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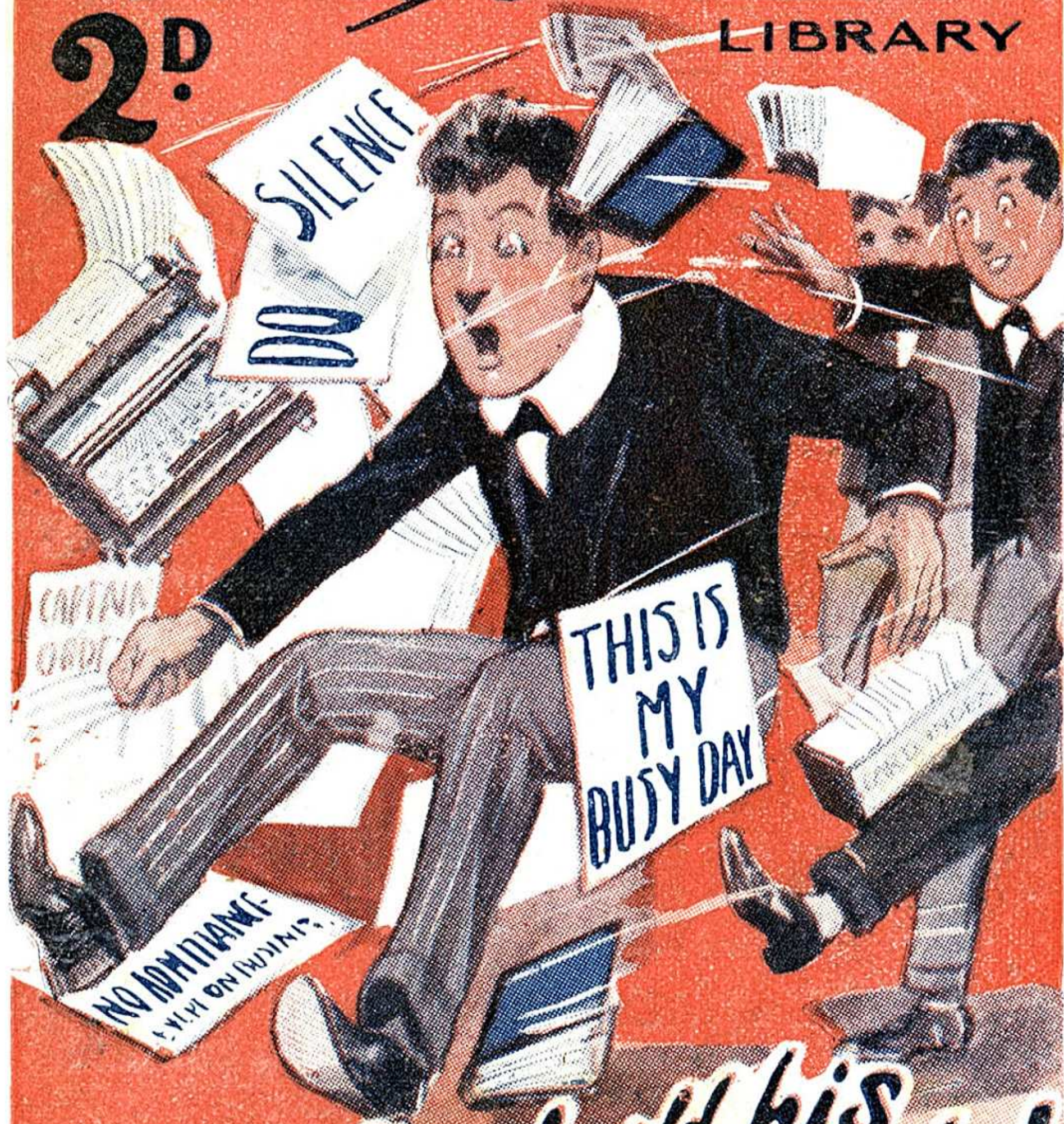
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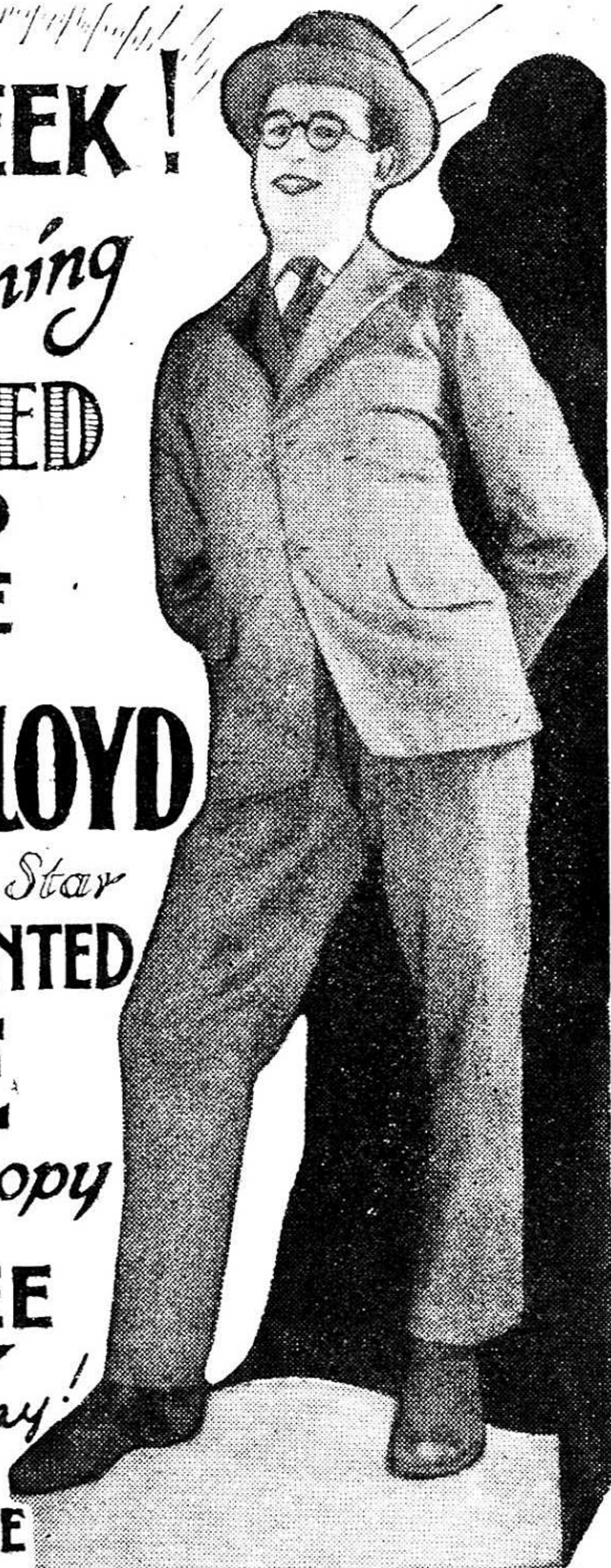
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Next Wednesday!

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KNOCKED OFF HIS PERCH!



By EDWY SEARLES BROOKS

Handy kicked out of the Captaincy! All about it in this week's rollicking long complete story of the Boys of St. Frank's.

CHAPTER 1.

THE BUSINESS MAN OF THE REMOVE.

HAROLD DOYLE, of the Remove, shot through the doorway like an avalanche, crashed against the wall on the other side of the passage, and subsided into a limp heap. The door slammed, and the human debris moaned.

"Well I'm blessed!" said Bob Christine, staring.

Bob Christine was a Fourth Former, and he belonged to the Modern House. He had just come over to have an interview with the Junior captain, concerning his place in the team.

Afternoon lessons were over, and the Ancient House was fairly quiet, for most of the fellows were taking advantage of the waning daylight. The October evenings were drawing in rather rapidly.

"Trouble?" asked Bob Christine, as he assisted the dazed Removite to arise. "My hat! You're in a bit of a mess, Doyle!"

Doyle, of the West House, swayed dizzily. "I've just seen the captain!" he murmured in a dreamy voice.

"What?"

"About my place in the Eleven!" said Doyle thickly.

Bob Christine started.

"You've just seen Handforth—about your place in the Eleven?" he repeated. "And is this what happens if you just go and ask him a simple question like that?"

Doyle gradually recovered. He tenderly rubbed his chin, felt his left ear, and then secured his collar, which had sprung off its stud.

"He's hopeless!" he said fiercely. "He's worse than ever—and we're not going to stand him! I've always played in the Eleven, haven't I? I've always been in the team, haven't I? And now, because this—this raving maniac gets into power, I'm biffed out!"

"Yes," nodded Bob, "I noticed that."

"I mean biffed out of the team!" roared Doyle. "Mind you, I didn't argue with him. I just wanted to know what the idea was. And what do you think he did?"

"Well, there's not much guesswork about it, is there?" said Bob soothingly.

"He grabbed me by the scruff of the neck, opened the door, and biffed me out! Not a word of explanation—not a syllable of satisfaction!"

"Tough luck!" said Christine sympathetically.

"Is that chap a captain, or is he a prize-fighter?" roared Doyle. "I can tell you, Christine, we're just sick of him! We've had more than we can stand! He's getting worse, day after day—and there's no hope in sight!"

"They say that Dick Hamilton might come back this week—sooner than the fellows first thought," said Bob. "There's nothing to worry about—"

"You're not in the Remove!" interrupted Doyle bitterly. "You don't have to stand the awful torture. We thought we'd got rid of him the other day, but he dished us, the bounder! He's still skipper, and he means to carry on until the end of term. We shall all be dead by then!"

"But Dick Hamilton is your proper captain."

"Of course he is!" snorted Doyle. "But what the dickens does Handforth care? He says he was elected by the Form, and he's got Mr. Crowell's consent, and he's not going to resign for a dozen Dick Hamiltons! And that's the worst of it—we can't eject him from the captaincy by force, we can't make him resign by trickery, and we can't do anything! He's making our lives a misery!"

Bob Christine grinned.

"Draw it mild!" he said, with a chuckle. "It's not so bad as all that. Handforth's all right so long as you understand him. I'm going in there now, to have a word with him about my place in the forward line."

"Good!" said Doyle. "I'll pick you up."

"Pick me up?"

"After your remains are chucked out," explained Doyle, with a certain gloomy satisfaction. "One good turn deserves another, you know."

"You silly ass!" frowned Bob. "He wouldn't dare to lay his fingers on me! I'm not in the Remove, thank goodness!"

"But he's Junior skipper, and you're going to see him about footer!"

"That's all right—don't worry about my safety!" said Bob gruffly. "I'm not afraid of—Hallo! What the—"

The door opened again, and Dick Goodwin sailed out in an inverted attitude. The door slammed, and Goodwin sat up with a bleary expression on his face.

"But be reasonable, Handy!" he said unsteadily.

"My only hat!" gasped Bob Christine, staring.

"Don't take any notice of this," said Doyle. "We have these little affairs every day. I'm waiting to see you go in—and I'm curious to know how you'll look when you come out!"

Bob strove hard to conceal his uneasiness.

"Is he always like this?" he asked carelessly.

"Generally!" said Doyle, with a sniff. "But he's been getting worse lately. More violent, you know."

"More violent?" asked Christine.

"Oh, much!" said Doyle. "He used to give you a chance to say what you came for, but he doesn't now. He just gives you one look, and sashes out."

"One look?" asked Bob, with a weak smile.

"That's all," replied Doyle gloomily. "Then you don't remember anything until you pick yourself up outside. Look at Goodwin! The poor chap's knucked half silly. And I'll bet he didn't do anything to deserve it."

Dick Goodwin was just picking himself up, and clawing at the wall to steady himself. Bob Christine braced himself, and assumed an air of dignity. He couldn't very well back out of the thing, with these two Removites looking on! They would only jump to a wrong conclusion if he suddenly remembered an important engagement elsewhere.

The door in front of him belonged to a room at the end of the Remove passage. It wasn't a study. It wasn't a box-room. Nobody knew exactly what the room was. It had always been empty and neglected. But now there was a great square of cardboard tacked on the door, informing all and sundry that the apartment was the Captain's Office, and that there was strictly No Admittance except on Business.

"By gum!" mumbled Dick Goodwin, as he looked at the other two juniors through a kind of haze. "Anybody seen my teeth knocking about?"

"Teeth?" repeated Bob, aghast.

"I've lost about a dozen," moaned Dick. "That's how it feels, anyhow. Eh, lad, Handy's a champion with his right! He didn't give me a chance to say much. And I only wanted to ask him about the House match."

"There you are!" said Doyle indignantly.

Bob Christine squared his shoulders, and hammered on the door. He wasn't going to be afraid of this blustering fathead! If Handy attempted to biff him, he'd be jolly sorry for himself! Bob was no mean boxer, and he had the advantage of being prepared.

All the same, it was rather a shock to him. He and all the other Fourth Formers had known for weeks past that Edward Oswald Handforth was the captain of the Remove—elected for a joke. But Mr. Crowell, the Form-master, had failed to see the point of it, and had insisted upon Handforth being retained. Since then the mighty leader of Study D had employed all his well-known aggressive methods to enforce his ideas upon the Remove. He appeared to think that a Form captain was a supreme dictator, and that his word was law. He had ruled with an iron hand, and the Remove was getting rather fed-up with him. Everything had gone wrong since Handforth had come into power. There was no peace for anybody. There was no certainty about football matches, the River House School was out of bounds in consequence of a free fight, and there were scores of other complaints—all

due to Handforth's mistaken policy of violence.

At first, he had been accepted as a joke. Then the juniors had rebelled against him, only to make him worse than ever. The Remove didn't know how to handle him, or the story would have been very different. The more opposition that Handforth encountered, the more aggressive became his attitude. And as he had received nothing else but opposition since he had taken the reins, his aggressiveness was now at its height.

"The Remove doesn't want me!" he had snapped. "All right! They've got me, and I'll jolly well show them who's the boss! They've tried to trick me into resigning, they've tried to make me look silly, and they've failed! Well, I'm going to rule the Remove with an iron rod!"

And, what was more, he was doing it! Such fellows as Reggie Pitt and Ralph Leslie Fullwood and De Valerie and Tregellis - West had given him up as a bad job. But the rank and file still resented him—and quite unconsciously made him worse.

"Afraid to go in?" asked Doyle sarcastically.

Bob Christine started. He had been so deep in thought that he had forgotten his surroundings for a moment.

"No, I'm not afraid to go in!" he retorted.

He now dimly remembered that a cheery voice had invited him to enter. He opened the door of the Captain's Office, and walked in. Then he paused, opening his eyes rather wide.

"Name, please!" said the cheery voice. "And business!"

Bob Christine was too surprised to reply for a moment. It was impossible to advance far into the room, because a barrier extended from wall to wall. It was a roughly constructed affair, the carpentry being of a primitive order; in fact, the barrier was made of broomsticks and trellis-work.

Behind this stood a small table, immediately facing the door, and at the small table sat a small youth, also immediately facing the door. And the small youth was Willy Handforth.

"What's this?" asked Bob Christine blankly.

"What's what?"

"All this—this idiotic rot!" said Bob, indicating the barrier, and the general effect.

"Better go easy!" murmured Willy warningly. "The boss is just behind the screen.

He's hard at work, planning out his next big campaign. I'm the office-boy. I shouldn't advise you to ask for an interview now."

"Office-boy!" said Bob, in amazement.

"Well, that's what he calls me," explained Willy, grinning. "This is his business sanctum—and he believes in running everything in the orthodox manner. This barrier, for example. Nobody's allowed into the inner office without express permission."

"Well I'm jiggered!"

"I'm here to ask callers for their names, and to make them state their business," proceeded Willy coolly. "Let's go ahead, Mr. Christine wants to see Mr. Handforth about his—Mr. Christine's—place in the forthcoming match against Bannington Grammar School. How's that?"

"You silly young fathead!" said Mr. Christine, turning red.

"Well, am I right?"

"As a matter of fact, you are."

"I shall have to turn this mind reading to account one of these days," said Willy, with a grin. "Why waste such a gift?"

A kind of snort came from somewhere further in the room.

"That's the chief!" murmured Willy. "That's a sign that he doesn't like being disturbed. I'll go and see if you've got a chance."

Willy got up from his chair, and walked

across the room to a big screen near the window. He tapped upon the end flap, and swung it open like a door.

"Gentleman to see you, chief!" he announced solemnly.



CHAPTER 2.

HANDFORTH'S LATEST!

EDWARD OSWALD HANDFORTH, the captain of the Remove and the skipper of the St. Frank's Junior Eleven, swung

round in his swivel chair, and looked at his minor with dignified concentration.

"A gentleman?" he repeated curtly.

"Mr. Bob Christine!" said Willy.

"He's not a gentleman!" snapped Handforth. "He's one of those fatheaded Fourth Formers! Tell him to go and eat coke! What's his business?"

"He's come about the footer——"

"Oh, has he?" roared Handforth, in exasperation. "That's about the sixth idiot who's bothered me within the last half-hour! You

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can go and tell him that he's got ten seconds to clear out of this office!"

Handforth swung himself round again, and seized the pen. His swivel chair was a home-made one, and it was rather inclined to creak. The table was strewn with papers and writing-blocks and bottles of ink. Most of this paraphernalia was there for the sake of effect—for a Form captain's duties were by no means so exacting as Handforth fooled himself into believing. But he regarded his office as a highly important one. He was the leader of the Form—the big noise of the Remove. While the Form denied the former statement, they were in full agreement with the latter.

"Wouldn't it be a good idea to have a word with Christine?" asked Willy. "He's a member of the regular team, you know—"

"There's no regular team until I've selected it!" interrupted Handforth curtly. "Obey my orders, my lad, or get the sack! I've engaged you as office-boy—not as adviser!"

"Oh, all right, chief," said Willy. "Have your own way—but you're a silly fathead, all the same!"

He went back into the other part of the room, and found Bob Christine glaring.

"I'm to tell you——" began Willy.

"Do you think I didn't hear, you silly young duffer?" demanded Bob. "What's the idea of all this crazy nonsense? Handy, you chump! Why don't you come out here, and act like a real skipper, and not like a lunatic? I want to know if I'm going to play in Saturday's match?"

"You can go and boil yourself!" roared Handforth, from behind the screen.

"You exasperating cuckoo!" snorted Christine. "I've been invited out for the afternoon, and I want to know whether I can accept the invite or not. If I write, accepting it, you'll shove my name on the list—and if I refuse I shall probably be left out! I know your funny little ways. So I'm not taking any chances. Am I playing, or am I not? That's all I want to know."

It was, after all, a perfectly reasonable question, and one that any footballer had the right to ask his captain. Bob Christine wasn't arguing, or making a fuss. He just wanted to make his plans in advance.

But Handforth was offended by his tone.

"I don't allow people to come in here, asking me silly questions!" he said, appearing from behind the screen, and pushing back his sleeves. "I'm a peaceful chap, and I don't mind answering a civil question. But you just called me a chump. You called me a cuckoo. You compared me to a lunatic. And I've got one word to say to you—outside!"

"You've got a word to say to me outside?"

"I'm saying it here!" roared Handforth. "Buzz off!"

"But, confound you——"

"Get out of this office!"

"I'm hanged if I will!" shouted Bob furiously. "I've got to write to my uncle by this evening's post, and I want to know——"

"Up with 'em!" interrupted Handforth briskly.

"What the dickens—— Hi! Steady on——"

Biff!

Bob Christine staggered back, and Willy deftly opened the wicket gate in the barrier. And as Bob continued to reel backwards, Willy opened the door. Bob sagged out into the passage, and sat down with a thud.

"Smart work!" said Willy, as he closed the door.

His major took a deep breath.

"I don't like doing this sort of thing, but duty is duty!" he said grimly. "If anybody comes here and talks to me with respect, I'll give them a civil answer. But I'm not going to be insulted in my own office! I'm not going to be called names! There's only one way to tame the Remove, and that is to keep biffing the chaps until they realise where they stand!"

"That's just the trouble," said Willy. "After you've biffed 'em they don't stand."

"I don't want any funny remarks from you, my lad!"

"No, chief!" said Willy solemnly.

"Get back to your table!"

"Yes, chief!"

"And not so much cheek!"

"No, chief!" said Willy calmly.

Edward Oswald gave him a queer look, and his fists instinctively closed, but he held himself in check, and walked back to his own inner sanctum. He was rather pleased with this office of his. He had planned it on the style of a real city office—although it had a suspiciously close resemblance to those offices one sees in an American film. But it pleased Handforth. He was exclusively private behind his screen, his office-boy was in attendance, and the rabble was held in check by the wooden barrier.

Outside, Bob Christine was slowly massaging his nose.

"The—the violent rotter!" he breathed. "He didn't give me a chance! He didn't—— What are you grinning at, Doyle?" he added coldly.

"That nose of yours will be a picture in about an hour!" said Doyle, with a joyous note in his voice which struck Bob as the essence of callousness.

"I'm going to make a fuss about this!" said the Fourth Former hotly. "You Remove chaps can put up with Handy's lunacy if you like, but the Fourth won't. Not likely! The Fourth's been insulted—and the Fourth will have revenge!"

"Do you happen to be the entire Fourth?" asked Doyle hotly. "Besides, what's the good of talking rot? Handforth doesn't make any distinctions. He'd biff out a prefect as soon as look at him!"

Reggie Pitt came up with a brisk stride.

"Hallo! Somebody been fighting?" he



"What's this idiotic rot? I want to see your major!" said Bob Christine. "Sorry, the boss is hard at work just now, and won't see anyone," replied Willy blandly. "But if you like, I will tell him that you called." "You can tell him from me that he's a silly ass," said Bob; and a kind of snort sounded from the inner sanctum, where Handforth, the Captain of the Remove, was pretending to be hard at work.

asked cheerily. "Haven't I often warned you against this unfortunate tendency to quarrel? You shouldn't let your tempers get the better of you—"

"You funny ass!" snapped Bob. "Handy's done this!"

