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A Rollicking Long Complete Yarn Featuring the Chums of St. Frank's!



TRIVERS' TROUBLE "TREASURE!"

By
EDWY
SEARLES BROOKS

Caned; lines; arrested—nothing but a pile of trouble for Vivian Travers, of the Remove, after he finds an ancient Egyptian "lucky" scarab!

CHAPTER 1.

The Scarab!

VIVIAN TRAVERS, of the St. Frank's Remove, gave a scornful sniff as he put his leg over the saddle of his motor-cycle.

"My poor fish, you don't expect to get home ahead of us on that crock, do you?" he asked pityingly.

Kirby Keeble Parkington grinned.

"Before you get to St. Frank's I'll have my jigger in the shed, and I'll be half-way through my prep," he replied coolly.

The engine of his own motor-cycle was purring smoothly, and it really wasn't such a crock as Travers made out. K. K. had glided up whilst Travers and Potts were preparing to mount their own machines. It was a dull November afternoon, and dusk was falling; the lights in Bannington High Street were beginning to gleam.

It was inevitable that there should be sarcastic remarks exchanged on such an occasion as this, for Travers and Potts were staunch Old-Timers, whilst K. K. was the leader of the rival Remove party, known as the Red-Hots. Whenever they could get in a dig at each other they did so.

Actually all three motor-bikes were of tip-top quality, and there wasn't a pin to choose between any of them. But it pleased the Old-Timers to refer to K. K.'s jigger as a "crock"—just as it pleased K. K. to talk of their machines as "old iron."

"You'd better get ahead, then," said Travers. "Potts, old man, we can go and do a bit more shopping, and we shall probably pass K. K. half-way home. He can't get more than ten miles an hour out of his animated lump of tin!"

"It'll be a wonder if he ever gets home," commented Jimmy Potts.

"I'll race you if you like," offered K. K., feeling that these odds of two to one were rather a handicap. As leader of the Red-Hots it was up to him to issue that challenge. Travers shook his head.

"Nothing doing," he said. "No racing for little me."

"Afraid you'll get licked?"

"I don't want to have my jigger barred by the Head," retorted Travers. "You know as well as I do that we're only allowed to have these motor-bikes on the understanding that we use them properly. If one of the masters spotted us racing he'd report to the Head, and our jiggers would be confiscated."

"Perhaps you're right," agreed Parkington. "Well, so-long! Give me a look in when you arrive home. I'll be there hours before you."

He glided off, and Travers grunted.

"Come on!" he said. "We're not going to stand that! We'll pass him at such a speed that he'll think he's standing still!"

"I thought you weren't going to do any racing?" asked the schoolboy baronet.

"No, but hang it all——"

"Don't be tempted, old man," said Sir James. "That sort of thing only leads to trouble."

Travers took the wise counsel, and he and Jimmy purred leisurely along the quiet country road towards Bellton and St. Frank's. Rivalry between the Old-Timers and the Red-Hots was keen, but there was no need to shout for trouble.

As it happened, Parkington's airy words fell flat; distinctly flat. For half-way home the other two junior motor-cyclists espied him at the side of the road, making some adjustments. They pulled up, grinning.

"Trouble?" asked Travers politely. "Or are you just doing this for the fun of the thing—just to let the tortoises get past?"

"One of these silencer clips came adrift," growled K. K. reluctantly.

"That's the worst of those cheap motor-bikes, Jimmy," said Travers. "You can never depend on 'em. They're always falling to pieces."

"I've noticed that the engine is as wheezy as a fellow with the asthma," agreed Potts. "Do you keep it together with wire, K. K., or with odd bits of string?"

"Oh, clear off!" said K. K., grinning sheepishly.

"The courtesy of the road impels us to lend a hand," replied Travers, dismounting. "Dear old fellow, let me offer you my bag of tools. You haven't got any on your mechanical dustbin, have you?"

Travers was about to move across—although K. K. had politely invited him to go to Timbuctoo—when he paused. Something glinting in the muddy roadway caught his eye. It gleamed redly.

"Here's a bit of your rear-lamp, dear old fellow," he said, kicking it. "Your old bus is falling completely to bits."

"I wouldn't swop this jigger for yours if you offered me twenty quid in addition!" roared Parkington, exasperated. "That's not a piece of my rear-lamp, either. My rear-lamp's one of the best made."

Travers picked up the object, grinning.

"Hallo, hallo!

I've struck treasure," he said. "By Samson! It's an old-fashioned trinket of some kind. Looks like gold, too."

He rubbed the thing on his coat

and removed some of the dirt. It certainly appeared to be made of dull gold, and was shaped like a crude design of a flying beetle. There were all sorts of quaint markings on one side; on the other there were some red stones. It was their red gleam which had caused Travers to make the sarcastic reference to K. K.'s rear-lamp.

"What do you make of it?" he asked, passing the thing to Potts.

"It looks pretty valuable," said Potts, after an examination. "And it's jolly heavy. By Jove! I believe these stones are real rubies, too. I've got it! It's a scarab."

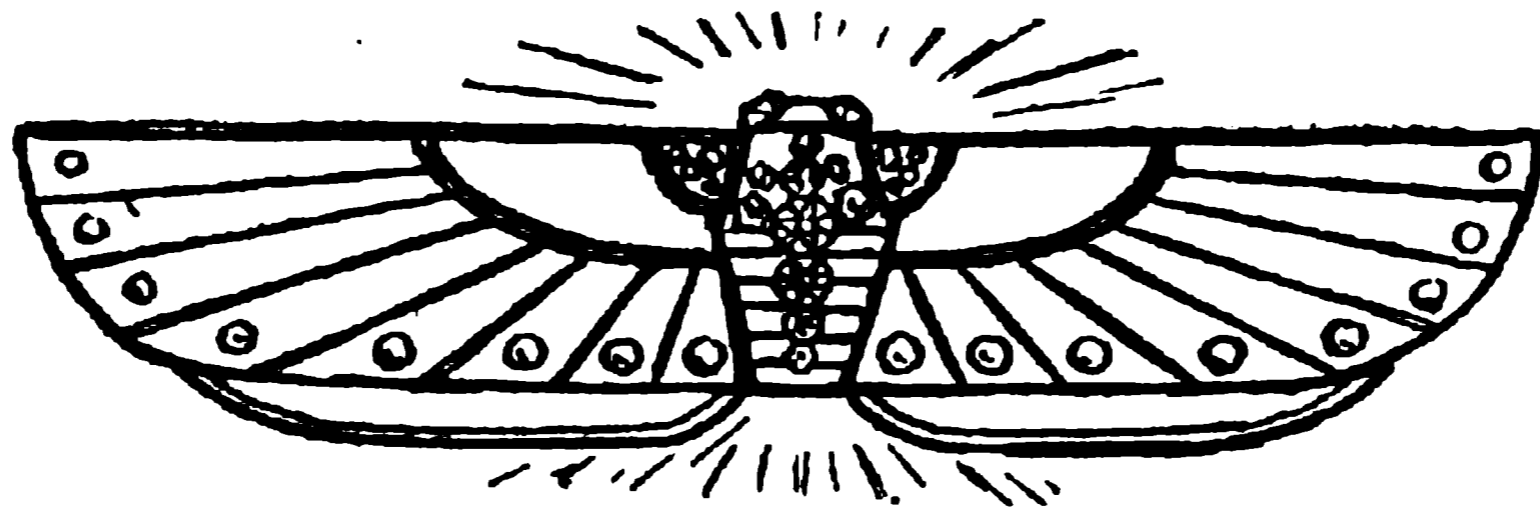
"A which?"

"I believe they find 'em in Egypt—in the tombs of the mummies," said Potts, almost excitedly. "Look at these hieroglyphics on the back."

"These which-ics?"

"Hieroglyphics—a kind of sign language," said Jimmy. "I was reading all about scarabs in some book the other day. The best thing you can do, old man, is to take this to the police station. It might be worth a pile."

"Not likely!" said Travers, taking it back. "Findings keepings!"



"You can't keep that!" protested Potts. "It wouldn't be—honest."

"How on earth are we to find the owner of a queer little thing like this?" demanded Travers. "I found it lying in the mud, and it might have been knocking about on the road for months—perhaps years."

"It might," agreed Jimmy. "On the other hand, it might have been lost only to-day."

"Well, it's been found to-day, and I'm going to clean it up, give it a good polish, and put it in my locker," said Travers coolly. "It's my sister's birthday next week, and I've been wondering what the dickens to buy her. I'll send her this."

It is quite possible that Travers was only trying to be funny; but Potts wasn't sure. In his way, Vivian Travers was a queer mixture. For twenty-nine days out of thirty he would run as straight as a die, and then he would do some silly thing which gave people a wrong impression about him.

He had even been known to sneak off to the Bannington Races and risk expulsion by backing horses. He occasionally smoked, but never in his Form captain's presence—or he would have lost his place in the Junior Eleven. Yet Travers was one of the most popular fellows in the St. Frank's Remove.

Jimmy Potts was uneasy. His own strict sense of honesty told him that the only right thing to do with this find was to take it at once to the police station. Perhaps Travers thought so, too; but he was a perverse fellow, and Jimmy's attitude piqued him. Even now he might have given way, but Jimmy unconsciously helped to make him obstinate.

"Oh!" said Jimmy tartly. "So you're going to give your sister a birthday present that you picked up in the road! That's a fine, generous gift—I don't think! A fat lot you must think of your sister!"

"Anything's good enough for a sister," replied Travers disparagingly. "If I bought her a bottle of scent she'd probably pour it down the sink—not being the sort she's partial to. If I bought her a handbag it wouldn't match her dresses, and it would be passed on to one of the maids. I've had some! But this little joker is safe. She's keen on carios."

K. K., having fixed his silencer, came over in the dusk.

"What's all this silly argument?" he asked. "I don't want to butt in, but can I have a look at that find?"

"Let's have expert opinion," said Travers dryly.

K. K. examined it closely, and as he did so his expression became serious. He switched on his electric headlamp, and inspected the scarab even more closely.

"This is gold right enough," he said, making a tiny scratch with a pin. "And look at these stones. By jingo! See how they sparkle now that the mud's off them. I believe they're real rubies."

"Then I'm in luck," said Travers.

"You don't mean what you just said about keeping it, of course," went on Parkington.

"I do."

"Rot! You're going to take this to the police, and report where you found it," said K. K. "For all you know, there might be a reward offered."

"And, for all I know, there won't be," retorted Travers. "I've heard of those rewards before! You find a thing worth fifty quid, and the grateful owner shows his appreciation by whacking out five bob! Not that I care a toss about the reward. My motto is 'findings keepings,' and that's why I'm keeping this thing."

"A lot of those old sayings are all bunkum," declared Jimmy Potts. "Findings keepings, indeed! It's a rank incitement to dishonesty! I've never heard of a more harmful dictum."

"A harmful which?"

"Dictum—it's Latin, but you wouldn't understand," said Potts caustically. "It means a dogmatic assertion."

"My poor chap, you must have swallowed a dictionary," said Travers, with sympathy. "But all this gets us no further. I'm keeping this 'treasure' for my sister's birthday, and you can both mind your own business."

He dropped it into his pocket, slung his leg over the saddle, and rode off.

CHAPTER 2.

Consulting the Oracle!

"I DON'T like it," said K. K. Parkington thoughtfully.

He was sitting in the easy-chair in Study K, and he had just finished his tea. Harvey Deeks and Clement Goffin, his study-mates, were still at the table.

"It's not particularly good," admitted Deeks, pushing his plate aside. "Where did you buy the giddy stuff, K. K.? If they sold you this as ham, they swindled you. They must have seen you coming."

K. K. looked up.

"I wasn't talking about the ham," he said. "Blow the ham! I was thinking about Travers."

"Oh, you mean that talisman thing he found?" asked Goffin.

K. K. had told his chums about it, and they weren't impressed. They felt that he was making a song over a trifle. Other fellows in the Remove had heard, too; but, like Deeks and Goffin, they had other and more important things to think about.

"I can't help feeling that that jewelled trinket is valuable," said K. K. "It's robbery to keep it. I never thought Travers was a chap like that."

"But he found it in the road," said Deeks.

"Oh, so you've got the same idea about finding things, have you?" demanded K. K., getting to his feet. "Supposing you walked across the Triangle and found Archie Glen-thorne's wallet with fifty quid in it? What would you do with it?"

"Give it back to Archie, of course."

"Of course you would," agreed K. K. "The only difference in the two cases is that you'd know the owner, and Travers doesn't. The principle's just the same. I'm going along to Travers' study to ask him what he's doing. This thing's worrying me."

Deeks and Goffin followed their leader to Study H, and they found Vivian Travers sitting at the table, busy with a small can of metal polish and some dusters. Jimmy Potts was looking on uneasily.

"I want a word with you, Travers," said Parkington.

"As many words as you like," replied Travers obligingly.

"There it is," said K. K., indicating the scarab. "Do you mind if these chaps have a look at it, Travers?"

Travers passed it over. Now that it had been cleaned up, it was more impressive-looking than ever. The tiny hieroglyphics on the base were mysterious and intriguing. The red stones gleamed and burned with a thousand fires under the electric lights.

"My hat!" said Deeks, with awe. "I don't blame Travers for sticking to it."

"What!" roared K. K.

"I—I mean, it looks valuable," said Deeks hastily.

"You, howling a s s, that's just the point," snapped Parkington, exasperated. "The more valuable it is, the more he ought to give it up. Travers, I'll bet a penny to a pound these are real rubies."

"I wouldn't bet," said Travers.

"You believe they are, too?"

"I'm jolly certain of it," said Vivian. "This thing's worth anything from fifty to a hundred quid. My sister ought to be pleased with it."

K. K.'s jaw looked very square.

"And thinking that these rubies are real, you're still determined to stick to your find and send it to your sister?" he asked angrily.

"Why not?"

"Why not?" roared K. K. "I'll tell you why not! It's the act of a thief—it's robbery!"

"Thanks for the compliments." Travers remained perfectly cool. More than once since cleaning the scarab he had half-decided to hand it over to Inspector Jameson, of the Bannington police. But this organised opposition got his rag out.

"And now do you mind clearing out of this study?" he added politely.

"The whole Remove is talking about this scarab, or whatever it is, and unless you do the right thing, Travers, you'll find yourself in hot water."

"Suits me," said Travers. "I don't like cold water this weather."

"You—you exasperating ass!" shouted Parkington.

"In any case, may I ask why the Remove takes such an interest in my affairs?" went on Travers. "Can't the Remove look after its own? You needn't think you can bully me into going your way instead of my own."

"Hang it all, Travers, I'm not trying to bully you," growled K. K. "Don't let's have a row, for goodness' sake. I know it's not my business—or the Remove's business, either—but everybody will feel more comfortable if you get the responsibility of this thing off your shoulders."

Travers grinned.

"That's just the point," he replied. "I don't feel any responsibility at all. Findings keepings, dear old fellow! If you don't like it, you can lump it."

"Grab him!" snapped Parkington. "We'll take that thing by force, and hand it to the police."

"Isn't that a bit rash?" asked Travers, his voice becoming grim. "I'd like to remind you that there are a dozen Old-Timers within call. If you start any of the rough-house stuff, you'll get kicked out on your necks."

K. K., realising it, breathed hard.

"You won't listen to reason, you won't be forced into honesty, and we can't use compulsion," he said. "What are we to do?"

"Clear out, and leave me in peace."

"Well, look here, will you consent to

having that thing examined by an expert?" asked the Red-Hot leader. "You can call it your own if you like, but we shall all feel more comfortable if you have it valued. The chances are that it's a cheap imitation, and worth nothing."

"Where's your expert?" asked Travers, amused. "If you think I'm going to hand this over to a Bannington jeweller—"

"What about Professor Tucker?" put in Jimmy Potts, inspired.

"It would be a waste of time to take it to him," said Travers. "All he cares about, apart from his school duties, is astronomy. I'll bet he's squinting at the sky now through his big telescope."

"But he's one of the cleverest Egyptologists in the country," urged Potts. "Don't you remember that lecture he gave the other day? He told us all about the tombs of the Pharaohs."

"H'm! That's true," admitted Travers. "Now you come to mention it, I believe he is an authority on Ancient Egypt."

"And this scarab looks as though it might have come out of an Egyptian tomb," said K. K. "Anyhow, the professor would know in a tick whether it was genuine or a fake. What about it?"

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Travers considered. His impulse was to refuse, but he was rather curious about his find on his own account, and it was perfectly true that Professor Tucker could give an expert opinion.

"All right," he said reluctantly. "I'll take it to him now."

"I'll come with you," said K. K., opening the door.

Travers smiled, but he said nothing. Evidently K. K. didn't accept his word—which wasn't much of a compliment.

PROFESSOR SYLVESTER TUCKER, the Science Master of St. Frank's, was, as Travers had predicted, busy with his big telescope. Somebody in Merionethshire had reported a new star, and for three solid nights the professor had been trying to find it. He had lost a good deal of sleep owing to that elusive star, and his temper, in consequence, was shortened. It had been noticed, too, that he had been more absent-minded than ever.

"What is it?" he asked peevishly, as Travers and K. K. came into his study after receiving a grudging invitation to enter. "Good gracious me! Am I to be bothered with you boys at this time of the day?"

His big telescope was mounted near the window, and the professor was sitting in front of it. He was impatiently waiting for a big bank of clouds to pass over.

"We won't keep you a minute, sir," said Travers. "We'd like to know if you can give us an opinion on this."

"On which?" asked Professor Tucker, turning round in his swivel chair and looking at them over the top of his glasses. "I can't give you an opinion on anything just now. I'm busy. Be good enough to go away."

"But just give it one look, sir!" urged K. K. "Travers thinks that it's a scarab of some sort."

"Eh? What's that? A scarab?" said the professor, pricking up his ears. "Let me see. I don't believe it, but—Dear me!"

He took the quaint curio, turned it over in his fingers, and then went and sat down at his desk, switching on a powerful reading lamp. Travers and K. K. watched him eagerly as he removed his glasses and stuck a watchmaker's magnifying lens into his eye.

"H'm! H'm! Rather disappointing," he commented, as though to himself. "Quite ordinary. A scarab, certainly, but by no means distinctive." He looked up and levelled the protruding lens at the juniors. "To whom does this belong?" he demanded.

"It's mine, sir," replied Travers untruthfully. "I didn't know what it was, and the chaps told me that you might help me. Do you think it really came from an Egyptian tomb?"

"Until I have examined it more thoroughly I can't say where it came from. I can't even be sure that it's strictly genuine," said the professor. "There are so many rogues about nowadays that these

scarabs are faked. Good gracious me! This is interesting," he added, as he turned the thing over. "Hieroglyphics! What an extraordinary number on such a small surface!"

"You couldn't tell us what they mean, I suppose, sir?"

"You can leave this with me, young man," said the professor, removing the lens from his eye and redonning his spectacles. "Upon my soul! Those clouds have gone! How dare you waste my time like this? Be gone!"

"But I want that scarab, sir——"

"Fiddlesticks! Leave it with me," said Professor Tucker. "I want to examine it at my leisure. Come again to-morrow, or on Wednesday."

"To-morrow is Wednesday, sir," said Travers.

"Eh? Is it? What do I care whether it's Wednesday, or whether it's St. Swithin's Day?" demanded the impatient scientist. "Haven't you any more sense than to bother me with such trifles?"

He waved them out of the room, and not only closed the door, but locked it.

"This is your doing, you ass!" said Travers irritably.

K. K. grinned.

"Well, your scarab is safe, isn't it?" he asked. "And, anyhow, you can rely on the professor to give you a correct reading of those hieroglyphics. He'll know if the thing is valuable or otherwise, too."

"I have an idea that you've raised a storm in a teacup," said Travers. "You heard what the professor said. I don't believe the thing's worth a red cent. Shall I still take it to the police station if it proves to have come out of a child's prize-packet?"

"Don't be an ass!"

"But why not?" asked Travers, with a cynical grin. "The principle's the same, isn't it? If I'm a good little boy, and hand it to the police, they might find the owner, and I shall probably be rewarded with a couple of peardrops."

And Travers, feeling that he had scored, walked off.

CHAPTER 3.

The Emblem of Ra!

PARKINGTON made a point of dropping in upon Professor Tucker directly after breakfast the next morning. He wasn't so sure that that scarab was as valueless as Travers believed.

"Come in—come in!" came the professor's eager voice when K. K. knocked.

K. K. went in, and the professor eyed him expectantly.

"Splendid!" he said. "You've been remarkably quick, my boy. Well, where is it?"

