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THE
S^T FRANK'S
ICE CARNIVAL

A striking incident from this week's grand long school yarn.



In response to a warning from Nipper, the juniors dodged back just as the runaway baker's cart hurtled past. It was swaying dangerously, and loaves were being scattered in all directions.

*Fun and Frolic on the Ice!**Handy as a Trick Skater!*

THE ST FRANK'S ICE CARNIVAL!



By EDWY SEARLES BROOKS

It isn't very often that Handforth gets a brain-wave, but he certainly scores a triumph when he suggests that St. Frank's should hold an ice carnival. And that brain-wave is only the beginning of a string of adventures and misadventures for the cheery chums of St. Frank's.

CHAPTER I.

The Great Idea!

"HOW about an ice carnival?" said Edward Oswald Handforth, of the Remove.

Everybody laughed, of course. Everybody always laughed at Handforth's suggestions. In the Ancient House, at least, it was almost considered a duty to laugh whenever the great Handforth brought out one of his ideas.

All the same, Handforth persisted. He was a dogged sort of junior, and he frequently got his own way by sheer aggressiveness. He went all over the school, talking about the ice carnival.

And although the Remove regarded Edward Oswald rather pitifully as a tame sort of lunatic, some of the seniors got wind of the suggestion. They liked it; they approved of it. And, in due course, some of the masters heard the rumours.

After all, what was wrong with the idea of

an ice carnival? For over a solid week St. Frank's had been in the grip of a hard, sustained frost. Not that this was anything unusual for mid-February. The only singular feature about the frost was its severity. Already the River Stowe had been frozen over for a couple of days, and the ice was five or six inches thick.

Each morning dawned to reveal a steely sky, without any sign of a cloud. The barometer was steady, and the fellows were beginning to forget what a wind was like.

On the seventh day of the great frost, everybody was beginning to talk excitedly about Handforth's suggestion. By this time, naturally, the fellows had forgotten that Handforth had first mooted the idea. It had now become a general sort of sensation. Rumours had been going about that the headmaster was not entirely opposed to the scheme.

And the long and the short of it was that the official permission was given. To-morrow would be a half-holiday—a Wednesday—and

if the frost still held the whole school would be allowed to hold high carnival on the river during the evening.

Handforth, of course, was in high feather. He claimed all the credit, and, in his opinion, the school owed him a vote of thanks. But the school was altogether too excited, too busy, to waste time on thanking Handforth. There were all sorts of preparations to be made.

One brilliant idiot had suggested a jazz band, and in less than an hour all the musicians of the Lower School were being routed out, together with their instruments. Rehearsals had to commence at once. Invitations had to be sent out, too—particularly to the Moor View girls. This ice carnival was to be something special—an occasion that would be remembered for many a year.

There was the anxiety, too, regarding the weather. Many pessimists openly predicted that the morrow would see the end of the frost. A thaw would inevitably set in, and by the time the evening arrived a drizzle would be falling, and the ice would be converted into slush. According to the pessimists, nothing else could possibly be expected.

But for every pessimist there were ten optimists. The majority of the fellows steadfastly refused to believe that fate would be so unkind. The frost had held for a week, and the glass was steady. There was every chance that the ice would still be perfect for the carnival.

Somebody discovered that one of the big shops in Bannington had a large supply of fireworks—probably left over from the previous November—and lots of pocket money went in buying Roman candles, rockets, Catherine wheels, and other fireworks. Why not? What was the good of holding a carnival unless there was a lot of fun? There were to be bonfires, too—flaring torches and strings of fairy-lamps.

As the fellows were making all these preparations themselves, a great deal of work had to be accomplished. So there was not much time for the ordinary school recreations.

It was Nipper, the popular captain of the Remove, who organised the various parties. Some were detailed to the task of making torches, in readiness for the carnival. Others were sawing wood and building bonfires. The musicians were rehearsing, much to the agony of those fellows who happened to be within earshot.

Everybody was working to make the carnival a huge success.

It was only natural, perhaps, that the juniors should be the more enthusiastic. The seniors, although they intended having a good time on the ice, took the thing more calmly. But it was more a question of dignity than anything else, for most of the seniors were as keen as any members of the Lower School.

Vivian Travers of the Remove, who generally had plenty of money, got up a kind of committee consisting of Archie Glenthorpe and the Hon. Douglas Singleton and one or two other moneyed fellows, and

they made arrangements for a big motor-van to come alongside the River Stowe during the carnival. It was to be a sort of glorified coffee-stall, where hot tea, buns, buttered toast, and every eatable delicacy would be served to the revellers free of cost.

Taking it all round, the St. Frank's ice carnival promised to be a huge success—if only the weather would hold good. And that, after all, was a rather big "if."



CHAPTER 2.

Too Good to be True!

"DON'T believe it!" said Church firmly.

He was standing at the window of his dormitory in the Ancient House, and Handforth and McClure, sitting up in bed, regarded him with sudden apprehension.

"What—what is it?" demanded Handforth huskily.

"Tell us the worst!" panted Mac.

It was the great morning, and Church, the instant the rising bell had sounded, had hopped out of bed like a jack-in-the-box, and now he was staring dazedly across West Square.

"The worst?" he repeated. "I suppose you mean the best. But I don't believe it, you chaps!"

"Don't believe what?" roared Handforth and McClure.

"Why, the frost's harder than ever!" said Church gleefully. "Come and look at it, you lazy bouncers! Are you glued to your beds, or what?"

They both leapt out, and joined Church at the window. Sure enough, the winter's morning was as glorious as any of the mornings that had preceded it during this wonderful week. The sky was clear and blue, and the roof of the West House, on the other side of the Square, was white with frost. Everything was hard and frozen.

"The fact is, I was afraid to get out of bed. I was afraid of the worst!" said McClure happily. "By jingo, you chaps, this is too good to be true, you know. The ice carnival this evening—and a thaw hasn't set in!"

It was just the same in the other dormitories. All the fellows were excited and happy. Until this morning, indeed, even the juniors themselves had not realised how eagerly they were looking forward to the carnival. It would be something novel.

Handforth & Co. were among the first down, but they found a crowd of other fellows gathered round the barometer in the lobby.

"It's all right, Handy! She's as steady as a rock!" said Fullwood cheerily. "There's not the slightest sign of a change."

"And this morning's paper says that the frost is likely to hold for another two days," put in Russell.

Vivian Travers shook his head sadly. "That's bad, dear old fellow," he said. "That's frightfully bad."

"How is it, you ass?" demanded Handforth.

"Whenever the newspapers predict a continuation of frost a thaw invariably sets in," replied Travers coolly. "Now, if the paper had said that we should be in the midst of a rapid thaw this evening, I should have been fearfully bucked."

"Ass!" said Handforth gruffly.

Crack, crack, crack!

Three sharp explosions sounded out in the Triangle, and a faint echo of laughter sounded in the distance.

"Some of those fat-headed Fourth-Formers, I expect," said Fullwood, frowning. "It's a pity they can't leave their fireworks until this evening. Somebody will be getting into trouble!"

"Serve them right if they do!" said Handforth.

"Yes, but you know what masters are," said Fullwood. "If lots of crackers and things are let off during the morning, there'll be a row—and perhaps the fireworks will be forbidden this evening. I think we'd better sally out, and find out who's breaking the rules. Everybody knows that fireworks are forbidden in the school grounds."

The truth was, everybody was on tenterhooks.

They wanted nothing to interfere with the evening's programme. The keenest anxiety was felt about the weather. If a tiny cloud was spotted in the sky—even if it turned out to be a puff of smoke from a passing steam wagon—there were all sorts of gloomy forebodings. Many fellows positively declared that the air was much milder. Some even went so far as to say that the ground was getting slushy. They were all looking for the first sign of a thaw. But they really needn't have worried—since the frost was as hard as ever and the glass was as steady as a rock.

Before any of the juniors could leave the Ancient House lobby, Mr. Crowell appeared. And the master of the Remove was looking stern.

"Do you boys know who is letting off fireworks?" he demanded sharply.

"No, sir—we were just going to find out," replied Handforth. "In fact, we were going to put a stop to it."

"I am very glad to hear that, Handforth," said Mr. Crowell. "But I am afraid that your system of punishment would be—er—somewhat drastic. I shall look into this matter myself."

"That's all right, sir—you can leave it to us," said Handforth. "It won't take us long to find—"

"No, Handforth, I will go myself," interrupted the Form-master. "Do these foolish boys think that this is the Fifth of November? On that day prefects and masters are sometimes deaf to an explosion or two. But this is not the Fifth of November—and there should be none of these ridiculous firework

exhibitions until the evening. It is a great concession on the headmaster's part to allow this carnival, in any case."

And Mr. Crowell strode out with compressed lips. Upon the whole, he didn't altogether approve of the carnival—since he knew well enough that the whole morning's work would be a farce. Even on the previous day it had been difficult enough for him to keep the fellows concentrated on their work. Mr. Crowell would be heartily glad when the whole thing was over.

In this, of course, he differed from the Remove!

CHAPTER 3.

Caught in the Act!



DAVID MERRELL, of Study No. 15 in the East House, chuckled in his most unpleasant way. This

was a very easy thing for David Merrell to do—since he was altogether an unpleasant junior.

"Let's do it, old man," he said, with a grin. "It'll be easy!"

Marriott, his study mate, looked dubious.

"A bit too risky, isn't it?" he asked.

"Hang it, Merrell, we've got to be a bit careful."

"Rats!" said Merrell.

The two young rascals of the East House were lurking near the wall in a corner of the Triangle. They had just been looking over into the lane. There, drawn up against the gate which led to the rear of the West House, was a baker's cart. The baker's man was missing, and the horse was patiently waiting for its driver to return.

"Come on—let's have the cracker!" said Merrell, chuckling. "It won't take two ticks to tie the thing to that nag's tail. By gad! Won't it give a jump when the cracker goes off!"

"And supposing we're spotted?" demanded Marriott.

"We shan't be spotted—there's nobody about!" retorted Merrell impatiently. "But if we waste any more time the man will be back—and then it'll be too late."

They hopped over the wall without any further delay, and while Marriott held the horse's head—not without uneasiness—Merrell swiftly tied the cannon cracker to the unfortunate animal's tail.

"All serene!" grinned Merrell. "And we're safe enough, because these crackers belong to old Armstrong. He's the only chap in the East House who's got any."

"Who had any, you mean!" said Marriott. "He doesn't know that they've been boned."

"Now then—ready?" said Merrell, as he struck a match. "Leggo his rein! Over the wall with you!"

Zizzzzh!

The fuse started spurting, and Merrell and Marriott made a leap for the wall. They

wanted to be over on the other side before the explosion took place

"Stop!"

A shout came to them, and they both went limp. One glance down the lane was sufficient. Mr. Crowell, the master of the Remové, had just emerged from the gateway, and he had seen the whole thing!

"Merrell—Marriott!" shouted Mr. Crowell, running forward. "Come here!"

"Crunbs!" gasped Marriott. "We're spotted! I knew what it would be, you idiot! I told you——"

"Shut up!" snarled Merrell.

"What have you boys been doing?" demanded Mr. Crowell, as he came running up. "Answer me!"

"Nun-nothing, sir!" babbled Marriott. "We—we were only having a look at the baker's horse, and—and——"

"You young rascals!" interrupted Mr. Crowell furiously. "Good heavens! Of all the ruffianly tricks!"

He had just caught sight of the sizzling cannon cracker, and he made a grab for the horse's tail. Unfortunately, Mr. Crowell was a second or two too late. For, even as he reached forward, the cannon cracker exploded with a tremendous report. The Form-master staggered backwards, quite unhurt, but very surprised and startled.

At the same moment, Handforth, Nipper, Travers and a number of other juniors came running out of the main gateway. They were just in time to see the startling result of the East House juniors' trick.

The baker's horse, usually a docile enough animal, took fright. The beast reared up, and then bolted. With the bit between its teeth it went tearing down the lane, the cart rattling over the hard road in its rear, and leaves of bread were strewn on every side.

"Look out!" yelled Nipper.

The juniors dodged, and they were only just in the nick of time. The horse came tearing past them, the cart rattling and swaying dangerously. Merrell and Marriott looked as though they were rooted to the ground—for they were scared stiff. If they had had an ounce of sense between them, they might have known that this would be the result of their ill-natured, cruel trick. But in their folly they had believed that the horse would only rear up a bit, and then get over the shock.

"Come on!" roared Handforth. "There's going to be an accident down the road, you chaps!"

"Let's hope there's nothing coming!" said Nipper. "If there are any cyclists down the lane, or a motor-car, there'll be the most awful crash."

"Look!" yelled Fullwood. "The cart's over!"

Crash!

At the bend, the baker's cart had been unable to hold the road any longer. The horse swung round, but the cart refused to take the turn. One wheel left the ground, and the next moment the whole contrivance was over on its side in the ditch; while the horse,

breaking its traces, tore away and went careering towards the village on its own.

The accident was serious enough, but it might have been ten times worse. Nobody was hurt, and even the cart had not sustained any serious damage.

But there was every chance that Merrell and Marriott would be very severely damaged during the next hour!



CHAPTER 4.

The Reward!

R. CROWELL watched with grim eyes as Nipper, Handforth and the rest went hurrying down the road to capture the horse, and to set the cart on its wheels and rescue the scattered leaves.

"You dangerous young rascals!" said the Form-master, turning to Merrell and Marriott. "What possessed you to perform such an inhuman, outrageous trick?"

"We—we didn't think it would do any harm, sir," faltered Marriott.

"If you are telling me the truth, Marriott, then you are admitting yourself to be an imbecile," said Mr. Crowell curtly. "In any case, you ought to be thoroughly ashamed of yourselves. There might have been a tragedy. If any cyclist had been coming round the bend at that moment he would most certainly have been killed. Thank Heaven there has been no such accident."

"It was only a lark, sir," said Merrell sullenly. "We—we didn't know the cracker would go off with such a bang. It was only a bit of fun."

"It is a bit of fun, Merrell, that will cost you dearly," said Mr. Crowell. "Come with me."

"Where—where are you going to take us, sir?"

"Silence!"

"But you're not our Form-master, sir!" said Merrell boldly.

"Another word from you, Merrell, and your punishment will be all the more severe!" snapped Mr. Crowell. "I may not be your Form-master, but I intend to report you at once to Mr. Goole. He may be able to deal with this matter personally—but it is quite probable that he will take you to the headmaster himself."

Merrell and Marriott, utterly cowed, were taken into the East House and into the presence of Mr. Barnaby Goole, their house-master. Mr. Goole was a kindly man generally, and he was a bit of a crank, too. He was a vegetarian, and he had other queer ideas. But it was generally conceded in the East House that Mr. Goole was rather a good sort on the whole.

Merrell and Marriott did not think so.

"I am glad that you brought the boys to

me, Mr. Crowell," said the Housemaster, after he had heard the story. "Their punishment will depend upon the result of this—this piece of folly. If anything really serious has happened, I shall have no alternative but to take the boys to the headmaster. Thank you, Mr. Crowell. You may leave the matter entirely in my hands now."

Mr. Crowell went on his way, and soon afterwards Mr. Goole himself sallied out, leaving Merrell and Marriott in charge of a prefect. Mr. Goole wanted to find out exactly how much damage had been done.

He found the lane thronged with juniors. They had been busily engaged in recovering the bread and the rolls and the other goods that had fallen from the cart. The baker's man was there, too, and he was in a fine fluster, as was to be expected.

"It's all right, sir—not much damage done," said Handforth cheerily. "We've picked up all the bread, and Nipper and Boots and one or two others have got hold of the horse."

"Is the horse injured?" asked Mr. Goole.

"I don't think so, sir," said the baker's man. "Rummy thing, too, seem' what happened. One or two traces are broke, an' the offside shaft is a bit cracked."

"I deeply regret that a boy of this school should be responsible for such a wicked trick. You will, of course, report the matter to your employer, and he will send in a claim," said Mr. Goole. "But it is just as well that I should have a look at the damage personally."

He was relieved to find that the horse was unscratched, and soon afterwards the animal was re-harnessed and the baker went on his way. Any animosity that he might have felt against the St. Frank's fellows was nullified by the generous help that had been given by Nipper and Handforth and the others.

Mr. Goole returned to his House, and he faced the shivering Merrell and Marriott.

"You may count yourselves very fortunate, you young rascals," he said, as he reached for his cane. "The horse is uninjured, and the damage is comparatively slight. When the baker sends his claim in, it will be sent on to your respective parents. In the meantime, you will be flogged."

"But it was only a joke, sir!" said Marriott desperately. "It was Merrell's idea. I didn't want to do it."

"You—you cad!" panted Merrell desperately.

"You were both equally employed in this disgraceful trick," said Mr. Goole. "Mr. Crowell saw one of you tying the cracker to the horse's tail, whilst the other held the horse's head. I am ashamed of you. You are equally guilty. Merrell, stand forward!"

Swish, swish, swish!

And forthwith the two young rascals were soundly flogged. Indeed, it was the severest flogging that Mr. Barnaby Goole had administered for months. He was quite out of breath by the time he had finished.

Incidentally, Merrell and Marriott were not only out of breath, but they were doubled up with agony. They crawled away, and they hid themselves in their own study, even refusing to go in to breakfast. Food had no appeal to them now.

"Beast—beast!" muttered Merrell, after the agony had subsided somewhat.

"Old Goole, you mean?" asked the other. "By gad! Didn't he lay it on thick?"

"I'm not thinking about Goole—I mean Crowell."

Both Merrell and Marriott were of the same mind. Mr. Barnaby Goole was their Housemaster, and he had flogged them because they had been reported to him. Mr. Crowell, the master of the Remove, was the real "beast."

"We'll get even with him, too!" vowed Merrell maliciously. "What does he want to interfere for? He's the Remove master, not ours. Like his nerve to butt in, and cart us off to old Goole. By gad, we'll pay him out for this!"



CHAPTER 5.

Sooner Than They Expected!

BY the time morning lessons were over, Merrell and Marriott were feeling so much better that their vindictiveness against Mr. Crowell had died down considerably.

They meant to be revenged, but they were willing to wait for a day or two, or a week or two, if necessary. The opportunity would come, sooner or later. But they realised the folly of making any move at once.

