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**HANDFORTH'S  
HOLIDAY  
FLIRTATION!**

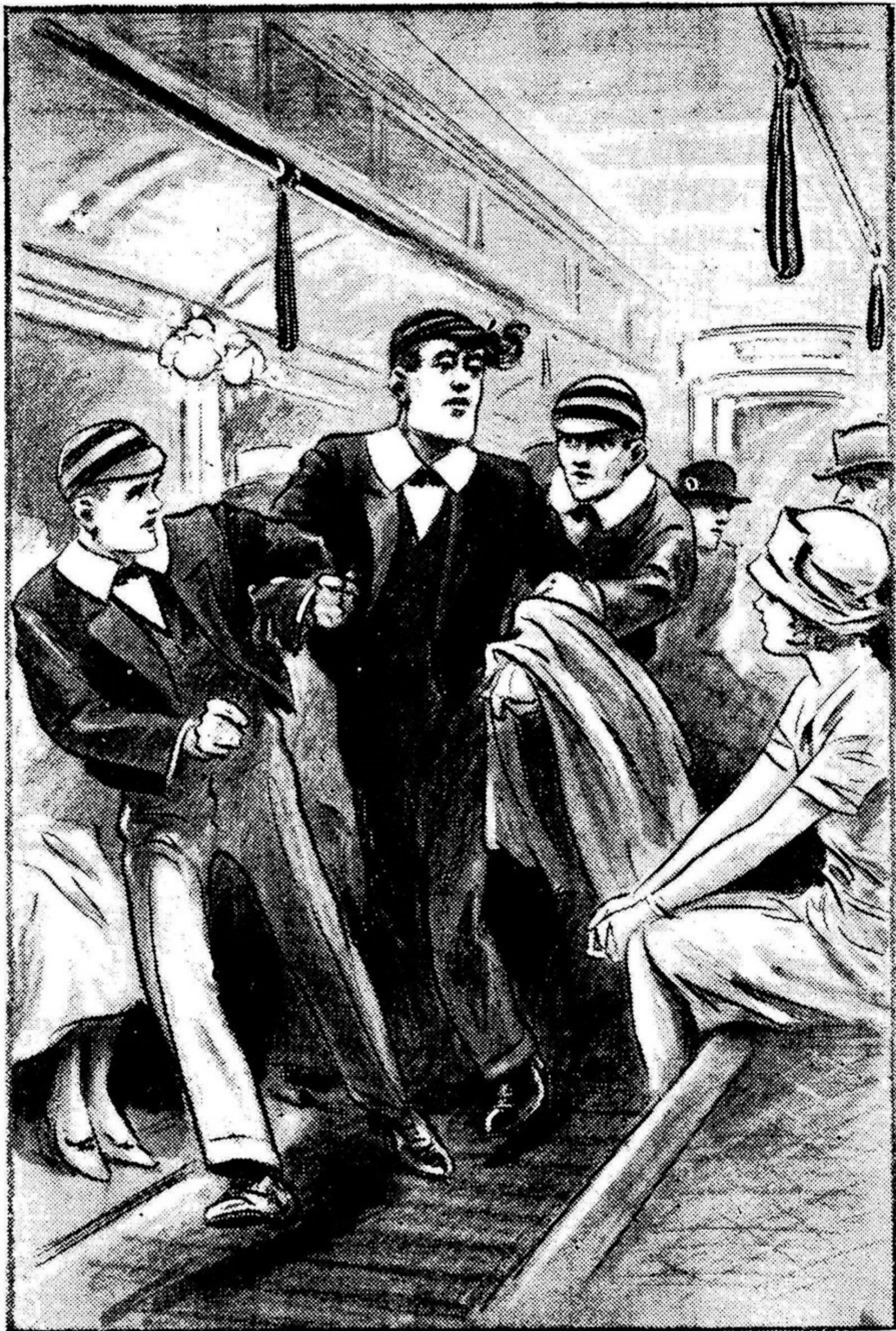
A corking long complete fun, mystery and adventure yarn featuring  
the cheery Chums of St. Frank's.

New Series No. 159.

OUT ON WEDNESDAY.

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"I'm not coming!" protested Handforth, whose whole attention was centred on the pretty girl in the Tube train. Church and McClure had other views on the subject, however. They grasped hold of their leader, yanked him out of his seat, and then proceeded to drag him forcibly down the carriage.



There's Hours Of Enjoyment In This Topping Whitsuntide Yarn, Chums!



By EDWY SEARLES BROOKS

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

Girls—pretty girls—have always been one of Edward Oswald Handforth's weaknesses. His latest fancy is an extra-pretty one—but Handy little realises that she is the niece of a——what?

## CHAPTER 1.

### The Girl in the Tube!

IT was the hunted look in her eyes which first attracted Handforth's attention. Church and McClure had noticed nothing in particular, because their thoughts were all on cricket. But Edward Oswald Handforth was rather susceptible where girls were concerned, and this particular girl was sitting next to him, and it was rather difficult to be indifferent to her nearness.

The famous chums of Study D. at St. Frank's, were in a Tube train, in London, on their way to Marble Arch, where they were to meet Nipper, and Vivian Travers, and Archie Glenthorne, and a few other celebrities of the Remove. It was Whit Monday, and a whole crowd of fellows had decided to go to Lord's, to see the cricket.

Marble Arch Tube Station had been fixed as a kind of rendezvous. At this point the juniors would join forces, and proceed along the Edgware Road by bus, getting off at St. John's Wood Road.

Handforth might not have noticed the girl ordinarily; but on entering the Tube train he had clumsily trodden on one of her feet, and had then made things worse by sitting on her bag. She had accepted his blurted-out apologies with a little smile, and a murmur to the effect that it was quite all right. Even that smile had struck Handforth as being forced and strained.

She was quite a nice girl, by the look of her—not more than sixteen or seventeen. Smartly dressed, in a fashionable summer frock, she was quite charming. Handforth, glancing sideways, could see that her hair was chestnut, and rather curly. She was pretty, too; Handforth had seen this at the first glance.

But it was undeniable that her expression was harassed—and in her eyes there was that hunted look. It worried Handforth. It was perfectly ridiculous that a ripping



girl like this should look so harassed.

"Better get ready, Handy," said Church.

"Marble Arch is the next stop."

"Eh?" said Handforth.

"Marble Arch is the next stop."

"No," said Handforth.

"What do you mean—'No'?"

"Eh? Don't bother me now!" said Handforth impatiently. "I've got an idea that—By George! I'm right, too!"

Church and McClure were frankly puzzled. They could not understand their leader's drift. So far, they had not noticed the girl that sat on the other side of Handforth. They knew, of course, that her foot had been trodden on, and that Handforth had clumsily apologised; but they were rash enough to believe that the incident was closed.

Handforth had forgotten all about the cricket, and the fact that Marble Arch was the next stop. He was subject to very sudden and unexpected attacks like this. Church and McClure were generally on the alert for the first symptoms; but this morning they were somewhat lax. Perhaps they felt there was no danger, since Irene Manners had promised to be at Lord's Cricket Ground with a number of her girl chums from the Moor View School. And Handforth was especially keen on the fair Irene. How could Church and McClure suspect that he would be smitten by a perfect stranger in the Tube train?

Handforth wasn't looking at the girl now—not even sideways. He had noticed that she kept glancing up the long coach, and he was certain, by now, that a hard-faced man, with a bowler hat on his head, was taking an unusual interest in the girl. It was he, no doubt, who was causing Handforth's neighbour to look so hunted.

Edward Oswald took a dislike to the man on the spot. Yet there was really nothing unpleasant about him. He was between thirty and forty—quiet, yet determined, with a particularly keen look about his eyes. The man was standing, for the carriage was overcrowded at the other end. He now let go of his strap, and moved nearer.

"Oh!" murmured the girl.

Handforth heard that little exclamation of dismay; and it was impossible for him to contain himself any longer.

"Beg pardon, miss, but if that fellow's bothering you, just say the word!" he murmured, looking into her brown eyes. "There's three of us here, and we'll soon send him about his business!"

"No, no!" said the girl quickly. "Thank you ever so much, but please don't trouble. It's quite all right. I really don't know the man at all."

"He seems to know you, though," said Handforth pointedly.

"I—I can't understand it," she murmured.

Handforth felt a tug at his sleeve, and he looked round impatiently. Both Church and McClure were regarding him in a startled way.

"What's the idea, fathead?" whispered Church. "What are you talking to that girl for?"

"Mind your own business!" hissed Handforth.

"Crumbs!" said McClure, with a groan.

He exchanged a quick glance with Church. In that flash, they recognised the symptoms. Handforth had been smitten again! There could be no mistaking that soft, far-away look in his eyes. Church and McClure had seen it often enough, and they had grown to fear it. Handforth was difficult enough to manage at the best of times; but whenever he got into one of those moods he was well-nigh unmanageable.

"Well, thank goodness we're getting out in half a jiffy!" muttered Mac, under his breath.

"What difference will that make?" said Church bitterly. "He'll stick in this carriage until the girl gets out! Goodness only knows where we shall be taken to!"

"Rats!" said McClure. "We'll drag him out by force!"

Handforth felt his sleeve plucked again, and this time he fairly glared.

"Come on, Handy—we're nearly there," said Church carelessly. "We'd better be getting to the door, so that we shan't waste any time."

Handforth bent over his chums, and his eyes were gleaming.

"Any more rot from you chaps, and I'll slaughter you!" he whispered threateningly. "You silly asses! This girl is being bothered by some rotter further up the carriage. He keeps looking at her, and she's scared stiff."

"Oh, draw it mild!" protested Church. "Any pretty girl is liable to be looked at in a Tube train."

"This one's more than pretty!" said Handforth stoutly.

"Don't speak so loud you chump, she'll hear you!"

"Eh? Oh, well, what does it matter?" said Handforth recklessly. "I'm going to offer to stand by, in case that merchant gets troublesome."

He turned back again, and he was quite unaware of the fact that a little transfer had taken place during that last moment. Handforth happened to have a light mackintosh over his arm; and, quick as a flash, the girl had slipped a tiny package into the pocket of the mac. The movement had been so swift, so clever, that Handforth had felt nothing. The other passengers, too, had seen nothing. But it was an undeniable fact that the girl allowed a fleeting expression of relief to appear in her eyes.

And at that moment the man in the bowler hat arrived on the spot, having worked his way down the carriage.

"Well, well! This is an unexpected pleasure," he said with a geniality that had a grim note in it. "I thought it was you. Going anywhere in particular?"

The girl breathed hard.

"Good-morning, Mr. Marshall," she said falteringly.

"We'll get out at Marble Arch, if you don't mind," said Mr. Marshall.

"Oh, but I'm going further——"



"I don't think so," interrupted Mr. Marshall. "In fact, I'm sure you're not. We'll both get out at Marble Arch."

Handforth boiled. He had heard everything. Here was this girl—this ripping girl—saying that she intended travelling further than Marble Arch Station, and this ugly rotter was laying down the law!

"I say, look here!" protested Handforth wrathfully. "If the young lady wants to travel——"

"Friend of yours?" asked Mr. Marshall, looking at the girl, and then indicating the schoolboy.

"No; I don't know him," said the girl. "I'm sure I don't know what's the matter with him."

"Leave him to me, Miss Winston," said the man in the bowler hat. "Now, young 'un, what's the idea?"

"If this young lady doesn't want you to talk to her, why don't you go away?" demanded Handforth indignantly. "For two pins, I'd——"

"Marble Arch!" droned the conductor, at the end of the carriage.

"Come on!" said Church anxiously. "Lend a hand, Mac!"

They seized hold of Handforth, yanked him out of his seat, and fairly dragged him down the carriage; and as the train was stopping at the same moment, the efforts of Church and McClure were provided with a useful impetus. All three juniors went hurtling to the end of the carriage, and, before Handforth could realise it, he was bundled out on to the platform.

"Where's the lift?" gasped Church. "Oh, here we are! This way!"

"Hi! Le'me go!" roared Handforth. "You silly asses! If you don't let me go——"

"We've got to hurry!" said Church. "The other chaps are waiting for us."

"Blow the other chaps!" howled Handforth.

"We're late already," urged McClure. "If we don't show up pretty soon, they won't wait for us."

"Who cares?" bellowed Edward Oswald.

But Church and McClure took no notice of him. They could see that the smartly-dressed young lady was getting out of the train, too, and they had a fear, which amounted to a conviction, that Handforth would make a chump of himself if he was allowed to have his own way. The girl had an escort, and this man, not unnaturally, would resent any interference from a schoolboy.

His chums had a horror of public "scenes." Somehow or other, Handforth generally managed to create one or two during the

holidays. And the more public the place, the more Handforth was liable to make an ass of himself.

So for once Church and McClure were a very determined pair of juniors. As a rule, they allowed Handforth to have very much his own way, but when the occasion demanded they could be relentless. This was clearly one of those occasions. They simply couldn't allow Handforth to make an idiot of himself with this girl—who was a perfect stranger.

The girl herself watched the three schoolboys hurtling down the platform with an anxious light in her eyes. Her heart nearly leapt into her mouth when she saw that Handforth almost dropped his mackintosh. But her companion had no cause to suspect that she was particularly interested in that article of apparel. He had lightly gripped her arm, and he appeared to be quite affable.

Handforth's chums, by dint of their rushing tactics, succeeded in getting Handforth to the lifts before any of the other passengers were on the spot. They went rushing into the first lift, and found it empty.

"Now then, young gents—now then!" said the lift attendant reprovingly. "In a bit of a 'urry, ain't you?"

"Yes!" gasped Church. "Quick! For goodness' sake, send this lift up! Never mind the other passengers! We're having a bit of trouble with our pal."

"Be a sportsman!" urged McClure.

They clung on to Handforth like leeches, and Handforth struggled violently.

"Let me go!" he bellowed. "By George! I'll half skin you for this! I'll—I'll——"

"Perhaps it'll be as well," said the attendant thoughtfully.

He cast a quick glance at the schoolboys, and another glance at the ordinary passengers who were coming along the subway. There were plenty of other lifts.

He touched a couple of buttons, and the gates automatically clanged to, leaving Handforth & Co. alone in that particular lift.

It commenced its upward journey.

"Good man!" said Church, with relief. "He is a sportsman!"

## CHAPTER 2.

### Rather Awkward!

**H**ANDFORTH'S feelings were too deep for words. He had just caught a glimpse of his heroine as she was led towards the lifts by her companion. Only that one glimpse, and then the lift had gone up, cutting her from his view.





"You rotters!" he panted thickly. "You think you've beaten me, don't you? But wait until we get to the top!"

"We shall be all right then!" said Church. "Nipper and Travers and a gang of the other chaps are waiting for us. They'll jolly well see that you don't start any of your tommy rot! I'm surprised at you, Handy! Falling in love with strange girls in Tube trains!"

Handforth coloured.

"I didn't fall in love!" he said fiercely. "But that girl was in distress——"

"Draw it mild!" protested McClure. "How the dickens do you know that she was in distress?"

"I could see it in her eyes!"

"Oh, my hat!" said Church helplessly.

"When this lift gets to the top, I'll show you whether I'm to be put off or not!" went on Handforth. "You and the rest of the chaps can clear off to Lord's. I'm not interested in cricket this morning."

"But it's Whit Monday!" said McClure. "And all the chaps are expecting us to——"

"Let them expect!" broke in Handforth coldly. "That girl needs my help. I don't know who the man is, but I believe he's a crook!"

"Yes; and for two pins you'd have told him so to his face!" said Church, in exasperation. "You'll finish by getting yourself locked up, Handy! You can't go about London forcing your attentions upon girls because they happen to be a bit worried——"

"Hallo!" said Mac. "We've stopped!"

There had been something about the stoppage, too, which did not seem to be normal. The lift had given a jarring jerk, and had then jolted to a standstill. It was still some little distance from the top.

"THAT'S done it!" said Church, after a pause

"Done what?" asked Handforth.

"The lift's stuck!"

"It's stopped, if that's what you mean——"

"It must have stuck!" insisted Church. "These lifts are automatic—the attendant just pushes the button, the lift goes right up to the top, and then the gates automatically open. At least, that's what they're supposed to do. This one must have had a relapse."

An expression of alarm came into Handforth's eyes.

"Do you mean to say that we're bottled up here?" he asked, looking round wildly. "Hey!" he added, in a roar. "Do something, somebody! We're stuck!"

"It's no good yelling!" protested McClure. "They'll get the lift going again as soon as they can. Thank goodness we're alone!" he added fervently. "Things would have been a lot worse if a crowd of people had been in here, too."

"Why don't they do something?" shouted Handforth frantically. "I was going to wait at the top for the next lift to come up! That girl—— I mean——"

"You're dished, Handy, old man," said Church sympathetically. "I expect the other lifts are working all right, and your lady-love will naturally pass out of your life. And you didn't even know her name."

Handforth clenched his fists, and stamped up and down.

"Why don't they do something?" he asked hoarsely. "My only hat! It's always the way! Just when you want to be particularly quick, or when there's a special reason why nothing should go wrong, everything goes wrong!"

Church and McClure held different views. They regarded the lift stoppage as a most fortunate occurrence. For after Handforth was fully resigned to the fact that the girl was lost to him for good, he would probably become normal.

DOWN below, in the subway, as the rest of the passengers from that particular train were getting into another lift, the attendant gave an expressive grunt.

"No. 3's gone wrong again!" he said. "Well, it's a good thing that there are only three schoolboys in it."

"Aren't the lifts working?" asked one of the passengers.

"They're all right except No. 3," replied the attendant. "No 3 went wrong two days ago, and there was a whole crowd stuck in it for pretty nearly an hour. I don't reckon those boys will see daylight yet awhile."

There was only one person within earshot who received this piece of information with interest. That one person was Miss Winston. She allowed an eager light to appear in her eyes for a second—although her companion did not observe this.

He had placed a light grip on her arm, and, although she resented this, she made no attempt to free herself. There seemed to be something about Mr. Marshall which compelled her to treat him with much respect.

There was a considerable squash in the lift, and neither Mr. Marshall nor his companion said anything as the gates closed, and the lift commenced its ascent. The girl had allowed that momentarily-eager expression to die out of her eyes. She now seemed to have mingled sensations of fright and relief.

When they got to the top they noticed that a number of other schoolboys were waiting near the lifts. These schoolboys seemed to be highly animated, too—if not positively excited. Some sort of argument seemed to be in progress.

"I think we'll take a taxi," said Mr. Marshall pleasantly.

They were outside in the street now.

"Where are you taking me to?" asked the girl, glancing up.

"Vinc Street Police Station!"

"Oh, but why?" she asked indignantly. "It's not fair, Mr. Marshall! You've got nothing against me——"



"No?" interrupted Mr. Marshall, who was obviously a police detective. "We'll see about that. Anyhow, you're coming along with me to Vine Street. If I've made a mistake, I'll apologise most humbly."

His latter words were more or less sarcastic, and he was beckoning to a passing taxi as he voiced them. A moment later they were in the vehicle, and were speeding towards Vine Street Police Station.

Arriving there, the girl was soon taken into the charge-room.

**H**ANDFORTH shook his fists helplessly. "I'll have the Underground prosecuted for this!" he raved. "Five minutes! And still we're stuck here, half-way up the shaft! Can't we get out somehow? Can't we smash these gates, and climb up the cables?"

"Idiot!" said Church, as he leaned against one of the walls. "Those gates are as strong as a prison! There's no way of getting out of here until the lift starts going again, and gets us to the top."

"Take it calmly, old man," advised McClure.

"I won't take it calmly!" hooted Handforth.

"Then take it the other way," said Mac. "It won't make any difference, anyhow. Only I'm jiggered if I can see the sense in raving and shouting against the railway company. They can't help it!"

"They ought to have their lifts in proper working order," said Handforth sternly. "It's disgraceful! And just when we're in such a hurry— By George! Listen to that!"

They could hear a humming sound, and an expression of consternation and alarm came into Edward Oswald's eyes.

"It's the next lift!" he ejaculated. "My only hat! The other lifts are working!"

"Only just found that out?" asked McClure, with a sniff. "I heard 'em two or three minutes ago!"

"Then—then that girl must have got to the top by now!"

"Ages ago," said Church, nodding. "My dear chap, why think any more about that girl? She's gone—lost for ever! You'll never see her again."

"And a jolly good thing, too!" said McClure. "I'm surprised at you, Handy! Getting excited like this just because a strange girl gives you the glad eye!"

"She didn't!" protested Handforth hotly. "I'll punch you on the nose, Arnold McClure, if you say that again! She didn't give me the glad eye!"

"Then you gave her the glad eye," said Mac. "What's the difference? There's Irene waiting for you at Lord's ground! You don't deserve to have a ripping girl like Irene for a chum!"

