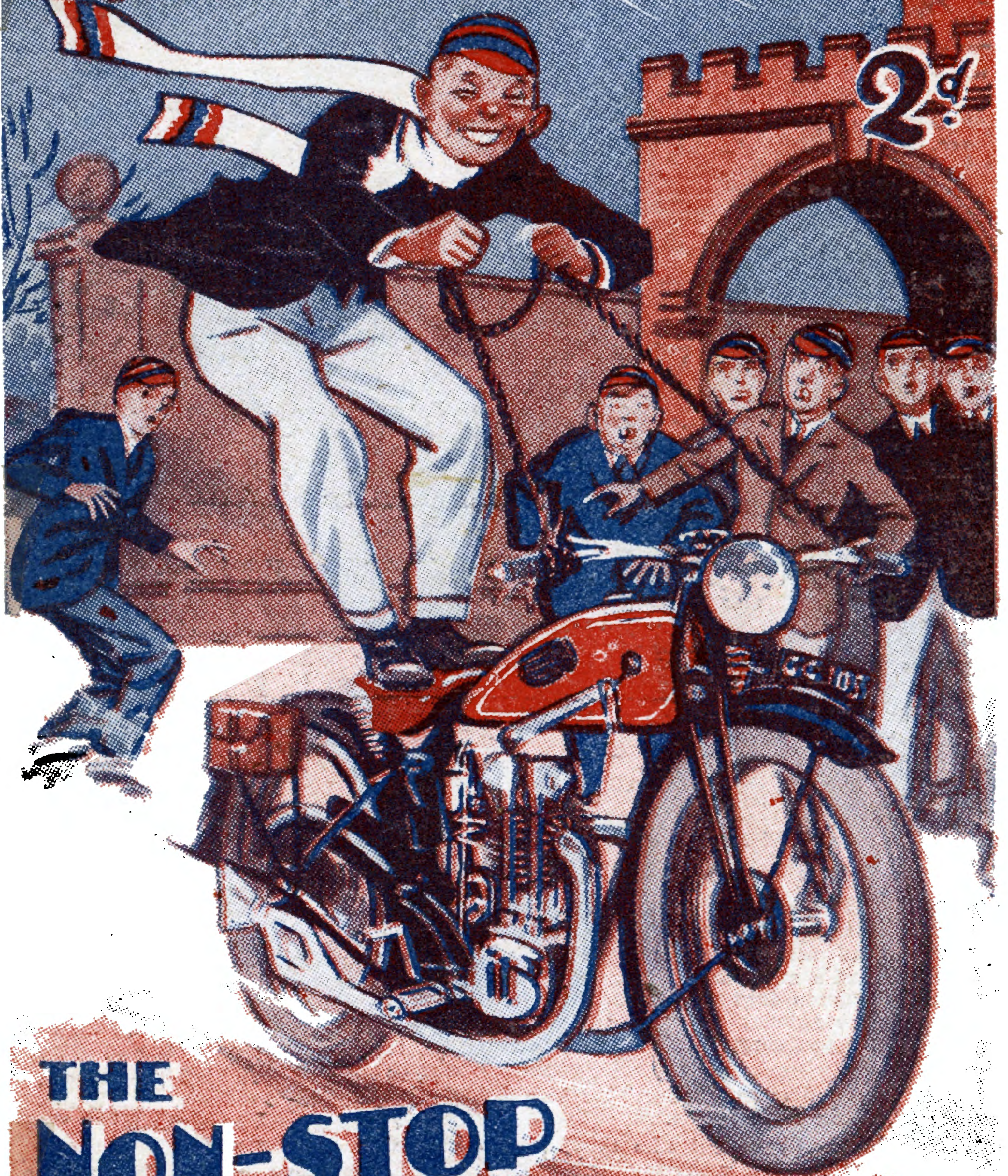


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New Series No. 55.

OUT ON WEDNESDAY.

February 7th 1931.

The FIGHTING



CHAPTER 1.

Trouble in the Third:

“**H**I! Wait a minute!” Chubby Heath, of the Third, raced across the Triangle of St. Frank’s and halted, breathless, in front of the dozen fags who were about to go through the gates.

“Where are you chaps off to?” demanded Chubby.

“That any business of yours?” retorted Fullerton, of the East House.

“You chaps can’t go out like this,” said Chubby angrily. “It’s a half-holiday, and you know jolly well that Willy has arranged footer practice. Everything is fixed up with Mr. Freeman—”

“What do I care?” broke in Fullerton. “Who does Handforth minor think he is, anyhow? A dictator, or a little tin god, or

something? I’m not going to obey his orders—neither are these other chaps!”

“Not likely!” chorused Fullerton’s companions.

“Willy is your Form captain, and when he puts your names down for footer practice you’re not supposed to cut it,” said Chubby Heath warmly. “You’re getting too slack, Fullerton, and you’re influencing these other chaps, too.”

“The more I can influence them, the better,” retorted Fullerton. “We’re just about fed up with Handforth minor and his high and mighty ways!”

Chubby breathed hard. He was one of Willy’s staunchest chums, and he was tempted to punch Fullerton on the nose. But the present of the other fags made

him pause. They were Fullerton’s own gang, and Chubby had no wish to be used as a broom to wipe up the Triangle.

St. Frank’s Fags To The Fore.

SHOCKS for the school from
the **LIVE-WIRE** new boy!

—Featuring the Cheery Chums of St. Frank's.

FAGS!

By

EDWY
SEARLES BROOKS



"You'd better think twice before you defy Willy," he said darkly. "You know what Willy is, once he gets on the warpath. You chaps have been slacking too much since the playing-fields were reopened. You're down for practice this afternoon—"

"We'd much rather go to the pictures in Bannington," interrupted Fullerton coolly. "Blow footer! We're calling at the village tuck-shop first, then we're going on to the Talkies. Handforth minor can eat coke!"

Fullerton wheeled his bicycle out into the roadway and mounted. Ryder, Hook, Parry minor, Dale, Conroy minus and the others followed suit. Chubby Heath glared after them.

"You'd better look out for yourselves when you come back!" he bawled. "Willy will slaughter you for this!"

He wasn't altogether surprised. George Fullerton, the burliest boy in the Third—he was old enough to be in the Remove—had shown signs of rebellion for some time, ever since the recent barring-out, in fact.

The Third had taken part in that exciting episode, and apparently rebellion had got into Fullerton's blood. He wasn't settling down to the normal school life, as the others were. For St. Frank's was "as you were" now, with all the masters back in their jobs. The great blizzard, which had resulted in St. Frank's being completely snowed up and cut off from the rest of the world, was a memory. Or nearly a memory, for there were still floods in the district to remind the fellows of those exciting days.

Chubby Heath thrust his hands into his trousers pockets and wandered off towards

Little Side. Willy Handforth was there, chatting with Wally Freeman, the St. Frank's football coach.

"Hallo, Chubby!" said Willy. "Seen anything of Useless and his crowd?"

"If you mean Fullerton, he's gone out to the pictures," said Chubby bluntly. "Nearly a dozen others with him."

Wally Freeman shook his head.

"I thought you were going to have trouble with those boys," he remarked. "They're not as keen as they should be."

"Leave this to me, Mr. Freeman," said Willy grimly. "So they've gone out to the pictures, have they? How long ago?"

"Not three minutes, and they went on their bikes," said Chubby. "Fullerton said they were going to call at the tuck-shop in the village first."

"That gives me a chance to overtake them," cut in Willy. "I'll show 'em whether they're going to the pictures or not. I'll slaughter the whole giddy crowd. I'll take 'em on single-handed!"

Willy was not boasting, either. He was a young firebrand in his own way, and he ruled the Third with a rod of iron. Slackers and mutineers were dealt with drastically.

Ever since the barring-out he had been having trouble with Fullerton and those other East House fags. They weren't settling down; they regarded footer practice as a nuisance; they regarded Willy himself as a bigger nuisance. Well, this sort of thing was going to stop.

Willy seethed with indignation as he ran across towards the school. He knew what the Third-Formers were. Give them an inch and they would take a mile. The slightest indication of weakness on his part and the Third would be split into two camps immediately.

"Hallo, Willy, my son, what's the hurry?" asked Edward Oswald Handforth, of the Remove, as his minor was about to pass him. "Is there a fight on somewhere?"

"There will be!" retorted Willy briefly.

"By George! I'm in it, then!" said Handforth eagerly. "Back up, Remove!"

"Don't be a potty ass!" said Willy. "This isn't a Remove scrap, and you can keep out of it, Ted. I'm only going to round up Fullerton and a crowd of other fags who have cut footer practice."

His major, who was always spoiling for a fight, halted in his tracks, red with indignation.

"Why, you young spoofer!" he snorted. "You said there was a scrap on. You don't think I'm interested in you fags, do you?"

Willy took no notice. He raced for his bicycle, mounted, and tore down the lane at top speed. There was something very determined in the set of his jaw. If he had to follow those fags all the way to Bannington and drag them out of the picture theatre, he would do so. But he remembered Chubby's reference to the tuck-shop,

and he was hoping that he would overtake the delinquents in the village.

It was really the first time for many months that Fullerton had openly defied him, so the matter had to be faced squarely. As Willy free-wheeled down a dip he even removed his hands from the bars and rubbed his knuckles with anticipation.

He turned a bend, caught his breath in quickly and grabbed for the handlebars. His bell tinkled warningly. A little child of about five was on the point of running across the road, and sensibly she paused as she heard that warning tinkle. Willy, who had applied the brakes, half-released them. But at that moment the little girl either lost her head or thought she could get across in time. After a moment of hesitation she ran on again.

"Hi!" shouted Willy. "Look out!"

He gripped his brake-handles so hard that his knuckles went white. He swerved. And, as so often happens in such cases, the little girl saw her peril and hesitated again. Willy, instead of swerving clear, rode full tilt at the child.

Admittedly, he had been riding recklessly, but his presence of mind now saved a bad accident. The child was completely panic-stricken, and stood motionless. Willy swerved again at the last second, and although his front wheel missed her, the near-side pedal caught her frock and flung her to the roadway. Willy's equilibrium was also destroyed and the bicycle crashed over.

"Well, I'm jiggered!" ejaculated Willy, staggering to his feet.

He had felt certain that he had steered clear of the little girl, and he was deeply concerned to see her lying full length in the roadway. He dashed to her, picked her up in his arms, and gave her a quick look. She did not appear to be hurt.

"It's all right, kiddie!" panted Willy. "Why didn't you keep on running?"

"I—I was frightened!" whispered the child with a sob.

"That's all right—no need to cry," said Willy hastily. "Be a brave little kid. That's right. We don't want any tears, do we?"

The little girl managed to smile, her terror dissipated by Willy's boisterous, gentle manner. He glanced round and moved towards a gate near by. He knew who this little girl was—Millie White. Mrs. White, who lived in the old thatched cottage, had several youngsters.

"Not hurt, are you?" asked Willy, as he looked down at the infant.

"I—I don't think so," she whispered. "Mummy will be awful cross. I wasn't s'posed to be out, but I was trying to find our kitten."

"Mummy won't be cross—don't you worry," said Willy, as he went through the little rustic porch.

The front door stood half-open, and Willy entered the prim little parlour.

"Mrs. White!" he sang out.

"Bless my life!" ejaculated a portly woman of about thirty-five, appearing from another room. "What's wrong? What's happened to Millie?"

"It's nothing—she ran in front of my bike, and she was knocked over," said Willy. "But she's not hurt—not even scratched. Don't be alarmed, Mrs. White."

The mother fairly flew across the room and clutched at her child.

"I'm allus sayin' that you schoolboys come round the bend too recklessly," she said with some heat. "There, there, Millie! Tell mother where you're hurt."

"But I ain't hurt anywhere, mummy," said Millie. "It's only my pinafore that's a bit torn."

Willy's one desire, now that he knew the little girl was uninjured, was to escape, but he couldn't very well leave until he had given some sort of brief explanation. Two other children had tumbled in from the kitchen by now—a little boy of about six, and another girl of four. Willy could not help looking at them with some curiosity. For their faces, especially in the region of the neck, were considerably swollen, and they looked rather comical.

"It wasn't my fault, ma'am—really," said Willy. "I rang my bell, but Millie hesitated half-way across the road—and that upset things a bit. Anyhow, I pulled up—"

"Haven't I always told you, child, not to run across the road when bicycles or motor-cars are coming?" asked Mrs. White severely. "And what were you doing out of doors, anyhow?"

"Please, mummy, I—I was looking for my kitten."

"Bother your kitten!" said the mother sharply. "The doctor strictly said you wasn't to go out in the road—not even in the front garden. But there! What's the good of talkin' to children nowadays?" she added, looking at Willy rather helplessly. "It was good of you to bring her indoors, young gentleman. Dr. Brett would have been real mad if he had seen her out in the road."

"She's not ill, is she?" asked Willy, looking at Millie's chubby cheeks.

"Maybe not—but she's bound to catch it next," sighed Mrs. White rather wearily.

"Catch what?"

"Ain't you seen little Elsie?" said the woman. "It's mumps, young gentleman. And a rare trouble I'm havin'—"

"Mumps?" howled Willy, leaping backwards about a yard.

"Lor' sakes! You startled me!" said Mrs. White.

"But mumps!" gasped Willy, horrified. "I oughtn't to be in here at all! I might catch the mumps myself! They're frightfully strict up at the school about things like mumps and measles! I—I'll be going, Mrs. White! Good-afternoon!"

He backed out hastily, understanding at last the reason for the curious swelling in the faces of the other two children. He had thought it rather rummy that they should both have the toothache at once. t

"Thank goodness nobody spotted me!" he murmured as he ran down the long path.

Then, when he reached the gate, his heart nearly stopped beating. For he came face to face with Dr. Brett. Dr. Brett was not only the general practitioner for the village, but he was the school doctor as well!

CHAPTER 2.

Rough on Willy!

"HALLO, doctor!" said Willy, pulling himself together with commendable presence of mind and speaking carelessly. "Jolly nice afternoon."

"Quite nice," said Dr. Brett, eyeing him steadily. "In fact, very mild for the time of the year."

"A bit of a change after all the snow, eh?" said Willy, as he prepared to get through the gateway. "Oh, hallo! Did you pick up my bike, sir? Thanks! I'll be going."

"Just a minute, young man!" said the doctor, laying a firm hand on Willy's shoulder. "Didn't I see you coming out of that cottage?"

"Cottage?" repeated Willy, looking round as though he had not known of the existence of the building until now. "Oh, Mrs. White's cottage? Well, I did pop inside—only just in the front room."

"I suppose you know that Mrs. White's children have the mumps?"

"I know now, sir, but I didn't when I went in," said Willy earnestly. "Look here, I'm all right. I didn't go near them."

"That makes little difference," said Dr. Brett, shaking his head.

"Oh, but it does, sir!" insisted Willy. "Mumps isn't infectious, is it? It's only contagious. And I didn't touch any of those children—" He broke off, aghast. "At least, not—not—I mean—"

"Well?" asked the doctor.

"Only one," said Willy, feeling that he was fighting a losing battle. "Little Millie ran across the road, and I nearly knocked her down. I carried her indoors—"

"That's enough!" interrupted Dr. Brett. "I'm sorry, Handforth minor, but you'll have to come with me. Thank Heaven I caught you before you mixed with any of the other boys. You can now be isolated satisfactorily."

"Isolated?" faltered Willy.

"That's what I said," replied Dr. Brett. "We don't want half the boys of St. Frank's down with mumps, do we? You'll have to go into the sanatorium, young man, for at least three weeks, until all danger of your having caught the complaint is over."

Willy reeled.

"Three weeks in the sanny?" he groaned. "Oh, I say, sir! Have a heart, you know! I can't stick it in the sanny for three weeks!"

Dr. Brett's grip on Willy's shoulder tightened. He had half an idea that the reckless Third-Former would attempt to dodge him. The doctor had his bag in his other

hand, and he was paying a professional visit to the cottage—which, naturally, was strictly quarantined. He was rather alarmed to hear that one of the children had been out in the road. He would have to talk severely to Mrs. White when he saw her; the woman should not have allowed Millie to escape. But there was something else to be done first.

Dr. Brett marched Willy up the lane towards the wide strip of grass at the bend, where he had left his car.

"Look here, sir, there's no need to hold me like this!" said Willy complainingly. "I'm not a prisoner under arrest."

"Promise you won't try to dodge me?"

"Of course, sir," said Willy.

Dr. Brett could take his word, and he immediately released his grip. They got into the car and drove off.

"You don't mean that about the sanny, do you, doctor?" asked Willy. "It's a bit thick, scaring me like that! I was only inside the cottage for a couple of minutes—"

"You've carried one of those children—and that means close contact," said the doctor, shaking his head. "My dear kid, what would the school authorities say to me if I let you run about, and then half the school contracted mumps? I daren't risk it. You'll have to go straight into the isolation ward."

"Oh, my only sainted aunt!" groaned Willy.

He was startled. One of the most active juniors in the school, the prospect of being isolated in the sanatorium for three weeks appalled him. And the disaster could not have come at a worse moment. Fullerton was stirring up trouble in the Third Form, and he—Willy—would be unable to take any action to prevent it.

DR. BRETT drove Willy straight through the Triangle, through Big Arch, and into Inner Court. He pulled up outside the school sanatorium, marched Willy to the isolation ward, and pointed to an empty bed.

"Strip, young 'un," he said briskly, "and get into that bed."

"Oh, I say!" ejaculated Willy. "But I'm not ill! Even those kids in the cottage weren't in bed!"

"You won't be kept there for long," explained the doctor. "But I want your clothes. I'm going to take them to my surgery and have them thoroughly sterilised. There are hundreds of boys in this school, and I'm taking no chances."

"Oh, my hat!" groaned Willy.

He stripped, whilst the doctor looked on, and as soon as he was in bed the doctor made his clothes up into a parcel.

"How long shall I have to stay here, doctor?" asked Willy miserably.

"Not long. I'll instruct one of the nurses to bring one of your spare suits, if you like," said the doctor. "There's no reason why you should be in bed. It's hard lines, young 'un, but it's necessary. I think I'll inoculate you, just to be on the safe side."

He dived into his bag, produced a hypodermic syringe, prepared it, and gave Willy a "shot" of something in his arm.

"It's all right—there'll be no after effects," said the doctor, smiling. "Oh, nurse! Just a minute!"

A neat figure approached the bed. The girl was one of the prettiest nurses imaginable, but Willy regarded her as though she were some sort of ogress. When Dora Manners was on duty, the patients in the sanny felt that being ill was well worth while.

"I want you to keep your eye on this youngster," said the doctor. "You know what a mischievous little beggar he is, and he might even try to sneak out—in his nightshirt!"

"He doesn't look very ill," said Dora, smiling. "What is it, Willy? A sprained ankle?"

"I wish it were," groaned Willy. "I'm as fit as a fiddle. But the doctor seems to think that I've caught the mumps."

Dr. Brett quickly explained, and Dora realised the urgency of the case. She promised that she would keep a very strict eye on the fag.

"I'm taking his clothes down to the surgery to sterilise them, but if he's too impatient to wait until I bring them back, he can wear another suit," said the doctor.

"But in no circumstances is he to leave this ward, and none of his friends must come to see him. He is strictly isolated."

"I understand," said Dora, nodding.

As the doctor was driving through the Triangle he was stopped by Mr. Alington Wilkes, the Housemaster of the Ancient House. Mr. Wilkes nodded approval when he heard what Brett had done.

"Very sensible of you, old man, to take such prompt measures," said Mr. Wilkes. "Can't be too careful in a big school like this. Rough on Willy, but I dare say he'll survive."

"I shouldn't be at all surprised," agreed the doctor. "But you needn't look so worried. Mr. Wilkes. It's only a trifle. There's not the slightest danger that the boy will spread the complaint."

Mr. Wilkes climbed into the car and sat down.

"As a matter of fact, old man, I wasn't thinking about young Handforth at all," he said slowly. "I'm rather concerned about a new boy who's coming to-day. The governors seem to think that he's an eligible pupil; but, as he's for my House, I'm the most interested party."

"Why be worried about a new boy?" asked the doctor. "You get plenty of them, don't you? What is there special about this one? Is he a freak, or something?"

Old Wilkey looked up.

"Freak is just the right word," he said, "although I wouldn't like to the boy to hear himself described in that way. He's the son of Wee Johnnie Ward."

"Wee Johnnie Ward?" repeated Dr. Brett, frowning. "I seem to know that name, somehow."



Fullerton & Co. gave Trotwood a push, and the Removite went surging through the flood waters, arms and legs flying, balanced precariously on the saddle of his bicycle.

"You ought to—it's a fairly famous name," said the Housemaster. "We heard Wee Johnnie on the wireless, not a fortnight ago."

"By Jove, yes! I know him now," said the doctor. "The comedian fellow? Child impersonator, or something, isn't he?"

"Wee Johnnie Ward is exceedingly small—in fact, a midget," explained Mr. Wilkes. "He's appearing in one of the big pantomimes just now—or the show may be off. I believe the run finished last Saturday, now I come to think of it. A very clever comedian—brilliant in his own line. His son is coming to-day, and I understand that he'll be for the Third. What do you think of it, Brett?"

"I think he ought to be a distinct acquisition—if he's anything like his father," chuckled the doctor.

"But he's probably a very small fellow, and that's why I'm worried," said Mr. Wilkes, frowning. "You know what the other boys will do—they'll chip him unmercifully. I'm not at all certain that the experiment will succeed. Do you think he'll have a fair chance?"