On any ordinary day, perhaps, the other fellows would have chipped the pair a great deal. But there were other things to think about to-day. The frost was as keen as ever, and hopes were now soaring high. Everybody knew that the ice carnival was a certainty. The frost would hold, and the evening's jollification would be the finest bit of sport that St. Frank's had seen for many a day.

"We're going to have the time of our lives this evening, Archie, old son!" said Handforth, clapping Archie Glenthorne on the back. "Don't forget to get your skates ready!"

"Good gad and odds earthquakes!" gasped the genial ass of the Remove, as he staggered. "Dash it all, Handforth, old cheese, there's no need to shatter the good old spine!"

"Rats!" laughed Handforth. "I only gave you a tap!"

"At any ordinary time, you blighter, your taps are bad enough," said Archie. "But on this sad day they feel too frightfully frightful for words. Kindly remember, laddie, that I am an invalid."

"Eh?" said Handforth. "First I knew of it."

"Absolutely!" said Archie stoutly. "Phipps has given forth the edict."

"Blow Phipps! He's only your valet."

"But Phipps knows everything," said Archie. "And it seems that the young master is revealing all the dreaded symptoms of a cold. In other words, skating this evening is strictly forbidden."

"The best way to treat a cold," said Handforth, "is to forget it. I don't believe in these people who nurse a cold. It only makes it a lot worse."

But Archie Glenthorne was firm.

"Phipps has pre-cribed several hours of the good old dreamless," he said. "And so Archie will recline on the good old lounge during the evening. It's a frightful prospect in one way, and yet, dash it, in another it lures me. I mean, forty of the best and brightest assorted winks are a never-failing remedy."

"Silly ass!" said Handforth, as Archie walked off. "If he had any sense he'd forget all about that cold, and revel in the carnival."

Handforth went off, accompanied by Church and McClure, to see how the jazz band was getting on. The musicians were having a final rehearsal this afternoon—for it was, of course, a half-holiday. Many of the other juniors were already on the river, preparing the bonfires and fixing the torches, and indulging in a little skating, too.

And then it was that Chance took a hand in the game.

Merrell and Marriott, coming out of the East House, caught sight of Mr. Crowell. There was nothing very unusual in this. But it was Mr. Crowell's position which brought a cunning look into Merrell's eyes. The Remove master was standing with his back to the fence which divided a portion of the shrubbery from the Triangle.

It might as well be explained that Merrell had, at that moment, a number of Roman candles in his pocket, to say nothing of two giant crackers. Merrell was an obstinate youngster, and he was determined to let some more fireworks off, in spite of what had happened that morning.

"By gad!" said Merrell tensely.

"If you're thinking about old Crowell——" began Marriott, in a nervous voice.

"Don't you start croaking!" interrupted Merrell sourly. "We've got to get our own back on that beast!"

"You—you silly ass!" said Marriott, frightened. "We can't do anything to-day! We shall be suspected in a minute——"

"It doesn't matter how much we're suspected, as long as we can prove an alibi—as long as there's no evidence against us," replied Merrell cunningly. "They can't touch us on suspicion. Besides, it's a chance in a thousand! Come on!"

Marriott did not want to go, but, on the other hand, he did not want to be left by himself. So he accompanied Merrell by a roundabout route until they reached the monastery ruins. Then, creeping cautiously, they made their way into the end of the

shrubbery—until they were creeping along the other side of that separating fence. The shrubbery was not fenced in all along—but only at this particular portion.

"Listen!" whispered Merrell, as they both paused.

Over on the other side of the fence they could hear Mr. Crowell talking animatedly. As a matter of fact, he was engaged in a heated political argument with Mr. Pagett, the master of the Fifth. The two Form-masters had met quite by accident, and as they held political views that were totally opposed, any argument between them was liable to get hot.

As a rule, they avoided all mention of political subjects, but that morning there was some big news in the papers, and the subject had cropped up automatically. And now Mr. Crowell and Mr. Pagett were hot at it—forgetting all about the cold as they stood there, gesticulating and growing more and more argumentative.

It was, as Merrell had said, a chance in a thousand.

For Mr. Crowell was standing with his back to the fence—and exactly at that spot there was a hole in the fence!



CHAPTER 6.

Rough on Mr. Crowell!

T any ordinary time, it would have been a sheer impossibility to catch the alert Mr. Crowell "on the hop."

But when he was engaged in a political argument, the master of the Remove was deaf and blind to everything else. And his argument with Mr. Pagett had just reached a point where he was literally beside himself with impatience and exasperation.

"Quick!" whispered Merrell. "Now's our time! Hold these!"

"It'll mean the sack if we're spotted!" panted Marriott.

"You idiot! We're as safe as houses!" whispered Merrell. "Listen to 'em! They're going it hammer and tongs—and they're not aware of anything else! If he moves away, we're done! Come on—look alive!"

It was the work of a moment for Merrell to whip the bundle of Roman candles out of his pocket. They were all tied together, in addition to the cannon crackers. Over on the other side of the fence, the two Form-masters were talking loudly, and they were so excited that there was no chance of them knowing anything about the juniors who were lurking so near.

With a swift movement, Merrell poked the bundle of fireworks through the hole in the fence, and then he rapidly, but carefully, hung them to the back of Mr. Crowell's gown—at just about the spot where his coat-tails were—and they were soon pinned there. Although Merrell had no intention of doing

Bang-bang-zurrrrh! The fireworks—which were tied to Mr. Crowell's gown—exploded with deafening reports, causing the master to leap and whirl about frantically. "Help!" he panted. "I'm on fire!"



So, he actually pinned the fireworks to Mr. Crowell's jacket—right through his gown.

"A match—a match!" urged Merrell.

He struck one, and his eyes glittered with satisfaction when he saw that Mr. Crowell was standing perfectly still—indeed, he was actually leaning against the fence now. The flame touched the fuse of one of the giant crackers, and the next second there was a spurt of red sparks.

"Done it!" murmured Merrell, under his breath. "Come on, Marriott, old man—this is where we do the vanishing act! Run for your giddy life!"

Like a couple of hares, they dodged back through the monastery ruins, and in an incredibly short space of time they entered the East House at the rear. By great good fortune, they came across Armstrong and Griffith there. Merrell was thinking about his alibi.

"Seen anything of Snipe?" asked Merrell casually.

"He was in the lobby a minute ago," replied Armstrong.

"Thanks," said Merrell, nodding. "Come on, Marriott. We've got to find that young blighter!"

As they moved down the long passage towards the front part of the House, they were aware of a sudden commotion in the Triangle.

"We've done it!" gloated Merrell. "We've got our alibi, too! Armstrong and Griffith will both be willing to swear that we were at the back of our own House when this thing

started. That was smart work, my son!"

"Let's—let's go and see the fun!" said Marriott breathlessly.

In the meantime, Mr. Crowell had received the surprise of his life. For, without the slightest warning, the first cannon cracker had exploded with a devastating, ear-splitting report.

It came at the very moment when Mr. Crowell was driving home one of his arguments. He was thumping a fist into his other palm, and then, right behind him, the explosion took place. It is no exaggeration to say that Mr. Crowell leapt a clear yard into the air.

"Good heavens!" ejaculated Mr. Pagett hoarsely. "What on earth—"

"Those—those confounded fireworks!" shouted Mr. Crowell, whirling round. "Somebody has had the audacity to throw a firework over the fence, and—"

Bang-bang-zurrrrh!

Two other explosions followed, and they were immediately succeeded by a terrific spurt of coloured sparks. They roared all round Mr. Crowell's feet. He whirled round again, and Mr. Pagett backed away, staring dazedly.

"Good gracious!" panted the Remove master. "Where are they? Mr. Pagett, I—I— Help—help! I am on fire!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

A number of juniors, scattered about the Triangle, yelled with laughter at the spectacle of Mr. Crowell dancing round in circles, with

coloured sparks streaming from him. Somehow, it struck the spectators that this scene was funny.

They had not yet realised the gravity of the situation.

"Why, they are tied to you!" shouted Mr. Pagett. "I have never seen anything so extraordinary— Upon my soul. Your gown is smouldering, sir! Off with it! Let me help—"

But Mr. Crowell, taking no notice of his colleague, was running across the Triangle for his life. A stream of fire roared from his rear, and now and again there were bright-coloured stars shooting forth.

Boom-bang-boom!

About three of the Roman candles burst at the same moment, and then the laughter in the Triangle was turned to sudden alarm. For a flame flickered up, and seemed to envelop the whole of Mr. Crowell's back. His gown had been set on fire!

"Smash the ice in the fountain pool!" shouted Nipper, running up. "That's right, you chaps! Look sharp about it!"

A number of the fellows rushed to the pool, and they sent their heels crashing through the ice. It had already been broken up once or twice recently, otherwise the juniors would have been unsuccessful in their efforts.

"Help—help!" screamed Mr. Crowell wildly.

There was every reason for his alarm. For his gown was on fire now—and his coat-tails, too!

He was about to run right past the fountain pool—hardly knowing what to do. But two or three of the Remove fellows dragged him sideways, and sent him plunging into that icy-cold water. It was a drastic remedy—but it had due effect. There was a spurt of steam, and then a sizzling sound. Mr. Crowell wallowed in the water, the fire completely extinguished.



CHAPTER 7.

No Clue!

STAND clear, you fellows—stand clear!" said Nipper sharply. "It's no laughing matter! Mr. Crowell is really hurt. Stand clear!"

"Oh, my goodness!"

"He seemed to be on fire all over his back!"

"Poor old Crowell!"

Many hands assisted the Form-master out of the fountain pool. He was weak and dazed. Every vestige of his colour had gone, and Nipper could see that the hair on the back of his head was burned; also in one or two places his neck and his cheeks were scorched and blistered.

"Stand back, boys—stand back!" commanded Mr. Pagett, as he ran up. "Good heavens! I trust you are not hurt, Mr. Crowell!"

"I—I— Really, I do not think it is much!" said Mr. Crowell feebly. "But I am drenched—and this water is excessively cold. The young scoundrels! The dangerous young hooligans! Where are they? Who did this? Who tied those fireworks to my gown?"

Then, before any of the fellows could answer, another figure came up—a figure that caused the juniors to melt away. Dr. Malcolm Stafford himself was now on the scene.

"My dear Mr. Crowell, what an outrageous occurrence!" said the Head. "My dear sir! I cannot find words to express my concern."

"Did you see what happened, sir?" asked Mr. Pagett.

"By sheer chance, I was at one of the windows of the School House," replied the Head. "Yes, I saw what happened. I saw Mr. Crowell running across the Triangle, with the sparks and the flames shooting from him. You boys showed great presence of mind to break the ice in this pool, and to plunge Mr. Crowell into it. Indeed, but for that action, it is more than probable that he would have been gravely injured."

"He's injured now, sir!" said Nipper quickly. "He's burnt in two or three places. Hadn't we better rush him to the sanny, sir? This water is icy-cold—and it's freezing, too!"

"Yes—yes!" said the Head. "A splendid idea, my boy! Take Mr. Crowell to the sanatorium at once."

There were many willing hands to help the unfortunate master. And Dr. Stafford paused for a moment to have a few words with Mr. Pagett.

"Do you know anything about this, Mr. Pagett?" he asked gravely. "Have you any clue as to the culprits?"

"The whole thing is an absolute mystery to me," said the master of the Fifth. "Really, sir, I cannot explain it."

"But you were with Mr. Crowell, were you not?"

"I was—and that is why I am so astounded," replied Mr. Pagett. "We were standing over on the other side of the Triangle—near the end fence. We were, as a matter of fact, engaged in a somewhat heated political argument. I very much regret to say that Mr. Crowell's views on the disarmament question—"

"Tut, tut, Mr. Pagett, there is no need for you to discuss Mr. Crowell's political views now," interrupted the Head testily. "You tell me that you and Mr. Crowell were standing near the fence. Well? Did you see no boys near you?"

"I saw none—because there were none," replied Mr. Pagett. "We were quite alone, sir—quite alone."

"And yet that is impossible," replied the Head impatiently. "Those crackers and other fireworks did not tie themselves to Mr. Crowell's coat-tails. There is only one explanation, as far as I can see. The young rascals were hiding behind the fence."

"Upon my word, you must be right, sir," said Mr. Pagett, as he stared at the fence. "There are one or two holes distinctly visible. The young rascals! So that was how they did it? While Mr. Crowell's back was to the fence, they fixed the fireworks on, and—

Disgraceful! Utterly disgraceful!"

"More shall be heard of this," said Dr. Stafford angrily. "This is no mere school-boy joke. It is an outrage—a malicious, dangerous outrage. And when the culprits are discovered they shall be publicly flogged."

"They ought to be expelled, sir," said Mr. Pagett stoutly.

"We shall see—we shall see," replied the Head, as he hurried away. "Make all the inquiries you can, Mr. Pagett. But before I take any further action I must go and see how Mr. Crowell is getting on."

Within five minutes, Dr. Stafford was in the sanatorium. He found the unhappy Form-master being put to bed by Dr. Brett. By the time Mr. Crowell was snugly between warm sheets, he was feeling very much better. It was necessary to bandage him, and to apply soothing lotions to the scorched parts of his face and neck.

"As it happens, sir, Mr. Crowell's condition is not serious," said the doctor, in a low voice. "One or two superficial burns, and there is just a chance that he has caught a chill. It will be necessary for him to remain here for two or three days at least."

"He seems to have had a wonderful escape," said the Head fervently.

"There can be no doubt about that," agreed Dr. Brett, nodding. "If his burning gown had enveloped his head, there might easily have been a tragedy this afternoon. The boys did splendidly in forcing Mr. Crowell into the fountain pool. It was the only thing that saved him from grave injury!"

The Head turned to Mr. Crowell, and looked down at him with real anxiety.

"I have no desire to bother you, Mr. Crowell, but have you any idea as to the identity of the culprits?" he asked gently.

"None whatever, sir," replied Mr. Crowell. "Please do not make a fuss over this slight incident. Really, there is no necessity for me to remain in the sanatorium. A few slight burns—nothing more. I really must insist, sir, upon getting up later on in the day. I have my duties—"

"Do not bother about your duties, Mr. Crowell," interrupted the Head. "I am anxious to discover the boys who molested you."

"I am afraid it will be a very difficult task, sir," replied the Form-master. "I was standing with my back to the fence, as Mr. Pagett has probably told you. We were arguing—quite a friendly argument, but, nevertheless, it was somewhat heated at the

moment. I am afraid that we did not notice much that went on around us. The young rascals must have crept up, and affixed the fireworks while we were absorbed in our argument."

"Thank you, Mr. Crowell," said the headmaster. "Very well—drastic measures must be adopted. And they shall be adopted—without a moment's delay!"



CHAPTER 8.

The Inquiry I

EDWARD OSWALD HANDFORTH II paused and opened his eyes wide as he saw the excited

crowd of fellows in the Ancient House lobby. Handforth & Co. had just come in, after attending to some of the details for the ice carnival.

"Hallo!" said Handforth. "What's all the excitement about?"

"Haven't you heard?" said Travers.

"Heard what?"

"Well, well!" said Vivian Travers. "Here we have a remarkable phenomenon, dear old fellows. Handforth does not know the latest!"

"You silly ass!" shouted Handforth. "What are you jawing about? What's happened?"

"It's about old Crowell," said Fullwood.

"I say, Travers, you know—don't rot!"

And Handforth & Co. were told of the exciting incidents that had happened only half an hour before.

"Of course, there's nothing to worry about," added Fullwood. "Mr. Crowell isn't really injured. He'll be out of the sanny in a day or two—perhaps by to-morrow. But it might have been jolly grave. He was only saved in the nick of time."

"And who did this, anyhow?" asked Handforth.

"Goodness knows!" replied Reggie Pitt, of the West House. "Some of the fellows believed that Merrell and Marriott might have done it at first—after what happened this morning, you know."

"I'll bet they did do it, too!" said Handforth. "You know what a couple of vindictive rotters they are—"

"Yes, but they couldn't have done this," said Fullwood. "Armstrong and one or two other fellows saw them at the back of the East House a minute or two before the thing happened. So that lets them out. The chaps couldn't be in two places at once. And fireworks don't go off by themselves."

Many other fellows were saying almost the same words, in various parts of the school, and although Merrell and Marriott were suspected by some of the shrewd juniors to begin with, these suspicions rapidly died down. It was generally agreed, too, that Merrell and Marriott wouldn't have had the

nervous to do such a thing. No, this must have been the work of somebody else.

While the discussions were going on, the big school bell commenced clanging. Everybody looked at one another in astonishment. That bell meant that the whole school was to collect together in Big Hall. It was a summons that could not be ignored.

"An inquiry, of course," said Nipper. "I'm not surprised at it, you chaps. The Head's as wild as the dickens about the affair. There's going to be trouble!"

The school went into Big Hall in an indignant frame of mind—indignant with the unknown culprits. They were wondering, too, what was going to happen, for they realised that the Head, quite justifiably, would take a serious view of the affair.

As for Merrell and Marriott, their early satisfaction had turned to fright by this time. For they had heard, from various sources, that Mr. Crowell was in the sanatorium, and in a bad way. All sorts of rumours were floating about—the majority of them unfounded.

"If you breathe a word, I'll slaughter you!" said Merrell fiercely, as he and Marriott made their way towards Big Hall, in answer to the summons. "The only thing we can do is to keep mum. We've got an alibi—lots of chaps are willing to swear that we couldn't have had anything to do with the business. And we're safe as long as we stick to the yarn that we were in our study—or, at least, in the back lobby of the East House—when the thing happened."

"But—but what if Crowell dies?" asked Marriott fearfully.

"You fool!" hissed Merrell, who was by far the stronger of the two. "It's not so serious as that!"

"But—but somebody told me—"

"Never mind what somebody told you!" interrupted Merrell. "I believe he sustained a few burns, but that's nothing. I tell you we're safe as long as we don't say anything."

"I shan't say anything!" babbled Marriott.

"And don't look like that, either!" went on Merrell. "Don't look so jolly scared, you idiot! You'll give yourself away by your very expression! We've got to pretend to be just as curious as any of the other fellows—and just as indignant, too. But don't overdo it, or the chaps'll smell a rat. Our best policy, on the whole, is to be sort of indifferent."

Somehow, Marriott managed to pull himself together. He was comforted by the thought that there was no evidence against him. Truth to tell, Merrell himself was feeling very shaky inwardly. He had planned that trick against Mr. Crowell, but he had never intended it to be so serious. It was merely a vindictive, ill-natured jape. Never for a moment had Merrell believed that Mr. Crowell's gown would be set on fire.

