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August 1st, 1931.

Thrills and Excitement for the Chums of St. Frank's in Caronia.

The BANDITS OF



CHAPTER 1.

St. Frank's on Holiday!

DORRIMORE CASTLE basked in the blazing sunshine of the summer's afternoon.

The picturesque pile, centuries old, stood up in stately magnificence against the blue skyline. The terraces radiated with the heat; the velvet-like lawns and the gaily-coloured flower gardens made a delightful picture in the hot sunshine; the lake shimmered lazily, and all round, the Derbyshire countryside, so bleak and rugged in the winter-time, was now one of England's most entrancing beauty spots.

In the wide-open doorway of the castle, Lord Dorrimore, free and easy in white flannels, was welcoming his guests. They were arriving, mostly, in motor-cars, and on motor-cycles, and they had been coming in a more or less continuous stream for over an hour.

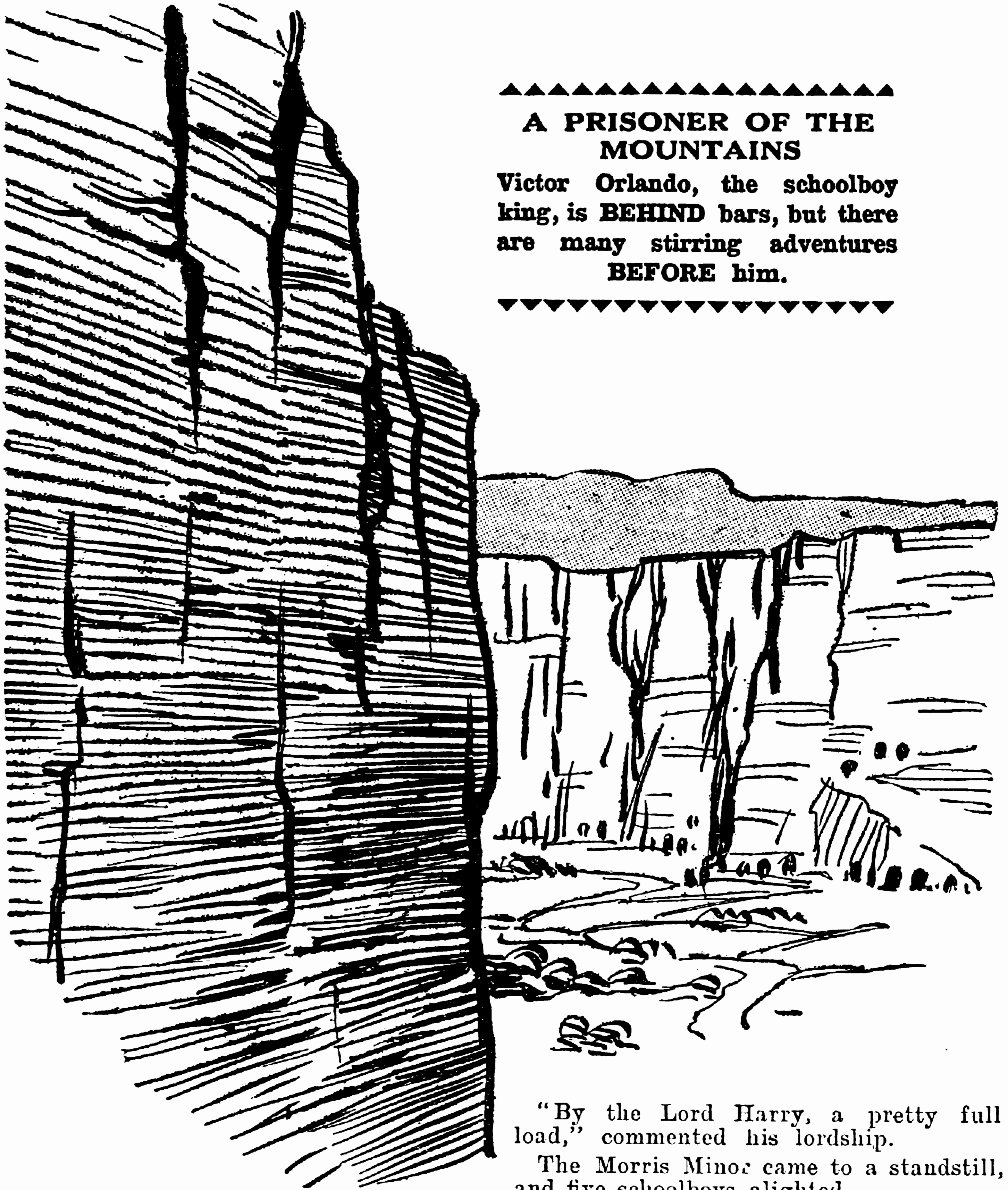
Behind Lord Dorrimore hovered the kindly yet dignified figure of Bayley, the elderly butler. It was Bayley's duty to take the guests in hand, after his lordship had greeted them, and advise them as to their quarters.

The genial Dorrie, lighting a fresh cigarette, heard a familiar hum on the drive, and he glanced over his shoulder.

First Complete Yarn of Magnificent New Holiday-Adventure Series.

CARONIA!

By *EDWY SEARLES*
BROOKS



A PRISONER OF THE MOUNTAINS

Victor Orlando, the schoolboy king, is **BEHIND** bars, but there are many stirring adventures **BEFORE** him.

"Look out, Bayley," he said cheerfully. "Another batch just arriving."

"Yes, my lord," said Bayley, all smiles.

A Morris Minor turned the bend in the drive, and it came gliding along the terrace to the foot of the imposing steps.

"By the Lord Harry, a pretty full load," commented his lordship.

The Morris Minor came to a standstill, and five schoolboys alighted.

"Welcome to the ancestral pile, you fellows!" said Lord Dorrimore genially. "Did you have a nice run?"

"Ripping, thanks, sir!" said Edward Oswald Handforth, the burly leader of Study D in the St. Frank's Remove—and, incidentally, the owner of the Morris

Minor. "I'm glad to be here, sir; thanks for inviting us."

"Rats!" said his lordship.

He shook hands all round—with Handforth, Church, McClure, Orlando and Maddox. While he was doing so, two motorcyclists arrived in the rear; Nipper, the Remove captain, and Vivian Travers.

"What was the idea, you two fatheads?" demanded Handforth, frowning at the latest arrivals. "What the dickens did you mean by sticking behind me all the way from London? My car isn't a racing model, and I came easy all the way. You could have passed me easily enough, if you had wanted."

"But we didn't want, old man," replied Nipper. "Hallo, Dorrie! I'll bet you can guess why we kept Handy's car in sight."

"Too hot for guessing to-day," said Lord Dorrimore, shaking his head.

"Well, you're pretty dense," said Nipper. "Travers and I were the bodyguard."

"The which?"

"Better say guard of honour, dear old fellow—it sounds better," observed Travers.

Light dawned upon Lord Dorrimore.

"Oh, I see," he said, with a significant glance at Orlando. "Our young friend, the king, eh?"

"That's it," replied Nipper. "He was pretty safe in Handforth's car, but Travers and I thought it as well to make doubly sure. So we kept the little 'bus in sight. Everything was O.K.—not a hitch all the way down."

Victor Orlando grinned.

"They're looking after me well, sir," he said. "Ever since that affair at St. Frank's the other day, I've had a bodyguard practically day and night. I'm afraid I'm causing an awful lot of trouble."

"Rot!" said Handforth. "As long as you've got mysterious enemies, who are always trying to kidnap you, it's up to the Remove to rally round."

THIS was not one of Handforth's usual wild yarns. It happened to be the literal truth.

For Victor Orlando, the new boy in the Remove, was different from the average run of new boys. He was high-spirited, mischievous, and as much a schoolboy as any other fellow in the Remove, but it also happened that he was the King of Caronia.

It had been arranged by his uncle, the Grand Duke Rudolph—who was the Regent, and virtually the dictator of Caronia's destinies—that Victor should remain at St. Frank's for the summer holidays, and Paul Maddox, his staunch chum, was to have remained with him.

Victor Alexis Orlando was the king; Paul Maddox was the son of a prominent Caronian tradesman; but the two had been playmates as children, they had had the same English tutor in the Royal Palace; they had spent a year or two in the same English preparatory school, and, still together, they had been sent to St. Frank's. Victor, in fact, had refused to come to school in England unless his friend came with him.

But strange things had happened at St. Frank's; there had been more than one attempt to kidnap Victor. Thus, when Lord Dorrimore arrived at the old school with wholesale invitations for the fellows to spend the summer holidays at Dorrimore Castle, he had promptly invited the two young Caronians to come along with the rest of the Removites.

The breezy, good-natured sporting peer had acted with characteristic efficiency upon his arrival at the old school; he had actually witnessed an attempt to kidnap the young king, and he had promptly frustrated it. Because of that incident, he had been admitted into Victor Orlando's confidence, and he had insisted that Victor and Paul should spend the vacation at the castle.

Victor was not only happy, now, but he had a feeling of complete security. Never once had his new friends of the Remove neglected him. During the journey up from St. Frank's, during the day or two that he had spent in Handforth's home, and during this journey down to Derbyshire, he had been constantly watched over. In the little car he had had Handforth and Church and McClure, and Nipper and Travers, on their motor-bikes, had acted as scouts.

It was all very embarrassing, and Victor felt that he was causing an extraordinary amount of bother, but the Removites, on the whole, rather enjoyed the situation. Guarding a boy king who was in danger of being kidnapped was something out of the common.

Victor was such a sterling good chap that they delighted in rallying round him. He was frank and open, and there wasn't an ounce of snobbishness in his whole composition. It was difficult, indeed, to believe that he was a king, and just as difficult to believe that he was a foreigner, and Paul Maddox was a sterling sportsman of the same calibre.

"YOU'VE got to forget that you're a king while you're my guest, Orlando," said Lord Dorrimore, smiling. "You've got to forget that you ever had kidnappers after you. You're safe enough here amongst the

crowd, and you've got to enjoy yourself. I want everybody to have a great time during this vacation."

"We'll have one, Dorrie!" said Nipper confidently. "With you as the host, it's a dead cert."

"By George, rather!" said Handforth enthusiastically. "I say, what a perfectly ripping place!" he added, as he looked round. "Look at that lake! Is bathing allowed in it, sir?"

"Any old thing you like," replied Lord Dorrimore cheerfully. "Bathing, swimming, boating, and all the rest of it. I've got a good supply of canoes, outboard motor-boats, launches, punts, and similar trifles. We're here to enjoy ourselves."

Other fellows were arriving now. A car turned up with William Napoleon Browne and Horace Stevens of the Fifth. A batch of Third-Formers made their appearance, led by Willy Handforth. And, more satisfactory still, girls began to arrive. For Irene & Co., of the Moor View School, had been invited, too. Lord Dorrimore felt that no summer holiday could be perfect without the inclusion of some bright, cheery girls.

Mrs. Bayley, Dorrie's faithful old housekeeper—and, incidentally, the butler's wife—took the girls in hand as soon as they arrived. There was a good supply of maids, too, to attend to the young lady guests.

By now Removites and Fourth-Formers were swarming all over the place, and Lord Dorrimore, strolling amongst them, was the ideal host.

"There's going to be nothing formal, young 'uns," he said. "Everything free and easy—everything jolly. Fishing, bathing, and all that sort of thing. A generally lazy time, eh?"

"It's going to be a wonderful house-party, sir," said Corcoran, the Fourth Form captain.

"Well, I think it ought to be a success," agreed his lordship. "If you fellows feel energetic enough for cricket, by the way, there's everything in readiness. I've had the ground prepared, with pitches marked out, and everything. We ought to have quite a lot of fun with cricket. We can fix up some matches with the local people, perhaps. We might have a girls versus boys match, too. Any old thing to keep the fun going."

Lord Dorrimore, of course, was in his element. He had a strong partiality for the society of young people—being, in fact, an overgrown schoolboy himself. If he could see them happy, he was happy on his own account. He was determined to give his young guests a never-ceasing round of healthy pleasure.

"I thought about inviting some older people down, but then I dismissed the idea," he confided to Nipper. "You know, Mr. and Mrs. Wilkes, Sir Hobart Manners, and a few more 'specials.' But, on the whole, I think we'll have a better time by ourselves, don't you?"

"Just we youngsters," grinned Nipper.

"That's it," nodded his lordship. "And, look here, my lad, if there's any cricket going, I'm playing. Understand? I don't care which side I play for, but you'll leave me out at your peril. Oh, and by the way, Umlosi has expressed a keen desire to learn cricket. I'm relying upon you fellows to give him a few tips——"

"Umlosi!" yelled Nipper. "By Jove! I'd forgotten him! Where is the old bounder?"

"Asleep somewhere, I expect," said Lord Dorrimore. "Umlosi may be a king in his own right, but between you and me, Nipper, he's the laziest nigger out of Africa. Fighting is his special line, and the more gory it is the better he likes it. If there's no fighting to do, he just sleeps. He hasn't been here a week, and he's bored to tears already."

"We'll wake him up!" said Nipper, with conviction.

"Talking about kings," went on Dorrie, lowering his voice, "what about this young fellow, Orlando? There was some funny business at St. Frank's wasn't there?"

"Yes; Archie Glenthorne was kidnapped in mistake for Orlando," replied Nipper, becoming serious. "Then, almost immediately afterwards, Orlando himself was collared. His enemies would have taken him completely away if you hadn't butted in, Dorrie."

"His half-brother, Prince Zeno, I understand, is the kidnapper-in-chief?"

"So we believe," replied Nipper. "Anyhow, we've been keeping a pretty close watch on Orlando since then, and nothing suspicious has happened."

"Well, he'll be all right here," declared Dorrie. "Not one chance in a thousand of those merchants getting at him."

"They've lost their chance now, Dorrie," Nipper agreed. "Their only hope was to grab Orlando while he was off his guard, but we're 'on' to their game now, and it's a certainty they know it. So the chances are they'll leave him alone."

"They'd better!" said his lordship gruffly. "If any darned kidnappers come messing round my property, I'll show them who's the lord and master of this fair domain! Oh, yes, I can be the real old feudal lord when I like!"

"Don't make me laugh," grinned Nipper. "Now tell me where Umlosi is; I want to give his nibs the glad hand."

CHAPTER 2.

The Plotters!

PRINCE ZENO OF KAZATOVA threw his cigarette down with savage violence, and stamped upon it.

"The carpet, your Highness!" protested his companion.

"You think I care about the carpet?" snapped Prince Zeno. "Are you a fool? You sit there and talk to me about carpets! Why this delay? Why this blundering?"

Count Frederic von Stelf shrugged his shoulders.

"You are impatient," he replied. "Your Highness expects too much. The task is not easy——"

"Not easy?" repeated the prince harshly. "Not easy to seize a mere school-boy, smuggle him out of England, and bring him to me? Bah! Children could have done better than the men I have employed. Lieutenant Klotz and his fools are nothing better than clumsy imbeciles!"

The count shrugged again, but he made no comment.

The two men were alone in the luxurious saloon of Prince Zeno's private yacht. It was a small but beautifully-appointed vessel, and at the moment she was placidly at anchor somewhere in the English Channel. The coastline was just visible in the heat haze.

"Day after day we leave our French port," went on the Caronian prince. "Day after day we come here and wait. What happens? Nothing! Nothing at all! Yet Victor should have been brought here a week ago. All my crazy agents can do is to make mistakes and bring the wrong boy!"

The two men were speaking in one of the numerous forms of the Slavonic tongue. The difference in them was very marked. For, whilst Prince Zeno was excitable, hot-tempered and volatile, Count Frederic von Stelf was stout, florid, unemotional.

"If it were not against my policy of caution, I would go ashore myself," growled the prince. "Much as I hate this country of the British, I would contaminate my feet with its soil, and——"

"But no, your Highness!" interrupted the count. "That would be folly."

"Have no fear," grunted the other. "I shall not land in England. It would be too risky. Soon—very soon—King Victor

of Caronia will disappear, and I do not wish to be associated with his disappearance. Here, at sea, I am safe. Even if I am suspected, there can be no proof. And once we have the boy safely in Caronia, we can snap our fingers at everybody."

"And yet we must not overlook the facts which stare us so plainly in the face, your Highness," said Von Stelf gently. "Much as we hate England, we know it to be a land of admirable law and order. It is not so easy forcibly to remove a boy from a Public school——"

"He is no longer at the school!" interrupted the prince angrily. "My men wasted their opportunities. All the school-boys are away from St. Frank's on holiday. And Victor? Even now I do not know where he is. He was to have remained at the school, but I hear that he is not there. Blunderers! All my men are blunderers!"

He paced up and down, pulling at his weak chin, fingering his small moustache. He bore not the slightest resemblance to the cheery, mischievous Victor, his young half-brother.

Prince Zeno had his eye on the Caronian throne.

If only he could get hold of Victor, and use him as a hostage, he would be able to force the Grand Duke Rudolph to abdicate. There would be a swift revolution in Caronia; the Slavonic population would triumph, and he, Zeno, would find himself upon the throne.

Everything was ripe for the coup.

A large proportion of the Caronians had taken kindly to the Grand Duke Rudolph's drastic changes, which included the introduction of the English language into that country; he could count upon the loyalty of all those peoples who had formerly spoken German and Italian. But the Slavs were difficult. They resented the innovations that were putting the little country of Caronia on the map of Europe. They were rallying round Prince Zeno, and when the day came the prince knew that he could count upon these wild, savage mountain people.

The great province of Kazatova was mountainous and rugged; it was peopled by tribes who were little better than bandits. They were Prince Zeno's supporters. And if he had his way, he would bring bloodshed and disaster upon the prosperous mid-European State.

Ambition was behind Prince Zeno's activities—the desire to rule, the desire to wield power. His brain was aflame with it, and he was a dangerous man. Round about him he had collected other



Umlosi swiped at the ball with such mighty force that he spun round and round and then sat down with a thud.

men who had visions of power—men, mostly, who had been dismissed by the Grand Duke Rudolph. Through Prince Zeno they hoped to get back all that they had lost, and more. Count Frederic von Stelf was the prince's chief adviser.

And the prince was beginning to regret his choice, since Von Stelf seemed to advise nothing but caution and delay. Yet Von Stelf was right. Zeno, in his impulsiveness, would bring ruin to his enterprise. It was essentially a time for care and precaution.

"Patience, your Highness—patience," said the count deprecatingly. "Why do you act so much like a sulky child? Your men are faithful, and they are doing their best. Give them time."

"You speak to me thus?" asked the prince, offended.

"By St. Peter! It's time I spoke thus," growled the count. "In your mad desire for haste you will ruin all—unless you are checked."

"Remember to whom you are speaking, Von Stelf!" snapped the other.

"I mean no discourtesy, your Highness," said the count gruffly. "You call me a pessimist; you say that I am over-cautious. But thrones were never won by ill-advised precipitancy. Great men are involved in this revolution; noble Caronian families; ay, and thousands of good Slavs, such as ourselves. One false step

now, and the grand duke will crush us. Until we are ready to strike, we must be careful—very careful."

Prince Zeno sneered.

"And many a throne has been lost, my good Von Stelf, by futile delays, and by the frittering away of one's opportunities," he said. "This boy, Victor, is merely an ordinary scholar at an English school. Yet my men cannot get hold of him and bring him to me! I tell you, they are blunderers!"

"It was I who urged caution upon them," replied the count stiffly.

"Do they obey you in preference to their prince?" asked Zeno, with a savage flash in his eyes. "Oh! This shall be altered, my friend!"

The count shrugged again; he knew that it was hopeless to argue while the prince was in this mood. Fortunately, a tap sounded on the door, and in response to Zeno's command an officer entered.

"The launch is on its way out from the shore, your Highness," said the officer, saluting.

"Something is happening at last!" exclaimed Zeno. "Good! Come, Von Stelf!"

He hurried on deck. Count von Stelf, bigger in body and calmer in mind, followed leisurely. When he reached the deck, he was in ample time to see a small

motor-launch gliding out over the sunlit sea.

The yacht was lying motionless on the shimmering water. It was a blazing day, typical of July, and even the sea breeze was insufficient to relieve the sweltering heat.

The yacht flew the Caronian flag—the Royal Standard, in fact. Every officer and man aboard was a staunch supporter of the revolutionary prince.

The man who arrived in the launch was smartly dressed and young; in his white flannels, with open-necked tennis-shirt, he looked a typical holiday-maker.

"Well, Lieutenant Klotz?" asked the prince, by way of greeting.

Lieutenant Klotz bowed stiffly.

"My report, your Highness, is of some length," he said, after a moment of hesitation. "Might I suggest the privacy of your state-room?"

"Come!" said the prince briefly.

They went below, and Count von Stelf accompanied them.

"Well?" said Prince Zeno, when they were in private. "I don't like the look of you, Klotz. I can sum up your report in one word, I think—failure!"

"But, your Highness——"

"Am I right?" snapped the prince. "Have you got that boy?"

