

NELSON LEE

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A COOLER FOR THE "RED-HOT" LEADER! — One of the lively incidents from the uproarious long complete story of the chums of St. Frank's, inside.

New Series No. 35.

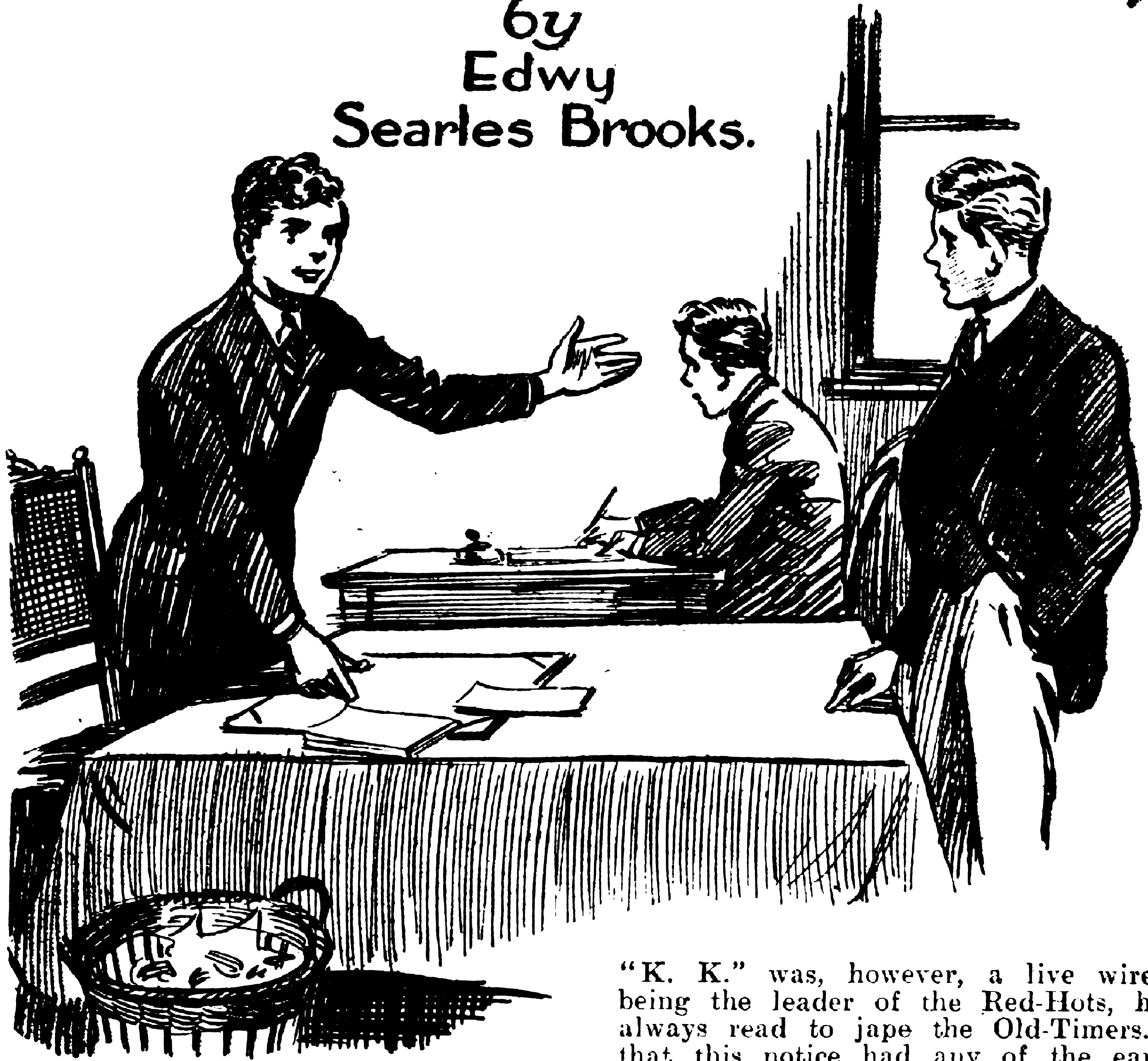
OUT ON WEDNESDAY.

September 20th, 1930.

Corking Extra-long Complete St. Frank's Yarn!

K.K.'S "K"OMPANY!

by
Edwy
Searles Brooks.



CHAPTER I.

Cooling the Red-Hot Leader!

"HALLO!" said Handforth, coming to a halt. "What's this?"

"Look's like a notice," said Church.

"It is a notice," declared McClure.

Handforth grunted. It was totally unnecessary for his chums to tell him that what he was looking at was a notice. It was a big card attached to the door of Study K, almost at the end of the Remove passage in the Ancient House.

"More of Parkington's drivel, I suppose," said Handforth disparagingly.

The great Edward Oswald was disposed to belittle anything and everything that Kirby Keeble Parkington did. The burly, red-headed

"K. K." was, however, a live wire, and being the leader of the Red-Hots, he was always read to jape the Old-Timers. Not that this notice had any of the earmarks of a jape. It ran as follows:

"THE K. K. LIMITED LIABILITY CO.

"This is to announce the formation of the above up-to-the-minute company. Every kind of work undertaken. No job too big, no job too small. Terms moderate. Apply within for full particulars.

"K. K. PARKINGTON

"(Managing Director)."

"Well, I'm jiggered!" said Church, grinning.

"Didn't I tell you it was more of K. K.'s drivel?" asked Handforth tartly.

**K. K. becomes B. B.,
resulting in Parkington's
greatest triumph and
Busterfield Boots' biggest
disaster!**

"What does he think he's up to now? What does he mean—'Every kind of work undertaken'? I've never seen such rot!"

"Why not go in and inquire?" suggested Church. "He invites us to."

A Riot of Laughter From The First Chapter!

Handforth was suspicious.

"It might be a booby-trap," he said cautiously. "Fine asses we should look if we opened this door and got a pailful of soot over us. You never know what these Red-Hots are doing!"

"Yes, they keep us pretty busy," agreed McClure.

It was always considered a perilous under-

studies running from O to Z, leaving two of the rooms unlettered; but as they weren't being used (except as store-rooms) this didn't matter.

"Yes, we shall have to be careful," went on Handforth firmly. He looked down the corridor as he spoke, and his gaze alighted on the fire hose which rested on a ledge set in the wall at the corner of the passage. "And prepared!" he added, as he walked down the corridor and seized the nozzle of the hose.

"Prepared? What's the giddy game?" asked McClure, looking at his leader in startled amazement. "What are you going



taking for any Old-Timer to venture to this end of the Junior passage. It was what the fellows called "the new end," since several extra studies had been added here. There were four, to be exact—K, L, M and N—and they were all occupied by Kirby Keeble Parkington and his self-styled Red-Hots. These twelve fellows, late of Carlton College, believed in sticking together.

There were four new rooms in the West House, corresponding to these, and the lettering of the studies over there had been slightly adjusted—the West House Remove

to do with that hose? Look here, you chump——"

"Who are you calling a chump, Arnold McClure?" demanded Handforth, glaring. "I already owe you a black eye for calling me a ramheaded idiot in the dormitory this morning, and now I owe you a thick ear. Don't forget to remind me about it later on. Idiot and chump yourself! Knowing K. K. as I do, I'm willing to wager ten to one that this notice is only a stunt to make us walk into a booby-trap. If that's the case—well, that red-headed ass is going to walk

into a stream of water from this hose. Churchy, you stand by that wheel arrangement, and if you hear me yell, turn it on!"

"But you can't do this, you big fathead!" expostulated McClure, undismayed by the fact that he was already booked for a black eye and a thick ear and was now likely to receive a swollen nose in addition. "Think of the mess——"

"It'll be K. K.'s fault if there's any mess, so he can jolly well clear it up!" said Handforth in the tone of one who will not be turned from his decision. "If there's no booby-trap I shan't use the hose."

McClure, who knew only too well just how obstinate Handforth could be when he liked, gave it up as a bad job. It would be Handforth's funeral, anyway, if he were caught.

Edward Oswald dragged the hose down the corridor and approached Parkington's study. He banged on the door with such vim that several other doors opened and a number of heads peered out. They gazed in astonishment at the sight of Handforth holding the nozzle of the hose threateningly before him.

"Come in!" sang out a crisp, cheery voice.

Handforth cautiously turned the handle and flung open the door, backing as he did so. Nothing happened. There seemed to be no booby-trap. The nozzle of the fire hose advanced into the study, followed by Handforth. A number of Removites gathered in the doorway, some looking at the notice, others regarding the scene in mixed astonishment and amusement.

The burly, red-headed Kirby Keeble Parkington was sitting behind the table in the middle of the room. He had a blotting-pad and writing tablets in front of him, and a pencil in his hand. Deeks and Goffin, his chums, were seated face to face at a side table, with similar pads, like a couple of junior clerks. All three juniors stared at the nozzle of the fire hose, pointed ominously towards them, in apprehension.

"Come in, gentlemen—come in!" invited K. K. with a calmness he did not feel. "I am very pleased to see you, Mr. Handforth, although I can't say the same for that thing you're holding. Would you mind turning it in another direction, Mr. Handforth——"

Handforth recovered from his amazement and advanced farther into the room, still holding the hose in front of him.

"What's the idea of all this nonsense, K. K.——" he began, and then broke off with a gasp as a stream of water suddenly shot out from the nozzle.

Swoooooosh!

Parkington's face disappeared from view as the stream of water hit him. Handforth was so surprised that he automatically moved the hose—and first Deeks and then Goffin were swept backwards off their chairs as the jet of water struck them.

As suddenly as it had started, the hose became "dead." Handforth, still blinking his incredulity, ran into the corridor. He was just in time to see Vivian Travers giv-

ing the brass wheel which operated the water supply a last turn.

"Did you turn on the water, Travers?" demanded Handforth wrathfully.

"I did," replied Travers sweetly. "I couldn't resist the temptation. It was such an ideal opportunity to give our red-headed, red-hot rival a cooling. Did he like it? And you're not cross with me, are you, Handy?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

A roar of laughter went up. Handforth gave a loud snort and looked as if he would like to slaughter Travers on the spot. But Travers was a ju-jitsu expert, so the Study D leader contented himself with winding up the length of hose and putting it back in its place. Then he stalked back to Parkington's study.

FORTUNATELY, the hose hadn't been turned on long enough to do any real damage, and by this time K. K. and his two chums were again seated round the table, looking even more business-like. They themselves may have been a little damp, but their enthusiasm was far from damped. K. K. was even looking pleased with himself. The study was now crowded with juniors, and business looked like booming.

"The K. K. Limited Liability Co. is now open for business," he was saying briskly, as Handforth strode in. "Gentlemen, tell us your troubles! Let us handle your little problems! We will take care of all your worries! Our fees are moderate, and our service second to none. All commissions are dealt with in strict rotation, so the sooner you give us your orders, the better. First comers will be first served." K. K. reeled this off as though he had learnt it by heart, and before any of his audience could make any comments, he waved a hand towards Deeks and Goffin. "Our staff is at your disposal," he added.

"Is this one of your new jokes, K. K.?" asked Nipper politely.

"Jokes be dashed!" said K. K. "Must I repeat myself? This company is ready to undertake any job that is placed in its hands. We don't care what it is. If you want us to write your impots, they are as good as done. One shilling per hundred lines—or one-and-sixpence if an exact duplication of the client's own handwriting is essential. Lines required by careless prefects—such as Biggleswade—are going at bargain prices. Rush work is our speciality."

"And supposing you do our lines and they are spotted as fakes?" asked Nipper pointedly.

K. K. shrugged his shoulders.

"You will kindly remember that this is a limited liability company, and therefore it is unnecessary for me to point out that we limit our liability in all such matters," he said. "We do the work, but you take the risk."

"I don't think much of it!" said Handforth tartly.

"But we must point out that the risks are negligible," said K. K.

"The risks are what?"

"They're so small that they hardly exist," continued the managing director, making it clearer. "Writing lines is one of our smallest undertakings. We are here to serve you in any way, shape or form. For the most moderate fees we will take all your problems off your hands."

"It's not a bad stunt, K. K.," said Nipper, chuckling. "I take it that Study K is hard up, and that this is a wheeze for raising the wind."

Parkington almost winced. Nipper had hit the bull's-eye, and it came as rather a blow to K. K. that his dodge should have been so quickly spotted. Study K, to be painfully accurate, was as stony as a heap of flints. It was absolutely "on the rocks." Not even a single penny could have been produced, and there was little or no prospect of the funds being replenished from normal sources until the end of the week. Hence the formation of the K. K. Limited Liability Co.

"The whole thing's a spoof!" said Handforth, with a sniff. "Come on, you chaps! We've seen enough of this!"

"One moment," urged K. K. "Gentlemen, your cars! Surely there are some little tasks that we can perform for you? Have you any difficulty in writing to your favourite aunts and uncles? If so, let us submit sample letters."

"We can write our own letters, thanks!" said Tommy Watson.

"Ah, but our letters carry a guarantee with them," replied K. K. quickly. "We know how to gain results. If the necessary tips are not forthcoming in response to these letters the company remains unpaid. What I mean to say is, these letters are supplied on commission only."

"And what does that mean in plain English?" asked Handforth. "I've got an uncle who hasn't sent me a tip for three terms, and I've written to him enough times giving him hints, goodness knows."

"Leave him to us!" said K. K. crisply. "Name and address, please! We will write him a letter which will work the oracle. Our letters, I may say, are not only works of art, but artful work! We get results! Ten per cent. on all tips thus obtained. No tips—no pay! What could be fairer?"

"You're dotty!" said Handforth. "My uncle would know that it wasn't my handwriting."

"We only supply the actual composition—you do the writing."

"I knew there was a catch in it!" said Handforth disgustedly.

"Catch, my aunt!" retorted Parkington. "It's the composing of a letter which requires brains! You want the best brains—we have them!"

"Says you!" scoffed Handforth.

"Says me!" nodded Parkington, grinning.

"Peace, children," interposed Nipper. "Well, K. K., I wish you and your company all success."

"Very nice of you—but haven't you got a job for us?" asked K. K. "We value your wishes, but we value your orders far more. Don't forget that we're open for business at all hours of the day and night. If a cat disturbs you in the small hours, just come to us, and for half a crown we'll guarantee to silence it."

"I admire your optimism, old son," grinned Nipper. "But if you're really hard up and want to raise the wind, why go to all this trouble. I'll lend you a quid until Saturday, if you like."

"Good man!" said Deeks and Goffin in one voice.

"Don't take any notice of my staff," said K. K., pained. "I haven't trained them properly yet. Thanks all the same, Nipper, but it's one of the rules of this company that money should never be borrowed. What we have we'll earn."

"If that's your policy, I'm afraid you'll be broke until the end of the week," said Nipper. "Somehow, I don't think you'll get many commissions. Optimism's a good thing, K. K., but it can be overdone."

"I know—like the optimist who did his cross-word puzzle in ink for the first time," said K. K. "But that's beside the point. We're here for business, and the Remove will soon find that it can't get along without us."

The Remove, however, proved to be strangely indifferent to the newly-formed K. K. Limited Liability Co.—and it was left to the Fourth to give that firm its first big commission.

CHAPTER 2.

Uncle Buster!

JOHN BUSTERFIELD BOOTS was worried.

He sat in Study No. 6, in the Modern House, and Percy Bray and Walter Denny, his chums, could do nothing to console him. Even Bob Christine and Yorke and Talmadge, who came along from Study No. 1, were unable to remove his worried frown.

"What's the trouble, old man?" asked Bob.

"You wouldn't understand even if I told you," groaned Buster Boots. "In any case, it's a family affair."

"Oh, I see. Sorry!"

"It's not private, or anything like that," continued Buster gloomily. "I suppose I'd better tell you—you're bound to know sooner or later. My little niece is coming down to St. Frank's."

"Your little which?" asked Yorke, staring.

"Allow me to introduce Uncle Buster!" grinned Denny. "It seems that he's got heaps of brothers and sisters, and some of 'em are married. Goodness only knows how many nephews and nieces he's got running about in various parts of the world."

"Fathead!" said Boots tartly. "I've only got one married sister. She's years older than I am—more like an aunt than a sister. But I shouldn't know her if I saw her. I haven't met her for fifteen years."

"Then you haven't seen her since you were a baby?"

"That's right," said Buster Boots reminiscently. "I can't remember anything about her, of course. All I know is that she's over double my age. Rummy, isn't it? I mean, rummy having a sister old enough to be my mother. She married some big Canadian railway man, and what with her family and one thing and another, she's been out there ever since. Now she's paying a visit to England for the first time since her marriage."

"But why worry?" asked Bob Christine. "You're not cut up because a niece is going to visit you, are you?"

"Yes, I am."

"Why?"

"Because all the chaps will be grinning at me, for one thing," said Boots ruefully. "Particularly those fatheaded Removites on the other side! Imagine me trotting round the giddy school with a tiny bit of a kid hanging on my coat-tails. I should never be able to live it down!"

"It would be funny!" chuckled Bob.

"Funny?" growled the burly Buster. "If you think that's funny, you ass, I don't think much of your sense of humour!"

"How old is this kid?"

"Only about four and a half," groaned Boots. "A mere infant! Blessed if I can understand why my sister should send her down like this. It wouldn't be half so bad if Marjorie was coming with her."

"You're mad!" said Denny. "As she's your sister, we can understand her doing any sort of dotty thing—it runs in the family, I suppose—but there's a limit. Even your sister wouldn't allow a four-year-old infant to travel down to St. Frank's alone."

"She's not coming alone, you chump!" snorted Boots.

"But you just said——"

"Oh, I'll read you the letter!" interrupted Boots impatiently. "I said that my sister wasn't coming with her—that's all. As a matter of fact, Mr. and Mrs. Stokes of the West House have been up in London, and it seems that Mrs. Stokes is pally with Marjorie. And Mrs. Stokes has offered to bring Maisie down here for a few days."

"Maisie?" repeated Bray. "Who the dickens is Maisie?"

"She's the kid—my niece," explained Buster. "Listen to this: 'Although the child will be the guest of Mr. and Mrs. Stokes, I shall naturally expect you, John, to give her all the attention you can.'"

"Hold on!" said Denny. "Who's this 'John'?"

"That's me, blow you!" roared Boots.

"Sorry!" grinned Denny. "I'd forgotten your name was John. Go ahead!"

"I shall expect you to show the child round, to amuse her, and to act generally as a good uncle should. You mustn't forget, John dear, that the child has never even seen you yet, and she is fairly bubbling with eagerness to meet her schoolboy Uncle John. I'm sure you will drop all your other recreations while Maisie is at your school, and devote all your attention to her.' There you are! What the dickens is a chap to do with a sister like that?"

"It's certainly a bit thick," admitted Bob Christine, shaking his head.

"It's all the more awkward because I've never seen the kid," said Boots dolefully. "My sister's got other children—I don't even know all their names—and I haven't seen one. It's all very well being an uncle, but I do wish Marjorie wouldn't expect these things of me!"

His Form-fellows grinned unsympathetically. They could see the humorous side of this situation. But Buster Boots himself was frankly alarmed.

Being an uncle was all very well, but the whole school would soon be laughing at him. He could picture himself going about St. Frank's with a tiny, toddling infant trailing after him all over the show and piping "Uncle John" every other minute. How the Removites would yell! He would be known as "Uncle John" as long as he remained in the school! The fellows would never cease to chip and rag him.

