

THE CHUMS OF ST. FRANK'S UNDER CANVAS

THE NELSON LEE

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A ferocious tiger at large in the St. Frank's camp! Thrills and excitement in this week's grand long complete school yarn of Nipper & Co.

New Series No. 77.

OUT ON WEDNESDAY.

July 11th, 1931.

Renewed Onslaughts from Amos Whittle to oust St. Frank's Campers!

PERIL CAMP!



CHAPTER 1.

St. Frank's Under Canvas!

"I SAY, Travers, let me clean them for you!"

Teddy Long, of the Remove at St. Frank's, ran eagerly up to the tent where Vivian Travers was busily scratching the mud from a pair of brown shoes.

"What's that?" said Travers, in surprise.

"Let me clean those shoes for you, old man!" suggested Teddy Long.

Travers eyed him wonderingly.

"Do you know, Long, I thought you said that all the time," he remarked.

"But I couldn't quite believe it."

"Oh, I say!"

"What's the matter with you?" went on Travers wonderingly. "You're not ill, are you?"

"Of course not! I——"

"And you don't want to borrow any money?"

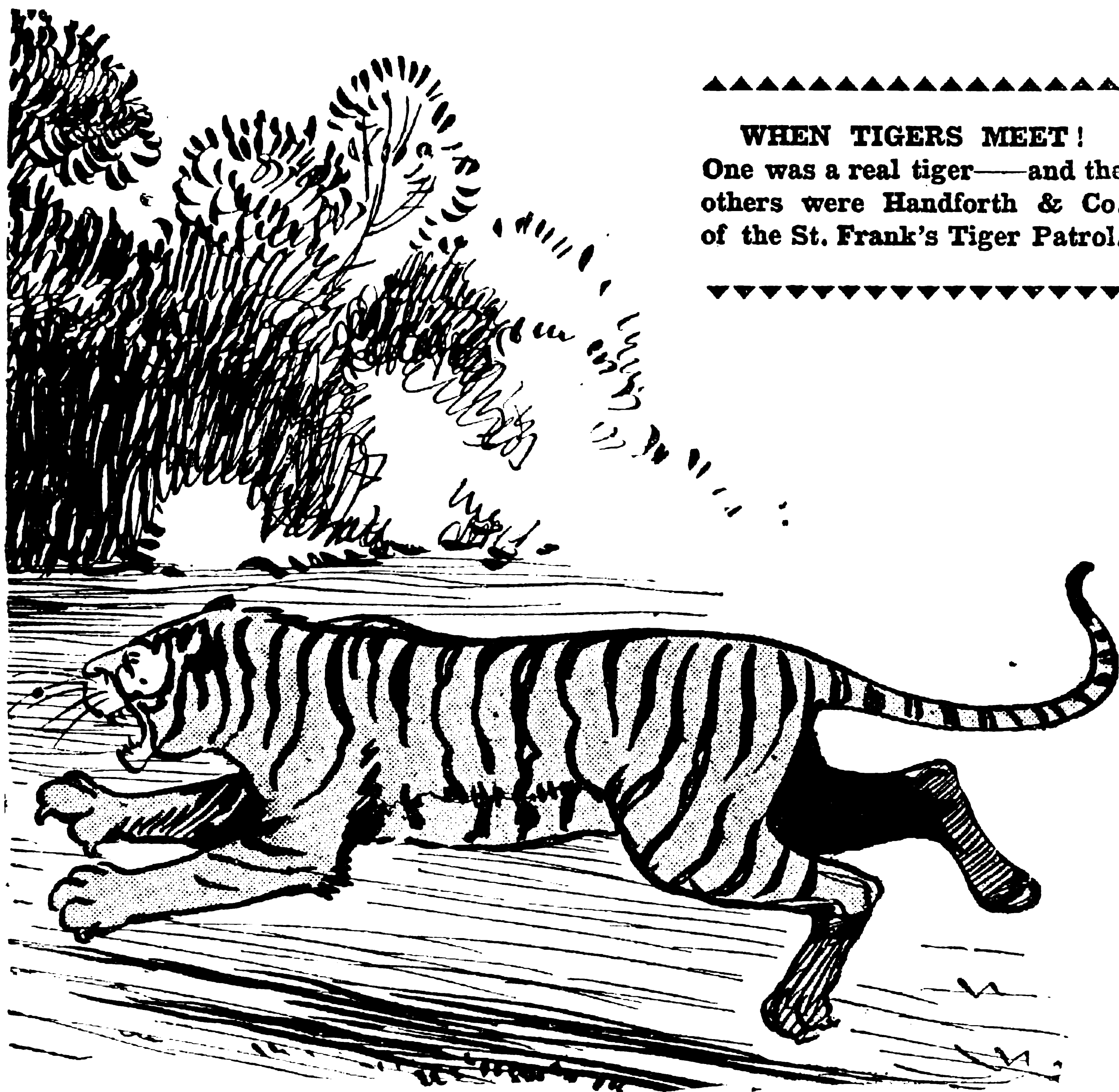
"Oh, really, Travers!" protested Teddy Long indignantly.

"Yet you come along and offer to clean my shoes," said Travers, shaking his head. "Well, well!! Wonders will never cease! You're quite sure you don't want to borrow something?"

"Chuck it, Travers!" said Teddy complainingly. "Honest Injun, I haven't the slightest idea of borrowing any

Stirring long complete school yarn which hums with excitement.

EDWY SEARLES
By
BROOKS



▲▲▲▲▲▲▲▲▲▲▲▲▲▲▲▲
WHEN TIGERS MEET!
One was a real tiger—and the
others were Handforth & Co.
of the St. Frank's Tiger Patrol.

money, or—or anything! Can't a chap be friendly? I thought I'd like to help, that's all."

Travers eyed him more curiously than ever. Teddy Long was the champion cadger of the Remove; he seldom, if ever, did anything for anybody without payment—or, at least, without the expectation of payment. His present offer, therefore, was open to suspicion.

It was nearly tea-time, and that, in itself, was significant. Teddy Long had a habit of rolling up just when a meal was commencing. He had a wonderful nose for a feed. He smelt it from afar,

so to speak. Not that there was any feed in prospect here. This Remove tent was shared by Vivian Travers, Sir Jimmy Potts, and Skeets Rossiter—and as these three juniors belonged to the Tiger Patrol, of the 1st St. Frank's Scout Troop, they were all more or less under the orders of Edward Oswald Handforth, the patrol leader. Handforth and Church and McClure, who occupied the next tent, had gone into the village to procure the wherewithal for tea.

It was a hot, sultry July afternoon. Up at the school, only a few hundred yards away, a 1st XI cricket

match was in progress on Big Side. Nipper and many of his men were practising on Little Side.

Not that the camp was anything like deserted; there were four or five prefects on duty; a number of Fifth-Formers were lounging about, taking things easily; and juniors were to be seen here and there, too. Nowadays, the camp was never left without its vigilance committee.

The school was only under canvas because of the eccentricity of old Jeremy Whittle, now deceased, who had made a clause in his will to the effect that the Half Mile Meadow should become the property of the school if the school camped on that meadow for the period of one calendar month.

The Half Mile Meadow was a delightful stretch of pastureland lying just beyond the school paddock, which bordered it on one side. The other three sides were bordered by the River Stowe, Bellton Wood, and the quiet country lane which led to the school. Here the camp had been established, in accordance with the instructions of the will—and the St. Frank's fellows had been having a somewhat hectic time.

For Amos Whittle, the old man's nephew, and the owner of the big saw-mills near Bannington, had his eye on the Half Mile Meadow, too. It was a condition of Uncle Jeremy's will that if St. Frank's failed to obey the exact letter of the clause, the property should go to Amos.

And Amos badly wanted the Half Mile Meadow as a site for his great new saw-mills. St. Frank's was determined that no ugly and noisy saw-mill should be erected close to the school.

So the affair had developed into a kind of warfare.

Pretending to be friendly at first, Amos Whittle was now frankly an enemy. He had been plotting and scheming to get the boys out of the encampment. For if the Half Mile Meadow was vacated by the St. Frank's fellows, even for one single minute, Amos Whittle would have the law on his side, and he could claim the property.

Quite recently, he had "accidentally" made a breach in the Edgemore Dam, and the encampment had been completely flooded. But the boys, utilising a great load of timber from one of Whittle's barges, had built a skeleton-like staging, on which the camp had been erected. The breach in the dam now repaired, the water had subsided, and the camp was "as you were."

And Whittle, for some days, had not even been seen. Many of the St. Frank's fellows believed that Whittle had given up the thing as a bad job. Other fellows, knowing Whittle better, were more on their guard than ever. His inactivity probably portended mischief. And the vigilance committee, composed of seniors and juniors, had been formed. Half a dozen members of the committee, at all times of the day and night, were pledged to remain on duty, no matter what happened.

"THANKS all the same, dear old fellow, but I can clean these shoes myself," said Travers pleasantly.

"I don't mind lending a hand——"

"That's all right," nodded Travers. "You can buzz off."

Teddy Long grunted, and walked away. It was a bit thick for Travers to be so beastly suspicious. Passing round some of the tents, Teddy Long discovered Archie Glenthorne fiddling with a spirit-stove.

"Hallo!" said Teddy eagerly. "Want a hand?"

Archie looked round.

"Not exactly, old tomato," he replied.

"What I really want is a match."

"Good egg! Here's one!"

"To say nothing of some methylated spirit," went on Archie. "I believe the dashed thing is empty. It's all very well for the chappies to go off, leaving me to boil the dashed kettle, but they might at least——"

"That's all right!" interrupted Teddy. "I'll attend to the spirit-stove, Archie. I'm always willing to oblige, you know."

Archibald Winston Derek Glenthorne regarded him steadily through his monocle.

"Do you want to borrow something, Long, you frightful blighter?" he asked.

"No, not at all!"

"Do you want to be invited to tea?"

"Certainly not!"

"You're offering this assistance purely and absolutely out of the goodness of your heart?"

"Yes!"

"Good gad!" ejaculated Archie, startled. "Then go ahead, laddie! But, odds mysteries and riddles, I'm blithered if I can understand it!"

And Archie lounged luxuriously on a rug and a couple of cushions whilst Teddy Long busied himself with the spirit-stove. Teddy soon had some spirit—borrowed, without permission, from another tent—and before long the stove was going well, and the kettle was over the flames.

"That's all right," said Teddy cheerfully. "She's going fine now, Archie. Only too pleased to have been of service."

He nodded, and went his way, leaving Archie in a more or less stunned condition. For Teddy Long to perform any service without suggesting a monetary return—even in the shape of a loan—was unheard of. Archie was never much good at mental problems, and he gave this one up, assuring himself that time alone would solve the riddle.

He was quite right. Two minutes later Teddy Long drifted back, paused uncertainly, and then gave a little cough.

