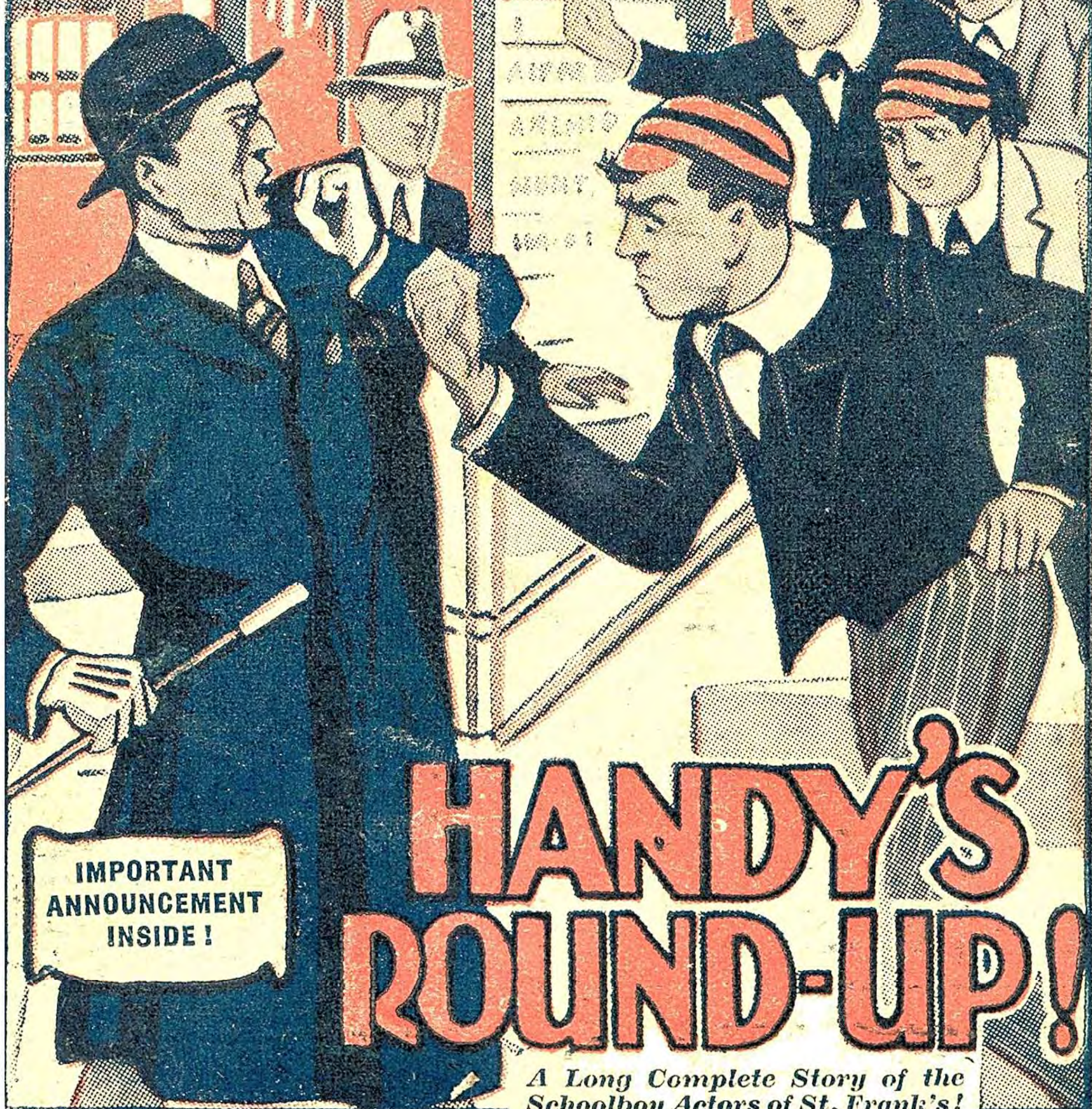


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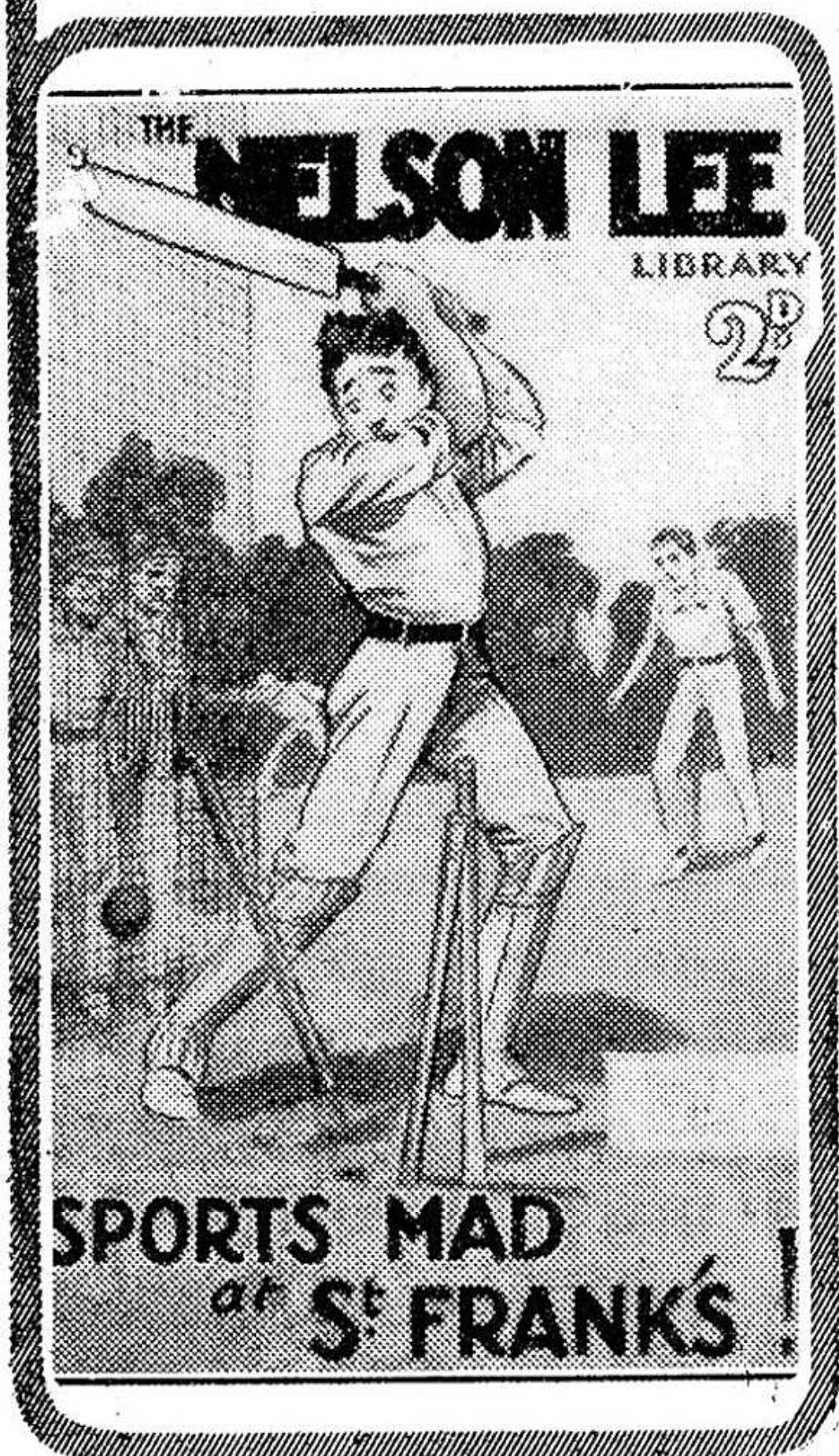
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By EDWY SEARLES BROOKS

CHAPTER I.

ARCHIE CONSULTS THE ORACLE.

ARCHIE GLENTHORNE, the dandy of St. Frank's, reeled unsteadily through the doorway, and almost fell into the arms of Phipps, his faithful valet.

"Is anything wrong, sir?" asked Phipps anxiously.

For once the imperturbable manservant revealed a trace of emotion. He caught his young master by the arm and steadied him. Archie's eyes had a glassy look, and he appeared to be in a daze.

"Has something happened, sir?" said Phipps quickly.

"What? I mean, what?" gasped Archie. "Good gad! Phipps, the good old life-saver! Kindly lead me to the lounge, laddie, and surround me with various stimulants."

"Tea is nearly ready, sir——"

"What ho!" interrupted Archie, pulling himself together with surprising fortitude. "Tea! The jolly old brew, what? Odds cups and saucers! The young master would fain wrap himself round a basinful."

By the time he got into the comfortable sitting-room, he was looking stronger and steadier. There was something wonderfully

soothing in Phipps' very presence. The room was cheerful, too, with the April sunlight streaming through the window across the opposite housetops.

Outside, the steady hum of traffic came up from Piccadilly Circus and the surrounding busy thoroughfares. Archie was, as usual, using his brother's flat in Jermyn Street. Captain Glenthorpe kept his chambers locked up for eight months out of the year, and he never objected to Archie using the place. For Phipps could be relied upon to keep everything sedate.

"Hallo!" ejaculated Archie, as he eyed the table. "I mean to say, what about it? Good gad, Phipps, what's all this?"

He screwed his monocle into his eye, and, with his gaze thus assisted, he viewed the table again. There were no less than four cups, and various dishes of pastry and cakes.

"I mean, all this?" said Archie, waving his hand.

"I thought it possible, sir, that you might bring several of your friends along for tea," explained Phipps. "You may remember that we were caught unprepared yesterday, so I thought it advisable to take no chances to-day."

Archie bestowed an admiring glance upon his valet.

"Brains, what?" he said, beaming. "I mean, how the dickens do you do it, Phipps? Not that it really matters to-day. As far as I know at the bally moment the lads of the village are distributed in various sections of London, weeping and wailing, and gnashing their good old champers!"

"I imagine, sir, that some minor misfortune has occurred?"

Archie shook his head.

"Absolutely not, Phipps," he replied firmly. "Minor misfortune, what? Why, a dashed calamity has blown up. The most frightful catastrophe has oozed up out of the offing, and barged into us like one of those dashed juggernauts. I mean, the whole posish is foul in the extreme."

"You are referring to the law suit, sir?"

"Absolutely."

"You have just come from the Law Courts, sir?"

"Absolutely with knobs on, laddie," agreed Archie. "But, I mean to say! This jolly old India-Ceylon? What about it? The good old tongue somewhat resembles a chunk of boot-leather."

"I am bringing the tea at once, sir."

"Good!"

Archie closed his eyes and lay back.

"Do you know, Phipps, there's something dashed peaceful about you," he went on. "Something absolutely restful to the good old tissues— Eh? Good gad! The blighter's absolutely vanished. Just like one of those bally spectres in the ghost story! Dashed rummy!"

Archie never ceased to marvel at the way in which Phipps glided in and out. The valet was certainly noiseless in his movements, and there was something so tremendously efficient about him that Archie always regarded him as his friend, guide and philosopher. Without Phipps, Archie would have been like a ship without a rudder.

"Your tea, sir," said a voice.

Archie opened his eyes, and there stood Phipps, with the steaming hot tea on the tray. A few delicious sips, and Archie felt positively braced.

"At moments like these, Phipps, the young master wonders what he would do without you," he murmured contentedly. "Good gad! Away with such poisonous possibilities. A chappie might as well think of Marshall without the Snellgrove, or, dash it, Armstrong without the priceless old Siddeley. What?"

"Without wishing to be inquisitive, sir, may I inquire as to the result of the law suit?" asked Phipps quietly. "I am naturally interested—since Master Stevens belongs to our school."

"What-ho!" nodded Archie. "That sounds frightfully good, Phipps. Our school, what? I mean, you absolutely shove yourself into the St Frank's community. One of us, and all that rot, eh? Topping! But

about the lawsuit. Frightful news, Phipps. Dank and murky information! The worst, I mean to say, has happened!"

"Surely Mr. Barton has not won?" asked Phipps, aghast.

"Good gad, no!" replied Archie. "Another cup of the priceless old fluid, laddie! What-ho! The young master is feeling braced already. Kindly dish out another spongeful of the liquid."

Phipps pressed no further questions. He knew that he would hear everything by degrees. But Archie was always a long-winded customer. He sat there, slowly absorbing a second cup of tea.

He had only just come from the Law Courts, where the action, Stevens v. Barton, was being heard. Horace Stevens was a member of the Fifth Form at St. Frank's—the wonderful schoolboy actor—and it was his mother who was bringing the action against Roger Barton.

There was scarcely a fellow at St. Frank's—or scarcely a girl at the Moor View School—who was not acquainted with the case in every detail. Roger Barton was the man who had stolen Stevens' play—the great play which had been written by the Fifth Former's dead father. And Barton was known to all, too, owing to his recent association with Mr. Andrew Sylvanus Noggs, the travelling showman.

He had not only stolen the play, but it had been produced by Mr. Samuel Arrow-smith, the millionaire theatrical magnate, at the Emperor Theatre. And it was the rage of the season—the greatest success that London had known for years.

Archie Glenthorne was very concerned. He instinctively felt that Mrs. Stevens was in low water financially, and that the proceeds from this play were essential if her son was to remain at St. Frank's, and afterwards go up to Oxford. So most of the St. Frank's fellows were taking a keen interest in the case, and were longing to see Roger Barton deprived of his unlawful gains. If Mrs. Stevens won the case, Barton would certainly be liable to arrest for theft and conspiracy.

"Everything was going absolutely pricelessly, Phipps," said Archie. "I mean to say, Sir Rufus Browne was shoving it across the witnesses to no small purpose. A brainy lad, Phipps! He takes after his son!"

"Master Browne is undoubtedly an able captain for the Fifth Form, sir, and we cannot but admire the staunch manner in which he has stood by his friend, Master Stevens," agreed Phipps. "I have been quite optimistic, for it seems to me that Master Browne's celebrated father is certain of success."

"Absolutely!" agreed Archie. "The case was humming along within the good old speed limit, you know, when Browne suddenly trod on the gas! I mean to say, out he came with one of those brainy wheezes of his. I've always thought you were fairly

bulging with the grey matter, Phipps, but it seems to me that old Browne comes a dashed close second!"

"Master Browne is a daring young gentleman, sir!"

"Daring? Odds chunks of ice!" ejaculated Archie. "The priceless lad is absolutely as cool as an Arctic blast! He defied the good old judge, Phipps, and suggested that the chappies should play the good old first Act of Steven's play in the court."

"Yes, sir, you told me this at lunch-time," said Phipps smoothly.

"Eh? Good gad, yes!" said Archie, with a start. "The fact is, I'm frightfully confused, Phipps. Imagine the young master in a court of law, making love to good old Marjorie. What? I mean, it required all the fortitude of the Glenthornes to pull it off."

"It must have been an ordeal, sir," agreed Phipps. "Although, of course, the really difficult passages do not occur until the second act. May I inquire what the Judge thought of this test? I understand that he held a copy of Mr. Barton's play, 'The Whirlpool,' whilst you and your companions spoke the lines of Mr. Stevens' play, 'The Third Chance'?"

"Precisely," agreed Archie. "A somewhat ripe and fruity test, laddie. I mean, there it was. If both the dashed plays were the same, the point was settled. You see the scheme?"

"I do, indeed, sir," said Phipps. "And, as far as I can understand, there could have been no failure. For we all know that Mr. Barton's play is merely a stolen copy of—"

"But wait!" interrupted Archie sadly. "You haven't heard the foul and ghastly news. The test was priceless. Word for word, I mean. The good old judge was ready to clap the irons on Barton and shove him off to the cells. About six policemen were converging on the blighter, in fact."

"And then, sir?"

"And then, Phipps, the defence dished up another witness," said Archie impressively. "They absolutely brought the lad out of their dashed sleeves, and sprung him upon us without warning. A somewhat dirty trick, Phipps. In fact, a piece of work that I can only describe as frayed at the edge."

"Another witness, sir?"

"A foul and mottled chappie named Salter," explained Archie. "One of the scene-shifter merchants from the Emperor Theatre. This beastly truth perverter stood in the witness-box and swore that good old Browne had handed him a sack of dubbions in exchange for a copy of Barton's play. I imagine the lad to be a direct descendant of Ananias."

"I am concerned to hear this, sir," said Phipps. "Naturally, such evidence is false, and this man has committed perjury. And I am deeply anxious about Master Browne, sir. I trust he will be able to refute these lies?"

"Of course, that remains to be seen," replied Archie. "There's the posish, Phipps. Sir Donald Bance—Barton's counsel—is trying to make out that we all learned the first act of Barton's play. He maintains that there are two plays, as it were. And we're all included in this bally conspiracy to defeat justice. I mean, it makes a chappie wilt at the thought, Phipps."

"And the case is adjourned, sir?"

"Absolutely pushed off the map until to-morrow," agreed Archie. "The beak made various remarks concerning criminal proceedings, and so forth, adjourned the case, and forthwith consigned the jury to the deepest dungeon until to-morrow. So here we are, with everything in the most frightful pickle. What about it?"

"I beg your pardon, sir."

"Dash it, Phipps, what about it?" repeated Archie, gazing at his valet coldly. "Here am I, consulting the good old oracle, and the good old oracle looks like a dashed waxwork! I'm waiting for your remarks, Phipps."

CHAPTER II

NELSON LEE TAKES UP THE CASE.



PHIPPS said nothing for a few moments. He was thinking over the facts, and he was a man who rarely spoke until he had weighed his words.

The case was undoubtedly serious.

Archie's description of the court proceedings had been somewhat involved, but Phipps was used to him, and he understood all the essentials. He could realise that Roger Barton and his counsel were going to great lengths in order to win the case. Somehow, Phipps could hardly believe that Sir Donald Bance was a party to deliberate perjury. He had been obviously hoodwinked by his client, and had produced the witness, Salter, in good faith.

That was the crucial point.

The case had been wholly in Mrs. Stevens' favour until that new witness had been put into the box. And it was fairly clear that Roger Barton had secured that witness during the luncheon adjournment—desperately, in a fit of panic.

Through that witness, he sought to prove that there were two plays—that "The Whirlpool" was a totally different work from "The Third Chance." In other words, Salter's testimony clearly indicated that the boys and girls had learned their parts from Barton's play—from the copy which Salter was supposed to have procured for Browne.

In reality, the spoken parts—retained in the memories of the boys and girls—were those of Mr. Stevens' original script. Therefore, the result of the test had seemed

conclusive. But the new witness threw a completely new light upon the whole affair. For there seemed no reasonable doubt that William Napoleon Browne had resorted to bribery and trickery.

And yet, actually, Salter's testimony had been false from first to last. Browne had never seen him in his life, and had never seen a copy of Roger Barton's manuscript. The witness had been brought forward on purpose to confound the plaintiff. And the judge, suspecting criminal duplicity, had immediately adjourned the case until to-morrow.

"There seems to be one irrefutable fact, sir," remarked Phipps, at length. "Mr. Barton stole the original version of the play from St. Frank's, and having copied it, destroyed it. Therefore, the only existing copy now purports to be Barton's own work."

"Absolutely," said Archie, nodding.

"There is nothing, I fear, to prove that you and the other young gentlemen learned your parts from Mr. Stevens' play," continued Phipps shrewdly. "So far as the court is concerned, it is just as feasible that you should have learnt them from Barton's copy."

"But, dash it, we played the bally play weeks ago, in Bellton!" protested Archie. "I mean, how about that, Phipps?"

"The fact is indisputable, sir, but I doubt if you can prove it to the satisfaction of a Court of Justice," replied Phipps smoothly. "That is just the point. In a law court, everything must be proved. And when there are witnesses telling completely different stories, the judge and jury have a very difficult task. It is sometimes impossible to detect the falsehood from the truth."

Archie stared.

"Good gad!" he ejaculated. "Then you mean to say there's a chance of this frightful centipede winning the case?"