"It wouldn't matter if Marjorie had chosen one of the other kids," went on Boots indignantly. "There's Peter, for instance. He's about eight. Why couldn't she have sent Peter? If the young beggar got checky I could have clipped him over the ear and settled his hash once and for all. But what the dickens can you do with a tiny girl of four? It's a perfectly hopeless age! And a girl, too!"

"Yes, it's a bit off-side," admitted Yorke soberly.

"I can't get out of it—there isn't time," said Boots. "That's the worst of it. Aren't these sisters cunning? She didn't write to me three days ago, so that I should have time to stop her game! Oh, no! She waits until the last minute! Mr. and Mrs. Stokes are bringing the kid this afternoon—they're practically on their way now."

"Then you're definitely for it," said Bob Christine, shaking his head. "Large chunks of sympathy, old man."

"Can't I do something?" asked Boots desperately. "Think of it! Imagine her running up to me in the Triangle and jumping into my arms and kissing me!"

He shuddered, and the others looked startled.

"Poor old Buster!" said Bob sadly.

"Instead of saying 'Poor old Buster,' can't you think of something to do?"

"What about K. K.?" suggested Yorke suddenly.

"K. K.? That burly ass in the Remove?"



The juniors regarded the study in horror. "How do you like it?" asked Irene. They did not reply; words failed them!

"Why not?" said Yorke eagerly. "Haven't you heard about the company he's just formed? You say that you've never seen this little infant, and she's never seen you, so you needn't let any sentiment stop you. This niece of yours is practically a stranger."

"I know that," said Boots impatiently. "But what's that got to do with Parkington of the Remove?"

"Nothing, only K. K. might be able to suggest something," replied Yorke. "This giddy company of his was formed especially to deal with our problems. This teaser ought to be just his mark! And in any case, K. K.'s a specialist in looking after kids."

"What do you mean—a specialist?"

"Well, what about that affair the other day, when the Junior Eleven went over to Carlton?" grinned Yorke. "Don't you remember that K. K. was like an uncle to little Dolly Wilkinson?"

"By jingo! The Carlton Head's little daughter!" said Boots. "That's right! She and K. K. were pals, weren't they? Perhaps

there's something in this, my sons! Perhaps K. K. can help me."

"It's worth trying," said Bob Christine firmly. "I don't approve of encouraging these Remove chaps as a rule, but this is an exceptional case."

"Rather!" said Boots, but without much hope. "Let's try."

KIRBY KEEBLE PARKINGTON cast an appraising eye over his visitors. The Fourth-Formers had come over in strength—six of them. Even as it was, they had nearly been slaughtered in the Ancient House lobby, and had only just managed to explain things in time.

Handforth and a crowd of other Removites had escorted them to the offices of the K. K. Limited Liability Co.; and if Buster Boots thought that his business was to be conducted

Kenneth
Brookins

privately, he was in error. The escort had left the door wide open, and the escort was jammed in the doorway.

"These silly Fourth-Form fatheads say they've got a job for you, K. K.," announced Handforth. "We don't believe it, and we've brought 'em here to make sure. I'll bet they're trying to jape us!"

"It's a pity you fellows can't mind your own business," said Parkington coldly. "Why shouldn't these gentlemen come over from the Modern House to insult—I mean consult me? If you simpletons are too unenterprising to support a live company, it's up to these fellows from a rival house to show you the way."

"If there's any showing to be done, we'll do it," retorted Handforth. "In about two minutes we're going to show these Fourth-Formers the way—out! And we're going to show it with the toes of our boots!"

Boots looked round impatiently.

"I'm sorry I came," he growled. "Somebody told me that this was a real company—ready to do real jobs; but I guessed that it was all a fake! You Removites are only——"

"Just a minute!" interrupted K. K. frantically. "Ignore these silly Old-Timers! Now, then, sir! What can I do for you?"

"I'll explain when we're in private," replied Boots.

"Ass! It doesn't make any difference!" urged Bob Christine. "These other fellows are bound to know as soon as your niece arrives. You can't prevent them laughing, anyhow—hyenas always laugh. It's their nature."

"You—you——" began Handforth.

"Now, sir!" roared K. K. "Kindly state your case."

"I'll state it for him!" yelled Christine, above the din. "He's got a little kid niece, and she's being brought to St. Frank's by Mr. and Mrs. Stokes this afternoon. He wants to know what to do about her. She's only just over four, and he's afraid that he'll become the laughing-stock of the school."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Removites yelled appreciatively. They were laughing already. Kirby Keeble Parkington was justified in being indignant. Business was being conducted under great difficulties. However, Boots managed to get a hearing. He gave the details as he had given them to his chums; he even showed K. K. the letter from his eldest sister.

"And as you're a bit of a specialist in kids, we came to you," he ended. "Everybody knows that you're pally with Dolly Wilkinson, of Carlton. So what about it, K. K.? What do you suggest? If you supply me with some good advice, I'll pay for it."

K. K. nodded.

"You say you've never seen this child?" he asked crisply.

"Never."

"And she's never seen you?"

"Of course not, you ass!"

"What about photographs?"

"I've never seen photos of any of my sister's children," replied Buster, frowning. "And as far as I know, they've never seen a photo of me."

"I see," said Parkington, and relapsed into a thoughtful silence. Minutes passed. K. K.'s brow was corrugated. He was obviously thinking deeply, intensely.

Boots shifted impatiently.

"Are you going to help me, Parkington, or not?" he asked. "If you haven't any suggestions to make, just say the word, and I'll clear off."

"Patience, darling—patience," urged K. K. "My brain has been functioning on all cylinders. In other words, your problem is solved. The K. K. Limited Liability Co. never fails!"

CHAPTER 3.

The Deputy Uncle!

BOOTS was frankly suspicious.

"That's all very well," he said.

"Talk's cheap——"

"Not here," interrupted K. K. crisply. "As managing director of this company, I must remind you that my time is valuable, and that the less interruption we have the smaller will be the charge."

"And as your prospective client, unless you cut this cackle and get to the hosses, I'll punch you on the nose—managing director or not!" said Boots aggressively.

K. K. waved an airy hand.

"You tell me, Mr. Boots, that you have never seen this child; that, in fact, you are perfect strangers to one another, and that it is your sole desire to be relieved of all responsibility in connection with her forthcoming visit?" he said in business-like tones. "That, I think, is the exact position?"

"It is."

"You even go to the length of desiring a proxy?"

"Desiring a which?"

"A proxy," said K. K. patiently.

"And what's a proxy?"

"Somebody to take your place," explained K. K., with the air of a professor dealing kindly with a stupid pupil. "In other words, a substitute—a deputy. A proxy is one who acts for another."

"You mean that you'll get somebody to impersonate me?" asked Boots, staring.

"In a way," replied Parkington. "Yet that is not strictly true, because no real impersonation will be necessary, since you and this tender infant are strangers and wouldn't know one another if you met face to face. Let us get to business, Mr. Boots. For the sum of two pounds, cash down, I will contract, in the name of this company, to keep Maisie amused and entertained during the full period of her visit."

Boots had only heard two words out of the last two dozen.

"A couple of quid!" he ejaculated indignantly.

"That is the fee," explained K. K. "There will, of course, be other expenses."

"What!"

"Toys—dolls—and so forth," explained the managing director. "You cannot expect to keep the child amused without various distractions. The average schoolboy does not possess a sufficiency of those baubles which interest the average feminine infant of four. Therefore, a stock of toys must be laid in."

"My only sainted aunt!" groaned Boots. "But never mind these toys! What's that you said about two quid for yourself? Do you think I'm going to pay you two quid for merely giving me a suggestion?"

K. K. looked at him coldly.

"The suggestion is worth a fiver—but we will let that pass," he said. "For the aforementioned sum—to wit, two of the best and crispest—I will undertake to act as Maisie's uncle, and to suffer the discomforts and trials consequent upon that task."

"You blithering idiot!" roared Boots exasperated. "What's the idea of talking like a dictionary? Why not use plain English? You're dotty! You say that you'll act as *me*?"

"I hope not," replied K. K. promptly. "I have no desire to imitate a fatheaded chump. But I'll willingly become 'Uncle Buster,' so that you shall be relieved of the responsibility, although I retain the right to act entirely as myself."

"The kid will know!" protested Boots.

"It is highly probable that the child has only been informed that you belong to that great and select band—the Red-Headed League," said K. K. smoothly. "I am red-headed, too. In that respect, Mr. Boots, we resemble one another closely. Maisie will be expecting to find a red-headed uncle—and she will find one. It will merely be for you to keep out of the way—or, at least, to efface yourself as much as possible. You need not actually go into hiding."

"Well, I'm jiggered!" ejaculated Handforth from the doorway. "I believe it's a good wheeze, after all! K. K.'s right, you chaps! There's no reason why the thing shouldn't be worked like a dream."

"And it's cheap, for two quid," declared Travers. "I wouldn't take it on for a fiver! By Samson! A kid of four!"

"And now, Mr. Boots, concerning the matter of two pounds?" asked K. K. pointedly.

"That's the difficulty," said Boots. "I've only got two-and-ninepence at the moment. You can have this on account, if you like, or you can regard it as a first instalment—"

"This company is run only on a cash basis," interrupted Parkington sternly. "No cash—no service! I'm very sorry, Mr. Boots, but I must wish you good-day."

"Here, wait a minute—"

"If you can raise the wind by making a collection amongst your Form-fellows, all well and good," continued K. K. "Roughly,

you will require five pounds for this job. Two pounds for my services—and three pounds for toys and etceteras. I suggest that one pound should be placed in my charge to be utilised as spending money—any surplus to be returned to you at the end of Maisie's visit."

"What about it, you chaps?" grinned Bob Christine. "I've got a quid that I can spare. Let's have a whip round. Let's help old Buster in his hour of trial. You can go ahead, K. K.," he added briskly. "I'll give you my personal guarantee that the Fourth will cough up this fiver during the next hour."

"Good enough," said Kirby Keeble Parkington, rising to his feet. "Mr. Boots, I accept your commission. From the moment of your niece's arrival I shall become Uncle Buster, and it will be my task to accept her kisses—I hope they won't be too damp—and other tokens of childish affection."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You'd better buck up with your preparations," said Boots. "Mr. and Mrs. Stokes might be here with the kid within an hour."

"We must get busy on Study K as a start," said Parkington. "Deeks, get on to the 'phone. Ring up the Moor View School— No! I've got a better idea than that. I'll trot along and see Vera, and she can get some of the other girls to lend a hand. It requires a girl's touch to make a room really dainty."

Deeks and Goffin were looking horrified.

"Dainty!" gurgled Deeks. "You don't mean to say that you're going to mess up our study?"

"My study!" corrected K. K. "You chaps are only in it because I allow you to be there. If this thing is to be done at all, it must be done properly. Somebody will have to go to the village for toys. Children are very impressionable, and there's nothing like starting off with a bang."

"Oh, my hat!" said Boots suddenly, with a startled expression in his eyes. "We've forgotten something! We can't work the thing at all!"

"There's no 'we' about it—I'm doing this job," said K. K.

"What about Mr. and Mrs. Stokes?" yelled Boots. "The kid's going to stay with them—and they'll know that you're not her uncle!"

"Great Scott!" went up a general shout.

"We can rely upon the fellows to keep up the joke, but Mr. Stokes is a Housemaster, and he won't be a party to it," said Buster. "What's to be done?"

Kirby Keeble Parkington gave him a sorrowful look.

"I would remind you that the K. K. Limited Liability Co. does not undertake any commission unless it is satisfied that that same commission can be successfully accomplished," he said with dignity. "My first task will be to interview Mr. Beverley Stokes, and to inform him of the trifling substitution. Being a sportsman, old Barry will, I am sure, wink his eye. As for

Wilkey, our own Housemaster, we know perfectly well that we can rely upon him, should he get wind of the wheeze."

THERE was much feverish activity after that.

Vera Wilkes entered into the spirit of the thing with enthusiasm, and she persuaded Irene Manners, Doris Berkeley, and several other Moor View girls to come over and lend a hand with Study K. The boys were ruthlessly ordered out, and the girls took complete charge.

In the meantime, the Fourth-Formers had quickly raised the necessary cash, for they were all anxious to help Boots. They could foresee a lot of fun over this deputy-uncle business. It was rather a joke on the Remove—since it was the Remove which would have the questionable benefit of Maisie's society. The Fourth considered itself rather lucky in having escaped the ordeal. There was really no reason why the child should come over their side of the Triangle at all.

Deeks and Goffin had gone to the village armed with two crisp and excellent pound-notes, and they had a perfect orgy of buying in the toy-shop. They were astonished at what they could purchase in the way of toys for two pounds.

The great Kirby Keeble Parkington went to Mr. Beverley Stokes, and the young Housemaster listened interestedly while the details of the plan were outlined to him. K. K. did it very smoothly and tactfully.

"Well, I don't see that there's any harm in it," said Mr. Stokes at length. "I'm not altogether pleased with Boots for shirking his responsibilities, and I must say it's rather sporting of you, Parkington, to shoulder them."

"I'm different, sir," explained K. K. "I get along quite well with infants."

"Infants?" repeated Mr. Stokes.

"Well, she's only four and a half, sir."

"Oh!" said the Housemaster startled. "I see! I didn't quite understand at first. So Boots says that this niece of his is only four

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and a half? Well, of course, that's different. You are a bit of an expert when it comes to children, aren't you, Parkington? I had an impression that Maisie was older."

"Well, Boots doesn't seem to know much himself," said K. K. "She might be five, for all I know."

Mr. Stokes grinned.

"All right—it's a go," he said, with a chuckle. "If Boots is so jolly anxious to disown his niece and shirk the responsibilities of amusing her, all well and good. As long as Maisie knows the real truth just before she leaves no harm will be done."

"You're a sport, sir."

"I enjoy a joke as much as anyone," replied Mr. Stokes. "We Housemasters aren't all fussy old fossils, you know, Parkington. Well, look here. I've got to go to the village before long, so I'll try to time it so that I can meet my wife on the way. That'll give me a chance to put her on her guard before she arrives. Then there won't be any misunderstanding when you come forward as the girl's uncle instead of Boots."

"That's awfully decent of you, sir," said K. K. eagerly. "And you'll have a word with old Wilkey—I mean, Mr. Wilkes—if you get the chance? He'll have to know, sir, and the sooner he knows the better."

"Leave it to me," promised the young Housemaster.

After Kirby Keeble Parkington had gone, Mr. Beverley Stokes sat back in his chair and roared with laughter.

CHAPTER 4.

A Shock for Buster Boots!

WHEN K. K. arrived back in the Remove passage of the Ancient House, he found a crowd of juniors collected at the end. Harvey Deeks and Clement Goffin were among them. Boots was there, too, and Handforth and Travers and one or two others.

"What's the idea?" asked Parkington wonderingly.

"We're not allowed any farther," grinned Travers. "The girls have strictly forbidden us to go beyond this line. They won't have any truck with us. We're waiting until we get the all clear signal."

"What about those toys, Deeks, dear one?" asked K. K.

"We got piles," said Deeks. "We took the parcels in to Vera and the other girls and left it at that. It's up to the girls to do the rest."

"I hope you got the right kind of toys," said Parkington dubiously.

As if in answer the door of Study K opened and Vera Wilkes came out looking indignant. Her hands were full.

"Who bought all these things?" she asked wrathfully. "What's the good of getting a Meccano set for a little girl of four? And this water-pistol!"

"Eh?" gasped Deeks, turning red.

"And this catapult!" continued Vera scornfully. "Whoever heard of a girl of four using a catapult? And why buy a pea-shooter?"

"It was Goffin who suggested the pea-shooter," said Deeks feebly. "I was all against it——"

"Yes, but you bought the Meccano set!" retorted Goffin warmly.

"You're both as bad as one another!" said Vera, with some heat. "You didn't use your imagination at all, or you wouldn't have got this kite. And there's actually a pair of cheap, useless roller skates in one of these parcels."

"Don't little girls like roller skates?" asked Deeks weakly.

"I might have known it!" snorted K. K. "I'm sorry, Vera. I thought I could rely on these chaps to do a simple job like that."

"Well, never mind," said the Housemaster's daughter. "It might have been a lot worse. They did bring a couple of jolly good dolls, and a nice little miniature tea-set, and a doll's cot. On the whole, there'll be a pretty good show."

Irene came out and looked doubtfully at the crowd.

"Well, we're ready," she announced, "but I don't know about letting all these boys blunder in. They'll only spoil everything."

"We promise to go easy, Irene," said Handforth eagerly.

"You'd better stay out altogether, Handy," said Nipper. "You can look in through the doorway, if you like—but that's as far as you'll be allowed to go. You're too clumsy to be let loose in a kid's nursery."

"Kid's nursery!" moaned Goffin. "And it's our study!"

There was something almost comic in the way the boys ventured forward. Some of them went on tiptoe, as though they were visiting a sick-room. Parkington and Boots were the first to arrive. They peered through the doorway, and the effect upon them was startling. K. K., schooled as he was in controlling himself, jumped about a foot. Buster Boots let out a yelp of dismay. The two red-headed juniors stood there, positively dazed.

"My only Sunday topper!" breathed Buster faintly.

Parkington was speechless. This was his study! But all resemblance to a junior schoolboy study had vanished. The place was transformed. Nipper and Handforth and Travers came up and peered over the shoulders of Boots and K. K. They shied like two-year-olds.

"Well?" said Vera proudly. "What do you think of it?"

"Horrible!" ejaculated Handforth hoarsely.

"What!" cried Irene from inside. "What did you say, Ted?"

"I've never seen anything so ghastly—— Eh?" gasped Handforth. "I—I mean—— Oh, help! Sorry, girls, but it hit me too suddenly!"

He closed his eyes and opened them again—but it was no good. It wasn't a nightmare. The window really was draped with dainty, frilly, rose-coloured curtains. The table was spread with a gaily-flowered cloth with a pretty fringe. The mantelpiece was tastefully draped with cretonne, and the chairs were provided with loose covers.

Flowers were dotted about here and there, dolls reclined in the easy-chair, a doll's-house stood prominently on the window-table, a miniature tea-set was set out on the bookcase, and the central table was filled with toy soldiers, teddy bears and gollywogs.

"Isn't it just lovely?" asked Vera, smiling.

"Lovely isn't the word," said K. K., pulling himself together with difficulty. "I've got a much better word—but perhaps I'd better not mention it."

"I wish you luck, you chaps," remarked Handforth. "So you've got to have your study like this for the next two or three days? What a life!"

Parkington squared his shoulders.

"The K. K. Limited Liability Company never shirks its duties, no matter how unpleasant," he replied. "Had I realised what I was taking on, however, I should certainly have demanded a higher fee."

He looked at the study again, and closed his eyes in pain.

"What's the matter with you boys?" asked Vera coldly. "I don't believe you like what we've done!"

There was an ominous silence.

"There's gratitude for you!" said Doris indignantly.

"It is not a question of what we like, old girl," said K. K. gently. "To be frank, this study has been utterly ruined. While all this frilly stuff is in evidence I shan't spend a peaceful minute. But I dare say that Maisie will shriek with delight—and it is for Maisie that these alterations have been made."

