

'Price's Sister'

Another of CHARLES HAMILTON'S Popular and Humorous Complete School Stories.



The 1st Chapter. Pankhurst's Plot.

PANKHURST came into No. 10 Study at Cliveden with a face as red as his hair—which is saying a great deal. He flung himself into a chair and looked at Price, and Price stopped the fretsaw he was using and looked at him in return.

"Anything wrong, Panky?" asked Price. Pankhurst grunted.

"What's the matter?" asked Price, quite concerned by the disturbed and excited look of his bosom chum. "What's wrong, old chap?" "Everything!" growled Pankhurst.

"It's the same old story," said Pankhurst. "I'm getting fed up on it. They've been chipping me again about that cycle ride the other day."

Price grinned, in spite of his concern for Pankhurst's worried looks. "Well, we were done, and no mistake, old chap."

"I know we were; and if it were only Poindexter, Neville, and Flynn who chipped us about it I could stand it, but the whole Form has got hold of it, and there's no end to the confounded matter. It's too rotten!"

"Quite so." "It was all through Miss Clara arranging to have a spin in the afternoon with those bouncers," said Pankhurst. "Of course, we were bound to chip in and muck them up, so that they couldn't go out, and then take Miss Clara along with us."

"Quite so." "If it had ended there it would have been all right, but they laid an ambush for us, punctured our tyres, and carried off Miss Clara under our eyes—"

"Quite so." "And the fellows have been cackling about it ever since."

Price knew it only too well. He had been chipped about that adventure as unmercifully as his chum. He could think of nothing comforting to say, and so he only made his usual remark—"Quite so."

But it was an unfortunate remark to make at that moment. Pankhurst was in an irritable mood.

"For goodness sake, Price," he said, "do find something else to say sometimes. You chirp that out like a parrot every time a chap speaks to you."

"Quite so," said Price absently. Pankhurst glared.

"Oh, don't get ratty, old chap!" said Price. "There's no sense in our rowing one another because the Combine have got the better of us."

"They haven't exactly got the better of us," said Pankhurst. "We'd have wiped up the road with them that time they punctured our tyres if there hadn't been a lady present."

"Quite—I mean, yes, rather." "But they did us brown, though," said Pankhurst. "After all, it's no good trying to get out of what the whole school knows. The Fourth have been cackling over it ever since. We were done."

"Brown," agreed Price. "The question is, how are we to get our own back?" said Pankhurst, running his fingers thoughtfully through his red hair. "If we don't do something pretty soon to raise our credit life won't be worth living at Cliveden."

"I don't see what—"

"Oh, I don't expect you to," said Pankhurst. "I shall have to think it out. Hallo, Greene, of the Fourth, had put in his head to the door."

"Oh, nothing," said Greene, grinning. "I only looked in to ask you if you had been on any more cycle rides yet—"

Pankhurst jumped up in wrath, and Greene vanished.

"That's some more of it," growled Pankhurst. "We can't even be left alone in our own study now."

"Quite so." "And when I'm trying to think anything I'm only backed up by a silly cuckoo who chirps out two silly words like a silly parrot!"

"Oh, I say, Panky—" Gatty, of the Fourth, looked into the study with a genial grin.

"Hallo, you fellows!" "Hallo!" grunted Pankhurst, sliding his hand surreptitiously towards a Latin grammar.

"I just looked in to ask if you chaps had had any more punctures lately," said Gatty. "I—Oh, you beast!"

Gatty dodged out just in time to escape the grammar, which crashed upon the door a second later.

"I say, let's go out and have a think," said Pankhurst restlessly. "I can think better in the open air, and we can have a jaw over it."

Price glanced at his fretwork, but he nodded a cheery assent.

"I'm ready," he said.

The auburn-haired chums of the Fourth went down the passage. Philpot was looking out of his study, and he grinned when he saw them.

"Hallo!" he said. "Have you been taking any more ladies out—Ow-ow-wow!"

The chums passed on, leaving Philpot sitting in his doorway, where he had been felled at one swoop by Pankhurst's good right arm.

On the lower floor three youths were standing in a group and chatting. They burst into a chuckle as Pankhurst and Price came by.

The three were Poindexter, Neville, and Micky Flynn, otherwise known as the Cliveden Combine.

"Faith, and it's a nice day intirely for a cycle ride," Micky Flynn remarked, affecting not to see the red-haired chums passing.

"I guess you're right," said Poindexter. "We might get some punctures, though."

"Sometimes you run over a lot of tin-tacks, and get no end of punctures," Dick Neville remarked solemnly.

And the Combine chuckled.

Pankhurst and Price walked on, apparently not hearing any of the remarks, but out in the Close, under the shady old elms, the red-headed chums of the Fourth looked at one another expressively.

"I'm getting fed up with it," said Pankhurst.

"Quite so."

The postman came along the Close, and Price glanced towards him.

"I say, wait a minute for me, Panky—" "Oh, rats! It doesn't matter about your letters now," said Pankhurst crossly.

"I'm expecting one from my sister—"

"Never mind it now—"

"It's to say whether she's coming down to see me this afternoon," said Price warmly. "If she is I'm going to meet the train."

