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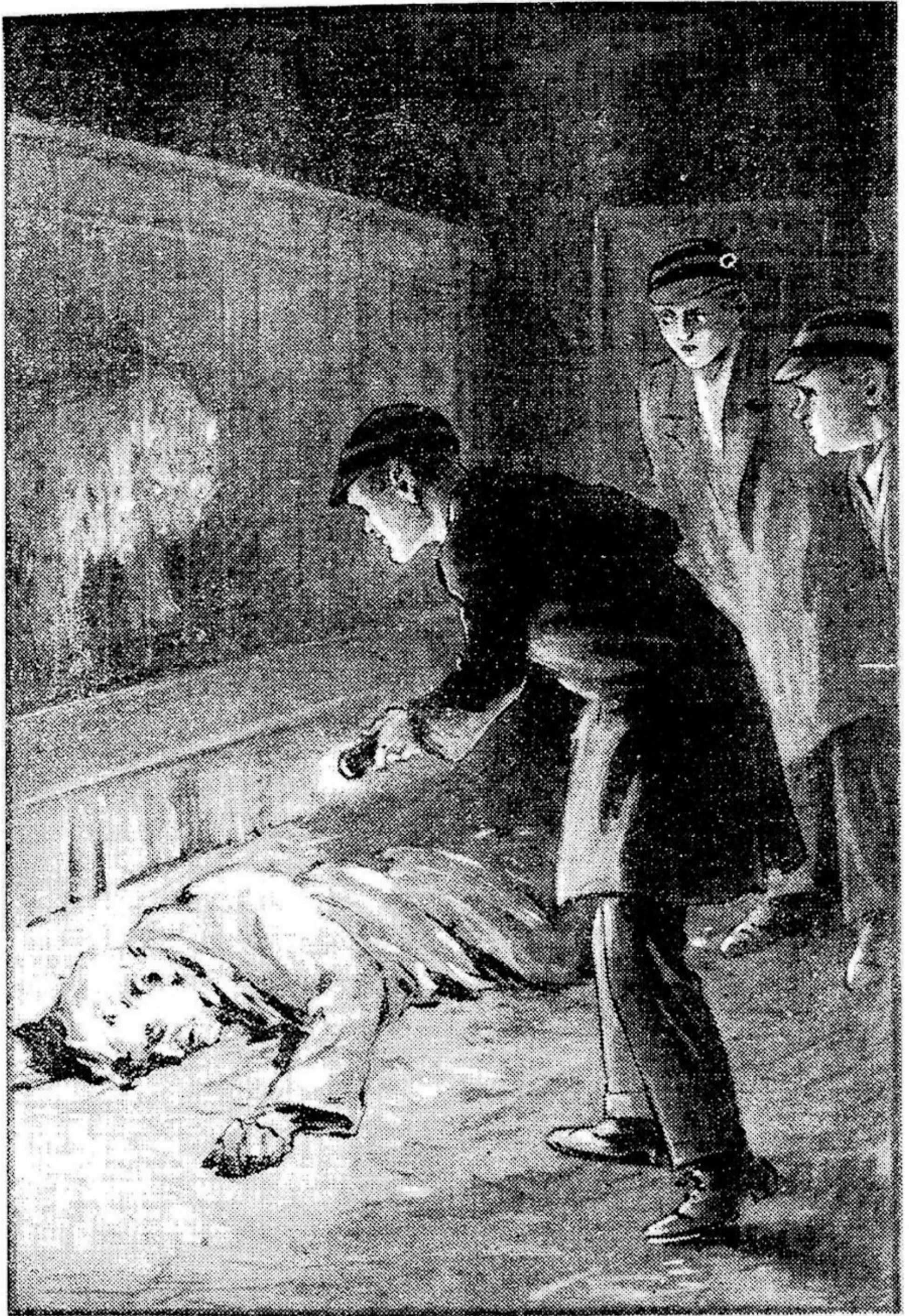
THE ST. FRANK'S MENAGERIE!

A magnificent complete yarn of schoolboy fun and adventure at St. Frank's, featuring Willy Handforth and many other popular characters.

New Series No. 158.

OUT ON WEDNESDAY

May 11th, 1929.

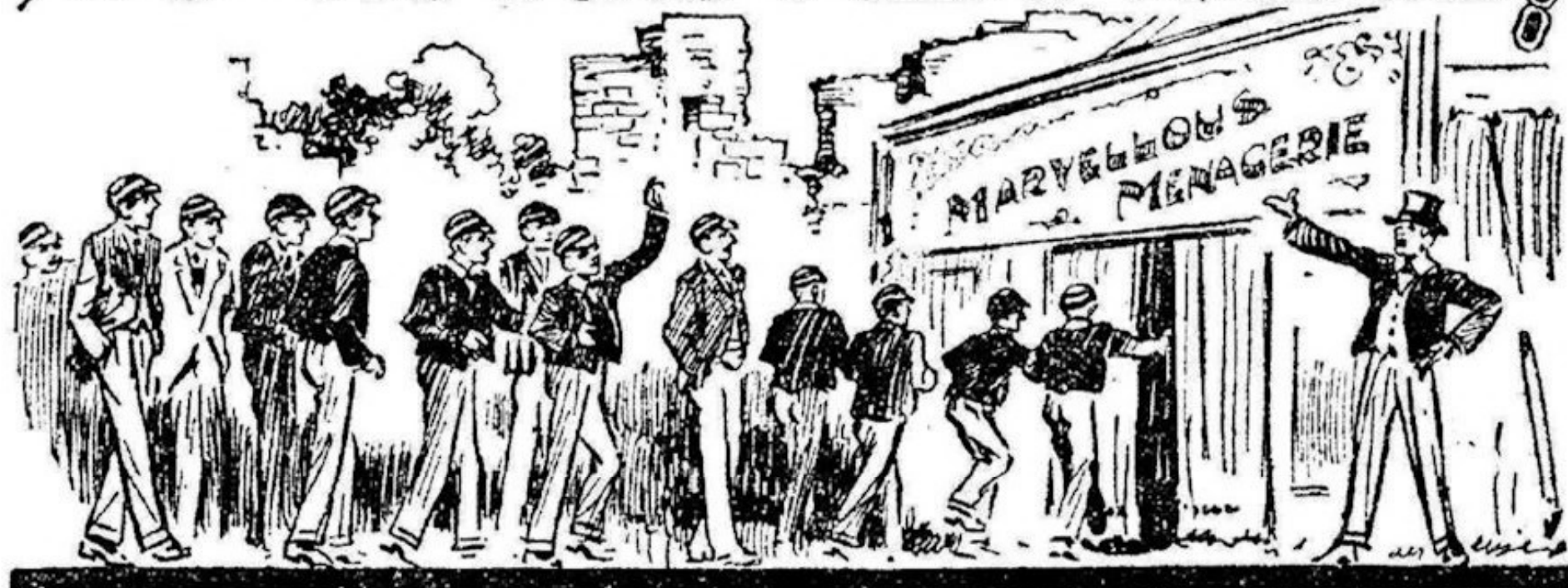


Willy swept the torch slowly round the tent. Suddenly he stiffened, and the white gleam remained steady. There, sprawling on the ground in a huddled position, was the old showman, Mr. Montgomery Maggs!

Roll Up, Roll Up, My Lucky Lads!

Don't Miss This Wonderful Attraction!

The ST FRANK'S MENAGERIE!



By EDWY SEARLES BROOKS

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

Willy Handforth, the cheery Third Form skipper, has always been an audacious youngster, but when he brings a menagerie to St. Frank's without official authority—well, it's asking for trouble! Trouble comes, in many shapes and forms, to say nothing of large chunks of excitement! Start reading this fine yarn now, chums.—ED.

CHAPTER 1.

Panthers on the Prowl!

WILLY HANDFORTH, the popular young skipper of the Third Form at St. Frank's, had a deep, sinister suspicion in his mind.

He wasn't naturally a suspicious junior, but it seemed to him that the truck was a lot heavier than it should have been. Either the rise was not so gentle as it appeared to be, or the other fags were deliberately slacking.

Willy decided to put it to the test.

Abruptly, he ceased his own efforts. The truck trundled on for about ten inches, and then came to a standstill. One or two startled exclamations sounded, and the truck was jerked forward again.

"Hold on!" said Willy grimly. "No hurry! I want a word with you slackers! What's the idea of giving me all the work to do? Do you think I'm a horse, or what? It's a funny thing you didn't jump on, and take a ride!"

The other fags, abashed, tried to explain, but this was a somewhat difficult task, because none of their explanations was plausible. When Willy had stopped pulling, the truck had stopped, too. In fact, Willy had been doing all the work, whilst his five companions slacked.

"I'm going to walk ahead now," said Willy calmly. "You fellows can lug the truck. I've done my share."

"You might give us a hand up this hill!" protested Juicy Lemon.

"Hill?" said Willy coldly. "Which hill?"

"This one in front of us."

"Ass! That's not a hill!" retorted Willy. "It's only a pimple. Wait until you get to the hill on the other side of the village!"

He spoke decisively, and his companions bitterly regretted their recent inactivity. Their young leader was undoubtedly determined to take it out of them; and if they presumed to argue, the result would be short, sharp, and painful. Willy had his own special way of dealing with grumblers.

The Panther Patrol was on its way home.

It was a half-holiday at St. Frank's, and while the Remove and Fourth were engaged on preliminary cricket practice—there was a sort of scratch game—Willy had considered that the afternoon warranted a scouting expedition.

So the Panthers, in all their glory, had ventured forth. They didn't look quite so smart now. They were dusty, weary, and ruddy with health. It was evening, and the Panthers had been for a considerable hike.

They had camped out for tea, Willy choosing a spot, much to the disgust of his fellow scouts, about a thousand miles from anywhere. At least, so it had seemed. They had lit their camp fire on a barren hilltop on Bannington Moor, and it could not be denied that they had obtained plenty of fresh air.

The journey home seemed a lot longer than the journey out; and the truck, which had been a mere trifle in the early afternoon, now seemed to have become loaded with lead. Yet it was a most unusual truck—as one would naturally expect, remembering that Willy was the patrol leader of the Panthers.

That truck was his own invention. It had four bicycle wheels, and, in order to be in the latest fashion, Willy had provided it with four-wheel brakes. It seemed to the Panthers that these four-wheel brakes had accidentally been applied.

The rest of the truck was as novel as the chassis. Actually, the body consisted of a canoe, which could be quickly dismounted and used on the river, and the chassis was provided with a special inflatable float which had its own uses. The chassis, in fact, could be towed across any river without trouble—and, if the float worked, without sinking. The float was really an air-pillow, which Willy had found lying about in the sanatorium. The sanatorium people had often wondered what had happened to that air-pillow, and would have been considerably shocked if they had known of the base use to which it was now put.

"Buck up!" said Willy briskly. "None of your slacking, young Chubby! What's the matter with your feet, Bobby Dexter?"

"Feet?" said Dexter who was known as "The Cherub", owing to his angelic—but deceptive—features. "I haven't got my feet! They're worn off!"

"We've only hiked about ten miles," said Willy scornfully. "My hat! You asses don't know what walking is!"

"This Boy Scouting is all very well, but one can't have too much of a good thing!" grumbled Owen minor. "Why couldn't we have camped in Bellton Wood for the afternoon? Why go half over England?"

Willy did not deign to answer. He merely reminded his Panthe that the truck wouldn't get home of its own volition, and he marched on ahead. They were approaching the hamlet of Edgemore.

The Third Form scouts were glad to see the first peep of Edgemore. They were nearly home. St. Frank's was only a mile

and a half further on. True, there was a nasty hill to be negotiated on the other side of the village, but after that it would be all down hill.

There was really no reason for the scouts to grumble. They had had a glorious afternoon, for the weather was mild and sunny, and now the May evening had settled down with tranquil peace over the Sussex countryside.

"Hallo, hallo!" murmured Willy. "What's this?"

His eyes gleamed with interest. His step became more sprightly, in spite of his tired muscles.

It was the word "menagerie" which had caught his eye. And such a word, to such a junior, was like magic. Willy Handforth's love of animals was well known at St. Frank's. In fact, he had a menagerie of his own, as many of the other Third-Formers knew to their cost.

Willy had turned a bend in the lane, and the outskirts of Edgemore lay two or three hundred yards ahead. Just here, in a little grass clearing near the lane, a ramshackle tent was revealing its patched, tattered exterior to the public gaze. Right across the front of this tent was a faded sign. Once, no doubt, it had been a thing of gaudy, brilliant paint, but now it could only be just distinguished:

"MAGGS' MARVELLOUS MENAGERIE."

Underneath it, in smaller type, only just readable, was the addition: "Montgomery Maggs, Prop."

A gentleman, who was apparently Mr. Montgomery Maggs himself, was standing outside the tattered entrance, looking extraordinarily forlorn. As the scouts approached, however, he turned a pair of eager, hungry eyes on them, and he cleared his throat for action.

"Walk up—walk up!" he wheezed. "Come on, young gents! See the World's Most Wonderful One-Man Menagerie! Only twopence each to see this great collection of wild, ferocious hanimals!"

"Well, I'm dashed!" said Willy, coming to a halt.

The other Panthers were not very interested. They wanted to walk straight past and get back to St. Frank's. But Willy wasn't having any. His interest in animals was intense. If it wasn't, as he had often explained, he would have had nothing to do with the Panthers.

"Half a tick, my sons," said Willy. "No reason why we shouldn't have twopenn'orth of this."

"Rats!" grumbled Chubby Heath wearily. "If we mess about here, wasting time, we shall be late for locking-up."

"Heaps of time yet," said Willy. "And if there's a menagerie on view for twopence, I'm sampling it. I don't suppose it'll be

much cop, but you never know. Anybody else coming in?"

"We can spend our twopences better!" said Juicy Lemon tartly.

Mr. Montgomery Maggs awoke to brisk activity as he saw that the scouts had halted. He advanced, waving a stick. He was incredibly thin, and his clothes hung on him like rags on a scarecrow. His face was lean and leathery and wizened, and when he moved his joints seemed all loose. The juniors half-expected to hear them rattling.

"Ho must be a hundred and fifty!" said Chubby, staring.

"Walk up, young gents—walk up!" invited Mr. Maggs, his old eyes alight with hope. "Twopence each! Come and see the hanimals! Come and see the ferocious grizzly bear—caught with me own 'ands in the Rocky Mountains! Come and see the kangaroo, what I trapped in Australia!"

"Rats!" said Owen minor, whose tiredness was inclined to make him a bit rude. "You can't spin us that yarn! I'll bet you've never been out of England! Oh, come on, you chaps! Why waste time here?"

"Twopence each, young gents!" urged the old man. "I ain't 'ad not two customers the whole arfternoon. You won't be sorry you're in. This ain't no swindle show! Twopence to see the menagerie! Walk up!"

Willy was a shrewd youngster. Behind the old man's boisterous manner he could detect tragedy. Mr. Maggs wasn't lean and wizened so much from old age as from under nourishment. No doubt he had a hard struggle to keep going. A one-man show of this kind was difficult to manage. And Willy was struck by the thought that if the owner was half-starved, the menagerie might not be in any better condition. It was a thought that startled him.

"Right-ho, Mr. Maggs," he said briskly. "We'll go in. Six of us. I'll treat these chaps if they're too mean to whack out their own money."

He dropped two separate shillings into the old showman's hand, and Mr. Maggs looked at them wonderingly. If it had been a two-shilling-piece he would have known that change was expected, but two separate shillings took him by surprise.

"Six of ye," he said, frowning. "That's a bob, young gent."

"It's all right," murmured Willy. "That's near enough."

Mr. Maggs started.

"Not me!" he said, with wheezy vehemence. "Not likely, young gent! Twopence each is the price. I ain't taking no charity!"

"Sorry!" said Willy, flushing.

He took the shilling back, and made no attempt to press it. Apparently Mr. Maggs

had an independent spirit, in spite of his pitiful poverty, and his rocky state of health. His breathing was so heavy that it sounded like a pair of old, leaky bellows.

"Step right in, young gents!" he said, after putting the skilling in his pocket. "There ain't any other customers in sight, so we might as well start the show. Business ain't what it was once upon a time. My! I can remember the days when I took twenty in at a time. Yes, and had to rush 'em out quick, so that the next lot shouldn't get tired o' waiting!"

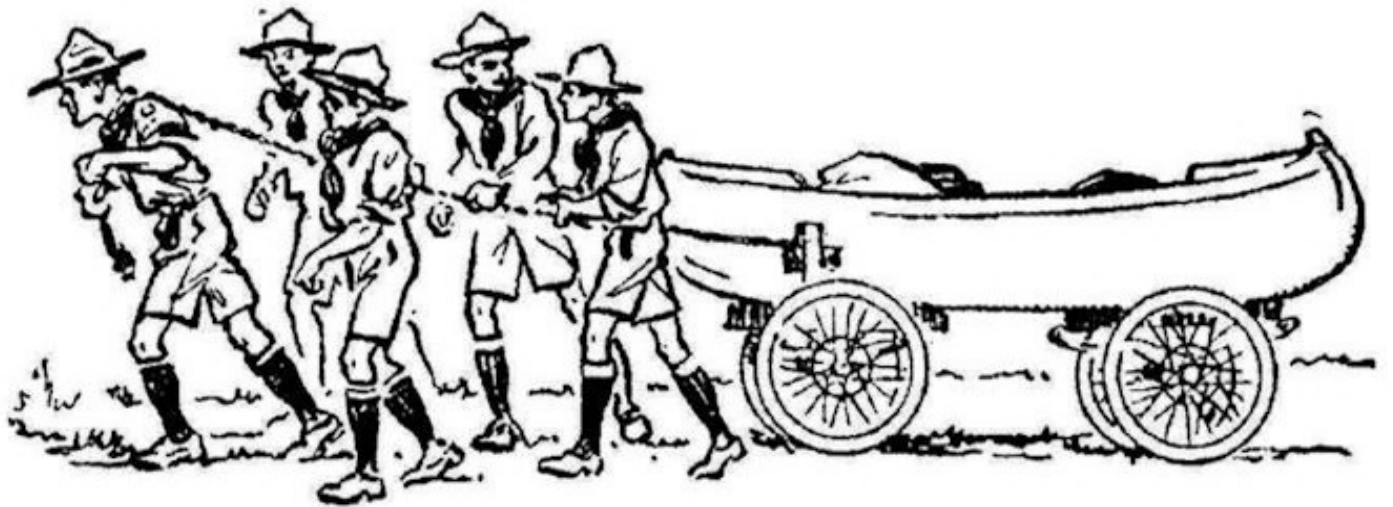
He was speaking more to himself than to the fags as, pushing the tattered tent flap aside, he invited the customers in.

WILLY walked in quickly, keenly, his senses on the alert. Much as he was concerned for Mr. Montgomery Maggs, he was intensely anxious about the animals. He half-believed that there weren't any—that the show was just one of those spoof affairs which are so often found at the fairs. The exhibits would probably be stuffed.

But directly Willy got inside, he knew different. The odour of animals was very pronounced. And there, all round the ramshackle tent, was a number of equally ramshackle cages.

"Well, I'm jiggered!" muttered Willy.

There were movements in the cages. The light was not particularly good, but Willy had no difficulty in recognising the first animal as a brown bear. In the next cage there was a dainty-looking kangaroo. The other members of the menagerie were equally interesting. A rather fierce-looking leopard—a creature which was unmistakably



a chimpanzee—and, most surprising of all, a hyena. As a menagerie, it wasn't particularly extensive; but even a show of this kind was undeniably cheap for twopence.

Willy got in a good comprehensive look round before the other fags had even commenced to examine the miniature zoo. And he was greatly struck by the fact that, while Mr. Maggs himself was half-starved, his animals were healthy-looking and well fed. Willy's fears were groundless; and his respect for the old showman went up tremendously.

He saw, too, that the cages were well kept, in spite of their dilapidated condition. It seemed a shame that such a really excellent show should be so badly supported.

Willy determined, on the spot, that Mr. Maggs should do some excellent business while he stayed in this district!

CHAPTER 2.

Wild and Woolly!

“WELL, 'ere we are, ladies and gentlemen,” said Mr. Montgomery Maggs, evidently speaking by force of habit—for there were certainly no ladies within sight. “Be'old my private collection of ferocious hanimals. I might say as every one was caught by my own 'ands, and if that there statement can be bowled out as a lie, I'll forfeit my day's takin's. Gather round ladies and gents!”

The fags grinned as they gathered round the cage containing the brown bear. There seemed something ridiculous in Mr. Maggs' suddenly-assumed grandiloquent air. He shouted at the top of his voice, as though he were addressing a crowd of fifty. He flung one of his thin arms up, and pointed to the bear's cage with his stick.

“'Ere we 'ave a genuine ferocious grizzly bear from the Rocky Mountains,” he went on. “Caught him with me own 'ands, I did. Ladies and gents, I ain't likely to forget that adventure. To look at me, you wouldn't think that I was once a big game hunter. But I was. Now I'm retired, and livin' on me means. I'm a doin' this 'ere just so's my fellow cuntrymen shall 'ave a chance o' seein' these wild creatures in their natteral state.”

The fags grinned more than ever. That sort of stuff might have “gone down” with raw rustics, but they didn't swallow it. The bear was only a small one, and, although it might have been fierce in its early captivity, it was certainly far from fierce now. Besides which, it wasn't a grizzly bear at all. It was more than ever obvious that Mr. Maggs was mechanically reciting a set formula. He had probably learnt it by heart years before.

Willy was perhaps the only fag who failed to grin. He could appreciate the pitiful reality behind it all. Mr. Maggs was half-starved. Taking this tiny show from village to village, single-handed, he was scarcely eking out an existence. Willy felt tremendously sorry for him.

“I 'unted two days afore I got that bear!” continued the old man in his wheezy voice. “Then, one evenin', I spotted 'im, crouchin' behind a rock. If he'd seen me, I shouldn't be 'ere now.”

“Ha, ha, ha!”

Three or four of the fags cackled audibly, and Willy frowned.

“Shut up, fatheads!” he muttered.

But Mr. Maggs took no notice. Perhaps he was accustomed to hearing his yarns laughed at.

“I wasn't takin' no chances,” went on the old man, lowering his voice. “No, ladies an'

gents! Not me! So what do you think I did?”

“Put some salt on his tail?” asked Chubby, grinning.

“Which I never!” retorted Mr. Maggs indignantly. “I climbed up some rocks, dropped on his shoulders, and 'ad him strung up afore 'e knew what 'it 'im. But I never 'urt 'im. I believes in bein' kind to hanimals. I whipped 'im in me cage, and it wasn't long afore he was fond of it. Not that he ain't fierce. Don't go near 'im, ladies and gents! If ye do, like as not he'll 'arf kill ye!”

Juicy Lemon, who was in the act of unwrapping a caramel, hesitated a moment, and looked at the bear. Then he looked at the caramel. He hesitated again, evidently having a fight with himself. He came to a final decision when he noticed that the caramel was coated on one side with rubber solution, which had evidently got under the wrapping. Juicy decided to sacrifice it to the bear.

He put up his arm through the bars of cage, and the ferocious beast of the Rockies moved forward a trifle, sniffed suspiciously, and then knocked the caramel out of Juicy's hand by a soft, gentle tap of his paw. The bear was evidently on his best behaviour to-day.