"There has been no opportunity, your Highness," protested Klotz earnestly. "We have been doing our best——"

"What did I say?" interrupted the prince, turning to Von Stelf. "Failure! The fool can do nothing better than come aboard and report failure!"

"Let him tell us the reason for his failure," suggested Von Stelf mildly. "Your Highness is contemptuous of the British law; but I will warrant that our friend Lieutenant Klotz has good reason to treat that same law with caution and respect."

The lieutenant shot a grateful glance at the count, and he turned eagerly to Prince Zeno.

"It has already been reported to you, your Highness, that the boy has left the school," he said. "We have been constantly watching—we have been constantly awaiting an opportunity. But never a single chance have we had. King Victor has been carefully guarded——"

"Guarded?" broke in the prince sharply. "How do you mean—guarded?"

"His schoolboy friends have watched over him constantly——"

"You are telling me that he is guarded by schoolboys?" interrupted the prince angrily. "What's this, Klotz? You are afraid of schoolboys?"

"It is not a question of being afraid, your Highness," replied Klotz indignantly. "But schoolboys are sharp-witted enough; we have been constantly harassed by them. Now we discover that King Victor has gone, with a large party of his schoolboy friends, to Dorrimore Castle, in Derbyshire."

"Dorrimore Castle?" repeated the prince.

"It is the country home, your Highness, of a man named Lord Dorrimore," explained Klotz. "He has invited these boys to spend the summer holidays there. Some dozens of boys and girls are in the party. King Victor is included. There is very little hope now. The boys seem to be aware of our plans, and they are constantly watching."

"Bad—very bad!" murmured Von Stelf. "It was difficult enough to get at the boy while he was at school; it will be more difficult now."

"Why?" demanded the prince. "Where are the difficulties? Are you telling me that there is no way in which a mere schoolboy can be tricked? Are these friends of his swarming round him in droves? Rubbish! Nonsense! I'm tired of these delays—tired of these paltry excuses!" He swung upon Lieutenant Klotz angrily. "Do not come to me again with such reports!" he said harshly. "I have only one thing to say to you, Klotz. Bring that boy to me!"

"But, your Highness, you cannot appreciate the difficulties——"

"I appreciate that you and your men have so far proved yourselves to be incompetent!" said Prince Zeno scornfully. "But I will give you one more chance. Just one more chance, my lieutenant! If you fail to bring King Victor to me this time—and I will give you three days—you shall be sent back to Caronia in disgrace!"

The lieutenant's eyes burned, but he said nothing.

"When the day comes there will be promotion for you," continued the prince. "Serve me well, my friend, and you will soon rise from a lieutenantcy to a command. But you must prove yourself to be worthy. Go!"

"Perhaps our young friend has more to tell?" suggested Count von Stelf gently. "Do not dismiss him so peremptorily, your Highness. Now that King Victor is a member of this house-party—now that his schoolboy friends are aware of our attentions—the need for caution is more acute than ever."

"Away with caution!" said the prince savagely. "There has been too much of it! The boy must be seized at once! I

am tired of these delays. I will make fresh plans—I will give instructions to other branches of my service. Listen to me, Lieutenant Klotz; you shall have further aid. But you must come to me with no further reports of failure. You understand? When I see you again, you must bring news of success—or you had better not come at all!”

Von Stelf was alarmed.

“But why this haste, your Highness?” he asked. “There is nothing to be gained by such rashness, and much to lose. A week—a month—what does it matter? When the prize is so great, and the issues so vital, it is madness to risk all by hasty, ill-considered action. Would it not be better to withdraw completely for some weeks? These boys are on the alert. Let them believe that we are no longer interested in King Victor, and they will become lax. I urge you, your Highness —”

“You may urge as much as you like,” interrupted Prince Zeno curtly. “I am tired of waiting. That boy must be seized at once.”

The count shrugged helplessly.

“This will mean trouble with the British authorities,” he groaned. “Think well, your Highness. The boy is under the protection of the British law; if we transgress that law, we place ourselves in a hopeless predicament, and there is no telling what complications——”

“Enough!” interrupted the prince. “I tell you my mind is made up!”

CHAPTER 3.

Holiday Cricket!

“**W**AU! I understand it not, this wondrous game!”

Umlosi, King of Kutanalanda, was the centre of a grinning crowd of St. Frank’s juniors. Of the two kings in Lord Dorrimore’s house-party, he was by far the more amusing.

Two days had elapsed, and the party was settling down and enjoying itself immensely. The weather held good, and bathing, fishing, and boating had been indulged in freely. And now, on this sunny morning, Umlosi was receiving his final lesson in cricket.

Nothing had occurred to mar the happiness of Victor Orlando. Here, at Dorrimore Castle, he seemed perfectly safe. No suspicious characters had been seen; and Victor’s self-appointed bodyguard had found that its services were not required. The juniors were not getting lax in any way, but they were beginning to think

that this bodyguard idea was becoming unnecessary. How could the young king be in any danger here? As long as he was never allowed to go anywhere alone, it was impossible for his enemies to get at him.

He was certainly safe enough now, for he was in the midst of a crowd of St. Frank’s fellows, grinning appreciatively at Umlosi’s difficulties. Some of the Moor View girls were there, too, and Lord Dorrimore himself was looking on, chuckling.

It was really a delightful scene. The playing-field was situated in a picturesque glade of the park. The turf was perfect, the pitch itself being reminiscent of Lord’s. Flanking the ground on one side was a shady little wood, and on the other side Dorrie had provided a little gem of a pavilion—a picturesque building with a shaded veranda, a refreshment-room, dressing-rooms, and a lounge.

“What’s the exact trouble, Umlosi, old friend?” asked Lord Dorrimore dryly. “We shall have to buck you up, you know. It’s getting time for the match.”

Umlosi gave one of his expressive grunts. He was a huge figure of a man, this paramount chief of the Kutanas; and at the present moment he was resplendent in white flannels, which suited him well. Yet the St. Frank’s fellows had a feeling that Umlosi would have been more comfortable in a strip of leopard skin, or some similar scanty garb. His famous six-foot spear was far more suitable to his grip than a cricket bat—which looked absurdly dwarfed in his great hands.

“Thou sayest, N’Kosc, that cricket is a game for men,” he rumbled. “Wau! Yet thou art bidding me play side by side with boys and with girls!”

Nipper laughed.

“Just a bit of fun, Umlosi,” he explained. “We’re having a special game to-day—Browne’s Eleven against mine. You’re in my team, and so is our cheery host.”

“And this is a game?” asked Umlosi, in surprise. “This hitting of a ball with a quaintly-shaped wooden club?”

“Not a club, old man—a bat,” pointed out Nipper.

“Thou hast spoken of the difficulties of this strange game, O, my young master,” said Umlosi. “But what is there in it? I stand before these three sticks, and I hit the ball when it is thrown to me: Wau! Is that what thou callest a game? Thinkest thou that these sticks can be touched by the ball if I determine otherwise?”

“Well, batsmen do miss the ball occasionally,” murmured Travers.

"Thou speakest of learning the game, and there is naught to learn," said Umlosi scornfully. "Is not my eye true? Am I not able to throw my spear so accurately that it unerringly enters the heart of an enemy? How, then, shall I miss hitting this ball when it is thrown to me?"

"We'll admit you've got a keen eye, Umlosi, but cricket's a funny game," said Nipper, with a grin. "Let's have another go, anyway. You stand at the wicket, and Gresham, here, will bowl to you."

"Even as thou sayest," rumbled Umlosi, who apparently thought that the whole business was a lamentable waste of time.

Cricket, to him, was tame and childish. In fact, his whole life in England was tame and childish. His fancy ran to fighting, and he was only really happy when he had his spear in his hand, and when he was battling against enemies. England, in Umlosi's opinion, was altogether too peaceful.

He had had one or two cricket lessons, but it was plain that he scorned them. He was only being included in Nipper's Eleven because he would probably provide some excellent fun.

Gresham bowled to him now—a really fast one. The bat flashed in Umlosi's hand, and the ball soared away skywards, vanishing over the top of a clump of stately chestnuts in the distance.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well hit, Umlosi!"

"If we want to find that ball, we shall have to look somewhere in Yorkshire!" grinned Victor. "Great Scott! What a swipe! I'll bet there's a big dent in the bat!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You'll do, Umlosi!" grinned Nipper. "I don't think you need any more teaching!"

"'Tis a game of wondrous mystery, methinks," rumbled Umlosi. "Thou hittest a ball, and the ball vanishes. Wau! My snake whispers that thou makest fun of me."

"Don't you believe it, Umlosi!" chuckled Nipper. "A batsman who can hit like you is worth his weight in gold!"

Everybody was in high spirits. This game was going to be real fun. Both elevens were well mixed. Nipper's team consisted of himself, Handforth, Travers, Jerry Dodd, Harry Gresham, Victor Orlando, Irene Manners, Mary Summers, Doris Berkeley, Lord Dorrimore, and Umlosi.

Browne's Eleven was made up of Browne himself, Stevens, Willy Handforth, Buster Boots, Corcoran, "Skeets"

Rossiter, Paul Maddox, Marjorie Temple, Winnie Pitt, Vera Wilkes, and Phipps.

Including Phipps had been a brain-wave of Archie Glenthorne's. Archie had been invited to play, but as he was feeling particularly lazy he had blandly suggested that Phipps, his valet, should play in his stead. Archie had only made the suggestion humorously, but Browne, who was out for as much fun as he could get, had insisted upon Phipps playing. Browne had also insisted upon Willy Handforth, of the Third, being included in the game. The girls, of course, were as keen as mustard.

"Well, Brother Nipper, are we ready for the fray?" asked the long, lean, elegant William Napoleon Browne, as he strolled up. "I hate to interrupt you while you are instructing your men in the simple rules of this delightful game, but I would remind you that the morning is advancing."

"We're ready!" said Nipper cheerfully. "No reason why we shouldn't start at once. Shall we toss?"

"As a mere formality, yes," agreed Browne. "I would mention that I have already made up my mind to win the toss, Brother Nipper. However——"

He produced a coin, and spun it high into the air.

"Heads!" called Nipper.

And heads it was.

"Alas!" sighed Browne. "I take it that you will elect to bat first? Something has apparently come unstuck."

"You and your men can get into the field," said Nipper briskly. "Of course we're batting first, Browne."

The opening "batsmen" were Irene Manners and Mary Summers. It was a case of "ladies first." Browne's Eleven took the field, and the spectators settled down to enjoy this most unusual game. Nothing depended upon it, so the batsmen felt that they could go "all out" for runs and a good time. It was a real holiday game.

Browne, with a gracious smile, tossed the ball to Vera Wilkes.

"I suggest," he said, "that you open the bowling, Sister Vera."

"Not likely!" replied Vera promptly.

"Eh?"

"Think again," said Vera, tossing the ball back.

"I would remind you that I am your skipper——"

"But, my dear chap, we don't want to make this into a girls' match, do we?" asked Vera Wilkes.

"There is a time-honoured adage to the effect that ladies should come first," murmured Browne.

"Forget it!" replied the girl, with a smile. "We want to mix things up as much as possible, don't we? If we girls bowl against the girls in the other team, there won't be much fun."

"Perhaps you are right, Sister Vera," said Browne, nodding. "In fact, I am quite sure that you are right. We will mix things up as much as possible—eh? Splendid! Brother Phipps, allow me!"

Phipps, who was looking far from comfortable in flannels, and who found it impossible to shed his dignity as a "gentleman's gentleman," was unprepared for the throw, and the ball struck him in the middle rib.

Browne put Phipps on in a spirit of fun; but he took Phipps off in a spirit of consternation at the end of the first over.

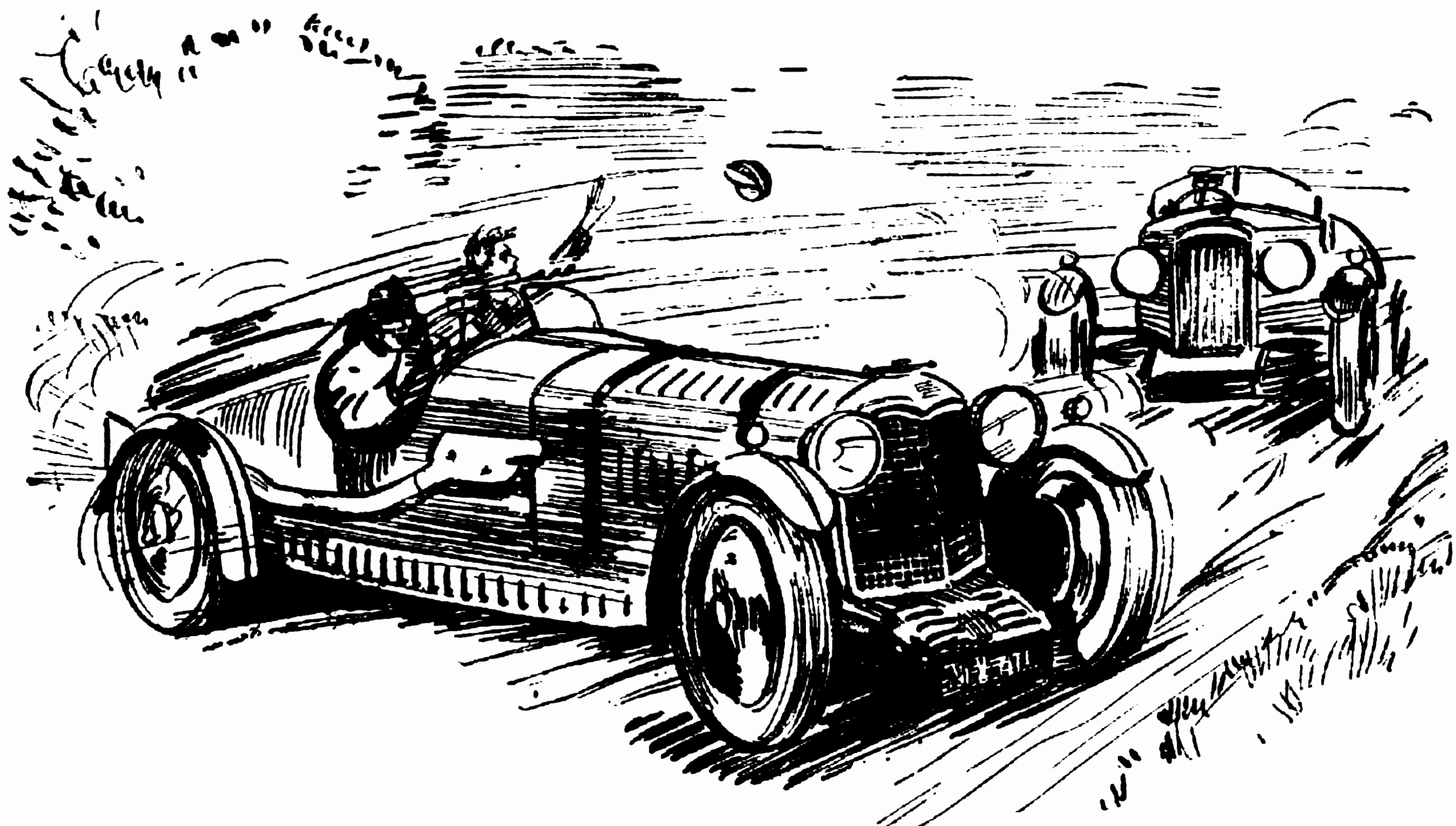
Phipps did his best. He bowled to Irene, and he bowled so much to Irene's liking that she sent the first ball away for an easy boundary. The second followed—and the third. Every ball of the over, in fact, asked to be swiped. Irene, always obliging, swiped them. In that one over the girl put on 24 runs.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Good old Irene!"

"You'd better keep Phipps on, Browne!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"



Lord Dorrimore swung his racer broadside across the road in a spectacular skid, so that the approaching car was forced to pull up.

"Really, Mr. Browne!" he gasped.

"Bad!" said Browne severely. "Decidedly weak, Brother Phipps. You'll have to do better than that. You will kindly start the bowling."

"Really, sir, I beg of you!" said Phipps, in alarm. "I have consented, under pressure, to play in this match, but at least you will please allow me to confine my activities to pursuing the ball."

"There are plenty of others to pursue the ball, Brother Phipps—and others, let me add, who can pursue with greater success than you. You are going to bowl."

"But I have never bowled in my life, sir."

"Then it is high time, Brother Phipps, that you started bowling," said Browne firmly. "No, no more protests! Kindly take this ball and do your stuff."

But Browne decided that the spirit of fun was not quite good enough. Paul Maddox, the young Caronian, bowled to Mary Summers from the other end. Paul was a brilliant bowler. Mary failed to score from the first three balls, and she knocked the fourth away for a single. Paul's fifth ball shattered Irene's wicket, and she laughed ruefully.

"Well, never mind," she said. "That was a ripping ball, anyway. And I've scored twenty-four for my side."

When the next over started, Phipps was fielding, and Willy Handforth had been put on to bowl. He was only a Third-Former, and the girl batsmen felt that they were going to make some more easy runs. Doris Berkeley had taken Irene's place.

Willy, however, bowled brilliantly. He secured two wickets in his first two overs.

And after that the game proceeded merrily.

Lord Dorrimore and Handforth happened to be in together, and Handforth went all out for runs, slogging mightily. Dorrie felt that it was a good example, and he did the same. In the course of two hectic overs they added over 30 to the score. But they didn't last. Their wickets soon fell.

When it was Umlosi's turn to bat, a chuckle went round the field.

"Better have five or six balls in reserve, Browne," suggested Stevens, with a grin. "Judging by Umlosi's practice hits, he'll try to knock the tops off a few local mountains."

"Umlosi will have little or no chance of batting, Brother Horace," said Browne smoothly. "Did I forget to tell you that I intend to put myself on to bowl this over?"

"Oh, I see!" grinned Stevens. "Then we'd better have a dozen balls in reserve."

As it happened, Umlosi missed the first ball altogether, and the force of his mighty swing spun him round like a top, and he sat down violently on the pitch—much to the merriment of the on-lookers.

The second ball he got hold of well, and it went skyward. Phipps was the only fieldsman near the spot where the leather fell, and although Phipps made a valiant attempt to effect a spectacular catch, he only succeeded in hurting his right hand.

"Oh, hard luck, Phipps!"

"I am beginning to think," said Phipps, "that cricket is a greatly over-rated game."

He spoke bitterly. He was, in fact, rather alarmed. He expected Umlosi's next hit to brain somebody. However, Umlosi very obligingly sent up another skier which Winnie Pitt cleverly caught, thus earning herself a prolonged round of applause. Umlosi, who hadn't the faintest idea he was out, looked quite pleased with himself, and settled down for further batting.

"That's all, Umlosi, old man," said Bueter Boots, who was the wicket-keeper. "You're out."

"Nay, thou art surely jesting," said Umlosi, grinning from ear to ear. "I have but commenced, and methinks I shall like this wondrous game."

"But you were caught, old boy," said Boots. "You're out!"

"Wau! Was it not said that these sticks must be disturbed?" asked Umlosi, with scorn. "See! They remain upright, and the little cross pieces of stick are undisturbed. And yet thou sayest that I am out!"

When he was finally convinced that he was genuinely out, and that the correct thing to do was to walk back to the pavilion, he gave an expressive grunt of disgust.

Cricket, after all, was but a paltry and footling waste of time!

CHAPTER 4.

Fortune Favours the—Wicked!

A LOW, rakish sports car, of a semi-racing type, glided smoothly along one of the quiet Derbyshire lanes in the neighbourhood of Dorrimore Castle.

Two men, apparently tourists, were aboard, and they were looking at the scenery with interest and approval. The car was moving slowly and almost noiselessly.

"We must be careful, Ernst," said one of the men slowly, and speaking in Slav. "Other men have failed at this job, but we must succeed. And it's not going to be easy. Above all, we must arouse no suspicions. These boys are on the alert."

"That being so, how can we avoid arousing their suspicions?" asked the other savagely. "All very fine for Lieutenant Klotz to give us this work—but you notice that he keeps well out of it himself."

Ernst Beyer and Jakob Pollnitz were two of Prince Zeno's secret agents. They were young men—ambitious young men. By throwing in their fortunes with the plotting prince, they hoped to gain rapid advancement. There would presently be many high positions to be filled in Caronia; there would be honours, there would be big-salaried jobs.

"It ought not to be so difficult," said Pollnitz thoughtfully. "We are unknown to these boys, and even if they see us they will have no cause to be suspicious. Are we so obviously foreign to English eyes? And is that in itself suspicious? There are many tourists in this delightful part of the country at this time of the year."

"All the same, we must be careful," replied Beyer. "Klotz tells us that we must succeed, or we shall be dismissed. But he is the one who fears dismissal, my good Ernst!"

