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THE NELSON LEE

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The

CHAPTER 1.

Invitations Galore!

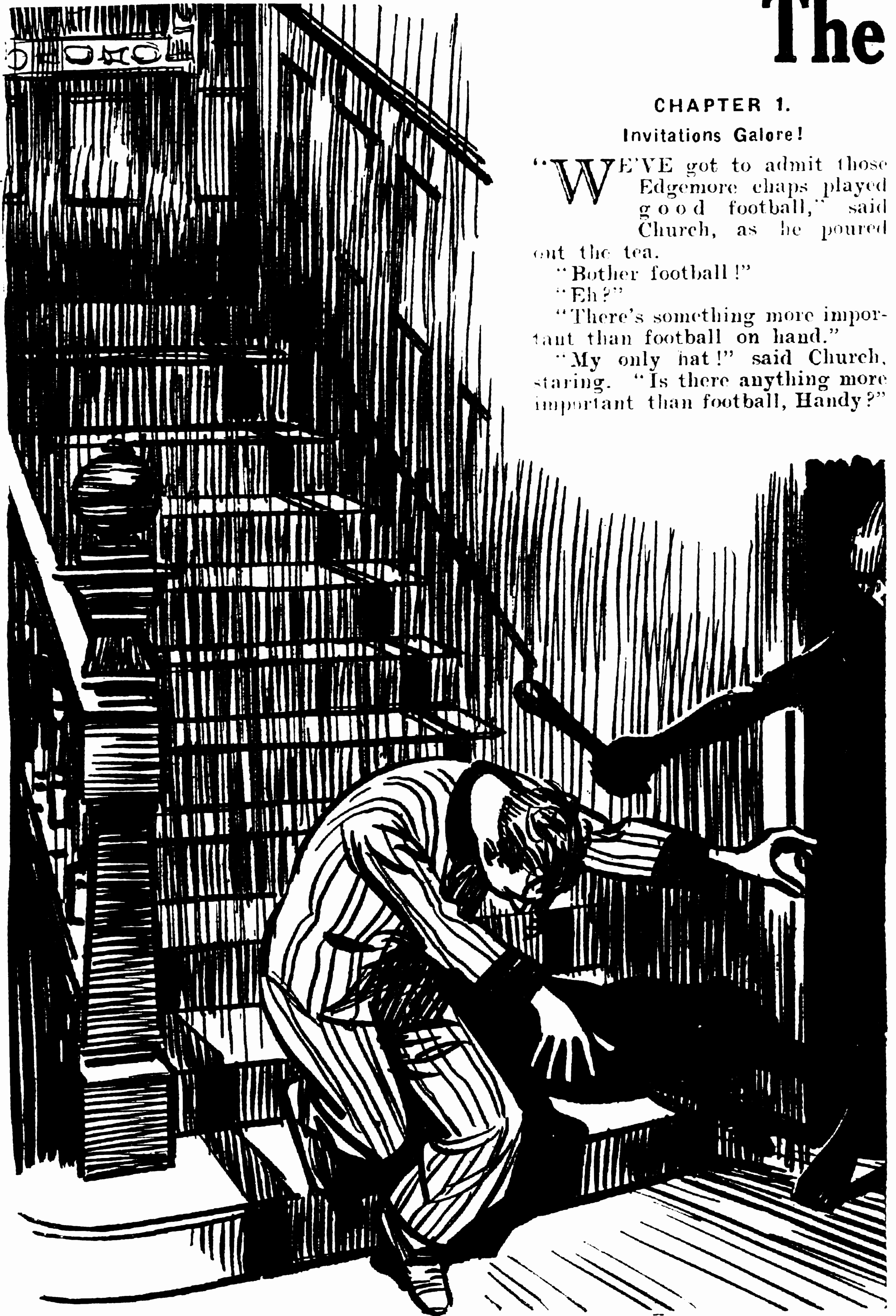
"WE'VE got to admit those Edgemore chaps played good football," said Church, as he poured out the tea.

"Bother football!"

"Eh?"

"There's something more important than football on hand."

"My only hat!" said Church, staring. "Is there anything more important than football, Handy?"



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WHISPERING PERIL!

"Yes—Christmas!" replied Handforth triumphantly.

Church and McClure grinned.

It was tea-time in Study D, in the Ancient House at St. Frank's. There had been a keen game of football on that crisp, clear, December afternoon. The St. Frank's League match against Edgemore Athletic had resulted in a fine win for the St. Frank's Junior XI by three goals to one. Nipper and his merry men had been in tip-top form, and they had proved to the Junior School in general that the recent leadership of Ulysses Spencer Adams had been a dismal farce.

"Yes, Christmas!" said Edward Oswald Handforth, with relish. "I've got it all mapped out, and—Hullo! What's this? Tea? Don't bother me with tea now! Take the rotten stuff away!"

He pushed the cup away from him, drew it back, stirred the tea, and gratefully sipped it.

"H'm! Not so bad," he admitted. "You've been a bit stingy with the sugar, though, haven't you? Now, about this list—"

He indicated a large sheet of exercise-paper on the table in front of him.

"What is it?" asked McClure. "A list of all the chaps in the Remove?"

"Fathead! These are the names of the guests I'm inviting to Travis Dene for Christmas!"

"All those?" ejaculated Church, startled.

"Why not?" retorted Handforth, as he looked at the list. "My pater has told me that I can bring as many chaps as I like—or, to be more exact, as many friends as I like. About a dozen of the Moor View girls are included in this list, my sons."

"Why bother about getting out a list at all?" asked Mac blandly. "Why not invite the two schools, and have done with it?"

But Handforth was impervious to this kind of chaff. He believed in doing things thoroughly. His father, in a rash

moment, had written to his two sons telling them that they could invite as many of their friends as they liked. Willy, of course, took this in the right way; but Handforth took it literally. He was inviting over half the Remove!

After tea he went along to the Junior Common-room, and that comfortable apartment was crowded. Everybody, of course, was agog with excitement at the prospect of Christmas.

"Good egg!" said Handforth boisterously. "Everybody all happy and smiling—eh? Hallo! You're not looking particularly bright, Jimmy!"

Sir James Potts, of Study H, forced a grin as Handforth slapped him on the back.

"I'm all right, thanks," he said. "But I've had a letter from my mother, and she says she won't be able to get home for Christmas."

"That's rough on you," said Handforth. "What are you going to do for the vacation?"

"I don't quite know yet," replied the schoolboy baronet. "Stay here, I suppose. You see, our house is shut up; mother went to Madeira for her health, and the doctors say that she mustn't come back to England until the spring."

"That's all right," said Handforth cheerfully.

"Eh?"

"You'll have to come along to Travis Dene, and spend Christmas with me."

"That's awfully decent of you—"

"Rot!" interrupted Handforth gruffly. "I'm inviting a lot of the chaps; you were on my list, anyhow!"

"Oh!" said Sir Jimmy, opening his eyes wider. "Is this on the level, Handy? Do you really mean it?"

"Don't be an ass," protested Handforth. "Of course I mean it. My pater has given me a free hand. I can promise you a ripping time, old man. Travis Dene, our country place in Suffolk, is topping. We'll have a regular, roaring, old-fashioned Christmas. What about your study mates, though? What

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The long arm of
REVENGE
stretches from far-off China
to St. Frank's—bringing
MYSTERY and TERROR.
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By
EDWY
SEARLES
BROOKS

about Travers and Skeets? I'd like them to come along, too."

Vivian Travers and Skeets—otherwise known as Viscount Bellton—were very gratified. It so happened that Travers' people were in South America, and Skeets' father had been invited to a Christmas house-party by one of the big county families. So Travers and Skeets accepted Handforth's invitation with alacrity.

"You're on the list, too, Nipper," said Handforth briskly, as he halted before the cheery Remove skipper. "You and Watson and Tregellis-West and Archie and——"

"Whoa!" interrupted Nipper, grinning. "Sorry, old man."

"Eh?"

"Can't be done, Handy," said Nipper, shaking his head.

"But, my dear fathead, I'm inviting you to Travis Dene for Christmas," said Handforth, staring.

"And I am desolated because I am compelled to refuse," said Nipper sadly. "You see, I'm booked to go somewhere else."

"Oh, are you?" growled Handforth, glaring. "Of all the beastly nerve——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"If you don't mind, Handy, old chappie, Nipper is my meat for Christmas," said Sir Montie Tregellis-West firmly. "He's comin' to Tregellis Castle, to spend the vacation with my people. So is Tommy Watson. Frightfully decent of you to think of us, old boy, but it's all fixed up."

"I shall have to cross your names off, then," said Handforth gruffly.

"While you're at it, you might as well cross off the names of Archie Glenthorne, Alf Brent, Reggie Pitt, Jack Grey, and Fatty Little," said Nipper blandly. "They've all accepted Montie's invitation, too."

"Oh!" said Handforth. "What about you, Gresham?" he went on, bestowing a glare upon Harry Gresham which was almost ferocious. "You're not going to tell me that you've accepted anybody else's dotty invite?"

"Well, as a matter of fact, I thought about spending Christmas at home," said Gresham mildly.

"That's a silly thing to do," retorted Handforth. "You're on my list, my lad, and I'm not going to cross your name off! It's Travis Dene for you—and don't you forget it!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

He also roped in Alec Duncan, the New Zealand boy. But his efforts in other directions were fruitless.

For it appeared that in addition to the party which Sir Montie Tregellis-West had invited to Tregellis Castle, there was a third party. The youthful Duke of Somerton had invited De Valerie, Fullwood, Russell, Waldo, Boots, Corcoran, and Christine to Somerton Abbey for Christmas. So most of the fellows Handforth had already "booked" were not available. There were plenty of others, of course, but Edward Oswald did not include them in his list of friends.

"It's a bit of a wash-out, then," he said disconsolately. "I've only got eight names on the list now. I mean, eight chaps. I think I shall be able to bag Irene Manners and three or four other girls, though."

"Eight is a good round number," said Nipper. "There are eight of us in Montie's party."

"Begad! You're all welcome, dear old boys," said Tregellis-West, beaming. "Why not cut out Travis Dene altogether, Handy? Why don't you and your gang come along to Tregellis Castle? I can promise you a frightfully rippin' time—I can really."

It was a case of "invitations galore." Many of the fellows were quite embarrassed. They hardly knew which invitations to accept. However, the parties sorted themselves out practically as they had been originally formed. Somerton, not to be outdone by Sir Montie, cheerfully invited the whole of Montie's party and the whole of Handforth's party to Somerton Abbey, but nobody took this quite seriously, although Somerton was in earnest.

Then, on the top of all that, Nipper sprang a little surprise.

"I was talking to the guv'nor this afternoon," he said.

Nobody was particularly interested. Nipper's "guv'nor" was none other than Mr. Nelson Lee, the famous detective-headmaster of St. Frank's.

"He's had a letter from old Dorrie," added Nipper calmly.

"What!"

There was general interest now. Everybody knew Dorrie—in other words, Lord Dorrimore, the genial millionaire peer. No man was more popular with the boys of St. Frank's than Lord Dorrimore.

"Yes," said Nipper. "It appears that Dorrie can't be in England for Christmas—he's on his way home from some outlandish quarter of the world now—but he'll arrive soon after. Before New Year, anyhow. And he has suggested that a big crowd of us should go along

to Dorrimore Castle, in Derbyshire, for a sort of house-warming."

"Good egg!"

"I say, that's ripping!"

"Rather!"

Everybody knew what to expect. Lord Dorrimore's parties were too wonderful for words. And a "house-warming" at Dorrimore Castle would certainly be something exceptionally tip-top.

"I'll tell you what," said Nipper, his eyes twinkling. "What about a general gathering of the clans after the Christmas festivities are over? By Jove! That ought to please everybody—old Dorrie included."

"How do you mean?" asked Handforth eagerly.

"Why, after we've had a ripping Christmas, we'll all congregate together at Dorrimore Castle," explained Nipper. "Sir Montie's party, your party, Handy, and Somerton's. Other chaps as well. Why not? The whole giddy Remove—and half the Fourth! Nothing would please Dorrie better."

And so it was decided. The three Christmas parties would go their various ways, and all join up together later in the holidays.

Little did the fellows realise that strange, mysterious influences were to bring about many dramatic changes in these plans!

CHAPTER 2.

Uncle Ben from China!

"CHINA?" said Vivian Travers languidly.

"Yes; the place where we hear they eat so much rice," explained Jimmy Potts, not without sarcasm. "You've heard of it, I suppose?"

"Oh, rather!" replied Travers. "China with its teeming millions, what? So your uncle is coming home to England for Christmas? I didn't know he was a Chinaman."

"He's not a Chinaman, you dummy!" roared Jimmy. "I only said he was a Chinese millionaire!"

"What's the difference?"

"He made his millions in China, but he's as English as I am."

"You should be more lucid, dear old fellow," murmured Travers calmly. "All the same, it's good hearing. The mere fact that Uncle Ben is a millionaire is enough. Any chance of his coming down to St. Frank's?"

"It wouldn't surprise me if he popped down to-morrow," said Jimmy.

"He would!" sighed Travers. "For the love of Samson! What's the good of a millionaire uncle popping down on a Sunday—when the tuck-shop's closed?"

The chums of Study H had finished their prep., and they were sitting round the fire. Jimmy Potts had a letter in his hand; Skeets was busily peeling hot roasted Chestnuts; and Travers was lounging back in the easy-chair, half asleep.

"I'm awfully keen on meeting Uncle Ben," said Jimmy thoughtfully. "I haven't heard much about him until now, but mother is tremendously pleased with him, according to her letter."

"You mean that you've never seen your uncle in your life?" asked Skeets, in surprise.

"This is his first visit to England for fifteen years," replied Jimmy. "I dare say I have seen him, but as I was only a month or two old at the time I don't remember much about it. Uncle Ben went to China on a three months' business trip; he went up one of the big rivers on a trading cruise, heard some rumours about gold—and stayed there. Now he's a millionaire, with immense property in China, and an income like that of an Indian prince."

"Just the kind of uncle I've always dreamed about," murmured Travers, with a sigh.

Jimmy consulted his mother's letter.

"It was awfully romantic—the way they happened to meet in Madeira," he said thoughtfully. "Pity about mother not being able to spend Christmas at home; but she had 'flu a couple of months ago, and it turned to pneumonia. She had to go south by the doctor's orders. It's all for the best, I expect—she's with some old family friends of ours—quite a jolly party. Well, the rummy thing is, when they arrived at Madeira and went to one of the big hotels, mother happened to spot the name of 'Benjamin Potts' in the hotel register."

"Nothing rummy about that," commented Travers. "Things like that are happening every day."

"Well, of course, as soon as mother met him she knew him at once," went on Jimmy. "He seems to be a genial old boy, and he was tremendously bucked at the meeting. I don't wonder at it. The first trip home for fifteen years, and it was only by chance that he broke his voyage at Madeira for a week. And one of the first persons he meets is his own sister-in-law!"

"The world's a small place," said Travers sententiously.

"Mother says that he gave her a perfectly ripping time during the few days before his boat left," continued Jimmy. "It's a pity poor old dad couldn't have seen him again."

The others were silent. Jimmy's father, of course, was dead, and Jimmy was a baronet in his own right, with big estates and a comfortable income. But he had not always been in this happy position. Indeed, when he had first come to St. Frank's he had been employed as a boot-boy. It was mainly owing to Travers, Jimmy's staunchest chum, that the family fortunes had been restored—and a crooked lawyer exposed.

"Uncle Ben promised mother that he would come down to see me before the vacation," continued Jimmy, after another glance at the letter. "It's ten to one he'll arrive to-morrow."

But it wasn't until Monday afternoon that Uncle Ben turned up. This was really the last day of term, for on Tuesday St. Frank's would break up for the Christmas vacation. Everybody was bustling about, full of high spirits.

Jimmy Potts happened to be standing in the Ancient House doorway chatting with Handforth & Co.; at least, Handforth was doing most of the chatting. He was telling his prospective guests of the hectic time they would have at Travis Dene.

A gleaming, glittering limousine glided noiselessly through the gateway. It was driven by a liveried chauffeur, and beside him sat a small, quietly-dressed man with a yellow, immobile face—obviously a Chinaman. But it was the car itself, so redolent of luxury, as much as the Chinaman, which told Jimmy Potts that his uncle had arrived.

In the rear of the car, alone, sat a big, bluff, middle-aged man dressed in rough tweeds. It was Jimmy himself who ran down to the car as soon as it stopped, and he opened the door. The big man hoisted himself out with a good deal of puffing and blowing. The Chinese servant, who had leapt to open the door, stood by respectfully.

"Are you Mr Benjamin Potts, sir?" asked Jimmy eagerly.

"I can't say that I am," replied the stranger boisterously, his eyes twinkling, and the skin round them puckering up into a thousand wrinkles. "Ben Potts, if you like—or, better still, Old Ben of Su-Kiang. Nobody's called me 'Benjamin' for fifteen years. Ben Potts. That's me. Known as such from Manchuria to Kwang-Si, and from Shantung to the Kiao-Kio Valley."

"Welcome to St. Frank's, Uncle Ben!" said Jimmy eagerly. "I'm Jimmy, sir."

"By the ghosts of my ancestors!" ejaculated Mr. Potts, seizing Jimmy, and holding him by the shoulders. "Good lad! Splendid! So you're Jimmy? I'm pleased with the look of ye, lad. I'll go further than that, and say that I'm darned pleased. Fine lad—straight as a ramrod—fine muscles—clear eyes. Jimmy's boy, eh? No wonder Jimmy was proud of ye! Ay, and let me tell you that your mother is proud of you, too!"

Jimmy was rather embarrassed—especially as there were so many of the other juniors watching this little scene. But they were all grinning. They took an instant liking to Uncle Ben; he breathed good cheer and heartiness.

"It's awfully decent of you to come down to St. Frank's, uncle," said Jimmy, hardly knowing what else to say.

"Now, I wonder," said Uncle Ben, shaking his head. "Are ye really as pleased as ye look, son? I'm a rough old lot. Fifteen years of roaming in a country like China leaves its mark, eh? But I've done well, lad—I've come home rich."

"Rich or not, I'm jolly pleased to see you, uncle!" said Jimmy enthusiastically. Uncle Ben chuckled delightedly.

"That's the spirit!" he said, slapping Jimmy on the back. "Good lad!" He looked round. "So these are some of your friends? Aren't you going to introduce me?"

CHAPTER 3.

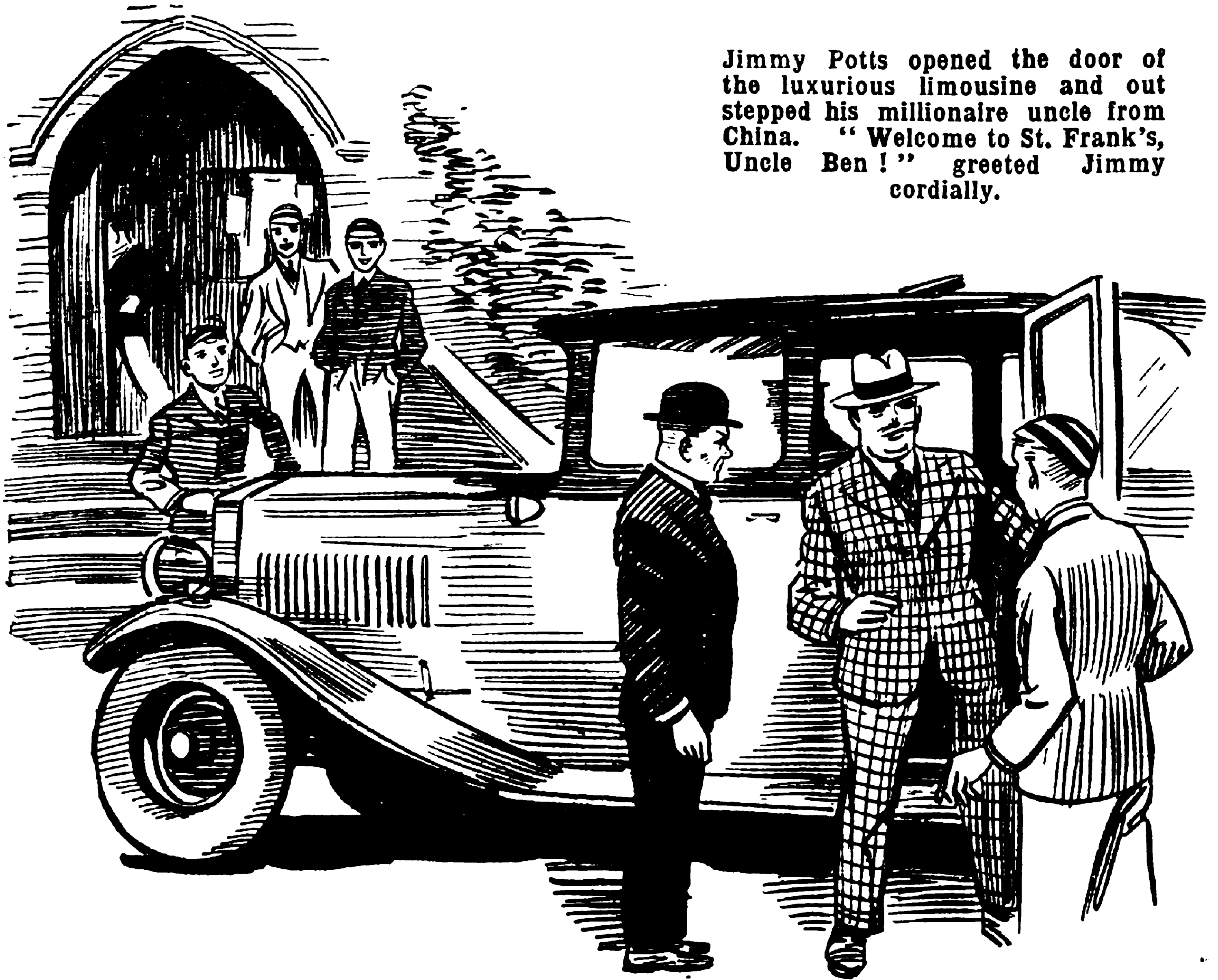
The Mandarin's Dagger!