"All of it?" asked Reggie, looking at the trio.

"Yes, confound him!"

"Then he's done well!" said Pitt, with a grin. "He's done you all a bit of no good, by the look of things. In one of his little moods, eh? Oh, well, life's full of these surprises. We shall have to try our luck."

"Are you going in there?" asked Christine, with sudden hope.

"That's what I came for, anyhow," nodded Reggie.

"Good man!" said Doyle. "We'll be ready for you."

Reggie nodded, and passed into the great man's office. He closed the door, and took in the scene at a glance. He grinned with appreciation.

"Name, please!" said Willy.

"All complete, eh?" said Pitt, with a chuckle. "No admittance beyond the barrier, I suppose? Tell his lordship that a humble slave awaits without—a miserable cur who would have converse with his nibs."

Willy grinned, went to the screen, and gave the message verbatim. Handforth

appeared, and regarded the visitor with a severe glance.

"Greetings, O Rajah!" said Reggie, salaaming low. "I just came along to speak about Saturday's team—"

"Oh, did you?" said Handforth ominously.

"There's such a lot of talk going round that I thought I'd pop in," went on Reggie, nodding. "The fellows seem to think you're going to make a mess of things. But you're the captain, and I'm a firm believer in letting the captain choose his own men without any interference. I thought you'd like to know that I shall be available, if you want me. Or, if you don't want me, I shan't raise Cain. You're skipper, and your word is final."

"Oh!" said Handforth, nodding. "Good man!"

"If you like any hints from a humble disciple—"

"Well, as a matter of fact, I haven't quite decided about the team yet," confessed Handforth. "I thought about making some experiments, but I'm not so sure. You're in the Eleven, anyhow. If I want some advice, I'll pop over to the West House later on, and perhaps we can have a jaw about it."

"Any old time," said Reggie, nodding. "You'll find me about."

"Thanks, old man," said Handforth.

Reggie nodded again and strolled out. He

closed the door softly, and Doyle and Christine and Goodwin regarded him with acute indignation.

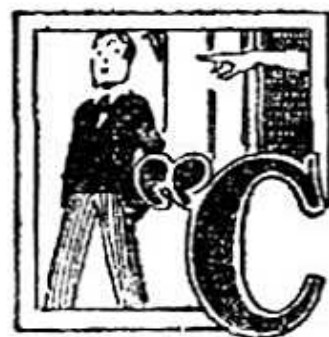
"What's the idea of this?" demanded Bob Christine hotly.

"What's the idea of what?"

"Coming out without a black eye!"

"My dear old chap, it's easy!" smiled Pitt gently. "Handy is one of the mildest fellows in the world—if you only know how to treat him. I went into that room with a certain object—and I've come out with the exact knowledge I require. It's just a question of tact."

He strolled off, leaving the trio staring after him blankly.



CHAPTER 3.

WILLY GETS THE SACK.

"LEVER chap, Reggie!" said Willy thoughtfully.

"Eh?"

"I'm saying that Reggie's a clever chap,"

repeated Willy. "He only wanted to know just the same as the other chaps, and he went out in one whole piece. You treated him like a long-lost brother."

Handforth started.

"You—you mean he was kidding me?" he asked, staring.

"He wasn't exactly kidding you, but he knows how to get on your right side, just the same as I do," explained Willy. "It's a mystery to me why these other chaps don't jump to it. It's the easiest thing in the world. And yet they keep to the same old tactics, and they never learn!"

"The easiest thing in the world!" repeated Handforth darkly.

"Oh, come off it!" grinned Willy. "My hat! I'm your brother, and I ought to know, oughtn't I? What's going to happen to me if I call you a pig-headed chump, and an obstinate donkey?"

"I'll smash you to atoms!" roared Handforth.

"Then I won't call you either of 'em," said Willy calmly. "You see, Ted, that's just the point. These other chaps won't keep their thoughts to themselves."

For once Handforth was rather swift.

"Oh!" he snapped. "So you *think* I'm a pig-headed chump, do you?"

"My dear old Ted!" protested Willy.

"You *think* I'm an obstinate donkey, eh?" insisted his major.

"Why jump to such rash conclusions?" asked Willy, pained.

"All right, my lad—I'll show you whether I can be subjected to this sort of thing from my own office-boy!" shouted Edward Oswald. "You've got the sack! Understand? You're sacked from this minute!"

Willy glanced at his watch.

"A minute earlier than I expected, but that's all to the good," he said. "It'll give

those chums of mine a bit more time to prepare tea. I've got to go along to the shop and buy the tuck. We've planned a special feed this evening, as a matter of fact."

"In that case, you're not sacked!" said his major calmly.

"Rats! You can't sack a chap, and then engage him in the next second," said Willy with a trace of anxiety. "I'm fed-up with this job, anyhow. You're too conceited, Ted. You expect me to 'Chief' you every minute, and bow and scrape as though you were a Chinese mandarin! You're a good sort, on the whole, but your head's too large for your hat!"

Handforth flushed deeply and pointed to the door.

"That's done it!" he roared. "You're dismissed!"

"Good man!" said Willy. "Is this final?"

"Absolutely!"

"All right, then—ten bob!"

"What?"

"Ten bob!" said Willy calmly, holding out his hand.

"You—you— Ten bob!" gasped Handforth. "Great corks! Have you got the nerve to stand there and ask me for ten bob?"

"No, of course not," said Willy. "I'm not asking—I'm demanding it as a right. Don't keep me messing about, Ted."

"A right?" breathed his major thickly.

"What else do you call it?" asked Willy indignantly. "Didn't you engage me as office-boy for ten bob a week?"

"Yes, I did."

"Then why argue?" asked Willy. "Ten bob!"

"But, you young sweep, you haven't been here more than half an hour!" bellowed Handforth. "D'you think I'm going to pay you ten bob for half an hour?"

Willy sighed.

"I wouldn't have thought it," he said sadly. "My own brother, too! Making a contract, and then tearing it up as though it were a scrap of paper!"

"A—a contract?" said his major with a start.

"Everybody knows that if an employee's sacked without notice, he's got to have his week's wages," explained Willy patiently. "Surely you know the law on that point, Ted? You haven't given me notice, so buck up with that ten bob, and don't quibble! A contract's a contract. Am I to go out and tell everybody that you've broken your word?"

Handforth was so speechless that he just stood there opening his mouth and closing it again. Then he dragged out a ten-shilling note and pushed it into his minor's hand. He pointed to the door with a quivering finger.

"Go!" he muttered hoarsely.

Willy nodded.

"Good old Ted!" he said with approval.

"Didn't I say that I knew exactly how to wangle you? Oh, I nearly forgot!"

He reached down and picked up a piece of cardboard near his table. Then he went to the door, opened it, and pinned the card on the outside.

"What's that?" demanded Handforth thickly.

"I thought you'd appreciate it," said Willy coolly.

He strolled off down the passage, whistling, and Handforth stared at the card, which bore the legend, in bold letters:

"OFFICE-BOY WANTED."

"Well, I'm jiggered!" gasped Handforth with a deep breath. "He had it all ready, too! He knew I was going to give him the sack. In fact, by George, the young burglar had it all prepared in advance!"

Willy met Chubby Heath and Juicy Lemon in the lobby, and they were both looking rather anxious. They rushed at their leader as he came up.

"On time to the minute," said Willy, grinning.

"Have you got it?" they demanded.

"Got what?"

"Why, that ten bob!"

"My poor fatheads, what did you think I accepted the job as office-boy for?" asked Willy tartly. "It was as easy as shelling peas! Ted said he wanted an office-boy, so I meekly agreed. I told you I should be out in half an hour, didn't I? Well, during the last minute I cheeked him, and I got the sack. Could anything be easier?"

"And he actually paid up?" asked Juicy, awed.

"He couldn't do anything else—an employer has got to give a week's wages in lieu of notice," grinned Willy blandly. "That's where I had him on toast, although he didn't see it until it was too late. Come on! Let's go and raid Mother Hake's tea supplies. Did you order the pies and things?"

"We didn't like to," admitted Chubby Heath. "We thought we'd better wait until you came along with the cash."

Willy shook his head.

"When will you chaps learn to have faith in me?" he asked bitterly. "Didn't I promise to bring the money? Don't I always make Ted shell out if I want him to? There's no cleverness in it."

"You're right!" agreed Chubby. "It's a gift!"

Church and McClure, of the Remove, came in, and Church gave the fags a suspicious glance.

"I thought you were on duty in the office?" he asked.

"I am sacked," explained Willy. "Ted will probably get one of you chaps to act as office-boy now. Poor old scouts! You have my sympathy! What a hard, drab life you must lead!"

The fags passed out, chuckling, and Church and McClure glared after them.

"I knew the young beggar was up to one of his dodges," said McClure, frowning. "I warned Handy, too, but he wouldn't take any notice. Well, anyhow, it's tea-time—so let's hope he'll be in a softened mood. I'll get busy on these kippers. You take him the parcel."

"Don't be mean," said Church. "Come along and support me."

Handforth's chums went along to the office and entered. Their leader was pacing up and down behind the barrier, with a flushed, excited look on his face, and a wild expression in his eyes. Church and McClure had often noticed these symptoms immediately after Willy had "touched" his major.

"It's the last time!" said Handforth, pausing and glaring. "The young bounder got me in a trap. I had to pay him up, or be pestered with him for a whole week. But if he comes near me again——"

He broke off, and eyed his faithful chums.

"Been to the village?" he asked keenly.

"Yes, rather," said McClure. "We've got some lovely kippers——"

"Kippers?" roared Handforth. "What about that typewriter? How can you expect a Form captain to conduct his office properly if he hasn't got a typewriter? Where is it? I suppose you've left it in the study?"

"No, it's here," said Church, putting his parcel on the table.

It wasn't a big parcel, although it was certainly rather weighty. The juniors had picked it up at the post-office—where parcels were often collected of an evening in preference to awaiting the morning delivery. Handforth looked at it with scorn.

"You hopeless asses!" he said. "That's not the typewriter. I expect they've sent the tools and oil-can and things. The giddy slow-coaches! And here am I, absolutely helpless without that machine!"

Church and McClure said nothing. They had their own ideas regarding Handforth's helplessness. They also had their own ideas about that parcel. But what was the good of saying anything? Their leader would only jump down their throats!

So they waited with interest while Handforth ripped off the wrapping.



CHAPTER 4.

THE WONDERFUL TYPE-
WRITER.

ELL, I'm jiggered!"

Handforth was startled. The typewriter was there, sure enough, but it wasn't exactly what he had pictured in his mind. The machine was quite a small one, and not at all conventional. There was a kind of round plate on the top, with a nickel-plated finger-grip in the middle.

The whole machine was only four or five inches high, and although it was brand-new and nicely produced, it did not seem to please its new owner at all.

"What—what's this thing?" he asked indignantly.

"Looks like your new typewriter, old man," said Church.

"They must have made a mistake!" snapped Handforth. "This isn't like the one they've got in the Senior Day-room."

McClure sighed.

"What do you expect for your money?" he asked tartly.

"A typewriter!"

"Well, you've got one."

"But it looks more like a—a— Well, I'm blessed if I know what it *does* look like!" snapped Handforth. "Anyhow, it's not like that machine in the Senior Day-room, and I've been swindled!"

"The machine in the Senior Day-room is a Remington," explained Church gently. "This one is a Cresto. You can't expect a jigger like a Remington or an Underwood or a Bar-lock for thirty bob!"

"Why can't I?" demanded Handforth.

"Oh, well, you can if you like, of course!" said Church obligingly. "There's no harm in expecting. But these typewriter people are a bit unreasonable, you know. Even for an important Form captain they won't send out a twenty-five quid machine for thirty bob! A short-sighted policy, but there you are!"

Handforth started.

"You mean that those other machines cost twenty-five quid?" he asked.

"Something like that."

"H'm! Then perhaps this one isn't so bad," said Handforth, fingering the thing gingerly. "After all, thirty bob isn't much of a price, so we mustn't expect too much. But it's a typewriter, and they guarantee that it'll do any typewriting you like. I wish you luck with it, Mac, old man."

"Eh?" said McClure.

"You'd better start practising at once."

"Who—me?" said McClure.

"Yes, you, fathead!"

"What for?"

"Because you're going to do all my typewriting!"

"Am I?" asked Mac in surprise.

"Haven't I just said you are?" roared Handforth, glaring.

"It's just one of your little mistakes, old son," said McClure gently. "I've never touched a typewriter in my life. I'm not ambitious. And I wouldn't deprive you of the pleasure for worlds. In fact, I couldn't wangle the thing, anyhow. It's yours, Handy—so you've got to operate it."

"You—you silly ass!" growled Handforth. "Who ever heard of a boss using his own typewriter? You've got to sit in this office, and type out all my minutes and things. All my agendas. Team lists, and notices."

"Oh, well, if you insist—"

"Of course I insist."

"In that case, I'll get busy," said McClure briskly. "Only I must say it's a bit of a come-down for you, Handy. It's your typewriter, and you're the skipper. Think of the honour of owning a typewriter, and making all the other chaps jealous. You ought to be proud of that machine. You ought to refuse to let anybody else lay a finger on it."

Handforth hesitated, and looked rather doubtful.

"You don't let people drive your Austin Seven," went on McClure. "So why should you buy a typewriter and practically give it away to me? I shan't feel comfortable. Besides, a Form captain—"

But Handforth had heard enough.

"You're right!" he said curtly. "This is my machine, and if you fatheads touch it, I'll biff you! Let's see how it works. By George, we'll soon have a lot of notices typed out and pinned up on the board!"

Handforth was determined to type out the notices for the mere sake of seeing them—for, at the moment, he had no bulletins to publish. However, that was a mere detail. He could soon invent some.

"Now, how does the thing go?" he asked, as he tried to put a piece of paper into it. "There seems to be a kind of roller here. But what about the keys? They've forgotten to fit the giddy things! I don't believe it's all here!"

"But there aren't any keys on this machine," explained Church. "The type is all round this plate, and you've got to move the plate round, and press it down when your finger gets opposite that guide. Don't you see the letters all round?"

The machine was not exactly a toy, but, on the other hand, it was not a typewriter that would be of any use in a busy office. The makers guaranteed that it would produce good typewriting—and it would. But there was no mention of speed. Even an expert operator on this semi-toy would have some difficulty in producing a thousand words of typewriting in an evening. Handforth, who knew nothing whatever about it, would be unlikely to produce a thousand words in a term. And, even then, there was a distinct probability that nine hundred of the words would be mis-spelt or jumbled together.

However, he was full of confidence—as usual.

"We had to have a machine—and here it is!" he said. "I'll have some practice on it this evening, and get the hang of it. I shan't do much, of course. I'll just type out three or four notices, and perhaps write a letter to the pater—to make him sit up and stare."

"I shouldn't be too optimistic, old son," said Church cautiously. "These things want a lot of learning. Even a big machine needs a good bit of practice before a chap can type anything properly. But this thing looks more like a Chinese puzzle than anything else!"

"Leave it to me," said Handforth confidently. "To a fellow with a mechanical

turn of mind, there's nothing in it. By George, I shall be able to type out my Trackett Grim stories, you know! I'm going to write a whole book of 'em, and send them to a big publisher. Then I've got a serial in mind, too, to say nothing of a ripping story of adventure in the Wild West. And this machine is coming in useful, I can tell you!"

"Well, we'll go and get tea ready," said Church.

"Rats! You'll stay here and help me to find out the way to wangle this fatheaded thing!" growled Handforth. "Tea can wait!"

"Yes, but it's nearly five——"

"I don't care what the time is!"

"And you seem to have forgotten——"

"I don't forget anything!" interrupted Handforth curtly.

"My dear old ass——"

"Dry up, and don't argue!" interrupted Edward Oswald. "Let's have some more paper. This piece seems to have got jammed in the works somehow. I can't make head nor tail——"

"It might be a good idea to have a look at the book of instructions," suggested McClure. "I don't want to be critical, but——"

"Those instructions are only sent out for duffers!" interrupted Handforth. "A mechanical chap can find out the ins and outs without any giddy book of rules! It only requires a little gumption."

He sat down at the table, and proceeded to exercise his gumption—not that it had much effect. He couldn't give the machine a real testing, because he couldn't find out how the paper went in. And Church and McClure, who were reading the instructions, neglected to give him any hints. Why should they offer any help? Hadn't Handforth declared that he was a mechanical chap?

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"So what the dickens are we going to do? He's getting on our nerves!"

"Absolutely!" said Archie Glenthorne with a nod. "I don't like to say it, but the old fright is absolutely a smudge on the good old face of the Remove! Life, I mean, is becoming too dashed ghastly for words! We go hither, and we go thither, and this foul chappie haunts us like a family spectre!"

Reggie Pitt grinned.

"It's chiefly our own fault," he said. "We haven't used the right tactics."

"There aren't any more tactics!" growled Doyle. "We've used 'em all up!"

"Don't you believe it!" smiled Reggie. "What about our little experience a quarter of an hour ago? Two of you fellows went into his office, and came out in a state of wreckage. I went in, and came out whole."

"Just your luck!" said Bob Christine gruffly.

"Yes, you had a taste of him, too, didn't you?" said Reggie.

"But it wasn't luck, Bob—it was tact. Handy is one of the best chaps in the world at heart, but since he became skipper he's made himself about as popular as a prefect at a dormitory spread. He's lost his balance, you know. This captaincy has got into his head, and his mind is filled with one idea. He thinks he's a dictator, and that he's got to dictate. He thinks the whole

Remove is against him, and that his only policy is to use force. He was always a forceful bounder.

"Then what the dickens can we do?" demanded Fullwood.

They were standing in the Ancient House lobby, discussing the fresh situation, and wondering how they could achieve the end they desired—the deposing of Edward Oswald Handforth.

"What can we do?" repeated Reggie. "We can use tact. We've been blind, my sons. Instead of taking a lesson from Church and McClure, we've used our own methods, and Handy is just as arrogant as ever. He knows we want to get rid of him, so he means to stick in power."

"In that case, we'd better tell him to hold the captaincy!" said Doyle sarcastically.

"Exactly!"

"What?" gasped the juniors.

"That's the exact idea!" grinned Reggie. "You know what a contrary mule he is. If he thinks we all want him as skipper, his one desire will be to abandon us, and leave us in the lurch."

CHAPTER 5.

REGGIE PITT'S IDEA.



"HIS worse than ever!" said Doyle indignantly. "It doesn't matter what we do, we can't squash him. He's even more violent, and he won't tell us anything about the football fixtures, or anything."

"We can't kick him out, and we can't make him resign!" said Fullwood desperately.

"It's too risky," said Fullwood, shaking his head. "These things don't always pan out in practice. If we do a thing like that, he'll only be more triumphant than ever, and we shall have done ourselves in."

Reggie Pitt was quite serene.

"Of course, we shall have to do it cunningly," he went on. "I've got a few ideas in my head now—and if they can only be welded together properly, we ought to be able to knock Handy off his perch. But the first thing to do is to try a little experiment."

"An experiment?"

"Yes," nodded Reggie. "I shan't tell you what it is yet. If it succeeds, I'll go ahead with my plan—and if I know anything about Handy, it will succeed. We'll go to his office now, as a deputation, and ask him to resign."

"My hat!" said Fullwood, staring. "Is that what you call an idea?"

"Yes—and I don't apologise for it."

"But, you idiot, haven't we tried it before?" asked De Valerie. "Haven't we asked him to resign scores of times? Haven't we sent deputations to him——"

"But this one's different," interrupted Pitt. "You won't see much difference, perhaps, and you'd better be prepared for ructions. But I'll do the talking, and it won't be many hours before you see the results. They won't come at once—they'll develop during the evening."

Reggie Pitt had succeeded in mystifying his companions, but he would not go into any explanations. So the deputation was formed, and off it marched to Handforth's office.

Pitt halted, and hammered on the door. Within, Handforth & Co. looked up. Edward Oswald frowned, but his chums expressed their relief. An interruption was just what they required, for it would give them an excuse to escape.

"Come in!" said Handforth gruffly.

The deputation went in, and there was just sufficient room for it on the outer side of the barrier.

"What's all this?" asked Handforth suspiciously.

"Just a little deputation," said Pitt gently. "I see you've got a new gadget for your wireless, Handy."

"You fathead—this is a typewriter!" said Handforth.

"Sorry!" said Pitt calmly. "I thought it was a condenser, or a new kind of loud speaker, or something. So you're going in for typewriting? I'm not at all surprised—it's just what we might have expected."

"What do you mean?" asked Handforth, glaring.

"My dear chap, you mustn't blame us for taking these things for granted," said Reggie, with a smile. "Aren't you always up to date? Always bobbing up with the very latest? And now that you're skipper, you seem to be more abreast of the times than ever. You're certainly full of go, old man."

Handforth thawed, and shrugged his shoulders.

"A Form captain has got to always be on the go," he agreed.

"That's just the trouble!" murmured Fullwood. "We only wish you were on the go, Handy! But you're not—you stick in one place!"

"Don't take any notice," advised Pitt. "We represent the Remove, Handy. We've just come along to put a few facts before you, and we want a fair hearing. Every Form captain ought to grant his critics a fair hearing."

"Critics?" snapped Handforth aggressively.

"Well, you can't get away from the fact that the bulk of the fellows are discontented," said Pitt sorrowfully. "They don't mind you being skipper so much, Handy, but they don't like all this display."

"What display?"

"Well, this office, and your methods," replied Pitt. "You seem to think that a captain of a Form is like the captain of a ship. You're the master, and we're the crew. That seems to be your attitude."

"So it is!" agreed Handforth grimly. "Anything else?"

"Before long you'll expect us to call you Captain Handforth, and salute you every time we come near you!" went on Reggie, in a complaining voice. "You'll be ordering us outside for dress inspection, or something!"

