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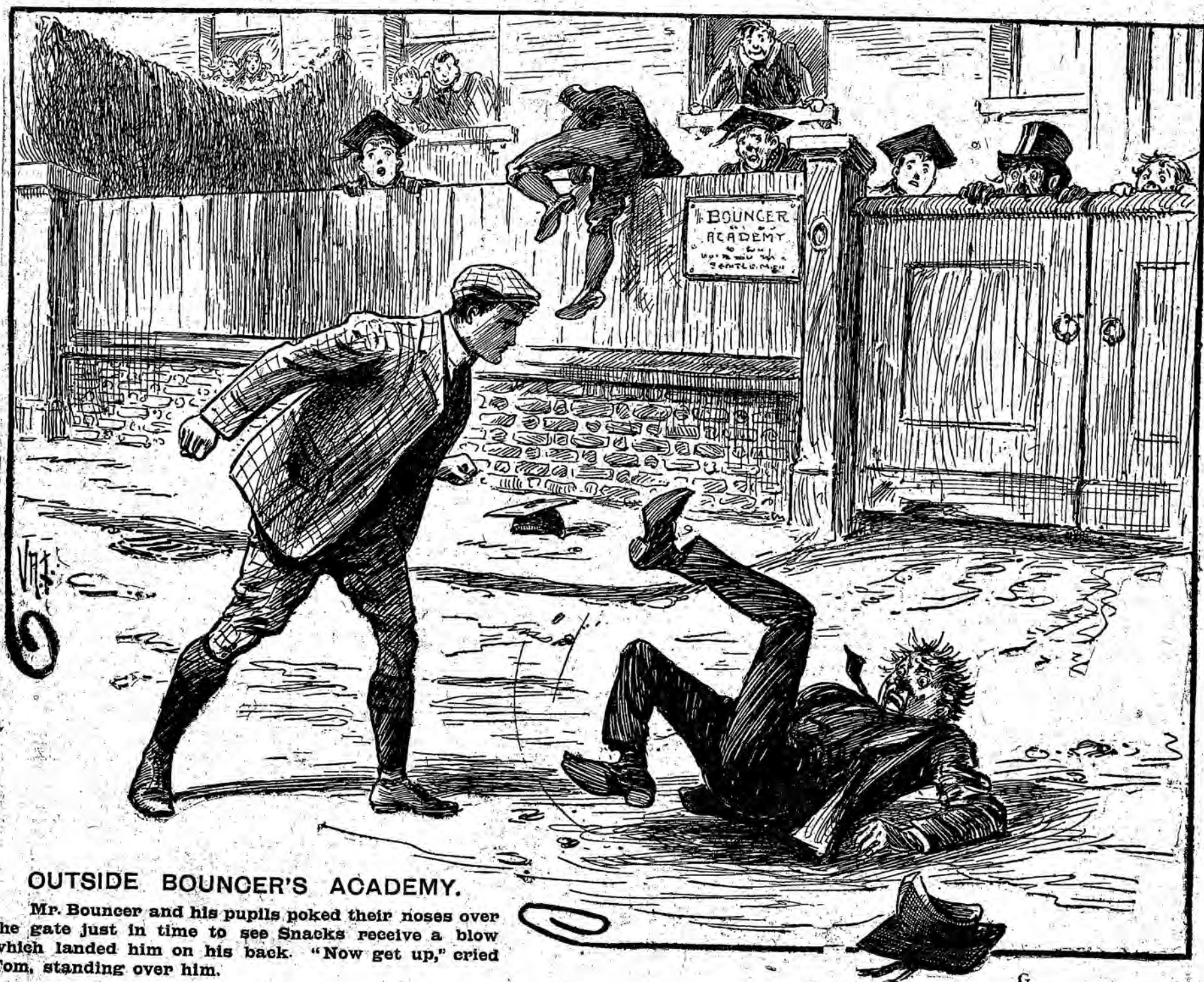
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EVERY SATURDAY—ONE PENNY.

[SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 3RD, 1906.]

TOM TARTAR'S SCHOOL DAYS.

OUR MAGNIFICENT STORY OF SCHOOL LIFE.



OUTSIDE BOUNCER'S ACADEMY.

Mr. Bouncer and his pupils poked their noses over the gate just in time to see Snacks receive a blow which landed him on his back. "Now get up," cried Tom, standing over him.

