

"BETWEEN OURSELVES" by E. S. BROOKS. Topping New Feature Inside.

NELSON LEE

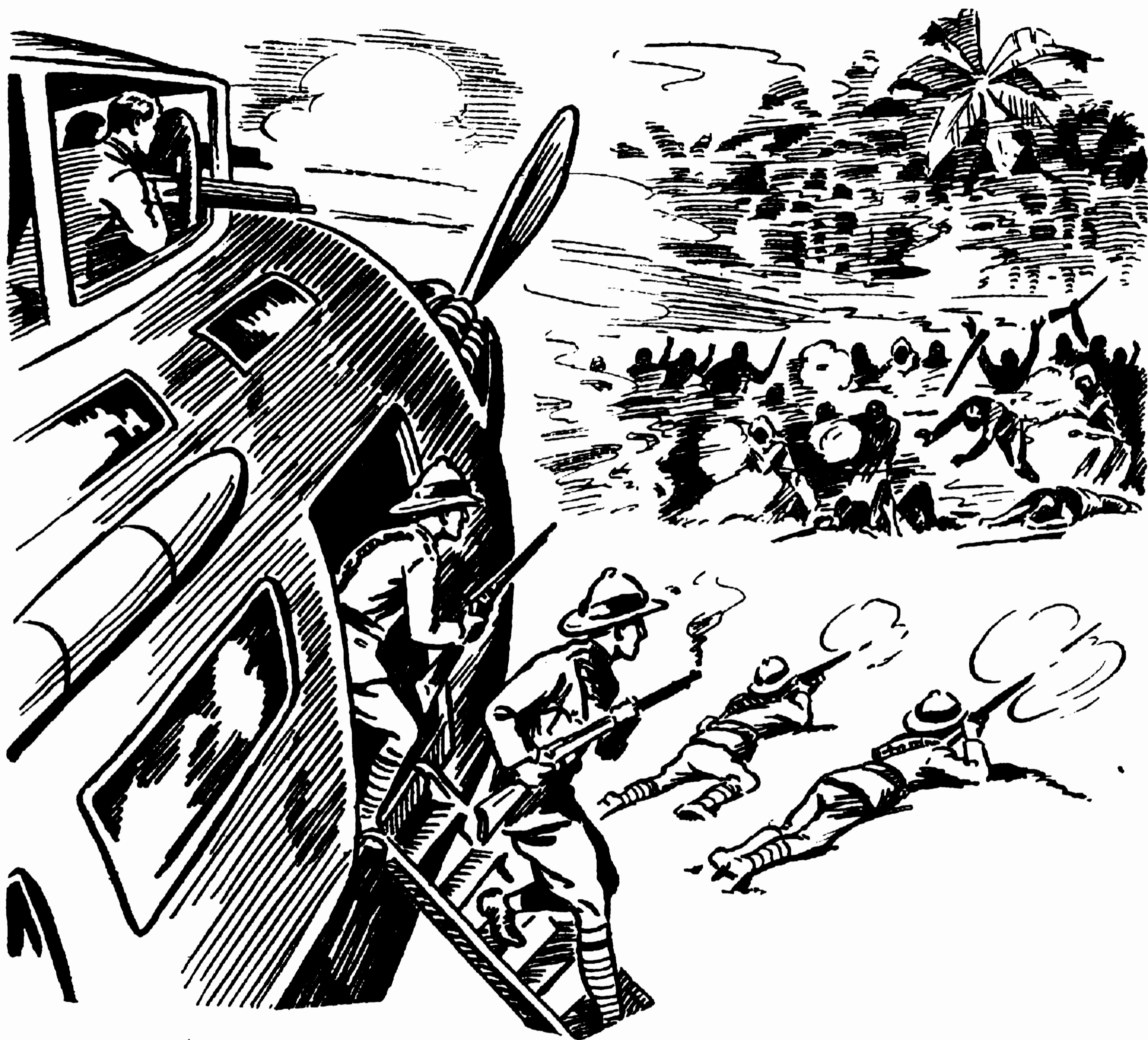
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JUNGLE JUSTICE!



CHAPTER 1.

The Nagirines Attack!

CRACK! Crack! Cra-a-ck!
Spang-g!

The ringing smack of a heavy army rifle crashed above the chorus of light Winchesters. On the edge of the Congo jungle eighty yards away a black arm jerked suddenly into view beside the bole of a great tree; a black body followed and lay still. The man in the soiled white uniform who crouched in the little square, stockaded hut on the glittering M'Bolo beach grinned mirthlessly.

But the grin changed next instant to a harsh grunt of pain as another volley of angry lead whined from the

jungle, and a bullet nicked in through his loophole, scoring a burning furrow across his sweating cheek. He recoiled hastily, glancing round with haggard eyes at his single companion in the room, a giant negro peering cautiously through another slot. And even as Lieutenant Descartes, of the Belgian Congo Force, stared at him, the man flung back his head and sagged limply down to the floor.

The lieutenant, chief of the little official trading-post at M'Bolo, pursed his lips grimly. Four other quiet forms lay against the walls of the store—a single big room with a broad counter running half its length, and, behind, shelves of merchandise, cloth, knives, bright beads and ornaments for

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barter. A rickety ladder led from the centre of the floor to the loft above.

"One more—one less!" he muttered, and, ducking his head from the bullets that spanged raggedly through the loopholes, crossed to the counter, moistening his parched lips from the water-jar. He leaned on the support, a man tired and wounded.

"One more—one less!" he droned lazily. "Only Jacques and I left now. Soon be over!"

He touched the revolver on his thigh shakily, as though to reassure himself that it was still there. Only one bullet remained in its chambers—and that was for himself, when the enemy made their final rush. He was not falling into the hands of the Nagirines alive. Of that he was fiercely certain!

The Nagirines! The thrice-accursed men from the Lost City of Nagir, somewhere hidden in the depths of impenetrable bush and once a colony of ancient Egypt. Since noon the little trading-post had been under fire. Now it wanted but a short hour to sunset.

Out of the forest the Nagirines had come in a surprise raid: tall, high-shouldered men, clear-brown of skin, devilish of heart. With them, unwilling allies, were—or had been—about sixty men of the N'Agui tribe: conquered by the Nagirines, like the rest of the tribes in that part of the Congo, and forced to fight their battles. The lieutenant laughed shortly. Poor devils! He almost pitied the N'Agui men,

although it was their shots, fired from good modern Winchesters, that were pattering ceaselessly against the store, and he himself had been forced to shoot a round score of them. He could not blame them for fighting, however. It was that or suffer torture from the Nagirines—such torture that had terrified every black in the Congo; which, as Descartes knew, was saying something. He, at least, did not mean to undergo that punishment.

A scraping sound at his back made him turn quickly to see a burly man clambering down painfully from the loft. Like the lieutenant, he was clad in a dirty white uniform, the left shoulder of which was torn away disclosing a fresh bandage with an ominous stain. As he reached the floor the newcomer saluted stiffly. Descartes smiled.

"Well, sergeant; not long now. How's the wound?"

"Like fire, my lieutenant," Sergeant Jacques grunted. "But—defeat is not ours yet!"

"Not yet, but soon!" was the grim reply. "I fancied just now I saw a fresh party of the N'Agui edge through the jungle—headed, of course, by a Nagirine dog. They will rush us shortly. What of the machine-gun?"

"We have but one belt left, lieutenant. Enough to knock over a few of the pigs when they charge!" The sergeant's brooding eye ran over the dead native soldiers, killed in doing their duty. "We are alone, I see!"

"As you say!" Descartes straightened himself with forced briskness. "Well, mon brave, back to your posts. We must fire till the end. Back to your gun, sergeant. Let them have it when they rush. And remember"—he touched his revolver—"do not let the Nagirines take you alive!"

"Sacre bleu! Rest assured of that, lieutenant!" The sergeant, veteran that he was in the Congo Force, knew more of Nagirine torture even than his superior; and his lips stiffened. As Descartes turned away once more, the man muttered:

"If I could but get my hands on that renegade cur who rules them, by the devil, I would——" His voice died away in a growl like that of a trapped tiger. He looked up to find savage agreement in the narrowed eyes of his officer.

By **JOHN BREARLEY**

"Then the lives of a thousand natives and a dozen white traders would be avenged—slowly, my good Jacques—very slowly indeed!" whispered Descartes viciously. "But there is no hope of that. The jackal rules somewhere in Nagir, sending out his men, who, in their turn, send cowed negroes into the firing-line."

The lieutenant crawled forward again to the loopholes. From post to post he prowled, staring out over the brilliant battlefield. Surrounding the trading-hut was a high, stiff stockade, the only defence besides Jacques' machine-gun that had enabled the little garrison to put up so long a fight. Its palings were dotted with black, drooping forms, with here and there a robed figure, showing that some of the domineering Nagirines had shared the fate of their conscripted followers. The expanse of eye-aching sand beyond was dotted with other black figures, right up to the edge of the jungle. Red flashes came constantly from the dark background of trees: sounds as of hail dropping pattered on the stone walls of the hut. Lieutenant Descartes suddenly pushed out his rifle and fired.

Out on the sun-blistered beach, a few yards in advance of the jungle, another crouching black figure stiffened, dropped his rifle and rolled over. He had exposed his head an inch too much. Like a lizard, a lean brown man in dingy robes crawled from behind a bush, recovered the rifle with a swift grab and edged back again.

On the other side of the shelter another man, coal-black like the one who had just died, had the rifle thrust into his unwilling hands. For a moment he rolled his big eyes in rebellion, but a bitter scowl and a fierce gesture from the Nagirine sent him crawling onwards to take his place in the advanced firing-line. No sooner had he reached the body of his fellow-tribesman than, to the roar of Descartes' rifle, he, too, gave a queer lurch. And this time his brown leader let the Winchester stay where it had fallen. Descartes' bullet had struck the breech-block before killing the rifleman, and the weapon was not worth recovering.

Instead, the Nagirine let his fierce eyes rove behind him to the trees. The jungle fringe was dotted with little parties of blacks, ten to a group and each group in charge of a robed leader like himself.

Straightening, the Nagirine picked up his own Winchester, put fingers to his mouth and blew a long, peculiar whistle. Instantly, from amid the trees, came the sharp, harsh bark of Nagirine orders. Foliage rustled; gleaming black bodies prowled reluctantly from cover, prodded onwards by their leaders. The Nagirine, flinging up his rifle, stepped boldly from the bush with a cry like a trumpet-call.

"Charge, dogs of N'Agui! Charge for Nagir and the White Serpent!"

His clarion-call died away in a groan as Descartes' rifle found him from the store. But the charge, once started, rolled on. A solid bunch of the N'Agui, spreading out

fearfully as they ran, rushed down the beach for the stockade, blazing a vicious, panicky volley as they went. Behind them, the robed Nagirines urged them on with shrill shouts and blood-curdling threats.

Tat-tat-tat-tat-tat!

From the store-loft flickering jets of fire stabbed into the rush; the harsh chatter of the machine-gun drowned the volleys of Winchester shots. Down in the main room Lieutenant Descartes, tight-lipped, narrow-eyed, moved from loophole to loophole, firing desperately at the onrushing blacks, shouting in cracked triumph as their vanguard crumpled up, and two of the Nagirines pitched headlong to the sand also.

"Well done, Jacques!" he croaked, as though the sergeant could hear him. But his elation was short-lived. Suddenly, so suddenly that the shock struck him like a hammer-blow, the machine-gun above ceased fire. There came a shout of agony, a jarring crash, and as he swung round the body of Sergeant Jacques sagged across the loft-opening.

Something snapped in the lieutenant's brain. He leapt up the ladder, pushing past his gallant comrade to hurl himself at the machine-gun. Through the loophole he saw the Nagirine band almost at the stockade, the leaders whooping like demons now that the spitting weapon was silent. With ice-cold hands Descartes thumbed the trigger, sending out a fresh screen of death. Then came a metallic click—and nothing more. The cartridge-belt—the last one—was empty!

Grabbing up another rifle, he poked it out, dropping black figures that had begun to scramble over the stockade. A bullet, ping-pong through, knocked him backwards, clutching at his shoulder. Doggedly he dragged himself up again, plucking at his revolver with feeble fingers.

It was the finish.

Into the stockade dropped a handful of lithe fighters; the main body charged up behind with redoubled energy. A few minutes, three at the most, and the store would be full of bloodthirsty, torturing natives. Lieutenant Descartes dragged his gun free, pressed the muzzle to his temple.

And then the miracle happened.

Out of the blazing sky, twin automatics roaring in outstretched hands, swooped an amazing winged figure under glittering wings that slashed the hot, still air. Straight into the heart of the charging tribesmen it streaked, reckless of flying lead. Each bullet from the spitting automatics found a billet. The men already in the stockade dropped like wheat before the reaper.

In a flash the yells of victory had changed to throat-cracking screams of terror and dismay. The charge wavered, halted—began madly pouring back up the beach towards the trees. Swinging above them, the strange phantom with the wings began to reload his guns deftly, gliding less than twenty yards above the fugitives' heads. The jungle-fringe spurted black bodies again as a fresh

reinforcement were driven forth to stiffen the fleeing attackers. As the two parties mingled, and the winged avenger dived again, the second miracle arrived.

The glazed, weary eyes of the Belgian officer bulged. He drew his hand across them as though to wipe out the sight, for it seemed that delirium—a fantasy of approaching death—had gripped him.

Squarely in front of the stockade, like some silent, protecting monster, dropped a giant airship, its steel sides brilliant in the sun-rays. So vast was its bulk that it completely blocked the store from the shrieking, milling natives. So utterly uncanny was its swift vertical plunge to earth under whirling helicopters that Descartes almost swooned from the sudden shock.

Recovering, he saw a squat turret on the airship's roof burst into a rattling crescendo of machine-gun fire. From the great sliding door nearest to him men tumbled out briskly—hefty, grinning white men, with bandoliers slung round their drill tunics and rifles in their fists. They doubled swiftly round the stern of the astonishing vessel, chucking themselves down on the sand, slinging out solid, crashing volleys of slugs across the beach.

To the panting, wounded man in the store-loft there came a babel of sounds that wracked his ear-drums. Shrieks, groans, hideous yells of fear that only native throats can achieve, welled up above the reports of rifles, the chatter of machine-guns.

As in a dream he caught occasional glimpses of the shining, winged figure darting and swooping high in the air above the distant jungle trees, red jets of fire still flashing from his hands. Saw, too, the whirlwind charge of the white riflemen emerge from beyond the bright airship and hurtle up the beach. Before them, plunging madly away or dropping in their tracks, sped the natives, N'Agú and Nagirine alike, in a terrified bolt for shelter.

And, with the sight, a red mist of pain welled up in him, changing swiftly to the blackness of unconsciousness. With a sigh and a little twitch of his lips Lieutenant Descartes, defender of M'Bolo, slumped forward in a heap.

CHAPTER 2.

Who is the White Serpent?

WHEN he came to again he opened his eyes slowly, blinking at the bright electric lights everywhere above him. He was in a comfortable bunk, his shoulder and the bullet furrow in his cheek skilfully bandaged. He felt clean and cool, too, and although his wounds pained him, the instinctive knowledge that he was in safe hands poured over him like a healing balm.

A cool hand, laid quietly on his forehead, made him look up more alertly, gasping with surprise to see a pretty girl in neat khaki smiling down at him. From the

girl his eyes travelled in awe to where a group of hefty men stood watching in quiet curiosity.

"The rifleman!" he muttered, almost to himself. And another dazed glance round at shining steel walls, divided by great windows, at other bunks, a long table, a steel ladder beside a control-platform, leading to the gun-turret above, told him that he must be aboard the massive airship that had dropped so miraculously from the sky to his rescue.

Then his brows went down sharply. Two men came towards him from the group, men with leadership written in every line. One was superbly tall and erect, with strong, clever face and slight but kindly smile. The other, shorter, sturdier, but with lines of hardship etched deeply on his bronzed visage. Recognition came at once to the lieutenant. He tried to sit up.

"Sir John Alan!"

The famous British explorer smiled and shook hands warmly.

"Awake at last Descartes! Gad, man, you put up a wonderful fight! Allow me to introduce my friend, the leader of this party—Professor Thurston Kyle!"

Descartes put out a hand, although naturally he did not recognise in Thurston Kyle the uncanny winged gunman who had first flashed to his aid. The Night Hawk bowed.

"I salute a very brave man, lieutenant!" he said deeply in faultless French.

"M-merci, monsieur——" began the Belgian officer, and almost choked. With a strong effort he pulled himself together, turning again to Sir John with wonder in his look.

"But, Sir John—how are you here? The last I saw of you was—many months ago, when you left M'Bolo for the bush in search of Nagir with your expedition. Your friends, Senor Alvarida and his men, who struggled back alone weeks later and camped beyond the village, told me that you and all the rest were dead—killed by those Nagirine dogs!"

A dour look crossed Sir John's face.

"Alvarida was a traitor!" he said quietly. "I was in his camp all the time he was here—till he fled to France on the next steamer. You did not know it; neither could I get word to you, lieutenant!"

"You—you were in Alvarida's camp? And he was a traitor? But, Sir John——"

To ease his obvious amazement, the explorer told him briefly the story of the last expedition to Nagir. Of how Alvarida had deserted in the face of a Nagirine attack, of how he—Sir John—and his three British friends, Foster, Hendricks and Langdale, had actually penetrated to the Lost City, found and hidden the Priests' Treasure there. And of how he escaped after the death of his three comrades, only to fall into the hands of Alvarida and be tortured and imprisoned for the secret of the treasure.

"He wanted to know where we'd hidden it, meaning to equip a strong party to go

back for it. When the Nagirines tracked us to M'Bolo he fled, taking me to a fake asylum in Paris. My friend here rescued me and took me secretly to England. But Alvarida followed. And"—Sir John's voice deepened—"so did the Nagirines. They, too, wanted the hiding-place of the treasure. They killed Alvarida in my own garden, attacked my friends, my daughter and myself. We beat them off. And now we have returned in Professor Kyle's airship Thunderer—on a mission of vengeance against these torturing Nagirines!"

"Torturing Nagirines," repeated the Belgian, with a shudder. "Yes, you are right there, Sir John. They are devils incarnate. And they followed you to Europe, eh? Ha! I see the hand of their white leader in that!"

"Can you tell us of this white leader, lieutenant?" Thurston Kyle spoke softly. An eager look answered him.

"Not much, monsieur, save that he is a fiend of fiends. My government have a theory that he is either a deserter from the French Foreign Legion who has wandered to the Congo, or that he is a certain Parisian millionaire who ruined himself with cards and racing, and fled some time back to avoid disgrace. We cannot tell, though, for no one has ever seen him—and lived!" He gripped the blanket over him with tense fingers.

"But of his deeds, messieurs. Ah, I can not speak of them before mademoiselle here. Suffice it that he rules the Nagirines, and has welded them into a terrible scourge. They are armed, as you saw, with Winchester, smuggled doubtless across the Cameroon borders. Under his leadership they have emerged from the mysterious forests in which they lived, and terrified the Western Congo. At least a thousand tribesmen have been wiped out—the others forced under his banner. He has paralysed their very souls. And besides that, every white trader and government post from here to the Luglaba has been destroyed. And every white man he has captured—" He shook his head with a grim significance that made his listeners and the Kittens beyond growl savagely.

"The White Serpent, as the Nagirines call their leader, plans to wrest the Congo away from my country. For the last month his attacks have been ceaseless. M'Bolo was the last official post left, and they surprised us at noon, mowing down all my detachment, save five native soldiers, who were near the store with Sergeant Jacques and myself.

"I have appealed to my government for aid—for an expeditionary force to fight this growing menace. But it is difficult. No one save yourself, Sir John, has ever reached Nagir and returned. We do not know where the city lies. And for white soldiers in the bush—" He shrugged. "If the snakes and crocodile-swamps don't get them, the Nagirines and their slaves do!"

He fell back, weak and tired. Thurston

Kyle smiled in a way that made his dark, handsome face almost cruel.

"Yet my men, flying above the Bush, not marching through it, will give this White Serpent something to think about!" he gritted.