"Oh, by the way, Archie," he said casually. "I suppose you know there's a circus in the village?"

Archie opened his eyes.

"A which?" he asked. "Oh, I see what you mean! You mean one of those circuses? A thing with a tent and clowns and things?"

"Yes," said Teddy eagerly. "It's in the field, just on the other side of the bridge, near the village. Holtz's Gigantic Circus and Menagerie. It's only here for one evening, you know. I—I was just wondering if you were going?"

"It's not at all an unsnappy idea, old lad," said Archie, nodding. "The trouble is, the dashed seats at these circuses are so blightingly uncomfortable. I mean to say, bare boards and all that sort of frightful rot."

"No fear!" said Teddy. "You can get reserved seats for two-and-four—proper seats, with backs and cushions and everything!"

He was drawing upon his imagination somewhat, but Archie was slightly off his guard.

"Really?" he said. "That sounds fairly juicy. Cushion seats, what?"

"I'm—I'm going into the village," said Teddy carelessly. "Always glad enough to do a favour for you, Archie. If you'd like me to book a seat for you, I don't mind a bit. I thought perhaps you and some of your pals would be going to the circus. And it's always better to book your seats in advance, you know—especially as the circus is only here for one evening."

"Oh, rather!" agreed Archie. "Stout fellow! I dare say a few of the lads would care to witness the good old show. Here's ten bob, and I shall be frightfully obliged if you'll book me four seats. You can keep the change for yourself, laddie."

Teddy made a swift mental calculation.

"Here, but I say, I can't book a seat for myself for eightpence!" he protested.

"Eh?"

"Didn't you just say that you'll treat me if I book the seats?" asked Teddy boldly. "I shall need another one-and-eightpence."

Archie eyed him sadly as he forked out a two-shilling piece.

"I thought there was a catch in it, dash you!" he said. "So that's why you've been buzzing round lighting spirit-stoves, and so forth? Good gad! You can book a seat for yourself, you frightful blighter, but see that you book it a dashed long way from where I'm sitting. I mean to say, I want to enjoy the show!"

Teddy grinned, took the money, and sailed off. And Archie Glenthorne, closing his eyes, at least had the gratification of knowing that the riddle of Teddy Long's amazing behaviour was solved.

"DOESN'T look much of a show," said Handforth critically.

He and Church and McClure were standing in Bellton Lane, looking into the meadow on the other side of the bridge. The great tent was erected, and all round about it were caravans and smaller tents, to say nothing of a lavish display of soiled bunting. The chief impression upon one's mind was dinginess.

"It might not be so bad," said Church. "Anyhow, you can't expect a whacking great circus to come to a small place like Bellton. I vote we go this evening."

"Rather!" said McClure. "It'll be a change, anyhow. We can get in for a bob."

Handforth was not very enthusiastic.

"It looks a mouldy affair to me," he said disparagingly. "We'd better give it a miss. If a circus isn't really good—By George!"

He broke off, staring. For at that moment a slim, graceful, dark-eyed girl had emerged from one of the caravans. She stood at the doorway for a moment, then tripped down the steps, and vanished into one of the tents.

"That must have been Zena, the Girl Without Fear," said Church casually. "Haven't you seen the posters, Handy? She's the girl who goes into the lion's cage, and——"

"H'm! Perhaps we'd better go, after all," said Handforth casually. "I'd forgotten about the lions. It's a menagerie, too, isn't it? I dare say the show will be worth seeing for the lion alone."

His chums grinned.

CHAPTER 2.

St. Frank's at the Circus!

"To say nothing of the dainty lion-tamer," murmured Church.

"Eh?" said Handforth, with a start. "Don't be an ass, you fathead! Let's go and book some seats."

Church and McClure were not fooled. Handforth's only object in booking the seats, now, was an excuse for entering the field. He was hoping to gain another glimpse of that dark-haired, dark-eyed damsel. But he was disappointed. She did not appear again. However, the seats were booked, and Church and McClure was satisfied. Circuses, even second-rate circuses, were few and far between; and they were quite ready to enjoy the show at Edward Oswald's expense.

They went into the village, and Handforth now had a dreamy look in his eyes. One brief glimpse of that girl had been sufficient. Wild horses could not have kept Handforth away from the circus now. He was like that. In one moment he could be smitten.

"Hallo! Look at the stilt-walker," grinned McClure, as they entered the little village High Street. "By jingo! He must be a clever chap to walk on those high stilts."

"Rot!" said Handforth. "Stilt-walking is easy enough. Any ass can do it."

"Even you might be able to," agreed McClure.

"Of course!" said Handforth. "If I had half a chance I'd jolly well show you!"

The stilt-walker, dressed as a clown, was attracting a good deal of attention. His stilts were fifteen or sixteen feet high, and he towered above a yelling, excited crowd of village children as he stalked up and down.

A sudden gleam came into Handforth's eyes as the stilt-walker, evidently desiring a rest, propped himself against one of the upper windows of the George Tavern. Here he disengaged himself from his stilts—long trousers included—and vanished through the window, leaving his stilts propped against the wall.

"Popping in for a refresher, I suppose," said Church. "I don't blame him on a warm day like this."

"Look at those stilts!" said Handforth eagerly. "By George! Not two minutes ago I was wondering if I would get a chance—and here it is!"

"Eh?" ejaculated Mac. "Look here, Handy, you mustn't do anything silly—"

"Silly be blowed!" interrupted Handforth. "There are those stilts, and I'm jolly well going to get into them! I'll show you how easy it is to walk on stilts!"

BEFORE Church and McClure could detain him, Handforth had walked into the hotel entrance of the George Tavern. He had seen that the stilts were against a landing window—and he knew exactly how to get there. As he had anticipated, the hall was empty, and nobody challenged him as he made his way upstairs.

A moment later, Church and McClure were startled to see their leader at the window; and Handforth promptly proceeded to affix the stilts.

"The silly chump will injure himself!" muttered Church. "Don't you think we'd better give the circus chap the tip?"

"Can't very well do that," said McClure. "It would be like sneaking. Blow the ass! It'll teach him a lesson if he comes a cropper."

Handforth was a fellow with an extraordinary amount of confidence in his own abilities; and the cool manner in which he claimed that stilt-walking was child's play had exasperated Church and McClure considerably. The worst of Handforth, however, was that he never learned by experience. He was always getting hard knocks because of his "swank," but he came up smiling every time.

Handforth, sitting on the sill, found that he could insert his legs into the wide stilt-trousers, and it was only a matter of a few moments to adjust the straps.

"I say, Handy, go easy!" urged Church, crossing the road. "You'll only get yourself into trouble. You haven't any right to pinch those stilts——"

"Who's pinching them?" interrupted Handforth. "I'm not doing any harm, am I? The circus people ought to be jolly pleased! I'm giving 'em a free advert!"

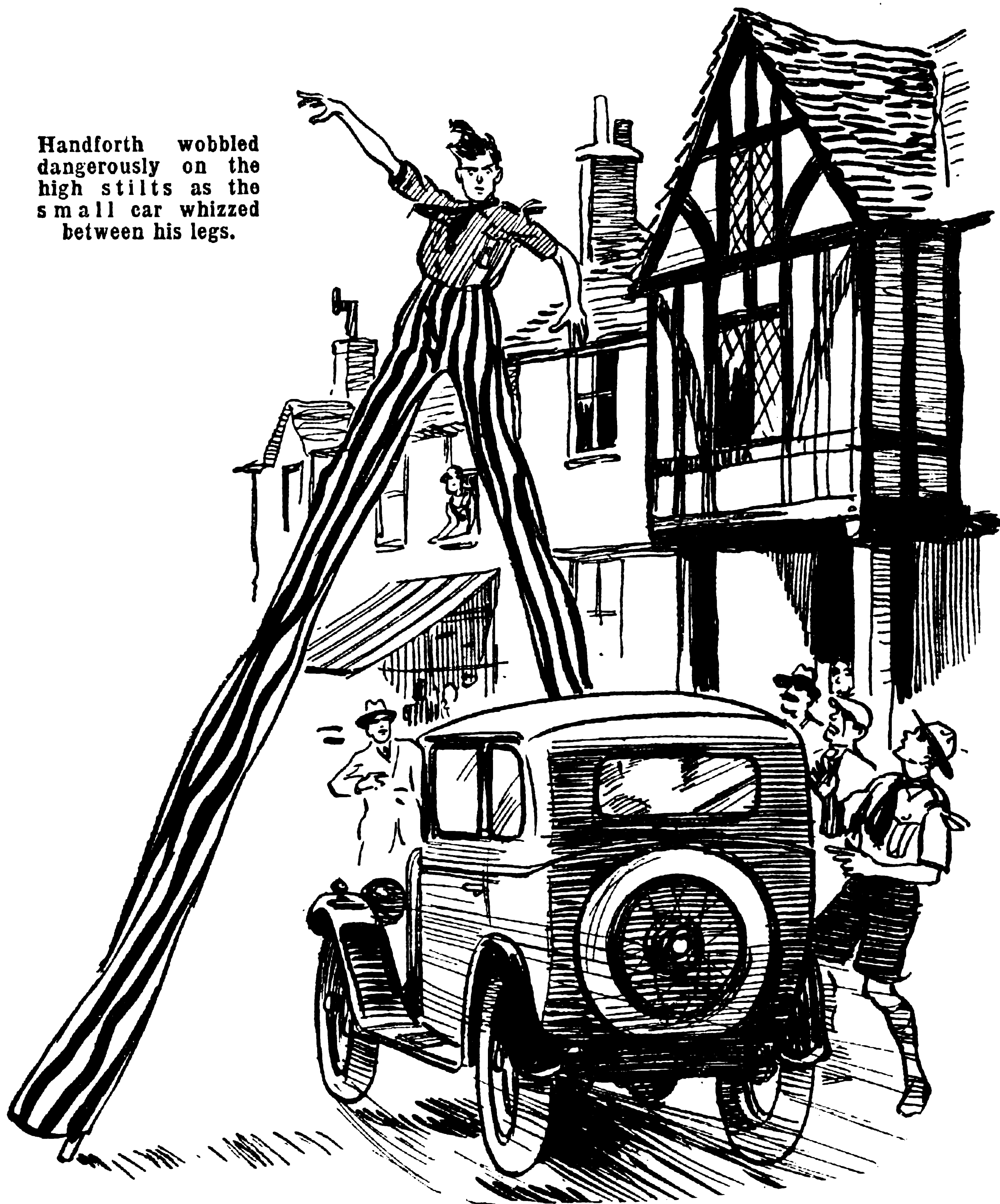
"Supposing you lose your balance?" asked Mac. "Can you jump?"

