

NELSON LEE



The LOVELORN GOALIE!

Kenneth
Brookes

An amusing incident from this week's extra-long, hilarious yarn featuring the cheery Chums of St. Frank's.

Extra-Long St. Frank's Yarn this Week, Chums—Start Reading it Now!

K.K.'s Secret!

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**K.K. Parkington : the
 he-man of the Remove
 —in love! How the
 Remove laughs—how
 you'll laugh!—but
 there's more in it
 than meets the eye.**
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By
**Edwy
 Searles Brooks**

CHAPTER 1.

K. K. Causes a Sensation!

TEDDY LONG took the letter out of the rack and grinned. And when Teddy Long grinned it generally meant something unpleasant.

The squat, tubby Removite was in the lobby of the Ancient House at St. Frank's. The September evening was dull, and a persistent, miserable drizzle was falling. Outside, through the open doorway, there was a mournful vista of dripping chestnut trees and wet gravel. Brown, sodden leaves were lying untidily about.

"Funny thing K. K. didn't notice this at tea-time," muttered Long.

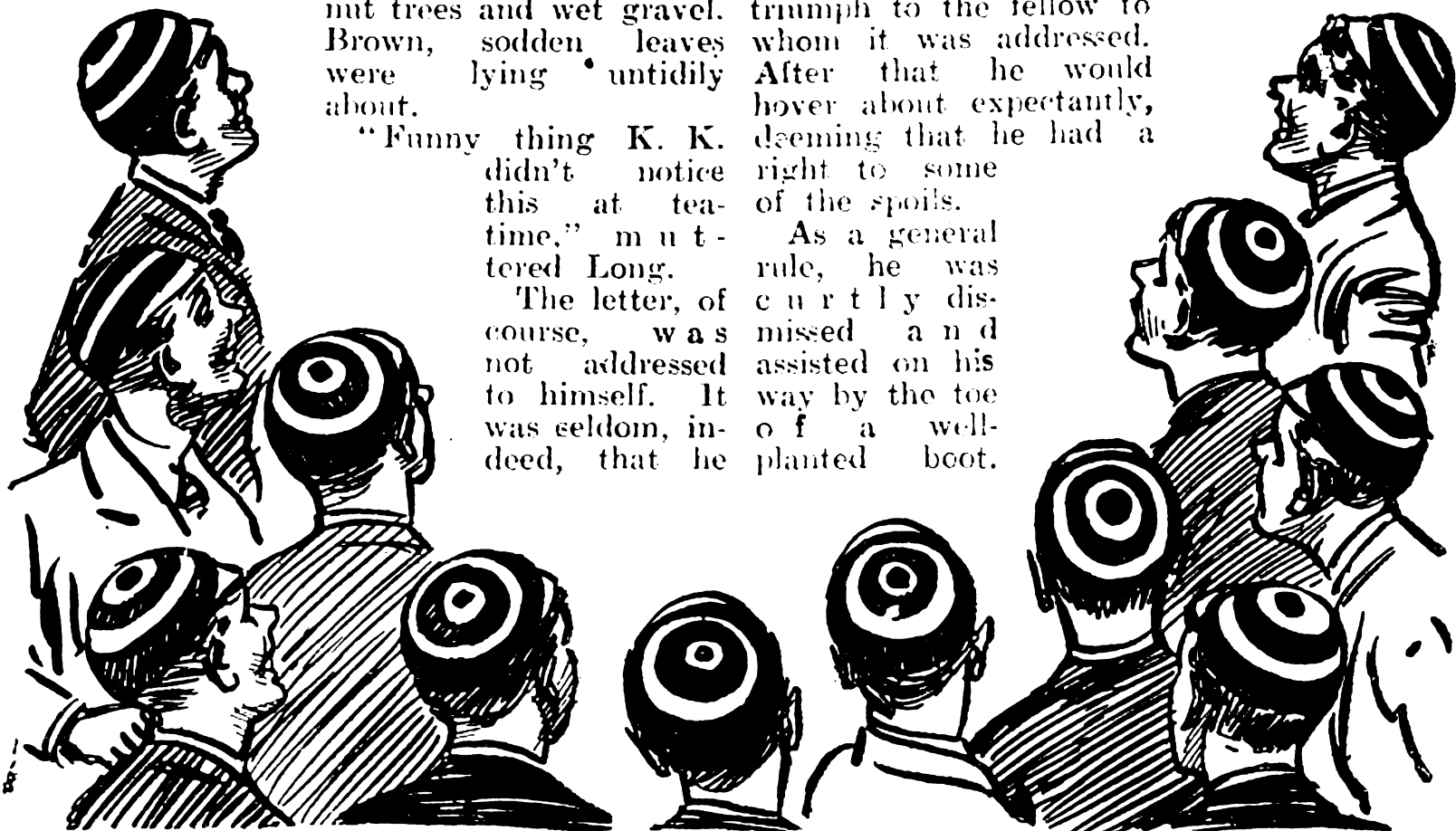
The letter, of course, was not addressed to himself. It was seldom, indeed, that he

received letters; but it was one of his unpleasant little habits to investigate the letter-rack at frequent intervals, and to finger the various missives which happened to be there.

Teddy had made an art of this. It mattered not to him whether the envelope was thin or thick; he could tell, by the feel alone, whether a letter contained currency notes or not. Those which did not—and these, incidentally, were in the vast

majority—he rejected with a sniff. But now and again he would come across one of a promising nature, and although it was no earthly business of his, he would convey it in triumph to the fellow to whom it was addressed. After that he would hover about expectantly, deeming that he had a right to some of the spoils.

As a general rule, he was curtly dismissed and assisted on his way by the toe of a well-planted boot.



His school-fellows had rooted objections to having their letters mauled and fingered by this inquisitive young bounder.

Archie Glenthorne, it seemed, was the cause of all the trouble; for on one famous occasion, terms ago, he had been rash enough to whack out a ten-shilling note to Teddy in the exuberance of the moment. Since then, Teddy had never ceased to hope. He regarded every letter as fair game.

This present one was an exception. It was addressed to "Master K. K. Parkington" in a firm, feminine handwriting. There was obviously no cash in it, but Teddy was intrigued on account of the handwriting itself. The postmark, too, was of exceptional interest, for it informed Teddy that this letter had come from Carlton, in Surrey.

"One of K. K.'s giddy girl friends, back in his old school," grinned Teddy. "Not the first time I've seen a letter like this, either!"

His grin vanished, and a frown came over his face. He rubbed himself tenderly. He was still suffering from the effects of a right-hander which Kirby Keeble Parkington had delivered with all his customary vigour just before tea—when he had found Long sampling a special cake in K. K.'s study cupboard.

Here was a chance to get his own back! K. K. was in the Common-room now, and it would be rather good fun to watch his face when he received that letter—in front of all the other fellows.

In many respects, Teddy Long was an obtuse person. Handforth, of Study D, had frequently declared that Teddy's brain had never succeeded in getting out of first gear, and was, in fact, nearly always in reverse. Handforth, being the proud owner of a Morris Minor, had a habit of using mechanical similes. If Teddy had paused to think at this moment, he would have put that letter back in the rack. K. K. was certainly not the kind of fellow to take kindly to what Teddy had in mind.

But the sneak of the Remove never thought of these things until it was too late. Therefore, with a wide and unsavoury grin upon his face, he barged into the Junior Common-room.

"Letter for you, K. K.!" he announced loudly.

Parkington looked up. He was in the midst of a game of Mah-Jongg, with Deeks, Goffin and Bonner—three of his henchmen. K. K. was a veritable young giant, with a mop of fiery-red hair, and a face which expressed vigour, determination, and abundant good-humour. Not that there was much good-humour on it now.

"What's that?" he demanded. "Half a tick, Deeks, old trout! I want to chow that Red Dragon of yours—"

"Ass!" said Deeks. "You can't chow Dragons. You can only pung 'em."

"Well, pung, then," said Parkington. "But wait till I come back!" He rose to his feet, and the various other occupants of the Common-room looked on with interest. "Where did you bag that letter from, Long, you fat worm?"

"It was in the rack," replied Teddy, holding it up for inspection.

"Nobody told you to take it out—"

"And it's from a lady!" grinned Teddy.

"You young toad!" roared K. K., leaping forward.

"I thought that would touch you up a bit," giggled Teddy, dodging. "It's from a young lady—and from your old school, too. It's got the Carlton postmark on it. The girl you left behind you, I suppose?"

"Give me that letter!" roared K. K. furiously.

His voice had taken on a note of savage alarm, and everybody else in the Common-room stared in astonishment. It was so unusual for Parkington to lose his temper.

"Here, I say!" gasped Teddy, scared. "I—I didn't mean—"

Crash!

K. K., dashing at him, floored him with a single blow. Breathing hard, he grabbed the letter, and his face was pale as he looked at the handwriting. Then, without a word, he turned and hurried towards the door.

"Here, what about our game, K. K.?" sang out Goffin.

K. K. did not answer. He went out and slammed the door. It wasn't so much an exit as a flight.

"Well, well!" murmured Vivian Travers. "Our genial K. K. seems to have been touched on the raw."

"Can you blame him?" demanded Handforth warmly. "It's like Long's nerve to bone people's letters."

"I'm hurt!" groaned Teddy, writhing on the floor. "Help! Fetch the doctor! That—that brute's half killed me!"

"Too bad!" said Nipper, the Remove skipper. "Steady on, Handy, this poor chap's half killed. We've got to do something about it. He needs assistance. Who's got the biggest feet?"

"Handy has!" promptly yelled half a dozen voices.

"Hi! Keep your feet to yourself!" howled Teddy, leaping up with remarkable agility for a half-killed person. "You rotters! Didn't you see how K. K. lashed into me?"

"And serve you jolly well right, you interfering blighter!" said Nipper. "I've a good mind to lash into you myself—just to complete the good work. You're too fond of taking chaps' letters out of the rack."

"I only did it for a bit of fun," complained Teddy sullenly. "How was I to know that K. K. would go off the deep end like that? That letter was from some girl at Carlton. I wonder what Vera Wilkes would say if she knew?"

There were a few chuckles, but most of the juniors frowned. It was well known that Kirby Keeble Parkington had a soft spot for the Housemaster's daughter; and there was every reason to believe that Vera had rather a liking for K. K., too.

"You'd better dry up, Long," said Nipper briefly.

"I don't see why I should," retorted Teddy. "It isn't the first time K. K.'s had letters

from that girl in Carlton! I've seen 'em before—and in the same handwriting, too!"

"Rats! It may be his sister," said Harry Gresham.

"Not likely! K. K.'s people live in Wiltshire," replied Teddy, who made it his business to know all these facts. "Carlton's only a little village—except for the school. We all know that K. K. was at Carlton College before he came here. And there's no girls' school there, either. I'll bet that letter's from one of the housemaids!"

"I think," said Harvey Deeks, getting to his feet, "that we've had enough of this young beast. Some of us were at Carlton, too, and we know jolly well that K. K. never had any girl friends there."

"Then who was that letter from?" jeered Teddy. "The postmark was Carlton, and it was addressed in a girl's handwriting. You can't fool me! And it's no good trying to shield K. K., either."

"Shield him!" roared Deeks. "What the dickens are you trying to insinuate?"

"Nun-nothing!" gasped Teddy Long. "I—I didn't mean——"

"Oh, dry up, and forget the whole thing," interrupted Nipper. "Long was biffed by K. K., and that ought to settle it. In any case, we're going over to Carlton on Saturday, and if K. K. has got a girl friend there, he'll be able to answer that letter in person. The sooner you learn to mind your own business, Long, the better."

Nipper had his back to the door, and thus he did not observe the entry of Kirby Keeble Parkington. The red-haired junior had come in briskly enough, his face composed and cheery. At Nipper's words, however, he halted, and a startled expression leapt into his eyes. Everybody stared at him in wonder. What was it that had caused him to express such consternation? There was a silence in the Common-room—a tense, hushed silence.

Nipper glanced round, puzzled—until he saw K. K.

"Hallo!" he said. "I didn't know you'd come in again, old man."

"What was that you just said, Nipper?" asked K. K. quietly. "About going over to Carlton, I mean?"

"Why, the eleven."

"What do you mean—the eleven?"

"Football," said Nipper patiently. "The cricket season's over, old man. I've been in touch with Walton, the junior skipper of Carlton, and I've fixed up a match for Saturday."

"Oh!" said K. K., as though crushed.

"I thought you would be rather keen on it," continued Nipper mildly. "I didn't say anything about it to you or these pals of yours because I wanted it to be a bit of a surprise. You're all ex-Carltonians——"

"I know," interrupted Parkington. "All the same, you might have told me about this match. I could have warned you."

"Warned me?"

"It's no good going to Carlton," said K. K. almost desperately. "Carlton's not good enough to play against St. Frank's. The best thing you can do is to write to Walton and scratch that match. He's a decent chap—he won't mind. Or perhaps he'll agree to bring his eleven over here instead."

"You're flustered, old man, or you wouldn't have given yourself away like that," said Nipper quietly.

"What do you mean?" asked K. K., startled.

"Well, in one breath you say that Carlton isn't good enough to play us, and in the next breath you intimate that the fixture will be quite O.K. if the Carlton chaps come here. What you mean is that you don't want us to play away, eh?"

"No, I—I——"

K. K. paused, conscious of the fact that all eyes were upon him. He had gone very red now, and the light of alarm in his eyes was stronger than ever.

"I am sorry if I've upset you over this," continued Nipper steadily. "I didn't mean to, K. K.—I thought you'd be rather bucked, in fact, particularly as I want you to play right-back. I'm posting the names tomorrow——"

"You want me to play?" ejaculated Parkington huskily. "You—you mean that I'm booked to go over to Carlton with the eleven?"

"Exactly. A fixture is a fixture."

"It's jolly decent of you to give me a place, Nipper, but really, I don't think I'm good enough," said K. K. "If you don't mind, I'll stand down and make room for somebody else—somebody who can play better."

If the juniors had been astonished at Kirby Keeble Parkington's attitude at first, they were now dumbfounded. Such a statement from him was akin to a bombshell.

CHAPTER 2.

Peppery!

NIPPER looked at Parkington very straightly.

"Do you expect me to believe that?" he asked. "Ever since the footer season started, K. K., you've been training your hardest; you've been urging me to include you in the Junior Eleven. And now, when I've given you your place, you calmly say that you're not good enough. It doesn't fit, old man."

"I—I need more training," said K. K. feebly.

"Well, I'm perfectly satisfied with your present form, and I want you at right-back," retorted Nipper. "Of course, if you can give me any definite and satisfactory reason why you don't want to play at Carlton, I'll release you. Merely saying that you are not good enough is a waste of breath."

K. K.'s face cleared; hope showed in his eyes.

"I've got a definite reason, as a matter of fact," he said reluctantly. "I was hoping you wouldn't press for it, old sardine. The fact is—well, I mean, Carlton's my old school."

"Go hon!" said Nipper sarcastically.

"Walton's a pal of mine—or was," went on K. K. "At least, I know him to speak to. Somehow it doesn't seem to be right that I should be included in a team that's visiting my old school. Understand? It's sort of playing against the chaps I used to play with. So you can leave me out, sweet-heart."

Nipper grinned.

"And is that what you call a reasonable and satisfactory excuse for not playing?" he asked. "Rats, K. K.! Rubbish! You'll have to think of something better than that, old man! Hang it, there's nothing in playing against your old school, is there? You're a St. Frank's chap now, and you're a good full-back, and I don't want any more of these feeble excuses."

For a fellow of K. K.'s resource he had certainly made a bad hash of this affair. It was as clear as daylight that he had thought up a desperate excuse on the spur of the moment. As an ex-Carltonian he should have been all the more keen to play for St. Frank's—if only to show his old school that he had made his mark at his new school.

"It's not feeble," protested Parkington frantically. "Besides, I—I'm not feeling any too well. I—I believe I've got a cold coming on. I feel all shaky."

"You'll be fit enough by Saturday," declared Nipper.

K. K. opened his mouth to speak, thought better of it, and charged out of the Common-room.

His behaviour was very strange. It wasn't so much that letter which Teddy Long had brought in; the red-haired junior had clearly recovered his composure before returning to the Common-room. His composure had been completely shattered by the sudden and unexpected knowledge that he was booked to go over to Carlton on the Saturday.

For some reason, known only to himself, he was desperately anxious to avoid his old school. None of the juniors could be blamed for connecting that letter with K. K.'s attitude. It was particularly significant that Deeks and Goffin and the other ex-Carltonians were as puzzled as the rest.

"Can't make it out," growled Harvey Deeks, scratching his head. "Anybody might think that K. K. had a guilty secret—a dark past! The chap's acting as though he's afraid to go back to Carlton."

"So he is," murmured Travers. "The very thought scares him."

"Well, I'm jiggered if I can understand it," put in Goffin bluntly. "I'm as keen as mustard to go back for half a day and to

look over the old surroundings. K. K. ought to feel the same."

"It's pretty clear, my sons, that your red-headed friend has a skeleton in his cupboard," said Handforth abruptly. "The fact that you know nothing about it doesn't prove that it isn't there. I wonder what the chump's been up to?"

"I'll bet that letter could tell us!" said Teddy Long, grinning.

"Oh, let's drop the whole thing," said Nipper impatiently. "Give K. K. a rest, and he'll probably forget all this nonsense. After all, we don't want to butt into his affairs, do we? If he likes to have a little secret, let him."

NOTHING more was said that evening, and K. K. himself was looking normal except for the fact that he had become silent and thoughtful.

He made no reference to the match until the following morning, when he happened to meet Nipper in the Ancient House lobby. He hesitated, and then gave a queer little cough. It wasn't well done. It sounded forced.

"Afraid that cold's developing, Nipper," he said huskily.

"It doesn't sound particularly bad," replied the junior skipper cheerily. "You're a strong chap, K. K.; you'll soon throw it off."

"I'm game for to-morrow if you really want me," continued Parkington, "but, honestly, you'd better be thinking of a substitute—just in case I crock up. I can't help feeling that this cold is going to be bad."

He sneezed violently, hastily clapped his handkerchief to his face, and walked away.

"Funny!" muttered Nipper, frowning.

Once or twice during the day he noticed that K. K. gave an occasional sneeze. He irritated Mr. Crowell in the Form-room by his sniffing and snuffing. As the day wore on, Nipper became more convinced than ever that K. K. was "putting it on." The climax came after tea.

It had turned out rainy again this evening, and the juniors were disgusted. Footer practice had been brought to an untimely end, and the Common-room was crowded. Into this crowd came Kirby Keeble Parkington. He was in a sorry plight. He was sneezing violently, and his eyes were watery and red.

"Frightfully sorry, old boy, but I'm unfit!" he said between fits of sneezing. "Feel pretty rotten."

"That cold seems to have developed rapidly," remarked Nipper.

"Never known anything like it," mumbled K. K.

"I saw you in the passage half an hour ago, and you were all right then," continued Nipper. "I'm sorry about this, Parkington."

"Got a bit damp—out on Little Side," whispered K. K. huskily. "That's why it's developed so quickly—" He broke off to

sneeze violently. "I'd better report to the sanny," he added glumly. "What a life!"

"You mean you can't play to-morrow?" asked Nipper grimly.

"Afraid it's impossible, old man—the doctor's bound to keep me in bed," replied K. K. "Oh, my eyes! My nose! I feel rotten!"

"You look rotten," said Handforth bluntly.

K. K.'s eyes were running worse than ever, and he was coughing and sneezing to such an extent that most of the juniors steered well clear of him. Nipper, however, went up to the patient and clapped him on the back.

"Buck up, old man!" he said heartily. "If you get to bed early and——" He broke off, and a rather queer light dawned in his eyes. "Yes, if you get to bed early and sleep soundly you'll be all right for to-morrow," he went on. "You mustn't think of going into the sanny, K. K. Once there, they'll keep you there over the week-end."

"Yes, I'm hoping—I mean, I'm afraid they will," gulped K. K. hastily.

He staggered off to a corner and sat down, using his handkerchief with much ostentation. He did not observe Nipper's exit; still less did he guess Nipper's errand.

The junior skipper had no desire to play an unfit man in an important match; but, at the same time, he wasn't going to be hoodwinked. He wanted K. K. for right-back, and if K. K. was fit he would have to play. And Nipper was very suspicious.

He went straight to Parkington's study and was glad to find it empty. He closed the door behind him, and sniffed the air keenly. The suspicion that he had formed in the Common-room was now confirmed.

"Pepper!" he muttered, breathing hard.

He examined the table without result; but K. K. had been careless over by the cupboard. There was a fine sprinkling of pepper showing on the polished mahogany top. When Nipper opened the cupboard itself, he found the pepper pot handy.

What on earth should he do?

The case was such an unusual one that the Junior skipper was nonplussed. Here was a junior, normally as keen as mustard on football, deliberately faking illness in order to

get out of playing! Not exactly that, either. K. K. didn't object to playing so much as he objected to going over to Carlton College. All this trickery on his part was done with the one object of getting left behind.

Obviously, he had drawn pepper into his nose, and he had sprayed pepper into his eyes. It was a good stunt as far as it went. He looked exactly like a fellow in the first stages of a bad cold in the head.

"Well, he's not going to get away with this bluff!" said Nipper gruffly. "If there's a good and valid reason why he doesn't want to go to Carlton, why doesn't he say so? I don't like the look of this at all."

Nipper's blood was up. He hated any kind of subterfuge. Frank and open himself, he liked others to be open; and if they weren't



K. K. seized the letter from the howling Teddy Long and dashed from the room in panic.

he wanted to know the reason why. K. K. was the last fellow in the school he would have suspected of deception. He had always thought K. K. a thorough sportsman.

He went back to the Common-room. K. K. was just on the point of reeling out, handkerchief to his face.