"Oh, no!" laughed Dr. Brett. "You're not going to drag me into this discussion, old man. You'll have to rely on your own judgment. The boy may be even bigger than his father, and then you won't need to worry

at all. It doesn't necessarily follow that the son will be a midget, too."

"That's what I am counting on," said Mr. Wilkes, as he climbed out of the car. "And I'm hoping for the best."

As soon as the doctor had driven off, Mr. Wilkes walked towards the Ancient House. Chubby Heath and Juicy Lemon, of the Third, buttonholed him. They wouldn't have dared to buttonhole any other master; but old Wilkey was a sport.

"Please, sir!" said Chubby eagerly.

"I'm sorry," said Mr. Wilkes, with the utmost gravity, "but I gave my last one to young Button."

"Your last what, sir?" asked Chubby, puzzled.

"Weren't you about to ask me for a cigarette card?" murmured Mr. Wilkes.

"Oh, I say, sir, cheese it!" protested Chubby, turning red. "I don't collect cigarette cards—now."

"Beyond it, eh?" grinned Mr. Wilkes. "Well, what is it? What's the trouble?"

"It's about Handforth minor, sir," said Chubby. "Juicy and I—that is, Lemon and I—were standing here when Willy went by in the doctor's car. And he hasn't come back. They've taken him to the sanny, haven't they, sir?"

"I'm afraid so."

"What's the matter with him, sir?" burst out Juicy anxiously. "He didn't look hurt!"

"He's not hurt bodily, and the chances are that he'll come to no harm at all," replied Mr. Wilkes. "Young Handforth was unfortunate enough to get into contact with some children who have the mumps, and it means that he'll be quarantined for two or three weeks."

"Oh, crumbs!" groaned Chubby Heath, in dismay.

"Pretty hard cheese, isn't it?" said Mr. Wilkes sympathetically. "You youngsters will have to get along as best you can until Willy comes out."

Within five minutes over half the Third had learned the alarming news. The fags were dismayed. They couldn't even go along to the sanny and sympathise under Willy's window, for Inner Court was out of bounds.

"What the dickens are we going to do?" asked Chubby Heath desperately. "What about our footer matches? Willy was getting a whole programme fixed up. Things will go to pot while he's in the sanny!"

"Cheese it!" said Owen minor. "Willy's a useful chap, but we're not helpless without him, are we? Nobody is indispensable."

"There's an exception to every rule," said Juicy Lemon gloomily. "Without Willy as leader the Third will crack up. What about Fullerton and his crowd? They'll crow like a lot of old hens when they hear what's happened to Willy."

"Hens don't crow, fathead!" pointed out Dicky Jones tartly.

"Fullerton will cause trouble," said Chubby Heath, looking worried.

"There's a new kid coming into our House to-day, too," said Owen minor. "I heard it from one of the prefects. Yes, and there's some talk that he'll come into the Third."

Chubby groaned.

"A new kid coming into the Third—and Willy stuck in the sanny! It's awful, you chaps! What can we do?"

"Nothing!" growled Juicy Lemon. "But one thing's certain—there's going to be a heap of trouble in the Third!"

CHAPTER 3.

The New Leader!

FULLERTON, for all his brag and big talk, was scared of Willy Handforth. He was always telling the East House fags what he would do, and how he would gain power, in the Third. Then Willy would come along, face Fullerton, and Fullerton's courage would ooze away. He was much bigger than Willy, but it isn't always the big fellows who are the best fighters.

Willy could wipe up Fullerton with one hand; and he had done so repeatedly. So Conroy minimus and Percy Ryder and Jimmy Hook and the other East House fags were not feeling particularly confident when

they came out of the tuck-shop in the village.

"Think we'd really better go to the pictures?" asked Parry minor dubiously. "Wouldn't it be better to get back, and turn up for footer practice?"

"You can turn up if you like, but I'm going to the pictures," replied Fullerton truculently. "As for Handforth minor, he can go and eat coke! Who is he? By what right does he order us about?"

"His own right," said Jimmy Hook sadly. "And he's pretty useful with his left, too!"

Jimmy Hook was right on the mark. For Willy Handforth's leadership of the Third did, indeed, depend upon his prowess with his fists. The Third wasn't like any other Form; it was no good arguing with fellows like Fullerton. The only thing to do was to punch him on the nose and give him an occasional black eye. It was the sole language which Fullerton really understood.

"We shall all get into trouble over this!" said Percy Ryder nervously. "Willy will be furious!"

"Let him be furious!" retorted Fullerton. "We're sick of his leadership, aren't we? We've broken away, and from now onwards there'll be two leaders in the Third!"

"You've said that before," growled Jimmy Hook, "and what's become of it?"

"This time I mean it!" said Fullerton, very brave and bold. "We're East House chaps, we are, and we're not going to be ordered about by a silly Ancient House fat-head! Come on, let's be going."

They mounted their bicycles, and pedalled through the village. Not one of the fags had sufficient courage to break away. Fullerton was easily their master. It was because he ruled them so easily that he toyed with thoughts of ruling the entire Third.

"Hallo!" said Parry minor suddenly. "What's this?"

They were out of the village now, and on the Bannington road. There was a dip just ahead, and the highway, in that dip, was flooded with swirling, muddy water. An Automobile Association scout was on duty near at hand.

"Can't get through this way, boys!" he said, as the fags dismounted. "Where do you want to go—Bannington?"

"Yes."

"Then you'll have to go round by Caistowe."

"What rot!" protested Fullerton. "It's over double the distance round by Caistowe. What's the matter with the Edgemore lane?"

"A good deal is the matter with it," replied the A.A. man. "It's even worse flooded than this. You'd better not chance it—you'd only get stuck half-way through. It's pretty deep in the middle."

"What a swindle!" said Fullerton disgustedly. "What's the matter with the Rural Council? It's a pity they can't keep the roads clear!"

"I'll tell them what you say," replied the A.A. man, nodding. "And perhaps you'd like me to complain to the Clerk of the Weather, while I'm about it? It was he who brought all this snow to the Stowe Valley; and when snow melts, young 'un, it has to run somewhere. Some of it's run across this road."

Fullerton felt uncomfortable, and looked foolish as the other fags chuckled. He had half a mind to jump on his bicycle and ride through the flood—only, if he did that, he might even feel more uncomfortable and look even more foolish.

So he moved aside, and the other fags joined him. They held a consultation. One thing was quite certain—the pictures were "off." None of the fags was willing to ride treble the normal distance in order to get to Bannington.

"We're not going back to St. Frank's, either," said Fullerton darkly.

"Afraid young Handforth will collar us and make us practice?" asked Jimmy Hook.

It was a true shot, and Fullerton flared up.

"No, I'm not!" he roared. "I'm not afraid of young Handforth! From this minute onwards, I'm going to lead you chaps! Willy can boil himself!"

Another cyclist came along, and the fags watched him as he dismounted. The A.A. man was busy with a motorist.

"Can't get through, Trotty," said Fullerton, shaking his head. "Water's too deep."

"Dear me!" said the new arrival. "This is unfortunate. And really, Fullerton, your suggestion is absurd. How do you think I can leap such a distance?"

"You deaf ass!" said Fullerton, with a sniff. "I thought you were your twin brother. The water's deep!" he added, in a roar. "You can't get through!"

Cornelius Trotwood was certainly deaf. The trouble with Corney was that he looked exactly like his brother, Nicodemus. And whilst Nicodemus was one of the keenest fellows in the Remove, Cornelius was exceedingly simple-minded.

"Really, I am greatly distressed," he said. "It is most imperative that I should get to Bannington."

Fullerton winked to the other fags.

"That's all right!" he shouted, putting his mouth close to Corney's ear. "You can get through safely enough. The water isn't half as deep as it looks. I don't suppose it's more than an inch or two."

"Really, Fullerton, you needn't shout like that," protested Corney. "I'm not very deaf. Did I understand you to say that the water is only an inch or two deep?"

"I don't suppose it's much more," replied Fullerton. "If I were you, I'd chance it. You'll be across in a tick."

"Then I shan't go!" said Cornelius firmly.

"Eh?"

"Didn't you say that I shall sink like a brick if I chance it?"

"No, I didn't!" roared Fullerton. "I said that you'd be across in a tick. The best way is to take it with a rush."

"Yes, I am in a rush," admitted Corney, nodding. "Indeed, in quite a great hurry."

"Then go ahead," said Fullerton. "Come on, you chaps—lend him a hand. Let's give him a real start off."

"I say! He'll get soaked!" murmured Jimmy Hook uneasily.

"All the better," grinned Fullerton. "Who are these Removites to lord it over us?"

He was feeling reckless, and just to prove his new independence—his bold leadership of this section of the Third—he made the innocent Cornelius Trotwood his victim. He and one or two of the other fags fairly hoisted Corney on to his machine, and gave him a push off.

It was really more than a push. They ran him to the very edge of the flood, and then gave a final terrific shove. The unfortunate Cornelius went surging into the water, arms and legs flying, balanced precariously on the saddle of his machine.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The fags roared with merriment. The A.A. man shouted a warning, but it was too late. The water, splashing on either side of Cornelius's front wheel, had already covered the hubs of his machine.

"Dear me!" gasped Corney suddenly. "I—I don't think I can proceed!"

His progress became slower, and finally he lost his balance completely, and sagged sideways. He disappeared into the flood with a mighty splash.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, that's that!" said Fullerton genially. The A.A. man glared across at him.

"What's the giddy game?" he shouted angrily. "Didn't I tell you that water was deep?"

"I believe you did," said Fullerton. "But we told poor old Corney that it was shallow."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The rebel fags jumped on their machines and pedalled back into Bellton. As they were denied the pictures, they decided that they might as well spend their money in the village tuck-shop. There was a very cosy tea-room there, with a nice fire, and perhaps they would be able to get some more fun.

But before they could enter the shop a figure came running towards them. They recognised Dawson, of the Modern House Third. Harry Dawson was one of the laziest young bounders in the Third, and he was generally in trouble with Mr. Suncliffe. He was one of the fags whom Fullerton regarded as his own property.

"What are you looking so excited about, young Dawson?" he asked. "If you think we're going to treat you—"

"Heard the latest?" gasped Dawson, as he arrived. "Willy's in the sanny!"

Fullerton sniffed.

"And he expects us to play footer, too!" he said sourly. "Serves him right! Got a kick, I suppose?"

"It's not that!" explained Dawson breathlessly. "There's nothing wrong with him at all! He didn't know those White kids had the mumps, and he mixed with them. Now he's insulated for two or three weeks."

"You mean isolated," said Fullerton, with a whistle. "Great pip! Handforth minor in the sanny for two or three weeks—and after that perhaps he'll have the mumps! That'll mean another month!"

"Great Scott!" chorused the other fags. "Why, he won't be out again this term!" yelled Fullerton.

"Well, you needn't crow about it," said Dawson, staring. "It's jolly rough on Willy——"

"Blow Willy!" interrupted Fullerton. "I'm jolly glad to hear this! It's about time something happened to that self-satisfied ass! Bottled up in the sanny, he'll be as helpless as a prisoner in Wormwood Scrubs!"

Fullerton made no effort to conceal his glee. The other fags were highly pleased,

too. They had been worrying about Willy Handforth—wondering what he would do to them when they showed up, after cutting footer practice. But that menace was now no more. They were beyond-Willy's reach.

"This is my opportunity!" said George Fullerton, his eyes gleaming. "With Willy helpless, I can take on the leadership of the Third! Who is there to stop me?"

"Well, Chubby Heath and Juicy Lemon and those other Ancient House chaps——"

"That for them!" interrupted Fullerton, contemptuously snapping his fingers. "If they come any of their rot with me, I'll slaughter them! I'm in command of the Third from now onwards—and when Handforth minor comes out of the sanny, he'll have lost his influence."

There was a great deal in Fullerton's boast. He was bigger than any of the other Third-formers, and he knew that he could lick them. He might have some trouble with Chubby Heath and Juicy Lemon, but

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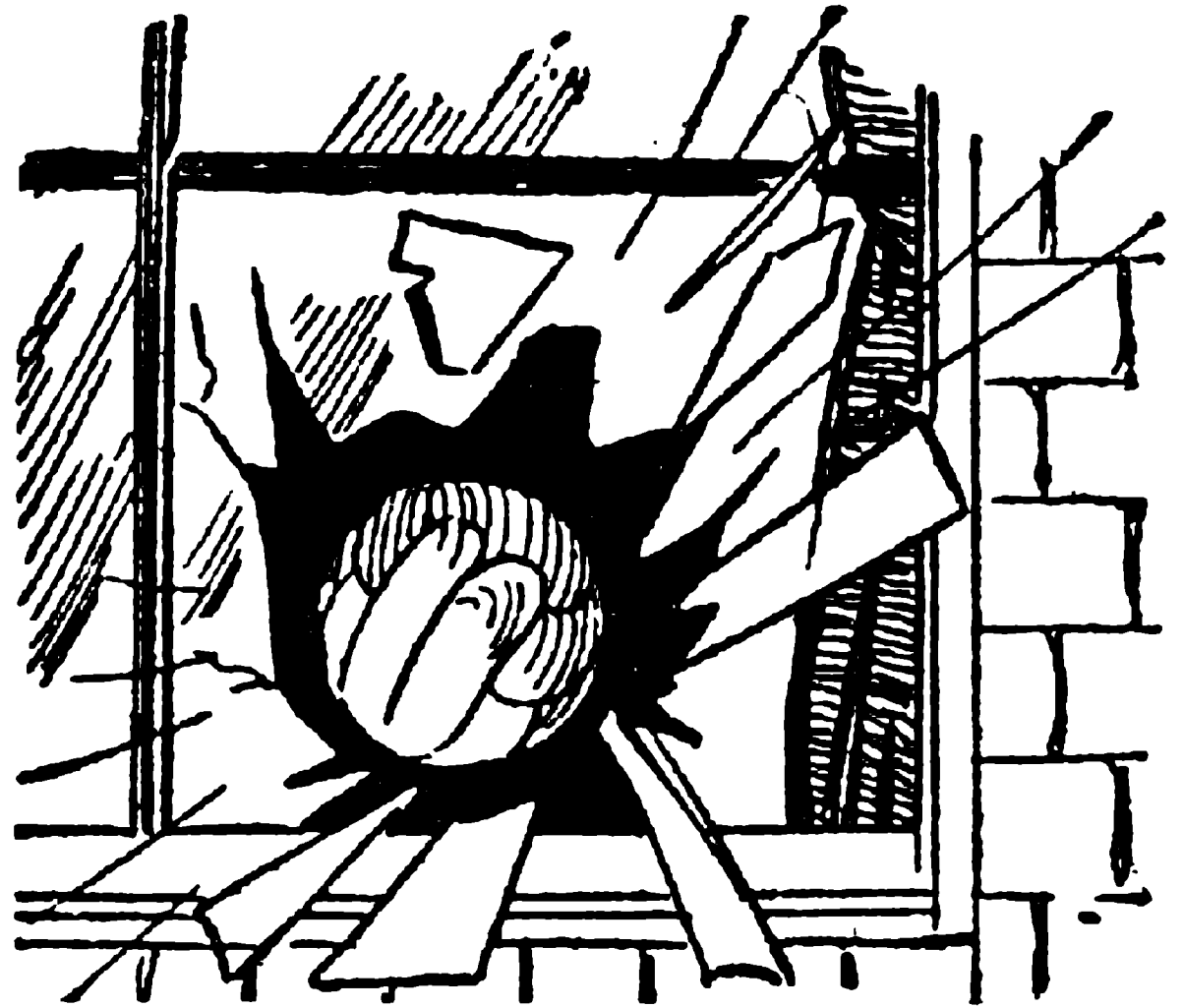
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they, without their leader, would be soon polished off.

In his new enthusiasm he jumped on his bicycle and raced up towards St. Frank's. The other fags, thoroughly excited, went with him. When they arrived in the Triangle, they found Chubby Heath and Juicy Lemon on the Ancient House steps, disconsolately discussing the situation with Owen minor and Bobby Dexter and the rest of the Ancient House fags.

Fullerton leapt off his machine and glared at Chubby Heath's crowd.

"So Handforth minor is in the sanny?" said Fullerton aggressively.

"And you're pleased, aren't you?" retorted Chubby.

"I'm tickled to death!" said Fullerton coolly. "From this minute, my sons, I'm the leader of the Third! Understand?"

Juicy Lemon glared.

"Know any more jokes?" he asked tartly.

"This isn't a joke—I'm in earnest!" said Fullerton. "And any fathead who likes to ignore my authority had better do so!"

There was a tense silence. The Ancient House fags were rather taken aback. But before any of them could reply, a heavy footfall sounded and Edward Oswald Handforth, of the Remove, strode up. He had just got out of his little Morris Minor saloon.

"What's that I heard about leadership?" asked the burly Removite. "My minor's in the sanny, and the Third is in a mess. It takes a Handforth to keep you young monkeys under control!"

"Well, I'm leader now," said Fullerton, staring. "You keep out of this, Handy! This is a Third Form racket!"

"Racket?" repeated Handforth. "Isn't English good enough for you, without talking Chicago? So you're leader of the Third? And it was you, I hear, who pushed Corny Trotwood into the flood, along the Bannington road."

Fullerton gulped.

"It—it was only a bit of fun!" he faltered.

"Well, as leader of the Third, you're responsible," said Handforth firmly. "That was an insult to the Remove—and, as a representative of the Remove, I'm now going to wipe out the insult!"

He grabbed Fullerton without further ceremony, and commenced marching him off towards the shrubbery. There was something purposeful in Handforth's behaviour.

"Hi!" howled Fullerton. "Rescue, Third! Back up! Don't let this Remove ass—"

"Not so much noise!" interrupted Handforth, forcing his victim into a run.

Fullerton appealed in vain. Chubby Heath and his crowd were quite indifferent, seeing that it was Fullerton who was being "put through the mill." The other fags were spineless in a matter of this sort, and they stood by helplessly.

"So you thought it was funny to send old Corny into the flood, did you?" said Handforth grimly. "You, a grubby, overgrown

fag playing dirty tricks on a Removite. Well, we'll see how you like being ducked."

"Help!" shrieked Fullerton wildly.

He struggled madly, trying to escape, but Handforth wasn't having any. He lifted Fullerton clean off his feet, swung him round, and dropped him with a dull splash into the big ditch which ran at the back of the shrubbery.

"One good turn deserves another," said Edward Oswald with satisfaction. "You try any more of your beastly tricks on a Remove fellow and you'll get some more of this medicine!"

He strode off, feeling that the Remove's honour was vindicated. And Fullerton, crawling wetly out of the ditch, came to the conclusion that being a Form leader wasn't half so good as it was made out to be.

CHAPTER 4.

Wee Johnnie Ward!

DR. BRETT, having paid his interrupted visit to the White patients, went along to his surgery and attended to Willy Handforth's clothing.

It was a comparatively simple job, and it was soon done. There were one or two patients to attend to, various bottles of medicine to prepare, and then Dr. Brett was ready for departure. He had to pay another visit to the school in any case, and with the parcel containing Willy's clothing under his arm, he went out to his waiting car. But at the gate he paused. The big water-splash encountered by Fullerton & Co. was only twenty or thirty yards away from his house, and a Bannington taxicab had halted at the further "shore." The A.A. man was no longer in evidence.

"Shall I chance it, sir?" Dr. Brett heard the taxi-driver saying. "Looks pretty deep to me."

The door of the taxi opened, and a man appeared. He leaned out, and Dr. Brett stared. He almost rubbed his eyes. For the taxi passenger was a man in miniature.

He was no bigger than an average St. Frank's fag, but he was scrupulously attired in well-cut trousers, a splendid overcoat, and a well-fitting bowler hat. His high collar was spotless, and a diamond gleamed in his tie. Yellow gloves covered his tiny hands.

"I think you'd better get through it, driver," he said in a boyish voice.

"Well, if we get stuck, gov'nor, don't blame me," said the driver.

Dr. Brett stood watching interestedly. He wasn't at all sure that the taxi would get through. More than one car had become stuck in that flood during the day. The small and dapper passenger, without question, was Mr. John Ward, otherwise Wee Johnnie Ward, the comedian. Exactly why the father should have come down to St.

Frank's instead of the son, Dr. Brett did not trouble to ponder over. It wasn't his business, anyhow. Besides, it was quite possible that the son was inside the taxi.

Dr. Brett could not help smiling as he observed the big cigar which protruded from Wee Johnnie's mouth. It looked very incongruous. The diminutive man had the face of a child, and the doctor reflected that he needed very little make-up on the stage. To improve upon Nature was unnecessary.

"Well, here goes, mister," said the taxi-driver. "Maybe we shall be lucky."

The little man still stood in the open doorway, and the cab ploughed slowly into the water. As it progressed it sank deeper and deeper, until the flood was level with the running-boards.

"I think she's all right, sir," said the driver, relieved.

He accelerated a trifle, which was exceedingly unfortunate. For at that very same moment the nearside front wheel bumped down into a hidden pothole. The cab jolted violently, and Wee Johnnie Ward, leaning out, lost his balance. He clutched wildly at the swinging door, failed to grip, and plunged headlong into the flood, to vanish beneath the murky surface.

"S'truth!" ejaculated the driver, jamming on his brakes.