Handforth had the decency to turn red.

"Irene's all right," he said quickly. "In

fact, she's a jolly fine girl. But you don't understand. This other girl—this one in the train—was in distress. The man was worrying her."

"How do you know?"

"I could see it in her eyes," replied Handforth promptly. "She looked positively scared. There was a sort of hunted expression in her eyes."

"You must have looked into her eyes pretty thoroughly to see that," said Church. "I only just caught a glimpse of them. Green, weren't they?"

"Yes, a glorious green— Eh?" said Handforth, with a start. "No, you silly fat-head! They weren't green! They were



brown! Topping brown eyes, full of tenderness."

"I thought you were partial to blue eyes?" asked Mac. "Irene's eyes are blue, aren't they?"

"Never mind!" said Handforth, who was really very worried. "I'm sure that girl needed help. And now, because of this rotten stoppage, we're diddled! I expect she's a mile away by this time."

"Probably two miles," nodded Church. "So why worry? It's no good crying over spilt milk, Handy. Forget the girl, and—"

"There might still be a chance if only we could get out of this beastly lift!" said Handforth fiercely. "Hi! Why doesn't somebody do something?"

He seized the iron trellis-work of the gate and rattled it, shouting violently at the same time.

"All right—all right!" came a voice from somewhere—it was difficult to tell whether from below or above. "Don't get excited. We'll have the lift going again within a few minutes."

"There you are!" said Church. "There's no need to— Hallo! What the— Great Scott!"

The lift had given a sudden jolt, descending for about a foot, and then pulling up again with a violent jerk.

"I thought we were going to drop down sheer!" said McClure, with a gasp. "I say! I hope they don't make a mess of it, you know. It'll be all up with us if this lift suddenly drops!"



"It can't do that," said Church. "There are all sorts of safety devices. I expect they're trying to get the mechanism going again."

"It's about time they finished with these silly lifts!" grunted Handforth. "There ought to be nothing but escalators."

The lift gave another jerk, proving that something was being done, at all events. It was all the more exasperating because the lift was only ten or twelve feet from the top. Yet this, of course, made no difference. Handforth & Co. were securely imprisoned, and there would be no escape for them until the mechanism was re-started.

In the station lobby, rapidly becoming impatient, stood a group of other St. Frank's boys. Nipper was prominent, with Tommy Watson and Tregellis-West, his own study-mates. Vivian Travers was there, too—and Archie Glenthorpe, Reggie Pitt, Castleton, Fullwood and a few others.

"We can always rely upon Handy to make a mess of things," Tommy Watson was saying. "He can't even meet us by appointment without being late. The cricket match is just about starting now, too. Unless we buck up we shall never get in. It's Bank Holiday, don't forget."

"Draw it mild, old man," protested Nipper. "It's hardly fair to blame Handy this time. He couldn't help the lift going wrong, could he?"

"I suppose not," admitted Watson. "But why the dickens did he choose this particular lift?"

"It's the very one he would choose, dear old fellow," said Travers, with a chuckle. "If Handy doesn't get into trouble of his own making, then he finds trouble of some other sort. It comes natural with him."

Reggie Pitt joined them.

"They're saying that it'll be fifteen or twenty minutes before they can get the lift going again," he remarked. "I've just asked one of the officials."

"Hard lines," said Nipper. "We've got to wait, of course. It would hardly be sporting of us to go off, leaving these three chaps in the lurch."

"Oh, rather!" said Archie Glenthorpe. "Absolutely! What about the good old waiting-room? Isn't there a place here where a chappie can spread his bones?"

"There's Hyde Park just across the road," said Castleton. "Tons of grass there, Archie."

"Good gad, no!" said Archie. "If you chappies are staying here, I'll stay with you. I mean, it's up to us to rally round, what? I suppose we couldn't do something to help?"

"I'm afraid not," said Nipper. "We've simply got to wait—and the worst of it is, we don't know how long the wait will be."

However, they were all agreed that it was up to them to stand by until Handforth & Co. were released from their imprisonment.

## CHAPTER 3

### Developments!

CHIEF DETECTIVE - INSPECTOR LENNARD, of Scotland Yard, walked briskly into Vine Street Police Station.

"Morning, Marshall," he said to the divisional detective-sergeant. "Any results?"

"We don't know yet, sir," said Marshall. "The girl's being searched now."

"Well, let's hope there's some definite result," said the Yard man, with a frown. "But I'm not particularly hopeful. Besides, we've really got nothing against him—yet."

"Well, this girl is Mortimer's niece," said the detective-sergeant. "I've had my eye on her for some little time. She's been mixed up in one or two jobs, although I haven't actually caught her with the goods yet."

"What made you bring her in?" asked Lennard.

"Well, I was really keeping an eye on Mortimer," replied the detective-sergeant. "He'd no idea I was observing him, and he went as far as Tottenham Court Road on the Underground. He met his niece in one of the subways, and I'll swear he passed her a little package."

"Oh!" said Lennard, opening his eyes.

"It was pretty quick work, but I was on the look-out for something of that sort," went on Marshall complacently. "Anyhow, when Mortimer parted from the girl I let him go. I thought the girl needed looking after."

"Quite right, too," said the chief inspector. "You think he passed her the diamonds, eh?"

"Well, it looks pretty fishy, doesn't it, sir?"

"Anyhow, you were wise in bringing the girl in," said the Yard man. "If Mortimer slipped her a package, it's ten to one that that package contained the Kingsway diamonds."

Just at present Scotland Yard was giving quite a lot of attention to the affair of the famous Kingsway diamonds. Several days earlier Lady Kingsway, the wife of Lord Kingsway, had been robbed. Her celebrated diamonds, valued at something like seventy-five thousand pounds, had been taken from her Park Lane flat.

The job had obviously been done by an expert cat-burglar, and Scotland Yard ever since had been closely watching the movements of several likely suspects. Sam Mortimer was one of them. There was really nothing to connect him with this particular robbery, but he was a man who had been more than once convicted of similar burglaries, and his movements, in consequence, were watched with great interest by the police.

Chief-inspector Lennard was in charge of the case, and so far there had been no definite result. There had been many lines of inquiry, but all had led to nothing.

This morning's incident, therefore, was particularly interesting. If Sam Mortimer had passed a package to his niece, the matter, apparently so trivial, was significant.





“My only hat! She’s pinched your mac!” ejaculated Church. Handforth spun round in a rage. He wasn’t going to hear Margaret spoken of like that— And then he started. He was just in time to see the girl running towards an exit, and over her arm was his mackintosh!

Mortimer knew that he was being watched, and if he really had the diamonds he would naturally go to considerable pains to get rid of them. And perhaps he had felt that his niece would make a safe go-between. Perhaps she had been on her way to convey the loot to a “fence,” or receiver.

“Who is this girl?” asked Lennard whilst they waited.

“Oh, she’s a rather decent sort, I believe,” replied Marshall. “Not the ordinary type, anyhow. A cut above Mortimer. Father’s a sailor, I believe, and spends most of his time at sea. The girl’s been living with her uncle for a month or two now—ever since her mother died.”

“H’m!” grunted the Yard man. “The girl’s probably decent enough; but, with a man like Sam Mortimer in charge of her, she’s liable to go crooked. A pity! I hate anything like that.”

“Yes, sir, it’s a bit rough on her,” said the other. “A year ago, I imagine, she was as innocent as any schoolgirl. It’s since her mother died that Mortimer has been influencing her. But what else can you expect? She lives with him, having nowhere else to go. After all, he’s her uncle, and with her father at sea most of the time—”

He was interrupted by the appearance of Miss Winston herself, accompanied by a wardress.

“Well?” asked Lennard sharply.

“Nothing, sir,” replied the wardress. “I’ve searched her, but there’s nothing on her.”

The chief inspector shrugged his shoulders, and Marshall uttered an exclamation of annoyance.

“Hang it! I’ll swear I saw— Look here, Miss Winston, why not come out with it?” he asked bluntly. “What was it that your uncle gave to you in the subway?”

The girl looked at him with cold disdain.

“I hope you’re satisfied, Mr. Marshall,” she said scornfully. “My uncle gave me some money, if you want to know. Being Bank Holiday, I was going out to enjoy myself. I’d arranged to meet some girl friends—”

“Yes, yes, of course,” interrupted the detective-sergeant. “That’s all very well. But are you sure that Mortimer didn’t pass you something else—in addition to some money?”

“I’m quite sure,” she said steadily.

They questioned her further, but it was no good. And, as they had absolutely nothing against her, they were obliged to let her go. Indeed, Chief Inspector Lennard was of the frank opinion that Marshall had made a mistake.

**T**HE girl’s expression changed completely a minute after she had left the police station.

Her look of injured innocence deserted her. She became agitated and almost feverish. One might have supposed that she would be intensely relieved to get out of the hands of the police. Yet she seemed utterly and completely frantic.



In spite of her agitation, however, she made sure that no police officers were following her. She secured a taxi-cab, and directed the driver to go to Marble Arch.

"It's the only way!" she told herself tensely. "They might be able to let me know where those boys went to. Yet it's doubtful. But if I can only find that boy, everything will be all right. If I have to go back and tell uncle I've lost——"

She paused, drawing her breath in quickly, and her eyes became frightened—terrified.

"He'll kill me!" she whispered to herself. "Oh, if I have to tell him that he'll kill me!"

The one thought which kept throbbing through her brain was that the lift had stuck in the shaft at the Marble Arch Tube station. How long had those boys been imprisoned in the lift? Practically an hour had passed since the mishap. By now they would be gone—perhaps on the other side of London—without any clue regarding the route they had taken. And that mackintosh, carelessly slung over Handforth's arm——

"But what else could I do?" asked the girl fiercely. "If I hadn't done it the police would have found the package on me, and that would have been worse than this!"

It was some little consolation to realise that she had saved the situation by her prompt sleight-of-hand performance. The police were not likely to bother her again to-day. If only she could get on the track of those schoolboys she might yet save the entire situation.

She reached Marble Arch station, dismissed the taxi, and her heart nearly leapt into her mouth when she beheld a crowd of schoolboys laughing and talking just inside the station.

"Oh!" she murmured, hardly able to credit her good fortune.

"**A**BOUT time, too!" said Handforth wrathfully.

"It's no good kicking, old man," said Nipper. "You weren't kept in the lift for much longer than an hour——"

"An hour!" yelled Handforth. "Isn't that enough? I'm going to tell my pater to write to the Underground about this!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"They didn't do it on purpose, you ass!" said Fullwood. "Mishaps like that are always liable to happen. You were just unlucky, that's all."

None of the other juniors could quite understand Edward Oswald Handforth's frantic excitement. There had been a long delay in getting the lift working again; but the incident was over now, so what was the good of grumbling? It was like Handforth to make a fuss, but even he was acting rather strangely.

"It wouldn't have been so bad if all the lifts had got stuck," he said, looking round with searching eyes. "But the other lifts kept working, didn't they? I mean, the other passengers came up and went out?"

"Of course they did," said Nipper.

And that was over an hour ago!" groaned Handforth. "Oh, why didn't all the lifts go wrong?"

"Here, I say, dash it!" protested Archie. "I mean, somewhat uncharitable, what?"

"He doesn't mean to be," said Church. "He's only thinking about the girl."

"The girl?" chorused the other St. Frank's juniors.

"He met some girl in the train," said Church relentlessly. "Not a bad looking girl, I'll admit that. About sixteen or seventeen, I should think, jolly smartly dressed and quite nice-looking. Poor old Handy was smitten."

"You—you——" began Handforth, colouring.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"There was some fellow in the train talking to her, and Handy didn't like it," put in McClure. "He thought she was being bothered, or something, and he started butting in. Churchy and I whisked him away to the lift, and by a piece of bad luck we got in the wrong one!"

"The right one, I think," grinned Nipper. "It made him lose the girl!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, it's no good looking for her now," said Travers. "Well, well! Our fickle Handy! And there's the fair Irene at Lord's, probably waiting anxiously to see his rugged face! If she only knew!"

"You silly, hulking great idiot!" roared Handforth. "Blow Lord's! I don't want to see cricket now! I'm going to make inquiries——"

"Grab him!" sang out Nipper. "That girl must have gone from here an hour ago, and there's no telling where she is now. Come on! We'll all get to Lord's at once. It's Bank Holiday, and the chances are that we shall find the gates closed. Still, you never know your luck."

Nipper and the other fellows were intensely amused when they heard the full details of Handforth's latest "affair." There was nothing new in this. He was liable to be attacked at any moment. Without any warning Handforth would fall in love with a waitress, or a shop assistant, or a flag-day collector. Church and McClure were always having trouble with him of that kind.

But just at present he seemed to be more severely "bitten" than usual. Perhaps this was because he had seen that hunted look in the girl's eyes.

For once Handforth had not been mistaken. Miss Winston actually had been hunted, and her anxiety had been real enough. Furthermore, he seemed to have lost her, without the slightest hope of ever seeing her again. This was another reason for his unhappiness. Cricket had completely lost its charm for him. He had no desire to go to Lord's. Yet, on the other hand, he knew perfectly well that to look for that girl in the whole of London would be about as difficult as looking for a needle in a haystack.



And then, just as he was being hustled out of the station by the other fellows, he gave a gasp of sheer, unbelievable astonishment.

"There she is!" he ejaculated breathlessly.

Church and McClure jumped. They were staring in the same direction as Handforth, and they were just in time to see a smartly dressed girl crossing the road. Her slim, silken-clad legs fairly twinkled as she ran across the road, avoiding the traffic.

"It can't be the same girl!" said Church scornfully. "She must have left here ages ago——"

"It is the same!" ejaculated Handforth. "Do you think I don't know? She looked at me just now. I saw her face—— There you are! Didn't you see her glance round?"

"Great Scott!" said McClure, startled. "Handy's right! That's the same girl, sure enough!"

"Whoa! Hold him!" grinned Nipper. "All hands to the pumps, you chaps! We can't have our Handy chasing girls in the public streets! What next?"

And Edward Oswald Handforth, much to his indignation, was seized by many hands and held in check.

#### CHAPTER 4.

##### Looking After Handy!

"LET me go!" gasped Handforth, struggling wildly. "You rotters! You traitors! Let me go!"

"Not this time, old man," said Church gently. "We're all going to Lord's—together. It's rummy about that girl. One might almost think that she had been waiting about on purpose to meet you again."

"That's not unlikely," said Travers. "Perhaps he was smitten, too. We don't appreciate Handy's features, but I understand that the young ladies go positively crazy over it."

"Handy's face is enough to send anybody crazy!" said McClure bluntly.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, she's gone now," said Nipper. "Let's find a bus."

Handforth was boiling; but he could do nothing against so many opponents. In spite of his objections and his yells, he was forced on to the top of a bus on the corner of Edgware Road, and his new hope had been killed. For the elusive Miss Winston had vanished again.

AS a matter of fact, Miss Margaret Winston was not very far off. Having heard that the schoolboys were bound for Lord's Cricket Ground, she quickly came to a decision. Her original intention had been to buttonhole Handforth immediately, making some sort of pretext for speaking to him. Then she had

suddenly seen that this plan would be futile, for Handforth's mackintosh, which had been so carelessly flung over his arm earlier, was now neatly rolled up, and tucked into his trousers pocket. She could just see the end of it, sticking out.

In a flash, she knew that any further sleight-of-hand business was out of the question. In her extremity—that is to say, finding Detective-sergeant Marshall on her track—she had slipped a little package into the pocket of Handforth's mac. At the time, she had believed that she could easily recover it. But now the problem looked like being a ticklish one.

It must be confessed that it was rather a shock for the niece of Sam Mortimer, the notorious cat-burglar. She felt that she had blundered, and she paled at the thought of making her explanations to her uncle. By hook or by crook, she must get that little package back.

But how?

In an instant she realised that it would be foolish to make the attempt now with so many schoolboys surrounding Handforth. Far better to await a favourable

opportunity. And Miss Winston displayed commendable presence of mind. She jumped into a taxi, and told the driver to take her to Lord's Cricket Ground. The schoolboys were going by bus, so it was obvious that she would get there first.

Having arrived, she sauntered about, waiting. But it cannot be truthfully said that her mind was settled. She was in a fever of impatience—of anxiety. And above all her concern for the recovery of that package was the shadow of her uncle's rage.

Indeed, it seemed incredible that such a refined, charming girl as this could be in any way associated with such a rascal as Sam Mortimer. There seemed to be something definitely wrong in this state of affairs. Margaret Winston, as anybody could tell at the first glance, was a really fine girl. Her eyes were frank and open; no dishonesty or cunning dwelt within those brown depths. Strangely enough, Handforth had been quite right when he had read the message of fear in those eyes. And they haunted him strangely. He felt sorry for her.

Yet his schoolfellows laughed at him—scoffed at him. They thought he was interested in the girl for other reasons. Handforth pondered. Of course, the girl certainly was a stunner. She would make a topping friend. He pictured himself going along with her arm-in-arm, her nearness thrilling him—— Handforth pulled himself up with a start. By George! Of course he wasn't interested in the girl—except to the extent of wanting to help her. His chums utterly failed to appreciate the true position. If it came to that, Handforth failed to appreciate it, too!





WHEN he arrived at Lord's, his interest in cricket had given its final flicker and had become extinguished. He hadn't the faintest desire to see a minute of the match. As eager as the other fellows were to watch the play, Handforth was just as eager to get right away from the ground.

Yet what was the use? Where could he go? How could he hope to find his new heroine amidst London's millions? It was all the more exasperating because he had found her again after she had apparently been lost for good. He had seen her at Marble Arch—only to be held back by the juniors until she had once more vanished. Handforth's feelings were too deep for words.

"Buck up, Handy, old man," said Nipper, slapping him on the back. "Here we are! Things aren't so bad. The match has only just started. It was a good thing we originally arranged to get here an hour before the kick-off."

"Kick-off?" said Handforth dully. "Oh, it's a football match, is it? I'd forgotten. Blow it!"

"You ass, it's cricket!" said Nipper. "I didn't actually mean kick-off, but—"

"Football or cricket, I don't care a toss!" interrupted Handforth. "I'm not keen on it. Why did I come here? This is a fine Bank Holiday for me—I don't think!"

"You'd better forget that girl, old man," said Gresham gently. "You've lost her now, anyway."

"Yes, and it was all your fault!" said Handforth fiercely. "Blow you all! You can laugh at me as much as you like, but I tell you that girl was in distress!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"A damsel in distress!" said Reggie Pitt gravely. "Set forth, O goodly knight, and do they deeds of chivalry! Methinks the wench had designs on thy pocket-book, O Unsuspicious One."

"She hadn't!" retorted Handforth hotly. "Do you think I don't know? You didn't see her as I did! I'll never forgive you for this, you rotters!"

"Oh, come on!" said Church. "Let's get inside. I expect we shall find Irene waiting for us, and perhaps she'll be able to put things right."

Handforth started.

"By George!" he said. "I'd forgotten that Irene was here. Don't let her see me, you chaps! She's a ripping girl, but she mightn't understand. Don't tell her—"

"Rely on us, dear old fellow," said Travers gently. "We'll be models of diplomacy. Girls are frightfully interesting creatures, bless 'em, but you've got to be dashed tactful with them."

The juniors crowded through the turnstile, and found themselves in the great enclosure. There was plenty of room on the wide terrace, where it was possible to stroll about, watching the play, in comfort. They did not attempt to secure any seats in the stands yet.

Much to Handforth's relief, there was no sign of Irene Manners, or Marjorie Temple,

or Doris Berkeley, or any of the other Moor View schoolgirls. As a rule, Handforth was more eager than anybody else to greet these young ladies; but to-day he had no enthusiasm for them. The girl in the Tube train filled his thoughts to the exclusion of all others, even including the fair Irene.

"Late again!" said Reggie Pitt, with a hopeless gesture. "Oh, these girls! My sister's as bad as any of 'em. They turn up an hour late, and calmly think that they're well on time!"

"A weakness of the fair sex, dear old fellow," said Travers smiling. "We must be indulgent with them. And to-day, as you must admit, it doesn't matter. They're bound to find us here when they turn up."

"Yes—if they manage to get in," said Reggie. "The crowds are still pouring through the turnstiles, and Winnie and the other girls may find themselves shut out."

"By Jingo! That was a ripping knock!" said Church enthusiastically. "A boundary, you chaps! Who's batting?"

"Don't ask me!" said Handforth gruffly. "I'm not watching."

"My hat! Still thinking about that girl?"

"Yes, I am!" retorted Handforth. "I've finished with you chaps! You're a crowd of heartless rotters! I tell you, that girl was in acute distress. I could see the agony in her eyes. I'm not spoofing, blow you!"