"Better go and report straight away, old man," somebody was saying. "You're really bad."

"Just a minute," put in Nipper. "I want a word with you, K. K. All this is very clever, but I don't admire you for it. If you don't want to go to Carlton, why can't you say so openly, and give me a good reason.

I can't have much of an opinion of a chap who fakes a cold as an excuse."

"Go easy, Nipper," protested Deeks indignantly. "That's a bit thick, isn't it? K. K.'s been sneezing all over the place, and his eyes are watering like fountains. A fellow can't do that sort of thing to order."

"He can if he uses pepper," retorted Nipper.

"What!" went up a general shout.

"Here, I say!" protested Parkington feebly.

"Do you deny it?" asked Nipper.

"I—I— Well—"

"When I slapped you on the back a little while ago, I smelt pepper," said Nipper. "That made me suspicious, so I went to your study. There's pepper all over the top of

"For goodness' sake don't make a mystery out of nothing," growled K. K. "I can't explain, but for private reasons it's impossible for me to go to Carlton. Is that plain or shall I repeat it?"

"I'll cross your name off the list," replied Nipper briefly.

"Thanks awfully!"

"And don't grumble, old man, if you're not included in the eleven for our next big game," added Nipper. "If you don't play at Carlton you might not get into the eleven for months. It all depends upon the fellow who takes your place. If he plays a good game, he'll keep his position."

"You're mad, K. K.," urged Deeks. "Why the dickens are you throwing away your opportunity? What's all this mystery? Why don't you want to go to Carlton?"

"I don't want to go!" retorted K. K. "Am I obliged to give reasons?"

"The fellows are suspecting that there's something fishy—"

"Let them suspect!" roared Parkington, with a flash of temper. "Do you think I care? Blow the lot of them!"

Edward Oswald Handforth pushed himself forward.

"Are we going to stand this, you Old-Timers?" he demanded noisily. "Are we going to let this fatheaded Red-Hot talk to us like that? Let's bump him!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Ho deserves it for trying to fool us with that dud cold," said Travers. And before he could escape Kirby Keeble Parkington was seized by an excited crowd of Old-Timers and bumped hard and often.

CHAPTER 3.

The Remove is Amused!

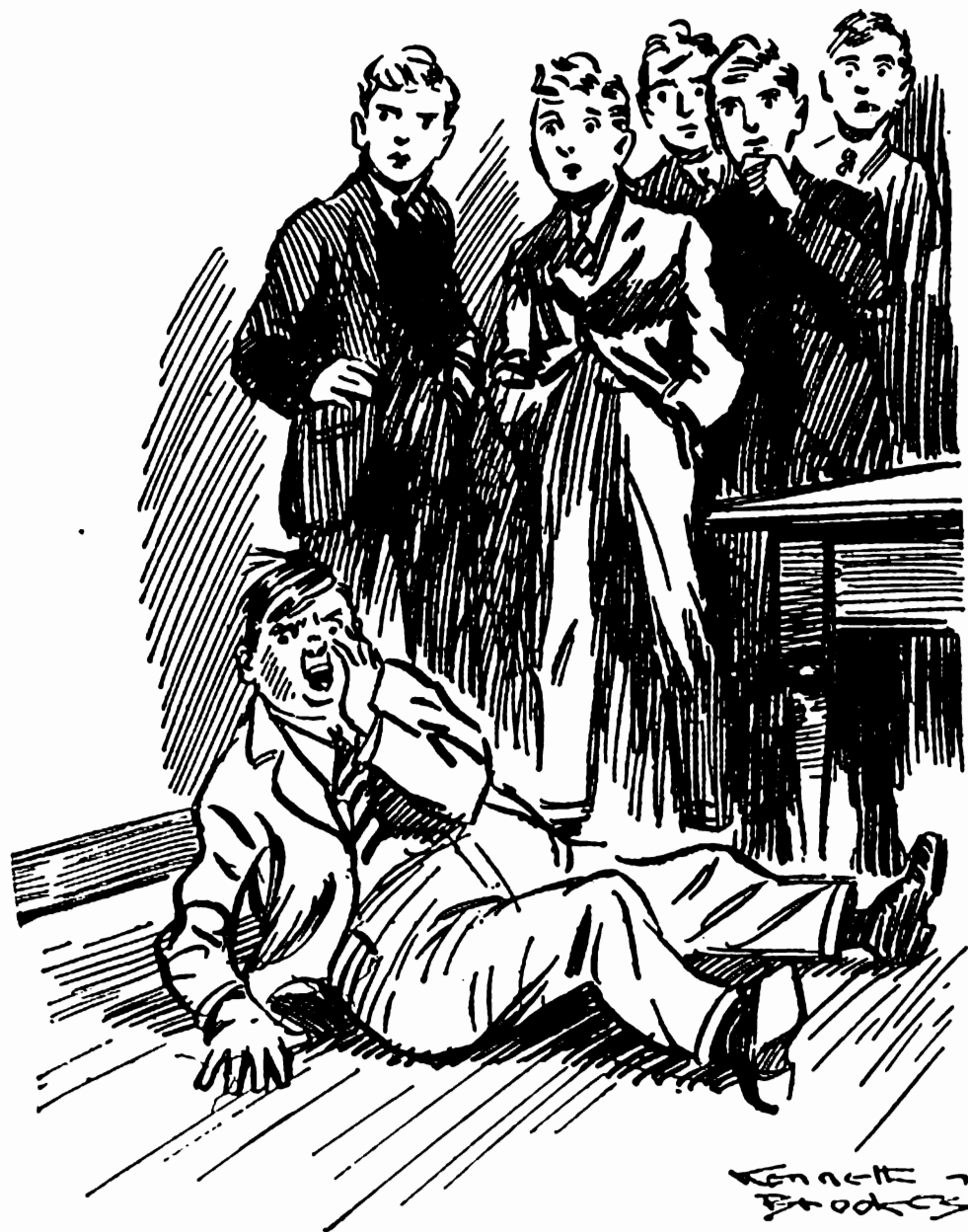
THE Removites were exasperated because the whole thing was very akin to a storm in a teacup. Nobody could understand why K. K. was

acting so strangely—and the juniors instinctively hated a mystery.

The leader of the Red-Hots, dishevelled, dusty and sore, managed to crawl away after the bumping. The rest of the fellows drifted back into the Common-room, and the incident was over.

It was about five minutes later that Vivian Travers wandered out of the Common-room and spotted some crumpled sheets of paper lying in a dark corner. Travers was by way of being a tidy fellow, and he automatically picked up the paper, intending to throw it away.

He thought it was a discarded notice, or some half-done lines; but at the first glance



the cupboard, K. K. What's the idea of all this?"

Parkington grinned sheepishly.

"I'm a good boy—I can't tell a lie!" he said mockingly. "Sweetheart, you're too clever for me! Blow you! I've been working up to this all day long, and you twig it first pop! Rats and dash! I don't mind telling you that I'm disappointed."

"And I'm puzzled," said Nipper. "Is this one of your Carlton games, K. K.? Do you think it's funny to mess about like this? Your name's on the list for to-morrow's game—"

"I'm not playing to-morrow!" declared K. K. emphatically.

"Not playing? And you're perfectly fit!"

he saw he was wrong. In fact, the first words he read were intriguing: "My Big Red-Headed Darling—"

Travers halted in his tracks, his eyes opening wider. He uncrumpled the sheets, and read. As he read, his eyes twinkled. Finally, he chuckled.

"Light in the darkness!" he murmured. "Well, well!" He hesitated for some moments, and then shrugged his shoulders.

"For the love of Samson, I'm no magician. I can't say with any certainty to whom this belongs," he told himself. "Best thing I can do is to pin it on the board and let the owner claim it. Judging by its contents, he might value it."

He chuckled again. He was something of a wag, and as he had found that letter on the floor he was perfectly justified in pinning it on the Common-room Notice Board. Fellows should not be so careless.

Not that there was much evidence of carelessness in this particular case. Travers remembered that K. K. had received the bulk of his bumping in that shadowy corner—shadowy corners being considered ideal for such a purpose, always remembering that prefects are liable to appear at awkward moments.

Still chuckling, Travers strolled into the Common-room and went to a table. He took pen and paper and wrote in printed characters: "FOUND IN PASSAGE. OWNER (UNKNOWN) CAN CLAIM SAME WITHOUT CHARGE. NO REWARD EXPECTED BY FINDER." Then he strolled across to the board and pinned up the notice. Many pairs of eyes followed his movements.

"What's the idea, Travers?" asked Gresham, staring.

"Somebody might want this," explained Travers blandly, as he jabbed a drawing-pin into the letter and stuck it beneath the notice. "There's no name on this, and I'm not supposed to know which particular red-headed fellow it belongs to."

"Red-headed!" said Nipper. "K. K.'s red-headed."

"So is Boots, of the Fourth," replied Travers easily. "So is Sumpter, of the Fifth—"

"Steady on!" protested Nipper. "If that's a private letter, Travers, you shouldn't pin it up there!"

"Private? I found it kicking about in the passage."

"Our passage?"

"Yes."

"Then you jolly well know that it must be K. K.'s," said Nipper. "Boots is in the Modern House, and Sumpter in the East. They wouldn't drop their letters over here. And look! This letter is addressed from Carlton College!"

"Well, well! So it is," said Travers mildly. "Frightfully careless of K. K. to leave it lying about on the floor."

A noisy crowd pressed round the notice board, and Nipper was elbowed aside.

"My only sainted aunt!" yelled Hubbard. "This is the letter that Teddy Long brought in! It's from a girl, too. Did you ever read anything so mushy? 'My Big Red-Headed Darling'!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"A giddy love letter to K. K.!"

"My only hat!"

After that it was impossible to keep the thing secret; somebody, in fact, took the letter down and read it aloud. The crowded Common-room was regaled with the following extraordinary effusion:

"High House,

"Carlton College, Surrey.

"My Big Red-Headed Darling,—Why don't you write? I wait and wait, and every post comes in, and there's nothing from you. Yet, when you left Carlton you promised that you would write very often. I'm afraid you've forgotten your little sweetheart. But I haven't forgotten you, my big boy. I loved the chocolates you sent last week, and you don't know how much I prize that book of poetry you gave me before you went away. I read a verse every night.

"I am keeping up my diary as I promised you, and I write about you in it every day. How I wish I could come to St. Frank's to see you in your new school; but I don't think daddy would let me, as St. Frank's is too far off. It's a shame for my big boy chum to go so far away. But if you'd only write to me quite, quite often, it wouldn't be so bad.

"It seems ages since we wandered in the woods together; there's nobody else here who takes me for such lovely walks. Do you remember how you carried me over that stream, and how you slipped and got wet through? Wasn't it fun? And what a job you had to avoid Old Sneezzer! Oh, how I miss you! Those walks were our own little secret, and nobody else ever knew. I've often thought how awfully clever you were to keep it so dark, without even letting your own friends guess anything.

"I am thinking dreadful things about you, and I shall be awfully jealous if I hear that you have found another sweetheart at St. Frank's instead of me. I hope your headmaster hasn't a daughter like me! Please write and tell me that you love me as much as ever, and that you'll soon come and see me.

"With heaps—oh, heaps and heaps!—of kisses from the lonely little girl you left behind you,

"DOLLY WILKINSON."

WAVES of laughter echoed throughout the Common-room after the letter had been read out—particularly as there were two full lines of crosses after the signature. It was hardly to be expected that the juniors should take anything but a comical view of this prize document.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"K. K.'s dark past!"

"The Head's daughter, too!" said Deeks faintly. "It's the first time I knew that old Wilkinson had a daughter! Old K. K. kept it as dark as the dickens, and we never suspected!"

"She hopes that our Head hasn't got a daughter!" grinned Hubbard. "He hasn't—but our Housemaster has!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And poor Dolly's suspicions are right!" yelled somebody else. "K. K.'s got a new girl already! Vera's made him forget all about Dolly!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, of course, now we understand why he doesn't want to go to Carlton to-morrow with the eleven!" said Handforth with a sniff. "The bounder hasn't written, and he's jolly well afraid to meet her!"

"There's another reason, too," said Nipper, nodding. "He thinks it's more than likely that we shall twig something if he goes. The girl's quite capable of giving the game away. I expect he's made up his mind to write and warn her not to breathe a word to any of us chaps. It's a lot safer than going himself."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Poor old K. K.! What a fix!" grinned Travers. "Don't these girls get fellows into fine old tangles? Still, it's K. K.'s own fault. He shouldn't make promises and then forget all about 'em!"

There was so much laughter that nobody noticed the door opening. Kirby Keeble Parkington himself entered. There was an expression of anxiety on his face, but it changed to blank consternation when he heard the drift of the shouts.

"Dry up, you chaps!" yelled somebody. "Here's K. K.!"

With a sudden rush the red-haired junior dashed forward and snatched the letter out of Travers' hand.

"You—you spying rotters!" he panted hoarsely.

"Steady, dear old fellow!" protested Travers. "No need to push me about, you know. I was just going to pin this back on the board."

"It's a private letter!" shouted K. K. furiously.

"Not now," said Travers. "Everybody knows about it."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You—you miserable blighters!" panted K. K., turning as red as a beetroot. "Who bagged this letter? Some cad picked my pocket—"

"Rats! Travers found it knocking about in the passage," interrupted Handforth. "You should be more careful with your precious love-letters, K. K."

Parkington breathed hard.

"You don't understand," he said fiercely. "This letter—"

"Don't understand?" broke in Jimmy Potts. "My dear chap, we're not so dull as all that! That giddy letter speaks for itself! K. K., you're a naughty boy! I hope you've told Vera all about 'the girl you left behind you'!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Another burst of laughter billowed throughout the Common-room, and K. K. Parkington went pale again.

"I tell you you don't understand!" he shouted frantically. "I can explain this, you silly, cackling asses! I don't mind admitting I was friendly with Dolly, but—"

"Friendly!" yelled Hubbard. "That's putting it a bit mildly, isn't it? We can jolly well understand now why you don't want to go to Carlton to-morrow! Afraid to face her, eh?"

"You—you—"

"Shut up, you chaps!" said Nipper. "It's a pity that letter was ever found, and as far as I'm concerned, I shall forget it. It's a bit rotten, you know, chipping K. K. like this. All the same, I hope you've changed your mind about coming with us to-morrow, K. K. You can't very well keep that rot up now."

"I'll come with you! I'll play for the eleven!" shouted K. K. "But if you'll let me explain about this letter—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

He couldn't get a word in edgeways, and after trying desperately to make himself heard, he suddenly changed his tactics. He grew calm; a grim, defiant light came into his eyes. He squared his shoulders resolutely.

"All right—cackle away!" he said bitterly. "Do you think I care? And I'm hanged if I'll explain things now! I'm proud of being Dolly's friend—and you can think what you jolly well like!"

He crammed the letter into his pocket, spun round, and charged out of the room. He could hear the yells of laughter long after he had got down the passage. And it was significant that he made himself scarce for the rest of the evening.

Vera Wilkes, of course, heard about it very soon afterwards. It was well known that K. K. was a bit "soft" about her; and there were plenty of fellows ready and eager enough to "spill the beans."

Claude Gore-Pearce, for example, was keen on Vera himself, and for the life of him he couldn't see why she almost went out of her way to avoid him. She never gave him the cut direct, but if he happened to pass her and raised his hat, she would smile the briefest of brief acknowledgments and walk straight on.

Gore-Pearce was not only annoyed about this, but his vanity was touched. In his own opinion, he was a very fine fellow—just the kind of fellow, in fact, that the Housemaster's daughter should have "cottoned on to." Wasn't he the son of a millionaire? Wasn't he always dressed as smartly as Archie Glen-

thorne himself? Wasn't he ever ready to take her off to the School Shop and treat her to ice-cream and similar delicacies? Yet never once had she accepted these oft-repeated invitations of his.

Gore-Pearce regarded K. K.'s present discomfiture as his opportunity. For nearly two hours he hovered about in the West Square, keeping his eye on Mr. Wilkes' private door. Just when he was beginning to think that he had wasted his time, his patience was rewarded.

Vera appeared in West Arch with Irene Manners, Doris Berkeley, Phyllis Palmer and one or two other Moor View girls. They were all in white, and Vera was carrying a tennis racquet. Although it was now autumn, tennis was still going strong.

To Gore-Pearce's relief, the other Moor View girls bade Vera good-night, and left her to cross the square alone. Claude straightened his tie, braced himself, and went over to meet her.

CHAPTER 4.

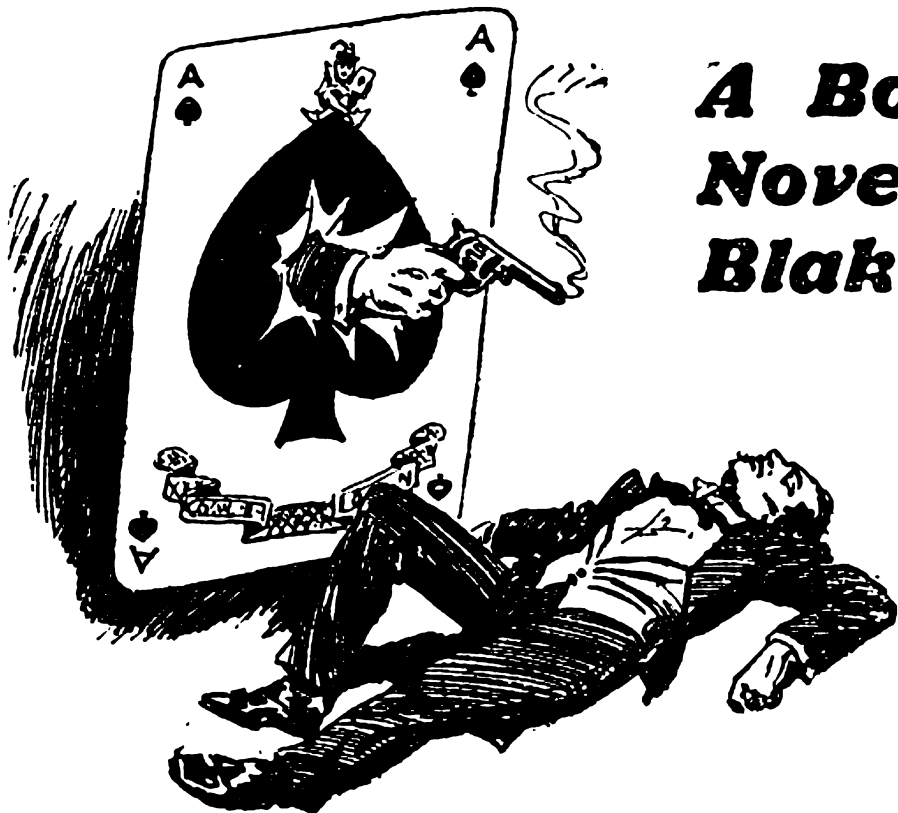
Gore-Pearce Does His Best!

IT was rather a clever move on Gore-Pearce's part. By all appearances he was casually strolling across the square, and his converging direction made it impossible for the girl to reach the private door without passing him—unless she deliberately turned aside to avoid the meeting. Vera wasn't the kind of girl to turn aside for anybody.

"Evening, Miss Vera," said Gore-Pearce, raising his cap. "Weather's a bit better now, isn't it? I'll bet you found the grass damp, though, for tennis."

"It was, rather," admitted Vera. "Good-night!"

"Here, I say!" protested Claude, who had no intention of accepting such an abrupt dismissal. "I—I was wondering if you'd come along to the Shop and have an ice-cream sundæ."



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"I'd love to," replied Vera, smiling. "Thanks awfully, but——"

"Good egg! Let's go!"

"——but Mrs. Hake has sold out," went on Vera calmly. "I've just been there with some of the girls, and we bagged the last. Too bad, isn't it?"

She prepared to pass on, but Gore-Pearce barred her way.

"Have a heart, Miss Vera!" he protested.

"I—I wanted to have a word with you about K. K."

She flashed him a sharp glance, and her colour rose slightly.

"Good-night, Gore-Pearce," she said coldly.

"Perhaps you've been wondering why you haven't seen him this evening," went on Claude, with a rush. "Well, I can tell you. He's afraid! He's had a love-letter from a girl at Carlton—his old school, you know. The headmaster's daughter, too! You never read such awful mush——"

"I'm sorry, but I'm not interested!" interrupted Vera, compressing her lips. "In any case, you must be a cad, Gore-Pearce, for reading K. K.'s private letters."

Gore-Pearce went red.

"Steady!" he exclaimed. "You don't understand, Miss Vera! All the chaps have read that letter—the whole Remove! K. K. left it in the passage and somebody pinned it on the board."

And Gore-Pearce, with many chuckles, gave her all the details. Vera would not have been true to her sex if she had not stayed to listen. She liked K. K., and it came as a bit of a shock to her to learn that he had had such a letter from the daughter of Carlton's headmaster. However, she masked her concern behind an assumed indifference.

"Really, I don't know why you're telling me all this," she said impatiently. "I'm not in the least bit interested, Gore-Pearce."

"Oh, come off it!" said Claude. "You know jolly well that K. K.— I—I mean K. K.— That is to say— Well, dash it, we're not all blind in the Remove," he added slyly. "It's only right that you should know that K. K. is several kinds of a flirt."

"I think you're perfectly horrid!" said Vera icily. "If you want to say things like this, why can't you say them in front of K. K. himself? You're afraid to! You know jolly well that he would knock you down!"

Gore-Pearce flushed. He was about to answer when Parkington himself turned into the square. The millionaire's son was not renowned for courage, but after that taunt—and from a girl, too!—he became desperate.

"Here he is!" he said, breathing hard. "I'm not afraid to say the same thing in front of him! Here, K. K. You're wanted!"

The red-headed Removite had paused, rather confused; but now he ran up.