"How shall we proceed?" asked the other man. "We have only just arrived; we know the castle is near, but it will not be wise to approach too closely. Our plan is to put up at a local hotel, and to pose as ordinary tourists, yes? Then we make our inspections. At night would be better, I think."

"One moment," said the other. "What is that noise?"

They were passing a dense little wood, and they stopped the car. On one hand, the ground rose steeply and picturesquely. It was very hilly here. On the other hand, the wood completely blotted out the landscape. The wood was obviously not extensive, or those voices would not have sounded so clearly. The two men sat in their car, listening.

They heard other sounds—the "clack" of bat meeting ball. They heard shouts of laughter, roars of applause.

"Perhaps it would be as well to have a little look, eh?" murmured Beyer. "Do you not understand, Jakob? Beyond these trees lies Dorrimore Park. The boys are there—playing some game. The cricket game, I imagine. It might be an excellent opportunity for us to take a look at them. Perhaps Victor is there."

"Would it be wise?" asked Jakob dubiously. "If we were seen——"

"There is no danger of that," broke in Beyer. "These trees will conceal us well, and we may not have another opportunity, in broad daylight, to look at these boys. All the advantage is with us, since we shall lurk in the wood, and they are in the open. Come! Even if we are seen, what of it? We are harmless tourists attracted by the sounds of the play."

They left the car, broke through the hedge, and soon they were on the other side of the strip of woodland. Parting the dense bushes, which grew in profusion under the trees, they had a clear view of the cricket pitch and the pavilion, and the crowds of figures.

It was a delightful scene; but those men, gazing upon it, found only one figure of interest to them. After some little difficulty they picked out Victor Alexis Orlando, the young King of Caronia. It was rather a shock for them to discover that he was comparatively near by—the nearest figure of all, in fact.

They had been looking beyond—looking at the spectators. Then they discovered that Victor was on the field of play. The fact that he had his back to them accounted for their initial failure to recognise him.

"As they say in this country—so near and yet so far," murmured Ernst Beyer regretfully.

It was an exasperating situation. The boy they so badly wanted to get hold of was only twenty or thirty yards away from them. But he was playing cricket—he was in full view of all the other players, and all the spectators. He was

as safe as though surrounded by armed guards.

He was thoroughly enjoying himself, too. This cricket match was a novelty—a real bit of fun. His mind was not troubled by any thoughts of his enemies.

Nipper's XI was in the field now—as evidenced by the fact that Victor was fielding—and Paul Maddox and Phipps were batting. It was one of the funniest periods of the game.

Nipper's XI had not done at all badly, the total amounting to 187. It was afternoon now, and the players and spectators, having partaken of an excellent lunch, were feeling in high good humour.

Paul Maddox was batting well against the bowling of Gresham and Irene Manners. Nipper thought it only fair to give the girls a chance at the bowling—and Irene was as clever with the ball as she was with the bat.

The fun was provided by Phipps. Phipps claimed to have played cricket as a boy, but he had so completely forgotten it that, to all intents and purposes, the game was a complete mystery to him.

However, he did his best—and his best was a scream. He was all the funnier because, usually, he was such a figure of imperturbable dignity. He crouched over the bat, and as the ball came down he lashed out with reckless abandon. Sometimes he hit the ball, and sometimes he didn't. Luckily, the balls he didn't hit were not quite true on the wicket. The others went off in all directions, and it was miraculous that he had not yet been caught.

"Go it, Phipps, old thing!" chuckled Archie Glenthorne. "I didn't think you had it in you, I'm dashed if I did!"

"He's a dark horse," grinned Skeets. "He'll hit a six next."

Surprisingly enough, Phipps obliged immediately. More by luck than judgment, he managed to get well hold of the next ball. His bat swung wildly, and a yell went up as the leather soared magnificently away, to fall crashing into the wood which bordered one side of the ground.

"Well knocked, Phipps!"

Phipps felt quite startled.

"Really, I am extremely sorry," he said. "I am afraid the ball has gone into that wood."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"All right, you fellows—I'll fetch it!" sang out Victor. "I saw just where it dropped."

There were two other people who had seen where the ball had dropped. Ernst
(Continued on page 15.)

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THE BANDITS OF CARONIA!*(Continued from page 13.)*

Beyer and Jakob Pollnitz, lurking amongst those trees, had been startled to see the leather coming straight for them. There was no time for them to dodge, or get out of the way. The ball fell not three feet from where they were standing, and Pollnitz cursed roundly in his own tongue.

"Quick! We must get away!" he exclaimed in alarm. "They will be coming here to search, and if we are seen——"

"Wait!" interrupted Beyer tensely.

For Beyer had seen that the fieldsman who was dashing towards the wood was Victor Orlando himself! The other players were still standing in their positions, laughing.

"But—but I do not see——" began Pollnitz.

"Fool!" ejaculated the other. "It is Victor who is coming! He will run into our arms! It is an amazing piece of good fortune, Jakob!"

As Beyer was speaking, he quickly removed his jacket, and now he held the garment ready.

"Down!" he muttered. "Get behind that bush! And be ready to help me when the moment arrives."

Victor, plunging lightheartedly into the edge of the wood in search of the lost ball, was still laughing. He thought that he could find the ball at once. He broke through some bushes——

Something thick and heavy was suddenly flung over his head. Strong arms encircled his shoulders and body.

"His feet!" came a low, hoarse voice. "Seize them!"

In a flash, Victor knew what this meant. That man had spoken in the Slav language. His enemies were on him!

Victor had no chance of calling out. His struggles were in vain. Something hard was pressed over his mouth, so that he could not utter a sound. His feet were jerked from under him, and he felt himself being carried.

Those two men were genuine opportunists. This chance had come their way, and without hesitation they had seized it.

They reached the hedge, they broke through, and glanced quickly up and down the quiet lane. Not a soul in sight. Quickly they whirled their burden to the car, they dumped him aboard, and Beyer held him down.

Pollnitz, leaping into the driving-seat, started the engine, and a moment later

the car sprang into motion and vanished down the lane at ever-increasing speed.

CHAPTER 6.**Victor Vanishes!**

"**B**ETTER go and help him, hadn't we?" suggested Vivian Travers.

Only a few moments had elapsed since Victor Orlando had plunged into the wood. But when a cricket field is awaiting the return of a lost ball, even a short wait seems long. Nipper and Travers, who were fielding on that part of the ground, moved towards the wood. Doris Berkeley and Mary Summers ran after them.

"They say that many hands make light work," laughed Doris, as she joined the boys.

"Yes; and they also say that too many cooks spoil the broth," chuckled Nipper. "Still, I don't think there can be too many cooks when the broth happens to be a lost cricket ball. Come on! Any luck, Orlando?"

There was no reply from the wood, and the boys and girls plunged in.

"Hallo!" sang out Nipper, after a moment. "Here it is! In full sight, too!"

Nipper was slightly astonished. He had found the ball without difficulty. It was lying beyond a clump of undergrowth, in a little open space—the exact spot where Victor had been making for.

"Good egg!" said Doris. "We needn't have come, after all."

"Hi, Orlando!" yelled Nipper. "Where are you? We've found it!"

There was no reply.

Not a suspicion that anything was wrong had occurred to the searchers. They merely assumed that Victor had missed seeing the ball upon his first entry into the wood, and that he was searching near at hand. His failure to reply, however, was strange. He must have known that the ball was somewhere close at hand, and he knew, also, that the other players were waiting.

"I say, Orlando!" shouted Nipper.

Still no reply.

"That's funny," said Nipper, frowning, a vague uneasiness disturbing him. "Where on earth can he be?"

"Well, he can't be far away," smiled Mary. "But I don't think much of him as a ball finder."

"We're playing cricket—not hide and seek," said Travers disapprovingly.

"Dry up, Travers!" said Nipper, frowning. "There's something queer about this."

Vivian Travers raised his eyebrows.

"Queer?" he repeated. "Dear old fellow, I'm afraid I don't quite get your meaning. It's annoying certainly. Victor has no right to spirit himself away, leaving the field waiting——" He broke off, startled by his own words. "For the love of Samson!" he ejaculated, staring. "You don't mean——"

"It seems fantastic—positively idiotic," said Nipper. "But Orlando is the fellow who has vanished! And you know as well as I do, Travers, that certain people have been trying pretty hard to get hold of Orlando lately."

"But, my dear old fellow, there couldn't have been any pre-arrangement about this affair," protested Travers. "Until Phipps sloshed the ball into this wood, nobody knew that Orlando would ever enter it! I mean, do draw it mild!"

"Orlando!" shouted Nipper loudly. "I say, Orlando!"

By this time most of the other fieldsmen had penetrated the wood, including Handforth, Gresham, and even Lord Dorrimore. A few of the spectators were also drifting across in this direction.

"What's the trouble here?" asked Handforth, as he plunged in. "Can't we carry on with another ball?"

"That's what I came to say," remarked Lord Dorrimore. "There are plenty more in the pavilion. This one can be found later. It doesn't matter if it's not found at all."

"We've found the ball, Dorrie—but we've lost Orlando," said Nipper significantly. "He wasn't by himself for more than two minutes, and yet he's gone! He came into this wood, and now he's vanished as completely as though the earth had opened and swallowed him up!"

"By the Lord Harry!" said his lordship.

They went about, shouting. Not many of them really believed that there was anything serious in this strange incident. And then Nipper, who had plunged deeper into the wood, suddenly uttered a shout of mingled consternation and surprise.

"I say, look here!" he yelled. "There's a lane running along here——"

He broke off, sniffing the air sharply. There was practically no wind, and the hot, sultry afternoon air hung heavily. Nipper could detect the faint but unmistakable odour of petrol fumes. He looked sharply up and down the lane, but no car was in sight. Then his attention was attracted by the condition of the hedge. In one particular spot there were clear signs of breakages. The twigs and leaves were bruised and crushed.

"What's up?" asked Handforth, plunging through.

Others followed him; and by now Nipper had made a startling discovery.

"Listen, everybody!" he said tensely. "I don't want to sound silly, or anything like that—but I believe that Orlando has been kidnapped!"

"What!" went up a general shout.

"It's no secret that some of his Caronian enemies have been trying to get him lately," continued Nipper. "We all know it, and we've all been keeping an eye on him. But look here! Look at this hedge! See the way it's been broken through? It wasn't like it five minutes ago, I'll swear. And across there, on the grass. See how the grass is trampled and disturbed? I smelt exhaust fumes just now——"

He broke off, and pounced on something on the other side of the hedge. He now held in his fingers a half-cigarette—and the end was still smouldering.

"Look!" shouted Handforth excitedly. "There are some car tracks on this sandy road, too! Oh, my hat! In spite of all our precautions, poor old Orlando has been grabbed! They've collared him—right in the middle of a cricket match—when we was actually playing in it!"

"Aren't you going to do something?" asked Irene breathlessly.

"Hold on—hold on!" said Lord Dorrimore, who was perfectly cool. "No use getting excited, young 'uns. It's as clear as daylight that something funny has happened to Orlando; and I don't think there's much doubt that he has been grabbed by his enemies and kidnapped. But it's a cert they could not have pre-arranged the affair."

"That's what I've been thinking, sir," nodded Nipper. "The men with the car couldn't have known that Orlando would come into the wood."

"Exactly," said Dorrie. "They were probably here spying. They crept into the wood to have a look at us. Then the ball came into the wood, and they saw that Orlando was running to retrieve it, and—well, we can easily imagine the rest. A quick grab, a rush, and they were off. The whole thing could have been done within thirty seconds."

Paul Maddox now came running up, his face flushed with anxiety and excitement.

"Is it true?" he panted. "Have they got Victor? Is it true that Victor has been carried off?"

"Steady, old son," said Lord Dorrimore. "I'm afraid it is true—but if we act quickly we might save him. And I can give you my word that we're going to act quickly."



Nipper made a grab at the Caronian plotter as he sought to escape, and tore his coat. A letter fell to the floor—a letter that was to have far-reaching results for the Chums of St. Frank's.

THE cricket match was forgotten.

This sensational abduction of the young king had taken everybody by surprise.

Fortune, for once, had favoured the wicked instead of the brave. And much as Lord Dorrimore and the boys anathematised the plotters who had brought off this coup, they could scarcely help admiring the brilliant opportunism of the rascals.

"We can't blame ourselves over this," said Nipper. "We weren't careless or neglectful. Orlando was playing in a match, and it was a thousand chances to one against anything happening to him. The trouble is, these rotters have obtained a good start. We only know that Orlando was carried off in a car. We don't know what kind of car, or how many men there were, or what the men looked like. It's a proper mess up!"

Lord Dorrimore was busy at the telephone. He was in communication with

the police, giving all the details, and advising the police to keep a careful watch on all main roads. Not that this was sufficient for the enterprising Dorrie.

"I'm going out in my racing car," he said crisply, after he had left the 'phone. "I don't suppose it'll be any good, but you can never tell. I'm going to scour the main roads."

"By George! That's a good idea, sir!" said Handforth eagerly. "I'll go out in my Morris Minor, too!"

Browne elected to take his own car; and Nipper and Travers and others got out their motor-cycles. Soon a plan was arranged. The cars and motor-cycles would go in different directions, hunting for any possible trace of the missing boy.

"We've got to remember that we have a certain advantage," said Lord Dorrimore. "But it's only an advantage if we act on the spot. Those men could not have counted on grabbing Orlando to-day,

therefore it's unlikely that they had any complete plan for getting him out of the district."

"By Jove, that's true, sir!" said Nipper, nodding.

"The beggars know, too, that we would immediately 'phone the police, and have the roads watched," continued Dorrie. "So it's pretty certain that they're not speeding towards London, or any other distant spot. Too risky. The chances are they'd take Orlando to some hiding-place in this district—a wood, perhaps, or an old barn. Until the hue and cry is over, see? Meanwhile, they'll make arrangements for getting him completely out of the county."

"I rather imagine that's where we come in, brothers," said William Napoleon Browne. "If we can locate his youthful majesty while the kidnapping gentry are making their plans, everything will be all serene. Let's go!"

And the hunters set forth.

THE plotters had a far better organisation than Orlando's friends imagined.

Both Ernst Beyer and Jakob Pollnitz were exultant over their unexpected coup. They had only just arrived in the district; they had been prepared to stay for some days, working with extreme caution. And yet, owing to the unlooked-for chance of that lost ball, they were now speeding off in their car with King Victor a prisoner.

While Pollnitz drove, Beyer busied himself in another direction. Holding Victor down, he half-throttled the unfortunate boy in his determination to keep him quiet.

Thus weakened, Victor only struggled feebly when a pad was pressed over his mouth and nostrils. He knew that the pad contained some kind of drug, and he used every ounce of his last strength to resist. But it was no good. Quickly his senses rocked, and he lapsed into unconsciousness.

"So!" exclaimed Beyer. "He is settled now, yes? Good! Stop the car, Jakob!"

They were in a deserted stretch of country road, with crags on one hand and woodland on the other. It was short work to lift Victor into the "dickey," and to push him well down into that cavity. The coachwork was then closed up.

"Now!" muttered Beyer. "He is out of sight—and that is important."

"You gave him a good dose?" asked Pollnitz. "No danger of him wakening?"

"He is all right for an hour—perhaps two hours," replied Ernst Beyer. "Quickly now, Jakob. We will drive to the nearest

post office. We must telephone to Klotz. He does not expect such early success, but he will be ready."

Ten minutes later they pulled up outside a rural post office, and Beyer entered. When he emerged his eyes were gleaming with satisfaction.

"We drive to the moorland," he said, as he climbed into the car. "And we had better drive quickly. There may be pursuit."

The car was capable of high speed, and it went roaring along magnificently. Pollnitz was an expert driver. Presently the fair countryside had been left behind; the car was getting out on to a great waste-land of moor. It was picturesque and delightful on this summer's afternoon; but desolate, particularly after the car had left the main road and had driven some miles along a grassy moorland track.

Another few miles, and the car descended into a great shallow basin—a kind of dip in the moorland which was only perceptible from close quarters. And here, in this dip, the conspirators waited. The place was evidently a rendezvous.

The wait was not a long one. Presently the two men listened; they could hear a faint rhythmic hum on the summer's air; they espied a spot high in the sky. The hum ceased, and Jakob Pollnitz smiled.

"Lieutenant Klotz has wasted no time, my friend," he said contentedly. "He comes already. It is well that we made our plans so carefully in advance."

The spot in the sky resolved itself into a rakish-looking monoplane—a machine of the latest type, fitted with an enclosed cabin. Skilfully piloted, it glided to earth and landed in the centre of that depression. With the propeller still ticking over, a side door opened, and a man leapt out. He ran across to the car.

"What is this?" he asked breathlessly, as he arrived. "You are not telling me that you have got the boy already?"

"Here, lieutenant," said Ernst Beyer, opening the dickey with a flourish.

Lieutenant Klotz stared at Victor Orlando in amazement and gratification. His eyes glowed as he heard the brief story.

"The prince will be pleased when he learns of this," he said, at length. "You will both be richly rewarded, my friends. You, Beyer, will accompany me. You will look after the boy."

"And I?" asked Pollnitz.

"You will convey my report to the prince," replied Lieutenant Klotz briskly.

"I think there is very little danger of trouble arising. We have been so quick in this matter that you cannot be connected with the boy's disappearance. Even

if you are—there will be no evidence against you. Once he is transferred to the 'plane, you may drive openly and freely where you will. But we must hasten."

While Beyer and Pollnitz carried Victor Orlando across to the 'plane, and stowed him away in the comfortable cabin, Lieutenant Klotz wrote a brief account of what had happened. He sealed it in a strong but flimsy envelope.

"In order to be on the safe side, Pollnitz, you will carry this in the lining of your jacket—in the special secret pocket," he said. "I have informed his Highness of the good work which you and Beyer have done; I have told him that the boy has been transferred to the 'plane, and that I am flying direct to Caronia—to the Kazatova Mountains."

"You can make the flight without interruption?" asked Pollnitz, in surprise.

"Easily," said Lieutenant Klotz. "There are sufficient hours before darkness; the weather is perfect all over Europe; my fuel tanks are full. And now—good-bye, Pollnitz. Take no risks, but deliver my report to his Highness at the earliest possible moment."

Jakob Pollnitz smiled as he shook hands.

"I shall be glad to get back aboard the yacht," he said. "I did not relish this task from the first. We are lucky to get it done so swiftly."

He stood watching after Klotz and Beyer had entered the 'plane. She taxied round, the engine opened out, and a few moments later she soared gracefully into the air.

Climbing higher and higher over the barren moor—where she was unlikely to be noticed—she soon became a mere speck in the sky.

CHAPTER 6.

The Kidnapper Kidnapped!

"**W**HAT'S the good, sir?" asked Paul Maddox gloomily. "It's worse than looking for a needle in a haystack."

"I'll admit the odds are all against us, but if those scamps had luck, why can't we have luck?" replied Lord Dorrimore. "In my experience of life, young'un, I've generally found that luck isn't all one-sided. It averages out pretty well in the long run. But whether we shall get our turn yet is another matter."

Dorrie was speeding along in his famous racing car. With him were Paul Maddox and Archie Glenthorne. The elegant Removite had been as keen on this hunt as anybody.

For over an hour Lord Dorrimore had been out; but he was forced to confess that he had seen nothing suspicious, and that the hunt was more or less a wild-goose chase. In other directions, Browne was searching, Handforth was searching, and so were Nipper, Travers, and others.

Many cars had been overtaken, and every car was scrutinised closely. But nothing of a suspicious nature had been seen. Now that the first enthusiasm of the hunt was over, in fact, Lord Dorrimore was beginning to realise the futility of it all.

"It's a deuce of a pity that Mr. Lee wasn't at the castle with us," growled his lordship. "Lee would have known what to do. I wired him, of course, but at the best he can't be at the castle until late evening."

"Do you think that Mr. Lee will really come, sir?" asked Paul eagerly.

"I fancy so," replied Dorrie. "Still, there's a chance that he's got himself tied up with one of his detective cases. He's a beggar for work."

"What-ho!" observed Archie. "Another car in the offing, old dears."

"Keep your eyes peeled," advised Lord Dorrimore. "Not that this car looks at all likely. It's stamped 'tourist' all over it. Continental bus, by the look of her."

They were on the fringe of the wild moorland, and Dorrie was thinking of turning back and trying in another direction. The approaching car was a big, luxury roadster, and it only contained a single occupant.

As it drew nearer, they could see that the occupant was a young man in yachting attire, lounging elegantly at the wheel. His splendid car was merely pottering along.

"Good gad!" ejaculated Archie abruptly.

The two vehicles had just passed each other, and Lord Dorrimore and Paul Maddox had already dismissed the stranger as O.K. He looked a bit foreign, perhaps, but that wasn't against him.

"What's the matter, young'un?" asked Dorrie, glancing at Archie.

"Stop!" ejaculated Archie. "I mean to say, shove on the good old brakes! That chappie! Odds coincidences and luck! I've seen him before!"

"The young fellow in that other car?" asked Dorrie quickly. "Where have you seen him before?"