“Dangerous—I don't think!” grinned Juicy.

“Now we come to the kangaroo,” said Mr. Maggs hastily. “I ain't sayin' as the kangaroo is ferocious, 'cause he ain't. But if you was to see 'im boxin', ladies and gents, you'd get a surprise. 'E could knock out Tunney with one jab. Rare terror, 'e is.”

The kangaroo gave a languid hop, and Willy judged that the creature was in the last throes of old age. If it could box at all—which was doubtful—it would probably be able to deliver a blow 'bout as heavy as a fly's kick.

Mr. Maggs gave a graphic description of how he had penetrated into the Australian bush in order to capture the animal. Then he went on to the leopard. This creature, it appeared, had come from the jungles of Borneo. Mr. Maggs himself had spent months amongst the cannibals in order to capture that leopard alive.

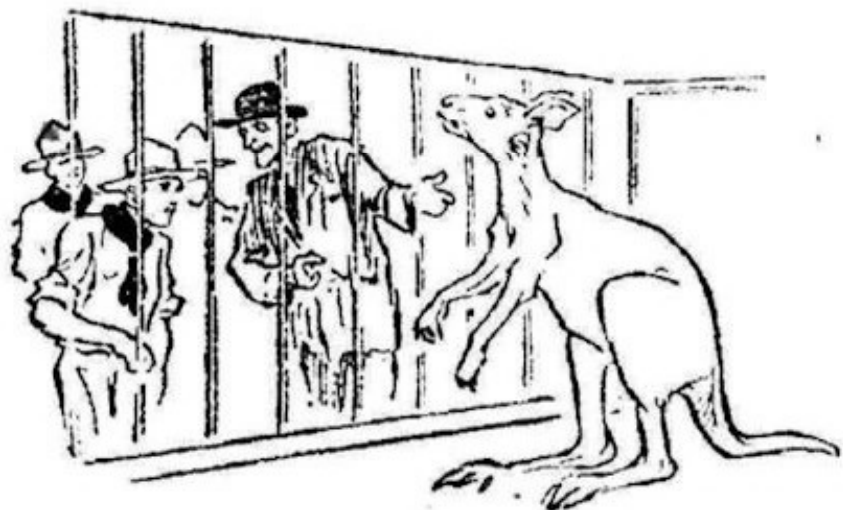
The fags were now beginning to enjoy their twopennyworth. The old showman was giving full value for money. His stories were more interesting than the exhibits.

For these stories, it must be admitted, were too highly coloured to be veracious, and the exhibits were certainly lacking in that wild ferocity upon which Mr. Maggs so insistently dwelt. A more harmless collection of tame creatures could not have been imagined. However, they were real enough. A bear was a bear, and a hyena was a hyena. There was no spoof about them, no matter what their ages and tempers might have been, and this, at least, was something.

“This 'ere hyena is the most dangerous hanimal of the lot!” declared Mr. Maggs im-

pressively. "If you do anything as he don't like, 'e'll reach out 'is paw through the bars an' tear you to bits. So steer clear, ladies an' gents! I don't want nobody to be 'urt. An' when he sees a joke, 'e laughs."

Either the hyena was trained to laugh at this particular moment—as Mr. Maggs rapped the bars of the cage with his stick—or else it was a coincidence. At all events, the brute uttered the most appalling noise imaginable. It sounded a bit like a laugh, but it was positively blood-curdling—and all



the more so because the sound was unexpected.

"My only hat!" gasped Chubby. "Let's get out!"

"Sounds just like your major, Willy!" said Juicy.

"You young fathead—"

"Steady, ladies an' gents—steady!" urged Mr. Maggs. "There ain't no call for alarm. 'E don't mean nothin'. He takes on like that now an' agin. There wasn't no joke, but mebbe 'e thought there was."

"He must have see Juicy's face," said Willy tartly. "Everybody knows that's a joke!"

"Now we've come to the end of the show!" said Mr. Maggs. "If ye like to go round agin, it'll be another twopence each. There's lots more yarns I can tell about my adventures in the jungles, while I was big game 'unting. Twopence each, ladies an' gents, for another go round! Now's your chance!"

"Here, let's get out!" said Chubby Heath hastily.

"No, fear," said Willy. "It's just getting interesting."

He was glad to give Mr. Maggs that other shilling—which the old showman now took without hesitation

Willy wanted to give him as much patronage as possible—and he was rather keen on getting personally acquainted with the menagerie. Willy had an uncanny way with animals, and he knew with a confidence that amounted to a conviction that he could soon be on the friendliest possible terms with them all—even the hyena. He could see that they were ridiculously tame, anyhow, in spite of the old man's assertions to the contrary.

"**E**RE we have a genuine ferocious grizzly bear from the Rocky Mountains," shouted Mr. Maggs, starting all over again, and using precisely the same words. "No, that's wrong! I said that the fust time! This 'ere bear, ladies an' gents, ain't one of the largest, but he makes up for that by bein' vicious. 'E's that vicious 'e sometimes fights 'isself! I've a rare time with 'im—"

He broke off, his wheezy voice fading away in a very curious manner. He seemed to droop, and he swayed uncertainly.

"This 'ere bear—" he began again, looking dazed. "Why, bust me if I ain't goin' off agin! It ain't took mo since February—"

With unexpected abruptness, Mr. Maggs collapsed to the trodden turf in a limp, grotesque heap. He lay there, breathing noisily. The fags stared down at him, startled and scared.

"Spoof!" whispered Dexter. "It's a wheeze to fool us!"

"Wants more money, I expect!" nodded Owen minor.

Willy glared at them, and brushed them aside.

"You young idiots!" he growled. "Can't you recognise a genuine collapse when you see it? The old boy's in a bad way. Fetch some water—quick! I thought he looked a bit rocky when we came in."

All the fags except Chubby and Willy rushed out, helter skelter, in search of water. Willy dropped on his knees beside the old man and would have helped to raise him, only Mr. Maggs half struggled up of his own accord.

"Thanks, young gent—thanks!" he panted, with difficulty. "It's all right! I ain't so bad. I often has these attacks nowadays. They wasn't so bad until I was took queer in the winter. Ah, that's better."

He managed to sit up, propped up by the two fags.

"I'm gettin' old, that's what it is," he muttered dully. "Shan't see seventy no more, I reckon. My! I thought I was goin', just for 'arf a minute. But there's life in the old bones yet. I'll be all right, young gents."

"Better sit still for a bit," advised Willy.

"Not likely," said the old man stubbornly. "No, don't 'elp me. I'll show ye I ain't finished. What about my hanimals? Who's goin' to look arter 'em if I was to go queer agin?"

With a tremendous effort, he got to his feet, and Willy watched him anxiously. The menagerie proprietor took a full minute to steady himself, breathing noisily all the time. Then he seemed to be a bit easier.

"I think we'd better get some help for you, Mr. Maggs," said Willy. "Or perhaps there's somebody you know? A relative or friend?"

"Me?" said Mr. Montgomery Maggs, staring. "Friends? Relatives? Lor' love yer, young gent, who is there what cares

for old Maggs? I've bin alone these twenty years past, an' I ain't givin' in now. I'm all right agin. Reckon we'd best get on with the show."

"No—you'd better get out and have some fresh air," said Willy. "Bother the show. Come along. Lend a hand, Chubby."

"I'm all right!" protested Mr. Maggs, as the fags assisted him. "I ain't got no call on you young gents—"

"We're Boy Scouts, and we're supposed to do this sort of thing," interrupted Willy briskly. "One good deed a day, Mr. Maggs, you know. This is ours."

They assisted him outside, and by this time the other fags had managed to find some water. There was another little tent adjoining the main one—evidently the old showman's home. The Third-Formers had found a decrepit camp bedstead inside, and some ancient cooking utensils.

Juicy Lemon now proffered a chipped enamel mug, and Mr. Maggs drank some of the water greedily, after which he seemed better.

"We ought to be getting on, you know," said Chubby. "We shall be late for calling-over, even as it is."

Willy hesitated. He didn't like leaving the old man in this way. He seemed so helpless—so alone. And there were the animals to think of, too. Willy turned to the menagerie proprietor anxiously.

"Sure there's nobody we can fetch, Mr. Maggs?" he asked. "You must have somebody who can help."

"There ain't nobody," replied the old man. "And I don't want nobody, either. Not arter all these years!"

"Perhaps we can get a man from the village—"

"Yes an' im interferin', and pretendin' 'e knows more than what I do!" interrupted Mr. Maggs obstinately. "Don't you worry, young gent. I'll be all right now. And thank ye kindly for thinkin' of me."

"Come on!" urged Chubby. "It's awfully late!"

Willy realised that he could do nothing more. He gave a glance at the truck, which they had left on the grass. He knew that if they trundled it home they would be hampered, and that would make them late.

"How long are you staying here, Mr. Maggs?" he asked suddenly.

"I reckon I'll be movin' on arter to-morrer," said the old man.

"You don't mind if we leave our truck here, do you?" said Willy. "We'll come back for it some time to-morrow—and we'll bring some more customers, too."

The old showman looked at him gratefully.

"You're a real young gent!" he said huskily. "It isn't often I meets one as thoughtful as you. Old Maggs ain't used to it."

THE Panther Patrol went off a minute later. By going at the double most of the way, they just managed to scrape in before locking-up, but it had been a narrow shave.

"Phew!" whistled Chubby, mopping his brow. "It wasn't worth it! It'll take us hours to get over this!"

"You rotter!" said Willy. "How the dickens could we come sooner? I didn't like leaving the old boy, even as it was. I'm afraid he'll have another attack. They often come one on top of the other—and the second one's always worse!"

"Well, we can't help it!" said Chubby Heath. "Dash it, we can't look after him, can we? He oughtn't to be on the road at his age!"

"I'm thinking of the animals, too," said Willy, frowning. "What's going to happen to them if he goes queer? Look here, my sons! Don't jaw about old Maggs to the other chaps."

"Why not?"

"Because I say so."

"That's no answer," grunted Juicy.

"Why do you say so?"

"Because you'll probably get laughed at," snapped Willy, "and then, to-morrow, nobody will go to the show and give old Maggs a bit of support. I'm going to work up something special for to-morrow evening, and take the chaps by surprise. So remember—not a word!"

"Oh, all right," said the others.

"If any of you talk, I shall soon find out who started it—and then there'll be ructions!" said Willy warningly. "I haven't thought the idea out thoroughly yet, but it's going to be corker."

The others, knowing Willy as they did, could fully believe it!

CHAPTER 3.

Willy's Presentiment!

"JUST a minute, my son!"

Willy turned as the stern voice of his elder brother smote his ears. He was going upstairs, in the Ancient House, and Edward Oswald Handforth had just appeared from the Remove passage. Needless to say, Church and McClure were with him. Some of the St. Frank's fellows half believed that Handforth and his chums were roped together.

"Can't stop now, Ted," said Willy briefly.

"When I tell you to stop, you've got to stop!" roared Handforth. "Come down, you young ass! What do you mean by going out scouting? You didn't say anything to me about it before you went!"

"That was very careless of me," said Willy, leaning over the balustrade. "I must have forgotten it."

"I should think you must!" snorted Handforth. "I'd made up my mind to be the first scouts out this spring. I was going to lead my Tigers on the warpath. And now



Mr. Pycraft, bent on getting somebody else in trouble, met with trouble himself. Not noticing the cord which stretched across the ground, he walked right into it—with disastrous results. Nearby was a deep pool of muddy water, and Mr. Pycraft went diving into this—face downwards!

I'm jiggered if you silly young fags haven't forestalled me!"

"Well, there's no law against it," said Willy. "I don't suppose you would have thought of reviving the Tiger Patrol at all if you hadn't seen me in uniform. Is that all you wanted to say?"

"No," replied Edward Oswald, his voice becoming stern. "I want to ask you something. You're a Boy Scout, and it's up to you to remember the traditions of the movement. Have you done your good deed for to-day?"

"Ass! Of course I have."

"What have you done?"

"I got out of your way for the whole afternoon," said Willy promptly.

"What! You silly young chump! That's not a good deed!"

"Isn't it?" retorted Willy. "I know it jolly well is! You haven't been able to roar at me, and the chaps have had a bit of peace. Not that that's certain," he added. "I expect you've been roaring at somebody else." And Willy walked upstairs, leaving Handforth roaring with such effect that a prefect came along to find out what it was all about. Remarkably enough, the prefect utterly failed to see Handforth's point of view, and was so dense that he actually gave Handforth a swipe.

"Well, you asked for it," said Church, after the enemy had gone.

"I'll have a word with my minor later on," said Handforth darkly. "Like his cheek to tell me I roar!"

"You shouldn't grumble at him for being truthful," said McClure.

He prepared to dodge, but at that moment Willy reappeared on the stairs, having

changed into Etons in apparently no time. He didn't even see his major as he came down into the lobby.

"Just a minute!" said Handforth ominously.

"Oh, my hat!" groaned Willy. "You still here? What's the matter now?"

"Don't talk to me in that tone!" shouted his major. "Anybody might think I was your younger brother! What's the matter with you?"

"I'm worried."

"Worried! You! What about?"

"Well, I'm worried about you, but that's not the main thing," said Willy. "Cheese it, old man! I've got to dash round to the pets' quarters and see about feeding Marmaduke and Rupert and all the others."

"Here, wait a minute——"

But Willy hurried off, leaving Handforth unsatisfied. He had spoken the truth when he had said that he was worried. The more he thought about old Montgomery Maggs, the more he worried. He was even absent-minded as he was feeding his pets, and for once he gave them scant attention. They were all very much upset, because Willy generally had a jolly half-hour with them.

WHEN bed-time came, Willy was aware of a vague alarm. He didn't believe in presentiments, or anything like that, but he remembered how Mr. Maggs had collapsed. What if the old man had neglected his animals? He wouldn't do it deliberately, but he might be physically unfit to give them the attention they required. He might even have left them without any supper! Willy was more and more concerned.

In fact, after lights out, he couldn't sleep. The thing preyed on his mind. If half a dozen human beings had been in danger of neglect, or of passing a supperless night, Willy would have gone to sleep with all his usual serenity. But when it came to animals, it was different—especially captive animals. They relied upon their masters to attend to them. And what could they do if this attention was neglected?

At last, as the clock was striking ten, Willy pushed the bedclothes back.

"It's no good," he muttered. "I shan't be able to sleep until I've made certain."

He looked up and down the Third Form dormitory. All the other fags were sleeping. He slipped out of bed, and at first he decided that he would slip away alone. Then it occurred to him that if Mr. Maggs was really helpless he might need assistance. So he ruthlessly awoke Chubby Heath and Juicy Lemon, his own particular chums.

"Come on! Get up!" he said in a whisper.

"Eh?" gasped Chubby. "Get up? What for? What's the time?"

"Just struck ten o'clock."

"Why, you ass, we're hardly asleep yet!"

"You're awake now," said Willy grimly, "and you're coming with me. You, too, Juicy. For goodness' sake, don't argue! It's important!"

"My hat!" said Juicy Lemon. "Is the school on fire, or something?"

"Don't be funny," frowned Willy. "We've got to go back to old Maggs and make sure that he's safe and sound."

The two fags looked their amazement.

"Now?" they asked incredulously.

"Yes, now."

"You—you mean break bounds?" gasped Juicy.

"What about it?"

"But you're dotty!" burst out Chubby Heath excitedly. "It's only ten o'clock, and lots of prefects and masters are up yet. Supposing we're spotted? It'll mean a flogging—and perhaps the sack!"

Willy sighed.

"The sack be blowed!" he retorted. "Can't you trust me? We shan't be spotted. I've got an idea that old Maggs is worse than he made out. He admitted he hasn't got a soul in the world, and it'll be awful if he's—"

"You're not thinking about Maggs," interrupted Chubby. "It's those giddy animals!"

"I'm thinking about Maggs *and* the animals," admitted Willy. "Anyhow, I can't sleep until I've made sure. And as I've decided that you chaps shall come with me, you'd better get dressed. Are you going to jib, or shall I give my knuckles a bit of exercise?"

WILLY & Co. stole out like shadows five minutes later. Chubby Heath and Juicy Lemon knew better than to oppose their young leader when he was determined. They were in very much the same position as Church and McClure

with regard to Handforth. Either they went quietly, or they went after fistic persuasion.

As Willy had anticipated, there was no difficulty in getting out. Certainly there were plenty of people still out of bed, but it was easy to avoid these, and before long the three fags were well clear of the school grounds.

Willy was silent as he trotted along. Perhaps the journey would be needless. Well, it wouldn't matter much. A bit more exercise would do them no harm, and the loss of sleep would be trivial.

Chubby and Juicy looked at it in a different light. Personally, they felt that the whole project was idiotic. The game wasn't worth the candle. Old Maggs was nothing to them, anyhow; and, besides, there wasn't one chance in a thousand that anything was wrong.

Not a light was showing as they trotted along. Everybody in the little hamlet had long since retired to rest. As they approached the site of the "marvellous menagerie," everything was utterly silent. No lights were showing here either. They could just see the tent in the gloom of the May night.

Then suddenly, abruptly, a fiendish, blood-curdling cackle arose on the night air. Chubby Heath and Juicy Lemon halted as though they had run into a brick wall.

"What—what was that?" panted Chubby, scared out of his wits.

"Idiot! Only that hyena," whispered Willy.

"Oh, my hat!" breathed Chubby. "I nearly had a fit! Old Maggs oughtn't to be allowed to keep such animals in his silly menagerie! It's enough to scare the whole neighbourhood!"

Willy made no comment. The sound had given him a start for the first second, but he had quickly recovered. And it indicated to him that something was wrong. Perhaps the hyena had cried out because it was hungry.

"Mr. Maggs!" called Willy, as he approached.

There was no reply. Willy pulled out an electric torch, approached the menagerie tent, and pulled aside the flap. He flashed his light within. Everything was the same as when he had seen it before. But there was no sign of Mr. Montgomery Maggs.

"What's the idea of looking here?" whispered Chubby. "The old chaps' in bed by this time."

"Of course," said Juicy.

Willy had merely satisfied himself that the animals were all right. Now he hurried round to the little adjoining tent, and flashed his light upon an empty camp-bed.

"I knew it!" he muttered in alarm. "The old boy isn't here! I was sure there was something wrong—"

"I say! What's that?" broke in Chubby Heath nervously.

They all stood still. They could distinctly hear a curious wheezing sound. Willy started, and then flashed his light round quickly. He suddenly brought it to a stop and held it steady.

"My hat!" he whispered.

He ran forward, but Chubby and Juicy hung back. There was Mr. Montgomery Maggs, sprawling on the ground, apparently asleep. His attitude was huddled, as though he had fallen unexpectedly, and had not been able to move afterwards.

"Quick, you chaps! Water!" called Willy, as he seized Mr. Maggs by the shoulder and shook him.

"My hat! What's the matter with him?" asked Chubby.

"You silly idiot! He's had another stroke, or something!" snapped Willy. "He must have fallen down here suddenly, without warning. Never had a chance of getting into his tent. Where's that water?"

He shook Mr. Maggs again, but there was no response. The old man was breathing erratically. He was quite unconscious, and even after a little water had been forced between his lips, and his brow had been dabbed, there was still no effect.

"Is—is he dying?" whispered Juicy shakily.

"I don't know," said Willy. "I'm not a doctor. But he's in a very bad way, all the same. Didn't I tell you that something was wrong?"

"But what are we going to do?" asked Chubby.

H e a t h.
"Hadn't we better fetch somebody from the village? Isn't there a policeman here? We can't do much by ourselves."

Willy rapidly considered the point.

"I know!" he said, as his eyes chanced to turn in the direction of the Scouts' truck, which they had left here only a few hours previously.

"We'll put him on our truck, and take him to the Bannington Hospital. No sense in wasting time on these village people. They won't know what to do, and while they're fooling about we can be at the hospital. The old boy needs expert attention by the look of him. Come on! Lend a hand!"

"But—but we can't do that," protested Chubby, aghast. "Don't be such an ass, Willy! We'd better find the Edgemore bobby—"

"He's probably miles away!" snapped Willy. "Are you chaps going to argue any more, or shall I get really wild? Fetch that truck here!"

The truck was fetched.

CHAPTER 4.

Willy's Promise!

MR. MONTGOMERY MAGGS was soon made comfortable on the improvised ambulance. There was something very brisk and business-like about Willy when he took charge of

anything; and the three fags, being Boy Scouts, were experts in first aid and all connected with it.

Mr. Maggs was clearly beyond their comparatively limited help. As Willy had said, he needed the attention of a doctor. He was unconscious, and obviously suffering from some kind of stroke, and this decision to take him straight to hospital was a brainy one."

It was much further to Bannington than to Bellton from this particular spot. There was no doctor in Edgemore, as Willy knew. Therefore, why waste time in finding Dr. Brett? Far better take the bold course, and put Mr. Maggs where he would receive constant attention.

There were all sorts of little points to be considered. Dr. Brett couldn't take the old man into his own house, and it was equally impracticable to take him to St. Frank's. So the hospital was the only place.

"As soon as we've delivered him, we'll come straight back and have a look at his animals," said Willy, as they trundled the silent, rubber-tyred truck. "I should have given them a squint before we started, only I'm worried about old Maggs. He seems to be in a bad way. Put your backs into it, my lads! There's a bit of a hill here."

They perspired freely as they pushed their burden. No sign or sound came from Mr. Maggs, who hadn't stirred since he had been gently lifted and placed on the truck.

As they reached the top of the rise, however, Willy thought he detected a slight movement. He immediately called a halt, and when

he bent over the patient the old man had his eyes open.

"Thank goodness!" said Willy. "It's all right, Mr. Maggs. Only us. We're taking you to hospital."

"The young gent what came to see my hanimals, ain't it?" wheezed Mr. Maggs unsteadily. "My! I feel queer, an' no mistake! What's 'appened?"

"It's all right," said Willy. "Don't try to think. We found you sprawling on the ground, and—"

"Ah, that's right," muttered the old man. "Came over queer agin, I did. Took me rare sudden. A bad attack it was, too. Don't seem to remember much after that. Just like I went a year ago, come June."

"Were you taken to hospital then, Mr. Maggs?" asked Chubby.

"'Orspital? Ah! That I was!" mumbled the old man. "Kep' me there a week, they did, and— 'Ere, don't take me to no 'orspital agin!" he panted, in sudden alarm.

He tried to struggle up, but failed. He fell back, breathing hard, pitiful in his weakness.



"Don't take me to no 'orspital agin!" he repeated feebly. "My hanimals! They took 'em away from me! The p'lice took 'em! A rare job I 'ad to get 'em back, young gents! They won't give 'em to me back next time!"

"Yes, they will," said Willy. "Don't you worry about your animals, Mr. Maggs. They're yours, aren't they? The police won't interfere with them unless you've pinched them from somebody."

"Me?" muttered the old man. "Pinched 'em? Why, I've 'ad 'em ever since I took 'em over from ole Bill Briggs—I mean, ever since I caught 'em in the wild jungles! And once I'm in 'orspital, an' there ain't nobody to look arter the show—"

His voice faded away, and he sank back, very weak and ill.

