

A GOOD JOKE WINS A GOOD PRIZE

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NELSON LEE

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*Alarums
and
Excursions*



A "rousing" incident from this week's topping long complete
St. Frank's school yarn.

New Series No. 59.

OUT ON WEDNESDAY.

March 7th, 1931.

Powerful Long Complete
School Yarn Featuring
the Cheery Chums of St.
Frank's and their Gram-
marian Rivals.

CHAPTER 1.

Handforth Does Not Approve!

"EVEN money in quids, then?" asked Capper genially.

"Done!" said Bernard Forrest. "That's a bet!"

A group of St. Frank's Removeites was standing round the Ancient House steps, in the welcome warmth of the March sunlight. There were three very elegant youths with them—three members of the Bannington Grammar School Fourth.

The St. Frank's Junior XI was playing the Grammarians this afternoon, and the Remove and the Fourth, almost to a man, were confidently expecting the Saints to win. George Capper, and his two pals, Fortescue Ford and Clarence Vine, thought differently—and they were willing to bet on it.

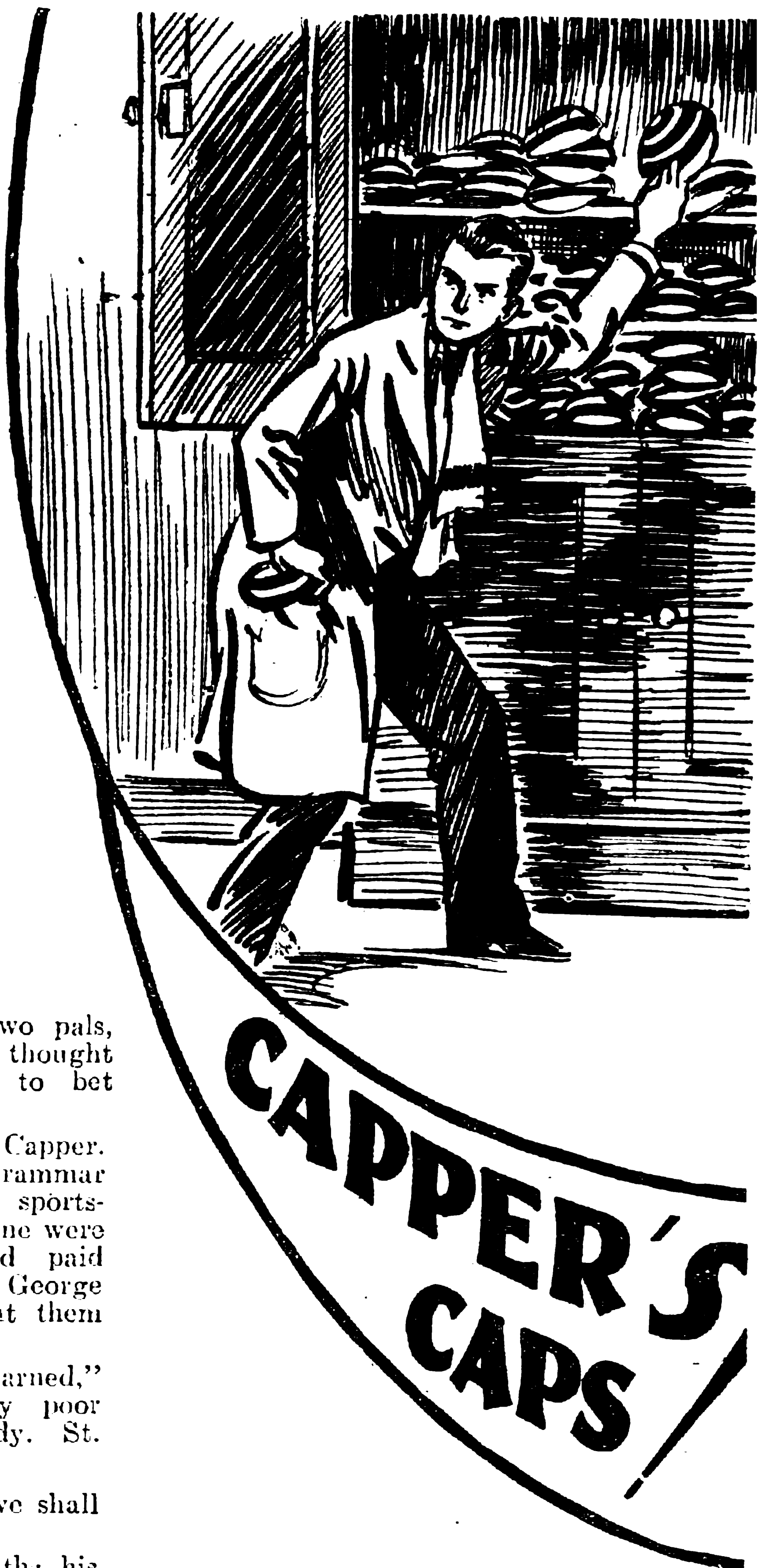
Bernard Forrest was pleased with Capper. Capper was a newcomer to the Grammar School, and, in Forrest's opinion, a sportsman. Fortescue Ford and Clarence Vine were old-timers, but hitherto Forrest had paid little or no attention to them. It was George Capper's influence which had brought them out.

"Well, don't say that you weren't warned," remarked Forrest pleasantly. "My poor simpletons, your money is gone already. St. Frank's simply can't lose."

"No?" drawled Capper. "Well, we shall see, shan't we?"

Capper was a slim, aristocratic youth; his dark hair was glistening with brilliantine; his supercilious face was permanently set in a sneering smile. Capper, in his way, was a great practical joker. But not many fellows at Bannington Grammar School cared for his practical jokes. They were generally ill-natured. Ford and Vine were more or less nonentities; youths with expensive clothing, and heaps of pocket-money, but with a minimum amount of brain. In many respects, Capper & Co. were the prototypes of Forrest and Gulliver and Bell, of the St. Frank's Remove.

"You asses are chucking your money away," said Fortescue Ford, with a grin. "I



suppose you know, don't you, that our Junior XI. hasn't lost a match this season?"

"They'll lose one this afternoon," retorted Forrest blandly.

"Rats! They're unbeatable," said Ford. "We've played hotter teams than yours, and we've wiped them up."

"You mustn't judge the St. Frank's Junior XI. by what you have already seen," remarked Vivian Travers, joining the group. "Am I allowed to enter the discussion, dear old fellows?"

"These Grammarians have just bet us even money, in quids, that their team will win this afternoon," chuckled Forrest.

"Then what's the argument about?" asked Travers. "I could understand your getting wild if we were betting against our own side—but we're betting for our own side. My dear man, you haven't a leg to stand on!"

Travers' jocularly left Handforth cold. He could see Forrest and Gulliver and Bell grinning; and the three Grammarians were chuckling, too.

"I'm not grumbling so much at you chaps as these Grammarians," said Handforth sternly.

"Oh, we're in trouble now, are we?" asked Capper.

"It was you who started this betting—I heard you," said Handforth. "You ought to have more sense. You're visitors, and you're taking advantage of our hospitality."

"You're old-fashioned," said Capper, with a sneer.

"Not only that, but the very fact of your making bets is an insult to me," continued Handforth indignantly. "I'm the St. Frank's goalie——"

"Cheese it, Handy," murmured Travers. "Don't make a fuss over nothing, dear old fellow. Hadn't you better be getting on the field?"

Handforth grunted, glared at Capper & Co., and shrugged his shoulders.

"Well, they're not worth sloshing, anyhow," he said, with a sniff. "I'm an ass to stand here talking to 'em."

He walked off, and the rotters roared with laughter.

Handforth might have allowed the matter to drop completely, only a few minutes later he happened to spot Capper & Co. making bets with a number of foolish Third-Formers. Handforth "saw red." He dashed up, his fists clenched.

"Are you making bets with these Grammarian chaps, young Hobbs?" he asked fiercely. "And you, Button? And you, Hook?"

"Only—only a couple of bob each, Handy," said Tommy Hobbs, looking guilty.

"They asked us, and—and we didn't like to refuse," piped Jimmy Hook.

"Oh, they asked you, did they?" growled Handforth. "You Grammarian cads! What do you mean by inducing these fags to start betting? I'm going to give you a good hiding!"

"You, and who else?" asked Capper sourly.

"Nobody else!" roared Handforth. "I can lick the three of you with one hand! Put 'em up, Capper! You're the ringleader!"

Capper sneered.

"I'm not fighting, thanks," he said shortly.

"By George! You're not?" bellowed Handforth. "Well, we'll soon see about that!"

Crash!

His right, famous throughout the Lower School at St. Frank's, swung in and landed upon George Capper's elegant nose. Capper went over in a glorious half-somersault, and thudded to the ground with a loud yell of pain.

"And you two!" shouted Handforth, swinging on Fortescue Ford and Clarence Vine. "You're nearly as bad! Take that"—crash!—"and that"—crash!—"and see how you like 'em!"

Ford and Vine didn't like them at all. Ford reeled back with a howl, Handy's left having crashed into his eye. Vine sat down with a bump, several of his front teeth loosened.

"That's what you get for making bets with our fags," said Handforth severely. "Have you given them any money, you fags?"

"Not likely!" said Hobbs. "We—we only made the bets. We're going to collect the money after our chaps win."

"Those bets are off—understand?" said Handforth. "You silly young asses! Supposing you lose?"

"You're not saying that you're going to let those Grammarians get the ball past you, are you, Handy?" asked Hook.

"That's not the point," retorted Handforth hastily. "It's the principle of the thing that matters. Supposing you lose? How much money have you got? About a couple of bob each, eh? And you'll be stony broke until your next pocket-money comes round! Gambling's no game for kids!"

By this time Capper & Co. had risen to their feet. Capper's nose was bleeding profusely, Vine's mouth was trickling blood, and Ford's eye was swelling visibly.

"You'll pay for this!" snarled Capper. "Come on, you chaps! Smash him! We'll teach him to——"

"Oh, you want some more, do you?" broke in Handforth promptly. "Good enough!"

Crash! Thud! Biff!

He let himself go, and the three Grammarian cads backed away, gasping and yelling. The noise attracted Nipper and Reggie Pitt and Buster Boots and two or three other members of the Junior XI.

"No wonder we couldn't find him!" said Nipper, the popular skipper. "Here he is—fighting! Fighting, just before the match!"

"He'll fight on his wedding day, if he gets the chance—and go to church with two black eyes!" said Pitt, grinning. "Easy, Handy! What do you think you're doing?"

"Smashing these rotters—that's what I'm doing!" said Handforth. "Hi! What the—— Leggo!"

"No fear!" said Nipper. "Handy, old man, have you forgotten yourself? Don't you realise that these chaps are Grammarians—that they are visitors?"

"I can't help that! They were making bets with these fags——"

"More fools the fags for having anything to do with bets," interrupted Nipper. "That doesn't alter the fact that you're fighting with visitors."

"Rats! If these Grammarians don't want to be biffed, they shouldn't abuse their privileges as guests," said Handforth, not without logic. "Well, anyhow, I've smashed 'em up a bit, and perhaps they'll learn their lesson."

He walked off, and as Travers and Potts and one or two other non-players came up just then, Nipper and his companions followed him towards Little Side—but not before Nipper had hinted to Travers that it would be a good idea to escort the Grammarians indoors, so that they could have a wash and brush up.

CHAPTER 2.

The Stolen Caps!

CAPPER & CO. were hurriedly escorted indoors. They were in rather a bad way. Capper's nose had swollen considerably, totally depriving him of his aristocratic appearance. Fortescue Ford's eye was rapidly closing, and turning a queer, greenish-black colour. Clarence Vine's lower lips was twice its normal size.

"Awfully sorry, and all that," said Travers. "But Handy is a bit of a firebrand, you know."

"He's a dangerous lunatic," said Capper. "By gad! He ought to be kept under restraint!"

They were led into a bath-room, and left to themselves. The St. Frank's fellows discreetly retired, chuckling hugely to themselves as soon as they were out of earshot.

"We ought to do something with that ugly brute before we go," said Vine maliciously. "I mean, think of the humiliation! One St. Frank's chap wiping up the three of us!"

"Awful!" said Ford, as he tenderly dabbed his eye.

"We'll get our own back—don't fear!" said Capper, in a vindictive voice.

By the time he and his pals had finished their cleaning up, they looked fairly presentable. Even Capper's nose was not unduly prominent. They left the bath-room, and found themselves alone in the corridor. Everybody had gone out on this spring-like March afternoon. Besides, the match had already started.

"Fine lot of hosts, to leave us to find our own way out!" said Capper unreasonably. "They might have waited for us, anyhow!"

They caught a glimpse of a stoutish feminine figure as it turned away from a cupboard and disappeared round an angle of the corridor. It was Mrs. Poulter, the matron. As they were passing the cupboard—which was ordinarily kept locked—Capper paused.

"Look pretty, don't they?" he said sneeringly.

He indicated a big pile of red and blue Ancient House caps. They were brand-new caps—the House stock. Ford and Vine hardly gave them a glance.

"Oh, let's get outside," said Fortescue Ford. "We want to see how the game's going. I'll bet our chaps have scored already."

They walked on, but suddenly Capper halted. There was an eager glitter in his eyes.

"Wait a minute!" he whispered tensely. "I've thought of something."

He looked back towards that open cupboard.

"What are you getting at?" asked Vine, staring.

"That old girl's gone—it's a chance in a thousand!" said Capper coolly.

His pals were amazed to see him dodge back to the cupboard, take three of the new Ancient House caps, and tuck them into his overcoat pocket.

"What the dickens are you playing at, Capper?" asked Ford, mystified, and rather startled. "You'll get into an awful row if somebody——"

"Dry up—and follow me," said Capper briskly.

They went downstairs, and no more was seen of Mrs. Poulter. Capper had obviously acted on the spur of the moment; but the idea which had come to him so suddenly was now developing. Capper was rather good at ideas—particularly if they were unpleasant ones; and he possessed a cunning brain.

"Listen to me, you chaps," he said, as they walked towards Little Side. "I've got some instructions for you."

He gave them his instructions, whereat Ford and Vine looked very astonished.

"But what on earth for?" demanded Ford. "The man's an absolute rotter! Why should we——"

"Never mind why—do as I say," interrupted Capper. "Come on! The game's well on the go, and we don't want to waste time."

"And those caps——"

"We'll talk about the caps later," said Capper. "In the meantime, forget 'em. Understand? Forget 'em completely!"

His pals were baffled, and they knew better than to disregard his instructions. They were completely under his sway. So they stationed themselves behind the St. Frank's goal, and they began to take an active interest in the game.

It wasn't long before Handforth became aware of Capper & Co.'s close proximity. They were cheering and shouting, and encouraging their own players.

"Who brought those fatheads here?" asked Handforth, apparently addressing the empty air. "By George! They'll put me right off my game!"

Yet this wasn't true; for, a minute later, Handforth was called upon to make a brilliant save. The Grammarian centre-forward, running through and beating the St. Frank's backs, sent in a first-time shot which looked a goal all the way. But the one and only Handy was ready. He flung himself sideways and his clenched fists sent the ball spinning back into play, where it was promptly cleared by Church.

"Oh, well done, Handy!"

"Well saved!"

"Dash it, the man's good!" came Capper's enthusiastic voice. "A ripping save, by gad! Well done, Handforth!"

"Rather!" roared Ford and Vine.

Handforth glanced round in astonishment. The play was being transferred into the Grammarian half of the field, and Handforth had plenty of time to take stock of his surroundings. The encouraging comments from Capper & Co. took him by surprise.

Capper waved as he saw Handforth staring at him.

"Jolly good, Handy!" sang out Capper. "That was a first-class save of yours!"

"What are you doing—pulling my leg?" asked Handforth suspiciously.

"That's unkind," replied Capper, in a hurt voice. "Dash it, I hope I can appreciate a good goalie when I see him?"

"Oh, well!" said Handforth awkwardly.

He turned back to his job, hardly knowing what to think. In any case, he couldn't ponder much on the situation, for the Grammarian forwards were becoming aggressive again. They had forced a corner, and when the kick was taken Handforth had to display more of his brilliance. Which he did, to the delight of the St. Frank's spectators. A grand "header" was saved by Handy with that contemptuous, boisterous indifference of his which so took the heart out of opposing forwards.

Soon afterwards a mighty roar went up as Nipper scored the opening goal of the match. The St. Frank's junior skipper took advantage of a neat pass from Bob Christine, and like lightning the ball was at the back of the net, the Grammarian goalie being beaten all the way.

"Goal!"

"Hurrah!"

The unbeaten Grammarians were startled; they were put off their ordinary game. The St. Frank's forward line was virile, tricky, enterprising. Nipper's XI, in fact, was at its best. Only recently Nipper had made an excursion into the Fourth, the Fourth then being in the doldrums. With Nipper as skipper, however, the Fourth had awakened, and it was now a very different Form.

The Fourth was being freely discussed all round the ropes, both by Removites and Fourth-Formers, and Capper & Co. kept their ears well open. They soon knew most of the facts. Everybody was interested in this particular game, for the Eleven—hitherto composed mostly of Removites—now contained four Fourth-Formers, and they were fully justifying their inclusion in the team.

By half-time the score was unaltered: one—nil. The Grammarians had attacked desperately in an attempt to equalise, but a sturdy defence kept them at bay. Then in the second half Church, one of the St. Frank's backs, had the misfortune to handle the ball within the penalty area. The referee immediately awarded a penalty-kick, and the St. Frank's spectators were dismayed. Handforth prepared himself for the ordeal, and the Grammarian skipper took the kick.

Slam!

It was a hot one; it fairly sizzled wide of the leaping goalie, travelling low and accurate. Handforth dived. His fingers got to

the ball just as it was hissing into the net, and he tipped it round the upright.

"Hurrah!"

A crackling, excited cheer went up. Handforth had saved!

"Rats!" murmured Capper, with a grimace. "There goes our money, my sons! We shall never win after this!"

"Well, it was you who wanted to make the bets," growled Fortescue Ford. "Why didn't somebody tell us that these Saints were so beastly hot?"

"They did tell us," sighed Capper, "only we wouldn't believe them. Still, don't worry! We'll have some fun out of our visit to this giddy school. Trust me!"

The corner-kick was taken, and Handforth, having saved the penalty, was determined that his citadel should not fall now. Out he leapt, his fists thudding. The ball fell clear of the group of excited players in the goal-mouth. McClure, nipping down, cleared cleverly, sending out a long, sweeping pass to Reggie Pitt on the wing. Reggie was off in a flash, racing down the touch-line.

In football, the position can be quickly reversed. The St. Frank's goal had been in danger a moment ago; now the Grammarian goal was menaced. Pitt centred, and a howl of excitement went up as Buster Boots, at centre-half, dashed up and sent in a scorching first-timer.

The Grammarian goalie managed to save, but the ball was slippery, and it slowed off at a tangent, falling right at the feet of Pitt, who had continued to run in. Pitt banged the ball into the back of the net.

That was practically the end of the match. The Grammarians, with most of the heart taken out of them, concentrated upon defence. Their attack became non-existent. By scrambling and dashing about, they kept the Saints at bay until the final whistle. But the Saints were satisfied. A glorious win by two clear goals.

Handforth, beaming upon all and sundry, was the happiest fellow on the ground. For once he had proved true to his word; he had kept out the Grammarians.

CHAPTER 3.

Capper's Mysterious Game!

"WELL played, old man! Congratulators!"

Handforth turned as George Capper approached him, his face aglow with enthusiasm. Fortescue Ford and Clarence Vine were looking every bit as eager.

But Handy, still suspicious, looked at the Grammarian rotters in a doubtful way.

"You've changed your minds, haven't you?" he asked bluntly.

"Have we?" countered Capper. "Why, we've been enthusiastic about you ever since the game started. Your play has been the big feature of the match."

"Oh!" said Handforth, who expanded to flattery like a sun-bathed flower.