"On Prince Zeno's private yacht!"

"You mean that?" gasped Paul, seizing Archie's shoulder. "Quick, Lord Dorrimore! Stop the car! We'd better give chase!"

Dorrie eased up.

"Let's have this straight," he said. "It's beginning to look hopeful. An Italian car with a foreign driver, and —"

"You remember how those blighters collared me in mistake for Orlando," interrupted Archie tensely. "They took me aboard that dashed yacht, and they thought I was unconscious all the time. But I fooled the blighters, and I had a pretty good look round. Well, that chappie we've just passed was one of the yacht's officers. Absolutely! I knew him in a tick!"

"One of the officers on Zeno's yacht!" said Lord Dorrimore, pulling up his car and getting into reverse. "Good enough! We'll make a few inquiries! This is beginning to look good!"

The big sports car was soon speeding back on its tracks. The speedometer needle leapt: 45—50—55—60! Archie Glenthorne and Paul Maddox could hardly talk owing to the terrific rush of wind.

All three were excited. Not a minute ago they had practically given up hope; now they were thrilled. If Archie was right, this chance meeting was a splendid stroke of good fortune. The luck was evening itself out!

The man in the Italian car had no reason to be afraid of recognition, for everybody aboard Prince Zeno's yacht believed that Archie Glenthorne had remained unconscious throughout the period when, having been kidnapped in mistake for Victor Orlando, he had been taken aboard the yacht. But Archie had been exceedingly cute on that occasion; he had regained his senses, but he had not given any sign of it. Thus he had not only seen Prince Zeno, but he had seen other men, too. The two original agents, Karl and Nickolas, had been taken off this work owing to the fact that they might be recognised—a precaution which, as events were proving, was to avail Prince Zeno nothing.

"Hallo, hallo!" murmured Dorrie grimly. "The fellow's trying to get away from us. He's putting on speed! Looks suspicious to me."

Dorrie's car was now humming along at a hot seventy. The road was deserted and straight. Half a mile ahead, just when Dorrie had told himself that it would be easy to overhaul the other car, his quarry had increased speed.

"I say, this is proof, what?" yelled Archie. "I mean to say, if the chappie wasn't afraid of us he wouldn't bolt!

Good gad! It's developing into a dashed race!"

"Hold still, young 'uns!" roared Dorrie. "We've only been crawling so far. Now we'll do a bit of speed."

He pressed down his foot on the throttle; the great car surged forward. Eighty—eighty-five! The car rocked and swayed, but Dorrie was a brilliant driver, and he had the racer under perfect control. The tyres shrieked on the road surface, and the exhaust was like that of an aeroplane. Ahead, the Italian car was still increasing speed. The hair-raising chase went on.

Jakob Pollnitz was alarmed. He hadn't liked the look of that racing car with the schoolboys in it when they had passed. But when he found that the racer had turned and was following, he increased his own speed. Now he was dashing away in palpable flight.

It was all very well along the straight, whilst the road was empty and easy. His car was a racer. But a little later, when bends had to be negotiated, and when the road narrowed, Lord Dorrimore's superior skill triumphed.

Pollnitz slowed down; once, indeed, he nearly crashed. He took a bend recklessly wide, and found himself driving head-on into a baby saloon. He swerved madly, just managing to get past. He had applied his brakes, and now he did not press so hard on the throttle. His nerves were shaken.

Lord Dorrimore, meanwhile, came on at full speed. He took the bend with that judgment and skill which were so characteristic of him. There was a straight stretch ahead, and Dorrie set his teeth, pressed his foot hard down, and crouched over the wheel.

With a mighty roar, and a blaring hoot from the electric horn, he careered past the Italian car. Paul Maddox, breathless, saw that the speedometer needle was on the "100" mark.

Dorrie could see that there were no side-roads here; high banks were on either hand. Speeding on, he chose his best spot. Then, applying the brakes, he took the car into a spectacular skid and brought it to a standstill practically broadside across the road.

There was a shriek of brakes from the Italian car, and it came to a standstill five or ten yards behind. Pollnitz stood up in the driving-seat, gesticulating excitedly.

"Ah, but it was a good race!" he shouted, with enthusiasm. "Me, I thought I beat you. But no! You beat me, yes?"

(Continued on page 24.)

Line Up Here for a Good Laugh, Lads!



HANDFORTH'S Weekly

No. 15. Vol. 1.

THE EDITOR'S LIFE STORY

Written by Himself

EDITORIAL STAFF.

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Editor E. O. Handforth
Chief Sub-Editor E. O. Handforth
Literary Editor E. O. Handforth
Art Editor E. O. Handforth
Rest of Staff E. O. Handforth

August 1st, 1931.

QUEER QUERIES

Professor
HARRY GRESHAM
answers weighty questions
by readers

EVERYBODY seems to be writing their biographies nowadays, and I don't see why I shouldn't have a go. So here's mine.

I was born at Great Travis, Suffolk, on the 18th of April. I don't remember much about the event, being rather young at that time. I was christened three weeks later, and was called Edward Oswald, after my Uncle Claude.

I wrote my first story at the age of three months. It wasn't very popular, because I hadn't learned to spell at that time, and all the story consisted of was, "Goo-goo! Goo! Goo-goo!"

But, by George, I was a smart kid! Everybody said that they had never seen a baby who knew so much as I did. Before I was a year old I could talk, and once, when my nurse upset my cradle, I let her have the rough side of my tongue.

"Dash it all!" I gurgled, throwing a Teddy bear at her in my rage. "You might be a bit careful, nurse. You nearly gave me a bump on my onion."

The nurse was so surprised that she fell downstairs, and immediately she came to gave a month's notice.

When I was a little over a year old my god-mother came to see me, and said she would teach me how to walk.

"Diddums den?" she observed, clawing me up in her arms. "Shall I teach little pettums how to walky-walky?"

"Look here!" I snorted, rather fed up. "If you've got anything to say to me, come out with it like a man, instead of burbling nonsense like a cheap chimpanzee with water on the brain."

"What a monster!" she cried.

Instead of apologising, as you'd imagine any ordinary lady would have done, she gathered up her bag and fur and breezed right off out of it.

That shows you what sort of a baby I was. By George! I had blacked my first eye before I cut my first tooth. But more of this later.

(To be continued—in a fortnight.)

Miss Deal (Poker Bridge, Cardington) asks me a very perplexing question. It is this: Why did the chicken cross the road?

Well, my dear young lady, your question has puzzled the most brilliant intellects of the land, and the answer is still disputed in many circles. Some very learned men hold that the reason was that the fowl desired to get to the other side. But a great scientist pointed out that this explanation is not feasible, because *the chicken was already on the other side*. Hence it could not have wished to cross for that purpose.

My own theory is that the bird had probably swallowed an iron nail or something, and was drawn across the road by a magnet, held there for that purpose by a poacher.

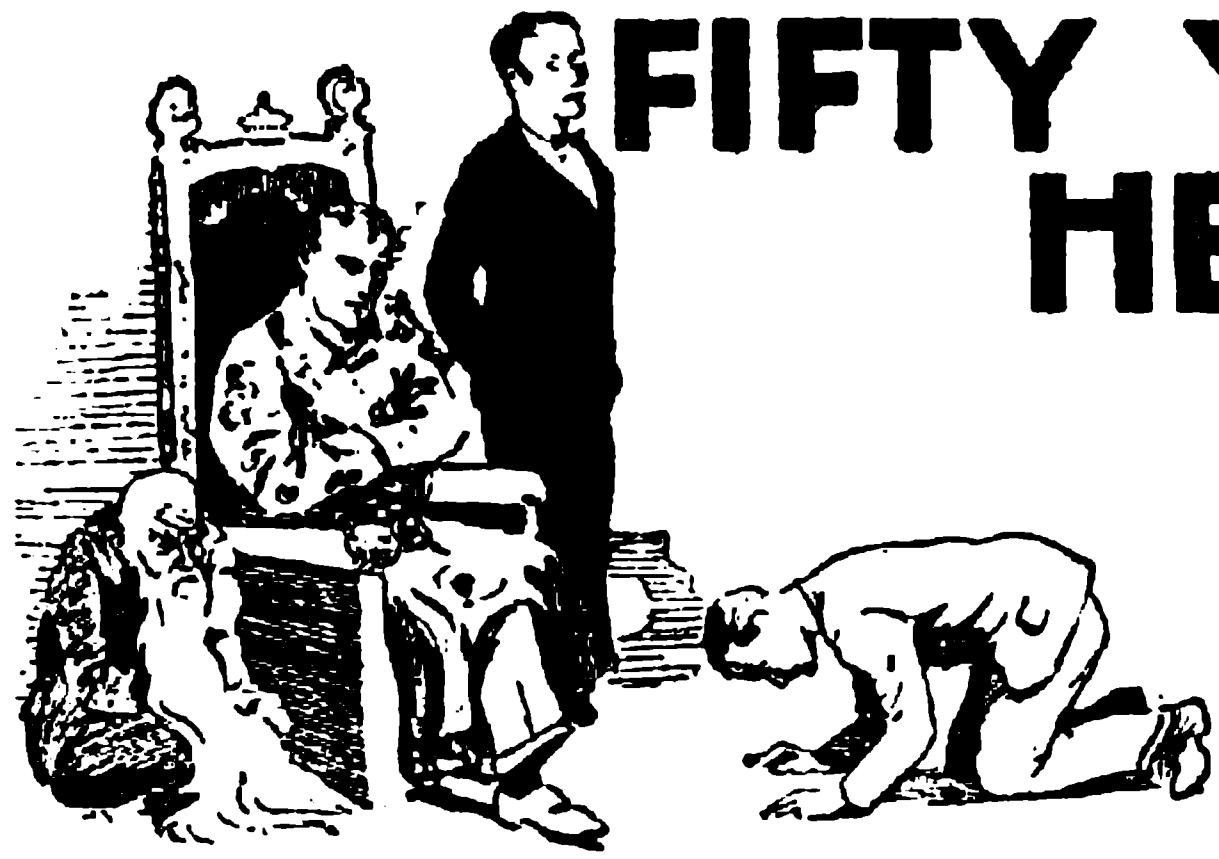
John O. Groats (Land's End) has listened in on the wireless to a famous tenor singing, "Alice, Where Art Thou?" And he is greatly puzzled to know where she is. He says quite truly that many famous singers every year express this same passionate desire.

Yes, John, your question is a very puzzling one. Many well-known detectives have tried to solve the mystery, but all, save one, were [absolutely baffled].

The remaining detective, a gentleman named Lewis Carroll, traced the missing Alice to a rabbit-hole, where he discovered that she had followed a white rabbit down the hole, and had involved herself in very serious trouble with their majesties, the King and Queen of Hearts. It appeared that she had aided and abetted a certain Hatter, March Hare and Dormouse to commit sundry offences at a Royal Trial, which led to her arrest. The affair has not yet been smoothed over, so Alice is still "not out."

G. Howe-Tuff (Watt-Hoe, Bucks) writes in great wrath asking if I can inform him of the slayer of a certain Cock Robin. That, my dear fellow, is a matter for the police, and one in which we are not allowed to say anything until the criminal has been finally found guilty. I will hint, however, that perhaps it might be advisable to question a person named Sparrow as to what he was doing with his bow and arrow on the night of the 12th inst. at 9.30 p.m.

Our interesting interviewer looks into the future.



FIFTY YEARS HENCE!

HAVING received instructions to interview Nipper, the World-Famous Detective—known as “Eagle-Eye Hamilton” to every crook in the world—I took a taxi, which in turn took me, to his address—Homicide House, Coiner’s Court, Forger Street, Crimehampton.

I was shown into the waiting-room, where two kings and a Russian prince were waiting humbly to consult the great man. When my name was mentioned, Nipper said to his body of menservants:

“Show him in at once, and kick their majesties and that silly prince downstairs.”

I was accordingly flung into Nipper’s presence by the footmen, and I went down on my knees, knocking my napper on the floor in reverence.

“You may stand up,” commanded Nipper coldly.

I rose to my feet. The great man was seated on a marble throne in the centre of the room, wearing a simple scarlet robe

and an expression of deep thought. Beside him I perceived an old, old man with a long white beard reaching to the floor, who wheezed heavily through

his toothless gums. This gent, I learned, was Nelson Lee.

At that moment the door was flung open and the Chief of Scotland Yard rushed in with a haggard face.

“Mr Nipper, sir,” he shrieked, “Sir George Goofus has been shot through the waistcoat, and we can’t find the murderer. We want you to detect the criminal right away.”

“Joe Snitt, 3, Little Carker Street, Limehouse,” snapped Nipper crisply.

Gurgling his thanks, the Chief rushed away.

Then Nipper turned to his secretary.

“Where is that ten-shilling cigar you bought me?” he demanded.

The secretary searched the room. Finally he turned to his master, and said:

“It’s been stolen, sir.”

“Stolen!” yelled Nipper. “Great bloodhounds! It must be recovered at once.”

“Can’t you detect the criminal, sir?” I asked.

“Nunno! I haven’t the faintest idea,” groaned Nipper as he rushed from the room, followed by the secretary.

“Very good, Nipper; very good, my boy!” wheezed the old man.

Then he took out a ten-shilling cigar from his pocket and asked me for a match.

ADVERTISING

PUDDING FOR SA
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dinner-time, for sa
Would make elegant
paper-weight. Might
by anyone with tea
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NOTICE. Bernard F
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ST. FRANK’S v. GREYFRIARS.

My impressions of the great match

By TIMOTHY TUCKER

MY dear friends! Let me give you my impressions of the great cricket contest between St. Frank’s and Greyfriars. First let me say that the notable athletic encounter eventuated amid an atmosphere of animation, excitement, and vociferation produced by the youthful assemblage of spectators.

The game began by the Greyfriars’ players ranging themselves in various positions around the patch, or pitch, as I believe it to be called. Two St. Frank’s representatives, called, I think, the batters or goalkeepers, defended three vertical wooden posts, known as the wickets or goals, I am not quite sure which.

A Greyfriars’ player—the sent-’er-forward, Hubbard tells me he is called—proceeded to hurl a spherical object at one of the St. Frank’s players, whose position

in the face of that reckless attack appeared to me, I must confess, to be altogether unenviable. By what seemed to me to be a miracle of judgment, the player in question, Handforth by name, hit the spherical object with what is technically known as his niblick and scored three tries.

It was then Nipper’s turn to face the sent-’er-forward, and I could not forbear to admire the courage with which he waited for the deadly sphere to be hurled at him. He, too, by some strange means, struck it with his niblick and scored two good tries.

Eventually the umpire ordered Nipper off the field, for what Hubbard tells me is known in cricketing circles as k.o.w.—knee-over-wicket. I must say it seemed to me to be a very strange and unaccountable rule.

In this fashion the encounter pro-

MENTS

HOW TO BE A CONJURER

By YUNG CHING (The "Yung" Magician)

(NOTE.—Before you try to read this frightful rot, bear in mind the fact that the Chinese always start a page at the bottom right-hand corner, and write upwards. By George! Did you ever hear of such owlshness?—E.O.H.)

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(If Yung Ching thinks I'm going to print any more of this awful bosh next week, it's nearly time he had another think.—E.O.H.)

(previous column)

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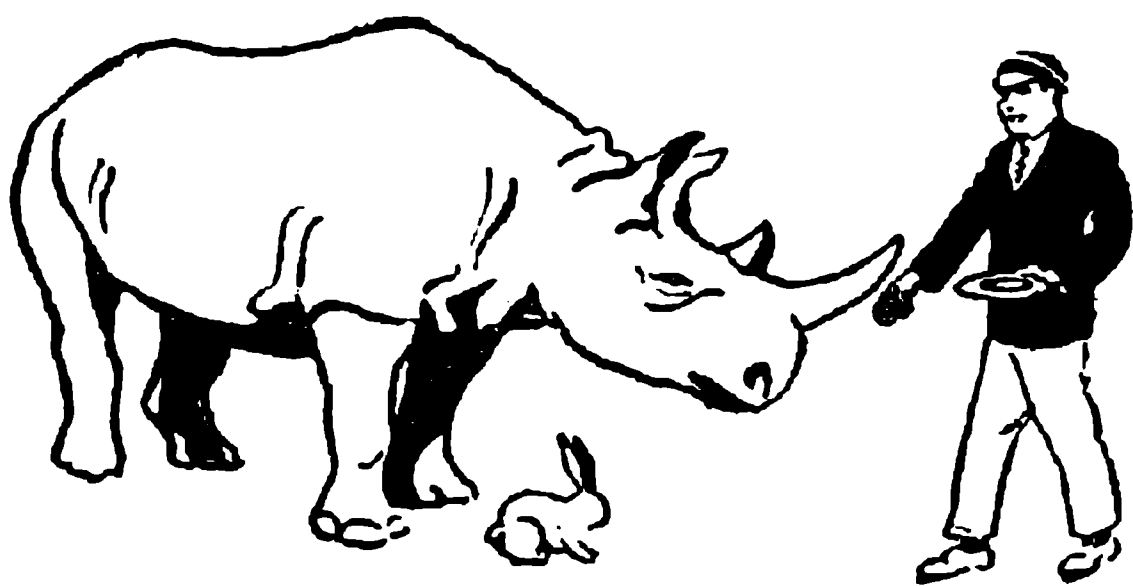
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PETS WANTED



By WILLY HANDFORTH

IN spite of the fact that I have several
pets, I still jolly well haven't enough.
My major thinks I ought to own a
zoo. Well, I wouldn't mind that—
and I'd take care to put my major in it,
you bet. My hobby is my pets, and I
don't care who knows it.

Of course, Lightning the greyhound,
Priscilla the parrot, Septimus the squirrel
& Co., are all right in their way. There
are no better pets anywhere. But what I
want is a few more. My pets-house isn't
half-completed yet. But those pets are so
jolly difficult to get hold of.

Where, for instance, am I to get a
Tasmanian Devil or a Duck-billed Platypus?
And yet I really do want one of each.
You can't seriously be fond of pets unless
you bag a Duck-billed Platypus.

Professor Tucker told me that he thought
he might be able to get me an Echidna,
or Porcupine Ant-Eater, from a friend of
his; but when he got it, the thing was
dead, and preserved in a glass case. I
don't want a silly stuffed Antupine Pork-
eater—or whatever it is. I want a live
one.

I should also like a nice snake. Sunny
says I wouldn't be allowed to keep a snake;
but, dash it all, I don't want a large one.
A ten-foot or twelve-foot snake would do
me fine—and it needn't be *very* poisonous.

If any reader has a snake about him
which he doesn't want, I'd take it as a
favour if he would send it along. Thanks
awfully.

LISTEN-IN NEXT WEEK!

SPECIAL WIRELESS NUMBER next
week! Another novelty from my inspired
brain-box. FULL PROGRAMME TO BE
BROADCAST, including extra-long
VAUDEVILLE, special WIRELESS
PLAY, NEWS, SHIPPING FORECAST
and TALKS. Tune-in next week to
STATION H.W.—relayed by STATION
N.L.L. Your license costs twopence, and
you can get it at the nearest book-sellers
by asking for the NELSON LEE.
E. O. H.

THE BANDITS OF CARONIA!

(Continued from page 20.)

He spoke in broken English, and Lord Dorrimore and the boys, advancing towards him, were slightly surprised. They had not expected this attitude. Archie Glenthorne was clutching at Lord Dorrimore's arm.

"Absolutely!" he murmured. "It's the very blighter!"

"I'd like a little chat with you, sir," said Dorrie, as he eyed the foreigner. "Why did you bolt when you found that I had turned my car and was coming in the same direction?"

Pollnitz shrugged.

"Is it not the sport?" he asked, laughing. "Me, I think that my Italian car can beat your English one. But you drive—ah, magnificently!"

He jumped out, still laughing.

"I am please to make the acquaintance, sir," he went on. "Me, I am Philipo Mazio, of Torino. You have heard of me, no? In Torino I am known as an amateur racer. And you, sir? May I be honoured?"

"I think you know who I am, Signor Mazio," replied Dorrie bluntly.

"But no!" replied the other, shrugging. "How should I know?"

Dorrie and Paul and Archie were looking at the man closely. Not for one moment were they deceived. He was no Italian—no sportsman of Turin. He was a Caronian—and a Slav, at that. Significant points.

But the position was not easy. Lord Dorrimore did some hard thinking. This fellow would obviously refuse to give any information. No doubt he possessed forged identification papers and passports, and had them on him. And it would be useless to go to the police, for there was no evidence.

Yet, on the other hand, the facts were very suggestive. Archie was ready to swear that he had seen this man aboard Prince Zeno's yacht. Victor Orlando had been kidnapped in a car. Why not this one? Since then, no doubt, he had been transferred elsewhere. This man, this so-called Philipo Mazio, could give a lot of information if he chose—or if he was forced.

Lord Dorrimore smiled; he had come to a decision.