"Where's what, sir?"

"Good gracious me, didn't I send you for a book from Mr. Wilkes?"

"Not me, sir."

"Aren't you Biggleswade?" asked the professor, adjusting his glasses and peering at him impatiently. "No, of course you're not Biggleswade. What on earth do you mean by bothering me like this? Who are you, anyhow?"

"I'm Parkington, of the Remove, sir."

"You've no right to be in the Remove," said the professor severely. "A big fellow like you! Why aren't you in the Sixth?"

"I'm only just over fifteen, sir."

"Good gracious! I thought you were nearly eighteen!" said the professor, eyeing K. K.'s frame with awe. "What a remarkably well-developed boy! Can't you do something about that hair of yours, my poor fellow? But never mind—red hair, I believe, is an affliction which cannot be satisfactorily remedied. Well, you can go."

The professor bustled across to the other side of the room, but paused half-way.

"And you say you couldn't get the book from Mr. Wilkes?" he asked.

"You sent Biggleswade for the book, sir."

"Good gracious! So I did," agreed the professor. "And Biggleswade ought to have been back long ago. I shall have something very severe to say to him when he turns up."

"I came about that scarab, sir," explained K. K. "You remember—Travers and I brought it to you last night. Have you had time to look at those hieroglyphics, sir?"

The professor pointed to his desk.

"That wretched scarab of yours kept me up till two o'clock this morning," he said gruffly. "If the sky hadn't become completely overcast I shouldn't have looked at it at all. You'll find the translation of the



Travers opened the door of his study, and then recoiled as a volume of smoke poured out. "My hat! The study's on fire!" yelled Potts in alarm.

hieroglyphics on that sheet of notepaper. It's not very interesting! In fact, the scarab is of very small account. But the translation is curious in its way."

K. K. picked up the notepaper and glanced at it.

"Is the scarab valuable, sir?" he asked casually.

"Valuable? Of course it's not valuable," said Professor Tucker impatiently. "What on earth gave you that idea?"

"I thought it might be, sir."

"You shouldn't have opinions on things you don't understand," said the professor sternly. "For all I know, the scarab is made of bronze."

"Aren't those stones real, sir?"

"Real glass, I dare say," said the expert. "Apart from its archæological interest, the thing is of no consequence whatsoever to me. The translation is commonplace, and there the matter ends. The sooner you take the scarab away, the better."

BUT Kirby Keeble Parkington was wise. It wasn't his scarab, and he left it with the professor—and also the precious translation. Travers would think a lot more of the professor's opinion if he obtained it direct. However, it was a relief to know that the scarab, intrinsically, was of little value.

Later in the morning K. K. casually asked Travers if he had had the report yet. Travers hadn't, but he went along to the professor as soon as lessons were over. He came back with the scarab and with the translation of the hieroglyphics.

"The old boy nearly bit my head off," he grinned. "Practically said the thing isn't worth twopence, and gave me this example of his scrawl. The only interesting thing about the scarab is the translation."

"What does it say?" asked Jimmy Potts curiously.

"I haven't looked yet, but I expect it's a lot of Egyptian jumble, without any meaning," replied Travers. "Just names, or something like that. I asked the professor what he thought about it, but he told me not to bother him. The hieroglyphics have certain points of interest—to use old Tucker's own words—but their meaning, at the best, is somewhat obscure."

"Which is another way of saying that he's not such an expert as we thought he was," smiled Jimmy. "Let's have a look, anyhow."

They were in their study, and before they could give any attention to the professor's report, K. K. & Co. arrived.

"Thought we'd drop in," said Parkington politely.

"Then the sooner you drop out again, the better," growled Travers. "All this fuss over nothing! This scarab is only interesting as a curio, without any actual value."

"It's just as well to know that," said K. K. "There won't be any harm in your sending it to your sister for a birthday present."

"You argue in a queer way," said Travers tartly. "If the thing's valuable, I'm a thief by keeping it! If it isn't valuable, I'm quite at liberty to send it to my sister! You don't know what you're talking about, you poor Red-Hot!"

"My dear ass, it's merely a matter of proportion," said K. K. patiently. "People don't take to the police trousers' buttons, or sixpences, or handkerchiefs they happen to find in the road. They're trifles, and they're not worth it. But an umbrella, or a pair of gloves, or a purse are valuable, and decent citizens do the right thing. If the real owner can't be found, the property becomes theirs."

"Well, you can make your mind easy about this scarab," grinned Travers, amused by K. K.'s moral lesson. "The professor told me frankly that it wasn't worth handing in to the police. He said the police had something better to do than mess about with silly trifles which happened to be picked up on the road."

Parkington grinned.

"That's one for me, I suppose?" he asked.

"If the cap fits, dear old fellow, you can wear it," replied Travers. "As for this translation, the professor says the hieroglyphics are genuine enough, but their origin is obscure."

He unfolded the notepaper and glanced at it. The other juniors were on the point of leaving. The scarab incident was apparently closed. Suddenly Vivian Travers gave a little whistle.

"This isn't so bad, you know," he remarked. "The old boy has given a pretty full translation. The scarab, he says, was once possessed by the Te-Hut-Mes family, whoever they may be when they're at home. At any rate, they seem to have been unlucky, because the last one was wiped out a few thousand years B.C. But the most interesting part of the translation is lower down."

"Oh, come on," said Deeks. "We don't want to hear this dry piffle."

"The scarab is the Emblem of the God of Ra," continued Travers. "Listen to this: 'It is written that whosoever possesses the sacred Emblem is doomed. It shall pass from hand to hand, and disaster and desolation shall be left along its trail.'"

"Sounds pretty cheerful for you, Travers," grinned K. K. "So you're doomed, are you? I'd chuck that thing away if I were you."

"Idiot! This only refers to ancient times," replied Travers. "What I can't understand is how the professor got all this from those queer-looking signs."

"It's a free translation. I expect, but it's astonishing what these old fossils can get out of a few hieroglyphics," put in Jimmy Potts. "You see, in lots of cases one sign stands for eight or nine words."

"Poor old Travers," said K. K. sympathetically. "So you've got the Curse of Ra upon you? Well, I must say that you asked for it."

Vivian Travers laughed.

"Not being a superstitious idiot, I'm perfectly at ease," he retorted. "Not that the Curse isn't ominous. It says here that on the second day of possession the owner will encounter tragedy; on the third day his footsteps will be dogged by ill-luck from sunrise to sunset; on the fourth day disaster will overtake him—and on the fifth day, Death, with a capital D. Pretty cheerful, what?"

"My only hat!" said Goffin, impressed.

"So it is written, and so it has come to pass with every successive mortal who has possessed the Emblem of Ra—for the wrath of Ra is inevitable," quoted Travers, and he looked up from the paper. "Well, well! What a life!"

"You'd better chuck the thing away," said Deeks uneasily.

"Rot! I'm sending it to my sister."

"But—but don't forget the Curse," said Deeks. "This is the second day you've possessed the thing, and you're going to encounter tragedy. You silly ass, if you stick to that scarab you'll be dead by the fifth day."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Deeks spoke so impressively, and with such a scare in his voice, that the others roared with laughter.

"Do you think I care twopence about this ancient Egyptian tosh?" asked Travers mockingly. "It's all superstitious piffle. Even if curses could be put on people in the dark ages of the past, that sort of thing is impossible now. The art of Black Magic has been dead for centuries."

"It seems to me that the previous owner of that thing must have known what he was in for, and he did the sensible thing and threw it away," said Goffin. "Dash it all, Travers, there's no sense in tempting Fate."

"Tempting rats!" retorted Travers. "Great Scott! You don't think there's anything in this Curse, do you?"

"Not—not exactly."

"Then what's the fright for?"

"Merely a question of being on the safe side, I suppose," said Parkington. "Personally, I agree with you, Travers; this old Curse is just about as effective as a stage magician's mystic word. But it sometimes happens that these curses come pretty nearly true. Pure coincidence, I expect, coupled with the fact that the owner is nervous, and generally helps the thing along—auto-suggestion kind of thing. That's why it might be better to throw the scarab away and make your mind free."

"My mind's quite free now," said Travers, amused. "The scarab may not be worth a pot of money, but it's an interesting little treasure, and I'm sticking to it. I'm rather curious to see if I shall encounter tragedy to-day," he added ironically.

Jimmy Potts shook his head.

"I don't like it," he said uncomfortably. "It's—it's tempting Fate!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It's all very well to cackle, but these old Egyptian curses have a way of being fulfilled," said Jimmy. "Don't forget what happened when they opened the tomb of Me-Rhab-Amen."

"What happened, James?"

"It was in all the papers some months ago," replied Potts. "They opened the tomb and found bags of treasure. Lord Maplestead, who financed the expedition, died suddenly while he was in the tomb. Heart failure, they said, owing to over-excitement. But how do we know that it wasn't the Curse of the gods? A week later another man died—Lord Maplestead's second-in-command. An insect bite, or something. Then there were two or three other deaths, in all parts of the world; and in each case it was proved that the men had had something to

do with the opening of Me-Rhab-Amen's tomb."

"By Jove, there's something in what the lad says!" exclaimed K. K. "Look here, Travers, is it wise to take the chance? I mean, you're safe now—you haven't owned the thing for twenty-four hours yet. If you chuck it away at once, the Curse won't have a chance to get busy."

Vivian Travers snorted.

"Bunkum!" he said in exasperation. "If any of you fellows are willing to bet, I'll lay even odds in quids that nothing happens."

"We wouldn't risk our money—and we don't bet in any case," said Parkington, shrugging his shoulders. "It's up to you, my child. If you're willing to risk this impending doom, it's your own look out!"

CHAPTER 4.

The Trouble Begins!

BEFORE the afternoon was out everybody in the Remove had heard about Vivian Travers "treasure," and the Curse which was attached thereto. The Remove regarded it as a good joke, and Travers came in for plenty of chipping. Not one fellow in a dozen, of course, paid any serious heed to the impressive warnings of the God of Ra.

"There's always one consolation, old man," said Nipper solemnly. "If you get through the fifth day without meeting a sticky end, the scarab will be yours for keeps. And you'll not only be safe, but you'll have a charmed existence."

"Really?" asked Travers, grinning. "It doesn't say anything about that in the translation."

"Oh, but these Curses are all the same," said Nipper. "If you can only convince the gods of Wrath that you are stronger than they, you're given up as a bad job. In fact, the gods take you to their hearts as a brother, and instead of making you fall into a hole in the road they guide you round it."

"Fathead!" said Travers, walking away.

He had occasion to go to the village as soon as lessons were over, and while petrol was being poured into his motor-bike at the filling station, the garage man took particular care to remove his cigarette and place it a long way from the pump.

"You've got jolly careful all at once, haven't you?" asked Travers, noticing the man's elaborate precaution. "There's no danger of fire from a cigarette."

"Mebbe not, young gent, but I ain't takin' any chances—not after yesterday, anyway," replied the man.

"What happened yesterday?"

"Ain't you 'eard about poor old Matthews?"

"I ain't even heard—that is to say, I haven't even heard of Matthews."

"The old boy what lived in the little hut

along the Caistowe road," said the garage man. "The place caught fire last night and he was burned to death. Nobody knows how it started, and the first we knew was when the postman saw the ruins."

"I'm sorry to hear it," said Travers. "Anybody dependent on him?"

"Bless you, no," replied the other. "The old feller has lived by himself for years."

Travers thought little of the incident until he happened to mention it casually in the Common-room that evening.

"Old Matthews burned to death?" repeated Fullwood. "I say, that's rough! I was speaking to him only yesterday, asking him about the weather. He was regarded as a local weather prophet. What a tragedy!"

"Tragedy!" said Jimmy Potts, with a start, and then gave Travers a queer look. "Who was the first St. Frank's fellow to hear of it?"

"How on earth should we know?" said Fullwood. "Travers was the one who brought the news into this room——"

"I knew it! Travers!" interrupted Deeks excitedly.

"What's the matter with you asses?" asked the amazed Fullwood.

"I'm not sure they're such asses," said Kirby Keeble Parkington, joining the group. "Doesn't it strike you as significant that Travers should be the one to hear of this tragedy?"

"Oh! You mean that silly old Curse?" asked Fullwood, seeing daylight.

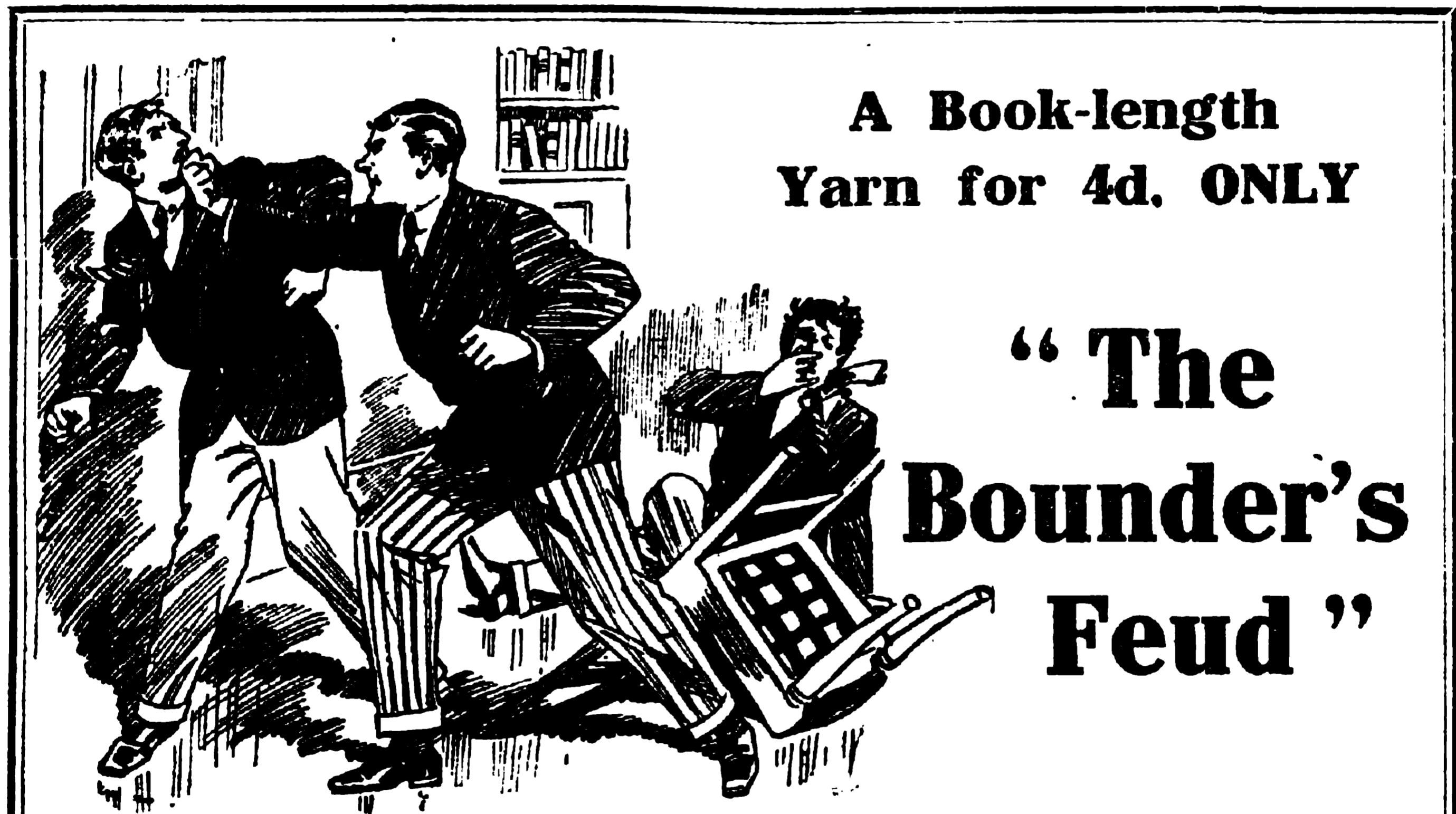
"What are the words? 'On the second day of possession the owner will encounter tragedy,'" said K. K. "That's how it goes—'So it is written, for the Wrath of Ra is inevitable.'"

"My only sainted aunt!"

"Rather a coincidence, isn't it?"

"Too much of a coincidence," said Goffin. "That Curse is coming true! On the second day Travers does actually encounter tragedy. My only hat! What's in store for him to-morrow?"

Travers sniffed.



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"I know what's in store for me to-morrow," he said tartly. "I shall have you idiots jabbering at me from morning till night, and exaggerating everyday trivialities into manifestations of the Curse. That's what'll happen!"

Parkington was looking really serious.

"You can't deny that the thing looks rummy," he said earnestly. "Burn my buttons, I know it's only a coincidence—but aren't these things always made to look like coincidences? Chuck that thing away to-night, or give it over to the police, and you'll be free."

"It might be worth it," agreed Travers, nodding. "At least, I should be free from your tommy rot!"

"We're only pointing out——"

"You're making mountains out of mole-hills," interrupted Travers. "If you want to know the truth, I'm looking forward to to-morrow with interest," he added defiantly. "According to the Curse, my footsteps will be dogged with ill-luck from sunrise to sunset. Well, we'll see."

In order to escape the unwelcome attentions of his schoolfellows, he departed from the Common-room and attempted to find peace in Study H. Not that he found it. Jimmy Potts followed him in, and Jimmy was uneasy.

"If you say a word to me about that scarab I'll turn you inside out!" threatened Travers. "You know as well as I do that the chaps are ragging me, and there's nothing at the back of the Curse except a lot of silly jaw."

"All the same, it looks funny," said Potts uncomfortably.

"Not half so funny as your face will look if you make me start work on it!" retorted Travers. "Why, you ass, to-morrow's going to be a red-letter day. I'm getting the usual fiver from my pater—and I need it, too. We shall be in funds, and everything in the garden will be lovely."

"I dare say it will—but will everything be lovely with you?" asked Potts. "That's the point that's worrying me."

IT was only natural that that chance news concerning the unfortunate old Mr. Matthews should give rise to a lot of talk and speculation. Everybody admitted that the affair was just a coincidence; but, at the same time, it struck an ominous note. Interest in Travers and his scarab, which had commenced to wane, was given a fresh lease of life.

The next morning numbers of juniors were watching and waiting for developments. The first sign soon arrived. Travers came down as cool and as cheery as ever. He and Potts strolled over to the letter-rack, and Travers extracted the expected missive from his father.

"As per usual," he said contentedly.

"Is it?" asked Jimmy. "Doesn't he usually register that letter?"

"By Samson! So he does!" ejaculated Travers, the smile vanishing from his face.

He tore the letter open, extracted the sheet of notepaper, and his expression was blank. There was no fiver! He read the letter disgustedly.

"Of all the swindles!" he grunted. "It's a giddy lecture about my latest report! I'm too slack, and until I buck up I shan't get any more pocket-money."

Kirby Keeble Parkington whistled.

"Cross bones and pirate skulls!" he ejaculated picturesquely. "There you are! The Curse again!"

"What!" roared Travers.

"Ill-luck and misfortune will dog your footsteps——"

"You blithering ass!" yelled Travers. "This letter was written by my pater yesterday."

"But you received it to-day, and that makes the Curse come true," said K. K. promptly. "If you don't call it ill-luck to be let down over a fiver, I do! My poor-old haddock, you're distinctly for it!"

"And it serves you right," added Deeks, with a sniff. "If you had done the right thing in the first place—if you had taken that scarab to the police station—you would have been all right. Finding keepings, indeed! I haven't any sympathy for you!"

"Did I ask for sympathy?" demanded the exasperated Travers.

He stalked off, thoroughly fed up. He could see that the fellows were only too ready to seize upon every trifling incident and attribute it to the Curse. Travers was far more worried about the non-arrival of the fiver, however, than he was by the Curse.

"This means poverty for the rest of the week," he said gloomily. "You don't get any more cash until Saturday, Jimmy, and we're both broke."

"It's that rotten scarab——"

"Rot!"

"If I were you I'd get rid of it," said Potts.

"Are you fool enough to believe that if I get rid of that scarab I shall find a mysterious fiver in this empty envelope?" asked Travers bitterly. "Or do you think it'll come by the next post? You make me tired with your superstitions."

And he was so touchy that Jimmy Potts let the matter drop.

It was surprising—not to say startling—that Travers should show signs of illness during breakfast. He was all right when he started, except for a feeling of depression occasioned by that fiver's non-arrival, but before the meal was half over he exhibited distress signals. Clearly, however, he was doing his best to conceal them.