"And must the room stay like this for days?" asked Deeks miserably.

"By mid-evening to-day, sweetheart, this room will be back in its old form," declared K. K., without hesitation. "It will be quite

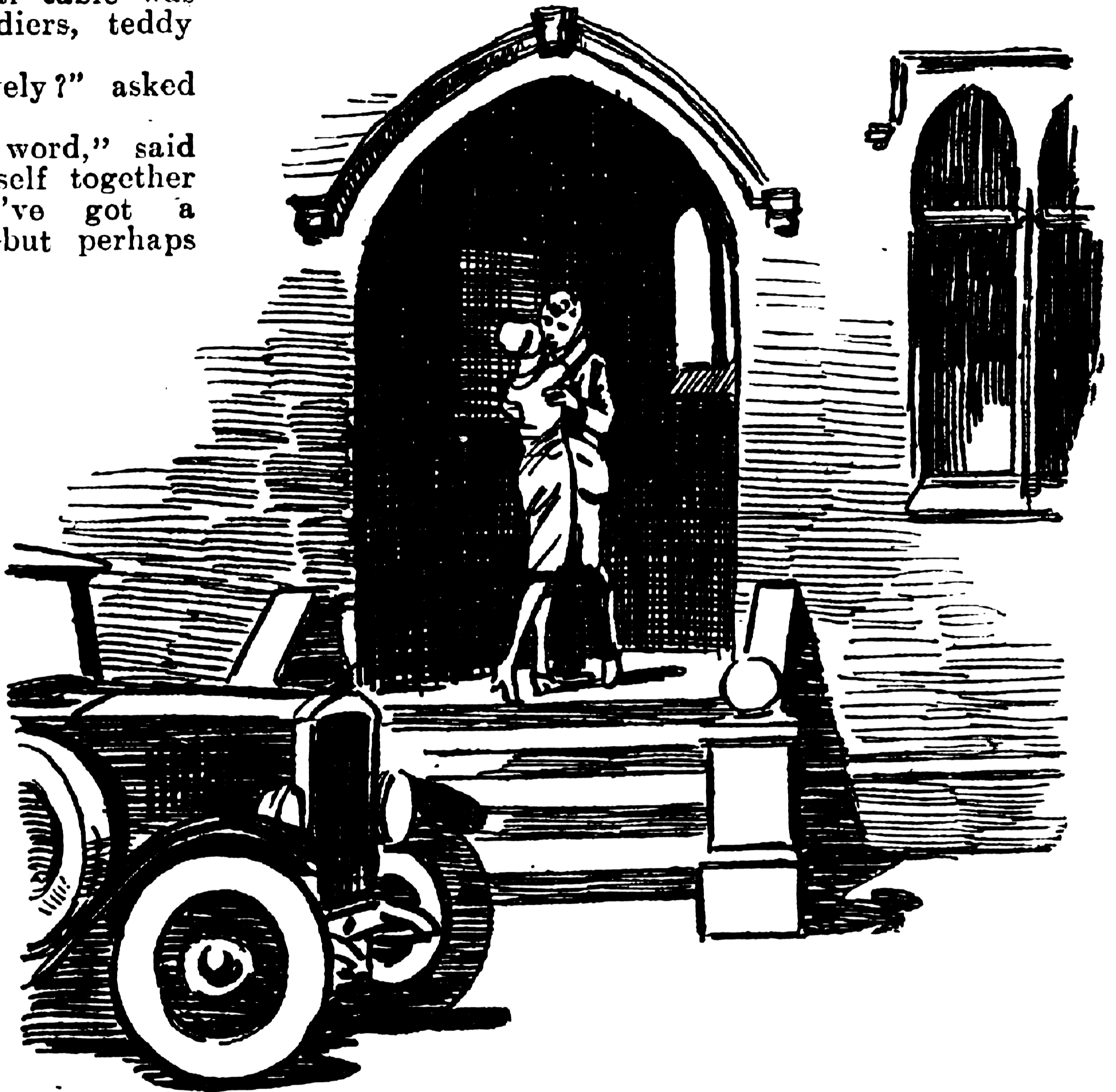
sufficient to entertain the child just once, and after that—"

"After that the child will do all the entertaining!" said Goffin, with a sniff.

K. K. glanced at his watch.

"Thanks awfully, Vera, for doing all this," he said briskly. "And you other girls, too—jolly decent of you. One of these days, perhaps, we'll be able to render you a service. Time's getting short—"

"And you'd like to get rid of us?" interrupted Vera, as K. K. hesitated. "Yes,



perhaps it's just as well. We should only be in the way."

They laughingly went, and the fellows breathed more freely. They were able to express their views with much greater accuracy. From a feminine point of view, Study K may have been improved; but the boys thought otherwise—very much so!

"Shut the door, for goodness' sake!" said Handforth. "Who was it who advised me not to go in there? Why, I wouldn't go in for a pension! I never thought that Irene was capable of such—"

"Listen!" broke in K. K., holding up a hand.

A shrill, siren-like whistle was faintly audible in the distance.

"What's that?" asked several voices.

"A member of my staff," replied K. K. coolly. "It's the signal! He's up in the tower, and I gave him orders to sound the siren as soon as he caught sight of Mrs.

Stokes' car coming up the lane. Just a precaution so that we should have time to be ready."

"Nothing like organisation!" grinned Nipper.

A MINUTE later the deputy Uncle Buster was standing on the West House steps in solitary state. K. K. had put on his best suit in honour of the occasion, and he had brushed his hair with unusual care.

A crowd of other fellows had wanted to be there, too, but K. K. had pointed out that their presence would ruin the show. It would look too suspicious. They weren't supposed to be interested in the arrival of House-

Parkington himself was beginning to feel a bit dubious. In the first flush of enthusiasm—at receiving his first big commission—he had made light of the task. But it wasn't going to be so easy. After all, entertaining a child of four was bound to have its disadvantages. However, the two currency notes in his pocket were undoubtedly soothing.

Mrs. Stokes' car glided through the big gates. It was a saloon, and Mr. Stokes himself was at the wheel; he had evidently kept his word to K. K. about walking to the village. The young Housemaster was positively grinning as he brought the car to a standstill opposite the West House steps.

"Here we are, Joyce," he sang out as he jumped to the ground and flung open the rear door. "Come along, Maisie! I expect your uncle is somewhere about—Why, yes! I fancy he's here."

The crowds watched breathlessly. Mrs. Stokes was the first to appear, and then came a remarkably pretty girl of about fifteen—slim, dainty, with dark brown wavy hair and brown eyes. She tripped up the West House steps, and to everybody's amazement Mr. Stokes closed the door of the car. So far, there had been no sign of any child.

"Hallo!" said K. K. awkwardly. "Didn't she come —" He broke off in bewilderment, for the pretty girl of fifteen was looking at him with wide-open, merry eyes.

"It's—it's Uncle John!" she exclaimed breathlessly.

"Eh?" gasped Parkington. "Who—what—I—I—"

"Oh, Uncle John, I'm so pleased!" cried the girl.

She fairly jumped at him, flung her arms round his neck, and gave him that sort of hearty kiss which any affectionate niece naturally gives to her uncle.



K.K., in the role of Uncle Buster, greeted the girl appropriately—while Buster Boots himself looked on and gnashed his teeth in envious rage!

master's wives and child visitors. They wouldn't be interested in ordinary circumstances, so why be interested now?

So Buster Boots himself, Handforth, Travers, Nipper, Bob Christine, and all the rest, were obliged to keep their distance. Some collected on the Ancient House steps, others lounged in West Arch. All of them, however, made sure that they would have a good view of the West House. This thing was too good to be missed.

CHAPTER 5.

Something Wrong Somewhere!

IF Kirby Keeble Parkington was staggered, Buster Boots was dumbfounded. Like all the other fellows, he had heard every word—he had seen everything.

And now he had turned pale. Where was Maisie? Where was that tiny mite of four? And who in the name of goodness was this jolly pretty girl who threw her arms round K. K.'s neck, and who kissed him and who called him "Uncle John"? Boots felt so dizzy that everything was swimming round.

As for K. K., he behaved with admirable poise. It took him about one second and a quarter to make a complete recovery. In fact, it was so speedy that he got in another kiss before the girl could get out of the embrace. K. K. wasn't fool enough to miss a golden opportunity of this kind.

"Well, this is splendid!" he said enthusiastically. "So you're Maisie? I'm awfully surprised, you know! I—I was expecting——"

"Doesn't it seem silly!" broke in the girl, laughing. "I mean your being my uncle?"

"Silly?" repeated Parkington. "Nothing of the sort! It's the greatest thing that ever happened!"

"You can only be a few months older than I am," said Maisie, looking at him with twinkling eyes. "And you're my Uncle John! I've heard such a lot about you, and now that I'm meeting you face to face I'm not a bit disappointed. In fact, I'm just tickled to death. But it sounds awfully formal to call you 'Uncle John.' The boys here call you Buster, don't they? Then I'm going to call you Uncle Buster."

"Good man!" said K. K., beaming. "That is, good girl! Well, I must say that St. Frank's is looking a lot better since you arrived. So you're my pretty niece from Canada? I can't tell you how bucked I am."

He played the heavy uncle for all it was worth. This situation might not last long, and K. K. was all for striking while the iron was hot. He seized Maisie by the shoulders, pulled her to him, and kissed her with fresh enthusiasm.

"You're upsetting my hat, Uncle Buster," protested Maisie.

Mr. Stokes coughed.

"When you've quite finished with your niece—er—Boots, we'd like to take her indoors," said the Housemaster with a twinkle in his eyes. "You'll be able to see her again later, if you wish. Come to tea with us."

"Yes, do," added Mrs. Stokes invitingly.

"Thanks most awfully!" said K. K. "I want to become better acquainted with my niece, you know."

"I am sure of that," said Mr. Stokes with conviction. "Still, young man, you haven't wasted much time so far."

They took Maisie by the arm and led her indoors. As she went she glanced over her shoulder and gave K. K. a sweet smile.

"See you later, Uncle Buster," she called cheerily, throwing him a kiss.

And the deputy Uncle Buster felt so pleased with life in general that it occurred to him that the only honest thing to do now was to give Boots his two pounds back. Really, it was a shame to take the money!

THE spell was broken as soon as Maisie had disappeared. Deeks came rushing across from one of the groups, and he was looking excited and even envious.

"You've been having a fine old time!" he said breathlessly.

"Not so bad, sweetheart—not so bad," admitted K. K.

"Buster wants you, old man."

"Rats! I'm Buster," said Parkington coolly. "You can go back to our client and tell him that he's perfectly at liberty to boil himself."

"But—but he wants to know about that girl!" urged Deeks. "So do we all!"

"Why bother?" asked K. K. "I'm perfectly satisfied with her—and I'm the chap who counts in this affair. Go back to Buster and tell him that the scheme is working well, and that it looks like panning out even better."

"You look like having a high old time," said Deeks. "There must be some mistake——"

"I can't help it if Boots makes mistakes," interrupted K. K. "His niece accepted me as her uncle without question, and I'm not going to grumble. I'm going to tea with Mr. and Mrs. Stokes soon, and the rest of you can go and eat coke."

"Yes, but——"

"Tell Boots that he can safely leave this affair in my hands," added K. K. "There's no need for him to worry about the girl at all; he needn't even meet her. I'll keep my contract to the letter. I'll give her my full attention while she's at St. Frank's, and do my best to amuse her."

Buster Boots had been unable to contain himself, and he couldn't wait for any messages to be brought across. He ran over with Bob Christine and Bray and Denny. Nipper and Travers and Handforth and Reggie Pitt, and many other Removites converged on Parkington at the same moment.

"You rotter!" burst out Boots indignantly.

"Rotter?" said K. K. "Talking to me?"

"What do you mean by letting that ripping girl kiss you?"

"My dear chap, surely an uncle is entitled to kiss his niece?"

"Rats!" roared Buster. "She's my niece—not yours!"

"But wasn't there a contract?" asked K. K. mildly. "Didn't I undertake to shoulder your responsibilities——"

"I've changed my mind!" broke in Boots. "I'll shoulder my own responsibilities from now on!"

"Wait a minute!" broke in Handforth impatiently. "There's something wrong somewhere."

"There's nothing wrong at all," declared K. K. "As far as I'm concerned, everything's right."

"But Boots said that this niece of his was only four years old," insisted Handforth. "You're not going to tell me that that girl is only four! Why, she's as old as Boots himself! She's one of the prettiest, daintiest——"

"Steady, old man," interrupted K. K. warningly. "I can see that I shall have to steer her clear of you. She's my niece, and I'm not going to introduce her to chaps who get smitten at first sight."

"I'm not smitten!" roared Handforth, turning red. "But who is the girl? Boots, you ass, why can't you explain? You distinctly told us that your niece was only four years old——"

"I must have got muddled," interrupted Boots frantically. "Didn't I say that my sister has lots of kids? I thought Maisie was coming down—she said she was sending Maisie in the letter."

"How could she send her in the letter, dear old fellow?" asked Travers. "I rather thought she came in the car. I couldn't imagine anything more uncomfortable than being stuck into an envelope and sent through the post."

"Oh, don't be funny!" shouted Boots desperately. "My sister must have sent her eldest daughter instead of her youngest. She's not Maisie at all."

"She told me that she's Maisie," said K. K.

"Eh? Then—then I must have mixed up the names," said Buster Boots, breathing hard. "Great Scott That's it! Oh, what a howling ass I've been! It's Maggie who's just over four—not Maisie! Why the dickens couldn't my sister have been more explicit?"

"It's not fair to blame your sister for your own mistakes," remarked Nipper.

"But, hang it, why couldn't she have written sensibly?" demanded Boots, with feeling. "She kept referring to 'the child,' and said that she wanted me to 'amuse her.' Naturally, I took it for granted that she meant an infant! You don't call a girl of fifteen a child."

"Some people do—particularly mothers," said Bob Christine. "Well, now that we've cleared up this mystery, what are you going to do about it?"

"Do?" repeated Boots. "Why, this Remove chump can mind his own business! I'll look after Maisie from now on. I'm her uncle, and it's my right."

"Just a minute!" said K. K. calmly. "You surrendered your right, Boots, when you commissioned me to take on this job. Do you think you can fool about with me like that? After we've fixed it all up with Mr. and Mrs. Stokes, too? You're too late, old man. The die's cast."

Boots' jaw sagged.

"Blow the die!" he exploded. "Do you think I'm going to let you take charge of that ripping girl and dish me out of a good time? It isn't every chap who has such a ripping niece as Maisie."

"I agree," said K. K. "She's a top-notch, and you ought to be ashamed of yourself for ever desiring to disown her."

"But I thought she was only a kid!" howled Boots.

"That doesn't make any difference to the principle," said Parkington sternly. "And now that you find out that she's a perfectly stunning girl of an attractive age, you can't expect to switch back. You started the ball rolling, and you'll have to abide by the consequences."

"K. K.'s right, old man," said Bob Christine sagely. "He took on this job to get you out of a mess—and when he took it on he had every reason to expect that it would be a tough business. Now that it's turned out the opposite, it's just his good luck."

"And just my bad luck, I suppose?" snorted Boots. "Well, I'm not having any! She's my niece, and I'm her uncle. The commission is off! I'm going straight in to tell her that it was all a joke."

Kirby Keeble Parkington shrugged his shoulders.

"Go ahead, then," he said resignedly.

"You agree?"

"What else can I do?" asked K. K. "There's no denying that you are her uncle, and if you're determined to make a fool of yourself, I don't suppose I can stop you."

"What do you mean—make a fool of myself?"

"My poor, misguided youth!" said K. K. sadly. "You don't expect for a moment that Maisie will take kindly to you, do you? You don't believe for a moment that she'll repeat the performance?"

"What performance?"

"You're very dense," said Parkington. "I'll put it more plainly. "If you think that Maisie will throw her arms round your neck and treat you as she treated me, you're in for a big disappointment."

Boots looked downcast.

"But—but why?" he faltered.

"Your imagination must be taking a half-holiday," said K. K. patiently. "What is this charming girl going to think when you confess to her—as you must confess if you explain things—that you desired her companionship so little that you paid another fellow two quid to take her off your hands?"

"Oh, my hat!" said Boots, aghast.

"Even to admit that you palmed me off as her uncle, without giving any of the harrowing details, will be enough to make her scorn you. She'll cut you dead, probably," concluded K. K. firmly, piling on the agony as much as he dared.

"My only sainted aunt! I—I suppose she will," said Boots miserably. "I hadn't thought of that."

"Then you had better think of it now—before you go indoors," said K. K. "If you leave things as they are, no great harm will be done. She'll never know of your cold-hearted deception."

"Oh, I say! I—I didn't mean—"

"You can disguise it by any term you like, but the fact remains that it is a cold-hearted deception," declared K. K. "I only accepted the job as a business proposition—and, being a business man, I'll fulfil that commission honourably and thoroughly."

"I wish I had a commission like that," said Handforth enviously.

Fortunately for the wily Parkington, Boots did not observe the grins and winks which were exchanged by Nipper and Travers and Pitt and a few more of the quicker-witted fellows. They could see through K. K.'s dodge very easily.

K. K. was on a good thing—and he knew it. Trotting Maisie about the school as her uncle would be a sheer joy. But if Buster Boots went forward now and openly confessed to her, it was any odds that she would laugh heartily over the whole business and forgive him. K. K. was well aware of this, and his policy, therefore, was to put Boots off as long as possible, and the longer he put him off, the more difficult it would be for Boots to explain. Buster had "fallen" for the red-headed Removite's bluff.

It was Kirby Keeble Parkington's win.

CHAPTER 6.

K. K. in Trouble!

"JOLLY clever of K. K.," murmured Travers admiringly.

"Rather!" agreed Nipper. "He's the leader of the Red-hots, and our rival—but this jape is up against the Fourth, so we've got to support him. Poor old Buster! What a chump to let his leg be pulled!"

"Chump isn't the word," said Travers softly. "By allowing this deception to go on he's doing himself in the eye. Seems to me that K. K. is going to have plenty of fun."

And then somebody remembered something.

"I say!" ejaculated Deeks suddenly. "What about Study K?"

Parkington leapt.

"Great Scott!" he ejaculated. "I'd forgotten all about it! Deeks, old man, why didn't you think of it before?"

"It—it never occurred to me until now," gasped Deeks. "What's Maisie going to think if she finds those dolls and things in Study K? She'll know in a minute that—"

"She'll know nothing!" broke in K. K. crisply. "We've got to clear those things out of Study K at once. We daren't let her know that we were expecting a child of four!"



Jokes from 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.

FINE!

A Scotsman had engaged a caddie at the local golf course.

"Laddie, are ye good at finding lost balls?" he asked, in a doubtful voice.

"I am, sir," replied the caddie.

"That's fine," said the Scot. "Find me half-a-dozen and we'll start right away."

(A. Wilson, 27, Richmond Terrace, Clifton, Bristol, has been awarded a handsome watch.)

DAMAGES!

The child came up to his mother in tears.

"Oh, mummy," he wailed, "I broke a tile in the hearth."

"Never mind, dear," said mother soothingly. "But how ever did you come to do it?"

"I was hammering it with father's gold watch!"

(C. Phillips, 76, Inner Forum, West Derby, Liverpool, has been awarded a penknife.)