Descartes struggled up again.

"You are going to Nagir? In this airship? But, of course, you said so. Will you fight the Nagirines?"

"To the last man, lieutenant!"

"Ah!" Descartes' face twitched with numbed wonder and delight. "It all seems a dream. I do not understand yet how you got here!"

Thurston Kyle smiled sardonically. He did not explain that, but for Scrapper Huggins seeing the fight miles away through the long-range glasses in the "look-out," the Thunderer would have passed high over M'Bolo and into the forests beyond without stopping. Getting in a tangle with Belgian officialdom was the last thing he had intended. Neither did he tell how he had donned his great wings at the first alarm, slipped out of the air-lock and hissed to the rescue, with the airship following. Explanations like that would come later—if at all. He said soothingly:

"Let us talk of that when you are strong, lieutenant. We will rest on this beach to-night, and, in the dawn, set forth again for Nagir—and a reckoning with the Nagirines. It will be a stern one, I assure you!"

A thought striking him, he stared at the officer with pensive eyes.

"But I forgot. You are the Belgian officer in charge of this territory, and we are Britons, carrying arms. Have you any objection to this invasion? In any case, you are too badly wounded for us to leave you here!"

"I object, monsieur?" cried Descartes eagerly. "Non, non! If you smash these Nagirines, the thanks of Belgium will be yours, and more. And I—I, monsieur, shall be the proudest man in the world to serve with you!"

The Night Hawk smiled again, and gently re-arranged the blanket over the wounded man.

"Good! Now try to sleep, my friend, until dawn. And remember—we shall not fail!"

Turning, he gave quiet orders that sent the Kittens and Snub Hawkins, his young assistant to their bunks. Margaret tip-toed to the little cubby-hole that had been made for her at the other end of the ship.

Outside, the velvety darkness of the beach was suddenly flooded with white radiance from two purring searchlights, whose beams, joined together, covered the shore for hundreds of yards. The forest fringe stood out starkly in the glare. Behind, all was dark and still. Thurston Kyle and Sir John turned at last to their own bunks.

But a fresh disturbance came along before the dawn.

Scarcely had four hours dragged by when Nobby Clarke, on sentry duty, came patten-



"The White Serpent commands that you turn back at once!" said the Nagirine messenger. "Disobey and you die!"

ing down from the turret. Thurston Kyle was awake in an instant, springing from his bunk to meet the alert Kitten. Nobby saluted.

"A bloke's just walked into the lights—from the forest, sir. One of them niggers who wore a robe. And he's got a flag o' truce stuck on a stick, sir!"

CHAPTER 3.

An Astounding Discovery!

WITHOUT a word, Thurston Kyle wheeled to the door and slid it open, taking precautions against treachery, however. Behind him, the Kittens, who had turned in "all-standing," stood in line.

Out on the brilliant beach, a tall figure plainly to be seen, stood a man in the robes of a Nagirine. As Thurston Kyle appeared he held up the white flag he carried. After a brief pause the Night Hawk raised his hand to call him in. He went back while the man was approaching and buckled a gun round his waist.

The Nagirine, lithe, hawk-faced, clean-shaven, strode in through the door at last with the arrogance of one who enters a conquered village instead of an impregnable fortress. Holding the flag over his shoulder,

he folded his arms, glancing disdainfully at the little group of white men. His lips curled in a contemptuous smile. And thus he stood, in silence.

Thurston Kyle frowned. At his command, Scrapper Huggins and Alf Jenkins sprang to the man's side and led him to the bunk of Lieutenant Descartes.

"We may want you to interpret, lieutenant!" explained the Night Hawk, in French, as the Belgian raised his eyebrows inquiringly. To everyone's surprise, the Nagirine replied in a broken variety of the same language.

"No need for him, white man!" he said insolently. "I see you are chief here. My message is for you, therefore!"

Thurston Kyle eyed him leisurely up and down.

"Speak, then!" he said curtly. The other smiled derisively as before.

"I bring a message from the White Serpent, he who holds the Congo in his toils!" he intoned. "He who rules in Nagir; he who——"

"You come from the renegade murderer who leads you!" cut in Thurston Kyle shortly. "Be brief, man, lest I lose patience, and turn you away. What is your message?"

Again the man began to smile, but this time the Night Hawk stepped close to him, and even his bold eyes faltered before the expression on Kyle's face. He shrugged.

"This, then, is the message, white man. My lord knows of your coming here at M'Bolo before sunset; and he has guessed your purpose. He commands you to do two things. One, that you return at once whence you came. The other, that you send him the secret hiding-place of the Priests' Treasure that was removed from the temple of Nagir!"

At the haughty words Thurston Kyle's cheeks flushed angrily. But after a moment he laughed in the man's face.

"So the White Serpent commands that, does he? Tell me, man, what follows if we do not obey?"

The Nagirine stiffened in amazement. It was clear he did not believe anyone would have the hardihood to disobey the commands of his mysterious leader.

"Death follows, white man!" he spat. "Death after many terrible hours. If you do not return to your country, if you try to reach Nagir, your end will be the worst our priests can devise!"

"So!" Thurston Kyle surveyed him unpleasantly. "And if we do not yield the hiding-place of the treasure, either—what then?"

"Then your friends die by torture!" was the astounding reply. So astounding, in fact, that Thurston Kyle gave back a pace and a queer hush descended. Then a strange, choked cry burst from Sir John Alan, who pushed hastily forward.

"Friends? What friends?" he gasped. "You hold no friends of mine captive, Nagirine. What do you mean?"

The answer that came was more shattering still.

"I mean the three white men whom we captured in the temple over three moons ago!" retorted the Nagirine calmly.

Reeling as from a blow, Sir John clutched at Thurston Kyle, lips trembling.

"He means—he can only mean Foster—Hendricks—Langdale!" he panted. "But—but they are——" He laid a grip of iron on the Nagirine's arm. "You and your White Serpent lie!" he thundered. "The white men you captured were killed. I saw them die beneath your knives. I, who was also in the temple when you attacked. Do you understand? I was there, but escaped from you mad dogs. But my friends were killed!"

"It is you who lie, white man!" snarled the Nagirine, frecing himself savagely. "We knew there were four in the temple and one escaped. We followed. But the others were not killed—no. We captured them alive!"

"Ye gods!" Sir John passed a hand over his eyes, trying bitterly to think back on that terrible night when the Nagirines had broken into the temple. He had been firing from a niche in the roof. The others, Foster, Hendricks and Langdale, his three companions in the expedition, had been below. The Nagirines had poured in like a torrent—he had seen his friends go down,

and, powerless to help because his rifle was empty, he had been forced to escape.

If what this man said was true, then, the three had not been killed in the rush, but merely overpowered. The dim temple light had deceived him.

"They are alive! Alive!" he muttered stupidly, while the Nagirine laughed at him.

"Alive—but for not for long, white man!" he snapped. "We tried to wrest the new hiding-place of the treasure from them, but they were British pigs, and obstinate. They live—until to-morrow night!" mocked the man. "When the moon is at its full to-morrow we hold the yearly feast of our god Ra-kot. In the temple. There your friends will die. The White Serpent has saved them for sacrifice!"

He held up his hand as Sir John gave a cry.

"But—their end depends on you, white man. They will die; that is certain. Yet whether they die by a swift knife-thrust or at the fiery hands of Ra-kot is for you to say. Send the White Serpent the secret of where you hid the treasure, go you back whence you came, as he commands, and your friends' death will be easy. Refuse, and——" He folded his arms again and smiled significantly.

A deadly stillness filled the Thunderer's cabin. It was broken by the Night Hawk, who waved the Nagirine coldly to the door.

"Retire, man. I desire to hold private speech with my friends. Scrapper—guard him!"

GATHERED in a group round Lieutenant Descartes' bunk, the adventurers looked at each other grimly.

Sir John gave a helpless groan. Determined man that he was, he had not yet recovered from his recent hardships, and his will-power had suffered. Besides——

"We're in a cleft stick!" he mumbled. "This discovery changes everything. What is the treasure to us, or Nagir either, providing we can save Foster and the others from a Nagirine death!"

Thurston Kyle laid a firm hand on his shoulder.

"Now, courage, old friend!" he said sternly. "It is not the treasure I want now, so much as vengeance for the white men who have died at the hands of these Nagirines and the brave fellows who died this afternoon. I have no intention of giving up this expedition. Nor have I any intention of letting your friends die at all. Don't you see—whether we give this information or not, the White Serpent will kill them? And what faith can we place in a renegade's word? Like as not he'll torture them to death in any case. No!" He squared his jaw. "They must be rescued!"

"Rescued? But how?" Sir John was bewildered. "If we refuse now this man will send word back to Nagir, and they may be killed out of hand!"

"Nothing of the kind, old chap!" The Night Hawk shook his head. "They are

ceremonial sacrifices, don't you see? When the moon is full to-morrow—that will be just after midnight—they will die. Not before, I am confident."

Snub struck in anxiously:

"What I can't fathom is how the White Serpent has learned we've arrived," he said. "Hang it, we've only been here a few hours, and Nagir, according to Sir John, must be many miles off, through tangled jungle. How has he learned of this fight? And how has he sent instructions back to his man? Guv'nor, it's a bluff!"

A feeble voice from the bunk answered him.

"Not at all, monsieur. The White Serpent knows, be assured. How fast does a telegram travel back in dear old Europe? Well, multiply that speed by twenty times, and still 'bush telegraphy' will beat it!"

"Bush telegraphy!" gasped Snub. He hadn't thought of that. The Belgian nodded.

"That is so. Remember the bush from here to Nagir swarms with natives. Word has travelled backwards and forwards with a speed white men cannot understand till they have been out here for years, as I have!"

"We're wasting time," interrupted Sir John impatiently. "It doesn't matter how the Serpent knows—the fact remains that he does. What do you mean by rescue, Kyle? Can we get to Nagir before midnight to-morrow? By air? Remember we have only our rough compass course to steer by and our own observation as we fly. And it will be night time!"

"We shall do it!" replied Kyle calmly. "We shall have African moonlight and our own searchlights. Also, I shall be on ahead!"

Understanding began to dawn on Snub and the others; all save the Belgian, who gasped in amazement.

"You, guv'nor? Alone? Into that rattlesnakes' den?" asked Snub hoarsely.

"Yes!" retorted the Night Hawk shortly. He had caught the look on Descartes' face, and, as usual, did not relish discussing his flying-powers before outsiders. "I can beat the Thunderer fast though the airship is," he went on, sinking his voice. "But you will be following closely. I will get there, and—but that's enough. Let us get rid of this Nagirine first and discuss plans afterwards."

Suddenly the old, eager light of adventure gleamed in his dark eyes. He turned and pinched Sir John's arm affectionately.

"Don't worry, old fellow. We came to find Nagir and wipe out the Nagirines. Now we have discovered that your brave friends are not dead, as supposed, but alive. And will remain alive, too, for nearly thirty

hours. It will be enough. We shall rescue them and fulfil our other tasks, too."

He spoke with such firm confidence that the feeling inspired the others. Their faces were stern, but almost serene as they wheeled and strode across the cabin to where the Nagirine waited, dwarfed by the Scrapper's enormous bulk. He glared at them haughtily.

"Well, white men?"

Thurston Kyle smiled deliberately.

"You may go now, man. Send word back to your foul leader that we refuse his commands. We neither turn back from our journey to Nagir, nor do we yield the secret of the Priests' Treasure which we are coming to seize!"

The Nagirine almost staggered as the sliding door opened invitingly behind him.

"You—refuse? You refuse the commands of our lord?" His voice rose to a scream. "White men—jackals—fools, you go to your death. And as for your friends—by to-morrow night they will be cursing your names. I tell you!"

"And I tell you to get out!" snapped Thurston Kyle.

"You have heard our message. Deliver it! Go! The palaver is finished!"

Utterly confounded, and taut with baffled rage, the Nagirine stood striving to blaze out a fresh torrent of words. At a nod from Kyle, the Scrapper's big hand landed on the man's shoulder, hauling him backwards to the door. He shook the grip off, however, drew himself erect and slowly rearranged his

loose garments. He half-turned, hands still busy; his eyes smouldered back at Thurston Kyle. And, on the threshold of the cabin, he spoke again, covering himself with the flag of truce.

"I serve the White Serpent!" he muttered, with strange simplicity, and his right hand, appearing from beneath the flag, moved like lightning.

Fast though the Nagirine drew his curly throwing-knife, the Night Hawk beat him to the draw. He had been expecting something of the sort. The gun at his waist gleamed in the light as though by magic. Its ringing report echoed crashingly through the cabin.

With a scream of pain, the Nagirine reeled back, clutching his shattered hand. The knife tinkled on the deck.

"Seize him!" rapped Thurston Kyle, and with the man firmly held by Scrapper and Jenkins, he strode over and looked deep into his eyes. "You treacherous dog! Scrapper!"

"Sir?"

"Dress his hand; then bind and blindfold him. Keep him safe."

After that whirlwind activity broke out aboard the Thunderer.

BOYS OF ST. FRANK'S RETURN TO NORTHESTRIA!

Wonderful new series of double-length yarns starting next week in which the Chums of St. Frank's travel to the North Pole and revisit Northestria, that country of primeval wonders set like a jewel amid Arctic wastes.

Turn to page 37 for more details.

CHAPTER 4.

The Lost City!

THIRTY minutes later the Night Hawk, in flying costume and great wings, stood on the roof of the Thunderer, staring across the brightly lit beach to the jungle beyond. He turned to young Snub beside him, who gave him a warm but anxious grip.

"You understand, lad; you're in charge of the ship and its controls, with Sir John to help you from the look-out. Let go the moment I take off; you'll not be far behind me then. From time to time I'll fire green flares. If and when I reach Nagir—two red ones. Land in the big central square before the temple, as Sir John has described, but if the Kittens have to make a rush, you, with your damaged rib, must stay behind. You and Margaret can work the firing-turret, if necessary. All clear?"

"Y-yes, gov'nor. And—good luck!"

Next moment, with a laugh and a swirl of his wings, the Night Hawk was away, off on his long, lone passage to the Lost City.

He was more heavily armed than usual. Besides his automatics, he carried a flare pistol in his belt, and, strapped along his back, a slender American hand machine-gun that could be used as a rifle but with deadlier effect. An illuminated compass was strapped to his wrist, and he had a copy of Sir John's chart, drawn as truly as the experienced explorer could make it. By this he had the rough direction in which Nagir lay from M'Bolo beach.

Out of the searchlight glare he sped and into the velvety night, which dropped around him like a star-spangled curtain. A bright moon, still some way from its zenith, covered the tangled land with unearthly radiance; the air was soft and warm. On he flew into the African depths, the great river gleaming beneath him—a lithe figure, silent as a wraith, an uncanny harbinger of fate.

Night became day, and a thunderous dawn found him deep in the heart of the mysterious land, flying at the same smooth speed.

Presently, as the day grew clearer, he turned his head from time to time, making out at last a great silver shape behind him, many miles to the rear, but following almost exactly in his course. The Night Hawk smiled quietly to himself at sight of the Thunderer, and swung ahead still faster.

The morning wore on; hotter and fiercer grew the dazzling sun, till the metal of his flying controls grew painful to the touch. Then, and not till then, did he fire two green flares into the air, and, in a long sloop, plunge towards the jungle.

Beneath the shade of an enormous tree, on a little bluff above an oily stream, he came to earth, and hauled himself into the lower branches. An intense, stifling silence brooded over all; even the insect life of the jungle was still. A strange feeling of oppression hung in the air, as though some

colossal force was gathering itself for a spring. But the Night Hawk, iron-nerved and gun in hand, rested quietly on his broad perch for three good hours, rising at last from the moist mossy ground and up through the avenues of trees into the free air again.

Far above him, and much nearer, the Thunderer glistened still. Again the green flares from his pistol stained the heat-haze, and, for a brief second, he saw a bright answering glow from his mighty airship. He swirled ahead once more, refreshed and alert.

But now he kept his goggled eyes glued to the forest and shining streams, seeking everywhere for a glint of sunlight on ruined masonry. No such sight rewarded him, but he held on, a vast stretch of country spread out beneath him like a spacious carpet.

Slowly the afternoon hours went; the sun touched the western horizon far away, gilding the matted jungle with crimson glory. For a short space the world was full of ruby light. Then, like an extinguisher, night closed in, with no interval of soft twilight such as occurs in Britain. An hour passed during which jungle and sky were wrapped in impenetrable darkness. But after that the stars came out in equatorial brilliance, and the bright moon loomed low in the dark-blue heavens.

Occasionally the Night Hawk glanced at his watch with narrowed eyes. Ten—eleven—eleven-thirty. He was peering anxiously over the jungle now, striving for an aerial glimpse of the Lost City. At midnight, or shortly afterwards, Sir John's three friends were to die. Thirty minutes—fifty at the most, he calculated. He dared not climb higher still, lest the tricky moonlight deceived him, but at whirlwind speed he zig-zagged on his course, quartering the country, searching, searching.

Suddenly he checked on whistling wings.

His glasses flew to his eyes. Had he seen something—the cold sheen of stonework in the moonlight? Or was it fancy? With heart bounding eagerly, he swung away in the direction of the glimmer, away to the left, where a shadowy river flowed. He flung himself lower, faster still, glasses glued in position, body tense with excitement.

It was not fancy! Plainer and plainer as he neared the spot gleamed the stony light. Other shimmers appeared dimly beneath the shaggy trees. But more thrilling even than these was the flicker of many torches—the first signs of human life since leaving M'Bolo. Like a great jewelled serpent the long line of lights wound in and out, disappearing at last into gloom.

The Night Hawk, jerking back his glasses and drawing his guns, dived earthwards at blinding speed. Beneath him, growing ever wider, was a huge cleared space in the heart of the jungle, many acres in extent. But empty and deathly silent, now that the torches had vanished. He swung down to within fifty yards, smiling with tight-lipped delight.

He had found Nagir—the Lost City of Egypt. His red flares blazed high above his head.

CHAPTER 5.

In the Temple of Ra-Kot!

DOWN he went, gliding across the empty city. It was divided into a series of squares, flanked on all sides by great dim buildings of time-polished stone, each framed in a background of barbaric foliage and thorns. Behind the cold, high pillars, dark, mysterious shadows lurked. Great human figures stared at him stonily; half-ruined statues, with animal bodies and fierce eagle heads, guarded the approaches to the houses.

Penetrating deeper into the buried city, he came to the mighty central space Sir John had described, bordered by the same strange colossi—the work of long-dead Egyptians. Massive flagstones, clear of weed or thorn, lined the square, from the northern end of which a great broad avenue stretched to the largest building of all, chequered with moonbeams and shadows like a great dappled beast.

With a glance at his watch, the Night Hawk flickered along this approach between lines of crouching sphinxes. He knew enough of Egyptian ruins to be sure that the huge structure ahead was the chief temple—and besides, he had listened to Sir John for hours.

The dark portal loomed up before him, guarded by monumental figures, tall and weather-beaten. It was here that, for the first time since gliding into this silent ancient city, he heard the sound of human voices. Softly, like the mutter of far-off waves, came a solemn chant from the depths of the temple beyond.

Pausing for a second to flash two more flares into the sky, the Night Hawk turned on silent wings, swept cautiously in through the door. Through a gloomy pillared hall he floated until he came to the end, and there met a sharp check. Squarely before him, blocking his path, was a great door of studded bronze, tight shut. And what made



The earth rumbled and heaved beneath them, and there came a mighty crash as the huge idol toppled over.

the delay more maddening was that through the chinks, too narrow for him to see through, came, much louder now, the sound of many voices, rising and falling in weird cadence.

Nothing deterred, he rose higher into the darkness, flashing his torch recklessly at the crumbling walls. At last, almost beneath the square roof, his patience was rewarded. A ragged gap yawned there, piercing the thick wall and glowing with faint light from the hall beyond the bronze door. Folding his wings and drawing a deep breath, he wormed his way through until he reached the other side.

And there he clung, staring down, every muscle flexed. He had reached the inner temple of Nagir.