"A distinct chance, I fear, sir," replied Phipps. "Cleverly-given evidence, although absolutely false, is sometimes far more weighty than a simple recital of the plain truth. It all depends upon the way in which it is brought out. If Barton and his hirelings can be plausible enough, it is possible that they may defeat the ends of justice, and win the case."

Archie sat there, looking grave.

"I mean, that's a dashed sombre thought, Phipps," he exclaimed. "It makes a chappie realise what a frightful world this is. Full of frightful liars, what? Snags and boulders in the path, and all that sort of stuff. I mean, it even makes me think, Phipps! And it's got to be something dashed steep to set my cogwheels going."

"If I may make a suggestion, sir——"

"What-ho!" said Archie, brightening up. "Good man! I knew I shouldn't appeal to you in vain, Phipps. Trot out the brain spasm."

"It is regarding Mr. Barton, sir," said

Phipps. "I should suggest that he should be closely watched."

"Watched?"

"Yes, sir."

"Who, Barton?"

"Exactly, sir."

"I mean, watched?" said Archie, feeling his way.

"You may not be aware, sir, that Mr. Barton occupies a flat only a few doors away—in Jermyn Street," said Phipps. "Quite a number of theatrical and journalistic gentlemen have chambers here, sir."

Archie looked horrified.

"But, dash it!" he protested. "That chunk of fungus! Absolutely living in Jermyn Street! We shall have to move, Phipps! We can't breathe the same bally air as that blighter!"

Phipps permitted himself to smile.

"I fear, sir, that Mr. Barton is not the only questionable gentleman living in this quarter," he replied. "One never knows who one rubs shoulders with nowadays, sir—and it is never wise to make too many inquiries."

"Oh, well, perhaps you're right, Phipps," said Archie. "But about this watching business. Shadowing stuff, what? The good old Trackett Grim act. Why? I mean, where does it lead to, laddie?"

Phipps revealed his longsightedness.

"You may remember, sir, that this stage-hand has perjured himself at Mr. Barton's instigation," he explained. "That arrangement was obviously concocted in a hurry, and it is distinctly possible that Salter will visit Barton during the day for some reward. It might be a valuable piece of evidence if I could enter the witness-box to-morrow and prove collusion on the part of these two."

Archie dropped his monocle in his admiration.

"Odds brains and genius!" he ejaculated. "Phipps, old chunk, I've absolutely got to admit it! You're not a human being at all. You're just one frightful mass of thinking material. The scheme is for you to stagger off and watch Barton's movements?"

"Precisely, sir."

"That is, if you can locate the bloke?"

"I have no fear in that respect, sir," replied the valet. "If Mr. Barton is not in his chambers, he will probably be at the Emperor Theatre. As a matter of fact, Master Archie, I happen to be acquainted with the porter in charge of Mr. Barton's flat. And I am also acquainted with the stage-door keeper at the Emperor Theatre. One gets to know these people, sir. I will admit, however, that I have sought their company in view of such a contingency as this."

"Phipps, you're a bally marvel!" declared Archie. "So I suppose you'll slide off now and make yourself look like an Italian organ-

grinder, or a window-cleaner, or something brainy of that sort?"

"I hardly think it will be necessary to adopt any disguise, sir," replied Phipps gravely. "I shall go just as I am."

"But this shadowing business——"

"You may leave that entirely to me, sir," said Phipps. "If there is anything of an important nature to report, I shall communicate at once with Sir Rufus Browne."

While this conversation was progressing, another on precisely the same subject was taking place in some equally comfortable chambers in a less pretentious part of London—to be exact, Grays Inn Road. Nelson Lee and Nipper were at tea, and they had thoroughly discussed the day's events. Nipper was very anxious to secure his famous "guv'nor's" interest.

"So you see, sir, things are looking pretty desperate," concluded Dick Hamilton—to give him his real name. "Barton produced this new witness without any warning, and it might be difficult to prove that his story is false."

The famous schoolmaster-detective nodded.

"You are quite right there, Nipper," he agreed gravely. "Once a crooked thing of this sort is started there is no limit to the length it will go. One false statement in the witness-box leads to a hundred others. That is how cases are dragged on for days when they are expected to finish within a few hours. It is sometimes impossible to sift the truth from the lies."

"What's going to be done about it, sir?" asked Nipper. "Old Browne is in a rotten position, you know—he's been accused of deliberate treachery. Rummily enough, he doesn't seem to mind. Browne takes everything calmly."

"The only certain way to confound the defence is to bring forward an irrefutable proof of Mr. Vincent Stevens' authorship of the play," replied Nelson Lee quietly. "That, of course, would wash out Barton's elaborate trickery in a moment. But a fortune rests upon this decision, and Barton will fight hard—and fight cunningly."

"Then we've got to get that irrefutable proof, sir," declared Nipper. "At least, you've got to get it! From this moment onwards you're in charge of the case!"

CHAPTER III.

RAPID RESULTS.



NELSON LEE chuckled. "I am deeply honoured," he said drily. "I take it, Nipper, that you have duly commissioned me."

"Yes, sir," grinned Nipper.

"Then, of course, I cannot possibly refuse such a royal command," said Lee. "From this moment onwards I am in charge of the case. Splendid! Is there any particular line of action which you would like me to adopt? I always believe in studying my clients' wishes."

"Cheese it, guv'nor," said Nipper. "Joking aside, are you going to look into the matter? Poor Mrs. Stevens is in a terrible way about it. As a matter of fact, I promised her this afternoon that I'd get you on the job."

"Oh, you did, did you?"

"I gave her my word," said Nipper.

"It's like your infernal cheek," said Nelson Lee gruffly. "I'm quite capable of making up my own mind, thank you, young 'un. As it happens, I'm interested in the affair, and I shall certainly do all I can. And it really seems that a little detective work is essential."

"You're a brick, sir!" said Dick eagerly. "You mean about Salter, of course? You'll try to prove some fakery or other between Salter and Barton?"

"No, not exactly that," replied Nelson Lee. "I shall go round to see Mrs. Stevens at once. You tell me that there is no proof of Mr. Stevens' authorship of the play? No documents of any kind?"

"Nothing at all, sir."

"I don't believe it, Nipper."

"But Stevens and his mother have searched everywhere——"

"I don't care if a hundred people have searched," interrupted Lee. "They've probably seen a dozen likely clues without recognising them as such. I'm not trying to belittle Sir Rufus Browne or anybody else, but it needs a trained mind on a job of this sort, my boy. Without any undue egotism, I fancy I can guarantee a result of some kind if I visit Mrs. Stevens."

TEST MATCHES

ENGLAND v. AUSTRALIA

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"Then, for goodness' sake, shoot round there, sir."

Nelson Lee had no intention of being a braggart, but he knew, from wide experience, how easily the most important lines of inquiry can be overlooked. It was inconceivable to him that every trace of the stolen play should have vanished. To his mind, the whole affair was a trifle. Accustomed as he was to intricate problems, he regarded this present obstacle as a mere detail. It only required a little concentration.

"Oh, by the way, sir, you might be interested in this," said Nipper, taking a folded sheet of paper from his pocket. "I picked it up from the floor of the Courtroom, after the case had been adjourned."

Nelson Lee found himself looking at a quarto sheet of paper, filled with sprawly writing. The sheet was numbered "54," and there were many crossings out and alterations.

"What is it?" he asked.

"It's a sheet of Barton's manuscript," replied Dick Hamilton. "It must have become detached, and probably blew under the table without anybody noticing it. I saw no reason to hand it over to Barton's counsel."

"By James, no!" muttered Lee. "This is valuable, Nipper."

"That's why I froze on to it, sir," replied Dick coolly. "You see, this is part of the defence's evidence—concrete proof that Barton wrote the play himself. This is supposed to be a page of his original script, written nearly a year ago."

Nelson Lee nodded.

"But in reality it is a copy, cleverly faked," he murmured. "H'm! Considering that it was only written a week or two since, Barton has done his work remarkably well."

"I thought you might be able to shove it under a chemical test, or something, sir—and prove that the ink is new," said Nipper. "Something brainy like that, you know."

"A very optimistic view, Nipper, but I am afraid it can't be done," replied Lee. "Even if I could satisfy myself regarding the ink's age, I doubt if I could satisfy a judge and jury—no matter how scientific my conclusions. It'll have to be something more positive than that."

"But wouldn't it be ripping if we could throw a bunch of fireworks into the defence?" asked Dick. "Why, if we can prove that this is a recent production, it'll have tremendous effect. It'll label Barton as a liar and a trickster. It'll show that he faked the whole manuscript—"

"Precisely," agreed Lee. "It would be a piece of evidence of paramount importance. But you mustn't run away with any such hopes." He held the paper up to the sunlight. "H'm! Quite a distinctive watermark, I see. It might help us, Nipper."

There's just a chance— Fetch me down reference book D from the corner bookcase."

Nipper fetched it with alacrity. The watermark on the paper was a clear one—an ornamental scroll with the words "DYLLWYNN WOVE" within it. Nelson Lee only spent a couple of minutes over the reference book, and then he nodded.

"Yes, here we are," he said. "Splendid! A London firm, Nipper. Messrs. Evans, Glynn & Co., Ltd., Borough, S.E. Get the number for me, will you?"

Dick Hamilton was soon on the telephone, eager and inwardly excited. It was just like his gov'nor to start things moving without a minute's delay. In less than a minute the manager of the paper manufacturing firm was at the other end of the wire.

"Dyllwynn Wove?" he repeated, after Nelson Lee had conversed for a short space. "I can't tell you offhand, Mr. Lee, but if you'll hang on I'll find out. Is it very important?"

"Very important, indeed."

"All right," said the manager. "You want to know when we started manufacturing this particular brand?"

"The exact point is, how long have you been using this watermark, that's all," replied Nelson Lee. "If you wish me to explain the details I shall have pleasure in doing so. But the point is only a small one, so far as you are concerned. I just wish to satisfy myself regarding the paper, that is all. It may be vital to a client of mine."

"Good enough, Mr. Lee. I'll let you know at once."

Nelson Lee hung on while the manager went off to consult his records.

"We might just as well know this point, Nipper," remarked Lee. "I believe in exploring every possible channel. The chances are they've been making this paper for years, but there is always a possibility— Yes? Oh, you have found out—"

"As it happens, Mr. Lee, 'Dyllwynn Wove' is quite a new brand of ours," came the manager's voice. "We have only been using this watermark for the last month or two. It is one of this year's new papers."

"What!" ejaculated Lee sharply. "Can you give me the exact date when this watermark was introduced? When the paper was first put on the market? It is the date which is so important to me. Please don't imagine I am questioning the quality of your paper—"

"Not at all, Mr. Lee," said the manager. "The date? Well, the first issue didn't come from the mill until the first week in February, and it wasn't actually on the market until early in March."

"This is absolutely certain?"

"Oh, absolutely!" said the manager. "I have just looked up our records, and you may be quite satisfied. It is a cheaper brand which we have recently put on the market to satisfy a certain demand. Quite good paper, you understand, but reasonably priced."

"Thank you!" said Nelson Lee. "I am very much obliged to you."

He rung off immediately afterwards, and looked at Nipper grimly.

"A deadly point, young 'un," he said. "By Jove, I hardly hoped for such a conclusive piece of evidence so soon!"

"But you haven't told me what the manager said, sir."

Nelson Lee rectified the omission.

"This means that Barton's dished, sir," said Dick excitedly. "It proves that his story is an absolute lie. I say, hadn't you better ring up that firm again? They ought to send a representative, so that he can go into the witness-box to-morrow—"

"You may be quite sure, Nipper, that I shall attend to that point," interrupted Lee. "There will be another new witness to-morrow, never fear. Now, we must hurry off to Mrs. Stevens' place. You know the address, don't you?"

Nipper jumped up, and glanced at his watch.

"Rather, sir!" he replied briskly. "Hallo! Sir Rufus will be there, I expect—he promised to call round for a consultation directly after tea. We couldn't go at a better time. By jingo, guv'nor, what a difference when you start on the job!"

Nelson Lee smiled.

"We'll try to accomplish something, anyhow," he said smoothly.

"Try!" echoed Dick. "Why, Roger Barton is as good as sunk!"

CHAPTER IV.

THE STRANGER.



"FIFTY pounds!"

Mr. Roger Barton muttered the words savagely as he sat back in his chair, and chewed an unlighted cigarette.

"Fifty pounds!" he repeated. "The grasping cur! And unless I'm careful he'll demand another fifty to-morrow. But I'm safe, and it's worth the money. By thunder, it was a narrow shave this afternoon!"

Barton was in his flat, quite alone, and he had only just concluded an interview with Joseph Salter, the scene-shifter. The man had left the flat fifty pounds the richer.

Barton was just beginning to cool down. Earlier in the afternoon he had been in a blue funk, fearful lest his trickery should be



Handforth looked in stupefied amazement and horror as McClure used the new white silk scarf to wipe the orange juice from his eyes. It was Handy's own scarf—and it was being stained with ugly yellow blotches!

discovered. But he had even pulled the wool over the eyes of his counsel, and had made Sir Donald Bance believe that Salter was a bona-fide witness. There was Lister, too—Lister, the man who had sworn in the witness-box that Barton had written the play nearly a year ago, in various lodgings, during a theatrical tour.

Lister was one of Barton's oldest friends—a man who had recently helped him in his frustrated attempt to rob Mr. Noggs of his property. The pair understood one another perfectly. In fact, Lister shared Barton's flat, and was a persistent hanger-on. Barton had tried to get rid of him, but had found it impossible.

Lister came in now, resplendent with clothes that Barton had paid for.

"Well things are looking pretty good, eh?" he remarked, helping himself to a cigar. "You seem to have got over the stile all right, Roger. A narrow shave, though."

"Can't you leave those cigars alone?" snapped Barton irritably.

"Why should I? They're good, aren't they?"

"Look here, Lister, I'm getting fed-up with your confounded sponging," said Barton, whose nerves were on edge. "If you're not careful I'll kick you out of this flat altogether."

The other sat down and smiled.

"That's a nice return for what I've done to-day," he retorted. "You're a bit peevish, old man. You've been sailing near the wind, and it's upset your nervous system. Take my advice, and keep cool."

"I don't want your advice," said Barton thickly. "It's easy enough for you to sit there and talk wisely, confound you! You've got nothing to lose—and I'm on the edge of a volcano. Things seem to be pretty smooth at the moment, but I'm nervous of Sir Rufus. He's not the kind of man to knuckle under."

"But what can he do?" asked Lister. "You've got this new witness, and his evidence is absolutely convincing. And what about Arrowsmith? Have you seen him?"

"I've got an appointment for this evening," replied Barton, rousing himself. "I shall have to be moving myself, too, if I'm to keep it. I suppose I can rely upon you to go into the witness-box to-morrow, if necessary?"

Lister shrugged his shoulders.

"You can rely upon me for anything, old man," he replied genially. "I'll lie like a trooper if you want me to. What do I care? This is the softest thing we've hit for years."

"We?"

"Yes, we!" retorted Lister coolly. "You mustn't run away with the idea that you're going to enjoy the bunce all by yourself, Barton. This play looks like making your fortune—and I shall want a nice look in."

"You'll get it," said Barton gruffly. "Only I wish you'd be a little less arrogant. I don't like a man to take things for granted. You won't find me mean, Lister. Well, I shall have to shift."

He was still jumpy, for he knew that if he made one false step the fat would be in the fire. He wasn't very concerned regarding the theatre people. If he could fool Sir Donald Bance he could easily fool them.

As the case stood at the moment, Barton maintained his authorship of the play, and was ready to fight to the last ditch. It was the softest thing he had ever had, and he wasn't going to relinquish it without a grim fight. With a little more bribery and corruption he was optimistic enough to believe that the prosecution would fail. He would be awarded the decision, and then, of course, he could crow as much as he liked.

As he walked round to the Emperor Theatre—quite a short distance from Jermyn Street—his spirits revived. The evening was gloriously fine, and London was looking good. Upon the whole, Barton decided, there was no reason why he should worry himself.

After all, most of the witnesses on the other side were schoolboys and schoolgirls, and a jury wasn't likely to take much notice of their testimony. Mr. Noggs had already given evidence, with no help to his side.

For he had been more or less of a joke, with his quotations and quaint style of talking.

On the morrow Sir Donald Bance would squash the plaintiff altogether, and the affair would be over. So Barton cheered up quite a lot, and was actually losing his haggard appearance when he turned towards the stage-door of the theatre. It was the quickest way to the manager's private office.

"Just a moment!"

Roger Barton halted as somebody plucked at his sleeve. He looked round sharply, and found a perfect stranger near him. The man was a fellow of about fifty, with a grizzled moustache, and an air of subdued excitement and nervousness about him. He was rather shabby, too. Yet he bore the marks of good education. Barton set him down as a head clerk or a senior shop assistant.

"Well?" he asked sharply. "What do you want?"

"You're Mr. Roger Barton, aren't you?"

"Yes, I am," said Barton.

"Can you spare me a minute?" asked the other, his breath coming and going quickly. "Can you stroll down towards the Square with me? I don't want to stand here, talking."

"If you want to sell me something, I'm too busy to attend to you," said Barton. "I've got no time—"

"It's important," interrupted the other nervously.

Barton regarded him with added interest. The man was obviously labouring under a great mental strain, and it was only with difficulty that he forced himself to speak calmly. Clearly he was no ordinary salesman, on the look out for business.

"Look here, I can't bother—"

"You'd better!" said the other fiercely.

"Confound your impudence!" snapped Barton. "I'm not going to put up with your infernal pestering. Leave go of my arm, or I'll call a policeman!"

The other clutched more tightly.

"Oh, will you?" he panted. "Listen to me, Roger Barton. If you want to win that lawsuit against Mrs. Stevens you'll spare me five minutes. Understand?"

"What the—"

"I know something," said the other impressively.

Barton caught his breath in. The stranger was gathering confidence. He had lost a great deal of his nervousness, and a grim glint had entered his eyes. He swung Barton round until they were face to face.

"Understand?" he muttered. "I know something."

His tone was unmistakable, and Roger Barton turned pale. His conscience smote him at once. To a man in his position—on the verge of a chasm—the stranger's words were electrifying. He forgot all about his

appointment with Mr. Arrowsmith, and panic seized him.

"What do you know?" he breathed huskily.

"This is hardly the place to talk, is it?" asked the other, cooler than ever, in proportion to Barton's growing anxiety. "Let me repeat that I know something important. If you don't want to hear it, Mr. Barton, I shall be compelled to go to Mrs. Stevens. She'll be pleased to see me."

"Good heavens!" breathed Barton. "All right—come with me!"

He turned on his heel, and led the way back to Jermyn Street.

His mind was in a state of chaos. Something seemed to tell him that this man was ready to explode a mine at a second's notice. And he had obviously come to Barton first because he had hopes of getting the most money for his information. But what it could be Barton had not the faintest idea. It did cross his mind, however, that Salter might have been talking.

In fact, this suggestion grew upon Barton, and by the time he reached his flat he was convinced that he had hit the nail on the head. Salter had left his chambers with fifty pounds in his pocket. The infernal fool had got drunk already—and had blabbed! This stranger was a blackmailer!

Roger Barton was a very alarmed man as he let himself into his flat, and ushered the stranger into the sitting-room.

CHAPTER V.

WHAT EDWARD WAINWRIGHT KNEW.



TO Barton's relief, Lister had cleared off, and the two men had the flat to themselves. It was only a tiny place—a little service flat consisting of a sitting-room and two small bed-rooms. But it was very exclusive and very expensive.

"Now," said Barton sharply, "I don't know who the deuce you are, and I'm not inclined to waste much time over you. The quicker you can state your business, the better."

The stranger had made no attempt to sit down.

"All right—all right," he said. "No need to shout at me, Mr. Barton. My name's Wainwright—Edward Wainwright."

"Never heard of you."