"It's a fact, isn't it, that you've had a letter from a girl named Dolly Wilkinson?" demanded Gore-Pearce, in a rush. "Miss Vera doesn't believe it."

"You tittle-tattling rotter!" said K. K. ferociously. "Who the dickens told you to babble about my affairs to people?"

"Rats! The whole Form's babbling about them."

"It's true, then?" asked Vera, her eyes opening wider.

"I had a letter, yes, but——"

"And did this girl call you her 'red-headed darling,' as Gore-Pearce says?"

"Yes, but look here——"

"And did she end up with a lot of—of kisses?" asked Vera scornfully.

"Yes," admitted K. K., in desperation. "But you don't understand, old girl! Dolly isn't the sort of girl you think! I can explain——"

"Please don't!" interrupted Vera coldly. "Why do you suggest that I want you to explain? I think you've said quite enough—and, really, I'm not at all interested. It doesn't matter to me who your girl friends are, or where they come from, or how many love-letters they write to you!"

And with a toss of her head she ran indoors and slammed the door.

"This is your doing, you toad!" snapped K. K. furiously.

Crash!

Claude Gore-Pearce was grinning in triumph; but that grin quickly came off his face. K. K.'s heavy fist thudded upon his unshapely nose, and the millionaire's son sprawled headlong on the gravel. K. K. walked off without even looking at him. If only he could get a word with Vera alone, he would put things right! Not that he cared! Why should he care? If she liked to think things about him, let her jolly well think!

All the same, K. K. tried several times that evening to get in touch with Vera. He invented all sorts of excuses to visit the Housemaster's private quarters. Mr. Wilkes was most genial. He invited him into his sitting-room, he chatted with K. K. about the football, and he even suggested that K. K. might like to go into the drawing-room to listen to the wireless.

This was all very promising, but when K. K. got into the drawing-room he merely wanted to escape. Mrs. Wilkes was there, and a game of Bridge was in progress, Mr. and Mrs. Stokes, of the West House, and Mr. Crowell making up the four. Of Vera there was no sign. So K. K. made his excuses, and escaped. To ask Mrs. Wilkes directly if he could speak to Vera was awkward. In fact, K. K. hadn't the courage to do it.

He went to bed that night in a disgruntled, irritable mood. Sundry Removites had chipped him on the way upstairs, and even Deeks and Goffin—his own pals, and who shared the dormitory with him—gave him no rest.

"How the dickens did you do it, K. K.?" asked Deeks wonderingly. "We're alone now, so you needn't——"

"If you're going to talk about that rotten letter, you might as well shut up!" snapped

K. K. "I don't want to hear any more about it!"

"Well, dash it, there's no need to jump down my throat!" protested Deeks. "And it's not very gentlemanly of you, you bounder, to call a lady's letter 'rotten.'"

"I didn't mean it that way," grunted K. K., exasperated. "Can't you fellows be sensible? What's the idea of goggling at me? There were some things I did at Carlton that even you didn't know about."

"So it seems," remarked Goffin, nodding.

"And Dolly is one of the best little girls in the world," went on K. K. deliberately. "You can grin all you please—and cackle, too! Blow you! Blow the whole crowd! And you can whistle for your explanation now! I'm tired of the whole subject."

"What do you mean—explanation?" asked Deeks sourly. "Who needs an explanation? That giddy love-letter from Dolly Wilkinson is enough for anybody, I should think. Poor kid! You're a fine sort of chap to make promises and then forget all about 'em."

This was intended as a taunt, and Deeks was ready to dodge. But K. K. merely nodded slowly and sat down heavily on his bed.

"You're right!" he muttered. "I deserve it! I have been a beastly rotter to neglect that sweet kid!"

"My hat!"

"One of the best little girls breathing," went on K. K. dreamily. "You never met her, did you, you chaps? As pretty as a picture—lovely wavy hair and deep blue eyes. Big eyes, you know. And she had a habit of looking straight at you until you simply had to do everything she asked you."

"My only sainted aunt!" ejaculated Goffin, staring.

"Now we know!" said Deeks, with conviction. "We often wondered, K. K., why you called us 'sweetheart' and 'darling'! We thought it was just your fun, but we now know that it was through sheer force of habit!"

"Quite possible," admitted K. K. blithely. "Dolly is a peach of a kid, sweethearts! I—I mean, you chaps! What a fool I was to try to get out of going to Carlton to-morrow! I was a funk—and I ought to be boiled. The square thing is for me to go there and ask Dolly to forgive me."

"I wish you luck," said Deeks, with a sniff. "I'm jiggered if you're not getting sloppy, K. K.! I never dreamed it of you! I suppose you know that Vera's going over in her pater's car to-morrow?"

"Vera?" asked K. K. "Oh, you mean Wilkey's daughter?" he added, as though he had never heard of her. "Well, what about it? It's Dolly I'm thinking of—my own little Dolly! By jingo! I'll introduce you to her when we get there, my sons, and if you don't admit that she's the greatest little girl under the sun I'll slaughter the pair of you!"

He got into bed, leaving Deeks and Goffin

vaguely uneasy. They hadn't seen their leader like this before. That blue-eyed girl must have left a very deep impression for K. K. to go "soft" like this at the very thought of seeing her again.

NEXT morning, Kirby Keeble Parkington was changed.

He went about with his head in the air, and he was loftily indifferent to any chipping. He was so indifferent, in fact, that he did not even bother to punch anybody's head. He had evidently come to the conclusion that his schoolfellows were not worth bothering about. It was Dolly who counted; Dolly who filled his thoughts. Yesterday he had been almost frantic in his desire to hide his friendship with Dolly; but to-day he did not care who knew about it. The thought of seeing his girl chum again outweighed all else.

Even when Vera Wilkes deliberately turned aside in the Triangle, so that she should not meet him, he merely smiled and shrugged his shoulders. Vera's charms, apparently, were only temporary. Dolly was his real girl.

"You've got over your cold, I see," remarked Nipper dryly, after lessons.

"Rather," said K. K. "I'm perfectly fit now, old man."

"Feel like playing a strong game against your former school?"

"I was considered pretty good at Carlton—but those chaps will hardly know me now," replied Parkington coolly. "I shall be so much improved that they'll mistake me for a professional."

"That's the spirit!" grinned Nipper. "I hope the Head's daughter won't distract you too much—"

"Distract me?" broke in K. K. "Sweet-heart, she'll improve my game a hundred per cent. I'll make her promise to watch the match, and that fact alone will put such vim and fire into me that—well, you'll be surprised!"

"As far as you're concerned, old man, nothing can surprise me—now!" replied Nipper politely.

But he was wrong. He got a surprise half way to Carlton. The team went over in a big saloon coach, and as there was plenty of room they were accompanied by a number of Removite supporters. Carlton was a goodish way off, and the start was made immediately after dinner. The journey was little more than half over when the coach pulled up at a level crossing in the middle of a small town. It was one of those level crossings adjoining a station, and a passenger train was just steaming in.

Several fellows, including K. K., got out to stretch their legs during the wait. When the gates were opened, and the coach was ready to start, Kirby Keeble Parkington had mysteriously disappeared.



Gore-Pearce grinned as Vera Wilkes left K. K. standing—and then howled as K. K.'s fist smote him forcibly on the nose!

CHAPTER 5.

K. K.'s Unlucky Move!

NIPPER was not only surprised, but annoyed.

"Didn't somebody see where he went?" he asked impatiently. "Several of you got out while the gates were closed."

"We're not supposed to look after K. K.!" growled Handforth. "The last I saw of him was when he went across the road to have a look at that sports car that was standing against the opposite pavement."

"We'd better wait a bit—he'll probably turn up," put in Deeks. "Perhaps he's gone to a shop to buy some chocolates—for Dolly!"

But the minutes sped by, and K. K. did not return.

"He's gone—he's dodged us!" said Nipper, exasperated. "Confound the chap! This is a bit too thick! He's had us on a piece of string all the time—or else he's lost his courage at the last moment."

"That's about what's happened," said Reggie Pitt. "As soon as he saw a chance of disappearing, he took it. Oh, these girls! But I never thought one would affect K. K. like this."

"He's letting the side down, too," said Nipper grimly. "If he doesn't show up at Carlton—and that doesn't seem likely now—I shall have to play Church at right-back."

"I'm game!" said Church eagerly.

"Good egg!" put in Handforth. "Churchy always plays in that position, anyhow, and I don't see why K. K. was given his place."

"Simply because K. K. is a better back than Church," replied Nipper. "Church hasn't found his form this season."

They got back into the coach, and the journey continued. K. K.'s mysterious disappearance was the chief item of conversation. It wasn't like him to back out in such a fashion—without a word of explanation or excuse.

As a matter of fact, K. K. had had no intention of letting the side down. He had merely acted upon impulse. There hadn't been time to explain to the others.

For Parkington, in stretching his legs, had wandered on to the station platform. Then he had suddenly discovered that the train standing in the station was one which went through Carlton. A chance! The train would get there a clear half-hour before the motor-coach!

There was no time for hesitation. K. K. jumped aboard as the guard was blowing his whistle. The very opportunity he had been hoping for! From the commencement of the journey he had been wondering how he would be able to meet Dolly without the other fellows knowing; without their watching and sniggering at him. Now he would be at Carlton first, with a clear half-hour of freedom. Just what he wanted.

Alas, for his hopes!

The train was passing into a long tunnel when K. K. felt the brakes being applied and it came to a standstill. He thought nothing for a minute or two, but after that he became impatient. This delay was going to mess things up!

Fifteen minutes elapsed, and by that time K. K. was frantic. He hung out of the window listening to the roar of escaping steam from the engine. There were no lights on, for it was only a local train, and the tunnel would normally have been negotiated in a minute or so.

"Now then, sir—now then!" came an annoyed protest, as K. K. opened the carriage door. "You mustn't do that!"

The guard loomed up out of the gloom.

"What's the matter with this beastly train?" asked K. K. "How much longer are we going to stick in this tunnel?"

"If we're lucky, we shall get away in half an hour," said the guard.

"Half an hour!" yelled the junior.

"Yes, and we can be thankful we're not hurt, young man," said the guard severely. "A lot of bricks became loosened and fell on the permanent way, and if it hadn't been for the smartness of some platelayers we should have been derailed."

"My only hat!" said K. K. thickly. "Just my luck! And I took this train on purpose to get there first! I say, can't I get out and walk?"

"You can't, my lad!" said the guard. "Leastways, I shouldn't advise you to. There's only a deep cutting on each side of this tunnel, and no village for three or four miles."

"Well, tell those men to buck up and clear the line!" urged K. K. "I've got an important engagement."

"I daresay you have," chuckled the guard. "A football match, most likely, seeing that it's Saturday afternoon. I daresay a good many other passengers have important engagements, too. But when these things happen the best thing is to be patient."

He walked on, and K. K. sat down fuming.

MEANWHILE, the coach arrived at Carlton College, and the St. Frank's fellows were favourably impressed.

Carlton did not, of course, come up to the description that the Red-Hots had frequently given, or anything like it; but it was, nevertheless, a biggish establishment of the super-Grammar School variety. It was a comparatively new school; a pile of severe red-brick buildings.

Deeks and Goffin and Langley and Baines and the others were boisterously greeted by their old schoolfellows, and for a time there was an orgy of introductions.

"Jolly glad to have you fellows over here for a game," said Walton, the junior skipper. "I hope we can count on two or three fixtures during the season after this. You'll naturally want us over at St. Frank's after we've licked you to-day."

"We shall want you over at St. Frank's whether you lick us or not—and you won't find us such easy prey," said Nipper cheerily. "By the way, has K. K. arrived?"

"Ginger Parkington, do you mean?" asked one of the Carltonians.

Deeks winced.

"Cheese it!" he protested. "We've never told anybody at St. Frank's that K. K. used to be called 'Ginger,' and we don't want it started now. He always answers to 'K. K.'"

"Sorry!" said the other. "No, we haven't seen him. We thought he was with you."

"H'm!" said Nipper. "I was afraid he wouldn't be here."

The Red-Hots were particularly worried. They took K. K.'s behaviour to heart; he was their leader, the fellow who had put a great deal of new life into the St. Frank's Remove. It was a pity that he should go and spoil everything because of a girl.

"I wish we could spot her!" said Goffin darkly. "By jingo! I'd like to give her a piece of my mind. I'd ask her what she means by writing such letters to a St. Frank's chap!"

Deeks suddenly grabbed at his companion's arm.

"Look over there!" he said in a hoarse whisper.

"Eh? Where?"

"Over by the Head's house—walking towards the pav.," said Deeks breathlessly. "It's her, old man. She's just come out of the Head's house, anyhow! And she's alone! What about it?"

Clement Goffin gulped.

"Dare we?" he asked.

They both looked at the girl with awe. She was certainly a very charming person—a trim, dainty young lady of perhaps sixteen or seventeen. She was dressed in a light, summer frock, and her wavy hair was innocent of any hat.

"Wavy hair!" murmured Goffin. "Twig it? Remember what K. K. said last night? It's Dolly, sure enough. We can't see the

colour of her eyes, but I'll bet they're blue. This is the giddy siren, my son!"

At that moment they saw Vivian Travers and Jimmy Potts and Handforth and a few other Removites marching resolutely towards the playing fields.

"Coming our way?" sang out Handforth, grinning. "We're going to tell Dolly that K. K. hasn't turned up, and we're going to express our regrets—and watch results!"

"Better go easy," said Goffin, looking scared. "There's never any telling what girls will do! They're so jolly difficult to handle, too. You can't slosh them in the eye, or bump them."

"Yes, that is a drawback," admitted Handforth.

Deeks and Goffin joined the conspirators, and the girl was considerably astonished when she suddenly found herself surrounded by a small army of schoolboys. She turned her big blue eyes upon them wonderingly.

"Miss Wilkinson?" asked Travers, deftly removing his cap.

"Yes, that is my name," said the girl, in surprise.

It was enough. She had admitted it! This was the siren!

CHAPTER 6.

The Girl in the Case.

VIVIAN TRAVERS looked Miss Wilkinson up and down with approval.

"Well, I must say that K. K. shows good taste," he remarked coolly.

Her start at the mention of "K. K." was eloquent.

"I—I don't think I understand," she faltered, colouring slightly.

"I'm sure you do, Miss Wilkinson," said Travers gently. "K. K. is merely short for Kirby Keeble Parkington. A great friend of yours, I believe? Please correct me if I am wrong when I state that you wrote him a letter a day or two ago."

"Oh!" exclaimed the girl, catching in her breath.

Her eyes opened wider, and her expression was one of mingled consternation, anger and indignation. One or two of the juniors backed away. They had an idea that it was nearly time for the balloon to go up.

"Oh! How dare you?" cried Miss Wilkinson hotly.

"No offence, old thing, I can assure you," said Travers. "But I think you ought to know that K. K. accidentally dropped your letter—that one which began 'My Big Red-Headed Darling'—and practically everyone in the Remove read it. Rough on K. K., and rough on you, if it comes to that, but it's better that we should tell you the worst."

The girl's eyes were flashing now.

"I'm not in the least interested," she said, with deadly coldness.

"Still, you did write that letter, didn't you?" asked Deeks.

"Yes, but—but——"

"Don't worry yourself, Miss Dolly," said Travers. "Personally, I think it was a topping letter. Although," he added reprovingly, "I'm sure you wouldn't like K. K. to hear you say that you're not in the least interested. However, that's beside the point. What we've come to tell you is that K. K. hasn't turned up—and now that I can see what he's missing, I think he deserves to be boiled in oil!"

The girl did not reply at once. She was plainly at a loss for words. She bit her lip, and the colour drained from her face, leaving her very pale.

"I don't know how you dare to come to me like this," she said in low tones. "I think you are all horrid boys!"

"How sadly we can be misjudged," said Travers, solemnly shaking his head. "We only came to you in a friendly spirit, Miss Dolly. We merely wanted to give you a word of warning."

"Warning!" repeated the girl. "I?"

"Don't write any more of those letters to K. K.!" urged Travers earnestly. "He's an awfully careless chap, and he might leave another one lying about. He has been chipped unmercifully as it is, and——"

"He deserves it!" she cried hotly. "Oh, how could he have dropped that letter? I shall never, never forgive him."

She coloured at the very thought of it, and her confusion was so great that she turned and ran away.

"Well, that's that," said Travers cheerfully. "Such a stunning girl, too!"

"By George, rather!" said Handforth admiringly. "I wonder what the dickens she could ever have seen in K. K.? Imagine it! Writing him letters like that!"

"Here, I say, look out!" gasped Goffin suddenly. "Here's K. K. himself!"

KIRBY KEEBLE PARKINGTON, hot and flustered and frantic, came dashing up. He had just arrived.

"Easy, old man—easy!" said Travers soothingly. "Everything's all right. We've seen Dolly, and broken the ice for you."

"You've seen her?" gurgled K. K.

"We can see her now," said Handforth, who was still looking. "You lucky bounder! I've never seen a prettier—I mean——"

"Oh, my hat!" grinned Potts. "Handy's smitten now!"

K. K. was staring after the retreating figure.

"You—you mean——" he began.

"She admitted all," nodded Travers. "How could she do anything else? She told us that she had written that letter, and that——"

"She admitted it?" yelled K. K. "Do you mean to say that she actually told you that she wrote that letter to me?"

"Come off it," growled Handforth. "What's the good of messing about like this? What that girl could ever see in your ugly

mug is more than I can understand! And you're a bit of a rotter, you know, for not writing to her as you promised. I hope you've brought her a whacking great bottle of scent, or something, to square yourself!"

The red-headed junior apparently did not hear. He was still looking after the girl, and he seemed to be less alarmed now.

"I think I'd better go and have a word with her," he said thickly.

"Why didn't you turn up earlier?" demanded Handforth. "Where did you get to, anyhow? We thought you'd funked it, and that you wouldn't show up at all."

"K. K. wouldn't do a thing like that," said Goffin loyally.

His leader made no comment; but suddenly he broke into a run and went dashing after the fair Miss Wilkinson.

"It's easy enough to talk about him squaring himself, but he'll have all his work cut out to do it," said Travers, chuckling. "What the dickens made him dash off so abruptly?"

"I think I know," said Deeks. "Look round, you chaps. No, don't stare—just glance round casually."

They did so—and were enlightened. Vera Wilkes was walking towards the Head's House with her father. A strange contrast, these two: Vera, neat and pretty and dressed with exquisite taste; Mr. Alington Wilkes in his inevitable baggy flannel trousers and crumpled Norfolk jacket.

"K. K.'s for it now!" said Handforth with a whistle. "Ye gods and little fishes! What about squaring himself with Vera? She's spotted him!"

"Spotted him running after Dolly!" grinned Travers. "The fat's in the fire now, with a vengeance! No wonder K. K. bunked!"

"It's difficult enough to keep right with one girl, so goodness only knows what it's like to have two!" said Jimmy Potts, laughing. "K. K. may be a bit of an ass, but I can't help being sorry for him."

Fortunately there was no further time to waste on Parkington's "love" affairs. The St. Frank's fellows had come over there for the purpose of football, and kick-off was approaching. Travers and Handforth were

obliged to dash like mad for the pavilion in order to get changed.

"Buck up, you slackers!" said Nipper. "Where the dickens have you been? We're practically ready!"

"Sorry," grinned Travers, as he prepared to strip. "Just been having a friendly little chat with K. K.'s best girl. And the unfortunate part about it is, his next best girl is on the war-path."

"If he plays a good game to-day, I'll be surprised," said Handforth.

"Where is K. K., anyway?" asked Travers briskly. "I suppose he is playing?"

"I'm getting fed up with K. K.," replied Nipper darkly. "There's only about three minutes before the kick-off, and— Oh, here you are," he went on, as Parkington dashed in. "What is it this time? Have you come to tell me you can't play, or what?"

"I'll be ready in two shakes, sweetheart," said K. K. crisply. "Before you've tossed with Walton I'll be on the field. Go to it, darling, and your own little K. K. will do his stuff."

Handforth snorted.

"We can jolly well tell where you've just come from!" he said sarcastically. "Hadn't you better kiss Nipper good-bye before he goes out?"

"Thanks all the same, but I don't want to be carried away on a stretcher before I even get on to the field!" replied K. K. blandly.

CHAPTER 7.

Lovelorn K. K.

THE Carltonians took football seriously. The Junior school was at strength, and practically every lower Form of Carlton had gathered in the pavilion and round the ropes. The few St. Frank's fellows who had come over with their eleven were more or less swamped out.

But they managed to give their champions a hearty cheer as they appeared on the field. Walton won the toss, and it was worth winning, too. The Saints had to face a stiff breeze and a strong sun.

"Never mind, you chaps, we shall have the advantage in the second half," said Nipper. "If we hold the fort this half, we've got the game in our pockets!"

"I'll hold the fort," said Handforth confidently. "It'll be a pity if you silly forwards can't score a goal or two before half-time."

"Absolutely," said Archie Glenthorne. "I don't mind telling you, dear old blunderbuss, that I'm feeling dashed energetic. Kindly get ready to cheer. A goal in the first two minutes is my chief aim in life."

"Good luck, Archie!" chuckled Nipper.

The genial Archie was keeping up his form, and he was proving a great success in the forward line. He did not actually fulfil his ambition to score in the first two minutes, but he came very close to it. He sent in a hot cross shot which had the goalie guessing

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all the way. But for the wind it would certainly have found the mark.

The Carlton custodian just managed to clutch the leather as it swerved—carried round by the wind—and he neatly dodged a charge from Travers and kicked. The wind carried the ball into mid-field, where it was seized upon by Walton and swept out to the wing in a clean, accurate pass.

The outside man ran hard, centred, and Walton was there. He kicked on the run; a first-time shot which took Handforth completely by surprise—and it had to be a remarkably good shot to do that!