MR. BENJAMIN POTTS was a rough diamond, but he soon became immensely popular. His clumsy, lumbering figure was surrounded by crowds of juniors; his lined, creased, mahogany face was expressive of the pleasure which this meeting with his nephew gave him.

"I'm wondering if there's a good hotel round about," he said. "I've no particular reason for getting back to London to-night—"

"Hotel be blowed, uncle!" protested Jimmy. "Mr. Wilkes will be only too delighted to find you a room. Old Wilkey's our Housemaster," he explained. "One of the best. I'll take you along to see him soon."

As it happened, Mr. Wilkes himself came in sight just then, and one of the very first things he did, after the introduction, was cordially to invite Jimmy's uncle to stay at the school. Thereupon



Jimmy Potts opened the door of the luxurious limousine and out stepped his millionaire uncle from China. "Welcome to St. Frank's, Uncle Ben!" greeted Jimmy cordially.

Yen, Uncle Ben's faithful Chinese valet, carried the various bags indoors from the car.

There was nothing stingy about Uncle Ben. So many millionaires—as Travers truthfully pointed out—were careful, mean, even miserly. That was why they were millionaires. But Uncle Ben boisterously treated everyone within sight to free tuck in the school shop. His popularity soared to dizzy heights.

He had tea in Study H, and Handforth & Co. were invited, too. It was a merry party; and Uncle Ben, far from disapproving of the noise, did his share as energetically as any of the juniors.

"So you're breaking up to-morrow?" he said, midway through the meal. "Too bad! Well, Jimmy, I shall have to be a mother to you, as well as an uncle—eh? She made me promise to give you a good Christmas."

"Yes, Uncle Ben, but——"

"Where are your manners, boy?" demanded Uncle Ben gruffly. "Who told ye to interrupt? You're going to stay with me in London; we'll 'do' all the pantomimes, eh? I'm not much when it comes to Christmas parties, but——"

"It's really awfully good of you, uncle, but—but I can't come," said Jimmy breathlessly.

Uncle Ben set down his tea-cup and stared.

"Can't come?" he repeated. "What d'ye mean? Why can't ye come?"

"Well, you see, sir, I've already accepted Handforth's invitation for Christmas," explained Jimmy. "I'm going to his country home with a lot of other fellows. I didn't know that you—— I mean, I'm awfully sorry, uncle——"

"Save your breath, lad," interrupted Uncle Ben, nodding his grizzled head; but he was obviously disappointed. "I understand. Of course, if you've made other arrangements you'll have to abide by them. I wish I'd let you know beforehand. I was looking forward to you and me having a good time. It's going to be lonely——"

"Look here, uncle, I'm coming with you," broke in Jimmy earnestly. "I say, Handy!" he went on, swinging round. "Do you mind if I don't come along with you? After all, now that Uncle Ben has turned up——"

"Rats!" said Handforth serenely. "There's an easy solution to this problem."

Why shouldn't Uncle Ben come with you to Travis?"

"Steady on—steady on!" said Mr. Potts. "I'm not unmindful of the honour, lad, but have ye the right to invite me to your parents' home? Don't ye think they'd like to have a say in it?"

"Jimmy's one of my friends, sir, and you're Jimmy's uncle," replied Handforth. "That'll be good enough for my pater. You're as welcome at Travis Dene for Christmas as—as sunshine at a cricket match. There's not much fun spending Christmas alone in London."

"Ay, I'm tempted," muttered Uncle Ben wistfully. "It's many a year since I had a real, good, old-fashioned Christmas in a real, good, old-fashioned English home. Darn it. I'll take ye at your word, lad! I'll come!"

"Good egg!" grinned Handforth.

"Handy, you're a brick," said Jimmy Potts, his eyes gleaming. "It'll be ripping to have Uncle Ben with us. Can you come down to-morrow, sir?" he added, turning to his uncle.

"To-morrow?" repeated Mr. Potts. "But I thought ye said the invitation was for Christmas?"

"I'm taking my party down straight-away, sir—straight from the school," explained Handforth. "After all, it'll simplify matters, and we can all have a good time between now and Christmas."

"It seems like imposing on ye," grumbled the millionaire. "Well, maybe ye're right, lad. Happily, I've no ties in London; I can send a telegram to my hotel. How are ye travelling? Some of you can come in my car, eh? Might as well make use of it."

A little later, in the blackness of the wintry evening, Jimmy strolled down to the village with Uncle Ben—to send off a telegram to the London hotel.

"Think your young friend was doing right in inviting me, Jimmy, boy?" asked Uncle Ben rather dubiously. "I'm mightily pleased at the prospect, but I have a feeling that I'm butting in. This boy's people might not be so cordial—"

"Put all those ideas out of your head, uncle," interrupted Jimmy. "Handforth's people are stunners. Sir Edward is one of the best. You'll like him, and he'll like you."

"Well, I'm certainly delighted at the prospect," said the big man. "Christmas in England, eh? Lad, it makes a lump come into my throat."

They walked on for a few paces in

silence. Suddenly Jimmy checked, clutching at his uncle's sleeve.

"What is it, lad?"

"Listen!" said Jimmy tensely. "I—I thought I heard whispers just now."

"Whispers! You must be dreaming, lad!"

"No; I was sure I heard— There! Listen!"

They had both halted, and for a moment all Uncle Ben could hear was the sighing of the wind in the leafless branches overhead. The sky was heavily overcast, and there were indications that the weather was deteriorating; the wind was getting higher, occasionally blowing with ferocious gusts.

And then, during a brief lull, Uncle Ben heard strange, sibilant whispers. They were weird—unreal—a little terrifying.

"By Heaven!" muttered Mr. Potts suddenly, with a strange note in his voice. "I wonder—"

"Look out!" yelled Jimmy, in sudden alarm.

Out of the corner of his eye he had seen a lithe black form leap clean over the low hedge. With the agility of a panther it flung itself upon the man from China.

Jimmy was bewildered—startled. The whole thing was so unexpected, so amazing, that he could only stand and stare, his heart thudding wildly.

"Ah, would ye!" came a puffing gasp from Uncle Ben. "By golly! Ye squirming yellow devil!"

There was a sudden clatter; something had fallen to the hard road—something which glimmered dully for a second. Uncle Ben and his assailant were struggling furiously; the black figure panting but uttering no intelligible sound.

"Help!" yelled Jimmy suddenly. "Help—help!"

Up the lane he heard an answering shout. He recognised Handforth's familiar voice. Handforth & Co. were at the gateway—on their way to the Moor View School. Now they came tearing helter-skelter down the lane.

Crash!

It was the sound of Uncle Ben's fist thudding against bone and flesh. The black figure groaned, fell back; then, like a snake, it slithered through a gap in the hedge and vanished.

Uncle Ben bent down, and he picked up the object from the road.

"The Mandarin's Dagger!" he muttered hoarsely.

CHAPTER 4.

More Mystery!

"UNCLE!" panted Jimmy, clutching at the big man's arm. "Are you hurt?"

"No," grunted Mr. Potts, like a man in a daze.

"That—that fellow who tried to knife you," said Jimmy. "We'd better chase him——"

"Chasing a rainbow would be more profitable than chasing an agent of Fu-Li-Sing," muttered Uncle Ben. "Huh! He nearly had me, the dog!"

By this time Handforth & Co. had arrived, breathless.

"What's the trouble here?" gasped Edward Oswald.

"I don't know; some awful rotter tried to kill Uncle Ben!" said Jimmy, in a low voice. "He sprang so suddenly that we had no chance——"

He broke off as Handforth switched on an electric torch. The beam of light clearly revealed the quaint Oriental dagger which Uncle Ben held in his hands.

"Even here, in England, I am dogged," muttered the man from China, as though talking to himself. "I thought I had shaken the devils off, but—— It doesn't matter," he added, with a faint smile. "It's nothing! Boys, forget this, won't you? No need to tell any of the others; we don't want a fuss."

"But—but I don't understand, uncle," said Jimmy anxiously. "It's all very well for you to tell us to forget it, but some man tried to murder you just now."

"Which way did he go?" asked Handforth eagerly.

"The hounds of Fate!" whispered old Ben. "With all my millions, what power have I to protect myself against the Mandarin of Shan-Si? Five years ago Fu-Li-Sing swore by his ancestors to kill me! And now, in this peaceful Sussex lane——" He broke off, shaking himself roughly. "Perhaps I'm mistaken," he concluded impatiently.

"You mean you incurred the enmity of a powerful Chinese mandarin, sir?" asked Handforth, agog with excitement. "By George! Some of those Chinese are fiendish blighters——"

"Steady, lad—steady!" interrupted Mr. Potts. "What do ye know of China and its people?"

"I've been there, sir," said Handforth triumphantly.

"Ay, and I'll warrant it was a tourist trip," said old Ben, with a snort. "To understand the Chinese, lad, ye must live there for years—a lifetime! Even then it's not long enough! There are bad Chinese, and there are good Chinese. Ay, and more good than bad. Ye require no contract with a Chinese merchant; his word is good enough; his word is his bond. Sooner than break it he would kill himself. Tell me of the white man ye can trust to that extent? Don't ye take notice of highly-coloured adventure novels and films, lad! The Chinese are a great people."

"Yet one of them just tried to kill you!" said Jimmy, staring.

"And what of it?" growled his uncle.

"Should I call the British nation a cut-throat people because a British footpad attempted to rob me? Ye've got to live in China to understand. It's a country that's torn by internal wars; a country with no head and no feet. Mostly, it just stands still. That's China, lad!"

He thrust the dagger into an inner pocket, and shrugged his shoulders.

"Well, we'll be getting along," he went on, in an effort to be lighthearted. "Forget just what happened. It does no good to remember such things."

But the light from Handforth's torch revealed Uncle Ben's face, and it was haggard and drawn. The sudden change in him was striking.

"Perhaps we'd better all go to the village, sir?" suggested Handforth.

Mr. Benjamin Potts would not hear of it. He was distressed that the boys had seen anything unusual; he urged them to forget the incident. So Handforth & Co. went off to the Moor View School.

It was on the way home from the village, after the telegram had been dispatched, that Jimmy Potts had an inspiration. He and his uncle had arrived in the Triangle; nothing untoward had happened during the walk, and Jimmy was relieved.

"I'll tell you what, Uncle Ben," he said eagerly. "Let me take you to Mr. Lee."

"And who's he?" asked Uncle Ben suspiciously.

"Our headmaster."

"Ay, I dare say he's wondering why I haven't been along to pay my respects——"

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"I don't mean that, uncle," interrupted Jimmy. "I want you to tell Mr. Lee what happened in the lane. He'll give you advice—he'll help."

"A country schoolmaster?" said Uncle Ben, with fine scorn. "By golly! What are ye talking of, lad?"

Jimmy laughed.

"That's just where you're off the rails, uncle," he said coolly. "Mr. Lee isn't the ordinary kind of country schoolmaster. You wait!"

And in spite of his uncle's protests, he led the way through Big Arch, across Inner court, and to the headmaster's private door. Two minutes later they were ushered into Nelson Lee's study, and Jimmy made the introduction.

"This is a great pleasure, Mr. Potts," said Nelson Lee warmly. "I heard that you had arrived, of course."

"I particularly wanted you to speak to Uncle Ben because something rummy happened in the lane not long ago, sir," said Jimmy eagerly. "Something mysterious. Uncle will tell you all about it," he added, turning to the man from China. "I'll buzz off now, uncle," he went on cheerfully. "You didn't know that our headmaster was Mr. Nelson Lee, the world-famous detective, did you?"

Uncle Ben's jaw dropped.

"Ye don't mean——" he began, staring in awe at Nelson Lee.

"Rather!" grinned Jimmy. "Well, I'll leave you alone now, uncle. Mr. Lee will give you some good advice, I'll bet."

He went out, chuckling at his uncle's bewilderment.

It was not until an hour later that he met Mr. Benjamin Potts in the Ancient House lobby. There was a subtle difference in Uncle Ben; he was looking confident and strong. The haggard lines had gone from his face.

"Well, uncle?" asked Jimmy eagerly.

"Come outside, lad; I want a word with ye in private," said the man from China.

They paced in the Triangle for some moments in silence; the wind was increasing, and it was buffeting round the old buildings boisterously. In the shelter of the shrubbery Uncle Ben halted.

"You young scamp!" he said, with mock severity. "What was the idea of making me look foolish? Why didn't ye tell me who your headmaster really was?"

"I thought I'd give you a bit of a surprise, uncle, that's all."

"By golly! It was a surprise all right," agreed Mr. Potts. "An amazing man, sonny—a wonderful man! I don't mind telling ye that I took your advice, and I told him everything."

"And what did he say?" asked Jimmy breathlessly.

"H'm! He took a more serious view than I had expected," admitted Uncle Ben. "Maybe he's right. Perhaps there is danger."

"If Mr. Lee says so, you can be pretty certain that he's right."

"I'm half sorry I went to him, and half glad," said the big man musingly. "If the mandarin's agents find out that Lee has promised to protect me, they'll make short work of him. They'll attend to him before they attend to me."

"You needn't worry about Mr. Lee; he can look after himself," said Jimmy confidently. "I wish you'd tell me more about this mandarin——"

"Hush!" snapped Uncle Ben suddenly.

He made a quick dive towards the shrubbery Jimmy caught sight of a slithering figure. Like a shadow, black and sinuous, it leapt for the wall, and was over in a flash.

"By Heaven! Did ye see?" muttered Uncle Ben hoarsely.

Jimmy was nearly speechless.

"He—he was going to try to kill you again, uncle!" he exclaimed, at last. "Oh, my hat! We'd better get indoors——"

"I'm not worrying about that," growled Uncle Ben. "Did he overhear what we were saying, lad? Did he learn that Mr. Nelson Lee has undertaken to protect me? Go ye indoors, Jimmy, boy. I must see Mr. Lee—I must warn him!"

Without another word Uncle Ben strode towards Big Arch. Jimmy Potts went indoors, strangely troubled.

CHAPTER 5.

The Figure in Black!

NELSON LEE was looking very thoughtful as he went to his study after his household had gone to bed. Lee had extra work to do; and to-morrow the school would break up.

There was something other than school work on his mind, however. He went into his study, switched on the lights, and piled some coal on to the fire. Outside the wind had increased to gale force, and it was howling and screaming.

It was half-past eleven, but Nelson Lee had no intention of going to bed. The school, for the most part, was asleep, and it was the best time for work. Lee consulted his private reference library.

"China!" he murmured abstractedly.

So engrossed did he become that midnight chimed before he sat down at his

The sinister figure in black crept stealthily, foot by foot, towards the unsuspecting man at the desk.



desk. It was obvious that he had been dwelling upon his interview, earlier in the evening, with Mr. Benjamin Potts. The matter seemed to intrigue him.

He even went to the window and made certain that the catch was fastened. He pulled the heavy curtains closely together. Smiling whimsically at his own sense of precaution, he filled his pipe, lit it, and sat down at his desk. There were piles of papers which needed his personal attention. He sighed. Schoolmasters have far more work to do than their boys ever realise.

He settled down to work in real earnest, but for once the great detective found that concentration was difficult. Now and again his thoughts would wander; he would sit back in his chair, pulling slowly at his pipe.

"This won't do," he muttered suddenly.

With an effort he gave his wholehearted attention to the papers. Silence reigned within the study, except for the occasional scratching of Nelson Lee's pen and the crackling of the fire.

Outside, the wind buffeted against the window, drowning a slight sound that came from behind the big, comfortable lounge which was set crosswise in one of the corners of the room. Slowly, inch by inch,

a face rose above the back of the lounge. It was a yellow face, calm, impassive, and the eyes were unblinking.

Higher and higher rose the figure. It was clothed entirely in a black, close-fitting garment—even to the hands. For two hours or more that lurking intruder must have crouched in the tiny space behind the lounge; it must have crept into the study during Nelson Lee's absence, and since then it had been waiting—waiting.

Nelson Lee sat with his back towards this menace. He knew nothing—he suspected nothing. He believed himself to be alone in his study, and the door was closed, and the window was fastened. He wrote on busily, his whole attention concentrated upon the papers in front of him.

A lean, black-clad leg rose over the lounge. Like a snake the figure slid across the cushions. There was something deadly in the slow, relentless movement. The intruder was taking no chances; never for a fraction of a second did his gaze leave the figure of his intended victim.

At last he stood upon the carpet, crouching, stealthily creeping inch by inch towards Lee. In one black-encased hand he held a short, thick bludgeon.

Nearer and nearer crept the menacing figure.

Perhaps it was instinct which caused Nelson Lee to look up suddenly. Certainly he heard no warning sound. At a time of impending danger a human being can become endowed with as potent an instinct as the most sensitive of wild animals.

Nelson Lee, conscious of some lurking peril, looked round swiftly. As he did so the intruder sprang.

Crash!

The famous headmaster-detective was a fraction of a second too late. Even as he was turning to grapple with his assailant the blow fell. That short, ugly bludgeon struck him on the head, and without a sound he collapsed, rolling over his chair and falling like a log to the carpet. Blood was flowing from an ugly gash in his scalp. Outside, as though to hide the noise of Nelson Lee's fall, a wild gust of wind howled furiously.

With silent footsteps the man in black crossed over to the electric light switch and pressed it. The study was plunged into darkness except for the ruddy, flickering glow from the fire. Quickly crossing the room, the unknown pulled the curtain aside, clicked back the catch of the window and opened it.

Another figure materialised out of the gloom. This figure, also, was clothed in black.

"The waiting has been long," it said, in a soft, sibilant Chinese dialect.

"Better to wait long and be certain," said the other. "Enter! The Iron Man sleeps."

"He sleeps on the Terraces of the night?"

"Nay, but shall we not soon send him on that wondrous journey?"

The second man entered, and with the light of a powerful electric torch he examined the unconscious Nelson Lee.

"It is well," he whispered. "You will take his feet; I his shoulders. Come!"

It was quickly done.

Bleeding from his wound, Nelson Lee was carried across the room, out of the window. The window itself was closed, and the mysterious figures, with their burden, were swallowed up in the night.

CHAPTER 6.

Dashed to Doom!

ST. Frank's slept. Not a light showed from any window.

The wind, blowing with gale force, roared and howled round the school buildings. Overhead the sky was thick with scudding clouds.

The men in black, carrying their burden with effortless determination, moved across the meadows which adjoined the school. Like shadows of the night they progressed.

Presently they halted, but even whilst they rested they were not idle. Thin cords were produced, and these were tied round Nelson Lee's wrists and ankles. A heavy silken handkerchief was bound round his mouth and nostrils.

"It is well," murmured one of the mystery men. "We should have secured him earlier; for it is said that the Iron Man is also a man of much slipperiness."

"It is well to have corrected the fault," said the other unemotionally.

"He that fears to correct a fault is not a brave man—as the great Confucius has it," was the whispering reply.

Again they lifted their burden, and again they walked on. Presently, breaking through a gap in the hedge, they came upon an insignificant lane. It was really little more than a cart track, used by Farmer Holt. Here, standing in the darkness, was a powerful automobile. There were no lights showing, and none was needed. The men in black deposited their burden in the front seat.

"You shall go," said one of the men shortly. "Your work is done."

"So!" murmured the other. "To you, then, I leave the Iron Man. See to it that he goes forth on his journey to the Terraces of the Night."

The figure slipped away and was lost in the blackness. The other climbed into the driving seat. This man was the one who had been waiting outside the window of Nelson Lee's study. It was his turn now to work singlehanded.

He donned a heavy leather motoring coat, a peaked cap and goggles. If, by chance, he should be seen, he would look like any ordinary chauffeur.

The engine of the car purred, but so quiet was it that the sound was completely drowned in the roaring of the wind. Still without lights, the car bumped and jolted down the cart track, finally turning into a little lane.

Then, at length, a bigger road was found, and here the man at the wheel switched on the side lights. The car shot forward with increasing speed.

THE powerful car drove quietly and sedately through Bellton. It took the Caistowe Road. The gale boomed noisily over the bleak countryside. Now and again there were fitful squalls of rain.

Nelson Lee was on his journey to the Terraces of the Night—a picturesque Chinese expression, the English meaning of which is—death!

Half-way to Caistowe, the car turned off the main road and took a narrow, rutty lane which led only to the lighthouse buildings on Shingle Head. The car did not keep to this lane; presently it swerved off across the bleak, wind-swept, grassy downs. Its speed was a mere walking pace now, and the lights had been extinguished. With excessive caution the driver took his vehicle onwards.

Presently, even above the howling of the wind, he could hear the thunder and roar of breaking waves—the turmoil of storm-lashed sea on the rocky coast.

Farther and farther he drove, until finally he stopped the car, took a look at his prisoner, and then walked onwards. He could see the winking, flashing light from Shingle Head away to his right. Immediately ahead there was blackness—and that sinister thundering roar.

He checked, then moved forward even more slowly. He went on his hands and knees, and he found himself at the cliff edge, gazing down upon the turmoil of foam and smother. The tide was in, and the sea was at its roughest. There was a sheer drop here—down, down to the tossing breakers.

"Yes, yes!" whispered the unknown.

He went back. Climbing into the car, he pulled an electric torch from his pocket. He flashed it upon the prisoner, lying inert and motionless. The light revealed Nelson Lee's pale face, and the features were peaceful and in perfect repose.

"You go now—Iron Man!" whispered the unknown. "You go on your lifelong journey to join your ancestors!"

Quietly, carefully, with diabolical coolness, he sat in the driving-seat, leaving the door open near him. The car moved forward, and while it was still only crawling top gear was engaged. The unknown extricated himself from the driving-seat; he got out upon the running-board. Then, with a last look at his prisoner, he suddenly gave the hand control a violent jerk. He had opened the throttle wide.

Leaping clear, he struck the wet turf and rolled over; but in a moment he was on his feet again, staring. His eyes were accustomed to the gloom and he could see the dark bulk of the car distinctly. The engine had spluttered at first, but now it was roaring—and the car itself was gathering speed with terrific power. The ground sloped slightly, leading downwards to the cliff edge. On went the car, faster and faster.

A driverless car—with the throttle wide open! And in the car the unconscious figure of Nelson Lee—bound hand and foot!

