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MY ONLY SAINTED AUNT!

A "painful" episode from the rollicking long complete yarn inside, featuring the Chums of St. Frank's.

New Series No. 126.

OUT ON WEDNESDAY.

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Handforth hurled the bag of jam-tarts. Of course, he meant to hit the flying figure of "Aunt Sophie," but unfortunately "Aunt Sophie" ducked—and Mr. Pycraft, the irascible Fourth-Form master, stopped the bag with his face. Splish! The paper-bag was thin. It burst, and the tarts spread themselves over Mr. Pycraft's visage in a fearful mess of jam and pastry.

“Charley’s Aunt” was a scream—but Archie’s “Aunt” is a Tartar!

MY ONLY SAINTED AUNT!



By EDWY SEARLES BROOKS

(Author of the St. Frank's stories now appearing in "The Popular" every Tuesday.)

Up to the present Nipper & Co. have undoubtedly had the best of matters in their "campaign" against Hal Brewster & Co. of the River House School. Such a state of affairs doesn't suit Brewster. The St. Frank's fellows have crowed long enough; now it's time the River House had a look in. And—My Only Sainted Aunt!—don't they just do it, too!—Ed.

CHAPTER 1

Archie All Forlorn!

ARCHIBALD WINSTON DEREK GLENTHORNE heaved a sigh. It wasn't an ordinary sigh, either. The genial ass of the Remove Form at St. Frank's gave vent to a sound that seemed to indicate that the troubles of the entire world were upon his elegant shoulders. His aristocratic features were expressive of mental torment, and his eyes were inclined to be glassy.

"The prospect," he murmured disconsolately, "is not merely poisonous, but absolutely too frightfully frightful!"

Having thus delivered himself, Archie heaved another sigh. Not that anybody took any notice; not that there was a soul to share his sorrows. Archie was alone, wandering aimlessly out of Bellton on the way to St. Frank's.

The lane stretched bleakly before him, a long, desolate vista of unfriendly barrenness. At least, that was how it looked to Archie, in his present mood. Actually, the late September afternoon was quite mild, and the autumn breeze was kindly. On every hand the countryside was looking mellow.

Suddenly, without any warning, the lane became filled with yelling schoolboys. Archie Glenthorpe stood stock still, and his monocle dropped out of his eye. With one rush, the juniors were upon him. They were River House fellows, led by Hal Brewster, the cheery skipper of the Fourth.

"Grab him!" said Dave Ascott briskly.

"He's fair game!" declared Kingswood.

Archie recovered his monocle, and gazed sadly at the crowd.

"What ho!" he observed. "I mean to say, the dashed enemy! Carry on, laddies—carry on!"

Hal Brewster chuckled.

"It's a fair catch, Archie!" he said. "We spotted you coming, and we dodged behind the hedge—"

"Absolutely!" nodded Archie. "Kindly proceed with the slaughter. I mean to say,

get it over. The sooner, in fact, the better. You may be surprised, old things, but I don't care a dash."

"You don't care a dash?" repeated Glynn.

"I'm dashed if I do!" asserted Archie firmly.

"But we're going to roll you in the ditch!" explained Driscoll.

"At the moment," said Archie, "the ditch has no terrors for me. Absolutely not! Be good enough to roll away, laddies! I mean, who cares? There are times in this life when a chappie has vaster troubles than ditches."

Hal Brewster looked at Archie closely.

"Just a minute, you fellows," he said. "Somehow, I don't quite like ragging this ass."

"Oh, I say!" protested Buller. "He's fair game, you know!"

"Yes, I know that!" agreed Hal. "But it's rather difficult to rag a chap who looks so unutterably miserable as Archie. Besides, when he doesn't care what happens to him, where's the fun of carrying on?"

There was something in this. Extraordinarily enough, Archie Glenthorne almost appeared to relish the idea of being rolled in the ditch. Yet, at any ordinary time, he would have been horrified at the very suggestion of it. He was always immaculately attired, and any interference with his appearance was, in his eyes, a heinous crime.

At the moment, there was keen rivalry between the St. Frank's juniors and those of the River House. There had been a good many japes recently, too, and so far the honours were well on the side of the St. Frank's Remove.

Brewster & Co. and Nipper & Co. were the firmest of friends, but when it came to a question of japes, they were unmerciful in their thoroughness.

"What's the trouble, Archie, old man?" asked Brewster concernedly.

"Oh, rather!" nodded Archie.

"Are you in pain, or have you lost a tenner?"

"Yes!" said Archie. "That is to say, absolutely not! Good gad! Nothing so frightfully simple."

"Somebody dead?"

"As a matter of fact, no," replied Archie. "The whole trouble is that somebody is most poisonously alive!"

"Ah?" nodded Brewster sagely. "Your pater? He's been calling you over the coals because your reports have been bad?"

"Absolutely not!" replied Archie. "The good old pater is a dashed sport. There's no trouble of that sort, old onion!"

"Then Phipps is ill," said Ascott, with a grin. "Your giddy valet has pegged out, or something."

Archie started.

"Kindly refrain from making such ghastly suggestions!" he said, with a shiver. "I mean to say, bad as the old situation is, it's not so dashed bad as that! I mean, if I lost

Phipps, I should lose the one ray of sunshine in my life!"

The River House juniors chuckled. They were always chipping Archie Glenthorne because he had a valet all to himself.

"If it isn't Phipps, and it isn't your pater—then what's the trouble?" asked Brewster pointedly. "I don't want to be inquisitive, Archie, but you're looking so thoroughly downhearted that we'd like to cheer you up. We'll forget about the rag this time. We'll let you off."

"Thanks awfully frightfully," said Archie gratefully.

"And now let's hear the tale of woe."

"A dashed good description," said Archie firmly. "You see, Aunt Sophie is a sort of—of female."

"So I should imagine!" grinned Brewster.

"Oh, absolutely!" said Archie. "She's absolutely one of those!"

"Wait a minute!" said Hal. "This is the first you've mentioned of your Aunt Sophie. Who is she, anyhow?"

"My aunt," replied Archie mournfully. "That is to say, *the* aunt. Of course, I have sundry aunts knocking about, here, there, and everywhere, but Aunt Sophie is the One. Positively and unquestionably, she is It."

"Yes, but——"

"The World's Worst!" declared Archie.

"Well, we're getting down to it!" murmured Brewster. "So your Aunt Sophie is a bit of a caution, is she? And she has been writing you stern letters?"

"It wouldn't matter so much, laddie, if she contented herself with writing letters," replied Archie. "But, dash it, the frightful dragon is absolutely coming to St. Frank's. I mean, could there be anything worse? At any moment, she may trickle in, and then the balloon will positively go up."

"You think she'll put you through the mill, eh?"

"The fireworks," said Archie, "will be too dashed dazzling for words."

"Well, of course, we don't know much about your Aunt Sophie," said Brewster. "But I don't see how she can be quite so bad as you make out. When did you see her last, anyhow?"

"Oh, ages ago," replied Archie gloomily. "That is to say, epochs. In other words, aeons."

"This term?" inquired Kingswood politely.

"Odds rot and rubbish, no!" said Archie. "I haven't seen the old girl since I was a frightful thing in velvet. I mean, I seem to have a sort of nightmare vision of her. When I was five years old, she buzzed off to South Africa. Positively buzzed. Well, of course, she always does buzz. She's one of that sort. Like one of these hornets!"

"You haven't seen her since you were five years old, and yet you're scared of her coming to St. Frank's?" asked Brewster, in astonishment. "Why, you silly ass! You're worrying over nothing! In all probability, she'll

fall on your neck, and leave you a nice fat tip before she leaves!"

Archie smiled bleakly, and shook his head. "Not Aunt Sophie!" he replied, in a tragic voice. "Other aunts, perhaps—but absolutely not Aunt Sophie!"



CHAPTER 2

Trouble in the Offing I

THE River House fellows were mightily amused. Archie Glen-thorne was always entertaining, and just at the moment he was particularly so. Brewster & Co. were quite convinced that his deep concern was unjustified, and it was comical to watch his sorrowful face.

"My dear old chap, there's no need for you to get so worried," said Brewster. "I expect your fears are groundless—"

"About as groundless as the coffee we have for breakfast," said Archie. "In other words, laddie, the grounds are so frightfully awful that there's nothing else but grounds."

"We have better coffee at the River House," said Driscoll, with a grin.

"I shouldn't be at all surprised," agreed Archie. "Not that I care a dash. The fact is, Aunt Sophie has removed the happiness from my life. Any day she might appear in the offing, and—"

"But don't you know?" asked Hal. "Hasn't she written to you and told you anything?"

"Oh, rather," said Archie. "She's told me that she's coming to St. Frank's, dash it. That's the whole blighting trouble. And I'm dashed if I know when she's coming!"

"Oh, I see!" nodded Brewster. "She's left it uncertain?"

"It might be to-morrow, it might be next week, or it might be the week after," explained Archie. "But she's coming. That's the whole frightful trouble. You see, she's only just arrived in England—"

"Where has she come from, then?"

"Didn't I explain, old dear, that she really lives in South Africa?"

"I don't remember it," said Hal.

"Well, it's a fact," said Archie. "On one of these dashed ostrich farms, or something. Or it may be a diamond mine. Not that it really matters. She lives in South Africa, on the good old veldt, and it's the only consolation I've got. I mean, she can't always be trickling over and buzzing in and buzzing out again. But I must confess it struck me all of a heap when I heard the fatal news that she had descended, like a blight, upon English soil. Even the good old weather has become murky."

"You're a fathead, Archie!" said Brewster frankly.

"Eh? I mean to say, what?"

"A chump!"

"Oh, well, of course," said Archie. "If it comes to that—"

"You admit you haven't seen your aunt since you were five years old, and that means about ten years ago," said Brewster. "Why, I don't suppose you even know her."

"Not by looks, perhaps—but, dash it, I'd jolly soon know her by her ways!" said Archie with conviction.

"Oh, you wouldn't know her by her looks?"

"I might, and I might not," replied the genial ass of St. Frank's. "I mean to say, she's one of these dashed persons who won't be photographed. A rather sensible scheme, of course, since there's really no sense in going about the world smashing good cameras. But I can remember her as a slightly smallish sort of female, thin and all that sort of thing, and most awfully acid."

"Sour, eh?"

"Lemons," said Archie, "aren't in it. I mean, when I was a kid, I used to go about in fear and trembling. Aunt Sophie is one of those sort, you know. Always criticising a chappie, and telling him he oughtn't to do this and he oughtn't to do that. A sort of female inquisitor, as it were."

"But she's probably changed by now," grinned Ascott. "Besides, you were only a little kid—"

"According to all the family rumours, Aunt Sophie is about five hundred horse power worse!" said Archie sadly. "Why, dash it, in the family she's known as the She-Dragon. Absolutely! Every time I think of her I go wobbly at the knees. I mean, all the tissues go dithery."

"And what do you suppose she'll do if she comes down to St. Frank's?"

"The fact is, old companion, I haven't dared to think," said Archie, in a horrified voice. "But it's dashed certain that she'll start doing the instant she staggers in, and she'll continue doing until she staggers out. You don't seem to understand that she's a family nightmare. She goes from relative to relative like a frightful tornado."

"I've got aunts something like that!" put in Glynn feelingly.

"Oh, dash it, but Aunt Sophie is the most poisonous female that was ever invented!" said Archie sorrowfully. "Not that I wish to say anything against the dear old soul. I dare say she means well. Most of these aunts do. But when she arrives she'll probably make me wear woollen socks."

"Great Scott!" said Brewster, in mock horror.

"Oh, absolutely!" said Archie. "I mean, what could be more absolutely frightful? Woollen socks, dash it! And then, again, she's quite capable of telling me that this dashed eyeglass is unnecessary."

"Well, isn't it?"

"You frightful fright!" said Archie frigidly. "A chappie can't look well dressed unless he has a monocle. But Aunt Sophie is liable to put the old foot down with considerable vim. And the worst of it is, I don't know when she's coming."

"Perhaps she'll give you a miss, old man," said Hal soothingly. "She may not be long in England——"

"A month," said Archie unhappily. "A whole dashed month. And before she goes back she'll ooze down to St. Frank's. Of course, there's some consolation in knowing that she'll ultimately go back to her dashed ostriches and things. But in the meantime I'm living in fear and trembling."

"Then you're a chump," said Hal, laughing. "Of course, it's always possible that your Aunt Sophie will criticise a good bit when she comes down. Most aunts do. It's just their way, you know. They generally find something wrong when they visit a fellow at school. Cheer up, Archie, and when she comes, agree to everything she says, and——"

"Oh, rather!" interrupted Archie. "But, dash it, I'm not worried about what she'll say. I mean, that's nothing. It's what she'll *do* that I'm so frightfully windy about. The old girl is capable of anything. Positively and absolutely *anything*. You don't know her!"

All the River House fellows chuckled.

"Forget it, Archie," said Driscoll amusedly. "And I'll bet you anything you like that when your aunt comes down, she'll prove to be harmless. Anticipation is always worse than realisation."

But Archie refused to be consoled, and Brewster & Co. hadn't the heart to commit any act of violence upon him. They allowed him to go.

"Well, you have our sympathy, old son," said Hal, just before they parted. "Oh, if you see Nipper, tell him that I'll be along later on in the afternoon."

"Eh?" said Archie. "Oh, I see what you mean! You'll be along?"

"Yes."

"Isn't that a frightfully risky thing to do?" asked Archie. "I mean, what with one thing and another, and this and that, it's not exactly safe——"

"But this is different!" grinned Brewster. "I'm coming to see Nipper about the footer. We've got to fix up some matches, and there'll be a truce for an hour or two."

"Oh, rather!" said Archie, nodding. "A good old truce, as it were. I gather the trend, laddie. I only wish that I could call a truce with Aunt Sophie."

He went off, shaking his head, and Brewster & Co. laughed heartily. In their opinions, Archie Glenthorpe was certainly making a mountain out of a molehill.



CHAPTER 3

Something Like An Idea!

"MY only sainted aunt!" said Hal Brewster, coming to a halt in the middle of the footpath.

The River House fellows were in the middle of Bellton Wood, on their way back to their own school. Hal Brewster was now staring straight ahead of him, his eyes gleaming, his face flushed.

"What's wrong?" asked Ascott curiously.

"My only sainted aunt!" repeated Brewster.

"What's wrong, ass?" roared the others in one voice.

"Nothing wrong!" said Hal. "But, by Jove, everything's going to be *right*!"

"Well, you ought to know best!" said Kingswood sarcastically. "But if you'll explain what the dickens you're getting at——"

"Aunt Sophie!" said Brewster dreamily.

"Eh?"

"Which?"

"Aunt Sophie!" repeated Brewster.

"Oh, you're dotty!" said Ascott, with a grunt. "You've got Aunt Sophie on the brain. I thought we'd forgotten all about Archie Glenthorpe by this time——"

"After all, why not?" said Hal, as though talking to himself. "Archie has admitted that he doesn't know when Aunt Sophie is actually coming. So why shouldn't she descend upon St. Frank's this afternoon?"

"What the dickens——"

"This very afternoon!" said Brewster, with a grin. "By Jove! That would give 'em a bit of a shock, wouldn't it?"

"We're going to give you a shock in five seconds!" said Kingswood ominously. "How can we know anything about Aunt Sophie's movements, you silly, hulking great fat-head?"

Hal Brewster came to himself with a start.

"Are you talking to me?" he asked, staring at Kingswood.

"I thought that would bring you to your senses!" said Kingswood, grinning.

"Well, as long as you didn't mean it, I won't punch your nose!" said Hal. "But look here, you fellows. Why shouldn't Aunt Sophie arrive this afternoon? In fact, let her arrive to tea!"

"Oh, rather!" said Ascott. "You'd better send her a wire, and——"

"No need to send her a wire," interrupted Brewster.

"Why not?"

"Because she's at the River House."

"She's—where?"

"You heard what I said," replied Brewster calmly.

"Is there any mental trouble in your family?" inquired Driscoll, in an anxious voice.

"Aunt Sophie is at the River House School!" said Hal Brewster, speaking very deliberately. "And Aunt Sophie is going to arrive at St. Frank's for tea. And, what's more to the point, Aunt Sophie is going to fulfil every one of Archie Glenthorne's horrible expectations—only more so!"

Kingswood touched his head.

"Mad!" he said significantly. "Clean off his rocker!"

"My poor, benighted simpletons," said Hal. "Haven't you got anything in your heads except water? I've given you three or four hints, and you haven't taken them. What about Cyril Graham?"

"The new chap?" asked Ascott.

"The new chap!" nodded Brewster. "Graham, the son of the famous West End actor. The chap who got dressed up as a girl at the beginning of term, and who spoofed Nipper & Co. up to the eyes."

"Yes, but—"

"This afternoon," said Brewster, "he'll be Aunt Sophie!"

And then the others saw what their leader was getting at. They stared at him blankly for a moment, and then they gulped.

"Great Scott!" ejaculated Kingswood. "You—you mean—"

"Exactly!" said Brewster. "Didn't Archie say that he wouldn't know his aunt when he saw her? He hasn't ever seen a photograph of her, and he hasn't seen her since he was five years old. My dear chaps, it'll be as easy as pie!"

"Oh, my hat!"

"He doesn't even know when she's coming down," continued Brewster keenly. "Therefore he won't be at all surprised if she turns up this afternoon. And none of the other fellows will be surprised, either. You can bet your boots that Archie has been broadcasting his troubles all through the Remove, and when Aunt Sophie turns up, they'll take her for granted. They won't suspect a thing."

"A jape on Nipper & Co.!" breathed Georgie Glynn.

"It's about time, too," went on Brewster, taking a deep breath. "Those St. Frank's chaps diddled us properly over that gorilla the other day. Well, now we're going to have a bit of our own back."

"Won't it be a bit rough on Archie?" chuckled Ascott.

"Archie is a member of the St. Frank's Remove," replied Brewster severely. "And in this world the innocent always have to suffer for the guilty. In any case, it'll be a jape against the Remove, because we can rely upon Graham to put some of the other fellows through the mill, too. Once he gets going, he'll make the fur fly."

"But we shan't be there to see it!" said Ascott, with a sigh.

"That's just where you're wrong," grinned Brewster. "We shall be there."

"What?"

"Of course we shall be there," added Hal. "It's all arranged, my sons. We're going up to St. Frank's this afternoon, to arrange the footer. Well, Nipper won't suspect anything when four or five of us turn up. Of course, we can't take a crowd; that would be too suspicious. We shall be there when Aunt Sophie arrives, and so we shall see the fun."

"Hal, old man, you're a genius!" said Ascott breathlessly.

"Well, I certainly think that this wheeze will work pretty well," admitted Hal, with due modesty. "But, of course, it all depends upon Graham. I don't think we need have any worry about him, though. He's an absolute marvel when it comes to disguising himself as a girl."

"But Aunt Sophie must be pretty elderly," protested Driscoll.

"All the better," said Brewster. "Graham will be able to spread himself."

"My hat! I've just thought of something!" said Glynn, in dismay. "We can't do it, you chaps! The wheeze is off!"

"Is it?" said Brewster. "Why?"

"Well, Graham has already been to St. Frank's, dressed up as a girl," said Glynn. "He can't spoof them twice! Hang it, they're not such duffers as all that!"

Hal Brewster laughed.

"Ass!" he said. "Graham is an actor—a born actor. I'll admit that if he dressed up as a girl and went to St. Frank's he might be suspected. But when he's made up as Archie's aunt, he'll diddle the whole crowd. He can change his voice just as he likes, and he'll naturally be wearing a grey wig and glasses. Besides, Aunt Sophie has lived in South Africa, so he can have a bronzed face. I've thought of all that, you chumps! I'll guarantee that those St. Frank's fellows will never spot him."

"I believe you're right," said Glynn breathlessly. "Oh, my stars, what a wheeze! Charley's Aunt won't be in it! And think of the laugh we'll have over Nipper & Co. when it's all over!"

"I'm thinking of it," grinned Brewster. "And I don't see any reason why we shouldn't have a laugh now—in anticipation."

And the other River House fellows roared.



CHAPTER 4

Aunt Sophie!

HERE was only one disturbing thought which troubled Hal Brewster as he and the others continued on their way to the River House School.

There was just a chance that Archie would tell some of the other Removites that he had met the River House fellows, and he might even tell them that he had poured his troubles into Brewster & Co.'s ears. In that case, there was a slim chance that Nipper & Co. would be suspicious.

However, Hal did not worry.

It was far more likely that Archie Glen-thorne would go straight to his own study, and sprawl on one of his lounges. He had probably mentioned his Aunt Sophie so many times of late that he would be promptly shut up if he started talking about her again. In any case, it was a risk that had to be faced.

Cyril Graham was quite ready for the ordeal when the scheme was outlined to him.

Graham was a new fellow at the River House, and he looked very innocent. His eyes were blue, his figure was slight, and his face was guileless and demure. But it was an established fact that he was an absolute terror.

He had nerve enough for any jape under the sun, and his supply of "cool check" was everlasting. At his previous school he had squeezed out of one scrape, only to get into another. He had never been free from them. And it was very much the same at the River House. He was a Tartar.

In fact, the St. Frank's Remove felt rather indignant that such an acquisition should have gone to their rivals. Unquestionably, Cyril Graham should have come to St. Frank's, and not to the River House.

Graham was very girlish in appearance, and this was one reason why he was so successful. Nobody could believe that he was anything but harmless. When he was in girl's clothing, he could easily enter any crowd of schoolgirls, and they would not know him from one of their own sex. He was uncannily clever when it came to acting, and this was obviously an inheritance from his celebrated father.

"Of course, we haven't got much to go on," he said, after Brewster had explained. "We only know that Archie's aunt is a fairly small woman, about middle-aged, and that she has lived in South Africa. That's a bit thin, isn't it?"