Handforth started.

"There's no telling what I'll do," he replied darkly. "Anyhow, I'm captain. So you'd better understand that I'm not here to listen to any more rot. If you want trouble, just make a few more complaints."

Reggie Pitt grinned.

"Well, as we shall get trouble in any case, it won't make much difference," he said. "The fact is, Handy, there's a growing feeling in the Form that it would be a ripe idea for you to resign. Perhaps you don't think much of it, though?"

"You silly chump! I'm not resigning for anybody!"

"Not if we ask you with tears in our eyes?"

"I won't resign if you all go down on your knees, and beg me to!" retorted Handforth curtly. "You elected me, and I got every vote in the Form. There's never been an election like it before—I swept the board!"

"Yes, you ass, but that was only a spoof," snorted Fullwood angrily. "If you had an ounce of sense, you'd know that we're all fed-up with you. You've either got to resign, or we'll——"

"Steady, old man," interrupted Pitt. "After all, it's for Handy to say. If he doesn't want to resign, there's an end of it. Our only course is to accept the inevitable, and do our duty."

"Our duty?" repeated the deputation.

"Of course!" said Reggie. "Our duty to the captain. If we only please him, he'll

probably show us that we've been misjudging him. He won't resign, so we'll try to be loyal to him. Good old Handy! Always sticking to your guns, and always firm! Dash it all, they're qualities we can't help admiring!"

"If you're rotting——" began Handforth.

"Rotting?" repeated Pitt, pained. "My dear chap, haven't I shown you how earnest I am? You're the captain—you're at the helm of the Remove. We want to be able to come to our skipper with our little troubles. We want to ask him for advice, and to guide us into the true path of right. We need harmony in the Form. So if you intend to cling to the captaincy, we can only resign ourselves, and knuckle under. You're the great man, and we're only your subjects."

Handforth smiled rather indulgently.

"I didn't know you had so much sense, Pitt," he said, with frank surprise.

"We're always learning things," replied Reggie. "Of course, at the same time, it would be heaps better if you resigned, old man."

"What?"

"Speaking quite candidly, the Remove is just about fed-up to the neck with you," said Reggie coolly. "The Remove is so tired of you that it hasn't got much strength left. As a skipper, you're a rank failure, and several kinds of a dud. It's high time you were knocked off your perch!"

Handforth goggled.

"Why you—you insulting fathead——" he began.

"But this, of course, is merely the Form's opinion," went on Pitt gently. "When it comes to a matter of personal——"

"I don't want to hear any personal judgments," interrupted Handforth fiercely. "You're just rotting! So you can clear out! I'll give you ten seconds to get out of this office."

"Then you won't resign?"

"No, blow you, I won't!" roared Handforth.

"Think very carefully——"

But Handforth uttered such a bellow of rage that Pitt beat a hasty retreat, and the deputation scuttled into the passage. Then it hurried off to the lobby once more—where it was comparatively safe. Pitt was looking highly satisfied. But his companions were flushed with impatience and indignation.

"Is that what you call smart?" asked Fullwood fiercely.

"My dear fellow——"

"You just went there to be funny!" snapped Fullwood, his eyes glittering. "But what else could we expect from a West House lunatic? What on earth was the idea of wasting all that time, kidding Handforth, and achieving nothing? You knew jolly well he'll never agree to resign!"

"Peace, O loud one!" said Reggie quietly. "You may not see the inner workings of the idea yet, but I don't expect too much from

Ancient House chaps. We all know they're rather weak-minded——"

"Smash him!" roared the Ancient House juniors.

"You can't touch me—I've got my fingers crossed," said Pitt calmly. "Joking aside, though, that little deputation wasn't so objectless as you might think. Wait, my lads! Just wait until after tea, and your uncle won't disappoint you."

And they had to be satisfied with that—although they were more puzzled than ever.



CHAPTER 6.

AN UNEXPECTED TURN!

"NERVE!" said Handforth, with a snort.

He glared at the closed door, and listened to the retreating feet of the deputation as it went down the passage.

"Pitt's always full of spooof like that," said Church, with a grin. "But I can't quite understand why he chose an important moment like this to come here with his spooof. It's tea-time, Handy—past tea-time——"

"I don't care about tea!" roared Handforth. "I'm determined to find out how this typewriter goes. The giddy thing's a swindle! The paper won't go in, and I'm all messed up with oil, and——"

"Well, we'll get tea while you're wrestling with it," said McClure, glancing at his watch. "By jingo! Twenty-past five. That's done it!"

"Done what?"

"Well, you issued the invitation," said Mac crossly.

"What invitation?"

"And the girls distinctly said they'd be here at a quarter-past five——"

"The girls!" gasped Handforth, leaping to his feet. "What's to-day? What's the time? Why isn't tea ready? You—you hopeless idiots! The girls will be here any minute, and we're not ready for them!"

"I like that!" snorted Church. "We tried to tell you three or four times, but you shut us up. I expect the fire's out by this time, too. You wouldn't let us go. Fires can't keep in without coal."

"Quick!" panted Edward Oswald. "There's just a chance that we might do it—they're bound to be late! Girls always are!"

"Not when we're behind with tea!" said McClure, shaking his head. "They're only late when we're all ready on the tick!"

But Handforth didn't listen. He rushed out, sped down the passage, and dashed into Study D. The room was cold and chilly, the fire having gone quite out, and the radiator being turned off. It was hopelessly untidy, too—in no fit condition for the fair visitors to see.

It was quite characteristic of Handforth to invite people to tea on a certain day, and then forget all about it. — But he had never

before committed such an unpardonable crime where the Moor View girls were concerned. The cares of office were undoubtedly the cause of this lapse.

All the same, he had no excuse for consistently refusing to let his chums remind him. And he couldn't very well blame them for being quite callous now. This was his funeral, anyhow!

And, naturally, the very worst happened.

Before they could make the slightest attempt to effect a general clear-up, the girls arrived. And it was a piece of sheer bad luck that Handforth should be on his knees at the moment, raking the ashes out of the fireplace with his hands.

"Quick, you ass!" gasped Church. "They're here!"

"Here?" blurted out Handforth, leaping up, and gazing past Church through the open doorway. "Shut that door! Make 'em believe I'm busy! Something connected with the captaincy! Anything you like—but keep 'em out—"

"Too late, Ted, old son!" said Irene Manners, as she stood smiling in the doorway. "Sorry! We heard what you said."

"Oh, crumbs!" breathed Handforth, aghast.

Doris Berkeley, Mary Summers, Marjorie Temple, and Winnie Pitt were in the party, and the four girls crowded into Study D, with Church and McClure grinning in the background. They weren't at all sorry to see their leader in distress. Although loyal to him, they were rather fed-up with his autocratic rule.

"You're—you're early!" said Handforth desperately.

"No, we're not—we're five minutes late," smiled Doris.

"I—I mean, we're not quite ready—"

"So it appears!" said Irene, looking round in surprise. "I believe you forgot all about us, Ted! There's nothing prepared—there's no fire—and the room's all untidy. Oh, Ted!"

"I—I didn't forget—that is to say, Church and McClure didn't forget!" gasped Handforth, extending a dusty, cindery hand. "How are you? Jolly glad you've come—Oh, corks!"

He noticed that Irene had not taken his hand, and he gazed at it in horror, as though it were some object of fearsome terror. "Sorry! I—I forgot—I mean, those cinders—We—we—"

He broke off, utterly confused.

"Yes, Ted, we quite understand," said Irene stiffly. "You invited us to tea, you forgot all about it, Church and McClure reminded you, but you wouldn't listen. Am I right?"

"No!" panted Handforth frantically.

"Are you sure?"

"I—I mean yes!" muttered Handforth dismally. "The—the fact is, I've been so worried about the captaincy, you know. The fellows are such a trial."

"According to what we hear, you're the trial!" smiled Marjorie. "Still, it's not our business, so we won't pass any opinions. We came to St. Frank's for tea, and as we like being truthful, we might as well add that we're hungry," she said pointedly.

"Tea!" said Doris. "Lead me to the nearest cup!"

Reggie Pitt, who had looked in, promptly bowed.

"Come straight across to the West House," he said. "Jack Grey is getting everything ready, and we shall be awfully pleased to leap to the rescue in this crisis. May we have the honour of your fair company?"

"If you'll promise not to talk nonsense, we'll come," said Doris, with a laugh. "But I'm not so sure about Winnie," she added doubtfully. "Surely Win doesn't want to have tea with her own brother?"

"I think I could stand it for once!" chuckled Winnie.

"You won't get the chance!" put in Ralph Leslie Fullwood firmly. "Tea's all ready in my study, Winnie, so I propose that we divide the party up. You take Doris and Mary over to the West House, Pitt, and I'll keep Winnie and Irene here. How's that?"

"Splendid!" said the schoolgirls.

"Then we're all satisfied," nodded Reggie Pitt. "Let's move."

Handforth, who had appeared to be on the point of choking, found his voice.

"All satisfied?" he burst out. "What about me?"

Fullwood stared.

"What about you?" he asked sternly. "You've got nothing to boast of, my son! You invite four young ladies to tea, and forget they're coming! You've lost them now, so you might as well dry up!"

"They're my guests!" roared Handforth.

"Yes, and you've got nothing ready for your guests!" retorted Pitt. "Not even a fire—not even a dusted chair!"

"And you claim to be a Form captain!" said Fullwood. "After this, Handy, I should think you'll find the nearest dark corner, and hide yourself! By gad! What a memory! This jolly well serves you right!"

Irene looked rather doubtful.

"It's your own fault, Ted," she said. "We came here at your invitation, and as you haven't got anything ready for us, you can't blame us for accepting tea elsewhere. Good-bye!"

They all vanished, chatting and laughing as they went. Church and McClure softly closed the door, and Handforth sat down with a thud in the chair. He wouldn't have had this happen for worlds. And he couldn't "take it out" of his chums, because they had attempted to remind him of his duties as host.

So he poured his wrath down upon the thirty-shilling typewriter.

"It's that rotten machine!" he snapped fiercely. "If that hadn't come, I shouldn't have forgotten about the girls. Blow the



Handy had clean forgotten he had invited Irene and Co. to tea that afternoon, and it was unfortunate that he was raking out the grate with his hands when his fair visitors arrived. "Keep 'em out! Tell 'em I'm busy!" he shouted to his chums. "You're too-late, Ted!" came a well-known voice.

machine! Rats to it! I never want to see another typewriter as long as I live! The beastly thing's no good, anyhow! I can't get the paper in, and it won't work, and I might as well have chucked the thirty bob into the gutter! Who first saw that advert?"

"Oh, somebody," said Church vaguely.

"Tell me who he is!" roared Handforth. "I'll smash him!"

"Well, you saw it first, old man," said McClure. "Go ahead!"

"What do you mean—go ahead?"

"We're waiting to see you smash yourself!" explained Mac, grinning.

"I don't want any funny remarks from you, Arnold McClure!" hooted Handforth. "I'm going to take that typewriter, and smash it up!"

"That's a silly thing to do," said Church, in alarm. "You can sell it to somebody in the Fifth or the Sixth for a quid, or twenty-five bob. It's brand-new, anyhow. If you'll promise me ten per cent commission, I'll sell it for you."

Handforth frowned.

"Oh, will you?" he snapped. "Then you can jolly well go and eat coke! That typewriter's mine, and I'm not selling it!"

"Great Scott!" ejaculated Church. "You just said——"

"Never mind what I just said," muttered Handforth miserably. "That typewriter's mine, and I'm going to keep it." He pulled himself together, and glared round the study. "But what's the good of sitting here moan-

ing?" he went on fiercely. "Let's get tea ready, and then go and get the girls back. It's likely I'm going to allow those other chaps to coolly collar my guests!"

"They've done it, old son," said Church sadly.

But Handforth, who never gave up hope, bustled about as Church and McClure had never seen him bustle before. Naturally, he was a nuisance. As fast as his chums cleared things up, he littered everything about again. Church lit the fire, and Handforth put it out by trying to blow it up too rapidly.

Study D, in fact, was no place of peace that evening.



CHAPTER 7.

REGGIE'S ALLY.

DORIS BERKELEY was looking thoughtful as she went out of the Ancient House with Mary Summers and Reggie Pitt.

The other girls had left them—the guests of Ralph Leslie Fullwood and Clive Russell, in Study I.

"Poor old Ted!" murmured Mary rather regretfully.

"Oh, he'll get over it!" smiled Doris. "Of course, I feel just a bit sorry for him, too, because he's such a dear old chump——"

"Oh, is he?" said Mary coldly. "Better let Rennie hear you—"

"Now, now—this is going to be a peaceful party, not full of arguments," said Reggie Pitt severely. "As a matter of fact, Handy deserves everything. He's a thoroughly good chap, and there isn't a fellow in the Remove who wouldn't rally round him in a real emergency. But just now he's a bit too thick for words. And he needs a jolt."

"A jolt?" asked Doris, as they strolled towards West Arch.

"Not merely a jolt, but a thorough crash," declared Reggie. "Of course, you girls don't understand the thing as we do. Handy's the skipper—elected as a joke, and practically foisted upon us by Mr. Crowell's edict."

"You shouldn't play such jokes," said Mary.

"You're quite right—we shouldn't," nodded Reggie. "We've had our lesson—and I can give you my word there'll be no more spoof elections. But if Handy had any sense, he'd appreciate that he isn't wanted and resign. But he won't resign. He's the Form captain, he's the little tin god of the Remove, and nothing short of dynamite will shift him—if the Remove continues to use force. Handy's a wonderful fellow in a scrap—he's a fine ally in any kind of trouble. He's generous, he's good-natured, he's as honest as the day, and his word is as sound as a bell. But he's the rottenest skipper under the sun!"

"Somehow, I believe you're right!" said Doris, smiling.

"If you were in the Remove, you'd know I was right," said Pitt grimly. "Handy was never cut out to be a leader. He hasn't got the temperament. He's too impulsive, too ram-headed, too fond of extremes. And the only way we can possibly get rid of him is to adopt strategic tactics."

"You won't do anything mean, I'm sure," said Mary.

"No, of course not—" Reggie paused and stared at the gateway. "Shades of the good old days!" he gasped. "Am I seeing double, or is that our true and trusted pal, Dick Hamilton, in that car?"

"Oh, Dick!" said Mary Summers eagerly, her eyes sparkling suddenly. "Where? Yes, it's Dick! Oh, how ripping!"

"You mean, how miraculous!" said Reggie with relief.

A car had just turned into the Triangle, and at the wheel of it sat Mr. Nelson Lee, the famous schoolmaster-detective. Next to him, Dick Hamilton was standing up in his seat, waving. The pair were looking bronzed and cheerful and happy.

"Welcome back, strangers!" ejaculated Pitt, as he ran up.

"Good old Reggie!" grinned Dick, clasping the West House junior's hand and gripping it hard. "We didn't expect to be back for a fortnight, but we soon got the crook the gov'nor was after, and the case fizzled out. So here we are, all merry and bright again."

"Are you back for good?" asked Reggie eagerly. "And you, sir?"

"As far as I know, young 'un," smiled Nelson Lee. "But where are your manners? Make way for the young ladies!"

Dick Hamilton was being warmly greeted already by Mary and Doris, for he had leapt out before the car had stopped. Mary was looking particularly pleased, for it was a well-known fact that she and Dick were the best of friends.

"And are you really back?" asked Mary, her pretty face aglow with pleasure.

"Yes, rather!" nodded Dick. "It's been pretty exciting, one way and another—this trip with the gov'nor—but I'd ten times rather be back at the old school. How's everybody?" he added, turning to Reggie. "How's the Remove?"

"Fed-up!" grinned Reggie.

"Well, let's dash for your study, and have a pow-wow before anybody spots us," said Dick Hamilton. "It's just about tea-time, and everybody's busy. I'd like to hear all the news before I join the big crowd."

"A fine idea!" agreed Reggie promptly. "Mary and Doris were just coming across for tea with Jack and me—so you can join us."

They raised their caps to Nelson Lee and hurried into the West House. Reggie particularly wanted to have Dick to himself for half an hour, and here was the chance. The leader of the West House juniors was overjoyed at Dick Hamilton's unexpected return. And he was not the only one.

When they got to Pitt's study in the West House, there was a brief delay while Jack Grey went slightly dotty. Jack was doubly pleased. He hadn't expected the girls to tea, and he hadn't expected Dick.

"We're a bit short of crocks, but I dare say we shall manage," he apologised finally. "We shall have to share one cup, Reggie!"

"I don't care if it's a flower-pot!" said Reggie promptly.

There was a cheerful fire burning in the grate, the air was heavy with the odour of tea and buttered toast, and the company was very congenial.

"Why did you say the Remove is fed-up, Reggie?" asked Dick, as he watched Mary pouring out the tea. "And why did you go off your rocker as soon as I came in, Jack? I didn't know I was missed so much."

"Missed?" said Jack. "Dick, old son, the Remove has missed you as much as a ship would miss its rudder!"

"My dear, delightful old horse, you're as welcome as a half-holiday!" declared Reggie solemnly.

Dick grinned.

"Cheese it!" he said. "What's the trouble?"

"Handforth."

"Good old impulsive Handy?"

"Impulsive is the right word," said Pitt grimly. "Take a good gulp of that tea, old man, sit back, and brace yourself. Allow

me to inform you that Handforth is our Form captain."

Dick simply grinned.

"Tell me something really funny!" he said, shaking his head.

"But it's a fact!" said Jack Grey. "The Remove elected him!"

"Honour bright?"

"Yes."

"Then the Remove deserves all it's received, is receiving, and is about to receive," replied Dick firmly. "You all know Handy, you all know his funny little ways, and you all know that it would be more sensible to elect an Australian bushman for a Form skipper! So it's on your own heads!"

"Oh, but, Dick, it was only a joke!" explained Mary.

"And the joke side-slipped!" chuckled Doris. "It skidded badly."

They explained the dreadful details, but Dick Hamilton only smiled. Then he grinned when he heard of the dance that Handforth had led the Remove, and finally roared when they told him of Edward Oswald's business office, of his rupture with Brewster & Co., of the River House School, and of a hundred and one other disasters.

"So Handy sticks in power, and won't shift?" asked Dick at last.

"We can't budge him," groaned Jack Grey. "He won't listen to reason, and he won't hear any arguments. We thought about trying gunpowder, but abandoned the idea. It wouldn't be powerful enough. We were all going to club together to buy some T.N.T.!"

"The very worst thing you could do," said Dick promptly: "My dear chaps, force isn't of any use. The only way to make Handforth shift from a position like this is to give him his head, agree with everything he says, and pretend to appreciate his marvellous worth as a skipper. Then he won't want to be skipper any more. Opposition is the only thing that keeps him going. Drop the opposition, and the captaincy will lose all interest in his eyes."

Reggie Pitt sat back and pursed his lips.

"Listen to him!" he said bitterly. "He hasn't heard the facts for more than five minutes when he comes and pinches my ideas——"

"I'm sorry, old chap," smiled Dick.

"I'm wild!" growled Reggie. "Wild with myself. It took me days and days to think of the best way to wangle Handy, and yet you trot it out without a minute's thought! Marvellous! And the rest of the chaps are still keen on the violence stuff. They want to pitch Handy out by force."

"Then they'll never do it," declared Dick.

"But aren't you captain now," inquired Mary. "I thought Ted was only temporary captain?"

"He won't admit it," said Pitt, shaking his head. "He maintains that he was elected, and that he's got the job until the end of

term. Our only course is to make him resign."

"And that's about impossible," said Jack Grey hopelessly.

"I'm not so sure," replied Reggie. "I had an idea over in the Ancient House, and I made an experiment. I shan't know until later on this evening whether the wheeze succeeded or not, but I'd bet ten to one on it romping home a winner. Oh, that reminds me!" he added, turning to Doris. "I want you to do me a favour."

"You can count upon it as done," smiled the girl.

"In fact, I really wanted you to come to tea so that I could ask it," went on Reggie frankly. "It wasn't merely for the pleasure of your society."

"I was wondering when we should come to the catch," laughed Mary.

"Oh, it's not much! I just want you to get Irene to help us," explained Reggie Pitt. "It's this way. I'm expecting Handforth to take a certain action to-night. If he does take it, then we shall have him on toast. And it'll help matters a lot if Irene asks him to do something for her."

"Then why not ask Irene?" said Doris, puzzled.

"Because—— Well, she's just a bit partial to Handy!" grinned Pitt. "She might think it a bit off-side. Of course, it isn't. But we can't afford to take any risks, and if Irene gets round Handy to do this job, he'll give it his full attention."

"Which job?" asked Doris. "I must be dense——"

"Not at all," chuckled Reggie. "I don't know what the job is—any old thing will do, so long as it keeps Handy busy for a day or two. You'll appreciate the significance of this later. I just want Irene to give old Handy a fairly stiffish task. And she's got to do this sincerely, you know—without realising that it's a part of the plot. Are you game?"

"Of course," replied Doris promptly. "I know you fellows wouldn't do anything mean, and I quite agree with you that Ted is out of his depth in this captaincy business. Besides, Dick's back now, and it's his job."

"Hear, hear!" said Mary. "We'll fix it up with Irene."

"You're a couple of sports!" said Reggie Pitt heartily.

"But won't you tell us the wheeze?" asked Doris with interest.

Reggie did tell them, and it met with the hearty approval of the girls. Dick Hamilton was equally enthusiastic.

"It's a winner!" he declared. "Handy won't hold the captaincy for a couple of days longer if we work the thing properly. But, mind you, I don't want to push him out. I'm quite content——"

"Happily, we don't need to take any notice of you!" interrupted Reggie Pitt grimly. "The Remove isn't content, and the Remove

Does want to push him out! In fact, either Handy gets pushed out, or the Remove goes off in a solid body to the nearest lunatic asylum!"

CHAPTER 8.



THE BEGINNING OF THE PLOT.