With a throaty roar the automobile leapt at the cliff edge. Over it went at full speed—soaring far out before it commenced dropping. Then—down, down, overturning as it went, until it plunged with a dull splash into the foaming breakers!

CHAPTER 7.

Sensation at St. Frank's!

"BY George! It's windy!" said Handforth.

"Who cares?" asked Church gaily. "We're breaking up to-day."

The chums of Study D had just come down, and were standing in the Ancient House doorway. The gale, hooting across the Triangle, hit them like something solid. It was a wild-looking morning, with twigs and scraps of branches littered all over the Triangle.

The rising-bell had only just sounded; but Handforth & Co. were not the only boys who were already dressed and down. On the last day of term nobody took any notice of rising-bells. The majority of the fellows awoke automatically, and, once awake, they had no further desire for sleep. On this day of all days they wanted to be up and about.

Nipper came downstairs briskly, whistling. Just behind him were Vivian Travers and Jimmy Potts.

"Early birds this morning, eh?" grinned Nipper, as he glanced round. "I hear you're going off in style, Jimmy?"

"Yes, rather," said Potts. "Uncle Ben's taking us to Suffolk in his car."

They all joined Handforth & Co. at the door. Before they could make any comment about the weather, however, a dishevelled figure suddenly came running wildly through Big Arch. It was the figure of Marsh, the indoor manservant of the Head's house. He was hatless, and his green apron was half-untied and fluttering in the wind. So frantic was the man that the boys stared at him wonderingly.

"Let me get by—let me get by!" he panted hoarsely, as he ran up the steps.

"I want Mr. Wilkes!"

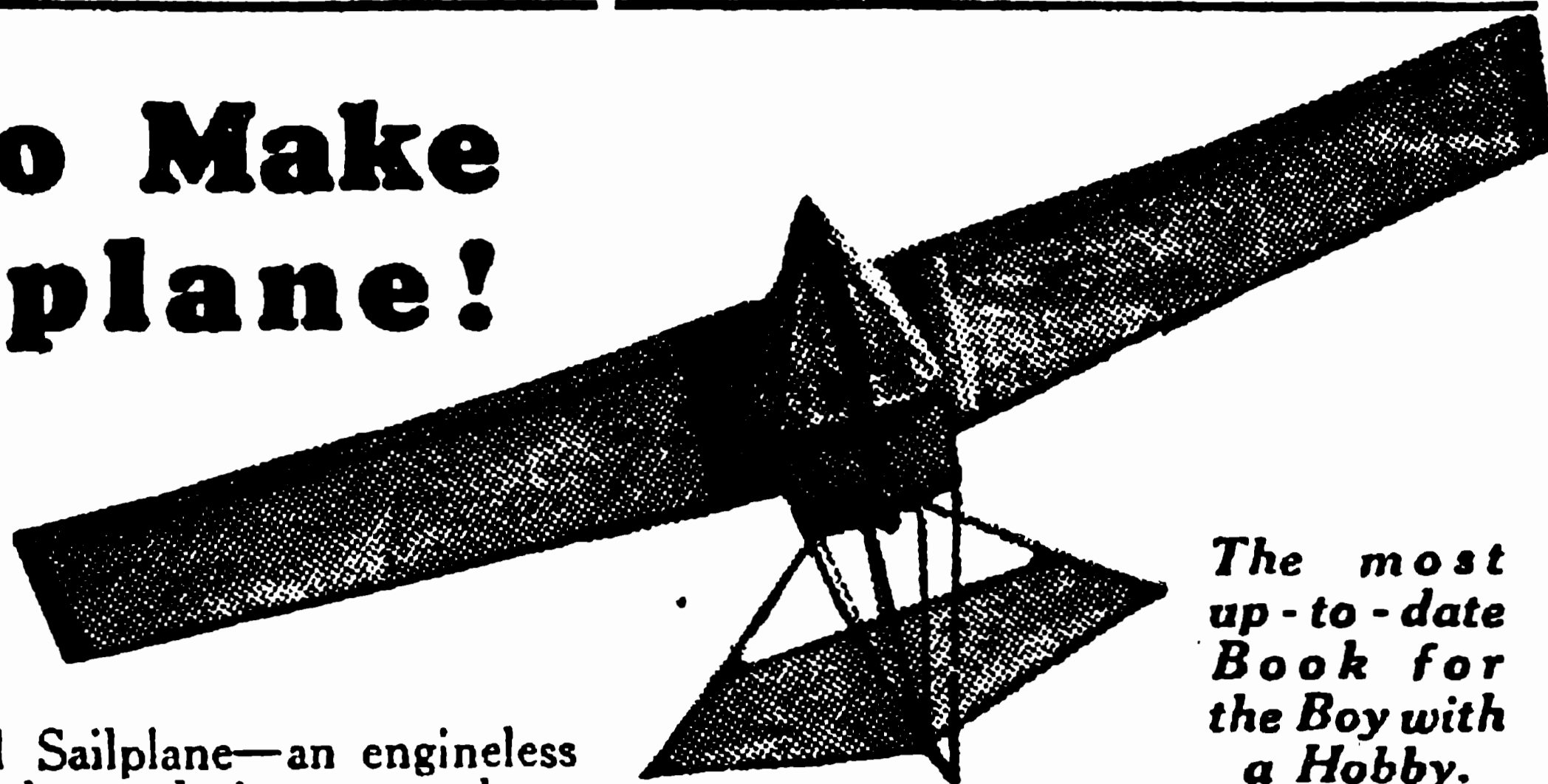
"What on earth's the matter, Marsh?" asked Nipper.

"Something dreadful, young gent!" gasped the man. "Where's Mr. Wilkes? Something's happened to Mr. Lee!"

(Continued on page 15.)

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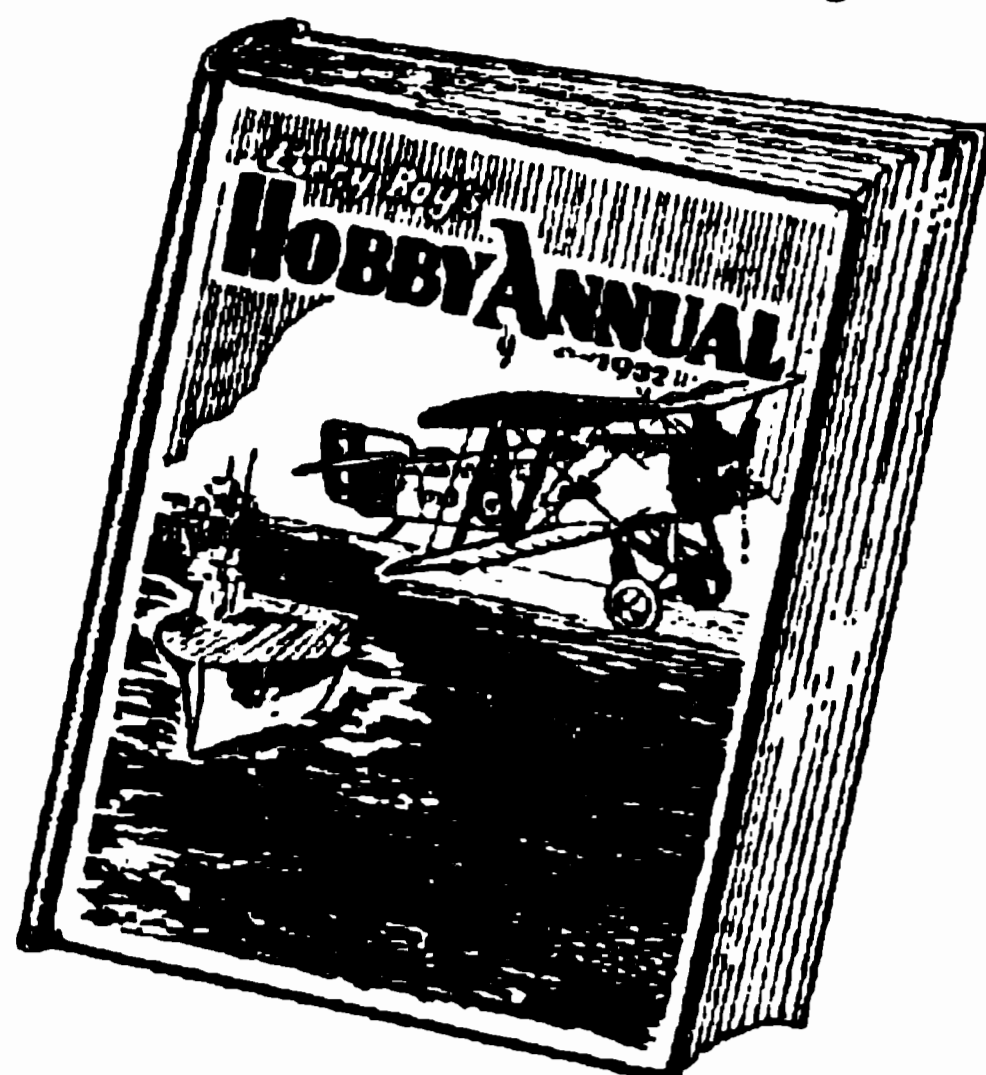


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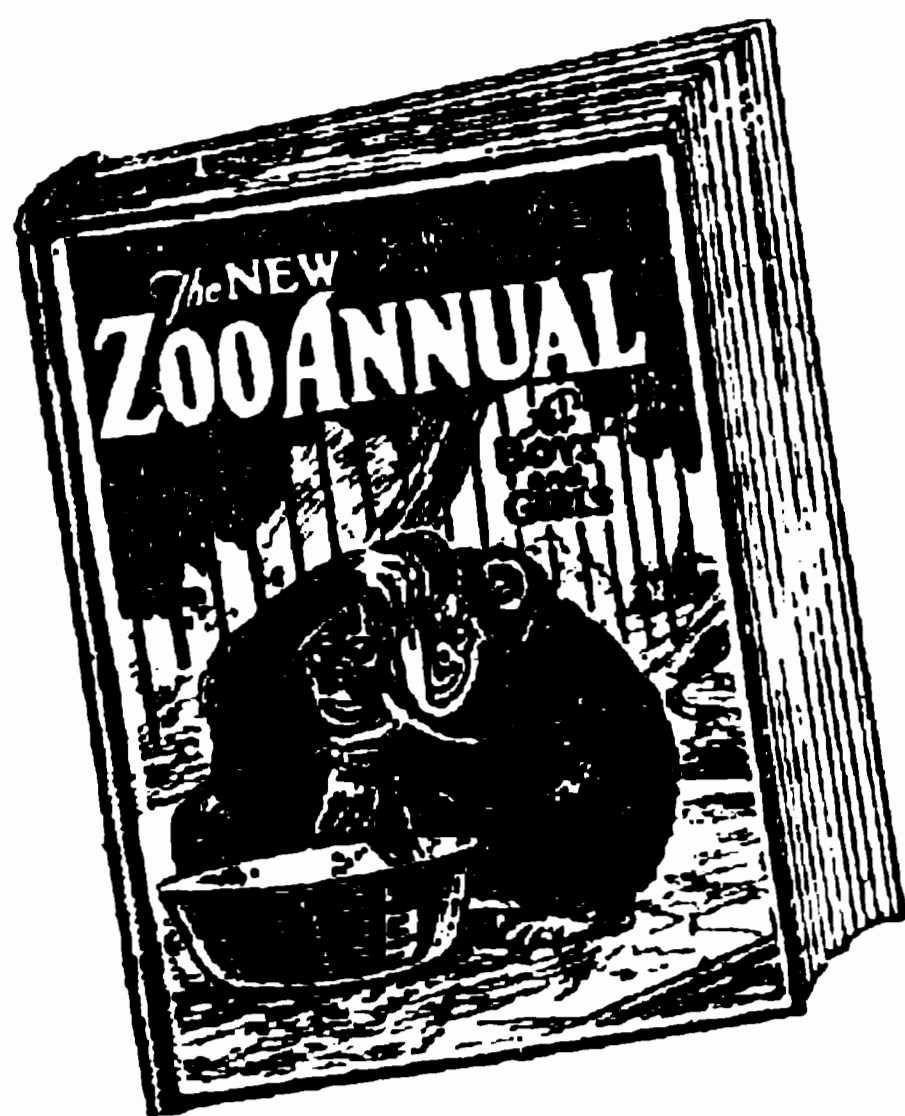
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The WHISPERING PERIL!

(Continued from page 13.)

"What!"

It was a general shout of alarm, but Nipper shouted the hardest, and he clutched Marsh fiercely by the arm.

"What do you mean—something has happened to Mr. Lee?" he said sharply. "Pull yourself together, Marsh! Tell me!"

"I—I don't know, sir," panted the man. "I always go into the Head's study to do the fire. I went in there just now. There's a chair overturned, and blood—and——"

"Find Old Wilkey!" interrupted Nipper urgently. "Help him, you chaps!"

Without another word he darted off. Handforth and Travers went with him. The others, breathlessly excited, rushed with Marsh to find Mr. Alington Wilkes.

When Nipper & Co. reached the Head's house they found the front door standing wide open. In the hall were two or three frightened-looking domestics.

"We've been knocking at Mr. Lee's bed-room door, sir, and we can't get any answer!" said one of the girls breathlessly. "Oh, I do hope that nothing bad has happened!"

Nipper rushed straight into the study. Handforth and Travers, who had followed him in, stopped just inside the doorway. The heavy curtains had been pulled back, and the wintry daylight was streaming into the room.

They could all see the obvious signs of foul play. The overturned chair, the papers on the desk; Nelson Lee's pen lying on the floor, just as it had fallen after it had been jerked from his hand. And there, most significant of all, an ugly stain on the carpet. Nipper's quick eye saw other stains—a trail of them leading towards the window.

"This is awful, you chaps!" he said, gripping himself hard.

To him the whole thing was as clear as daylight. The evidence was overwhelming. Nelson Lee had been sitting at his desk, he had been bludgeoned from behind, he had fallen, the blood running from his wound. Then he had been carried to the window.

"Wait here," said Nipper huskily. "Don't move a thing, you chaps; don't tread anywhere."

He ran out, took the stairs three at a time, and reached Nelson Lee's bed-room. He burst into the room, and the first glance filled him with cold dread. The bed was just as it had been made the previous day.

"Is the Head there, Master Nipper?" asked one of the girls tremulously, as Nipper came out.

"No!" said Nipper. "Mr. Lee's bed hasn't been slept in all night."

"Oh! Then—then Marsh was right, sir," faltered the girl. "Something must have happened to Mr. Lee last night—while he was working? I've always thought he sat up too late——"

Nipper did not wait to listen. He ran downstairs again, and he was just in time to meet Mr. Wilkes, looking rather dishevelled, as he came through the front doorway with Fenton of the Sixth. Outside there was a crowd of juniors—afraid to come any farther because of Old Wilkey's stern orders.

"Come and look in here, sir," said Nipper briefly.

Mr. Wilkes gave him a hard, straight look. There was tragedy in Nipper's voice, and his features were pale and haggard.

Mr. Wilkes was deeply concerned as soon as he saw the condition of the headmaster's study. Those bloodstains were particularly suggestive.

"They took him to the window, by the look of it," said Mr. Wilkes. "H'm! This is bad—very bad!"

They went to the window, and opened it. Nipper leaned out, and an exclamation escaped him.

"Look here, sir!" he said tensely.

Mr. Wilkes looked. On the flower-bed were footprints. They were deeply embedded, and there was just a trace of them on the grass beyond the border.

"Bare feet!" said Nipper incredulously. "There must have been two men, sir—look! You can see the marks clearly. But who could have come here last night, and at this time of the year, in bare feet?"

"Extraordinary!" muttered Old Wilkey, deeply puzzled.

He pulled himself back, strode to the desk, and picked up the telephone.

"What are you going to do, sir?" asked Travers.

"Do?" rapped out Mr. Wilkes. "I'm ringing up the police, of course!"

Then, while Mr. Wilkes was waiting to get through, Tom, the scullery boy, came rushing in.

"The Head's car's gone!" he blurted out dramatically.

"What!"

"Yes, young gents," said the boy. "The garage is open—the lock busted! Somebody's pinched the Head's car!"

Before Mr. Wilkes could make any comment a voice came through on the telephone.

"Halle, hallo!" answered the House-master. "Is that the Bannington police-station? This is Mr. Wilkes, of St. Frank's. I want you to send some men over here as quickly as possible. Mr. Nelson Lee has disappeared—in mysterious circumstances."

"Just a minute, sir," came the stolid voice of the station sergeant. "I'll take that down in writing, if you don't mind. Mr. Nelson Lee has disappeared, you say? That's bad, ain't it? What time——"

"Never mind what time!" interrupted Mr. Wilkes. "Where's the inspector?"

"Ain't here, sir—yet; having breakfast, I suppose."

"Then fetch him away from his breakfast!" retorted Mr. Wilkes impatiently. "I have just learned that Mr. Lee's car was stolen——"

"Car—stolen?" repeated the sergeant, with a sudden startled note in his voice. "That's funny, sir. Not five minutes ago we had a telephone call from the light-house crew at Shingle Head to say that there's a wrecked car lying upside down at the bottom of the cliffs!"

CHAPTER 8.

The Torment of Nipper!

WHEN Jimmy Potts reached his uncle's bed-room he found a motionless figure squatting, statue-like, on the mat. Yen, the little Chinaman, rose respectfully.

"What are you doing here?" asked Jimmy.

"I guard," said Yen simply.

"You've been here all night?"

"Yes, young Excellency. I see that no harm comes to my master."

"Are you sure that he is safe?"

"He is safe, young Excellency," said Yen. "I watch. I listen. I know."

Jimmy hammered violently on the door, and he was relieved to hear a noisy yawn, and then Uncle Ben's sleepy voice. A moment later Uncle Ben himself unlocked the door and stood there in his pyjamas, with a dressing-gown flung carelessly round him.

"By my ancestors!" he chuckled. "What's this, lad? Getting me up with your own rising-bell, eh?"

"No, no, uncle!" exclaimed Jimmy. "Something awful has happened! Mr. Lee has disappeared!"

A douche of icy-cold water could not have awakened Mr. Benjamin Potts more thoroughly than that announcement of Jimmy's. He heard the bare details whilst he scrambled into some clothes.

"This is terrible!" he said tragically. "Can't ye see what it means, lad? Those devils must have overheard me last night. This is my fault——"

"You can't say that, uncle," protested Jimmy. "It's—it's awful! Mr. Lee has always been able to look after himself——"

"But he has never had the hounds of the Mandarin Fu-Li-Sing on his trail," interrupted Uncle Ben, in a low voice.

"Why did they attack Mr. Lee—and not you?"

"They could not get at me—Yen was watching," said Uncle Ben. "Yen is a better man than he looks, lad. For years he was one of the smartest, one of the most feared detectives in the Shanghai Secret Service."

"Well, I'm jiggered!" said Jimmy, astonished.

"I didn't mean to tell you. I don't like people to know that I travel about watched and guarded," grunted Mr. Potts. "If those devils had come near here, Yen would have known. But they went for Mr. Lee because Mr. Lee had promised to help me. Ay, they're cunning—clever. I'm afraid Mr. Lee was half-inclined to discredit my story. Let us hope that he has not paid the full penalty."

They were soon down, and they found the school throbbing with the sensation. The rapid approach of Christmas was forgotten, the fact that it was breaking-up day was forgotten. Mr. Nelson Lee, head-master of St. Frank's, had vanished during the night, and there was every indication that he had been murdered!

Small wonder that St. Frank's seethed.

Whilst most of the boys were eager with excitement, anxious for further news, there were three people, at least, who were filled with intense, burning anxiety. They were Nipper and Jimmy Potts and his Uncle Ben.

For these three were very directly affected.

Nelson Lee was Nipper's beloved gov'nor; his disappearance left Nipper stunned with agony. Mr. Potts, too, was worried and haggard.

"To think that I should have brought this tragedy to the school!" he groaned, when he was talking to Mr. Wilkes and Inspector Jameson, of the Bannington police. "Ay, I'm under no delusions. The devils that took Mr. Lee away were my own enemies."

"What do you know of them, Mr. Potts?" asked the inspector.

"Practically nothing," replied the man from China, helplessly shrugging his shoulders. "I never dreamed that this

At a dizzy speed the driverless car, containing the inert body of Nelson Lee, hurtled towards the cliff edge.



menace would follow me to England. I cannot tell who these men are, how they came, or—or anything. The first hint I had of their presence was last night, when an unknown man leapt at me with a dagger. I avoided his rush, but he escaped."

Mr. Potts did everything he could to help the police, but even Inspector Jameson realised that Uncle Ben's information was of little or no value. The origin of the quarrel was of no importance. What had happened in China did not concern what was happening here. But it appeared, from what Uncle Ben said, that there had been some trouble over a big gold concession. The Mandarin of Shan-Si maintained that the land was his; and the Chinese Government had granted it to Mr. Potts. Hence the quarrel.

"I can only assume that the mandarin has agents in England," said Mr. Potts gravely. "Maybe it is his idea to get rid of me here, and then he will be free to bribe the Chinese officials and regain control of the property. But it all seems so fantastic—so unreal."

"There's nothing unreal about what happened here last night," said the inspector gruffly. "In my opinion, there's no doubt whatever that Mr. Lee was murdered. The evidence is clear enough. He was murdered in his own study, carried

out of the window by two men, and taken to his own car, which had previously been stolen from the garage and parked in a lane."

It had been easy enough for the inspector to make these discoveries. There had been many traces of the footprints; then the car marks had been found. Nipper put in a lot of detective work on his own account, and the deeper he went into the investigation the greater became his concern.

On the cliff top, near Shingle Head, the car marks were plain; and there were

further imprints of bare feet. Far below was Nelson Lee's car, a complete wreck on the rocky shore.

"The crime itself is obvious," said the inspector. "Our trouble will be to trace the unknown murderers. They left no footprints that we can make use of; they wore gloves, so that no finger-prints were left behind. There's not a clue."

"By golly! They're cunning—they're clever!" said Uncle Ben. "Ye don't know how clever they are!"

Nipper, with Handforth and Jimmy Potts and a crowd of others, had gone down to the beach. There were police there, too, and coastguards. But nothing of any importance had been discovered.