"No, I don't suppose you have," said the stranger agreeably. "But my business with you is very confidential. If you want to win this lawsuit to-morrow you've got to pay me a thousand pounds."

"What!"

"You heard what I said."

"You're a fool!" roared Barton. "What on earth—"

"Easy!" interrupted Wainwright. "I don't like being called a fool by a crook!"

"Crook!" panted Barton. "You—you confounded blackmailer—"

"It's no good the pot calling the kettle black, is it?" put in Wainwright coolly. "And we shall get along a lot better, Mr. Barton, if you'll keep your temper. I don't think you're in a position to lose it. I wouldn't be in your shoes for any money. One little slip, my friend, and you'll have Scotland Yard at your heels."

Barton gulped. There was something about this man that struck him with terror. Every trace of Wainwright's nervousness had gone. He had gained a full grip on himself—the natural result of his position. For he knew well enough that he was the upper dog. Barton's very manner proved that he was desperate with worry.

"You're mad!" he ejaculated hoarsely. "What—what knowledge do you possess that's worth a thousand pounds? If you think I'm going to be browbeaten into paying money so that you shall hold your tongue—"

"No, Mr. Barton, it's not a question of holding my tongue," interrupted Wainwright. "I've got something more substantial than that. If I like to go to Mrs. Stevens, I can place something in her hands that'll crush your case to pulp."

"Oh, have you?" breathed Barton. "What is it?"

"The original script of 'The Third Chance.'"

Wainwright uttered the words quite coolly, but their effect was stupendous. Roger Barton clutched at the table, and he went deathly pale. Then he uttered a harsh, panic-stricken laugh.

"Don't be a fool!" he retorted. "There's no such thing in existence—I—I mean, why should I worry about that manuscript?"

"No, Mr. Barton, it's no good," said the other. "You've given yourself away long ago. It's no good trying to fool me that 'The Whirlpool' is your own play. It isn't. It's Mr. Stevens' play, under another title. And I can prove it."

"You're a confounded liar!"

"If you want to buy this script, I'm willing to sell it," went on Wainwright. "But if you're not interested, I'll take it to Sir Rufus Browne. I rather fancy he'll give me a substantial reward. I'm quite indifferent."

Barton's panic was passing. Reason was returning.

"We'd better understand one another," he said grimly. "You're trying to pull off a bluff, my friend—and it won't work. Yes, I'll admit I took Stevens' play—we're quite alone, so it doesn't matter what I say. And you seem to know it, anyhow. But you can't fool me about that script. It's destroyed."

"Oh?" said Wainwright coolly. "Who destroyed it?"

"I did."

"You mean you destroyed the typewritten copy and the typewritten parts?" asked Wainwright. "They're the originals, no doubt, so far as the typewriting is concerned. But what about the hand-written script?"

"There's no such thing in existence."

"There is, because I've got it," said the other. "I didn't know anything about this affair until to-day—didn't even know there was a lawsuit on. But the evening papers made a bit of a fuss about it, and it attracted my attention. I thought I'd come and see you straight away."

"You can't take any notice of the papers—"

"I've seen all that it's necessary to see," interrupted Wainwright. "I've seen that Mrs. Stevens has brought an action against you regarding 'The Whirlpool.' She claims that it's her husband's play under another name. As I say, I didn't know anything about it until I saw the evening paper. But Mrs. Stevens happens to be right, and I can prove it, too."

"Who—who the thunder do you happen to be, anyway?" asked Barton viciously. "You seem to know a lot, don't you?"

"I'm nobody much," replied the other. "Just a struggling little business man who hasn't had a chance of a holiday for twenty years. Now I've got an opportunity of taking a few months off. And you're going to pay the expenses, Mr. Barton."

"Confound you—who are you?"

"I run a little typewriting office in Camden Town," replied Wainwright. "Not much of a place, you know. A single room, and a couple of machines. Sometimes I have enough work to employ a girl, and sometimes I don't. I'm pretty slack just now, as it happens. I'm the proprietor of 'The Wainwright Smart-Service Typewriting Bureau,' at your service."

Barton cursed.

"Don't try any of that foolery!" he exclaimed harshly. "What about this script you talk about? I don't believe a word you say."

"No?" said Mr. Wainwright. "I'll just tell you how I got on to this game. I was in my office this afternoon, and I bought a paper. The name of Mrs. Stevens didn't recall anything, but when I saw something about 'The Third Chance,' I had a hazy recollection that I'd heard the name before."

"Well?"

"Well, one train of thought led to another," explained Wainwright. "I began to turn up my old files—just out of curiosity at first. As a matter of fact, I thought I was wrong. It took me an hour to go through that musty old file, but I was well rewarded at the finish. I not only found what I was looking for, but a letter as well."

"A letter?"

"I'm the man the late Mr. Vincent Stevens came to when he had his play typewritten," said Wainwright. "I remember him now—

I recalled him as soon as I got hold of his letter and the manuscript. He only took one copy of the play, and he had all the parts typed out, too. He was very optimistic at the time—he thought he was going to sell it."

"I don't believe—"

"Wait a minute!" interrupted the other. "He took the typed stuff away, but left his hand-written script with me. I remember that he kept me waiting for a few weeks, and then wrote me a letter. It wasn't much—just a few lines to instruct me to hold the script, so that I could take another copy from it, if necessary. A foolish thing, of course—as I could have taken a carbon in the first place for a bit extra. But Mr. Stevens wasn't a business man. Well, I heard nothing further. That's all."

"And—and you've got that handwritten script now?"

"In my office," smiled Wainwright. "No. I was not quite such a fool as to bring it with me, Mr. Barton. I wanted to have a look at my man first. We've got to arrange the financial details, too. I said a thousand pounds, didn't I? H'm! It's a bit too cheap, I think."

"If you think you can rook me of any sum you like, you've made a mistake!" snarled Barton furiously. "It's a bluff—and I don't take any notice of it. Get out of this flat before I call a policeman!"

Mr. Wainwright didn't flinch.

"No, it's not a bluff, Mr. Barton," he replied. "If I hadn't got that manuscript I might bolt, and call it a failure. I thought I'd bring Mr. Stevens' letter just as evidence of my good faith. Like to see it?"

Barton made no reply—he was too agitated.

"Be good enough to stay on that side of the table, Mr. Barton—I don't trust you yet," said Wainwright, pulling a folded paper out of his pocket. "You can see quite well from over there."

He unfolded the letter, and held it up. Barton gazed at it fascinatedly. And his heart gave a leap. In that second he knew that this man had got him in a trap. There was nothing faked about that letter. It was in Vincent Stevens' handwriting, and was absolutely genuine.

CHAPTER VI.

TWO OF A KIND.



EDWARD WAINWRIGHT seemed to be thoroughly enjoying himself. He had not come to Roger Barton with the possible hope of gaining a reward—but with a certainty

of it. For he held the trump card in the game.

Barton continued to stare dazedly across the table.

He knew Mr. Stevens' handwriting, for there had been many marginal notes on the manuscript he had destroyed—the manuscript he had previously copied. And there was no mistaking that distinctive hand.

The letter was quite brief, as Wainwright had stated—but the date of it, and the signature, and the words it contained, converted a valueless piece of paper into a document of supreme value. And Edward Wainwright had the whole handwritten script in his possession, too! This was a catastrophe which Barton had never dreamed of in his most pessimistic moments.

"If this man went to the other side, they would welcome him with open arms—and would win the case after another half-hour's hearing. For nothing on earth could refute this concrete evidence. It was overwhelming proof of Barton's villainy.

Unfortunately, Wainwright had succumbed to the temptation of making a big sum of money. An honest man would have taken these documents to the police—or to Mrs. Stevens' lawyers. But Wainwright was a man who had been struggling for years—a man with no great initiative, who had never managed to climb. At the chance of making a big sum of money, he fell. Once or twice in earlier years he had committed questionable acts, and he had no particular scruples. If he could get a big sum of money out of Barton, he was ready for a deal.

"Give me that letter!" panted Barton hoarsely. "Do you hear me? By thunder, I'll—"

Wainwright refolded it, and put it into his pocket.

"I'm a bigger man than you are, Mr. Barton, and stronger," he said. "I shouldn't advise you to try any nonsense. Besides, we don't want to act like a couple of madmen, do we? I'm here on business. I've got something to sell—and you want to buy it. Let's strike a bargain. Besides, it wouldn't make any difference even if you did throw a chair at my head, and get this letter. That manuscript's enough to land you in jail."

Barton was well aware of the truth of this argument, and he held himself in check. Violence wouldn't do him any good at all. But his alarm and fury took another turn.

He reviled his visitor in the most foul terms, cursing him atrociously.

Mr. Wainwright looked grim, but he kept cool.

"Finished?" he said at last.

"Confound your cursed impudence!" snarled Barton breathlessly. "You've got me in a corner, and you know it!"

"You're the first man I've allowed to talk to me as you've just talked," retorted Wainwright. "It's been a very expensive business, Mr. Barton. For the pleasure of cursing me you'll have to pay a thousand pounds."

"You—you fool——"

"I want two thousand for these papers—and not a cent less," replied Wainwright calmly. "And unless you're pretty careful, my friend, it'll go up to three thousand."

Barton cooled himself with amazing rapidity.

"Two thousand pounds!" he panted. "Why, it's ridiculous—outrageous! You can't pull that sort of stuff, you hound! I haven't got two thousand—or anything like two thousand."

"That's a pity," said the other. "I shall have to go to Mrs. Stevens——"

"Go!" snarled Barton. "See how much you'll get!"

"I don't suppose I shall get anything like two thousand—that's why I've come to you first," retorted Wainwright. "But I'll want a thousand, at the least. Not now, perhaps—but when

she begins to draw the royalties in. This play's a winner, you know, Mr. Barton. I shouldn't lose it, if I were you."

There was silence for a moment. Wainwright had sized his man up accurately. He felt sure that Barton was good for two thousand—but a sum like that would be difficult to get hold of. It would be too risky to ask for more. And two thousand, anyhow, was double what he had had in mind when he had started out.

"I tell you I can't pay it!" said Barton, at last. "Do you think I'm made of money?"

"I know you're the supposed author of this big success."

"Big success! Bah!" shouted Barton. "Who gets the money? The actors—the magement! My percentage is next to nothing. The most I can lay my hands on

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is a hundred or two. I'll give you two hundred down."

"Nothing doing."

"I'll give you two hundred down, and another three hundred at the end of the month," panted Barton. "That's five hundred altogether. I can't pay more. I shan't make more than two thousand out of the play altogether."

"I may be only the boss of a typewriting bureau, but I'm not a fool," returned Wainwright calmly. "It's London's biggest success, Mr. Barton, and it looks like running for years. There'll be touring companies, too. At a rough estimate, I should think you'll make a cool twenty-five thousand."

"You're absolutely mad!"

"No, I'm not—I'm quite moderate," said Wainwright. "Then what about the foreign rights? America's going to take this play, Mr. Barton—and America's a good field for successful playwrights. And perhaps you've overlooked the films? By the end of five years you'll get something like a hundred thousand or more. I'm a fool to ask for only two thousand."

Barton breathed hard. He knew that the man was right. Perhaps his estimate was rather high, but it wasn't far short of the mark. And it was brought home to Barton what he stood to lose.

But he hadn't got two thousand—or even a quarter of that sum. The play had only just started, and the recent injunction had resulted in all Barton's money being held up. Until the lawsuit was settled, his income had stopped. But what was the use of telling this to Wainwright?

Barton came to the conclusion there was only one course for him. And that was to pay the two thousand, and get the letter and the manuscript. He dared not let this man approach the other side. For that would mean the loss of all his royalties—the loss of that great fortune—and the absolute certainty of jail.

"Well?" asked Wainwright, at length. "I'm letting you off very lightly with two thousand, Mr. Barton. But I'm a reasonable man. I know it'll be a bit difficult for you to lay your hands on money at the moment. Most of your profits are to come."

"Wait!" breathed Barton. "I've got to think."

"All right—go ahead," said the other. "But let me remind you that you'll be safe from me as soon as the money's paid. I've got to hand over the manuscript, so I shan't be able to come for any more money afterwards. I'm not a blackmailer, Mr. Barton. I've got something to sell, as I said before."

"You're an infernal rogue!" snarled Barton.

"I'm not fool enough to think I'm doing anything saintly at the moment," retorted Mr. Wainwright, with a grin. "But if I'm a rogue, I shouldn't like to think what you

are! Perhaps we'd better say that we're two of a kind, eh? Now what about that two thousand? I'll wait until ten o'clock to-night—but not a minute longer."

"Until ten o'clock!" said Barton sharply.

"Yes."

"Where?"

"I'll wait at my office," said Wainwright. "It's only the front room of a private house—No. 360, Minter Avenue, Camden Town. We shall be quite private there. The rest of the house isn't occupied at night. It's used as a sort of warehouse."

"All right—I'll be there before ten," exclaimed Barton, making up his mind. "Or, better say, ten o'clock exactly."

"And you'll bring the two thousand with you?"

"Yes, hang you!"

"In cash, mind," said the visitor. "And you needn't bring bank-notes, Mr. Barton. I'm not to be caught in that way. I want currency notes, or nothing at all—old ones, too. No running series of numbers, so that they might be traced. And don't go to the police and say that you're being blackmailed. I've got you fixed, and you know it."

"Yes, I know it!" growled Barton. "I don't know how I shall get the money, but I'll be there with it on time."

"Remember, I shan't wait after ten o'clock," said Wainwright. "If you don't turn up by then, I shall go straight to Mrs. Stevens. The case comes on again to-morrow, and I've got to act to-night, or it may be too late."

"You can get out," snapped Barton, pointing to the door. "We've made our arrangement, and there's an end of it. Supposing I come earlier? Will you be there?"

"I'll wait in my office all the evening."

A minute later Mr. Edward Wainwright took his departure, feeling that he had executed a clever stroke of business. Roger Barton was a changed man. He was haggard and jumpy.

There was only one thing to be done. He would have to go to Mr. Samuel Arrow-smith and get the money. It might be difficult, but Barton couldn't possibly consider the prospect of failure.

For unless he kept faith with Wainwright, his doom was sealed.

CHAPTER VII.

NELSON LEE'S DISCOVERIES.



SIR RUFUS BROWNE, K.C., shook hands warmly with Nelson Lee.

"We heard that you might be coming to help us, Mr. Lee, but we thought it was rather too good to be true," he said heartily. "We need help of some kind, heaven knows! The case is looking rather bad at the

moment—owing to the roguery of that man, Barton.”

“We must see what we can do, Sir Rufus,” said Nelson Lee quietly.

He and Nipper had arrived a few minutes earlier, and they had already had a few words with Horace Stevens and his mother. William Napoleon Browne was there, too—still supremely confident that everything would turn out all right in the end.

“Have no fear, Brother Horace,” he murmured. “I venture to suggest that Brother Lee will place his finger upon the vital spot, and unmask us as a crowd of duffers. Greatly as I admire my own abilities, I claim no credit as a detective. We are all moulded differently, brother.”

“Do you really think he’ll do something?” asked the schoolboy actor.

“Wait!” urged Browne. “Indeed, do I not detect a gleam in Brother Hamilton’s eye? Can it be that something is already on the move?”

On the other side of the comfortable drawing-room, Mrs. Stevens was listening intently to Nelson Lee and Sir Rufus. She had begged of them to talk freely, without worrying about her presence. Mrs. Stevens was looking very ill and pale, but she was brave. This lawsuit was a trying ordeal for her.

It would have been bad enough even if everything had gone smoothly. But Roger Barton’s villainy—his production of a false witness—had made the case look almost hopeless. And poor Mrs. Stevens was torn with doubt and worry and anxiety. This sort of thing confused her. Sir Rufus’ questions had got her in a muddle, and she was afraid of Nelson Lee’s inquiries. It was far better that the two men should be undisturbed.

“Well, Sir Rufus, I have some good news already,” smiled Lee, after a few moments. “If the proof that Barton is a liar will be of any use to you, I can supply it.”

“Any use!” echoed Sir Rufus. “It’s just what we need.”

Nelson Lee explained the little matter of the sheet of paper, and everybody in the room listened eagerly.

“Of course, the evidence is quite conclusive on this point,” concluded Lee. “The paper manufacturers will be only too willing to put a representative in the witness-box, to testify that this watermark was not used prior to February.”

“And Barton claims that this was written a year ago!” exclaimed Browne’s father. “Splendid! A wonderful piece of good news, Mr. Lee. This evidence alone will discredit Barton in the eyes of the jury. It might make the whole difference in the case. Even if we get no other data.”

“Yes, I think it will be valuable,” agreed Nelson Lee. “And we must thank Nipper for this piece of luck. He was sharp enough to pick the sheet from beneath the solicitors’ table in the Court this afternoon.”

“Was that a criminal offence, Sir Rufus?” asked Dick, smiling.

“Well, I’m seriously afraid it was quite opposed to all correct procedure,” said Sir Rufus gravely, but with a twinkle in his eye. “But I don’t think it would be fair to quibble, eh? Let us be thankful that we have gained such a good point. Mrs. Stevens, we are already getting along. Mr. Lee must be our lucky mascot.”

“I’m quite sure of it,” replied Mrs. Stevens gladly.

“But I’m by no means satisfied,” said Nelson Lee, shaking his head. “We need something much stronger, Sir Rufus. Isn’t there any possibility of securing a direct proof that Barton’s alleged play is actually Mr. Stevens’ play? That’s the point we want to concentrate upon. Once we can prove that, Barton’s defence collapses.”

“I know,” agreed Sir Rufus. “But we’re faced with a great difficulty, Mr. Lee. Some years ago there were plenty of papers—even including the original handwritten manuscript of the play. But they’re all gone.”

“Please don’t look so shocked, Mr. Lee,” put in Mrs. Stevens. “The papers were destroyed by accident—by a careless blunder. I’m afraid I’m mainly to blame—”

“You’re not, mother!” broke in Horace warmly.

“At the time, Mr. Lee, those papers were only of sentimental value,” continued Mrs. Stevens. “I dare say they seemed like a lot of lumber—and some careless workmen burned them in error. How were we to ever dream—”

“But is there nothing?” interrupted Lee. “Are there no papers of any kind left? Surely you have searched the house from top to bottom?”

“We’ve ransacked everything, Mr. Lee,” put in Horace. “Every paper we could find is in the breakfast-room. You’ll find them there—but I don’t think they’ll be of any use.”

“You’ve turned out every cupboard?”

“Every hole and corner, sir.”

“You’ve emptied vases, drawers, and similar likely receptacles for odd papers?”

“There isn’t an inch we haven’t explored, sir.”

“Then it’s very peculiar,” said Nelson Lee slowly. “The slightest scrap of paper might prove to be the key, you know. You’d be surprised how an apparently worthless trifle will sometimes turn the scale. May I look at these papers?”

“Please do, Mr. Lee!” said Mrs. Stevens. “I’ve been over them a hundred times, until my eyes ache and my brain reels. But I haven’t found anything of importance. Horace has looked, too, and Billy and Dick. Sir Rufus has looked.”

“We’ve made a thorough job of it, Mr. Lee,” said Sir Rufus.

“Then there doesn’t seem to be much left

for me to do," smiled Nelson Lee. "Perhaps I'd better take your word—"

"Good gracious, no!" interrupted Sir Rufus quickly. "We are mere novices, Mr. Lee—you're an expert. You may see something that didn't strike us as being significant. Perhaps you'd like to be alone? We'll wait here while you go through the pile."

"Thank you. I'll try not to be too long," said Lee.

"Can I come, sir?" asked Nipper.

"By all means, young 'un. You have been through these papers before, so perhaps you'll be of assistance."

They went out together and entered the breakfast-room. The entire expanse of the table had been given over to a confusing litter of odds and ends—a pile which had been added to from time to time, as further batches of odd papers were found.

"H'm! This isn't going to be an easy task, Nipper," said Nelson Lee dubiously. "We shall be lucky if we get through this lot within three hours."

