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THE
ST. FRANK'S
GALA!

A grand extra-long complete yarn of school-life and fun
featuring the cheery Chums of St. Frank's.

New Series No. 112.

OUT ON WEDNESDAY.

June 23rd, 1928.



Leisurely, lazily, Willy Handforth, dangling at the end of the parachute, drifted right over the top of the Old Priory Tower. To his utter amazement, he beheld a number of bound and gagged figures lying there on the stonework—figures among which he recognised Archie Glenthorpe, Nipper and Vivian Travers.

This is Just the Kind of School Yarn You'll Thoroughly Enjoy!



By EDWY SEARLES BROOKS

Dirty work and Gore-Pearce are very well acquainted, but in his latest effort to do somebody a bad turn Gore-Pearce bites off more than he can chew!—Ed.

CHAPTER 1.

Corn in Egypt!

“ROT!” said Fatty Little indignantly.

“I am very sorry, young gentleman—”

“You must have made a mistake!” went on Fatty. “Have another look through your parcels. I tell you it must be here!”

“I am sorry!” repeated the clerk. “But there is no hamper in this office addressed to Master Little, of St. Frank’s. Of course,” he added hopefully, “it may be down by the next train.”

Fatty Little seemed to stagger.

“But—but the next train doesn’t get in until this evening!” he protested. “We can’t wait until then!”

The clerk, somewhat impatient, shrugged his shoulders, and went back to a big ledger, and Fatty stood at the door of the parcels’ office, dazed and stunned.

Over by the door of the booking office stood three or four other members of the St. Frank’s Remove. They were trying to look unconcerned as they lounged in the doorway, gazing idly out into the station yard, where the air quivered drowsily in the sweltering heat of the June afternoon.

They were all West House Juniors, including Fatty Little himself. Reggie Pitt, smiling and cheery as ever, was chatting with his bosom chum, Jack Grey, and Alan Castleton and Tom Burton were engaged in a friendly little argument concerning the probable movements of a sprightly bantam cock, which was strolling across the station yard as though he owned the freehold of the place.

“Great pancakes!” muttered Fatty Little feebly.

Reggie Pitt turned an inquiring eye upon him.

“What is it, little one?” he asked, in a kindly voice.

“No hamper!” ejaculated Fatty hoarsely.

“No hamper!” echoed four voices in unison.

“It hasn’t come!”

“I don’t want to appear carping, or critical,” said Castleton grimly, “but what about your promise, Fatty?”

“Mum-my promise?”

“Yes, your promise!” said Castleton, with a stern glance. “In the Triangle at St.

Frank's you told us that a big hamper was waiting for you at the station. You expressed doubts as to your ability to carry it single-handed, and so, like the large-hearted chaps we are, we offered to lend you a hand."

"Yes, I know, but——"

"In spite of the sweltering heat of the afternoon, we came to Bellton—here, to the station," continued Castleton. "And you promised us that we should be well rewarded for our efforts by participating in the hamper's contents. In other words, my fat chump, there was going to be a share-out. What about it?"

"I can't share it out if I haven't got it!" protested Fatty.

"But you told us the hamper was here!" Jack Grey reminded him.

"So it ought to have been here!" said the fat junior indignantly. "I had a letter from home this morning, saying that the hamper was sent off yesterday. This railway ought to be scrapped! There's always trouble about hampers!"

Reggie Pitt chuckled.

"The railway's all right," he said soothingly. "But you're a bit too impatient, Fatty. Besides I'm not satisfied yet. I don't believe the clerk had a proper look. There's a big hamper standing in the corner, half hidden by parcels. You can't expect these clerks to have any soul for tuck. Before we go, we'd better make certain!"

And Reggie marched to the half-door of the parcels office, and leaned over. The clerk was still busy at the big ledger.

"You might have another look, old man," said Reggie coaxingly.

"Eh?" said the clerk, looking up.

"No; I don't want you to have another look at me," said Pitt. "Once is quite enough. But what about that hamper?"

"For Master Little?"

"Yes."

"It hasn't come," said the clerk impatiently.

"What's that big one over there, in the corner?"

The clerk turned, glancing in the direction of Reggie's pointing finger.

"That's not for St. Frank's," he said shortly.

"But why not have another look at the label and make sure?"

"Because I know my business!" retorted the clerk irritably. "Why on earth can't you boys leave me alone? That hamper is for the River House School."

"The River House School!" echoed the St. Frank's juniors in one voice.

"Yes; it's for Master Brewster."

"Master Brewster!" murmured Reggie Pitt, a dreamy expression coming into his eyes. "Did I hear aright, Oh comrades? Are my ears faithful to me? Here, before our eyes, is a goodly hamper, and it is addressed to Master Brewster!"

"It looks promising!" said Castleton.

"One moment, good scribe," went on Reggie, turning to the clerk. "I know you're

immersed in your writing, but please put your pen down for a moment. Do you know if that hamper contains tuck?"

The clerk grinned in spite of himself.

"How the thunder should I know what it contains?" he retorted. "Do you think I open the packages that come here? That hamper is marked 'Perishable,' and one corner of it is a bit sticky, as though a jar of jam had broken, but I can't tell you anything else——"

"There's no need to tell us anything else," said Reggie promptly. "My children, forward! Here we have a hamper addressed to our good friend, Hal Brewster, of the Fourth Form at the River House School. But that hamper is destined for another address."

"You—you mean——" gasped Fatty, his eyes bulging.

"Need I explain?" murmured Pitt. "We haven't a hamper of our own, and we're so broke that we can't raise a halfpenny doughnut among the lot of us, so why not bug Brewster's little prize? I've always been in favour of this friendly rivalry—this raiding of grub when the opportunity arises!"

The others chuckled.

Hal Brewster & Co., of the River House School, were fellows of the right sort, and in the old days there had always been scraps and friendly tussles. But of late this healthy rivalry had somewhat languished. Surely this was an excellent opportunity to revive it?

"Reggie, you're a genius!" said Castleton admiringly.

"I know it!" agreed Reggie, with a grin. "A genius, according to all the best dictionaries, is only once removed from a lunatic. But why waste time on these questions? Let us be up and doing!"

And Reggie opened the half-door, and marched into the office. The others followed him, and their movements were purposeful. Ruthlessly they swept the parcels aside, and seized the big hamper!



CHAPTER 2.

The More the Merrier!

"HEY!" said the clerk in alarm.

"Don't mind us!" smiled Reggie. "No need to interrupt

your work, old man. Go right ahead. We'll attend to this!"

"What do you think you're doing?" demanded the clerk angrily.

"Nothing much; only taking this hamper."

"But you can't take it!" said the official, turning red with indignation. "Get out of this office, you young chumps! That hamper is addressed to Brewster. It's not yours at all!"

"Let me remind you of an old proverb——"

"I don't want to hear any proverbs!" roared the clerk.

"Possession is nine points of the law," said Reggie smoothly. "Sorry, old man, and all that, but as Fatty's hamper hasn't come, we'll take this one."

"We're not particular," said Jack Grey. "We're easily pleased."

"Of all the confounded— Put that hamper down!" shouted the clerk wrathfully.

"You can't take it away from here!"

"Why not?" asked Reggie. "It's not chained to the floor!"

"It's got to be signed for—"

"That's easy," said Castleton. "I'll sign for it."

"No, you won't!" shouted the excited man. "You know as well as I do that that hamper is not your property, and you're not going to steal it—"

"Steal it!" echoed Pitt, pained. "My poor, benighted innocent! Let me correct you. If this hamper belonged to a private resident of the village, then our seizure of it would be theft. But as it belongs to Brewster, of the River House School, it is more or less public property."

"Hear, hear!" said the other juniors firmly.

"The precise manner of the raid is of no importance," continued Reggie. "Every St. Frank's hamper is liable to be boned by the Brewster birds; and in the same way every River House hamper is similarly in jeopardy. Brewster has been slow in claiming his prize, so we'll do him the favour of collecting it for him."

"We like Brewster," said Castleton. "We don't mind doing a small favour for him, do we?"

"We love it!" grinned Fatty Little.

With a single heave, the hamper was whisked out of the parcels office, and before the clerk could take any action the raiders were half-way across the booking-hall.

"Hey! Bring that back!" he shouted desperately.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Yelling with laughter, the five juniors staggered out into the sunshine with their prize. The clerk, coming to the open door, gazed after them furiously. But he had sufficient sense to realise that he was helpless. At that lazy hour of the afternoon, there was nobody else about, and the man had no desire to cross swords with these schoolboys. Singlehanded, he was helpless.

"Good egg!" grinned Pitt, as they staggered into the old High Street. "This is a prize worth lifting, my sons! It's no ordinary tuck hamper, either. It's a super hamper!"

"Hadn't we better get it out of sight as quickly as possible?" asked Jack Grey. "Those River House chaps might be along at any minute; and how should we look after a dozen of them had caught us with this?"

"I hate to visualise the picture!" said Pitt, shuddering. "You're right, O fount of wisdom! As soon as we get to the wood,

we'll dodge in and have a picnic in a shady glade."

"Cave!" gasped Fatty suddenly. "Ancient House rotters!"

The five West House juniors stared at a group of fellows who had just emerged from one of the village shops. There was no avoiding them. Nipper & Co., of Study C, were in the forefront; the others included such stalwarts as Vivian Travers and Jimmy Potts and Archie Glenthorne. Church and McClure were in the offing, and they came up at the double upon spotting the hamper.

"Hallo! What's this?" asked Nipper genially.

"Tuck, by the look of it," said Tommy Watson, licking his lips. "Corn in Egypt, my sons! We were wondering what we should do for tea, weren't we?"

"Begad! We needn't worry any longer!" murmured Tregellis-West.

The West House juniors, seeing that they were outnumbered, made the best of it. In any case, there was no need for a squabble. That hamper was a big one.

"Everybody welcome!" said Pitt kindly. "In fact, you chaps can have a go at carrying the thing, if you like. We're just off to the woods, to have a picnic in one of the fairy glades."

"Well, well!" said Travers indulgently. "We must have our simple pleasures, mustn't we? Congrats, Pitt, old scout!"

"Eh?" said Reggie, staring.

"I have noticed the label!" said Travers coolly.

"Yes, artistic, isn't it?" replied Reggie Pitt. "I rather like that ornamental surround."

Nipper bent over the hamper and inspected the label.

"Why, you burgling bounders!" he said, with a whistle. "This hamper is addressed to Hal Brewster!"

"What!" yelled the others.

"We found it at the station," explained Reggie. "Brewster evidently doesn't want it, or he'd have called for it. And I hate to think of good food going bad in this hot weather."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The ancient House fellows entered into the spirit of the thing with gusto, and within another minute they were all helping to carry the hamper. They proceeded at a brisk pace down the High Street.

"But, dash it all, is this quite the thing?" asked Archie Glenthorne dubiously. "I mean, laddies, isn't there liable to be a spot of bother?"

"I shouldn't be at all surprised," grinned Nipper.

"Absolutely!" said Archie. "Brewster will probably feel most frightfully done when he discovers that his hamper has been bagged."

"He probably will," agreed Pitt. "But why should we worry ourselves over his troubles? Life's too short, Archie, old man."

"Oh, rather!" said Archie. "Too short? I see what you mean! Absolutely!"

The triumphant Removites reached the woodland glade at last. They took the foot-path, and then branched off into the trees after they had penetrated some distance into the wood.

It was an ideal spot for an impromptu picnic. A tiny stream ran gurgling on its way at the bottom of the glade. There was plenty of shade, and the earth was carpeted by long grass, with hardly a thistle or a nettle to mar the comfort.

All the juniors were perspiring freely after their walk through the hot sunshine. But they had a rich reward. The hamper was opened with much gusto, and the raiders were not disappointed.

They found everything that their hearts could desire.

"This is what I call a spread!" said Fatty Little ecstatically, as he gazed at the good things. "Great pancakes! I expected a few good things in my own hamper, but this beats everything!"

"Well, come on—let's sample the stuff," said Nipper briskly.

"My hat, rather!"

They fell to with eager appetites, and the rapidity with which the good things disappeared was astonishing. For even on a hot afternoon fourteen or fifteen healthy school-boys can perform sturdy work when it comes to a question of making food disappear.

"The next time we meet Brewster, we'll have to thank him," said Travers languidly. "It's just possible that he won't appreciate our thanks, but we must do our duty."

"Listen!" exclaimed Church, suddenly jumping to his feet.

They all became silent, and voices came to their ears—many voices. They heard the crackling of twigs, and the swishing of branches. The raiders glanced at one another with consternation.

"Talk of angels, and they appear!" muttered Castleton. "It's Brewster & Co.! Of all the rummy things!"

"Great Scott!" gasped McClure. "What shall we do?"

Nipper grinned.

"Do?" he repeated coolly. "Do nothing! Just leave this to me! Unless I'm very much mistaken, there's going to be some fun!"

CHAPTER 3.

A Pressing Invitation!



THE River House juniors came into sight almost at once; and they proved to be nine in number.

They were all dressed in flannels, and they were smiling amiably. They stood for a

moment on the edge of the glade, looking at the festive scene.

"Hard luck!" said Hal Brewster, shaking his head. "There are too many of them for us."

"My hat, yes!" muttered one of the others. "Hadn't we better buzz off while the buzzing is good?"

But just then Nipper rose to his feet, and gaily waved his hand.

"Hallo, you River House bounders!" he sang out. "Jolly pleased to see you! Care to join the feast?"

"That's jolly decent of you!" said Hal Brewster, as he moved forward. "There's no spoof about this, I suppose?"

"None at all, old man."

"Honour bright?"

"Absolutely honour bright!" said Nipper solemnly. "It's pax, old scout."

The River House juniors, much relieved, came forward and joined their rivals. They consisted of Brewster and Glynn and Ascott, of Study No. 1; Kingswood, Norton, and Robinson, of Study No. 2; and Lang, Mason, and Reeves, of Study No. 4. They gathered round the remnants of the feed, and their grins were broad.

"Well, this is jolly decent of you, you chaps!" remarked Mason. "I'm just feeling like a feed."

"Good man!" said Pitt, waving an inviting hand. "Pile in!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The other St. Frank's fellows laughed uproariously. They could see the joke, and appreciate it. But Brewster & Co. were rather in the dark.

"Where's the joke?" asked Kingswood suspiciously.

"Joke?" repeated Pitt. "Oh, it's nothing! You wouldn't understand!"

"There's nothing wrong with this grub, I suppose?"

"Nothing at all!" said Pitt. "It's some of the finest grub we ever tasted."

"Look at Fatty!" said Nipper. "You needn't think we're trying to work a dodge on you, my lads. This tuck is A.1."

There was a smile on Hal Brewster's sunny, honest face as he helped himself to a sandwich.

"Well, you can't blame us for being a bit suspicious," he said. "We're outnumbered, and we had an idea that you would take advantage of us."

"Perish the thought!" said Pitt, in horror.

"Who's springing the feed?" inquired Ascott, as he glanced at the big hamper.

"Why bother?" said Nipper blandly. "The grub's all right, and we've had our fill. You River House fellows are welcome to pile in, and we don't begrudge you a crumb."

"Thanks awfully!" said the River House fellows.

They sprawled in the grass and helped themselves liberally, very delighted with the generous attitude of the St. Frank's juniors.

"How's everything going at the River House?" asked Nipper politely.

"Oh, pretty well!" said Brewster.

"Having much trouble with the Honourables?"

"Not much," replied Brewster. "We generally keep Wellborne and his rotters in place."

The River House juniors were divided into two well-defined sections. Hal Brewster was the recognised leader of the Commoners—and this was by far the larger force. The Commoners were the backbone of the River House Junior School.

The Hon. Aubrey de Vere Wellborne was the languid, slacking leader of the Honourables—a so-called smart set. The Honourables were distinguished for their "doggish" ways, and for their poor showing in all the River House sports.

"It's rather a pity we don't see more of each other," remarked Hal Brewster, after a slight pause. "We only meet for cricket matches, and things like that."

"Yes," said Nipper. "There's no reason why we shouldn't be the best of friends, Hal, old man."

"Well, of course, we are the best of friends," said Brewster. "But why shouldn't we exchange social visits occasionally?"

"Why not?" murmured Nipper.

"We shan't forget this afternoon," nodded Robinson, as he bit into a doughnut. "You've shown the right spirit in inviting us to this feed."

"Yes, rather!" said all the other Commoners.

"Ahem!" coughed Reggie Pitt. "We naturally like to be hospitable."

"Absolutely!" said Archie Glenthorne. "We'll let bygones be bygones, and all that sort of thing. I mean to say, after all, what's the good of quarrelling?"

"No good at all!" said Brewster genially. "We heard your voices as we were going along the footpath, and we thought we'd investigate. But we hardly expected to find a treat like this."

"Don't mention it!" said Nipper. "As soon as we saw you, we couldn't resist the temptation to invite you to the spread."

The air was positively thick with politeness, and Brewster & Co. were becoming more and more convinced that the St. Frank's fellows were one and all "true blue."

"It's not often we get invited to a feed like this," said Ascott happily. "I'll bet Archie Glenthorne is the good old host."

"Absolutely not!" said Archie promptly.

"If you don't ask any questions, you won't hear any fibs!" smiled Nipper. "But we don't mind telling you that this hamper was raided."

"By Jove!" said Brewster, grinning. "Really?"

"Yes, really."

"Well, that's jolly rich!" laughed the River House leader, grinning from ear to ear. "Raided, eh? My only topper! There'll

be a row when the real owner finds out!"

"I shouldn't be a bit surprised!" nodded Nipper, his eyes twinkling.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the other St. Frank's fellows.

And the River House juniors joined in, appreciating the joke to the full.

"This makes the grub all the sweeter!" chuckled Brewster. "Raided fodder always seems to be more appetising, doesn't it?"

"That's rummy!" said Travers. "We thought exactly the same thing, dear old fellow."

"As a matter of fact, we're on our way to the station ourselves," remarked Norton. "Brewster is expecting a hamper——"

"Ass!" interrupted Brewster warningly.

"Eh?" gasped Norton, with a start.

"Not that it matters, I suppose," added Brewster. "I wasn't going to say anything——"

"Don't mind us," said Nipper. "We've had our fill, and we're satisfied."

"I'll bet you are!" grinned Brewster, as he glanced at the hamper. "I'll bet you raided this hamper from the Fourth-Formers?"

"Well, yes," admitted Nipper. "I suppose you can call them Fourth-Formers."

"Ha, ha, ha!" howled all the others.

"Yes, but what's the joke?" demanded Brewster, looking surprised. "There's something about this feed that we don't understand!"

"You won't remain in ignorance for long, dear old fellow," murmured Travers.

Perhaps a suspicion of the dreadful truth crossed Hal Brewster's mind. At all events, he suddenly dropped the cake that he was in the act of eating. A startled look leapt into his eyes, and he suddenly jumped to his feet and ran to the hamper.

"What's the matter?" asked Nipper mildly.

"Where's the label?" roared Brewster.

"I want to see— Why, this—this——"

He broke off, staring dazedly at the label.

"Yes," said Nipper, "I was just going to draw your attention to that, Brewster, old scout. Quite a pretty label, isn't it?"

"But—but it's addressed to *me!*" panted Brewster hoarsely.

"Really?" murmured Nipper. "You don't say so!"



CHAPTER 4.

A Spot of Bother!

ALL the River House fellows were on their feet now, and their faces wore startled expressions. Hal

Brewster himself was still looking dazed; the thing was *too* big for him to grasp all at once.

"Well, well!" said Vivian Travers amusedly. "It's refreshing to know that you appreciate the joke, Brewster, dear old fellow."

"Joke?" howled Brewster.

"Your own words!" nodded Travers. "Didn't you distinctly say to us that raided grub is more palatable?"

"Yes, but this is different!" hooted the River House junior leader. "This is *our* hamper!"

"I don't see how that affects it," replied Travers.

"Our hamper!" repeated Brewster dizzily. "Look, you chaps!" he added, turning to his companions. "This label is addressed to me! It's our hamper—the one we were on the way to arrange about!"

"My giddy aunt!" muttered Ascott hoarsely. "What—what about our feed this evening?"