"Of course you're not, old son," said McClure gently. "We know that you meant well. But do you seriously think that the girl would have allowed you to help her? Dash it, you can't go butting into the affairs of perfect strangers, Handy! She would only have snubbed you for your pains. Better forget her, and enjoy the cricket."

"I wish I knew where she went," said Handforth gloomily.

"Well, you'll never find her now, so make up your mind to enjoy the cricket," said Church. "It's a glorious day for the game. No sign of rain, and— By the way, what did you do with your mackintosh?" he added sharply. "You haven't lost it, have you?"

"No; I rolled it up and shoved it in my pocket."

"We told you not to bring it," put in McClure. "You don't need a mackintosh to-day, Handy: there's going to be no rain."

"One of you chaps had better take charge of it," said Handforth, pulling the folded garment out and handing it over. "I'm fed up with it, anyhow."

"Well, I like that!" said Church indignantly. "We told you not to bring the mac., and now you shove it on to us!"

But they took it all the same—partly because they felt that Handforth would inevitably lose it before the day was over if it was left in his care.

He wandered off disconsolately, and Church and McClure regarded him anxiously for a few moments. Then they looked rather rebellious.

"What are we going to do—spend the

(Continued on page 14.)



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# HANDFORTH'S HOLIDAY FLIRTATION!



(Continued from page 12.)

whole day looking after Handy, or are we going to watch the cricket?" asked Church.

"Watch the cricket!" replied McClure promptly. "Blow Handy! There's a limit in all things, and I'm jiggered if we're going to waste our whole day. Besides, there's no danger that he'll wander far. He knows jolly well he won't be able to find that girl again."

Curiously enough, at that very moment Handforth had spotted her!

**E**DWARD OSWALD could hardly believe the evidence of his eyes.

He had given up all hope of seeing Miss Winton again after he and his chums had been released from the lift. Then he had seen her—only to be held back by the juniors until she had once more vanished. Now, by all that was miraculous, here she was again! In Lord's Cricket Ground—in the very same enclosure as himself!

Handforth did not pause to consider that such an occurrence was far beyond the bounds of ordinary coincidence. He was only aware of the astounding fact that here she was—and, to make things even more wonderful, she was actually smiling at him!

"By George!" he breathed.

He pulled himself together, and looked hastily round. Some of the other juniors were within sight. But this time he did not make any blunder; he did not shout aloud, or make any sudden move. Experience is a great teacher, and Handforth acted with great caution. He pretended to become very interested in the cricket, then, gradually, he edged his way clear of the St. Frank's fellows, as though seeking to obtain a clearer point of vantage.

Actually, he was edging his way nearer to the girl.

He glanced at her again. She was apparently not expecting that sudden look, for he surprised her. She was gazing at him anxiously, almost feverishly; and in her eyes there was that same light of tense worry. Yet she smiled instantly now.

Handforth pushed his way past a few people, and raised his cap.

"I—I say, this is pretty good, you know," he said clumsily. "Awfully pleased to see you again. I—I mean, I thought——"

"Why, isn't it the boy who was in the Tube train?" asked Margaret Winston, in a friendly manner. "I knew I had seen you before somewhere. Isn't it glorious here?"

And the ice, so to speak, was definitely broken.

## CHAPTER 5.

### Not so Easy!

**M**MARGARET WINSTON was bitterly disappointed.

The mackintosh had vanished from Handforth's pocket! And, after all, that mackintosh was the only reason why she was interested in this rugged youth. For himself she cared nothing. For the mackintosh she cared nothing. But she certainly wanted the little package that reposed in the coat pocket. Now she saw that Handforth had somehow discarded the garment. A horrifying thought occurred to her that he might have lost it. It was a point that must be cleared up without any delay.

"I love cricket," she said, as though trying to find an easy subject for conversation. "The only thing that spoils it is the rain."

"I don't think there'll be any rain to-day," said Handforth, glancing at the blue sky.

"But didn't you have a mackintosh when I saw you before?"

"I was an ass to bring it," said Handforth, nodding. "I gave it to two of my chums to look after. They were afraid I should lose it, I expect," he added, with a grin. "I'm a bit careless with my togs."

"I hope they're not careless," said Margaret fervently.

"That's jolly nice of you—to be concerned for my giddy mackintosh," grinned Handforth. "But you needn't worry—it'll be as safe as houses with those chaps. I say, if it isn't butting in, or anything like that, was that chap bothering you in the Tube? I mean, I wanted to punch him in the eye——"

"I'm glad you didn't," interrupted the girl, laughing. "He was only an acquaintance, and I—well, I soon got rid of him. I would rather you didn't mention him again."

She was slightly relieved, although she could see no solution to her problem. It was not so easy! The thing which had appeared to be so childishly simple was presenting all sorts of snags. There was an elusive quality in that mackintosh!

Somehow or other, she must get possession of Handforth's mackintosh. She had saved herself from Detective-sergeant Marshall by her swift action in the Tube train; but she was almost as badly off now. True, she was not harassed by the police; but when she thought of her uncle, and of his anger, if she failed to deliver that package, she trembled.

She looked at Handforth, and she could see the admiring light in his eyes. This fellow would not be so difficult to deal with. She must lead him on—she must pretend to be interested in him, and later, perhaps, she would secure an opportunity of getting possession of his mackintosh.

Margaret flushed guiltily as she glanced away. She felt that the whole thing was contemptible. She was ashamed of herself for the trick she was perpetrating. Behind her feeling of guilt was a different



emotion. She was resentful against her uncle—she was angry. It was he who had forced her into this contemptible position. Once or twice she had felt like abandoning the whole thing; then, when she remembered that her father was at sea and that she had no home but her uncle's, she was compelled to swallow her anger.

She had sense enough to know that she was being used as a tool. Her rascally uncle, feeling certain that she would not be suspected, had employed her as a go-between. But the police had been clever enough to detect this dodge, and it was only by Margaret's presence of mind that grave trouble had been averted.

Margaret went hot and cold as she thought of her recent adventure with the police. She knew that that package contained the famous Kingsway diamonds. If they had been found on her she would have been arrested, and no doubt she would have been convicted as her uncle's accomplice and sent to prison.

It was small wonder that Margaret Winston boiled with inward anger. It was shameful that her uncle should have subjected her to that danger. For, to tell the truth without any further delay, Margaret was a good, honest girl, with an utter horror of her uncle's roguery. Yet Mortimer was her guardian, and his home was her home. Short of running away—which, indeed, she had often contemplated—she could do nothing but suffer his bullying and petty persecution.

"Penny for them!" came a cheerful voice.

Margaret started, and found Handforth regarding her with frank amusement and admiration. She could not help flushing again. She could see that this schoolboy was as honest as the daylight, and as innocent of her real purpose as a baby. She felt extraordinarily guilty, and her self-contempt was even greater than before.

Yet she must go on with it! Failure to recover that package would mean a terrible quarrel with her uncle. He would beat her—as he had beaten her before—brutally, and cruelly. And she dreaded the thought of running away from her home now—for she was expecting her father's ship to arrive in port any day. Besides, where could she go, even if she ran away? She had no money—her uncle saw to that—and she had no friends. Sam Mortimer's associates were not the kind of people with whom Margaret could mix.

She was a determined little lady, this girl. And she made up her mind, then and there, that she would get that package back, return it to her uncle, and tell him point-blank that she would have nothing further to do with his evil plans. He had trusted her with that package, and she must recover it. She would not betray this rogue, richly as he deserved arrest and imprisonment. After all, he was her own flesh and blood—at least, he was her mother's brother—and for

her dead mother's sake it was impossible for her to betray him.

"You don't seem to be very interested in the cricket," remarked Handforth wonderingly.

"I—I was thinking," said Margaret, in a low voice. "It's nothing. Please don't look so concerned."

"But I am concerned," said Handforth doggedly. "You were thinking about that man who bothered you in the train, weren't you? By George! I wish you'd let me help you, Miss—Miss——"

"Margaret Winston is my name."

"Margaret!" said Handforth dreamily. "By George! That's a ripping name! I wish you'd let me help you, Miss Margaret. It's no good trying to spoof me, you know. I'm positive that something is worrying you. There's an awful scared look in your eyes."

The girl started; she had not realised that her distress was so obvious.

"I'm sorry," she said quietly. "I am a bit worried, I suppose—but I don't think you can help me."

"If you'll only tell me——"

"Please!" said the girl steadily.

"Oh, all right!" said Handforth. "You know best, I suppose. All the same, I hope you'll change your mind."

"Where are your friends?" asked Margaret abruptly.

"Eh? Oh, somewhere about, I think—watching the cricket!" said Handforth. "I say, they'll only chip me if they see us together. How about going somewhere? The Zoo, for example? It's not far off. Only a short walk, I believe. We're comparatively near to Regent's Park."

"I don't think I should like to go to the Zoo, thank you," said Margaret, shaking her head.

"Madame Tussauds, then," said Handforth eagerly. "It'll be ripping there to-day."

"On Whit Monday?" asked the girl dryly. "I'm afraid it will be very crowded, Mr.—Mr.——"

"Oh, rats! Don't call me mister anything. My name's Ted Handforth. I'm a St. Frank's fellow, you know. I'm called Ted—although most of the chaps call me Handy."

"Then I'll call you Handy, if you don't mind," said Margaret. "And I'd much rather remain here—Handy. I should very much like to meet your friends."

Handforth started.





This was the last thing he desired; but, since she suggested it, there was nothing else for it but to fall in with her wishes. He could not guess that her main reason for wanting to meet his friends was to locate the exact whereabouts of the fateful mackintosh.

Fortunately Handforth had forgotten all about Irene Manners. He was very friendly with Irene, and he held her in high esteem. Yet he might have been reluctant to face his girl chum when accompanied by this comparative stranger. Irene might easily have wondered who she was, and why Handforth was making such a fuss of her. Not that there was any nonsense about Irene; she was a sensible girl, and she would probably be more amused than jealous.

**H**OWEVER, Church and McClure acted promptly when they saw Handforth approaching through the crowd with Margaret Winston by his side. As it happened, Irene was talking to Church and McClure at the moment, asking them where their leader was. They could have told her, but they didn't.

"Supposing we pop round to the refreshment place?" suggested Church hastily. "Handy may be having a ginger-pop, or something. Anyhow, it'll be something to do."

"But don't you want to watch the cricket?" asked Irene wonderingly.

"The cricket? Oh, rather!" said Church. "But that doesn't matter for the minute. You want Handy, and we'll try to find him. Come on! This way!"

They fairly seized Irene, and hustled her off. She thought it rather peculiar, but she had no suspicion as to the real reason for their haste.

Arriving at the refreshment-room, they pretended to search, and, having failed to locate Edward Oswald, they suggested an ice-cream. Irene was by no means averse.

Outside, Handforth was looking eagerly for his chums. There was a defiant light in his eyes. He would introduce Margaret to them, and they could go to the dickens! By George! He would show them that he wasn't the sort of fellow to be choked off! They had tried to prevent him meeting this girl, and he had got the better of them all along the line!

"Well, well! Who's your lady friend, dear old fellow?"

Handforth turned and found Vivian Travers politely raising his cap. Harry Gresham and Jimmy Potts and Nipper were there, too. They also doffed their caps.

"Oh, rather!" said Handforth briskly. "This is Miss Margaret Winston, you chaps. Miss Margaret, these are the chaps."

"I'm very pleased to meet you," said Margaret, smiling.

"I'm afraid Handy is a bit careless in his introductions, Miss Winston," said Nipper, grinning. "I think perhaps we'd better tell your our names."

And Nipper himself performed the intro-

duction in a more formal manner. Margaret seemed very charmed, and she shook hands all round. However, she failed to see any sign of that mackintosh, and her heart began to sink.

"But I thought you had some other friends?" she asked, looking at Handforth.

"Oh, you mean Church and McClure?" said Edward Oswald. "Rather! They're my special pals, you know. Two of the best. It's just like them to be out of the way when they're wanted. Has anybody here seen Church and McClure knocking about?"

"I think they're with Irene," said Reggie Pitt solemnly.

Reggie had come up in time to be introduced, and Handforth started guiltily at Reggie's words.

"Oh, Irene!" he said, trying to speak carelessly. "A friend of mine, Miss Margaret," he added, with a wave of his hand. "You'll like Irene when you meet her."

"I'm sure I shall, if she's a friend of yours," said Margaret.

"Let's go and find her," said Handforth.

"Your two special friends have got your mackintosh, haven't they?" asked Margaret.

"My mac? Yes," said Handforth. "But what does it matter? The sky's blue, and there's going to be no rain. There's no need for you to worry so much about the giddy thing."

He wondered, vaguely, why she should refer to the mackintosh again—and Margaret herself felt that it had been risky. But she was growing anxious—she was, indeed, becoming intensely worried.

She was all the more worried later, after a vain search for Church and McClure. They were not to be found anywhere—and in that great crowd there seemed little or no hope of ever locating them.

Perhaps this was because Church and McClure were doing their utmost to keep out of Handforth's way.

## CHAPTER 6.

### Very Suspicious!

"**I**T'S no good," said Handforth impatiently. "The fatheads have probably gone into one of the stands, and we'll never find them in this crowd. What does it matter, anyhow?"

Margaret Winston did not reply. She was feeling desperate now. All this trouble over a simple mackintosh! If only Handforth had kept possession of his property, the girl could have secured that little package long ago. As things were going, it seemed to her that she would be completely helpless. A sort of panic swept over her. She thought of what her uncle would say when she was obliged to make an explanation.

She and Handforth had paused where the crowd wasn't quite so dense, and she was pretending to watch the cricket. Handforth, looking at her, could not fail to observe that look in her eyes.





There came a click from the door and Handforth, swinging round, noticed that the portal was silently opening, inch by inch. "What the——" began Handy. He felt a curious sensation run down his spine. There was something very mysterious and sinister about all this!

"I say, why don't you tell me what's wrong?" he asked impulsively. "You're frightened, Miss Margaret."

"No, no!" she said quickly. "I mean—Really, it's nothing."

"You can't spoof me!" said Handforth. "It is something—and something big, too! Why are you looking so scared? It's—it's not right that a dainty, pretty girl like you—I—I mean, that you should be looking so miserable on such a sunny, glorious day."

"I wish it would rain!" said Margaret bitterly.

Handforth did not understand the hidden meaning of this remark.

"That's only because you're feeling depressed," he said. "Hang it, I don't want to butt into your affairs, Miss Margaret, but it seems to me that——"

"If you could help me, I would ask you," she interrupted quietly, and with very real distress. "But there's nothing that you can do—Handy. I want you to believe me."

"Oh, rather!" said Edward Oswald. "Of course! I mean, what rot! No, I don't mean that—— But, look here, it's a bit thick, you know," he protested. "It's as clear as daylight that you're jolly worried. And if you're worried, it means that there's some trouble on your mind. And if there's trouble it stands to reason that you need help. I'm here to——"

"Aren't these two boys some friends of yours?" interrupted the girl, trying to speak steadily.

Handforth turned round.

"By George! Yes! Rather!" he said. "Churchy and Mac! At last! I wonder where the dickens they have been all this time?"

Church and McClure were approaching, and Handforth was relieved to see that Irene Manners was not with them. Margaret found her heart beating more rapidly. For tucked under Church's arm was a folded mackintosh! These were the two boys who really mattered! She began to hope that she might yet recover that fateful package containing the stolen Kingsway Diamonds.

Indeed, she *had* to recover that package. These boys—absolutely innocent of any wrong-doing—might be involved in police proceedings if those diamonds were discovered on them. She could not possibly bring such trouble upon Handforth and his chums.

"Oh, so you've had the nerve to show yourselves?" asked Handforth, as his chums came up. "Where have you been all this time?"

"Oh, moving about among the crowds," said Church vaguely.

He and McClure raised their caps, and looked inquiringly at the girl. Handforth introduced them—rather grudgingly. He did not know that Church and McClure had had considerable difficulty in getting Irene safely out of the way.

These two juniors were frankly suspicious. Margaret was the girl who had been in the Tube train. Why was it that she was following Handforth about? They could not believe that her presence here, at Lord's, was a



mere coincidence. There was something behind all this—and Church and McClure could not help thinking that it was something sinister.

They were compelled to admit, however, that the girl looked harmless enough. In every way, indeed, she was a refined, charming girl. Quite different from what they had expected.

"You're a nice pair, I must say!" exclaimed Handforth accusingly. "When I want you, I can't find you! Supposing it had rained? What should I have done about my mackintosh?"

"Well, you told us to keep it, didn't you?" retorted Church. "We don't want your giddy mackintosh."

"Well, you can keep it now, all the same," said Handforth. "But don't wander away—"

"Don't you think you had better take your coat?" suggested Margaret, trying to speak carelessly. "There are a few clouds appearing, and if there should be a shower—"

"A shower wouldn't hurt me, Miss Margaret," said Handforth promptly. "Still, it's a pretty good idea. Your dress isn't particularly waterproof, now I come to look at it. I'll take that mac, Churchy. Nothing like being on the safe side."

"You're welcome to it," said Church, handing it over.

He managed to pull Handforth aside, and McClure edged himself between Edward Oswald and the girl.

"You—you silly ass!" hissed Church. "What's the idea?"

"The idea of what?"

"Getting so familiar with this girl—this stranger?" asked Church indignantly. "Calling her by her Christian name, too!"

"That's my business!" said Handforth stiffly.

"And here we've been keeping Irene out of your way for hours," continued Church rebelliously. "We're fed up with it, Handy. You're dotty! You don't even know who this girl is, or where she lives, or what her people are, or anything. She may be a pick-pocket for all you know. I don't believe she's on the square!"

Handforth nearly choked.

"You—you insulting rotter!" he panted. "If you say that again I'll slaughter you! Miss Margaret is a ripping girl!"

"Do you know where she lives?"

"Well, no, not exactly—"

"Do you know who her people are?"

"Well, no, not exactly—"

"Do you know why she happened to be at Marble Arch Station an hour after the lift got stuck?" asked Church relentlessly. "Do you know why she happened to be in this enclosure? Don't you think it all looks a bit fishy?"

"Well, no, not exactly—"

"He's turned into a parrot!" said McClure tartly.

"Even parrots have got brains—and Handy's proving that he doesn't possess a

shadow of one!" said Church. "This girl is up to some sort of mischief. She looks innocent enough, but she may be a confidence trickster. Those sort of people always look innocent. It's a part of their stock-in-trade, and—"

"That's enough!" broke in Handforth fiercely. "I've had more than I can stand! Don't you think my judgment is any good? Miss Margaret is one of the best, and I'm going to give you chaps a hiding for daring to suggest that she isn't on the square!"

From sheer force of habit he prepared to remove his jacket. The mackintosh slipped from under his arm and dropped to the ground. Margaret, who was standing quite near by, pretending to hear nothing of the altercation, picked the garment up and looked at it with gleaming eyes. She could feel a little lump amongst the folds. Her package! The one she had slipped into the pocket unknown to Handforth!

"Steady, Handy, you chump!" said Church, in alarm. "You can't do any scap-ping here! You'll get thrown out—"

"You fellows are going to be thrown out first," said Handforth, "and I'm going to do the throwing!"

Church and McClure were so busy preparing for the onslaught that it was only by sheer chance that Church happened to spot Margaret picking up the folded waterproof.

Church thought nothing of it. It seemed a trifle. It was a little service anybody would have performed. But what surprised Church was the girl's next action. Quick as a flash she turned on her heels and sped away through the crowds.

"My only hat!" ejaculated Church blankly.

"Put up your hands!" said Handforth.

"Hold on!" gasped Church. "She's pinched your mac!"

"What?" thundered Handforth.

"It's a fact! Look! There she goes!"

Handforth spun round.

"You're mad!" he said thickly. "If you start accusing— Hallo! Why, what the— Well, I'm jiggered! Where's she gone?"

"She's making for the exit, of course," said McClure bitterly. "Didn't we warn you, Handy? She's pinched your mackintosh!"

"I never saw anything more deliberate in all my life!" said Church indignantly. "She picked it up, gave one look, and then bunked. My aunt! Who'd have thought it?"

"I would!" said McClure, with a sniff. "You don't know who to trust nowadays—and Handy is bound to pick a wrong 'un!"

Handforth was so staggered that he did not knock his chums down, as he felt inclined to do. He could only stare and watch the girl as she hurried frantically through the gaily-attired crowds. Scarcely anybody took any notice of her. Just at this moment there was a bit of very exciting cricket, and the crowds were enthusiastic.



"Come on!" said Handforth thickly. "There's—there's something rummy about this! I don't believe she's a burglar!"