"It doesn't matter," said Brewster. "I suggest that you get dressed up in a prim sort of way, with fairly longish skirts, and with a severe style of hairdressing. It's quite on the cards that Aunt Sophie is a bit old-fashioned, and——"

"But we mustn't overdo it!" said Graham cautiously. "We mustn't make her into a farical aunt, you know. Even if Archie didn't smell a rat, the other fellows might. It's so jolly easy to overdo it."

"Well, we'll leave it to you," said Brewster, very sensibly. "Practically the whole jape will rest on your shoulders, and so I'm giving you a free hand, my son. You ought to take it as an honour, considering that you're practically a new chap."

"I do," grinned Graham. "Thanks most awfully."

"There isn't much time to lose, so we'd better get busy," added Brewster. "We couldn't do it on a better day, because I've already arranged with Nipper to go over this afternoon. We simply must be there to see the fun."

"I hope to goodness you won't spoil it," said Graham dubiously. "Even if you laugh, you might arouse suspicions."

"You cheeky new ass!" said Brewster, frowning. "We shan't spoil anything. And in the case of trouble, we shall be there to help you out."

"That's a consoling thought," admitted Graham coolly. "Well, let's get busy on the doings."

"We shall have to bone some clothes from somewhere," said Ascott, with a frown. "I say, this is going to be a snag, isn't it? Where the dickens can we get some suitable togs? And what about a wig? We hadn't thought of all these things."

"No need to think of them," said Graham. "I've got everything I want in my trunk."

"What?"

"I came prepared," said Graham blandly. "I've got every sort of make-up imaginable—especially in the feminine line. You see, I thought I might take part in amateur theatricals and things. And as acting is my hobby, I naturally brought a pretty big stock."

"Good man!" said Brewster. "Come along! Let's go up to the dormitory."

But Graham shook his head.

"Too unsafe," he said. "Old Wragg might spot me coming down, and then he would want to know all sorts of things. And supposing the Head met me going out?"

"H'm! I hadn't thought of that," admitted Brewster.

"Well, you'd better think of it now," said Graham. "I'd better get dressed up in the sports pavilion. The playing-fields are deserted this afternoon, and we can easily bag one of the dressing-rooms. From there I can dodge across the meadows, and get to the footpath."

"This chap," said Brewster, "is brainy."

Without further delay, the plan was put into effect. Two or three juniors accompanied Graham, and they got all the necessary clothing and make-up. There was no difficulty in carrying the stuff out in a suitcase, and Graham vanished into the pavilion with Brewster, Ascott, and Glynn. All the rest waited about outside, pretending to be punting a football about.

"It's a pretty good wheeze, of course, but I'm not sure whether it'll work," remarked Kingswood to his chums of Study No. 2—Norton and Robinson. "I mean, it's a bit thick."

"Yes, it's a tall order," admitted Norton.

"It might be wangled in the evening, when it's dusky—but he's talking about going to St. Frank's in broad daylight," continued Kingswood. "And if those St. Frank's chaps twig him, he'll be half-slaughtered."

"Well, he seems confident enough," said Mann of Study No. 8. "It'll be his funeral if he makes a hash of it."

And so they continued talking, expressing all sorts of doubts. Fifteen minutes elapsed—twenty minutes. Then, finally, after half



"Cheer up, Archie, old son," said Handforth, and gave the noble junior such a clap on the back that Archie very nearly capsized. "Good gad! Great cyclones and earthquakes!" gasped that junior. Handy, as a comforter, was not too soothing in his methods!

an hour, Brewster & Co. appeared from the pavilion.

"Is the coast clear?" asked Hal cautiously.

"Clear as you like," replied Kingswood.

"Not a soul in sight."

"Come on, Aunt Sophie!" said Brewster, glancing back.

All the other River House fellows stared. A lady emerged from the pavilion—and there was something remarkably genuine about her. Those juniors had been expecting to see a sort of stage "Charley's Aunt." Instead, they beheld a rather stern-looking, elderly lady, dressed more or less fashionably. Her skirts descended to her ankles, it was true, but there was nothing frumpish about her appearance. And she looked so much like a real lady that some of the River House fellows unconsciously bared their heads. They couldn't believe that this was really Graham of the Fourth.

"Well, I'm jiggered!" said Kingswood blankly. "It's—it's uncanny!"

"It isn't right that any fellow should be able to do such things!" declared Driscoll.

They were dumbfounded. As Aunt Sophie came nearer and nearer, the illusion was not lost. At close quarters, standing within arm's-length of Aunt Sophie, she still looked authentic.

Cyril Graham had completely disappeared.

There wasn't one single trace of his personality left. Even his facial expression was different. And in his place stood this elderly, aristocratic-looking lady.

Her countenance was severe; slightly bronzed, as befitted a lady who had spent so many years in South Africa, and also slightly wrinkled. Her chin was firm and aggressive; her eyes were piercing, notwithstanding the *pince nez* that were perched on her nose. Grey hair peeped from beneath her hat, and her back was as straight as a ramrod. She was feminine in every inch of her—and yet, at the same time, she was formidable. In every possible way she exactly fitted Archie Glenthorne's description.

"What is the meaning of this?" she said coldly. "You rude boys! Don't you know your manners? How dare you stare at me in this unseemly fashion?"

"Sus-sorry, ma'am!" stammered Norton. "I—I mean—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Silence!" said Aunt Sophie angrily. "I will not have this ridiculous laughter!"

"Oh crumbs!" breathed Kingswood faintly.

The voice was marvellous. A rather high-pitched, feminine voice—but sharp and acid. Brewster and Ascott and Glynn roared with laughter as the other juniors half-backed away. Even though they knew that they

were facing Graham of the Fourth, they felt impelled to beat a retreat.

"You'll do, Graham, my son!" said Brewster heartily. "By Jove! You certainly are a caution!"



CHAPTER 5

A False Alarm.

Edward Oswald Handforth, the celebrated leader of Study D at St. Frank's, frowned as he beheld six cheery figures marching in through the gateway into the Triangle.

"Hallo!" he said. "What the dickens are these fatheads doing here?"

"Nothing, yet, by the look of them," said Church.

"Are you trying to be funny?" frowned Handforth.

"Well, you asked!" protested Church. "Didn't he, Mac?"

"He certainly did!" agreed McClure.

The "fatheads" in question were Hal Brewster, Dave Ascott, Georgie Glynn, and Kingswood, Norton, and Robinson, of Studies Nos. 1 and 2 respectively, of the River House School. In a word, they were the leaders of the Commoners.

"Hi!" roared Handforth. "Come on, Remove!"

"Here, steady——" began Church.

"River House rotters!" bellowed Handforth excitedly.

Brewster & Co. came up to the Ancient House steps, grinning.

"What's all the fuss about?" asked Hal Brewster. "Hallo, Handy! How goes it? Cheerio, Church, my son! And same to you, Mac, with knobs on!"

"Don't mention it!" grinned McClure.

Handforth stared wrathfully at the visitors.

"You've got a nerve, coming in here like this!" he said in an indignant voice. "You're going to get chucked out on your necks——"

"My dear, poor ass!" said Brewster kindly, "don't you understand that I'm here to discuss footer with your junior skipper?"

"Oh!" said Handforth.

"It was arranged yesterday," explained Hal. "I had a word with Nipper over the 'phone, and he asked me to come along at about tea-time this afternoon. Of course, if you object to it——"

At this moment, Nipper himself came out of the Ancient House, accompanied by his chums of Study C—Sir Montie Tregellis-West and Tommy Watson.

"Oh, hallo, Brewster!" said Nipper cheerily. "Good man! Tea isn't quite ready yet, but we can be having a jaw about football until then."

"Just what I thought," nodded Brewster, as they shook hands.

"I rather thought you'd come alone," said Nipper. "Still, it doesn't make any difference—the more, the merrier. I dare say we shall be able to rake up enough cups and saucers—and we're in funds, so the grub problem won't worry us."

"That's good hearing!" said Kingswood heartily.

Handforth frowned.

"I don't see why these six chaps should all have tea in Study C!" he said. "What about three of them piling into Study D?"

"Are you in funds, too?" asked Norton politely.

"Yes."

"Then it's settled!" said Norton. "Either study will do!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You needn't worry," said Handforth. "We shouldn't invite you River House fellows to tea unless we could give you a first-class feed. A better feed, in fact, than you could give us!"

"Don't start any arguments, Handy, old man," murmured Nipper. "Remember that these fellows are guests."

Reggie Pitt came up at that moment, with one or two other West House Removites.

"All Hail, O mighty ones!" said Reggie, by way of greeting. "What see we here? An armistice, forsooth!"

"I'm not so sure about that," replied Brewster promptly.

His conscience would not allow him to call a complete truce. Somehow, it seemed to him that it would not be quite playing the game. For, after all, he and his companions were there to witness the jape that Graham was about to play on the St. Frank's fellows in general, and Archie Glenthorne in particular. And, as it was Brewster's idea, he, too, was involved.

"Not an armistice?" said Reggie Pitt. "Then why aren't you scrapping?"

"We're really here to discuss football," replied Hal. "As far as I know, we haven't flown a flag of truce, and if you fellows start any funny business, we shall probably retaliate. So that's how the matter stands."

"Well, according to that, there's nothing to prevent us from wiping you up on the spot!" said Handforth agreeably.

"Well, a prefect might come along and spoil it," said Brewster. "And, anyhow, there are only six of us against scores of you fellows."

Nipper chuckled.

"There's not much fear of these River House chaps causing any trouble," he said. "So, truce or no truce, there'll be peace."

"H'm! I suppose so," said Handforth in a disappointed voice.

"I suppose we'd better be getting along for tea," said Nipper briskly. "How are we going to divide up the enemy, Handy? I suggest that I take Brewster and Glynn and Ascott, and you can have the other three asses."

"That'll suit me," said Handforth. "They're all the same. One River House chaps is very much like another River House chap."

"Half a minute, there," said Reggie Pitt, with a grin. "Make way for the sleep-walker."

"The which?" said Handforth.

"Observe!" said Reggie, with a wave of his hand.

Archie Glenthorne was approaching the Ancient House steps. He was lost in thought—abstracted and gloomy.

"A perfect picture of misery," murmured Reggie Pitt. "I don't know what has come over Archie these days. I haven't seen him smile for nearly a week! Has he lost one of his ties, or spilt some ink on his best bags?"

"It's worse than that," said Nipper. "He's expecting his aunt."

"Well, of course, opinions differ," remarked Pitt. "Personally, when I'm expecting my aunt, I'm rather bucked. It generally means a quid, at the very least."

Brewster & Co. pretended to be politely interested, but they were not very happy at this meeting. They were half-afraid that Archie might reveal the fact that they had met before that afternoon.

"Cheer up, Archie, old son!" said Handforth, giving the noble junior a clap on the back that nearly capsized him. "You needn't look so blue—Whoa! What's the matter, ass?"

"Good gad!" gasped Archie, coming to himself. "Great cyclones and earthquakes! Where are we? I mean to say, what happened?"

"I only gave you a tap," grinned Handforth.

"Then kindly refrain from the murky practice," said Archie. "At the moment, old thing, the tissues are considerably depleted."

He was about to depart indoors when the tinkle of a bicycle bell sounded. All the juniors looked towards the gates.

"Hallo!" said Tommy Watson. "Telegram for somebody."

Archie leaped about two feet into the air.

"Good gad!" he babbled. "A telegram? Odds horrors and tragedies! I'll bet it's from Aunt Sophie!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Poor old Archie!" said Handforth. "Your Aunt Sophie is coming down at last!"

But the telegraph messenger kept on towards the Modern House, and vanished within. Archie took a deep breath of relief, and some of the colour returned to his cheeks.

"It's wearing me away to a shadow," he said sadly. "I mean to say, this sort of thing is too dashed strenuous for words! Suspense, what? And it might go on for days—perhaps a week or two. Life, dash it, isn't worth living!"

And he wandered hopelessly into the lobby and drifted out of sight.



CHAPTER 6

Phipps the Comforter!

ARRIVING in Study E, Archie had just sufficient strength to ring the bell, and then sag limply upon one of the luxurious lounges. His study was, perhaps, the most expensively furnished in all the Junior quarters of St. Frank's. There were soft carpets on the floor, cushioned lounges round the walls, and many other aids to comfort. And everything was of superb quality. Archie was fastidious, and he always had heaps of money. He was able to indulge his fads and fancies.

The door softly opened, and Phipps glided into the room.

"You rang, sir?" he asked gently.

"Eh? Oh, rather!" said Archie, opening his eyes. "Good old Phipps! Kindly rally round the young master!"

"Is anything wrong, sir?"

"Everything is wrong, Phipps—absolutely everything!" said Archie hopelessly. "I mean to say, Aunt Sophie—"

"Ahem! Quite so, sir," murmured Phipps. "But I think I have already expressed an opinion, sir, that your fears regarding the lady are groundless."

"Pray don't be so utterly ridic., Phipps," said Archie, adjusting his monocle, and giving Phipps an icy stare. "Good gad! That is to say, gadzooks! Aunt Sophie is on my mind to such an extent that I'm getting jumpy. Positively jumpy, Phipps! At the slightest provocation, I find myself leaping into the dashed air like a young gazelle!"

Phipps eyed his young employer with concern. It was obvious to him that Archie was fretting. For two or three days he had been getting worse and worse. His Aunt Sophie was preying on his mind.

"Has anything fresh happened, sir?" he inquired.

"Nothing absolutely fresh, Phipps," replied Archie. "I mean, I haven't had any other letters, or anything foul like that. But just now a telegram came—"

"Indeed, sir?"

"For somebody else," explained Archie. "But, dash it, how was I to know? As soon as I saw the lad on the red jigger, I had about fourteen spasms of heart failure. Absolutely, Phipps! The good old heart leapt about five yards, and then did a considerable amount of palpitating. I mean, this sort of thing is wearing me down. Kindly observe the shadowy effect."

"You are certainly looking somewhat out of condition, sir," admitted Phipps. "However, there is really no need for you to be so concerned. Even if the lady turned up—"

Archie winced.

"Don't talk about it, Phipps!" he said unhappily. "Be good enough to rally round

with the stimulant. It seems to me that a spot of tea is indicated."

"It's hardly the time yet, sir——"

"Bother the time, Phipps," said Archie firmly. "In fact, dash the time! Buzz off, and prepare large quantities of the good old brew for the young master. In the meantime, I will obtain forty of the best and brightest."

"Very good, sir."

"Oh, and, Phipps," said Archie, "just another word about Aunt Sophie. Supposing—just supposing—she absolutely trickled in to-morrow, or the next day?"

"Yes, sir?"

"Well, dash it, there it is!" said Archie. "I mean, supposing? In other words, what is to be done? Kindly remember, Phipps, that the young master is relying upon you to see him through."

"Do you wish me to speak quite plainly, sir?" asked Phipps steadily.

"Oh, rather! As plainly as you like, old bean."

"Then, sir, I am of the opinion that you are making an unnecessary trouble over this proposed visit of your aunt's," said Phipps quietly. "Even if the lady does come—which is doubtful—I cannot see that you have any reason to disturb yourself."

"No reason?" repeated Archie blankly.

"None whatever, sir."

"Then all I can say, Phipps, is that you are a blighter!" said Archie coldly. "It pains the young master most frightfully to say this, but you are undoubtedly a blighter. I mean, what's the idea? Here am I, counting on you——"

"My only desire, sir, is to allay your fears," said Phipps. "Unfortunately, I have never had the pleasure of meeting your Aunt Sophie——"

"The pleasure?" repeated Archie, aghast.

"I trust it would be a pleasure, sir."

"Then, Phipps, you can keep on trusting," said Archie. "I confess I don't remember Aunt Sophie particularly well. There is only one distinct recollection that lingers in the good old grey matter. One day, Phipps, when I was at the tender age of approximately five, I was unguarded enough to pluck a carnation from the garden, in the presence of Aunt Sophie. And do you know, Phipps, the poisonous lady absolutely heaved me across her knee department, and administered a slapping. I mean, there it was! Or, in other words, there was I, with the half-nelson on me——"

"A mere childish recollection, sir," said Phipps. "The lady is not liable to do anything of that sort nowadays."

"Good gad!" said Archie, with a start. "What a poisonous idea!"

"You must remember, sir, that you are now quite a young man," continued Phipps. "The chances are that your Aunt Sophie will be exceedingly pleased with you."

"And supposing she starts the criticising business, Phipps? I mean, what if she objects to the good old socks and the neckties?"

"In that case, sir, you must be firm."

"What ho! I see what you mean," said Archie. "Firm, what?"

"You must show the lady, sir, that you are now quite beyond the stage when you can be—er—slapped."

"Oh, rather!" said Archie, brightening up. "After all, Phipps, the young master is a somewhat hefty lad, as it were."

"Quite so, sir."

"Do you know, Phipps, you have braced me considerably," said Archie, recovering some of his old spirit. "I mean to say, the tissues are feeling decidedly bucked. Before long I shall be singing about the place."

"I am sure of it, sir," nodded Phipps. "If you will take my advice, you will not worry yourself any further on this subject."

Archie allowed himself to sink back amongst the cushions.

"Tea, Phipps!" he murmured. "I rather think that a dash of the good old reviver will put new spirit into the Glenthorne veins. So trickle off, old tea-pot, and get busy with the doings."

Phipps glided noiselessly out of the study, and after he had gone Archie felt soothed and comforted.

"There's no getting away from it," he murmured. "There's something dashed cheery about old Phipps. I mean to say, here I am, feeling as bucked as the dickens."

He was feeling so bucked, in fact, that within a couple of minutes he was dozing contentedly, and in perfect peace.



CHAPTER 7

Aunt Sophie Arrives!

WELL, well!" said Vivian Travers, of the Remove.

He was waiting on the Ancient House steps for his study mate, Jimmy Potts. It was tea-time, and Jimmy was over in the tuck-shop, purchasing various luxuries in the food line. Most of the other fellows were indoors.

A car had just entered the gateway, and it was now gliding towards the Ancient House. Travers, inspecting the occupant of the car with mild interest, saw a severe-looking lady in the rear compartment. And there was something about her appearance which suggested a purposeful mission. Travers was an efficient junior, but he certainly had no suspicions of this alleged lady. Without question, Brewster & Co. were doing the thing properly. They had even gone to the expense of hiring this motor-car. The fact that only one or two juniors were in the Triangle at the time made no difference. Aunt Sophie was arriving in style, as befitted a lady of her wealth and position.

"This is the Ancient House?" inquired the visitor, as the car came to a halt.

"Yes, ma'am!" said the driver, getting out, and opening the rear door.

Travers stepped forward, raising his cap gracefully.

"Allow me, madam," he said graciously. "If there is anything I can do, be gracious enough to command."

Aunt Sophie regarded him suspiciously.

"I trust, my boy, you are not attempting to be facetious?" she asked frigidly.

"For the love of Samson, no!" replied Travers. "But if there is any particular person you are seeking, perhaps I can be of some assistance."

"You seem to be a very strange boy!" said Aunt Sophie, eyeing him up and down. "If you can direct me to Master Glenthorne—Master Archibald Glenthorne—"

"With the greatest of pleasure, madam," said Travers smoothly. "I take it that you are Aunt Sophie?"

"Your assumption happens to be right, and I do not really think that you intend to be impertinent," said the lady. "If you know where my nephew is to be found, I should like you to direct me to him."

"Nothing easier, ma'am," said Travers. "But perhaps you would care to be taken to the Housemaster first—"

"If I desired to be taken to the Housemaster, I should say so," interrupted Aunt Sophie frigidly. "I have no intention of allowing my nephew to receive a warning of my arrival. I have every reason to believe that the boy is pampered and spoilt in this school, and I have come here to find out the truth for myself."

Vivian Travers gave a sidelong glance at Jimmy Potts, who had come up during the conversation, and there was a world of expression in Travers' glance. It really seemed that Archie's fears were well founded. There was something very dragon-like about this small but determined lady.

"You'll find Archie in his study," remarked Jimmy Potts.

"I do not think I require two escorts, thank you," said Aunt Sophie, with a stare at Jimmy.

"Allow me to introduce my study-mate," said Travers. "Sir James Potts—Aunt Sophie. My own name, dear lady, is Travers—"

"I am not interested in your name, or in that of your friend," said Aunt Sophie testily. "Are you going to show me to my nephew's room, or shall I seek other assistance? I do not intend to be kept waiting here."

"This way, madam!" said Travers humbly.

Cyril Graham, during this time, had experienced a faint trace of anxiety. He was cool enough, and calm, too. But this was the real test. Travers was one of the keenest fellows in the Remove, and if he failed to detect anything wrong. Graham knew he had little to fear from most of the other juniors. And, without question, Travers had accepted the visitor without any hesitation.

The car had already gone, and there was now no delay. The alleged Aunt Sophie swept through the lobby, with Travers and Potts slightly in advance of her, acting as guides.

One or two other juniors happened along, and they raised their caps politely, and they also raised their eyebrows. It did not need much guesswork on their part to conclude that this was Aunt Sophie. Archie Glenthorne's fears were justified! The lady had descended upon St. Frank's without giving him the slightest warning. But even Archie had not expected her until another day or two had elapsed, at least.

The Remove passage was reached, and suddenly Aunt Sophie came to a standstill, her eyes gleaming behind the *pince nez*.

"What is that unseemly noise?" she asked in astonishment.

Travers chuckled.

"Nothing, madam—at least, nothing to speak of!" he replied. "Merely a little trouble in Study D. Quite a usual occurrence—"

"I was sure of it!" said Aunt Sophie triumphantly.

"Eh? I beg your pardon?"

"Even before I came to this school, I was convinced that it was inhabited by young hooligans and ruffians!" said the lady, her voice becoming sterner. "I have heard various rumours—various unsettling reports. To think that my nephew should be here, amongst—"

At this moment the door of Study D burst open, and Church came hurtling through like a rocket. He reeled against the opposite wall of the passage, sagged, and sat down violently.