"Rather!" said Clarence Vine. "We've lost our bets, but that serves us right!"

"You shouldn't make bets," said Handforth severely.

"Well, we've had a lesson this time, old man," said Capper, with a sigh. "But we don't mind paying. Your game was worth the money. I say, I hope you don't bear us any grudge for what happened before the match?"

"Grudge?" repeated Handforth.

"Well, I mean, we had a bit of unpleasantness," said Capper. "You sloshed us, but I dare say you were justified."

"Oh, let's forget it," said Handforth gruffly.

"If you'll accept our apologies, old man, we shall be grateful," continued Capper, in an earnest voice. "I'd hate to be on unfriendly terms with you. Can't we let bygones be bygones?"

"Well, of course," said Handforth, without hesitation. "Hang it, I'm not a chap to keep up a nasty spirit. Put it there, Capper!"

He shook hands gladly, and Capper's energetic grip was genuine enough. Ford and Vine shook hands, too, and after that Handforth was beaming.

"Better come and get changed," said Church bluntly.

He and McClure had been standing by, and they were not so easily spoofed as their leader. They did not trust George Capper an inch. Somehow they could not help suspecting that Capper was insincere.

"Yes, you'd better go and change or you'll catch cold," said Capper. "See you later, eh?"

"Rather!" agreed Handforth.

He went off with Church and McClure, glowing. It was the easiest matter in the world to pull his leg—and it had been pulled now very considerably.



Click! The light was suddenly switched on, revealing Mr. Alington Wilkes. Handforth & Co. had been caught breaking bounds!

"Well, I'm glad you had the good sense to get away from those Grammarian rotters," said Church gruffly, when they were in the dressing-room.

"We were mistaken about them," said Handforth. "They're not such rotters, after all. No chap's a rotter when he admits himself in the wrong as handsomely as Capper did. He made a mistake, and he acknowledged it. That's good enough for me."

"But not for us," said Mac. "Why, you ass, they were only kidding you!"

"Rot! They apologised."

"Well, you'd better keep your eyes skinned," said the Scottish junior warningly. "That fellow, Capper, is up to something. I wouldn't trust him further than I could see him. He's a tricky bounder; you can see it in his face."

"They're trying to put something over on you, Handy," urged Church. "Why don't you listen to Mac and me?"

"Because you're a couple of suspicious fat-heads—that's why," replied Handforth coldly. "I'm surprised at you! Here are these Grammarian chaps, openly apologising, and saying that they have been fools, and you suspect them of trickery! You ought to be ashamed of yourselves! Give the chaps a chance!"

"Yes, but they've an axe of their own to grind, you dense lubber!" said Church, exasperated.

"Did you call me a lubber?" demanded Handforth, glaring.

"Oh, never mind that!" snapped Church. "Capper's out for revenge—and so are his pals. Why can't you see it, Handy? What have you got in your head instead of a brain—a chunk of putty?"

Handforth flared up.

"So I'm a lubber, and my brain is a chunk of putty?" he roared. "For two pins, I'll wipe up the pair of you! Mind your own giddy business! I hope I'll never be as suspicious-minded as you cuckoos! You make me tired!"

Handforth continued his dressing in a huff, refusing to speak with his chums any more. He was finished before them, and he went out without recognising their existence.

"What's the matter with you Study D chaps?" asked Fullwood curiously. "Had a tiff?"

"It's Handy," growled McClure. "Capper and those other two Grammarian rotters have been pulling his leg—apologising to him, and pretending that they're keen on being friendly."

"Perhaps they are," said Fullwood good-naturedly.

"Rats! The change was too sudden," said Church. "Those rotters have something up their sleeves—and it means trouble for Handy, or I'm a knock-kneed goat!"

"That may be so," agreed Fullwood.

"Eh?"

"You said it yourself, old man," grinned Fullwood. "I wouldn't call you a knock-kneed goat, of course, but you ought to know best!"

"I didn't mean that!" snorted Church. "Blow you—and blow Handy, too! If he gets himself into a mess, it'll serve him right!"

Handforth, meanwhile, had run into Capper & Co. in the Triangle. They promptly invited him into the school shop, and before long they were sitting at one of the little tables, indulging in tea and cakes.

"Glad we're having this opportunity of a chat before we go," said Capper amiably. "By gad, Handforth, you played a marvelous game this afternoon! Didn't he, you chaps?"

"Never saw anything like it!" vowed Ford promptly.

"He'll play for England one day," prophesied Vine.

"Oh, I don't know," said Handforth, expanding visibly.

"There's no doubt about it, the real backbone of the St. Frank's Junior XI. is in

the Remove," said Capper. "You Remove fellows are the brains of the team. The chaps out of the Fourth don't amount to much."

"Oh, I don't know," said Handforth again. "The Fourth has come on a lot lately, you know. I daresay you've heard?"

"We've heard a good bit," admitted Capper, pleased at his adroitness in bringing the discussion round to this subject. "I understand that the Remove and the Fourth are keen rivals again? Not only in sport, but in japes and everything else?"

"Yes, rather," replied Handforth. "Buster Boots, the captain of the Fourth, is making things hum."

"I hear that you fellows owe the Fourth-Formers a jape?" asked Capper.

"Yes, the bounders," nodded Handforth, as he bit into a doughnut. "They dished us properly last week."

"You ought to get your own back, then," said Capper. "By gad! I'll tell you what! I can give you a tip, if you like. A first-class jape—one that was played at the Grammar School some weeks ago. No need to tell anybody I told you, of course—you can use it as your own. It's a scream."

Handforth looked doubtful.

"Well, I mean, we generally get our own japes up," he said. "Thanks all the same."

"Yes, but wait," said Capper. "Don't be in such a giddy hurry. This jape will be entirely new to St. Frank's—and I can assure you it's something special." He bent nearer. "Three chaps could work it entirely on their own," he went on confidentially. "You're not above breaking bounds after lights out, are you?"

Handforth shook his head.

"We don't play those silly games here," he replied, with an inward start—wondering if Church and McClure had been right in their warning.

"Dash it, it's nothing," urged Capper. "I'm only suggesting that you and your two chums should creep into the Modern House after lights out."

"Oh! That's different," said Handforth, his confidence restored. "We don't call that breaking bounds, actually. I thought you meant something else."

"This particular jape must be after lights out, or not at all," said Capper, grinning. "Listen. All you have to do is to creep into the Fourth dormitory."

"It isn't one dormitory at St. Frank's," said Handforth. "This is a real school. We have separate bed-rooms—two or three fellows in each."

"Well, that doesn't make any difference," replied Capper. "You can visit two or three bed-rooms in turn. All you have to do is partially to cut through the stitchings of the Fourth-Formers' suits."

"Do what?" asked Handforth, staring.

"That's why the job must be done after lights-out—while the chaps are asleep, and

while their suits are available," said Capper, grinning. "See?"

"I'm jiggered if I can see," said Handforth. "What the dickens is the good of mutilating their suits? I don't think much of your jape, Capper! It seems a dirty sort of trick——"

"But you don't understand," interrupted Capper earnestly. "I tell you, it's a scream. The Grammar School howled over it when some of our chaps worked it. You see, the victims will guess nothing in the morning when they put their suits on; and under normal conditions, the stitchings will still hold."

"And what then?"

"Well, as soon as Boots and his pals come down, you'll be waiting in the 'Triangle,'" said Capper. "You can be doing anything boisterous—having a kick-about with a football, for example. All you've got to do is to induce them into it—and then watch the results! If you don't howl yourselves hoarse, I shall be surprised!"

"By George!" said Handforth, his eyes gleaming. "You—you mean——"

"Their clothes will begin to fall off," chuckled Capper. "First, their jackets will burst at the seams, and then their waistcoats, and perhaps their bags! I tell you, it's worth quids to see them with their clobber falling away, bit by bit! You needn't tell the other Remove chaps, and they'll be as surprised as the victims themselves. And what a jape on the Fourth! You'll score a terrific triumph, Handy."

"It doesn't seem so bad," admitted Handforth. "In fact, it's jolly good."

"Well, you can have the benefit of the wheeze, if you like," said Capper generously. "We can't work it at the Grammar School again, because it's been done. Don't say I told you, of course."

"Good egg!" grinned Handforth. "Thanks, Capper! I'll try it out—to-night. It certainly ought to be funny."

George Capper glanced at his pals. Edward Oswald Handforth had "caught on."

CHAPTER 4.

Capper's Cunning!

EXACTLY ten minutes later, George Capper seized an opportunity to have a word in private with John Busterfield Boots, the burly, red-headed skipper of the Fourth.

Capper was such a clever fellow in the art of making himself agreeable that he soon had Boots smiling with friendliness. Capper had an excellent chance of becoming an expert confidence man when he grew up. He had all the qualifications. His charm of manner and his apparent sincerity were both disarming.

"Nothing to do with me, of course, but I thought I'd give you the tip," he said confidentially. "You're the skipper of the Fourth here, aren't you?"

"Yes," admitted Boots.

"Perhaps I'm wrong in saying anything at all," said Capper rather hesitantly, "but when I was in the Ancient House just now I couldn't help hearing some whispers that certain Removites are planning a jape on you for to-night."

"My only sainted aunt!" ejaculated Boots. "So you heard that, did you? Who are the chaps?"

"I say, you don't expect me to tell you, do you?" asked Capper. "Dash it, I'm not going to mention any names. That wouldn't be playing the game."

"Perhaps you're right," said Boots. "But there's a jape being planned, is there? Know what it is?"

"Haven't the faintest idea," replied Capper glibly. "Perhaps I'm all wrong—there may be nothing in it at all. But in case you are raided, I might be able to give you a tip."

"What do you mean—a tip?"

"Something like this happened over at the Grammar School a week or two ago," said Capper smoothly. "We kept a watch out for the raiders, and as soon as they started their games we collared them. It's rather a difficult job to deal with would-be japers successfully after lights-out—too much risk of things being heard—so we locked them in a cupboard until two o'clock in the morning. By gad! That cooled them down! They couldn't hammer to get out because they were afraid of attracting attention."

"It's a good stunt—thanks for the tip, Capper," said Boots. "We'll be on our guard to-night; and if there are any raiders, we'll try your dodge. There's a nice handy cupboard in our corridor, and we'll lock 'em in it until two a.m."

Capper nodded with satisfaction. A gleam of vindictive triumph showed in his eyes, unnoticed by Boots. A few minutes later Capper & Co. took their departure.

The second move in Capper's game of revenge against Handforth had been made—successfully!

THE Grammarian footballers and their supporters left St. Frank's soon afterwards. Capper & Co. found places in the big motor-coach with the team.

Capper said nothing to his pals until they reached their own school. Ford and Vine were completely bewildered by Capper's recent activities. They could not make head or tail of his cunningly devised plans.

"Well, my sons, the stage is all set," said Capper, at last, when they were in the privacy of their own study at the Grammar School. "I rather think I've excelled myself."

"You've been acting the giddy ox, if you ask me," said Fortescue Ford, with a sniff. "What was the idea of making us spook that ugly brute, Handforth, that we were pally with him?"

"And why spin him that yarn about raiding the Modern House and the Fourth-Formers?" demanded Clarence Vine. "You know dashed well that we've never had a jape like that here."

Capper dropped into a chair and stretched himself out luxuriously.

"Your brains, my lads, are feeble," he said coolly. "Can't you see that I've arranged everything so that it will work up to a certain point? You'll be telling me, next, that we've never locked any of our chaps in a cupboard."

"We haven't, either."

"Does that matter?" said Capper. "Boots distinctly said that if any Remove chaps raid the Modern House, he'll lock them in a cupboard until two a.m. And that's the keynote of the whole situation."

"What situation?" asked Vine, staring.

"The situation I'm going to wangle."

"I didn't even know you were going to wangle a situation," said Ford gruffly. "In

fact, I don't know what the dickens you're talking about. It's all double Dutch!"

A vindictive look came into Capper's eyes. "I'll soon show you whether it's double Dutch or not," he said, almost fiercely. "Are we going to let that fool, Handforth, get away with what he did to us this afternoon? Look at my nose! Look at your eye, Ford—and your mouth, Vine!"

"I'm glad you've remembered," said Vine sourly. "You were so pally with Handforth that I thought——"

"Pally with him be hanged!" snapped Capper. "I mean to get my revenge on him—and it's going to be a good one, too! I'll teach him to punch me on the nose! By gad! If he escapes from this mix-up without being sacked from the school, he'll be lucky!"

Ford and Vine began to look alarmed.

"I say, you know, you can't do anything like that!" protested Ford. "The chap deserves something pretty hot, but getting him the sack is too steep."

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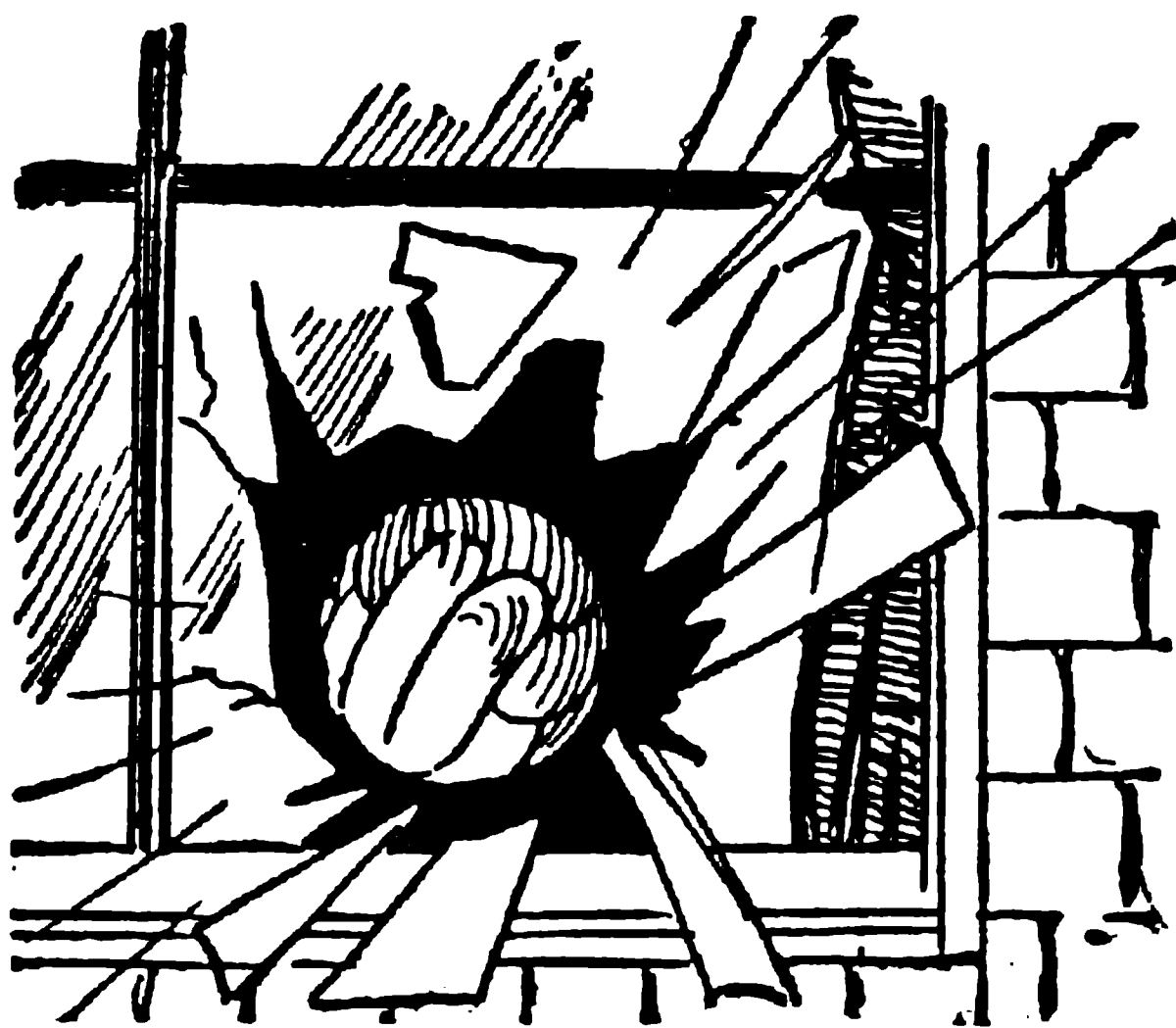
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"If I can get him sacked, without suffering myself, I'll cheerfully see him go," retorted Capper savagely. "Look here! I've thought it all out. We'll not only work this dodge on that St. Frank's ape, but we can do ourselves a good turn at the same time."

"You're a bit too tricky for us, Capper," said Clarence Vine uneasily. "You haven't been at the Grammar School long or you'd know that it's a dangerous business to try any dodges on those St. Frank's chaps. I tell you, they're hot."

"Don't worry—there's not a chance in a thousand that we shall get into any trouble," replied Capper coolly. "Have you forgotten these?"

He pulled three objects from his pocket—the three brand-new blue-and-red Ancient House caps.

"That's another thing," said Fortescue Ford, staring. "What was the idea of boning those caps, Capper. They're just about as useful to us as a tennis-shirt is at the North Pole!"

"That's just where you're wrong, my sons," replied Capper slowly. "You haven't forgotten, by any chance, that there's going to be a big fancy dress dance and carnival at the Waterfront Pavilion in Caistowe this evening?"

"Yes; but——"

"It continues until 1 a.m.—and it's a ripping affair," said Capper. "We even went so far as to get our costumes—to order them last week. They're here—the Three Musketeers, all complete!"

"But you're dotty!" expostulated Fortescue Ford. "You know jolly well that we can't use those costumes. Have you forgotten what happened at the half-crown hop three nights ago?"

"Hang the half-crown hop!" sneered Capper. "This carnival is a seven-and-six touch—a real slap-up posh affair."

"What difference does it make?" said Vine. "The very last time we were there old Pinder, the manager, buttonholed us, and asked us what we were doing there. We had to admit that we were breaking bounds."

"Well?"

"You know jolly well that he barred us from the place in future," said Vine. "He said he wasn't going to take any risks with our Head. He wasn't having any schoolboys in there who were playing truant—as he called it."

George Capper nodded.

"Exactly," he agreed. "Pinder's a fool. At the time, we were a bit wild about it—especially as we had already bought our seven-and-six tickets. We thought we'd have to waste 'em. But we're not going to. We shall be at that carnival to-night, my sons, and we shall thoroughly enjoy ourselves."

"But I don't understand——"

"My dear Clarence, you never do understand," interrupted Capper, getting briskly to his feet. "But I haven't forgotten what

that fool, Pinder, said to us. He insulted us right and left. Well, I'm going to kill two birds with one stone. I'm going to get even with Handforth, and even with Pinder, both at the same time. And, what's more, we'll have a fine old spree, free of all risk, as a bit of make-weight. How's that for a brilliant wheeze?"

His chums stared fascinatedly.

"My word, you are a caution, Capper!" said Ford breathlessly. "Do you really think it can be done—safely?"

"As easy as falling off a form," laughed Capper. "You hopeless asses, don't you see that we shall be O.K.? It's a masked carnival, and in our Three Musketeers costumes nobody will recognise us. Pinder won't, certainly."

"By gad!"

"It's the usual thing, of course, to unmask at a certain time, but it's not a law," said Capper. "We can keep our masks on all the time if we want to—and we shall want to. In fact, we shall have to. But that's nothing. You leave it to me!"

CHAPTER 5.

Handforth Trips Up!

"CUT the stitches?" asked Church wonderingly.

"Not all of them, of course," murmured Handforth. "Only a few here and there. I've thought it all out, my sons, and it's a great wheeze. You take my word for it."

Handforth & Co., in their dormitory, were not asleep. It was after lights out, and Church and McClure had been rather astonished to find that Handforth was eager and alert. Usually, he spent such a strenuous day that he was only too ready to get into bed and fall asleep.

During the evening, they had felt reassured. Handforth had not referred to Capper again, and it seemed to his chums that the whole affair was over.

