

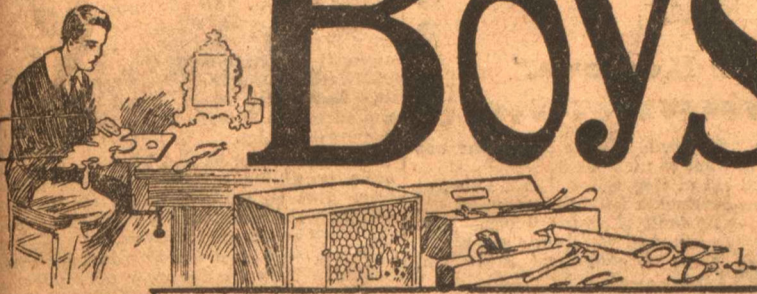
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No. 245, Vol. V.

EVERY WEDNESDAY—ONE PENNY.

WEEK ENDING MARCH 28, 1908.



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# Poindexter's Pecil

### An Exciting Story About the Famous Cliveden Chums.

Written Specially by

## CHARLES HAMILTON.



### The 1st Chapter.

#### A Jape that Didn't Come Off.

**W**HAT the—how the—why—  
 "Shut up!"  
 "But—"  
 "Shut up, I tell you!" growled Pankhurst.  
 "Get into cover before he sees you."  
 "But—"  
 "Oh, blow your butts, Pricey! Do as I tell you, and stop butting."  
 "Quite so; but—"  
 Pankhurst's hand over his mouth stopped Price's amazed questioning. The two juniors of Cliveden were crouching in a gap of the hedge in Cliveden Lane. They had been sauntering along towards the school when Pankhurst had suddenly gripped his chum by the shoulder and dragged him into the cover of the hedge. The amazed Price could only conclude that Pankhurst had become the victim of a sudden attack of insanity.  
 "Shut up!" whispered Pankhurst, as his hand gripped over Price's open mouth. "I tell you he'll hear you."  
 Price jerked his head free.  
 "Who will?" he gasped. "Are you off your rocker?"  
 "No, I'm not off my rocker," growled Pankhurst, looking out cautiously from the hedge. "I think you must be, or else you were born fat-headed. Didn't you see Poindexter coming along the lane?"  
 "No, I didn't."  
 "Well, I did," grinned Pankhurst. "He's coming along, to go to the village, I suppose, and he's alone. Those two bounders, Neville and Flynn, are not with him for once."  
 Price's eyes glimmered with comprehension.  
 "Oh, I see!"  
 "Time you did, I think. Poindexter will pass this gap, and that's where we jump on him. It's a piece of sheer good luck that I've just bought a box of crayons in Clivebank. We'll colour up his face and march him into the school."  
 "Ha, ha, ha!"  
 "With a label on his chest, the 'Latest from Chicago,'" grinned Pankhurst. "It will make the Combine wild when they see him."  
 "Quite so. Ha, ha, ha!"  
 "Mind, you're to jump out on him as soon as he passes, and he'll be by here in a minute," murmured Pankhurst. "You can use your necktie to tie his wrists when I've collared him."  
 "I'd rather use your necktie if you don't mind, Panky."  
 "Now, don't be selfish, Price, and raise petty difficulties at the start."  
 "Quite so, but—"  
 "Just you do as I direct, and it will go off all right. Tie up his wrists with your necktie while I hold him, and then I'll colour his chivvy. It will be a screaming joke on the Combine. They've been altogether too cocky lately, and badly want taking down a peg or two. But quiet. He must be close here now."  
 The grinning juniors waited in silence.  
 Pankhurst and Price, known at Cliveden as the Old Firm, were always on the look-out for a chance of scoring off the Cliveden Combine—Poindexter, Neville, and Flynn. Now that the American chum had been discovered in the solitary lane separated from his chums, the opportunity seemed too good to be lost.  
 There was a sound of heavy footsteps in the lane.  
 Price nudged his chum.  
 "There he comes!"  
 "Quiet," whispered Pankhurst. "That's not Puntpusher; that's somebody coming from the village."  
 "My hat, so it is!"  
 The auburn-haired juniors of Cliveden made no movement. They watched the lane in silence. Fallen leaves were twirling in the March wind. A slouching figure came into view from the direction of the village. It was from the opposite direction that Pankhurst had seen the American chum approaching.  
 The man who passed the ambushed juniors was a powerful fellow, with a hard-bearded face, and little glittering black eyes. He wore a fur cap on the back of his head, and a black pipe was

stuck in his mouth upside down. He did not see the Cliveden juniors as he slouched along, and he passed the ambush in a few moments.  
 "Nice-looking chap," murmured Pankhurst.  
 "I'd like to meet him alone on a dark night here—I don't think."  
 "Quite so," murmured Price, his usual remark.  
 "I've seen him before," said Pankhurst. "He's been hanging about the village for some time now, and I hear that he's called Jim the Nailor. Pretty name, isn't it? But I say, where is that Yankee bounder?"  
 "I wonder."  
 "He ought to be by here by this time."  
 "I should think so."  
 Pankhurst cautiously put his head out beyond the hedge, and looked up the lane. A bend in the winding road shut off the view a dozen yards away. Jim the Nailor had already disappeared. There was no sign of Poindexter.  
 Pankhurst looked puzzled.  
 "Can he have stopped for anything?" he murmured.  
 Price uttered an ejaculation.  
 "My word! Of course! You were wrong in thinking he was going to the village, Panky. He's turned off from the lane by the stile, to take the path up through the wood on the hill."  
 Pankhurst bit his lip.  
 "I never thought of that."  
 "Quite so."  
 "I say, I was a silly ass not to think—"  
 "Quite so."  
 "Oh, dry up!" said Pankhurst crossly.  
 "But look here, if he's gone through the wood, we can follow him, so it's all right. Come on."  
 And the chums of the Fourth Form stepped out of the abortive ambush, and hurried up the lane.

