the fellow to waste time. His right came round with devastating force and made contact with Pietro's jaw. The next second his left went driving into Ed's face.

That was the beginning of the scrap. It developed rapidly. Church, McClure, Travers and the rest were swarming up in a stream, and they all dashed into battle with hot determination. The Chicago gunmen had never encountered anything like it.

Kapone tried to pull his gun, and even succeeded in getting it out, but it was jerked out of his grip and sent hurtling across the room. Somebody's hard fist hit him on the right cheekbone, and at the same moment another fist crashed on his left ear. He reeled back, roaring madly.

Then at least three Removites flung themselves at him bodily and got him down. Ed and Pietro were fighting just as desperately, and were just as certainly losing.

It was a victory for the schoolboys from the start.

CHAPTER 8.

Shots in the Dark!

UNFORTUNATELY, something happened which completely altered the situation.

Some of the boys, reeling about with Pietro, knocked the candle over. Black and impenetrable darkness immediately shut down. Deprived of the light, the battle became a game of chance.

Handforth found himself hammering a face which came in close proximity to his fists, and it wasn't until the face gurgled "Good gad!" that Handforth realised that he was attacking Archie Glenthorne.

It was the same with the others. They floundered about, scrapping indiscriminately with one another. The confusion lasted for about half a minute until Nipper, who had got half knocked out by somebody's flying elbow, managed to strike a light. In the meantime the disorder grew worse.

"Hold 'em!" Handforth roared. "Don't let the rotters escape!"

"Thank goodness you're safe, Handy!" came a voice near him.

"That you, Mac?" said Handforth. "Good egg! We mustn't let those brutes get down into the vault," he added, in a tense whisper. "I haven't let anything out, but if they get a hint that Diamond is in the ruins——"

"Quiet, you idiot!" panted McClure. "What the—— Who's that? Hi! Somebody's pulling my foot——"

He broke off to grapple with an unknown opponent. It seemed ages before the match was struck by Nipper. When the light flared out the juniors discovered that the gangsters, instead of lying senseless on the floor, were conspicuous by their absence.

"I thought as much!" panted Nipper. "While we've been biffing one another the rotters have escaped!"

The boys almost fell over themselves in their efforts to get to the ladder first. Then there was another delay on the ladder itself, for two or three fellows tried to descend in a bunch and got jammed.

When at last they emerged into the open air there was no sight or sound of the gunmen. They had seized their chance to make themselves scarce. But they were not so lacking in information as Handforth fondly believed. He had stubbornly refused to "split," only to impart the vital information in that incautious whisper to McClure.

For at that very moment Kapone had been descending through the trap-door, and he had heard the fateful words. "Vault"—"ruins." He remembered the quaint, ivy-covered ruins near the school, but this was the first he had heard of any vault. Handforth had even been rash enough to mention Diamond's name. The Chicago gang leader was provided with the clue that he needed.

"Boys, we've got to work fast," said Scarneck, as he hurried across the moor with his two henchmen. "I guess we've got the dope on that New York rat, and we'll sure bump him off."

"You're crazy, chief!" said Ed. "That kid wouldn't come across! As for those others, the blamed young mutts half croaked me."

"Forget it!" snapped Kapone. "I've got the dope, I tell you!"

As they walked he explained what he had overheard; but the others were not so enthusiastic.

"Those kids will be swarming around like a pack of young wolves inside of five minutes," said Pietro. "I guess we'd better quit, chief. We'll have the whole blamed school on our heels if we don't."

"We don't quit until we've got Jake Diamond!" retorted Kapone. "And this time we'll get him good!"

He would listen to no objections from his men. As he pointed out, it would not take them long to find that vault, and the rest would be easy. They would take Diamond

by surprise, and all the advantage of the situation would be with them. Kapone had a second gun, and both his companions were fully armed.

"We'll fill that gorilla so full of lead that he wouldn't float in the Dead Sea!" declared Kapone grimly.

He was loath to leave this district without accomplishing his mission. He had nothing against the schoolboys, and was only too anxious to leave them alone. His feud was with Jake Diamond, and he had sworn to "get" him. Unless he succeeded his power as gang leader would be gone. He dared not return to America whilst Diamond was still alive. The gangsters of New York would never accept him as their leader if he did.

So he was inclined to be reckless now. If he missed this opportunity he might not get another one for days. In the meantime the English police—whom he feared—were likely to get busy.

Arriving at the monastery ruins, Kapone soon found the narrow stone stairway behind the broken masonry which led down into the vault. One of his men had examined this spot before, but had reported that there was nothing promising. He had never guessed that a roomy vault existed far below the surface.

As the gangsters went down the worn steps they used electric torches. But when Kapone, who was leading, saw the floor of the vault stretching in front of him, he switched off his light. He had no intention of making himself a mark for his enemy. Ed and Pietro switched-off their own torches, too. Like shadows they crept down into the body of the vault.

Suddenly Al Kapone's torch flashed on again. His finger was on the trigger of his automatic, for he knew that he was taking a big chance. His eyes glittered with triumph. Over against one wall was a spread of blankets, half-concealing the outline of two human figures. Kapone could have laughed.

Jake Diamond and his wife—asleep! So certain were they of their safety that they were not even on the alert.

"Get to it, boys!" breathed Kapone curtly. Thud, thud, thud!

His own silenced automatic flashed flame as he repeatedly pulled the trigger. The guns of his companions spoke at the same moment, and the forms under the blankets were riddled with bullets. So complete was the surprise, so devastating the fire, that neither Jake Diamond nor Trixie had so much as moved.

"Well, I guess that's put 'paid' to this account!" said Kapone harshly.

He strode through the acrid fumes, wrenched the blankets back, and then cursed violently.

"Tricked!" he roared. "Gosh! That ape has put one over on us!"

There had been no crime. Beneath the blankets were merely two cunningly-contrived dummies of odds and ends of rubbish.

“Stick ‘em up, Al!” came a sudden voice. “I guess I’ve got the drop on you all right. I’ve got you just where I want you.”

Kapone caught his breath in with a hiss. He blazed away madly into the darkness, and an answering flash appeared. The electric-torch was torn out of Kapone’s grasp, and his two men switched off their own torches at the same moment. But the move was useless. For Jake Diamond’s own torch flashed out, revealing the three men standing in a group.

“Up with your hands!” came Diamond’s command. “I’ve got the drop on you, and you know it! Careful, Al! I’d hate to plug you yet.”

Long practice in such matters had taught these men to act quickly. Their hands were already well above their heads; not one of them dared to move an inch.

“Say, you Chicago eggs sure think you’re smart, don’t you?” said Diamond contemptuously. “Did you expect to surprise me? Listen, Al! We New-Yorkers ain’t so dumb as you punk Middle-West mutts think! Just now you tried to croak me in cold blood. One good turn deserves another.”

“Listen, Jake!” panted Kapone. “Let’s get together on this. We’ll go fifty-fifty with the New York racket. Say, I knew they were only dummies under that blanket. I’m not so dumb!”

“Not so dumb as you will be in ten seconds from now!” retorted Diamond. “I guess it’s either me or you, Al—and I’ve got a big score to settle.”

Came an ominous click, and there would have been another shooting affray but for

the fact that a rush of footsteps unexpectedly sounded on the stone stairs. A second later three figures plunged into the vault.

Handforth & Co. had arrived!

They could hardly have arrived at a more dramatic moment. Slipping away from the

other Removites after leaving the mill, they had raced to the vault—to warn Jake and Trixie that Kapone’s gang was on their track. It was their own secret, and they had not mentioned their mission to any of the other fellows.

“Great Scott!” gasped Handforth, pulling up. “What—what’s this?”

Thud!

A spurt of flame showed, and a scream sounded.

“Drop, kids!” came Trixie’s urgent warning.

Another dulled report sounded, and Handforth jumped when he heard a bullet thud against the wall near him. He and Church and McClure dropped on the instant. They were beginning to learn! There was more firing, and Jake Diamond’s torch was obliterated—either deliberately or by a bullet.

Thud, thud, thud!

It was a nightmare. Automatic pistols flamed in the darkness, the fierce stabs of fire showing like lurid meteors. Handforth & Co. were startled out of their wits. They had never expected to plunge headlong into a hotbed of gunshooting like this. They had thought that Kapone

and his gang were miles away. Silence came at last, and Church, who was nearest the steps, heard the echoes of footsteps above him.

“They’ve gone, haven’t they?” he whispered.

A light suddenly flashed out and remained steady. It was sufficient to show that the

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vault was empty except for the three boys and the original occupants. Al Kapone and his men had gone.

"Are you boys all right?" came Trixie's anxious inquiry.

"Nix on the boys!" snapped Jake Diamond. "They butted in just when they weren't wanted. I'd sure got Kapone fixed that time."

"Aw, be yourself, Jake!" said Trixie. "Haven't I told you that you're crazy to start that racket in this country? If you croak Al you'll sure be hanged. These English police get their man!"

Diamond recovered his torch from the ledge where he had placed it. After switching it on, he had leapt aside, in case he should have drawn the enemy's fire. An extraordinary feature of the shooting was that nobody seemed to have been hurt.

"Well, maybe we winged one of the uglies," growled Diamond. "I'm sure obliged to you kids for what you've done—but this time you've kind of messed things up."

"I like that!" said Handforth indignantly. "We came down here to warn you!"

"Thanks a lot," said Diamond caustically.

"And you'll have to get out of here now," went on Handforth. "Those fellows have escaped, and they may come back again. You'll have to get into a new hiding-place."

"It can't be done, boy friend," said Trixie, going over to him. "I guess we're through. We figured that we'd left Kapone and his men in London—but they're here. So we'd best call it a day."

"Not likely!" said Handforth. "They'll kill you as well as Jake!"

"They're not particular," admitted Trixie wearily.

"Oh, I say! You're sick of it all, aren't you?" said Handforth with concern. "It must have been awful, too, skulking down in this place all day. Look here, I'm going to get you out. There's only one refuge where you'll be absolutely secure—and that's in the school itself."

"But you can't get us in the school!" protested Trixie, open-eyed.

"Can't I?" retorted Handforth. "You ain't seen nothing yet!"

CHAPTER 9.

Kapone Caught Napping!

NELSON LEE stood quite still, alert and watchful.