HANDFORTH was like a cat on hot bricks.

Study D was neat and tidy. Tea was set for six or seven, the table was loaded with good things, and a bright fire was burning in the grate. And McClure, who was making toast in front of it, maintained a frosty silence.

He and Church were just about weary. They had told their leader fifty times that all this preparation was useless. How the dickens could he expect the girls to come to tea after they had had tea elsewhere? But Handforth wouldn't listen. He had gone ahead just as though there had been no mishap. And Church was now supposed to be collecting the girls together and bringing them along.

"The ass is taking his time!" growled Handforth, as he paused in his pacing. "Why doesn't he come? What's the idea of keeping me waiting— By George! Footsteps! Here they are!"

But Church burst in alone, and Church was excited.

"Well?" snapped Handforth. "Where are they?"

"They?" panted Church. "Who?"

"Why, the girls——"

"Oh, they've gone!" said Church breathlessly. "But look here——"

"Gone?" roared Handforth, staggering. "Gone? And you come here and pass it off as though I hadn't sent you out to fetch 'em! Why, you rotter, you'd even forgotten——"

"I tell you they've gone!" broke in Church. "What else did you expect? It's past six. But Dick Hamilton's here!"

"What?" gurgled Handforth.

McClure leapt up from the fireplace and threw a round of toast towards the ceiling.

"Hurrah!" he yelled. "Then we're saved!"

Handforth looked at him grimly.

"What do you mean—we're saved?" he asked. "What are you cheering about?"

McClure cooled down abruptly.

"Well, I—I was thinking," he said hastily.

"You shouldn't think!" snapped Handforth. "It puts too much strain on you. I'm the chap who does all the thinking in this study. Huh! So Dick Hamilton's come back, has he? Like his nerve!"

"Chuck it!" said Church. "Everybody's as pleased as punch, I can tell you!"

Edward Oswald set his lips, and his eyes gleamed.

"Oh, they're as pleased as punch, are

they?" he said bitterly. "They think that I'm going to resign, do they? Just because Dick Hamilton's come back, he's going to walk back into the captaincy! That's what they're saying, is it?"

"My hat!" said Church. "How did you know?"

"Then they *are* saying it!" hooted Handforth.

"Why, yes——"

"Then they can keep on saying it!" panted Handforth. "But I'm not going to resign for Dick Hamilton, or a thousand Dick Hamiltons! I was elected by the Form, and he needn't think he can come here and calmly push me out of the captaincy. He's nobody now! He's an ordinary Remove chap—he's under my leadership! And if he doesn't like it, he can lump it! And if he comes here with any of his rot, I'll biff him out! Just let him show his face!"

Handforth glared round ferociously. And, curiously enough, the door opened at that moment and Dick Hamilton walked in.

"Hallo, Handy, my old warrior!" he said cheerily. "It gladdens my eyes to see your rugged features once again! Same old face, same old glare, same old fist! Put it there, old son!"

Handforth shook hands with real enthusiasm.

"Thundering glad to see you, Hamilton, old man," he said heartily. "By George! We've missed you, I can tell you! Back for good?"

"Yes, I think so."

"Fine!" said Handforth, his eyes gleaming. "We want you badly in the team, and——" He pulled himself up short, suddenly realising that he should, strictly speaking, be now biffing this intruder out. "But look here!" he added darkly. "None of your old buck, you know! I'm captain! I suppose they've told you?"

Dick Hamilton nodded gravely.

"I've heard it everywhere," he replied. "Everybody's full of nothing else. It seems to be the sole topic of conversation in the Junior School. Congrats, Handy, old man."

"Thanks!" said Handforth feebly. "I—I thought——"

"Aren't you going to take up your old job?" asked McClure in dismay. "After all, Handy was only temporary skipper——"

"Until Handy decides to resign, I'm perfectly willing to be a humble follower," interrupted Dick Hamilton promptly. "Of course, if Handforth likes to step out of the captaincy, I don't suppose there'll be another election, because I shall be able to take up the reins where I dropped them. But he naturally keeps his job until he chooses to throw it up."

Handforth took a deep breath, and he was flushed with triumph.

"Well, that's jolly sporting of you, Hamilton," he declared. "I rather thought you'd make a fuss."

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"A fuss?" said Dick. "Why on earth should I?"

"The other chaps have been kicking up enough row—"

"That's because they don't understand you," interrupted Dick. "Instead of coming to you with their little troubles, they've been treating you as an enemy. Of course, that was all wrong. You stick to the captaincy as long as you like, Handy. The Remove will soon understand."

And Dick, with another nod, passed out of the study.

"That chap's brainy!" said Handforth approvingly. "I take back all I said against him! He knows jolly well that I'm the best skipper—and he's proved it by his words! That's settled me now! I'm going to call a Form meeting at half-past seven, and I'm going to put forward some new ideas."

"Oh crumbs!" said Church blankly.

"Help!" murmured McClure in a hollow voice.

Fortunately, Handforth was too engrossed to notice these doubtful ejaculations.

"Yes, some new ideas," he said absently. "Now that Hamilton is on my side, I know where I am. The Remove is going to sit up soon! By George! I'll show the chaps whether I mean business or not!"

And practically at this same moment, Doris Berkeley was having a little chat with Irene Manners, as they were approaching the Moor View School.

"Did you see much of Ted before you left Ralph?" she was asking.

"No," replied Irene, frowning. "I thought it was a bit thick, you know, the way he forgot all about us, so I came away without even saying good-bye. I'm rather sorry for it now—perhaps it was a bit mean."

"Oh, it'll do him good!" laughed Mary Summers.

"I was wondering if I shouldn't go back on some pretext," said Irene rather contritely.

"Perhaps it was cattish, you know. After all, Ted's very worried about the captaincy."

Doris could have hugged her for providing this opportunity.

"Have you heard about his latest?" she said. "He's bought a typewriter."

"A typewriter?" said Irene. "Never!"

"It's a fact—it came this evening," smiled Doris. "I say, what a chance for you to get that story of yours typed out on the cheap! Ted would go off his head with delight if you asked him to edit it for you and type it out."

Irene flushed slightly.

"Oh, but it's not good enough to be typed!" she protested.

Doris had remembered that short story—a schoolgirl effort which Irene's friends thought rather well of. It wasn't very short, either, being at least five thousand words in length. And this was quite long for a first attempt. Doris really believed that it would stand a chance if it was sent out to the right quarter. It would never be published, of course, but a kindly editor might send a few encouraging words.

"Of course it's good enough to be typed," said Doris. "And now that Ted's got a machine, why not get him to do it for you in his spare time? He'd look upon it as a pleasure, particularly if you asked him to edit it as he went along. He's a bit of a nut at writing himself."

Irene's blue eyes sparkled.

"I might," she murmured. "Only I'm rather afraid to—"

"Nonsense!" laughed Doris. "You didn't want to send it to a typewriting office, but this is different. Besides," she added casually, "it'll provide you with a good reason to pop back this evening. I dare say he's feeling a bit blue over that tea, so you can put him right."

"So I can," said Irene softly. "Yes, I'll do it."

She hurried on ahead, and Doris turned to Mary Summers with a sweet smile.

"It's worked!" she murmured. "And if Reggie is right, that little manuscript of Renie's will keep Ted fully occupied for days!"

"She was talking about entering for that 'First Effort Competition,' in some magazine, I believe," said Mary. "But the closing date is next Wednesday—"

"The very thing!" interrupted Doris gleefully. "Why didn't you say that before? If she tells Ted that the manuscript has got to be done by Tuesday, he won't have time for anything else but that typewriting, and that's the very thing that Reggie wants! I say, what a brilliant idea!"

And they managed to get hold of Irene before she went back to St. Frank's. It was nearly seven by the time Irene arrived, and the Ancient House was quiet—everybody being busy at prep. Study D contained only Church and McClure, and they jumped to their feet when Irene looked in.

"Don't bother," she said. "I can see you're busy. I just wanted Ted for a minute."

"You'll find him in his office," said Church. "I'll take you, if you like."

In spite of her protests, he led the way to the celebrated office, tapped on the door, and entered.

"I don't want to be bothered now!" said Handforth, looking up from his table. "Clear off!"

"But there's somebody to see you!" hissed Church in alarm.

"I don't care who it is—they can go and eat coke!" retorted Handforth curtly. "Tell 'em I'm busy! Tell 'em I can't be pestered—"

"You howling idiot—it's Irene!" snapped Church.

Handforth turned pale.

"Irene!" he gasped, as he looked past Church and saw her. "Oh, help! She—she must have heard—"

"Of course I heard," said Irene, as she came in. "But I'm sure you didn't mean that for me, Ted."

"Great Scott, no!" said Handforth breathlessly. "I—I didn't know—I thought you'd gone back home—I don't see why you should stand there grinning, Church!" he added curtly. "What about your prep?"

"I'm not dense!" said Church. "I can take a hint!"

He went out, and Irene produced her manuscript.

"I can't stop, Ted," she said quickly. "For one thing, I've got to hurry back, and you're busy, too. I want you to do me a favour. I'm afraid it's a very big one, and you might think it an awful nerve—"

"What rot!" interrupted Handforth. "I—I mean— Sorry! But any favour is O.K. for you, Irene! Just say the word—"

"Well, I've written a story—it's a terribly awful thing, really—but I thought perhaps

you'd read it for me and edit it," said the girl.

"You've written a story?" said Handforth delightedly. "By George! Haven't I always said that you were jolly clever? Let's have a look at it! It takes brains to write a story! Only the cleverest people can do it!"

"Yes, you write stories, too!" smiled Irene. "Eh? Oh, well—"

"I hear you've got a typewriter, Ted, so I was wondering if you could type out the manuscript for me," she continued. "I want to send it off on Tuesday, so that I can enter for a competition. Do you think that you can get it done by then?"

Handforth's usual confidence asserted itself. "Get it done by Tuesday?" he laughed, as he looked over the neatly written sheets. "Of course I can—and long before Tuesday! Just leave it to me, and I'll have it all ready for you."

"But have you learned the typewriter properly yet?"

"That's nothing," said Handforth lightly. "To a mechanical chap like me, a typewriter is as simple as a pop-gun! You shall have this story long before Tuesday, all typed out, corrected, and edited! That's a promise!"

Little did Edward Oswald Handforth realise what he had bitten off!

CHAPTER 9.

STRICTLY ACCORDING TO PLAN.



NOTICE! A meeting of the Remove is called for 7.30 sharp, in the Small Lecture Hall, in the Ancient House. All absentees will be rounded up and severely dealt with. The meeting is of the utmost importance, and any fathead who stays away will be sorry for himself. 7.30, sharp, remember, and no messing about.

"(Signed) Ed. O. HANDFORTH (Captain)."

Reggie Pitt grinned as he finished reading the notice, and as he glanced at his watch.

"Twenty-past," he said. "That gives us ten minutes."

"But we're not going, are we?" asked Doyle, staring.

"Of course we are."

"Well, you fellows can do as you like, but I'm giving the meeting a miss," said the Hon. Douglas Singleton. "Do you think I take any notice of that rot? Blow Handforth and his meetings!"

Reggie shook his head.

"But this is important," he said impressively. "We've all got to turn up. Handy is falling into the trap, or I'm a Dutchman! I've been expecting this announcement all the evening—and here, to and behold, it appears! And yet I haven't had the slightest hint from anybody."

"Then how did you know?" asked Singleton.

"Because I've gauged Handy's character correctly—that's all," smiled Pitt.

"What the thunder do you mean?"

"I'll explain later," replied Reggie tantalisingly. "But Dick and I have been putting our heads together."

"That accounts for all the splinters we've seen about!"

"Very likely!" agreed Reggie, nodding. "I've no illusions about my head-piece, old man. Well, to cut it short, the new wheeze is to agree to everything that Handforth suggests—*everything*, mark you. It doesn't matter if it's unreasonable or if it's impossible or if it's dotty. We've simply got to cheer Handy to the echo, and agree to do his bidding."

"You're mad!" said Doyle, staring. "It'll mean chaos!"

"It'll mean worse!" snapped the Hon. Douglas. "Slavery's the only word! Instead of Handy being subdued, he'll be worse than ever he was before."

Reggie Pitt sighed.

"Which only shows how little you know Handy's real character!" he replied. "Anyhow, it comes to this. You're fed-up with Handy as a captain, and Dick Hamilton's back. He and I have got up this scheme, so are you going to support us, or continue the opposition to Handy? I rather think it's up to the Remove to back up Dick and me for all we're worth."

"Well, if it comes to that, I agree, naturally," said Singleton.

"Same here!" admitted Doyle.

"Of course!" said two or three other West House fellows.

"Then, my dear old spiffers, why argue?" asked Reggie. "Over in the Ancient House, Dick and his cheery men are now passing the word round. And I'm trying to do the same thing here. This meeting has got to be attended in full force."

"We were going to ignore it," declared Solomon Levi.

"Then you'll have to change your minds," said Reggie. "I dare say most of the chaps had decided to ignore it. But, after all, Handy's the skipper, and when a Form meeting is called, it's an unwritten law that the Form captain's orders shall be obeyed. We can't break the rules like that. We've all got to turn up."

"But he won't expect us!" grinned Scott.

"Of course he won't, and that'll make him all the more enthusiastic," said Reggie with a chuckle. "And, remember—no opposition! We've got to agree to everything he proposes. Later on I shall be able to tell you if he has fallen into the trap."

And Reggie hurried off, to rouse up the other Removites, and to use the same arguments as he had just employed. Dick Hamilton and Fullwood and a few others were engaged in a similar task in the Ancient

House. Even Church and McClure were admitted into the plot.

"We rely upon you fellows for support," said Dick firmly. "You may be Handforth's chums, but there's nothing mean about this dodge. It's just a scheme to make him resign. We trust you not to give him any tips, or put him on his guard."

"You're sure it's square?" asked Church. "Sorry!" he added. "You wouldn't suggest it if it wasn't, Dick."

"I should hope not," said Hamilton. "Are you fed-up with Handy as a skipper, or do you want him to retain office?"

"Fed-up?" said McClure. "We're nearly exhausted!"

"Then it's your duty to back us up," put in Fullwood. "Is it a promise?"

"We're with you right through!" said Handforth's chums.

They were perfectly satisfied that there would be no disloyalty to their leader by joining in the general game. After all, he had been leading them a fearful dance. If the Remove in general had been suffering, Church and McClure had been fairly tortured. They were with Handforth morning, noon, and night, and they were becoming weak in consequence of his forceful rules. He was a trial at the best of times, but as captain, he was impossible. Church and McClure longed for the comparatively peaceful days of yore.

Even at this very moment, Handforth was trying them sorely. They had gone back to Study D, after that private word with Dick Hamilton and Fullwood, and they found Handforth rehearsing his speech.

"Nearly half-past, Handy!" said Church pointedly.

"Yes, by George!" said Handforth, glancing at the clock. "I shall have to get ready for a lot of work. I don't suppose half the idiots will turn up, and that'll mean some sloshing!"

"Oh, I don't know," said McClure. "Lots of fellows are preparing to go to the Lecture Hall. Perhaps they think you're going to resign, and there's a good deal of excitement about."

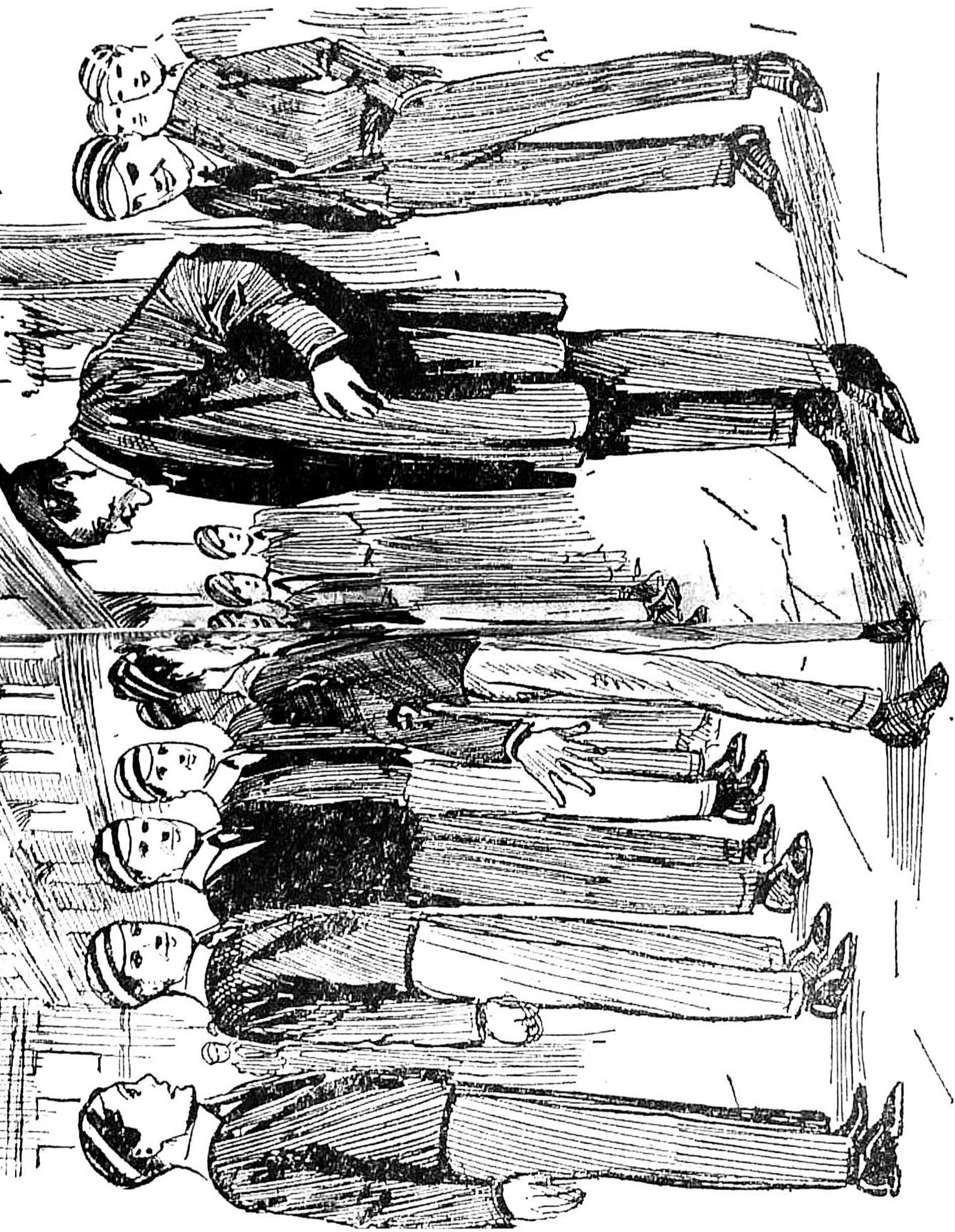
"Resign!" repeated Handforth, staring.

"Well, you know, Dick Hamilton's back," said Church gently. "And there was some idea of you holding the captaincy as a temporary measure—"

"By George!" breathed Handforth tensely. "So that's what they're thinking, is it? They expect me to resign because Dick's come back weeks before his time! I'll make them understand the true position, my lads! Just when I'm planning a complete new campaign, too. Why, I haven't started with the Remove yet! I've decided to adopt new tactics—to show the fellows that I'm their friend and guide!"

"Oh, my hat!" said McClure blankly. "Friend? Guide?"

"If you're going to be funny, Arnold McClure, I'll tip you into the fireplace!" roared Handforth. "I've been thinking



Nelson Lee stared grimly at Handforth's slovenly dress. The Captain of the Remove had been so keen on holding a dress inspection of the other juniors, that he had forgotten all about himself! "Your appearance, Handforth," said the Housemaster, "is a thorough disgrace!" Handforth gasped; behind him the Remove chortled.

things over, and I've called this meeting for a certain object! And if anybody opposes me, there'll be ructions!"

He stalked out of Study D, and marched grimly towards the Lecture Hall. Church and McClure grinned at one another, and followed.



CHAPTER 10.

HANDFORTH'S NEW POLICY!

URRAH!"

"Here he is!"

"Speech, Handy, speech!"

Edward Oswald Handforth paused just inside the doorway of the Lecture Hall. The roar of cheering startled him. He hadn't expected it. In fact, he hadn't expected to find many fellows present. The Remove had a habit of ignoring his orders.

He had just looked in to ascertain the absentees, only to find that there weren't any! With Church and McClure, just behind him, the entire Remove was present! As far as Handforth's amazed eyes could see, there wasn't one absentee.

"My only hat!" he muttered dazedly.

A full meeting was surprising enough, but this enthusiastic cheering was even more extraordinary. Another fellow might have suspected something. But Handforth, after the first moment of stupefaction, jumped to the conclusion that the Remove was at last appreciating him at his true worth!

He had been expecting this all along; he had been wondering why the fellows had failed to come up to the scratch. Surely they couldn't hope for a more energetic skipper than he? And at last they realised it!

Reggie Pitt had counted upon this characteristic of Handforth's to the full. It was so easy to pull his leg!

"All right—all right!" roared Handforth, as he strode down the hall towards the raised platform. "Don't make so much noise, you chumps! I want this meeting to be peaceful and serious. I've got some new ideas."

"Hurrah!"

"Let's hear them, Handy!"

Edward Oswald mounted the platform and faced the throng. And a less innocent fellow than he might easily have been deceived. There wasn't a sign of dissension. All the juniors in the hall were looking eager and excited, and their enthusiasm had the stamp of sincerity. Reggie Pitt was highly delighted by the loyal way in which the Remove was backing him up.

"Gentlemen——" began Handforth.

"Hear, hear!"

"Go it, Handy!"

"Gentlemen——"

"Hurrah!"

"Gentlemen——"

"Bravo!"