### The 2nd Chapter.

#### Where is Poindexter?

**P**ANKHURST stopped at the stile. It was not more than twenty yards from the gap in the hedge where the Old Firm had ambushed themselves. On the other side of the stile lay the thick woods of Cliveden Park, stretching away black and shadowy over the hill. Through the woods ran a narrow shady footpath leading to the market town of Carbury, a walk of a good two miles.  
 Pankhurst jumped upon the top bar of the stile and looked along the path. But the trees hid the view, and he could see nothing but trunks and foliage. But there was no sign of the American chum in the lane, so it was pretty certain that he had gone by the footpath through the wood.  
 "It's all right," said Pankhurst cheerfully.  
 "He's gone through the wood right enough. He was only strolling along, so we shall easily overtake him if we sprint a little."  
 "Quite so."  
 The auburn-haired chums were soon over the stile, and sprinting along the footpath as if they were on the running track. The ground flew under their feet, and they had covered half a mile or more before Pankhurst stopped to speak.  
 "I say, there's no sign of him yet, Pricey."  
 "Curious," said Price.  
 "Do you think he can have spotted us, and started running?"  
 "If he were walking we should have overtaken him before this."  
 The chums stopped, and looked at each other grimly.  
 "Done!" said Pankhurst. "Ten to one he saw us in the lane, and went straight back to the school, and never came over the stile at all."  
 "Shouldn't wonder."  
 "And the best thing we can do is to walk home, I suppose," said Pankhurst disconsolately.  
 "No good keeping right on to Carbury."  
 "Certainly not."  
 "We'll keep this dark, Pricey," said Pankhurst, as, after some hesitation, they turned back and walked towards Cliveden Lane. "If the Combine got to know of this run we've had for nothing, we should never hear the end of it."  
 "Quite so."  
 "You see, we— Hallo!"

Pankhurst broke off with a sudden ejaculation of utter amazement.  
 "What is it?"  
 "Look!"  
 Pankhurst pointed at a dark object that lay half hidden in the grass of the footpath. It was a boy's cap, and as it lay there it was easy to see the Cliveden badge on the front of it.  
 Price picked it up.  
 "A Cliveden cap."  
 "It's Poindexter's cap," said Pankhurst slowly.  
 "Poindexter's?"  
 "Certainly it is! Whose else? Besides, look there."  
 Pankhurst pointed to the three initials, "L. G. P.," worked in the cap.  
 "Lincoln G. Poindexter," he said.  
 "That proves that the chap did come along this path, Pricey. But what, in the name of all that's idiotic, did he leave his cap here for?"  
 "Perhaps he found we were after him and bolted so quick that he dropped his cap," was all that Price could suggest.  
 Pankhurst shook his head decidedly.  
 "That's not it. He's been here, and he's gone—and left his cap behind. I can't understand it."  
 Pankhurst looked round in a strange uneasiness at the dark, silent woods, the shadowy old trees looming up on all sides and darkening the footpath with their huge branches and thick foliage. For the first time it occurred to him how gloomy, how lonely the place was, and how danger might lurk in the mysterious shadows of the wood.  
 "I say, nothing can have happened to him, surely," murmured Price.  
 "I don't know."  
 "But what—"  
 "I can't think. Let's get back to Cliveden and see if he's returned," said Pankhurst abruptly.  
 The juniors quickened their pace, and were soon in Cliveden Lane again.  
 The dusk of the March evening was beginning to settle over the landscape.  
 Pankhurst and Price lost no time in getting to the school, and as they entered the gates of Cliveden they caught sight of Neville and Flynn in the Close.  
 "Hallo!" exclaimed Neville, glancing at the Old Firm. "What price copper to-day?"  
 But the reference to the rich hue of his auburn hair failed to draw a retort from Pankhurst now.  
 "Where is Poindexter?" he asked.  
 The look on his face at once arrested Neville's attention.  
 "Poindexter? Gone to Carbury," he replied.  
 "What's the matter?"  
 "Did you know he was going by the footpath through the wood over the hill?"  
 "Yes. He's got a pass from Trevelyan to stay out after calling over. He's gone to Carbury to get some new films for his camera. You can't get them in the village. But what are you looking like a funeral for?"  
 "Sure, and ye look as if ye'd lost a shillin' and found threepence," said Micky Flynn. "What's the matter wid ye intirely, Panky?"  
 "Look at that!"  
 Pankhurst produced Poindexter's cap from under his jacket.  
 The chums of the Combine stared at it in amazement.  
 "What on earth are you doing with Poindexter's cap?" demanded Dick Neville.  
 "Faith, and what does it mean intirely?" exclaimed the equally amazed Micky.  
 "We found it on the path through the wood."  
 "What were you doing there?"  
 "We were tracking Pointpusher, to play a little jape on him."  
 "The Dickens you were!"  
 "Never mind that now, Neville. I'm afraid something has happened. We ran along the path after him so quickly that we must have overtaken him, unless he went off into the wood."  
 "He wouldn't do that."  
 "Then where was he? And why did he leave his cap on the path?"  
 Neville looked worried.  
 "I don't know. I can't make it out."  
 "Neither can I. We can only hope it's all right."  
 "Suppose we go to Carbury and look for him?" suggested Price.  
 "Can't be did. It's too late," said Neville.  
 "Besides, he said that if he was late he would come home by train to Clivebank, so we should miss him."  
 "Faith, and we can only wait till he turns up," said Flynn. "I don't see what can have happened. There's no danger in the wood, unless you ran into a poacher, and Poindexter wouldn't interfere wid them, anyway. He'll come in smiling in an hour or two."  
 And the juniors agreed that they could do nothing but wait.