"That's what you get for being funny!" roared Handforth, appearing in the doorway.

Church was on his feet in an instant.

"You—you rotter!" he panted. "You babbling lunatic! Is this the sort of thing you do in front of visitors?"

"Blow the visitors!" snorted Handforth. "Rats to the visitors! If visitors come here, they'll jolly well see me as I really am. I don't put on any false front for anybody!"

Church was boiling with rage.

"Well, I'm not going to stand this!" he panted. "I'm not going to—Hallo! What the— My only hat! I—I beg pardon, ma'am! I—I didn't know—"

He halted, confused and red. He had just caught sight of Aunt Sophie, who had, until that moment, remained perfectly stationary, flanked on either side by Travers and Potts. These latter juniors were quite interested; they were beginning to realise that Aunt Sophie was an entertaining lady. The way she had stood there, listening to Handforth and Church, was rather refreshing.

"So!" said Aunt Sophie in a terrible voice.

"Great pip!" gurgled Handforth, as he turned his head.

Aunt Sophie strode forward, and her brow was as black as thunder.

"Things are even worse than I thought!" she said ominously. "Good gracious me! And so you care nothing for visitors? Visitors can be blown! Never, in all my life, have I heard—"

"But—but you don't understand, ma'am!" gasped Handforth. "I wasn't referring to you!"

"Indeed! I distinctly heard you say——"

"I—I meant these River House chaps, in my study!" said Handforth, with a gulp. "I—I didn't know you were there, ma'am! I'm awfully sorry——"

"And I, for my part, am glad!" said Aunt Sophie. "I have been enabled to see you boys as you really are—to use your own expression. And I cannot say that I am gratified. One could expect to find better manners in a reformatory!"

"Oh, I say!" protested Handforth.

"In a reformatory!" thundered Aunt Sophie. "Good heavens! I am coming along this passage, and what do I see? A boy comes flying through a doorway, evidently knocked about with dreadful brutality. And I cannot doubt that you are responsible."

"He's—he's one of my chums, ma'am!" said Handforth indignantly. "We're the best of pals——"

"Come out here!" said Aunt Sophie sternly.

"Eh? I—I——"

"Come out here!" she commanded.

"Ye-e-es!" faltered Handforth.

He came out, and the other fellows in Study D stood looking on, politely silent. Kingswood & Co., incidentally, were hugging themselves with inward delight. Graham was doing far better than they had ever expected!

The door of Study C had also opened, and Nipper & Co. were there, and also Brewster and Ascott and Glynn. Up and down the passage, doors were opening, and fellows were looking out.

"Now, young man!" said Aunt Sophie. "Hold out your hand!"

"Oh, crumbs!" breathed Handforth. "You—you don't mean——"

"You heard what I said!"

"But—but it's not your business to make me hold out my hand, ma'am!" protested Handforth indignantly. "I don't mind doing anything for a lady, but when it comes to——"

Swish! Swish! Swish!

Aunt Sophie waited for no more. Round came her umbrella, and Handforth received the first knock on the knuckles, the second in the small of his back, and the third on his legs. He danced about madly.

"Hi! Help!" he howled. "Stop it! Oh, my goodness!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Up and down the passage a ripple of laughter ran. Aunt Sophie swung round on the instant, and there came a succession of slams. Every door had closed.

"You disgraceful boy" said Aunt Sophie, glaring at Handforth. "Let this be a lesson to you. I shall probably see you later, and if necessary I may report your conduct to your headmaster. Hooligans—nothing less!"

Aunt Sophie swept on, and Travers and Potts obligingly opened the door of Study E for her.

CHAPTER 8

Somewhat Poisonous!



THE moment was inopportune.

In spite of the slight commotion that had recently taken place in the Remove passage, Archie Glenthorne was in no fit condition to receive an unexpected visitor. He was sprawling on the lounge, indulging, as he himself expressed it, in forty of the best and brightest. His mouth was wide open, his breathing was even, and his expression was one of seraphic peace. Phipps had smoothed those wrinkles from Archie's brow, and had given him fresh heart. "Wake up, Archie——" began Travers, by way of warning.

"Silence!" ordered Aunt Sophie, turning upon him. "Do not utter a sound, young man! It is my desire to look round this apartment before my nephew awakens. I suppose this actually is my nephew? This—this pitiable specimen is actually Archie?"

"Oh, yes, ma'am," put in Jimmy Potts. "He's Archie all right. Just having a little nap, I suppose."

"We will continue to await his pleasure!" said the lady, with ominous calmness. "So! This is his study? Never, in my life, have I seen such outrageous extravagance! Such unnecessary luxury! It is positively disgusting!"

She walked over the soft carpet, and inspected the many cushions, the elegant furniture, and the rich curtains. And everything, judging by her expression, was wrong.

Travers and Potts were glad that she had left the door wide open. This was better than they had anticipated! Nipper and Handforth and some other juniors had crept along the corridor, and were looking into the fatal apartment. Even Brewster & Co. had ventured out, and were hovering in the background. They could not actually see into Archie's study, but they would be able to hear all that transpired. And this would be sufficient for them! They were jubilant. The jape was going splendidly.

"It is not so much the boy's fault as his parents!" said Aunt Sophie angrily. "Outrageous! Scandalous! That they should allow him these absurd comforts! They are enough to ruin any young boy's stamina!"

Whack!

Aunt Sophie, who appeared to be very handy with her umbrella, now brought it down across Archie's chest. It wasn't a heavy blow, but it was quite sufficient to awaken the genial ass of the Remove.

"What ho!" he said, sitting up and fumbling for his monocle. "Tea, by gad! Absolutely, Phipps! The jolly old stuff to pour down the thorax, what?"

"Archibald!" ejaculated Aunt Sophie, taking a step backwards, and gazing at

Archie in dumbfounded amazement. "Can—can this be the sweet little boy I once knew?"

Archie opened his eyes, closed them again, blinked, and went as limp as a wet rag.

"Good gad!" he gurgled, falling back on the lounge.

"I am shocked—inexpressibly shocked!" said Aunt Sophie, in horrified accents. "That my sweet little Archie—the golden-haired child of my memory—should grow up into a pampered dude! It is far more appalling than I had ever feared!"

"I—I mean to say— Odds surprises and shocks!" murmured Archie, staring glassily at the lady. "The fact is, I don't quite know—"

"Get up from that ridiculous lounge, Archibald!" commanded Aunt Sophie. "And do not pretend that you do not know me! Did I not write, telling you that I should come down—"

"Aunt Sophie, what?" breathed Archie. "Oh, rather! How do you do, old thing? Frightfully pleased to see you— That is to say, absolutely not! However, I mean—"

"You need not pretend that you are pleased to see me, Archibald!" broke in Aunt Sophie coldly. "I can well believe that you are alarmed and perturbed. Your conscience is evidently guilty, or so it should be!"

"Oh, rather not!" protested Archie. "The fact, old scream—"

"What did you call me?" demanded the lady.

"That is to say, old article—"

"What!"

"In other words, old girl!" gasped Archie. "Or, to put it exact, dear lady! Good gad! I'm getting all flustered and bothered, dash it! I mean to say, wasn't it a bit of a foul proposition to barge in on a chappie while he was sampling a slight nap?"

"It was my intention to surprise you, young man!" said the visitor, with relish. "I had a suspicion that I should find you asleep. I have heard from various relatives that you are lazy, indolent, worthless."

"Oh, rather!" said Archie. "I mean to say, relatives generally give reports of that sort, what? Kindly and charitable—"

"Silence!" said Aunt Sophie. "I find that all my fears are well-founded. I come to this school, and here I discover you—surrounded with cushions. I find you in the midst of needless luxury."

"Really, Aunt Sophie, dear old girl, you're absolutely wrong!" said Archie, recovering himself to some extent, and remembering Phipps' words. "I'll admit the old study is somewhat lavish, but a chappie doesn't get much comfort outside his own quarters, you know. Besides, the pater thinks it's rather a bright scheme—"

"We will not discuss your father!" interrupted Aunt Sophie coldly.

"No? Well, perhaps not," said Archie. "In fact, decidedly not! Now, the mater

"Or your mother, either, young man!"

"Just as you say," babbled Archie feebly. "But I'd like you to understand, Aunt Sophie, that I'm not really the sort of blighter you imagine. I mean, when it comes to football, I'm pretty brisk. And, when the occasion demands, the good old fists can be slightly useful."

"You cannot delude me with these nonsensical statements!" said Aunt Sophie coldly. "You are obviously a worthless weed."

"Good gad!"

"Yes, a weed," continued the lady. "Instead of growing up like a flower, as I had hoped, I find that you have developed into a perfectly useless member of society. Your tone of voice is that of a dandy, your language is preposterous. But there will be a difference before I leave this school!" she added ominously. "I intend to alter things!"

Archie clutched at the table for support.

"I rather thought you would come down later in the week, dear old thing!" he murmured. "I mean to say, a post-card wouldn't have been amiss. Or a telegram, or something of that sort. But here you come, without any dashed warning, and—"

"Stand upright, boy!" commanded Aunt Sophie.

"Eh? Oh, but—"

"Hold your shoulders back, and raise your chin!" said the lady. "I do not like to see this wilting attitude. If possible, I will make a man of you! Your clothing is preposterous. That waistcoat must be destroyed!"

"Oh, but really—"

"Your necktie is a positive disgrace!" proceeded Aunt Sophie. "Remove it at once. It offends me."

Archie fought for breath.

"But, good gad, I can't remove the good old necktie in public!" he protested. "I mean, undressing downstairs, as it were—"

"Remove that necktie!" commanded Aunt Sophie. "It is an atrocity!"

"But—"

"If you do not remove it, Archibald, I will tear it from you!"

"Oh, well, of course," said Archibald bleakly, "that's different."

He unfastened his necktie, and handed it over. To his horror, Auntie Sophie threw it into the fire. The late September evening was chilly, and Phipps had been thoughtful enough to light a fire. Archie watched the necktie as it blazed up.

"And this!" said Aunt Sophie, in a tone of renewed horror. "Good gracious! Is it possible?"

"Eh? I must confess I don't quite gather the trend—"

"Upon my word!" ejaculated Aunt Sophie, her voice rising with indignation. "A monocle! That my nephew should come to such a pass! An eyeglass! This is indeed appalling!"

She grasped Archie's monocle, and gave it a sharp tug. The cord broke, and the unfortunate junior gave a yelp of alarm.

"Silence!" said Aunt Sophie. "Menocles are a sign of imbecility! There!"

She tossed the offending eyeglass into the wastepaper-basket—and at that moment Phipps arrived, laden with a tray!



CHAPTER 9

The She-Dragon!

"If you don't mind, young gentlemen," said Phipps politely. Archie's valet had no suspicion of what was taking place in Study E. The fact that so many juniors were gathered round the doorway meant nothing. Juniors round a study door was a common sight in the Remove passage.

So Phipps entered Study E in blind ignorance of Aunt Sophie's presence until he was actually within the room.

"And what," demanded the lady, "is this?"

She pointed her umbrella accusingly at the startled Phipps.

"That?" said Archie. "Oh, rather! I mean, Phipps, what?"

"I do not mean the man!" snapped Aunt Sophie. "What is this absurd tray, with its silver pots and jugs?"

"There, of course, you're wrong!" said Archie stoutly. "There's absolutely nothing absurd about this, Aunt Sophie. Good gad, no! Here we have the cup that cheers. I mean to say, tea!"

"Tea!" shouted the lady, in accents of sheer consternation.

"Tea!" repeated Archie firmly. "The good old life reviver! Absolutely the stuff to lubricate the gullet! The good old liquid that is never failing——"

"Stop!" thundered Aunt Sophie. "Tea, young man, is poison!"

"Eh?" gasped Archie. "Good gad! That is to say, odds life! Really, Aunt Sophie, I don't seem to understand——"

"Then you will understand before I have done with you!" interrupted Aunt Sophie harshly. "Tea, indeed! Take that tray away!" she added, gazing sternly at Phipps.

"Yes, ma'am!" said Phipps, startled.

"Oh, but I say!" protested Archie, leaping forward, imbued with new life at the thought of losing his precious cup of tea. "I mean to say, I say! Positively not, dear lady! When it comes to a matter of tea, the young master must assert himself."

"The young master?" repeated Aunt Sophie, in amazement.

"Phipps," explained Archie, "is my valet."

It was rather a foolish statement to make, for until then there had been a chance that Aunt Sophie would take Phipps for one of the school attendants. Not much chance, of course, since the River House spoofer had

intended to make some very pointed inquiries regarding Phipps' standing. But that was now unnecessary.

"Oh, so we are learning more and more!" said Aunt Sophie, in a voice that caused Archie's bones to feel like jelly. "So this—this man is your valet?"

"Well, you see——"

"Are all the boys allowed to employ personal servants in this way?"

"Good gad, no!" said Archie. "In my case it's an absolute exception. You see, I'm a helpless sort of chappie, and the Head rather thought, and I rather thought, that it wouldn't be a bad sort of scheme——"

"You need not go into any lengthy explanation, Archibald," put in Aunt Sophie coldly. "I know quite sufficient. This man has been employed by you in the capacity of valet. In other words, you have been waited upon hand and foot."

"Well, in a way of speaking——"

"It is not sufficient for you to have luxuries and refinements in your study," continued the grim visitor. "You must needs have a valet, to indulge your laziness even further. I am shocked. The whole thing is scandalous! It is outrageous in the extreme!"

"Phipps, old lad, kindly come to the young master's rescue!" murmured Archie appealingly. "In other words, S.O.S.! Rally round and rescue the perishing! It seems to me that Archie is sunk!"

"To return to the subject of tea, I forbid any further use of this pernicious beverage," said Aunt Sophie. "You will understand, Archibald, that I command you to dispense with tea entirely. It is poisonous to the system! It is a commodity that should be prohibited by Act of Parliament!"

"I'm frightfully sorry, Aunt Sophie, but it's absolutely imposs.!" declared Archie, bracing himself up, and facing his aunt with a show of boldness. "I mean to say, there are some things that a chappie can do without. But tea—no! Absolutely—no! Phipps, be good enough to trickle forward with the stimulant. The young master needs a couple of spots without further delay."

This, of course, was rank insubordination. Aunt Sophie could hardly believe her ears at first, and all the juniors collected in the doorway chuckled joyously. This was what they had been hoping for—a show of spirit on Archie's part. Without question, it would have a startling effect.

"Archibald!" shouted Aunt Sophie furiously. "How dare you defy me in this way! I have instructed you to dispense with tea——"

"Oh, but, dash it——"

"Take that tray away this instant!" ordered the lady, twirling round upon Phipps. "And as for you, my man, you may consider yourself dismissed!"

"I think, madam, that it is for Master Archibald to say whether I am to be dismissed or not!" replied Phipps, politely but firmly.

"Master Archibald is incapable of any sensible action!" declared Aunt Sophie. "I



Prim Aunt Sophie, escorted by Jimmy Potts and Vivian Travers, arrived outside Study D just in time to see Church come hurtling through the doorway like a rocket. He reeled against the opposite wall of the passage, sagged, and sat down violently. And Aunt Sophie, her brow as black as a thundercloud, looked on ominously.

am thankful that I am here to guide him and to advise him. You are no longer needed, my man. Go, and do not return! You are dismissed from my nephew's service!"

Archie reeled, and sank back dazedly on to the lounge.

"Help!" he breathed faintly. "Phipps, laddie, don't desert the young master in his hour of trial!"

"I will do my best, sir——" began Phipps.

"How dare you!" shouted Aunt Sophie, glaring at him. "Did you not hear my command? Go at once!"

"Yes, ma'am, but——"

"Good gracious!" panted Aunt Sophie. "This—this is beyond endurance!"

She brought her umbrella round, and cracked Phipps sharply on the elbow. The tea-tray rocked and swayed, and a considerable portion of hot tea leapt out of the pot and spread itself over Phipps' shirt-front.

"Ouch!" gasped Phipps.

He beat a hasty retreat, and the juniors in the doorway parted so that he could pass through. And Archie Glenthorne watched the proceedings with dull, glassy eyes. Not only was the tea vanishing, but Phipps was going, too! Things were getting worse and worse.

"And Phipps told me that everything would be all serene!" he murmured sadly. "I mean, the foul blighter absolutely said that there was nothing to worry about. Dash it, he deserves the sack! Absolutely! The frightful fright has failed the young master in the moment of his distress!"

But if Archie thought that the worst was over, he was very much of an optimist!



CHAPTER 10

All Hands to the Pumps!

REWSTER & CO. were hugging themselves with joy.

The jape was going gloriously—far better than they had dared to hope for. Perhaps it was rather hard lines on Archie, but, after all, it was only a jape, and sooner or later he would know the real truth, and then his relief would be ample compensation for his present misery.

"Poor old Archie!" murmured Nipper. "His aunt seems to be a bit of a caution!"

"A sort of Gorgon," nodded Brewster feelingly. "I don't think she's finished yet, either."

"Finished?" said Handforth, with a sniff. "She hasn't started!"

Brewster was very gratified because none of the St. Frank's fellows had the slightest suspicion of the truth. Even Nipper, with all his astuteness, failed to recognise an enemy in Aunt Sophie.

As for Archie, he was in the depths of despair.

Phipps had failed him—badly. Indeed, never before had Phipps been such an utter wash-out. He had distinctly told Archie that there was nothing to worry about. Now,

practically within half an hour, Phipps had been dismissed, and had gone for good.

And here was Aunt Sophie, just getting into the swing of things. She was warming to her work in the most refreshing manner.

"Archibald!" she commanded. "Get up from that sofa!"

"Eh?" panted Archie, opening his eyes. "Sofa? Good gad! I hope, dear old thing, that I haven't got such a thing in this dashed study as a sofa! I mean so frightfully old-fashioned! If you're referring to the lounge—"

"Do not quibble with me, young man!" interrupted the lady coldly. "Stand up at once! You are my nephew, and I intend to save you from this morass of indolence into which you have fallen. It is high time that you were brought to your senses."

"Oh, rather!" said Archie, as he rose dazedly to his feet. "I rather think I shall require a few large doses of restoratives."

"I am the only large dose you will get," replied Aunt Sophie grimly. "I am going to save you, Archibald."

"Isn't it too late, old thing?" murmured Archie. "I mean, the worst has happened."

"I intend to alter the whole course of your life!" continued the visitor. "From to-day onwards you must drink no more tea, and your valet is dispensed with. Now we must pay some attention to this furniture."

Archie blinked.

"Furniture?" he repeated. "Oh, but you're not going to start messing about with the good old goods and chattels?"

"All this outrageous furniture is to be removed from this study," replied Aunt Sophie calmly. "Here, young men!" she added, turning to the crowd in the doorway. "You are doing nothing——"

She broke off, as there was a general move to beat a retreat.

"Stop!" she commanded. "How dare you move when I am addressing you? Come in here! Six of you will be sufficient. All this furniture is to be taken out, and stored away in a lumber-room."

"Good gad!" gurgled Archie.

"But, I say, we're not furniture removers, ma'am!" protested Handforth indignantly.

"You are idle, good-for-nothing boys!" retorted Aunt Sophie. "If you can stand there, inactive, you can just as well obey my orders. Remove this furniture at once!"

"But if the Housemaster sees us——"

"You may leave the Housemaster to me," said the lady calmly.

"My only topper!" breathed Brewster, startled. "He's certainly a terror!"

He was referring to Cyril Graham, the spoofer. Even Brewster & Co. had not expected that Graham would go to such lengths as this. But it was a glorious development. The idea of Archie Glenthorpe's study being cleared of all its luxurious furniture was screamingly funny. At least, it was to the River House juniors. To Archie Glenthorpe it was a nightmare.

But he made a last effort.

"Kindly listen to reason, Aunt Sophie," he urged. "I mean to say, it will be most frightfully awkward without tables and things——"

"You shall have a table," interrupted Aunt Sophie. "But I cannot allow you to retain these abominable aids to laziness. The lounges and the soft chairs shall be removed."

"Well, ma'am, I don't see why we should do it!" said Fullwood warmly.

Crack!

Aunt Sophie's umbrella caught Fullwood sharply over the shoulders.

"Now," said the alleged lady, with acidity. "How dare you! When I command, I expect to be obeyed!"

"Oh, corks!" muttered Fullwood. "I—I suppose we'd better do it, you fellows?"

"I think it'll be the safest course, dear old fellow," remarked Travers.

They commenced lifting the heavy furniture, and they went staggering out with it. Aunt Sophie watched complacently, superintending the proceedings. As for Archie, he was too weak and dazed to make any further protests.

Nipper was taking no actual part in the work. As a matter of fact, the Remove skipper was puzzled—and thoughtful. Until a few minutes ago, he had had no doubts regarding Aunt Sophie. But now, for the first time, he began to wonder.

Surely the lady was going too far?

Indeed, she was too drastic to be really genuine. And yet, when Nipper examined her closely, he could only conclude that she really was the person she purported to be. Certainly, Nipper did not dream, for a single second, that he was really gazing upon a River House fellow. At the very most, he dimly suspected that Aunt Sophie was slightly wrong in the head.

"Look out!" sang out somebody from the corridor. "Here comes old Crowell!"

"My only hat!" said Tommy Watson, startled.

Nipper, by sheer chance, had his gaze still fixed upon Aunt Sophie. The sudden announcement that the Remove Form-master was coming was not particularly dramatic. After all, any Form-master might appear in a Junior passage. It wasn't usual at this hour of the evening, but it was by no means uncommon.

Aunt Sophie glanced round sharply.

"Close that door!" she said, in a commanding voice. "I do not want any interruptions from these schoolmasters now!"

"No, ma'am!" said Fullwood.

The door was closed, but a moment later Gresham opened it, and looked in.

"It's all right—he went the other way," he explained. "We thought he was coming here at first."