The burly leader of Study D made a tremendous upward leap, his hands outstretched. The ball whizzed between them into the net, while Handforth's head hit the crossbar with a dull thud.

"Goal!"

"Well played, Walton!"

"Hurrah!"

The referee's whistle blew sharply, and then it was noticed that Handforth was lying in a crumpled heap in the goalmouth. Nipper and two or three others dragged him up, and somebody came along with a wet sponge.

"Chuck it!" gurgled Handforth, as his face was swamped with cold water. "I'm all right. Caught my head against the bar. They didn't score, anyway!"

"I'm afraid they did, old man," said Nipper gently.

"Rats! I tipped it over the cross-bar."

"You mean, you thought you did," said Nipper. "Anyhow, the referee has a vague idea that Walton scored a goal, and we shall have to abide by his decision. Still, we're not downhearted."

"Well I'm blowed!" said Handforth disgustedly, as he sat up. "So they scored, did they? It'll take them all their time to get another! It was really K. K.'s fault for not being in position when—Whoa! Oh, my hat!"

He had attempted to rise, but fell back with a gasp of pain.

"Something wrong with my ankle!" he ejaculated, startled. "I seem to remember twisting it as I fell. Nothing much, though. I'll soon be all right."

But he wasn't all right. Wally Freeman, the St. Frank's coach, who had come over with the team, took one look at Handforth's ankle, which was already beginning to swell, and shook his head.

"Not much of a sprain, but you'll have to rest it," he announced. "Afraid you'll be out of the team for the rest of this game, old man."

"What rot!" protested Handforth. "I shall be all serene in a minute."

There was nothing wrong with his pluck. He would have been ready enough to play on, hobbling about in goal. But it was useless. When he tried to walk he found that he could only do so with difficulty. As for keeping goal, the feat was beyond him.

So, much to his chagrin, he was forced to retire, and with only ten men on the field Nipper had to make a rearrangement. K. K.

dropped back into goal, Jimmy Potts took up his position as right-back, and Travers became right-half. This left the Saints with only four forwards—Harry Gresham, Archie, Nipper, and Reggie Pitt. It was a decided handicap—particularly as the visitors were already one goal down.

"Afraid this has done it, K. K.," remarked Potts, as the teams lined up. "It'll be a miracle if we save the game now."

"Don't you believe it!" said Parkington cheerily. "We've come over to Carlton to win. We've got to win, too! I've promised somebody that—Oh, well, never mind! They're off, anyhow."

The schoolboy baronet grinned as he glanced round. The charming Miss Wilkinson was in the pavilion, watching the game with keen, intelligent interest. It was clear that she understood every move, and that she was following closely. Her eyes, for the most part, were concentrated upon K. K.

Vera was interested, too; but the St. Frank's fellows who happened to look at the pavilion noticed that Vera was sitting well away from her "rival." Whether this was by accident, or by design, remained uncertain.

The Carltonians were dangerous now—even more dangerous than before. Not only had they the advantage of wind and sun, but they were now playing against ten men only. Nipper decided to concentrate upon defence. If the Saints could only break up the attacking movements and hold the fort during this half, they might still leave the field at the end of the game without having suffered a big defeat.

Handforth's absence made a tremendous difference; K. K. could be relied upon in goal, but the whole side was weakened. Again and again the Carltonian forwards broke through, and Buster Boots, at centre-half, found it almost impossible to hold the agile Walton. The Carlton centre-forward got away twice in succession; the first time he was boldly robbed by McClure, the Saints' left-back, when it seemed certain that he would run clean through. The second time he did get through, and the shot he sent in looked a winner all the way. But K. K., in goal, was ready. He caught the leather deftly, dodged round another forward, and kicked the ball almost to the half-way line, despite the wind. Archie, nimble and sure, was on it in a moment.

"What ho!" he sang out cheerily. "Tally ho, and so forth!"

He took one look round, passed to Reggie Pitt, and ran up. Unfortunately, he was rather too eager, and placed himself off-side. From the resulting free kick the ball was taken once more into the danger zone. The Carlton forwards pressed determinedly.

"This is a goal!" said Church gloomily.

He was standing behind the ropes, near the St. Frank's goal, and Tommy Watson and De Valerie and Jack Grey were with him. They watched anxiously.

Bang!

The ball came in like a bullet. K. K. coolly punched it back. It was returned deftly from Walton's head, and this time the St. Frank's goalie leapt and made another brilliant save. The ball fell into a crowd of players, and McClure, dashing in, managed to effect a good clearance.

"Phew! That was hot!" said Grey, with a whistle. "I'm dashed if K.K. isn't doing as well as Handy! They were two glorious saves just now!"

"By jingo! Look at Nipper!" yelled Church excitedly. "He's streaking for goal! Go it, Nipper! Shoot, man!"

Nipper had seized upon a sudden chance.

A pass had come his way from Pitt, on the wing, and Nipper was dashing through. He and the home defenders were having a race; he got through just in the nick of time, and the goalmouth loomed before him. The Carlton goalkeeper was leaping from side to side. Nipper steadied himself, and made as if to shoot hard into the left-hand corner of the net. The goalie leapt that way. But it was only a bluff. Nipper coolly ran on for another two yards, and then sent in a low shot in the other corner. The goalie hadn't an earthly chance of getting there in time.

"Goal!" howled the St. Frank's fellows.

"Well played, Nipper!"

In spite of the odds, the Saints had equalised—and Nipper's goal had been a clever one. Cheering came from everybody in general. A goal like that simply had to be applauded,

no matter which side scored it. Back in the St. Frank's goalmouth, K. K. turned a grinning face towards Church and the other Removites behind the net.

"Pretty good, eh?" he said. "We haven't lost this game yet, sweethearts!"

"And we won't lose it if you keep 'em out as you have been doing," shouted Deeks, who had joined the group. "Go it, K. K.!"

"Show the Old-Timers that you really are red-hot!" roared Goffin.

"He's not so bad," admitted Handforth handsomely. "Question is, can he keep it up? He's only a silly Red-Hot, and that isn't saying much! I'm expecting him to crack up any minute!"

"You fatheaded Old-Timer, K. K.'s a cert!" yelled Deeks indignantly.

"He won't be if he keeps on looking towards the pav!" said Handforth, with a sniff. "No good thinking about girls when you're on the footer field. It's fatal."

"Well, you ought to know—you're an expert on girls," said Goffin blandly. "I believe you've fallen in love with Dolly yourself!"

Handforth turned red. It was a home-thrust. He had been concentrating so much on the pavilion that he had nearly missed Nipper's goal; only the tremendous shouting had brought his attention back to the game.

Handy had felt peeved at first—peeved with Mr. Freeman for sending him out of



Jokes from our readers wanted for this feature! If you know of a good rib tickler send it along now—and win a prize! A handsome watch will be awarded each week to the sender of the best joke; all other readers whose efforts are published will receive a pocket wallet or a penknife. Address your jokes to "Smilers," Nelson Lee Library, 5, Carmelite Street, London, E.C.4.

SMART LAD!

The inspector had come to take the class in physiology, and he tried little Tommy with this teaser:

"How many bones have you in your body, my lad?"

"Nine hundred," replied Tommy promptly.

"Oh, indeed!" said the inspector. "Well, that's a great many more than I have."

"Very likely," said Tommy. "But, then, perhaps you ain't had kippers for breakfast!"

(N. R. Walton, "Woodlands," Arnside, Westmoreland, has been awarded a handsome watch.)

ONE EXCITING MOMENT!

Reporter (to famous footballer): "What was the most exciting match you played in?"

Footballer: "It was a Cup Final. The score was two all with two minutes to go. I had the ball at my toe and was tearing through the opposing defence. I saw the referee look at his watch, and the crowd shouted, 'Shoot, man, shoot!' and I shot."

Reporter (excitedly): "Did you score?"

Footballer: "Score! Why, it took ten minutes to get my foot from between the bed-rails!"

(W. Osborn, 11, Sumatra Road, West Hampstead, N.W.6, has been awarded a pocket wallet.)

HELPFUL!

Father (looking at paper bill): "Terrible! Ruinous! We shall have to economise."

Small son (helpfully): "Well, father, I could buy my NELSON LEE myself—if you gave me eightpence instead of sixpence for my pocket-money."

(M. Hartley, Windyridge, Ben Rhydding, nr. Ilkley, has been awarded a penknife.)

THE PORTER'S RETORT!

The train was moving swiftly out of the station when a passenger put his head out of the window and yelled at the porter:

"Fool! Why didn't you put my suit-case in here as I asked you?"

"Fool yourself, guv'nor! You're in the wrong train!"

(W. Huggins, 48, Poole Road, Westbourne, Bournemouth, has been awarded a penknife.)

the game—but after he had hobbled out of the dressing-room and had reached the ropes, he knew that the coach was right. His ankle wouldn't cause him a great deal of trouble if he was careful with it for a day or two; but to have kept on playing would have been asking for trouble, besides being unfair to his side.

Edward Oswald turned his attention to the pavilion again, and his heart gave a leap when he saw that Miss Wilkinson was standing up in her seat and waving.

"My only sainted aunt!" breathed Handforth huskily.

She was waving at him! He was almost on the point of waving back when he noticed that K. K. was just in front—and waving, too. What rot! She was waving to K. K., after all!

And then something else happened.

The St. Frank's forwards, fired by the equaliser, were pressing hard, and play was confined to the Carlton end. K. K. had time to lounge up and down in the St. Frank's goalmouth, and even to lean negligently against one of the posts. While he was doing this a small boy dodged under the ropes and ran up to him. The small boy was one of the Carlton fags.

"You're Pilkington, aren't you?" he asked breathlessly.

"Parkington, dear one," corrected K. K. kindly.

"That's it—Parkington," said the fag.

"Well, here's a note for you—from the Head's daughter."

"My son, come to me after the game and I'll give you a bob!" promised K. K. "I'd give it to you now, only they make no allowance for money pockets in these togs."

The fag grinned and bolted back. His move, naturally, had been spotted by the St. Frank's group just behind the ropes. The juniors now beheld K. K. reading that precious note.

"Hi, you!" said Handforth, grabbing the fag. "What's that you've just given to K. K.? Who sent it?"

"The Head's daughter," grinned the fag. "Gave me a bob to take it—and I'm going to get another bob, too, after the game! I hope she'll send some more!"

"Well, I'm jiggered!" ejaculated Handforth indignantly. "She's actually sending him love-letters while he's playing! This is going to mess the game right up! He'll go right to pieces after this!"

"Look at him!" ejaculated Church in alarm.

There was certainly cause for alarm. K. K., still reading his precious letter, was leaning against one of the goalposts. There was a dreamy expression upon his face, and he seemed completely oblivious of the match in progress; completely unaware of the fact that the Carlton forwards had broken away and were bearing down upon the St. Frank's goalmouth. A roar went up.

TOO HASTY!

The salesman had been travelling on the local line for years—and one day, to his surprise, the train came in on time. He immediately went up to the guard and said:

"Here's a cigar. I want to congratulate you. I have travelled on this line for fifteen years, and this is the first time I have caught a train on time."

"Keep the cigar," replied the guard. "I cannot lie. This is yesterday's train."

(*P. Edmunds, 59, Sackville Road, Hove, has been awarded a pocket wallet.*)

WHEN NOT TO LAUGH!

Old gent: "Why are you crying, my boy?"

Boy: "Father hit his thumb with the hammer just now."

Old gent: "What a kind-hearted boy you are. Is that what makes you weep?"

Boy: "No, but I laughed when father did it."

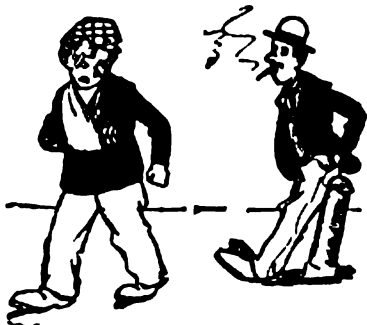
(*J. Phillips, 49, Stiven Crescent, Eastcote Lane, South Harrow, has been awarded a penknife.*)

OBVIOUS!

Harry: "Hallo, Bill! Been fighting?"

Bill: "Do you suppose I'm advertising sticking-plaster?"

(*D. Hardie, 20, Stirling Road, Causewayhead, has been awarded a pocket wallet.*)



CONGRATERS!

Arthur: "So your brother tried to get a Government job? What is he doing now?"

Ben: "Nothing. He got the job!"

(*N. Kirkman, 236, Boom Street, Pietermaritzburg, Natal, S. Africa, has been awarded a pocket wallet.*)

FATHER'S GOOD EXAMPLE.

Father: "I am grieved to hear, my boy, that you have told your mother several falsehoods. Always tell the truth, even if it should bring trouble on you. Will you promise to do so?"

Tommy: "Yes, father."

Father: "All right. Now go and see who it is knocking at the door. If it's the landlord, say I'm out."

(*H. Rowe, 92, Lower Union Lane, Torquay, has been awarded a penknife.*)

DID HE GET IT?

Teacher (who has found a sixpence): "Has anyone lost a sixpence?"

Willie: "Yes, sir."

Teacher: "And where did you lose it?"

Willie: "Where you found it."

(*P. Kilby, 70, Spencer Road, Luton, has been awarded a pocket wallet.*)

"Look out, there, K. K.!"

"What's the giddy idea, K. K.? Pull yourself together."

"Now's your chance, Carlton! Shoot!"

A goal seemed certain. Walton, the home side's centre-forward, had the ball at his foot, was preparing to shoot. And still K. K. leaned against the goalpost, reading his letter, lost to the world. Walton's foot flashed up and down, the ball hurtled goalwards—and it was then that K. K. came out of his reverie. In an instant he realised the danger. In one movement he stuffed the letter into the pocket of his shorts and hurled himself across the goalmouth. His outstretched fist tipped the ball round the post for a corner. A great sigh of relief went up from the St. Frank's supporters; groans of disappointment from the Carlton onlookers.

The corner came to nothing, and the ball was cleared. With the play transferred to Carlton territory, K. K. took the letter out of his pocket and started reading it again.

"By Jove! Look at him now!" gasped Church.

K. K. was doing a brief war-dance between the posts. His face was flushed, and his eyes were sparkling.

"Old sardine, you've got to keep 'em out now as you've never kept 'em out before," he told himself firmly. "Come on, you Carlton forwards! Try and score! I dare you!"

He was so serenely happy that he almost shouted the words.

"He's going potty!" said Handforth.

It wasn't long before K. K. was called upon to show some action. Hard as the Saints pressed, they could not keep up the pace. After three or four minutes of severe pressure in the Carlton half of the field, the ball came down on the wind. The Carlton forwards got busy.

A drive came in from the left wing, and K. K. ran out and blithely kicked clear. The ball was trapped, centred, and Walton leapt upon it, to send in a first-time shot which made K. K. leap. He cleared again at the expense of another corner.

The kick was taken, the ball soared over the goalmouth, and many heads were ready. But Parkington leapt up with perfect coolness, and his fist was there. It was a good clearance, but not good enough. The ball dropped at the feet of one of the Carlton forwards, and he promptly slammed it goalwards. Down went K. K. full length, and in a flash he had the leather in his grip. He was up in another flash, and the way he dodged the Carlton forwards was an education. Bouncing the ball twice, he kicked clear, and the immediate danger was over.

"Well played, K. K.!" roared the Saints.

"Keep it up, old man!"

K. K. waved cheerily.

"That's three saves within a minute!" he murmured happily. "By jingo, I hope they attack like that again!"

He was playing as though inspired—and perhaps, indeed, he had been inspired. At all events, he had become much more brilliant since receiving that note from the Head's daughter. And that note, at this very moment, was blowing about in the neighbourhood of the goal-line.

During those energetic moments the little scrap of paper must have jerked out of K. K.'s hip-pocket, where he had hastily put it during the last Carlton offensive. At all events, he had lost it. A sudden gust of wind now seized it and carried it nearer to the ropes. Deeks and Goffin spotted it at the same moment, and they jumped at it.

"That giddy love-letter!" gasped Deeks. "We'd better bag it!"

But Handforth, in spite of his "wonky" ankle, was there first. He dived under the ropes, seized the note, and held it fast.

"Not likely!" he roared. "Reading K. K.'s love-letters is becoming a habit! I'm blowed if you're going to broadcast this one!"

Parkington looked round, attracted by the commotion.

"Hi, you careless ass!" roared Handforth. "You're making a practice of dropping your giddy letters, aren't you? I'm keeping this one till half-time, and you can thank your stars I've collared it, or everybody would be reading it."

Kirby Keeble Parkington laughed happily.

"Who cares?" he sang out. "Read it! Let everybody read it! The more, the merrier! I've made three good saves, and I'm hoping for some more!"

CHAPTER 8.

A One-Man Game!

HANDFORTH was so astonished by K. K.'s invitation that he allowed Deeks and Goffin to jerk that letter out of his hand before he could decide what to do.

"The chap's off his rocker!" he gasped. "He's so much in love that he's light-headed! He actually wants these Carlton chaps to shoot goals!"

"And no wonder!" yelled Deeks, who had just read the note.

"Eh? Look here, you rotter!" said Handforth. "It's not playing the game to read that—"

"Rats! He invited us to!" broke in Deeks. "Look at this!"

It was a very brief note—but very much to the point:

"My Big Hero,—I'll give you a kiss for every save you make, and I hope our men try to score lots and lots of goals!—DOLLY."

"Great Scott!" gurgled Handforth faintly. "So that's why he's dancing about like a

giddy Zulu! He's just made three saves! And that means three kisses! Oh, my hat!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The other Removites were shouting with laughter, although they weren't sure whether to be amused or not.

"This is a bit too thick!" protested the burly leader of Study D. "We read that first letter of his by accident—but now he's broadcasting his giddy love affairs!"

"He's got to that stage when he doesn't care," grinned Jack Grey. "We know so much that he thinks we'd better know the rest! A kiss for every save he makes, eh? By jingo! Here come the forwards. K. K.'s going to earn some more kisses, by the look of it!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Another laugh went up, and it was so uproarious that the home spectators in the vicinity were puzzled. They couldn't see anything to laugh at. Their men were about to score, by the look of things.

"What's the matter with you St. Frank's chaps?" asked one of the Carlton juniors. "What are you cackling at? You're going to get beaten hollow! There's a goal coming now!"

"Don't you believe it!" roared Handforth. "K. K. was a good goalie before, but nothing can get past him now!"

It seemed that he was right. The home forwards were pressing determinedly and shot after shot was rained in upon the burly, red-headed St. Frank's goalie, but he saved them all.

Ordinarily, Carlton would have been two goals up by now; and on the run of the play they deserved to be two goals up. Everything was in their favour—wind, sun, and greater strength. Again and again they broke through the visitors' outer defences, and goals seemed inevitable.

But there was always that last barrier. K. K., in goal, was invincible. The fact that he was an ex-Carltonian made his performance all the more praiseworthy, and the Carlton fellows consoled themselves by the reflection that it was at Carlton, after all, that Parkington had received his early training. They could turn out footballers at Carlton, by Jove!

"FOUR times!" said Handforth, taking a deep breath. "Phew! That was a hot three minutes, if you like! Four times K. K.'s saved the fort, and every one looked a certain goal. Bravo! I couldn't have done better myself!"

"You silly ass, you couldn't have done half as good!" said Church tartly. "K.K. couldn't have done half as good, either, if he hadn't been thinking of the kisses he'll get! Isn't it marvellous what a girl can do?"

"If Dolly Wilkinson can make K.K. play like this, she's worth her weight in gold!" declared Deeks. "Keep 'em out, K.K.!"

he added excitedly. "We're still all square, and it's nearly half-time!"

"By George, yes," grinned Handforth. "And after that we shall have the sun with us, and the wind, too. We'll make 'em sit up!"

During the last two minutes of the first half the Carlton forwards again pressed. They realised how necessary it was for them to score now. If they couldn't find the net this half, they were not likely to do it afterwards. And it was always K.K. who prevented them.

McClure and Potts were beaten again and again—not because they were playing badly, but because the Carlton forwards overwhelmed them. Yet, to Walton and his fellow forwards, it seemed that the St. Frank's goal-mouth was boarded up. K.K. was there, and K.K. was like rock—a solid piece of rock which stretched from upright to upright, and from ground to cross-bar.

No matter at what angle the ball sizzled in, K.K. was there. If it was a low shot, he dived first; if it was a high shot, he was waiting. His anticipation was uncanny. Without any question at all, it was a one-man game. It was the Carlton Junior XI versus Kirby Keeble Parkington.

The St. Frank's spectators were breathless—spellbound. They no longer laughed. Chipping K.K. about the Head's daughter was a thing of the past. The chap was inspired; he was a magician.

And then came the whistle for half-time—one all!

THE roar that went up must have been heard miles away. These Carltonians were generous, and they cheered K.K. to the echo. They could appreciate good football, and K.K., after all, was by way of being a favourite of their own. They realised what they had lost.

"Congratters, K.K., old man!" exclaimed Nipper heartily, as he clapped Parkington on the back. "I've never seen anything like it! Goodness only knows how many saves you made during this last twenty minutes —"

"I know," interrupted K.K. coolly. "I counted 'em."

"Eh?"

"Fifteen!" said Parkington, with a cheerful grin. "Only twelve really decent ones, and three easy ones. Still, they count. Fifteen saves since Dolly sent me that note. I suppose I can't go into the pav. now?"

"Not likely!" said Handforth, pushing forward. "You've got to wait till the game's over, my lad! If you go and collect that reward now you'll be useless in the second half. All your pep will be gone!"

"Reward?" asked Nipper, staring.

"Didn't you know?" asked Handforth. "K.K.'s best girl sent him a note, and promised him a kiss for every save he made! No, it's not private—K.K. invited us to read it. I dare say he felt that it would be better,

or we were liable to think that he had gone mad."