### The 3rd Chapter. Missing!

**B**EDTIME!" said Trevelyan, the captain of Cliveden, looking into the junior common-room. "Get a on you!"  
 There was a general movement in the room, and Neville, Flynn, Pankhurst, and Price towards Trevelyan, and followed him out into the passage.  
 "I say, Trevelyan," began Dick.  
 "What's the matter?" asked the captain, looking curiously at the juniors' faces.  
 "Poindexter hasn't come in," said Price abruptly.  
 Trevelyan started.  
 "Not come in? I gave him a pass, he should have been in a good hour ago. What he mean by staying out till this time?"  
 "I'm afraid something has happened."  
 "What?"  
 "Tell him about it, Panky."  
 The captain of the school looked at Pankhurst and Price. The chief of the Old Firm briefly told him and Trevelyan listened with astonishment and evident uneasiness.  
 "I wish you had told me this before," said Trevelyan.  
 "Well, it seems so unlikely that anything happened," said Neville. "I don't see how it can possibly have happened, Trevelyan. Poindexter hasn't come in."  
 "It looks very strange," said Trevelyan. "Even if he had been kept somehow in the footpath. If anything has happened to him has happened in the wood."  
 "But what—"  
 "I simply can't imagine. But the school will have to be looked into. You had better get with me to the Head."  
 And the juniors followed the captain of Cliveden into the principal's house, and they were shown up to the drawing-room, where Dr. Brown was seated with his wife and daughter.  
 The Head of Cliveden looked surprised, but surprise changed to anxiety when he heard of Trevelyan had to tell him.  
 "Shall I take some of the Sixth, and go look for Poindexter, sir?" asked the captain.  
 "Certainly, Trevelyan. That is the best to be done," said the doctor, looking extremely worried. "I cannot imagine what can have happened to Poindexter, but I am alarmed. If you do not find any trace of him go straight to the police-station in Clivebank, acquaint them with the circumstances."  
 "Certainly, sir."  
 "May we help in the search, sir?" said Pankhurst diffidently. "I can point out just where we found the cap."  
 "H'm! I do not think you juniors should out at this hour. You can tell Trevelyan as you know, and then I think you had better go to bed."  
 There was no arguing with the Head, and the juniors unwillingly submitted to the inevitable. While Trevelyan and half a dozen of the First Form went out to make the search for the missing junior, the Fourth-Formers went up to the dormitory; but, needless to say, although they went to bed, they did not sleep. Their anxiety for the missing lad was too keen for that.  
 The whole Form soon knew what was the matter, and the dormitory was a buzz of cussion from end to end.  
 "Poor old Puntdodger!" said Pankhurst the twentieth time. "And to think that we were just going to jape him when this—"  
 "Oh, that's nothing!" said Neville. "I've japed you often enough, goodness knows, but what can have happened to him?"  
 "Can't imagine."  
 "There was a fellow robbed in the wood," said Gatty. "A ruffian chap knocked him on the head with a cudgel and took his watch, and wasn't found till some labourers passed next morning."  
 Dick Neville shuddered.  
 "Oh, cheese it, Gatty!" he exclaimed. "I give a chap the creeps!"  
 "Well, it looks to me as if something like that might have happened now," said Gatty.  
 The chums were silent.  
 Gatty's words were true enough, and the possibility was only too terrible, and when they thought that at that very moment Poindexter might be lying in the dark, damp undergrowth with his white face upturned to the stars, and felt something rise in their throats, and could not speak.  
 Pankhurst jumped out of bed.  
 "I can't stand this!" he exclaimed. "I can't lie there when Poindexter— Oh, too horrible to think of! When will Trevelyan be back?"  
 Others of the Fourth Form got up too, dressed. It was impossible to even think of sleep. It seemed ages before they heard the sounds of an opening door and footsteps. They knew that the search party had returned.  
 "I'm going to see what they've found," said Pankhurst determinedly, and he was followed by a dozen juniors following him.  
 They looked down the dark staircase into the hall, where the tired and muddy search-party had come in. It was plain enough from the looks that they had had no success.  
 The Head was there, speaking to Trevelyan. He caught sight of the juniors on the stairs and frowned.  
 "What are you boys doing out of bed?"  
 "If you please, sir, we couldn't go to sleep. The doctor's face softened a little.  
 "But, my lads—"  
 "Will you tell us if anything has happened, covered, sir?"  
 "I am sorry to have to tell you that

# ANSWERS

ONE PENNY. EVERY TUESDAY.

has been seen of Poindexter, my boys,” said the Head kindly. “The only explanation I can think of is that he has somehow gone astray in the wood, and lost his way there. The police have been informed, and a search will be made in the morning. Now go back to bed.”

The 4th Chapter. Kidnapped!