"Hard lines!" said Nipper blandly. "Were you arranging a feed for this evening?"

"Yes, we were!" roared Brewster. "It's a very special occasion—with half the Fourth Form invited!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You—you rotters!" hooted Brewster, his face becoming red with wrath. "You've boned our hamper!"

"But, my dear chap, raided grub is always sweeter——"

"We were on our way to the station, so that we could arrange to have this hamper sent up!" panted Hal Brewster. "My only hat! And you had the nerve to invite us to this feed!"

"Nerve?" said Nipper mildly.

"Yes, nerve!" shouted Brewster. "All this tuck is ours!"

"You're welcome to it!" said Reggie Pitt, with a generous wave of his hand. "I'll admit there's not much left, but what there is you can have."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The St. Frank's fellows howled with merriment. The expressions on the faces of Brewster & Co. were genuinely funny. At all events, the Saints thought so.

"You—you burgling bounders!" shouted Kingswood angrily. "You raiding rotters! It's our hamper, and you raided it!"

"Well, what are you grumbling at!" asked Nipper. "You've had a share, haven't you?"

"A share!" howled Kingswood. "What about our feed for this evening?"

"Well, old man, you can't eat your cake, and still have it."

Hal Brewster quivered from head to foot.

"How did you know?" he demanded furiously. "How did you know this hamper was at the station?"

"We didn't know," explained Nipper. "We went there to collect a hamper of Fatty's. But as Fatty's hadn't turned up, we boned yours. We weren't particular."

"Not a bit," said Reggie Pitt. "We're easily pleased."

And the St. Frank's fellows went off into another roar of laughter as the nine River House juniors gnashed their teeth with fury.

"And this is what you call friendship!" panted Brewster. "You—you rotters! You burglars!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You awful bounders!" roared Brewster. "And not five minutes ago you were agreeing with me that we ought to be better friends!"

"Well, why not?" asked Nipper. "Cheese it, Hal! A raid is a raid, and I think that you are all sportsmen enough to take it in the right spirit. If you had pinched one of our hampers we shouldn't make a fuss——"

"Oh, wouldn't you!" broke in Brewster heatedly.

"Well, we might make a fuss, perhaps," amended Nipper. "But we should take it all in the right spirit."

Hal Brewster breathed hard.

"I'm taking it in the right spirit!" he retorted. "Of course, it's fair enough. I'm not denying that! But, by Jove, we'll make you fellows pay for this! We'll get our own back!"

"Yes, rather!" shouted Kingswood. "Come on! Let's go for them now!"

"Hear, hear!" roared the other River House juniors, in one voice.

And the next second Hal Brewster & Co. had rashly flung themselves upon the Saints. As Archie remarked, a spot of bother rapidly developed. Of course, it was hopeless from the very start. There were only nine River House boys, and about fifteen St. Frank's fellows.

The scrap was short and sharp.

In the end, Brewster & Co. were sent hurtling out of the glade. They were dusty, dishevelled, torn and tattered.

"All right" panted Hal Brewster, shaking his fist at the yelling Removites. "We'll make you pay for this!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"The rivalry between the River House and St. Frank's has been slumbering of late!" went on Brewster darkly. "But, by Jove, it's awake now! And we'll see that it remains awake!"

"Good egg!" said Nipper heartily. "There's nothing we'd like better!"

"And before the week is out we'll get our own back!" shouted Brewster. "This is only the beginning, my sons!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I'm giving you fair warning!" said Brewster tensely. "You've raided our hamper, and we don't bear you any malice. All's fair in love and war! And from this minute onwards, it's going to be war! War to the knife!"

"Go it!" said Reggie Pitt. "You look rather impressive in that attitude, Brewster, old man!"

Hal Brewster gave a snort, and turned on his heel.

A moment later, the discomfited River House juniors had vanished amid the trees, and the successful raiders laughed themselves hoarse. From their point of view, the whole



The clown was capering about with amazing energy, much to the delight of the smaller children. As he progressed, he turned somersaults and cartwheels, and nobody suspected, even for a second, that he was Willy Handforth!

affair was a great joke. And they weren't at all sorry to hear that the long slumbering rivalry was now to be revived with greater intensity than ever before.

"The more, the merrier," replied Nipper complacently. "It's about time that the old rivalry was awakened. We can do with a few diversions during these dog-days."

"These which days?" asked Church.

"Dog-days, old man," replied Nipper. "Don't you know what dog-days are? In the old days they were supposed to be connected with the Dog Star. But now it's a kind of general term, and the dog-days are supposed to begin about July 3rd and end towards the 11th of August."

"I suppose you've been looking that up in an encyclopedia?" asked De Valeria, with a grin. "Still, it's pretty appropriate. The dog-days are nearly on us, my lads, and a bit of excitement with the River House chaps will be welcome."

"Yes, rather!" yawned Gresham. "Things will be pretty slow between now and the Big Vacation, unless something happens to buck us up. It's rather a pity that old Handforth has gone!"

"He'll soon be back!" said Church confidently.

"Rats!" put in De Valeria. "Handforth is at St. Jim's."

"Yes, I know," agreed Church. "But according to his letters, he's not going to stop there much longer. He'll probably be back here by next week."

CHAPTER 5.

A Welcome Invitation!



THERE were many chuckles at St. Frank's that evening, when the story of the raid on Brewster &

Co.'s hamper got about. It was regarded as an excellent joke.

"Lucky beggars!" remarked Harry Gresham, of Study J. "Why didn't the rest of us know about this feed?"

"That's what I've been asking," said De Valeria. "It ought to have been a Form spread."

Nipper grinned.

"The hamper was large, I'll admit, but it wouldn't have gone very far if the whole Remove had participated," he said. "About half a jam tart each, all round."

"There's going to be trouble with those River House fellows," said Duncan.

"Do you really think he'll come back?" asked Fullwood curiously.

"I don't think anything about it!" replied Church. "It's a dead cert that he'll come back!"

"Absolutely positive!" declared McClure.

And there was a world of confidence in the voices of Handforth's old chums. The Remove, as a whole, had begun to look upon Handforth's return as a forlorn hope—for there was no denying that Edward Oswald Handforth had been very popular, in spite of his nonsense, and that he was greatly missed. His return to the fold would be a signal for much enthusiasm in the Remove; and Church and McClure were serenely confident that the day would soon dawn.

However, a welcome diversion occurred on the morrow.

After prayers, Dr. Stafford addressed the school, and his address was of considerable interest.

"You are all acquainted, I think, with the Earl of Edgemore," he said genially, as he glanced at a paper which he held in his hand. "Not so very long ago, the earl was a recluse, but nowadays he is interesting himself actively in the welfare of the district. As one of our most distinguished neighbours, we are naturally attracted by his activities."

There was a murmur of assent.

Everybody remembered the old Earl of Edgemore, the determined hermit who had resisted the efforts of Mr. William Gore-Pearce to evict him from Edgemore Manor. But that affair was all over now, although not forgotten; and the Earl of Edgemore was no longer a recluse, but a big power in the neighbourhood.

"I have received a general invitation from Lord Edgemore," continued the Head. "It is an invitation which embraces the entire school. On Saturday afternoon, it seems, there will be a big gala in Edgemore Park."

There was another murmur—and this time it was much more hearty.

"Our distinguished neighbour wants us all to attend this gala," said the Head smilingly. "It will, of course, appeal more to the junior boys, but the seniors, too, will be welcome. By what I can understand, this gala will be a very attractive affair, and, if the weather is fine, the attendance will no doubt be considerable. For not only is this school invited, but also the boys of the River House School, and the girls of the Moor View School."

"A sort of school treat, eh?" murmured Travers.

"The earl has also invited his hundreds of tenants," continued Dr. Stafford, "and it is quite safe to say that there will be many well-known Bellton and Edgemore residents at this gathering. Incidentally, all meals and refreshments will be free—"

"Good egg!"

"That's the stuff, sir!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Everything, in fact, will be free," smiled

the Head. "I understand that there will be a parachute descent, a tightrope act, trapeze performances, and many other attractions, concluding with a big firework display. In fact, this gala will be something exceptional, and I have no doubt that you are all grateful to the Earl of Edgemore for his generous invitation."

"Yes, rather, sir!"

"Hear, hear!"

"The earl's a brick, sir!"

Soon afterwards the school dismissed, with everybody talking animatedly about the coming gala—which had taken the school quite by surprise. The seniors were inclined to be somewhat indifferent about it all, but the Junior School was heartily enthusiastic.

This gala promised to be something exceptionally attractive, and it would be worth going to. The feed, especially, would be well worthy of support!



CHAPTER 6.

Preparations I

"JUST a minute!" said Claude Gore-Pearce.

It was Friday evening, and Gore-Pearce and Gulliver and Bell were on their bicycles. The cads of Study A had been to Bannington, and were now on their way back, having come round by way of Edgemore. There was a hint of rain in the air, and the three Removites were hurrying, as it was getting near to the hour of locking-up.

"Oh, don't waste time!" said Bell impatiently. "We've got to hurry, Gore-Pearce."

But Claude Gore-Pearce jumped off his bicycle, and stared over the hedge. Gulliver and Bell were compelled to dismount, too, and they stood there, leaning on their machines, wondering why their leader had stopped.

Of late, Claude Gore-Pearce had assumed complete ascendancy in Study A. He was the recognised leader of the Remove "sports." Happily, there were not many fellows of this calibre in the Remove, so Gore-Pearce's band was not a big one.

"What the deuce are you looking at?" asked Gulliver tartly.

"Just what I was going to say!" grunted Bell.

They could see nothing particularly interesting in the landscape. As it happened, the view was picturesque in the extreme. Over that hedge, the juniors could see into Edgemore Park, across the rolling grassland, dotted here and there with clumps of noble chestnuts; and peeping from behind the distant trees was Edgemore Manor itself, a veritable castle with its battlements and its turrets and towers.

"By gad!" muttered Gore-Pearce, with a scowl.

His cronies stared at him in astonishment.

"What's wrong, you idiot?" demanded Bell.

"Everything's wrong!" replied Gore-Pearce sullenly. "My people ought to be living here—yes, and I ought to be there, too. When I came to St. Frank's I was only a day boy, and the idea was for me to live at Edgemore Manor, here, with my people."

"Oh, crumbs!" said Gulliver. "Why keep harping on the same string?"

They were rather tired of hearing this complaint from Claude Gore-Pearce.

"Well, it's true, isn't it?" demanded Gore-Pearce fiercely. "My pater bought this place—lock, stock and barrel. And then, because of a lot of interference on the part of the Remove, the earl got his property back again. Whenever I go past this park I feel wild."

"There's an easy remedy for that!" said Gulliver sourly. "Never come past it!"

But Gore-Pearce only scowled more vindictively than ever. He had never ceased to hate the genial old Earl of Edgemore. He still bore a grudge against that kindly old gentleman.

"Hallo!" remarked Bell, with a sudden interest. "What's happening over there?"

"Over where?" said Gulliver.

Bell pointed.

"What are those men doing?" he said.

"By gad! I believe they're shoving up a kind of trapeze!"

"That's about the size of it," said Gore-Pearce, as he stared. "Preparing for to-morrow, I suppose. Of all the idiotic rot!" he added contemptuously. "Fancy turning Edgemore Park into a rotten circus ground!"

"Oh, come off it!" said Gulliver. "This gala is going to be a big affair, by all that we can hear. And as it's free, gratis, an' for nothin', I don't see why we shouldn't come to it."

"You can come to it if you like—but I wouldn't be seen dead in the place!" sneered Gore-Pearce. "I shall go to the Bannington Races to-morrow afternoon."

They continued looking over the rolling grassland. In the distance they could see a number of men busy with a great marquee, whilst other men were certainly erecting an impressive-looking trapeze.

"Let's cut across the park," suggested Bell eagerly. "We can easily ride our bikes over this grass, and we shan't waste much time because we can join the road again farther on."

"What the deuce for?" asked Gore-Pearce.

"Well, we can make some inquiries, and then we shall be in the know," said Bell. "We'll give the other chaps a surprise when we tell 'em that we've had a look round."

Gore-Pearce was not very keen on it, but Gulliver entirely approved the idea. A minute later they had lifted their bicycles over the

hedge, and were cycling across the smooth grassland.

Arriving at the scene of activities, they dismounted, and stood looking on.

At close quarters there was a good deal to see. Not only was a trapeze being erected, but a long tightrope, too, and railings were being put up all the way round the special enclosure.

A man strolled towards the juniors, and he looked at them curiously.

"We're not in the way, are we?" asked Gulliver.

"Well, I wouldn't say that, young gent," replied the man. "I suppose his lordship knows that you're here, eh?"

"He doesn't know it—but we're welcome, all the same," replied Bell, with an airy wave of his hand. "Lord Edgemore never minds the St. Frank's fellows coming into the park. You're preparing for to-morrow, I suppose?"

"That's it!" nodded the man. "There's going to be a big 'do' here to-morrow afternoon."

"Who's going to perform?" asked Gore-Pearce, making no attempt to veil the contempt in his voice. "Some paltry amateurs, eh?"

The man bristled.

"Amateurs be blowed!" he replied, with some heat. "The Colosseum Troupe has been booked for this gala."

"Never heard of the Colosseum Troupe," said Gore-Pearce indifferently.

"Then you're only showing your ignorance!" retorted the man. "The Colosseum Troupe is one of the cleverest bunch of performers in the country."

"Are they here already?" asked Gulliver, with genuine interest.

Both he and Bell did not like Gore-Pearce's tone; and they were anxious to show this man that they disassociated themselves from it. For Gulliver and Bell, in spite of their pretended air of boredom, were really keen upon this gala. It was a free show, and they saw no reason why they should not attend it.

"No, the Colosseum Troupe is performing at the Winter Garden, Helmford, this evening," replied the man.

"What about all their stuff?" asked Bell, indicating the trapeze and the tightrope.

"Oh, they only use this for outdoor shows," replied the man. "They're giving an indoor performance at the Winter Garden. Just you wait until you see 'em to-morrow—and then you'll get a surprise!"

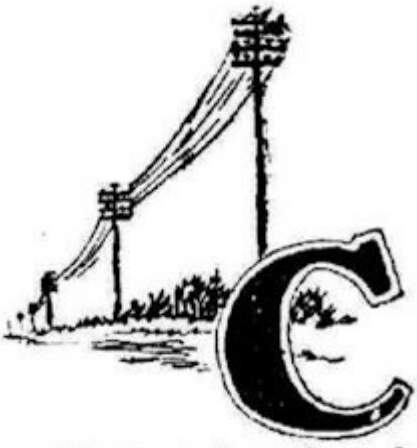
Claude Gore-Pearce yawned.

"Thanks all the same, but we've got another engagement!" he said languidly. "I should hope we're a bit above this sort of thing. By gad! You don't take us for country bumpkins, do you?"

The man eyed them rather grimly.

"I shouldn't like to say what I take you for!" he replied, turning on his heel.

And Gulliver and Bell, to do them justice, felt just a trifle small.



CHAPTER 7.

Treachery!

CLAUDE GORE-PEARCE, however, merely shrugged his shoulders, and grinned.

"Well, I let that fellow see what I thought of his rotten show, didn't I?" he remarked unpleasantly. "Of all the nerve! Fancy thinking that we should be interested in a lot of drivelling tight-rope walking and trapeze acting!"

Gulliver glared.

"Well, there was no need for you to make yourself so confoundedly nasty," he said. "I expect these men are employed by the Colosseum Troupe."

"Hang the men!" retorted Gore-Pearce, mounting his bicycle.

He said very little as they proceeded on their way to St. Frank's; and Gulliver and Bell thought it wise to drop the subject. They were willing enough to let Gore-Pearce lord it over them—mainly because he always had plenty of cash, and was not particularly mean with it. But, now and again, Gulliver and Bell wondered if it was worth the candle.

Later on, in Study A, Gore-Pearce lounged in the big armchair, buried in thought. Gulliver and Bell had gone off to the common-room, where they told, with an air of great importance, all that they had seen in the grounds of Edgemoor Manor. There were plenty of willing listeners, for now that the gala was so close at hand, it was the general topic of conversation.

Alone in Study A, Gore-Pearce gave himself up to his thoughts.

And his thoughts were evil. By sheer accident, he had learned some information that evening. The famous Colosseum Troupe was now at Helmford, giving a performance in the Winter Garden. This, as he knew, was a place of amusement that was only open to the public during the summer months.

"Why not?" muttered Gore-Pearce, his eyes gleaming vindictively. "By gad! If I can only wangle it, the whole affair to-morrow will be a fiasco! And it'll be a knock for that beastly old earl! He'll be in a mess, and he won't be able to get out of it! I'd give a five-pound note to mess up his rotten gala!"

He wondered how it could be done, and it wasn't long before his mean, cunning mind evolved a plan. Indeed, armed with such information as was his, the thing would be childishly easy.

"These rotten performers are at the Winter Garden this evening, so they can't possibly come to Edgemoor Park until to-morrow," he decided. "They won't be needed until the afternoon, anyhow, and that means they'll

be in Helmford all to-morrow morning. By gad, it's a cert!"

Claude Gore-Pearce then left Study A, a satisfied smirk on his face. He strolled into the common-room, and listened to all the talk with inward amusement.

"What's happened?" asked Gulliver, as he and Bell joined their leader just before supper.

"What do you mean—what's happened?"

"You're looking jolly pleased with yourself, aren't you?" asked Gulliver, staring.

"Am I?"

"Yes; you look as though you'd heard some good news."

"No," said Gore-Pearce, "I haven't heard any good news, Gulliver. But I've made up my mind on a certain little point, and it has given me some satisfaction. That's all. I'll probably tell you about it to-morrow."

"Why not now?"

"Because I don't choose to," replied Gore-Pearce.

He moved away, and Gulliver and Bell instinctively felt that their precious leader had been referring to the forthcoming gala.

The next morning Gore-Pearce was out of bed a minute after the rising bell had sounded. This was a very unusual proceeding for him, for he was an arrant slacker. Before anybody else was down he was on his way to the post office in Bellton. As soon as the office was open at eight o'clock, Gore-Pearce went in and dispatched a telegram.

He had it written out already—in fact, the words of that telegram had caused him a great deal of time and thought. He copied it on to one of the official forms, and then read it over:

"Manager, Colosseum Troupe, Winter Garden, Helmford. Arrangements cancelled. Do not come. Gala postponed until Wednesday. All properties safeguarded meanwhile. Will pay additional expenses caused by hold-over. Do not communicate until you hear from me again.—EDGEMORE."

Claude Gore-Pearce chuckled as he read the message over.

"That ought to do the trick!" he murmured gloatingly. "By gad! I don't think I've left a single loophole!"

The wire cost him just over three shillings, but this was a mere trifle to him. He had an anxious moment as the girl read the telegram over and counted the words. He was afraid that she might be suspicious—that she might question the authenticity of the telegram. But he need not have worried. The girl seemed quite indifferent, and she hardly gave him a glance. If she thought anything at all—which was very unlikely—she probably assumed that Gore-Pearce was the Earl of Edgemoor's messenger.

Later, at St. Frank's, Gulliver and Bell met their leader at the gates. He was grinning widely.

(Continued on page 14.)

PAL UP WITH FATTY FOWKES!



Feeding Time!



Fighting Fit!

better chum. In a scrap, between the posts or when there's a bit of grub, he's a corker! His great pals are Ben Gillingham, the bow-legged back who never took a prize in a beauty competition, and "Tich" Harborough, the midget schoolboy winger, who plays at outside right. You'll like Mr. Piecombe, too. He's the Crusaders' manager, and is a bit of a crank. He used to be a schoolmaster, which perhaps accounts for some of his crazy ideas! Why not meet the whole jolly bunch this week in the **BOYS' REALM**? They are featured in an amazing yarn of close-season footer and thrilling adventure abroad entitled:



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On the Field!

THE BOYS' REALM

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THE ST. FRANK'S GALA!

(Continued from page 12.)

"Where the deuce have you been to?" demanded Bell, with a stare.

"Post office."

"At this hour! What for?"

"I've just sent a telegram," explained Gore-Pearce blandly. "And it might interest you to know, my pippins, that there'll be no performance this afternoon 'of that rotten gala!"

