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NELSON LEE

2¢



**"FROM PRAIRIE
TO CASTLE!"**

*This Week's Novel
School Yarn*



CHAPTER 1. Distinguished Arrivals!

"HEARD the latest?" asked Kirby Keeble Parkington of the Remove, as he emerged from the Ancient House at St. Frank's, and found a group of Removites sunning themselves on the steps.

"Don't bother us now, K. K., old man," said Handforth, as he noticed the newspaper in Parkington's hand. "We're planning our hike for this afternoon. As patrol leader of the Tigers, I've decided that the Tigers shall take a different route."

"So much better for all the other Scouts," said K. K. approvingly.

"Eh?"

"We can get along splendidly without you, Handy," declared K. K. "I'm relieved. A hike is so much better when there's no fighting attached to it; and if the Tigers took the same route as the Lions and the Hawks and the Bears and all the rest, fighting would be a certainty."

Nobody took much notice of Parkington, and the discussion continued. The weather was so fine and spring-like that the St. Frank's Scouts had decided to commence operations. The first troop, of seven patrols, was made up entirely of Removites—Nipper, the Form captain, being patrol leader of the Lions. K. K. was in command of the Leopard Patrol—which represented half the Red-Hots; the other six Red-Hots, under the leadership of Conway Baines, were known as the Jaguars.

The Fourth-Formers represented the 2nd St. Frank's Troop—the Wolves, the Buffaloes, the Beavers, the

**Meet Viscount "Skeets" Bellton,
from Mosquito Bend, Saskatchewan
—the boy with a sting in both fists!**

Rhinos, the Otters and the Elephants. John Busterfield Boots was patrol leader of the Wolves.

"We're going out in force," Nipper was saying. "For this afternoon all japes are distinctly off. If we can put one over on the 2nd Troop by an exhibition of better scoutcraft, all well and good."

"We'll make those silly Fourth-Formers look like raw wolf-cubs," said Handforth.

Scouting was the latest "craze" among the juniors. Practically everybody in the Lower School had got the fever; all pocket-money was going on new equipment for the coming season. Even the Third-Formers, under Willy Handforth—the 3rd St. Frank's Troop—were just as eager.

"Never mind the hike for the moment," said Parkington, bringing his newspaper into prominence. "There's

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TO CASTLE!

by Edwy Searles Brooks.



an item of news here that looks interesting."

"Anything about Scouts?" asked Fullwood.

"No."

"Then it can't be interesting."

"It's about the new Earl of Edgemore."

"Oh!"

"It says here that the new Earl of Edgemore and his son, Viscount Bellton, have arrived in England from abroad, and they will be soon proceeding to Edgemore Castle to take up residence," said K. K., consulting his paper. "That's not entirely without interest, is it? I mean, Edgemore Castle is only a mile or so away—practically a neighbour of St. Frank's."

The other fellows were silent. For a moment a little cloud had obscured their cheeriness, for they could not help being reminded of the recent tragic death of the old earl. Most of the fellows had known the kindly, genial old peer. But he was dead now.

"What exactly happened?" asked Deeks soberly. "Wasn't the poor old boy drowned

when some ship went down?"

"Yes; it happened towards the end of the Christmas holidays," said Nipper. "The old Earl of Edgemore, with his daughter-in-law and his grandson—quite a kid—went for a winter cruise on the Sonoria. She was in a collision somewhere off Spain, and quite a few lives were lost."

"Including those three, eh?" said Deeks, nodding. "I say, that was a bit rough, wasn't it? Who's the new earl?"

"Nobody seems to know," replied Nipper. "I believe there's been some dispute about it. Anyhow, there was nobody of the direct line to inherit the title and estates, so they have gone to a distant line."

"Well, let's hope that the new earl is a sportsman like his old kinsman," said Handforth. "How old is he? And what about this son, Viscount Bellton?"

"It says here that he's a boy of about fifteen," replied K. K.

"By George! That's interesting!" ejaculated Handforth. "Perhaps he'll come to St. Frank's?"

"More than likely, I should think," nodded Nipper. "It's hardly feasible that the earl would send his son to any other school. Isn't St. Frank's the best public school in the country?"

"Bar none!" went up a general chorus.

"And now I come to think of it, Old Wilkey was saying something about a new fellow for the Remove," added Nipper. "Coming this week, I believe."

"Then it's a cert!" said Handforth eagerly. "Viscount Bellton for the Remove, eh?"

"Hallo!" ejaculated Church suddenly. "Did you spot who that was walking past

the gates just then? That big, fat man. It was Bodkin, the Edgemore Castle butler."

"Good egg!" said Handforth. "He might know something. Let's make inquiries."

As there was a distinct possibility that the new Earl of Edgemore's son would be coming into the Remove, the juniors were personally interested. It was not mere inquisitiveness which sent them dashing to the gates. The portly figure of the butler had moved some hundred yards onwards by the time the crowd got out into the lane.

"Hi!" roared Handforth.

Mr. Bodkin, the butler, continued walking.

"I say! Hi!" yelled Handforth.

Mr. Bodkin still continued walking.

"Must be deaf!" grinned McClure.

"Half a minute, Mr. Bodkin!" yelled several juniors.

This time Mr. Bodkin halted, and he looked back with some severity.

"Were you shouting 'Hi!' to me, young men?" he asked coldly, as the juniors crowded round.

"We didn't know you were deaf," said Handforth.

"I am certainly deaf when ill-mannered boys shout 'Hi!' to me," replied Mr. Bodkin severely. "What is it you want? I would point out that I have no time to waste on schoolboys."

Mr. Bodkin, in his own opinion, was a very important individual. His manner was dignified in the extreme; pomposity oozed out of every pore. This was the first time the Removites had actually met him, and they took a dislike to him on the spot. He was so very different from old Jenkins, his predecessor, who had been comfortably pensioned off by the late earl before the latter's tragic death.

"No need to get shirty, Mr. Bodkin," said Handforth with some warmth.

"You are quite wrong, young man, in assuming that I am—er—shirty, whatever that may mean," said the butler frigidly. "But I am excessively busy to-day."

"Something special?" asked Nipper.

"Very special indeed," said Mr. Bodkin. "This is a great day for Edgemore Castle. The new earl and his son, the new viscount, arrive this afternoon to take up permanent residence."

"By Jove! Is that official?" asked Nipper.

"I have told you," said Mr. Bodkin coldly.

"This afternoon, eh!" exclaimed Handforth. "Sooner than we thought! What's the new earl like, Mr. Bodkin?"

"I am afraid, young gentlemen, that I have not the time, nor the inclination, to answer your inquisitive—and, indeed, impertinent—questions," said the butler. "It has not been my pleasure to meet his lordship yet; but I am thankful to say that he is a Rossiter, and, as all England knows, the Rossiter family is one of the proudest and one of the oldest in the county of Sussex."

"I suppose you are making special preparations at the castle?" asked Travers,

"Everything is being got ready for a quiet and dignified welcome," said the butler. "The new earl and his son will arrive by car at approximately three o'clock. Yes, it is a great day for us folk of the castle. We are hoping—and confidently—that the new earl will do much to revive the former splendours of the House of Edgemore. His late lordship was a nobleman of great distinction, but, I fear, he lacked a correct understanding of the old Edgemore tradition."

And Mr. Bodkin, with a curt nod, went on his way.

"Snobbish old blighter!" commented Handforth, almost before the butler was out of hearing. "What the dickens did he mean about the Edgemore tradition?"

"Only that the old earl lived quietly and without pomp and splendour," said Nipper. "If you look up the history of Edgemore Castle, you'll find that in the old days it was famous for its feasts and its hunts and its revels. Old Bodkin is glad that the new earl will bring the castle into the limelight again."

"Which merely means that there'll be house parties and dinners and big society gatherings," said Travers. "Grand balls, and all that sort of thing. Well, perhaps it'll be all for the good. We can do with a bit of life in the district—"

"By Jove! I've got an idea!" burst in Handforth excitedly.

Nobody took any notice. Most of the fellows were thinking about the stately old castle, with its towers and turrets, and its centuries of history. For a good few weeks now it had been solely inhabited by the household staff, with Mr. Bodkin in command. Things had been at sixes and sevens; but now, it appeared, everything was in order.

"Did you hear me?" demanded Handforth, glaring round. "I said that I've got a great idea!"

"Tell it to Church and McClure, dear old fellow," begged Travers. "They can appreciate your great ideas. We other chaps, I'm afraid, being rude and uncouth, will give it the bird."

"You—you silly fathead!" roared Handforth. "Do you think I didn't know that you were rude and uncouth? But listen to this whceze! We've all decided to go on a hike this afternoon, haven't we?"

"The Tigers are going on their own hike, I understand?" asked Travers.

"That's all changed," replied Handforth. "Why shouldn't we—the St. Frank's Scouts—buzz along to Edgemore Castle?"

"So that we can get a look at the new earl and his son?" grinned Travers. "Handy, Handy, you must curb this inquisitiveness of yours."

"Inquisitiveness be blowed!" howled Handforth. "Can't you spot a good idea when you hear it? My suggestion is that the St. Frank's Scouts should form a guard of honour for the new earl!"

"Oh!"

"Why shouldn't we line the terrace, standing at attention, like—like soldiers?" asked Handforth eagerly. "We can get there just before three o'clock, and the whole thing will be rather impressive. I mean, a sort of friendly gesture."

Nipper looked at Handforth wonderingly.

"Do you know, old man, this is a good idea," he said frankly. "Fellow citizens, gather round! For once our own little Handy has made the bell ring! A guard of honour, standing at attention, lining the terrace at Edgemore Castle! By Jove! That's what I call a stunning wheeze!"

The other fellows were equally enthusiastic—once they had thoroughly grasped the possibilities. Edward Oswald Handforth, as the originator of the idea, beamed round good-naturedly. He ignored the many expressions of wonder that he—alone—could have thought of such a ripe wheeze.

It was enough for him to know that the St. Frank's Scouts had unanimously approved.

CHAPTER 2.

The Rancher-Earl!

EDGEMORE CASTLE looked wonderful in the bright afternoon sunshine.

The stout grey walls were almost hidden by the masses of ivy which grew in thick profusion; the towers and battlements stood out against the blue sky, making a fine, imposing picture.

The castle was one of the most perfect examples of Norman architecture in the country, and it was in an excellent state of preservation. Surrounding the great, straggling pile were the rolling expanses of wooded parkland, with the drive winding its way through to the old-fashioned entrance gates.

Just beyond the green lawns the terrace stretched along the whole front of the castle, and lining this terrace, standing at ease at the moment, were some scores of smartly-uniformed Boy Scouts. It was nearly three o'clock.

Mr. Bodkin, very resplendent, came down the noble steps from the wide-open iron-studded doors.

"I granted you permission, young men, to form this guard of honour because I feel that his lordship will appreciate it as a mark of esteem," said Mr. Bodkin, with his most dignified air. "But I wish to warn you that there must be no rowdyism."

"I say! What do you take us for?" protested Buster Boots, of the Fourth.

"By rowdyism, I mean uncouth calls," explained Mr. Bodkin severely. "I am aware that you Boy Scouts have strange and peculiar cries, denoting your patrols. I would suggest that all such cries should be eliminated from this afternoon's function. Cheer if you will, but let it be a good,

honest British cheer. We can well dispense with the Scout calls."

The Scouts thought differently. The Tigers were particularly proud of their own call; Handforth, the leader, had a voice like a real tiger, and when he let himself go, setting his head well back, he almost created an air pocket in the atmosphere. The other Scouts were equally addicted to their own patrol calls. But where was the sense of arguing with Mr. Bodkin? The Scouts decided, privately, to cheer the new earl and his son as they drove up the terrace—and to conclude with a rousing chorus of their various patrol calls. Mr. Bodkin, his dignity included, could go to the dickens.

At first he had been rather dubious about the arrangement; but, secretly, he approved. Mr. Bodkin liked nothing better than pomp, and this guard of honour, so imposing and spectacular, appealed to him.

Three o'clock came—but it did not bring any stately limousine with, perhaps, a train of other imposing cars containing personal servants and baggage.

But the Scouts were ready. Many were keeping their eyes on the drive, watching the distant gates, which could just be glimpsed through a gap in the trees. The stately chestnuts of Edgemore Park provided one of the many sights of the district.

"They're late!" said Handforth severely.

"An earl, coming to his own domain, is privileged to be late, old man," chuckled Nipper. "It's quite on the cards that we shall be kept for another half-hour."

"I think I can hear a car now," put in Tommy Watson, listening.

"Car?" grinned Travers. "Sounds like a traction-engine! It's only some old van passing along the lane——"

"Coming up the drive, you mean," said Nipper. "Hallo, my sons! This is rather spoiling the effect!"

All the Scouts were concentrating their attention upon the drive. A dirty, dilapidated "flivver" lorry was sailing serenely through the park, the driver evidently oblivious of the fact that he was butting in at an awkward moment. It would certainly be unfortunate if the earl and his entourage arrived while this interloper was on the spot.

Mr. Bodkin, on the castle steps, bristled like an angry hedgehog.

"Well!" he ejaculated angrily. "This—this is an outrage!"

The flivver, rattling and shaking, was coming straight up the drive at a smart speed, and it was clearly the intention of the driver to come right up to the very front door of the castle itself. Mr. Bodkin was not only scandalised, but horrified. It would be a perfectly awful situation if the earl were to turn up now. The St. Frank's fellows were rather amused, and they chuckled openly as they observed Mr. Bodkin's agitation.

The rattling lorry was close at hand now. One or two trunks could be seen standing

up in the body of the vehicle, and there was a lot of other miscellaneous stuff.

The driver was a rough-looking, middle-aged man, dressed in shabby corduroys and check shirt. Beside him, on the box-seat of the lorry, was a youngster of about fifteen. This boy was also attired in travel-stained Bedford cord breeches, an open-necked shirt with a coloured handkerchief tied round his neck, Colonial style. He wore neither jacket nor waistcoat, for the day was quite warm for the time of the year.

The boy was so intent upon looking at the castle that he hardly noticed the Scouts. The driver, placid and matter-of-fact, steered the rattling vehicle on to the terrace and pulled up with a jerk right opposite the imposing flight of steps, in the middle of which stood Mr. Bodkin, nearly speechless with anger.

"Well, pop, I sure allow it's some dump," said the boy in an awed voice.

"Yep! It looks good to me," agreed the man. "Well, we're here, Skeets. Right on the spot. Guess I'll be glad to stretch my legs."

But before he could move, Bodkin came hurrying down the steps, and he strode forward towards the lorry, his face working with emotion.

"How dare you!" he burst out. "Who are you? What do you mean by driving up like this?"

"Gee, pop! Who's the field-marshal?"

"Search me!" replied the driver, looking inquiringly at Mr. Bodkin, and shifting a plug of tobacco from one side of his mouth to the other. "Howdy, stranger? Something wrong?"

"There is a great deal wrong!" fumed Mr. Bodkin. "I want to know what you mean by driving up to the front of the castle in this outrageous manner?"

The man at the wheel looked mildly surprised.

"What's wrong with driving up to the front?" he asked. "Are we breaking any law?"

"If you have come here to deliver anything, you should have gone to the back—where all tradesmen go!" retorted Mr. Bodkin hotly. "You ought to have had enough sense to know that you should not bring that—that wretched vehicle up the drive to the terrace. Go away at once!"

"Say, pop—" began the boy.

"Wait a minute, Skeets," interrupted the man, who was evidently his father. "Let's get this straight. This guy seems to be somebody in authority." He turned to Mr. Bodkin. "Well, sonny, who do you happen to be, anyway?"

"Who I happen to be is no concern of yours!" roared Mr. Bodkin, thoroughly aroused. "I tell you that you have no right here. Go! At any moment, his lordship may arrive."

"Oh! Did you get that, Skeets?"

"The poor sap doesn't know us," said the boy, grinning.

"I—I have had enough of this!" panted

Mr. Bodkin. "I don't know who you are, or why you have come. But you must go at once. The Earl of Edgemore and his son, Viscount Bellton, may arrive at any moment —"

"Hold on, friend," interrupted the driver, shifting his tobacco again. "I guess there's a little misunderstanding here. We'll put it right. Now I come to think of it, I guess you'll be Bodkin, the butler?"

"I don't care what you're thinking—"

"Howdy, Bodkin, I'm glad to know you," said the man, getting down from the lorry and proffering his hand. "Meet my son, Skeets, better known to you, perhaps, as Viscount Bellton."

Bodkin's jaw dropped; then he pulled himself together, and his anger increased. The St. Frank's fellows, drifting nearer, were intensely interested in the proceedings.

"Oh, indeed!" said Mr. Bodkin, infusing a deep sarcasm into his angry voice. "So this young gentleman is Viscount Bellton, eh? And you, I suppose, are the Earl of Edgemore?"

"What a brain-box, pop!" murmured Skeets.

"Yes, I am the Earl of Edgemore," said the rough-looking lorry-driver. "It looks like he doesn't believe me, Skeets. Well, I guess I don't blame him—and there's no ill-feeling. There'll be plenty changes around this dump before I'm through. But I'm not saying that it's not a grand old pile, and I'm sure proud of it. Gee, Skeets! Makes you feel good, eh?"

By this time Mr. Bodkins was nearly dancing with rage.

"Will—will you be good enough to tell me what all this nonsense means?" he demanded angrily. "Do you think for one moment that I believe this preposterous statement of yours? Unless you remove yourselves, and this lorry—"

"Listen, friend!" interrupted the other, his voice hardening. "I guess you're all swelled up with dignity, and you just can't believe the truth when you hear it. My son and I are plain, honest-to-goodness folk, and the fact that we have inherited titles doesn't mean a thing. But the sooner you get it into your head that I *am* the Earl of Edgemore, the better it will be for you."

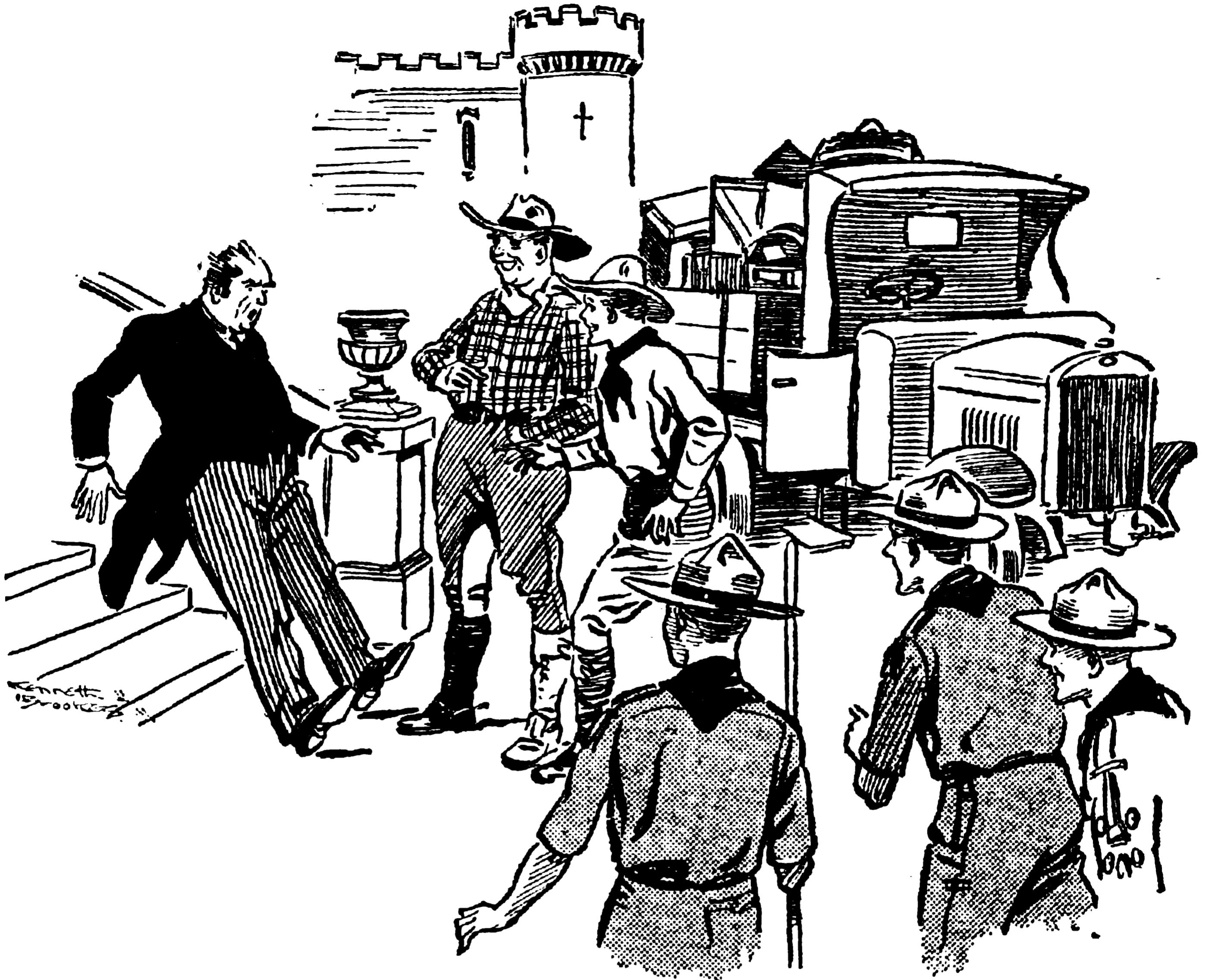
There was something in his tone which brought Bodkin up with a jerk. And when he saw, a moment later, a letter of identification, supplied by the late Lord Edgemore's executors, he prayed for a hole to open in the terrace—a big hole—so that he could be swallowed up.