Merrell had only wanted the pleasure of seeing Mr. Crowell dancing about in the Triangle and the dramatic turn that the

affair had taken had given Merrell a bad jolt. But he was feeling better now.

And in Big Hall, the pair managed to look quite disinterested. Nobody gave them much attention, for all eyes were centred upon the platform. The headmaster had just appeared, and Dr. Stafford was looking very grave.

"There is no need for me to tell you all what has happened," said the Head. "You know that an ill-natured, ruffianly trick has been played upon Mr. Crowell, and that trick, without question, was performed by some boy, or boys, belonging to this school. I call upon the culprit, or culprits, to stand forward."

There was a tense silence, but there was no movement.



CHAPTER 9.

The Bombshell!

DR. STAFFORD moved a step nearer to the edge of the platform. "I am waiting,"

he said quietly. "Let me say at once that if the culprits confess now, their punishment will be all the less severe. I am ready to believe that this outrage upon Mr. Crowell was not a deliberate act of hooliganism. I wish to be just. Let the culprits stand forward, and give an explanation of what took place."

Still the school remained silent. Nobody moved.

"Come, come!" said the headmaster sternly. "I call upon the guilty boys to surrender. As I have just said, I believe that this trick was only an ill-natured practical joke. That it turned out to be so serious was only an accident—an unlooked for development. Therefore, I shall bear that in mind when administering the punishment."

"Expulsion could be the only reward if this outrage had been committed with the deliberate intention of injuring Mr. Crowell," went on the Head. "But I do not believe that for a moment, and if the boys step forward now, and make a clean breast of their guilt, I am prepared to be merciful. I might add that Mr. Crowell himself has requested me to deal leniently with the guilty parties. In my opinion, it is a very handsome attitude for Mr. Crowell to adopt."

"Hear, hear!"

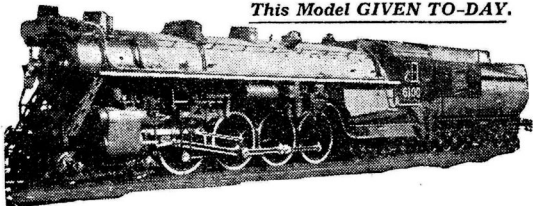
"Good old Crowell!"

Merrell and Marriott remained impassive and indifferent. Although they had been plainly told that they would not be expelled—although they knew, indeed, that their punishment would be comparatively slight—they did not surrender. They saw no reason why they should. They felt safe—and so they did not move out of the ranks of the Fourth.

(Continued on page 14.)

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The headmaster's expression changed, and a hard look came into his face.

"I cannot say any more than I have said," he declared grimly. "But there shall be no leniency if I am compelled to discover the names of these boys by careful and painstaking investigation. Once again, I call upon the culprits to stand forward."

Silence.

"Very well!" said Dr. Stafford curtly. "Since it is a waste of time for me to remain here, the school will be dismissed. But everybody will understand that the ice carnival which has been planned for to-night will be cancelled!"

"Oh!"

"Great Scott!"

"Cancelled!"

"Oh, I say, sir!"

A storm of protest went up—particularly from the Junior School. But the headmaster stood there, grim and relentless.

"This is a very serious matter," he declared. "If the culprits own up at once, the programme for to-night's carnival will go ahead as planned. But unless I learn the names of the boys who played this trick on Mr. Crowell, there shall be no carnival—no dancing—no celebrations on the river! Now, let the guilty boys stand forward."

Just for a moment, unscen by any of the others, Merrell and Marriott exchanged a glance. Marriott's eyes were full of doubt—but Merrell's were grim. They conveyed a warning to his companion. Their compact of silence was to be kept.

"Very well!" said the Head sternly. "The school is dismissed!"

And the school, smouldering and burning, dismissed.

The juniors, in particular, were dumb-founded. They were furious. After all their preparations, the ice carnival was to come to nothing! It added to the mockery of the situation when it was realised that the frost was keener than ever.

Indeed, the evening was closing down windlessly—and there was every prospect that the stars would be shining, that a moon would be sailing majestically through the crystal heavens that night. The ice on the river was perfect—the bonfires were ready, and the torches were prepared.

And now the bombshell had exploded.

The ice carnival was prohibited! And all because of that unpleasant trick upon Mr. Crowell! All because the wretched culprits would not own up. Yet the Head had told them, as plainly as possible, that they would receive a comparatively light punishment.

"What are we going to do about it?" asked Handforth breathlessly, as he found himself with a crowd of other Removites in the junior passage of the Ancient House. "What about the carnival, you chaps?"

"It's all up with it," said Church gloomily. "I say, what a rotten shame! After all our preparations, too! After inviting the girls to come, and—"

"Rats!" interrupted Handforth. "We're not going to abandon it, you fatheads!"

"But the Head's cancelled it, hasn't he?" asked McClure.

"If the culprits own up the carnival will still be permitted," interrupted Handforth. "So we've got to find the culprits, and make them own up! That's the only solution to the problem, my sons!"

But it wasn't so easy as it sounded.



CHAPTER 10.

No Hope!

T. FRANK'S was hard hit.

For two or three days—ever since the ice carnival had been first mooted—the fellows had been eagerly looking forward to this evening. It was so special—so unusual. A glorious carnival on the ice, with permission to remain out of doors until a late hour of the evening. And now, with the weather all in favour of the jollification, it was prohibited.

Tea in Study D that evening was a stormy business. Handforth, as the originator of the carnival idea, was bubbling and seething with indignation. All this talk of an investigation was idle, since nobody knew where to start any such inquiry. There wasn't a clue of any kind.

"It's no good, Handy—we shall have to give it up," said Church, for the tenth time. "Don't you see how hopeless it is?"

"No, I don't!" said Handforth obstinately. "If we can't find the rotters who played that trick on old Crowell, then we shall have to have a go at the Head. We shall have to make him alter his decision."

"That'll be easy!" said Church sarcastically.

"We shall have to get up a deputation, and beard him in his den," went on Handforth. "By George! We're not going to be diddled out of the ice carnival! What about the girls? They'll be here soon—all dressed ready for the skating and for the fun!"

"It'll be hard lines on them—but no harder lines than it is on us," said McClure soberly. "As for finding the culprits, there's not a chance of it. Nobody even caught a glimpse of them. They were behind that fence, and, in the confusion, nobody thought of looking there. The rotters haven't confessed, and they're safe."

"I'll bet Merrell and Marriott did it!" said Handforth fiercely.

"That's pretty well impossible," said Church. "I was talking to Boots of the Fourth before tea, and Boots says that there are lots of Fourth Formers who saw Merrell and Marriott in the East House just before the fireworks went off. So it couldn't have been them."

No matter how the situation was looked at, it was hopeless. The failure of the culprits to confess had resulted in a deadlock.

After tea—which had been a mere farce in many studies—there were all sorts of indignation meetings. Even the seniors were getting excited about it now—for they had been looking forward very keenly to the carnival.

But, after all, what could they do? It was impossible to defy the headmaster.

And it was equally impossible to send a deputation to him. Or, at all events, if one were sent, there wasn't the slightest chance that it would be successful.

"It seems to be a frightfully frightful sort of posish, dear old screams," said Archie Glenthorpe, in the Junior Common-room. "I mean to say, the blighters who did this deed are still lurking in the offing, and refuse to buzz into the public eye."

"Yes, Archie, it's a shame," said Nipper. "But it's no good kicking against fate. The carnival is off, so we'd better make the best of a bad job."

"Oh, rather!" said Archie, nodding. "Not that I was going to join the jolly old carnival, in any case. Absolutely not! But I trust you will all realise that my heart aches for you—absolutely aches!"

"But isn't there any hope of finding the rotters who did it?" asked Fullwood desperately.

"No hope at all," replied Nipper. "There weren't any witnesses, and it's as clear as daylight, by this time, that the culprits don't mean to own up. So the best thing we can do is to telephone to the Moor View School and stop the girls from coming."

"Oh, my goodness!"

"What a giddy frost!"

"That's just it," said Nipper ruefully.

"If a rapid thaw had set in we shouldn't mind much. But the evening is simply glorious—with the frost harder than ever, and with all the stars shining—"

"Cheese it!" growled Duncan. "Don't rub it in, old man!"

"Well, it's all frightfully rotten," said Archie Glenthorpe, with deep concern. "In fact, I might even say that it's rottenly frightful. I dashed well wish that I could dashed well do something to help you. But I'm not much of a lad at this sort of thing."

Nobody made any reply. A general depression was settling over the juniors. The indignation meetings were breaking up, and a hopeless misery was enveloping the whole Junior school.

Realisation had come.

All the fellows were beginning to appreciate the fact that nothing could be done—and that the ice carnival was distinctly off the menu. The gnashing of teeth had been in vain, and there was nothing for it now but to grin and bear it. Only nobody was grinning.

As Archie Glenthorpe made his way to Study E. in the Remove passage, he was thoroughly depressed by the miserable faces he saw. There was an all-pervading gloom in the Ancient House—and, incidentally, in every other House, too. And Archie, who had a soft heart, was deeply moved. He felt it all the more particularly because he

had decided not to go to the carnival, in any case.

In his study he found Phipps, his faithful valet. Archie brightened somewhat as he closed the door. As a general rule, Phipps was useful—he was a man of ideas.

"Phipps, old lad, lend me your ear!" said Archie.

"Yes, sir," said Phipps.

"The lads are in the most frightful sort of difficulty," said Archie, as he sat down on the lounge. "The good old carnival is wiped off the slate, and it seems that something ought to be done. What about it, Phipps?"



CHAPTER 11.

One Way Out!

HIPPS shook his head.

"I am very sorry sir, but this seems to be one of those occasions when I am unable to be of any assistance," he said.

"I am sorry that the young gentlemen have been denied the pleasure of this ice carnival, but I cannot see any way out of the deadlock."

"Oh, come, Phipps," said Archie, pained. "I mean to say, come! You don't absolutely mean it, laddie! You're not standing there and telling me that you're stumped?"

"I am very much afraid so, sir."

"Good gad!" ejaculated Archie. "Dash it all, I mean to say—Odds blows and shocks! This isn't like you, Phipps! This isn't like the good old lad I used to know!"

"If it were merely a matter of advising you on some personal question, sir, I have no doubt that I should be ready with a solution," he said. "But the—er—young gentlemen who played that trick upon Mr. Crowell have refused to give themselves up and so we are helpless."

"Even you, Phipps—helpless?"

"I fear so, sir."

"Then go!" said Archie coldly. "Phipps, dash you, I'm disappointed! I mean to say, I'm absolutely undone."

"I would like to point out, Master Archie, that we have no control over the boys," said Phipps. "We cannot compel them to give themselves up—particularly when we do not know who these culprits actually are."

"But think of the dear old lads," urged Archie. "I mean to say, there they are, strewn all over the place—littered about the passages, don't you know—absolutely in the throes of despair. I mean to say, their faces are so dashed long that if you put them end on end, they'd reach to Mars!"

"The whole thing is very distressing, sir," admitted Phipps.

"What? Distressing? Oh, I see what you mean!" said Archie, nodding. "Absolutely! Distressing isn't the word, Phipps, old onion."

Foul would be more appropriate—not to say poisonous. Here's everything ready for the good old ice carnival, and the chappies can't go. The river calls to them—the ice fairly yells at them to ooze forth, and they can't dashed well ooze."

"There is only one possible way out, sir," said Phipps. "The culprit, or culprits, must confess. If these unhappy boys went to the headmaster now—or even if only one of them went—I am inclined to believe that Dr. Stafford would relent."

"You mean to say that everything would be all serene if the blighter buzzed into the Presence, and coughed it all up, what?" asked Archie. "The trouble is, Phipps, we don't know who this blighter is. Some murky miscreant, no doubt, who hasn't the pluck to face a swishing. The chappie must have a backbone like a dashed table jelly!"

"Yes, I fear he is a boy of little stamina, sir," said Phipps. "It is a great pity—for this confession would restore gaiety to the school, and the ice carnival would be allowed. As it is, all must suffer for the sin of one."

"Or two, Phipps—or possibly three."

"Exactly, sir," said Phipps. "But if one young gentleman confessed, I think it would be sufficient for the headmaster."

And Phipps made haste to depart. This was certainly a case where he was helpless. After he had gone, Archie lounged back in his comfortable seat, and pondered over the problem.

"Dashed disturbing!" he decided at length. "Here I am, thinking of this, and thinking of that, and the good old problem remains as messy as ever. If only one chappie would have the courage to slide into the Head's study and warble out the good old confession, all would be well. Six of the juiciest, laid on with the Head's choicest energy, and the dashed affair would be over. But who is the poisonous merchant who did the deed?"

Archie ruminated further.

"Not that it matters," he mused. "I mean to say, any chappie could go and do the trick. Of course, it would be rather frightful if some cove confessed to a thing that he didn't do—but the whole school would be released, as it were. All the lads would be able to stagger out on to the ice—"

Archie paused abruptly, startled by a sudden thought. He sat forward in the lounge, his eyes open wide.

"Good gad!" he gasped.

He was dumbfounded by the brilliance of the idea that had just come into his head. Archie knew his own limitations—and he wasn't famed for his ideas.

"A scheme!" he said firmly, as he stood up. "Odds gad and dash it! A double-barrelled, five-valve idea—complete with jewels in every hole! And why not? Archie, old cocoanut, this is a chance for you to bring joy and happiness into many lives."

The genial ass of the Remove realised that Phipps had put the suggestion into his head—

although in an indirect way. Why shouldn't he go to the headmaster at once—and ask for his punishment?

The fact that he didn't commit that outrage upon Mr. Crowell mattered little. If the headmaster would accept him as the culprit, all well and good. He would get his swishing, and the ice carnival would be allowed!

It was a generous, quixotic decision of Archie Glenthorne's. He had planned to remain indoors this evening, anyhow. So why shouldn't he receive a swishing—why shouldn't he sacrifice himself, so that the rest of the school could enjoy itself?



CHAPTER 12.

Good Old Archie!

HERE was no time for hesitation—no time for dwelling upon this sudden decision.

It was after five o'clock even now, and Irene Manners & Co., of the Moor View School, had been invited to come over before six. Perhaps, if everything went all right, there would be no need to tell the girls that any hitch in the arrangements had occurred.

Archie Glenthorne was true blue—and never for a moment did he feel that he was doing anything praiseworthy. It was just a solution to the problem. The fellows were all gloomy and disappointed—and Archie felt that he could easily bear the pain of a swishing if only that sacrifice on his part would bring joy to all and sundry. As for the real culprits, it didn't much matter whether they were brought to book or not.

So Archie sallied out, and in the Ancient House lobby he came across Fullwood and Castleton and several other Remove fellows. Their faces were all long, and they were moodily silent.

"Cheer up, laddies!" said Archie gaily. "Nearly time for the good old carnival, what?"

"Chuck it, Archie!" said Fullwood, with a glare. "It isn't a matter to joke about. We're all in the dumps—and no wonder! Even old Handy has given up hope now, and he's gone into his study, a broken man."

"Something seems to tell me, laddie, that all will soon be all right," said Archie cheerily.

He went outside, greatly strengthened in his resolve. Those gloomy faces had made him more determined than ever. He couldn't help noticing that a listless silence had fallen over the school. There were no cheery shouts, as usual—no peals of laughter. Everybody—seniors and juniors alike—were more disappointed than they cared to tell.

And Archie Glenthorne, by a simple act, could bring happiness to all. He went on his way towards the Head's house, cheery and



"Come on, Renie!" yelled Handforth excitedly, as the girl skaters flashed over the ice towards the finishing point. But Doris Berkeley was the first past the post, with Irene a close second and Winnie Pitt third.

lighthearted. Everything was soon going to be all right!

Within five minutes Archie found himself ushered into Dr. Stafford's presence. Archie was rather glad that nobody else was in the room. The Head was looking worried, and his expression was somewhat impatient as he looked at his young visitor.

"Well, Glenthorne, what is it you want?" he asked. "If you had not been so insistent, I should certainly not have granted you this interview now. I do not like being disturbed in the evening——"

"Absolutely not, sir," said Archie. "I mean, if it comes to that, I'm a bit frightfully particular in the same way. It always gives me the pip when some chappie comes barging in——"

"Quite so, Glenthorne—quite so," said the Head. "But why are you here?"

"Oh, rather!" said Archie. "You mean, why am I here? Well, of course, that's easy!"

"My time is limited, Glenthorne," said the Head.

"The fact is, sir—the fact is, I've just trickled in to receive the good old punishment."

"The punishment, Glenthorne? What punishment?"

"For the trick that was played on Mr. Crowell, sir," said Archie stoutly.

Dr. Stafford started.

"Do you realise what you are saying, Glenthorne?" he demanded sharply. "Are you telling me that you tied those fireworks to Mr. Crowell's gown?"

Archie opened his mouth to reply, and then he shut it again. He had a horror of telling a lie—even in such a good cause as this.

"I mean to say—well, the truth is, sir, the least said, soonest mended, what?" he ejaculated. "If it's all the same to you, sir, I'd rather not make any dashed statement. Here I am, and I've no doubt that your cane is somewhere frightfully handy. So kindly get busy, sir, and deliver the swishing. In other words, sir, do your worst!"

"Glenthorne, I am astounded!" said Dr. Stafford, rising to his feet. "You have confessed to this—this despicable practical joke upon Mr. Crowell?"

"Absolutely, sir."

"You are the last boy I should have connected with an affair of this sort," said the Head coldly. "I can only assume, Glenthorne, that you were associated with other boys in this unhappy affair."

Archie was silent.

"Why did you do this thing?" went on the Head. "Why did you take any part in such a disgraceful trick?"

"Well, the fact of the matter is, sir—I should say, between you and me—— Or, rather, sir, fireworks, don't you know!" said Archie brightly. "Absolutely! Fireworks! They're always liable to make a chappie

forget things, don't you know! Those jolly Roman candles look so dashed ripping when they're bursting forth in all their glory."

"You had no intention, I take it, of causing injury to Mr. Crowell?"