"You musn't try to talk, Mr. Maggs," said Willy severely. "We must take you to see a doctor, and Bannington Hospital is the best place. You need careful attention. I dare say it'll be a week before you can get about again, but—"

"What about my hanimals?" groaned the old man. "Last time the p'lice wouldn't give 'em up without a rare bother, and—"

"You mustn't keep on talking!" broke in Willy anxiously, as he noticed that the old man was becoming more and more feeble. "I'll look after your show, Mr. Maggs. Leave it to me. I promise you that you'll find your animals in good condition when you come back."

"Thank ye kindly, young gent," said Mr. Maggs dully.

He sank into a sort of stupor again, and the fags continued on their way, wheeling the truck quickly.

YOU did the best thing, young 'un," said the House-surgeon at Bannington Hospital, as he patted Willy on the back. "The old boy needs careful nursing."

The fags were standing in an ante-room of the hospital. The building was very quiet, for the hour was after eleven. The House-surgeon, a young man in a white coat, was regarding the three fags with some curiosity. At first, he had been very suspicious of them, but after he had had a look at Mr. Montgomery Maggs, and after the latter had been removed to one of the general wards, he made a few inquiries as to the old man's history. Willy could only tell him about the show.

"If he had been left unattended all night, there wouldn't have been a chance for him," said the doctor, shaking his head. "He would have been dead by the morning."

"Phew!" whistled Chubby Heath. "And we didn't want to come, Juicy!"

"It makes me go all funny!" said Juicy soberly. "How the dickens did Willy know? Pretty uncanny, I call it."

"Don't be an ass!" said Willy, frowning. "The old chap had an attack while we were with him, and he looked pretty rocky then.

I only went back because I knew there was nobody to help him, in case he had another spasm."

"Why didn't you mention the matter to your schoolmaster, instead of doing the thing yourself?" asked the doctor curiously.

Willy sniffed.

"Might as well mention it to a pillar-box!" he said, with disdain. "Do you think they would have believed me? I should have been told to cut off, and nothing would have been done. You're not so old yourself—and you ought to know what schoolmasters are! You haven't forgotten, have you?"

The doctor chuckled.

"No, I can still remember 'em," he replied dryly. "Perhaps you were wise, kid. I shall put in a good word for you when I report—"

"No fear!" interrupted Willy. "No good words, thanks! Dash it, we're scouts, and we do these things as a matter of course. Hasn't the Chief Scout always told us to do good deeds? Besides, what's going to happen to us if the beaks know we've been breaking bounds? Please don't say a word."

"All right—just as you like," said the doctor, smiling. "Well, you needn't worry about the old man. He's bad, but I think a week's good rest will make a big difference to him."

"What's the matter with him, sir?" asked Chubby.

The doctor frowned.

"Collapse!" he said gruffly. "That's what I make of it. Collapse from sheer physical weakness. The old boy's nothing but skin and bone. Hasn't had any proper nourishment for months, by the look of him. Poor beggar!"

"You mean—starvation?" asked Willy.

"That's about the size of it, in blunt language," replied the doctor. "Starvation, young 'un. Under-nutrition. The toughest of us can carry on up to a certain point—and it's surprising how far we *can* carry on—but then there comes a collapse, and it generally comes suddenly. Good food, rest, and careful treatment, will soon put the old chap on his feet."

"I'm glad of that, anyhow," said Willy. "Well, we'll be going. Come on, you chaps—"

"Just a minute," said the doctor. "What about the old man's show? You'd better get somebody to take charge of it."

Before Willy could answer a uniformed nurse appeared.

"Oh, they're still here," she said, as she caught sight of the fags. "That old man is asking for these boys, doctor. He's nearly frantic. Says he must see them."

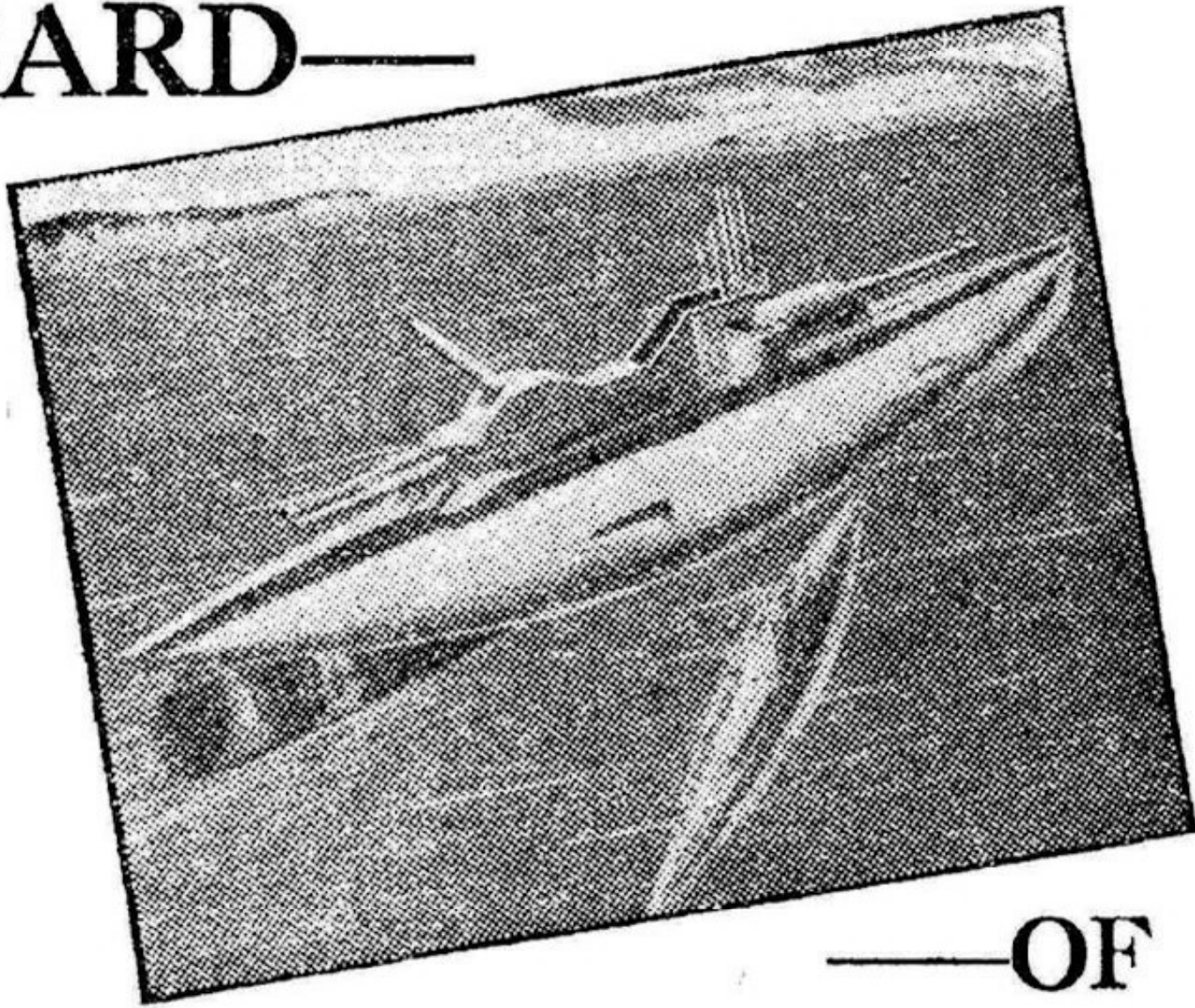
"I'll go," said Willy briskly.

He didn't wait for the doctor's permission, but accompanied the nurse into the general ward. He found Mr. Maggs in bed, looking even more emaciated and haggard in contrast with the snowy-white linen.

(Continued on page 14.)

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The ST. FRANK'S MENAGERIE!

(Continued from page 12.)

"Ah, I'm glad ye ain't gone, young gent," he wheezed, in a faint whisper, as Willy bent over the bed. "It was rare good of ye to bring me here, but I can't rest nohow. There's my hanimals. I didn't feed 'em last night, and——"

"But I promised you I'd look after them, Mr. Maggs," said Willy.

"Did ye?" he said. "I seem to remember somethin', but I reckoned that I must 'ave imagined it. I'm afraid o' the p'lice comin' along an' takin' my show away. That's what they did afore. Quite right, too, seeing as the hanimals 'ad to be looked after. But I'd a rare job to get 'em back——"

"Yes, you told me that, Mr. Maggs," interrupted Willy. "But you won't have a rare job this time. I'll look after your show—and I'll feed your animals and see that everything's done properly. Trust me."

The old man looked at him queerly.

"I ain't got no call on ye, young gent——" he began.

"Never mind that," growled Willy. "You've got to promise me that you won't worry. I'm fond of animals, Mr. Maggs—I keep pets of my own. Your show will be safe with me. I'll come here every now and again to let you know how things are going. Don't you worry at all."

At first the old man had looked at Willy in a sceptical kind of way, but now he seemed to be influenced by the youngster's earnest sincerity. Willy generally managed to inspire confidence. In spite of his youth, there was something extraordinarily capable about him.

"My! That's a load off my mind, an' no mistake!" said old Maggs gratefully. "Ye're a real young sport, that's what ye are. I shan't worry now. Sleep's what I need. Ay, sleep, an' I dessay a little food wouldn't come amiss. Not as I ever let the hanimals go short——"

He was wandering a bit, and his voice trailed away. His old eyes closed, and Willy crept from the bedside.

"**P**OOOR old Maggs!" said Willy compassionately, as he and his chums walked briskly back towards Edgemoor in the darkness of the May night. "Think of it, you chaps! Starving! That's what was wrong with him—a collapse from starvation. It's awful!"

"There's no need for anybody to starve in England, is there?" asked Chubby.

"Old Maggs is one of the independent sort," replied Willy. "I'll bet he doesn't take much cash on the road, and he spends

that on grub for his menagerie. What tough luck, you know. It's a good show, too. Lots of chaps with dud side-shows make pots of money, yet here's old Maggs, with a genuine menagerie, and he can't earn enough to keep himself from starvation!"

"Pretty hard lines," said Juicy Lemon. "But what can we do about it? And why the dickens have you promised to look after the show? It's all very well to make the old boy's mind easy, but what's going to happen?"

Willy grinned.

"We're going to have a busy time, my sons," he said briskly. "We've got to look after those animals until he comes out of hospital. It may be a week, or it may be a fortnight."

"We?" repeated Chubby, with a start.

"All of us!" replied Willy. "The whole Third!"

"What the dickens——"

"I've got ideas," said Willy dreamily. "Oh, yes, my sons, it's going to be a busy week for the Third!"

CHAPTER 5.

A Bit of Trouble!

CHUBBY HEATH and Juicy Lemon were startled.

There was never any knowing what Willy Handforth would do. And when he talked of having "ideas," it meant, as a general rule, that his fellow fags would be required to do lots of hard work. There would be no getting out of it, either. Willy was an autocrat.

"You were mad to promise old Maggs that you'd look after his show!" said Chubby indignantly.

"I was mad, was I?" snorted Willy, pulling the truck to a halt and facing Chubby.

"Are we scouts, or not?"

"Ye-e-es, of course, but——"

"Very well, then!" snapped Willy. "We're scouts, and this is our good deed for the day! Not that it would make a scrap of difference, even if we weren't scouts," he added tartly. "You callous rotter! I've a good mind to punch your head!"

"I'm not callous," protested Chubby. "I'm only thinking of the difficulties. You've bitten off more than you can chew!"

"Rats!"

"You ought to have told old Maggs that you'd tell our Housemaster, and have the animals stored in a shed, or something," went on Chubby. "Then they could have been looked after by a groom, or somebody."

"And old Maggs would have come out and found them dead, or something!" mimicked Willy, with a sniff. "Do you think I want those animals to die? A groom wouldn't know how to feed 'em! Besides, I've got other ideas, as I told you. And we've got to keep it dark about this show—until we're ready."

Chubby and Juicy felt helpless.

"What about to-night?" asked Juicy, as they walked on again. "How are we going to manage? I suppose we shall just give the animals some hay, or bran-meal, and then get back to bed?"

"You suppose wrong," said Willy. "We're going to stay in the camp all night!"

"What?"

"Of course," said Willy coolly. "What else? First of all, we'll feed the animals, and then we'll take a snooze on the spot—until the early morning. After making everything shipshape, we can get back before rising-bell, and nobody will ever know that we've spent the night out of bed."

"But—but—"

"No arguments!" said Willy. "It's all in a good cause."

Although Chubby and Juicy protested vigorously, he brushed aside their objections. He had made up his mind, and he wasn't going to be turned from his purpose.

HOWEVER, something developed which made Willy's plan impracticable.

When the fags got back to the camp, they found a large-sized elderly man poking about the tents. He carried a lantern with him, to say nothing of a heavy stick. At first, the fags thought he was the village constable, but they soon saw that he was dressed in breeches and leggings.

"Hallo! What's this?" he demanded, approaching the fags as they halted with their truck, and raising his lantern. "Schoolboys! What the thunder are you doing here, at midnight?"

"Nothing yet," replied Willy. "But we're going to take charge of this little camp."

"Oh, you are, are you?" said the man. "Well, it might interest you to know that my name's Simpson."

"Sorry; it doesn't interest me a bit," said Willy, who didn't like the man's tone or manner—or, indeed, his face. "Is there anything you want? You seemed to be looking for something."

"I'm looking for that wizened old rascal who owns this circus!" grunted the other. "Where is he? Know anything about him?"

"We've just taken him to hospital," said Willy. "He collapsed—from starvation. The poor old boy was completely bowled over. I dare say he'll be in hospital for a fortnight, and we're going to look after his show in the meantime."

"Not here, you won't!" said Mr. Simpson promptly.

"Why not?"

"Because I say you won't! The idea!" said Mr. Simpson. "This is my property, and I'm not having any wild animals on it—to say nothing of you young rips. This stuff has got to be cleared away!"

Willy was a bit startled, but he didn't show it.

"Look here, Mr. Simpson," he said earnestly. "I suppose you're a farmer?"

"Yes, I am. What of it?"

"And this is your property, eh?" went on Willy. "Well, the show isn't doing any harm, and we'll promise to be careful—"

"No, no!" broke in Mr. Simpson impatiently. "I'm not allowing anything like that. I shall have the whole village complaining about these animals. Making horrible noises in the middle of the night! I'm not going to have it!"

"That giddy hyena, I expect," said Willy, scratching his head. "It's only because they weren't fed, Mr. Simpson. They'll be all right to-morrow."

"I don't care whether they're all right or all wrong—they're going away from this field," said the farmer. "I told the old man that it was like his nerve to pitch his rotten tents on my property! Without so much as 'by your leave,' too!"

"He couldn't afford to pay anything," protested Willy. "Haven't I told you that he collapsed from starvation? We've promised to look after his animals until he comes out of hospital. Be a sport, Mr. Simpson! Don't make a fuss over nothing!"

"I'm making no fuss, you cheeky young scamp!" frowned the farmer. "It isn't nothing, either. That old rogue promised me he'd clear these tents away before dark, so I went easy with him. I didn't tell the police, as I should have done. Now I come here and find everything just the same."

Willy breathed hard.

"How the dickens could he clear his tents away when he was lying helpless?" he asked



angrily. "We came here and found him unconscious! Dash it, Mr. Simpson, you needn't be so fasty about it! I expect the old boy meant to clear off, but when he collapsed—"

"I've had enough of this nonsense!" broke in the farmer roughly. "If the old man's taken bad, I'm sorry for him. But I'm not going to have these infernal animals on my land. That's final! Now that I know the old man's in hospital, I shall have to tell the police and get them to clear the whole lot off."

Willy simmered down. He realised that Mr. Simpson was not grossly unreasonable. From the farmer's point of view, the situation was not very satisfactory. It was only natural that he should want to get these animals cleared off his property.

"Perhaps you're right, Mr. Simpson," said Willy, nodding. "But you needn't get the wind up. We'll clear the animals away."

"Now, look here, kids, you can't play them games with me—"

"I mean it," said Willy. "There's no need to tell the police, or to have any bother about it. You see, I've promised the old man to look after his menagerie while he's in hospital, and I'm going to keep that promise, too. If you want all this stuff taken away, we'll take it. Surely that'll satisfy you, won't it?"

"Where are you going to take it to?" asked Mr. Simpson suspiciously.

"I don't know—yet," replied the Third Form skipper. "However, we'll take it off your property and clear it right away. Isn't that good enough?"

The farmer grunted.

"You're a lively youngster!" he remarked, his anger subsiding. "The trouble is, I don't know how to take you kids. If there's any trickery about this, young man, I'll have something to say to you. I'll give you just one hour to get all this stuff off my field. Understand? One hour!"

"Done!" said Willy promptly. "And you won't tell the police anything?"

"Not if you take everything away within the hour."

"All right. Leave it to us," said Willy. "Come back in an hour's time. If we haven't finished, we shan't be far off, and you can wait and see the last of us. Be a sportsman, Mr. Simpson."

Mr. Simpson stroked his chin.

"I'll make it two hours," he said gruffly. "St. Frank's boys, aren't you? I'm thinking I ought to see one of your masters, and tell him about this. You kids oughtn't to be out at this time of night."

Willy faced the farmer squarely.

"If you do that, Mr. Simpson, we shall get into trouble," he said. "There's no reason why any of the masters should know about this affair, and if you think it out carefully you'll see that we don't deserve to be treated like that. As long as we take the menagerie off your property, why should you give us away?"

"H'm! All right!" said Mr. Simpson grudgingly. "But mind you take it right away. None of your tricks. Don't you go and shift the stuff into the next meadow, or anything like that. I'll be watching you."

"If it'll ease your mind at all, I'll tell you straight away that we'll shift the whole works to our school," said Willy coolly. "If there's any rumpus, it'll be there. That puts you right, doesn't it, sir?"

Mr. Simpson had to admit that it did.

HE walked off soon afterwards, mentioning that he would stroll back at the end of an hour to see how things were going on.

"Now you've done it!" said Chubby Heath, in a mournful voice, after Mr. Simpson had gone.

"Done what?"

"Let us in for a pile of trouble—that's what," growled Chubby. "You're mad! How can we take all this stuff to St. Frank's?"

"In the truck."

"What?"

"About three journeys'll do it," said Willy. "There are only a few cages, and they're not over-large. And it won't take long to dismantle the tent and the other stuff."

"But what about when we get the stuff there?" demanded Juicy excitedly. "Where can we store it? We shall all get sacked for this!"

"Sacked for helping a poor old chap who's starving?" asked Willy indignantly. "We may be breaking the school rules, but who cares? Besides, nobody will ever know."

"Never know!" yelled Chubby. "Do you think you can hide all these animals in the study cupboard?"

"Come on!" said Willy briskly. "I'll show you where we'll hide 'em."

They were soon at work. Chubby Heath and Juicy Lemon were inclined to be a bit nervous of the animals at first. They were particularly scared of the hideous hyena—perhaps the most repulsive of all creatures. This particular specimen, however, was not so bad. It had probably been born in captivity, and was old, too. With Willy, at all events, it was surprisingly docile; in fact, he was soon on good terms with all the animals.

Two of the cages were carried out and placed on the patent truck. Then the first trip was made. It was fortunate that the truck was provided with pneumatic tyres, for no sounds broke the stillness of the night as the fags approached the school.

"Well, where do we go?" whispered Chubby.

"Behind the shrubbery," replied Willy. "In the monastery ruins, in fact. They'll be out of the way there—and hardly anybody ever goes there. It'll make a good camp for the time being—and it'll be handy, too."

"I know we shall get the sack over this!" said Chubby gloomily.

WITHIN the two hours the job was done.

But Willy & Co. were mightily tired by then. They ached in every limb, and they were unaccustomed to being up at this hour, too. It was two o'clock in the morning before they arrived at St. Frank's with the final load.

"You chaps had better buzz off to bed now," said Willy, after things were fairly shipshape in the new quarters. "And remember—not a word to a soul! I've got certain plans in mind, and they'll all be ruined if you chaps get talking."

"We're not going without you," said Chubby gruffly.

"Rats! I shall be half an hour, I tell you," said Willy. "I've got to give these animals some water, and I'm afraid they



The chimpanzee leered and chattered at Mr. Pycraft in a most alarming fashion, and then made as if to jump into the room. "Help!" screamed the terrified Form-master, and went dashing helter skelter out of the study.

haven't had much grub. I shall have to ask old Maggs exactly how he feeds 'em tomorrow. Might as well keep 'em to their proper diet. But they'll be all right for to-night."

Chubby and Juicy, now that it came to the test, refused to desert their leader. Although they were nearly dropping with tiredness, they insisted upon remaining until he was ready. They both felt that it would have been lots better if Willy had openly sought help from the school authorities, and left them with the responsibility. But a promise was a promise, and Willy had no idea of breaking it. Mr. Montgomery Maggs trusted him.

Besides, Willy had some ideas in his head which the school authorities would never have thought of!

CHAPTER 6.

Mysterious Behaviour of Willy & Co.!

"IMAGINATION!" said Handforth scornfully.

"All right! You can call it what you like—but I know I heard a beastly rummy sound in the night!" said Church. "A horrible sound, in fact. It fairly gave me the creeps."

"Sure you weren't dreaming?" asked McClure sceptically.

The three Removites were getting up. The May sunshine was stealing through the dormitory window, and they were eager to be out, so that they could enjoy themselves in the open air before breakfast.

"I couldn't have been dreaming," said Church. "I heard the clock strike. It was three o'clock. I listened, but the sound didn't come again. I never heard anything like it before."

"What kind of sound was it?"

"Like somebody laughing—only it was twenty times more horrible," said Church. "A—a sort of ghostly effect—a ghostly blood-curdling cackle, dying away to a wail."

"Here, chuck it!" said McClure.

"Well, I'm only telling you what I heard!"

"You can tell it to the marines," said Handforth, with a sniff. "You had a nightmare, my lad! You didn't hear any unearthly cackle in the night. Forget it, and don't eat pork-pies in bed any more."

Church decided to drop the subject. It was obvious that his chums completely discredited his story. Indeed, he himself wondered if he hadn't really been dreaming—he might even have convinced himself that such was the case—only an unexpected corroboration of the story was forthcoming.

When Handforth & Co. went down, they found Nipper and Tregellis-West and Watson in the lobby, laughing heartily. Corky & Co. had come over from the East House. There were no ructions. This was a peaceful call. The Removites' Fourth-Form rivals were all looking worried.

"Imagination!" Nipper was saying.

"Hallo!" ejaculated Handforth, as he came down. "That's a coincidence! That's the word I used a few minutes ago."

"It's a perfectly good word," said Nipper. "These East House fatheads are trying to

bluff us with the yarn that they heard a banshee during the night."

"A which?" asked Handforth, staring.

"Not exactly a banshee," said Lionel Corcoran. "Banshees are Irish, aren't they? This thing was too awful for words. A kind of horrible laugh, like the cackling of a fiend!"

"Great Scott!" yelled Church. "What time did you hear it?"

"Just before three," said Armstrong. "It woke us up, and then we heard the clock strike——"

"There you are!" shouted Church excitedly. "What did I tell you? I heard the same thing, but these chaps wouldn't believe me."

"Oh, you heard it, did you?" asked Corky, with interest.