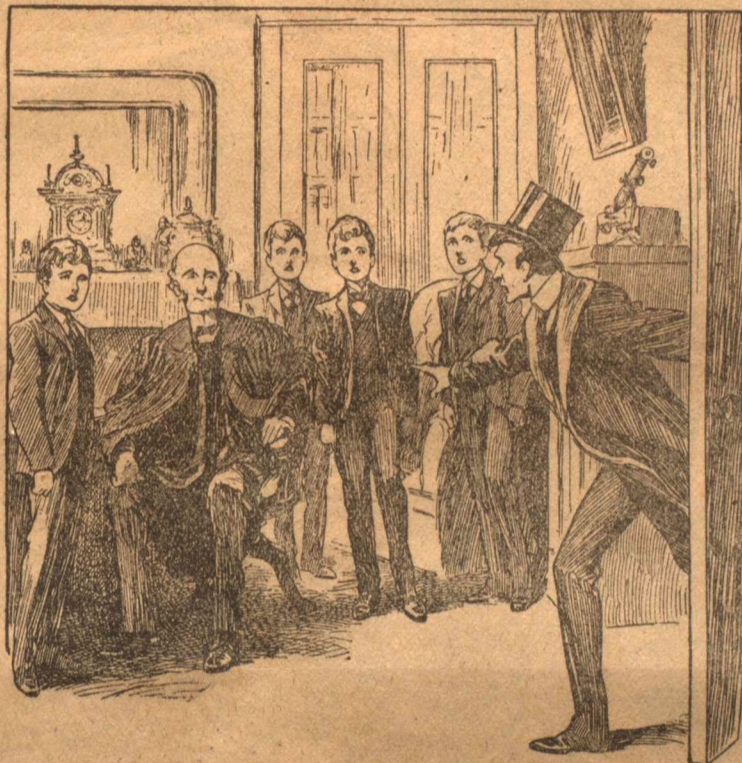
THERE were anxious faces round the breakfast-tables the next morning at Cliveden. Early in the morning the inspector from the Clivebank police-station had been up to the school to see the Head. He brought the information that his men were searching the wood for the missing boy, but that nothing had yet been discovered. The news of Poindexter's disappearance had been wired in several directions, and the police in Carbury and Woodstead had been notified. The inspector thought that something was certain to be heard of the boy soon. But breakfast was over, and there was still no news. After chapel the boys wondered whether the morning classes would begin as usual. They did not feel in a mood for work, with the certainty now in their minds that something serious had happened to Poindexter. The Head announced after prayers that the lower Forms would go into the class-rooms as usual, and that the Fifth and Sixth were at liberty to join in the search for the missing junior. Needless to say, this announcement was far from pleasing to the Old Firm and the Combine. If there were danger in the wood, it might be wise to keep the lower Forms from joining in the quest, but this could not apply to Poindexter's own chums. So, at least, the four juniors said to themselves. “Sure and we're not goin' in to lessons till Puntdodger's found,” declared Micky Flynn, as the Fourth fled in. “What do you say, kids?” Dick Neville shook his head decidedly. “Certainly not. We ought to be allowed to join in the search, even if the other juniors are barred.” “Quite so,” said Price. “Right,” said Pankhurst. “Let's go to the Head, and put it to him straight like an old sport.” There was a momentary hesitation. Pankhurst's suggestion was a daring one, and the idea of bearing the lion in his den in this manner was rather startling. But unless the juniors played truant, it was the only thing to be done; and so they summoned up their resolution, and instead of entering the class-room with the rest, marched off together to the doctor's study. The Head was there, and he looked considerably surprised when the juniors presented themselves. “What do you want, boys?” he asked. “Why are you not in your class?” “If you please, sir—” “Faith, sir, and we think—” “Dry up, Micky!” “Sure and—” “Come, come, what is it?” asked the Head, rather testily. “Sure we—” “We want to ask a favour, sir,” said Pankhurst, with an earnestness that impressed the Head. “We are Poindexter's special chums, sir—at least, Neville and Flynn are, and we are their rivals—but it's all the same—” “Sure and it's right ye are, Panky.” “Go on, Pankhurst,” said the Head, kindly enough. “Well, sir, as Poindexter's special friends, we should like to be allowed to join in the search for him,” ventured Pankhurst. “That's it, sir,” said Neville. “We'll all keep together, sir, if you let us go, so that there will be no danger.” “Faith, and we—” “But, my dear lads—” “Don't refuse, sir. You don't know how anxious we feel about poor old Poindexter,” said Dick Neville, and in spite of himself there came a break in his voice, and a warm gush to his eyes. “We—” “My dear lads, I will not refuse you,” said the doctor, his voice softening. “You shall be excused classes for the morning, and shall search for Poindexter, if you like. I make only the condition that you remain with the Sixth-Formers, and go nowhere alone.” “Oh, thank you, sir!” “Faith, and we—” Micky was interrupted. The door of the study was flung violently open, and a tall, slim gentleman, with a silk hat on the back of his head, rushed in. An astonished manservant was staring after him. “The Head started up in surprise. “Mr. Poindexter!” “The juniors looked at the new arrival curiously. They knew Cyrus K. Poindexter, the Chicago millionaire, well enough. Only the last week he had been down at Cliveden for the juniors' sports, and had made himself immensely popular by standing one of the biggest feeds in the history of the school. “Doctor!” gasped the newcomer, breathlessly. “My dear sir!” “Is it true?” “Is what true?” “My boy—where is he?” “How did you hear?” gasped the Head, in amazement. “I was keeping the unfortunate