"Good gad, no, sir—absolutely not!" said Archie. "Why, I wouldn't hurt Mr. Crowell for anything. He's a frightfully decent bird, in many ways. But wouldn't it be a good idea, sir, to produce the swisher and to polish off the painful duty? I mean, now that the confession has rolled along, the chappies will be allowed to dash off to the river, won't they? The good old ice carnival will be on the programme again?"

"I shall punish you very severely, Glenthorne," said the Head. "Yes, now that you have made this confession, I shall announce to the school that the ice carnival can be held."

"Then everything," said Archie happily, "is all serene!"

Fortunately, he said this under his breath—or Dr. Stafford might have put two and two together with unfortunate results. As it was, it did not occur to the Head that Archie knew no more about the firework incident than he did himself!



CHAPTER 13.

Poor Archie!

DR STAFFORD turned to his telephone and lifted the receiver.

He pressed one of the many buttons in

front of the instrument, and waited.

"Is that the Ancient House Senior Day Room?" he asked abruptly.

"Yes, sir. Biggleswade speaking," came the reply.

"Is Fenton there?"

"Yes, sir. I'll fetch him."

"Ah, is that you, Fenton?" said the Head, a moment later. "I want you to come over to my study."

"Certainly, sir."

"I'm sorry to disturb you at this hour, Fenton, but the boy who committed the outrage upon Mr. Crowell has just confessed," went on the Head. "So, before you come over, send the word round to the various head prefects that the ban on the carnival is removed."

"I'm awfully pleased to hear that, sir," said Fenton gladly. "Everybody is properly down in the dumps. Only just in time, too. Thanks awfully, sir! I'll send word round at once, and then I'll come over to you."

"Don't be too long Fenton," said the Head, as he hung up the receiver.

He adjusted his glasses, and regarded Archie Glenthorne again. There was a pained, disappointed look on the Head's face.

"I cannot possibly understand, Glenthorne, what could have possessed you," he said sternly. "If I thought for a moment that you had deliberately intended your foolish

trick as an expression of vindictiveness, I should expel you at once."

"Oh, I say, sir! I mean, dash it!" said Archie feebly.

"But, knowing you as I do, Glenthorne, I can only conclude that you were carried away by the excitement of the occasion," went on the Head. "It was just an act of folly—a piece of pure nonsense which had the most unfortunate results. And since there was no malice intended, and since your record in the school is a very good one, I am inclined to deal leniently with you."

"Oh, rather!" said Archie. "Thanks most frightfully, sir! Malice, what? Good gad, no! But you know what it is, when all the lads are dashing about with fireworks and things. A chappie is inclined to get—"

"Yes, yes, Glenthorne," said the Head, rising to his feet. "Perhaps we had better say as little about it as possible."

"A brainy scheme, sir," said Archie stoutly. "So I shall punish you without delay," went on the headmaster, reaching for his cane.

And then the ordeal began.

It can be safely assumed that Archie had a prejudiced opinion, and he was therefore no judge. But it rather seemed to him that the Head's idea of leniency was open to severe criticism.

In fact, by the time Dr. Stafford had done, Archie bitterly told himself that the Head didn't even know what the word "leniency" meant. Archie could have given him a much better definition. But, then, it must be repeated that Archie was prejudiced.

Not that the genial ass of the Remove regretted his act. He had taken his gruel, and he wasn't whining over it. The school was able to attend the ice carnival, and even now the echoes of the joyous fellows could be heard outside. The school was getting ready to make a swift exodus to the river. Cheers were ringing out from the Junior quarters, and Archie's pain was soothed.

He was just coming to the conclusion that he really did possess two hands still, when a tap came on the door, and Fenton entered. The captain of St. Frank's looked at the Head, he looked at Archie, and then he looked round the room. After that he looked at Archie again—hard.

"Not Glenthorne, sir!" he ejaculated, appealing to the Head.

"Yes, Fenton."

"Well I'm blessed!" said the skipper. "Beg pardon, sir! I—I didn't mean—"

"I can well understand your surprise, Fenton," said the Head. "But as I told Glenthorne himself, I can only believe that he gave way to a moment of folly. I want you to take him into the Ancient House at once."

"Absolutely!" murmured Archie. "Thanks most awfully, sir! A dashed good dose of the dreamless on the old lounge—"

"And place him in the Punishment Room!" said the Head sternly.

"Yes, sir," said Fenton.

Archie started as though he had been stung.

"Eh?" he ejaculated. "What? I—I mean—Odds shocks and blows! Not really, sir?"

"For this evening, Glenthorne, you will remain in the Punishment Room!" said the Head relentlessly. "I have caned you severely, but that is not sufficient. The school is allowed to attend the ice carnival—but not you. You will be placed in the Punishment Room, and you will not be released until bedtime."

"The Punishment Room!" repeated Archie dazedly. "Oh, rather! I see what you mean, sir! Absolutely! You mean the Punishment Room, what?"

"Come along, Glenthorne," said Fenton, catching at Archie's arm.

"Anything you like, dear old cheese, but isn't something wrong somewhere?" said Archie feebly. "Hasn't somebody blown a fuse? I mean, when you come to think of it, the Punishment Room! I didn't bargain for—"

"This way!" said Fenton curtly.

The unfortunate Archie, freshly startled, was led out of the headmaster's presence. He certainly had not bargained for this development! And Archie's brain could not quite grasp the new order of things. He had planned it all out so carefully.

He would go to the Head, he would accept his swishing, and then he would stagger back to his lounge in Study E and recuperate. But how could he do anything of that sort in the Punishment Room? It would be cold and cheerless—and there wasn't a lounge, anyhow.

Life, for Archie, had suddenly become dreary and colourless!



CHAPTER 14.

The Martyr

EWARD OSWALD HANDFORTH scratched his head.

"Who did it?" he asked, frowning.

"That's what I want to know!"

"Never mind who did it," said Church briskly. "What does it matter, anyhow? The rotter has confessed, and the ban has been lifted. The girls will be here in a couple of minutes, Handy, and we're not even ready."

"By George, yes!" said Handforth, suddenly waking up. "Where are my skates? Who the dickens has pinched my skates? Mac, you rotter, if you've got my skates—"

"He's blind, as well as being dotty!" said McClure, in exasperation. "What do you think those things are on the table, Handy—sledges? Of course, they could easily be mistaken for sledges, being so large—"

"I don't want any of your rot!" said Handforth, as he seized his skates. "Why

couldn't you tell me they were there, instead of quibbling? Are we all ready now? Good egg! Then let's be moving!"

They hustled out of Study D, and found the junior passage full of hurrying, excited figures. It was the same all over the school.

Everybody was dashing about, getting ready to go down to the river.

Ten minutes ago, St Frank's had believed that the ice carnival was off, and the whole school had resigned itself to what had seemed the inevitable. Now, as though by magic, the ban was lifted, and everything was all serene.

The moon was shining gloriously, the night was windless, and the frost was keener than ever. It was no time to think about the wretched youth who had had the decency to confess.

Out in the Triangle, streams of fellows were pouring out of the various Houses—and they were all making tracks for the river, laughing, joking, and boisterously happy.

Archie Glenthorne himself was feeling very relieved. Fenton had smuggled him in by the servants' entrance, and had taken him upstairs without anybody knowing. Archie had hated the prospect of appearing before all the other fellows as a martyr. Besides, they might think that he actually had committed that assault upon Mr. Crowell, and it wasn't a very pleasant reflection.

When Handforth & Co. arrived in the lobby, they found Nipper and Watson and Tregellis-West already there—to say nothing of such fellows as Vivian Travers and Alan Castleton and Fullwood and Russell and Duncan. They seemed in no immediate hurry to depart, although they were over-coated and ready.

"What's the delay?" asked Handforth, as he came up.

"Waiting for the girls," explained Nipper.

"Oh, yes, of course!" said Handforth.

"By George! They're late, aren't they?"

"Not exactly late, dear old fellow," said Travers languidly. "They're only twenty minutes overdue."

"Don't you call that late?"

"Not for girls," said Travers. "If a fellow makes an appointment with a girl, and she arrives half an hour after the fixed time, you can practically say that she is punctual."

"Fathead!" said Handforth tartly.

"You'd better let Irene & Co. hear you say anything like that."

Fenton came along at that moment, accompanied by Biggleswade and Wilson of the Sixth. There was a general shout.

"Half a minute, Fenton!" called Nipper.

"Do you know who it was who confessed?"

"Yes," said Fenton uncomfortably.

"Not one of our chaps, was it?" said Nipper. "Not an Ancient House man?"

"The least we can say, the better," growled Fenton. "The Head has lifted the ban, and the ice carnival is going ahead. But I don't mind telling you fellows that I'm a bit suspicious. Glenthorne was the fellow."

"Glen.horne!"

"Great Scott!"

"Old Archie!"
"Rot!"

There was a general chorus of incredulity. "Glenthorne went to the Head and confessed—that's all I know," said Fenton. "He received his swishing, and he's in the Punishment-room for the rest of the evening. That reminds me!" he added. "The Punishment Room is absolutely out of bounds. If any of you fellows go up there, and are found there, you'll be confined to gates."

Fenton and the other seniors passed out, and the juniors gazed at one another in blank astonishment and wonder.

"Old Archie!" said Nipper, shaking his head. "Of course, I don't believe it."

"But Fenton says that Archie confessed!" protested Tommy Watson.

"We all know Archie," said Handforth gruffly. "The hopeless ass! Can't you see his dodge? He's confessed, and the Head has lifted the ban! He did it deliberately, so that we should all have our enjoyment."

"I say, what a sportsman!" said Travers admiringly. "Well, well! I always thought Archie was one of the best!"

Not for a moment did these juniors misunderstand the position. They correctly interpreted Archie's quixotic action, and their admiration for him was immense.

It was, of course, utterly impossible that he could have tied those fireworks to Mr. Crowell's coat-tails. It was the very last thing in the world that such a fellow as Archie would have done. He wasn't guilty. Of course he wasn't guilty. He had gone to the Head, and he had confessed—for the sake of the others. Yes, he was certainly a brick!

The news spread throughout the Junior School—among the West House fellows, among the Fourth-Formers. And although everybody was very sorry for Archie—and although many juniors regarded him as a proper chump—they all blessed him.

For the ice carnival was now a reality instead of a fiasco!

CHAPTER 15.

Something Like a Spree!



"DOTTY!" said Merrell blankly.

"Absolutely off his rocker!" agreed Marriott. "I've always

thought that Glenthorne was up the pole, and this proves it!"

Never for an instant did these despicable young cads give Archie Glenthorne any credit. They, like the others, had heard the astounding news; it was all the more astounding to them—since they were the real culprits.

"I can't make out what the dickens caused him to do it!" said Marriott, with relief. "Anyhow, it lets us out! If Archie has confessed, and has had his swishing, then we're as safe as houses. We can't come to any

harm. As far as the Head is concerned, the affair is over."

"Exactly!" grinned Merrell. "Glenthorne wasn't anywhere near us—he didn't know anything about it. So why should he go and confess? And now the poor idiot is up in the Punishment Room!"

Marriott cackled, and they both went off towards the river. Their relief was tremendous—and their mystification colossal. But such was the hollowness of their natures that they forgot Archie Glenthorne and his troubles within five minutes.

Yet they had some little excuse.

For when they reached the river, they were enchanted by that magic scene. They were familiar with the Stowe in nearly all its moods—they knew the river when it was gentle and placid, when the banks were green, and when the summer sunshine beat down from a cloudless sky.

They knew the Stowe on the cold of a winter's day, when the water looked bitter and cruel. They knew it when the frost was on, and when the ice stretched from bank to bank.

But never before had they seen such wonders as now feasted their eyes.

Right down the river, well past Willard's Island, the ice was crowded with happy, laughing skaters. All down the banks, on either side, bonfires were crackling and blazing, converting the icy landscape into a fairy glade.

Hundreds of little fairy lamps were glowing, too, and all down the river long torches were fixed to high posts, and they blazed and smoked and flickered with mysterious enchantment. The air was full of the tang of pungent wood smoke, and overhead the moon shone kindly on the scene.

Irene & Co., of the Moor View School, were there in force. There were between fifteen and twenty of the girls—and even then there weren't a tenth enough to go round. So Irene & Co. found themselves in great demand.

"Ripping, eh?" sang out Nipper, as he went gliding past with Mary Summers.

"Rather!" yelled Handforth enthusiastically.

"You said it!" grinned Adams, the American boy. "I hand it to you guys that this carnival is sure the camel's instep! Oh, boy! It reminds me of home!"

"Rats!" said Fullwood. "You may have plenty of ice out in New York in the winter, time, Adams, but you haven't a river or scenery like this!"

"Aw, shucks!" said Adams. "You don't know the half of it! If you were to come over to lil' old New York—"

But nobody wanted to listen to him. They were perfectly satisfied with Sussex—and this little section of the River Stowe.

The jazz band was already beginning to tune up, and dancing would soon be on the programme. Dancing on the ice—on skates!

Seniors and juniors alike were revelling in the gaiety of it. It wasn't often they had a

chance to enjoy themselves like this, and they were making the most of their opportunity.

Before long, the strains of music were floating over the icy meadows. At least, the musicians claimed that it was music, but the dancers weren't very particular. True, the saxophone was flat occasionally, and the cornet had a kink in its note which was liable to put a fellow off his stroke. But who cared? It was all in the fun.

And so, to the accompaniment of these questionable strains, and with the torches flaring and the bouffres blazing, St. Frank's enjoyed itself.

Skating, dancing, merriment. The ice carnival was a huge success.

But there was no happiness for Archie Glen-thorne—who had made all this possible.

The unfortunate Archie was up in the chilly Punishment Room, in the dark, with his hands feeling double their normal size. But Archie was happy in his own way. He knew that his trivial sufferings were giving enjoyment and happiness to hundreds. So he listened to the faint echoes of the laughter from the river, and he did not complain.



CHAPTER 16.

A Little Mix-up!

“ISN'T it just glorious?” asked Irene Manners breathlessly.

There was a brief lull, while the musi-

cians were recovering their breath after a particularly energetic fox-trot.

Irene and two or three of the other girls were surrounded by a group of juniors. All were flushed, and their eyes were sparkling. This ice carnival was certainly a huge success.

“Oughtn't we to have some races, or something?” suggested Church. “This waltzing and fox trotting is all right for those chaps who've got partners—but what about the rest?”

Nipper grinned.

“There's something in what you say, Churchy,” he agreed. “A race or two would fill in the intervals splendidly. Let's organise one now.”

“Oh, topping!” cried Doris Berkeley, clapping her hands. “Can we all join in?”

“We'll have one for the girls first, and then one for the boys,” said Nipper briskly. “And after that we'll have a mixed race, the competitors being the three leaders in each class. How's that?”

“Jolly fine!”

“It's a funny thing, but I was going to suggest the same thing!” said Handforth boisterously. “What's the good of an ice carnival if we don't have races? And there ought to be some fancy skating, too. A regular competition, with a prize for the best performer!”

“Never mind the fancy skating,” said Nipper. “Let's get on with the races. Now then, girls, get ready!”

It was quite an impromptu affair, but the girls were eager enough to exhibit their prowess. The news spread rapidly, and in less than three minutes the river was lined with spectators, and Irene Manners and her companions of the Moor View School were in position for the start.

The race was to be from the boathouse to Willard's Island, then round the island and up the other side of the river, the winning post being the starting point.

“Ready?” sang out Nipper.

“Yes, yes!” chorused the girls.

“One—two—three—go!”

And off they went, skimming over the ice with infinite grace. Long before Willard's Island was reached, Doris Berkeley was well ahead of the others, with Irene Manners second, and Mary Summers a good third.

“Hurrah!”

“Go it, girls!”

The most spectacular part of the race was at the bend, at the base of Willard's Island. There was a sharp turn here, and as none of the competitors had tested the course beforehand, there were one or two casualties.

Doris, being ahead, got round in fine style, the ice spraying from her skates as she flashed round. But there was a collision between Mary Summers and Marjorie Temple, the latter attempting to swing in. Both the girls went flying, laughing merrily, and skidding alarmingly on the ice. Unfortunately, they were out of the race, for by the time they recovered their feet the others were well on their way back.

“Hurrah!”

“Come on, Doris—you're winning!”

“Rats!” roared Handforth, in alarm. “Irene—Irene! Come on, Renie!”

With her skates flashing in the torchlight, Doris Berkeley was the first past the winning post, with Irene a close second. Winnie Pitt was third, but only by a hair's breadth, for Violet Watson was practically level with her.

“Jolly good!” said Nipper. “Any casualties?”

“No, we're all right!” laughed one of the girls who had fallen. “One or two slight bruises, perhaps, but who cares?”

Nipper made a quick note on a slip of paper.

“Doris, Irene and Winnie,” he said. “You three will compete in the mixed race, later. Now then, you chaps, get yourselves ready!”

There was a big list of competitors in the boys' race. Handforth, of course, was well to the front, and he had already made it quite plain to all and sundry that he would be the winner. Seniors and juniors alike were lined up, and even Willy Handforth, of the Third, was in the race.

“I venture to predict, brothers, that we shall have to go all out in order to beat Brother William,” said Browne of the Fifth. “It is true that my legs are long, and it is also true that I am reputed to be a master



Handforth collided with something extraordinarily solid, and both went down on to the ice with a crash. Just then a number of juniors came skating up, and when they saw what had happened, a great howl of laughter went up. For Handy was hopelessly mixed up with a cow!

skater. However, Brother Willy will doubtless be second."

"That means that you're going to be the winner, eh?" chuckled Reggie Pitt.

"Modesty prevents me from giving a direct answer," said Browne benevolently.

There were many chuckles as Irene Manners prepared to start the race. Nipper was competing, so she had agreed to act as official starter.

"Go!" cried Irene.

And away they went.

Unfortunately, Handforth got mixed up with Church and McClure in the first ten yards, and all three of them went slithering over, skidding sideways into the bank. The rest were well away, but by a miraculous recovery Handforth got to his feet after losing only a second or two, and he was off after the other competitors—leaving Church and McClure in an inextricable mass near the river bank.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Go it, Handy!"

"You'll win, old man!"

But the time Handforth got to the bottom of Willard's Island the other skaters had swung round the sharp bend, and were out of sight. They were on the homeward run, and Edward Oswald bitterly realised that he would not be able to compete in the mixed race.

It was rather dim down here, for the torches did not extend lower than the upper section of Willard's Island.