"I—I— My lord, I did not understand!" he faltered. "I did not realise—"

"That's all right," said the new Lord Edgemore, smiling.

"I can only trust that your lordship will overlook my absurd blunder," stammered Mr. Bodkin, bowing with deference. "But your lordship will doubtless understand that I was in no measure prepared—"

"Cut it out, Bodkin—and not so much of the bowing and scraping!" interrupted the



"Howdy, Bodkin!" said the Earl of Edgemore cheerily, and proffered his hand to the scandalised butler.

Earl of Edgemore. "I'm not used to that sort of stuff—and I don't like it!"

"Very well, my lord," murmured Mr. Bodkin, pale to the lips.

Handforth and Nipper and Travers and the other St. Frank's fellows were looking on in open-eyed wonder. They were convinced by now, too. The fact that their well-rehearsed guard of honour stunt had gone wrong meant nothing. They were nearly overwhelmed by the fact that these two rough-and-ready individuals were, indeed, the Earl of Edgemore and his son, Viscount Bellton.

CHAPTER 3.

The Boy From the Prairie!

At least ten years had been suddenly added to Bodkin's age. He even wore a shrivelled look as he stood helplessly before the new Earl of Edgemore. Truth to tell, the unfortunate Bodkin was dizzy with consternation and outraged dignity.

He was appalled for two reasons—firstly, because he had addressed his new master so unceremoniously; and, secondly, because he found it almost impossible to believe that this man could be his new master. Bodkin,

in his mind's eye, had been expecting a great, luxurious limousine, with an immaculately-attired, aristocratic gentleman, to say nothing of an equally aristocratic youth.

And here were these two—the father a blunt-spoken, roughly-attired man who chewed tobacco; the boy a shabby, long-limbed, shock-haired, grinning youngster from the wilds!

Bodkin had received the shock of his life, and he was shaken to the marrow.

The young Viscount, having given the Scouts more than one searching look, left the shabby old lorry and approached them.

"I guess you fellows are Boy Scouts, eh?" he said good-naturedly. "I sure admit you're an eyeful! We have Boy Scouts, too, where we come from. What are you fellows doing here, anyway?"

"We're from St. Frank's College—just over a mile away," explained Nipper. "We're not always dressed like this, you know—only on special occasions. We came along to form a guard of honour for you and your father. And I don't mind telling you that you've given us a bit of a surprise."

"Pop was figuring, as we came down, that we'd give the folks around here a jolt," said the other. "Well, I'm glad to know you, fellers. My name's Skeets Rossiter. Richard

Rossiter, to be exact, and I'm blamed if they haven't tacked a title on to me! Viss-count Bellton, I figure. Sounds kinda funny to me."

His frankness and his sunny smile caused the Scouts to grin.

"Well, between you and me and the old flivver, you don't look much like a viscount," said Nipper. "But what does that matter, after all? You've given us a surprise, and we rather like surprises."

"Where do you come from?" asked Handforth.

"Me? Mosquito Bend, Saskatchewan," replied the young viscount. "When I was a kid they used to call me 'Skeeter,' meaning mosquito—see? Then it got shortened to Skeets, and pop figures it kinda suits me. Howdy, fellers?"

Skeets went round, shaking hands with all and sundry. He seemed to carry with him a breath of the open prairie, and his total absence of "side" popularised him at once.

"Wasn't it a bit of a shock for you when you learned that your father had become the Earl of Edgemore?" asked K. K. Parkington.

"Say, we nearly passed out!" admitted Skeets. "Knocked us all of a heap, to begin with; and now that we're here, I guess we're still dazed. Say, this castle is sure the genuine old feudal joint."

"It's history goes back right into the Middle Ages—and even further," said Nipper. "The Rossiters, of Sussex, are famed in history, too. You belong to a great family, Skeets."

"You bet your life!" agreed the boy. "My pop's a he-man! Gee, it's sure good to be meeting you English fellers! I've been looking forward to it ever since we started out from Canada."

"We're neighbours, too," said Nipper. "I say, where's Russell? You'll like to meet Russell," he added, turning to Skeets. "He's a Canadian, like you."

"Gee, that's dandy!" said Skeets. "Any time you fellers like to drop in, pop and I will sure be glad to see you. We don't want any fuss, fellers. Just come right along, and the place is yours."

He was so eager to be friendly, and to know more about the St. Frank's fellows, that he could hardly talk fast enough.

"There was one thing which sure worried me all the way across on the boat," he said. "I was figuring that when I got to England I wouldn't be able to ride and shoot, and that there wouldn't be room to breathe. Back around Mosquito Bend, on the old ranch, there's a whole heap of prairie. But, say, I guess I was all wrong about England!"

He looked round him, and waved his hand towards the extensive, wooded parkland.

"This is just swell!" he continued enthusiastically. "There's room here—there's space! I thought the old homestead, back at Skeeter Bend, was a dandy dump, but this sure knocks me flat."

His enthusiasm was refreshing.

"Very decent of you to invite us over," said Nipper. "But we shall be seeing a

good deal of you anyhow, shan't we, Skeets? Aren't you coming to St. Frank's?"

"Swell! I'd sure like to pay you fellers a visit."

"No, I don't mean that," said Nipper. "Isn't your father sending you to St. Frank's as a scholar?"

"Gee! Me?" asked the youngster, laughing. "Say, I finished school a year ago. My pop figures that I'm old enough to work and earn my own keep."

"But things are different now," argued Handforth. "I mean, your being Viscount Bellton, and your father being the Earl of Edgemore——"

"Say, that don't mean a thing to my pop," interrupted Skeets quickly. "He ain't built that way. My pop's a real man. Titles and such-like leave him standing. And when it comes to giving me a high-falutin education, I guess he'll tell me to go chase myself. Nix! There'll be no college life for this bird."

The Earl of Edgemore was approaching now, having been talking to Bodkin for some little time. Bodkin retired, still looking dazed. Skeets introduced his father eagerly, and Lord Edgemore gave the St. Frank's fellows a cheery welcome. He smiled when he understood the meaning of the gathering.

"Well, it was good of you to come around with this guard of honour stunt," he said. "But I'm telling you right now, boys, that this sort of thing don't appeal to me any. Don't get me wrong—I'm mighty pleased to know you—but I'm a plain man, and I like plain ways. Roughneck Rossiter—that's what I was called when I was a young 'un, and I guess I'm a roughneck still. I'm glad my boy has made friends, and I'm just as glad to know that you live close around. The castle's yours whenever you like to pay us a call."

"Thanks awfully, sir!" chorused the juniors.

"I like that!" said the earl enthusiastically. "You can call me 'sir,' if it'll do you any good, but don't get busy with 'my lords' and 'your lordships'—because, if you do, I'm liable to get riled."

And so the new lord of the Edgemore estates went into his castle, side by side with his son. The St. Frank's fellows did their cheering, as per schedule, to say nothing of giving their celebrated patrol calls. After that they returned to St. Frank's.

"HALLO! Who's the fashion plate?" asked Handforth, staring.

The Tiger Patrol, with various other Scouts, had turned into the Triangle at St. Frank's. Edward Oswald Handforth's eyes, which missed little, were attracted by an extremely elegant youth who lounged near the Ancient House steps. He was talking with Bernard Forrest, of Study A. Gulliver, Bell, and Gore-Pearce were hovering round.

"He can't be much good—or he wouldn't be speaking with Forrest," said Church caustically.

"Go easy, old man," said McClure. "This chap looks like a stranger—and Forrest can be very pleasant when he likes."

They approached. The elegant youth was a real figure of splendour; there was rather too much of the dandy about him to appeal to Handforth & Co. There was something about his face, too—a half-sneering, supercilious look—which antagonised Handforth immediately. It was the kind of face, as he explained afterwards, which he instinctively longed to punch.

"Just a minute, you fellows," said Forrest pleasantly. "Perhaps you'd like to meet Carroll, the new chap?"

"New chap?" said Handforth. "New chap for the Remove, do you mean?"

"Yes."

"But I thought— Well, I'm jiggered!" said Handforth, turning to the others. "Nipper said something about a new chap coming, didn't he, but we naturally supposed that he would be Viscount Bellton."

"Perhaps he is Viscount Bellton," said the elegant youth bluntly.

"You—Viscount Bellton?"

"I may be one day—and soon."

"What the dickens are you talking about?" asked Handforth. "We've just been talking to Viscount Bellton, at Edgemore Castle."

"Oh, have you?" said the newcomer, a shade of annoyance appearing on his face. "So those dirty Canadians are here, are they? I heard they were coming."

"I don't understand," said Handforth, looking from the stranger to Forrest & Co. and back. "Didn't somebody say that this chap's name is Carroll?"

"My name is Carroll—Eustace Carroll," said the new arrival. "I'm in the Ancient House, and Forrest has been good enough to invite me into his study. Rather a crush, I'm afraid, but it seems that most of the Remove studies in the Ancient House are full."

"You're welcome to dig in Study A, if you want to," remarked Nipper, as he joined the group. "You're right about our being a bit overcrowded. Welcome into the Remove, Carroll. Glad to meet you. I'm Hamilton, the Remove captain."

They shook hands, and Handforth, standing by, liked the new fellow less than ever.

"So you're Eustace Carroll, eh?" he said. "Well, I'm Handforth. What's that you were saying about Viscount Bellton?"

"I'm his cousin, if you want to know," said Carroll.

"Oh!"

"A distant cousin, I'll admit—as a matter of fact, a cousin many, many times removed," went on Carroll. "And the more distantly I am removed, the better. My pater, don't you know, is the head of another branch of the Edgemore family."

"Ah, we're getting down to it," said Travers smoothly. "And the dear pater, no doubt, is considerably peeved because this rough-and-ready Canadian has inherited the title and estates? A cruel blow, dear old fellow. But for some long past marriage,

no doubt, you would now be Viscount Bellton yourself? But then, life is full of these trials."

Eustace Carroll looked at him closely, detecting the undertone of mocking jocularities.

"You're laughing at me, eh?" he asked, with some heat.

"Perish the thought!" said Travers, shocked.

"I can tell you this much," went on Carroll, his voice quivering with sudden anger. "My pater is furious about the whole rotten business. He is the new Earl of Edgemore—and, by all rights, I'm Viscount Bellton. But these—these interlopers have already claimed the title and estates."

"Yes, but dash it, there can't be any mistake about it, can there?" asked Kirby Keeble Parkington, staring. "There can only be one Earl of Edgemore."

"And that one is my father!" retorted Carroll promptly. "This plot has been put through by the lawyers. You know what lawyers are, don't you? Rossiter's lawyers were paid the most, I expect, and they succeeded in proving that Rossiter was the rightful heir. But that will be changed soon—when my pater's claim comes before the High Court."

The juniors were astonished.

"So there's going to be a fight for the title, is there?" asked Handforth, with a whistle. "That's the worst of it when the descent goes away from the direct line, and some distant relative steps in. There's always somebody else who wants to step in, too."

"According to Carroll, it won't be long before those people at the castle will have to step out," said Forrest, grinning. "His pater is so sure he'll win the case that he has sent Carroll to St. Frank's in advance. He's here so that he'll be handy."

"This man, Rossiter, has absolutely no claim to the inheritance," said Carroll indignantly. "The whole thing is false from beginning to end—but, somehow or other, he has satisfied the old earl's executors. Money has done it, I suppose. And what is the man, anyhow? A dirty, grubbing farmer from Canada!"

"Have you met him?" asked Nipper quietly.

"No—and I don't want to!" retorted the new boy. "I've heard enough about him from my pater, though! This fellow and his son have worked on their own one-horse ranch—they've never known what it was like to have two halfpennies for a penny. And now, suddenly, they've come into this inheritance! Why, they're not fit to live at Edgemore Castle!"

CHAPTER 4.

Full of Surprises!

EUSTACE CARROLL glared round defiantly as he finished speaking; and the Removites were already taking a strong dislike to him.

They could understand his indignation; it must have been a big shock to know that,

by a fluke, perhaps, he had just missed the honour of becoming Viscount Bellton. The boys knew none of the ins and outs of the facts, but it struck them that as the new Lord Edgemore was already in possession of the castle, his claim to the property was definitely made good.

"If I were you, Carroll, I'd keep quiet about this," said Nipper smoothly.

"Keep quiet? Why?"

"Well, you won't do yourself any good by going about the place saying that these people at the castle are impostors," replied Nipper.

"I tell you they are impostors!"

"There's a case coming on in High Court, you say?"

"Yes."

"Then if there is anything wrong with the new Earl of Edgemore's claim, it will be thrashed out there," said Nipper. "In the meantime, it would only be gentlemanly for you to let matters rest."

"Gentlemanly?" snapped Carroll. "What do you mean by that sneer?"

"You can take it as a sneer if you like—but I don't think it's exactly gentlemanly of you to insult these relatives of yours—people you have never even met."

"I don't care what you think!" said Carroll angrily.

He turned on his heel and walked off; but before the juniors could make any comments, a huge limousine came gliding noiselessly through Big Arch. In it, behind the liveried chauffeur, sat a fat, over-dressed man of obvious wealth. His facial resemblance to Eustace Carroll was marked.

"So this is the blighter's pater?" murmured Travers. "Like father, like son, what? If I'm any judge of human character, this man is a frightfully snobbish bounder of the first water."

The limousine stopped, the big man got out, and he looked about him with a cold, fishy eye. Some of the fellows were gathering round the big car, but he waved them away imperiously.

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"Stand back, there!" he said nastily. "I don't want you boys crowding round my car! Eustace, come here!"

Eustace Carroll, lounging elegantly, approached.

"I am going now, Eustace," said Mr. Carroll in a loud voice. "I am not particularly impressed with this school, but we must see how you get along."

"Yes, pater."

"Don't worry about the—er—affair which is foremost in our minds," continued Mr. Carroll. "One day, and before long, we shall be the—er—victors. You have money, Eustace?"

"Not much, pater—not more than ten quid."

"Insufficient—totally insufficient!" said Mr. Carroll, flashing out a fat pocket-book. "Take these four five-pound notes, Eustace. When you require more money, let me know. Well, good-bye—good-bye! I can only hope that you will settle down here; although, frankly, I'm afraid you won't. I must repeat that I do not like the school at all."

He shook hands, climbed back into the car, and nosily told the chauffeur to drive on.

The St. Frank's fellows had only had a brief glimpse of this man; but in that short time he had revealed himself as a loud-voiced, blatant snob. The open flashing of his money, the sneering references to St. Frank's, and his insufferable manner—all antagonised the Removites at once.

"So that—that fat, common bounder reckons he's the real Earl of Edgemore?" asked Handforth wrathfully. "By George! I prefer the impostors!"

"Same here," said Parkington, nodding.

"I don't believe they are impostors, either," went on Handforth. "What rot! Those two we met at Edgemore are worth two hundred and fifty of these sneering Carrolls! Who the dickens do they think they are, anyhow, to claim the inheritance?"

THE more the Removites saw of Eustace Carroll, the less the Removites liked him.

Before long, Carroll's statement that his pater was the rightful Earl of Edgemore was regarded as a joke—and a very poor joke at that. The thing was palpably absurd. For centuries a Rossiter had inherited the title; and a Rossiter was at the castle now. What more did anybody want?

Next morning, Handforth & Co. were up early, together with all the other members of the Junior XI. There had been some keen football practice, and as soon as the fellows had changed Nipper made a suggestion.

"How about running over to Edgemore Castle and taking that chap, Skeets, at his word?" he asked, grinning. "We were invited to call at any time we liked, weren't we? Let's pop over and say 'Good-morning'."

"By George, rather!" said Handforth eagerly.

There were many others who agreed to the suggestion; and before long at least a dozen Removites were setting off. They went on their bicycles. Handforth didn't think it worth while taking out his Morris Minor for such a short journey.

So they arrived together, cycling up the sunlit drive, and dismounting at the bottom of the big castle steps. Everything was very quiet; there were no gardeners at work on the lawns, or in the flower gardens; no servants visible anywhere.

"I'll do the announcing," said Nipper, as they mounted the steps. "When old Bodkin comes, I'll tell him we've just come to pay our compliments. I'll bet he'll be looking a bit washed out this morning—after his shock of yesterday."

The others grinned, and Nipper pulled at the great bell. Faintly, they could hear it clanging in some far-distant corner of the castle. Presently came the sound of bolts being shot, and one of the great iron-studded doors was swung inwards.

But instead of Bodkin, or a footman, the young Viscount Bellton stood there. He was wearing the same old travel-stained breeches, his sleeves were turned up, and his hair was wet and untidy. In fact, he still held a towel in his hand.

"Why, gee!" he exclaimed delightedly. "This is dandy! Come right in, fellers!"

"I suppose it's a bit thick, calling at this unearthly hour," grinned Nipper, "but we thought we'd come along to say 'Good-morning' to you and your father. Hope you don't mind?"

"Mind?" repeated Skeets. "Gosh darn it, pop will be tickled pink! Step right into the old family pile!"

The St. Frank's fellows, laughing, crowded into the stately hall of the castle, with its fine oak beams, its panelled walls, and its wide, sweeping staircase.

"Guess we haven't got shipshape yet," said Skeets apologetically. "This ranch-house has kind of scared us, I figure. I tried to count the rooms yesterday, but before I was half-way through I got lost. Some little old shack!"

His pleasure was genuine, and the juniors responded. They followed him down a wide, stone-flagged corridor, expecting to be taken to the library, or the dining-room. But they went straight on, down another corridor, and then through a great arched doorway. The door itself, covered with baize, stood wide open.

"I guess this is where we're parked," said Skeets, turning to another doorway.

The Removites half-entered, halted, and stared. The Earl of Edgemore, in his shirt-sleeves, was in the kitchen. He was standing at the stove, busying himself in front of a frying-pan. Near by stood a coffee-pot, steaming merrily.

"These fellers called to see how we were getting along, pop," explained Skeets.

"Don't mind me asking them in, do you?"

"If they're friends of yours, young 'un, they're welcome," replied the earl pleasantly. "Step right in, boys. Maybe you'll stay for a bite of breakfast with us?"

"But—but——" began Handforth, gulping.

"Maybe you fellers are surprised to see me messing around in the kitchen, eh?" laughed the peer. "Well, I guess I'm a rough and ready prairie man. Can't stand any truck with fal-de-lals. Never could."

"But what about the servants?" asked Nipper.

"Bodkin, and the rest of his tribe?"

"Yes."

"They're fired!" said the earl briefly.

"You—you mean that you've sacked all the castle servants?" asked Parkington, in amazement.

"The whole bunch," said Skeets. "Pop took one look at them, and that was enough. They quit this morning."

"Oh, I see," said Nipper. "So you're just carrying on until you get some new servants?"

"Say, what do you think I am?" asked Lord Edgemore bluntly. "Do I look like a cripple?"

"No, sir, but——"

"Skeets and me can look after ourselves, I guess," went on the earl quietly. "We've looked after ourselves since Skeets was able to walk, and I don't see any reason why we should make a change now."

"Well, of course, it's up to you, sir, but——"

"Since Skeets' mother died, when he was a mite of six, we've done the chars around the house," continued Lord Edgemore. "I'm allowing that this house is bigger than the one we've been used to; but we don't need to use all of it, do we? I'm a simple man, and my son takes after me. Maybe the folks around here will think we're kinda funny, but they'll soon get used to it."

"How do you suppose we could live comfortably if we had a bunch of servants dancing around us from morning till night?" asked Skeets. "I was raised on a one-man ranch, and life wouldn't be worth living if I couldn't help pop around the place."

The St. Frank's fellows were more startled than they cared to admit. The simplicity of these sound, honest Canadian ranchers rather took their breath away.

CHAPTER 5.

Giving Them Beans!

THE Earl of Edgemore, pausing in his cooking, cast a kindly, humorous eye over the schoolboy visitors.

"Guess you're feeling kinda rather shocked, eh?" he asked.

"Not shocked, sir—but it is rather unusual, isn't it?" said Nipper. "When people come into an inheritance like this, they usually alter their mode of living. You know what I mean—they live up to their position."

"I get you," nodded Lord Edgemore. "But how do you think Skeets and I would fit in with a position like this? Entertaining the nobility and gentry of the county? Say, can you imagine me in a boiled shirt, sitting at the head of a swell table acting the host?"

"Gee, pop, you'd sure look funny!" grinned Skeets.

"I'd not only look funny, but I'd look foolish," said his father. "I've come into this title and these estates—and I hope I'm keeping my head. I'm not one of these fools who get high-falutin ideas and only make themselves the laughing-stock of everybody they come in contact with. No, sir! Title or no title, I'm just plain Jim Rossiter, of Mosquito Bend, Saskatchewan."