"That's what I was afraid of, sir," said Dick.

"You'd better return to the drawing-room soon and warn them that we shall be a long time," replied Lee. "Well, we'd better make a start. I believe in being thorough, or refusing the job altogether. Every one of these papers has got to be examined separately and systematically."

And the great detective buried himself in the task. After about half an hour Nipper went on and broke the news gently. And naturally Mrs. Stevens at once insisted upon a meal being prepared. Sir Rufus had an urgent appointment, and couldn't stay, although he promised to drive round again later on.

Browne and Stevens were persuaded to go round to the house of a mutual friend, in order to tell the latest developments.

So Nelson Lee and Nipper were left practically undisturbed. And the time passed quickly. But nothing was discovered. That pile of papers apparently contained no document of any value.

Over half of them were gone through before Nelson Lee received the slightest shadow of hope. Then he took a second glance at a faded, crumpled, receipted statement which had turned up among a file of similar receipts—all of them being jabbed on a spike-file of the old-fashioned type.

"We've looked through all those receipts,

sir," said Nipper. "It's a mere waste of time to look them over again. You can take my word they're useless. In fact, there's nothing here—"

"I'm not so sure, Nipper—I'm not so sure," interrupted Nelson Lee slowly. "There's no name on this invoice, a very careless piece of work, but the date is significant. That's a point I've been constantly keeping in mind. This date is approximately the same month and the same year in which Mr. Stevens wrote his play."

"And what's the receipt, sir?"

"Merely 'To account rendered,' and the sum is four guineas."

"Well, what's the good of that, guv'nor?" asked Dick Hamilton in surprise. "There's nothing to prove that it was even for Mr. Stevens—"

"Perhaps not, but I fancy we are permitted to take a certain amount for granted," replied Lee. "This statement was sent in by the Wainwright Smart-Service Typewriting Bureau, of Camden Town. And you must remember that Camden Town is not very far from this spot, Nipper. In fact, Minter Avenue is within an easy walk."

Nipper scratched his head.

"But even now I'm blessed if I can see how that's going to help us, sir," he said. "A statement like that— Oh, you mean— By Jove! You think that Mr. Stevens might have had some typewriting done?"

"The period synchronises with the writing of the play, Nipper—a point of very vital importance," said Nelson Lee. "Is it not feasible to assume that Mr. Stevens sent his play out to be copied?"

"Then—then it might be a clue?"

"There is a possibility that the typewriting bureau might be able to supply us with some information on the point, and we are after all the information we can get," explained Lee. "I would like to have a word with Mrs. Stevens on the subject."

They went into the drawing-room, and Mrs. Stevens looked up eagerly.

"Have you found something, Mr. Lee?" she asked, catching her breath.

"Nothing of much value, I am afraid—merely a statement from a typewriting bureau," replied Lee. "Can you tell me if your late husband ever essayed any of his own typewriting?"

"No, he never had a typewriter."

"Did he ever send work out to be copied?"

"Quite frequently," replied Mrs. Stevens. "At one time he was very busily engaged—he had an article to write for a weekly paper, and it was always sent out," replied Mrs. Stevens.

ANSWERS

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"Do you happen to know the name of the agency—"

"Please, Mr. Lee!" she broke in. "I couldn't possibly recall that because I didn't even know the name at the time. You see, I never took any active part in that sort of thing. I was very interested in my husband's work, but he always used to read it aloud to me."

"But you are quite sure that he sent this work out?"

"Oh, quite!"

"Including the play itself?"

"Yes, he was particularly anxious about the play, because he wanted to get a type-written copy as quickly as possible. Some-

CHAPTER VIII.

HANDFORTH'S BIG IDEA.



EDWARD OSWALD HANDFORTH, the celebrated leader of Study D at St. Frank's, brought his fist down on the table with a crash.

"Something's got to be done!" he declared grimly.

"Well, there's no need to break up the happy home about it," said Church, who was eating an orange. "You nearly made me swallow a pip that time, you fathead!"



Handforth protested, of course, but he was squashed. He was bowled over, sat on, and ragged until even his own enthusiasm had faded away.

times he walked round to the typewriting office himself."

Nelson Lee returned to the breakfast-room and continued his task of sorting out the mass of papers.

"I shall be at that typewriting bureau quite early in the morning, young 'un," he said. "I might even go round to-night, on the chance of finding somebody there, after I've looked through the rest of these papers. It is quite likely that the files of this bureau will prove interesting."

But even Nelson Lee little imagined how close he was to a vital discovery.

"You'll have your pater up here unless you're careful," warned McClure.

The three inseparable chums were in Handforth's "den" at his father's West End mansion. Strictly speaking, it was Willy's den, too. But Handforth minor could only use the room when Edward Oswald was absent.

Even Willy disliked fighting, when it was continuous.

"We shall have to buck up, too," said Church. "Aren't we going to the pictures to-night?"

"Pictures?" repeated Handforth glaring.

"The cinema," explained Church.

"The cinema!" roared Handforth.

"That place where they show things on the screen——"

"You—you howling ass!" hooted Edward Oswald. "Do you think I don't know what a cinema is?"

"You didn't seem to, by the way you kept repeating it!" growled Church. "And there's no need to bulge your eyes out of your head like that. What have I done now? What's the latest crime?"

"I seem to have committed it, too," remarked McClure. "Anyhow, I'm included in the glare."

"Pictures!" snorted Handforth contemptuously. "You—you heartless wretches. Can't you think of something better than pictures when there's a crisis in the air? Talk about Nero fiddling while Vesuvius was in eruption!"

"You've got a bit mixed," said Church. "You're thinking of Pompeii. Nero used to live in Rome, and the place got on fire, and Nero thought it a good idea to start up some jazz on the violin——"

"I'm not talking about Nero!" snorted Handforth, "or Vesuvius, either. What does it matter whether the place was burnt up or not?"

"Not a bit," said McClure. "An eruption more or less doesn't make any difference, I suppose."

"I'm talking about Stevens!" said Handforth fiercely.

"Oh, you mean that lawsuit——"

"Yes, I do!" said his leader. "What about it? Are we to stand by, idle, and let that rotter of a Barton win the action?"

His chums looked rather troubled.

"Things do seem a bit black," admitted Church. "But what can we do, old son? We've just got to wait until to-morrow, and then see how the case goes. And we shall have to be at the Court early, too, or we shan't get any seats."

"I hear Nipper's gone round to Stevens' mater this evening," said McClure. "Browne's there, too. But I can't see what can be done. Barton kyboshed everything this afternoon by producing a new witness——"

"It was a faked-up yarn!" growled Handforth. "It was a lie from beginning to end—and we ought to do something about it. It's no good sitting here, twiddling our thumbs."

"We're not twiddling our thumbs," said Church. "I've just been eating an orange, and Mac's started on one now——"

"You hopeless fatheads!" yelled Handforth. "I'm only speaking figuratively. I've got a great idea. I've got a brain-wave. It's so utterly gorgeous that you'd better prepare yourselves."

"All right, we're ready," said Church promptly.

He and McClure looked quite indifferent. They had heard of Handforth's great ideas before.

"My suggestion is that we should collect a lot of the chaps, go to Barton's flat, and grab him."

"Grab him?" repeated McClure, staring.

"Grab him, tie him up, and then search his place for evidence," explained Handforth triumphantly. "How's that?"

"Rotten!"

"What?"

"Well, I mean, isn't it a bit rash?" asked Church hastily. "We might get into awful trouble if we broke into the man's flat like that. And what would be the good of it, anyhow? We shouldn't help Mrs. Stevens by giving Barton a ragging."

"Far better go to the pictures," said McClure. "We can't do better than the movies, Handy. There's a jolly good picture——"

"Hold on!" interrupted Handforth grimly. "I'm not thinking of a rag. We might shove Barton into his own coal-cellar, or something, but that's only a detail. My idea is to search his flat for evidence."

Church and McClure were startled.

"But—but we could get prosecuted for that!" gasped McClure. "It's an awful thing to burgle anybody's flat and ransack it. Barton might fetch the police in!"

"We'd soon kick the police out!"

It was quite obvious to Church and McClure, after such a retort, that any sort of argument was useless. When Handforth was in the mood for defying the police, he was fairly reckless. And at normal times he just about held the record.

"Come on—we'll buzz downstairs and use the pater's 'phone," he said briskly. "We'll ring up Archie and Pitt and Fullwood and a few of the others—and then arrange a rendezvous."

"But look here, Handy!" exclaimed Church, wailing his orange. "We can't——"

"Oh! You ass!" gasped McClure. Church had squeezed the orange a little too hard in his excitement, and a quantity of juice and a number of pips found a resting-place in McClure's eye.

McClure grabbed the first thing which came to hand, with which to wipe the juice away—it chanced to be Handy's scarf! It was a white silk scarf, and Handy happened to be proud of it.

As McClure dabbed at his eyes, a deep and tense silence fell on the room. Through it sounded the hiss of Handy's indrawn breath as he stared in absolute horror and amazement. McClure was covering the beautiful whiteness of the scarf with yellow blotches!

Handy pounced on him, and snatched the scarf away.

"Orange!" he gasped. "You—you——"

"That's all right," said McClure. "Church squirted some juice in my eye. Quite an accident!"

"Accident! And you use my new scarf to — Rotten, sticky orange!" he exclaimed thickly. "You—you destructive bounders! Just for this, I won't take you on this trip to Barton's flat!"

CHAPTER IX.

WILLY SAYS "NO."



SOMEHOW, Church and McClure didn't seem particularly aghast at this threat.

"All right," said Church. "If you like to be nasty, we shall have to put up with it.

Mac and I'll go to the pictures."

"Good!" said McClure. "It's a pity about the other thing, though. But, after Handy's forbidden us to go with him——"

"Oh, so that's your tone, is it?" interrupted Handforth darkly. "You can't rot me like that, my lads! We're all going to Barton's flat together—so don't have any more nonsense."

"I suppose you know where Barton's flat is?" asked Church.

"Eh?"

"It's rather an unimportant point, but it might be as well to know which flat we're going to raid," said McClure carelessly. "Of course, don't trouble unless you like. If we raid enough flats, we're bound to come to Barton's in the long run."

"My only hat!" ejaculated Handforth. "I hadn't thought of that, you know! Where does Barton live?"

"How should we know?"

"Then—then we can't raid him?"

"It doesn't seem like it," said Church. "So it'll have to be the pictures, after all? What a disappointment! Poor old Mac's got tears in his eyes."

Edward Oswald gave an expressive snort, and stalked out. He went downstairs three at a time, and hurried into his father's library, in order to use the telephone. For some reason, he didn't use it. He came out looking very red, and indignant.

"You've been quick," said Church.

"You chump, I haven't 'phoned anybody yet!" growled Handforth. "The mater called it a dotty idea, and refused to let me use the 'phone. I'm going out to the nearest call-office. I'm not going to be dished like that."

He was off before his chums could stop him, and they were about to hurry in his wake when Willy strolled in. Willy was looking hot and dusty. The leader of the St. Frank's Third Form had just been playing cricket with Chubby Heath and Juicy Lemon—his special chums. It was practically dark now, so all play had been abandoned. Moreover, Juicy had carelessly biffed the ball into a cucumber frame, and further play had been deemed injudicious. Willy was keeping a wary eye on the library door,

for his father always—or nearly always—heard everything that was not intended for his ears. He had a particular keen sense for hearing breaking glass.

"Pater in the library?" he asked carelessly.

"Yes, I think so," said Church. "Your major's just come out—they've been having a bit of a shindy, I believe."

"That accounts for it," said Willy, with relief.

"Accounts for what?"

"Well, even the pater can't hear much if Ted's with him," said Willy. "Only one of the cucumber frames, you know. Juicy tried to score a boundary, and busted a couple of panes. The fathead bunked, and Chubby's gone with him. They left me to face the music, the cowards!"

Church grunted.

"That music's only a soft lullaby compared to the brass band we shall have to face later on," he said. "Your major's got one of his marvellous ideas."

"He can't help it," said Willy. "It's a disease."

"He's gone out to ring up Archie and Fullwood and Pitt and Russell, and some of the other chaps," explained McClure. "He wants us all to raid Barton's flat, and get some evidence."

Willy looked thoughtful.

"Has he fixed up any meeting place?" he asked.

"Yes, Archie's place, in Jermyn Street."

"Well, he couldn't have decided on any better spot," grinned Willy. "Barton lives in Jermyn Street, too. I heard it from Browne to-day."

"By Jove, does he?" said Church. "Can't we do something to stop it, Willy? Can't you persuade your major——"

"It's no good trying to persuade my major about anything," interrupted Willy. "There's only one thing to be done with Ted. Force! Force—and plenty of it. So we'll wait until the crowd collects at Archie's place."

In the meantime, Handforth was getting in touch with various other members of the Remove. The holidays were nearly at an end, and within a few days everybody would be back at St. Frank's. But most of the prominent fellows were within easy reach of London.

Reggie Pitt and Jack Grey thought the idea rather a good one. They promptly decided to go to Archie Glenthorne's flat and wait there for the others. As Reggie remarked, something pretty drastic was necessary, and he and Jack were feeling bored. A raid on Roger Barton's flat seemed distinctly good.

Ralph Leslie Fullwood and Clive Russell were equally enthusiastic. Archie Glenthorne weakly protested, but it was no good. He complained that he was entirely on his own—that Phipps was out somewhere—and that he couldn't possibly cope with an invasion.

But at this point Handforth hung up the receiver, and Archie could say no more.

Quite a number of other juniors promised to be on hand, too—including De Valerie, Somerton, Sir Montie Tregellis-West and Tommy Watson. Even the Trotwood twins decided to go—and John Busterfield Boots and two or three of his chums hailed the suggestion as a life-saver.

Thus it came about that, half an hour later, Archie Glenthorne's peace was rudely shattered. The dandy of the Remove was feeling somewhat anxious. He had heard nothing of Phipps, and there had been no report. Archie was feeble. He had answered the telephone eight or nine times—always expecting Phipps to be at the other end of the wire.

And now his flat was becoming over-run with juniors.

"Carry on, laddies—make yourselves absolutely at home," he said, at last. "I mean to say, what's the good of protesting? Take a chair or two! But when it comes to dashing out on a frightful raid, I absolutely decline."

"We'll leave you out of it, Archie," said Reggie Pitt generously. "As soon as Handforth comes you'll be rid of us—so don't look so jolly alarmed."

"I mean to say—Phipps!" murmured Archie. "I'm not so sure that the old boy would agree to this raiding business. You see, he's dashed off on a mission of some secrecy—"

Archie paused, realising that it wasn't advisable to say too much. He knew that Phipps was watching Roger Barton's flat, and it occurred to him that this raiding party might upset matters. But it was a difficult subject to bring up—and he wasn't allowed any chance, anyhow.

For Edward Oswald Handforth arrived with his chums. By this time the little flat was overcrowded—the juniors filling the sitting-room, and overflowing into the lobby.

"All here?" asked Handforth briskly. "Good egg! Barton's flat is only a couple of hundred yards away—that's what Church says, anyhow."

"That's right enough," agreed Pitt. "Barton's got one of those service flats, further along. But I'm not sure about this raid, you know, Handy. I agree that something drastic is necessary, but we shall have to go easy—"

"Leave it to me," interrupted Handforth firmly. "There's going to be nothing wild or silly about this affair. It'll be calm and peaceful all along. When it's a matter of business, I don't believe in anything rough."

"You mean we'll just search for evidence?" asked Boots.

"That's the idea," agreed Handforth, nodding. "If Barton's at home, we shan't do

anything to him. We'll just bowl him over, shove his head up the chimney, tie him up with his own braces, and push him in the bath, or something. If he gets troublesome, we might push a few cinders down his throat, or gag him with a cake of soap."

"And is that what you call doing nothing to him?" grinned Church.

"Well, practically nothing," said Edward Oswald. "And I don't believe in making a mess of the flat, either. All we'll do is to tip the furniture upside down, and ransack the drawers and things. No destruction, mind!" he added warningly. "We'll simply go through every room, and—"

"Hold on!" interrupted Willy, pushing his way forward.

"Look here, my lad—"

"This thing isn't going to happen," said Willy calmly.

"Which thing?"

"This raid."

"Who says so?"

"I say so."

"You—you silly young duffer!" roared Handforth. "If you think you can push your way in, and give your orders—"

"I'm not talking to you, Ted—I'm talking to the other chaps," interrupted Willy coldly. "I don't expect you to understand—but they might. You can't go ahead with this raid. It would be fatal."

"Fatal?" roared Handforth.

"Of course it would," growled Willy impatiently. "Hasn't Barton been saying in court that we chaps have faked everything up? Didn't he produce that new witness to prove that we've got a down on him?"

"By Jove, yes," said Pitt thoughtfully.

"Well, what's going to happen if the judge learns that you chaps have raided Barton's flat?" demanded Willy. "It'll prejudice the whole case—and ruin all Mrs. Stevens' chance of winning."

"You're dotty!" said his major tartly. "We're going—"

"We're not going!" interrupted Fullwood. "Your minor's right, Handy. I hadn't looked at it like that before—but a raid on Barton's flat might do an awful lot of damage."

"It would!" grinned Pitt.

"I mean, damage to the case."

And the others, after a moment's consideration, were compelled to agree. So the whole scheme was abandoned. Handforth protested, of course, but he was squashed. That was why Willy had left things until the whole crowd was present. Edward Oswald simply had no chance. He was bowled over, sat on, and ragged until even his own enthusiasm had faded away.

But Willy suggested staying at Archie's for supper—and preparing it themselves. So affairs weren't so bad, after all.

CHAPTER X.

THE CHEAT.



R OGER BARTON entered his flat breathlessly.

He hurried into the sitting-room, switched on the light, and glanced at his watch. His face was flushed, and his eyes were anxious. There was, indeed, a half-hunted look about him.

"Half-past nine, by gad!" he muttered. "I'm in time, anyhow! What a sweat! I thought I should never get that cursed money."

He had spent three hours of wild anxiety and misery. How he had asked Samuel Arrowsmith for the two thousand pounds, he hardly knew. But the millionaire theatrical magnate had at length agreed—and the money was in Barton's attache case.

He had, of course, no claim upon Mr. Arrowsmith at all—for the court had suspended all his payments until the lawsuit was settled. But, after all, the play was a huge success, and it was making big money. The management could hardly refuse a private advance to the author. For Barton, of course, was fully accepted as the author by Mr. Arrowsmith.

It was the question of cash that had been most difficult. Barton could have obtained a cheque with ease—but a cheque was useless, since it could not be cashed until the morrow. So he had got notes—much to Mr. Arrowsmith's astonishment, and inconvenience.

"He thinks I'm mad, but I can't help it," muttered Barton. "I've got the money, and I'm safe. That cur of a Wainwright has got to give me those documents, or I'll smash him."

He had only come into his flat for one purpose. He went to a desk, unlocked it, and took out an ugly-looking Oriental club. It was quite a small affair, and had been used as a paper-weight. But it was easy to handle, and it slipped nicely into the overcoat pocket. Wainwright was a powerful man, and Barton meant to be prepared.

He made sure that his attache case was locked, he switched off the light, and went out. A minute later he was in a taxi, speeding towards Minter Avenue, Camden Town.

At exactly ten minutes to seven he dismissed the taxi, and found himself in a mean-looking road, not particularly well-lighted. He had five minutes still to walk before he reached No. 360. It turned out to be an old-fashioned, semi-detached house, with a rough kind of garden in front of it. There was no gate, but the post bore a dirty brass plate—with the name of the typewriting bureau on it. There were some bushes just against the path, and Barton felt nervous as he walked to the door. He suspected every dark corner of holding an enemy.

Before he actually reached the door, it opened, and Edward Wainwright stood there.

"Mr. Barton?" he asked promptly.

"Yes."