A dark object was looming on the ice, just at the bend, and Handforth let out a yell. Obviously, somebody was trespassing on the course.

"Hi!" roared Handforth. "Get out of the way, you ass!"

He slewed round in splendid style, but the intruder, instead of getting out of the way, advanced further; and there was something lumbering and clumsy about its movements. A shout went up from a number of fellows who had come running down the bank, but Handforth did not understand the purport of that warning.

He made a final effort to avoid the obstruction, but he failed. The next moment he collided.

Crash—thud!

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Handforth, in astonishment.

He had struck against something extraordinarily solid. It went over, and the ice cracked ominously as it struck. At the same moment a number of fellows came running down with torches, and a howl of laughter went up.

For there was Handforth, sprawling on the ice, hopelessly mixed up with a cow! The

unfortunate animal was on its back, its legs feebly beating the air. And Edward Oswald was in the midst of it.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I didn't know you'd brought Cissie along!" grinned Reggie Pitt.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Cissie?" gasped Handforth, as he struggled to his feet.

"Your cow!" said Pitt solemnly. "Isn't your cow named Cissie, old man?"

"It's not my cow!" roared Handforth indignantly. "Who put the giddy thing on the



Handforth collided with something extraordinarily solid, and both went up, and when they saw what had happened, a great howl

ice, anyhow? I didn't know what it was until I hit it! I can't win the race now!"

"Of course you can't," said Nipper, as he came skating up. "You'd better prepare yourself for a shock, Handy. Your minor won the race!"

"Willy!" said Handforth, with a gulp. "Willy won! Well, I'm jiggered!"

"Old Browne was second—and he seems jolly pleased about it!" chuckled Pitt. "I believe he gave the race to young Willy, although he won't admit it."

Somehow or other, the juniors got the unfortunate cow on to its feet, and then hustled

it off across the meadows. Apparently the animal had strayed, and in an absent-minded moment had wandered on to the frozen river. Later, a couple of farm-labourers came along, and took the cow off to its shed. But that was long after the revellers had forgotten the incident.

The mixed race was a huge success. The competitors were Irene Manners, Doris Berkeley, Winnie Pitt, Nipper, Browne and Willy. The result was interesting, for Nipper arrived home first, with Doris a close second. Willy was third, and all the fags were overjoyed at their leader's success.



...e with a crash. Just then a number of juniors came skating
... For Handy was hopelessly mixed up with a cow!

"Well, it was a jolly good race," said Reggie Pitt enthusiastically. "Now we'll have some more dancing, and during the next interval we'll hold the fancy skating competition."

Whereat the jazz band struck up a lively fox-trot, and everybody started dancing.

And so the carnival went on, with everybody enjoying themselves to the full.

While up in the Punishment Room of the Ancient House at St. Frank's, Archie Glen-thorne still heard the faint echoes of merriment from the river. And the genial Archie was glad, if a little uncomfortable!

CHAPTER 17.

The Figure Skating
Competition.

HANDFORTH, of course, was prominent when it came to the figure skating competition. He appointed himself master of the ceremonies, and the others felt that it was too much trouble to dethrone him.

"All the competitors will have to give a five-minute exhibition," declared Handforth firmly. "I'll be the first—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Just a minute, Handy!" grinned Nipper. "I know you're the M.C., but you seem to have forgotten that there are at least twelve competitors."

"What about it?" asked Handforth.

"Well, if we have five minutes each, the competition will take over an hour," said Nipper. "That's too long. One minute ought to be the limit, and then, with luck, we'll have the competition over in about a quarter of an hour. Let's do it briskly."

"Hear, hear!"

"One minute is the time limit."

"And the girl competitors have first shot!" said Browne. "Come along, sisters, let us see what you can do. Kindly proceed to charm us with your graceful gyrations."

There were only three girl competitors—Irene Manners, Mary Summers and Tessa Love. But although Irene and Mary performed wonders of grace and agility, all the honours went to Tessa.

Her exhibition was, indeed, extraordinary. She won rounds of cheers and applause. Whirling and twirling in the glow of the torch-lights, and in the flare from the bonfires, she made a fascinating picture.

"Bravo, Tessa!"

"Absolutely marvellous!"

"I do not hesitate to declare that Sister Tessa will run away with all the honours," said Browne. "No mere male will be able to emulate these wondrous movements. Little did we imagine that we had such a gifted performer in our midst."

"We mustn't forget that Tessa used to be in a circus," said Nipper, with a smile. "She's a marvellous bare-back rider, and a tightrope walker—"

"Do not belittle Sister Tessa's prowess on skates," interrupted Browne. "I have attended many circuses in my life, but never have I seen such fancy skating at any of

these exhibitions. No, Sister Tessa must be allowed full credit."

And she was. At the conclusion of her performance, she received a tumultuous ovation. The other competitors, by comparison, seemed merely amateurish.

Then it came the turn of the fellows. Handforth, naturally, was the first to perform, and it was just as natural that he should prove to be the comedian of the show.

Handforth was nothing if not confident. He had an idea that figure skating was supremely easy, and he started off with tremendous vigour. His idea, apparently, was to execute a figure "8," but it struck the spectators that he was slightly too energetic in his initial movements.

Anyhow, Handforth somehow got out of control, and developed a spin. From that it was a perfectly natural sequence for him to go into a nose-dive.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

There was something excruciatingly funny in Edward Oswald Handforth's performance. He was in the midst of his uncontrolled spin, whirling round like a top, and the more he tried to steady himself, the faster he went.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Go it, Handy!"

"You'll be the winner, old man!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Then, abruptly, Handforth came out of his spin. One leg was up in the air, although he could not, for the life of him, have explained how it got there. He was whirling round on one skate now, and, without any warning, he shot off down the river, with that one leg still in the air. He was just on the balance, nearly going over, but not quite. Suddenly the yells of laughter changed to shouts of dismay. For Handforth's new movement was so unexpected that the onlookers were taken by surprise.

They scattered in all directions, but they were too late.

Thud!

Handforth went over at last—on his back—and he had gathered such speed before assuming this position that he slithered along on his back, twirling round, his arms and legs flying wildly.

"Look out!"

"Oh, my goodness!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Before the nearest of the onlookers could get out of the way, Handforth was felling them like a scythe going through a cornfield. Over they went, in all directions.

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It was rather surprising that there were no serious casualties, for Handforth might have done some serious injury with those whirling skates of his. He bumped into the bank, and finally came to a halt, leaving the river littered with the fallen.

"Well, I'm jiggered!" muttered Handforth dazedly.

He scrambled to his feet, but he was so bewildered that he overlooked the fact that he was still on skates. He gave a wild howl, his feet flew away from him, and once again he thudded on the ice.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Good old Handy!"

"You win!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Is this supposed to be a figure-skating competition, or a contest for knocking down the greatest number of spectators?" asked Reggie Pitt politely. "There seems to be some doubt on the point, Handy, so I thought I'd better inquire."

Handforth was on his feet again by now, and he was very cautious.

"Something went wrong," he said breathlessly.

"Go hon!" grinned Church. "Weren't you doing all that on purpose?"

"You—you silly ass!" frowned Handforth. "I was just going to show you how to do a diamond. I saw a chap doing it on the films, a week or two ago, and it was as easy as winking!"

"It looked easy, old man, but these things are a bit deceptive," said Nipper solemnly. "Anyhow, I think you've done enough for once. We'll let somebody else have a go!"

"Not likely!" said Handforth aggressively. "That was a mistake just now. I'm going to have my proper shot. I'm going to show you how that diamond ought to be executed."

"Yes, you're pretty good at execution, brother," nodded Browne. "It cannot be denied, at all events, that you did sturdy execution a minute or two ago."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"He's too dangerous!" said Buster Boots, rubbing one of his arms. "He nearly broke my elbow just now. I vote that we exclude him from the ice!"

"Hear, hear!"

In less than ten seconds the motion was carried unanimously.

"But I haven't given my exhibition!" roared Handforth.

"Yes, you have!" said Nipper gently. "You've given the funniest exhibition of the evening!"

"Rats!" said the leader of Study D. "What about the figure skating? What about doing that diamond?"

"Never mind the diamond!" said half a dozen voices. "You've finished!"

"You're warned off the course, old man," said McClure, pulling at Handforth's sleeve. "But you needn't worry. Nobody else will do anything half so funny."

Handforth didn't like it at all, but the decision was final, and the other competitors were allowed to go ahead with the contest.

Not that there was any question as to the result.

Tessa Love won with supreme ease. There was nobody else capable of coming anywhere near to her splendid performance, and she was voted to be the winner.

After that the alleged jazz band plaintively declared that it was getting cold. It needed exercise. So the music started up again, and, before very long, all the skaters were merrily waltzing on the ice. The carnival was going ahead with full enjoyment for everybody. Even Handforth forgot his discomfiture when Irene offered herself as his partner.

So to the accompaniment of the crackling bonfires and the flaring torches, the revellers continued their sport.

CHAPTER 18.

Letting the Cat Out of the Bag!



THE refreshment-stall was a huge success.

It wasn't really a stall, but a big motor van, especially made

for this kind of thing. One side of it let down, and the interior was brilliantly illuminated. Here there were great coffee urns, and inexhaustible supplies of hot drinks, to say nothing of doughnuts, pastries, cakes, sandwiches, and endless other light refreshments.

As it was all free, such fellows as Teddy Long and Merrell and Marriott hovered round the refreshment-stall continually, caring little about the joys of skating. They couldn't skate, in any case, and it was only natural that such spirits as these should collect together in a clique.

"Well, I must say it's jolly rippin'," remarked Gulliver, of Study A. "What do you fellows think?"

"Rather!" said Marriott, as he bit deeply into a sandwich. "All the fun of the fair, eh? And free grub! I wish we could have an ice carnival every week!"

"No such luck!" said Bell.

"Oh, it's not so bad," said Gulliver indulgently. "Of course, it's a bit tame. I should hope we're above this sort of kiddish amusement. Still, anything's all right for a change."

Gulliver and Bell were not popular, and Vivian Travers, their leader, had deserted them. This was not very surprising, since Travers held Gulliver and Bell in great contempt, and he did not make any effort to conceal it. Besides, Travers was popular with the Moor View girls, and all his time was occupied in dancing with various partners.

"Blessed if I can make out why Glenthorne

played that trick on old Crowell," said Bell, after a pause.

"Ha, ha, ha!" chuckled Marriott violently.

Gulliver and Bell stared at him in astonishment—and they saw that Merrell was grinning, too.

"What's the joke?" asked Gulliver.

"Oh, nothing!" said Marriott, with another cackle. "Glenthorne, eh? Oh, my hat!"

"Do you know anything about it?" asked Bell suspiciously. "Lots of the fellows are saying that Glenthorne didn't do it—that he only confessed for the sake of all the rest of the chaps."

"That's about true, too," said Marriott. "Silly idiot! He's got no more sense than a worm!"

"If he didn't do it, who did?" asked Teddy Long eagerly. "Oh, my goodness! You did it!" he added, jumping to the truth. "You East House chaps did it!"

"Here, I say—steady!" said Merrell, becoming serious. "No need to shout."

"But you did, eh?" went on the sneak of the Remove. "Well, you awful rotters! You stood there in Big Hall, and you didn't confess when the Head—"

"Don't be a fool!" said Merrell savagely. "Do you think we wanted the sack?"

"By gad!" said Gulliver, with a slow grin. "You're about right there, Merrell! You certainly would have got the sack! It was you fellows who got a swishing this morning, for tying those crackers to the gee-gee's tail! And you played that trick on old Crowell by way of revenge—what?"

"What's the use of keeping it up, Merrell?" asked Marriott, with a grin. "We're safe now—Glenthorne has confessed, and the affair is wiped out."

"Is it?" said a cool voice.

They spun round, and found Vivian Travers just behind them. They were standing a little distance from the refreshment-van, on the bank of the river, and Travers had come up unnoticed.

"Well, well!" said Travers, as he eyed the group. "What dullards we were not to have guessed it before! So you East House rats played that filthy trick on poor old Crowell?"

"You'd better be careful what you're saying!" growled Merrell, with a glare.

Travers turned and waved a hand.

"Hey, Handy!" he shouted. "You, too, Nipper! Just a minute, Fullwood! You're wanted—urgently!"

"You—you silly idiot!" panted Merrell, in dire alarm. "Bunk, you fellows, quick!"

But it was too late. Handforth & Co., Nipper, Tregellis-West, Fullwood, and Reggie Pitt and a number of other Removites came speeding up on their skates, curious to know why Travers was calling so urgently.

"There they are!" said Vivian, pointing. "Observe them, dear old fellows. We've just heard a full confession! Merrell and Marriott are the cads who played that trick on Mr. Crowell. And poor old Archie is up in the Punishment Room—suffering for their vindictive sins!"

"By George!" said Handforth. "The cads! I vote we frog's-march them, and——"
 "Lemme alone!" yelled Marriott, in wild alarm. "The thing's over now! Glenthorne has been swished for it.

"Then you admit that you did it?"

"Yes—I mean, nunno!" gasped Marriott. "Well, supposing we did?" he added defiantly. "It's over now, and——"

"Hold on, young 'uns!" said Edgar Fenton of the Sixth, as he pushed through!"



CHAPTER 19.

The Sentence!

FENTON of the Sixth was looking very grim.

"You sneaks!" panted Merrell savagely.

"Oh, you rotten sneaks!"

"None of that, Merrell!" said Fenton

sharply. "There was only one sneak, as far as I know. That was young Long, and he hasn't any reputation to lose, in any case. Browne and I heard what Long was saying, and I thought I'd better come along and make a few inquiries."

"A jolly good thing, too, Fenton," said Handforth approvingly. "Since you know everything from Long, what are you going to do about it?"

"It's true, then?" asked the school captain.

"Of course it's true," said Nipper. "Marriott was just admitting it, in front of us all."

"Sneak!" hissed Marriott.

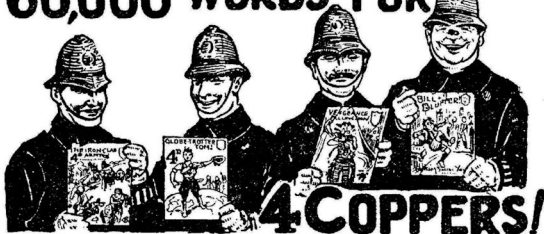
"Rubbish!" frowned Nipper. "Everybody knows that I'm not a sneak. But there's poor old Archie, up in the Punishment Room—suffering for your caddishness, Marriott!"

"It was Merrell's idea!" said Marriott shrilly.

"Liar!" howled Merrell.

"I've heard quite enough," said Fenton curtly. "I had a suspicion about Glenthorne all the time, and I'm thundering glad to have this verification. Glenthorne did it so that

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the school could enjoy itself. Bravo, Archie!"

"Hear, hear!"

"He's a brick!"

"One of the best!"

"We all know that, but we mustn't allow him to remain in the Punishment Room," said Nipper quickly. "Archie didn't do it, and he's already had a swishing. He ought to be got out of that Punishment Room at once, Fenton, and brought down here, so that he can enjoy himself with the rest of us."

"Hear, hear!" agreed Handforth. "Let's buzz up to the school and set Archie free!"

"Wait a minute, Handforth—don't be so impulsive," said Fenton.

"Aren't you going to do it?" roared Handforth.

"Yes, I am—but in my own way," said Fenton. "Of course, Glenthorne must be released. What's more, the Head will be told of this—and these young sweeps will receive their own punishment."

"But why?" panted Merrell. "Can't you let us alone, Fenton? The Head's satisfied, isn't he?"

"The Head may be satisfied, but I'm not!" retorted Edgar Fenton. "As far as the Head is concerned, the matter is over and done with. But there's such a thing as justice, and you two youngsters are going to receive the licking of your lives. You needn't think that I shall stand by and see this injustice continue. But we don't want to bother the Head now," he added thoughtfully. "I'm not even sure that the Head is in. He was going out somewhere this evening—to visit the vicar, I believe."

"Have you got the key of the Punishment Room, Fenton?" asked Handforth suddenly.

"Yes, but—"

"Then everything's all right," said Handforth. "Let's have that key, old man, and you can leave everything to us. These cads can get their licking later—when the Head comes back, after the carnival."

"That's not a bad idea, Handy," said Nipper, with a nod. "You mean that we'll escort Merrell and Marriott up to the school now, and lock them into the Punishment Room—after releasing poor old Archie?"

"That's the wheeze!" said Handforth. "What about it, Fenton? Nothing wrong with it, is there?"

Fenton considered.

"These two youngsters belong to the East House," he objected.

"What does that matter?" said Handforth. "They can be locked in the Ancient House Punishment Room for the time being, can't they? You've got the key of that room—and we don't know how to get into the East House Punishment Room. As long as the rotters are locked up, and as long as Archie is released, everything will be all right."

Fenton came to a decision, and nodded.

"All right, young 'uns—I agree," he said. "We don't want to make a fuss now. Lots of the fellows are beginning to crowd round

already. We can't spoil the fun of the carnival over these two sweeps. Take 'em away—and look 'em up. I'll report to the Head later."

"Good man, Fenton!" said Travers, with a smile.

Fenton handed over the key, and then he went off. He felt that he had done the right thing, in the circumstances. He knew that he could trust these juniors to safely escort Merrell and Marriott to the "lock-up." And, as he had said, their punishment could come later.

Merrell and Marriott themselves were shivering with fright. Yet they had brought this disaster upon themselves—for if they had kept still tongues in their heads, nobody would have known. It had been especially foolish of them to breathe a word in the presence of Teddy Long.

"You wait!" snarled Merrell, as he glared at Teddy. "You wait until to-morrow, you young beast! We'll flay you alive for this!"

"Yah!" jeered Teddy. "I don't belong to the rotten Fourth! I'm a Remove chap—and if you touch me, the Remove will slaughter you!"

"Come on!" said Nipper grimly. "We don't want any wrangling here. You two are going into the Punishment Room, and if you don't get the sack for that dirty trick on Mr. Crowell, you'll be lucky."

The escort consisted of eight juniors—Handforth & Co., Nipper, Travers, Fullwood, Alf Brent and Tommy Watson. Brent was Archie's study mate, and he was particularly anxious to be the first to release the unhappy Archie.

There was no escape for the East House pair.