CIRCUMSTANTIAL EVIDENCE.

Magistrate: "How do you know that these fowls you accuse your neighbour of stealing were yours?"

Prosecutor: "They were brown and white fowls, your Honour."

Magistrate: "That doesn't prove anything. I have brown and white fowls myself at home."

Prosecutor: "Yes, your Honour; this isn't the first time I've missed fowls."

(J. McArdle, 38, Sidney Street, Arbroath, Scotland, has been awarded a pocket wallet.)

TIME!

Heckler: "Do you believe in the Early Closing Act?"

Long-winded Speaker: "Certainly, my dear sir, certainly."

Heckler: "Well, ain't it about time you shut up?"

(T. Moore, 59, Falcon Grove, Battersea, S.W.11, has been awarded a penknife.)

"Why not?" asked Boots, with a flash of genius. "If she knew that, she'd forgive me for everything! By jingo! You'd better leave that study as it is——"

"Nothing doing!" interrupted K. K., seeing his danger. "Isn't it likely that she'd be more furious with you than ever? You wouldn't palm her off on another chap, but you were perfectly ready to disown a sweet, innocent little child! My dear chap, she'd think less of you than ever."

"Would she?" groaned Boots. "I suppose she would!"

K. K. breathed a sigh of relief. Once again he had side-tracked Boots; once again he had averted the possible collapse of his little scheme. For none knew better than K. K. that if Maisie were told the full facts she would probably laugh heartily at the whole business and forgive Boots on the instant.

K. K. lost no time in dashing to Study K, but there was no real cause for alarm. Maisie was in the West House, and she would certainly stay there until after tea. It wasn't tea-time yet by nearly an hour, and K. K. himself was going over there to join with her host and hostess. When he brought her over to the Ancient House to show her his study, everything would be normal.

Unfortunately, Parkington was reckoning without Mr. Stokes' sense of humour.

FOR, of course, Barry Stokes had appreciated the really comic side of this situation from the very first.

The Housemaster knew perfectly well that Maisie was fifteen; and when K. K. had first approached him he had been averse to permitting the deception. When he learned, however, that Buster Boots was expecting a mere child, he changed his mind. It would do Boots good to have the shock, and to be taught the lesson. For Mr. Stokes was certain that Boots would kick himself with rage when he discovered how he had "done" himself out of such a charming girl's companionship. It was this fact alone which had induced the Housemaster to be a party to the plot.

"Why don't you trot along and see your uncle in his—well, shall we say, in his native element?" asked Mr. Stokes genially, when Maisie came downstairs after a wash and a change. "There's time before tea, and you could perhaps bring him over with you."

"I'd love it," replied Maisie.

"You'll find him in the Ancient House, I expect," said Mr. Stokes with a mischievous twinkle in his eye. "You can't make any mistake. The Ancient House is the next one to this, on the same side as you go up the Triangle. Your uncle occupies Study K in the lower passage."

"That's fine," said the girl. "I'll run along and find him."

So Maisie, giving her hair a pat here and there, whisked off on her errand. She could

TACT!

A customer sat down at a table in a smart restaurant and tied his serviette round his neck. The manager, scandalised, called a waiter and said to him:

"Try to make him understand, as tactfully as possible, that it's not done."

The waiter went up to the customer.

"Shave or haircut, sir?" he asked.

(*T. Thorpe, 4, Bolton Road, Wednesfield, Staffs, has been awarded a pocket wallet.*)

WHAT FATHER SAID.

Little Boy (calling on Mr. Jones): "Will you lend dad your spade?"

Mr. Jones (reprovingly): "Haven't you forgotten something?"

Little Boy: "Oh, yes; dad said if the old miser refuses try Mr. Smith."

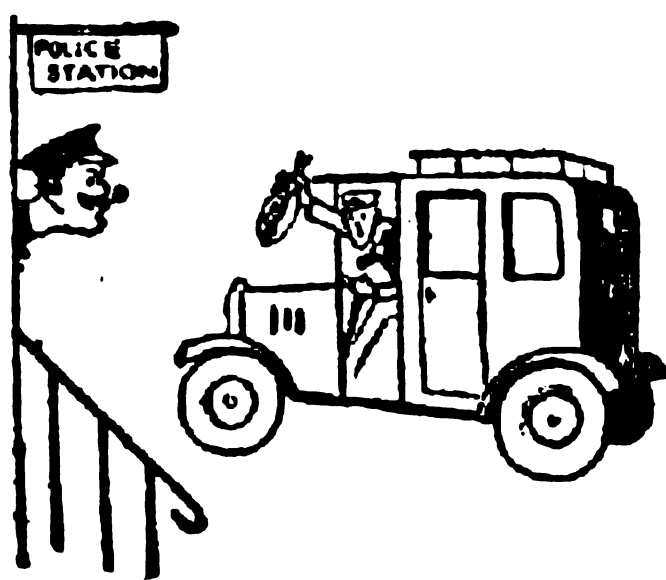
(*O. Copson, 38, Westfield Avenue, Rushden, Northants, has been awarded a penknife.*)

WORTH WAITING FOR!

Taxi-driver: "Somebody left this kipper in my cab. What shall I do with it?"

Constable: "Leave it at the police-station. If it's not claimed in six months it'll be yours."

(*J. Walker, 10, Sun Street, Stockton-on-Tees, has been awarded a pocket wallet.*)



WELL PUT.

The mistress of an elementary school in the country had a number of small pupils who persisted in saying "putten" instead of "put." To cure them, she wrote on the blackboard: "I have putten my book on the table," and asked her pupils to point out the mistake. After some hesitation one put up his hand and said:

"Ah knows; you'm putten 'putten' where you'm ought to have putten 'put.'"

(*W. Anderson, 16, Westbourne Terrace, Stockton-on-Tees, has been awarded a pocket wallet.*)

SQUASHED!

A conjurer was producing eggs from a top hat.

"Your mother can't get eggs without hens, can she?" he asked of a small boy in the front.

"Oh, yes," replied the boy.

"How's that?" asked the conjurer.

"She keeps ducks," came the answer.

(*F. Kitt, 17, Woodlands Road, Timaru, New Zealand, has been awarded a penknife.*)

SEEING THE SIGHTS.

Maiden Aunt: "And what's brought you up here, Joe?"

Country Nephew: "I coom up ta toon to see the sights, so I thought as I'd call on ye first."

(*Monica Kerr, 35, The Green, Stratford, has been awarded a penknife.*)

see the possibilities. It would be great fun to take her schoolboy uncle by surprise, and to beard him in his den.

She found the Ancient House without any trouble, and she found the Remove passage just as easily. Parkington and Deeks and Goffin had only just got into Study K, and about half a dozen other fellows were in there, too. The Fourth-Formers, with the saddened Boots in their midst, had gone back to their own quarters.

"Now, we'll all take something," K. K. was saying. "We'd better shift the things into a box-room. Hard luck on those girls who spent so much time here, but how were we to know?"

"It won't take us long," said Goffin briskly.

A light footstep sounded in the passage.

"Who's that?" asked Travers, who was nearest the door.

It was an unnecessary question, since he was the only one who could see. He put his head round the corner, and withdrew it so quickly that he nearly cricked his neck.

"Cave!" he breathed. "She's here!"

"What!" gasped K. K. "You don't mean——"

"Maisie!" hissed Travers.

"Great Scott!" gurgled Handforth, making a grab at the nearest doll. "We'd better shove these things under the table——"

"Oh, here you are, Uncle Buster!" came a laughing voice from the doorway.

Handforth, who had picked up the doll, dropped it as though it had become electrified. He had thought that there was a minute in which to act—but there wasn't.

"Come in, Maisie," invited K. K., pulling himself together and speaking composedly. "I say, this is awfully good of you! I didn't expect——"

"I thought I'd give you a surprise, Uncle Buster," said the girl sweetly.

"You have," said K. K. feelingly.

"It's more like a shock!" breathed Travers.

"What a perfectly dandy room you have!" went on the girl, opening her eyes wider as she looked round. "Gee! I never expected anything so dinky as this!"

"No," said K. K. with an effort. "You—you see, it's—it's not quite usual. A sort of special occasion. None of the other studies is like this."

"But why?" asked the girl. "Who were you expecting?"

"Eh? Who was I expecting?" repeated K. K., playing for time. "Well, the fact is——"

"Dolls!" cried Maisie, running forward. "And teddy bears and things! Why, it's like a nursery!"

"It is a nursery," said K. K. firmly.

"But I thought it was your study, Uncle Buster?"

"So it is, but this is a special occasion," replied K. K., while the other juniors stood dumbly by, admiring his nerve. "I said that

before, didn't I? The fact is, she hasn't turned up."

"Who hasn't turned up?"

"We were expecting a little girl of about four," said Parkington glibly. "Most charming kidlet, you know. Why hasn't she come yet?" he added, turning abruptly to the nearest junior, who happened to be Handforth. "Why is she so late?"

"Eh?" gasped Handforth, taken off his guard. "But she's not late! She's here—— I—I mean——"

"That's the worst of these children," broke in K. K. apologetically. "They've no idea of time. Dot ought to have known that I was waiting. Deeks, old man, dash out and see if you can find her."

"Find her?" repeated Deeks helplessly.

"She must be knocking about the school somewhere," proceeded K. K., perfectly calm now that he had thought of a solution. "You all know Dot, don't you, you fellows? Delightful little kid! Buzz off and search! Bring her as quickly as you can—but if you can't find her we shall have to give up all idea of the tea-party."

"Right-ho!" said Nipper briskly. "We'll see what we can do."

He hurried out of the study, and the others, taking their cue, followed him. They were only too glad to escape. Maisie's companionship was very nice, but this situation was a little too tricky for them.

"Thank goodness we got out!" breathed Church when they arrived in the lobby. "What a giddy mess-up, that girl blowing in before we could shift those things!"

"K. K.'s a masterpiece!" said Nipper admiringly. "The way he saved the situation was brilliant!"

"But he hasn't saved it," said Tommy Watson. "It's all very well to fool that girl that he was expecting a kid of four—but where is the kid?"

"He's relying upon us for that," replied Nipper. "And it's quite true that K. K. was expecting a kid of four. He didn't even tell a fib."

"I say, what a lark!" grinned Travers. "Let's give old K. K. a hand. Amongst the lot of us we're bound to find a kiddie somewhere. The Head's gardener has got quite a family. Then there's the chauffeur—he's married, with lots of children. And there are umpteen in the village. We're bound to find one. The first chap who succeeds brings her at full speed to Study K."

The juniors spread out, and went off on their hunt.

"WELL, I think it's very nice of you, Uncle Buster, to give parties to little children," said Maisie admiringly. "I'm awfully surprised, really. I didn't think you were that kind of boy."

"I'm frightfully fond of children," said K. K. stoutly.

"Mother always told me that you were—well, uncouth," said Maisie gently. "When

I get back to London I shall tell her how mistaken she is."

"Marjorie doesn't know me at all," scoffed K. K. with perfect truth.

"Tell me about this little girl, Dot," went on Maisie enthusiastically.

"Oh, she's nobody!" said K. K. with a shrug, and once again speaking the truth without quite realising it. "Honestly, she's nobody at all."

"Oh, but she must be," insisted Maisie. "If she wasn't you wouldn't have made all these preparations. I think it's just lovely, your inviting a child like that to tea. I'm—I'm quite proud of you, Uncle Buster. It proves that you must have a very tender heart. I always thought that boys were so callous and indifferent to children."

"Let's—let's change the subject," said Parkington hastily. "Tell me about Canada. What's your home like? What sort of a voyage did you have? When are you going back?"

"Oh, we're staying over in England until the end of November," replied Maisie. "We're visiting all the branches of the family, you know. I guess we shall make you all tired of us before we go."

"Never," replied K. K. firmly. "I could never get tired of you—"

He broke off abruptly. Childish prattling had made itself heard in the corridor, and a moment later Travers came sailing into the study with a tiny girl of about three and a half in his arms.

"Here she is!" he announced breathlessly. "Do you know, Buster, old man, I believe she'd forgotten all about the tea-party. But you'd like some tea now, wouldn't you, Dot?"

"Please!" piped the child, running across to K. K. as she was set on the floor. "Kiss, Uncle Buster!" she added imperiously, as she jumped on his knee.

K. K. gulped. Travers had done the thing properly—even to the length of giving the kiddie a few tips about his supposed name, and about what to do when she saw him.

He was "Uncle Buster" now with a vengeance!

CHAPTER 7.

Somewhat Dotty!

KISSING Maisie was a very different proposition from kissing this freshly arrived infant. Dot was not a very particular child, and a certain proportion of the toffee she had just been eating was transferred to K. K.'s visage.

"There, there!" he said frantically, as he pulled out his handkerchief. "Go and sit on that chair, sweetheart. Yes, darling, that one. Awfully good of you, Travers, to find her like this."

But the glance he bestowed upon Travers hinted that his one desire at the moment was to knock Travers into the middle of next week.

"I'll go and fetch some of the other chaps," said Travers smoothly.

"Here, I say, don't leave this kid—I mean—"

"You'll need somebody to help you with the tea, old man."

"Oh, yes!" said K. K. helplessly.

"But aren't you coming to tea with us?" asked Maisie in surprise. "Mr. and Mrs. Stokes invited you, and you said 'Yes.' It was very wrong of you, Uncle Buster, to forget little Dot. You'll have to stay here now, and I'll make your excuses to Mr. and Mrs. Stokes."

Parkington, who had been looking forward very keenly to having tea with Maisie, was flabbergasted. He cast another glance at Travers, and this one was positively fiendish. Never for a moment had he expected the Removites to help him so wholeheartedly. This was carrying things a bit too far!

A scamper of feet sounded in the passage. K. K. went pale. Travers jumped. Maisie glanced inquiringly at the door.

"Here we are, Dot!" came Reggie Pitt's cheery voice. "Uncle Buster's waiting for you, and don't forget to give him a kiss as soon as you get in."

"Wha-a-a-at?" babbled Parkington, leaping to his feet.

"Why, it's another little girl!" cried Maisie, as Reggie appeared in the doorway, hand-in-hand with an exceedingly grubby little infant of about four.

"Twins!" gasped K. K. desperately. "I—I mean—"

"They can't be twins," said Maisie. "One's nearly a year older than the other—and, besides, they wouldn't both be named the same."

"Oh, rather not!" said Parkington. "There are lots of Dots dotted about here. So many, in fact, that it nearly drives you dotty to think of them. Everybody in the neighbourhood has an extraordinary fancy for calling their children Dot. Funny, isn't it?"

"It must be very awkward," said Maisie solemnly.

"Awkward isn't the word," put in Travers, doing his bit to help. "It's so confusing, you know. What with all these Dots—"

"There's another one coming!" interrupted Pitt, startled.

It was true. Harry Gresham was trotting down the passage with his own particular find—a child of at least seven. Gresham had been rather dubious, but he felt that she was better than nothing. She had straggly, straw-coloured hair, a grimy face, and a vacant expression.

"Found her out in the lane, Buster," he said, as he came bustling in. "I thought I'd better—Hullo! What the—Great Scott! Who—who are these kids?"

"Bring her in!" said K. K. feebly. "The more the merrier!"

"I—I didn't know," said Gresham, turning red when he found Maisie's gaze upon him. "It's—it's Buster's little whim,

you know, to have these tea-parties. He's an awfully kind uncle to the local kiddies."

"I think he must be a kind uncle to everybody," said Maisie loyally.

"We were just explaining to Buster's niece that there are lots of kids about here named Dot," said Pitt, giving Gresham a dig in the rear. "You've noticed it, too, haven't you? This is one of his tea-parties."

"A sort of dotty tea-party," nodded Gresham. "I—I—"

He broke off in consternation as a fifty horse power howl sounded from the passage. All eyes were turned on the doorway. Church and McClure appeared dragging a little girl between them.

"Don't be silly, Dot!" Church was saying. "Don't cry like that. Uncle Buster's waiting to kiss you. He's got a doll for you!"

"Le' me go!" howled the child. "I want my mummy!"

"Never mind your mummy—Uncle Buster wants you," said McClure desperately. "Be a good girl, Dot! You'll get a bar of chocolate."

"Look!" yelled Church in amazement, as he beheld the scene in Study K.

"Bring her in!" said K. K. recklessly. "Nearly all the Dots of the neighbourhood are being collected here, so another one won't do any harm."

Church and McClure were staggered, but they wisely held their tongues. And then, to

cap the whole situation, Handforth's strident voice was heard from the lobby.

"Don't be a young ass!" he was saying. "I've given you sixpence, and you can clear off as soon as Maisie's seen you."

"I ain't goin' in!" came a childish whimper. "My name's Joey, too!"

"Rats! Your name's Dot—and don't you forget it!" came Handforth's roar. "If I didn't believe in being kind to children, I'd jolly well put you across my knee! Of all the blubbing young blighters, you're the worst! Can't you understand? Haven't you got any sense? I've only borrowed you for ten minutes. And don't forget that your name's Dot!"

"It isn't!" came the child's voice. "It's Joey. I'm Joey Catchpole, and you're not going to call me by a girl's name!"

K. K., who had been going pale and crimson in turn, gave it up.

"Of course, when Handforth starts on the job we know what to expect," he said resignedly. "Will one of you chaps go out there and take that blithering idiot away? And don't let that kid come in here, either."

Church and McClure dashed out. Handforth was just outside with a ragged, grubby child of about six in tow. He had done his best to find a little girl, but he had failed. However, Handforth considered that a boy was better than nothing. K. K. wanted a kid in his study, so K. K. should have a kid.

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Handforth took it for granted that none of the other fellows would succeed in their individual efforts.

"Take him away!" hissed Church. "Are you potty, Handy? K.K. wanted a little girl—not a boy!"

"Can't help that," said Handforth. "I've dragged this kid here——"

He was interrupted by a peal of merry laughter from Study K. He heard, too, the yelling of little children, and he was startled. Hurrying to the door, he found Maisie rocking with laughter, and Kirby Keeble Parkington and the others looking at her in a hopeless sort of way. Tiny children were dotted about everywhere.

"Well, I'm jiggered!" ejaculated Handforth blankly.

"Oh, Uncle Buster," sobbed Maisie, controlling her laughter, "it's too funny! You really are a scream!"

"Am I?" said K. K. weakly.

"You can't fool me like this," went on the girl, her eyes twinkling. "The very instant I saw this room I guessed the truth."

"The truth?" yelled K. K.

"Of course," said Maisie. "Something that Mrs. Stokes said to me, too, gave me a hint, although she didn't mean to 'spill the beans.' It was really this study which put me wise. You were expecting Maggie, weren't you? Now, tell the truth."

Parkington controlled himself. For an awful moment he had believed that Maisie had jumped to the full truth, that she knew he was not really her uncle.

"Well, I'll admit I was expecting a little girl of about four," he said guardedly. "You mustn't take any notice of all that rot about Dot. I was just trying to put you off. But I can see it won't work."

"Why didn't you like to admit that you had made a mistake?" asked Maisie. "I shouldn't have been cross with you, Uncle Buster."

"Well, it—it seemed so silly," said Parkington. "But as long as you don't mind, everything's all right. Let's—let's go out of doors."