Handforth was explaining the proposed jape on the Fourth—conveniently forgetting to mention that the idea had been presented to him by George Capper. He was taking Capper at his word. He was trotting out the wheeze as his own.

"It might work—although it's risky," said Church dubiously, after a while. "It'll certainly be funny, in the morning, to see those Fourth-Formers kicking a footer about, and bursting at the seams everywhere."

"It'll be a scream!" said Handforth. "And think of the laugh we shall have over them—particularly when they know that it's our jape."

"That's all very well, Handy, but what about doing the job?" asked McClure. "It's not going to be half as easy as you make out."

"What is there difficult in it?" asked Handforth. "We've only got to supply ourselves with some sharp scissors or pocket-knives——"

"Cutting the stitchings will be simple enough—but I didn't mean that," said Mac. "How about stealing into their dormitories? And what about light? We can't cut the stitches without lights—we should make an awful hash of it. And if we have any lights, we shall wake the chaps up. How are you going to get over those difficulties?"

"We'll manage all right," scoffed Handforth, with his usual optimism. "The main thing is to get over there. We'll give 'em until about eleven o'clock, and they'll be fast asleep by then. We can take some electric torches with us, and we can nip out into the corridor with the clothes as soon as we've bagged them. We'll get the whole job over in half an hour."

"And supposing they collar us?" asked Church practically. "Then the jape will go the wrong way, won't it?"

Handforth sighed with exasperation.

"You're a couple of pains in the neck, I must say!" he said tartly. "Always making mountains out of molehills. Blow you! If you don't want to help, you needn't! I'm dashed if I won't work the jape on my own! You can go and eat coke, both of you!"

But when eleven o'clock came, Church and McClure slipped into their clothes at the same time as Handforth. They weren't going to let him venture forth alone! The only chance of the jape succeeding would have vanished if Handy had gone by himself. There was just a chance that his chums might be able to keep him in check.

The house was silent as they crept downstairs. In Study D, they paused to arm themselves with electric torches, and implements with which to cut the stitches. Then, like shadows, they slipped out of the window, and crept across West Square.

One or two windows were still lighted; for not all the masters were in bed yet. However, there was very little chance of the raiders being spotted, for the night was dark and a strong wind was blowing. Any little sounds they might make would be very effectually drowned.

"Well, what now?" whispered Mac as they paused in the blackness of East Arch. "How are we going to get into the Modern House? I suppose you've thought of that, Handy?"

"Yes, rather!"

"You have?"

"What do you take me for?" demanded Handforth. "When I plan a jape, I plan it thoroughly."

He crept into East Square, and led the way towards Study No. 10—which, as Church and McClure knew, was an empty study, a spare one. To their surprise, when Handforth pressed on the window, it gently opened.

"I came over here just before bed-time," whispered Handforth triumphantly. "It didn't take me long to nip in here and loosen the window-catch, leaving it so that it looked fastened. The chief thing in a jape—or in any piece of strategy—is careful preparation."

"Go up one, Handy," grinned Church. "We didn't give you credit for such forethought."

Silently they slipped into the empty study. Church gently closed the window. They got out into the passage, crept along, and mounted the stairs. Everything was just as quiet here as in the Ancient House. Having reached the landing, Handforth led the way into the Fourth Form dormitory passage. Suddenly he tripped.

"What's that?" he gasped, drawing back.

"Sounded like a dust-bin lid falling," murmured Church. "It's nothing, I suppose—only the wind."

"I don't mean that!" breathed Handforth. "Something touched my ankle!"

"What!"

"Like—like a ghostly hand!" panted Handforth. "I've never felt anything so queer— By George! There it is again!"

It was certainly startling. Handforth had moved forward, and again he tripped. Curiously enough, that distant muffled sound which resembled the rattling of a dust-bin lid was repeated.

The three juniors stood there breathing rapidly.

Thud! Thud!

Handforth & Co. were now freshly startled to hear a number of mysterious thudding sounds. They were repeated, each one becoming more and more vague.

"What—what was that noise?" breathed McClure.

"Never mind the noise—I'm going to see what's holding on to my leg," said Handforth tensely. "Oh, my hat! I've never felt anything—"

He had switched on his electric torch as he spoke, and his words trailed away. There was nothing gripping his foot. His ankle was pressing hard against a thin string which was stretched right across the passage, four inches above the floor.

"Well, I'm jiggered!" he muttered. "What's the idea of this?"

"Cave!" hissed Church. "They must have been expecting us! Don't you understand, Handy? Look! That string goes under the door of Boots' dormitory!"

Before Handforth could say anything, five or six dormitory doors opened at once. The concentrated flashes from a number of electric torches gleamed upon the intruders. They were surrounded. Figures advanced upon them from all sides.

"Well, I'm dashed!" said Boots. "Handy & Co.! Then that tip I got was the real goods!"

John Busterfield Boots felt pleased with himself. He had been rather doubtful about that tip of Capper's, and he had seen no reason why he should lose any sleep because of it. So he had fixed up that string to his bed-rail with a few tin cans dangling on the end. Any touch of the string would mean that the cans would rattle, thus awakening him.



The Fourth-Formers waved their fists indignantly at Handforth & Co. "Yah! Sneaks! Send 'em to Coventry!"

Quite an ingenious little idea—simple and effective. Boots had also previously arranged with a number of other fellows that he would thump on the wall if anything happened, and they were to thump in turn.

As a result, Handforth & Co. were trapped, with Fourth-Formers to the right of them, Fourth-Formers to the left of them—in fact, Fourth-Formers all round them.

"You—you rotters!" gasped Handforth indignantly. "How—how did you know we were coming?"

"My poor old Handy, this is distressing," said Boots sweetly. "Caught red-handed, eh? So you pitiful Removites thought that you could jape the Fourth? Well, well! I'm afraid this is going to be a messy sort of business."

"Here, steady!" warned Church. "You can't smash us, Boots! You'll make too much noise!"

Church and McClure were thoroughly disgusted. They assumed—and their past experience of Handforth justified them in the assumption—that Handy had been talking to somebody else about his jape. He never could keep anything to himself. He must have let something slip, and the Fourth-Formers had thus been warned.

So neither Boots nor Handforth, nor any of the other fellows, had any real idea, at this stage of affairs, how George Capper, of

the Bannington Grammar School, was involved in all this business.

"We're going to teach you a lesson, my sons!" went on Boots blandly. "A pity we can't slaughter you—but, as you say, that would be too noisy. And we've got our own skins to think of, as well as yours. Bring 'em along, you chaps!"

Handforth & Co. were grabbed. They had more sense than to resist. The consequences for them, if found in the Modern House, would be serious indeed. A flogging would be their reward.

They were taken to the end of the passage, and Bob Christine obligingly opened the big door of a cupboard. It was a fairly narrow cupboard, with just standing room for three.

"What's the idea?" asked Handforth, mystified.

"Walk into my parlour, said the spider to the fly," murmured Boots. "Cramped quarters, you chaps, but it's the best that we can offer you."

"You—you silly ass!" ejaculated Handforth. "We're not going into this cupboard!"

"That's just your mistake—you are!" replied Boots kindly. "We must punish you somehow, and this is easy. Why should we go without any sleep? Walk in, please! Or, if you don't please, you'll be shoved in!"

"But—but——"

"I'm going to set my alarm clock for two a.m.," continued Boots genially. "I shan't fail to wake—don't worry. About three hours in this cupboard ought to cool you off—or warm you up, as the case may be. And it will give you time to think over the awful, dismal failure of your raid."

Handforth & Co. were startled.

"You can't do this!" said Handforth in alarm. "If you do, we shan't get any sleep until about three o'clock——"

"That's your own fault—for breaking bounds after lights-out," said Bob Christine severely. "Oh, and there's something else! You can hammer on the door if you want to—but I don't think it would be advisable. A prefect might come along."

"He would let you out, of course," added Boots. "There would be that advantage in hammering on the door. But the subsequent interview with Mr. Wilkes might be most painful and harrowing. Good-night, you chaps! See you again at two a.m.!"

Handforth & Co., with feelings too deep for words, were bundled into the cupboard, and the door was closed. They heard the key locked upon them.

As a jape, Handforth's wheeze was not exactly successful; but, as a part of George Capper's cunning plot, it was a complete success.

CHAPTER 6.

The Impostors!

THE Fancy Dress Carnival Dance at the Waterfront Pavilion, Caistowe, was in full swing.

The pavilion was thronged, and the masked dancers, all in fancy costume, were picturesque in the extreme as they floated round the great hall to the accompaniment of the very excellent dance band. The place was gay with carnival lamps, and coloured spotlights were constantly playing upon the gay throng.

Capper & Co. were having a ripping time. Dressed as the Three Musketeers, their own identities were effectually hidden. Their masks were rather larger than the normal carnival mask. It was difficult to judge their real age, and Capper and Ford and Vine were in no danger of being recognised and ejected by the management.

There were any amount of girls present, and Capper & Co., who could dance quite well, were never at a loss for partners. A fox-trot was on the go now, and Capper, dancing with a dainty little pierrette, was becoming confidential.

"So you think the costume is pretty good?" he asked genially.

"It's splendid!" replied his partner. "You're one of the Three Musketeers, aren't you? I've seen the other two."

"I'm Porthos," replied Capper easily. "In other words, Handforth. That's my real name, you know—Handforth. I'm a St. Frank's chap."

"Oh! I thought you were older."

"I'm old enough to enjoy myself," grinned Capper. "We St. Frank's chaps, you know, often get out like this. Aramis and Athos are my two pals—Church and McClure. We're generally about together."

"I should think it's frightfully risky for you to come here like this," said the girl. "I've always understood that you St. Frank's boys were compelled to be indoors fairly early in the evening. You're breaking bounds, aren't you?"

"Who cares?" laughed Capper. "We're safe enough—and if we don't take a chance now and again, we never see life."

He was telling exactly the same confidential yarn to other partners. Fortescue Ford and Clarence Vine were carrying on the good work. They were spreading it, everywhere, that their names were Handforth and Church and McClure of St. Frank's. Just another little step in George Capper's ingenious plot.

There was not only the fun of using these false identities, but the fun of the carnival itself. Capper & Co. were in high glee. Forbidden fruit, it is said, is always the sweetest. The three Grammarians had been forbidden this carnival—yet they were here, and they had the satisfaction of knowing that if there were any inquiries afterwards, their own names would never be mentioned. They were as safe as a rock.

But the real business of the evening was yet to come!

The carnival ended in a grand display of coloured lights, and with a lively dance in which everybody let themselves go. Capper and Ford and Vine, with the others, went crowding to the cloak-rooms, laughing and jolly.

"Don't forget, now," murmured Capper. "Wait until you get the signal from me—and then get busy."

They secured their overcoats, donned them; then they pulled the three St. Frank's caps from their pockets and placed them on their heads. The caps stood out prominently, more particularly as the three boys were still masked.

"Better buck up!" sang out Capper loudly. "My hat! We shan't get back to St. Frank's until the morning!"

"Well, mind what you're doing, Handy," said Ford. "Don't push me!"

"I'll push you as much as I like!" roared Capper.

He pushed as he spoke, and there was a bit of a commotion. They were in the big lobby of the pavilion, which was thronged with people. There were some smiles, for it was thought that this little schoolboy argument was of no consequence.

But a moment later Capper & Co. were apparently mixed up in a desperate fight. In the course of it, Capper took care to shove violently against one or two people, and nearly to knock them over. Then Ford and Vine dashed for the exit, and Capper let out a bellow.

"Steady on, you boys!" exclaimed one man sternly. "Can't you behave yourselves?"

"Young hooligans!" cried a lady.

Capper pulled something from his pocket as his companions were disappearing—a half brick. He flung it with all his strength, and it struck an enormous ornamental mirror on the side of the lobby wall. The mirror shattered to fragments with a devastating crash. Then Capper bolted.

The whole incident had happened within a few hectic seconds, and Capper was so slippery that nobody had the chance of stopping him. His vindictive spirit was satisfied. Mr. Pinder, the pavilion manager, was paid out for having refused Capper & Co. admission. Furthermore, Handforth & Co. were now nicely in the soup!

There was a tremendous commotion as Capper fled. Shrieks arose from many of the ladies, shouts went up from the men. Outside, Capper ran like a hare. He came up with Ford and Vine in a side street, just beyond the big building. Ford and Vine were mounted on bicycles, and were holding Capper's machine handy.

Capper leapt on as he ran, and a second later the three of them were off. The hue and cry in the rear was becoming tumultuous.

"O.K.!" gasped Capper. "It went off a treat!"

He swept into an alley, pedalling hard. Then round into another quiet side street, down another alley, twisting and turning.

Before entering the Pavilion, Capper & Co. had thoroughly explored these alleys, and they knew exactly where to go. It was a cunning plan, for if people in motor-cars attempted to follow, they were baffled. For no car could drive down these narrow alleys.

As a consequence, Capper & Co. were on the Bannington road, well clear of all pursuit, within five minutes. There wasn't a chance in a thousand that they would be overtaken. In any case, the pursuit would unquestionably take the road to Bellton—which led to St. Frank's. Thus the Grammarians would escape with ease.

They did.

They reached the Grammar School by a roundabout route, not venturing to cycle through Bannington itself. They hid their bicycles, crept through a window they had left unlatched, and they were soon in their study, undressing by the screened light of an electric torch.

"We'll bung these costumes in the cupboard for now," whispered Capper. "We've got our pyjamas handy; it'll only take us a tick to creep upstairs into the dormitory. My sons, we've had a fine old time to-night!"

"You took an awful risk with that half brick, Capper," said Ford nervously.

"Rot! I was outside within a second," grinned Capper. "What a lark! We've done old Pinder in the eye—and those St. Frank's bounders will cop out for it!"

But Capper had not finished yet. There was the final touch; the final touch which was to be the vital part of the whole elaborate scheme.

Having donned their pyjamas, slippers and dressing-gowns, the three Grammarians slipped along to the empty prefects' room. Here Capper went to the telephone. The time, he noted, was just 1.35.

"Bannington 7-3," he said, in a gruff, disguised voice, when the exchange answered. "Ring hard, please!"

Capper was a very thorough youth. While at St. Frank's, he had ascertained that Bannington 73 was Mr. Alington Wilkes' personal telephone number—and Mr. Wilkes had an extension in his bed-room.

"Hallo!" came a sleepy voice, after a long pause. "Yes? Who is it?"

"Am I speaking to St. Frank's?" demanded Capper, in a tone thick with fury. "I want St. Frank's!"

"This is St. Frank's," came the reply. "You are speaking to Mr. Wilkes, the House-master of the Ancient House——"

"Good—good!" fumed Capper. "The very man! Are you aware, sir, that three of your boys are breaking bounds—that they have attended a carnival dance at the Water-front Pavilion, in Caistowe?"

"I think you must be mistaken, sir," came Mr. Wilkes' reply. "I do not think that any of my boys——"

"I am not mistaken!" stormed Capper. "I am a respectable, responsible Caistowe townsman. These boys of yours have been acting like young hooligans, and goodness knows what further damage they have done——" He deliberately put his finger on the receiver hook, cutting himself off from Mr. Wilkes. Then he released it. "Hallo! Hallo!" he went on impatiently. "Are they cutting us off? I warn you, Mr. Wilkes——"

This time, he hung the receiver up completely—leaving Mr. Wilkes with the impression that the conversation had been accidentally interrupted. This had the advantage of leaving Mr. Wilkes in ignorance as to the identity of the caller.

"Well, that's that!" murmured George Capper, yawning. "To bed, my sons! I think we can leave the rest to work itself out without our kindly assistance."

TWO a.m.

The alarm clock under Buster Boots' pillow went off suddenly, sending a drumming buzz into Boots' ear. It was a good idea, putting the clock under his pillow, for the sound was muffled and only Boots himself could hear it.

He sat up, blinking, and then remembered. Bray and Denny, who shared the dormitory with him, were sound asleep, and Boots saw no reason to awaken them. He got out of bed, slipped on his dressing-gown and crept out.

Yawning, he put the key in the cupboard door and unlocked it. It seemed to Boots, somehow, that this joke wasn't particularly funny now. And when he looked at Hand-

forth & Co. he was almost sorry for them. The three Remove japers looked startled and dazed and bewildered in the flash of Boots' electric torch.

"Time to go to bed, my poor chumps," said Boots kindly. "I hope you're feeling duly sorry for yourselves."

Handforth & Co. looked it. They staggered out of the cupboard, cramped and wrathful. More than once, during that imprisonment, Handforth had vowed that he would burst the door down; but he had been restrained by Church and McClure. They urged him to realise that they were whacked—so why not take their medicine gamely? No sense in making a hullabaloo in the middle of the night, and involving Boots & Co. in the consequent inquiry.

"You—you rotter!" panted Handforth thickly. "You wait! The Remove will pay you back for this!"

"Haven't you learned, by this time, that it's a risky business to try japes on the Fourth?" asked Boots. "Cut off, you asses! And don't make a noise—or you'll be heard by somebody."

Handforth breathed fire, and Buster Boots ceased to feel sorry for him. After all, this kind of treatment was the very best thing for an ass like Handy. How the Fourth would laugh to-morrow! How the Fourth would crow at the Remove's expense!

Handforth & Co. crept downstairs silently, and made their way out into the Triangle. They were tired, stiff; they badly wanted to get to sleep. They had dozed a bit in that cupboard, but sleeping whilst leaning against the wall and standing up was far from comfortable. Their necks were cricked, and they were altogether depressed.

One by one, they got through the window of Study D. Then they stole down the passage, arrived in the lobby, and commenced mounting the stairs.

Click!

The lobby became flooded with electric light, and Handforth & Co. jumped, gasping. Standing at the top of the stairs, attired in a faded dressing-gown, was the figure of Mr. Alington Wilkes!

"Oh, my only sainted aunt!" breathed Handforth, aghast.

He and his chums stood at the bottom of the stairs, their hearts thudding wildly. Mr. Wilkes descended. As he did so he gave the three boys a quick, close scrutiny. Their appearance was significant. They looked considerably dishevelled, and very tired.

"The time," said Mr. Wilkes quietly, "is just six minutes past two. What have you boys to say for yourselves? How is it that I find you creeping into your House in the small hours of the morning? I rather think, don't you, that an explanation is necessary?"

"I—I— We—we—"

Handforth paused, incoherent.

"You are all fully dressed—you have been out—breaking bounds," said Mr. Wilkes, pained. "Come, come, boys. If you have a reasonable explanation I will listen to it."

Handforth looked at Church and McClure, and Church and McClure looked at Handforth. It was a case of three minds with but a single thought. They could not possibly sneak on Boots & Co.! They could not breathe a word of the real truth; for, if they did so, the Fourth-Formers would be involved and punished. Besides, they—Handforth & Co.—had started this jape, and it was up to them to take their medicine.

"Well?" asked Mr. Wilkes ominously. "I am waiting."

"We—we only just—I mean, we went out, sir," said Handforth stubbornly. "We've just got back!"

"Come, Handforth, that won't do," said Mr. Wilkes, his voice becoming sharp. "I know very well that you have been out, and that you have just come back. But where have you been, and what have you been doing?"

He was more pained than he could express. He had not believed that telephone message—he had thought it to be an ill-humoured practical joke, just to get him out of bed. A quiet round of the dormitories had revealed the startling fact that Handforth and Church and McClure were missing.

And now, only a few minutes after Mr. Wilkes had completed his search, the three boys had returned—and they would give no explanation!

"I'm sorry, sir," said Handforth stubbornly. "We've nothing to say."

"And you two boys?" asked Mr. Wilkes. "You will not say where you have been?"

"No, sir," said Church and McClure, in one voice.

"Very well! I cannot force you to speak, of course," said Mr. Wilkes regretfully. "But this is a very serious offence, and you must realise that I cannot let it end here. You will go to bed at once, and I will see you again in the morning."