"And would it have mattered, even if he had come here?" demanded Aunt Sophie tartly. "Do not imagine, young man, that I am afraid of schoolmasters!"

"Nun-no, ma'am!" stammered Gresham, retreating.

But Nipper found his heart beating very rapidly. Just for a suspicion of a second, he had detected a light of alarm in Aunt Sophie's eyes. When she had heard that Mr. Crowell was coming, she looked startled, and then she had ordered the door to be closed.

Why?

If she was Archie Glenthorne's genuine aunt, why should she be unwilling to let the masters know what she was doing? Surely she intended telling them of her actions, later? Besides, why should the very name, "Mr. Crowell," cause her to look alarmed? She was a stranger at St. Frank's, and it was impossible for her to know the Form-masters by name.

"Phew!" whistled Nipper. "There's something fishy about this!"

At first, it had been a mere doubt, at the back of his mind. Now, however, it was becoming a conviction.



CHAPTER 11

Suspicious!

NIPPER drew Travers and Handforth aside. They had carried out one of the big chairs, and had taken it to a lumber-room. Now, before returning to the scene of battle, they held a brief consultation.

"My sons," said Nipper, in a low voice, "there's something rummy about this!"

"Dear old fellow, you're right!" agreed Travers. "It's thundering rummy. Aunt Sophie appears to be a cough-drop."

"She's even worse than Archie thought!" growled Handforth. "Women like that ought to be kept locked up somewhere. She's dangerous!"

"Never mind about her being dangerous—but I don't believe she's genuine!" said Nipper keenly.

"What!"

"For the love of Samson!"

"She was quite scared for a tick when she heard that Crowell was going near the study," went on Nipper. "And I've been thinking of other things, too. After all, is it reasonable that Archie's real aunt would come into the school and create all this commotion?"

"What does it matter whether it's reasonable or not?" asked Handforth, staring. "She's doing it!"

"Just now, before we brought that chair along, I took a good look at Brewster & Co.," went on Nipper steadily. "They were pretending to be politely interested—as though they had nothing to do with the affair. Yet, I'll swear that they were bubbling with inward laughter. I tell you, there's something fishy about the whole business—or I'm a Dutchman!"

"Well, well!" said Travers, staring straight before him. "Dear old fellow, you mean—a jape?"

"What else?"

"A jape!" gasped Handforth. "Great pip! You—you mean that these River House chaps—"

"Well, isn't it significant that they're here, just at this particular time?" asked Nipper shrewdly. "I expected Brewster to pop in to discuss footer. But six of these River House fellows come—and they take jolly good care to be in the Remove passage while Aunt Sophie is getting busy with Archie! I'm not saying that it is so, but it seems suspicious."

"Aunt Sophie!" said Travers. "H'm! And Archie, remember, told us that he hadn't seen his aunt for ten years—"

"By Jove!" said Nipper, with a start. "I'd overlooked that, for the moment!"

"Then, again!" went on Travers. "The way she dismissed Phipps. Would any real lady take a liberty like that? It's just possible that Brewster & Co. engaged her to work this stunt—"

"Or—or—"

Nipper came to a sudden stop. An idea had occurred to him, but he had dismissed it in the same flash. But it returned, and now he was left breathless.

"Or what?" asked Handforth.

"Wait a minute!" said Nipper. "I can't believe it, you know. And yet—and yet—"

"Can't believe what, ass?" demanded Handforth. "What the dickens are you raving about?"

"Graham!" said Nipper tensely.

"Eh?"

"Graham?"

"That new chap at the River House School!" said Nipper. "Don't you remember how he came here, not long ago, dressed up as Larry Scott's supposed sister? He spoofed all of us—"

"Oh, cheese it!" protested Handforth. "What rot! Aunt Sophie is genuine enough. It's all piffle to suppose that she could really be Graham in disguise. No chap on earth could do it!"

"Great Samson!" murmured Travers. "I'm not so sure, Handy, dear old fellow. I'm not so sure! Don't forget that Craham is the son of a famous actor, and the way he pulled that other stunt off was marvellous. And if he can do it once, why not twice?"

"But we know him now!" said Edward Oswald.

"We know him in his ordinary personality—yes!" said Nipper. "But if he's such a clever actor, it oughtn't to be too difficult for him to sink his own personality completely. And, by Jove, the more I think of it, the more likely it seems. Brewster & Co. here—watching everything! Aunt Sophie turning up days before she was expected! Dismissing Phipps, and having all this furniture cleared out—"

"Let's go along and face her!" said Travers.

"Yes, but it's a pretty delicate situation!" said Nipper dubiously. "We can't take any liberties, you know! Not being absolutely

sure, it's awkward. We might get into serious trouble if we have made a blunder."

"Oh, rats!" said Handforth. "It'll be easy enough. I'll make a grab at her hat, and if her hair comes off with it, we shall know——"

"There's a big 'if' about that, old man," grinned Nipper. "Supposing the hair doesn't come off? I can see you getting murdered on the spot."

"Well, now that we're on our guard, it will be easier to find out the truth," said Travers.

They hurried back to Study E, and when they arrived they found that famous apartment looking very bare and forlorn. Even the carpet had been taken up. Somebody had brought in a couple of hard Windsor chairs, and Archie was sitting on one of these in the most disconsolate attitude. He sat on the very edge, as though the rest of the chair was red-hot.

"There!" Aunt Sophie was saying. "That is much better, Archibald! In future, your study will remain like this."

"I mean to say, I'd rather go into a dashed prison!" mumbled Archie. "The fact is, Aunt Sophie, you're a bit too strenuous. All this sort of thing may go down frightfully well in South Africa, but——"

"Silence!"

"Oh, rather!" murmured Archie. "Any old thing."

Nipper had noticed that Brewster & Co. were still hovering about—and now that he was really suspicious he could tell that they were certainly enjoying the situation.

"You will come with me, Archibald!" continued Aunt Sophie. "I intend to examine your bed-room now, and——"

"Good gad!" babbled Archie. "You—you don't mean to absolutely say that you're going to wreck the old sleeping apartment?"

"If it is furnished in any way like this room, then I intend to dismantle it!" replied the lady grimly. "I will not have you lounging and lolling about——"

"Pardon me, ma'am," said Nipper hesitantly.

Aunt Sophie turned and regarded him coldly.

"Well?" she demanded.

"I am the captain of the Remove, ma'am," said Nipper. "Archie, as you may know, is in the Remove, and——"

"Is that any reason why you should interrupt me?"

"No real reason, perhaps," replied Nipper. "But, you see, we have always regarded Archie as a bit of an exception. As you probably know, his Uncle Jeremiah has always taken a great interest in him. For example, did you know that Uncle Jeremiah paid for all the furniture, and that he advised Archie to take life easily?"

Aunt Sophie snorted—although it was quite a ladylike snort.

"I have never had any patience with Jeremiah!" she said tartly. "The man is far worse than Archibald himself!"

Nipper's eyes gleamed.

"That's very peculiar, ma'am!" he said blandly. "As far as I know, Archie has never possessed an Uncle Jeremiah!"

Aunt Sophie took half a step backwards, and for an instant her eyes were filled with alarm.

"Indeed!" she said sharply, as she recovered herself. "What is your idea in attempting to——"

"Awfully sorry, ma'am, but we don't quite take you for granted," said Nipper coolly. "In fact, we're becoming a bit suspicious."

"Suspicious!" ejaculated the lady.

"Yes!" roared Handforth. "You're not Archie's aunt at all! Come on, you fellows! It's a jape! I believe these River House chaps——"

"Crumbs!" came a gasp from Norton.

It was a fatal slip on Norton's part.

"Did you hear that?" yelled Handforth excitedly. "It's a jape, you fellows! Remove, ahoy! Come on—grab the lot of 'em!"

Hal Brewster, in the open doorway, knew that there was only one thing to be done. Dramatically, unexpectedly, the jape had crashed.

"Bunk!" thundered Brewster. "Come on, you chaps! Bolt!"

Before any of the Removites could make a grab at Aunt Sophie, she took one flying leap to the door and tore out. And this, in itself, was sufficient.

"It's Graham!" shouted Nipper. "I knew it! We've been diddled!"

"Oh, my only sainted aunt!"

"Absolutely!" breathed Archie, passing a hand over his brow. "I rather think that it's *my* sainted aunt, laddies!"

A wave of intense excitement was sweeping throughout the Remove. But it had come too late. They had been rendered inactive by the very suddenness of the disclosure, and in the meantime Brewster & Co. were gaining their liberty.



CHAPTER 12

Rough on Mr. Pycraft!

FTER them!"

"River House rotters!"

The pursuers were in full cry, but Brewster & Co. had obtained an excellent start. Nipper, now that he knew the full truth, could easily understand why Hal Brewster had refused to call an armistice. For Brewster had known, all along, that an act of war was in progress, so to speak.

And now, to cap everything, it seemed that the raiders were to escape scot-free!

Yet the excitement was by no means over. The six River House juniors were well in front, with Graham tearing along some little way behind them. They had not

deserted their companion, but were deliberately keeping ahead, so that they could clear the road.

Unfortunately, Mr. Horace Pycraft, the master of the Fourth Form, was entering the Ancient House at the very moment of Brewster & Co.'s exit; and there was no time for dodging.

The six River House fellows simply swept into Mr. Pycraft like a cyclone. They didn't see him until it was too late, and then he had a momentary idea that the world had come to an end.

Crash! Biff! Thud!

Mr. Pycraft went over like a ninepin. Confused and bewildered, he had a vision of flying figures. He sprawled on the floor, his glasses on one side of him, his mortar-board on the other.

"Good gracious!" he gurgled faintly.

Somehow, he managed to scramble to his feet. It was a most unlucky moment for him. Bad as the situation was, it became worse.

For Aunt Sophie was nearly upon him, tearing across the lobby at top speed. Handforth was leading the pursuers—and, what was more to the point, Handforth was whirling a bag of jam-tarts. He had grabbed them from an outraged junior a minute earlier as he had swept past.

Whiz!

The bag of tarts flew accurately through the air, and some instinct seemed to tell "Aunt Sophie" that he had better duck. Or perhaps he ducked because Mr. Pycraft was in the way.

At all events, the master of the Fourth only had a brief, hazy glimpse of an extraordinary lady, dashing along with her skirts held nearly up to her knees. Then the bag of jam-tarts struck Mr. Pycraft in the very centre of his face!

Splosh!

The paper-bag, unfortunately, was very thin. It burst, and the tarts spread themselves over Mr. Pycraft's visage in a fearful mess of jam and pastry.

He staggered, reeled, and then Handforth and Co. collided violently with him. He turned a back-somersault, and rolled half-way down the Ancient House steps.

Not that the St. Frank's fellows had had any intention of molesting Mr. Pycraft. They knew better than that. The whole thing had been an accident. In their excitement, they hadn't even seen the Form-master, and when they did see him, it was too late.

"Quick!" gasped Church. "Come on! We've half-killed old Pycraft!"

"But he can't see—thank goodness!" said Fullwood. "He's all smothered! Cave, you chaps!"

But the brief delay over Mr. Pycraft had been sufficient for the fugitives. They managed to get through the gateway, and then, as though by magic, they were mounted

on their bicycles—even including Aunt Sophie.

Those machines had been concealed behind the hedge—in readiness! And Nipper & Co. were not prepared for such measures.

A great crowd of Removites went surging out into the road, and they had the disappointment of their lives. Brewster & Co. were sailing away down the lane, laughing like hyenas.

"Poor old St. Frank's!" came Brewster's yell.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Who's dished this time?" sang out Brewster.

"St. Franks!" yelled the other River House juniors.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Nipper drew a deep breath.

"Well, that's done it!" he said. "We can't chase them now—but we'll have our revenge later on. For the moment, we'd better dodge round, and get back into the Ancient House by the rear door."

"Ye gods and little fishes, yes!" said Fullwood. "You mean, old Pycraft!"

"Exactly!"

There was every need for speed. The immediate excitement was over, but there was liable to be a lot more, if Mr. Horace Pycraft started making any pressing inquiries.

As it happened, Mr. Pycraft picked himself up from the steps, removed a certain proportion of the jam from his face, and gazed round dizzily.

He was alone—utterly alone.

Silence reigned over the Triangle. A brooding peace had descended upon St. Frank's, and it seemed incredible that there could have been so much noise a short minute earlier.

"Help!" shouted Mr. Pycraft feebly. "Help—help!"

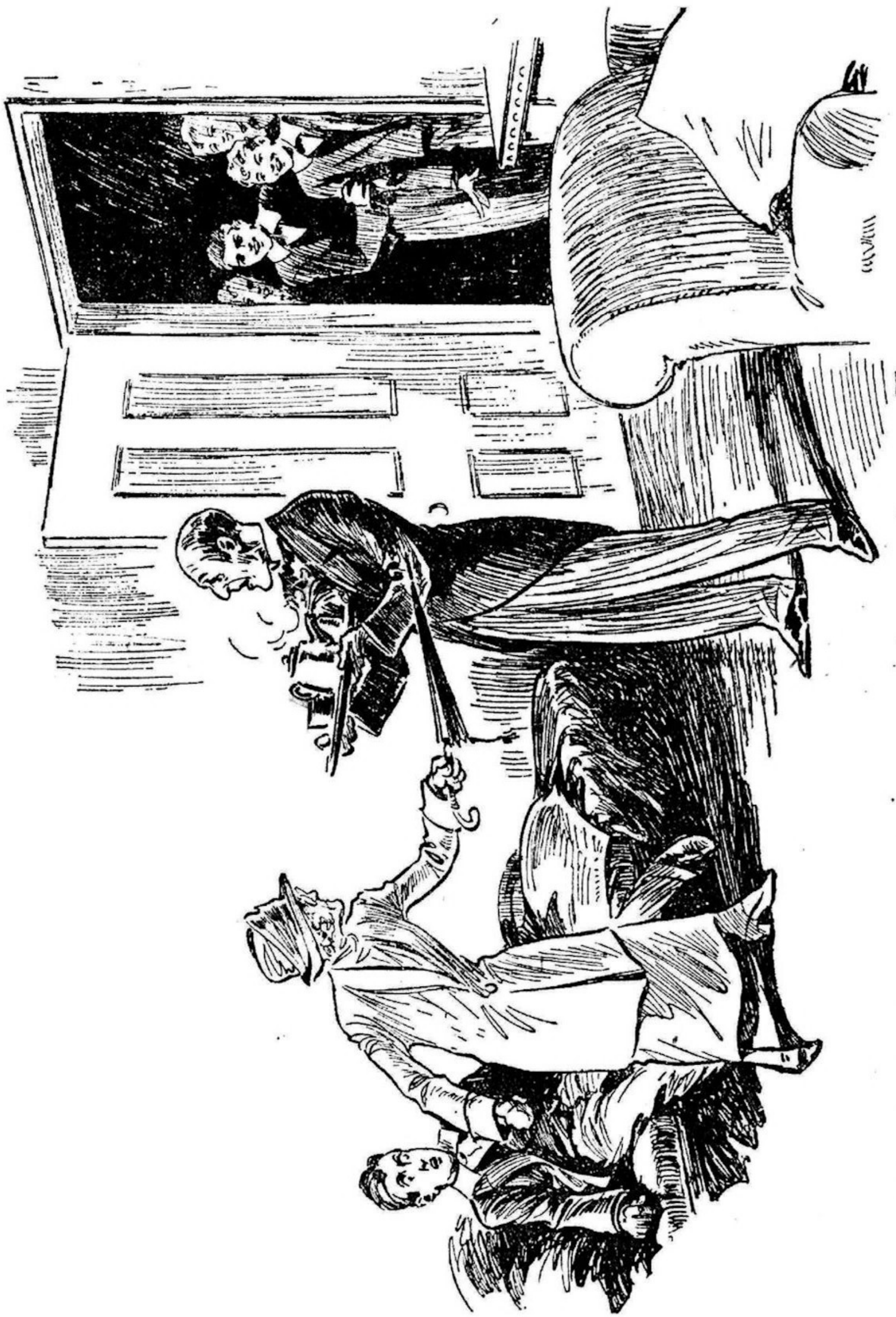
But no help came.

Mr. Pycraft was dizzy and bruised. He had, in fact, been very ill treated. First of all, Brewster & Co. had knocked him over, then about a dozen jam-tarts had spread themselves over his face, and after that he had been bowled over again. It had been one succession of disasters.

The worst of it was, Mr. Pycraft hadn't the faintest idea who had committed these outrages.

He had seen a glimpse of flying figures, and then he had gone down. He had caught the faintest blur of an extraordinary-looking lady, and then he had gone down again. It was most exasperating. But Mr. Pycraft was not content to let matters stand as they were. He was going to make some very grim inquiries—and then, after that, the culprits were to be punished.

Breathing threats, and limping considerably, Mr. Pycraft hurried across the Triangle, for he had no desire to meet anybody in his present condition. He had thought about rushing to the Head, just as he was, but he decided that it would not be advisable. The Head



Aunt Sophie had told Phipps to go, and Phipps had hesitated; Aunt Sophie wasn't the type to stand any nonsense. She brought her umbrella round, and cracked Phipps sharply on the elbow. The tea-tray rocked and swayed, and a considerable portion of hot tea leapt out of the pot and spread itself over the valet's shirt-front. "Ouch!" gasped Phipps.

would only lecture him for making an exhibition of himself in public.

On the East House steps, Mr. Pycraft encountered Professor Tucker, the science master.

"Ah, Mr. Pycraft!" said the professor. "I have just been looking for you——"

"I am very sorry, sir, but I cannot stop!" snapped Mr. Pycraft.

"Really! It is most important!" said Professor Tucker. "With reference to your science class to-morrow—— Good gracious me! Upon my soul! Whatever has happened, Mr. Pycraft? You appear to have a most violent rash on your face."

"Bah!" snarled Mr. Pycraft.

Professor Tucker adjusted his spectacles, and took a closer look.

"But this is dreadful!" he said, in alarm. "My dear sir! You are severely injured——"

But Mr. Pycraft pushed past, and hurried upstairs. Professor Tucker had made the mistake of confusing a certain amount of raspberry jam with Mr. Pycraft's gore. He had believed that the Form-master had suffered a severe mangling of his face.

"Dear me!" said the professor, in distress. "I am very much afraid that Mr. Pycraft is gravely injured. We must inquire into this."

Drake, of the Fifth, came out just then.

"Any sign of a new moon, sir?" asked Drake genially.

Actually, he was only chipping the professor — since the professor's hobby was astronomy. But the old gentleman took the question quite seriously.

"Upon my word, Drake, you are extraordinarily ignorant!" he said, in surprise. "Surely you know that the moon is at the full just now?"

"Is it, sir?"

"It certainly is!" declared the professor. "And, Drake, let me tell you something else. Just now there is a rather strange phenomenon to be witnessed in the sky. If you will come to my laboratory this evening, after darkness has fallen—— Drake! Dear me! Surely the boy must have known that I was talking to him!"

Drake had escaped, and Professor Tucker wandered away, this interruption having completely driven Mr. Pycraft out of his mind.

In the meantime the majority of the Removites had collected in the Ancient House Common-room, and they were breathing fire and brimstone. Every smile had vanished, and the air was thick with wrathful threats.

"The spoofers! The rotters!" shouted Handforth. "It was that chap, Graham, all the time! And he had the nerve to biff me with that umbrella of his!"

"What about poor old Archie?" said Nipper. "Come along, you fellows! It's no good staying in here, jabbering. Let's go to Archie's study, and put all that furniture back. There'll only be trouble if we delay."

"But what about those River House bounders?" demanded Fullwood. "How are we going to get our own back?"

But nobody could answer that question. Brewster & Co., without doubt, had scored a great triumph!

CHAPTER 13

Mr. Pycraft on the War-path



AP!

"Eh?" said Archie Glenthorne bleakly. "Oh, rather! Come in, old onion! Come

in!"

The door of Study E opened, and Phipps entered. Archie gazed at him very coldly. The sudden sight of Phipps seemed to have a reviving effect upon the genial ass of the Remove.



Aunt Sophie had told Phipps to go, and Phipps brought her umbrella round, and cracked Phipps a considerable portion of hot tea leapt out of the pot.

"You dashed blighter!" he said witheringly.

"Really, sir——"

"You frightful failure!" declared Archie. "I mean to say, what about it, Phipps?"

Phipps looked round the bare and cheerless study, and then he returned his gaze to Archie.

"It will not take us long, sir, to restore

the furniture," he said smoothly. "The trouble is now over, and I think it will be better if we forget the entire incident."

"Forget it!" ejaculated Archie. "Good gad! I'm beginning to think, Phipps, that you are tottering somewhat on the old rocker. What, exactly, has been happening? The young master is all confused."

"I thought you understood, sir, that your—ahem!—Aunt Sophie was a fake?"

Archie hardly knew whether he was on his head or his heels. He had been so dazed that



Aunt Sophie wasn't the type to stand any nonsense. She elbowed the valet's shirt-front. "Ouch!" gasped Phipps.

he could only remember a confusion of shouts and yells. He knew that his Aunt Sophie had gone, but this was the first intimation he had had that the affair had been a practical joke. Archie had found himself alone, and he had been so miserable that he hadn't had a chance to think.

"Odds hope and wonders!" he said "You're not absolutely telling me, Phipps,

that the dear lady was a sort of swindle?"

"The so-called lady, sir, was a River House boy, impersonating your aunt."

"Well I'm dashed!" said Archie, leaning back in his chair. "I mean to say, well I'm blowed! Absolutely blowed, Phipps! And here have I been accusing you of faithlessness, and——"

"I had my suspicions from the first, sir," said Phipps, nodding. "And when your aunt dismissed me, I was certainly more suspicious than ever. But as it was only a practical joke, and as it is now all over, we can resume our normal procedure. Would you prefer tea now, sir, or shall we get the study right first?"

"Tea!" said Archie dreamily. "Kindly trot in with the steaming bracer."