Dr. Brett ran out of his gateway and approached the flood. It seemed to him that he might be of some assistance here. He was glad that there were no other witnesses of the little disaster. The situation was embarrassing enough for Wee Johnnie Ward as it was.

The little man sat up, then struggled to his feet, and the flood surged about his legs. All his dapper appearance had gone; he looked a sorry, bedraggled figure. His smart bowler was floating away through a gap in the hedge.

"If you think it's funny to tip me into this flood, I don't!" said Wee Johnnie, spluttering.

"It wasn't my doing!" protested the driver. "You ought to have hung on harder——"

"All right; I don't blame you," said Wee Johnnie, who knew well enough that the fault was his own. "The question is, what are we going to do? Ugh! This water's like ice!"

He climbed on to the car's running-board and clung to the body.

"Can you get out of there?" sang out Dr. Brett. "Perhaps I can be of some help?"

The driver nodded, engaged his gears, and slowly advanced. Fortunately, his exhaust pipe was high, and it had not become flooded. The cab crawled out of the flood, Wee Johnnie Ward jumped off the foot-board and stood before Dr. Brett, looking even smaller than ever at close quarters.

"I happened to see the mishap," said the doctor briskly. "Won't you come indoors, sir? I'm a doctor, and you are perfectly welcome to any hospitality that I can offer.

In any case, you'll need to get out of those wet clothes as quickly as possible unless you wish to court pneumonia."

"This is really very good of you, sir," said Wee Johnnie. "Stop here, driver; wait for me."

He followed Dr. Brett up the path, water pouring from him in cascades. Very soon he was standing in the doctor's warm surgery, in front of the fire.

As Wee Johnnie undressed Dr. Brett introduced himself more fully, and by the time the visitor was carefully wrapped in a blanket the two were well acquainted. Wee Johnnie's good humour was completely restored.

"Awfully good of you, Dr. Brett, to act the Good Samaritan like this," he said.

"Don't mention it, Mr. Ward," laughed the doctor. "If you'll wait here I'll soon have a warm bath ready, and then you can rub yourself down, and I don't think you'll suffer any ill effects."

"You're too good," said Wee Johnnie. "By the way, I'm wondering if I could telephone to St. Frank's College? Oh, but I don't think it matters; I wasn't expected at any particular time. St. Frank's isn't far away, is it?"

"About a mile."

"I've come down to see the school," explained the little man. "My son was to have arrived to-day, but he's got such a dreadful influenza cold that I wouldn't let him risk it. I thought it rather a good idea to come down myself to explain things, and to have a look round the school at the same time. Nice school, St. Frank's, isn't it?"

"One of the best in the country," replied Dr. Brett promptly.

He went off to attend to the bath, having neglected to mention that he was the school doctor.

While his strange little visitor was partaking of his bath Dr. Brett pondered as to what Wee Johnnie would do for clothing. His own suit was, of course, soaked, and would not be ready for some hours. But before long an idea came to the doctor, and he chuckled.

When Wee Johnnie came down clad in one of the doctor's dressing-gowns, much too large for him, the comedian was in excellent humour.

"I am really very grateful to you, Dr. Brett," he said. "I must insist upon your regarding this as a professional visit."

"Such an insistence on your part would offend me, Mr. Ward," interrupted the doctor. "Hang it all, can't a fellow extend a friendly hand once in a while? The fact that I'm a doctor is neither here nor there."

"Well, it's very nice of you," said the comedian.

"I'm having your clothes dried, but I doubt if they'll be ready until this evening," said the doctor. "In the meantime, there's nothing for you to do except to remain here, unless you would care to wear a

Handforth deposited the protesting Fullerton in a muddy ditch—and that unfortunate worthy decided that being leader of the fags wasn't so good, after all!



suit I have in this parcel," he added with a smile.

"If it's one of yours, I'd rather be excused," chuckled Wee Johnnie.

They both laughed.

"No, it happens to belong to one of the St. Frank's boys; just about your own size, too," said the doctor, with a twinkle in his eyes. "The boy chanced to go into a cottago where there are two cases of mumps, and I was obliged to rush him to the school sanatorium and to deprive him of his clothing."

"Mumps?" said the little man. "Thanks all the same——"

"They're quite safe now," interrupted the doctor, smiling. "I have thoroughly sterilised them, and they are as safe as brand-new things. I was just thinking that if you cared to take the chance, the suit is available. You can return them to young Handforth—to whom the things belong—in due course."

A responding twinkle appeared in Wee Johnnie Ward's eyes.

"Let's have a look at them," he said gleefully.

The parcel was unwrapped, and when Wee Johnnie tried on the jacket it fitted him like a glove.

"Why not?" he grinned. "I wear these sort of clothes on the stage—even more kiddish ones, if it comes to that. Anyhow, it's better than being bottled up for several hours—to say nothing of inconveniencing you."

WITHIN fifteen minutes a transformation had taken place.

Wee Johnnie Ward, attired in Willy Handforth's complete outfit, looked every inch a fag. Dr. Brett simply roared when he surveyed his visitor. Boyish as Wee Johnnie had looked before, he was now absurdly juvenile.

"It's amazing!" said the doctor. "Without any make-up at all you look just about twelve years of age. For Heaven's sake, Mr. Ward, take that cigar out of your mouth! It positively gives me cold shivers!"

"I'd better not smoke it when I go out," said Wee Johnny. "I should have the whole village staring at me, eh? By Jove, this is going to be a bit of a joke! I'm not at all sorry that I fell into that water. I'm a beggar for practical jokes, you know, doctor."

Wee Johnnie was now eager to get to St. Frank's. His eyes were twinkling mischievously.

He took leave of the doctor, having arranged to call for his own clothes that evening. The taxi-driver, who had been waiting, opened his eyes wide as his fare proceeded to climb into the cab.

"S'truth!" said the taxi-man.

"Mum's the word!" said Wee Johnnie. "If anybody asks you anything about me, you don't know a thing. Understand?"

"You ain't half a one, gov'nor," said the man. "I thought you was a little boy at

first. Them clothes makes all the difference."

So it happened that when Wee Johnnie Ward proceeded to St. Frank's he had all the appearance of a junior schoolboy!

CHAPTER 5.

A "New" New Kid!

"GREAT Scott!"

"What the dickens——"

"Who is it?"

"You ass, you'll kill yourself!"

A roar of excited remarks went up from a group of Third-Formers collected in the Triangle at St. Frank's. Chubby Heath was there; so was Juicy Lemon, and a number of other Ancient House fags. And there was real cause for their excitement.

A terrific roaring had sounded from the roadway outside, and a few moments later a powerful motor-bike whizzed recklessly through the school gates and hurtled across the Triangle towards the Ancient House steps. It was ridden by a boy—but it was the way in which it was being ridden that had caused the fags to utter exclamations of startled amazement. For the boy was standing on the saddle and guiding the machine with a piece of thick cord, the ends of which were attached to the handlebars.

Wee Johnnie Ward had arrived at St. Frank's!

He had meant to cause a sensation, and he caused a sensation. It was as his taxi had been nearing St. Frank's that he had spotted a motor-bike left unattended by the roadside. All the way from Dr. Brett's house the comedian had been trying to think of an idea which would make his arrival at St. Frank's sensational. The sight of that motor-bike had given him the idea. Dismissing his taxi, he had promptly collared the unattended machine, and thus he had arrived at the famous old school.

He was whizzing round the Triangle now, watched by popping eyes and gaping mouths. Once round the Triangle he sped, then, dropping lightly on to the saddle, he grabbed the handlebars and came to a halt by Chubby Heath & Co.

"Hallo!" he said brightly.

Chubby just stared at him. The other's audacity had left him rather dazed.

"Ha-allo!" he returned at length. "Who—who are you? New kid?"

"Not very." said Wee Johnnie gravely as he dismounted.

Having got over his initial amazement, Chubby was quickly recovering himself.

"Better go easy, kid," he warned. "You mustn't answer back like that. It's cheeky. New kids aren't supposed to answer back at all——"

"But I'm not an ordinary new kid," said Wee Johnnie, with a grin. "You'll soon find that out."

Chubby, remembering the newcomer's audacious arrival, was ready to believe that statement.

"We heard that you were coming—nothing definite, of course," said Owen minor. "You're for the Third, aren't you?"

"If you chaps are in the Third, I hope I am," replied Wee Johnnie promptly.

His self-possession left the fags rather nonplussed. New kids for the Third were usually so dumb and scared! And this boy looked even younger than the average. He was two or three inches shorter than the sturdy Chubby Heath.

"Well, what's your name?" asked Chubby bluntly.

"Ward—John Ward."

"Nothing much wrong with that name," said Chubby approvingly. "Well, Ward, if you're really coming into the Third, you'd better understand that new kids are of no importance whatever. We're favouring you now by even talking to you. How old are you?"

"I'd rather not say."

"What do you mean, you young ass?"

"If I told you, you wouldn't believe me," said Wee Johnnie coolly. "Now, what's the routine? What do I do first? Don't I report to somebody?"

"Do you know which House you're going into?" asked Owen minor.

"Ancient House."

"That's our House," said Chubby, nodding. "It's a good thing we happened to spot you. We can give you a word of warning."

"Oh?" said Wee Johnnie.

"Yes, rather!" went on Chubby. "There's a fellow named Fullerton in the Third—a hulking, clumsy rotter who ought to have moved up terms ago. He's an East House chap, and he has suddenly decided that he's going to run the Third. And most of the East House and Modern House fags have been idiots enough to rally round him."

"What am I supposed to do if I meet him?" asked Wee Johnnie.

"Cut and run," replied Chubby, without hesitation. "He'll fasten on to you like a leech—he'll rag you till you're a wreck if he gets a chance. One of his greatest joys in life is ragging new kids, and you're such a little beggar that he'll eat you up."

Wee Johnnie appeared to consider. He was vastly interested. Without asking for any information, he was receiving it. The Third Form, apparently, was in a state of disruption. And the way in which these boys had accepted him as a "new kid" was highly amusing. The little man saw no reason why he should not let the joke have its run. Wee Johnnie was a born practical joker, with a great sense of humour.

"This chap, Fullerton," he said easily. "What is he—a little tin god? You kids seem to be pretty well scared of him, don't you?"

"We're not scared of him," retorted Chubby indignantly. "And don't you call

us kids, either! Kid yourself! I'll bet I'm a year older than you!"

"Well, we won't go into that," said Wee Johnnie, with a grin. "Age isn't everything, you know. As for Fullerton, you oughtn't to put up with his rot."

"We're not going to," said Juicy Lemon darkly. "The trouble is, Willy's in the sanny."

"Who is in the which?" asked the supposed new boy.

"Willy Handforth—our Form skipper," growled Chubby Heath. "He's the real leader of the Third. A fine chap—full of ideas—afraid of nobody. If Willy was about Fullerton wouldn't have started any of his rotten games. But poor old Willy's in the sanny with the mumps."

Wee Johnnie began to see daylight.

"The mumps isn't much," he said disparagingly.

"Of course it isn't—and that's just the trouble," said Chubby. "Willy hasn't got the mumps at all, in fact. He's only in the sanny because Dr. Brett took him there. He's quarantined for two or three weeks, and the Third is at sixes and sevens in consequence."

"You're telling me that the whole Third Form is upset because one chap is in the sanny?" asked Wee Johnnie, staring.

"You don't know Handforth minor!" grunted Juicy Lemon. "He's not like any other chap—he's a caution! The very instant Fullerton hears that Willy is helpless he starts kicking, and lots of the other chaps support him. They know jolly well that they're safe."

"So the Third's divided into two forces?" asked Wee Johnnie thoughtfully. "Fullerton has got the East House and Modern House chaps under his control, eh? What about the rest of you?"

"We're just about the same strength—Ancient House and West House," replied Chubby. "But what's the use? Without Willy, we're pretty helpless."

"What you want is a new leader," said Wee Johnnie briskly. "It seems to me that I've arrived at the right moment."

"Eh?"

"Didn't you hear what I said?"

"Yes, I did, and you're a cheeky young fathead!" said Chubby warmly. "Who do you think you are, anyhow? A giddy new kid! You're not suggesting that you should be our new leader, are you?"

"I'm suggesting nothing else," replied Wee Johnnie crisply. "Come along! Let's get together! We'll soon show this chap Fullerton that we're ready for him! Leave it to me, kids. We'll squash him!"

The fags regarded him rather qucerly. They hardly knew what to say. His daring, his coolness, his self-possession, his ready answers, left them limp.

"You'd better go and see the Housemaster," said Chubby Heath rather helplessly. "He'll be expecting you, and if you don't turn up he'll want to know the reason why."

"I'll go along presently," said Wee Johnnie coolly. "No hurry. And I want to take this motor-bike back to where I got it from. It's not mine, you know—I bagged it. Also I want to get the hang of this Fullerton situation."

Although the fags were indignant at his cool cheek, his personality conquered them. He soon had all the "dope"; he knew that Fullerton was a rotter, that he had caused a mutiny in the Third Form—and all because Willy Handforth, the real leader, was beyond reach.

It was an ideal situation from Wee Johnnie Ward's point of view. There was something for him to do—something which would justify his carrying this practical joke on to a definite conclusion. He would suppress Fullerton & Co. and put them in their proper place!

He returned the motor-bike to where he had found it, and then, chuckling inwardly, he marched back into the Ancient House. At first he had not intended to meet the Housemaster, but now, in view of his decision, which would necessitate his remaining at St. Frank's for the rest of the day at least, that was imperative. He wasn't feeling at all anxious regarding the outcome of the interview. The boys had accepted him as a new kid; there was no reason why he shouldn't put it over on the Housemaster also.

He presented himself to Mr. Wilkes; and if Chubby Heath & Co. could have seen him then, they would have rubbed their eyes. For there was a complete transformation. The "new boy" stood before the Housemaster, nervous, self-conscious, frightened, overawed by his surroundings, stricken by the importance of the great man sitting at the desk.

"There's no need for you to be nervous, youngster," said Mr. Wilkes kindly. "Your name is Ward, isn't it? What is your Christian name?"

"John, sir," faltered the new arrival.

"Same name as your father, eh?" nodded Mr. Wilkes. "Did you come down alone?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, it's all to the good that you should start your school life right off your own bat," said Mr. Wilkes. "You may have a bit of a rough time to begin with, but you'll soon get used to it. Most of the boys in the Third are quite good fellows, and when you know them better, you'll like them."

Mr. Wilkes was intensely relieved. Never for a moment did he suspect the true identity of this "boy." He had been expecting the son, and when Wee Johnnie presented himself, saying that he was the son, Mr. Wilkes saw no reason to doubt his word. Knowing the comedian to be a tiny man, he had been afraid that the son would be even tinier. Mr. Wilkes' relief upon finding that this boy was about the normal size of the average Third-Former was consequently considerable.

"I—I hope the boys won't be too rough, sir," piped Wee Johnnie. "Can—can I go now please, sir?"

"Perhaps you'd better," said Mr. Wilkes, nodding. "You can come to me later on, and I'll examine you then. Get the hang of the place first—settle down a bit. The boys will tell you which is your dormitory, and you can find out from them, too, where the dining-hall is, and all those other details. Cut off, young 'un!"

Wee Johnnie "cut off." Outside the Housemaster's study his nervousness disappeared magically; his eyes twinkled with roguish mischief.

"Well, that's that," he murmured complacently. "I put it over on the Housemaster all right! Now for the Third!"

CHAPTER 6.

Surprising the Third!

"SAUCE!" said Chubby Heath, bristling.

"Sauce isn't the word!" agreed Juicy Lemon. "That kid's got too much to say by half!"

"Rather!" chorused the others.

The fags were thoroughly indignant. They were no longer under the spell of Wee Johnnie Ward's personality. And they were rather amazed with themselves for having put up with so much of his "nerve." A raw new kid—even younger than themselves—calmly talking about taking the leadership! It was unheard of!

"When he comes back we'll put him in his place!" went on Chubby darkly. "We'll squash him so much that he'll look like a freshly-landed plaice!"

"Best thing will be to ignore him," said Juicy with a sniff. "Don't we always ignore new kids? It does 'em good!"

Chubby Heath looked uneasy.

"Somehow, I don't think this particular new kid can be ignored," he replied. "He's not the sort. We shall have to squash him—flatten him out. I'll tell you what!" he added excitedly. "I'll pop along and see Willy. He'll know what to do!"

"But you can't!" said Owen minor, staring. "You won't be allowed in the sanny!"

"Who wants to go in the sanny?" retorted Chubby, running off.

He felt reckless. Things were getting to a pretty pass in the Third—and it was time that Willy Handforth was informed of the details. Chubby sauntered sedately through Big Arch, and ventured upon the forbidden ground of Inner Court. Luck was with him. He met nobody in authority. A hail from one of the sanatorium windows made him break into a run, throwing caution to the winds. Willy Handforth was leaning out of an upper window.

"Hallo, Chubby, old son!" was Willy's greeting. "What's happened?"

"All sorts of things!" said Chubby breathlessly. "Any chance of your getting out of there, Willy? We're in an awful mess. Fullerton and his gang have gathered

a lot of other chaps about them, and they're boasting about ruling the roost. Fullerton says he's going to take complete command of the Third."

"My only hat!"

"Lots of fellows are scared of Fullerton, and they're joining his crowd for the sake of peace. And there's a new kid here, too."

"You needn't bother about him."

"Needn't we?" said Chubby. "He's a caution. He hadn't been here five minutes before he was talking about taking your place and becoming leader of the Third."

"What!"

"Fact!" said Chubby, looking worried. "He's with old Wilkey now, and we hardly know what to do. The chap's got enough nerve for a dozen!"

"Slosh him!" said Willy firmly. "Don't stand any rot from a new kid. Squash him utterly and completely!"

"That's what I say," agreed Chubby. "But he's so—so different. I'm not sure that it'll work."

"If he comes any more of his rot, fight him," advised Willy. "You can put up a pretty good scrap, Chubby, and don't forget that you're my first lieutenant. During my absence you're leader. See? I'm giving you full authority."

"Right-ho! I'm on!" said Chubby eagerly. "I'll keep the flag flying!"

Chubby went off in high spirits. On the quiet he rather fancied himself as leader of the Third.

Dicky Jones was standing on the Ancient House steps alone when Chubby came up.

"Where are all the others?" asked Chubby.

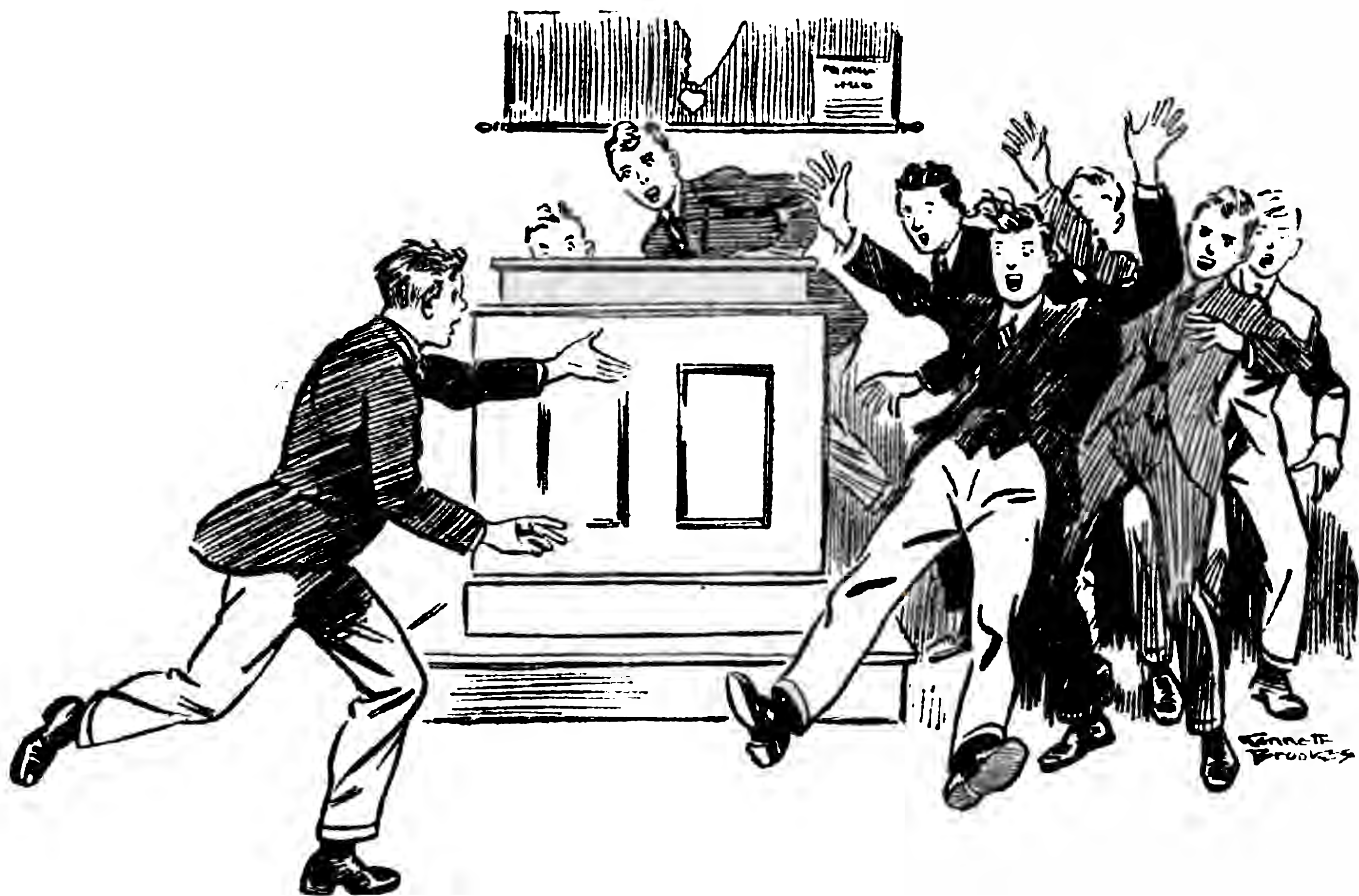
"There's something on," said Dicky in a low voice. "That new kid came out, and Juicy and Owen minor and some others have taken him upstairs to show him the dormitory. The rest have gone along to the Third Form room to set up a booby trap. We're going to show this new kid what's what!"