Pankhurst started. "By Jove! Your sister's a nice girl, Pricey, and it would make the Combine wild if we—"

"That's why I asked her to come," chuckled Price. "Of course, I want to see her as well. But I thought, too—"

"See if there's a letter for you."

There was a letter for Price, and the Cliveden postman handed it out of his sack. Price nodded with satisfaction.

"Is it from your sister, Pricey?"

"Yes, old chap; it's Amy's writing."

"Then read it, quick!" said Pankhurst eagerly.

Price tore open the letter and glanced through it, and an expression of disappointment overspread his face.

"She can't come!" Pankhurst's face fell. "Can't come?" "No; it's put off. I'm sorry, old chap, but—What's the matter?" Pankhurst had given a sudden jump, as if struck all at once with a new and brilliant idea. He grasped Price's arm.

"I've got it!" "Got what?" "The wheeze! Your sister is coming—"

"She isn't."

"Yes she is. You're awfully like your sister, and your face is smooth and plump, and you know how rippingly you made up as a girl in the amateur theatricals, when I was spending the vac. at your place last Christmas."

Price started.

"I say, Panky—" "It's a ripping wheeze. We can go to the costumier's in Clivebank, and give out that we're going to meet the train your sister's coming in."

"Ha, ha! But—"

"You'll come back alone, having missed us, and you'll take in the Combine, and make regular asses of them if you play the part well, and—"

Price's face expanded into a grin.

"My word, Panky! It's a great idea, if you think I can do it!"

"I know you can if you try."

"Well, I'll try, anyway."

"Come along, then. The cricket can go for this afternoon. The Combine are going to write up the next number of the 'Cliveden Rag' this afternoon, as I happen to know. Let's get out."

"Hallo, is your sister coming down, Price?" asked Trimble, of the Fourth, passing the Old Firm in the Close. Teddy Trimble was the gossip of Cliveden, and a surer means of disseminating news—true or untrue—could not have been found.

"I've just had a letter from her," said Price diplomatically. "Must get off to Clivebank at once."

And the Old Firm walked out of the gates before Teddy Trimble could speak again.

The 2nd Chapter. Price's Sister.

"WE must have an article on it," said Poindexter.

Dick Neville looked up.

"On what?"

"On that cycle ride of the Old Firm the other day."

Neville and Flynn chuckled.

"Faith, and ye're right, Puntpusher!"

The Cliveden Combine were busy in the editorial office. The editorial office was their Study, No. 4, in the Fourth Form. The study was also the publishing department. As Flynn put it, when you were in the editorial office, and you wanted to get into the publishing department, you stood just where you were, which saved time.

"The whole Form will grin over it," said Poindexter. "It had better be an article on punctures, and how red-headed chaps get them when they go cycling."

"Ha, ha!"

"I've finished the leading article, and I'd better make this a leaderette. I guess—"

There was a tap at the door of the study.

"Get along!" shouted Poindexter. "We're busy."

Tap!

"We can't be bothered now!" Tap!

"Oh, hang!" growled Neville. "I suppose it's those red-headed rotters come to bother us with some of their rotten contributions."

"Faith, and it isn't!" said Micky Flynn. "They've gone to Clivebank to meet Price's sister!"

"Didn't know he had one," said Neville.

"I—"

Tap!

"Oh, come in, fathead!" called out Poindexter testily.

The door opened timidly.

The next moment the chums were on their feet, Poindexter with a face quite scarlet with confusion.

For it was a girl who stood in the doorway of No. 4 Study, looking in timidly at the Fourth-Formers.

A girl, seemingly of about fifteen, with a pretty figure and a charming plump face, and long, golden hair, inclining to rich auburn, and a large summer hat that threw her face somewhat into the shade.

"If you please—"

"I—I beg your pardon!" stammered Poindexter. "I—I thought—"

"Faith, and ye've put ye'r foot in it this time, Puntpusher!" murmured Micky Flynn. "The top of the afternoon to ye, miss!"

"Is this my brother's study?" Poindexter started.

The resemblance of the girl to Price had struck him at once, and he understood now how the case stood.

It was Price's sister.

"Miss Price, is it not?" said the American chum, recovering himself a little.

"That is my name."

"Ah, yes, I heard that you were coming down this afternoon!" said Poindexter.

"But your brother has gone to the station to meet you, I believe."

The girl looked disappointed.

"Oh, dear, I did not see him there!"

"Pankhurst has gone with him," said Neville. "They must be a pair of duffers to miss you—I mean, it's an awful pity—"

"Faith, and ye're right—"

"Oh, dear! And isn't this my brother's study?"

The Combine could not help grinning.

Of all the studies in the Fourth Form passage, Miss Price had happened upon the very one which contained the deadly rivals of her brother and his chum. But the Combine were not likely to let her know that. Chivalry to the gentle sex was a ruling trait in the character of the three chums.

"No," said Poindexter; "I guess this isn't Price's study, but we know Price awfully well. He's a very decent chap, and we all like him."

"Faith, and ye're right! I love him as a brother!" said Micky Flynn.

"He's a champion," said Neville earnestly. "One of the finest chaps in Cliveden. I've often envied Panky having him for a chum."

The girl smiled sweetly.

"How kind of you to say so! Would you—would you mind showing me where my brother's study is, so that I can wait for him?"

"With all the pleasure in life!" exclaimed Micky Flynn.