As far as Archie Glenthorne was concerned, everything in the world was now all right. This was particularly the case when Nipper & Co. arrived, bringing back the carpet, and the lounges, and all the other stuff that had been carried out.

In the meantime, Mr. Pycraft had removed all traces from his face of the recent catastrophe, and now he was on the warpath.

As the affair had happened on the Ancient House steps, it was a natural assumption that the Remove juniors were responsible. And Mr. Pycraft intended to pursue his inquiries until he had arrived at the truth. He would find the culprits and do his worst.

As it happened, he ran into Biggleswade, in the Ancient House lobby. Biggleswade was a Sixth Former, and a prefect. Incidentally, he was an amiable, easy-going sort of fellow, well liked by all the juniors. And, in passing, it might be mentioned that Biggleswade had about as much affection for Mr. Pycraft as a dog for a cat.

"Feeling better now, sir?" asked the prefect cheerfully.

Mr. Pycraft started.

"Ah, Biggleswade!" he said. "So you have—er—heard of the—er—lamentable accident?"

"One of our fellows found the remains of the jam-tarts, sir," explained Biggleswade. "And, here and there, we picked up a few items of information. Hard lines, sir! I hope you didn't hurt yourself much

when you fell down the steps?" he added, with solicitude.

Mr. Pycraft looked at him suspiciously.

"I trust you are sincere, Biggleswade?"

"Why should I be anything else, sir?" said Biggleswade, hedging. "The only pity is, I wasn't there to witness—— That is, it's rather a shame we didn't collar the young bounders who did it."

"They are going to be—ahem—collared, Biggleswade!" said Mr. Pycraft grimly. "I have come over here for the express purpose of finding the names of these boys."

"Why, didn't you see them, sir?"

"That is the trouble!" snapped the Form-master. "I was knocked over, Biggleswade. I was knocked over—twice! And I did not see any of the boys who committed the outrage."

"Well, it wouldn't have made much difference, sir, even if you had seen them," said Biggleswade comfortingly. "I mean, you couldn't very well punish them."

"Indeed! And why not?"

"Well, you see, sir, they don't belong to this school."

"Don't belong to this school!" shouted Mr. Pycraft, aghast.

"No, sir."

"Then—then, who were they?"

"Well, I believe they were River House fellows," said Biggleswade, thoroughly enjoying himself. "And I'm very much afraid, Mr. Pycraft, that you won't be able to get your revenge."

"Revenge!" snorted Mr. Pycraft. "What do you mean, Biggleswade, by using such a word? My only intention is to see that these boys are adequately punished."

"Yes, sir—of course, sir!" murmured the prefect. "But the trouble is, you'll never be able to discover their names. None of the fellows here will remember the names of those juniors—and you'll have an awful job at the River House School if you start making inquiries. Take my advice, sir, and drop it."

"I refuse to drop it!" shouted Mr. Pycraft. "The idea! I have been grossly assaulted, Biggleswade, and I intend to punish the culprits. And then there was a lady——"

"Oh, rather, sir!" grinned Biggleswade.

"Why do you stand there making those ridiculous grimaces?" asked Mr. Pycraft sourly. "Do you know who the lady was?"

"I don't know his name, sir——"

"His name?"

"Well, you see, the 'lady' was really one of those River House fellows, dressed up," replied Biggleswade cheerfully. "He came to the school, and pretended to be Archie Glen-thorne's aunt. Rather a good joke, in its way——"

"An absurd joke!" barked Mr. Pycraft. "A ridiculous joke!"

"As you say, sir."

"So that was how it happened?" muttered Mr. Pycraft, biting his lip. "I was knocked down by those River House boys, and the

figure I saw was not a lady at all, but—Scandalous! Utterly and absolutely outrageous! I shall make it my business to go over to the River House School this evening, and to demand satisfaction of 'Dr. Hogge!'"

"Well, of course, that is for you to decide, sir," said Biggleswade, shrugging his shoulders. "But if I were you, sir, I shouldn't advertise the thing too much. There's just a chance that nobody will get to know about it, as matters stand. But if you go and make a fuss, the whole River House and all St. Frank's will be chuckling."

Mr. Pycraft started.

"Are you suggesting, Biggleswade, that the two schools would chuckle over my—my misfortunes?" he demanded.

"Well, you never know, sir!" replied the prefect cautiously. "The fellows are always liable to laugh at other people's misfortunes. That's the way of the world, sir. I'm not presuming to give you any advice, but——"

"That will do, Biggleswade!" interrupted Mr. Pycraft coldly. "Thank you for the information you have given me. It has saved me a lot of trouble."

Mr. Horace Pycraft turned on his heel, and strode off across the Triangle. He was a disappointed man. Since the "outrage" had been committed by River House boys, he could not very well vent his wrath upon them. He knew also that if he made any inquiries it was very unlikely that he would get any satisfaction.

So it seemed that he would have to grin and bear it. Only Mr. Pycraft did not grin. As for bearing it, there was no alternative.



CHAPTER 14

A Slight Mistake!

AFTER wandering round the Triangle once or twice, Mr. Pycraft reluctantly arrived at the conclusion that Biggleswade was right. Nothing could be done. It was an appalling state of affairs, considering that he had been so grossly treated, but there was no other conclusion.

"Bah!" muttered Mr. Pycraft savagely. "I am injured! I shall even have to consult Dr. Brett with regard to my bruises. And yet there is no redress for me!"

He strode into the East House in a fine temper, and it would have been unlucky for any of the Fourth Formers if they had met him just then.

But as it happened Mr. Pycraft met somebody else.

A strange lady was standing in the lobby, looking rather aimless, as though she had lost her way. As Mr. Pycraft appeared, her eyes lighted up with interest, and she advanced towards him. She was rather a slight, elderly lady, with grey hair, and some-

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what old-fashioned clothing. Moreover, she was wearing a veil, so that Mr. Pycraft could not see her features very clearly.

"I trust you will pardon me, sir," said the lady. "But do you know where I can find a boy named Archibald Glenthorne?"

Mr. Pycraft grunted.

"You are in the wrong house, madam," he said shortly. "The boy you mention belongs to the Ancient House, on the other side of the Triangle."

"Thank you so much," replied the lady. "You see, I am Archibald's aunt, and——"

"Wha-a-at!" gasped Mr. Pycraft, starting back.

Aunt Sophie looked at him in some astonishment.

"Are you ill, sir?" she asked quickly.

Mr. Pycraft suddenly recovered himself. With a gulp he composed his features, and then he gave Aunt Sophie a look that caused that startled lady to back away. It was a look of utter ferocity—a look of sheer fury.

"So!" said Mr. Pycraft, under his breath.

The luckless gentleman had made a very terrible mistake, through no fault of his own.

Here was the real Aunt Sophie—Archie Glenthorne's authentic relative. As promised, she had come down unheralded, and it was pure chance that she should have arrived so shortly after the fake aunt had vanished. Naturally, she knew nothing whatever of the events that had so recently taken place.

She had come down to Glenthorne Manor the previous day—and as Glenthorne Manor was only situated just on the other side of Bannington, she had taken the train to Bell-ton that afternoon, and had "dropped in" for tea with her nephew. In her own opinion, it was quite an excellent idea.

Mr. Pycraft was labouring under an appalling misapprehension.

He had learned, not ten minutes ago, that a River House junior, disguised as Archie's aunt, had dared to invade St. Frank's. And now, not content with his first escapade, he had come back again! That was the blunder Mr. Pycraft made! He assumed that he was now gazing upon the audacious River House junior.

Perhaps there was some excuse for the unhappy Mr. Pycraft.

In the first place, Aunt Sophie was small, and, in the second place, her voice had a slightly falsetto note. In normal circumstances, Mr. Pycraft might not have been impressed by it; but flooded with suspicions as he was, it occurred to him at once that the lady's voice was disguised. It was really a boy's voice, and the young rascal was making it high-pitched.

To cap everything, Aunt Sophie was wearing a veil!

This, indeed, was a crowning proof, in Mr. Pycraft's mind, that he was facing a River House fellow. Naturally, the practical joker would not dare to show his face boldly to

the world. So he had resorted to a veil, so that his features would be partially hidden.

There wasn't a shadow of a doubt in Mr. Pycraft's mind. He took it for granted. He knew—or, he thought he knew—that this lady was not genuine. And that, of course, was an awful complication.

Just for a moment, Mr. Pycraft had an idea of reaching forward, tearing the veil from the disguised face, and slapping the lady over the ear. Then, in the nick of time, Mr. Pycraft checked himself.

A cunning, eager expression came into his unpleasant eyes.

Why should he spoil this rare joke? Why should he deny himself the pleasure of leading this outrageous boy on? It would be quite good—quite amusing—to pretend to be fooled for a bit. Yes—fooled! Mr. Pycraft quivered with rage.

This impertinent young rascal was actually having the audacity to attempt to fool *him*! Having finished with the Ancient House, he was now starting his tricks in the East House!

So Mr. Pycraft thought.

Well, it would be an excellent scheme to let the boy run on for a bit, so that, later, Mr. Pycraft would be able to punish him justifiably. For by then the boy would have played a trick on the master, and that would give Mr. Pycraft ample excuse for taking drastic action.

The Form-master had only caught a vague glimpse of the previous Aunt Sophie, and now, as he looked at the present lady, he was perfectly satisfied that he was viewing the same figure. The boy was evidently crazy to come back like this.

"I—I beg your pardon, madam," said Mr. Pycraft thickly.

"Do not mention it," said Aunt Sophie, with relief. "For a moment, sir, I feared that you were ill."

"No, I am not ill!" replied the Form-master. "My name is Pycraft—and it is my luckless duty to look after the Fourth Form of this school."

"Luckless?" repeated the genuine Aunt Sophie.

"All boys are young ruffians!" said Mr. Pycraft, with relish. "I am in a position to know, and I can safely make that statement."

"I am very surprised to hear you speak in this way," remarked Aunt Sophie, rather shocked. "You are a responsible man, sir. You are a master of this school, and yet you say such a thing as that! Surely you cannot mean it?"

"I do mean it," declared Mr. Pycraft, warning to his subject. "But, bad as the boys of St. Frank's are, they are young gentlemen compared to the outrageous hooligans who are to be found at the River House School."

That was rather a good one! Mr. Pycraft looked at the lady keenly, feeling sure that it would go right home. But Aunt Sophie merely raised her eyebrows, and looked at

the master in greater astonishment than ever. Mr. Pycraft, however, could not see this very clearly, owing to the veil.

"I think, Mr. Pycraft, that you had better show me to the—er—Ancient House!" said Aunt Sophie coldly. "I would like to find my nephew."

Mr. Pycraft bowed.

"With pleasure, madam!" he said genially.

Bob Christine and Buster Boots, of the Fourth, who were just coming into the lobby, nearly fell into one another's arms in blank amazement. Never in their lives had they seen Mr. Pycraft so polite.

"Great Scott!" breathed Bob. "What's come over him?"

"He's smitten," grinned Boots. "Ye gods and little fishes! Old Pycraft is in love!"

"Oh, rot!"

"But there can't be any other explanation," said Boots. "Just look at him! Grinning all over his face, and making himself ten times as ugly as usual! And just look at the way he's bowing and scraping, too! My son, this is worth watching!"

Mr. Pycraft glanced round, and he caught sight of the two juniors. For a second he frowned, but then his expression changed. After all, why not? It would be all the

better for a number of juniors to witness the whole thing. They might take a lesson from it! Moreover, Mr. Pycraft was excessively pleased with himself. He felt very smart; he was acting his part cleverly, and he was rather surprised at his own genius. By all means let the juniors watch him!

So he escorted Aunt Sophie down the East House steps, and then he strolled leisurely across the Triangle with her. He was geniality itself—smiling, gracious, and urbane. How on earth he managed it, nobody knew. St. Frank's had never seen Mr. Pycraft in this mood before—and St. Frank's was startled.

Long before the pair had reached the Fountain Pool, in the middle of the Triangle, three-parts of the Fourth had come crowding out of the East House and the Modern House. All the juniors were standing about, watching and wondering. The rummy part about it all was that Mr. Pycraft knew they were there, and he seemed to be enjoying the publicity to the full. The more fellows watching, the greater became his antics.

Then Handforth & Co. appeared on the Ancient House steps, and Reggie Pitt & Co. emerged from the West House. The Remove heard the rumours, and came out in force.

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The Remove certainly was in a better position to understand what was in the wind!



CHAPTER 15

Getting Interesting!

“FOR the love of Samson!” said Vivian Travers wonderingly. “Old Pycraft must be in love!” said Handforth, staring. “Look at him! Smirking and smiling like a Cheshire cat! I wonder who that old girl is, anyway?”

“At a random guess, dear old fellow, I should set her down as Aunt Sophie,” replied Travers.

“Great Scott!”

“Why not?” said Travers. “Archie was expecting her, and she certainly fills the bill.”

“You’re probably right, Travers,” said Nipper, with a chuckle. “Well, thank goodness the genuine Aunt Sophie didn’t turn up earlier. Then there would have been an awful mix-up.”

Everybody was grinning when this rumour got round. Of course, it was by no means certain that the lady was Archie’s aunt, but it was decidedly probable. Nobody guessed, at this period, that Mr. Pycraft had made a regrettable error, and that he was leading his victim on.

It was merely thought that the Form-master had “fallen” for Aunt Sophie’s charms, and that he was making himself unusually pleasant in consequence.

“I trust you are in no immediate hurry, Miss—Miss——” He paused suggestively.

“You are quite right, Mr. Pycraft,” smiled Aunt Sophie. “I am a spinster. My name is Miss Heaton.”

“Thank you, Miss Heaton,” said Mr. Pycraft, inwardly boiling at the trickster’s ready answer. “Before taking you into the Ancient House, I should like to show you a few of the architectural beauties of this famous old school.”

“That is very kind of you, sir,” said Aunt Sophie, beginning to think that she had made a mistake about Mr. Pycraft’s character. “I am very interested in architecture, but I rather thought that my nephew would——”

“Never mind your nephew now!” said Mr. Pycraft grimly. “Er—that is to say, I trust you will accept my escort instead,” he said, with haste. “Now, here you see the chapel. Not a particularly large building, but very picturesque.”

“Very!” agreed Aunt Sophie, nodding.

She was getting bored. She rather badly wanted a cup of tea, and she felt certain that Archie would provide her with one, if only she could find him. Yet it was difficult to snub this Form-master, and to leave him cold, so to speak.

Handforth & Co., who were watching intently, slowly shook their heads after a few minutes.

“It can’t be Aunt Sophie!” said Handforth.

“Of course not!” agreed McClure.

“Impossible!” said Church.

They were firmly convinced on the point.

“According to all that Archie has told us, Aunt Sophie is a sort of dragon,” continued Church. “And this lady is rather a dear old soul. It must be somebody else. And, after all, why *should* she be Aunt Sophie? Other chaps have aunt and relatives visiting them.”

“Well, we can soon make certain,” said Handforth briskly.

He strode forward and approached the pair. None of the fellows were afraid of Mr. Pycraft now. Biggleswade had very discreetly allowed it to leak out that Mr. Pycraft had decided to say nothing about that unfortunate incident on the Ancient House steps. Moreover, the juniors knew that Mr. Pycraft was quite in the dark regarding the affair. He hadn’t the faintest idea as to who his assailants had been. And on the top of all this, the whole thing had been an accident. So nobody had any cause to feel guilty.

“Anything I can do, ma’am?” asked Handforth, raising his hat as he arrived.

“Handforth,” snapped Mr. Pycraft, “go away! How dare you interrupt!”

“I thought the lady might be asking for somebody, sir,” said Handforth.

“Well, that is perfectly true, Mr. Pycraft,” said Aunt Sophie mildly. “Thank you, my boy! If you happen to know a boy named Archie Glenthorne——”

“In my Form,” said Handforth, nodding.

“That is splendid,” smiled Miss Heaton. “I am Archie’s aunt——”

“Leave us at once, Handforth!” shouted Mr. Pycraft violently. “When I ask you to interfere you may come—but not before! Go, sir!”

“But this lady——”

“Did you hear me?” thundered Mr. Pycraft.

Even Handforth was not rash enough to defy the Form-master to his face. So Edward Oswald looked at Aunt Sophie rather helplessly and raised his cap.

“Sorry, ma’am,” he said. “I’d take you to Archie like a shot, but——”

“I think I understand,” said the lady, nodding.

Handforth went off, and rejoined the crowd near the Ancient House steps.

“You silly ass, Handy!” said Church. “What was your idea in butting in?”

“Well, I’ve found out who she is,” said Handforth triumphantly. “She’s Archie’s aunt!”

“Well, I’m blessed!”

“But Archie told us that she was an awful person!”

“Then Archie was dotty!” said Handforth. “She seems to be a dear old lady! Anyhow, she told me that she’s looking for Archie Glenthorne, and that she’s his aunt. There’s no spoof about it this time.”

"Are you sure?" asked Fullwood. "My hat, it would be a bit steep if those River House bounders——"

"Rats!" grinned Nipper. "It's the real Aunt Sophie this time. Any other idea would be silly."

"Yes, I suppose it would," admitted Fullwood.

Mr. Pycraft was pointing out the glories of the great clock-tower.

"There, Miss Heaton, you see a piece of wonderful architecture," he said. "Perhaps you can tell me, off hand, whether it is Norman or Tudor?" he added sharply, swinging round on her like a tiger.

"Really, sir!" protested Miss Heaton, alarmed.

"Well?" snapped Mr. Pycraft. "Cannot you answer my simple question?"

Mr. Pycraft was no actor. He was attempting to bowl the trickster out by asking awkward questions. But he changed his manner too abruptly. One minute was ultra-polite, and the next minute he was just the opposite. Archie's aunt began to suspect that she was dealing with a lunatic.

"I think, Mr. Pycraft, that I will leave you now," she said stiffly. "If you will tell me which is the Ancient House——"

"I will tell you when it pleases me, madam," replied Mr. Pycraft, with relish. "And I should like you to remember that you must remain with me until I give you permission to go."

"How dare you, sir!"

"I dare all sorts of things!" said Mr. Pycraft airily. "And as for your young rascal of a nephew, he can wait. Before we go indoors, I intend to take you all round the playing-fields, and——"

"And I shall refuse to go!" said Miss Heaton angrily. "How dare you behave in this manner, sir! Have you taken leave of your senses? Unless you escort me into the Ancient House at once, I shall walk away from you!"

"Oh, indeed!" said Mr. Pycraft nastily. "And suppose I prevent you from doing that?"

"You would not dare!" replied Aunt Sophie, her eyes blazing. "My patience is not inexhaustible, Mr. Pycraft. I do not wish to make you look ridiculous in the eyes of all these boys, but you are behaving so strangely that you will very soon compel me to act in a decisive way. And I would like to assure you that I am not quite so helpless as you seem to imagine."

There was a grim note in Aunt Sophie's voice now—indeed, almost a dragon-like note. She was being aroused, and that made all the difference. Frankly, she was astounded at the master's behaviour. It was so different from what she expected.

"You will not leave my side!" said Mr. Pycraft sourly. "It may surprise you, madam, but here, in this school, I have a certain amount of authority."

"But not over visitors, surely?"

"Over visitors!" replied Mr. Pycraft, with relish.

Things were progressing very nicely, he told himself. He wondered if the disguised boy was beginning to suspect anything. If so, all the better. The dénouement would come very soon now, anyway. Indeed, Mr. Pycraft beckoned to an East House fag, and the latter, after a moment of hesitation, ran forward.

"Ah, Ryder," murmured Mr. Pycraft, bending down, and whispering into the fag's ear, "run to my study as quickly as you can and fetch me a cane."

"Yes, sir!" said Ryder breathlessly. "Shall—shall I bring it out here, sir?"

"Don't be ridiculous, boy!" snapped Mr. Pycraft. "Of course you will bring it out here!"

And Ryder shot off, wondering what was in the wind now.

Mr. Pycraft turned, and he was astonished to find that Aunt Sophie was walking away. He took several strides after her, and he roughly grasped her by the arm.

"No, not just yet!" he said threateningly.



CHAPTER 16

Not Quite Helpless!

UNT SOPHIE quivered with anger. "Release me, sir!" she said hotly.

"I shall do nothing of the sort!" replied Mr. Pycraft, grinning with enjoyment. "As I told you before, my fine lady, I want you here, with me!"

"This—this is an outrage!" said Archie's aunt in amazement. "Are you mad, sir? By what right do you lay your hands upon me? Release your grip at once!"

But Mr. Pycraft hung on more tightly than ever.

All the juniors, in the meantime, watched in amazement. They had seen the change in Mr. Pycraft's manner. He was no longer polite and suave. He was aggressive now—and, strangely enough, he appeared to be revelling in the whole affair.

"He must have gone off his rocker!" said Fullwood, staring.

"Clean dotty!" agreed Gresham.

"But—but can't we do anything?" asked Handforth. "We don't want to stand here, seeing him acting like this towards Archie's aunt——"

"We can't do anything, Handy," put in Nipper. "Besides, I don't think it will be necessary for us to do anything. Archie's aunt seems capable of taking care of herself. Before long we shall see something interesting, I believe."

Mr. Pycraft was in the swing of it now. It was getting near to the moment when



Aunt Sophie grasped Archie's monocle and gave the cord such a sharp tug that it broke. "Monocles are a sign of imbecility!" she snapped.

he would expose the fraud. Then it would be his moment of triumph! The juniors, no doubt, were wondering what had happened to him—but they would soon know the truth! And after that they would have a great amount of respect for him, for he would prove to them that he was not the kind of man who could be fooled.

"Will you release my arm, Mr. Pycraft, or shall I appeal to these boys for assistance?" asked Aunt Sophie, her voice quivering. "Your conduct, sir, is outrageous!"

"It is nothing like so outrageous as it will be before long!" chuckled Mr. Pycraft. "As I said before, my fine *lady*—"

"How dare you use that tone of voice?" demanded Aunt Sophie hotly. "Are you implying, sir, that I am *not* a lady?"