"Yes, sir," said the culprits miserably.

Mr. Wilkes escorted them to bed, his face expressive of his sorrow. He had always regarded these three boys as honourable, decent fellows. It was almost unbelievable that they could break bounds, and go to a fancy-dress carnival and make trouble there. But here they were, just returned! How could Mr. Wilkes doubt the authenticity of that telephone message?

Handforth & Co. went to sleep unhappily—but they little dreamed of the actual storm which was brewing!

CHAPTER 7.

On the Carpet!

MR. WILKES looked at Mr. Pinder expectantly. It was quite early in the morning, and Mr. Pinder had practically routed the Housemaster out of bed, demanding an immediate interview. Mr. Wilkes, coming downstairs, found the visitor waiting, pacing impatiently up and down the study.

"You are Mr. Wilkes, the Housemaster of this House, sir?" demanded Mr. Pinder.

"I am."

"Well, my name is Pinder, and I am the manager of the Waterfront Pavilion, in Caistowe," said the visitor. "I am here to claim fifty pounds damages for a big mirror which was deliberately broken by three of your boys——"

"Not so fast, Mr. Pinder," expostulated Old Wilkey. "Is it really necessary to shout at me?"

"A man who is furious, Mr. Wilkes, cannot be blamed for shouting!" roared Mr.

"H'm! I will admit, Mr. Pinder, that your charge is a serious one," said Mr. Wilkes. "Can you identify these boys? You have told me that they were masked——"

"What difference does that make?" snorted Mr. Pinder. "The young fools told dozens of people who they really were. I can give you their names—Handforth and Church and McClure. In addition, they went away wearing their own school caps—red-and-blue caps."

The evidence seemed absolutely complete. and Mr. Wilkes compressed his lips and nodded.

"The guilt of these boys seems unquestionable," he said quietly. "You may take it from me, Mr. Pinder, that I shall inquire very deeply into the matter, and report it to the headmaster. We cannot have this sort of conduct committed by our boys. As for the damages, they will be settled."

Mr. Pinder, greatly mollified, apologised for his excitement and violence.

"Do you intend to take any action now, sir?" he asked.

"At once," replied Mr. Wilkes. "I will communicate with you again, Mr. Pinder. Be assured that this unfortunate matter will be sifted to the very bottom."

Mr. Pinder took his departure in a relieved frame of mind. And when Handforth & Co.

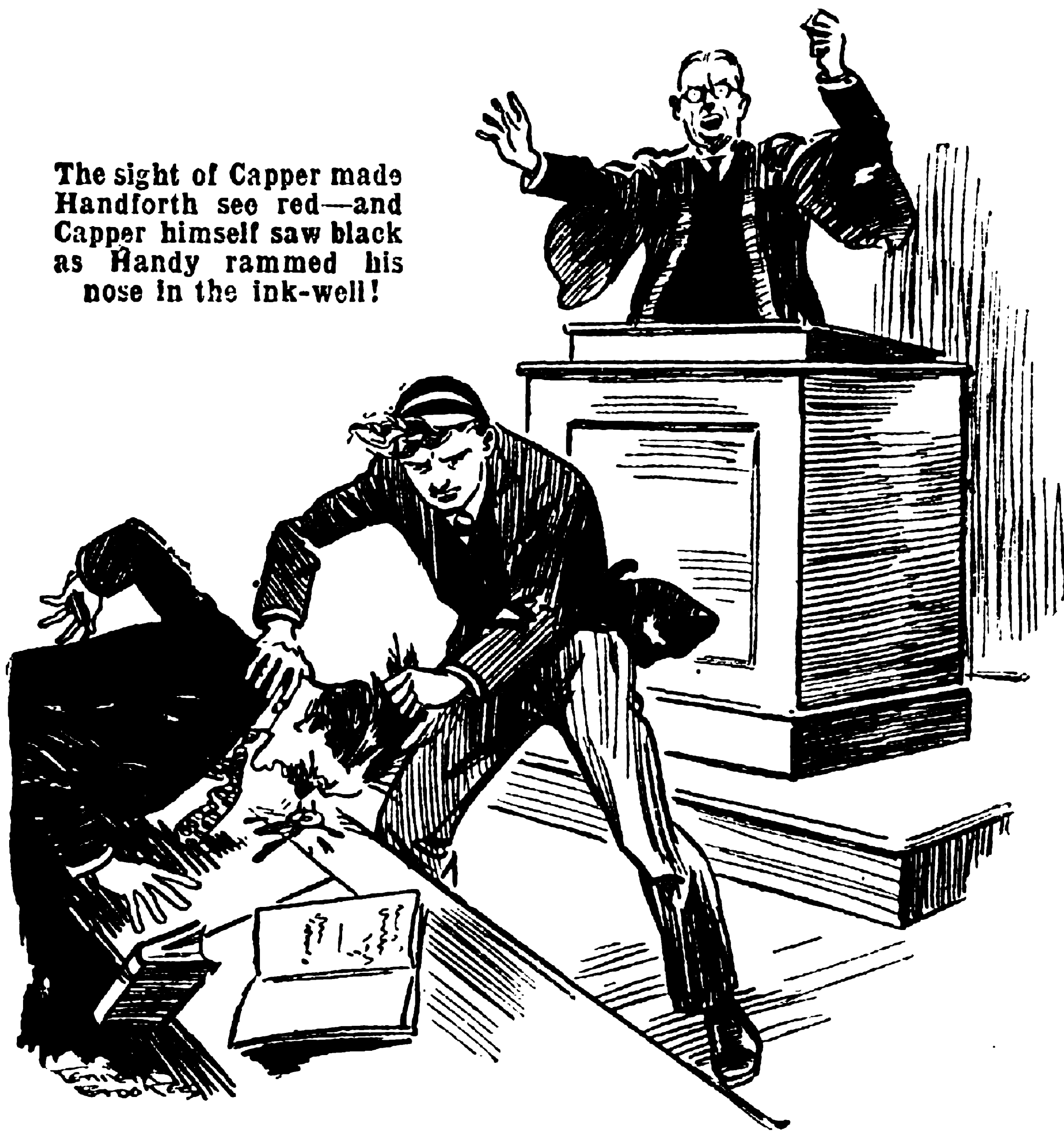
came downstairs shortly afterwards, a prefect buttonholed them and marshalled them into Mr. Wilkes' study. They did not protest—they had been expecting it.

"Well, boys, I want you to tell me, in your own words, exactly what you did last night," said Mr. Wilkes gently.

"We can't say anything, sir," growled Handforth, with defiance. "We don't care how much you question us—we're not going to say a word."

"That will be unfortunate—for you," said Mr. Wilkes, his usually kindly manner conspicuous by its absence. "Come, Handforth, this matter is altogether too serious for any beating about the bush. I'm ashamed of you three boys. Your behaviour last night was disgraceful!"

The sight of Capper made Handforth see red—and Capper himself saw black as Handy rammed his nose in the ink-well!



Pinder, glaring. "Those three boys of yours are young hooligans! Do you hear me?"

"I should imagine that the whole House is hearing you."

"They came to the carnival last night—a select, thoroughly high-class dance," fumed Mr. Pinder. "I would like you to know, sir, that no schoolboys are permitted to enter my establishment; but these boys took advantage of their fancy costumes——"

And Mr. Pinder proceeded to relate the details, growing more and more angry as he did so.

"The smashing of that mirror was malicious—deliberate," he ended up. "It is a mercy that nobody was cut by flying glass. I am not covered by insurance, since the damage was caused deliberately."

"What do you mean, sir?" asked Handforth, faintly surprised by the Housemaster's anger.

"I can hardly believe, Handforth, that you were capable of deliberately throwing a half-brick at an expensive mirror—"

"Throw a half-brick at a mirror, sir!" gasped Handforth. "But—but you've got it all wrong, sir!"

"Are you denying that you went to the Waterfront Pavilion, in Caistowe, last night?"

Handforth & Co. looked so amazed that Old Wilkey eyed them narrowly—with rising hopes.

"We—we don't know what you're talking about, sir!" burst out McClure. "We didn't even leave St. Frank's last night! We never went to Caistowe!"

"Of course not, sir!" echoed Handforth and Church.

"You deny it, then—absolutely?" asked Mr. Wilkes. "You deny attending this fancy dress carnival attired as the Three Musketeers? You deny smashing a valuable mirror? That you gave your names to various people?"

"Why, it's—it's ridiculous, sir!" exclaimed Handforth excitedly.

"In that case, perhaps you will tell me exactly what you were doing?" said Mr. Wilkes gently.

"We—we can't do that, sir," faltered Handforth.

"That's a pity, because your very silence is tantamount to a confession," said the Housemaster. "You had better realise, my boys, that I shall have no alternative but to report this entire matter to the headmaster, and that will mean expulsion beyond all question."

Handforth, his face flushed with excitement and alarm, turned to his chums.

"We've got to explain!" he panted. "Dash it, Boots would want us to! This is altogether too serious for us to keep quiet!"

"That'll be sneaking——" began Church uneasily.

"Sneaking be blowed!" shouted Handforth. "Boots wouldn't stand by and see us sacked, you ass! He'd be the first to tell the truth!" He turned to Mr. Wilkes. "Look here, sir, we didn't leave the school premises last night. We only went to the Modern House to play a jape on the Fourth."

"Oh, I see!" said Mr. Wilkes. "Is there anybody who can corroborate this?"

"Why, half the Fourth, sir!" replied Handforth quickly. "Boots and a lot of other Fourth-Formers grabbed us as soon as we entered, and they locked us in a cupboard until two o'clock in the morning as a sort of punishment. How could we have been at Caistowe, sir, when we were locked in a Modern House cupboard from eleven o'clock till two o'clock?"

Mr. Wilkes thought rapidly.

"Wait here, my boys," he said, rising to his feet. "Wait here until I come back.

You promise me that you will not leave this room or communicate with anybody?"

"Yes, of course, sir!" said Handforth & Co. in one voice.

Mr. Wilkes went. He was intensely relieved. Perhaps, after all, there was some preposterous mistake. Handforth & Co.'s denials had the ring of truth in them.

Mr. Wilkes believed in striking while the iron was hot. He had purposely had Handforth & Co. brought to his study the very instant they came down. They had had no time to discuss things with any of the other boys. Now he meant to question Boots & Co. before they could hear any rumours. If Handforth's story was the truth, Mr. Wilkes would soon know. For it was impossible that they could have been in collusion with Handforth and his chums.

In the Modern House, Mr. Wilkes went straight to Study No. 6. He was fortunate in finding John Busterfield Boots, Percy Bray and Walter Denny at home. Bob Christine and Roddy Yorke and Charley Talmadge were there, too; and Mr. Wilkes found them all chuckling hugely. As a matter of fact, they had been discussing the events of the night.

"I am sorry to butt in like this, boys, but the matter is rather important," said Mr. Wilkes apologetically. "I want to have a word with you, Boots, if I may."

"With pleasure, sir," said Boots promptly.

"We'll be clearing out," murmured Bob Christine.

"No, don't go," said Mr. Wilkes. "You may be able to help me, too. Do you know if any of my boys came over to this House to perpetrate a—er—jape last night?"

The Fourth-Formers looked at one another blankly; and Mr. Wilkes, watching them, could not quite determine whether their blankness was due to consternation or mystification.

"Ancient House fellows, sir—over here for a jape—last night?" said Boots, puzzled.

"Handforth and Church and McClure, to be exact," said Mr. Wilkes.

"Did they come over here, sir?"

"I am asking you, Boots."

"How should I know, sir?" replied Boots promptly. "I went to bed at the usual hour. Nobody from the Ancient House played a jape on us last night, sir," he added truthfully.

"That's right, sir!" chorused the others, catching on to the wheeze.

"Then you can tell me definitely that Handforth and Church and McClure did not come here at all last night?"

"How can we tell you that definitely, sir?" asked Boots, his mind working rapidly. "I mean, they might have come, mightn't they?"

"I'm afraid you're quibbling, Boots," said Mr. Wilkes sternly. "Did you see Handforth and Church and McClure last night in this House?"

Boots and the others were silent.

"I particularly want you to tell me, because a very serious charge is hanging over these boys," said Mr. Wilkes. "They claim that they were over in your House—that, in fact, you locked them in a cupboard until two a.m. It is very important that I should know the absolute truth of this."

Boots and the other Fourth-Formers again exchanged glances—this time, indignant, angry glances. So Handforth & Co. had sneaked! It was such a shock that the Fourth-Formers were bewildered. They had thought Handforth was the very last fellow in the school to sneak.

"Well?" asked Mr. Wilkes, after a pause.

"You say there's a serious charge against them, sir?" asked Bob Christine. "But it's not very serious getting into another House to play a jape, is it?"

"That is not the charge, Christine—that is Handforth's defence," replied Mr. Wilkes. "It is Handforth's alibi; he declares that he was here, and that you can prove it."

"Oh, well, in that case, you chaps, we'd better be frank," said Boots, looking round. "Yes, sir, Handforth was here last night, and Church and McClure, too."

"Yet, not a minute ago, you said that they weren't here, Boots."

"No, I didn't, sir!" protested Boots. "I was only trying to put you off—I didn't tell any lies. I asked you how we should know whether they were here or not. Don't you remember, you accused me of quibbling?"

"What is your story now?" asked Mr. Wilkes grimly.

"Well, there's no story to speak of," replied Boots, with an awkward air. "Handforth and Church and McClure came over here to work a jape on us at about eleven o'clock. We heard them, and stopped their game. We locked them in a cupboard up in the corridor, and left them there until two a.m. Then we let them out."

"And that is all?"

"That's all, sir," chorused the Fourth-Formers.

"I see," said Mr. Wilkes slowly. "All right, boys, you may hear more of this."

"We shall only get a swishing, shan't we, sir?" asked Bray, with some anxiety. "After all, we didn't do much. We didn't break bounds, or——"

"I may have to report to Mr. Stockdale—I don't know yet," interrupted Mr. Wilkes.

"For the moment we will leave the matter as it stands."

He went out without another word. He was troubled. He regretted now that he had made any mention of the more serious charge which hung over Handforth & Co. For he realised that by so doing he had prompted the Fourth-Formers to tell lies. That was the obvious conclusion.

Until they had heard of that serious charge, they had denied all knowledge of Handforth & Co. being in the Modern House. Then they had altered their tone—they had admitted that Handforth & Co. had been

there. Why? Clearly, they had lied in order to shield the three Removites.

Handforth & Co. had told that story, and without knowing any of the whys or wherefores Boots & Co. had supported it. It was a case of loyalty amongst friends—even at the cost of lying. Thus thought Mr. Wilkes.

He went back to the Ancient House, more gravely troubled than ever.

CHAPTER 8.

Faced With Expulsion!

HANDFORTH and his chums looked at Mr. Wilkes eagerly as the House-master re-entered his study. They had a pretty shrewd idea where he had been.

"I always held a high opinion of you boys," said Mr. Wilkes quietly. "If you have acted foolishly and in an ungentlemanly way, I should like you openly to confess it. No good can come of stubborn denials."

"I—I don't know what you mean, sir," said Handforth huskily.

"You three boys were at Caistowe last night, were you not?"

"No, sir!" they exclaimed, in one voice.

"Do you tell me that honestly, with a full realisation of the gravity of the position?"

"Yes, sir!" replied Handforth, his face glowing. "We were never in Caistowe last night, sir! Ask Boots! Haven't you asked him already, sir? Hasn't Boots told you that we were over in the Modern House last night?"

Mr. Wilkes sat down at his desk, stroking his untidy moustache.

"Yes, Boots has agreed with your own story," he said slowly.

"Well, then, sir——"

"I am reluctant to discredit Boots' corroboration—but I cannot help feeling that those Fourth Form boys lied to me in order to shield you," said Mr. Wilkes bluntly. "Come, come, boys, be frank. If you were not the three who went to Caistowe, who are they? I have made inquiries. Last night I went from dormitory to dormitory, and you were the only three boys out of your beds. And three Ancient House boys were seen in Caistowe—not by one person, but by dozens. You three were out—and I caught you red-handed as you came back. Cannot you see, young 'uns, that I find it almost impossible to accept your explanation—or to accept Boots' statements, either?"

"But Boots wouldn't tell lies like that, sir," protested Handforth.

"Boots is a friend of yours, and he knows that you are in trouble," replied Mr. Wilkes. "I am very sorry, but I cannot possibly accept this very thin explanation you have to offer—and which Boots has corroborated. I want you to tell me the truth."

"We have told you the truth, sir!"

"Then who were the three boys who were seen in Caistowe?"

"How should we know, sir?" asked Handforth helplessly.

Mr. Wilkes pointed to the door.

"You may go now," he said, to the surprise of the three Removites. "Think this over. I will give you just one hour to make up your minds."

They went, rather dazed. They knew only too well that Mr. Wilkes was giving them an hour in which to make a full confession. The pained look on his face told them that he was almost convinced of their guilt. But, before taking any action, he wanted them to confess.

When they got outside, they were immediately surrounded by a noisy angry mob of Fourth-Formers. They had had no opportunity of discussing the awkward predicament.

"You sneaks!" said Bob Christine angrily. "You rotten Remove sneaks!"

"Eh?" gasped Handforth.

"Oh, you needn't deny it," put in Boots.

"Old Wilkes came over and saw us. He told us that you had peached on us."

"Yah! Rotters!"

"They ought to be bumped!"

"Send 'em to Coventry!"

All sorts of shouts were going up, and Handforth & Co. were pushed about roughly. Handforth, after the first flush, was now looking grimly stubborn.

"Wait a bit, you chaps!" he said coldly. "We did sneak—we admit it."

"What!"

"We told Old Wilkey where we were last night—locked in a cupboard in the Modern House," continued Handforth defiantly. "And why? Because we had to! We were accused of going to a fancy-dress carnival at Caistowe, and smashing valuable mirrors, and acting like young hooligans. Do you think we could let that charge stand over us? I tell you, we had to say where we really were. And I know jolly well that you, Boots, would have been the first to go to Mr. Wilkes with the truth."

Buster Boots glared round.

"Wait a bit, you chaps!" he shouted.

"Handy's right! It wasn't sneaking! The only pity is we didn't know this before—or we should have been frank with Old Wilkey at the start. But as it is he doesn't know whether to believe us or not."

"That's the trouble," said Handforth anxiously. "He thinks you were lying to shield us."

When the Fourth-Formers thoroughly understood the position, there were no more shouts of "Sneak." It was realised that Handforth & Co. had been fully justified in telling the truth. But the position did not seem to be in any way improved.

Nipper, the Remove skipper, was looking very grave.

"What's this yarn about Caistowe?" he asked. "What makes Wilkey think that you were in Caistowe last night?"

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"Goodness only knows!" groaned Handforth. "But three chaps, wearing Ancient House caps, were at a fancy-dress carnival—they acted like hooligans—and they smashed a mirror, or something. And they made out that they were us. Who can blame Wilkey for believing the worst? Didn't he collar us at two o'clock, as we sneaked in?"

"I wish to goodness I'd never taken Capper's advice!" grunted Boots.

"Capper's advice?" repeated Handforth, with a violent start.

"Yes."

"You mean that Grammar School cad?" asked Church excitedly.

"Of course," said Boots. "It was Capper who gave me the tip about you chaps coming over into our House—and he advised me to lock you up in a cupboard until two o'clock in the morning. He said that it had been done over in the Grammar School, and that it was a good wheeze."

Handforth fought for breath.

"Wait a minute!" he gasped. "There's—there's something fishy about this! Capper gave you the tip that we were coming?"

"He said that he'd heard something by accident——"

"The liar!" roared Handforth. "The awful, scheming liar! Why, it was Capper who put us up to the jape!"

"What!"

"At least, he told me about it," amended Handforth. "He suggested that Churchy and Mac and I should go over to your House after lights-out, and cut the stitches of your clothes——"

"Here, wait a minute!" put in McClure grimly. "I thought you said that was your idea, Handy?"