"Hold on!" said Poindexter. "Price may wait for you at the station, Miss Price. He may think you are coming by the next train. You may be hung up in the study all the afternoon if you wait for him."

The fair visitor looked distressed.

"Oh, dear! What shall I do?"

"No good waiting in No. 10, I guess," said Poindexter. "As Price's special friends, it's our business to look after you till he comes back."

"Thank you so much!"

"Not at all. It's a real pleasure, to say nothing of obliging a chum like Price!" said Poindexter. "You must be hungry after your railway journey. I wonder whether you would have tea with us?"

Miss Price nodded.

"I should be very pleased."

The Combine beamed at one another. To entertain a pretty girl in the study to tea was rather a novelty, and had hitherto only happened on such occasions as Speech Day, when the sisters and the cousins and the aunts of the Cliveden boys came down to the old school in force.

"Faith, and that will be jolly!" said Micky Flynn. "Puntddodger, old man, I'll take Miss Price for a stroll in the Close while you get the tea—"

"Bosh!" said Neville warmly. "I am going to show Miss Price over Cliveden, while you and Puntddodger get the tea. It's not fair to leave it all on Puntty."

Poindexter grinned.

"I guess that Miss Price would like me to show her the improvements in the gym," he said. "You chaps can get tea while we're gone."

"Look, here, Puntddodger—"

"I guess—"

"Faith, and sure I—"

"Oh, dear, I am sure I am giving you a great deal of trouble!" murmured Miss Amy.

The commencing altercation ceased at once.

"Not at all—not at all!" exclaimed Poindexter eagerly. "These youngsters always want keeping in their place. I'm the boss of this study, you know!"

"Faith, and sure I—"

"I guess I'm going to show Miss Price round while you get the tea," said Poindexter, looking daggers at Micky and Dick with the left side of his face, which was turned away from the fair visitor, and smiling at Miss



Up went Miss Price's arms. There was a smack, and the ball was caught. Then Miss Price threw it into the air, and caught it in her palm as it came down, as easily and truly as any fieldsman in the Fifth could have done.

PRICE'S SISTER.

(Continued from the previous page.)

Price with the right—an effort which led to startling facial contortions.

"Thank you so much!" said Miss Price. Poindexter smiled triumphantly at Neville and Flynn, and walked out with the smiling girl, picking up his cap as he went.

Neville and Flynn looked at one another. "Well, of all the cheek!" said Dick Neville emphatically.

"Faith, of all the nerve!" "Well, we'll get a ripping tea," said Neville, "and we'll rag Poindexter afterwards for his cheek! Let's get down to the school shop and lay in a supply of grub."

"Faith, and I'm wid ye!" The chums passed Poindexter and his fair companion as they went down to the tuck-shop. Amy and Lincoln G. Poindexter were strolling towards the cricket-field, the girl looking up at the American chum and chatting sweetly, and many fellows casting envious glances at Poindexter, who looked extremely pleased with himself.

The 3rd Chapter.

Taken In!

"Do you play cricket?" Miss Price asked that question in a timid voice, and with a sweet smile, as they stopped by the ropes and looked on at the practice for a few minutes. The Fifth-Form cricketers were playing, and Crane and Cuffy of that Form were slogging at the ball in turns.

Poindexter smiled condescendingly. "I guess so," he replied. "We all play cricket here. I'm considered rather good in the Form eleven."

"Yes, I have heard my brother speak of you."

"Have you really?" said Poindexter, flattered. "Yes, but he pronounces your name differently—but I suppose it is the same." "Oh, he does, does he?" murmured Poindexter, whose name frequently underwent all sorts of curious variations amongst his acquaintances.

"Yes," said Miss Price, with a charming smile. "He pronounces it Beefpotter, I think. Is that correct?"

Poindexter's eye glimmered for a moment. "No; that isn't quite correct, Miss Amy. It's Poindexter."

"Ah, yes! I shall remember, now—Poindexter."

"No—Poindexter." "Yes, I remember Sidney speaking of you," said Miss Price thoughtfully. "He spoke about your cricket. It was something about duck's eggs."

Poindexter turned red.

"Was it?" "Yes; I think he mentioned that you scored more duck's eggs than any other fellow in the Form," said Miss Price innocently. "That is a great distinction, I suppose?"

Poindexter murmured something unintelligible.

"Look out, there!" It was a yell from the fieldsmen. Crane, of the Fifth, had just given the ball a swipe, and it was whizzing through the air, and came directly towards Poindexter and his fair companion.

Up went Miss Price's arm. There was a smack, and the ball was caught. Then Miss Price threw it into the air, and caught it in her palm as it came down, as easily and truly as any fieldsmen in the Fifth could have done.

"How's that?"

Poindexter gasped. It was Miss Price who called out "How's that?" as she caught the descending ball in her palm.

The fieldsmen stared at her in amazement, and so did the American chum. For a girl who did not know what cricketers' duck-eggs were, Miss Price was a good field.

"Thank you!" said Morris, of the Fifth, as Miss Price tossed the ball to him. "Thank you very much. That was well caught!"

"Oh, I think I could give you Fifth-Form chaps points in fielding a ball," said Miss Price. The Fifth-Former gasped.