"Anything wrong, old chap?" asked Potts, who was sitting next to him.

"I'm all right," muttered Travers thickly.

Potts eyed him closely. He didn't look all right. He looked exceedingly groggy. He was eyeing the food in front of him with an expression which suggested that he had been handed a plate of cooked caterpillars.

"Ugh!" he breathed, shuddering.

"What's up with that ass?" asked Handforth, from the other side of the table. "He's making faces at his bacon and looks as pale as a sheet. Has that giddy Curse started work on his grub now?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Mr. Crowell inquired into the source of the hilarity.

"Aren't you feeling well, Travers?" he asked, as he noticed the junior's pallid complexion. "Come along, speak up!"

keep so habitually well. Heaven alone knows you eat enough indigestible rubbish between meals to ruin your constitutions. I expect Travers has been stuffing himself with the usual unhealthy concoctions."

"He's eaten nothing this morning, sir," protested Jimmy Potts. "At least, nothing until he had his porridge. Perhaps there was something wrong with that."

"Nonsense!" said Mr. Crowell sharply. "If there had been something wrong with the porridge, all of you would have been affected."



"He's gone white about the gills, sir," commented Handforth.

"I didn't ask for any observations from you, Handforth—and I would remind you that Travers is not a fish," said Mr. Crowell coldly. "Come, Travers—if you are not feeling well you had better leave the table."

"Thank you, sir!" gurgled Travers feebly.

He rose to his feet and staggered away, his hands pressed upon the region of his middle.

"If it were early summer, I should imagine that Travers had been eating green apples," said Mr. Crowell. "The amazing thing to me is that all you boys should

"It's that Curse working," said K. K. firmly.

"What did you say, Parkington?"

"Er—nothing, sir."

"I'm not deaf, you idiot!" snapped the Form-master. "You said something about a curse."

"Only my fun, sir."

"Then don't make fun of such ridiculous subjects," said Mr. Crowell. "I'll see Travers after breakfast, and if he isn't better I shall have him report to the doctor."

When the Remove went out after the meal, Travers was found leaning limply against

Potts tripped and upset the ink over Travers' new fancy waistcoat.



the Ancient House steps, looking very sorry for himself.

"It must be that porridge, old man," said Potts sympathetically.

"It can't be now—I've said good-bye to it," groaned Travers. "But why should porridge upset me? It never has done before."

"It must have acted upon something you'd eaten previously," said Nipper.

"But I'd eaten nothing previously."

"What did you have last night?"

"Supper in Hall, and all I had for tea was bread-and-butter and a couple of new-laid eggs."

"Very mysterious," said Parkington. "In fact, so mysterious that there's no logical explanation. Which means that the Curse is starting its dirty work."

"Oh, shut up!"

"Blister you, but isn't it significant?" went on K. K. "First your fiver fails to turn up—cash you had absolutely relied on—and now your grub shies as soon as it gets into your tummy. The Curse of Ra plainly says that on the third day the owner of the scarab will meet with misfortune from morning till night. This old boy, Ra, has started the day well."

CHAPTER 5.

Very Mysterious!

WHEN Mr. Crowell suggested a visit to the doctor, Travers scoffed at the idea. Visits to the doctor often meant detention in the sanatorium, or other restrictions on one's liberties.

"I'm all right, sir," said Travers, pulling himself together. "I'm not half so groggy now. I expect I shall make up for breakfast at dinner-time."

"If your appetite has not returned by then, I shall certainly send you to the doctor," declared Mr. Crowell, walking away.

"Let's get indoors," said Travers gruffly to Jimmy Potts.

He was sorry that he had found that ancient scarab. But he was hanged if he would throw it away or get rid of it at all. He wasn't going to have the chaps laughing at him.

"You can't get away from it, old man—there's something queer about this," said Potts, as they entered the Ancient House and walked towards their study. "Why should you be ill? You've eaten nothing to make you ill, and it's—it's worrying."

"The less you worry, the better I shall like it," retorted Travers.

He opened the door of Study H, strode in, and recoiled.

"For the love of Samson!" he yelled.

The study was full of smoke. It was so thick that the opposite wall could not even be seen; and the smoke came rolling out into the passage in suffocating billows.

"My hat! The study's on fire! Our new furniture!" gasped Potts in alarm.

He and Travers were very proud of their study. Recently their people had footed the bill for new easy-chairs, carpet, and other luxuries. With the exception of Archie Glen-thorne's, it was the classiest study in the Remove passage.

Potts dashed through the smoke and flung open the window. Meanwhile, Handforth and Fullwood and Nipper and others gathered round the doorway, making inquiries. At first they thought Study H was on fire again. Handforth had set fire to it once with some home-made squibs, and there had been a rare to-do in getting the new furniture replaced—Handy's pater being spoofed, in the end, into shelling out.

"It's only the chimney," said Travers irritably. "Don't make such a silly fuss. Nothing's on fire."

"But look at the soot!" wailed Potts. "Everything's ruined!"

"There's more smoke than soot, and we'll soon have the air clear," said Travers, as he waved his arms about like millsails. "What I can't understand is how it happened. The chimney's never smoked before."

"It's the Curse!" said half a dozen voices in unison.

"What!"

"Ra seems to be a cunning old fox," commented K. K. "I expect he was coming

down Travers' chimney to start some mischief, and he got stuck."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Go it! Have your cackle!" jeered Travers, who was still feeling far from well, and whose nerves were ragged. "They say that fools laugh at nothing!"

By this time the study was practically clear, and although there was a good sprinkling of soot everywhere, half an hour's careful work with a duster would remove all traces of it.

Strangely enough, the fire was burning clearly now; and even when the juniors, by way of experiment, closed the window and door, it still refused to misbehave. The coals glowed well, and the smoke rolled up the chimney freely.

"Look at it how you will, it's mysterious," said Handforth, greatly impressed. "There's no wind this morning, so there can't be a down draught. Has this chimney ever smoked before, Travers?"

"Not while I've had the study."

"Ha! Yet it makes up its mind to smoke this morning—of all mornings!" said Handforth significantly. "Up till now I've been inclined to laugh at this curse. But it's getting mysterious. Why did this chimney smoke?"

"I expect one of Farmer Holt's pigs grew wings, and sat on the top of the chimney by mistake!" retorted Travers sarcastically. "In the name of Samson, why make a mystery out of nothing? I expect there was a sudden current of air, or perhaps a quantity of soot fell down. Merely a coincidence."

Parkington shook his head.

"We can accept one coincidence, and even two at a pinch; but we're not swallowing three," he replied. "Travers, why can't you admit that there's some evil influence working against you?"

"I do admit it," growled Travers.

"Eh?"

"All you funny-faced idiots are working against me, by exaggerating molehills into mountains—and if that's not an evil influence, I'm a kippered herring!" said Travers. "Now you can all clear out, and lose yourselves!"

IT was strange that the Study H chimney showed no further signs of smoking after that one mysterious spasm.

Travers and Potts could not even make it smoke, although they tried to by causing erratic air currents. Finally, they gave it up as a bad job—but mainly because the bell was ringing for morning lessons.

"I think you'd better cut morning school," suggested Potts, as they walked across to the School House.

"Cut it? What on earth for?"

"You're bound to meet with further misfortunes in the class-room—and you've got a good excuse for Crowell," said Jimmy. "After being ill at breakfast-time you've only got to give him a hint and he'll let you off like a shot."

"And how am I to escape the Curse by being let off lessons?" asked Travers tartly.

"Well, you can lounge in an easy-chair all the morning."

"And if a hot coal jumps out of the fire and burns me while I'm dozing, it'll be put down to the Curse, I suppose?" snapped Travers. "I shall be just as safe in the class-room as anywhere else."

"Oh! You admit there's danger, then?"

"No, I don't!" roared Travers. "Dash it, you're getting as bad as the others!"

He maintained a grumpy silence after that, and Potts said no more. They entered the School House and found, when they reached the Remove class-room, that Mr. Crowell had not yet arrived. They knew this before they got there, owing to the din.

Somebody was busy at the blackboard, and Travers grunted when he heard the chuckles that went up on his appearance. An unknown artist had drawn a picture of Ra—a fearsome-looking, ghost-like monstrosity with clutching skeleton hands, and a body that trailed away to a thin wisp. Alongside it were the words, "Ra! Ra! Ra! Look out for Ra! He's Ra-ther busy to-day!"

"Little things please little minds," said Travers scornfully.

He went to his desk and sat down, deciding that this exhibition of childish nonsense should be ignored. Jimmy Potts, having filled his inkpot from Mr. Crowell's big supply (a practice strictly forbidden), went to his own place. At the crucial moment he stumbled and sprawled on to the next fellow.

"Look out!" yelled Travers, in alarm.

It was too late. The entire contents of the inkpot had splashed over his new fancy waistcoat. Potts stared, aghast.

"I say, I'm awfully sorry!" he ejaculated. "I tripped on something, and I'll swear I didn't hit my foot against the desk. There was something right in the way—and now it's gone."

Travers eyed him suspiciously.

"You did it on purpose!" he said, between inquiry and challenge.

"I didn't," replied Potts earnestly. "Honest Injun, old man! I can't understand how the dickens I tripped."

"Old Ra must have been looking at you from the blackboard," said Fullwood. "By the way, somebody had better wipe that off before old Crowell—"

"Cave!" gasped somebody. "He's coming!"

Another junior made a frantic attempt to reach the blackboard, but he couldn't do it. Mr. Crowell strode in, flustered. He demanded punctuality in his boys, and he loathed being late himself. Mr. Goole, of the East House, had detained him, and he was irritated.

"Now, boys!" he said reprovingly. "Must you really make all this noise because I happen to be a minute late? Sit down, all of you! I was hoping that you would be preparing— Good heavens, Travers, what have you been doing to your waistcoat?"

"It's ink, sir," explained Travers.

"I can see it is ink," said the Form-master. "I strongly disapprove of this form of horseplay—"

"It wasn't horseplay, sir," interrupted Potts. "I tripped as I was carrying my inkpot. Quite an accident, sir."

Mr. Crowell glanced at his desk, and saw a tell-tale spot.

"I take it that you helped yourself from my supply, Potts?" he said. "You will write me fifty lines for the impertinence. Why you should prefer my ink to that from the big bottle in the cupboard is one of those mysteries which I can never hope to fathom."

And why Mr. Crowell should cling tenaciously to his private supply of ink, and get ratty when people interfered with it, was a mystery which the boys themselves could never fathom.

"As for your waistcoat, Travers, I'm not going to express any sympathy with you," continued Mr. Crowell coldly. "If you will indulge in these affrays while I'm out of the room, you have only yourself to thank—"

"Well, I like that, sir!" interrupted Travers. "There wasn't any affray. Potts tripped on thin air—according to his own story—and this is the result. If you'll let me have your duster, sir—"

"I shall do nothing of the sort," said Mr. Crowell. "I require my duster for the blackboard—"

He broke off as he mechanically glanced round at the blackboard whilst referring to it. A titter went round the class-room as Mr. Crowell's jaw sagged. He gazed long and grimly at the masterpiece.

"It is unfortunate that my back cannot be turned for a few minutes without this sort of thing happening," he said bitterly, but with a note of danger in his voice. "This—er—atrocious drawing, I presume, is supposed to represent myself?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Remove knew its peril, but it couldn't help roaring.

"Silence!" thundered Mr. Crowell.

"It's not meant to be you, sir," explained Handforth. "It's old Ra."

Mr. Crowell adjusted his glasses and read the scrawl on the blackboard.

"And who is Ra?" he asked sourly. "I pity the boy whose mentality prompted him to compose this appalling doggerel."

Such a condemnation from Mr. Crowell was very high praise indeed, and the unknown artist glowed with pride.

"Ra is the God of Wrath, sir, or somebody like that," explained Parkington. "He's the fellow who's been bringing misfortune upon Travers. The Curse, you know, sir."

Mr. Crowell's lips tightened. He had heard rumors about Travers, and he thought he understood.

"I want to hear no more about this preposterous—er—curse," he said tartly. "I am astounded that boys of reputed intelligence

should listen to such nonsense. The genius who drew this atrocity will kindly stand up."

The genius failed to oblige.

"Very well," said Mr. Crowell. "Every boy in this room will write me one hundred lines."

Duncan, the New Zealand junior, rose in his desk.

"I drew it, sir," he confessed hastily.

"Then you will come here and clean the board, Duncan," said Mr. Crowell. "I shall add another hundred lines to your own particular imposition."

Duncan looked dismayed.

"But I only confessed so that you should let the others off," he said.

"I am afraid your confession came too late, Duncan," retorted the Form-master. "But your conscience need not worry you; I had intended punishing the whole Form, in any case. Now let us get on with some work."

The Remove felt that the morning had started well, and the impot caused no particular worry; the fun had been worth it.

But Vivian Travers sat rather gloomily in his place after he had changed his waistcoat. An uneasy doubt was creeping into his mind. His common sense told him that all this talk about the Curse was nonsense; but it was certainly remarkable that so many misfortunes should have befallen him on this particular morning. Was there something in this old Egyptian curse, after all? Travers recalled the case of Me-Rhab-Amen's tomb,

and the long train of misfortune which followed its opening. It was all very well for people to scoff and say "coincidence," but could such things really be explained by coincidence?

Travers was so thoughtful on the subject that he completely neglected the lesson, and soon got into trouble with Mr. Crowell again.

"I am sorry, Travers, if your private worries bear you down; but you are in this room to work," said Mr. Crowell acidly. "If you are still ill, say so, and I will excuse you."

"I'm not ill, sir."

"Then you are merely lazy—or, at least, inattentive," said Mr. Crowell. "I shall have to detain you after lessons, so that you can make up for this lost time."

Jimmy Potts nudged his chum a minute later.

"The Curse again," he murmured slyly.

"You—you—"

"Well, isn't it rummy? You haven't been detained for weeks."

"It's my own fault, for letting myself worry over the rot," growled Travers. "There's no curse about it; it's just the logical result—"

"Travers, you are talking now," interrupted the Form-master. "I hope I shan't have to speak to you again. Talking is even worse than inattention, since it involves inattention on the part of another junior. You will write me a further hundred lines."



Jokes from readers wanted for this feature! If you know 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.

THE CONJURER CAUGHT.

Conjurer (to small boy as he produces an egg from his sleeve): "Your mother can't get eggs without a hen, can she, sonny?"

Boy: "Yes."

Conjurer: "How does she do it?"

Boy: "We keep ducks."

(G. Tregilgas, 8, Carclaze Road, St. Austell, Cornwall, has been awarded a handsome watch.)

NO EFFECT.

Manager (reprimanding the new office boy): "And when I ask you a question you should answer, 'yes, sir,' or 'no, sir,' as the case may be."

Boy: "Righto!"

(J. Willett, 27, Grosvenor Street, Cheltenham, has been awarded a penknife.)

FIRE!

"Good gracious!" exclaimed the old lady, as she saw sky writing for the first time. "That must be one of those wireless messages caught fire!"

(D. Beaumont, 61, Park Avenue, Worthing, has been awarded a pocket wallet.)

FISHY!

"Boy!" snapped the bad-tempered examiner to a nervous-looking pupil in the corner of the class-room. "Do we eat the flesh of the whale?"

"Y-y-yes, sir," stammered the scholar.

"And what do we do with the bones?"

"P-p-please, sir," replied the nervous one, with chattering teeth, "we l-leave them on our plates."

(T. Frost, 25, St. Paul's Road, Weston-super-Mare, has been awarded a penknife.)

WHAT HE WANTED.

Tramp: "Please, lady, I'm ill and the doctor has given me this medicine, but I want something to take it with."

Lady: "My poor man! Shall I get you a spoon and a glass of water?"

Tramp: "No, lady. But this medicine has to be taken after meals. Have you a dinner handy?"

(E. Lawrence, "Dorothy," Rickstones Road, Witham, Essex, has been awarded a pocket wallet.)

"Oh, my hat!" groaned Travers dismally. Curse or no curse, he was getting the misfortunes sure enough!

CHAPTER 6.

Trouble Galore!

WHEN Travers came out of morning school—having been detained—he was immediately seized upon by Sir Jimmy Potts, Kirby Keeble Parkington, Deeks, Goffin, and one or two others.

"Where is it?" they chorused.

"Where's what?"

"That beastly scarab!"

"What does it matter to you where it is?" asked Travers tartly.

"We're going to burn it—destroy it for ever, so that it can't work its evil influence on the next owner," said K. K. "I expect that beastly thing has left a trail of misfortune behind it stretching out through the centuries. The only thing to do is to put an end to it."

Travers, who had toyed with the idea of throwing the scarab down the nearest drain, resented this interference. If only the fellows had left him alone, much trouble might have been avoided. Perverse by nature, he changed his plans.

"Burning it would be a confession that we're afraid of it?," he said. "Well, you

asses may be afraid of it, but I'm not. I'm keeping it."

"Grab him!" said Goffin, exasperated. "Before long he'll have this misfortune spreading all through the Remove. Let's tip him upside-down and bone the thing."

Travers laughed.

"Go ahead! Tip me upside-down!" he said scornfully. "Do you think I'm carrying the giddy thing about with me? That scarab is in a safe place—where you won't find it."

It was, in fact, in his waistcoat pocket, but the bluff worked.

"You're an obstinate ass, Travers!" growled Jimmy. "Why the dickens can't you be sensible about this? Look what happened in the Form-room! Are you going to stand there and say the Curse wasn't working?"

"I'll stand anywhere you like and say it," replied Travers. "Nothing happened in the Form-room that can't be logically explained."

Nipper came up.

"I've been looking for you, Travers," he said briskly. "Sorry, old man, but you won't be wanted in the forward line this afternoon for the Redcliffe match."

Travers, who loved football, was startled.

"Hang it, but what's the idea?" he asked, staring at the junior skipper. "You know I'm in the team, and my name's on the list —"

ASKING FOR TROUBLE.

Farmer (as new and youthful employee staggers up to him): "What's the matter with you? I sent you to brand all the livestock, and you come back all blisters!"

New hand: "Well, I had a lot of trouble branding the bees."

(G. Buckley, 18, Christie Street, Off Hempshaw Lane, Stockport, has been awarded a pocket wallet.)

NOTHING BUT THE TRUTH.

"You are on your oath, sir," the counsel reminded the witness, "and your answers must be exact. You said you drove a coal-cart."

"I didn't, sir."

"But you do drive a coal-cart?"

"No, sir."

"Then what do you drive?"

"A horse attached to a coal-cart, sir."

(B. Blyth, "Red Lion," Thorpe St. Andrew, Nr. Norwich, has been awarded a penknife.)

A MISTAKEN IMPRESSION.

Boarder (angrily): "I protest. I have been at this place a week and haven't seen a bit of soap with which to wash myself."

Landlady (mildly): "Well, you've got a tongue, haven't you, sir?"

Boarder: "Yes. But what do you think I am—a cat?"

(J. Cresswell, 7, Greaves Street, Ripley, Derby, has been awarded a pocket wallet.)

WHAT A HOPE!

The instructor was addressing a number of flying cadets on the uses of the parachute.

"Now, then," he said, "if anything goes wrong with your 'plane, jump out, count three as you fall, so as to clear the machine, and then pull the ring. You will find that the parachute opens and you will come down like a feather."

"But supposing it does not open?" asked one of the cadets.

"Bring it back, and I'll give you another one," replied the instructor.

(R. Little, 71, Main Street, Haworth, Nr. Keighley, Yorks, has been awarded a pocket wallet.)

SQUASHED!

The conceited novice had just finished a round of golf.

"Well," he asked of his caddie, "what do you think of my game?"

"I suppose it's all right," was the dubious reply, "but I prefer golf."

(S. Hunt, 8, Cumberland Road, Ramsgate, has been awarded a pocket wallet.)



"Not now," interrupted Nipper. "I'm putting Nick Trotwood in your place."

K. K. shrugged.

"You see?" he asked, turning to the others. "Half an hour doesn't pass without another misfortune. And this thick-headed chump still persists that the Cruse isn't working, and he won't allow us to burn that scarab."

Travers did regard it as a misfortune.

"It's only fair, Nipper, that you should tell me why you've dropped me out of the team," he said hotly. "It's a bit too thick

"My dear chap, you mustn't take any notice of these humorists," said Nipper. "Nick's playing a splendid game just now, and you're a bit groggy to-day. You were very unwell at breakfast-time. We can't take any risks against Redcliffe, that's all."

"But I'm not groggy now!" roared Travers.

"We've got to have dinner before the match, and the grub might upset you."