At low tide the wrecked car had been found half-buried in the shingle and masses of seaweed. It was an open car, and there was little doubt that Nelson Lee had been flung out when the car had taken its deadly plunge.

"He's gone—gone!" muttered Nipper dully.

"Cheese it!" growled Handforth. "You know your guv'nor better than I do, Nipper. He's got out of many a tight scrape——"

"I know," interrupted Nipper, his eyes burning. "Perhaps he escaped somehow. At least, they haven't found his body! I shan't give up hope till they have found it! I won't—I won't!"

"Steady, old man," said Travers gently. "Don't you think we'd better go back to the school? There's nothing for us to do here."

But Nipper was reluctant to drag himself away. He stood on the beach, his eyes roving across the storm-swept sea, a figure of tragedy.

The lighthouse men and the coastguards shook their heads dubiously. It was their opinion that Lee had been drowned at once—if he had not already been killed before being taken from the school. And his body had been washed away far out into the Channel.

"Might be a week before they find the body," said one of the coastguards, shaking his head. "Might be a month. Wouldn't surprise me if they never found it at all. In a storm like this——"

He did not finish his sentence, but shrugged his brawny shoulders expressively.

"Dead!" said Nipper unsteadily. "My guv'nor—dead!"

For him the whole world had suddenly come to an end.

CHAPTER 9.

The Clutching Hand!

CHRISTMAS!

What a mockery it seemed—to Nipper. The last day of the term—the day when he should have been bubbling with high spirits and laughter—the day he was booked to go off with Sir Montie Tregellis-West's cheery party!

It was only human nature, perhaps, that when Nipper looked at Jimmy Potts he should look with sullen resentment.

"Don't look at me like that, Nipper," muttered Jimmy wretchedly. "I know this awful thing has happened because of my uncle, but it's not my fault, or Uncle Ben's fault, either. I took Uncle Ben to Mr. Lee, and—and——"

"Sorry, old man," said Nipper, taking a grip on himself. "Don't take any notice, Jimmy. Of course you're not to blame." He suddenly clenched his fists. "But it's my guv'nor!" he went on tragically. "My guv'nor has gone—murdered! Oh, it's horrible!"

The others were silent in their sympathy for the agonised Nipper.

"They say that the—the body won't be found for weeks," went on Nipper, his voice becoming fierce. "I don't believe the guv'nor's dead! I'll never believe it—until I find the positive evidence! Perhaps something happened—perhaps he wasn't too badly injured. There's always a chance——"

He broke off with a gulp. Why fool himself in this way? What hope was there that Nelson Lee had escaped?

It was mid-morning by the time he got back to St. Frank's. He had had no breakfast, and had no desire for food. Sir Montie, full of grave concern, met him in the Triangle with some other fellows.

"Any news, old boy?" he asked eagerly.

"None," said Nipper.

"Begad! I was hoping—— I'm wondering, too," said Sir Montie awkwardly. "About this afternoon, I mean. Everything's arranged and I'm frightfully worried. I hardly know what to do——"

"You go home, Montie," said Nipper quietly. "You and Tommy and all the rest of the fellows. Carry on just the same. You can't do any good by remaining here."

"But you, Nipper, boy?" asked Sir Montie, troubled.

"I? No, no!" said Nipper tragically. "Oh, Montie, do you think I could go to your Christmas-party and enjoy myself? I should be a wet blanket. Besides, I want to stay here—I want to be near at hand in case—in case——"

They knew what he was thinking, and they said nothing.

"I'm going to stay, too, by George!" declared Handforth suddenly. "It's no good your glaring at me, Walter Church! There's a terrific mystery here, and I mean to investigate!"

Church and McClure, and the other members of Handforth's Christmas-party, were thoroughly startled. If Edward Oswald made up his mind to stay here—to investigate this mystery—wild horses would not drag him away. Every arrangement was being messed up.

"Handy, old man, you mustn't do that," said Nipper, and his voice was very quiet and firm. "There's no earthly reason why this—this affair should upset your Christmas plans. Please, for my sake, go right ahead. You won't do any good by remaining. The police are doing all they can, and—and the coastguards are keeping a watch. I'll stay here—I'll wait. I'm not convinced that my guv'nor is dead!" he added fiercely. "Do you hear? They haven't found him, have they? Until they do, I shall hope. Yes, I shall hope!"

He walked off, and the others sighed. It seemed to them that there was little enough cause for hope.

But Nipper was right. The sensible thing to do was to carry on with their plans, as though nothing had happened. It was, indeed, out of the question for them to remain at the school. Mr. Wilkes, as acting headmaster, would not allow it.

It was instinct, perhaps—that semi-dormant quality which is in all of us—that took Nipper's steps to Nelson Lee's study. The police had finished their investigations here, and Nipper found the room empty.

Nobody challenged him. He went in, closed the door, and stood just inside the apartment, fighting a little battle with himself.

He was striving to force himself to be calm—so that he could think clearly, so that he could reason. Perhaps this room would provide him with some clue. There was no sense in taking matters for granted. There might be something here which he had missed on that earlier visit—which the police had missed.

"I can't believe that the guv'nor is dead," muttered Nipper. "There's some other explanation—there must be!"

Suddenly his faith became strong. It was too early, yet, to take the worst for granted. His brain cleared, his eyes sparkled. He looked round the room with new confidence.

And then he caught in his breath. He had been standing motionless for some

moments. It was a faint, almost inaudible click which had now attracted his attention.

Only the muscles of his eyes moved. But his heart jumped as he saw one of the panels, on the inner wall, slowly and mysteriously moving outwards!

Nipper shook himself. For a second he thought he was dreaming. A secret panel here—in Nelson Lee's study! Then he remembered. There was a secret passage leading to this study. He remembered finding it two or three terms earlier, and the headmaster had caused it to be closed up. It joined one of the other underground passages, beneath the monastery ruins, some distance away. At one time—hundreds of years before—the ground beneath St. Frank's had been honeycombed by secret tunnels and passages.

With every fibre of his being throbbing, Nipper tiptoed towards the slowly opening panel. Somebody was behind there—some lurking enemy! The man who had attacked Nelson Lee, perhaps! A blinding rage seized Nipper. With a sudden spring he reached the panel; with all his strength Nipper tore it open.

"Now!" he panted. "Who are you?"

There was no sound, but a hand, lean and muscular, reached mysteriously out of the blackness. It clutched at Nipper, seized him, and the fingers closed like a steel vice.

Too late, Nipper realised that he had played into the hands of this unknown. He struggled, but it was useless. Relentlessly, he was dragged into the darkness of the secret passage.

Another hand gripped him round the shoulders; forced him down. Slam! The panel closed, and absolute blackness fell.

"Help!" shouted Nipper desperately.

A hand was clapped over his mouth. He struggled madly, but he could do nothing against that iron grip which held him. He felt the warm breath of his captor against his cheek.

"Sorry if I've given you a scare, young 'un!" whispered a voice in his ear. "But I rather wanted a quiet word with you—in strict private."

Nipper nearly swooned—for the voice in his ear was the voice of Nelson Lee!

CHAPTER 10.

In the Secret Passage!

"GUV'NOR!" breathed Nipper, almost choking.

"Well, my dear chap, you insisted upon yelling, so I had to do something drastic," came Lee's

voice. "It's all right—don't think I'm a ghost. I have every right to be one, I know, but I am a slippery sort of customer, particularly when people try to kill me."

The hand had been removed from Nipper's mouth, for there was no longer any danger of his shouting out. He was quivering from head to foot with wild excitement and joy.

"Guv'nor!" he muttered again, gripping Nelson Lee's hand in the darkness, and pressing it so hard that the great detective almost winced. "I knew you were alive, guv'nor!"

"Splendid!" came a chuckle from Lee.

"I—I mean, I knew it two or three minutes ago," said Nipper earnestly. "Something mysterious came over me when I was standing in your study. All my fears went, and I became confident. You were near me then—separated only by that panel. It must have been a sort of telepathy, guv'nor; anyhow, I knew that everything was all right."

"Well, we needn't go into any discussion on that subject," said Lee dryly. "You were fairly rattled when I grabbed you, weren't you? Have you got a match? I must confess that I am singularly lacking in all those trifles which are so essential in a situation of this sort."

Nipper pulled out his electric torch, and flashed it on. Then he gasped. The light revealed Nelson Lee—a weary, haggard-looking, unshaven Nelson Lee. His hair was matted, there was an ugly cut on his scalp, which recently had been bleeding. He was indescribably bedraggled—collarless, and his clothing, even now, was not completely dry.

"Guv'nor!" ejaculated Nipper, horrified.

"I'm a disgusting sight, eh?" chuckled Lee. "Upon my word, young 'un, it was a lucky thing that you happened to be in my study alone. You can help me a lot."

"But—but I don't understand, sir," said Nipper, wide-eyed. "Why have you come back like this—secretly? If you escaped, why didn't you—"

"That's an easy one," interrupted Lee, a grim note creeping into his voice. "Certain ill-disposed gentlemen attempted to murder me last night, and the circumstances are such that they can very easily go on thinking that they did their work successfully. So it will be to my advantage to remain—dead. At least, until I am ready to come to life again. Do you understand?"

"By Jove! You're a marvel, guv'nor!"

"I really think I am," replied Nelson Lee frankly. "I was sitting in my study

writing, last night, when this thing first began. I was attacked from behind—and knocked senseless."

"That's an awful place on your head, sir," said Nipper, with concern. "Do you know who did it? Did you see—"

"The place on my head is trifling," broke in Lee. "You seem to forget, Nipper, that my head is usefully thick. I have congratulated myself upon that fact on more than one occasion. Or perhaps it has become toughened through use. As for recognising my assailant, I can tell you definitely that I did not. I had no time. But I have my suspicions, nevertheless."

"You mean those Chinks, sir?" asked Nipper eagerly. "Those enemies of Mr. Potts'?"

"So Mr. Potts has been talking?" asked Lee.

"What else could he do, sir?" said Nipper. "Jimmy knew about those mysterious enemies, anyhow. Mr. Potts told the police everything he could, but old Jameson doesn't seem to be very hopeful."

"Jameson wouldn't be," nodded Lee. "Jameson's that sort of man. Well, as I was saying, when I awoke I found myself in my own car, and my head was singing like a factory whistle. Somebody came and had a look at me, but not until I had had time to wriggle practically free from my bonds. It was my intention to take him by surprise, but he took me by surprise instead."

"You didn't see him—even then, sir?"

"I am not a cat—I cannot see in pitch darkness," replied Lee. "No; the car started moving, and while I was making up my mind to attack the driver, I suddenly found that the driver had inconsiderately left the car to its own devices. And before I could take any further action, over we went—and it was quite an exhilarating fall."

"Oh!" muttered Nipper, thrilled.

"The plunge into the cold sea water revived me thoroughly," continued Lee. "Having already freed myself from my cords, I was able to swim, but it was a tough job in that raging sea. Even now I don't know how I managed to get ashore. Luck, I think. A sudden wave caught me and threw me up on the shingle. It might just as easily have dashed me to death against one of the rocks. But I scrambled up, and I did some hard thinking. I made for the old quarry on the moor, and got into the secret tunnels."

"That must have been over twelve hours ago, sir."

(Continued on page 24.)

Fatty Little gains three stone in three weeks through laughing at—



HANDFORTH'S Weekly

No. 33. Vol. 2.

EDITORIAL STAFF.

December 5th, 1931.

A DEADLY SECRET

By Ye Editor

Editor-in-Chief E. O. Handforth
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

CHRISTMAS GIFTS.

Tommy Watson gives us an
idea—free—on the subject.

THIS week—next week—sometime—never !
That's what people say when they
count their plum-stones after dinner,
and that is what people have been
saying all over the world for some weeks.

When is the Special Christmas Number of
HANDFORTH'S WEEKLY going to be on sale ?
That's what they want to know. And they
shake their heads mysteriously, and answer :

"This week—next week—sometime—never !"

The time has come to reveal the answer to this
deadly secret. My Special Christmas Number
will be on sale NEXT WEEK. In spite of the
fact that I have got the whole of my enormous
brain to bear in producing this wonderful
festive issue, the Editor of the NELSON LEE has
decided to charge only twopence as usual. He
asks me to add that, after reading my Christmas
Number, it is of no use for readers to demand
their money back, because no money will be
refunded.

So that is the answer to the great question
that has been asked all over the world. In
America they have been asking :

"Say, guys, when's this durned Christmas
Number gonna be published ?"

In China, the coolies have whispered to the
mandarins, "Me tinkee likee know when
Handforth's Weeklee Chlistmas Numbel publish."
And even in the icy wastes of Greenland, the
Eskimaux have asked each other, "Sgwxxxk
glnktrsquofnx mrxtsh blanfxxtik woxshk Hanx-
fyox Weexlikk ?"

The secret is revealed at last.

NEXT WEEK ! ! ! ! !

Don't miss it whatever you do. It doesn't
matter about missing your Christmas dinner ;
but if you miss my Christmas Number, you'll
never forgive yourself.

Yours to a cinder,

E. O. HANDFORTH.

I HAVE heard from Nipper that detective
sometimes catch crooks by a process of
elimination. This is a good stunt. I
fancy it could be worked when you are
buying Christmas presents.

For instance, what shall I buy my Uncle
Claude ? I ask you ! He's bound to give me
a lavish tip, and I ought to buy the old bean a
decent present. Well, here's a list I made out—
a list of possible presents :

Brush and comb, book, deck-chair, hair
cream, toothbrush, razor, bicycle, shampoo-
powder, cigars, pipe, slippers, walking-stick,
handkerchiefs, pocket-knife, shaving-cream,
ice-skates, turkey, cinematograph, cigarette-
case, watch, York ham.

Of course, I really can't afford many of these
presents. Handkerchiefs I think I could
manage, but some of the others are expensive.
However, the problem is : Which of these
presents shall I buy ?

This is where the process of elimination comes
in. I shall proceed to eliminate, as follows :

Uncle Claude is BALD. Eliminate : Brush
and comb, hair cream and shampoo powder.

Uncle Claude is SHORT-SIGHTED. Eliminate :
Book, watch and cinematograph.

Uncle Claude has no TEETH. Eliminate :
Toothbrush.

Uncle Claude has a long BEARD. Eliminate :
Razor, shaving cream.

Uncle Claude is a NON-SMOKER. Eliminate :
Cigars, pipe and cigarette-case.

Uncle Claude is very FAT. Eliminate :
Bicycle, ice-skates and deck-chair.

Uncle Claude is very SHORT-TEMPERED.
Eliminate : Slippers, walking-stick and pocket-
knife.

Uncle Claude is a VEGETARIAN. Eliminate :
Turkey and York ham.

THAT LEAVES—Handkerchiefs !

Excellent ! I'll go out at once and buy them

The REMOVE DRAMATIC SOCIETY

By VIVIAN TRAVERS.

AT a General Meeting of the Remove Dramatic Society last Tuesday, it was decided to produce Shakespeare's Richard the Third. As the cast is an extremely large one, there will be parts for most of the fellows interested in amateur theatricals. The principal parts have already been selected, and I should like to make one or two comments on these.

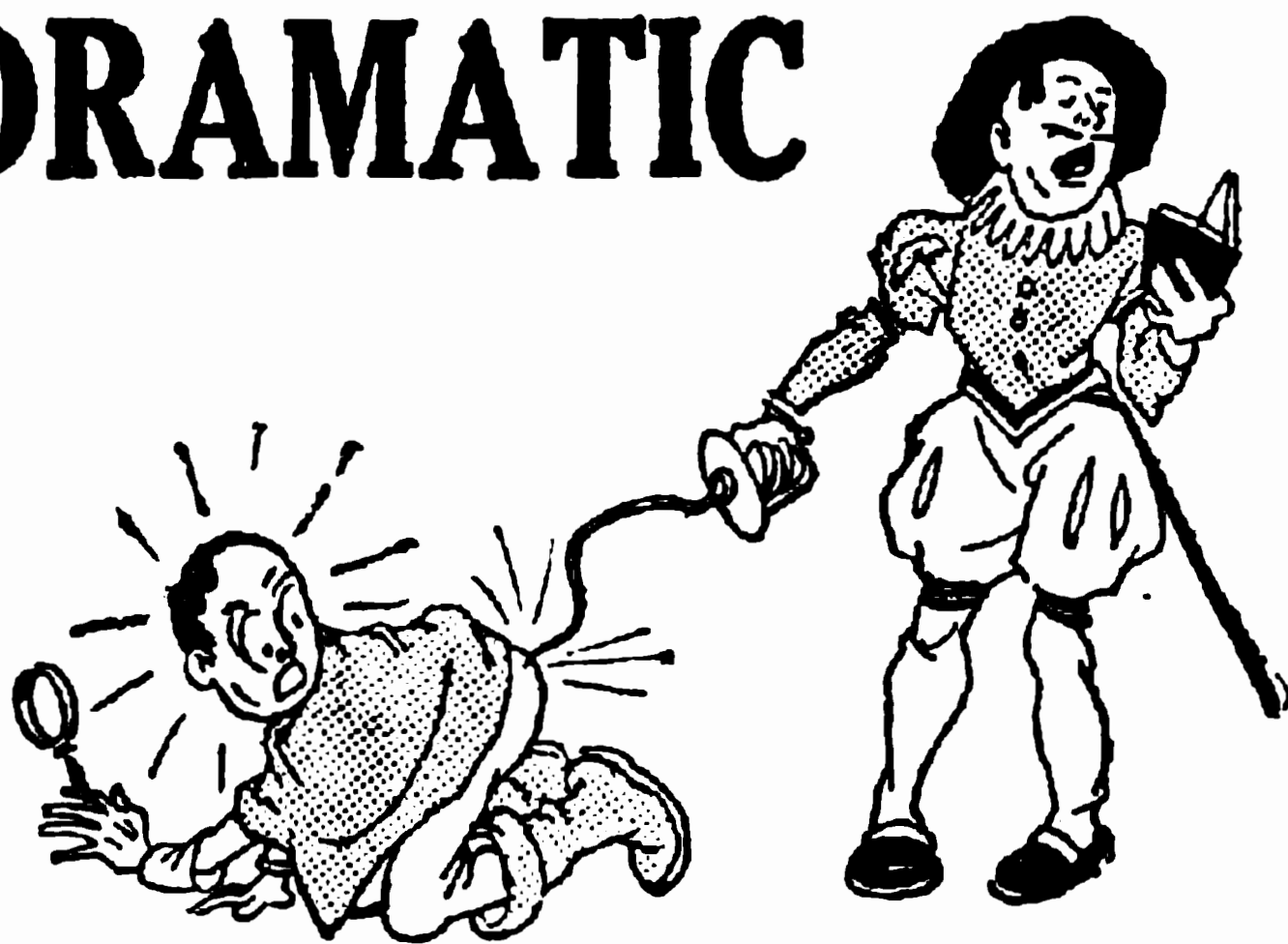
E. O. Handforth will play the Duke of Gloucester, and he is kindly requested not to give himself any airs, and to be careful what he does with his sword. Also, it would be as well if he remembered his lines this time, and not have to read them out of a book concealed in his hat—as was the case in Julius Cæsar. Likewise, he is requested to remember that Shakespeare does not, as a rule, use slang, and the Duke of Gloucester does *not* deliver his opening speech in this fashion:

‘By Géorge! Now is the winter of
our discontent
Made glorious summer by the—the
What-d’ye-call it.
And all the clouds that leered upon our
house
In the deep bottom of the ocean
buried——’

The words, Handy old top, are “lower’d”—not “leered”—and “bosom”—not “bottom.” Don’t forget.

Nipper will play the Duke of Clarence, and will he kindly remember that old Clarence was not a detective? Montie Tregellis-West, as Lord Hastings, is asked to take note that this noble lord never spoke as follows:

“Good time of day to you, dear old fellows,
But I shall live, begad, to give them thanks
That were the cause of my imprisonment—I shall really.”



Myself, as the Duke of Buckingham, will be the star performer of the cast, and De Valerie as the Earl of Surrey will be all right.

We are going to let Messrs. Willy Handforth and Chubby Heath play the parts of the young Prince of Wales and Duke of York, and in this connection may I say strongly that on no occasion did the Prince of Wales or Duke of York bring fire-crackers or stink-bombs with them to the palace. Any repetition of the distressing scenes which occurred when Willy Handforth played Arthur in King John, and bombarded his executioner with a home-made catapult, will be dealt with very severely.

Church and McClure have been selected for the parts of First and Second Murderers, owing to their natural advantages. The various knights—Vaughan, Ratcliff, Catesby, Tyrrell, Blount, Herbert and Brackenbury—will be selected from Remove fellows, as also will be the female parts—Elizabeth, Margaret, Duchess of York, Lady Anne and Margaret Plantagenet.

Tommy Watson will be Edward the Fourth, Harry Gresham will be the Earl of Richmond and Reggie Pitt will be Cardinal Bouchier.

As for Rotherham, Morton, Norfolk, Rivers, Dorset, Lord Grey, Earl Oxford, Lord Stanley, Lord Lovel—oh, crikey! How many more of them?

Here, this won't do. We can't do this play, or we shall use up every fellow in the school. There won't be any left to watch it.

TAKE NOTICE: Richard the Third is scrapped. I'll write a play with only four parts in it, and I'll do all four myself.

MY CHRISTMAS

I'VE been to Christmas bought any out for card verses on them; that I could find May Christmas In happy friends If joy and peace Then I shall

All right, of course sentiments; but sound original end like every other F'rinstance, here's dearer than the pose they thought because the poet repeat the word “job for a Christmas” May joy be yours And all yours May memories That time shall

After reading section marked “A” came to the conclusion want a thing done do it yourself. So my own Christmas different verse for

I want, first of all Moor View, wishing and prosperity. originality, I am “prosperity” with rotten rhyme, as will be as follows: Greetings, Oh England And a wish that May the bread the waters Return to you

Now that's some original. What about it, I don't know, in fact.

This one is to I'd wish an eight My tubby friend But what's the You'd rather An eighteen can

Nipper's verse Oh, wonderful I hope, by That you'll Within your

This verse is aristocrats who “pudding” as whose preference the verse should Oh, wonderful My wish to That you'll detect Within your

ADVERTISEMENTS

FOUND. A large cake. Owner can have it restored by applying to CECIL de VALERIE. P.S.—Fatty Little needn't trouble to apply. It's a cake of soap.