A noisy crowd came downstairs at that moment, and Chubby went indoors. The new boy was being escorted down, and Juicy Lemon and the other fags were making themselves extremely pleasant. In fact, they were overdoing it, and Wee Johnnie Ward, although he didn't show it, was full of suspicion. Something was "on." He didn't quite know what, but he was ready for any emergency.

"Oh, hallo, Chubby!" said Juicy, with exaggerated cordiality. "Just showing the new kid round. We're going to take him to his study now."

He winked as he spoke, and Chubby Heath remained quite serious. Third-Formers were not allowed single studies, but apparently the new boy was being spoofed.

"Oh, rather!" said Chubby. "Ward's study, eh? Yes, you might as well show it to him at once, and then he'll know just where he stands."



A roar of consternation went up from the assembled Removites as Willy Handforth dashed in among them. "Keep away, you idiot! You'll give us all mumps!"

He wasn't surprised when the crowd marched straight into the Sixth Form passage, and Juicy Lemon, with a flourish, flung open the door of Fenton's study. Fenton was the captain of the school, and the head prefect of the Ancient House. But Juicy happened to know that Fenton was out for the afternoon.

"Here we are," said Juicy heartily. "This is your study, Ward. Make yourself thoroughly at home."

Wee Johnnie walked in and looked round with interest. The fags stood in the doorway, all looking very innocent.

"What about these photographs and things?" asked Wee Johnnie, waving his hand towards the walls.

"Oh, those!" said Chubby quickly. "The—the last chap who was in here left them up, I suppose. You'd better take them all down. You won't need those old photos. Put your own up."

The fags were startled at this moment by the sudden arrival of Biggleswade of the Sixth. Biggleswade was a prefect, too, and his appearance was inopportune.

"Hallo!" said Biggy. "What's all this?"

"We—we— That is— This new kid—" began Juicy helplessly.

"It's all right," put in Wee Johnnie, with the utmost coolness. "I'm a new kid—Third Form. That means that I'm a fag, doesn't it? I came along to report myself for duty, please. If this is your study I'm ready to take orders."

"It's Fenton's study, and I'm not sure that Fenton wants a new kid to fag for him, anyhow," said Biggleswade. "Thoughtful of you, kid, to offer yourself so promptly, but you needn't bother. We'll send for you if we want you."

And Biggleswade, good-natured and unsuspecting, went off. The fags hastily beat a retreat from these forbidden quarters.

"I say, that was awfully decent of you, Ward," said Juicy breathlessly. "You saved us from a swishing."

"I don't think that prefect suspected much," grinned Wee Johnnie. "You silly chump. You don't think I believed that rot about the study, do you? I knew it wasn't mine. Fags don't have studies to themselves, and I soon twigged your game."

"Well, come along to the Form-room," said Chubby gruffly.

They arrived, and Juicy Lemon carelessly turned the handle and pushed the door open an inch or two.

"You go first, Ward," he said politely.

It might have fooled a raw new boy, but it did not fool the wary Wee Johnnie.

"I wouldn't think of it," he said promptly. "It's bad form for a new kid to push himself forward. After you, if you don't mind."

He seized the startled Juicy in a vice-like grip, and shoved him forward. The door opened, there was a clatter from above, a yell from Juicy, and the next second he was smothered with earth and soot and cinders.

"What do you take me for?" asked Wee Johnnie scornfully. "You can't kid me with these old chestnuts!"

CHAPTER 7.

Fullerton Flops!

"**W**ELL, I'm jiggered!" said Chubby Heath blankly.

Juicy Lemon was gurgling and gasping and spluttering. He had been half-obliterated by that deluge of rubbish.

"I say!" burst out Dicky Jones. "How did you know there was a booby trap?"

"I didn't know, but I was jolly suspicious," grinned Wee Johnnie. "I believe in being on the safe side."

The fags regarded him heatedly, but with inward respect. A new kid who dodged trouble as adroitly as Wee Johnnie was deserving of respect.

"You're a caution!" said Owen minor admiringly. "Blessed if you aren't as hard to spoof as Willy himself. Well, we're still friends, I hope. Have one of these mincepies."

Owen minor produced a bag, selected a mincepie himself, and bit into it. Wee Johnnie took one, and shook his head as he broke it open.

"Nothing doing," he said coolly.

The interior of that mincepie was filled with waste carbide from an acetelyne gas-lamp, mustard and liquid glue.

"I'm used to these dodges," said Wee Johnnie indulgently.

"My only sainted aunt! You're a cool card!" said Chubby Heath, staring. "I've never known a new kid who hasn't been sucked in by these japes."

The Third-Formers were feeling rather helpless. The way in which the "new kid" coolly dodged every trap was startling. They couldn't put anything over on him! He was ready every time.

"We've had enough of this silly business," said Wee Johnnie, who knew that the time was getting on. "Where's that fellow, Fullerton? He's got to understand that I'm the new leader of the Third—"

"Wait a minute!" interrupted Chubby. "I've just seen Willy Handforth, and he has appointed me the new leader."

"That's because he hadn't seen me," said Wee Johnnie. "We don't want any fuss over this. How are these things usually settled?"

"I'll show you how they're settled," shouted Chubby, ripping off his jacket. "I'm going to fight you, you cheeky new kid! I'm going to put you in your place!"

The crowd now surged into the Form-room, and the door was slammed. Juicy Lemon, now partially cleaned, also wanted to fight Wee Johnnie, but Chubby claimed it as his own special privilege.



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

TICKLISH.

Willie: "Grandma, the **NELSON LEE** is offering prizes for rib-ticklers."

Grandma (after a pause): "Well, dear, send them a feather out of my old hat."

(**J. Harris, 13, Stanhope Road, Swanscombe, Kent, has been awarded a handsome watch.**)

'EAR, 'EAR!

A friend was helping Jones to overhaul his car.

"I say, old man," he said, "I've just oiled the carburetter."

"Carburotter be dashed!" came an infuriated answer from under the car. "That was my ear!"

(**E. Cowell, 29, Lockwood Road, Ilford, has been awarded a "Holiday Annual."**)

THE QUICKEST WAY.

Pompous Young Man (poking navy in the back with walking-stick): "My good fellow, which is the quickest way to the hospital?"

Navy: "Poke me in the back again with that stick, and you'll find yourself there!"

(**L. Kerridge, 41, Belmont Mansions, Goldsmith's Row, London, E.2, has been awarded a penknife.**)

POULTRY SPORT.

Tommy: "Why do they have fowls in football?"

Timmy: "Because they have ducks in cricket."

(**J. Goldstone, 18, Clyde Road, West Didsbury, Manchester, has been awarded a pocket wallet.**)

MAKING SURE.

First Boy: "My father is so absent-minded that he lost his glasses and found them again on his forehead."

Second Boy: "Pooh, that's nothing! The other night my father got out of bed and struck a match to see if he had blown out the candle."

(**H. Walker, 20, Waterloo Road, Barnsley, has been awarded a pocket wallet.**)

A SMASHER.

Father (to son, who is breaking best china crockery): "Great Scott! what are you up to now?"

The comedian chuckled inwardly, and prepared for the scrap. His sense of humour had got completely away with him by this time, and he was ready for anything. In his active mind he was already storing material for a new vaudeville sketch. There was nothing like getting the “dope” at first hand!

“I don’t want to fight you, old son,” he said kindly, “and I’m giving you fair warning. If I hit you once, you’ll simply fade away.”

“Rats!” said Chubby. “The only way to put you in your place is to slaughter you!”

“Hear, hear!”

“Go it, Chubby!”

“Wipe up the floor with him!”

“We’ve had enough of his nerve!”

The other fags gathered round excitedly. Wee Johnnie, for the first time, was beginning to feel slightly uncomfortable. He was small, but he was a man, and physical culture was one of his daily tasks. He was as hard as nails, and his muscles were like whipcord. He had no desire to hurt this youngster.

“Come on, put ‘em up!” roared Chubby, advancing.

He gave Wee Johnnie no opportunity of backing out. Third Form fights were not, as a rule, dignified affairs. They were hammer-and-tong scraps, with the combatants going “all out” until one or the other was knocked out.

Crash!

Chubby’s fist thudded into Wee Johnnie’s face, and the comedian reeled back amid a roar from the other fags. The little man decided, then and there, that this thing had gone far enough. He didn’t want to leave St. Frank’s with a black eye!

“All right, young fellow!” he said briskly.

He was ready now. Chubby’s rushes were futile. The fags looked on in admiration and amazement as Wee Johnnie avoided every lunge with supreme ease. His boxing ability was uncanny for a boy apparently so young. His guard, now that he was fighting in earnest, was impregnable.

Crash!

Wee Johnnie’s right slid through Chubby’s defence as though it did not exist. It seemed to Chubby that a coke hammer had struck him on the chin. He reeled over, sagged at the knees, and subsided to the floor.

“Sorry,” said Wee Johnnie, genuinely concerned. “I didn’t mean to hurt you, kid.”

The other fags crowded round, wild with excitement.

“Get up, Chubby!” roared Juicy, frantic. “You’re not going to let this new chap win, are you? Get up!”

But Chubby remained on the floor, dazed and bewildered. Somebody counted ten, and the confusion became worse. The fags stared fascinatedly as Wee Johnnie bent

Fond Mother: “Don’t worry, George; it keeps the boy out of mischief!”

(K. Ludlow, 122, Phillimore Road, Salley, Birmingham, has been awarded a “Nature Annual.”)

TOO TRUE.

Bill: “I’ve just been having a tussle with the dentist.”

Joe: “Who won?”

Bill: “It was a draw.”

(F. Fairey, 25, Roseveare Road, Grove Park London, S.E.12, has been awarded a penknife.)

CAUGHT.

Small Boy: “Will this letter get to London to-morrow, postman?”

Postman: “Certainly, my lad.”

Small Boy (preparing to run): “That’s funny; it’s addressed to York!”

(A. Martin, 14, Church Cottages, North Ferriby, nr. Hull, has been awarded a penknife.)

PASS AND PARSE.

Teacher: “Take this sentence, Jimmy: ‘The car was travelling at forty miles per hour.’ Can you parse it?”

Jimmy: “No; but dad’s got a car that could do it easily.”

(J. Crook, 20, Pilling Street, Norden, nr. Rockdale, has been awarded a “Holiday Annual.”)

UNAPPRECIATED.

Poet: “Have you an opening for a poet of real genius?”

Editor: “Certainly; we have several doors and windows!”

(F. Thwaite, 56, Devon Street, Werneth, Oldham, has been awarded a penknife.)

’NUFF SAID.

Master: “This is the worst essay I’ve ever read. I shall tell your father——”

Pupil: “I shouldn’t; he wrote it!”

(G. Gorman, 21, Clark Drive, Irvine, Scotland, has been awarded a penknife.)

A SCOTSMAN’S RISE.

The manager of an Aberdeen firm called his book-keeper into his private room.

“Sandy,” he said, “the accountant is leaving, and I’m gawn tae gie you his job.”

Sandy’s face lit up with expectation.

“Thank ye, sir,” he said. “And what will the salary be now?”

The manager shook his head.

“The same as ye’re getting, but ye’ll now hae a hat-pog to yourself!”

(W. Ingram, General Delivery, Brampton, Ontario, Canada, has been awarded a “Nature Annual.”)

over Chubby, assisted him to his feet, and massaged him.

"You're all right, kid," said the little man briskly. "I only gave you a tap."

"And I thought I could fight!" said Chubby dazedly. "Why, that punch of yours is like the kick of a mule! It's twice as hard as Willy's! Put it there, Ward!"

He shook hands generously.

"That's the spirit," said Wee Johnnie, relieved.

"I give you best," went on Chubby, shaking his head. "A chap who can scrap like this is a born leader! Give Fullerton a punch like that, and I'm your slave for the rest of my life!"

"Lead me to him," said Wee Johnnie promptly.

FULLERTON, feeling highly important, was in the School Shop, surrounded by his own gang. He had defied Willy—an easy matter, seeing that Willy was helpless in the sanny—and he had defied Chubby Heath, Juicy Lemon and all the other fags who were Willy's supporters. Fullerton, in fact, was feeling "on top of the world." He was the Big Noise of the Third. His force was now a large one—fully half the Third.

"We'll show those fathcads!" he said disparagingly. "We've been under Willy Handforth's thumb too jolly long! From now onwards we're going to show our independence!"

"Yes, rather!" chorused the others.

"Let's go indoors and hunt up some trouble," went on Fullerton. "Let's bump Chubby Heath and some of those other chaps. We've got to show 'em we're top dogs!"

"Hear, hear!"

They crowded out of the School Shop, but suddenly came to a pause. A small army of fags was marching out of the Ancient House, and at their head strode Wee Johnnie Ward.

"This is Fullerton," said Chubby Heath eagerly, as the two parties came face to face.

"Who wants me?" demanded Fullerton, in a truculent tone.

"I do," said Wee Johnnie, measuring the burly fag with a contemplative eye.

"Oh, you do?" said Fullerton sarcastically. "And who the dickens do you think you are? A checky new kid! Well, I don't even know your name."

"My name is Ward."

"I didn't ask you to tell me," sneered Fullerton. "I don't want to know, anyhow! I don't take any notice of new fry."

"Well, I think you're going to take notice of me," said Wee Johnnie, seeing that Fullerton was nothing but a windbag and a bluffer. "Perhaps you'll be interested to know that I am the new skipper of the Third?"

"What!" yelled Fullerton's supporters,

"You—a new kid—skipper of the Third?" yelled Fullerton. "Ha, ha, ha! That's funny. "What's the matter with you other chaps? You're not letting this little whipper-snapper rule you, are you?"

Chubby Heath and the others waited. Their confidence in Wee Johnnie was now supreme, and they felt that they would not be disappointed.

"I understand that Willy Handforth held the Third together by strong, drastic measures," said Wee Johnnie. "I can see that I shall have to adopt the same tactics. What about a fight, Fullerton? Feel like a scrap? And the winner——"

"I'm not fighting you," interrupted Fullerton sourly. "I.. don't fight with infants! Why don't you run away and play?"

"You won't fight, then?" asked the little man.

"No, I won't!" roared Fullerton, giving him a push. "I'm not going to make myself a laughing-stock—— Hi! What the—— Whoa!"

He yelped with dismay. The "new boy" had grabbed hold of him as if he were a sack of straw. Fullerton lost his balance, pitched over Wee Johnnie's shoulder, and thudded to the ground. As he was staggering to his feet Wee Johnnie got another grip, whirled him over his shoulder again, and he went to the ground with another thud.

"My only hat!" gasped Chubby, staring.

It seemed uncanny—yet, really, it was simple enough. In one of his music-hall sketches, Wee Johnnie was supposed to fight against a gang of ruffians, and for this purpose he used a number of well-known ju-jitsu throws. Wee Johnnie was an expert in the art of Japanese wrestling.

He stood back, wiping his hands carelessly.

"Want some more?" he asked. "Or will you fight?"

Fullerton leapt up savagely.

"I'll fight!" he shouted, lashing out.

But Wee Johnnie got his own right in first, and Fullerton sat down on the gravel with a hard thud. There was an expression of foolish surprise on his face, and he gradually sank back into semi-oblivion.

"One hit's enough from this chap," said Chubby gleefully. "He's got a punch like Carnera!"

Fullerton's supporters were awed—in fact, overawed. This lightning-like defeat of their chosen leader staggered them, and, as a party, they went to pieces.

Wee Johnnie was quick to follow up his advantage

"Come on, you fellows!" he sang out. "Now's the time to wipe up this crowd! We'll show them who's who in the Third!"

"Hurrah!"

"Smash 'em!"

Chubby and Juicy and the others, nothing loth, charged to the attack. Fullerton's mob,

a poor enough fighting force at the best, was put to the rout.

It was over so quickly that prefects, sallying out, arrived too late. Fullerton's mob had bolted, disorganised. And when Fullerton, partially recovering, tried to gather them about him again, there was nothing doing. They had lost faith in him completely—and they were full of respect for the new kid.

Wee Johnnie Ward, in fact, had already established himself in Willy Handforth's shoes!

CHAPTER 8.

A Live-Wire Leader!

AFTER tea, the fags gathered in force in the Third Form Common-room. They were wildly enthusiastic about their new leader. And Wee Johnnie, basking in this hero worship, was tempted to carry on with the practical joke. He was, in fact, carried away by the circumstances, his sense of humour getting the better of his judgment.

Once or twice, during tea—when the elite of the Third had made him the guest of honour—he had had a qualm or two. He knew that he could not keep up this pretence much longer—yet, at the same time, he was reluctant to cry "halt!" before he was compelled to.

"The Third's all right!" he said cheerfully, with the fags gathered round him in an enthusiastic crowd. "We're a united body now, and we ought to start something moving."

"Hear, hear!"

"Hurrah!"

Even the fags who had supported Fullerton were now wild in their enthusiasm for Wee Johnnie. The unfortunate Willy Handforth, quarantined in the sanatorium, was forgotten.

"What can we do?" asked Chubby Heath eagerly. "We can't jape the Fourth, or the Remove—"

"Why not?" interrupted Wee Johnnie

"Why not?" repeated Chubby, staring. "Well—The Fourth and the Remove are a bit above us, you know," he went on doubtfully. "We've never had the nerve to jape them in a big way."

"Then it's about time the Third started," said Wee Johnnie firmly. "Let's not bother about the Fourth; let's go for the bigger crowd the Remove."

"We've never done such a thing!" said Dicky Jones breathlessly. "My only hat! If we japed the Remove, we should have the laugh over them for the rest of the term!"

"We can't jape the Remove!" said Juicy Lemon, shaking his head. "The Remove's holding a meeting in the Lecture Hall. A full Form meeting."

"That sounds pretty good to me," said Wee Johnnie, quickly grasping the possibili-

ties. "If all the Remove fellows are in one room, there's a chance for us to get busy."

The door opened, and Biggleswade, of the Sixth, looked in.

"Not so much noise here, you young sweeps," he said severely. "What's all the excitement about? It's a pity that young Willy is in the sanny. He's the only one who could keep you in control."

"Oh, cheese it, Biggy!" protested Chubby. "We're not making much noise."

"Well, see that you don't," warned Biggleswade. "Where's that new kid? Oh, there you are!" he added, as he spotted Wee Johnnie. "Ward's your name, isn't it? The Housemaster's asking for you."

"Splendid!" said Wee Johnnie calmly. "Quite a sociable man, Mr Wilkes."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Don't fool yourself," said Biggleswade. "The chances are that you'll get a swishing—for kicking up so much noise before tea."

"Rats!" said Wee Johnnie. "He asked me to go back—he wants to examine me. I suppose I'd better humour him, you chaps. I shan't be long."

He went along to Mr. Wilkes' study with mingled feelings. Had he been bowled out? He doubted it. This summons was probably a formal matter. He was rather dubious about that examination, though. Well, if the truth had to come out now, it wouldn't matter much; he had had his fun.

It was a pity, all the same. He had been rather looking forward to that jape on the Remove. Perhaps, by a little wangling, he could put Mr. Wilkes off. Wee Johnnie had enough assurance for anything.

He tapped on the door of the Housemaster's study, and entered. The study was empty. Mr. Wilkes, apparently, had been called away, for his light was still burning, and some papers—evidently relating to Wee Johnnie's son—were on the desk

Zurrrrh!

The telephone-bell rang sharply, and after a moment's hesitation the comedian went across to the desk and lifted the receiver. In Mr. Wilkes' absence, there was no reason why he shouldn't answer the 'phone.

"Hallo!" he said crisply

"That you, Mr. Wilkes?" came a familiar voice.

"It's Dr. Brett, isn't it?" asked Wee Johnnie. "No, Mr. Wilkes is out of the room for a minute. I happened to be in here—"

"You'll do, Mr. Ward," came Dr. Brett's voice. "How are you getting along with that suit?"

"I'm having a splendid time, thanks."

"I am glad to hear it—I thought you would be thoroughly uncomfortable," chuckled Dr. Brett. "By the way, your own clothes are ready, when you like to collect them"

"It's really very good of you, Dr. Brett," said Wee Johnnie. "I'll be down soon. Will you be in?"

"I don't know—I've got to go off to a patient unexpectedly, and I may be detained," replied the doctor. "I'm glad I've had this word with you, Mr. Ward—but I really rang up about something quite different. I wanted to speak to Mr. Wilkes—but I dare say you can give him a message?"

"Anything you like."

"It's about that youngster whose clothes you are wearing," continued the doctor. "I'm glad to say that there's no need for him to be kept in the sanatorium."

"I thought he had the mumps?"