"I'll go without dinner, then."

"That's just as bad, because you can't expect to play a good game on an empty stomach," replied Nipper. "No, old man, you're definitely out."

He walked off, fully justified in the step he had taken, and Travers groaned.

"I'm out of the team now," he said dismally. "I wonder what the next thing will be. Oh, rats! Who's coming to the shop?"

Two or three accepted the invitation, and as they entered the School Shop, Travers put his hand in his hip-pocket for some money. He paused on the threshold, startled.

"My money!" he ejaculated.

"What about it?" asked Deeks.

"It's gone!"

"Well, that's nothing to worry about—it couldn't have been much," said Deeks. "You told us that you were practically broke, and, in fact, I was rather wondering why you invited us into the shop."

"I borrowed two quid from Archie this morning," yelled Travers. "I didn't want to, but he came forward of his own accord, and pressed me so much that I accepted. And now it's gone!"

"Look again, Travers," said K. K. "The Curse may get you into misfortune, but it can't cause two pound notes to disappear into thin air."

Travers was frantic.

"I put that money in my hip-pocket with my gold cigarette-case," he said. "It's gone—and the cigarette-case, too."

"It doesn't matter about the cigarette-case—you shouldn't be ass enough to smoke—but it's serious about the money," said Potts. "I don't see how you could have lost—"

"By Samson! Look at this!" broke in Travers, twisting himself round and gazing at the lining in his hip-pocket, which he pulled inside out. "There's a whacking great hole."

The others understood.

"That's bad," said Parkington gravely.

"Of course, you've dropped that cigarette-case and the money somewhere about the school."

"Thank goodness I haven't been out of gates," said Travers, with relief. "Somebody will have found that money and the case—"

"Does that give you any satisfaction?" asked K. K. "If they follow your example, sweetheart, they'll stick to what they've found and say nothing. Findings keepings!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"But this is different!" protested Travers, startled by this boomerang, which brought home to him, more forcibly than any other argument, the fallacy of the "findings keepings" code. "That money and that case belong to me."

"They did before you lost them, but the finder may have your own peculiar kink," said K. K. coolly. "Hard lines, old man. But I'm not surprised—it's just another link in the chain of misfortune."

Travers went off on a search and a round of inquiry. A number of fellows accompanied him. They followed him into Study H, and no sooner had Handforth stepped round the table than something metallic crumpled under his heavy foot.

"Good egg!" he said, bending down. "I've found your cigarette-case, anyhow."

He handed it back to Travers—a crumpled, battered, twisted scrap of wreckage.

"It's ruined!" said Travers aghast.

"It does look a bit damaged," admitted Handforth. "I trod on it."

Travers fumed.

"You careless, clumsy ass!" he shouted. "That cigarette case cost five quid! It's solid gold!"

"Pretty flimsy," said Handforth, who was singularly unaffected by the damage he had wrought. "Anyhow, you're welcome to it, Travers. It's mine, really."

"Yours?"

"Didn't I find it?" asked Handforth, staring. "Findings keepings, my son! But as I don't believe in that policy, you can have it back."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Travers was nearly speechless. The misfortunes were piling up with a vengeance.

"It's a pity you can't be more tidy in this study, Travers," Potts was complaining, as he cleared up the fender. "Look at this litter of paper in the hearth."

He swept up some odds and ends of envelopes, circulars, and tossed them into the fire. But as he did so he caught sight of two greenish oblong, crumpled scraps.

"Great Scott!" he yelled. "Quick! Who's got some tongs? I believe I've chucked those two notes into the fire!"

"Wha-a-a-at?" gasped Travers, spinning round.

He was just in time to see the last of the conflagration. A glimpse of green, a burst of flame, and glowing, curling ashes. Jimmy Potts was dumbfounded.

"Two quid—burnt up!" he said dismally. "I'm sorry, Travers!"

"I owe Archie two quid, and I haven't even touched the money," said Travers, stunned by this fresh misfortune, coming so hard on the heels of the last. "If I didn't know you to be a careful chap, Potts, I'd say you did that on purpose."

The schoolboy baronet flushed with indignation.

"Do you think I'd deliberately burn money—just to spite you?" he asked wrathfully. "How the dickens was I to know what those papers were? The fender's no place for currency notes!"

"They must have slipped out of your pocket while you were leaning with your back on the mantelpiece," said Parkington. "That's the only explanation that I can see. But it's obvious that the Curse has been working again."

"It's obvious that you're a superstitious idiot!" snapped Travers.

BUT these fresh disasters made him pause for thought.

After all, was it logical that so many mishaps could occur by sheer chance? There seemed to be a hidden hand here—an evil influence working relentlessly against him.

Looking at the incidents singly, they were commonplace enough; but, collectively, they took on an ugly significance. There seemed something more than coincidence.

Travers reviewed his settled convictions on the subject of curses. He had scoffed at the misfortunes which had followed the opening of the Me-Rhab-Amen tomb; he had scoffed at the professor's translation of those hieroglyphics on the scarab.

But he felt less like scoffing now. It seemed to him that the net was closing about him, and with something like a shock he remembered the other prophecies of the Curse. To-morrow he would meet with some disaster personally; on the next day he would die! Was it worth sticking out? Why not do as the chaps said—burn the scarab?

He pondered over the possibility. And his jaw became grim when he pictured how the fellows would grin at him for giving in. No, he'd stick it out, and show them that all this talk of a curse was a lot of tommy rot!

He was hurrying round the corner of the Remove passage, thinking deeply, and feeling relieved that he had come to this strong-minded decision, when he ran into Biggleswade of the Sixth. He had been telling himself that he only needed to be a bit careful and nothing further could happen to him.

And, naturally, something did happen.

Bumping into Biggleswade was not exactly a misfortune—but the result of that bump was. The prefect gave a fiendish yell,

juggled wildly with something he was carrying, and the object dropped to the hard floor with a splintering crash.

"Sorry!" said Travers lightly.

Biggleswade grabbed him.

"Sorry?" he repeated. "Do you think that'll square you? You silly young ass, I'll teach you to come barging round corners like a charging bull!"

"It was quite an accident!"

"Accident be hanged!" snorted "Biggy."

"It was rank carelessness."

"I don't see why you should make all this fuss over an electric-light bulb——"

"You pitiful young insect!" broke in Biggleswade. "That's my new screened grid wireless valve—at least, it was!"

Vivian Travers' jaw dropped.

"I say!" he ejaculated. "I thought it was a light bulb."

"I lent it to Chambers, and I was just taking it back for my own set," explained the prefect. "And there's something I particularly want to hear in ten minutes! Confound you, Travers, that valve cost twenty-five bob!"

"I'll pay you on Saturday," said Travers wearily.

What was the use? At the very moment of colliding with Biggleswade, he had been telling himself that he couldn't meet with any further misfortune! The whole thing was getting on his nerves.

And Biggleswade wasn't his usual sunny self, either. Biggy was the most easy-going prefect in the school, with the exception, perhaps, of Payne, of the East

House. He generally took things philosophically. But wireless was his hobby, and the loss of that valve robbed him of his serenity.

"It's not the cost of it," he growled angrily. "There's not another valve like it in the school—that's why Chambers borrowed it. It's a special type, and you can't even buy 'em in Bannington. This means I've got to send away to London, and for three or four days my set will be out of commission."

"I'm really awfully sorry——"

"You'll be sorrier before I've done with you," promised Biggleswade, with unusual aggressiveness. "I'll trouble you, Travers, to come along to my study."

Travers went along, and was astonished when Biggleswade produced his cane. The St. Frank's prefects were allowed the privilege of "swiping" the juniors, but they seldom availed themselves of this. Biggleswade, indeed, hadn't used his cane for terms.

"Hold out your hand, Travers," he said curtly. "I'm going to teach you not to dash round corners and smash people's property. On second thoughts, you'd better lean over this table."

"But, hang it——"

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"Go on!" roared Biggleswade.

Travers leaned over, and Biggleswade lifted Travers' jacket.

Swish! Swish! Swish!

Afterwards, David Biggleswade felt quite remorseful, and that swishing played upon his conscience for days. In fact, he resolved that whenever he had occasion to swipe a fellow in future, he would allow himself to cool down first.

Travers had it hot—the worst licking he had received this term. When he departed from the study he felt that he was, in all truth, participating in an unequal fight.

The fates were definitely and relentlessly against him.

CHAPTER 7.

Pity Poor Travers!

"HALLO! What's up with Travers now?"

K. K. Parkington asked that question as Vivian Travers emerged from the Ancient House with a peculiar, stiff-legged gait. He walked as though he were upon stilts, and the mode of progress was very noticeable.

"If I didn't think it impossible, I should say he'd just had a fearful swiping," said Jimmy Potts, staring. "He's showing all the symptoms. Travers, what's happened?"

"Did you fall downstairs, or something?"

Travers halted as a few of the other juniors approached him.

"I'm awfully sorry, but I'm afraid I didn't fall downstairs," he replied sarcastically. "If you'd particularly like me to, I'll go indoors again and do it for you."

"Don't be an ass!" said Jimmy. "We noticed the way you were walking——"

"Could you see anything different in my walk, then?" asked Travers, startled. "I just passed Vera Wilkes, and I wondered why she gave me such a funny look. I thought I wasn't giving myself away."

"You don't mean to say you've been swished?" asked Potts blankly.

Travers gave the details.

"That's two more misfortunes right off," said K. K. promptly. "Twenty-five bob to pay on Saturday, and a swishing from Biggy. You *are* going the pace, Travers!"

Decks shook his head and looked solemn.

"I don't mind admitting that I've been a bit doubtful about that Curse, but all my doubts have gone now," he said. "This is more than coincidence, Travers. Nothing but a Curse could change Biggy's nature like that."

"It seems to be affecting everybody who's connected with you, Travers," put in Parkington. "Now, why don't you be sensible? Let's make a nice little bonfire, put the scarab on the top of it, and watch it burn."



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Or if you don't want to do that, let's take it down to the police-station and hand it in as lost property."

But Vivian Travers, thoroughly fed up, was walking away.

"He'll never do it now," said Jimmy mournfully. "The more we try to help him, the more he'll resist. One of the best chaps breathing, really, but as perverse and as pigheaded as—as Handy himself!"

During the afternoon Travers seemed to have a respite. It is true that he fell over a rope on Little Side, while he was watching the Redcliffe match, but he only made his nose bleed, and that could hardly be called a misfortune.

However, something developed from it which was a misfortune—not only for Travers himself, but for the whole Junior XI. In so many of these calamities it was a trifling incident which paved the way to them.

Travers bumped his face on the ground, made his nose bleed, and attracted attention towards himself. He was just behind the St. Frank's goal, and Handforth, of course, found it necessary to give some advice. While he was doing so an enterprising Redcliffe forward made a clean breakaway and took a drive at goal from just outside the penalty area.

"Look out, Handy!" yelled McClure.

Mac was one of the backs, and he had vainly attempted to intercept that ball by jumping up to head it. But it was well out of his reach, and he noticed, to his horror, that Handforth was looking the other way.

Handforth turned round just in time to see the leather dropping straight at him. He frantically fisted, but it was impossible to judge his effort, and the ball dropped over his shoulder, bounced within the net, and rolled leisurely to the back.

"Goal!"

"My only sainted aunt!" gasped Handforth frantically.

Ordinarily, Handforth would have dealt with that long drive with ease. It was just that brief second or two of inattention which had caused the disaster.

"It's not your fault, Handy," shouted Deeks, his voice throbbing with indignation.

"It's that rotten Curse!"

"What!"

"That old blighter, Ra, is getting busy again."

"You hopeless ass! I'm not Travers!" said Handforth.

"That doesn't make any difference," said Deeks. "The whole Remove is becoming affected now. If Travers hadn't fallen over and made his nose bleed you wouldn't have looked round."

"By George, that's right!" said Handforth, with a start. "Still, I'm not going to excuse myself like that. I was an ass for taking my eye off the game, and nobody's to blame but me. Rats and blow!"

He was furious with himself, and Travers felt grateful towards him. It was sporting of Handforth not to grasp this chance of an excuse.

But the other fellows were not so open-minded about it. They argued that Travers had caused the disaster—and as it was certainly a fact that he had distracted Handforth's attention, the argument was not entirely without foundation.

"All right—all right!" said Travers gruffly. "You needn't tell me any more. I'm not wanted here. I'm a hoodoo."

"That's it—a hoodoo!" said Goffin excitedly. "That means bad luck. Can't you see it yourself, Travers? It's not your fault. You didn't consciously do anything to attract Handy's attention. It's just the Curso working."

Travers grunted.

"Well, you're not going to say that I'm the cause of this match being lost," he retorted. "The score's one-all at present, so if there's no more scoring it'll be a draw, at least. I'm going! Handy's not going to be worried by me any more."

He drifted back into the Triangle, disconsolate and gloomy. The fellows were beginning to blame him for other misfortunes now. He was alone and forlorn. He took out the scarab and held it between thumb and forefinger. The red stones gleamed wickedly at him.

"It's all rubbish!" he muttered. "This—this giddy talisman can't be responsible for anything. If there hadn't been so much talk——"

He broke off, startled. Without warning a heavy downpour of rain had started. He dodged for the Ancient House lobby, and stood just within, looking out at the deluge. Fellows were dashing in from Little Side, for hardly any of them had provided themselves with macs. The afternoon had been cloudy, but nobody had anticipated rain.

"Sorry, you chaps," said Travers, as Parkington and Deeks and Goffin and Gresham and Russell came hoofing it into the lobby, considerably wet. "I'm afraid this is my fault."

"Which is your fault?" asked Gresham. "My hat! I'm soaked already. I've never known it to start raining so suddenly, or so hard."

"Rats!" said Russell annoyed. "It often comes on to rain like that in this country. There's no relying on the weather at all. Now in Canada we *do* have decent weather——"

"Blow your Canadian weather!" interrupted Parkington. "We don't get our ears bitten off by frost in this country. The English weather is the best in the world, and the fact that it's changeable is all to the good."

"It's pouring cats and dogs," said Gresham, looking out. "Looks like keeping on, too. I doubt if they'll finish the game."

"And it's all my fault," said Travers sourly.

"How do you make that out?"

"Isn't everything that goes wrong my fault?" asked Travers, in mock surprise.

"It's rummy, but there wasn't a drop of rain when I got into the Triangle. I took this scarab out of my pocket, and I no sooner looked at it than the rain came down in sheets. I must say that that Curse is pretty hefty."

The others stared at the scarab askance.

"Rummy, to say the least," commented K. K. "I don't actually believe that that scarab could bring the rain on, but— Here, put it back in your pocket, you ass! Hide it up! Look what it's done to Bob Christine."

It was a fact that Bob Christine had skidded about three yards on the Modern House steps as he dashed up them. But it was entirely his own fault. It was just a case of more haste less speed.

"Go ahead," said Travers, glaring. "Blame me for everything!"

"I'm not blaming you—but that Emblem of Ra," replied K. K., linking his arm into Travers. "Let's put our macs on, stroll down to the giddy police-station, and hand this scarab to P.-c. Sparrow. The more misfortunes that befall him, the better. He's given me one or two funny looks lately when I've been on my motor-bike."

Travers disengaged himself.

"The only walk I'm taking is to my study," he replied coolly. "As I've told you before, this scarab is mine, and I'm not giving it up."

"Obstinate blighter!" said K. K., pained.

NO further misfortune befell Travers until bedtime—unless the attitude of the Remove could be regarded as a misfortune. That match against Redcliffe had been finished, in spite of the rain, and had ended in a draw.

"It would have been a dead certain win for St. Frank's if Handy hadn't given that goal away," said De Valeric, voicing the general opinion. "And he only gave it away because Travers bumped his nose. I'm not saying it was Travers' fault, but he was the unconscious cause of the disaster. It was that rotten Curse."

Travers spent a miserable evening. Everywhere he went he was pestered by the



Removites to destroy the scarab. And he was gradually being worn down. Even his strong determination was weakening.

It was still raining when the Remove went to bed, and Travers was not exactly surprised to find water dripping through the ceiling of his dormitory. He was getting accustomed to these things. Naturally, the water was pouring directly upon his own bed. Jimmy Potts' bed was not touched.

"Roof's leaking now," said Travers hopelessly. "Look at my bed, Jimmy. I can't sleep in that!"

Potts eyed it dubiously.

"You could, but it wouldn't be advisable. You'd better dig with me for to-night. You can't get the matron to change the mattress and the sheets and the blankets at this hour.

Handforth was so intent upon watching Travers that he had completely forgotten the match in progress. A Redcliffe forward kicked the ball, and it whizzed goalwards.

the times I was nearly suffocated or strangled."

"Draw it mild!" protested Potts, amazed. Travers proceeded to dress in a listless way.

"It's no good trying to tell you—you wouldn't believe me," he said. "Thank goodness there's no more water coming through the ceiling. What's to-day?"

"This is the day you're going to meet with disaster!" replied Potts promptly.

CHAPTER 8.

The Day of Disaster!

USUALLY so careful in his dress, this morning Vivian Travers was careless to the point of being slovenly. He was down before anybody else, for he felt that he wanted to be alone. A feeling of wretchedness had come over him, mostly due, probably, to his lack of sleep.

He was also feeling reckless.

"If I've got to meet with disaster, I might as well meet with it straight away," he told himself bitterly, as he got out his motor-bike.

"Perhaps the front forks will break off, or the back wheel may fall out. With any ordinary luck the petrol tank might explode."

He felt that a ride round the countryside would brighten him up a bit. It was a clear, crisp morning after the rain. There was even a touch of frost in the air now—more than a touch—and if Travers had been in a less reckless mood he would have been warned.

The air was so keen that he was irresistibly reminded of Christmas, which was now growing imminent. Fellows were already beginning to make their arrangements for the vacation, for within a day or two St. Frank's was due to break up.

"Oh, rats!" growled Travers, as he started his engine.

Even Christmas would bring him no comfort. His people would be abroad, and unless somebody invited him out he would have a quiet time.

He started off at a reckless speed. He was perhaps the best motor-cyclist at St. Frank's, with the possible exception of Nipper. He could perform the most astonishing stunts, and his recklessness was more apparent than real, for his control of his mount was uncanny.



Our beds are bolted to the floor, too."

Travers resigned himself to the lesser of two evils. As it was impossible to sleep in his own bed he shared Jimmy Potts'—and Jimmy was notoriously restless. An awfully nice chap during his waking hours, but a Tartar in his sleep. He had a habit of kicking out, or punching.

The unfortunate Travers got very little sleep that night. Twice he found himself deprived of all covering; twice he awoke to find one of Jimmy's arms resting across his face. It was like sleeping with a forest lion. It wasn't until the small hours that Potts gave his bed companion any rest, and Travers was able to snatch a few hours of real sleep. When the rising-bell rang he was heavy-eyed and listless. Potts seemed quite pleased with himself.

"Well, after this, I hope you'll stop talking rot about my being a bad sleeper," he said, as he got into his shirt. "I'll bet you didn't wake up once."

"Ye gods and little fishes!" ejaculated Travers. "The poor ass doesn't even know. Why, you—you human windmill, you nearly kicked me out of bed twice, you pulled all the clothes off so often that I got tired of dragging them back, and I've lost count of

He swept through the Triangle and the hard gravel gave him no warning of what he was to discover out in the road. It must be admitted that he was unjustified in dashing through the gateway at such speed, for he had no right to assume that the lane would be empty.

It wasn't empty. A trader's van was just about to turn into the Triangle. Travers saw it as he got half-way through the gates, and he light-heartedly dodged to the near side. Ordinarily he could have avoided that van with ease. He was an expert at quick action. But he had overlooked the ground-frost. After all that rain the frost had converted the smooth tarred road into a sheet of ice.

Travers' motor-cycle skidded with fearful velocity. At the same moment the van driver attempted to swerve. The result was disastrous. The two met head-on. Nipper, Parkington, Tregellis-West and a number of other Removities emerged from the Ancient House just in time to see the whole incident.

Crash!

The motor-cycle struck the van's radiator. Travers was flung head-first out of the saddle. Like a catapult he slithered over the car's bonnet, and crashed headlong through the windscreen.

"Great Scott!" yelled Nipper. "It's Travers!"

"He must have nearly killed himself."

"And it's—it's the fourth day!" added K. K., in a curiously strained voice. "The day of disaster! Well I'm blistered!"

"Somebody fetch the doctor!" yelled Nipper as he ran.

But his words were not heeded. All the fellows present were anxious to get to the spot. They did not doubt that Vivian Travers was gravely injured. It was the nastiest accident they had ever seen.