"Perhaps it would be as well, my friend, to dispense with the comedy," he said smoothly. "You profess that you do not know me?"

"But no!" said the other. "Are we not strangers?"

"You will be surprised, then, when I tell you that my name is Lord Dorrimore?"

"Ah! I have heard of you, my dear sir!" shouted Pollnitz eagerly. "But this is splendid! It is magnificent! I meet the great Lord Dorrimore—the famous sportsman! The hunter of such renown—the driver of racing cars at the Brooklands!"

"I shall take it as an honour, Signor Mazio, if you will come with me to my castle," said Dorrie smoothly. "You will accept the invitation?"

"Alas! I deeply regret," said Pollnitz, with another of his shrugs. "Much as I would like, I cannot. I have the engagement, and——"

"Oh, but I won't hear of any refusal," said Dorrie boisterously. "You've simply got to come. I insist!"

As he spoke he moved nearer, and suddenly he took Pollnitz in a ju-jitsu grip, which gave the man no chance of struggling.

"Your belt, Maddox!" he snapped. "Never mind your bags—they'll hold up! Let's have the belt! Yours, too, Archie!"

"Absolutely!" gasped Archie.

Pollnitz struggled frantically for a second, but in that ju-jitsu grip he was helpless. Spasms of agony shot through him, and he cursed with panic-stricken vehemence, and in his alarm he spoke in the Slav tongue.

"Hallo! Hallo!" said Dorrie, grinning. "I thought you told me that you were an Italian?"

"I am!" panted Pollnitz. "I am Philipo Mazio, of Torino! How dare you assault me?"

"You are coming to Dorrimore Castle," retorted his lordship. "I simply hate doing this sort of thing, but you compel me. Good fellow, Maddox! Fasten that strap round his shoulders, so that his arms are tightly bound."

Dorrie was satisfied. That outburst of Slav was enough. The man, in his panic, had revealed himself as an impostor.

With the two straps in position, he was helpless. He was lifted into the car, and the two boys jumped in beside him. Dorrie ran back, drove the Italian car on to the grass verge, and stopped the engine. Then he ran round, opened the dicky, and made a swift inspection. He had not expected to find Victor there, but he thought that there might be some trace.

He was right.

In one corner of the cavity he found a few blades of grass and some scraps of fresh soil. The discovery was significant.

Victor must have been bundled into this dickey, and those blades of grass had fallen from one of his shoes. At all events, this evidence, combined with the outburst of Slav—to say nothing of Archie's identification—settled Lord Dorrimore's plan of action.

It was useless going to the police, but there was nothing to prevent him taking the law into his own hands.

CHAPTER 7.

Dorrie's Decision!

UNDENIABLY Lord Dorrimore was acting in an exceedingly high-handed fashion.

By seizing the man like this and taking him forcibly to the castle he was laying himself open to a prosecution for assault. But somehow Dorrie felt that the prisoner would never make any complaint to the police.

The drive to the castle was quickly accomplished. The so-called Mazio was helpless; yet, hemmed in by Archie and Paul, it was not noticeable that his arms were strapped to his sides. The few people that were passed on the road took little or no notice.

When the castle was reached, Dorrie marched his captive straight into the library. Nipper had returned by now, and so had Handforth and some of the others. There was great excitement when it was learned that Dorrie had brought in a prisoner. A crowd collected in the library, including Nipper, Travers, Handforth, Archie, Paul, and others.

Jacob Pollnitz was really frightened. He stood in the centre of the library, looking round him with assumed fury, but inwardly he was filled with acute alarm. His arms were still bound to his sides.

"It is the outrage!" he panted. "You will release me, no?"

"No," agreed Dorrie coolly.

"I shall tell the police! I shall have you punished!" shouted Pollnitz wildly. "I am the tourist in this country. Why do you treat a harmless Italian in this way? Who are you that you do this?"

"My friend, you're wasting your breath," said Lord Dorrimore, whilst the others stood round in breathless silence. "You are not an Italian, and your name is not Philipo Mazio. I want the truth from you. You are one of Prince Zeno's agents, I think? You come from Prince Zeno's private yacht?"

"No, no!" shouted Pollnitz. "No, no, no! You are wrong!"

"Aren't you just a little too emphatic, old man?" asked Dorrie mildly. "I have brought you here because you know exactly what happened to King Victor of Caronia this afternoon. You helped to kidnap him, and you know where he is now. I require that information from you."

Pollnitz pretended to be amazed.

"But I am bewildered!" he panted. "I know nothing of what you speak! King Victor of Caronia? But this is absurd!"

"Absurd or not, I am taking the law into my own hands," said Lord Dorrimore, a grim note creeping into his voice. "My ancestors, Signor Mazio, or whatever your real name is, were men who enjoyed certain delightful privileges. They were feudal lords in this part of the country. Nowadays, of course, we are more enlightened. Strictly speaking, I haven't the power of my ancestors. But there's no reason why I shouldn't revert back to their methods for once. In a word, I feel like becoming a feudal lord myself."

"You talk the madness!" snarled Pollnitz.

"Not at all," went on Dorrie. "You will either tell me the whole truth about the kidnapping of Victor Orlando or I will throw you into one of the murkiest dungeons in this castle!"

"Good egg!" breathed Handforth excitedly. "That's the stuff!"

"I will say nothing!" shouted Pollnitz. "How can I? I know nothing! I tell you I am Philipo Mazio, of Torino! You speak in the riddles. Bah! I take no notice of your crazy threats!"

"Blustering eh?" said Dorrie, nodding. "I half expected it. All right! We won't beat about the bush. The dungeons for you, my lad! I'll soon show you whether I'm in earnest or not! You think I am bluffing, don't you?"

"You are the maniac!" panted Pollnitz. "You throw me into your dungeons, and it is the criminal offence!"

"Don't forget that I am a feudal lord, and that I have a perfect right to throw you into my dungeons if I want to," retorted Lord Dorrimore coolly. "Bring him along, boys! He doesn't believe us—but we'll make him change his mind."

Dorrie was in earnest, too. Paul and Nipper and Archie and Handforth seized the prisoner, and he was hustled out of the library. He was taken down stone-flagged corridors, and at last he was forced through a low-arched doorway and taken down some dark, dank stone steps. Then into the noisome tunnels, and finally into a black, ill-smelling dungeon.

Without a word, Lord Dorrimore swung the heavy door to and shot home the great bolts.

"**O**F course, we're taking a chance, and we might fail," said Dorrie thoughtfully. "But it's my risk, and I fancy it'll work out all right in the end."

They were holding a conference in the big lounge hall. Practically all the members of the house party were there, including the girls. Everybody was wildly excited. Dorrie's drastic action in throwing the prisoner into the dungeons had taken them all by surprise.

"Of course, there's no certainty that he'll talk, Dorrie," said Nipper. "He looks a stubborn customer."

"Archie tells me that this man was an officer aboard Prince Zeno's yacht, and that's good enough for me," growled Dorrie. "He calls himself an Italian, but he spoke in Slav when he was excited. He must be connected with the kidnapping. I've made no mistake, and I'm going ahead with my plan."

"But wouldn't it be better to go to the police, sir?" asked one of the others. "You could charge him——"

"Charge him with what?" interrupted Dorrie. "Where's the evidence? I'm satisfied that he's our man, but the police would only laugh at me. In fact, I should get into an awful lot of trouble. No, young 'uns, this is essentially a case where our only hope is to take the law into our own hands."

"And if he refuses to speak after being locked in the dungeons?" asked Nipper.

"Well, I'm afraid we shall come a cropper," said Dorrie.

He had been on the telephone, and he had learned that no trace of Victor had been found. The police were unable to give any information.

Dorrie only waited an hour; then he went down to the dungeons again, accompanied by six of the fellows. Mazio had been left all this time with his arms bound, and Dorrie was hoping that the darkness of the dungeon and the hopelessness of his plight would have had effect.

But Jakob Pollnitz was as obstinate as ever. He maintained that he was an Italian tourist, and that he knew nothing whatever about the kidnapping.

"H'm!" said Dorrie, nonplussed. "So you're keeping it up, are you? Well, we'll leave you in this dungeon until to-morrow, and see how that works. I won't leave you strapped up. You can't escape, anyhow."

He unfastened the straps, and Pollnitz stretched his arms painfully.

"You shall pay!" he panted. "This is the outrage! Carramba! You shall pay!"

"So you keep telling me," nodded Dorrie. "However, we'll see how a night in this dungeon——"

He broke off, for Pollnitz, with a sudden shout of fury, had made a dash for the open door. It was a mad thing to do, for he really had no chance of escape. But, finding himself at liberty, he made a dash for freedom.

"Stop him!" yelled Handforth, making a grab.

Nipper leapt at the same moment. He clutched at Pollnitz's coat and secured a firm hold. There was a rending tear as the material gave way. With Nipper and Handforth clutching at the man and delaying him, the others pressed round. The fight was brief. Pollnitz went down under a flood of youthful humanity.

"I do hate these brawls," said Lord Dorrimore, with a sigh. "There's really no need for them. If you want your liberty, my

friend, you have only to be perfectly frank and tell me the truth."

"I have told you!" panted Pollnitz hoarsely. "I know nothing. I am the harmless tourist. Ah, but the Italian Government, it shall know of this! There shall be much trouble for you!"

"What's this?" asked Nipper abruptly.

He had seen something lying on the floor—a flimsy envelope. He picked it up, and as he did so a possible explanation came to him.

"By Jove!" he exclaimed. "This must have fallen out of the man's coat when it tore open! And it must have been hidden in the lining, too!"

"Let's have a look at it!" said Dorrie crisply.

He looked, and the others, gazing at Pollnitz, saw the expression of alarm and consternation on the man's face.

"Italian, eh?" said Lord Dorrimore grimly. "This is very, very interesting."

"No, no!" gasped Pollnitz. "You shall not open that! It is the private letter!"

Lord Dorrimore ruthlessly tore it open, and as he glanced at the contents he pursed his lips.

"Quite remarkable," he observed. "You say that you are an Italian, and here we have a message written in the Slavonic characters. I'm not much of an expert at the language, but I've travelled a good deal in Russia and in Greece and the Balkans. I think I ought to be able to read this."

Pollnitz seemed to crumple up; his shoulders drooped, and all the anger and fire deserted him.

"What is it, sir?" went up a chorus when Dorrie had finished reading.

"Nothing much," replied his lordship smoothly. "Only a report from one Ernst Beyer, saying that Victor has been seized, conveyed to an aeroplane, and that he is being transported direct by air to the Kazatova Mountains."

"Oh, my hat!"

"Then—then they've really got him, sir!"

"The brutes!" shouted Paul Maddox huskily. "Oh, poor old Vic! And this man knows——"

"He knows everything, and he's going to tell us," said Dorrie, turning to Pollnitz. "What about it now, my friend? Don't you think it's time to give up all pretence?"

Pollnitz shrugged.

"I did my best," he muttered sullenly.

"Your name is not Philipo Mazio, but Jakob Pollnitz," continued Dorrie, glancing at the report again. "That is so, is it not?"

"Yes," muttered the prisoner. "But you will not give me to the police?" he added in fear. "I have only acted under orders. I could not help myself!"

"Bring him up to the library, boys," said Dorrie briskly. "It's not very comfortable, talking down here—and there might be quite a lot of talking to do."

Up in the library, Pollnitz looked more at ease. At all events he had lost his fear, and now a wild light of exultant mockery was in his eyes. He even swaggered.

"What I have done, I have done for Caronia," he said fiercely. "To perdition with the Grand Duke Rudolph! I serve Prince Zeno! Soon, with the boy Victor in our hands, we shall dictate our terms to the Grand Duke. And then Zeno shall mount the throne of Caronia!"

"I am not particularly interested in your political intrigues, my friend," said Lord Dorrimore gruffly. "What I want to know is this: exactly how did you get hold of Victor, and what did you do with him?"

In a boasting mood now, Pollnitz gave all the details. There was no reason why he should withhold them.

That report in itself was sufficient to warrant the police arresting him. And if he was perfectly frank with Lord Dorrimore, there was a chance that he would be allowed to go free.

"Your organisation seems to be pretty thorough," commented Dorrie at length. "So this aeroplane was ready, waiting for your call, eh? And you tell me that it has flown direct to Caronia?"

"Yes, to the Kazatova Mountains," boasted Pollnitz. "At last Prince Zeno has success within his grasp! Long live Zeno, King of Caronia!"

"Not yet," said Paul Maddox hotly. "Victor is the King of Caronia!"

Pollnitz swung round upon him.

"You young fool!" he sneered. "Do you realise how impossible it is for Victor ever to mount the throne? In a few hours he will be safe in that mountain stronghold—a prisoner. Prince Zeno will dictate his terms to the Grand Duke. And what then? The Grand Duke will either surrender—abdicate—or Victor will die!"

"How do you know that Victor won't be rescued?" demanded Handforth aggressively.

"Rescued!" repeated Pollnitz, breaking into a loud laugh. "That is a good one!

A bearded ruffian in picturesque costume swaggered into the room. It was Miklos Keiff, the notorious Caronian bandit chief.



Don't you understand that he has been taken to the mountains—to the wild country beyond Nid? Ah, but you don't see all this! Nid is a small town at the foot of the mountains. Five miles beyond lies the camp of Miklos Keiff, the great soldier, the great Caronian patriot."

"Is that what you call him?" asked Lord Dorrimore grimly. "I've heard of Miklos Keiff. Oh, yes! The most powerful and most ruthless bandit in the Balkans!"

"Bandit?" asked the prisoner, in amazement. "You call Miklos Keiff a bandit? He has thousands of men at his command! They are all Slavs," he added proudly. "They are all loyal Caronians—loyal to Prince Zeno. And Miklos Keiff has thrown in his lot with Prince Zeno, like the great patriot he is! Do you think that the boy Victor can be rescued from the stronghold of Miklos Keiff? The nearest village is Palakna—and beyond that village none but Keiff's own men dare penetrate. Every mountain pass is guarded. You do not know the country."

"I think I do," replied Dorrie. "And I know that it's a pretty tough country, too. I'm admitting that young King Victor is in a tight spot."

"And it will yet be tighter!" declared Pollnitz, with satisfaction. "Very soon now Zeno will be king! The day is at hand. The revolution may break out at any time now that the boy has been seized! And as for you—what do I care? You are too late!"

He laughed into Lord Dorrimore's face.

"Do you understand?" he gloated. "You are too late! The boy has gone. He is beyond your reach! Is it not humorous that you should come to the stable, as you English say, after the horse has been stolen?"

CHAPTER 8.

Off to Caronia!

FOR some minutes Lord Dorrimore was silent. He paced up and down, smoking jerkily. Finally, he flung his cigarette into the fireplace and faced Jakob Pollnitz.

"I'll give you twenty-four hours, my friend, to get out of the country," he said curtly. "For that period of time, I will say nothing to the police. You had better take full advantage of your period of grace."

"But, Lord Dorrimore, this man is guilty of——" began Paul Maddox.

"Guilty of what?" interrupted Dorrie,

with a shrug. "What proof have we? This letter? In any case, Victor has been taken away, and he is now beyond our reach. This man is not so much to blame as Prince Zeno. Let him go."

"You are very kind," said Pollnitz, with a sneer. "But am I not right in saying that you wish to avoid trouble on your own account?"

Lord Dorrimore ignored him.

"You see, boys, we're practically helpless," he said, with all the fire and vigour gone out of his voice. "Strictly speaking, there has been no criminal offence for young Victor has merely been taken home to his own country by his half-brother. What can we do?"

"Dorrie!" ejaculated Nipper, in amazement. "Can't we tell the police? Can't we get the Government to act? Who is Prince Zeno that he can plot and kidnap people from England?"

Lord Dorrimore shrugged.

"I know all that," he said dully. "It sounds fine, but do you suppose for a moment that the Government would act? Do you imagine that the Government would precipitate a quarrel with Caronia? No. It's a pity to lose Victor—I liked him—but it's impossible for us to butt into this Caronian family quarrel. Let them get on with it! We did all we could, so we needn't blame ourselves."

Pollnitz's eyes were gleaming.



Jokes from readers wanted for this feature. If you know a good rib-tickler, send it along now. A handsome watch will be awarded each week to the sender of the best joke; pocket wallets, penknives and bumper books are also offered as prizes. Address your jokes to "Smilers," Nelson Lee Library, 5, Carmelite Street, London, E.C.4.

CORRECT.

Teacher: "What is the highest form of animal life?"

Small Boy: "A giraffe, sir."

(L. Reeve, 5, Rice Lane, Wallasey, Cheshire, has been awarded a handsome watch.)

NOT DIGESTIBLE.

Billy: "Hallo, Tommy! What are you looking so serious about?"

Tommy: "I dreamt that I was eating shredded wheat last night."

Billy: "Well, what about it?"

Tommy: "And when I woke up I found that I'd eaten half the straw mattress."

(Miss A. Andrews, 51a, Ballingdon Street, Sudbury, Suffolk, has been awarded a book.)

NOTHING DOING.

Friend: "If you are so hard up why don't you write to your rich brother in London for some money?"

Schoolboy: "I did, and what do you think he said? He wrote back saying that my letter had not reached him."

(G. Knight, 59, Langdale Road, Hove, has been awarded a penknife.)

TAKING IT EASY.

Gent: "You say you are an invalid and cannot do heavy work? Then what can you do?"

Tramp: "Well, wot's wrong wiv sit ting in the greenhouse smokin' your cigars an keeping the flies off the tomatoes?"

(S. Yeend, 26, Roman Road, St. Marks, Cheltenham, has been awarded a pocket wallet.)

A STOREY STORY.

Two business friends were staying in New York. They put up at a big hotel and were accommodated on the fortieth storey. One night they returned to the hotel and discovered that the lift was out of order. Valiantly they started to walk up, and whiled away the time by telling yarns to each other. Finally, panting and breathless, they reached the fortieth storey.

"And now here's the best yarn of all!" exclaimed one of the men. "I've just dis-

"You are the sensible man, Lord Dorrimore," he said. "You mix yourself up in this, and it will mean much trouble. Far better to let it go, eh?"

"If you will come with me, Mazio, or Pollnitz, or whatever you're called, I'll escort you back to your car," said Dorrie curtly. "You fellows had better go and find the girls, and when I come back we'll have tea. Perhaps we can finish that match during the evening."

He went off with Pollnitz, leaving the St. Frank's fellows bitterly disappointed.

They crowded out, and the rest of the boys joined them—and the girls, too. There were many exclamations of amazement and dismay when the full truth was known.

"I'm surprised at old Dorrie!" said Handforth. "Letting the man go, and saying that we can't do anything to help poor old Orlando! It's—it's rotten!"

"And yet, dear old fellow, just think of the difficulties," said Travers. "Orlando has been whisked away by 'plane. He's half-way across Europe by now. How is it possible to rescue him?"

"We don't even know the route which the airman is taking," put in Nipper. "It's a beastly awkward position, which ever way you look at it. Perhaps Dorrie has done right. Anyhow, I'm ready to back his judgment."

"You mean to say that you approve?" demanded Handforth, staring. "You think

we ought to let the whole thing drop, and have tea, and go ahead with that cricket match afterwards—when we know that one of our chums has been kidnapped by his enemies?"

"If Dorrie had handed that man over to the police, there would have been a lot of awkward inquiries," pointed out Travers. "And merely because he was carrying that report, was there any direct evidence that he himself had been concerned in Orlando's kidnapping? The police would have had the dickens of a job to prove any case. Dorrie was cute enough to realise that, and so he let the fellow go."

"And Vic has been taken," muttered Paul. "After all our careful planning, too! Those brutes will kill him if his uncle doesn't surrender to them. Poor old Vic! What a mess!"

"It's rough, old man—dashed rough!" said Nipper sympathetically.

When Lord Dorrimore came into the big dining-hall some twenty minutes later he found his guests partaking of tea in a half-hearted manner. Their faces were gloomy, and when they looked at him they did so almost accusingly.

"Well, boys and girls, what about it?" asked Dorrie bluntly, as he sat down at the head of the great table.

"What about what, sir?" asked one of the guests.

covered that I've left the key of our room at the office."

(G. Lidster, 2, Longford Road, Birkdale, Southport, has been awarded a pocket wallet.)

A LITTLE DEMONSTRATION.

A small boy asked his father how wars began. "Well," said his father, "supposing that England quarrelled with France——"

"But," interrupted mother, "England mustn't quarrel with France."

"I know," he answered. "I am taking a hypothetical instance."

"You are misleading the child," said the mother.

"No, I am not," he answered.

"Yes, you are."

"No."