Nelson Lee stared grimly at Handforth's slovenly as holding a dress inspection of the other juniors, then Handforth," said the Housemaster, "is a thorough Remove chortled happily—it was a job

"Am I going to speak, or am I not?" roared Handforth, glaring. "If any fat-head interrupts, I'll chuck him out of the meeting! I'm here to announce some new ideas, and I'm not going to be interrupted!"

The Remove became obediently silent, as though awed.

"That's better," said Handforth severely. "Now, then, how does that speech go? Gentlemen, as your elected captain, I stand here—— I stand here—— Rats! I can't remember everything I prepared! I'll just jaw at you in the ordinary way!"

"Hear, hear! Be yourself, Handy!"

"First of all, Dick Hamilton's back!" said Handforth grimly. "In case you don't know it, I'd better tell you that he's already seen me, and he doesn't want the captaincy back unless I resign. In fact, he's left me in full control, and it wouldn't have made any difference if he hadn't! I'm skipper of this craft, and I'm going to steer it to victory!"



The Captain of the Remove had been so keen on forgotten all about himself! "Your appearance, nice!" Handforth gasped; behind him the see Handy getting it in the neck!

"Hurrah!"

"I'm the captain!" roared Handforth, warming up to his work. "The captain of any ship is the supreme master of his crew! What happens if a member of that crew mutinies? He's dealt with drastically! So take warning, my lads! If there's any sign of mutiny, there'll be big trouble. I'm the captain, and you're the crew. That's understood!"

"A sound argument, old man!" said Reggie Pitt heartily.

"Hear, hear!"

"And there's something else!" continued Handforth. "Something I thought of this evening. The captain of the ship is entitled to respect, and he gets it. A member of his crew doesn't go up to him and say 'How are you, Jones?' He calls him 'Captain Jones'! And that's what you've got to call me, or I'll know the reason why! I'm captain of the Form, and from

this minute I'm going to be known as Captain Handforth!"

"It's working!" breathed Jack Grey ecstatically.

"Dry up, you ass!" murmured Pitt. "Didn't I say it would?"

"So, from now on, you've got to call me 'captain' whenever you address me," said Handforth, highly satisfied with the Remove's attitude. "I've made up my mind on this point, and I'm going to be hard and fast in enforcing it. At the first sign of disrespect I shall act firmly!"

The Remove was showing a few indications of forgetfulness. Some of the fellows were indignant at this ridiculous proposition of Handforth's. Why, it was too dotty for words! It was likely they were going to call him "captain" every time they spoke to him! But Dick Hamilton and Reggie Pitt and the rest of the ringleaders guided the others.

"You're the captain, so we'll obey!" shouted Reggie promptly. "All right, cap'n! Go ahead!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Silence, there!" shouted Dick. "Captain Handforth has got a lot more to say. Give him a hearing!"

"All right, captain!" roared the Remove.

Handforth found it rather difficult to continue for a moment. He had never really anticipated that that suggestion of his would be put into operation. He had anticipated a storm of derision, and had already glowed at the thought of wiping up a few of the objectors. But there was nobody to wipe up!

"You—you mean you agree to it?" he asked blankly.

"Agree to what, captain?" asked Fullwood.

"About calling me— Why, yes, of course!" said Handforth hastily. "You can't do anything else but agree, my lads! You're just beginning to understand that my iron rule is made of concrete! It's hard and fast!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Silence!" thundered Handforth. "What do the members of a ship's crew do when they happen to meet their skipper? Answer me that! What do they do?"

"Salute him, I suppose," said Reggie Pitt innocently.

"Yes!" roared Handforth. "They salute him! And you fellows have got to salute me! I'm the captain of this Form, and I've got to have that token of respect from all of you! In future, you'll salute whenever you see me!"

"You're mad!"

"You're getting worse every day, Handy!"

But the forgetful fellows, who shouted their real thoughts, were drowned by the shouts of mock approval. The Lecture Hall was a scene of wildly-exaggerated enthusiasm for a minute or two.

"There's just one question, Captain Handforth," said Dick Hamilton, during a lull. "Have I your permission to ask a question?"

"Yes, if it's not nerry!" said Handforth suspiciously.

"I wouldn't be nerry with you, captain," replied Dick, with an air of shocked surprise, and saluting at the same moment. "You say that we've got to always salute you? We want to get this clear."

"You've got to salute me every time you pass me, and every time you speak to me," said Handforth loftily. "Is that clear enough?"

"And you'll salute back?" asked Dick.

"Salute back?"

"Every ship's captain acknowledges the salutes of his crew," explained Dick Hamilton. "That's a recognised custom——"

"Don't be a chump!" interrupted Handforth gruffly. "Of course, I shall acknowledge every salute! What do you take me for? That point's settled."

"Yes, captain!" said Dick, saluting.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Not so much noise!" roared Handforth.

"No, captain!" chorused the Remove, saluting.

Handforth was so astonished that he neglected to acknowledge it, but, as the idea was his own, he would probably get into the habit in time. He was full of eagerness to get on to the next point.

"Starting with to-morrow morning, there's going to be a daily inspection!" he continued grimly. "I'm not satisfied with the appearance of some of you chaps! Most of you are all right—and one or two go to the other extreme. But there's too much slovenliness—too many dirty collars and baggy trousers. So I'm going to hold a daily dress inspection in the West Square. Eight-thirty, prompt! So don't forget to-morrow morning!"

"Orders are orders, captain!" said Pitt, saluting. "I'll tell Mr. Stokes that breakfast will have to be altered. At half-past eight we're all in the dining-hall, but that can easily be altered——"

"Eh?" interrupted Handforth, with a start. "Half-past eight? My hat! I'd forgotten about breakfast! We'll say a quarter-past nine, and leave it at that. Remember—nine-fifteen in the West Square!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Good old Handforth!"

"Say the word, old man, and we'll agree to anything!"

The Remove expressed its approval with exaggerated heartiness.



CHAPTER II.

THE FRIEND OF THE REMOVE.
THE Remove was enjoying itself.

There was something novel in agreeing to everything Handforth suggested—something rather humorous in agreeing unswervingly and unquestionably. They had never enjoyed this privilege before.

But for Reggie Pitt's timely warning, the Remove would, of course, have ridiculed the proposals with painfully plain speaking. The meeting would have broken up in disorder, and Handforth would have been left flat. For these new suggestions were, indeed, the limit. And the Remove was more than ever determined to give the scheme a fair trial.

Many fellows declared that it would be a failure. Handforth would be more arrogant than ever—for, with the fellows pretending to support him, he would be encouraged to adopt more outrageous tactics still. It seemed a sound enough argument, but Pitt had no fear of it.

Handforth himself was inwardly amazed. He had realised that his suggestions were impossible, and that they would arouse a storm of protest. But he lived on opposition, and he had looked forward to the triumph. And here was the Remove, supporting him to a man! It was a tremendous change, indeed!

But Handforth, instead of seeing the truth, immediately jumped to a wrong conclusion. The Remove was tamed! That was the explanation of this extraordinary reception!

At last he had worn down their resistance!

And now the fellows were seeing their early mistakes—they were appreciating him as he deserved. This, of course, was the logical explanation for this sudden change of front.

So Handforth deluded himself. No doubt Dick Hamilton's surprise return had something to do with it, too. Dick had made it known that he would only accept the captaincy on the condition that Handforth resigned. And as Handforth had made it quite clear that he had no intention of resigning, the Remove had settled its mind to the inevitable. It was all so easy to understand.

In a word, Edward Oswald was completely hoodwinked.

"Well, I'm jolly glad to see that you've got some sense," he said, looking down at the faces with complete approval. "I've had a tough fight with you, but I've won. You've wriggled, and you've struggled, but now you're beginning to see that it's a hopeless job. I'm the captain, and I mean to be obeyed. But you mustn't think that I like this reign of force!"

The Remove listened, wondering what was coming. Handforth was feeling in the best of tempers. Victory! He could easily afford to be a little generous. He could show the Remove that he was an ideal captain. Hitherto, all his time had been spent in the drastic enforcement of his authority.

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"I'm a peaceful chap," continued Handforth. "You've all come round to my way of thinking, so there's no reason why we shouldn't pull together in harmony. I want you all to understand that I'm your friend. If necessary, I'll punch your noses, and I'll wipe up the floor with you—but I only do these things in the course of my duty. Apart from such incidents, I'm your friend and guide."

"Hear, hear!"

"Good for you, captain!"

"Well said, Captain Handforth!"

"Hurrah!"

"You see how peaceful this meeting is?" went on Handforth impressively. "Instead of opposing me, you're agreeing with me. Look at the result—nothing but harmony all along the line! As captain of the Form, I regard myself as a leader and a pal. And if any of you have any little troubles, bring them to me, and I'll settle them for you."

"Good old skipper!"

"If you can't agree in an argument, bring the argument to me, and I'll polish it off," said Handforth generously. "If you need any help, I'm here to help you! If you're in trouble, confide in me. I hold that a Form captain has something else to think of besides sports. He's the Form's guiding star! He's got to lead the Form in the way it should go! So if you come to me with your worries and problems, I'll settle them for you. Come when you like, and as often as you like. You'll never be refused."

"Is that a promise, captain?" asked Dick Hamilton, saluting.

"Yes, it is—a promise!" said Handforth stiffly. "Do you expect a Form captain to utter hollow words? I've always meant what I've said, and I mean what I say now!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Good old guide and philosopher!"

Reggie Pitt bent close to Jack Grey.

"This," he whispered, "is the beginning of the end."

"You mean——"

"He's done it!" murmured Reggie gleefully. "He's fallen into the trap. As old Browne would say, he's knee deep in the soup! Within two days Dick Hamilton will be skipper, and the Remove will be normal."

"Two days?" breathed Jack. "I shouldn't be too sure."

"All right, you see."

"It's got to be put into practice yet——"

"My dear old son, it's a cert," grinned Reggie. "Without realising it, Handy has soaked up my ideas, and he's now on the road to resignation. In fact, I don't think he'll last two days."

Under ordinary circumstances, the Remove would have accepted Handforth's offer with the utmost derision—for he was about the last fellow in the world they would have taken their troubles to. His idea of settling any dispute was to take part in the dispute himself, and render it doubly as violent. His advice was generally given before he knew any of the facts, and it was certain to con-

tain more than a hint of violence. As for solving any problems, he was just about as useful as a wax dummy. But the Remove, in accordance with their secret instructions, cheered their skipper to the echo. And he stood there on the platform, gloating over his first great victory.

This was his moment of triumph! In spite of Dick Hamilton's return, the Remove was supporting him through thick and thin! It was more than he had ever dared to hope for.

Never for an instant did he guess that the whole thing was a put-up job—that even his own ideas had been insidiously put into his head with the sole object of furthering this scheme! The Remove had elected him by a jape—and the Remove had come to the conclusion that it must force him to resign by a jape! It was the only possible solution to the problem.

"Well, there's nothing much more to say," shouted Handforth, above the enthusiastic din. "I'm glad to see that you've all learned sense. From now onwards I'm to be addressed as 'Captain.' From now onwards I'm to be saluted. And from now onwards you can bring me your troubles, and be certain of a hearing."

"Hurrah!"

"Three cheers for Captain Handforth!"

The meeting broke up amid scenes of renewed enthusiasm. Some of the lesser lights, who were liable to overdo things, wanted to seize Handforth, and carry him shoulder high. But Dick Hamilton and a few others put a stop to this. There was a limit, even to Handforth's credulity!

Never had Edward Oswald felt so serene as when he returned to Study D, in company with his chums. Most of the other juniors crowded out into the Triangle, discussing the meeting with eager interest.

"Not so much noise!" warned Reggie Pitt. "We mustn't let him guess that he's being led along at the end of a piece of string. The whole secret of this business lies in the fact that he's spoofed."

"But how did you know he would fall into the trap?" asked Singleton.

"I had the beginnings of this idea before tea," grinned Reggie. "I led a deputation to Handy's office, and pointed out that he couldn't regard us as a ship's crew, and make us salute him, and call him 'captain.' And now's he accepted those ideas as his own! He doesn't even guess that I put them into his head!"

"And you put them there deliberately?"

"Yes."

"And counted upon him calling a meeting, and adopting the suggestions as his own?"

"Of course," said Reggie, nodding.

"Then you're a marvel!" said Doyle wonderingly. "My only aunt! I knew you were as tricky as a giddy snake, but this beats everything!"

"Thanks awfully!" said Reggie.

"I—I don't mean anything nasty—but, my hat!" ejaculated Doyle. "You told us all to agree with Handy's suggestions—and you

knew what his suggestions would be! And now we've agreed to salute him, and take him our troubles, and goodness knows what else! What's the giddy idea?"

"Yes, how shall we benefit?" demanded Hubbard.

"Hear, hear!"

"Steady on!" warned Dick Hamilton. "Pitt's idea is a corker—and I agreed with it from the very start. All you've got to do is to do exactly as Handforth has ordered, and he will soon be sick of the captaincy! But we can't jaw here—he'll probably overhear us."

And the puzzled Remove went indoors—some into the West House, and some into the Ancient House. Within half an hour, however, either Pitt or Hamilton had been round to the various studies, and the full meaning of the plot was made clear.

Reggie Pitt had made a true shot—and by all appearances, Handforth was booked for a rather lively twenty-four hours!



CHAPTER 12.

NOT QUITE SO GOOD!

CECIL DE VALERIE came hurrying down the Remove passage just as Handforth was emerging from Study D. He saluted

smartly, and passed on. Handforth stared after him.

"I say, that's a bit too bad, Handy," tested Church.

"Eh? What's too bad?"

"Why, you didn't acknowledge his salute," said Church.

"By George, no!" said Handforth, starting. "I'd forgotten!"

"Forgotten!" echoed Church, "You can't kid me like that, old son."

"Nunno! I—I mean—"

paused in confusion, and glared at the "old son"!

"Handy! Haven't I told you to address me as captain, blow you?"

"Yes, captain," said Church humbly.

"Just because you're my study chum, I'm not going to have you taking advantage of me!"

"No, captain!"

"You two fellows are just as much in the Remove as the rest!" snapped Handforth.

"So don't forget it! And I'm not permitting any laxity!"

"No, captain!" said his chums, in one voice.

"That's settled!"

"Yes, captain!"

"And I don't want any rot!" growled Handforth.

"No, captain!"

"Don't keep saying 'No, captain,' and 'Yes, captain!'" roared Handforth ex-

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peratedly. "And don't keep messing about with your arms! What's the idea of pushing them up and down like that?"

"We're saluting, captain," explained Church.

"Saluting!" gasped Handforth. "Oh, I forgot—"

"Yes, and you haven't acknowledged us once," complained McClure bitterly. "We're members of your crew, captain, and we've got to obey orders!" he added, with another salute. "That's what you told us, captain, and we're doing it!"

"Yes, captain," said Church, saluting in turn.

Handforth breathed hard, and saluted twice. "All right—but there's no need to make such a fuss," he growled. "Of course, you're right, now I come to think of it. And I like to see you fellows practising obedience for once."

Fullwood came by, and smartly saluted.

"My only hat!" breathed Handforth.

He acknowledged the salute long after Fullwood had passed, and was just in time to salute back to Archie Glenthorne, Watson, Russell and Brent as they went down the passage, one after the other. Handforth's arm was kept going briskly.

"By George! This is jolly good!" he said, with satisfaction. "They're all obeying my orders without question! Didn't I always tell you chaps that I'd make them eat out of my hand before I'd done?"

"Yes, captain," said Church, saluting.

Handforth saluted back, grudgingly.

"Well, you stay here—I don't want you with me, saluting me every giddy time you speak," he growled. "I'm going to fetch my typewriter, and I'm going to do some work! My hat! The time's getting on, too!" he added anxiously. "I was going to type the first ten pages of that manuscript this evening, too!"

"Which manuscript, captain?" asked McClure, saluting.

"Eh?" said Edward Oswald, raising his hand to his head. "It's none of your business! You'd better go to the Common-room—both of you! I don't want to be bothered with you!"

He strode off, and went to his office. But before he got to the end of the passage he passed no fewer than ten different Remove fellows, and every one saluted him in strict obedience to his orders. And whereas they only saluted once each, Handforth was obliged to salute ten times. But he didn't notice this little detail at present. His chief sensation was one of supreme satisfaction.

He carried his typewriter out of the office, and went back to Study D. The passage seemed to be swarming with fellows to-night. He no sooner came along than study doors opened up and down the corridor, and the juniors came along, and everybody saluted him, whether they spoke or not. Quite a number addressed him as "captain," much to his satisfaction. But by the time he had got

into his study with the typewriter, his arms were aching—his left arm from carrying the typewriter, and his right arm from the effects of continuous saluting.

"Thank goodness for some peace!" he muttered, as he sat down at the table, with the typewriter in front of him. "Now I can get busy on this job for Irene! Once I get the hang of this giddy machine—"

The door opened, and De Valerie looked in. "Got the right time, captain?" he asked, saluting.

"Eh?"

"The right time, captain?" said De Valerie, repeating the movement.

"What's the matter with the school clock?" demanded Handforth.

"Nothing that I know of, captain, but I thought I'd better come to you," replied De Valerie, with a third salute. "The school clock might be wrong, but you being the Form skipper, you can't be wrong."

Handforth pulled out his watch.

"Twenty minutes to nine!" he said briefly.

"Thanks, captain," said De Valerie, saluting. "Haven't you forgotten something?"

"What do you mean—forgotten something?"

"You didn't acknowledge my salute, captain."

Handforth breathed hard.

"Clear out!" he snorted, saluting. "It's all very well to obey my orders like this—I'm glad to see it—but there's no need to come here asking me the giddy time!"

De Valerie looked very pained.

"Oh, captain, but didn't you tell us to come to you for advice?" he asked, saluting.

"Didn't we understand that you would help us in everything—no matter how small or how big?"

Handforth saluted stiffly.

"Yes, of course," he replied. "Scrry!"

"Thank you, captain."

De Valerie saluted again, and withdrew. Handforth allowed his hand to drop as the door closed. Somehow, this saluting business wasn't quite so ideal as he had expected it to be.

"I shall have to be careful!" he murmured. "I can't tell the chaps to clear out after I've asked them to come to me for advice! A Form captain must remember his duties—Yes, and there's this manuscript, too! I distinctly promised Irene she should have it—and she's more important than the whole Remove put together!"

He settled himself down to the labour of love—at least, he prepared to settle down. But within the space of five minutes no less than three juniors had looked in, and had asked various trivial questions in the politest of voices. During the brief period, Handforth had found it necessary to salute no less than forty-seven times. So far, he hadn't even looked at the typewriter.

"Oh, crumbs!" he murmured, resting his saluting arm.

And then Church and McClure came in. Handforth leapt to his feet.

"I don't want any saluting!" he said hoarsely.

"Why not, captain?" asked Church, saluting.

Edward Oswald's hand automatically shot up.

"Because I'm fed-up with it!" he snapped fiercely.

"Fed-up with it, captain?" asked McClure, in amazement, as he touched his forelock. "But the new order hasn't been in force for more than an hour, captain. We all thought you were tremendously pleased, captain."

"Don't keep calling me 'captain'!" hooted Handforth.

His chums backed away, saluting.

"But—but you told us to, captain!" said Church unhappily.

Handforth gulped, and recovered himself.

"Yes, I know I did!" he muttered. "It's all right—I'm a bit worried this evening. I've got some typewriting to do, and during the last half-hour I've been pestered—I mean, I've been giving advice," he said hastily. "I'm going along to the office to do that typewriting."

"The office, captain?" asked Church.

"Yes—I shall be quiet there," said his leader. "This manuscript has got to be ready for Irene—"

"Irene!" interrupted McClure. "And you're going to use the captain's office for a purely personal job like that, captain? It wouldn't be fair!"

"Eh? What the dickens—"

"As Form captain, captain, you ought to know!" went on McClure severely. "That office is only for strictly official business. And you're proposing to go there to type out a manuscript for Irene! Why, it's unfair to the Form! You can't allow your conscience to agree to such a thing! Such a private matter ought to be done here, in the study, captain."

Handforth acknowledged two salutes, and ground his teeth.

"But I'll lock myself in, anyhow!" he vowed.

"Lock yourself in, captain?" repeated Church, shocked. "Then how can the chaps come to you for advice, and to tell you their troubles? This has got to be an ever-open door, captain—as you ought to know, without any telling."

"Well, there goes the bell for bed!" said McClure, with a grin. "That's settled all the argument for to-night, captain."

He saluted, and went out. Church saluted and went out. And Handforth stood there, breathing heavily. He caught sight of himself in the mirror, and automatically saluted. And as his reflection naturally saluted simultaneously, he did it three times before he realised the situation.

"Bah!" he panted. "They're all mad!"

But he realised, with a fearful shock, that it was impossible for him to complain. The Remove was simply obeying his orders. And

he ought, strictly speaking, to be filled with satisfaction.

But for some reason he wasn't at all satisfied!



CHAPTER 13.

PILING IT ON!

THAT night Handforth was troubled with many nightmares. He dreamed that his right arm had swollen to about five times its usual size, and St. Frank's, instead of being a school, was a huge ship. Not merely the Remove, but everybody else constantly passed up and down before him in a kind of parade, and he was kept at his saluting job until he fell overboard, from sheer exhaustion.

He awoke in a perspiration, and discovered that the unwelcome note of the rising-bell was clanging out. He lounged in bed, immensely relieved to find that everything was normal. But it was a fact that his arm certainly did ache a little. He examined it, and thought he detected one or two signs of swelling, too.

He remembered the orgy of saluting the previous night. He had not been spared, even after the bed-time bell had rung. On his way up to the dormitory, he had passed through thousands of juniors, who were all saluting. Actually, there had not been more than twenty, or twenty-five, but many of them had made a point of passing Handforth three or four times, by devious subterfuges, and Handforth had finally sought refuge in the dormitory, only to discover his chums saluting him with every word they said.