When they got into the Triangle they found that the news had got out before them. John Busterfield Boots had heard that Maisie had discovered the truth. And he not unnaturally fell into the error of believing that she knew the full truth. In a way, he was relieved. Perhaps she wouldn't be so hard on him after all.

"I say, Maisie, I'm awfully sorry about it!" he burst out as he ran up. "I didn't mean to do anything shabby——"

"Hold on!" interrupted K. K. "What's the idea? Who told you that you could call my niece by her Christian name, you cheeky Fourth-Former?"

"But—but she knows, doesn't she?" asked Boots blankly.

"She knows that you're too familiar, if that's what you mean," replied K. K. coldly. "The best thing you can do is to clear off; but you'd better apologise to my niece first."

"Apologise, be blowed!" shouted Boots. "This bluff has gone far enough. I'm going to tell the truth and risk the consequences—and I'm jolly sure that Maisie won't be too cross with me."

The girl was looking at him in astonishment, and K. K. inwardly writhed. So Buster had not been so easily hoodwinked. Parkington's little game was up. He wouldn't be allowed the "ownership" of Maisie any longer.

"I wish you would make this boy go away," said Maisie frigidly. "And how dare he call me by my first name? I'm only Maisie to you, Uncle Buster. This other boy ought to call me Miss Deakin."

"Of course he ought!" said K. K. promptly. "How dare you annoy Miss Deakin like this?"

"Deakin, my eye!" yelled Boots. "You've given yourself away, you ass! Her name's Deakin—not Deacon. I ought to know—I'm her uncle!"

Other fellows were beginning to gather round, interested. It seemed to them that the climax was at hand, and they wanted to join in the fun. K. K. could have kicked himself for being so careless. He ought to have made certain of Maisie's surname long ago. He realised, with a bit of a shock, that this was the first time he had ever heard it.

Boots himself was feeling desperate. Confound Parkington and his warnings! Maisie knew that there had been a mistake about her age, that she had been confused with little Maggie, so she might just as well know the rest.

"I'm sure I don't know what this boy means," said Maisie, giving Boots a disdainful look. "Is he crazy? Why does he say that he's my uncle?"

"That's it—he's crazy, although perfectly harmless!" replied K. K. He grabbed Buster's arm. "Shift-o!" he hissed. "And make it quick, you ass!"

"Not likely!" roared Boots. "I'm fed-up with the whole game! Maisie, I've got something to tell you. But first of all there's something else to be done."

Buster was certainly reckless. He seized Maisie, pulled her towards him, and kissed her.

"Oh!" cried the girl indignantly. She wrenched herself away, and her hand came round like lightning.

Slap!

"How dare you?" she panted hotly, the marks of her fingers on Buster's cheek. "Uncle Buster, please punch this wretched boy for being so—so cheeky!"

"You bet I will!" said K. K. promptly.

"Wait a minute!" bellowed Boots furiously. "You keep your hands to yourself, Parkington! Yes—Parkington! I've finished with all this tomfoolery! Maisie, this fellow is named Parkington, and he isn't your uncle at all. I'm your uncle."

"That's torn it!" murmured Travers.

"Well, it had to end sooner or later," commented Handforth.

But Maisie was looking at Buster with bewilderment, and she turned appealingly to K. K.

"What does he mean?" she asked. "I really think he must be crazy!"

"I'm not," urged Boots. "I'm your Uncle Buster. My name's John Busterfield Boots, and Parkington only pretended to be your uncle for fun. At least, I asked him to do it, and I'll explain later."

Maisie gave a scornful laugh.

"You!" she said with a look which froze him. "What nonsense!"

She took hold of K. K.'s arm, and hugged it affectionately.

"This is my Uncle Buster," she declared. "You can't fool me with a silly story like that. Uncle Buster, please punch this cheeky boy!"

"But—but don't you believe it?" gasped Boots, all the wind taken out of his sails. "Don't you understand, Maisie? I mixed you up with Maggie, and as I'm not much of a lad with little children I paid Parkington to pretend to be your uncle. There, it's out now! I didn't mean any harm, and I wouldn't have had it if I had known that you were coming. This silly Remove chap has been spoofing you."

The look of disbelief on her face was unmistakable.

"Why don't you deny this, Uncle Buster?" she asked angrily. "The whole thing's impossible—and I don't believe it! This boy can't be my uncle."

"But, look here——" began Boots.

"He's too ugly," said Maisie firmly.

"What!"

"Too uncouth!"

"Oh, I say——"

"Too ill-mannered," said Maisie coldly. "I simply won't believe that he's my real uncle. Besides, I like you so much more," she added, with a smile at K. K. "I'm quite satisfied with you, and I don't want this other boy to speak to me again."

"You hear that?" said Parkington, with a triumphant look at Boots. "What do you mean by playing a trick like this? Clear off before I hurt you!"

"Why, you—you rotter!" gasped Boots. "You're not going to keep it up, are you? After I've explained, and after——"

"Take me indoors, please, uncle," said Maisie, turning her back on Boots. "I don't like this boy."

"Ignore him," advised Parkington. "He doesn't mean anything—he just can't help it. Come on, let's go in to tea. Mr. and Mrs. Stokes will be waiting for us."

"That's what I was thinking," said the girl sweetly.

She flashed Buster another scornful look, took a firmer grip on K. K.'s arm, and they marched off.

CHAPTER 8.

K. K. Scores Over B. B.

"WELL, I'm jiggered!" breathed Buster Boots faintly.

"It didn't come off, old man," said Bray, giving his leader a friendly pat on the shoulder. "Tough luck!"

"She wasn't having any of it," said Denny. "And, really, you can't be sur-



prised, Buster. She has accepted K. K. as her uncle, and she doesn't believe in chopping and changing about."

"And why should she change?" put in Travers mildly. "You can't expect her to give two looks at Boots after having seen Parkington. Of two evils, choose the lesser—or, in another way, of two uncles choose the better."

"I'm her uncle!" snorted Boots desperately.

"You were," corrected Travers. "But this charming girl, having accepted K. K., means to stick to him. The situation becomes more and more interesting. Why blame the girl?

There's something about her I like—especially her refreshing candour."

"I didn't ask for your opinions!" fumed Boots.

"She tells the truth so openly," continued Travers. "I've often felt like describing you, Buster, old man, but Maisie has done it so much better than I could ever do it. She says you're ugly—and you should be the first to admit this—"

"You—you—"

"Uncouth," said Travers. "That's perfectly true, too."

"Are you going to stop, you rotter?"

"Ill-mannered!" said Travers. "At this very second, Boots, you are proving that you are ill-mannered. And look at the way you spoke to her and treated her—why, you were just yelling for trouble."

"He's right, Buster," put in Bob Christine. "You made a mess of the whole thing, and that's why she turned you down. It was a ghastly mistake, in the first place, to kiss her like that before even explaining. That prejudiced her at the outset."

"Why did it?" demanded Boots hotly.

"What's the use?" sighed Travers. "He roars up to her like a hippopotamus, mauls her about, shouts at the top of his voice, and then expects her to fall into his arms and coo! She's done the right thing in sticking to K. K. And after this Boots, you'll have an awful job to make her believe the real truth."

"But she must believe it!" groaned Buster. "I'll go to Mr. Stokes, and he'll put things right."

"Why should he?" said Travers. "If I were Mr. Stokes and you came to me, I should tell you to settle your own affairs. In any case it would be most awfully weak of you to go running to a master. And what would Maisie think of you? If you don't convince her off your own bat, you don't stand an earthly."

"How can I convince her?" asked Boots gloomily.

"By showing her that you are made of the right stuff," said Bob Christine. "So far, you've made an awful hash of it, and nobody can blame her for preferring K. K. I



K. K. groaned as Handforth brought in another child. Parkington's scheme had sprung a leak—badly!

hate saying it, because he's a cheeky Removite, but at least K. K. acted with dignity. You behaved like a charging bull, and with about as much tact!"

"I wanted to open her eyes to the truth," muttered the unfortunate Buster.

He was baffled. Having decided to reveal himself, he had thought that the rest would be easy. Maisie's calm repudiation of him had knocked all the wind out of his sails. There was simply nothing else to be done.

To make matters worse, he became the laughing-stock of the Remove, and even his fellow Fourth-Formers chuckled hugely. The Junior School felt that he deserved all he was getting.

LATER in the evening Boots was mortified to see the triumphant Kirby Keeble Parkington strolling arm-in-arm with the pretty Maisie. They went here, there and everywhere. K. K. was taking full advantage of his opportunity.

He showed his "niece" all round the school; he took her for walks to the river, to the golf links, and to other points of interest. He treated Maisie to ice-creams in the school shop, and altogether spent a most enjoyable evening.

The Removites and the Fourth-Formers looked on smilingly. K. K. was sticking to his contract, and he was earning his fee honestly. For had he not undertaken to amuse Buster's niece during the period of her visit? That this task had become such a delight was just his luck. And all Buster Boots could do was to look on from a distance and gnash his teeth with helpless impotence.

It wasn't until nearly bed-time that Buster was able to get a word with his rival. Bray and Denny, who had been scouting, reported that Maisie had at last bade good-night to K. K., and had gone indoors.

"You ought to have seen 'em," said Bray, grinning. "K. K. had just brought her in from a trip up the river."

"They'd been canoeing," put in Denny.

"And it might have been me!" moaned Boots. "Oh, my hat! Think of it, you chaps! Taking a ripping girl like that up the river in a canoe! My own niece, too!" he added thickly. "This is driving me dotty!"

"They strolled across the West Square arm-in-arm," went on Bray with relish, "and just outside old Barry's private door they said good-night—in the appropriate fashion."

Buster clenched his fists, and his face was red.

"Where's K. K.?" he demanded hoarsely. "By Jupiter, I'm going to have this out with him!"

He dashed across the Triangle in the gloom, ran into the Ancient House, and burst into Study K. Parkington was standing with his back to the mantelpiece, and Deeks and Goffin were sitting on the table, grinning. Evidently they were being regaled with an account of the evening's adventures.

"Now then, you—you impostor!" panted Boots fiercely.

"It's no good getting excited, sweetheart," said K. K. gently. "And why those harsh words? If I'm an impostor—and I suppose I am—I'm only one at your invitation."

"That doesn't matter!" snorted Buster. "I told you hours ago that that contract was off!"

"But Maisie wouldn't hear of it," said K. K., shrugging his shoulders. "What was I to do?"

"Tell the truth, of course!" replied the enraged Fourth-Former. "Why couldn't you have backed me up? When I told her who I really was, it was up to you to support me. Instead of that, you stand by while she slaps my face, and say nothing!"

"I know which side my bread is buttered," retorted K. K. blandly. "Be reasonable, darling. If Maisie prefers me, why should I object? In this affair, it's absolutely up to her. Her wishes are paramount."

"Well, I'm not going to have you kissing her good-night and going about arm-in-arm!" declared Boots hotly. "If you don't tell her the truth—"

"Do you think she'd believe me, even if I did tell her?" interrupted K. K., with some impatience. "You've got to accept the situation, Boots. You started it, and it's like your nerve to kick up all this fuss."

"He'll kick up more fuss to-morrow, after you've gone to London, you lucky bargee," put in Deeks.

"London!" ejaculated Boots.

"Just a little trip," nodded K. K. "Taking Maisie up to see the sights."

"Wha-a-at!"

"Yes," said Parkington cheerfully. "You don't know what a good time you've thrown away, Boots? It seems that Maisie has fixed it all up. It wasn't my idea at all."

"What wasn't your idea?" asked Buster thickly.

"Maisie got Mr. Stokes to have a word with Wilkey," explained K. K. "The result is I've got the day off to take Maisie to London, so that she can see all the sights—the Zoo, the Tower, and all the other places. I must say your sister is a brick—she's providing all the necessary cash."

"My only sainted aunt!" babbled Boots. "And I paid you for all this!"

"Oh, yes!" said K. K., as though remembering something. "In the circs., old man, I think I ought to give you that money back. It's a shame to take it."

"You can keep it—but I'm going to have Maisie!" declared Boots. "I'm her uncle, and I'm going up to London with her! You can't do a thing like this, Parkington! I believe you're trying to fool me, anyhow," he added suspiciously. "Mr. Wilkes wouldn't give you a permit to take my niece to London."

"He has already done so," said K. K. gently.

"Rot! He knows who you really are—and he wouldn't be a party to this deception!" declared Boots. "You can't kid me!"

"Wilkey happens to be a sport," explained K. K. "As a matter of fact, I believe that Barry Stokes went to him and took him into the little secret. And as Maisie has definitely accepted me as her uncle, Wilkey naturally saw the thing in the right light. Anyhow, I've got permission to go—and that's all that matters."

Buster Boots was frantic.

"I'll stop it!" he vowed. "I'm not going to let you take Maisie to London—and alone, too."

"Rats! Mrs. Stokes and Vera Wilkes are coming with us."

"That only makes it worse," said Boots. "Vera's your girl, isn't she? Hang it, it's a bit thick—"

"Vera's sensible," replied K. K. calmly. "Why should she object to me being pally with my own niece?"

"But she's my niece!" shrieked Buster.

"Vera sees the thing in the right light," went on K. K. "She's a sport, and I fancy we're all going to have a high old time to-morrow. Sorry, Buster, but I don't sympathise with you in the least. You're only getting what you asked for."

Boots brandished his fists.

"You'll get something you haven't asked for in a minute!" he bel-lowed.

"Can you wonder why Maisie doesn't take to him?" said K. K., glancing at his chums. "Look at him. A roaring gorilla escaped from his cage! Why should we put up with this cheeky Fourth-Former, anyhow?"

"Why?" asked Decks. "Let's chuck him out!"

John Busterfield Boots was chucked out. To add to his mortification, Handforth and some other Removites happened to witness

the ejection, and as it was against all the rules for a Fourth-Former to be at large in the Remove passage, he was seized, whirled through the lobby, and hurled into the Triangle.

Buster's cup of bitterness was filled to the brim.

CHAPTER 9. The Final Blow!

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IT was very late before the unhappy Boots got to sleep.

He tossed about in bed, thinking up all sorts of wild schemes to open Maisie's eyes to the truth. But what could he do? As long as K. K. kept silent, he was helpless. That was the worst of it—and, in justice, he couldn't blame the red-headed Removite. K. K. had undertaken to fulfil his commission, and he was merely carrying out the contract. It was this thought which sent Buster nearly crazy. The whole thing was his own doing! And when he pictured K. K. showing Maisie the sights of London, he came within an ace of gnawing his sneets.

He went to sleep at last, and felt very much better in the morning. He was calmer. He could see that he had been unduly alarmed overnight. All he had to do was to go to Mr. Stokes and demand—yes, demand—that his niece should be told the full truth without delay.

"It won't be sneaking," Boots told himself.

"Stokes knows the truth, anyhow, so I shan't be giving anything away. Yes, by Jingo! If anybody goes up to London with Maisie to-day, it'll be me!"

He nearly had a fit when he went out of doors, after dressing himself with unusual care. He had put on his best suit; he had brushed his hair until his arms ached, and

he was spick and span from tip to toe. For there, outside the West House, stood Mr. Stokes' car. The party was on the point of departing. Boots jumped. He hadn't allowed for the possibility of a before-breakfast start.

"Cheese it, old man," said Bob Christine, who was standing on the Modern House steps with Yorke and Talmadge. "You can't make a scene out here. Don't go and repeat your blunder of yesterday."

"I shan't blunder this morning," said Boots grimly.

"But they're just off," said Bob. "K. K. was out here two or three minutes ago, and Vera was with him. They've just gone into the West House to fetch Maisie and Mrs. Stokes. They'll be going in a minute."

"I'll be going, too," declared Boots, "and that nervy bouncer of a K. K. will stay behind!"

"Oh, he's hopeless!" said Talmadge with a sniff. "What's the good of kicking now? I like a chap who takes a defeat calmly."

"Oh, do you?" retorted Boots aggressively. "Well, I never know when I'm beaten! That's me! And, by Jingo, I'm not beaten yet! K. K.'s going to get a surprise this morning, my sons!"

He strode off with determination in every step, and, as luck would have it, he came face to face with Mr. Beverley Stokes in West Arch. He was so surprised at the meeting that some of his aggressiveness deserted him. Last night he had thought of all sorts of splendid things to say to Mr. Stokes; bold things; now—

"Ah, good-morning, young man!" said the Housemaster.

"I—I was hoping to see you, sir," said Boots breathlessly. "Don't you think it's about time for all this rot to finish?"

"Rot?" repeated Mr. Stokes. "What rot?"

Boots squirmed. He hadn't meant to say that at all. He had meant to be indignant and self-assertive. But there was something about Mr. Stokes' twinkling eyes which unnerved him.

"You know what I mean, sir," he panted. "Maisie Deakin is my niece. She's not Parkington's niece."

"So I understand," nodded Mr. Stokes.

"She still thinks that Parkington is her uncle, doesn't she, sir?" went on Buster. "And they're going out on the spree this morning. Well, I'm jolly well going to put a stop to it."

"Really, Boots, I'm surprised at you," said the Housemaster. "You wouldn't wilfully spoil your niece's happiness, would you?"

"But she ought to know the truth, sir——"

"Come, come!" broke in Mr. Stokes. "I understood that it was you yourself who engineered this harmless little deception?"

"Well, it was, sir, in a way——"

"Then why grumble now?"

"Because it's gone on long enough, sir," said the junior. "I think it's your duty to tell my niece that Parkington is an impostor."

"Oh, no!" laughed Mr. Stokes, shaking his head. "Nothing doing, young man. You got yourself into this muddle, and you'll have to get yourself out. I'm not taking sides either one way or the other. The girl seems perfectly satisfied with Parkington, and if you want her to know the truth you must tell her yourself."

"But I have told her, sir."

"Indeed?"

"And she wouldn't believe me," groaned Boots.

"That's awkward," said Mr. Stokes gravely. "Not to say unfortunate. So Maisie wouldn't believe you, young man?"

"She might have done if K. K. had only backed me up, sir."

"My dear chap, you can't expect K. K. to give up a good thing when he's got it in both hands," smiled the Housemaster. "When you arranged for him to act as your deputy you thought the task was going to be an irksome one. Therefore you were eager enough to let it proceed. Now you find out that things are very different you are just as eager to assume your rightful position. But you must learn, Boots, that we have to abide by our mistakes—and make the best of them. I'm afraid you are a trifle unreasonable."

Boots felt his heart sinking. Things weren't going right at all.

"Then—then won't you do anything, sir?" he asked. "Or Mr. Wilkes? Supposing I go to Mr. Wilkes?"

"You'll have a job—Mr. Wilkes has gone off for a day's golfing," said Mr. Stokes. "I'm certainly not going to interfere in this matter. As I told you before, Boots, it's up to you to claim your own niece."

And the young Housemaster walked on, leaving Buster helpless. The junior clenched his fists after a moment or two of thought, then strode purposefully into the Triangle. By jingo, he wasn't going to be squashed like this! Maisie was his niece——

"Great Scott!" he gasped blankly.

The car had gone!

"Hard luck, old man," said Denny, strolling over. "What kept you? I thought you were going to bid Maisie good-bye."

"They haven't gone, have they?" yelled Boots.

"Two minutes ago," said Denny. "I saw K. K. looking round, and I believe he was expecting you——"

"The—the awful rotter!" fumed Boots. "I don't mean K. K.—I mean Stokes! He must have known what was happening, and he deliberately kept me in the archway so that I shouldn't know!"