"No performance!" echoed Gulliver and Bell.

"Not a trace of one!" grinned Gore-Pearce. "Mum's the word, of course, but I've sent a telegram to the Colosseum Troupe, telling them that the gala is postponed until Wednesday!"

"Great Scott!" ejaculated Bell. "You—you idiot! The gala will be properly messed up—"

"Exactly!"

"But—but we wanted to see those performers!" protested Gulliver indignantly.

"Rot!" said Gore-Pearce. "Won't it be ten times as amusing to stand there and see the dismay when the hour gets late and when the performers fail to turn up? Why, the crowd's disappointment will be worth quids! And think of the row afterwards—with that fat-headed old earl trying to explain!"

Slow grins spread themselves over the unpleasant features of Gulliver and Bell.

"Perhaps you're right!" admitted Gulliver.

"I know I'm right," replied Gore-Pearce. "Oh, there's going to be a show all right—but it'll hardly be the show that everybody expects!"

And in this remark Claude Gore-Pearce was prophetically right!

CHAPTER 8.

The Great Occasion!



"HALF-PAST two!" remarked Reggie Pitt carelessly.

Nipper and a few of the other juniors chuckled. Quite a crowd of Remove fellows were lounging about in the lane, almost opposite the gates of the Moor View School. Incidentally they had been waiting there for nearly twenty minutes, and they were beginning to get impatient.

It was afternoon now, and the June heat was considerable. Much to everybody's satisfaction, the weather was gloriously fine, with a hot sun shining down from an almost cloudless sky.

The crowd outside the gates of the Moor View School consisted of Nipper & Co., Vivian Travers, Archie Glenthorpe, Pitt & Co., and one or two other stalwarts of the

Remove. They had arranged to call for Irene Manners & Co. at a quarter past two, and they had arrived five minutes before time.

The rest of the St. Frank's juniors had long since gone to Edgemore Park. Practically the entire Third, Fourth and Remove had gone. A goodly sprinkling of the Fifth had wandered off towards the gala ground, too. But the seniors, on the whole, were inclined to treat the affair with lordly indifference. It was rather beneath their dignity. Quite a number, however, had condescendingly observed that they might "drop in" later on in the afternoon.

"Half-past two!" said Reggie Pitt again. "Just wait until my sister comes out! I'll give her a jolly good ticking off!"

"Oh, well, you know what girls are!" said Nipper, with a smile. "And there's really no hurry, because the performance doesn't begin until half-past three or four."

"I wasn't thinking about the performance," said Reggie. "But there was some rumour that a free feed was to be provided this afternoon and unless we buck up we shall find everything gone!"

"Oh, well, it's no weather for eating," said Nipper soothingly.

"Why, you silly ass——" began Tommy Watson.

But he pulled up short as girlish laughter was heard. And a moment later Irene & Co. came tripping towards the gateway, looking very charming in their summery frocks. They made a refreshing picture in the June sunlight, and the juniors forgot their impatience of a moment ago.

"Are we late?" asked Doris Berkeley gaily.

"Ahem! Don't mention it!" murmured Reggie Pitt. "We've only been waiting for about twenty minutes. A mere trifle!"

"Oh, we're so sorry!" said Mary Summers, laughing.

"Yes, you look it!" chuckled Nipper. "Well, never mind—better late than never. Besides, we expected it."

"You horrid thing!" said Mary.

All the girls were there. That is to say, all the special chums of the prominent St. Frank's juniors. Archie Glenthorpe was in animated conversation with Marjorie Temple, Reggie Pitt had attached himself to Doris, Fullwood was chatting cheerily with Winnie Pitt, Nipper and Mary Summers were already walking on ahead, Tessa Love and Violet Watson and Ena Handforth were honoured by two or three escorts each, and Irene Manners was sandwiched between Church and McClure.

These latter two juniors were not particularly happy, for they generally felt uncomfortable in the presence of girls. But they were Handforth's special chums, and as Irene had always been Handforth's girl friend, they felt that it was their duty to tack themselves on to her.

"It's an awful pity that Ted isn't here," said Irene regretfully. "He would have enjoyed himself this afternoon."

"Oh, I suppose so," said Church. "But you could never tell with old Handy. He might have thought it pretty dull."

"I had a letter from him a couple of days ago," said Irene cheerfully. "He says that he's coming back to St. Frank's soon. Do you think he means it?"

"Of course he means it," said McClure. "I'll guarantee that he's back here within a fortnight—probably within a week. St. Jim's is a jolly good school, but Handy never ought to have gone there. The silly ass knows jolly well that St. Frank's is his real school, and he's just coming to his senses."

"Oh, well, let's hope that he can wangle it all right," smiled Irene. "But it might be difficult for him to leave St. Jim's now. Supposing his father objects?"

"That'll only make him all the more determined to come back to St. Frank's," replied Church promptly.

The little party did not keep to the lane. After about half a mile, they took to the meadows, and soon found themselves within the rolling expanse of Edgemore Park. It was much more pleasant, strolling here; and it was a short cut, too. By taking this route, they would arrive at the gala ground sooner.

It was a delightful walk, for there was shade most of the way, and the scenery in itself was some of the loveliest in the district.

The absent Handforth had been dismissed from the conversation by this time, and the schoolboys and schoolgirls were now discussing a picturesque little lodge which peeped out from between the trees just ahead. The gala ground itself was not visible, for a belt of lordly chestnuts hid that festive scene completely.

"Yes, this must be the South Lodge," remarked Nipper. "There are two or three lodges, but most of them are empty."

"This one isn't empty," remarked Mary. "I can see a couple of men standing just outside the door."

As the party approached they could also see that the two men were looking anxious and troubled. Although they were talking together, they were both looking earnestly towards the Manor, and if their attention wandered at any time, it was only to glance at their watches.

"Yes, it does seem queer," agreed Stan worriedly.

The two men had only given a single glance at the approaching group of schoolboys and schoolgirls. Then they had turned their attention once more towards the picturesque path which led through the chestnuts towards the Manor.

"Is there anything we can do?" asked Nipper politely.

"I don't know that there is, young gent," replied the man who had spoken first. "Still, if you're on your way to the Manor House, I'd just like you to find out if Mr. Bryan has come yet."

"Mr. Bryan?"

"My guv'nor," explained the man. "I'm Millar—Joe Millar."

"Oh, I see!" said Nipper. "Mr. Bryan, I suppose, is the boss of the Colosseum Troupe?"

"That's it!" said the man, nodding. "We can't make out why him and the others haven't turned up. They ought to have been here a couple of hours ago. Not a word from 'em, either. If they were held up on the road, or somethin' like that, they would have telephoned."

"And you've heard nothing?" put in Reggie Pitt.

"Not a thing."

"Then they'll turn up soon!" said Reggie comfortingly. "No news is generally good news. Perhaps they've had a delay, and they know there's no fixed time for this show, anyhow. Don't worry yourselves."

"The young gent is right, Joe," remarked Stan. "What's the good of worrying, anyhow? We've got everything ready here—all fixed up. So there won't be any delay when the guv'nor blows in."

Nipper glanced towards the lodge.

"I suppose this place is being used as a kind of dressing-room, eh?" he asked.

"You've got it, sir!" said Joe Millar. "We've prepared two rooms already—one for Miss Zoe, and the other for the boys."

"The boys?" repeated Irene politely.

Joe Millar grinned.

"Well, you see, miss, it ain't exactly official, but there's no reason why you shouldn't know," he said confidentially. "The Colosseum Troupe is a kind of family affair, as you might say. Mr. Bryan is my boss—Dick Bryan, one of the cleverest riders that ever appeared in a circus."

Tessa Love raised her eyebrows.

"Why, you must mean Dakota Dick," she said with interest.

"That's 'im, missie—Dakota Dick," said Joe. "Well, I'm blowed! You speak as if you've met the guv'nor."

"So I have," replied Tessa, smiling. "It was some years ago, when I was quite a small girl."

She did not add that she had met Dakota Dick during those days when she had been with the famous Onions Circus.



CHAPTER 9.

Very Mysterious!

"CAN'T understand it, Stan," said one of the men, shaking his head. "The guv'nor has never done anything like this before. Never! Not as long as I've known him!"

"Yes, it's a sort of family affair," proceeded Joe. "There's the gov'nor, and then there's Mr. Zack, and young Sammy and Miss Zoe."

"One sister and three brothers?" asked Reggie Pitt.

"That's the whole shoot!" agreed Joe. "Dakota Dick, Zoe and Zack, the dare-devil tight-rope walkers, and Sammy Simple, the clown. They've been on their own for a year or two now. Got tired of circuses. Pays better, too."

"I hope we shall meet them after they've given their performance," said Nipper. "But I had an idea that there was going to be quite a big company," he added.

"Oh, they're bringing a tidy crowd of extra men—supers—from Bannington, I think," replied Joe, as he took another look at his watch. "That's what I can't understand. Even the supers ain't turned up! Nobody's turned up! The gov'nor told me yesterday that he'd be here not later than two o'clock, and now it's nigh on three."

"Perhaps they've been delayed on the road," suggested Irene.

"It ain't like the gov'nor to be delayed, missie," growled Joe. "He's a rare prompt 'un, is Mr. Dick."

"Well, is there anything that we can do?" asked Nipper. "I expect we shall be seeing Lord Edgemore—"

"Then you might just have a word with his lordship, sir," said Joe Millar. "If the gov'nor hasn't turned up, you might ask his lordship to give a ring through to Helmford, just to ask what time they left."

"To Helmford?"

"They gave a show at the Winter Garden, Helmford, last night," explained Joe. "The manager there is a good sort, and he'll tell you like a shot if he knows anything."

"All right," said Nipper. "As soon as I see Lord Edgemore, I'll ask him. And if we get any information we'll come along and tell you."

"That's very good of you, young gent," said Joe. "Thanks. All I hope is that nothing has happened on the way."

The St. Frank's fellows and the Moor View girls then continued on their way towards the gala ground. They were glad that they had stopped at the little lodge, and had had the conversation with the two men.

"This makes it all the more interesting," remarked Reggie Pitt. "So the Colosseum Troupe is a kind of happy family?"

"Dakota Dick is the eldest brother," explained Tessa. "I met him once, in the old days—in the circus."

"You'll have to introduce us," suggested Fullwood.

"Oh, I don't suppose he'd remember me!" laughed Tessa.

At that moment they came within sight of the gala ground, and the subject was dropped. For it was a very gay scene that now spread itself in front of their eyes.

The great marquee was thronged inside and out, and there was a merry clatter of crockery and a hum of laughing voices. Bunting was floating in the afternoon breeze, gay and colourful.

The whole place was literally swarming with the Earl of Edgemore's tenants, the adults being just as numerous as the youngsters. And everybody appeared to be enjoying themselves immensely.



CHAPTER 10.

Startling News!

THE EARL OF EDGE-MORE, smiling and happy, gave Nipper and Co. a warm greeting when they encountered him on the wide terrace overlooking the gala grounds.

"I am very glad to see you all here, boys," said the old earl with genuine delight. "Things are beginning to move, eh? The old man is no longer a hermit!" he added with a chuckle. "In fact, he's getting quite gay."

"It's not fair to call yourself an old man, sir!" smiled Nipper. "It's splendid of you to give such a treat to the local people—and to us, too."

"Well, I hope it will be a treat for you," said the earl simply. "I was half-afraid that this gala would be too—too uninteresting to meet the tastes of the modern schoolboy."

"Don't you believe it, sir!" said Reggie Pitt promptly. "There's nothing we like better than a good time of this sort."

Practically all the St. Frank's fellows and the Moor View girls had distributed themselves over the gala grounds by now, and only Nipper and Pitt and Fullwood and Travers had come to seek out the earl.

"I am very glad to hear you expressing these views, my dear boys," said the earl, as he beamed upon the juniors. "It proves that we cannot believe all we hear about the modern schoolboy, eh? Well, I fancy that the Colosseum Troupe will provide some very excellent entertainment—"

"Have they come, sir?" put in Nipper quickly.

"I'm afraid not," replied his lordship with a frown. "I can't quite understand it, either. Mr. Bryan, the leader of the troupe, assured me that he would be here not later than two o'clock to-day. But, as far as I can gather, he has not yet arrived."

"That's what we really came to speak to you about, sir," said Nipper. "We've been having a talk with those men at the lodge, and they're very anxious. They wanted us to find out if anything had been heard of the troupe."

"I know nothing," replied Lord Edgemore. "I assume, however, that the performers will



"Well, I'm jiggered!" ejaculated Brewster, of the River House School! "All these—these Indians are St. Frank's fellows!" "Yes," said one of the Indians. "And this is where we get our own back. Down with the Palefaces! Wirroo! Let's have their scalps!" And with wild, fiendish cries, the "Indians" performed a war dance round the dismayed Brewster and Co.

present themselves at the Manor—and, as a matter of fact, I have a man all ready to escort them to their own quarters."

"And haven't you heard anything, sir?" asked Travers.

"Nothing."

"Well, one of the men at the Lodge suggested that we should get you to ring up Helmford, sir," said Nipper. "They were at the Winter Garden last night, I think, and if you ring up you may be able to get hold of some news."

"I will certainly do so," said the earl promptly.

"Thanks very much, sir."

"You had better come with me, young men," continued his lordship. "Not that I really think there is any cause for concern. Mr. Bryan would not disappoint me. I am afraid the gala will be a dreadful fiasco if the Colosseum Troupe fails to turn up."

Willy Handforth joined the juniors at this moment, and he doffed his cap politely to the earl.

"Ah, Willy, and how are you?" asked his lordship. "I think I have the name right, eh? You're the young gentleman who made himself so useful during that unfortunate Gore-Pearce affair, eh?"

"I wasn't more useful than any of the other fellows, sir," replied Willy cheerfully. "You're doing us grand, sir. The grub's ripping, and if the show is of the same order, we shan't have anything to grumble at."

Lord Edgemore chuckled, and went indoors. The juniors accompanied him, and

presently they found themselves in the stately library. They stood silent and attentive while their host got through on the telephone to the Winter Garden at Helmford.

"This is Lord Edgemore speaking," said the old peer at length. "I would like to have a few words with the manager—I beg your pardon? Oh, I see! You are the manager? Splendid!"

"Is there anything I can do, my lord?" came a polite voice over the wire.

"I am really sorry to trouble you," replied the earl. "I only want to know when the Colosseum Troupe left Helmford. You may not be in a position to tell me—"

"I think I am, my lord," replied the manager of the Winter Garden. "They went off this morning somewhere—and I believe it was to Brighton."

"Brighton!" ejaculated the earl, startled. "But, good gracious! Why on earth should they go to Brighton?"

"Well, as it was an off-day for them—"

"An off-day!" echoed Lord Edgemore. "Surely you must be mistaken, sir? Did you not know that the Colosseum Troupe had been booked to appear at a gala here, in Edgemore, to-day?"

An ejaculation came over the wire.

"Well, I knew that, of course," said the manager. "But Dick Bryan had a telegram from you this morning, Lord Edgemore."

"A telegram—from me?" repeated his lordship. "Nothing of the kind, sir! I sent him no telegram!"

"Then it's very rummy, my lord," said the manager, in a puzzled voice. "Dick Bryan came to me this morning, looking quite pleased with himself. He showed me the telegram, too—and it was signed in your name."

"This—this is extraordinary!" ejaculated his lordship.

"Looks like a hoax, my lord," replied the manager. "But Dick Bryan wasn't to know that, of course."

"What did it say in this—this preposterous telegram?"

"Why, it cancelled the whole affair," replied the manager. "At least, it postponed it. In the telegram you said that the gala wasn't going to take place until Wednesday, and that you were willing to pay all additional expenses—"

"Good heavens!" said Lord Edgemore. "This is most remarkable! And—and you tell me that the Bryan family have gone off to Brighton?"

"So I understood, my lord," replied the manager. "Anyhow, they went away two or three hours ago. They may have gone to some other place, for all I know. But I have a recollection that Dick Bryan said something about Brighton."

"This means, I suppose, that you cannot possibly get in touch with them?"

"I'm afraid it can't be done," said the manager. "I don't know where they are—and I can't get at 'em, either."

A minute later, Lord Edgemore hung up the receiver, and he looked at the surprised St. Frank's juniors with deep concern in his eyes. In a few words, he explained to them the situation, and they were all excited and mystified.

"It beats me, sir!" said Nipper, scratching his head. "Who on earth could have sent that bogus telegram? And why?"

"Because some mischievous, evil person is anxious to spoil the afternoon," replied Lord Edgemore grimly. "It is a contemptible, despicable thing! What am I to do? How am I to explain? There are hundreds of people here—close upon a thousand! What am I to tell them? The Colosseum Troupe is out of reach, and there can be no performance of any kind! This—this is nothing less than a catastrophe!"

And the agitated earl paced up and down, his brow troubled, his eyes filled with concern.

But Nipper's eyes, curiously enough, were sparkling with sudden inspiration!



CHAPTER 11.

The Great Wheeze!

LORD EDMORE halted, and he stood before the juniors with clenched fists.

"We are helpless—quite helpless!" he said sadly. "It is absolutely

impossible to engage any substitute artists at such short notice. And there are these hundreds of people here—the majority of them simple country folk, with their children. What a disappointment it will be for them! I am very upset. I am more grieved than I can say."

"But who can have done it, sir?" asked Reggie Pitt, scratching his head. "Why should anybody try to spoil the afternoon?"

"Even the best of us have enemies, my boy," replied the earl quietly. "Is it not obvious that some malicious, evil-minded person sent that bogus telegram? The object, of course, was to injure me in the eyes of all my tenants. These people will be terribly disappointed when the performance does not take place, and the gala, instead of being a success, will be a dreadful failure. How can I tell them?" he added in distraction. "What can I say?"

He continued to pace up and down, and then Nipper caught his arm and pulled him to a standstill.

"Listen, sir!" said the Remove skipper eagerly. "I've got an idea."

The old earl stared at him.

"Do you mean that you will be able to find these performers——" he began.

"Well, no, sir," replied Nipper. "I don't see how we can possibly find the Colosseum Troupe. And even if we could find them, by some miraculous means, they would never be able to get here in time. If this show is going to be a success, a start will have to be made within the next half-hour."

The earl turned to one of the great windows, and he stood looking out over the gardens towards the gala ground.

"Yes, you are right!" he agreed. "There can be no prolonged delay. Even now the balloon is waiting—with crowds expectantly gathering round it."

"Sammy Simple, the clown, was going to make a parachute descent, sir, wasn't he?" asked Willy.

"Yes," said the earl. "But what can happen now? We have no substitutes. And there is the broncho riding, and the trapeze act, the tight-rope walking— Upon my soul! Nothing can be done! Absolutely nothing! We are helpless!"

"But I don't think so, sir!" urged Nipper. "If you'll let us go ahead with this idea of mine——"

"What idea?" interrupted his lordship wonderingly. "You just told me that there is no chance of getting these people here."

"I know that, sir," said Nipper. "But why not let us give the show?"

"Us!" yelled the other juniors.

"You!" said the earl, staring. "Upon my word! Surely you are attempting to be humorous——"

"I am not, sir!" said Nipper. "And when I say 'us,' I don't mean Reggie Pitt, or Fullwood, or myself, or anybody else in this room. But just consider what these Bryan brothers and their sister do. The chief of the show is Dakota Dick, and he gives a perform-

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ance on his broncho. Then there are Zoe and Zack, who do stunts on the tight-rope and on the trapeze. We needn't bother about Sammy Simple. He's only a bit of make-weight, anyhow."

"But, my dear boy——"

"Please hear me out, sir!" said Nipper earnestly. "In the Remove we've got a fellow named Jerry Dodd. He's an Australian, and his pony, Bud, is an absolute marvel at doing tricks, and all that sort of thing. He can take Dakota Dick's place as easily as winking!"

"Nipper, old man," murmured Pitt, "you're a genius!"

"Jerry Dodd is an absolute wonder, sir!" continued Nipper, still clutching at the earl's arm. Of course, he may not be so good as Dakota Dick, but who will know the difference? And then, again! We've got a fellow named Johnny Onions——"

"He's in my House, sir!" said Reggie. "By Jingo! Johnny is the very fellow! He's an absolute terror on a tight-rope and on the trapeze!"