"Not very well," replied Handforth. "These giddy things are strapped to my feet and my legs, too. If the stilts go, I shall have to go with 'em. But don't you worry—I can keep my balance all right!"

"You'll break your silly neck!" said Church, worried.

Handforth was beginning to have a few doubts of his own. Now that he had the stilts fixed, the ground seemed to be an enormous way below. And he suddenly realised that his chums' warning was not entirely unjustified. If anything

Handforth wobbled dangerously on the high stilts as the small car whizzed between his legs.



happened to cause him to lose his balance, he would inevitably be flung the full length of the stilts—and there would be no possible way of breaking his fall. In fact, he was just beginning to realise that stilt-walking of this kind was, after all, a specialised art.

But he couldn't back out of it now! Not only his chums were looking, but a crowd of village people, too. He would be the laughing-stock of Belton if he turned tail, at the last moment. He would probably be the laughing-stock, in any case, but he didn't quite realise that at the moment.

"Rats!" he murmured. "It's easy enough! I've walked on stilts before."

He had—on four-foot stilts. But these were over fifteen feet, and they had no handgrips. Cautiously he hoisted himself upright, holding on to the hotel wall.

"Crumbs!" he breathed, inwardly dismayed. "Oh, well! I dare say I shall be all right once I get a start!"

He took his courage in both hands, moved outwards, and a sinking sensation assailed him in the pit of the stomach as he saw the hotel wall pass out of his reach.

"Whoa! Steady!" gasped Church, dodging out of the way. "Look out, Handy! Oh, you hopeless ass!"

Handforth, gulping, was certainly stilt-walking; but, once started, he found it impossible to stop. If he had stopped, he would have lost his balance. All he could do was to take great strides, and move onwards towards the centre of the road. It was a most alarming sensation.

"I'm—I'm all right!" he panted. "Clear out of my way—that's all! Didn't I tell you——"

"Hey! Look out! There's a car coming!" roared McClure.

Handforth had no time to look round. Perhaps it was just as well, anyhow. A little Austin Seven, driven fairly fast, shot down the village street. The surprised driver, catching sight of Handforth too late, had no time even to swerve. In the same second Handforth took a wild stride. The Austin Seven shot forward, and just managed to squeeze itself between his elongated, outstretched legs.

"My hat!" gasped Church. "I—I thought it was all over with him!"

"It's all over now!" exclaimed Mac. "At least, Handy's all over!"

It was true. Handforth, having gained the middle of the road, was unable to keep his balance. No doubt he had been thoroughly unnerved by that car shooting beneath him. He swayed sideways, his arms beating the air like mill-sails. Then, unable to save himself, he toppled over, falling full length with the stilts.

But it might have been worse. He might, for example, have crashed upon the hard road. He might have hurtled through a window. What he actually did was to fall across the hedge which divided the George Tavern yard from the road—and this, incidentally, broke his fall—and topple full length into a large trough of pig swill.

He sat up spluttering and gasping, festooned with potato-peelings, odds and ends of cabbage and other green stuff, and dripping with unsavoury moisture.

Church and McClure were not surprised, when they reached him, to find that he was unhurt. In some extraordinary way, Handforth generally managed to come out of these things scatheless. But if he wasn't hurt, he was certainly cured.

At least, he was cured by the time his chums had got him free from those stilts, and by the time he had forked out a ten-shilling note to pay for the damage to the hedge, and another ten-shilling note to compensate the real stilt-walker for the tears in the long trousers.

And as Handforth returned to the camp, he gave it as his considered opinion that stilt-walking was a much over-rated pastime.

THE "big top" was ablaze with light, noisy with the eager shouts of children, and noisier with the blare of the so-called band.

The show was about to commence. Outside, it was still broad daylight, of course, but the dazzling electric lights within the tent gave a false impression of night. Two or three clowns were already fooling about in the ring.

"Lucky for these circus people that our camp was pretty near by," remarked Wilson, of the Sixth, as he glanced over the crowd.

The big tent was nearly full. It was an excellent "house"; but well over sixty per cent. of those present were St. Frank's fellows. Seniors and juniors alike had patronised the circus, with the juniors at practically full strength.

There was no need to worry about the camp; plenty of fellows were left there, to say nothing of the masters. The circus proprietor was evidently a keen business man, and he had only come to this small village because he had known of the St. Frank's camp.

He stood just outside the ring, a tall, stoutish, imposing figure in a cross between a military uniform of red and evening dress. Otto von Holtz was not only the proprietor, but the ringmaster.

"You see, Wilhelm," he said, turning to the big, beefy man beside him. "The boys haf filled our seats, as I told you. We do good business, yes?"

"Better than we've done lately, and chance it!" answered Mr. William Stubbs, otherwise known as "Herculo, the Strongest Man on Earth." "There ain't no flies on you, guv'nor!"

They stood aside as the band, with an extra-loud blare, heralded the entry of the opening act. It was an equestrienne turn, two ladies performing remarkable feats on horseback.

Handforth, sitting in the midst of a big group of Removites, opened his eyes a little wider.

"Hallo!" he murmured, nudging Church. "Isn't that the girl we saw coming out of that caravan?"

"That dark one, you mean?" whispered Church. "Yes, I think so."

"I thought you said that she was a lion-tamer?"

"So she is," murmured Church. "But you know what these small circuses are. The artists have to do all sorts of things—lion-taming, bare-back riding, tight-

rope walking, and goodness only knows what else!"

"It's too bad!" said Handforth sternly. "The poor girl must be overworked! By George! She's pretty clever, you know! Look at the way she's turning somersaults on the back of that giddy horse!"

The performance was quite good, and Handforth applauded loudly. He was glad that he had come. This girl, alone, was worth the money.

"There are about twenty turns on the programme," said Church, with a grin, "but I don't suppose there are more than five or six performers. They come out under different names, you know. Still, what does it matter?"

"I hope this girl comes out half a dozen times!" said Handforth enthusiastically.

"Then you're in favour of her being overworked?" asked McClure.

"Eh? Oh, well, she's different from the others," said Handforth promptly. "Jolly good!" he added, clapping loudly. "She's marvellous!"

His chums grinned. The other performer, who was a rather plump lady of about thirty, was by far the cleverer, and more deserving of the applause. But Handforth, as usual, was not attracted so much by the talent as by the appearance. The young lady with the dark hair and flashing eyes was certainly nicer to look upon than the other. Hence she gained his applause.

On the whole, the circus was fair. Von Holtz made an imposing figure in the ring, putting his ponies through their paces. The clowns were astonishingly unfunny—although they pleased the children.

Then, by way of a change, Herculo came into the centre of the ring, accompanied by large quantities of "props" to do his turn. He had several assistants, and, to the uninitiated, his performance was impressive.

Bill Stubbs was a fine figure of a man, dressed in a kind of leopard skin, and revealing large quantities of rippling muscle. He lifted great weights, he threw cannon-balls, and amidst a great hush from the audience he concluded his turn by lying on his back and allowing a wooden platform to be placed on his upraised hands and knees. A horse was led upon the platform; after which Herculo, with much display, proceeded to worm himself round until the platform was balanced upon his back. Then he rose higher and higher, until he had reached his feet. It was a very clever performance, and, as a final staggerer, he allowed four attendants to grip the four

corners of the platform and add their weight to that of the horse. Storms of applause greeted this feat, and Herculo retired, bowing, to the exit.

And now Von Holtz strode forward into the centre of the ring, raising his hands impressively.

"You haf seen the great Herculo!" he shouted loudly. "You haf seen his marvellous feats of strength, yes? Goot! I will gif the sum of ten pounds to any member of the audience who can enter this ring and perform the feats of strength which Herculo has just shown you. The offer is open to all comers. Now, let us see! Will any gentleman come forward? Ten pounds will be given!"

He looked round, beaming, and the audience laughed at the joke. Von Holtz had made this offer week in and week out, and never had he known anybody to accept. It was a good stunt, and his ten pounds was never really in jeopardy.

But now a boy in Scout's uniform leapt lightly over the barrier and went into the ring, smiling.

"Ten pounds if I do everything that Herculo has done?" he asked. "Good egg! I'll have a shot!"

CHAPTER 3.

An Expensive Business!

OTTO VON HOLTZ gazed at the St. Frank's junior in mingled astonishment and amusement.

"So!" he ejaculated, at length. "You make the joke, yes?"

"Not at all," replied the Removeite. "I'm quite serious. You've offered ten pounds—and I'm after it."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Go it, Waldo!"

"You'll win!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Show us what you can do, old man!"

The Remove fellows, in particular, were highly amused and eager. For this youngster who had accepted the challenge was Stanley Waldo. And the juniors knew, even if Otto von Holtz didn't, that Waldo was the son of Rupert Waldo, the celebrated Peril Expert. Like his father, Waldo possessed amazing strength. But whether he would be able to emulate Herculo's feats remained to be seen. In comparison with Herculo, Stanley Waldo looked a midget.

However, the audience was provided with a thrill which it had not expected, and it settled down to enjoy the fun. Von Holtz was more amused than ever.

"But certainly!" he said boisterously. "If you mean it, young man, come along!"

You perform Herculo's great feats of strength, yes? Goot! We will see!"

He spoke patronisingly, and while Waldo was making his simple preparations, the ringmaster cracked a few jokes at his expense.

However, his tone changed when this remarkable youngster seized a great cross-bar, with two enormous weights on the ends, which Herculo had been recently lifting with apparent difficulty. Waldo picked it up quite easily, raised it above his head, and did everything that Herculo had done—only he did it effortlessly.

"Himmel!" muttered Von Holtz, startled.

"Better send this kid back to his seat, guv'nor!" said Bill Stubbs, angry and alarmed. "Do you think I want to be shown up like this?"

"Be silent!" hissed the proprietor. "I haf made the offer. It must stand. Do you think I want to be the laughing-stock?"

"What about me?" retorted Herculo. "I'm the laughing-stock already!"

"Wait—wait!" said Von Holtz. "This boy will not lift the pony, no! And the four attendants, no!"

He was confident. Bill Stubbs may not have been "the strongest man on earth," but he was certainly as strong as the average circus strong man. It was inconceivable that this slim schoolboy could really perform all of Herculo's feats.

Waldo was thoroughly enjoying himself. He had no grudge against Herculo, and he had no desire to show the man up; but Von Holtz had made the offer without any reservations, and the whole thing was a good bit of fun.

The audience yelled with laughter, and cheered to the echo when Waldo proceeded to lie flat on his back, and the platform was placed just as it had been placed for Herculo. The pony was led on; and to Von Holtz's startled amazement and consternation, Waldo rose to his feet, bearing the great burden with an effortless ease which made Herculo's performance seem amateurish. And when the four attendants added their weight, Waldo was in no way perturbed.

"Buck up, Remove!" he sang out. "I want four of you to add your weight to this little lot! I might as well earn that tenner properly!"