"Well, I'm jiggered!" said Handforth. "Fancy that! All the same, I think you must have been dreaming. If not, why didn't I hear it?"

"Because you were asleep, fathead!" snorted Church. "It would take about twenty-five unearthly cackles to wake you up in the middle of the night. You'd sleep through a tornado!"

Ninper grinned.

"Well, don't make a lot of mystery over a trifle," he said. "You probably heard an owl, or perhaps some other night creature. Such cries are always liable to be weird in the middle of the night."

But Corcoran wasn't satisfied.

"I've heard owls before—and other things, too," he said, "but none of them was ever like this! I tell you, it wasn't healthy!"

IT turned out that at least half a dozen other fellows, in various Houses, had heard the extraordinary sound. There was much speculation as to the cause but nobody could suggest any likely explanation.

It did not occur to the juniors that Willy Handforth, of the Third, might have enlightened them. In spite of going to bed after 2 a.m., Willy had been up at the first sound of the rising-bell, and he had attended to his queer charges well before breakfast. He had also 'phoned the hospital, and the doctor had promised to get a full list of the correct foodstuffs for the animals from old Maggs during the morning.

Willy had now been joined by Chubby Heath and Juicy Lemon, who had come along to help after all the work was done.

"You'll have to do something about that rotten hyena, Willy," said Chubby, with concern. "Half the school was kept awake by it. Haven't you heard the chaps talking?"

"You haven't let on, I suppose?" asked Willy sharply.

"Of course not."

"And don't exaggerate," went on Willy. "Half the school be blowed! Only about six chaps were disturbed—and then only once. I dare say Horace will keep quiet if he's properly fed."

"Horace?" said Juicy, staring.

"That's the name I've given him," said Willy. "Horace the Hyena."

"Then it's a rotten trick on all the Horaces in the school!" said Chubby indignantly.

"Rats!" retorted Willy. "But why argue about names, you fatheads? I'm in a hurry to see my major. Whatever you do, don't tell any of the other fellows about all this."

Willy buttonholed Edward Oswald after breakfast. At the moment, Handforth was in the Triangle, and quite a number of other Removites were there, too. This suited Willy perfectly. He had reason for not wanting to catch his major alone.

"Just a minute, Ted," he said briskly. "Have you got any money?"

"Money?" said Handforth, with a start.

"Stuff with which you buy things," explained Willy. "Stuff that causes more ructions than anything else on earth, but stuff that you can't get on without. How much have you got?"

"You cheeky young ass——"

"It doesn't matter how much it is—I want the lot!" said Willy coolly.

"Well, well!" murmured Vivian Travers. "So the humble five bob is useless to-day?"

"Not useless," said Willy. "Five bob'll be better than nothing, but I was thinking of quids. Five quid wouldn't be too much."

"You funny young ass!" said Handforth coldly. "Even if I had five quid, you wouldn't get a penny of it. I'm not going to tell you how much money I've got, and you can go and eat coke!"

"You had three quid yesterday, didn't you?"

"No, I didn't! I only had two!"

"All right," said Willy. "That'll do!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You—you young rotter!" bellowed Handforth. "I didn't mean to tell you I'd got two quid. You won't get a shilling of it——"

"It's in a good cause, Ted," urged Willy. "It's not for myself. It's not exactly charity either. It's—it's—— Well, if you'll trust me, you'll soon know. And afterwards you'll pat me on the back, and say I've done the right thing. So come on—whack out!"

OF course, the result was inevitable. Handforth whacked out.

He stated, with considerable violence, that he wouldn't part with a penny. He told Willy to go and boil himself; he demanded a full account of how the money was to be spent, even if he handed it over.

But in the end he forked it out, and received no explanation at all. Willy, as usual, won the day. However, even Willy's audacity might have failed him had it not been for the fact that he gave his solemn assurance—honour bright—that the money was to be spent on somebody who was in need.

The other fellows soon gathered that Willy was working on something special. Travers very generously offered to lend a couple of pounds for the cause. Willy refused it. If Travers liked to give the money, all well and good; but no money could be borrowed. Travers gave it.

Then Willy paid a visit to Archie Glen-thorne.

"Absolutely, laddie," said Archie, as soon as Willy mentioned money. "With large assortments of pleasure. How much? A fiver? A tenner? Any dashed old thing, laddie. Pay me back when you like. This year, next year, never, if you know what I mean."

"The money isn't for me, Archie—it's to spend on somebody who is on the rocks. Starving, in fact," said Willy. "So I want you to give it."

"Good gad! Starving?" said Archie in horror. "What a frightfully unripe thought! I mean, no grub, what? Not even a cup of the good old brew! How frightfully foul! Take the lot, laddie!"

But Willy was perfectly satisfied with a fiver. He had ten pounds by the time he had finished his round, and later on that day there was a tremendous amount of activity in the Third.

Not only were Willy & Co. to be observed hauling heavy loads up the lane in their Scouts' truck, but large numbers of other fags were pressed into service.

Willy had first made sure that a big stock of the necessary food was laid in for the animals. By this time, of course, he had taken the entire Third into his confidence. There was nothing else for it. Such a lot had to be done that all hands were required.

Naturally, so much activity could not proceed without the rest of the school knowing about it. Immediately after lessons, for instance, the fags were observed to be flocking behind the shrubbery. Sounds of mysterious hammering proceeded from the monastery ruins, too.

And when Willy & Co. were seen arriving at the school with their truck heavily loaded with matchboarding and canvas and pots of paint, it was felt that a few pertinent questions would not be out of place. Edward Oswald Handforth was particularly keen on this.

"Spending my money on some rotten fags' game," he said indignantly. "I'm surprised at Willy! He gave me his word that the money was for somebody in need, and here he is building a hut, or something, behind the shrubbery!"

"Don't make a fuss," said Church. "There may be a good reason for it."

"Rot! Look at all this new wood!" said Handforth accusingly. "How can that benefit anybody in need? We've been spoofed, my

sons! I'm going to investigate this rummy business."

Handforth's investigations did not progress far.

He and his chums got into the shrubbery, and they even penetrated to the back of it, but at this point they were met by the guards. A regular barrier of Third-Formers stood in the way.

"Can't go any further," said Owen minor, eyeing the Removites warily.

"Oh, can't we?" said Handforth. "Who said so?"

"I do—or, rather, Willy does," replied Owen minor hastily. "He's given orders that nobody shall be allowed past us—you in particular."

"Oh! Me in particular?" asked Handforth ominously.



The SCHOOL TRAIN

Owen minor nodded.

"He said we could just warn the other chaps, but if you started any rot we were to bowl you over and bump you," said Owen minor. "He gave us the most careful instructions about that."

Handforth turned red and snorted furiously.

"You cheeky young asses!" he roared. "Clear out of my way! I'm going into the ruins to see what's happening there! Of all the cheek! You fags are getting too big

for your boots! Let me get past!"

"Ready?" asked Owen minor swiftly, as he turned and glanced at his companions.

"Ready for what?" bellowed Handforth.

"Ready?" repeated Owen minor, ignoring Handforth's question.

"Yes!" yelled the other fags.

They made a sudden rush. Handforth was caught like a piece of flotsam in the turmoil of a breaking wave. He was swept out of the shrubbery, rolled over, hurtled along the ground, and left stranded, high and dry, in the Triangle.

CHAPTER 7.

Getting Ready for the Opening!

WILLY lowered his hammer and wiped his perspiring brow.

"Afraid we shan't be able to open this evening," he said regretfully. "It'll be to-morrow, at the earliest. Still, there's no particular hurry—especially if Horace keeps quiet to-night."

"If we open by to-morrow evening we shall have done marvels," said Chubby Heath. "My hat! It'll be a topping affair when it's completed."

Practically all the Third-Formers had entered enthusiastically into the work once they had thoroughly understood the nature of it. There were only one or two fags who were half-hearted, or inclined to jib—and Willy had his own method of dealing with these.

There were about ten fags working at the present moment, under Willy's supervision. All the others were on guard—posted near the shrubbery path, on the other side of the monastery ruins, and in other strategic places. It was quite impossible to get anywhere near the scene of activities without encountering a strong force of guards. Here and there, too, isolated scouts were on duty. Willy was taking no chances.

"I think we're safe enough," he said, as he looked round. "We don't want anybody else to get wind of this until it's all finished and ready for the admission of the public. And the more curious the chaps are, the better."

"It's an awful job to keep 'em away," said Dicky Jones.

"Besides, what's the idea?" put in Tommy Hobbs. "Why mustn't anybody know? They'll know later on."

Willy looked at him pityingly.

"If schoolmasters were human beings, instead of soulless automatic machines, it would be different," he said. "What do you think would happen if we let the cat out of the bag? Prefects would descend upon us—and then masters. We should be hustled out, and the whole game would be knocked on the head."

"But isn't that likely to happen afterwards?"

"No fear," replied Willy shrewdly. "When the job is finished, and the masters can see the solid result, they'll permit it. It's all in a good cause, and they won't dare to do anything else. But if they came now they'd think we were just fooling about—they wouldn't have enough faith in us to know that we shall do it properly—and we should be dished. So it's vital that we should keep the secret until to-morrow. Then it won't matter who knows."

There was a lot of sound common sense in Willy's argument. If the Head, for example, had come along just then, he would certainly have put a stop to the whole business; but later, when the thing was an accom-

plished fact, he would probably smile, and good-naturedly allow it to carry on.

The mere fact that the fags were "up to something" aroused no curiosity amongst those in authority. The fags were always up to something—and as long as they didn't make too much noise about it, no questions were asked. It was the Removites and the Fourth-Formers who were curious now, and they didn't count. They could be ruthlessly kicked out if they became too inquisitive!

WILLY examined the progress with satisfaction.

"Maggs' Marvellous Menagerie" was being entirely transformed. The tattered old tent had been scrapped. Even the cages were being re-made and smartened. It was really surprising what skill the fags displayed.

A new tent was coming into being. Perhaps it was somewhat patchy, and perhaps it was far less imposing than Willy would have desired; but with limited capital he had to be careful. Even as it was, he had found it necessary to go round and collar some more money.

It is to be feared that he did not buy everything. A good proportion of the new tent, in fact, had once belonged to the St. Frank's Cadets. Willy had seen no wrong in commandeering it. After all, such canvas costs money—big money—and even Willy couldn't perform miracles with ten or fifteen pounds.

The new tent had a most imposing front—a kind of collapsible wooden affair, invented by Willy himself. It was all made to fold up, so that it should be easily portable, but when in position in front of the tent it gave the whole place an imposing appearance.

"We'll have it painted red," he said calmly. "Red's the best colour to attract the eye. Red, with a touch of blue here and there. And there's got to be a kind of little pay-box in the entrance. Must do the thing properly. That's the next thing I must design."

Willy was taking no chances with his workers. He superintended everything, and yet managed to put in more actual work than any two of the others. And rapidly the new show was taking definite shape.

Willy had cunningly erected it within the monastery ruins—so that it should be completely hidden from view. There was a big open space, grass-grown and picturesque, within the ruins. The grey old walls rose in crumbling masses all round. Until one actually passed through an ancient doorway and entered the ruins, nothing could be seen of the tent.

In this way it was a comparatively easy matter to guard the secret. For nobody was allowed to get anywhere near the doorway—or doorways, for there were two or three of them all round the ruins.

"Now then, my sons—no slacking!" said Willy, as he came upon one or two of the

East House fags apparently preparing to leave. "What's the idea, Fullerton? I thought I told you and Parry minor to get on with that painting?"

Fullerton glared. He was a big fag—much bigger than Willy—and he had a blustering, aggressive air. In fact, George Fullerton was an arrant dunce, and he was quite old enough to be in the Remove. He always resented Willy's authority, but he did not possess sufficient courage to jib against it. It was only occasionally that he tried it on.

"Look here, I've been working for two hours already," he protested fiercely. "It's nearly seven o'clock now. It'll soon be calling-over—"

"Nobody leaves here until five minutes before calling-over," interrupted Willy. "There's plenty of time yet. You get on with that work."

"I'm blowed if I will!"

"What!"

"I—I've got an appointment with somebody," said Fullerton, backing a way. "I promised I'd meet some River House chaps—"

"Bother the River House chaps!" said Willy. "This is more important than they are. You can see them another time. Haven't I told you that the owner of this menagerie is in hospital?"

"Yes, but—"

"Haven't I explained that he collapsed from starvation?" went on Willy sternly. "A regular old die-hard—that's Montgomery Maggs! A sticker—and he deserves all the help we can give him. He didn't whine when he was starving, and he didn't make his animals go short, either. If we had offered to help him, he wouldn't have let us—but he's in hospital, and can't prevent it. Which are you going to do—help in this good work, or try to see your River House pals?"

"I'm going to see my pals!" retorted Fullerton aggressively.

"I said try to see them," snapped Willy. "My hat! I'm not going to have any arguments with you, Fullerton. Put up your hands! I'll show you whether I'm in earnest or not!"

"Here, I say!" gasped Fullerton. "Whoa! Hi, stop it—"

Crash! Thud! Biff!

Willy made no bones about it. He went for Fullerton bald-headed, and in about ten seconds the hulking fag was sprawling on the ground, his left eye puffy, his nose swollen, and with a sensation in his chest as though a steam-hammer had hit it.

"Now," said Willy, "are you going on with that painting?"

"Yes!" gasped Fullerton. "Cheese it, Handforth minor! I—I didn't mean what I said! I'll do the painting!"

And he worked with a will, too. He never seemed to learn that jibbing was futile.

Willy always had his own way in the end, anyhow.

If this work had been of a purely personal nature, the Third Form leader would not have been so autocratic. He would have called for volunteers, and would have only used volunteers. But he held that it was the duty of every Third-Former to do an equal share in this affair. It was a Third Form stunt, and there were to be no laggards.

Fullerton had exaggerated, too. He hadn't been working for two hours, or anything like it. Willy had arranged things on a system. The fags worked in shifts—half an hour a time. The workers were relieved every half-hour, taking their places on guard in the meantime, which was pure rest-time.

So none of them had any real cause for grumbling. In fact, only one or two isolated

cases were inclined to jib—and one look from Willy was enough. The Third, as a whole, had entered enthusiastically into the scheme. The fags were overjoyed to help in this brilliant stunt. They were already regarding the

menagerie as their own. A side-show to be run by the Third! It was something worth working for!

Willy's idea was ambitious.

He wanted to get as much money for Mr. Maggs as possible by the time the old man came out of hospital. He scoffed at the idea of charging twopence admission. Now that the menagerie had come to a pitch where there was plenty of money knocking about, the price should be raised in proportion.

"We can only charge more if we smarten the show up," said Willy. "It didn't look worth more than twopence as it stood. In fact, people didn't like to go in at all. But they'll flock in when the show gets on the road again. And when we admit the Remove and the Fourth—to-morrow evening—they'll pay a bob each."

"A bob!" said Chubby Heath. "They'll never spring it, old man."

"Won't they?" said Willy confidently. "You wait until I get my publicity scheme on the go! They'll pay a bob each, and like it! And when old Maggs comes out we'll have a nice little pile of money for him—all earned by his own show. So he can't refuse it. He can't say it's charity."

"You're a caution!" said Chubby admiringly.

NONE of the fags "downed tools" until five minutes before calling-over. Then they hurried off, hastily tidied themselves up, and scraped in just in time to answer to their names. They were tired, but happy.

Within five minutes a good proportion of the Third had vanished again, including Willy himself. There was no more work





The bed heaved up into the air and then tilted over with a crash and Handforth was revealed—wrestling with a brown furry thing. “Hi! Help!” he hooted. “It’s a bear!” Handy was generally inclined to exaggerate, but this time he was speaking the truth!

to be done—for the sounds of activity would probably result in official interference—but it was just as well that the ruins should be guarded.

"We've got to stick it until bed-time," said Willy. "Lots of inquisitive chaps will be on the prowl now, thinking that we're off our guard. We've got to be more cautious than ever."

That his precautions were necessary was proved a minute later, for several Fourth-Formers were found approaching the scene of operations. They were suddenly jumped upon, bowled over, and sent about their business.

Then Handforth decided to have a go. He was getting more and more exasperated. Again and again he had questioned Willy, but had received no satisfaction. He received less now—unless he was satisfied to be grabbed by half a dozen fags, frog's-marched through the shrubbery, and dumped with a terrific thud upon the hard gravel. By the time he found his voice, the fags had gone.

"It's no good, Handy," said Church soothingly. "Haven't you learned by this time that you can't beat your minor?"

"Can't I?" panted Handforth. "By George! That's a good idea of yours, Churchy. I'll not only beat him, but I'll give him the hiding of his life!"

"I didn't mean that kind of beating," said Church, with a grin. "You're up against the whole Third, and you know what reckless bounders these fags are. They're no respecters of persons—especially your person. The more you go for them, the worse they get!"

CHAPTER 8.

Mr. Pycraft Sees Things!

MR. HORACE PYCRAFT, the master of the Fourth Form, emerged from the East House, and beckoned peremptorily to Corcoran and one or two other Fourth-Formers who were standing out in the Triangle.

"Come here, Corcoran," said Mr. Pycraft.

Corky went, anticipating trouble. Mr. Pycraft had a way of keeping things up his sleeve. He would nose something out, say nothing about it for hours, leaving his intended victim to imagine that he was safe. Then, suddenly, Mr. Pycraft would spring his bombshell.

Lionel Corcoran was acutely aware of the fact that he had been responsible for the unaccountable flavour of paraffin in Mr. Pycraft's coffee that morning. He couldn't quite see how Mr. Pycraft could have bowled him out, but one never knew. Mr. Pycraft had his own methods.

"Can you tell me, Corcoran, what these Third-Form boys are doing?" asked Mr. Pycraft, to Corky's relief. "It seems to me that they are unusually active this evening—and any great activity on the part of the Third invariably means that mischief is afoot."

Corcoran smiled.

"I dare say, sir," he agreed. "But we're not interested in the Third."

"Eh? No, of course not," said Mr. Pycraft, frowning. "Only I thought that you might possibly know of some—well, some irregularity. If these fags are breaking the rules, Corcoran, we must check them."

"I don't care how many rules they break, sir," replied Corcoran coolly. "I mean, I'm not supposed to look after them, am I? Or, if it comes to that, you either, sir."

"Are you implying that I have no business



The bed heaved up into the air and then tilted over with a crash. "Help!" he hooted. "It's a bear!" Handy was gone.

to interest myself in the affairs of the Third Form?" snapped Mr. Pycraft, glaring.

"Oh, I say!" protested Corky. "I'm simply implying, sir, that you've got your hands full enough with us Fourth-Formers."

Mr. Horace Pycraft grunted.

"For once, Corcoran, I find it easy to agree with you," he said sourly. "My hands are indeed full! At the same time, if these Third Form boys are getting into mischief, I shall consider it my duty to make inquiries. You tell me that you know nothing?"

"Very little, sir," replied Corky gravely. "You've often told me so in class."

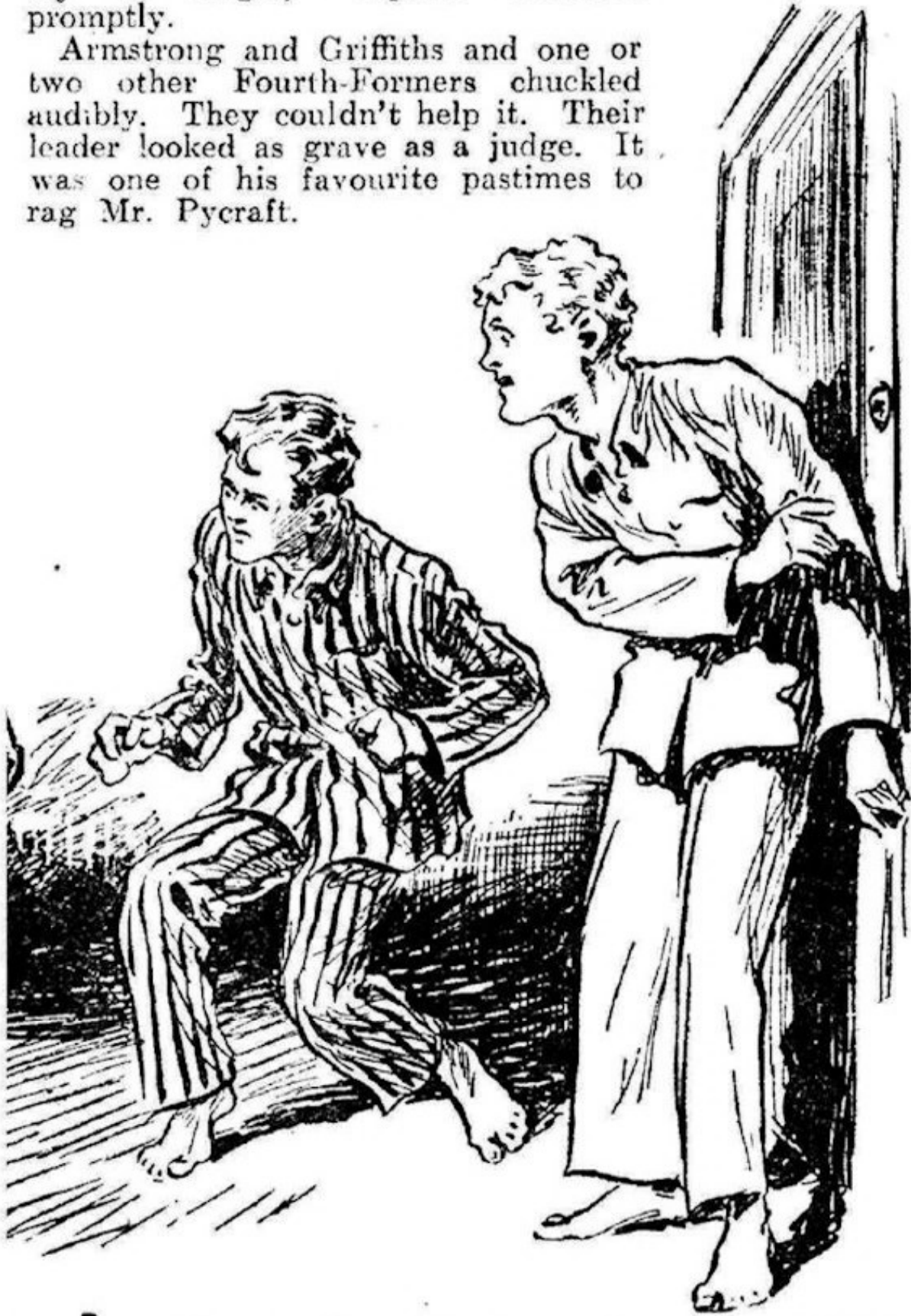
"Eh? What do you mean?"

"You've often told me I know very little, sir."

"You are deliberately misunderstanding me, Corcoran!" snapped Mr. Pycraft. "Indeed, I believe you are being purposely impertinent. What do you know about these Third Form boys?"

"Not much, sir—and what I do know I try to forget," replied Corcoran promptly.

Armstrong and Griffiths and one or two other Fourth-Formers chuckled audibly. They couldn't help it. Their leader looked as grave as a judge. It was one of his favourite pastimes to rag Mr. Pycraft.



It was revealed—wrestling with a brown furry thing. "Hi! Don't exaggerate, but this time he was speaking the truth!"