They ran up, breathless. The motor-cycle was lying on its side in front of the van, still smoking. It was a wreck. The front wheel was twisted and bent, the forks were snapped off, the frame was buckled, and petrol was pouring out of the gaping tank. Luckily enough, the spirit had not caught fire.

The newcomers only gave one glance at the cycle, or at the dented radiator of the van. Their only concern was for Travers. They tore open the door of the van's cab, and fragments of broken glass clattered out on to the hard road. Vivian Travers was in the act of sorting himself out, for he had been flung on to the seat next to the driver, and then to the floor.

"Travers, old man!" exclaimed Nipper huskily.

"A bit of a mess-up, dear old fellow," said Travers, grinning. "What's happened to the old speed-iron?"

"Struth! He's a cool 'un, that kid!" ejaculated the driver, gingerly picking a chunk of glass from his waistcoat. "I thought it was all up with me, an' 'im, too, when he came through that windscreen."

Travers sat up, and glanced at one or two tiny cuts on his hands and wrists. They were only bleeding slightly.

"When you're driving head-first through the windscreen, the main thing is to go clean through," he explained calmly. "It's no good hesitating about it. Do the job thoroughly, or not at all."

"Great Scott, he's not dead!" shouted Handforth.

"Awfully sorry, dear old fellow, but I'm afraid I can't oblige you this time," said Travers. "It's all the fault of that icy road. I didn't realise it until I was on it—and then it was too late. I rather think I'm lucky."

They got him down on to the road, and it was an astonishing fact that his face and head were not even cut. He suffered no bruises. The few grazes on his hands and wrists were the only injuries, and these were so slight that he wouldn't hear of first aid.

"Let's hope none of the masters heard the crash," he said, as he glanced across the Triangle. "If we can only get this litter out of the way quickly, I might escape an inquiry—and a wiggling from the Head."

"Blessed if I can understand it," said Jimmy Potts breathlessly. "By all the laws of accidents, you ought to have been half-killed."

"It was the speed that saved him, and the clean way he went through the windscreen," said Nipper.

"I'm mighty glad the youngster ain't come to no 'arm, but what about my van?" asked the driver practically. "It's all very well for you young gents to talk about 'ushin' it up, but that won't suit me. My guv'nor will ask questions——"

At this point Mr. Wilkes arrived on the scene. The Housemaster was not afflicted with deafness, and that crash had quickly brought him out. He listened patiently while Travers explained exactly how it happened, and how it was out of the question to fix the blame upon anybody.

"H'm!" said Mr. Alington Wilkes, rubbing his nose.

"My bike's insured, sir, so I shall get it repaired free," went on Travers. "I expect this van is insured, too."

"Is it?" asked the Housemaster, looking at the driver.

"Yes, sir."

"There's no policeman here to take official details, so perhaps we'd better leave it at this," said Mr. Wilkes. "When the insurance company sends its investigator I'll see the man, and there are plenty of witnesses here who can tell him just what happened."

The van was not badly damaged; the radiator was only dented, and the impact had not caused it to leak. The driver, satisfied, cleared the rest of the broken glass away and continued his interrupted journey.

"Take your machine round to the garage, Travers," said Mr. Wilkes. "Nobody had better touch it until the insurance man has seen it. And what about yourself, Travers?"

"I'm all right, sir—only a graze or two."

"You're very lucky to have come off so well," said Mr. Wilkes, adjusting his glasses

and eyeing Travers thoughtfully. "But there's another aspect of the affair, old scout. I'm not altogether sure that I shall let you off."

"It was quite an accident, sir."

"An accident that could have been avoided," retorted the Housemaster. "You're not going to tell me that it was necessary for you to blind out of this gateway at such a reckless speed."

"I should have been all right but for the slippery road, sir."

"You knew it was frosty, and you should have made allowances for the road," said Mr. Wilkes. "I am very much afraid, Travers, old boy, that I shall have to give you a tanning. It's rather hard lines after you've had such a spill, but you must be taught not to be so reckless."

"Just as you say, sir," said Travers resignedly.

"You will report in my study after breakfast for a swishing," said Mr. Wilkes, with a sigh. "I think I ought to give you five hundred lines, too!"

"I say, draw it mild, sir!"

"I am surprising myself at my own mildness," declared the Housemaster. "By rights, I ought to take you straight to the Head. And he, you may be sure, would place an immediate ban upon your motor-bike. Which is it to be?"

"I'll take the swishing and the lines, sir," said Travers promptly.

Mr. Wilkes went off amid the appreciative grins of the crowd. It was characteristic of him to deal with and settle the affair at once.

"Well, you've got off lightly," said Nipper. "Old Wilkey couldn't do much less. Just another of your misfortunes, old man, and it might have been a lot worse."

"It's the disaster, just as that Curse foretold," said Potts excitedly.

"Rot!" put in K. K. "It wasn't a real disaster, although it might have been."

"Near enough for me!" said Travers.

"Why did you do it?" demanded Parkington half-angrily. "Did you deliberately try to get yourself hurt?"

"Oh, I don't know!" growled Travers. "I was feeling fed up in general. I hardly had a wink of sleep all night, and I've got that 'don't care' feeling. What's the use? I escape injury by a miracle, and now I'm in for a swishing and five hundred lines. I'm beginning to believe in that Curse!"

"It's about time," said K. K.

"According to that translation of Professor Tucker's, the fourth day brings disaster on the scarab's owner, and I haven't been out of doors five minutes before I nearly get killed," growled Travers, looking round with a defiant glare. "Well, I'm whacked—I admit it—I give it best."

"What!"

"It's taken that Curse a long time to get me down, but I'm down at last," went on Travers, producing the scarab and eyeing it vindictively. "I believe there's something evil about it, and I'm going to chuck the rotten thing away—or burn it. I haven't the nerve to go through the whole day—or to wait for to-morrow!"

"It's your death to-morrow," said Decks, nodding.

"Don't you believe it," retorted Travers, lifting his arm to fling the scarab into the ditch. "You can laugh at me now, and I don't care if you do. This confounded thing has got on my nerves!"

"One moment, my lad!" said K. K.

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CHAPTER 9.

A Red-Hot Shock!

THERE was something significant in Kirby Keeble Parkington's manner. The burly, red-headed junior towered over Travers, and he prevented Travers from throwing the scarab away.

"Don't be in a hurry," he said smoothly.

"Think I'd better burn it, then?"

"It doesn't matter to me whether you burn it, or drown it, or have it quietly suffocated," replied Parkington. "Although, of course, what you really ought to do is to take it to the police-station, as any honest chap would, and say that you found it in the road. But before you do that there's something you'd better know."

The other juniors gathered round, scenting something of interest.

"What's all this mystery?" asked Travers suspiciously.

"You've admitted that you're whacked."

"What of it?"

"The Curse has got you down flat on your back?"

"If you like to put it that way," grunted Travers.

"All I want to say, then, is that this is the exact moment where we Red-Hots laugh," said K. K. blandly. "Red-Hots, kindly oblige."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Red-Hots obliged and burst into a loud roar of laughter—laughter which suggested that it had been long suppressed. The Old-Timers, with a horrid feeling that K. K. had been up to one of his celebrated spoofs, stood looking on rather blankly.

"Finished?" asked Travers sarcastically. "Or do you intend to continue this imitation of the hyena house at the Zoo? I've never heard such a fiendish cackle of triumph in all my life! Where's the joke?"

"The Curse is the joke," grinned K. K. "And it's become a greater joke now that you have confessed that you believe in it. Red-Hots, all, observe the fallen. It's been a hard fight, a long fight, but we've worn him down at last. He actually believes in the Curse!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What's the giddy idea, you red-headed lunatic?" roared Travers, exasperated.

"My poor child, the whole thing was a spoof from beginning to end," said K. K. kindly. "We red-hots got together and decided that you needed a lesson."

"What!"

"Your 'findings keepings' code didn't agree with our ideas of right and wrong," continued K. K. sternly. "We decided that it must be put right, so we got busy."

"Is this really true?" asked Travers thickly.

"You silly ass, we've been kidding you from the first," grinned Deeks.

"By George!" commented Handforth. "I thought there was something squiffy about it."

"At first we weren't sure," explained Parkington. "That's why we suggested

taking the scarab to Professor Tucker. If you'll cast your mind back, Travers, you'll remember that I saw Professor Tucker before you did. Or is it possible that you didn't know? Anyhow, the professor told me that the scarab was only made of brass and cut glass, and that the hieroglyphics were only the names of an ancient Egyptian potentate and his numerous family. The scarab, in fact, is a sort of family emblem—although the thing you've got is only a copy."

"Well, I'm dashed!" said Travers, thoroughly annoyed. "But that translation was in the professor's own handwriting."

"Pardon me, that handwriting was mine."

"Yours!"

"I have some reputation as a forger," said Parkington proudly. "On more than one occasion I have forged Deeks' or Goffin's fist quite well when I've done their lines for them."

"Once in a blue moon," put in Goffin.

"I spotted what the translation was, and I didn't see many possibilities," continued K. K. "So I got out a special translation of my own, and went to see the professor about the extraordinary brilliance of the planet Jupiter. While he was telling me exactly why Jupiter is so brilliant, I easily substituted the faked translation for the real."

"You sly old blighter!"

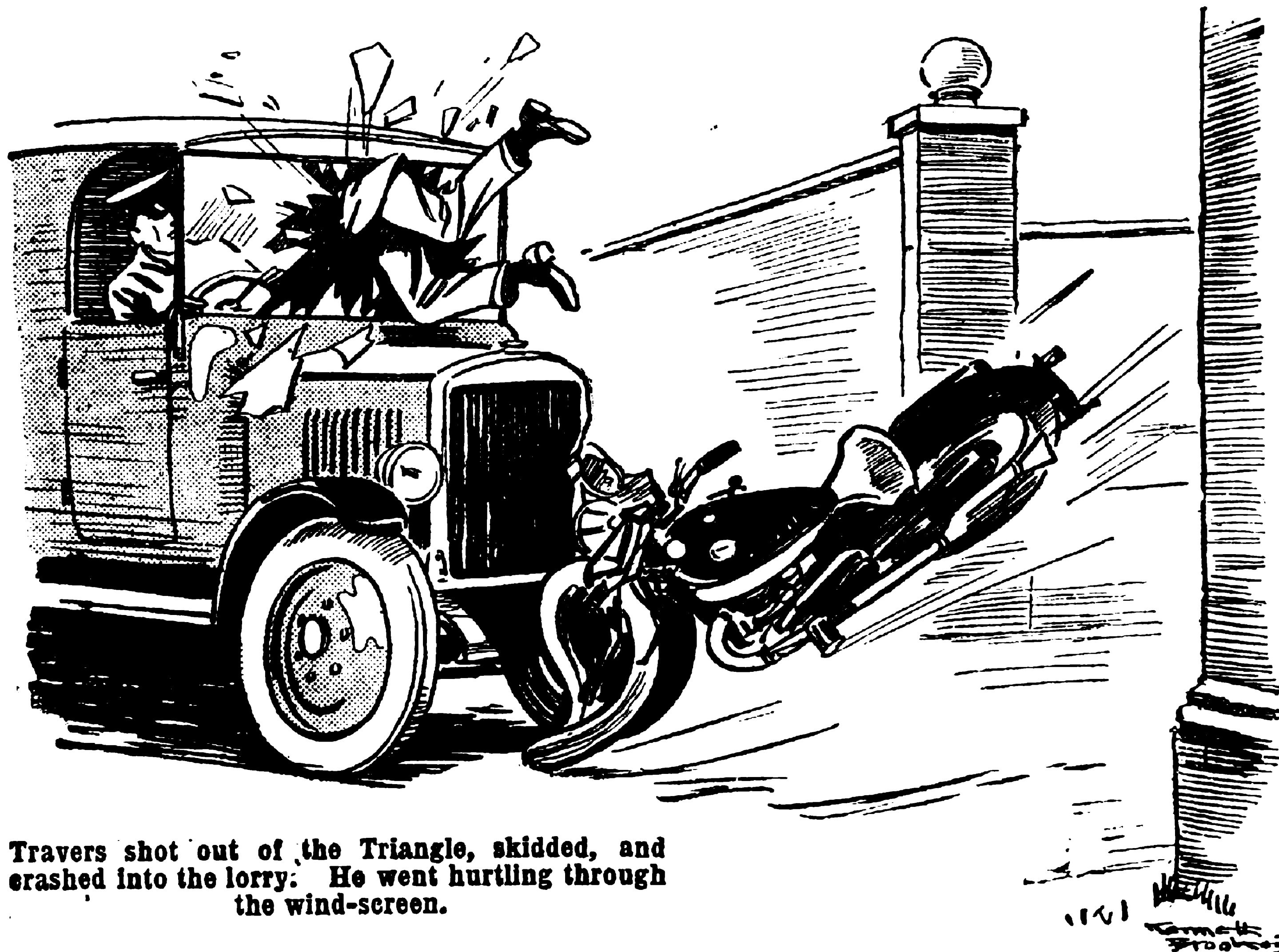
"Thus we made the professor an innocent participator in our little wheeze," grinned K. K. "You went to him, and with his own hand he gave you the translation. How were you to suspect that it wasn't genuine? I may mention that I was just outside the door, in readiness to cause an interruption in case you asked the professor anything about the Curse. But he told you to take the scarab and the paper and to clear off. You cleared off, and everything else was all serene."

"How do you account for Travers being ill yesterday morning?" demanded Handforth. "And what about all those misfortunes?"

"I'm afraid that we were responsible for most of them," admitted K. K. "We dropped a little harmless but potent chemical into Travers' porridge. We fixed a hidden wire across Potts' desk, so that he would trip. Naturally, we didn't know that he would be carrying an inkpot, but that made it all the better."

"There wasn't any wire!" protested Potts.

"There wasn't when you looked," agreed Parkington. "When we Red-Hots fix wires, we fix them properly—so that they can be quickly drawn away. Then, about the study chimney, Jepson very obligingly went on the roof and held a sack over the chimney-pot until he got the signal to take it away. Merely a matter of brilliant organisation. We had one of our men stationed in the West Square, ready to pass the signal on when he got it from me from the study window. We Red-Hots do things thoroughly."



Travers shot out of the Triangle, skidded, and crashed into the lorry. He went hurtling through the wind-screen.

"Including patting yourselves on the back?" asked Travers.

"Since we expect nobody else to give us a boost, we naturally perform that service ourselves," grinned Kirby Keeble Parkington. "I might add that we cut a hole in your pocket—a delicate piece of work, this, necessitating the utmost care on the part of the operator—while your attention was suitably attracted. It was obliging of Handforth to tread on your cigarette-case."

"Oh! I thought he did that on purpose."

"Handforth treads on things as a matter of course—and the more valuable they are, the more he treads," replied K. K. "Not that we need waste any time on that cigarette-case. It's a thing you shouldn't possess, anyhow. So we'll shed no tears over its loss."

"But those bank notes?" asked Travers. "Didn't Potts burn them?"

"He burnt two chocolate coupons in mistake for bank notes, which he had carefully planted in the fender," replied K. K. "We poured water over your ceiling last night, carefully choosing a spot so that your bed should be soaked. You naturally assumed that the roof was leaking, but—"

"You—you cunning rotters!" burst out Travers. "Then the whole thing was one of your rotten japes from beginning to end! You even got Biggleswade into your plot?"

"No; you really smashed Biggleswade's valve," said Parkington. "All sorts of other coincidences happened which worked in with the plot, and which we naturally made the most of. For example, that letter from

your pater, without the fiver. That wasn't our doing—but we saw our chance, and pointed out that the Curse had begun its work."

Travers appeared to be on the point of exploding for a moment or two, but he managed to get himself in hand, and he grinned good-humouredly.

"Well, you deserve your laugh," he said, with a wry grimace. "Congratters, K. K., on the success of your wheeze. It worked like a dream. I'll admit I didn't have the faintest suspicion."

Handforth burst into speech.

"Did you hear that, you chaps?" he demanded fiercely. "This chump is congratulating K. K.!"

"Merely one master mind recognising another," murmured K. K.

"Come on, you Old-Timers!" roared Handforth. "These beastly Red-Hots have been spoofing one of our chaps. Let's knock 'em sideways!"

"And all get detention for the rest of the week for rowdyism in the Triangle?" asked Nipper. "No fear, Handy! Your direct methods are a bit too drastic. We'll wait a bit—and spoof these fatheads worse than they've spoofed Travers."

"Says you!" grinned K. K.

"So this scarab hasn't any strings tied to it, after all," remarked Travers, regarding the object with renewed interest. "I'm glad I know. I shall still send it to my sister for her birthday."

K. K.'s jaw dropped.

"You'll do *what*?" he asked blankly.

"You heard."

"But the thing isn't worth twopence!" yelled K. K. "Besides, what was the good of our teaching you a lesson if you don't profit by it?"

"It's not your fault if I still remain pig-headed, is it?" grinned Vivian Travers. "Now that you've explained all your conspiracy, I know that the scarab is safe. Naturally, I shall send my sister something else as well—"

"Well, I'm jiggered!" ejaculated K. K., in exasperation. "What's the use? For three days we've been ragging this chap so that he shall learn that 'findings keepings' is dishonest. Then the very instant he hears that we've been spoofing him he backslides!"

"We've been wasting our time," said Deeks disgustedly.

It was, indeed, disappointing to find that all their plotting had gone for nothing. But they needn't have worried. Travers was due for the greatest shock of all—and it happened immediately.

CHAPTER 10.

The Unexpected Happens!

HANDFORTH was the first to see the policeman. He wasn't an ordinary policeman, but an inspector. He had just arrived on a motor-cycle, and the juniors stared at him in amazement.

"Who's this merchant?" asked Handforth wonderingly.

The inspector approached them with a businesslike stride.

"Perhaps you boys can tell me where I can find somebody in authority—the head-master, for example?" he asked.

"Straight through Big Arch, sir," said one of the juniors. "But perhaps there's something we can tell you?"

"There might be," replied the inspector thoughtfully. "In fact, it's rather a good idea to have a word with you boys before I see anybody else. You might be able to tell me what I want to know."

"Have you come to arrest somebody?" asked Handforth, with a grin.

"It all depends," replied the inspector. "In any case, I hope I haven't had my journey from Reading for nothing. I am Inspector Jarvis, of the Reading police, and it has come to my knowledge that a certain piece of valuable jewellery is in this school—presumably in the possession of a junior boy."

Travers started.

"A valuable piece of jewellery?" he repeated, staring.

"Do you boys know anything about it?" asked the inspector, eyeing them closely. "It's part of the proceeds of a robbery, and it's badly wanted. A quaint, old-fashioned curio, rather like a beetle, with rubies."

"My scarab!" ejaculated Travers involuntarily.

"What's that?" asked Inspector Jarvis sharply. "Scarab! That's the word! What do you know about this scarab?"

"He's got it!" sang out somebody in the background.

"Just a minute!" said the inspector, seizing Travers' arm. "Is this true, young man? Have you got that piece of jewellery?"

"But it's worthless—"

"Never mind whether it's worthless, or whether it's valuable," said the inspector. "Have you got it in your possession?"

"Why, yes."

"Give it to me—and don't try any tricks."

Travers, not a little scared, handed it over. The inspector's eyes lighted up as he saw it, and he took possession of the thing.

"It's just as well I spoke to you boys first," he said with satisfaction, producing a folded blue paper and glancing at it. "Is your name Travers?" he went on, looking at Travers again. "Vivian Travers?"

"Yes; but I don't understand—"

"You'll understand when I tell you that this paper is a warrant for your arrest!" said the inspector grimly.

"My—my arrest!" gasped Travers, his composure shattered.

A shout of excitement and consternation went up from the others. Even K. K. was looking startled.

"It's all rot!" he protested. "You can't arrest Travers! We've been spoofing him about that scarab, but this thing is beyond a joke. He didn't steal it, and you can't execute that silly warrant—"

"When I ask for comments from you, young man, it'll be time enough for you to speak," interrupted the inspector sharply. "I'll soon show you whether a police warrant is silly. Vivian Travers, it is my duty to arrest you for being in unlawful possession of a valuable article of jewellery; to wit, a ruby-studded Egyptian scarab. You'll have to come with me."

"My only hat!" said Travers feebly.

Crowds of other fellows had got wind of the affair by now, and they were pressing round inquisitively and excitedly. Mr. Horace Pycraft, of the Fourth, was standing on the East House steps, watching curiously; indeed, the sour-tempered Form-master was now pushing his way forward through the crowds of juniors.