Handforth and three others, chuckling gleefully, ran into the ring. They clung to the platform at the four sides, and the rest of the audience fairly gasped. Not only had this schoolboy equalled Herculo's feat, but he had bettered it. The applause was deafening, and Bill Stubbs,

having recovered from his initial anger and amazement, proved himself to be a sportsman.

"Put it there, kid!" he shouted with hoarse enthusiasm, after Waldo had been relieved of his burden. "Gosh! You're a wonder!"

"That's all right," grinned Waldo. "Sorry if I've stolen some of your thunder——"

"No fear!" interrupted Herculo. "I ain't one of these fakes. I'll defy any man in this audience to lift them weights! But you're different—you're a mivvy! What are you doin' in a school? You ought to be performing, like me! Why, if we teamed up we could get engagements with the biggest circuses on the road!"

Von Holtz, swallowing his chagrin, came forward with a forced smile. He had ten one-pound notes in his hand, and he waved them aloft.

"Ten pounds!" he shouted. "You see, ladies and gentlemen? I am as goot as my word! Ten pounds to this boy for his wonderful performance."

The applause was deafening.

"Just a minute, sir," said Waldo, smiling. "I don't think I'm really entitled to that money. In fact, I'm not going to take it."

"But yes!" shouted Von Holtz. "I insist!"

"You don't know me," replied Waldo. "I don't think the thing is quite fair. I'm the son of Rupert Waldo—who was once a strong man in a circus himself. Your offer was to the ordinary public, and I don't think that I'm really eligible. So we'll call the tenner off."

"Fathead!" groaned Fullwood, who shared Study I with Waldo and Russell. "And I thought he was going to spend that on a big feed!"

But Von Holtz shook his head.

"Ach, no!" he said, pressing the money into Waldo's hand. "You haf won fairly. I care not if your father is the Great Waldo. I make my offer—I stick to it, yes? The money is yours."

Of course, there was more applause than ever, and Waldo retired contentedly. And after that the show continued.

THERE was more clowning, and then another trapeze act. Von Holtz, seizing his chance, hurried to Herculo's dressing-tent. His mask of good humour had gone.

"Accursed boys!" he grated, as he faced the strong man. "Ten pounds it cost me, Wilhelm! What you think? That boy? He lift things easier than you, yes? And you call yourself a

strong man! Bah! I pay you money, and you not worth it!"

Bill Stubbs stared.

"Easy, guv'nor," he said gruffly. "That kid's an exception. It cost you ten quid—yes—but that's just a bit of bad luck for you. If you think you can get another strong man for the money you're paying me, try to get him!"

"But a boy!" protested Von Holtz. "A boy, half your size, does these things!"

"Well, you needn't come here making a fuss," said the strong man sourly. "I'm no fake, Von Holtz. Ask any man in the audience to do what I've done—or what that boy did. I tell you he's special. It's just your bad luck!"

"All my profits go," grumbled Von Holtz. "I think I do well here with these schoolboys, and now I lose!"

"You won't lose in the long run," replied Bill. "You've had a pretty good advert, if you ask me. You dubbed up the ten quid like a sport, and that'll get talked about."

"Ach, perhaps you are right," grunted Von Holtz, wandering out.

He went back into the ring, still troubled over the loss of that money. The lion-tamer was just commencing his turn. The great cage was in the centre of the ring, and Carlo was telling the audience of the lion's brutal savagery. It certainly looked an ugly, ferocious creature, as it prowled round the cage, occasionally giving vent to a fearsome roar.

Willy Handforth, of the Third, nudged his chums and grinned. He was watching closely, and he knew something about animals.

Waldo lifted a horse and eight human beings. It was a wonderful display of his enormous strength.



"All bunkum!" he murmured. "That lion's as tame as a kitten! I don't believe he's got any teeth, to begin with."

"Well, I wouldn't like to test it," whispered Chubby Heath.

"There's no need to be afraid of lions," said Willy coolly. "For two pins I'd go into that cage and show you."

Willy was fearless with all animals. He had an extraordinary "way" with them. He claimed no credit for this; it just happened to be so. Time and again he had proved his amazing control over savage beasts.

"Let me introduce my daughter, Zena—known throughout the world as the Girl Without Fear!" Carlo was proudly saying. "She will enter the lion's den; she will fondle this savage beast. Before you all, she will prove her fearlessness. Watch closely!"

Handforth stiffened in his seat as Carlo opened the door of the cage. Zena—that same dark-eyed, dark-haired damsel—now dressed in a sort of military uniform, waved to the audience, paused impressively for a moment, and then entered the cage. Carlo slammed the door, and fastened the catch.

There was a tense, hushed silence.

"I don't like it!" breathed Handforth anxiously. "She might get hurt!"

The girl cautiously approached the lion, who was growling and roaring alarmingly. But Zena was fearless. She not only approached the brute, but she used him as a couch, lying full length and placing her head close against the lion's. Then she fondled him.

"Oh, my hat!" murmured Handforth anxiously.

"Fathead!" said Church, nudging him. "There's no real danger. I expect that lion is absolutely harmless. It's only a part of the show."

"Rot!" retorted Handforth. "These lion-tamers take all sorts of horrible risks to earn their money! And to think of that sweet girl in there—Oh, thank goodness!"

He clapped loudly as Zena tripped gaily out of the cage, and the door was once again secured. The whole audience, in fact, was applauding, and now Otto von Holtz strode forward to the centre of the ring, his whip upraised.

"I am the sportsman!" he announced impressively. "Already I have paid ten pounds to a member of the audience. Another ten pounds will I give to any person who will enter the lion's cage as the fearless Zena has done. Ten pounds to the person who will fondle the lion!"

He made the offer almost mechanically—as he had made it hundreds of times

before. It never occurred to him that there would be a second disaster for him that evening!

"What-ho! Ten quid!" said Willy Handforth briskly, as he left his seat. "Is that offer genuine, sir? If so I'm on!"

He ran into the ring, and Von Holtz stared at him almost stupidly. The audience, after a momentary hush, broke into a great laugh.

"You make the joke, too?" asked the proprietor impatiently.

"It's no joke," replied Willy. "You just made the offer, didn't you? Well, I'm game to go into that lion's cage."

"Ach, but you know not the danger!" said Von Holtz. "A young boy like you? No! I cannot permit!"

"Oh!" said Willy. "Then that offer of yours was just spoof?"

"The lion, he is dangerous——"

"But you offered ten quid to any member of the audience who would go in," interrupted Willy tartly. "Well, whether I get the ten quid or not, I'm going to show you that it can be done!"

And before the lion-tamer or the proprietor could stop him, he jerked the catch back, opened the door of the cage, and walked in.

CHAPTER 4.

A Damsel in Distress!

EDWARD OSWALD HANDFORTH leapt wildly to his feet.

"Come out of that, Willy!" he shouted huskily. "You young idiot! You'll get killed!"

"Rats!" retorted Willy, from within the cage. "I'm safe enough, Ted!"

He approached the lion confidently; and that beast of the forest, perhaps sensing that Willy was his friend, eyed him unblinkingly. Willy went up close, patted Leo on the head, and squatted down beside him.

By this time, Willy had perceived that the lion was an old, harmless animal, probably without a tooth in his head. At all events, Willy was his friend within a short minute, and he was sprawling full length, fondling the animal.

The audience, awed at first, now became amused and appreciative.

"Well done, young 'un!"

"Hear, hear!"

"The kid has got grit!"

"Rather!"

"Good old Willy!"

Von Holtz, almost choking with ill-suppressed rage, could hardly speak.

Willy had "called his bluff," and he knew it. This lion was just about as dangerous as a Shetland pony.

"You come out now, yes?" panted Von Holtz, opening the door of the cage. "Of this nonsense, enough there has been. It is you come out, poy!"

Willy patted the lion on the head, pulled his ear playfully, and rose to his feet. He sauntered to the door, and dropped lightly to the sawdust, grinning.

"Well, anyway, I accepted your challenge," he said. "Thanks for giving me the opportunity of going into the cage. I'm rather fond of animals, you know."

"You go back to your seat, yes?" shouted Von Holtz, pointing. "You let the show go on, yes? Enough time we waste already."

"What about that ten quid?" sang out Chubby Heath indignantly.

"There is no money for this poy," retorted Von Holtz. "He say he go in the cage for nothing, yes? Well, he go! I tell him not to, but he go!"

"Pay up, you rotter!"

"Yes, you made the offer, so pay up!"

"Yah, swindler!"

"Pay up—pay up!"

A tumult was arising, the Third-Formers, who had had dreams of a great feed, making most of the noise. The Removites and Fourth-Formers joined in, too, and a few seniors added their voices to the general commotion.

"You offered ten pounds—so pay up, and look pleasant!"

Von Holtz, sensing the antagonism in the audience, swallowed hard and raised a hand. This was the sort of publicity he did not require. The whole countryside would be talking of this incident soon, and he had fixed up many other dates in the district.

"Vait—vait!" he shouted hoarsely. "I only choke, you see?"

"You deserve to choke, too!" growled Handforth.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I make the choke!" shouted Von Holtz. "The poy I pay, yes. Ten pounds I gif. Ach, I am der sport, und the money, yes, I pay."

His English was getting worse in his excitement, and he turned rapidly to an attendant, gave some orders, and addressed the audience again. A moment later the attendant returned with the money. Von Holtz raised the ten pounds in the air.

"See!" he shouted. "I offer the ten pounds, and here is the money! I gif it freely—gladly. I keep my word, yes?"

He placed the money in Willy's hand, and Willy calmly counted it.

"Ten quid—right!" he said coolly. "Well, you kept your word right enough. It was a fair enough offer, and I don't mind taking the cash."

Willy was quite philosophical about it. If Von Holtz had been open and straightforward from the first, he would have felt uncomfortable in taking that money. But the man's brazen attempt to withhold payment had robbed him of any possible sympathy. So Willy returned to the ranks of the Third, and the Third cheered joyously.

The circus attendants had now dragged on another huge cage, and it was noticeable that Carlo, the lion-tamer, was eyeing the brute within that cage in no uncertain manner. The occupant was a great, tawny tiger. He stalked restlessly round the cage, lashing his tail, emitting occasional growls, and showing his teeth menacingly.

Von Holtz, still inwardly fuming at the loss of twenty pounds, attempted to carry on with the show.

"Here, ladies and gentlemen, you see the most savage, the most untamed creature of the jungles—the man-eating tiger of India! I haf secured this tiger at enormous expense for my menagerie. He is so savage that not even Signor Carlo dare enter the cage."

A thought seemed to strike him, and he gazed at the audience where Willy was sitting.

"Perhaps the young poy will enter the cage?" he said mockingly. "I gif yet another ten pounds if he enters this cage, yes!"