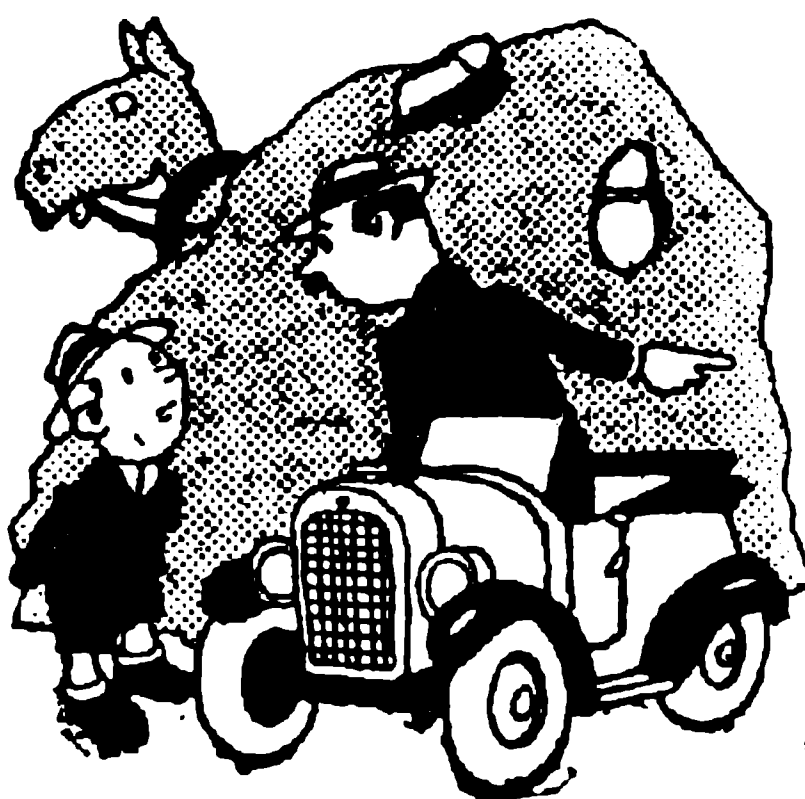
"Yes."

"All right, dad," said the small boy. "I think I know how wars begin."

(H. Jones, 58, Havelock Road, Derby, has been awarded a book.)

THEN THE FUR FLEW.

Infuriated chemist (called up at 2 a.m.): "What do you mean by calling me up at this hour for two-pennyworth of bicarbonate of soda for indigestion when a tumbler of hot water would have been just as good?"



Scotsman: "Weel, thank ye for the advice. I'll no bother ye, after all."

(J. Parker, Beckett Lodge, Beckett Lane, Worcester, has been awarded a book.)

VERY CONSPICUOUS.

Very Stout and Nervous Gent (who wants to cross the road): "Could you see me across the road, my boy?"

Boy (misunderstanding): "Not 'arf, mister. I could see you a mile off."

(A. Chapman, 68, Trinity Street, Canning Town, E.16, has been awarded a penknife.)

SCARS OF WAR.

Ted: "What a lovely black eye you've got, Fred. Who gave it you?"

Fred: "Gave it me be blowed! I had to fight for it."

(D. Stephenson, 13, Ilton Road, Walthamstow, E.17, has been awarded a penknife.)

COLLISION.

"Hadn't you better go and tell your master?" said the motorist to the farmer's boy, who stood looking at the load of hay upset in the road by a collision.

"He knows," replied the boy. "Knows? How can he know?"

"Because he's under the hay."
(I. Weinstein, 3, Cawley Road, Victoria Park, E. 9, has been awarded a pocket wallet.)

"You ought to know," retorted his lordship. "Pass some of those sandwiches, Handy, old man. Thanks! Well, I took that blighter back to his car and saw him off. Rather a pity we had to let him go."

"Why did we have to let him go, sir?" demanded Handforth truculently.

"Well, he was very useful to us in his gloating excitement," replied Dorrie coolly. "He was quite rash, in fact. He gave us some details which a wiser man would have kept to himself. That bit about young Victor being to take Miklos Keiff's stronghold, for example."

He put his sandwich down and rose to his feet.

"What's the matter with you all?" he asked, looking round from the boys to the girls and back to the boys again. "Don't you understand that I let that fellow go because I want him to tell his precious chief that we've given up the whole thing as a bad job? Ye gods and little fishes! Are you all struck dumb? You don't think we really have given it up as a bad job, do you?"

"Why, what—what do you mean, sir?" asked Paul Maddox, staring.

"I mean that if we've got any spirit in us we're not going to let those revolutionaries pinch King Victor's throne!" said Lord Dorrimore fiercely. "He's a decent kid. He's a St. Frank's fellow—one of us. It's our job to go out there after him—to rescue him!"

There was a chorus of exclamations, and the boys and girls sprang to their feet.

"Good old Dorrie!" roared Handforth. "By George! I knew it all the time! I knew that he was only fooling us!"

"I didn't mean to fool you," retorted Dorrie. "The object was to fool that spy. And I think I succeeded, too. What I want to know is this—if I decided to go out to Caronia to find Victor Orlando, will you youngsters back me up?"

"Yes, rather, sir!" went up an enthusiastic chorus.

"Good egg!" grinned his lordship. "I thought I could rely upon you. It's no good going to the police or applying to the Government. They'd mess about for weeks, and even in the end they'd get nothing done. If we really want to help that boy, we've got to go out to Caronia ourselves!"

"Hurrah!"

"Down with Prince Zeno!"

All Dorrie's guests were wildly excited. So many of them had been bitterly disappointed in their host a few minutes earlier; now they completely changed. They could see what Lord Dorrimore's real game was. They cheered enthusiastically.

"Of course, it will mean the abandoning of our holiday at the castle," said Dorrie. "No more cricket for a bit—no fishing, or bathing —"

"Who cares, sir?" shouted Gresham. "This trip to Caronia will be better than anything!"

"Rather!"

"I mean to say, bandits, and all that sort of thing," murmured Archie. "A frightfully murky sort of prospect, but I'm in with the rest of you!"

Dorrie chuckled.

"Caronia is not quite such a wild country as some of you seem to think," he said. "It is a popular holiday country. It is easy to get at. Visitors are flocking there in their thousands this summer, and we shall scarcely notice that we are in a foreign country at all. I don't anticipate trouble with any of your parents. They'll be willing enough to let you go. But it would be just as well, perhaps, not to mention to them that we're really going out there to help King Victor. It'll be just a friendly holiday tour, you see? I'm your host, so I'll pay all the exes and make all the arrangements. That's understood."

"You're a brick, sir!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Good old Dorrie!"

His lordship grinned as he heard the excited exclamations and cheers.

"Chuck it!" he protested. "You're my guests, and I can do as I like with you, can't I? Perhaps it's just as well on the whole that our mutual pal, the one and only Nelson Lee, isn't knocking about. He'd probably throw a screw-wrench into the works."

"Oh, I don't know, Dorrie," said Nipper. "I was wondering if we couldn't get in touch with him."

"Risky," replied Dorrie, shaking his head. "You know your guv'nor, Nipper. He'd start calling me a reckless chump for taking you all out there with a revolution in the offing, and he might even force me to give the full facts to your people. But I'm one of you. I'm jolly sure that you want to come for the fun of it. Am I right?"

"Yes, rather, Dorrie!"

It was a general chorus.

"So we'll leave Lee out of it," said Lord Dorrimore cheerfully. "I'll tell him, of course, when we get to London, but it'll be too late then for him to mess up the programme. My idea is for us to enter Caronia as ordinary tourists. Then, after we've done a bit of sightseeing, we'll set about the task of locating Victor."

"Supposing the revolution happens in the meantime, sir?" asked Travers pointedly.

"Not much fear of that, young 'un," replied Dorrie. "It'll be a good few weeks before these negotiations between Prince Zeno and the Grand Duke Rudolph are completed. And Victor, don't you forget, will be kept prisoner. Our job will be to nab him and smuggle him back to England. By doing that we shall strip the gears of Prince Zeno's plot."

Tea was forgotten; cricket was forgotten. From that minute onwards it was just one long round of feverish preparations.

CHAPTER 9.

The Prisoner of the Mountains!

VICTOR ORLANDO looked round his prison and sighed.

"I'll bet poor old Paul is in an awful stew over all this!" he told himself ruefully. "And Nipper and Handforth and the others, too."

It was a thought which needed more attention.

"I wonder if they really are cut up about me?" he asked himself frankly. "Paul is, of course. Paul's like my own brother, and he'll be as worried as the dickens. But, after all, the rest of the chaps are having a fine time at Dorrimore Castle, and I'm a conceited ass if I think that they're worrying about me. My hat, I'd give a week's rations for just one sight of good old Paul's chivvy!"

He sighed again, and inspected his prison for the hundredth time. Not that he had any thought of making an attempt to escape. He had entertained hopes in that direction when, some days earlier, he had first awakened, but one inspection of his strange quarters had convinced him that escape was impossible.

It seemed to him that weeks and weeks must have passed. The days were endless, and the nights— Well, thank goodness he slept soundly during the nights! But he was beginning to lose count of the days.

His prison was a mountain cave. Even Victor himself did not know how deep in the bowels of the mountain his prison was situated. The only entrance was through a narrow tunnel, but the length of this tunnel was a mystery to him, since he had not recovered consciousness until he had actually found himself within the cave.

When his guards came to him with food, they entered by a massive rock door. Beyond this door Victor had seen the tunnel, with another door some distance down. It was a cunning arrangement. For that second door was always locked and barred when the guards came. Even if Victor made a sudden rush, it would get him nowhere.

The cave itself was oblong in shape, some twenty feet by twelve. The rock wall rose sheer on one side; on the other it slanted, meeting the opposite wall some eighteen feet above.

The cave, Victor judged, was a natural fissure in the mountain, but a great deal had been done to it by human hands. In the sloping wall, for example, three windows had been hewn out of the solid rock, and these windows provided the prison with ample daylight and ventilation. To escape through them was impossible, however, for enormously strong iron bars were deeply sunken into the solid rock and rigidly set in with concrete.

It was plain to Victor that this prison had been prepared for some time—all in readiness for him. There was a carpet on the floor; there were comfortable chairs, a table, and a bed which was far more comfortable than the one he had slept in at St. Frank's.

There were books and magazines. At the end of the cave, partitioned off, was a well-equipped little bath-room. Victor's food was brought to him regularly, and although it was plain it was wholesome and appetising. Prince Zeno had at least remembered the royal status of his prisoner, and he had provided him with a fitting prison.

Victor knew that he was within the stronghold of Miklos Keiff, the ferocious leader of the Kazatova mountain men.

He remembered nothing of the journey. He knew he had been seized in that wood during the cricket match; he recalled being forced into the car. After that oblivion had enveloped him. Upon awakening he had found himself in this prison, without any knowledge of how many hours had passed or how he had been transported here. Yet his thoughts had immediately turned to the one possible solution—an aeroplane.

In any case, it didn't matter. Here he was, many hundreds of miles from his friends.

Disconsolately he walked across to one of the barred windows and gazed out. No attempts had been made to place these windows out of reach. They were waist-high, like the windows of an ordinary room.

It was a hot, sunny afternoon, and Victor found himself gazing upon a picturesque and unfamiliar scene. He could hardly believe that this country was Caronia—his own country. Everything was so strange to him. He had been practically brought up in England. His early childhood, spent in the royal palace of Galvarad, was a very pleasant memory. For Galvarad was a modern city, thoroughly up-to-date in every way.

He had heard of the Kazatova Mountains, of course; as a child he had spoken of the notorious Miklos Keiff and his bandits with bated breath.

From the windows he looked down upon a wide gorge, a great, deep gash in the mountains. On all sides the rocky walls rose. Beneath the window was a sheer drop of some hundreds of feet. The view was limited, however, for the iron bars were set close in.

Impossible to lean out and obtain a comprehensive view. The prisoner could only see straight in front of him—down into the gorge.

There were caves in plenty—the gorge was honeycombed with hundreds of them. A stream flowed merrily along the floor of the basin, and there was any amount of woodland, and large patches of cultivated ground. About half a mile distant stood an age-old village. Here lived the prominent families of Miklos Keiff's own tribe.

Victor knew, from all he had learned in his younger days, that there were many of these tribes living in villages scattered throughout the gorges and valleys. These people were somewhat akin to the mountain folk of Kentucky; they held that the mountains were their own property. They

defied the laws which the Caronian Government formulated. They had laws of their own.

Miklos Keiff was their ruler, the supreme lord of life and death in this wild region.

Always there had been strife amongst these mountain peoples. There had been endless vendettas and blood feuds. But for once in their history these people now had one common desire, that to put Prince Zeno on the throne of Caronia. For Zeno was their ally; he had promised them that when he became king he would allow them to go their own way, as they had gone for endless centuries.

The Grand Duke Rudolph, on the other hand, had decreed that these people should conform to all the laws of the land; they should adopt English as their one and only language, they should be law-abiding and peaceful. Vendettas were an offence, and were forbidden. It was the Grand Duke's dream that ultimately these wild people would be tamed and converted into useful, industrious citizens.

At present they were little better than bandits and brigands, preying upon tourists and the industrious peoples of the plains. They had given Caronia a bad name. Even now tourists were reluctant to come to Caronia lest they should be robbed—perhaps captured and held for ransom. Visitors flocked to Galvarad and to the civilised districts; but they shunned the mountains. Yet the Caronian mountains were magnificent; if only they could be made safe they would attract thousands of visitors yearly. And all this would increase the prosperity of the little kingdom.

FAR away, down in the gorge, dust was rising lazily into the hot air. Victor, gazing intently, made out a big cavalcade of horsemen. It was not an unusual sight. A great many of these mountain bandits used horses.

But Victor could now see the glint of the sunlight on polished buttons. These men were in uniform. They were soldiers.

For just one moment Victor's heart throbbed rapidly. Was it possible that he was being rescued? Had his uncle sent a big force of troops to give battle to the mountain men?

But he soon dismissed the idea. There was no fighting; even the women and children were flocking out and waving to the approaching horsemen. And presently they all vanished from Victor's sight farther down the gorge.

An hour later he knew the truth. For the muffled sound of footsteps came to his ears, the door of his prison was opened, and a tall, slim young man in smart uniform stepped in.

"Zeno!" exclaimed Victor, immediately recognising the newcomer.

"Ah, my dear half-brother, we meet again after quite a number of years," said Prince

Zeno smoothly. "All right, lieutenant, you may leave us alone."

The officer who had accompanied Prince Zeno saluted, turned, and left the cave, closing the door after him. The prince paused to light a cigarette, then he strode forward and flung his headgear upon the table.

"They seem to have made you comfortable, boy," he said, now speaking in perfect English. "Well, they have only carried out my orders. You see, I have no wish to make you suffer in any way."

"You are very kind," said Victor fiercely. "Don't you think I'm suffering? Don't you think it's torture for me to be locked up in this mountain cave, hundreds of miles away from all those who love me?"

"You flatter yourself, my dear child," said Prince Zeno lightly. "Your dear uncle may love you, but I rather think he loves his vainglorious ambitions a great deal more."

"They are not vainglorious ambitions!" said Victor hotly. "My uncle is the greatest man Caronia has ever known. He is changing this country from a medieval wasteland into a modern, industrious nation. In the course of five short years Caronia has trebled her exports; her manufactured goods are going to every corner of Europe. The hotels of Galvarad are full of visitors, winter and summer alike."

"You seem to be well up in your information, my dear Victor," said Prince Zeno mockingly. "In any case, I do not intend to discuss politics with you. I merely came to pay my respects, to ask if you were comfortable. Perhaps you have some message you would like to send to your kind Uncle Rudolph?"

Victor had always hated his half-brother, and he hated him more than ever now.

"You were always different from the rest of us, Zeno," he said bitterly. "What have you become now? A conspirator, a plotter, an enemy of your own people."

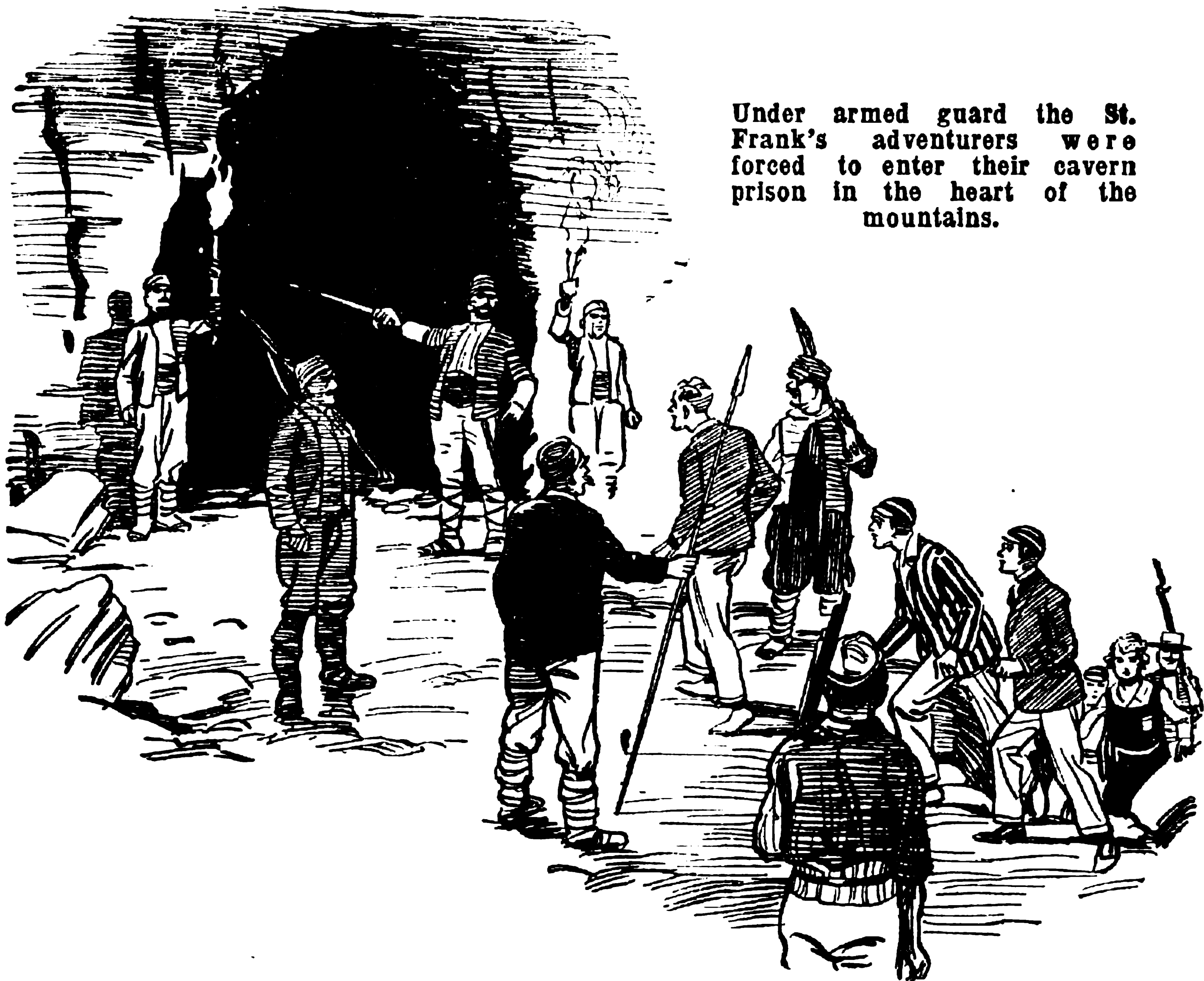
"Oh, no," said Zeno. "I am a friend of my people. There are thousands rallying to my banner—"

"Thousands of these mountain brigands!" interrupted Victor contemptuously. "You don't call them good Caronians, do you? Ever since our history began they have caused trouble and bloodshed."

"They are helping me to the throne, and for that reason I regard them as my friends," said Zeno coolly. "Well, that throne will soon be mine. I am very much afraid, my poor Victor, that you will never sit upon it."

"You are very sure of yourself."

"I have reason to be," said the prince easily. "Negotiations are now in progress with the Grand Duke. He has been informed of your—er—predicament. I may tell you that he has also been informed that unless he submits to my ultimatum, you will be—I regret to say—put to death. Not a very pretty death, either," he added reflectively.



Under armed guard the St. Frank's adventurers were forced to enter their cavern prison in the heart of the mountains.

tively. "Our friend Miklos Keiff has his own ideas with regard to executions. I fancy he burns people at the stake, in the good old-fashioned way. But that may be only a rumour. Perhaps he merely uses the dagger."

He flicked the ash from his cigarette.

"You've heard of the dagger method of execution, haven't you?" he went on. "They bind the condemned unfortunate, stick him against the rock wall, and then these cheerful fellows stands twenty or thirty paces away and throw daggers at him. The one who scores a bull's-eye—that is to say, the one who gets his dagger through the victim's heart—is feted royally. Quite a picturesque old custom, Victor."

Victor laughed contemptuously.

"If you're trying to scare me, you're wasting your breath," he said. "I'm not afraid of you. My uncle won't allow you to triumph over him."