He had come out for a walk some time earlier, and he was invisible in the intense gloom of the evening. An instinct, perhaps, had warned him that there was something unusual going on. He had had an overpowering impulse to get out.

Perhaps it was because of that incident of Handforth's topper. Lee could not get it out of his mind; and although his common-sense told him that it must have been a foolish practical joke, he had the uneasy im-

pression that it was really something more sinister. On the top of this he had heard some of the boys talking about a mysterious stranger who had been seen hanging about the school. Lee thought it just as well to go for a quiet walk round.

He had been out for about half an hour, and he had heard nothing more suspicious than a scuttling of schoolboys in the distance. Some of the juniors, no doubt, out on some jape. Lee had no desire to interfere, even though they might be breaking the rules. He was not the kind of man to spy on his boys, and he knew how to wink his eye when necessary.

But now there was something rather more significant. He had heard, from a distance, a peculiar, bird-like whistle. He had thought nothing of it until an answering whistle sounded near a hedge, not twenty paces from him. It came to him with sudden force that these whistles were human. Signals! No doubt they had been made by some of the boys, who were out on scouting practice perhaps, but Lee thought it just as well to make sure.

Like a portion of the darkness itself, he moved nearer—and there was no greater expert in the art of silent progress than Nelson Lee. He suddenly found himself within two yards of a motionless figure; and he knew in that moment that this was no schoolboy. The figure was that of a man, and a big man at that.

"Can I help you in any way?" asked Lee.

The figure jumped round as though he had been shot, uttering a stifled exclamation. Until that moment he had had no idea that another human being was near him.

"Say, you've got a crust!" he panted, when he could find his voice. "What's the idea of creeping up on a guy like this?"

"I really beg your pardon," said Nelson Lee, his mild tone entirely belying the grim suspicions in his mind. "But as I happen to be the headmaster of this school, and as these grounds are private property, I really think I have some justification for inquiring what your business may be. Perhaps you do not realise, sir, that you are trespassing?"

"Say! Is that so?" was all Kapone could think of.

A match flared, and cupping his hands and holding it so that his own features were not plainly visible, Lee took stock of his companion. He had an electric torch in his pocket, but he thought it a wiser policy to use a match.

"A stranger hereabouts, I believe?" he said quietly.

Al Kapone was reassured. There was no need to be worried about this schoolmaster. He was ready to kick himself for having failed to detect Lee's approach. When he and his men had escaped from the vault they had separated, but as there seemed to be no further signs of danger Kapone had been whistling his confederates to rejoin him.

"I guess you're right, brother," said Kapone easily. "I'm a stranger sure enough. Just looking around your country for pleasure."



Handforth & Co. arrived in the vault to find Jake Diamond holding up Al Kapone and his gunmen at the point of an automatic.

My car broke down up the road, and while the chauffeur is busy on the repairs I took a walk. Guess I was attracted by the lights of your school, and thought I'd give it the once over. I'm sorry if I'm trespassing."

"In the light of your explanation, of course, we will say no more of the matter," replied Lee, smiling. "I hope, sir, you will allow me to extend the hospitality of the school to you whilst you are waiting. Perhaps you would care to come to my study, and wait until your car is ready?"

"Awful nice of you, but I'd rather not," said Kapone.

"But please do," urged Lee. "We are always only too glad to entertain American visitors, for we are proud of our schools in England."

Kapone thought quickly. Perhaps there would be some advantage in acceding to this simple-minded schoolmaster's invitation. In any case, he badly wanted to allay any further suspicions that his movements might have aroused.

"All right, stranger," he said, laughing. "I guess I'll come along. Maybe you've got some of the real stuff, eh?"

"Plenty," said Lee, laughing.

They walked off, chatting amiably. But Lee was only acting a part. During that

match flare he had not failed to recognise the well-advertised features of Scarneck Al Kapone, and his worst fears were justified. So these American gunmen had centred their attentions upon St. Frank's. Was it possible that they were using their energies for the extinction of Handforth—merely because Handforth had helped Jake Diamond in London? It seemed very unlikely. Surely there was something deeper behind all this?

They reached Inner Court, and Leo ushered his visitor into his warm, cosy study. He switched the lights on, and Al Kapone took a curious look at his host. This was his first full glimpse of the schoolmaster's face. An instant change came over his countenance.

"Schoolmaster nothing!" he rapped out. "You're Lee, the detective!"

Like a shot his hand went to his gun—and then hesitated. Something steely and glittering was pointing straight at him.

"I think not, Mr. Kapone," said Leo grimly. "I shouldn't advise you to try any of that gunplay just now. Take a seat, will you?"

The change in his manner was staggering. He had expected Kapone to recognise him, and he had been ready.

"You darned double-crosser!" panted

Kapone, startled, as he fell back into a chair. "Say, you sure put one over me that time." "But not quite to the extent you believe," said Nelson Lee, his gun never wavering. "I will admit that your description of me is fairly accurate, but it happens that I am also headmaster of this school."

"You're some learned little guy, ain't you?" sneered Kapone.

"We need not discuss that matter," replied Nelson Lee. "I want to know, Kapone, just why you were trespassing in the grounds of this school. If you intend to menace any of my boys——"

"Forget it," interrupted Kapone impatiently. "What the heck do I care about your boys? If they don't interfere with me I'll lay off them. And I should advise, you, brother, to lay off me!"

"You are hardly in the position, Kapone, to give me advice," snapped Lee. "If I liked I could call in my servants and have you roped up until the police arrived. But as I wish to avoid involving St. Frank's in a scandal, and as the only charge I can bring against you is one of petty trespassing, I fancy I shall let you go. However, I want to warn you that England is getting very hot for you. The sooner you clear out of the country, the better. You cannot play fast and loose with the law here as you do in your own country."

Lee did not overlook the fact that the police would be only too glad to get hold of Kapone for what he had done in London, but there was the certainty that any publicity would be harmful to St. Frank's. Parents would not feel reassured if they learned, through the medium of the sensational Press, that American gunmen were operating at St. Frank's. Such a disclosure might do incalculable harm to the good name of the school.

"You said it, brother," agreed Kapone feelingly. "I'll sure hand it to you that your country knows how to keep law and order. The sooner I quit the better I'll like it."

"I want to know what you are doing here," insisted Lee.

"I'll tell you," replied Kapone frankly. "I'm not after your boys. That's honest to goodness talk. But if any of these boys butt into my affairs, I'll give them a tough time. I'm here because I've got a hunch that a guy I'm after has got a hide-out around here in some place."

"An American gangster?"

"Surely," said Kapone. "You said it. I'm not chasing any Englishmen around. This is my own private war, and if I've butted in on your territory I'm sure sorry. That's all there is to it."

"I see," said Lee slowly. "Well, I don't want you to butt in any more, Kapone. I think you understand what I just said. You'd better get completely out of this district, and if you don't show yourself again I'll take no action. But I only give one

warning. I give no man a second chance. Do we understand one another?"

"I guess we do!" agreed Kapone, nodding.

CHAPTER 10.

Success—and Failure!

FIVE minutes later a crestfallen figure emerged into the night. Evidently Al Kapone had not enjoyed his interview with the famous schoolmaster-detective.

The figure did not depart from St. Frank's in the normal way. He turned aside, broke through the hedge, and went back to the same spot where he had encountered Lee earlier. Once again he gave that bird-like whistle. It was answered from two different directions fairly close at hand. He whistled again, and waited. Very soon his henchmen came stealing up out of the darkness.

"Say, what's wrong with you, boys?" asked Kapone harshly. "Didn't you hear me whistle first time, twenty minutes ago?"

"We couldn't find you, Al," muttered Pietro. "Say, what's doing? Hadn't we best get quit of this doggone place?"

"We're quitting right now, boys," replied Al. "I've just got a hunch that the quicker we move, the safer it'll be for us."

"Then you ain't fixing Diamond this trip?" asked Ed eagerly. "Say, chief, I'm sure glad! We're safer within shooting distance of Scotland Yard than we are in this dump of schoolboys."

Apparently Al Kapone had no intention of telling his companions of his recent interview with Nelson Lee. Perhaps he wasn't very proud of it.

"No, we'll leave Diamond," he said, with a curious little note in his voice. "Maybe we'll get another chance later."

"Unless he's croaked already," said Pietro. "We might have got him in that gunplay—although I doubt it. The girl would have said her piece if we'd winged him. Guess they're both whole."

"Wait, boys!" muttered Kapone thoughtfully. "On second thoughts I don't care a whole lot for leaving without fixing that hobo. You'd best get the car and have it waiting down the road. Maybe I can trick Diamond yet."

"It's darned risky," objected Ed. "We've been lucky so far."

"I'm giving orders around here," snapped Kapone. "Get going."

"Ain't you coming, chief?"

"I'll meet you in the road," said the gang leader. "Where was it we last saw that Diamond guy?"

"Say, you ought to know," ejaculated Pietro, in surprise. "Wasn't it down in that crypt under the ruins? But he won't be there now—unless he's dead. Listen, chief! Let's all quit straight away."

"I'll meet you in the road," retorted Kapone curtly,

He moved off without giving them any further satisfaction, and, thoroughly discontented, they went to obey his orders.

It was about a minute later that another surprise came. Kapone, moving cautiously towards the monastery ruins, found himself beset by a crowd of figures which seemed to materialise out of the ground itself.

"On him—and hold him down!" came an urgent call.

Kapone was struck by a solid avalanche of humanity. He hadn't an earthly chance. He went over like a ninepin, and he was held down by a swarm of figures.

"We've got him!" came Nipper's triumphant voice. "It's Kapone himself—I recognised his voice."

"What about the other two?" asked Travers breathlessly.

"Afraid they're gone, but it can't be helped," said Nipper. "Kapone's the big prize. Who's got some rope or string? We'll tie the rotter up, and take him in to Mr. Lee."

"Entirely unnecessary, Nipper," came Nelson Lee's voice, as though from the ground. "If some of you will be good enough to remove your carcasses, I shall be much obliged. I shall be particularly glad if the fellow who has been sitting on my face will remove the pocket-knife and other hard objects from his hip-pocket."

"Guv'nor!" gasped Nipper, aghast.

"Where is he?" yelled Tommy Watson.

"You silly idiots—we're sitting on him!" gurgled Nipper. "We—we thought you were a crook, guv'nor! I can't understand it!"

The boys jumped off their captive as though he had suddenly commenced exuding electric shocks. Lee, considerably bruised, rose painfully to his feet.