"This chap used to be in a circus, sir!" said Nipper, before the earl could interrupt. "You know him—Johnny Onions! And then there's Tessa Love, of the Moor View School. She was in the same circus with Johnny, and they used to do their performances together. In fact, they're both expert tight-rope walkers and trapeze artists. They can easily take the place of Zoe and Zack."

"And if it comes to the parachute descent, what about me?" put in Willy coolly. "I can take the place of Sammy Simple——"

"Certainly not!" said Lord Edgemore promptly. "Good gracious, no! I cannot allow you to risk your life, young man, in this rash and foolhardy manner."

"There's nothing in making a parachute descent, sir!" protested Willy.

"Nevertheless, I forbid it!" said the earl. "I won't hear of it!"

"Well, we'll cut out the parachute descent, sir," said Nipper. "It's the tight-rope walking and the broncho act and the trapeze stuff that matters most."

"H'm!" said Lord Edgemore, pacing up and down, and pursing his lips. "Upon my soul, boys, I hardly know what to say. It is generous of you to make these suggestions—to think of helping me. But I am very dubious. I'm very uncertain."

"But surely it will be better than nothing, sir?" asked Nipper. "You must admit that! You can't possibly get the Colosseum Troupe here now, and our chaps and Tessa Love will do themselves justice. Any kind of show is better than none at all!"

"In that, of course, you are perfectly right," said the earl, his eyes gleaming.

"Well, boys, have your own way!"

"Thanks awfully, sir."

"But I do not think you have realised the difficulties," continued the earl. "What of your costumes?"

"They're all ready, in the lodge, sir," said Nipper promptly. "We've only got to arrange with Joe Millar, and everything will be as right as rain. Leave it to us, sir! My idea is to tell the crowd nothing, and then everybody will think that the genuine Colos-

seum Troupe has been performing. It'll be heaps better to keep them in the dark. There'll be no disappointment, and the whole gala will go off as merrily as marriage bells."

Before Lord Edgemore could change his mind, or raise any further objections, the juniors dashed out of the Manor, and they gathered the clans together. And, in the general excitement, it was not noticed that Willy Handforth was conspicuous by his absence!



CHAPTER 12.

Willy on the Job!

“O he forbids it, does he?” said Willy Handforth grimly. “Well, we’ll see about that!”

Willy was walking rapidly towards the South Lodge, having left the gala grounds well behind. He was quite alone, and he was looking very determined. In one way, he was very much like his elder brother, the celebrated Edward Oswald. Once he made up his mind to a thing, he went ahead with it, and the mere fact that he had been forbidden to do it only added to his zeal.

“We’re not going to leave this game entirely in the hands of the Remove!” he told himself. “Not likely! The Third’s going to have a look in!”

The Third, of course, had not been consulted in the matter, and was not likely to be consulted. Willy was a bit of an autocrat. What he said “went.” And just now he had set his heart upon impersonating the absent Sammy Simple, and he knew that the only way to accomplish his purpose was to step lively.

“It’s now or never!” he muttered, as he came within sight of the lodge. “And I believe it’ll need a bit of wangling, too.”

With perfect coolness, he approached Joe Millar, who was looking anxiously towards him and wondering, probably, if he had brought any news.

“Hallo!” said Willy cheerily. “Still waiting?”

Joe Millar was a friendly kind of man, but he frowned as he heard Willy’s tone. There was something rather trivial about it—as though Willy considered the delay a matter of no importance. But the wily Third Former was playing a little game of his own, and he was anxious that the dodge should work without any hitch.

“Yes, my fine young gentleman, I’m still waiting!” said Joe grimly. “You’re one of the younger boys, ain’t you? You’re not one of those young gents who went to make inquiries, are you?”

“Those Remove chaps?” said Willy. “Not likely! At the same time, I can give you some information, if you want it.”

“About the gov’nor?”

“Yes, about Mr. Bryan and the other members of the Colosseum Troupe,” nodded Willy. “They’re not coming here to-day.”

“Look here, my lad—”

“Fact, I assure you!” said Willy, with exasperating coolness. “Your gov’nor and his brothers and sister have gone off to Brighton, or somewhere like that. They’re on the spree to-day.”

“If you’re tryin’ to be funny, young ‘un, I might as well tell you that I’m not in a humour to appreciate it!” growled Joe Millar.

“I’m sorry about that,” said Willy. “But the truth is the truth. I’ve heard it officially, as you might say. From Lord Edgemore himself. He ‘phoned up to the Winter Garden, Helmford, and they told him that the Colosseum Troupe had gone off to Brighton.”

Willy spoke with an air of supreme indifference—as though the movements of the Colosseum Troupe meant absolutely nothing. In fact, he was exasperatingly cheerful about it, and he produced precisely the effect that he desired.

“They’ve gone to Brighton!” ejaculated Joe Millar blankly, as his friend, Stan, came up. “Did you hear that, Stan? This young gent says that the gov’nor has gone to Brighton with Miss Zoe and the boys!”

“Don’t you believe it, Joe,” said Stan stolidly.

“Some practical joker sent them a dud telegram,” grinned Willy. “Rather a jape, eh? If you don’t believe me, then go and ask Lord Edgemore. Anyhow, you won’t see the Colosseum Troupe here to-day.”

Joe Millar glanced quickly at his companion.

“We’d best go, Stan!” he said anxiously. “I’m fed up with this suspense, anyhow. The gov’nor ought to have been here hours ago. Come on! We’ll go and have a word with his lordship, and find out the real truth.”

Both the men strode off, without giving Willy another glance. Indeed, they almost went at the double, and they soon vanished behind the fringe of chestnuts. Willy stood there, in front of the lodge, grinning with calm triumph.

“I thought that would do the trick!” he murmured. “There’s nothing like telling the truth! But I used exactly the right tone—and those poor chaps didn’t know what to think. And here I am, all on my ownsome, with the lodge open to me.”

He knew there was no time to waste, for it was quite possible that Joe Millar would meet Nipper & Co. within a minute or two. Therefore it behoved Willy to work quickly.

He ran into the lodge, and he found that the two front rooms had been prepared as dressing-rooms. He only gave a glance into one, where he beheld some fluffy dresses and some dainty shoes. This place was obviously not for him.

He went into the other dressing-room, and his eyes gleamed.

Here he found a complete cowboy’s outfit, and other costumes—including the appropriate garb for a clown.

"It's as easy as rolling off a form!" murmured Willy gleefully.

On a long table, he found all the necessary grease-paints and materials for make-up. Joe Millar was a conscientious man, and he had left nothing undone. It took Willy about three minutes to get into the clown's costume, and he was delighted to find that it fitted him to perfection. Sammy Simple, no doubt, was a very small young man, and it was for this reason that he had been selected as the parachutist.

Willy, who had some little knowledge of amateur theatricals, quickly whitened his face and daubed himself with colours; by the time he had donned the wig his own personality had completely vanished, and he looked a clown from top to toe.

Hanging on a nail, he also found an airman's crash helmet and some goggles. But they were not of the ordinary kind. They were highly coloured and grotesque, and were evidently meant to go with the clown's outfit. He donned them, and he chuckled gleefully as he eyed his reflection in the mirror.

"Good egg!" he said. "Sammy Simple is going to make the parachute descent, after all! I'd like to see anybody stop me now!"

He dodged out of the lodge, glanced up and down, and found that the coast was clear. Then, making his way through the trees, he cut straight across, and in less than a minute he was mingling with the crowds in the gala grounds.

Shouts were going up, and a wave of excitement passed through the throng.

"Here comes the clown!"

"Hurrah!"

"They're going to start the fun!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Willy was capering about with amazing energy, much to the delight of the smaller children. As he progressed, he turned somersaults and cartwheels, and nobody suspected, even for a second, that he was merely a St. Frank's junior. Yet there were plenty of St. Frank's fellows there watching him, amused by his antics. Even his own chums, Chubby Heath and Juicy Lemon, watched him and guessed nothing.

The game of bluff had begun in earnest!



CHAPTER 13.

An Unexpected Development!

"GREAT Scott!" said Reggie Pitt, in astonishment.

He and Nipper and a number of others were hurrying towards the lodge. Word had already been passed round, and a good many Removites were prepared for the exciting work that had been planned.

Jerry Dodd and Johnny Onions had been told of the scheme, and they were filled with great enthusiasm. Here was a chance for

them to give of their best, and they were not going to let the kindly old earl down!

"What's the matter, Reggie?" asked Nipper, glancing at the West House Junior leader.

"Look over there!" said Pitt, pointing. "Ye gods and little fishes! Has somebody made a bloomer? Are we going to be dished, after all?"

"My dear chap, what on earth are you talking about?"

"Nothing much—only that the Colosseum Troupe seems to have turned up!" replied Reggie gruffly.

"What!" gasped the others.

And then they saw the reason for Reggie's statement. They were all on a little hillock, and they could see right down into the gala grounds. And there, near the big marquee, a crowd of children were pressing round an agile, somersaulting figure. It was the figure of a clown! And this clown, moreover, was clearly on his way towards the captive balloon!

"Well, I'm jiggered!" said Nipper, with a whistle.

"Well, I'm glad," said Jerry Dodd sportingly. "We should have done our best, but there's no denying that the real troupe——"

"Real troupe?" interrupted Nipper. "Don't you believe it, Jerry! The real troupe hasn't turned up."

"What about that clown, then?"

"I'll eat my hat if I haven't seen that particular type of cartwheel before!" said Nipper keenly. "That's no clown over there. It's young Willy, of the Third!"

"Good gad!" ejaculated Archie, dropping his monocle. "You don't absolutely mean to say that Willy has already——"

"Yes, Archie," said Nipper. "While we've been collecting the chaps together, Willy has been acting."

"Acting the goat, I should think!" said Fullwood, frowning.

"Rats!" grinned Nipper. "Good luck to him! He's carrying on the good work! Just like him, of course, to ignore the earl's orders. Willy means to make that parachute descent!"

"Oughtn't we to do something?" asked Travers languidly. "Or do you think that the dear young fellow will be safe?"

"Of course he'll be safe," replied Nipper. "It's a perfect day, and the balloon is captive, and you can be quite certain that the parachute will be absolutely effective. Let him get on with it—and good luck to him!"

"Oh, rather!" said Archie. "Absolutely! Chunks of good luck to him, in fact!"

"Well, we mustn't waste any time here watching," continued Nipper briskly. "Our job is to get to that lodge as quickly as we can, and to fix things up with Joe Millar. It's all the more important now, because Willy has started the ball rolling. Besides, the time's getting on. People are expecting the fun to begin."



Bud went round the enclosure like a streak, bucking in the most extraordinary way, and doing his utmost to unseat his rider. "Indians!" The excitement increased when it was noticed that a number of Indians were creeping up in the rear of the pony and rider.

Just then Church and McClure came hurrying up, with Harry Gresham and De Valerie.

"We can't find Tessa anywhere!" said Church, with concern. All the newcomers were perspiring freely, and they were looking disappointed, too.

"We've searched every inch of the giddy ground!" added Harry Gresham, mopping his brow with a handkerchief. "Somebody told us that Tessa had gone off with your sister, Pitt. But we can't find either of them."

"Then buzz back as quickly as you can," said Nipper, before Reggie Pitt could speak. "Tessa must be found! It's absolutely imperative! She's in the grounds somewhere—or perhaps in the Manor. Keep on looking until you find her, and then bring her straight to the lodge."

"And supposing we don't find her?" asked McClure.

"There mustn't be any supposing about it, Mac," replied Nipper. "There's no immediate hurry—because Jerry Dodd can do his turn first. While he's getting into the cowboy's outfit, two or three of our chaps have buzzed to St. Frank's to fetch Bud, the pony. They'll be back at any minute now."

While Nipper & Co. hurried off towards the lodge, and the other juniors went in search of Tessa, Willy Handforth had arrived at the captive balloon. Crowds were surging round now, laughing uproariously at Willy's antics.

Like a monkey, Willy leapt at the edge of the big basket, and a moment later he was inside, face to face with the aeronaut.

This gentleman was a middle-aged man, lean and businesslike. He had been sent specially down from London, at Lord Edgemore's request, and, fortunately, he was not closely acquainted with the Bryan brothers. He took it for granted that this painted clown was the genuine article.

As it was already past the fixed time for the ascent, he quickly gave instructions to his men, and preparations were made for an immediate ascent.

Willy, in the basket, noted with satisfaction that the parachute was there, and one of the men strapped this securely round the fag's body.

Five minutes later, as Nipper & Co. were approaching the lodge, they beheld the captive balloon mounting higher and higher into the blue heavens.

"Young Willy deserves a medal for this!" said Nipper approvingly. "He's—" And then the Remove skipper stopped, startled. For as he and his companions turned round a clump of chestnuts, they came face to face with a number of determined-looking juniors.

They were Hal Brewster & Co., of the River House School.

And, incidentally, Hal Brewster & Co. were looking grim, determined, and relentless.

There was something about their attitudes—about their expressions—which boded ill for the smaller St. Frank's force!

CHAPTER 14.

The Disaster!



HAL BREWSTER'S mind worked rapidly. During the first instant of this dramatic encounter,

he saw that he and his followers were in much greater strength than the Saints. All



Bud went round the enclosure like a streak, bucking in rider. "Indians!" The excitement increased when it of the

told, there were only about ten Remove fellows, with Nipper at their head. The rest of the conspirators were scattered all over the gala grounds, eagerly looking for Tessa Love; and some of the others had gone to St. Frank's to fetch Jerry Dodd's pony, and to make other arrangements.

Only Nipper and his immediate supporters—the ringleaders, in fact—were making their way to the lodge, so that they could fix things up with Joe Millar. And now, unexpectedly, they had run right into this River House crowd!

Nearly all the Commoners were there. For, in addition to Hal Brewster & Co., and



Many way, and doing his utmost to unseat his number of Indians were creeping up in the rear

their immediate friends, there were others. Driscoll and Buller and Pringle, of Study No. 5, were there; Littlewood, Mann, and Palmer, of Study No. 8; Hadley, Commerford, and Grant, of Study No. 11; and Hawes and Knight and Lacey, of Study No. 12. In short, there were well over a

score of the River House juniors, and Nipper and Co. were outnumbered by two to one.

"By Jove!" ejaculated Hal Brewster grimly.

In a flash, he remembered his discomfiture earlier in the week—when these Saints had "bagged" his precious hamper, and when he and his small force had been wiped up. Now was the time for his revenge!

"Come on, you fellows!" shouted Brewster suddenly. "No time to ask questions! On 'em! Down with the Saints!"

"Hurrah!" roared the other River House fellows enthusiastically.

"Hold on!" shouted Nipper urgently. "You don't understand, Brewster! This isn't an ordinary—"

"Rats!" sang out Brewster. "This is where we get out our own back!"

"But listen!" roared Nipper. "Make it pax this time, Brewster! It's gala day, and—"

"Pax!" yelled Brewster. "That's likely, isn't it? No fear!"

"Odds mishaps and tragedies!" ejaculated Archie Glenthorne. "I mean, what about the good old performance, laddies? These blighters appear to be out for blood, as it were!"

"They don't understand!" said Pitt breathlessly. "And, by the look of them, they're not going to make any inquiries, either!"

The next second the River House juniors were at it hammer and tongs. Nipper and Pitt and Archie and the others fought gamely, and they put up a terrific resistance. But what hope was there for them? They were overwhelmed by the strength of the opposing force.

"Listen, Hal!" panted Nipper, as he fought desperately with Brewster and Ascott. "We'd take our gruel willingly at any ordinary time, but this is different! The Colosseum Troupe—"

"Yes, I know all about it!" interrupted Hal Brewster, as he seized Nipper by the scruff of the neck and hauled him down on to the grass, ably assisted by two of his companions. "The Colosseum Troupe is going to perform, eh? And you chaps want to see the show?"

"I rather think they'll be disappointed!" grinned Ascott.

"You're wrong!" gurgled Nipper. "The Colosseum Troupe hasn't turned up, and —"

But Brewster was not listening. Near by, one of the prisoners was yelling at the top of his voice, and one or two of the other defeated Saints were taking up the cry.

"Rescue, Remove!" they shouted. "Rescue, St. Franks!"

"Here, quick!" gasped Brewster. "Gag these fatheads! There are tons of St. Frank's chaps about, and if a rescue party comes

along we shall be overwhelmed! Gag the idiots!"

"We're doing it!" panted Kingswood.

The confusion was terrific. But there was no longer any fighting. All the St. Frank's fellows were flat on their backs in the grass. They were held down by their victorious rivals; and although they were attempting to explain, nobody would listen to them. In the general babble, the true situation was not understood.

How was it possible, in any case, for Hal Brewster to appreciate the peculiar misfortune of this scrap? He knew nothing about the Colosseum Troupe and their failure to turn up. He knew nothing of Claude Gore-Pearce's vindictive bogus telegram. All innocently he had captured the leaders of the St. Frank's Remove—and among these prisoners were Jerry Dodd and Johnny Onions, two of the star performers for the forthcoming entertainment!

Without Nipper to manage the entire programme, and without the performers, nothing could be done. Here they were, captives in the hands of their River House rivals! And to make the situation more galling still, they were not allowed to explain matters.

"This is what I call poetic justice!" grinned Brewster, as he deftly tied a handkerchief round Nipper's mouth. "That's the style! Now, my fine prisoner, what about it? You can talk all you like, and I shan't even attempt to stop you!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled some of the other River House boys.

Nipper vainly tried to work the gag free, and his face was red with anxiety and consternation. But Hal Brewster misunderstood the message in Nipper's eyes; he thought that the St. Frank's leader was merely angry at his discomfiture.

"Are they all gagged and bound?" asked Brewster, as he stood up.

"Every one of 'em!" said Littlewood, with a grin. "And now, what are we going to do with them, Brewster? We can't leave them here."

"Well, no," admitted Hal Brewster thoughtfully. "We shall have to do something with them, I suppose. But one thing is jolly certain. They're not going to see the gala performance. We'll dish these fatheads out of all the fun. It'll be a lesson to them!"

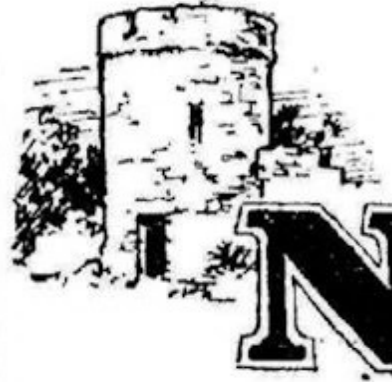
"Yes, rather!"

"Serve 'em jolly well right!"

"They pinched our tuck, so we'll spoil their fun for the afternoon!"

"Hear, hear!"

Nipper & Co. writhed helplessly as their rivals stood over them. The disaster was complete!



CHAPTER 15.

Prisoners!

NIPPER'S feelings were too deep for words, even if he could have uttered them, as he sprawled on his back in the grass with two River House juniors sitting on him, with his ankles and wrists bound, and with his mouth gagged.

The success of the gala had depended upon swift action—and now these River House fellows had ruined the whole game.

They had done so innocently, it was true. Their only object in capturing the Saints was to "get their own back." There was nothing vindictive in it—nothing unsporting. In fact, it was rather a good joke to capture these St. Frank's fellows, and to prevent them from seeing the performance. Little did Brewster & Co. dream that they had captured the performers themselves!

Nipper had only one hope, and this was shared by Reggie Pitt and Travers and most of the other prisoners. The rest of the Remove would soon be coming along—might appear at any second. If this happened all would be well, for the River House crowd would be routed. And then, after a few explanations, Hal Brewster might possibly feel glad that his plan had failed.

Unfortunately, the rest of the Remove was conspicuous by its absence.

Seldom had Nipper felt so exasperated. At any other time he might have welcomed a good old "mill" with Hal Brewster & Co., and he wouldn't have grumbled so much if he and his supporters were defeated. But just now it meant not only a defeat, but a disaster for Lord Edgemore.