There was something engagingly bluff and hearty about the rancher earl that the St. Frank's fellows were more warmed to him than before.

"Breakfast, boys?" asked his lordship genially. "There's plenty here to go round. Pork and beans, bread and butter, and some real honest to goodness coffee."

"We don't want to impose on you, sir——" began K. K.

"Aw, shucks! Lay hold of some of these chairs and get round the table," said Lord Edgemore. "Maybe you'd best open two or three more cans of beans, Skeets."

Before long the St. Frank's fellows were gathered round the table, thoroughly enjoying themselves. The unconventionality of this little breakfast party appealed to them.

"There's a new fellow at our school, sir," remarked Handforth, after a while. "Came yesterday; a chap named Eustace Carroll."

The new Lord Edgemore looked up, and he smiled contemptuously.

"That's quick work," he commented. "Did you get that, Skeets?"

"What's that bird doing at St. Frank's, pop?" asked Skeets, rather startled, laying down his fork.

His father shrugged.

"No good asking me, son," he replied. "In any case, I guess I'm not interested."

"Aren't these Carrolls relatives of yours, sir?" asked one of the juniors.

"Relatives—yes," said the earl. "Distant relatives at that. That Carroll guy has been stirring up a heap of trouble, I understand. He figures that he's the direct descendant of the old man, but I'm figuring that he'll have a heap of trouble to prove it. It's just so much hot air, boys. Maybe he thinks that he can get his lawyers busy and prove that black is white."

The earl laughed.

"Let them get on with it," he went on scornfully. "I'm a Rossiter, and this title and these estates are rightfully mine. No darned Carroll is going to take them away from me. You see, young 'uns, the Carrolls and the Rossiters are two different branches of the family, and I guess they've always been at enmity. A sort of feud, stretching back through generation after generation."

"I suppose this man Carroll is the next of kin after you, sir?" asked Handforth.

"You bet your life he isn't," replied Lord Edgemore. "Skeets is after me."

"Oh, yes, of course," said Handforth. "But after Skeets?"

"Well, maybe Carroll would have something of a show then," smiled the earl. "But let's talk of something more pleasant. I understand that there's a whole heap of rabbits on this property. Maybe you boys would care for some sport? And how about riding? There are some dandy horses in the stables, and I can see that Skeets is going to have a swell time around this ranch."

"You said something then, pop," agreed Skeets, nodding.

At this moment the bell clanged noisily, and father and son glanced at one another.

"Somebody at the front door, I guess," said Lord Edgemore.

"Let me go, sir," ejaculated Handforth, springing up. "If anybody wants you, what shall I say?"

"Bring them along, whoever they are," replied the earl breezily.

Handforth hurried down the wide, stately corridors, and he was soon pulling open one of the great doors. Outside, on the terrace, stood a stately limousine, and on the steps were four equally stately visitors.

"My only hat!" ejaculated Handforth, in dismay.

He recognised the visitors at once—Major-General Rollins, Mrs. Rollins and the Misses Rollins. They came from Bristowe Hall, near Caistowe, and the St. Frank's fellows had no reason to regard Major-General Rollins with affection.

He was an arrogant, pompous old buffer who had more than once fallen foul of the juniors. Indeed, on two or three occasions the major-general had reported some of the boys to the headmaster, and had got them into trouble. Handforth had every reason to believe that the whole Rollins family was



The early morning visitors from St. Frank's found the rancher-earl cooking his own breakfast. "Come right in, fellers!" he called breezily.

built on the same pattern as the major-general himself.

"Good—good-morning!" said Handforth, hardly knowing what else to say.

"Upon my soul! What does this mean?" demanded the major-general, staring. "Are you not a St. Frank's boy?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then may I ask what you are doing here at this hour of the day?" demanded the major-general. "Are there no servants in the castle to answer the door?"

"Well, the fact is, sir—"

"I really think, Roderick, that our call is inconvenient," said the elder of the ladies. "I warned you that the hour was unusually early."

"Nonsense, my dear—nonsense!" said the major-general. "We were passing, and I deem it my duty to pay my respects to Lord Edgemore at the first opportunity. His lordship is at home, boy?" he added, glaring at Handforth over the tops of his glasses.

"Why, yes, sir," replied Handforth promptly. "Please come in—all of you. Lord Edgemore said that he would be pleased to see you. He's having breakfast at the moment—"

"Then we must certainly not disturb him," said Mrs. Rollins.

"That's all right—he won't mind a bit," declared Handforth, recovering his full confidence. "This way, please."

Handforth was beginning to enjoy himself. He had often dreamed of "getting one back" on the major-general, and here was a golden opportunity. These people were awful snobs, and it would do them good to receive a sudden jar.

"I confess," said the major-general, as he puffed along with Handforth in the lead, "I confess, young man, that I cannot understand why you, a schoolboy, should have opened the door to us."

"Lord Edgemore isn't a proud man, sir," said Handforth genially. "He sacked all the servants this morning."

"What!"

"Fact, sir," nodded Handforth. "Believes in the simple life. And good luck to him, I say! Down this corridor, please."

The ladies, by this time, were looking worried. Mrs. Rollins was a sour-visaged specimen, and her two daughters, of uncertain age, while attired in the height of fashion, were no oil paintings to look at.

"I am sure this boy is acting without authority. Roderick," Handforth heard Mrs. Rollins murmur. "This is ridiculous! I don't believe the earl has arrived at the castle yet!"

"But, my dear——"

"It is all so strange," came the lady's agitated voice. "Why are we being taken down these long corridors? Good gracious, Roderick! I believe we are in the servants' quarters!"

"If this boy is playing some silly joke, by gad, I'll—I'll——"

"Here we are, sir!" announced Handforth boisterously. "Major-General Roderick Rollins, Mrs. Rollins, and the Misses Rollins," he added in a loud, impressive voice.

The visitors had turned into a wide-open doorway, and now they stood stock-still, startled, and even horrified, by the spectacle which met their gaze. They were looking into the kitchen; and round the kitchen table, eating heartily, were a number of St. Frank's boys, a roughly-attired man in his shirt-sleeves, and a youth of similar aspect.

The Earl of Edgemore rose to his feet at once.

"Come right in, strangers!" he invited cordially. "I guess you'll have to take me as you find me——"

"Good heavens!" burst out Major-General Rollins, in a voice like thunder.

He had gone purple with fury, and he only paused to give the earl a quick, contemptuous glance. Then he swung round upon Handforth, who was serene in his position of security.

"Boy!" roared the major-general. "How dare you?"

"Beg pardon, sir!"

"I say, how dare you?"

"How dare I what, sir?"

"Don't bandy words with me, you—you impudent young puppy!" hooted the major-general. "How dare you play this—this preposterous trick on us?"

"Trick, sir? But I don't understand——"

"Yes, trick!" shouted the great man. "This—this is the kitchen!"

"I know that, sir——"

"Say, hold your horses," interrupted the Earl of Edgemore. "You've got the boy wrong, sir. Maybe it's up to me to explain——"

"I require no explanations from you!" thundered the major-general. "Who are you, anyway? One of the grooms, I presume?"

"I am the Earl of Edgemore."

"What! You—you have the audacity to stand there and say——" The major-general spluttered, speech failing him. "By gad! I—I—I——"

"Roderick! Remember your heart!" warned Mrs. Rollins anxiously.

"Oh, please take us out of here, mother," said one of the daughters. "These awful boys have been playing a trick on us!"

"They shall be reported to their headmaster without delay!" fumed Mrs. Rollins, revealing her dragon-like qualities by the fiery flash of her eyes. "We have had occasion to complain of these ill-mannered St. Frank's boys before!"

"The boy is neither ill-mannered nor at fault," said the Earl of Edgemore quietly. "I am sorry if you are shocked, folks. Don't blame the boy: I told him to bring you straight in."

"You told him? And who are you to tell him?" shouted the major-general, recovering his voice. "By heavens, sir, you shall pay for this! I was under the impression that the Earl of Edgemore and his son had arrived at the castle; but I can see that I was wrong. The castle is obviously unoccupied—either by the household staff or by its new master."

"If you will only listen to me——"

"I don't know who you are, and I don't care who you are!" bellowed the great man. "But you may be sure that I shall report your insolent conduct to Lord Edgemore when I see him!"

The major-general had advanced towards the end of the table, and he was more purple with fury than ever.

"But see here, sir——"

"Silence!" roared the major-general, bringing his fist down with a crash on what he thought to be the table—but which, in his excitement, was the edge of a big bowl full of baked beans.

The next second the kitchen was raining baked beans. The bowl, flying ceilingwards, distributed its contents over a wide area—but it seemed to the major-general that he received at least ninety per cent of the deluge.

And the bowl, after spinning round two or three times, alighted, upside down, on the major-general's bald head.

CHAPTER 6.

Skeets at St. Frank's!

FOR just one moment there was a tense, horrified silence; then a gale of laughter swept through the kitchen.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Although many of the St. Frank's fellows were bespattered with baked beans, it was impossible for them to restrain their shouts of hilarity. Major-General Rollins undoubtedly presented a comic appearance.

"Geo! I'm sorry about this, folks," said the Earl of Edgemore, deeply concerned. "But you will permit me to say that it was through no fault——"

"Bah!" panted the major-general, flinging the bowl to the other end of the kitchen, and emerging with his head and face streaming with baked bean juice. "You will suffer for this—all of you! As for you, you young puppy, you're coming with me!"

He made a grab at Handforth, and held him in a grip that had more than once put fear into the heart of an Afghan tribesman.

"Here, I say!" gasped Handforth. "I don't see why—— Oh, well, perhaps you're right!"

"You're coming with me!" exclaimed the major-general fiercely. "I intend to take you straight to your Housemaster at once! Yes, boy! For this outrage, you will be expelled from the school!"

"My only hat!" said Handforth, startled.

The next moment he grinned, and when Nipper and some of the other St. Frank's fellows half rose in order to go to his assistance, he winked violently at them. And they understood. After all, it wasn't their fault that Major-General Rollins had jumped to such foolish conclusions. Handforth was in the right, and he had nothing to fear.

"Please, sir, I'll come quietly," said Handforth meekly.

"You had better!" snapped the major-general. "As for you," he added, glaring at the earl, "I will see to it that you get summarily dismissed from his lordship's service! Come, my dear!"

He stalked out of the kitchen, and Mrs. Rollins and the Misses Rollins preceded him almost at a run. The major-general was still maintaining a tight grip on Handforth's jacket.

They got back to the waiting limousine, and Handforth, under dire threats, was ordered to sit by the chauffeur. Then the major-general bawled out his orders, and the car glided away. By this time the rest of the fellows and the earl and the viscount were in the big doorway, watching the departure.

"Say, pop, I guess it's up to us," said Skeets, grinning.

"Looks a whole heap like it," agreed his father. "These people wouldn't believe us, eh? Shock number one for the local big-wigs!"

"It'll do the major-general good, sir," said Vivian Travers, chuckling. "He's no big-wig—although he thinks he is."

Meanwhile, the limousine, under its owner's orders, drove rapidly to St. Frank's. When it pulled up in the Triangle, the major-general jumped out like a jack-in-the-box, and he was relieved to catch immediate sight of Mr. Alington Wilkes, the Housemaster of the Ancient House.

"Hi!" bellowed the great man.

Mr. Wilkes, who was not accustomed to having "Hi!" shouted at him, did not at first respond. But when the major-general ran after him and grabbed him by the arm, he was compelled to take notice.

"Dear me!" said Mr. Wilkes, mildly astonished.

The major-general was not a pleasant sight. There were still traces of baked beans on his clothing, and although he had wiped his head and face with his handkerchief, there were smears in plenty.

"You—you are a responsible master of this school?" demanded the visitor.

"I fancy so, sir," said Mr. Wilkes gently. "I am the Housemaster of the Ancient House."

"I have brought this boy to you, sir——"

"You could not have brought him to a better man," declared Mr. Wilkes. "He is one of the boys of my own House."

"I demand that he shall be expelled from this school!" thundered the major-general. "He has participated in an outrageous practical joke upon me and upon my wife and daughters!"

Handforth, who had strolled up, was looking quite serene. Crowds of fellows had gathered round, vastly interested.

"This is a very serious charge, sir," said Mr. Wilkes. "Handforth, what have you to say?"

"Only that Major-General Rollins is quite mistaken, sir," said Edward Oswald coolly. "He and his people called at Edgemore Castle while a crowd of us chaps were having breakfast with the earl and his son. And for some reason the major-general didn't believe——"

"Silence!" hooted the soldier. "How dare you maintain your preposterous tissue of falsehood? You know perfectly well that the Earl of Edgemore was not there!"

"But he was, sir—you spoke to him!"

"I did nothing of the sort!" howled the major-general. "The man I saw was a coachman or a gamekeeper, I should imagine!"

"Well, here he is, sir, anyhow," said Handforth happily.

A noisy rattle at the gates had attracted his attention, and, turning, he espied the flivver lorry turning through the gates with the Earl of Edgemore at the wheel. Skeets and the other St. Frank's fellows were in the back.

"Good heavens!" panted the major-general. "So—so this wretched man has had the audacity to come to the school!"

"By the—er—wretched man, are you referring to the driver of this lorry, sir?" asked Mr. Wilkes smoothly.

"Yes, I am!"

"Then I am afraid, major-general, that the mistake is yours," murmured the Housemaster. "This gentleman is the Earl of Edgemore himself."

"What!"

The major-general started back, his jaw dropping, his eyes popping.

"Quite so," said Mr. Wilkes. "And the boy in the shirt-sleeves is the young Viscount Bellton."

"But—but— Nonsense!" gurgled the major-general. "Really, sir, this—this is beyond a joke! How can you possibly tell me—"

"I am merely telling you a fact, sir," said Mr. Wilkes. "I will admit that I have not yet had the pleasure of being introduced to his lordship, but his photograph appears in this morning's papers quite prominently. I believe that the earl is an unconventional man—"

Major-General Rollins heard no more. He was tottering dizzily. He was fighting a terrific inward battle. He didn't know whether to feel scandalised or horrified at this amazing revelation. The old soldier wilted at the knees when he remembered how he had called the Earl of Edgemore a stableman; for the major-general made a point of toadying to all the aristocrats in the district. On the other hand, memory of the earl's appearance, his actions, caused him to shudder.

However, he had the decency to acknowledge himself in the wrong. As the Earl of Edgemore came up, the major-general bowed stiffly.

"I owe you an apology, Lord Edgemore," he said thickly.

They were the only words he could utter. He fled. Jumping into his car, he gave some feeble orders to his chauffeur, and the limousine rolled away.

"Quite a mistake, Mr. Wilkes," said the earl, smiling, after a few words of explanation. "This youngster did nothing wrong, and he deserves no punishment."

"So I realise," said the Housemaster. "It was good of you, Lord Edgemore, to come along on the boy's behalf. I hope this will be the first of many visits."

"Well, I'm not much of a fellow for making party calls," smiled the earl. "Maybe you'll drop around the castle some time, Mr. Wilkes. You're sure welcome."

"That's very nice of you," said Mr. Wilkes. "I shall be delighted."

And after a few more pleasantries of this sort, the earl and his son departed, the juniors humorously forming into a double row and doffing their caps as the pair walked towards their lorry.

"Skeets promised to come over this afternoon," said Nipper, as he went in to lessons with the other fellows. "Good egg! I like Skeets, and he'll be able to see the footer match. He says he's not very familiar with Soccer."

TRUE to his promise, Viscount Bellton turned up in the early afternoon.

He had come over to see a football match, but he apparently believed in combining business with pleasure. For Skeets drove into the school grounds in the flivver lorry. Nipper, Handforth, Travers, K. K. and others surrounding the dingy old vehicle were astonished to find that it contained large supplies of vegetables, to say nothing of a big heap of dead rabbits.

"What's the general idea?" asked Travers, interestedly, indicating the cargo.

"I've been working all morning," said the young viscount, as he jumped down from the driver's-seat.

"Working?" asked Nipper. "Shooting rabbits?"

"Part of the time," nodded Skeets coolly.

"My only sainted aunt!"

"Guess that I put in a couple of hours at the vegetable patch, too," went on Skeets. "Say, that's sure a swell vegetable garden at the castle! I'm mighty glad pop has decided to hire four or five gardeners."

"I thought he'd sacked everybody?" asked Handforth.

"All the indoor servants, yes," said Skeets. "But pop figures that the vegetable patch and the orchards will pay for themselves if they're properly looked after."

"What's the idea of bringing all this stuff here to St. Frank's?" demanded Handforth, staring.

"I'm figuring on selling it."

"Selling it!" yelled Handforth.

"Sure! Why not?"

"But—but—"

"Pop says if I want any money I've got to earn it," continued Skeets. "He's given me the run of the park, and I can shoot as many rabbits as I like—and sell 'em."

"Well, I'm jiggered!"

"So I'm here to sell this load," continued the young viscount. "Pop gets the money for the vegetables, but I make good on the rabbits."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The juniors could not help roaring with laughter. The whole thing seemed so extraordinary. The Earl of Edgemore, with his great estates and prosperous farms and house property—all contributing to the earl's income—sending his son out with a lorry to sell vegetables and rabbits!

"Say, what's the laugh 'or?" asked Skeets, in surprise.

"You don't really mean this?" demanded Travers, grinning.

"Sure I do," said Skeets. "We always drove into town from the old ranch, and sold our stuff. So why not here? Where's the difference? Pop figures that money isn't any good unless he earns it himself. Any other kind of money doesn't feel like money."

And Skeets, determined and business-like, sought out Mr. Alington Wilkes.



The basin of beans descended upside down upon the irate Major-General's head, spilling its contents all over him.

CHAPTER 7.

Forrest & Co. Meet Some Friends!

MR. WILKES listened to the offer, convinced himself that it was genuine, and gave it his consideration.

"Of course, a big school like St. Frank's needs a large supply of vegetables," he said, as he went out to inspect the load. "We Housemasters naturally do our best to obtain our supplies at the right price. If Edgemore Castle can provide me with vegetables cheaper than I can get them elsewhere, that's all to the good."

"I figured on giving you the first offer, sir," said Skeets cheerfully. "St. Frank's being a big school, I kinda thought it would take a whole pile of stuff, regular."

"An excellent idea," said Mr. Wilkes, smiling. "Ha! So here we are! H'm! Very good! Very good, indeed!"

His first glance told him that the vegetables from the Edgemore Castle gardens were vastly superior to any the school usually obtained. And when Skeets mentioned a price which was fair and reasonable, Mr. Wilkes closed the deal. He shrewdly suspected that the Earl of Edgemore had been studying the market prices, with a keen eye to business.

"And the rabbits, sir?" asked Skeets eagerly.

"Yes, we'll have the rabbits," replied Mr. Wilkes. "They will fit in excellently. I'll send your father a cheque——"

"I reckon he'd prefer cash, Mr. Wilkes, if you don't mind," interrupted Skeets, with some anxiety. "My pop was always paid cash on the nail in Mosquito Bend."

"Just as you like," chuckled Mr. Wilkes. "Come into my study and I'll pay you—and you can give me a receipt. You can take this lorry load of stuff round to the back, and the servants will do the rest."

Mr. Wilkes heartily approved of the new earl's unconventionality. He had no use for snobs. Mr. Wilkes cordially invited Skeets to call again.

"Positively sickening, I call it!" commented Bernard Forrest, when he heard. "These outsiders ought to be booted out of the country! Hang it, going about with a beastly lorry, hawking vegetables!"

"Disgusting!" said Gulliver, with a shudder. "Where's their pride?"

"Never had any, I suppose," commented Bell. "What are they, anyhow? Only common ranchers! What do you think of it, Carroll?"

Eustace Carroll, who was with the Study A cads, snorted disdainfully.

"I'm too disgusted to say much," he replied. "I'm ashamed to belong to the same family! They weren't even ranchers. Their beastly little farm-house in Canada was nothing of any account. You can hardly call them squatters. Just cheap tramps! And that man has succeeded to the Earldom of Edgemore! Makes me boil!"

"I don't wonder at it, old chap," said Forrest sympathetically.

"But they won't last long!" vowed Carroll. "Wait until my pater contests the inheritance in the High Court! There'll be a change then! These people are impostors!"

"And yet they say that possession is nine points of the law," murmured Forrest, grinning. "It strikes me, old man, that it'll be a bit of a job to turn them out now."

"Look here, I've got an idea," said Carroll, with an unpleasant gleam in his eyes. "This young blighter who calls himself Skeets hasn't actually met you yet, has he? Listen to this!"

Forrest & Co. listened; and, as a consequence, they strolled leisurely round to the rear of the Ancient House and buttonholed Skeets as he was preparing to shift the lorry, after it had been unloaded.

"Well, well! So you're the new Viscount Bellton, eh?" asked Forrest genially. "Jolly glad to meet you, old chap! My name's Forrest. These are my pals, Gulliver and Bell. We're in the Remove, you know."

Skeets shook hands cordially. He naturally thought that these three Removites were of the same stamp as the other fellows he had met. Even Forrest & Co. could make themselves very pleasant when they liked—and they liked now.