"Oh, what does that matter?" said Handforth impatiently. "Can't you see, as plain as daylight, that Capper has been playing some sort of rotten game?"

"Capper advised you to go to the Modern House—and then Capper gave Boots the tip that you were coming," said Nipper. "Of course, it was a plant. But what was his object?"

"Why, it was Capper and those two pals of his who went over to Caistowe and acted like hooligans!" gasped Handforth. "Don't you see? Why, it's becoming as clear as anything!"

"Handy's right," said Boots, with a whistle. "Don't you remember how Handy smashed Capper & Co. yesterday?"

"Yes, and how Handy was fooled by Capper's soft soap," said Church tartly. "Mac and I warned him not to take any notice of Capper—but Handy ignored us. It was just a part of Capper's rotten plot to get us into trouble."

"It's certainly beginning to look like it," said Nipper, shaking his head. "But we'd better take this calmly, you chaps. No sense in getting excited. The more we look into

it, the clearer it becomes that the thing was a frame-up."

"Everything's all right, then," said Handforth, with relief. "We've only got to tell Wilkes about Capper's trickiness and we're safe."

"Don't you believe it," said Nipper sharply. "Don't have any such hopes, Handy."

"Why not?"

"Because you can be certain that Capper has done this thing thoroughly," replied the Remove skipper. "The plot is a cunning one from beginning to end—and Capper won't let himself be tripped up very easily. He and his pals will swear that they never stirred out all night. And who's to prove that they were out?"

"We can prove it!" replied Handforth.

"Can we? How?" asked Nipper. "We can say that Capper put the idea of japing the Fourth into your head, and that he told the Fourth-Formers how to deal with you when you arrived. But what does that prove? Merely that Capper was having a joke at our expense."

"Caistowe doesn't come into it at all," said Boots. "And if Capper and Ford and Vine lie—as they will lie—how can it ever be established that they were the rotters who went to the carnival and acted like hooligans?"

"We seem to be in a pretty nasty pickle," said Church dismally.

"Nasty isn't the word—it's worse than that," said McClure. "We don't get anywhere by telling the truth—and these Fourth-Formers can't help us either. It's the sack for the three of us, Handy."

The bell for breakfast rang just then, and the fellows began to drift indoors. Much as they wanted to help Handy and his chums, the call for breakfast was more important. Handforth & Co. found themselves alone in the Triangle.

"Well, it's no good sticking here, Handy," said Church, with a sigh. "We'd better go in——"

"You're right," interrupted Handforth, his eyes agleam. "It's no good sticking here. There's only one thing for us to do—get out and get evidence of our innocence. If necessary we'll drag Capper and his pals out of their own school and make them come here and confess! Come on! We're going on the warpath, my sons!"

Handforth meant it. He got out his Morris Minor. Breakfast was of no importance.

Instead of driving straight to Bannington, however, Handforth took the Caistowe road. He wanted to find out the full truth of what had happened at the Waterfront Pavilion.

As luck would have it, Mr. Pinder himself was in the lobby of the pavilion when Handforth & Co. arrived. He was inspecting the damaged mirror—making arrangements, in fact, for the fragments to be removed, and for a new mirror to be fitted.

"We want to see the manager," said Handforth breathlessly.

"Well, you're seeing him," said Mr. Pinder, staring. "St. Frank's boys, eh? Hallo! I seem to recognise——"

"Look here, sir, you've got to exonerate us!" interrupted Handforth. "We're accused of coming here last night and causing trouble. Well, you know jolly well that we were never here."

"By heaven!" shouted Mr. Pinder furiously. "Of all the infernal impudence! So you've got the nerve to come here."

"But, I say, look here——"

"You are the three boys!" thundered Mr. Pinder. "I recognise you!"

"Wh-a-at!" gurgled Handforth, staggered.

"Your name is Handforth," said Mr. Pinder accusingly.

"Yes, I know it is, but——"

"You admit it, then?" demanded the other. "You admit that you are Handforth and Church and McClure. Yes, there is no mistaking that tuft of hair sticking out from under your cap, Handforth. If you have come to me, expecting to square me, you are mistaken. I have reported to your schoolmaster, and he——"

"But—but we're not the three!" panted Handforth desperately. "You're all wrong! We didn't come here last night——"

"Oh, come away, Handy!" said Church. "It's no good!"

They went out, dismayed.

"Capper's hair is the same colour as yours, Handy," said McClure grimly. "My hat! What a cunning rotter! He must have deliberately brushed his hair forward into a tuft so that it looked like yours. The masks and the St. Frank's caps did the rest. It looks to me as if we're properly sunk!"

"The deeper we go, the more involved we get," moaned Church. "These Grammarian chaps have cooked our goose!"

"Have they?" snapped Handforth, as he climbed into the Minor. "Come on! Get in, you chaps! I'll show you whether our goose



is cooked! By George! I'm on the warpath now, and something's going to happen!"

CHAPTER 9.

On the Warpath!

LESSONS at Bannington Grammar School started a little earlier than at St. Frank's, and the Fourth Form had hardly got settled down when the door burst open and three excited figures came in. Mr. Bull, the Form-master, started round in amazement.



Handforth flung himself at the ball and saved the penalty in brilliant style. "Well saved, Handforth!" yelled Capper & Co.

"There they are!" shouted the burliest of the intruders.

The three figures ran in, and Handforth rushed up to where Capper was sitting in the front row of desks, with Fortescue Ford and Clarence Vine on either side of him.

Sight of Capper made Handforth see red—and Capper himself saw black! For the St. Frank's junior grabbed hold of the Grammarian cad and rammed his nose in the ink-well.

"Good gracious! What is the meaning of this outrageous conduct?" thundered Mr.

Bull angrily, and he strode forward and jerked Handforth away from the groaning, spluttering Capper.

"How dare you treat Capper in such an abominable fashion! Who are you boys? And what do you mean by bursting into my class-room like this?"

"Sorry, sir—we're St. Frank's chaps," said Handforth breathlessly. "We've come after these three chaps—Capper and Vine and Ford."

"Oh, you've come after them, have you?" said the Form-master sarcastically. "Well, I am very sorry, but you cannot have them. They are required in this room for work."

"But you don't understand, sir," said Handforth. "We're accused of being in Caistowe last night, at a carnival dance, and it was Capper and Ford and Vine who were there."

"Indeed?" said Mr. Bull incredulously.

"They're mad, sir," said Capper, as he gently dabbed at his inky nose with a handkerchief. "They don't

know what they're talking about. And I hope, sir, that you will punish this hooligan for grossly assaulting me—"

Handforth spun round on him.

"You rotter!" he roared. "Wheedling round me yesterday and making out that you were my pal, when all the time you were plotting against me! By George, I'll smash you!"

"You won't do any smashing here, young man," interrupted Mr. Bull angrily, as he caught Handforth by the shoulder. "You have already assaulted Capper, and I've had enough of this unseemly disturbance. Leave this room at once. If you have any quarrel with Capper and these other boys, you had better settle it some other time."

"But you don't understand, sir," put in Church earnestly. "Don't take any notice of Handforth—he's excited. We're in danger of being expelled from St. Frank's, sir, and we've only got an hour to prove our innocence. We're sure that Capper can help us."

And Church quickly explained how serious the situation was. Mr. Bull listened with growing impatience.

"You are quite wrong in assuming that Capper knows anything about the matter," he said at length. "I can prove that Capper was here in this school at half-past twelve last night."

"You can prove it, sir?" asked Handforth blankly.

"Quite easily," replied the Form-master
 "Thanks awfully, sir," said Capper. "I was just going to remind you of that—but I see that it isn't necessary. As I was here at half-past twelve, I couldn't very well be at the Waterfront Pavilion in Caistowe, could I?"

"But he wasn't here, sir!" urged Handforth frantically. "He couldn't have been!"

"Yet, half an hour after midnight, Capper came to me with a raging toothache," said Mr. Bull. "He asked me for some drops, which I gave him. You have evidently made an absurd mistake, and you had better go."

Handforth & Co. went out, dazed, fully aware of the fact that Capper & Co. were looking after them with triumphant glances.

"This has done it—absolutely!" muttered Handforth huskily. "If Capper & Co. weren't out last night, who were the three chaps?"

They walked across the quad towards the gates, slowly and miserably. Their investigations had come to nothing. Capper's alibi was cast iron. With a master to support him, what hope was there of forcing him to tell the truth? Indeed, it really seemed that Capper & Co. were completely innocent, and it was this fact which had struck Handforth like a blow between the eyes.

"Wait a minute!" said McClure shrewdly. "By Jove! I wonder!"

"You wonder what?"

"That master said that the time was half an hour after midnight by his clock," said Mac. "Not his watch, remember His bedroom clock."

"What difference does that make?"

"Well, that alibi might be no alibi at all," replied the Scottish junior. "Don't you see? There's no limit to Capper's cunning."

"I don't see what you're getting at," said Handforth, staring.

"Well, supposing Capper and his pals got back here at half-past one?" asked McClure.

"What was to prevent Capper creeping into the master's bed-room, putting the clock back an hour, and then waking the master saying that he had a raging toothache?"

"By George, you've hit it!" said Handforth excitedly. "Let's go back and—"

"My dear ass, what's the good!" interrupted Church. "Mac's idea is only a theory—it's not proof."

"Oh, crumbs!" said Handforth, realising the force of the argument.

They were up against another snag. But Handforth was not going to give in as tamely as this. He braced himself, he set his jaw, and he turned towards the school buildings. An eager look had come into his eyes.

"By George, why didn't we think of it before?" he said tensely. "Now's our chance! Capper and those other cads are bottled up in the class-room. We can go to his study and search it. You never know—we may find something. A programme of that carnival, perhaps—or something else that'll prove they were there last night."

But his hopes were soon dashed to the ground. Having learned the whereabouts of Capper's study from one of the servants, they ransacked the place from end to end. Ruthlessly they turned out the drawers, the cupboards. They looked under the table, in the fireplace, behind the books on the shelves. But there was nothing. Not a tiny item of incriminating evidence. They were baffled.

"It's no good, Handy," said Church, with a sigh. "We're finished."

Even Handforth had to admit it. There was no hope now. Handy was almost frightened when he thought of the chain of circumstantial evidence which had been built up against himself and his chums.

Mr. Pinder was willing to swear that he—Handforth—was one of the boys; Capper had even been careful to imitate Handforth's famous tuft of hair. Capper's alibi was sound, in spite of the fact that McClure had suggested a possible flaw in it.

And then, at that moment, Handforth spotted something which sent his hopes soaring again. He was passing a side-table, in the hall, and almost unconsciously he glanced at some letters and a parcel that were ready for the post. Then he uttered a startled gasp.

He indicated the parcel. It was bulky and soft, and it was addressed to a famous London firm of fancy-dress costumiers!

"Stillson & Co. are the big costume people—we've had fancy carnival costumes from them ourselves!" exclaimed Handforth. "Don't you understand? What's this parcel doing here? Capper & Co. were wearing fancy costumes last night—the Three Musketeers! And here, on this table, is a parcel—"

He broke off. Further words seemed pointless. Without compunction, he jerked at the string and broke it. With trembling fingers, he tore open the parcel—and revealed fancy-dress costumes of the Three Musketeers!

— —

CHAPTER 10.

Exposed!

"WE'VE got them!" said Handforth breathlessly. "We've got them where we want them—and all because Capper was fool enough to leave this parcel here instead of posting it himself!"

"Do you think this proof'll be enough?" asked Church excitedly.

"Do I think? I know!" laughed Handforth. "Look here! Here's a letter—signed by Capper himself! He thanks the firm for the costumes, and says—"

"Hallo! What's this?" interrupted McClure suddenly.

He had caught sight of something peeping out of one of the pockets. He pulled it out and gasped. A brand-new blue-and-red 'Ancient House cap!

"That clinches it!" yelled Handforth.

A hasty search followed, and the other two caps came to light. This was a big oversight of Capper's. In their hurry during the night, the Grammarian cads had stuffed the St. Frank's caps into their costume pockets, and had forgotten all about them. Capper, when wrapping up the parcel this morning, had never thought to search the pockets. Thus those incriminating caps had now come to light.

"What's your little game, young men?" asked a stern voice.

Handforth & Co. spun round. They found a Grammarian senior advancing upon them—a fellow of about eighteen; a prefect, apparently.

Briskly, concisely, Handforth gave the facts. Edward Oswald was cool now. The finding of this parcel had dissipated all the troubles. Here was the convincing evidence.

The prefect listened, and he became more and more grave.

"That's the lot," said Handforth, at last. "We know jolly well that Capper was in Caistowe last night, in spite of his alibi. These costumes prove it, and the caps, too —"

"I think I know something about this, young 'uns," said the prefect, nodding. "Come with me."

He led them straight to the Fourth Form class-room, and Mr. Bull was exasperated at this further interruption.

"I think there's something here, sir, that has to be investigated," said the prefect quietly. "Capper, Ford and Vine broke bounds last night and attended a carnival at Caistowe."

"Nonsense!" said Mr. Bull sharply. "You are all wrong, Colmore. Capper came to my bed-room last night, at half-past twelve, with a raging toothache."

"At what time, sir?" asked Colmore, staring.

"Half-past twelve."

"Well, I'd just like you to know, sir, that I heard somebody go to your bed-room last night," said the prefect. "And it wasn't at half-past twelve—but at ten minutes to two."

"That's a lie!" shouted Capper, leaping up. "It was half-past twelve, sir! You saw the time on the clock!"

"Silence, Capper!" ordered Mr. Bull.

"There are three costumes here, sir—the Three Musketeers," went on Colmore. "In the pockets these boys found three St. Frank's caps."

"Indeed!"

"They didn't know I was watching, sir, or that I was listening," continued the prefect. "It appears that these St. Frank's boys are accused of hooliganism in Caistowe. But the fact that these costumes are found here is significant enough. Look at this letter, sir."

Mr. Bull looked at it, and read it. Then

he turned to Capper & Co., who were pale and shaky with apprehension.

"Did you hire these fancy costumes, Capper?" demanded Mr. Bull grimly.

"No, sir! I—I mean—"

"This letter is in your handwriting, Capper, and it is signed by you," interrupted Mr. Bull. "Denial is useless. You did hire these costumes."

And then Capper broke down. He could see that the game was up. He confessed everything.

When Mr. Bull had heard, he turned to Handforth & Co.

"You boys had better go back to your own school," he said quietly. "I will attend to Capper and Ford and Vine. I'm sorry I was so sharp with you a little while ago. I can see, now, that your suspicions were more than justified."

HANDFORTH & Co. went back to St. Frank's with light hearts. Handforth's only regret was that he had had no opportunity of smashing George Capper as George Capper deserved.

When the Study D trio arrived back at St. Frank's, they found Mr. Wilkes on the Ancient House steps.

"I may as well tell you at once that I have just received a telephone call from the headmaster of the Bannington Grammar School," said Mr. Wilkes, without beating about the bush. "Capper has confessed everything, and he is to be expelled."

"Oh!" ejaculated Handforth & Co.

"He thoroughly deserves expulsion," went on Mr. Wilkes quietly. "Ford and Vine, being mere tools, are to be flogged. I am very glad indeed, boys, that you are thus cleared."

"Thanks awfully, sir."

"At the same time, you are guilty of breaking bounds and entering the Modern House after lights-out," said Mr. Wilkes, changing his tone. "I shall have to punish you for that. I am very much afraid—er—that it will mean a swishing."

"Go ahead, sir," grinned Handforth. "Who cares?"

A swishing it was—but then, after all, Mr. Wilkes was not much of a hand at swishing. Handforth & Co. hardly smarted after they had had their medicine. And Mr. Wilkes forgot to report Boots & Co. to Mr. Stockdale, the Housemaster of the Modern House, so the Fourth-Formers heard nothing more of the matter whatever. Which was just as it should be.

THE END.

(Look out next Wednesday for a grand long complete story of breathless schoolboy mystery and adventure featuring the Chums of St. Frank's. Entitled: "The Mystery of the Monastery Ruins!" Order your copy in advance, lads.)



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; bumper books, pocket wallets and penknives are also offered as prizes. Address your jokes to "Smilers," Nelson Lee Library, 5, Carmelite Street, London, E.C.4.

KICK-OFF.

Mudford Rovers had discovered that several of their supporters were gaining admission into the ground without paying. The secretary considered the matter, then pasted up the following notice in a prominent position:

"There are two kick-offs—one can be seen and the other felt. To see one and avoid the other, please pay as you enter."

(R. Avis, 105, Beech Hall Road, Highams Park, E.4, has been awarded a penknife.)

A GOOD START.

Uncle (to small nephew): "Well, Johnny, how are you getting on at school?"

Johnny: "To-day I was the only boy who could answer a question."

Uncle: "What was the question?"

Johnny: "Who put the ink in the teacher's hat."

(G. France, 4, Olive Terrace, Marsden, near Huddersfield, has been awarded a pocket wallet.)

HIS AMBITION.

"You will never get anywhere unless you have higher ideas than this," said the woman at whose door the tramp had applied for assistance. "Are you really content to spend your life walking around the country begging?"

"No, lady," answered Weary Willie. "Many's the time I've wished I had a motor."

(R. Wilson, 25, Liddal Lane, Halifax, has been awarded a penknife.)

BILL'S BLUNDER.

Teacher (to new pupil): "Now, what is your name?"

New Boy: "William Brown."

Teacher: "When you speak to a master you must always add 'sir.' Now once again: What is your name?"

New Boy: "Sir William Brown."

(Yurie Taji, 1 of 11 Chome, Kojimachi, Yotsuyaku, Tokyo, has been awarded a book.)

HECTIC.

It was a one-horse village, and the traveller who had just missed the last train to town was looking around for some way of killing time.

"Any picture show in this place?" he asked a village yokel. "Or a billiard-hall or library?"

"Eh—no," was the reply. "There's nothing like that 'ere."

"Well, how do you spend your evenings?" asked the traveller.

"Oh," was the reply, "we go down to the store—they've just got a new bacon-slicer."

(Robert S. Smith, 6, Smithy Lane, Walton, Liverpool, has been awarded a pocket wallet.)

ECONOMY.

Lady (to chauffeur): "Do you know you took that corner on two wheels?"

Chauffeur: "Yes, madam. I thought it would save the tyres."

(R. Goddard, Roseneath, Clarence Road, Fleet, Hants, has been awarded a penknife.)

THIS'LL MAKE YOU LAUGH!



BAD RECEPTION.

The electrician, called in to repair the wireless, found several cough-lozenges in the loudspeaker.

"I put them in there," confessed little Tommy. "I was listening-in, and the man speaking sounded so hoarse."

(N. C. Langdon, 20, Apsley Road, Southsea, has been awarded a handsome watch.)

HIGH FINANCE.

Butcher (to small boy): "Well, what do you want, sonny?"

Small Boy: "Nine penn'orth of steak and threepence change. Father will bring the shilling in the morning."

(B. Mitchell, 31, Pinderfield Road, Wakefield, has been awarded a book.)

SOMETHING ABOUT NOTHING.

Teacher: "Now, Tommy, can you give me a definition of 'nothing'?"

Tommy: "Yes, sir: a toy balloon without a covering on it."

(E. Bournier, Back Cottage, Cross Oaks, Shenley, Herts, has been awarded a pocket wallet.)

"SLANGY!"

Willy (reading): "'The sandy coves of Cornwall are very beautiful.'"

Teacher: "Willy, what is a sandy cove?"

Willy: "A bloke with red hair, miss."

(M. Goldfarb, 21, Vega Street, Cheetham, Manchester, has been awarded a book.)

CHAMPION.

Local: "There goes our light-weight champion."

Stranger: "Boxer?"

Local: "No—butcher."

(A. Cryer, 34, Heeley Green, Sheffield, has been awarded a pocket wallet.)