Poindexter stared blankly at Miss Price. Her voice had taken on a deeper tone as she spoke, and sounded more than ever like her brother's.

Miss Price caught his glance of amazement, and turned red.

"Oh, excuse me," she murmured, dropping into the shy, timid manner again instantly. "I—I have played cricket at home, you know, and I—I should not have—"

"Oh, stuff!" said Poindexter. "I never saw a ball caught so neatly. It must be awfully jolly for Price to have a sister who can play cricket with him in the holidays."

"Do you think so? Shall we have a look at that old tower?" said Miss Price, with a nod towards the ruined tower—one of the most ancient relics of the former abbey of Cliveden. "My brother has told me about it. Some boys were shut up in it once, I believe—some rivals of my brother and Pankhurst. They were very simple boys, and were trapped and shut up there like geese, Sidney said."

Poindexter clinched his teeth. He well remembered the occasion upon which he and Neville and Flynn had been trapped in the tower by the Old Firm. It was evident that Miss Price heard many stories of the Old Firm's doings at Cliveden.

"Let's have a look at it, by all means," said Poindexter. "It's a curious old place. Once you get inside, there's no getting out again if the door gets fastened; and it's so far from the school-buildings, that there isn't much chance of being heard if you shout. That's how it was that we—that the fellows you speak of—were kept there until your brother and Pankhurst let them out."

"How interesting!"

They strolled away to the old tower. It was indeed a very quiet and secluded spot, shaded by old trees, and seemed strangely silent after the liveliness of the cricket-field. The old, oaken door creaked on its rusty hinges, as Poindexter opened it. Dark and gloomy looked the interior of the tower, though the hot, summer sunshine was blazing down outside.

The girl glanced in with a little shiver.

"How dark it looks!"

"Oh, you get used to that," said Poindexter. "It's cool and shady. Look! This little door leads on to the spiral staircase that goes up half-way to the top. It's rotten further on, and you can't go higher."

"I should so like to see it."

Poindexter opened the staircase door. Dimly within could be seen the spiral stair, winding upward, lighted here and there by shafts of sunlight through the crannies in the old wall. Miss Price looked at it with another pretty little shiver.

"Dear me! What a mysterious-looking place. Would you dare to go up the stairs?" Poindexter laughed.

"Well, I should say so!" he replied, stepping through the little doorway. "Mind the door doesn't get shut, as it won't open from the inside."

He stepped up the stairs. He only meant to show Miss Price that it was quite safe, and that he, Lincoln G. Poindexter, wouldn't have been afraid, anyway. He gave a start as he heard a click below, and turned back hurriedly. The door at the bottom of the stair was shut.

"My hat!" muttered Poindexter. "What on earth did she want to shut that door for?" He tapped on the door.

"I say, Miss Amy."

"Yes."

"How did the door come shut?"

"I just pushed it," came back a distressed voice, "and it clicked shut."

"What did you push it for?" murmured Poindexter. "How exactly like a girl!"

Aloud he went on: "See if you can find the lock, will you? It pulls back, you know—it's quite simple."

Several minutes elapsed.

"Have you found it?" asked Poindexter, at last.

"I haven't got it open."

"Pull it back!"

"It doesn't move."

"Great snakes! I guess it's got jammed, somehow! Pull harder!"

Another minute of suspense.

"Is it moving, now?"

"No. Its exactly as it was."

This was not surprising, as Miss Price was not even touching it. But Lincoln G. Poindexter, of course, was not aware of that fact.

"My hat! It's jammed, to a certainty! Never mind, Miss Amy, don't bother; go and tell Neville and Flynn, and they'll see to it."

"But I cannot go away and leave you in that dreadful place," came the distressed voice faintly through the oaken door.

"It's all right. It's not dreadful. I've been in here before. I shan't mind, in the least, if you'll go and tell Neville."

"You might die of fright in the solitude!"

Poindexter grinned.

"I guess I shouldn't die of fright if there

was any danger—and there isn't any," he replied.

"I can't bear to leave you there." "My dear Miss Amy, if you can't open the door, you must go and tell Neville," said Poindexter, with admirable patience. "I couldn't make anybody hear, if I shouted, and I can't remain here all night."

"Shall I go out and scream for help?"

"No!" roared Poindexter.

"But if I screamed and shrieked loud enough?"

Poindexter murmured something. He could guess what a grinning crowd would assemble, and guy him unmercifully when he came out, if Miss Price carried out her suggestion.

"Shall I shriek?"

"No, please don't, Miss Price. There's nothing whatever to be alarmed about. Just go quietly back to the study, and as soon as you see Neville, tell him what's happened, and he'll have me out in a jiffy."

"You are sure you don't mind my leaving you here?"

"Not a bit."

"Then I will go. Keep your courage up!"

"My courage is all right. There's nothing the matter."

"Then I will go."

And Miss Price's voice was heard no more. Poindexter imagined for a moment that he heard a chuckle through the oaken door, but he dismissed the idea. He settled down to wait patiently—more patiently than would have been possible had he known how long that wait was to be.

The 4th Chapter.

Guests in No. 4.

"FAITH, and where's that Chicago bounder got to with Miss Price?" exclaimed Micky Flynn.

"I suppose he's forgotten all about tea," said Neville, with a grunt.

The chums had cause to be exasperated, and they were.