"You know so much about Dolly already that there's no harm in your knowing the rest," said K. K. serenely. "She's my chum—and I don't care who knows it! If it comes to that, I don't care who knows about those kisses, either! I'm going to collect 'em as soon as the game's over, and you can all go to the dickens!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Nipper began to understand.

"We'd better hold him here, you chaps," he said firmly. "If he gets anywhere near the pavilion he'll be a lost soul! Once he collects those kisses he'll be a goner."

"You can chip me all you like—I don't care now!" said K. K., with supreme indifference. "I was a chump to care in the first place. Dolly Wilkinson is a jolly nice girl, and she's my pal. Why the dickens did I ever try to spoof you chaps? I don't care who knows about her loving me! I love her, too!"

"My only sainted aunt!" gasped Handforth. "Steady, K. K.! You know, a thing like this can be carried too far——"

"Not where I'm concerned!" interrupted K. K. firmly. "Dolly is my little sweetheart, and I'm proud of it! As soon as the game's over, I'll introduce you."

"But we've met her," grinned Travers.

"Have you?" retorted K. K., shaking his head. "Don't you believe it, my son! I want you to meet her as she really is. As the Americans say, 'You ain't seen nothing yet! Oh, boy, what a girl!' If you're nice to her, she might even kiss you, too!"

"Great Scott! And wouldn't you be jealous?"

"I dare say I should," admitted K. K. thoughtfully. "In fact, I won't let her kiss anybody else, even if she wants to."

He walked away, coolly sucking a chunk of lemon. The St. Frank's juniors stared after him in wonder.

"He must be light-headed!" declared Handforth. "That's what we thought at first—and now we know it! As far as the game's concerned, it's a good thing—he's brought victory within our grasp. But don't you think we ought to do something after the match?"

"We ought—and we shall," replied Nipper, nodding. "Why, in his present mood—fired up as he is—he'll only make a hopeless chump of himself! We've got to protect him. And we must think of that girl, too! We mustn't allow K. K. to make her the laughing stock of the whole place! She's the Head's daughter, and this giddy football seems to have turned her head, too. They're a pair, and we must save them from themselves."

"How do you mean?" asked Handforth, staring.

"Why, as soon as the game's over, K. K.



will rush to the pav. and collect those kisses unless we stop him," replied Nipper. "And think how awful that would be for Dolly! Not at the moment, perhaps—because she's evidently just as potty as he is. But she'd never be able to live it down. Dash it, she's a couple of years older than K. K., I should imagine. We mustn't let it happen."

"Then why not act now?" asked Handforth.

"Ass!" retorted Nipper scornfully. "We want to win this game, don't we? Our policy is to let things run on until the final whistle. Then we'll act!"



leaping up to save the Carlton forward's shot, Handforth caught his head on the cross-bar—and fell in a crumpled heap!

CHAPTER 9.

Thanks to K. K.!

“PASS, Archie—pass!”

The St. Frank's spectators were not many, but what they lacked in numbers they made up for in noise. The second half was only five minutes old, and already the Saints were feeling the advantages of wind and sun.

A long, sweeping pass from McClure had taken the ball down the field, and Archie, neatly trapping it, ran on. Two defenders bore down upon him, and the St. Frank's supporters groaned as Archie made no attempt to get rid of the ball. But Archie knew what he was doing. His idea was to draw the defence. At the last second he sent the ball gliding over the turf in a perfect pass.

Gresham, on the wing, was well on-side, and the ball came to his toe. He took it on the run, and a quick glance told him that if a goal was to be scored he must score it himself, for Nipper was covered by one of the backs.

“Shoot, Gresham!”

Harry ran in, and in his stride he kicked. It was a diagonal shot, and it rose as it left his foot. The ball whizzed into the top left-hand corner of the net like a bullet, beating the goal-keeper all ends up.

“Hurrah!”

“Goal!”

“Well played, Gresham!”

“And good old Archie!” shouted Church. “That pass of his was worth quids!”

“Keep 'em out, K. K.!” urged Handforth. “We can't expect the forwards to score again—so it's up to you!”

Parkington, between the posts, glanced round.

“If these silly Carlton forwards think they're going to score, they'd better wake up!” he said calmly. “Nothing's going to get past me, sweethearts! They couldn't score if they used a high-explosive shell!”

“Good old K. K.! That's the spirit!”

“Keep it up, old man, and you'll be playing for the First soon!”

Parkington, although so blithe, was quite in earnest. His words sounded boastful,

but they weren't. In his present mood he was an insurmountable obstacle to the Carlton forwards. They tried once or twice to get past him when their opportunities came—and these opportunities were not many. The Saints were in the ascendant now, and they were pressing hard. However, now and then Walton and his men would break through. One or two movements looked dangerous—indeed, but for K. K. they would have resulted in goals. Driving through the St. Frank's defence with dogged determination, Walton ran clean through and took a hard shot from within a foot of the penalty spot.

"Sorry, old son," sang out K. K. cheerily. He did not even trouble to dive after the ball. He did a thing which seemed utterly mad—and which would have been mad in any other circumstances. It was only his present mood which made it possible. He leapt sideways and met the whizzing ball with the toe of his boot. The leather soared well out into mid-field.

"Great Scott!" gasped Walton, chagrined.

"Oh, well saved, K. K.!"

"The man's under a spell!" ejaculated Handforth. "I thought it was a certain goal just now!"

"It's a certain kiss, anyhow!" grinned Deeks.

The game continued, and there were more tense situations as the time grew shorter. But K. K. was unbeatable. He punched, he kicked, and he even headed with the impartiality of an automatic machine. No matter what came his way he sent it back. And this, of course, began to have a moral effect upon the Carlton forwards. Once they realised that it was well-nigh impossible for them to score, all the ginger was taken out of their attack.

It wasn't surprising, therefore, when the Saints scored another goal within five minutes of time. It was Nipper's turn, and he made no mistake about it. To add to the debacle, Reggie Pitt thrilled the crowd with one of his famous runs during the last half minute, and the goal he scored was a corker. At last the final whistle blew, leaving St. Frank's the winners by four goals to one.

It was K. K.'s match. No sooner did the referee's shrill blast sound than he was surrounded by swarms of excited, enthusiastic juniors. He was slapped on the back and clapped on the shoulders until he scarcely had any breath left.

"You're a marvel, K. K.!" declared Nipper. "I feel like kissing you myself!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Dolly will do all the kissing," grinned Travers. "He must have a score due to him, I should think."

"Twenty-seven, to be exact," said K. K. calmly. "I've counted all my saves, and I'll bet Dolly has kept a pretty close score, too. Pity those Carlton forwards couldn't have made it an even thirty."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, I'll be going," went on Parkington contentedly. "If you chaps will get out of the way I'll run to the pavilion——"

"No fear!" said Nipper firmly. "Dash it, K. K., you can't expect Dolly to kiss you in your present state! There's about half a pound of mud on your face, and your hair's filled with it. Come along to the dressing-room, clean yourself up, and get dressed. Must do the thing properly, you know."

"By Jove, perhaps you're right," admitted K. K. "I hadn't thought about the mud."

"When a chap's in love he forgets everything else!" said Handforth. "It's surprising the silly things he can do! I remember once going out to meet Irene and forgetting all about my collar and—— Well, it doesn't matter!" he added hastily.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"K. K. can forget as many collars as he likes," said Nipper soothingly. "When Handy was crooked at the beginning of this game it looked as though we were in for a certain licking. K. K.'s love affair has given us the game—and we're not ungrateful. Let's give him a hand, you fellows."

They lifted him off his feet, set him on their shoulders, and carried him triumphantly to the dressing-room. He deserved it, but this move was not really made in the spirit of hero-worship; it was merely a dodge to be sure that K. K. didn't slip off.

So the hero of the match was watched over closely whilst he washed and changed. Fellows were on every hand, helping him. Their attentions, in fact, became embarrassing. K. K. found it impossible to move a yard without clusters of juniors impeding his progress.

He was glad enough when he had dressed and when he was ready to go. His face was flushed and shining from much towel massage, and his hair was neatly brushed. He smiled cheerily at the other members of the team.

"Well, thanks awfully for looking after me so well," he said graciously. "Awfully decent of you, and all that, but I didn't really ask for it. And if you don't mind I'd like to get to the door."

"It's all right," said Handforth breathlessly as he came in. "She's not in the pavilion now. She waited a bit, and then went indoors with her pater and Mr. Wilkes and Vera. The coast's clear."

K. K. frowned.

"What's the idea?" he asked suspiciously. "Dolly promised to wait for me——"

"I daresay her pater made her go indoors," interrupted Nipper. "Hard cheese, old man! It might not be so easy to collect that reward of yours, eh? Well, it's all to the good, I suppose."

"All to the good!" roared Parkington. "Look here, you asses, you'd better stop this rot! I believe it's some wheeze of yours! You silly Old-Timers think——"

"Cheese it, K. K.!" interrupted Deeks uncomfortably. "We're in it, too. We couldn't see you make such a hopeless ass of yourself without lending you a helping hand. Later on, when this fever has left you, you'll thank us."

"Fever!" gasped K. K. "What the dickens ——"

"This way!" said Nipper briskly.

The astonished K. K. found himself seized by many hands. He wasn't seized roughly, but with a firmness which left him in no doubt as to which way he had to go. The juniors surrounded him in a solid phalanx.

"You—you dummies——" he began indignantly.

"Coach all ready?" asked Nipper.

"Waiting!"

"Good! Then we'll take him straight to it," said the Junior skipper. "It's a good thing I explained to Walton that we should want to dash off immediately the game was over. Pity we can't stop to tea, but we've got to think of that girl—to say nothing of the dignity of St. Frank's."

K. K. was looking startled now.

"What are you going to do?" he demanded angrily. "You can't carry me off like this, you babbling lunatics! I tell you I've got to find Dolly——"

"You've made a howling ass of yourself in private, K. K., but you're not going to do it in public!" interrupted Nipper. "You ought to be grateful to us. We're forgoing tea on your behalf."

"Tea!" howled Parkington.

"I don't care anything about tea! But I promised Dolly that I'd——"

"That you'd go along to collect those twenty-seven kisses, eh?" said Nipper. "Exactly!"

Well, we've had a jaw, and we've decided that Miss Dolly has done enough already. She's given us the game—and why should she suffer for it?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You—you maniacs!" bellowed K. K., now thoroughly aroused. "If you'll only listen to me for a minute——"

"We've listened to you enough, old son,"

said Nipper. "There comes a time when fellows in your mental condition have to be restrained. You're coming with us!"

And K. K. Parkington went.

CHAPTER 10.

Dolly Delivers the Goods!

Next Wednesday's Extra-Long Treat!



Buy British goods, says Handforth senior in a lecture, and E. O. Handforth becomes his father's staunchest supporter. Studies at St. Frank's are ruthlessly torn asunder; goods dumped—some in the river; he becomes a nightmare to local shopkeepers! When the ramheaded Handy gets going there's no stopping him!

You can guess the amusing situations that result—and there are troublous times for Handy, too! Look out for this screamingly funny extra-long yarn next week, chums—

"IT'S AN OLD SPANISH CUSTOM!"

And order your copy In Advance.

IT was a shock for the leader of the Red-Hots. He had not expected anything so drastic as this; and the worst of it was, he was so completely outnumbered that he hadn't an earthly chance. Even Deeks and Goffin, his own study-mates, were against him. The other Red-Hots, too—all had joined forces with the old-Timers. It was felt by the St. Frank's crowd generally that the sooner K. K. could be got away from Carlton, the better.

K. K. was bundled unceremoniously into the waiting motor-coach and in spite of his frantic struggles, he was jammed into a seat and held down. The other fellows piled in, and the driver was given the word to start. Only a few Carltonians stood by, looking on and grinning. They hadn't been let into the secret, and they hadn't the vaguest notion what was really taking place. Fortunately, Nipper and the rest of the St. Frank's team had bade good-bye to Walton and his men earlier. Walton

knew that something was "on," and he was discreet enough to make no inquiries.

"Thank goodness we're off," said Handforth, with relief. "And not a sign of Dolly, either."

"I'm not so sure of that," said Nipper. "I think she must have sent her little sister out to scout. All the better, because she'll go back and tell Dolly that K. K. has gone."

"Little sister?" repeated Handforth.

"Yes, didn't you notice that little kid standing by while we were pushing K. K. into the coach?" asked Nipper. "A girl of about six—in a pink frock. Pretty little kid, too—and she was looking so scared and indignant that I'm pretty certain she had been sent out by her sister."

K. K. was nearly foaming at the mouth.

"You—you blundering idiots!" he gasped. "Stop this coach! You don't understand! If you'd only let me explain——"

"Better gag him!" suggested Travers mildly.

"Not a bad idea," nodded Gresham, producing a scarf.

The unfortunate K. K. was promptly muffled, and a crowd of fellows jammed him so tightly into his seat that he couldn't move. K. K. wriggled convulsively, and made gendish sounds under the muffler.

"Let him rave!" said Handforth, grinning. "I thought he'd get a bit better after we had once started, but he's worse. Hallo! I'm jiggered if old Wilkey isn't trying to race us in that mouldy old bus of his."

The others glanced out of the off-side windows. A shabby open car was overtaking them, and at the wheel sat Mr. Alington Wilkes. It wasn't much of a car to look at, but it could certainly move. Like all else in connection with "Old Wilkey," that car was a surprise packet. Under its shabby exterior it concealed a super-tuned racing engine. Mr. Wilkes himself was a driver of outstanding brilliance.

He signalled to the coach-driver as he shot ahead, and pulled up some distance in advance. The coach was obliged to do the same. Mr. Wilkes, with an expression of mild remonstrance on his face, looked up at the faces in the open windows.

"And what's the idea of this, you silly young asses?" he asked gruffly.

"We—we thought we'd better get off, sir," said Nipper lamely.

"Oh, you did?" retorted the Housemaster. "What about the courtesies of this occasion? People don't go to other schools to play football matches and then barge off without ceremony. What about tea?"

"We explained to the chaps, sir," said Nipper. "Walton excused us, and we really had a particular reason——"

"Well, you can forget your particular reason," interrupted Mr. Wilkes. "It's like your blessed cheek to make me get out the old bus and chase you! You're all coming back."

"Oh, I say, sir, but——"

"Walton can excuse you all he likes, but Dr. Wilkinson doesn't," said the Housemaster. "He's prepared to entertain the whole crowd of you in his garden—his daughter's idea, I believe. She particularly wants her pater to meet K. K. And you push off before anyone has a chance to stop you!"

"We're sorry, sir," ejaculated Nipper. "We never dreamed of anything like this! We—we rather wanted to hurry off——"

"Just a minute before you carry on," put in Mr. Wilkes. "What's that rummy noise I can hear from inside the coach? Is somebody in pain?"

"It's only K. K., sir," said Handforth desperately. "He's—he's a bit short of breath!"

"And so would you be if you had a woollen muffler wrapped round your gills," said Mr. Wilkes sternly. "Take it off at once! That's a fine way to treat the fellow who's won the game for you."

"You don't understand, sir—it's for K. K.'s own good!" said Nipper.

"Well, take it off, anyhow," said Mr. Wilkes. "Give him time to make himself presentable. By all I've heard, Dolly Wilkinson has a little ceremony to perform."

"Great Scott!" gurgled Handforth. "You know, sir?"

"About those twenty-seven kisses?" chuckled Mr. Wilkes. "Of course I know! And it's like your nerve to swindle K. K. out of his reward! All right, driver—you can go to the next corner and turn round."

The Removites gazed at one another helplessly. They had done their best, but Fate was against them. The fact that Mr. Wilkes knew all about that kissing bargain, too, was a staggerer. It was more staggering still that he should view it in such a matter-of-fact way. What was the world coming to?

TEA in the Head's garden was a great honour.

The weather was still warm enough for out-door meals; summer was lingering, and although there was a fairly high wind, the thick trees and hedges formed an excellent screen.

When the schoolboy visitors arrived, full of inward apprehension, they found everything nicely set out on the lawn. There were dainty tables, with appetising plates of tomato sandwiches, thin bread-and-butter and other delicacies.

Dr. Wilkinson was an upright, genial-looking man of well under fifty—and looking much younger. The juniors noted, with mild surprise, that the charming Miss Wilkinson and Vera were strolling together arm in arm. There wasn't a sign of jealousy here—although Vera must have known all about that bargain.

"I'm glad we got you back, young men," said Carlton's headmaster, as he shook hands with the juniors. "You played a very splendid game this afternoon, and I am not at all displeased with my own boys for losing."

"It was K. K. who won the match for us, sir—I mean, Parkington," said Nipper. "His goalkeeping was too marvellous for words."

"It just shows what a fellow can do when he is determined," nodded the Head. "I won't say that he was actually inspired, but my little daughter had expressed her absolute faith in him and he rose to the occasion. Well done, Kirby!"

He patted K. K. affectionately on the shoulder.



In spite of his frantic struggles, K. K. was bundled unceremoniously into the charabanc by the grinning Removites.

"I'd have been here sooner, sir, only these chumps carried me off—and I wasn't expecting that," said Parkington. "You know I wouldn't dream of leaving Carlton without coming along to see you all."

"I certainly didn't think it possible," agreed the Head. "You see," he added, turning to the St. Frank's fellows, "Kirby is very much like one of the family here. When he was at Carlton he was always popping in for tea, and it was gratifying to me that he and my daughter formed a very strong affection for one another. At this very moment she's waiting to give him quite a lot of kisses!"

"Wha-a-a-at?" breathed Handforth faintly.

The other St. Frank's juniors were feeling too weak to express their emotions. It was amazing enough to know that the Head was fully aware of that kissing compact, but it was extraordinary that he should openly boast of the affection existing between his daughter and K. K.

"I shouldn't have said anything about it, only you boys apparently know," continued Dr. Wilkinson. "K. K. himself was always very shy of his schoolfellows knowing what took place in this garden, and I was ready enough to respect his little secret. Dolly and

he have had many a happy hour here together."

"My only sainted aunt!" gurgled Nipper.

"Nothing pleased me better than to leave them here alone, romping about on the lawn," continued the Head reminiscently. "It was always good of you, Kirby, to come. Little Dolly was almost heartbroken when she lost her playmate."

"I'm afraid I've been a bit of a rotter, sir," said K. K. contritely. "I ought to have written to her more than I did."

"Well, I dare say she's forgiven you," smiled the Head. "Now that her sister is here, things are much better."

"I knew that Edna had come, sir, and that's why I didn't worry!" exclaimed K. K.

Mrs. Wilkinson, youngish and charming, announced that tea was ready, and the St. Frank's juniors came out of their trance. But they were still very much bewildered. Everything was so different from what they had expected. Here was Dolly's father actually saying that he liked K. K. to "romp" with her in this secluded garden!

"Good egg!" ejaculated K. K. suddenly. "Here's Dolly at last! I was wondering when she'd show up."

(Concluded on page 34.)

Our Series of Thrill Stories

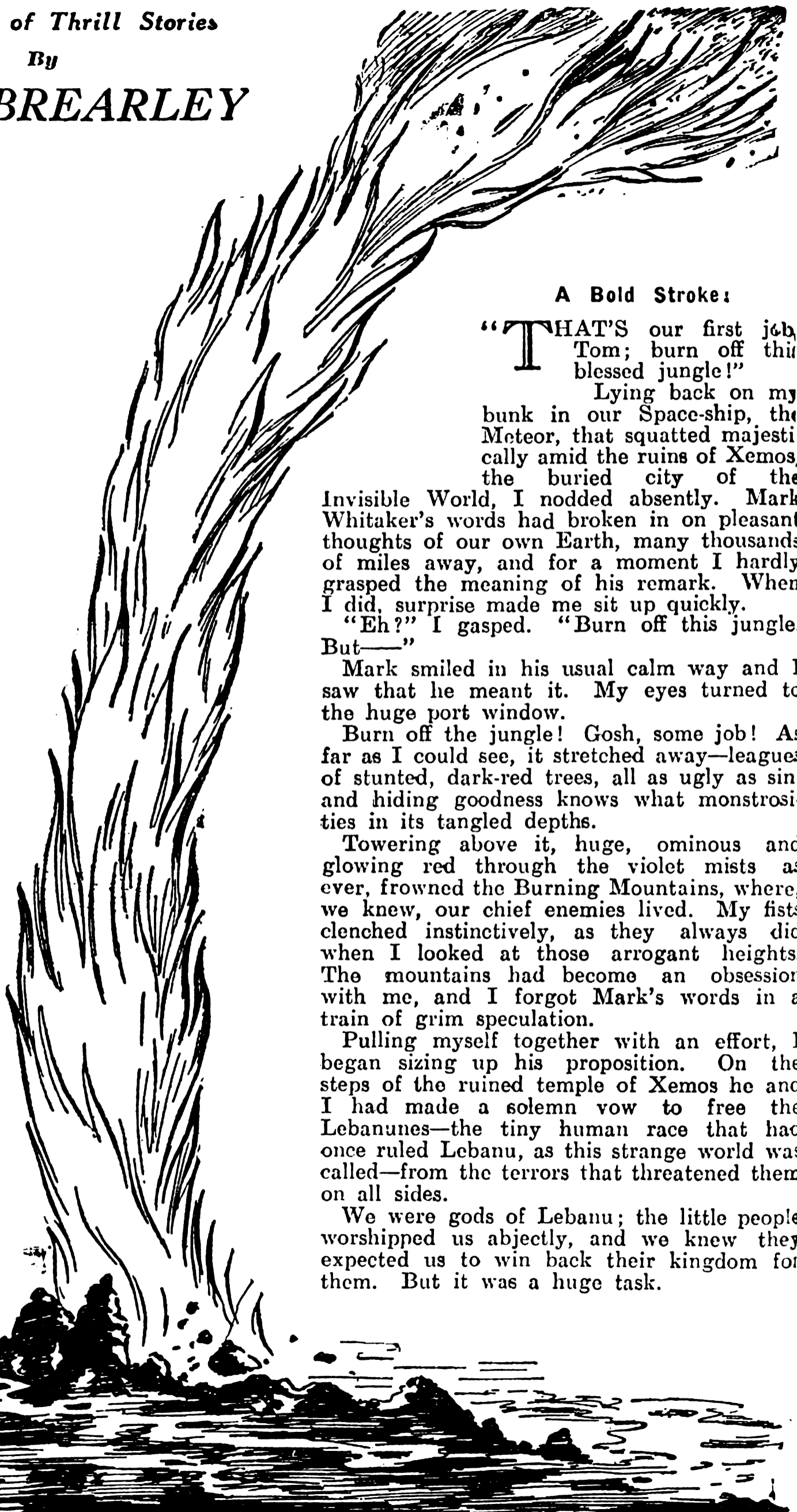
By

JOHN BREARLEY

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A Bold Stroke:

"THAT'S our first job, Tom; burn off this blessed jungle!"