The Colosseum Troupe had failed to turn up, and now it seemed that the substitutes were to be placed out of the running. Could anything have been more unfortunate? And on Hal Brewster's part it was all so innocent.

"Well, what are we going to do with them?" asked Glynn, as he looked round at the captives. "We can't leave them here, Hal."

"No, I suppose not," said Brewster. "It won't be much good leaving them in the trees, either. There are so many people about that they might easily be found—"

"By jingo! I've got it!" ejaculated Ascott eagerly.

"Then trot it out, my son!"

"The old ruined priory!" said Ascott.

"The which?"

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"Edgemore Priory!" repeated Ascott. "You know it, you fathead! It's only two or three hundred yards away from here—in the middle of those big chestnuts. We used to explore it last summer—before Lord Edgemore came out of his shell."

Hal Brewster's eyes gleamed.

"I didn't know you were so brainy, Ascott, old man!" he said approvingly. "By Jove! You're right! The old priory ruins will just fit the bill! Buck up, you chaps! Grab these fatheads, and haul them along!"

To the added consternation of the Saints, they were seized and then bundled through the trees towards the prison that had been selected for them. Nipper's efforts to catch Brewster's eye were all in vain. Not one of these River House fellows understood the situation.

And Nipper & Co., when they heard what their fate was to be, gave up hope.

There would be no escape from the ruined priory. For they knew that old building, too. It was almost hidden amid the trees, and unless one was well acquainted with the geography of the district one would never have known that the priory was there.

In fact, there was practically nothing left of the place, except a mere ruined tower. Decay had long since removed all traces of the main building, and trees—tall and stately—were now growing where the original priory had stood.

There was just this tower, with the chestnuts hemming it in and hiding it from view.

Curiously enough, the steps inside the tower were in an excellent state of preservation. They led up in a circular fashion, and continued upwards until a great heavy door was encountered.

Nipper knew the place well, for he had been up to the top of that tower on several occasions. It was flat up there, with high battlements, and there was very little prospect of escape for any luckless prisoner who was placed there.

And now, to Nipper's dismay, he and his companions were dragged up those circular steps one after the other. When the top was reached they were thrust through the heavy doorway and placed in a circular fashion all round the top of the tower.

By this time the River House fellows were hot and breathless.

"It's been a bit of a struggle, but it's worth it!" said Brewster, grinning. "These asses will never escape from here! We'll come and release them after the gala is all over."

"That's the ticket!" chuckled Kingswood. "I rather think we can look upon this as a River House victory, eh?"

"You bet we can!" agreed Brewster, as he bent down over Nipper. "Well, Nipper, old man, what about it? Frightfully sorry to treat you like this, but you would have done just the same in my position."

"Burrhhh!" mumbled Nipper under his gag.

"Exactly!" nodded Brewster. "I quite agree, old son!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"We're going to leave you here now," continued Brewster. "You are quite open to the sky, but I don't quite see how any rescue can come. You are hidden from all eyes—surrounded by trees; at the top of this tower you could stay here for weeks and nobody would ever spot you. But in case any of you get free, we're going to close and bolt this door."

He turned, and most of the River House fellows cleared out.

"There's no ivy on these walls, so you won't be able to climb down," said Brewster genially. "You're prisoners, my lads—our prisoners. And here you'll stay until it is our pleasure to release you!"

Slam!

The great door closed, and Nipper & Co., grinding their teeth with helpless rage, heard the bolts shot home.

They were left alone, and very soon the chuckles of the departing River House boys faded into the distance. Overhead the prisoners could see the blue sky. But, as Brewster had said, they were hemmed in.

The high battlements formed a screen, and even if some of the visitors came near the tower they would see nothing. There was nothing whatever to show that the space at the top of the tower was filled with bound and gagged prisoners.

Without doubt it was a great victory for Brewster & Co.—but little did they appreciate what they had actually done!

CHAPTER 16.

Just Luck!



HAL BREWSTER grinned happily.

"Well, you fellows, we can enjoy ourselves now," he said

coolly. "I'm not a spiteful sort of fellow, but it'll just serve those Saints right to be dished out of the show."

"Yes, rather!" agreed Ascott. "They pinched our tuck the other day, and now we're having our own back."

"Of course, we won't leave them up in that tower too long," said Brewster. "About an hour will be enough, eh?"

"But you told them that we shouldn't release them until after the gala was over," put in Kingswood.

"That was only spoof," grinned Brewster. "We don't want to be vindictive, do we? An hour ought to do the trick all right. By that time, anyhow, most of the show will be over."

"Yes!" said Grant. "The balloon's going up now!"

"By Jove! So it is!"

The River House fellows had arrived on the gala ground by now, and they found a good deal of excitement. The captive balloon was mounting higher and higher, and everybody was staring upwards. Young and old—all were interested. The parachute descent was about to be made.

In the basket, Willy Handforth was feeling quite cool and collected. He was aware of the fact that his heart was throbbing a little more rapidly than usual, but this only added to his enjoyment. The balloon ascent, in itself, was a thrill. But he was looking forward to the joy of leaping out of the basket and falling like a stone, and then feeling the parachute open and checking his downward plunge.

His companion was busy with his controls, and he was keeping an eye, too, on the men below, who were operating the winch which paid the cable out and which allowed the balloon to rise higher and higher.

"There's a fair-sized crowd here," remarked the aeronaut, as he leaned over the edge of the basket and looked down at the great panorama of gay colour. "There's not very much wind, either; I think you'll have a good descent."

"Oh, I think so," agreed Willy, trying to make his voice deep.

"Done this sort of thing often?" inquired the other.

"Eh? Oh, this!" said Willy airily. "Dropping from balloons in parachutes, you mean? Why, there's nothing in it!"

"Well, it's safe, if that's what you mean," replied the aeronaut. "As safe as we can make it, at all events. On a fine day like this, there's practically no prospect of danger."

"None at all!" agreed Willy, as though he knew all about it. "There's not one chance in a thousand that the parachute won't open after I've made my jump—"

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"Won't open!" echoed the man in charge, staring. "Jump? What on earth are you talking about?"

"I'm going to jump from this balloon aren't I?"

"With an unopened parachute?" said the aeronaut, staring harder than ever.

"Of course I am," said Willy, with a trace of misgiving. "Isn't that the programme?"

"No, it isn't—and you ought to know it, too!" said the aeronaut suspiciously. "We're not doing stunts in the R.A.F.! This is merely an exhibition descent, and before you leave this basket the parachute will be completely open."

"Oh, I see!" said Willy. "Then I don't really jump?"

"No, you float down," replied the man. "And look here! I'm beginning to get a bit doubtful of you, young man! Is your name Bryan?"

"I don't see that that matters!" hedged Willy.

The aeronaut suddenly seized him by the shoulders, and looked closely into his painted face.

"By thunder!" panted the man. "What does this foolery mean? You're only a schoolboy!"

"Oh, come off it! You know jolly well that this——"

"Answer me!" shouted the other. "Are you a schoolboy, or not?"

"Oh, it doesn't much matter now," said Willy, seeing that further concealment was useless. "I'm a St. Frank's chap."

"Good heavens!"

"The Colosseum Troupe didn't turn up, and so——"

"This is outrageous!" said the aeronaut furiously. "How dare you play this practical joke on me?"

"But it's not a practical joke!" protested Willy. "The public wants to see the parachute descent, and we saw no reason why they should be disappointed. What difference does it make whether the real Sammy Simple does the trick, or whether I do it?"

"But you're not going to do it!" said the man hotly. "Do you think I'm going to let you—a mere schoolboy—risk your life——"

"I thought you just said that it was safe?"

"It is safe for an experienced man—but not for a schoolboy!" retorted the aeronaut.

"You can't play these tricks with me, young man! We're going down—as quickly as we can!"

Willy disliked the man's tone. Indeed, the fag could see that unless he acted quickly this parachute descent would be a fiasco. With a sudden movement he jerked the cord which released the folded masses of soft silk, and threw them overside.

"Stop it!" shouted the man in charge.

"Not likely!" replied Willy. "We're not going to disappoint the public!"

"You crazy young lunatic!" shouted the man. "I tell you we're going down! I'm not going to allow you to make this descent! I should never have come up if I had known the truth!"

"Oh, but look here!" urged Willy. "What harm is there in it? It's a fine day, and there can't be any danger. Think of all these people——"

"Look out!" shouted the aeronaut, in wild anxiety.

A gust of wind had caught the billowing folds of the parachute, and suddenly, unexpectedly, the silken masses opened out. A great cheer rose from the crowds beneath.

Almost in the space of a second, the parachute was fully opened, and Willy felt a strong, imperative tug at the cords.

"Unstrap the harness, you young fool!" shouted the aeronaut.

But Willy did nothing of the sort. And the next second, with a gasp of astonishment and wonder, Willy felt himself being pulled bodily out of the basket. His companion made a futile grab at him, and for a second he fouled the ropes which held the basket to the gasbag.

But then the parachute, soaring suddenly in the breeze, gave a tremendous impulse upwards, and Willy Handforth was literally swept out of the car and carried well clear of the balloon!



CHAPTER 17.

The Rescue!

"GOOD heavens!" panted the aeronaut in anguish.

He stared with frightened eyes as he

beheld Willy being carried further and further away from the captive balloon.

"Keep your hair on!" sang out Willy. "I'm all right!"

"Well, I'm hanged!" ejaculated the aeronaut, startled by Willy's calmness.

"And don't forget to keep up the little secret!" shouted Willy, as the breeze bore him further and further away. "Don't say a word to anybody down below—or you'll give the game away. Be a sportsman!"

"By gad, the boy's got spirit!" muttered the man in the balloon. "I'll keep his little secret, too."

Never for an instant did he take his gaze off the parachute. From below, he could hear the tumult of the crowd. Cheers were ringing out, and the majority of them were the shrill cheers of the delighted children. For practically all of Lord Edgemore's tenants had brought their families, and a large proportion of the crowd consisted of small boys and small girls.

Willy was in no way alarmed as he felt himself gently dropping towards the earth. The harness was strapped securely round his body, and he knew that he would be on *terra firma* within a minute or two. There was nothing to worry about.

The effect was most curious; it seemed to him that the earth was coming upwards to meet him. He was drifting with the breeze—drifting away from the gala grounds, far

off towards the stately chestnuts. Lower and lower he went, and the first rush of the crowd was checked. The people on the ground could see that the parachutist would descend well outside of the gala grounds, and the crowd contented itself by watching.

The novelty of the situation was now a thing of the past for Willy. Something else was giving him food for thought.

"This looks a bit tricky!" he murmured, as he bent his head and stared downwards. "This breeze is going to carry me right over those trees, and unless I'm jolly careful I shall perch in one of the topmost boughs, like a giddy crow!"

The prospect was not particularly enlivening, for Willy had no desire to be dumped into a tree top; the consequences would probably be serious.

Lower and lower!

Now, to his relief and satisfaction, he judged that he would just be carried clear of the tree tops, and so down into an open space beyond. All his uneasiness left him, and he took a lively interest in his surroundings.

His descent was now nearly over.

He was only eighty or ninety feet from the ground, and drifting over the tops of chestnuts. They seemed very close to him, and he could look down into the masses of foliage, and—

Suddenly, Willy's heart gave a jump. Leisurely, lazily, he was drifting right over the top of the old Priory tower, and from his elevated position he could see the flat top, with the battlements and the heavy old door. And, to his startled amazement, he beheld a number of bound and gagged figures lying there on the stonework!

"Well I'm blessed!" muttered Willy, bewildered.

He stared down harder than ever, for he was now immediately over the top of the tower—it was, indeed, only a few feet under him, and it was no means certain that he would clear the trees beyond—and during those tense seconds Willy recognised Archie Glenthorne, and Nipper—yes, and Vivian Travers. Then he had been carried beyond range, and all his attention was concentrated on a fresh problem.

His feet touched the tree tops, and for a moment he thought that he was going to be entangled. Then he got free, and the ground seemed to come up swiftly.

The delicate masses of the parachute caught in the outer branches of one of the chestnuts. There was a jerk, a tug, and then Willy felt himself check. But only for a second. There was a swishing of branches, a rustling of foliage, and a ripping of silken material.

"Now for it!" muttered Willy.

He was only a few feet from the ground, and he went down with a rush. His feet struck the turf, and he rolled over and over. In a flash he was on his feet, quite unhurt. He felt for the knife he knew to be in the pocket of his jacket under the clown's costume, found it, and then cut away the harness of the parachute from round his body.

"Well, that's that!" grinned Willy, with satisfaction. "I didn't think it was going to be so jolly easy!"

He drew a deep breath, and looked up and down. Nobody was within sight. From the distance, he could hear a faint echo of cheering, and he suddenly pulled himself together.

"There's sure to be somebody along here in a minute or two," he told himself, "and it seems to me that there's some work to be done before they arrive. My only hat! How the dickens did those fatheads get themselves into such a mess? Who shoved them up on the top of that tower? There's been dirty work at the cross-roads!"

Willy did not waste any time in idle conjecture. He hurried through the trees, and arrived at the base of the ruined tower. The next moment he was speeding up the circular stone stairway, and at last he reached the summit.

He jerked back the heavy bolt, and swung the door open. Then he stepped through, and stood grinning down at the bound figures of the captives. Many pairs of eyes were upon him—eyes that expressed hope and astonishment.

"Cheer up, my sons!" chuckled Willy. "Uncle has come to the rescue!"

He deftly unfastened Nipper's gag, and then he started on the bonds which held Nipper's wrists together.

"Thank goodness!" panted the leader of the Remove. "Good man, Willy! Talk about a bolt from the blue! You've literally come out of the heavens to help us!"

"Well, I didn't see any reason why I should be diddled out of that parachute descent!" said Willy cheerfully. "But, by jingo, what on earth have you chaps been doing to yourselves? How did you get into this mess?"

"It was those River House rotters!" panted Nipper, as he felt his wrists free. "Thanks! All right—I can untie my feet. Get busy on some of the others!"

Within a couple of minutes, all the prisoners were at liberty. They were standing up, stretching themselves, breathing hard, and generally making the air blue with regard to Brewster & Co.

"Well, well!" said Travers complacently. "Things aren't so bad as they seemed, dear old fellows. We've only been up here for five or ten minutes, and now we are freed. Not too late to get on with the good work, eh?"

"No; it certainly isn't too late!" agreed Nipper, with a nod. "But you fellows needn't be so bitter against Brewster & Co. They didn't understand the situation, and we never had a chance of explaining it to them. It's a jolly lucky thing for us that Willy spotted our plight."

"Oh, absolutely!" said Archie Glenthorne. "I mean to say, good gad! In other words, odds luck and providence! I was absolutely staggered when Willy appeared in the middle distance, hovering in mid-air like one of those dashed dragon-fly things!"

A minute later the St. Frank's fellows were descending the tower, helter-skelter—eager to

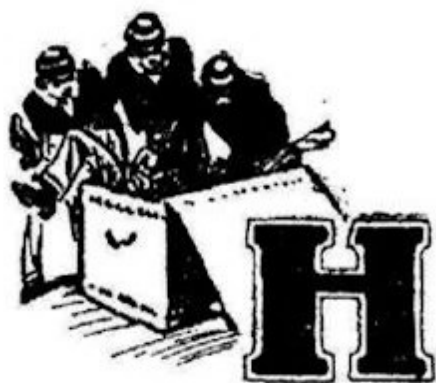


“Come on, you chaps—let’s get it over!” said Church. “All hands to the pump!” Gore-Pearce found himself whirled off his feet, and he howled wildly, utterly helpless in the hands of these determined juniors. Next moment he was receiving the “bumping” of his life!

proceed with their original plan. Thanks to Willy, all was well again.

CHAPTER 18.

More Trouble!



HURRYING through the trees by a round-about route, the juniors were just able to miss the section of the gala crowd which was hurrying on to the scene. The rest of the crowd was now eagerly awaiting the next item on the programme.

Nipper & Co. were determined to provide it! “We shall have to look sharp!” said Nipper, as they hurried along. “If we don’t, the public will be getting impatient, and then they might smell a rat.”

“Oh, well, it’ll be easy now,” said Reggie Pitt. “I expect those chaps have brought Bud to the lodge, and it won’t take Jerry Dodd a couple of minutes to get into that cowboy’s outfit.”

“You bet it won’t!” agreed the Australian junior. “I may not be such a good performer as Dakota Dick, but Bud is a dinkum pony,

and if his tricks don’t please the crowd I’m not a cornstalk!”

They emerged from the trees only a few yards from the picturesque little lodge, and they were rather surprised to find Tessa Love and Irene Manners and some other girls and fellows talking excitedly and animatedly with Joe Millar and his companion.

“It’s no good, young ladies—it can’t be done!” Joe Millar was saying. “And as for those other young gents, I ain’t seen ’em. They haven’t been here, anyhow.”

“Oh, look!” cried Winnie Pitt, as she glanced round. “Here they are!”

Nipper & Co. ran up, breathless.

“What’s the trouble?” asked Nipper quickly.

“Where the dickens have you chaps been to?” demanded Gresham. “We found Tessa, but when we got here you’d vanished! What have you been doing?”

“Never mind that now,” said Nipper. “We had a scrap with Brewster & Co., and they got the better of us. But here we are—and we can start the business straight away.”

“What business?” demanded Joe Millar suspiciously.

“Haven’t you seen Lord Edgemore?” asked Nipper. “Hasn’t he told you the troupe has been fooled?”

"Yes, and I'm blowed if I can understand it!" said Joe, scratching his head. "Rummiest thing I've ever heard of! It ain't like the guv'nor to be tricked in that way! Who could have sent that dud telegram to him? That's what I want to know!"

"There'll be plenty of time to find that out later!" replied Nipper. "In the meantime, the public is waiting, and it wouldn't be fair to disappoint them!"

Joe Millar stared.

"Look here, young gent!" he said coldly. "These young ladies and boys have been telling me about some sort of game. What's all this about you youngsters giving a show, instead of the Colosseum Troupe?"

"He won't believe us!" complained Tessa indignantly.

Nipper seized Joe by the arm.

"It's perfectly simple!" he said. "Two or three of our chaps are pretty good at horse-riding and trapeze work. Our scheme is to say nothing to the public, but to give the show just as though everything was normal."

"Bud's here!" put in Gresham eagerly. "The chaps have got him round at the back, waiting."

"Dinkum oil!" murmured Jerry Dodd.

But the juniors had reckoned without their host; Joe Millar was inclined to be uncompromising in his attitude.

"It can't be done, young gents!" he said flatly. "Not likely! I never heard of such a thing! With all due respects to your idea, I'm not going to allow it."

"But you must!" insisted Nipper. "We've got crowds of chaps ready to put on the Indian costumes, and Jerry Dodd is going to play the part of the cowloy."

"Well, it can't be done!" insisted Joe doggedly. "You're not going to touch any of the guv'nor's costumes! Understand that, young gents!"

"But what's the objection?" shouted Nipper, exasperated.

"Do you think I'm going to let you ruin the reputation of the Colosseum Troupe!" demanded Joe hotly. "No fear! Why, you youngsters will only appear in public and make fools of yourselves! I'm not trying to be nasty—I'm only pointing out that schoolboys can't expect to do the same as professional circus performers."

"But Johnny Onions and Tessa have been in a circus!" insisted Nipper. "And Jerry Dodd is clever with the pony——"

"Can't help it!" said Joe Millar, setting his jaw. "You youngsters ain't going to spoil the good name of my guv'nor. And you can't touch any of these costumes and props. That's final!"

Nipper glanced round at the other juniors.

"Did you hear that, you chaps?" he said. "It's final! What are we going to do about it?"

"I rather think, dear old fellow, there's only one solution to the problem!" murmured Travers. "Are we all ready?"

"Yes!" shouted the others.