"Oh, no! There was a slight danger that he had carried the germ away from that cottage," said the doctor, "but I've just made a thorough examination of Mrs. White's children, and I find that their complaint is not the mumps at all. Young Handforth can come out of the sanny as soon as he likes."

"I think he'll be rather pleased to hear that," chuckled Wee Johnnie. "All right, doctor—I'll tell Mr. Wilkes as soon as he comes in."

Wee Johnnie hung up, and remained thoughtful for some moments. His eyes were gleaming.

He was the only person in the whole of St. Frank's who knew that Willy Handforth was free to leave quarantine. And Dr. Brett was going off on a case which might keep him detained for some time. Surely there were possibilities here.

Wee Johnnie slipped out of Mr. Wilkes' study. An idea had occurred to him which necessitated his immediate departure. He had no desire to see the Housemaster now—and it wasn't likely that Mr. Wilkes would come searching for him. Anyhow, he could chance that.

Arriving back in the Third Form Common-room, the fags crowded round him, asking all sorts of questions.

"Steady—steady!" said Wee Johnnie, his coolness effectually silencing them. "Don't all shout at once! As it happens, Mr. Wilkes wasn't there, and I came away without seeing him."

"You'll catch it hot if you don't report!"

"Who cares?" replied Wee Johnnie. "I'm not afraid of old Wilkey! Now, we were planning to jape the Remove, weren't we? Fate has shown me the way, kids! You don't know how lucky it was that Dr. Brett should have rung up while Mr. Wilkes was



Wee Johnnie Ward gave Juicy Lemon a push—and Juicy

out of the room—and while I was there."

"What the dickens are you talking about?" asked Dicky Jones.

"Just this!" said Wee Johnnie impressively. "Dr. Brett rang up to say that Willy Handforth is in no danger of the mumps, and that he can come out of the sanny."

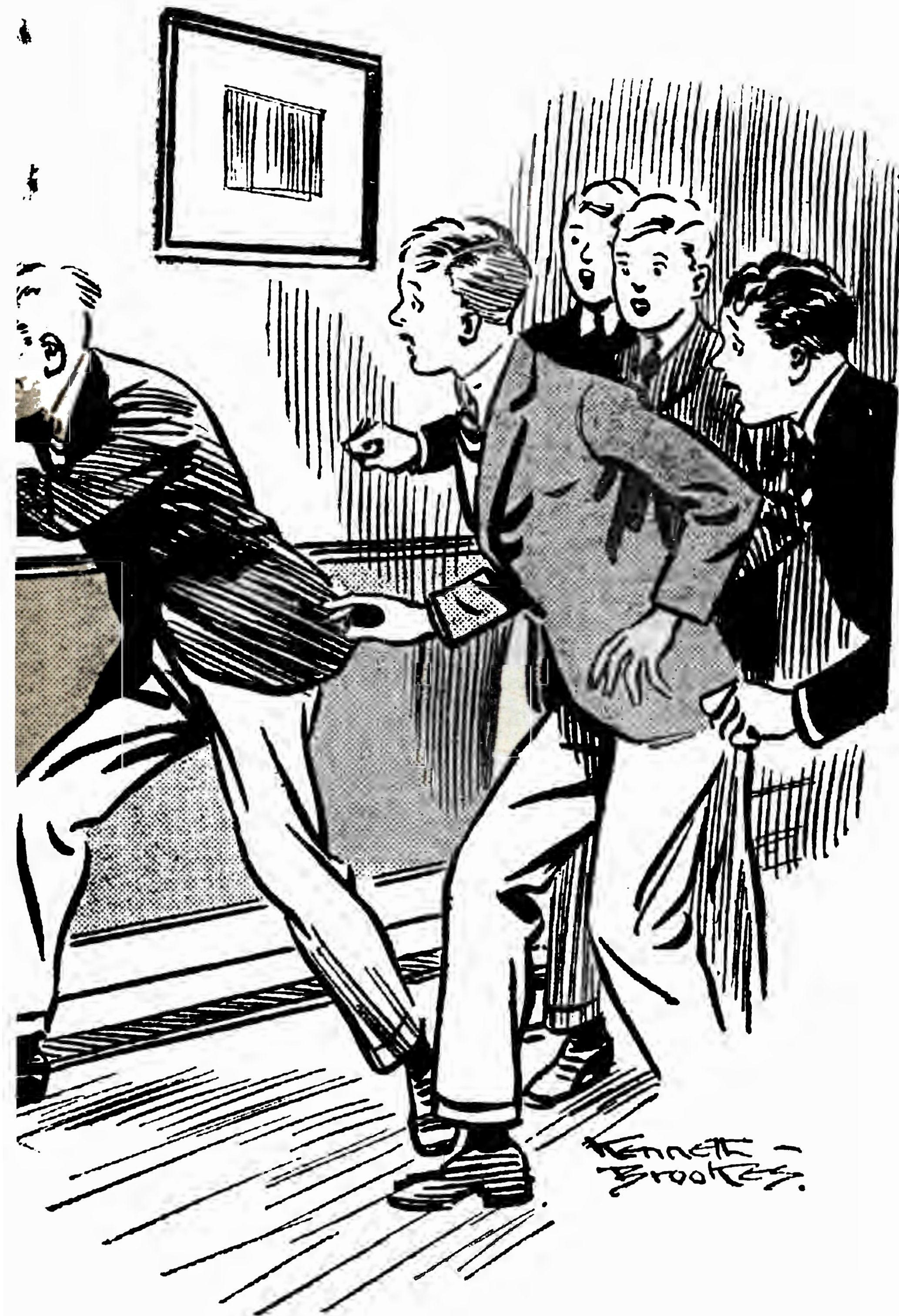
"What!"

"Oh, good egg!"

"Let's rush off and tell Willy the good news!"

"Rather!"

"Hi! Wait a minute!" roared Wee Johnnie, as some of the fags excitedly ran



"Exactly," grinned Wee Johnnie. "And the Remove is holding a meeting in the Lecture Hall," he added significantly. "Don't you think that this is a good chance to spoof the Remove up to the eyes?"

"I—I don't understand," said Chubby Heath helplessly.

"Well, I want two of you to come with me—you two will do," said Wee Johnnie, indicating Chubby and Juicy. "The rest of you must remain here and keep mum. Understand? If you breathe a word about Willy to anybody else, the game will be ruined."

Wee Johnnie Ward walked briskly out of the Form-room, followed by Chubby Heath and Juicy Lemon. Outside, in the darkness, the comedian brought his companions to a halt.

"The first thing we want," he said briskly, "is a ladder."

"A ladder?"

"One of those things you climb up, my child," explained the little man.

"I know what a ladder is, you chump!" growled Chubby. "But what do you want a ladder for? There's one behind the woodshed—"

"Where's the woodshed?" interrupted Wee Johnny crisply.

They went there, found the ladder, and under Wee Johnnie's instructions they smuggled it across the Triangle, through Big Arch, and then to the sanatorium. It was placed against the window of Willy's room, and after a word of caution to his two companions, Wee Johnnie silently mounted.

CHAPTER 9.

Remove Ructions!

WILLY HANDFORTH was fed-up to the teeth.

Compulsory detention in the isolation ward was gall and wormwood to him. One of the most active fellows in the Third, he felt this enforced idleness keenly—the more so because he knew that there was nothing wrong with him.

He had every comfort, it was true. He was sitting in an easy-chair, and there was a cheerful fire. He had plenty of books to read, and the nurse in charge had been doing everything possible to make his confinement agreeable.

Tap-tap!

towards the door. "Don't be in such a hurry! We can make some capital out of this information. Don't forget, we're the only ones in the school who know it."

"But old Wilkey—"

"Old Wilkey knows nothing," said Wee Johnnie. "I'm supposed to tell him—but I haven't told him yet. Now, supposing Willy gets out of the sanny?"

Chubby Heath stared.

"Gets out, you mean, without anybody else in the school knowing that he's safe?" he asked breathlessly. "Why, he'll cause a panic! Everybody will steer clear of him as though he has the plague!"

ly received the full contents of a sooty booby-trap.

Willy looked up sharply, and was startled to see a face at the window. He went across, opened the window, and found himself confronted by a perfectly strange youngster, who was standing on the top of a short ladder.

"You're Willy Handforth, I suppose?" said the stranger coolly. "My name's Ward. New chap."

"Well, I'm jiggered!" ejaculated Willy.

"I've been getting the Third ship-shape for you," went on Wee Johnnie. "Fullerton's crowd is subdued, and the Third is a united body once again. In fact, I've been elected leader in your absence."

"Well, I'm jiggered!" ejaculated Willy again.

"How are you fixed here?" went on Wee Johnnie. "What about the nurse? Any chance of her popping in?"

"Not just yet," replied Willy. "But what's the idea? You cheeky new kid—"

"Keep your hair on," grinned Wee Johnnie. "Chubby Heath and Juicy Lemon are down below. We've come to rescue you."

"What!"

"And the Remove is holding a meeting in the Lecture Hall, and we thought it was a good opportunity for a jape," continued Wee Johnnie. "You'll understand all about it when we explain. But the main thing is for you to hop down this ladder while you've got the chance."

An excited flash came into Willy's eyes, but it died away and he shook his head.

"Nothing doing!" he said shortly.

"But look here—"

"Nothing doing!" repeated Willy. "What do you take me for? I haven't got the mumps, and I don't suppose I shall get it, but there's always the risk. And I've given my word—"

"You don't think I'd suggest your escaping if you really were a germ-carrier, do you?" broke in Wee Johnnie impatiently.

"Dr. Brett has just rung up to say that those White children haven't got mumps at all, but a harmless glandular swelling. He's given permission for you to be immediately released."

Willy clutched at him.

"Is—is this true?" he asked tensely. "Oh, my hat! Am I really free?"

"Honour bright!" said Wee Johnnie.

"Dr. Brett rang up Mr. Wilkes, but he happened to be out of the room, and I took the message. So nobody in authority knows the truth yet. That's why we're smuggling you out."

"This isn't a wheeze, is it?" asked Willy suspiciously. "Don't forget I've given my word that I won't try to escape—"

"That doesn't count now," said Wee Johnnie. "I tell you that Dr. Brett has given you the 'all clear.' Didn't I say, 'Honour bright'?"

Willy did not hesitate now. He had promised not to escape, it was true; but he had given that promise because there was

a chance that he was a germ-carrier. With that danger obliterated, his promise no longer held good. He shinned down that ladder in Wee Johnnie's wake like a monkey.

"We'll leave the ladder here," whispered Wee Johnnie. "We want the nurse to find it, so that she can give the alarm."

"I don't know what you are getting at," said Willy, puzzled. "Hallo, Juicy! Hallo, Chubby!"

They all slipped away into the darkness.

"Now, what's the big idea?" asked Willy, when they paused.

"It's not my idea—it's Ward's," said Chubby admiringly. "A jape on the Remove! The wheeze is to scare those Removites and pull their legs generally. As far as anybody in the school knows, you're still a purveyor of mumps. Twig? Actually, you're safe, but who knows—except us?"

"My only sainted aunt!" breathed Willy. "And did—did this new chap hink it out all by himself?" He seized Wee Johnnie's hand and wrung it warmly. "That's good enough for me," he went on heartily. "My son, we can do with you in the Third!"

"I thought you'd appreciate me, sooner or later," grinned Wee Johnnie.

"But you mustn't forget that I'm skipper, and I'm leader again now that I'm out," went on Willy waningly.

"I wouldn't dream of usurping your position," said the comedian, with the utmost gravity.

THE Remove meeting in the Lecture Hall was in full swing.

It was a full meeting of the Form, called by Nipper. The subject under discussion was an important one—football. There had been a good deal of slacking amongst the rank and file since the recent barring-out, and Nipper was determined to call a halt. He was in the middle of an earnest speech when the door burst open and Willy Handforth, wild-looking and dishevelled, dashed in. All eyes were turned upon him—eyes that opened wide as they recognised the new arrival.

"Where's my major?" gasped Willy. "Biggy's after me, and one or two other prefects! They spotted me in the Triangle!"

Chubby Heath, Juicy Lemon and Wee Johnnie came running in after him, and Wee Johnnie slammed the door. Confusion reigned within the space of ten seconds.

"Hi! Keep away from me!" yelled Fullwood as Willy brushed against him. "What are you doing here, you young idiot? You're in quarantine, aren't you?"

"I escaped!" panted Willy.

"What?" went up a general roar.

"It's all right—no need to get excited!" shouted Wee Johnnie. "We took a ladder to the sanny, and helped Willy to get down. The prefects are after us!"

"You're mad!" shouted Nipper, in alarm. "You shouldn't have come here. Willy!"

You know how strict the beaks are about a thing like the mumps! Are you off your rocker?"

Willy took no notice. He went dashing about among the scared Removites.

"Oh, here you are, Ted!" panted Willy, as he grabbed his major. "I want you! I want five bob!"

"Five bob!" gasped Edward Oswald Handforth, jumping back a yard or more.

"Let go my arm, you young idiot! I don't want to be contaminated!"

"Five bob!" urged Willy, holding out his hand.

"You — you — you——"

The uproar continued, and then the door opened again, and Biggleswade, Wilson and Conray major — all prefects — charged in.

"There he is!" shouted Biggleswade, pointing.

There was an immediate hush.

"Come here, Handforth minor!" said Wilson grimly.

"Keep quiet, you other fellows. No, don't come too close, Handforth minor. Stand about ten yards away from me."

Willy obeyed.

"Did you escape from the sanny?" asked Wilson.

"Yes, please, Wilson," said Willy meekly.

"Well, you're going back — and you're keeping right away from me," said Wilson sternly.

"You young idiot! Don't you know that it's a serious

offence to escape from quarantine? Everybody in this room will stay where he is!"

"But, Wilson, please!" pleaded Willy, dashing up and clutching at Wilson—much to the prefect's consternation. "I haven't got the mumps! There's really no danger——"

"You'll have me quarantined now!" howled Wilson wildly.

"Let's get out of here!" bawled Handforth. "We shall be in the soup if we don't!"

Wilson's consternation was shared by all the Removites. But before there could be a general rush for the door, Mr. Crowell, the

Remove Form-master, and Mr. Sandliffe, the Third Form-master, and Mr. Wilkes appeared. All three masters were looking hot and angry. Old Wilkey, for once, had entirely lost his good humour.

"All right, Wilson, leave this to me," said Mr. Wilkes crisply. "Attention, all of you!"

The juniors stood as though frozen to the floor.

"Handforth minor, I understand that you escaped from the sanatorium by means of a ladder?" asked old Wilkey sternly. "You

were assisted by some of your Form-fellows, were you not?"

"It's all right, sir—really!" said Willy earnestly. "These chaps are getting alarmed over nothing. I haven't got the mumps, and there's no chance that I shall spread——"

"That will do!" interrupted Mr. Wilkes. "I am very disappointed in you, Handforth minor. I understand that you gave a definite promise that you would not try to escape."

"But, sir——"

"I will not listen," said old Wilkey angrily. "Nothing that you can say can alter the fact that you escaped from the sanatorium, and that you mixed with these other boys. It is fortunate, in a way, that you came straight here, and that none of the boys has since gone away. We

have, at least, confined the infection to one quarter."

"I'm afraid it's my fault, sir," said Wee Johnnie meekly. "It was I who helped Handforth minor to escape."

"I shall deal with you later, young man," retorted Mr. Wilkes grimly. "Now, everybody will march out of this Lecture Hall in double file. You, Wilson, will lead,"

Wilson breathed hard.

"But I'm—I'm not included in this, am I, sir?" he asked thickly. "I don't want to be isolated——"

"I can sympathise with you, Wilson, in your dilemma," said Mr. Wilkes; "but when there is a danger of the whole school becom-

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ing infected with a complaint like the mumps, we must take every precaution. Every boy in this room will form into line, and march straight to the sanatorium. You will all be quarantined until Dr. Brett has had the opportunity of making a thorough examination. If necessary, you will remain isolated from the remainder of the school until all risks of infection have passed."

And Mr. Wilkes and the other masters, standing well aside, watched the procession start.

CHAPTER 10.

Exit Wee Johnnie!

"WELL, it worked," murmured Wee Johnnie complacently.
"Like a dream," grinned Willy.

They were marching side by side, and Chubby Heath and Juicy Lemon were just in their rear. Chubby and Juicy, in fact, were thoroughly scared. This jape was so successful that they had the wind up. The inclusion of prefects and masters in the affair had not entered their earlier calculations. But Willy and Wee Johnnie, both possessed of unlimited "nerve," were thoroughly enjoying themselves.

The Remove boiled and seethed. This meant quarantine for them all, for two or

three weeks. All because one reckless fag had dashed in amongst them. Willy was decidedly unpopular at that moment.

The alarm had got round by now, and other prefects were on duty in the Triangle, keeping the way clear for the infected ones. The procession was crossing the Triangle when it was held up by the passage of a big limousine car. Fourth-Formers and Fifth-Formers were crowding in the offing, watching excitedly. The affair was quite a sensation. A heavily-built, bluff gentleman stepped down from the car.

"May I ask—er—what is the meaning of this unusual procedure?" he asked, addressing Mr. Suncliffe, who happened to be nearest.

"Bless my soul!" ejaculated the Third Form master. "Are you not Sir John Brent, sir? Mr. Wilkes! Sir John is here!"

Mr. Wilkes came across. The visitor was indeed Sir John Brent, Bart., the chairman of the Board of Governors. He had arrived at an awkward moment. He had come, in fact, to see how the school was settling down after the recent barring-out, and he was not too pleased to find this commotion.

"It is rather an unfortunate affair, Sir John," said Mr. Wilkes. "One of our boys came into contact with some mumps patients, and he was quarantined in the sanatorium. But he escaped and mingled with all these other boys."



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"Good heavens!" ejaculated Sir John. "This is very serious, Mr. Wilkes."

"I am afraid it is, Sir John," agreed the Housemaster. "However, we have succeeded in confining the infection to these thirty or forty boys."

"Just a minute!" said another voice, in a tone of blank astonishment.

And Dr. Brett emerged from the car.

"Get ready for fireworks!" breathed Wee Johnnie, nudging Willy. "This is where you're going to get a surprise, kid."

The comedian was considerably taken aback. He had intended explaining everything to Mr. Wilkes very soon, but now he could see that it would be unnecessary. Dr. Brett had encountered Sir John in the village, and Sir John had given him a lift.

"What is this I hear about infection?" asked the doctor, stepping out of the car and facing Mr. Wilkes. "Didn't you get my message?"

"What message?" asked the Housemaster. "I had no message."

"When I rang you up some time ago Mr. Ward answered the telephone, and he assured me that he would tell you——"

"Mr. Ward?" broke in Old Wilkey. "There is nobody at St. Frank's named Mr. Ward."

"I think there is," said Dr. Brett. "Mr. John Ward, known on the stage as Wee Johnnie Ward."

"Oh, I see!" said Mr. Wilkes. "No, doctor, Mr. Ward has not been here. His son has arrived, of course."

"His son!" almost yelled the doctor.

"Yes, his son came this afternoon, and reported to me at once," said Mr. Wilkes. "He is here now. He is one of the boys who assisted young Handforth to escape."

Wee Johnnie came forward, laughing.

"I think it's time to explain, doctor," he said mildly.

"I think it is," said Dr. Brett. "But first of all I had better tell you, Mr. Wilkes, that there is no danger of infection at all. Mr. Ward knew it, and I can only assume that he has been deliberately playing a practical joke."

"Let's hear some more," said Mr. Wilkes softly. "This is getting very entertaining."

"I rang you up, Mr. Wilkes, to tell you that Handforth minor was free to leave the sanatorium," continued the doctor. "Mr. Ward took the message——"

"Why do you keep saying 'Mr. Ward,' when you are obviously talking about a mere boy?" broke in Sir John.

"Well, this boy, then," said Dr. Brett. "He knew that there was no danger."

"What!" went up a shout from the Removites.

"Just a little joke, Mr. Wilkes," said Wee Johnnie, smiling. "But we didn't mean to drag you into it, or any of the other masters, either. It was a joke against the Remove."

The Remove, listening, hardly knew whether to be relieved or angry. Upon the whole, it decided to be relieved.

"As for this 'boy,' I think it's about time he came out in his true colours," went on Dr. Brett. "Really, Mr. Ward, I wouldn't have lent you young Handforth's clothes if I had dreamed that you would play such a trick as this."

Willy Handforth and Chubby Heath and the other Third-Formers felt rather weak at the knees as they gazed fascinatedly at Wee Johnnie.

"A—a man?" gurgled Chubby. "Oh, my hat!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Fourth-Formers, at least, could appreciate the joke, and they yelled with laughter. As soon as everybody fully understood that this new fag was indeed a man the whole thing became excruciatingly funny. How the Third had been spoofed. And how the Remove had been spoofed.

"You are a very clever comedian, Mr. Ward," said Old Wilkey gently. "Not only did you fool my boys, but you fooled me, too. I am not quite sure that I shall easily forgive you."

"Don't say that, sir!" urged Wee Johnnie earnestly. "Honestly, I meant no harm. But when I start on a practical joke, it sort of gets away with me. And I didn't see any real harm in it."

Mr. Wilkes suddenly smiled and took the little man's hand.

"Well, it's all right with me," he said with a chuckle. "But I'm afraid that Sir John will take rather a different view of the matter."