Glyn Elmhurst Resigns

THE next day Elmhurst turned up at the football ground for practice in the afternoon. He found the colonel there, and was called into the manager's room.

He went with an outward show of boldness, but a beating heart. What to expect he knew not. When he had first learned of Pat's rescue, his heart had stood still with terror. The fact that he was not denounced to the police had led him to hope, however, that Pat had not known him as his assailant. He had tried to see Nugent, but his former confederate had carefully avoided him, and he had not been able to get a word of explanation. He was in a painful state of doubt and uneasiness, which was increased when he was called in to speak in private with the manager of the Blackfield Club.

And the colonel's look was not reassuring. When he saw the gleaming, angry eyes and the tightly-drawn lips, Elmhurst was prepared for what followed.

"I don't want to waste words upon you, Glyn Elmhurst," said the colonel, and his voice cut like a knife. "Your villainy is known, and I want you to resign from the Blackfield United Football Club. That is all."

"Really, I don't understand you, sir," said Elmhurst. "What have I done to offend you?"

The colonel looked daggers at him.

"Pat Clare recognised you on Saturday at the old mill," he said outright.

In spite of his effrontery, Elmhurst was staggered.

"To save scandal, he is willing to pardon you," said the colonel. "And I presume you do not wish to drag the name of Blackfield United in the mud? If it were not for that, you should stand in the felon's dock, by James, sir! You ought to be sent to Portland, you cowardly hound!"

"Colonel Darrell!"

"Don't answer me!" roared the old soldier. "I can hardly keep my hands off you as it is. You'll send in your resignation at once, and if you ever show your nose here again I'll kick you out, sir—do you hear? Get out!"

"By James, if you don't go, I'll start on you now!"

And Glyn Elmhurst, with black rage and malice in his heart, turned and went. His football career in Blackfield was over.

The Burton Match—Pat's Triumph.

FOR many days Pat Clare was very ill. All that kindly care could do for him was done by Colonel Darrell. The colonel's own doctor attended him, and nothing that was required for him was lacking. It was not only his genuine regard for the lad that caused the colonel to act thus. He was anxious to have Pat back in the team. For while his illness lasted Blackfield had met with worse luck than ever. Two successive defeats, following that of Leicester, damped the spirits of the team's supporters, and Blackfield generally regarded the outlook as gloomy.

The colonel had had no alternative but to get rid of Elmhurst, but his going was a loss to the team. He had been a quick and reliable player, if not a brilliant one, and many who did not know the facts were inclined to strongly criticise the colonel's action; for it was hardly a secret that Elmhurst had resigned under pressure. And Philip Nugent, who had filled, more or less efficiently, Clare's place in the Blackfield forward line, had followed Elmhurst's example and resigned.

It was a week before Pat left his bed for good, and then the doctor declared that another week must elapse before he was fit for practice. The colonel came to see him almost daily, and sometimes he received a message from Madge. But the girl herself did not come. Clare understood that Abel Darrell had forbidden her to do so.

Philip Nugent did not come to see Clare until he was convalescent. When he came, Pat shook hands with him cordially enough, but his cousin's look was conscious and downcast.

"I am leaving Blackfield," he said abruptly.

"I have come to say good-bye."

"Leaving Blackfield!" echoed Pat. "What about United?"

"I have resigned."

"I am sorry for that," said Pat sincerely enough. "The team cannot afford to lose a good player, and I hoped that after—" He paused.

Nugent nodded.

"You're a decent fellow, Pat, and I know I never did you justice. But I couldn't have stayed on. Now—now that I know how matters stand between you and Madge, I don't care to remain in Blackfield; and as for United, Colonel Darrell has shown pretty plainly that he prefers my room to my company. He has some idea of—of the facts," said Nugent, colouring, "and he is glad for me to go. I don't blame him."

Pat was silent. Upon the whole, it was wise for Phil to go, he had to admit.

"But where are you going?" he asked, after a pause.

"What are you going to do?"

"I've had an offer from a club," replied Nugent. "It's not much, but I am going to accept it. I am going to stick to football."

"Good luck to you!" said Pat heartily. "I'm sorry you're going, Phil, but I'm jolly glad we part friends after all."

And he held out his hand in his frank way. Nugent gripped it, and took his leave.