back from you, in the hope of hearing something of the boy. I should have wired you at noon if he was not found this morning.” “Then—then it is true!” “I am sorry to say that Poindexter is missing, but I sincerely hope and believe that nothing serious has happened to him.” “True!” exclaimed Cyrus K. Poindexter, sinking into a chair, his silk hat falling off the back of his head as he did so. “True! The scoundrel!” “Eh?” “The villain!” “What?” “The blackmailing, pesky sweep!” “My dear sir—” “But I won't pay the money!” “Eh?” “Or if I do, I'll spend a million dollars, sir, in hunting down that kidnapping villain, and bringing him to penal servitude!” “What can you possibly be talking about?” exclaimed the bewildered Doctor, passing his hand over his brow. “What—what do you mean, Mr. Poindexter?” Both gentlemen seemed to have totally forgotten the presence of the wondering juniors. Mr. Poindexter groped in his pocket, and dragged out a crumpled and dirty sheet of paper, scribbled on in pencil. “I got this by the first post this morning,” he gasped. “When I had read it, I ordered my car, and came down here as fast as a first-class Darracq could bring me, sir.” “That—what is that?” “Listen to it, sir. This is what the scoundrel says—” “What scoundrel?” “The scoundrel who has kidnapped my son!” roared the irate millionaire. “Oh!” gasped the Head. “Listen! To Mr. Poindexter. Dear Sir,—Your son is in my hands, and I am keeping him safe. If the sum of one hundred pounds is paid to me, he will be returned safe and sound to Cliveden School. Otherwise, you will never see him again, unless you fish up what is left of him from the river. If you decide to pay the money, I shall know your decision if you make a chalk cross on the big oak beside the stile in Cliveden Lane.” “There's no signature,” said Mr. Poindexter. “What do you think of that for a note to get along with your morning cup of coffee? I thought it was probably a hoax, but I came down to see instead of wiring, so as to save time if it was really true. And you tell me that it is true?” “It is true that Poindexter did not return to the school last evening,” said Dr. Rayne, “and the search has as yet failed to discover him.” “Then there is not the slightest doubt upon the point. He is in the hands of the scoundrel who wrote this letter, and being kept a prisoner somewhere for the ransom to be paid on him.” “It—it looks like it.” “I'm glad I came down,” said the millionaire, fanning his heated brow. “I hope I didn't startle you by bolting into your office—I mean study—so suddenly.” “Well, you did, somewhat; but it is of no consequence. Dear me, what an altogether unexpected and unpleasant occurrence. I— you boys—I thought you were gone.” “Sorry, sir,” said Pankhurst. “We will keep this secret if you wish.” “Not at all,” exclaimed Cyrus K. Poindexter. “Spread it everywhere, and somebody may guess what rascal it is who has gone into the kidnapping business. It's certain that it's some scoundrel known in the neighbourhood, I should think; the police may guess when they see this letter.” “It is possible,” said the doctor. “I guess I'll buzz down to the station at once in my car!” exclaimed the millionaire; and snatching up his hat, he jammed it on his head and was gone in a moment. The doctor, unused to the atmosphere of American hustle, sank into his chair gasping. The juniors followed the millionaire out. They were in time to see the long legs of Cyrus K. Poindexter disappearing into the car. Then the Darracq buzzed and hummed out of the gates of Cliveden and vanished in a cloud of dust.

The 5th Chapter.

Cyrus K. Poindexter Decides to Pay. THROUGH that long day the search for Lincoln G. Poindexter went on, and when the dusk again fell over the landscape, the search parties returned to Cliveden, baffled.

Mr. Poindexter had been to the local police-station, and interviewed the inspector there. The slow movements of the country police disgusted the hustling gentleman from Chicago. He accelerated them as much as possible by the offer of a hundred dollars reward for the discovery of his missing son. But he told Dr. Rayne plainly that he expected very little of the efforts of the local police. “Then what is to be done?” said the Head, clasping and unclasping his slim white hands in a helpless way. The American millionaire nursed his chin thoughtfully. He was burning with impatience, and yet he could not think of a satisfactory way out of the dilemma, in spite of his “hustle.” The kidnapping of Poindexter had fallen like a thunderclap on the Head. Accustomed to quiet scholarly ways, secluded from the main stream of life in the ancient walls of Cliveden, the Head seemed like a man rudely awakened from a dream by this breath, as it were, from the world of crime and violence. Such a thing had never happened at Cliveden before, and now that it had come, the doctor simply did not know how to deal with it. If the police failed, the Head was completely nonplussed. Cyrus K. Poindexter screwed his brows together in a great effort of reflection. “We can't find the boy!” he exclaimed, at last. “It really seems so,” murmured the Head. “The Fifth and the Sixth Forms have been searching through the whole neighbourhood—” “And the police can do nothing—” “Apparently the boy is too well concealed for them to find him, or probably the kidnapper has taken him out of the neighbourhood.” The millionaire shook his head decidedly. “He is hidden somewhere close at hand, probably in the wood where he was kidnapped. A boy is not so easily carried away, and you



The door of the study was flung violently open, and a tall, slim gentleman, with a silk hat on the back of his head, rushed in. The Head started up in surprise. “Mr. Poindexter!” he cried.

must remember that it was daylight when he was kidnapped yesterday.” “That is true.” “I should imagine that there is some secret place in the wood.” “It is quite possible. It is an extensive one, and covers many miles, and especially on the upper slopes of the hill there are many parts almost unknown to the keepers themselves,” said the doctor. “But if he's there we can't find him.” The American millionaire drummed on the table with his knuckles. “If he's stuck away in some corner of the wood, he's probably tied up and gagged so that he cannot give the alarm.” “Poor, poor lad!” “And as likely as not has had nothing to eat or drink since he was captured by this unknown scoundrel.” “Dear me!” “So I don't see what's to be done unless we pay the money demanded,” said the American abruptly. “Pay the money! But—but that is illegal!” Cyrus K. Poindexter made a gesture of supreme indifference. “I'm not going to let my boy suffer for the sake of a hundred pounds. We can take it out of the kidnapper afterwards, for I'll spend a thousand if necessary in hunting him down and bringing him to justice.” And the millionaire thumped the table, and his eyes blazed. “But the question now is to get Lincoln out of the hands of the kidnapper. If a hundred can do it, what's a hundred pounds to me?” “But what guarantee have you that the ruffian will release the boy when the money is paid? May it not merely whet his appetite for more?” “I guess that's very likely.” “Well, my dear sir—” “But by opening negotiations with him, we may get on his track; and that appears to be the only chance we have of getting into touch with him.”