WHILE the school chuckled over the spoofing of the Remove—much to the Remove's discomfiture, and much to the Third's glee—Wee Johnnie changed into his own clothing—which Dr. Brett had brought to the school—and he once again became himself.

Sir John Brent, as Mr. Wilkes had suspected, was upset. He told Wee Johnnie quite frankly that the Governors would have to reconsider the question of taking Wee Johnnie's son into the school. The application, he declared, must once again come before the Governing Board.

When Wee Johnnie left, now resplendent in his own attire, he was cheered to the echo, particularly by the Third. The fags regarded him as a hero.

But as for his son coming to St. Frank's—well, that was very doubtful now. There was every chance that the application, when it came before the Governing Board for a second time, would be turned down. Wee Johnnie Ward had had his joke, but he had to pay the reckoning.

THE END.

(Edward Oswald Handforth writes a play next week, lads; and as a playwright Handy is the world's funniest. Look out for "HANDY'S PLAY"; it'll make you cry tears of laughter.)

HONOURS



CHAPTER 1.

A Call to Arms!

THURSTON KYLE'S fist came down on his desk with a compelling thud.

"That is the story, Lee. Here is the boy. His father is dead—hunted to death. His cur of an uncle reigns on a throne that should be his by right. This lad, Prince Budrudin, is the true Rajah of Bhuristan. And, by Heaven, my friends, I do not rest until he is back once more on the throne of his ancestors!"

The echo of the Night Hawk's deep, vigorous voice died away, and a hush fell over the room.

A council of war had gathered in the Night Hawk's great laboratory at Hampstead. In chairs, drawn in a circle round the scientist's bureau, sat his comrades in many

a strange adventure—Nelson Lee and Nipper, just arrived from St. Frank's; Snub Hawkins, Kyle's cheery little assistant; and the vast bulk of Scrapper Huggins, expugilist, proprietor of Huggins' Gymnasium, Limehouse, and leader of that tough, ready-for-anything bunch of fighting-men, "Thurston Kyle's Kittens."

They had foregathered that afternoon in response to messages from the Night Hawk; and already the atmosphere was charged with interest and tense anticipation. There was work to be done; daring, reckless work at that.

Thurston Kyle himself, his handsome, ascetic face slightly flushed, surveyed his allies with dark, eager glances, studying the effect of his words. But for once they had no eyes for him just then; they were staring thoughtfully at the cause of the conference

"SHOOT THE NIGHT HAWK!"

Nelson Lee, hypnotised, receives his instructions—and obeys!

—in a Yarn Crammed with Thrills!

DIVIDED

By **JOHN
BREARLEY**



—the small Indian boy who sat on a stool beside the Night Hawk, thin, brown hands clasped nervously round his knees.

It was a strange story Thurston Kyle had just finished; a tale of a bitter Oriental feud and vilest treachery. And it all centred round this slender lad of fourteen, with the smooth, dusky face and clear-cut features of the high-caste Indian. His Serene Highness, Prince Budrudin Ananda, rightful Rajah of Bhuristan. Or, as Snub Hawkins called him, "Buddy—'cos life's too short!"

Some years before, as the result of a rebellion, Budrudin's father, the old rajah, had been driven from his kingdom by his savage brother. He had been forced to fly to Europe, taking the boy with him; but, in his flight, he had taken also the marvellous hereditary jewel of Bhuristan, a peerless ruby known as the "Dagger of Blood."

From such a beginning the feud had spread; for without that ruby in the front of his turban of State, no man could safely hold the throne of Bhuristan. By means of severe precautions and a counterfeit gem, the present rajah had succeeded in tricking his subjects up till now, but secretly he had

spared no efforts to track the fugitives down and regain the genuine stone, lest at some future time the old rajah or Prince Budrudin should reappear in Bhuristan once more with the flaming talisman—in which case the usurper could look for no mercy or support from his duped countrymen.

To that end, his agents had hounded the old ruler and the boy from country to country, city to city, all through the years. Yet always they had failed.

A year ago, however, the old man had died—worn out; and on his death-bed he had given his son and the famous jewel into the guardianship of a solicitor, one Jonathan Silk, trusting the man to the hilt.

But Silk had turned out a treacherous rogue. Either coveting the ruby for himself, or selling his services to the false Rajah of Bhuristan for high pay, he had deliberately plotted the lonely youngster's death. His schemes had come to a head during the night that had just

passed. In a few short hours, twice Budrudin had been lured to a hideous end; and twice Thurston Kyle, the Night Hawk, had saved him!

Barely though Thurston Kyle had given the facts, his listeners had had no difficulty in picturing the reckless bravery by which he had snatched the boy prince from the buffers of the Devon express, and, later, from the clutches of two rascally Indian assassins. To do this he had faced death a score of times; the stiffness of his right arm told eloquently of his narrow escapes. He had, in fact, been badly injured. But the boy had been saved.

Afterwards, by cold nerve and bluff, little Snub had rammed home the victory by forcing the treacherous Jonathan Silk to hand over the ruby and fly at once to France. Thus, in a single night, the solicitor's careful plans had ended in utter failure. The boy rajah sat securely now beside Thurston Kyle, and on the bureau, by the scientist's elbow, sparkled the glorious Dagger of Blood.

The Dagger of Blood! Never was jewel more grimly named and designed. In his

time Nelson Lee had handled most of the world's historic gems, nearly all with a long and deadly history attached. Yet never had he seen such a ruby as the one Kyle showed him now—a huge stone, cut by a genius to the shape of a vicious, curving blade, its innermost depths glowing with a thousand rays of purest blood-red hue.

Lighting a pensive cigarette, Nelson Lee surveyed the young rajah with grave curiosity, conning over the strange story Thurston Kyle had told, sensing the pathos behind the boy's wistful eyes.

The lad's slim body was almost comically "lost" in an old suit belonging to the sturdy Snub, and his dark face was tired and sad. The long years of exile and pursuit, the death of his father, the treachery of trusted friends, had left traces plainly to be seen by such keen eyes as those of Nelson Lee.

And, for the sake of this small boy, Thurston Kyle was preparing to embark on a campaign that secretly staggered Nelson Lee by its sweeping audacity! For the Night Hawk's fierce vow meant nothing less than a proposal to invade the State of Bhuristan—a little kingdom sheltered behind colossal mountains, that in its time had successfully defeated Afghan raiders and British soldiers, too!

That was what Thurston Kyle meant; and in his heart Nelson Lee knew that his strange ally would go to any lengths to achieve his purpose, as always. Already the Night Hawk had stated that his plans were ready—what they were, Nelson Lee had yet to learn. The famous detective exhaled a long column of smoke, and spoke at last:

"An interesting tale, Kyle; very exciting indeed. But do you realise the risk of taking armed men and stirring up strife, even in a wild country, during these modern days? Man, you will have the Indian Government, if not the whole civilised world, about your ears!"

The Night Hawk snapped his fingers. That was all—but it was enough. Nelson Lee smiled wryly.

"Very well," he shrugged. "I know you too well to waste further words. You want my help, Kyle?"

For the first time Thurston Kyle hesitated.

"Yes, of course," he confessed after a pause. "But I am dubious of asking you, old friend. It will mean, for one thing, a lengthy absence from England; a dangerous journey into one of the wildest regions in the world; and, probably, some hard fighting and peril. What do you say?"

The detective smiled again quietly.

"Have I ever failed you yet?" he said; and the Night Hawk shot out his hand.

"Thank you, Lee!" He turned to the Scrapper, a silent, breathless onlooker all this while. "And you, Scrapper—and your men? I shall need you as my fighting force. Budrudin tells me he has friends among the mountains who will spring to arms the moment we strike; but I can do with my faithful Kittens to lead the way!"

He struck the chair sharply.

"With twenty good men, I believe we can spring a complete surprise. Your men will be well armed, Huggins, well paid. And if anything happens to them, they will be taken care of. What do you think? Will they follow me to India—fight there?"

Scrapper Huggins made no reply in words. Only his huge shoulders twitched vigorously, a great hand plucked feverishly at the neat choker round his neck, and a smile slowly split his rugged face from ear to ear. That was Scrapper Huggins' reply for himself and the Kittens!

Thurston Kyle flung back his head and laughed joyously as a schoolboy. With a quick movement he leapt from his chair, towering above them all in his magnificent height.

"Splendid! Now, my friends, to work! Let us talk of our plans for the invasion of Bhuristan!"

CHAPTER 2.

The Night Hawk's Smashing Plans!

IN long, rapid strides the Night Hawk crossed the laboratory, his allies following him to where, on a table before the french windows, was spread a huge map of India. When they had gathered round, Thurston Kyle's long forefinger darted unerringly at a tiny patch of yellow high up in the north-west corner. He tapped it sharply.

"Here is the scene of our campaign. This is Bhuristan—hidden away between the borders of Bokhara and Afghanistan, a wild, lonely region, but the lonelier the better for our purpose. News will not travel so fast!"

In curt, imperative sentences he went on, his magnetic personality driving home every word as he unfolded his plan.

"As you see, Bhuristan is a small state, shaped like a saucer, with great, desolate mountains ringing it round. Through these mountains, according to Budrudin, there are but two passes through which men can safely pass. They are, of course, strongly guarded; and the mountains are so high that to fly over them by 'plane would court disaster. A pretty problem, is it not?"

Long and earnestly Nelson Lee studied the tiny spot on the map, weighing up the position in his mind. Years before he had been in that region after big-game; it was one of the world's waste spots, a No-Man's-Land of colossal peaks and secret valleys, peopled by fierce hill tribes from Afghanistan, a place of burning suns, bitter gales, desolation, and death. He nodded slowly.

"Yes. A pretty problem!"

The Night Hawk laughed softly.

"Yet I shall solve it. What are mountains to me? If it were merely a case of putting paid to this scoundrelly rajah, I would fly over the ridges myself, and do it without ado. But it is not. We have Budrudin here, and the Dagger of Blood, and both must be got safely into Bhuristan to ensure success,

"That is where you, Lee, and the Kittens come in. You must act as their bodyguard!"

Rapidly his finger flew over the map; his sentences grew shorter, more dynamic still.

"This is our route. You and the Kittens will go by steam yacht to the eastern Mediterranean. Somewhere on the shores of Palestine you will disembark, and afterwards the party will fly across Persia into the wilds of Turkistan. That is a secret way into that lonely country, a back-door, you understand. Across deserts and waste-lands, keeping away from all cities all the time!"

Nelson Lee frowned in perplexity, but before he could speak the Night Hawk swept onwards.

"I know what you are thinking—where is our transport to come from? Leave it to me, Lee. In half an hour I must leave here for an appointment in Harley Street with Foster, the masseur. The strained muscles in my arm, I find, can only be quickly cured by expert hands. But after I leave there I shall attend to the transport of my—army."

His ringing, infectious laughter rang out again.

"First, I can procure the right yacht and a trusty crew at a few hours' notice. It is lying in Southampton Water at the moment, and I have used it before. The matter of 'planes for crossing the desert I will solve later, never fear. Remember the sea voyage to Palestine will take you over a fortnight, and I shall be far ahead. If it can be done with secrecy I will hire the 'planes—preferably one of the latest big troop-carriers such as the Army use. But if I can't get one quietly, I shall loot it from the Egyptian Army and take the risk. Or, failing that, three smaller passenger-carriers that you, Nipper and Snub can pilot."

The reckless, whirlwind plans, so calmly uttered, left Nelson Lee and the others dumb. What could the detective say? He knew his superb ally would make good; the fast-flying invisible Night Hawk could achieve tasks that no ordinary man would consider. As for Nipper, Budrudin and the Scrapper, they gazed at Thurston Kyle with shining eyes, and the leader of the Kittens summed up the situation in one breathless gasp:

"Strike, me, 'ooray!"

Even Nelson Lee's cool mind was slightly carried away by his friend's stern enthusiasm. It was the most fantastic project he had ever heard, but his faith in the Night Hawk was strong. He asked with quiet eagerness:

"And when do we start?"

"To-morrow night, Lee, if possible. Can you make your arrangements by then?"

"It's short notice—but I'll try."

"Good. And you, Scrapper? Can you leave here now and collect the Kittens by to-morrow? I will see to their gear."

"Can I, gov'nor?" The Scrapper chuckled hoarsely. "Not 'arf I can't!" And Nipper and Snub gave a whoop.

"Then we can go ahead," smiled the Night Hawk. "The essence of our plan is speed. We hold both trump cards: Budrudin and the Dagger. Snub terrified Jonathan Silk out of England last night—the dog even cabled us from Calais, as ordered, this morning. In any case there would be little to fear from him, for he is not to know I rescued Budrudin from those Indian fiends last night in mid-air.

"One of them caught a glimpse of me, I think, but probably took me for a great bird. Anyway, I am certain he did not see me catch the boy after he had fallen from the 'plane. Therefore they and Silk will believe him dead, and report as much to his uncle. They may make some attempt to regain the ruby; let them try, that's all. It's up to us to strike quickly while they fancy themselves secure. Take them by surprise—in Bhuristan! My friends, the odds are in our—"

His voice stopped and his face grew alert as, sharp and shrill, came the sudden peal of an electric bell from the front gates, hidden by the belt of trees that fringed the wide lawn. Snub looked at his master in quick surprise.

"Visitors, sir! Are you expecting—"

"No, lad!" For a moment Thurston Kyle pursed his lips thoughtfully. Then: "All right, Snub; open the gates. We will see who the caller is as he comes up the drive—it may be nothing of importance!"

Quickly the freckled youth moved to a wall-lever that controlled the big iron gates. He swung it down; the bell ceased abruptly and the little party moved with caution to the windows. Unexpected visitors were never welcome at the old Hampstead mansion, and Thurston Kyle had his own careful methods of admitting them.

There was a silence, broken presently by the sound of a motor edging slowly along the drive that wound through the thick trees. A second later the car itself emerged into plain view—a long covered Daimler, magnificent with purple enamel and silver work.

Smoothly it skirted the lawn, drew up before the front steps beside the other cars there, its progress followed by keen eyes from the laboratory veranda. Then the door opened and the mysterious driver stepped leisurely on to the gravel. And, with his appearance, from each of the watchers came a sibilant, wordless exclamation.

The newcomer was an Indian; a tall man, broad-shouldered, trim-waisted, his brown, high-checked face adorned by a black beard. He was dressed in faultless European clothes save that round his head he wore a neat mauve turban, bearing a single ornament in front that flashed wickedly in the afternoon sun.

There came a sudden sharp cry of fear from Nelson Lee's side, and back into the laboratory tumbled Prince Budrudin, gasping, speechless, his dark eyes dull with

terror. In a flash Thurston Kyle had turned and was holding the lad tight. Buddy, gripping the Night Hawk's strong arms, clung to him, his lithe body quivering.

"My dear lad! What is it? Who is the man? You know him?"

Piercely the young Indian bit into his quivering lips, trying hard to pull himself together. A glance at the stalwart men and two sturdy boys around him tightened his frayed nerves a little. In a husky voice he stammered a reply—a reply that hardened every face there.

"He is Prince Ram Tagore—my cousin. The eldest son of my uncle, the Rajah of Bhuristan!"

The door bell rang sharply.

CHAPTER 3.

A Deadly New Opponent!

A BLEAK smile wreathed the Night Hawk's stern face.

"This is interesting, my friends.

We had better see this bold gentleman, I think!" Without waiting for a reply, he nodded decisively towards Snub.

"Show him up, lad. Bring him in here!"

Laying a hand on Budrudin's shoulder, he led him towards the tapestry curtain that screened the entrance to his private room, and thrust the boy behind it.

"You must keep out of sight, Burdudin; remember, you are supposed to be dead. I think I can guess why your cousin is here; in any case, you will hear every word. But, understand you must keep hidden. Success depends on it. On no account are you to reveal yourself until I say so."

Obediently the boy nodded, crouching back against the hidden door. The Night Hawk dropped the curtain carefully, flicking the folds back into place. Then he strode back into the room and stood waiting just as the laboratory door opened and Snub motioned the visitor to enter.

"Good-afternoon, gentlemen!"

Into the faces of Thurston Kyle and Nelson Lee crept a swift gleam of admiration—gone as quickly as it appeared—as the tall Indian strode in calmly, halted on the threshold and bowed to them all with easy, arrogant grace. Whoever the man was, he certainly knew no fear.

Now that they saw him close, he was indeed a splendid figure—as powerful almost as Thurston Kyle himself. But it was his eyes that drew their attention at once; dark brown eyes, brilliant as jewels, with something strange and compelling in their depths as they ran leisurely over each of the company in turn.

Thurston Kyle, his face an icy mask, inclined his head.

"Good-afternoon! May I ask your name? And to what we owe this honour?"

The keen edge to his voice was unmistakable; but the Indian only bowed again mockingly, and from a gold case took a card

which he tendered with an elaborate gesture. Thurston Kyle flicked a careless glance at it.

"So! Well, your Highness, what can I do for you, pray?"

Prince Tagore's bearded lips parted in a fleeting smile, and again he eyed each man and boy before replying. At last, in a musical voice marked only by the faintest accent, he purred:

"You can restore to me, my friend, the Dagger of Blood that this boy—your assistant, I believe—stole from my employee, Jonathan Silk, last night!"

Not by the faintest movement did any of the five betray emotion at the audacious demand. They stood rigid and quiet until Thurston Kyle, in a softly derisive voice, snapped the tension.

"Indeed?"

The Indian nodded placidly.

"You will not, I trust, trouble to deny that you have the ruby. I have been directing—er—operations myself from Paris, and I met Jonathan Silk in Calais this morning, whither your assistant had forced him to run. He wired me before he communicated with you. Also he told me the full story of last night. Thus I myself have flown across from France to fetch our jewel!"

Serenely he plucked a cambric handkerchief from the sleeve of his perfect lounge jacket and touched it to his lips.

"Before we go further let us understand each other, yes? You, I presume, are Professor Thurston Kyle, the famous British scientist. Last night, in his agitation, Silk did not appreciate your name in its correct value. Since then, however, we have had leisure to think more of you. It was easy to find your address."

"Thank you!" Thurston Kyle bowed sardonically.

"Not at all!" With the same unhurried manner Prince Tagore suddenly slipped something from the folds of his handkerchief—a narrow glass test-tube, hermetically sealed. He poised it daintily aloft in his fingers and smiled silkily.

"Since you are a scientist, Professor Kyle—possibly you know what Vactine is?" he drawled.

For the first time in the interview Thurston Kyle paused. His lips tightened the merest fraction, and through half-closed lids he stared at the frail glass tube.

"Yes!" he replied steadily, at length. "I know Vactine—the newest and deadliest poison gas yet invented." A graceful wave of the hand answered him.

"Correct. Then please observe that this tube is full of gas. The glass is fragile. Should you, my dear professor, or any of your friends attempt to shoot me or in any way molest me, remember that if this tube falls—you will be dead in five seconds!"

His last words cracked sharply like a whip-lash, in vicious contrast to his former smooth tone. A stillness followed, during which five pairs of eyes watched the deadly tube; a weapon more powerful than gun or knife. At last Thurston Kyle laughed resignedly.



With a lightning-like movement the Night Hawk touched a lever. Hidden arms sprang from the armchair and made Ram Tagore a prisoner.

"In less than five seconds, your Highness!" he corrected; and there was an under-current of sarcastic humour in his manner. "You hold a strong whip-hand with that; in fact, I confess we are helpless. Shall we talk things over quietly?"

With a little nod he strolled across to his bureau, carelessly at ease, and sat down, waving a courteous hand.

"Will you be seated? Doubtless you will prefer that armchair nearest the door. I can recommend its comfort!"

Ram Tagore matched him tone for tone. They were like two polished fencers.

"I thank you. You are gracious."

Still holding the test tube between his fingers, he sauntered over and sank into the chair the Night Hawk indicated. At the scientist's glance, Nelson Lee and the others followed and sat down, too.

As Thurston Kyle had said, the Indian held the whip-hand. Beneath his debonair exterior there was iron determination. They knew that at the first false move that tube of gas would be shattered on the floor, and then—

Nelson Lee crossed his legs and waited. The duel was not finished yet. Still with the little smile on his lips, Thurston Kyle turned to his visitor, his manner suave.

"Now, your Highness, perhaps you will continue with the conversation?"

"Have I not made myself clear already?" was the languid reply. "I want the Dagger of Blood. I will tell you something, because I do not fear you in the least. My father, the Rajah of Bhuristan, sent me to Europe for two purposes: one, to—er—remove my cousin, Prince Budrudin Ananda, whom you met last night; the other to bring back the ruby that his rogue of a father stole long ago.

"The first of those tasks, despite your unwarranted interference, professor, was eventually accomplished last night. Budrudin went to a well-merited death; my servants inform me that they dropped the brat into your excellent but lonely countryside from a great height. Now, as you see"—his teeth flashed in a mirthless smile—"I have come to you for the Dagger you seized from Jonathan Silk!"

"So—you killed Budrudin last night, after all?" murmured the Night Hawk slowly. "Having robbed the boy of his throne, you killed him. Now you want his ruby!"

Unaware that he had played into his opponent's hands completely, Ram Tagore answered with a bitter sneer.

"Robbed Budrudin of his throne? No! It belongs to my father rightfully. If Budrudin told you otherwise, he was a liar—as his father was a liar before him!"

"Liar yourself!"

A shrill cry, half sob, half scream, ripped through the laboratory, causing the Indian to stiffen in frantic bewilderment. And before he could be stopped, from behind the curtain burst young Budrudin, face aflame with rage, forgetful of Thurston Kyle's stern warning in his eagerness to avenge the insult to his dead father.