"I don't blame you, boys," he said ruefully. "I blame myself—for not being alert enough. You must have heard me talking to those two men."

"But it wasn't your voice, sir!" protested Travers.

"It was a little trick of mine—to gain information," replied Lee. "Kapone himself is locked in my study cupboard at the moment, and I took his place. No elaborate disguise was necessary in this darkness."

"You copied his voice exactly, sir," said Nipper admiringly.

It was a startling disclosure. Except for Kapone's hat and overcoat, Lee had not troubled to adopt any further disguise. His little ruse had been very successful, too, until the juniors had unwittingly interfered. Their action had not done much damage as yet, but it was to lead to unforeseen consequences.

Lee knew for certain that Jake Diamond was alive, and that, startling as it would appear, he had sought refuge from his enemies in the old monastery vault. What was more, he had brought a woman companion with him! The thing was staggering.

It had been Lee's intention to get all these gangsters cleared out of the district at once. He had Kapone already. He could only assume that Jake Diamond had thought of St. Frank's as a refuge because some of the St. Frank's boys had been mixed up in his affairs in London. The fantastic notion that Handforth or any other boy had helped Diamond did not enter Lee's head.

"What do you know of this affair?" he asked quietly. "You've done no harm, boys. I want to know how you were aware that Kapone was in the district, and why you were watching for him."

"That's easy, sir," said Nipper. "Kapone and his men kidnapped Handforth not long ago, and took him to the old mill on the moor. Revenge, I suppose, for what Handy did in town. We rescued him, but the men escaped. And when we heard your voice we pounced on you. That's all."

Unfortunately, neither Nipper nor any of the others knew the real truth, so they could not impart it. Not one of them had any inkling that Jake Diamond and Trixie Foster were practically on the spot. Only Handforth & Co. knew that; and Handforth & Co. were not there.

Nelson Lee, far more astute than most men, could not be blamed for falling into the error that *all* the boys were in ignorance of Jake Diamond's activities.

"It's an unfortunate incident, and I want you to talk about it as little as possible," he said quietly. "We don't want a lot of exaggerated stories going about in connection with these gunmen. I don't suppose they'll trouble us again. Will you boys promise to keep it to yourselves?"

"Of course, sir!" they chorused.

SOON afterwards Lee was down in the old monastery vault. What he found was significant. There were many traces that the place had been recently occupied. There was the smell of an oil-stove still in the air, mingled with the pungent odour of exploded powder. The birds had flown, removing what belongings they had had with them. This, at all events, was satisfactory. It was hardly likely that the refugees would remain in the district now.

There were no bloodstains, so Lee assumed that the gun fight had been harmless. Perhaps it would be as well to question Kapone again before allowing him to go. The man might be tricked into giving more details.

Lee emerged from the ruins, and was immediately aware of the fact that a high-powered car was roaring swiftly along the lane. The detective was puzzled. If Kapone's men were doing as they had been ordered, they would hardly be travelling at that rate, and so openly. Lee leapt beyond the ruins and broke through the hedge. He stood revealed in the bright headlights as the car swung past.

(Continued on page 44.)

Stumbling through the jungle, completely lost, Jack Maitland comes across the uncle for whom he has been searching—but in what amazing circumstances.

The SLAVE.

The Silent Village!

LOST in the African wilds!

That was the plight of fifteen-year-old Jack Maitland. Right through the night and for the best part of a day had he stumbled and struggled through elephant-grass twice his own height, and through tropical forest so dense that the light of day scarcely entered it.

Jack was the youngest member of a party organised by his father which had set out on

an expedition into almost unexplored country north of Kenya.

Months before, Jack's uncle, Rupert Maitland, had departed in the same northerly direction on a mysterious expedition. From the day he left no word had come from him, and it was the mission of Jack's father, Mr. George Maitland, to find out, if possible, his brother's fate.

Though little had been said about the nature of his uncle's expedition, Jack had his own ideas on the subject. He had heard from native servants in his Kenya home dark rumours of slave-raiding in the north, and he felt sure that his uncle had gone to find out the truth about them.

But Jack had little time to think of slave-raiding at present. Through foolishly straying from his father's camp the night before, he was hopelessly lost in a land where every step was fraught with peril. He was hungry, parched, footsore and weary, yet he dared not rest.

Renewed hope came to him as he saw ahead of him a patch of light breaking through the gloom of the forest. He stumbled on. The vegetation thinned out as he drew nearer and nearer to the light, and with a quickening heart he realised that he must be nearing the edge of the forest.

Out into the open at last!

But here fresh disappointment awaited him. The land he had reached now was a rocky, desolate waste, entirely unfamiliar to him. Giant ant-heaps cast great shadows from the light of the westering sun, giving the scene a weird, ghostly aspect.



RAIDERS!

Written by
ROLAND HOWARD

Desperately Jack continued his aimless journey, praying for some sign of human habitation. At first there was none. Then, over the ridge of a hill, he saw a glistening stream, and cultivated land. Those signs had led him to expect a peaceful and flourishing little settlement. What he saw was a charred, blackened heap of ruins, still smoking from the fire that had consumed the village that had stood there!

Wondering, Jack Maitland went down into the valley. As he drew near the scene of desolation, a sickening fear took hold of him.

For the village was as silent as the grave. Silent with a sinister silence of which the meaning was beyond him at first. Though evidence existed in plenty that the village had been a busy and populous centre but a few hours before, nothing living seemed to be left.

What mysterious calamity had befallen the place? Jack Maitland pondered over the problem as he stood in the middle of the smouldering ruins. Suddenly the answer came to him.

Slave-raiders!

Who else but the plunderers of those atrocities he had heard whispers of in Nairobi could be responsible for this outrage? Slave-raiders it must be; Jack felt certain of it, and, with an Englishman's hatred of injustice, burned with rage at the thought of the peaceful inhabitants of this remote spot being led away into captivity.

His tiredness forgotten, he hurried through the silent village. At the other end the trampled grass and the hoof-marks of horses or mules showed which direction the raiders and their captives had taken.

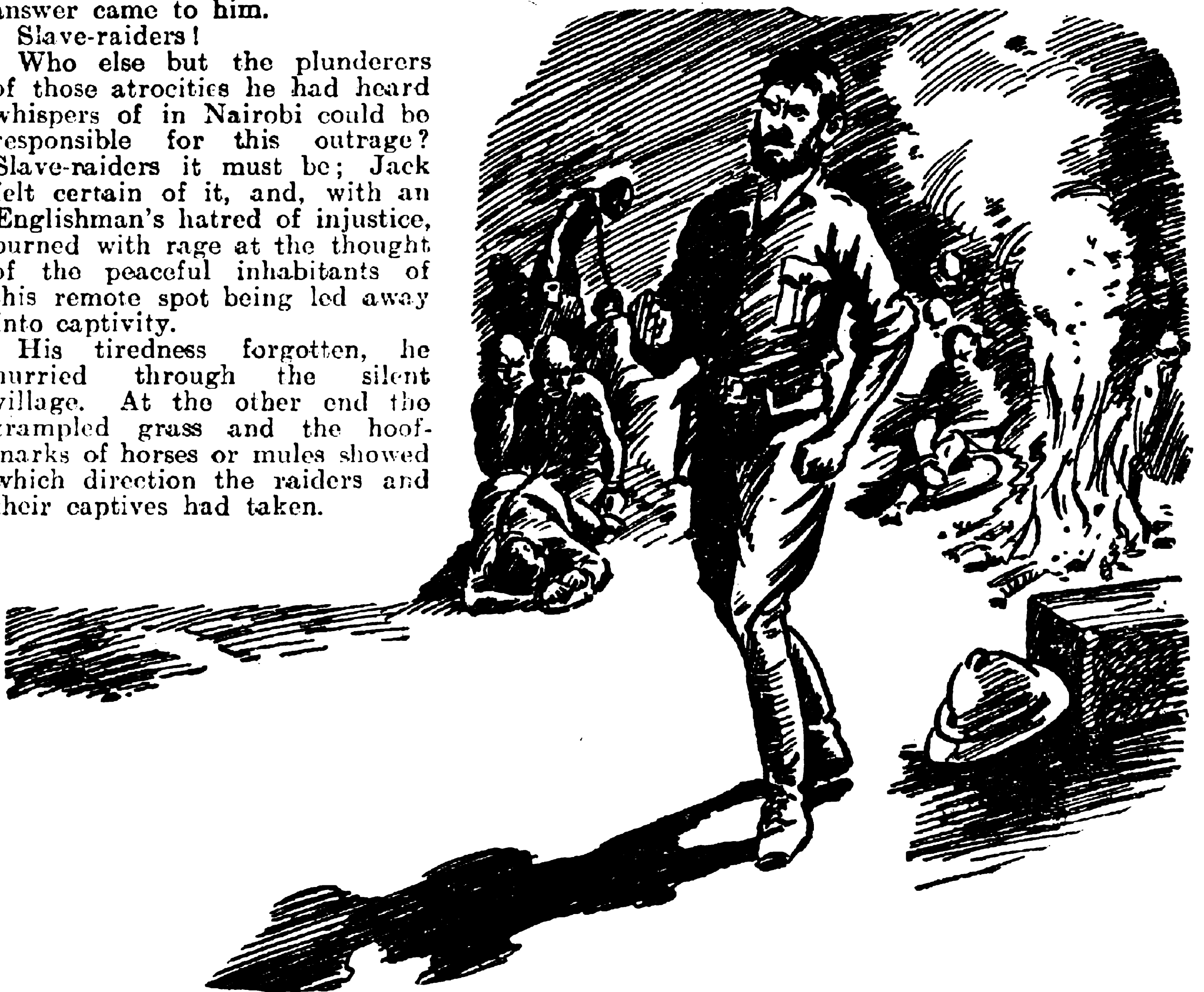
Jack followed the trail. He wanted to see for himself what had happened. In any case, if he hoped to get out of his plight he would have to find human beings of some kind, and the raiders seemed the only possibility.

The sun was setting when at last he saw, outlined against the sky-line at the top of a slope, a group of riders mounted on mules.

Before he had need to attract attention, he was seen. The riders turned their mounts towards him, cantered down the slope, and in a few minutes were reining in beside him.