Lying back on my bunk in our Space-ship, the Meteor, that squatted majestically amid the ruins of Xemos, the buried city of the Invisible World, I nodded absently. Mark Whitaker's words had broken in on pleasant thoughts of our own Earth, many thousands of miles away, and for a moment I hardly grasped the meaning of his remark. When I did, surprise made me sit up quickly.

"Eh?" I gasped. "Burn off this jungle. But—"

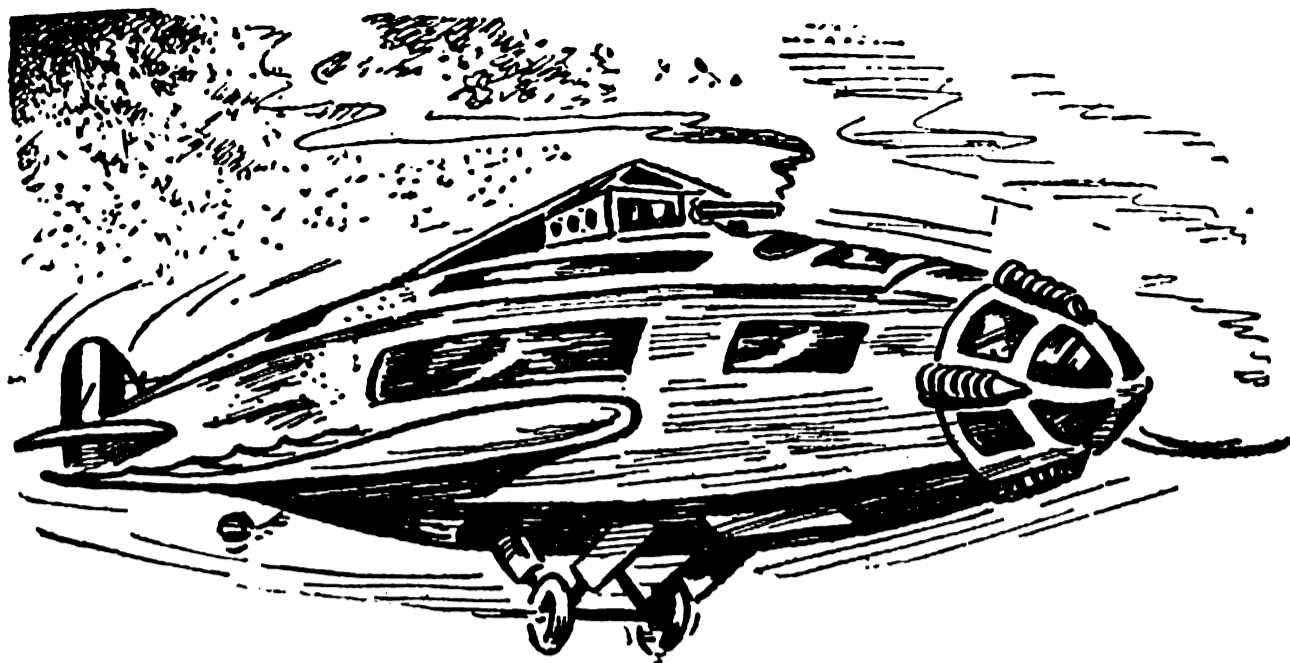
Mark smiled in his usual calm way and I saw that he meant it. My eyes turned to the huge port window.

Burn off the jungle! Gosh, some job! As far as I could see, it stretched away—leagues of stunted, dark-red trees, all as ugly as sin, and hiding goodness knows what monstrosities in its tangled depths.

Towering above it, huge, ominous and glowing red through the violet mists as ever, frowned the Burning Mountains, where, we knew, our chief enemies lived. My fists clenched instinctively, as they always did when I looked at those arrogant heights. The mountains had become an obsession with me, and I forgot Mark's words in a train of grim speculation.

Pulling myself together with an effort, I began sizing up his proposition. On the steps of the ruined temple of Xemos he and I had made a solemn vow to free the Lebanunes—the tiny human race that had once ruled Lebanu, as this strange world was called—from the terrors that threatened them on all sides.

We were gods of Lebanu; the little people worshipped us abjectly, and we knew they expected us to win back their kingdom for them. But it was a huge task.



Three days had gone by since our fight with the latest horror discovered on Lebanu—the Flying Devils—and Mark and I had been busy.

Our first job had been to rally the shattered Lebanunes, cowed and heart-sick through years of suffering, and to try and put their miniature city shipshape.

This was a job for me. I'm pretty dead from the neck up when it comes to planning things, or trying to understand the scientific marvels old Mark revels in; but when it comes to strong-arm work, I'm all there and happy. Armed with my big axe and followed by a crowd of admiring, twittering pygmies, I worked for two whole days, cleaning up that city good and proper; chopping back the jungle trees and thorns that had smothered the little broken houses during the passage of years, smashing down those buildings I saw were past hope, and generally enjoying the free use of my muscles once more.

Late on the second day came some excitement in the shape of a party of the Green Apes. I was breaking down the matted vines over what had once been an elegant forum, when five of the ugly brutes jumped at me from cover.

The fun started right then. The first stroke of the axe swept their leader's head right off, and the backswing cut another in two, but the other three closed in, and a very hectic five minutes passed before I was able to kick and punch two to death and break the neck of the third.

The leather suit I wore was already in rags from the first fight with them the day we landed, and before this little shindy was over my arms and chest were badly torn. Mark, however, got busy quickly with the medicine chest, and except that the wounds smarted a bit, I felt no effects. And the Lebanunes thought me more wonderful than ever—poor little blighters!

Mark, too, had been occupied, working all hours at his bench, and scaring the pygmies into fits with the sword-like flashes of light-

ning that darted occasionally from the Meteor, accompanied by the whine of his dynamo. The clever beggar was driving it from the accumulators of his uncanny Light-engines, and even I could appreciate the power he had harnessed. But I didn't know how he meant to use it.

He proceeded to tell me.

"Yes!" he nodded, in answer to my amazed stare. "Burn it down—all of it except the bit we're in now. Even if we carry out our contract and make these Lebanunes the ruling race once more, what good will it do if the jungle still covers their fields and crops? It would take them hundreds of years to clear it themselves—you see?"

I saw. It hadn't occurred to me before.

"And then again!" Mark went on. "If we burn the jungle, we'll clear out the apes and whatever else we find with one stroke. As soon as the fire starts they'll probably make a break for the open beaches, and then—we've got 'em!"

"Rather!" I whooped. "Like shootin' rats in a cornfield! When d'you start!"

"Now!"

Going to the cabin door, he sent a long, thin cry across the midget city. Instantly the Lebanunes, who were pottering joyfully about the ruins, stopped work, and out of the temple gates came old Onada, their venerable king—a stout fellow if ever there

was one! With wonderful dignity for such an old man, he stalked across to the ship, where Mark reached down and lifted him gently up the ladder.

There, on the aluminium deck, King Onada bowed to the ground and awaited our commands.

Quietly and earnestly Mark spoke to him at some length in the queer, clicking dialect of Lebanu, and Onada bowed again. There was no surprise or hesitation in his fine, lined face; he just obeyed us implicitly. He strode back into the city square, and presently I saw him mount the steps of the temple and summon his people. They followed him, meekly silent, into the darkness of the building, the rickety doors swung to, and all was quiet in Xemos.

I couldn't help chuckling to myself—it seemed so strange, out in this primitive jungle. At our bidding, what remained of a powerful nation had tucked themselves away in hiding—until we told them to come

The Fourth Adventure: FLAMES OF DEATH!

out. But then, of course, we were—gods!

Mark grunted with satisfaction.

"They're as safe there as anywhere!" he grunted; and sliding into the driving-seat, made ready for our flight. Meanwhile, I closed everything down and ran up into the gun-turret.

"O.K.!" I called.

"Right!"

The engines purred, the Meteor lifted smoothly. We were off. Scowling through the window, I jerked my fingers towards the fiercely-glowing mountains.

"Burn away, blow you!" I gloated. "This is where we do some roasting, too!"

A Sea of Flame!

IN a clean, upward slant the Meteor lifted from her jungle bed and went gliding across the plain, a slim, gleaming annihilator.

Half a mile up Mark straightened her out, and we cruised, looking for the best spot to commence operations—for we couldn't risk trapping the Lebanunes in the flames. The moment we shot into the air the Fire People in the mountains saw us, as they always did, for the whole range deepened at once to a dangerous scarlet. Barely had we covered the first mile when the bright light twinkled on the highest peak, and in a second rings of gas were spinning through the sky towards us.

That didn't worry us a jot, however. Beyond making us sick, the gas didn't harm us much. Quietly, methodically Mark dodged the brownish clouds; I felt our pace quicken, the Meteor swing round quickly, and then—she burst into brilliant light! From a dozen points in the hull great jets of azure flame darted out like searchlights and began sweeping the jungle beneath us.

I understood then just how Mark intended to burn off this vast stretch of chaotic vegetation. He was attacking it as he had done the Flying Devils—with rays composed of terrific electric heat.

The gas clouds from the mountains grew thicker, ringing us round. Ignoring them completely, I crouched in the turret, watching my friend in fascinated silence. He had one hand on the engine control and the other on the switch of a small battery, mounted by his side on a tripod, and as the beams of light hit the jungle on a wide circle, he pulled the switch right over.

A wisp of dark smoke below attracted my attention; then another. I half rose to my feet in excitement, when—

Whoo-oo-oosh!

Above the purr of the Meteor's engines rose a deadly, gushing roar, followed by fierce crackling. Flames spurted from the jungle, struggled, spread and joined together. In less than a second a mile-wide sheet of vivid flame exploded into the air, and the Meteor shot away like a dragon-fly.

The jungle of Lebanu was on fire!

And what a fire! Once, when I was a kid, I saw a celluloid factory go up, but the inferno that opened before our eyes now simply appalled me. As a tidal wave sweeps over a harbour, so the blaze Mark had started flooded the plain, leaping and hissing in a devil's dance of destruction.

Very skilfully my leader had planned the stroke, for a light breeze fanned the yellow tongues, driving them towards the mountains and away from Xemos. Soon it was as much as we could do to see through the waving pillar of smoke that blotted out the violet sky; made thicker still by a savage and devastating gas-attack launched at us now from the Burning Mountains, which glared and simmered at blood-heat.

Turning and twisting, Mark shot his rays into other parts, mowing down great malevolent stretches, sending other fires racing to join the main one, which by now was storming irresistibly towards the distant horizon.

Thicker and thicker grew the smoke, until the whole of Lebanu was dimmed by a screen of reeking clouds, pierced by a riot of mad, eye-scorching red from the Burning Mountains, and orange from the holocaust in the jungle. And all of it slashed and torn by the dazzling beams from the Meteor. It was like the end of the world.

At the height of the confusion Mark's voice from the control-platform roared up to me:

"Stand by the gun!"

Stand by! I was quivering like a terrier at a rat-hole. The moment I heard his voice I slammed a shell into the breech and tried to see something through the drifting gloom beneath.

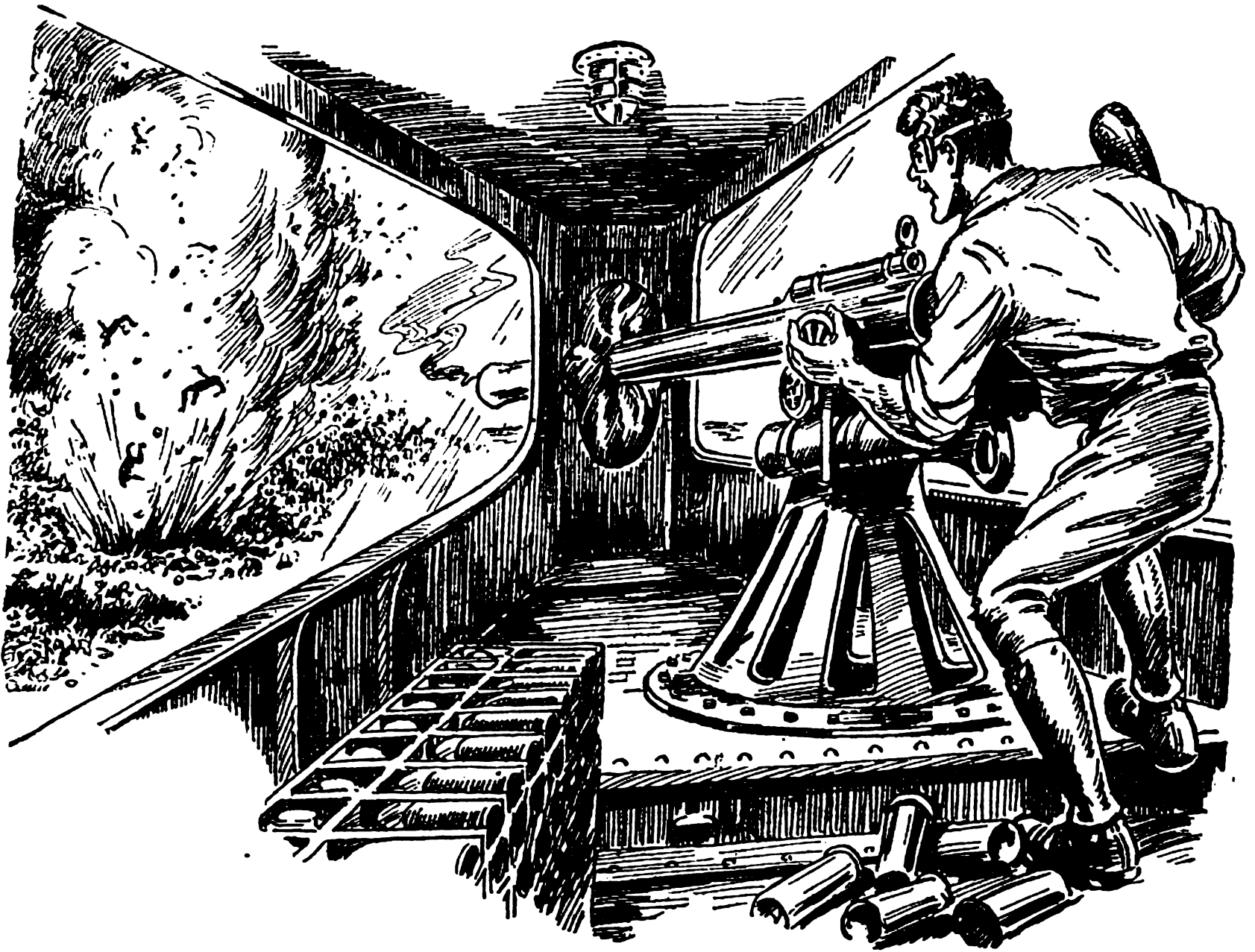
In a beautiful circle Mark swung the Meteor round, lifting her pointed nose out of the maelstrom, smashing through to the calm violet sky above. The clouds of gas from the Burning Mountains followed us, of course, but they were some seconds in catching us up, and in that short space of time, as we sped towards the sea, I had seen all I wanted.

The apes! We had chased them from their jungle lairs with a vengeance! Out of the fringe of trees they came in their thousands, pelting towards the strip of beach and the placid waves beyond; green apes and orange, forgetting their rivalry, deaf and blind to everything save the terror raging at their heels. They were utterly bestial in their fear of fire, and as I looked at them, snarling and writhing over each other, trampling the weaker ones to shreds, I almost forgot my job in the nightmare interest of that picture.

Only for a moment, though. Slipping the control-lever back another notch, Mark ranged along the beach, sank to within two hundred yards; and I let drive gaily at point-blank range!

Spang!

A jet of fire spat among the apes, followed by the crash of the explosive. In the thin



“The gun spat fire and created havoc among the terrified apes!”

air and density of Lebanu, our little one-pound shell went off like a “coal-box,” spreading death and panic for fifty yards around.

Spang! Spang! Whirr-ump! As fast as I could ram the shells home, I sent them speeding earthwards, tangling up that hideous horde. Yet, so great was their fear of fire, I could not stop the apes, even though my first six shells must have slaughtered hundreds. The survivors, wailing in terror, only hurled themselves over the stained craters and torn bodies, and panted on to what they thought was safety.

An absolute avalanche of brown gas poured down on us from the mountains as soon as the firing began. At first it blanketed our sight, but Mark soon defeated that. In ten seconds the Meteor was two miles out to sea and clear; in another ten she was back over the shore once again in another spot—with Mark’s electric fire raging once more. And all that time I was pumping gas and lyddite into the screaming, terrified fiends on the beach, cheering in hoarse delight as the Meteor’s flames caught them and ploughed great lanes through their huddled ranks.

There was no escape. The Fire People tried savagely to beat us off, but we were too fast. We wanted those green and orange devils, and we meant to get them. Those that turned back into the forest crumpled

up before the swift rush of the fire, and those that covered on the beach went up in clouds of shingle, or were blotted out of existence.

Out to sea, back again, swooping and ducking the gas-clouds, we stormed above the mob until it was over! A few bobbing heads out to sea, a few jerky movements in the shambles round the shell-holes, were all that remained of the Apes of Lebanu.

Our first attack against the enemies of the Lebanunes was over. But before we could draw breath we were at death-grips again with a second host!

Smoke of Battle!

THE Flying Devils were on us once more. From the heart of the huge smoke cloud they swooped down on rustling wings, claws outstretched ready to grapple us, cruel, deep jaws agrin. It was as though a swarm of hideous grasshoppers, magnified a million times, swept down on us; and against the background of flames and the hiss and crackle of burning forest they looked even more repellent than when they had first attacked us in Xemos City.

Flying in an enormous crescent, they closed with us like lightning. So great was the impact of that first charge that the Meteor, travelling fast though she was, reeled

and staggered. Flung off her course by the weight of hundreds of heavy bodies, she came perilously near to hitting the shore in a helpless dive, while the devils settled on her, beating at our windows with their great legs.

The plunge knocked me out of the gun-turret; but Mark, ever cool, nursed the ship with firm, gentle hands, and presently slammed the engines into their fullest speed, a speed that nothing in the universe could hinder.

We streaked across the jungle, shedding the devils from our curved sides, swung out to sea and hung there for a breather while Mark adjusted his battery and coils. Then, when we saw the wings of our foes beating through the smoke again, we rushed them of our own accord!

We were the attackers now. All out, at eye-baffling speed, the Meteor hurtled into the wall of vapour, and instantly the blackness of night swamped down on us. For the first time since our arrival the Burning Mountains disappeared from sight. It was like plunging into a tunnel. The terrible rattle of Flying Devils on all sides told us we were mowing them down.

'In the midst of the carnage Mark switched on his battery again. The rapiers of azure light stabbed the gloom.

We saw, then!

All around us, wheeling and darting in an effort to catch us up, were the devils; and the instant our fiery rays caught and scorched them, the creatures shrivelled in the ghastly heat or burst into spluttering flames. Very soon, as we circled among them, the darkness vanished in the glare of their torch-like bodies, each of which flamed up vividly for some seconds before diving swiftly through the smoke like brilliant rockets descending to earth.

Amid the eddying wreaths they flamed and exploded in hundreds, while hundreds more were smashed by our zigzag rushes until the Meteor's hull and windows dripped with their turgid blood. My turret gun was useless at the speed we flew, even had I been able to aim properly; so I crouched there on the ladder and watched Mark, with a saturnine smile on his face, fighting and sailing the ship at the same time.

And there, hidden from the violet sunlight, under the glaring peaks of the Burning Mountains somewhere lost in the murk, we fought the Flying Devils as we had the apes. And won.

The last of them crackled in the glittering beams and drifted to earth, legless, wingless and on fire. Mark touched the elevator-bar, and we rose slowly through the thinning smoke to the clear air above.

Gosh! From what I could see of the stains on the windows I'll bet our ship looked a gruesome sight. The jungle of Lebanu, too, looked pretty ghastly now we had finished our work. Far away, licking at the

very base of the mountains themselves, we could see flames still eating up the outskirts of the forest; while below, in patches where the smoke had drifted away, was nothing but a sea of charred, blackened plain, dotted with stretches of bare rocks. The tiny strip behind us, where Xemos City lay, was all that remained.

It was a terrible spectacle. Yet when I thought of the foul, distorted trees that had grown there, and the fair crops that would soon spring up in their place—my hat, I chuckled with glee!

We had already struck a giant blow for the freedom of Lebanu and its pygmy race, but the day's fighting wasn't over yet—by long chalks!

The Pillar of Fire!

HARDLY had we retreated out of the battle-smoke into the upper reaches when the poison clouds from the Burning Mountains rolled down on us again—this time not in volleys of rings, but in thick, tumbling billows.