Beneath him, lighted by scores of flickering torches, was a hall vaster than any he had yet seen—measuring at least one hundred yards by fifty. Two lines of rich columns, sculptured and carved, divided the spacious shrine. The central aisle was filled with dim-robed worshippers, rising and bowing on bended knees at the command of a half-naked priest who stalked in their midst. Their piercing sing-song voices rose to the Night-Hawk in a confused medley of sound. The Nagirines were holding their feast of Ra-kot. It must have been their processional torches he had seen winding through the ruined city without.

In that case, the ceremony could not have started long. He glanced at his watch. Twelve-fifteen. Spreading his wings softly, he glided above the unconscious heads far below, clinging at last to a massive ram-headed Sphinx, jutting out among the columns half-way down the temple.

The monstrous altar of the god at the far end, hitherto shrouded in the dim light, was now plainly in view. What he saw filled him with horror and fierce, bitter rage.

On a high raised dais between two crouched, leering statues were the men he had flown so far to see—Foster, Hendricks, Professor Langdale. His heart leapt with triumph at the sight. Filthy beyond description, wasted and haggard, they lay glaring indomitably upwards. Yet so obviously weak and helpless were they that their captors had scorned to bind them, merely securing their wrists in front. Beside them lay a giant negro, whose naked ebony limbs twitched with uncontrollable fear.

Around the captives on the dais stood a group of priests, their arms and bodies swaying rhythmically; old men in robes and the high, colourful head-dress of ancient Egypt. In the midst of them a tall Hercules, whose ivory-hued face made strange contrast to the lean brown ones around him, was their leader; dressed from head to foot in a purple robe, down the front of which writhed a magnificent serpent, worked in silver and rubies.

With gleaming eyes the Night Hawk studied this personage from his perch on high—noting the masterful features, the restless, piercing gaze, the clean-shaven mouth and chin.

Power and ruthless authority radiated from the man. The servile gestures of the attendant priests told forcibly of the thralldom in which he held them. Renegade and European that he was, he ruled his strange brood, here in the heart of a jungle-hedged city, with iron hand.

"The White Serpent!" muttered Thurston Kyle, his smile a mirthless challenge. This, then, was the man who had become the scourge of the Congo—the destroyer of hundreds, white men and black alike. His eyes travelled from the gesticulating group to what lay beyond—something only half visible but vaguely and grotesquely terrible.

Even as he looked a fantastic, dramatic change came over the scene. Through some aperture in the invisible roof overhead darted a great silver moonbeam with the suddenness and precision of a theatrical spotlight. Straight and clear it darted down, cleaving the torch-lit gloom, bathing the dais with cold light. And not only the dais, but the monstrous figure beyond, the figure of a stupendous god, crouched with great bronze claws extended.

Never before had the Night Hawk seen such a spectacle. It was a creature out of a nightmare. Its body was human yet bestial; its broad, flat face seemed more horrible by virtue of the calm, inscrutable expression on the massive carved features. So titanic was its size that the men below shrank into insignificance. With the moonlight playing full upon it, the towering god brooded awfully over its temple, its worshippers—and its victims.

A great shout, louder than ever, filled the temple. The moon had reached its full. Before the Night Hawk could realise it the sacrifices to Ra-kot had begun. He had arrived just in time.

After a short, high incantation two of the priests seized the twitching negro and dragged him down the dais. They laid him out flat, sprinkling his muscular body with liquid from a heavy golden ewer. Then all save the White Serpent prostrated themselves in silence. And he, with ghoulish dignity, slowly pulled over a bronze lever beside the dais. There was a sound as of cumbrous rollers beneath him.

Immediately the prone black figure began to slide across the dais, helpless, drawn by irresistible force. The Night Hawk stiffened in savage rage, opened his wings. As the man was hauled nearer, the eyes and nose of the god belched fire, then its middle opened, and great flames from the fierce fires raging within gushed out. The claws of the idol closed in, gripping the victim with a slow, grinding clutch.

So utterly and terribly surprising was the sight that, for a moment, Thurston Kyle faltered and closed his eyes instinctively. When he opened them again a second later, to the babel of another shout from all over the temple, the negro had vanished—into the flaming maw of Ra-kot!

And the priests were advancing towards the first of the white captives.

Thurston Kyle, beside himself with volcanic fury, swooped swiftly to the attack. Like a thunderbolt he launched himself from his perch. Into the midst of the priests he crashed, folding his pinions, smashing into the fiends with the frenzied activity of a man demented.

Startled, terrified shrieks ripped through the hall as the uncanny invader darted into view. The White Serpent, eyes bulging, sprang forward, a glittering knife in his hand. Thurston Kyle's left lashed home between his brows, smashing the man to the

dais in a writhing heap. After that his automatics came out in a flash.

Crack—craa-ck!

Caught at point-blank range by that withering hail, the priests wilted like straws in a breeze till the dais was dotted with their robed figures. With a hysterical roar, as of a sea-tempest, the worshippers below leapt from their knees and rushed, surging towards the altar and the demon apparition who had profaned it. The Night Hawk's laugh, harsh and metallic, rang out. Holstering his guns, he slipped the hand machine-gun from his back, crouched down beside the idol, thumbed the trigger.

Brr-rr-rr-rr-p! Brr-rr-rr-rr-p!

The circular drum spun madly; heavy bullets belched from the slender barrel straight into the heart of the charge, mowing the Nagirines down, slashing great gaps in the ranks. They gave back, rushed again, stampeded before another burst and huddled behind the columns. Setting his weapon down, the Night Hawk jerked out his flare pistol, firing again and again right up the steady moonbeam and out through the aperture above into the sky.

Even in that wild second he caught a look of appeal from the white men on the ground, leapt to the first man's side, cut the thongs about his wrist and laid the knife beside him. Then came another tigerish rush of the Nagirines. Again the Night Hawk's machine-gun barked death until the temple floor was piled with robed men and the survivors were racing for the tall bronze door at the other end.

Smash! They burst it open, leapt through, pursued by flying lead. Suddenly, from the outer hall beyond, came another sound to the Night Hawk's ears above the bedlam of yells and screams—the sound of heavy rifles, the crashing chatter of heavier machine-guns!

Tat-tat-tat-tat-tat!

Craa-ack! Spang-g!

Kyle flung out a hand to the three white men, now freed from their bonds. Bullets were chipping in through the bronze door, whining against the columns, even pinging against the god at his back.

"Down! Take cover for your lives! My Kittens have arrived!" he thundered joyously.

They dragged themselves weakly to the edge of the dais just as the Nagirines poured back, caught between two fires. Thurston Kyle fired a red flare to show his position—heard a breathless, rolling cheer from the distance. A speechless gesture of warning from one of the ex-captives caught his eye—the man's thin hand was stabbing frantically behind him. The Night Hawk spun round—in time to meet the charge of the enraged White Serpent, recovered from his knock-out.

Body to body the two tall men met in a savage pounding flurry of punches. A terrific drive snapped to the Night Hawk's chin, but his leather guard protected him.

He bored in, shocking the breath from the renegade's lungs with short, fierce jabs: took another jarring punch to the face, replied with an uppercut that lifted the Serpent off his feet and hurled him almost to the feet of the calm-staring god.

And then Professor Langdale, with his last remaining strength, took a hand in the game and obtained his revenge.

With a harsh croak that warned the Night Hawk back, the feeble explorer launched himself at the bronze lever beside the dais, struggled with it, fell back—and pulled. Instantly the White Serpent was drawn nearer to Ra-kot. Again the hungry claws of the god closed in—in on the screaming renegade who had worshipped it. The glare of fire from its interior flashed for a second time across the altar with lurid light.

The end came swiftly. . . .

The White Serpent—French soldier or millionaire, none knew which—had gone to the doom prepared for others. The menace overhanging the Congo was at an end.

CHAPTER 6.

The Earthquake.

THE Night Hawk wheeled on his gasping friends. Below him in the temple the Nagirines were too fully occupied with the Kittens' storming attack to heed the man on the altar.

"Can you walk?" he panted. They nodded, tried to rise, but only stumbled back weakly. He glided across to them, helping them up. Even as he did so, into the main temple, like a lead-slinging tempest, charged the Kittens. A blinding light shone at their backs—the searchlights from the Thunderer, which had landed before the temple and was flashing its powerful beams right through the long, straight building.

The Nagirines, or what was left of them, had scattered to all parts, scrambling desperately through gaps in the ragged outer walls or through other exits. And straight down the aisle, revolver blazing, raced Sir John Aian, alone, shouting to the Night Hawk as he came:

"Lift me up, Kyle—lift me up to the god!"

In wondering obedience the Night Hawk reached down, wings opening. He clutched his friend, gave a mighty beat that lifted them both from the ground.

"To the head of the god!" gasped the explorer; and Thurston Kyle took him there, up into the moonlight to where the solemn, hideous face stared at them unwinkingly. Sir John hoisted himself across the tremendous head, clawing into the gloomy shadow behind.

He fell back at last. In his arms were three great bundles, tied in old khaki shirts.

"Hid it on their own bally god—hid it on their own bally god!" he cackled in hoarse

triumph. "The Priests' Treasure, Kyle—hid behind their own bally god!"

So heavy were the bundles that one slipped to the altar with a clang of metal. Kyle retrieved it as he landed again, thrusting his friend ahead.

"Go! Back to the airship! Ah, here come the Kittens!"

His men, Scrapper in the lead, swarmed round him, the rearguard still firing. Strong, gentle hands picked up the three white men at his command, hustled them into the midst of the bodyguard.

And with that every man there fell headlong to the ground. . . .

What had happened none realised for a moment. Only that the whole temple seemed suddenly to have writhed in agony and still was quaking. The air became filled with the sound of mighty crashes, creaks, groans. As the party scrambled up again, one of the thick columns down the aisle snapped raggedly in two, collapsing amid clouds of debris and a thunderous roar. The temple began to sway again crazily.

Thurston Kyle was the first to recover his wits. Memory of that brooding, uncanny stillness in the forest, in the air, everywhere, came to him with stunning force.

"Outside!" he roared. "Outside, every man! It's an earthquake!"

Coolly desperate, the Kitten, bearing their burdens between them, rushed down the aisle. The Nagirines were bolting blindly into the forest. Another column farther behind fell. Then came such a tremendous, ear-splitting crash that made all look back even in the midst of their flight, and stand in awe-stricken wonder.

Ra-kot, the fire god of Nagir, was toppling.

Slowly, ponderously, the enormous figure swayed, seeming to bow majestically to its retreating conquerors. It reeled towards them: the opening between its paws yawned, streamers of fire gushed from the interior. In a shattering, reverberating roar the monster idol struck the ground, face down, exploding into whirling fragments and leaping flames. Thurston Kyle shoved his stupefied men forward.

"Run, you idiots—we'll be trapped. Make for the Thunderer!"

Like a torrent the invaders of Nagir poured into the airship, pitching breathlessly to the deck. At Thurston Kyle's gasp, Snub switched on full power.

Up rose the airship under spinning helicopters—up and away from that quaking city, tumbling faster into ruins as shock succeeded shock with greater speed and violence. A spurt of flame from the god Ra-kot darted through the temple roof; the sphinx-lined avenue cracked open from end to end. The last the dazed watchers saw as the safe upper regions received them, was the vast temple splitting asunder, too, as though from an axe-blow—sinking sullenly into chaos.

The airship streaked forward.

Within the great cabin willing helpers leapt to assist Margaret in getting the limp explorers, unconscious from weakness and excitement, to their bunks and rendering first-aid. While, in another corner, the Night Hawk had literally to force Sir John away from the glittering ancient Priests' Treasure and drag him, worn out, to his blankets.

But when order was restored at last, he stripped off his wings and strode across to where Lieutenant Descartes, a speechless on-looker from the first, lay watching. The Night Hawk smiled.

"I think those white traders are avenged, lieutenant. And the Congo is yours once more!" he said simply.

Descartes raised his hand slowly in a feeble but heartfelt salute.

"I thank you—monsieur!"

WHEN daybreak dawned again on a gale-swept world, the Thunderer returned to hover majestically over what had once been Nagir. Now indeed it was the Lost City—lost for all time. Mightier forces than the airship had gathered and conspired to complete the work of three thousand years.

Where, a few hours before, had been squares, buildings and a temple, was now a glistening sheet of water, extending for miles into the jungle. Under the earthquake's severe shocks, the river flowing near Nagir had burst its banks, inundating the surrounding countryside, transforming it into a magnificent lake.

For some hours the Thunderer cruised while Sir John Alan took photographs and wrote notes, while Margaret Alan bustled around her invalids and Thurston Kyle examined the Priests' Treasure with sombre eyes.

The identity of the White Serpent would never be cleared up now. Whatever the man had been, Kyle was thinking, his determination and powers of organisation had been amazing. A great man, save for his criminal kink, had been lost to the world.

And thus, at length, the huge steel airship swung away from the lonely desolation, back across M'Bolo beach and out into the ocean for home—where fame and the thanks of the Belgian Government awaited Sir John and his friends.

With the exception of Snub and the Kittens! When the fierce light of publicity began to glow upon them, they went abroad again, with their mysterious leader, the Night Hawk, whose slightest wish to them was law.

THE END.

(Look out for details of a thrilling new serial featuring your old pal, the Night Hawk, coming soon. Meanwhile, don't forget that next week will appear a magnificent, double-length yarn of the Boys of St. Frank's. Tell your pals.)



Jokes from readers wanted for this feature. If you know a good rib-tickler, send it along now. A handsome watch will be awarded each week to the sender of the best joke; pocket wallets, penknives and bumper books are also offered as prizes. Address your jokes to "Smilers," Nelson Lee Library, 5, Carmelite House, London, E.C.4.

HEARD AND FELT.

Tommy had been caned by his father, and he was crying.

"You are a cry-baby!" exclaimed his friend scornfully. "I never cry when dad whacks me."

"P-p'raps you d-don't," sobbed Tommy; "b-but my dad p-plays the big drum in the town band!"

(F. Weeks, 30, Dartmouth Cottages, Watling Street, Bexley Heath, has been awarded a handsome watch.)

BORING.

The teacher was putting questions to the class.

"What is a man," he asked, "who keeps on talking and talking when people are no longer interested?"

"Please, sir," replied one boy, "a teacher."

(W. Carlisle, 26-27, Conduit Street, London, W.1, has been awarded a pocket wallet.)

A SOCCER SNIP.

Barber (combing footballer's hair): "Right back, sir?"

Footballer (absently): "No, centre forward." (Miss Betty Keague, 252, King Cross, Halifax, has been awarded a book.)

FISHY.

Student (to professor): "My doctor has ordered me to take fish to improve the brain, sir. What kind of fish would you recommend?"

Professor: "Well, if I had a brain like yours I think I would start with a couple of whales."

(B. C. Warren, 42, Ifield Road, West Brompton, London, S.W.10, has been awarded a penknife.)

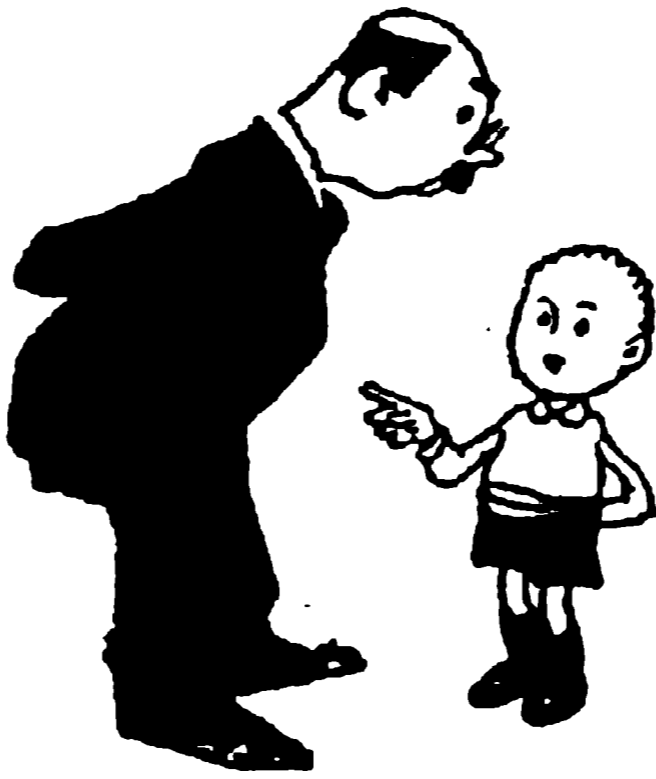
POOR OLD PAT!

Pat: "How much do you charge for a funeral notice in your paper?"

Editor: "Two shillings an inch."

Pat: "Begorrah! And me poor brother was six feet tall!"

STOP HERE FOR A GOOD LAUGH!



SAFETY FIRST.

Father: "Willie, didn't you go round to the trunk-maker's yesterday and tell him to send the trunk I ordered?"

Willie: "Yes, pa."

Father: "Well, the trunk has arrived, but with no straps."

Willie (artfully): "Yes, pa. I told him I thought you wouldn't be needing the straps."

(T. Burke, 4, Beechmount Villas, Dublin, has been awarded a book.)

(J. Henderson, 31, Laburnum Road, Fulwell, Sunderland, has been awarded a pocket wallet.)

UPSIDE DOWN.

Willie: "Quick, dad, Tommy's up to his ankles in mud!"

Dad: "Well, tell him to get out."

Willie: "But he can't—he's in head first."

(A. Skiller, 554, Main Road, Mordialloc, S.12, Melbourne, Australia, has been awarded a book.)

STUNG.

George: "Do you know that a grasshopper can jump a hundred times its own length?"

Tom: "That's nothing. I once saw a wasp lift a fifteen-stone man three feet in the air."

(J. Rogers, 7, West Street, Reigate, has been awarded a penknife.)

THE WRONG MARKS.

Fond Mother: "Well, Jimmy, how did you get on with your examinations?"

Jimmy: "I got five marks for everything."

Mother: "Did you really?"

Jimmy: "Yes, and I can't sit down now!"

(F. W. Thompson, 96, Westbourne Road, Bedford, has been awarded a pocket wallet.)

THE BEST FOR THE BOSS!

Customer: "I must say, waiter, that this is the first time I've ever had a tender steak here."

Waiter: "Great Scott! I must have given you the boss's dinner!"

(R. C. Kaye, 13, Letchford Cottages, Hatch End, Middlesex, has been awarded a penknife.)

FOUND OUT.

Grocer: "I ordered a pound of meat and you have only sent me twelve ounces."

Butcher: "Well, you see, I lost my pound weight so I had to use one of your pound packets of tea."

(C. M. Hitchens, 76b, Grand Parade, Brighton, has been awarded a book.)

BRAINY BILLY.

Mother: "I told you to give your brother half that jam, Billy."

Billy: "Well, mother, I wanted the bottom half so I had to eat his half to get to mine."

(P. Jones, Station Master's House, Tidworth, Hants, has been awarded a penknife.)

St. FRANK'S By

CHAPTER 1.

Trouble in the Ranks!

"HALF a minute!" said Handforth abruptly.

Church and McClure, his chums of Study D, halted automatically; but the rest of the St. Frank's Removites took no notice. They continued their walk along the brilliantly illuminated Broadway of Hovetown.

"What's the idea, Handy?" asked Church impatiently. "All the other fellows are getting ahead——"

"Let them!" interrupted Handforth. "Look at this!"

Church and McClure looked, and they now saw, for the first time, that they were outside the entrance of a third-rate cinema. And Edward Oswald Handforth was looking at the display bills with an eager, excited look in his eyes.

"Cheese it, Handy!" said McClure hastily. "We don't want to go

into this dump. You know jolly well that we've all agreed to go to the Plaza and see 'The Girl From New Orleans.' The other chaps are going in already."

"Bother the girl from New Orleans!" retorted Handforth.

"But it's one of the biggest talking pictures ever made!" said Church. "Dorothy Devino is featured in it, and she's one of your favourites, Handy."