Jack Maitland regarded them a little uneasily. They were as ill-favoured a crew of negroes as he had ever encountered in Africa. Armed to the teeth and dressed in motley garb, some in North African robes and others in tattered European clothes, they looked as if they had been recruited from the dregs of the continent.

Their astonishment at this unexpected meeting with a white boy so far from civilisation was great. Their eyes rolled and they



talked animatedly among themselves as they drew up. One of them addressed him in guttural English.

"You boy, you savvy Inglees, eh?"

Jack nodded.

"I am English; I have lost my party."

"What for you mak' come here?"

"We are hunting."

The evil-looking negro conferred with his comrades, then made a sign to the white boy.

"You mak' follow us."

They turned the heads of their mules and started up the slope again. Jack dragged his weary limbs after them. That his hosts were the dreaded slave-raiders whose handiwork he had seen farther back, he had no doubt. But he was too tired now to feel anything but thankfulness that he was at last in touch with creatures of flesh and blood again. Fortunately, the journey was of short duration, but night had come before they finished, and the last stage was completed by starlight.

The flickering of camp-fires in a spot sheltered by rocks told Jack that their destination was reached. The blacks dismounted, and two of them took him roughly by the arms and led him into the camp.

There was no mistaking his hosts' vocation now. Huddled in groups in every direction were chained gangs of wretched captives. By all appearances, Jack judged that he had arrived at the headquarters of the slave-raiding organisation.

They reached the biggest of the camp-fires. A tall, bearded figure in European dress rose to meet them. Jack's tired eyes rested on the man for an instant. Then an amazed cry left his lips.

"Uncle—Uncle Rupert!"

It was Rupert Maitland, his father's brother!

Immediately after Jack's joy changed to petrified astonishment. For instead of returning his greeting, his uncle stared back at him without a sign of recognition; and when he spoke his voice was harsh and forbidding.

"Silence, dog!"

Prisoners!

BEFORE Jack had recovered from the bewildering shock of his uncle's strange greeting, there was a tramp of footsteps behind him and several newcomers arrived on the scene. The dancing light of the camp-fire shone on savage ebony faces—and one of a lighter hue.

Looking up, Jack saw a heavy-jowled man of middle-age staring at him out of gleaming, bloodshot eyes. He returned the stare fearlessly. The newcomer turned to Rupert Maitland and addressed him in broken English.

"Strange find this, Maitlan'—ver' strange. Where he come from?"

Rupert Maitland shrugged.

"How should I know, Mustafa? He has just been brought in."

"You know heem, maybe?"

"Never seen him before in my life!"

"Huh! We soon know heem!" The man called Mustafa reached out and grabbed the English boy fiercely. "You speak English, eh? Where you come from? Queeck!"

"Nairobi!" Jack managed to gasp.

"Why you come here?"

It was on the tip of Jack's tongue to tell the truth—that he had come with a party into these wild parts to find the very man who was at present standing only a yard away from him. But something made him refrain. He had had no time to think things out yet, but he had seen very plainly that for some reason his uncle wished their relationship to remain unknown in the camp.

"I was with a hunting party and got separated from them," he replied at last.

Mustafa shook him savagely.

"You tell me lie, fool dog of a boy! Ver' good. I flog you till you speak truth!"

With a sharp movement he flung the lad from him, and Jack Maitland, weakened by hunger and privation, staggered and fell to the ground. Mustafa wrenched from his belt a heavy leather whip and whirled it over his head. Another instant and the first blow would have fallen. But in that instant someone else had taken a hand in the game. Rupert Maitland had stiffened as Jack fell. Now he acted. His hand shot out, and a grip as of iron descended on the arm of the slave-raider.

"Stop that!" he said sharply.

The slave-raider swung round with a furious oath.

"English peeg! You think you order me?"

"I forbid you to touch that boy. He is almost too weak to stand. Give him food and rest, and question him afterwards."

The Turk's bloodshot eyes rested evilly on the Englishman for a moment. Then he laughed.

"Maybe you forget sometime you my servant!" he said. "One word from me, dog, an' you get ten—twenty bullets, queeck!"

"And you'd lose the best man you've ever had to help you through to the Red Sea!" retorted Maitland swiftly. "Are we to quarrel over this wretched lost boy, Mustafa?"

Mustafa scowled.

"The fool peeg may be lying. He come from enemies, perhaps—peegs who would stop my trade!"

"Impossible!"

The Turk shrugged.

"Ver' good. We see, sometime. You feed the fool boy now; later I talk to heem again."

He strode off with his black bodyguard. Rupert Maitland gave a sharp order in a native dialect to one of the remaining men, who hurried off, evidently to procure food.

Jack was on his feet again by this time. He glanced up at his uncle, but with an assumption of indifference now. He was beginning to see reason in Rupert Maitland's refusal to recognise him. It was evident that the Turkish slave-raider held his uncle in his power, and any suspicion that a rescue-party was near might decide him to end the Englishman's life.

Rupert Maitland pointed to a small tent which had been erected some distance away from the fire.

"Go to that tent, dog! Food will be brought to you."

Jack nodded and obeyed.

The food which was brought to him was coarse and badly cooked, but he ate it ravenously. Having finished, he stretched himself out on the floor of the tent and fell fast asleep.

How long he slept, he did not know. He was awakened by a touch on the arm and the pressure of a hand over his mouth. Sitting up, he saw his uncle.

"Quiet, Jack!" were Rupert Maitland's

guessed by this time why I had to pretend not to know you?"

"Because Mustafa What's-his-name would smell a rat?"

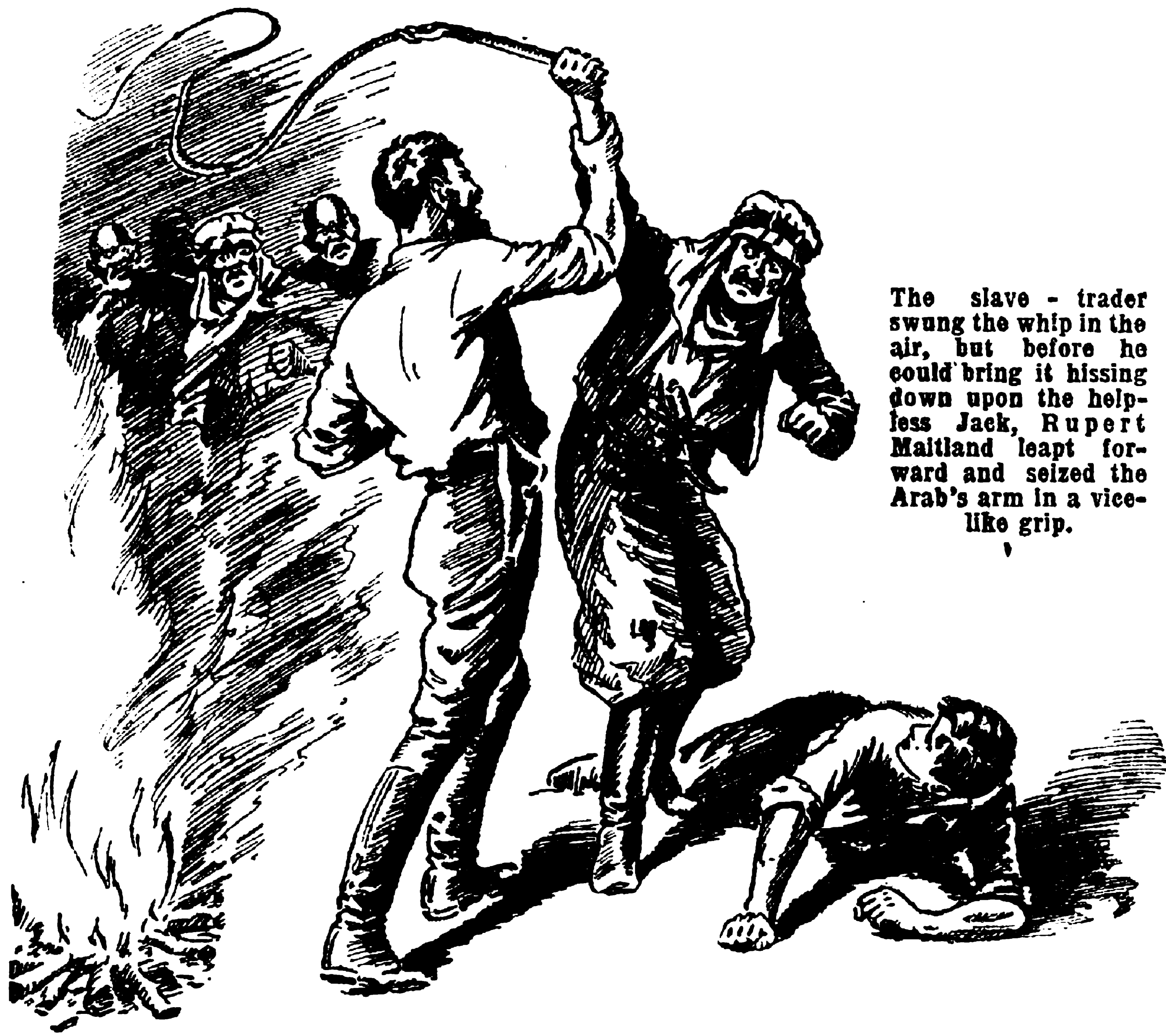
"Dead right. And, if he does, it's all U.P. with us! How far back are your father and the rest?"

"Goodness knows now. I've lost all sense of direction and distance, uncle."

"Can't be far, anyway. 'S-sh!"

Rupert Maitland drew back farther into the shadow of the tent as a slight movement sounded from outside. A moment later the two Britishers heard a chuckle.

"So you think you trick me, Maitlan',



The slave-trader swung the whip in the air, but before he could bring it hissing down upon the helpless Jack, Rupert Maitland leapt forward and seized the Arab's arm in a vice-like grip.

first words. Then he uncovered Jack's mouth. "This is the first chance I've had of getting to you. Feeling better now, old man?"

"Much. What's doing?" asked Jack in the same low tone as his uncle was using.

"Nothing, yet. I had to see you, though, to explain things. As you see, I have had to throw in my lot with this Turkish slave-dealer, Mustafa Bensali. It was my one chance of getting back to civilisation, and, anyway, I had started out to get at the truth about this business. Of course, you've

huh? Peegs of English! Hands up! Maybe I shoot!"

"Put them up! He means it!" hissed Rupert Maitland.