"Exactly!" grinned Mr. Pycraft. "I am quite convinced, madam, that you are not a lady!"

"Well, I'm blessed!" murmured Nipper.

"He's actually insulting her now!" said Handforth indignantly.

"Hallo—look!" grinned Church.

Aunt Sophie, without further ado, had brought her umbrella round, and cracked Mr. Pycraft across the knuckles. He released his grip on the instant.

"Now, sir!" snapped Aunt Sophie dangerously.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

A ripple of laughter went round the Triangle, and Mr. Pycraft boiled. But if he

was angry, Aunt Sophie was positively furious. She was utterly mystified, too; she could not understand why this master was treating her so insultingly.

Naturally, she had mistaken Mr. Pycraft's meaning when he had stated that she was not a lady. But Mr. Pycraft thought that that passage was rather clever. He had an idea that the wretched River House boy would get an inkling of the truth before the actual exposure came.

And it would have to come within a very few moments now, or it would be too late. Mr. Pycraft glanced anxiously towards the East House. He wanted his cane—for, without it, he could not give this trickster the sharp lesson that he deserved.

At that particular time a number of fellows were gazing over the wall, just on the other side of the Triangle. In a word, Brewster & Co. were watching events.

The River House fellows had come back for the genial purpose of "crowing" over their rivals. They were in strong force now, so there was nothing to fear. But, before entering the Triangle, they had made a careful inspection, and had discovered a remarkable state of affairs. Now they were all looking over the top of the wall, greatly interested in the proceedings.

"My sons, this is too good!" said Brewster after a while. "Oh, my only hat! We thought our jape was pretty good, but this makes it perfect!"

"But—but I don't understand!" said Ascott blankly.

"What's the matter with old Pycraft?" added Glynn. "He's gone dotty, hasn't he?"

"Can't you understand?" said Brewster. "We bowled Pycraft over, didn't we?"

"I believe we did!" grinned Kingswood.

"And then Graham came along, and Mr. Pycraft may have caught a glimpse of him," continued Brewster shrewdly. "Well, this lady in the Triangle must be Archie's real aunt!"

"What!"

"Who else?" grinned Brewster. "And old Pycraft has mistaken her for the wrong one!"

"Oh crumbs!"

"He thinks she's Graham in disguise!" said Brewster breathlessly. "It proves it, by the way he's talking to her! He thinks he's caught the japer redhanded!"

"Oh, my goodness!"

"It's worth quids and quids!" said Kingswood, hugging himself. "What a shock for old Pycraft when he discovers the truth!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The River House fellows laughed softly—although they really wanted to laugh loudly. But, in the circumstances, this would have been unwise. So they contented themselves with chuckles.

It was the cream of the jape.

Everything had gone well from the very start, but this simply put the lid on all that had already passed. Mr. Pycraft had mistaken the genuine Aunt Sophie for Cyril Graham in disguise!

"Oh, I say, but look here!" protested Ascott. "Oughtn't we to go in and explain things?"

"And save old Pycraft?" asked Brewster, staring.

"I wasn't thinking about Pycraft!" growled Ascott. "I was thinking about Archie's aunt."

"Then save yourself the trouble," said Brewster. "Judging by the way she rapped him across the knuckles just now, she's capable of dealing with him. We japed the Remove—and now our jape is leading to the complete extinction of the Pycraft bird!"

"Hallo! What's happening now?" asked Glynn.

Ryder, of the Third, was running from the East House, and he reached Mr. Pycraft's side and handed the Form-master a cane. As he did so, Nipper and a number of other juniors prepared themselves for action.

"Now, Miss Heaton!" said Mr. Pycraft in ominous tones. "I think that the moment for a little explanation has arrived. Be good enough to remove your veil!"

Aunt Sophie, who was, at last, on the point of walking away, turned round in sheer astonishment. Until now she had hesitated—wishing to avoid a scene. But she could now see that it was out of the question. This master's conduct was becoming altogether too outrageous.

"What did you say, sir?" she repeated in a dangerous voice.

"You heard what I said, *madam!*" replied Mr. Pycraft. "I told you to remove your veil!"

"Really, sir! I—I— This is getting beyond all endurance!" said Miss Heaton frigidly. "Your conduct is inexcusable, sir!"

"You—you impudent wretch!" shouted Mr. Pycraft, suddenly losing all patience. "This farce has gone on long enough!"

Aunt Sophie was really alarmed now.

"Impudent wretch!" she repeated dazedly. "Never have I been so insulted—"

NEXT WEDNESDAY!



"Hold out your hand!" roared Mr. Pycraft, giving the cane a violent swish through the air.

"Good—good gracious!" gasped Aunt Sophie.

"Now!" thundered Mr. Pycraft. "This is going to be a very severe lesson, let me tell you! The time has come for this pretence to be cast aside. And it may interest you to know, you young rascal, that I have been aware of your identity the whole time! Hold out your hand, sir!"

"You must be mad!" ejaculated Aunt Sophie, gazing at him in stupefaction. "What—what do you mean? Do you imagine that you are dealing with one of your boys?"

"Not one of *my* boys—but I know very well that you *are* a boy!" shouted Mr. Pycraft triumphantly. "And, what is more to the

point, I am now going to thrash you as you deserve!"



CHAPTER 17

Very Entertaining!

"H, help!" said Hal Brewster faintly.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The River House fellows were dizzy with laughter—and yet, at the same time,

"HONOURS EVEN!"

A paper chase; a thunderstorm; the "hounds"—Nipper, Handforth, Travers, Glenthorne and one or two other prominent Removites—trapped in a cellar which becomes flooded; the water relentlessly rising inch by inch; rescue seems impossible; an awful fate awaits the plucky juniors. . . .

Those are only a few of the thrills in next week's intensely exciting yarn. You will read, too, how the Removites came to get in their awful predicament, of the subsequent happenings which lead up to the last, greatest and funniest jape of all between St. Frank's and the River House School.

Next Wednesday's ripping story is one not to be missed; make sure YOU don't miss it!

"THE CRUISE OF THE BLUE BIRD!"

More gripping chapters of Coutts Brisbane's stunning adventure serial.

ORDER IN ADVANCE!

they realised that they could not remain inactive any longer.

"Come on, you chaps!" said Brewster, recovering himself. "We've got to save Aunt Sophie!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Yes, but what about these St. Frank's chaps!" asked Kingswood, in alarm. "They'll pounce on us like the dickens! Besides, there are plenty of them there. Why can't they do something?"

"They're doing it!" put in Graham. "Easy, you chaps! We're not needed!"

Over by the Ancient House, Nipper and Handforth and a few others were advancing grimly. From the Modern House, Christine and Yorke and Buster Boots were hurrying across, too.

"It's gone far enough" said Nipper. "We'd better tell Mr. Pycraft that he's dotty. Of course, he believes that Aunt Sophie is Graham in disguise."

"By George!" said Handforth. "That's it!"

"And he's liable to do something pretty drastic," continued Nipper. "We simply can't let it go on!"

"Easy—easy!" murmured Travers. "Give her just another few seconds, dear old fellows. I rather think she's going to get busy now."

Aunt Sophie was, indeed, looking more dangerous than ever. She had recovered from her original stupefaction, and now she was facing Mr. Pycraft with a light of battle in her eyes. She was quite satisfied now that she was dealing with a lunatic.

"Stop!" she commanded.

"That tune don't do, young man!" grinned Mr. Pycraft, swishing his cane again. "You needn't think that you can fool me as you have fooled the junior boys! Oh, no! Once again, will you hold out your hand?"

Aunt Sophie did not reply. She moved boldly forward, snatched the cane out of Mr. Pycraft's hand, and threw it away.

"I think, sir, that you had better go indoors, and I will see that a doctor is called to you!" she said calmly. "I can only hope that you do not suffer from these attacks very often."

"You—you——" Mr. Pycraft paused, breathless with fury. "Upon my soul! What do you mean, you young scamp, by snatching that cane out of my hand?"

He could hardly contain himself. He knew—he positively knew, in his own mind—that this ridiculous "female" was a River House schoolboy. And the fellow had the impertinence to keep the pretence up, even after he must have known that he was bowled out. It was not merely outrageous, but beyond human endurance.

"Until now," said Mr. Pycraft, his voice shaking, "I have succeeded in keeping my temper. But let me inform you at once, young man, that I am fully aware of this pretence."

"Indeed!" panted Aunt Sophie ominously.

"Yes, indeed, sir!" roared Mr. Pycraft. "Good heavens! Did you suppose, for a moment, that I was deceived by your ridiculous appearance? My eyes are sharper than that. You are a River House boy——"

"Is it possible that there is some error?" asked Aunt Sophie, in wonder. "I do not wish to be too hasty, Mr. Pycraft. Perhaps a practical joke has been played upon you. But if you are mistaking me for a boy, in disguise, then let me tell you that you are quite wrong."

"Stop!" hooted Mr. Pycraft. "Your audacity is appalling, sir! This bravado will not save you! Remove your hat at once!"

"I shall do nothing of the kind!"

"Remove it!" shouted Mr. Pycraft violently. "Yes, and remove your hair, too!"

"My—my hair!"

"Your wig!" thundered the excited Form-master. "It is my intention to expose you in front of all these boys. Perhaps they will be satisfied when they see you minus your hat and wig. I want you to understand that while you can possibly delude the boys, you cannot delude *me!*"

Aunt Sophie lost all her remaining patience. It was evidently useless to reason with this man. Even when he was told the truth, he preferred not to believe it.

And Archie's aunt, it seemed, was a lady of action.

"Go indoors, sir!" she commanded dangerously. "Go indoors before I do you an injury!"

"You insolent young puppy——"

Crack!

Aunt Sophie's umbrella came round again, and rapped Mr. Pycraft on the elbow. This was more than he could stand, and he reached out a hand, attempting to seize the lady's headgear.

"You wretch!" shouted Aunt Sophie angrily.

Rap! Rap! Rap!

Again and again she brought her umbrella down—across Mr. Pycraft's shoulders, over his skinny arms. Mr. Pycraft, staggering back, became positively alarmed.

He had not bargained for this!

Indeed, he had toyed with the thought of his triumph, right from the very start. He had taken it for granted that the "lady" would collapse as soon as the *tho dénouement* came. Instead of that, it was he who was on the point of collapse.

"Stop!" he shrieked. "If you hit me again——"

"Go indoors, sir!" ordered Aunt Sophie. "You are not safe to be out of doors without somebody to look after you!"

"Boy!" gasped Mr. Pycraft. "Cannot you see that you are discovered? I am not deceived by your wig and your clothing. It is perfectly obvious that the wrinkles on your face are false——"

"This is too much!" fumed Archie's aunt.

She was aware of those wrinkles on her face, but she did not like to be reminded of them—particularly in this way.

Again and again she plied her umbrella, and Mr. Pycraft backed away before the onslaught. Nipper & Co., and all the other juniors, watched in sheer, undiluted joy.

"Stop! Desist!" panted Mr. Pycraft. "Why, you—you—— Help—help! Boys—boys!"

Aunt Sophie continued to advance so menacingly that Mr. Pycraft swung round, and took to his heels. It was an undignified retreat.

To make matters worse, the indignant lady gave chase. As Mr. Pycraft ran, she followed him, hitting out with her umbrella.

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

He went flying round the Triangle, and Aunt Sophie went running after him. It was one of the most extraordinary scenes that St. Frank's had ever witnessed.

Whack! Whack!

Mr. Pycraft was no runner, and even Aunt Sophie was able to keep pace with him. Every now and again she got home a beautiful swipe. Nipper & Co. were glad that they had not interfered. For, had they done so, they would have missed this exquisite comedy.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Go it, Mr. Pycraft!"

"Run, sir—run!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You're winning, sir!"

In the midst of all the excitement Archie Glenthorne himself came strolling elegantly out of the Ancient House. He had no idea that anything exciting was in the wind. He paused on the top of the steps, however, and he adjusted his monocle.

"Good gad!" he ejaculated blankly. "I mean to say, what's all this? A bit of bother, of sorts, what?"

"It's your real aunt, Archie!" grinned Handforth. "You'd better go across and rescue her!"

"She looks as though she needs rescuing!" chuckled Church.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Archie's monocle dropped out of his eye. A light of recognition came into his face. Even at this distance, he could tell that the lady was, without any doubt, his genuine Aunt Sophie.

And there couldn't be much doubt, either, that she was dangerous!



CHAPTER 18

Poor Old Pycraft!

"DDS horrors and shocks!" murmured Archie Glenthorne bleakly.

The worst had happened!

Just when he was congratulating himself that everything was all serene, this bombshell had exploded! His Aunt Sophie was here at St. Frank's, after all! And, by the look of things, she would turn out to be about three times as bad as the japer!

"Cheese it, Archie!" said McClure. "Hadn't you better go across and put things straight?"

"Eh?" said Archie dizzily. "Straight, old thing?"

"Mr. Pycraft thinks that your aunt is that River House fellow!" said Mac. "At least, he thought so until a minute or two ago. He's probably changing his mind now."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"He's been insulting her dreadfully, Archie," said Handforth. "You're her nephew, so it's up to you to go across and——"

"Insulting her?" said Archie fiercely. "Good gad! Not absolutely?"

"Yes, absolutely!"

"Then it seems to me that Archie must do a certain amount of butting-in!" said the genial ass of the Remove. "In other words, laddies, kindly observe the extinction of Pycraft!"

And Archie, his jaw very grim, dashed across the Triangle.

He arrived at the scene of action just as Mr. Pycraft had turned at bay near the steps of the East House. Aunt Sophie, rather breathless, but triumphant, was regarding him with scorn.

"Now, sir, perhaps you will apologise!" she was saying.

"What-ho!" ejaculated Archie, before Mr. Pycraft could reply. "Absolutely! Aunt Sophie, dear old girl, how goes it?"

The lady turned and looked at Archie with recognition.

"My dear boy!" she said with relief. "This is splendid! Why did you not come to me earlier?"

"Well, the fact is, auntie, I did not know that you were on the good old premises," explained Archie. "Frightfully sorry, and all that, but there it is."

"Well, now that you have come, perhaps you will inform this gentleman that I am really your aunt, and not anybody else!" said Miss Heaton frigidly. "Much against my will, I have been compelled to act in a somewhat drastic manner——"

"You—you impertinent scamp!" breathed Mr. Pycraft hoarsely. "I shall seek help! I shall bring the headmaster himself——"

"Good gad!" said Archie. "You're not absolutely addressing Aunt Sophie, are you, sir?"

"That's not your aunt!" shouted Mr. Pycraft. "This—this so-called lady is only a boy in disguise——"

"Dear me!" breathed Aunt Sophie. "The poor man is still unconvinced!"

Archie took Mr. Pycraft's arm, and he gazed at the master with sorrowing eyes.

"It seems to me, old dear—that is to say, sir—that you've made a bit of a bloomer, what?" he said in a kindly voice. "My chief idea in dashing across was to tick you off——"

"How dare you!"

"Absolutely!" said Archie firmly. "But as there appears to be some sort of confusion, a word of explanation might not come amiss. The fact is, sir, you've got shunted on to the wrong set of rails."

"Glenthorpe," shouted Mr. Pycraft, "there has been enough of this idiocy——"

"Oh, rather!" agreed Archie, nodding. "You see, sir, a River House chappie came to St. Frank's not long ago, and he pretended to be my aunt. The blighter absolutely put the wind up me to a vertical degree."

"But—but——"

"Of course, he was bowled out, and biffed off the premises," continued Archie. "And now, lo and behold, Aunt Sophie herself

rolls up! Absolutely! Guaranteed genuine and gilt-edged! This lady, Mr. Pycraft, is positively my aunt."

Mr. Horace Pycraft took a big gulp, and for the first time a light of doubt leapt into his eyes. He went nearly green as he realised the enormity of his mistake.

"Good heavens!" he ejaculated faintly. "But—but you cannot be serious, Glenthorpe! This is a trick—a joke! You're attempting to delude me!"

"Oh, come, sir!" protested Archie. "I mean to say, dash it! I'm not the kind of chappie to go about doing that sort of thing. I don't blame you for making the mistake, but there it is. This lady is really my Aunt Sophie, and you must have mistaken her for the spoofer."

"Now, sir!" said Aunt Sophie triumphantly.

Mr. Pycraft was on the point of fainting.

"Do—do you assure me, Glenthorpe, on your honour——" he began feverishly.

"On my honour, sir!" replied Archie. "There *has* been a joke, but it is now over. This lady is Miss Sophie Heaton, my aunt from South Africa. Absolutely, sir! Honest Injun, and positively honour bright!"

Mr. Pycraft knew very well that he could not doubt Archie Glenthorpe's word. Moreover, now that the truth was forced upon him, he could see that Aunt Sophie was really genuine, and not a trickster. In a confused, subconscious way, Mr. Pycraft wondered why he had not seen this earlier.

"Good heavens!" he babbled. "I—I am completely overwhelmed! I—I had no idea—— That is to say, I was convinced——"

He broke off, agitated and pale.

"So there it is, sir!" said Archie brightly. "And it seems to me that a certain specie of apology is indicated."

Mr. Pycraft gulped.

"I—I beg your pardon, madam!" he mumbled. "I was under the impression that you were a schoolboy attempting to—to trick me. I—I trust that you will accept my apologies for this regrettable and unfortunate error——"

"It is quite all right, Mr. Pycraft," interrupted Aunt Sophie, her face losing its grim expression and breaking into a smile. "The situation is not without its humorous side. I regret that I was compelled to use violence, but I had no alternative. As far as I am concerned, the matter is now over and forgotten."

"Thank you, madam!" breathed Mr. Pycraft tremblingly.

He turned on his heel and walked into the East House, feeling about as small as an ant. He expected to hear a yell of laughter, but none came. The St. Frank's fellows were rather sorry for the unpopular master of the Fourth. His extinction had been so complete that they hadn't the heart to laugh at him.

"My arrival appears to have created something of a commotion," smiled Aunt Sophie, turning to her nephew. "Perhaps it would be as well for us to go indoors as quickly as possible. I would not like any of the other masters to know of this."

"Oh, rather not!" said Archie hastily. "I mean to say, old Pycraft might get it somewhat severely in the neck."

"That is precisely what I was thinking," nodded Aunt Sophie. "The unfortunate man made an error, and I fear he looked very ridiculous."

Archie was dimly astonished. Somehow, Aunt Sophie was not so dragon-like as he had feared. He introduced her to Nipper and Handforth and several of the other juniors, then an escort was formed, and they all went triumphantly into the Ancient House.

Archie's heart beat rapidly as Aunt Sophie was ushered into Study E. But the lady looked round, and her eyes were expressive of keen appreciation.

"Splendid!" she declared. "A most remarkable study, Archie, my dear boy! May I congratulate you upon it?"

"Oh, rather!" said Archie. "Thanks frightfully, Aunt Sophie!"

"And if you can conjure me up a cup of tea, I should be most grateful," continued Aunt Sophie, as she sat down. "You have a valet, haven't you?"

"Why—er—in a way, yes!" confessed Archie.

"Excellent!" beamed Aunt Sophie. "Please ring for him, and tell him that I would like some tea as quickly as possible."

And Archie, in a kind of dream, rang the bell.

CHAPTER 19

One Up for the River House!



HERE was a difference, indeed!

Not only did Aunt Sophie entirely approve of the

luxurious study, but she seemed to regard Phipps as an excellent innovation. There was no indication that she disapproved of these extravagances.

In a word, Aunt Sophie was a sport.

All Archie's fears had been groundless—as most of the Remove fellows had believed all along. Archie had formed a childlike opinion of his aunt, and he had allowed his imagination to do the rest. As for Aunt Sophie's reputation in the family, there was really no justification for Archie's exaggerated reports. The lady was, perhaps, severe when the occasion demanded. Otherwise, she was more or less of a dear old soul.

Archie's relief was enormous, and all the other fellows chuckled with glee.

"Funniest thing we've seen for terms!" grinned Bob Christine of the Fourth. "Poor old Pycraft!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I'll bet he'll sulk for days!" said Talmadge happily. "And that means that we shall have a prefect looking after us in the Form-room."

"Oh, good egg!"

"Pycraft won't dare to show himself," agreed Buster Boots, nodding. "He'll be in fear and trembling over this. Why, if Archie's aunt made a complaint to the Head, Piecrust would be hauled over the coals like the dickens. He might even get chucked out of his job."

"I hope Aunt Sophie makes the complaint!" said Bob Christine fervently.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"No such luck!" remarked Yorke. "She seems to be a good sort, and she accepted his apology, too. No fear, my lads! We shan't be able to get rid of Pycraft as easily as all that!"

But it was some consolation to know that Mr. Pycraft would be a very subdued man for several days.

On the other side of the Triangle, the Remove fellows had come out of the Ancient House, laughing heartily. But their laughs changed to frowns when they observed Brewster & Co. walking boldly and airily through the gateway.

"Well, of all the cheek!" said Handforth, with indignation.

There was a general move towards the River House fellows.

"Can't touch us—we've got our fingers crossed!" grinned Brewster cheerfully.

"You silly fatheads——"

"Pax!" said Brewster. "I can spot Morrow, of the Sixth, over by Big Arch, chatting with Mr. Stokes. I shouldn't advise you fellows to start any trouble just now."

The Removites looked round, and, sure enough, the Housemaster of the West House was in full sight, with Morrow, the prefect. It would certainly be rash to fall upon these visitors and slaughter them.

"All right—it's pax, then," growled Nipper. "But what are you bounders doing here?"

"We just came along to enjoy the fun!" said Kingswood blandly.

"And we've been enjoying it!" remarked Driscoll.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

All the other River House fellows shouted with laughter.

Nipper grinned, and he clapped Cyril Graham on the back.

"You dished us properly, old son!" he said ruefully. "Congratters! It was really a masterpiece!"