When the colonel came again to see Pat, he had a piece of news for him which interested and pleased him a good deal.

"When you rejoin the United you'll find an



A FINE NEW FOOTBALL SERIAL,
By CHARLES HAMILTON.

old friend in the ranks," he said. "I've taken a new recruit from the Ramblers."

"Oakley," asked Pat.

"Yes. He's been in trouble up at the mills, and Mr. Darrell discharged him, Elmhurst having found some fault with him—his friendship with you more than anything else, I imagine. My brother seems to listen very tamely to the advice of that secretary of his," the colonel went on, with a slight frown. "I am trying Oakley now, and I think he will fill Elmhurst's place in the forward line better than any of our present reserves."

"I think so, too," said Pat. "I believe he will do well, quite as well as Elmhurst, at least."

It was a happy day for Pat when he was able to go down to the ground again for practice. It was on a Monday that he appeared there, looking a good deal like his old self, and it was pretty certain that he would be able to play by the end of the week. His comrades gave him a hearty welcome.

"Jolly glad to see you back," said Stevenson, slapping him upon the shoulder. "Here's an old chum of yours, Clare."

It was Oakley. The former Rambler was looking very fit, and in cheerful spirits. The change from mill-overseer to professional footballer seemed to agree with him.

"Glad to see you in the team," said Pat heartily. "It was through me, I suppose, that you left Blackfield Mills?"

"Yes," said Oakley, with a nod. "Elmhurst had his knife into me on your account. He twists old Darrell round his finger, somehow, and he got me the order of the boot. He didn't foresee that I should step into his shoes here. He intended to do me an ill turn, and he did me a good one."

The United played Burslem away on Wednesday, and Pat Clare went with the team and saw the match, but he was not yet up to playing, and did not take part in it. Oakley played in Glyn Elmhurst's old place of inside-left, and acquitted himself well. But the game ended in a draw of one to one—Stevenson taking the equalising goal in the last five minutes of the match.

But the tide of ill-fortune for Blackfield was almost on the turn. On Saturday Pat was to take his old place. Blackfield was to meet Burton, at home, and the game was destined to be one of the most brilliant ever played on the United ground.

Each day Pat had practised assiduously with his comrades, and when Saturday arrived he was in all his old form. It was three weeks since the unlucky Leicester match, and in the interval Blackfield had scored two defeats and a draw. The club's late record had damped the enthusiasm of its keenest backers, and the Burtonians came to Blackfield with the full intention of wiping up the ground with the United. But there was a surprise in store for the visitors.

"Feeling fit?" said the colonel to Pat, in the morning, looking at the young footballer somewhat anxiously.

"Fit as a fiddle, sir."

"Let me see you play the game of your life to-day, Clare. It needs something to put fresh heart into the boys. Our record for the last few weeks has been simply sickening. We have got to win to-day."

"And we will win," said Pat resolutely.

As the time for the kick-off drew near, the enclosures filled rapidly. The Blackfielders, still loyal in spite of the frowns of fortune, came in their thousands to see their champions play, though with many doubts about seeing them win. The band was discoursing sweet music as the turnstiles clicked merrily, and the crowds surged in.

The appearance of the teams in the field was the signal for a rousing cheer. There was another when it was seen that Blackfield had won the toss, giving the visitors a stiffish wind, to play against. But the Burton skipper did not seem to mind. He had decided that he was going to beat the home team, and his men were of the same opinion.

The exchanges were pretty even to begin with. Soon, however, Burton broke away, and came with a rush for the home goal. But a back sent out the ball and Oakley headed it

past the half-way line, and the tussle was transferred to the visitors' half.

After a skirmish the Blackfield forwards got away in line. Passing the ball one to another, they brought it right up to the visitors' goal. The backs gave them a sharp tussle, but Clare beat them, and shot for goal amid a roar of cheering. The roar was redoubled as it was seen that the Burton custodian, in a desperate attempt to stop the ball, had lost his balance, and stumbled over, while the elusive leather lodged safely in the net.

"Goal!" roared the Blackfielders, and their hopes revived. Clare's name was shouted on all sides, amid cheering. The colonel's eyes sparkled.

"I knew that he had it in him, Madge," he said to his niece, who sat at his side to see the match, as usual. "He will save United from coming a cropper this season. He was born for the game. What pace! What keen judgment! He's the youngest of the team, but he's the best man of them all."