"Liar yourself!" he screamed, and hurled himself forward like a terrier at a mastiff.

CHAPTER 4.

Thurston Kyle's Trap!

ONLY the quickness of Scrapper Huggins saved a calamity then. With a speed that was astounding in so huge a man, he flashed from his chair, whisked the boy off his feet and tucked him securely under one mighty arm.

"Stow it, yer little spitfire! Lumme, you've torn it now, me son!"

And the Scrapper was right; Budrudin's impetuous appearance had, at a stroke, rendered Thurston Kyle's plan of surprise useless. Ram Tagore still sat in his chair, but he was crouched forward as if for flight, and the gas-tube was held on high as though at any second he would throw it. The man's dark face was almost livid; his piercing eyes blazed with leaping fires of hatred. So he sat, ready to throw six lives—and his own, too, if need be—to destruction.

The Night Hawk sat upright beside his bureau, watching the Indian unwaveringly. At last, after what seemed an eternity, he spoke, without looking round, to Budrudin.

"Budrudin, come here! Sit on that stool beside me—so. Now hold your tongue."

His firm lips curled as he addressed the panting Tagore again with sympathetic irony.

"Rather a shock for you, my friend, is it not? As you see, Prince Budrudin did not die, after all, last night. You still have both your tasks yet to accomplish."

Slowly the Indian took in a long, deep breath, turning his glittering eyes hungrily from Budrudin to the Night Hawk. All his former ease of manner, his haughty, ice-cold nerve had departed. When he replied, his voice was no longer soft, but harsh and shaky.

"Yes—I am punished for employing fools to do work I should have done myself. I shall not make that error again!" He laughed shortly. "For now, gentlemen, besides taking the ruby with me when I leave here, I shall have the pleasure—the great pleasure—of taking my dear young cousin also!"

Very deliberately Thurston Kyle, the Night Hawk, lay back in his chair, placed an elbow on his bureau and stroked his chin with thumb and forefinger. In silence he smiled back at the glaring Indian, a dark smile that set a thousand imps of mockery dancing in his deep eyes.

"Yes?" he drawled. "I think not, Tagore. This comedy is finished—now!"

Quick as lightning his elbow slid farther on to the desk, pushing down the small switch concealed there. Quicker still, with a snap and a clang, two steel bands flashed from the arm of Tagore's chair, forcing him back, pinning him down tightly; two others clutched at his ankles.

And quickest of all, Snub Hawkins, who had been waiting for this to happen ever since Tagore had been lured into that special trap, streaked from his own chair with outstretched hand, whipped the tube of Vactine from the man's palsied grip—and laid it safely on to his master's desk.

The tables were turned.

THE suddenness, the overwhelming success of the manœuvre, was such that for some seconds not a sound was heard. The Scrapper could only stare in limp astonishment at the man who, top dog a moment before, was now as helpless as a child. And even Nelson Lee, who had himself been the victim of that innocent-looking chair on one historic occasion, felt a thrill.

Ram Tagore seemed hardly to realise his defeat at first. Dazedly his eyes travelled from the tube of gas on Thurston Kyle's desk, to the tight steel bands that cruelly held his arms and body. Then, as the full bitterness of it rushed over him, flecks of foam bubbled on his thick lips, and he burst into a mad, shrill torrent of Bhuristani that made young Buddy cower back at first and afterwards laugh aloud in triumphant glee.

On Thurston Kyle's cold face, however, no trace of exultation or any other emotion was visible. After one brief glance at his writhing captive he rose, took from his desk the Dagger of Blood and the Vactine tube, and crossed the laboratory. Watching him, the others saw the precious ruby securely locked away in his safe; and after that, the death-tube vanished for ever behind the steel doors of a small electric furnace. That menace, at least, was removed from the world.

Once more the scientist strode across to his friends, ignoring the prisoner still. He glanced at his watch.

"Snub," he said calmly, "'phone Mr. Foster—ask him to give me a little grace, as I shall be a few minutes late for my appointment. Lee, my dear fellow, may I ask you to remain here—in charge. I expect to be gone two hours; Snub will get you anything you want. Scrapper, away with you at once; we have wasted too much time. Let me know how you get on."

The giant rose, touching his forelock.

"Yessir I came 'ere in me new car, guv'nor—so I'll be running round after the boys straight away. Aft'noon, gents."

He went out. Thurston Kyle turned finally to his captive.

"And you, your Highness—I must ask you to wait. I will attend to you on my

return." His voice was cold and harsh. "My friend, you are a bold man—but stupid and cruel, I think. You have played your game and lost. Au-revoir. Snub, get my car."

A quick handshake for Nelson Lee, and the tall, upright figure disappeared. His plans for the invasion of Bhuristan could go forward smoothly, after all. Presently there came from the drive below the purr of his car. Snub Hawkins returned to the laboratory, grinning.

And Nelson Lee, lighting a cigarette, settled himself to keep guard over his sullen Highness, Prince Ram Tagore of Bhuristan. Snub, Nipper and the smiling Buddy took seats beside him.

CHAPTER 5.

The Eyes of Ram Tagore!

"MAY I ask for a cigarette, too, Mr. Lee?"

Ram Tagore's voice, low and steady now, suddenly broke the silence. Although the steel bands still held him tight, the man seemed to have relaxed. An Indian stoicism marked his features; apparently he was accepting the inevitable with the easy fatalism of his race. He even broke into a pleasant smile when Nipper gave him one of Nelson Lee's special Virginians and held a match to the tip.

"Ah, thank you. Well, gentlemen, the trick is yours up to now, yes?"

Nelson Lee nodded non-committally. He was watching Tagore's face keenly through the faint wisp of smoke, although, pinned in that chair, the man could do no mischief. Several minutes slipped past.

Still there was something queer about the prisoner. True, the bearded countenance was utterly devoid of expression; only the brilliant eyes had any life in them. But the great velvety pupils, almost jet-black in colour, seemed larger, more piercing than ever. They were fixed on Nelson Lee alone, and yet uncannily they seemed to play in rapier-strokes upon the three boys as well.

The detective frowned slightly, his own eyes narrowed. Yes, there *was* something wrong. It dawned on him suspiciously that Tagore's look had changed to one of terrific intensity, as though all his Oriental soul was striving to do, what? A pin could have been heard to drop in the ominous hush.

And suddenly a wild throb of alarm fluttered Nelson Lee's heart. He tried with all his power to rise, to fight against the growing weirdness, to drag his eyes away from the Indian's stare. Over his body a coldness was spreading; the chill—he realised it with sick horror—of departing will-power. And still Ram Tagore glared at him through the cigarette smoke.

Burning now with an unearthly light, his big eyes scorched the detective's brain like

black but dazzling fires. Wave upon wave of mental numbness poured down on Nelson Lee, drowning his consciousness. For long-drawn minutes the eyes continued their boring, growing ever larger, more luminous. Then with a little sigh he gave up the struggle and fell back into his chair. Prince Tagore smiled slowly, with bitter gentleness.

Lingeringly he looked round at the three boys, they, like Nelson Lee, stared back at him blankly. He nodded at Snub three times, and smiled again as he spoke:

"Mr. Snub. Kindly release me from this chair!"

THROUGH the mental fog that smothered him, Nelson Lee tried hard to struggle. He seemed to be shouting at the freckled boy to disobey, yet no words came. Staring fixedly in front of him, Snub rose stiffly and obediently, crossed to his master's desk. The lever was pulled back and the steel bonds slid away from Ram Tagore's body. The Indian was free.

Luxuriously he rose to his feet, stretching his cramped limbs, waving Snub back to his chair. Then straightening his immaculate suit, he laughed openly at Nelson Lee.

"That is something, at least, that we of an older race can teach you Western upstarts!" he purred. "Have you never heard of the fakirs of India, Mr. Lee? Mass-hypnotism? An interesting study, I assure you!"

His manner took on one of its lightning changes. He strode over, thrusting a venomous face close to Nelson Lee.

"You are in my power. You are slaves to my will. Your brain is my brain. Understand?"

The curt, dry voice rang through the room, but there came no replies from the hypnotised four. With a last stare, Tagore stood back, triumphant, rubbing his hands. He turned to Snub again, crooking a contemptuous finger.

"You, my young friend, get me that ruby. Since it was you who stole it, it is only meet you should give it back!"

And without a struggle Snub did so. His fingers turned the combination lock of Thurston Kyle's safe unhesitatingly. In a few moments the blazing Dagger of Blood reposed at last in Ram Tagore's hand, and he gloated over it fondly before placing it in an inside pocket.

Leisurely he strolled over to Nelson Lee, patted the detective's pocket until he found his gun, which he drew out and stroked lovingly. In jaunty, arrogant amusement he placed it carefully in Lee's right hand, fitted the forefinger round the trigger and nodded placidly.

"So! That is right!" he murmured softly. "I could, of course, kill you all as you sit. But that is too crude; also, just now I do not wish entanglements with your slow but thorough police. But you, Mr. Lee, shall be the instrument of my revenge. Ven-

geance or."—his lips snarled—"that clever, insolent dog who entrapped me. Listen!"

Bending down he spoke coldly, each word slow and distinct, impressing itself on Nelson Lee's captive brain.

"You will sit here, you understand? Do not move. Be deaf and dumb. Your eyes will remain on that door. When Professor Kyle returns you will wait for him to open that door. Then you will raise the gun. And you will shoot him through the heart!"

Once more he changed, becoming brisk and deft. Taking Budrudin by the arm, he pulled him from the chair, gave a look around, and then strode from the room.

CHAPTER 6.

A Fateful Puncture!

NEAR the Highgate end of the Spaniards Road, that hefty and genial fighting-man, Scrapper Huggins, was mumbling a few harsh words and fitting a spare wheel on his new car.

The car, a lean grey roadster, was drawn into the kerb. Huggins was working on it like a man possessed. Although he had owned it only a fortnight, the powerful speeder was the pride of the Scrapper's life already, for it was a present from the one man in the world he looked upon in blind adoration. Thurston Kyle had presented it to him with his usual princely generosity as an extra reward for "services rendered."

"If I 'ad the careless so-an'-so who dumped that broken bottle in the road, I'd tan his blinkin' hide!" muttered the giant, busy with nuts and bolts. "Fifteen perishin' minutes wasted, and me 'urrying to obey the gov'nor's orders and collect the lads. Kim up, darn yer! That's right!"

Turning the last nut he removed the jack and slipped back into his seat. The grey car moved sweetly from the kerb towards the middle of the road. As it did so, from behind came the haughty siren of another car, and the Scrapper straightened out hastily to let it pass, turning a casual glance over his shoulder at the same time.

"Strewth!"

The exclamation was fairly wrung from him. He almost lost control of his car. Not two yards away, slipping swiftly past down the centre of the road, was a great purple Daimler, shining, magnificent, unmistakable. At the wheel, eyes rigidly ahead, sat the bearded, turbaned figure of an Indian. And beside him, chin sunk forward on his chest as though asleep, was a small Indian boy.

"My thunderin' Sam!" Head in a whirl, the great Scrapper instinctively trod on the accelerator, sending his car zipping after the other. His thoughts were racing wildly, faster than his beating heart. There was no mistake, could be no mistake.

"It's 'im! Strike me pink, it's that

Injun!" he breathed. "Bearded dial, coloured turban an' all. An' that's his purple car. An'—an' strewth, he's collared young Buddy!"

What had happened? Barely twenty minutes ago he had left that turbaned figure safely trapped between steeled arms in Thurston Kyle's laboratory, with the Night Hawk, Nelson Lee and the boys all there. And now the man was speeding towards Highgate, free, with Budrudin in the car with him! The Scrapper had received the shock of his life.

All his instincts urged him to turn about and streak back to Thurston Kyle's house to find what had happened to his friends. Perhaps—perhaps this Indian bloke had shot his way out! The Scrapper's great square jaw bulged.

But that wouldn't do. Whatever had gone wrong, his own course was plain. He had to follow that purple Daimler in front.

With eyes screwed up to merest slits, Scrapper Huggins took up the trail. By now the cars were purring down Highgate Hill. They came to the Archway; a traffic block stopped them. Cautiously the pugilist edged up closer, tucking his face into the big collar of his coat, squinting quietly through the windscreen. Yes, no mistake. It was Ram Tagore all right, and young Buddy. Two mighty fists tightened on the wheel of the grey car and their stalwart owner settled closer in his seat.

"No good tacklin' him now. Only cause a copper to come up. Mr. Kyle'd skin me," he thought jerkily as he weaved in and out of the Holloway Road traffic. "All right, no turbaned beauty, cut a'ead. I'm behind yer, matey. wherever yer goes!"

Another thought struck him in the midst of the Islington crush.

"Strewth! I wonder if 'e's got that ruby, too?"

On they went, grey car and purple, threading in and out of traffic lanes. The man ahead was driving swiftly but cautiously, risking no hold-ups for speeding. And always behind him followed the Scrapper.

The leader of the Kittens was feeling happier now. A definite plan of action was settled in his mind. From time to time as the cars sprinted east he darted glances at the pavements on either side. Not for nothing was he the leader of his band and one of the best known men in London's seamy side. He realised with grim joy that Ram Tagore was heading right into the heart of his own territory.

At last, edging through crowded Dalston, he saw what he was looking for—a small, wiry man, cheerfully shoving a barrow-load of oranges along the gutter. With a lightning, measuring glance at the purple car in front, the Scrapper leaned out, two fingers thrusting into his mouth. Above the roar of the traffic rang out a shrill, piercing whistle, two notes in staccato succession.

The effect on the little hawker was electric. He took one glance round, saw the big grey

car, and left his barrow flat. Two jumps, a skip and a hop, and he had dodged in front of two cyclists, whipped across the bonnet of a bus, and was on the Scrapper's running-beard. Next moment he was inside the car, huddling down while his leader spurred.

"Yus, Scrapper?"

"Listen, Sam—hard! The guv'nor's on something big—an' it's gone wrong. I'm follering that big bloke ahead. You nip out at the next block—telephone Mr. Kyle's 'ouse. If yer don't get no answer, 'ook it up there as quick as you can. Collect any of the boys you see—but 'ook it. Find out what's wrong, some'ow; an' if yer see the guv'nor or Mr. Lee—tell 'em I'm follerin' the Indian and the kid! They'll understand. Get it?"

"Yus, Scrapper, but—"

"If yer argue, Sam, I'll bash yer black an' blue! 'Op it—sharp!"

"All screno, Scrapper!" said the little man cheerily, and when the cars slowed down at the next cross-roads, he was away and lost in the confusion in a second. The Scrapper chuckled contentedly and looked out for his next Kitten. He'd show Ram Tagore what "staff work" meant.

He found his man quickly. Ram Tagore had swung definitely east now, seemingly heading for the Essex borders of London. Stratford fell behind, then East Ham; they were turning towards the river at last. Forty yards apart, the cars swung down a narrow highway, and the Scrapper's keen eyes at once picked up another of his men, comfortably taking the air against a lamp-post.

He grinned—and whistled.

Again that peculiar call had magic qualities. Out of his day-dream snapped the lounging Kitten, alert and keen, picked up the grey car instantly, and raced into the road. Huggins had the door open swiftly. His comrade came aboard in a single leap.

Rapidly the giant explained the situation, never taking his eyes from Ram Tagore's Daimler. And at the finish, Mr. Alfred

The Night Hawk's arm flashed round and caught Nelson Lee full on the jaw. The detective fell to the floor in a huddled heap.



Jenkins, a brawny, taciturn youth, spat complacently on his large hands and settled back with a grunt. The chase went on.

LIGHTS were beginning to twinkle now; the early dusk of winter was drawing in. Soon the purple car had faded into the gloom, but its rear light twinkled clearly, and the Scrapper's eyes were glued to its red glow. By now they had crossed the Thames, and were swerving smoothly through busy Woolwich.

Suddenly the leader of the Kittens had another inspiration.

"Alf, kin you drive?"

"Yup. Well enough."

"Right. Then stand by. I reckon that bloke may lose us outside if 'e's 'eadin' for the country or the coast, an' I gotter hunch that he is. When we slow up ag'in, I'm gettin' out. You foller; whatever 'appens, you foller 'im."

The laconic Jenkins nodded. Huggins spurred harder until, when the next block came, a bare yard separated his fender from the luggage-holder of the purple Daimler. With the same explosive speed he had shown

earlier on, the big man slid into the road, took one elastic stride, and, as the traffic moved on again, hoisted himself aboard Ram Tagore's car, clinging there with all his great strength. Behind him, Alf Jenkins whirred the grey car easily into its stride and trailed along.

That was the last traffic hold-up. Up through Plumstead, into the quieter secondary roads towards Erith and Gravesend, swung the Indian, the Scrapper on his luggage-grid, Alf Jenkins stealing behind. Darkness came down. Beyond Plumstead Common, the Daimler's headlights flickered down the road.

From the way Ram Tagore had driven, it was fairly plain he suspected no pursuit. But now the roads were dark, it was as well to take no chances. Huggins grunted approvingly to note that his mate behind was driving with sidelights only and keeping a nice distance to the rear.

Across the Kentish flats pursued and pursuer fled; swerved away from Dartford into lonelier roads still. Some keen instinct told the Scrapper that developments would not be long now; he felt it in his bones, and, edging forward with one hand clutching the near wing, poked his head round the side of the car. From that position he could watch the route in comfort.

In front of them the road—a narrow one—was empty. Bare hedges stretched on either side, save where, fifty yards ahead, the squat, grimy stonework of a little canal bridge showed in Tagore's headlights.

And then—action came abruptly! The Scrapper felt the car lift to the rise of the bridge; and next instant he was jerked heavily from his perch into the road. With a protesting scrunch of tyres, Tagore had jammed on his four-wheel brakes savagely. The Daimler stopped dead.

Crouched in the grit, Huggins heard a side door fly open, its edge almost touching the parapet of the bridge. Then something dark and limp was thrown out fiercely, to the sound of a sharp laugh. And, looking up with blazing eyes, the pugilist saw Prince Budrudin of Bhuristan, helpless and unconscious, sliding slowly out of view into the dark, still waters below!

The instant the boy disappeared, the purple Daimler hummed into life again—went flashing off into the darkness. From first to last, the vicious deed had been accomplished in five seconds—a halt, a swing of powerful shoulders, and on again. Prince Tagore swept on towards the coast and France, the Dagger of Blood in his pocket, Budrudin in the canal. Both his tasks were over.

Growling like a wounded lion, Scrapper Huggins recovered himself and leapt to the parapet before the Daimler was ten yards away. His massive body poised itself, and, just as Alf Jenkins raced to the spot, the burly boxer plunged through the air.

Splash!

Blindly, recklessly the Scrapper dived into that black canal, unaware that it was a

stagnant branch, long disused and choked with slimy weed. Slippery ropes of vegetation, like obscene arms, tangled gently but insistently round his legs and shoulders. He kicked himself free in a frenzied effort, groping round amid the nauseating depths.

Despair gripped his heart. Everywhere he reached out in the wet blackness his fingers met only sliminess and decay. His lungs began to labour; eyes were blinded by churning mud. None but a Hercules could have swum through that ghastly under-water trap; and, even so, the resolute giant was at his last gasp when—blessed, wonderful relief!—his clutching hands smashed through swaying weeds and closed firmly on a thin human body.

In a final frantic burst, he pulled, tucked the boy to his chest, shot upwards to the surface. His head above water at last, he floated there, gulping down great mouthfuls of air, feeling his strength flow back with each reviving lungful. Then, hoisting Buddy higher on to his shoulder, he splashed his way sluggishly to the bank.

And there, without a word, Alf Jenkins reached down two steel arms and yanked his leader ashore.

The Scrapper spat, shaking himself like a dog.

"Wot's the game?" he panted wrathfully. "Didn't I tell yer to follow that Injun? Now we've lost him for keeps."

"Follow him when I saw you hop into the canal?" Jenkins sniffed. "Be yourself. To blazes with the Injun! Let's get the kid into the 'bus."

Although he growled and fumed in disappointment, Huggins had to admit it was sense. The two men tramped up the bank in silence to their car, and, laying Budrudin's crumpled figure inside, went to work with all their might for many long minutes.

The boy was nearly all-in. His mouth and nostrils were almost choked with mud, and he had swallowed much foul water. But the two experienced Kittens, wrists and fingers busy, kneaded him and pulled him, deftly forcing the water out and clean, fresh air into the frail lungs. There came a snort of relief from Jenkins when, at long last, the boy's pale lips quivered and a shuddering sigh shook his frame.

"He'll make it. What now, Scrapper?"

"Back to 'Appy Hampstead on the run!" grunted his chief.

From Budrudin's jacket he took four heavy spanners, weighing them grimly in his hand. Ram Tagore had meant playing for safety all right. He had loaded his young cousin's pockets as they went along with junk enough to sink him at once.

"Alf!"

"Yes, Scrapper?"

Huggins clinked the spanners together.

"If ever I get my mitts on that Injun hound," he said quietly, "I'm a-goin' to break his back like a rotten stick. See?"

Alf Jenkins nodded with emphasis.

CHAPTER 7.**Nelson Lee—Shools!**

JUST about the same time Thurston Kyle, the Night Hawk, his strained arm encased in an elastic sleeve and already easier for the masseur's attentions, swung his two-seater across Hampstead Heath and into the private road leading to his house.