"I think you'd better take Travers away at once," said K. K. to the inspector hastily.

Strangely enough, K. K. had become frantic over the approach of Mr. Pycraft. Even Inspector Jarvis looked worried. It was strange that he should be so averse to meeting one of the masters.

"Out of my way, Crooks!" came Mr. Pycraft's impatient voice. "Oldfield, why can't you move? Duncan, stand aside."

"Come on, we'll get off," said the inspector hastily.

Nipper gave a sudden yell.

"Wait a minute!" he shouted. He went up to the inspector and dragged off his peaked cap. "My only hat! Stevens!"

A wig had come away with the cap, and although Horace Stevens, of the Fifth, was

otherwise made up, he was now recognisable.

"What is all this?" demanded Mr. Pycraft, arriving at last. "Who—who are you? Good gracious! I believe you are Stevens!"

"That's right, sir," said Stevens, in his natural voice. "Just a little joke, sir—you wouldn't understand, even if I explained. Quite harmless, sir."

"Oh, indeed!" said Mr. Pycraft, with a feeling that he had been made to look silly. "I am astonished, Stevens, that a senior boy of your standing should indulge in such buffoonery. However, I certainly have no desire to inquire further."

And Mr. Pycraft retired, with as much dignity as he could muster.

"Interfering old busybody!" murmured Stevens. "If he hadn't come butting in I should have got Travers away as easily as winking. I hope you're satisfied, Parkington."

"Parkington!" yelled Travers. "Is this another of K. K.'s spoofs?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Red-Hots yelled uproariously, and the Old-Timers stood by, wrathful.

"As a matter of fact, old bean, it was too late to cancel this part of the programme," explained K. K. blandly. "I had already arranged with Stevens to come here dressed as a police-inspector. Your arrest was to be the 'disaster' foretold for the fourth day by the Curse."

"Well, I'm jiggered!"

"I didn't reckon on your diving headfirst through the windscreen of a motor-van," went on K. K. "That rather messed things up, because I had to explain before the right time. Still, Stevens couldn't have arrived at a better moment. I believe you had a real scare."

"By Samson! I did!" said Travers feelingly.

HE had had such a scare, in fact, that he decided then and there to abandon his views on "findings keepings," and to hand the scarab over to the police at once. As he said to Jimmy Potts, as he rode to Banington on the back of Jimmy's motor-bike, the thing wasn't valuable, but he might as well get rid of the beastly thing.

He and Jimmy Potts marched into the Banington police-station together, and they were lucky enough to run into Inspector Jameson, whom they both knew well, just inside the cold, barren-looking lobby.

"Well, young man, what do you want?" asked the inspector.

"I found this in the road, and I thought I'd better bring it in to you," explained Travers, neglecting to mention that he had found it two or three days earlier. "I don't think it's any good, but—"

"Hallo! Let's have a look!" interrupted the inspector sharply. "Well, I'm bothered! You say you found this in the road?"

"Why, yes," said Travers curiously. "Do you know anything about it?"

"Powell, look up the description of that curio that was reported as lost by Lady Hodson-Kendrick," said the inspector, calling to one of his subordinates. "It seems to me, my young friend, that you're a very lucky individual."

"Wha-a-at?" gurgled Travers.

"Come with me," said the inspector crisply.

They went into his office, and Jameson compared the curio with an official description.

"Yes, this is it, right enough," he said with satisfaction. "Lady Hodson-Kendrick will be very pleased. Well done, boys. I'm very glad that you are honest, and that you brought this piece of jewellery straight to the police."

"Yes, sir," said Travers, with a guilty glance at Jimmy Potts.

"Her ladyship reported that she dropped it out of her car somewhere between Caistows and Helmford," continued the inspector. "We couldn't search all that stretch of road, of course, but we've had a notice in the paper for two or three days."

"We didn't see it," put in Jimmy quickly.

"Apparently not, or you would have known that this is a valuable Egyptian antique, of pure gold, and studded with genuine rubies," said the inspector. "Lady Hodson-Kendrick has offered a reward of twenty pounds for its recovery!"

"Hold me, Jimmy, I'm going all giddy!" murmured Travers faintly.

IT did not say much for Professor Sylvester Tucker's opinion on gold and precious stones. The japers had founded their spoof on the professor's verdict that the scarab was worthless. Had they known otherwise they would never have played the joke. But the professor, busy with his astronomical problems, had evidently paid the scarab but scant attention. Possessed by a schoolboy, too, he had taken it for granted that it was a mere imitation.

The effect upon Vivian Travers was entirely satisfactory. This unexpected development had proved to him, more convincingly than anything else, that he had been all wrong. How much better it was to do the right thing!

His conscience would not allow him to keep that twenty pounds for himself. He felt that the Remove—and particularly the Red-Hots—deserved their share of that reward. So he used it for a glorious "breaking-up" feed—the last big feast of the term before the Christmas holidays.

THE END.

(A lively Christmas yarn featuring the Chums of St. Frank's in next Wednesday's ENLARGED Xmas issue of the Old Paper. Entitled: "The Phantom of the Grange!" Order your copy now, lads.)

Another Breezy Adventure of Your Old Pal—

BOUNCER BILLY BAXTER!



Swinging headfirst from the rope, Billy swooped down and clutched the heroine in his arms.

CHAPTER 1.

Billy At the Movies!

“WATCH yer back!” yelled Fatty Hart hoarsely, as the villain advanced slowly towards the unsuspecting hero. “Watch yer back!”

The three pals, Billy Baxter, Ginger Jones, and Fatty Hart, were seated in the stalls of the Bynville Cinema, where they went every Saturday afternoon. And they were watching the tenth episode of that exciting serial, “The Grizzly Hand,” featuring Ed Simons, the well-known dare-devil of the screen.

The climax of the episode was at hand, and the whole audience was yelling at Ed

Simons to watch his back. But Ed was deaf, and a groan escaped from all as the villain pounced upon him. It was followed by a breathless silence as the two men came to grips.

The struggle raged grimly and furiously, sometimes Ed uppermost, but more often the villain, who carried a hefty club, getting the better of it. Then gradually the two moved backwards, until the horrified spectators saw that they were fighting on the very brink of a deep chasm. Everybody held their breath. Then suddenly the tense silence in the cinema was broken by an interruption.

“Hu-u-u-uh!” said a tired voice in a very bored tone.

Billy Baxter doubles for a double on the films!

Everybody jumped. Turning in the direction of the sound, they beheld Billy Baxter stifling a yawn!

After that the spell was broken and the excitement ruined. Not a single groan was raised as the villain coshed his opponent with the club and Ed went hurtling into the canyon, while the picture faded out, "To Be Continued Next Week." This finished the programme, and the audience, glaring at Billy, left the cinema.

"What was the idea, going to sleep during the serial, Billy?" asked Ginger Jones, as they walked along the road. "Didn't you find the picture exciting?"

Billy shook his head.

"When you know how these things are done," he explained, "it takes away all the interest."

His pals stared.

"What do you mean about knowing how things are done?" inquired Fatty. "Meaner say it ain't real, Billy?"

Billy laughed scornfully.

"Well, you are a softy, Fatty!" he declared. "Did Ginger and you really believe that Ed Simons did all those stunts?"

"Well, didn't he?" demanded Ginger.

"No, he didn't!" said Billy Baxter. "For one thing, there wasn't any cliff. Ed Simons only fell into a ditch a few feet deep, but a trick camera made it look miles deep. And for another thing, when Ed Simons has to do really dangerous work he pays a double to do it for him."

Neither Fatty nor Ginger said anything for several seconds. It wasn't often that Billy Baxter made statements that were obviously untrue, but this one certainly took a lot of swallowing.

They had been watching the picture very closely, and Ed Simons had undoubtedly gone over the cliff. As for the suggestion that the cliff was a ditch, why, anybody could tell the difference, trick camera or no trick camera.

"How do you know all this, anyway?" asked Ginger suspiciously.

As a matter of fact, Billy had read something about doubles and trick cameras in a movie magazine. But he saw a chance to uphold his reputation.

"Aw," he said in desperation, "haven't I seen Ed Simons at work on a picture?"

Fatty and Ginger were knocked speechless. For nearly a minute they gaped at Billy, then Fatty managed to find his voice.

"Meaner say you've seen Ed Simons making a film?" he gasped.

"Course I have!" responded Billy. "Ed Simons and me are great pals. I used to teach him a lot of tricks, you know. In fact, many a time I've doubled for him."

"Garn!" said Ginger disbelievingly. "Ed Simons makes his films in America. When were you in Hollywood?"

Billy regarded his pal pityingly.

"I've never been in Hollywood, Ginger," he replied, "though Ed is always coaxing me to visit him. But if you knew anything

about history you'd know that Ed Simons made films in this country for years. It was me that advised him to go to America. There's more money there, you know."

Since this was something that everybody knew to be true, Fatty and Ginger began to think that Billy must be speaking the truth. Naturally, it was disappointing to discover that Ed Simons' stunts were faked, but it was thrilling to have a pal who has acted in the movies. They regarded Billy with awe.

"Are you ever going to be on the films again, Billy?"

"You never can tell," responded Billy cautiously. "But I don't think so. You see, me being so good-looking they'd want me to do a lot of kissing. I don't mind doing dangerous tricks, but kissing isn't in my line."

This was the first time Fatty and Ginger had ever heard about Billy Baxter being good-looking, and they certainly hadn't noticed the fact themselves.

As they continued on their way deploring the fact that kissing had kept such a great actor as Billy Baxter off the screen, they were suddenly aware of a strange spectacle coming along the High Street. This was no less than a troupe of horsemen, dressed in cowboy garb, and headed by a motor-car, in which sat a young man in ordinary dress. The procession was followed by an admiring crowd, who cheered loudly as the young man raised his hat in salute.

"Seems something familiar about that fellow," remarked Ginger.

"By golly!" cried Fatty Hart in intense excitement, as the car came nearer. "It's Ed Simons!"

"So it is!" gasped Ginger.

There was now no mistaking the familiar features of the famous screen hero, and Billy Baxter felt his heart sinking as he realised what he had let himself in for. His luck had deserted him.

"Course it's Ed!" he put in hastily. "Do you think he would visit this country without coming to see me?"

Mentally he was wondering what really had brought Ed Simons to Bynville, and he could see the looks of scorn on his pals' faces. Fortunately for Billy, the awkwardness of the moment was relieved by the arrival of Sam Binns, who knew everything.

"That's Ed Simons," he informed them, before they could say a word. "His company is camping in the old quarry. Been there since early morning. Ed has just come off the train. Going to make some of his new picture at the quarry."

And, leaving the three pals staring after them, Sam, the crowd, the film cowboys, and the car containing Ed Simons passed on their way. There was a foreboding silence among the three friends.

"Well!" said Ginger Jones at last, with some feeling. "For a fellow you taught all the tricks of the business, Billy, Ed. Simons seems to be dashed ungrateful. Didn't recognise you, Billy!"

Billy yawned.

"I didn't expect him to," he admitted. "Did you notice that I didn't recognise him, either? You see, I shall be doubling for him in his new picture, and if it got around it would be harmful to Ed's reputation. We have decided to ignore each other in public."

Even Ginger Jones had to admit that there might be something in this.

"And you're going to act in his new film, Billy?" asked the admiring Fatty Hart.

Billy nodded.

"When?" inquired the still doubtful Ginger.

"Oh, maybe Monday," answered Billy casually. "All depends on when they want something dangerous to be done."

CHAPTER 2.

Billy in Disgrace!

ALL day on Sunday the road to the quarry where the film company was encamped was thronged with people eager to catch a glimpse of the movie folk. At one time or other every man, woman, and child in the village strolled out that way. But there was one exception. That was Billy Baxter.

Billy did not accompany his pals, pleading that he had to pay his visits in secret. Afterwards he told Fatty and Ginger how pleased Ed Simons had been when he made his appearance.

"There's dangerous work to be done," said Billy. "I think Ed was scared in case I didn't turn up."

"I hear they're starting work to-morrow," put in Ginger. "I suppose you'll be doing your stuff, Billy?"

Billy yawned.

"Oh, sure," he said.

The next day—Monday—happened to be a school holiday. Billy awoke with the feeling that it wasn't going to be a great holiday, and his worst fears were confirmed when, shortly after breakfast, he left his home to find Fatty Hart, Ginger Jones, Sam Binns, and several others waiting for him at the gate.

"Hallo!" exclaimed Billy. "Waiting for something?"

Sam Binns grinned.

"It's like this, Billy," he said. "Fatty and Ginger here say that Ed Simons is a great pal of yours, and that you're going to act in his picture. Is it true?"

"Absolutely," declared Billy, glaring at his two pals, who shifted uncomfortably.

"Well, in that case," went on Sam Binns smoothly, "you'll be able to get us into the quarry to watch, won't you?"

Billy groaned inwardly.

"Can't be done, boys! There are strict rules against strangers being allowed on the sets. It puts the actors off their work."

"Oh, well," said Sam Binns, and from the sneer on his face Billy could see that he had

been declaring his doubts about Billy and Ed Simons being such great friends. "We only thought you had some influence, Billy."

Billy realised that he was in a tight corner. Not only was his reputation in danger, but his two pals were also likely to feel disgraced if he let them down.

"Oh, all right," he agreed, to the joy of Fatty and Ginger. "Come along. I'll see what I can do."

At the entrance to the old quarry there had been erected a barbed wire barrier, and in order to get past it was necessary to pass through a narrow gateway. When Billy and his pals arrived they found the gateway guarded by a burly commissionaire.

"Hey!" yelled the commissionaire, as Billy strolled through the gate. "Where are you going?"

"It's all right, Jake," said Billy airily. "The boys are all pals of mine."

"Oh, is that so?" snarled the gatekeeper, catching Billy by the scruff of the neck. "You gotta permit?"

"No."

"What?"

"Aw, listen, Jake——"

"Listen nothin'!" said the other. "You get out! And me name ain't Jake!"

And, gripping the slack of Billy's pants with his other hand, he heaved. Billy Baxter landed in a heap at the feet of his schoolmates.

"Well, well!" said Sam Binns sneeringly. "What a welcome, Billy! What a welcome!"

Billy Baxter rose slowly and tried to look as unconcerned as possible.

"Oh, that!" he said scornfully. "That's nothing. We were just practising some comedy stuff."

But even Billy felt that this excuse was unconvincing, and he was in no way surprised at the looks of open disgust on the faces of his schoolmates.

"Aw, don't make things worse," said Sam Binns. "I always said you were only a bouncer, Billy Baxter, and this proves it. I fancy you'll sing dumb in future. Come on, boys!"

And, leaving Billy staring at the ground, Sam Binns and the others strolled off, laughing loudly. For a moment or two Fatty and Ginger, both looking pretty blue, hesitated. Then, with a heavy sigh, they, too, left their pal.

CHAPTER 3.

Billy the Double!

FOR some moments Billy Baxter did not move. There had been many black occasions in his life, but never had his reputation sunk so low as to be deserted even by his two best friends.

"By gosh!" he muttered, clenching his teeth. "I'll show 'em!"



The burly commissioner grabbed hold of Billy by the scruff of the neck and the seat of his pants and threw him at the feet of his two pals.

He determined to get into Ed Simons' new film even if he died in the attempt, and, walking a little way back along the road, he examined the fences and walls that barred the way to the quarry.

To a fellow of Billy's ability, climbing a rough stone wall presented no difficulties, and although he tore his pants on the barbed wire at the top of the wall, he was soon crouching safely among the bushes on the other side.

Gradually Billy wormed his way up the slight hill through the undergrowth, until presently he was lying on the edge of the quarry and gazing at the scene below. An amazing scene it was, too.

The old quarry had obviously been chosen because it resembled in miniature a Wild West canyon, with a narrow gully between the two sections. Near this narrow pass a small wooden shack had been built, and at the moment several actors dressed as cowboys were grouped together near the hut. Some distance from them was a movable platform on wheels, and upon it was placed the camera.

Beside this platform were three men. One was a little stout man in plus-fours, whom Billy guessed to be the director. The other two were dressed exactly alike in cowboy garb, and, being of the same build, they seemed like twins.

Billy easily recognised one of them as Ed Simons. The other was a stranger, and his resemblance to the movie star was puzzling.

"Goshoo!" exclaimed Billy suddenly. "It's his double!"

It was rather a shock, even to Billy, to discover that Ed Simons used a double, and at first he was inclined to doubt it. But soon the matter was settled. For presently the director, the double, and Ed Simons ascended the slope of the quarry until they were within a few yards of Billy's hiding-place.

Billy Baxter could hear their voices plainly. The director was giving the double his instructions.

"You come dashing over the hill here, Jimmy. Down at the hut yonder you see Miss Gunner struggling with the rustlers. At the same time the 'plane comes over. You signal to it, and a rope looped at the end drops over. You dash round the edge of the canyon, and as you reach the cleft the 'plane arrives and the rope is eight or ten yards away. You jump for it. If you miss it's sure death, Jimmy, but we've got you insured. Then you tie the loop around your feet, the 'plane swoops into the quarry, you clutch the dummy of Miss Gunner and rise. Meantime the rustlers recover and start shooting. One of them severs the rope and you drop. That's the end. Ed will do the stuff on the ground after that."

"O.K.," said Jimmy the double cheerfully.

The director and Ed Simons then went away. Jimmy the double threw away his

(Continued on page 42.)

*Thrills in the
Centre of the Earth!*

SUBTER- RANEAN CASTAWAYS

This Week's Amazing
Adventure:
THE PIT OF HORROR!



Roddy found himself shooting downwards, away from his companions: down, down.

When the Earth Opened!

A PALE beam of an electric torch stabbed the darkness, throwing into silhouette the figures of two boys, who squatted on the floor of a vast cave. In the distance roared the rushing waters of a mighty waterfall, which cascaded into the cave, and then flowed through it in an underground torrent.

Roddy Patterson, who was slightly older than his companion, Spud Thompson, took a bite at some of the food which he had just fished out from the haversack he carried on his back, and turned to Spud.

"This is a bit of a rag, you know," he said. "Who would have thought that less than a week ago you and I were a couple of ordinary British boys, and now we are monarchs of all we survey in this underground world of caves?"

"Um!" said Spud. "But what's going

to happen to us, Roddy? We can never get back up that waterfall, and when our spare batteries for the torches give out——"

"Don't be a pessimist," put in his chum. "Uncle will find some way of getting round that. It was he who discovered that edible fungus to eke out our food supply, and now we've got plenty of food and water. Why, we could live for years and years in these caves, and the most curious thing about them is that the air is perfectly fresh down here. Uncle reckons that there are some gases or chemicals down here which generate oxygen and keep the air fresh."

At that moment the boys were interrupted by the arrival of a third figure—Professor Patterson, Roddy's uncle, and the leader of this expedition into the subterranean caves, where they had been trapped by the machinations of Jefferson Jetby, an old enemy of the professor's.

"Any further discoveries, uncle?" asked Roddy, getting up.

"Yes, my boy," was the reply. "Look at this!" He struck together two pieces of rock, which he held in his hands, causing a shower of vivid sparks. "With the aid of this rock we can light a fire of the driftwood, which is carried down into this cave from the earth above by the underground torrent. Furthermore, the caves which are connected to this one have ponds and lakes containing curious sightless fish, while crab-like creatures crawl amongst the rocks. So far as food and fire are concerned, we have everything necessary to sustain life. But——"

"But what, uncle?" asked Roddy, as Professor Patterson hesitated.

"I am sorry to say that we have not thrown Jetby off our track," was the reply. "I have seen footsteps that have undoubtedly been made by the feet of men. We are being tracked through the caverns, and that is why we must push on. These caves stretch, without end throughout the whole of the earth. There are tens of thousands—perhaps millions—of miles of caves, ravines, passages and clefts in the rocks, forming a vast labyrinth. We are on the verge of most wonderful discoveries, of which, as yet, science knows nothing. If you are ready, boys, we will proceed."

"Which way, uncle?" asked Roddy.

"We must follow the underground stream. It may lead us to——"

"To where?" asked Roddy, as his uncle broke off.

"To the centre of the earth!" answered the professor impressively.

Thrilling with excitement, the boys needed no further urging. In a moment,

with haversacks strapped on their backs, they were ready, and together the three explorers began their wonderful journey. It was rough going over the floor of the cave, with the torrent rushing at their side. They had to scramble over massive rocks, and skirt around stalagmites which were as much as ten feet in circumference.