Lincoln G. Poindexter, with the coolness that was a part of his nature, had walked Miss Price off under their noses, leaving them the task of getting tea. Tea was ready now, and the American chum had not returned, and there was no sign of him.

And it was, as Neville said, a ripping tea.

There were ham and tongue, and salmon, and cake and biscuits, and nice wholemeal bread and delightfully fresh butter and cream. Neville had surreptitiously raided a bunch of flowers from the Head's garden, and they were tastefully arranged in jars on the table and mantelpiece. Nobody could have found fault with the fact that the jars had once contained jam and marmalade. The flowers were the thing, and they were looking very fresh and sweet, and shed a pleasant fragrance through the room.

The kettle was singing on the hob. Flynn had lighted the fire to boil it, but it was dying down now, for the afternoon was warm. The window was wide open to let in the breeze from the Close, and the distant shouts from the cricket field.

"Where can that Chicago rotter be?"

"Faith, and he may have taken the lady off on some excursion, the spalpeen!" exclaimed Micky Flynn. "And forgotten about the tay intirely!"

"Shouldn't wonder!"

"The beast!"

"I'll see if the bounder's in sight," said Neville, crossing to the window, and looking out into the sunny Close.

Then he gave an exclamation.

"Sure, and phwat is it?"

"There's Miss Price!"

Micky looked out too, and he, too, uttered an ejaculation.

"Panky's with her!"

There was no sign of Lincoln G. Poindexter.

Miss Price was standing under the elm tree, looking at Pankhurst. Poindexter had appeared.

Miss Price and Pankhurst were laughing at something, Neville could see that, though it was too far off to hear what was said.

"My hat! I wonder where Poindexter's got to?"

"Faith, and how is it that Panky has come back without Price?"

Neville chuckled.

"Oh, I dare say Price is still waiting at station!"

"Ha, ha!"

"This is rather rotten. Miss Price will be up with Panky, as he's Price's chum, and she shall be rather out in the cold—"

"Sure she's promised to have the tea with us!"

"It's all Poindexter's fault. He ought to have kept her under his wing, and not allowed her to fall into Pankhurst's clutches," said Neville, frowning. "Where can the bounder have taken himself off to?"

"Faith, we'd better go and speak to Mr. Price, anyway, before she wanders away with Panky," said Flynn. "That bounder would be jolly glad to take her away, and leave us to our tay alone!"

"Yes, rather! Come on!"

Neville and Flynn hurried out of the Close. Miss Price looked up with a charming smile as they came up, and Pankhurst nodded.

"Hallo," he said, "I see you've met Mr. Amy's acquaintance!"

"Yes, rather," said Dick Neville, "friends of Price—"

"As what?"

"As friends of Price," repeated Dick Neville, phatically. "Miss Price has promised to have tea with us in the study."

Pankhurst grinned again, as much as to say that he would not give them away, and Dick Neville felt relieved. It would have been painful if Miss Price had learned just then the real footing that matters stood upon between the Combine and the Old Firm.

"Where's Poindexter?" asked Pankhurst.

"He was showing Miss Price round the den," said Dick, looking puzzled. "Did he leave you, Miss Amy?"

"I lost sight of him about a quarter of an hour ago," said Miss Price. "Then I saw Pankhurst in the Close."

"I've just got in from Cliveden," said Pankhurst. "When we got to the village, I had to go—a sudden engagement. I saw Miss Price, and here I am. Price, of course, looks to me to look after his sister."

"That's not at all necessary," said Dick.

"We're looking after her."

"But—"

"Don't you worry, Panky, old man. Are you going to do some cricket practice this afternoon?"

"I wasn't thinking of—"

"You can't be too careful, old fellow. I remember you're in rotten form for the next week—"

"Am I?" said Pankhurst warmly. "To know—"

"You'd better get some batting in with a chance. Gatty or Simpson will be with you, and—"

"I'm not going to do any cricket this afternoon. I'm going to look after Price's sister."

"You're not; Miss Price has promised to have tea with us."

"Faith, and sure—"

"Yes, certainly," said Miss Price.

"I am looking forward ever so much to tea in a junior's study, you know, but excuse me if—if—"

"Certainly!" said Neville. "But if Price shily."

"My brother says that Poindexter and his friends live almost entirely on tinned-beef, sent from Chicago by Pankhurst's father—"

"Faith, and sure he—"

"Oh, that was only one of his little tricks," said Neville, forcing a smile.

"You'll never see any tinned-beef in my study, especially of the Chicago variety, I promise you that!"

"Faith, and it's right ye are! That's Price—Oh! What are ye stamping for, foot for, Neville?"

"Did I tread on your foot?" said Dick blandly.

"Sure, and ye did, ye—"

"Never mind! You shouldn't have stepped on it. It's rather difficult to move about in the Close at all without treading on some one's feet," said Neville.

"Faith, and I—"

"Tea is quite ready, Miss Price."

"Of course, you won't mind if my friend comes to tea?"

Dick Neville forced a cheerful smile.

"I was just going to ask him," he said.

"Well, that's really nice of you," said Pankhurst genially. "I don't mind."

"That's more than we shall—"

"Keep off my feet, Dicky darling, or I shall give ye a thick ear intirely!"

"Come along!"