They were placed in the middle of the escort, and it was a question of "Quick—march!" Skates had been discarded for the time being, and all the members of the escort had forsaken their pleasure. There was a duty to be done—a grim duty, and a pleasant duty!



CHAPTER 20.

Out—and In!

ARCHIE GLEN-

THORNE was think-

ing of this and that,

and nothing in par-

ticular, when he

heard a tramp of feet on the stairs. He also heard many voices, and he gave a little start.

"What ho!" he murmured, as he got up stiffly from the hard chair. "More inmates, what? Good gad! By the sound of it, the good old casual ward will be full to overflowing!"

A key rattled in the lock, and the next moment the door opened. Somebody switched on the light—the switch being outside, in the passage.

"Odds sorties and charges!" ejaculated Archie, as the juniors flooded into the room.

"Tally-ho and yoicks—not to say tantivy! What, laddies, is the exact idea?"

"You bouncer!" said Alf Brent, dashing up to Archie and thumping him on the chest.

"Good gad!" said Archie breathlessly.

"You old swindler!" said Brent.

"Eh? I mean, the fact is—"

"We know all about it, Archie!" said Handforth cheerily.

"You know all about it?" repeated Archie, with a blank look. "Good gad! Oh, I see what you mean! You mean that you know all about it? If it's not frightfully inquisitive—all about what?"

"Your quixotic action, Archie," said Nipper.

"His what-otic action?" said Handforth, staring.

"You've read about Don Quixote, haven't you, Handy?" asked Church, with a grin.

"Why drag Don Quixote into this affair?" asked Handforth, in amazement.

"Absolutely!" said Archie, feeling that it was necessary for him to say something. "I'm frightfully keen on shaking hands with you, Alf, laddie—but if it's all the same to you, be good enough to desist. I might mention that the good old flippers are somewhat raw!"

"Oh, sorry!" said Brent, with concern. "Poor old Archie! Fancy you receiving that swishing—just for our sakes! You needn't keep up this pretence, you old ass! We know that you went to the Head and confessed so that the ice carnival could be held. Merrell and Marriott were the real culprits, and they've confessed."

"We didn't confess!" howled Merrell, who was in the rear.

"Well, it came to the same thing," said Handforth. "We know that you did it—and we're here to release the innocent sufferer—"

"Oh, I say, that's frightfully bright!" said Archie, with relief. "So you've come to drag me from the good old dungeon, what? How priceless, priceless, dear old boy! I don't mind admitting that I've been dashed uncomfortable here. I rather think somebody ought to get up a petition, complaining about the frightful barrenness of these dashed Punishment Rooms!"

Within three minutes, Archie was released, and Merrell and Marriott had been left in his place. Then all the guards went downstairs in a clump, and they were so vigorous in their praise of Archie that he was quite embarrassed.

"Really, old boys, it was nothing!" said the genial ass of the Remove. "Absolutely nothing! I had planned to remain indoors, in any case, and it didn't make a scrap of difference. All the same, I'm glad that those blighters have dashed into the lime-light with this confession stuff. It rather clears the good old posh."

"Well, everybody knows that you're innocent, Archie," said Nipper, clapping him on the back. "And everybody knows, too, about your generous, thoughtful action—a

self-sacrificing action that would want a lot of beating."

"Oh, come!" protested Archie. "Kindly change the needle, old boy! Be good enough to switch off the loud speaker! I mean to say, tune in another station!"

Nipper chuckled.

"Well, our work's done," he said. "We've released you, Archie, and we've put Merrell and Marriott into the Punishment Room. Later on, they'll get it hot."

"Oh, absolutely," said Archie contentedly. "Frightfully hot—and I am speaking as one who knows. I rather think that the good old Head has been taking something special lately. He's too disgustingly strong for words. And now, laddies, allow me to trickle away into the offing, for I need forty of the best."

"No forty winks for you, Archie!" said Handforth firmly. "You're coming with us!"

"Oh, I say! I mean—"

"Of course you are, Archie," said Brent. "Get your skates, and come down to the carnival. My dear chap, it's wonderful! Bonfires, torches, fairy lights—and the ice. The ice is simply marvellous. We're all itching to get back."

But Archie was firm.

"I'm most awfully cut up about your itching, dear old lad, but I must insist," he said. "The old tissues need restoring. A dose of dreamless is the only possible remedy. So kindly allow me to stagger into the good old study and collapse upon the lounge. Much as the ice carnival attracts me, the lounge, too, has its own allurements."

"Well, we'll let him have his own way, eh?" said Nipper, smiling. "After all, he's been a brick, and it wouldn't be fair to force him. But he's an ass, all the same."

"A chump!" agreed Handforth. "I wouldn't miss this ice carnival for worlds!"

So while Archie went to his study to indulge in his nap, the other juniors hurried off back to the river—to fling themselves once again into the revelry.

Upstairs, in the Punishment Room, Merrell and Marriott were in a blue funk. They knew what was coming to them—at least, they could guess what it would be—and there was no escape! To say that their evening was spoilt would be putting it very inadequately!



CHAPTER 21.

The Figure of Mystery!

T. FRANK'S was quiet and extraordinarily still.

The ice carnival was at its height,

and the school was deserted.

Everybody had responded to the lure of the river. All the juniors had left the school at the beginning of the celebrations, and the seniors had been trickling away in



From his position on the lounge, Archie Glenthorne caught a fleeting glimpse of the masked figure as it fumbled with something in the desk. Next moment Archie leaped to his feet and prepared to fling himself upon the mysterious intruder!

twos and threes—and in various groups. Many of them had declared that they wouldn't go to the river—that it was rather above them. But they had all succumbed, in the end.

And now the school was uncannily still.

Even the headmaster was away, and the other masters, if they were in the school at all, were comfortably settled in their own quarters.

In the various Houses, the Junior passages and the Common-rooms and the studies were empty. There were no sounds of trampling feet—no shouts of laughter—no cat-calls. For St. Frank's was down at the river, and the school buildings were uncannily quiet.

And yet—what was that?

A figure—flitting down the Junior passage of the Ancient House. For a moment it paused, and then was no more. Had it gone into one of the studies? There was no sound—nothing.

A moment later, the figure came again—and passed into another study. For in that particular building every fellow had gone out, with the exception of Archie Glenthorne, who was asleep in his study, and Merrell and Marriott, who were locked up in the Punishment Room!

Who was this mysterious intruder—what was he doing?

The figure of mystery appeared again—and this time it came out of Study D. There was something rather sinister about this figure—in his long coat, and with hunched shoulders.

He crept along the passage, paused at the door of Study E, and silently opened it. All was dark within, except for the ruddy glow from the fireplace. Without a sound the figure slipped through the doorway and padded across the soft carpet.

On the lounge, Archie Glenthorne was stretched out, hidden amid the shadows. He was sleeping quietly, and the intruder knew nothing. How was he to guess that this study, of all the studies, contained an occupant?

Over by the desk, the mysterious intruder fumbled with the drawers. There was a click, the rustle of a pen as it rolled away from the inkstand. In the silence of that room the sound was exaggerated until it seemed to echo and echo.

There was a slight movement on the couch—but no sound came from Archie. For Archie was very comfortable, and he was enjoying himself hugely. The ice carnival was all very well in its way, no doubt, but could any pleasure on earth compare with this?

Archie shifted again, and he opened his eyes lazily. He glanced at the fireplace, vaguely aware that there had been a sound. A lump of coal, perhaps, had fallen from the grate. By the way, the fire needed making up. It was sinking low, and—
What was that?

Archie caught his breath in, and stared. Was it his imagination, or was there a dark patch over by the desk? In a moment he was wide awake, and he knew that his heart was beating rapidly. Yet he thought that he

was still dreaming, for this thing was incredible.

He had been alone, and the only light in the room came from that glow in the fireplace. No, he wasn't dreaming, it was just his imagination. One can easily see shadows in such a dark room. One's imagination is always liable to play tricks.

"Good gad!" breathed Archie, aghast.

His murmured ejaculation was drowned by the sound of a drawer creaking out of its socket. Archie was staring, but his heart was no longer beating wildly.

For he knew the truth now.

Somebody was in the room with him, some intruder who had no right there. Archie Glenthorne often claimed that he had a slow brain, but this was a libel on himself. He thought quickly enough now, and he came to the instant conclusion that this marauder had entered the room believing that it was empty.

He strained his eyes, and he could now see the dim shape of the other. A black, hunched shape, unrecognisable and strangely sinister.

There was a chink—the rattle of money! Silently Archie lifted his legs from the lounge, and he sat forward.

"You frightful chunk of poison!" he ejaculated indignantly.

A gasp sounded, and the figure at the desk spun round. At the same moment the coals in the fireplace dropped, and a flickering flame leaped up from the red-hot embers. In that lurid light Archie Glenthorne saw a brief vision of the face of the intruder.

It was a pale face, and the upper portion of it was masked!

There was a black band across the eyes and the nose; a big cap was pulled low over the brow. For a brief instant Archie caught sight of the startled eyes, gleaming with fear, and he himself was startled now. Never for an instant had he expected to see a masked figure there—a mysterious marauder of this kind.

But Archie Glenthorne was nothing if not plucky. With one leap he was on his feet, and he flung himself across the room, to grapple with the unknown!



CHAPTER 22.

The Alarm!

IN that tense second Archie's thoughts were rapid.

The empty school, the deserted studies and passages, the ice carnival!

In a moment Archie knew the truth. This figure of mystery had taken advantage of the school's empty condition to come on a thieving expedition. And wasn't it natural? Wasn't it surprising that nobody had thought of this possibility? Everybody had gone, leaving doors open, windows unfastened, desks unlocked.

"You frightful blighter!" panted Archie, as he grappled with the intruder. "This dashed study wasn't so dashed empty as you thought, what? Absolutely not!"

He heard a gasp, a rasping, choking sound of alarm. But nothing more, except for the dull panting of his opponent.

But Archie was handicapped, as he now discovered. For as he grappled he found it difficult to gain a hold. His fingers were swollen, puffy, and his palms were intensely sore.

With a sudden violent wrench, a desperate pull, the masked figure got away from Archie's grip. But never for a moment did he attempt to carry on the fight. He fled.

NEXT WEDNESDAY! ~~~~~



He dashed to the door, tore it open, and bolted.

Down the passage he flew, his long coat sailing behind him, his feet padding like those of an animal.

Archie Glenthorne followed quickly, and he was furious with himself for having allowed the intruder to get away. He dashed out of the doorway and caught a sight of the mysterious figure as it vanished round the bend into the lobby. Archie was after him like a streak.

"What-ho!" he yelled, as he ran. "Stop, you poisonous boulder! Hi, S.O.S., and all that sort of thing!"

He tore through the lobby at lightning

speed, and then rushed out into the Triangle, taking the steps in one clean leap.

Outside, the Triangle was empty, silent. The moonlight was streaming down upon the frozen fountain, and Archie gave a fresh yell when he caught a glimpse of a dim-moving figure round by the gymnasium. He ran, scooting past the fountain at top speed, and swerving as he approached the gym.

But that swerve was fatal.

The ground was frozen; it was treacherous. With a long, skidding sideslip, Archie crashed over. There was something dramatic in this fall of his, something rather awful.

For Archie fell backwards, turning as he toppled over. His head struck the ground

smashed. The voices began crying aloud in dire alarm.

"Help, help!"

One voice belonged to Merrell—and the other to Marriott. They were at the window of the Punishment Room, and their faces could be seen in the moonlight, pale and drawn.

"Help, help!"

Mr. Nelson Lee, the Housemaster of the Ancient House, was the first to hear those cries. He was just leaving the Modern House, having been with Mr. Stockdale for the past hour. As Nelson Lee emerged he looked upwards, attracted by those cries.

"What is it?" he demanded sharply.

"Oh, thank goodness you've come, sir!" came Merrell's desperate reply. "There's been a burglar or somebody like that here! Quick, sir! He ran off towards the lane, and—"

"What nonsense is this, Merrell?" demanded Nelson Lee. "You are Merrell, of the East House, are you not?"

"Yes, sir; but—"

"What are you doing up there, in the Ancient House?"

"We're locked in, sir!" shouted Merrell desperately. "We're in the Punishment Room, and we can't get out. Ten minutes ago we heard somebody creeping about, and we were both scared into fits. We broke the window at last, and—"

"I'll come up!" said Nelson Lee curtly.

"No, sir, no!" panted Merrell. "Glenthorne's down there, over by the gym. We saw him chasing the burglar, a horrible figure in a kind of cloak, with hunched shoulders. We saw him clearly in the moonlight. Didn't we, Marriott?"

"Yes!" gulped Marriott, in mortal fear.

"Glenthorne!" said Nelson Lee. "What do you mean? Where is Glenthorne?"

"Over by the gym, sir!" said Merrell, with shrill breathlessness. "The burglar turned on him and struck him—hit him a terrible blow on the back of the head with a great stick or a bludgeon or something. It was about five minutes ago, sir, and we haven't been able to attract anybody's attention. The school's empty; everybody's away!"

Nelson Lee hardly credited this extraordinary story. It seemed too fantastic to be true. In that moment he believed that Merrell and Marriott had been imagining things. And yet, what was that over there, huddled on the ground in the moonlight?

As the famous schoolmaster-detective ran up, he felt his heart quicken its beat. The next moment he came to a halt, and stared down.

There, at his feet, was the still, huddled figure of Archie Glenthorne!

"Handforth the Detective!"

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ORDER IN ADVANCE!

with a dull thud, and he rolled over on his face and lay still, his figure huddled, his legs grotesquely crossed.

Not a sound came from anywhere, except the faint echo of the revelry from the river. It was now getting near to the time when the ice carnival had to finish. Already many of the juniors were coming home, happy, fired, joyous.

The minutes passed, and still Archie Glenthorne remained there, without moving. Voices could now be heard, sounding from the top window in the Ancient House. Presently they became louder, and there was a shattering of glass as a window was

CHAPTER 21

The Mystery!



HALLO! What's all the shouting about?" It was Handforth who made the inquiry, and he and Church and McClure and a group of other Removites had just turned round the angle of the Modern House. They had come across the playing-fields from the river, and they had heard Merrell's voice.

"Sounds like Merrell," said Nipper, with a frown. "What's the silly ass up to? What's he shouting from the Punishment Room for?"

"Boys—boys!" came another voice. "Come quickly! Nipper! Are you there?" "The 'gub'nor!" ejaculated Nipper. "Yes, sir?"

"Come here—quickly!" There was alarm in Nelson Lee's tone, and with one accord, Nipper and Handforth and the others raced across the Triangle; they pulled up with a jerk as they saw the still figure at Nelson Lee's feet.

"What's happened, sir?" gasped Handforth.

"This is Glenthorne!" said Nelson Lee quickly. "Carry him indoors, boys—and be gentle with him."

"But—but—" "This is no time for asking questions!" said Lee. "One of you race to the sanatorium, and fetch Dr. Brett. No, don't take Glenthorne to the doctor—I don't think it's anything serious. Take him into his own study, and lay him down gently. I rather think a bandage will be all that he needs—followed by a good night's sleep. But he has had a very nasty knock."

There was a tremendous amount of excitement. Other fellows were crowding up now, and they were all shouting at once. The news spread throughout the school like wildfire, but nobody knew exactly what had happened.

Prefects came, and they tried to restore order. In the Ancient House, Nelson Lee was attending to the unfortunate Archie, and his ministrations had their effect before Dr. Brett arrived on the scene. Archie opened his eyes, and looked about him dazedly.

He was on the couch in his study, and Nelson Lee was near him—and in the background were Nipper and Handforth and several others.

"All right, Glenthorne—take it gently!" said Nelson Lee. "You've had a very nasty crack on the head, but I don't think you've come to much harm. Here, take a sip of this."

Archie took a sip—and spluttered. "Odds gad!" he gasped. "Kindly take that poisonous liquid away, sir!"

"It is only a little brandy, Glenthorne, and it will do you good," said Nelson Lee.

"The dashed burglar!" said Archie, with a start. "He was in this study, sir—pilfering my desk, dash him!"

"What!" went up a shout from the juniors.

"Quiet, boys!" said Lee sternly. "I chased him, sir, and I buzzed out into the Triangle, and—and— What ho! The good old memory fails!" said Archie, looking bewildered. "I don't exactly know what happened after that. All becomes blank, as they say in the priceless old novels."

Nelson Lee was feeling relieved. "There is very little the matter with you, Glenthorne," he said.

"Oh, absolutely, sir—but opinions differ," murmured Archie feebly. "Personally, it seems to me that my head is about five times the size it should be. Still, you know best."

"You have a very ugly bruise on your head—but the skull is quite sound," said Nelson Lee dryly. "Nipper, stay here with Glenthorne until Dr. Brett comes. I'm going upstairs to question Merrell and Marriott. It seems to me that they are the only witnesses of this extraordinary affair."

Five minutes later, Nelson Lee was up in the Punishment Room, and there were fresh rumours flying round. Fenton had accompanied the housemaster-detective, and there were lots of juniors on the stairs, straining their ears to hear what was going on.

"Oh, I'm glad you've come, sir!" panted Merrell, as he stood blinking in the light. "Have you got him?"

"If you mean the burglar—no," replied Nelson Lee. "What exactly is it you saw, Merrell? Tell me in as few words as possible."

"It's not only what we saw, sir, but what we heard," said Merrell, with a shiver. "We heard padding footsteps outside—on the stairs. We thought somebody was coming in here, but the padding footsteps went away."

"And after that?" "I don't exactly remember, sir, but there was a shout out in the Triangle, and when we went to the window we saw Glenthorne running across," replied Merrell. "It's moonlight, but we couldn't see very clearly from this angle. But there was a dark figure, and we believe that he turned round and gave Glenthorne a terrible crack—"

"You believe?" interrupted Nelson Lee sharply.

"Well, sir, Glenthorne fell and he remained still, so we thought—"

"I don't want to know what you thought!" interrupted Lee. "Did you actually see this black figure turn and strike Glenthorne a blow?"

"Not—not exactly, sir," put in Marriott fearfully. "We only know that Glenthorne went down, but we wouldn't swear that anybody really hit him. But he must have been hit," he added. "Otherwise, why did he lie

so still? Oh, there's been somebody in here—some awful thing of the night!"

"Pull yourself together, Marriott," said Nelson Lee coldly. "I will agree with you that there has been a burglar—or a pilferer, at least. We cannot tell until we have made further investigations. As for Glenthorne, he may have been struck down by this intruder, or he may have slipped on the icy ground, and fallen."