They were certainly stickers, those fellows—or whatever they were in the mountains! Time and again we had come through their gas attacks unscathed, yet they were always ready to shoot it at us at every opportunity; and this time they beat all records.

Not one light, but twenty sparkled and snapped on the mountain sides, and such a volume of gas as we had never seen before sailed towards us. The damage we had wrought seemed to have stung the Fire People to madness, for in addition to the overwhelming gas, the whole of the mountains burnt now with such a dreadful radiance that I half expected the vast pile to explode at any minute and destroy Lebanu, ourselves, and the whole Invisible World in one titanic convulsion.

Nearer and nearer foamed the brown menace, with Mark backing away cautiously before it. I wondered why he did not sheer off altogether now the circus was over, for all this time he had somehow fought shy of a direct attack on the Fire People's stronghold, in spite of my urging him to wade in and risk a scrap. We were nearer now than we had ever been to them, and I would have given quids to have planted a couple of shells among 'em for luck before clearing for home.

However, while I was staring longingly through the turret, I heard Mark's voice calling me down. He was lolling back in the driving-seat, steering the Meteor calmly, but for all that I noticed a hard glitter in his eyes, and his knuckles showed white where they grasped the engine-lever.

As soon as I came up he pointed through the bow windows straight towards the biggest light that sparkled on the peaks. It was from that point that the gas attacks always started, and his quiet words made me gasp for joy.

"Tom," he murmured, "if I work the ship a few miles closer in, d'you think you can hit that light up there?"

I cheered.

"Can I?" I carolled. "Watch me, old son! I'll hit it right on the nose!"

In two seconds I had started for the turret ladder, but he stopped me.

"Wait!"

I turned impatiently, to see his narrowed eyes studying me absently.

"Listen, Tom; I'm not sure if it's fair to ask you. If my theory concerning that mountain range yonder is correct, the explosion of a shell up there may cause—disaster!"

"Disaster your granny!" I replied daintily, not even asking what his theory was. "Let's chance it and see!" And I was up the turret before he could say another word. "Let her go, Mark!" I yelled; at which he pulled up the lever and the Meteor dashed into the approaching cloud of gas.

We were through it too fast even to get a whiff, and next instant the fiery cliffs were leaping towards us. Quickly I loaded the gun and cuddled down against the padded recoil-shield, squinting along the sights until I held the distant target squarely in line. It took all the elevation I could give our little beauty, but I laid her dead on the target and shouted to Mark.

"Right!" I heard him answer.

The Meteor's engines stopped. My hand grasped the firing handle. The turret shook as the gun roared. Both Mark and I held our breath as we awaited the result.

Suffering cats! What happened next I never can remember quite. During one gorgeous, breath-stopping moment I thought our little shell had knocked the top of the mountain clean off. The twinkling light disappeared in a fountain of red fire, a ringing concussion came to our ears, and then—half the mountain-side fell in!

There was a bellow like the crack of doom, a tearing, blinding sheet of flame from the very heart of some gigantic furnace. In a twinkling Mark had turned the Meteor in her tracks and was racing for the open sea with the speed of light.

High in the air above us, reaching up until its crest was lost in the violet mists, shrieked a stupendous pillar of white-hot fire, livid and sulphurous. Rising until it lit the whole world, it swayed towards us, a monstrous serpent preparing to strike, and only a wild swerve and the power of our glorious engines

saved us then. Showers of blistering ashes screeched against our hull, the cabin grew hot to suffocation; but Mark stuck to his driving-seat, teeth set hard, while I clung to the turret ladder, whooping and cheering for sheer mischief, like the chump I am.

"Yee-ee-ow! Whack her up, Mark—the house is afire! Hurray!"

Straight out to sea we fled, pulling up only when we saw the searching column flicker, weaken and begin to subside. Looking back, I saw it fade at last to an angry scarlet stain on the mountain peak; and then, even as I stared, it sank from sight.

With its passing came a wondrous change. From every pinnacle in turn the red-hot colour ebbed away; slowly at first, as heat dies out of a cooling cinder, leaving a dull, cold blackness that spread through the length and breadth of the massive chain of mountains. It was as though our tiny shell had pierced a vital spot and the monsters were slowly bleeding to death. Neither Mark nor I could resist a little shudder; my forehead became suddenly cold and damp.

No danger threatened now; we seemed to have paralysed our foes—or perhaps destroyed them. We edged back to land and, staring through our glasses, made out an enormous crater where the shell had landed—a gaping hole punched in the roof of the mountain, out of whose sullen depths trailed thin streamers of vapour.

Something caught my eye and I gasped.

"Why—it's hollow, Mark! I can see right in!"

He nodded gravely without once lowering his binoculars.

"Yes—hollow!" he repeated. "As I thought. That whole mountain range which looks so solid is nothing but a thin shell of rock filled with flame and gas. Those lights we have seen twinkling must be vent holes through which the gas is forced when we're attacked!"

"But what about the Fire People?" I cried, amazed. "Do they live inside—amid the flames? How can they?"

The smile of the genuine explorer, who never gives up in face of any risk, lit my friend's quiet and clever face.

"That's what I mean to discover, Tom!" he whispered softly. "And very soon!"

Which is all he would say. The first part of our self-imposed task was over—the second was yet to come. I wondered what the end would be!

THE END.

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K. K.'S SECRET!

(Continued from page 27.)

Nipper and Handforth and the others started. What did K. K. mean? Dolly was there all the time, talking to Vera—

They stared blankly. The little girl of about six, dressed in a pink frock, had come running across the lawn, shouting gaily. She fairly flung herself into K. K.'s arms—and he held himself ready to catch her in an attitude which had evidently been well rehearsed.

"Twenty-seven!" cried the child gleefully. "You've got to hold still, K. K., while I give you twenty-seven kisses. Oh, I think you're just too marvellous for words!"

"I'm all ready for my reward, but for goodness sake go easy," pleaded K. K. "I mean, in front of your father and mother and all these chaps!"

"Oh, never mind them," said the child, laughing.

A great light had dawned upon Nipper.

"K. K.!" he said fiercely. "Is—is this Dolly?"

"Of course," grinned K. K.

"But—but—" began Handforth.

It was unnecessary for him to say what was in his mind, for he had looked across at that charming girl of seventeen who was now strolling over the lawn towards them. K. K. gave a hearty laugh.

"I thought you'd be surprised," he said calmly. "Allow me to introduce you, my sons, to Miss Dolly Wilkinson—my little

sweetheart. Just five and a half years old. We've been pals ever since she was four."

"You—you boulder!" breathed Nipper thickly.

"Well, it was your own fault, and you deserved to be spoofed," said K. K.

"But—but the girl we met—she said—" spluttered Handforth.

"Exactly," nodded K. K. "You thought Edna was Dolly, and Edna was sporting enough to keep up the joke. And she did write that letter to me—for Dolly, who's too young to do her own correspondence just yet."

AND thus K. K.'s secret came to light; thus was his "love affair" explained.

The St. Frank's juniors realised they had been spoofed up to the eyes, and they laughed uproariously at their discomfiture. What asses they had been!

Two important points emerged from the jape. The first—the juniors saw a side of K. K.'s character they had never suspected. The he-man of the Remove had a soft spot for children. Second—the leader of the Red-Hots was red-hot at putting over japes!

K. K. had always been popular—but now his popularity was greater than ever!

THE END.

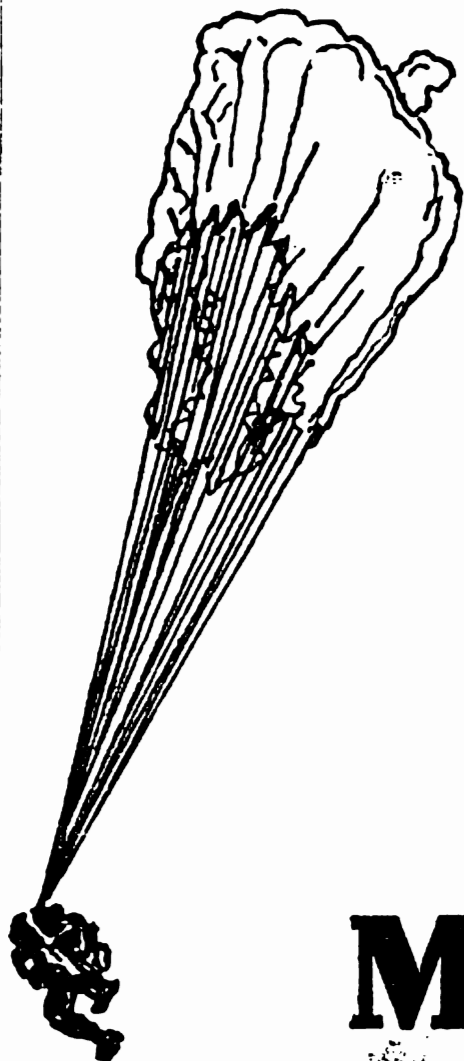
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HOW TO JOIN THE LEAGUE

ST. FRANK'S LEAGUE APPLICATION FORM No. 120.

SECTION

A

READER'S APPLICATION FOR MEMBERSHIP.

I desire to become enrolled as a Member of THE ST. FRANK'S LEAGUE, and to qualify for all such benefits and privileges as are offered to Members of the League. I hereby declare that I have introduced "THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY" and THE ST. FRANK'S LEAGUE to one new reader, whose signature to certify this appears on second form attached hereto. Will you, therefore, kindly forward me Certificate of Enrolment with the Membership Number assigned to me, and Membership Badge.

SECTION

B

MEMBER'S APPLICATION FOR MEDAL AWARDS.

I, Member No..... (give Membership No.), hereby declare that I have introduced one more new reader, whose signature to certify this appears on second form attached hereto. This makes me (state number of introductions up to date) introductions to my credit.

SECTION

C

NEW READER'S DECLARATION.

I hereby declare that I have been introduced by (give name of introducer) to this issue of "THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY."

(FULL NAME).....

(ADDRESS)

INSTRUCTIONS.

INSTRUCTIONS.—Reader Applying for Membership. Cut out TWO complete Application Forms from Two copies of this week's issue of THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY. On one of the forms leave in Section A, crossing out Sections B and C. Then write clearly your full name and address at bottom of form. *The second form* is for your new reader, who fills in Section C, crosses out Sections A and B, and writes his name and address at bottom of form. Both forms are then pinned together, and sent to the Chief Officer, The St. Frank's League, c/o THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY, 5, Carmelite Street, London, E.C.4.

Member Applying for Bronze Medal: It will be necessary for you to obtain six new readers for this award. For each new reader TWO complete forms, bearing the same number, are needed. On one of the forms fill in Section B, crossing out Sections A and C, and write your name and address at bottom of form. The other form is for your new reader, who fills in Section C, crosses out Sections A and B, and writes his

name and address at the bottom of the form. Now pin both forms together and send them to the Chief Officer, as above. One new reader will then be registered against your name, and when six new readers have been registered you will be sent the St. Frank's League bronze medal. There is nothing to prevent you from sending in forms for two or more new readers at once, providing that each pair of forms bears the same date and number.

Bronze medallists wishing to qualify for the silver medals can apply in the same way as for the bronze medal, filling in Section B. Every introduction they make will be credited to them, so that when they have secured the requisite number of readers they can exchange their bronze medal for a silver one.

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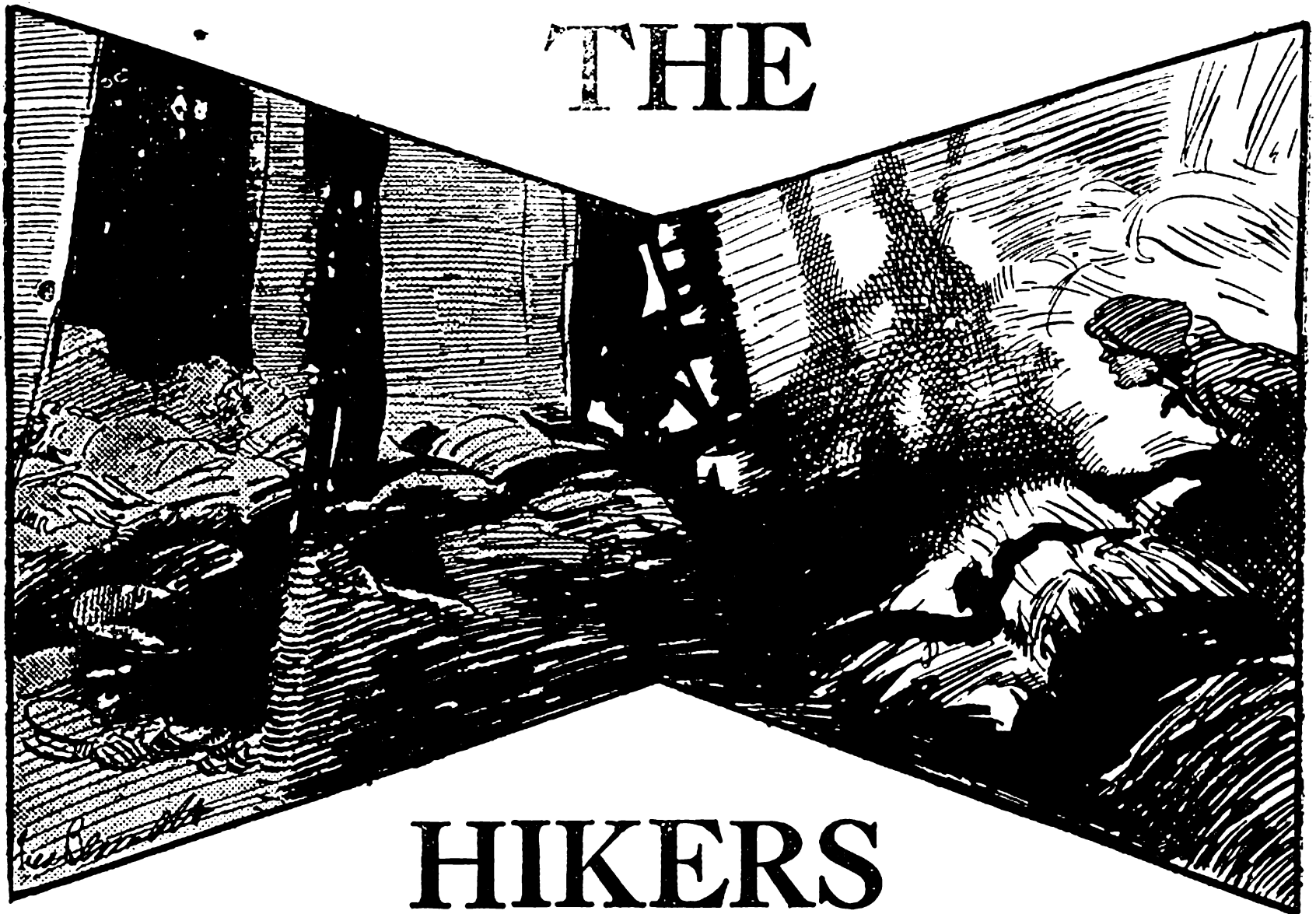
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Stop Here for Plenty of Laughs—the Hikers are in Fine Form!



THE HIKERS

Orphans of the Storm!

LOOKS like some soup—bags of it!" said Eric Gale.

He grinned wryly at his two companions, Tony Ridgers and Eustace Giles Trevor Radlett Tarrants, who was called Bloop for short. The three chums were on a go-as-you-please walking tour.

Eric's pessimism seemed justified. The sky behind them had darkened with threatening clouds. So far the weather had been kind to the three hikers, but now it looked like a downpour on a grand scale.

"We're in for a regular soaker, chaps," said Bloop, glancing back, "and it's coming up fast. By the ugly look of it, the weather's going to bust, and it may rain hard for a month."

"Cheerful sort of guy you are," said Eric. "Shove her along, Tony. I can't see anywhere to shelter yet, but we may spot something when we get to the top of the hill."

Bloop helped with the small hand-cart and they gained the hill-top just as the first drops of rain began to fall. Near the footpath, which crossed a common, there was a barn.

"Sprint for it," said Eric. "If we can get in, we'll dodge this lot."

It was a large barn and its wide doors stood open. They only reached it in time, for a few seconds later it grew almost as

dark as night and the rain began to fall in hissing sheets.

"I repeat for the umpteenth time that before I started off with you two lunatics on this hiking stunt, I ought to have been grabbed by the neck and shoved into a padded cell," said Bloop.

It was so gloomy that they could not see across the barn, and they could hardly hear Bloop's voice for the clatter of the rain on the roof.

"What's the time, somebody?" Tony Ridgers asked.

"That's a question you ought to put to old Slivey, for I'm pretty sure he's got your watch," grinned Eric. "It's only just after six, but it's so jolly dark it might be midnight. Gee! Isn't it walloping down?"

Tony grunted. He hadn't completely got over the loss of his watch yet. And, as Eric said, it was fairly obvious that

it had been stolen by Mr. Slivey, a rascally organ-grinder whom the Hikers had already had trouble with on several occasions.

Bloop found a flashlamp and investigated the barn. It seemed to contain nothing with the exception of faggots, hurdles, and bundles of pea-sticks. The floor was unpaved and rather dirty, and the smell of the place didn't resemble lavender, or anything nice.

The Hikers camp in a barn: raining "cats and dogs"—and a burglar, too!

"Well, it would have been a jolly sight worse if this had come in the middle of the night, when we'd camped out," said Tony, who always tried to make the best of things.

Bloop whistled dismally. Even if the rain cleared off quickly, there had been enough of it already to make things unpleasantly wet.

"If I knew where to find it, I'd treat the three of us to a dry bed," he said, "but I haven't the foggiest notion where we are. This barracks smells a bit too high to make a comfortable bed-room."

As Bloop spoke, a police-constable on a bicycle came squelching over the grass and nearly upset Tony as he rode into the barn.

"Hallo!" he cried, dismounting. "I didn't know there was anybody in here. Lively, isn't it?"

"I haven't noticed it," said Bloop. "You look as nice and as dry as if you'd just swum a river."

"And I feel like it, sir." The constable gave a swift glance at the boys and at their push-cart. "On the hike, eh? Come far to-day?"

"Linkinbridge," said Tony. "We were looking for a place to camp in when this beastly rain came on."

"Orphans of the storm," said Bloop; "lost to the wide world. How far are we from any civilised place where we can get a decent meal and a comfortable bed?"

"There's the Anchor, at Denning," answered the dripping policeman. "That's a bit over two miles, straight across the common. Dark hole this, isn't it? Got a flashlamp to lend?"

Bloop handed over his torch.

"Thanks," said the policeman. "We're looking for a chap, and he may be in here. A burglary at Major Cornwebb's bungalow. A dirty-looking chap was seen hanging about. Did you meet anybody suspicious-looking?"

As the boys had been dodging roads and following little-used footpaths, they had met very few people, and nobody whose looks suggested that he had recently burgled a gentleman's bungalow. Tony and Eric got out their own flashlamps and helped the policeman in his search.

"Not here, children; not here," said Bloop. "I thought all these burglar johnnies did their crib-cracking in style nowadays and brought a car, constable?"

"They do, generally, but we didn't see any traces of a car. I'm so wet now that if I stood neck deep in the sea for an hour I couldn't get any wetter, so I'm off. If you mean to stay here, don't set the show alight. Evening, young gentlemen."

The constable and his bicycle vanished into the rain. Muddy pools were forming on the common, and the prospect of a two-mile tramp to the Anchor Inn was a dreary and sodden one.

"We shall have to stop here," said Eric. "It does smell a trifle musty, but you won't notice that when you get used to it."

Tony got busy. He found a few bricks and made a fireplace. Ground sheets were spread and the tent was put up. Some sacks hung on hurdles formed a screen that prevented the glow of the fire from being seen outside. The pleasant scent of burning wood quickly overcame the musty odour of the place, and Bloop admitted that it was a jolly lot better than he had expected.

Out came kettle and frying-pan and coffee-pot, and Bloop cooked three succulent chops to a turn and added a dish of sliced potatoes, fried a golden brown. In a dozen places the rain was leaking through the roof, but the Hikers seemed to have picked out one of the dry spots.

"There are no complaints at all, people," said Eric. "Considering what it's like outside we're jolly lucky. Stick coffee down on your list for to-morrow, Tony, for we've nearly run out of it. Hallo, hallo! That was thunder, wasn't it?"

"It sounded like it, but it was a jolly long way off," said Tony Ridgers.

It was the rule of the camp to leave nothing over till morning, so they set about the rather greasy job of washing up, and then gathered round the welcome fire which lighted up their healthy sun-tanned faces.

"An eerie sort of show this," said Eric, peering into the mysterious shadows of the barn. "You're good at yarns, Bloop. Tell us a ghost story, or some tale of a ghastly murder with lots and lots of blood in it, something to make our flesh creep."

"Now that I've had my supper and that beastly smell has shifted, I don't feel either ghostly or ghastly," said Bloop. "I don't care if it snows sharks. Let us warble a few."

Bloop hammered the frying-pan with a spoon, three boyish voices rose loud above the patter of the rain and wakened echoes in the old barn.

"Yesterday was full of trouble and sorrow,
Nobody knows what's going to happen
to-morrow.

Give yourself a pat on the back,
A pat on the back, a pat on the back,
And say to yourself, here's jolly good
health,
We've had a good day to-day."

An hour later the three youngsters were sound asleep, and the smouldering fire was dying out. A breeze sprang up, driving away the clouds, and the moon gleamed down on a very damp world.

The Capture!

IT was when all three boys were sound asleep that a pile of pea-sticks in the corner of the barn gave a gentle heave, and a man put a dirty face out of his snug hiding-place.

He hauled a yellow portmanteau out after him, stood up and yawned. The moon,

shining in through the big open doorway, cast a square of light, and as a human shadow fell on it the man dropped on his knees and scuttled back to his hiding-place.