And Madge's eyes sparkled, too, with pleasure as she watched Pat. In the excitement of the game, watching the exploits of him she loved, she could forget the trouble and vexation which shadowed her young life. As she heard Pat Clare's name ringing out with wild cheers, she could forget the evil face of Glyn Elmhurst.

Burton were in a more subdued mood when they lined up again. The game was not to be the walk-over they had fancied, but they meant to make a strenuous fight for victory. And fight they did, hard and fast, and soon they were besieging the home goal. The crowd watched with breathless anxiety. Twice Murphy was called upon to save, and did it. Then the ball came to Pat Clare from the foot of a home half, and like a flash he was off with it. With one of those wonderful rushes which were winning him a name in the football world, he took the ball down the field, going through the Burton halves like lightning, and sending in a long shot before the backs could tackle him.

For a fraction of a second sixteen thousand people held their breath; would the goalie save? Far from that. The shot had taken him almost by surprise, and his wild grab missed it by inches. The ball tried to climb up the back of the net, and the air shook with the shout of applause.

The goalie slung the leather out rather viciously. This was the second time he had been defeated by that youngster, as he termed Clare, and he swore inwardly that it should be the last.

Blackfield were grinning with delight as they lined up again. Thirty minutes of the first forty-five had ticked away, and they were two up, and the visitors had not had a look-in. Truly, it seemed as if the club's long spell of ill-luck was broken at last. No one doubted now for an instant that they would win, and that feeling alone was worth goals to them.

Forward! was the word for Blackfield, and a minute after the kick-off they were in the visitors' half, pressing them hard. Burton resisted finely, and for some time the struggle was obstinate. Several times the ball went into touch. Once or twice Burton got it over the half-way line, but Blackfield speedily brought it back again. A swift shot, sent in by Clare, hit the post and came back into play, and the spectators caught their breath. It had been a close thing. The Burton backs tried to clear, but they were driven hard, and at length one of them sent the ball behind the flag as his only resource.

Stevenson instantly claimed the corner kick, and it was taken by Oakley. With gleaming eyes the players watched him, and the spectators were hushed into mute attention. Colonel Darrell was on his feet.

A sudden movement—a rush—a shout! Oakley has kicked, and the Burton backs are on the ball. No; before they can get it away, a Blackfield forward has robbed them of it, and in it goes, with a low, rapid shot that beats the custodian all hollow!

"Goal! Goal!"

It is not a shout, it is a frenzied roar; and men are stamping, shouting, yelling, waving their hats or flinging them into the air. Pat Clare has done the "hat trick!" No wonder the Blackfielders shouted themselves hoarse.

"Goal! Hurrah, hurrah!"

The whistle went for half-time a few minutes later, and the players went off for a well-earned respite. Clare was overwhelmed with congratulations by his comrades. It is safe to say that he was the most popular fellow in the team at that moment. No thought of jealousy was there; the gallant fellows were proud of the comrade who had brought honour to the club colours. Blackfield were three goals up, to nil. The tide had turned with a vengeance; Pat Clare's return had brought good fortune.

When the teams reappeared in the field, Pat was wildly cheered. He saw a white handkerchief wave where Madge sat, and his heart beat.

The change of ends brought Blackfield facing the wind, but they cared little. They were in a mood to face anything now. Burton were looking very dogged when the game was restarted. They knew they had very little chance of winning, but like true Britons they meant to do their level best.

From the restart the play was sensational. In spite of the wind and of the men from Burton town, Blackfield soon got away with the ball, and the scarlet shirts were seen besieging the visitors' goal. A shot from Stevenson rebounded from a post, and after that the Burton custodian twice saved with great difficulty. But Blackfield were raining in shots, and presently one from Stevenson found the net.

Four up for Blackfield! After that the Burton men played an almost purely defensive game. They had not the slightest hope of equalising, and only aimed to keep down the number of goals they were beaten by. They played steadily and ran no risks, and for a time the Blackfield attack was baffled. The spectators, who wanted sensational football all the time, after the manner of spectators, began to growl audibly. But presently the game woke to new life.

An irresistible attack of the Blackfielders broke through the visitors' defence, and Pat Clare had the ball at his foot. Right into the net he slammed it, and a hurricane of cheering made the very atmosphere roar.