"Good man!" said Mr. Wainwright pleasantly. "Three minutes before time, Mr. Barton. I was just taking a last look before setting out for Regent's Park. Have you got it?"

"Can't we talk inside, confound you?" growled Barton.

"By all means."

Wainwright turned, and led the way into his office—an apartment which had once been the sitting-room of the house. It was a dingy-looking place, with shabby furniture, and equipped with two typewriters.

Barton closed the door, and glanced at the window.

"Are those blinds all right?" he asked.

"Quite," said Wainwright. "There's no fear of anybody seeing in here, Mr. Barton. I notice that you are impatient, so perhaps we had better get this little transaction over at once."

"The sooner the better."

For a moment they stood looking at one another. It could scarcely be called a friendly exchange of glances. Roger Barton was deeply suspicious of Wainwright even now. He was nearly convinced that the man possessed the original manuscript—but not quite. And he did not want to hand over the money until he was positive.

Wainwright, for his part, suspected Barton of treachery. He had demanded two thousand pounds, but he hadn't seen it yet. And Barton's record was such that he was not the type of man to be taken at his word.

"I am waiting," said Wainwright briefly.

"So am I waiting," retorted Barton.

"I think it's up to you to hand out the cash, isn't it?" said the typewriting expert. "When I see the colour of that money, Mr. Barton, I'll keep my part of the bargain. We've got to trust one another to a certain extent, you know. There's honour, even among thieves," he added drily.

"Don't try to be funny!" snarled Barton.

He hesitated a moment, and then opened his attache case. He took out the heavy bundle of notes—securely tied with tape. With a contemptuous gesture, he flung it on the table.

"Do you want to count them?" he asked sourly.

Wainwright's eyes glittered at the sight of that wealth.

"By Heaven!" he muttered. "Two thousand quid!"

"They're all in separate hundreds, so you needn't keep me hanging about here while you count them," growled Barton. "I haven't tried to twist you, Wainwright. There's too much at stake for that. I want that letter and the original script."

Edward Wainwright was a changed man. The very sight of that money had excited him, and he was literally trembling with



triumph. A few short hours earlier he had had no prospect of getting money. In fact, his business was slumping, and he was distinctly hard up.

And now the sum of two thousand pounds rested upon his dingy table! For a moment, he gave way to a sudden greed. Why should he part with that script? He could get more money like this— But he pulled himself up. If he didn't take this chance, it might be withdrawn, and he wouldn't get another. He quickly went to a desk, pulled open a drawer, and brought out a faded, tattered manuscript. Parts of the edges were torn away, and two or three of the back pages were completely missing. There was no fake about it. It was a genuine manuscript—one that had been lying among a lot of old papers for years.

Barton seized it quickly—eagerly.

"Yes, this is it," he breathed. "This is it!"

"Of course it is!" retorted Wainwright. "I'm not trying to bluff you. This is a straight deal, Mr. Barton—and good luck to you for playing square with me. I'm not a crook. This is the first tricky thing I've ever done. But it's been worth it!" he added, looking at the money.

Barton had no ears for his companion's talk. He was turning over the sheets of the manuscript—comparing them, in his memory, with his own copy. It was, of course, the actual play. And Barton had no difficulty in recognising the characteristic handwriting.

For the space of two or three minutes, not a word was spoken. And yet each man was fully occupied. Barton with that precious manuscript, and Wainwright with the bundles of notes. He wasn't counting them, but he was making sure that each hundred contained genuine notes, and not false slips. He had read of such tricks.

"What about these missing pages?" asked Barton sharply.

"Eh? Oh, they're gone."

"What do you mean—gone?"

"I don't know where they are—I haven't seen any sign of them," replied Wainwright. "I expect they've got lost at different times— Oh, you needn't worry!" he added tartly. "I haven't kept them back so that I can come down on you for more cash. I'm not that kind of hound, Mr. Barton. I told you this is a square deal, and I meant it."

"All right—I'll take your word," said Barton. "What about that letter?"

"Oh, yes—a good thing you reminded me," said Wainwright. "Not that I should have made any use of it. You played the game, Mr. Barton, and I wouldn't do the dirty on you. Every inch of paper I've got is there. You've got nothing to fear once that's burnt."

"It'll soon be burnt!" said Roger Barton grimly.

"You can do it here, if you like," offered Wainwright. "Make yourself thoroughly at home—I don't care."

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He bent over the money again, breathing hard. Two thousand pounds! He had never seen so much money in all his life. It fascinated him. It deprived him of his previous coolness and caution. He had been amazed, in fact, to find that Barton had kept his word—for he had never brought himself to credit that such wealth would be his. This lapse on Wainwright's part was fatal.

"You cur!" snarled Barton suddenly.

There was something so thick in his voice that Wainwright jerked himself up with a start. That Oriental paper-weight of Barton's struck him a fearful blow on the head. It had been aimed direct, but Wainwright's movement caused it to glance off. Nevertheless, it was sufficient to cause insensibility.

"Do you think I'm going to be swindled by a dog like you?" panted Barton. "Why, what— Confound you, man— Let go! I tell you, let—"

Wainwright, in falling, had clutched at his assailant, and his grip held. With a sudden burst of panic, Barton shook off that clutch—which seemed uncannily death-like. With a thud, Wainwright sank to the floor. He uttered a kind of groan as he fell over.

With one sweep, Barton pushed the notes back into his attache case, and snapped it to. It revealed his panic when he failed to place that manuscript in, too. He still clutched it in his hand. And the next

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moment he wrenched at the door, and flung himself out.

He hardly knew what he was doing. He hadn't really intended any attack upon Wainwright—he had brought that weapon to be used in self-defence. But the man's unguarded position had tempted Barton, and he had acted almost before he knew it. All he thought of now was flight.

He didn't know what Wainwright's injuries were—didn't dare to think of them. But he had a vague feeling that he had made a grave blunder. It was too late to undo the damage now, however. He reached the front door, and staggered out.

With a click, he closed it, and hung on to the handle for a moment. The cool air fanned his brow, and he breathed hard.

And at that moment footsteps sounded—and Roger caught a glimpse of a man walking briskly towards the gateway.

CHAPTER XI.

NELSON LEE ON THE SCENE.



ROGER BARTON nearly fainted with sheer terror.

But he managed to pull himself together in time, and forced himself to be cooler. Perhaps this man was a mere passer-by. There was no sense in getting into a mad panic for nothing.

With two swift movements, Barton reached the welcome shelter of the bushes. They grew closely in the neglected front garden, bordering on the path. And as Barton vanished into them, the figure paused at the gateway, examining the dingy brass plate.

Barton crouched there, frightened and shaky. This newcomer, whoever he was, was taking a special interest in the Typewriting Bureau! And Barton couldn't get away until the path was clear.

The stranger entered the gateway, and approached the front door. For a second his face was outlined against the light of a distant street lamp. Barton saw it fully—and his heart nearly stopped beating.

Nelson Lee!

This was a terrible shock. At St. Frank's, Barton had merely regarded Lee as one of the Housemasters. But he knew that Lee was also a famous detective. And here he was, at Wainwright's door!

Barton's brain worked acutely—the numbness dropping from it like a cloak. So the other side had got on to the right track! They had come to Wainwright for that evidence! But Lee was a shade too late!

As he knocked at the door, Barton moved. He stole off between the bushes as Lee hammered again. And these knocks prevented the detective from hearing any suspicious sounds near by.

And then something else came to Barton's aid. A lumbering motor-lorry roared past, clattering and jangling. Barton took immediate advantage of this circumstance, and a moment later he was in the quiet road—beyond the vision of Lee. He set off almost at a run.

One thought filled his mind—one all-pervading thought. Somehow or other he would have to destroy that manuscript at once. He was afraid of it. It seemed to be burning his hand. He didn't even want to take it to his flat, where he could destroy it in private. There might be traces left. It would be better to throw it into the Regent's Canal— But no! The infernal thing might float, and turn up again.

And while Barton fled, Nelson Lee waited at the door. It was a cruel piece of bad luck.

Lee, of course, had no certain knowledge that this mission of his would bear any fruit. It was more or less a chance. He had not received any communication from Wainwright, as Barton had.

In fact, Lee had never expected to find anybody at the office so late, but had merely come round to satisfy himself that the Wainwright Bureau was still in business. He would make his inquiries in the morning.

Naturally, Lee was not on-the alert for anything unusual or mysterious. He had no reason to be. But he noticed that a glint of light showed in the front room, which was obviously the typewriting office. He thought, possibly, that somebody was

there working late, on some special job, perhaps.

But he could get no answer to his summons. He was just about to give up the attempt when he heard a sound on the other side of the door. The next second the door was flung open, and a man stood there, clinging to the post.

"You treacherous dog!" he muttered thickly.

Even as he spoke he nearly slithered over, and Lee caught him by the shoulders.

"Steady, man—steady!" he said sharply. "What's the matter? Come along, you'd better get back inside."

During the first moment Lee thought that he was dealing with a drunken man. But the instant he got Wainwright into the office he changed his opinion, and his eyes became sharp. A livid weal was showing on Wainwright's temple—a nasty-looking, ugly bruise, and the swelling was heavy. The man was still dazed and incoherent.

"It's all right—there's nothing to harm you," said Lee quietly. "Take it coolly, man. You can tell me——"

"Where's that hound Barton?" breathed Wainwright.

"Barton!" exclaimed Lee. "Has Barton been here?"

"The cur! He's gone—he's robbed me!" panted Wainwright wretchedly. "I trusted him, too; I thought he was playing square——"

"By James!" muttered Lee tensely.

He whipped out his brandy flask, and forced Wainwright to drink. Obviously something of paramount importance had just occurred. Lee watched anxiously as his companion partially recovered.

"Tell me what's happened," he said, as a look of returning intelligence came into Wainwright's eyes. "I represent Mrs. Stevens, and by what I can understand you've just been betrayed by Barton——"

"Mrs. Stevens?" said Wainwright, grasping at Lee. "You've come from Mrs. Stevens?"

"Yes."

"I wish to Heaven I'd gone straight to you people first!" said the man brokenly. "I've been a fool; but I'll get even with that reptile! He gave me two thousand for that manuscript. Two thousand in notes. And then he knocked me down, like a common footpad——"

"Manuscript?" repeated Lee. "Which manuscript?"

The original one—in Mr. Stevens' handwriting," said Wainwright shakily. "Barton's got it. Get it back, for heaven's sake. He's robbed me, I tell you——"

But Lee heard no more. He ran out like a hare. Until that second he had not known the exact nature of the recent quarrel. But he was now filled with acute alarm.

So this man had had possession of the original script. A clear proof of how close Lee had been to the right track. But the fool had approached Roger Barton first; had attempted to sell him the documents.

Lee felt no pity for Wainwright. The man had received just what he deserved. He had lost the manuscript, and he had gained nothing more substantial than an ugly bruise on the head. It was a fitting reward for such rascality. Had Wainwright been honest, he would have received an honourable recompense for his help—and a big one, too.

Lee reached the road, feeling certain that he would be too late. There was no sign of life. In both directions the Avenue was empty. Running like the wind Lee sped off in the direction of a main thoroughfare.

The chances were that Barton would return to his flat at once. He would make for home, in order to consign the fatal manuscript to the flames. And Nelson Lee was seeking a taxi—hoping that he would be able to get to Jermyn Street before it was too late.

CHAPTER XII.

THE WATCHMAN'S BRAZIER.



"SAFE! I'm safe!"

Roger Barton breathed the words gloatingly as he hurried down Minter Avenue. There wasn't another soul in sight. He had got out of the garden without attracting Nelson Lee's attention, and his one thought now—just as Lee supposed—was to reach his flat.

Now and again he glanced behind as he walked.

A lurking fear gripped him. Perhaps Lee was following. Perhaps he hadn't escaped danger, after all. Barton was a prey to every panic-stricken fear.

He felt that clutch of Wainwright's again, just as though the man were gripping him now. Wainwright, of course, was hardly hurt—a mere superficial bruise. But Barton feared the worst. What if he had killed the man?

He pictured Wainwright as he had fallen to the floor. A still figure—a dying man, struck down by Barton. It seemed to the hurrying rascal that every shadow contained an accusing finger, pointing at him.

He didn't know that Lee was even then speaking to Wainwright, and that nearly the whole distance of Minter Avenue separated them. There wasn't the faintest possibility of Lee overtaking him now.

Barton turned a corner, and glanced round again.

His heart missed a beat. For the fraction

of a second he caught a glimpse of a figure, somebody who seemed to be following.

But, of course, the figure wasn't that of Nelson Lee, although Barton immediately jumped to this conclusion. Perhaps there wasn't a figure at all. A mere figment of the man's overwrought imagination.

But he ran—he ran madly.

True panic had got hold of him now. He thought he could hear the footfalls right behind. But he dared not turn. It was Lee. It was the hand of justice behind him, ready to grasp his shoulder.

Breathing hard, his lungs nearly bursting, he ran blindly on, turning down any side street that he came to. But it seemed to his fevered mind that he couldn't shake off that elusive shadow. And Lee, at this very moment, was actually emerging from Wainwright's office.

An obsession had gripped hold of Roger Barton. It was all the result of his insane panic. But for the fact that he had struck Wainwright down, he would have remained cool in this emergency. But he fancied that he had committed murder, and he was like a man possessed.

His one idea, an idea that amounted to a mania, was to destroy the script and the letter. Both were clutched in his hand, the letter tucked into the bulk of the script. In Barton's other hand he carried the attache-case, but it had ceased to be of any value to him. The two thousand pounds it contained seemed a mass of waste-paper compared to the tattered bundle of rags in his other hand.

How to get rid of it. That was the question. At any second Lee would be upon him; Lee would seize that evidence. And the fortune would vanish; gaol would open its doors—

Barton caught his breath in with a wild gulp.

Just ahead, on the other side of the road, repairs were in progress. Red lamps were dotted here and there. And a watchman's coke brazier was glowing and gleaming in front of his little hut. But the hut was deserted, for the watchman was up the road, attending to a faulty lamp.

Here was Barton's chance.

He didn't wait—he didn't hesitate. He sped over, and plunged the manuscript into the heart of a glowing fire. A blaze of flame went up like a torch, and Barton raced away, his heart throbbing.

He had succeeded. Good luck had come to his aid at the crucial moment, and he had been enabled to destroy that deadly evidence. By this time it had gone beyond all hope of recovery.

He glanced back. He could see the watchman's fire in the distance, not a red glow now, but a white torch. Nothing short of



Barton plunged the manuscript of the stolen play into the heart of the glowing brazier. No evidence remained against him now!

asbestos could have lived in that inferno of glowing coke.

Almost without realising it, he found himself in a busy thoroughfare, where motor-buses and taxis passed to and fro. And with a shock Barton realised that he was streaming with perspiration and utterly dishevelled. His right hand, too, was paining him badly, for he had scorched it when he had plunged the manuscript into the fire.

He hailed a passing taxi, and somehow managed to climb into it, giving the driver instructions to take him to Jermyn Street. He sank back among the cushions, nearly exhausted. But he had won. In spite of Nelson Lee's hot chase Barton had won!

The rascal might have been even more comfortable in mind if he had known that Nelson Lee had not even seen him, if he had known that Nelson Lee had no knowledge of that unhappy brazier incident. For what chance was there now of Mrs. Stevens winning her case?

It seemed to Barton that Jermyn Street was reached in a mere second or two. But he had recovered his breath a little, and the destruction of the manuscript gave him confidence again. He felt as though he had got rid of some living parasite.

But the remembrance of Edward Wainwright's clutching grip remained with him. It haunted him. He had the two thousand pounds in his possession, but they meant almost nothing to him now. He wished with all his heart that he had left Wainwright alone. What a fool he had been to attack the man like that.

Perhaps the police would get on his track. He hadn't taken any precautions against leaving fingerprints, and Barton knew how men could be traced by such trifles. He was tempted to go back, to satisfy himself that Wainwright was still alive.

But then the taxi arrived in Jermyn Street.

"Here you are, sir," said the driver. "Which number?"

"Eh? Number?" said Barton, with a start. "Oh, it doesn't matter! This will do. How much? What's the fare? You fool, what's the fare?" he added fiercely.

"All right, guv'nor—all right!" said the taximan, with a curious look. "No need to get excited. I'll make it two-and-ninepence to you, seein' as I like your face."

He obviously thought that he had to deal with an intoxicated fare, and was facetious at Barton's expense. A ten-shilling note was thrust into his hand.

"I ain't sure about change——" he began.

"Never mind about change!" snapped Barton, walking off.

The taximan stared after him.

"Well I'm blowed!" he muttered.

Barton was several hundred yards away from the block of flats where his own chambers were situated. And as he walked up there was a sudden rush of feet from another building—one that he was obliged to pass.

Jermyn Street seemed to be suddenly filled with schoolboys. Handforth & Co., Buster Boots, Reggie Pitt, and a number of others, came flooding out of the lighted doorway. They were, in fact, just leaving Archie Glenthorne's place, bent upon returning to their various homes.

Roger Barton paused, catching his breath in.

He had every reason to recognise this crowd. How many times had he encountered the St. Frank's fellows in the vicinity of the school? He knew them all by sight—and he hated them.

The recognition was mutual, too.

Handforth was the first fellow to catch sight of Barton, and Handforth wasn't feeling particularly agreeable at the moment. His great scheme had been knocked on the head, and completely abandoned. The sudden sight of Roger Barton aroused all Handforth's enthusiasm again.

"By George, Barton!" he roared. "On him, you chaps!"

"Steady, Handy——"

"It's Barton!"

"That doesn't matter!" panted Willy. "Keep cool, Ted. We don't want to start a brawl!"

"I'm jolly well going to have it out with him!" snorted Handforth. "I'm going to ask him what he means by bringing that blessed scene-shifter to tell a lot of lies in the witness-box. Come on, Remove!"

Barton found himself surrounded by a swarming mob. But he needn't have been afraid. Handforth was the only one who had warlike intentions. The others were merely crowding round to see that he didn't do anything rash.

"You young cubs!" snarled Barton, in panic. "Get out of this! Let me pass, hang you! I'll call the police——"

"I want a word with you, Mr. Roger Barton!" panted Handforth. "I want to know what the dickens you mean——"

"Cave!"

"Look out, Handy!"

"Here's Mr. Lee!"

Edward Oswald started, and he noticed that Roger Barton started, too. The man attempted to push madly through the crowd. But he couldn't do it. The juniors were too many for him.

And then Nelson Lee came up—grim and cool.

CHAPTER XIII.

AN UNEXPECTED TURN.



"**S**TAND aside, boys—stand aside," said Nelson Lee crisply. "Mr. Barton, I would like a few words with you. I'll trouble you to give me a certain manuscript. I think you understand what I mean."

Barton started, and then laughed harshly.

"What's this—some scheme to trick me?" he asked. "Sorry, old man, there's nothing doing."

The sight of Nelson Lee had given him a turn at first, but then he quickly recovered. He knew that Lee hadn't been able to recover that precious bundle of paper from the fire.

Lee, of course, had no knowledge of the incident, so the pair were at cross purposes. Lee had dashed straight here by taxi, and had fumed because the vehicle had been a slow one—and because it had been held up in two or three traffic jams. But he had reached Barton's flat before the man himself, and that was what he had set out for.

And Lee acted at once. In spite of the presence of the boys, he went straight to the point. He was taking no risks. Alone with Barton, he might have had a lot of trouble. But the man was hemmed in by these St. Frank's fellows, and the opportunity was an ideal one. The situation, moreover, was too acute to allow Barton any

loophole. Once out of sight, he would probably destroy that script instantly.

"You had better understand me, Barton," said Lee quietly. "I have just come from Wainwright—and I know precisely what has passed. Will you hand me that script, or shall I tell these boys to bowl you over, and take it by force? I think the circumstances justify such a measure. I am not giving you a chance to——"

"I don't know what the deuce you're talking about," said Barton harshly. "Script? What script? I haven't seen such a thing. And who's Wainwright?"