"We've heard all about you from your new friends," went on Forrest. "They've asked us to escort you to them."

"I guess I was coming right along," said Skeets. "My lorry——"

"Never mind that now!" interrupted Forrest. "These new friends of yours are very anxious that you should join them at once."

"The football game, you mean?"

"Not exactly the football game," said Forrest. "As a matter of fact, I don't think they intend playing football this afternoon. Not these friends I mean, anyhow. But come along and I'll show you what I mean."

Skeets, unsuspecting, accompanied Forrest & Co. past the garages, round the paddock, and he was still unsuspecting when the three Removites halted in front of a low building from which jutted a pen.

"Here we are!" said Forrest. "Your new friends, old chap!"

With one accord Forrest and Gulliver and Bell seized Skeets, lifted him off the ground, and pitched him headlong into the pen. Skeets landed in the mud with a resounding splash, and pigs by the dozen, squealing and grunting, scampered helter-skelter in all directions.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Forrest & Co.

"Say! What the——" began Skeets, sitting up, smothered.

"Your new friends," explained Forrest blandly. "This is just about what you're fit for, my dear Viscount Bellton! Haven't you always been accustomed to mixing with pigs?"

Very slowly Skeets climbed out from amongst the pigs. His eyes were gleaming with fury. He advanced upon Bernard Forrest, and the latter contemptuously turned his shoulder. But only for a second. Skeets' hand shot out, swung him round, and they stood face to face.

"Lay your filthy hands off me!" snapped Forrest.

Crash!

The young Canadian's fist hammered into Forrest's face, and the elegant cad of Study A reeled backwards.

"Will you put them up now?" asked Skeets quietly.

"Confound you!" gasped Forrest. "I don't fight with low, common——"

But he did fight. Skeets wasted no time at all. His right crashed into Forrest's face again, and his left followed it up. Forrest discovered, to his dismay, that the young Viscount was not only possessed of muscles and sinews like whipcord, but his skill was disquieting; and his punch was like the recoil of a six-inch gun.

"Here, I say——" howled Forrest. But he didn't say any more. From that second onwards he was far too busy gathering his scattered and dazed wits to bother about idle conversation.

Skeets' last blow had sent Forrest hurtling backwards, and Forrest hovered for a dreadful moment, poised on the edge of the pigsty wall. Then he toppled over, and subsided amongst the bacon to be.

Handforth, hurrying up in footer togs, with Church and McClure and several others, paused in awe. Handforth always seemed to know when there was a fight going on, even when he couldn't hear it. Some sort of instinct guided his footsteps.

"Don't interrupt!" he said tensely. "My sons, we're not wanted! Did you see that last biff? An absolute work of art, if ever I saw one!"

Gulliver and Bell tried to escape; but Viscount Bellton made short work of them. He put in some more of the artistic work which Handforth so much admired. The two cads, yelling with pain, staggering under the rain of blows which Skeets dealt them, both followed Bernard Forrest into the pigsty.

"Good work!" roared Handforth delightedly, as he ran up. "I don't know why you've done this, Skeets, but you've earned the approval of the entire populace!"

Skeets looked at them rather uncomfortably.

"I'm sure sorry, fellers, about this," he said. "But I didn't start the racket. These three tramps told me that some of my new friends wanted to see me—and they brought me here and threw me amongst the pigs."

"The rotters!" said Handforth. "You did quite right—you gave Forrest & Co. their deserts. By George! We need a chap like you at St. Frank's!"

"Better come indoors and clean up," suggested Church. "Don't take any notice of this, Skeets—those cads don't count, anyhow!"

They carried him off, leaving Forrest & Co. to crawl out of the pig-sty at their leisure.

"Yes," went on Handforth enthusiastically. "We need you at St. Frank's, Skeets. What about it?"

"Well, I'm here, aren't I?" smiled the young viscount.

"Don't be an ass! I mean, we want you in the Remove—as one of us."

"You'd best not suggest anything like that to my pop," said Skeets, laughing. "Gee! I'm fifteen, and I'm big enough and old enough to earn my own living. Ask pop!"

"You just told us not to ask him!" said Handforth, staring.

"I'd sure like to be with you fellers," went on Skeets, rather wistfully, "but my pop figures that a fancy education is a heap of good time wasted. Work, and more work—that's my pop's motto. Maybe he's right."

"But, dash it, don't you know!" protested Archie Glenthorne from among the crowd of juniors. Archie was perhaps the most dandified fellow at St. Franks, and therefore the one junior who might be reasonably expected to disapprove of the Canadian; but Archie knew well enough that Skeets, despite his rough exterior, was true blue. "I mean to say," he went on, "aren't things slightly changed now? The good old ranch days are over. You're Viscount Bellton now, what?"

The boy from the prairie grinned.

"Say, that's the bunk!" he laughed. "Viscount Bellton! It sounds kinda cuckoo to me. I'm Skeets."

They carried him indoors to clean up, and then they carried him out to Little Side to watch the football—more than ever convinced that this youngster from Mosquito Bend, Saskatchewan, was the "goods."

CHAPTER 8.

The Schemer!

EUSTACE CARROLL was not in the best of humours after tea that evening. For Forrest & Co., venting their spite upon him, had made his afternoon thoroughly uncomfortable.

After tea Eustace walked moodily to the village. He wasn't so pleased with St. Frank's. The way the majority of the fellows were swarming round Skeets sickened him. It was all so totally different from what he had expected.

At the farther end of the High Street, near the cross-roads, he hung about sulkily, leaning against a gate in the twilight. Presently a small coupé appeared from the direction of Bannington. Eustace's eyes watched it in a surly way as it came to a standstill. He approached the driver's door.

"What's the matter with you, young Carroll?" asked the man at the wheel. "What are you peeved about? Get in." Eustace got in and sat down. The man by his side was well dressed, well groomed; but there was something crafty in his face, something cunning in his eyes. "How are things going?" added the man. "What's your report?"

"Everything's rotten. Mr. Gatfield," growled Eustace.

"Rotten? How rotten?"

"Well, to begin with, ninety per cent of the St. Frank's fellows are buzzing round that cad

Rossiter like flies round a jampot!"

"Oh!"

"He's as popular as the dickens!" growled Eustace. "That's not going to help us much, is it? His father is just as popular, too. For some reason these St. Frank's chaps have taken a liking to the pair of them."

"Well, I don't know that it matters much," said Mr. Gatfield thoughtfully. "We're not dependent upon St. Frank's. But if we can get the county aristocracy up in arms against these Canadian hoboes we'll be doing good work."

"I can't see what good can come of it," objected Eustace.

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"You're not supposed to see," replied the other. "Your father sent you to St. Frank's so that you could keep your eye on things in general. I'm your father's private secretary, and I'm here to keep my eyes open, too."

"Yes, but what can we do?"

"A lot," replied Mr. Gatfield. "The general idea is to antagonise the nobility and the gentry of this entire district against the Earl of Edgemore and his son. All you've got to do is to carry out your father's wishes. Find out everything detrimental you can against these two Canadians; invent scandal if you want to, but be careful. If it'll help you at all, I've got a list of all the most snobbish families round about. I've been putting in some overtime."

Mr. Gatfield produced a sheet of paper, and Eustace, unfolding it, saw a long list of names and imposing addresses. The Glenthornes, of Glenthorne Manor, near Bannington—although, perhaps, the richest and most aristocratic family of all—were conspicuous by their absence. For the Glenthornes were the very reverse of snobbish, and therefore of no use on this list.

"It might be useful," admitted Eustace, as he folded the paper and put it in his pocket. "Look here, Mr. Gatfield. Do you really think there's a chance of my pater becoming Earl of Edgemore?"

"A chance?" repeated Mr. Gatfield. "He'll be the Earl of Edgemore inside a month—and you'll be Viscount Bellton."

Eustace's eyes gleamed with excitement.

"You—you mean that?" he asked tensely.

"I mean that those roughnecks at the castle stand no earthly chance!" replied Mr. Gatfield. "When your father starts a thing, young Carroll, he finishes it!"

WHEN Mr. Gatfield drove into Bannington, some little time later, he went straight to the Grapes Hotel—that big, imposing edifice of which Bannington was justly proud. Mr. Gatfield went up in the lift, and was admitted into one of the most palatial suites.

"Well?" asked Mr. Carroll.

Eustace's father was looking worried as he faced his private secretary. He was staying here unknown to his son. He listened moodily as Gatfield made his report.

"Not very encouraging, Gatfield," said Mr. Carroll at length.

"No, sir."

"What do you suggest?"

"We had better leave it to your son for the time being, sir," said the private secretary. "I understand that you are returning to London this evening, leaving me to carry on?"

Mr. Carroll gave him a rather startled look.

"I don't like it, Gatfield—it's ghastly!" he muttered. "You don't really think that

extreme measures will be necessary, do you?"

The private secretary smiled.

"You have a chance of becoming the Earl of Edgemore, sir," he said smoothly. "That chance will elude your grasp for ever unless you act almost at once. It is not a question of money, I know; but, as a peer of the realm, you will have enormous influence. Your political ambitions——"

"I know—I know!" interrupted Mr. Carroll impatiently. "As the Earl of Edgemore I shall go ahead, never to look back. And my son, as Viscount Bellton, will have a real chance in life. Don't you think we'd better wait, Gatfield? When this case comes off——"

"Do you really believe, Mr. Carroll, that there is the slightest hope of the courts awarding you the earldom?" interrupted Gatfield, almost contemptuously. "Man alive, Rossiter's claim is cast-iron. He is the direct heir and nothing can shift him—nothing, that is, that the courts can do."

"But the—alternative is horrible!" muttered Mr. Carroll, losing some of his colour.

"Are you becoming yellow?" sneered Gatfield, his deferential manner changing to one of insolence. "You—Mortimer Carroll, millionaire! Who are these Canadians? A couple of worthless, one-horse farmers! Who's to care if they go? What right have they to live at Edgemore Castle? Think of the way they're abusing their birthright! Living there without servants—like backwoodsmen!"

"Yes, they don't deserve the title, or the castle, or the estates," muttered Mr. Carroll.

"And if they—go—so much the better for all concerned," continued Gatfield smoothly. "I'm the only man, perhaps, who knows exactly how you made your fortune, Mr. Carroll. You and I understand one another."

"By heaven, Gatfield, if you're going to threaten me again——" began Mr. Carroll hotly.

"Nothing was further from my mind, sir," said the private secretary suavely. "But we do understand one another, don't we? I have already told you how useless it is to rely upon the High Courts in this matter. But these two people are new to this district, and if anything happens to them—well, there will be no hint of treachery. Leave that to me. I offered to see this job through for the sum of twenty thousand pounds, cash down."

"Understand me, Gatfield, I'm not sanctioning this," said Mr. Carroll hoarsely. "Get that right into your head. I tell you I'm not sanctioning it."

"No, sir."

"If there is an—accident—all well and good," continued Eustace's father. "But I accept no responsibility, and if anything goes wrong you'll never be able to point to me as the instigator. I tell you, Gatfield, I don't sanction it."

"But if everything goes well—and there are no awkward developments—you will present me with the little sum I mentioned,"

murmured Gatfield. "Nothing to do with this—job—of course. As I have said, sir, we understand one another. Leave it to me."

"In heaven's name, Gatfield, my son mustn't dream—"

"I am not a fool, sir," interrupted Gatfield, with that same contempt. "I shall be happy if you will return to London and continue with your normal activities. Before long you will hear from me—or perhaps you will read something in the newspapers. In any case, I shall achieve the desired end."

What fiendish devilry was Gatfield hatching?

EUSTACE CARROLL, on his way back to St. Frank's, thought of something hot. At least, he considered it hot.

"What time does the post go out here?" he asked of Forrest, when he got indoors.

"Not for half an hour yet."

"I've got a bit of a wheeze," said Eustace, grinning. "Up against those beautiful relations of mine at the castle."

"Another wheeze!" sneered Forrest. "Anything to do with a pig-sty?"

"Oh, cut it out!" said Eustace, as they went into Study A. "Do you happen to have some very swell paper here? If so, I'd like a sheet—and an envelope, too."

"What's the scheme?" asked Forrest, staring.

"Do you know anything about Lord and Lady Dunkeley, of Dunkeley Lodge, Helmsford?"

"Know anything about them?" repeated Forrest. "Of course I do! Biggest pots in the neighbourhood."

"Snobs?"

"They're aristocratic, if that's what you mean," replied Forrest. "One of the oldest county families in Sussex. Posh to a degree. What do you want to know for?"

"Just a little wheeze of mine," replied Eustace coolly. "I'm going to write a letter to Lord and Lady Dunkeley, and in an absent-minded moment I'm going to sign myself 'Edgemore'—that is to say, the Earl of Edgemore."

"What on earth—"

"I'm going to invite the whole giddy Dunkeley family to dinner, at Edgemore Castle, to-morrow evening," explained Eustace. "Can you imagine what will happen when they turn up? They're bound to accept the invite, as everybody in the district is waiting for the new earl to do the honours. The noble Dunkeleys will arrive at Edgemore Castle, and they'll find my cheerful relatives, probably collarless and in their shirt-sleeves, grubbing in the kitchen, having a supper off pork and beans!"

Bernard Forrest stared, then he grinned—and then he roared.

"My son, it's a brainwave!" he ejaculated. "My only hat! What a shock for the blue-blooded Dunkeleys, by gad!"

"Just what I was thinking!" chuckled Eustace. "The Dunkeleys will have a fit. There'll be a terrible scene, and the Earl of

Edgemore and Viscount Bellton, so far as the Dunkeleys are concerned, will henceforth be erased from the register!"

CHAPTER 9.

Campfire Fun!

IT was just after calling-over, the following evening, when Biggleswade, of the Sixth, encountered Mr. Wilkes in the Ancient House lobby. Biggleswade was looking worried.

"Sorry, sir, but I've got to report something," he said reluctantly.

"I hope it's nothing serious, Biggleswade."

"It all depends upon the way you look at it, sir," replied the prefect. "About a dozen Remove boys have missed calling-over this evening, and they're nowhere to be found."

He gave the names, referring to a paper in his hand, and Mr. Wilkes pursed his lips.

"Any idea where they are, Biggleswade?" he asked.

"Not the faintest, sir."

"Well, I daresay they'll turn up soon—with some plausible excuse," said the House-master. "When they do turn up, send them to me."

"Excuse me, sir," said Eustace Carroll, sidling up from the background.

"Hallo! What's on your mind?" asked Mr. Wilkes.

"About those missing chaps, sir," said Carroll. "I don't want to sneak, or anything like that, but I think I can tell you where they are."

"Well, Carroll, if you don't want to sneak, perhaps you'd better keep quiet," replied Mr. Wilkes promptly. "I daresay the boys will have an excuse, and they'll take their punishment—"

"They're over at Edgemore Castle, sir," said Carroll hastily. "I heard them saying that they were going over there this evening."

Mr. Wilkes sighed; he had not wanted to hear. But, having heard, he would have to act.

"Very well, Carroll," he said shortly. "That'll do!"

"Shall I pop over to the castle and bring the young beggars back, sir?" asked Biggleswade. "I mean, it's a bit thick—"

"You will leave this to me, Biggleswade, if you don't mind," interrupted Mr. Wilkes sternly. "When one or two boys miss calling-over, I can, perhaps, be lenient. But when twelve or fourteen deliberately and wilfully ignore the school regulations, strong measures must be taken. I will go myself."

Mr. Wilkes, his eyes gleaming angrily, strode off. However, he wasn't looking quite so angry as he wended his way across the fields, in the deep twilight, towards Edgemore Park. In fact, his eyes twinkled.

"Young scallywags!" he muttered. "I'll teach 'em to stay out after calling-over! Having a rough-and-ready supper with his lord-

ship, I suppose. Ah, me! What it is to be a boy!"

He sighed, and chuckled again. His reason for going on this errand personally was so that he could deal leniently with the culprits. He would have to punish them, of course, but away from the school he could punish them much more satisfactorily.

As he crossed the park, where the noble chestnuts were already springing into leaf, he caught sight of a ruddy glow down in one of the wooded hollows. The castle itself, so far as he could see, was in total darkness—looking, in fact, somewhat grim and forbidding silhouetted against the darkening sky.

Mr. Wilkes paused. He fancied that he could hear voices raised in a rousing chorus. The voices seemed to be coming from the direction of the ruddy glow. He altered his course, approaching leisurely. Making his way round some bushes, he came within full sight of a picturesque scene, and he halted, a wistful look in his eyes.

Down in the hollow, a great campfire was crackling and blazing. Round it sat the Earl of Edgemore, Viscount Bellton, Nipper, Handforth, Travers, Archie Glenthorne, and all the other missing Removites. Some of them were singing, some were busily tending the rough-and-ready cooking utensils which were suspended over the flames. A real, old-fashioned camp scene. Small wonder that Mr. Wilkes hesitated.

A waft of smoke came in his direction—bringing with it the pungent odour of burning wood and cooking meat. It sent him giddy for the moment. It revived old memories. For in his time Mr. Wilkes had been a great hunter. Many a hundred times had he sat round his own camp fire in just such a manner as this. But now, a staid, prosaic schoolmaster—

He braced himself, strode down into the hollow, and another waft of pungent smoke enveloped him. When he arrived by the crackling camp fire, he was a man first and a schoolmaster second.

"Well, youngsters, what do you think you're doing here?" he asked, with mock sternness. "Good evening, Lord Edgemore! I'm awfully sorry to interrupt this pleasant scene—"

"Why, it's Mr. Wilkes!" interrupted the earl boisterously. "Sit down, sir! I guess we're real glad for you to join us!"

Skeets' fist flashed out, and Bernard Forrest uttered a howl of pain as he toppled over the wall into the pig-sty.

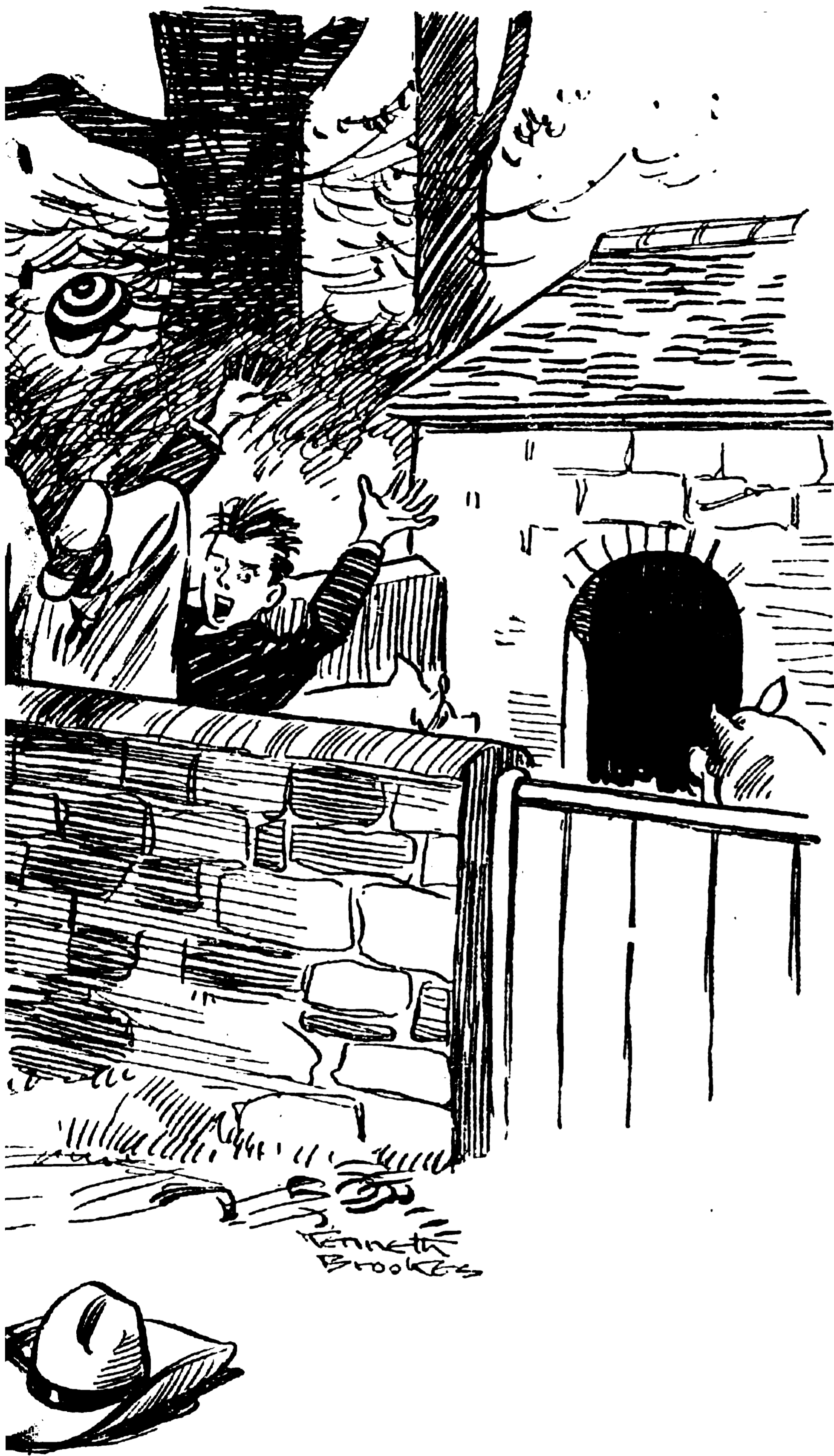


"Ahem! Thank you," said Mr. Wilkes. "But the fact is, these boys have apparently overlooked the time."