And, with one accord, the St. Frank's fellows fell upon the two unfortunate men,

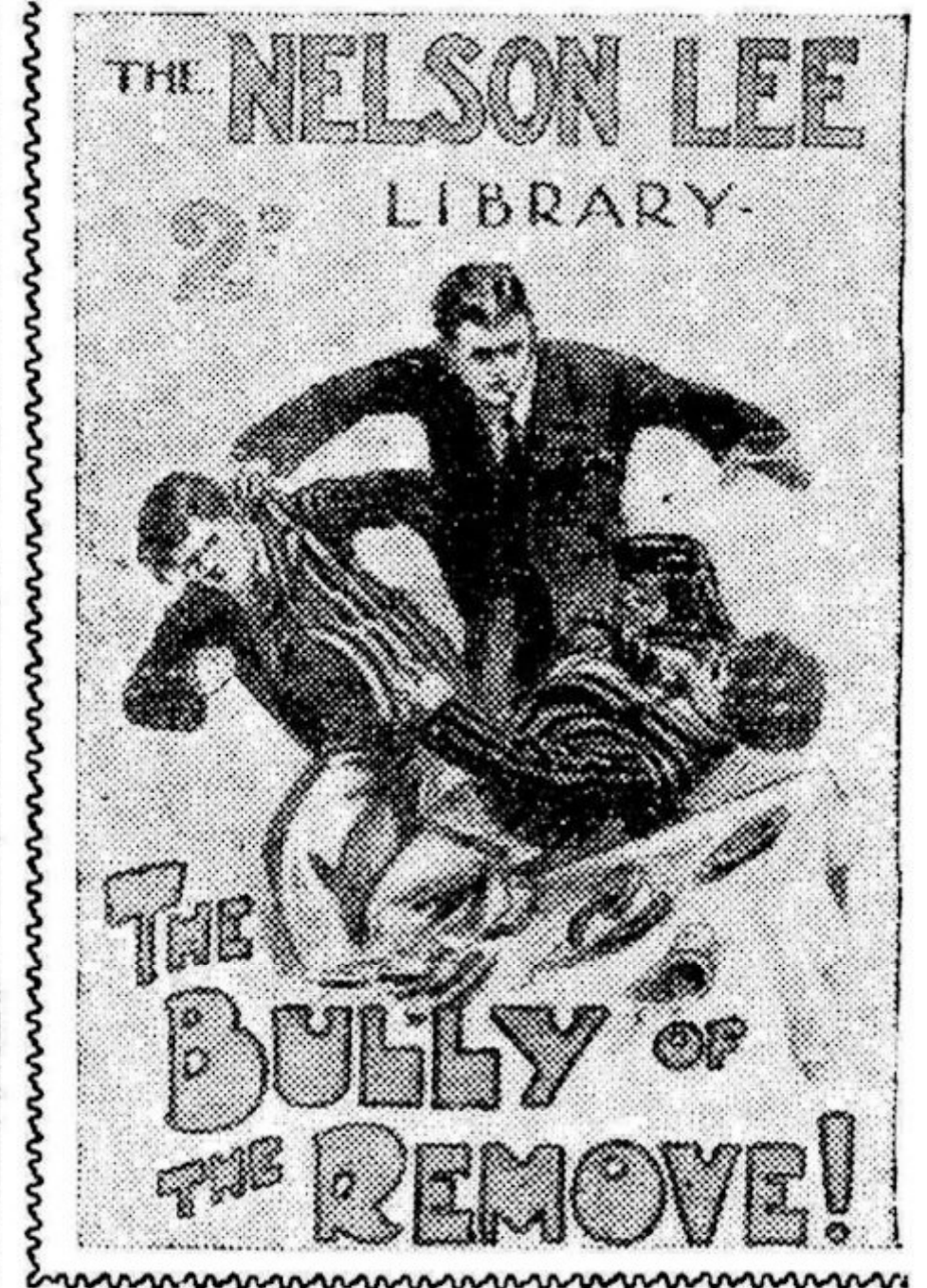
and in about six seconds they were flat on their backs and helpless. This was no time for gentle measures!

"I hate doing this, Joe," said Nipper, as he straddled the unhappy man's chest. "You're a good sort, I believe, and you're loyal to your boss. But we're not going to let Lord Edgemore down—or the public, either. If you won't see reason in the ordinary way, we've got to use force."

"You—you young rascallions!" panted Joe hoarsely.

"I'll give you a last chance!" said Nipper.

NEXT WEDNESDAY!



"As Mr. Bryan's representative, will you allow us to use the troupe's costumes?"

"No!" roared Joe Millar. "I'm blowed if I will!"

Exactly two minutes later, Joe Millar and Stan were dumped into a couple of empty dress-baskets, and the lids were strapped down!

CHAPTER 19.

Dakota Dick and
His Indians!



HERE they come!"
"Hurrah!"

Many cheers went up as an impressive procession was seen in the distance. The gala grounds were

packed with spectators. More and more people had been coming in during the past hour, a great many of them from Bannington, and even from Caistowe.

Although the crowds had been getting impatient, everything was all right now. The parachute descent had been made, and Dakota Dick was just appearing in sight, with his Indians. And as the show was a free one, nobody could grumble much.

Lord Edgemore himself stood on the terrace of the manor, watching anxiously and with many misgivings. He had given his

"THE BULLY OF THE REMOVE."

Cuthbert Chambers—of the Remove!
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What a come-down for the mighty, pompous, arrogant Cuthbert Chambers. But Chambers has asked for it; he's been slacking terribly and at last the Head is forced to take such drastic steps.

So Chambers goes down into the Remove. And then starts the trouble. Naturally, a fellow of Chambers' disposition is not going to take such an indignity lying down, and he starts flinging his weight about. The Remove, on their part, are not standing for that, and so things get lively—very lively!

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consent to this well-meaning deception, but he was by no means certain that he had acted wisely.

Time alone would show.

There was a natural hollow in the grounds at the point where the performances were to take place. The public distributed itself up the sloping, grassy banks, and everybody had an excellent view. Down in that hollow, the enclosure was railed off, and in the very centre of it was fixed the great trapeze, and the long tight-rope. All round, there was a wide stretch of perfect turf.

It was unoccupied now, save for one solitary figure. This was the figure of Willy Handforth—inpersonating Sammy Simple, the clown. Willy had hurried to the scene while Jerry Dodd and the other juniors were preparing—just so that the public should have something to hold their attention. And Willy had certainly done his best.

He had capered about, he had turned cart-wheels, and he had generally played the fool. The children, at least, had been very much amused.

"Well, it's about time that something happened!" remarked Hal Brewster critically. "That clown isn't so bad, but we want to see something thrilling. I wonder if this Dakota Dick chap will be any good?"

The other River House fellows expressed their various opinions. They had an excellent position, on one of the slopes, and they were eagerly looking forward to the entertainment. It afforded them no real satisfaction to remember that Nipper & Co. were prisoners in the priory tower—at least, the River House fellows thought they were prisoners—and they were not particularly cheerful about it.

"How long have those fellows been up in that tower?" asked Glynn casually.

"Oh, about half an hour," said Brewster, with an uncomfortable glance at his chums. "Blow them! They asked for trouble, didn't they?"

He was trying to justify himself, and he wasn't very successful.

However, it was impossible to make any move just then, for the crowds hemmed them in. And Dakota Dick and his Indians were practically on the scene.

They made an impressive sight as they came into the arena. Dakota Dick led the way, riding on his "bucking broncho." Immediately in his rear were crowds of yelling Indians. They were painted, befeathered, and fearsome-looking.

These Indians were usually impersonated by "supers," but there had been no lack of Remove fellows eager to take their places. And they played their parts extremely well. When it came to uttering fiendish yells, and doing wild capers, they were better than any supers that had ever been hired.

And then the real performance started.

Bud, in response to Jerry Dodd's word, lost his docility and acted like a wild thing. He went round the enclosure like a streak, bucking in the most extraordinary way, doing his utmost to unseat his rider.

But Jerry Dodd, the Australian boy, was a past-master in the art of riding. He held his seat without trouble, and he aroused the crowds to great enthusiasm by his wonderful exhibition of riding.

And then followed many tricks.

Bud was extraordinarily clever, and his feats were superb. The great audience was enthralled when a number of the Indians came creeping up in the pony's rear, evidently intent upon murdering Bud and his rider.

Yells of laughter went up when Bud swiftly turned, charged the Indians, and pushed them aside, one after the other, with his lowered head.

The applause was deafening.

"Well, I must say that this Dakota Dick is a jolly good performer!" remarked

Brewster approvingly. "This is one of the best shows I've seen!"

"Hear, hear!" said Ascott.

And the other River House fellows agreed.

Never for a second did they suspect that they were looking at their old friend, Jerry Dodd! Even Bud was disguised. The pony, in his blanket and his glittering harness, was scarcely recognisable as Jerry Dodd's pet. Certainly none of the River House fellows jumped to the truth.

Still less did they guess that the Indians were none other than Nipper & Co. and Reggie Pitt and Travers, and even Archie Glenthorne. Their reddened, painted faces disguised them, and their feathers and costumes added to the general effect.

At last the "turn" was over, and Jerry Dodd and his Indians went galloping off, out of the enclosure. They were followed by tumults of cheering, and by storms of hand-clapping. It is doubtful if Dakota Dick himself could have aroused more enthusiasm.

Certainly Jerry Dodd had done nothing to besmirch the fame of the renowned Dakota Dick. From first to last, his performance had been clever.

But if the audience, as a whole, was delighted, there were three members, at least, who felt nothing but chagrin. They were Claude Gore-Pearce, and his chums, Gulliver and Bell.

"I'm blessed if I can understand it!" said Gore-Pearce, for the twentieth time. "They must have got my telegram, and yet they're giving their show, after all! Rats! The whole thing is a frost!"

"Why worry about it?" asked Bell. "You were a bit surprised when that clown appeared—and you seemed to have a fit when these Indians showed up. Why can't you settle yourself to the truth, Gore-Pearce? That game of yours has fizzled out, and there's nothing more to be said about it."

"But I can't understand why!" said the cad of Study A. "That telegram of mine was absolutely conclusive——"

"Oh, hang your telegram!" snapped Gulliver.

"But why are these performers here?" insisted Gore-Pearce sourly. "That's what I want to know!"

"Why ask riddles?" retorted Bell. "You sent a telegram to Helmsford, telling the Colosseum Troupe not to come, and at first it seemed that the dodge had succeeded. But the troupe is here now, so you'd better forget the whole thing. I'm not sorry, if it comes to that. It was a dirty trick to try and mess up the gala."

Gore-Pearce scowled, and said no more.

And none of the cads of Study A noticed that Chubby Heath, of the Third, was behind them, and comparatively near. Incidentally, Chubby Heath's ears were very, very sharp!



CHAPTER 20.

A Little Surprise for Brewster & Co.!

GEORGIE GLYNN glanced casually at his leader.

"There'll probably be a bit of a wait here," he suggested. "A sort of interval, eh?"

Hal Brewster nodded.

"Time for us to pop to the priory tower," he agreed. "That's what you mean, isn't it?"

Glynn grunted.

"Well, hang it, we don't want to act like a crowd of rotters, do we?" he said. "We wiped up those St. Frank's chaps, and we dished them out of seeing Dakota Dick. Don't you think they've had enough?"

"Yes, rather!" said a number of the other River House fellows, as they pressed round.

"Let's go and release them, Brewster!" said Kingswood eagerly.

"Good enough!" grinned Hal Brewster. "We're all agreed, aren't we? A jape is a jape, but we don't want it to become vindictive. So, in the generosity of our hearts, we'll buzz to the tower and release the prisoners from their durance vile."

"Good egg!"

"We've made it quits now, anyhow."

And the River House fellows, much relieved by their decision, hurried away from the gala grounds and made their way towards the old priory tower. The distance was not so very far, and they reckoned that they would have at least five or ten minutes. Zoe and Zack were the performers who would provide the next item on the programme, and Hal Brewster & Co. did not want to miss the fun.

But they could hardly enjoy themselves, knowing, as they did, that they had imprisoned their rivals in the priory tower. In the heat of the moment it had seemed a very fine joke; but now Brewster & Co. were troubled by their consciences, and they felt that they had gone just a little too far.

Happily the thing could be easily remedied.

"Here we are!" said Brewster briskly.

The River House fellows swarmed round the base of the tower, and Brewster and Glynn and Ascott led the way up the crazy stone stairs.

"We'll make it pax," said Brewster, as he neared the top. "We'll shake hands, and—Why, hallo! What the dickens—— Great Scott!"

"What's the matter?" asked Glynn, from the rear.

"This door is open!" shouted Brewster, leaping up the steps two at a time.

In another second he was at the top of the tower, staring blankly at the deserted space. Not a sign of their prisoners remained. Nipper & Co. had completely vanished!

"They've gone!" yelled Ascott.

"Clean as a whistle!" agreed Brewster. "Well, I'm jiggered! How did they manage to escape?"

By this time the other River House fellows had arrived, and they were all staring round in complete astonishment.

"Somebody must have helped them," said Kingswood. "You found the door open, didn't you, Brewster?"

"Yes."

"Well, they couldn't have opened it themselves," declared Kingswood. "It was bolted, and——"

"Yes, it's pretty clear that somebody came up and released them," interrupted Brewster, with a grin. "But what does it matter?"

"It matters a good bit!" growled Ascott. "Even if we tell Nipper that we came here to release him he might not believe it."

"Oh, well, we can't help it," said Brewster. "They've escaped, and it's no good crying over spilt milk. Come on! Let's get back to the gala ground."

And the River House juniors, feeling rather swindled, descended the stairs again and reported to their companions who were waiting in the shade of the big trees.

"Hadn't we better be cautious?" suggested Grant, as he looked round with an uneasy glance. "Those fatheaded Saints may be gathering their forces, you know. They may be on the watch. What's going to happen to us if they swarm down and suddenly attack? As likely as not they'll shove us up in that tower, the same as we did them."

"All right—let's get back to the crowds," said Brewster. "We shall be safe enough there."

But before starting off they paused, listening. They could hear voices and a good deal of laughter. There were curious cackles, too, and other cries of the most fiendish kind.

"It sounds like those Indians!" said Glynn.

"Rats! They're not Indians!" grinned Brewster. "They're only members of the Colosseum Troupe dressed up. Still, I must admit they looked like the genuine article."

They made their way through the trees, and in the distance they caught sight of some grotesque, painted, be-feathered figures. These figures were capering about wildly, and occasionally bursting into shouts of laughter.

One particularly ugly specimen was comparatively near by, quite by himself. In fact, he wandered round the trees right into the midst of the River House juniors before he realised their presence. Then, with a start, he halted and stared at them.

"Good gad!" ejaculated the Indian.

Hal Brewster & Co. grinned as they moved forward, eyeing the painted and be-feathered figure with interest.

"It's all right—we're quite harmless," said Brewster genially.

The desperate-looking Indian stared but made no comment. His jaw had dropped, and he appeared to be quite startled.

"We saw your show, and we thought it was jolly fine," said Glynn enthusiastically. "Dakota Dick was particularly good, and all your Indians were just as good as the real thing."

"Shut up, ass!" hissed Kingswood. "For all you know, he may be a *real* Indian!"

"Absolutely not!" said the Indian stoutly.

"You're only an ordinary performer, aren't you—painted up for the occasion?" asked Brewster, staring at the figure somewhat suspiciously. "It's rummy, but I seemed to know that voice——"

"Voice?" repeated the Redskin. "Good gad! You don't mean to say that the good old vocal music has given me away?"

"My only sainted aunt!" yelled Ascott at the top of his voice. "It's Glenthorne, of St. Frank's!"

"Absolutely!" nodded Archie. "And kindly remember, you blighters, that—Odds avalanches and cyclones! Hi, help! S.O.S.! Rescue, Remove!"

The River House fellows were swarming round Archie, excited and amazed. But before they could ply him with any questions a crowd of other Indians came running up. They had heard Archie's shouts, and they looked dangerous as they surrounded the River House crowd.

"Cheese it, Brewster!" said Nipper coolly. "Leave Archie alone!"

"Nipper!" gasped Brewster.

"As large as life, but slightly disguised," acknowledged Nipper. "As Archie gave the game away, there's no sense in keeping up the spoof——"

"Really, old onion, I didn't intentionally do it," protested Archie. "But these dashed chappies took me by surprise, don't you know."

Brewster & Co. were utterly startled.

"Well, I'm jiggered!" ejaculated Brewster. "All these—these Indians are St. Frank's fellows!"

"Yes!" said one of the Indians. "And this is where we get our own back, my lads! Down with the Palefaces! Wirooo! Let's have their scalps!"

And with wild, fiendish cries the "Indians" performed a war-dance round the dismayed Brewster & Co.

CHAPTER 21.

Carrying on the Good Work!



"PEACE, brothers, peace!" said Nipper sternly.

"Peace be blowed!" roared one

of the Indians. "We're going to have the scalps of these——"

"No, we're not!" said Nipper, much to the relief of the River House fellows. "We raided their grub the other day, and they imprisoned us in the tower this afternoon. That makes it quits."

"Good man!" said Brewster. "That's the way we looked at it, too."

"We don't want to waste any time, either," went on Nipper. "Brewster and his gang have discovered us, so the best thing we can do is to let them into the little secret. We can rely upon them to keep it mum."

"What's happened?" demanded Brewster. "Why are you chaps all dressed up like Indians? What about the real Troupe?"

As briefly as possible Nipper explained the situation, and the River House fellows were genuinely surprised and delighted.

"Well, if the rest of the show goes off as smoothly as the first part, nobody will ever guess," said Brewster at length. "I never dreamed that Dakota Dick was really Jerry Dodd. He was terrific!"

"You say the Colosseum Troupe received a bogus telegram?" asked Ascott. "Somebody must have done it deliberately—somebody who has a grudge against Lord Edgemoor. I should think."

"Yes, it looks like it," said Reggie Pitt. "But we can't prove anything, and there's no time to make any inquiries now. I expect the truth will come out sooner or later."

A minute afterwards the River House fellows were trooping back to the gala grounds full of enthusiasm. They had offered their own help, but Nipper had politely pointed out to them that there was nothing that they could do. The rest of the show would be in the hands of Tessa Love and Johnny Onions, and then later, as a kind of finale, all the Indians would appear in the arena again, with Dakota Dick and his pony.

The crowds were cheering when Brewster & Co. took their places once more on the slope.

"By jingo!" exclaimed Kingswood, pointing. "They're here already! Look! There they go, up the ladder!"

It was true. "Zoe and Zack," looking very smart in their gaily coloured performing costumes, were preparing for the trapeze act. They were well made-up. Tessa was wearing a big fluffy wig which effectually disguised her, and Johnny Onions had fashioned himself a little black mask, which looked very effective, and which concealed his own personality. The gala crowds had not the slightest doubt that these two performers were really Zoe and Zack. There would have been great amazement if the real truth had come out! But how were all these people to know that they were now gazing upon a schoolgirl of the Moor View School, and a schoolboy of St. Frank's?

Indeed, if any such suspicions had been going round, they would soon have been squashed. For when the pair began their act it was quite obvious that they were experts in the art.

It had been many months since Tessa Love and Johnny Onions had performed their tricks on the trapeze; and perhaps they were out of practice. But such prowess, once learned, is not easily forgotten, and they had hardly been on the trapeze more than a minute before they automatically fell into their old tricks. It came quite naturally to them. And they gave of their best.

In fact, the performance was astonishingly good.

True, there was a wide net stretched beneath the trapezes—but even Zoe and Zack would have used this net in just the same way. And the knowledge that they were safe in any case gave Tessa and Johnny plenty of confidence. Never once did they make a slip. They performed the most hair-raising stunts on those trapezes, and aroused the audience to a high pitch of enthusiasm and delight.

"Well, I don't know what Zoe and Zack are like," remarked Brewster, "but I'm blown if they could be any better than these two!"

"They're marvellous!" said Glynn. "I can't believe that they're only Johnny Onions and—"

"Dry up, you ass!" murmured Brewster.

"Why should I dry up?" asked Ascott. "I don't see any reason for this secrecy."

"Didn't Nipper particularly ask us to keep mum?"

"Yes, but why?" went on Ascott stubbornly. "Why shouldn't Tessa Love and Johnny Onions get the credit for their show? Why should everybody be made to believe that Zoe and Zack are doing it? It doesn't seem fair!"

"That's one way of looking at it, of course," murmured Brewster. "But you know what people are."

"How do you mean?"