"Thanks!" said Graham. "But the joke wasn't really against Archie, but against the whole lot of you."

"We know that," said Nipper. "And you needn't think that you're going to crow over us for long!"

"But we'll crow just at present if you don't mind," said Brewster cheerily.

And all his companions crowed in the most exasperating manner.

It was doubly annoying because nothing could be done. With a Housemaster looking on, it was impossible to jump on these River House fellows. Or, if it wasn't impossible, it would certainly have been rash.

"I rather think it's one up for the River House," said Brewster heartily. "We've not only japed you fellows, but old Pycraft has been included in the joke, too. If you can wipe out this stain, you'll be pretty clever."

"We may not be very clever, but we shall be clever enough for that!" retorted Nipper promptly.

"Just you wait!" said Handforth, clenching his fist and shaking it at the grinning visitors. "By George! I've already got an idea for a ripping wheeze against you chaps."

"Oh?" said Brewster. "Is it a good one?"

"Yes, it is!" roared Handforth. "I'm going to jape you up to the eyes!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You can yell!" thundered Handforth. "But you'll be a bit more subdued after I've arrived at the River House School dressed up as your headmaster's brother from Peru!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Is it advisable, Handy, to give them a warning like this?" asked Nipper mildly.

Handforth started.

"Eh?" he gasped. "I—I didn't mean——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Good old Handy!" grinned Brewster. "Thanks for the tip! We'll be on the lookout for the Head's brother from Peru!"

Nipper & Co.'s rivals yelled afresh, and when they went off they were still cackling. It was their opinion that the St. Frank's fellows would not be able to lift up their heads again. They had been completely and positively whacked. They were the under-dogs.

"Of course," said Reggio Pitt thoughtfully, "something will have to be done!"

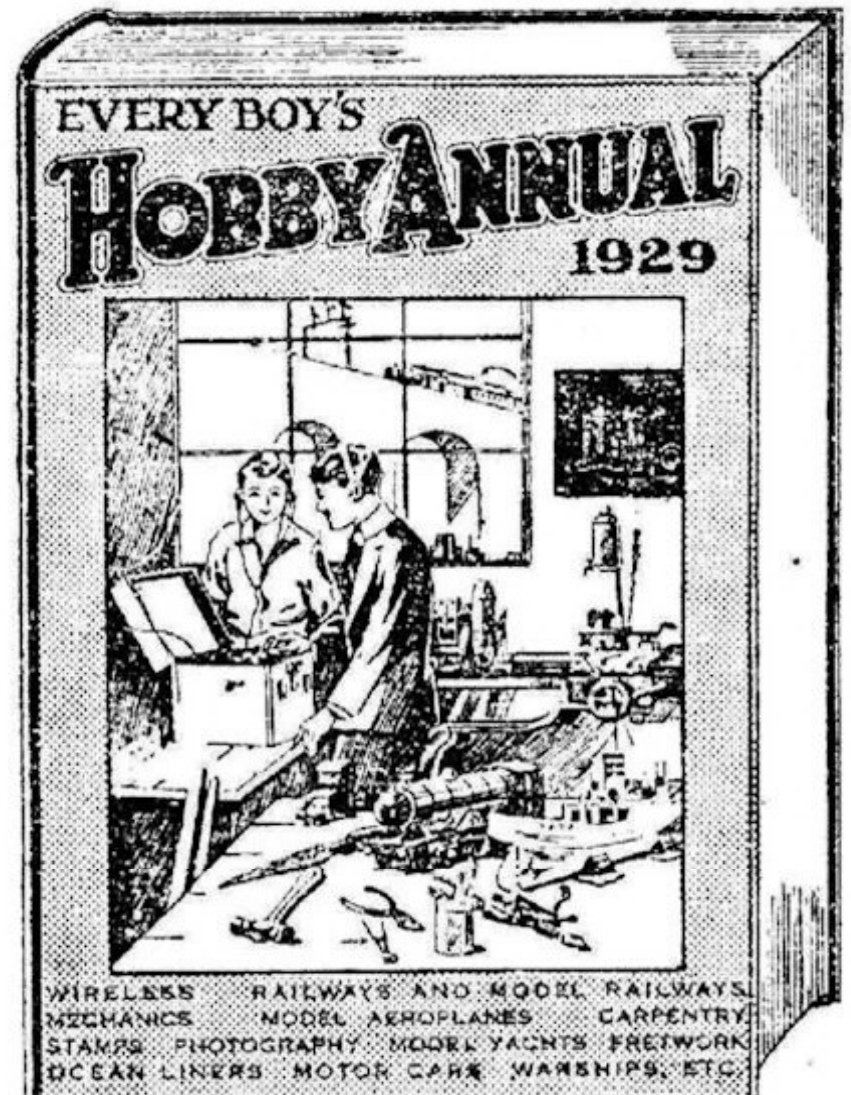
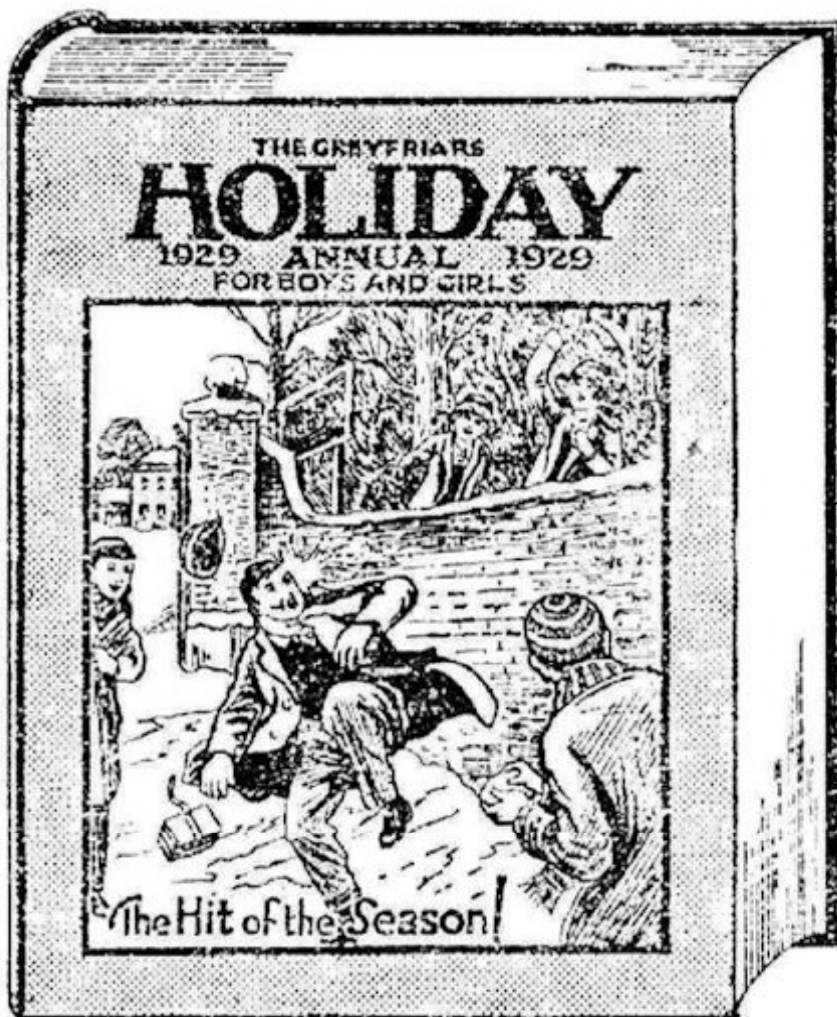
"It will!" agreed Nipper, in a grim voice. "The River House has registered a triumph. But don't worry, you chaps. A little reverse of this sort only adds zest to the whole game. Before long St. Frank's will be top-dogs again."

And so the affair was over. For the remainder of that evening, the Remove gave itself up to entertaining Aunt Sophie, who really was a good old sort. And although the memory of the River House triumph rankled with most of the juniors, Archie Glenthorne was supremely happy. His period of worry was over.

THE END.

(Brewster & Co. have got their revenge in no uncertain way. The St. Frank's fellows will have to "pull up their socks" if they want to call themselves the "top dogs." And they have a good try, too. You'll read all about it in next week's exciting yarn, which is entitled, "Honours Even!")

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E. S. BROOKS.

BETWEEN OURSELVES!

OUR AUTHOR CHATS WITH OUR READERS

NOTE.—If any reader writes to me, I shall be pleased to comment upon such remarks as are likely to interest the majority. All letters should be addressed: EDWY SEARLES BROOKS, c/o The Editor, THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY, The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, LONDON, E.C.4.



JOHN FEARN

I DON'T agree with you about names—C. V. Edwards (Pleckville, New Zealand). You say that the crooks in my stories have been given ill-sounding names—such as Jake Crasher, Simon Grell, and Jake Starkey. They are ill-sounding in your ears merely because of association. If, for example, I had described Jake Starkey as a jolly old salt, always grinning, always cracking jokes, I don't suppose you would have found the name disagreeable in the least. What comes into your mind when you hear the name of Uriah Heep? A most unpleasant fellow, eh? Yet, if Dickens had made Uriah Heep one of his most lovable characters, you would picture a very different sort of person upon hearing that name. It is the same with Judas, Shylock, and so on. The names themselves are quite good; it is the association which renders them so ill-sounding. If, at the very beginning of my St. Frank's stories, I had described Handforth as an out-and-out rascal, the very name "Handforth" would be distasteful to you. Just think it over, old man. I agree with you about anonymous letters: "They haven't got the courage of their convictions, and their arguments are not worth listening to." I think you are wrong when you say that Soccer only pleases about one-tenth of our readers, and that the other nine-tenths are pining for Rugby. That may apply in New Zealand, but not at home. And, as you know, our job is to please the majority.

If it will please you to write to me every fortnight, Thomas W. Hopwood (Wakefield), then I shall be *more* than pleased to get your letters. But now we're on the subject, I would like to mention that this page isn't big enough for me to deal with all the interesting subjects that you and other readers bring up in your letters. So I can only comment upon little bits here and there. I always reply to every letter which strikes me as really calling for an answer, either on this page, or by post. Enclosing a stamped and addressed envelope won't help you much, though—*what you say in the letter itself* is the deciding factor. I can't answer *all* of you all the time, but I can reply to *some* of you all the time. What's

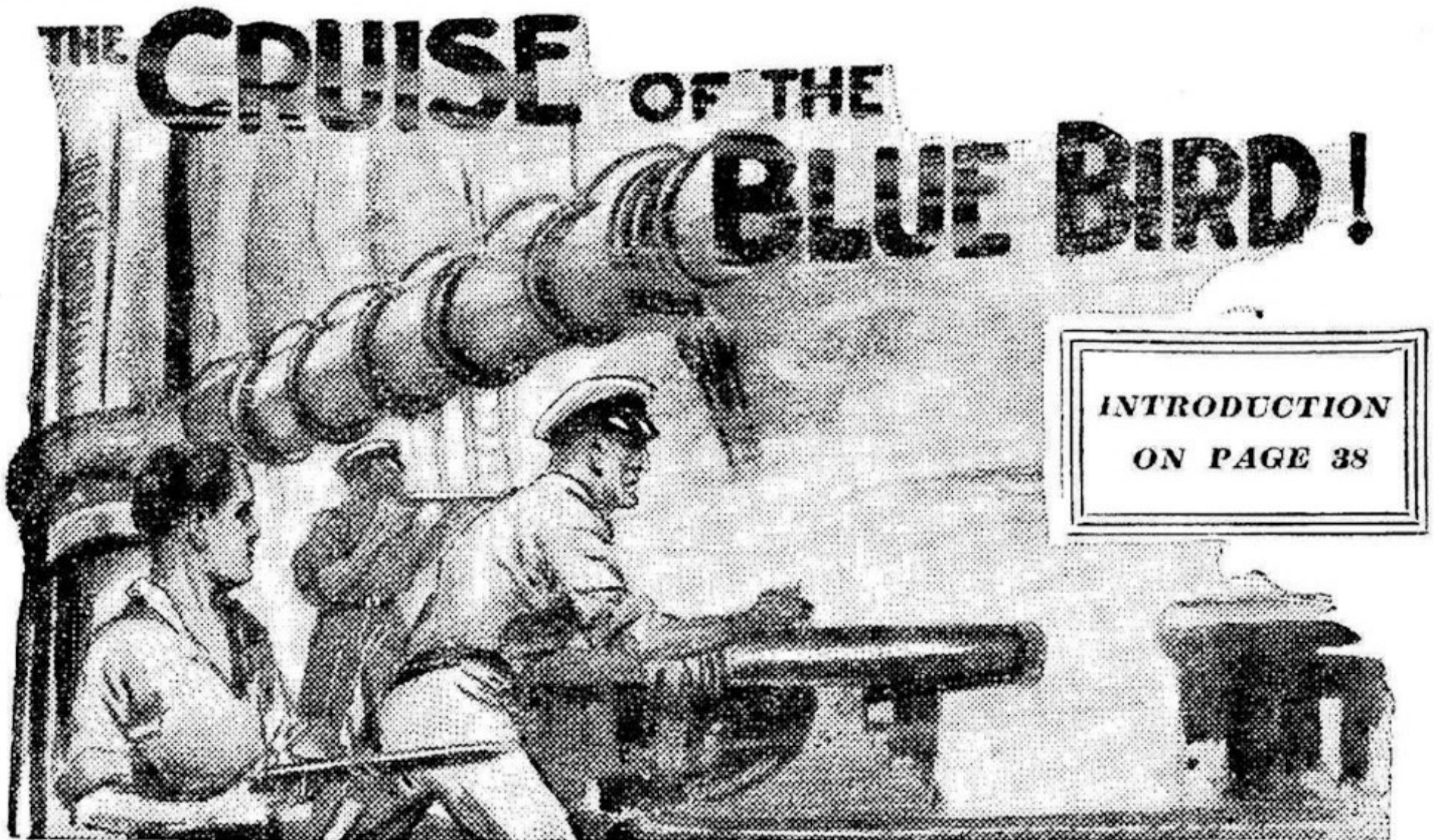
more, I do. So if you really want an answer from me, you've only got to keep plugging away at the target, and sooner or later you're sure to hit the bullseye.

William Napoleon Browne's car—J. Fairman (Horley)—is still going strong. It hasn't been mentioned in the yarns recently because there's been no reason to refer to it. The same applies to Vivian Travers' motor-bike. There are heaps of things like this, you know. And just because they are not mentioned, you mustn't think that they have gone for good. I am sorry, but I can't give you any information about driving licences.

One very frank reader has included the following in his letter: "The more I read of Handy's faults, the more I see my own, and for this I heartily thank you—for teaching me the lesson that I never could learn." Of course, this reader gives me his full name and address, but I don't think it would be quite fair to him to "let the cat out of the bag." We are very fortunate, indeed, if we can discover our own faults. It is more often the case that we are blind to them, worse luck. But if this reader of mine is like old Handy in his good points, as well as his bad, he must be a pretty decent sort of chap on the whole, eh?

I think you are now getting the type of stories you asked for—Fred Hill (Portsmouth). You might drop me a line, some time or other, to tell me how you like them. And what about the St. Frank's stories in the "Popular"? I think these will be the very kind you are looking for—unless you have already found them.

This week's instalment of this fine serial is as exciting as ever!



By COUTTS BRISBANE

Jack and Ned have pulled through many exciting scrapes by the skin of their teeth, but they're still lively and kicking. And they're likely to pass through more hazardous adventures for soon they'll be on the track of the scoundrelly French convicts who have "pinched" Captain Manby's schooner!

To The Rescue!

HARDLY had Jack and Ned disappeared in the bush than Captain Manby remembered that there might be danger for them in the course of a promenade upon the side of a volcano which was showing signs of an unusual activity.

"Don't go far!" he bellowed. "And don't loiter on the job. Come back as soon as you've spotted the Blue Bird!"

The echoes alone answered him. He stared up at the volcanic cone uneasily. Certainly there was a great deal more smoke than there had been, and there was a nasty underglow that suggested the internal fire was mighty near the boiling-over point.

"I've half a mind to go after them," he growled. "Jack is a thoughtless fellow. He'd go to the edge of the crater just to see the lava boiling."

"Ned is a bit more cautious, isn't he?" suggested Trotter. "They'll be all right, sir. Now, I want some thin battens, about four

feet long. And for a bit of canvas, if I might have the dinghy sail, I could cover it with some of the wax from those candle nuts. There are plenty around. The natives use 'em for lights, y'know."

"I know," said Manby, and gave one of the men orders to gather some and extract the oily wax by cooking them in a pot over a fire.

The battens were cut, the work proceeded. Manby lent a hand, but his uneasiness was growing. He reproached himself for sending the boys on what might well prove to be a dangerous errand, the more so as the discharge of smoke was growing thicker.

"They should be coming back by now," he said at length. "I'll give them another five minutes, and then go— Great Jupiter! It's an earthquake!"

The ground heaved sickeningly, the smooth waters of the lagoon rippled in rings, swayed outward, and returned in a wave that broke along the beach, and a few moments after came the rumble and crash of the landslide.

Captain Manby, staring upwards, saw part of the hill slithering down, carrying boulders and bushes with it, heard the smash of brush-wood as it fell.

"The boys!" he ejaculated hoarsely. "If they were caught by that, they are buried for ever. Carry on, Trotter! I'm going to see—"

He disappeared into the grove at a run, while Ah Moy, just arrived with some cooked fish, laid down his burden and waddled after him. He overtook the captain as he reached the foot of the huge mound of debris lying at the foot of the precipice, where previously had been an easy slope.

Smoke beat down upon them blindingly. Farther off to the right a ruddy glare rose from the burning brush, set on fire by the lava stream.

"No walkee!" remonstrated Ah Moy, as Manby made an attempt to climb the face of the loose earth and piled rocks. "Looke see! No walkee up alonga thlat piecee rock."

Manby halted. It was true. The precipice rose sheer and bare beyond the downfall. Even if he succeeded in reaching the foot of it, he could go no farther. With smarting eyes, he tried to pierce the eddying smoke-clouds, but saw nothing.

"You walkee 'longee thlis way piecee?" suggested Ah Moy. "If thlem alongee heah, thlem deadee, no usee lookee. If thlem alivee, thlem walkee 'long thlere."

"You're right," said Manby, with a grim laugh. "If they're under here, there's no use looking for them. It would take a steam shovel a month to shift this. But they have got out of tight places enough before now. Step lively!"

Ah Moy needed no telling. He was genuinely attached to the boys, although a stranger would have called his words calous. But that was only his way of speaking. In reality the plump Chinaman was desperately afraid that Ned and Jack had perished, though his placid face showed no trace of feeling. He contrived to keep pace with the captain as he ran forward along the edge of the fallen earth, crashing a way through the brush, regardless of scratches and torn clothes.

Thus the pair came out upon the stretch of coral reef, thinly covered with sand, and halted at the foot of the sheer cliff, straining

their eyes in an effort to see through the drifting smoke.

Something white moved away up near the top of the cliff. For a moment Manby thought that it was a gull caught in an eddy of the stifling air, then the smoke-clouds parted for a moment, and he saw the boys crouched on the edge of a ledge; saw that the white object was a waving linen jacket, and his voice rose in a roar that cut across the deep-toned rumbling of the volcano.

"Ahoy! Are you all right?" he shouted.

"Can't get down," came the reply. "Can't go on."

"Can you make fast a rope if we send one up?" shouted Manby.

"Yes. But how will you do it?" answered Jack.

"Unravel a sock! Let down a line!"

"We aren't wearing any."

"Cut your coats into strips, then. Hurry up! If there's another eruption, it will be worse than ever. I'm going for ropes. Ah Moy will stay here."

With that, Manby turned and raced away for the beach. There was no time to be lost. The red glare of the volcano was growing broader. At any moment another lava stream might burst forth and come flooding down upon this side. The captain strove not to think of that as he smashed a way through the bush.

Up aloft on the ledge, Ned and Jack ripped at their coats, tearing the linen into thin slips, knotting the strips together. Down below, Ah Moy very deliberately, yet swiftly, sat down, hauled off a long cotton stocking, and, cutting off the top edge, rippled out a long thread, which he methodically wound into a ball. He had gauged the height of the cliff, and it seemed to him likely that the line the boys would make would prove too short to be of use.

He saw it descend presently, only to be drawn up, for it didn't reach more than a third of the distance. The boys began upon their shirts. Ah Moy rose, and, cupping his hands about his mouth, loosed a shrill yell.

"You waitee piecee. Piecee line come up. You catchee when come," he screamed, and waddled to the edge of the bush.

Out came his knife. He cut a springy young sapling, then a light, straight rod of a couple of feet in length, and waddled back,

WHAT'S ALREADY HAPPENED:

CAPTAIN MANBY is skipper of the schooner Blue Bird, which is bound for the Malea atolls, in the Southern Pacific. He is accompanied by his son

JACK MANBY, and his nephew

NED SUTTON, two adventure-loving boys. From a native Captain Manby has learned that in these atolls is an uncharted island—supposed to be practically inaccessible—the lagoon of which is full of pearl shell. The captain is successful in finding this unknown island; and to his surprise discovers that it is inhabited by a number of French castaways. At first they are friendly, but later, when Captain Manby

finds out what they really are—shipwrecked convicts—their attitude changes and they capture the Blue Bird and its valuable cargo. Two friends of the captain's named Trotter and Coombes arrive in a seaplane. The 'plane gets damaged, and they set about repairing it. In the meantime Jack and Ned go up the side of a volcano to get the Blue Bird's bearings. They see it anchored among the reefs outside the island—and then the volcano erupts. The two boys escape injury, but find themselves trapped on the side of the lava-strewn volcano.

(Now read on.)

stopping to pick up a handful of feathers from the remains of a nest.

"You waitee. Makee piecee blow and narrow!" he murmured.