"Corcoran, I shall punish you severely if you continue to be so impudent," rasped the Form master. "What do you know of these Third-Former's activities? Answer my question plainly."

"I know practically nothing, sir," said Corky, with a sigh. "Not that it's for the want of trying. The young bounders won't let on. I suppose it's only some wheeze of their own—no harm in it. Let 'em carry on, sir. It amuses them, and it doesn't hurt anybody else."

Mr. Pycraft looked as though he meant to ask another question, but he apparently realised that he was wasting his time. So

he gave it up. Which proved, in spite of the Fourth-Formers' repeated assertions to the contrary, that Mr. Pycraft *did* possess a certain amount of brain.

"**B**BETTER go easy, Handforth minor," said Corky. "The Pycraft bird is stretching its wings. It's preparing to go on the warpath."

Willy sniffed.

"We're not afraid of your giddy Form-master," he said tartly. "If Pycraft sticks his nose in my affairs, he'll be sorry for it."

"Sorry for his nose?"

"Yes—and all the rest of himself, too," replied Willy. "Still, thanks for the warning."

Corcoran had thought it only cricket to tip Willy the wink. He quite failed to appreciate that such a wink was superfluous. Willy had long since been aware of Mr. Pycraft's curiosity. In fact, two fags were especially detailed to keep an eye on Mr. Pycraft's movements.

"We've got to be careful with that merchant," Willy had said. "He spends half his life in going about looking for trouble—and the other half of his life in finding it. He knows there's something on, and if he can bowl us out he'll be as pleased as a cat with two sets of whiskers!"

It wasn't until quite late in the evening that Mr. Pycraft plucked up enough courage to make a personal investigation. His inquiries had only strengthened his suspicions. Everybody appeared to be childishly ignorant of the fact that the fags were "up to something." Even the prefects were disinterested—and in their case it was perfectly true that they told Mr. Pycraft nothing because they knew nothing. The doings of the fags did not interest them—unless they were neglected; and Willy had seen to it that a good supply of fags was always on hand to answer the calls of duty. Willy wasn't such

a bad general as to leave an opening like that.

Strictly speaking, Mr. Pycraft had no right in investigate at all. He might have mentioned to Mr. Suncliffe, of the Third, that the fags were acting suspiciously, and left it to Mr. Suncliffe to look into things. But such an obvious course did not occur to Mr. Pycraft. He wanted to have the pleasure of catching Willy red-handed.

Moreover, he was inquisitive. He had heard the mysterious knockings; he had seen Fourth-Formers and Removites thrown violently out of the shrubbery. He had a special eye for these trifles.

So just before bed-time, when it was growing dark, Mr. Pycraft went for a stroll. He purposely allowed his footsteps to wander in the direction of the shrubbery. By this time he was satisfied that all the fags were indoors. It was so near to bed-time that they wouldn't dare to be out now.

Nobody was in sight as he slipped unobtrusively into the gloom of the shrubbery. His heart was beating more rapidly than usual. It would give him great pleasure if he could discover something unlawful, and expose it. All Mr. Pycraft's great moments in life were occasioned when getting somebody into trouble.

Once within the dense shadow of the shrubbery, Mr. Pycraft quickened his pace. He instinctively knew that the secret was hidden within the monastery ruins. He didn't particularly care for the idea of exploring the ruins in the darkness, but duty was duty. Not that Mr. Pycraft ever got as far as the ruins.

Suddenly, without warning, unseen hands seemed to grip his ankles. He gave a hoarse cry, and went over with a crash. Yet when he sat up, fumbling for his glasses, he could see that no living soul was in sight.

"Good heavens!" he panted. "What—what was that?"

He leapt to his feet, thoroughly scared. He backed away, only to trip once more, and even more violently. This time he descended with a dull splash into a deep pool of muddy water that had been getting "richer" for some days. It was well off the pathway, and Mr. Pycraft had known nothing of its existence until now. Sitting in it, he could appreciate it to the full.

"Help!" he babbled wildly. "Good gracious! I'm soaked to the skin. Pah! This stagnant water is enough to give me the fever!"

He got to his feet, and in attempting to stagger away, his ankle was seized again, and this time he fell face downwards. It was most unfortunate. Mr. Pycraft was soaked fore and aft, and he was rather terrified by the mysterious manner in which he had been repeatedly tripped.

How was he to know that Willy had stretched powerful cords through the trees, ankle high, so that they would trip any lurking investigator? It was a little scheme of Willy's to give warning to the guards who were on duty in the ruins.

Mr. Pycraft's interest in the ruins, however, had completely evaporated. He reeled back into the Triangle, beside himself with alarm and rage and helplessness. He couldn't ob-

tain any redress for this because the whole thing was apparently an accident. Yet he instinctively knew that there must be some other explanation; and to realise that the Third-Formers had scored over him was like gall and wormwood to the mean-spirited Form-master.

"I'll make them suffer for this!" he told himself viciously. "Good heavens! How was it done? I am thankful that nobody saw me. That, at all events, is some consolation."

He managed to dodge indoors by the side door, and he was pleased when he got upstairs unnoticed. A complete change of clothing was necessary, for he was soaked through. Outside the late evening air had been chilly, and Mr. Pycraft was in no way gratified when he sneezed twice in quick succession.

"I knew it!" he panted, gritting his teeth. "I've caught a chill! I knew I should catch a chill! This is going to be serious."

By the time he had changed his clothes, he had sneezed twenty-three times. He knew this because he had counted them. Mr. Pycraft, like so many men of his stamp, was shockingly afraid of ailments. Another man would probably have changed his clothes and thought no more of the matter; but Mr. Pycraft definitely made up his mind that he had caught a chill, that he was going to be thoroughly ill, and by the time he went downstairs he was shivery and shaky, with every symptom of a genuine chill. Mr. Pycraft was convinced that it would develop into pneumonia unless he took the strongest precautions.

SO he ordered a fire to be lit in his study, although fires had long since been abandoned. He investigated his cupboard, and dosed himself with the various patent medicines. When he saw the Fourth-Formers to bed he was feeling so weak and shaky that Cerky & Co. had quite an easy time of it.

Then Mr. Pycraft went downstairs again, shut himself up in his study, and proceeded to roast himself in front of the fire. It is quite possible that he had caught a chill, but it was only a trivial one. Mr. Pycraft, owing to his nervousness, now looked like converting it into a real illness, however.

He was certainly going the right way to work to make himself worse. He sat huddled in the easy chair until the heat of the room became unbearable—until he was in a fever of perspiration. Then he opened the window to let some fresh air in and to cool the superheated atmosphere, which, of course, was simply asking for trouble.

"I'm worse!" he told himself, as he looked at his reflection in the mirror. "I'm definitely worse. Good gracious! I really believe that my temperature is leaping up to the danger mark. I must see the doctor. Unquestionably, I must see the doctor."

He collapsed into his chair again, haggard and drawn. How could he see the doctor?

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It would necessitate an explanation, and he certainly didn't want to explain that he had got soaked through whilst prowling about in the shrubbery. On the other hand, he couldn't invent a deliberate lie to account for his condition.

Mr. Pycraft came to the conclusion that he would have to be his own doctor. If he wasn't any better by the morning, he would take to his bed for a few days. He went to the cupboard, and he shakily took hold of an ominous-looking bottle. To be exact, that bottle contained grog—the real stuff. In other words, rum.

Let it be said at once that Mr. Pycraft was an abstemious man. He wasn't a teetotaler, either. But he didn't like intoxicating liquors; they disagreed with him as a rule. He had heard, however, on the highest authority, that rum was an extraordinarily effective cure for a cold. It would kill the 'flu, or a developing chill, in the course of one night.

"Why not?" asked Mr. Pycraft nervously. "Everybody is in bed. I can safely take the risk. I loathe the stuff, but as a medicine I dare say it is good."

He had really laid in that bottle of rum because he had read an article in his favourite weekly periodical which praised its uses as a cure for colds and like ailments. It was a weekly article, always contributed by a gentleman who wrote under the name of "Harley Street." Mr. Pycraft had the utmost faith in these articles as was clearly proved by the fact that he had bought that bottle of rum to keep in stock. Here was a genuine occasion to test it.

Mr. Pycraft tested it thoroughly.

He drank half a tumbler of rum, and proceeded to perspire alarmingly. Then his head started to buzz, and things began to go round. Mr. Pycraft wasn't accustomed to rum, even in small tots.

"Dear me!" he murmured, in some alarm. "I hope I haven't overdone it! That would be quite appalling!"

It seemed to him that the books on the shelves were rather blurry, and that the clock on the mantelpiece was swaying slightly. He came over in a wave of heat, and his fright increased. He was becoming horrified. What had he done?

It suddenly occurred to him, however, that perhaps the rum wasn't alone responsible for his rise in temperature. The fire had burned up fiercely, and the window, too, was tightly closed again.

"I'd better open it!" muttered Mr. Pycraft.

He rose somewhat unsteadily, went to the window, and flung it wide open. He stood for some moments enjoying the cool, calm air. Then he realised that this was probably a foolish proceeding. He went back to his easy chair, and sank into it.

"Ah, that's better," he murmured gratefully. "Upon my word! My head is positively spinning! How dreadful! If I am no better in the morning, I shall write to the

papers about the evil of rum. **Poisonous stuff! Absolutely poisonous! I don't believe it will cure me at all!**"

He closed his eyes, and in this way several peaceful minutes elapsed. It wasn't until a curious little sound came from the window that the Form-master opened his eyes again. He had heard it once before, but had put it down to the slight breeze. It was a kind of scraping sound, and Mr. Pycraft was irritated.

He opened his eyes to find out what was the exact cause. Then his gaze became fixed and glassy. It was ridiculous, of course, but it seemed to him that he could see a creature squatting on the window-sill, looking in at him. An extraordinary object—not unlike a chimpanzee. Its little beady eyes were shining in the electric-light, and it was watching Mr. Pycraft intently.

"Horrible—horrible!" moaned Mr. Pycraft.

He shut his eyes, convinced that there was really nothing there, and for a time he was afraid to re-open them. But when further sounds smote his ears—more scrapings, and, indeed, some distinct scufflings—he ventured to look.

"Good heavens!" he gasped faintly.

The thing wasn't a chimpanzee at all. It was a kangaroo! Undeniably, it was a kangaroo.

"This—this is positively ghastly!" groaned Mr. Pycraft, pressing his hands to his eyes. "There is nothing there actually. There cannot be anything. Certainly not! Such a thing is unthinkable!"

He hoped that the hallucinations would pass. No doubt the rum was acting violently to begin with. He had never dreamed that it was such potent spirit. This consequence was unlooked-for and alarming.

He opened his eyes again, and leapt about a foot out of his chair. There it was again; but this time it was the chimpanzee squatting there, leering at him. What was more to the point, the terrible creature was actually preparing to leap into the room!

"Help!" screamed Mr. Pycraft wildly.

He bolted for the door, tore it open, and went dashing helter-skelter out into the corridor!

CHAPTER 9.

So Does Archie!

"**W**HAT on earth is that?" asked Mr. Goole, frowning.

The Housemaster of the East House was talking to Payne of the Sixth, in the upper passage. Payne was just going to bed, having seen that all lights were out in the Junior dormitories.

"Sounds like somebody in trouble, sir," said Payne.

He was the fattest senior at St. Frank's—a jovial, good-natured sort of fellow, and deservedly popular. The other East House prefects were very different from Payne. They were as unpopular as he was popular.

"Surely that is Mr. Pycraft's voice!" said the Housemaster. "What can be the matter with him? What an extraordinary noise, Payne! What can have possessed him to shout and scream like this?"

"No good asking me, sir," said Payne. "He didn't turn up to supper, you know. Said he had a chill, and stuck to his own room. Hadn't we better go down and see what's the matter with him?"

Mr. Barnaby Goole made no reply. He was already walking off. Not that it was necessary for him to go downstairs. Mr. Pycraft reached the upper landing at the same time as Mr. Goole. He came scooting up as though demons were after him, and he nearly collided with the Housemaster.

"Mr. Pycraft!" thundered Mr. Goole.

"Help!" babbled Mr. Pycraft. "Look out, sir! There are wild animals in the place! I have just seen them! At first I thought— But no matter! The creatures are real—absolutely real!"

Mr. Goole was startled beyond measure. There was something ominously suspicious about Mr. Horace Pycraft's condition. He was collarless, and he looked generally dishevelled. His hair was all in wisps, and even three or four of his waistcoat buttons were undone.

By this time a number of other seniors had appeared on the scene—Kenmore and Sinclair of the Sixth—Grayson and Drake and Simms of the Fifth. They all collected round, greatly interested. They were grateful to Mr. Pycraft. They had never expected him to amuse them like this.

How were they to know that Mr. Pycraft had piled his fire so big that he had been compelled, for comfort's sake, to remove his collar? How could they guess that it was a habit of his to ruffle his hair up the last thing at night, when in private? Mr. Pycraft had never imagined that he would meet anybody again before the morning.

"Pull yourself together, sir!" said Mr. Goole sternly. "Really, Mr. Pycraft, I am amazed! Control yourself, sir!"

Mr. Pycraft gulped.

"An ape!" he said incoherently. "Without question, an ape!"

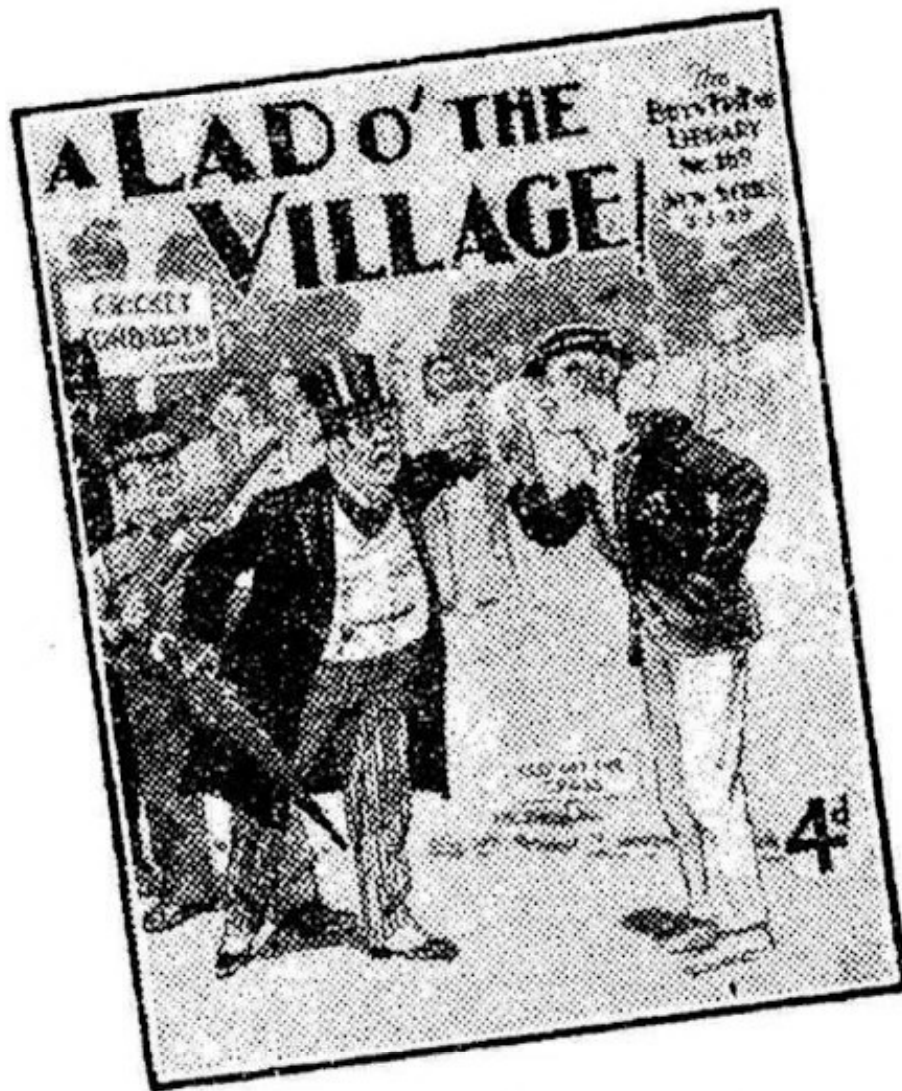
"Really, sir—"

"Or a chimpanzee," said Mr. Pycraft hoarsely.

"What on earth—"

"And a kangaroo, too!" said the Form-master, clutching at Mr. Goole's sleeve. "Down—down in my study! They were in the open window, and—and— Be careful, sir! They're probably prowling—"

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"This is terrible!" said Mr. Goole, scandalised.

He tried to make himself believe that he was mistaken—that his sense of smell was at fault—but he could not help noticing the significant glances that were passing between the prefects. It was not Mr. Goole's imagination which told him that the atmosphere in Mr. Pycraft's vicinity was very rummy. In fact, decidedly rummy!

"Mr. Pycraft, you had better go to bed!" said the Housemaster angrily. "Do try to pull yourself together! Upon my soul, this is shocking! I have never before known you to—ahem—to get in such a condition! I shall really have to speak to you about it to-morrow. For the present, be good enough to seek your room."

Mr. Pycraft recoiled.

"You—you don't think that I—that I——" he began, aghast.

"Easy, sir," said Kenmore gently, laying a hand on the Form-master's arm. "I shouldn't talk too much, sir. A good sleep will work wonders."

"Kenmore!" screamed Mr. Pycraft. "What do you mean? Are you daring to suggest that I am—er—intoxicated?"

Simon Kenmore became more soothing than ever.

"There, there, sir," he said kindly. "Payne will give me a hand. We'll soon get you into bed, sir."

"An excellent suggestion, Kenmore," said Mr. Goole bluntly.

Mr. Pycraft nearly fainted.

"But you are wrong!" he shouted in a shrill voice. "You are absolutely wrong! I tell you I've seen kangaroos and gorillas——"

"It was chimpanzees just now," murmured Payne. "Great Scott! He's in a bad way! Must be a secret vice, and we never knew it!"

"Payne, I'll have you expelled for that gross slander!" shrieked Mr. Pycraft. "How dare you! I will admit that I partook of a little spirit—rum, to be exact—but that was purely because I felt a chill coming on. When you suggest that I am intoxicated, I——"

"Come, Mr. Pycraft," said the Housemaster angrily. "I insist upon your going to bed at once! Kenmore! Payne! Assist Mr. Pycraft!"

"But this is outrageous!" protested Mr. Pycraft wildly.

"Silence, sir!" snapped Mr. Goole. "I am amazed—and very startled. The less you say, Mr. Pycraft, the better."

It was very hard lines on Mr. Pycraft. He was as sober as Mr. Goole himself. The rum had certainly affected him slightly at first, but his dizziness had been occasioned more by the heat of the study than by the potent spirit.

Mr. Goole, however, not unnaturally, took his excited condition to be a certain indication of intoxication. He refused to listen. And Mr. Pycraft was so flabbergasted that he became weak. His protests became incoherent, and he suffered himself to be led to his bed-room.

Once there, he was locked in, and Mr. Goole wiped his brow.

"I urge you, my dear fellows, not to make any mention of this to anybody else," he said earnestly, as he looked at the prefects. "Let us keep Mr. Pycraft's—ahem!—guilty secret. I shall make no report to the headmaster, and I am hoping that Mr. Pycraft's memory will be blank by the morning. However, I shall certainly have to talk to him."

"He must have had a good old dose, sir," said Kenmore, grinning.

"Really, Kenmore, there is no necessity for you to be amused," frowned the Housemaster. "Some of you had better go down and see if Mr. Pycraft's study light is out."

Kenmore and Payne went down. They found the study light on; they found the bottle of rum; they found the window wide open and the fire roaring. But they found no chimpanzee or kangaroo.

Those mysterious creatures had evidently sought fresh pastures, having found Mr. Pycraft's study singularly disappointing.

WITHOUT doubt, something startling had happened.

Mr. Pycraft knew well enough that those creatures had not been figments of his imagination. The fact that he was not believed was only to be expected. And if a chimpanzee and a kangaroo were at large in the darkness of the school grounds, wasn't it likely that other creatures were at large, too?

At all events, Archie Glenthorne, peacefully sleeping in the Ancient House, had every reason to conclude that something was wrong.

He had gone to sleep with all his usual serenity, his mind troubled by no weightier problem than the cut of his latest suit. He had an idea that Phipps didn't quite approve of it.

Phipps was his valet. Of course, it rather pleased the Head's vanity to regard Phipps as his butler; but everybody knew that Phipps was Archie's valet. He only acted as the Head's butler as a kind of side-line, and in order to make his presence at St. Frank's justified.

Archie had had his doubts about that suit. He had ordered it without consulting Phipps at all—which, in itself, was a risky thing to do. Phipps was all right, but he had frightfully old-fashioned notions.

Perhaps it wasn't the cut of the suit, after all. As he had unwrapped the parcel, Archie had noticed a cold sort of gleam in Phipps' eye. Archie wasn't sure, but he believed that Phipps had even changed colour. Personally, Archie thought the suit was ripping.

It was true that the colour scheme was a bit startling and aggressive. The pattern hadn't seemed half so bad. But Archie liked that suit, and he had insisted upon wearing it on the morrow. Phipps had bade him good-night in a voice that had chilled Archie to the marrow. He hadn't uttered a word of reproach, but, more significant still, he

hadn't passed any opinion whatsoever on the suit.

It troubled Archie at first. Then he steeled himself. It was a bit thick if a fellow couldn't choose his own dashed suits!

"No, dash it!" said Archie, as he prepared to go to sleep. "To-morrow I shall startle the good old populace with the new spring suiting! Absolutely the latest thing. And Phipps can frown all he dashed well likes!"

It was all very well to bluster like this, but Archie felt, deep down in his heart, that he would inevitably get the worst of it in the long run. Now and again he had these tussles with Phipps, and once or twice he had sacked Phipps on the spot—Phipps, of course, remaining imperturbably on duty—only to be convinced, in the end, that Phipps' judgment was best.

Archie dreamed. In fact, it was a nightmare. He was in a kind of torture chamber, and Phipps was the chief inquisitor. He was forcing Archie to get into the most diabolical suit that Archie had ever seen. It was mauve, with yellow and green spots.

This suit seemed to buzz all round him as he put it on. It wasn't unlike the loud purring of a cat. It filled the air, it rose up in waves about him, and threatened to overwhelm him—

"Good gad!" gurgled Archie, waking up with a start. "I mean to say, how frightfully frightful! A dream like that is calculated to upset a chappie for months. I shall tell Phipps to burn that dashed suit! He's right about the colour—"

Archie's thoughts halted. He was awake now—he was quite certain that he was awake. He could see the outline of the window. But that nightmare had been so realistic that he could still hear the purring. This was a bit too frightful.

He half sat up, and shook his head to clear away the cobwebs. The school clock boomed out the hour of eleven. This was unexpected, for Archie had believed that the hour was something like two or three in the morning. And that purring continued even louder than ever.

"Odds shocks and staggerers!" gurgled Archie suddenly. "It's really here! I mean, it's not the good old imagination at all! Some dashed cat must have climbed through the dashed window! Well, I'm dashed!"