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Thrills and Adventure*

By
**JOHN
BREARLEY.**

▲▲▲▲▲▲▲▲▲▲▲▲▲▲▲▲
The Night Hawk's
"present" to a
scoundrel—a bomb
and two grenades!
▼▼▼▼▼▼▼▼▼▼▼▼▼▼▼▼

CHAPTER 1.

A Man Drops Dead!

"BY jove, guv'nor, that was good!" Thurston Kyle, an immaculate figure in opera hat and overcoat, smiled gravely down at the glowing, freckled face of his young assistant, Snub Hawkins.

"Yes, it was a fine play. Glad you enjoyed it, my boy!"

The famous scientist and Snub stood out on the brilliantly lighted pavement before the Paladrome Theatre, filled by a gaily dressed throng of theatre-goers patiently waiting for cars and taxis. The two had been on one of their rare visits to the theatre, in honour of Snub's birthday.

All around them sounded the bustle of the "theatre rush"; the purr of motor-cars, a pleasant babel of talk, laughter and good-byes as the crowd began to break up. Thurston Kyle smiled again quietly and looked around.

"Quite a crush!" he murmured. "We'll have to wait some minutes for a taxi, I fear—"

But Snub was not listening. He had turned away slightly, and his hand,



descending on the scientist's arm with an eager clutch, made his master break off and look down quickly.

"Great Scott, sir, look at this chap!" whispered the boy.

In mild surprise, Thurston Kyle followed the youngster's frowning stare, and after a brief glance his own eyes narrowed keenly.

On the edge of the throng, only three yards away, stood a slimly-built man, huddled in seedy overcoat and bowler hat, and watching the smiling, chattering crowd with burning eyes. No others among the carefree pleasure-seekers appeared to have noticed him; he seemed just an ordinary passer-by attracted for a few moments by the bright, gay scene. But the terrible, strained expression on the man's face had caught Snub's roving, observant glance in-

stantly, and through the gaps in the thinning crowd the lad and Thurston Kyle watched quietly.

Something was plainly very wrong with the man. His bowler hat, pushed impatiently back on his head, disclosed tiny beads of sweat glistening on the puckered forehead, and his face in the glare of lights from the vestibule was haggard and desperate.

From the twitching of his shoulders, he was in the grip of some feverish excitement almost beyond control. His weak mouth was pinched into a light, bloodless gash of determination, while the hectic flushes on each thin cheekbone stood out in startling contrast to the rest of his chalk-white complexion. He had the air of a man who was seething inwardly, and had screwed up his nerve and courage to the point of desperation.

Heedless of the people around them, Thurston Kyle and Snub studied the stranger, curiosity and instinct alike aroused by his manner. Even as they watched, they saw the drawn features grow bleaker still; the man's right arm, hand buried in his overcoat pocket, stiffened, while the sunken eyes grew suddenly alert, blazing with hate and fury.

With an odd little thrill in his heart, Snub turned quickly on his master. To his surprise, he found Thurston Kyle's eyes searching the crowd also, and wonderingly the boy whispered again:

"Anythin' wrong, sir? That chap's waitin' for someone, sure, and precious ugly he looks about it— Oh, my giddy aunt!"

Quick as a flash, the boy left his master's side, covering the intervening three yards

in a single whirlwind leap. A tigerish snarl had abruptly twisted the man's features, and his right hand jerked savagely from his pocket. But before he could make another movement Snub's sturdy weight had landed full on his shoulder.

Immediately from the throng came cries of astonishment and alarm as the stranger and Snub writhed in a fierce struggle that lasted a few brief seconds. Men shouted and women screamed. Then Snub, sticking to his man like a leech, jerked his own right arm up and down rapidly, and on to the pavement at his feet dropped something that hit the flags with a clatter.

Crack! It was a stubby, blue-nosed automatic.

"Good heavens! Look out, there! Police!"

At sight of that ugly weapon beside the struggling pair a fresh outcry burst from the crowd. A burly policeman, followed by a commissionaire, came pushing through to seize the man before he could escape. What followed then was swift and tragic.

With a hoarse scream and a burst of maniacal strength, the man wrenched himself away from Snub, hurled the boy to the ground and turned to run. He had not taken two steps, however, before another cry was torn from him—a choking, terrified groan. And, clutching madly at his heart, he tottered forward like one in mortal agony.

The onlookers stood as though rooted to the ground, while, just for one instinctive second, both the constable and commissionaire halted dead. Thurston Kyle was the one person to move, and he came running forward, hands outstretched.



All this time the scientist had remained silent and rigid as a statue, his piercing stare fixed intently on the crowd. But the second the stranger ground and tottered the Night Hawk's eyes had hardened and turned instantly upon the wavering figure.

For a moment he had stood watching, lips firmly compressed. Now he sprang to life, and was beside the stricken man in two jumps. But even so his strong hands reached to catch the frail shoulders, the other's knees buckled weakly and he collapsed. A grim and heavy thud followed when his body hit the pavement.

Swiftly the Night Hawk turned him over, searching the pain-distorted face. The eyes were wide open and staring, and an ominous blue stain was gathering rapidly about the man's drooping lips. Then his hands moved in a last desperate endeavor, grew very limp, and his head fell heavily forward.

Glaucous backwards, the scientist saw the agonized, staring face of the policeman close to his shoulder. In a swift, imperative whisper he jerked out:

"See if a doctor is handy, constable. This man is dead!"

OBEDIENT to the quiet authority in Kyle's voice, the policeman straightened and whirled to scan the crowd face before him. Other constables had appeared swiftly to keep the crowd back, and the onlookers stood huddled in the presence of death.

"Is a doctor present, please?" he cried loudly, and his worried eyes brightened as, in immediate answer, a burly, middle-aged man in evening dress, with a clever, distinguished face, stepped through the cordons, pulling off his gloves.

"My name is Sir Franklyn Moon, constable," he said briskly. "Can I assist you?"

The policeman smiled gratefully.

"Lucky to find you here, Sir Franklyn. You're just the man, thank goodness! There were few officers in the West End district who did not know London's most famous heart and brain specialists."

Nodding curtly, Sir Franklyn stepped past to where Thurston Kyle still bent over the prostrate figure on the pavement. The two men exchanged a direct, expressive glance, and when the constable held the dead man's head the specialist commenced a rapid but thorough examination, studying the twisted face intently before bending on the limbs—hands that had moved for good. Panning his lips, he shook his head gravely at last and stood up.

"Hæst felicitat!" he pronounced. "Acute, I imagine, from the stiffness of the poor fellow's cad. H'm!" His head again to roll aside the man's shabby clothing, exposing the hollow chest and rib bones showing plainly through the skin. At his quick professional nod the constable took out his notebook.

"Better get him to Charing Cross, officer," jerked the specialist. "I make him a man of about thirty—constitution very weak, heart trouble aggravated by starvation. Some poor fellow out of employment, I suppose. Judging from the bloodshot eyes, he must have been greatly excited at or just prior to his death, which probably brought about the fatal collapse!"

The particulars were jotted down rapidly. But the moment the policeman's flying pencil stopped, Thurston Kyle's voice struck in with quiet emphasis:

"You may also say, officer, that the man was an expert chemist. He was also accustomed to handling radium frequently and in large quantities!"

At the surprising statement, drawn out so freely and unhesitatingly, both Sir Franklyn and the constable looked sharply at the cold, handsome face before them. The specialist's brows came down in a quick frown as of remembrance. The policeman gazed steadily.

"Expert chemist?" His eyes darted momentarily to the dead man's soiled garments. "Then he's not so—I mean—" He coughed. "Er—may I ask your name, sir?"

"I am Professor Thurston Kyle. My card!"

"Thurston Kyle?" Sir Franklyn's sharp eyes became keener still, studying the specialist closely. "I have heard of you, sir, often, but never and you before. Delighted to do so now, although the—ah—circumstances—"

At this point a short sturdy man strode through the police cordons to the little group on the pavement. Drawing him, the constable snapped to the salute at once, and in a low voice gave a rapid story of the incident. The newcomer frowned for a few minutes in thought, then turned heavily upon Thurston Kyle and Sir Franklyn Moon.

"Events", gentlemen!" he snapped. "I'm Superintendent Fennor of the Yard. The constable has just told me what has happened!" His eyes turned into Thurston Kyle's. "You are just the man, you're a chemist, Professor Kyle? And about the radium, too?"

For answer the Night Hawk lifted the dead man's hands, and his companions all bent to study them. They were well-shaped, with long, clever fingers, but plentifully disfigured by old scars from acid burns, with here and there on palms and backs, small shiny patches in which the scientist pointed quietly.

"These marks are not burns, like the other scars, but small pores—radium scars," he explained. "They're gradually eating away the hands. From their number and condition, it is obvious to me that the man has handled radium very often. Ah, as it is so extremely rare and precious, it is obvious entrusted to someone but an expert chemist or scientist. That is, all!"

The acid edge to Thurston Kyle's tongue was so sharp that the specialist recoiled quickly, but, recovering his good-humor in

a short jovial laugh, shrugged carelessly. "Ah, really? Well, I know nothing about the stuff—I'm only a heart and brain specialist, Mr. Kyle, and wouldn't presume to argue with a specialist of your reputation! Struggling again, he turned positively to the Yard official. "Nothing else I can do is there, superintendent! No! Then I'll be off. You know where to find me if I'm wanted—good night! Good night, Professor Kyle!"

With that, and a little about how from the Night Hawk in reply, Sir Franklyn advanced and thrust himself through the crowd to a big car inside the park. As soon as he had gone, Superintendent Fraser looked Thornton Kyle's arm.

"Sir Franklyn didn't quote like that, sir!" he smiled. "You found out something he must have overlooked. Much obliged for the information; it'll help us to solve the case. There's nothing in his portfolio but two he-parasels—and the automatic here!" He glanced his umbrella thoughtfully for a moment and at last carried a small bright eye at his tall companion again. "You are quite sure about that, indeed, sir, aren't you?"

A quick, impatient frown crossed Thornton Kyle's face.

"I am quite sure!" he snapped, and the C.I.D. man smiled placatingly.

"No offense, sir. Only it's strange. Here's this chap, obviously down and out, but carrying a gun. A famous scientist like you says he's been an expert chemist, and has handled a lot of radium, which sort of gun too wonderful, because—his voice dropped suddenly—there's been a lot of radium stolen lately, from two hospitals and the National Laboratory, sir?"

If he expected to surprise Thornton Kyle, he was disappointed.

"So I have heard!" was the cool reply, and nothing more. Head on one side, the Yard man waited expectantly. But the restless Night Hawk had given the police all the information he furnished for one night, and resumed the other's stare frigidly until the official's eyes finally fell. Then he swung away. "You have my card, superintendent. Good night!"

And then abruptly, followed by the bewildered Smith, the persistent staid old, long-suffering C.I.D. man still holding his umbrella.

Throughout the journey home to Hampstead, Thornton Kyle sat absorbed in silent thoughts, from which Smith knew better than to disturb him. In fact, it was not until the two were in the scientist's cozy apartment above, with cups of fragrant coffee before them, that the youngster ventured to refer to the curiously incident outside the Palace—and incidentally yielded a weight that had pressed on his mind ever since.

"Er—about that poor bloke, sir!" he began at last, absently stirring his coffee. "He—do you think the poor beggar died so quickly through my landing on him as I

did? Of course, I didn't know he was starting, and practically dyle's of heart disease, any way, did I?—I saw him pullin' that gun for someone's hands, and so—and so—"

Thornton Kyle looked at the lad with a slow, kindly smile.

"And so you, too, think that our late friend died of heart-failure, Smith?" he asked softly, so softly that Smith stiffened in his chair at once. The odd expression in his master's eyes was one he knew of old.

"Why do you say that, sir?" he murmured at last. "I feared what was being said. Didn't the man die of heart-failure, then?"

"He died of acute and hidden poisoning, boy!" replied the Night Hawk in the same soft tone. "In fact, he was murdered in cold blood—by Sir Franklyn Meme, the specialist!"

CHAPTER 2.

Discovering and Suspicion!

"MY spotted coat!" Only by a miracle did Smith save his coffee cup from crashing to the ground as surprise jerked him from the chair. His jaw sagged, and he stared at his master with eyes like grey-stone saucers.

"I—murmured? By Sir Franklyn! Good, sir! What? How?"

"When you were struggling with the man, Smith?" replied Thornton Kyle impatiently. "How? By this!"

From the lapel of his dress-overcoat, which he had folded over a chair close at hand, he picked something delicately between thumb and forefinger, held it carefully in the palm of his hand and held it out for Smith's inspection. It was a tiny splinter of wood, like a straight, sharp tooth. But to the lad's hand went not instinctively to take it, Thornton Kyle dropped him quickly.

"Don't touch it! A scratch from that, my boy, and—well, you saw what happened. This was hanging in that man's right chest, just below the eye. Sir Franklyn, I noticed, tried hard to find it, but I was there first."

"This—the gun you told, sir?" murmured Smith. "How do you know Sir Franklyn Meme did the trick?"

"Because I saw him do it!" was the shattering reply. "Let me give you a warning, Smith, for future use. Whenever you are the face of a man who is obviously in the throes of equatorial fever, light up with hate and murder, follow the direction of that man's stare at once. I did so, while you had your eyes fixed on him alone. And I saw he was glaring at Sir Franklyn Meme, who, at that moment, stood a few yards in front of him, and so on between them Sir Franklyn was the quarry for whom that gun was drawn. Your plucky action saved his life!"

"Oh, yes, sir!" blurted Smith, and shook his head in much despair. "I wish you'd stop pullin' my leg, and tell me what hap-

pened!" he said plaintively. Thurston Kyle broke into a quiet laugh, and nodded.

"Right, I will. As I say, I saw the man who is dead glaring at Sir Franklyn Mosse, and at the same moment, the specialist caught sight of his threatening opponent, and froze in his tracks. He had just lighted a cigar, but as soon as he saw the man before him, he threw it away—a perfectly natural action in one confronted by an enemy he knew. Then you tackled the man with the gun, and I still watched Sir Franklyn. And what he did then was not natural, by any means!

"The instant you grasped his enemy, he took out another cigar and placed it carefully between his lips. But"—the Night Hawk's voice hardened—"he did not take the second cigar from his case but from his outside overcoat pocket—a remarkably queer place in which to keep excellent Coronas. Neither did he light it. Instead, he pointed the end straight at the man with whom you were struggling—and waited!"

"Gummy!"

"And the split second you were thrown down, Snub, and your opponent turned to run, Sir Franklyn blew hard through his cigar. It was then I realised that murder had been committed while I stood foolishly watching!"

Thurston Kyle's deep eyes glowed sombrely at the memory.

"However, for that foolishness I have made some amends. There is something big behind this murder to-night. I shall not rest until I have found out what it is."

Snub nodded, but his face was still puzzled.

"And do you mean Sir Franklyn fired this thorn—through a cigar, sir? That'd be difficult to prove, I guess!"

"On the contrary, Snub, it will be quite easy!" drawled Thurston Kyle with a cold smile. "Because when Sir Franklyn hurried forward to cover his tracks by removing the poison dart and giving a false diagnosis of heart-failure, I took the liberty of picking his pocket. It was undignified, but necessary. Look!"

Again he held out something that fetched a fresh gasp of amazement from his assistant. For in Thurston Kyle's hand this time lay a large, expensive and unlighted cigar.

"This is the *second* one!" he said simply.

With a sharp penknife he deliberately sliced the Corona in two halves and opened it wide. A faint sardonic smile appeared on his lips as he studied the debris briefly. Then he pushed it across to Snub, who, after one look, gave a sharp cry. Down the centre of one of the halves, embedded in a special groove, lay a slender, hollow tube of silver. A solemn hush followed the discovery.

"A very ingenious blow-pipe!" smiled Thurston Kyle at last. "And this thorn was the 'bullet,' steeped in virulent poison which I must analyse. Swift, sure and very

silent. That is how Sir Franklyn Mosse killed his enemy before a crowd of people!"

Snub rolled the tube back with a little frown of disgust.

"What are you going to do to the blighter, sir?" he growled.

"Find out more about him first," returned the Night Hawk, coolly lighting a cigarette. "We know he is a killer who went about armed with a deadly weapon which he used ruthlessly when the time arrived. But apart from that there were other strange points to-night which interest me greatly." Blowing out a cloud of smoke, he gazed at it with dreamy eyes.

"For instance, why should a starving chemistry expert hate a famous specialist so bitterly as to try and shoot him in public? That man certainly intended murder, and Sir Franklyn was just as certainly prepared for him. What was the connection between the two?"

"Again, why was Sir Franklyn so terribly anxious to throw doubt on my statement that the man had handled radium in large quantities? He laughed and shrugged about it later, true, but there was something very like stark terror in his eyes when I first mentioned the fact. To make matters worse, he followed up by saying emphatically that he knew nothing about radium—surely a strange confession from a medical man of his fame, eh? And then, the moment Superintendent Frazer seized on the subject so eagerly, Sir Franklyn left the scene as quickly as he could. Why? Do these questions convey anything to you, Snub?"

"You bet!" The shrewd lad smiled keenly. "It seems to me to be radium, radium, radium all the way through. And the connection between Sir Franklyn and the dead bloke hinges on that somewhere, guv'nor."

"Exactly!" The Night Hawk nodded approvingly. "My theory may be wrong, but I do not think so. I feel certain that what happened to-night may form a strong clue in the villainous chain of radium robberies that have taken place during the last few months. As you know, St. Peter's Hospital, the National Laboratory and the East London Institute have been robbed of their entire supplies, amounting to something like ninety thousand pounds in value. And the crimes are still unsolved." He compressed his lips grimly.

"I myself have tried to solve those robberies—without success so far. But I intend to do so, and heaven help the thieves if I catch them! Radium is too wonderful to be tangled up with crime. It is rare and precious; it saves the lives of hundreds yearly, and relieves intolerable pain. Once a supply is lost, it takes some time for more to be procured, and invalids die in the meantime. Therefore, criminals who steal radium in preference to money or gems are practically murderers, too, and should be punished mercilessly. You follow?"

Snub nodded tensely as the Night Hawk's deep voice went on:



Flattening himself against the bridge, the burdened Night Hawk missed death by inches as the tug passed underneath.

"As I said, I feel certain to-night's incident may prove a clue. In any case, I shall follow it up. Superintendant Frazer thought so, too, I could see, although not having seen what I did, he cannot connect Sir Franklyn Mosse with the dead chemist as we can. Well, that is unfortunate for him, as I shall work alone as usual. And I intend to begin now!"

"You mean we'll put Sir Franklyn on our radio first, sir?" queried Snub eagerly.

"I do." The Night Hawk rose to his feet with a whimsical smile. "As unofficial enemies of crime, my boy, we must act. I want you to look up Sir Franklyn's address in the 'phone book, get out my wings, and prepare a set of microphones." He laughed keenly, for there was work to be done. "Yes, we must certainly add Sir Franklyn Mosse to our 'secret service' list, my lad!"

"You bet!" jerked Snub. And was off in a flash to obey orders, while Thurston Kyle changed quickly into his flying costume.

CHAPTER 3.

Snatched from Death!

SWEETLY and smoothly, a few minutes later, Thurston Kyle sailed out into the cool night air on his peculiar mission, his great wings bearing him aloft at easy speed. In his hand he carried a canvas folder containing the set of delicate microphones for his amazing "radio," the secret of which he had never divulged even to his tried ally, Nelson Lee, the headmaster-detective of St. Frank's.

Gone now was the handsome, immaculately-dressed man of an hour ago. He had become the Night Hawk once more, silent as a phantom, swift and resolute in action—an enemy of crime. Below him, as he sped high above London, were the still twinkling lights of the West End, surrounded by the darker masses of the suburbs. The freshness of the air and the stimulus of action made him chuckle softly.

But his thoughts were grim and busy. As a result of the radium robberies, as they

were called, three great institutions had lost their supplies of that wonderful healer. To replace them took time and huge sums of money. But worse than that the work of curing sufferers had been checked. All the scientist in Thurston Kyle grew bitter at the knowledge. Whoever he found was behind these robberies, Sir Franklyn Mosse or anyone else, they would pay a swift and final penalty.