The river roared as it tore on its course, the crashing of the waterfall filled the cave with thunderous echoes, and there was a constant "drip-drip" of water from the roof above. But there was never a sound of a human voice or of human foot-falls save their own.

They were using only one torch, and keeping the others in case of emergency. In their haversacks, too, were spare batteries.

On and on they went, with the light of the torch shining on weird and wonderful stalagmites and stalactites, and marvellous alabaster formations, which assumed grotesque shapes. Roddy, who was leading the party, passed out of the larger caves, and the three intrepid adventurers found themselves in a series of smaller ones.

Roddy had fixed the torch, which was provided with a hanger, on to the front of his coat, so as to leave his hands free. Suddenly he stumbled, and had just time to shout out a cry of warning to the others before he disappeared completely, as if the ground had opened and swallowed him.

And that, indeed, was what had happened; for he had trodden on an insecure stone, which had tipped up immediately. Before Roddy could gather his scattered wits together, he found himself sliding swiftly down a steep declivity, worn smooth with the rushing waters of a bygone age.

Crash!

He landed at last with a shock that drove the breath from his body. Luckily for him, the torch had not been smashed. Roddy staggered to his feet and sent the beam of light flashing round.

He was in a bowl-shaped depression which was, perhaps, some twenty feet across. The walls were highly polished and slippery. His heart sank as he saw them, for he knew that he would never be able to clamber up them. High above him he could see a faint twinkle of light, and he knew that Spud had turned on the other torch, and was attempting to peer down into the pit. But the light was not sufficient, and Roddy realised he could not be seen by his companions. He shouted and waited for a reply, but none came. The boy then looked around him for a means of escape.

A patch of blackness caught his eye, and he turned his torch in that direction. Then he gave a whoop of joy. About ten feet above him was an opening, leading to a small passage. Roddy took a run up the sloping wall, trusting to grip the end of the ledge and drag himself into the opening.

The next moment the blood seemed to freeze in his veins, and he recoiled with a gasp of horror. For he beheld two greenish eyes shining out of the darkness of the passage; he found himself looking at the most terrifying creature he had ever seen!

It was something like a spider—but what a spider! Its horrible slimy body was at least three feet across; its legs were each four feet long, and the two fore-legs were provided with great pincer-like paws.

It made a curious grating sound, and then—green eyes gleaming, sharp, ugly teeth bared—it crawled over the edge of the pit and slithered down the sloping wall, heading straight for the horrified Roddy!

The Pit of the Spider!

RODDY'S heart seemed to miss a beat. Then, uttering a wild, despairing cry, he shrank back against the wall of the pit. Slowly and deliberately the monster advanced upon him. He looked around for something that would serve him as a weapon—but found nothing. Like a rabbit fascinated by a snake, he kept the beam of his torch turned full upon the creature, unable to move, paralysed into inactivity by the horror of his ghastly predicament.

Nearer and nearer came the monster spider. One of its tentacle-like fore-legs shot out. Roddy side-stepped, just as the pincers closed with a clash, missing him by inches. He became galvanised into activity.

Swiftly he ran around the pit, and the spider turned and began to crawl in his direction. Again the same thing happened, and again Roddy dodged. But he knew that he could not go on dodging for ever. Sooner or later he would slip, and then—

His heart was beating furiously. He knew he was playing a losing game, but, with dogged pluck, he continued. Then he gave a sobbing cry as what he had feared happened. He slipped on the polished floor, and the spider, with a curious grunt, sprang forward.

Its nippers were ready to rend him, and all seemed over. Roddy closed his eyes for the fraction of a second.

Bump! Crash!

Roddy opened his eyes. Something else had slipped into the pit with terrific force, crashing into the spider and knocking it sideways. As Roddy jumped to his feet, the torch-light fell on the newcomer, and Roddy gave a gasp as he saw—Jefferson Jetby!

Jetby, prowling in the caves above, had stumbled across the tipping stone, and he, too, had joined Roddy in this pit of horror. Roddy remembered that Jetby was armed, as were all the men of his gang.

“Jetby!” he yelled. “If you value your life—shoot it!”

Jetby, shaken by his fall, dragged himself slowly to his feet, and then, as his gaze fell on the horrible denizen of the pit, he gave a howl of terror and stood there, trembling and terrified.

“Shoot, you fool, shoot!” yelled Roddy, but Jetby was paralysed with fear, and although he had a revolver in his belt, his trembling fingers could not draw it.

For the spider, stung to anger by Jetby crashing into it, had turned its attention to the newcomer, and was now advancing upon him. Jetby cowered back. The pincers flashed out—and Jetby uttered a wild scream as they seized his leg and dragged him down.

Scoundrel though Jetby was, Roddy could not bring himself to stand by and see him killed in such a horrible way. He jumped forward. At school Roddy had been no mean footballer—and his feet were the only weapons he could now use. He used them to advantage!

Thud! Thud! Thud!

His feet shot out, kicking at the spider as they had been wont to kick the leather sphere. But the flesh of the spider was soft and yielding, and Roddy's kicks seemed to have little impression upon the creature.

They had one good effect, however. The monster's pincers snapped open, and the spider turned, leaving Jetby lying there, moaning. Roddy took a spring and jumped right over the monster. The next minute he had bent down over Jetby; had snatched the revolver from his belt.

He was just in time. The spider had advanced upon him, and the tentacles were stretching out. In another second they would close on him. Desperately the boy levelled the revolver and fired.

Crash!

The air was split by a shattering explosion, followed by a weird scream. By the light of the torch, Roddy saw the creature drop back. Its legs flashed out like flails, it twisted and contorted its horrible body and legs convulsively.

Again and again Roddy fired, and when

the noise of the last report had ceased echoing and re-echoing around the circular pit, the monster lay there—dead!

Roddy wiped the perspiration from his forehead. Jetby was still lying on the ground, terrified out of his wits. Roddy went to him, and took from him the extra supply of cartridges which the man carried.

"These'll be safer in my keeping," he said calmly. "Now come on, you fool! There may be others of these creatures here. Make your escape while you can!"

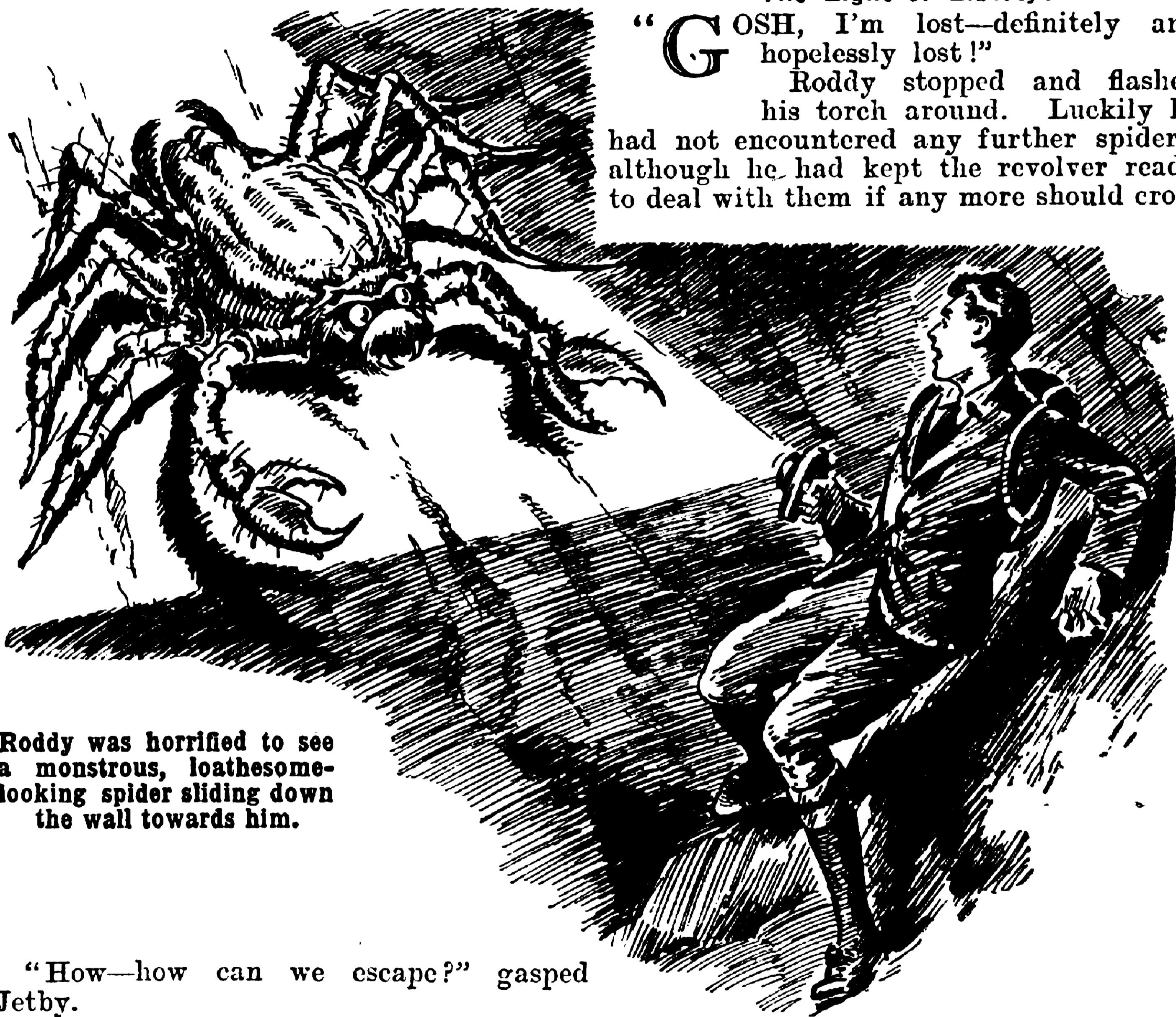
"You know what you said, Jetby," Roddy reminded him. "It was to be war to the knife between us—and no quarter! I'm not risking my life for a swab like you—but I'll do one thing. I'll leave a message for your gang to tell 'em where you are, and then it's up to them. Good-bye, Jefferson Jetby!"

And, with a wave of his hand, Roddy turned and began to feel his way down the passage through which the monster spider had gained the pit!

The Light of Liberty!

"GOSH, I'm lost—definitely and hopelessly lost!"

Roddy stopped and flashed his torch around. Luckily he had not encountered any further spiders, although he had kept the revolver ready to deal with them if any more should cross



Roddy was horrified to see a monstrous, loathesomelooking spider sliding down the wall towards him.

"How—how can we escape?" gasped Jetby.

"Follow me!" snapped Roddy, and retreated across the pit.

He indicated the opening in the side of the wall. After assuring himself that no more of the horrible spiders were lurking in the aperture, he took a run and leaped upwards. His hands caught the edge of the opening, and he hung there for some moments before he could exert all his strength and drag himself upward, to collapse at last, breathless, upon the ledge.

"Come on, man!" he yelled back to Jetby, but the man's nerve had gone.

"I—I can't!" he gasped. "Don't—don't leave me!"

his path. The passage through which he had made his way had wound and twisted tortuously, until by now he had not the slightest idea in which direction he was heading.

To his relief the passage had gone upward, which meant that he stood a chance of getting back to the level upon which he had left the professor and Spud. But although he had sent shouts ringing down the subterranean passages, no answering hails had come back to him, and he was beginning to fear that he would never rejoin his two companions.

Suddenly he started—and jumped back quickly. A stone had begun to tip up under his foot, and he realised with a start that he had come back to the very spot where lay the trap of the spider! But where were Spud and the professor?

Again he shouted, and again only silence rewarded his efforts. He looked around. The tunnel branched off at that spot, and, listening intently, he fancied he could hear the rushing of waters. If the passage led to the underground river, it was possible that the professor and Spud had gone down it.

That seemed feasible, for Jefferson Jetby had tumbled into the trap of the spider—and therefore he had come down that passage. Spud and the professor might have been attempting to dodge Jetby and his gang.

Roddy wasted no more time. Turning into the side tunnel, he went along it cautiously, making sure that the ground was firm beneath his feet. A moment or two later he chanced to raise his eyes—and beheld two gleaming points of greenish light staring out of the darkness at him.

He thought at first that it was another of the monster cave spiders, and he raised the revolver. As he did so there came a scuffling sound, and the eyes vanished.

He heard the patter of naked feet on the rock floor, and knew that whoever—or whatever—had been gazing at him had taken to flight. Perhaps it was one of Jetby's gang. Perhaps Spud and the professor had been taken prisoner!

At any rate, if the fugitive in front of him could run along the tunnel, it proved that the ground was firm and safe. Roddy took to his heels and sped after the pattering footsteps, his torch lighting up the way before him. But he saw nothing more of the gleaming eyes, or of the person or creature to whom they belonged. Only the ghostly footfalls led him on!

Then suddenly he pitched forward, and sprawled over something that was lying in his path. Picking himself up, he flashed the beam of the torch at his feet.

"Spud!" he gasped. "And you, uncle!"

"Thank goodness you've come, Roddy!" gasped his uncle. "I—I was beginning to think that all was over!"

"What happened?" asked Roddy, kneeling down by his uncle and working to free him from the curious ropes which bound both the professor and Spud. "Did Jetby's gang get you?"

"We don't know," said Spud. "We were gazing down into the pit, trying to find out what had happened to you, when

someone seized us both. Before we knew where we were we were tied up. The torch caught against me and went out. But it couldn't be Jetby's gang who did it."

"Why not?" asked Roddy.

"Because whoever it was were interrupted by the sound of Jetby following us along the passage," put in the professor. "They dragged us down here, dropped us, and scurried off into the darkness. One went by just a moment ago. We—we thought it was Jetby!"

"Jetby's out of mischief for the time being," said Roddy, and explained what had happened to the scoundrel. "But—but if it wasn't Jetby's crowd who got you, who was it?"

"Roddy, I said that we were on the verge of great discoveries," said his uncle quietly. "But it seems that even more amazing things are in store than I imagined. These caves must be inhabited!"

"You mean that there are men here?" gasped Roddy.

"Not men, perhaps," said the professor, "but troglodytes! Cave-dwellers, who know nothing of the life of the outer world. It was these troglodytes who seized us and who bound us, and we must seek them out, for they are the only creatures who can tell us whether or no there exists any means of getting back to the earth above!"

By this time Spud and the professor had been released from their bonds, and the three adventurers stared into the darkness that lay ahead of them.

"Come," said the professor. "The sooner we find out whether the troglodytes are hostile or friendly, the better."

In single file the intrepid trio pressed on, leaving the pit of the spider far behind them, and delving deeper into the twisting, tortuous caverns. For hours, it seemed, they walked, and then, as they turned a sudden corner, a cry of amazement came to their lips.

"Light!" cried the professor. "Light—there, ahead of us!"

And light there was, shining dimly from some point far ahead of them, and showing an opening beyond which a pale, bluish light trickled through!

"Come!" said the professor. "There lies the way to safety—or death!"

And, with beating hearts, the subterranean castaways pressed forward!

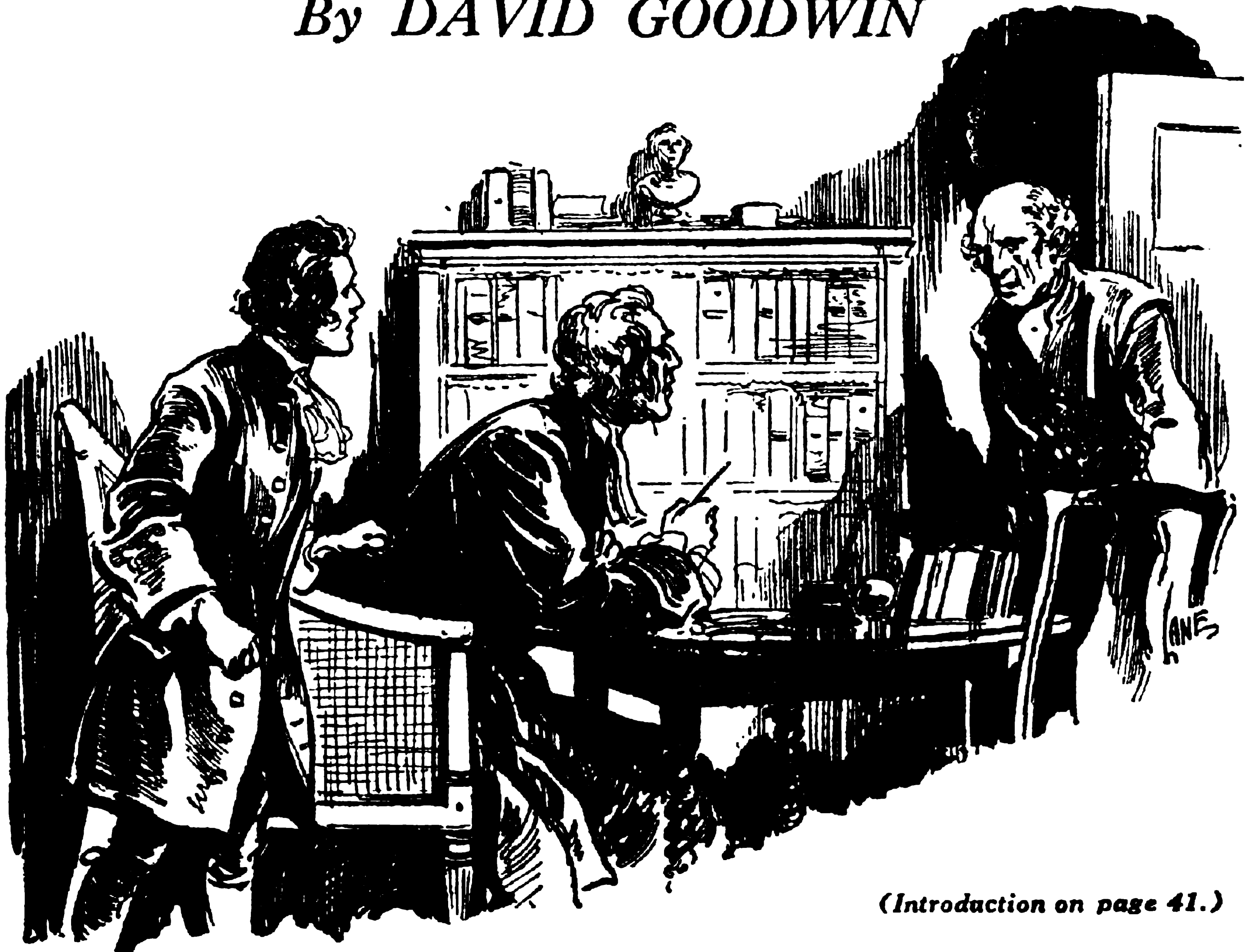
THE END.

(Another exciting yarn in this amazing series next Wednesday, chums. More thrilling adventures for the three intrepid adventurers.)

A Popular Serial by a Popular Author!

Knights of the Road!

By DAVID GOODWIN



(Introduction on page 41.)

Vane Forrester's Threat!

“MR. VANE FORRESTER, of Fernhall, desires speech with you, sir!” As the servant uttered the words to Dr. Trelawney, Ralph gave a low cry of alarm. Just when he had been hoping that his scoundrelly uncle had lost track of him—the man appeared on the scene. It was a shattering blow. He looked at Dr. Trelawney appealingly. The venerable Head smiled at him encouragingly, then turned to the servant.

“Desire Mr. Forrester to step up,” he said quietly.

The man departed. As the door closed, the doctor threw open the other portal on the far side of the room.

“Go!” he whispered quickly to Ralph. “Go down by the back staircase. Do not leave the school but trust to me. I will do what I can for you.”

Ralph vanished in a moment, and the door

was hardly shut on him when Vane Forrester was shown into the room. He was flabby and fat, and his dark eyes shone more threateningly than ever. His rich clothes sat uneasily on his big body.

“Dr. Trelawney?” he asked, in a curt, inquiring way.

The doctor bowed coldly.

“What is your pleasure with me, sir?”

“Pleasure!” echoed Vane, with a short laugh. “I know not if it be pleasure to you, but 'tis very little to me. I believe you

have a young ward of mine as a pupil in this school?”

“What is his name?”

“Ralph Forrester.”

“I have no such name on my books,” said the doctor coldly.

“Like enough,” returned Vane, “he is sailing under false colours, and what name his brother has hit on for him I do not yet

Scoundrelly Vane Forrester appears on the scene once again: more trouble—and excitement—for Dick and Ralph.

know. But he is in your school, and I am going to take him back with me."

"Indeed?" said Trelawney quietly.