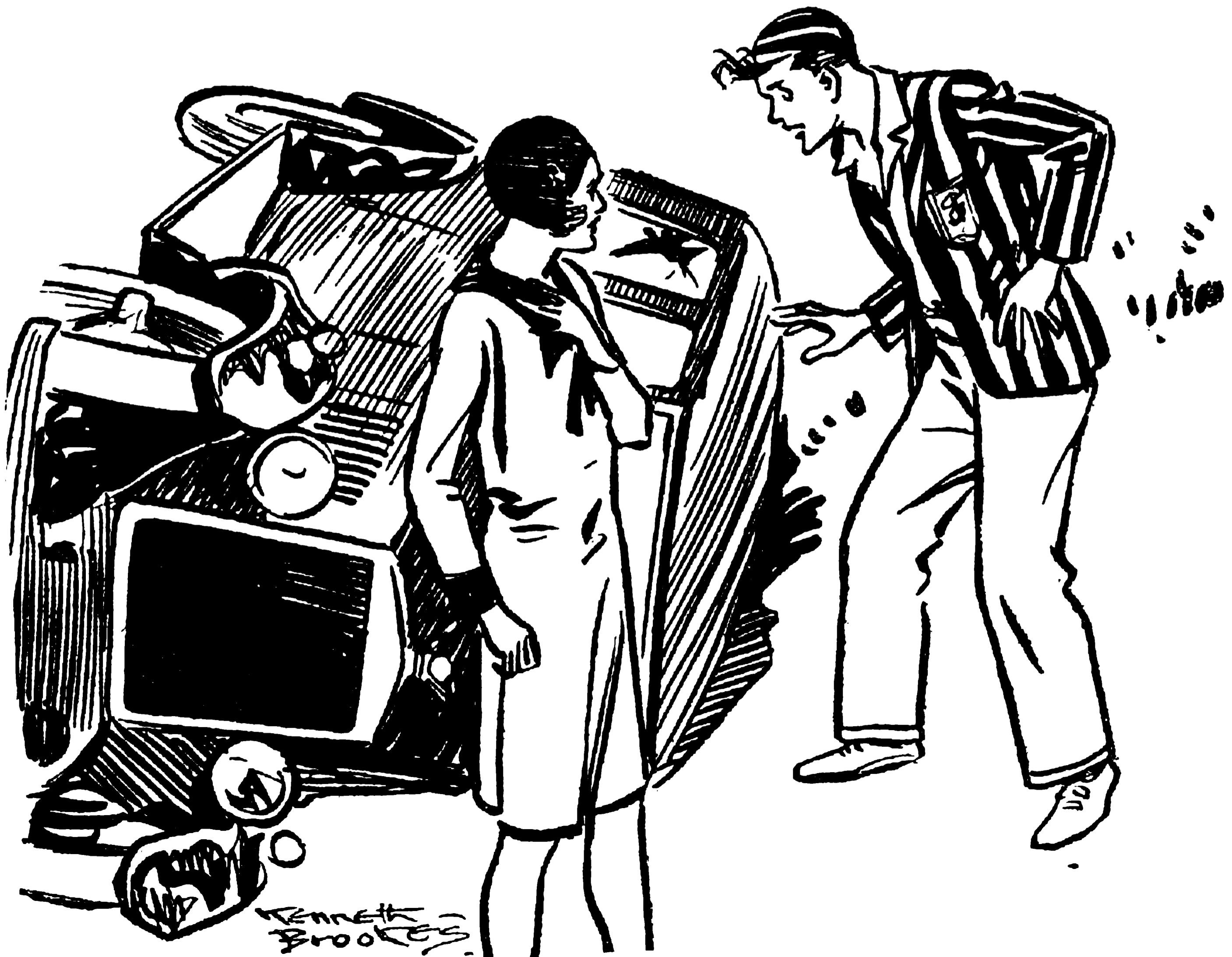
"She used to be—but not now," pointed out Handforth. "Look at this, my sons! By George! This is the picture for us. 'Two-Gun Thompson, the Terror of the Treble A.' Sounds pretty good, eh?"

"Sounds awful to me," said McClure. "It's one of those cheap Western pictures. We don't want to see it, do we, Mac?"

"I'd rather pay half-a-crown to stay outside," replied the Scottish junior.

He and Church walked on, leaving Handforth devouring the bills. But they paused twenty or thirty yards away, troubled.

Handforth sails in and puts a number of seaside revellers "all at sea."



A Tip-top, Rollicking Complete Easter-tide Story!

The BRINY!



"He'll make us go in that rotten place in the end," groaned Church.

"Don't be an ass," said McClure. "Hang it, there are times when we must assert ourselves, Churchy. This is one of them."

They were bent upon enjoying themselves this evening, and "Two-Gun Thompson, the Terror of the Treble A," did not appeal to them at all. The other picture, at the Plaza, was a genuinely first-rate attraction.

Over two dozen St. Frank's Removites were spending Easter holiday week at Hovetown, and they were having the time of their lives. The great South Coast resort was full of visitors, the weather was mild and sunny.

All expenses were being paid by the Earl of Edgemore, and although the earl himself was not with the party, his son, Viscount Bell-ton was deputising as host.

Quite recently there had been some exciting happenings at Edgemore Castle, near St. Frank's, and the Removites had saved Lord Edgemore's life on two occasions. This holiday spree at Hovetown was something in the nature of a partial reward.

Lord Edgemore and his son had only recently come into the inheritance; they had arrived in England from Canada, and they were both rough prairie types. A distant relative had attempted to get the pair out of the way, but all that trouble was now over. Thanks to the St. Frank's fellows, the rancher-earl and his son were no longer in any danger.

The boys were doing things in style at Hovetown. They had taken possession of a great mansion on the front—in Hovetown's

By *EDWY SEARLES BROOKS*

most fashionable quarter. It was Lord Edgemore's seaside residence, and there was room in that house for double the number of guests. Everything was being done on the grand scale—his lordship had not stinted his young guests in any way—and the boys, in consequence, were having a high old time of it.

"What's the idea of walking away?" demanded Handforth, joining his chums.

"We're waiting for you, that's all," replied Church. "The Plaza's filling up pretty rapidly——"

"Never mind the Plaza—we're going in this place," interrupted Handforth. "You can't beat a really good Western drama."

"Look here, Handy, Mac and I have made up our minds to see 'The Girl From New Orleans,'" said Church determinedly. "It's getting on for half-past seven, and you know what these seaside cinemas are—they fill up in no time, especially on an evening like this."

"It'll rain soon," said McClure, glancing at the lowering clouds overhead.

"What do we care if it rains?" retorted Handforth, staring. "We're going to the pictures, aren't we?"

"We are!" agreed McClure, walking on. "Come on, Churchy! There won't be any one-and-three seats left if we're not quick!"

Handforth ran after them, red in the face.

"Look here!" he roared. "Are you chaps defying me?"

"Don't be an ass!" said Church. "And don't make a scene in public, either! If you're so keen on this two-gun terror picture, you can go and see it. We don't care. We'll go to the Plaza."

"You—you traitors!" fumed Handforth. "There's no fun in sitting in a picture theatre all by yourself!"

"That's your own lookout—you can come with us if you like."

"Well, I'm not coming with you!"

"See you later, Handy," said McClure. "This way, Churchy, old man."

Church prepared to move away with McClure, but Handforth wasn't having any. Handforth didn't like being flouted by his study-mates. With a bull-like bellow he grabbed hold of Church by his scarf and began pulling that unfortunate individual towards him. McClure, not to be outdone, grabbed hold of Church's arm and hauled in the opposite direction.

"Leggo, you chumps!" howled Church. "Leggo! What's the giddy idea?"

He broke off with a roar of wrath. Handforth was tugging energetically, and Mac was hauling just as heartily. The climax came when Church's coat split with a loud tearing sound. Handforth let go with a gasp of dismay, and Church, half choked, catapulted into McClure's arms. A chuckle went up from the amused passers-by who had collected.

"Come on, Churchy!" said Mac hastily. "Now's our chance!"

"That's all very well," grumbled Church. "What about my coat?"

However, he decided to get away while the going was good, and before Handforth indulged in any more "rough stuff." The two juniors scuttled down the street. When Handforth finally gave chase he arrived in time to see his chums entering the palatial entrance of the Plaza and paying for two one-and-threepenny tickets.

Handforth was so indignant and disgusted that he could not find words to express himself. When, at last, he felt that he could do justice to the occasion, his chums had disappeared.

"Blow 'em!" he muttered gruffly. "Who cares, anyhow? I'll jolly well go and see my own picture!"

He stalked back along the Broadway to the small, old-fashioned cinema where the Western talkie was showing. He reflected that his chums were probably expecting him to follow them in. Well, they would be mistaken! Serve them jolly well right! It never occurred to him that Church and McClure might be relieved to find themselves without him. Handforth was a good sort, a staunch chum; but in the pictures he was liable to be noisy and troublesome.

"Shilling seat, please," he said, glaring at the girl in the box-office.

"No shilling seats."

"What do you mean—no shilling seats?" replied Handforth. "There's a list of admission prices here——"

"Shilling seats full up," said the girl.

"Oh! Better give me an eighteenpenny one, then."

"Eighteenpenny seats full up."

"Look here, I'm jiggered if I'm going to pay two-and-fourpence——"

"Two-and-four seats full up, too," said the girl. "There'll be standing room in about half an hour."

Handforth backed away, baffled. He had not allowed for this contingency at all. Much as it went against the grain, he hurried away to the Plaza.

He hoped that Church and McClure would not see him, for they would only have the laugh over him later. Well, he could go into a different part of the house, and even if it cost a bit more it would be worth it. He was sorry now that he had not stuck with Church and McClure from the first.

"How the dickens was I to know that the giddy place would be full?" he growled. "But it jolly well proves that I was right! That Western picture must be a corker!"

He went to the palatial Plaza pay-box, but before he could ask for his ticket a big attendant in uniform appeared.

"You'll have to get into the queue, young gent," said the attendant firmly.

"Queue?"

"No seats left, sir," replied the attendant. "I don't suppose you'll have to wait long—not more than half an hour."

"But—but two of my chums went in here five minutes ago!" protested Handforth.

"Maybe they did—but we're full up now," said the man. "Sorry, young gent; but you can't stand here."

Handforth retired, baffled again. This was very much like adding insult to injury. And it afforded him no consolation to remember that his chums had reminded him that the cinemas were rapidly filling, and that any delay involved the risk of being disappointed.

"Rats and blow!" he muttered, as he walked away with his hands in his pockets. "Why the dickens can't they build these cinemas larger!"

The realisation that it was all his own fault only added to his disgust. But it was too late now. The other fellows had got in, and he was left out.

He drifted back to the smaller picture-theatre, and made further inquiries. There was a chance that he would be able to get a seat within twenty minutes. So he decided to take a stroll along the front, and then come back.

But he was not altogether happy as he left the Broadway, and ventured upon the dark, deserted promenade. A chill wind was blowing, and a few drops of rain were now falling. There were very few people about. The tide was in, and the waves were crashing upon the shingle near at hand. A flurry of rain commenced, sharp and insistent—a typical April shower.

"This is a bit thick!" muttered Handforth, fed up to the teeth.

He dodged into the nearest shelter, and sat down disconsolately. He was always miserable after he had had a squabble with his chums. He tried to fool himself into thinking that he would enjoy "Two-gun Thompson, the Terror of the Treble A," when he went along to see it; but he knew perfectly well that he would be miserable all the time. Owing to his obstinacy, his whole evening was spoilt. Brooding thus, he hunched himself up into a corner of the shelter, and listened to the beating of the rain as it fell upon the paved esplanade outside.

A curious little sound attracted his attention, and for the first time he noticed that he was not the only person on this side of the shelter. Somebody was sitting at the further end, huddled in the corner.

Handforth could have sworn that the sound he heard was a half-stifled sob. He was startled. Looking round, he could faintly see a dim shape in the corner. A girl, without question; he could detect her light-coloured silk stockings in the gloom.

At this point his inspection was assisted by a motor-car which was reversing on the promenade near by. For a moment the car's headlights flashed fully into the shelter, revealing the girl with dazzling distinctness. Handforth saw that she was smartly dressed in a greenish coat with a fur collar. She looked up, surprised and startled by the sudden blaze of light. And Handforth saw her tear-dimmed eyes; he saw the trim, close-fitting hat, with the waves of fair hair

nestling about her ears. Then darkness came again as the car swerved round.

"My only hat!" ejaculated Handforth, under his breath.

He forgot all about the pictures, forgot his chums. That one glimpse of the girl had shown him that she was quite young and extraordinarily pretty. And although Handforth was an unusually susceptible youth, it wasn't the girl's prettiness which had affected him. It was the fact that she was crying—that her cheeks were tear-stained—that made his heart give a jump.

His heart, as Church and McClure had often said, was just a solid chunk of gold, and the sight of anybody in distress moved him deeply. When the "somebody" happened to be a pretty girl, he was moved to the depths.

He heard another little sob, and he edged nearer and nearer.

CHAPTER 2.

Handforth the Samaritan!

"I SAY!" muttered Handforth, in deep distress.

This was getting too awful for words. He was nearer now, but he had not dared to venture quite close to this girl who shared the shelter with him. He knew that she was still sobbing; he could hear distinctly.

The shelter was one of the ordinary sea-side type, with seats on all four sides. Handforth and the unknown girl were the sole occupants of this particular side; and Handforth did not care whether the other sides were occupied or not. His heart had been touched by the girl's sobbing, and his one and only impulse was to break the silence and to ask if he could be of any assistance.

But it was rather a ticklish proposition. The chances were that he would be rebuffed; that she would hurry away, telling him to mind his own business. Yet it was certain that something would have to be done.

"Er—I say!" he ventured boldly.

Then he realised that he had only spoken in a whisper, and that the beating of the rain had completely drowned his words. He cleared his throat, and tried again.

"Anything wrong, miss?" he asked, taking his courage in both hands and sliding along the seat until he was beside her.

The girl looked up, half-frightened. Until that moment, apparently, she had not even been aware of his presence in the shelter. Handforth could see the sudden alarm in her eyes, and she shrank back from him.

"Oh!" she murmured.

"I say, you know, it's all right," said Handforth impulsively. "I'm only a school-boy. But I heard you crying, and I thought that something might be the matter. If there's anything I can do—"

He hesitated, confused. The girl was looking at him in such a straight way. But she was reassured—both by his words and by his appearance.

"Thanks awfully," she murmured. "But—but I'm quite all right. There's nothing really the matter. It's nice of you to be worried about me, but it's nothing."

"Rats! I—I mean, cheese it!" protested Handforth. "If there's nothing the matter, why are you crying?"

"Well, it's nothing that you could help with," said the girl quietly.

She was trying to dry her eyes now, and to compose herself.

"Well, you never know," said Handforth cheerfully. "I'm from St. Frank's, you know—on a holiday down here, with a crowd of other chaps. Ted Handforth's my name, of the Remove. I was going to the pictures with a couple of chums, but there was a bit of a mix-up, and I didn't get in. And now all the seats are full. So I came along here."

"I—I see," murmured the girl.

"I was feeling pretty miserable, I can tell you," continued Handforth conversationally. "And it doesn't make me any happier

to know that you're miserable, too. I say, Miss—Miss——"

"Bell is my name, if you really want to know," said the girl, half-smiling.

"Oh, rather! What's the trouble, Miss Bell?" asked Handforth impulsively. "Be a sport, you know! I just hate to see a girl crying. If I can do anything to help——"

"But you can't—really," said Miss Bell. "All the same, talking to you has made me feel lots and lots better."

"By George! That's one good thing, anyhow," said Handforth eagerly. "Let's talk some more! Or what about going along to a restaurant for a snack?"

"Oh!" breathed the girl, with a catch in her voice.

Handforth looked at her closely; his eyes were well accustomed to the gloom by now, and he instantly detected the hungry, longing look in her eyes. But instantly she controlled herself. She shook her head firmly.



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"Thank you, all the same, Ted Handforth, but I couldn't possibly let you," she said. "It's very nice of you to talk to me like this—"

"Oh, I say, chuck it!" protested Handforth. "Look here, Miss Bell, you gave a sort of gasp when I mentioned food just now. I'll bet you're hungry. When did you have your last meal?"

"You mustn't be silly—"

"You're afraid to answer me, aren't you?" interrupted Handforth. "When did you have your last meal?"

"Last night," confessed the girl, in a whisper.

Handforth was aghast.

"Last night!" he echoed. "You mean to say that you've had nothing to eat all to-day? Look here, what's wrong? I say, why can't you tell me? Be a sport, you know!"

The girl was completely conquered by his refreshing outspokenness.

"There's no mystery about it," she said quietly. "I can tell you the whole thing in a dozen words. I belong to the 'Hallo, Jazz!' Revue Company which was left stranded here last week. We were all turned out of our lodgings this morning; we're broke, and we don't know what to do. There! I've told you now."

Handforth's mind was in a whirl.

"Turned out of your lodgings!" he ejaculated, when he could find words. "You! Do you mean to tell me that some awful landlady was heartless enough to turn you out of your lodgings?"

"Not only me, but the whole company," explained the girl. "You see, we hadn't paid. They've kept most of our baggage—"

"I say!" burst out Handforth, as another thought struck him. "Then—then you must be an actress?"

"Not quite an actress," said the girl. "I'm a dancer."

"My only sainted aunt!"

"I'm Joy Bell, and I do one of the speciality dances in the revue," went on the girl. "Oh, everything's gone wrong—ever since the beginning of the tour. And when we got here, to the Theatre Royal, we were left stranded. It's not the show's fault," she went on, with some animation. "The show's topping all the way through. But that beast of a manager, Mr. Shand— Oh, but what's the good of telling you all this?" she added, with a weary little sigh.

"If it's going to make you feel any better, you can tell me anything you like," said Handforth impulsively. "By George! So you're a speciality dancer in a revue!"

He looked at her with more admiration than ever. What an ass he had been not to guess this before! Anybody with half an eye could tell that she was no ordinary girl! She was so pretty, so dainty, so topping in every way. Edward Oswald Handforth, to tell the truth, was rapidly "falling."

Not that this was anything unusual in him. As Church and McClure were ready to testify, their leader was apt, at any moment,

to be "smitten." They hardly dared to enter a restaurant, for fear of Handforth "falling" for one of the waitresses.

"Can't we have a few more details?" he asked earnestly. "I say, Miss Bell—what a ripping name that is, Joy Bell!—I say, you know, I might be able to think of a wheeze to help you."

"But how could you?" asked the girl, shaking her head.

"Well, anyway, what happened—exactly?"

"Mr. Shand—he was our manager—was a rotter from the very beginning," said Joy Bell quietly. "Last Saturday he capped everything by bolting—with all the money. He left the whole company without salaries, stranded here. We were supposed to have gone on to Porthampton, but the booking was cancelled. The whole tour has been cancelled. We're just stranded. Mr. Shand left money owing everywhere, and everything at sixes and sevens. We've been waiting in our lodgings for something to happen—but nothing has happened. And this morning we were all turned out because we couldn't pay. We haven't even got enough money to get back to London."

"Or even to buy a meal, eh?" asked Handforth quickly.

She was silent.

"Who's in charge?" asked Handforth.

"Mr. Wilcox, the leading man, is trying to look after things," said the girl. "He and his wife—she's the leading lady—have been awfully nice. They've done everything they could. He's been wiring and telephoning to the head office, but he can't do anything. We believe that the people at the head office have bolted, too."

Handforth was not particularly interested in these details.

"What I want to know is, what are you planning for to-night?" he asked. "How about feeding—and lodgings? Haven't you any money at all?"

"We're broke—all of us," said the girl simply. "That's just the truth of it, Ted Handforth. And when I sat down in this shelter, I broke down. I just couldn't help it. Perhaps it's because I'm hungry, and tired. I'm really awfully sorry for bothering you—"

"Bothering me be blowed!" interrupted Handforth indignantly. "Where's the rest of the company?"

"Mr. Wilcox and the others are in the next shelter—talking things over, discussing ways and means," replied Joy Bell. "I felt so much like crying that I came away, so that I could be alone. I suppose I'm dreadfully silly."