MARGARET felt like falling through the ground from very shame. Openly, deliberately, she had stolen that waterproof from Handforth. Never in her life before had she committed such an act. Yet, in her desperation, she had known no other course. She told herself that she would return the mackintosh by post, so that she would not look upon herself as a thief. The fear of her uncle's wrath was at the back of her mind all the time. At all costs she had to recover that package!

And here it was—in her hands—folded up within that mackintosh. She was hoping that Handforth & Co. would continue their argument for some minutes, so that she would be enabled to get outside. Once she had chartered a taxi, all would be well. She could vanish, and she would never set eyes on these schoolboys again.

But luck was against her.

She made the mistake of going to an entrance gate instead of an exit. She thought the turnstiles worked both ways probably, but, of course, this is not so. She was directed by an official to one of the proper exits.

There were comparatively few people here. Everything was very leisurely and sedate, as is usual at Lord's. Handforth & Co. had no difficulty in spotting Margaret as she ran towards the proper exit.

"I say!" sang out Handforth urgently.

Margaret gave a start. She flashed a glance over her shoulder. The three schoolboys were bearing down upon her—running. A sort of panic seized her. She fairly raced out of the exit, and she beheld a number of taxicabs. She ran up to them breathlessly.

"I want a cab, please!" she panted.

"You'll have to take the one at the front, miss," said one of the drivers. "Hi, Bill!"

And then, before Margaret could move from the spot—before she could go to the leading taxi—Handforth & Co. surrounded her. With a supreme effort she controlled herself, and she did not fail to read the accusing looks of Church and McClure. Handforth was only concerned and worried.

"I'm—I'm sorry!" she said, in a low voice. "I suddenly remembered an appointment. I—I had to go."

"If only you had mentioned it I would have escorted you," said Handforth, in an aggrieved voice. "I mean, there wasn't any need to rush off like that, Miss Margaret."

"I'm sorry," she murmured. "I believe I was a little frightened. It's an important appointment."

"So important, miss, that you took Handforth's mackintosh with you," said Church pointedly.

She managed to give a convincing start.

"Oh, how foolish of me!" she exclaimed, looking at the mackintosh as though she had seen it for the first time. "I remember picking it up, and then—I do hope you'll forgive me!" she added, proffering it to Handforth. "I'm so sorry. What will you think of me?"

"Oh, we're all liable to be a bit absent-minded at times," said Handforth cheerfully. "That's all right, Miss Margaret. Don't mention it! Who cares about the old mac, anyhow?"

"It was really most ridiculous of me," protested the girl.

"Nothing of the sort!" said Handforth, flashing a triumphant glance at his chums. "And if you want to hurry off somewhere, please let me escort you."

"If you insist——" began Margaret.

"I do," said Handforth, tossing the mackintosh to Church. "Here you are! Hang on to that!"

Handforth opened the door of the taxi-cab and invited Margaret in. A second earlier she had felt that the situation was saved. Now, all in a flash, the position was back in its old shape. Indeed, worse. For she was committed to leaving Lord's cricket ground, and the mackintosh would remain in charge of Church and McClure!

## CHAPTER 7.

### Uncle Sam is Angry!

THE unhappy girl's feelings were mingled as she sat in the taxicab with Handforth beside her. Everything seemed so hopeless. Such a simple matter—and yet so difficult! She would never have believed it.

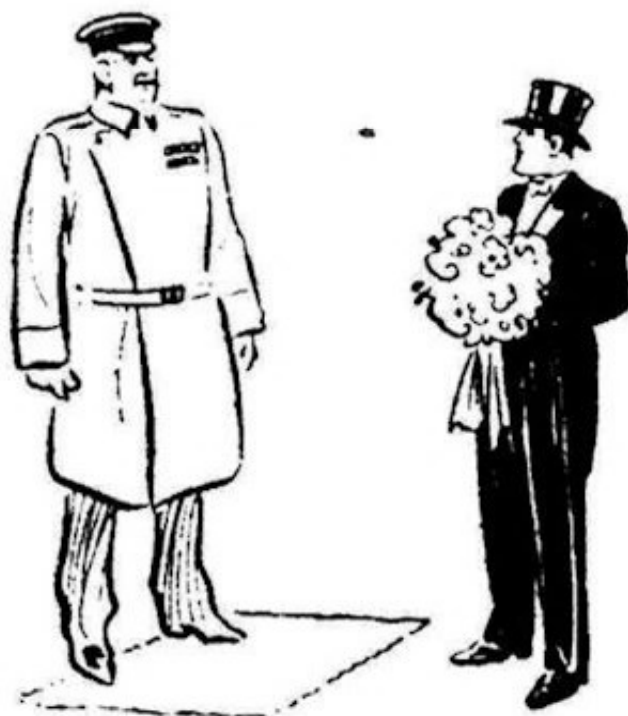
Handforth had swallowed her explanation whole. Never for a moment had he thought of questioning it. But Church and McClure, as they had watched the taxi bowling off, were filled with misgivings. They were not

satisfied with Margaret's naive explanation.

"Well, we've got his mac. back—but I'm a bit sorry for all the cash he's got on him!" said Church bluntly. "Before that taxi has gone a couple of miles she'll have picked his giddy pockets!"

"You think she's a wrong 'un?" asked McClure.

"A member of a gang, probably," said Church, nodding. "That's the way these people work, you know—particularly on Bank Holidays. They're always on the lookout for mugs."





"Well, they've found one to-day!" said McClure, with conviction.

**M**ARGARET was in an uncomfortable dilemma.

She hadn't the remotest idea where she was going; at random, she had mentioned South Kensington Station. She only knew that she was getting farther and farther away from the Kingsway diamonds. And it was impossible for her to make any further reference to that fateful waterproof. Handforth was hoodwinked now; but even his suspicions would be aroused if she re-introduced the subject.

She was at the end of her resources, and she knew it. Her desperate move had failed, and she was conscious of a feeling of shame for having descended to such depths. She felt that she was as bad as her uncle—whom she so bitterly condemned. She had committed robbery! True, the act had been trivial and she had intended returning the stolen property after her own package had been recovered. At the same time, she felt terribly guilty. Her only consolation was that Handforth thought no ill of her.

In fact, Handforth's blind admiration—his unswerving trust—rather touched her. She felt so mean and so contemptible for deceiving him, and her self-contempt was even greater when she realised that she would have to deceive him still more.

"I don't think I shall keep that appointment, after all," she said, after a while. "It will be better if I go home."

"Where do you live?" asked Handforth promptly. "I'll tell the driver."

She remembered the name of some high-class flats she had seen in Kensington.

"Beaconsfield Gardens, Kensington," she said. "If you will put me down at the station, though, I shall be able to walk—"

"Not likely!" said Handforth. "It'll take you all the way home, Miss Margaret."

"It's very kind of you," said the girl, in a low voice.

Handforth instructed the driver, and then leaned back again.

"I can't help thinking that there's something wrong," he said, looking at Margaret with his frank gaze. "You don't seem easy in mind, you know. There's something troubling you. Why don't you tell me? I might be able to help."

"Really, there is nothing that you can do."

"Well, perhaps my pater can help," said Handforth brightly. "He's an M.P., you know."

"Really?"

"Haven't you heard of Sir Edward Handforth, M.P.?" asked Handforth, rather proudly. "My pater's quite a big noise in the City, too."

"I'm quite sure he is," said Margaret, nodding.

"Eh?" said Handforth. "You'd like my pater, too. We don't live far from Kensington."

And Handforth thoughtlessly gave his address. He was completely bewitched by this charmingly pretty girl. His admiration for her was tremendous. He was also overwhelmed with a desire to help her—to serve her! Something told him that she was in distress, and he badly wanted to help her over the stile. Her refusal to tell him what the trouble was only strengthened his purpose.

But she said scarcely anything to him during the remainder of the ride, and when they arrived at Beaconsfield Gardens, Kensington, Handforth was still completely mystified. They both got out, and the taxi was dismissed.

The girl was now getting into a panic. These flats were exclusive—a great block of superb flats which had lately been erected. There was a magnificent entrance, with a commissionaire on duty. They could see into the sumptuous foyer, with its lifts and its stately staircase.

"Well—good-bye!" said Margaret, holding out her gloved hand.

"I say, won't you let me see you to your door?" asked Handforth impulsively.

"Really, if you don't mind, I would rather not," said Margaret, now thoroughly alarmed. "Please say good-bye here. I—I hope I shall see you again, Handy."

"Oh, rather!" said Handforth.

He shook hands, and she quickly turned and entered the foyer. Handforth hesitated for a moment, desolated. After what she had said, it was impossible to follow in. But it was something, at all events, to know that she lived here!

**O**NCE inside the building, Margaret walked boldly to the nearest lift, entered, and asked the attendant to take her to the fourth floor.

When she arrived, she walked calmly along the great corridor, intending to make some pretence of knocking at one of the flats, and then going down again. She was hoping that Handforth would have gone by the time she got out.

She was relieved to see a staircase at the farther end of the corridor—a rear staircase. It was not so sumptuous as the main one, but this was an advantage. Margaret tripped quickly down, and her relief was great when she found that this staircase led out at the rear of the building. She found herself in a quiet back street.

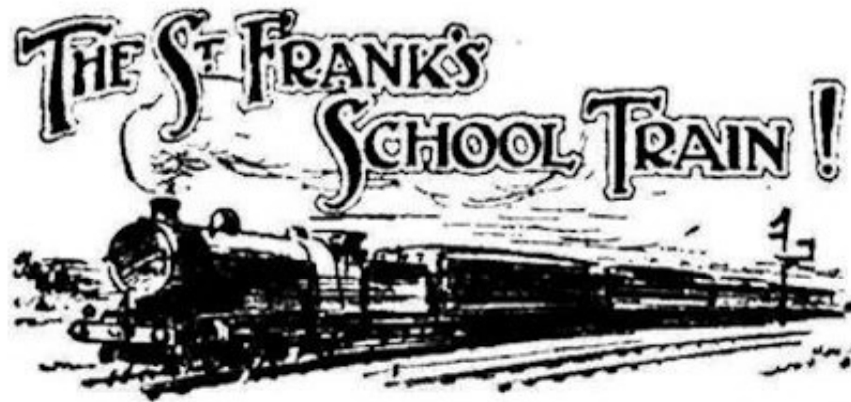
She walked rapidly away, and at the end of the street there was a 'bus route. She jumped on the first 'bus that came along. Not until she was inside, and the 'bus was on its way again, did she feel secure. Fortunately, the 'bus was going in the direction she desired. She changed on to another 'bus after a twopenny ride, and this one took her to Islington.

"Oh, what a cheat I am!" she murmured accusingly. "And that boy thinks such a lot of me, too! I shall never be able to lift up my head again!"



## ALL CLEAR FOR THE SCHOOL TRAIN!

St. Frank's travelling round Great Britain in a special train, stopping at the principal cities and towns on the way! How does that strike you for a wheeze, chums? Lord Dorrimore is responsible for the brain-wave; he says that Nipper & Co. have been practically all round the world, and yet they haven't seen their own country! So he provides them with a Pullman train—and the St. Frank's boys are due to start on their long trip next week. Lucky lads!



A very special affair this school train is, too, complete with dormitories, studies, and Form-rooms! For this trip is not to be in the nature of a holiday. Oh dear, no! Lessons have got to be carried on just as if the boys were still at St. Frank's. Look out for "The St. Frank's School Train," which is the title of the first yarn in this magnificent new school adventure series. It's coming next Wednesday, chums, when the Boys of St. Frank's will be—

## IN THE CHELMSFORD, COLCHESTER AND IPSWICH DISTRICTS!

But these thoughts, after all, were only fleeting. There was the greater problem—indeed, the greater peril. She was nearing her home now—a vastly different home from the one that Handforth fondly believed was hers. And she did not doubt that her uncle would be waiting.

Her uncle was.

She entered a rather shabby cycle shop in a dingy street. Mr. Sam Mortimer had started his career as a mechanic, and he was still a mechanic—and a clever one, too. But this small cycle shop was more or less of a blind. Actually, Mr. Mortimer was a gentleman of much wider activities.

Behind the shop there was a sitting-room, and when Margaret entered she found a man pacing up and down, smoking furiously. He turned on her with an exclamation of relief as she appeared.

"Where have you been all this time?" he demanded harshly. "Shut that door! What have you been doing?"

She faced him quietly, and he could not guess the tumult that was going on within her. He was a tall, thin man, wiry and loose-limbed. His lips were thin, and his eyes were small and piercing.

"Well?" he snapped. "Why don't you speak? What's happened?"

"Something went wrong, uncle," she said. "Mr. Marshall saw me in the Tube train—"

"Marshall!" ejaculated Sam Mortimer, drawing in his breath sharply. "What happened? He didn't get that package, did he?"

"No."

"Then what's become of it?" demanded Margaret's uncle. "I 'phoned up Dixon and he tells me that he hasn't seen you. What do you think you've been doing?"

"Oh, uncle, you don't understand!" cried Margaret. "Mr. Marshall suspected me. He knew that you had sent me as a messenger, and he took me to Vine Street Police Station. The wardress searched me," she added hotly. "It's not fair that you should put me to these indignities—"

"Searched you!" shouted Mortimer. "But you said they didn't get—"

"They didn't," interrupted the girl. "While I was in the train I saw Mr. Marshall edging towards me, and I slipped the package into a schoolboy's mackintosh who was next to me."

Her uncle's face changed.

"Smart!" he commented, nodding. "A darned good thing you had that presence of mind! If the police had found that package on you it would have meant prison—for both of us."

"Oh, my father will have something to say to you when he knows of this!" said Margaret fiercely. "He can't make you live honestly, uncle, but he can stop you from dragging me into your wretched ways."



Handforth looked down into the hall. He saw the figure of a girl; he saw her hand picking up his mackintosh. And then Handy gave a gasp. "Great Scott!" he exclaimed. For the girl intruder was Margaret Winston—the girl he had seen in the Tube train!





It's not fair! When you sent me with that packet you didn't tell me that there was any danger——"

"I didn't think there was any danger!" he broke in harshly. "Don't snivel! What about that schoolboy?"

She explained all the details, and he listened with growing alarm and rage. She told him how the lift at Marble Arch Station had stuck—thus helping her considerably, for she had been enabled to get on the track of that schoolboy again. Her uncle listened impatiently as she told of the later developments.

"You've blundered—you've bungled!" he said furiously. "I was a fool to trust you with the stuff! But how did I know that you'd make such a mess of it? That package is worth thousands of pounds!"

"I know," said Margaret coldly. "The Kingsway diamonds. I wish I had dropped them to the floor of the train, so that an honest man would pick them up and give them to the police!"

Mortimer raved up and down, frantic with fury.

"There's only one chance!" he said at length. "There's been no rain to-day, and no rain is likely. The chances are that that mackintosh will remain folded up. When that boy gets home, he'll fling it into a corner—probably in the hall. You know where he lives, don't you?"

"Yes," said Margaret.

A second later she regretted admitting that fact. She was feeling resentful and rebellious.

"Very well, then!" said Mortimer grimly. "I'll go straight to that house and watch it. We shall have to keep our eyes on the papers, too. If those diamonds are found in the boy's pocket, they'll be given to the police, and the evening papers will get hold of the story, you can be sure. If there's no report, we can be certain that the diamonds are still undiscovered. We'll get them to-night."

"We'll get them?" repeated the girl. "I don't know what you mean!"

"Don't you?" said Mortimer. "You caused this mess-up, my girl, and you'll have to go into that house and get that mackintosh! Understand? I'll help you in—but I'm not going to take the risk."

"I won't—I won't!" she panted, backing away. "You're not going to make me break into that boy's house! You're not going to make me into a criminal! I tell you I won't do it!"

He leapt forward, and seized her slim wrist.

"Won't you?" he snarled. "By thunder! I'll make you toe the line, my girl! You'll obey me, or I'll thrash you even worse than

I thrashed you a couple of months ago! So you'd defy me, eh?"

He twisted her arm brutally, cruelly. She went deathly white, sobbing convulsively.

"Oh, let me go!" she panted, at last. "You're hurting me, uncle! Let me go!"

"I mean to hurt you!" he rapped out. "Will you agree to do as I tell you, or shall I hurt you a bit more?"

Handforth looked down into the hall. He saw the figure of a girl; he saw her hand picking up the mackintosh. And then Handy gave a gasp. "Scott!" he exclaimed. For the girl intruder was Margaret Winston—the girl he had seen in the Tube train!



"Oh, don't—don't!" she sobbed, utterly terrified. "Yes, I'll—I'll do it! Oh, you brute—you brute!"

He released her, and she fell away, swaying.

"I'll have you in pretty good fettle before many weeks are over," said Mr. Mortimer



contemptuously. "A girl with your looks and your nerve can do a tremendous lot in my game. You're going to help me, too! I'll break you in!"

She looked at him with burning eyes.

"I've often wondered how it is that young boys and young girls become criminals!" she said tensely. "I think I know now! They're forced into it—they're bullied and



beaten until there's no escape! I'd run away from you now if it wasn't for my father! Oh, I only hope he comes back quickly."

Mortimer laughed with scorn.

"You won't see your father for months yet—and by that time I'll have you in hand!" he retorted. "You needn't think that he's coming home yet."

"When he does come home he'll make you pay for this," panted Margaret. "Why can't you let me go to this boy's house openly? I'll—I'll try to think of some excuse. Can't I say that I accidentally dropped something into his mackintosh pocket? He'll let me search——"

"And somebody will find that package—with the diamonds?" sneered Mortimer. "Don't be a little fool! You can't risk a thing like that! You'd only be detained and given up to the police, and that would mean my arrest as well as yours! No! Our only chance is to break in, after everybody has gone to bed. And you're going to do the breaking!"

She moved towards the door, a sudden gleam entering her eyes.

"No, you don't, my girl!" snapped her uncle, leaping forward. "You're thinking of walking out—and running away, eh? Not this time! I'll keep you here until we're ready to start out."

He caught her by the arm, dragged her through the sitting-room, and locked her away in a windowless store-room at the back of the premises. And there, in the darkness and silence, Margaret gave way completely and sobbed brokenly.

## CHAPTER 8.

### Pulling Handy's Leg!

"READY, Ted?"

"No!" said Handforth.

It was evening, and Edward Oswald Handforth was sitting disconsolately in a corner of the lounge hall at home. Sir Edward and Lady Handforth were out, and the big mansion was very quiet.

Willy had appeared from somewhere upstairs—a very neat, shining Willy. He was evidently ready to attend some social gathering.

"There's something the matter with you, Ted," said Willy, giving his elder brother a close examination. "I believe you're in love again."

Handforth looked up, flushing.

"If you say that again, I'll slaughter you!" he said thickly. "Margaret's a jolly fine girl, but——"

"Margaret, eh?" said Willy, nodding. "A jolly ripping name, anyhow."

He knew how to deal with his major. He had been out all day, on the spree, with Chubby Heath and Juicy Lemon and a crowd of other Third-Formers. Willy knew nothing of the events at Lord's. He had arrived home in the evening tired out but happy, and he had hardly seen anything of Edward Oswald until now.

"By George! Margaret!" said Handforth dreamily. "A jolly nice name, eh?"







falls in love with girls like this. Until now he's been rather keen on waitresses and shop assistants and girls of that sort, but he's flying higher this time by the look of it."

"There's no telling how it catches him," said Willy. "He once fell in love with a girl at a big reception the pater gave, and she turned out to be some European princess. But do you think Ted cared? If it hadn't been for the pater, he would have taken her under the mistletoe and kissed her—if there had been any mistletoe."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ted has these spasms, you know," said Willy. "Now look here, you chaps. We can soon pop along to Kensington, and the party isn't due to start just yet. I'm not very satisfied about those flats. I think we ought to pop along there and make a few inquiries."

"You don't think she really lives there?" asked Travers.

"Poor old Ted has been duped," said Willy. "That's about the size of it. He's been spoofed up to the eyes. Anyhow, it wouldn't do any harm for us to go along to Beaconsfield Gardens and make a few inquiries, would it?"

"What do you chaps think?" asked Reggie, turning to the others.

"Well, it might be a good wheeze," said Nipper. "If Handy said he was going there, you can bet he'll go. He'll only make an ass of himself, of course, and we ought to save him from that. Even if the girl does live there I dare say we can manage to wangle something so that he won't be allowed to bother her. There's bound to be a commissionaire at those flats, and commissionaires, while being splendid fellows, are not averse to a tip now and again."