Willy leapt into the ring with alacrity.

"Done!" he sang out, as the audience chuckled. "I'm on!"

He approached the tiger's cage, and got within an inch or so of the door when Carlo leapt forward and forcibly pulled him back. The lion-tamer was pale and shaky with apprehension.

"You get killed!" he gasped. "You fool!" he went on, turning fiercely upon Von Holtz. "You wish to kill the boy?"

Von Holtz, who had not expected such a prompt acceptance of his offer, turned to Willy and waved his hand.

"Nein!" he snapped. "This cage you shall not enter! I want not to be charged with the murder! Go back to your seat, poy! There has been enough, yes!"

He was shaking, and he had turned a trifle pale. The tiger was hurriedly wheeled out of the ring in its cage, and with much alacrity a couple of trapeze artists got busy on the next turn.

THE rest of the show was more or less ordinary; but when it was all over the St. Frank's fellows crowded out, feeling that they had had more than their money's worth. From their point of view, the circus had been a tremendous success. The Remove, at least, was certain of a feed—and the Third was equally optimistic. Waldo and Willy Handforth would certainly share their good fortune with their respective Form-fellows.

But one junior, at least, was not thinking of a feed. Edward Oswald Handforth, as soon as he got out, wandered off to the rear of the big tent. He did so almost furtively, having seized an opportunity of slipping away from Church and McClure. At least, he thought he had done so. Actually, his chums were well on his track.

"I don't wonder that some of the chaps

call us Handy's keepers," breathed Church feelingly. "My only Sunday hat! Where would he be if we didn't look after him?"

"Goodness only knows!" replied McClure. "Of course, we know what he's up to now."

"Trying to spot that girl with the dark eyes and dark hair," nodded Church gruffly. "Her caravan's round this way, I believe. I'll bet anything you like that old Handy is going to ask her where the circus will be to-morrow evening, and he'll buzz there in his Morris Minor!"

"If we left him to himself, he'd follow the circus all over the giddy countryside!" agreed Mac.

They decided to take immediate action. It was hopeless to argue with Handforth in his present mood. Far better to drag him away, and get him back to the camp. They closed in upon him silently, and



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seized both his arms from the rear before he could quite realise that they had come up in the gloom.

"Oh, hallo, you chaps!" he said, after a start of guilty surprise. "What's the giddy idea? Lemme go!"

"You're coming with us, old man!" said Church firmly.

"Not likely! I want to find Zena's cara——" Handforth paused and swallowed hard. "I—I mean—— That is to say—— I was wondering if Willy might be round here," he continued hastily. "I don't suppose he is, really; but he can't be trusted with all that money—— What's the idea of looking at me in that silly way?"

"You weren't looking for Willy, and you jolly well know it!" said McClure sternly. "You were looking for Zella."

"Not Zella, you fathead—Zena!"

"Well, Zena, then."

"A jolly nice name, too," said Handforth softly.

"Look here, Handy, you can't prowl round like this, looking for girls you haven't even been introduced to!" said Church indignantly. "I'm surprised at you! Why can't you leave Zena alone?"

"I haven't even spoken to her yet!" retorted Handforth, glaring. "Mind your own silly business! Clear off! Both of you!"

Church and McClure eyed him warily. They could tell that he was in one of his obstinate moods. A fight was more or less inevitable.

"Oh, well, we might as well get it over," said Church, with a sigh, as he rolled up his sleeves. "Are you ready, Mac?"

"What we really need is chloroform," said the Scottish junior. "Well, come on!"

Handforth backed away.

"Here, cheese it!" he protested. "If you idiots are looking for trouble——"

He paused, and Church and McClure started. A sudden scream, in a high-pitched, feminine voice, had struck their ears. It came from close by, and although it was half-muffled they heard it very distinctly. The next second, as they spun round, they beheld two figures in the entrance of a small side tent. One was Carlo, the lion-tamer, and the other was Zena. The girl was struggling fiercely in the man's grasp.

"Oh! You hurt me!" she sobbed.

"Oh, my arm!"

"I hurt you more yet!" panted the man. "I show you who is master! You think you defy me? Carramba! We see!"

With a sudden heave, he dragged the girl farther out, and she shrieked again as his stronger fingers dug into her soft arm.

"The brute!" exclaimed Handforth. "Treating his daughter like that! Come on, you chaps! Rescue, St. Frank's!"

Church and McClure needed no second bidding. Here was a damsel in distress, and all their former plans went by the board. They were willing enough to help Handforth now. In a body they rushed up, and Carlo was dragged forcibly away from his victim.

"What is this?" he gasped angrily.

"We'll show you what is, you cowardly rotter!" shouted Handforth hotly. "We'll teach you to knock your daughter about——"

"Ah, but you are wrong!" panted Carlo. "She? My daughter! No, no! You do not understand——"

"By George! So she's not your daughter!" yelled Handforth excitedly. "That makes it all the worse, you rotter!"

Carlo was dragged back, still protesting. He fought savagely now, kicking and elbowing, but he was no match for those three sturdy schoolboys. Zena stood watching, fascinated by the fight, her dark eyes aglow.

"By George! There's a tank of water here!" exclaimed Handforth, as he struggled. "In with him, you chaps! He needs cooling off, the rotter!"

Carlo was whirled towards the tank, which could be seen in the gloom. It jutted out from beyond one of the smaller tents, and just round that tent a traction-engine was still labouring, driving one of the great dynamos which supplied the circus with electric light.

With a mighty heave, Carlo was hoisted from the ground; he was carried to the tank, and, still struggling, he was plunged in. When he emerged he was not soaked with water, as the boys had expected, but was covered from head to foot with a vile, sticky coating of black waste oil!

CHAPTER 5.

Hard Luck for Handy!

"GREAT Scott!" ejaculated Church, staring. "It's not water, you chaps! It's oil from that giddy engine!"

"All the better!" said Handforth gruffly. "It jolly well serves him right! It'll take him two or three hours to clean himself now, and by that time, perhaps, he'll——"

He broke off as Zena, excited and angry, came running up.

"It's all right, Miss Zena," said Handforth awkwardly. "You needn't bother to thank us——"

"You cowards!" cried Zena hotly.

Handforth jumped.

"Eh?" he gasped. "I—I——"

"Three of you—to one man!" panted the girl. "You throw him in the dirty oil! How dare you?"

"I—I——" Handforth, feeling weak at the knees, found his tongue equally nerveless. "But—but you don't seem to understand, Miss Zena!" he went on. "We've been helping you. We rescued you from this brute——"

"You not call him a brute!" interrupted the girl fiercely.

"But he was hurting you——"

"He hurt me, yes!" said Zena, her eyes blazing dangerously. "And what of it? If he hurt me, is it your business?"

Handforth was too dumbfounded to make any reply. Church and McClure, although almost equally surprised, at least kept their heads.

"Ahem!" coughed Church discreetly.

"We'd better be going, Handy!"

"And we'd better make it snappy!" breathed Mac.

"Yes, you go—all of you!" cried Zena. "Oh, my poor Carlo! Look what you have done to my Carlo!"

Carlo was crawling feebly out of the oil tank. Handforth, who had been expecting the girl to shower her thanks upon him, had not yet completely recovered from his surprise.

"Oh, well, of course, if you like being knocked about by this brute, I've got nothing to say," he exclaimed, with an effort. "But I thought you'd be glad——"

"So!" interrupted Zena hotly. "You call my husband a brute!"

"Your—your what?" gasped Handforth.

"Carlo—he is my husband!"

"Oh, crumbs!" ejaculated Handforth, his jaw sagging at this fresh shock.

Church and McClure were also astonished. Zena—Carlo's wife! But they could see, at such close quarters as this, that Zena was not so young as she had appeared to be in the ring. She was probably only just on the right side of thirty.

"Your husband!" muttered Handforth dully. "Oh, my hat!"

"Yes, my husband," said Zena, calming down somewhat. "You take him, and you throw him into the oil. But you make the mistake—eh? So I forgive you. And I thank you for helping me."

By this time Carlo had crawled to his caravan, leaving a trail of oil behind him.

"I—I'm awfully sorry, you know," said Handforth awkwardly. "I hadn't the faintest idea that he was your husband, Miss Zena. I—I mean, Mrs. Carlo!"

She laughed, her quick Southern good temper restored.

"We say no more," she said softly. "Perhaps it do Carlo a little good—eh?"

Handforth laughed with relief. He was still disappointed at finding his "dark-eyed damsel" a married woman, but he was capable of getting over these shocks very quickly. In fact, now that he could see that Zena was so much older than he had believed, he had lost interest.

"I think we'd better clear off," he said uncomfortably. "Sorry if we've been a bother. But I say, look here!" he added impulsively. "About that lion. Is it really safe for you to go into his cage like that?"

Zena laughed.

"The lion, he is harmless," she replied lightly. "He is savage in his looks, but he is like the dog whose bark is worse than his bite—eh?"

"Then it's all spoof about his being savage?"

"He is old, he is toothless," said Zena, with a shrug. "He is as tame as a white mouse."

"I'm jolly glad to hear it!" said Handforth. "Doesn't it just show you, you chaps, how much to believe in these giddy circus animals? They're all as tame as puppies!"

"But no!" said Zena quickly. "The tiger—he is not tame!"

"Oh!"

"He has come only a week or so," said Zena, shaking her dark head. "Oh, he is a terrible, terrible beast! Even my husband, who has trained lions and tigers all his life, dare not enter the cage. He is only used for show. Von Holtz, he wants my Carlo to go into the cage, to teach the tiger the tricks. But Carlo says no, he won't. The tiger is too dangerous. It will be months before the brute can be tamed. I am frightened. I think that the boss force Carlo to do this. And Carlo knows best. That tiger, he is a devil!"

"Well, thank goodness old Holtz didn't let Willy go into the cage," said Handforth, with relief.

"The boss, he is very angry," said Zena. "He lose twenty pounds by you schoolboys—and he not like it. If he find you here, he get angry. You better go."



Handforth & Co. threw the lion-tamer into a tank, and when he emerged he was covered from head to foot with thick, black oil.

Handforth & Co. thought so, too. So they bade Zena a somewhat hurried good-night, and made their way back to the St. Frank's camp.

SOME little time afterwards, whilst the circus men were busily engaged in taking down the great tent, a newcomer arrived.

He was a big, florid-faced man, well dressed and gentlemanly in appearance. Yet his movements seemed furtive. He entered the circus field as though he wished to avoid publicity. He made a low-voiced inquiry of one of the men; and a minute later he was shown into the big caravan which was owned and occupied by Otto von Holtz himself.

"Yes? You want to see me?" asked the proprietor, who was sprawling within the caravan. "Come in. I don't know you—but come in."

Von Holtz had discarded most of his uniform; he was in his shirt-sleeves, the neck of his shirt open. It was hot and oppressive in the caravan.