"The next shelter!" exclaimed Handforth, standing up. "Come on, Miss Bell! We'll go and join them."

His mind was full of ideas already. He hadn't much money of his own, but there was Skeets—otherwise Viscount Bellton—and Archie Glenthorne and Vivian Travers and a few other fellows with a good deal of cash. If the St. Frank's crowd couldn't do some-

thing for this stranded theatrical company it would be a pity!

"Oh, but really——" began the girl, in alarm.

She broke off, for Handforth was already walking on towards the next shelter.

CHAPTER 3.

Handy the Host!

EDWARD OSWALD HANDFORTH was fairly on the warpath now; and when Handforth was on the warpath, things happened.

He did not know much about theatrical companies, but when he arrived in the next shelter he needed no further corroboration of Joy Bell's story. There were about twenty people there, and it seemed to Handforth, at first, that they were all girls. They were talking animatedly, some excitedly. Then Handforth saw that there were four men amongst them. As a matter of fact, these were Mr. Wilcox, the leading man, two character actors and the company's comedian.

"We wondered where you had got to, Joy," said one of the girls.

"It's all right—she's been talking to me," said Handforth bluntly. "And she's been telling me what a mess you're in. You're the 'Hallo, Jazz!' Company, aren't you?"

"The 'Hallo, Jazz!' Company was silent, too surprised to utter any comments.

"Well, my name's Handforth—Ted Handforth," continued Edward Oswald. "I belong to St. Frank's School, and I'm in Hovetown on holiday with a crowd of other chaps. Now we know one another, don't we?"

"What on earth——" began Mr. Wilcox.

"He's all right—I'm sure he is," interrupted Joy. "He thinks he might be able to help us."

"A schoolboy?" chorused two or three of the girls.

"Which of you is Mr. Wilcox?" asked Handforth, looking from one to another.

"I'm Wilcox," said the leading man. "This lady is Mrs. Wilcox."

He made some introductions—the character actors, the comedian, the comedienne, the twelve chorus girls, and another speciality dancer. Mr. Wilcox was inclined to be jocular.



Handforth wanted Church to go to one cin
a tug-of-war resulted with

"Well, look here, we don't want to waste any time," said Handforth, in his direct way. "Is it a fact that you've been chucked out of your lodgings, and that you haven't had any grub all day?"

"I don't see that we're called upon to answer that question, young man," said Wally Weeks, the comedian—who, off the stage, was a grave, melancholy individual. "We don't believe in advertising our troubles."

"But it's a fact, all the same," insisted



na ; McClure wanted him to go to another—and Church acting as the rope !

Handforth. "Now, look here—I don't want to be a nuisance, but I believe we St. Frank's chaps can help you—if you'll let us."

"I think you mean well, young man," said Mr. Wilcox kindly, "but for the life of me I can't see what you can do—you, or your friends, either. In any case, we haven't the slightest justification for accepting any help—even if you could give it."

Handforth was impressed by the "Hallo, Jazz!" Company. Mr. Wilcox was a clean-looking, athletic man of about thirty; his

wife, rather pale and frail, seemed several years younger. All the rest were a thoroughly nice-looking crowd. The chorus girls, many of them tired and weary and haggard, were quite as young as Joy Bell—and she could not be any older than seventeen or eighteen.

"I hope we're not going to have any arguments about this," said Handforth unhappily. "Miss Bell has told me that your manager walked out on you, and left you stranded. That's true, isn't it?"

Mr. Wilcox took Handforth by the arm, and he dropped his voice to a confidential murmur.

"We appreciate your feelings, young 'un, but I'm afraid we can't accept any help," he said. "It's a fact that we've been kicked out of our digs—I'm not denying it—and it's also a fact that we don't quite know where we're going for to-night. But we'll get through somehow, and we'll keep our chins up, too. Thanks, all the same—"

"But this is rot!" interrupted Handforth. "I can help, and you're all coming with me!"

"My dear kid—"

"Look here, all of you," went on Handforth, brushing Mr. Wilcox aside and addressing the company, "I've got a brainwave. If you like to make your own arrangements to-morrow, all well and good. But for to-night I want you to be the guests of Viscount Bellton."

"What!" went up a chorus.

"Say that again, laddie," murmured Mr. Wellington Grant, one of the elderly character actors.

"Viscount Bellton," said Handforth, with some importance. "We call him Skeets—he's one of our crowd, you know. He's the son of the Earl of Edgemore, and we're all staying at his big seaside mansion on the front.

You can take my word for it that it'll be all right. If he were here he would invite you, just the same. But he's at the pictures just now, and I can't get in touch with him."

"Are you trying to kid us?" asked Wally Weeks suspiciously.

"Great Scott, no!" replied Handforth, with some impatience. "Can't you believe a chap when he tells you the truth? There's tons of room in this house—bed-rooms by the dozen, not even used. There's grub in plenty, too. If you'll all come along with me, you'll be sitting down to a ripping supper within half an hour."

"Oh, boy! Lead me to it!" murmured one of the girls.

"Will you come?" asked Handforth eagerly. "I'm not asking you to take my word. If Skeets cuts up rusty, I'll take my boots off and eat 'em! You're all tired," he added, glancing tenderly at Joy. "You're fed up with life in general. Come along with me, and a good hot supper will put new life into you. I'm not playing a silly joke on you—and if you take my word you'll soon find that everything is all serene."

The company was silent.

There was no doubt that Handforth was in deadly earnest; his tone was sincere. Yet the stranded actors and actresses could hardly be blamed for hesitating. Handforth was only a schoolboy, and his offer was not only astonishing, but unique. And Mr. Wilcox, at least, did not overlook the fact that Handforth was inviting the "crowd" to somebody else's house.

"Don't think I'm ungrateful, young 'un," he said, "but I feel that we are not on very safe ground. Your heart's all right, and you're sorry for us because we're stranded. But this young viscount might not look at the thing in exactly the same light. We don't want to butt in where we're not wanted, and, if it's all the same to you, we'll carry on as we are."

"Rot!" burst out Handforth excitedly. "Rats! It's only your silly pride that's standing in the way! You're too jolly independent! You're all hungry and tired, and you're jolly well coming with me!"

"Yes, but look here——"

"I've heard enough!" said Handforth ferociously. "My only hat! It's a pity if a chap can't do a good turn to somebody without all this fuss! Come on—get your bags and things! We're going!"

"The kid's a sport," said one of the chorus girls. "Let's take a chance!"

"I really think it would be as well, Wilcox, dear old boy," said Mr. Wellington Grant. "I'm really seriously worried about these girls—and we can, at least, see that they are cared for."

"Good egg!" shouted Handforth boisterously. "Let's have no more objections. Come along, everybody!"

His manner was so compelling, his enthusiasm so contagious, that even Mr. Wilcox gave in. Within three minutes the entire company was marching along the promenade, bags and grips in hand, with Handforth in the lead.

"**H**ERE we are!" said Handforth briskly.

He turned through the gateway of one of the biggest and finest houses on the front. It was a detached mansion, set well back from the promenade, with ornamental gardens in front.

"I hope this boy knows what he's doing," murmured Mr. Wilcox, into his wife's ear. "I'm uncomfortable about the whole business, Bella."

"I'm past caring, Dick," said Mrs. Wilcox wearily.

Handforth had boldly taken Miss Joy Bell by the arm. He was genuinely sorry for the whole crowd, and he was anxious to help them; but it cannot be denied that his main thoughts were for the girl he had met first. He had noticed, to his dismay, that she had limped during the walk. He needed no further evidence that she was footsore and weary in real earnest.

"We'll soon have everything settled," he said cheerfully, as he rang the bell. "None of the chaps is in now—they're all at the pictures—but that doesn't matter. I expect supper's prepared."

"But we mustn't touch it," said Joy softly. "It is your friends' supper."

"They can get another when they come in," replied Handforth. "Hallo! Here we are! It's all right, Mason; I've brought a few friends home."

A middle-aged man, apparently a butler, eyed the visitors in astonishment.

"Is his lordship here, Master Handforth?" he asked. "Does his lordship know——"

"Never mind his giddy lordship!" interrupted Handforth. "Come in, everybody! Make yourselves thoroughly at home."

Handforth pushed Mason before him, and backed him into a corner at the end of the spacious hall. Mason was in charge of the household, so to speak; his wife was the cook, and they had several servants under them. Lord Edgemore had done things thoroughly for his son and his son's guests.

"Now, look here, Mason, don't make any fuss," murmured Handforth, getting straight to the point. "These people are absolutely broke. I want you to give 'em a good supper. Fetch Mrs. Mason, so that she can take all the girls up to some of the spare rooms——"

"But, bless my soul, Master Handforth, are you sure that you're doing right?" interrupted Mason worriedly.

"Cheese it, Mason!" protested Handforth. "Skeets won't mind. Skeets is a brick. You take my word for it, Mason, that everything is going to be all serene. Now, buck up, and do as I say!"

The startled butler, unable to take any other course, obeyed Handforth's instructions.

There was no doubt that the boisterous, good-natured leader of Study D had taken a very high-handed course, considering that he was only one of Skeets' guests. But nobody could deny that Handy's heart was in the right place.

CHAPTER 4.

Something Like a Surprise!

"**S**EEN anything of Handy?" asked Church.

He and McClure had just come out of the Plaza with the rest of the big audience, and they had joined up with

Nipper, Tommy Watson, Tregellis-West and a crowd of other Removites.

"You don't mean to say you've lost him?" asked Kirby-Keeble Parkington, with a grin.

"He went to that mouldy little picture theatre down the Broadway, I think," replied McClure. "But that place is closed. Churchy and I thought that Handy might be hanging about waiting for us."

"Far more likely that he's gone home," said Travers.

Other members of the holiday party joined them, and before long all the schoolboys were together—with the sole exception of Handforth. The rain had stopped now, and they strolled along the sea front in a cheery crowd.

"I guess we'll find Handy at home, having supper," said the young Viscount Bellton. "Maybe he'll be peeved with you two fellers for deserting him."

"Let him be peeved, then," said Church gruffly. "He shouldn't be so jolly pig-headed!"

Skeets chuckled, and the subject of Handforth was dropped. During the rest of the walk the boys discussed their plans for the morrow.

"Gee! What's all this?" asked Skeets, when they arrived at the big house. "What do you make of it, fellers?"

Many of the windows were illuminated. The house, in fact, was practically a blaze of light. Yet most of the front rooms, as the boys knew, were unoccupied.

"Funny!" said Nipper.

"Funny be blowed!" grunted McClure. "Handy's been up to something! You know him as well as I do. We can't let him out of our sight for five minutes without his getting up to some dotty wheeze or other!"

Skeets had a key, and he opened the door; they all trooped into the hall, peeling off their overcoats and caps. As they did so they glanced at one another in astonishment, for, from the dining-room, came the sound of laughter and voices.

"Great Scott!" murmured Parkington, looking round. "Have we come into the wrong house?"

"I was thinking the same thing," said Skeets, bewildered.

Much of that laughter, proceeding from the dining-room, was feminine. Without question there was a number of girls in there! Church and McClure glanced at one another in a frightened sort of way; instinctively, they vaguely guessed the truth.

"We'd better go and see," said Nipper, striding towards the dining-room.

Mason appeared from the rear quarters at this moment, but he was too late to intercept the boys. They burst into the dining-room, full of curiosity and wonder. And they were all struck dumb by the spectacle which now lay before their eyes. They crowded in the doorway, opened-eyed and breathless.

The scene was certainly startling.

Edward Oswald Handforth sat at the head of the great table, and all round were num-

bers of laughing, cheerful girls! There were one or two men, it was true, but they seemed lost amongst this host of femininity. The table itself was loaded with food, and everybody was eating with tremendous heartiness.

"Oh, hallo, you chaps!" sang out Handforth, standing up.

The company, as one individual, ceased eating and talking. Everybody looked at the fresh arrivals.

"Come in, you chaps!" went on Handforth breezily. "I want to introduce you to these new friends of mine!"

The Removites were aghast.

"What's been happening, Handy?" asked Nipper feebly.

"You'll understand in a minute—when I tell you," replied Handforth. "Everything's all right—nothing to worry about. Come in, all of you!"

"Oh, my only hat!" groaned Church into McClure's ear. "We never ought to have let him loose!"

"But we thought he'd gone to that other cinema!" said Mac, staring.

Mr. Wilcox was on his feet by this time.

"Just a minute, please," he said quietly. "I feel that it is up to me to give an explanation——"

"Not much!" interrupted Handforth. "I'm responsible for all this, and I'll do the explaining, if you don't mind, Mr. Wilcox! Skeets, old man, let me introduce Mr. Richard Wilcox and the 'Hallo, Jazz!' Revue Company."

"Jumping Snakes!" ejaculated Skeets.

"Revue company!" whispered Church, reeling.

"Mr. and Mrs. Wilcox," continued Handforth, with a wave of his hand. "Miss Joy Bell; Mr. Wally Weeks; Mr. Wellington Grant; Mr. Francis Farrant; the young ladies of the chorus——"

"My only Sunday topper!"

"Great Scott!"

"Don't stare like that, you asses!" rattled on Handforth, scarcely giving them time to breathe. "The 'Hallo, Jazz!' company was stranded last week. The manager bunked with all the money and left the crowd flat. I found them on the front, and invited them along. They've had no food all day—no lodgings—no anything. I told them that it would be all right with you, Skeets, and so it will be. You're a sport."

"Which of you is—er—Skeets?" asked Mr. Wilcox, looking round.

"I guess I am," said Skeets, moving forward.

"You are Viscount Bellton?"

"Well, yes."

"We owe you an apology, Viscount Bellton," said Mr. Wilcox gravely. "Your young friend, Handforth, induced us to accept the hospitality of this house; but we realise that the whole business is a bit thick——"

"If that's what's worrying you, stranger, you'd best forget it," interrupted Skeets, grinning. "If you are friends of Handy, I

guess you're friends of mine. You're sure welcome here."

There was a chorus of excited comment and cheering.

"I'm afraid we've made rather a mess of your supper, boys," said Wally Weeks, with a sigh. "But young Handforth tells us that there is plenty more——"

"Heaps and heaps!" interrupted Skeets. "Good old Handy! Always doing something unexpected!"

WITHIN an hour Skeets and his fellow schoolboy guests were fully acquainted with all the details of the situation. Handforth lost no time in explaining the full position. And, for once, the fellows considered that he had acted brilliantly.

Skeets himself was, as he described it, "tickled pink." It was just the sort of thing he would have done himself. All the boys were genuinely sorry for the stranded revue company.

"This is one of those things we shan't easily forget," said Mr. Wilcox, after supper. "You boys have helped us more than you know. A square meal when you're hungry, a bed when you're tired—they may mean small things to you, but they're mighty big things to us just now."

The girls had all gone off to their rooms, and the schoolboys were left alone with the men of the company.

"I can't tell you how I've been worried about my wife and all those girls," continued Mr. Wilcox. "Poor kids! They've had the very deuce of a time to-day. Hardly one of them has a stitch of clothing except what's on their backs. All our stuff was seized at our digs—in lieu of money."

"Good gad!" said Archie Glenthorne, genuinely distressed. "What about it, old things? I mean to say, isn't this one of those occasions when a whip-round would be somewhat juicy?"

"Rather!" said Handforth eagerly.

"I trust, old bean, that you will allow us to leap into the breach?" went on Archie, taking out his pocket-book. "Just a temporary loan——"

"Hang it all, you boys have done enough without lending us money!" protested Mr. Wilcox, thoroughly uncomfortable. "No, I'm hanged if I'll accept it!"

"Can't do it, kids," muttered Wally Weeks.

"Aw, shucks! What's the difference?" asked Skeets. "I guess we'll take it as an honour if you'll let us——"

"Not now, at all events," interrupted Mr. Wilcox. "To-morrow I'll do my best to get in touch with our London people. You're a great crowd of youngsters, and we're more grateful than we can express. But there's a limit, you know."

"But you want to get hold of your baggage, don't you?" asked Handforth. "Supposing we lend you enough just for that?"

"To-morrow," smiled Mr. Wilcox. "We'll leave everything just as it stands until to-

morrow, if you don't mind. I'm going to move Heaven and earth to get something going in the morning. And one day, perhaps, we'll be able to square this account."

CHAPTER 5.

The Hon. Clarence!

BREAKFAST, the next morning, was an exceedingly merry meal.

A hearty supper, a good night's sleep, and a solid breakfast had put new life into the "Hallo, Jazz!" Company. The outlook seemed brighter; they were able to view their troubles with a smile.

"We'll get things moving to-day!" declared Mr. Wilcox, during the meal. "I should advise you girls to get out and enjoy yourselves. It's a sunny morning, and warm, too."

"We'd have a bathe if we weren't so broke," said one of the girls, laughing.

"I say, dash it, what about that loan?" asked Archie, jamming his monocle into his eye and looking round. "Don't be so pricelessly proud, old things. A couple of quid each all round, what? Just until that manager chappie can be rounded up?"

In the end the boys had their way. Such fellows as Archie Glenthorne and Vivian Travers and Skeets and Sir Montie Tregellis-West whacked out substantial loans. Mr. Wilcox gave his personal promise that the money would be refunded at the first opportunity.

"The fact is, you boys are overwhelming us a bit," said Mr. Wilcox, smiling. "I'll get some action to-day, never fear! I'll take a run up to London by the first train, and see if I can't get into touch with the boss. We'll be off your hands by tea-time, at the latest!"

"Oh, I say, what rot!" protested Handforth, with an anxious glance at Joy, who was sitting next to him. "There's no reason why you shouldn't stay on here for the whole week!"

"I guess that goes with me, too," said Skeets, nodding.

"But we can't take advantage of your kindness to that extent, young 'un," replied Mr. Wilcox. "Besides, we've got our tour to think of. I'm hoping that we'll all be in London by this evening, and that something definite will be fixed up."

"All in London?" murmured Handforth, dismayed. "Oh, crumbs!"

To the amusement of the others, Handforth looked stunned. He wasn't worried about the company leaving—but only about Joy Bell. If they went, she would go, too. The prospect filled Handforth with dismay.

However, he was cheered somewhat by the girl's promise that she would let him take her for a long walk along the promenade at eleven o'clock.

"Why at eleven?" asked Handforth eagerly. "Why not now?"

"I'm going with the other girls for a bathe," replied Joy, smiling. "But I'll be back long before eleven, Ted, and then we'll go for our stroll."

She was humouring him—for she knew, as well as anybody else, that the burly schoolboy was "smitten" with her. But she hadn't the heart to rebuff him.

Handforth himself consented to go with the St. Frank's crowd for their own morning bath. They had indulged in a dip every day since they had been in Hovetown, and, although the water was a bit chilly, they were growing accustomed to it by now.

"But why should they all go so soon?" asked Handforth, as he and the others walked along the esplanade towards the bathing-huts. "I mean, it's rot! They haven't got an engagement this week, and they might as well stay with us——"

"Can't you see, you ass, that they don't like accepting our help?" put in Nipper. "Skeets has told them that they are his guests, but they feel that they are imposing upon him; and, naturally, they want to get away as quickly as possible."

"And she'll go with them," murmured Handforth wretchedly.

"Eh?"

"I shan't even have the opportunity of seeing her dance—on the stage," groaned Edward Oswald. "I'll bet she's great, too!"

"Poor old Handy!" said Church sympathetically. "I don't like saying so, but I expect the whole show must be a proper dud, or it wouldn't have gone bust at the end of last week."

"It didn't go bust, you idiot!" retorted Handforth angrily.

"Didn't it? Wasn't it supposed to go to Porthampton this week?"

"You can't blame the show for that," put in Nipper. "I was having a talk with Mr. Wilcox, and he tells me that the show is



The St. Frank's juniors stared in amazement. Handforth was seated at the head of the table in the dining-room, surrounded by a crowd of laughing girls!

one of the raciest, smartest, cleverest revues on tour. It's beautifully put on, and everybody is tip-top."

"Oh!" said Church.

"Joy Bell is a speciality dancer of extraordinary talent," continued Nipper, whilst Handforth beamed his approval. "Mr. Wilcox says that she only needs her chance, and she'll be snapped up for a West End show."