He remembered that Phipps had left the window wide open. He sat up, and at the same moment there was a movement at the foot of his bed. Archie simply froze. Never in all his life had he known a cat to move so heavily. It fairly shook the bed—and it heaved itself up enormously, and Archie could see the outline of it.

"Good gad!" he gasped. "It's like a donkey! Oh, I say! Absolutely imposs. I dare say I'm dreaming all the time!"

The purring increased. It almost became a rattle—a sound that filled the room like the throbbing of a dynamo. At least, so it seemed to Archie's strained imagination. It suddenly occurred to him that it wouldn't be a bad idea to switch on the light. There

was a handy switch just near his bed, and his fingers felt for it.

Snap!

He pressed it down, and the little dormitory became flooded with light. There, sitting on Archie's bed, was not a cat—but a creature many, many times larger. Even Archie knew, at the first glance, that it was a leopard!

CHAPTER 10.

Handforth Isn't Having Any!

ARCHIE was a slacker, but when the occasion demanded he could spring into action as rapidly as anybody.

He sprang into action now. He gave one look at the leopard—which had risen and was now gazing at him with baleful eyes and gleaming fangs—he took one leap out of bed, and he was at the door in the space of a split second. There was something miraculous in the way in which he tore the door open, flashed through, and slammed the door after him.

"I mean, scarcely the time for asking questions, what?" he breathed.

Undoubtedly, Archie had acted wisely. There would have been no sense in trying to stare the leopard out, or in attempting to shoo it away. When a fellow finds a leopard on his bed, the best thing to do is to give it best.

Archie had acted with commendable promptitude, and now he proceeded to follow up the good start by sounding the alarm.

"S.O.S.!" he howled. "Phipps! Rescue, Remove, and so forth!"

Unfortunately—or perhaps fortunately—Archie's voice was so strained with excitement that it cracked. Instead of the yell that should have come from the expenditure of such energy, nothing happened except a kind of high-pitched croak. It was heard by several fellows in the Remove passage, but it did not penetrate further. Consequently, no masters or prefects arrived on the scene. Archie found himself surrounded by Nipper and Tregellis-West and Watson and Handforth & Co., to say nothing of Travers and Potts.

"What's the matter, Archie?" asked Nipper quickly. "For goodness' sake, stop this noise! What's up with you?"

"Tigers!" said Archie feebly.

"What?"

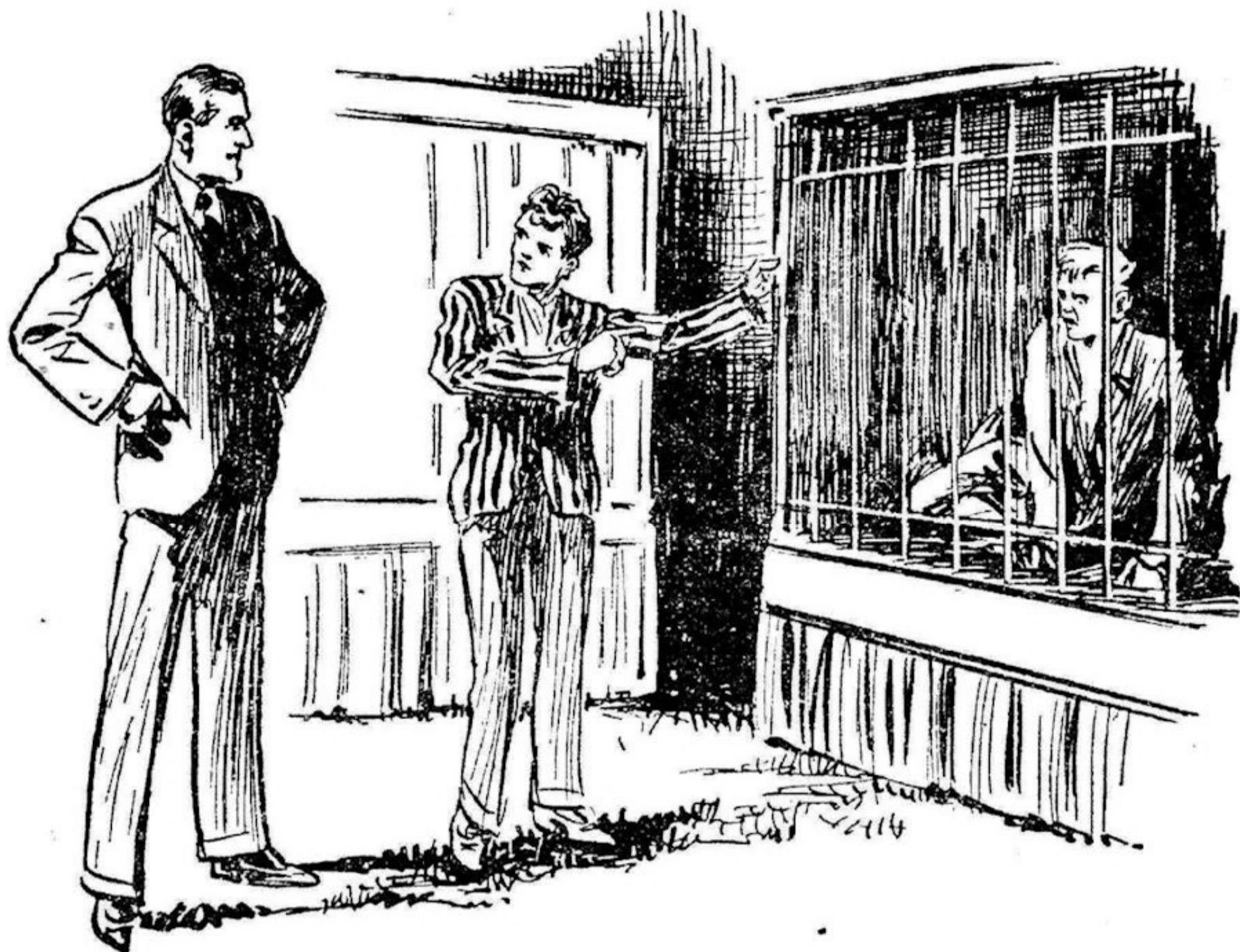
"Absolutely!" said Archie.

"You silly ass, you're asleep, or something!" said Nipper. "What do you mean—tigers?"

"I'm a Tiger!" said Handforth. "Anyhow, I'm the leader of the Tiger Patrol."

"Good gad, no!" panted Archie. "It was frightful, but not so frightful as that. Absolutely a tiger on my bed! Coiled there, dash it, and purring at me."

The other juniors looked at him doubtfully. In fact, they were quite incredulous. If they had known something of Willy's enterprise—if they had even known of the



"What is this specimen?" asked Nelson Lee interestedly, looking at the cage which contained Fullerton. "Oh, this is a very curious specimen, sir," replied Willy. "Occasionally it talks, but it's never been known to talk sense. In fact, it's such a worthless exhibit that I'm going to set it free!"

existence of Maggs' Marvellous Menagerie—they might have put two and two together. But they knew nothing. Willy had kept his secret too well.

"My dear chap, you've been having a nightmare," said Potts, grinning. "There aren't any tigers here. We're not in India."

"No," said Archie. "I mean, absolutely not. All the same, there was the dashed thing on my bed. Not exactly a tiger, now I come to think of it. A sort of panther, you know. A dashed leopard."

"Make up your mind," said Nipper. "Which was it?"

"Yes," said Archie, nodding.

"That's no answer, you fathead!"

"Answer?" repeated Archie. "Oh, I see what you mean! You want an answer? Oh, rather! The frightful thing was a jaguar!"

The juniors grinned.

"You've forgotten the lion, haven't you?" asked Handforth sarcastically. "You might as well go the whole hog while you're about it. Why mess about with leopards and jaguars? Say it was a lion and done with it!"

"Good gad! Don't you believe me?" asked Archie, with a start.

"No, we don't!"

"Oh, but absolutely!" said Archie. "Positively, old cheese! There it was, purring like a gas engine."

"I've never heard a gas engine purring," said Handforth.

"Sitting on my bed," said Archie, with a shiver. "I can assure you, laddies, that never in my whole life have I fled from the good old couch so dashed speedily. One leap, and I was outside. I mean, a chappie can't argue with leopards."

"My dear fathead, you've been dreaming," said Nipper goodnaturedly. "Just to satisfy you, we'll go and look in your bed-room—and then perhaps you'll let us have some more sleep."

"Whoa! Odds risks and perils!" gasped Archie. "Guns, what? Wouldn't it be a ripe scheme to take a chunk of artillery with us?"

"Rats!" said Handforth. "There's nothing in your room!"

He opened the door and strode in—before Archie could open his mouth to make another protest. Handforth looked at the bed, he looked round the room, and then he snorted.

"Thought so," he said. "There's nothing here."

"Eh?" yelped Archie. "But, dash it, I tell you I saw it."

He drifted into the bed-room, and as though he couldn't be satisfied with his optic senses, he went and felt the bed. Then he looked under the bed, and behind the furniture. The other boys watched him, grinning. There was certainly no leopard in the room now. Nipper and the rest couldn't be blamed for concluding that there never had been a leopard there.

"Satisfied?" asked Handforth tartly.

"Absolutely not!" replied Archie. "I tell you—"

"Well, we're satisfied," said Nipper, grinning. "My dear chap, be sensible! You know as well as I do that there aren't any leopards roaming about St. Frank's—or jaguars or panthers either."

"Not to mention lions and tigers," murmured Travers.

"You've had a dream—and that's all there is in it," said Nipper. "Come now! Can't you remember a dream of some sort?"

"Well, yes," admitted Archie reluctantly. "Good gad! You don't absolutely mean to suggest— But it wasn't a leopard in the dream, laddies! I had a most frightful nightmare. Phipps was forcing me to wear a suit, and the pattern was so dashed loud that it was purring at me!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Removites chuckled with amusement, and Nipper turned to the door.

"Well, after that I think we can clear out," he said. "He's not likely to beat that one! Go to bed again, Archie—and don't spend so much time thinking about your giddy suits. If you do, they'll drive you potty in the end!"

"Good gad!" said Archie feebly.

He was almost convinced that it really had been a dream. After the others had gone he climbed back into bed again, and prepared to switch off the light. Then he started, and gave a gulp.

There, on the bed, was a scrap of damp earth! He looked closer; he found a few longish hairs, too. He stared at them dazedly.

"I mean, the good old evidence, what?" he murmured.

He jumped out of bed again, went to the door, and then paused. Something told him that the juniors would never come back. They would probably get quite violent.

So he grabbed the eiderdown quilt, opened the big wardrobe, and tucked himself in. Then he closed the door, and tried to get to sleep. Archie could see no sense in taking unnecessary chances!

"LIKE his nerve, spoiling our sleep!" grumbled Handforth.

He was getting back into bed. Church and McClure were already in theirs and settling themselves for slumber. Church was pretending to snore, and McClure commenced to breathe heavily. Anything, in fact, to silence their leader. Unless they did something drastic like this, he was liable to jabber for half an hour.

"Can't understand a chap having nightmares like that," went on Handforth. "And what's that he said about me? You remember? When I said I was the leader of the Tiger Patrol?"

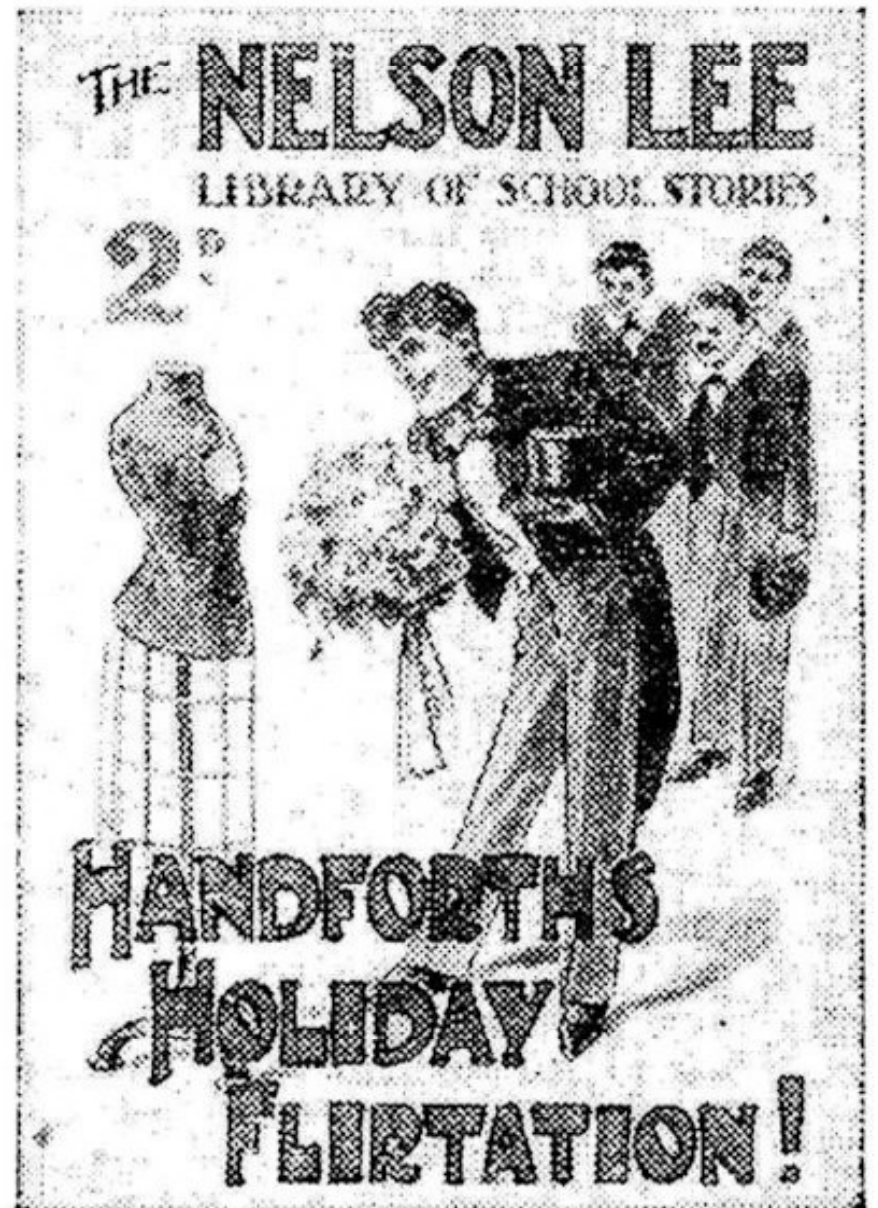
No reply came from his chums.

"I believe no meant to be personal," said Handforth sternly. "I shall have to speak to him about it to-morrow, and I shall probably find it necessary to punch his nose. Remind me of it, you chaps!"

Still no reply.

"Do you hear me?" said Handforth, glaring into the gloom.

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While he was waiting for their reply he felt an unmistakable heave beneath his bed. He started, and opened his mouth—only to shut it again quickly. He also heard a curious scraping sound under the bed.

"What was that?" asked Church, sitting up like a jack-in-the-box.

"Hallo! I thought you were asleep!"

"I wasn't! I was only pretending," said Church. "But I just heard something rummy under your bed, Handy!"

"No! Really?" said Handforth, with exaggerated carelessness. "It's a funny thing! I thought I felt something, too. Marvellous what the imagination can do!"

It came again—a distinct heave, which caused Handforth to nearly topple over. Still he pretended to take no notice.

"Can't you hear anything?" asked McClure hoarsely. "I—I say! Supposing Archie was

right? Supposing there really was a leopard in this room? It might have got in through the window while we were out!"

"Idiot!" said Handforth.

"There's a rummy niff in the room!" breathed Church. "Like—like some sort of animal! I tell you——"

"Rats!" interrupted Handforth. "The only animal in this room is some fatheaded spoofer under my bed! Do you think I can be fooled like that? Come out, blow you! The game's up!"

The intruder, whoever he was, failed to accept the invitation. Instead, he heaved

"HANDFORTH'S HOLIDAY FLIRTATION!"

Edward Oswald Handforth has always had an eye for pretty girls. Especially during holiday times is it one of his weaknesses to fall for the charms of some fair maiden.

This Whitsun proves no exception to the rule. The "affair" starts in a London Tube train. Handy is badly smitten—he even forgets all about Irene Manners—and his interest in the girl is heightened by the fact that she is obviously in distress. And, of course, kind-hearted Handy decides to help her.

Handy's adventures during his latest "affair" prove to be exerceiatingly funny; and behind it all there is a tinge of mystery which will add to your enjoyment of this stunning yarn.

"RIVALS OF THE BLUE CRUSADERS!"

Don't miss reading next week's concluding instalment of Edwy Searles Brooks' exciting serial, chums.

ORDER IN ADVANCE!

up, causing Handforth to rise and fall like a ship in an angry swell. At the same time a sound came into the room—not exactly a grunt, but a kind of hoarse breathing, as though the intruder had exerted himself.

"It's the leopard!" gurgled Church.

Handforth jumped out of bed.

"It's some idiot who thinks he's being clever!" he snorted. "Sneaked into our bed-room while we were away, and thinks he can spoof us! Come out! If you don't, I'll jolly well come under there and fetch you!"

The spoofer was as obstinate as ever.

"By George!" roared Handforth.

He dived under the bed, and then a sort of earthquake happened. Handforth uttered a wild howl of surprise and consternation. His hands came into contact with something furry—something warm and startling. Cer-

tainly it wasn't the pyjama-clad figure of a japer.

Church and McClure saw the bed flung up into the air. It went half-way to the ceiling, and crashed over with such terrific force that it sounded as though half the school was being wrecked. It was extraordinarily lucky that Church and McClure weren't hit.

"Hi! Help!" hooted Handforth. "It's a bear!"

This was a random shot, but, strangely enough, it was perfectly true. Church managed to switch the light on, and he and McClure, nearly scared out of their wits, beheld Handforth on the floor, on the spot where the bed had been, wrestling frantically with a brown furry thing.

"Run!" screamed Church. "It's a bear!"

Somehow they managed to wrench the door open—a difficult job, for it was half-jammed by the fallen bed. They dashed out—and then dashed back. They couldn't leave Handforth to his fate, scared though they were.

Fortunately, Handforth had got free, and he collided with his chums so violently that they all shot out into the corridor in a heap. The bear, not wishing to miss the fun, followed them.

Just then the passage lights were switched on, and people appeared from everywhere at once. Juniors came out of their dormitories, Willy came tearing up at the double, prefects arrived—and Mr. Nelson Lee himself turned up.

"After him!" yelled Handforth. "Look! It's a bear! He tried to hug me to death just now!"

Nelson Lee acted with commendable promptitude. The brown object was just going into one of the dormitories. Lee switched on the light, saw that the window was closed, and that no boys were in the room. He closed the door and locked it.

"Now!" he said briskly. "I'd like to know what all this means!"

"That's easy, sir," said Willy, with a sigh. "My menagerie seems to have escaped!"

CHAPTER 11.

Rounding Up the Circus!

NELSON LEE knew that the situation was serious, but he remained quite calm. It was necessary to set a cool example to the juniors.

"Oh! Your menagerie has escaped, has it, Handforth minor?" he said grimly. "Unfortunately, this affair seems to be more serious than that. You don't include bears among your pets."

"Not my pets, sir—my menagerie," said Willy.

"Is there any difference?"

"It's not mine really, sir—I'm looking after it," explained Willy anxiously. "Only five animals—a bear, a chimpanzee, a hyena, a leopard, and a kangaroo. They belong to

an old chap named Maggs, and I'm taking care of them for him while he's in hospital."

"A leopard!" ejaculated Nipper. "Then Archie wasn't dreaming at all!"

"By George!" gurgled Handforth. "So my minor's at the bottom of all this! He wanted my money to waste on these giddy animals, and then he sets 'em on his own brother!"

"Be quiet, Handforth!" said Nelson Lee. "Your minor hasn't set the animals on anybody. It is clear that they escaped, and the situation is grave. It is alarming to realise that these wild animals are roaming about loose."

"No need to worry, sir," said Willy impatiently. "These animals are as tame as mice. They're all about a thousand years old, and pretty nearly toothless. I've never seen a more harmless lot. Even the leopard is as docile as a kitten."

"They may have been docile with you, Handforth minor, but that means nothing," replied Lee. "You have a 'way' with animals. It is quite possible that others of us may be attacked. Fenton! Wilson! Get all the other prefects, and organise search-parties."

"That's what I was going to suggest, sir," said Fenton of the Sixth. "We shall need lanterns and ropes, shan't we?"

"Better take pitchforks, too," said Wilson.

"Here, steady!" protested Willy. "There's no need to hurt the poor things! They're tame enough, I tell you."

"Let's all help!" roared Handforth. "Where's that bear? I'm going to give him socks for having the sauce to get under my bed!"

"All you boys will go back into your dormitories at once—and close your doors," said Leo sharply. "Understand? I am in earnest, and I won't have any nonsense!"

There was no arguing with him. The juniors were compelled to go back into their rooms. But there was no law to prevent them from leaning out of the windows and watching the round-up.

Presently groups of seniors were to be seen carrying lanterns, travelling rugs, blankets and rugs. Nelson Lee was not going to be satisfied until every effort had been made to capture all the missing exhibits.

His first move was to go straight to the monastery ruins—with Willy. He made no comment as he saw the imposing tent, which was erected with such grandeur amidst the ruins. He went straight to the cages, and examined them. They were the new cages, and Willy failed to understand how the animals could have escaped. Only one was occupied. The hyena wasn't abroad.

"This is serious," said Nelson Lee grimly. "The kangaroo and the bear are harmless enough, I believe—and perhaps the chimpanzee is not dangerous. But I have my doubts about the leopard. I'm afraid we shan't be able to recapture them, young 'un."

"I think we shall, sir," said Willy confidently. "They're not wild beasts at all. I expect they're a lot more scared than the chaps are, and they're bound to stick near the buildings. They'll be afraid to go off across country."

"I shall have something to say to you later with regard to all this—this fancy work," said Lee, indicating the tent. "You had better remain here, Handforth minor, until we have finished our search."

WILLY was glad that he was left alone. He badly wanted to have a look at those cages. He looked, and he became coldly angry.

"Thought so!" he muttered. "That vindictive cad, Fullerton!"

It was only a chance shot. The doors of the cages were not made to open in the ordinary way. They slid up in grooves—the doors being in the ends of the cages. And Willy could see distinct traces of foul play.

There was a hole in the new wood at the top of each door. Some fellows might have been puzzled, but Willy quickly put two and two together. He looked up, and saw that a ventilator flap in the tent was open. Going outside, he raced towards the ruined walls of the monastery and climbed up one of them. There, at the top, he found several lengths of string.

"Thought so!" he grunted. "Nails, lightly knocked into the doors, with strings on each. Each door was pulled open—easy enough from this height—and after a bit the strings were jerked. Of course, the nails came out, and the young idiot thought that he had destroyed the evidence. Just like him to leave the string up here."

He hurried off, inwardly boiling. Before he did anything else he had to be satisfied as to one point. He raced indoors and arrived in the Third Form dormitory, breathless. This was in the East House.

"Have they been recaptured yet?" asked a chorus.

"Where's Fullerton?" demanded Willy, looking round.

Fullerton was in bed, but he was soon out.