The crowd of juniors listened intently.

"I think you know who Wainwright is," replied Lee. "The man has told me everything——"

"You—you found him all right?" asked Barton sharply.

"I thought you'd never heard of him?"

"I haven't—— I—I mean——" Barton paused, too full of relief to say anything further. But he knew enough. Wainwright was all right! The blow hadn't been serious, after all! And the manuscript was destroyed! Roger Barton laughed in Nelson Lee's face.

"Perhaps we understand one another, Mr. Lee, but the joke's on you," he said coolly. "And when you talk about a manuscript, you're mad. If you start any tricks with me, I'll call the police——"

"Shall we search him, sir?" panted Handforth eagerly.

"You young whelp!" snarled Barton, turning on him. "If you touch me——"

"Whelp!" gasped Handforth. "By George!"

He simply flung himself at Barton, and it was a signal for the others, who were all thoroughly excited. It was a very swift affair. Barton was hardly able to utter a sound. He was just swept off his feet, and the juniors swarmed over him.

"This rotter's got some sort of manuscript on him, sir?" asked Pitt. "All right—we'll find it."

And then and there—in the middle of Jermyn Street—Barton was searched. A few people stood looking on idly from a respectable distance—but they merely took this affair to be a schoolboy rag. Nobody suspected that there was something very grim behind it all.

"There's nothing here, sir," panted Fullwood, at length. "We've searched all his pockets, and everything. There's a lot of money in the attache case, but no manuscript."

Lee satisfied himself that Fullwood was right.

"Let him get up, boys," he said quietly. Barton rose, smothered with grime.

"You hound!" he gasped. "I'll have the police on you for this! I'll give you in charge for assault——"

"You are perfectly at liberty to do so, Mr. Barton," said Lee curtly. "I won't run

away. There's a constable at the corner now. Shall I beckon him? I am quite indifferent."

Barton took a deep breath.

"I wouldn't demean myself!" he snarled.

He staggered off, a mere wreck. But he had known better than to make any complaint to the police. Nelson Lee was not only disappointed, but intensely worried. And the publicity was becoming pronounced now.

"Thank you, boys, for your services," he said quietly. "But do me a favour and disperse as soon as possible."

"Why not go into Archie's flat, sir?" suggested Pitt. "It's right opposite here, and we shall get out of the crowd like that."

"An excellent suggestion," agreed Lee. "Come along, boys."

They all crowded in, and went upstairs. But only Reggie Pitt and Handforth and one or two others went into the sitting-room. The rest discreetly remained out in the hall, or went to the kitchen. And all were talking excitedly over the recent incident.

"What-ho!" exclaimed Archie Glenthorne, arousing himself from the lounge. "Welcome, laddies! I mean to say, back again, what? I thought the dashed multitude had faded into the offing for the good old night!"

"I brought them back, Archie," said Nelson Lee.

"Good gad!" said Archie, with a start. "Odds shocks and starts! I mean to say, how do you do, Mr. Lee? Frightfully pleased to welcome you. Phipps, old thing! Rally round with the stimulants!"

"Phipps isn't here, you chump!" said Pitt.

"It doesn't matter, Archie," said Nelson Lee. "No stimulants are required—although I must admit I am feeling very depressed. I have missed a vital piece of evidence by a hair's breadth."

"How do you mean, sir?" asked Fullwood curiously.

"Since you know so much, boys, it is only fair that I should tell you briefly what has happened," replied Lee. "It seems that the original manuscript of Mr. Stevens' play was in the hands of a typewriting agency at Camden Town."

"Oh, my hat!"

"The genuine original, sir?"

"Well, I'm jiggered!"

All the fellows could hear—for those who were not in the room were crowding in the lobby. They filled the open doorway. And all were startled to hear this piece of news.

"I needn't go into the actual details—I don't even know them myself—but it appears that Barton knew of this manuscript also," continued Lee. "I think the man who runs the agency attempted a crooked deal. Anyhow, Barton secured the document."

"But can't you have him arrested, sir?" asked Handforth excitedly.

"I'm afraid not——"

"The man's an absolute rotter, sir!" shouted Pitt. "His guilt stands out like a beacon! Surely there's no chance of him winning that case to-morrow?"

"It wouldn't be just, sir!"

"Under the circumstances, I don't think Barton will have any chance of winning," replied Lee. "At the same time, I should have welcomed that manuscript. He certainly left Camden Town with it in his possession, and I can only conclude that he passed it on to a confederate on his way here."

"Then you'll never get it, sir?"

"By this time, it is undoubtedly destroyed," replied Lee regretfully. "I fail to see any other possibility. That manuscript is of vital importance to Mrs. Stevens, and Barton realises its value. Its destruction would make him much safer."

"I say, what a rotten shame, sir," growled Fullwood. "Isn't there anything we can do? We're all dying to help—to do something to dish Barton. We all want to help old Stevens and his mother, too. Just say the word, sir."

"I realise your eagerness, boys, but I am afraid there is nothing you can do now. As it is getting late, I should like you all to go home. Say as little of this as you can. There may be a fresh development by to-morrow. We cannot be certain of anything."

"All right, sir."

"Anything you say, sir."

Over half the fellows departed at once. Handforth & Co. lingered. Church and McClure wanted to get off, but Handforth was obstinate. Reggie Pitt stopped, too, and Tregellis-West and Watson were waiting for Dick Hamilton. The latter had promised to meet them at Archie's place.

But these few were a mere handful compared to the crowd which had previously packed the flat. And a sort of peace reigned. Archie Glenthorne was deeply concerned.

"I mean to say, it's too frightfully bad of Phipps to stay away all this time," he complained. "It isn't like the dear old bean to desert the young master—"

"Coffee, sir?"

Archie swung round, and found Phipps in the doorway, holding a tray with steaming cups upon it.

"Good gad!" ejaculated Archie. "The dashed lad is here all the time! Bally good, Phipps! When did you trickle in?"

"About ten minutes ago, sir, by the rear door," explained Phipps. "I thought perhaps Mr. Lee and the young gentlemen would care for a cup of coffee. Mr. Lee? May I give you a cup?"

"Thank you, Phipps—yes, I can do with a cup," said Nelson Lee.

Phipps set the tray down on the table,

and took something else from it. He placed it against the schoolmaster detective. It was a charred bundle of paper.

"The original script, sir," he murmured imperturbably.

CHAPTER XIV.

GOOD OLD PHIPPS!



PHIPPS was out of the sitting-room almost before Nelson Lee could speak. For once in his life Lee was absolutely startled. Archie Glenthorne and the other juniors stared blankly, with growing excitement.

"Phipps!" called Lee sharply.

"Sir?"

The valet appeared in the doorway again.

"Just a moment, Phipps," said Lee.

"What is this?"

"The manuscript you are seeking, sir."

"But, good gracious! I don't see—"

Lee paused, and picked up the charred mass. It proved to be a bundle of paper, the edges entirely destroyed, and the bottoms of all the pages charred and brittle. But the bulk of the script was still white, particularly in the centres of the pages. And the handwriting was clear and distinct. There was also a letter—the vital words on it still legible and clear.

"Upon my soul!" ejaculated Nelson Lee.

"This is it, Phipps!"

"Exactly, sir."

"Mr. Stevens' original work!"

"But, Phipps, I don't quite see—"

"Perhaps you had better know, sir, that Mr. Barton is under the impression that it has been totally destroyed," put in Phipps evenly. "That is undoubtedly unfortunate—from Mr. Barton's point of view. I fear the gentleman is at present labouring under a misapprehension, sir."

"Barton thinks it is destroyed?"

"Yes, sir."

"I congratulate you, Phipps, upon a very smart piece of work," said Lee, whose delight was unbounded. "But I must confess that I cannot understand how it was accomplished. I didn't even know that you were interesting yourself in this case."

"Just a slight diversion, sir."

"You—you dark horse!" exclaimed Pitt delightedly. "I say, Nipper! Quick! Come and look at this! Phipps has got Mr. Stevens' original manuscript. Goodness knows how he managed it!"

Dick Hamilton had just come in, accompanied by Browne and Stevens. They were all eager—having heard about the recent excitement from some of the fellows who had been leaving.

"What's Phipps been doing?" asked Nipper quickly.

"Something brainy, without question," murmured Browne. "I have always placed

the utmost confidence in Brother Phipps. A man of resource."

"Come, Phipps, let's hear how you managed it," said Nelson Lee.

"Quite a trifle, sir, I assure you," said Phipps modestly. "It was Master Archie's suggestion in the first place——"

"Absolutely not!" burst out Archie. "Good gad! What frightful rot!"

"Master Archie sought my advice this evening, sir, regarding the lawsuit now in progress," explained Phipps. "I thought it a good idea, perhaps, to watch Mr. Barton's flat—in case he had any meeting with Salter, the stage hand who was placed in the witness-box this afternoon."

the fact. But I fear he saw me. At all events, he decided to get rid of the manuscript in a somewhat curious way. I can only suggest, sir, that he was a victim of panic."

"What did Barton do?"

"He was passing a watchman's coke fire, sir, and he abruptly thrust the manuscript into the heart of it, and fled. For a moment I feared that my efforts had been unavailing."

"Good gad, Phipps, what did you do in that frightful posish?" asked Archie. "Some rapid thinking, what? The old brain had to work at a few thousand revs, I mean!"

"Hesitation, of course, would have been



And then and there—in the middle of Jermyn Street—Barton was searched.

"Quite a good plan, Phipps," nodded Lee.

"I saw no sign of Salter, sir, but Mr. Barton met a man outside the stage-door of the Emperor Theatre—a fellow who persisted in forcing himself upon Mr. Barton."

"Wainwright!"

"Exactly, sir," agreed Phipps. "I thought it advisable to keep my eyes well open during the evening, and I followed Mr. Barton when he went to Camden Town. I was watching when he emerged, gripping the manuscript."

"You were there at a very opportune moment, Phipps."

"I rather fancy I was, sir," said the valet. "Mr. Barton fled in panic, and I did my best to follow without his being aware of

fatal, Master Archie," replied Phipps. "Before I could get to the brazier, the manuscript was roaring up in flames. If I had waited for a mere second or two, there would have been no hope. So I plunged my hand in, pulled out the burning mass, and threw it on the ground. A few rapid stampings, and it was out."

"A wonderful exhibition of presence of mind, Phipps," said Nelson Lee warmly. "But your hand? Surely you must have burnt it very severely?"

"No, sir."

"Odds life, the lad must be made of asbestos!" gasped Archie. "He absolutely plunges the old digits into the burning mass, and emerges scathless!"

"I was wearing a glove, sir," explained Phipps. "The action was so swift that there was no time for me to receive anything but a slight scorching round the wrist."

"Phipps, you have done amazingly well," said Lee.

"I am afraid the manuscript is badly burnt, sir—"

"It is in quite good condition," insisted Lee. "These charred edges are a mere trifle. The heart of the manuscript is here—and it provides all the evidence we require to smash Barton's case, and land him in gaol. And he knows nothing of it! That is the best feature of all—for he will be at the court to-morrow, unsuspecting of danger. He will think he has won the case."

does this mean that everything's all right now?"

"It means that Roger Barton is utterly defeated," replied Nelson Lee. "The evidence we can produce to-morrow morning will prove beyond question that 'The Whirlpool' is your father's play, Stevens. You may go home to your mother, and tell her that the tension is over. You have won the case."

"But—but perhaps there might be a hitch, sir."

"There will be no hitch, Stevens, and I should like you to be the first to carry this good news to your mother," said Lee quietly. "As for the rest of you, please keep it to yourselves. It is vitally important

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"Would you care for another cup of coffee, sir?" asked Phipps smoothly.

"Laddie, kindly go to the young master's desk, and seize a batch of fivers," said Archie firmly.

"Thank you, sir!"

"No, Archie, Phipps will be fully rewarded from the right quarter," said Nelson Lee. "You may be quite sure that Mrs. Stevens will show a very marked appreciation of Phipps' great service."

"I should think the mater will!" gasped Horace Stevens, coming to himself with a start. "Dad's manuscript!" he added, picking up the charred remains. "Yes, it's his writing! No mistaking it, Mr. Lee. Does—

that not one word of this development should leak out. Handforth, can I rely upon you to keep quiet?"

"Yes, rather, sir!" replied Edward Oswald.

"That's all right, sir—leave him to me," said Willy calmly. "Ted won't breathe a word. We may have to gag him, and bind him hand and foot, but we'll do the trick."

"You—you young ass!" said his major, turning red. "I'm giving Mr. Lee my word of honour that I'll say nothing. Isn't that good enough?"

"Quite good enough for me, Handforth," replied Lee, smiling. "Phipps, I trust you will have no objection to appearing in the witness-box to-morrow, if necessary?"

"I am already prepared for that, sir," said Phipps.

"I should like to express my appreciation of your splendid resourcefulness, Phipps, but I know well enough that you understand the feelings of us all," continued Lee. "We will go at once, and leave Glenthorne in peace."

And five minutes later the last of the visitors had departed—everybody happy and thrilling with joy at the prospect of the morrow.

Archie Glenthorne was lolling back in the most comfortable chair, and Phipps was clearing the table.

"I mean to say, laddie," murmured Archie.

"Pardon, sir?"

"Dash it, Phipps, the young master can't find the good old words," complained Archie. "But it seems to me that you have absolutely bespattered the name of Phipps with glory, as it were. I'm proud of you, old thing! I'm absolutely honoured to have you dashing hither and thither, attending to this and that. The fact is, Phipps, you're too frightfully brainy for this sort of thing."

"Not at all, sir," replied Phipps. "A little change does us all good, sir. I am quite content with life as I find it, Master Archie."

And Phipps glided out with a happy glint in his eye.

CHAPTER XV.

EXIT MR. ROGER BARTON.



WHEN the proceedings opened in Lord Riggindale's Court the next day, there was a quiet air of subdued excitement permeating the entire apartment of justice.

Both sides, apparently, were full of confidence.

The public seats were full. All the St. Frank's fellows who had been there the previous day were in their places again. And Irene Manners & Co., of the Moor View School, were also conspicuous. The general public did not get much of a look in. The boys and girls had waited outside the Law Courts for hours in order to make sure of getting in.

Sir Rufus Browne was looking serene and calm. And so, for that matter, was Sir Donald Bance—Barton's counsel. And when Barton himself came into court, he did so with a brisk step—with a clear eye and a jaunty air. He firmly believed that he was now completely safe.

The judge was looking grave and concerned. The previous day's events had been more or less irregular, and Lord Riggindale was suspicious of criminal conspiracy. He was well on the alert this morning.

"How long shall we have to wait?" murmured Handforth. "I hope there won't be

a lot of delays before Barton gets it in the neck——"

"Shush, you ass!"

"Don't even whisper, Ted!" murmured Irene.

"Oh, right-ho!" said Handforth obediently.

But there was not long to wait, for Sir Rufus Browne was determined to explode his two fireworks one after the other. The very first witness to be called was a Mr. Simpson, representing the paper manufacturing firm of Evans, Glynn & Co., Limited.

Sir Rufus Browne rose to his feet.

"My lord, I should like this witness to examine the defendant's written script of his play," said Sir Rufus smoothly.

"Very well," said the judge. "Let the manuscript be passed to the witness."

"I protest against this!" exclaimed Sir Donald Bance, rising.

"Tut, tut, Sir Donald! I cannot see upon what grounds you should protest," said his lordship. "The manuscript has been placed in evidence, and the witness has every right to examine it at Sir Rufus' request."

Barton exchanged a sharp glance with his counsel, and looked uneasy for the first time that morning. Mr. Simpson looked at the pages closely, holding them up to the light, and nodding to himself.

"Does your firm manufacture this particular brand of paper, Mr. Simpson?" asked Sir Rufus quietly.

"Yes, sir."

"What is the watermark of this paper?"

"Dyllwynn Wove."

"How long has that watermark been employed by the makers?"

"It was used for the first time in February of this year, sir."

Sir Donald sprang to his feet.

"I protest——"

"Be good enough to resume your seat, Sir Donald," interposed the judge sharply. "This evidence is of the utmost importance. That manuscript was written, according to sworn witnesses, a year ago. And this present witness has declared that no such paper was manufactured until February of this year. Proceed with your examination, Sir Rufus."

"I have finished, my lord."

Sir Donald rose to cross-examine.

"You represent the firm of Evans, Glynn & Co.?" he snapped.

"Yes."

"You swear that this paper was not made until this year?"

"The paper was made, but the watermark is new."

"It was never employed until this February?"

"Never."

"Have you any records to prove this?"

"I am speaking on oath," replied the witness coldly. "There are no records that I know of beyond my firm's stock list. And this paper, with the Dyllwynn watermark, was not placed in stock until late February."

Sir Donald could make nothing of the cross-examination. He was thoroughly alarmed, and revealed it. He knew how deadly this evidence was. For it utterly discredited the previous evidence that the play had been written a year earlier.

Sir Rufus' next witness was even more sensational—for he placed Mrs. Stevens in the box. Everybody in court held their breath. There was something about the playwright's widow which indicated supreme confidence. She was calm and smiling, and all her former anxiety had gone. Sir Rufus handed her a charred bundle.

"What is that you are holding, Mrs. Stevens?" asked counsel.

"The original manuscript of 'The Third Chance.'"

"It is in your late husband's own handwriting?"

"Yes!"

"There can be no question on that point?"

"None whatever."

Roger Barton leapt to his feet, pale to the lips.

"It's a lie!" he choked. "That—that manuscript was destroyed—"

He pulled himself up, gasping. In that second, he knew that he was a beaten man. And he was mad with panic. The manuscript he had thrust into that fire! Somehow, it had been rescued. It was charred and blackened, but it was nevertheless recognisable.

It was only necessary to compare that script with the play that he had supposedly written to know that the two were identical, word for word, and phrase for phrase.

He gave way to a sudden mad impulse.

Pushing Sir Donald Bance aside, he made for the exit. The judge commanded him to halt. But he took no notice. He bolted out, and the whole court hummed with excitement. Practically everybody talked at once, and there was a rush of ushers to the exit that Barton had chosen.

Out in the corridor, Barton received another dreadful shock.

He found himself gripped by two grim-looking men.

"Just a minute, Mr. Barton," said one of them. "I hold a warrant for your arrest, and—"

"Arrest!" whispered Barton huskily.

"You are charged with perjury and conspiracy, and it is my duty to warn you that—"

"You're mad—you're crazy!" screamed Barton. "Everything's gone wrong this morning! Get out of my way! Let me go, I tell you. You hounds, let me go!"

Click!

Before he could struggle, he was handcuffed.

"This is outrageous!" he shouted thickly. "Take these things off! Why don't you arrest Lister? Why don't you take Salter? They're as guilty as I am! I'm not the only one—"

"Both men are under arrest already. Mr. Barton," said one of the Scotland Yard detectives. "I must warn you—"

Barton was taken away, a mere wreck. His downfall had come with dramatic suddenness, just when he had been anticipating complete victory.

The case, of course, was over.

There was another adjournment, and all sorts of legal points to be dealt with, but the result was now a foregone conclusion. Barton's very action in bolting had finished the affair.

"I rather fancy, Brother Horace, that nothing now remains but to raise our voices and crow," remarked William Napoleon Browne. "I wonder if you observed the consternation of Brother Bance?"

"Yes, by Jove, he looked bowled over," said Stevens. "I don't wonder at it, either, after seeing his client bolt out of the court like that. Everything's all right now, Browne, old man."

"I venture to say that you have spilled a home truth."

"There may be all sorts of formalities to go through, but there's nothing else to worry about," went on Stevens happily. "We've proved that the play's ours, and all the royalties will now go to mother. We shall be rich, Browne, old son. Rich!"