OLD CLOTHES.

OLD CLOTHES FOR SALE. Some genuinely antique. Owner has recently outgrown them. He bought them when a fag. It breaks his heart to lose them, but it must be done. What offers? **DUKE OF SOMERTON.** Remove.

ENTERTAINMENTS.

BANNINGTON. Cinema-de-Luxe. High Street. **BOOK TO BANNINGTON STATION** and take the first on the right. Almost opposite the Public Library. The West Sussex 'Bus Service passes the door.

CLOSED FOR REPAIRS.

PERSONAL.

MARRIOTT.—See you to-night, usual place. Don't wake anybody up as you get out. The prefects are suspicious.—**FORREST.**

The HISTORY OF MINCE PIES

Related by Sir James Potts.

THESE succulent pies were invented by a certain Mortimer Mince.

Mortimer was the son of a poor baker who lived in Baker Street, having moved there from Bread Street in the City, with a branch at Pie Corner. This poor baker was the man about whom was written the famous song:

"He was only a poor old baker,
And, oh, how he kneaded some dough."

When Mortimer was a little boy, it was his delight to go into his father's bakery and watch the men making cakes and pies. It was a still greater delight to our young hero when the baker's back was turned, and he would stretch out his little hand in a simple, confiding way and pinch every pie he could lay his fingers on. If he could finish up by falling into the dough-mixing machine, his joy knew no bounds.

At the age of fourteen and two days, Mortimer joined his father in the business, and the profits immediately fell with a tremendous thud. It was Mortimer's job to hold the sausages inside the sausage-

rolls until they were suffocated, in order to prevent their wriggling out before being baked. He was so successful at this job that in a short time he was promoted to the managership of the Sausage Roll Department, and from there he had a rise into the Pie Foundry. By the time his father fell into the oven, Mortimer was so clever that he was able to take over the business and open a new branch in Chelsea and another in Switzerland, where he invented the Swiss and Chelsea buns.

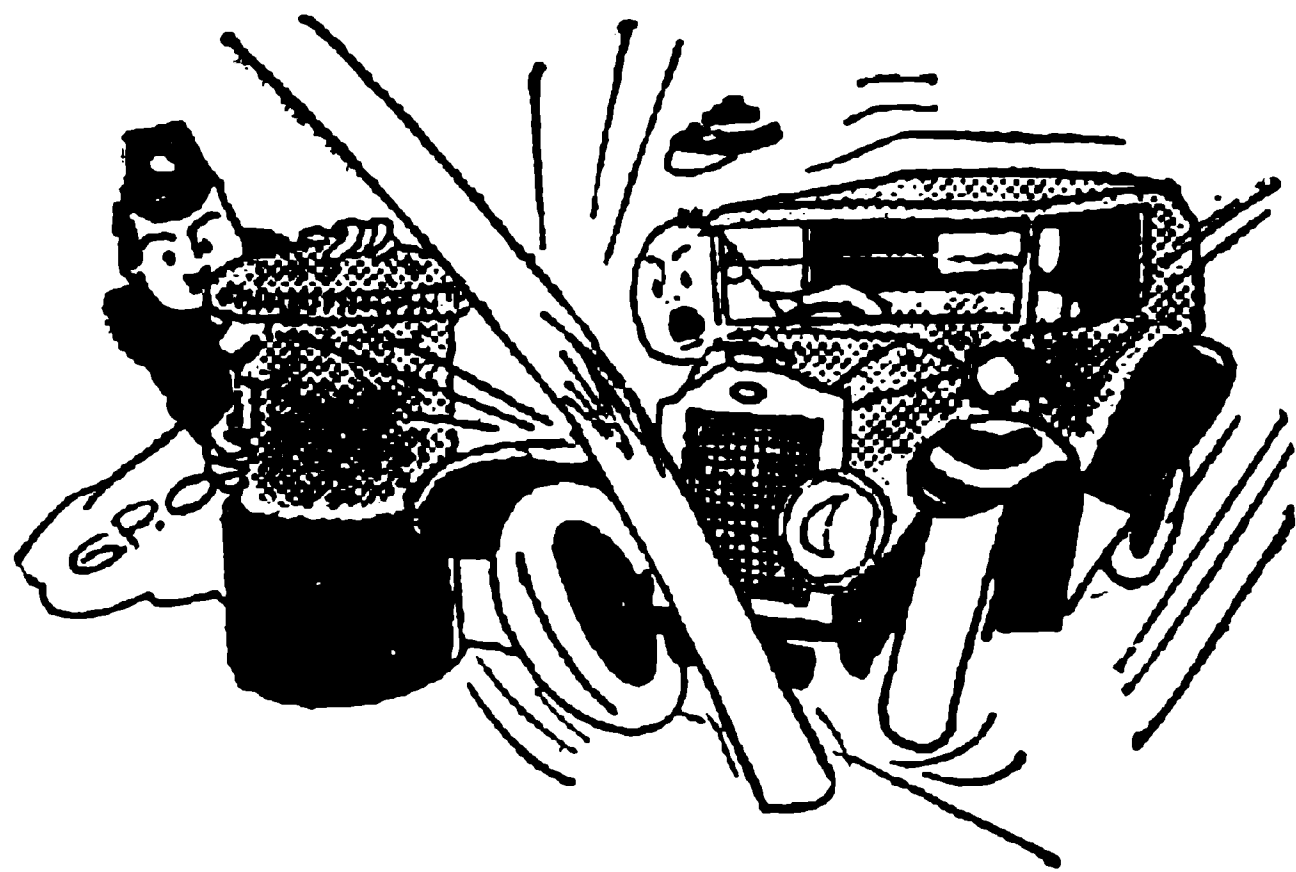
Branches soon began to spring up all over the place. At his branch at Bath he invented the Bath bun; at his branch in Banbury he invented the Banbury Cake, and at his branch at Hotcross he invented the Hotcross Bun. But his greatest invention—the luscious Mince Pie—came about by accident.

He was carrying some raw material to be manufactured into pies; carrying it on a large tray. There were apples for apple-pies; currants for currant-pies; raisins for raisin-pies and suet for suet-pies. He put this down on the edge of the mixing-machine while he went to look at a calendar to see the time. When he came back, the tray had disappeared—it had fallen into the mixing-machine and the currants and stuff had been mixed up into "Hot Apple Pies." These hot pies sold like hot cakes, and the people came back, clamouring for more. Mortimer Mince soon realised what had happened, and he invented this great new pie ("It Tickles the World's Palate," said his advert.), and swiftly made his fortune.

STRAY THOUGHTS

Bending and stretching is a good exercise—if it isn't you who is doing the bending and a master the stretching.

An attack of 'flu has visited the school staff. Well, we have made our own beds—but I'm dashed if we can lie in them.



"I've just managed to catch the post," observed Handforth, as his Morris Minor crashed into a telegraph pole.

With a view to being given a seat near the fire, Teddy Long has recently been rubbing his hands and shivering in class of a morning. We need hardly remind Mr. Crowell that all that shivers is not cold.

Horace Stevens, after making an awful row in the music room, said he had been doing scales. Well, he evidently hadn't used them to weigh his words.

Walter Church.

RECIPE.

TO ENJOY CHRISTMAS.—Take one cornet, one drum, one trombone, and two or three mixed voices, and mix well together to form a Carol Party. Now pour this mixture into a side street and strike up a popular carol. Let the melody burble gently for about forty minutes; then take the nearest householder and bring him to the boil by asking for money. Repeat procedure until you have obtained the sum of twopence, and then dash to the nearest newsagent next Wednesday and procure a copy of "THE NELSON LEE" CHRISTMAS NUMBER.

A Happy Christmas will then be assured.

MOTTO.

In works of labour or of skill
I would be busy, too;
But I feel absolutely ill
When I've much work to do.

J. B. B., Fourth.

AS CARDS

to buy some
I have not
was on the look-
some original
the only sort
like this:
you happy hours
spent;
be ours,
tent.

and dashed good
show it doesn't
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istmas card.
that was a penny
sample. I sup-
was worth more
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you abide
diminish.

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n going to write
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person.

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going to rhyme
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ery touching:
etective!
ly brooding,
the sixpence,
pe of pudding.

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ounce the word
ing." For those
to "pudden"
ended thus:

ective!
a good 'un!
sixpence
pe of pudden.

The WHISPERING PERIL!

(Continued from page 20.)

"Yes, I am afraid I displayed a certain amount of weakness," confessed Lee. "In point of fact, I fell exhausted after I had reached the tunnels. And I must have slept for some hours. It's a good thing I have an iron constitution, young 'un; I don't think I have come to much harm."

"And what are you going to do now, guv'nor?" asked Nipper eagerly.

"Officially, I am dead," said Lee, his voice very soft. "For my own purposes I shall remain dead. I want to investigate this little mystery quietly, undisturbed. It will be far better for Mr. Benjamin Potts if he remains under the delusion that I am dead—far better because those mystery men will think so, too."

"By Jove, I get the idea, guv'nor," said Nipper, nodding. "You're going to protect Mr. Potts, eh? You're going to remain in the background—watching and waiting, so that you can nab the brutes when they're not expecting it!"

"I have an idea that the danger will be more for young Jimmy than for his uncle," said Nelson Lee, to Nipper's surprise. "These people have their own methods, Nipper—and those methods are cunning. But we need not go into this now. I came back secretly, in this way, because I need food and drink."

"Oh, guv'nor, I ought to have thought of that," said Nipper, with concern. "You look terribly fagged."

"I also need money," said Lee, with a slight smile. "I cannot very well carry on without money. And a change of clothing, and so on. You can help, Nipper. Quietly, unobtrusively, you must bring me my cashbox, a complete change of things, and some food. I think you can manage it without attracting any attention. And you must do it at once. Furthermore, you must say nothing to a soul. You understand? Give me your word of honour, Nipper, that you will not breathe a word of this meeting."

"Not even to my own chums, sir?"

"Not even to your own chums," replied Lee impressively. "Let this be our secret—and ours alone. I cannot take any risks, and much as I trust your chums they are schoolboys, and an unwary word from them might mean death for me."

"By Jove, you're right, sir," said Nipper. "I'll give you my word of honour."

"Good! That is all I need," said Lee briskly. "And now, see what you can do. By the way, you had better start

your holiday just as though nothing had happened. Urge the others to go off on their holidays, too."

"That'll look callous, guv'nor," protested Nipper. "If I'm to keep mum about your being alive, I shall have to pretend to be unhappy——"

"Nothing of the sort," interrupted Lee. "Even before you met me you were assured that I was alive. You told me so yourself. All you have to do is to express an absolute confidence in my ability to look after myself," he added dryly. "Tell the others you are convinced that everything is all right. You know how to put it—I leave it to you. As for myself, I shall disappear in earnest, and I can assure you that I shall spend a happy Christmas, for I shall be hard at work!"

CHAPTER 11.

Off to Travis Dene!

"**B**UT look here, Handy——"

"Rats!"

"You've got to go home as you planned——"

"I don't care!" said Handforth obstinately. "Do you think I'm going to leave poor old Nipper in the cart? He needs me."

"Needs you?" gasped Church.

"Yes; to help him in this investigation."

"You hopeless idiot!" roared McClure. "If you stop here you won't help him—you'll hinder him! Besides, didn't you write to your people last night telling them that you had invited Mr. Potts? We're all expected during the evening, and everything will be prepared——"

"Can't be helped," broke in Handforth stubbornly. "I'm not going to leave Nipper in the lurch—and that's my last word! You callous rotters! Here's poor old Mr. Lee murdered, and Chinese crooks dodging all over the place, and——"

He broke off, for at that moment Nipper had appeared in the Triangle. It was practically dinner-time now, and Tregellis-West and Jimmy Potts and Travers and many of the other fellows were standing about, uncertain what to do. Nipper's sudden appearance attracted general attention, for a great change had come over Nipper.

Everybody had left him to himself because it was felt that he desired solitude. Which was quite true! Nipper had fulfilled all those commissions very successfully for Nelson Lee, and he was now

satisfied that his guv'nor would have no difficulty in getting away safely from the district.

"I've been thinking, you chaps," said Nipper briskly as he came up. "I was an ass this morning—a fathead—a double-dyed lunatic!"

The juniors stared in wonder.

"I say, have you had any good news?" asked Tommy Watson eagerly. "You're so different——"

"That's because I've come to my senses," replied Nipper. "I've got a hunch that my guv'nor is alive and well."

"Great Scott!"

"I can't tell you how, or why, but I just know that everything's all right," continued Nipper, with quiet conviction. "It seems to me that he must have fooled those crooks somehow, and he's lying low for reasons of his own. That's how I look at it, anyhow. That's what I'm going to think—that's what I'm going to din into myself. It's just craziness to stop here and worry. We're starting for Tregellis Castle as planned, Montie, and I mean to enjoy myself over Christmas, too."

The others thought they understood. They admired Nipper. He was doing this for their sake—so that their vacation should not be spoilt. Many of them felt that he was tragically fooling himself, but they preferred to see him this way. It was better than his mooning about in abject misery.

"By George!" said Handforth, with some indignation. "Then you don't want me to stay here to investigate?"

"Why spoil your holidays, old man?" asked Nipper. "I'm not staying—so why should you?"

"Well, of course, if you're going off, I'll go off, too," said Handforth promptly.

"I don't know whether I shall be able to come, Handy," said Jimmy Potts. "My uncle may be compelled to remain——"

"I don't see why," said Nipper. "He's given the police all the information he can, and the police will know where he's going, so they can get in touch with him if necessary. Why should he have to stay here? He might just as well go to Travis Dene as go back to his hotel in London."

"That's true," said Jimmy, his eyes lighting up. "I say, this is ripping! I'd better go and tell him."

Everybody was catching Nipper's faith. They felt, in their hearts, that it was a misplaced faith; but, after all, their affection for Nelson Lee was not like that of Nipper. It was far better, on the whole, that they should all go off home for the holidays, as planned.

Mr. Potts was agreeable; in fact, he was relieved. He learned from Inspector Jameson that it was not essential that he should remain.

"All the better for you to go, sir," said the inspector gruffly. "If these mysterious enemies are after you, this part of the country is the last place where you should be. They won't take any action by daylight; they're not that sort. By going to Suffolk, with these boys, you'll probably give your enemies the slip."

"By golly! That hadn't occurred to me," said the big man, with sudden eagerness. "You're right, inspector! I left word at my London hotel where I was going, so those devils could easily have traced me. But nobody need know my destination this time—none of the school servants, I mean, so they can't answer any inquiries, or talk. Yes, it might be the best thing of all for me to bury myself in the heart of the country."

Nipper had thought of this, too, and apparently so had Nelson Lee.

Thus, that afternoon, amid the general exodus of boys, Handforth started off with his party for Travis Dene; Nipper went with Tregellis-West's crowd to Tregellis Castle; and the young Duke of Somerton took his own party to Somerton Abbey. It was the parting of the ways, but all these chums of St. Frank's were to be re-united sooner than they expected!

IT was not a particularly arduous journey to Travis Dene.

The afternoon was fine, and the roads were in good condition. There was still a very high wind, but this did not hinder motoring. Handforth drove his own Morris Minor, and he accommodated not only Church and McClure, but Irene Manners, too. He had had the idea of turning out Church and McClure, so that his sister, Ena, and Phyllis Palmer and Molly Stapleton could be accommodated, too. But these other girls preferred to ride in Uncle Ben's luxurious limousine.

The limousine had a pretty full load, with Uncle Ben himself, Jimmy, Travers, and the rest. But it was a seven-seater car, and it could accommodate ten with ease—to say nothing of heaps of luggage outside.

The journey through London was the most trying part of the trip—for, in order to get to Bury St. Edmunds, in Suffolk, it was necessary to traverse London from one side to the other.

However, Handforth led the way—he knew the route by heart—and the evening was crisp and clear by the time London

had been left behind and the cars were passing through Romford. Then came Brentwood and Chelmsford. Here it was necessary to turn, and the road through Braintree, Halstead, and Sudbury was taken. Soon after passing through the old-time village of Long Melford, Handforth branched off, and the way led through wandering, straggling country lanes until the village of Great Travis was reached.

At last they turned into a private drive, and there was Travis Dene standing out boldly—a fine old Tudor mansion, partially surrounded by stately trees, and with lawns and private gardens on all sides.

The great main door of the mansion was flung wide open as the cars drew to a standstill. But Edward Oswald Handforth's vision of brilliant lights and colourful decorations was not fulfilled. There was certainly a great log fire burning in the vast hall, but the other lights were meagre.

"By George! What's wrong?" asked Handforth, as he climbed out of the driving-seat and stared into the open doorway. "Where are all the lights? What the dickens—— Hallo! Who's this?"

He stared blankly. A man who was evidently a butler was standing by the open door. He was respectful enough, but the set of his countenance was—in Handforth's own words—sinister. He had great, bushy eyebrows, and his shoulders were slightly hunched.

"I am Rutley, sir," said the man quietly. "I am Sir Edward's new butler."

"Well, I'm jiggered," said Handforth. "How long have you been here? I didn't know anything about it."

"The master doubtless thought it unnecessary to write you on the matter, sir," said Rutley smoothly. "The master has been very occupied during the past two weeks——"

"So you've been here two weeks?" interrupted Handforth. "And I didn't know anything about it! That's a bit thick!"

The other guests were now crowding in, and Handforth was not allowed to have any further conversation with the new butler—to whom he had taken an instant dislike.

And outside, in the darkness bordering the drive, a watcher stood—a man who took note of the fact that Mr. Benjamin Potts and his nephew had safely arrived. As the great door closed, the silent

watcher turned and slipped away like a shadow of the night.

CHAPTER 12.

The Prowler in the Night!

"WELL, well! This is indeed a great pleasure!"

Sir Edward Handforth, bluff and hearty, was welcoming his guests. Lady Handforth was there, too, sweet and charming. There was a babel of voices in the great hall as the boys and girls greeted their host and hostess. Handforth himself stood by, grinning happily, with an air of proprietorship.

"And you, sir!" said Sir Edward, as he heartily wrung Mr. Potts' hand. "I am honoured that you have accepted my son's invitation to spend Christmas under this rural roof. I can assure you that I endorse my son's invitation with the utmost heartiness."

"Which leaves me almost at a loss for words, Sir Edward," said Uncle Ben. "By golly, but I must confess that I've felt very much like an intruder until this minute. My young nephew was invited, but——"

"Pooh!! You are the uncle of one of my son's friends—and therefore we are overjoyed, sir, to have you as our guest," said Sir Edward. "Come! I dare say you would like to go straight up to your room, eh? I have put one apart for you and your nephew. That's how you'd like it, eh? You have a valet, I believe? Splendid!"

"I hesitated to bring Yen," remarked Uncle Ben. "I thought, maybe, his being a Chinaman, that you might have objections. But Yen is as faithful as a dog—he would lay down his life for me."

There was no mistaking the cordiality of Sir Edward's greeting, and Uncle Ben's doubts were dissipated. He felt at home already. He was mightily glad, now, that he had allowed himself to be persuaded. That adventure at St. Frank's, although so recent, seemed very far distant now.

"Just a minute, pater," said Handforth, as Sir Edward and Mr. Potts were going upstairs. "What's up here? What's the matter with all the lights? The place is as dismal as a grotto!"

"You may well ask!" said Sir Edward, with a sudden frown of indignation. "Infernal nuisance! From some unearthly cause, the electric light plant has failed. Not an hour ago—just when we had everything a regular blaze in readiness for your arrival. Upon my word, we all had to rush about finding candles and lamps."

"But can't something be done?"

"Not until to-morrow, I'm afraid," said Sir Edward. "The whole year round the plant works perfectly, and then it has to fizzle out to-night! But there you are—that's just the way things happen!"



An unseen figure watched the arrival of the St. Frank's Christmas party at Travis Dene—and then crept away like a shadow into the night.

The boys and girls were far too cheery to worry about the lack of light. At least, to begin with. They were all hungry and tired; and dinner by candlelight was, after all, something of a novelty. It was picturesque in the great old dining-hall of Travis Dene, sitting there in the dim light, with the flickering glow from the great fire.

Rutley, the butler, performed his duties with a smoothness which was commendable. Perhaps it was the feeble lighting, but more than once the boys and girls found themselves glancing curiously at that strange-looking man. There was something almost mysterious about him as he moved silently at their backs; his eyes seemed to glitter in the candlelight, and his mouth, slightly twisted, looked thin-lipped and cruel.

All this, coming on top of the strange disappearance of Nelson Lee, was hardly a good augury for the merriment of the Christmas festivities. After the keen edge had been removed from the guests' appetites, they felt an oppressive gloom descending upon them.

"I say, pater, where the dickens did you get that butler from?" complained Handforth, when he happened to catch his father alone, after dinner. "The beggar gives me the creeps."

"Nonsense," said Sir Edward, staring. "What do you mean? The fellow's all right. Does his duties perfectly. Never had a better butler."

"But he looks such a rummy bird."

"Upon my soul! Where do you get these ridiculous expressions from?" asked Sir Edward. "'Rummy bird,' indeed! Rutley came to me with the best of references, and if you don't like him, Edward, I can only say that your opinion does not weigh with me in the slightest."

"I never supposed it would," said Handforth bitterly. "But I'm pretty keen on these sort of things, pater. I don't like the look of that fellow. How do you know that his references were genuine? He looks like a crook to me. I shouldn't be surprised if he's after the family silver!"

"Stuff and nonsense!" snorted Sir Edward. "How can you make such preposterous suggestions, you young idiot? Just because Rutley is a stranger, you get these fantastic ideas into your head. It's the light, too—I'll admit he looks rather forbidding in this feeble light. Confound the plant!"

The gloom cast such a dismal spell over everybody that it was generally agreed that an "early to bed and early to rise" policy

would be for the best. Soon after ten o'clock all the boys and girls went up to their rooms.

Handforth couldn't sleep. He was rather disgusted with Church and McClure because they had rolled into their beds and had dropped off within five minutes. There was nothing wrong with the hot-water plant at Travis Dene, and the radiators were working perfectly, and all the bed-rooms were gratefully warm.