"Do you mind if I bring a friend?"

Pankhurst. "I can't refuse your invitation, especially as you're so good to bring him along, do you? Miss Price's King."

Dick Neville made a grimace.

King was the glutton of the Fifth-Form, and he had never been known to leave a while a single eatable article remained on his plate.

He was no particular friend of Pankhurst's.

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Post Free.

other. Neville also knew perfectly well that Panky was planting the glutton of the form on him, because it was impossible to raise any objection in the presence of Miss Price.

"Oh, do ask him!" said Miss Price. "Certainly!" said Dick Neville. "Just look at him, will you, Panky, and bring him along by all means."

"Faith, and sure we'll be plazed intirely!" said Pankhurst.

"Right you are!" said Miss Price, and walked away in quest of King, and Neville and Flynn, after a last look round for Poindexter, escorted Miss Price up to Study No. 4. The disappearance of the American chum was inexplicable. He might have been called suddenly away, but it was discourteous to Miss Price to leave her in this way. It was necessary for Neville and Flynn to be additionally attentive to make up for the shortcomings of their American chum.

"How sweet!" exclaimed Miss Price, as she looked round the flower-scented and adorned study, with its clean, white tablecloth, and the array of shining crockery upon it.

"Faith, and it's rather nice, isn't it?" said Micky Flynn. "You know, we don't often have a charming lady visitor!"

"Quite so!" said Miss Price.

Neville glanced at her. Miss Price was very, very like her brother, and she seemed to have his tricks of speaking, too. That "Quite so!" might have been uttered by Price himself.

"You will sit by the window, won't you?" said Neville. "We're going to let the fire out as soon as the tea's made. Make it, will you, Micky!"

"Sure, and that's what I'm doin'," said Micky Flynn, poking sticks under the kettle to make it boil, and industriously blowing until he was scarlet in the face.

"You'll find it cool here," said Dick Neville; "and there's a nice view of the Close."

"How nice!"

"You'd like this cushion, wouldn't you? I'll shut the door, in case there's a draught."

Pankhurst was just coming in, but apparently Dick did not notice that, for he shut the door with a slam. Pankhurst gave a yell, and hurled the door open the next second.

"You howling ass!" he roared. "You gave me a bill—"

"Pankhurst!"

"You shrieking idiot—"

"I'm surprised at you," said Neville severely. "You seem to have forgotten that you are in the presence of a lady."

Pankhurst remembered himself.

"I beg your pardon, Miss Price!"

"Oh, it's nothing!" said Miss Price. "You were naturally startled. Ah, this is King! I am very glad to see you, King!"

Miss Price shook hands with King. King said he was very glad to make the acquaintance of Miss Price, but from the glimmer in his eye as he glanced over the table, it might have been guessed that he was gladder still to make the acquaintance of that feed in the study.

"Make the tea, Micky!"

"Sure, and I've made it!"

"Better let the fire out, then," said Pankhurst. "It's hot in here."

"Sure, it would be cooler if ye left ye're head outside," said Micky Flynn.

"I'm ready for tea," King remarked.

"Tea's ready," said Neville. "You might shut the door, Panky."

Panky shut the door, and the juniors seated themselves, and tea commenced.

The 5th Chapter. Tea in the Study.

TEA in Study No. 4 at Cliveden was generally a cosy and comfortable meal, and on the present occasion there was an unusually excellent spread.

There was plenty of everything, and it was all of the best quality. King's eyes glistened as he sat down, a sign that he meant to do his duty nobly in the cause of clearing the festive board; and he did!

Neville poured out the tea. Miss Price sipped from her cup in a really charming way. She accepted the delicacies Neville kept her supplied with without a single refusal, and certainly she had an excellent appetite.

"Sorry Price isn't here!" said Dick Neville, feeling that he could safely express regret, as there was no chance of Price getting there.

Pankhurst chuckled.

Dick Neville looked at him frigidly.

"Anything wrong, Panky?" he asked.

"Not at all!"

"Oh, I say, Miss Price, I'm really sorry your brother isn't here!" said Neville again. "It would make the party complete."

"Quite so."

"It's curious," said Neville. "You remind me very much of your brother, Miss Price. We're considered much alike," said Miss Price.

"Yes, I will have some jam, please," Flynn passed the jam. Miss Price evidently liked strawberry jam, for she had already made a deep inroad upon it and now she made another. The chums were pleased to see it. Miss Price would not pay them a higher compliment than making a good tea, and that she was certainly doing. Pankhurst was making a good one, too, so was King. King did not join in the conversation. He seldom did at meal times. He set himself to travel steadily through all the

provisions within his reach, and he was too busy to talk.

"It is very kind of you to entertain me like this," said Miss Price.

"A real pleasure!" said Neville.

"Faith, and ye're right, Dicky darling. We—"

"My brother will be very grateful to you," said Miss Price. "It is very unfortunate that he had to go out this afternoon, when I was coming down."

"Oh, he knew he could trust me to look after you," said Pankhurst, "and, of course, these other friends of Price's were bound to come to the rescue."

"Faith, and sure we—"

"Isn't Poindexter coming to tea?" asked the girl, glancing at Dick Neville.

Dick looked puzzled.

"I can't imagine where he's got to," he confessed. "He ought to be here, of course. He must have been called away, or something."