"There's got to be a change!" he muttered firmly.

But how? He was rather uneasy about it. These were the very first orders that the Remove had ever accepted without jibbing. So how could he possibly cancel them, and retain his dignity.

Naturally, the idiots would only jump to the conclusion that he was cancelling the new order because it was too much trouble to acknowledge their salutes! They were bound to think something dotty like that!

"Human nature's a rummy thing!" thought Handforth bitterly. "If I rescind this order for their sakes, they'll think I'm doing it for my own! It's funny how people always misunderstand you! And this giddy 'captain' business, too! It's getting on my nerves! I wouldn't mind if they did it in reason, but it's all rot!"

Still, he had suggested it himself, so how could he get out of it?

Church yawned, sat up, and glanced at the window.

"Another fine day!" he said drowsily. "A bit chilly, though, by the look of the wind."

"Don't be silly!" said Handforth crossly. "You can't see the wind!"

"No, but I can see the way it's moving all the trees, and bringing down the leaves!"



This saluting business was getting beyond a joke, and Handy's arm was aching with fatigue. "Look here, Arnold McClure and Walter Church, this saluting has got to stop!" he cried. "Why, captain? The order has only been out an hour, captain," said McClure, saluting again. "I tell you it's got to stop," said Handforth. "I'm fed up with it. And don't keep calling me captain!" he hooted.

replied Church, getting out of bed. "Anything wrong, Handy? You're looking a bit peevish this morning."

"Well, you're wrong!" said Handforth, very peevishly.

"After yesterday, you ought to be—" Church paused, remembering himself. "Sorry, captain!" he added, saluting. "Good-morning, captain!"

"Good-morning!" snarled Handforth.

"Good-morning, captain!" said McClure—saluting in turn.

"Look here, you chaps!" said Handforth thickly. "I'm fed-up with this! Remember, I'm talking to you in private! I'm fed-up to the neck! If either of you salute me again, I'll slaughter you! And don't call me captain, either."

His chums looked amazed.

"But you distinctly said—" began Mac.

"I don't care what I distinctly said!" raved Handforth. "I'm not going to have you saluting me every minute of the day! Understand that!"

Church breathed a sigh of relief.

"Well, thank goodness it's over," he said, with relief. "But there's never any satisfying some people. My only hat! This is a lesson for us, Mac, if you like!"

"One that we shan't forget in a hurry," agreed McClure, nodding.

"What do you mean?" demanded Handforth.

"What do we mean?" repeated Church, his voice quivering with wrath. "You're never satisfied, you discontented fathead! That's what I mean. And if you don't like it, we'll put your head under the tap, and half drown you!"

"Quick!" added McClure grimly.

Handforth was startled by the aggressive tones.

"Why, you insubordinate mutincers—" he began.

"That's enough!" interrupted Church curtly.

"Wha-a-at?"

"I say, that's enough!" repeated Church. "You're a fine chap to give us orders, aren't you? You're a fine kind of skipper! The Remove jibs at everything you suggest, and you get wild, and distribute black eyes and thick ears until further orders! You're not satisfied with a discontented Remove!"

"Well?"

"Well, the Remove agrees to your suggestions, and gives you a free hand to do just as you like, and even that's not good enough for you! You order us all to call you captain, you order us to salute you, and within twelve hours you're fed-up! What you need is your own way every time—with full per-

mission to change your mind twice an hour! You can mess about with Mac and me, perhaps, but you can't mess about with the Remove!"

"Oh, can't I?" roared Handforth.

"Oh, well, do as you like, of course!" snapped Church. "But what's going to happen to a Form captain who gives an order one day, and withdraws it the next? You'll forfeit all respect, and you'll be the laughing-stock of the school!"

"He's that now!" said McClure fiercely.

"Well, he'll be the yelling-stock of the school," amended Church. "My hat! Won't everybody yell if he abandons this saluting business—just to save his own arm! Why, Handy, you ass, you'll be ridiculed so much that you'll have to resign from sheer shame."

"I won't resign!" hissed Handforth.

"Then stick in the captaincy, and do your worst!" shouted Church. "You won't resign, and you won't abide by your own orders, and you're just as discontented when the Remove obeys you as when it doesn't! You're like a baby that's been robbed of its rattle!"

Church went on dressing, and Handforth was so staggered by this rank mutiny that he hadn't sufficient strength to smash his chums to pulp. Besides, his conscience was pricking him. He had a most uncomfortable feeling that his chums were right. It had been bad enough while the Remove was opposed to him. But now that the Remove was doing exactly as he had ordered, everything was going wrong!

That was the rummy part of it. He had enjoyed himself thoroughly while the Form was jibbing at his orders. He didn't realise that opposition was the breath of life to him. He failed to understand that a meek Remove was the very last thing he desired in his heart. It left him nothing to shout about! There weren't any noses to punch! Robbed of any arguments, Handforth was like a lost sheep.

Church and McClure were dressed before he was, and when they went downstairs, they found Dick Hamilton and Reggie Pitt.

"Well, how's the patient?" asked Pitt.

"Peevish," said Church, with a grin. "By jingo, Reggie, you're a cunning beggar! You couldn't do anything with Handy while you opposed him—but now he's nearly ready to knuckle under! He's fed-up with this saluting business, and he's like a bear with a sore head."

"He's fed-up, is he? Good egg! Dick, rush round, and tell the fellows to be ready! We'll give him another dose of it before breakfast! We'll make his arm ache so much that he won't be able to use his knife and fork!"

"Well, it's his own idea," grinned Dick Hamilton. "So he can't grumble."

And when Handforth came down, he walked into the thick of it. He was cautious, too. He came out of the dormitory quietly, meaning to steal down, and lock himself in Study D so that he could do some of that typewriting

for Irene. He was very worried about it. It was Friday already, and he had definitely promised the complete MS. for Monday. It would take every minute of his spare time!

Brent came out of his own dormitory, saw Handforth, and saluted.

"Morning, Captain Handforth!" he said cheerfully. "Any fresh orders to-day?"

"No!" said Handforth, saluting in return.

"We're all eager to obey, captain!" said Brent, saluting again.

"Go and eat coke!" hooted the leader of Study D.

"Thanks!" grinned Brent, saluting for the third time. "But when I said we were willing to obey orders, captain, I meant anything within reason."

Handforth strode on, and that nightmare of his was a pleasant memory compared to the experience he went through now. Before he reached Study D, he had passed everybody in the Remove, and some of them twice. And they had all said "Good-morning, Captain Handforth!" with the utmost cheeriness, and they had all saluted. His arm was as heavy as lead by the time he found refuge in his study.

And then Church and McClure came in.

"Get out!" howled Handforth dangerously.

"But, my dear chap——"

"I'm busy!" raved Edward Oswald.

They backed out, and he slammed the door. The whole affair was getting on his nerves. Well, thank goodness he could get ahead with that typewriting now! If he didn't get ahead with it, he would disappoint Irene, he would break his promise, and——

"Blow the Remove!" he muttered. "Blow the captaincy!"

He sat himself in front of the typewriter, and feverishly attempted to work it. And, naturally, being agitated, the thing jammed and jibbed worse than ever. The cleverness of Reggie Pitt's plan was now obvious. With the Remove docile, Handforth's position would have been quite aggravating enough—but this typewriting job made it a hundred-fold more so. That manuscript had to be typed—there was only a limited amount of time—and it was for Irene!

"Good!" breathed Handforth, at last. "I'm just getting the hang of it. Now I can settle down, and——"

Clang-clang!

"Breakfast!" roared Church, through the door, as he thumped the panel.

Edward Oswald Handforth sagged down in his chair.

"What's the use?" he muttered dismally.



CHAPTER 14.

THE DRESS INSPECTION!

"GREAT corks!" said Handforth, after breakfast. "What's all this?"

He was staring out of the window of his study into the West Square. It seemed to him that

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the entire Remove was congregating there for some reason. Most of the fellows were already present, and others were hurrying up.

Handforth had escaped from the breakfast-table before the rest of the fellows—pleading a lack of appetite, which was perfectly true—and he had again sought refuge in Study D.

At last he had got the typewriter going. By grim concentration, he had found out how it worked. But the discovery only dismayed him. For the confounded thing was so laboriously slow that it would probably take him a couple of hours to do one page. And even then it wouldn't be worth reading! He would have to type several "practice" pages first, before he could start on the actual manuscript. This, being for Irene, must be perfect.

For a brief second a sinister suggestion had occurred to him. Why not rush the manuscript to a typewriting office in Bannington? But he had dismissed this base idea with a frown of self-condemnation. He had promised Irene that he would type it himself—on his own machine. And that was the point. Irene

could easily afford to have it typed at a proper office, and if she ever found out that he had adopted such measures, she would never forgive him. No, it was a labour of love—and he would have to do it, captaincy or no captaincy.

He turned in his chair, and stared through the window. The noise of the gathering juniors had disturbed him. His hair was ruffled, he was perspiring, his collar was limp, and he was generally desperate. This typewriting was getting on his nerves! To-day was Friday. To-morrow was a half-holiday, and he had to play in a match. On Sunday he couldn't do any typewriting at all. And on Monday he had promised— It was impossible! At least, it could only be done if he devoted himself to it to the exclusion of everything else. And it was for Irene!

"The thoughtless rotters!" snapped Handforth fiercely, as he leapt to his feet. "It's a pity they can't go somewhere else for their beastly drilling, or whatever it is! Right under my window!" he added bitterly. "By George, I'll show 'em!"

He flung open the window and leaned out.

"Hi!" he bellowed. "Clear off!"

"Hallo, captain!" chorused a dozen voices, as a dozen hands went to the salute.

Handforth made a curious sound, swallowed hard, and saluted.

"Anything wrong, Ted?" asked a voice behind him.

He turned, quivering, and found Willy in the room. He stood there, and goggled. His expression was so alarming, in fact, that Willy was half-spared.

"What's the matter—choking?" he asked. "You've been eating something again! I've often warned you—"

"Get out!" croaked Handforth, pointing. "I locked that door!"

"Yes, I noticed it," said Willy. "You locked it before it was latched, so I only had to give it a push, and it came open. Just like you, Ted! You can't even lock a door without bungling it!"

"I haven't slaughtered anybody in this world yet—but unless you get out of this room in ten seconds there'll be a funeral!" panted Handforth thickly. "I came here so that I shouldn't be disturbed—"

"Yes, but what about the inspection?" asked Willy.

"The—the what?"

"It's a quarter-past nine," said Willy. "Haven't you seen the chaps collecting in the Square?"

"Yes, I have!" snorted Handforth. "And a crowd of rotters they are! Disturbing me just when I want to be busy—"

"But, you fathead, they're waiting for you!" broke in Willy, amazed. "Ye gods and little fishes! Have you forgotten that you gave the order?"

"Order?" breathed Handforth, a dim memory coming back to him.

"The dress inspection at nine-fifteen," said Willy. "I've got the Third all lined up, to watch the fun. They're reserving me a place in the front row. But as you weren't there, I thought I'd better come and fish you out. You've got a dreadful memory, Ted!"

But Handforth hardly heard. He was staring dazedly out of the window. So the Remove was collecting out there according to his orders! It was so startling that he could hardly realise it. Without question, they were obeying him! While he had forgotten all about the inspection, they had remembered it! It was such a reversal of the ordinary order of things that Handforth was dazed.

There was the Remove—waiting for him! He couldn't possibly get out of it. He was the Form captain, and it would be an utter farce unless he went out and made the inspection. And this was to be a daily occurrence, too—by his own instructions! Handforth was realising to the full how his orders were recoiling upon his own head. It was all right while the Remove ignored them, but when the Remove obeyed them it was a horse of another colour!

"Well?" asked Willy. "What do you think

you are—a cab-horse? Going to sleep standing up?"

Handforth started violently.

"Of all the voices in this world, I hate yours the most!" he said hoarsely. "Clear out of this study before I forget that you're my minor—before I forget I'm bigger and older! I warn you, I'm dangerous!"

Willy grinned.

"That's nothing new, old son," he said coolly. "You've always been dangerous. But we know how to deal with you. Dynamite is dangerous, if it comes to that, but people handle it every day with perfect safety. You'd better buck up with that inspection, or you'll look a bigger chump than you are now! You ought to thank me for coming here and reminding you."

"Thank you!" panted his major.

"Of course," said Willy. "What would you have looked like if you had ignored that inspection altogether? In fact, it's worth five bob!" he added thoughtfully.

Handforth made a determined rush, but Willy dodged through the doorway and skipped down the passage.

"I'll collect that five bob to-morrow!" he said cheerily.

Handforth went out rather unsteadily, realising that he could do no more typewriting before lessons. That meant he wouldn't do any typewriting at all, for the simple reason that he hadn't actually started yet. Some demon of fate was making it impossible for him even to type the title!

As Form captain, it was plainly his duty to attend this inspection. He had ordered it, and there was no getting out of it. But, by George, he wasn't going to waste any time over it! He'd pick out the slovenly ones with an eagle eye, and rushed them off upstairs to tidy themselves! He'd show his full authority! He was in no mood for overlooking the slightest fault.

The Remove was lined up in the West Square in two columns, and as Handforth tore through West Arch in the most undignified manner, the Remove saluted to a man—smartly and startlingly.

Handforth saluted in turn—carelessly and grudgingly. He came to a halt in front of the juniors, and swayed. One glance was enough. He was just in front of Somerton and Teddy Long and Hubbard. They were the three most slovenly chaps in the Remove, as a rule—but at the present moment they were spick-and-span. Again his weapons were torn out of his hands!

"Attention!" he rapped out, in his confusion.

The Remove saluted again, and Handforth breathed hard.

"Don't do that!" he shouted, as he returned the salute.

"We're only obeying orders, captain," said Pitt, saluting.

The Form captain fled, pacing up and down the line in sheer desperation. There wasn't a fellow he could pick on. In spite of his

dismay at this discovery, he couldn't help feeling a little proud, too! By George! He had tamed them, and no mistake! They had obeyed his orders in a startling manner.

"Well, you seem all right," he admitted grudgingly. "I expect you'd better dismiss—"

"Handforth, what is all this remarkable display?"

Edward Oswald turned, and found Mr. Nelson Lee walking up. The Housemaster-detective was looking his old self again, in gown and mortar-board. Naturally, he had resumed his duties as Housemaster of the Ancient House this morning, and he had thought it necessary to make an inquiry.

Handforth saluted before he realised what he was doing.

"Inspection, sir," he explained. "I'm Form captain, you know."

"Yes, I heard that you had been elected," said Lee drily. "So this is an inspection, Handforth? A new idea of yours, I take it?"

"Yes, sir."

"But what is the nature of the inspection?"

"Dress, sir," said Handforth. "I've been displeased with the general appearance of the Remove, sir. Baggy trousers—dirty shoes—untidy hair, and all that sort of thing, sir. So I instituted this morning inspection, just so that I could keep my eyes on the chaps."

Nelson Lee nodded.

"A very praiseworthy notion, Handforth," he agreed. "It seems that your ideas of a Form captain's duties are novel. And the Remove appears to be taking full notice of your instructions. I have seldom seen the boys so smart."

"Yes, sir," said Handforth, with satisfaction. "My idea, sir."

"I rather think the inspection would be a greater success, Handforth, if you gave more thought to your own appearance," continued the Housemaster grimly. "Perhaps you don't realise the unconscious humour of your action. Surely the inspector should be at least as smart as the inspected?"

"Eh?" gasped Handforth. "I—I mean—"

"I have seldom seen the Remove so smart—and I have seldom seen you so slovenly," continued Lee, with a frown. "Good gracious, Handforth—look at your shoes!"

Handforth looked at his shoes dazedly. They mocked at him.

"Look at your hair!" said Lee. "Untidy, uncombed, and matted! Your collar is crumpled, and stained with ink, and your general appearance is slovenly to a degree. I am amazed that you, a Form captain, should have the audacity to hold an inspection! Go indoors at once, Handforth, and make yourself tidy! Boys, you may dismiss!"

The Remove dismissed, happier than it had felt for days—and Handforth crawled indoors, conscious of the fact that he had come a frightful cropper.

And all this was the result of the Remove's obedience!



CHAPTER 15.

NEAR THE BREAKING-POINT.

THE day passed in a kind of nightmare for Handforth.

He had done so much saluting by tea-time that his arm was actually hurt-

ing him. There was no imagination about it. A dozen times he had informed different fellows that they could regard the order as cancelled. But they simply took no notice! They saluted him just the same—and he was obliged to return it! Such rigid adherence to orders was terrifying.

And if there was one word in the English language which he detested it was "captain." He had heard it thousands of times during the day. Nobody spoke to him without calling him "captain" and saluting him. And the more he tried to escape these unwelcome attentions, the more he ran into them. And not in a single instance could he detect any sign of deliberate ragging. And, if it comes to that, there was none. In the ordinary course of events, Handforth passed dozens of fellows every hour of the day, and there was no necessity to pile anything on until the evening—when, unknown to Handforth, the Remove would make a final burst of activity.

During tea, Handforth looked a wreck. There was a hunted expression in his eyes, and if footsteps sounded in the corridor he gave a violent start. Church and McClure were feeling just a bit sorry for him, but they stuck to their guns. They would be more pleased than anybody else to see him resign the captaincy. They were longing for peaceful times again.

"I don't want any tea!" said Handforth wearily.

"It'll do you good, captain," said Church.

Crash! Handforth's plate splintered to the floor as he leapt to his feet.

"Don't call me captain!" he raved violently.

"Sorry, it was a slip!" gasped Church.

"Well, don't make any more slips!" shouted his leader desperately. "I'm sick of that word—and I never want to see another salute as long as I live. I keep telling the rotters to drop it, but they won't! Go out of this study and leave me alone! I've got to work!"

"You mustn't forget your promise, you know," said McClure.

"Promise? What promise?"

"Well, you offered to help the chaps in their troubles," said Mac. "I know for a fact that Dick Goodwin is coming over here after tea, to ask your advice about a new table he's making. Dick's keen on carpentry, you know, and he's keen to have your opinion."

"All right, I don't mind giving it to him," growled Handforth, having nothing else to say. "But I don't want to be pestered—"

"Pestered!" interrupted Church, in surprise. "Hang it, that's a bit ungracious, Handy, isn't it? When the fellows accept your offer, and honour you by coming for

their Form captain's advice, you can't call it being pestered."

"Give me some tea, and dry up!" muttered Handforth.

"We're only reminding you," said McClure, as he poured the tea out. "So don't lock your door, and tell everybody to go away. It wouldn't be playing the game! And if there's one thing about you, Handy, that the Remove counts upon—it's the certainty that you'll always play the game."

"Yes!" said Handforth miserably.

To his joy, Church and McClure took themselves off immediately tea was over, and for a dizzy quarter of an hour he believed that he was to be left undisturbed. The typewriter was on the table in front of him, and he had at last succeeded in getting the title of Irene's story on the paper to his satisfaction. And then, to his horror, he discovered that the machine had blobbed a lot of oil on to the very centre of the page.

"Help!" he moaned. "I've got to do it all over again!"

Tap!

There was a soft knock on the door, and Handforth jumped. The haggard expression on his face became positively alarming.

"Come in!" he muttered between set teeth.

The door opened, and Canham, of the West House, came in. Canham was a quiet fellow, and he was looking thoughtful.

"Sorry to trouble you, captain," he said, saluting.

Handforth winced, and returned the salute.

"Well?" he asked ominously.

"You know what you said last night," went on Canham. "You told us to come to you with our little troubles and things. Can you tell me the age of Harold Lloyd?"

"The age of Harold Lloyd?" repeated Handforth blankly.

"Yes, captain."

"Harold Lloyd?" breathed Handy.

"He's a cinema star, you know——"

"Do you think I don't know who Harold Lloyd is?" roared Handforth fiercely. "How the dickens should I know how old he is, you West House idiot?"

Canham started back.

"But—but I'm interested in film stars, you know, and you told us to come to you, captain," he protested. "I thought you'd help."

Handforth controlled himself by a supreme effort.

"I'm sorry!" he said. "I don't know how old Harold Lloyd is, and I don't care! You want my advice, do you?"

"Yes, please, captain."

"Then buzz off!" snapped Handforth fiercely. "That's my advice!"

Canham went, the door closed, Handforth breathed a sigh of relief—and the door opened again.

"Busy, captain?" asked Dick Goodwin cheerily.

He came in, saluted, and grinned. Handforth had always rather liked Goodwin, but just at the moment he felt like annihilating him.

"I'm making a new sort of table," said the Lancashire boy briskly. "By gum, it's real champion! It folds up into such a small space that you can put it behind the door. But when you need it large, it comes out as big as this one."

"What do I care about your rotten table?" groaned Handforth. "Can't you leave me alone? D'you think I care whether your table goes behind the door or through a key-hole?"

"But I want your advice," said Dick, in surprise. "You see, captain, I haven't quite decided whether I shall use oak or mahogany. Which do you think is the best? It's only a small question, but I always like the advice of an expert. And you, being our Form captain——"

"Oak!" said Handforth, with a gulp. "Oak, my lad! There's nothing in the world to beat oak! Now clear off, and never let me hear about your fatheaded table again!"

"Well, you needn't talk like that——"

Dick Goodwin was interrupted by the opening of the door, and Jack Grey came in. He saluted smartly as Dick left, and sat down on the edge of the table. Handforth was nearly purple in the face, and he gave a hopeless, despairing glance at his typewriter.

"About my banjo, captain," said Jack.

"Your what?" croaked Handforth.

"My banjo, captain," said Jack Grey. "I was wondering if you could tell me how to put some new parchment on it. Some fathead pushed his finger through mine, and it costs a lot to have them done at the shop. Do you know where I can find some parchment?"

This sort of inquiry struck Handforth as being outrageous.