Church and McClure and a few other juniors arrived just then, and they were enthusiastic about the suggestion. It seemed that they had been to Handforth's home, and had found him ready—arrayed in full evening dress. But he was not, they had learned, coming to Reggie's party. Handy, it seemed, had much more important things to occupy his time. For instance, these juniors had found him in the act of presenting an enormous bouquet of flowers to a tailor's dummy! Apparently Handforth had purchased these flowers for the fair Margaret, and not being quite confident of his abilities to present same, he had decided to put in a bit of practice. Certainly the tailor's dummy wasn't a fair representation of Margaret, but it suited the circumstances.

Nipper and the others roared with laughter when they heard this. Handy had got it badly, it seemed!

Let it be mentioned here that Church and McClure had brought Handforth's mackintosh back, and had left it in the hall at Handy's home, folded up as before. Mr.

Sam Mortimer had shrewdly anticipated that this would happen. He had taken it for granted that Handforth's schoolboy friends would make no attempt to unfold the garment, and thus chance upon the package. The weather was so fine that there was no earthly reason why that mac should be opened out.

"Well, I'd love to come with you, but I'm afraid I mustn't risk it," said Reggie Pitt regretfully. "I have got to stay here to welcome the guests. Winnie will jump down my throat if she hears that I'm going out."

"I don't suppose we shall be long," said Church.

"I hope you won't be, because I want you here," replied Reggie. "But Handy's got to be cured."

They were soon off—about six of them, including Willy. When they arrived at Beaconsfield Gardens they found a very stout, jovial-looking commissionaire on duty.

"Name of Winston?" he said, when they made inquiries. "Not that I know of, young gents. Nobody in these flats named Winston."

"Can you make sure?" asked Nipper, with a glance at the others.

"I dare say I can, sir."

And the commissionaire went off to seek the necessary information.

"Well, it's not surprising me," said Willy. "I don't believe that girl lives in these flats at all. It was easy enough to spoof Ted. I've seen the same trick done on the films. You can easily walk into a big block of flats like this, go upstairs, and then sneak out by another door. Who's to know? Besides, is it likely that she would give Ted her real address?"

"There's always the chance that she's living with some relatives who have a different name," said Nipper. "But, even in that case, the commissionaire would know her by name."

"Of course," said Church. "These men know all the tenants by name. They can't help it. And that commissionaire didn't know the name of 'Winston' at all."

The commissionaire soon returned.

"No, there's nobody occupying any of these flats by the name of Winston," he said. "I don't know the name, either. Don't know of any young lady called that. Sure you've come to the right flats?"

"These are Beaconsfield Gardens, aren't they?"

"Yes."

"Then we're at the right place," said Nipper. "You see, we believe that one of our chums has been spoofed by this girl."

"There's never no knowing what you schoolboys will be up to!" said the commissionaire, wagging a finger. Then he suddenly pursed his lip and looked thoughtfully at the juniors. "A young feller about your own age?" he went on. "Sort of untidy



hair? A biggish sort of youngster? Would that be him?"

"That's him!" said Church eagerly.

"Now I come to think of it, he was here to-day," said the commissionaire. "I noticed him walking about outside, as though he was waitin' for somebody. Came up in a taxi with a young lady."

"That's the girl we mean," said Nipper. "Miss Margaret Winston. Isn't she a tenant?"

"Never seen her before," said the commissionaire. "And I know all the tenants by sight—and by name, too. No, young gents. She doesn't live here. Must have popped out by one of the other doors, I suppose."

Willy drew the Removites aside.

"Well, we thought so, didn't we?" he said. "That girl was spoofing poor old Ted. But I blame him all the time; he shouldn't have been such an ass!"

"Well, we tried to warn him," said Church. "Didn't we, Mac?"

"Until we were tired," said McClure.

"He deserves a lesson," said Willy. "He's coming here soon—might arrive any minute. Don't you think this is a good opportunity for us to wangle something?"

And the others certainly did.

## CHAPTER 9.

### The Flat of Mystery!

**T**WENTY minutes later Edward Oswald Handforth arrived.

He arrived in great style. Not only was he in evening dress, but he carried an enormous bouquet of flowers. It was only with an effort, however, that he succeeded in concealing his nervousness as he entered the foyer.

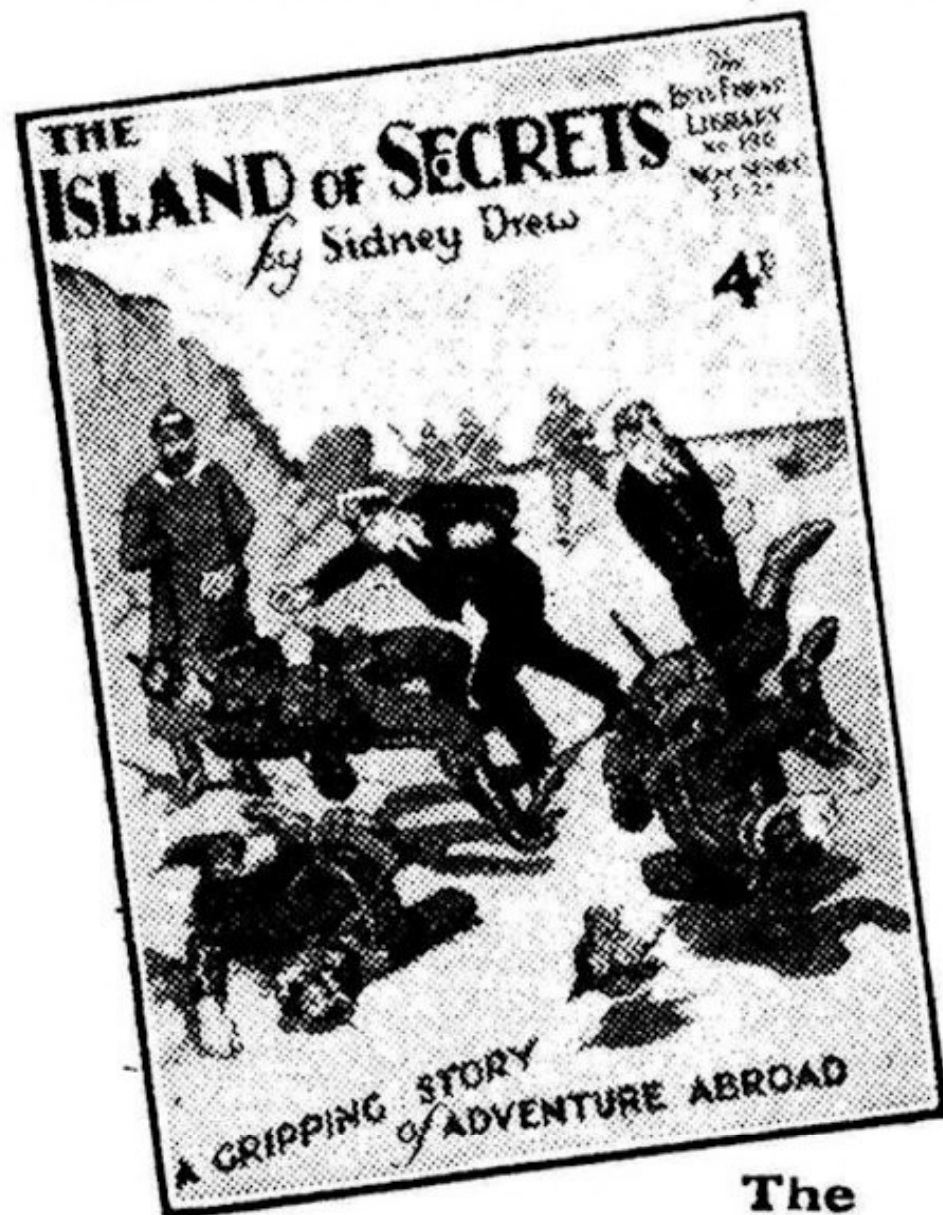
He realised that there was a difficulty. He did not know the number of Margaret's flat. This was awkward, for it would mean making inquiries—and Handforth's mission was such that he scarcely liked discussing it with commissionaires and lift attendants. He had made up his mind that Margaret Winston was in distress, and it was his duty, therefore, to go to her aid. For a fellow with such intentions he had come curiously equipped.

If he had known the number of her flat, he could have gone straight up. But he didn't know, so he was obliged to pause in front of the portly commissionaire.

"Miss Winston, please," he said carelessly. "Which floor?"

"Miss Margaret Winston, sir?" asked the commissionaire, with such promptitude and

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heartiness that any other fellow but Handforth might have been suspicious.

"Yes, rather."

"Second floor, sir—number seventy-five," said the commissionaire. "Here, William! Take this young gentleman up to the second floor. Miss Winston's flat—number seventy-five."

"This way, sir!" said the lift attendant, touching his cap.

Handforth felt gratified. He had had no trouble at all. And, judging by the deference that these men showed him, Miss Winston must be a very distinguished tenant; or, at least, her people were distinguished. Handforth took it for granted that she lived here with her mother and father, and perhaps a brother or sister or two. He was already regarding his Bank Holiday heroine as an old friend, and he was now hoping that he would become acquainted with her people.

"Here we are, sir—second floor," said the attendant, as the lift came to a stop.

"Thanks," said Handforth, stepping out.

"Number seventy-five is at the end, sir—that door facing us," said the attendant. "Can't go wrong, sir."

Handforth nodded, and strolled away. He was further gratified by the fact that neither the commissionaire nor the lift attendant had smiled at his bouquet. Perhaps this sort of thing was commonplace in these flats. Anyhow, Handforth's confidence was considerably restored.

The lift went down again, and Handforth moved down the corridor until he came to the end flat. "Seventy-five" was plainly marked on the door in brass embossed figures.

He gave his tie a final adjustment, patted his hair, and rang the bell. He prepared himself for the ordeal. It might be a bit of a trial to meet the girl's mother and father—and an even greater trial for him to explain why he was so interested in the girl. After all, he was only a schoolboy, and they might think that it was a cheek on his part.

The door opened, and a black cavity was revealed. There was no light within the flat. Handforth expected to see a brilliant lobby with a stately butler. But he only saw blackness, with a shadowy figure lurking in the gloom.

"My hat!" said Handforth.

"Yes, sair," said the shadowy figure.

"You hang ze hat on ze stand."

"No, no! I mean——" Handforth pulled himself together. "Does—does Miss Winston live here?"

"Mees Winston?" said the dim figure, who was apparently a foreigner. "Step inside. said. Perhaps, yes, mademoiselle will see you. Ze name, sair?"

"Oh, Handforth—Ted Handforth," said the junior, stepping inside.

"Zis way, Meester Handforth," said the other softly.

Edward Oswald was filled with wonder. He was also half filled with uneasiness.

There was something very rummy about this flat. It was so totally different from what he had expected. The door was closed now, and he had not been able to get a good look at the man so close to him. The darkness was pitchy after the door had been closed.

"I say, what's the idea?" asked Handforth suspiciously. "Have all the electric lights gone out? Where's Miss Winston?"

"Zees way, sair," murmured the other. "Take ze seat."

To Handforth's relief, he found that there was a light in one of the rooms. A door had been softly opened, and Handforth walked in—surprised to find that there was no carpet on the floor. He was walking on bare boards.

The door closed again, and he had a dim impression that the foreign gentleman had been wearing a long black cloak—a most mysterious-looking merchant.

"My only topper!" said Handforth, aghast.

A solitary candle was burning on the mantelpiece. And in the centre of the empty room stood an upturned sugar-box. This, no doubt, was "ze seat." But Handforth did not take it.

"Well, I'm dashed!" he muttered, as he looked round again, and noted the carefully-drawn blinds. "I've never known such a rummy business! But it's the right flat! The commissionaire said so, and the lift attendant said so, and that rummy foreign chap said so! So there can't be any bloomer!"

He tried hard to connect his thoughts.

"By George!" he muttered suddenly.

"I'll bet I've got it! They've had the brokers in!"

Having come to this brilliant conclusion, Handforth drew upon his imagination further.

"Poor kid!" he said, with a whistle. "Her people have had the giddy brokers in, and they've cleared all the furniture out! And I'll bet that foreign rotter is a broker's man!"

He waited eagerly for Margaret to appear. Perhaps she would be able to give him the full details. He wondered how he could help. No wonder she had been looking so worried! Perhaps all the furniture had been cleared out that very day! And, of course, the fellow who had met her in the train had been another broker's man! Handforth's ideas on such subjects were somewhat vague.

Suddenly, the electric light came on, and Handforth jumped. He hadn't expected that. But it seemed to confirm his own idea that the "juice" had temporarily failed. The bareness of the room seemed all the more aggressive now that it was brilliantly illuminated. It was a splendid room, however. The decorations were quite wonderful, clearly proving the exclusive quality of these flats.

There came a click from the door, and Handforth, swinging round, noticed that the



door was silently opening. Inch by inch, it came farther open.

"What the——" began Handforth.

He felt a curious sensation run down his spine. There was something very mysterious and sinister about all this!

"WHO'S there?" asked Handforth sharply.

There was no reply. He walked to the door, pulled it completely open, and looked out. For a flat, the hall was spacious and airy. The lights were gleaming, but no human being was in sight. He stood there, uncertain and puzzled.

And then, abruptly, startlingly, a piercing scream sounded from a room on the other side of the hall.

"Great corks!" gasped Handforth, jumping a foot into the air.

The scream had not been very loud—but there was something significant about it. It gave Handforth a real scare. Then, in another second, he pulled himself together. Margaret! That scream had come from Margaret! She was in that other room, and she was in danger.

"Help! Help!" came a frantic wail. "Handy—Handy! Oh, help!"

Handforth was so obsessed with the idea that Margaret was in distress, he convinced himself that he recognised the voice. He flung open the door of that room on the other side of the hall and went charging in. It was just like the other room—empty. The lights were on, but there was not a soul to be seen.

"Great Scott!" gasped Handforth blankly. "I—I thought—— Miss Margaret! Are you here?"

He noticed an inner door in this room, and it was slightly ajar. A groan sounded from beyond, and Handforth leaped forward. He flung the door open, charged through—only to find an inner apartment, as empty as the others!

Thud-thud-thud!

Strange knocking sounds came to his ears now. They came from that first room, where the candle was burning on the mantelpiece. He went rushing back. But the result was just the same. No living thing was in sight.

It was all very bewildering, and Handforth was getting more and more startled.

"Hi! What's the game?" he demanded angrily. "Who's fooling about?"

He heard a sound near the door, and he twirled round. He caught a glimpse of a shadowy figure, and he made a dash at the door. Either he was dreaming, or that figure was wearing a heavy black mask, which completely covered its face!

Before he got to the door the lights suddenly snapped out again. And now the darkness was pitchy—for that candle on the mantelpiece had been extinguished, too. It must have been put out earlier.

Handforth came to a halt, just against the doorway, helpless and completely blinded by the sudden darkness. Then he felt hands upon him, and he heard breathing.

"Who's—who's that?" he ejaculated huskily. "Who are you? What—what does this mean?"

"Ze rope!" hissed a voice. "Queek! We bind heem up, yes?"

Handforth fought madly, but it was no use. He was suddenly tripped and borne to the floor. Ropes were passed round him; he felt his wrists and ankles being tied. There came the shuffling of feet, the soft slamming of the door, and then—silence.

Handforth was about to yell for help—convinced that this flat was occupied by a gang of crooks—when it occurred to him that the ropes were not very tightly bound round him. In fact, he wriggled free after only a single minute's hard work. He cast the ropes aside, blundered to the door, opened it, and went out into the hall. He dashed down to one of the other doors at the end. He opened it and shouted. But only the echo of his own voice came back to him.

Indeed, he soon came to the conclusion that the flat was empty. He went to the front door, opened it, then walked out and slammed the door after him. He stood there, breathing hard. He was glad enough to be out of that mysterious flat.

He did not trouble to go down by the lift, but took the stairs—three at a time. When he got to the bottom, he went running up to the big commissionaire.

The man seemed to have grown extraordinary thin since Handforth had seen him last. This, however, was explained when the commissionaire turned—for he was a different man altogether.

"Hallo, hallo! Anything the matter, young gent?" he asked suspiciously. "You ain't looking any too calm. In fact, if you ask me, I should say you're a bit flustered."

"There's something wrong in number seventy-five!" panted Handforth. "Miss Winston isn't there, and there's a chap with a black mask, and——"

"Hold on—hold on!" said the commissionaire grimly. "Trying to kid me, sir? Number seventy-five is vacant."

"Vacant!"

"Been empty for a week past," said the man. "New tenants ain't coming in until Friday. What's the idea?"

"But Miss Winston——"

"Never heard the name," said the commissionaire, shaking his head. "There ain't nobody of the name of Winston living in these flats. Never was."

"But—but—but——"

Handforth paused, his brain refusing to function.

"Strikes me you're having a rare old game, ain't you, young gent?" said the man.





"Grab him!" yelled Handforth, as Mortimer made to escape. He and Willy rushed at the rascal, but Mortimer was ready for them. With one blow he sent Edward Oswald crashing to the floor, while Willy found himself seized in a grip of iron and flung bodily on top of his brother.

"What have you been doing in number seventy-five, anyhow? Who let you in?"

"Where's the other commissionaire?" asked Handforth huskily.

"Off duty."

"I'm going to see him——"

"You won't be able to see him until tomorrow," said the man. "I'm not sure I hadn't better fetch a policeman. You've got no right on these premises, my lad!"

"I—I can't understand it!" muttered Handforth, passing a hand over his brow. "Miss Winston came in here to-day, and she told me she lived here. I went up to number seventy-five, and——"

"There, there, that'll do!" said the commissionaire kindly. "I reckon you've been having a dream, young gent. Best go into the open air and get cooled off."

Edward Oswald Handforth went out, his brain in a complete whirl. And, after he had vanished, two or three youthful figures appeared from one of the lifts. They were all grinning. So was the big commissionaire, who had come out from the lift, too.

"Well, that's that!" said Nipper, with a chuckle. "Poor old Handy! We've had to be cruel to be kind! I hope this'll be a lesson to him, the chump!"

"I doubt it!" said Church. "We weren't half violent enough with him!"

## CHAPTER 10.

### Very Mysterious!

**H**ANDFORTH felt better after he had got out into the open air.

He wondered if it would be any good going back; but he decided, after a little thought, that it would be inadvisable. If Margaret Winston really lived in the empty flat, then there was something very queer about the girl. And Handforth was rapidly coming to the conclusion that the mysterious man of the Tube train was mixed up with the whole business.

He regarded the innocent Detective-sergeant Marshall as a kind of ogre. In his mind's eye he remembered Mr. Marshall as an ugly, villainous individual. Without question, this man was exerting an evil influence over Margaret. And Handforth was intensely worried because he had no idea how he could get in touch with the girl again, so that he could rescue her from harm.

It was all very confusing and bewildering.

He made his way home disconsolately. When he thought of what had happened at Beaconsfield Gardens, he rather wondered if he was in his right senses. It all seemed too ridiculous. He thought of going back and finding that stout commissionaire. Yet he hesitated to do this. He had a horror of making an ass of himself.



Thus, in this state of bewilderment, Handforth arrived near to his home. Suddenly he gave a little gulp. Passing a street lamp, on the other side of the road, was a smartly-dressed girl accompanied by a man. And Handforth was absolutely certain that the girl was Margaret!

"Great Scott!" he ejaculated.

There could be no mistaking her face. That she should be here, quite near to his house, was amazing enough. There seemed to be no end to these coincidences.

"Hi!" shouted Handforth wildly.

He dived across the road, but the loud, raucous hoot of an electric motor-horn, apparently a foot from his ear, caused him to leap frantically back to the pavement. A big car shot past, missing him by inches.

"Oh, my hat!" he gasped.

In his excitement he had nearly got himself run over. Indeed, if he hadn't jumped back with such promptitude, he would certainly have been knocked down. Two other cars went gliding by, and by the time the road was sufficiently clear for him to cross he was alarmed to find that Margaret had vanished.

He ran across desperately and searched up and down with such frantic zest that a policeman was soon regarding him with suspicion. But there was no sign of Margaret now. Handforth spent ten solid minutes going from side to side of the road, round the block of houses, and back again. He even began to wonder if he had imagined it.

It was all very confusing and bewildering. Coming right on the top of the flat incident, he felt that he was going off his rocker. And, baffled, he finally went indoors.

"SO that's the young fool, is it?" muttered Mr. Sam Mortimer. "It's a good thing we got out of the way before he could cross the road. We don't want him to see us here."

Margaret Winston made no reply. She was sick at heart, and inwardly rebellious. She and her uncle were just within sight of Sir Edward Handforth's house, and they had seen Edward Oswald go indoors.

"Well, we'll be going now—it's safe," said Mortimer. "Only I thought it just as well to come along and look at the place. Nothing like being prepared in advance. It ought to be easy."