There was no help for it. Hands above their heads, uncle and nephew came out of the tent. Outside they could see the trap they had fallen into. Fully a dozen armed negroes were standing there, revolvers held ready to fire. The Turk was in their midst, grinning ferociously.

"Fool peeg! So you plot against me, huh? Now you pay! To-morrow I flog you both,

then I pin you to ant-heaps, and you are eaten alive an' die, screaming! You see, fools!"

He turned and rapped out a sharp order to the blacks, who immediately laid rough hands on the two Britishers. Rope was produced and the prisoners' arms and legs securely tied so that movement of any kind was almost impossible. Then, at Bensali's bidding, the pair were flung into the tent again and left to ponder on the ghastly fate which threatened them with the coming of the dawn.

In the Night!

JACK MAITLAND awoke with a start, to feel something soft and wet licking his face.

Even the knowledge that only a few short hours separated him from torture and death had been unable to keep him from the sleep he still needed. He had slept soundly almost as soon as the blacks had left the tent. Rupert Maitland, after struggling vainly with his bonds for some time, had also fallen into a fitful, troubled doze.

Now Jack awoke with the sharp consciousness of a dim shape moving near him and the feel of moist flesh on his face. Helpless to move, he rolled his eyes upwards to see what was there. A gasp of amazement left his lips at what he saw.

"It's Gip! Dad's old dog! Uncle!"

"Great guns! Are you dreaming, Jack?" came a hoarse whisper from Rupert Maitland. Then he, too, saw the terrier. "By all that's wonderful! You're right! Quiet, boy!"

"There's hope, after all!" said Jack. "Surely they must be near?"

"They may not be very near; perhaps the dog has found you on his own. But he may help us to get away," said Rupert Maitland quickly. "Got him to gnaw at the cord round your hands. Will he do it?"

"Do it? Why, there's nothing he can't do!" declared Jack. "Here, Gip!"

The terrier whined and nosed round him. Jack, with an effort, rolled over so that his hands were near its nose.

"Go for it! Worry it, boy!" he whispered. Then, as the terrier began a low growl: "Quiet!"

Anxious moments followed. For a time it seemed that the animal would do nothing but fret and paw about the cord, unable to understand what was expected of him. Then Jack felt the dog's fangs against his wrists.

"Good boy! Worry it! Chew it up!" he whispered.

The dog seemed to know what was wanted at last. Growling softly, he bit into the cord and tugged, tearing the strands asunder one by one. To the prisoners the suspense was unending. Hours seemed to pass before anything happened. In reality, it was only a matter of minutes before the cord round Jack's wrists suddenly parted.

"He's done it!" he said exultantly. "Quiet! Quiet, old boy!"

The terrier, mercifully, remained obediently quiet. Jack sat up and stretched across to untie his uncle's wrists.

Then things began to move. With their hands free the prisoners were soon able to loosen their feet. They spent a minute or two moving their limbs about to restore circulation, then Rupert Maitland reconnoitred.

Silence reigned over the camp. A couple of sleepy sentries were seated half-way between the camp-fire and the tent, rifles on their knees. Nowhere else was there a sign of animation. The chained rows of wretched captives, destined for slavery in some distant Arabian stronghold of barbarism, lay motionless in the flickering fire-light.

"Crawl under the back of the tent and make for the shelter of the nearest rock!" whispered Jack's uncle. "I'll join you—after I've found mules and guns!"

Jack nodded and hastened to obey. Taking the dog with him, he was soon safe behind one of the enormous boulders that surrounded the camp. Five minutes later his uncle joined him, leading a couple of mules and carrying a brace of revolvers. Then, without a moment's delay, they mounted and started off.

What direction to follow was a puzzle at first. Gip solved the problem by trotting ahead of them on his own.

"Follow him!" Jack said excitedly. "I believe he knows!"

And Jack was right, as later events proved.

But the journey was not to be made in peace. Scarcely a mile had been covered before the sound of a shot rang out from the direction of the camp.

"A signal! Now we're in for it!" said Rupert Maitland grimly.

The terrier ran on tirelessly before them and they urged their mules forward at greater speed. Soon, in the rear, they could hear the clatter of hoofs on the hard ground. A shot rang out, and then another, and something whistled unpleasantly close to Jack's ear.

On through the night, with their pursuers gaining on them every minute!

"We shall have to make a stand, Jack!" said Rupert Maitland between his teeth at last. "Ride up to the top of that ridge, and we'll take cover."

They reached the spot he had indicated, dismounted, and dived into the shelter of the rocks. Then they waited, guns ready.

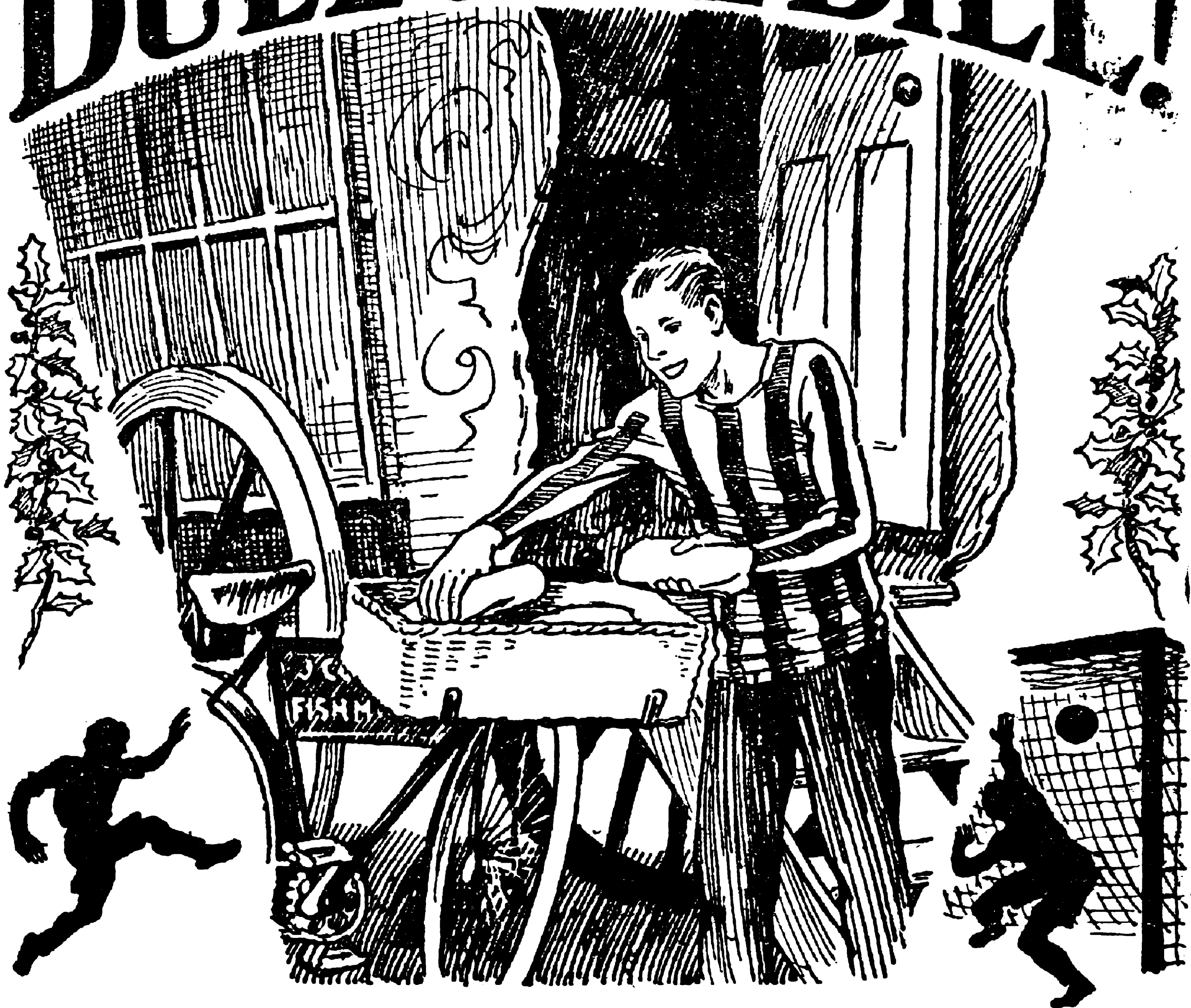
The slave-raiders came into view, riding straight towards them. Jack and his uncle fired simultaneously, and two of the enemy toppled off their mounts, yelling. That brought the advance to a stop. The rest pulled up and took what cover was offered down the slope. A pitched battle began.

So far as the two Britishers were concerned, it was a losing battle all the time. Their aim was accurate and their position was good, but ammunition was limited, and the enemy continued to advance yard by yard

(Continued on page 44.)

Your Old Pal, Bill, In Another Topping Footer Yarn.

BULL'S-EYE BILL!



Fine Fyne Kippers!

IT was a particularly glorious autumn morning, and Bull's-Eye Bill and Gipsy Dick, with whom the young footballer lived, were lured early from their bunks in the gipsy's gaily-painted caravan, which was parked on Mudbank Flats. Gipsy Dick let loose his horse, Buttercup, to graze on the Flats, cooked breakfast, and suggested to Bill a saunter into the town.

"For I wanta place an order for some sweet-making stuff at the stores," he explained.

Gipsy Dick made a living by making succulent sweets and selling them to the footballers and supporters who frequented the Flats.

The two pals walked into the town. Gipsy Dick handed in his order for sugar and butter and flavourings and what-not at

the stores, and he and Bull's-Eye ran into Ginger Hackem as they regained the street.

Ginger was loading up his motor delivery tricycle.

"Ginger," said Gipsy Dick with a grin, "I've handed in another order at the stores. I've asked them to make sure that you bring the goods along to the Flats. So don't be late with 'em, there's a good boy."

"Garn!" snarled Ginger Hackem, who was always trying to score off Gipsy Dick and

Bull's-Eye Bill, whom he hated like poison. "Think I'm always gonna be running parcels down to the Flats for you?"

"Of course," said Gipsy, giving his broad-brimmed hat a tilt and pulling at his moustache, "you can hand in your notice if you like. It means delivering the goods or losing your job, Ginger. It's for you to choose."

A PAIR OF KIPPERS COOK CRAB'S GOOSE!