"No, I don't!" he roared. "Why come to me? Do you think I've got parchment up my sleeves or in my ears? Blow your banjo! I hope somebody shoves his foot through it!"

"But, as Form captain——"

"I'm fed up with being Form captain!" hooted Handforth, desperately. "I've had nothing but trouble ever since——" He pulled himself up, and pointed to the door. "Clear out, and keep out!" he breathed.

"All right, if that's the way you're going to treat us, I'll go," said Jack coldly.

He left the study and slammed the door. Handforth sat there, weak and trembling. He was startled, too. After all, the chaps hadn't been so very unreasonable in their simple inquiries. And he had told them to come to him! He set his teeth, and went to the door, his eyes on the key.

Then it opened, and De Valerie came in. "I'm just writing a letter to my mater, captain," he said, without beating about the bush. "Now, she promised to send me a fiver in her letter before last, and there wasn't a sign of it in the letter that came this morning. She seems to have forgotten all about it. What shall I do?"

"Do?" said Handforth feebly. "How should I know?"

(Continued on page 43.)

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THE BERMONDSEY MISER!

*A Clever Complete Story of
NELSON LEE & NIPPER*

CHAPTER 1.

THE SPOT OF WAX.

"EVERYBODY'LL think I'm guilty, Mr. Lee," the young man began, as Nelson Lee and Nipper walked into the office of a Lincoln's Inn solicitor. "Mr. Gerry'll have me arrested, and—"

"One moment, please!" Nelson Lee interrupted. "In the first place, who are you, and why did you 'phone me in such haste?"

"I'm Jim Monkton, confidential clerk to the Mr. John Gerry who runs this office," the young fellow answered, trying to speak calmly. "Mr. Gerry had to leave a big sum of money in the safe last night, and soon's I arrived here I opened the safe to see everything was all right."

"Well, the safe's not been broken into?" Lee said, glancing at the ponderous steel box let into the wall.

"That's just it, Mr. Lee," Monkton groaned. "If it had been broken open, I wouldn't have minded so much—though I'd have been sorry for the boss. No, sir; the worst of it is the safe's been opened with a key—and I'm the only fellow who has a key to open it with!"

Lee's eyes narrowed, and he looked searchingly at the young solicitor's clerk. Before he could speak, however, Monkton plunged into his story again and made the case against himself blacker with every word he used.

"The door of this private office has also been opened with a key, and there again I'm the only fellow who carries one," he said. "They're both intricate locks, the keys are never out of my possession, and I haven't an excuse to offer Gerry when he arrives."

"How much money was in the safe?" Lee asked.

"Twelve hundred pounds—in banknotes!" Monkton whispered. "That beastly old Bermondsey miser insisted on cash—wouldn't hear of a cheque—"

"We'll have your story in proper order, Monkton," Lee said impatiently.

"Sorry, Mr. Lee, but I hardly know what I'm talking about this morning," Monkton muttered. "Well, sir, the boss was asked some time ago to sell a house in Bermondsey, owned by a queer old stick named Silas Warner. He was letting it go cheap—for £1,200, in fact. Mr. Gerry found a buyer quickly enough, and Warner should have been here to complete the sale at four o'clock yesterday afternoon. He didn't turn up, Mr. Lee, and it wasn't until six that he 'phoned saying he'd been detained but would come this morning."

"And it was then too late to bank the money,"

Lee nodded. "Strange that the office should be burgled on the one night it held really big money."

"There you are, sir," Monkton groaned. "You're saying just what everyone else'll say—especially when it's known that the office and safe were opened with my own keys!"

"I'm saying nothing of the sort!" Lee said sharply. "Tell me, Monkton, are you quite sure the keys never left you during last night?"

"Nor any other night," Monkton replied quickly. "Since Mr. Gerry first trusted me with them, I'm certain they've never been out of my care for a single minute!"

"Um—let me have a look at them," Nelson Lee requested.

With a sigh, Monkton tossed a bunch of three keys on the table. The moment the great detective fingered them, he frowned and glanced sternly at the solicitor's clerk.

"Monkton, either these keys have been out of your hands within the last day or so, or you've had them copied!" he said accusingly.

"No! You're wrong, sir!" Monkton shouted excitedly.

But Nelson Lee was now handing the keys to Nipper, and took no notice of the clerk's denials.

"What d'you make of them, young 'un?" he asked.

Nipper looked closely at the keys, and, for a moment, couldn't see what the gov'nor was driving at. Then something in the feel of them made him whistle sharply, and he looked up in astonishment.

"Gosh, gov'nor!" he gasped. "They're greased—they've been in hot candle-fat or wax!"

"I tell you they haven't!" Monkton exclaimed. "They've never left—"

"Keep quiet a moment," Lee snapped. He took a powerful magnifying-glass from his pocket, and carefully examined the keys with its aid. "Ah! The proof's here! Look inside this hollowed barrel, young 'un."

Staring through the glass, Nipper could now make out a tiny spot of yellow substance clinging to the inner rim of the hollowed safe key. In turn, Monkton gazed at the spot—then he threw the keys on the table, and glanced at Lee in white-faced misery.

"I've told you the truth, Mr. Lee," he said quietly.

"And I believe you," Lee answered kindly. "Only you've made a mistake, Monkton, in saying the keys have never been out of your hands."

"Somebody might have nicked 'em while you were asleep," Nipper suggested.

Monkton shook his head.

"I keep them under the mattress and sleep on them," he replied. "Anyone trying to get those keys'd have to pull me off the bed first—and I'm sure nobody's done that."

"Then think again, my lad," Lee prompted. "Have you been in a place where they could have been taken from your pocket—any crowded place, where you stayed for some time?"

Monkton hesitated, coloured painfully, then shook his head again.

"No, I haven't," he began; then his mouth suddenly dropped open, and a look of fear sprang into his eyes. "My hat, Mr. Lee, I did go to a queer place two nights ago—a pretty low-down show, where an old army pal'd written asking me to help him out of a mess!"

"Ah! And where was this?" Lee asked. "Who was the pal—tell us all about it, Monkton."

"I had a letter from a chap named McKane, saying he was down and out, and would I meet him at Mother Mull's supper-rooms at ten o'clock," Monkton confessed. "Rotten show it was—crowded with fellows round a feeding counter, and—"

"I can guess the rest," Nelson Lee said, as Monkton paused. "Mull's is really a gambling den of the lowest type. I suppose you stood in the crowd, treating McKane, and listening to his troubles?"

"That's about it, Mr. Lee," Monkton admitted.

"And during that time, McKane, or one of his pals, helped himself to your keys, took an impression, and quietly returned them to your pocket," Nelson Lee smiled. "I suppose he wasn't kind enough to give you his home address?"

"He wasn't," Monkton confessed ruefully.

"And he won't be seen at Mull's again in a hurry," Lee said. "Now, Nipper, we'll have a look round this office."

But the thieves had done their work well. There wasn't a finger-print in the place, nor the least evidence that any stranger had visited it—until Nipper suddenly pounced on an oblong slip of cardboard.

It was coloured green, roughly stamped on one side with the number "24," and its perforated edges showed it had been torn from a roll.

"Sort of thing they shoot from a pay-box machine," Nipper muttered. "Ever seen it before, Mr. Monkton?"

"No, but the boss might have dropped it," Monkton replied, glancing at it with complete indifference.

Nelson Lee took the slip from Nipper's hand, and studied it in thoughtful silence.

"It's very likely our thief dropped it, not Mr. Gerry," he said at last. "You're right in saying it was shot from a machine, young 'un, for it's the kind of thing now used in many of the East End lodging-houses. You pay sixpence and get a ticket like this—the number being the room or cubicle you are to sleep in."

"Doesn't help us much, guv'nor," Nipper answered.

"Can't see it helps me at all," Monkton burst out. "The boss'll be here in a few minutes, and what am I to tell him?"

"The truth, exactly as you have told us," Lee advised. "But not a word about the duplicate keys, or this slip, my friend."

"But they're the only points in my favour!" Monkton protested. "If I can't tell him of your finds, I'll be in prison before noon!"

"And you'll remain there for several years if our clues are broadcast in the newspapers!" Lee snapped tartly.

Monkton smiled wryly, but squared his shoulders.

"Right-ho, Mr. Lee," he agreed. "Looks to me as if you haven't a chance in a million of get-

ting those notes back, but I'll stick till you say the word."

"Good lad!" Lee nodded, and he turned to Nipper. "Now, young 'un, your job's to hunt the East End locksmiths, and to try and trace anyone who has had three keys made from a wax impression."

"And I suppose you're going to Mull's feeding house," Nipper grinned. "Swop jobs if you like, guv'nor?"

Lee's eyes twinkled, but his answer to Nipper's bright suggestion was not encouraging.

"You've about a hundred locksmiths to visit, young 'un, and I'll expect your report this evening," he said, pointing to the door.

CHAPTER 2.

THE ITALIAN BEGGAR-BOY.

BY tea-time, Nipper had grown to hate the sight of a locksmith's shop. He was fed up with tramping the streets, half the fellows he questioned thought he was trying to be funny, and not a shred of luck had come his way.

To make matters worse, a thick fog was settling on London, and he began to fear he'd never finish his job by closing-time. The next place on his list proved to be a cellar filled with scrap-iron and rusty old keys by the cartload. It was run by a whiskered old chap named Wilkins, and the moment Nipper made his request the locksmith began to eye him suspiciously.

"Maybe you comes from th' police?" he grunted.

"Not exactly, though I wouldn't say you're far wrong," Nipper grinned. "Anyway, Mr. Wilkins, the chap who bought those keys is a real wrong 'un, and the chap who made 'em'll have a rotten time when the police do get busy." He could see the old fellow did know something, so he took a banknote from his pocket and crinkled it noisily. "Besides, I'm willing to pay for information—but the police will demand it."

Wilkins' hand outstretched greedily over for the fiver, but Nipper drew back out of his reach.

"Only when you've told me what you know," he said.

"I've nothing to hide, young sir, and a feller did order three keys off me yesterday," Wilkins answered huskily. "Mighty hurry 'e was in, sayin' 'e'd lost the keys of his office, but happened to 'ave taken a copy of 'em, for safety, like." His hand again clawed at the banknote. "Now, gimme the flimsy!"

"You've nearly earned it," Nipper grinned, keeping just out of reach. "But what name did the chap give you—what do you know about him?"

"Didn't gimme no name," Wilkins answered sourly. "But I saw 'im comin' out of a house in Carlin Street—a doss-house, if that's any help to yer?"

"It is, and the fiver's yours," Nipper said quickly. He hurried from the shop, found a public telephone, and got through to Gray's Inn Road with all speed.

But Nelson Lee had not been home all day, and Mrs. Jones was beginning to talk about the "good food as was spi'lin' in th' oven," when Nipper gently replaced the receiver and left the box.

"He's waiting round Mull's, I expect, and by the time I can get him the lodgin'-house'll be closed for the night," he thought quickly. "Carlin Street's about five minutes away, and if

I can only get into the place I might hear something about McKane." He puzzled over that problem for a full minute, then his frown gave way to a wide grin. "Old Isaacs, the second-hand clothes man! He's this end of the Kent Road, an' he owes me a good turn, anyway! He'll give me a decent disguise."

It was barely an hour later when a ragged urchin slouched up the steps of a four-storied house in Carlin Street. The door was open for anyone to enter, and a big placard announced that a good bed could be had for a modest sixpence. The fellows who used the place were mostly tramps and hawkers of the poorest class, but it would have taken very keen eyes to have recognised Nipper as any different from them, when old Isaacs had finished with him.

He was dressed in a greasy, patched coat, a grey flannel shirt, and trousers that showed an inch of fringe. He carried a worn, old concertina, slung by a string to his neck. His face and hands were brown beneath his grime, his hair was jet black, and his eyes never seemed to be more than half open.

But those same eyes were keenly examining everything in sight. He paid his sixpence over to a surly-looking chap sitting in the lobby, and his heart jumped as he received a green slip of cardboard, exactly

similar to the one he had found in Mr. Gerry's office!

He slouched into a room where a dozen poorly-dressed chaps were eating, cooking, or patching their clothes, and was quietly making his way to a corner when a grimy labourer grabbed him by the shoulder.

"Hallo, Italy!" the chap grinned. "Give us a tune on the ole concertina—we wants livenin' up on a night like this."

"Me no play 'gain t'-night," Nipper shrugged. "Dis fog-smoke kill-a my trade-a. Poor Beppo not earn a lira dis day; too tired, Beppo want-a get back Italiana—where der sun shine."

He was really wondering what would happen if the crowd insisted upon him playing, for he hadn't the least idea of how to use the instrument; in fact, it was really a dud that Isaacs had been glad to get rid of, and its inside had long since ceased to make music.

But he was saved further trouble when the fellow who had taken his sixpence suddenly appeared in the doorway, and scowled blackly on the crowd.

"You leave the macaroni kid alone—I ain't 'avin' no row in here to-night!" he snarled. "D'you 'ear me, Biggs?"

"All right, Mac," Biggs growled. "No 'arm in askin' fer a tune, is there?"

"Harm or not, I ain't 'aving it," the other growled, and went back to his seat, scowling more blackly than ever.

"Lummy! Anyone'd think McKane 'ad the jim-jams, or something," Biggs muttered—and Nipper nearly gave himself away by his sudden start.

McKane! It must be the very fellow he was looking for! There could hardly be two chaps of that name in the same house; yet, if this McKane was the thief, why was he still hanging

about instead of getting away with his plunder?

And now, when he came to look at the door-keeper more closely, he could see that McKane was on the jump about something. Looking out into the hall, Nipper watched him get up from his cash table, sneak over to the stairway, and listen intently. He came back after a time, waited, then again sneaked softly over to the stairs. It was all done very quietly, but Nipper could see the chap was waiting and expecting someone to come downstairs—someone he had no love for, judging by the scowls on his face.

Nipper casually dropped into a seat that gave him a good view of the hall, and there he sat as if dozing for nearly an hour. Other fellows appeared, and the room gradually filled—but the Italian beggar-lad slept with his hat tilted far over his eyes, and took no notice of anyone.

About nine o'clock, he saw a queer old chap creeping down the stairs, carrying a handbag that looked older than himself, and wearing clothes that a rag-man would not have given two bob for. He seemed to be more than half-starved, his face so thin that every bone showed through the yellow skin. But his fierce, wide-open eyes showed that he was very wide awake, and not a customer to be played with.

He crossed straight over to McKane, and his shrill, reedy voice carried faintly across to where Nipper sat.

"I'm goin' out f'supper, Mac," he wheezed, in what was meant to be a whisper. "You'll not forget that we leave here at two, eh?"

"I'm ready when you are," McKane growled. "Don't see what you want t' fool about in this fog for, Warner—you'll have enough of it later on."

"Must have a good feed to-night," Warner giggled. "Get the house settled down early, Mac, an' I'll be back soon."

He hobbled to the street door, still giggling over a joke that was hidden from Nipper. But he saw that McKane's glance never left the bent old figure until it was swallowed up by the fog, and he was not surprised when McKane quietly followed out into the street.

That was enough for Nipper. He rose slowly to his feet, slouched from the room, then jumped like a cat for the open! He was just in time to see McKane's back vanishing in the mist ten yards ahead, and the chap's cautious steps showed plainly enough that he was shadowing the old man. They turned from Carlin Street into a side lane, where the fog hung down thick as a blanket, and Nipper was forced to close rapidly in on his quarry.

He was not more than eight paces behind McKane when the fellow suddenly darted ahead and vanished as completely as if a wall had sprung between them. Nipper tiptoed quickly on, but a dozen steps showed that he had lost the chap, and he came to a stand with ears alert for the tiniest sound!

Then, from the middle of the roadway, he heard the beginning of a scream that broke instantly to a choking gurgle. It was followed by a slither of boots on stones, and as he dashed across the street he almost collided with another fellow rushing in to the rescue!

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There was not a word exchanged, but the stranger wrenched McKane away from the old man, and Nipper noticed now that McKane's face was hidden by a mask!

"Piratin', by hookey!" the newcomer said. "You look after the old 'un, matey, while I uncover this feller's headlights and see what flag he's sailing under!"

Nipper grinned, and was turning to help old Warner when the scrap broke out again like a lightning flash. He saw McKane suddenly duck and twist away from the sailor's hold; then, before he could move, the chap swooped down on Warner, grabbed the bag he carried, and sprang away into the blinding fog!

"After him, you dolts!" Warner screamed. "He's got—"

"Shurrup!" the sailor yelled.

They listened for the sound of McKane's retreating steps; but a dead silence surrounded them, and McKane might have been a mile away for all they could see or hear of him.

"Scuppered!" the sailor muttered, in disgust. "If only you'd kep' yer mouth shut, whiskers, we might ha' got him!"

"And if you'd kept proper hold of him, this wouldn't have happened!" Warner hooted furiously. "I've lost my bag—lost it through you, you dense idiot!"

"Well, it didn't look worth much," the sailor chuckled. "I admits th' pirate was too quick f' me, but if a quid'll pay the damage—"

"Pah!" Warner snarled. "That bag had the savings of a lifetime in it! All that I've worked and starved for was in it, and you—you—"

The old chap was spitting and spluttering like a cornered wild-cat, but Nipper left them to settle their quarrel in the best way they could. He sneaked away, thinking that McKane might be hiding in some doorway until they had cleared off; but he soon abandoned the search, for the fog was thickening every second, and it was now impossible to see more than a yard ahead.

He could hear the deep mumble of the sailor's voice, and he hesitated for a moment whether to return to them, or to make his way home and report to the gov'nor; but the events of the last hour made him think that Warner was a bigger rogue than his doorkeeper, and he decided that the old chap might be worth watching.

"Anyway, they're both mixed up with the burglary in Lincoln's Inn," he muttered. "Warner's the one that was selling his house for £1,200, and McKane's the chap that pinched the keys." A sudden thought came to him, and he gasped with surprise. "Gosh! I wonder if Warner pinched the money himself, and had it in that old bag he carried! And I was going to tell him it was McKane who'd just attacked him—but I guess I'll hang back a bit."

Warner and the sailor were now making their way slowly back to the house in Carlin Street, and the old chap was still raving bitterly about his stolen bag.

"Yer say yer name's Warner, and you run this lodgin'-house I was makin' for," the sailor interrupted. "Well, my name's Neilson, an' I ain't so sure as I can't find that pirate for ye. I fink I knows him—anyways, I knows where to lay me hands on him to-morrer mornin', if he's th' bloke I think he is."

They fell to whispering as they neared the door of Warner's house, and Nipper was unable to pick up another word. But he had heard enough to deepen his curiosity in this sailor-man, and he was beginning to grin at the surprise that awaited Warner when he found that the doorkeeper was missing.

Then a voice hailed Warner from the doorway, and Nipper began to wonder if he was dreaming;

for there was McKane himself, a fat grin on his face, actually welcoming the old man like a long-lost brother!

CHAPTER 3.

THE SAILOR BUTTS IN!

"HALLO, Warner, where you been?" McKane yelled. "Thought you'd got lost in th' fog, an' I was comin' out to search f'you."

Nipper was amazed at the fellow's cool cheek, seeing that he had robbed and half killed his boss less than five minutes ago. But Warner had no suspicion of this; and if McKane was acting a part, the old man was every bit as clever.

"Lost me bag and supper," he grumbled. "Some brute snatched it off me just after I'd filled it, an' I never got a glimpse of him in this dratted fog."

"You ole idiot," McKane sneered. "You come in an' get t'bed, for I'm wakenin' you up early, remember," he added meaningly.

Nipper showed his ticket and sidled quietly past while the sailor was paying for a room. From the glimpse Nipper had been able to get, this Neilson looked like a ship's stoker—heavily bearded, grimed with coal-dust, and clad in dirty blue dungarees.

Nipper went straight up to his bed-room, but not with any idea of sleep. With the door open a quarter-inch, he had a good view of the stairs leading to the rooms occupied by Warner and McKane—and there he watched and waited for hours.

At eleven, McKane stumbled noisily upstairs, and the house settled down to complete silence. But it was not until a distant clock struck twelve that the tired lad thought of moving; even then, he allowed another ten minutes to pass before beginning the dangerous adventure he had mapped out.

He dropped the shoes from his feet and crept up the stairs as quietly as a moving shadow. The drawn-out snores that issued faintly from the room satisfied him that McKane was fast asleep, but a half-turn of the knob proved that the door was locked.

He was expecting that, and quickly fished a pair of steel tweezers from his ragged coat. In about three seconds he had a firm grip on the end of the key, and with a steady, powerful twist, he turned the thing backward!

The click of the sockets falling into place sounded eerily loud in the silent house, and for a full minute he paused outside the door, almost fearing to breathe. But McKane's snores came as regularly as a miniature syren, and at last Nipper softly turned the knob, opened the door a dozen inches, and sidled into the room!