"There you are!" said Handforth triumphantly.

"The revue didn't go bust last week," continued Nipper. "The manager, Mr. Shand, was a wrong 'un. He bolted with the takings—swindling both the company and the theatre management. It seems that he had been wangling things from the very beginning of the tour, and everything is now in a hopeless mess. It's just bad luck on these actors and actresses."

"It's a pity we can't do something—something really useful, I mean," remarked Parkington thoughtfully. "Still, I dare say

they'll get out of their troubles all right. That chap Wilcox seems to be a brainy, go-ahead chap."

At this point there was an interruption, and the subject was forgotten. An extremely elegant youth attired in the whitest of white flannels, was strolling languidly past, along the promenade. He glanced casually at the schoolboys in a weary, tired sort of way. He was about seventeen or eighteen, this youth, with aristocratic features.

"What-ho!" he ejaculated, coming to a sudden halt. "Young Archie Glenthorne, or I'm a filleted oyster!"

"Good gad!" said Archie.

The two stared at one another for a moment, whilst the other juniors gathered round, grinning. Then Archie and the stranger dashed at one another, and clasped hands.

"Clarence, old boy!" said Archie, beaming.

"Archie, old chappie!" chortled Clarence.

"The last blighter I expected to see in Hovetown, what?" smiled Archie.

"Upon my word and honour, this is absolutely priceless-cum-ripping!" declared the youth in white flannels. "Archie, old lad, it's within your power to save my life! I'm not sure that you haven't saved it already! What are you doing here in this mildew-infested spot?"

"Easter holidays, and all that sort of thing," explained Archie. "I say, old things,

gather round. Meet the Hon. Clarence Popkiss, an old pal of my family's, you know. Clarence and I are by the way of being kindred spirits, although I haven't seen the chump for months."

The Hon. Clarence Popkiss, whose appearance quite fitted his name, was introduced all round. But he was like a cat on hot bricks; he seemed tremendously anxious to tell Archie something.

"Are you staying down here?" asked Archie, at length.

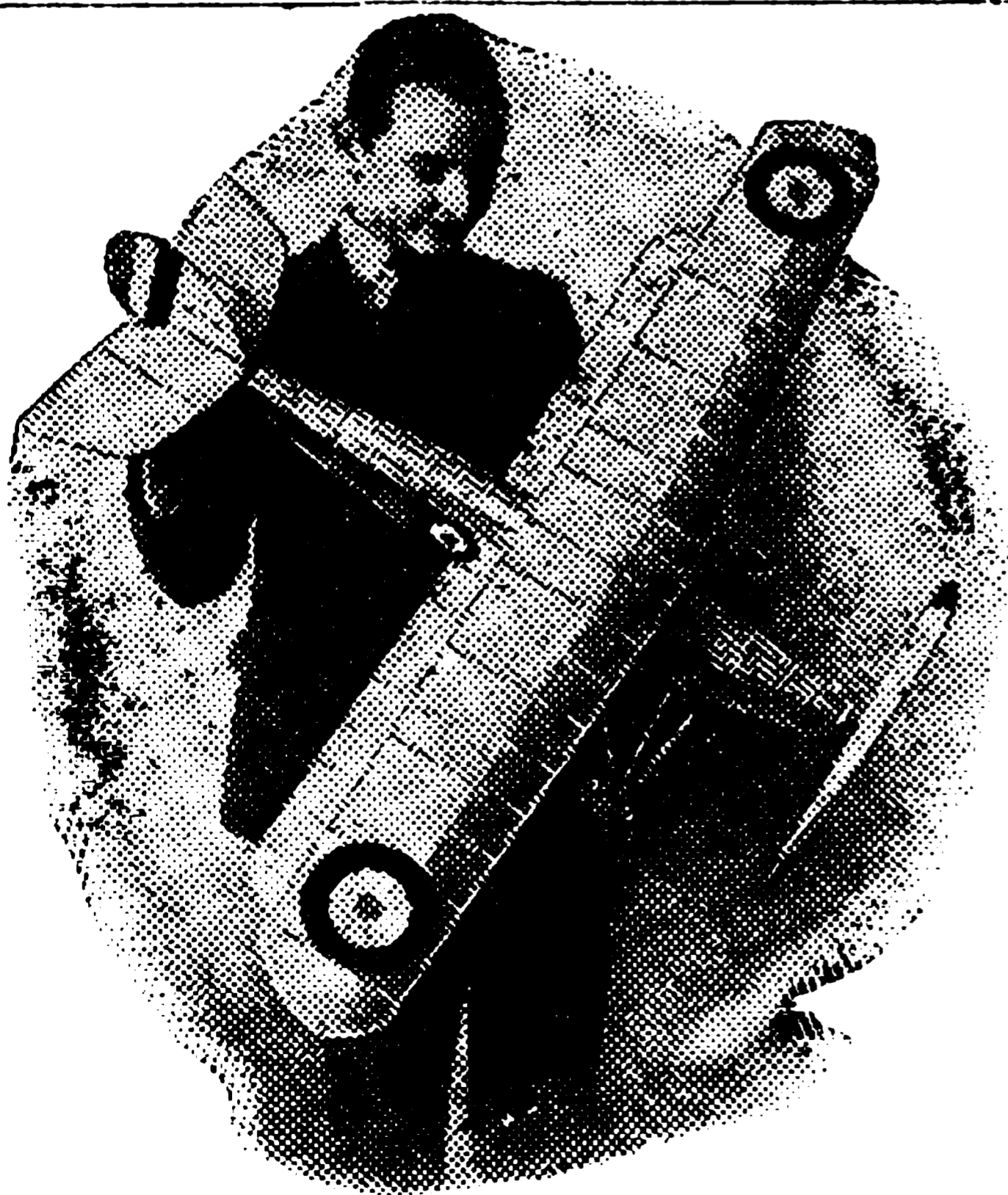
"Not absolutely on the jolly old spot, if you know what I mean," replied the Hon. Clarence. "As a matter of fact, I am staying with my Aunt Hilda, over at Bellamy Court, about eight miles inland."

"Oh, I see!" said Archie. "Rather out of the way, what?"

"Positively the last place on earth!" declared the Hon. Clarence, with a shudder. "The nearest village is Little Hocklewell-in-the-Wold, and Bellamy Court is in the thickest of that same wold. Surrounded by nothingness and desolate parklands, if you can gather my meaning."

"House party?" asked Archie sympathetically.

"Oh, rather! Crowds of people there and all that, but I must admit that they're not my set," said the Hon. Clarence. "I don't mind telling you, Archie, old life-saver, that I'm having a perfectly poisonous time. Meeting you has bucked me up most frightfully."



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"I always thought your Aunt Hilda was something of a sportsman?"

"Oh, Aunt Hilda's all right, in her way!" admitted Clarence. "But you mustn't forget that she's the wife of Sir George Marley, the big City chappie. Always getting up these blighting society functions. If I had known that anything of the sort was mapped out for this week, I would have avoided the place like the plague. But once a chappie has accepted the old invite, well, what could he do? I mean to say, he's more or less landed."

"Oh, rather!" agreed Archie.

"And to make matters worse, there's something else," continued the Hon. Clarence feelingly. "Mark this, Archie, old bird, and mark it well! At the present moment there is a gang of male and female loonies, calling themselves the Mayfair Amateur Dramatic Society, infesting the Imperial Hotel."

"Good gad!" said Archie. "I must confess that I don't quite gather the connection——"

"Wait!" interrupted the Hon. Clarence tragically. "These scourges of humanity—these Bright Young People—have been rehearsing a wretched revue for weeks. And when I tell you that they wrote the revue themselves, including the music and the lyrics, you will understand the full horror of the situation."

"It certainly sounds frightfully frightful," admitted Archie.

"This gang is due to descend upon Bellamy Court this evening," continued Clarence, in a mournful voice. "My aunt's giving a special feast for the nobs and the landed gentry in general. One of those big society functions, you know. And the piece de resistance of the evening will be this blighting amateur revue. Can you imagine, Archie, what my feelings are when I tell you that Aunt Hilda insists upon my being present?"

"I gather that this revue will not be up to the usual specifications?"

"My dear old lad, stir your brains a bit!" protested the Hon. Clarence. "Haven't I told you that this show is being got up by Bright Young People—by empty-headed society youths and maidens with about as much sense, between them, as the off-side hind hoof of a donkey? I can tell you, I am appalled at the prospect."

"It certainly sounds a bit cheesy," admitted Archie.

"But you needn't go to this show, need you?" asked Nipper, grinning.

"Obviously, you don't know my Aunt Hilda," said the Hon. Clarence, with a sigh. "My only chance of dodging this horror is to have a good excuse for being elsewhere. And as I don't know a soul in the dashed neighbourhood, I've been stumped. But this meeting with you, Archie, causes the old heart to thump with considerable vim. Invite me over for the evening, laddie!"

"Oh, rather!" said Archie. "Anything you like."

"Then that's official?" asked Clarence eagerly. "You have invited me to a most pressing jollification this evening, what? I'll try it on Aunt Hilda and see what the effect is. If that won't work, I shall have to get you to kidnap me. Any fate will be better than sitting through that ghastly revue. I am not," added Clarence, "such a frightful ass as I look, Archie. I bar Bright Young People emphatically, and without reservation. And when Bright Young People write and produce an amateur revue, I maintain that it is time to bleat for help."

CHAPTER 6.

Poor Old Handy!

NIPPER and Parkington and Handforth and the other St. Frank's fellows were grinning amusedly.

They rather liked the Hon. Clarence Popkiss. He was another edition of Archie Glenthorne himself. But it seemed quite clear to Nipper & Co. that he was grossly exaggerating the "horrors" of the situation.

"I shouldn't worry so much about it," said K. K. to Clarence, with a chuckle. "After all, this amateur revue might be entertaining."

The Hon. Clarence stared blankly.

"Entertaining?" he repeated. "My dear kid, you don't know these brainless lads and these loony lasses! They're the terror of every hostess in Mayfair, and why my aunt has invited them to Bellamy Court to give this mouldy performance is beyond the grasping power of my onion. I have an idea that one of the girls is more or less engaged to Aunt Hilda's eldest son, who, candidly, is a prize chump! Possibly Aunt Hilda is hoping to clinch the catastrophe. She seems to be hypnotised by these frightful bores. They have even induced her to invite down three or four big London managers."

"Theatrical managers?" asked Nipper.

"Absolutely!" said Clarence. "These Bright Young People are so dashed conceited that they think they're good, and they have an idea that these London managers only need to spot them in this revue and they'll get West End engagements—although, of course, they don't need 'em because they've all got pots of dough. You see, my Aunt Hilda, being the wife of Sir George Marley, is such an important person that these dashed managers haven't dared to refuse the invite."

"A scaly prospect, whichever way you look at it," said Archie, nodding. "Well, Clarence, old lad, you can rely upon me. I am here, and you can use me as you will."

"Good enough," said Clarence, clasping Archie's arm. "Well! Pip-pip! I'll de-park the old two-seater and tootle back to Bellamy Court. You'll be hearing from me anon."

Good gad! What's your address, by the way?"

Archie gave it, and he went along with Clarence to see him off in his two-seater.

Meanwhile the other St. Frank's fellows continued their stroll to the bathing huts. And it was noticeable that Handforth was looking flushed and hot. There was a tense, excited gleam in his eyes.

"What's the matter, Handy?" asked Church, glancing curiously at his leader.

"Dry up! I'm thinking!" said Handforth.

"I thought there was something the matter with you," said Church. "But I shouldn't strain too much if I were you. You look as if you might burst a blood-vessel——"

"Yes, it's an idea!" interrupted Handforth eagerly. "By George! Not merely an idea, but a brain-wave! It's the wheeze of the year!"

"Are you talking to yourself, or to us?" asked McClure.

"And Joy will get her big chance!" continued Handforth excitedly. "That's the brainiest part of it! What's more, I shall be able to see Joy doing her bit in the show, and the managers——"

"What on earth are you drivelling about?" interrupted Church impatiently.

Handforth looked at him with wild eyes, and then he waved his arms.

"Hold on, you chaps!" he sang out. "Collect round, everybody! Listen to me! I've got a wheeze!"

"After the bathe, old man," said K. K. kindly.

"Rot! You'll listen to me now!" declared Handforth. "It's about those stranded theatricals!"

"You might as well listen," said Church. "He won't give us any rest until he's got this brain-wave out of his system."

"Make it brief, then," said Parkington.

"I guess we'd better gather round, fellers," murmured Skeets, with a wink at the others. They gathered round.

"Now, here's the idea in a nutshell," said Handforth impressively. "You heard what that chap Popkiss said, didn't you? There's going to be an amateur revue at Bellamy Court this evening, given by a crowd of brainless young Society people."

"We've only got the fellow's word for that," said Nipper. "He was probably exaggerating."

"Well, that doesn't make any difference," insisted Handforth. "We know that there's going to be an amateur revue—and we also know that two or three big West End theatrical managers are to be present to witness the show."

"Yes, that seems to be certain," agreed Travers.

"Well, there you are!" said Handforth triumphantly. "All we've got to do is to waylay this mouldy amateur revue company and substitute the 'Hallo, Jazz!' crowd!"

"What!"

"My only sainted aunt!"

"Cheese it, Handy!"

"Don't be an idiot!"

"It ought to be easy," continued Handforth eagerly. "These Bright Young People are staying at the Imperial Hotel, and they're going over to Bellamy Court, all ready for the show. We can have the 'Hallo, Jazz!' company all ready, and when they arrive Lady Marley won't know the difference. Even if she does, it won't matter—it'll be too late to make any alteration then."

"But—but what's the object of this crazy wheeze?" asked Church, in amazement.

"This what wheeze?"

"Well, what's the object of it, anyhow?"

"Isn't it obvious?" said Handforth, staring. "These big West End managers will see Joy doing her speciality dance, and then they'll fall over themselves in their eagerness to give her a starring part in a big West End show!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Good old Handy!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"We thought there was a catch in it somewhere!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Catch be blowed!" roared Handforth, glaring round. "You know as well as I do that these touring revues companies often contain as much talent as any West End show."

"Well, that's right enough," agreed Nipper. "But it seems to me, Handy, that there are too many difficulties attached to this wild wheeze of yours. We can't go interfering with Lady Marley's arrangements like that! This is going to be a swell Society function——"

"Who cares about that?" interrupted Handforth impatiently. "You heard what Popkiss said about this amateur show. What does it matter to these Bright Young People whether they give their performance or not? They've all got pots of money—they've nothing to lose. And here's this genuine revue company, stranded, broke, without engagements. And there are to be big West End managers at Bellamy Court this evening! It's a chance in a thousand for this genuine revue to be seen by the nobs!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What are you laughing at, you fat-heads?"

"I'm afraid you're thinking more of Joy Bell than you are of the stranded company," grinned Nipper. "I'm not denying, Handy, that the idea has possibilities, but it seems to me that the difficulties will be too great. And, after all, we've no justification for barging in on these amateurs and preventing them from giving their show."

"Just what I was thinking," said K. K., nodding. "It would be a bit of a dirty trick. Even for the sake of helping Miss Bell and her stranded company we couldn't very well do a shabby stunt of this sort. We've got nothing against these amateurs—and we're

Some of the Bright Young Men squatted upon Handforth and held him down, while others went round and dented his car and emptied his petrol into a roadside ditch.



under no obligation to help that chump, Popkiss."

And Handforth's brain-wave was lightly dismissed—much to Handforth's disgust.

EVEN during the bathe Handforth continued to argue his cause.

In his opinion here was a golden opportunity to help the "Hallo, Jazz!" revue company. A big Society function—West End managers—everything! A chance in a million for these talented actors and actresses to show what they could do!

"You're all dotty!" said Handforth, as he swam. "I wouldn't mind if I could work the wheeze single-handed. But I can't! I need the help of you chaps."

"Forget it, old man," said McClure wearily.

"You're jealous—that's the trouble!" went on Handforth, his voice full of bitterness. "You all know that it's a jolly good wheeze, but you always run down my wheezes. I'm disappointed. I thought you were all made of better stuff."

In the dressing huts he was more eloquent than ever, and when all the juniors gathered together, after they had dressed, he was still at it.

"If I can only make you fellows realise —" he was beginning.

"But you can't!" interrupted K. K. "You haven't realised the difficulties, Handy. And, apart from that, it wouldn't be playing the game."

"I guess we came here to enjoy the Easter holidays," said Skeets pointedly. "Cut it out, Handy! Who's for going on one of these sight-seeing trips? There are heaps of coaches ready."

"Good egg!" said Fullwood. "Let's make up a big party. Coming, Handy?"

"Blow your sight-seeing trips!" retorted Handforth gruffly.

"He couldn't come, anyhow," said Church, with a sniff. "He's going out for a walk with his best girl."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Handforth turned red, and glared at Church.

"You silly idiot!" he snapped. "Miss Bell is a ripping girl, and I'm not going to have her insulted—"

"But I didn't insult her, you ass!" interrupted Church. "Didn't you say you were going to meet her at eleven o'clock? You're a fine chap! It's five past eleven already!"

"What!" yelled Handforth, grabbing for his watch.

He took one look, gulped, and streaked off, leaving the other fellows roaring with laughter.

CHAPTER 7.

The Bright Young People!

JOY BELL, looking very sweet and fresh, was waiting near the pier when Handforth hurried up—eight minutes late.

"I say!" he burst out breathlessly. "I'm most frightfully sorry!"

"It's nothing," laughed the girl. "I've only been here half a minute myself."

Handforth was looking at her with admiring eyes. His heart was thudding rapidly. Pretty as Joy had looked overnight, she was a hundred times prettier now. She was dressed in a quiet, fashionable frock, which revealed her slim, graceful figure to full advantage. Standing there, with the wind ruffling her wavy hair, she looked, in Handforth's opinion, too ripping for words.

The burly Romovito hardly realised, however, that she had consented to go for this walk because he had expressed a desire for it. She liked him well enough; but, after all, he was only a schoolboy. And Joy was really too worried just now to enjoy any walk. However, she successfully concealed her troubles, and only revealed to him a smiling face and a pair of merry eyes.

"Did you enjoy your bathe?" she asked as they started their walk along the front.

"Not much," admitted Handforth.

"Why, I thought the water was fine this morning," said the girl. "A little chilly, but——"

"Oh, the water was all right—but those chaps made me tired," said Handforth resentfully. "I got a wonderful idea to help you and the rest of the company, and they turned it down."

"That was too bad of them," murmured Joy.

"I'll tell you all about it!" said Handforth impulsively. "Before we had our bathe, Archie Glenthorne—he's one of our chaps—happened to meet a friend of his——"

At this point Handforth broke off, for the esplanade was fairly crowded on this sunny morning, and intimate conversation was rather difficult. Handforth suddenly halted, another idea occurring to him. He was full of ideas to-day.

"We can't talk properly here," he said. "How about going for a run in my car?"

The girl laughed.

"You haven't a car of your own, surely?" she asked.

"You bet I jolly well have!" replied Handforth. "I've got a Morris Minor—and a run into the country would be ripping, eh? What do you say, Miss Joy? A lot better than this walk, and we could talk easier, too!"

"It's up to you," smiled Joy. "I'm in your hands for this morning, Ted."

He felt thrilled. She was so jolly and friendly. No side about her. No affectation. Just the sort of girl he admired.

Within five minutes he had carried her off to the garage where his Morris Minor was parked, and they drove off on their ride. As soon as Hovetown was left well behind, Handforth trotted out his brain-wave. The girl listened gravely, shaking her head once or twice, but making no comment.

"The chaps won't help!" complained Handforth, in the end. "And it's such a chance, too. Think of it, Joy! You don't mind my leaving off the 'Miss,' do you?"

"Don't be silly," laughed the girl. "Why should I mind?"

"You're a sport!" declared Handforth enthusiastically. "Just think of the chance! Here are two or three big London managers coming down to Bellamy Court this evening. Really big West End men! Why, if the 'Hallo, Jazz!' company gave the show instead of this mouldy amateur crowd, you would be made! The managers would spot you in a tick, and offer you big, fat contracts!"