After that the Burtonians visibly lost heart, and another goal was taken almost easily by Oakley. Only the whistle sounding for time saved the visitors from a still more crushing defeat; but the total, six to nil, was sufficiently gratifying to the Blackfielders. And when the whistle buzzed out, and play ceased, Pat's comrades made a rush for him, and in spite of his effort to escape, he was seized by Stevenson and Oakley, and borne shoulder-high off the ground in the midst of his friends, through a lane of excited faces and waving hats, amid frantic hurrahing.

The Last Chance.

"YOU sent for me, papa."

Madge Darrell's face was pale, but resolved as she entered the room.

Mr. Darrell sat at the table, his head resting upon his hands. His whole attitude was that of a man crushed down by some mental burden. As he raised his head to look at his daughter, Madge made a quick step forward, with a little cry of alarm.

"Papa, what is the matter?"

Mr. Darrell's face was white and lined, its expression almost haggard. He looked at the girl coldly.

"You know what is the matter, Madge," he said. "You have disobeyed my commands. You have acted in direct opposition to my wishes. Mr. Elmhurst has told me that you have refused him."

"Why should that concern you so much, papa? Why do you want me to marry Mr. Elmhurst?" the girl cried, almost in tears. "I have told you I cannot. I dislike him, and despise him. You know he is not a good man."

"Then my wishes are nothing to you?"

"I have never disobeyed you before. But in this, papa, I cannot obey you."

"I will speak plainly to you, Madge," Abel Darrell's voice had become low and hoarse, and his lips were twitching. "You have guessed that I am in Glyn Elmhurst's power. Well, it is true. He can ruin me if he chooses."

The girl's eyes grew wider, but she did not speak.

"You know the price of his silence. Will you pay it? My fate depends upon you: Will you marry Elmhurst and save me, or will you refuse him and ruin me?"

There was no doubting his earnestness. He was a man face to face with ruin, and willing to sacrifice anything or anybody to save himself. At that moment Madge did not think of his baseness, his cowardice. For a moment, in spite of herself, her resolution wavered. Mr. Darrell saw the signs of yielding in her face, and his eyes gleamed with hope. But it was only for a moment.

"Papa, I cannot."

"You prefer to ruin me?"

"It cannot be so bad as that. You could not be so greatly in that wicked man's power unless you had committed some crime."

Mr. Darrell, with a groan, allowed his head to sink upon his hands again. The girl watched him, her heart aching with a strange, vague fear.

There was a short silence in the room.

When the mill-owner raised his head again, his face was not angry, but white and weary.

"Very well, Madge," he said, in a strangely gentle voice, "I will not ask you again. Perhaps there may be another way out of the difficulty. Leave me now. No, no, say no more; I am not angry with you; but leave me."

The girl passed quietly from the room. Mr. Darrell sat still, staring into the fire. His pallid face wore a strange expression. But he

was left alone for only a few minutes. The door reopened, and Glyn Elmhurst came in.

"Well!" he said abruptly, fixing an inquiring gaze upon the mill-owner.

"It is useless," said Mr. Darrell quietly.

The secretary made a fierce gesture.

"You know what to expect, then."

"Don't be a fool, Elmhurst. If you carry out your threat, you will lose almost as much as I do."

"I care nothing for that. If Madge does not give me her word, I will ruin you. If she knew that I could send you to prison she would not refuse. You have not told her that?"

"How could I?" groaned the mill-owner.

"Ah, I thought not. Well, do so; it is your last chance. I tell you that nothing you can say will alter my determination. Either Madge becomes my wife, or you are lost. I will give you one week more. On next Monday I must have Madge's promise, or I will show you no mercy. Remember!"

And the secretary, gritting his teeth, quitted the room. Had he seen the look the mill-owner cast after him he would have been startled, and he might have taken warning. But his employer had been so long under his thumb that it did not occur to him that the worm might turn at last.

The Burnley Match—Blackfield Mills On Fire.

FORTUNE had indeed ceased to frown upon the Blackfield United Football Club. The long series of defeats and drawn games had ended on the day of the Burton match, when Pat Clare performed the "hat trick," and helped his side to beat the visitors by a sensational total. Several weeks had elapsed since that match, and Blackfield had met four clubs, with the result of three victories and one draw. No wonder the Blackfielders were jubilant, and no wonder Pat became popular with his comrades. For everyone knew well that the team's success was largely due to the brilliant young forward.