A bit of fishing line from a pocket of his blouse served as bowstring, he bound some feathers about one end of the stick with a few turns of thread from the sock, and was ready.

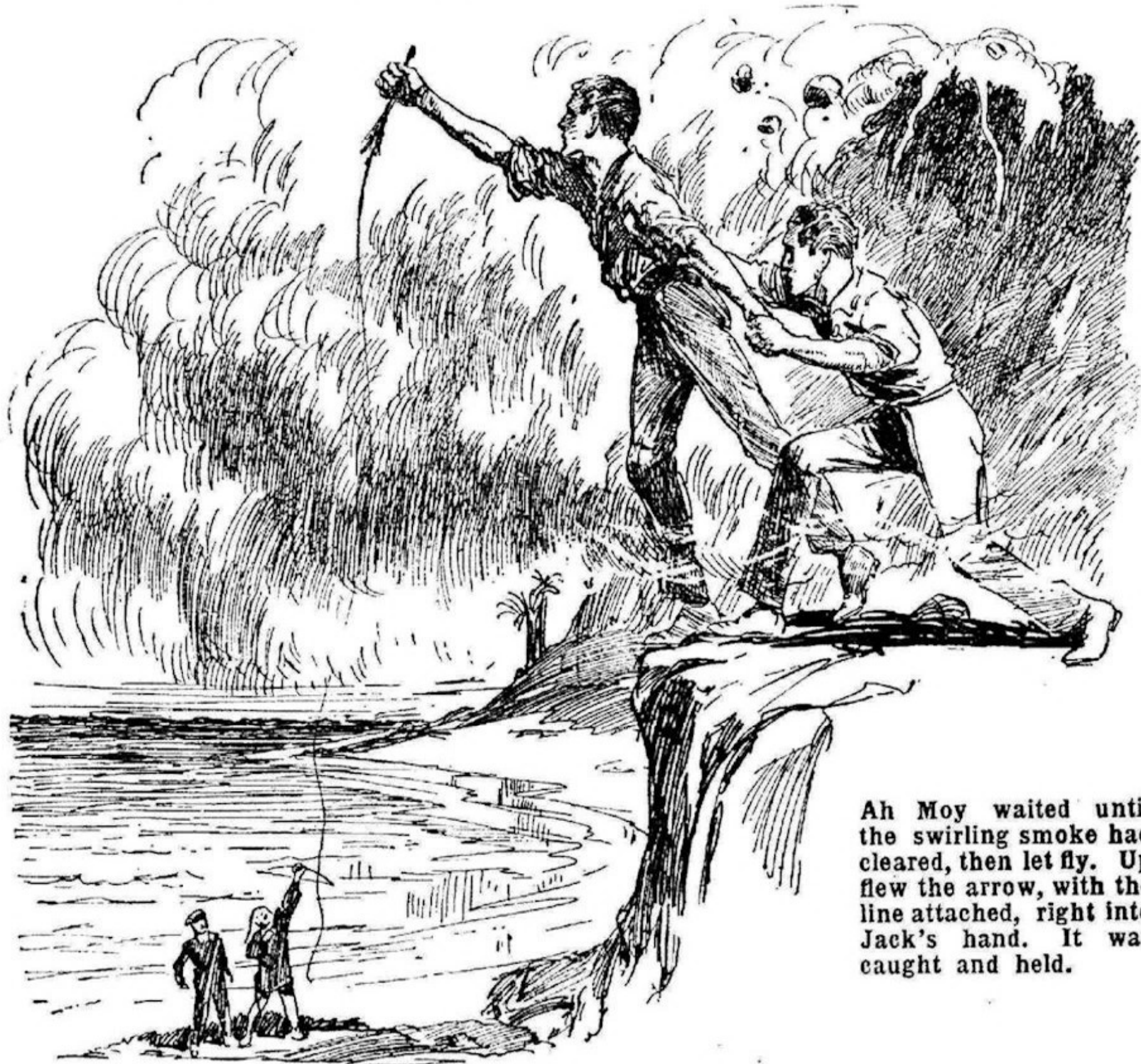
"You makee catchee. Narrow comee up!" he shrilled, tied one end of his line to the arrow and, taking careful aim, let fly.

made, had dipped into countless dishes of chop suey.

It was the measure of Ah Moy's affection for the boys that he hesitated only a moment before taking one of the things and binding it to the arrow, dragon end foremost.

"You catchee thlis makee sure!" he yelled. "You makee velly sure. Velly fine chop-stick! Now watchee!"

He waited a few seconds, his eyes on the swirling smoke, then, as the wreaths were still for a moment, let fly again, and this time



Ah Moy waited until the swirling smoke had cleared, then let fly. Up flew the arrow, with the line attached, right into Jack's hand. It was caught and held.

The missile glanced up the face of the cliff almost into Jack's hands, but even as he reached out to catch it a swirl of the air blew it aside and it dropped back to earth.

"Waitee bit!" howled Ah Moy. "Makee hleavy!"

He looked about for something to suit his purpose, saw nothing, then with a sigh drew out his most cherished possession—a pair of silver and ivory chop sticks. They were very fine, having once belonged to a mandarin who wore the yellow jacket and three peacock's feathers—a top-notch mandarin in the days when China still had an emperor. A curly dragon in silver formed the handle, holding in its claws the ivory stick which, in the years that had passed since the thing was

all was well. Up flew the arrow right into Jack's hand. It was caught and held.

"Haullee up. Waitee. Cap'n comee."

Between rumbles the Chinaman's quick ears had caught the sound of running feet. Captain Manby came bursting out of the bush, a long rope coiled about his shoulders, a coil of thin line in his hand. After him came half the Kanaka boys carrying more line, all shouting excitedly.

"Line he velly thin. You makee go slowee!" yelled Ah Moy warningly to the two boys above. "Peecee flish line, cap'n," he added, to the captain.

A fishing line was made fast to the thread and hauled up. The stout rope followed. The boys made it fast.

"You not forgettee my chopstick!" howled Ah Moy, and a minute after was happy again, for Jack handed it to him as he alighted. "No wantee losee. Mandarin chopstick," explained the Chinaman. "We walkee, cap'n?"

Ned alighted as he spoke, and silently returned the grip of the hand with which Captain Manby greeted him.

"You were a pair of young asses to linger about so long," said Manby. "But I was an ass to send you. Back to the lagoon, men. Move!"

A spray of boiling water showered about them to hurry the retreat. Evidently the volcano was just getting into its stride, for now the noise increased. A great cloud of steam drifting from the further side of the island told that the lava stream had reached the sea and, mingling with the smoke from the volcano and the burning bush, floated away out to sea in a dense cloud.

"Did you see the ship?" asked Manby, as they ploughed a way back towards the beach.

"Yes. Nearly a dozen miles away, I should say, dad," replied Jack. "She had sail on her, but I think the wind had almost died away out there."

Manby nodded, then coughed. The smoke was growing denser every moment. They had to grope their way through the palm-grove, and found that Trotter and Coombes and the men with them were working with torches to aid them.

Ready For The Flight!

"LOUD cheers!" cried Trotter, when he saw the two boys looming up in the captain's wake. "Did you get cut off?"

"They were stuck on a ledge. How are you getting on?" asked Manby.

"We'll be fit to float in another hour. But the question is, what are we going to do when we get aloft? Look at that smoke. It's blanketing the sea for miles. Probably the Blue Bird is wrapped up in it by now."

"Yes, I'm afraid that's so. The wind has died away to a breeze, but it sets that way."

"And the fire in the bush is coming this way, too, uncle," put in Ned. "D'you think these palms will burn?"

"The brush under them will anyhow. The sooner you're afloat, Trotter, the better for the plane."

Trotter grunted and went on with his work. The smoke grew even denser. Manby sent off the boys with orders to see that the repairs to the cutter were finished as quickly as possible, and assisted Trotter. Meanwhile, Coombes had been busy with the motor, cleaning and oiling, after getting rid of the water. Satisfied at last, he descended to get busy with the pot of oily wax which rendered the canvas stretched over the repaired portions of the floats waterproof.

By now the smoke was so thick that it was dark as night along the beach and upon the lagoon. A drift of fine ashes fell upon everything, while occasionally a stone, shot up by

the invisible volcano, fell hissing into the water.

The bush fire was approaching. Red tongues of flame darted up through the smoke pall, and the air grew very hot.

"There! That's that! She'll float all right, though I wouldn't back her to keep up more than a day or two. That canvas needs a lot more doping to make a really sound job, but she'll do. Let's get her away. If one of those redhot stones happened to drop on to a tank, that would be the finish," said Trotter. "We'll be safer away on the other side of the lagoon at least. Thank goodness the tide's making. Dig, you brown darlings, dig!"

The Kanaka boys understood his gesture, and hastened to follow his example as he seized a bit of plank and began digging away the sand beneath one of the floats. The cutter appeared with the rest of the crew aboard. They lent a hand. Everybody burrowed and scraped at the sand, and presently two channels were dug into which the tide flowed. The 'plane lifted on the floats. A little longer and she was hauled out into the lagoon, taken in tow by the cutter and drawn over to the further side of the lagoon near the mouth.

Captain Manby, having made certain that the shore was clear, followed in the dinghy.

Their situation was very precarious. So far the fire was confined to the southern end of the grove, but it might very easily spread till it had devoured the whole of the woods, rendering the island a barren waste. Or a fresh lava stream might burst from the volcano and run down into the lagoon, in which case the party would have to go outside, risking the swell that still ran upon the reef. In that event, dependent as they were for food upon fish and fruit, they would be in a sorry plight.

"What am I to do?" demanded Trotter, as Manby brought his boat alongside the 'plane, which was anchored near the reef. "I can take the old ship up and go to look for the Blue Bird, but I very much doubt if I should find her in this smoke. It would only be a waste of fuel, and I shouldn't be able to find the lagoon again. Seems to me we'll have to wait till the show simmers down."

"That's all we can do—and, in the meantime, fish."

They fished. As usual there was no lack in the supply. There was plenty of driftwood on the reef, and the men soon had fires going and the fish broiling. The sun set, though that made no difference, for it was already blacker than the nights mostly were.

Most of the crew elected to sleep on the reef. With big fires going and a man on watch they had nothing to fear from the denizens of the deep. Wearily the night passed. Towards morning rain fell heavily, and though it drenched everybody except the airmen—who slept aboard their craft—it stopped the fire in the bush, and beat down the heavy smoke-clouds, revealing the peak of the volcano. Smoke still rolled from the

erater, but it no longer reflected the glow of the fires beneath. The eruption was slackening off, though the dawn revealed a scene of desolation to the southward. The palms at that end of the island still stood for the most part, but their trunks were blackened and their crowns of leaves had been burned off or shrivelled to mere blackened ribs, while the ground beneath was burned clear of any vestige of herbage.

Captain Manby and the boys, who had spent the night in the cutter, went ashore, and from the highest part of the reef surveyed the island.

"The worst seems to be over, and the place hasn't suffered so much as might have been expected," said Manby, then turned to look seaward.

The slow breeze had shifted to the west, and the sea in the direction in which the Blue Bird was gone was now clear of smoke. From that height it was, of course, impossible to see anything of the schooner, supposing she had made no progress since the boys had last viewed her. It wasn't a glimpse of his beloved vessel that made Manby utter an exclamation and fling out a pointing hand.

"Look! That's a new reef!" he exclaimed. "And over there is another. That earthquake tremor must have done it. I've heard of the like happening before, of islands sinking and new ones appearing through volcanic agency. And see, away over there there is a third new rock, if I'm not mistaken."

They stared. There was no mistake, for the newly-risen reefs were covered with a brilliant growth of sea anemones, corals, and weeds now swiftly decaying in the air.

"Where's Gull Rock?" asked Jack suddenly. "It lay over there."

He pointed to where a conical rock much loved by sea birds had been. "It's gone!"

"Sunk. That's the way of it when a volcano gives the earth a shake up. The whole chart wants reconstructing. I wonder——" Manby paused. "It's quite on the cards that the passage through the reefs away out yonder is now either much easier, or perhaps impossible. It's possible that the Blue Bird may be hung up on one of these new reefs. Or she may be sailing away through clear water."

He glanced towards the seaplane. Trotter had awakened, and was in the act of climbing down to a float. He paddled ashore in the dinghy and joined them. He whistled softly as he heard and saw what had happened.

"I'll take the bus up for a trial presently, sir. Then we'll be able to locate the Blue Bird if she's anywhere within range. Then we can take you and one other aboard, and try what the Lewis gun and rifles can do."

"All right for clearing the deck, but what then? Could you drop me alongside?" asked Captain Manby.

"Once the deck's clear, we could drop, and you could get aboard, I think. Anyhow, settling the convicts is the first thing. A mouthful of food, and then we'll try a preliminary flight."

Fish and bananas made their breakfast. Then Coombes started the motor of the 'plane, and, after a little adjusting, it ran well. Leaving its moorings, it glided down the lagoon, took the air, circled up and up, then returned.

"She's there, sir. About twelve miles out, I should guess. No sail on her. She was hard to pick up, but Coombes found her," Trotter reported.

"And there seems to be a lot of new rocks thrusting up, sir," added Coombes. "I'd be inclined to say she may find the way out barred. If that's so, those beauties are in a pretty pickle. Their one chance would be to take to the boats, or else come back here in the hope of being able to settle you all."

"The eruption seems to be about over for the moment, anyhow," said Manby. "Are you all fit? Shall we make a start?"

"We can take you and one more. One of the boys, for choice. They're light weights, and we haven't much room to spare. Which of them?" asked Trotter.

"Let them toss for it."

They tossed. Jack won. Taking his rifle, he climbed into the 'plane.

"I'll bring you back a change of togs, Ned," he called down. "And something for you to cook besides fish, Ah Moy. We can do with a change of grub."

"Eh? You waitee. You listlen, Mister Jackee," cried Ah Moy, with sudden and most unusual excitement. "You see two big piecee clan alongee galley, alongee shlef by store cupboard, you no takee. Two piecee big clan markee, klidney. You no touchee, savee? Thlem no good."

"All right, though I don't know why you want to keep them. I'll find something else."

"Shut up, and hope that you don't find a bullet in your body," growled his father. "Now then, Ned, you're in charge here. Get more fruit if you can do it safely. Don't go near that landslide or the hill, and stand by to get afloat at the first sign of a renewal of the eruption. If we are successful, Trotter will come back with the news. He will, in any case."

"Couldn't we come along in the boat and bear a hand?" asked Ned wistfully.

"No. It would take too much time. Later, perhaps. If we clear the decks of these scum, one man can do the rest. If I get on board, I can clap the hatches shut and keep them below. And there's Sinclair. He'll lend a hand if he can. Perhaps, though, this will only be a reconnaissance, and we'll come back for your help. Good-bye for a little."

The motor started; the 'plane slid away and took the air, circled up, then, getting her bearings, darted away!

(Once more Captain Manby is going to attempt to recapture the Blue Bird and its valuable cargo. Will he be more successful this time? Don't miss reading next Wednesday's exciting chapters.)

HOW TO JOIN THE LEAGUE

ST. FRANK'S LEAGUE APPLICATION FORM No. 99.

SECTION

READER'S APPLICATION FOR MEMBERSHIP.

A

I desire to become enrolled as a Member of THE ST. FRANK'S LEAGUE, and to qualify for all such benefits and privileges as are offered to Members of the League. I hereby declare that I have introduced "THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY" and THE ST. FRANK'S LEAGUE to one new reader, whose signature to certify this appears on second form attached hereto. Will you, therefore, kindly forward me Certificate of Enrolment with the Membership Number assigned to me, and Membership Badge.

SECTION

MEMBER'S APPLICATION FOR MEDAL AWARDS.

B

I, Member No..... (give Membership No.), hereby declare that I have introduced one more new reader, whose signature to certify this appears on second form attached hereto. This makes me (state number of introductions up to date) introductions to my credit.

SECTION

NEW READER'S DECLARATION.

C

I hereby declare that I have been introduced by (give name of introducer) to this issue of "THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY."

(FULL NAME)

(ADDRESS)

INSTRUCTIONS.

INSTRUCTIONS.—Reader Applying for Membership. Cut out TWO complete Application Forms from Two copies of this week's issue of THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY. On one of the forms leave in Section A, crossing out Sections B and C. Then write clearly your full name and address at bottom of form. *The second form* is for your new reader, who fills in Section C, crosses out Sections A and B, and writes his name and address at bottom of form. Both forms are then pinned together, and sent to the Chief Officer, The St. Frank's League, c/o THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY, 5, Carmelite Street, London, E.C.4.

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writes his name and address at the bottom of the form. Now pin both forms together and send them to the Chief Officer, as above. One new reader will then be registered against your name, and when six new readers have been registered, you will be sent the St. Frank's League bronze medal. There is nothing to prevent you from sending in forms for two or more new readers at once, providing that each pair of forms bears the same date and number.

Bronze medallists wishing to qualify for the silver medals can apply in the same way as for the bronze medal, filling in Section B. Every introduction they make will be credited to them, so that when they have secured the requisite number of readers they can exchange their bronze medal for a silver one.

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You can qualify for the various awards by promoting the growth of the League.

If you want help or information on any subject, you will find the Chief Officer ever ready to assist you.

NOTICE!

The St. Frank's League has now attained such proportions that we are compelled to discontinue the offer of gold medals in connection therewith. The silver and bronze medals will still be available, however, as heretofore, to those who qualify for them in accordance with the rules.



Our Weekly Pow-Wow!

By
The Editor.

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.

A Gramophone with a Cold.

IN reply to a chum at Uttoxeter who is puzzled by the symptoms of his gramophone, I suggest that he takes the machine to the vet, otherwise the gramophone shop, and gets the advice of an expert. This particular gramophone has had a fairly heavy summer of it, and one evening, when in a boat on the river, got the soaking of its life. Now, the best gramophone won't stand this kind of thing. It may be the most up-to-date affair, 25 h.p., and all that, but damp will ruin its tone, and a gramophone with a dangerous squeak in it, or which interpolates a bitter groan right in the midst of a jolly old dance tune, is likely to be unpopular. The only way is to rush the damaged article to the establishment where such discrepancies can be set right. There is bound to be grave trouble with the neighbours otherwise. Tunes get mangled, and nerves badly frayed. It's no treat to listen to a song which dithers off in a pip squeak right in the interesting part.

Poetical Praise!

J. B. thinks most highly of the NELSON LEE LIBRARY, and his feelings on the subject of Handy have bubbled over into the following:—

We know that life is passing sad,
For poets sing of vales and woe,
But things cannot be really bad,
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No brickbats, please. Sympathy for a poet, not missiles!

A Puzzler.

A thoughtful reader sends me a letter which shows once again how carefully one has to tread when manipulating the English language. Without close attention to details

there is always a chance of being made to say, or seem to say, something quite the opposite of what was intended. My correspondent tells me that he is much interested in old furniture, and the other day he saw in a paper an advertisement of a table. This article seemed to be a real bargain. The advertisement ran as follows:—

"For Sale, cheap, a garden seat, very old, by a man with curiously carved legs."

Now, what my correspondent not unreasonably asks is this—who, or which, has those curiously carved legs? Does the statement refer to the antique garden bench whereon past generations have plumped themselves and gazed at the nasturtiums and vegetable marrows, or is it the owner? Has this poor fellow been forced to offer the giddy old heirloom at a job-lot price in order to pay for hospital treatment for those carved legs of his? One is left to sad and uneasy conjecture about these matters. It all shows what tact and discrimination are called for in the treatment of the language. Mishandling leads to much trouble. Sometimes, when a comma is omitted—people always put this sort of thing down to the printer, but they know jolly well in their own guilty consciences that it is they who are to blame—there is the printer's devil to pay!

CORRESPONDENTS WANTED.

Walter Leach, 4, Vernon Terrace, Victoria Street, Burton-on-Trent, wishes to hear from readers anywhere, particularly abroad, on any subject, especially wireless; all letters answered.

Wallace Varnish, 88, Clifford Street, Lozells, Birmingham, wishes to hear from readers interested in butterflies and moths, also in books, music, photography, cycling and painting.

S. N. Ballard, 82, Hamilton Road, Long Eaton, Nottingham, wants to hear from readers anywhere, and all parts of the Empire especially; also wants to buy N.L.L. new series 1-58, and also old series.

CORRESPONDENTS WANTED

(Continued from previous page.)

George L. Alderson, 77, Pelham Street, Middlesborough, Yorks., wants to hear from readers, aged 15-16, in British Empire.

Geo. Archibald Peterson, P.O. Maitland Street, Riversdale, Cape Province, South Africa, wishes to correspond with readers interested in roving, electrical engineering, stamps and ju-jitsu.

Richard Simpson, 198, Haydon's Road, Wimbledon, London, S.W.19, wishes to hear from readers.

Sidney Cross, 23, Wellington Road, Norwich, wants readers in his district to join his correspondence club.

E. S. Brooks, Barton House, Halstead, Essex, would like to obtain "N.L.L." old series, Nos. 23, 25, 27, 35, 66, 70, 234 and 236.

David Lynch, 26, Swinbrook Road, North Kensington, London W.10, has back numbers "N.L.L." to sell; 513-561 old series; 1-92 new series.

C. Rosie and F. Winters, 52, Tunael Road, Edge Hill, Liverpool, wish to obtain members for their social club; ages 15-16.

A. Chapman, 83, Swiss Avenue, Chetford, wishes to hear from Keith Dieterich, of Launceston, Tasmania; also from members in his district.

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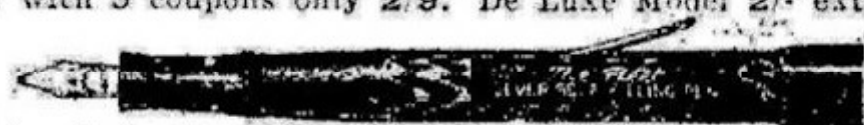
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