He realised fully that his suspicions concerning the specialist were based purely on theories. Yet some uncanny instinct whispered that he was on the right track. In any case, Sir Franklyn was a cold-blooded killer, and as such alone merited the Night Hawk's deadly vigilance.

The mission on which he was bound was the first step, although there was little prospect of a thrill in it. Winging his silent way eventually above a quiet backwater behind the Embankment Gardens, he counted the tall old houses carefully, flying low under cover of darkness until he found the one in which Sir Franklyn had chambers.

On outstretched wings he wheeled, and landed softly among the sloping eaves; and for the next few minutes he was busy there. When he had finished his tiny apparatus was securely fixed into position beneath a loosened tile, and he smiled in grim content. From now on every word uttered in the famous specialist's rooms would be carried through the ether, to be picked up in the Hampstead laboratory by the ever-vigilant Snub. Sir Franklyn Mosse was on the Night Hawk's "secret service" list.

Laughing quietly, Thurston Kyle flung himself aloft once more, hovering for a moment to glance idly down at the great city below him. He was not in the mood to return home at once; the short flight from Hampstead through the starry night had whetted his appetite for more, and he fell to pondering which direction he should take.

To his left the streets behind the Strand were quiet and almost deserted; the Thames, flowing blackly beyond the Embankment, seemed to promise better things. Often the down-river haunts, the lonely wharfs and warehouses, the narrow streets, had proved rich hunting-grounds for the thrill-loving Night Hawk, for life moves swiftly there at times when the day is young. Throwing back his goggles, he set his wings rippling for a leisurely cruise east—a watchful, indefatigable figure embarked on his favourite hobby—seeking adventure!

Whereupon adventure came to him swiftly, as it does to those who search.

Fifty feet above the dark bosom of the river he was flying, the massive bulk of Waterloo Bridge looming up before him, very quiet and desolate at this early hour. The day traffic had ceased long since; the market carts had not yet come in. Save for a solitary taxi coasting along the gutter, the wide thoroughfare was empty.

And then, from one of the deep embrasures on the bridge, where homeless wanderers try vainly to sleep the night away, hurtled the dark figure of a man. On the brink of the parapet he clawed feebly for an instant as though doubt had seized him, only to slip further, and afterwards plunge horribly downwards to where the dark, choppy river flowed beneath. A shrill, high scream reached the Night Hawk's ears, even as his keen glance caught that scrambling, lurching dive.

In a second he was streaking down to the rescue, arms outstretched, knife-edged wings cutting the air at a breathless swoop. Faster than the falling man he flashed, vanishing into the gloomy shadow of the bridge. The man's coat had opened in his fall. The faint glimmer of something white beneath it was all that guided his winged deliverer. But that was sufficient.

Like lightning the Night Hawk swerved dizzily upon him, eating up the space between. A heavy splash broke the black surface of the river as the man's legs hit the water, but before he could go right under, through the rising spray crashed the rescuer at terrific speed, two strong arms gripped him accurately about the shoulders and hauled him back forcibly from that cold and watery grave. Skimming flat above the waves, unable to check his burdened rush towards a mighty stone pier, Thurston Kyle saved himself by another dazzling swerve and plunged headlong into the echoing depths of the bridge's centre-span.

And there Death rushed thunderously upon him.

Unnoticed in the heat of rapid action, a sturdy tug, heading upstream for home, had plunged into the arch from the other side. Blocking the way, it bore down on the racing Night Hawk like some snorting monster of the deep.

By inches only did the iron-nerved flyer wrench himself and his limp passenger aloft then, scraping past the rush of the tug's blunt bows, flattening himself tensely as the bridge and smoke-stack glided just below him. The man at the wheel, catching sight of the weird figure a few feet above him as the glow of lights lit up the arch, let out a cry of astonishment and fear. The tug surged onwards, and the Night Hawk, on struggling pinions, fought his way out of that queer death trap into which he had so nearly fallen.

Soaring high into the air once more, he looked down at his captive, now completely unconscious in his arms. But the darkness above the river was too great to see his features properly, and hoisting him in a firmer grip, Thurston Kyle glided away towards the north bank, where the massive buildings and flat roofs of Somerset House would form a welcome perch.

In the centre of the great mass he found a suitable spot, and, laying the man down at last so that his heavy head was supported by

a stone parapet, he pulled out his slender electric torch.

"Some poor beggar tired of struggles and hardship, I suppose," the Night Hawk mused sadly, as he thought of the many who had preferred the Thames to the cold streets of night. As if to confirm his remarks the guarded beam of white light shot out then to reveal soaked and shabby garments, and a white, thin face disfigured by a stubby beard days old. For the second time that night Thurston Kyle had encountered one of the City's down-and-outers; although this one seemed in poorer straits even than the seedy ex-chemist who had died outside the Paladrome.

He was clad in coat, trousers and gaping boots only, with a ragged muffler tied round his throat to try to hide the fact that he possessed no shirt or vest. Very gently the Night Hawk turned out the tattered pockets, without revealing anything except a small round tin, strangely and tightly bound with copper wire. Laying this aside, he pulled the man's coat further away from his bare chest to listen to his heart.

And instantly his sharp eyes saw a sight that narrowed them down to mere gleaming slits.

"Good heavens!"

He drew in his breath with a peculiar little hiss of excitement. The man was wounded—stabbed. Just inside his left collar-bone was a small but jagged wound that Thurston Kyle's experience told him at once was deep and dangerous. The lips of the cut were curiously puckered inwards, with only a tiny splash of blood to mark the place. Yet the wound was fresh.

"Stabbed! Knifed from above with a triple-edged dagger, which means he's bleeding inwardly. By all that's devilish!"

It was a startling discovery, and changed the situation completely. Instead of rescuing a would-be suicide as he had thought, he had snatched up a dangerously wounded man who must have been stabbed in that embrasure on Waterloo Bridge and rolled over the parapet in a second. That scream he had heard, allowing for distance, had been one of pain, not despair.

Rapidly Thurston Kyle pulled the shabby clothes aside still more, searching for further wounds. There were none. But suddenly, as he looked, his torch fell upon the man's hands. And for all the Night Hawk's cool impassiveness, he could not restrain a harsh cry of amazement.

They were lean, firm hands, but acid-scarred and stained from fingers to wrists—the hands of an expert chemist. And like that other chemist who had been killed by Sir Franklyn Mosse, his hands were ravaged by the shiny sores of radium-rays!

The astounding coincidence, the sharpest of his career, hit Thurston Kyle like a blow. He sat back on his heels, staring at those tell-tale hands as though unable to believe his eyes. Then, as a whole flood of thoughts began to race through his mind, he stopped,

and without a word gathered the limp figure in his arms, hurled himself from the roof into space, and went shooting across London as fast as his wings could fly.

CHAPTER 4.

The Second Chemist!

BACK in the great laboratory, Snub Hawkins, too keen to go to bed until his master returned, was sitting before the radio cabinet with the big ear-phones about his head. He turned as the french-window opened and the Night Hawk strode in; and one glance at the burden his master carried sent him flying to clear a work-bench of its apparatus.

"Good boy!" murmured Thurston Kyle, hurrying across. "Now help me lay him out flat. Gently, lad; he's badly hurt!"

"Who is he, sir?"

In answer to the eager words the scientist pointed eloquently to the man's scarred hands, and Snub uttered a whistle of amazement. The Night Hawk was already busy with medicine-glass and phials.

Breathlessly the boy waited until a tiny measure of golden liquid had been forced between the wounded man's clenched teeth, and the heavy head allowed to drop back on a hastily fetched cushion. A long silence fell while the two watched a faint tinge of colour appear slowly in the pallid cheeks as the powerful stimulant did its work. A faint moan showed presently that consciousness was creeping back to their stranger-guest, and a moment later heavy eyelids fluttered drowsily, closed again, and finally opened wide. A pair of pain-drawn eyes gradually brightened into life, and at last came to rest on Thurston Kyle, who was quietly unbuckling his wings.

"Oh!" It was a startled groan, a mixture of agony and fear. Before the man could move or cry out again, however, the scientist's strong, cool hand was laid on his forehead, and its magnetic touch was firm but soothing.

"Lie still. You are in no danger here. Do not worry."

The calm words had the desired effect, for the terror on the bearded face faded a little. Dazedly the man's eyes left Thurston Kyle and travelled round the large, strange room, a look of almost humorous wonder dawning in their depths. To the watchers' surprise a little smile, painful and ironic, curled the stranger's lips, and he began to murmur to himself in a quiet, educated voice.

"My aunt—I'm in a lab. again! I'm dyin' in a lab. What a jest!" A soft, grim chuckle shook him so that he winced in agony and coughed. His wide stare settled on Thurston Kyle once more. "I am dying, aren't I?" he whispered.

The scientist bent over him.

"I am afraid you are, my friend," he said gently. "You've been stabbed by a triple-

edged blade, you see. It has missed the heart by a little, I think, but a wound from such a knife bleeds inwardly and cannot be plugged. I am sorry!"

Again the ironic smile crept over the other's face.

"You wouldn't be if you knew the circs.," he murmured. "A triple-edged blade, eh? Then I know who got me all right. But how did I get here?"

"Never mind that. Try and tell me what happened."

"Oh, just what I'd been expectin' for days!" was the feeble but careless answer. "I was sleepin'—in an embrasure on Waterloo Bridge. The next I knew was someone bendin' over me, the stab of a knife, and over the top I went! That's all."

"But who killed you? You say you know?"

"I guess I know all right. But I'll keep mum. Honour among thieves, you know. Gang law an' all that." And with that surprising reply, the drowsy eyes closed wearily.

Thurston Kyle bent closer still. This man was dying, and two murdered radium chemists in one night, both poverty stricken at that, was a coincidence far too strong to be wasted. Fate had thrown these men in the scientist's path—of that he was convinced. This second one must be made to talk before it was too late.

"Was it Sir Franklyn Mosse, the specialist?" he asked softly, and Snub's heart leapt at the effect of the question. It was electrical.

A shudder twitched the stranger's body from head to toe; his eyes snapped open at once. There was no weariness in them now; they were fixed and hard with frightened suspicion.

"Why—why d'you ask that? Who are you, any way?" he panted.

The Night Hawk held up a stern hand.

"Never mind that, either. Answer me—was it he who killed you?"

"I—I— Find out!"

"I mean to. I see you have been a chemistry expert, accustomed to handling radium. Don't deny it! Your hands give you away. Well, are you aware that Sir Franklyn Mosse killed another of your profession to-night, in cold blood, outside the —"

"Shut up; shut up!" Unable to endure the remorseless probing, the dying man croaked hoarsely. "So you know that, too, eh? I wish I knew who you were—here in this splendid lab! Reminds me of my own—once!"

He began to ramble incoherently. Thurston Kyle, all his will-power concentrated on the task, brought him back to earth.

"Did Sir Franklyn attempt to kill you, too? I want to know—I must know. And if so, why?"

The cold, insistent voice cut mercilessly through the mists gathering in the man's mind. His eyes opened once more. And this time they were filled with a blaze of hatred and revenge, reminding Thurston

Kyle of the eyes of that other man who was already dead.

"All right. I'll tell you—I'll tell you. I meant to get even with that skunk, anyway. Give me—a drink!"

With a fresh dose of Kyle's stimulant coursing like fire through his veins, the ex-chemist's tones grew stronger. His eyes still burned with that unearthly light.

"It wasn't Mosse who got me. It was Tony, his Italian valet, I guess. But it's all the same. Mosse meant to kill me, same as he killed Harris earlier on. We were marked down. On the spot, as the Americans say, what?"

In jerky gasps, he began a tale that kept his listeners tense and silent.

"**H**EARD of the radium robberies, as the newspapers dubbed 'em? Yes? Well, Mosse is behind them—in England. He visited the hospitals as a doctor—spied out the land. Then Tony and another cracksman did the rest.

"Harris and I—Graham's my name—were in it, too. As you've spotted, Mr. Whoever-you-are, we were chemists—once. Specialists in radium. Only we made a—slip, let's call it. Got struck off the Association. Oh, rats! What's it matter? We were right up against it, anyway, and when Mosse came to us with his proposition we joined him—the rat!

"He's working with a foreign gang. They're planning to clean out all the hospitals that possess radium, and sell it to some American concern. The Americans want it for commercial purposes, and they can't get enough honestly because most of the radium supply has to go to hospitals and institutes by law. So they're paying Mosse big money to get it for 'em. See?"

Thurston Kyle nodded bitterly. He saw.

"Well, Mosse and Tony got all the stuff over here. Harris and I handled it. We changed the quantities and resealed it for smuggling into the States. Ticklish job with radium, eh? And as soon as that job was over and the money paid, Mosse double-crossed us!

"He just kicked us out. He's a devil, without fear. We threatened to give him away. He laughed, and told us to try it—with a man of his reputation. Looking it over, we found we couldn't do it, and anyway we'd go to gaol, too. So we tried to get our shares peaceably.

"But we failed. And we were nearly broke, too. At last Mosse said if we pestered him again he'd put us 'on the spot.' We knew he would, too. He was out East as a young man, and we'd heard some ugly tales about him. So we sold all we could, and bought weapons to protect ourselves.

"Harris bought a gun. I bought some 'dope,' and made a li'l bomb from a tin box and copper wire. I'd get him if he got me all right. Of course, that left us broke flat, and we were soon starving, and had only our top clothes left. But we felt better with

the weapons on us, and we stuck to Mosse for our money.

"To-day ended it. We hadn't eaten for three days. We tackled him this evening, in his chambers. Told him we were armed, in case he got rough. That changed his tone.

"He was just off to the theatre, asked us to come again in the morning, and he'd put things right. We told him we were staying right there—till he returned. He shrugged—told Tony, his man, to give us some food and coffee, and went out. And again he was double-crossing us!

"Tony brought us the food and drink, but the coffee was doped. That's where he made a mistake, eh? Giving doped coffee to two chemical experts, the fool! We spotted it the very first sip—tasted and smelt it. That settled it!

"I laid Tony out right then, with a decanter. Knocked him silly. And after we'd nosed round a bit we left. Harris was boiling with fury—said he was going to shoot Mosse outside the theatre.

"Well, he tried, and I watched Mosse kill him. He'd threatened us with that cigar trick before—always carried it. I could have slung my bomb at him from where I stood, but it meant killing other folks, too. There was a better way to get even, I knew. So I slunk off, to wait for him later on Waterloo Bridge!"

"Why there?" broke in Thurston Kyle. "At one o'clock in the morning?"

A twisted smile of malice wrinkled Graham's face.

"Because he'll be crossing about two-thirty, I guess, and I wanted to be in time. I know his car—big grey Minerva. He'll be driving himself, and I was going to throw him my little present as he passed. But Tony—must have recovered and—trailed me—somehow!"

"Where is Mosse going?" snapped Thurston Kyle as the ex-chemist's head dropped.

"To the coast!" he mumbled. "We found letters in his study—after we'd downed Tony. Gave the game away. It was from his pals—in France. Coded, o' course, but we knew the code!

"They're pullin' off their biggest haul to-night—in Paris. Makin' a clean sweep of all the radium stored in the institute there. Biggest supply in the world—worth a quarter of a million, I guess. The robbery's probably done by now. They're clever!

"The stuff's bein' raced to the French



Down flashed the Night Hawk from the skies, to snatch the precious radium from the scoundrel's nerveless fingers.

coast, where a fishin' boat'll row it out a mile and hand it on—to a submarine—waiting there. The sub.'s going to smuggle it across the Channel. Mosse is to be on the beach about four, three miles below Hythe—it's pretty lonely there—and wait for the sub.'s signal.

"Then he's sailin' for America first boat!" Tired by his story, Graham was sinking fast. His voice became a drawling mumble. "Don' wan' Harris 'n me no more—seen us han'le the stuff—c'n do it himself now. No one s'spect such highly respec'able British specialist as Sir—Sir—that dirty dog!"

The mumble ceased. Thurston Kyle glanced at his watch sharply; it said ten past

two. In twenty minutes Sir Franklyn Mosse was due to start for the coast to fetch the stolen radium.

He snapped out an order to Snub that sent him flying to the radio, and turned to find Graham's eyes staring glassily at him again.

"Wha' you goin' to do—get Mosse?" he asked thickly. "Pay him out for poor Harris an' me? We—we've been fools, I know—and worse than fools. But—but——"

A terrible cough choked him; he struggled for a moment, and then fell back, limp and still.

The Night Hawk soberly covered him with a large cloth. His handsome face was dark and savage.

"Yes, you've been a criminal fool, Graham!" he said slowly. "And paid for it with your life. But you've made amends at last, don't worry. Sir Franklyn Mosse is going to pay the same price, too!"

CHAPTER 5.

The Night Hawk Flies Again!

FOR the second time that night, the Night Hawk streaked out into the starlit darkness above sleeping London.

Merciless as Doom itself, he hurled himself faster and faster across the City, to be on hand when Sir Franklyn started for the coast.

He had one small errand to do first—to pick up something he had left on the roof of Somerset House. That done, he swung into full speed again. He arrived above the Embankment backwater where the specialist lived just in time to see a big car come purring forth.

From the shape of its bonnet and its crest as it passed a gleaming street-lamp, he saw it was a Minerva. The laugh that burst from him was almost a snarl.

Speedily they travelled, motorist and flyer, plunging deeper into the dark country until a faint briny tang mingled with the breeze, and from the height he was cruising Thurston Kyle got his first sight of the heaving Channel, with the lights of two passing ships far out from land. The scene of action was drawing near.

Ten minutes later, somewhat to his surprise, Sir Franklyn slowed his car down in a narrow lane a good half-mile from the shore, and, running it into the hedge, parked it without lights beneath an overhanging elm. After that he got out briskly, vaulted a low stile farther down with the air of a man who knows his way well, and went prowling cautiously along a narrow footpath leading towards the sea. The murmur of waves grew louder as the Night Hawk followed, and he saw, nestling darkly among some trees, the huddled cottages of a little fishing village.

Skirting the small buildings without challenge, the London specialist crept down to the beach, a solitary figure in the gloom. The reason he had come there was soon plain, for the moment his feet touched the

sand he headed unerringly for a group of fishermen's dinghies, hauled up above high water. He searched among them until he had founded the sturdiest.

Pushing it gently down to the water, with only the faint hiss of the keel on the soft beach to mark its passing, he launched the craft and piled in over the stern. For fifteen minutes he rowed parallel with the beach, until he came to an ancient and battered groyne jutting into the waves. He headed promptly for the lee-side and stopped pulling.

A glance at his illuminated wrist-watch told the Night Hawk that there would not be long to wait for the coming of the submarine from France; it wanted but a minute to four o'clock now. He loosened his guns carefully in their holsters, and felt for the grenades in the small of his back. He was ready. He had hardly finished these preparations when, from the blurred moving waters before him, came a dull, long splash, and a flicker of dim foam in the starlight caught his eyes. He swung up his glasses swiftly.

A hundred yards away, swaying to the movement of the rollers, he saw a squat conning-tower rise darkly above the surface. A tiny stab of light—the merest flicker—darted towards the shore.

The Radium Robbers' submarine had arrived, daringly nosed her way to the edge of the shelving beach, safe in the knowledge of a lonely shore and darkness. Switching his glasses to the dinghy below, the Night Hawk saw that Sir Franklyn had caught the signal, too, and was pulling stealthily away from the groyne. In three or four silent strokes of his wings, the hovering avenger covered the distance to the submarine and sank lower, thumbs hooked in his belt.

Through the little steep waves struggled Sir Franklyn, himself and the boat just a blur against the writhing seas. As though suspended by an invisible rope, Thurston Kyle dropped slowly from the skies until the conning-tower rocked but a few yards beneath him. A man in oilskins leaned rigidly over the rail, straining his eyes to follow the course of the oncoming rowing-boat.