"You revengeful rotter!" snapped Willy. "You tied strings to the doors of the cages and let the animals out, didn't you?"

Fullerton went pale. His guilt was so obvious that any other sort of confession was needless. Willy's direct methods had scored a bullseye.

"I wonder you had the nerve to do it!" went on Willy contemptuously. "Weren't you afraid that the animals would get you as you bolted indoors?"

"You—you said they were tame!" gasped Fullerton. "I—I mean, I didn't do it at all! I don't know anything about it!"

"It's too late to deny it now," said Willy, with scorn. "I dare say you thought you'd get your own back on me, eh?"

"I—I was sorry for it afterwards," muttered Fullerton. "I didn't mean to let the brutes out, either. That was all a mistake."

"How could it have been a mistake if you opened the cages?"

"Yes, but I closed the tent up tight," replied Fullerton, with a gulp. "I only meant to let the rotten things out into the tent. I thought they'd have a scrap, or something. My idea was to make them kick up a shindy so that the masters heard it, and then your plan would be messed up."

Willy grunted.

"You're a fool, Fullerton!" he said tartly. "Do you mean to say you thought the tent would hold them?"

"Yes," replied the East House fag. "Then, as I was buzzing across the Triangle, that rotten leopard shot past me. I nearly died of fright. Honestly, I didn't mean to let the animals escape out of the tent."

"I suppose you know that my major found the bear under his bed?" asked Willy sternly. "He and the bear got a bit mixed up, in fact. Poor old Ted! And Archie, too," he added mournfully. "The leopard got in his bedroom—"

"You don't mean that they're hurt?" gasped Fullerton.

"I hope they won't arrest you, that's all!" said Willy.

"Are they—dead?" yelled Fullerton, aghast.

"What else can you expect?" said Willy, turning away. "I don't suppose you meant to let them lose. I'll take your word for that. But it was a mad thing to do—"

"I didn't know!" moaned the other fag. "Oh, they're dead! And I've killed them! What shall I do? They'll come here and arrest me! They'll take me to prison!"

The other East House fags were looking almost as scared as Fullerton.

"You jolly well deserve to go to prison!" said Parry minor. "It was an awful thing to do. Perhaps those beastly animals will kill other people, too! Once they escape like that there's no telling."

"I'd better run away!" babbled Fullerton, nearly beside himself with fear. "You chaps'll help me, won't you? If I bolt, I might be able to get away before the truth comes out."

"Cheese it!" growled Willy, with disgust. "I didn't say anybody was dead, you worm! I was only kidding you. Those animals wouldn't hurt a fly. But you needed a lesson for being such a cad."

"Then—then your major isn't really killed?"

"You can't kill my major as easily as that," said Willy, with a sniff. "I came here to give you a thundering good hiding, Fullerton. I thought you had deliberately loosened the menagerie on the school. But I'll take your word for it that you only meant to give an alarm, and I'll let you off the hiding."

"I never dreamed they'd get out of the tent!" panted Fullerton.

"I'll bet you didn't!" retorted Willy. "Otherwise you wouldn't have dared to go within a mile of the place. You're coming

with me, my son! Get some things on, and look lively!"

"Coming with you! What for?"

"Never mind what for!" snapped Willy. "Get your things on!"

"But—but—"

"I'm in a hurry!" said Willy, clenching his fists.

Fullerton protested no longer. He hastily dressed, and went out with Willy. He had never thought it possible that he would be bowled out, and now that the climax had come he was helpless with fright.

Willy took him straight to the monastery ruins. Fullerton was additionally scared by the thought that one of the wild beasts might spring out on him, but nothing of this sort happened.

They reached the tent, and Willy opened one of the cages.

"Get in!" he said curtly.

"What!"

"You heard what I said."

"But you're mad!" gasped Fullerton. "I'm not going to—"

"Yes, you are!" snorted Willy. "Get in that cage, you rotter! I'm going to keep you bottled up until all these animals are recaptured. They're tame compared with you!"

Fullerton tried to escape, but it was a futile effort. Willy caught him and proceeded to set about him in no uncertain fashion. Fullerton surrendered after the first few seconds. He climbed into the cage, and Willy carefully secured the sliding door.

FORTUNATELY, the runaways were captured without a great deal of trouble.

As Willy had anticipated, the animals were so accustomed to captivity that they did not know what to make of their liberty, even when they obtained it. Not one of them made a break for the open country.

The bear was already secured. The leopard was found in the West House kitchen, making a meal of the West House's next day's joint. The kangaroo was discovered timidly hiding amongst a lot of bushes in the Head's garden. And the chimpanzee, having made a round of investigation, had apparently got fed up with the whole night's work, and had squashed himself into an empty packing-case behind the Modern House, where he had gone to sleep.

They were all transferred to the cages and made secure. It wasn't until the last one was put in that Nelson Lee noticed an unusual type of exhibit in another cage. It was one of the new cages, which hadn't yet been used.

"What's this?" asked Lee.

"That's a curious specimen without any known name, sir," said Willy. "It thinks it's human, but it isn't. Occasionally it can talk, but it's never been known to say anything worth listening to. In fact, it's such a worthless kind of exhibit that I'm going to set it free."

"I am inclined to agree with you," said Nelson Lee gravely. "I doubt if the public would pay good money to see this particular specimen. I really think it should be liberated."

Fullerton was released, and Lee requested one of the East House prefects to escort the fag back to his dormitory. Fullerton himself was speechless. Willy hadn't sneaked on him, but the circumstances were certainly significant.

As a matter of fact, Lee had a pretty good idea of how the wind blew. He decided that the case did not call for him to ask any awkward questions, however. The animals were recaptured now, anyhow, and no actual harm had been done.

But there was something else to be discussed.

"Now, Handforth minor, I think you'd better explain what all this means," said Lee, indicating the cages and the tent. "I'm not going to blame you for to-night's unfortunate mischance. We'll forget that. But I'd like to know what you mean by bringing these creatures into the school premises."

"I'm looking after 'em, sir," said Willy boldly.

"If you had looked after them more thoroughly, young man, this situation wouldn't have arisen," replied Lee. "I want to know who they belong to, and why you brought them here."

CHAPTER 12.

A Huge Success!

NOW that the excitement was over, an informal sort of official inquiry was afoot. There were many prefects present, and Willy had every reason to feel trapped. He was one small fag in the midst of these grim accusers.

The scene, lit up by the gleaming lanterns, was rather effective, too. There was Nelson Lee, dominating all the others, stern and relentless. The seniors were hoping that he would inflict a very severe punishment upon Willy. They were all rather fed up. It was a bit thick to have their night's sleep ruined by these unnecessary alarms and excursions.

"I am waiting, Handforth minor," said Lee coldly.

"It's simple enough, sir," replied Willy. "I'm going to open the show to-morrow evening. All the fags have been working on the thing, preparing this tent and getting everything ready. I'm going to charge a shilling a head."

"Isn't that rather excessive?"

"The show will be worth it by the time we've done, sir," said Willy enthusiastically.

"The show will not be here," said Nelson Lee, much to the relief of the prefects. "I have no intention of allowing it to remain. In the morning, Handforth minor, these animals will be removed. You cannot have a menagerie of this sort on the school property."

"But it's a special occasion, sir——"

"I can well believe that," said Lee. "You had an idea that the authorities would interfere with your plans, hadn't you?"

"Don't the authorities always interfere, sir?" asked Willy bitterly. "I kept the thing mum so that there wouldn't be any hitch, and if the animals hadn't escaped nobody would have known. But I don't believe that you'll be so hard-hearted as to kybosh the stunt before it's really on the go."

"You young idiot!" put in Wilson of the Sixth. "Why let him go on, sir? It's like his confounded nerve to talk to you like this!"

"I wouldn't let him talk, only I feel that there is something unusual behind all this activity," said Lee. "This material must have cost a lot of money, Handforth minor."

"It did, sir—nearly fifteen quid."

"Is it paid for?"

"Of course, sir; the Remove chaps helped," said Willy. "And they helped without even knowing what the game was. They trusted me. I'm glad there are some people who can trust me," he added coldly. "I'm sorry you can't, sir."

"You are a very extraordinary boy, Handforth minor," said Nelson Lee. "These animals, of course, are not your own property. To whom do they really belong? And why are they here? You had better be absolutely frank."

Willy was. It did not take him long to give a full and graphic description of how he and his chums had found the unfortunate Mr. Montgomery Maggs and how they had taken him to hospital, promising to look after his animals while he was laid up.

"What else could I do but bring 'em here, sir?" concluded Willy defensively. "My first idea was to keep them on the old pitch, but the farmer turned us off. So I thought of the monastery ruins."

"I cannot but approve of your action, Handforth minor," said Lee thoughtfully. "In promising to help the old man you upheld the best traditions of the Boy Scouts. It was a splendid 'good deed.' But you had absolutely no right to bring the animals here, on the school property, without permission."

"That's just it, sir," said Willy. "If I had asked for permission I shouldn't have got it. You know that as well as I do, sir."

"H'm! Perhaps I do," admitted Lee. "But why all this palaver? And what's this nonsense about opening the show to-morrow?"

"It's not nonsense, sir," said Willy indignantly. "Haven't I told you that old Maggs is nearly starving? I thought I'd run his show for him while he's helpless. Then, when he comes out of hospital, he'll have a nice little bag of takings to carry him on for a bit. And I thought this would be the best pitch because there are so many chaps here. They've got money, too, and they'll readily whack out a bob each to see the menagerie."

The prefects had changed their expressions. Willy's explanation had made a big difference. At first they had believed that it was merely one of Willy's personal stunts, but the story of Mr. Maggs had rather touched them. Willy's manner, too, was entirely disarming.

"Be a sport, sir!" he urged. "I'd love to open the show to-morrow, as I've arranged. If I take it somewhere else the chaps won't patronise it. You know what a lazy lot they are! It'll be bad enough to get them to walk through the shrubbery, even."

"We'll see," said Nelson Lee, patting Willy on the back. "I had some idea of caning you, young man, but I shan't now. Your motives are excellent, and your industry has been very creditable. Your only mistake was to dump this menagerie on the school property. Even if I were to consent to it remaining, I am afraid the headmaster would forbid it. However, I'll have a talk with him."

"You're a brick, sir!" said Willy frankly. And after that they went to bed.

IN the morning the whole school was chuckling over the events of the night. In the light of explanations, the incidents became distinctly humorous. There was a particular wave of merriment over the misadventures of Mr. Pycraft—for the East House seniors saw no reason why they should keep mum.

Mr. Pycraft himself was furious. When he heard the cackles of laughter, coupled with his name, he went tearing off to the Head to lodge a complaint.

It wasn't mere chance which brought Nelson Lee into Inner Court at that particular time. He buttonholed Mr. Pycraft, soothed him, and led him back to his own House. Mr. Pycraft made no report to the Head.

In fact, the Head knew nothing about the affair that day. When Nelson Lee went to Dr. Nicholls' study to have a chat with him over the matter, he found that Dr. Nicholls had gone to London, and wouldn't be back until the last train.

"The gov'nor's a sport," chuckled Nipper, as he discussed the latest development with Handforth and Willy and a few others. "He knew all the time that the Head was going to London, and he kept people from going near him this morning. He's on your side, Willy. He's going to let that show of yours open."

"Not officially," grinned Willy. "I saw him ten minutes ago, and he was as solemn as an owl. Said the matter was being considered, but in the absence of the Head nothing much could be done. He warned me that there would be a full inquiry as soon as the Head came back. However, he didn't tell me to shift the show."

"Of course not—he wants you to open it," said Nipper, smiling, "although he can't give you official permission. It wouldn't be the thing."

This, in fact, was exactly Nelson Lee's attitude. He had already rung up the Bannington Hospital—not because he thought it necessary to verify Willy's statement, but because he was genuinely interested to hear how old Maggs was progressing. Incidentally, Lee was wondering how long Willy would be required to look after the menagerie.

The news from the hospital was encouraging.

Mr. Maggs was much better. Complete rest and plenty of nourishment were working wonders with that leathery old frame. The doctor assured Lee that Mr. Maggs would be out within a week, as hale as ever.

SO that evening the show opened.

Willy, knowing that the school authorities would take no action, went wholeheartedly into the scheme. He conducted a lightning advertising campaign. Notices were posted in every House. Handbills were distributed by all the fags. Everybody was urged to patronise the great menagerie.

And soon after tea the crowds began to roll up.

Handforth, of course, was one of the first to arrive. He had been trying to get near the show all day, but no outsiders were admitted until after tea. When the hour came there were crowds lining up—and it wasn't merely curiosity which engendered all this excitement.

"My only hat!" said Handforth, in astonishment.

He had expected to see a grubby tent, with one or two tawdry ornamentations. Instead, he found a really imposing show. The frontage was artistically painted in red and blue, with "Maggs' Marvellous Menagerie" painted across the top. There was a proper pay-box, and everything was smart and attractive. The entrance was so imposing that one half-expected to find a huge arena within.

"These fags are pretty smart, when you come to think of it," said Fullwood, with a grin. "They've done wonders in a couple of days."

"The painting might have been better, but I dare say it'll pass," remarked Travers critically. "Anyhow, I'll bet Mr. Maggs will be quite satisfied. Personally, I think a shilling is too cheap. I'm going to see the show two or three times."

And he wasn't the only one.

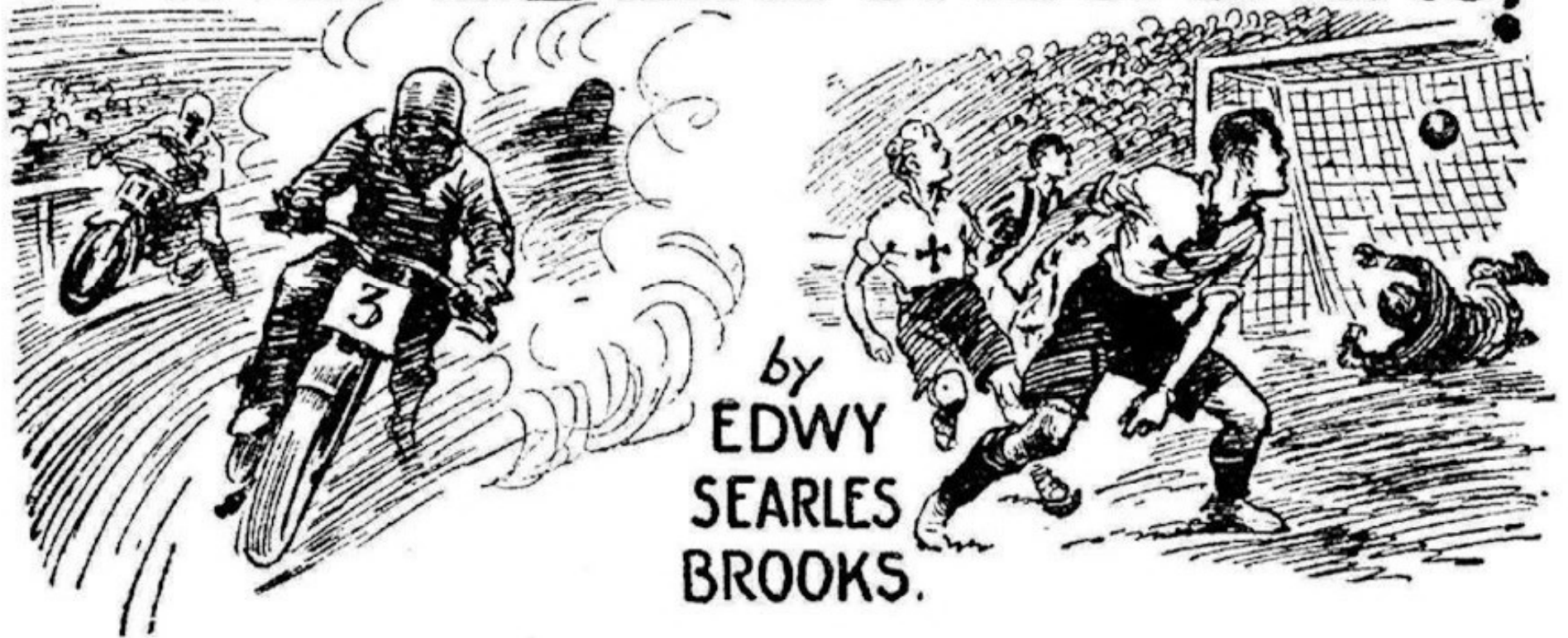
There was something rather humorous in the situation. Not one of those fellows cared a brass farthing about seeing the menagerie. Some of them were curious to have a look at the fags' handiwork, but the majority of them went because they wanted to help in the good work.

Willy, a mere fag, had undertaken this enterprise on his own—and all for the sake of doing a good turn to help this old man. The school felt, in honour bound, to back him up. Anything else was unthinkable.

(Concluded on page 42.)

THE OUTCAST OF BANNINGTON! That's Rex Carrington, but is he downhearted? No-o! He's got hold of Curly Hankin, and if that worthy doesn't tell him where he can lay hands on the rascally Burke—well, Rex is willing to eat his best Sunday hat!

RIVAL^{OF} THE BLUE CRUSADERS!



by
**EDWY
SEARLES
BROOKS.**

Rex on the Warpath!

REX forced Curly upstairs, thrust him into the little bed-room, and locked the door.

"I'm going to keep calm, Hankin," he said quietly. "You needn't be afraid of me, unless you start jibbing. I shall only get violent if you force me to. I don't want to get violent, because Mrs. Wilkins is a good old soul, and she might get scared. Besides, I can't afford to pay if the furniture is all smashed up."

"Smashed up!" gasped Curly, looking round. "You're mad! What do you want with me, anyhow? I don't know anything about your rotten affairs. It's a pity you haven't the decency to clear out of the town."

"By Jove!" said Rex, taking a deep breath. "If that isn't the limit in nerve. You—you infernal parrot!"

"Parrot!"

"You're just repeating the things that everybody else is saying," went on Rex scathingly. "I can understand the other people saying them, because they were fooled. But you're the fellow who lured me into that shed, and it stands to reason that you must know what really happened."

"I don't know what you're talking about," blustered Curly.

"Do you deny that you came to me last night, when I was ready for the race, and that you told me Fatty was injured—"

"You're dreaming!" interrupted Hankin, taking the only line of defence possible. "I wasn't near the Speedway last night. I was in the Wheatsheaf, and I can prove it, too. I can bring witnesses—"

"I dare say you can," interrupted Rex,

"and I don't doubt that you were in the Wheatsheaf last night. But you were in the Speedway, too. This bluff won't work with me, my lad. It might be swallowed by some people, but I'm not such a mug. I've brought you here because I want to get the whole yarn out of you. And before you leave this room I'll have it!"

"I tell you I don't know anything!" gasped Curly.

"Either I'll have that story or I'll go down and telephone for the ambulance," said Rex, becoming calmer and calmer.

"The ambulance!" gurgled Curly. "What will you want the ambulance for?"

"You'll learn that in some days' time—after you've recovered consciousness," replied Rex easily. "But you needn't be unconscious at all—if you prove reasonable. You're the one man in this whole town who can tell me a few things that I want to know. So come along—out with it! Who were the men who helped you to play that trick on me?"

"There weren't any men!" shouted Curly desperately. "Don't I keep on telling you that you've made a mistake? You're mad! You're just trying to scare me! You know well enough that you half-killed those men through your foul riding, and—"

"That's enough!" rapped out Rex. "I'll only tell you once more, Hankin, that that bluff isn't any good. I suppose Burke was behind you, eh?"

Curly's eyes shifted with alarm.

"I don't know what you're talking about!" he muttered.

"I can see that something a little more drastic is required," said Rex, knowing full well that his man was nearly ready for

talking, and only needed a further application of the spur, so to speak. "I'm a patient fellow; as a rule, but this morning I'm feeling in the mood for action."

He deliberately peeled off his jacket, laid it aside, and with a calmness that made Curly shiver in his shoes, he proceeded to roll up his shirt-sleeves.

"You—you daren't attack me!" he panted.

"Attack you be hanged!" retorted Rex contemptuously. "I'm going to fight you! If you're afraid to fight—if you're too much of a funk—I'll simply give you a thrashing. You can take your choice!"

Curly uttered a gurgling protest.

"You're right!" he said feverishly. "It—it was Burke!"

"And Brewer and Parr, no doubt?" asked Rex. "They helped to hold me, eh?"

"It was Burke's plan," snarled Curly. "He forced us to help him, Carrington. We couldn't help ourselves. Why don't you put your jacket on again?"

"I may have to use my arms yet," replied Rex grimly. "It all depends. I want to know who the fellow was who took my place on the track. Burke didn't do it himself—he's no rider—and you fellows haven't the pluck. Who was it?"

"I don't know!"

"Sure?"

"I—I mean, I think I've got an idea," stammered Hankin, as he fascinatedly watched Rex closing his knuckles and bracing his arms. "I—I believe it was a man named Smith."

"Smith! If you're trying to fool me——"

"'Lightning' Smith, they call him," said Curly, with genuine indignation. "I'm not lying! I don't know the man's other name."

Rex Carrington breathed hard, and his eyes gleamed.

"The Killer!" he muttered.

"The—the what?"

"I've heard of 'Lightning' Smith," muttered Rex. "Billy Ross was telling me about him. In America they called him the 'Killer,' because he caused so many accidents by his foul riding. Jove! So he's the fellow who did it! I might have guessed!"

"You can't do anything, Carrington!" said Curly desperately. "Burke's too strong for you! He forced me to help him. I didn't want to, but——"

"The less you say about that, the better!" snapped Rex. "You helped—and that's enough. I suppose he paid you a bit, eh? You've always had your knife into me, Curly, haven't you?"

"No," muttered Curly. "You don't know what you're talking about!"

"But you've given me the information I want, so I'll let you off," continued Rex. "There's only one other bit of information I require—and then you can go to the deuce! Where's Burke now?"

Curly looked frightened.

"I don't know!" he faltered.

"Where's Burke now?" insisted Rex, grabbing Hankin's arm, and tightening his grip over it. "You needn't be afraid that I'll tell him where I got the information from. Where is he?"

"At—at the Wheatsheaf!" gasped Curly.

"If you're lying to me——"

"I'm not! I arranged to meet him there this morning at eleven o'clock. He'll be in the smoking-room——"

"That's enough!" interrupted Rex. "I've finished with you now. There's something more important to be done!"

He seized his coat, flung it on, and strode out—on the warpath!

THE OPENING CHAPTERS IN BRIEF.

ULYSSES PIECOMBE—more commonly known as *Piecan*—manager of the *Blue Crusaders*—is worried. Not because the *Blues* are doing badly, but because a dirt-track has been opened nearby. The players, however, seem unperturbed. Especially

REX CARRINGTON, the *Blues'* brilliant centre-forward. Rex is also a clever dirt-track rider, and he appears regularly at the *Speedway*. Just recently he has fallen foul of

PETER BURKE, ex-manager of the *Speedway*. Burke it was who disabled Rex for footer, thus adding to *Piecan's* troubles, for without Rex the team is going to pieces. However, the centre-forward's injured foot is practically better now, but he tells nobody of this—except *Fatty Fowkes*, who promises to keep it secret—meaning to surprise *Piecan* upon the day of the match against *Denton City*. Unfortunately for his plans, *Burke* has thought of a scheme which will mean the complete ruin of *Rex*. The ex-track manager has arranged for somebody to ride under *Rex's* name at the *Speedway*, and this man rides in such a foul and dangerous fashion that he earns for himself—or for *Rex*—the hatred of the crowd. Thus *Rex*, his protests of innocence unheeded, finds himself an outcast. Everybody shuns him—except *Fatty Fowkes*—while *Piecan* provides the final shock by telling him that he has been kicked out of the *Blue Crusaders Football Club*. Next day he sees *Curly Hankin*, and, knowing him to be in *Burke's* pay, and that he played a part in the plot, *Rex* collars him and takes him to his lodgings.