There was sound commonsense in Mortimer's plan. To reconnoitre the house after midnight would have been risky, for a wary policeman might easily have become suspicious. At this time of the evening, however, there was no danger at all. People were constantly passing to and fro, and there was a continuous flow of traffic, too. Mortimer had been able to get the "lie of the land" very thoroughly, and without attracting any attention.

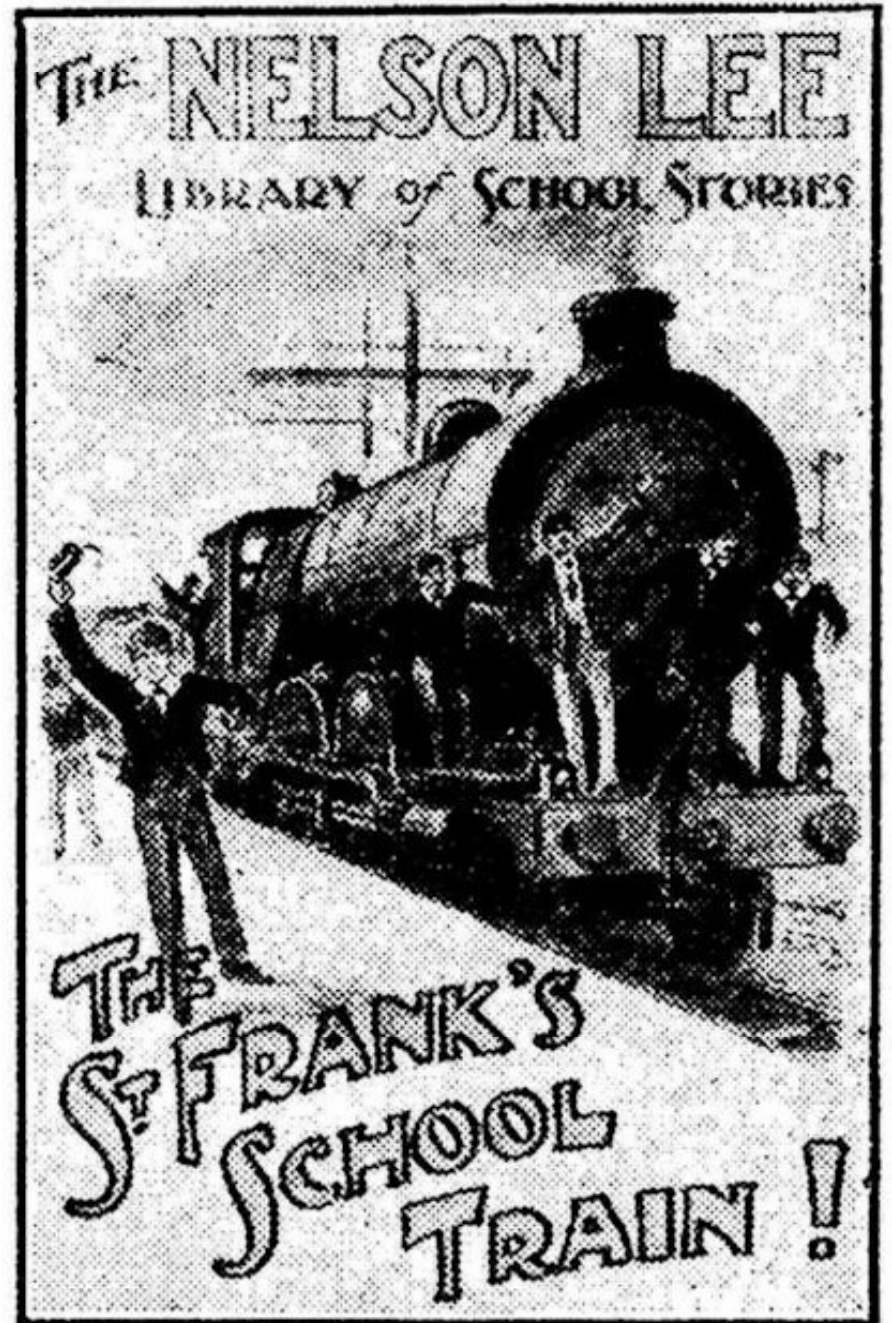
"This is what comes of trusting a fool girl!" he said sourly. "I'll know better next time. But you'll put this thing right, my

lady! It'll be good experience for you, and if there's any risk about it, it'll be yours. You've got things into this mess, and you'll have to get them out."

"You can't make me," said Margaret, with a show of spirit. "I won't break into that house, uncle! Oh, it's madness! We don't even know that the diamonds are there."

"Yes, we do," snapped her uncle. "That mackintosh belongs to this boy, and it's as good as certain that the boy's friends brought the mac here. They wouldn't take it to their own homes. Anyhow, you'll get

COMING NEXT WEEK! ~~~~~



into the place later on, and make certain. It won't take you long. The coat is bound to be hanging in the hall."

"Why don't you do it yourself?" asked Margaret hotly.

"Because you need a lesson—that's why," said the other. "Besides, if anybody's going to be caught, it's you. The police are too hot on me already. I'm not going to give them a chance to drop on me. You were a young fool not to get the package while you had the mac in your hands."

"But I couldn't," protested Margaret. "The mac was all rolled up and tied with string. I tried to get it free as I ran for a taxi, but the boy overtook me before I could manage it. And I had to give him the mac back. What else could I do? I had to pretend that I'd taken it by mistake."



"It's a good thing for you that the boy's a fool," snapped Mortimer. "That's what makes me hopeful now. It's a cert that those diamonds haven't been found yet. They're still in that pocket. We'll have them back, too, before the night's out."

Looking at the affair from Mr. Mortimer's warped point of view, his anxiety could easily be understood. He had worked for weeks to steal the famous Kingsway diamond necklace; he had cunningly laid his plans, and he had cunningly carried them out. Complete success had rewarded his efforts.

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Not only had he got the diamonds, but the police had absolutely no evidence against him. He was suspected, but that was only natural, since he had two or three convictions against him. Unless the police found the diamonds on him, or evidence that he was connected with the robbery, they could not touch him.

Realising the risk of carrying the loot on his own person, he had used Margaret as his go-between. He had not only fixed up a price with the "fence," but he had made the most careful arrangements for the diamonds to be delivered. Thus it had been like a blow between the eyes to learn that Margaret had been compelled to get rid of the packet while on her way to deliver it.

She had done well there. Mortimer was forced to admit it. She had not only saved herself, but she had saved him. But he felt that she had blundered inexcusably by allowing the schoolboy to keep the diamonds out

of her reach. It ought to have been easy for her to get possession of the mackintosh by a simple subterfuge, and recover the package.

If her heart had been in the business she would have done so. It was this fact which aroused Mr. Mortimer to fury. He knew that she resented the whole affair—that she would only be too glad to see him baffled. Only her fear of him had caused her to carry out his orders.

It was some consolation to know that the diamonds were still undiscovered. Whilst they reposed in that harmless garment they would be safer there than anywhere else. For why should the police ever think of looking for the stolen necklace in Sir Edward Handforth's home? But once they were accidentally discovered, they would never be recoverable. So it was necessary that no time should be lost.

Mortimer would receive five thousand pounds in cash upon the delivery of the goods. An absurdly small percentage of the diamonds' real value; but a burglar is always in the hands of the "fence" or receiver, and is lucky to get even a tithe of a stolen article's worth. Yet it is not to be wondered at, since it is the receiver who runs most of the risk. Disposing of such property is a tricky business.

Margaret's uncle saw no reason why he should lightly give up five thousand pounds in cash. It was the biggest haul he had ever made—a small fortune for him. It had been within his grasp, too. He had expected the girl to come back with the money.

Now the diamonds were probably somewhere in Sir Edward Handforth's house. Even this wasn't certain. There was always the chance that the mackintosh had been carelessly taken home by one of Handforth's chums. But since Handforth's home was the only one Mortimer knew of, his operations must begin here.

HANDFORTH was sitting gloomily in an easy-chair in the dining-room when a crowd of fellows came in from Reggie Pitt's party. It was nearly eleven o'clock at night, and Handforth had been in sole possession of the dining-room for two or three hours.

"Hallo, Handy, old man!" said Church, staring. "My only hat! You're looking a bit white about the gills!"

"Go and eat coke!" said Handforth gruffly.

"Where have you been all the evening?" asked Nipper.

"Here, most of the time," replied Handforth. "But you needn't ask any questions—because I won't answer them. I'm fed up."

"You look it."

"I'm worried!"

"You look worried, too."

"I'm—I'm desperate!" said Handforth fiercely.



"I believe you are, old man," nodded Nipper. "But why? Wasn't your visit to the young thing's home a success?"

"Eh?"

"Didn't she make you welcome?"

"Who told you I went there?" demanded Handforth warmly. "Why can't you chaps mind your own business? That girl's beset with dangers! I believe she's in the hands of crooks!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Are you sure she isn't one herself?" asked McClure bluntly.

"Why, you—you insulting rotter——"

"Well, it's jolly suspicious!" said Mac, shaking his head. "She makes you believe that she lives in an expensive flat, and what do you find? An empty flat! Mysterious screams and thuds!"

"How—how did you know?" gasped Handforth blankly.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The whole crowd yelled with merriment. They had been expecting Handforth at Pitt's party all the evening, and to find Handforth moping at home struck them as being humorous.

"My poor old chump!" said Willy gently. "That flat business was our stunt."

"Wha-a-at!"

"Of course it was," grinned Willy. "We guessed that the girl had been spoofing you, and we soon found that she had never been heard of in Beaconsfield Gardens. So we tipped the commissionaire and lift attendant, and they let us use an empty flat for ten minutes."

Handforth fought for breath. In one way, he was relieved; and in another way, he was boiling with indignation. It cleared the air somewhat to know that Margaret had had nothing to do with that mysterious flat affair. But the knowledge that she had fooled him hurt him deeply. And the knowledge that his chums had spoofed him made him see red.

"You—you rotters!" he said, glaring round. "If you think this is funny, I don't! What was the idea of it, anyhow?"

"Well, it wasn't quite so senseless as you seem to think, old man," said Nipper, becoming serious. "We didn't like to see you making an ass of yourself, and we thought you needed a lesson. My dear chap, can't you see that that girl deliberately hoodwinked you? She's probably a pick-pocket——"

"You—you insulting rotter!" roared Handforth, leaping forward.

Only by swift action, and the application of force, was Handforth dragged back. In another second he would have knocked Nipper down.

"I don't blame you!" he panted bitterly. "You didn't even meet the girl—you didn't meet her as I did, anyhow. I'll eat my hat if she's a wrong 'un! There's some mystery about her, and she's in distress. And because I want to help her you chaps jeer at me and make fun of me!"

They were somewhat abashed.

"Don't take it to heart, old son," said Nipper. "We're only trying to show you that it's risky to get friendly with strangers. It doesn't matter whether they're old gentlemen, or young fellows, or charming girls. You never know what their game is. These confidence tricksters are as clever as they make 'em, and the more innocent they look the more tricky they actually are."

"And your leg was made to be pulled!" added Willy, nodding.

Handforth became icily cold.

"You're all wrong!" he said. "This girl isn't a confidence trickster. I can't pretend to know what danger she's in, but she's true blue. I'll stake my life on it! I saw her outside this very house earlier in the evening——"

"What!"

"I couldn't get a word with her, though, because I was stopped by the traffic," said Handforth glumly. "And when I tried to find her, she'd gone again."

The other juniors exchanged glances.

"You didn't give her your address, did you?" asked Church quickly.

"I forget. I might have done."

"You reckless ass!" said McClure excitedly. "And you say you saw her outside? Why, it's as clear as daylight that she's a wrong 'un! She's been twisting you round her little finger, you ass! I expect she's a member of a gang, and they're up to some sort of mischief——"

"If you say anything more against her, Arnold McClure, I'll never speak to you again!" interrupted Handforth fiercely. "In fact, I'll never speak to any of you again! You all think I'm a mug, but, by George, I'll show you that I'm not!"

He flung himself out of the room, and now there were no smiles on the faces of the others.

"Phew!" whistled Nipper. "It's even more serious than we thought, you chaps!"

Willy was looking thoughtful.

"Leave Ted to me," he said slowly. "You chaps go home, and sleep comfortably. I'll deal with Ted!"

## CHAPTER 11.

### At Dead of Night!

**H**ANDFORTH tossed sleeplessly in bed. He had heard one o'clock just strike, and he was getting desperate.

What was the good of trying to go to sleep when his mind was so disturbed? The very idea of sleep was ridiculous.

He couldn't get it out of his head that Margaret Winston was in danger, and the unfortunate Edward Oswald was frantic because he hadn't the faintest idea where she really lived, or how to get in touch with her. He was at his wits' end.

At bed-time, an hour or so earlier, Willy had had a "jaw" with him, but this had done no good. Handforth at least gained some comfort from the reflection that he had left Willy's curiosity unsatisfied. All



Willy's questionings had come to nothing. The fag had got no change out of his major.

At least, this was what Handforth supposed.

"It's no good!" he muttered, sitting up and tossing the bedclothes back. "I can't sleep! What's the good of trying?"

He got out of bed, put on his dressing-gown, and paced up and down. He was glad that Willy slept in another room. Lady Handforth had tried the experiment of putting the brothers in one bedroom, but she had found it too costly. There was really no reason why the whole household should be kept awake half the night.

"The chaps can say what they like," muttered Handforth, clenching his fists. "They're mad! They think I'm in love with that girl—and I'll admit she's a jolly ripping girl—but, goodness knows, I'm only worried because she seemed so troubled! Yet what can I do to help her? Why did she try to pinch my mac? Why did she fool me about Beaconsfield Gardens? And what was she doing outside the house? Oh, it's an awful mix-up!"

He was compelled to admit—to himself, at all events—that the circumstances were suspicious. On the face of things Margaret's behaviour was strange. One might easily suppose that she was up to some crooked scheme—that she was, indeed, the member of a criminal gang.

But Handforth knew—positively and absolutely—that she was straight. It was characteristic of him to take people on trust. Sometimes he was completely bluffed, but at other times his judgment was singularly sound.

"The trouble is, I don't know what to do," he muttered, halting. "I can't look for the girl in a place like London! I don't suppose I shall ever see her again. Yet I'll jolly well try to trace—"

He broke off as a board creaked somewhere on the landing. He went to the door, rather uncertain. Perhaps he had been mistaken. He looked out on to the landing, but could see nothing unusual. Everything was dark, except for a stray moonbeam or two coming in through the window.

He crept quietly along until he came to the wide opening where it was possible to look right down into the lounge hall. And now he checked himself, and smothered a stifled gasp.

Somebody was down in the hall!

He could see a dim figure, and there was a beam of white light from an electric torch, too! He stood there, staring fascinatedly. The beam of light slowly circled round, and finally came to rest on the big hall-stand.

Then he heard a quick intake of breath from the intruder. The light had revealed a folded mackintosh, carelessly dropped into the base of the hall-stand. There came a little rustle, and Handforth saw a slim hand picking up the mackintosh.

"Great Scott!" he breathed, aghast.

For in that second he knew that the intruder was a girl! Margaret! There could

be no mistaking the faint rustle of her skirt. Besides, that slim hand belonged to no man! And the very fact that the mackintosh was the object of the intruder's search was significant. For it was this garment which Margaret had attempted to steal at Lord's. The thing was dumfounding in its fantastic absurdity. Why burgle a house to get a thirty-shilling mac?

"Miss Margaret!" whispered Handforth, running downstairs.

"Oh!" panted the girl.

It was more like a little gasp of terror. She swung round, the mackintosh in her grasp, and she faced Handforth in frightened dismay. Only a moment earlier she had told herself that her mission was safely accomplished.

"What are you doing in here?" asked Handforth sternly.

At last his faith was shaken. What could he think? The girl was caught redhanded. His heroine had become a figure of scorn. It was a mercy that he had kept awake, so that he could receive this disillusionment. It was a mercy, too, that nobody else had surprised her—for in that case she would have been handed to the police. Handforth had no idea of taking such a drastic step.

"I—I— Oh, you mustn't look at me like that!" whispered the girl shakily. "Please don't think—"

"What are you doing in here, Miss Margaret?" repeated Handforth. "And I told the chaps you were straight, too! I—I didn't realise I'd been such a fool. But I've caught you in the act, and—"

"Oh, you're wrong!" she interrupted tearfully. "I didn't want to break in! My uncle forced me!"

"Your uncle?" said Handforth, with a start. "That man in the Tube?"

"No; that was Detective-sergeant Marshall."

"A detective!" gasped Handforth. "Then—then— But look here! You're not going to tell me that you broke into this house on purpose to pinch my mouldy mac? It's only worth about three-halfpence!"

Margaret realised that her position was acute. To explain the truth was impossible. Yet how else could she account for her presence here? An inspiration came to her.

"It's all my fault," she said, laying a trembling hand on his arm. "You remember when we were in the Tube train? I was flustered, and I dropped a little packet. It wasn't mine—it belongs to my uncle."

"You dropped it? I don't see—"

"It must have fallen into your mackintosh," said the girl. "When I looked for it it was gone. I couldn't explain to you, could I? You might think that I had done it deliberately. Besides, it was so awkward. If you'll let me unroll the mac, I'll show you. I'm sure the packet must be inside."

Handforth's brain began to clear.

"But why didn't you explain at first?" he asked wonderingly. "If you had done



that, I should have let you have the mac in a jiffy!"

He took the garment from her, broke the strings, and shook it out. He plunged his hand into one of the pockets, and withdrew a small paper packet.

"By George!" he said. "This isn't mine!"

"No; it's the one I had in the Tube train," said Margaret. "My uncle was dreadfully angry when I told him——"

"Well, of course, you can have it," said Handforth gladly. "But it was a dotty thing to break into the house like this! You might have got yourself arrested for burglary. Look here, you'd better go out by the front door. Then if you're seen, I can explain——"

"Just a minute, Ted, old man," said Willy.

Both Handforth and Margaret spun round. Willy had come downstairs silently, and he approached the pair.

"Who told you to butt in?" asked Handforth thickly.

"Awfully sorry, Ted, but I don't think you quite realise the position," said Willy. "Do you happen to know that Lady Kingsway was recently robbed of her famous diamond necklace?"

Margaret drew her breath in so sharply that Willy was left in no doubt regarding her knowledge of the truth. She turned deathly pale, and clutched at Handforth's arm for support.

"I don't know what you mean!" said Handforth, staring.

"My dear chap! You must know that this girl wouldn't break into our house unless there was something very big to be gained," said Willy quietly. "That package contains the Kingsway diamonds. Don't you understand? Stolen property! The police are searching everywhere——"

"I don't believe it!" said Handforth fiercely. "You're mad! Miss Margaret, tell him he's mad!"

"No; it's true!" sobbed the girl, in a whisper.

"What!"

"I—I couldn't tell you!" she whispered. "But please don't think too badly of me. I didn't want to break in. My uncle forced me——"

"You treacherous little cat!" snarled Sam Mortimer abruptly.

And he sprang forward out of the shadows.

**M**ORTIMER had grown impatient. And finding everything so quiet, and considering himself to be safe, he had ventured in—creeping into the house through the window that he had forced open for his niece.

Now, with one movement, he snatched the packet.

"Uncle!" panted Margaret.

"In another minute you would have been ready to give the diamonds up," said Mortimer harshly. "It's a good thing I've come along!"

"Grab him!" yelled Handforth excitedly.

He and Willy rushed at the rascal at the same moment. But Mortimer was ready for them. He caught Edward Oswald a crashing blow on the side of the head which sent him reeling over. He picked Willy up and flung him on the top of his brother. Then, without even a glance at the girl, Mortimer sped away.

"After him!" gasped Handforth painfully.

He struggled dazedly to his feet. They could hear Mortimer scrambling through a window some distance away. Margaret was standing quite still, stunned by all this unexpected commotion.

"You'd better send for the police," she muttered brokenly. "It's all my fault, and I can't expect you to let me go."

"I knew you weren't to blame!" said Handforth triumphantly. "It was your uncle who forced you into it! And now he's got the diamonds!"

"Keep your hair on!" said Willy. "Look at these!"

He held up a glittering object, which positively sparkled and glinted in the moonlight. Handforth and Margaret looked at it dazedly.

"Not bad, eh?" said Willy, grinning.

"But—but——"

"Just a little wheeze of mine," explained Willy. "When you told me about your mac, Ted, and the way this girl tried to pinch it, I got suspicious. So I examined it."

"And—and you found the package?" asked Margaret breathlessly.

"Rather!" said Willy. "I opened it, and things became a bit clear to me when I saw these diamonds. I thought I'd put a fake packet back, and see what happened. Somehow, I believe your uncle is going to get a bit of a shock before long!"