The Removites looked at Mr. Wilkes anxiously.

"Frightfully sorry, sir!" said Nipper. "I know we've missed calling-over, but we'll toe the line, sir. Lord Edgemore asked us to stay to supper, and—well, sir, we just couldn't resist."

"I guess it's my fault, Mr. Wilkes," said Lord Edgemore genially. "I'm figuring that you won't punish these boys much. Say, supper's just ready. How about joining in?"



"Hurrah!"

"Good old Wilkey!"

"You're a sport, sir!"

Mr. Wilkes squatted down in a place that had been hastily prepared for him. His face glowed in the light of the camp fire; and the others, gathering round, were soon laughing and singing again.

"Don't blame the boys, Mr. Wilkes," said the earl, bending over. "I guess this was all my doing. So I hope you won't punish them——"

"Leave it to me," interrupted Mr. Wilkes, with a chuckle. "I shall have to give them a nominal punishment, of course—but let's forget that for the moment. Hallo! Anybody playing this banjo?"

"It's mine, sir" chuckled Skeets, who was next to him. "Can you play?"

"No, but I can strum," replied Mr. Wilkes, grabbing the banjo, and getting busy. "Now, come along—all of you! Let's have a rousing song."

Within a minute Mr. Alington Wilkes, the Housemaster of the Ancient House, was playing the banjo like an expert, and roaring a lusty song at the top of his voice, accompanied by over a dozen voices just as lusty.

A SUPERB, glittering limousine rolled silently through the imposing gateway of Edgemore Park. The Dunkeleys were arriving at the castle. Eustace Carroll's little scheme, it seemed, had come to fruition.

The chauffeur drove straight on to the terrace, and brought the magnificent car to a halt at the foot of the great steps. There emerged Lord and Lady Dunkeley, and the Dowager Lady Dunkeley, to say nothing of the Hon. Claude and the Hon. Cecil Underhill, his lordship's hopeful

"Nothing would please me better, and I thank you for the invitation," said Mr. Wilkes. "But, really, these boys——"

He broke off, for at that moment a stupefying waft of hot coffee, mingled with the pungent smoke, had assailed his nostrils. It was the last straw. The cheery camp fire, the sizzling meat, and the glamour of the open air had already seized Mr. Wilkes in their grip. He had fought hard; but that smell of hot coffee robbed him of his final scruple.

"Well, for a few minutes, then," he grinned. "Cheer up, boys—let's forget school for a bit."

sons.

"Hum! Ha! We're here, then," said Lord Dunkeley, as he looked up at the castle. "Upon my soul! Queer, Margaret! Not a light anywhere!"

"Don't be absurd, George, my dear," said Lady Dunkeley. "The reception-rooms are undoubtedly on the other side of the castle. Claude, go and ring the bell."

"Yes, mater," said Claude.

They all mounted the steps in a sedate way. The Dowager Lady Dunkeley, on Lord Dunkeley's arm, was a rather shrivelled, aristocratic-looking old lady with white hair. Lord Dunkeley, stout, ruddy, and boisterous,

was a typical country squire. His good lady, an aristocrat every inch of her, was superb. The Hon. Claude and the Hon. Cecil, young fellows of about twenty-two and twenty-four, were immaculate to a degree.

Claude pulled the great bell, and they all waited. Claude pulled it again. Still there was no response. The great castle remained silent and still. Not a light gleamed in any window; not a footstep sounded beyond the great iron-studded doors.

"Extraordinary!" said Lord Dunkeley. "We'd better send Jenkins round to the back. Where is the back, anyhow? But I must confess that the whole thing strikes me as being most peculiar—most peculiar indeed! I mean, not a light anywhere! In my opinion, the castle is empty."

Claude, who had been ringing again, gave it up as a bad job.

"It's no good sending Jenkins round to the back, pater," he said. "There can't be anybody in the place. I'm jiggered if I can understand—Hullo! What's that glow over there, in the park?"

"I've been wondering the same thing," said the Hon. Cecil. "Can't you hear singing, too?"

They all stared across the parkland. They could see the glow in the distance, but the actual scene at the camp fire was hidden from them by intervening trees.

"Some of the gamekeepers, I presume," said Lord Dunkeley.

"Gamekeepers don't sing round a fire, George," objected her ladyship. "Good gracious! I wonder—You know, George, the Earl of Edgemore is a—er—Canadian backwoodsman. At least, so I have been given to understand."

"Upon my soul, you are not suggesting—"

"I hardly know what I am suggesting, George," interrupted Lady Dunkeley. "But perhaps it would be as well for us to make inquiries of these people at the camp fire. They will, at least, be able to give us some information."

Thus, a few minutes later, the Dunkeleys were walking across the soft grass, approaching the hollow. They rounded the bushes and came within full sight of the remarkable scene. At the moment, the Earl of Edgemore was leading a rousing camp chorus, beating time with a fork, on the end of which was a chunk of meat.

"Good gracious me!" exclaimed Lady Dunkeley faintly.

"A singular scene, indeed!" said his lordship, bringing out his glasses and setting them on his nose. "Well, I never! School-boys, aren't they? What on earth are they doing—"

"George!" interrupted Lady Dunkeley, grasping her husband's arm. "Look, George! Look at that man with the fork in his hand!"

"The man in the shabby old breeches and the open shirt?"

"Yes!"

"What of him?"

"That man is Lord Edgemore!" said her ladyship tensely. "His photograph was in the paper this morning! And that boy next to him—"

"Viscount Bellton, by gad!" ejaculated Lord Dunkeley. "I recognise them now! Well I'm hanged!"

"I say, this is a bit blue at the roots, pater," said the Hon. Claude. "I mean, after inviting us to dinner!"

"It requires an explanation," said Lord Dunkeley.

And he and his family descended upon the boisterous party round the camp fire.

CHAPTER 10.

Booked for St. Frank's!

EUSTACE CARROLL, lurking in the background, hugged himself. He had taken care to be on the spot—to witness the arrival of the noble Dunkeley family. But never in Eustace's wildest dreams had he hoped for any such scene as this.

Nipper and Handforth and two or three other St. Frank's fellows were the first to notice the new arrivals. They sprang up, rather startled. The daintily attired ladies and the immaculate gentleman were incongruous in this camp fire setting.

"My only hat!" gasped Handforth. "Visitors, Skeets! People calling at the castle, I expect!"

"Say, pop, look who's here!" said Skeets in alarm.

The Earl of Edgemore went forward to meet his guests. He looked a typical Canadian backwoodsman as he stood outlined against the blazing camp fire.

"Lord Edgemore?" asked Lord Dunkeley bluntly.

"Why, yes, I guess so, sir," said the earl.

"Allow me to introduce Lady Dunkeley and my mother, the Dowager Lady Dunkeley," said the visitor. "I am Lord Dunkeley of Helmford."

"Why, say, I'm sure glad to meet you, folks," said the earl. "But I guess I wasn't quite prepared—"

"Not prepared?" interrupted Lord Dunkeley. "What on earth do you mean, sir? We are here at your invitation, and I must be allowed to remark that I am amazed—"

"Not at my invitation, sir," interrupted Lord Edgemore. "I hope you will forgive me, but this is the first time I have ever heard of you."

"Really, Lord Edgemore, how can you say that?" asked Lady Dunkeley, with some heat. "We came to Edgemore Castle at your express invitation. And when we arrive we find the castle in darkness—"

"Gee! There's surely some mistake!" interrupted Lord Edgemore, deeply concerned. "Honestly, folks, I didn't write to you."

The Dunkeleys, confused, looked at one another rather helplessly.

"A hoax?" shouted his lordship, slapping his thigh.

"I'm more sorry about this than I can say!" exclaimed the Earl of Edgemore earnestly. "Somebody, of course, has played a practical joke. A particularly ill-mannered practical joke at that."

"Well, what about staying?" put in Handforth from the outskirts of the crowd. "We've got heaps and heaps of grub here—miles more than we can manage. It's nothing to do with me, of course—"

"I'm glad you realise that," muttered Church, grabbing his arm. "Shut up, you ass!"

"Eh?" gasped Handforth. "Oh, well—"

"The boy's right," said Lord Edgemore heartily. "Ladies and gentlemen I shall be honoured if you will stay. I guess this camp fire meal doesn't exactly appeal to you, but it's the best I can offer at such short notice. It's just the rough Canadian style, but the food is wholesome, and I sure wouldn't like you to go home dinnerless."

"Really!" protested Lady Dunkeley, shocked

"Don't be absurd, Margaret," said the dowager. "There's no earthly reason for you to speak in that tone of voice. I think Lord Edgemore's invitation is perfectly thrilling.

"Only last week we saw a most exciting talking picture in which some Western men were gathered round the camp fire," added the dowager firmly. "Don't you remember, Margaret, how I envied them? Well, here is our chance to see what it is really like to sit down to a meal round a camp fire. What an extraordinary situation! I'm quite excited. Lord Edgemore, your arm!"

"Good for you, grandma!" said the Hon. Claude, grinning. "You always were a sport, weren't you? Buck up, mother! Don't look so dashed shocked! This is a bit of fun!"

"Rather!" said the Hon. Cecil. "I'm hanged if young Archie Glenthorne isn't here! Hallo, Archie, old kid!"

"Come and squat down, Cecil, old thing!" said Archie genially. "This is absolutely

top-hole, you chappies! The Glenthornes and the Dunkeleys are life-long pals, so to speak. Gather round and let's resume the vocal effects."

Eustace Carroll, gazing down upon this scene from a distance, was filled with utter dismay. For his great plan had gone to pieces; it had sprung a bad leak. The Dunkeleys, instead of haughtily retiring in a huff, were actually entering into the spirit of the thing, and accepting the invitation to this rough and ready camp fire supper!

Within ten minutes they were enjoying themselves hugely. Food had never before tasted so perfectly delicious. The crackling of the camp fire, the soft murmur of the breeze, the twinkling stars overhead—all combined to make this occasion a memorable one. And the Dunkeleys, one and all, discovered that the Earl of Edgemore and Viscount Bellton, in spite of their rough exteriors, were true-born aristocrats at heart. They sealed a friendship in that hour which was not to be lightly broken. Eustace Carroll, bitter at heart, slunk away.

SPORTSMEN all—particularly the lively old dowager," chuckled Handforth, after the Dunkeleys had gone. "By George! I take off my hat to those people!"

"They sure fitted themselves into the picture," agreed

Lord Edgemore, with a smile. "And they didn't seem to be particularly slow with the eats, either."

"Gee, pop, we're sure having fun!" said Skeets delightedly.

"I guess you'd best be getting indoors, son," said the Earl of Edgemore. "Well, Mr. Wilkes, I'm glad you stayed—and I hope you won't be too severe on these boys."

Mr. Wilkes, who was preparing to return to St. Frank's with the Removites, went so far as to wink.

"Leave them to me," he said. "I shall punish them, of course, but since they were here at your express invitation, I think I can be lenient. Ready, you fellows?"

"Yes, sir!" chorused the Removites.

NEXT WEEK'S BUMPER ATTRACTIONS!

"Flooded Out at St. Frank's!"

By E. S. Brooks.

Hectic times at the old school, lads, in which Nipper & Co. and the rancher-earl of Edgemore and his son play stirring parts. How a plot against the rancher-earl brings about the flooding of St. Frank's is told in this brilliant school and adventure yarn.

"The Lost Explorer!"

By John Brearley.

The Night Hawk at the top of his form—more thrilling than ever—in the first of an amazing new series of breath-taking stories.

"The Valley of Hot Springs!"

More enthralling chapters of Ladbroke Black's popular serial of adventure in the Arctic.

[Order your copy in advance, chums.]

"Say, I'll come along with you," declared Skeets.

"Not on your life," put in his father. "Didn't I tell you to go back to the castle? Bed for you, sonny! You've got to be up and around early in the morning."

"Aw, pop, have a heart!" protested Skeets. "I guess I won't be long."

"But I say you've got to go to bed," said the earl sternly.

"Shucks!" grinned Skeets. "Be yourself, pop. What's the good of being a viscount if I can't do as I want? Well, let's be going, boys!"

The Earl of Edgemore shrugged rather helplessly.

"What's the use?" he asked, appealing to the stars.

Mr. Alington Wilkes, seizing Skeets by the arm, took him aside and said a few quiet, earnest words. Skeets, looking rather sheepish, grinned.

"Well, good-night, fellers!" he said. "Good-night, Mr. Wilkes! I get you, sir." He went over and joined his father against the dying camp fire.

"Say, what's this?" asked the earl.

"Guess I'm going to bed, pop," replied Skeets meekly.

The Earl of Edgemore looked from Skeets to Mr. Wilkes; then he went across to Old Wilkey.

"Say, tell me something, will you?" he asked. "How in the name of all that's miraculous did you get that darned boy of mine to agree to go to bed?"

"I merely told him, Lord Edgemore, that it was his duty to do as you requested," replied Mr. Wilkes mildly. "You see, I am accustomed to dealing with boys. I have my own methods. I don't order them about so

much as ask them. They seldom resent my —"

"Say, wait a minute!" interrupted Lord Edgemore, his eyes gleaming. "Gosh darn it! If you can handle boys like that, Mr. Wilkes, I'm figuring that I'd like you to handle Skeets. Maybe the boy deserves a break now that he's a viscount, eh? A swell education wouldn't do him any harm, would it?"

"I think it highly necessary that the boy should continue at school, if you really want my frank opinion," said Mr. Wilkes.

"Well, say, look here," said the earl impulsively, "I'll be around first thing in the morning, and I'll get your headmaster to take Skeets into your school. How's that?"

"I think it is an excellent idea," replied Mr. Wilkes, smiling.

"Gee, pop! Is that a real, honest-to-goodness promise?" asked Skeets eagerly.

"Am I going to St. Frank's?"

"You sure are!" said his father firmly. "If I can't handle you, I guess Mr. Wilkes can!"

"Good egg!" roared Handforth. "Welcome to St. Frank's, Skeets!"

"Hurrah!"

Thus it was decided that Skeets, otherwise Viscount Bellton, should join the St. Frank's Remove. But little did he or any of the other Removites dream of the sinister perils which were looming so close!

THE END.

(Another topping yarn in this magnificent new series of school stories coming next Wednesday, entitled, "Flooded Out at St. Frank's!" And it's sure the real goods!)

CORRESPONDENTS WANTED

Leon Rothfield, 120, Christopher Avenue, Brooklyn, New York, wants to hear from stamp collectors—India, East Indies, South America, and Africa.

The Wellington Correspondence Club requires new members. Write to Alec Singleton, 18, Nelson Square, Castle Croft, Egremont, Cumberland.

R. J. Frost, May House, 35, Vincent Street, Walsall, Staffs, asks for correspondents.

Miss Madge Denmark, 4, King's Gardens, Ilford, Essex, would like a French correspondent.

R. Rudoff, 15, West Bank, Stamford Hill, London, N.16, wishes to correspond with overseas readers, especially those in Africa, Australia, and Canada. Interested in sport.

K. Potter, 78, Lichfield Road, Aston, Birmingham, would like to hear from fellow-readers in Birmingham; ages 15 or 16; all letters answered.

Albert C. Ward, 28, South Street, Bourne, Lincs., asks for pen-friends anywhere on the Continent or in Africa; ages 16 or 17.

Miss Iris Williams, 106, Coventry Road, Queen's Park, Bedford, would like to correspond with girl readers in U.S.A.; ages 14 or 15.

Ernest J. Simpkins, 18, Jersey Road, Leytonstone, London, E.11, will welcome new members for his stamp club.

R. Leeming, 38, Russell Street, Hull, wishes to hear from readers anywhere abroad; aged 15.

L. Davidson, 8, Radstock Road, Elm Park, Liverpool, wants to hear from stamp collectors in S. Africa, Egypt, or Canada.

A. Knight, 68, St. Leonard's Avenue, Lawrence Park, Toronto 12, Canada, would like readers to write him.

The World-Wide Correspondence Club is always open for new members. Write, asking for particulars, to the secretary, 27, Crosby Road, Holbeck, Leeds.

Charles A. Moorrees, c/o J. F. Stadler, Dorp Street, Stellenbosch, C. P., South Africa, asks for correspondents, especially in Singapore and India. Interested in photography.

Miss Mabel Caldwell, 128, The Boulevard, Strathfield, Sydney, New South Wales, Australia, wants girl correspondents.

J. F. Rinaldi, 160, Caledonian Road, King's Cross, London, N.1, desires correspondents in South Africa and Australia.



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; bumper books, pocket wallets and penknives are also offered as prizes. Address your jokes to "Smilers," Nelson Lee Library 5, Carmelite Street, London, E.C.4.

WRONG AGAIN.

Teacher (sternly): "Jones minor, you haven't put the answer to any of these sums."

Jones minor: "That's right, sir. I did that purposely. I always get that part wrong."

(H. Strange, 16, Gwenayth Street, Cathays, Cardiff, has been awarded a handsome watch.)

NOT A WATER BABY.

Father: "Where shall we hide Willio's present till his birthday?"

Mother: "I think the bathroom would be the safest place."

(R. Woodward, 594, High Road, Chiswick, W.4, has been awarded a book.)

SNAPPY.

Tommy: "Why do you call your dog 'Camera'?"

Johnnie: "Because he tries to snap everyone he sees."

(B. Nettleton, 21, Lytham Street, Pendleton, has been awarded a pocket wallet.)

GO HON!

Pa (after searching for half an hour): "Billy, do you know what I've done with my hammer?"

Billy: "Yes, pa."

Pa: "Well?"

Billy: "You've lost it."

(G. Weir, c/o Stevenson, 1, Cunningham Street, Glasgow, has been awarded a penknife.)

SOME SUNSET!

The young artist was showing his lady friend round the studio.

"How very realistic your paintings are!" she said delightedly.

"Do you really think so?" murmured the gratified artist.

"Why, yes. That one absolutely makes my mouth water."

"What!" shrieked the outraged painter.

"A sunset makes your mouth water?"

"Oh, is it a sunset?" she asked sweetly. "I thought it was a fried egg."



COULDN'T BE DONE.

Sportsman (in poulterer's shop): "Have you any rabbits?"

Shopkeeper: "No, sir; but I have some pork pies."

Sportsman: "But I can't go home and tell the wife I've shot a couple of pork pies!"

(D. Keymer, Acacia House, The Thoroughfare, Harleston, Norfolk, has been awarded a pocket wallet.)

(L. Connell, 11, Raymond Street, W. Preston, Melbourne, has been awarded a book.)

CATCHING THE GAS.

Jones: "There's a leak in our gas pipe"

Gas-man: "Did you do anything with it before you came to fetch me?"

Jones: "Yes, I put a bucket under it."

(F. Wilcox, 47, Grange Lane, Rossington, Doncaster, has been awarded a penknife.)

NO DOUBT.

Shopper: "Can I hang this paper on myself?"

Salesman (in surprised tone): "Yes, sir. But it would look better on the wall."

(G. Marshall, 24, Burrows Road, Kensal Rise, N.W.10 has been awarded a pocket wallet.)

SERGEANTS ARE DUMB.

The now private was shaving outside his tent.

"Do you always shave outside?" asked a sergeant.

"Of course," answered the private. "What do you think I am—fur-lined?"

(H. C. Hastings, Taunton School, Taunton, has been awarded a book.)

TOO OBSERVANT.

It was grammar lesson, and the schoolmistress, hoping to demonstrate the word "quickly," walked rapidly across the room.

"Now, children, tell me how I am walking."

"Bow-leggedly!" chanted the class in unison.
(Chee Seng Kee, 473, Havelock Road, Singapore, has been awarded a book.)

VERY SUSPICIOUS.

A conjurer, who was giving an entertainment at the village hall asked for the assistance of a boy from the audience. He particularly stipulated that he must be an entire stranger to him. After a long appeal, a boy stepped up on to the platform

"I have never seen you before in my life, have I?" asked the conjurer.

"No, father," replied the boy

(W. Denholm, 20, Cardigan Road, Bridlington, has been awarded a pocket wallet.)

TRUTH WILL OUT.

Jinks: "A man is an idiot to be absolutely certain of anything."

Binks: "Are you sure of that?"

Jinks: "Certain."

(A. Gotham, 48, Bernard Road, Edgbaston, Birmingham, has been awarded a penknife.)

Red-hot Thrills in This Week's Complete Night Hawk Yarn!

The HOUSE of MYSTERY

By
JOHN BREARLEY.

A Fire - Fiend
comes to grips with the
Night Hawk—and is soon
Subdued!

CHAPTER I.

The Man on the Roof!

IT was the queer stealthiness about the man that first attracted the keen eyes of Thurston Kyle, the Night Hawk.