His various errands had taken longer than he had allowed for; but they had been smoothly successful, and the scientist was in a grimly satisfied mood. But his serenity changed in a flash to frowning inquiry when he drew up at his gates a few seconds later, and immediately two dark figures darted towards him from the shadowy wall.

He flung up his hand.

"Well? Who goes there?"

The men stopped dead, touching their caps. One of them spoke up hastily.

"Mr. Kyle, sir? It's us—Sam Smith and Charlie Banks o' the Kittens. We gotter message from the Scrapper, sir."

"Ah, yes, I recognise you now! Well, what is it, men?"

"This, sir," said Sam. "The Scrapper signalled me at Dalston; he was in 'is car, a-follerin' a big purple Daimler——"

"What?" Thurston Kyle was out of his car in a moment. "A purple Daimler?"

"Yessir. Scrapper said to tell you 'e was a-follerin' the Indian and the kid. You'd understand. He told me to 'phone your house, but I didn't get no reply, so I picked up Charlie Banks, and we bunked str'ight 'ere, Mr. Kyle."

"Good heavens!" The Night Hawk glared at the little hawker, utterly at a loss for once. The Scrapper—Dalston—following an Indian and a boy in a purple Daimler?

But where was Nelson Lee? Nipper and Snub? With a swift bitter word the Night Hawk suddenly flung himself at the gates, unlocked them, and went running down the dark drive. His hand slid into his pocket as he went; the two Kittens pounded hard at his heels.

At the edge of the lawn he halted, staring across at the dark, silent house. Not a light could be seen, and the two old family retainers who served him so unobtrusively, and rarely penetrated into the upper regions, had long since gone to their little cottage at the other end of the grounds. The mansion itself loomed black and desolate against the night sky.

"Men!" Thurston Kyle's voice was razor-edged. "Something is badly wrong here. Follow me—but go very carefully!"

They nodded, and soft-footed, stole across the grass to the side-door. Inside the house the Night Hawk listened tensely, gun drawn, eyes like coals of fire. He stole up the thickly carpeted stairs, looking into each room cautiously, leaving Banks on guard on the first landing. Then, with Sam Smith

after him, he mounted the stairs again to his laboratory.

The ghostly silence in the house was like a dull weight. Little Sam, as tough a handful as they make 'em, yet kept close to his leader shooting wary glances around. A feeling of impending danger hung in the air, as though somewhere an evil thing was lurking, ready to show itself at every step.

And the Night Hawk laid his hand on the laboratory door.

Softly, warily, he turned the handle, holding the latch back tight. He opened the door inch by inch, listening hard with his ear glued to the chink. The grip on his gun tightened. For, plainly through the stillness, came the sound of regular, quiet breathing.

Someone, at least, was inside.

The Night Hawk squared his shoulders sharply. Gradually he pushed the door wider, the well-oiled hinges making no sound. The breathing from the darkness grew louder; he thought he could hear more than one person now. And, collecting his muscles for a mighty spring, he whirled through the doorway, lithe as a panther, gun ready, other hand darting towards the electric switches behind him.

Crack!

From the room, for a split-second, the darkness vanished. A red tongue flickered and a gun flashed once. A leaden slug whined through the door, burying itself in the passage wall. The wind of its passing sang in Kyle's ear its deadly song.

"Heavens!"

Eyes ablaze with rage and astonishment, the Night Hawk glared at the three stony figures before him—his own assistant, Snub, and his two tried and trusted friends, Nelson Lee and Nipper. Their stares, turned towards him, were fixed and vacant, and in Nelson Lee's hand was a smoking gun. It was he who had fired that shot!

"Lee——"

The Night Hawk had no time for further words. In frozen horror he saw the detective's hand commence to move again in little stiff jerks. The smoking gun was pointing towards him.

A second shot! Nelson Lee, awful though it seemed, meant to fire again at him—to kill him. The Night Hawk ripped into lightning action.

Phutt! Phu-utt!

Twice, the "silenced" reports merging into one, he fired from his hip. The gun in Nelson Lee's hand spun giddily into the air. Then, without any hesitation, Thurston Kyle cleared the intervening space in a single headlong leap, raised his fist and crashed it down square on his ally's chin. Huddling forward in a heap, the detective slid from the chair and thudded to the floor.

The noise of his fall was drowned instantly by the telephone bell, trilling jauntily and importantly through the great echoing room.

(Continued on page 43.)



The VALLEY of HOT SPRINGS

The Prisoner!

FOR a moment the professor made no comment. Then he turned slowly and looked at Eric, his eyes shining.

"Not the Valley—but the entrance to it! What is it Eric the Red said? 'There is grass and low shrub, and the air is filled with a hot mist that rises from the sea.'"

Eric felt a pull on his arm. It was Danny trying to attract his attention.

"Is it all O.K., Mr. Eric? Have we got there?"

The boy explained.

"Then for the love of Mike get the gov'nor to sit down, or he'll be falling in the water when we run ashore!"

As if in answer to his words, the bows at that moment struck the sandy beach, and the professor disappeared suddenly amidst the

crowd of kayakers. From somewhere at the bottom of the boat he bawled out his orders.

"Eric, you and Danny jump ashore, and see if you can see anything of those two scoundrels! And take a gun with you."

The youngster leapt ashore, followed by Danny. There was no sign of the two fugitives, but there was no question which way they had gone. The sandy beach was not more than twenty yards across. Except for the gap of the valley, the cliffs rose perpendicularly on every side. With his gun carried at the trail, the boy entered that narrow gap.

Beneath his feet the grass was long and curiously lush. Down the very centre of this strange pass ran a stream, from the surface of which rose clouds of vapour.

"Go easy, Mr. Eric,"

Danny panted warningly from behind.

"Everybody can see us, but those two blokes have got themselves

Stranded In The Arctic Wastes!

**But Eric Denning is hot-stuff
at getting out of tight corners.**

lost in what looks to me like a real London fog."

Eric realised the truth of that statement, for the farther they progressed the closer seemed to grow the walls of the gorge and the density of the atmosphere. Suddenly he found himself in a world of clinging vapour in which he could see nothing. He halted, listening. Danny came puffing up to his side.

"Lumme, Mr. Eric, this is like one of them Turkish baths I used to have when I was in the ring and wanting to sweat off a few pounds in a hurry! Blow me if this water ain't hot!"

He had stooped down and put his hand into the stream. As he did so, Eric caught him by the arm.

"Listen, Danny," whispered the boy. "What's that?"

From somewhere above them came the sounds of a struggle, the hard breathing of two men—a splash—a stifled groan—and then the crack of a revolver which went echoing terrifyingly through the narrow, vapour-filled valley.

Motioning to Danny, Eric began to creep along the edge of the stream. He had gone about twenty yards when a man's figure loomed out of the mist. He was coming towards them, a revolver in his hand. In spite of the fur cap he was wearing, the youngster recognised him instantly. To his utter astonishment he saw that it was the gang-leader whom he had last seen standing by the side of a lamp-post in Chancery Lane! Eric's gun went to his shoulder with a jerk.

"Drop the revolver and put your hands up!" he shouted.

The man stood quite still, dropping his revolver on the grass. Eric approached him cautiously, fearing a trap. A pair of very luminous eyes looked into his.

"All right! I'll come quietly. I was coming, anyway. The guy with the bow and arrow, with whom I thought of getting to the Valley of Hot Springs before you, cut up rough, and I had to shoot him in self-defence. Now what are you going to do?"

Danny had arrived on the scene, and after taking one look at the man, began to run his hands over his body.

"Yes, it's him, Mr. Eric—him as came to the cottage and hid on the boat. I owe him something, by the way, which I'd like to pay him back."

He clenched his broken-knuckled fist and thrust it under the other man's nose so that the scar made by the knife was visible. The prisoner merely laughed.

"Funny, ain't you?" Danny snorted. "What are you going to do with him, Mr. Eric?"

"That's for my uncle to decide. We'll take him back with us. How did you manage to get here, by the way?"

"Just followed you," the other retorted, with a shrug of his shoulders. "Not very difficult. And then I was so fortunate as to run into the gentleman with the bow and arrow, who was trying to work off on you some fancy stunt of his own. I joined with him, and here we are. He seemed to like my company until just now, and then he tried to finish me."

He smiled frostily.

"The game's yours, young man. You've won. Take me along to Professor Denning, and let's get it over."

It took them nearly a quarter of an hour to reach the little stretch of beach again. When they did so, it was to find the professor, purple in the face, his red beard bristling, standing on the edge of the water, shaking his fist at the boat, which was already half a mile away.

"They've left us, Eric—left us with hardly any stores. Not one of them would stay—not even that oily scoundrel Sagdloq! We shall have to start for the Valley of Hot Springs at once—otherwise we shall starve on the way!"

Stranded!

THE influence of vile superstitions—the abode of Tormansuk! Interesting myth, of course, but when it comes to leaving us stranded here with hardly two days' supplies—"

The professor finished his statement by clutching at his beard with both hands. Danny stooped down and examined the stores that had been left on the beach. All their guns and ammunition were there, and one of

HOW THE STORY BEGAN

ERIC DENNING, 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, in spite of the gang's attempts to prevent them, start out for the Valley of Hot Springs. They are attacked by somebody with a bow and arrow, who makes his getaway, accompanied by another man. The Englishmen give chase, and find themselves in a valley filled with clouds of vapour. "Uncle," exclaims Eric, "it's the Valley of Hot Springs!"

(Now read on.)

the tents. Of food, however, there was not more than two days' supply.

"Looks to me as if these here heathens just wanted to make sure the gov'nor would beat it out of here as soon as possible!" exclaimed Danny in an aside to Eric. "They've left us a boat, and all we've got to do is to give this valley a miss and paddle after them."

It appeared later that Sagdlog had not been quite the traitor the professor had painted him. He had refused to set foot on the shore. From the boat he had begged the professor, almost with tears in his eyes, to come away from the Valley of Devils. When the professor had refused to listen to him, he had thrown the guns and ammunition ashore, and deliberately limited the supplies to two days, thinking, by these means, to force the English party to follow him out of the haunted fiord.

"What about this bloke, gov'nor?" Danny went on, calling the professor's attention to their prisoner.

The professor halted and stared at the man.

"Where on earth did you find him?" he demanded. "And what's he doing here?"

Before Danny could explain, the man himself spoke.

"Quite simple, Professor Denning. Your friend, Mr. Peters, was brought to my place in London. He told me that he had lost a narwhal's horn, on which was engraved the account of a mysterious Valley of Hot Springs, where there was gold and platinum. I gathered that he accused you of stealing it, and he begged me to recover it. I promised to do my best, and paid a visit to your cottage at Chalcombe. There I found, as he had stated, that you were in possession of the horn. I had the pleasure of listening to the translation you had made of the writing. Owing to the unfortunate interruption of the police, I was unable to complete the object of my visit. When I returned to my house it was to find that Mr. Peters had vanished, and later I learned that his dead body had been picked up in the Thames."

Danny gave a gasp.

"Well, of all the liars!"

"Are you telling me that my friend Mr. Peters accused me of having stolen the horn?" the professor broke in furiously. "Why, he was coming to stay with me, and the horn was brought to me with the rest of his luggage in a taxi."

There was an odd smile on the man's lips.

"May I point out to you that when, at Mr. Peter's request, I called at your cottage to inquire if his luggage had been delivered there, and hearing it had, asked for its return, I was assaulted and the men I had brought with me to assist me were treated with the most brutal inhumanity."

The professor gaped at him. Eric could hardly believe his ears. It was Danny who brought the discussion down to what he called "brass tacks."

"Don't believe a word of it! He's the bloke, gov'nor, that tried to pinch your notes from you in the train, and if I hadn't copped him he'd have forced his way through the floor of your cabin. Hiding aboard, he was, along with his gang as the crew!"

The professor stared at the prisoner coldly.

"What's your name?" he demanded.

"Jackson!" lied Boss Maunsell.

"Then, Jackson, if what Danny says is true, I consider you an infamous scoundrel!" snorted Professor Denning angrily. "You deserve drastic punishment, sir, and I will see that you get it when we get back to civilisation. Meanwhile, you will have to accompany us."

Danny eyed the prisoner ferociously.

"Come on, Jackson, do something useful for a change, and hump this pack."

The stores were divided between them, Danny taking care that Jackson's share included the heaviest portion. Then, when they were all ready to start, the professor hastily ran through his notes again.

"I see that Eric the Red stated that it was two days' march to the end of this valley. To provide against all emergencies we must try to do it in one. Let us march!"

Without another word he entered the narrow gap, and in single file they proceeded along the bank of the stream. Presently they had plunged into the warm mist which rose in clouds about them from the water. At the end of twenty minutes the professor halted, and Eric, who was just behind him, saw that he was stooping over a motionless fur-clad figure that lay stretched on the grass.

"That's the chap Jackson had to shoot!" exclaimed the boy. "The man with the bow and arrow!"

The professor dropped on his knees.

"This is most extraordinary, my lad. This man belongs to a type with which I am quite unfamiliar. You can see for yourself that he is nearly six foot two, and his features are more of the Red Indian type than the Esquimaux. His skull, on the other hand, is almost Nordic."

He called to Jackson and began to question him. The man repeated the story he had already told. After their flight in the stolen kayak his companion had never hesitated about the route they must follow. He had led the way up the valley as if he were quite familiar with it, and then, after having been perfectly friendly, he had become violent, with the result that he—Jackson—had had to shoot him.

The professor pulled meditatively at his beard.

"It's my firm conviction that this man must be one of the inhabitants of the Valley of Hot Springs. Most interesting! Let us proceed, gentlemen."

(Eric & Co. are nearing their goal. More thrills for them—and you—in next Wednesday's exciting instalment.)

HONOURS DIVIDED!

(Continued from page 39).

"MY dear fellow! Come, drink this! That's better!"

Gently Thurston Kyle lowered his friend's head back on to the pillow, looking down at the bruised face with apologetic gaze. Nelson Lee, as a mouthful of stimulant revived him a little, smiled groggily.

"By Jove, my jaw!" he muttered. "You have a smashing punch, Kyle, and, gad, my hand is simply numb!"

The Night Hawk gripped his shoulder quickly.

"Believe me, I am awfully sorry, Lee; but I could do no less, old chap. There you were, gun in hand, trying hard to end my career."

Nelson Lee closed his eyes to shut out a painful memory.

"And I nearly killed you, Kyle. I shall never forgive myself for this afternoon's work!"

"But for the Scrapper's warning, and the speed at which I slipped through the door, you might have scored a bull, old friend!" laughed Thurston Kyle. "Your bullet missed by inches only!"

Altering his mood, he clapped his hands sharply.

"Now, come; brace up, everybody, please. All's well that ends well. Ram Tagore has captured the ruby, true; well, he still has to get it back to Bhuristan. Our luck to-day has not entirely deserted us, and I have not finished with him yet. It is a long journey from here to Budrudin's country, and"—his voice rose gladly—"let us thank our stars that Huggins has rescued Budrudin!"

"Wha-at?"

An exclamation of incredulous joy burst from his companions.

The Night Hawk smiled keenly.

"Huggins stopped in Erith half an hour ago and 'phoned me. The boy is safe and on his way here. We shall get the story when he arrives," he explained.

Nelson Lee struggled to his feet. His eyes were hard; his fists clenched. Tagore, with his hypnotism, had beaten him, and the famous detective felt humiliated. He burned with a desire to avenge the defeat.

"So Tagore's victory was not complete?" he cried. "He has the ruby; we have the boy. We are still in the game, eh? Kyle, you can't begin the invasion of Bhuristan too quickly for me. I'm with you all the way."

And Snub and Nipper, hard-eyed, growled in unison:

"Hear, hear!"

THIRTY hours later a sleek pleasure yacht, carrying a large crew and a surprising number of tough-looking passengers in her cabins, daintily skirted the Needles off the Isle of Wight and danced towards the open sea.

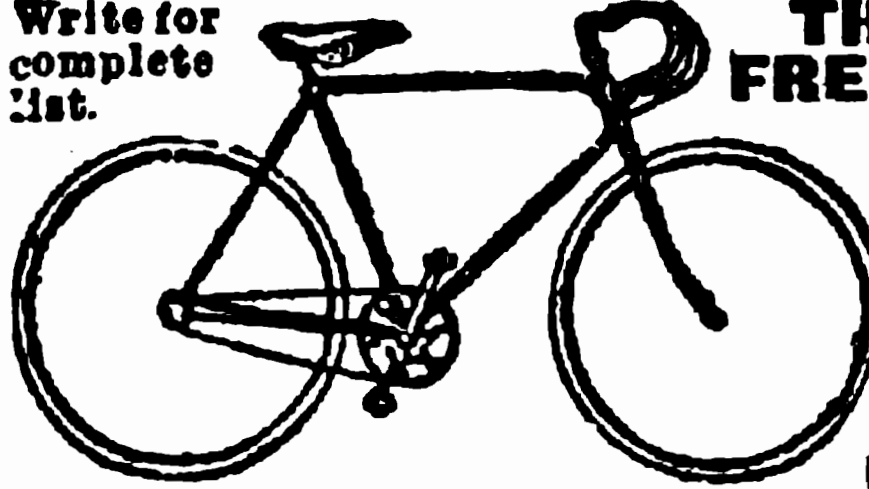
Above her, through the darkness, laughing gaily as his great black wings beat the whirling sea-wind, swept Thurston Kyle, the invisible Night Hawk.

The fight for the throne of Bhuristan had commenced at last in earnest!

THE END.

(Bound for Bhuristan—the Night Hawk and Nelson Lee waging a fight against mighty odds. Next week's gripping yarn is entitled "TERROR OF THE SKIES!")

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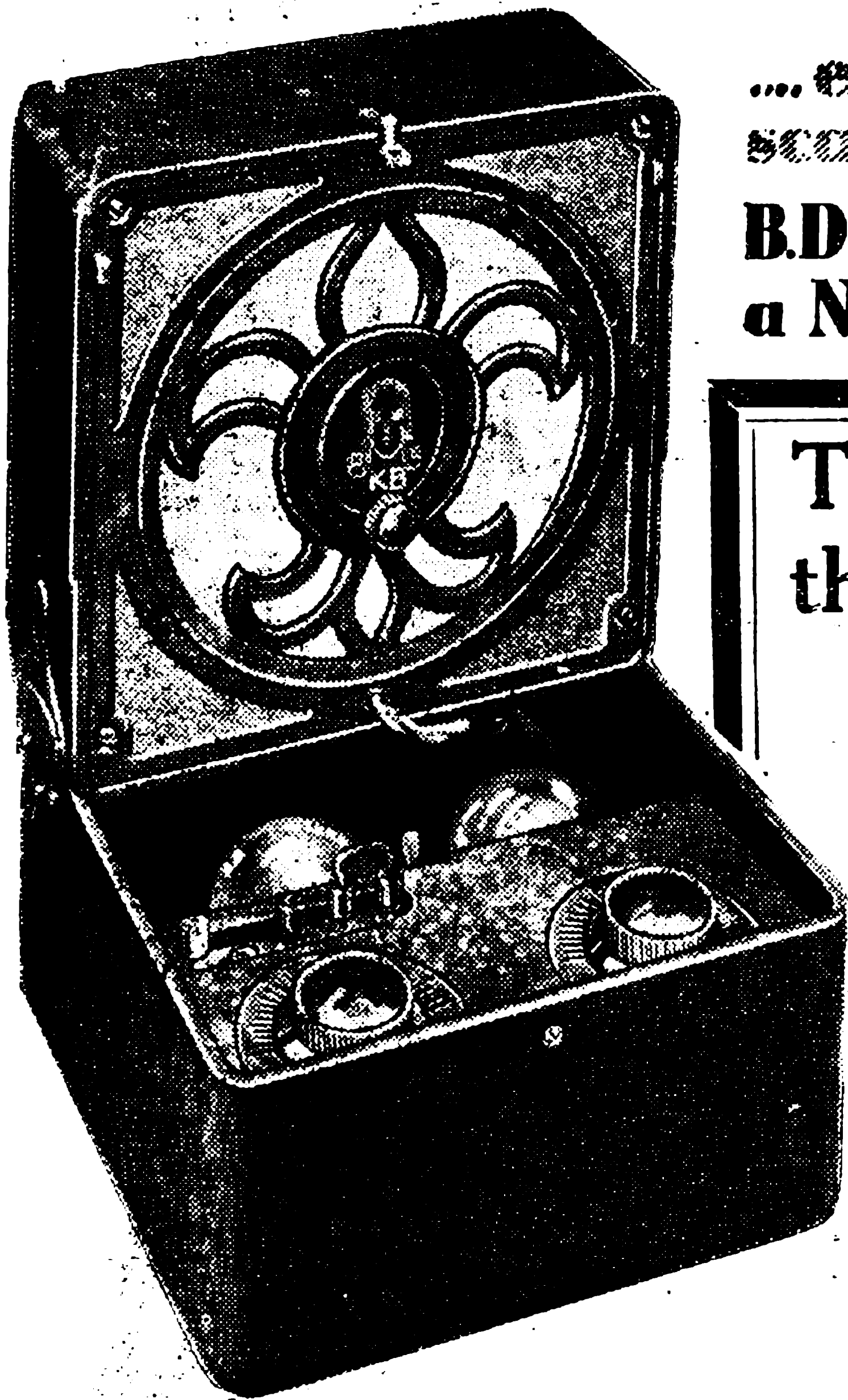
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