"Sure, and it was mighty unceivil of him," said Micky Flynn. "I'll punch his head for it, when I see him again!"

"Yes, that would do him good," said Pankhurst. "He's rather a cheeky young bouncer, that Poindexter!"

"If it's lookin' for a thick ear ye are, Panky—"

"Oh, rats!"

"Sure, and I—"

"I'm surprised at you, Panky!" said Dick Neville.

"Oh, I beg your pardon again, Miss Price!" said Pankhurst.

"Quite so!"

"I forgot for a moment."

"Quite so!"

Pankhurst looked daggers at Miss Price for a moment. Miss Price coloured, and she did not say "Quite so!" again for some time.

"Will you have another cup of tea, Miss Price?"

"Yes, please!"

"Can I help you to some cake?"

"If you please!"

"Would you like some cream puffs?"

"Oh, please!"

"These are nice biscuits—"

"I will have some, please!"

Dick Neville smiled with gratification. Not a single offer was refused. There was no nonsense, evidently, about Miss Price. She had an appetite, and was not ashamed to own it.

The tea progressed swimmingly. Pankhurst was not a guest whom the Combine would have chosen, perhaps. He seemed more full of fun than they had ever known him before. He continually mentioned matters they would have left unmentioned, and told Miss Price several stories of defeats inflicted upon the Combine, without mentioning names, of course, but in a way that made Neville and Flynn long to have him alone to themselves for a few minutes.

He told how he had drenched "some fellows" with a garden hose just when they were going on a spin with Miss Clara, the Head's daughter; how he had shut up "some fellows" in the old tower; how he had bowled out and shown up "some fellows" who were playing nigger minstrels at Cliveden; and Neville and Flynn, being the fellows referred to, boiled inwardly and smiled outwardly, and longed for the time when they would meet Pankhurst in a quiet spot.

The worst of it was, that Miss Price seemed to be highly amused by Pankhurst's stories, and agreed with him that the unnamed "fellows" must have been duffers, asses, and mugs.

"They are asses, and no mistake," said Pankhurst. "We're playing them at cricket next week, and we're going to beat them hollow. They can't play, you know."

"Can't they?" murmured Neville. "You wait till next week, you rotter!"

"Did you speak, Neville?"

"Oh, no; I was just thinking."

"You know the fellows I've been speaking of," said Pankhurst. "I won't mention their names, but aren't they awful mugs?"

Neville murmured something.

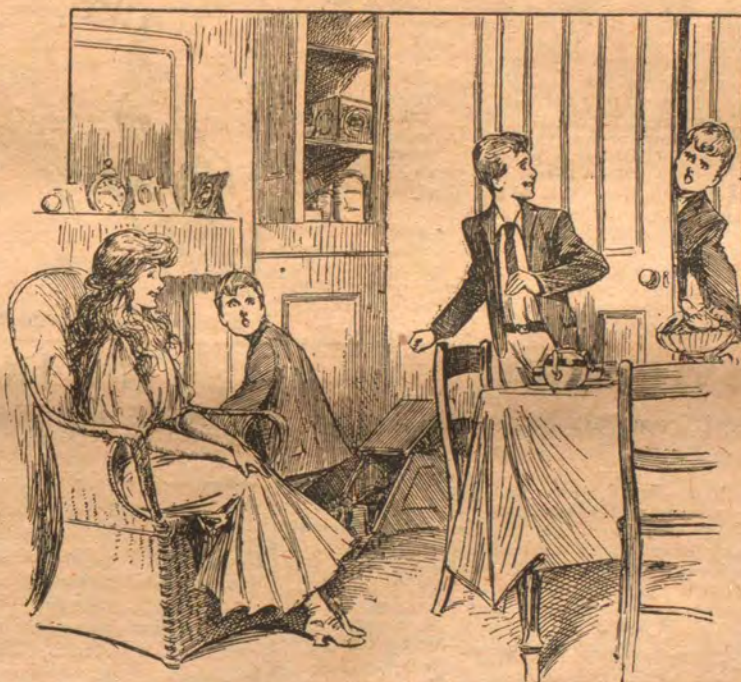
"You know them, too, Flynn? Aren't they screaming duffers?"

Flynn muttered under his breath.

"They're the joke of Cliveden, for their asinine qualities, you know, Miss Price," said Pankhurst. "We've got a joke up against them at the present moment, and all the school will be shrieking over it presently; but, bless you, they're too asinine to see it."

"They must be very foolish fellows," said Miss Price.

"Oh, they are; not a doubt about that!"



Pankhurst was just coming in, but Dick shut the door with a slam. Pankhurst gave a yell, and hurled the door open the next second. "You howling ass!" he roared. "You shrieking idiot—" "I'm surprised at you," said Neville severely. "You seem to have forgotten, Pankhurst, that you are in the presence of a lady."

Miss Price started as the chimes rang out from the clock tower.

"Dear me, my train will be due soon!" Pankhurst rose to his feet.

"You'll let me see you to the station?"

"Certainly!"

"Not at all!" exclaimed Dick Neville hotly.

"We're going to see Miss Price to the station, Pankhurst."

"Faith, and it's right ye are!" said Micky Flynn emphatically.

"Oh, no," said Miss Price. "I—I am anxious about Poindexter. I would much rather you went and looked for him."