Amos Whittle—for the newcomer was none other than the owner of the big

Bannington saw-mills—entered hesitatingly, and he closed the door.

"You think it cold in here?" asked Von Holtz sarcastically.

"It is hot, my friend, but what I have to say is private," replied Amos Whittle, as he turned and faced the other. "My name is Whittle, and I am a resident of Bannington. I heard—no matter to you how—of the incident in your performance this evening when a schoolboy entered the lion's cage and earned ten pounds."

Von Holtz cursed in German.

"Why do you remind me of that?" he snapped. "I lose money here, in this silly little village! I have a big audience, and yet I lose money!"

"Perhaps I can make your visit to Bellton worth while, after all, Mr. Holtz," said Whittle, sitting down. "I have a suggestion to make to you. Perhaps we can strike a bargain."

"Your manner, Mr. Whittle, I not like," said Von Holtz. "What is this talk of bargains? I am an honest man —"

"Yes, yes, of course!" interrupted Whittle hastily. "Don't misunderstand

me, Mr. Hoitz. That lion of yours, now. It is quite harmless—eh? If a boy can enter the cage safely——"

"Ach, so soon it gets talked about!" grunted the proprietor, in disgust. "People will no longer look at my lion with awe, but they will laugh at him!"

"They will not laugh if you fall in with the suggestion I have to make," said Whittle. "In fact, Von Holtz, you can gain a great deal of very useful publicity."

Whittle bent closer, and lowered his voice.

"These schoolboys," he went on. "They are in camp, as you know. Now, that meadow is really mine, and for some weeks I have been trying to get the boys off it. Under the conditions of my late uncle's will——"

And Mr. Amos Whittle, as briefly as possible, put his listener into possession of the facts regarding the Half Mile Meadow. Von Holtz wondered what it was all about, but he quickly grasped the situation.

"So that we shall have no beating about the bush—so that there shall be no misunderstandings—I want to fix up a harmless little arrangement with you, Von Holtz," said Whittle. "Your circus

will be moving on in the small hours of the morning, I take it?"

"Yes, that is so."

"And it will go along Bellton Lane?"

"Yes."

"I am willing to give you thirty pounds, Von Holtz, if there can be a little—er—accident to the cage-van containing the lion," said Whittle, in a whisper. "You understand? Perhaps the lion's van can be jolted, or upset, and the door opened. The lion will escape into the St. Frank's camp. You see?"

Von Holtz saw, and he shook his head.

"You haf the goot idea, my friend," he said. "A lion in the camp will cause the panic, yes? And all the boys will run? And the meadow will be emptied, yes? But what of my lion?"

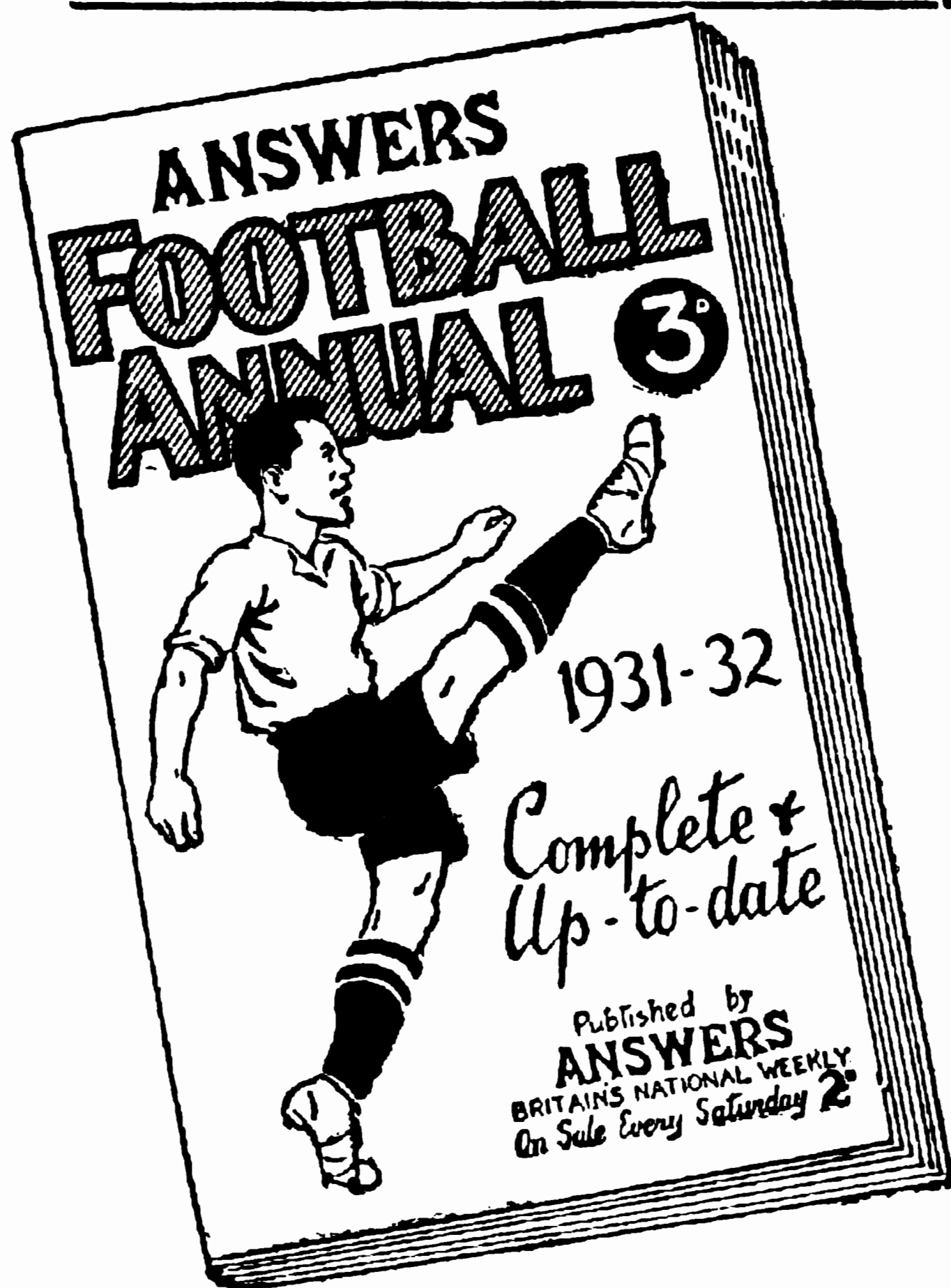
"You have told me that he is harmless——"

"But I stand the risk of losing him," murmured Von Holtz. "For thirty pounds, you expect this? Ach, no! I haf to see Carlo, the trainer. I must gif him money, or he will not do this."

"I'll make it fifty pounds, and here's the cash, on the nail!" said Whittle, his eyes gleaming.

"Now you talk the goot business," beamed Von Holtz. "Yes, I think it

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could be done. A little accident, yes? The lion, he gets into the camp! Ach! What a running of boys!"

He laughed uproariously.

"And a good advertisement for me, yes?" he went on "It will be in the papers. Everybody will be talking of my circus—and the lion—yes, we can say that the lion is a dangerous beast."

"It is not a dangerous beast, is it?" asked Whittle sharply. "I am only suggesting this plan, Von Holtz, on the definite understanding that the lion will do nothing more than frighten these boys. If there is the slightest possibility of that brute causing any injury

"Wait—wait!" interrupted Von Holtz. "Do you think I agree to this if the lion was savage? Ach, he has no teeth—no claws! An old fool of a lion! He will be more frightened than the boys! He will roar, yes, but more than that he will not do."

Amos Whittle was reassured, and after that there was much low-voiced conversation as the two men went into the details of the cunning plot.

CHAPTER 6.

After Lights Out!

WHEN Amos Whittle left the circus field he did not walk into Bell-ton, but over the bridge and along the quiet side road which ran past the old house. Moat Hollow, almost parallel with the river. Some distance up here, round a bend, he came upon a saloon car.

"You can take her home, Mansell," said Whittle, as he opened the driving-door. "I shall have a pretty long wait here, and there's no need for you to lose your night's sleep."

Mansell, the works manager of Whittle's saw-mill, detected the eager, exultant note in his employer's voice.

"Everything go all right, sir?" he asked.

Whittle got into the car, and closed the door.

"Yes, Mansell," he replied. "I have arranged it all. And this time, you will notice, I have done the planning myself. It is my idea—not yours."

"Is that meant to be sarcastic?"

"You can take it so if you wish," replied Whittle. "You mustn't blame me for reminding you, Mansell, that our previous schemes have failed—and failed miserably. Those schemes were suggested by you."

"And because they happen to go wrong, you blame me!" said Mansell bitterly. "Hang it, sir, that's a bit thick! You were enthusiastic enough about that flooding idea, weren't you? How on earth could we guess that the boys would grab one of our barges, seize the timber, and build platforms and stagings?"

"Well, never mind that—it's all over now," said Whittle. "This new idea of mine is better than any of the others. Its very simplicity will ensure its success."

"That lion?" asked Mansell dubiously. "Well, you may call it a simple idea, but in my opinion it's dangerous. You've no desire to injure any of these boys. They've done you no harm. It's the meadow you want——"

"And it is the meadow I shall have!" interrupted Whittle. "As for injuring the boys—get that idea out of your head, Mansell. That lion is as harmless as a month-old kitten."

"In that case, how will it frighten the boys?"

"Von Holtz has arranged everything," said Whittle. "The lion is to be let out of its cage 'accidentally' as the circus is passing the meadow. I understand that the brute is a lazy animal, and he won't run far. He'll just show himself in the meadow—and, remember, there'll be bright moonlight—and his very appearance will be enough to scare the boys away."

Whittle explained, in detail, how everything had been arranged. Mansell was not impressed.

"Well, it's your idea, sir, so you'd better get on with it," he said bluntly. "Personally, I can't see how it will succeed. If the lion's harmless, the boys will soon spot it. Why, one of the youngsters even went into the lion's cage during the show! They know he's tame!"

"Oh, no," said Whittle confidently. "I'm not thinking only of the boys. The masters will order a general retirement. That lion has a most fearsome roar, and he will make himself well heard. Think of it, Mansell! An escaped lion—loose in the St. Frank's camp! What can the masters do? Nothing, except order the boys to seek safety. That will mean the desertion of the camp. And I shall be there to take possession the instant my opportunity arises."

"Well, I don't like the idea at all, sir," said Mansell gruffly. "Still, it's yours, and you had better get on with it. I'm glad that I am getting home. I don't

want to be mixed up in this dirty business."

"What do you mean—'dirty business'?" asked Whittle angrily.