Queerer still was the fact that the man was prowling furtively among the chimneys of a flat-roofed, obviously empty mansion, set among trees near the Highgate end of Hampstead Heath.

For all that a brilliant moon made the task fairly easy, this night-climbing on the part of a middle-aged man seemed a curious and perilous performance.

Under his great wings the scientist Night Hawk was gliding leisurely homewards after one of his customary trips through the cool night air, following a long, hard day in his laboratory. The flight had been shorter and more idle than usual; just a flit across London at top speed, then a quiet flit back to his Hampstead house and bed. He had even left his twin guns and grenade belt at home on account of their weight, because, for once in a way, he had not been in the mood to seek adventure. The sight of such a man in so peculiar a position, however,



aroused Thurston Kyle's ever-acute interest, and, without a sound, he dropped lower still, safe in the knowledge of his "invisibility."

At first, naturally, he had taken the man for some marauder, bent on breaking-in—one of London's many daring cat-burglars, for instance. But a brief glance was enough to shake that theory.

Just for a second, as the roof-walker hovered beside the chimneys, he changed his position so that the clear moon shone fully upon him. He looked a sturdy, respectable citizen of over fifty, soberly dressed, with a broad, heavy face and curly grey beard, topped by a mane of iron grey hair.

From the chimney-clump he took something that looked like a straight thick stick.

which he held close to his body as he turned and stole cautiously towards the foot-high parapet of the roof. Thirty feet above him the Night Hawk smiled to himself and swirled his wings quietly, preparatory to continuing his short flight home. Instead of some petty criminal, as he had thought, the man below was probably the caretaker of the mansion, or even the landlord, taking a stick to clear away rotten leaves or an old bird's nest that had fouled his gutters. Although, to be sure, he had chosen a queer time o' day for such a task.

Slowly the Night Hawk drifted away, chuckling quietly at his own suspicions. And then, before he had gone twenty yards, came a flat, hollow sound that made him spin dizzily on one wing-tip—alert, ready for instant action.

Tock! Tock!

'To a man like Thurston Kyle, those queer



but characteristic reports needed no explanation. He knew what they meant even as he whirled, and knew that he had just been guilty of a serious error. A pointed jet of flame caught his eye, sending him gliding swiftly towards the empty house he had just left. Someone was pumping bullets through a rifle that had a silencer fixed on the muzzle. And that someone was the innocent-looking greybeard he had seen a moment ago.

The man was no longer prowling the roof, but lying flat, with head and shoulders resting on the parapet. The "stick" he had held, now fully exposed to the moon,

gleamed with the blue sleekness of polished steel—a vicious and high-powered rifle. And he was cuddling the butt expertly into his shoulder.

All unconscious of the grim figure sweeping towards him, he fired again and again with deadly precision. There was something odd about his bullets, too; they left a twinkling trail from the rifle's mouth like the burning "tracers" of an aero machine-gun.

Glancing ahead, Thurston Kyle saw with amazement that the man's target was the open back window of another quiet mansion, some seventy yards away. The two houses lay directly opposite each other, their gardens separated by a low wall and a screen made by the bare branches of tall poplars. Not a soul was to be seen in the second house, nor even a light; but from the fact that the moonlit windows had curtains in them, it was apparently occupied, unlike the one on which the deadly marksman lay.

Why anyone should fire with a silenced rifle at the back of a dark house Thurston Kyle could not guess. Yet it was certainly up to him to intervene. He flexed his muscles for a lightning downwards swoop; dived. Then he stiffened his wings with abrupt force, checked brilliantly and swung away again, his handsome face grimmer than ever.

For at last the rifleman's bullets had taken a fierce and appalling effect that stopped the Night Hawk in full stride. From the window at which the greybeard had been aiming there came a sudden ugly flash, the faintest clang of metal. Next instant the flash had spread to a leaping, fiery glare, and a roaring gush of fire lit up the room beyond the window.

It was not so much a fire as an explosion; a veritable fountain of blue-red flames that seemed to swamp the whole room in a second. It was uncanny that a man with a rifle should have caused such a swift and horrible blaze. But what made the Night Hawk slash into a frenzied speed was the sight of a man's body, bent over what looked to be a table, and clearly silhouetted against the glow of the ghastly furnace around him.

Heedless of the dastardly marksman, who still continued to fire with cold-blooded persistency, Thurston Kyle flashed at dazzling speed across the seventy yards of space on an errand of mercy. Punishment for the other man could wait; he had first to try and rescue the limp figure in that madly burning room yonder.

Like a thunderbolt he came down, folded his wings neatly, and almost hurtled through the wide-opened window, straight into the very heart of the fiery blaze. Yet, for all his agility and speed in making an entrance, he felt the wind of another bullet, and heard its wicked impact amid the flame on the farther wall. With a staggering sway and side-step as he piled in over the sill, he slid

into a corner and stood for one split-second staring.

Never before had he seen a fire reach such ferocity in so short a time. The flames filled the back of the room almost solidly, and waves of scorching smoke and air almost stifled him. The strip of floor beside the window on which he stood was not burning yet, and there was still a chance of reaching the open door. But the man he had streaked to rescue was in dire straits.

He lay with arms outflung across the table, as though the fire had caught him while he dozed. Beside him lay what was left of a large, old-fashioned oil-lamp, its brass container burst open by a bullet. The top of the table was swimming with liquid that had poured from the puncture—liquid that swirled and blazed with a dazzling light. And through the smoke of the burning room came the pungent smell of heavy, inflammable spirit.

The trained nostrils of the scientist placed those throat-gripped fumes at once. At the same time the explanation of the glittering bullets came like a thunderclap.

"Naphtha—and incendiary bullets!" he choked. "Heaven, the foul fiend—the devil!"

Careless of any more twinkling slugs that might rip through the window, he plunged forward, pulling down his vizor as the smoke enveloped him. Flames danced before him, rising to his knees, blocking his path; but he kept grimly on, and at last his leather-gloved hands gripped the unfortunate man and hauled him away with a force that knocked over the table. To the sound of its crash the pool of naphtha went flying in all directions, increasing the roaring holocaust.

Only the goggles of his helmet and the suit he wore saved the Night Hawk from certain and hideous death. Fire seemed to scud around him, rippling across the floor like a wave. Destruction licked hungrily at the naphtha-sprinkled walls and ceiling, which was bulging already with the heat.

To climb back through the window with his burden was certain death also, for the ghoul on the roof opposite would see him at once, and, seeing, shoot. Heart pounding with the effort, jaw hard set, Thurston Kyle pressed the limp figure under one arm, lowered his head and shoulders, and crashed across the room to the door.

Vigorously though he stormed through, the ferocious scarlet tongues caught him, frizzling the silken cover of his suit and setting the leather underneath a-smoulder. The flames rising from the clothes of the man he carried fluttered in his lowered face, blackening his goggles. For an eternity he seemed to be struggling in a welter of overpowering heat, until at long last he won through. The door loomed up before him; he gathered himself for an effort and lurched through out on to a small landing.

A gush of dark brown smoke raced after him like the paw of some famished animal reaching for its escaping prey.

WITH head a-whirl and lungs nearly bursting, the Night Hawk fell to the floor, only to stagger up after a second and lay his burden face downwards. Across the landing was a second room, with door gaping wide open like the one he had just left. He darted in, returning quickly with a thick floor-rug, which he pressed on the blazing clothes of the crumpled man—but flung it away next instant with a snarl of rage. That, too, was soaked with naphtha. The whole place, landing included, reeked of it.

To get away as swiftly as possible was imperative, for the house was one great death-trap. The landing was already well alight, and below the fire roared and crackled. Yet, in spite of that, the Night Hawk stopped to do a typically gallant action. Falling forward, he hurled himself full-toss on top of the man he ha' rescued, crushing and beating out the rising flames by the weight of his own body.

Then he gathered up the poor fellow in his arms.

And even the austere Night Hawk, with nerves of chilled steel, frowned doubtfully as he glanced at his injuries by the glare from the blazing room. The naphtha that had poured from the bullet-smashed lamp must have gushed in a fiery splash all over the man's head and shoulders. If he was to be saved, there must be no delay in getting him straight back to the scientist's laboratory—and first aid! Fortunately that would be a matter of two minutes once this doomed house was left behind.

Thurston Kyle darted a swift glance round. For the first time he noticed a small window on the landing, through which he could see the distant roof of the other mansion. As he looked, bright and sharp came two more jets of fire. The bearded man, not satisfied yet with his vile handiwork, was still plugging incendiary bullets into the burning house. But this time he appeared to be aiming lower.

Cold with rage, Thurston Kyle turned towards the stairhead, hoping to find an avenue of escape through the lower depths of the house. He had neither seen nor heard any signs of other occupants in the place—the man in the burning room had been alone, apparently. He approached the banisters; and then drew back swiftly. Only just in time, too.

Whoo-oo-sh! Cra-aa-sh!

With a terrific crash the stairway collapsed into the fiery inferno below. A myriad crackling sparks danced in the suffocating air; the flames roared more fiercely than ever. There was no hope of escape that way for the Night Hawk!

Wild gusts of fire came licking up the walls, fed by the deadly spirit which had been sprayed everywhere. By the vivid light, the Night Hawk saw that all the doors of the rooms, or—as many as he could see, were open; and found time even then to marvel at the diabolical cleverness with which the

fiend with the rifle had set fire to the mansion, from the safety of seventy yards' range. He must have fired through a few open windows on the ground floor, having previously soaked the rooms with naphtha and left the doors open so that the flames could gush into the hall and up the stairs.

One avenue of escape only remained now—the room across the landing, which had not yet caught alight. Holding the rescued man firmly, Thurston Kyle ran through the door, leaping to the window. The firing from the opposite window seemed to have stopped at last, but in any case he had to risk a bullet. He flung up the sash, hoisted himself and the man over the sill—and dropped.

For several dizzy yards he fell before his great wings could take hold. They opened eventually, and gripped the air, swinging him swiftly away from that house of flame. Great scarlet columns, topped by black smoke, were gushing from the lower windows, lighting the garden with their glare. He heard the sound of a police whistle shrilling furiously from the quiet street beyond; a dim, excited roar of voices. Then, with a deft swerve, he regained full control of his wings, zoomed up above the high poplars in the garden, and flew straight as an arrow towards the empty mansion opposite.

As he swung nearer to the flat roof, he was just in time to see a trap-door closing down on a triumphant, bearded face.

The desire to get his hands on the devil who had caused this fearful havoc almost made him forget his errand of mercy. But not quite. The welfare of sufferers always came first with Thurston Kyle; and, without a check, he swooped on through the night towards his own home, the other side of the Heath.

For all that, however, he had not finished with that murderous rifleman. The man would have to wait still longer for his punishment, galling though it was to have to postpone the event. But it would come.

There and then, Thurston Kyle vowed to spare no pains until the fiend was tracked down. And one thing was certain—he would never forget that broad, bearded countenance he had seen outlined in the moonlight.

CHAPTER 2.

A Weird Discovery!

ARRIVED at the little veranda of his home, after the short flight, the Night Hawk landed silently. But, with memory of the sight of the injuries the man in his arms had sustained, he laid him gently on the rail before striding in through the French windows of the laboratory.

His cheery young assistant, Snub Hawkins, looked up from a book with a smile as his

master entered, only to rise hastily next moment. Thurston Kyle took him gravely by the arm.

"I want you to leave the laboratory till I ring for you, my boy!" he said quietly. "No; there is nothing wrong with me. But I have—er—a patient I do not wish you to see till he has been bandaged!"

When the Night Hawk spoke in that tone, Snub never delayed. After one worried glance he obediently left the room. Thurston Kyle went back to the veranda and gently brought in the victim of the fire. He laid him on a bench beneath two hanging electric lights for examination. And the first thing he discovered was that all his swift homeward flight had been useless. The man was dead.

To an extent, the fact was not surprising, in view of the damage caused by the flaring naphtha. But then, to Thurston Kyle's utter amazement, he found, on closer study, that death had occurred some hours before.

The grim irony of it made him clench his hands. He had risked death by fire and flaming bullets—to rescue a man who had long before passed away from human aid. It was a staggering discovery.

Quietly he put back the soothing oils and bandages he had laid ready, lighted a cigarette and stood staring down at the still figure on the bench. His reflective eyes began absently to take in the details of the man's clothes, or what was left of them, and after a while he frowned thoughtfully. There was something queer about the garments; something that did not quite fit in. He put out a hand at last and fingered the badly-charred suit of excellent cloth, while his frown grew deeper.

Yes—something queer! The victim was dressed in what had once been a severely-cut dark grey suit, such as a sober, business man of about middle age might wear. But the boots were those of a much younger man—and a somewhat flashy type of man at that.

In bold contrast to the rest of his good, unobtrusive clothing, they were made of cheap leather, bright yellow in colour once, and adorned with ornate cloth tops and buttons. Their toes narrowed to long, very sharp points; the heels were worn and slovenly. Altogether they were far too raffish to be worn by the sort of man the plain grey suit seemed to indicate.

"H'm! Mystery piled on mystery!" murmured Thurston Kyle. "From the suit he appears to have been a fairly solid and respectable citizen; and from these ridiculous boots, something very much the reverse. I wonder which is right?"

If only he could have got some idea from the man's face—but that was impossible. He began rapidly to explore the tattered garments.

Search of the trousers, waistcoat and outside pockets revealed nothing, not so much as a penny or a key. But when he came to the inside pocket of the coat, he nodded with satisfaction as he pulled out a heavy and

bulky wallet. He had it open in a second.

The first thing that came to light was money in plenty. Robbery, at least, did not seem to be the motive for the elaborate murder and arson he had seen carried out. There was a great wad of notes, English fivers and tenners and—to his faint surprise—French hundred-franc notes also. They were all clean and unfolded, as though they had recently come from a bank. He rifled them calmly, noting their series numbers and the amount they represented—£200 in English money, and over £300 in French. A big sum for a murdered man to possess, indeed.

But suddenly, as he examined them, his dark eyes grew keener. He bent, fluttering one of the notes between thumb and forefinger. Then he turned swiftly and held it close to one of the hanging lights.

For some seconds there was a tense silence, broken only by the rustle of the notes as he took them up one by one and examined them. Not until he had scrutinised them all did he stack them neatly into a pile again and lay them aside on the bench. A little sardonic smile appeared at the corners of his lips.

Small wonder the murdered man had not been robbed also. For each of the notes, English and French alike, were forgeries—the cleverest forgeries he had ever seen! The mystery of those two quiet Highgate mansions was growing apace.

Once more he took up the pocket-book, and this time he emptied the contents out all together. On top of the little pile were a few engraved visiting-cards, each with the same name and address.

"Simon Myall, the Poplars, Glenister Road, Highgate, N.," he read, and stroked his chin, carefully recalling the streets in the neighbourhood over which he had been flying, and the tall trees in the garden of the burning house. He nodded slowly.

"Yes. Glenister Road would be where the fire is all right. The next street, in which the empty house stands, is Arlette Avenue, I think. I must remember that and ask Snub, to make sure!"

The visiting-cards, at least, appeared to settle the name and address of the dead man. But Thurston Kyle glanced at those flashy yellow boots again, and his doubts returned. The boots worried him. He spread out the rest of the pile with an impatient hand.

There was an old letter, the envelope of which bore the same name and address as the cards, but the contents were not helpful. More interesting, however, was the next item.

It was a booklet of rail-and-boat tickets to Paris, via Dover, and had been issued by a well-known West End agency. Inside the folder, also, was a voucher for a reserved cabin on the packet-steamer, and this helped considerably. From the dates it was plain that Simon Myall, if that was the dead man's name, had intended crossing the Channel by to-night's boat!

With his eyes on the pile of counterfeit

French notes, Thurston Kyle compressed his lips and laid down the tickets.

Last of all came a slim blue book, bearing the arms of the British Government—a travelling passport. The scientist snatched it up and opened it eagerly, turning at once to the gummed photo inside, which every visa must carry. At last he was to get some idea of what the dead man had looked like—before those naphtha flames had covered him.

And then the biggest shock of the night hit Thurston Kyle like a bullet. Hardly able to believe his eyes, he stood staring down at the glossy snapshot, his limbs rigid with utter astonishment. He saw a broad, heavy face, with masterful features and a fine forehead, topped by a mane of grey hair. And the square jaw was covered by a curly grey beard.

It was the face of the rifleman he had seen on the roof of the empty mansion. Beneath the photo, in block capitals, was the name—Simon Myall!

CHAPTER 3.

On the Trail!

THURSTON KYLE gasped.

There was no doubt about it—the photo at which he was staring was that of the murderous incendiary he had last seen vanishing through the trap-door on the lonely roof, with the results of his blazing bullets staining the night sky with awful light. The bearded face of the man was fixed too firmly in the scientist's memory to admit of any mistake. And the name of that man, beyond all question, was Simon Myall.

It was utterly bewildering. From the visiting-cards and letter, Myall was plainly the owner or the tenant of the Poplars, Glenister Road. Yet he had gone to such fiendish lengths to destroy his property completely—and with appalling swiftness. More than that, he had left a man in the naphtha-soaked mansion who had been dead for some hours. And, most amazing of all, he had left his own passport, his tickets for Paris that night, his cards, letter, and perhaps the money, too, in that dead man's pocket.

Recovering from the numbing surprise only by an effort, Thurston Kyle turned like lightning to the description-page of the passport, scanning the particulars there avidly. Myall, he found, had described himself as a British subject, born in 1879, 5 ft. 9 ins. in height, with blue eyes, grey hair and beard—all of which fitted the prowling rifleman exactly. For profession he had filled in the bald remark, "General merchant."

"Which means anything or nothing!" jerked the Night Hawk.

Suddenly he whirled on the dead man, pulling aside the charred clothes with gentle but firm hands. He had become the scientist once more—cold, dispassionate, intent of facts. No use wasting time on guesswork or memory; this question of identity must



Only just in time did the Night Hawk step back as the stairway collapsed into the inferno below. There was no escape that way from the burning house!

be firmly fixed before proceeding further. He had to prove, if it was humanly possible, that the still figure before him could not be Simon Myall. And having proved that, he would have to try and find out who this man really was.

Beneath the pendant lights he worked, in the lonely silence of the great laboratory. His keen eyes and skilled fingers carried out the grim task with smooth rapidity, and from time to time he turned to consult the open passport and the photo.

On the dead man's head he found only one small feature that could possibly supply any aid to comparison—the right ear. Although disfigured like the rest of the head and shoulders, it had escaped the flames sulli-

ciently to retain its peculiar shape, and for several seconds the Night Hawk scrutinised it intently. Then, picking up a magnifying glass, he took up the passport again and studied Myall's photo with the same grim carefulness that missed not a detail.

He put it down after a while, with a slow, pensive nod, and, lighting a cigarette, became lost in reverie. All his iron concentration was at work on the ghastly mystery into which he had stumbled so curiously. For, whoever the murdered man was, he definitely was not the original of that photograph.

Presently, as the Night Hawk paced up and down, a sharp thought came to him, sending him striding back to the litter on the bench. And this time he picked up the heavy wallet in which everything had been packed.

Holding it beneath one of the nights, he studied the case closely for the first time. On the outside, the pigskin had been burnt into black, brittle wrinkles, showing where the terrible naphtha flames had laid their fierce clutches. But, though he looked hard again at the papers and notes that had been inside the case, he could see no sign of even so much as a scorch-mark on any of them!

It was a small point, perhaps, but it struck the scientist as distinctly queer. Flames that had been deadly enough to disfigure a man's features and burn up tough pigskin in a matter of seconds, had not even marked the flimsy contents of the latter. Why?

The question was answered next moment. Breaking into a little abrupt smile, Thurston Kyle took out his penknife and began scraping the ashes of the wrinkled pigskin away, till an under-surface of something that looked like compressed blotting-paper was laid bare. This he examined with fingers and magnifying glass.

And when, after many long and thoughtful seconds, he laid the wallet down again, his smile was more saturnine than ever.

The wallet was lined throughout with a

thin layer of finest asbestos. It was capable of resisting the fiercest flames for many hours. Thus, Simon Myall, who had taken such hideous pains to dispose of a dead man, had taken equal care to preserve the private papers that he himself must have planted in the pocket of the corpse!

So far from increasing the mystery of the Poplars, however, the discovery of the asbestos had cleared up the one doubt that had been lingering in the Night Hawk's shrewd brain. Carefully placing a cloth over the dead man's head, he walked across to his desk and rang for Snub. His face was that of one who sees full daylight at last.

And while he was waiting for the boy, he glanced at his wrist-watch and made a swift calculation. Since the time he had last seen Simon Myall, the bearded rifleman, disappearing through the trap-door, barely forty-five minutes had passed.

For some reason that thought increased his quiet satisfaction.

SNUB'S behaviour on re-entering the laboratory was characteristic. He took one quick stare at the still figure on the bench, made no remarks, but waited for his master to say the first word. In his deep voice the Night Hawk quickly told the boy everything that had happened since he had first seen the bearded man on the roof of the empty house.

"By 'gosh!" breathed Snub. "You've found a nasty case this time, sir. You—you're sure this chap can't be Simon Myall?"