"I trust you will not allow this intoxication to enter your head," said Browne warningly. "I am rich, Brother Horace, but I am also brainy. I fear that you will lose what little wits you have—"

"Chuck it, you ass!" grinned Stevens. "In less than a week there'll be another title outside the Emperor Theatre. We shall see 'The Third Chance' in electric letters—"

"Quite possibly, Brother Horace; but I predict that Brother Arrowsmith will have something to say on that subject," replied Browne benevolently. "Alas, when shall I instil you with business instinct? Remember, the play has made its name on another title, and it would be fatal to change it. But what matters? Your father's name will be blazoned forth in letters of fire, and your mother's bank balance will bulge incredibly. And it is even possible that your own Saturday halfpenny, Brother Horace, will be increased to the colossal figure of tuppence."

CHAPTER XVI.

HORACE STEVENS DECIDES.



View girls.

THREE days later the Pall Mall Theatre was packed with an enthusiastic and appreciative audience, including scores of St. Frank's fellows and dozens of Moor

It was a special matinee of "Hamlet," with Horace Stevens in the title role. On the morrow all the fellows would be at school again, and this was the last day of the vacation. It seemed ages since Roger Barton's arrest, and the juniors had ceased to take interest in him.

He had been brought before the magistrates and remanded, but it was a certainty that he would be sentenced to a stiff term of imprisonment.

And changes had taken place at the Emperor Theatre, too. As Browne had predicted, the title of the play was unchanged, but the author's name was totally different. And while better business was impossible, for the theatre had previously been playing to capacity, the audiences were far more enthusiastic. Mr. Samuel Arrowsmith confidentially declared that this publicity had added another six months to the length of the run, and he was a good prophet on theatrical matters.

So far as Mrs. Stevens and her son were concerned, their troubles were completely over. There was no longer any danger of Stevens being taken away from St. Franks, no longer any chance that he would be unable to go up to Oxford in due course.

Money in the Stevens' household was likely to be extremely plentiful.

But Horace was as keen as ever upon his acting. He played "Hamlet" with even greater brilliance than he had played it in Andy Noggs' little theatre. And he gave London another surprise.

For such a youngster the performance was marvellous. Without any question Stevens was a born actor, and there could be only one possible profession for him when he reached manhood. Not that he would really need any profession, since he would be rich enough to be independent. Just the profits of one play, the legacy of his dead father. At last Mr. Vincent Stevens had come into his own. Too late, however, for the author himself to enjoy this newly found fame. That indeed was the only sad feature of the affair.

After the matinee Stevens felt happier than he had ever felt in all his life. He was entertained at dinner that night, he was fêted, and everybody prophesied that he would become one of England's greatest actors.

He was urged to leave school forthwith, and to throw his heart and soul into the theatre. And by the time he and his mother reached home that night they were rather dazed and bewildered by all the fêting. Mrs. Stevens was revealing her tiredness, in spite of her happy smile.

"Well, St. Frank's again to-morrow, mother," said Stevens contentedly. "And everything's O.K. Before I go back to

school you've got to promise me that you'll go right away for a long rest."

"I'm not so sure of that, Horace."

"Then you've got to be sure, mum," said Horace firmly. "All this excitement has left you weak and run down. Uncle Howard is going to the South of France next week, and you'll have to go with the family. No refusing, mother. It'll do you a world of good!"

Mrs. Stevens sighed.

"But I want to spend some of our new money on the home, Horace," she replied. "I've got all sorts of wonderful plans. You don't know how I've longed to be able to realise my dreams——"

"All that can wait," said Stevens, with no mercy. "The main thing is your health, mother. And while I'm at St. Frank's this term you've got to fill out, and get sun-burnt, and——"

"Let's talk about you for a change, Horace," interrupted his mother. "There's one thing I'm more glad of than anything else, and that is that you haven't lost your head. After your triumphs on the stage I'm proud of the way you have remained just the same Horace as ever."

"Oh, chuck it, mother!" growled her son.

"You've created a record," went on Mrs. Stevens quietly. "You've done very wonderful things, and if you choose you can take up the stage as a profession at any minute you please. Indeed, Mr. Arrowsmith almost begged of me to let you take the leading part in dad's play."

"I'd love it," breathed Stevens. "And yet there's St. Frank's. I love St. Frank's, too. I'm jiggered if I know exactly what to think. What do you think I'd better do, mother?"

"I'm going to leave it for you to decide, my boy."

"Of course, it's the summer term," mused Stevens thoughtfully. "Plenty of cricket, and fine, sunny days. Fenton's talking about making a big feature of all sports, too. A sort of carnival, I believe. I'd love to be there. And yet the stage——"

"You are quite young yet, Horace," smiled his mother.

"Yes, by Jove!" nodded Stevens. "I suppose I should be an ass to chuck up school and the 'Varsity to go on the stage, shouldn't I? I can become a real actor after I've got my Blue. I should only make an ass of myself if I started too soon. And I can get plenty of experience at St. Frank's, anyhow."

"Have you really decided, then?"

"Of course I have, mother," he replied, chuckling. "As a matter of fact, I couldn't chuck St. Frank's, even if I tried. There's old Browne, too. How the dickens could I get on without him?"

"And don't forget the other wonderful boys there, too," said Mrs. Stevens. "I

shall never forget how they helped us, and how they remained true from first to last. I shouldn't like you to leave St. Frank's now, Horace. It would seem too abrupt—too much of a wrench."

"By Jove, so it would!" agreed Horace softly. "I'm going to forget all about the stage, mother. At least, I'm going to put it at the back of my mind, and let it hibernate. Instead of being a blessed stage prodigy I'll become a schoolboy again. I should be dotty to think of anything else."

Mrs. Stevens pressed his arm.

"I'm so glad, Horace," she whispered. "This is just what I wanted."

And when the schoolboy actor went to bed that night he wasn't thinking about the stage, about his ambitious plans for the

distant future. His mind was on the coming term at St. Frank's. His thoughts were centred on cricket, swimming, and rowing.

In other words, he was as much a schoolboy as ever.

It was almost as though he had glimpsed into the future when deciding to throw himself wholeheartedly into school life once more. For this coming term was likely to provide the most thrilling sports struggle that St. Frank's had ever witnessed.

Cricket!

The Test Matches!

These were visions to conjure with, and the boys of St. Frank's little imagined how intimately the Test Matches would be entwined with their own school cricket.

THE END.

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BETTER
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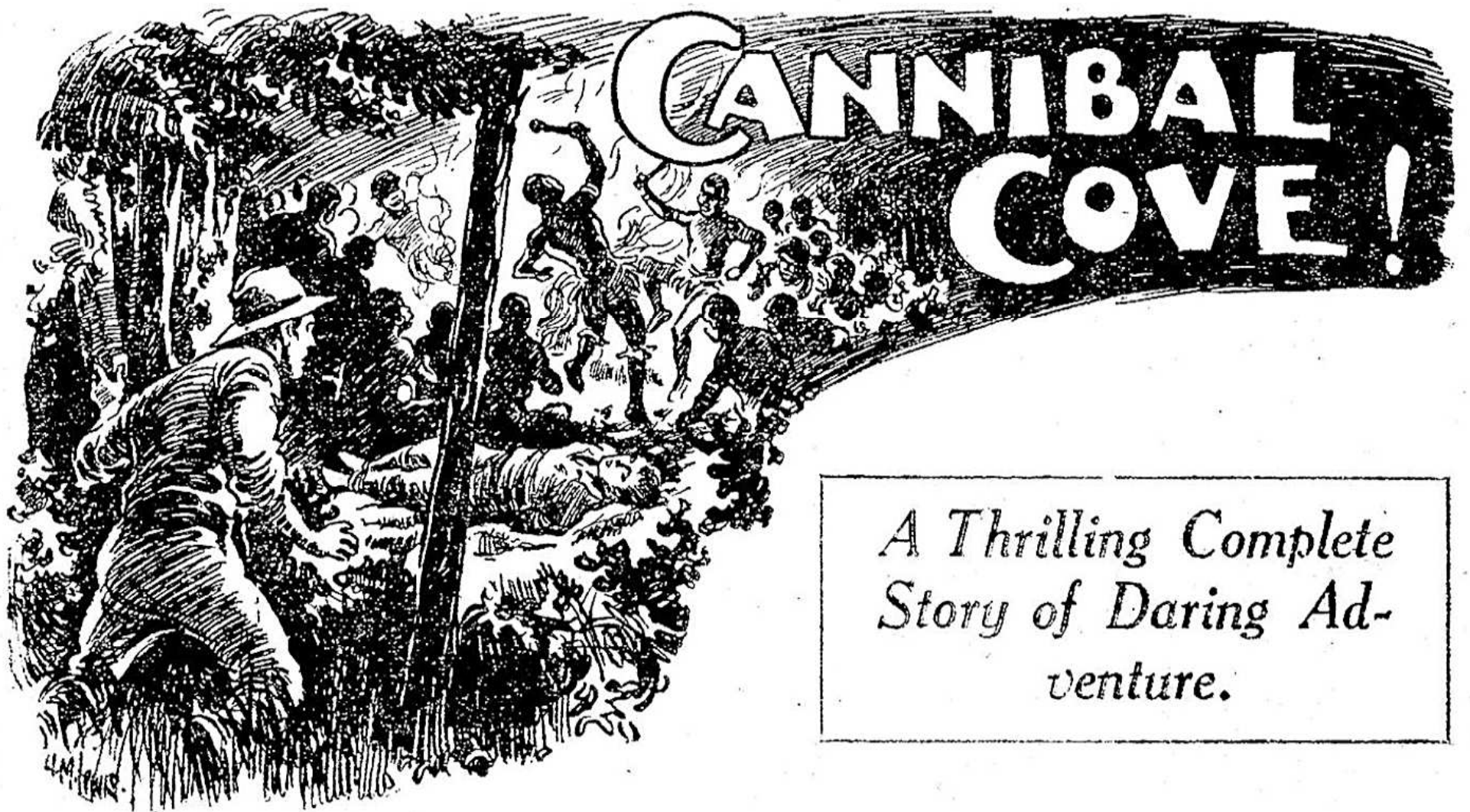
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CHAPTER I.

RED REVOLUTION.

"WELL, good-night, uncle!" said Hart, squeezing the hand of the tall, thin-faced, anxious-eyed gentleman. "I'm awfully sorry about this. But perhaps it's not so bad as you fear. Probably we'll hear better news in the morning."

"We may," faltered Mr. Asprey, in tones which implied the precise opposite to the words used. "But out here, you know, one must be prepared for anything. And this looks decidedly ugly. Still, of course, reports may have been exaggerated."

"No doubt, no doubt!" promptly voiced his stalwart nephew, fastening instantly on this remote possibility. "It's very often so at such times. Anyhow, don't you worry; we'll be all right."

But, once outside, all that cheery optimism vanished.

For, though this was his first visit to Hayti—he had called on his way home from Panama, where he had been working on the great canal—Clive Hart already knew sufficient of that hotbed of strife to be quite sure that this new revolution which had so suddenly broken out must mean serious trouble.

Mr. Asprey, a coffee-planter, had settled near the coast in Hayti, with his sixteen-year-old son, Raymond, and his daughter, Grace.

But, if business had proved largely successful, the locality was anything but a desirable place to live in, and, though a comfortable home was now theirs, the hard-working trio could never really feel secure, surrounded as they were by hostile niggers—blacks so innately savage and bloodthirsty that all the

boasted civilisation of our day has only been able to put the thinnest of veneers upon them!

"I do wish dad would chuck it, and clear off back to the Old Country," remarked Raymond to his newly-arrived cousin. "The wretched hole has never suited him, but he will stick on. This yellow fever's pulled him down frightfully, and I'm positive the vile atmosphere's killing him. Then there's sis. She's a fair brick; don't know what we should have done without her! But, frankly, this is no place for her!"

"Quite so!" nodded Clive. "But uncle knows that, too."

"Oh, yes! Only—well," smiled Raymond, "you know how it is with some people. The more you hammer away, the less they think of budging. Dad sees the point, but he won't be forced."

"Strikes me he will, old man!" grinned the other. "If this row goes on, I reckon he'll jolly well have to make tracks. Heard any more?"

"No. Matain"—Mr. Asprey's faithful negro overseer—"is away now, trying to get news. We've had a tidy few dust-ups here; but my private feeling is this'll be the worst. However, nothing can happen to-night. The bounders are too far off to strike our trail 'fore daylight, even if they steer in this direction. So I'll say night-night, old chap!"

Clive turned in, but not to sleep. For himself he feared nothing. Despite his youth—he was twenty, but looked older—he had faced death more than once. It was of his uncle he thought as he tossed restlessly upon his bed—his uncle, Raymond, and Grace—the sweet, gentle-eyed girl, he had so often romped with in the old days in England. Why, they had grown up to-

gether as children. And here they were all united again after the lapse of years in a strange, wild land, with terrible peril closing in upon them.

Early astir, he learned that Matalu had not returned. But, on coming in from a stroll about midday, Clive found the coffee-planter and his son conversing gravely in low tones.

"Bad news!" spoke the former. "A large band of insurgents, marching hither, are plundering and burning places wholesale; so we'll shortly be up against it!"

"No good fighting," Raymond promptly declared, discerning his father's mind. "It'd be sheer madness to tackle single-handed"—the servants had fled—"all these cut-throat beggars. Once let 'em besiege us, and we're done!"

"But we may be able to obtain help—a cruiser, or perhaps——"

"Too late, dad!" broke in Raymond. "Had we known earlier, when the rumpus was brewing, we might have got assistance, but there's no time now. Besides, think of Grace."

"Yes, yes, I know." Mr. Asprey sighed wearily. "I suppose—— What say you, Clive?"

Like his uncle, Clive was a fighter. He had the same bulldog spirit, his square-set jaw told you that, but he also possessed discretion, and knew when to use it.

"I hate knuckling under to a pack of howling blacks," replied he; "and I guess them's your sentiments, too! But this seems a case of up sticks and run, no matter how much it goes against the grain. Otherwise"—with a grim smile—"we risk a complete wipe-out!"

The planter's hands clenched. To leave all at a moment's notice, to abandon that which the labour of years had wrought, for others to ruthlessly pillage, was hard indeed. Yet it must be.

"You're right," he owned, after a moment's pause. "We'll have to decamp. Have the launch got ready?"

To which Raymond, who had been thoughtfully preparing for the inevitable exodus, made answer that steam was up.

"Then run and tell Grace, and we'll be off at once," cried the planter, slipping some papers into his pocket.

Hardly had this decision been arrived at when a terrific yell burst out from the heights behind the plantation—a fearful, terror-striking roar that could only bear one interpretation.

The revolted blacks were close at hand!

CHAPTER II.

TOUCH AND GO.

THINGS then began to spin!

Clive, sprinting to find Grace, hurried her down the path that led to the quay, while Raymond remained for a moment to help his father

gather a few articles he particularly wished to take.

"It's all right!" soothed Clive, in answer to Grace's imploring cries to them to be quick. "They'll catch us up."

On they sped, the tumult increasing every minute. Louder and louder grew the rebels' shouts. They must be at the house now, thought Clive. He threw back a quick glance. No sign of Mr. Asprey or Raymond!

A moment more brought them to the creek, the launch, and friend Matalu.

Rushing up, the last-named gabbled out anxious inquiries in his curious, debased sort of French; then, scarcely waiting for a reply, the brave fellow, knowing only too well what tremendous danger the absentees were in, tore off to the house with all speed.

One thought leapt to the minds of the runners—Matalu had gone to his death! And if so, did not that of itself imply the heartrending fact that it was now too late to——

Putting Grace aboard, Clive stood ready to cast off, well-nigh bursting in his longing to bound after Matalu, yet restrained by his duty to Grace.

The nerve-torturing moments ticked by. With eyes and ears strained to their utmost, they waited in agonised suspense.

But no one came!

"Oh, Clive," wailed a choking voice, "why don't they come? What can——"

"Wait a minute." Clive's tone was wonderfully composed, but intense suffering was depicted on his face. "Fancy I heard—— Hark!"

Yes, the yelling was rapidly coming their way. A sudden crashing made itself heard. More shouts and trampling feet.

Plainly someone was being hotly pursued.

Nearer came the hunt; and then all in an instant out shot the lanky figure of Mr. Asprey, and panted unsteadily for the launch.

Helping him in, Clive flung himself on the throttle, and got the screw churning just as the pursuers raced madly down to the quay, firing a running fusillade of gun-slugs, which rattled on the smokestack and chipped the boat's paint.

Summoning his fast-ebbing strength, the breathless planter desperately seized the tiller, while Clive stopped further shooting by levelling his Browning as they glided out into the creek.

Overawed by the vicious lead-pumper, the baffled pursuers speedily retreated, and soon returned to their looting.

"Look! They've fired the place already!" cried Grace presently, pointing to a rising column of smoke and a lurid glow.

But where was Raymond? And Matalu?

Questioned the moment they were at a safe distance, Mr. Asprey, bewildered and utterly exhausted, could at first give no coherent reply. But as they raced on, not knowing whether the fleet-footed savages would try and head them off, he recalled that he and Raymond had finally left the

house by different doors—Raymond's object really being to check the enemy's advance, and so increase his father's chance of escape—intending to make for the quay by separate routes.

Believing his son would quickly converge on the path, Mr. Asprey hastened out, to be almost immediately pursued by the flanking-party into whose clutches he had so nearly fallen. Of Matalu he had seen nothing.

What was to be done? Clearly they must return—or one must—while the others went for help.

The distracted father immediately announced his intention of going back, but Clive would not hear of it.

point where was a trail leading to the plantation.

Two hands were gripped in turn, and then, with one last look, Clive Hart disappeared through the gap in the vegetation that crowded to the water's edge.

CHAPTER III.

A MOONLIGHT FIGHT.

CLIVE harboured no delusions regarding his perilous undertaking. That it was fraught with danger he was fully aware. Equally certain was it that he stood little chance of saving his



A queer click told Raymond that his magazine was empty. He had used his last cartridge!

"No, you won't!" he snapped firmly. "I'm going myself! So if you'll put me ashore, I'll be off, uncle."

"But, Clive," began the latter, while Grace looked her admiration for her old chum, "you must not—er—"

"Look here!" cut in Clive. "We can't be far from the sea, and Port au Prince. No, I thought so. Well, you rip on to the port, and see if you can obtain some reinforcements. Meanwhile, I'll make backtracks for the old place. Somehow, I believe Ray'll outwit those brutes yet. Anyhow, I'm going to find him."

After a few further remarks, the launch was put about, Clive being landed at a

cousin, who, in all probability, was now beyond all human aid, or, for that matter, of preserving his own skin. Most likely he would never return—never see again those he had just left. Perfectly conscious of this, he did not flinch or repent his decision.

So, while two aching, prayerful hearts throbbed on their painful way to the sea, Clive swung resolutely inland, grimly determined to rescue Raymond or die in the attempt.

The course, he quickly discovered, was one seldom used—a mere track, curling up through the forest; and he had to force through thick, trailing undergrowth that

seemed to confront him at every twist and turn of the winding, primeval jungle-path.

The day was sweltering, the heat terrific, there being no air to breathe, only a hot, stifling, dank haze that hung over everything, and made the odorous tropical plants drip moisture.

Holding doggedly to it, the perspiring Clive came at last to a clearing. Before crossing this he paused, but there was no one about. Several times he stopped to listen, without hearing anything. But now, on picking up the path afresh, he soon caught sounds from a distance—sounds that proclaimed he was fast nearing the danger zone.

Presently, as he sped on warily, a bend in the path—which was here much better—brought him to an opening, where familiar ground burst into view.

He was now on the edge of the plantation, but little or nothing was visible, for the coffee-bushes cut off all else. Skirting these, still dimly hearing shouts afar off, he shortly emerged close to the ruined homestead.

What he there beheld seemed incredible, like some horribly bad nightmare. Only yesterday all was fair to look upon, and now—

The house had gone! Built mostly of wood, it had blazed as tinder, and only a charred heap marked the spot. The whole place was deserted, but the wreckers were not far away. For as Clive went first to the one solitary outbuilding, a little removed from its ill-fated neighbours, that still remained, he saw in the distance a number of men scaling the mountain-side.