That Pat was gratified by his success, and by the encomiums he received on all sides, goes without saying. Yet at this time he was far from being happy. When he was playing the game, he thought of the game and nothing else, as in duty bound. But in leisure moments his thoughts were always with Madge. He could not help thinking of the trouble that had come into the life of the girl he loved, and he chafed at his own powerlessness to help her.

He never saw Madge now, except on match days, when she never failed to see the Blackfield team play, whether at home or away. And on such occasions Clare could never snatch more than a word or two before she drove home. He knew that she was still firm, but he knew, too, what the struggle cost her, and his heart ached at the thought of it.

It was fortunate for his peace of mind that he knew nothing of Glyn Elmhurst's ultimatum to Mr. Darrell. On the Saturday preceding the Monday which was the limit of the mill-owner's period of grace, Blackfield United were to be visited by Burnley. The day turned out a sharp and frosty one, very cold, but quite dry, and there was a record attendance at the club ground. While the strains of the band rang out merrily, the loyal Blackfielders crowded in, and the enclosures were full up long before the time assigned for the kick-off.

Loud shouts greeted the teams when they came scampering into the field. Burnley were said to be in fine fettle, but Blackfield had no doubts about its champions winning. They had already grown accustomed to conquest. And the team looked quite fit to fulfil Blackfield's hopes.

Colonel Darrell glanced over his men with an eye of pride as they lined up, the scarlet of Blackfield fronting the green and white of Burnley. The referee put his whistle to his lips. The visitors had won the toss, and Blackfield were facing the wind. The ball rolled from Stevenson's foot, and some rapid, exciting play immediately followed.

Blackfield were soon swarming over the enemy's territory, making a determined attack, which the Burnley lads found it hard to resist. They played up gallantly, however, and for some time kept their goal intact. Blackfield were not to be denied, and the attack was pressed well home, till at last Stevenson, receiving a pass from Clare, shot for goal. Out came the ball from the Burnley custodian's fist, and a Burnley back was upon it in a moment. But before he could clear, Pat Clare rushed in and sent the ball past the goalie with a lightning-like shot. It was an unexpected shot, and the custodian did not know it was coming until it was there, and then it was too late. He smiled in a sickly way as he tossed out the ball.

The crowd shouted with delight. Pat was cheered to the echo. His name was shouted round the field with enthusiastic hurrahs. The game was hardly ten minutes old. The spectators confidently anticipated a goal or two more before half time. In this, however, they were disappointed. Burnley played a cautious game, losing no chances, and opposing a stubborn resistance to the Blackfield advance. The ball went frequently into touch. Play was pretty level and not especially interesting, and

the crowd showered advice and adjurations upon the players.

"Now, then, Burnley, play the game!"

"Buck up, Blackfield!"

But the players, like sensible men, took no notice of the remarks that showered upon them. They had something better to think about.

The game wore on to half-time without any further scoring. The first half ended with Blackfield one up.

But when the second half opened the most exacting of the spectators felt that he was getting his full money's worth. In the first five minutes Stevenson scored from a pass by Clare, and ten minutes later Pat took a goal.

Then Burnley made a determined effort, and by luck and pluck drove right through the home defence and put the ball in the net.

This gleam of success seemed to greatly encourage the visitors, for from the restart they played up wonderfully, and Blackfield had all their work cut out to hold their own. And when Burnley scored a second goal the excitement grew to fever heat. There were still twenty minutes to play, and Burnley seemed fully determined to make up their leeway.

In the intense interest excited by the game, no one noticed for some time the change that was coming over the sky. A drift of smoke from the west was shadowing the football-ground, and at last not even the most rapt of the spectators could ignore the acrid smell of it. Colonel Darrell looked up anxiously at the clouded sky.

"A big fire somewhere in Blackfield, Madge," he remarked.

"The smoke is coming from the direction of the mills, uncle," the girl replied, as she followed his glance.

"Oh, it can't be there; the mills are closed at one o'clock, you know, so nothing could have happened," said the colonel carelessly.

It was certain that there was a big fire somewhere, but the interest of the hard-fought game was too keen for much thought to be given to it.