Handforth had yawned twice, and he was listening to the rattling of the wind outside the casement, when he heard the creak of a board outside, in the corridor. There was nothing peculiar in this—probably somebody passing—but Handforth was in the mood for mysteries. He could not get the thoughts of that butler out of his head, either.

"By George!" he muttered, sitting up. "I wonder if it's that fellow prowling about?"

He wondered, too—subconsciously—about Uncle Ben. He had not forgotten that exciting adventure in Bellton lane. Supposing Uncle Ben's enemies had discovered that he had come here? Supposing—

Handforth slipped out of bed, opened the door, and peered into the corridor. All was dark. Distinctly, he heard the creak of a stair, and a queer little tingle ran up and down his spine.

That the whole household had gone to bed was evidenced by the fact that every light had been extinguished. Of course, in an old house like this, creaks and whispers were to be expected, but—

Handforth started. Was it his imagination, or could he hear, from somewhere downstairs, a soft, mysterious, sibilant whispering? Was there somebody prowling about in the hall?

He padded along to the great landing and peered over the balustrade. Everything was quiet. The great log fire had burned down, and now only a few embers were redly glowing, casting a strange, unreal radiance over the hall.

"Anybody there?" asked Handforth, in a low voice.

There was no reply, but he thought he heard a quick, slithering footstep.

"By George!" he breathed.

He ran downstairs—and as he reached the bottom he half checked, thinking that he saw a black, grotesque figure looming out of the darkness.

Something crashed heavily on the back of his head—and he went down on his knees and rolled over without even a groan.

CHAPTER 13.

Whispers of Mystery!

WHEN Handforth opened his eyes he was aware of a dull, grinding ache in his head. He was lying perfectly still, and complete and utter blackness surrounded him. It was some moments before he could remember. And then, with a sudden shock, he recalled what had happened.

He had heard a sort of slithering sound in the hall, he had crept downstairs, and then—After that he couldn't remember at all clearly. Yes, something had struck him on the head; he recalled the blinding, dazzling light which had momentarily appeared in front of his eyes. Then had come blankness.

He lay still, hardly daring to move. Where was he now? Not in the hall, or the glow of the fire would have showed itself. He was warm; there was something covering him—blankets. And then he heard breathing; slow, regular, steady breathing.

What had happened to him?

With a sudden movement he sat up, and his action set him rocking up and down as though on springs. For the first few seconds he was bewildered, and then, with a rush of relief, he realised that he was on a bed of some sort.

"My only sainted aunt!" he gurgled.

A thought had come to him. He twisted round, and—yes—there was a pillow. He dived his hand under the pillow, and his fingers gripped an electric torch. He switched it on, and gasped.

He was in his own bed—and the regular breathing was coming from Church and McClure.

"Great Scott!" he yelled.

Church stirred, for the beam from the torch was playing fully upon his face. He opened his eyes and gave a little yelp.

"What's that?" he gasped, bewildered by sleep. "Who—who is it?"

"All right—only me," said Handforth. "I say—"

"You gibbering idiot!" ejaculated Church. "You gave me a scare! What the dickens do you mean by flashing that light on me like that?"

McClure sat up grumpily.

"Aren't you fatheads ever going to sleep?" he complained. "Who's that monkeying about with a torch?"

"I—I don't understand," muttered Handforth, bewildered. "Look here, you chaps, this is impossible!"

"What's impossible?"

"My being in bed," said Handforth. "After you had gone to sleep I thought I heard a sound in the corridor. I crept downstairs, and somebody coshed me on the back of the head. And—and when I came to my senses I found myself in bed again!"

"My poor child, you've been dreaming," said Church sympathetically. "You've had a nightmare. Go to sleep again, and dream of something more pleasant, for goodness' sake!"

"My only topper!" muttered Handforth. "I wonder if it was a dream? But I could swear—Ow!"

He broke off with a sudden exclamation of agony.

"What's up now?" asked Mac wearily.

"It wasn't a dream—it couldn't have been a dream!" exclaimed Handforth. "There's a bump on the back of my head as big as a turkey's egg! I *was* coshed! Whoever did it must have carried me upstairs and put me in bed."

"Oh, cheese it!" protested Church. "Chaps do all sorts of funny things in nightmares. You must have jerked backwards in your sleep, and crashed your head against the bedpost, or something. That's what woke you up."

It was such a sensible suggestion that even Handforth almost accepted it. It was certainly possible for him to have banged his head in that way. Yet the doubt remained. Had it been a dream—or had there really been a mysterious night prowler down in the great hall?

But Edward Oswald Handforth had not been dreaming.

There were other strange things happening in this old house to-night.

Jimmy Potts had been very pleased to find that he had been put in a bed-room with his uncle. He felt, too, that if anything happened to Mr. Potts, he would be on the spot. It was a comfortable bed-room—one of the best guest-rooms in the old mansion, and ordinarily it would have been brilliantly lighted. But now there were only candles.

There were two beds side by side, separated only by a short space.

"Mighty nice of your friend's parents to have me like this," commented Uncle Ben, after he had undressed, and got into bed. "My! It's many a long year since I spent a night in a real old English country home! It feels grand, Jimmy, I can tell ye! It's a long cry from here to the interior of China!"

"I wish it wasn't quite so gloomy, uncle," said Jimmy, with a little shiver.

"Gloomy!" laughed Uncle Ben. "By golly, boy, you don't know what gloom is! Out in China—— But I won't tell you now—it might upset your nerves. Get ye to sleep, lad; you're becoming fanciful. It's only tiredness."

"Is Yen outside the door, uncle?" asked Jimmy suddenly.

"Gracious, lad, no!" said Mr. Potts, with a laugh. "There's no danger here. Get all such ideas out of your silly young head. No harm can come to me in this quiet, delightful old place. Let Yen have his sleep, like an honest man. I'll warrant the poor fellow is dead tired."

He put out the candle, and the room was plunged into darkness. He bade Jimmy good-night, and when Uncle Ben said "good-night" he meant it. Within a couple of minutes he was sleeping serenely, breathing with the slightest of snores. It was, Jimmy thought, a comforting sound. He tried to sleep himself but, like Handforth, his brain was too active. Uncle Ben had been right—he was over-tired.

Suddenly he lifted his head from the pillow. What was that peculiar sound? Surely he was only imagining—— It came again, and this time Jimmy sat bolt upright, every fibre of his being quivering.

Whispers—queer, eerie whispers! It seemed to the startled boy that they were sounding in every corner of the room—they surrounded him. Whispering voices, clearly audible—and yet uttering no intelligible word!

"Uncle—uncle!" shouted Jimmy urgently. The man from China stirred, and his bed creaked.

"Hey? What's that?" he asked sleepily. "Well, upon my word! Aren't you asleep yet, lad?"

"Listen, uncle," urged Jimmy. "There's—there's something funny going on! Whispers!"

"What's that? Whispers?" asked the startled man. "Ye're dreaming, lad! There are no whispers."

They both remained silent, and the whispers recommenced, softly, insidiously, increasing in volume. Jimmy found it difficult to prevent himself from shouting aloud.

"There! Do you hear them?" he murmured.

"I hear nothing," growled Uncle Ben impatiently.

"But, uncle! I can swear——"

Jimmy paused. Was he going mad? Only he could hear those whispers! What could it mean? They were filling the room now.

"Listen!" he said hoarsely. "Can't you hear them?"

Uncle Ben struck a match and held it aloft. Jimmy's startled eyes expected to see the room peopled with hideous creatures of some sort—he knew not what. But the room was empty, save for himself and his uncle. The big man, his face full of kindly concern, was looking at Jimmy.

"There, lad, ye see!" he said gently. "There's nothing! Did ye ever suffer with nerves before?"

Sir Jimmy passed a hand over his brow.

"I—I can't understand it!" he muttered. "I could have sworn—— But no. It must have been imagination. I'm dreadfully sorry, uncle."

"Maybe I'd best leave the candle alight," said Uncle Ben, applying the nearly-spent match to the candle. "Get ye to sleep, Jimmy, and I'll keep awake for a bit. There's nothing amiss. It was just your fancy."

The light brought relief to the half-frightened boy. He said no more—he felt rather ashamed. He saw that Uncle Ben had lighted a cigar, and he felt comforted. Soon he dropped off into a peaceful slumber.

He did not know what time it was when he suddenly awoke with a start. The candle was out, and he could hear his uncle's steady breathing. Moonbeams were streaming through the window.

A curious feeling assailed Jimmy; he was filled with a sense of impending dread. Then, to his startled ears, came a whisper—and at the same moment the boy stiffened with terror. Silhouetted on the wall was a shadow—the shadow of a Chinaman, with long, bony fingers.

Again Jimmy heard a whisper—from behind him. He jerked his head round. There, by the side of his bed, bending menacingly over him, was a hideous yellow face; and two hands, with long, talon-like nails, were reaching for his throat!

CHAPTER 14.

The Haunted Room!

A TERRIFIED scream escaped Jimmy Potts' lips—a wild, shrill scream, which echoed and re-echoed through the old-fashioned bed-room.

A gurgling grunt came from Uncle Ben, followed by a startled ejaculation. Jimmy, his eyes staring wildly, saw nothing. That yellow face had gone—it had vanished on the instant. But he knew, in his heart, that the dread figure was only just beyond—out of the range of the moonbeam.

A match scratched, a light flared. Jimmy stared about him fearfully, but the bed-room was empty save for himself and his uncle.

"Heaven save us, lad!" ejaculated Mr. Potts. "What ails ye?"

Jimmy tried to speak, but the muscles of his throat were helpless. No words came. His face was as pale as death, and his eyes were wild and staring.

"Poor lad—poor lad!" muttered Mr. Potts, in deep distress.

He lumbered heavily out of bed after lighting the candle. Bending over Jimmy, he caught the boy by the shoulder, and held him.

"There!" he said comfortingly. "A nightmare, eh?"

"No, no," whispered Jimmy, with a gulp. "I'll swear it wasn't a nightmare, uncle! I was awake—wide awake. I saw the moonlight on my bed, and I heard—I heard a

whisper. And when I looked round there was a vile yellow face near me. Yes, and hands, with claws——"

"Come, come," interrupted the other sharply. "This won't do! Pull yourself together, lad! Ye're talking nonsense."

"But, uncle, he's here—he's in the room now!" said the boy. "He must be—the window's still closed, and nobody has gone out through the door. He's under one of the beds, I expect—or in that big cupboard. A Chinaman——"

"There's no Chinaman," broke in Mr. Potts, his voice almost harsh in his anxiety. "The events of the past day or two must have been getting on your nerves——"

He broke off, for he could hear voices and footsteps out in the corridor. He guessed what those voices and footsteps meant. He went to the door, and flung it open.

Out there stood Handforth and Church and Travers and Gresham—and Sir Edward himself came bustling up. There was Yen, too—only half-dressed, but impassive in spite of his anxiety.

"Has ill befallen my master?" Yen was asking.

"Come in—all of you," said Mr. Potts. "The more light we can have, the better. I'm glad ye've all got candles. It's the boy—my nephew. The poor lad had a nightmare, I believe."

They all crowded in, and the bed-room suddenly became a blaze of light—for there were many candles.



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

MISSING!

Passer-by: "What is the horse-power of your car?"

Voice from under car: "Forty"

Passer-by: "What's wrong with it?"

Voice from under car: "As far as I can make out, thirty-nine of the horses have bolted, and the remaining one is too upset to answer questions!"

(A. Aust, 84, Hillmorton Road, Rugby, has been awarded a handsome watch.)

'EAR, 'EAR.

Juryman: "Sir, I desire to be excused from duty, as I can only hear with one ear."

Judge: "Oh, you'll do! We only hear one side of the case at a time."

(C. Headworth, 36, Cambridge Road, Mile End, London, E.1, has been awarded a penknife.)

NOTHING TO WORRY ABOUT.

The village doctor was taking a friend for a ride in his car.

"I say, look out!" cautioned the passenger. "You're doing over sixty miles an hour."

"Don't worry about that," chuckled the doctor. "I've got the village policeman in bed with rheumatism."

(B. Laws, 5a, Wellington Road, Stoke Newington, London, N.16, has been awarded a pocket wallet.)

FIGHTING FATHERS.

Willie: "Johnny Jones said his father could wipe up the floor with you."

Father: "You didn't let him get away with that, did you?"

Willie: "I should say not! I asked him to bring his father round to-morrow night to prove it."

(T. Clark, 156, Dundee Street, Edinburgh, has been awarded a penknife.)

HIS OWN FAULT.

Visitor: "Why are you in prison, my good man?"

Prisoner: "For driving a car too slowly."

Visitor: "You mean, too quickly?"

Prisoner: "No; I mean too slowly. The owner jumped into another car and caught me up."

(C. Fitch, Brook House Cottages, Tiptree, Essex, has been awarded a pocket wallet.)

"Your mother awoke me, Edward," said the host. "She said she heard a scream, but I confess I heard nothing."

"There was a scream, pater," said Handforth. "It woke me up—so it must have been pretty bad. I thought— Great Scott! Look at Jimmy!"

Jimmy Potts, sitting in bed, was still as pale as a sheet. Briefly, Mr. Potts explained all he knew. Meanwhile others were collecting out in the corridor—Irene Manners and Ena and even some of the servants.

"I heard—whispers," muttered Jimmy dully. "Uncle thought it was my imagination, but I knew I was right! The whole room was filled with whispers."

"Whispers!" said Handforth, with a start. "Great guns! That's rummy! When I was down in the hall I heard—"

"Now, Edward, don't confuse this unfortunate matter," said his father impatiently. "Come, come, my dear boy, this won't do," he added, bending over Jimmy Potts. "You could not have heard any whispers."

"I must have been asleep for hours," went on Jimmy hoarsely. "And then I suddenly woke up—there was a moonbeam across my bed. I heard a whisper behind me, I turned, and there was a terrible yellow face—"

"The lad's half out of his mind," interrupted Uncle Ben, in a worried voice. "Look, Jimmy lad! No intruder could have got out of this room without being seen. Take your candles, everybody, and search.

We must satisfy him. Look under the beds—look in the wardrobe—and the cupboard. Look everywhere."

"Yes, rather," said Church.

It was quickly done. There were so many of them that the search was over within a few seconds. Every inch of available space in that bed-room was searched—and there was certainly no yellow man with claw-like hands to be found.

"Ye see, lad?" asked Mr. Potts gently.

"I wasn't dreaming," insisted Jimmy, in a fierce voice. "Oh, I've had dreams—I've had nightmares! I know what they're like, uncle! But this was different—terribly different. This room must be haunted—it's the only possible explanation."

"I say, pater, I wonder if he's right?" asked Handforth eagerly.

"Don't talk arrant nonsense, Edward," snapped his father. "Of course he's not right! The idea! Travis Dene is not haunted!"

"But there is supposed to be a sort of family ghost," argued Handforth. "I mean —"

"We may have a family ghost, Edward—every county family boasts of one," said the host gruffly. "But I can assure you that our family ghost is not a yellow man with claws instead of hands! In any case, the whole idea is preposterous. It is quite obvious that the poor lad had a nightmare, and that he imagined the rest. He is unstrung, and I don't think we are doing him any good by

NOT REQUIRED.

A visitor to the coast narrowly escaped walking over a concealed precipice. Indignantly he approached a man who was working nearby.

"Do you know I nearly fell down that precipice?" he said angrily. "Why don't you have a warning notice put up?"

"Well, sir," replied the workman, "we did put up a board once, but nobody fell over, so we took it down."

(D. Ward, 49, Queen's Drive, Nottingham, has been awarded a penknife.)

HE FEARED NO FOE.

Fortune-teller: "A dark man stands in your path."

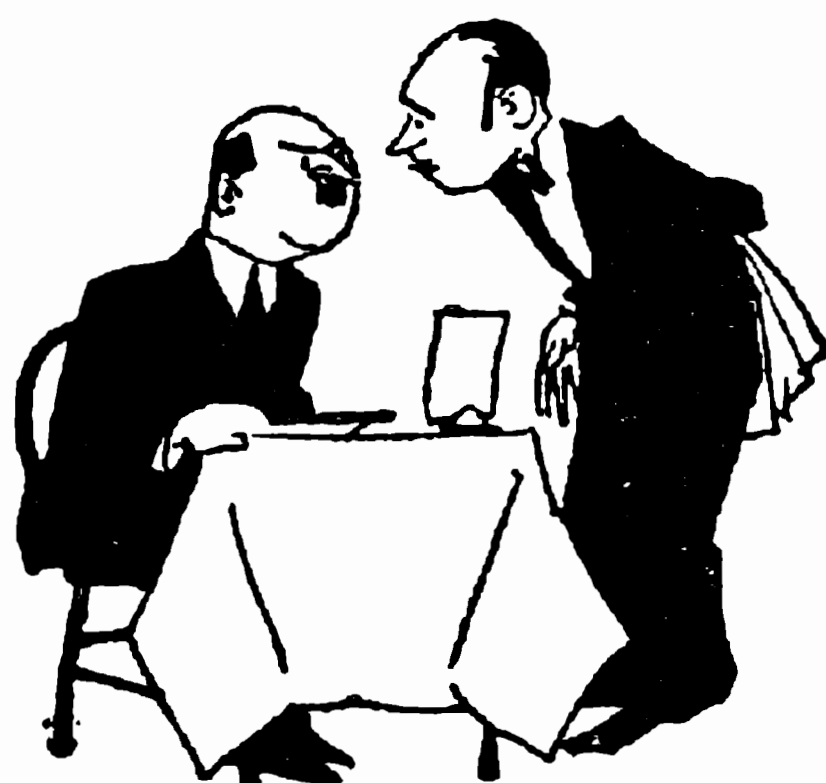
Client: "I'm sorry for him, then. I drive a steam-roller."

(L. Kline, 2, Carlton Avenue, Wembley, has been awarded a pocket wallet.)

WHAT A MEMORY.

The professor and his wife were returning from the theatre.

"Now, who's absent-minded?" he asked, triumphantly producing two umbrellas from under his coat. "You forgot your umbrella, but I remembered not only mine, but yours, too."



"Good gracious!" exclaimed his wife. "Neither of us took one!"

(Jean Neylon, Vista, Liverpool Road, Sydney, Australia, has been awarded a useful prize.)

TOMMY KNEW.

Teacher: "What is the first thing you would do if you lost a shilling and found it again?"

Tommy: "Stop looking for it, sir."

(S. Greenberg, 153, Romford Street, Whitechapel, London, E.1, has been awarded a pocket wallet.)

FLY.

Willie: "I want to buy some paper."

Shopkeeper: "What kind of paper do you want, sonny?"

Willie: "You'd better give me fly-paper. I want to make a kite."

(R. Walsh, 12, River Street, Casino, N.S.W., Australia, has been awarded a useful prize.)

IN THE SOUP.

Waiter: "It looks like rain, sir."

Diner (referring to soup): "Yes, and it tastes like petrol."

(E. Perrin, 38, Lyndhurst Road, Higham's Park, E.4, has been awarded a pocket wallet.)

crowding in here and talking. Far better for him to get to sleep again—and a light in the room will be all to the good."

Travers and Skeets—who were Jimmy's study mates at St. Frank's—were particularly concerned. They could see that Jimmy was in such a highly-strung condition that he was ready to jump at the slightest sound. They could not quite understand it. Sir Jimmy had always been such a strong-minded, healthy youngster. It wasn't at all like him to become terrified in this way. They felt, in their hearts, that his experience had been something greater than a mere nightmare.

As a special concession, they were allowed to remain in the bed-room. Uncle Ben did not mind in the least. Jimmy's was a big bed—a double bed—and there was ample room for Travers and Skeets. They tumbled in with Jimmy, and although Jimmy said nothing—he felt rather shamefaced about it—he was tremendously grateful.

To make doubly sure, Mr. Potts gave a nod to Yen—and Yen, instead of going back to bed, took up his position outside the door.

The rest of the night passed undisturbed.

CHAPTER 15.

Suspicious!

"WHY, Ted, it really is a big bump," said Irene Manners, with concern. "You poor thing!"

Handforth was gratified by this expression of sympathy.

"Well, I ought to know," he said. "That crack on the head was enough to knock me senseless."

"You didn't need a crack on the head, dear old fellow, to get into that condition," remarked Vivian Travers blandly.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The young guests at Travis Dene were taking the air on the wide terrace. In front of them stretched the green lawns, now covered with filmy frost. The sun was shining brilliantly this morning, and everybody was anxiously awaiting the welcome sound of the breakfast gong.

Jimmy Potts had not yet come down, but it was reported that he was getting dressed. The old place was looking charming in the full light of day; the gloom of the previous evening had been entirely dissipated.

The mysterious events of the night, which had seemed so real at the time, now seemed fantastic. Handforth had been entertaining the St. Frank's fellows and the Moor View girls with an account of his own adventure—and they had listened with polite, but incredulous smiles.

"You can laugh!" he said coldly. "But I ought to know! I tell you, Jimmy Potts did see something. There was somebody prowling about the house last night. I heard him myself, and I followed him downstairs. He whacked me on the head——"

"Rats!" interrupted Church. "Don't take any notice of him, you girls. He's just try-

ing to pull your legs. He had a bit of a nightmare, and he banged his own head against the bedpost."

"Do you think I'd give it a bang like this?" roared Handforth, indicating the bump on his head.

"There's no telling what you'd do," retorted Church. "You do rummy things at any time of the day, and in a nightmare you'd do even rummier."

"But I know it happened," yelled Handforth. "I distinctly remember going downstairs——"

He broke off, for at that moment Sir Jimmy had come out of doors. Uncle Ben, bluff and hearty and genial, was with him. If the big man from China had had a disturbed night, he showed no signs of it. But Jimmy was looking very pale and washed-out. He was still nervy and jumpy from the effects of his experience.

He had tried again and again to convince himself that everybody was right, that he had only experienced a particularly bad nightmare; but he knew, in his heart, that this was a false explanation. That ghastly adventure of his in the night had really happened.

A chorus of anxious inquiries greeted him, particularly from the girls, but he looked so uncomfortable that they stopped.