With a last few digs of his oars, the leader of the Radium Robbers came alongside; a boat-hook darted down from the man on the conning-tower, caught the dinghy's bow, and eased her off until she scraped broadside against the submarine's half-submerged hull.

Teeth flashing in a triumphant smile, the man on the submarine bent and took a flat metal box from the well of the conning-tower behind him. Carefully he held it out to Sir Franklyn, who stretched forth an eager hand to grasp it. But the motion of the dinghy balked him at first. He staggered, grabbed wildly, and missed.

"Thanks!" drawled a cold, contemptuous voice.

Before the scoundrel could reach out a second time, a great winged figure slid silently between the two men, a long litho

arm flicked down and twitched the precious box of radium tubes from the Frenchman's nerveless clutch.

Then terror and whirlwind action broke out off the Hythe foreshore.

CHAPTER 6.

Sir Franklyn Pays His Price!

"SACRE dieu!"

A piercing scream of terror ripped from the Frenchman next instant. His hand twitched spasmodically towards a shoulder holster inside his coat. Firing savagely with his left-hand gun, the Night Hawk dropped him at point-blank range. The man threw up his arms feebly, crumpled, and fell across the rail of the

conning-tower. Sir Franklyn Mosso collapsed heavily to the bottom of his dinghy.

Whereupon Thurston Kyle fell to work at ruthless speed. He thrust the box of radium tubes inside the breast of his flying-suit, and leapt down with a swirl of wings upon Sir Franklyn. The harsh shout for help the man gave was strangled at birth by the steel fingers that gripped his throat cruelly, and, struggling but helpless, he was hauled up and pinned across the body of his dead accomplice on the submarine.

Holding him so with one hand in an agonising grip, the Night Hawk pulled something from his pouch and held it up before the man's bulging eyes. It was a little round tin, bound with copper wire.

(Continued on page 43.)

The heat of the game



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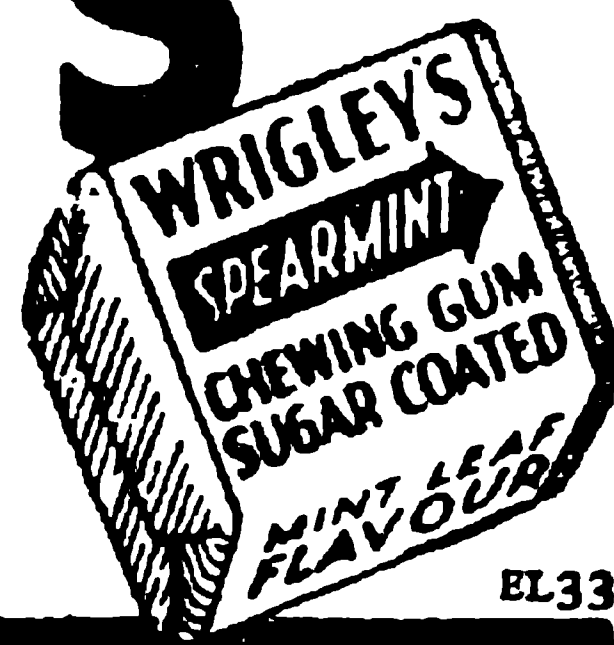
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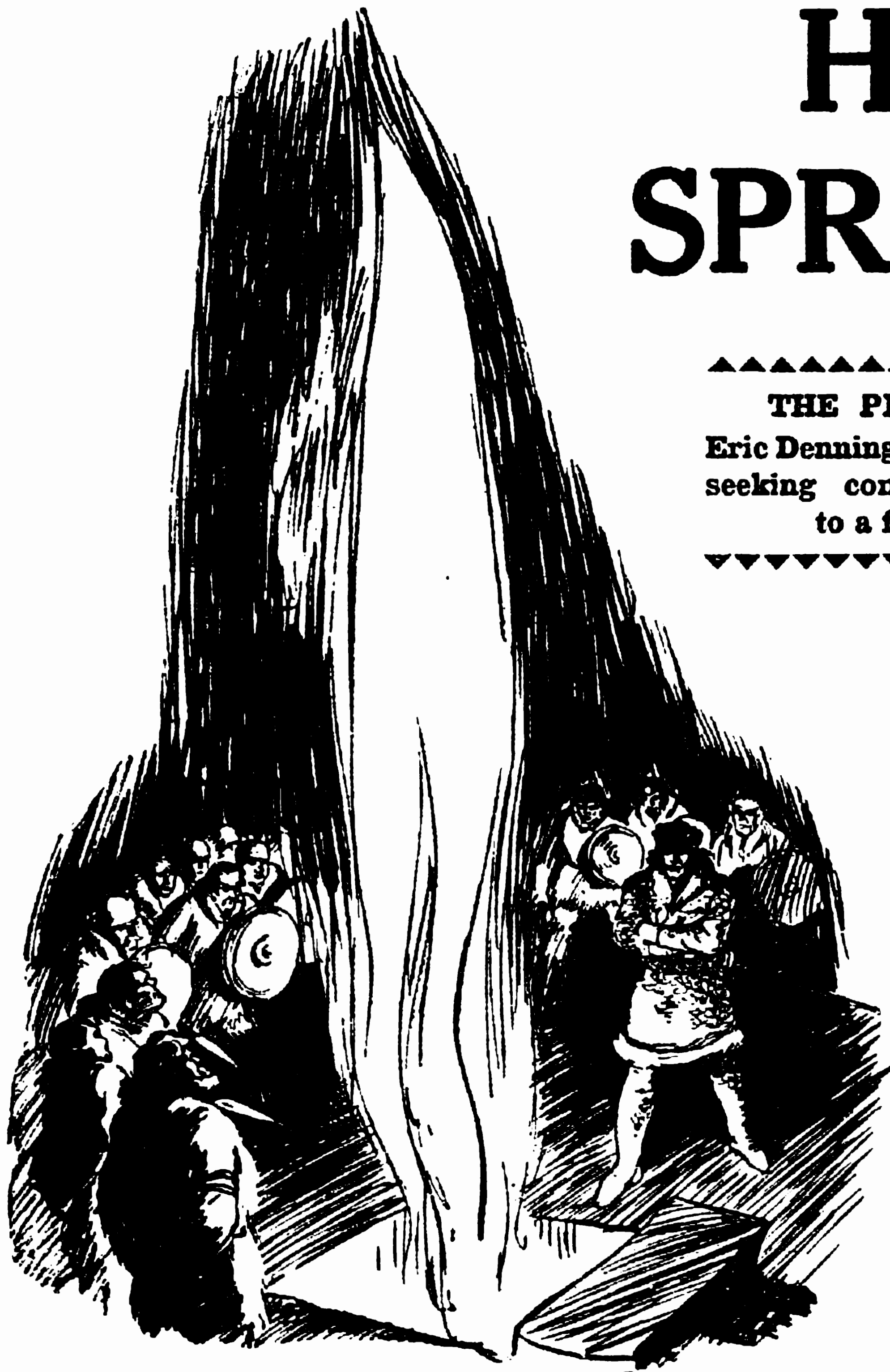


The VALLEY of HOT SPRINGS!



THE PIT OF FIRE!

Eric Denning and his treasure-seeking companions doomed to a fiery grave!



was looking round as if determined not to miss a single item of the programme.

"Now he's saying that the sacrifice is about to be made," the professor commented calmly. "I'm afraid, my boy, this is the end of us. For myself I do not care, but I regret that I have brought you to such a pass."

He cleared his throat.

"Danny — Danny, my old friend—I'd like you to know that I don't wish you to pay any attention to that notice I gave you in a moment of irritation — perhaps pardonable irritation."

Danny made no reply. Three guards had moved forward and now stood at attention, each by the

side of one of the prisoners. The Angekok raised his hands slowly. Instantly the guard standing by Danny's side caught him by the shoulders, with the obvious intention of propelling him forward and pushing him into the fiery pit.

But as his hands touched Danny's shoulders, the old pugilist swung round. Eric saw his deep-set blue eyes aglare, his massive jaw tight set. He glimpsed a lightning left uppercut, and then, with a clash of mail, the

Danny's Peril!

"A VOLCANIC fire! Extraordinarily ingenious. This pyramid is built, obviously, over the main shaft of the volcano. The geysers, of course, act as vents, keeping the pressure within ordinary limits of safety."

Though he must have known what fate awaited him, the professor's insatiable curiosity rose superior to the terrors of death. Turning his head, Eric saw that his uncle

guard had dropped senseless on the pavement.

Before either of the other two guards could recover from their astonishment, Danny's fists had felled them to the ground.

"For the love of Mike, guv'nor, keep still, can't you!"

He was behind the professor, slashing frenziedly with a knife at the leather thongs which bound him. Even as he did so the other guards, recovering from the surprise that had momentarily paralysed them, came charging across the floor, spears upraised to strike.

But the professor's arms were free now, and Danny began to attack Eric's bonds. Glancing over his shoulder, the boy saw that their chances were hopeless. Close on three hundred men, roused to fury by what they must have regarded as an act of sacrilege, were bearing down on them.

"It's no good, Danny," he cried despairingly as at last he felt his arms freed. "We're for it!"

"Well, if I've got to go down into this here burning pit, there's somebody goes along of me!" Danny retorted.

As he spoke the soldiers were almost on him. With the open knife still in his hand, he took a run, leapt clean through that tongue of flame, and landed at the other side immediately in front of the Angekok. His intention was obvious. Through the hall rang a cry of horror. A spear hurtled through the air, missing his shoulder by the fraction of an inch. Danny's arms went out as if to encircle the body of the Angekok.

And then a strange thing happened. The Angekok never moved, but suddenly Danny became as if turned to stone, his body still crouched, his arms still extended. To his horror, Eric saw that he was beginning to move backwards, as if urged by some unseen, irresistible force—backwards to the edge of the pit.

"Danny!" he cried, and, following the other's example, sprang across the opening in the floor.

Catching Danny by the collar, he strove to drag him back. But Danny, in spite of all the boy's efforts, never ceased his slow, backward movement. Claspings his arms about him, Eric tried with all his strength

to pull him to the ground. Still Danny moved backwards, inch by inch, with an odd shuffling movement. Now he was only a foot from the edge, and in another moment he would have stepped into that subterranean furnace.

Frantic with despair, Eric had given up all hope when, amidst that babel, a shot rang out.

Instantly, it seemed, the strange spell which had held the old pugilist in a trance, relaxed. He stumbled forward on the top of Eric, so that both of them came to the floor. As he fell, Eric saw the Angekok's tall figure, with an odd round mark on his forehead, from which the blood was pouring, sag and topple!

A Game of Bluff!

NOT one of the People of the Valley assembled in that vast hall had ever before heard the discharge of firearms. The sound of the revolver shot, therefore, which echoed and echoed through the great vaulted dome of the hall, and the sudden and mysterious behaviour of the Angekok—the Priest and King of the Valley—produced a startling effect upon that concourse of people.

The guards halted in their forward rush to surround the sacrificial victims who had been dedicated to Tormansuk. The spectators stood as if turned to stone. There was that ominous pause which might end in panic, or might break into a furious onslaught, in which the white men would be torn to pieces. Any incident, however slight, might be sufficient to weight the scales one way or another.

"Gosh, but his nibs has taken the count all right!" Danny, his voice very hoarse and a little tremulous, resting on hands and knees, was staring at that prone, resplendent figure. "Jackson!" he gasped. "It must have been Jackson."

Eric, in the act of scrambling to his feet, with a vague notion of rushing to his uncle's succour, paused in amazement. Coming across the hall, his white face looking more than ever like that of a monk in the frame of his fur hood, was Jackson. His right hand was at his hip, gripping a revolver. His body was curiously crouched. His little eyes were as hard as steel. There

HOW THE STORY BEGAN.

ERIC DENNING, a cheery, adventure-loving youngster, lives with his uncle,

PROFESSOR DENNING. The professor, absent-minded and interested in nothing save his studies, is expecting a visit from John Peters, an Arctic explorer who has discovered a narwhal's horn, on which is written in Runic writing the key to tremendous treasure, in Greenland. The horn arrives, but not Peters. For Peters is dead—murdered by one of a gang of scoundrels, the leader of which is

BOSS MAUNSELL. Maunsell attempts to capture the narwhal's horn, but is frustrated, largely owing to the activities of

DANNY, the professor's man-of-all-work and an ex-pugilist. The professor deciphers the writing on the horn, and he and Eric and Danny travel to Greenland, and start out for the Valley of Hot Springs. They capture Maunsell, who has been trailing them; he gives his name as Jackson. Passing through a tunnel in the glaciers, they arrive at the mysterious valley. The Angekok, or ruler of this wonder world, receives them as friends at first—and then tells them that they are to be sacrificed! They are taken to the great assembly hall, where a portion of the stone floor moves—revealing below a pit of fire!

(Now read on.)

was something almost demoniac in his features. The face was that of a killer.

There were flecks of foam upon his lips, and he pushed among the guards with the indifference of a man elbowing his way in a crowded railway station towards a booking-office. Nobody stirred; nobody tried to stay him. As he came level with that open pit, the leaping volcanic flames turned his face to a lurid, unearthly hue. Swiftly he gained the side of the dead Angekok.

Eric and Danny, who were now erect, watched him open-mouthed. With an almost brutal callousness, he stooped over the dead man and tore the golden helmet, with its mysterious symbols, from his head. Eric awoke from his trance of astonishment to see that his uncle had come round the pit unhindered, and was standing there by Jackson's side.

"Spill something to 'em, professor!" snapped Jackson. "Tell 'em I'm the big noise now. Put it good and strong! Something about this god of theirs. Having given this guy the once over for not doing his job properly, I've been chosen to do it instead. Step on it, or it won't hold them." He motioned to Eric and Danny, who came forward. "Strip him—quick!" ordered Jackson, indicating the Angekok. "I want his duds to dress the part."

The professor, after one long stare at Jackson, took a survey of the hall. Then, convulsively clutching his beard, he began to speak in his booming voice. What he said, Eric had not the slightest idea. The boy's whole attention was concentrated upon stripping the body of the dead Angekok, taking off the coat of golden mail and the chain belt, until nothing was left of his splendour, and he lay there clad only in furs.

"Get to the coronation piece, professor!" Jackson snapped. "We want to finish this, quick. I don't know what you're saying, but it seems the goods. The danger is that this push won't stand for too much of it."

With a low obeisance the professor took the helmet, with its strange symbols, from Jackson, and then, going behind him, held it suspended above the other's head for some moments, while his booming voice awoke the echoes of the vast chamber. Slowly, with an air of great reverence, he placed the head-piece in position.

"I'm blowed if he don't look the real, proper pantomime guy!" Danny muttered, in a tone of genuine admiration. "But what's the great idea, Mr. Eric?"

Dimly Eric was beginning to realise the audacious plan this strange companion of theirs had conceived. He was assuming the symbols of authority of the dead Angekok!

But before the youngster could even hint to Danny what was afoot, Jackson was snapping out further orders.

"Shift that stuff, boys, and chuck him into the pit. Say a piece, professor, about this god of theirs having got the sacrifice he's looking for. Pitch it to 'em good and strong.

And look here! Any of you savvy the trick of this revolving stone? We've got to close it after we've parted with this lot."

Eric glanced down at the ground. He could see the very spot where the Angekok had taken up his station. It was distinguished from the rest of the floor by being made of gold instead of stone. Immediately in front of this golden slab the end of a metal bar projected above the level. One swift glance showed him that the bar was pivoted, and that the opposite end was a corresponding distance beneath the level of the pavement, in which a long niche had been cut to receive it.

"That's how it's worked, I think," the boy whispered. "He must have pressed on that end with that stick of his, and if you reverse the process by pushing on the other end, that'll probably close the stone."

Jackson let his eyes wander for a moment to the ground.

"Right!" he muttered. "I'll chance it. Pick up that guy and stand ready to tumble him into the hole as soon as the professor begins to talk. Now then, professor, let them have it!"

The professor "let them have it" in long, sonorous sentences, gesticulating grandly the while with his arms. Picking up the lifeless body of the Angekok, Eric and Danny brought it slowly towards the edge of the pit of fire. Not a living soul in the hall moved. The mailed guards stood there like statues, offering no resistance.

"Now then, Mr. Eric, give him a heave," Danny muttered. "I'm getting toasted."

With one final swing, they hurled the body into the mouth of the pit. As it vanished, the subterranean fires seemed to take on new life. The tongues of flame rose higher into the air, lighting up luridly the massive roof of the hall.

"That's that! And nobody can't say he didn't deserve it for his treachery," Danny exclaimed in an undertone. "The question is, Mr. Eric, will Jackson get away with it?"

The professor was working up to a climax. And then, as his voice rose to an even more passionate declamation, the great stone at their feet began to move. Slowly and ponderously it revolved. From beneath the pavement came a rumbling sound. That sword-like flame vanished. For a moment the air about them was filled with sulphurous fumes, and then, with a faint click, the great stone was in position again.

So far, Jackson had carried out his plan with startling effectiveness. He stood there, dressed in the symbols of the Angekok's office. In the face of several hundreds of armed men, he had carried out an amazing bluff, and rescued the party from a dreadful death. But what was to happen now?

(Many perils and exciting adventures await Eric and his companions in the Valley of Hot Springs. Don't miss reading next week's vivid instalment of this enthralling serial.)

THE RADIUM ROBBERS!

(Continued from page 39.)

"A present from Graham, your murdered dupe!" he grinned. "Now, take it with you where you're going, you hospital-robbing cur!"

Flinging the last words full in the specialist's teeth, the pitiless flyer stowed the bomb into the man's pocket, and, with a deft movement, added two more of his own grenades—pins out! Then he flew aloft, and allowed his captive to drop—

At whirlwind speed the Night Hawk flung himself away from the doomed vessel beneath him, gliding close to the waves before the explosion came. It came—a rending crash, a smashing upheaval of waters and a grinding, shuddering lurch as the submarine turned on its side and rolled sluggishly beneath the waves.

High and safe above the shore again, the Night Hawk looked down, a sombre smile in his dark eyes.

"You've got your revenge, Graham and Harris!" he murmured. "I don't know what that bomb contained, but from its effect it was worthy of an expert. So ends the radium robberies!"

Buttoning the precious metal box safely into his pouch, he turned on graceful tilted wings and swung contentedly away for London and home.

THAT evening a small package arrived at Scotland Yard, addressed to Superintendent Frazer and posted from the Strand P.O. Inside it, when opened carefully, that astounded official found the box of radium tubes stolen from the Radium Institute in Paris, news of which cruel and daring robbery had reached England some hours before.

The tubes were intact and untouched. A typewritten note accompanied the box, giving a curt account, with full names, of the activities of the Radium Robbers. And Frazer, like an intelligent man, acted swiftly.

Tony, Sir Franklyn's valet, was arrested at Dover as he was stepping on to a Channel packet, en route for the Continent and as a result of his confession further lightning arrests were made in France, and, later, in America, where certain tough business magnates in the oil industry suffered for their cupidity. The shattered submarine, hauled ashore on the Kentish coast, was examined. But the details were never published. Nor was any official mention ever made of a dead chemist named Graham, found apparently asleep by the canal in Regent's Park.

One other mystery Superintendent Frazer failed to settle in this startling case—the identity of the man who had recovered the radium and prepared the way for the general "clean up." Not by so much as a finger-print on the box was there any clue. That item, at least, went down eventually as "unsolved."

But a few nights later a tall figure, borne by wonderful wings, floated through the darkness to the roof of a house near the Thames Embankment, prised up a loosened tile, and wrapped a set of tiny microphones in a canvas folder.

Sir Franklyn Mosse, the leader of the Radium Robbers, was off the Night Hawk's "secret service" list at last—permanently.

THE END.

(Kyle's Kittens play a fighting part in next week's exciting Night Hawk yarn, which is entitled "Kittens' Prey!" One long thrill throughout.)

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