"Lions are queer creatures, and although this animal may be apparently tame, there's never any telling," replied Mansell. "Man alive! Think of the possible consequences! Supposing that lion does turn savage, even for a moment? Supposing he mauls one of the boys—even kills him? Where do you stand then?"

"Oh, it's out of the question!" muttered Whittle uneasily.

"Well, you'd better consider the possibility, all the same," said the other. "If anything like that happened, it would mean an inquiry, and then the whole truth would come out. You'd be put in the dock on a charge of manslaughter. It's not worth the risk, sir! I agreed to help you in getting these boys away from the meadow; but you're going too far to-night. It's a dangerous game you're playing!"

"Nonsense!" said Whittle impatiently. "In any case, you're not in it, Mansell, and I don't want to hear any more of your objections. You'd better go."

Mansell went—glad enough to get out of this particular "stunt." And Amos Whittle, after he had watched the car disappear, broke through a hedge and cautiously made his way across the meadows in the direction of the St. Frank's camp.

THE picture of the school camp was a pleasant one on this mild summer's evening.

Lights were gleaming here and there, and the camp fires were glowing, with figures squatting round them, and other figures flitting to and fro. The juniors, in particular, had been having a celebration. They had plenty of money to spend—Von Holtz's money—and special feeds had been in progress round almost every Third, Fourth, and Remove camp fire.

Whittle, approaching the camp from the Bellton Wood end, surveyed the scene frowningly. He was completely hidden in the gloom, but he could keep a watch over the whole camp.

He settled himself down as comfortably as possible for a long vigil. The circus, he had been informed, would be moving on in the small hours. And by then the entire camp would be peacefully sleeping. Thus the shock of the escaping lion would be all the greater. The hastily-awakened boys would certainly become panic-stricken. The moon would

be well up, and the sight of that lion, loose in the Half Mile Meadow, would have a very devastating effect.

Whittle felt an uneasy twinge now and again as he thought of Mansell's words. But then he remembered Von Holtz's assurances. The lion was tame—harmless. It looked ferocious, but it was really docile. It would be more frightened than the boys.

"I'm getting sick of all this!" muttered Whittle fiercely. "I'm tired of waiting. Before long it will be too late—the boys will have complied with the conditions of that old fool's will."

Thus he stilled the doubts which occasionally crept into his mind. And he waited.

One after another the lights of the camp were extinguished; the camp fires dwindled and died. Voices ceased, and at last there were no longer any figures to be seen moving about. Several fellows, perhaps, were wakeful—suspicious of some move from Whittle—but, if so, they did not show themselves.

The St. Frank's open-air camp slept.

Amos Whittle secretly admired these determined schoolboys. They were giving him an endless amount of trouble; but they were rapidly earning his respect. He had thought, at first, that it would be such an easy matter to drive them out—to trick them. But, at every turn, they had beaten him.

To-night, however, he would be the master!

COMPARATIVELY near by, Otto von Holtz was celebrating in his own peculiar way. While his men worked and perspired in the circus field, he lounged in his caravan, drinking.

He had been very fed up until Whittle had paid his visit. He had been twenty pounds out of pocket; all his profits, and more, had gone. His feelings with regard to the St. Frank's fellows had been bitter. They were still bitter. He considered that these boys had bested him. And he was only too glad to get his own back.

He had taken fifty pounds from Amos Whittle, so he was well on the right side now. As for the lion, he laughed when he thought of the plan.

Hearing the grinding of wheels, and the puffing of the traction-engines, he left his caravan. He was somewhat unsteady on his feet now, but he was in the best of good humours.

The word soon went round among the hands that the "boss was half-seas over."

(Continued on page 24.)

LINE UP HERE FOR A GOOD LAUGH, LADS!



HANDFORTH'S Weekly

No. 12. Vol. 1.

EDITORIAL STAFF.

July 11th, 1931.

RATS! RATS! RATS!

By **THE EDITOR**
who has a bad attack of 'em
this week.

Editor-in-Chief E. O. Handforth
Editor E. O. Handforth
Chief Sub-Editor E. O. Handforth
Literary Editor E. O. Handforth
Art Editor E. O. Handforth
Rest of Staff E. O. Handforth

**HEARD and SEEN
AT ST. FRANK'S**

BY George, you chaps! This is too thick. Yesterday morning I took all the trouble to telephone to the Editor of the NELSON LEE and inform him that I should require only 20 pages for my Special Summer Number. That's all—only 20 pages. I did think of collaring the entire NELSON LEE for my Summer Number—but I've been generous, and limited my WEEKLY to 20 pages.

And what's the result?
The Editor answered politely that he was sorry it could not be arranged.

"All right, then," I said, rather bitterly. "I suppose I'll have to agree to 15 pages; but I would much rather have the whole 20. I've written a story that will take up 12 pages, and this only leaves three for the other fellows."

The Editor then had the nerve to tell me—as calmly as you like—that I should only be able to have three pages as usual.

It absolutely took my breath away. Before I could think of anything to say, he rang off. I couldn't ring him up again. It costs a shilling a go from St. Frank's, and I'm broke.

But what an awful nerve, eh? I shall have to cut chunks out of my special ripping holiday yarn, and I spent the whole of one afternoon writing it. It's rotten. This is all the thanks I get for producing my ripping magazine every week.

I've a good mind, in fact, to cut out the holiday number altogether—just to spite the measly old Editor. Anyway, I'm going to hold it over for a little while. Instead, my WEEKLY next Wednesday will be a special Cinema Number.

Take a note of that, everybody. By George, it's great stuff, too. My massive brain has worked on well-oiled cylinders, and this special Cinema Number will be a sensation. I can see all the film companies fighting among themselves to secure my services. But, never fear I shall remain faithful to the WEEKLY.

So don't forget, lads and lassies. Don't spend all your tanners at the local cinema next week, but see and hear my special Cinema Number for twopence only.

E. O. HANDFORTH.

THE fountain in the Triangle has been getting rather muddy. It was cleaned out yesterday. The Remove cleaned it out, using Bernard Forrest for the purpose.

Professor Sylvester Tucker is getting so absent-minded that he hasn't done anything silly for the last two weeks.

Chubby Heath of the Third was seen washing his neck last night. He must be getting as bad as Professor Tucker.

The Fifth have been clubbing together to buy William Napoleon Browne a jolly good feed. This is not because they like him; but because he can't talk while he is eating.

Enoch Snipe will address an indignation meeting to-night, and move a resolution that "The Latin Language should be jolly well suppressed, and anybody speaking Latin should be horsewhipped." Poor old Snipey knows more about tin-tacks than syntax.

Mr. Crowell is due to give a lecture on Horace this evening. Be careful that you are not injured in the furious and terrible struggle at the door. Those who come early will get the best seats, and will avoid the frantic rush of the crowd.

Arthur Hubbard was boasting the other day that any fool can play draughts. That's why he's so good at it.

Fatty Little states that he would spend all his money on grub. Let's hope he doesn't get left a fortune—for his own sake and safety.

Heard in the Junior Common-room. Archie Glenthorne: "Clothes make a chappie." Vivian Travers: "Then why not wear some." Archie was so scandalised that he didn't spot the slur cast upon his character.

IMAGINARY INTERVIEWS

No. 3.—GUIDO FAWKES.

I DID not much relish the job of interviewing Guy Fawkes; he is too handy with gunpowder for my liking. However, our august Editor had told me to do so, and I dared not disobey. I found Mr. Fawkes at the Tower of London, and was shown in to him.

"Good-morning, Mr. Fawkes. What a Guy!" I said to him.

He frowned at me in a nasty fashion.

"Remember, remember the Fifth of November—gunpowder treason and plot!" he snapped. "Sit down, and don't give me any chin, because I stand chin from nobody—not even the Houses of Parliament!"

"You were unlucky there," I nodded, sitting down.

"Ay, verily!" he scowled. "Methinks some plotting wretch must have blown ye gaff on me. I was arrested and hauled off to chokey just as I was putting a match to ye gunpowder."

"Bad luck!"

"Even so! And when I told the judge that I was only trying to do Parliament a good turn, ye saucy varlet laughed at me."



"How were you trying to do them a good turn?"

"Why, I was trying to raise them in the eyes of the country. If I had succeeded, they would have gone up in everybody's opinion."

There wasn't much doubt about that

"Let me treat you to something," urged Mr. Fawkes.

"Have a rocket, or a squib, or a Roman candle?"

"No, thanks!" I answered hastily. "Not until next November; then I'll have as many as you like. Well, sir, we're all sorry that you didn't bring the thing off. Better luck next time."

"If there is a next time," he growled.

I leaned forward and whispered in his ear.

"I've got a message for you from the whole country," I said. "If we manage to get you out of the Tower, and if we provide you with umpteen barrels of gunpowder, will you have another go?"

Guy Fawkes winked.

ST. FRANK'S LIMERICKS

*A merchant named Cecil de Valerie,
Once went on the stage for a salary;
But—"I got none," he said,
"I got celery instead,
And it crashed on my nut
from the gallery."*

*Old Fatty was whiter than chalk;
He sat down and started to talk;
"I've eaten ten scones,
Which were harder than stones,
And they rattle inside when I walk."*

OUR AGONY COLUMN

COW FOR SALE. Owner won it in a raffle for the Cottage Hospital, and now has no further use for it. Very faithful, and is fond of children. The cow is at present tethered to the side of the Tuckshop. What offers?—DON HARRON, East House.

FRESH MILK SUPPLIED.—Mrs. Hake, TUCKSHOP.

WANTED. 100 LINES. I gave an impot of 100 lines to one of you kids yesterday, but I forget which. The guilty party had better do those lines, in case I happen to remember his name.—BIGGLESWADE (Perfect).

The latest misadventure of Tr

THE MOTOR

A smashing, two-thrills-per-word

E. O. HAN

The Hold Up!

TRACKETT GRIM and Splinter had just popped up to Scotland in their 80 horse-power Tinn cann motor-car. There had been a beastly burglary at one of the biggest houses in Scotland, and the famous detective had been called in to find out what was stolen—a baffling problem. In the end, he had proved that nothing whatever had been pinched, and the grateful householder had rewarded him with a night's lodging free of all expense—but boots and bath extra.

Now he and Splinter were tearing back to London in the giant Tinn cann. They were whizzing along through the countryside at the dizzy speed of 12 m.p.h., when suddenly a light gleamed ahead of them, and a policeman stepped out into the road. Trackett Grim deduced that he was a policeman, because he was wearing a policeman's uniform.

"Stop!" bawled the cop.

Splinter hopped out and dragged the car to a standstill.

"What's the matter?" demanded Trackett Grim angrily. "Do you know who I am? I am Trackett Grim."

"Oh, crikey!" gasped the cop, his face turning as white as suet. "I—I'm sorry, sir. I didn't know it was you. Carry on."

"Why did you stop me, fool?" raved Grim.