"Be good sports, and say nothing about it," urged Jimmy awkwardly. "If I tell you what I really think, you won't believe me—and it'll help matters a lot, anyhow, if we try to forget it all."

"Well spoken, lad," said the millionaire. "That's the spirit! Forget it! Ye'll be a different boy after a few hours."

Even in daylight Handforth did not like the look of Rutley, the butler. The fellow still had an aspect of "sinister evil," as Handforth expressed it. Even Church and McClure, when pressed, admitted to their leader that they were not exactly in love with Rutley's looks.

"There you are!" said Edward Oswald triumphantly. "What did I tell you? The fellow's a wrong 'un."

"But, dash it, he can't help his looks!" protested Church. "If your pater is satisfied with him, Handy, I don't see why you should get these dotty ideas."

"Dotty, are they?" retorted Handforth. "All right—you wait! I'm jolly certain that it was Rutley who was up to tricks last night."

"Oh, draw it mild!"

"Who else could it have been?" demanded Handforth.

"Well, it wasn't Rutley who coshed you on the head, I suppose?"

"Why not? Why shouldn't he cosh me on the head?"

"That's not the question," said McClure. "Why should he?"

"Because I'd followed him downstairs, and because he was afraid that I'd spot his game," said Handforth.

"And what was his game?"



A mysterious glowing figure appeared out of the darkness and leered upon Jimmy Potts and his uncle.

"How do I know? I never had a chance of finding out."

"I suppose you'll tell us that Jimmy Potts saw Rutley bending over his bed—in the moonlight?" asked Church, with a sniff. "Rutley—with a yellow face, and talon-like claws?"

"It's quite likely."

"What!"

"Of course it is," said Handforth firmly. "Jimmy only caught a brief glimpse of him—and any man's face looks a bit yellow in the moonlight."

"It doesn't—it looks green."

"Well, how do we know that the blighter wasn't wearing a mask, or something?" asked Handforth triumphantly. "And he could easily have fixed some false nails on his fingers. You're not going to tell me that Rutley is on the level. I'm going to watch him—and, what's more, I'm going to bowl him out! The fellow's up to mischief."

"Oh, my hat!" sighed McClure. "If you're going to tell us that Rutley is in some way connected with Mr. Potts' enemies——"

"I'd thought of that, too," growled Handforth. "But it seems that Rutley has been here for a couple of weeks. So that's impossible. No it isn't, by George!" he added,

as a sudden thought occurred to him. "I say, what an ass I am!"

"Only just found it out?" asked Church.

"Naturally, those Chinks daren't show themselves ordinarily," went on Handforth, deeply impressed by his sudden theory. "Don't you see? They knew that Uncle Ben was coming here——"

"How did they know?"

"I can't tell you that, but it's pretty certain that they did know," said Handforth impatiently. "They got here last night, and they got in touch with Rutley. They could tell that he was a crook. They bribed him. He's hand-in-glove with Mr. Potts' enemies, and when I surprised him downstairs last night, he was on his way to let them into the house."

Church and McClure gazed at their chum in amazement.

"My only sainted aunt!" ejaculated Church. "What an imagination you've got, Handy!"

"He's been reading thrillers, that's what's the matter with him!" grunted Mac.

"But it all fits!" urged Handforth. "Don't you see? Later on—after Rutley had carried me back to bed—he went downstairs again,

and he let in one of those Chinks. Then the Chink went to Jimmy's room."

"Of course!" broke in Church sarcastically. "Considering that these Chinks are after Mr. Potts, it's quite natural that they should scare Jimmy, and make him awaken the whole giddy household!"

But Handforth was not to be put off in this way.

"The room was dark, and the Chink made a bloomer," he said. "He went to the wrong bed—and Jimmy's yell spoilt his whole plan. That's why nothing happened to Mr. Potts during the night. Unless we want a repetition here of what took place at St. Frank's, we'd better keep watch to-night—and guard Jimmy's uncle."

"Rats and tosh!" said the Scottish junior. "Thank goodness there goes the breakfast gong! We've come here to enjoy ourselves, Handy—to have a jolly Christmas. So I hope you're not going to spoil everything by keeping up these dotty investigations of yours."

A hearty breakfast made them all feel better. Uncle Ben, in the circumstances, gave a few details of the danger which overshadowed him, but he was quite confident that the Mandarin's emissaries had not followed him to Travis Dene.

"If I had even thought such a thing possible, I would not have come—to bring trouble upon this peaceful household," he said. "Be quite certain, Sir Edward, that I am in no danger."

"I don't care if these infernal fellows do come," said Sir Edward stoutly. "Let them try it on, that's all! I'd welcome them, in fact—so that we could capture them, once and for all. Huh! I'm not averse to a little excitement!"

Lady Handforth had other views, but she did not express them. And during the day the sense of mystery completely evaporated, and long before luncheon everybody was in the highest of spirits. Jimmy himself was making a remarkable recovery.

During the day, however, Church and McClure gave a great deal of thought to Handforth's precious theory; and, in spite of themselves, they began wondering if there might not be something in it. Now and again—once in blue moon—he did happen upon a true solution. And his insistence that some mysterious unknown had "coshed" him at the bottom of the stairs was unflagging. Jimmy Potts, too, did not budge from his contention that the adventure in the bed-room had really happened.

So, with all the jollity and gaiety, there was also an undercurrent of uneasiness at Travis Dene.

CHAPTER 16.

The Night Attacker!

THERE was general satisfaction when it became known that the electric lighting had been restored.

Engineers had been at work, and they had discovered a serious fault in the

wiring, in the power-house. But everything was all right now. So, when the short winter's day came to an end, Travis Dene was turned into a blaze of light.

Every shadow in the old house was dispelled; from end to end Travis Dene was happy and gay. The great hall was a brilliant blaze, and all across the ceiling, and entwined amongst the banisters of the noble staircase, were gaily-coloured fairy lamps.

It was the same in the dining-hall, and in the drawing-room—and all along the downstairs corridors and the upstairs passages. The previous evening's gloom had been dis-

COMING NEXT WEDNESDAY!



pelled as though by a magician's wand. It was a house transformed.

"We're all right now," said Sir Edward, rubbing his hands with satisfaction. "Light! Give me light! If there's one thing I do detest, Mr. Potts, it is gloom. I like everyone in my house to be happy!"

"I'm glad of these lights, Sir Edward," said Uncle Ben. "I find there are several in the bed-room; we can keep them on so that the lad will have no return of his fears."

"Pooh! He's forgotten them already," said Sir Edward, laughing. "It was just the gloom of this old house that affected him—and I don't wonder. These old country mansions are fine, but I must confess that they are apt to be forbidding unless they are well illuminated. By the way, we shall

have to have some yarns in the library to-night, eh? I'm anxious to hear some of your experiences."

Everybody was gay that evening. Dinner was a great success. Even Rutley seemed far more human in these changed conditions.

But suddenly, in the midst of a humorous story, which Uncle Ben was telling with inimitable wit, the blow fell. Without warning, all those dazzling lights and festoons of fairy lamps snapped out, and the great dining-hall was plunged into blackness.

"Why, what—what—— Good heavens!" exploded Sir Edward furiously. "This is too bad! This is outrageous!"

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"Perhaps they'll come on again, dear?" suggested the hostess.

"I don't see how they can," replied Sir Edward. "We're not on the main. If the light fails, it fails. It means that there's something wrong in the power house. Those engineers must have bungled their job—By George!" he added suddenly. "I wonder if somebody has been tampering with that plant? I was suspicious yesterday, and now——"

"Somebody tampering!" muttered Handforth tensely. "Oh, my hat!"

It so happened that his own seat was near the door. He slipped out, and in a moment he was racing across the black, gloomy hall. He nearly collided with a couple of maid-servants, who were chattering excitedly.

Reaching the side door in safety, he tore it open.

Like the wind, he ran down a paved path, dodged round the angle of the west wing, and made a bee-line for the outbuildings. It was dark out here, and Handforth was not yet accustomed to the gloom.

He was getting near to the power house, when a black figure suddenly loomed up right ahead of him. There was no time to avoid a collision.

Crash!

They met heavily, and Handforth, gasping, heard a little grunt. He clutched, and his fingers caught hold of a man's sleeve.

"Really, Master Edward, you should be more careful," said a respectful voice.

"Rutley!" gasped Handforth.

"Yes, sir," said the butler. "I was just on my way to ascertain——"

"What are you doing out here?" demanded Handforth fiercely. "You rotter! I've bowled you out! I've caught you red-handed!"

"Really, sir——"

"Don't tell whoppers to me!" roared Handforth. "You were coming away from the power house—and you've just tampered with the juice, and you've cut it off! By George! You crook!"

"I beg your pardon, Master Edward, but I must urge you to control yourself," said Rutley, an unpleasant note creeping into his voice. "I resent these outrageous accusations. I was on the same errand as yourself—to ascertain the cause of the light failure."

"I don't believe you," snapped Handforth. "You were coming away from the power house."

"I beg your pardon, sir—I have not even been there," said the butler. "It occurred to me that somebody might be maliciously tampering with the plant, and I was anxious to be on the scene quickly. I am afraid that this delay has prevented us from making any discovery."

"Well, it sounds fishy to me," growled Handforth.

They stood silent—Handforth deeply suspicious, the butler nursing his injured dignity. And during that brief silence between them there was no other sound except for the sighing of the wind in the trees. The gale had dropped now, and there was only a cold northerly breeze.

Then it was that other sounds came—as dramatically mysterious as they were unexpected. Whispers! Uncanny, ghostly whispers!

"What's that?" asked Handforth, with a catch in his voice.

"I—I don't know, sir," faltered Rutley.

"You do! This is one of your tricks," hissed Handforth. "You can't deny it——"

But Rutley, with a muttered exclamation, had bolted. The man was clearly scared—unless he was cleverly acting, in order to deceive Handforth.

Handforth was startled by this sudden turn—and he was not a little dismayed to find

himself alone. But before he could hear the whispers again there came another sound. A sudden cry of fear from the paved path round the angle of the West Wing. Handforth recognised the voice of Jimmy Potts.

"Great guns!" gasped Handforth.

He forgot Rutley. He ran swiftly round the wing of the house. And abruptly he came upon two figures in the pathway. They were struggling desperately.

"Help—help!" came a gasp from Jimmy.

"I'm here!" roared Handforth.

Perhaps it was a blunder. He should not have shouted, thus giving away his presence. For one of the figures, black and mysterious, suddenly broke away. Jimmy Potts staggered, and would have fallen but for Handforth's protecting arm. With Jimmy in his grasp, Handforth was momentarily at a loss; it was impossible for him to chase the Unknown.

Others were coming now, running and shouting.

"Who was it, Potts?" asked Handforth urgently. "Was it Rutley who grabbed you?"

"No, no—not Rutley," muttered Jimmy. "He was a queer sort of figure—dressed all in black—even his hands were covered. I couldn't see his face properly, but—but I believe it was yellow! It was one of those Chinamen."

"Oh, my hat!"

"They're coming—the others," whispered Jimmy. "For goodness sake don't say anything—or your party will be ruined! Let the others think that it was just my imagination. They're used to thinking that, anyhow!" he added bitterly.

Handforth warmed towards him. He knew, at least, that there had been a sinister, mysterious figure. But because Jimmy Potts had no desire to spoil the party, he wanted to conceal the truth.

CHAPTER 17.

The Phantom of Travis!

"IT was nothing," said Jimmy Potts steadily.

The others were crowding round him, including his anxious uncle and Sir Edward.

"But somebody yelled out," said Travers.

"There was a bit of a mix-up," explained Jimmy. "Handforth was running to the power house, and he bumped into Rutley. I saw them, and— Well, you know how it is. But there's nothing to worry about."

"It's all because of those infernal lights!" roared Sir Edward. "If they hadn't failed, this could not have happened! No sooner do the lights go out than there are all these scares and alarms! Upon my word! I shall have something to say to those engineers."

So nobody except Handforth and Sir Jimmy knew of that Unknown—and it was too late, now, to attempt any chase.

"What happened, Jimmy?" asked Handforth, when they had a minute alone.

"I don't exactly know," replied the schoolboy baronet. "I followed you outside—my idea was to go to the power house, too—and I heard you shouting at Rutley, and then I was startled by hearing those rummy whispers again."

"I heard them, too," muttered Handforth.

"Thank goodness."

"Eh?"

"Well, it proves that I'm not going dotty!" said Sir Jimmy feelingly. "If you heard the whispers, too, it's certain they must have been real. I was standing on the path when that black figure suddenly jumped at me. I yelled and grappled, and—and— Well, you came along immediately afterwards."

"It's a jolly good thing I was near by," grunted Handforth. "If I hadn't been, that—that Thing would have carried you off. I tell you, Jimmy, I don't like the look of things at all."

"Nor do I," said Jimmy Potts. "But we're certain of one thing, Handy—the others won't believe us, and it's no good trying to convince them."

"But we will convince them," retorted Handforth firmly.

The rest of that evening passed miserably. Many of the servants tried their hand at restoring the electric light, but they failed. There seemed no doubt that some unknown person had deliberately tampered with the plant.

Sir Edward was morose and irritable. The boys, for the most part, felt depressed, and the girls succumbed to the same atmosphere, although they tried hard to liven things up in the drawing-room.

Many candles were burning, and there was some piano-playing and dancing; Sir Edward's big radio was turned on. But it was impossible to restore fully the spirits of the disappointed Christmas party.

The one consolation was that it was not yet really Christmas-time. Later, of course, there would be lots of other guests—for Sir Edward was aiming at having a really big, boisterous Yuletide party. These boys and girls were the advance guard.

By Christmas, no doubt, everything would be quite all right; Sir Edward vowed that he would make absolutely certain of the electric light on the morrow.

For to-night, the gloom remained, however. And, as on the previous evening, everybody voted for going to bed early. Bed was the best place in such circumstances as these.

Travers and Skeets suggested sleeping with Jimmy again, but he would not hear of it; and even Uncle Ben laughed at the suggestion.

"It's good of ye, boys, but don't worry," he said, in his bluff way. "Jimmy will be all right. I'll keep the candle burning—and I'll take care to remain awake until he is soundly asleep. There's not likely to be a repetition of last night's—er—adventure, anyhow."

Uncle Ben, unknown to the others, had a word with Yen. And Yen, instead of going to bed, took up his vigil in the corridor. Jimmy was the only one that Mr. Potts took into his confidence.

"I thought it would comfort ye, lad," he said kindly. "Yen never sleeps—at least, if he does sleep, he always keeps one eye open. I've told him that if he hears the slightest sound from within this room, he is to give the alarm—and then come in. By golly! It'll take a clever trickster to get past Yen!"

"I'm glad he's out there, uncle," said Jimmy quietly.

He went to sleep peacefully to-night. He was tired out, and that helped a lot.

It seemed to him that he had been asleep for endless hours when, for some reason, he awoke. The bed-room was in total darkness. Not even a stray moonbeam filtered through the window. In the air there was a peculiar odour; Jimmy recognised it as the smell from a snuffed candle. He jumped out of bed.

"Uncle!" he whispered, striving to calm his uneasiness.

"Eh? What's that?" came a sleepy voice, accompanied by a sound of movement.

"It's only me, uncle," breathed Jimmy. "I woke up for some reason—the candle going out, I expect. I thought you told me that you were going to keep it alight?"

"I can't understand it," said Uncle Ben anxiously. "It was almost a new candle, so it couldn't have burnt out of its own accord. I didn't put it out, lad. Here, I'll—What's this? Who's taken the matches? There seems to be some funny trickery going on—"

"Oh, uncle—look!" whispered Jimmy, a choking sound in his voice.

In a second Mr. Potts was out of bed. He reached Jimmy, groping for him in the dark. And thus, together, they saw the Figure. Weirdly, mysteriously, it had appeared in a farther corner of the room. It was a wraith-like figure of a Chinaman, visible in spite of the utter darkness. It appeared to exude a kind of unearthly halo—and from it came soft, menacing whispers.

"Steady, lad," muttered Mr. Potts.

"Can—can you see it, uncle?" asked Jimmy.

"Yes—yes—I can see it," said Uncle Ben. "Good heavens! Are we both going mad? A ghost, Jimmy! As I live, it's a ghost!"

"Help!" screamed Jimmy wildly.

His uncle clutched him, and at the same second the uncanny figure faded into blackness. Mr. Potts dashed across the bed-room; the door burst open. Yen was there.

"Master!" he exclaimed. "There is trouble?"

Mr. Potts spoke rapidly to him in Chinese, and Yen instantly flashed on a powerful electric torch. But there was nothing in that room to account for the dread apparition.

A footstep sounded outside. Uncle Ben turned. In the doorway was Rutley, half-dressed, dishevelled, more sinister-looking than ever.

"I heard something, sir," said the butler. "Has anything happened?"

"Perhaps you know if something has happened!" retorted Mr. Potts sharply. "How is it that you came to be on the scene so quickly, my friend?"

"By George! That's just what I was wondering!" came Handforth's excited voice. "What's happening in here, Mr. Potts?"

"We don't know," said Uncle Ben grimly. "Yen, you were outside the door, yes? You saw nobody—you heard nothing?"

"Excellency, no living soul passed me," replied Yen.

"Well, we can't waste time now," said Mr. Potts, giving Rutley a quick glance—almost a suspicious glance. "We must think of the boy."

They found Jimmy Potts unconscious in a dead faint.

"I AM not absolutely sure that I did really see anything," said Mr. Potts quietly. "Remember, I was only half awake. Jimmy was terrified. He told me he could see something. It all seems so unreal now. I am not an imaginative man—"

"I can believe it, Mr. Potts," said Sir Edward gruffly. "I am absolutely certain that there is no ghost at Travis Dene. The boy was frightened again—and you, being in a receptive mood, fancied that you saw something. It is very easy. A moonbeam, perhaps. I am intensely distressed that this should have happened."

They were down in the library. Upstairs, Lady Handforth was with Jimmy—and also the family doctor, who had come immediately after a frantic telephone call from Sir Edward.

"Well, Wallace?" asked Sir Edward, when the doctor appeared in the library.

"The unfortunate boy is half mad with terror," said Dr. Wallace gravely. "It is my opinion that he should be taken away from Travis Dene immediately. If he

(Concluded on page 44.)



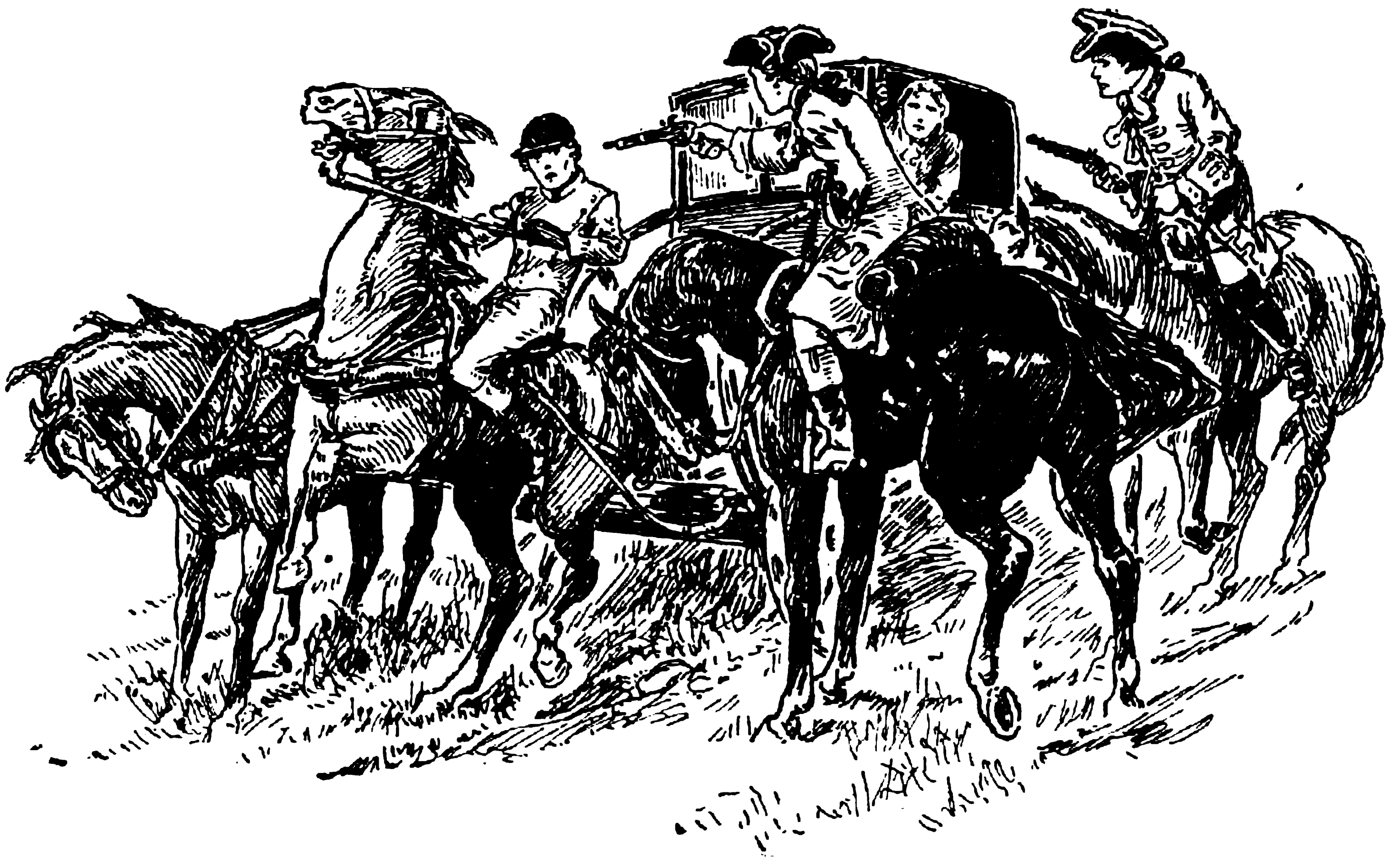
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Outlawed!



A stirring serial of old-time romance and adventure.

By *DAVID GOODWIN*

The End of a Perfect Day!