(Now read on.)

An Unexpected Turn!

AS Rex strode down the road, he had recovered all his old springiness of step. His eyes were shining with their usual confidence, too. Hope had been restored within him, and he could have laughed at the simple way in which his problem had been solved.

Why had he worried so much overnight, and in the early morning? He might have known that Curly Hankin would crumple up. The reserve player was not made of particularly stern stuff, especially when face to face with a determined man.

Rex had gained the information he required.

Peter Burke was definitely named as the instigator of the plot. And while Rex realised that he could not hope to deal with Burke as easily as he had dealt with Curly, he was optimistic.

"Burke will deny everything, of course—and I shan't be able to produce a shred of proof," Rex told himself, as he strode along. "Hankin's word won't be any good. Burke will repudiate the blighter as soon as I mention him."

He remembered that he had promised Curly he wouldn't mention his—Curly's—name. Not that this made any real difference. There was no need to mention it. Rex had no definite plan. His one idea was to get to the Wheatsheaf and come face to face with Burke. His thoughts went no further.

Perhaps it was fortunate that Fate stepped in and altered the whole course of Rex's movements. It is to be feared that his proposed interview with Peter Burke would have been worse than useless. Burke would have had no difficulty in getting Rex thrown out of the Wheatsheaf—for Burke had been busily working up indignation against Rex all the morning.

However, something totally different happened.

Rex hadn't gone far before he found a number of roughs following him, shouting insulting epithets. Much as he wanted to turn and set about them, he kept himself under control. That sort of thing wouldn't do any good. He walked on as though he heard nothing.

"Yah! Dirty Carrington!"

"Go back to your own town—Bannington doesn't want you!"

All might have been well if Rex had not walked towards a group of loungers who were collected round the doors of a public house. He recognised the type at once. They weren't unemployed—but unemployables. Good for nothing louts who wouldn't work, even if they had been able to find it.

"Ullo! 'Er's Rex, the Wrecker!" grinned one of the roughs.

"Let's biff 'im off the pavement!"

Rex set his teeth, and kept straight on. He wasn't going to alter his course because of

these young hooligans. Behind him the others were pressing closer, emboldened by the general situation.

"Arf a minute, mate!" said one of the roughs.

He stood straight in front of Rex's path, and caught the footballer's arm.

"You'd better be careful!" said Rex steadily. "Take your filthy paw off my arm! I shan't warn you twice!"

"Oh! And who do you think you are?" sneered the hooligan. "Ark at 'im, mate!"

"Let's run 'im out o' town!" yelled one of the others. "That's what they do in America! I saw it on the films!"

"We're not in America—we're in England!" said Rex quietly. "We're not quite so lawless here. If you lay your hands on me I'll give you something to be going on with!"

"Swipe 'im, Bill!" advised one of the others.

The man who was holding Rex's arm attempted to deliver a swipe, but Rex countered in a flash. He swept the clumsy thrust aside; his right came up and struck the fellow's jaw with a jarring thud.

And that started the trouble. The roughs, incensed at seeing their leader treated with such scant respect, made a rush forward.

"Grab 'im, mates! He's knocked Bill out!"

"We'll put him through it!"

Rex turned his back to the road and faced the ugly mob. The next second they were upon him. It was as though a battering-ram had struck him. He staggered back, caught his heel against the curb, and in trying to regain his balance he went sprawling half across the road.

"Look out!" shouted somebody.

There was a wild yell, the shrieking of brakes, and the roughs were horrified to see Rex Carrington fall beneath the lumbering lorry which had attempted in vain to pull up.

"It wasn't my fault!" gasped the driver, pale to the lips.

This was perfectly true. The man had had no opportunity of pulling up in time. The roughs fled helter-skelter, frightened out of their wits. Other people came running across from shops and houses and side streets. The lorry was surrounded by wildly excited crowds.

Curly Hankin came up at the height of the excitement, having followed Rex after a respectable lapse of some minutes. He had a vague idea of going to the Wheatsheaf and finding out what was happening. He pressed his way into the outskirts of the crowd which surrounded the lorry.

"Accident?" he asked.

"Poor bloke killed!" said a man. "Went right under the lorry. No chance at all. They're getting him out now."

"Oh!" said Curly, backing away.

He had no desire to remain. But as he

was getting out of the crowd he couldn't help hearing some of the comments that were being uttered.

"Well, he won't do any more dirty riding that's a cert!" somebody was saying. "All the same, nobody wanted this to happen. Fine footballer, too—best centre the Blues ever had."

Curly halted, staring in amazement.

"What do you mean?" he asked, seizing the man who had been speaking. "Who—who's the chap under that lorry?"

"Carrington, the fellow who—"

"Carrington!" gasped Curly. "What happened?"

"A perfectly disgraceful affair!" said another spectator—a quiet, reserved gentleman. "Carrington was set on by a mob, knocked into the road, and they didn't even give him a dog's chance. I hope to heaven they're rounded up, and the ringleaders sent to prison."

"You're right, sir," said somebody else. "I don't hold with kicking a man when he's down."

Curly fairly reeled away, startled beyond measure. It was another trick of fate which led him to dash from the spot at once. For less than a minute later the news was flying from mouth to mouth that Rex Carrington was hardly hurt at all!

When Rogues Fall Out!

BUT Curly Hankin thought that Rex was dead.

Everybody had thought so at first. When somebody is run over by a heavy lorry there is generally a first impression that he could not have escaped death. Rex had fallen in front of the vehicle, which had run right over him without the wheels actually touching him. But he had caught his head an awful crack on the crank-case, and he had been stunned. Thus he had remained motionless beneath the lorry, lending colour to the rumour that he was killed.

Curly Hankin, pale and shaky, arrived at the Wheatsheaf. Rumour was following hard on his heels. The word was passing from mouth to mouth that Rex had been killed in a street accident. But fast as rumour travelled, Curly got to the Wheatsheaf first.

He found Peter Burke in the smoking-room. He and a lean-faced, leathery individual were sitting in a corner. Brewer and Parr were some little distance away.

"Carrington's been killed!" said Curly, striding straight to the corner and springing his bombshell without any beating about the bush.

"What?" ejaculated Burke, starting up.

"Gang of rougs!" panted Hankin. "They threw him in the road. Lorry went over him. Killed on the spot."

"Good heavens!" said Burke, sitting down heavily.

(Continued on next page.)



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The mob of roughs charged at Rex. He backed away, lost his balance and went staggering out into the roadway—right in front of the oncoming motor-lorry!

The leathery man had remained silent, but he looked from Burke to Hankin with a startled, dumbfounded expression in his eyes. It was easy to see that he had been drinking.

"Carrington killed!" he muttered, at length. "Then—then it's my fault! If I hadn't——" He paused, gulping. "If I hadn't——"

He stopped abruptly this time, obviously unable to complete his sentence. Burke pulled himself together in a flash, and gripped the other's arm.

"For Heaven's sake, keep quiet, Smith!" he muttered.

"But we never bargained for this!" said Lightning Smith, who was shaken to the core. "I didn't mean the feller to get killed over the affair! You didn't tell me there was any chance——"

"You fool! How could I foresee such a thing?" snapped Burke. "It's not our fault! We couldn't help it! Perhaps Hankin's wrong——"

"I'm not!" said Curly. "I was there—on the spot!"

"You saw it?"

"No, but I was there a minute afterwards—while they were getting Carrington's body out."

Lightning Smith shuddered.

"His body!" he muttered. "It reminds me of—— Burke, you dog, you never told me that there would be such a storm over Carrington! I didn't know he would be attacked in the street."

Burke was amazed. He had regarded this hard-bitten track-rider as proof against any feelings of remorse. Smith was a rover, a man who had ridden on a great many tracks in the United States, Australia, and England. He had generally been warned off after his methods had become known. He was unscrupulous and very much of a rascal.

But when it came to a death through his activities he was not a man of much stamina. Or perhaps the drink in him was robbing him of his normal strength of will. Whatever the cause, the sudden news of Carrington's supposed death had a startling effect upon him.

For he and Burke to enter into any sort of altercation here was madness. Yet Burke was compelled to speak—if only to keep Smith from saying too much. And they weren't to know that a man in another corner of the smoking-room was one of the "Gazette" reporters—who was now pricking up his ears very keenly. He was a young man of ambition, who would presently arrive in Fleet Street, no doubt. It was unlikely that the "Gazette" would keep him for long.

"Can't you keep quiet, Smith?" snarled Burke. "If you want to talk, wait till we're outside. Do you want to give the whole thing away?"

"You'll have to pay me double money if you want me to keep quiet!" said Smith fearfully. "When I arranged to take Carrington's place in that race I didn't know

that Carrington would be killed over it. There's too much risk, and—"

"Hold him, Hankin!" panted Burke, in dire fear.

They seized the excited man, and Brewer and Parr came over to help. None of them noticed that the other man had quietly disappeared. In fact, Burke was unaware of it until some minutes had elapsed.

"Now then—don't be such a madman, Smith," he said, in a low voice. "You won't do yourself any good by talking. As for Carrington being killed, it was purely accidental. It might have happened even if we hadn't done anything."

"It wouldn't!" insisted Smith. "Carrington was set on by a crowd of men, wasn't he? They wouldn't have done that—"

"Oh, shut up!" snapped Burke, losing patience. "Gosh! Where's that fellow who was sitting on the other side of the room?" he added, in alarm.

"He must have gone out," said Curly.

"Yes, and he may have heard what Smith was saying!" snapped Burke. "We'd better clear from here! Come on, Smith!"

"I'm not going," said the other. "I want another drink. I'm feeling a bit rocky over this. I didn't expect—"

"Hang you, how many more times are you going to say that?" snarled Burke. "How could any of us expect it? You can go to blazes!"

He strode out through the communicating-door into the billiard-room. Almost at the same moment the other door opened, and the "Gazette" reporter came in, accompanied by a police sergeant and a constable.

"Burke's gone—but there's the other man," said the reporter briskly.

"Run!" gasped Brewer, like a fool.

He and Parr and Curly Hankin might have saved themselves from being implicated; but when they made a bolt for the billiard-room the police sergeant let out a yell that brought them to an abrupt halt.

"No good you boys trying to escape!" he said sharply. "I know you all! And if you've had anything to do with this business, you'd better come out with it. But this is the man I'm after."

He seized Lightning Smith by the shoulder

"It wasn't my doing!" ejaculated Smith. "Burke's the man you want! He paid me for the job!"

"You're the man who played a trick on Carrington last night, and rode in his place, aren't you?" asked the officer.

"Yes, but Burke—"

"All right—all right! Never mind Burke," said the sergeant. "We don't want any trouble, my friend. I shall have to ask you to come along to the station and make a statement. You're not arrested, understand. So you needn't look so scared."

It was doubtful if the sergeant had any authority to arrest the man. The trick that had been played was not a criminal offence unless Carrington made a complaint. But the reporter had persuaded the sergeant that

there was excellent cause for this man Smith to be detained.

And whether it was strictly legal or not, Smith was taken to the police station. Being thoroughly scared, he didn't hesitate to make a full confession, and the enterprising reporter was very busy with his notebook all the time. After that he dashed to his office at breakneck speed.

"Better hold up the press, sir!" he announced to the editor, as he dashed into that gentleman's sanctum. "I've got something special here."

He slapped his notes down in front of the editor's face. The editor looked at them, glaring. At first he was inclined to sweep them aside—just to show this young upstart where he stood. Then he caught sight of a few of the words, and his gaze became keener.

"We've got the news in about Carrington," he said sharply. "Reported dead at first—but he's only slightly injured. In the hospital now. But what's this? You're not telling me that Carrington didn't ride last night?"

"Most of these notes are in shorthand, sir," said the reporter. "But I'll give you the story in twenty words. I bluffed the police into detaining a man who was in the Wheatsheaf—"

It took rather more than twenty words, but the editor soon cut him short.

"This goes in the noon edition," he said briskly, as he grabbed for his telephone.

At the Hospital!

FATTY FOWKES was like a cat on hot brieks.

"Faster!" he roared, hammering on the glass. "Don't crawl like this!"

He was in a taxi, and the vehicle was already tearing along at the highest speed it could attain. He had heard the news about Rex Carrington while the Blues were at practice in the Stronghold, when one of the workmen had obligingly shouted that Rex had been killed in a street accident.

(Continued on next page.)



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Fatty had nearly fainted at the news, but pressing inquiries had reassured him. It came out that Rex was not killed, but injured, and had been taken to hospital.

So Fatty was dashing there as fast as a taxi could take him.

The other Blues soon heard the story, too, and it wasn't long before they were also on their way to the hospital. But Fatty got there well in advance.

"Where's Carrington?" he asked a nurse, after rushing breathlessly into the place. "Somebody told me that he's been half killed in an accident. Where——"

"There's no need to get excited," protested the nurse. "Carrington is in one of the out-patients' wards. I think he's being discharged even now. Dr. Thomas said——"

"Being discharged!" echoed Fatty. "But isn't he badly hurt?"

"It was only a trifle," smiled the nurse. "Come along. I'll take you to him."

"Oh, glory! Thank goodness!" said Fatty, with untold relief.

He was taken up a bare passage, into a bare room, and here he found Rex Carrington, with a bandage round his head, talking to an elderly man in a white coat.

"Rex!" yelled Fatty.

"Steady on, old man," smiled Rex. "I suppose you've heard that I've been killed, eh? It's wonderful how these rumours get about. I was only knocked silly for a bit—and it didn't take much of a knock to accomplish that!"

Fatty wrung Rex's hand, and looked anxiously at the bandage round his head.

"You oughtn't to leave the hospital yet!" he said. "There might be complications, or—or something."

"Nonsense," laughed the doctor. "Above an inch of torn skin, and a slight abrasion. 'I don't suppose he's even got a headache. Our beds are too precious to be wasted on a fellow who's hardly hurt.'"

"I've had an awful time, Rex," said Fatty. "They said that you were set on by roughs, and that you were pushed under a lorry. I thought you were badly injured and——"

"Not a bit of it," said Rex, with a chuckle. "Don't I keep telling you that the whole thing was trivial? I'll admit I'm a lucky beggar. I might have been killed on the spot."

An interruption came. The nurse reappeared, and said that a whole crowd of young men wanted to come in. Fatty knew at once that the other Blues had arrived. He bristled with indignation.

"Keep Rex here for a minute, doctor!" he said. "Don't let him escape, whatever you do. I'll go and speak to these chaps! I've got something I want to say to them."

(Good old Rex! Everything is coming right for him now; next week he's completely vindicated, and once more he becomes the popular Rex Carrington as of old. Look out for the concluding chapters of this fine serial next Wednesday.)

The St. Frank's Menagerie!

(Continued from page 35.)

Even the meanest fellows were compelled to patronise the show, and to pay their shillings. There was no getting out of it. Anybody who hadn't seen the menagerie was looked upon as a rank outsider. They all had to do their whack.

Even the masters came along, and they solemnly paid their admission money and passed through. If any of the juniors were hard up, and hadn't the price of admission, they borrowed it from somebody who had.

By the end of the evening the takings were considerable. More important still, the news of the whole affair had spread to Bellton, and an enterprising reporter of the "Bannington Gazette" had got hold of the story.

The Head was quite startled when he came back, and when he heard of the unusual activities. At the same time he expressed his admiration of Willy's actions. Later, Willy himself was called into the headmaster's presence. He was hauled over the coals for daring to flout the school's authority, but he was praised for his good work, and he was allowed a couple of days to find new quarters for the menagerie.

As it happened, the matter was taken out of Willy's hands. Public opinion in Bannington was excited by the full story in the following morning's "Gazette." Bannington had caught the fever, and wanted to see the menagerie. So Willy made arrangements with a firm of contractors, and the whole outfit was shifted and set up in the town.

Bannington followed the example of St. Frank's, and flocked to see the show. In the case of the general public, however, the admission price was twopence, as of old—and there was no hint of charity about the business. Everybody who entered received full value for money.

IT was a week before Mr. Montgomery Maggs took charge of his show again. The reports he had heard in the meantime had been better than all the hospital's medicine. He looked twenty years younger when he resumed control once more.

"It ain't much good me saying anything, young gent," he said huskily, when he saw Willy. "I knew you was goin' to stand by me but I never expected anything like this. I'd like to thank ye, but there ain't no words——"

"In that case, Mr. Maggs, the least said the better," interrupted Willy cheerfully.

But Mr. Maggs said quite a lot!

THE END.

("Handforth's Holiday Flirtation!" is the title of next week's amusing long complete Whitsuntide yarn, featuring the cheery Chums of St. Frank's. Order your copy now to save disappointment.)



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.



L. GODDEN.

THANKS for your new photograph—Victor Hill (High Barnet)—which really makes the only likeness of you I have, since the previous snapshot you sent (and for which you received my own autographed photo in exchange) is so ancient and blurred that I'd need to be Nelson Lee himself to detect any similiarity between the two. I regard this new one as the correct exchange photo. What about permission to publish it?

* * *

Sorry I can't oblige you—Clifford Harding (Peterborough)—with the address of the reader you ask for. I make it a rule not to give any reader's address without that reader's express permission. If I didn't, our genial friend the Editor might jump on me. Try to put yourself in the other's place. Supposing I gave your address to everybody who asked for it? You might get snowed up with all sorts of letters that you didn't want, and you'd be in an uncomfortable position. To reply would be an expense and a bother, and not to reply would seem churlish. So, you see, it isn't fair to give readers' addresses unless they themselves permit me to do so. It's a totally different matter if I give *your* address to the reader with whom you want to correspond. Then it's up to that reader to write you if he wants to. That's what I've done in your case, and what I do in all such cases. So if you don't hear from the reader you'll know that he isn't enthusiastic about the idea. And no harm is done either way.

* * *

Here's your photo—Laurie Godden (Hilton, S. Australia)—and I hope it reproduces as well as some of the other tiny snapshots which have recently appeared, for many of these have "come out" splendidly. By that, I don't mean I welcome snapshots from other readers. Oh, no! A decent-sized photograph, if it's at all possible, please! Write to me as often as you like, Laurie, old man. I'm always pleased to receive your extremely interesting letters.

* * *

I can't answer all your questions—Eric C. Mitcham (Chalk Farm)—but here is one bit

of information. Willy Handforth first appeared in the stories in the issue for October 28th, 1922—No. 386, Old Series. Before then Owen minor was the Third Form leader. Willy has now completely eclipsed him, although Owen minor jibs a bit now and again.

* * *

Here is the information you ask for—Arthur Bunch (Sutton). The occupants of the studies you mention are as follows: K—Reggie Pitt, Jack Grey; L—Trotwood twins and Fatty Little; M—Guy Pepys and Johnny and Bertie Onions; N—Hon. Douglas Singleton and Hussi Ranjit Lal Khan; O—Solomon Levi and Dick Goodwin; P—Justin B. Farman, Owen major and Augustus Hart; R—Harold Doyle, Yung Ching and Larry Scott. 10, 18, 19 and 20 have never had their occupants mentioned. In order to make this quite clear, since you seem to be a bit mixed yourself, I'd better explain that Studies A to J are Ancient House; K to T, West House; 1 to 10, Modern House; 11 to 20, East House. This bit of information might help other readers, too.

* * *

I don't know if girls read boys' books as a general rule—George Murphy (Dukinfield)—but there are hosts of girls who read the St. Frank's yarns. Perhaps this is because I write them with a sort of general appeal. You see, I try to please everybody, and although I'm not ass enough to think I succeed, I keep on pegging away.



Our Weekly Pow-Wow

By
The Editor.

Your Editor welcomes letters from all his readers; send him on now. Address it to, The Editor, "Nelson Lee Library," Fleetway House, Farringdon Street London, E.C.4.

News for Manchester.

THE St. Frank's League is booming. Evidence of this is forthcoming from the numerous letters I receive from readers who write telling me that their clubs, formed under the auspices of the St. Frank's League, are going from success to success.

This week I have to announce that B. Rosen, of Neardale House, Middleton Road, Higher Crumpsall, Manchester, wants to form a club for NELSON LEE readers in the Manchester and Salford districts. Anybody who is interested should write to the above address. The club will cater for cycling, rambling, cricket, and other sports, and, of course, the social side of the question will not be overlooked.

The above reader is also desirous of corresponding with "Nelson Leeites" anywhere and on any subject.

In answer to your two questions, B. Rosen, both Manchester City and Manchester United have won the F.A. Cup—once each. The City won it in 1903-4, when they beat Bolton Wanderers 1-0. The United were successful in 1908-9, beating Bristol City by the same score. Manchester City also reached the Final tie in 1925-26, but this time they were defeated—Bolton Wanderers getting their revenge and winning by the only goal of the match.

Our New Serial!

Concerning the new naval serial by Stanton Hope, which I mentioned last week—and which is due to commence in the NELSON LEE in a fortnight's time—a rather interesting coincidence has occurred. Among my postbag this week was a letter from a reader in Birmingham. Apparently he had read a story by Stanton Hope in another book, and was so impressed by it that he wrote asking me if I could not get a yarn by the same author published in the NELSON LEE.

That reader can now rest contented; A serial by Stanton Hope is coming; and in securing it, I think I am justified in congratulating myself, for after reading the opening instalments I am convinced that it is one of the best stories that Mr. Hope has ever written—which is saying a lot. I am also convinced that this yarn will make one of the finest serials that has appeared in the Old Paper for a long time.

Full details will appear next week—and also particulars of a wonderful new series of stories featuring the Chums of St. Frank's. Most of you will remember that a few months back Edwy Searles Brooks asked readers, in "Between Ourselves," for their opinions about a School Train series. Since then both Mr. Brooks and myself have been inundated with letters, and the writers of them have all expressed their approval of the idea. So the School Train is coming into existence—also in a fortnight's time!

Look out for details in next Wednesday's issue of the NELSON LEE, chums!

THE EDITOR.

CORRESPONDENTS WANTED.

Emilie Bryan, Wood View, New Road, Chingford, Essex, wants correspondents, about 16 years of age; he has back numbers of the NELSON LEE for sale.

Jack Jones, 4, Kennington Avenue, Bristol, would like to correspond with readers in Ireland and Australia.

Lionel C. Blackley, Bridge Hotel, Albert Street, Newcastle, Natal, S. Africa, wants correspondents.

Leonard Lasky, 51, Titchfield's Road, Holborn, London, W.C. 1, wishes to correspond with a Jewish reader in London.

Stanley Bailey, 40, Holmes Avenue, Walthamstow, London, E., has back numbers of the NELSON LEE to sell.

E. J. C. Coward, 8, Norwood Place, Pokesdown, Bournemouth, wants to hear from readers; ages 16-18.