"I don't think he'll allow you to die, if that's what you mean," replied Prince Zeno thoughtfully. "He loves you too well for that. He'll surrender. And the instant he does—the instant I step upon the Caronian throne—you will be freed. You and dear Uncle Rudolph will be exiled. Then you can both go to your beloved England. Until then, you will stay here."

And the prince, with a careless nod of adieu, took his departure.

CHAPTER 10.

At the Royal Palace!

"BY George! It seems funny, doesn't it?" asked Handforth, in a wondering voice.

"Yes, rather!"

"Dashed uncanny, if you ask me, old things," observed Archie Glenthorne, jamming his monocle into his eye and surveying the scene. "I mean to say, here we are in the foreign capital of a foreign country, and I'm dithered if everything isn't as English as Regent Street!"

"I think it's wonderful!" said Doris Berkeley approvingly.

Several members of Lord Dorrimore's party had just emerged from their hotel in Palace Square, Galvarad. It was a sunny morning, hot and pleasant. It was rather difficult to believe that this was indeed a foreign city, in Central Europe, eight hundred miles away from England.

The Ritz Hotel, which they had just left, was a great, modern structure, replete with every luxury. In fact, it was identical with any one of the great new hotels which are to be seen in the West End of London.

Palace Square made a delightful picture. It was a great open space, the centre of which was entirely occupied by ornamental gardens. There were graceful trees, brilliant flowerbeds, playing fountains. All round, on every

side, were great wide smoothly-paved boulevards.

One side of the square was occupied by several of the big modern hotels, and immediately opposite stood the quaint old Royal Palace, surrounded by its well-kept grounds. The other sides of the square were occupied by great stores, fashionable edifices of white stone, built in conformity with the hotels. The whole made an imposing picture. Galvarad was justly proud of its Palace Square.

Passing out of the square and turning into Victor Street—named after the boy King—the St. Frank's party was again thrilled. For Victor Street was new also. It was wide, with a narrow strip of gardens in the centre. Along the roads rolled private cars, smart taxis and buses. These latter were luxury Pullman coaches of the latest type.

There were wide pavements and glittering shops. On all sides there was evidence of intense activity. New buildings were being erected; great steel girders were rising skywards.

Everywhere the one language to be heard was English. The signs on the buses, over the shop fronts, and on the articles in the windows—all were in English. The newspapers of Caronia were printed in English, too. As Vivian Travers remarked, Galvarad was a home from home.

It was the Grand Duke's belief that the English language would one day become the universal language of the world. So he had forbidden the normal languages of the country—Italian, German, and Slav. There had always been confusion in Caronia owing to the many languages. With the one, everything was simplified.

The people, for the most part, were co-operating loyally with this great man who was bringing such prosperity to the little country. At first they had resented his drastic changes, but now that they had become used to them they could appreciate their worth.

In Galvarad, and in all the other big cities and towns, English was now spoken as a matter of course. Even the country's currency had been changed, and was like the English. Pounds, shillings, and pence were now used in Caronia.

It was only when visitors went into the older quarters of the town that it was realised that Galvarad was a Central European city. But even here the people mostly spoke English. Only occasionally could German or Italian be heard, and then in an undertone, as though the speakers were transgressing the law.

WHILE the boys and girls were on their sight-seeing tour, two visitors were ushered through the great halls of the Royal Palace and escorted to the inner sanctum of the Grand Duke Rudolph. These two visitors were Lord Dorrimore and Paul Maddox.

The Grand Duke received them gravely. He was a biggish man, elderly, with a touch of iron-grey at his temples. He was as

straight as a ramrod, every inch a soldier, with a kindly, determined face.

"Ah, my dear Paul, this is a sad meeting," he said as he took Paul Maddox's hands in his own. "I wish I had some good news to tell you."

"Haven't you been able to locate Victor yet, uncle?" asked Paul Maddox eagerly.

"I only know that he is a prisoner in the hands of Miklos Keiff," replied the Grand Duke quietly. "Lord Dorrimore, I am grateful to you for your interest in my nephew, and for the help you are giving me."

They shook hands. Dorrie had not been surprised to hear Paul addressing the Grand

COMING NEXT WEDNESDAY!



Duke as "uncle," for Paul Maddox, although the son of a commoner, had been Victor's chum since childhood.

"We arrived in Galvarad last night," said Dorrie. "My first duty this morning was to call upon you, sir."

"And I am grateful," said the Grand Duke again. "I received your letters and read them with deep concern. I need hardly tell you that Prince Zeno, in his communication, gave no details as to how Victor was seized and conveyed to the Kazatova Mountains. But you have made everything very clear, Lord Dorrimore, and I am greatly in your debt."

"I don't look at it that way at all," said Dorrie. "I feel responsible. I feel that it is up to me to rescue Victor. He was my guest. I invited him to Dorrimore Castle, with those

other boys and girls, in the belief that he would be safe there. And yet, in the very first week, he is kidnapped!"

"You must not blame yourself for that, Lord Dorrimore," replied the Grand Duke, shaking his head. "I have no doubt that Zeno's agents would have got hold of him wherever he was."

"We can't be sure of that, and, I repeat, he was my guest," said Dorrie gruffly. "I took the responsibility of protecting him. I failed. I'm not saying that it was my fault. Luck was very much on the side of these kidnapers. But I do claim the right to go

But not for long. He would demand ransom, and if the money arrived all well and good; you would be released. Otherwise——"

The Grand Duke shrugged significantly.

"So, you see, I should strongly advise you not to approach the mountain country," he went on. "I could not guarantee you any protection. Not as matters now stand; the whole situation in Caronia is acute. Prince Zeno will soon strike. He will send me his ultimatum."

"And you will succumb?"

"If it means the life or death of Victor, I shall have no other alternative," replied the Regent sadly.

"And that will mean the wrecking of all your wonderful plans," said Lord Dorrimore. "It can't be, sir. I am responsible for King Victor. He was my guest, and I regard it as my duty to rescue him from these revolutionaries, and to put a stop to their dirty game. But before going into the mountains I wanted to learn if you were taking any action."

"I am not," replied the Grand Duke. "Any action on my part would be disastrous. Prince Zeno has brought off a great coup. So far, the people do not know. I dare not tell them. And as for sending any forces against Miklos Keiff, the very idea is out of the question. Such a step would immediately precipitate the revolution, and that would mean general bloodshed. You see, Lord Dorrimore, I am in a most unfortunate position. I can do nothing but wait. And Prince Zeno holds the trump cards."

"That settles it, then," said Paul Maddox cagerly. "We've got to go and fetch Victor ourselves."

"You don't realise the difficulties, my boy," said the Grand Duke, shaking his head. "Neither do you, Lord Dorrimore. Caronia is not ready for a revolution. For years I have tried, by diplomatic means, to win the trust and support of those fiery Slavonic tribes. I believe I was succeeding. But Prince Zeno, with his ambitions to mount the throne, has proved himself to be a cruel thorn in my side. And now my work of years is slowly being ruined. I have never been able to enforce the new laws in the province of Kazatova. Some of my soldiers are there, but they dare not take any action. For any real fighting would cause an upheaval."

Lord Dorrimore rose to his feet, and his eyes were gleaming.

"That's just where we come in then," he said briskly. "Can't you see the possibilities, sir? I'm just an English tourist, a happy-go-lucky nobleman. I am accompanied by a harmless crowd of English boys and girls. Tourists having a look round Caronia. Miklos Keiff and his men will be contemptuous of us. That will give us a big advantage. Thanks to one of Zeno's agents, a man named Pollnitz, I know that Victor is being held in the mountains some miles beyond the town of Nid."

"THE MOUNTAIN TYRANT!"

By E. S. BROOKS.

Umlosi bound to a stake. Miklos Keiff, the bandit chief, facing him, a dagger in his hand. His arm goes backwards; forwards. The dagger hisses through the air.

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into the Kazatova Mountains to rescue the boy. That is why I am here, sir."

"But what you ask is unthinkable!" protested the Grand Duke. "Even my own soldiers dare not penetrate the country which Miklos Keiff regards as his own. For you to do so would be risky in the extreme."

"I'm rather fond of risks," replied Dorrie dryly. "Now, suppose I went into the mountain country with my party of boys and girls? This Keiff fellow isn't a murderer, is he? He might seize us and make us prisoners, but he would not harm us?"

The Grand Duke pursed his lips.

"There is no doubt that he would capture you all," he replied. "Miklos Keiff would not neglect such an opportunity. He would hold you for ransom. No, I don't think he would harm you; in fact, he would treat you well,

"You know that?" asked the Grand Duke sharply. "I have only been informed that Victor has been captured. Zeno has not dared to tell me the locality."

"And I fancy that Pollnitz has not dared to tell Prince Zeno that he allowed that very important piece of information to slip out," said Dorrie dryly. "Therefore we have a double advantage. If you were to send your forces to Nid, the prince and Keiff would be at once suspicious. But will they be afraid of a few tourists?"

"You are a daring man, Lord Dorrimore, and a brave one," said the Regent quietly. "I admire your ingenuity. But would it be fair to these boys and girls to take them into the mountains?"

"They would consider themselves hard done by if they were left behind," replied Dorrie promptly.

"But the dangers——"

"They like dangers; they thrive on dangers," interrupted his lordship cheerfully. "And, after all, what are the dangers? Miklos Keiff does not kill his victims—he only asks ransom. Well, we're ready for that. And while we're on the spot we can be nosing round for Victor's hiding-place. All I require, sir, is your permission for us to enter the Province of Kazatova. I will hold myself responsible for the safety of my party, and, if necessary, pay every penny of the ransom which is demanded if any of them get captured."

Before Lord Dorrimore and Paul Maddox left the royal palace that permission was granted. Dorrie was a persistent beggar, and he generally got his own way.

CHAPTER 11.

Captured by Bandits!

THUS it came about that Lord Dorrimore's holiday party left Galvarad after only a brief twenty-four hours' stay.

They took the quaint train for the Kazatova mountains. It was not a particularly pleasant journey, for the railway facilities of Caronia were only just beginning to awaken. The trains along the main lines, communicating with the other European capitals, were excellent, but on these rural lines there was a marked difference.

The train service to Nid, the little town high in the mountains, was antiquated. Tourists seldom, if ever, came here, for the name of Miklos Keiff was greatly feared.

"Well, boys and girls, we're going into an adventure, and I rather think you approve of it," Dorrie had said, when he had put the proposition to them. "We might have to suffer a few inconveniences, but I don't think there'll be any real danger. Any of you who want to stay behind, just say the word."

Dorrie had not been allowed to get any further than that. All the St. Frank's fellows were eager to undertake the adven-

ture. Victor Orlando was their own school chum, and they wanted to go to his aid. The girls were naturally every bit as keen.

At various places along the route Lord Dorrimore had been warned not to penetrate into the town of Nid. For Nid was virtually ruled by the bandits. To go there was just asking for trouble.

"We're in Caronia to see the sights," Lord Dorrimore declared cheerfully. "Who is this Miklos Keiff, anyhow? We're not afraid of him. We're British; he daren't touch us."

Amazed officials listened more in sorrow than in fear. These English. Mad, as usual.

Lord Dorrimore took good care to advertise his coming. He sent many telegrams to the mayor of Nid, requesting that first-class hotel accommodation should be found for them. He would be obliged, too, if the mayor of Nid would wait upon them after they had arrived so that he could map out the most spectacular tour for them. They were English holiday-makers, and they wanted to see all the picturesque sights.

Dorrie ignored the fact that the mayor of Nid was a swarthy rascal under the direct sway of Miklos Keiff. Ostensibly, Nid was administered by the National Government. But everybody in Caronia knew that Nid and many other mountain towns and villages was ruled by the iron hand of Miklos Keiff.

The comedy was played out elaborately when the little train puffed laboriously up the steep grade into Nid. The mayor and his officials were at the quaint station to meet the party. Tourists had not been there for years. They were welcomed enthusiastically; they were escorted to the biggest hotel in the town. It was a dilapidated, old-fashioned place, but rooms had been prepared, and everybody was most charming. The mayor, his officials, the hotel proprietor, all assured Lord Dorrimore that the greatest care would be taken of him and his party.

These assurances were so emphatic and so suave, in fact, that Dorrie was not deceived for a moment.

"Well, young 'uns, we've walked right into the hornets' nest," he said contentedly, as they all sat down to a hearty meal in the barn-like dining-hall, with its brick floor, its uneven walls, and its low, timbered ceiling. "I warned you what to expect, so you mustn't grumble if something exciting happens."

"I hope it comes this evening!" murmured Irene, her eyes agleam. "I say, you girls, what a thrill!"

"Gorgeous!" said Doris.

Their faith in Lord Dorrimore was supreme. He was leading them into this, but they were all perfectly satisfied that he would not allow any harm to befall them.

THE excitement, as it happened, came in the dusk, before that meal was over.

There came the sounds of hoof-beats in the dusty main street of the town.

Horsemen galloped up from all directions. The hotel was surrounded.

"By the Lord Harry!" ejaculated Dorrie, going to the window. "It's happened, young 'uns!"

Even Dorrie was surprised. He had not expected any move from Miklos Keiff until to-morrow. But the hotel was completely surrounded by wild-looking mountain men—picturesque fellows in true Balkan costume.

There came shrieks and shouts of alarm from the hotel servants, the tramping of feet in the stone passages. The great door of the dining-hall was flung open, and armed men forced their way in. At the head of them was a big, broad-shouldered man of striking appearance. His costume was more colourful than that of the others, his hair was long and abundant, his face was almost concealed by the great untrimmed beard and moustache which he affected.

In a deep, rumbling voice he gave orders to his men, speaking in a tongue which none of the boys or girls could understand.

"By George! The bandits!" yelled Handforth. "Let's make a fight for it! Buck up, St. Frank's!"

"No," said Lord Dorrimore. "We can't fight against armed men. Take it easy, Handy."

Fighting at this juncture was not Dorrie's policy. He was responsible for the safety of these boys and girls. If they started a scrap with the bandits there might be bloodshed, and the odds were all in favour of the enemy. Even Umlosi, who was with the party, found to his disgust that he could not indulge in his favourite pastime.

"I am glad, Lord Dorrimore, that you have the good sense to know when you are beaten," said the bearded man, with an elaborate bow. "You are wise in urging your companions to surrender without resistance. You will allow me to introduce myself—Miklos Keiff!"

A gasp went up from the boys and girls. So this was the bandit chief himself. He spoke with a slight accent, but otherwise his English was perfect. There was a mocking light in his eyes as he surveyed the party.

"I wonder if you are brave, or if you are merely foolish," he went on. "Let me say, however, that I am honoured by your visit to this interesting mountain town. I feel so gratified, in fact, that I intend to escort you at once into the picturesque heart of the mountains. Nid is but a drab place at the best."

Dorrie looked hard at the notorious brigand.

"Does that mean that you are taking us away as prisoners?" he asked bluntly.

Miklos Keiff shrugged.

"I am not slow to take advantage of good fortune when she smiles," he replied suavely. "But when you suggest that I am taking you prisoners. I am pained. Not prisoners, Lord

Dorrimore. I insist that you shall be my guests—far in the mountains. You will prepare yourselves for the journey, please? At once?"

It was not a request, but an order.

Half an hour later the entire party, surrounded by the bandits, moved out of Nid. All the prisoners had been provided with horses, and they went under armed guard.

Through great canyons and gorges and rock passes the party rode, with the boys and girls marvelling at the grandeur and beauty of the mountainous scenery. It was while they were negotiating one of these passes, narrow and steep, that they were provided with an unexpected thrill—a thrill which might easily have ended in tragedy for one of their number.

Edward Oswald Handforth, of course, was the one concerned. Handy could always be relied upon to get himself into trouble, although on this occasion it must be admitted that the fault was not of his own making.

His horse stumbled over a boulder, and Handforth, caught napping, was flung to the ground. A shout of horror went up from Church when he saw his chum rolling over and over towards the edge of the mountain path. For Church had seen that below was a sheer drop for hundreds of feet into a deep gorge.

"Look out, Handy!" he yelled frantically.

But it was too late. Handforth, unable to stop himself, clawing desperately but unavailing at the ground, had rolled over the mountain edge. With a loud shriek he disappeared from view.

The cavalcade had come to an abrupt stop. Shouts of inquiry and alarm rang out, the bandits were bellowing orders. Church, McClure and Nipper who had been riding together, hurriedly dismounted and ran to the mountain ledge. With palpitating hearts they gazed apprehensively down into the gorge. And then they gave loud gasps of relief.

Handforth, with his usual colossal luck, was safe. Vaguely discernible in the darkness, they could see him, clinging desperately to a small bush which grew out of the rock. Obviously, as he was falling, his clawing fingers had grabbed at the branches of the bush, and thus he had been saved.

"Handy, are you all right?" called Nipper anxiously.

"Yes, but buck up and throw down a rope or something!" came Handforth's voice through the darkness. "I can feel this bush giving way."

Miklos Keiff, with a rope in his hand, strode up to the edge of the precipice. The rope was lowered. Only just in time, too. Even as Handforth made a frantic grab at it one of the branches he had been holding snapped and the bush itself came away by the roots and disappeared into the blackness of the gorge.

When Handforth was hauled up he was pale and shaky. It had been a narrow escape. He recovered quickly, however, and then the party continued on its journey.

They passed through another and bigger gorge, going down steep hillsides. Lights were showing here, from what appeared to be quite a large village. But there was no pause. They rode straight through.

Finally they were ordered to dismount at the mouth of a great cave, which yawned blackly ahead. Men with flaming torches stood at the entrance.

It was an eerie, unforgettable scene.

Under strong guard they were marched in, and at length they found themselves in a great domed cavern. Greasy, evil-smelling candles were burning on little ledges of the rock. A great stone door clanged, and they were left to themselves.

"Well, we're here," said Paul Maddox, in a low voice. "We're right in Miklos Keiff's stronghold. And Victor is here!"

"Exactly," nodded Dorrie. "That's just the point. Victor is here. And if we can't manage to locate him——"

He broke off as the great stone door opened again.

It was Miklos Keiff himself who entered—alone. He turned in the doorway, gave orders to some of his subordinates, and then closed the door tightly. He advanced into the big cavern.

"Keep your voices low, and don't make any silly exclamations of surprise," he said, speaking with smooth quietness. "Dorrie, you idiot, is there no limit to your recklessness?"

Lord Dorrimore's jaw dropped. Nipper gulped and leapt forward.

"Guv'nor!" he gasped.

The supposed Miklos Keiff nodded.

"Yes, I'm Lee," he said smoothly. "I thought you'd recognise my voice. Now, now! For heaven's sake keep it low!"

It was a staggering surprise. The boys and girls could hardly believe the evidence of their ears. Even Lord Dorrimore was bewildered.

"But this is amazing!" he said blankly. "You, Lee! How in the name of all that's marvellous did you get here? And—and in this get-up, too!"

"Before I tell you why I am here or how I got here, I want to know what you mean, Dorrie, by bringing all these boys and girls into this bandit camp?" demanded Lee angrily. "You knew very well that your entry into Nid would mean capture."

"That's right," admitted Dorrie. "But what of it? I did it on purpose. We're not afraid of the real Keiff; we reckoned that he would hold us for ransom. And we thought we might be able to locate Victor——"

"You're hopeless!" interrupted Lee gruffly. "Thank Heaven I'm on the spot—to ensure the safety of you all."

Lord Dorrimore and his party, utterly bewildered, listened breathlessly.

"You were incautious enough, Dorrie, to hint at your plans when we met in London," went on Lee. "I tried to dissuade you, but you wouldn't listen. It was too late for me to stop you from bringing the boys and girls out here. I had already made my own plans, for I rather fancied rescuing Victor Orlando myself."

"The deuce you did!" said Dorrie.

"I came out here by 'plane—I arrived some days before you," continued Lee. "Luck was with me. I learned that Miklos Keiff was staying the night in an isolated inn. I can't go into the whole story now, but I ventured into that inn myself, in the small hours. I was assisted by three of the Grand Duke's secret agents."

Dorrie uttered an exclamation of disgust.

"And I thought I was pretty clever!" he said in a tired voice. "Yet you were getting busy days ago!"

"Miklos Keiff was captured. I took his place," said Lee. "And while Keiff was being smuggled away to Galvarad I assumed his identity. It is a plan I formulated with the Grand Duke himself."

"But the Grand Duke told me nothing of it!" protested Dorrie.

"I pledged him to secrecy," replied Lee. "Do you think he would have let you and your party come out here if he had not been assured that I would see that you came to no harm?"

"By the Lord Harry!" growled Dorrie. "I thought the old boy was pretty easy to handle."

"It's just like your headstrong recklessness," said Lee accusingly. "Well, I thought the best thing I could do was to capture the lot of you and bring you straight here. To-morrow you're going out again, under escort, and Victor Orlando will be with you."

"Well, I'm jiggered!" said Handforth in dismay. "Then the whole thing's a giddy frost! We haven't had any adventures at all."