"Can't he explain anything himself, sir?" asked Merrell.

"No; he remembers nothing after running out into the Triangle," replied Nelson Lee. "The whole affair is very mysterious. And now, since you can tell me so little, I want to know what you boys are doing here."

"I can tell you that, sir," said Fenton. "They were put in here by my instructions. Nipper and Handforth and a crowd of others escorted them up, and locked them in. They are the real culprits—the young rascals who played that trick on Mr. Crowell. Glenthorne didn't do it."

"And my silver pencil!" said Handforth indignantly. "Oh, my goodness! Everybody's missing something! The whole place has been burgled!"

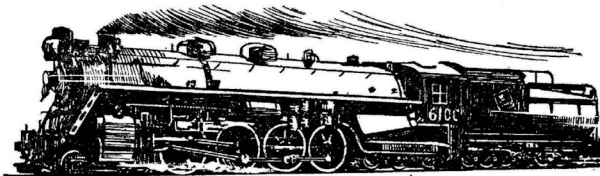
Excitement ran high. Now that the fellows had gained an inkling of what had taken place, there had been a rush for the studies, and it wasn't long before many losses were discovered.

The intruder had been very busy during his stay in the deserted Ancient House. He had gone round from study to study, taking silver pencils, fountain-pens, watches, spoons, cameras, and many other things of a like nature that were valuable. In one or two cases, he had taken money—but there was never much money lying about in the junior studies of St. Frank's.

From Archie Glenthorne's desk, three five-pound notes had gone, while Vivian Travers had suffered the loss of four currency notes, too.

"But who could have done it?" said Nipper, frowning. "There aren't any pro-

A METAL MODEL OF THE EMPIRE'S BIGGEST RAILWAY ENGINE—



—GIVEN FREE WITH THIS WEEK'S MODERN BOY!

"But Glenthorne confessed!" exclaimed Nelson Lee. "Oh, I see! Just one of Glenthorne's little deceptions—eh? Good lad! I can easily understand why he did it."

"Yes, it was very sporting of him," said Fenton. "And now I'll take Merrell and Marriott to the Head, if you don't mind, sir."

Nelson Lee nodded.

"Yes, you had better do so," he agreed. "Meanwhile, I must go downstairs, and discover the full extent of this strange affair!"



CHAPTER 24.

Burgled!

"My camera's gone!" shouted De Valerie excitedly.

"What about my fountain pen?" yelled

Church. "And McClure's watch!"

fessional burglars round this district, and the affair doesn't bear the stamp of a professional burglary, either. The man who came in here was just a pilferer—a sneak-thief."

"What difference does it make?" asked Handforth. "Our things have been pinched, haven't they? What do we care whether he was a professional burglar, or a sneak-thief, or a pilferer?"

"Well, it doesn't make much difference, of course," admitted Nipper. "Anyhow, the gov'nor is busy on the job, and it'll be a funny thing if he doesn't make some discoveries soon."

"I don't see how he can make any discoveries," put in Travers mildly.

"Why not?"

"No clues, dear old fellow," said Travers. "Archie says that he saw a queer, hunched figure, wearing a mask. That's not very informative, is it? And if rumour speaks the truth, Merrell and Marriott are just about as useful as a couple of blind chaps.

They didn't see anything—they only heard Archie out in the Triangle. And there can't be any footprints outside, because everything's frozen solid. The man had gone long before we came up, and he must be miles and miles away by now."

Nipper scratched his head.

"There's something in what you say, Travers," he confessed. "Even the gov'nor can't do impossibilities, of course."

In the meantime, Merrell and Marriott were on the carpet, in the Head's study. They were sternly questioned—and the Head's anger was great when they blurted out their wretched story.

"I am amazed—I am shocked!" said the Head, at length. "So you are the actual culprits—and you allowed Glenthorne to come and confess, and accept a thrashing

"We didn't know he'd come to you, sir!" panted Merrell. "If we had known, we should have confessed then."

"That is a point which I doubt, Merrell," replied the Head coldly. "Your action in tying the fireworks to Mr. Crowell's coat-tails was malicious and vindictive. In your own petty way, you wanted to 'get your own back.' But for the fact that Mr. Crowell expressly asked for the culprits to be dealt with leniently, I should expel you both."

"Oh, sir!" gasped the unhappy pair.

"As it is, I shall give you a public flogging to-morrow—after prayers," said the Head. "You may go now—Fenton will escort you back to your own House. Further, you will be confined to gates for the period of one month."

Merrell and Marriott went away, more frightened than ever. A public flogging! Archie had only been wished, in the privacy of the Head's study—but they were to be flogged. That was a much worse punishment!

Not that anybody gave any attention to the plight of Merrell and Marriott. That little affair was over—and forgotten, too.

The school was agog with excitement over this new sensation. And the ice carnival was the cause of it all. For while the school had been absent, while the Ancient House had been empty and deserted, that mysterious intruder had come in, and had stolen various articles from almost every study.

And there was no clue as to his identity—no clue regarding his manner of escape.

It was now time for the school to go to bed, and Handforth, who had been thinking about making an investigation, was indignant when Wilson of the Sixth told him to get to his dormitory.

"But what about the investigation?" he demanded. "What about that burglar who came and took our things? We're not going to bed yet!"

"Yes, you are!" said Wilson. "None of your nonsense, Handforth. Everybody's got to turn in now."

"But I'd already made up my mind to go out on the trail!" said Handforth. "I'm going to investigate, and I'm going to track that burglar to his lair!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Cheese it, Handy—don't make us laugh!" grinned Fullwood.

"You silly ass!" roared Handforth, glaring. "I'm an amateur detective, and

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"My dear ass, you'd better forget all about it!" said Nipper coolly. "You seem to have overlooked the fact that my gov'nor has taken up the case."

"Eh?"

"And there isn't room for two!" added Nipper, with a chuckle. "Mr. Nelson Lee is on this job, Handy—and you don't suppose you can do the job as well as my gov'nor?"

Handforth grunted.

"Well, I'll investigate to-morrow, anyhow!" he said stubbornly. "You're not jolly well going to push me out of it like this! Some of my things have been pinched, and I mean to find out what's become of 'em!"

And St. Frank's went to bed—the fellows having been told that they must make their claims on the morrow. Everybody who missed anything had to make a full report to his Housemaster. But for to-night the mystery remained a mystery.

Who was the intruder who had entered the Ancient House so mysteriously? What could be the explanation of this startling affair?

Much as St. Frank's hated it, there was no alternative but to await developments. And, incidentally, the school was booked for a fairly exciting time in the immediate days that were to follow!

THE END.

Look Out

For—

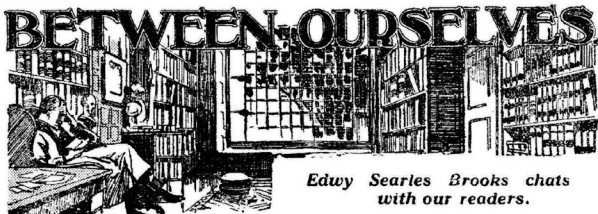
A YARN
YOU'LL ALL
ENJOY.

HANDFORTH THE
DETECTIVE!



ADVENTURE,
FUN AND
MYSTERY.

—Coming Next
Wednesday.



Edwy Searles Brooks chats
with our readers.

NOTE.—If any reader writes to me, I shall be pleased to comment upon such remarks as are likely to interest the majority. All letters should be addressed: EDWY SEARLES BROOKS, c/o The Editor, THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY, The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, LONDON, E.C.4. Every letter will have my personal attention. Letters of very special merit will be distinguished by a star (*) against the sender's name. My photo exclusive offer is still open: my autographed photo for yours—but yours first please.—E. S. B.

EDWARD OSWALD HANDFORTH was already at the school—Harry McMahon (West Broken Hill, N.S.W.)—when my first St. Frank's story appeared in the Old Paper. And, as that was the first St. Frank's story I ever wrote, you can't get further back than that, can you? The title of the tale was "Nipper at St. Frank's," and it was contained in No. 112, Old Series.

I always write my stories at home—F.E.W. (Maidenhead)—and not at the London offices of the Old Paper. Many thanks for your promises of a better photo. I don't see why you should drop your friend merely because he smokes. Nor is that alone a good reason for disliking him. All the other qualities in him which you do like should override this one, although it happens to be distasteful to you. But your friend is certainly exhibiting a very bad quality when he tries to coerce you into smoking against your will. Apart from that, you may be pretty sure that there are just as good fellows among smokers as among non-smokers—often better. But I don't think any fellow ought to start smoking until he has stopped growing.

There are two little items in your nice letter—Joe Krietzman* (29, Ernest Street, London, E.)—which I feel I must quote—one as an example to other readers, and the other for their benefit. Here they are: "Your stories of the boys of St. Frank's are very popular in my house. In fact, each Wednesday evening there are two copies of the latest number of the 'N.L.L.' lying about on the table for members of the family to read after working hours are over. I have saved up four hundred copies (old series and new)—a good few of them are the same—so now the time has come for me to give these copies away. All I need is that readers who want copies must write to me personally and state what story, or stories, they would like—only two copies for each reader, and no money or postage should be sent. I will send out all copies free and post paid."

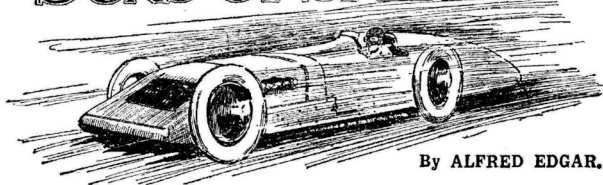
Well, that's very nice of you, Joe, and I think I can't do better than wind up this paragraph with another little quotation from your letter: "I am a member of the St. Frank's League, my membership number is 207, and I am the proud owner of the League's silver medal."

* * * * *
Charles H. Coutman (West Tamworth, N.S.W.), Arthur Palmer (Leicester), Jack Thomas (Bumaloo, N.S.W.), Manuel A. Danino, Jr. (Gibraltar), Richard Graham Lilley* (Derby), Ronald E. Mabbett (Fairford), C. W. Berner (London, N.2), "E. E." (Carsialton), Geoffrey Grimaldi (Manchester), G. Bradley (Thornton Heath), A. Storey (Grimsby).

* * * * *
The title of No. 306, old series, Edwin F. Ebborn* (Charters Towers, Queensland), was "The Ship of Mystery." The number of the issue containing the story "Handforth Minor" was 386. You won't mind me quoting a little bit from your letter, for the benefit of sceptical parents, will you, Edwin, old chap? No? All right! Here it is: "I often see where boys say their parents say they do not like their sons reading the 'N.L.L.' But in my case it was my mother who introduced it to me. My mother, father, elder brother, three sisters and myself all read it." That's another little bombshell to drop among the Doubting Thomases, and I hope some of them will get it fired into them. Thanks, Edwin! If the Doubting Thomases knew as much as we do about what lies between the covers of the old paper, they wouldn't be so unjust, would they?

MOTOR-RACING THRILLS! Dick Barry's driving in the British Grand Prix at Brooklands, and he's proving to the world that the Kent car is the fastest 'bus ever turned out of a workshop!

SONS OF SPEED!



By ALFRED EDGAR.

HOW THE STORY STARTED—

DICK BARRY is a cheery, iron-nerved boy who is made captain of the Kent team of racing cars in the British Grand Prix when his brother—

BIG BILL BARRY is injured while making an effort to break world's records for speed, in a wonderful machine known as the Kent Flyer. Dick takes the Flyer over and does 205 miles an hour, dead-heating for the record with his brother's rival—

MARK LYNCH, who drives a monster machine known as the Giant Ince Eight. Further attempts on the record are

stopped by the weather. Dick and Bill then throw themselves whole-heartedly into preparation of a team of three cars to run at Brooklands in the British Grand Prix, although Bill can't drive owing to his injury. They know that Lynch will make every effort to win, and they expect foul play. But nothing happens during practice. On the night before the race, Dick sleeps in a bungalow on the track. He is rendered unconscious and kidnapped by two men, who imprison him in a shed near Brooklands. Dick escapes and jumps on a passing car. Will he be in time for the race?

(Now read on.)

A Race Against Time!

DICK tumbled into the machine, while among the trees his baffled pursuers pulled up short. The driver of the car was a sportsman, and he helped Dick into the seat at his side, then stared at him as he drove on.

Dick didn't realise it, but all he wore was a pair of trousers which had been dragged on by the men over his pyjamas, and a pair of slippers they had put on his feet. His face was dead white, and he was smothered with grime from the sacks, and little bits of twigs and leaves where he had fallen into the bracken.

"Had a rough time, haven't you?" the driver observed, as they approached the sharp curve which leads to the tunnel before the paddock at Brooklands.

"Yes," Dick tried to grin. "I'm Barry—Dick Barry. What's the time?"

"Race starts in ten minutes," the driver answered, and there was surprise in his eyes. "Barry, eh? On Number One Kent? You'll have to look slippy. Sit tight!"

He changed down and, with a sudden roar, sent his powerful machine cutting out of the string of cars. They shot past a score of them, swept into the curve, then went roaring down the slope to the tunnel.

Dimly, Dick heard other drivers cursing them as the Lancia cut in for the tunnel, zoomed through it, and then was brought to a dead stop by a block in the line of cars making for the paddock.

"Better get out and walk," the man said. "It'll be quicker!"

"Thanks, I will!" Dick slipped from the car. "Awfully obliged," he murmured, and the man watched him as he reeled a little on his feet, then steadied, and walked on.

Dick set his teeth and broke into a jog trot. His head was aching again now, and his mouth felt horribly dry. He could see people in the cars that he passed staring after him, but he didn't care about that. Presently he reached the paddock entrance, and a gateman there clawed at his arm to stop him entering.

Dick broke away with a sudden movement as he spotted a little row of water-filled fire-buckets standing by a building on his right.

He made for them, dropped to his knees, and then dipped his head full into the chill water of one. That helped a lot, and, with head and shoulders dripping, he stood up. The gateman was staring at him in astonishment, while two other officials were coming towards him, but Dick didn't wait for them. He went streaking through the crowd across the paddock to the gates which led on to the track.

A man stood there, and he fell back when he saw Dick making for him. He held out an arm to stop him, but Dick brushed him aside and went charging on along the straight towards the replenishment pits. He had to run out to the middle of the concrete to get around the sandbanks built there to form bends, then he got to the railings again and trotted on.

At the far end he could see the cars lined up for the start. One tardy machine was just leaving the pits, but all the Kent racers had gone. He stumbled past the pits, then came to that belonging to his team.

Gasps of amazement went up from the mechanics there. At one side of the pit-plank, Dick saw his own racing kit piled. He grabbed at it.

"Dick, where've you been? What's happened?" A man leaned across and yelled the words at him. "Bill's got your car! He's had a row with Lynch an' knocked him down. He said Lynch had got you!"

"He had!" answered Dick grimly. "Any lemonade? I could do with a drink!" He was clawing into his overalls as he spoke. Somebody, seeing that he meant to drive, thrust a sweater at him and helped him pull it over his pyjama jacket.

Dick drained the brimming glass of lemonade that was handed to him, then slid his overalls on over the sweater and buttoned them up. He kicked off his slippers and dragged on the rope-soled shoes over his bare feet.

"Here, you can't drive—you're all in!" a man gasped, and grabbed at Dick's arm as the boy reached for crash helmet and goggles.

Dick didn't answer. He grabbed his gear and then went running on towards the line of cars. Already the starter was out in front—that meant that there was less than five minutes to go.

Dick didn't think about his own condition. His one anxiety was to get to his

machine. Bill had taken it—meant to drive despite his busted rib. That showed the way Bill felt about things; he must be in a fierce rage.

Young Dick himself was feeling much the same. He wanted to get in his machine, put his foot down and drive until Lynch croaked up. He'd lick him—he'd show that grinning rotter—he'd teach him to play dirty tricks like this!

His mad run had brought a flush to his cheeks by the time that he came to the cars. He pulled on his crash helmet as he ran, sliding three pairs of goggles round his neck. He picked up the shapes of the Kent machines, and he saw Bill climbing from the cockpit of No. 1. Dick was up to him as his brother reached the ground.

"What's happened, young 'un? Where've you been?" asked Bill.

"In a shed. Two men bagged me out of the bungalow!" Dick answered. "All right, Bill, I can take her. I want to get my own back on Lynch for this!"

"Haven't hurt you, have they?" Bill caught Dick's shoulder and stared at his wet face. "Been in the river or something?"

"No; I dipped my head in a water-bucket to—to freshen myself up," Dick answered, and he was climbing into the cockpit as he spoke. Track marshals were coming forward, yelling for Bill to stand away.

A quick handclasp, a "Good luck, young 'un!" and he was gone.

Dick toed on the accelerator pedal and felt the machine respond willingly. He glanced along the row of machines. Lynch was at the end, not looking at him, but staring straight ahead.

Out in front was the starter, flag in hand. Above him was the red and white arm of the semaphore. Couldn't be long to wait now! Gosh, but he was going to drive! Lynch 'ud—

The semaphore slashed down!

With a tearing roar Kent No. 1 stormed forward, a shifting streak in the heart of a mass of roaring cars!

Licking Lynch Hollow!

DICK'S car went away as though it was fueled with dynamite instead of petrol. He revved his engine to crescendo and slid through the machines in the row ahead of him, then changed up and smashed on along the straightway. He went round the bend at the end of the straight in one long, wild skid, then the railway straight opened wide in front of him—and he was leading!

At his tail was a bunch of five cars, separated from him only by half a dozen yards. From them, Lynch pushed the nose of his Ince Eight, coming all-out after Dick.

In the race for the British Grand Prix there were only two bends, both of which were about two hundred yards apart and both set at the end of what was known as the Finishing Straight. The remainder of the track was formed by the Railway Straight, the long Byfleet banking and a flat stretch which ran down to the two bends.

There were 125 laps of the course, each circuit being just over two and a half miles.

Dick went into the race as though it was only a five-mile sprint, instead of an event which would last well over three hours. It is not the right thing to jump a speed machine to its limit from the dropping of the flag, but he did it and chanced the risk of something failing him.