“Yes, there is certainly something in that.” “I guess so. Either he gives up the boy when the money is paid, or he may be captured through coming to take the money.” “Very good.” “The first step is to put the chalk mark on the tree as a sign that we are willing to open negotiations,” said the millionaire, “that, at all events, commits us to nothing.” “Do as you wish, my dear sir. I can only say that I am overwhelmed by this unfortunate happening, while your son was in my charge—” “You have nothing to reproach yourself with, Dr. Rayne. The boys cannot be kept within the school walls, I suppose, and this might have happened to any lad with rich parents from whom money could be extorted.” “Yes, that is very true,” said the doctor. “Have all the searchers come in yet? I may as well hear the latest report before I put the mark on the tree.” “I will inquire.” The Head rang. He was soon informed that all the Fifth and most of the Sixth were in, and all reported failure. Trevelyan and Santley and Baker of the Sixth, and four juniors, were still absent, though the dusk was now falling thick. “I can guess who the four juniors are,” Dr. Rayne remarked. “The four chief friends of your son—and four of the best lads in the school. I gave them permission to be absent from classes to-day to join in the search. The other juniors have been searching, too, since school. The whole place is turning itself into a search-party, in fact. You will wait for the others to come in?” “I guess so.” “The inspector has promised to come up and make his report, too, this evening.” “I guess I'll wait for him.” The millionaire moved about the study restlessly. “I suppose it's no good hurrying. I haven't much faith in your police. The inspector suggested putting the mark on the tree and then watching there for the kidnapper. I guess I won't have it. The fellow will be too cunning to show himself while the police are watching, and they won't be able to take him in. I guess he's got more cunning than the whole bunch of them.” And the Head felt that it was probably true. They waited for the last of the search parties to return. The Cliveden fellows were at that moment leaving the wood, and turning their dusty and weary faces towards the school. Trevelyan and his companions, like the rest, had been unsuccessful. Pankhurst had shown them the spot where Poindexter's cap had been found, and they had endeavoured to find tracks in the wood, but entirely without success. The hard ground bore no traces of the footsteps that had passed over it. Here and there the searchers thought they came upon a sign. But it led to nothing. The day had passed in a weary, fruitless hunt. They had nothing to eat but sandwiches they had brought with them. In the March dusk they turned their faces homewards, fatigued and dispirited, with a tale of failure to tell. The Sixth-Formers strode on first, and the four juniors, wearied in mind and body, had dropped a little behind. They were too tired to talk, and they plodded on dully towards the school. Pankhurst glanced up carelessly as someone passed in the lane, and then gave a slight start. He recognised the slouching, fur-capped figure that passed in the dusk. It was that of the ruffian who had passed the ambush in the hedge the previous day—Jim the Nailer. The man glanced curiously at the weary schoolboys, and turned his head to follow them with his eyes.

The boys reached Cliveden, and went in at the gate wearily. To the questions of those who were waiting for them, they could only reply with sad shakes of the head. Nothing had been discovered; there was nothing to tell. Trevelyan went in to the doctor's study, to make his report, which was listened to in depressed silence by the two gentlemen there. A little later Inspector Snoop from Clivebank called, and he had only to tell that his men were making every effort but had discovered nothing. Cyrus K. Poindexter shrugged his broad shoulders. “I shall have to pay the money, if necessary; at all events get into communication with the scoundrel,” he said, when the inspector was gone. “I will make the chalk mark on the tree myself. There is nothing else to be done.” The doctor nodded. “I suppose you are right!”

The 6th Chapter.

Pankhurst has an Idea.

A DISMAL party had gathered in No. 4 study at Cliveden. It was seldom that a day passed at Cliveden without some kind of a row between the Combine and the Old Firm, but rows were “off” now. Pankhurst and Price had been the Combine's keen rivals in the Fourth Form, but now that the Combine's leader was in unknown peril, they would have braved anything to rescue him. They were quite as anxious about his safety as his own study-chums. Tea in No. 4 study was usually a pleasant and cosy meal, especially when there were guests, but it was a dull one this evening. The juniors were hungry after their long tramp, but they had hardly the heart to eat with the thought of their missing chum in their minds. “Poor old Puntdodger!” exclaimed Pankhurst. “Where can he be? That letter his father has had doesn't throw much light on the subject, you know. We know he's a prisoner somewhere—but where?”

"Quite so," said Price dismally.  
 "Faith, and it's a puzzle intirely!"  
 "Somewhere in the wood on the hill, I imagine," said Dick Neville thoughtfully. "We haven't been over a tenth of the ground yet. It would take weeks to thoroughly search the wood, if the whole school and all the keepers turned out to the task."

"Faith, and ye're right!"  
 "If we could only—" began Pankhurst. Then he stopped, and jumped up suddenly from his chair, so suddenly that he sent a cup of tea flying off the table, full upon the manly chest of Micky Flynn.

The Irish junior leaped to his feet with a yell.  
 "Arrah, then, and what are ye doin' intirely, ye mad spalpeen!"

"Sorry—"

"Sorry is it, and ye've soaked me to the skin—ow, it's hot!"

"Ha, ha!"

"Faith, and I'll tache ye to laugh—"

"Stop! Hold on—I mean, leave go! I tell you—"

Neville dragged the excited Irishman back in time. Pankhurst's eyes were gleaming with the new idea that had shot into his brain.

"Keep your wool on, Micky! I've thought of something, and I believe—I really believe—I've got on to the thing at last."

"Was that why ye jumped up like a howlin' lunatic, ye gossoon?"

"Of course it was."

"Then I excuse ye," said Flynn, mopping the tea off his waistcoat with his handkerchief.

"Go on wid ye."

"What have you thought of, Panky?" asked Dick Neville, not very hopefully.

Pankhurst looked greatly excited.

"You remember that ruffian-looking fellow we passed in the lane just before we came in awhile ago?" he exclaimed.

"Yes; what about him?"

"He's a rotten bad character, who has been hanging about the village for some time. I've heard that he's called Jim the Nailor. Well, you remember that Pricey and I had laid an ambush for Poindexter, thinking he was coming along the lane—"

"Yes; you told us."

"He turned off at the stile instead. But while we were ambushed there, Jim the Nailor passed us, going towards the stile from the direction of the village."