Ginger's cheeks flamed.

"I'll get even with the pair of yer some day," he snapped.

"It's taking you a long time, Ginger," said Bull's-Eye. "I suppose you haven't arranged any more dates for my football team, have you? The Spiders are ready—any time."

Ginger Hackem stuck out his under-jaw and screwed up his eyes in a wicked leer.

"Let 'em play my team, the Wasps. We'll play you Saturday on the Flats—on our pitch, if you like."

Bull's-Eye Bill shook his head.

"Nothing doing," he cried. "We gave you such a licking last time you oughta have had enough."

He pulled Gipsy along and grinned as Ginger shouted after them.

"Ginger thinks such a lot of himself it will drive him nearly crazy having to bring those parcels down to you, Dick," he said as they walked away.

Five minutes later they were outside the fishmonger's shop—owned by Mr. Crab—where Bull's-Eye used to work; and there at the door, wearing an apron and his sourest smile, stood old Crab himself, while in the back of the shop Bull's-Eye saw young Crab—home from school evidently—a mean-looking, small-eyed, freckle-faced kid with ears like sails and a pasty complexion. Bull's-Eye hadn't seen young Crab for a long time. He had grown taller and looked stronger, but had in no other way improved.

As old Crab caught sight of Gipsy Dick, he snorted. He owed Gipsy one because he had tried to get Gipsy—the kindest-hearted fellow in the world—convicted for cruelty to his horse Buttercup, but, as a result, had himself been fined for keeping bad fish.

"Got any nice kippers, Mr. Crab?" asked Gipsy, coming to a halt.

"Not for you!" returned Crab with a wave of his hand.

Gipsy looked at the marble slab and saw displayed there piles of golden kippers, and on the kippers a ticket which announced, "Loch Fyne Kippers—the Best."

"Why, look there now!" said Gipsy. "'Pon my word, Mr. Crab, those kippers do look good. I'll have a coupla pairs, large size, for Bull's-Eye and I have hearty appetites. My horse Buttercup don't eat 'em."

The fishmonger's face flamed.

"You'll buy no kippers from me!" he almost shouted. "I refuse to serve you!"

"Listen to that now, Bull's-Eye," remarked Gipsy Dick, as a crowd began to collect and a swell motor-car glided up to the kerb and stopped. "Mr. Crab opens a shop and then refuses to serve a cash customer. I'll have two pair of large kippers, if you please, Mr. Crab. I'll pay for 'em now, and you can send 'em along to the Flats at your convenience."

Old Crab began to stamp with rage.

"Buy your kippers elsewhere," he bawled. "You won't get 'em here. I'll have nothing to do with you."

Bull's-Eye had entered the shop where he used to work, had parted a pair of Loch Fynes, and had opened his eyes in surprise.

"Why, Dick," he said, as if he were regarding a miracle, "these really are fine. I wonder how old Crab managed it." He selected two of the largest pairs, handed them to young Crab, and said: "You might weigh these, please, and tell us how much."

"Put those kippers down!" yelled Mr. Crab. "You won't get served 'ere, Gipsy Dick! I've a good mind to send for the police."

And then a ringing, mellow voice imposed itself upon the ears of the staring crowd.

"Really, Mr. Crab, I am surprised at you—greatly surprised. Indeed, I am astonished. What do you keep a shop for? Don't be silly! Let—er—this man—er—Gipsy Dick have his kippers, and be good enough to send me two pairs also. My wife likes them, and I myself am not averse to fine Loch Fynes!"

It was the mayor, who had stepped down from his swell car and now stood in front of Mr. Crab, smacking his lips in anticipation as he eyed the golden beauties on the slab.

Old Crab gasped. It was as much as his business was worth to get at loggerheads with the mayor.

"Private animosity should never be allowed to interfere with public business," remarked the mayor with the air of one who had said a mouthful. "Send those kippers down to the Flats at once, and let me have mine in due course, Mr. Crab."

Mr. Crab felt that he must submit, and in a rasping voice ordered his son to weigh the kippers Bull's-Eye had selected.

"One-and-fourpence," announced young Crab, keeping his finger on the scales.

"A good deal, but I have no doubt the kippers are worth it," said Gipsy, handing over the money.

It was young Crab's duty to deliver those kippers on a push-bike. Now it may be stated at this juncture that young Crab had not left school on a holiday. He had been fired—that is to say, expelled—for general misbehaviour, for slogging a kid half his size, for sneaking, for saucing the masters, and for playing rough practical jokes on the boys.

He was a nasty kid whichever way you looked at him, and so he substituted two pairs of bad kippers for those Bull's-Eye had selected, stuck on them a ticket bearing the address, "Gipsy Dick, the Caravan, the Flats," and wrapped up a fine pair for the mayor, to which he attached another ticket with the mayor's address written on it. Neither Bull's-Eye nor Gipsy Dick noticed the exchange, for the mayor was talking to them.

"I have often heard of the football games on the Flats," said the mayor. "I have motored past the spot. One of these fine days I must come down and view a game—h'm—for I like to mix with—ahem—my fellow-townsmen!"

"It's the way to become popular, your washup," said Gipsy Dick with a grin. "And, if you like, Bull's-Eye Bill's team, the Spiders, will fix up a special game for your benefit with the Wasps. The teams are old rivals, and both play on the Flats."



Bill kicked the ball with all his force. It hissed over Ginger's head and burst upon One-Punch Pete's face, emitting a cloud of vile-smelling powder.

The mayor pulled at his chin and regarded Bull's-Eye Bill with a friendly stare.

"Bull's-Eye Bill? I have often heard of his prowess," he murmured. "Always on the target, eh? When do you suggest the match shall be played, Mr. Dick?"

"We have been challenged for Saturday," put in Bull's-Eye.

"Very well, accept the challenge." The mayor waved his hand, "I will motor down in good time for the kick off. Indeed, I should like to kick off myself—I like kicking off. Arrange the match, my dear fellow. Arrange the match."

"Sure," said Gipsy, winking at Bull's-Eye.

And so, before returning to the Flats, they sought out Ginger Hackem and told him that the match was on and that the mayor was going to kick off. Ginger Hackem's cunning eyes glinted wickedly at the news!

Crab Cops Out!

WHEN young Crab arrived with the kippers, Gipsy Dick was busy making sweets in his travelling kitchen, and Bull's-Eye was sitting outside reading a copy of the NELSON LEE. Bull's-Eye was so absorbed in reading his favourite paper that he did not see or hear Crab cycle up, but an old familiar smell, to which he had grown accustomed when

working at Crab's shop, caused him to look up.

"Kippers," said young Crab, handing over a parcel with a grin.

He was just about to slip into the saddle when Bull's-Eye stopped him by calling out:

"Hi, Gipsy, show young Crab how you make sweets, will you?"

And as young Crab strolled into the travelling kitchen, a sneer on his lips, Bull's-Eye rapidly exchanged the ticket on his parcel with that he took from another which lay in the basket, and dumped the parcel young Crab had given him in the basket in place of the one he had taken. Then young Crab came back.

"If you can't make any better sweets than those," he shouted to Gipsy Dick, "you oughta be locked up!"

And he pedalled away, whistling shrilly.

Now that morning the mayor went through a pretty hectic time at the town hall, truculent members of the council putting up a lot of trouble, as usual. The mayor always went home for lunch, and he prided himself upon his punctuality. He would always much rather give ten pounds to any deserving charity than be ten minutes late for lunch. So when, on this particular morning, he arrived home half an hour late, he was in a pretty big fume.

"This chop is all burnt up and the vegetables are stale, my dear," he grumbled to the lady mayoress. "I can't eat either. Ring and ask cook to do me some kippers on toast. I—ahem—dote on kippers on toast, and I had some fine ones sent in from Crab's this morning."

The lady mayoress made it a point never to oppose the mayor, and so an order was sent to the cook. A minute later the maid came back with an answer.

"Please, sir," she said, "cook says if you have the kippers you won't like 'em."

"How dare she!" flared the mayor. "Order her to do them—at once!"

The maid wanted to say something, but was promptly checked.

"Don't stand chattering there, Mary," said the mayor testily. "Do as I say!"

Five minutes later the dining-room door opened, and Mary came in with her head turned sideways and her hands clutching an entree dish which she set before the mayor.

"Please sir, cook says——" she began, but was impatiently waved away.

Then the mayor lifted the cover. Instantly he dropped it and fell back in his chair, whilst Mary hastened to open the windows.

"Where's Crab?" bellowed his lordship.

"I've no doubt you'll find him in the fish shop, my dear," said the lady mayoress.

The mayor rose without a word, seized his hat, and ordered his car. He arrived at Crab's during the slack hour, and found Crab dozing in the pay-desk. Young Crab was stealing the prawns. Crab did not see the mayor enter the shop. The first he knew of his arrival was when a paper packet slid on to the entry book before him. It burst asunder, a grilled kipper jumped out and hit him in the eye, so to speak, and he recoiled, violently crashing from his stool to the boards.

"If you sent me those kippers as a joke, Crab," howled the mayor, pushing his angry face in at the window of the box, "I fail to see the humour. Send me my account to date, and I'll pay you, but I'll buy no more bad fish in your shop—not even a winkle!"

Then, crushing his hat down on his head, the mayor stalked out over the stale sawdust and climbed into his car.

Meccano's 1931 Improvements.

Every year sees improvements in Meccano, and 1931 brings new parts, new models and new scope for keen constructors and inventors.

With the No. 3 Meccano Outfit, priced at 27/6, no less than 686 working models can now be built—and this number refers only to the models the makers themselves have designed, and is exclusive of those every inventive Meccano owner plans and constructs for himself.

To-day, with all the new parts that each year has added to its range, with its electric and clockwork motors to give working models self-contained power, Meccano engineering is a game that in interest, in fun, and in educative power, has been improved beyond all knowledge. Fathers who give their sons Meccano this year will be inclined to aver that the modern boy has all the luck!

As soon as he had disinfected the kippers, old Crab faced young Crab.

"Is this another of your funny jokes?" he snapped.

"I only put the bad kippers in the parcel intended for Gipsy Dick, pa," almost sobbed young crab. "Bull's-Eye Bill must have changed the parcels and the tickets."

Then old Crab's right hand swung round and caught his offspring a wallop on the bean, and as he reeled old Crab's left hand straightened him up again; and when he turned old Crab shot his hobnailed boot behind him, and young Crab leapt for the house door like a scared rabbit.