"Ay, indeed!" cried Vane, giving the table a rap with his knuckles. "I am his guardian, sir. Now, will you be good enough to deliver him to me forthwith, for I must be going on my way? My coach awaits me outside."

"And how do you propose that I should find a boy—if, indeed, he is here—whose name in the school you do not know?" said the doctor calmly. "Who is this Forrester? You had better furnish me with more particulars."

"Why, hang it, sir, he is a slim young villain of sixteen or less, with yellow-brown hair, and features of a delicate sort, and a proud, supercilious way about him!" cried Vane impatiently.

"That description does not help me," said Trelawney, who became more cool as Vane grew more excited. "It would fit a dozen boys of mine."

"Well, then, sir, parade all of them together in your hall, and I will soon pick him out!" cried Vane. "Od's fish, man, are you trying to fence with me?"

"If you return at eleven to-morrow morning, you will see the boys on parade in the quadrangle," said Trelawney. "It is not my custom to call out four hundred boys, at the instance of a stranger, at eight o'clock at night."

"Now, look ye here, schoolmaster," said Vane savagely, bringing his fist down on the table, "you are trying to make a fool of me, and you had better cut it short, or——"

Dr. Trelawney rose abruptly.

"Enough, sir," he said in a biting voice. "I am not accustomed to this manner of address! Do you hear me?" he added, in a voice that made Vane jump. "Comport yourself as nearly in the fashion of a gentleman as you can while you are here, or I will call my men and have you thrown out through the gates!"

Vane gasped and turned white. Full of his own new majesty as a landed gentleman, he had thought to treat the mere dominic with a high hand, and the doctor's mild voice had deceived him. But now he had roused the blood of the fiery old Head. Vane had no stomach for fighting.

"Well, well, sir!" he said, swallowing his choler and speaking in a milder tone. "I had no wish to affront you, and you will make allowance for a man who has had to dance across country after a disobedient young cub on such a cold night as this. But I want that boy, and I must have him. You should be glad enough to be rid of him, for he will do your school little credit. He is brother to the notorious rogue and outlaw, Dick Forrester, and this brother it was who brought him here."

"This, if it is true, certainly wants looking into!" said Trelawney calmly. "A grave scandal, no doubt."

"Yes, sir, a devilish ugly affair for you,

if the governors of the school learned how you had admitted a highwayman's brother," said Vane grimly. "Now, sir, you will see that it is important I should take the lad away from such perilous guardianship as that brother of his, who actually had the audacity to remove him from Duncansby School, where I had placed him as a pupil. Do you refuse to give him up?"

"To you? Certainly, I refuse."

"Then I shall apply to the governors of the school for his surrender!" cried Vane hotly.

"Moderate your voice, sir," said the doctor quietly. "I see you carry a sword at your side, and I shall call upon you to use it if you address me in that manner again."

Vane scowled at him uneasily.

"As to the governors," said Trelawney, "I shall abide by their decision, not by yours. Your authority has ceased since you gave him into the charge of Mr. Stephen Callard at Duncansby. I know something of Duncansby—and of Callard," he added meaningly.

Vane changed colour, and bit his lip.

"And I think you know more of this highwayman business than you choose to say!" he returned. "So much the worse for you. I shall apply at once to your superiors. Good-night to you, sir. We will see who comes off best!"

The doctor bowed politely, and Vane strode out of the room.

An Awkward Meeting!

INDIFFERENT as he had shown himself before his visitor, Dr. Trelawney felt very uneasy and disturbed as he heard Vane Forrester's coach-wheels roll away into the night. All his hopes of keeping Ralph's whereabouts from his powerful relative had been dashed to the ground just as they were at their highest. The outlook was black indeed.

"It looks as though Dick Forrester and his brother and myself are all in plaguey hot water together," thought the doctor. "There's no peace for those who get on the wrong side of the law, and troublous times are coming for me." The front gate bell rang. "Now, who can that be?"

"Sir Henry Stanhope prays you to excuse the lateness of the hour, and would be glad to see you," said the servant.

"The chief governor of the school," muttered the doctor. "Now for it! Surely that rogue Vane Forrester cannot have seen him yet? Show Sir Henry up," he added aloud to the servant.

The doctor wondered what was coming. Sir Henry was an old acquaintance, and a great landowner in the neighbourhood. Dr. Trelawney could never quite understand him. The baronet always seemed to Trelawney to be poking fun at him, as, indeed, he did at everybody. Yet at bottom the doctor knew him to be stern and unbending when need came.

"Ha, Trelawney, how are you?" cried Sir Henry, stamping into the room. He was a

cheery-looking, red-faced man of fifty, bluff, handsome, rather stout, with twinkling grey eyes. "Pest on it, what a pinching night! If this frost lasts, every hunter in the country will be growing fat in his stall. I looked in to beg you to dine with me to-morrow night."

"To-morrow?" said the doctor. "Ha, hum! I fear I shall be busy judging the boys' examination papers till midnight."

"Oh, burn the examination papers!" cried Sir Henry, with a chuckle of laughter. "Give all the young rips a holiday. Come over and shoot my coverts; we'll dine afterwards. The south spinneys are as full of woodcock as a dumpling is of currants!"

"I fear it is impossible at such short notice," said the doctor regretfully. "I have to deny myself many worldly pleasures."

"Well, you'll dine, at any rate, for I'll take no refusal!" said Sir Henry. "Vincent and Bailey are coming, and half a dozen other—jolly dogs, every one of them!" And Sir Henry, chuckling and taking a huge pinch of snuff, gave the doctor a poke in the waistcoat.

"Very well, I shall be delighted," said the Head, laughing in spite of himself.

At that moment there came another knock at the door.

To Dr. Trelawney's horror, in strode Dick Forrester himself!

"A friend of yours, doctor?" asked Sir Henry, taking a shrewd look at Dick. "Present him to me!"

"Mr. Fernhall—Sir Henry Stanhope!" stammered the doctor. "Plague take it!" he muttered to himself, as once more a servant appeared at the door. "I am besieged with visitors to-night!" He raised his voice again. "I pray you to excuse me, gentlemen, I shall not be long away."

And with a warning glance at Dick, the doctor hurried out to attend the matter which summoned him. He was away longer than he expected—nearly half an hour, in fact—and when he returned to his study, he found Dick Forrester and Sir Henry walking up and down arm-in-arm, laughing merrily.

"Pink me!" cried Sir Henry. "Your young friend is the jolliest dog I ever met, Trelawney! I have asked him to join us to-morrow night—run me through the body if I'll take any refusal!"

"I shall be charmed, Sir Henry!" said Dick.

The doctor stared at them in astonishment, and his face cleared.

"We shall be a merry party indeed!" said the Head; "but, Sir Henry, I shall be glad to see you in private for a few minutes before you depart. There is a most grave matter which I must put before you—I know not how you will take it."

"A grave matter!" exclaimed Sir Henry, clapping on his hat and making for the door. "Plague it, man, it would spoil my night's rest to have weighty business flung at me this time of the evening! Two mornings a week I give up to matters of business, and that's bad enough when a man might be hunting! I never deal with grave affairs so late at night."

"Nay, but this business cannot wait, Sir Henry!" said the doctor eagerly. "I pray you——"

"I won't hear a word!" cried the baronet, chuckling. "Tell me to-morrow. A good-night to you, Mr. Fernhall, and sleep well."

Sir Henry clattered down the stairs, his spurs jingling.

"A very cheery old boy," said Dick, chuckling. "He will be rare good company."

"No doubt," said the doctor gloomily; "but I wish he had listened to me. I know not how we are coming out of this business. What brings you here, Dick, without a word of warning? It might have been most perilous for both of us. It was risky; it was foolish!"

"Forgive me," said Dick, "but I had made sure of finding you alone, and there is already such danger that I thought well to come to you hot-foot! My Uncle Vane is in the neighbourhood; it is plain he has tracked Ralph down."

"I know that too well," said the doctor grimly; "he was here not an hour ago."

"Trying to get young Ralph away from you?"

"Ay! He ordered me to surrender your brother to him on the instant, and was mighty uncivil. I threatened to call him out and cross swords with him unless he mended his manners."

"If he gets hold of Ralph I fear the consequences," said Dick gravely.

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, while Ralph goes on to Duncansby. He has a terrible time there, but is eventually rescued by his brother—now a notorious highwayman with a price on his head—who takes him to St. Ansell's College, where he is known as Fernhall. Dirkley, the school sneak, discovers the secret. He tells Dr. Trelawney, the headmaster, who, however, because he is indebted to Dick for a service, takes no action. Dirkley himself is carried away by gipsies at Dick's request. The Head, anxious to help Ralph, calls him to his study. The interview is interrupted by the entry of a servant, who announces that Vane Forrester has arrived and wishes to see Dr. Trelawney.

(Now read on.)

"We must keep your brother out of his clutches at all costs," agreed Trelawney. "But it is a matter of law, and as an outlaw, your hands are tied."

"Where has Vane gone?"

"Either to the governors of the school, or to the magistrates at Hutton. Sir Henry Stanhope is the chief governor. That is why I was so anxious to prepare him in some way for what is coming, though for all his off-hand ways, Sir Henry is a man of iron when it is a question of the law. The crux of the matter is this, Dick: Will you take your brother away now that the danger threatens, and try to find a safe harbour for him elsewhere, or shall we fight it out with Vane here? If Ralph is to stay I will stand by you to the end."

"Then let him stay!" said Dick. "There is no better place I know, and it is grave peril for him to ride the country in my company, for I carry my neck in my hands."

"So be it, then!" returned Trelawney. "But look you, Dick, if I am ordered by the governors to give up your brother I cannot refuse. So mount and ride, and if there is a way on earth to do it, stop Vane before he can speak to Sir Henry!"

"I'll stop him," said Dick grimly, "with a warrant in each holster."

Trouble Brewing!

WHETHER by luck or good management, Vane Forrester kept out of Dick's way next day, nor was the young highwayman able to find where he was staying. Some plan was at work which threw his pursuer off the track completely, and while Dick, for once, was off on a fool's errand in the wrong direction, Vane's coach rolled boldly up to the door of Basing Hall, Sir Henry Stanhope's mansion. It was then towards the middle of the afternoon.

"Tell Sir Henry Stanhope that Mr. Forrester, of Fernhall, waits upon him," said

Vane pompously to the serving-man who opened the great door.

"Mr. Forrester?" grunted Sir Henry impatiently when the servant brought him the news. He was pulling on his boots in great haste. "Of Fernhall, eh? Why, that's the name of that jolly young dog who's coming here to-night! What an odd thing!"

"He waits below, sir, and he seems very impatient," said the servant.

"Impatient? Burn him, what's he got to be impatient about?" said Sir Henry, pulling on the other boot. "I don't know him from Adam! I can't see him now. My horse is saddled, and I'd sooner keep any man waiting than a good horse."

At that moment, fearing he was going to be refused, Vane appeared in the doorway, having bribed a servant to show him up.

"Have I the honour—" he began.

"Ah, how d'ye do, sir, how d'ye do?" said Sir Henry, snatching up his whip and gloves. "Must beg you to excuse me—can't stop now—most pressing business!"

"Sir, I pray you hear me but a moment!" cried Vane eagerly. "It is a matter of the greatest urgency—"

"Couldn't think of it! Come and dine to-night—tell me after dinner—lot of jolly fellows coming—half-past five—don't forget! Good-bye till then, sir!"

And Sir Henry was gone like a whirlwind, leaving Vane gaping behind him.

"These pudding-headed country baronets! They think of nothing but dining and riding!" growled Vane, as he made his way back to his coach. "Well, I must make the best of it, I suppose, and wait till the evening. He will wish he had listened when he hears my news. The fellow is a magistrate, and holds the King's commission of the Peace. He cannot, at any rate, take sides against the law!"

(What will happen when Dick comes face to face with Vane Forrester? On no account miss reading next week's dramatic instalment, chums.)

BOUNCER BILLY BAXTER

(Continued from page 33.)

cigarette, and, before Billy could move, he came towards his hiding-place.

Billy started to scramble away hastily, and in doing so he got into the other's way. With a startled cry the double stumbled over Billy, struck his head violently against a tree, rolled several yards down the slope, and lay still. When Billy reached him Jimmy the double was out to the world.

"Here's a go!" muttered Billy.

As he stared down at the unconscious double he became aware of noises near him, and, looking down the hill, he saw Fatty Hart, Ginger Jones, Sam Binns, and the others in the act of clambering over the wall. In a flash Billy Baxter realised that he now had the means of retrieving his lost reputation.

He dragged Jimmy the double behind a bush, and hurriedly stripped him of his clothes. These Billy himself donned, covering the double with his own clothes. This done, Billy waited until his schoolmates were crawling up the hill, then he stepped into the open.

"You fellows had better stay where you are," he advised calmly. "We're about to start work, and you'll spoil this scene if you go over that hill."

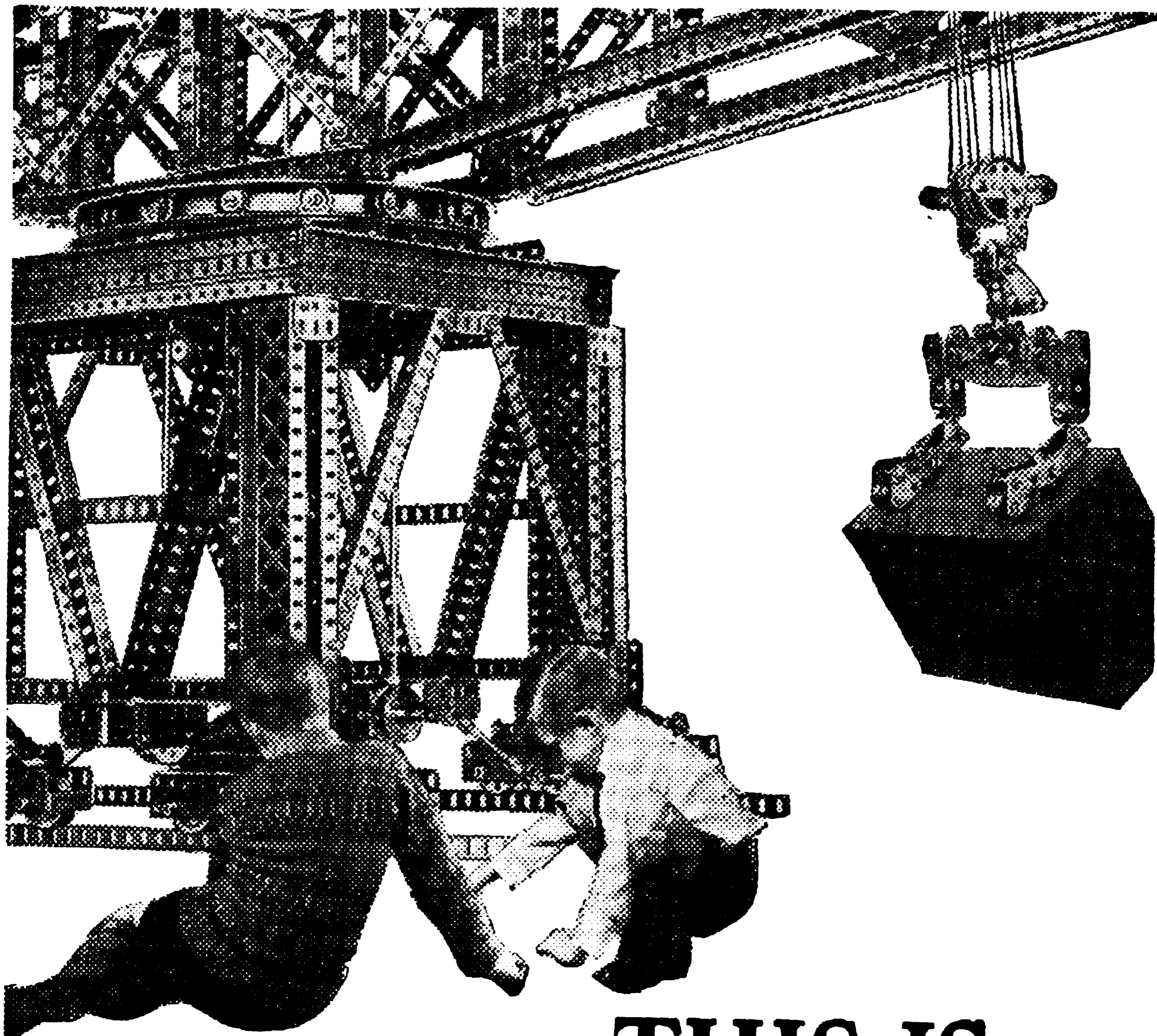
His dumbfounded friends could only sit on the ground and stare open-mouthed.

Billy enjoyed his moment of triumph, and as he struck a really impressive attitude a loud voice was heard:

"All set, Jimmy!"

It was the director calling upon Ed Simons' double to start his work. Billy had forgotten that business for the moment. He

(Continued on page 44.)



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OLD SWAN

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BOUNCER BILLY BAXTER

(Continued from page 42.)

would have to go through with the whole bag of tricks!

"That's my call, boys!" he said rather shakily. "My name is Jimmy in the picture. Well, I'm off!"

He was off all right, and feeling very wobbly at the knees about it, too. Standing on the edge of the quarry, he saw that a young lady, the heroine of the film, was fighting a group of rustlers outside the little cabin. While he watched he heard a droning sound, and, looking up, he saw an aeroplane flying low and coming in his direction. From the plane dangled a long rope with a loop at the end.

"Off you go, Jimmy!" bawled the director.

Billy started to run round the edge of the quarry. As he came near the cleft between the two quarries he saw that the rope from the aeroplane was dangling over the chasm several feet from the edge. Billy gathered speed, judged his distance, closed his eyes, and took the leap with outstretched hands.

"Good boy!" yelled a voice.

Billy opened his eyes. Wonder of wonders; he had the rope gripped in his hands. He now secured the loop about his foot and allowed himself to hang head downwards. He was rather vague about what happened next. The plane swooped down into the quarry,

and there was a hasty scramble of the supposed rustlers. When the plane rose again Billy found himself clutching a dummy figure made up to represent the heroine.

Then, from below, came the sounds of revolver shots. Billy felt a tremor run through the rope, and, glancing up, he saw that one of the shots had found its mark. Billy was suspended by a single strand.

"Goshoo!" groaned Billy.

Looking down, it seemed to him that the quarry was miles away. He was in for a nasty bump. At that moment the rope snapped and Billy, closing his eyes tightly, hurtled head over heels towards the ground.

It seemed to him that he fell for hours, but he landed at last. He was lying on an outspread safety net about ten feet above the ground. Directly underneath him he could see the director, Ed Simons, Miss Gunner, and the rest of the actors.

"Your double had an accident, Ed," explained Billy; "I thought I'd take his place."

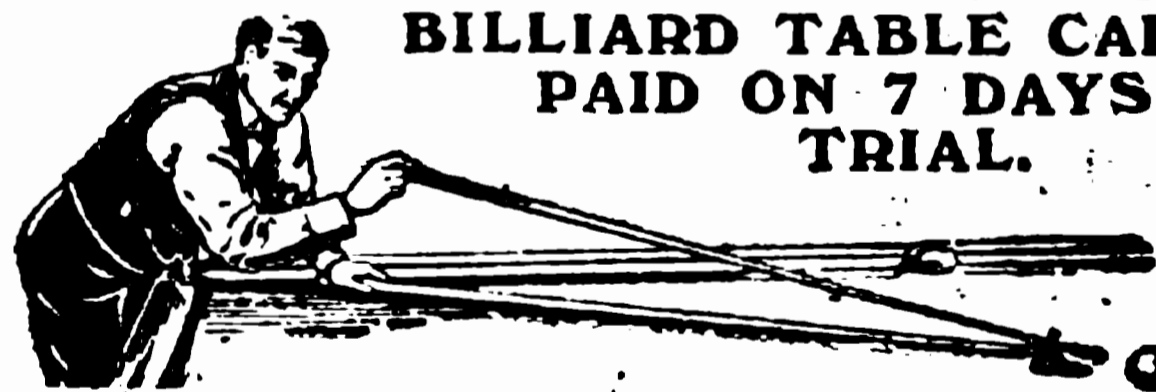
"Take his place be darned!" put in the director enthusiastically. "That was great stuff, kid. If you can do any more stunts like that we'll feature you in a two-reel comedy."

And, later, with Fatty, Ginger, Sam Binns, and the others looking on in admiration, that is exactly what they did!

THE END.

(Billy in a pantomime next week. Plenty of fun in this breezy, festive yarn.)

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