## CHAPTER 12.

### All Serene!

**M**MARGARET WINSTON was looking very frightened.

"You've taken the diamonds!" she whispered. "Oh, when my uncle finds out how he's been tricked he'll be mad with rage!"

"But I had to do it," said Willy. "I couldn't leave the diamonds there. I'll give 'em to my pater in the morning, and he'll hand 'em over to the police. I'm pretty sure that you're not a wrong 'un, though. Your uncle ought to be horse-whipped for forcing you——"

"But you don't understand!" broke in Handforth, in alarm. "She can't go home now! He'll kill her when she gets there—after this! He'll say it's her fault!"

"H'm! I hadn't thought of that," admitted Willy. "It'll certainly be a bit awkward. You can't stay here, and you can't go home——"



Abruptly, the lights were all switched on. Sir Edward Handforth stood on the landing, looking sternly down into the hall.

"Edward! William!" he ejaculated. "What—what is the meaning of this? What are you doing down there? Who is this—young person?"

It was Margaret who answered. As Sir Edward came downstairs, she walked towards him.

"Please don't blame your sons, sir," she said quietly. "I broke into your house, and they caught me red-handed. If you'll send for the police——"

"No, no!" broke in Handforth excitedly. "Don't listen to her, pater! She's not to blame at all! It was her uncle who forced her——"

"One moment," said Sir Edward sternly. "Edward, be quiet! What is that you have in your hand, William!"

"The Kingsway diamond necklace, dad."

"Good heavens!"

"It was stolen, you know," explained Willy. "But Ted's right about the girl. I'm sure she's not to blame. She's scared stiff of her uncle, and—— Look out! Whoa! She's going to faint!"

Margaret was swaying dizzily, and there was no pretence about it, as Sir Edward first suspected. She was taken to a chair, and gently lowered into it.

Willy fetched some water, and after a few minutes the girl was a little better.

"Come, now," said Sir Edward, touched by the girl's distress—and impressed, too, by her obvious refinement and frankness. "I'm not a hard man. Tell me the whole truth—and then I shall decide what shall be done."

**S**AM MORTIMER was panic-stricken when he got back to his cycle shop in Islington. He had decided to throw a few things together, to take a motor-cycle combination from his workshop—one that had been brought in for repairs—and make a bolt for it.

After what had happened, he was certain that the police would soon be hot on his track. And he had got the diamonds!

In the sitting-room behind the shop he feverishly unfastened the precious package. It was too risky to take the diamonds like this. He would slip them into a spare inner tube—it would only take a few moments to remove the valve and replace it. Then, if he was stopped, the police might not see through the dodge, and, failing to find the diamonds, they would have nothing against him, in spite of any information they might have received.

"But I must be off pretty sharply," he muttered, as he unfolded the wrappings. "They'll be here soon——"

He stared dazedly at the thing which was revealed. A cheap, tawdry imitation pearl necklace! He took it in his hands, and crushed two of the baubles in his amazement and rage.

"They've tricked me!" he gasped, with a snarl.

He looked like a wild animal in his rage. He was bewildered—stunned. At the same time he instinctively realised that those boys were responsible—perhaps with Margaret's help! That cheap necklace, as a matter of fact, was one of Ena's. Willy had taken it from an old toybox of hers—one that had been discarded for six or seven years.

"Fooled!" shouted Mortimer crazily. "By heaven! When that girl comes back I'll break every bone in her body!"

He dropped his idea of bolting. His one thought now was to wait here for Margaret. Yet, when his first excess of fury was over, he realised that such a wait might be futile. Would she come? The chances are that she wouldn't!

Fresh panic seized him. He made up his mind, then and there, to dash back to the West End. She was hand-in-glove with those infernal schoolboys! No doubt she had told them that her uncle was ill-treating her; perhaps she had persuaded them to shelter her. If so, she would still be there. And the diamonds would still be there! Mortimer quickly made up his mind.

He left the shop, and as soon as he got on to the pavement he ran full tilt into a big, bluff man in a reefer jacket and a peaked cap.

"Why, Sam!" said the other, surprised.

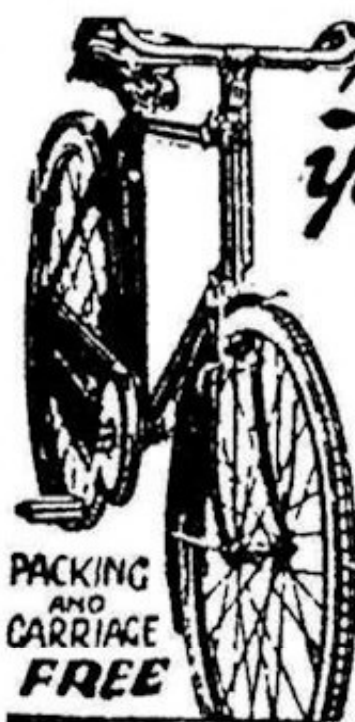
Mortimer stared at him dazedly.

"Harry!" he ejaculated. "I—I didn't know you were coming home——"

"Well, you needn't look so startled," said Captain Harry Winston. "Man alive! What's the matter with you? By thunder! Has anything happened to Margaret? What are you looking so frightened about?"

Here was another unexpected hitch. The girl's father had returned home! As a matter of fact, his ship had docked in London river soon after midnight, and he had got away at the earliest possible moment.

(Continued on next page.)



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He had left England as first mate in a cargo steamer; he had returned as captain.

"Well?" he asked sharply. "What's the matter with you, Sam? I dare say you've been up to your old tricks again, eh? You fool! Haven't you learned to go straight yet?"

There was a world of contempt in Captain Winston's voice. It drove Mortimer to a frenzy.

"You big fool!" he snarled. "You want your daughter, do you? She's with the police—under arrest!"

"You hound!" panted Captain Winston. "Where is she, I say? If you don't tell me I'll choke the life out of you!"

For the first time Sam Mortimer realised that this good-natured, bluff giant was in earnest. He had always held his brother-in-law in contempt, but he didn't now. Gurgling with panic, he gave Handforth's address.

"But it's no good," he gasped. "She won't be there now. I tell you, the police have got her! And a good thing, too! She's double-crossed me! I trusted her, and she's let me down——"

Captain Winston suddenly released him, and as Mortimer staggered back he feebly put up his arms to defend himself. But he might as well have tried to ward off an earthquake.

Crash! Crash!

It was over in a couple of seconds. Two big fists hammered into his face, and Mortimer went over like a dog, knocked out.

**M**ARGARET was a pathetic figure as she sat in the lounge hall at Handforth's home, coming near to the end of her story. Sir Edward and his two sons had listened intently, and with complete understanding.

"It would have been all right if my father had been at home," concluded the girl brokenly. "But when my mother died I had nowhere to go. My uncle took me lawfully, and made me work for him. He kept me without money, and he tried to make me help him in his burglaries."

"The awful rotter!" said Handforth fiercely.

"I am quite sure the man is an infernal rogue," said Sir Edward, nodding. "Your mistake, young lady, was in submitting to his bullying. You should have appealed to the police for protection."

"But he's my uncle," whispered Margaret. "After all, he's my mother's brother, and although I hate him I couldn't betray him like that. I've been hoping against hope that my father would come home."

"Where is your father now?"

"I don't know," she sobbed. "He's written to me, but my uncle wouldn't let me see the letters. I managed to get one, and I believe father is homeward bound. But I don't know when his ship will get in."

"We must make inquiries," said Sir

Edward briskly. "There, there! I told you I'm not a hard man. I'll see that your uncle is punished for his villainy, my dear. And I'll see that you are properly looked after until your father can take you under his care."

"You're a brick, pater!" said Edward Oswald Handforth huskily.

"Nonsense!" frowned Sir Edward. "Don't you think I'm human——"

Thump! Thump! Thump!

"Great Scott!" ejaculated Handforth, jumping up.

A loud hammering had sounded on the front door, just behind him. They all got to their feet, and Margaret had gone as white as a sheet.

"Oh! The police!" she whispered.

"Leave them to me," said Sir Edward grimly. "No, don't hide yourself. You're my guest—and under my roof you're safe."

**H**E flung open the door, and found himself facing a big man in a reefer coat and a peaked cap.

"Father!" came a joyous cry from behind.

There was no time for Sir Edward to ask any questions. He saw something flash past him, and the next moment he beheld Margaret clasped in the big man's arms.

"Well, I'm bothered," said Sir Edward.

"Oh, dad!" panted Margaret, as she clung to Captain Winston. "It's too good to be true! How did you know I was here? How did you——"

"That's all right, lassie," said the captain gruffly. "I want to ask a few questions first! I've been told by your scoundrelly uncle that you're in danger from the police. I want to get to the bottom of this!"

And then, of course, lengthy explanations followed. Margaret's happiness was good to see, and Edward Oswald wasn't looking particularly miserable, either. His face was glowing with triumph. His heroine had turned out to be true blue in spite of everything.

As for the diamonds, they were handed to the police the next morning, and Margaret's name was never mentioned in the affair. Sam Mortimer, it turned out, had been found on the pavement by a policeman—just as Captain Winston had left him. The police never got any evidence against him, however, and he was only too glad to take advantage of Captain Winston's good nature, and get into the country.

And it was many a long day before Edward Oswald Handforth forgot his Bank Holiday Flirtation!

THE END.

*(Something extra-special is due for you next Wednesday, chums—the School Train series! Don't miss reading the first yarn, which is entitled "The St. Frank's School Train!" Your pals will also be interested in this amazing new series of stories—tell them all about it!)*





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.



STANLEY CUBIN.

I DON'T agree with you—B. R. Pettinger (Sheffield)—about Handforth. You say: "In the story, 'St. Frank's In New Zealand,' Handforth wants to investigate the geysers closely, and a few lines before that Duncan had told him it was dangerous if he went too near. Don't you think he ought to have been satisfied with seeing them from a safe distance, like other boys?" No, I don't. It would be quite opposed to Handforth's character if he stated that he was satisfied by looking at any dangerous object from a safe distance. Handforth's chief characteristic is recklessness—and blundering recklessness at that. So I think I was right in making him investigate the geyser so closely that he got himself into trouble.

I'm afraid I cannot see "eye to eye" with your request, Peggy Rodgers (Maida Vale). You want me to write a series starring McClure. What has McClure ever done to warrant this honour? He's one of Handforth's chums, I know, but I think he would be a bit disappointing in a star rôle. Besides, what would happen afterwards, when he was compelled to go back into the comparative obscurity of being just a member of Handforth's "Co."? Personally, I think the main interest in Church and McClure is that they are Handforth's keepers, as it were.

I hope you weren't disappointed—D. A. Hanlon (Geraldton, Western Australia)—when you found out that I wasn't "an old gentleman with side whiskers," as you had always fondly imagined. I'm afraid the publication of my dial at the top of this page has disillusioned lots of other readers, too. But you needn't think there's any spoof about it. It's me all right. And if you want an actual photo of myself, just let me have one of your own, and then I'll send you my autographed portrait in exchange.

Glad to hear from you again—Stanley Cubin (Ilkley)—and to receive your additional photo for publication. It appears this week, and I hope your hat won't overshadow your face too much. I should imagine that you don't often venture on "Ilkla Moor baht 'at"—which, in English, I

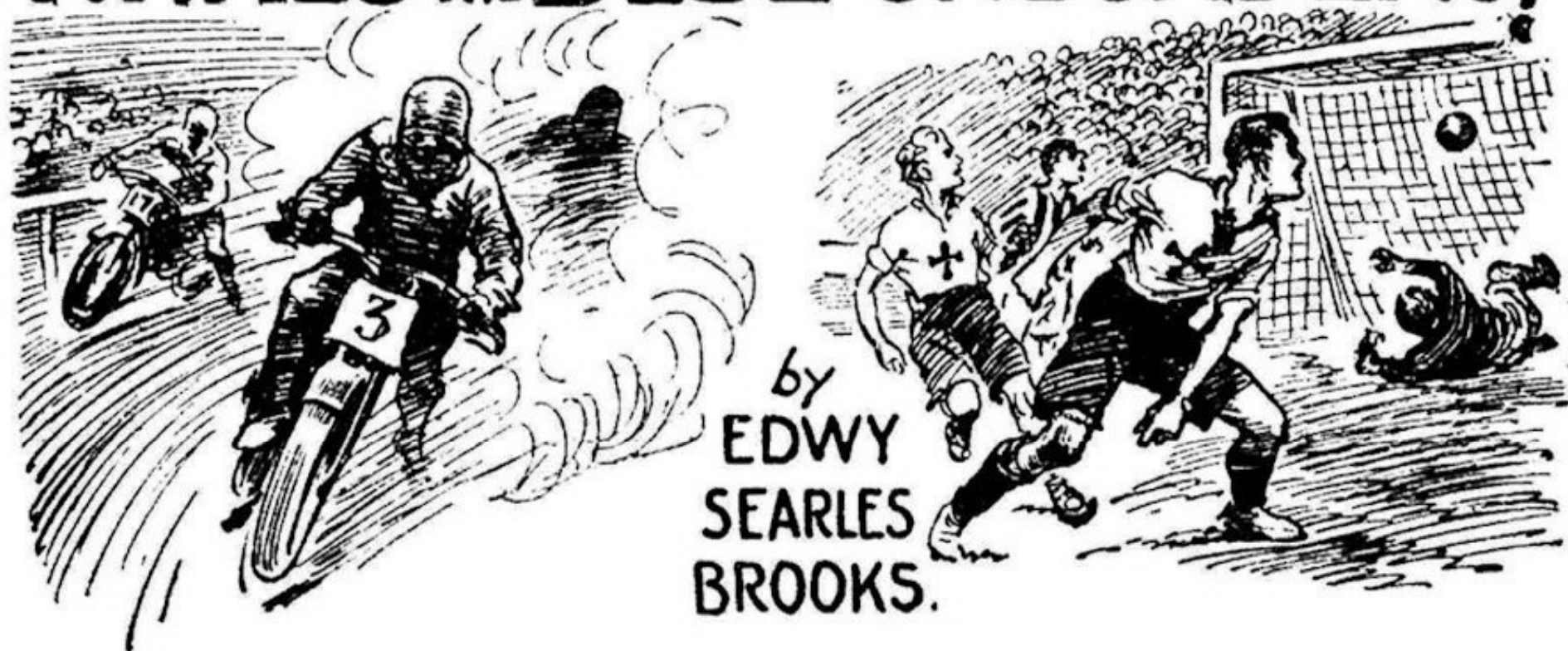
believe, means "on Ilkley Moor without a hat"—since the photograph which appears above, and the snapshot you sent me in March, 1927, both exhibit you in a be-hatted condition. I am gratified to know that your wife reads and enjoys my stories, too, and that you are keeping the cricketers' badges to gladden your son's heart when he's old enough. I dare say he'll be a reader one day. Anyhow, his parents won't be like some others, and jump on him because he reads the Old Paper. They know, from their own experience, that there's nothing harmful in it.

Thanks for your "Southern Cross Journal"—Fred L. Burnett (Malvern, Victoria, Australia)—which, I understand, is the official organ of the Southern Cross Exchange and Correspondence Club. You ask me to mention your club, and to state that you are inviting inquiries. All right. If any of the other readers want to join your well-organised Correspondence Club, they'd better write direct to you—Fred L. Burnett, Southern Cross Exchange and Correspondence Club, 37, Victoria Road, Malvern, S.E.4, Victoria, Australia.

Please don't be so sensitive—"Reader" (Ely, Cardiff)—about having your real name published. I have respected your wish, and put your pen-name, but I hope you'll let me publish your real name next time. You are only one among numerous other wives and mothers who read my stories, and as for laughing at you, and thinking you foolish because you have written to me, these are the last things I should do. Your husband can pull your leg as much as he likes, but I'm glad he's an enthusiastic reader of the Old Paper as well as you. Please tell him I'd like him to write personally, giving me his own opinions and criticisms. And do let me have that photo of yourself for publication.



# RIVALRY OF THE BLUE CRUSADERS!



*"Yab! Dirty Carrington!" That has been the cry in Bannington for the past few days. But now that Burke's villainy has been exposed, the people are saying: "Good old Rex!"*

## Good News!

**F**ATTY FOWKES rushed out of the hospital ward and he found Dave Moran and Ben Gillingham and the other Blues collected in the passage.

"How is Rex?" they chorused.

"What do you care?" asked Fatty coldly. "I wonder you had the decency to come here at all! You turned Rex away from our quarters last night, and I'm going to turn you away from here! I'm blowed if you shall see him!"

"You're mad!" said Dave. "It was Piecan who turned him away."

"And the rest of you believed that rotten yarn about him!" said Fatty, with scorn. "If you had had any feeling, you would have opposed Piecan and made him alter his rotten decision."

"Come off it, Fatty," said Dave, looking troubled. "Hang it, what else could we believe last night? But now that Rex has met with an accident, we're naturally sorry for him. We'd like to see him——"

"Hold on!" interrupted Fatty. "You're sorry for him, are you? But you still believe that he rode in that race last night?"

"You hulking idiot, what else can we believe?" snapped Ben Gillingham. "That yarn of his was too tall—too idiotic. We're sorry for him, all the same——"

"Then you can go and show your sorrow somewhere else!" roared Fatty. "Clear out—the lot of you! If you can't believe in Rex you're no friends of his! That's all I've got to say."

He fairly hustled them towards the main exit. They could have easily overpowered him, but Dave, who hated the idea of lengthening this scene, advised his companions to retreat. They'd wait outside until Fatty had cooled down.

Fatty went back into the ward, breathing hard.

"Trouble out there?" asked Rex politely.

"I wouldn't let 'em come in," snorted Fatty. "If they can't have faith in you, Rex, they're no friends of ours. Besides, I've got an idea. You're not crooked, are you? I mean, if we can only put old Piecan right before Saturday, you'll be fit for footer?"

"Yes, of course," said Rex. "But there's no chance of old Piecan being put right, unless I can get hold of those crooks who——"

"We'll work together, old man," said Fatty. "Look here! I'll do the active work, and you can stay in hospital. That foot of yours needs rest. You want to nurse it up for the big game."

"But I shan't play in the big game," protested Rex. "And the doctor has said that I can't stay here. Cool down, Fatty! You're too excited."

But Fatty won the argument, all the same. He simply refused to believe that Rex would not be able to play. And he fixed things up with Dr. Thomas. Rex was to remain in the hospital, and no reports regarding his condition were to be given to the papers. But Rex wouldn't occupy one of the patients' wards—he would be fixed up in an attic in the domestic quarters. Fatty didn't mind—



and Rex apparently had no say in the matter.

"You're a brick, doctor," said Fatty, at length. "I want to fool those other chaps, and Mr. Piecombe, too."

"I must confess that I wasn't thinking of your fellow footballers," said Dr. Thomas dryly. "Carrington, to put it bluntly, is not very popular in Bannington just now. He might meet with further trouble if he ventured out. It is better to keep him here until the feeling against him has died down."

"There'll be a different feeling about him when the real truth comes out," said Fatty bluntly. "I don't believe he's guilty of anything wrong, doctor—and you'll find I'm right before long."

Fatty hadn't the faintest idea that the truth would come out within the very next minute. For before he could leave, one of the nurses came in, looking flushed and excited. She was carrying a newspaper.

"What is it?" asked the doctor.

"I thought Mr. Carrington would like to see this," replied the nurse, giving Rex a quick, admiring flash from her eyes. "Oh, what a shame that people should have misjudged him so awfully!"

Rex felt his heart give a leap.

"Thank you, miss," he said quietly. "I—I— Why, what the— Oh, by Jove! Look at this, Fatty!"

They stared at the paper, and Fatty let out a terrific whoop.

The early editions had been sensational enough—but this was absolutely startling. Right across the front page, in heavy type, were the words: "Rex Carrington Vindicated." "Blues' Centre-Forward Cleared of Foul-ing Charges."

And there, in leaded type, were the columns of "story"—describing the detain-ing of "Lightning" Smith, his confession, and the obvious truth that Rex Carrington had been the victim of a plot.

"Good old Rex!" exclaimed Fatty fervently, as he clapped Rex on the shoulder. "Gosh! I'm glad I stood out against all the others! I knew you were made of the right stuff, old man!"

Rex couldn't speak. The clouds were clearing—and all in this moment he could see that Fate wasn't going to be so hard on him, after all. And now a new thought whirred through his brain. The Denton City match! He would be able to play, in spite of every-thing!

### Fatty's Triumph!

DR. THOMAS took Rex's hand, and wrung it.

"I am mightily glad, my boy," he said heartily. "I am glad, too, that I expressed no opinion on that unfortunate affair of last night. I'm afraid the town has been very hard on you, but I am sure that it will do everything in its power to make amends."