"Oh, Poindexter's all right."

"Faith, and he doesn't matter much, anyway!"

"I remember, now," said Miss Price, "that he said something about the old tower. Suppose he has got shut up in it, and can't get out again!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" cackled Pankhurst.

"Oh, he wouldn't be such a duffer," said Neville. "No chance of that."

"Faith, none at all—at all!"

"Still, I should be glad if you would go and see," said Miss Price. "You may walk with me as far as the gate, and Pankhurst will take me to the station. I expect I shall meet my brother in Clivebank."

"Of course, it's exactly as you wish, Miss Price," said Neville.

"You don't mind looking for Poindexter? I have a feeling that he has somehow got himself shut up in the old tower."

"Well, we'll look," said Neville, feeling that Miss Price's anxiety was misplaced, but willing to humour her. "We'll go there first, if you like, before we see you off."

"Oh, no; I am afraid I shall be too late!"

"Very well, then; let's get down to the gate."

Miss Price put on her big summer hat, and

"Sure, and I hope we shall see ye again, acushla!"

"I am sure you will, soon. Will you tell Poindexter—or rather, will you give him this little note? I have written it for him."

Miss Price passed a folded note into Dick Neville's hand. The junior took it mechanically. He had not seen Miss Price write that note, and he wondered what it meant, anyway.

"Will you give that to Poindexter when you find him?"

"Certainly."

"I have a feeling that you will find him in the old tower."

"We will look," smiled Neville.

"Thank you, so much! Good-bye!"

"Good-bye!"

The juniors stood cap in hand as Miss Price turned away. She walked down the lane beside Pankhurst, and disappeared in the direction of the village.

"A ripping girl," said Neville.

"Faith, and it's right ye are!"

"Blessed if I know when and why she wrote this letter to Puntpusher, though," said Dick Neville, puzzled. "I suppose we had better look for him."

"Where can he be?"

"Well, we told Miss Price we'd look in the old tower," smiled Neville; "of course, he can't be there, but we'll keep our word. Come along!"

The juniors strolled away towards the old tower. As they neared it, Dick Neville gave a start.

From within the thick walls came the sound of a heavy thumping and a muffled voice, growing more and more audible as they came nearer.

"My hat; somebody's there!"

"Sure, and it must be Beefpotter!"

"Let's look; I don't quite catch on to this."

They hurried into the tower. Certain enough, someone was thumping away furiously upon the inner side of the oaken door leading upon the spiral staircase.

Neville pulled back the fastening.

The door swung open, and Lincoln G. Poindexter, looking very red and flustered, was visible in the gloom of the tower.

Neville and Flynn stared at him.

"What on earth are you doing here, Punty?" demanded Neville.

"Faith, and it's shuttin' himself up on the old tower he's been after doin'."

"You asses!" roared the exasperated Poindexter. "Why didn't you come here before and let me out?"

"Eh? How were we to know you were here?"

"Didn't Miss Price tell you?"

"Miss Price! No! Did she know?"

"Know!" yelled Poindexter. "I should say so. She shut me in, fooling about with the lock when I was inside, and couldn't open it again. I asked her to tell you, and here you leave me shut up all the afternoon."

"But—but she never told us," gasped Neville. "She just mentioned before she went, now, that you might be in the old tower—that's all. We came along to look because we said we would; we never expected to find you here, really."

Poindexter looked dazed.

"She didn't tell you she had shut me up here by accident."

"Not a word of it! You must be dreamin'."

"Sure, and it's dreamin' ye are, Point-poker."

"I tell you she shut me in, and couldn't undo the door, and went off to tell you," shouted Poindexter.

"Then I can't understand it."

"Didn't she explain at all?"

"Oh, here's this note for you! She gave it me for you just before she went."

Poindexter tore open the note. He stepped out of the shady tower to read it in the sunlight. Then he gave a roar.

"Done!"

"What's the matter?"

"Done!"

"You ass! What's the matter?"

"It wasn't Price's sister at all."

"What! Who was it, then?"

"Price."

"Eh?"

"Read the note and you'll see."

Neville snatched the note. Micky Flynn read it over his shoulder. And the feelings of the Cliveden Combine may be imagined as they perused the following.

"Many thanks for a ripping tea and a howlingly good joke. Who's top of the Fourth Form now, you silly duffers, eh?"

(Signed)
H. PANKHURST,
SIDNEY PRICE, alias Price's Sister."

THE END.

The 6th Chapter.

A Shock for the Combine.

MISS PRICE took leave of the juniors at the gate. Neville and Flynn would willingly have wiped up the lane with Pankhurst, but under Miss Price's eyes that was not feasible, so they maintained an outward show of bland friendliness, and mentally promised Panky all sorts of things afterwards.

Pankhurst's face wore a perpetual grin. He seemed to try to repress it sometimes, and it returned in spite of him. It was as though there was an inward well of merriment which would bubble up.

"Good-bye!" said Miss Price, shaking hands with Neville. "And thank you, so much!"

"Not at all," said Neville; "you've made the afternoon a real holiday. Good-bye!"

"Good-bye, Flynn, and thank you, so much!"

"Faith, and it's a happiness to see ye, and hear ye're sweet voice," said Micky Flynn.

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