Neville gave a start.

"Then he must have met Poindexter!"

"Either met him or seen him, at the least. When we went up the lane to look for Poindexter, it was empty. I was thinking only about Poin. and had quite forgotten the rough; but I remember now that there was no sign of him in the lane, any more than there was of Poindexter."

The chums were eagerly excited now.

"Then he must have taken the footpath?"

"It is certain that he did, or else we should have seen him."

"Then he followed Poindexter?"

"Evidently."

"My only hat! We've hit it, then! It was Jim the Nailor who kidnapped Poindexter in the wood!" almost shouted Dick Neville.

"Arrah, Panky, and sure it's a janius ye are!" cried Micky Flynn.

Pankhurst's eyes were blazing.

"It's no good making too sure at first," he exclaimed. "But it looks like it, and I for one believe it's true. Jim the Nailor, at any rate, must have been the last to see Poindexter, as he was following him through the wood. He must have been near enough to see the kidnapping, as a matter of fact. The whole village is talking about the affair, and he must have heard of it. Why hasn't he come forward to say what he knows? He must at least have seen Poindexter on the path."

"True!"

"Faith, and it's right ye are!"

"Quite so."

"We're on the track, I firmly believe," said Pankhurst, controlling his excitement. "If Jim the Nailor knows what's become of Poindexter, we'll jolly soon make him tell."

"Shall we go to the Head?"

"No."

"But what—"

"My dear chap, the Head would tell Inspector Snoop, and Inspector Snoop would try to shadow Jim the Nailor, and he would give the whole game away at the start."

"Faith, and that's so, Panky."

"We're going to look into this matter ourselves," said Pankhurst, with an air of considerable importance. "If Jim the Nailor has kidnapped Poindexter, there's enough of us to deal with the scoundrel, I suppose."

"Yes, if we can run him down."

"That's what I'm coming to. The kidnapper whoever he is, has fastened Poindexter up somewhere in the wood—in some cave up the hillside. I should guess—and left him there. He won't want to make it a hanging matter for himself, so he's pretty certain to go to him some time to take him food and drink."

"I suppose so."

"He couldn't have gone through the wood in the daytime without being spotted by some of the scores of people who have been searching."

"Good! You think he'll go at night?"

"It seems to me pretty certain. Now, if it's Jim the Nailor, that's where we come in," said Pankhurst impressively. "We can easily find him at his haunts in the village; he is always hanging about the Red Lion. We'll spot him there."

"To-night?"

"This evening, certainly."

"That means breaking bounds after dark."

"Can't be helped. I fancy the Head will overlook that when we bring Poindexter safe and sound back to the school. Anyway, I suppose we're all willing to risk a licking for the sake of our old Poindexter?"

"Rather!"

"That's settled, then. We'll spot Jim the Nailor, and if he leaves the village we'll follow him. We'll track him wherever he goes. If he goes into the wood we shall know he is the kidnapper, and then we shall only have to follow him far enough to find Poindexter."

"Ripping! And capture the scoundrel himself!"

"If possible, yes. We'll take a cricket stump each, and give him what-ho if he makes a fuss," said Pankhurst, with a satisfied grin. "Now, if you've done tea, we'll get off. No good wasting time. We can get out now before the gates are closed if we buck up."

Five minutes later the four juniors, careless of calling-over, were speeding down the shadowy lane towards the village.

### The 7th Chapter The Rescue!

THE gleam of light from the windows of the Red Lion in Clivebank fell across the shadowy street, and glimmered upon the trunk of the big beech opposite the inn. From the inn came the sounds of voices and the clinking of glasses, plainly audible to the ears of four juniors lurking in the shadows behind the big tree trunk.

"You are sure you saw him go in, Panky?"

"Yes, certain."

"It's a long time."

"Nine pealed out from the village church."

"Nine!" said Micky Flynn, with a deep breath.

"Sure, and I wonder what they think of us at Cliveden intirely."



Pankhurst's heart beat hard. Jim the Nailor stooped over the bound lad, and removed the gag from his mouth. But the boy's limbs did not move. Only the dark eyes stared wildly up at the ruffian.

"No good thinking of that now," said Pankhurst. "If we succeed, we're all right; if we fail, it means a licking. But we've got to run the risk for Poindexter's sake."

"Faith, and it's right ye are!"

"Look!" exclaimed Price, in a suppressed voice, pointing across the street.

From the shadows where they lurked the four juniors had seen the door of the Red Lion swing open many times, each time letting out a flood of light into the dusky evening, and the sound of a chorus. But each time they had been disappointed in their hope of seeing Jim the Nailor reappear. But this time they were not disappointed!

The burly, tough slouching figure—the fur cap and black pipe, clearly seen in the glare of light from the open door—were not to be mistaken.

"It was Jim the Nailor at last!"

He stood for some moments before the inn, lighting his pipe. Then he turned and slouched away up the dark street towards the darker lane.

"He's going out of the village!" muttered Pankhurst.

"Good! Follow him."

"Careful! If he sees us, all's up."

With great caution the juniors followed the ruffian. Their caution was needed, for Jim the Nailor was in a suspicious mood, and he looked round into the shadows many times. But he did not see his pursuers. He plunged into the starless darkness of the lane, and was lost to sight; but the juniors easily followed his heavy footsteps. Their hearts were beating with wild excitement now. The manner of the ruffian, as well as the direction he had taken, seemed to hint that the suspicion that he was the kidnapper was correct.

They heard him stop at the stile and clamber over it. The stars were coming out one by one in the dark sky, and in the glimmer they made out the burly figure of the ruffian again. He plunged under the shadowy trees, and they heard his heavy footfalls ring upon the footpath. In a few moments they were over the stile and following him. Deep into the lonely wood he went, till, somewhere near the spot where Poindexter's cap had been found, he turned off into the thick trees. The juniors halted on the spot where he had left the path, and listened. His heavy form brushing through the foliage was a sufficient guide. They fell into single file, and followed cautiously. There was a glimmer of light ahead.