"I don't blame the town, sir," said Rex. "What else could the people think?"

He was bewildered. All this had hap-pened, it seemed, because those roughs had set upon him! Curly Hankin's name was not mentioned in the report, but Rex could easily guess what had occurred. Burke and Lightning Smith had heard the news, and they had given themselves away in their alarm. But it was really the "Gazette" re-porter who deserved most of the praise.

"There's nothing about Burke," said Fatty, as he scanned the paper. "The rotter appears to have got away. I don't suppose they could arrest him—and even Smith has been freed. But what does it matter? The truth is out!"

"Then there's no need for me to stay here," said Rex eagerly. "I might just as well get back, Fatty. Piecombe will let me go back into my old quarters now, and the boys will welcome me, too. I'm not resentful—"

"Piecan needs a lesson—and so do the boys!" frowned Fatty. "I'm going to spin them a yarn! I've got another idea, too!"

"You're full of 'em," said Rex, with a chuckle.

"You stay here, and lie low," continued Fatty. "Dr. Thomas won't let anybody see you—except me."

"I'm not sure that I can enter into this conspiracy—" began the doctor.

"Yes, you can, sir—you've got to," urged Fatty. "There's nothing in it—nothing wrong, anyhow. It's Thursday now, and you'll only have to keep him here until Satur-day morning. And that foot of his needs rest."

Five minutes later, Fatty emerged from the hospital. In spite of his bulk he felt as though he were walking on air. Never had he dreamed that everything would come right so quickly, and so unexpectedly. Out-side, he found the Blues. Newspapers were on view everywhere. Fatty stood regarding them all—and he noticed, too, that Mr. Piecombe and Mr. Harding were talking earnestly together a little further off.

"Here he is!" sang out Ben Gillingham.

"It's no good, boys—you can't see him!" said Fatty sternly.

"Is he badly hurt?" went up a chorus.

"Not badly—but he's bandaged and all that sort of thing," said Fatty vaguely. "Besides, you know about his foot. He's crooked, anyway."

Mr. Piecombe came hurrying forward.

"I insist upon seeing Carrington!" he ex-claimed. "By what right, Fowkes, do you assume this—er—unwarrantable air of autho-rity? I must see Carrington. I find it necessary to apologise to him. I am anxious to apologise," he added frankly. "Good heavens! How cruelly I have misjudged the boy!"

"And I, too," said Mr. Harding, with self-reproach. "I can find no excuse for my harshness. I should have known Carrington better. I think we both should be ashamed of ourselves, Mr. Piecombe!"

"Er—yes! Of course! Undoubtedly!" said Mr. Piecombe, startled.

"I hope you'll be a bit more careful next



time, then, sir!" said Fatty Fowkes sternly. "I feel like crowing a bit. I was the only one to believe in Rex all along. I had faith in him, and you all said I was mad!"

"We admit we were fools, Fatty," said Dave.

It was Fatty's moment of triumph. For the life of him, he couldn't deny himself the satisfaction of saying: "I told you so"—although he didn't use these actual words. He now proceeded thoroughly to enjoy himself. He felt that Mr. Piecombe, Mr. Harding, and all the players, deserved a lesson.

"I dare say the doctor would have turned me out, too, if I hadn't been Rex's best pal," he said. "Anyhow, I'm the only one who can see him. He can't have any other visitors. Doctor's orders."

"I refuse to believe this," said Mr. Piecombe anxiously. "I am particularly anxious to see Carrington."

"Sorry, sir—it's impossible," insisted Fatty. "If you had believed in him as I did, you wouldn't have turned him out of the Stronghold, and the chances are that he wouldn't have been hurt at all. So it is really your fault."

"Really, Fowkes! I protest—"

"I can't help that, sir," interrupted Fatty coldly. "If you don't believe me, you can go and ask the doctor. He's the house surgeon, anyway, and he ought to know. Carrington can't have any visitors at all. I don't know when you'll be able to see him."

"Stand aside, Fowkes," said Mr. Piecombe authoritatively.

But he got no satisfaction from Dr. Thomas. This gentleman kept his word, and he regarded Mr. Piecombe and Mr. Harding with very grave eyes. He assured them, most solemnly, that he could not possibly permit them to see the patient.

And when they asked him about Rex's condition, he was exasperatingly vague. He used technical words that sounded appalling, and which left Mr. Piecombe with the impression that the unfortunate Rex would be in hospital for at least a month—after which he would be lucky if he could be wheeled out in a chair.

"I am sorry, boys, but Rex seems to be in a bad way," said the manager, when he rejoined the Blues. "Fowkes was right. Nobody is allowed to see Carrington. I am afraid his football days are over!"

"Poor old Rex!" said Ben, with genuine sorrow.

"What a shame we treated him so rottenly!" muttered Andy Tait. "Poor old chap! I feel awful about it!"

They all felt awful. And Fatty, in order to keep the thing up, went about with a gloom that affected all the others. He was only cheerful when he reminded them that Rex's name was now honoured in the town.

As for Rex himself, he had the time of his life.

The most amazing presents arrived at the hospital—from Mr. Piecombe, from Mr.

Harding, from the Blues—and, indeed, from countless admirers in the town. Flowers in abundance, fruit of the most expensive and luscious kind. Rex was overwhelmed with it all; and the hospital staff, incidentally, had one of the best laughs it could remember. The whole thing was treated as a very fine joke. Rex was generous with all his gifts, and the staff put in some good work in helping to distribute the stuff amongst all the genuine patients.

In this way, the house surgeon felt that he was justified in helping with the little deception. Never before had the patients enjoyed such an abundance of luxuries.

And at the Stronghold—in fact, throughout Bannington—it was generally accepted as an absolute fact that Rex Carrington was badly crooked, and that his football days were over. This false impression had been dinned into everybody persistently—particularly by Fatty Fowkes.

But the town was in for a little surprise!

### The Vital Game!

MR. ULYSSES PIECOMBE regarded the Blues earnestly. It was Saturday afternoon, and the Stronghold was filling rapidly. It was only five minutes from the kick-off, and the players were lined up in front of the manager, all ready for the field.

"There's no need, boys, for me to tell you to do your best," said Mr. Piecombe. "Neither is it necessary for me to remind you that this game is a vital one. If we lose, our hopes of promotion are definitely and irrevocably lost."

"We'll play the game, sir," said Dave Moran.

"I know it, Dave," said Mr. Piecombe. "But I want you to all do more than play the game. Unfortunately, Carrington is definitely lost to us. I am—er—saddened when I think of the shameful way in which we treated him. However, this is no time for—er—sentimentality. There is grim work before us."

"I'll do the best I can, sir," said Sam Russell, the reserve centre-forward.

"I don't doubt it, Russell," replied the manager. "We must win this match. I know the hurdle is a stiff one. Denton City is at the top of the table, and its players are in brilliant form. If they draw with us it will be nearly fatal, when we consider the position of the other clubs."

"To make ourselves safe, sir, we've got to win!" said Dave.

"And even then we shan't be safe—unless we score at least half a dozen goals," said Mr. Piecombe, in a hopeless voice. "I can't expect miracles of you, boys. We need goals—goals! Our average is rocky, and we might even be pipped in the last match of the season—robbed of promotion by a mere question of goal average. The lack of one goal might do it."

He sent them on to the field with all the



encouragement he could muster. But he knew—and they knew—that he was asking too much. If they won, it would be extremely good. What chance was there of them winning by an overwhelming margin of goals? Scraping through would be something like a miracle.

Just as they were going out, Fatty seized Sam Russell by the arm and held him back. From outside came the tumult of cheers as the Blues appeared.

"Just a minute, Sam," said Fatty mysteriously. "Pop back into the dressing-room.

voice. "He's never been fitter! Darn my buttonholes! I've never been so surprised in all my life! There's a chance of promotion yet!"

A minute later Rex ran easily out on to the field. There was no sign of a limp now. His foot had healed marvellously. For a few tense seconds nobody seemed to take any notice. Even the players only looked round casually—thinking that Sam Russell was joining them.

Fatty Fowkes, in goal, where he was receiving a few preliminary pot-shots, found



"Hallo, boys!" sang out Rex, as he came running up. The other Blues—that is, all except Fatty Fowkes, who was grinning like a lunatic—gazed at Rex in amazement. And no wonder! For Rex was supposed to be ill in hospital—and yet here he was, dressed ready for footer!

Not a word! I rather think you'll get a surprise."

"But—"

Fatty whispered something in Sam's ear, and the reserve centre-forward gave an unceremonious gasp. Then he dashed back. He could hardly believe the evidence of his eyes when he beheld Rex Carrington standing there—with John Smart, the trainer, buzzing round him like an ostler grooming a horse.

"Rex!" gasped Sam Russell. "But—but we thought—"

"No time, old man," chuckled Rex. "There was a substitution on the dirt track—and it was Fatty's idea to make another one here. Only this one will be a bit more obvious."

"But are you fit?" gurgled Sam incredulously.

"Fit!" breathed Grouser, in a dreamy

it impossible to keep his face straight. He was grinning like a lunatic. He knew that the storm would burst any second now.

"What's the joke?" asked Ben, who was near the goal.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Fatty. "You'll see soon!"

"This is no time to laugh, you great chunk of blubber!" frowned the burly back. "This is going to be a serious game, and a good deal depends on you, too. If you let a goal through, we shall probably be sunk!"

"Ben—Ben!" gasped George Scott, the other back, running up. "Look over there!"

Ben Gillingham spun round. Scott was staring dazedly, an expression of utter bewilderment in his eyes.

"Seeing a ghost?" asked Ben tartly.

"By thunder! I believe I am!" panted George Scott. "It's Rex!"



Ben took no notice of the yell of triumphant laughter which came from Fatty Fowkes. He stared at the figure which was midway between the grand-stand and the players. Dave Moran and the other Blues had suddenly brought their kick-about to an end, too. They were all standing stock-still, staring unbelievably.

"Hallo, boys!" sang out Rex, as he ran up.

"Wake me up, somebody!" gurgled Ben. "This can't be true!"

"By Jove!" shouted Dave. "Rex, old man! We—we thought——"

"Hurrah!" yelled Tich Harborough, the schoolboy winger. "It's Rex himself! He's turned out for the Blues again!"

"Hurrah!"

All the players swarmed round Rex like madmen. They wanted to shake him by the hand, and everybody was asking questions. The thing seemed absurdly impossible. A minute earlier they had believed Rex to be in hospital, and permanently crooked. Yet here he was, looking as fit as a fiddle, without a scar on him!

And just then, too, the crowds had sensed that something was different. Here and there, excited supporters were pointing. They were shouting that Rex Carrington had turned out. Hundreds of other people were laughing these fools to scorn. What nonsense!

But those early, keen-eyed supporters weren't such fools, after all. Rex was being recognised by everybody now. A swelling wave of excitement was growing. It was a murmuring ripple at first, growing louder and louder. Then a stupendous burst of cheering broke.

Never before had the Stronghold seen such a scene of enthusiasm.

It was a glorious reception for Rex. And he, being the kind of fellow who responds readily to such expressions of goodwill, burned inwardly with joy. He vowed that he would play the game of his life to-day!

"Hurrah!"

"Good old Rex Carrington!"

"Play up, the Blues!"

The cheers were getting louder and more violent. Hats were being flung high into the air, and the noise was audible on the other side of Bannington. Rex was playing for the Blues! It was too good to be true!

Ordinarily, the crowds would have given him a rousing reception after an absence of some weeks—for he had always been a strong favourite. But to-day it was quite different. Rex had been misjudged by the town—he had been scorned and held in contempt.

Then the town had found that he had been victimised. His vindication had come—and this was his first public appearance since then. It was only natural that the tens of thousands should nearly cheer their beads off.

Mr. Piccombe, in his office, heard the first swelling roar, and rather wondered what

it could mean. Lionel Corcoran happened to be with him, and he looked inquiringly at the schoolboy owner.

"The Denton men, I suppose, sir," said Corky.

"But they're out!" protested Mr. Piccombe. "The game hasn't started yet, and— Good gracious! Listen to that! What on earth has happened?"

They hurried from the office, and came out upon the lower terrace of the grand-stand. They beheld an amazing scene. Everybody in that packed stand was on his or her feet, waving, cheering, and apparently going mad with excitement. And in the field, the Blues were crowding round one particular player.

"Good heavens!" said Mr. Piccombe faintly. "What does it mean?"

"It's Rex!" yelled Corcoran. "Look, sir! It's old Rex!"

"Nonsense!" said the manager. "Impossible! Out of the question! Rex is in hospital! I wish you wouldn't get such ideas——"

He broke off, for the air was filled with the name of "Rex." Even Mr. Piccombe became convinced. He ran like a rabbit to the players' exit, Corky at his heels. With his coat-tails flying, Mr. Piccombe dashed across the turf.

"Carrington!" he panted, as he came up. "Upon my word! This is—er—astoundingly incredible! How did you get here? You mustn't play, Carrington! The doctor distinctly said——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It's all right, sir—Rex is fit!" said Dave Moran happily. "It's a trick of Fatty's. Fatty knew he was fit all the time and he's been keeping it a secret until to-day. Rather a ripping surprise, eh, sir?"

Mr. Piccombe took a deep breath.

"I am more gratified than I can possibly express," he said huskily. "And my first duty, Carrington, even before congratulating you, is to tender you my sincere apologies."

"That's all right sir," said Rex awkwardly. "There's no need——"

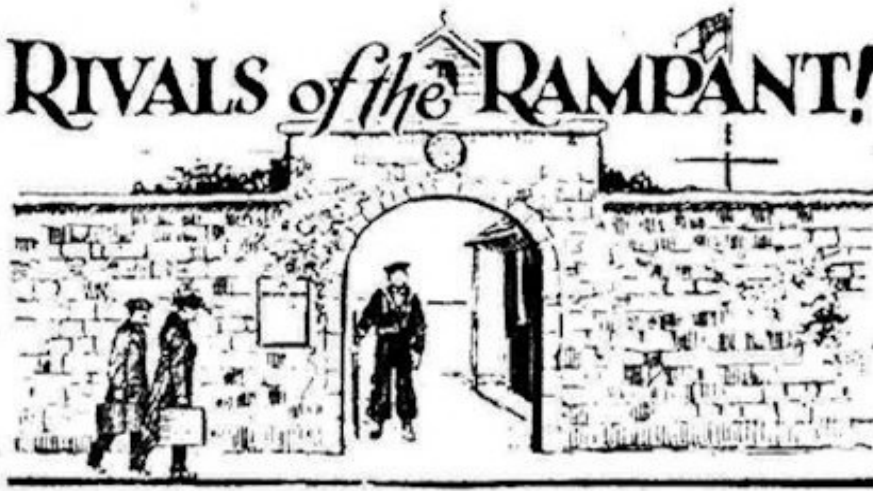
"I can only hope, Carrington, that you will find it in your heart to overlook my harsh and unwarranted conduct," said Mr. Piccombe, with ruthless self-condemnation. "You are showing your own fine spirit by turning out for us, and I cannot express my gladness."

All the other players apologised, too, and Rex was feeling just a bit bewildered—particularly as the multitude was still cheering. No Cup-tie crowd had ever displayed such excitement.

Rex was thankful that the referee gave a preliminary blast on his whistle just then. The sound sent a thrill right through his frame. Football! He laughed aloud as he thought of the dirt track. More than ever he realised that football was in his blood, and that he only really lived when he was on the football field.



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Popular Stanton Hope has written a real masterpiece in "Rivals of the Rampant!" This is a serial which will live long in the memories of all Nelson Lee readers as one of the best that has ever appeared in the Old Paper. Don't miss the opening instalment NEXT WEEK, chums!

## Good Old Rex!

"GOAL!"

"Well played, Rex!"

"Oh, what a beauty!"

"That's the way to do it, the Blues!"

The game was not three minutes old. The Denton City players, who had come here fully expecting to win "hands down," were looking startled and dismayed. Their defences had been sliced clean through.

The ball had gone out to Tich Harborough on the wing, had been slipped in to Penniworth, and then Rex, as of old, had sent in a lightning drive which the goalie hadn't even seen. It was one of his unbeatable first-time shots which was worth pounds to see.

"Hurrah!"

Rex himself wondered what all the cheering was about. It had been the simplest of shots with a ready-made opening for him. And he was feeling the glorious exhilaration of the game getting into his bones. All his fellow-players were flushed and eager. Rex's re-appearance in the forward line had brought about an electric effect. There was something uncanny about it.

Mr. Piecombe, in the stand, was feeling quite faint.

"A goal—already!" he breathed. "Much as we appreciated Carrington in the past, I doubt if we realised his true value, Corcoran. One does not value a possession until one loses it."

"But we've regained Rex, sir," said Corcoran happily.

The Denton City players tried to pull themselves together as soon as the game restarted, but they soon found that it was an

impossible task—quite beyond their powers. They felt like a village-green team pitted against the Cup Finalists. They were simply run off their feet.

And this, of course, added to the brilliance of the Blues.

All the Denton players' passing was erratic; all the Blues' passing was startlingly accurate. Before another minute had elapsed, the forward line was on the move again. The visitors' half-backs were left standing, panic-stricken. The backs became confused, and this time Rex went clean through on his own.

"Shoot, Carrington!" shrieked the crowd.

Rex made no mistake about it. With that superb coolness which was characteristically his, he lured the goalie out, swerved in precisely the opposite direction to that which the unfortunate custodian expected, and shot the leather into the net with deadly accuracy.

"Goal!"

"Good old Rex!"

The cheering was more deafening than ever. Dave and Penniworth and the others came running up, trying to grab Rex's hand.

"Cheese it!" he protested. "Dash it, any fool could have scored there."

Denton City now made a big effort to pull themselves together. They succeeded for a time, but couldn't keep it up. Soon the Blues were pressing again. Tich scored a glorious goal of his own five minutes from half-time, and then Rex added to the bag just as the whistle was about to blow.

Four up!

The game was as good as won—but every member of the Blues team was as inspired as ever. Goals—goals—goals! Promotion was



nearly certain now, but the more goals they could score, the more sure the triumph would be.

Half-time came, and the players made a dash for the dressing-room.

Mr. Piecombe came in, full of enthusiasm and congratulations. He didn't forget to remind the players that fine as the score was, more goals would not come amiss. Mr. Piecombe seemed to have shed ten years during the past hour.

The whistle blew, and out went the players again. As they emerged upon the field, they noticed a kind of heaving earthquake amongst the spectators at the far end of the enclosure. It was a remarkable sight. Then, from amidst that mountain of humanity, a figure shot out and came pelting across the turf.

It was a tattered figure—practically in rags from head to foot. In spite of these drawbacks, however, there seemed to be plenty of life in it. A section of the crowd tried to follow, but the police managed to gain control.

"Great Scott!" said Fatty. "It's Burke!"

"By Jove, so it is!" said Rex.

None of the Blues could feel sorry for the rascal. It was unnecessary for them to ask any questions. Clearly, Burke had been foolish enough to attend the match—drawn there, perhaps, by the rumours that Rex was appearing. Anyhow, he had been recognised, pounced upon, and this was the result.

The whole town knew that Burke was the culprit in that race-track affair. Lightning Smith had not hesitated to talk, and, although the papers had not published Burke's name, Bannington knew. Burke had been a fool not to get out sooner.

But he got out now quickly enough!

If it hadn't been for the protection of the police, he might have been half lynched. As it was, the Blues learned, later, that he had shaken the dust of Bannington from his feet for good—and he was lucky to get away so lightly.

The second half of that never-to-be-forgotten game was every bit as brilliant as the first. Twice Denton City broke through, but only twice—and on both occasions Fatty Fowkes foiled them. His defence was rock-like.

At the other end the Blues' attack was simply irresistible. Rex scored three more goals off his own boot—a record even for the Crusaders' famous sharpshooter. Six goals in one match!

Penniworth scored, too—making a bag of eight altogether. And when the final whistle blew, Mr. Ulysses Piecombe threw all his reserve to the winds, and so far forgot himself as to dance like a dervish.

"Well done, boys!" he sang out exultantly.

"Well played, Carrington!" It means promotion! It's certain now. First Division next season!"

"Hurrah!" roared the triumphant Blues.

"Thanks to good old Rex!" yelled Fatty, slapping Rex on the back. "It's his game, sir—his victory! We can't do without Rex at the Stronghold!"

And all the others were heartily of the same opinion. THE END.

*(That's the end of Edwin Scarles Brooks' fine serial, chums, but there's another topping new yarn starting next week entitled "Rivals of the Rampant!" which is written by popular Stanton Hope. Look out for the long opening instalment next Wednesday.)*

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