"Jolly sensible man, too," commented Handforth, as he joined them. "He didn't want you to create a scene with his wife and guest."

This was quite true, and Buster received very little sympathy from the juniors. It was entirely his own fault.

Exactly how Boots got through that day he could never remember. Three times during morning lessons he was in trouble with Mr. Pycraft, and impositions accumulated against



Parkington and Boots were going it hammer and tongs when a girlish figure rushed up. "What are you silly boys fighting about?" demanded Maisie anxiously.

him as fast as the dead leaves were accumulating against the walls of the Triangle. He was reckless and indifferent. After what had happened he felt that nothing else mattered.

In the afternoon he was just as bad, although somewhat more subdued. A couple of swishings had sobered him. When evening came he was like a seething furnace. All he wanted was to get face to face with Kirby Keeble Parkington.

It was raining towards dusk, but Boots didn't care. He mooched about in the Triangle, with his hands thrust into his overcoat pockets. He did a kind of sentry-go between the gates and the fountain. He was waiting for the car to return.

At last it came—bringing with it a fresh shock. Mrs. Stokes was driving, and sitting next to her was a largely-built, pleasant lady of about thirty-three or four, and looking even younger. So young-looking, in fact, that it was difficult to realise that she was Maisie's mother.

"Marjorie!" gurgled Boots, as he spotted her. "My giddy sister!"

It was true. The lady in the car was Mrs. Deakin, the wife of the big Canadian railway man. And in the rear, sitting to-

gether, were Kirby Keeble Parkington and Maisie. Boots could just see their shadowy outlines—and he saw red, too. As the car stopped he dashed up and flung open the near-side front door.

"Marjorie!" he ejaculated hoarsely.

Mrs. Deakin gave a little gasp, and stared at him with indignation and bewilderment.

"How dare you frighten me like that?" she asked. "You foolish boy! What do you mean by this extraordinary familiarity, too?"

"But I'm Buster—I'm John!" panted Boots. "I knew you in a tick, sis! You're a Boots all over! Don't you know me? I'm your young brother!"

"Nonsense!" said Mrs. Deakin sharply. "My young brother is seated in the back of this car at the present moment. Please go away! You annoy me!"

It was the final blow!

CHAPTER 10.

A Series of Shocks!

THE unfortunate Buster's brain was reeling. Indeed, for an awful moment he began to think that Maisie really was Parkington's niece, and that Mrs. Deakin was Parkington's sister. He must

have made a mistake somewhere. He must have got muddled.

It was simply one blow piling on top of another. It had been a shock to see his sister in the car, for he had never dreamed that she would come down to St. Frank's. As for Parkington successfully passing himself off as her brother—why, the idea was preposterous. Yet K. K. had apparently succeeded!

"What's the trouble, sis?"

Boots jumped. The voice had come from the back of the car, and he now stared open-eyed as the rear door opened and K. K. and Maisie alighted. Mrs. Deakin had also alighted.

"It is this boy," said Boots' sister. "Do you know him, Buster? He seems to have an absurd delusion that he is you."

"Oh, you mustn't take any notice of him!" said K. K. smoothly. "He's quite harmless. One of the Fourth-Formers, you know. All the Fourth-Formers are more or less half-witted——"

"You rotter!" shouted Boots, beside himself. "Marjorie, don't take any notice of him. He's Parkington, of the Remove. I'm your brother. I tried to tell Maisie yesterday, but——"

"Poor boy, he seems to get worse and worse," interrupted Maisie gently. "Do you think it would do him any good if he went into the sanatorium for a month? Come along, mummy, we'd better get indoors. It's still raining a bit."

Speechless, Boots watched them vanish into the West House. A kind of paralysis had crept over him. He even stood there while Mrs. Stokes drove the car round to the garage. He was left alone in the gloom and the drizzle.

But a reaction came five minutes later. Unless he had a fight with somebody, he felt he would go clean off his rocker. And who could he fight better than Parkington? It was Parkington who was the cause of all his troubles.

He had half a mind to barge recklessly into Mr. Stokes' private quarters and to drag K. K. out by the scruff of his neck. He abandoned this scheme, however. He would be likely to receive more trouble than he gave.

His problem was solved unexpectedly. Before he could actually decide what to do, a brisk footstep sounded in the West House lobby, and when Boots looked round he saw K. K. descending the steps two at a time. Whistling, the Removite made a bee-line for the Ancient House.

"Hey!" said Boots hoarsely. "I want you, K. K.!"

Parkington halted.

"Hallo!" he said genially. "If it isn't my old pal, Buster! What's eating you, sweetheart? I was hoping to see you—I want to tell you what a fine time we had to-day."

Boots clenched his fists.

"Oh, you had a fine time, did you?" he said ominously.

"Perfectly gorgeous," said K. K. "There

wasn't a drop of rain while we were in London, and I must say that your sister is a ripper. A regular sport to her finger-tips. She took to me like a duck takes to water."

"And you bluffed her into believing that you are her brother?"

"My dear old trout, bluff wasn't needed," said Parkington. "Maisie introduced me as her Uncle Buster, and I just let the ball roll on. As the Americans say, I found that I was sitting pretty. Yes, your sister is a brick!" he added reflectively. "She even was sporting enough to sit in the front of the car, leaving Maisie to me at the back."

"Put up your fists!" croaked Boots.

"Eh? My dear ass——"

"Put 'em up!" ordered the Fourth-Former. "You rotter! I'm going to smash the dickens out of you! But I'll give you one more chance first! Are you going to put this thing right?"

"Not likely," replied K. K. "Maisie's here for two or three days yet——"

"Put your hands up or I'll knock you cold!" broke in Boots fiercely. "I've got to fight somebody or I'll bust! By the time I've finished with you, Maisie won't recognise you as Uncle Buster or anybody else!"

K. K. sighed.

"Well, if you must fight you must," he said resignedly. "It's rather spoiling my day, but it can't be helped. I'd like to remind you that I was champion boxer at Carlton College, and that—— Whoa! All right, then!"

Boots wasn't waiting for any more. He sailed in like an enraged bull. A moment later the pair were going at it hammer and tongs. All the advantage was with Kirby Keeble Parkington, for he was not only the better fighter, but he was cool and collected—whereas Boots was frantic with rage. They swayed into the deeper shadow of West Arch, and the battle continued. However, it had really only just got fairly into its stride when a quick patter of light footsteps sounded.

"Oh, you mustn't do this, you idiots!" cried Maisie indignantly. "It isn't respectful for a girl to call her uncle an idiot, but how can I help it? What are you fighting about?"

"About you, I'm afraid," said K. K. apologetically.

"Then you shouldn't, Uncle Buster," replied the girl. "And you shouldn't fight about me, either, Uncle Buster," she added, turning to Boots.

"Eh?" gasped Boots. "Then—then you know?"

"I've known all the time," said Maisie coolly.

"The dickens you have?" ejaculated K. K. startled.

"Of course I've known all the time," went on the girl. "Were you foolish enough to think that I shouldn't know my own uncle when I saw him? The very instant you claimed me as your niece, when I first arrived, I knew that you were a fraud."

(Continued on page 44.)

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BULL'S-EYE BILL!



By *ARTHUR S. HARDY*

The Sack!

AS Bull's-Eye Bill cast a glance at the clock, he saw that it wanted five minutes to one. In five minutes he would be free, for it was early closing day, and at half-past two he would be down at the Flats playing football for the Spiders, and kicking goals against the Wasps in the biggest game of the season. Hooray for freedom!

As Bull's-Eye looked away from the clock, a shadow darkened the doorway, and the boy who showed there uttered a shrill whistle.

"Hi, Bull's-Eye, shall I wait for yer?"

Bull's-Eye's boss, Mr. Crab, the fishmonger, was hovering near the pay desk, and Bull's-Eye didn't want to take any chances.

"No, Chip," he whispered. "Old Crab's just the sort to cut up rusty if you do. I'll meet you at Junction corner at Half-past one."

"Righto," answered Bull's-Eye's pal, Chip Rogers. "You've gotta get some goals, Bill; we've gotta beat the Wasps. It means the championship of the Flats, yer know."

Bull's-Eye knew, and his heart swelled with pride because he could not help scoring goals. He had popped on two or three or four in every match since he had played for the Spiders.

"I'll get 'em, Chip," he promised. "But beat it, boy, 'cos I can see old Crab looking sideways at me, and I don't like his smile."

**Always on the target—
that's Bill; but in this
first lively story everything
goes wrong and he's—
always Off the target!**



Bull's-Eye knew old Crab, and he made no mistake, for no sooner had Chip Rogers disappeared and Bull's-Eye made a bee-line for the back shop to get his coat and cap, than the fishmonger stopped him. The shop hands were beating it at the double. Old Crab grinned.

"Did I hear you say you were going to play football?" he asked.

"Yes," answered Bull's-Eye enthusiastically. "Spiders versus Wasps, down on the Flats. You come along and see me score some goals, Mr. Crab."

"You're not going to score any goals," answered the fishmonger. "You're going to work. You're going to earn your wages. You get on your bike and take that turbot—the whole fish—along to the Metropole Hotel; I want that dish o' soles taken round to Mrs. Robinson in Cork Street; those lobsters to Major Martin in the Grove, and the dried 'addicks to Mrs. Taylor's in the

Park, an' look sharp about it, and when you come back I'll find you some more to do."

Bull's-Eye's head whirled. The streets old Crab mentioned were in different parts of the town. It would take him forty minutes to do the journey at his best pace on the bike. And when he got back there would be more jobs to do.

"But it's half-holiday, sir," Bull's-Eye protested. "All the others have gone——"

"It's because the others have gone you'll have to do the run. Now, no argument. Start right away."

Bull's-Eye would have chucked up his job right there and then if he had not suddenly remembered his stepfather Peter Doyle, better known as One-Punch Pete. One-Punch Pete never did a stroke of work, but he made a living because Bull's-Eye's mother had a whole-time job which brought her in thirty-five bob a week, and Bull's-Eye, earning fifteen shillings at Crab's, supplied any of the deficiencies.

One-Punch Pete had arms like Carnera, and it was said that no man had ever taken his wallop and stayed on his feet. Bull's-Eye certainly hadn't to date; and so, with a sigh, he piled the fish in the carrier, wheeled his bike into the road, and started off at top speed.

Now, the whole turbot being the weightiest item in the basket, Bull's-Eye made for the Hotel 'Metropole' first. He was half-way along Main Street, and within sight of the big hotel when, as he came out from behind a motor-bus and did a sprint to get by, he saw his arch-enemy, Ginger Hackem, coming in the opposite direction on a flashy-looking motor delivery tricycle belonging to the Stores.

Bull's-Eye could tell by the way Ginger was speeding that he had got through with his last round, and he groaned again.

Just then Ginger caught sight of him. Now Ginger played full back for the Wasps, and he knew better than most people that to-day's match largely depended upon the goals Bull's-Eye would score, or would not score. There was nothing to tell that old Crab did not intend to let Bull's-Eye play, and he suddenly thought if he could only damage Bull's-Eye a little—not hurt him, but damage him—the business of getting goals wouldn't be so easy.

Bull's-Eye was right in the main stream of traffic. Ginger suddenly swerved, and, in turning to avoid a collision with the rushing tradesman's tricycle, Bull's-Eye turned his front wheel on to the front wheel of a motor-bus, and came down with a deafening crash.

His basket of fish shot out of the carrier. His right knee bumped the ground. When he got up, feeling dazed, Ginger Hackem had disappeared. Bull's-Eye's bike was under the wheels of a charabanc. The motor-bus had driven over the basket of fish. The whole turbot was reduced to pulp. The lobsters had been flattened to a coral patch. The smoked haddocks were sizzling on the overheated radiator of the bus, and the dish

of soles was sticking to the balloon tyres of the mighty vehicle like glue.

As soon as Bull's-Eye could collect the scrap-iron of the delivery bike he put it on his shoulder, dodged out of the crowd, saying he was all right, and hoofed it back to Crab's.

Crab's face when he saw Bull's-Eye come in smothered with mud, with the right knee of his trousers gaping in a right-angle slit, and throw the scrap-iron down on the sawdust, was a study.

"What's this?" he howled.

"Your bike!" answered Bull's-Eye.

"Where's the fish?" howled old Crab.

"Singing in the rain!" replied Bull's-Eye.

"Get out of here!" cried old Crab, pointing to the street.

"All right, it's Thursday. What about my wages?"

"You'll get no wages. I'm not sure I shan't sue you for damages. I'm going round to tell your stepfather about you."

Bull's-Eye's heart failed. No wages. No job. He did not know how he dare go home and face One-Punch Pete after this. But meanwhile Chip Rogers and the boys would be waiting for him at Junction Corner, and there was that football match for the championship of the Flats. Bull's-Eye stepped out into the rain and left old Crab saying things that even made his wrinkles shudder.

Off the Target!

WHEN Bull's-Eye turned up, the Spiders, who were waiting in the drizzle at Junction Corner, gave him a cheer, but when they saw his torn trousers, and noticed his limp, they didn't think it was so good, and when he told them what had happened they thought it was rotten.

"Don't you fellows worry," Bill cried cheerfully. "I'll score plenty of goals. I can't help scoring goals. And now that it's drizzling we'll stand a better chance, 'cos the Wasps don't like a soft ground."

But in spite of his cheerfulness, Bull's-Eye walked along with a decided limp that promised badly for the Spiders.

As they drew near the Flats, they overtook a horse-drawn caravan which was moving their way. It was a rickety caravan which creaked and groaned along, threatening to collapse at any moment, but it was the most gaudily-painted thing Bull's-Eye had ever seen. It was green and yellow and red and blue and gold, and the horse was a mustard-coloured nag whose ribs stuck right out of his body. He had hardly any tail, but a shaggy coat and whiskers round his hoofs.

Bull's-Eye laughed.

"What price the bit o' cat's meat?" he cried.

Then, feeling the caravan driver's eyes fixed on him, he looked up and very nearly yelled. The driver's face was the colour of copper, and he wore a fierce black moustache, and ear-rings in his ears. His lank, raven-black hair tumbled on his shoulders, and a

gaudy red silk handkerchief with white spots was wound round his head.

He wore dark silk corduroy breeches, leggings, and a velvet coat. One would have expected fierce eyes with such a get-up, but the gleam in the gipsy's eyes was soft, and he grinned as he saw Chip Rogers carrying the football, and the rest of the Spiders trudging along.

"You play the football, eh?" he asked.

Chip grinned.

"I'll say we do," he said. "We're the Spiders."

The gipsy stroked the protruding ribs of his horse with his whip, tickling it into a jog-trot, and the caravan swayed and lurched dangerously.

"Where you play football?" he asked.

"On the Flats. Say, we're gonna lick the Wasps. Only one of 'em has busted up old Bull's-Eye, here, and he may not score his usual crop of goals."

"Bull's-Eye?" said the gipsy questioningly.

"Yeah!" explained Chip Rogers. "Always on the target."

The gipsy seemed to like their company.

"My name's Gipsy Dick," he told them.

"I'm the mystery man. I can make people do 'most anything. Bull's-Eye, eh? Always on the target. Clever?"

"Trickiest dribbler and slipper and goal-getter ever you see, Gipsy!"

Ahead they could see the vast area of waste-land bordering the canal which was called the Flats. Dark clouds were speeding overhead, and the willows were bending under the force of the wind.

Far across the Flats a crowd outlined a playing pitch on which half a team was already out at practice, and towards which crowds were streaming from all directions.

"That's where we play," said Chip, pointing. "The Wasps are already out."

The gipsy turned his yellow horse down the road which led to a bridge and went on with them.

"I like football," he said. "Use to play myself. I'm going to see the game." And so he followed them right up to the crowd and drew his caravan up behind the big crowd opposite the half-way line.

Led by Chip Rogers, their captain, the Spiders took the field. As soon as Ginger Hackem saw Bull's-Eye limping, he began to laugh. He had settled old Bull's-Eye properly. Bull's-Eye's knee was terribly swollen, and every movement gave him pain.

"He won't score any goals to-day," said Ginger, with a sneer, as he went up to toss for choice of ends with Chip.

Chip called heads, but it was the lady, and so the Spiders found themselves set to face the stiffish wind. Half a minute later Bull's-Eye kicked off for the Spiders, who, with some clever first-time passing, raced the ball to the other end, where Chip slipped a peach of a pass right to Bull's-Eye's feet.

The Spiders' goal was only twelve yards away. It was the sort of gilt-edged chance that Bull's-Eye was never known to miss. His foot flashed up and down.

"Goal! Goal! Goal!" roared the crowd, who knew their Bull's-Eye, but, to Bull's-Eye's horror, the ball went nowhere near goal, shooting away to the right, and finishing up very near the corner flag.

Bull's-Eye had hit the ball with his right foot, and the pain in his knee made him squirm. But it wasn't the pain that made him look so glum when he turned up field; he suddenly realised that he had forgotten how to shoot!

Worse and Worse!

FROM that moment until the game was half an hour old Bull's-Eye played like a hero in a desperate attempt to score the first goal for the Spiders. But every ball he drove at the Wasps' goal was misdirected.

And then, in a break-away, the Wasps scored the opening goal, one of their forwards handling the ball before they could force it through, and the goalkeeper having no chance with four men swarming round him, and both Spiders' full-backs down.

Bull's-Eye was nearly broken-hearted. He would not have minded his game leg if he had only been able to shoot. Always on the target! Yet he couldn't even send one shot straight this afternoon.

As the game wore on his limp grew worse. And when the half-time whistle blew he could only just stagger off the field. Chip led him to the caravan, and Bull's-Eye sat upon the steps which Gipsy Dick had rigged up.

"Let me look at that knee," said the gipsy. He looked at it, he rubbed it with lotion, and he gave it a wrench. "You'll manago better in the second half," he declared, with a grin, and to the boy's amazement he found himself able to run on to the field just as if he had never been hurt at all.

Then the battle was resumed in earnest. Ginger Hackem found himself outpaced and outclassed by Bull's-Eye. And now Bull's-Eye was right on the target. Fifteen times he burst through, and fifteen times he shot, and fifteen times he beat the Wasps' goalkeeper all ends up, but, to his disgust, the ball went anywhere but into the net. It hit the cross-bar, it bumped against the up-rights, it floored the goalkeeper after he had missed it, but Bull's-Eye saw the ball trickle slowly past the post.

Then the Wasps scored a second goal, and the crowd yelled like mad, reckoning the Wasps had won.

It was close on time. Bull's-Eye arranged a plan of attack with Chip. The ball was swung right out on the wing, and squared on the run right across to the outside-left. He tricked Hackem, and slipped back, passing to Chip, who, in turn, gave to Bull's-Eye, and Bull's-Eye found himself only six yards out of goal with the ball at his feet.

He gave one look, and hit the ball hard. But, to his horror, it went ballooning high above the bar, and over the heads of the crowd. Bull's-Eye had missed a thousand



An open goal loomed before Bill. He shot—and the ball swerved away towards the corner flag!

to one on chance, and the next moment the whistle blew for time.

Bull's-Eye was done. He had never felt so tired. And he would not have felt so tired if he hadn't been so disappointed.

He was jostled by the Wasps' supporters as he made his way with Chip Rogers and his chums back towards the caravan. For the first time since his pals had christened him Bull's-Eye Bill he had played in a game of football without scoring a goal.