"Why, as long as they believe that this performance is being given by real professionals, they'll think it's marvellous," said Hal Brewster shrewdly. "And, of course, it really is marvellous. But if the crowds get to know that they are only looking at a schoolboy and schoolgirl, they'll think they've been diddled!"

"Oh, rot!" said Ascott. "How can they think that?"

"Well, the fact remains that human nature is a rumny business," said Brewster. "You can give a chap margarine, and as long as he thinks it's butter he'll enjoy it. But as soon as he knows that it's only margarine, he'll turn up his giddy nose! In other words, where ignorance is bliss, 'tis folly to be wise!"

And, when all was said and done, there was a good deal of commonsense in Hal Brewster's observation. The leader of the River House juniors heartily agreed with Nipper that "mum's the word" was the best order for the day.

CHAPTER 22.

Changing their Minds.



LORD EDMOND MORE
rubbed his eyes.

"Incredible!" he
murmured.
"Positively

incredible!"

He found it difficult to believe that this whole show was being given by the St. Frank's fellows and one of their girl chums. Indeed, more than once the old earl had half-suspected that the Colosseum Troupe had turned up, after all.

And mingled with his astonishment and delight there was a feeling of intense gratification. He was more relieved than he could possibly express. His gala, over which he had worked so hard for some weeks, was a complete and unqualified success. All his tenants were thoroughly enjoying themselves. There was no fiasco here — no disappointments.

Thanks to the ingenuity of Nipper & Co., the day was saved.

"Wonderful!" murmured his lordship, as he beheld Tessa whirling on her trapeze. "And to think that I was all against this plan! Upon my soul! I must apologise to these good young people as soon as ever the performance is over. They are splendid—yes, splendid!"

His heart nearly came into his mouth as Tessa suddenly flew from her trapeze, somersaulted through the air, and was deftly caught by Johnny Onions, who was waiting, ready. A roar of applause went up from the hundreds of spectators.

There were others who witnessed this talented performance, too. To be brief, Joe Millar and his assistant, Stan.

After a great deal of trouble, during which he got himself into a flood of perspiration, Joe had succeeded in getting out of his dress-basket. At first he had not had much hope.

Fortunately, he had a knife on him, and after working strenuously and continuously he managed to hack through the tough, thick wickerwork. This task would have been easy enough from the outside of the basket; but Joe was in a very cramped position, and he could obtain little room in which to move his arms.

However, the thing was done in the end, and then it was only the work of a few moments to release Stan. Both the men were furious; now that they had gained their liberty, their rage knew no bounds.

"I'll make those youngsters suffer for this!" declared Joe Millar hotly. "Of all the cheeky varmint! Listen, Stan! Can't you hear the crowds?"

"Them boys are foolin' about on our trapezes!" said Stan ominously.

"You've hit it!" went on Joe Millar, his voice rising with righteous indignation. "Yes, and they're foolin' the people that they're Zoe and Zack! Think of it, Stan! While we've been bottled up here in these baskets, those kids have been ruinin' the reputation of the gov'nor! What will people think of the Colosseum Troupe after seein' these crazy schoolboys?"

"But what can we do?" asked Stan helplessly.

"Do!" roared Joe. "I'll show you what we can do! Come on—and look lively!"

"You're—you're not goin' to the gala ground, are you?"

"Yes, I am!" thundered Joe Millar. "What's more, I'm goin' to climb up one of those ladders, and I'll make a speech! I'll tell everybody just what's happened, and I'll warn them that they've been fooled. I've got to do it—even if it's only to get a bit of my own back!"

But this was not the real reason for Joe Millar's excitement. He was loyal to his employer, and he wanted everybody to know that these footling amateurs were basely tricking them.

"Go easy, Joe!" urged Stan in alarm. "You don't want to do anythin' rash. Why not leave it until afterwards—until these kids have given their show? You might do more harm than good if you interrupt—"

"HURRAH!"

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"I'm in charge here, Stan, and don't you forget it!" cut in Joe Millar curtly. "And what I says goes! Leave it till afterwards, eh? Yes, I don't think!" he added fiercely. "I'm going to tell the public—*now!* And if I interrupt the performance, all the better!"

With Stan at his heels he hurried off towards the gala grounds. He was hot and dishevelled; but he did not care. His anxiety to expose these youthful tricksters gave him an overwhelming urge.

At last the pair came out from the trees, and they stood upon a little knoll of rising ground. From here they could see the arena clearly, in the evening sunlight. They could see the trapeze, with the bogus "Zoe and Zack" in the midst of their activities.

As it happened, Joe Millar could not have arrived at a better moment.

For Tessa, swinging lightly on her trapeze, turned a wonderful double somersault in the air, and was deftly caught by Johnny Onions. Then, in a flash, she was twirled round, and then she went hurtling back to catch her own trapeze on its return swing.

A thunderous roar of applause went up as this clever manœuvre was made. And Joe Millar, standing there, allowed his jaw to drop. He stared, his eyes bulging.

"Here, Stan!" he panted helplessly. "Did you see that, too?"

"Yes, I did," replied Stan, mopping his brow. "Crikey! Just like the gov'nor and Miss Zoe!"

"Look!" muttered Joe.

The performers were at it again, and there was something fascinating in their lithe activity.

Before Joe Millar could make any further comment, a smallish figure approached him and planted itself in front of him. It was the figure of a clown.

"Well, what about it now?" asked Willy Handforth coolly.

Joe started violently.

"Here, are you one of them schoolboys?" he asked hoarsely.

"Of course I am," replied Willy. "I'm the chap who made the parachute descent. How did you fellows manage to get out of those dress-baskets?"

"Never mind about that!" retorted Joe. "We got out, and we came here to tell the truth to the public about this show!"

"Oh, did you?" said Willy. "What the dickens for? Tessa and Johnny aren't doing so badly, are they?"

Joe Millar seized the fag by the shoulder.

"Look here, young gent!" he said tensely. "Tell me the truth. Are those two on the trapezes your friends? Are they——"

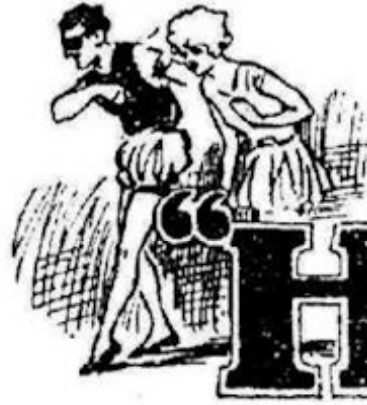
"I know it's hard to believe, but it's a fact, all the same," interrupted Willy. "One of them is Tessa Love, of the Moor View School, and the other is Johnny Onions, of St. Frank's. What are you going to do? Give them away?"

Joe Millar scratched his head.

"Give them away?" he repeated. "Good gosh, no! Why, they're pretty near as good as Zoe and Zack!"

"Strikes me they're better!" said Stan faintly.

"Well, anyway, they ain't doing anything to harm the reputation of the Colosseum Troupe!" declared Joe. "Seems to me, Stan, that these young gents knew what they was doin' when they shoved you and me into them baskets!"



CHAPTER 23.

A Complete Success!

"URRAH!"

The calm evening air was filled with the tumultuous applause. "Zoe and Zack" had

just finished their trapeze act, and they were receiving a tremendous ovation. There were scores of St. Frank's fellows on the scene who had no inkling of the truth, and these applauded as heartily as any of the ordinary public.

Lord Edgemore was more than delighted; he was well nigh dumbfounded. He could hardly believe that this great success had been achieved by the schoolboy substitutes, assisted by the nimble Tessa.

Now, without any pause, Jerry Dodd came riding into the arena for another display, and he was accompanied by the yelling "Indians." This was another surprise for Joe Millar. The man had reversed his opinion completely, and now he was filled with great enthusiasm. "Blowing the gaff" was the last thought in his mind.

While Jerry Dodd was busy with Bud, Willy Handforth found himself suddenly seized from behind by Chubby Heath and Juicy Lemon—for by this time these two fags were in "the know." He twirled round, and frowned.

"Clear off, you idiots!" he snapped. "Do you want everybody to know who I am?"

"It's all right—they're all looking at Jerry Dodd!" said Chubby Heath excitedly. "We're safe enough here for a couple of minutes. Nobody will suspect anything if they see us talking to the clown. We've got something to tell you, Willy!"

"All right—tell it, and be quick about it!" said Willy crisply.

"We know why the real Colosseum Troupe failed to turn up."

"Oh, you do, eh?" said Willy, staring. "And how do you know? I don't want to hear any silly rumours——"

"Gore-Pearce did it!" said Chubby hotly. "The cad! He tried to mess up the gala——"

"Here, hold on!" interrupted Willy. "Not so fast, my son! How do you know this?"

"I happened to be behind Gore-Pearce and those other cads, Gulliver and Bell," said Chubby. "I wasn't listening, or anything, but they were dotty enough to talk loudly."

"Well, what did you hear?"

"Why, that Gore-Pearce had sent a telegram to Helmford," replied Chubby indignantly. "The scheme was to prevent the performers from coming, so that Lord Edgemore would be dished. Gore-Pearce wanted to ruin the gala!"

"I'm not surprised," said Willy. "Gore-Pearce is cad enough for anything—and we all know that he still bears a grudge against Lord Edgemore."

"And the joke of it is, Gore-Pearce thinks that the telegram went wrong!" said Chubby, with a grin. "He thinks that the Colosseum Troupe is really here, giving the show!"

"Yes, but that doesn't make any difference to his caddishness," said Willy judicially. "Gore-Pearce is guilty—and if it hadn't been for Nipper, there wouldn't have been any performance. It was Nipper's idea, don't forget. The public knows nothing—and won't know anything, if we can help it. But Gore-Pearce ought to be punished, all the same!"

Later, after Jerry Dodd and the Indians had come out of the enclosure, Willy passed on his news to Nipper. By this time, Tessa Love and Johnny Onions were at it again, and this time they were giving a clever tight-rope act.

"I'm glad you've told me this, Willy," said Nipper quietly, after he had heard. "You can leave Gore-Pearce to us."

"I know that—but I'd rather like to be in the scene," said Willy, grinning. "I suppose you'll slaughter the cad, won't you?"

Nipper and Reggie Pitt and a few other Removites held a consultation.

"There's no reason why we should explain anything," said Nipper at length. "If we tell Gore-Pearce anything, he'll know that his plan succeeded, and that the Colosseum Troupe failed to turn up. As it is, he believes that his rotten telegram went astray."

"The best thing we can do is just to grab the rotter and bump him," said Reggie Pitt. "We won't tell him why—and we can leave him guessing. As long as he gets the bumping, everything will be satisfactory."

And so it was decided.

For the time being, Nipper & Co. dismissed Claude Gore-Pearce from their minds, and they went to the arena, after the tight-rope act had finished, to join in the grand finale.

Still nobody suspected the truth. The general run of the public was delighted with the whole show, and voted it to be excellent, from start to finish. And when the juniors had changed into their ordinary attire, Lord Edgemore insisted upon them coming before him.

He was particularly set upon meeting Tessa Love and personally congratulating her.

"My boys, you have saved the situation for me," he said gratefully. "You, too, Miss Tessa! It was splendid! From the bottom of my heart I thank you for all your services."

"It was nothing, sir!" protested Jerry Dodd. "Why, we thoroughly enjoyed ourselves."

"It was a great treat to us!" smiled Tessa. Joe Millar offered his congratulations, too, and he stated it as his considered opinion that it was a sin and a shame that such clever performers as Tessa Love and Johnny Onions and Jerry Dodd should be at school.

And so the day drew to a close, with everybody in an excellent humour. There was dancing on the turf, with an excellent band in attendance, and with fairy lights twinkling in their myriads.

And now, in their own personalities, the St. Frank's fellows and the Moor View girls—to say nothing of the River House crowd—enjoyed themselves to the full.

CHAPTER 24.

The End of a Perfect Day!



OOOOOOOOOM!

The last flight of rockets was going up into the starlit evening sky. The fireworks display had been as successful as any of the other events, and the throngs of people were moving off homewards in a contented mood.

"It's all right, you fellows," said Nipper, as he joined a group of his companions. "I've just been talking to Lord Edgemore, and he's been in touch with Mr. Bryan."

"Who the dickens is Mr. Bryan?" asked Jack Grey.

"The leader of the Colosseum Troupe, of course," replied Nipper. "He's just returned to Helmford and, having heard a few rumours, 'phoned up Lord Edgemore, who told him what had been happenings."

"Was he wild?" asked Pitt interestedly.

"Well, I think he was a bit startled at first, but Lord Edgemore soon put him right," smiled Nipper. "And then, when Joe Millar got on the phone and told him how smoothly everything had gone off, he was jolly relieved. So there's nothing more for us to worry about, my lads!"

"We're not worrying!" grinned Reggie Pitt. "We saved the situation, and we're satisfied. And don't forget—mum's the word."

"Yes, rather!" said Nipper. "We don't want the truth to trickle out—not to a soul beyond ourselves."

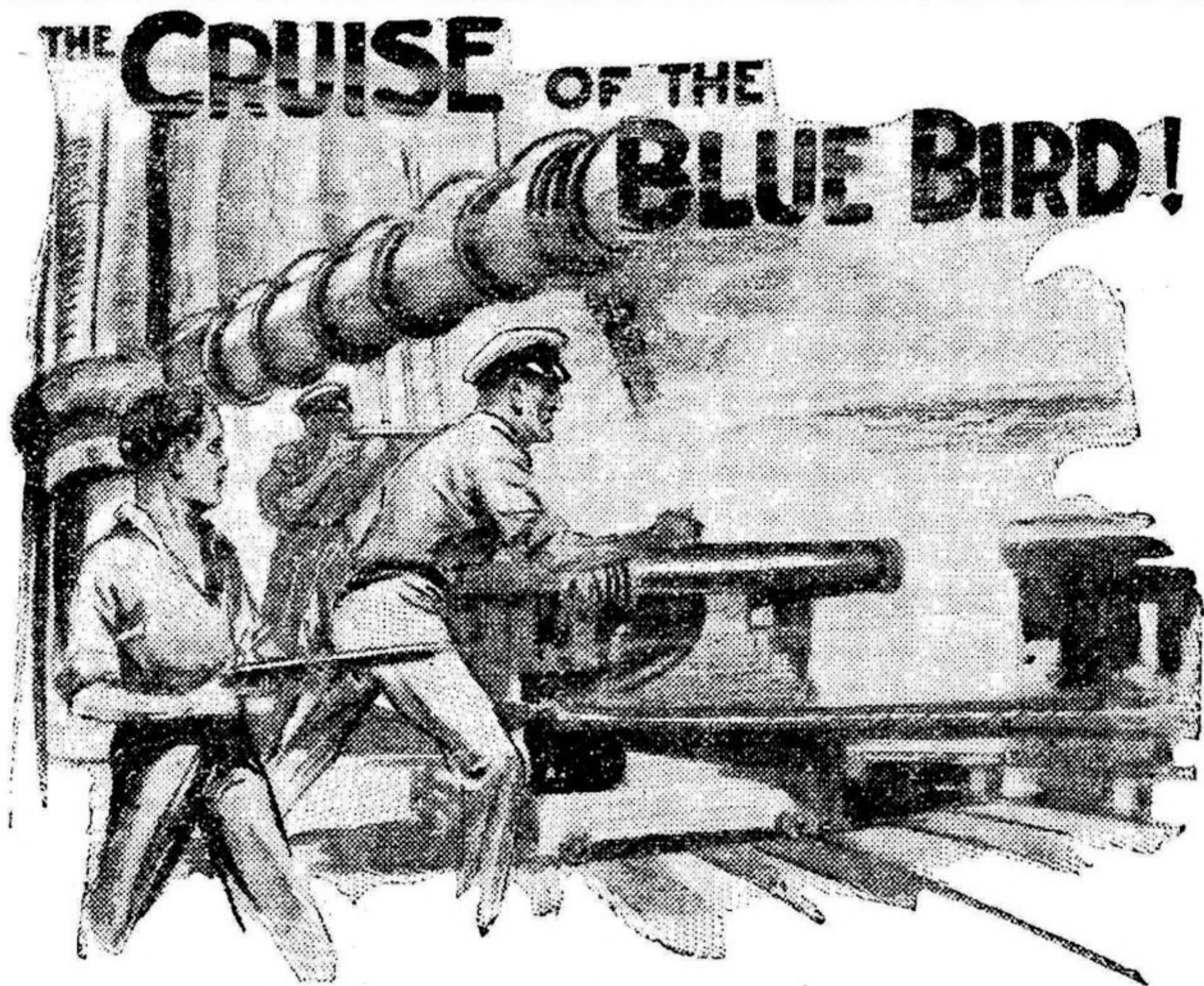
And they meant this.

There was only one final duty to perform now. This was put into effect on the way home to St. Frank's.

Claude Gore-Pearce had rather unwisely decided to walk home by way of the meadows. Gulliver and Bell were with him, and the gathering dusk almost concealed them. But in a particularly lonely spot, just after they had walked round a big clump of trees, they found themselves surrounded by a number of Removites.

(Concluded on page 44.)

IF IT'S THRILLS YOU WANT JUST READ THIS GRAND SERIAL!



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Ned and Jack are in a tight hole, but they're still smiling. And Captain Manby is coming to the rescue at full speed. The question is: Will he be in time? The grand chapters below will tell you.

Picking up The Trail!

"NED! Jack!" Captain Manby roared. "Have you seen them?" he demanded, turning to the men nearest him.

"Not see, cap'n. Them 'long jus' now, but not see last minit," replied one of the Kanaka crew of the Blue Bird. "Mebbe them go 'long look 'long trees."

"As they're not in the bungalow, and they couldn't have gone anywhere else without being seen, I suppose they have," growled Manby. "The confounded young fools have gone off scouting after Rua-Rua, I expect, and there's a very fair chance that they may run into a trap and get scuppered. We'll have to go after them."

"Shall we come with you, sir?" asked Trotter. "We can't take the bus up till we have repaired the float, or we might try

a buzz round the island and locate them in that way."

"No. Get on with the repairs. I count on you to put these fellows in a proper state of funk by going up again." Manby looked around him. His men were all wounded and weary, quite unfit to travel fast or far, and finding the boys might well be a long job. "I'll have to go aboard and get a fresh squad. Send off your messenger, Hutton."

Hutton glowered down on the Solomon prisoner, who squatted submissively at his feet, ready to do anything to save his hide.

"Tell your people that if they will give up their spears and clubs and promise to work quietly as before, no harm shall come to them," Hutton said to the man. "But if they choose war, then the big bird that lies yonder will come after them. And Rua-Rua, who has led them to do all this evil, must be bound and brought here and given up to

me to be punished. Now, go, before I change my mind and bid the Men-Who-Kill-From-The-Sky to go and kill you all. When you have given the message, come back and tell me whether it is peace or war. You shall not be killed, but have three sticks of baccy. Go!"

The man rose, looked about him fearfully, cast one glance at the dreadful "bird" lying so quietly beside the beach, as though he thought it might rise and fly at him, then, glancing back continually, raced away into the palm grove.

"I'll get aboard now and get patched up. I'll return as quickly as possible," said Captain Manby, and led his battered handful down to the boat. The two airmen helped him to shove off, then turned to their own craft.

The tide was falling now, and by a little manœuvring, they contrived to swing the 'plane round so that it lay above level sand. Soon it was high and dry, and they were able to set about repairs.

Meanwhile, Tubby Sinclair was busy with plaster and bandages upon the captain's wounds, whilst Ah Moy attended to the men.

"Hurry up!" snapped Manby impatiently, as Sinclair made fast the bandage about his shoulder. "Even now those young asses may be in trouble. And the bother is that we don't know which of half a dozen ways they may have gone."

Ah Moy appeared and deposited a bottle of iodine which he had been using on dressings. He had, of course, heard the bad news.

"Tom Cheese allee light now. Walkee next week," he reported. "Othlah fella bettlah. Timo sick, bettlah to-morrow. You takee me 'long helpee flind Mislal Neddee, Mislal Jackee."

"What use would you be, Ah Moy? We don't know which way they have gone."