Clearly they had all departed. But where was Raymond? Had he been carried off? Or had the fiends—

Clive strode over to the smouldering debris, where, almost at once, he dropped on his knees with a sharp cry, his gaze falling suddenly on an object partly covered by ashes—a dead body.

Matalu! The face was little disfigured, while the clothes, though scorched, were recognisable. Yes, Matalu; and the loyal old servant and scout had fallen riddled with bullets.

But what of Raymond?

Clive was rising, when his sorrow-and-rage-filled eyes glimpsed something wedged under the poor black's body. A quick pull, and it was in his hand—a sombrero—Raymond's!

Yes, there could be no doubt—the colour was unmistakable. Protected by the body, it had been a little burnt.

Then, did this mean Raymond had also fallen? Clive did not believe so, though he thought well to make sure by further searching.

No; Raymond had been captured—that was the seeker's fixed conclusion, and speedily he set himself to follow the insurgents' trail, which he soon saw was leading seaward.

All was now silent, and nothing of the enemy could be observed; but Clive had a

keen sense of direction, and confidently breasted the slope.

That he would track the Haytians he had little doubt; but would he be in time?

It was this that sent him climbing with such haste, soon to enter the dense woods that ran right down to the shore.

But hardly had he got among the trees, when the sun set, and darkness closed down like a knife, with true tropical celerity, rendering further progress impossible until the moon's advent.

Forced thus to halt, Clive bethought him of some food Grace had considerably thrust into his pocket. Eating a portion, he saved the bulk for later, and then waited, consumed with anxiety and suspense.

What was happening ahead? Doubtless the rebel niggers were now encamped in the very thick of the forest; doubtless, also, the devil-priests were busy preparing for a celebration of those hideous rites and barbarous practices so relished by the cannibal mind of the Haytian black.

No doubt the "witch doctor," or Obeah man, as he is termed, had selected his sacrificial victim, and— Clive shuddered violently, and dug his nails into his palms at the thought of— Ah, the moon at last!

Again afoot, he hurried on, running whenever possible. Stronger grew the light, and faster he sped through the ghostly forest.

Of a sudden a new sound reached his ears a weird noise that quickened his steps, and caused his heart to thump madly.

For that, surely, was the tom-tomming of the Voodoo drums—a signal that the witch-priests were already astir. The orgy had commenced!

Louder grew the beating drums. He pushed on, torn with maddening thoughts of Raymond. Was he there? Was he being— All in an instant the red glare of a fire showed through the trees. The ruddy light increased, and now, not more than a dozen yards ahead, the forest ended abruptly. Beyond was a broad, sandy cove, with the sea showing on the far side, and—

Creeping forward, he beheld a horribly revolting sight.

Around a great camp-fire several eerie, shadowy forms were dancing to a vampire jig, leaping and yelling with the ferocity of demons. Now and again a piercing shriek rang out, whether of joy or pain, or whether uttered at the sight of bloodshed or death itself, Clive could not tell; while with it all was the ceaseless din of the Voodoo drums.

For a moment the watcher's horrified gaze rested on the debasing scene, then stealthily he stole towards another part, where something had already caught his keen eye—a dimly-seen bundle, lying on the ground behind the inhuman throng, apparently quite alone.

Working round cautiously, Clive managed to wriggle up near to the dark shape.

Yes; it was Raymond!

Bound hand and foot, he lay with closed eyes, and a face like death.

Clive had just time to observe this much when, from the edge of the crowd of spectators, two giant negroes detached themselves, and came towards the motionless captive.

Mistaking their purpose, Clive whipped out his knife to sever Raymond's bonds, but ere he could do this they, seeing their charge was still there, turned back, after advancing a few steps.

Now was Clive's opportunity—a far better one than he had hoped for—and he was not slow to avail himself of it.

Worming through the grass to Raymond's ear, he gently spoke his name. Slowly the eyes opened.

"It's me—Clive!" whispered he, slashing at the thongs. "There!" as the last was severed. "Up you get!" He helped him to his feet. "Now, come on!"

But the boy was dazed and cramped, and at first scarcely knew how to stand.

Instantly Clive's strong arms lifted him up and bore him towards cover.

But hardly was this gained when a loud shout, quite near, interrupted a mumbling statement of Raymond's; and Clive, peering forth, saw to his horror three forms advancing—one a great, grotesque figure, whose barbaric head-dress and painted body proclaimed him the dread witch-doctor; the others the guards, who had just discovered the human sacrifice was missing.

"Cut off—I'll follow!" cried Clive, gripping his pistol in swift decision.

Full at the Obeah wretch he aimed. Then, as the hideous man-eating monster pitched forward, his companions at once stopping to attend to him, as the marksman hoped they would, Clive bounded after Raymond.

Down the moonlit path they ran, expecting every instant to have a yelling, blood-thirsty mob at their heels; but the pursuit did not immediately begin.

"Hark!" panted Raymond, as indignant yells burst forth in the rear. "They're coming; but the brutes haven't hit the right trail yet!"

They flogged on. Gamely went Raymond, but he rocked heavily; and Clive, seeing how spent he was, took his arm.

"We mustn't stop!" gasped he. "Those brutes will spread out in no time. This track leads to the creek, and if we can only reach it, there's a boat near by, and——"

"Yes; but don't talk," ordered Clive. "How far is the water?"

"Oh, barely another mile, I should say!"

"Then we ought to do it."

"Unless they're playing to cut us off or hem us in. Instead of our having the lead, you imagine they may be ahead now—waiting to pounce on us!"

"I see." Clive slipped a spare pistol into his chum's hand. "Well, we'll be ready. Keep your eyes skinned!"

In silence they plunged on. All seemed quiet, and they were rapidly nearing the creek, when a series of yells burst out, and almost immediately several shadowy forms were seen racing up, while here and there others could be discerned flitting between the trees.

Speedily it flashed on the hunted pair that the wily savages had drawn a cordon around them.

With the road blocked ahead it was useless going on, and Clive, knowing they would have to fight, spurred for the one deserted spot that remained—a big tree.

As they gained this—they were in a glade with little or no bush cover—a score of negroes sprang from the surrounding timber, brandishing all sorts of weapons.

Even in that moment Clive, who rarely missed a point, espied another detachment working round to the rear.

Shouting to Raymond to attend to these from his side, he took the main body.

Crack, crack, crack! went the powerful Browning.

Checked by the rapid fire, the savages returned to the trees.

Ammunition was now getting low, and Clive was wondering whether they should make a dash for the creek, when a bullet sang past his head, followed by others.

The hidden blacks were sniping, and only by dropping flat on the instant was the ensuing volley avoided.

"Lucky they're such rotten shots, or we'd have been plugged 'fore now!" muttered Raymond. "Wonder what——"

Clive's voice cut in sharply:

"Quick! Your crowd have joined the others for a combined attack! We're in for it now!"

Hopeless indeed it seemed, but shoulder to shoulder the chums boldly faced the oncoming horde, resolved that if they must die they would die like Britons, fighting to the last.

Craftily, in fan-shaped formation, the blacks came on, discharging their scattered shots, most of which went wide. Albeit, several hit the stem, and one ploughed through Clive's hat, while another pinged close to Raymond's ear.

It was the finish—must be. For, though the automatic still rained lead, ammunition was almost exhausted, and withal the savages pressed on.

A queer click told Raymond that his magazine was empty. He had used his last cartridge!

Clive had scarcely half a dozen left. Another minute would see those gone, then it would be fists and—the end!

Suddenly in the very midst of that despairing crisis a ringing cheer and the quick barking of rifles was heard, and next

instant the desperate defenders saw a squad of bluejackets hurl out on the surprised savages, who gave back and fled right and left.

"A rescue! Hurrah!" boomed Clive. "We're saved, Ray!"

But Raymond, overcome by the strain, had slid to the ground in a swoon.

At Port au Prince Mr. Asprey, finding

H.M.S. Speedy just arrived to inquire about the reported revolution, at once interviewed her commander, who forthwith despatched the steam pinnace up the creek, retaining Grace and her father on board the cruiser.

Thus directed and urged on by the sounds, the rescue was accomplished in the nick of time. Indeed, though Clive Hart and Raymond Asprey have since tumbled into other hot corners, they readily agree this one in wild Hayti was easily the tightest of all.

THE END.

ADDITIONAL ATTRACTIONS FOR NEXT WEEK!

NELSON LEE AND NIPPER

are featured next Wednesday in the first of a new series of complete detective-adventure yarns, telling of their exciting exploits on Special Cases.

"THE CLUE OF THE CRIMSON DUST!"

is the title of next week's thrilling story.

Look out for

"GETTING READY FOR CRICKET!"

This chat on the great summer game has been penned by an expert cricketer, and he has much of interest to tell. His article is packed tight with helpful hints, and is the first of a number which will appear week by week.

And

DON'T FORGET

that the next issue of the Nelson Lee Library will be

PERMANENTLY ENLARGED!

BIGGER AND BETTER
THAN EVER!

CAREERS FOR BOYS

By A. C. HORTH

PLASTERING

THE work of the plasterer in its higher branches is highly skilled, and the craftsman who has had experience in the ornamental branches of the work is in demand. Plastering is a craft of some antiquity, and there exists in many of the older houses and public buildings of the country fine examples of the plasterers' craft, in the form of moulded cornices and decorative ceilings. The Worshipful Company of Plasterers takes a keen interest in the training of apprentices, and offer various prizes for proficiency in examinations; this Company is also associated with the Worshipful Company of Carpenters and other City Companies in the conduct of the Trades Training School, Titchfield Street, London.

THE OPENINGS FOR PLASTERERS.

In the great revival of building which is going on at the present time, the plasterer is in considerable demand, and although the bricklayer is often employed to do rough plastering, known as rendering, the plasterer is required for the finishing of walls and ceilings in new buildings, as well as for the repair of plaster work in old buildings. The apprenticeship system of training is not general at present, but it is included in the general scheme put forward by the Education Committee of the Industrial Council for the Building Industry (Building Trades Parliament.) Notwithstanding the fact that substitutes for plaster-work are being used in some types of houses, it is certain that the demand for plaster walls and ceilings will continue, and that skilled craftsmen will continue at the same level as to-day.

WHAT PLASTERING WORK INCLUDES.

The simplest form of plaster-work is seen on the spreading of mortar on brickwork surrounding fireplaces and chimneys, etc., but the greater proportion of the work is done in connection with laths, expanded metal or woven wire to provide a smooth

coating over the walls and for the formation of ceilings. Generally, the work is fairly heavy, and requires strength, but the heaviest part of the work, that of mixing the plaster and carrying it from place to place during the building operation, is the work of the plasterer's labourer, and is classed as unskilled labour. The plasterer has to undertake such constructions as roughcast, which is a popular form of construction for bungalows, and stucco. The higher branches of the work include panelled ceilings, all kinds of columns, pilasters, pediments, and cornices, and all forms of decorative mouldings.

THE TRAINING OF THE PLASTERER.

The plasterer has, during his training, to know the names and qualities of the various limes in general use, the method of slaking, and the purpose for which each variety is suited. The various qualities and proportion of admixture for various limes, cements and fresco plastering must be understood, as well as the uses of hair and antiseptic fibre. The use of plaster of Paris and the various plasters and cements such as Portland, Roman, Keenes, Parian, selenitic, adamant, etc., should be known. The method of keying the plaster on either wooden laths, or lattice work formed by expanded metal or wire, should be understood, and the plasterer should know the best methods of securing the laths to particular forms of construction. Ornamental plaster-work includes the setting out and the construction of moulds and moulding in plaster, wax, gelatine, and sulphur, as well as in cement. It also includes special methods of forming cores of laths and by other means, and also of attaching previously prepared ornamental features for domes, ceilings, walls, etc.

THE QUALIFYING EXAMINATIONS FOR PLASTERERS.

The recognised qualifying examination for plasterers is that held by the Department of Technology of the City and Guilds of London Institute. It is divided into Grade I and the final examination, and in connection with the latter the candidate has to submit actual specimens of work done during the year previous to the examination. A good knowledge of freehand drawing and of clay modelling is required, and in the course of preliminary training it will be necessary for the apprentice to attend art classes, in order to learn something about classic ornament and design before he can attempt to do any real practical work in the more ornamental branches of his work. The Worshipful Company of Plasterers offer £8, £7, and £5 for the three highest examination results each year. These prizes are given with the silver medal of the Institute.

AS SIMPLE AS A B C.

INSTRUCTIONS.—Reader Applying for Membership. Cut out TWO complete Application Forms from Two copies of this week's issue of THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY. On one of the forms fill in Section A, crossing out Sections B and C by running the pen diagonally across both Sections. Then write clearly your full name and address at bottom of form. The second form is for your new reader, who fills in Section C, crosses out Sections A and B, and writes his name and address at bottom of form. Both forms are then pinned together and sent to the Chief Officer, The St. Frank's League, c/o THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY, Gough House, Gough Square, London, E.C.4.

Member Applying for Bronze Medal: It will be necessary for you to obtain six new readers for this award. For each new reader TWO complete forms are needed, and these must be taken from copies of the latest issue of THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY at the time when the forms are sent in. On one of the forms fill in Section B, crossing out Sections A and C, and write your name and address at bottom of form. The other form is for your new reader, who fills in Section C, crosses out Sections

A and B, and writes his name and address at the bottom of the form. Now pin both forms together and send them to the Chief Officer, as above. One new reader will then be registered against your name, and when six new readers have been registered, you will be sent the St. Frank's League bronze medal. There is nothing to prevent you from sending in forms for two or more new readers at once, provided the forms are taken from the latest issue of THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY at the time when the forms are sent in.

Bronze medallists wishing to qualify for the silver or gold medals can apply in the same way as for the bronze medal, filling in Section B, which has been revised for this purpose. Every introduction they make will be credited to them, so that when the League reaches the required number of members, they can exchange their bronze medal for a silver or gold one, according to the number of introductions with which they are credited.

These Application Forms can be posted for ½d., providing the envelope is not sealed and no letter is enclosed.

ST. FRANK'S LEAGUE APPLICATION FORM No. 35. April 24, 1926.

SECTION

A

READER'S APPLICATION FOR MEMBERSHIP.

Being a regular reader of "THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY," I desire to become enrolled as a Member of THE ST. FRANK'S LEAGUE, and to qualify for all such benefits and privileges as are offered to Members of the League. I hereby declare myself to be a staunch supporter of "THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY" and THE ST. FRANK'S LEAGUE, and that I have introduced Our Paper to one new reader, whose signature to certify this appears on second form attached hereto. Will you, therefore, kindly forward me Certificate of Enrolment with Membership Number assigned to me.

SECTION

B

MEMBER'S APPLICATION FOR MEDAL AWARDS.

I, Member No..... (give Membership No.) hereby declare that I have introduced one more new reader, whose signature to certify this appears on second form attached hereto. This makes me..... (state number of introductions up to date) introductions to my credit.

SECTION

C

NEW READER'S DECLARATION.

I hereby declare that I have been introduced by (give name of introducer) to this issue of "THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY," which I will read with a view to becoming a regular reader of this paper.

(FULL NAME)

(ADDRESS)

IMPORTANT.—Complete and post off this form before the next issue of THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY is on sale. Otherwise the form becomes out of date and useless.

A SPECIAL MESSAGE FROM YOUR EDITOR

Bigger and Better than Ever.

Those five words embody the whole meaning of the sweeping changes which will mark next Wednesday's issue of the NELSON LEE LIBRARY. Everything about it will be bigger—and better.

Enormous expense is involved in this enlargement of your favourite weekly, and it all boils down to the fact that you will, for the future, get a great deal more for your money. The enlargement is not temporary, not for one issue only—**BUT FOR GOOD AND ALL!**

IN the past, many readers have written to me suggesting that, if the NELSON LEE LIBRARY could be improved, it might be made larger. Of course, this was fairly evident; at the same time, such a change would cost a great deal of money, and was not a thing to be lightly undertaken. Lately, however, the popularity of the St. Frank's stories has greatly increased, more fellows are reading them than ever before—and the result is that you are all reaping the benefit.

It would have been possible to enlarge the paper by cutting off some of the pages, but this was hardly what you fellows wanted. It was no good making the paper bigger in appearance only. I did not feel justified in permanently enlarging the NELSON LEE LIBRARY until it could really be enlarged throughout. So the new series which commences next week will contain exactly the same number of pages as heretofore—only they will all be bigger!

On cover page 2 you will find a small reproduction of the picture which will adorn the front of next Wednesday's great issue. The picture of the cover is rather small, but it will be big enough for you to get some idea of what to look out for; it depicts an incident from one of the finest St. Frank's yarns that have ever come from the pen of Edwy Searles Brooks.

This story—"SPORTS MAD AT ST. FRANK'S!"—is the first of a new series of yarns. Mr. Brooks has been working on these stories for some months now, and I am sure you will agree, when you read them, that he has never written anything better. As you all know, the Australians are very much in the limelight just now, and their visit is the theme which Mr. Brooks has taken for this series.

Put briefly, the idea is a series of school-boy test matches—St. Frank's against a team of Australian schoolboys!

At the same time, there is a sort of sports carnival at St. Frank's—everybody goes

sports mad! When that sort of thing happens, study and classes are liable to be somewhat neglected—with resultant trouble!

I doubt if I can whet your appetite further than by saying that of all the St. Frank's yarns that I have read—and I have read a few!—I like this series best of all. And so will you!

To back up Mr. Brooks' great effort, I have secured a splendid new series of detective adventure stories featuring Nelson Lee and Nipper. Each yarn will be complete in the issue in which it appears, and the stories will deal with the Special Cases of the world-famous detective.

By "Special Cases" is meant those investigations which Nelson Lee and Nipper make during holidays, or when the detective chances to be called away from St. Frank's in order to lend his powers of deduction in unravelling the mystery of some baffling crime.

There is not the least doubt but that you will thoroughly enjoy these stories. They are real detective yarns—yarns that will grip, mystify and thrill.

The St. Frank's League is going very strong indeed; fresh enrolments are being made by every post, and members now number very many thousands. But we still want many more readers to join this ever expanding circle of friends. With the wonderful improvements beginning in the Old Paper next week, you should find no difficulty in getting that one introduction of a new reader to enable you to qualify for Membership of the League. And, if you are already a member, you can secure without any effort the coveted Bronze Medal, for it will only be necessary to show a copy of our forthcoming issue to your chums and they will become readers automatically. Finally, I ask you in the cause of friendship to make up your mind to commemorate next week's great event in the history of the NELSON LEE LIBRARY by enrolling your name as a Member of the St. Frank's League.

"ALL ABOARD FOR WEMBLEY!"

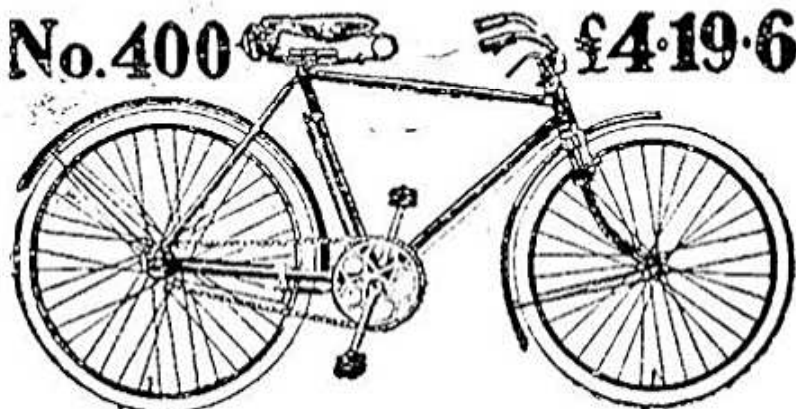
Lads, look at this! It's a tip-top extra-long complete yarn about the Cup Final. You'll find it in this week's—

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