"Quite sure, my lad!" replied Thurston Kyle emphatically. "I saw Myall's face plainly when he stood on the roof, and recognised it again the moment I opened the passport. My examination of that body yonder only made the matter more certain.

"For one thing, this poor fellow was not born in 1879, or anything like it. His body is that of a young man in the early thirties. Again, he has what is known in boxing circles as a 'cauliflower' ear, developed at some time in his career. And the ear of the man in the photo is quite unblemished!"

"Oh!"

"I am willing to swear, Snub, that Simon Myall fired the incendiary bullets that set his own house ablaze. And I think I have guessed the reason, and also why he left his private papers in the dead man's pocket."

Snub grunted and stroked his chin.

"That's more than I have then. In fact, it's a proper muddle to me, sir!"

"And unfortunately I have not time to explain it just now," replied the Night Hawk, beginning briskly to strip off his scorched flying suit. "All I can tell you is that murder and arson have been committed, together with a clever attempt to disappear on the part of Simon Myall. Forgery also plays a part in this queer case." His eyes narrowed grimly.

"But I have an idea that I can catch the

fiend behind it all—before he can complete his disappearance!" added Kyle, to Snub's utter surprise. "My theory may be wrong, of course. The sooner I test it, the better. Get me my spare suit, lad, please. This one is badly burnt!"

Snub was out of the laboratory and back again in a few seconds. And while the Night Hawk changed into the glistening suit the youngster brought in, he jerked out brief orders.

"You know the roads and houses I have just described?"

Snub nodded. He knew the districts around Hampstead like the palm of his hand.

"Rather—know 'em well, sir. That empty house in Arlette Avenue, where you saw Myall, must be the one called Trouville. It's been vacant for donkeys' years. Supposed to be haunted, or some such rot!"

"Ah, is that so?" The Night Hawk raised his eyebrows. "Good boy! Then I want you to 'phone Scrapper Huggins at once. Tell him to make full speed, bring four of the Kittens at least, and surround the grounds of—Trouville, you say? Describe the place to him and tell him to come armed. Also to keep out of sight of anybody who might be watching the fire at the Poplars. Is that clear?"

"Yes, sir!"

"As for you, lad, I want you to stay here. Tune in the radio to Scotland Yard as quickly as you can, and listen for any report of this fire that may come through. It is not usual to report fires to Scotland Yard, but"—his voice deepened—"I have an idea somehow that this one will interest them greatly. You may hear mention of forgery, too, in connection with it. You understand?"

"You bet, sir!" was the boy's keen reply. "But what are you going to do now?" He was helping Thurston Kyle on with his wings as he spoke, and his voice held a trace of anxiety when the scientist asked for his gun-belt, too. "You're not going after that bearded chap, are you? Down into that Trouville house—like this? Why, the brute will have hooked it long ago!"

The Night Hawk looked at him reflectively, laughing at last with cold eagerness.

"On the contrary, my boy; so far from having 'hooked it,' as you say, I am willing to wager that Mr. Simon Myall is still hiding in that empty house," he said softly. Whereupon Snub gulped at the staggering reply, and stared wide-eyed as his master drawled on:

"If my theory concerning this mystery is correct, he may be intending to stay there for some days, in fact. What you have told me of the haunted reputation of Trouville only strengthens my suspicions."

Snub stiffened anxiously.

"But—but think of the risk, sir!" he cried. "You'll be tackling a desperate man—armed with a rifle—in an empty house——"

He stopped at sight of the dark expression on his master's face. The Night Hawk flexed his muscles, and his eyes were like daggers.

"I would take any risk to get my hands on such men as Simon Myall!" he said quietly. And his young assistant fell silent.

Five minutes later the Night Hawk darted from the veranda of the laboratory and swung aloft, high and fast, invisible in the soft moonlight. He had several tasks to perform.

But this time he was no longer unarmed. At his thighs, as he flew, hung the comforting weight of his deadly automatics.

He was going down into that empty mansion, Trouville. And if Simon Myall was there, then—so much the worse for Simon Myall.

CHAPTER 4.

The House of Brooding Silence!

THE first thing the Night Hawk noticed as his wings swept him clear of his garden trees was that the Poplars was apparently still burning as fiercely as ever. And that despite the fact that firemen had been fighting the flames for an hour.

Away on the Highgate side of the great Heath the moonlit sky was reddened as though by an enormous torch. The wind in Thurston Kyle's face brought a strong tang of smoke. In less than two minutes he was hovering high above the scene, his face bitter as he surveyed the damage Simon Myall's incendiary bullets and naptha had done to a fine old house. From basement to roof the Poplars was one huge bonfire; a glowing, incandescent mass of tottering brick and stone.

Out of every window fluttered long streamers of flame, licking hungrily at the outer walls. Roof beams, some stark and black, others well alight, showered where the slates had burst and chimneys fallen through. The mansion was steadily crumbling before the onslaught of the raging furnace inside.

Circling round, the Night Hawk was glad to see that no damage had been done to the neighbouring houses by flying sparks. Glenister Road, in which the Poplars stood, was a long, quiet avenue of big houses, each separated from the other by wide grounds.

The garden of the doomed mansion had been emptied of sightseers, and the police had swept back the crowd from the front of the house, too, in an effort to aid the firemen. But although fully a dozen hoses were plying the flames, the effect was only to increase the wide pall of smoke that hung over everything for hundreds of yards around. Simon Myall had done his fell work thoroughly. Many hours would pass before even the boldest fireman could penetrate into the Poplars.

Lightly and gracefully the Night Hawk

swerved away from the fire, dropping in a long slant towards that other mansion, black, cold and gloomy. Red gleams from the fire flickered in and out of the shadowy garden and across the moonlit roof, heightening the uncanny feeling of horror about the place. It seemed like some grim monster, implacably watching the sufferings of a beaten foe.

For the first time Thurston Kyle flew round, studying the house intently. He noted the straggly, unkempt grounds, the dark, gaping windows and general air of decay. Haunted, said Snub? Trouville certainly looked it.

Very quietly he glided down to the fatal roof, landing on the cold stone without a sound.

His first task was to loosen the guns in his holsters, ready for a quick draw—and quicker shooting, if necessary. Then he slipped out of his great wings, folded them and leaned them against the stacks in the darkest part of the shadow.

He hated to part with them even for a time, but where he was going they would be more hindrance than help. Free from the pressure of the controls, he shook his limbs and drew a deep breath, while his eyes glowed with the love of adventure. He stole across the roof towards the trap-door like a phantom of the moonlight.

Crooking his fingers beneath the cover, he eased it up bit by bit, taking care to make no sound. At last he had raised it sufficiently for his needs, and, holding the trap up with one arm, he slid his lithe body cautiously through the gap.

It was breathless work, wriggling down in the black depths of an unknown house, with the possibility of a silenced incendiary bullet flaring out of the darkness at any second. Cool as ice, however, the Night Hawk hung until his groping feet touched a small ladder. Then he climbed slowly down.

Gun in one hand, electric torch in the other, he strained his ears for any sounds. But none came; no furtive movement, no hard, tense breathing, telling of a man at bay. Satisfied at length that the room in which he stood was empty, he switched on his torch.

He was in a garret, low, musty and thick with dust and cobwebs. From the ladder by which he had descended, a double line of boot-tracks led across to the door, plainly outlined on the powdered floor. With a last flash round, the Night Hawk followed them.

Cautiously he opened the door, gripping his gun tighter at the protest of the rusty hinges. He listened again from the landing outside, peering over the banisters into the darkness below. But still no sound came. A stillness like that of the tomb brooded over the strange old place.

Down the stairs he went, his light footsteps muffled to absolute silence by the thick layers of dust everywhere. For the moment, at least, there was no need to use his torch; the moonlight, shining through the large shuttered windows, filled the stairs with

patches of bright light, interspersed with monstrous shadows. The tracks that started in the garret were still plain to see, and they led steadily downwards.

Still the stifling hush. Everywhere silvery dust; the clusters of choked cobwebs, peeling walls; the dark mustiness of neglected and rotting wood. Even as he felt his way along, followed by a gigantic, distorted shadow, Thurston Kyle found himself wondering how this once-splendid mansion had been left to moulder so piteously.

He came at last to a lower landing, which opened out into a long, broad corridor, bright with moonlight from the windows in the outer wall, and running the length of the house. It was apparently a gallery of bedrooms, eerie and cold. And for the first time the even line of footsteps broke off before the second door in the row.

The door was ajar. The tracks led inside. Gun to the fore, the Night Hawk laid his fingertips on the panels and gently pushed. Inch by inch he widened the gap, peering inside, ready to duck and shoot at the first hostile sound. Within the room, all was dark, for the moon failed to penetrate there. And when, after several aching seconds, no challenge came, he edged himself inside; shrank against the wall; listened with bated breath.

Nothing! With sudden resolution, he swung up his torch, pressed the button and aimed his gun along the white beam at the same time. Any risk was better than this prowling and waiting in the gloom. But no target showed; no snarling, bearded face. The room was as empty as the garret and stairs.

Thurston Kyle tightened his lips and frowned. Certainly the footprints led into the room, but he almost began to fear that Snub had been right after all. Simon Myall had probably escaped some time back, and his own theory was wrong. In which case, the trail of vengeance was going to be long and difficult.

The chamber in which the Night Hawk stood had once been a vast bed-room. The remains of excellent furniture, in fact, were still there; an enormous, crumbling four-poster, some chairs and a rickety dressing-table with cracked and dirty mirror. Myall had been here, and not long since—

Suddenly the Night Hawk crossed the stuffy room in two fierce but noiseless strides. His hands went eagerly into a corner of the dressing-table and came forth holding two discoveries, which he held to the beam of the torch.

"Ha!" It was a soft exclamation, a bare whisper. Something valuable had come to light at last. In his hand he held a soft mass of curly grey hair, roughly shorn; beside it lay a crumpled piece of paper, dotted with thick blobs of scented soap and short, grey bristles.

Touching the soap with expert forefinger, the scientist Night Hawk nodded. It was still fresh and quite wet. Within the last

ten minutes or so, Simon Myall had been in the house and in this room. He had removed his grey beard with a single hasty sweep of some scissors, and afterwards shaved off the stubble.

Putting the tell-tale hair and paper back, the Night Hawk stared carefully round the room again. He was taking no chances against this opponent. Everything pointed to the fact that the man was not only a desperate killer, but a clever, methodical schemer, too, who thought of everything.

Once more it was the old dressing-table that led to fresh finds. Mingled with the dust on its flat top were tiny crumbs of food; bread-crumbs, a merest shred of ham. Dark eyes glinting, Thurston Kyle knelt down, studying some fingerprints round the knob of the top drawer.

With greatest caution he grasped the handle and began to pull open the drawer. A loud squeak stopped him for a second; but after a while, as no alarm came, he carried on boldly, opening it wide—and chuckling at the sight he saw.

His theory was proved to the hilt. Not only was Simon Myall hiding in this empty "haunted" mansion, but this bed-room was apparently his living quarters—in which he meant to stay for some time. The drawer was stuffed with tinned food. And there was sufficient to last a frugal man for over a week!

Where was he now? Out in the grounds, secretly watching the fire he had caused? It would go badly for him if the Scrapper and the Kittens nailed him—they should be outside, too, by now.

Down in the basement? Prowling through the other rooms? He certainly was not in the upper regions. Then the Night Hawk whirled with the frenzied speed of a tiger.

Crash!

Boldly and suddenly the door had been thrown open. He had a lightning glimpse of a sturdy man silhouetted against the moonlight in the corridor, a silenced automatic held close to his hip. As the newcomer burst through the door, he slammed it shut. And as he slammed it, so the man sidestepped and fired.

CHAPTER 5.

The Fight in the Haunted House!

A PAIN like a red-hot knife blazed across Thurston Kyle's right shoulder and the base of his throat, the heavy bullet ripping his leather suit and burning a stinging weal across his flesh. Quick as lightning, however, his own gun went up, flashing defiance. He heard the smack of the bullet against the wall, knew he had missed, and ducked beside the dressing-table as another slug smashed the mirror to fragments.

Tock! Tock-tock! Tock! Slashing tongues of fire split the darkness, hollow thuds shattered the silence. In the gloom

of that huge bed-room, the two men began a deadly game of hide-and-seek, firing at the faintest sound and spinning away at the same time to escape the return shot.

Once a stifled gasp from close to the ancient bed rewarded one of Kyle's swift snap-shots. A moment later the answer bored a hole in a chair-leg, scarce an inch from his face.

Again and again the opponents fired. But that massive four-poster made good cover, and the darkness rendered accurate shooting impossible.

Thurston Kyle's handsome face was no longer grim, but smiling with the sheer delight of this close-range duel. But he had to get it over without much more firing, lest the sounds, faint though they were, attracted outsiders to the house. He was sure it was Simon Myall he was up against. Although the man had shaved his beard, his stocky figure was the same. The Night Hawk holstered his guns quietly and, like a huge stealthy serpent, began to worm his way across the floor towards the bed.

For all his caution, however, his unseen opponent heard him. There snarled a wild-beast growl out of the darkness, with just a quiver of pain behind it. "Keep back!" Following the words, at once, came the click of a revolver-hammer from the other side of the bed.

But no bullet! Myall had emptied his gun; forgotten to count the bullets or been slow in reloading. Savage glee flooding his heart, Thurston Kyle rose from the floor in one smooth, magnificent leap, flung up his arms and launched himself recklessly but accurately across the bed. A squarely-built figure seemed to shoot out of nowhere to meet him; and in a moment the combatants were locked in each other's arms, writhing in a mad, whirlwind struggle.

For all his grey hair, Simon Myall was as strong as an ox, hard as a pine-knot, and a "rough-house" expert to boot. At the first touch of Kyle's clutching hand he began to fight like a demon, fear and desperation goading him to maddened efforts. The scientist had his work cut out to hold him.

On the old four-poster the opponents rolled,

choked by the dust that arose in clouds. Myall slammed in with boots, fists, and teeth, wrestling and pounding with maniac ferocity; while Thurston Kyle, tucking his head away from the rain of blows, strove coolly but inexorably for his favourite throat-hold.

To the sound of rending wood, the foot of the old bed collapsed abruptly beneath the strain. The fighters shot heavily to the floor and rolled apart, only to leap up and tear into each other again. By instinct alone, Thurston Kyle swayed aside from a terrible



Relentlessly the Night Hawk advanced upon the fire-fiend. Terror-stricken, the man raised a chair and prepared to throw it at his avenging foe.

kick. He retaliated with a whistling left that slung his assailant across the room and against the door with stunning force.

Before he could recover, the Night Hawk was on him again, boring in with crushing short-arm jabs. Myall crouched, panting and cursing, to beat his tall opponent off; he turned and tried to escape through the door. He managed to get it open, but that was all. A grip that made him gasp with pain streaked out and hauled him back into the room.

Then Thurston Kyle himself calmly opened the door wide, to allow the bright moonlight

to flow in. After that he advanced ominously, blocking the way to safety with his great crouching body and crooked arms.

Completely trapped, Simon Myall snapped the last bounds of control that held him. He fought with the venom of a cornered rat. A chair whistled through the air, followed by two more as fast as he could snatch them up and fling them. He howled like a mad dog as his silent enemy dodged them gracefully and still came on.

Round the room the Night Hawk shepherded his quarry, soft of foot, stern as fate itself. He trapped him at the finish in a corner by the old four-poster. The end of the battle was approaching, and Simon Myall knew it.

Iron purpose glittered in the Night Hawk's stern eyes, plain for the man who stood at bay to read. Reeling back against the wall, Myall stared at his menacing, strangely-garbed foe, marking his steady approach as though fascinated. Then, of a sudden, the villain snapped out of his trance.

With Thurston Kyle's clutch almost upon him, he whipped something from his pocket and clapped it to his lips, too fast for the Night Hawk to stop him. His gun dropped to the floor with a thud; a tiny glass phial followed, smashing into tinkling fragments.

After one faint gasp, Simon Myall slipped quietly forward on to the huge bed.

Quietly the Night Hawk bent over him, shook his head in thoughtful silence, and stood back. The mad fight in the empty mansion was over. He was glad it had ended this way. Simon Myall, murderer and incendiary, was dead—killed by his own hand.

WITHOUT a tremor Thurston Kyle went through the pockets of his late foe; and again a wallet came to light, very similar to the first. A fleeting smile of satisfaction curled his stern lips as he saw that this one was also filled with notes, mostly French and of large denomination.

A brief scrutiny by the light of his torch showed him that they were forgeries, too, exactly similar to those he had discovered on the dead man in his laboratory. But whereas the latter had only been in possession of about £500 all told, the sum in Myall's wallet was a hundred times greater.

There was no doubt now as to the "profession" the rogue had followed. With over £50,000 in false currency stored away in his pockets, it was evident that he had been a forger on a colossal scale. Putting the notes back neatly, Thurston Kyle folded the wallet and returned it to the man's pocket. After that he turned and walked away soberly towards the cold moonlight.

Striding out of the door, he suddenly stopped as if turned to stone. Not ten yards away, caught in the act of prowling towards the bed-room, stood the enormous figure of a man whose face was hidden by the shadow of a wide-peaked cap. He stood there

motionless and alert, a great, grim figure in that eerie corridor.

For a moment Thurston Kyle stared at this new apparition; and his hands darted to his guns. Both automatics were half out of their holsters when the shadowy giant moved at last, holding out his hand quickly and turning his face to the light. The Night Hawk's guns fell back. He laughed quietly in surprise and relief.

"It's you, Scrapper. You nearly came in for a bullet then, my friend."

Scrapper Huggins, the mighty leader of Thurston Kyle's Kittens, came forward, mopping his brow.

"Strewth, that was nasty, chief!" he confessed. "I thought I was a goner, sure. Me and the boys fancied we heard sounds o' scrapping in here ten minutes back, and I said I'd come in and find out. Talk about wind-up and spooks! I've been wanderin' over this haunted dump ever since, scared paralytic!"

The Night Hawk laughed mirthlessly, his eyes straying for just one second to the vault-like room behind him.

"You're too late, Scrapper. The fighting is done. Get out of here quietly, recall your men and bring them on to my house. I may have some orders for you—there!"

The Scrapper touched his forelock. Without another word the two men parted, one to creep through a lower window into the grounds, where four tense Kittens awaited him; the other to the roof, there to don his great wings once more.

The lonely stillness came back once more to haunted Trouville.

CHAPTER 6.

Identified!

BY the time the Night Hawk reached his laboratory again, after a few minutes spent in the air, watching the final collapse of the Poplars, he found the Scrapper awaiting him there, while the others sat in the car down on the dark drive. But his first glance was for young Snub, who hailed him eagerly from the radio cabinet, tuned in on Scotland Yard.

"You were right, sir!" glowed the lad. "There's news of the fire all right. Big news. And of Myall, too!"

Switching off, he took up a paper with some notes on, and continued swiftly, while Thurston Kyle listened with close attention.

"Simon Myall was a forger, sir. The police have been trailing him for some time, it seems, but they couldn't prove it definitely. They were going to raid his place to-night—the house that's burning. I've heard old Lennard tearing his hair about that fire. He's got three men waiting outside the house to dash in the moment the fire chief lets 'em!

"Also, Scotland Yard's watching the Channel ports for Myall—sounds as if they

knew he was going to bolt that way. And they're scouring London, too, for a crook called 'Punch' Arthurs. Sounds as though he's been Myall's partner in crime!"

"Ah!" At the last sentence, Thurston Kyle spun round on Huggins and took the giant Kitten by the arm. "Scrapper—perhaps you can help me here? Do you know of a 'Punch' Arthurs?"

There were precious few petty gangsters in London Scrapper Huggins didn't know something about. He nodded at once.

"I know him, sir—a bit. Useter be a fighting-man—light-weight. Very useful an' a good boy—till he began to go wrong sudden-like. Got flash—stuck-up. Seemed to have plenty o' dough. But"—the huge man frowned ponderously—"I did 'ear from someone that a lot of that dough was 'slush.' Dud, if yer know what I mean, sir?"

Thurston Kyle tapped his foot impatiently.

"Yes, that's obvious if the police are looking for him in connection with Myall, the forger. But what is Arthurs like? Can you describe him?"

"Well," hesitated the Scrapper, scratching his head, "he was tallish; allus dressed up to the nines, sir. Tight suits, yer know—pointed yaller boots—very flash——"

"Yes?" Thurston Kyle's eyes blazed deeply. "And his face?"

"Oh, usual fighting-mug, sir. Got a thick

ear someone gave him at the Ring one night. Right ear——"

"Aha!"

"An' I remember when 'e was stripped for the ring he'd got a coiled-up snake tattooed behind his left shoulder. Pretty bit o' work, sir——"

The garrulous Scrapper stopped. For the Night Hawk was no longer listening. He had turned, and was staring sombrely across the great laboratory to where a quiet figure, shrouded by a cloth, made a strange picture against the background of gleaming retorts and apparatus. In the end, he inclined his head gravely.

"Punch Arthurs will not be arrested to-night," he said in a quiet voice. "For that is his body yonder—murdered by his vile partner. Poor, misguided fool!"

He turned again to the awe-stricken Kitten and spoke tersely for several minutes.