Only a thoughtful look remained upon Madge's face. She knew that her father had stayed late that afternoon at the mills, and the smoke was certainly coming from that direction.

A fresh roar from the crowd broke upon her thoughts.

"Goal! Hurrah! Pat Clare for ever!"

Pat certainly had his shooting—boots on that afternoon. It was the hat trick again, and the Blackfielders were wild with delight.

Blackfield had proved their superiority now incontestably, but the Burnley lads were playing bravely right up to the finish. Meanwhile, the murk of smoke had grown blacker, and strange whispers went about among the crowd, some of whom left the ground without waiting for the end of the match. At last the news reached the ears of the girl by the colonel's side.

"Blackfield Mills are on fire!" The girl turned a terrified face towards her uncle.

"Uncle! Papa is at the mills!"

"Are you sure, Madge?"

"Yes. He was staying to go over some books with Mr. Elmhurst."

"Calm yourself, my dear girl. There is no reason to suppose that anything has happened to him. Ah, there goes the whistle!"

The colonel was glad to hear it. Madge was already on her feet, but the colonel would have found it hard to tear himself away before the finish. However, he was free to go now, and he hurried away with his niece. Now that the game was played out, everything else could wait till he knew that his brother was safe.

The home team had won by four goals to two, after a stiff fight. The Blackfield men were in high spirits as they trooped into the dressing-room. There for the first time they learned of the cause of the murk of smoke that shadowed the football-ground.

"Blackfield Mills are on fire!" Pat Clare was the first to change his clothes and to leave the ground. The crowd was all surging towards the mills, and Pat naturally hurried there to see if he could be of any use. Oakley joined him, and they ran on together.

All Blackfield seemed to be pouring towards the mills. The throng was dense in the vicinity

of the fire, but Pat and Oakley had worked their way through hostile teams on the football-field too often to be stopped by a crowd. And as they were recognised, people were mostly willing to make way for them. They were soon in the forefront of the throng that was watching the operations of the firemen.

At a glance Pat saw that the mills were doomed. The firemen were doing their best, but the conflagration had too tight a hold. Flames and smoke soared skyward, and the jets of water fell hissing into the fire without perceptible effect.

"The old place is done for, Pat," Oakley remarked, with a shake of the head. "Lucky there was no one inside."

Pat did not reply. He was not listening to Oakley, but to another voice that was speaking close by him.

To Save His Fee!

"THE mills are doomed, I am afraid, Abel!"

Colonel Darrell glanced sympathetically at his brother as he spoke. Mr. Darrell nodded, but did not speak. His face was white and his lips twitching.

He had been on his way homeward when the alarm of fire at the mills had overtaken him, and he had hurriedly returned. When the dog-cart dashed up with the colonel and Madge, they found the mill-owner there, anxiously



There was a roar from the crowd as the young footballer appeared with the senseless form of Glyn Elmhurst borne upon his shoulder.

watching the efforts of the firemen to subdue the flames. Madge gave a little sob of relief at the sight of her father safe and sound, and passed her arm timidly through his, but he scarcely looked at her. All his faculties seemed to be absorbed in watching the burning building.

"How did it happen?" continued the colonel, somewhat puzzled by his brother's expression, for he knew that the mills were insured.

"Madge told me you were still here, and I was anxious about you."

"I haven't the faintest idea," said Mr. Darrell mechanically. "I had left the mills, and was nearly at Fern House when I learned that the place was on fire. I came back at once. How the fire can have originated I cannot guess. The caretaker appears not to have been on the premises. He will have to explain his neglect. But the mills are doomed, and they are insured for less than half their value."

"That is hard lines, of course, but it is fortunate that no lives will be lost. There was nobody in the mill, then?"

"Not that I am aware of."

"Did Mr. Elmhurst leave with you, papa?" ask Madge.

"No; he stayed to put away some papers," said her father. "That did not detain him, however, more than a few minutes probably."

"I suppose it's certain that he's not in there?" suggested the colonel. "The fire appears to be fiercest where the offices are, which looks as if it started there. If—"

"Nonsense!" broke in Mr. Darrell irritably. "If Elmhurst had been there when the fire started, I suppose he would not stay to be burnt. Of course he is not there."