"Me walkee one ttime alongee huntlah man, 'long Java. Me flind him big snlake alongee mark on glound. Catchee heap lot. Mislal Jackee wear boot when go ashlore. Snlake no wear boot. Heap more easy flind Mislal Jackee."

"Oh, come, then! If you find them I'll give you five pounds," replied Captain Manby. He had no great faith in Ah Moy's

powers as a tracker, but, lacking any other guide, he was willing to give him a chance. "You had better take a rifle. We are going ashore at once."

"Me no likee. Takee Chinee knlife," replied Ah Moy sedately. "Me flind. Likee five pound."

"I dare say he'll find them, sir," said Sinclair hopefully. "He doesn't talk, but he's a clever sort of chap, and he's fond of the boys in his own way. Can't I come along, sir? You're really not fit."

"Fit? Of course I am! You must take charge of the ship. It's on the cards that those brutes might try another attack on the bungalow, though I don't think it's likely. That 'plane put an awful fear into 'em, as well as laying out half a dozen." Manby glanced anxiously at the sun. "There's not much daylight left. We must hurry," he grunted, and went stiffly down into the boat which had been manned by the six men who had previously remained aboard the schooner.

Ah Moy, with an eighteen-inch Chinese short sword in his belt, dropped in after him. The boat slid away and was quickly at the beach, where Hutton and Mitchie, who looked grotesquely like an old woman with toothache, his face being swathed in bandages, met them.

"Now, you showee place Neddee and Jackee walkee las' ttime," said Ah Moy. "Alongee thlis place? Me walkee."

His plump figure inclined at an angle, his shrewd, little, oblique eyes on the ground, he padded away towards the rear of the bungalow. Presently he returned at a trot.

"Mislal Jackee boot mark!" he announced in a sing-song. "You allee walkee along blehind me." He rolled towards the edge of the grove, then waved a pointing hand. "More Jackee mark. He walkee thlis way."

There, clearly marked in a patch of soft soil, were the imprints of boot heels, obviously those of Jack, since Ned and all the other white men wore shoes with flat rubber soles.

"Good man!" ejaculated Manby. "Get on with it. Hurry!"

"Me walkee flast," replied Ah Moy, and, producing an electric torch, went forward

WHAT HAPPENED IN THE OPENING INSTALMENTS:

CAPTAIN MANBY is skipper of the schooner Blue Bird, which is approaching Graden Island, in the Southern Pacific. He is accompanied by his son

JACK MANBY, and Jack's cousin

NED SUTTON, two adventure-loving boys, although the former lacks the cautious nature of Ned. From the deck of the Blue Bird they see that the bungalow wherein resides Hutton, manager for the man who owns the copra crops on the island, is surrounded by a seething mob of mutinous Solomon Islanders. The captain, with the two boys and a party from the schooner, go to the rescue.

They become overwhelmed by the savages, and are saved just in time by the arrival of a seaplane, which frightens the mob away. The 'plane is piloted by an old friend of Manby's named Trotter. Hutton tells them that Rua-Rua, a native chief, is the cause of all the trouble. Jack and Ned decide to try and capture Rua-Rua on their own. They set out—unknown to Manby—but are themselves taken prisoners. To their horror, they discover that the savages are cannibals. Meanwhile Captain Manby has discovered the boys' absence.

(Now read on.)

steadily, with only an occasional pause to make certain of the tracks. Presently he halted in the path where the boys had stopped, crossed it and paused again.

"Them walkee heap fast. Why?" muttered Ah Moy, then found the answer. "Solomon boy walkee. Them walkee aftlah Solomon boy!"

"Eh? How d'you know that?" asked Manby doubtfully.

"You no smellee? Solomon boy makee rub sandalwood-oil allee ovlah topside."

"That's so," said Hutton. "And you can smell it. They rub their hides with the stuff and drench their hair with it."

"Then it probably means that the boys actually found Rua-Rua, or one of his gang. They'll run into trouble. Hurry, Ah Moy!"

"No can do. Sluppose hully, loosee mark," replied Ah Moy placidly, and proceeded at a maddeningly deliberate pace.

Cannibals!

THE light was failing, and under the thick roof of foliage it was now really dark, adding to the difficulty of holding to the trail. Though Manby fumed, he saw the wisdom of going slowly. Once lose the track, and a lot of valuable time might be wasted in finding it again.

"What is there at the end of this island?" he asked Hutton.

"Nothing in particular except an ancient volcanic crater with one of those big stone idols in it. Rather a weird place. Our natives steer clear of it. I don't know about the Solomon boys. Probably they're scared of it, too."

"If the natives of the island don't go there, it would be a good place for a man to hide in," suggested Manby. "Perhaps it's where Rua-Rua was making for when my youngsters found him. That is, if it is he they're following. It's a wonder we haven't heard any shooting."

"The trees deaden the sound of a shot," explained Hutton. "You wouldn't hear one at half a mile, and we're still a mile from the crater."

"Then I'm for going ahead. Two men will keep with you, Ah Moy, while the rest of us go on double quick. If we find nothing then we can come back to you."

"Allee lightee," agreed Ah Moy. "S'plosin' you find, you gimme five pound allee samee?"

"Yes. All the same."

"Then you go walkee," Ah Moy said, and bent anew over the trail, while two of the crew fell in behind him at a sign from the skipper.

Manby began to run. After him came Hutton, then the four Kanakas, while Mitchie brought up the rear. Winding about between the trees, they sped through the forest till the broadening light warned Manby that he was close to the open. He halted amidst a fringe of scrub, and as he did so a whiff of smoke came floating up from below, followed by a sudden outburst

of harsh chattering, as though a score of raucous-voiced monkeys were all jabbering together.

"Some of them down there," whispered Hatton. "We're on the edge of the crater basin. Better go very quietly through the brush, and then we'll surprise them. Ready, behind there?"

They crept forward softly, taking advantage of a clump of tall ferns that grew luxuriantly on the edge of the cover, and peered down into the crater.

"Ovens, by cripes!" exclaimed Hutton under his breath. He knew exactly what the two long trenches filled with red-hot stones and glowing ashes implied. They could be meant only for the cooking of some very large creature. There were no wild pigs on Graden Island, there was no sign of any pig beside the fires. "They're meant for—the boys! The beastly cannibals! Oh, golly!"

The group of nearly naked men about the fires had turned as, from behind the gigantic stone head that masked the entrance to the cave or ancient temple, came several more, shoving two helpless figures before them.

"Jack—and Ned!" whispered Captain Manby between clenched teeth. "They're alive, anyhow. Is that big fellow, Rua-Rua?"

"Yes! He— Quick! Quick!" Hutton's voice cracked as he raised his rifle.

Rua-Rua's hand had flashed up holding a gleaming knife. It hovered above Ned Sutton's head; in another moment it would have descended. But just then Manby's rifle spoke, and Rua-Rua whirled round with a yell and staggered back, shot through the shoulder, the knife tinkling at his feet.

An irregular volley blazed from the others, but it was hardly needed. With a yell of panic the Solomon men leapt away for their lives, dashing into the brushwood beyond the idol and up the steep slopes of the crater, Rua-Rua leading despite his wound; while heedless of anything but the plight of his son and nephew, Manby raced down to where the two boys were bound, whipped out his knife and cut them loose.

"Damaged?" he asked curtly.

"Pins and needles!" replied Jack, and dropped to the ground grunting.

"You'll be better presently." Manby wheeled about. "Catch that fellow Rua-Rua alive if possible," he cried. "There he goes!"

The other natives had disappeared, but his wound had apparently slowed Rua-Rua, for he was still in view breaking a way through the brush close to the spot from which the rescue party had descended.

"He'll get away!" growled Manby. He flung up his rifle, then lowered it as, out of the thicket ahead of the fugitive, appeared a portly figure in white ducks. It was Ah Moy who, forsaking the trail, had waddled forward at his best speed at sound of the firing. At sight of Rua-Rua he whipped out his long knife, or short sword, and rolled at the man.

Rua-Rua halted. Below him the three white men were running up the slope, above him the yellow man, with glinting blade aloft and a nasty grin on his broad, yellow face, was almost within striking distance. All his vague, foolish plans of plunder and murder had been defeated, and he knew well that if his deluded native followers got hold of him now he would probably pay for it with his life. One faint chance remained. White men had queer ways. They did not always kill at once, and if he was given time to talk he had something to offer in exchange for freedom. With a loud cry he threw his hand above his head, ran towards Manby and Hutton and dropped at their feet.

"I've a mind to shoot him out of hand!" exclaimed Hutton. "You saw what he was going to do with the boys, didn't you?"

Manby shuddered. The boys had had a

circulation to numbed limbs is painful. But thanks to his efforts they were presently able to stand and accept meekly the wiggling that Captain Manby gave them.

"In future, you'll obey orders strictly. When in doubt, you'll come to me. But now, as you've had punishment enough for your idiocy, we'll say no more about it. March!"

Their rifles had been found inside the cave; they shouldered them and, clinging to each for support—being still very wobbly on their pins—climbed the slope, Ah Moy lending a helping hand, for he was exceedingly pleased with them and himself.



Rua-Rua's hand flashed up, holding a gleaming knife. It hovered above Ned's head; in another moment it would have descended. But just then Captain Manby's rifle spoke, and Rua-Rua whirled round with a yell, and staggered back, shot through the shoulder.

very narrow escape, and he was tempted to settle the score out of hand, but his sense of justice and inbred respect for law and order prevailed.

"No. We'll take him back, and I'll cart him to the commissioner for judgment." Manby nodded to a couple of his men. "Take him back to the ship. If he tries to escape, shoot him, but do not hurt him if he goes quietly."

"No killee?" asked Ah Moy, waddling up, his glittering blade at the ready.

"No, Ah Moy. Sheath your pig sticker. It won't be needed."

"Velly well. Savee cleanee blade," murmured Ah Moy philosophically. "Mistlah Jackee, Mistlah Neddee allee savee, this person get five pound. Me go rub leggee."

And he toddled on to where Jack and Ned sat before the glowing ovens, trying to restore the circulation of their numbed limbs.

"You velly good boys," he purred. "Makee me five pound. Poor leggee sore? Me rub?"

He fell to work with an energy that made the boys howl, for the process of restoring

"You velly good boys. Me makee you big sweet cakee alongee this. You makee me five pound," he murmured happily, and shoved his best.

Under the palm trees it was now quite dark, but the electric torch lighted the way and they made good progress. Presently they overtook the two men in charge of Rua-Rua. The prisoner, despite the pain he must have been suffering from the wound in his shoulder, marched in haughty silence. Not till they had reached the open and were crossing the beach towards the schooner's boat did he speak, addressing Hutton.

"Where do I go?" he asked.

"You go in the schooner to be taken before the big white man at Bauro, who shall hear what you have done," replied Hutton.

"This white man's schooner?" Rua-Rua nodded at Captain Manby. "Does he speak my talk?"

"Yes," put in Manby. "But talking won't save you, so you may keep your words till you see the big white judge."

"But you will listen to my talk? I have

a big word to tell you. When you hear it you will let me go. I know white men."

"I will listen to you later, but talk will not save you," repeated Manby. "Take him aboard," he added to the boat's crew. "See to his wound, Ah Moy, then tell Mr. Sinclair to put him in irons with a man to watch him. Send back the boat at once."

"Me tellee. Me watchee, cap'n," responded Ah Moy. "Walkee, black man!"

Rua-Rua got aboard without further words; the boat put off.

Manby and the boys, with Hutton and Mitchie, walked along the beach in the fading light to where the two airmen were putting the finishing touches to the repairs of the float.

"All fit now, captain," said Trotter. "I see your hunt was successful. Was that the villain of the piece you sent aboard?"

"Yes," replied Manby. "We only arrived in the nick of time. He was going to finish up the day by dining on these two young asses, in company with a few friends. We stopped him, with about a second to spare. Hallo! Stand by! There's a man coming out of the wood. Perhaps those brutes are coming again."

"No. It's the man I sent with the message," said Hutton. "Come here, Siri. No harm shall happen to you. What do your people say?"

Siri advanced cautiously, looking fearfully at the big plane as though he thought it would jump at him.

"They are sorry," said the messenger. "It was because of Rua-Rua. He ordered it and he is a chief. But because they are sorry they will hunt him and the men who are with him, and bring you their heads and work for you as before. They are waiting not far away for your word."

"Look!" Hutton pointed across the lagoon to the boat going alongside the Blue Bird. "There goes Rua-Rua. He will do no more harm, for the big white man will punish him. There shall be no more killing, if your people will come in the morning and make their prayer to the great bird there that it should spare them."

"No, tell them to come to-night, in half an hour," interrupted Trotter. "I reckon that we have the dope that will put a big scare into them."

"If you are sure——" began Hutton doubtfully.

"I'm jolly well certain!" retorted the young airman. "In half an hour, tell him. I understand a bit of their lingo, but I can't speak it well. Half an hour, and they're to sit along the edge of the forest there. Tell him we'll make a big magic."

"Very well," Hutton translated, and the

man, with a grunt of comprehension, backed away and melted into the twilight. "But what's the big idea?" he asked curiously. "If it's fireworks, I'm afraid they won't be much impressed."

"Fireworks be hanged!" exclaimed Trotter. "What about a movie show? The white gable of your house will make a first-class silver screen. We have a little cinematograph machine aboard, and a lot of special films of battleships and soldiers and scenes in jolly old London. The notion was that we should cheer the lonely trader and give the native population of any island we happened on a notion of the power of the old country, happy and glorious and so forth. Now, if we give these scamps of yours a sight of the Navy and Army cavorting about on your house, the simple savage will get the notion you have 'em bottled up inside ready for use, eh, what?"

"They certainly will. A great notion. Let's get at it at once."

"First-class!" chimed in Captain Manby. "Better build up something to hide the projector, though."

"That's soon done. We have plenty of packing-cases."

They turned to with a will and quickly built a screen of boxes behind which Trotter and Coombe installed the little projector. As darkness fell, all was ready.

And now came a stir on the edge of the grove, a muttering of many voices, the rumour of many feet, while a strong odour of sandal-wood oil floated towards the lagoon. A dusky figure came hesitatingly forward. It was the messenger, Siri.

"We have come, boss," he said tremulously, addressing Hutton. "We sit in the shadow of the trees. There will be no killing?"

"No. Go back and tell them to watch well the end of my fine house and they shall see marvels." Siri disappeared, and Hutton raised his voice:

"Oh, men! To-day you have done great evil. You have been punished, for some of you lie dead and many have hurts. Rua-Rua, who led you to evil, is taken. He will be punished, but the rest of you I forgive, nor will I let the Men-From-The-Sky kill you as they desire. But now they will put a strong magic into my house, a magic of great war canoes and guns that will kill even those who are hidden, and very many strong soldiers before whom you would be helpless as children. Watch, and you will see the magic going into my house. If ever there should be need, it will come out of my house and kill you all. Watch! Let her rip!" he added in an undertone, and at once a shaft of light sprang from the projector to the white wall.

(With the mutinous Solomon Islanders now well in hand, and with Rua-Rua safely captured, it would seem that things are likely to be more or less quiet for Captain Manby and the two boys. But are they? Rua-Rua is a cunning old scoundrel, and his idea of wanting to speak to the captain is because he's got something up his sleeve—something stupendous! What that "something" is you'll know next week.)



Our Weekly Pow-Wow!

By
The Editor.

Your Editor welcomes letters from all his readers; send him one now. Address it to: The Editor, "Nelson Lee Library," Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4.

Putting on the Pace.

TALK about speed! The plain fact of the matter is these days everybody is talking about speed. More and more wonderful things are happening every week. Some brainy inventor puts up a scheme for rattling round the world in less than no time, but directly afterwards his stunt is dwarfed into miserable insignificance by a plan for going much faster.

Short of harnessing a businesslike flash of lightning and making it do the travelling, it doesn't seem to me there is any beating the mighty ingenious wheeze of Herr Max Valier. This brilliant German scientist has invented a rocket car which, it is claimed, will lick all former records in speed. The maximum speed at the trial trip was some 112 miles per hour, but that's nothing to what may be attained. The rocket set the world talking at its first display. It was a sheer wonder. The herr thinks that the day is not so far distant when rocket-driven aeroplanes will travel at altitudes of twelve to eighteen miles and put up an easy 625 miles p.h., which will want a bit of doing, but nothing seems impossible.

One foresees the time when a traveller who is out for a bit of excitement will have a smart trip round the world before breakfast. He might not see much, or spot the hang of the scenery, but the dash through the air would doubtless be bracing. The rocket car has stabilising wings on its racing body, and twenty-four rockets at its tail. These may be trusted to keep things lively.

You can see how it will be at the rate we are going. Travellers will get to the point they wish to reach almost before they have started. The speed of the famous express train will be baby's play compared to what's coming. The old joke will be remembered of a passenger who leaned out of the window just as the guard wagged his flag. It was the aim of the traveller to bid farewell to his wife, but the train gave a sudden move, and he found himself kissing a porter with

red whiskers at a station fifty miles down the line!

Mud Pools and Geysers.

Roy Gilbert writes from Sauvanga, New Zealand, to say that Vivian Travers ought to keep in the limelight. He also thinks there should be a St. Frank's pilgrimage to New Zealand. There are plenty of attractions, from mud pools to geysers, snow-covered mountains to big game fishing for Handy. What about it? This reader's address is c/o Butter Factory, Sauvanga, and he wants to hear from stamp-collectors all over the world.

A Famous Ticker.

A Pinner reader asks how long Big Ben has been ticking at Westminster. The clock in question clocked in in the year 1856, and has been keeping right, excellent time ever since. It merits the description Big, for it weighs 13½ tons, and it cost somewhere about £40,000. It was named after Sir Benjamin Hall, the First Commissioner of Works of the year in question, and its accuracy is never in doubt for it is electrically synchronised from Greenwich Observatory.



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"THE ST. FRANK'S GALA!"

(Continued from page 37.)

Gulliver and Bell were allowed to go unharmed, and then Nipper faced Gore-Pearce.

"Now, Gore-Pearce, we're going to bump you," said Nipper smoothly.

"But—but why?" gasped the cad of Study A. "What have I done to you?"

"We're not saying that you've done anything to us," said Nipper soothingly. "But you can't deny that you deserve a bumping, Gore-Pearce. We feel that a bumping will do you good—on principle."

Gore-Pearce panted for breath.

"Let me go!" he said hoarsely. "I didn't send that telegram—I—I mean, it didn't come to anything."

"Telegram?" repeated Nipper, in mock surprise. "What telegram?"

"I didn't do any harm, I tell you!" babbled Gore-Pearce. "The troupe turned up, so my plan must have failed—"

Nipper & Co. were more determined than ever, now, to proceed with their grim work. Out of his own mouth, Claude Gore-Pearce had condemned himself. He had corroborated Chubby Heath's story. He, and he alone, had been responsible for the non-arrival of the Colosseum Troupe.

In fact, his malicious plan had fully succeeded—although Gore-Pearce himself was far from realising it. For he was still under the impression that the Colosseum Troupe had been performing that evening.

And now he was booked for his punishment.

"We can't stay here all night!" said Church impatiently. "Come on, you chaps—let's get it over! All hands to the pump!"

Gore-Pearce was whirled off his feet, helpless in the grip of these determined juniors.

Bump!

The millionaire's son descended with a hard crash upon the turf, and his howlings were treblefold.

Bump! Bump!

Again and again Gore-Pearce was sent thudding to the earth, and before very long he was howling for mercy. But Nipper & Co. felt that he had not yet received his full punishment. Then and there he was frog-marched across the meadows, until St. Frank's was within sight. By this time, the wretched Removite was aching from head to foot. He was bruised, he was battered, and every bone in his body ached. And then, at last, he was released. He crawled away, still in complete ignorance as to why he had been so drastically treated.

"Well, that's that!" said Nipper contentedly. "I rather think we can call it the end of a perfect day, you fellows!"

And the fellows heartily agreed.

Precisely what Gore-Pearce thought does not matter!

THE END.

(Look out next Wednesday for "The Bully of the Remove!" which is the title of the opening yarn in a stunning new series of stories featuring Cuthbert Chambers.)



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