Into the straight he roared, with the concrete stretching wide and empty before him, and the sun gleaming on the distant banking. The corrugated iron fence at the side slammed back the thunder of the hurtling car's exhaust, flinging the crackling sound in a challenge to the machines leaping in pursuit.

Through the little rear-view mirror, set under the edge of the scuttle, Dick could see Lynch sliding after him. He grinned at sight of the man's lean face and goggled eyes, and turned his attention to what lay ahead.

He eased to take the turn into the banking, then went slashing round it, with his car so near the top that he could see the drop through the bushes and trees beyond.

The Kent car swept past the aviation sheds, then leaped off the banking, to skid and straighten on the flat and go flinging down for the yellow smudge of sand making the first bend. Crisply, Dick changed down; he went through the turn with *ney*: a fault—one lap finished, and he held the lead!

He took the second turn, and stormed away along the railway straight once more. When he looked through his mirror again, he saw that Lynch had dropped a full twenty yards behind—the Kent was drawing away from him!

At the replenishment pits, Bill watched Dick on that first tearing lap, and he grinned when he saw the boy come round in the lead. The big fellow sat on the pit-plank, watching the race with narrowed eyes, and he marked how the other two cars in the Kent team were both

sitting just behind Lynch's tail, while the rest of the field dropped further and further away.

But for Lynch, the whole of the Kent team would have been leading the race. Dick was setting a smashing speed, showing the world what a wonderful car he rode. Although Dick didn't know it, Bill had very carefully prepared all three machines for just such a smashing opening burst of speed, and there was no fear of them failing.

The fierce thrust of air around the edge of his windscreen was like a tonic to Dick. It fanned away the ache which sat his brow, and keyed his brain. The tense excitement of a high-speed race wiped away the sick feeling that was an aftermath of his overnight experience, and inside five laps he had settled to a grim coolness.

It was on the fifth lap that little Joey Hurst took his car past Mark Lynch's machine. Four laps later and the third car in the Kent team also passed him, while the watching crowd stared in amazement as they saw the Kent cars lying first, second and third in the race and leaving all challengers half a lap behind.

Now showed the fruit of Big Bill's careful work on the machines. With never a falter they held to their speed, and when twenty-five laps were behind them, they were two miles in the lead of Mark Lynch!

The race went on. For Dick it was formed of long stretches of gleaming concrete, the yellow bends, the white stand by the paddock, and the pinky blur of faces along the rails, where spectators crowded.

Most of the time, he drove high on the banking, continually passing slower cars. Behind him, all the while, came Joey Hurst and the third machine, running as steadily as clocks.

Once Dick saw Lynch's machine at the replenishment pits, with its driver under the bonnet and doing something to his engine. He was in at the pits again a little later, and soon after that Dick saw a blue and white striped flag flying from the Kent pit above his race number; he realised that he had reached half distance, and was to come in for repairs on the next lap.

Next time round he pulled in with brakes screaming, and hopped out of the machine. His mechanic, waiting there, started the routine work of replenishing the car, just as the boy had practised it for days before the race. Dick started on his own part of the job, swiftly and methodically. Then, his work done, he jumped to the bench, where Bill leaned across with a glass of lemonade in his hand.

"Doin' fine, young 'un—you've got the race in your pocket!" Bill said. "Lynch has been into the pits twice with engine trouble, and he's two laps behind you. The leading Delage is a minute and a half behind, but you needn't worry about 'em. Watch my signals. All clear—off you go!"

Dick smacked the glass down and leaped back to the car. He was into the race again, just as Lynch came roaring past the pits. He just beat Dick for the first turn, and in the sprint to the second Dick sat on his tail.

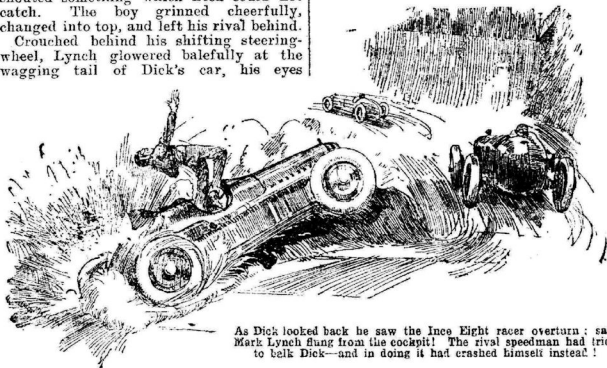
He came out of the second bend like a streak, roared level with Lynch, and began to pass. The man turned to him, and his face twisted viciously as he shouted something which Dick could not catch. The boy grinned cheerfully, changed into top, and left his rival behind.

Crouched behind his shifting steering-wheel, Lynch glowered balefully at the wagging tail of Dick's car, his eyes

the rails cheering his young rival. They liked the idea of seeing this iron-nerved youngster putting it across everything else in the race, and they hadn't forgotten how he had tied for the big speed record at Seacombe.

Though the cheering came but faintly above the thunder of his own machine, Lynch heard it. It was galling to think that the boy and the cars he had despised were winning out of hand. Besides that, it meant a lot to Lynch. He knew too well what little chance he stood of beating the Kent Flyer with the Giant Ince Eight when they went up to Seacombe again. But if he himself couldn't win this race, he vowed that Dick shouldn't get it!

Lynch drove on for ten more laps, and



As Dick looked back he saw the Ince Eight racer overturn: saw Mark Lynch hung from the cockpit! The rival speedman had tried to balk Dick—and in doing it had crashed himself instead!

glittering evilly and his thin lips working as he hissed vicious threats that were lost in the smashing roar of the Kent racer's blaring exhaust!

The Smash!

THREE-QUARTER distance, and the team of Kent cars were still in the lead, riding each about a quarter of a mile apart. On the hundredth lap, Mark Lynch again pulled his machine in for repairs; when he drove into the race again he was a full five laps behind Dick!

As Lynch came out he saw Dick go roaring triumphantly past, and above the sound of his car he heard the crowd by

at the finish of them he had a plan in mind.

With only ten laps more to go, Dick began to take things very steadily. He didn't race so fiercely into the bends, and five laps from the finish he sighted Lynch ahead of him on the Byfleet banking.

He opened up for the sheer pleasure of passing the rogue driver once more, but Lynch found speed from somewhere, for he held ahead of Dick right down to the first bend, and then pulled over, as though to allow him to go through first.

Dick thought Lynch did that because the crowd was watching, and to give a bend to a faster car was the normal chivalry of speedmen. Dick spurred in gear, shaped for the turn, and, in that

moment, Lynch zoomed forward, cutting across his path!

Wheel to wheel, the machines slid into the bend, while the crowd gasped in horror. In the fraction of a second that he had to think, Dick could see that Lynch meant him to smash up on the inner sand-bank.

He knew that he couldn't stop in time—but he could go on!

Dick slammed the throttle wide, and his car seemed to leap forward to the end of the bank. He trod on the brake-pedal and wrenched the wheel over, to skid the tail of his machine round.

Lynch saw that he had been balked. He pulled out, accelerated, swung on the outside of Dick as he turned—and then Lynch's machine found a patch of oil and slithered sideways.

Dick went round with his tyres screaming on the concrete, skidding skilfully and under control. Lynch shot across the curve, his car turning as he went. The tail of it hit the outer sand-bank in a mighty cloud of dust. Dick saw the machine heaving up and over.

The fraction of a second later, as he shot out of the bend, he saw Lynch flung from the cockpit of his machine. The rival speedman hit the top of the bank, and then was sent flying over it to the concrete beyond.

Dick's first impulse was to stop, then he realised that he could do nothing, and already track officials were rushing to the spot. He sent his car on, and the next time round he saw that the battered wreckage of Lynch's machine had been drawn to one side, while the man himself was beneath the paddock grand-stand, with a doctor binding up his head.

Apparently he had escaped without serious hurt, and nothing that he could now do could stop the victorious career of the trio of Kent racers.

Presently Dick saw his number dropped from the footbridge by the paddock. Next time he roared down the straight, the railings became a forest of waving arms. Faintly he heard the crowd cheering him in, while above his number heaved a square of black and white checkered fabric—the winner's flag!

Alarming News!

DICK did another circuit of the track at touring speed, then officials waved for him to pull his machine in by the Fork, where cars which had been knocked out of the race had

parked. The other two Kent machines drew in after him, having taken second and third places a few seconds after he had crossed the finishing line.

The moment that Dick stopped he was surrounded by a cheering crowd and a bunch of photographers. He did not get away from them until Bill came up with a group of mechanics and half dragged him off to the comparative quiet of the Kent replenishment pit.

"You've done it, young 'un—a one, two, three win!" Bill exclaimed exultantly. "Looked as though Lynch misjudged that turn! Was he trying to do something funny?"

"I think he made an—an error," Dick gasped. "Is there any of that lemonade left? Where's Joey Hurst?"

The wizened little mechanic came up a few moments later, grinning all over his lined face. He shook Dick's fist again and again, while a crowd swarmed behind the pit, anxious to get a glimpse of the boy who had won the big race.

Now that it was all over, Dick began to feel something of what had passed during the night. He said as much to Bill, and soon the two of them slipped away from the crowd and, borrowing a car, made for the bungalow by the aviation sheds.

It wasn't until Dick had stripped his kit, had sponged down and got into ordinary clothes, that Bill asked him just what had happened overnight. Dick told him as much as he could, and that was really very little.

"You'd know the two men again if you saw them?" Bill asked at the finish. "I had a bit of bother with Lynch when I found that you'd gone. He said he didn't know anything about it, but I knew the swab was lying. Anyway, it's all come out right, and you've wiped the track with him—Gosh, young 'un, you drove like a winner all the way!"

"Only because you'd tuned the car!" Dick told him. "If only we can get the big record with the Flyer, we'll—"

"We're going for that on Monday," Bill said. "At least, you will, if you're game to take the car. I've just heard that the sands will be fit for us, and I know that Lynch will take the Giant up there. So it—Hallo, what d'you want?"

He turned as someone strode through the doorway. It was one of the mechanics from the pit, and he was out of breath from running.

"'Phone call—just come through to the pavilion!" he gasped. "Couldn't find you, so I took—the message. It was from our works!"

"Did you tell 'em we'd won?" asked Bill. "That's what they were after, wasn't it—the result of the race?"

The mechanic shook his head.

"No, it was the works foreman. He said—said——" The man broke off, and stood staring at them. There was something in his expression which brought both Dick and Bill to their feet.

"What's wrong?" demanded Bill, as he stared at the man. "What is it?"

"There's been an accident!" the mechanic gasped. "The professor's been injured an' the Flyer's—wrecked!"

Back at the Works!

THE professor's been injured, and the Flyer's wrecked!"

The voice of the mechanic sounded gaspingly as Dick and Bill stared at him.

"The Flyer—wrecked!" Bill exclaimed, then looked at Dick.

The big record-breaker damaged, and on the Monday they were due to take the car to Seacombe Sands and beat Lynch for the world's speed record!

"How'd it happen?" Bill went on. "How much is the professor hurt?"

"I don't know," the man answered. "It was the works foreman on the 'phone. He just told me to tell you that, and to ask you to go up there at once. It was a long-distance call, and the time was almost up when I got there—they only allow three minutes. We looked everywhere for you, before I took the message."

"All right!" Bill stood with his hands bunched at his side, staring out to where the grey concrete of the great speedway showed near at hand. Suddenly he swung round to Dick. "I'll go up right away and——"

"I'll come with you!" Dick answered. "And if the Flyer's knocked about, we'd better take as many of the mechanics as we can with us, in case they're needed to repair the car."

"You're right. Pack your things—and look slippy!" Bill exclaimed, then dived for his own room in the bungalow, pausing to yell at the mechanic: "Send Joey Hurst over with Morgan, Harry and Bates. Quick as you can!"

The mechanic dashed off, while Dick hastily grabbed his clothes and racing gear and crammed the whole lot into his bag. In the other room, he could hear Bill slinging things about, and they were both ready just as Hurst arrived at the bungalow.

It took only a few seconds to explain what had happened. Ten minutes afterwards and all six of them were crowded into a Kent car, with Bill at the wheel.

Luckily, the traffic of departing spectators had thinned as they roared back to the paddock. Bill stopped the car there, yelled to a gateman, and gave him a message, then sent the car on.

There was a lot of speedy traffic coming from the Brooklands speedway and moving up the Portsmouth road, but there were hardly any drivers of Bill's calibre. The way he sent the car shifting over the black-surfaced road showed how desperately eager he was to get to the works.

His damaged rib didn't stop him handling the machine. Driving on a main road was simple compared with track work, and the bumps weren't felt anything like so much as when piloting a racing machine.

As he rode beside his brother, the four mechanics crowded in the seat behind, Dick wondered about the professor. He liked the quiet, grey-haired man, and he wondered what injury he had sustained. Once Bill leaned across to him and grunted:

(Continued on page 44.)

THE BARRING-OUT AT MOOR FIELD!



A famous League team barricading themselves in their club house and barring-out their manager!

This is what happens to the Blue Crusaders at Moor Field, their splendid ground. They are fed up with their cranky manager's methods and shut him out, running the club themselves! There's a pile of amazing incidents in this week's corking yarn, entitled:

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HOW TO JOIN THE LEAGUE

ST. FRANK'S LEAGUE APPLICATION FORM No. 93.

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 leave 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 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 they have secured the requisite number of readers they can exchange their bronze medal for a silver one.

These Application Forms can be posted for *id.*, providing the envelope is not sealed and no letter is enclosed.

A FEW OF THE ADVANTAGES OF JOINING THE LEAGUE.

You can write to fellow members living at home or in the most distant outposts of the Empire.

You are offered free advice on choosing a trade or calling, and on emigration to the colonies and dependencies.

If you want to form a sports or social club, you can do so amongst local members of the League.

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.

NOTICE!

The St. Frank's League has now attained such proportions that we are compelled to discontinue the offer of gold medals in connection therewith. The silver and bronze medals will still be available, however, as heretofore, to those who qualify for them in accordance with the rules.



Our Weekly Pow-Wow!

By
The Editor.

Adventure In The Air!

KEEP your eyes skinned for our new wonder serial of the air. This grand feature, written by a man who was himself an air pilot during the Great War, will create a sensation. It is undoubtedly the finest yarn of the airways ever penned, brimful of excitement, and bringing into view some of the marvellous possibilities of air travel. One is disposed to envy the author whose job it is to tackle a subject which simply hums with novelty—and the reader will find his attention fixed by a daring presentment of facts which come freshly to the understanding and set the imagination at work. This coming serial will be a rare treat for everybody. Pass the word along to your chums.

The History of Nipper.

An Essex reader asks in what circumstances Nipper became assistant to Nelson Lee. Dick Hamilton, otherwise Nipper, was formerly a newspaper boy and Nelson Lee adopted him and trained him as his assistant. Nipper shaped well, and the experiment proved a marked success. The story of the first meeting of the two, and Nelson Lee's resolve to give the lad his chance, is told in a far back yarn which is now out of print.

Thirty New Readers!

C. A. Richardson, of 31, Chetwynd Street, Aigburth Road, Liverpool, sends me word of a friend of his in Africa who distributed a few specimen copies of the N.L.L. amongst people he knew. The result is that thirty new regular readers have joined up. This is quite the style. I have been trying to reckon up what the circulation of the paper would be if every supporter brought in thirty more readers. The figures are magnificent, and I only hope the example from Africa will be imitated.

To Stamp Enthusiasts.

Collectors of stamps should communicate with Thomas G. Mercer, 1, Sweden Grove, Waterloo, Liverpool, who is one of the keenest philatelists I know. He is forming

a Stamp and Sports Club, and has secured a useful club-room. He is prepared to put himself out to meet the wishes of intending members.

A Note of Warning.

Members of the St. Frank's League are warned against having any dealings with any persons calling themselves "high officials" or "representatives" of the League.

The St. Frank's League is run entirely from this office by correspondence, and the Chief Officer can take no responsibility for the bona fides of any person who may approach members personally with the object of organising camps, excursions, etc., under the auspices of the League.

(Continued on next page.)

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OUR WEEKLY POW-WOW!

(Continued from previous page.)

A Real Good Wheeze.

It is a sound thing to put something by. An Ashton friend tells me he is saving up for his summer holidays. The pile is growing, and he has opened a small Post Office account. This is sheer wisdom. A sixpence saved is sixpence gained. Anybody can spend money. It takes a bit of determination to deny oneself some passing wish and put by the cash that would otherwise be spent. Saving up for a summer holiday may in our climate be tantamount to saving for the rainy day, but that's nothing. The few shillings to the credit side soon grow. It's the first effort that costs. No occasion to be a miser. Genuine saving does not mean washing out all pleasures, or being kept on edge when it is a question of paying what ought to be paid. There are lots of rewards for the individual who cuts a few extravagances right out, and banks the cash. He gets a fresh feeling of cheery independence. He can help a pal who has been hit hard, and, as in the case of the Ashton reader, he is in a position when his summer holiday comes along to go on his biking or walking tour with the comfortable sense that he has enough money to see him through.

CORRESPONDENTS WANTED.

Gordon Howard, 1, Ascroft Street, Oldham, Lancs., wishes to correspond with readers interested in physical culture, wrestling and amateur magazines.

Miss Amy Ellie, 218, Upper Parliament Street, Princes Park, Liverpool, wishes to correspond with girl readers only, preferably in Ireland.



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"SONS OF SPEED!"

(Continued from page 41.)

"Hope the old chap hasn't got it badly!"

It showed that Bill was more worried about him than about the wonderful Kent Flyer. Dick thought, and that turned his attention to the car. The 'phone message had said that the machine was wrecked. What did "wrecked" mean? Was it too badly damaged to run on the Monday, or could it be repaired in time?

They covered the last part of the distance, going all out, and at last the headlights swung on to the gates which gave entrance to the Kent works. The gates opened to the imperious hooting of the car's horn, they slammed between them, then came to a stop on the gravelled roadway, skidding with locked wheels.

"Where's the professor?" Bill yelled the words to the gatekeeper, as he and the others tumbled out of the car.

"In the racing shed, sir!" the man answered; and they set off for the building at a run.


Brilliant lights showed through the windows. The door was open, and they saw the Kent Flyer standing there. Both front wheels were buckled, and her radiator was a tangled mass; two mechanics were trying to clear the wreckage. To one side stood the professor, a bandage round his head, and his face pale beneath it!

(Look out for the concluding chapters of this great serial next week, boys!)

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