Pat Clare was standing close to the mill-owner, and as Mr. Darrell spoke these words the lad glanced at his face. Mr. Darrell caught his look, and immediately averted his eyes. Clare turned suddenly pale. A terrible suspicion shot into his mind.

It was so terrible that for a minute or two he strove to dismiss it, but it would not leave him. He knew, only too well, how the mill-owner had writhed under the thumb of the blackmailer, he more than suspected that Abel Darrell hated the secretary with a bitter hatred; hated him as much as he feared him.

Was it possible?

"What's the matter with you, Clare?" asked Oakley, who was watching the changes in his chum's face with amazement. "You don't think that Elmhurst is in there, do you?"

At this moment a strange and fearful cry rang from the burning building.

It froze the blood of all who heard it.

"Heavens!" cried the colonel excitedly.

"There is someone in there! Someone alive!"

Mr. Darrell's pale face became paler, and he staggered, and would have fallen but for the strong grasp of his brother.

"Buck up, old fellow!" cried the colonel.

"Whoever he is, the firemen will save him."

One of the brave fellows was already rushing into the flaming building. The hose played upon him as he went, and the jets of water followed him as he vanished into the smoke.

A minute, two minutes elapsed! Then a figure came staggering out. It was the fireman, and he came alone. He fell fainting.

"It's no good!" he gasped. "It can't be done! I did my best!"

He was scorched and blistered, and had evidently done his best. There had been no other sound from the building.

"It must be all over!" said Mr. Darrell, in a cracked voice. "Who could it have been, I wonder? Pat Clare, where are you going?"

For Pat had stepped forward with a determined look. The lad's eyes met the mill-owner's steadily as he replied:

"I am going to save Elmhurst!"

"Nonsense! He must be dead, or he would have cried out again."

"There is a chance."

"You will throw away your life. I forbid you to try!" cried Mr. Darrell excitedly. "Are you mad? The man was your enemy."

"That makes no difference now."

Pat gave Madge one glance. The girl was pale as death, but she did not say a word to stop him. Mr. Darrell grasped him by the arm, but Pat shook him off.

"Stop him!" cried the mill-owner. "He is going to certain death!"

The firemen seemed inclined to obey him. But Pat was resolute.

"I know the interior of the building thoroughly," he said. "I have a better chance than any of you of finding him. I am going."

And without wasting another moment, he took the jacket Oakley handed him, wound it about his head and face, and ran into the smoke. And the firemen drenched him with water as he went, to protect him from the flames as much as possible, and the jets followed him with ceaseless splashing and hissing.

Madge leaned heavily on her uncle's arm. She was almost fainting with fear for Pat. The colonel pressed her hand, but his own bronzed face was pale. Would the gallant young footballer ever emerge alive? It seemed doubtful.

Pat fought his way through the blinding smoke. Tongues of flame licked and scorched him, but he plunged on. A peculiar smell which was perceptible amid the acrid fumes of the smoke told him, if he had not guessed it before, that the fire had not been an accident. Some kind of inflammable oil had been scattered there.

He knew his way with his eyes shut in this part of the building, and he knew which room to aim for, if his suspicion was well founded, and he had now no doubt of it. He reached the door of the mill-owner's private office. It refused to open. It was locked, and the key was gone. Pat groped for one of the office stools, and with a tremendous crash sent the door flying in. He rushed into the inner room, and stumbled over a form that was stretched upon the floor.

He bent down, gripped the insensible man in his strong arms, and threw him over his shoulder. He was half suffocated by the smoke, and burnt in a dozen places. Reeling with exhaustion, he plunged desperately towards the open air.

There was a roar from the crowd as the young footballer appeared with the senseless form of Glyn Elmhurst borne upon his shoulder. Ready hands relieved him of his burden, and the colonel caught him as he was staggering. The fresh, cool air revived him; in a few minutes he was himself again, though in great pain. But matters were more serious with the man he had rescued.

Elmhurst had evidently been overcome by the smoke after uttering that one cry. There was a terrible bruise on his head, which, it was assumed, he had made in falling down. He appeared like a dead man as a doctor, who was fortunately in the crowd, bent over him.

"Is he dead?" Mr. Darrell asked the question in a cracked and broken voice.

[This magnificent story of football life will be concluded on Saturday next, and its plot will be taken by "The Blue Crusaders," A. S. Hardy.]

ANSWERS
ONE PENNY.
Every Tuesday.