The girl laughed merrily.

"Managers only do things like that in stories—or films," she said.

"Are you against this idea, too?" asked Handforth, amazed.

"I'm afraid I am."

"Oh, I say! But why?"

"Because it wouldn't be fair, for one thing," replied the girl, becoming serious. "I'd rather get a job in a straightforward manner—much rather than by playing a trick. I'm afraid that you are so infatuated with your idea that you haven't thought of the difficulties. For all we know, these amateurs may be putting up a really good show. And what excuse have you boys for butting in and ruining it?"

"The excuse of giving you a big chance," replied Handforth promptly.

"That's not a real excuse at all," said the girl. "No, Ted, I'm afraid you'll have to forget all about it. Mr. Wilcox has gone to London this morning, and I'm sure he'll fix something up. He'll probably get things straightened out, so that our tour can go on. It's awfully nice of you to be so interested, but can't we talk of something else?"

They were driving along slowly, Handforth giving more attention to his companion than to the road. But, fortunately, there was little or no traffic, and the road was wide.

"Let's talk about you!" he said eagerly.

"Oh, no! I'd much rather hear about you and your school," said the girl.

"But there's nothing interesting in a school!" protested Handforth. "I want to know about you—and your act. I want to know if you've ever appeared in a West End theatre, and all the rest of it. What do you actually do on the stage?"

"I'm a dancer," smiled the girl.

"I know—but what kind of a dance do you do?"

"Oh, I dance on my toes," said the girl amusedly. "It's not an ordinary toe-dance, of course—something special of my own. It's a sort of step-dance, on a special mat, and I do it all on my toes. And I do some acrobatics—doubling over backwards, with a few somersaults, and all that sort of thing."

Handforth looked at her with open admiration.

"My only hat! Can you do all that?" he asked, deeply impressed. "You must be awfully clever!"

"It's not cleverness, you silly—it's just practice and training," replied Joy. "My dad taught me everything I know. He used

to be one of the cleverest dancers on the stage."

"I'd give quids to see your act," said Handforth, with sudden gloom. "But what chance is there? Nobody will help me in this wheeze for to-night, and——"

"Don't look at me so much, Ted," interrupted Joy, amused and yet embarrassed. "You mustn't forget that you're driving."

"I'm trying to picture you on the stage," said Handforth, continuing to look at her. "By George! I'll bet you're marvellous!"

He had taken no notice of his fair companion's warning; he found her so attractive that the driving of the car became of secondary importance. Unconsciously, he had veered over to the off-side now, unaware of the fact that there was a sharp bend just ahead. And at that very moment a big limousine came swinging round the bend at high speed. The driver gave a loud warning hoot on the electric horn, and Handforth jumped.

"Great Scott!" he ejaculated, gasping.

He clutched at the steering-wheel, attempting to swerve. But the luxurious limousine was practically upon him, and there was no time for him to get back to his right side of the road.

A crash seemed inevitable.

The driver of the other car took the only sensible course. He swerved on to the green-sward at the side of the road, his brakes shrieking. The next moment the great car, lurching and bumping, came to a halt, the near-side wheels nearly in the ditch.

Handforth had pulled up, too, shaken.

"Oh!" murmured Joy, pale and trembling. "I—I thought we were going to be killed!"

The driver's door of the limousine opened, and a tall, lanky young man emerged, his face red with anger.

"Hi, you!" he shouted, striding across to the Morris Minor. "What do you think you're doing? Do you realise that you might have killed the lot of us?"

Handforth opened his own door, and got out.

"I'm most awfully sorry!" he said earnestly. "It was all my fault, and I hope you haven't damaged your car at all. I—I didn't notice I was on my wrong side. I'm really terribly sorry!"

It was an abject apology, and it should have served. But the tall young man did not accept it. Handforth was really sincere—he knew that he was entirely at fault—and he had done the right thing in acknowledging his guilt.

The limousine was now pouring out an astonishing stream of young people. Handforth had never seen so many human beings get out of one car. There must have been nine or ten of them altogether—including four young ladies. He looked at them with astonishment, and without much pleasure. Seldom had he seen such a crowd of unpleasant-looking young men and girls.

All the young men were dressed in white flannels and gaily coloured sweaters. They were knuts of the most blatant type. The girls, in short skirts and woollen jerseys, were hatless. Two of them were smoking. At the first glance Handforth could tell that they were society people of the wrong type.

"So this is the young blighter who nearly sent us into the ditch?" said one of the other young men, striding up. "We ought to kick him, Cecil!"

Cecil, the driver, nodded.

"I'm going to kick him, too!" he said angrily. "A silly schoolboy, spooning with this girl!"

"Here, I say!" protested Handforth, flushing.

"Well, weren't you spooning?" demanded Cecil unpleasantly. "What other reason was there for your driving on the wrong side of the road? A kid like you ought to be barred from holding a licence!"

The Bright Young People—for, without doubt, the occupants of the limousine were of that clan—gathered round, noisy, rude, and ill-mannered.

Handforth's temper was rapidly becoming short.

"I've said that I'm sorry, and I've admitted that the fault was mine," he said. "What else do you want me to do? Go on my knees and grovel for your forgiveness?"

"You'd better not get cheeky, my lad!" said Cecil darkly.

"Cheeky be blowed!" retorted Handforth. "No damage has been done—your car isn't scratched. So what the dickens are you gassing about?"

"It's a bit thick, you know, being driven into the ditch by this sardine-can!" said one of the others, moving round the Morris Minor and pushing at it. "I think we ought to do something, you fellows. Just to show this kid what we think of him. How about tipping the contraption on its side?"

"That's not a bad idea," said one of the others, grinning.

Handforth boiled as two of the fellows walked round his car, tapping at the wings. One of them had a big spanner in his hand, and every time he tapped he left a dent.

"Here, I say!" roared Handforth. "Mind what you're doing to my car!"

"Your which?" asked the fellow with the spanner. "Sorry! I thought it was a dust-bin."

The others yelled with laughter at this inane sally.

"You leave my car alone!" shouted Handforth hotly. "Look what you've done to this off-side wing! There are two or three dents in it!"

Joy caught at Handforth's arm.

"Hadn't we better be going?" she murmured. "There's no sense in standing here arguing."

"Yes, you'd like to go, wouldn't you?" said Cecil, who had heard the words. "But

before you go we're going to teach this young fool a lesson!"

Handforth quivered.

"I've admitted I was in the wrong—that it was my fault!" he said thickly. "You cads! If you touch my car any more, I'll —"

"You'll do what?" interrupted one of the young men. "Get out of the way, you little idiot!"

"What about emptying his petrol?" suggested one of the others.

"Gad! That's a good idea! Let's leave him stranded!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Handforth was roughly seized and sat upon, while the others entered into their task with enthusiasm. The girls took no part in this; they stood by the limousine, watching. But, judging by the manner in which they were laughing, they heartily approved of the entire procedure.

CHAPTER 8.

A Different Matter!

HANDFORTH, helpless under the weight of three or four young men squatting on various portions of his anatomy, watched with rising indignation as the others commenced their "dirty work" on the Morris Minor. Joy, unable to do anything, stood by looking on angrily.

With considerable enthusiasm they unclipped Handforth's spare petrol can, emptied it into the ditch by the roadside—thus avoiding the danger of fire—while some of the others unscrewed the petrol pipe. Then all the petrol in the tank was drawn off into the can—the can being emptied again. Finally, the Morris Minor was left without a drop of "juice" of any kind.

"Gad! This is better than the show!" grinned one of the young men. "How about introducing a scene like this into our revue?"

"Too late now," replied Cecil. "We shouldn't have time to rehearse."

"Show! Rehearse!" ejaculated Handforth, with a start. He had been released, and was on his feet now.

"We're amateur actors and actresses," said Cecil importantly. "We're giving a revue of our own to-night at Bellamy Court. Lend a hand here, Splinters! You, too, Jammy!"

Handforth was so startled by the discovery that these Bright Young People were the actual stars of the amateur revue company—which was to give a performance that night at Bellamy Court—that he hardly saw what they were doing. But Joy Bell saw, and she boiled with indignation.

"Oh, Ted!" she breathed, clutching at his arm. "This is—outrageous! Can't you do something to stop them?"

Yelling with foolish laughter, the young men—thinking themselves clever—were heaving at Handforth's Morris Minor and overturning it on to its side.

"You—you rotters!" shouted Handforth angrily. "You can't leave us here like this!"

"Can't we?" grinned Cecil. "Watch us! Come on, everybody!"

They all climbed back into their limousine, and, still shouting with laughter, drove away.

"The rotters!" panted Handforth again, as he looked at his damaged car in dismay. "What are we going to do now?"

"It's too bad," said the girl sympathetically. "But you mustn't worry, Ted. When somebody comes along we'll be able to get your car put right. I don't think there's any real damage."

"They left us here, stranded—deliberately," said Handforth. "They knew jolly well that we couldn't set the Minor right ourselves. And they've thrown all the petrol away, too. The miserable cads! I'll bet when they were at school they were just like Forrest and Gore-Pearce and their crowd at St. Frank's!"

HOWEVER, Handforth and his companions were not destined to be stranded for long.

Within five minutes a super-coach came along, and, luckily, it was filled with the St. Frank's crowd. They were on their sight-seeing tour, and it was fortunate that they should come along this road at such a time.

"Great Scott!" sang out Church, standing up in his excitement. "There's been an accident up the road, there! Lock! There's a car on its side!"

"Isn't that Handy standing next to it?" asked Nipper.

"By Jove! So it is!" yelled McClure. "It's Handy's Morris Minor! I hope he isn't hurt!"

"He seems to be all right—and so does the girl," said Skeets. "Whoa, driver! You'd better pull up here for a bit!"

The driver was already slowing down, and, as soon as the coach stopped, the St. Frank's fellows poured out of her in a flood and surrounded Handforth and Joy Bell.

"Thank goodness you chaps have come!" said Handforth breathlessly. "By George! I've never been more pleased to see you!"

"But what's happened?" asked Church. "How did you overturn like this?"

"Don't be a hopeless ass!" retorted Handforth. "I didn't overturn!"

"But there's been an accident, hasn't there?"

"Of course not!" said Handforth. "There might have been one—and it would have been my fault, too. But that's not the point."

Indignantly he described exactly what had happened, and the juniors listened with growing heat.

"Of course, you were wrong to be on the off-side of the road," said Nipper at length. "But that didn't justify these fools in what they did. It was a dirty trick!"

"And that's not all!" went on Handforth eagerly. "They're those people Clarence Popkiss was telling us about. The Bright Young People who are staying at the Imperial!"

"The crowd that's going to give that amateur revue to-night?" asked Parkington.

"Yes."

"Oh-ho! Then the genial Clarence was just about right," said K. K. "He told us that those Bright Young People were no good."

"I never saw a mouldier crowd!" declared Handforth.

Nipper was looking serious.

"I don't know what you other fellows think, but it seems to me that the Remove has been insulted. And it's up to the Remove to wipe out the stain."

"Hear, hear!"

"That's just what I think!" shouted Handforth excitedly. "We're not going to let those bounders get away with this, are we?"

"No fear!"

"Never!"

There were plenty of ready helpers, and the Morris Minor was soon set upon its wheels again. Handforth, hurrying round, made an anxious inspection. The damage was not very serious; a few dents in the wings, a slight buckling of the front bumper and a broken window.

"My idea is for us to square this thing ourselves," said Handforth at last. "You haven't forgotten that wheeze of mine, have you?"

"I'm thinking about it now," replied Nipper, nodding. "Handy, we'll do it!"

"You mean that?" gasped Handforth.

"Rather! Don't you see, old man, that we've got full justification now?" said Nipper briskly. "It'll serve these Bright Young People right if we dish their revue. They've asked for trouble—and they'll get it!"

THE sight-seeing tour was forgotten.

Handforth bundled Joy into his Morris Minor again, and drove back into Hovetown. The coach turned, and the St. Frank's fellows went back into Hovetown, too.



As the last of the Bright Young People passed into the barn, Clarence closed the door and barred it. "It's worked, you chaps!" he yelled triumphantly, to the St. Frank's fellows.

Archie Glenthorne was acquainted with the facts, and he dashed off to the nearest telephone and got into touch with Bellamy Court. Luckily enough, he was able to talk with the Hon. Clarence Popkiss at once—and the Hon. Clarence promised to dash over.

He was in Hovetown within half an hour, and he listened in a dazed sort of way as the scheme was outlined to him.

"By gad!" he ejaculated, when he had heard all. "I can't help saying it, old chappies—by gad!"

"What do you think of the wheeze?" asked Handforth.

"As a matter of fact, old thing, the onion is slightly dizzy," replied the Hon. Clarence. "But if you want to know what I absolutely think, I regard the whole scheme as a stroke of genius."

"Good for you, Clarence," grinned Handforth.

"I mean, it's perfect!" said the Hon. Clarence dreamily. "A real revue instead of that frightful amateur hotch-potch! And a perfect dishing in the eye for those blighters. Of course, my aunt Hilda might cut up rough about it, but who cares?"

"We want to talk to you about your Aunt Hilda—and about other things, too, laddie," said Archie firmly. "You needn't think that we got you over here just to tell you all this. A few details are indicated."

"Details?"

"Absolutely!" said Archie. "We want to know where this show is to be given—how it is to be given—what the arrangements are, and so forth, and such like. In a nutshell, spill a few mouthfuls!"

The Hon. Clarence was able to give the plotters a good deal of vitally necessary information. Thus they were made familiar with all the inner details of the arrangements for the big function. And they were able to make their own plans with precision.

At lunch-time Handforth—who regarded himself as the master of the ceremonies—put it to "the crowd."

The whole "Hallo, Jazz!" company had turned up for luncheon, even including Mr. Wilcox. He had got back from London in a depressed frame of mind—as the other members of the company saw at the first glance.

"Nothing doing," he said bluntly. "The London offices are closed, and it seems that the man who was backing our show has bolted with Shand. We're just as much stranded as ever."

"Good!" said Handforth, grinning.

"What do you mean—'Good'?" asked Mr. Wilcox.

"Well, I didn't want you to fix anything up in London," replied Handforth frankly. "I've got a scheme of my own. We St. Frank's chaps want to help you people all we can—and there's just a chance that we'll be able to do it to-night. I want everybody here—every member of the 'Hallo, Jazz!' company—to be ready at a certain fixed hour."

"Ready for what?" asked the mystified Mr. Wilcox.

"Ready dressed for your parts—ready to go right on the stage," replied Handforth. "You don't know it yet, but you're going to give your show to-night. And you're going to give it at Bellamy Court, the home of Sir George and Lady Marley. They've got everything ready there—a stage, temporary dressing-rooms, and everything you can think of."

"What on earth——"

"What's more, two or three big West End managers will be in the audience!" said Handforth impressively. "And if you give your show with all its usual vim and pep, it's a cert that these West End managers will spot you and sign you up."

And Handforth proceeded to explain to the excited, mystified company exactly what was in the wind. They were staggered at

first—and then dubious—and, finally, excited.

"I'll take all the responsibility," promised Handforth. "If there's any trouble over this, I'll take the blame—at least, we St. Frank's chaps will."

"Hear, hear!" chorused the others. "We'll back you up, Handy!"

"It's a chance in a thousand for you people to be seen by these big managers," continued Handforth. "Now, we don't want any arguments. You're just going to do as we say. Leave all the arrangements to us! All you've got to do is to give your show at the right time."

COMING NEXT WEDNESDAY



And the "Hallo, Jazz!" company, feeling rather weak, gave in.

CHAPTER 9.

The Trap!

THE Hon. Clarence Popkiss beamed. "That's all fixed, then, what?" he asked genially. "Here's a fiver for each of you, and you'll do exactly what I've told you?"

The two men in front of him touched their caps.

"That'll be all right, Mr. Popkiss, sir," said one of them.

"You know the place, don't you—just against the big elm near the bend," said the Hon. Clarence. "And don't forget the

time, either. We shall be relying upon you, lads."

"We'll be there on time, sir," promised the men.

They departed, and the Hon. Clarence beamed again. He was somewhere at the rear of Bellamy Court, and the men he had been speaking to were two of Sir George Marley's employees. An extensive farm was run by Sir George, and one of the men to whom Clarence had been speaking was the driver of a farm lorry.

Clarence went by a roundabout route to the quiet country lane which led from Bellamy Court through Little Hocklewell-in-the-Wold to the main road. It was a very quiet

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lane, and traffic upon it was infrequent.

At the bend, near the big elm, he came across Handforth and Nipper and Skeets and several other St. Frank's fellows. They were all perspiring, and they had evidently been working hard.

"How's everything?" asked Handforth eagerly.

"All fixed, laddie,—all fixed," replied the Hon. Clarence, with joy in his voice. "As far as I can see, this affair will go forward without the slightest hitch. Archie, old thing, my meeting you to-day was more priceless than I first imagined. This is going to be a big night. Whoopce!"

"Absolutely!" agreed Archie stoutly.

The Hon. Clarence strolled along the lane a short distance, and surveyed the handiwork which the St. Frank's fellows had been busy on. He was frankly astonished.

"But this is positively gorgeous-cum-terrific!" he ejaculated, awed. "I mean to say, so priceless lifelike!"

"Well, it was a bit of trouble, but I fancy the dodge will work," grinned Nipper. "Fortunately, those amateurs won't come along until after dark, and I doubt if they will suspect any trickery."

The Hon. Clarence was impressed.

"I shall have to come along to St. Frank's one of these days," he said firmly. "I mean, the place is absolutely a home of genius!"

THE Bright Young People were ready.

Dressed in their stage costumes, with coats and wraps flung round them, they were piling into the special luxury coach which had been hired to take them from Hovetown to Bellamy Court.

It was evening, and darkness was falling. "All aboard for the big show!" yelled one of the young men in the coach. "We're going to knock spots off every London show that was ever produced! We'll show 'em something to-night!"

"Something they won't forget for years!" declared one of the others.

The Bright Young People, at all events, were confident of the success of their show. Clarence, who had been present at one of the rehearsals, knew perfectly well that the show was too awful for words.

The coach drove off. Hovetown was quickly left behind, and soon it was bowling through the country. By the time sleepy little Hocklewell-in-the-Wold was reached and passed, darkness had completely descended.

Turning a bend in the narrow country lane, the driver of the coach suddenly applied his brakes. A few yards ahead was a man waving a red lantern. The lane was completely blocked by a big, clumsy vehicle which was sprawled broadside.

A chorus of indignant shouts went up from the occupants of the coach.

"I say, this is a beastly nuisance!" complained one of the fellows in an affected voice.

Anxious and alarmed, the Bright Young People swarmed out into the roadway. They could now see that the obstruction ahead was a ramshackle lorry. One wheel was off, and the lorry was sprawled right across the lane. To pass it was impossible. The amateur actors and actresses surged towards the two men who were standing beside the lorry.

"What's the idea of having this beastly chunk of old iron across the road?" indignantly demanded one of the young men who answered to the name of Squiggles. "You'll have to remove it, my man—and quickly. We've got an important engagement—"

"Sorry, sir, but I can't help that," answered the man who had been waving the lantern. "It's not my fault the blinking wheel came off. Still, we shall only be about twenty minutes—"

"Twenty minutes!" squeaked Squiggles. "Rot! You'll have to remove the lorry before that, or there'll be trouble!"

At that moment a figure came running up. It turned out to be the Hon. Clarence Popkiss, and he was rather breathless.

"I say, you know, this is a bit of off-side, what?" he ejaculated. "We've been expecting you people!"

"You'd better dash back and tell Lady Marley that we'll be late," said Squiggles.

"Can't we walk?" suggested one of the others.

"But, dash it, it's over a mile!" protested one of the girls. "We're wearing our dancing shoes, and they'll be ruined!"

"I'll tell you what," said the Hon. Clarence brightly. "How about popping into the jolly little inn, just round the bend? They'll make you comfortable for ten minutes, and by that time this lorry will be out of the way."

"Inn?" said Squiggles, staring. "There's no inn in this lane."