"My hat!" muttered Pankhurst. "That settles it."

He was right. The ruffian might have entered the wood to poach, but he would not then have lighted the lantern. He had evidently obtained a light to find his way to some remote and hidden recess which was inaccessible in the darkness.

The light gleamed weirdly on bush and bramble and foliage. The March wind rustling in the trees was sufficient to disguise any slight sounds made by the eager juniors. But they were very careful. They had taken out the cricket stumps from under their coats now, and gripped them ready for use. They would probably be wanted soon.

The light wound on through the wood, through thicket and bramble. The ground was very rough and hilly on the steepest slope of Cliveden Hill. They were now in a part of the wood always lonely and unfrequented, seldom visited even by the keepers. The light suddenly disappeared.

The Cliveden juniors halted.

"Where's the brute got to?" muttered Neville.

"Ere you are—water, with a dash of something in it; and I tell you I'm bein' kind to ye bring yor anythin'."

Poindexter drank eagerly. His face, chalk white in the light of the lantern, showed how terribly he had suffered, lying a bound prisoner on the bed of leaves in the dark cave during the long day. His bonds were not tied with extreme tightness, but quite securely; and he was in addition to a stake driven into the ground, that he could not attempt to roll out of the cave. The ruffian, probably for his own sake as much as anything else, had spared him as much as possible. But the cramped confinement had told upon the unfortunate junior.

"You—you scoundrel!" he muttered, firmly his voice again. "I guess you're more likely to get prison than a ransom over this."

Jim the Nailor grinned.

"We'll see," he replied. "The police have been searchin' for you all day, but they haint got a clue to you yet, and they won't ave. I've got this in my mind for weeks, my young shaver, and a hundred poun' ain't all I'll have over you millionaire father, either."

"You had better let me go—"

"Ha, ha! I can see myself doin' that—don't think. I—Hallo!"

The ruffian broke off with a yell of startled affright as Pankhurst rushed through the bushes into the cave, his cricket-stump whirling aloft.

Jim the Nailor threw up his right arm to defend his head, and the next moment his arm dropped numbly to his side as the stump crashed upon it.

Neville, Price, and Flynn were after Pankhurst in a twinkling.

As the ruffian groaned with the pain of his injured arm, three more cricket-stumps circled over his head; and, though he dodged one, he crashed upon him, and he fell to the ground, stunned. In a twinkling the juniors had hurled themselves upon him, and he was pinned to the ground under their weight.

"Hurrah!" roared Pankhurst. And the juniors rang with the joyous shout of the Cliveden juniors.

"Hurrah!"

Poindexter gasped in amazement.

"What the—how the—"

"It's all right, old chap," cried Neville; "we've found you! We'll have you loose in a jiffy. Hold that rotter, kids, and we'll tie him up with his own rope."

"Good!"

Neville had Poindexter untied in a few minutes. Jim the Nailor was in no condition to offer much resistance, and he was quickly bound with the rope removed from his former prisoner. And the juniors did not spare the knots.

Poindexter staggered to his feet. The chums of Cliveden hugged him ecstatically. Jim the Nailor glowered at them like a demon, but little they cared for his rage.

"Hurrah!" cried Pankhurst. "Come on, Puntdodger; back to Cliveden, old chap!"

"I guess I shall be glad to get there, and to get outside a square meal," said Poindexter.

"I should think so. We'll leave this rascal tied up here for the police to fetch; they'll be glad of him," grinned Neville. "Come along, old chap. Lean on my shoulder."

And with the rescued junior in their midst, the successful and gleeful chums set out for the school, sure of a coriaal reception there now.

"Dear me!" exclaimed Dr. Rayne. "What can all that noise be?"

The sound of wild shouting in the Close and the Hall had interrupted the conversation in the Head's study.

Cyrus K. Poindexter started to his feet.

"Is it possible that Lincoln—"

The door opened. Five juniors presented themselves to view, with a cheering crowd behind them—Neville, Flynn, Pankhurst, and Price—and in the midst of them, muddy and worn and white of face—Lincoln G. Poindexter!

"My boy!" shouted the millionaire, in amazement and joy.

"Hallo, popper!" said Lincoln G., with his usual coolness. "Glad to see you."

Cyrus K. Poindexter hugged his recovered son to his breast. The doctor stared almost dumbly at the juniors.

"Neville, Pankhurst! What does this mean?"

"We found him, sir."

"Sure, and we've captured the thief of the worruld that kidnapped him, too, intirely!"

"I hope you'll excuse us for breaking bounds, sir?"

The doctor could not help smiling.

"Under the circumstances, I must not only excuse but thank you," he said. "Pankhurst, you tell me what has happened."

"And I'll get something to eat, if you don't mind, sir," said Poindexter. "I've been tied up in a muddy cave for a night and a day, with only a crust and a drink of water all the time, and I guess I'm rather peckish."

"Certainly, my boy. I cannot say how glad I am to see you again. Trevelyan, please see his wants attended to. Now, Pankhurst."

And the chief of the Old Firm told the whole story. When he had finished the Chicago millionaire slapped him heartily on the back.

"I guess these youngsters are the right staff, doctor," he said.

And the doctor smilingly acknowledged that he thought so, too.

Jim the Nailor had plenty of time, in the session of a stone cell, to reflect upon the error of his ways, and it is to be hoped that he did so. While at Cliveden the affair was a nine days' wonder, and for nearly a week there was not a single row between the Combine and the Old Firm, a surprising result of the effect wrought upon the juniors by Poindexter's Peril.

THE END.

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