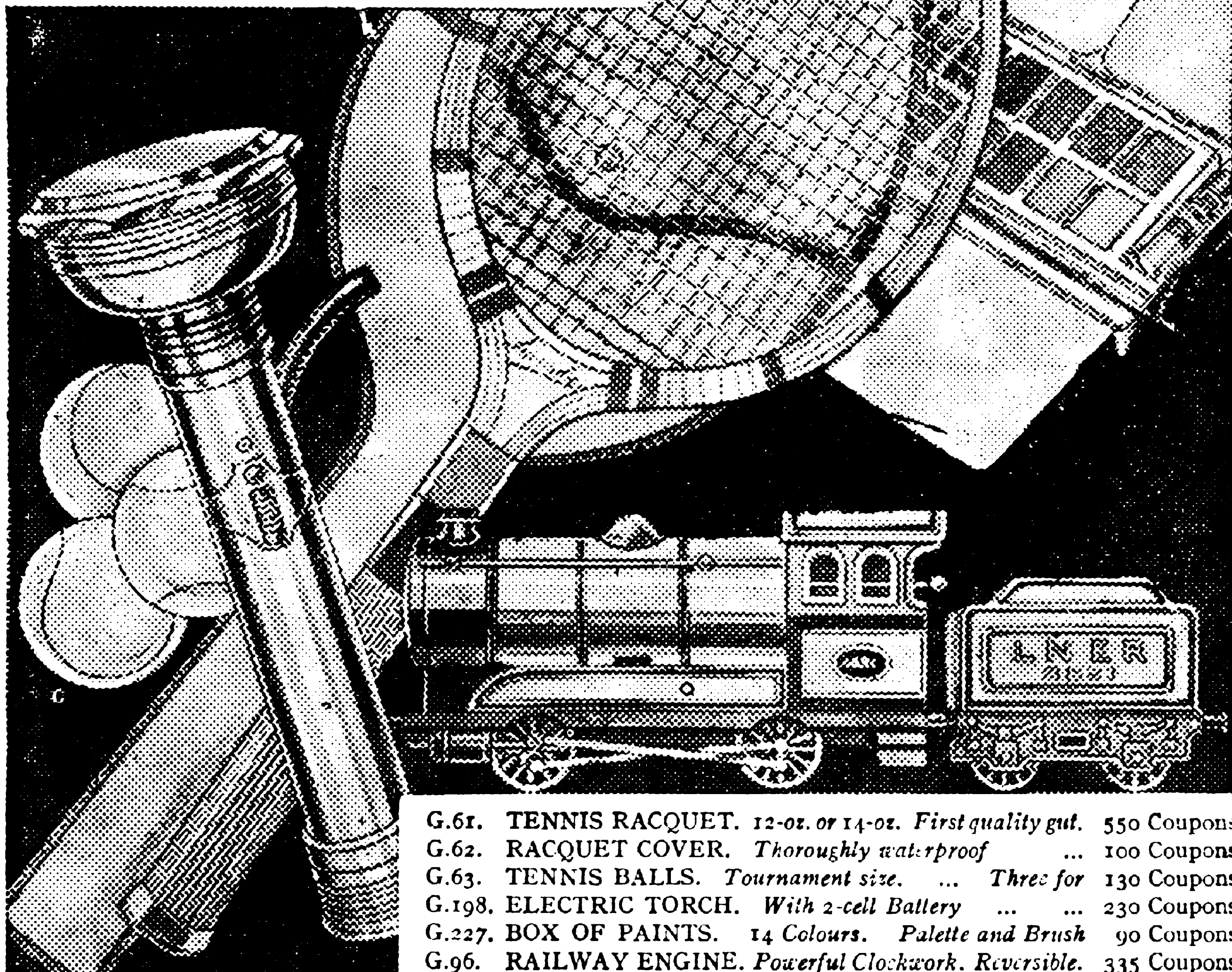
But Handforth need not have worried, or the others, either. This adventure was not over yet—it was only just beginning.

The rescuing of King Victor of Caronia was not to prove so easy, for there was the cunning Prince Zeno in the background, and although Nelson Lee and Dorrie and his party had won the first hand in the game, there were other hands to be played. Had they but known it, there were some stirring times ahead for these bold adventurers.

THE END.

(Next week's grand yarn in this corking holiday-adventure series featuring the Chums of St. Frank's is entitled: "The Mountain Tyrant!" Order your copy now to avoid disappointment.)

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MR. EDWY SEARLES BROOKS wishes me to acknowledge, on his behalf, letters addressed to him from the following readers: Barbara M. Ives* (Jersey), Stanley George Jonson (Port Elizabeth, South Africa), "Mrs. R." (Leicester), Patrick Dockery (Carrick-on-Shannon, Ireland), Herbert Mitchell (Portsmouth), G. Mackay (Glasgow), F. Harold Martin (Bristol), G. E. C. Smith (Richmond, Surrey), "Old-Timer" (Nottingham), Ralph Eadmer Clarry (Toronto), Jack Kemp (London, E.2), Tom W. Richards* (Liverpool), Edith Wilkinson (Catford), Ernest S. Holman (Leyton, E.10).

Mr. Brooks comments below on matters of wide general interest brought up in the above letters. But readers should please note that all letters must be addressed to: The Editor, NELSON LEE LIBRARY, Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4, and not to Mr. Brooks. I shall be pleased to secure Mr. Brooks' personal comments for this page on any special points concerning his St. Frank's stories which may have been brought forward in your letters to me.

Willy Handforth was not at the school when the St. Frank's stories first started, Stanley G. Jonson. He first appeared in No. 386, Old Series, in a story entitled "Handforth Minor." Study J is not in the West House, but in the Ancient House, and it is occupied by Harry Gresham, Alec Duncan, and Ulysses Spencer Adams.

When we say such things as "Gather round, boys," or "Order your copy now, chums," or "Tell your pals," we naturally include such staunch readers as "Mrs. R.," of Leicester. She says that she has read the good Old Paper since she was ten years of age, and she is now the mother of a boy of seven and a girl of three and a half. After she has finished with the Old Paper every week she sends it to her father, who is

seventy-eight, and who enjoys the St. Frank's yarns just as much as she does. So our "boys" embrace readers of both sexes and all ages. Another staunch reader, Patrick Dockery, says that his father often reads the stories.

Herbert Vandyke "digs" in Study No. 8, in the Modern House, G. E. C. Smith. He shares the study with Terence O'Grady, the Irish boy. The most brilliant Latin scholar at St. Frank's is Mr. Robert Langton, the master of the Sixth Form.

It is scarcely fair to regard Viscount "Skeets" Bellton as a cowboy, Tom W. Richards. It is true that he was brought up on a Canadian ranch, but his blood is just as blue for all that, and he is a thoroughly good sport in every way. He is immensely popular with the St. Frank's Removites. You mustn't assume that Fullwood has become a saint; he has his moments of weakness like everybody else, and on more than one occasion since he threw up his old bad ways he has been dangerously near to going back to them. But his friendship with Clive Russell and Winnie Pitt has so far stopped him from making an ass of himself. But you never know! As for it being a mystery to you that the "bad lads can't stand up to a scrap," there is Fullwood himself as an example that you are mistaken. When Fullwood was a bad lad he was a very tough customer in a fight—as he is now. And Bernard Forrest, who is certainly the worst scamp in the Remove, is every bit as tough. In any fight he gives a good account of himself. Of course, weaklings like Gulliver and Bell scarcely count. Without a leader, they are not even "bad lads" at all, since it is the custom of their breed to follow in the footsteps of others. As for Willy Handforth, it is likely to be a long time before his pets are "sent to the Zoo." Willy and his pets are inseparable, and the school authorities, if anything, encourage his love of animals.

The Phantom Foe Exposed By Thurston Kyle.



The PHANTOM FOE!

By JOHN BREARLEY

A thrilling mystery and adventure serial, the opening chapters of which are briefly retold on page 42.

Exposed!

CAPTAIN ARTHURS had a small, three-room flat in a quiet block of Bayswater mansions; and hailing a taxi outside the Yard, he gave the driver crisp orders to step on the gas hard.

The road in which he lived was quiet enough at the best of times, but at 4.45 in the morning not even road-sweepers or milkmen were about yet. Paying off the cab, he shot a quick glance up and down the empty pavements, then hurried into the entrance-hall of his block. The flat he occupied was on the first floor.

Inside the tiny kitchen, his first task was to eat a hearty breakfast, which he cooked himself, for he employed no servants. That over, he left the table as it was and strode into his bed-room. And there became busier still.

The barely-furnished room was typical of a man who spent little time at home

and was used to going off anywhere any time. In one corner was a cupboard for his clothes; that and a small bed with a wall-phone beside it, a chair and a steamer trunk having a shaving mirror on top, was all the place contained.

Lighting a cigarette, he took a mahogany make-up box from the mantelpiece, placed it open on the chair, and rubbed his hands eagerly. His earlier weariness had dropped from him like a cloak; every movement he made was quick, deft, and decisive.

Carefully he unwrapped a clipped grey wig from the box and laid it down. Another fleeting smile crossed his grim face at memory of Sergeant Baker's stunned surprise at the Yard. Visiting the Phantom's gang—eh? Yes, by thunder, after that 'phone message—and not as Captain Arthurs, C.I.D., either. Still with a smile on his tight lips, he

walked briskly across to the cupboard and opened it.

Next moment, to the sound of a fiercely-driven fist meeting hard bone, he was flat on his back, eyes closed, mouth open—knocked out to the world!

From the depths of the cupboard glided a muscular figure, lithe and soft-footed as a cat, a mask covering its face to the chin. At the thump of the Canadian's heavy fall, too, the door leading from the bed-room to the little, unused, unfurnished sitting-room opened noiselessly, and two other masked men stole in. The trio looked at the prostrate man for a moment, nodding in silent satisfaction. He who had delivered the terrific knock-out spoke first.

"Telephone!"

One of the men went over, called a number, and spoke four words in a low, husky voice. Then he stole softly away, out of the flat and down to the entrance-hall. Stillness reigned supreme; in the rest of the mansions the occupants were still sleeping soundly.

Meanwhile his confederates worked.

With a measuring glance at the unconscious Arthurs, they took hold of the steamer-trunk, laid it flat, opened it, and threw out the few articles of clothing it contained. A faint mutter from the Canadian announced that the effects of the punch were beginning to wear off, and immediately, without the slightest compunction, the bigger of the men bent down and administered another six-inch, expert jab. Then Arthurs was tightly bound and gagged, and after that dumped into the trunk.

Arthurs was a big man, but so was the trunk, and by dint of squeezing his captors stowed him in roughly at last. Hardly had they done so and closed the lid than the third man prowled back, jerking his thumb significantly over one shoulder.

"Right!" The leader spoke again, bent and hefted the trunk in his powerful arms. His assistant did the same, and, headed

by the "scout," they marched lightly out, carrying their burden with ease.

Everything about the daring capture of the Yard officer went smoothly, and with a rapidity that told of perfect team-work. The coast was still clear; and in front of the mansions a small, covered lorry had just drawn up, its motor ticking over softly. The scout went on to the pavement first, looking quietly to right and left before giving a furtive signal. Then the two with the trunk came out leisurely, stowed it deftly aboard, and climbed in afterwards. Ten seconds later the lorry was moving rapidly down the deserted, respectable street.

As soon as they were under weigh, the trunk was opened again. This time Arthurs was dragged out. Under the rough treatment he came round slightly, but was still half-stupefied by the two punches he had taken and the lack of air in his narrow prison. For a time he lay on the floor of the van, stiff and unmoving. But presently, as his brain began to clear, so he began to writhe in his bonds, recklessly, savagely, in spite of its futility, while his frenzied eyes glared mad, defiant curses.

Heedless of the trio beside him, regarding him stonily through the slits in their masks, he fought and raged like a demon till exhaustion conquered him. Even so his eyes still burned with rage—and something else, too. But the man who had tied him had been a sailor once, and those ropes would have held him till Doomsday.

Where he was going he had no idea, for the stuffy van was well covered. To his strained imagination the journey seemed to go on for an eternity, although actually it lasted little more than an hour. He felt the car turn off abruptly at last, and from the crunch of gravel beneath the tyres and the swish of branches against the van once or twice, deduced that they had entered the drive of a house. Then came half a minute's jolting over tufty grass; and the strange ride ended.

HOW THE STORY BEGAN.

THE NIGHT HAWK, known to the world as *Thurston Kyle*, scientist, declares war on *THE PHANTOM FOE*, a ruthless criminal, who has commenced a reign of terror, killing, kidnapping, looting. Always he attacks amid a cloud of yellow gas, which stupefies his victims; then disappears literally into air, for he directs operations from an invisible airship. Kyle combines with

CAPTAIN FRANK ARTHURS, of Scotland Yard, to bring the criminal to book, but their plans are frustrated owing to a leakage of information. *Lucius Pelton*, of the Treasury, vanishes, and Arthurs immediately suspects that he is the Phantom Foe. The Night Hawk severs his connection with Scotland Yard; he intends to play a lone hand, for he also has his suspicions regarding the identity of the Phantom. The Phantom announces that he intends to attack the towns of Porthampton and Southtown; Kyle goes out to meet him in his own airship, the *Thunderer*. Flying through the night on wings, his young assistant, *Snub Hawkins*, sights the Phantom's craft, attacks, and is captured. He is taken to the gang's secret headquarters on a lonely island off the Hebrides. Meanwhile, at Scotland Yard, Captain Arthurs receives a telephone call, after which he prepares to depart. "I'm paying a friendly visit to the Phantom Foe's gang!" he announces.

(Now read on.)

As soon as the motor stopped, his captors slid out. A cloth was flung over his head and loosely tied, after which he was yanked out and carried by ankles and shoulders up a few short steps. He heard the soft clack of boots on a metal floor, and a curt command. Tossing him down carelessly, the men jerked the cloth from his face and stood back.

There was not another sound; everything fell silent as a vault. Dazedly Arthurs turned his head to look around him. And as he did so the colour faded even from his lips, leaving them dry and bloodless. His body arched itself in a desperate, involuntary convulsion.

Everywhere, curving sides of gleaming metal surrounded him, lit by thick windows through which he could see trees and glimpses of early-morning sky. The deck on which he was lying was metal, too, and a few yards to his left a short steel ladder led up to a turret. He was a prisoner in the hull of an airship.

And suddenly, as he craned his neck, a tall man stepped quietly into his arc of vision.

A cry that was half-curse and half-groan burst from the Yard man's lips. He stared at the face above him like a rabbit fascinated by a snake. It was a handsome face, cold and white as marble, and utterly impassive. But the dark eyes under their heavy brows burned with a bitter fury, all the more terrible because it was under iron restraint. A thrill shot through Arthurs' heart, agonising as the stab of a knife.

"You! You!" he muttered hoarsely, almost swooning where he lay. By a great effort he recovered himself, raising his head for another glassy stare. "You—Thurston Kyle!"

The Night Hawk inclined his head slowly.

"Yes, Thurston Kyle — quitter!" he whispered. "Good-morning, Captain Arthurs, C.I.D.; alias—the Ace!"

Menacingly he bent lower towards his crumpled captive, his next words coming with shattering force:

"Or should I say—alias, the Phantom Foe?"

Arthurs wilted in his bonds as though all the life had gone from him in one rattling gasp.

—
"Where is Snub Hawkins?"

A FURY was raging in Thurston Kyle's heart that threatened nearly to overwhelm him. He was burning with the urge to kill and destroy. Only rigid will-power kept him in check, and the effort it was costing showed in the savage compression of his lips.

For him, too, the night just passed had been one of nerve-racking strain. The attack on the Phantom's airship over Porthampton and Southtown had been a failure after all, thanks to the gang's skilful manoeuvres. And what was worse, far worse, Snub Hawkins, on his first trip as the "Sparrowhawk," had vanished completely.

What fate had overtaken him was a mystery. A matter for hopeless guess-work only.

Shortly after the Thunderer had sprung its surprise on the enemy, smashing through the night-gale with a blazing challenge from its turret, the Night Hawk had flashed into action also. A single one of his new bombs crashing home would have ended the monstrous air duel and the Phantom's gang as well. But he had been just a fatal second too late in getting to close quarters.

Dodging with dazzling speed, covered by her smoke screen and aided by the storm, the sleek bandit ship had fled. Her opponents had combed the sky for her in swift, resolute dashes, and the Thunderer had climbed to a colossal height during the hunt. All in vain; the panic-stricken gang had hurtled clear of the trap, racing away into space.

And Snub had gone also. All through the chase, signal-flares had been fired for his guidance, without result. Thurston Kyle had ordered the Thunderer home at long last, in case daybreak caught the airship unawares and still in the air. Then he had searched for Snub himself as best he could, possessed by a gnawing fear that grew with every fruitless minute.

He had flown back to his retreat in Sir John Alan's house eventually, tired, anxious, hoping desperately that the lad had returned there earlier, having lost his bearings and been beaten by the storm. But although the Thunderer, with its disconsolate crew, had berthed safely in the tree-sheltered paddock, of Snub there was no sign!

Thurston Kyle's worst fears had been realised.

That was two hours ago. Since then he and Scrapper Huggins had spent the worst and longest wait of their lives in his private room, with the telephone close at hand.

Every Kitten aboard the airship had been earnestly questioned, but none had seen so much as a glimpse of Snub during the fight. Their opinion, given in fierce growls, was that he had been hurled to the ground by the gale, or shot down. But somehow, Thurston Kyle, with the strange, highly-developed instinct that aided his reasoning powers in a crisis, felt

otherwise; knew otherwise. He was certain that, by some means, the self-reliant youngster had been caught. The shock had almost numbed him at first.

Cold and reserved though he was, his affection for the missing Snub knew no bounds. His clever, cheerful assistant, henchman in many a stirring affair, meant everything to the masterful Night Hawk. Angrily he blamed himself for ever having allowed the boy to go aloft in the storm; only Snub's earnest pleading had weakened his decision. But it was useless being wise after the event.

He had one chance and one only of getting square with the Phantom now; even of picking up Snub's trail if the lad had been captured. During that terrible wait, with Scrapper Huggins for silent company, his brooding eyes never once stirred from the telephone in his room.

For the triple-jawed trap to destroy the Phantom's airship had not been all that Thurston Kyle had planned the previous night. There was something else, too. As soon as the Thunderer, with himself and Snub aboard, had left for Porthampton and Southtown, two of the Kittens, led by dour Alf Jenkins, had motored quietly to London on a very special mission—involving housebreaking

and kidnapping to say the least. The result of that mission was the one Kyle had waited so tensely beside the telephone to hear.

And at five o'clock, the result had come through: four husky words whispered over the wire:

"Got him at last!"

There had been a triumphant snarl in the Night Hawk's voice as he had answered:

"Then bring the dog here at once!"

The order had been slickly obeyed. The "dog" in question lay bound and helpless before him, surrounded by the most loyal crowd in the world, in Thurston Kyle's own airship—Captain Frank Arthurs, once the Ace, and now almost certainly the mysterious arch-criminal, the Phantom Foe.

The Night Hawk gazed harshly at his glaring captive. When he spoke his voice was like the lash of a whip.

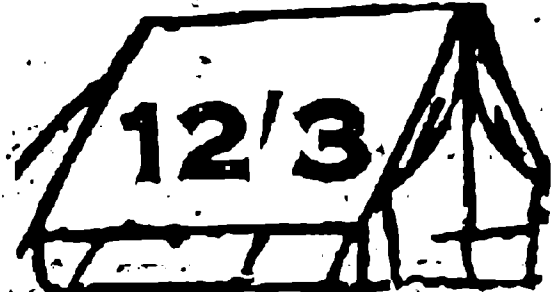
"Where are your headquarters, Phantom? And where is Snub Hawkins, whom your gang captured last night? You're going to answer me," he said softly, "or, by all that's devilish, I'll kill you with my bare hands!"

(More excitement in next week's smashing instalment of this super-thriller serial.)

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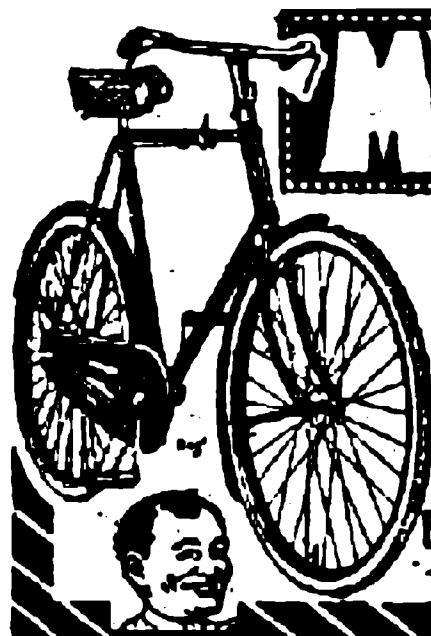
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