All the Spiders' supporters were hurrying away, sick because their team hadn't won the game, and Bull's-Eye Bill could hear them blaming him for it. Only a few loyal supporters stayed to give him a cheer.

"Never mind, Bull's-Eye," said a man who wore a black-and-white rosette, "you'll be on the target next time."

Then Bill heard a man shouting:

"Where is he? Where's Bull's-Eye Bill?"

Bill recognised that voice. One-Punch Pete, his stepfather, had arrived, and it sounded as if he was looking for trouble. A pair of broad shoulders loomed above the heads of the crowd. Two giant hands swung the men aside. And there stood One-Punch Pete, his cap stuck sideways on his bullet head, his unshaven lower jaw stuck out, his leg-of-mutton fists doubled up, and his great feet firmly planted, the biggest, ugliest-looking bully you could ever meet.

"Found you, 'ave I?" he snarled. "What you bin doin'?"

"Playing football," answered Bull's-Eye Bill.

"I know that. What about Crab? What about 'is fish? He give you the sack. Gimme your wages!"

Bull's-Eye told his stepfather that he hadn't any wages.

"Crab stuck to the money," he said, every bone and muscle in him aching.

"He came to see me. Well, listen! I can't afford to keep you. If you try to git into the house to-night you're for it! And you've got something coming to you now!"

One-Punch Pete pulled off his coat and rolled up his shirtsleeves, showing his enormous, muscular arms, all covered with hair like an ape's. He clenched his fists. His right swung round and crashed—not against Bull's-Eye Bill's jaw, as he had intended, but against the arm of Gipsy Dick, who had slid down the stairs of the caravan, pulled Bull's-Eye aside as quick as a wink, and turned aside the blow.

Then, as One-Punch Pete swung both arms, the gipsy let him have one punch only, a wallop with the right that hit him on the button, and Pete flew through the air to drop, dazed and helpless, ten yards away.

One-Punch Pete beat a hasty retreat when he recovered. The crowd dispersed. Bull's-Eye's pals went, too, after they had said good-night.

Bull's-Eye, wishing almost that he were dead, sat on the caravan steps in the rain.

"I've nowhere to go to," he murmured. "and I can't kick a goal. I don't know what I'm gonna do."

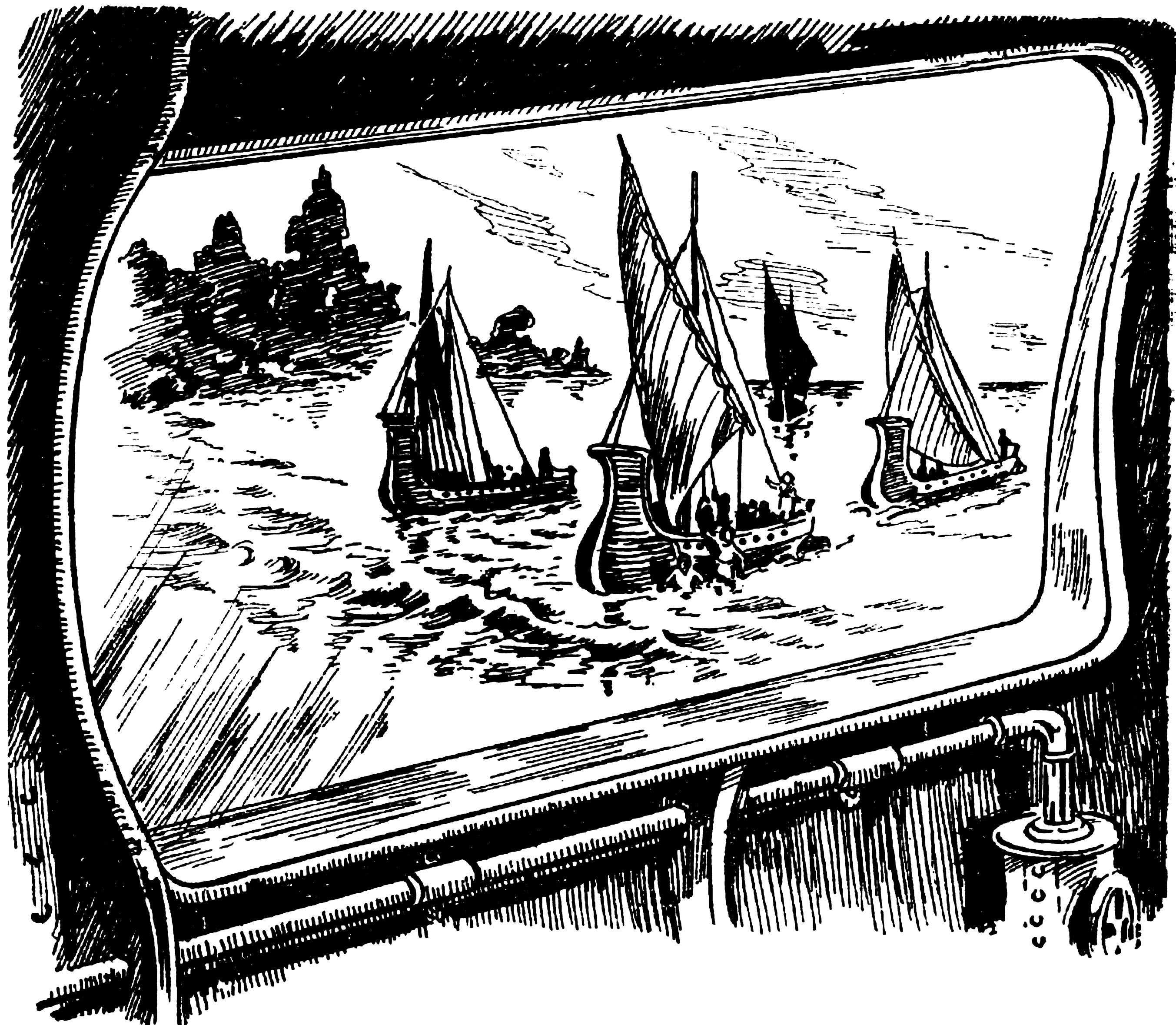
Gipsy Dick grinned, and pointed to the lighted caravan.

"I do," he said; "you're coming along o' me!"

(Bull's-Eye Bill's a great lad, isn't he? Make sure you read the next sparkling story in this football series. Order your NELSON LEE now.)

Stop Here For A Succession Of Thrills, Chums!

THE INVISIBLE



Strange Visitors!

“OW! Great-aunt Jemima, but I’m sore!”

From the depths of his comfortable bunk Mark Whitaker opened a pair of scorched and inflamed eyes and blinked at me owlishly. After a moment’s rueful stare at each other in the clear light of day we indulged in rueful grins.

“Gosh, you do look a sight!” said I.

“You do look a wreck!” quoth he.

And we were both right; we looked wrecks and sights as we staggered from our beds. The chronometer on the Meteor’s control-platform told us we had slept a round nineteen hours, but we had deserved the rest if ever fellows had.

In silence we went to the cabin door, star-

ing across the strip of strange beach on which we had landed, to our handiwork of the day before. Far above our heads loomed the towering Burning Mountains—dead and cold. No longer did every peak in the great range glower at us with its hateful crimson glare; they stood there, black, dull and lifeless.

Stark holes and chasms yawned in their fragile sides where our shells had smashed through the thin stone, unloosing avalanches and landslides that had buried the Valley

The Sixth Adventure:

THE LOST TRIBE OF LEBANU!

of Flame inside, and with it the dreadful Fire People who had lived there, dominating Lebanu, the Invisible World. We had smashed the mountains and them in a fight that neither Mark nor I would ever forget.

Despite the fact that our bodies still smarted agonisingly with the hundred odd

WORLD!

By JOHN BREARLEY



burns we had received we breathed a satisfied sigh. Our vow to restore the ancient kingdom of Lebanu had been accomplished. King Onada and his pygmy followers were at last free from the menace of the Fire People. But what of our fine Space-cruiser?

Even though Mark could do little more than examine her casually—for we were still tired—his eyes had a serious calculating gleam in them when he finished. Her aluminium and helloid hull was scorched and blackened, dented where flying rocks had hit her and blistered where scores of the Fire People had clung to her with their flaming bodies.

As far as we could see, the discharge

tubes and the rudder were all right; but when I clambered into the gun turret I nearly wept. That, at least, was clean out of action; our sturdy little gun was so much "scrap." Heated beyond endurance by the shells I had poured forth, the last one of all had burst the rifling completely, and the final explosion of flame that had splashed through the turret when we swamped the great Pool of Fire had buckled the steelwork like so much cardboard. How the deuce I had escaped licked me. But I was chiefly mad about the gun.

"That's one weapon done in, then!" Mark grunted when I told him. "Still, we've got the electric fire and the carbon dioxide gas in case of accidents. Tom, our time's up here. We've got to set Lebanu straight and hook it. Besides, our supplies are nearly finished. Then savagely: "But I'm going inside those darned mountains before I go, whatever happens!"

I jumped.

"Gr-great Scott! Why?"

"Curiosity. Also, I want to find out if we've done our work properly. I've been figuring it out. All these mountains, as we know, are nothing but a shell guarding the Valley of Flame, and that valley is nothing but the gaping mouth of a great volcano. Now it's quite on the cards that although we've blocked and quenched the fires with rocks and gas, it may be only for the time being. At some future epoch, the volcano may spring into life again, heat things up, and perhaps even breed more Fire People as it did before. So I want to find out for certain. Tom, I'm going to seal that volcano if I have to smash every mountain there and pile 'em on top of each other!"

"Oh!" I looked at him helplessly. When Mark's eyes glitter like swords and his high forehead is creased with strong deep lines, charging elephants are meek compared to him. "How're you going inside?"

He laughed shortly.

"Dunno—yet. Let's have grub!"

All during the meal he was silent, and when I had cleared away he drew himself up to the table with his charts and precious journal. It was at this point that I wandered to the window and saw something which made me yell with surprise.

"Jumping mackerel, Mark! Come and look!"

He joined me hastily, and I pointed out to sea without another word.

A few hundred yards off shore was a fleet of four ships, the first we had ever seen on Lebanu. They were nearing the land as fast as a light breeze could drive them.

A Wondrous Tale!

“DON'T move!”

I had started for the door, but Mark's sharp command stopped me dead. Together we stepped back from the window, watching this strange invasion with puzzled frowns. For up till now we had believed Lebanu uninhabited, save for the great stretch of plain around Xemos.

On came the ships, cutting through the little waves with high curving prows. They were no larger than good-sized dinghies, and were driven by a single lateen sail made of woven grass—the only kind of cloth we had found in use, but very strong. We could see no signs of crew or weapons—just the four quaint vessels plunging calmly towards us, out of nowhere!

In a few minutes their keels hit the shallows, their sails came down with a run. The moment the ships lost weigh, their crews sprang into the water.

Mark and I gasped in chorus:

“Pygmies!”

The newcomers were Lebanuncs—swarthier of face and bolder of movement than the poor cowed people who had lurked in the jungle depth all their lives; but Lebanuncs for all that, well-built, good-looking and less than two feet high.

Under the command of a young captain, anchors were dropped and mooring lines run out. In well-disciplined order, the little folk lined the beach, waiting until their leader stalked to the van. There were sixty of them in all; men, women and children. Their captain gave one swift, birdlike glance up at the colossal mountains, turned and spoke sharply. Then we saw an impressive sight.

At his word, all dropped on their knees, and, heads bent in humbleness, came crawling slowly up the beach towards the Meteor. We did not move; they had not seen us yet. And when they were within ten yards of the ship's bows the leader rose to his knees, arms outflung, while his followers fell full length on the ground. A thin high chant broke the silence.

Mark and I looked at each other oddly. We recognised both the words and the ceremony. The seafarers were worshipping our ship.

So funny did it look to me that I might have laughed outright but that I saw Mark's dark eyes alight with interest. Patiently, then, we waited until the incantation was over and the Lebanuncs, heads still bowed, began to back away. Mark, snapping his fingers at me, moved quickly, and we both appeared in the cabin door, side by side.

The young chieftain was the first to see us as we stood there, rigid as graven images. For a moment he stared at us in amazement,

his jaw dropping slowly. A strangled cry burst from his lips; his people looked up and saw us, too. With a terrified cry they leapt to their feet and stampeded for the ships as though the Fire People themselves were on their heels.

Mark's voice, ringing clearly above their screams, halted them in their tracks.

“Stay!”

They stayed, in every attitude of fear. In dignified state we stepped on to the beach and strode towards them. I saw their eyes run quickly from Mark's slim figure to me, and just as Onada's folk had done, they collapsed with a wail of terror. I suppose I am rather hefty for pygmies!

Of all the crowd, only the chief remained on his feet. Coming to a standstill, Mark smiled and beckoned to him gently.

“Come hither, chief!” he coaxed. “Tell me, why do your people fear us?”

The sound of his native language, softly uttered by such giants as we appeared to be, shocked the sea captain. After an effort to control himself, his voice came to us, low and timid:

“Great Lords, we did not know that thou dwelt in the Destroyer from the Skies, whom we have come from afar to find and worship—now that it has destroyed our enemies yonder!”

He lifted a shaky hand to the dull mountains, crouching behind us like some huge dead beast. Mark whistled softly.

“What-ho!” he whispered. “And is it thus? I think we're discovering something big, Thomas!” To the chieftain: “Bid thy people be at ease, chief. Now tell me again; who art thou and whence comest thou? I thought there were none others of thy race left?”

“Nor are there, Great Lords!” replied the Lebanunc eagerly. “We are the people of Lebanu, and I am their prince, Sigur. Once, in the long ago, our people were mighty. But there came fiends from the Burning Mountains who swept our forefathers into their kingdom to be slaves or sacrificed. Some of these, by patient means, contrived a vessel and escaped through the River of Doom into the sea. There they lived all their days, in the far islands or aboard the vessels which they built. And we are their descendants!”

We could only stare. It was amazing, and it bore out the tale we had heard already. King Onada had told us how the greater portion of his nation had been snatched into the mountains when the Fire People first appeared on Lebanu, but it was thought they had perished long ago. Now here were their children—a fine, hardier lot than Onada's by far.

Mark thought for a moment.

“And why hast thou ventured to this land of fear again, Sigur—even to the mountains themselves?”

Prince Sigur's face lit up.



“I grabbed hold of the two boats, and waited for the huge wall of water to crash down upon us!”

“Because we have seen the sign, lord, and we know our enemies are dead.”

“The sign?”

“Ay, lord! It was foretold to us, when our people first broke free, that a destroyer would come from the skies to rescue us. Two suns ago, as we cruised near our islands, we saw a tongue of fire leap into the heavens and later we saw a mountain die. That was the sign. With the sinking of the next sun we saw mighty fires eating the skies and through the fire flew a strange ship, spitting flames and roaring loudly. Then came the last destruction, and behold, all the mountains died and we knew the prophecy was fulfilled. We marked where the strange ship came to earth. Therefore have we ventured to land on the kingdom our fathers held in the long ago!”

“My hat, they saw the scrap from out at sea!” I muttered.

It was quite easy to understand that, for we ourselves had never lost sight of the Burning Mountains, no matter how far out we had been. They must have made a gaudy sight yesterday when the battle was at its height.

Chin in hand, Mark bent closer to the prince.

“What is this River of Doom by which your forefathers escaped, O Sigur?” he demanded quietly.

The prince rose and pointed along the beach.

“It is a river, lord, flowing from the sea into the Burning Mountains. It pierces their heart until it reaches the Valley of Flame and then it turns off. The fiends who captured our ancestors feared the river with a great fear. They made sacrifices to it at all times and watched it lest it grew angry and overwhelmed them. Its mouth is yonder, six hytels away!”

Mark’s face was a study.

“An underground river nearly two miles off!” he gasped. “And flowing near the Valley of Flame! Oh, dandelions; I wonder—I wonder!”

Rising to his feet, leaving me flabbergasted with his vague murmurs, he folded his arms impressively and addressed the pygmies.

“O sea-wanderers of Lebanu, I have great tidings for you. Know, then, that thou art

not the last survivors of your race. On the hidden side of the Burning Mountains, where once your people dwelt, others still remain. They, too, have struggled hard to live all these years!"

At this the Lebanunes struggled to their feet, forgetful of our presence in their amazement. Joy and astonishment appeared on their tiny faces, their little voices united in a cry of awed delight. Stepping forward, the prince cast himself at Mark's feet.

"Who art thou, great lords, who bring such joyful news?" he implored.

"We are the Gods of Lebanu!" boomed Mark in a voice that came from his boots. "We have descended from the skies to aid you, as the prophecy said. By deeds of strength and cunning we have freed Lebanu from the terrors that bound her; laid waste the savage jungle and"—he swept his hands towards the mountains—"wiped out the Fire People for ever—I hope!" he added, beneath his breath.

In a body the pygmies threw themselves before us, worshipping us with full rites to the murmur of the sea.

"We are your slaves, Gods of Lebanu!"

Mark nodded.

"That is well. Soon we shall carry you over the mountains to your people, so that Lebanu may be one race again. But first—"

"Ay, lord?"

"You shall take your two best ships and your best men, Prince Sigur, and sail down the coast to the River of Doom. There you shall wait till we come. The rest of your people stay here by the magic ship!"

"What's the game, Mark?" I hissed urgently, as Sigur turned without a murmur and began snapping orders.

"Into the mountains by river. It'll save hours of climbing. And besides—"

Which is all the blighter would say. He bolted into the Meteor, and left me frowning at our new adoring subjects.

Down the River of Doom!

AS we left the Meteor fifteen minutes later, leaving the remaining Lebanunes prostrate on their faces, Mark and I must have presented a queer sight. Neither of us wore any clothes save a pair of ragged shorts, for our leather suits were charred and torn nearly beyond repair. We each had a gun and cartridge belt round the waist, I shouldered my axe, and Mark carried a canvas bag which he handled with fearful care. Our muscles gleamed with sun and carron oil.

Although they had a good start, we soon caught up the ships and passed on until we came to the river. It opened as a creek from the sea, splitting the beach in two, but within a short fifty yards it narrowed and deepened, plunging into the mountain side through an enormous natural arch. Once inside, a gloom hid everything from sight.

I grunted. Sailing into that dark cavern looked anything but good to me.

The boats came up at last and we embarked, Mark in the first, myself in the second. The Lebanunes seemed to have no fear of following us; our feat of "killing" the mountains had settled all doubts in their minds. Dropping the sails, they produced long sculls in their stead, and all so briskly that in a few minutes the expedition was ready.

Sigur looked at Mark for orders; Mark nodded. The oars hit the water all together and we shot smoothly towards the entrance, the sea-tide helping us along. The dark arch rose above us, the murmur of water filled our ears. We glided inside, and a stifling darkness fell over us like a cloak.

We were underneath the mountains. Gradually our eyes became accustomed to the dim light and our men rowed manfully. Soon the river narrowed still more into a deep channel worn in the solid rock, twisting constantly in snake-like coils round the feet of huge buttresses of stone, whose topmost heights were lost in eternal darkness. Sometimes we plunged into low tunnels where the water laughed and gurgled evilly, and saw-toothed splinters of basalt threatened to brain me if I stood up. At others we were in vast cathedrals, in which the splash of our oars echoed in a million ghostly whispers.