"I'll teach you to ruin my business and get me in bad favour with the mayor!" shouted old Crab as his son and heir vanished from the scene.

When old Crab turned he saw One-Punch Pete, Bull's-Eye Bill's stepfather, and the biggest hooligan in the town, staring hard at the golden kippers.

"I wanna pair o' kippers, Mr. Crab," almost whined One-Punch Pete. "But these are awful dear—they're much cheaper in the market."

"Oh!" cried Crab with a cunning glint in his eyes. "You always want something for nothing, you do! I tell you what. I've got a pair of ready-cooked kippers 'ere that were meant for lunch, and you can 'ave 'em if you like."

Old Crab picked up and showed the kippers at a distance to One-Punch Pete, then wrapped them up in four wrappings of stout paper and stuffed them in a fish basket.

"They're yours," he said encouragingly, "basket and all."

"Mr. Crab," said One-Punch Pete as he began to walk away, "you're a reg'lar good feller!"

Ginger is Unlucky!

YOUNG Crab, being a bad egg, had always been pally with Ginger Hackem, another bad egg. And so, still smarting from the back-handers his father had given him, he sought out Ginger and told him the tale.

"It was Bull's-Eye Bill who changed the kippers," he howled. "I've got my knife into him. And I've got my knife into the mayor as well. I wish I could get even with 'em."

Ginger Hackem laughed.

"So you can soon!" he cried. "I'm only waiting for a chance, too. I've tried many a time, but Bull's-Eye's always had the luck. It can't last. And I hate the mayor as much as you do. One day I tried to scratch some of the paint off his posh car with my motor-tricycle, but the shuffer bumped the bike instead. It cost the stores five pounds to put the damage right, the insurance company refused to pay the damage, and it nearly got me the sack. Crab, we've fixed up a football match—Spiders v. Wasps, on the Flats for Saturday. The old fool of a mayor is

gonna kick off, and if we don't git our own back I'm a Zulu."

"How are you gonna do it?" asked young Crab.

"Dunno yet, but the Wasps are holding a committee meeting to-night, an' we'll think of something. One thing I promise yer—the mayor won't kick off in any other match on the Flats, an' we'll git a dig at the Spiders, too. Bull's-Eye Bill and his team won't be so popular after Saturday's match!"

Ginger Hackem spoke darkly, and Crab was satisfied.

At the Wasps committee that night—to which One-Punch Pete, Bull's-Eye Bill's rascally stepfather, was invited—it was decided after a long wrangle that Ginger Hackem should weaken the leather case of a new match football, substitute for the stout rubber bladder one so thin that a real hard kick would burst it, and that he should fill it with a mighty dollop of cobalt blue powder.

"And when the mayor kicks off," said Ginger Hackem, laughing in joyful anticipation, "the stuff will smother him—hat, clothes, an' boots, an' 'is dial as well."

"Can you do it so as it won't fail?" asked One-Punch Pete doubtfully.

"Sure I can. I've done it before. This time it'll be a lot worser!"

"An' I'm gonna be there to see the fun," said Pete savagely. "Old Crab palmed a pair o' bad kippers orf on me, and young Crab told me they come from the mayor. Just you wait!"

The match, Spiders v. Wasps—one of the many tussles between the rival teams for the championship of the Flats which were waged during the season—had been advertised by posters, Bull's-Eye proudly paying for the printing out of a collection made among his pals. The news that the mayor was going to kick off attracted thousands down to the dreary Flats on Saturday afternoon, turning the place into a real pleasure ground.

The mayor drove up in style and was loudly cheered. Fifteen thousand spectators cheered the Spiders and the Wasps when they turned out, and the mayor walked proudly to the centre-line to kick off.

Ginger Hackem, with a wink at his pals, dumped a fine new football at his worship's feet. Young Crab had brought old Crab down to see the fun. One-Punch Pete, who was in the know, stalked out to mid-field to get a closer view. He stood just behind Ginger. They had all come to witness the downfall of the mayor, who had donned his fur-lined coat and silk topper for the great occasion.

All was ready. One-Punch Pete's presence was ignored amid the excitement, and the mayor was just about to kick off to the call of the referee's whistle when he remembered something. The mayor always prided himself upon his courtesy. His politeness had made him popular. Turning to Bull's-Eye Bill, who stood behind him, he stretched out his hand.

"My dear boy," he cried, "it was indeed kind of you to have prepared specially a football for this occasion. I appreciate the compliment very much; but your team need not have gone to the expense and trouble. An ordinary football would have done just as well."

Bull's-Eye gasped, and he was about to deny the impeachment when he pulled himself together and changed his mind.

"Why, who let you into the secret, your washup?" he asked.

"That really nice young man, Ginger Hackem!" replied the mayor.

Then the referee whistled again insistently, and the mayor ran forward to kick the ball. But Bull's-Eye Bill pulled him aside.

"Wait a minute, your washup!" he cried. "This is a trap!"

That football, provided by Ginger Hackem, might or might not go off, but Bull's-Eye Bill did not care. He took a run and kicked it as hard as he could swing a leg. He aimed it right at Ginger. Ginger ducked, and it whizzed over him. He was wondering why it had not burst.

Behind him stood One-Punch Pete, laughing his head off. But he did not laugh for long. The football caught him bang on the dial and bowled him over as if he had been shot. At the same time it burst, and a cloud of nasty, sticky, smelly blue powder smothered him and Ginger Hackem and all the Wasps who were standing near.

A great yell of appreciation went up from the crowd.

"It was a trap, and I think I saved you that lot, your washup," said Bull's-Eye with a grin.

Then One-Punch Pete got up and slugged Ginger Hackem on the nose, and they had to carry Ginger off and find a substitute.

In the game that followed Bull's-Eye Bill scored half a dozen goals. Bill was in tip-top form. Time and time again he made rings round the Wasps' defence, while the crowd cheered deliriously. It was almost monotonous the way in which Bull's-Eye beat man after man. Not that the Wasps found it monotonous. They found it distinctly annoying, and being Wasps, did not hesitate to use foul tactics in an effort to subdue their clever opponent. But Bill was as slippery as an eel, and came off best every time. The Wasps were licked to a frazzle.

"I did not kick off," said the mayor, as he shook hands with Bull's-Eye Bill and Gipsy Dick just before he drove away, "but I enjoyed that match more than any I have ever seen!"

THE END.

(Good old Bill! There's no stopping him from scoring goals—and he's at it again in next week's rollicking footer yarn.)

Concluding Chapters Of DAVID GOODWIN'S Popular Serial.

Knights of the Road!



The Confession!

"I HAVE your father's death to answer for!" said Vane Forrester in a hoarse whisper.

Dick set his teeth and tried to keep down the horror and hate that rose in his breast. It was a dying man who lay before him. He had long guessed what Vane told him, but now he had it from the man's guilty lips.

"I killed him!" went on Vane, speaking with difficulty, for the end was near. "Not by the steel, nor by the lead. Through all his long illness he was in my hands. He would have died at length in any case, but I hastened the end with drugs and subtle herbs.

"Throughout that time I kept him in the half-witted, foolish state to which he had sunk under my treatment. His mind was weakened; I was able to guide it as I pleased. Strong and commanding, as he once was, I bent his mind the way I would

With a bodyguard of King's Riders, Dick Forrester is marched away—the shadow of the gibbet hangs over the young outlaw's head!

have it go, and I filled him day and night with the fear of the legendary curse of the Forresters, which is supposed to

fall on the eldest son at every fifth generation."

The dying man paused, and struggled for breath.

"He had always dreaded the curse, as I gave him no rest. It was under my care that he made the will disinheriting you and Ralph, and passing the estates of Fernhall and Huntercomb to me.

"You nearly balked me at the last. When you were with him, and the old servant revived his failing frame with the old elixir that he knew of, John Forrester rallied enough to cast off the dread I had placed upon him, and made a fresh will, leaving all to you and Ralph, his sons. But he died before his pen could sign the deed, and I came in time to take possession of all I had schemed for so long.

"The rest you know. I took advantage

of your escapade in riding off with the coach-horse and your joining with Turpin, to have you proclaimed an outlaw. Since then, feeling I was not too secure while you and Ralph lived, I have never ceased to seek your destruction and his. But the fortune of war has been against me, and I fail, a dying man."

The thud of hoofs sounded outside. A chestnut horse pulled up at the door, and a tall white-haired clergyman with a kindly face dismounted, and came hurriedly to the door.

Dick went to usher him in.

"It is my uncle, and he is mortally wounded," said Dick in a low voice. "He is past the aid of human skill and needs your ministrations."

"I will do all that may be done," said the vicar gently. "Your friend who summoned me bade me tell you that he has ridden on to St. Anstell's School to acquaint Dr. Trelawney with certain news."

The vicar passed quietly to Vane's bedside, and the dying man welcomed him eagerly. Dick left them together, and stood outside the door, silent, and deep in thought.

Captured—and Pardoned!

FOR the first time Dick felt a pang of regret. He was a notorious highwayman, wanted by the law, and even now Fernhall would not be his.

"Huntercomb shall be Ralph's, at least," he said to himself, "though Fernhall cannot be mine. He has done no wrong, and cannot be robbed of his right."

A touch on his shoulder made him turn. It was the vicar, and his face was grave.

"Your uncle is no more," he said. "He has gone before his Judge. Let us pray that he may find forgiveness. But who are these? What—the King's Riders! What is this?"

A sudden whirlwind of hoofs and horses descended upon the cottage from both sides, and a dozen uniformed men swept down upon Dick, four of them leaping from their horses and rushing at him.

"Surrender, in the king's name!" cried the officer of the Riders, his sword at Dick's breast.

So swift was the onset, so completely were Dick's thoughts elsewhere with the strange events of the past hour, that he was taken by surprise.

His hand flew to his side, but even as it did so a burly man leaped upon him and prevented him from drawing. The young outlaw struggled madly, and had he been able to draw a weapon it would have gone hard with some of his captors.

"Strip him of his weapons!" cried the lieutenant of the Riders. "Bind him hand and foot. He is the most slippery dog in England!"

"What does this mean, sir?" said the vicar fiercely to the lieutenant. "What is this brawling before a house of death?"