The policeman, who had been told by his comrade that he would probably find three boys camping in the barn, took a glance over the sacks and went out again. As if not satisfied, he came back, and Tony Ridgers, the lightest of sleepers, snapped open his eyes and sat up.

"Who's that?"

"Only the police," answered the constable. "My mate told me you might be in here, and I didn't mean to disturb you. You haven't seen anybody hanging about, I suppose?"

"We haven't," said Tony. "We haven't poked our noses outside since we came."

"It's cleared up now, but it's left the ground in a mess. My mate says you helped him to search the place, but I'd better have another look. Nobody seems to have seen the going of the fellow, and it's so quiet round here that most people take a second look at a stranger. Sorry I woke you up."

"I don't think you'll find him here, but if you do and want any help, you've only got to give a loud chi-ike to call out the troops."

Tony snuggled down again, and the constable, an older and more experienced man than the one the boys had met before, switched on the light of a powerful electric torch and searched the piles of faggots, hurdles and pea-sticks foot by foot with its dazzling rays. The beam sank lower and moved over the floor of the barn, which was wet and muddy in places owing to the leaky state of the roof.

Switching off the light with a snap, the constable walked back.

"There's nothing doing here. I'll be off," he said rather loudly. "He is here, sir," he added in a whisper. "S-sh! Over in the corner there, back of the big pile of sticks. He crawled in on hands and knees and left the prints of 'em."

"I suppose that's you talking in your sleep now, Eric," growled the sleepy voice of Bloop from the tent. "Shurrup, or I'll give you such a sock!"

"It's the police back again, to know if we've seen that burglar johnny," said Tony.

"If they think I've got the chap in my pocket, they can search me," said Bloop. "Hi, wake up, Eric! You haven't got a burglar about you, have you, for the police have mislaid one?"

Tony slipped into the tent and whispered the news to Bloop, who yawned and grinned.

"What's all the silly fuss?" asked Eric, half awake.

It took some time to make Eric understand.

"I call it rotten impertinence, digging a chap out of his dreams for a silly thing like that," he complained.

"Shove the kettle on the old primus and

we'll give the constable a cup of tea," said clear-headed Bloop, emerging from the tent in slippers and pyjamas. "Good-evening, constable! How about a cup of tea?"

"I'd love one, sir." He leaned forward. "I don't think this is such a safe job to tackle, sir," he added in a whisper. "One of the articles missing is a loaded revolver, and he may have it. I wonder if one of you could slip down to the Anchor Inn on my bike, wake 'em up and 'phone through to Winkleton police station. They'd send along half a dozen men in a car in two shakes. Of course, if he smells a rat and tries to bolt, I shall have to tackle him, revolver or no revolver."

Tony agreed to be the messenger, and, having received fuller instructions, he slipped out of the barn like a ghost and pedalled away.

"A jolly nice cup of tea, this, sir," said the constable, with one eye on the dark corner. "More apologies for waking you up, and I hope you're enjoying your hike."

"It's very good in parts, as the curate remarked of his egg when they gave him a shop 'un for a new-laid," said Bloop. "How do you like night work?"

"Not much," replied the constable. "I do this round three nights a week, and it's as lonely as a graveyard and not 'arf as lively. My time's up now and I must be off. Good-night, and thanks!"

Bloop and Eric knew that the constable was not going far away. Five minutes later the pea-sticks stirred again.

"Don't you do no squealin' or make a song about it," said a gruff voice. "You'll be 'urt bad if you do!"

A dirty man with a revolver in his hand peered into the lighted tent. Bloop and Eric did not recognise him, but Tony would have known him at a glance, for it was Mr. Slivey's spiky-chinned friend, Slimmy, though they were friends no longer and had parted company.

"Now you sit tight while you're safe, my lads, and keep your mouths shut arter," said Slimmy, "for if you lets on me I shall know yer again and get yer."

He brought in a cup of warm water, shaving brush and razor, and began to lather his chin. Using the mirror hanging to the tent-pole, he began to scrape his chin with his right hand, keeping the revolver in his left.

As there was nothing else to be done, Bloop and Eric sat tight and watched him. Having shaved, Slimmy brushed his stubby hair with a pair of silver-backed brushes and got rid of his tattered clothes and ancient boots.

From the portmanteau he took shirt, socks, collar and tie, a pair of brown shoes, a tweed suit and a cap. With the revolver in easy reach, the man proceeded to attire himself.

"Now what do you think of me?" he asked, grinning.

"If I told you," said Bloop, bitterly and truthfully, "you'd shoot me dead."

Slimmy grinned again and wriggled about, trying to obtain a view of his new beauties in the little mirror. Then he began to fill his pockets with small articles of value taken from the portmanteau.

"Now, Mr. Baronet's Son," he said to Bloop, who sat with his arms clasped round his knees. "You see, I knows yer. That's a nice wrist-watch you've got, but I ain't going to take it from you. Everythink in the garden's lovely 'cept one thing, and that's a shortage of ready money. I know you've got a nice fat pocket-book, so fork it out."

Guessing that he would soon get his wallet back, Bloop handed it over.

"Only eight quid," said Slimmy, counting the notes, "and these two flimsies. They make my mouth water, but they ain't no use to me, for if I was to try and cash a ten-pun'



A figure loomed out of the darkness, and the startled burglar found himself in the strong grip of a policeman.

note I should get lagged."

He tossed the two ten-pound notes back to their owner and straightened his tie.

"You can keep the bag and what's left," he said, then added with a ferocious glare: "And don't you go yarning to the police. Leave them to find the bag. Don't you tell 'em, or I'll murder both of you! If I'm lagged and do time, I'll get you when I come out."

"You must be an awfully jolly chap to know," said Eric.

"And a jollier one to hang," said Bloop.

They were both listening intently and wondering what the policeman was doing, for they were sure he was close at hand. Their coolness seemed to strike the burglar.

"I must say you takes it jolly well," he remarked, as he struck a match and lighted a stolen cigar. "It do 'urt to give back them crisp notes, but I daren't try to cash 'em. And now I'll be off—and so-long, dear boys, so-long."

Slimmy bent to take a last admiring glance at himself in the mirror. It proved his undoing. Out of the semi-gloom behind him stole two eager hands and two arms clothed in blue, and with a glad snap the hands locked themselves round Slimmy's throat.

"Bargo out of it, Eric!" yelled Bloop frantically.

They both rolled aside as the revolver exploded with an ear-splitting bang, and a cloud of pungent smoke filled the tent.

Slimmy's kicking feet vanished as the constable dragged him out backwards. The next moment he had his knee on the man's chest and his arms locked, and Bloop and Eric were sitting on his legs.

Then the handcuffs clicked home.

The flying-squad arrived just when Tony did, but except that they saved the constable the trouble of marching his prisoner a couple of miles to the lock-up, they were not of any great assistance. As he was about to

(Continued on page 43.)

On a hay-rick : fighting for his freedom . . . and the odds are heavy against plucky young Ralph Forrester !

Knights of the Road!



A Fight for Freedom!

NEARER and nearer came the sounds of pursuit. And more and more difficult was Ralph finding it to keep on running.

He strained every nerve and muscle to increase his speed, but his breath was coming in short, panting gasps now. He knew his pursuers were gaining on him. He could hear the hoarse baying of the hounds more plainly, and the murmur of voices. Bruised and exhausted, never a swift runner, he was now hardly able to make any way at all.

He looked back, and over the crest of the hill, black against the eastern sky, he saw the pursuers and the dogs in full cry after him. The savage shouts of Callard and his son reached the boy's ears, and he saw that the scoundrelly headmaster was accompanied by two of the school men-servants.

"I won't go back alive!" he cried. "The dogs shall tear me to pieces first!"

He charged through a hedge, and, doubling down the other side of it, struck away at right-angles to his former direction. He came to a haystack and clambered on top of it. He took a swift look round him. There was a farmhouse not half a mile away; it was useless to go there—they would give him up.

He looked over the adjoining hedge, and saw the men and dogs sweeping along in hot pursuit. They had lost sight of him,

but the mastiffs were following his scent at top speed. Capture seemed inevitable!

Ralph set his teeth and gripped tight the sharp stake he had picked up. The odds were against him; but, slender and delicate as he was, the boy came of a fighting race, and he knew what awaited him if he fell into the hands of Callard.

With a roar and a rush Callard and his men flung themselves at the haystack on which Ralph had taken refuge, digging their fists and toes in and scrambling up, while the dogs bayed and leaped furiously.

Ralph watched them with a keen, cool eye, ready to strike where he could do most harm.

"Now you've got him!" yelled Callard.

One of the schoolmaster's men was foremost—a coarse, brutal-looking groom. He pulled himself within arm's length of Ralph. The boy swung up the heavy stake, and brought the flat of it across the ruffian's face.

The groom gave a yell, and, losing his grip, tumbled backwards, knocking down Callard and his son. They fell in a heap, Alexander undermost, and as luck had it, one of the dogs under Alexander. The mastiff gave a yowl of protest, and fastened its jaws in the handiest part of Alick's person, so that when the mix-up straightened itself out, Callard sat nursing a sprained ankle and cursing the groom, who was too busy staunching the flow of blood from his nose to take any notice; while Alick was running round in a circle, squalling loudly, with both hands clapped to his back.

"Bungler!" shrieked Callard, pulling himself to his feet. "And I'll make the kid pay for this! Come on; he can't get away!"

"Aye, come on and have some more!" cried Ralph, his fevered eyes burning with the excitement, and he flourished his weapon. "Come on, you bullies, and see what you'll get!"

"All together!" cried Callard, as they rushed in.

"Look out for that hedge-stake o' his'n!" called the groom, who had suffered before. "The whelp, I'll tan his hide off with it when I get him down!"

The warning was needed, for Ralph used his weapon as a lance this time, and the

enemy, made cautious by their first failure, were held off. Alick, nearly in reach, was sharply pricked in the shoulder; and his worthy father, making a snatch at the stake, received a crack over the wrist that made him roar. The besiegers fell back afresh.

"We'll have him down! Hang me if I leave him!" screamed the schoolmaster, beside himself with rage. "Stand back an' give the dogs a chance! That's it! Haul up the barn door an' let them get at him!"

The two stablemen pulled an old barn door against the stack, forming a slope, and they crowded round it while the dogs, hounded on, sprang up it and leaped at the boy. They could just reach him, and when Ralph saw the frantic brutes with their red jowls and slavering jaws coming right at him, he knew he must hit shrewdly, or they would be at his throat.

With all his force he drove the sharp hedge-stake lance-wise at the nearest, and, by good luck, the brute fairly impaled itself on it. The point ran deep into the dog's breast; with a choking howl it toppled backwards, wrenching the stake out of Ralph's hands as it fell over the edge of the rick.

"He's killed the dog!" shrieked Callard.

"Aye, but he's lost his hedge-stake!" cried Alick. "Now for it! Up an' grab him!"

The attacking party, maddened with rage at being held back so long by a stripling, rushed once more at the stack. Ralph dragged up another thatch-pin, but it was a sorry weapon, light and blunt. There was no other ready to his hand. Up came the attackers, and the stack rocked at the shock of them. Several times they fell back, great bunches of hay coming away in their hands as they climbed, and soon the ground was strewn with a cart-load of hay and thatch. But the more they pulled away, the easier the ascent became, and soon they gained the top.

Ralph laid about him madly with the light stake. As he saw the enemy were bound to take him he rose to fling himself from the stack. But Callard was too quick for him, and, seizing him by the ankles, threw him down on the thatch and pinned him there.

"Got him!" shrieked Callard, his voice quivering with triumph. "Here——"

HOW THE STORY STARTED.

DICK FORRESTER learns upon the death of his father that all the vast estates and fortune, with the exception of a hundred guineas, have passed into the hands of his rascally uncle,

VANE FORRESTER. The latter refuses to give the boy his money, and, appointing himself guardian, states his intention of sending Dick and his brother,

RALPH FORRESTER, to Duncansby School—a notorious place in the North of England. Travelling by coach, Vane and the two boys are held up by

DICK TURPIN, the famous highwayman. Dick joins forces with Turpin, and, after bidding Ralph to be of stout heart and promising to fetch him soon, the two ride away. They have many stirring adventures together until Dick leaves his companion and rides north to see how his brother is faring. In the meantime, Ralph has reached Duncansby School, a dreary, desolate place on the wild moorlands. Unknown to him, Vane has arranged with the headmaster that the boy shall "not live long." Ralph is treated cruelly, and during the night he escapes—but his persecutors are soon in hot pursuit!

(Now read on.)

A cry of warning interrupted him, and then suddenly a whirlwind seemed to descend upon the attacking party. The owner of the haystack, an enormous Yorkshire farmer, roaring like a bull with rage, and with a son nearly as big as himself by his side, burst upon the scene. He sprang up and seized Callard by the legs, bringing all four besiegers to the ground in an avalanche, leaving Ralph panting and clinging to the thatch. Callard and his men sprang up, but the farmer and his son laid about them so heartily with a couple of stout cudgels that the Duncansby faction was soon scattered and yelling for mercy.

"What be ye about, ye runagate thieves, wreckin' my stack?" roared the farmer, as he plied his cudgel. "What d'ye mean by it—eh?"

A tremendous uproar arose, for the farmer's bulldog, a huge brindled beast, fell foul of the remaining mastiff. In a moment they were at each other's throats, rolling over and over in a pandemonium of growls and howls.

"Stop—stop!" shouted Callard, leaping out of reach of the cudgel, and holding his smarting shoulders. "What are you about, you blundering chaw-bacon! There's a run-away boy of mine on that stack, and I'm going to have him!"

"Are ye so?" cried the farmer. "Do ye think thee's to pull my stacks to rags? I'll teach thee, thou wreckin' thief!"

"Hands off me!" cried Callard, dodging as the farmer came at him again. "I won't stand it! I'm going to have that boy, do you hear me, fellow? I'm a schoolmaster!"

"Skulemaster!" cried the farmer, snapping his huge fingers. "I don't care if ye're fifty skulemasters! Thou shan't have t'lad, neither. It's little wonder he's run away from such as thou! So off with tha' afore I cracks thy pate again! Coom thee down, my lad; they shan't harm thee. Noo, Jock, come here an' larrup these skulemasters off the place."

And, plying their sticks like wheat-flails, the farmer and his son soon drove Callard and his hangers-on yelping from the field.

"Let's have this nipper down, Jock!" said the big farmer to his son. "Poor little whipper-snapper, I doubt they've used him sore! Coom down, lad! Why, he's bleeding!"

And indeed, poor Ralph, now that the excitement of the fight was over, felt his exhaustion and hardships come back upon him with a rush. His weakened body slipped unconscious from the thatch as his grip relaxed, into the arms of the farmer.

"Poor little nipper!" said the big Yorkshireman, lifting him up. "Why, his skin's as fair as a girl's, an' he's covered wi' welts an' bruises! But sakes alive, he's made a fight o' it while his strength lasted! See, one girt mastiff killed, an' two o' those runagates bore the marks o' him! I love a plucky feighter! Let's have him to t' house, Jock."

They carried the unconscious boy to the farmhouse, where the farmer put Ralph in charge of his wife, a comely-looking woman, who was much distressed at the boy's plight.

"T' murderin' rascals!" she cried. "I hope thou dusted their jackets, John! Poor lad!"

She laid Ralph tenderly on a couch and sponged his hurts as she spoke.

"Aye, I'd sooner send a son o' mine to gaol than to Duncansby School!" said the farmer. "I haven't finished wi' yon skulemaster yet; an' next time I'll put him past floggin' his boys for a month or two! Look, missus, t' little chap's cooming to!"

"T' poor lad's in a fever," said the woman. "Nay, thou mustn't get oop, little measter. Some good hot broth an' then bed, that's what tha' wants!"

— —

What Happened in the Night!

WHEN Ralph awoke it was evening, and he found himself between lavender-scented sheets in a cosy bedroom. He felt a little better, but his head was hot and throbbing, and for long he lay awake in the darkness, thinking of the new friends he had found, and what kindly folk they were.

Then his wits began to wander, and he thought himself at home in the old mansion at Fernhall once more. Drowsily the events passed through his head—the coming and going of his Uncle Vane, his father's strange illness, and how much weaker he was after Vane's visits. Ralph's mind wandered to the journey to the North, and the mad escapade of his brother Dick when the highwayman Turpin stopped the coach.

Ralph's fevered eyes dwelt on the curtained window as, half-delirious, all this passed through his fevered brain. Then, suddenly, he saw something that called him back to realities.

A dark form was looking in at him from the window, and Ralph heard voices whispering. He lay there, spellbound. The dark figure crept softly through the window into the room, and he lost sight of it for a moment. Then a hand was clapped over his mouth, and a hoarse voice said thickly:

"I've got him! Bear a hand here; we've pinned him at last!"

Ralph struggled and strove to cry out, but the hot, clammy hand held his mouth tight shut, and a strong arm held him down on the bed. He stared upwards, and with a shiver saw that he was in the hands of the groom from Duncansby School. A second form entered by the window—it was Alick Callard.

"Tie his wrists," whispered the groom; "we must have no noise!"

"We'll have a bit o' sport to-night!" muttered Alick, gloating over his prisoner as he bound his wrists. "Aye, we'll put it on him as never a boy had it yet, even at Dun-

cansby! Slip your hand away, Jim, an' I'll bind this over his mouth."

Ralph was bound and gagged quietly; he was too weak to resist much, but his heart was nearly bursting as they lifted him from the bed and passed him out to another man outside.

"Bind him on the old horse," whispered Alick. "Don't make a shindy, or we shall have that lout of a farmer after us again with his cudgel. A pity dad didn't come; we're shorthanded if it comes to a fight."

"If it comes to a fight wi' yon beggar from the farmhouse, you'll see me out o' sight in ten seconds," muttered the first groom. "I've no mind to try the taste o' him agen. Heave the cub up."

They lifted Ralph on to a raw-boned old horse, and, holding him on, left the farmstead as quickly and as quietly as they could. Ralph felt the last hopes in his breast die as the lights of the house that had sheltered him faded out and were lost to sight.

"Pull up for a minute," said Alick. "We can't hold him on like this all the way. Tie his feet under the horse's girths."

"Better to tie him under its belly, head down'ards, an' set t'owd hoss to a gallop," said the groom. "Let's see a bit o' sport with him!"

"Not till we get back to the school," said Alick. "We must get him back alive—alive, d'ye hear?"

Despair brought Ralph's strength back to him.

"You hounds! You hounds!" he cried wildly, struggling like a madman. "Let me go!"

He flung himself sideways and fell heavily. The frightened horse began to plunge, and in the momentary confusion Ralph, whose legs were not tied, struggled to his feet and ran blindly away in the darkness.

"After him!" cried Alick, and away they went, the pursuers swearing savagely. Ralph had no possible chance of escape, but he ran as a blinded hare runs, not knowing where he went, nor caring for anything save to get away from his captors.

Sobbing with exhaustion, he dashed ahead till he ran straight into a muddy ditch full of stagnant water, from which his captors dragged him more dead than alive. They brought him back, tied him on the horse; and took him to Duncansby.

The wide door was open, and Callard himself stood in the porch with a lantern.

"We've got him, dad!" said Alick.

The schoolmaster said nothing, but he fixed his glittering eyes gloatingly on the boy swaying in the saddle.

"Cut him down," said Callard. "Bring him in."

Ralph was cut loose and dragged into the hall. A more pitiable sight could not have been found in all Yorkshire that night. White as paper, save where the blood trickled from the thorn-cuts, the fever burning in his eyes, his clothes hanging from him in tatters, wet through and daubed with mire from the ditches, the boy looked hardly human.

"So you'd try to escape, would you?" snarled Callard. "Well, you have failed—and now you're going to pay the penalty!"

Ralph, as he heard the dread words, shuddered; and he dared not think of the terrible ordeal which he knew lay ahead.

"Away to bed with him, Alick!" ordered Callard. "We must get him fit so that he can the more appreciate his punishment!"

And Ralph, too exhausted to struggle, was borne away.

(Ralph is in a terrible plight—what will happen? Dramatic developments in next Wednesday's absorbing instalment, chums!)

THE HIKERS

(Continued from page 39.)

lift the open portmanteau out of the tent, Bloop happened to glance inside, and an amused grin crossed his face. He seized the object that had amused him and slipped it into the pocket of his pyjama-jacket.

Presently the inspector who was in charge of the flying-squad shook hands with the three hikers.

"Much obliged for your help," he said. "I think you've acted finely."

"Your officer acted more finely," said Bloop. "He thought you hadn't got the message, and it was a plucky thing to tackle that bully when he had a loaded revolver in his hand. And please do try to keep us out of the police-court business, inspector, for we'd hate it."

"I think I can manage it. Good-night, and jolly good luck!"

When peace and quiet had come again to the camp in the barn, the dawn was showing faintly in the eastern sky.

"Well, Bloop, old scout, you can't grouse

about things being slow and tame after this packet, can you?" said Eric.

"You wouldn't if you'd heard the names that guy at the Anchor Inn called me when I knocked him up and asked to use the 'phone," said Tony. "That's what made me late, for it took about ten minutes to convince the fathead I wasn't bluffing."

Bloop began to chuckle, and Eric wanted to hear the joke.

"As a matter of fact, I was thinking of our old pal Mr. Slivey, of the whiskers," said Bloop; "the sweet pet who got two pounds out of me and then so gratefully mizzled with Tony's watch. They say dog doesn't eat dog. You're sure that burglar chap was Slivey's pal, Tony?"

"Absolutely. There can't be two faces like that on earth."

"Then they've dissolved partnership, and he robbed old Slivey before they parted. Here's your watch and chain, Tony. I collected it for you."

THE END.

(Always cheery, that's the Hikers—and they're more cheery, more amusing, than ever in next week's breezy complete yarn.)

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