"Oh, but I mean to say, I ought to know," protested Clarence. "I dare say you've missed seeing it. It stands back a bit. Come along, everybody!"

Everybody went, Clarence's idea seeming a good one. If they had to wait, it was far better to wait in the inn. They could get a drink there, too, and Clarence could go along to Bellamy Court and explain the cause of the delay.

Clarence's heart was beating rapidly as he walked along the lane. Everything was working beautifully.

But the big test was to come.

At the bend he turned into what looked like the gateway of a meadow, although it was so gloomy that it was difficult to see clearly. But something was very clear, and that was a bulky building close by, with a hospitable-looking door, over which hung a softly-shaded light. And over the light was an inn sign—the White Hart—swinging gently in the evening breeze.

"Well, I'm dashed!" said Squiggles. "I never knew there was an inn here! We must have passed it dozens of times, too!"

"This way," said Clarence eagerly.

He passed through the rustic porch, opened a door, and stood aside. The Bright Young People, walking in, found themselves in semi-darkness. An old-fashioned lantern was burning against a rough-looking wall, some distance away. They plunged in wonderingly, but as yet unsuspecting.

After all, many of these country inns were very dim inside until one turned into a parlour or a tap-room. Nothing had happened, so far, to make the victims suspect that trickery was afoot.

The Hon. Clarence gave a gulp of relief as the last of the crowd passed into the big doorway. Then with a little yelp, he grabbed at the door and swung it to.

"All serene!" he yelled. "Whoopee, lads!"

Bang-bang!

Two bolts were shot home, and at the same moment Handforth and Nipper and a crowd of other St. Frank's fellows appeared from the surrounding darkness.

CHAPTER 10.

Good Old Handy!

"BY George! It's worked!" gurgled Handforth delightedly.

"Like a dream, old cheese!" said Clarence.

A confused noise was sounding inside the "inn" now, and the Bright Young People were shouting angrily.

"Shout away!" roared Handforth. "You won't get out of here until we let you out—we've got two or three men on the job to keep guard!"

"What are you up to, you young fools?" came Squiggles's furious voice. "What's the game?"

"Revenge is sweet!" shouted Handforth, with a chuckle. "You tipped my Morris Minor over, and you emptied all the petrol out. Now you can see what it's like to be stranded! If you give your show at Bellamy Court to-night, it'll be a miracle!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The other St. Frank's fellows roared with laughter, and the noise within the "inn" increased.

Not that this was likely to help the victims. They had no chance of getting out. For the inn wasn't an inn at all—but a substantially built barn!

The thing had been worked very cunningly. During the early part of the evening the St. Frank's fellows had got busy, and they had easily contrived a rustic-looking porchway over the barn door. The inn sign, borrowed for the occasion, had been just as easily fixed up, together with the hospitable-looking light.

In the darkness the Bright Young People had had no reason to suspect anything; the place looked exactly like an old-fashioned inn—for, of course, they had only seen the doorway, with its light and its sign.

And now they were hopelessly imprisoned. The door had been provided with special bolts, and there wasn't a window in the place.

By this time, too, the lorry had been repaired. As a matter of fact, the back axle had been jacked up all ready, and it had been merely the work of three minutes for the men to slip the wheel on and to tighten the nuts.

"Everything's all serene now," said Clarence happily. "Come on, you lads! I've fixed it up with Aunt Hilda, and I've told her that I'm bringing some pals of my own. We're going to see the show!"

"And the Bright Young People—can be as bright as they like in this barn!" grinned Handforth. "Let's hope it'll be a lesson to 'em!"

(Continued on page 40.)

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ST. FRANK'S BY THE BRINY!

(Continued from page 38.)

MEANWHILE, the rest of the plot was working just as smoothly.

The "Hallo, Jazz!" Revue Co., in another luxury coach, arrived at Bellamy Court dead on time.

And as they were all dressed in their stage costumes, wearing their make-ups, nobody suspected anything. The professionals were accepted as the amateurs.

It might not have been so easy had the young society people arranged to present themselves at Bellamy Court itself. But this amateur revue was to be given in a huge marquee, out in the grounds, and it had been planned that the "company" should drive straight up to the stage-door, at the back of the marquee. They were to give their show, and then mix with the house-party later, at the end of the performance.

Thus the dodgo was easily wangled.

The coach drove up, the "Hallo, Jazz!" company marched boldly into the marquee, and took possession of the temporary dressing-rooms which had been fixed up behind the stage.

Mr. Wilcox himself had arranged for an orchestra—he had hired one, in fact. It was only a small orchestra, but it would suffice. And it was provided with all the necessary music, and had had one or two hasty rehearsals.

Just before the curtain was due to rise, and while the orchestra was playing merrily, the Hon Clarence turned up with the whole crowd of St. Frank's fellows.

All the lights in the auditorium suddenly snapped out, and the curtain rose to reveal the chorus—young, fresh, graceful, and full of tremendous enthusiasm.

Members of the distinguished audience rubbed their eyes after the first few minutes. The girls were dancing superbly, and there was a finished quality about their work which made everybody sit up.

"Remarkable! Quite remarkable!" murmured Lady Marley, turning to her husband. "I would never have believed, George, that those young girls could dance so cleverly after only a week or two's rehearsal."

"It's a funny thing," growled Sir George, who was a big, bluff man, "but I can't spot Cynthia, or Beryl, either. I thought you told me they were in the chorus?"

"So they are," replied Lady Marley. "Dear me! I don't recognise them, either!"

A stir was passing through the audience by now. A great many people knew the performers intimately—at least, they knew the Bright Young People. But as the revue proceeded they were bewildered by the fact that everybody on the stage was strange.

However, the whole show was so good that there was no thought of interruption. People simply remained puzzled. And their enthusiasm for the revue increased as the time went on.

There was no interval—this had been deliberately cut out so that there could be no

inquiries midway. From start to finish, the show went with a fizz and a bang.

It really was a brilliant show, too. The performers, from the chorus-girls to the principals, were working as they had never worked before.

Handforth sat spellbound in his chair when Joy Bell came on and did her speciality dance. She was even better than he had dared to hope. She was the embodiment of grace and beauty and daintiness. Her dance was given the greatest applause of the evening. She was a huge success.

Exactly how it got out, nobody could tell; but before the end of the show the audience knew that this was the wrong company!

It went round from seat to seat, and from row to row. These were not the amateurs! In all probability the Hon. Clarence had passed some incautious remark. But it didn't really matter.

Before the curtain went down Lady Marley and her guests knew that the performance was being given by the stranded "Hallo, Jazz!" Company. Everybody in the district knew of the company's misfortunes, for the facts had been reported in the local papers.

It was towards the end that the Bright Young People turned up. They came bursting in, furious, weary and dishevelled. And they were considerably startled when they were hushed into silence.

IT was a feather in Handforth's cap that things turned out almost exactly as he had predicted.

The West End managers were enthusiastic about many members of the company. They did not actually fight amongst themselves as to who should engage Joy Bell—as Handforth had said—but one of them was smart enough to get into touch with Mr. Wilcox at the first possible moment after the curtain had fallen, and he promptly booked the whole company to appear in one of his forthcoming productions at a West End theatre.

The actors and actresses, of course, could hardly express their gratitude to the boys for the way they had helped them. Joy Bell was particularly grateful, and Handforth was the happiest fellow alive when, in her exuberance, she kissed him as a token of her appreciation!

Lady Marley sportingly forgave the St. Frank's plotters when she heard the whole story, and the Bright Young People, instead of receiving the sympathy they expected, became the laugh of the evening—as the butt of the schoolboys' joke.

Needless to say, they were a very subdued crowd now. They had learned their lesson—thanks to Handforth!

THE END.

(Double-length St. Frank's yarn next week, lads. Entitled: "By Submarine to the Pole." And it's the first of an amazing new series in which the schoolboys once again visit Northestria, where many stirring adventures await them. Order your copy in advance!)

BETWEEN OURSELVES



Edwy Searles Brooks, popular author of the St. Frank's stories, chats with readers of the "Nelson Lee."

NEXT week the Old Paper will really and truly be back in its old form, with the St. Frank's yarn longer than it has ever been before. The Editor and I are determined to go one better than ever in the past. And as a smashing start we're going to give you a school-adventure series of the sort you have always relished.

* * *

Lord Dorrimore, whom you all know as a genial sportsman, is determined to be the first to reach the Pole by submarine, and in the next yarn you will read all about this daring dash. The submarine doesn't actually get to the Pole, but it gets to a far more interesting place. I wonder how many of you remember a quaint "waistcoat pocket" country called Northestia, tucked away in the Polar regions, hidden by mountain barriers and eternal blizzards and mists? The St. Frank's fellows discovered this amazing little country in a former adventure series, and they had some exciting times.

* * *

For Northestia is a land where everything is back in the Middle Ages; feudal castles, brutal overlords, serfs and men-at-arms; armour, chain-mail, and desperate tournaments! Lord Dorrimore thought it would be a stunning idea to go back to that romantic spot, where time has stood still for ten centuries. And it wouldn't be like the one and only Dorrie to make such a trip without taking "the old crowd." So next week they're off!

* * *

And while we're talking about the Old Paper getting back into its former stride, we're going to revive another popular feature on this page. Every week we used to publish a reader's photograph. So I'm now inviting you to send in your photos for this purpose. Address them to me: Edwy Searles Brooks, C/o THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY, The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4.

* * *

A timely word about these photographs. It's no good sending blurry snapshots, of the kind which are turned out by enthusiastic

amateurs in the summer-time. You know the sort I mean—snapshots with a shadow in the left-hand corner, a mysterious blob in the centre, and with you half in shadow and half out, displaying a fine pair of tennis shoes but very little face—the latter unrecognisable even by your own mother.

What I want you to send me are clear-cut studio portraits—or, failing these, good, well-defined portrait-snapshots, in which the face is outstanding. It doesn't matter a bit if you are grinning like a Cheshire cat—all the better. So get busy, and send your "dials" along to me. And within a few weeks we'll commence publishing readers' photographs as a regular thing.

It'll be a good idea for you to send a chatty letter of general interest at the same time, and I'll make a point of dealing with your remarks at our "Round Table" every week, with you looking on, so to speak. I'll try to interest all the others at the "Round Table" in what we've got to say to each other—and this means I shall probably publish extracts from your letters.

Now, the above doesn't apply only to boys. Girls are just as welcome to send their photographs for publication. So are adults—fathers and mothers and uncles and aunts. Even grandfathers and grandmothers if it comes to that. I've had heaps of letters from readers of over seventy, and, if anything, they are more enthusiastic than the youngsters! For if one thing has been impressed upon me more than anything else during the years I have been writing the St. Frank's stories, it is that our readers embrace people of all ages, all walks in life, all classes, and both sexes. People may look upon this as a boys' paper—which, of course, it is—but its appeal is really general.

Edwy Searles Brooks

The VALLEY of HOT SPRINGS



ing in honour bound to support the boy.

"Will you kindly only speak when you're spoken to, Danny?" the professor growled irritably. "The question is, what are we to do now? We have taken six lives. We've already had, earlier to-day, an example of the passions we have aroused. Now we shall have all the people of the valley against us, and the scientific investigations I wished to make will be seriously hampered, if not rendered impossible."

He turned to the girl, whose hand Eric was still holding, and began to speak to her in the tongue of the Skrellings.

"What do you advise, O Daughter of the Sun, who have befriended us?"

"Let the Angekok go down to the Great Assembly Stone, and standing there, summon the guard. Then do you, O white man, who know our tongue, tell them what has befallen Imatuk because of his treachery. Tell them that the Angekok has appointed you captain of the guard. Then bring them here and let them see the men whom the Angekok has struck with the lightning of his wrath."

"This young lady advises us to take a bold line," the professor interrupted, turning to his companions. "It has its elements of risk, but I frankly see no other course open to us. We must either make

The Professor's New Rôle

"I WAS only making an example of the men—just to show the people here that we're standing no nonsense from them," explained Jackson. "And, anyway, if I hadn't done it, Eric would."

The professor turned a pair of astonished eyes towards his young nephew.

"They were torturing her," the boy exclaimed. "You didn't see, uncle. If you had you would have felt just the same."

"Yes, you ain't just a harmless little lamb, guv'nor, when you're put out!" Danny interrupted, evidently feel-

**A Game of Bluff—
and the penalty of one false move
is death for Eric and his com-
panions!**

ourselves masters here or go under, and that would mean a loss to the world of scientific material of the highest importance. You must assume the dress of your office, Jackson, and come with us at once."

Returning to the Angekok's apartment, the sacred symbols were brought from their hiding-place. While Jackson was dressing, the professor changed into a suit of chain-mail armour and grabbed hold of a battle-axe. As the new captain of the guard, he explained to Eric, this was essential. Then they all set out.

Jackson walked briskly at first, but once they were outside in the open air his pace dropped to a slow stately progress. As they drew clear of the temple and began to pass across the open space beyond, not a living soul was visible. Eric, walking by his uncle's side, questioned him in an undertone as to their plans.

"Jackson takes his position on the Assembly Stone. That is the signal for the guards to form about the Angekok and for the people to assemble. The Assembly Stone is the taller of those two rocks standing by the side of the central geyser."

Eric recognised the rock as one of the two which he and Danny had used as cover. Nothing could be heard except the splashing of water as they approached their objective. A silence like death seemed to brood over the clustered dwellings of the people of the Valley. They reached the rock at last. Now they could see that stone steps had been cut in it which led to the top.

"What do I do now, professor?" Jackson inquired.

"You go to the top of the rock and you stand there and raise your arms above your head. The rest you will leave to me."

The little procession climbed the steps. As they came out on the summit Eric looked across the valley without glimpsing one living soul. Inwardly, he reflected, that standing there they made an excellent target for any hidden foes. Meanwhile, prompted by the professor, Jackson, holding himself very erect, raised both arms above his head.

Instantly, where before there had been a lifeless stillness, the open space beneath them began to fill with golden mail-clad

figures, who came charging across the turf with their spears at the present.

"Gee, Mr. Eric, this puts the wind up me!" Danny whispered in a hoarse voice.

Eric's feelings were very much the same. The armed men were rushing straight towards the rock on which they were standing. Another moment and they would be surrounded.

A Dangerous Situation!

FROM every point of the compass the guards were bearing down upon the Assembly Stone, waving their spears and gesticulating as they ran. To Eric it seemed absolutely certain that he and his companions had walked into a trap from which there was no escape.

The comparative ease with which they had reached the Valley of Hot Springs, carried things with a high hand, rid themselves of the Angekok, and assumed the authority for themselves, had inspired them with a dangerous self-confidence. Now they were going to reap the consequences. Was it possible that these men, armed and disciplined, would tamely submit to the rule of the white strangers from beyond the sea? In their place, Eric was confident he wouldn't have done so.

The boy was telling himself all this, and wondering if there were any chance of cutting their way through that enclosing circle and reaching the temple again when, as if at a given signal, the guards halted. They stiffened to attention and then, raising their spears high in the air, gave vent in unison to a curious cry. The next moment they were standing motionless.

"Gosh, Mr. Eric, but I believe they've bitten it!" Danny exclaimed in relief.

And now there was another sound. Across that open space, about the centre of the geyser, hundreds of fur-clad figures were streaming—men, women and children. In ten minutes they had made a compact mass about the circle of guards.

"This is where you'd better say your piece, professor," Jackson muttered.

The professor glared at him a moment as if resenting that hint, gave a tug at his

(Continued on next page.)

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. They make an enemy of Imatuk, captain of the guard, and Eric and Jackson find him torturing a girl whom they have befriended. A fight results, in which Imatuk and a number of other guards are killed. The professor is angry, for, he points out, this may arouse the People of the Valley against them.

(Now read on.)

beard, cleared his throat, and then began to speak. Eric found himself looking down upon a sea of upturned faces, all eagerly listening to what that booming voice was saying.

"The gov'nor's got 'em groggy," Danny whispered with a chuckle. "They ain't used to him. To listen to him spilling the stuff like that is something new to them; but he won't have to do it too often or there'll be a revolution!"

In twenty minutes the professor had completed his address.

"Raise your right hand!" he exclaimed in an undertone to Jackson. "That is the signal of dismissal."

With a slow, dignified gesture Jackson did as he was bid. Instantly the outer circle of fur-clad figures broke and disappeared, leaving only the guards.

"We will now descend from the rock," the professor remarked. "I have assumed the captaincy of the guard, and after the incidents of to-day I think it necessary to give them a lesson. Remember, Jackson, I disapprove of this bloodthirsty violence of yours, but the mischief is done now, and in our own interests we must make what use we can of what has happened."

Descending from the rock, Jackson, flanked on either side by stalwart figures in golden mail, led the procession across the plain, the professor following immediately

behind. Eric, glancing at his uncle, saw by the way he plucked at his beard that he was suffering from some mental disturbance. Presently he heard him whisper to Danny.

"You were a soldier in the Great War, Danny. I find myself in the position, somewhat humiliating to me, of having to draw upon your experiences. You will have the goodness to relate briefly to me the words of command necessary to halt these men and face them, fronting the entrance to our apartments."

"Well, you gives 'em the cautionary word first, gov'nor. Company, or guards, or guys, or anything you fancy. Then having got that off your chest you pauses a moment and let's rip with the word 'Halt.' As they don't seem to know how to form fours, but run around in file, all you've got to do is to tell 'em to 'fight turn.'"

When it came to putting this information into practice the professor behaved himself very efficiently. Marching down the ranks he selected every tenth man, formed them into single file and led them into that room where their companions lay dead.

What would be the effect? Would the guard take the death of their comrades quietly, or would they assume the offensive and mutiny?

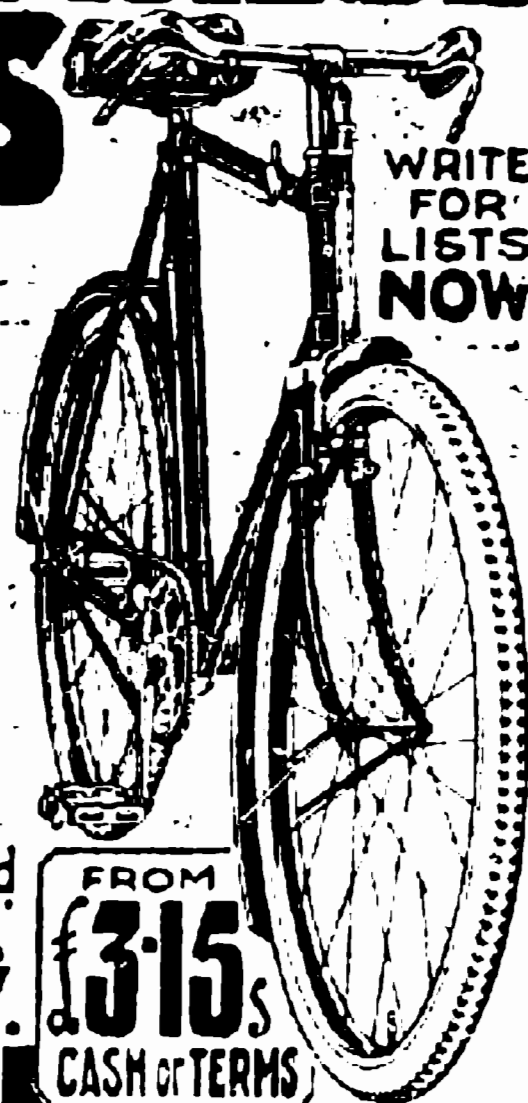
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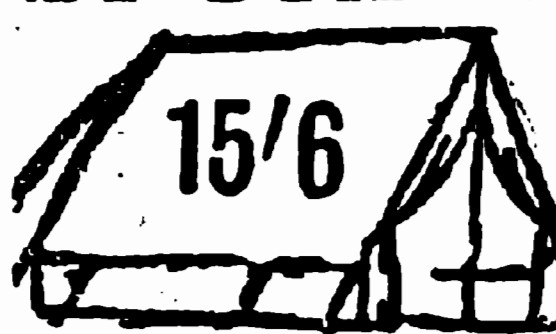
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