WHEN the Scrapper and the other Kittens had gone—some time later—Snub turned eagerly to his master. He grinned with engaging frank-

ness.

"Now, sir, I'm properly in the soup about to-night's stunt," he confessed. "Spin the whole yarn, guv'nor, please!"

The lad waited with ill-concealed impatience while Thurston Kyle donned his splendid smock and sank gratefully into an

Expelled from Greyfriars!

They call him the "Bounder" and rightly so, for Herbert Vernon-Smith can't run straight for long. He scornfully breaks the School rules at Greyfriars when he feels like it. Luckily for the "Bounder" he possesses a jewel of a chum in Tom Redwing, who would do anything to help his wayward pal. But the sacrifice Tom makes in order to save the "Bounder" spells his own disaster—Expelled from Greyfriars. Read this fine dramatic long complete yarn

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armchair. Not until he had one of his priceless cigars glowing evenly did he begin.

"Well, the mystery was really quite simple," he smiled at last. "It was easy to place Myall as a forger in a big way once I found that huge sum of bad notes in his pocket. What you overheard at Scotland Yard confirms it. But I wanted to fit the dead unknown into the scheme also; which, thanks to Scrapper and our 'Secret Service,' I have done. Everything is quite clear now.

"As we have heard, the Yard suspected both men of forgery, and were throwing out a net to catch them. Myall must have got wind of this and decided to bolt. But, having arranged to get to the Continent, he must have changed his mind for some reason, and planned a different way to disappear entirely.

"He intended to do so by 'killing' himself, or, rather, being 'killed,' at the same time getting rid of his accomplice, Arthurs. And his method of doing so was clever, but diabolical.

"He laid quick but elaborate plans, and, when everything was ready, killed Arthurs, probably by the same poison he took himself in the end. He dressed the body in one of his own suits by way of extra precaution, but either overlooked the man's rakish boots, or his own did not fit. In any case, he hoped nothing would be discovered—save one thing.

"That was the wallet lined with asbestos which I found. He had filled it with his own private papers and stuffed it in his dead accomplice's pockets.

"Having dressed the man, he left him lying across a table with his head close to an oil-lamp containing naphtha—one of the most inflammable spirits known. With the same liquid he literally soaked his house, left a few windows and all the doors open, and retired to empty Trouville. There, by the aid of his rifle and incendiary bullets, he proceeded to turn the Poplars into a furnace from the safety of seventy yards' range.

"One of his first bullets smashed the oil-lamp beside Arthurs. The naphtha gushed all over the man's head and shoulders, catching fire immediately from the bullet. Before I could even reach the poor devil—well, you know what happened. And in a few seconds more, had I not dragged him away, his whole body would have been burnt to a cinder. Which is just what Myall wanted.

"But—and this was his chief stroke—that asbestos-lined wallet would still have been intact when at last the firemen broke in to find what was left of Arthurs. And since it contained Myall's cards, passport, photo, forged notes and proofs that he intended flying from the country, what could the police have thought? Only that the mass of charred bones represented what had once been Simon Myall. And the Myall forgery case would have been closed—permanently.

"Meanwhile Myall would have been lurking safely in empty, haunted Trouville. He

had shaved his beard a few minutes before I broke in, and from the food he had smuggled in previously, was planning to hide there for some days—until the coast was clear, in fact. Then, with the huge sum in false French notes on him, he would have sneaked off to the Continent at last in real earnest.

"His accomplice was dead; officially, he was 'dead' also. Like most criminals, however, he overlooked the fact that other people possess common-sense and reasoning powers. That asbestos lining to the wallet was too crude. It gave the plot away the moment I found it.

"Previous to the discovery I had been toying with the idea that the mystery of the Poplars was one of revenge, or just a bad case of murder and arson. But that discovery put me on the track of the fake 'disappearance' at once!"

Snub drew a deep breath when the quiet voice ceased.

"What a devil!" he muttered. "But, gov'nor, how did you figure Myall was hiding in Trouville?"

"Partly guesswork, partly more common-sense!" chuckled the Night Hawk. "The tickets he had taken to Paris, and his passport, were still in the wallet of the dead man, so he did not intend bolting that way to-night evidently. But, best of all"—he rose to his feet, stretching his limbs wearily—"what better hiding-place could he have found them a reputedly haunted house, empty for so many years—and next door almost to the scene of his crime? It was a neat and daring idea. And but for my seeing him go through the trap-door, he might have succeeded in his attempt."

"Well, he was unlucky then!" snorted Snub.

His master drew pensively at his cigar.

"Yes, he was unlucky. But—"

The sharp ring of the telephone bell cut him short and sent him striding to his desk. Across the wire came the voice of Scrapper Huggins, gruff and mysterious.

"All O.K., sir!"

"Well done, Scrapper!" The Night Hawk spoke warmly. "Now 'phone that message I gave you—and go home. Good-night!"

An hour later Chief Detective-inspector Lennard and two C.I.D. officers broke into Trouville, Arlette Avenue, Highgate. They did so in response to a curious telephone call from some quiet booth in the East End.

And, in a certain vast bed-room within that house of mystery, they found Simon Myall and Punch Arthurs—partners there, as they had been in crime. But the secret of how they came there was never revealed.

The proofs of their guilt lay beside them.

THE END.

(New series of super-thrill yarns featuring the Night Hawk commencing next week, boys. The opening story is entitled "The Lost Explorer!" Order your copy NOW, chums.)

LADBROKE BLACK'S Amazing Serial is Breaking all Records for Excitement!



The VALLEY of HOT SPRINGS!

(Opening chapters re-told on page 42.)

Imatuk Intervenes!

“WE must be careful of Imatuk if we want to avoid any trouble!”

The professor repeated the warning words very impressively, and then went on to explain that the Angekok lived apart in the Pyramid of the Sun—the building in which they now found themselves—with a small personal retinue. His duties consisted in the occasional performance of religious mysteries, and in settling such disputes as might arise among the population. His subjects were divided into two castes—the military caste, who lived in the bigger buildings they had seen clustered about the central geyser, and the lower orders, who performed the useful work of the community.

“I propose, gentle-

men, that we now take the rest of which we badly stand in need. In public it behoves us to show respect to the office which Jackson has assumed. We will, therefore, summon his attendants and request them to lead him to the apartment in which he sleeps. For our own protection, I have secured the room next door for our accommodation.”

Professor Denning clapped his hands, and instantly the curtain was drawn aside and six of the female attendants appeared to conduct the Angekok to his room. Then the professor, having seen Jackson installed in lonely state, drew Eric and Danny into the apartment next door. Like all the rooms, it was triangular, its walls following the outer shape of the pyramid. There were three beds of skins and dried grass.

A Shower of Arrows!

Everything points to a whole pile of trouble awaiting Eric and his fellow-adventurers.

Eric was in the act of pulling off his coat, when the curtain lifted and the girl with the golden hair stood on the threshold. She gave the boy one glance of shy recognition and then, turning to the professor, began to speak in an excited whisper.

"It appears we haven't dismissed the guard," the professor remarked presently. "I'd better go and see to it."

"Not alone, guv'nor. Mr. Eric and me is coming along with you. And now we're bosses here, you might as well ask Miss Sun to hand over those guns of ours."

The professor having translated this request, the girl retired, to return presently with their weapons. Carrying these, the party made their way back into the huge temple, the walls of which were still lined by the soldiers in their golden mail. At sight of the professor, a tall man, whose face with its high cheekbones was reminiscent of a Red Indian type, came forward with an almost insolent air.

"The Angekok has bade me tell you that your services are no longer required!" the professor exclaimed in Esquimaux.

"I know you not, O stranger from over the seas! I am Imatuk, captain of the guard, and I take my orders only from the Angekok himself. Such is the law."

Here was a difficulty, the professor realised. Until he had coached Jackson to repeat the necessary words, nothing could be done.

"The Angekok in his wisdom has decided to alter that law," he said quickly. "He desires time for meditation, while he ponders upon the mysteries revealed to him by Tormansuk. Only through me will he speak."

An evil light crept into the man's eyes. With one swift stride he moved forward and laid his hand on the professor's shoulder. Instantly Danny, who was standing close behind his master, brought his left up from the hip and crashed home a blow on the man's jaw. Imatuk staggered back, threw up his arms, and dropped full length on the floor.

"What on earth are you doing, Danny?" the professor exclaimed irritably. "Will you kindly learn not to interfere?"

"Well, pass the word to him, guv'nor, to keep his hands off you," Danny growled.

Imatuk was slowly scrambling to his feet, his dark face convulsed with passion. One quivering hand streaked to the weapon he carried at his belt, and then he leapt towards the professor.

But again Danny frustrated him. Pushing aside the professor, he put the captain of the guard down again with a quick right and left.

"This unseemly violence, Danny, makes my position untenable!" the professor exclaimed in a tone of exasperation. "This man is the captain of the guard—a person of position and authority—the man who, as I've already told you, expected to step into the late Angekok's shoes. My object was to conciliate him. Now you have made him an enemy."

"By the looks of him he wasn't exactly friendly, anyway, guv'nor. What I've given him will teach him not to come any funny tricks again!"

The Attack!

IMATUK appeared extraordinarily submissive when once more he was on his feet. He raised no further objections to receiving his orders from the professor. At his command, the long line of mail-clad guards turned right and began to file out of the temple. When the last of them had disappeared, a strange, creepy silence seemed to fall upon the huge chamber—a stillness that was like death.

"Let's go back to bed, uncle!" Eric exclaimed. "This is too bogey-bogey."

But the professor was in no hurry. He had begun to examine the walls, and the more he examined the more excited and interested he became.

"Extraordinary, my boy! The construction of this pyramid reveals a remarkable state of civilisation. It is worthy of the Egyptians—of the ancient Aztec Civilisation. Compare it with the humble hovels which are the ordinary habitations of the Esquimaux in Greenland."

There were all the signs of a long and exhausting lecture. Danny, however, cut him short.

"Begging your pardon, guv'nor, but have you seen your fountain-pen? You will be wanting to write up your notes, and it's just

HOW THE STORY BEGAN.

ERIC DENNING, a cheery, adventure-loving youngster, lives with his uncle,

PROFESSOR DENNING. The professor, absent-minded and interested in nothing save his studies, is expecting a visit from John Peters, an Arctic explorer who has discovered a narwhal's horn, on which is written in Runic writing the key to tremendous treasure, in Greenland. The horn arrives, but not Peters. For Peters is dead—murdered by one of a gang of scoundrels, the leader of which is

BOSS MAUNSELL. Maunsell attempts to capture the narwhal's horn, but is frustrated, largely owing to the activities of

DANNY, the professor's man-of-all-work and an ex-pugilist. The professor deciphers the writing on the horn, and he and Eric and Danny travel to Greenland, and start out for the Valley of Hot Springs. They capture Maunsell, who has been trailing them; he gives his name as Jackson. Passing through a tunnel in the glaciers, they arrive at the mysterious valley. They are captured by the Angekok, or ruler of the valley, but he is killed by Jackson, who assumes his place of office. Later the Englishmen are warned by one of the girl attendants that Imatuk, captain of the guard, is likely to cause trouble.

(Now read on.)

come over me that you haven't got it on you."

The professor began to examine his clothes, forgetting all about the architectural genius of the People of the Valley. The more he searched the more frantic he became.

"I have only a pencil, and pencilled notes are utterly inadequate. You should have taken care of my pen, Danny."

"Perhaps it's back in that there room we were in, gov'nor. It may have dropped out when you were having that rough and tumble."

The pen was found, quite remarkably, on the floor by Danny. As, later, they made their way to the room in which they were to sleep, Danny winked at Eric.

"That was a good one, wasn't it, Mr. Eric? The gov'nor would have talked the roof off the blessed building if I hadn't remembered I'd got his pen in my pocket."

As soon as Eric was undressed and had laid himself down on his bed, even the excitement he had been through was not proof against the fatigues he had endured, or the comforting warmth of the atmosphere and the softness of the couch. He was wakened by feeling Danny's hand on his shoulder.

"I left you as long as I could, Mr. Eric, but you've got to get up now because the gov'nor's bursting for his breakfast and fretting to see the sights. I'll take you to your bath."

"Bath!" Eric exclaimed in astonishment.

"Not 'arf! I knows, because I've 'ad one. I'll show you."

He led the way out of the room and down a passage, pausing at last at an open doorway from which came a curious bubbling sound. Eric found himself standing on the edge of a huge stone tank filled almost to the brim with warm water.

"The gov'nor says it comes from somewhere in the earth, same as them geysers we saw. You can step right in, Mr. Eric. Here's the soap I kept."

Having washed, and now feeling very hungry, Eric presented himself for breakfast. He found Jackson enlarging on the arrangements for the day. A royal progress through the valley was clearly indicated, he decided. It would enable him to get wise at once as to where the gold and platinum were to be found. The professor, by his looks, obviously did not approve of these proposals. At last he broke out:

"The fact is, Jackson, I shall have to dance attendance on you in order to be your mouth-piece, and that will be very inconvenient. I have other and more important work to do. I informed the captain of the guard last night that you intended to live in seclusion for some days while you pondered on the holy mysteries. It appears to be the practice of the captain of the guard to take orders only from the Angekok personally. I thought you could spend these days of seclusion in making a study of the Esquimaux language through some notes I have drawn up for you."

Jackson waved aside the sheet of foolscap the professor held out to him.

"Forget it, professor. I finished my schooling more years ago than I care to think about. If I can't come as the Angekok I'll come as myself. Nobody, I'll bet, knows rightly how many of us there are, and they'll think the Angekok's sitting tight here hatching out the mysteries."

To this arrangement, to which the professor had reluctantly to agree, an unexpected obstacle presented itself. They were just about to set out on their first exploration of the valley, when the girl with the golden hair, whom Danny insisted on calling Miss Sun, stopped the professor.

"This girl says that the Angekok cannot be seen in public without the ceremonial robes of his position. It appears it isn't done. The helmet, in particular, has been handed down from generations of Angekoks, and is held to be a sacred object. If anyone were to find it and assume it, the authority of the Angekok would apparently pass to him."

"Let's cache the whole bag of tricks somewhere, then!" Jackson exclaimed impatiently.

The girl had no objection to carrying the coat of golden mail or the belt, but the wand and the helmet she refused to touch. It was Eric who carried them and placed them in a secret hiding-place under the floor which she showed him. As they stood up they smiled at one another. With a curious fluttering of his heart, Eric rejoined his companions.

For the next six hours they were wandering through this wonderland set in the heart of the Greenland mountains. The sun shone on a world of green, turning into all the colours of the rainbow the tumbling waters of the five or six hundred geysers that gave warmth to the atmosphere and made life possible in that Arctic region.

The professor, with an open note-book in one hand and a fountain-pen in the other, walked about observing and commenting, talking to the natives who thronged about them in a friendly way, as if the whole incident of the previous day had been forgotten. It was only when it was time to return that the adventurers located the sources of the enormous supplies of platinum and gold in which this valley abounded.

"It's the world's treasure house!" the professor exclaimed, as from a small hillock they looked down on the opening to the mines which had been driven into the walls of the surrounding cliffs.

"The question is, how are we going to get away with it?" Jackson remarked as they turned back.

They were still all eagerly debating this problem when, having passed through the outer circle of meaner houses, they reached the more magnificent buildings clustered round the central geyser. As the shadow of the first of these houses fell upon them a curious twanging sound mingled with the splash of the tumbling waters. The next moment the air was alive with a cloud of arrows!

Lurking Peril!

SO sudden and unexpected was the attack that for a moment none of the party of four did anything. They stood there gaping. Not a soul was to be seen. If it had not been for the fact that fifty or more arrows stuck in the ground in front of them like the quills in a hedgehog, the whole incident would have seemed unreal.

Danny was the first to recover from the surprise. Seizing the professor by the shoulders, he twisted him round and propelled him forcibly into the shelter of a house.

"Sorry, g'v'nor!" he exclaimed apologetically. "But those notes in your note-book ain't going to be no manner of use to you if you get them skewers through you."

Both Eric and Jackson hastened to follow Danny's example, taking refuge behind some of the huge boulders with which the ground was strewn. They were only just in time, for hardly had they found cover before there was another flight of arrows.

Eric was forcibly reminded of the accounts of the Battle of Hastings, which he had read at school—how the Normans, unable to break the solid front of the Saxons marshalled on the summit of a hillock, had loosed what modern gunners would call a flight of high elevation projectiles. The arrows were dropping instead of pursuing a straight course, and the reason was at once apparent.

"Their foes, for some purpose of their own, had no desire to show themselves in the open. They were firing from behind the cover of the wall of a partly demolished house. The

difficulty of getting the range in these circumstances was obvious, but that the bowmen were skilled and knew their job was proved by the fact that the second discharge fell exactly on the spot where the party had been standing only a moment before.

As long as they remained where they were the English party was perfectly safe. But they could not remain there for ever. Eric felt a little glow of excitement. This was real adventure—a battle! He took in the situation swiftly.

While the two parties to the contest kept their positions they were incapable of harming one another. The thing was to get their opponents into the open—when he and his companions could use their guns to effect.

But how to get them into the open? That was the problem. Eric's brain worked like lightning, and soon he had thought of a plan of action. The youngster grinned to himself in joyous anticipation.

Waiting until the next flight of arrows had come clattering harmlessly on the rocks about them, he began wriggling his way towards the spot where Danny was forcibly restraining the very infuriated and protesting professor.

"Where you going, kid?" called Jackson in surprise, as the boy moved away.

Eric looked back.

"You sit tight there," he answered softly. "I'm going to try and work round into the rear of those arrow-sliding blighters!"

(Good old Eric! Will his plan prove successful? Don't miss next week's instalment, chums—it's packed with excitement.)

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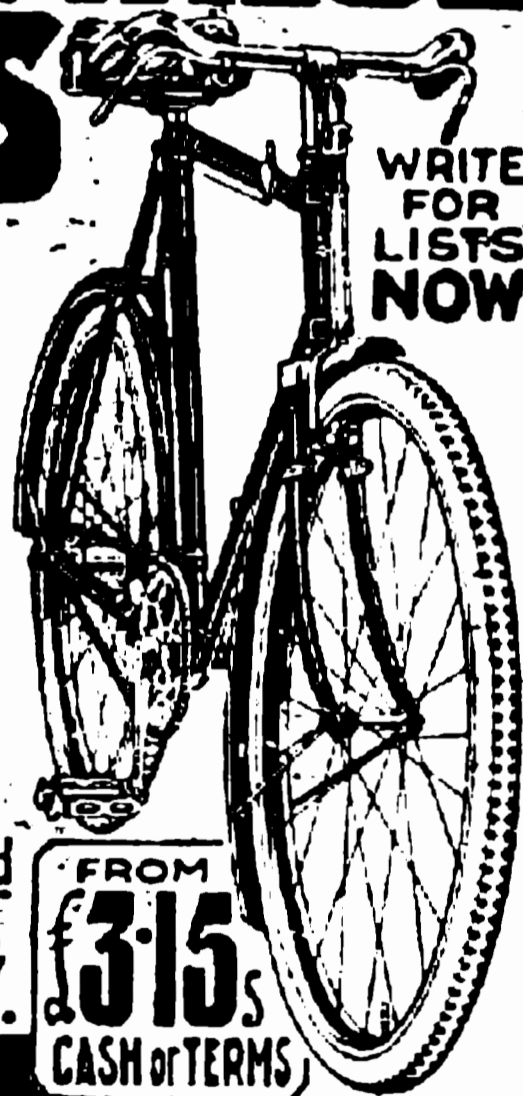
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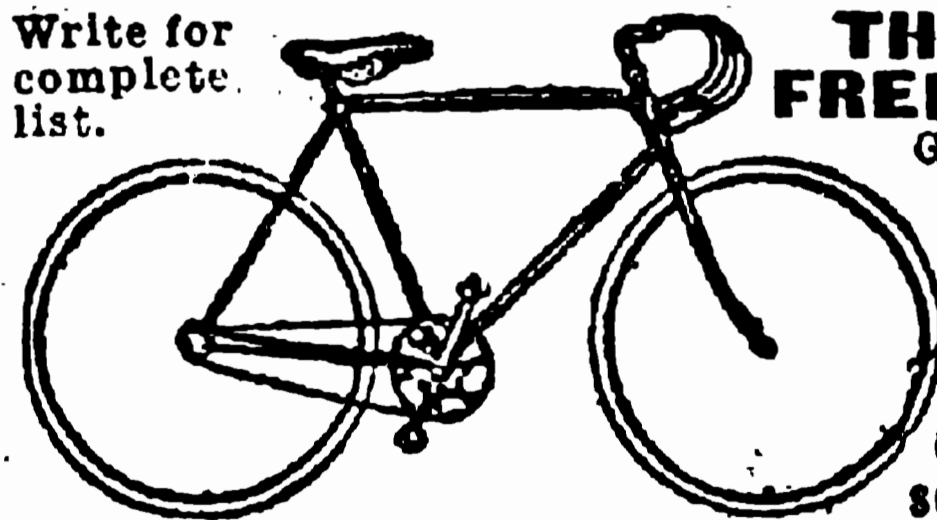
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