"Mean!" echoed the lieutenant, seeing busily to Dick's bonds. "It means we have captured the notorious highwayman, Richard Forrester, and that ere long we shall find a hempen cravat for him."

"You have me fast, sir," said Dick, as they set him, securely bound, upon his feet. "And I feel the less shame, for 'twas smartly done. But I should take it a favour if you would tell me whence you got the news. Was it from"—he lowered his voice—"Mr. Vane Forrester, of Fernhall?"

"Nay," said the lieutenant; "we acted upon orders from the sheriff of Barrington. I know naught of him you speak."

Dick drew a breath, almost of relief. He was glad to find he did not owe his capture to the dead man.

"Thank the powers Turpin was not

THE STORY IN BRIEF.

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 approaches Turpin, and attempts to bribe him to betray Dick. Turpin refuses, and, although attacked by ruffians, succeeds in getting away, taking Vane with him. A raking volley follows them, and Vane is mortally injured. They meet Dick, and the dying man tells him that he wants to make a confession.

(Now read on.)

taken," he thought. "I am blithe to think he escaped, and I believe he will be sorrowful when he hears the news. There is naught before me but the hangman's cart and the gibbet; but Ralph is saved! Lead on, sir!" he said to the lieutenant. "I am your prisoner. I will make no resistance."

They formed a compact and careful guard round Dick two deep, and the procession moved off. The young highwayman smiled to himself grimly. It was something of a compliment that a dozen armed men should take such nervous care with a bound prisoner. It was no ordinary knight of the road they were taking to the cells.

With much relief, Dick saw they were not bound for Hutton. They made a journey of a couple of miles to Barrington Town instead. Most of the townspeople were away at Hutton Fair, and Dick was thankful there were few to stare at him as he was conveyed along.

They thrust Dick into a damp, gloomy cell in the heart of the court-house; the great door shut upon him with a sullen clang.

They brought him bread and water at nightfall, and though darkness closed in

upon the narrow cell, never very light, he could not sleep till the small hours, when he sank into a troubled, fitful rest.

He was brought before the magistrate at noon next day. The sea of curious faces, the voices, the speech of the public prosecutor, the drone of the court bailiff, were as a dream to him. When it ended he was committed for immediate trial at Ufford Assizes, where his conviction and his sentence to death were assured. There was but one penalty for a knight of the road.

They put him in a cart and drove him out, well guarded, stared at by the wayfarers—an object-lesson for all.

The rattle of the cart on the stones roused him, and when he felt the wind on his face once more he was filled with a fierce despair at the thought that he must leave the world. Before him he saw the grim assize-court of Ufford. In a few moments the cart would pass through its yard-gate, whence he would emerge no more till the morning of his execution.

Suddenly he was aware of the swift rattle of galloping horses, and down the street came a chestnut hunter flecked with

Stirring New Adventure Serial Starting Next Week!

"THE VALLEY OF HOT SPRINGS!"

By LADBROKE BLACK.



When Eric Denning looked at the Narwhal horn he wasn't very impressed. Just a tusk, yellow with age, and covered with innumerable lines. But then, not being versed in such matters, how could young Eric be expected to know that those little lines were the key to enormous treasure . . . treasure in Greenland!

Ladbroke Black has written a really enthralling yarn round this Narwhal horn. He takes you to Greenland with Eric and Professor Denning on their treasure-seeking expedition; you will revel in their adventures; thrill to their exciting encounters with a gang of rogues who are also on the track of the treasure.

Look out for the opening instalment of this magnificent new serial next Wednesday, lads.

foam, and behind it another. A loud, ringing voice called Dick's name, and with a start the boy looked up. He saw that the rider was Sir Henry Stanhope, with Sir Adam Vincent behind him.

"Cut loose the prisoner!" shouted the bluff old baronet. "Strike off his fetters! I bring his pardon!"

He waved a folded parchment in the air, pulling his horse on to its haunches beside the prisoner's cart.

"A pardon, Dick, my boy," he shouted, "from the Secretary of State! Vincent and I have been to London these four days to sue for it, since the day Vane Forrester trapped you in my dining-hall. By the rood, we plagued my Lord Harrington till he granted it! I had the signatures of sixty gentlemen of the county to the petition. You are a free man!"

"A free man, you young rascal!" cried Sir Adam Vincent. "No more pistolings on the King's highway, mark you! When Stanhope and I heard of your capture, we rode like postboys begad, and we're in the nick of time!"

"By the rood," cried Dick, a lump in his throat, "I would refuse you nothing under heaven, Sir Henry, nor you, Sir Adam, for you have saved my life. I can never thank you for this!"

"A plague on the thanks!" cried Sir Henry. "You have done no crime that deserves fetters, since first your uncle hounded you on to the road. I'll run any man through the body who says you have. Here is the sheriff. Read, sir! Read Dick Forrester's pardon, with the seal of the Secretary of State scarce dry upon it! Read well, and deliver him up to us; for he is our guest to-night!"

The pardon was in order. The sheriff had no choice but to set Dick free, and twenty minutes later he was riding out of the town between his two preservers, bound for Basing Hall.

"Such a night we'll make of it!" chuckled Sir Henry. "We'll have young Ralph down from the school, and old Tre-lawney! Gallop, boys!"

A WEEK later the lawyers had declared possession, and Dick was free to enter his kingdom as heir to the estate of Fernhall and guardian of Huntercomb. He set out with Ralph and Stanhope and Vincent—for Dick insisted on their joining in the entry to his old home, and they gladly assented. The four friends were cantering over Norwich Heath on their way south, for they preferred riding to posting.

Black Satan was carrying Dick with his long, easy stride, when suddenly he threw up his head and gave a wild neigh, checking his pace.

"What ails him, Dick?" cried Ralph. "Can it be that he scents a friend? Aye, look yonder!"

Cantering towards them over the heath came a glorious sable mare, with a figure on her back that the boys knew well, and hailed with a joyful shout.

"'Tis Turpin and Black Bess!" cried Dick. "Well met, old comrade!"

And in a moment the aforetime brothers of the road were exchanging a heart-felt handgrip.

"I have heard of your good fortune, Dick," said Turpin, "and pink me, though it goes to my heart to lose so stout and merry a comrade, yet 'twas right glad news. And now you are going to enter into your own!"

"Come with me, Turpin!" cried Dick. "Give up the road, and join me at Fernhall. All that's mine is yours; for I owe you the head on my shoulders twice over!"

"Nay, Dick," said the outlaw, laughing. "You mean it kindly, yet it may not be. I am not one to sponge upon my friends, and though I am glad for your good fortune, 'tis meat and drink for me to feel Black Bess between my knees, and the pistols ready to my hands. I have had the habit too long to give it up. Yet I keep the warmest place in my heart for you, Dick Forrester, and we shall meet again, be very sure. Perchance I may do you a good turn yet."

"Then till our next meeting, if you will have it so," said Dick, for he saw the highwayman was fixed in his resolve. "But, remember, while I have two guineas in the world one of them is yours, and that the Forresters are your friends till death. Come and greet me soon, comrade. Now one more grip before you ride away!"

And, after a firm handgrip with the boys, the outlaw waved his hat and galloped away like the wind across the black heath, while Dick and Ralph, a little pensive, rode down with their friends towards the brightly lit windows and the forty gables of Fernhall.

THE END.

(Opening chapters of an enthralling new serial coming next Wednesday, lads. "The Valley of Hot Springs!"—a stirring tale of treasure-seeking adventure in Greenland. Don't miss the exciting first instalment.)

THE SLAVE-RAIDERS! GUNMEN AT ST. FRANK'S!

(Continued from page 34.)

It seemed that the end was very near, and both realised it.

But, unknown to them, a dumb friend who had left them at the top of the ridge was already returning with help. At the very moment when all seemed lost, Gip the terrier came bounding up from the other side of the ridge with half a dozen white men at his heels.

"Dad!" shouted Jack. "Oh, heavens! Just in time!"

And just in time they were. Even as Jack spoke, Mustafa Bensali and his black followers came charging up the slope.

Rifles were levelled like lightning, and a hail of lead met the slave-raiders in the very moment of their triumph. Yelling with fear, the uninjured fled. The timely arrival of Mr. Maitland and his comrades had, in the space of a few seconds, completely turned the tide of battle. Jack and his uncle were saved!

MUSTAFA BENSALI'S evil career ended the following day when Mr. Maitland and his party released the negro captives. Who among them was responsible for the slave-raider's death was never revealed, and the white men did not think it well, in the circumstances, to inquire very closely into it.

With the end of the Turk, the reign of terror which he had brought into this remote part of the Dark Continent also ended. Thanks to Rupert Maitland, and in no small measure also to Jack Maitland and the terrier Gip, the natives could now live their simple lives untroubled by dread of the slave-raiders.

THE END.

(Another enthralling complete yarn of exciting adventure in the African wilds, introducing young Jack Maitland next Wednesday.)

(Continued from page 29.)

Thud-thud-thud!

Flashes of fire showed. A bullet ripped through Nelson Lee's sleeve, grazing his arm. He ducked instinctively. More shots came, and the car roared on. Yet Lee had time to see the figure of Searneck Al Kapone standing beside the driver, gun in hand.

It was another unexpected turn. Kapone had escaped! Lee understood how the other gangsters, hearing a commotion after they had parted from their supposed leader, must have crept back. Thus they had overheard what Lee had been saying, and they had forthwith broken into the school and released Kapone.

And this, as Lee soon found by inquiry, was exactly what had happened. Two strangers had encountered a senior in the Triangle, and had demanded to know which was Nelson Lee's quarters. They had been told. They had then rung at Nelson Lee's door, and had forced the butler at the point of the gun to show them into Lee's study. The whole thing had been done at such speed that the crooks were away before any general alarm could be given.

The only satisfactory reflection was that they had now left St. Frank's. And it was safe to assume that Jake Diamond and his fair companion had left the district, too.

Little did Nelson Lee guess that Edward Oswald Handforth had been busy again, and that his queer protégés, instead of being miles away, were actually sheltered within the walls of St. Frank's itself.

The old school had not finished with the gunmen yet!

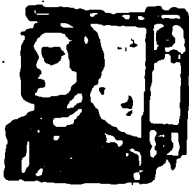
THE END.

(St. Frank's witnesses many stirring scenes next week when the rival gangsters fight out their feud with the old school as a battleground. Look out for the title; Put 'Em Up, St. Frank's.)

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