Narrower grew the stream until our oars rasped frequently against the sloping walls, and once or twice I had to lean out and fond the boat off, shivering when my hand slid on the greasy stone. We had covered perhaps half a mile and I felt sure we were well inside the great range now. I wished we were jolly well outside again.

A sudden shout from Mark in the boat ahead echoed crashingly through the lone corridors and sent my crew cowering beneath their thwarts. Looking up hastily, hand on gun, I saw he had stopped his boat, and—wonder of wonders!—his face shone through the gloom, lit by a faint shaft of sunlight. Also, he was piling out of his boat with an eagerness that made me rally my fellows.

In a few strokes we were alongside. Mark was standing on a narrow ridge of rock, little more than a yard wide, and at his back gaped a curved opening through which the violet sun was streaming in. He held the canvas bag tenderly in his arms and was almost quivering with excitement.

"Get out—quick!" he commanded as we came up, and when I had done so he grabbed me by the arm and dragged me towards the opening. "See—there!"

I blinked in utter amazement. At that moment the puniest of the Lebanunes could have downed me with a blow. Behind me the River of Doom gurgled in its rocky bed; before me stretched a deep valley, covered with yellow-white ashes and pitted with ugly holes. There was something terribly nauseating about its ruggedness; it looked like a hideous scar, a sword-cut slashed across an evil face.

On either side of it, as high as we could

see, rose the mountain walls, strewn with loose rocks and letting in daylight through hundreds of gaping holes. We were at the entrance to the Valley of Flame. And it was as dead and cold as the rest of the Burning Mountains.

"My stars, Mark, we did mess it up! Going to explore?"

"Not for a million pounds!" he snapped. "That valley floor is nothing but a soft layer of sulphur ashes. We might go through into goodness knows what. Gad, I hoped I'd find it like this—I hoped I would!"

"You—you hoped so?" I stammered in surprise.

"Yes. Don't you see? This ridge we're on—this narrow dam of rock—is all that divides the River of Doom from the Valley of Flame. Sigur told us that the Fire People feared the river and made sacrifices to it. Can't you understand why?"

Light began to dawn on me, but before I could answer he rattled on.

"I saw it the moment we were alongside. The river was a constant menace to them. Supposing, through some explosion, this rocky strip burst. Why then, the river, and with it the sea, would flood the volcanic bed and good-bye Burning Mountains and Fire People, too."

He punched me joyously on the chest.

"Tom, that explosion's coming off!"

Raging Waters!

HIS excitement caught me up. It was true what he said. Perhaps, after all, the volcano might still be active, deep in the bowels of Lebanu, ready to bubble forth in future years and breed death and devils once more. Now was our chance to swamp it for all eternity.

Mark patted his bag gently.

"From what Sigur told me and from what I guessed, I foresaw something like that. Tom, the circus starts right now!"

I had ceased being astonished at my strange friend's uncanny knack of seeing ahead and being prepared for all emergencies. Quite as a matter of course, I watched him produce two sticks of dynamite wrapped in greasy paper, a detonator and a small electric firing-battery complete with wires, all of which I had seen many times in the Meteor's arsenal, but never given a thought.

In his quick decisive way he surveyed the land, nodded and gave his orders.

"Tom, you get those pygmies and the boats under cover round the next river bend. This is going to be ticklish!"

"You're right!" I growled, as I shepherded the wondering Lebanunes behind a great rock shield thirty yards upstream. Ticklish was the word. If Mark made the slightest error he might bring the whole mountain side crashing down.

But he was as cool as ice. In a wonderfully short time everything was connected up and ready. Mark regained a boat with his gadgets. Then an idea occurred to me.

I entered the water between the two vessels, with an arm over each gunwale. Too busy to notice me, Mark tested the firing-key. All was in order. He turned a grim smile on Prince Sigur.

"Prince," he said calmly, "bid thy followers hide their faces and fear not. Wonders are about to happen, and it is not meet that common mortals should witness the miracles of their gods!"

In a second all the Lebanunes were stretched in the bottoms of the boats, then Mark pressed the firing-key.

For a horrible moment my heart refused to beat. An explosion, doubly deafening in that confined space, tore our eardrums, a blinding light made the tunnel walls leap towards us. Down the river channel howled the back-blast and with it came the thing I feared—an enormous, dangerous wave.

Mark saw it first, whipping round the river bend. It was something he had overlooked and his roar of warning only added to the pygmies' terror. But I had known it would come; it was one to me. The second I saw it I hoisted myself half out of the water to get a firmer grip of the two boats, and when the wave hit I held them with all my strength.

My hat, it was a hectic two minutes. If I let go the boats would be smashed against the rocky walls like empty bottles, and our pygmies drowned without a struggle. The vessels slammed together with a jar that nearly cracked my ribs, and immediately they were whirled into the centre of the stream, helpless save for my two arms linking them together.

I hung on for dear life, Mark not daring to move in case his boat overbalanced, until, at long, long last, the pressure eased. I felt the tide take a decided turn and flow back, another big wave nearly beat me under. Then the flood was over.

Fighting our way to the projecting buttress, we clung there, staring downstream happily. Of the thin ridge of rock there was no sign, only a wild edge of foam where the waters roared over broken stones into their new course.

Mark had done his job well; a huge gap had been blown outwards. The River of Doom flowed through it now, spreading in a great fan of water as it gushed down into the Valley of Flame, drowning it, hiding it, quenching its dread fires for ever.

The Burning Mountains were conquered at last.

When Mark eventually arrived back to the Meteor again, Prince Sigur's people were stowed on board, boats and all. Then the ship lifted from the beach and turned towards Xemos.

The Lost Tribe of Lebanu was homeward bound—after many years!

THE END.

(Don't fail to read the last thrilling adventure in this gripping series. Order your copy now to make sure.)

More Enthralling Chapters Of Our Grand Adventure Serial!

Knights of the Road!



**A Romance
of Olden
Times.**

**By
DAVID
GOODWIN.**

Good-bye to Duncansby!

I FEAR you're ill, Ralph lad!" said Dick, who had been watching his brother. "And no wonder! Your teeth are chattering. What's wrong?"

"A touch of fever," said Ralph, linking his arm in his brother's. "And I'm sore and sick. But I count it not a fly, Dick, now you're with me again. And what I've seen since you came has done me more good than all the physic in England."

"We must get you into good shelter and care," said Dick. "I blame myself bitterly for not seeing to it before. I stopped at Dunsford and ordered a post-chaise to follow on, for I have but the one horse, and I meant having you out of this den of thieves in whatever case I might find you. But see here, Ralph, you will be in queer case with me! I am a hunted outlaw with a price on my head and the King's Riders at my heels. It will be well to keep you out of all that lest you suffer, so I will see you in good hands, and not bring you to danger."

"Danger!" cried Ralph. "Since when have the Forresters turned their faces from danger? My place is at my brother's side!"

Dick looked at his young brother affectionately, but shook his head.

"I shall see that you want for nothing, yet I am not going to let you saddle yourself

**Good-bye to the dark
doors of Duncansby—but
there's more trouble
awaiting Dick and Ralph
Forrester!**

with the perils that are mine. They are the salt of life to me now. A good pistol and Black Satan to carry me are all I need. But that's no life for you, Ralph."

Ralph was going to break in, but Dick rapped on the table loudly.

"Boys," he cried, "the time comes when I must leave you. But I will straighten matters with your guardians first. Go six of you, take this key, and bring the schoolmaster and his son into this room. In the meantime write all your names, and the names and homes of those who own you, upon a sheet of foolscap, and bring it here to me. I'll see right done to you all!"

Some of the boys, now that the feast was over, were beginning to wonder what would be in store for them when their gallant rescuer was gone. Their faces brightened again, and soon they brought Dick the list. Stephen Callard and his son, past all resistance, slunk into the room, walking stiffly and painfully.

"Give me your attention," said Dick as they were brought before him, "and mark well what I say. I have here a true list of all the boys in your school, and I shall make it my business to learn how matters progress here.

"If ever I hear of cruelty or wrong wrought on any of those in your charge or of any vengeance for what has passed to-day,

you will pay for it with your lives! I pass you my word upon that—the word of Dick Forrester! The darkest secret of this school will reach my ears, be it soon or late, and the penalty will be death! Go hence now, and think well upon it!”

The Callards looked at him, and his words sank into their black hearts. There was no mistaking the menace in Dick Forrester's eyes. They felt he would be as good as his word. The shadow of the young highwayman would be cast over Duncansby.

The schoolmaster and his son slunk from the room. There was a moment's silence, then three rousing cheers were raised for Dick and Ralph. The boys hoisted them up and chaired them round the school till Black Satan cantered up, neighing loudly.

“We part here, boys!” cried Dick as a smart post-chaise came rolling up to the door. “Keep a kindly thought for Dick Forrester, and remember that as long as he rides the roads you are safe from cruelty and wrong. Fare you well, all!”

And, amid a roar of cheers, Dick hoisted his brother into the post-chaise, mounted the magnificent black horse, and away went the brothers amid a clatter of hoofs and spinning of yellow wheels, leaving the dark house of Duncansby behind them.

Dick rode beside the chaise for a short distance, and then, calling to the postillion to pull up, he dismounted and joined Ralph in the chaise, Black Satan cantering along behind.

“What a splendid beast, Dick!” said Ralph, lost in admiration of the great horse. “Will he follow?”

“Follow?” said Dick. “He would follow me to the jaws of death, and pull me out of them if I needed it! You will know Black Satan better before we part, Ralph!”

And, taking up his story from the time he had left his brother with Vane in the coach, Dick told of his escape from the King's Riders, of Vane's plot for his destruction, and of his ride to the North after he left Turpin at Lincoln.

“He is the strangest fellow, Ralph! A rogue and a rascal to the backbone, but the merriest knave in the world, and frank as a new button about his rascalities. To those who are staunch to him he is the staunchest heart in England, and I am owing him my

life at the risk of his own twice over. 'Twas on his advice, and what he told me of Duncansby, that I rode hot-foot to see how you were faring. Why, here's the very rogue himself! Well met!”

The postillion pulled up with a jerk as a mounted horseman cantered round the corner, and as Dick flung the chaise door open, Turpin himself reined in Black Bess and gave a shout of welcome.

“Well met, Dick Forrester! 'Od's wounds! I told you I would not be far behind you, and here I am. Have you wrung the withers of the knaves at Duncansby? Is this your brother?”

“Hail, brother of the road!” cried Dick, laughing. “Here, Ralph, come and be presented to the wickedest rogue in all Britain!”

“Proud to meet you, young sir!” said Turpin, taking off his hat with a sweep to Ralph. “And may you never become such a sword-and-pistols ruffler as this brother of yours, who is a terror to every traveller in Britain, beshrew me!”

“The honour is mine!” replied Ralph, laughing. “I had never dared hope to meet such a celebrity face to face, Master Turpin. It is not the first time, though, for I envied you when you poked your pistol into my uncle's face in the coach a week ago.”

“Egad, was it so?” said Turpin. “Did I so far forget my manners? A poor wanted highwayman has to get his living, you see.”

“Faith, you needn't apologise; it was merry to see what colours my uncle turned!” laughed Ralph. “In truth, I have a good conceit of the gentlemen of the road, for my brother is one, and the best brother that ever a fellow had!”

“You look far from well, lad,” said Turpin, scanning the boy's drawn and weary-looking eyes. “Were I your brother, I would get you into shelter forthwith.”

“Ay, I am going to put him in good hands!” broke in Dick. “We must push on without delay. Let us ride on either side of the chaise, Turpin; we can talk as we go. There are weighty matters toward.”

“But what of this school?” cried Turpin. “May there not be a little settling to be done thereabouts? I have not yet heard how you found your brother.”

“I will tell you,” said Dick.

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 escapes, but is recaptured, and is being flogged, when Dick, his brother, comes to his rescue. The highwayman orders the boys to flog Callard, the schoolmaster, for his cruelty, and then to set to on a feed the master had planned for himself and his son. (Now read on.)

—And, as the chaise rolled on, he gave Turpin the whole history, what had befallen at the dark house on the moor up to the time Dick arrived. The highwayman listened with interest, and as the tale progressed, his cheeks flushed and his eyes grew fierce and hard, till at last he wheeled round with an oath.

“Stay! Where are you going?” cried Dick, grasping Black Bess’ bridle.

“Going? Egad, to thrust a handful of cold iron through the schoolmaster! Let go lad—let go!”

“Nay, nay!” cried Dick, laughing. “That matter is settled, good friend.”

Rather reluctantly, and muttering that the schoolmaster would be better with an ounce of lead in his carcass, Turpin consented to turn his face from Duncansby and ride on with the chaise.

“Where are you making for, lad?” he said.

“To the Crown Inn at Ulchester,” said Dick.

“You are learning your trade, I see,” said the highwayman. “’Tis a right good house, and safe for us Knights of the Road. You need not fear treachery there. Yet, mark me, do not stay too long, for the host will not be able to keep out any King’s man with a warrant, and it will not be long before they are on your track. And here, lad, we must part. I have urgent affairs at Durham, where a friend of mine is in trouble.”

“Godspeed to you,” said Dick, as Turpin doffed his hat and wheeled the mare. “When shall we meet again?”

“At the Ufford cross-roads, four nights hence, at eleyen in the dark hours!” called Turpin as he rode away. “I may have good news for you. Good-bye, Dick. Keep your powder dry, and mistrust all men—so shall you keep your neck unstretched. Adieu, Master Ralph!”

“Well, Ralph, what think you of the great Turpin?” said Dick to his brother, as the black mare carried her rider away like the wind.

“A rogue, but a very jolly companion,” said Ralph. “I would rather be his friend than his enemy, but I think he would be staunch as steel to those who were true to him.”

“You have hit the mark,” said Dick, “and I own that I am beginning to love the rogue greatly. But I’ll not have you mingled in our affairs, Ralph, nor lay you open to the law. There is the smoke of Ulchester ahead, and the sooner I get you under a good shelter, the better.”

Half an hour later they were at the Crown, a fine old hostelry on the outskirts of the town, where they were made welcome. Dick’s open-handedness and cheery ways were a better passport than any could bring; it was not long before he had Ralph in the best bed-room, and the most skilful physician the town could boast to attend him. The doctor reported favourably.

“Your young friend, sir,” said he, for Dick had not announced Ralph as his brother, not wishing to run him into possible danger, “has suffered much exhaustion and ill-treatment, I find. But he is of a most high courage, and, though not strong, the life in him is tough. The fever will soon abate under rest and proper food.”

The Two Strangers!

RALPH slept from the middle of the afternoon to near noon next day, and woke with a raging appetite. He wanted to rise and ride with his brother; but the doctor kept him in bed, and Dick upheld the man of medicine.

“It’s weary work lying here doing nothing,” said Ralph. “By the way, what think you Uncle Vane will do when he hears of this? He’ll be biting his nails when he hears I’ve left Duncansby!”

“He may bite his thumbs off for all I care!” said Dick. “Vane shall have no more to do with you. It’s clear enough to me that he counted on your death at Duncansby. He wants us both out of the way.”

“What ails the knave?” said Ralph. “He enjoys everything that should be ours, and reigns at Fernhall in our stead, upheld by the law. Isn’t that enough for him?”

“He thinks himself, perchance, not over safe while the rightful heirs are alive,” said Dick, “and, by my halidom, he’s right! We will find a way to put that rascal where he belongs!”

“Think you so?” said Ralph eagerly. “And what shall I do when we leave here? I tell you, Dick, I’d give my right hand to ride with you on the highways with a pistol and a good horse.”

“You’ll do nothing of the kind, lad,” said Dick firmly. “Many a youngster gets his head full of that kind of folly—a free life, you call it. I’ve been pitchforked into it and held there by Vane’s spite, and he’s got the best of me by this time, for I’m outlawed and there’s a price on my head. I’m not complaining. I’ve largely myself to thank, and the life suits me. But one of us has got to keep clear of the gallows, and I’m going to put you to a good school, Ralph. Not a pig’s den like Duncansby, but one of our own kind—Eton or Rugby or St. Anstell’s.”

“Ay, that sounds better!” said Ralph. “But how, Dick? A highwayman’s brother at a great school!”

“You’ll find that no drawback,” said Dick, grinning. “There’s some rare sport ahead of you, and I shall pay your fees from many a fat purse on the road. Ho, ho!”

“Egad! We’ll make the name of Forrester respected between us!” grinned Ralph. “I’m game. As soon as ever you like, Dick. What do you suppose Uncle Vane is doing all this time?”

“Doing his best to track me down,” said Dick. “But I doubt the knave has lost the

scent. He has many minions and rogues to do his dirty work, and he's in touch with the King's men, too, working to help them catch me. Any rascal with a knife and a cudgel is to be hired for the reward. I'll have a care while I'm with you; I'm not playing the highwayman in Ulchester!"

He went to a drawer near the bed, and placed therein one of his richly chased double horse-pistols, which he took from the pocket of his riding cloak.

"No need to carry two of these hereabouts," he said. "One is good for self-defence, but a pair smacks too much of the robber when one plays at being a peaceful citizen. And now, Ralph, I must leave you for awhile. Remember that your name is Harry Burton, travelling with me, but no brother or kin of mine."

Ralph frowned.

"I am not ashamed of my name, nor of you, Dick!"

"Perhaps not," said his brother, "but I am handling this matter, and you will obey my orders."

He went out, and Ralph lay back on the pillows, dozing. The afternoon wore on, and how long he lay asleep, Ralph knew not. A sound of footsteps on the stairs awakened him from a light slumber, and before he realised it the door had been softly opened, and two strangers entered.

(Who are the two strangers who have entered Ralph's room? What do they want? Don't miss the next absorbing instalment in this stirring serial.)



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K. K'S 'K'OMPANY!

(Continued from page 28.)

"Then—then why did you keep it up?" asked K. K. amazed. "I—I mean, you let me kiss you, and—"

"Yes, that was rather an ordeal," admitted the girl, "but for the sake of teaching my uncle a lesson I was willing to suffer even that."

"Thanks most awfully," said K. K. squashed.

"I don't understand," bleated Boots, feeling groggy at the knees. "You mean to say that you knew I was your uncle from the very start?"

"I did!" laughed Maisie. "We have a photograph of you that was taken last year. So, you see, there was nothing clever about it. I just wanted to know what the game was when this other boy posed as my uncle. It didn't take me long to find out, either," she added laughingly. "You were expecting little Maggie, instead of me, and you wanted to palm her off on somebody else."

"I—I was scared of her!" confessed Buster miserably.

"And as Mr. and Mrs. Stokes were willing to let the joke go on, I thought I would oblige and carry on with it, too," continued the girl. "The next time you have a little niece coming down to see you, I hope you won't try to wriggle out of your responsibilities. It was a long-time before I got mother to agree not to recognise you as her brother, but she thought it would do you good—as a final shock."

"Shock!" groaned Boots. "It nearly knocked me silly!"

"Well, it's all settled now, and you'd better come in and have supper with us—Uncle Buster," said Maisie mischievously. "Oh, and as you really are my uncle, I suppose I'd better be a dutiful niece and give you the correct salute."

She kissed him warmly, and all the misery left his heart. In fact, from that minute onwards, John Busterfield Boots became himself again!

THE END.

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