PISTOL in hand, Hector Forrester faced Dick. His face was working with the fury that consumed him; his finger trembled on the trigger. The young outlaw was very near to death at that moment—and he himself was powerless to prevent it.

Before Hector could pull the trigger, however, an ample figure rushed up and knocked his arm aside. The pistol crashed, but the ball lodged itself harmlessly in the ceiling. Hector found himself looking into the furious face of Janet, the fat cook.

"You knave!" she shrilled. "Would'st try to kill Master Dick, the finest gentleman breathing? Pity's the day when he left Fernhall—forced out by a base scallywag like yourself. Take that!"

And her fat fists lashed out, playing a tattoo upon Hector's livid face. Dick, calm in spite of the narrowness of his escape from death, strode forward.

"Hold, Janet!" he commanded. "Well my rascally cousin deserves it, but he has suffered enough for one day, I think. I am indeed obliged to you, good lady. Your quickness undoubtedly saved my life, for which please accept my heartfelt gratitude. Cousin Hector, you have more pluck than I gave you credit for. But no doubt the thought of the gold you are about to lose influenced you. I can think of no other reason to inspire bravery in your craven soul."

Then, just as though nothing had happened, the young outlaw returned to the table whereon were laid out the piles of gold, and again faced the servants, who had attended him when he was squire of Fernhall.

"It is the custom of Fernhall," he said, "to allow all faithful servants a pension. I think it doubtful, if I extracted a promise from my Cousin Hector to pay, whether you would ever get your monthly doles. Therefore, let each of you over the age of forty take one hundred

and fifty guineas in gold, and each under that age fifty-guineas—the reason being that the young may fight their way, but the old need succour.”

The old servitors came forward one by one, many with tears in their eyes, for their young master of the good times that were gone, outlaw and highwayman though he might be, was more than gold to them.

Each took his dole of the gold with heartfelt gratitude, and Hector Forrester stood and watched with a face such as a fiend might wear. No part of the hard lesson he had learned that night—the defeat and humiliation—touched him so deeply as did the loss of his gold. Wealthy though he was, it tore his very heartstrings.

Dick threw open the window as the last of the gold was being divided, and whistled loud and long. Soon came the answering beat of hoofs, and Black Satan and Bess came out of the wood, and cantered up to the house.

“Are you all paid?” said Dick, as the servitors showered blessings on him. “That is well!”

“Three cheers for the rightful heir!” cried a voice. And they gave him three times three, whereupon Dick bade them leave, for their claim upon Fernhall was cleared.

“All this giving away is mighty fine,” said Turpin; “and now, methinks, the time is come to help ourselves—eh, Dick?”

“Sling a couple of bags across your saddle, and we’ll ride!” said Dick, stepping through the open window on to the gravel, and standing to Satan’s stirrup. “Good-night to you, cousin!”

“We shall meet again!” said Hector between his teeth.

Dick turned in the saddle as he mounted, and looked him in the eyes.

“We shall,” he said quietly, “and in a different fashion; but the day is not yet ripe. When that day comes, Heaven help you, Hector!”

And the two highwaymen cantered away into the night, leaving Hector Forrester biting his nails at the porch of Fernhall.

“Zounds!” exclaimed Dick, pulling up

suddenly. “Out on me for a blockhead! I have forgotten my sword!”

“What sword, man?” asked Turpin.

“My old rapier—the chief reason I came back to Fernhall for. The sport we had put it out of my head. Trot on, comrade, and I will overtake you in a while.”

“Dick,” cried his companion, “do not go back now! ’Tis unsafe! The Riders——”

But Dick was already galloping back like the wind, and Turpin, protesting vainly, turned and trotted after him. At first he intended riding to Fernhall with Dick, but on second thoughts he rode up a steep knoll, when he could see the roads. He looked southward anxiously, and presently made out a loose troop of horsemen riding hard along the main highway; but hardly had he spied them when the thud of Black Satan’s hoofs broke the silence again, and Dick arrived at a gallop.

“I have it safe!” he cried, touching the handsome James II. rapier at his side. “I’ve left the other driven through the slack of Hector’s breeches, which is the fitting place for him to wear a sword.”

“Spur forward,” said Turpin. “We must ride hard. The Riders are coming up the main road.”

“As I guessed they would be. Fernhall was humming like a beehive. Ho, ho! Hector little thought to see me back again.”

“Why didn’t you stick the sword through his plaguey hide?” growled Turpin.

“Nay; I have not yet paid off in full my score with Hector. Turpin Fernhall shall be mine again, in spite of all England! I begin to see my way, and I’ll beat this miserly cur before they hang me! The time will soon ripen, and there’s hot work coming. We’ve shaken yonder dunderheads off the trail, Turpin. Let us breathe the horses”

“Nay. Turn through the woods here, and double down the other side,” said the elder highwayman. “The Riders are growing too sharp for my liking. We’ll give them no openings. Yonder is the Beccles Road. We can go easier there.”

HOW THE STORY BEGAN

DICK FORRESTER, formerly a young highwayman, has been deprived of his fortune and estate at Fernhall by the trickery of

HECTOR FORRESTER. This is only the beginning of Dick’s troubles, for he next falls foul of

CAPTAIN SWEENEY, the notorious leader of a gang of footpads, and is also wanted by the King’s Riders for assisting his former comrade of the road,

RICHARD TURPIN, the famous highwayman, to escape capture. Dick is forced to become an outlaw, and he and Turpin ride off together. They are pursued by Riders, but make their escape after a fierce fight. Turpin goes off on a mission, arranging to meet Dick three days later. Sweeney makes numerous attempts on Dick’s life, but every time the young outlaw eludes him. The two comrades come together again and, learning that Hector is disgracing the name of Forrester by his meanness and tyranny, they travel to Fernhall, where Dick teaches his rascally cousin a well-deserved lesson. Then, just as Dick is about to distribute money among his faithful servants, Hector seizes a pistol and points it at the young outlaw.

(Now read on.)

A Lucky Meeting!

THE two comrades gained the roadway, and having put a very wide stretch of country between them and the Riders, breathed their horses at a walk.

"We are close upon Huntercombe," said Dick presently. "I wonder—Hullo! What's yonder? Not our enemies, surely?"

The sound of hoofs and shoutings broke the silence. Cantering a little farther down the road, the two highwaymen then halted and peered ahead.

"Nay. 'Tis some roadside fracas," said Turpin carelessly. "No affair of ours, Dick. However, let's ride on and see."

They came clear of the hedgerows to the open part of the road, where it crossed a common, and there they saw a single horseman beset by three or four men on foot, and laying about him lustily with a hunting-crop.

"Get to the nag's head, Mat!" cried a hoarse voice. "Pull the whelp down!"

"By the rood, here's ugly odds!" cried Dick, spurring forward. "Come, Turpin, let's make the game fairer. Four to one, and he but a youngster!"

Dick charged into the fray, and sent a couple of the rascals flying—one knocked head over heels with a blow from a pistol, and the other ridden down by Satan. Furious oaths broke from the other two, but as they turned to flee Turpin galloped up, and he, not caring to draw a pistol, pricked one of them with his sword in such wise that the ruffian rushed off, screaming like a joybird.

"I am vastly beholden to you, gentlemen!" cried the horseman, in a clear, boyish voice. "You came very——"

"'Od so!" cried Dick. "Ralph!"

"Dick! Heaven and earth, is it you?"

The brothers gripped hands in delighted amazement.

"Why, young cock o' the woods," exclaimed Turpin, "we meet again, then! You have the family knack of getting into scrapes, pink me!"

"How did it happen, Ralph?" said Dick wonderingly. "Who were those knaves?"

"Faith, I don't know, but I suspect they've something to do with Hector. This is the second time I've been attacked. I was riding home to Huntercombe when they sprang up from the furze and set upon me. One had a knife, and the others bludgeons. But that my nag was so scared, and reared and kicked like a young stallion, they'd have made short work of me. I know one of them belonged to Hector's household."

"Zounds," said Dick, smiting his thigh, "I was a fool not to think of this. I should have taken better care of you, Ralph boy. Hector cannot upset your right to Huntercombe, and I thought you would be safe

there. But I had forgotten that if you died he is next-of-kin and would succeed to the property, now that I am outlawed. The base knave! He seeks to join Huntercombe to Fernhall, and rule all the Forrester estates, and one stroke of his knife, which is easily bought, will get them for him."

"I told you you ought to have shot him, Dick," said Turpin, with the air of one who has proved himself in the right.

"He has certainly given me endless trouble of late," said Ralph. "I thought it was merely to revenge himself on you, but doubtless you are right. I sent him a challenge to fight, but the cur has no stomach for that."

Dick sat with knitted brows.

"You cannot stay here, Ralph," he said. "He will gain his end sooner or later, while you are here alone. You must leave Huntercombe and get beyond his reach till I can deal with him. What do you say to going back to St. Austell's School, where we had such sport in Vane's time?"

"Ay, I like nothing better," said Ralph. "'Tis mighty dull here without you, Dick."

"So be it, then. You have money, position, everything to please yourself. You'll have rare times at St. Austell's, and staunch old Dr. Trelawney will be a good friend to you. Term begins in two days. You have a trustworthy agent at Huntercombe?"

"Yes. Old John Blandford—true as steel."

"Right! There's no need for you to return to-night. We'll push right on for Yorkshire. You can ride with us to Bealsford, and stay there the night."

"I've got a post-chaise there," said Ralph excitedly. "I left it at the King's Head last week. But no horses."

"Excellent! You'll have to pick up horses on the way. But we must not ride with your chaise, Ralph, nor must we be seen with you; we're too well known, and might bring danger on you. Who's that among the bushes?"

Dick suddenly galloped off to the left, and after searching among the gorse-bushes for some time, came back.

"I could have sworn I saw a man watching us there," he said; "a tall, lean fellow. But he has disappeared."

"I've seen Samuel Slink, Vane's old rascally servant, in the neighbourhood once or twice," replied Ralph coolly. "He's in Hector's service now. I didn't notice him with the fellows who attacked me."

"No. He hasn't heart enough for open ruffianism; but he's all the more dangerous. A treacherous rascal! If I catch him at any tricks I'll have little hesitation in ridding you of him," muttered Dick. "Now, Ralph, is your horse fresh? 'Tis more than ours are, but we shall make Bealsford without trouble, and rest them till midday to-morrow."

Dick Makes a Promise!

LITTLE more was said till they had reached Bealsford.

On the outskirts of the town they parted, Ralph going to the inn where his chaise lay, and the two comrades putting up elsewhere for the night. They gave the horses a rest till near noon next day, and Ralph's chaise was some miles in front when they started.

"I have a feeling, Turpin," said Dick, "that our going is known to the enemy."

"If you and I are not a match for any of Hector's tricks, I will eat my pistols, and the powder-horn on top of them," replied Turpin. "But I see no great reason for your suspicions. Here we have been four hours on the road, and, pink me, if I've seen anything out of the common."

"You did not see Sam Slink ride by on a sorrel nag when we were halted at the little inn for our hasty meal?"

"There stands one now, with a black-coated man on his back, by the stables of yonder farmhouse," remarked Turpin.

"By the rood, yes!" exclaimed Dick. "Here, pull aside, man—pull aside under the hedge. Don't let him see us! 'Tis Samuel Slink, sure enough."

"Odso!" said Turpin. "Then the proper course, in that case, is to shoot him through the head, since he can be here for no good."

"Nay, not so hasty!" said Dick. "See, he is bargaining with the master of that house—he is giving him money. Now, what should that be for?"

"The man will be no accomplice of Slink's," said Turpin. "'Tis some country horse-coper or such-like—sharp enough, doubtless, but not a professional ruffler. Slink is not hiring him to bludgeon your young brother, Dick."

"Nay, Slink will go to work in some subtler way than that; he does not lightly lay himself open to the law. Now he rides out, and goes on. Let him out of sight, and then we will proceed slowly. I do not want him to see us."

"Well," said Turpin, when they had ridden a mile farther, "Grantley lies ahead of us, and the man Slink will have stopped there, doubtless."

"Ay, 'tis safe to say he already has news of Ralph's movements. Who comes behind us? By my bolt, there's a fine couple of chestnut mares, eh, Turpin?"

A groom was journeying rapidly along the road leading a pair of large, wild-eyed chestnuts that gave him much ado to hold.

"That's a pretty brace of yours, ostler," called Turpin to the man.

"Ay, plague take 'em!" said the groom.

"I wonder you don't ride one and lead the other," said Dick, who knew a groom never walked, whatever his orders were.

"Because I don't want to break my neck, master," grinned the man.

"You're no rider, eh?"

"Rider!" exclaimed the groom. "I'd like to see the man in Norfolk who could beat me! But there ain't no man alive can hold these 'osses. You can sit 'em, but you can't hold 'em. You ain't from these parts, or you'd know 'em. They're shay-'osses, but they're deadly bolters. The first mile they go steady; an' then they'll take the bits between their teeth an' run till they smash the shay to atoms agin' something!"

"Ah," said Dick reflectively. "That is indeed interesting."

"They've broke five carriages to match-wood, an' killed a man every time. They're dead certain for it every time they get into 'arness. Now some traveller's been an' bought 'em, to go in a shay, I think. He's staying at the Green Man, at Grantley. I'm to leave 'em there. Whoever it is will need 'is coffin if he sits behind 'em."

And clucking to the mares, in which he seemed to take a gloomy pride, the man hurried on towards Grantley.

Dick looked meaningly at his comrade.

"I told you," he said, "that Samuel Slink would bring forward something out of the common. He knows this district like a book."

"It looks," said Turpin pensively, "as though he proposes to deliver your young brother to the mercy of the fiery chestnut mares. What do you intend doing?"

"Ride into Grantley, and learn a little more about it. It will be better sport than shooting Slink, as you suggested."

They put up their horse at a cottage in the woods near the village, and in the evening Dick went out to learn what he might. He returned in two hours, smiling grimly.

"All is ready, comrade," he said. "To-morrow, all things favouring, we will give Samuel Slink a ride in his own chaise!"

The Ride of Death!

THOUGH Turpin, whose curiosity was roused, plied him with questions, Dick would say nothing more of his plan.

Chuckling at his comrade's obvious exasperation, he calmly went to bed and was soon asleep.

Dick was up betimes next morning, however, and he groomed Black Satan with unusual care. Having broken their fast, he called Turpin to horse, and they started forth.

"We must not be late to-day, of all days," said Dick. "The jest might take a very ugly turn for Ralph if we are not at the edge of the heath by the time he gets there."

"You are the most irritating young villain I ever knew, keeping all this to yourself!" growled Turpin. "Pink me, if I ride another step until you tell me what's in the wind!"

"Well," said Dick, laughing, "you are such a slap-dash fellow with those pistols of yours. The one remedy you keep for all ills is to shoot your enemy through the head, and if you'd had your way yesterday, there would now be no Samuel Slink to show us sport. And yet," he added, more gravely, "now we are so close to the business, I begin to doubt whether you were not right. Ralph will run some piece of risk as it is."

"Ay, now things have gone so far, you begin to see which is the wiser head!" grunted Turpin. "I tell you, a leaden pill is the best cure for an enemy—it purges all the ill out of him at one stroke. I have had many enemies, Dick, and I speak as an expert."

"I don't see how one could fire a pistol at Samuel Slink," said Dick; "nor sully good steel on him, rascal though he is! 'Tis such a crawling, wriggling knave, without spirit enough to draw a weapon, unless his opponent were asleep. Yet, look you, his life is forfeit, for he has laid this plot to kill Ralph, and that in the most underhand way."

"When I reconnoitred in the village last night, I found the whole place in a turmoil with the news of you and me, touching our escapade at Fernhall. There are many here who know me of old, and I was unable to get word with Ralph, for I did not dare bring danger on him by seeking him out, nor was there anyone trustworthy whom I could send."

"Nay, I would trust no one at Grantley," agreed Turpin. "A plaguey, low, treacherous place!"

"Yet one thing I found—it is known that those bolting mares are to be harnessed to Ralph's chaise, and the whole village is relishing the joke. They think it a jest that a man should go to his death in ignorance, cooped up in a box on wheels. I have a strong notion that Slink will have the door fastened up; that there may be no getting out!"

"Like enough," agreed Turpin.

"From what I learned, too, the post-boy is in Slink's pay. He will hold himself ready to jump off at the right time, and let the chaise and its burden go crashing to disaster. Slink will be bound to follow, to see that his villainy bears fruit. Our business, Turpin, is to stop the chaise where the road leaves the hedgerows and comes out upon the open heath and quarry-pits, for there the danger will begin."

"And stop your brother with a 'Stand and deliver!'" chuckled Turpin. "It's to be hoped he recognises you at once, else he may bring you toppling off your horse with a snap-shot through the chaise-window."

"Ralph has too sharp an eye for that," said Dick. "But yonder is the place where we should await the chaise, and that little grove of pine-trees on either side of the road will give us good shelter till it comes up."

They took cover, one on each side of the highway, and waited for the sound of wheels. They were less than half a mile beyond the village itself, and Dick knew that the mares could be trusted not to bolt before they gained the open. Up to that point the road ran between tall hedges.

But beyond the pinewood it wound across an open, stony heath, dotted with old, unfenced quarries, and was as ugly a piece of highway as there was in the country in that day. Dick, as he waited, pistol in hand, felt a sudden qualm of anxiety lest the hour should have been altered.

Then came the sound of wheels, and Ralph's smart, lemon-coloured chaise appeared down the road from the village, trotting along sharply. A big, red-nosed postillion rode the offside mare, which he sat tightly and uneasily. He was watching both the mares' heads, as they bored and shook, their wild eyes beginning to gleam savagely at the sight of the open road beyond. Inside the chaise Ralph's figure could just be seen. As the mares neared the pinewood, the postillion pulled them in slightly, and shook his feet out of the stirrups. The time had come!

"Stand!" cried Dick, spurring out across the road. "Pull up, or you are a dead man!"

The post-boy gave a cry of dismay, and hauled the mares in with all his might. He made as if to let them go again, but Dick's pistol convinced him. The mares reared up and snatched at their bits, but in a moment Turpin threw himself off Black Bess and had them by the bridles. The red-nosed post-boy fell off with sheer terror.

"So you are in the game, are you, rascal?" said Dick fiercely. "Stand there and move not a hair, else there'll be a bullet through your skull! Ralph, out with you quickly!"

"Why, Dick, what's amiss?" cried Ralph through the chaise window.

"Come out, I say! You will soon learn."

"I can't. This plaguey door is fastened somehow!" said Ralph, shaking it.

"Ay, I thought so!" snapped Dick grimly. "Get back upon the seat, Ralph, out of the way. Turpin, hold the mares hard."

He placed his pistol-muzzle to the lock handle of the door, fired, and blew the lock clean out. The mares plunged furiously, but Turpin's weight on the bridles held them.

"A very neat way of getting a man out of a chaise," said Ralph, throwing open the door and stepping down. "What's in the wind, Dick, so early in the day?"

"You will very shortly see," said Dick. "But let me promise you some good sport, in which that rascal Slink, will be made to pay dearly for his villainy!"

(How the young outlaw keeps his promise is told in next Wednesday's enthralling instalment—which appears in our grand special Christmas Number of the N.L.L.)

The Editor welcomes letters from all his readers—write to-day.



A breezy chat with readers conducted by the EDITOR. All letters should be addressed to The Editor,

NELSON LEE LIBRARY, Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4.

MAKE a note, chums, that next week's issue of the N.L.L. is our Special Christmas Number. It is packed with ripping festive features, including a magnificent yarn of the Chums of St. Frank's. Popular E. S. Brooks is a past-master in the art of producing stories with a ghostly, Christmasy flavour, and in next Wednesday's special Christmas yarn he has excelled himself. There is sure to be a big demand for this bumper issue of the N.L.L., so make sure you order your copy in advance. Slip round to your newsagent to-day and get him to do the necessary—it's the only way to make sure of avoiding disappointment.

Ethel Church was away from the Moor View School for a long time owing to illness, "Old Timer" (Liverpool), and she is, in fact, away at present. She is perfectly well now, but as it is so late in the term she will not appear again until the New Year.

One of Archie's eyes used to be slightly different from the other, G. W. Linford (Norwich), and it was for this reason that he adopted the monocle. It was only a temporary defect, as his eyesight is now perfect; but he likes the monocle so much that he is sticking to it.

The titles of the series you want, I. Borts (Ottawa), are as follows: No. 153 (1st New Series) "The Sneaks' Paradise," No. 154 "Boss of the Remove," No. 155 "The Downfall of Nipper," No. 156 "Scorned by the School." You can obtain back numbers, by applying to the Publishers, Back No. Department.

Claude Carter left St. Frank's in very dire disgrace, Ernest S. Holman (Leyton). He has never been seen since—and a very good thing, too, because, as you say, he was an exceedingly bad lad—far worse than Forrest.

Handforth appeared in the very first St. Frank's story that was written, Victor G. Newman (Bendigo, Australia). His height is five foot three and a half inches; hair, medium chestnut; eyes blue-grey.

Ezra Quirke first appeared, Lilian E. Urquhart (Greenford), in a story called "The Schoolboy Magician"—No. 542, Old Series, published October 24th, 1925. This was long before St. Frank's was partially destroyed and rebuilt. That mysterious cellar is still there, as none of the foundations of the school was destroyed in the catastrophe. In the old days there were only two Houses—Ancient House and College House—but when the school was enlarged the College House became the Modern House. The Ancient House, of course, at one time constituted the whole school, dating back for centuries.

Pen sketches of three more Fifth-Formers: PERCIVAL DRAKE. Arguing with Drake is like wrestling with a dictionary. He is one of the learned men of the Fifth; he knows everything; he can reel off facts on a thousand and one subjects with the ease and fluency of a professor. HAROLD GRAYSON. A leader in the Fifth—of everything unpleasant. A rotter capable of any amount of malicious mischief, with a habit of bullying all boys much smaller than himself. WALTER HITCHIN. The Fifth's busybody. Makes a habit of prying into the affairs of others and then discoursing upon those affairs in public. Decidedly unpopular.

Mr. Brooks' time is so fully occupied in writing the St. Frank's stories, "Tennis" (Birmingham), that he is unable to contribute the articles for "Handforth's Weekly." These are penned by another author.