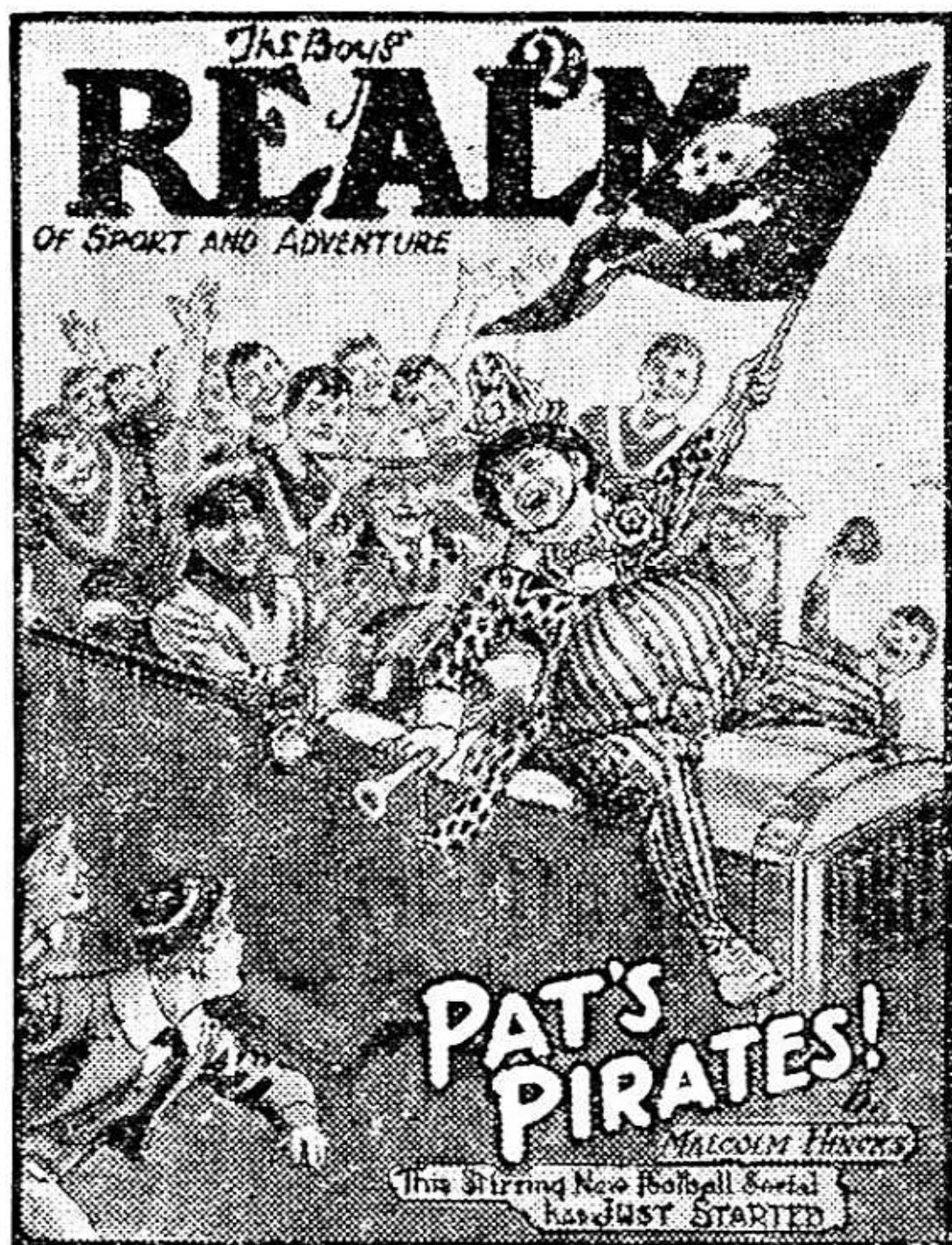
It was pitch-black inside the place, and he was forced to use his torch. The first flash dropped right on the bed, lit up McKane's ugly face, and made the fellow stir and mutter uneasily.

But Nipper doused the light almost before it touched the closed lids, and the gurgling snore was soon in full swing again. Treading as softly as a hunting cat, he crept to the head of the bed, slipped his hand softly beneath the pillow and grinned soundlessly when his fingers touched flimsy paper!

An inch at a time, he began to withdraw his hand; but, as if some sixth sense warned him, McKane suddenly let out a startled cry and sat bolt upright in bed!

It was then a matter of seconds, and Nipper was more awake than the thieving doorkeeper. He snatched the bundle from beneath the pillow,

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EVERY WEDNESDAY—PRICE TWOPENCE

jumped for the open door, and was out of the room before McKane's eyes were really open!

Jumping the stairs at a reckless pace, he shot into his own room and quickly examined his prize. He had no wish to take anything from McKane that really belonged to the chap, but when he found that the notes he held amounted to exactly £1,200, he knew that he had recovered the money stolen from Lincoln's Inn the previous night.

His next job was to hide the cash and to try and escape before McKane got really busy. He suddenly thought of the concertina that was part of his make-up, and in a second he had slashed a three-inch slit in the bellows and had crammed the notes inside!

Slinging the thing round his neck and holding his shoes in one hand, he stepped from the room and began to creep downstairs. For a moment the house seemed as quiet as ever, and he began to think that he was going to get away without any trouble; then a curiously muffled "thud, thud, thud!" on a wall above made him pause, and the hoarse growl of McKane reached his ears.

"You creeping snake, Warner!" the fellow was mumbling. "Gimme back that money, you bound—d'y'hear me, where is it?"

"Leave me alone, Mac!" Warner whimpered.

"I dunno what you're getting at—can't you believe me, man?"

McKane certainly did not, if his vicious snarl was anything to go by.

"Gosh! He thinks it was Warner who sneaked into his room!" Nipper gasped. "Sounds as if he's making a door-mat of the old 'un, and—I've got to stop him, somehow!"

It was rotten-luck, but Nipper knew that he couldn't sneak away and leave the old man to stand the rage of that Bermondsey tough. He had to interfere, but he grinned very crookedly as he ran upstairs, dropped his concertina in a dark corner and quietly opened the door of Warner's room.

The fellows were too busy arguing to notice him, and he saw that Warner had been dragged from the bed, and that McKane had him by the throat with his back jammed hard against a wall.

"Hand over, you skinflint!" McKane was snarling. "That's twice you've double-crossed me, an' I'll break every bone you own if I has any more of yer monkey tricks!"

"You're mad, Mac!" Warner wailed. "I ain't got any money—I ain't been near your room, I keep on telling you!"

"An' I says you're lying!" McKane hissed,

banging Warner's head hard against the wall with each word he uttered.

It was cruel punishment for the frail old man, and more than Nipper could stand. With a yell, he sprang across the room, tore McKane's hands from the thin throat, and shouldered him roughly aside.

"That's enough, McKane!" he said hotly. "You've nearly killed Warner already, you brute!"

For a single second, fear sprang into McKane's eyes at the unexpected interruption. Then a leering grin came to his coarse face, and he closed in threateningly!

"Ho, the macaroni kid, is it?" he sneered. "But you knows English now—and who are you, you rat?"

He spat the last words out venomously, and Nipper suddenly realised that he had given himself away. But McKane waited for no explanation—he simply sprang in like a panther and crashed slogging blows at Nipper's face!

He was like a living tornado—a pug specially picked to keep toughs quiet in the rough lodging-house. His great muscled arms swung like pile-driving hammers, and, though Nipper put up a good show, he hadn't an earthly against the chap's brutal strength. The first two blows crashed with numbing force on his arms—then his defence was swept aside, and he was flung across the bed with a jolt that jarred every bone in his body!

McKane slipped round the bed and dropped on the lad's chest before Nipper could make any attempt to squirm away. Then the brute lifted his fist to complete the job, and Nipper had given himself up for lost, when McKane was suddenly wrenched aside and sent whirling against the opposite wall!

Dazed, Nipper climbed slowly to his feet, and saw the bearded stoker facing McKane with a sour grin on his face.

"Skulls an' crossbones!" Neilson yelled. "Cease fire, matey, or—"

McKane's eyes glinted red rage, and he sprang in with the same ferocious swiftness that had overcome Nipper. His mighty right lunged straight at the stoker's chin, but Neilson flicked his head aside, and, as the brute blundered forward, he hit—twice!

A right—and McKane stood stock-still! A left—a lightning upper-cut met his protruding jaw, lifted him clean from his feet, and stretched him unconscious across the bed!

"Gosh!" Nipper gasped, awe-struck. Before he could add another word, the stoker darted from the room—to reappear a second later with the concertina in his outstretched arms!

"Yer lost some money, ole whiskers," he said to Warner. "I've had me optics open—an' I'm goin' to do ye a good turn now!"

As though he smelt the money in the thing, Warner eyed the concertina with hungry greed; but Nipper, after a moment of blank astonishment, jumped forward with a cry of rage and tried to tear the case from Neilson's hands!

"Tisn't yours!" he cried. "It's stolen money, and you'll get yourself into trouble if you interfere."

"Aye, it's stolen money—don't I knows it!" the stoker grinned. "I saw you sneak into Mac's room, an' I heard him accusin' this old 'un o' taking it!" He turned to the crowd of lodgers who had been wakened by the swift uproar, and he now beckoned them into the room.

"Look 'ere, lads—what d'yer think of—that?" Before Nipper could stop him, he had torn the concertina into two complete halves, and dropped the bundle of notes on to Warner's table. The old miser fell on them with a whimper of joy—but a second before his hand touched, Neilson grabbed his wrist!

"Not so fast, matey!" he snapped. "I promised to find the notes—not to hand them over to you!"

"You'd never rob an old man!" Warner shrieked, trying to tear away from Neilson's hold. "They're mine—they're mine!"

"They're not!" Nipper yelled. "And you've no right to them either, Neilson!"

The chaps at the door were pressing forward, staring hungrily at the treasure, and things were looking decidedly ugly when Neilson picked up the notes and calmly stuffed them into his pocket. The next instant a gleaming automatic appeared in his hand and the pointed barrel waved the crowd back to a safe distance.

"You're a silly ass—" Nipper began furiously—then goggled like a landed fish as the stoker's free hand swept to his face and the heavy beard came away! "You—guv'nor!"

"Lummy! It's Nelson Lee 'imself!" a fellow muttered from the doorway.

Warner heard the name and shrank against the wall like a whipped cur.

"Don't blame me, Mr. Lee," he whined. "McKane put me up to it—he stole the keys—"

"And you stole the money!" Lee snapped, his lip curling. "There wasn't even honour between thieves, in your case, Warner."

"Gosh, guv'nor!" Nipper gasped. "Y'mean he pinched the notes from under his partner's nose?"

Lee nodded.

"McKane thought they were going to do the job to-night," he explained. "Warner got in a night ahead, and McKane was only trying to get his own back, when he caught this beauty slipping away with the plunder."

Nipper grinned.

"And I thought you were after the same plunder a moment ago," he said. "I also thought I was some clever nut, getting the notes into my own hands; but it seems as if you've been playing a fine old game with me, guv'nor."

"No, you played the game—and played it well, young 'un," Lee answered quietly. "I'd never have interfered, if you hadn't tried to tackle a prize pug—after robbing him of a fortune." He turned to the crowd, now grinning in the doorway. "I'm keeping the notes, lads, but I've some loose silver for the chap that'll rouse up Charles Street police-station!"

THE END.

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HOW TO JOIN THE LEAGUE

ST. FRANK'S LEAGUE APPLICATION

FORM No. 54.

SECTION

A

READER'S APPLICATION FOR MEMBERSHIP.

I desire to become enrolled as a Member of THE ST. FRANK'S LEAGUE, and to qualify for all such benefits and privileges as are offered to Members of the League. I hereby declare that I have introduced "THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY" and THE ST. FRANK'S LEAGUE to one new reader, whose signature to certify this appears on second form attached hereto. Will you, therefore, kindly forward me Certificate of Enrolment with the Membership Number assigned to me, and Membership Badge.

SECTION

B

MEMBER'S APPLICATION FOR MEDAL AWARDS.

I, Member No..... (give Membership No.) hereby declare that I have introduced one more new reader, whose signature to certify this appears on second form attached hereto. This makes me..... (state number of introductions up to date) introductions to my credit.

SECTION

C

NEW READER'S DECLARATION.

I hereby declare that I have been introduced by (give name of introducer) to this issue of "THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY."

(FULL NAME).....

(ADDRESS).....

INSTRUCTIONS.

INSTRUCTIONS.—Reader Applying for Membership. Cut out TWO complete Application Forms from Two copies of this week's issue of THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY. On one of the forms fill in Section A, crossing out Sections B and C. Then write clearly your full name and address at bottom of form. *The second form* is for your new reader, who fills in Section C, crosses out Sections A and B, and writes his name and address at bottom of form. Both forms are then pinned together, and sent to the Chief Officer, The St. Frank's League, c/o THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY, Gough House, Gough Square, London, E.C.4. **Member Applying for Bronze Medal:** It will be necessary for you to obtain six new readers for this award. For each new reader TWO complete forms, bearing the same number, are needed. On one of the forms fill in Section B, crossing out Sections A and C, and write your name and address at bottom of form. The other form is for your new reader, who fills in Section C; crosses out Sections A and B, and writes his name and address at the bottom of

the form. Now pin both forms together and send them to the Chief Officer, as above. One new reader will then be registered against your name, and when six new readers have been registered, you will be sent the St. Frank's League bronze medal. There is nothing to prevent you from sending in forms for two or more new readers at once, provided that each pair of forms bears the same date and number.

Bronze medallists wishing to qualify for the silver or gold medals can apply in the same way as for the bronze medal, filling in Section B. Every introduction they make will be credited to them, so that when the League reaches the required number of members, they can exchange their bronze medal for a silver or gold one, according to the number of introductions with which they are credited.

These Application Forms can be posted for 1d., providing the envelope is not sealed and no letter is enclosed.

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You are offered free hints on holidays, whether walking, biking, or camping.

You can qualify for the various awards by promoting the growth of the League.

If you want help or information on any subject, you will find the Chief Officer ever ready to assist you.

THE ST. FRANK'S LEAGUE

THE CHIEF OFFICER'S CHAT

All LETTERS in reference to the League should be addressed to the Chief Officer, The St. Frank's League, c/o THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY, The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4. Any enquiries which need an immediate answer should be accompanied by a stamped and addressed envelope.

Our Correspondence Column.

A WEEKLY feature which has been fairly jumped at like our correspondence corner is something worth thinking about. The Correspondence Column is a regular call-office for chums. That from the first is what I intended it to be, and I repeat my former invitation to Leagueites to avail themselves of the splendid facilities thus granted for getting into touch with friends. The correspondence department is increasingly popular, and I can see it becoming even more important as we go on. Send me any request you want published dealing with exchange of views on sport, hobbies, etc., with readers all over the world.

Girl Members.

I am glad to say that the S.F.L. has plenty of enthusiastic adherents amongst the girls. And why not? I am prompted to refer to the matter because a London member says it is "rather feeble" to have girl Leagueites. I disagree with him entirely. If girls can qualify as O.O.'s, and show themselves capable of forming clubs, good luck to them. There is false sentiment in the objection. Give the palms to those who merit them. The spirit of emulation will help fellows to go one better—if they can!

Gingering Up Clubs.

It is one thing to form a club, another to keep the movement going. It is no use for the half-hearted to try the game. It is personality alone that succeeds in keeping a club alive. And if there is a sport motive in a club, if members are keen on other things also, on debating, say, and show the right spirit, a club well started must win.

Rallying.

This has been a tremendous week. There will be still bigger things next. I know the League and the splendid spirit animating everybody, but there have been a few pleasant surprises this journey even for me.

Personal Application.

I have got to impress this matter on my chums. I have had jolly well-intentioned letters running: "Will you send Tom or Dick a Badge?" Sorry, but it would save a world of trouble if Tom and Dick would write in on their own.

CORRESPONDENTS WANTED

Ernest Peel, 80, Sunderland Street, Houghton-le-Spring, Co. Durham, wishes to hear from readers in his district.

Harry Robinson, 83, Nottingham Road, Mansfield, Notts., wishes to correspond with a reader in England or Australia.

L. Preston, Long Lane, Honley, near Huddersfield, wishes to correspond with readers in Australia, Africa or India interested in photography and stamp-collecting.

C. Utteridge, 56, Plymouth Road, Canning Town, E. 16, wishes to correspond with readers in Australia, or New Zealand; interested in cricket, football, and swimming.

Will any reader who is interested in amateur journalism write to W. A. Downes, St. Kevin's Park, Stillorgan, Co. Dublin, Ireland. Mr. Downes is an official of the British Amateur Press Association. This Association exists for the encouragement of the young writer, and its work will, I know, appeal to many St. Frank's Leagueites and readers of the N.L.L.

J. Shirley, 30, Parker Street, Byker, Newcastle-on-Tyne, wishes to correspond with Leagueites in New Zealand, Australia and South America.

John Levy, 29, Grey Street, Southwich, Sunderland, wishes to hear from members in his district.

J. Sorrel, 17, Dobbies Loan, Townhead, Glasgow, asks any members wishing to form a club to write to him at once.

R. Gauge, 52, Honley Road, Catford, S.E. 6, wishes to hear from members in his district who could meet together Thursday afternoons.

Miss Elsie Dickson, The Bungalow, Sutton Courtenay, Abingdon, Berks., wishes to correspond with an overseas reader.

A. G. Boyd, 10, Cotter Street, Liverpool, wishes to correspond with members.

T. Allum, 107, Penshurst Road, Thornton Heath, Surrey, wishes to correspond with members.

P. McLellan, 14, Thornhill Road, Barnsbury, London, N. 1, wishes to hear from readers.

H. Butler, 32, Windham Road, Bournemouth, wishes to hear from local readers and from an Australian chum.

Harold Denial, 48, Haughton Road, Woodseats, Sheffield, wishes to correspond with readers anywhere.

Lloyd Chipperfield, 46, Fairley Way, Flamstead End, Cheshunt, Herts., wishes to hear from readers in Australia and New Zealand.

KNOCKED OFF HIS PERCH!



(Continued from page 34.)

"Well, I want your advice," said De Valerie. "Just one of those little problems you were referring to last night, captain."

Handforth's brain reeled.

"Why come to me?" he asked drearily.

"But, as Form captain—"

"I don't care whether I'm captain or whether I'm not!" interrupted Handforth. De Valerie sniffed.

"A fat lot of notice I shall take of your offers again, captain," he said tartly. "Hang it, captain, I did think you were a man of your word! It's a bit of a shock to have these eye-openers, captain!"

He passed out, leaving Handforth dazed, and Church passed in.



CHAPTER 16.

KNOCKED OFF HIS PERCH!

MAN of my word!" muttered Handforth, in an agony. "And he says he's had an eye-opener! And he called me 'captain' three times in one breath!"

"You're wanted, Handy!" said Church briskly.

"Wanted?" repeated Edward Oswald.

"I think it's Doris—she's on the 'phone," said Church.

"Great Scott!" gasped Handforth.

He ran out like mad. Perhaps Irene didn't want the story typed, after all!

He rushed to the common-room, and found it crowded. But he took no notice of the twenty or thirty salutes that bombarded him as he pushed through the crowd to the telephone-box.

"Hallo!" he panted, as he put the receiver to his ear.

"Oh, Ted, is it you?" came Doris' voice. "Sorry to disturb you, captain, but have you got fairly going on that story yet?"

"No! I—I mean— The fact is—"

"Renie doesn't say much, but I believe she's keen," went on Doris.

The joy faded out of Handforth's life.

"You're a dear, Ted!" said Doris. "Irene will be awfully proud of you when you come along with that complete manuscript on Monday. So-long!"

The line became dead, and Handforth reeled.

So Irene was keen! She was expecting the typed story on Monday!

"Good man!" said Dick Hamilton heartily, shortly after. "We want you captain!"

"Want me?" asked Handforth.

"Yes; we're holding a discussion about footer, and as you're the captain, we can't get along without your advice," said Dick. "I'd settle the point, but the other chaps insist that you, as captain—"

Handforth gave a wild yell. He glared round feverishly.

"Blow the captaincy!" he roared. "I can't bother with it!"

"Can't bother with it?" gasped Dick, in amazement.

"No!" bellowed Handforth. "I'm fed up!"

"You mean, you resign?" asked Pitt, in a sorrowful voice.

"Yes, I resign!" hooted Handforth.

"Is this final?" asked Pitt sadly.

"Yes, it jolly well is!"

"Then we've got to elect another captain at once!" said Pitt. "Hands up, all those in favour of Dick Hamilton resuming his old job!"

A flood of hands went up at once.

"That's good enough," said Reggie nodding. "An overwhelming majority, Dick. Congrats, old man! You're skipper again—legally elected by the Form."

"Quick work!" chuckled Dick. "Thanks, awfully, you chaps!"

"Poor old Handy!" yelled a dozen voices. "Ha, ha, ha! How do you like it, captain? You've been sold, captain! You're dished, captain!"

Handforth stared at the throng glassily.

"Sold?" he gasped faintly.

"I'm just going to ring up Doris, and tell her that you've resigned, and that Dick is elected!" smiled Reggie. "Then she'll tell you that it doesn't matter about that manuscript."

"Doesn't matter!" repeated Handforth, his jaw dropping.

"That was just part of the wheeze!" explained Reggie. "Of course, Irene wasn't in it, and she asked you to type the manuscript in good faith. Still, all's well that ends well. We obeyed you in every detail, and you weren't satisfied, so you can't grumble!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Dished, by jingo!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Handforth gazed at the laughing Removeites. In a flash he realised that he had been spoofed; that the Remove had tricked him into his resignation!

"You—you rotters!" he shouted furiously. "I'm still captain—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And I'm not going to stand any rot—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Sorry, old man, but I shall have to ask you to be quiet," said Dick Hamilton, tapping Handforth's shoulder. "We're going to select the team for to-morrow's game, and as captain of the Remove, I insist upon silence."

(Continued on next page.)

KNOCKED OFF HIS PERCH!

(Continued from previous page.)

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Edward Oswald Handforth gave one gulp of helpless defeat, and fled. He staggered into Study D, and Church and McClure followed close at his heels. From the common-room came the faint echoes of joyous laughter.

"We're awfully sorry, old man——" began Church gently.

"Sorry?" interrupted Handforth, with a sudden expression of intense relief in his eyes. "What are you sorry about?"

"The way you were dished out of the captaincy——"

"Well, you can keep your sorrow for someone else," broke in Handforth happily. "By George! I'm glad," he added, sitting down. "No more worries—no more bothering about the chaps or anything! I was sick of the captaincy, anyhow."

"Thank goodness!" murmured Church and McClure. "Then we go on in the old way?"

"Yes, my lads," murmured Handforth dreamily. "By George, what a relief!"

And the leader of Study D meant it! He had had his fill!

THE END.

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