"Only to give you this, sir," answered the policeman and, so saying, he took out his truncheon and brought it down with sickening force on to Trackett Grim's head.

Good Old Grim!

WITHOUT a sound, Grim dropped senseless—more so than usual—to the floor of the car. Splinter, as he heard a wild yell from his master, started and clutched a spanner.

"Are you hurt, sir?" he gasped.

"I am brained, Splinter," moaned Grim. "The cop has brained me."

The policeman grinned, and produced a revolver.

"Keep those fins waving well up in the air, young 'un," he said, pointing the weapon at Splinter.

"What do you mean by this?" demanded the lad, with great courage, putting his hands up very quickly. "Are you a madman?"

Trackett Grim, Detective.

BANDITS!

story by that prince of authors,
HANDFORTH.

"No, I'm a motor-bandit," grinned the cop. "I'm only disguised as a policeman so that motorists will stop when I tell 'em to. Heave your master out of the car. I'm going to steal this car. My own 'bus has broken down and I've got to escape somehow."

Splinter gritted his teeth, and then bent down to attend to his master. Grim was prone on the floor; but Splinter noticed that one of his hands had fallen into the engine through a hole in the fabric. The lad heaved and strained, but the detective could not be shifted.

"He's insensible," groaned the lad.

"That's right," said Grim, from the floor.

"Oh, I'll soon have him out of that," snarled the villainous motor-bandit. He seized the detective's ankles and heaved with all his might. By George! Poor old Trackett Grim shout out of the car like lightning, and landed in the road.

"Ha, ha!" sniggered the bandit. "That shifted him. Toodle-oo!" And the villain climbed into the car and drove furiously out of sight along the road.

"Are you dead, guv'nor?" groaned the young assistant, sitting by his master in the road.

Trackett Grim raised his head.

"I'm better now," he said. "Go and get the police at once, young 'un. We'll soon get after that rotter and arrest him."

"But he's driven off at a furious rate; we'll never find him," wailed Splinter.

The great detective winked.

"While I was pretending to be senseless," he said, "I unscrewed the tap of the oil tank, and let the oil drip out. That lad will leave a trail of black oil wherever he goes."

"Marvellous, guv'nor!" gasped Splinter, amazed at the great detective's presence of mind.

The police soon arrived, and they brought a car with them. The trail of oil was easily followed for miles and miles, through lanes and fields and foot-paths. It ended at the back of a crumbling old house, where Trackett Grim found his Tinnecann in the garage.

The police rushed in and nabbed the rotter and marched him off to chokey. Once again some bad lad had run up against Trackett Grim, and once again the detective's marvellous cunning had beaten him.

THE END.

READY WIT from REGGIE PITT

HERE we are again. Still doing business at the old stand. Before I proceed to anything else, I should like to reply to MARMADUKE MISFIT (Manchester), who noticed in a recent story the phrase, "The evening is wearing on." And now Marmaduke wants to know what the evening was wearing. The "close" of day, Marmy; the "close" of day.

I saw Nipper reading the political news in the paper yesterday, and he told me that the Empire was going to the dogs. "Yes," I agreed. "You get a much better show at the Hippodrome next-door."

I asked Teddy Long yesterday what was his pet ambition. He answered: "To find out the name and address of the rotter who makes canes for schools, and then blow his factory to bits, and him in it." If it wasn't for Teddy, a good many cane-makers would be on the dole by now.

News reaches me of a lovable little fellow who went to the school doctor and said, "Please, sir, it's your job to cure things, isn't it?" "Yes," agreed the doctor. "Then cure that for my tea," said this delightful youth, giving the doctor a haddock.

Wait a minute; this isn't finished yet. The doctor looked at the boy. "It's your job to be interested in study, isn't it?" he asked. The boy nodded. "Then come and be interested in mine," said the doctor grimly.

And that youth, I am told, related what happened in the study with these words:

"Ow-wow-wow! Wow-wow-wow! Ow-wow!?"

Motto over the Fag's Common-room at St. Frank's: "Abandon soap, all ye who enter here!"

There will be more of this next week, and all of it very good—very good indeed. It makes me roar with mirth every time I read it. Same here!

SUMMER FASHIONS

By ARCHIE GLENTHORNE.

WHAT-HO!

Well, old lads, bend the bean and permit your humble servant to whisper a few golden words in the old shell-like. I want to spill a considerable mouthful about Summer Fashions and what-not. Especially the latter.

Here, Phipps, I'm too tired to write any more of this. Finish it for the young master, will you? Biff in a bit about flannel suitings and so forth. You know the stuff.

Exactly! What Mr. Glenthorne desires to say is that, as there is a prospect of a warm summer this year, flannel suitings will be largely worn, and may even take the place of the City lounge. Mr. Glenthorne strongly recommends you to purchase a dozen or so flannel suits of various shades.



Mr. Glenthorne also desires me to put in a word for silk shirts which will be found the most suitable for summer wear. Half-sleeved silk tennis shirts are extremely well fitted for outdoor sports, and a plain white or cream silk shirt blends admirably with flannel suitings. This does not, of course, include dress shirts, which, I believe Mr. Glenthorne desires to point out, should always be stiff.

Certainly, Phipps. Very well said, old chappie. Now pack this up and biff it into the Editor's study, with our compliments.

Very good, sir.

PERIL CAMP!

(Continued from page 20.)

The men took little or no notice; they had their work to do, and it was commonplace enough for Von Holtz to get into this condition.

He went round, superintending. At least, he gave orders here and there, and he probably believed that he was helping in the work. But the hands were glad enough when Von Holtz drifted away in the direction of Carlo's caravan.

He blundered in through the open doorway, and found the lion-tamer alone. Von Holtz looked round with a leer.

"Taking things easy, yes?" he asked. "Where's the little one? The pretty one?"

Carlo shrugged.

"Some of us must work," he replied. "Zena has much to do."

"While you take your ease," chuckled Von Holtz. "Goot! It is best that the women should work, my friend. Keep them at work, and they will not make the mischief, yes? I wish to speak with you."

Carlo regarded him cautiously. They were not the best of friends—never had been. He could tell that Von Holtz had been drinking. His excessive good humour, in fact, made the lion-tamer suspicious.

He expected the conversation to turn on the newly-acquired tiger. They had had more than one argument regarding that savage brute. From the first, Carlo had been opposed to including the tiger in the performance, even though the animal was only wheeled into the ring in its cage. In all his experience, Carlo had never before encountered such a savage creature as that tiger. He had had endless trouble ever since the brute had been taken into the circus. It was bad-tempered, untamed, dangerous.

Von Holtz did not understand wild animals. He had engaged Carlo as a tamer, and he expected Carlo to perform miracles. But Carlo had a greater liking for the safety of his own skin, and the more he learned of that tiger the more he feared and hated the brute.

"I have work for you, good Carlo," said Von Holtz gently. "We move on presently, eh? And you will be looking after your animals. How would it be if our friend, the lion, got out of his cage?"

"You have been drinking!" said Carlo shortly.

"I know what I say!" continued Von Holtz. "A little jolt of the cage—something go wrong with the wagon, my friend. And the lion, he get out. It can be easily arranged—yes?"

Carlo was relieved to find that the tiger was not the subject of the conversation; but, at the same time, he was puzzled. This talk of allowing the lion to escape—even though the lion was harmless—was strange.

"You are joking," said Carlo.

"Am I joking when I tell you that five pounds is yours if you can arrange this—accident?" asked Von Holtz, bending nearer. "Quite a simple little accident, Carlo. And five pounds for your pocket. You take no responsibility. I am the boss, yes? If the lion escape, I must recapture him."

Carlo's eyes narrowed.

"You mean this, boss?" he asked. "It is not the joke?"

Von Holtz soon convinced him that it was not a joke. The circus proprietor did not go into any details; he did not tell Carlo why Whittle required the lion to be set free. It was sufficient for the lion-tamer to know that the beast was to be let loose into the St. Frank's camp. And Carlo was ready enough to fall in with the plan when he saw the five one-pound notes in Von Holtz's hand.

"Yes, it can be easily arranged," said the lion-tamer, eyeing the money greedily. "But is it not worth more, boss? If something should happen, I get the blame."

"You speak like the fool!" snapped Von Holtz, losing his good humour. "I offer the five pounds, and you want more! Ach, you get no more! All you do is to open the door of the cage at the right moment—so that the lion leaps over the hedge into the camp. He is tame, yes? He injure nobody?"

They argued, and in the end Von Holtz won. He was well satisfied. Five pounds was a small enough share for Carlo—who knew nothing of the fifty pounds which Amos Whittle had paid.

And so the matter was arranged.

CHAPTER 7.

Hidden Fires!

CARLO would have agreed to release the lion for no payment at all. For when he learned that it was to be set free into the St. Frank's camp, his eyes glowed with vindictive pleasure.

He had not forgotten how those St. Frank's boys had knocked him down, how they had flung him into the oil-tank. His only regret was that his revenge would be so inadequate.

For Carlo knew, better than anybody else, how docile and harmless the old circus lion was.

In fact, he doubted if the trick would be of any real use. Otto von Holtz doubted it, too, but it did not concern him. Whittle had paid to have the lion released, and it would be Whittle's misfortune if the whole programme fizzled out.

Both the circus owner and the lion-tamer believed that the lion, finding himself at liberty, would bolt to the nearest cover—probably a ditch—and skulk there until it could be recaptured. It was too feeble to run far, and it had never tasted liberty in all its life. As for scaring the boys out of the camp—that was a very doubtful point.

But Von Holtz did not care. He would keep his part of the bargain. And, in any case, it would be a good advertisement for him. He was on safe ground all the while—particularly now that Carlo had so readily agreed to do his part for a mere fiver.

The boss, still in his good-humoured mood, left Carlo's caravan, and it was quite by chance that he ran into Zena as she approached.

"Well, you haf finished your work, yes?" asked Von Holtz, as he caught the girl by the arm. "You not so friendly to me of late, Zena."

"Carlo, he not like me to be too friendly," replied Zena, trying to get away.

"Oh-ho! So Carlo is jealous, yes?" laughed Von Holtz, highly amused. "You come to my caravan, Zena, and I gif you supper. Yes? You haf supper with me?"

"I not want to eat now," replied the girl. "You let me go, please."

"Ach, I like your eyes, my little beauty!" said Von Holtz playfully. "You not come to supper, so I gif you one little kiss. Yes?"

He drew her towards him and gave her a friendly, fatherly kiss, laughing amusedly. Being of a stolid, Teutonic type, he never could understand the fieriness of these Southerners. And in his present playful mood he cared not whether Carlo saw or not.

Carlo did see. Carlo was in the doorway of the caravan, and his eyes burned dangerously as he beheld Zena in the proprietor's arms. The next second, Carlo ran down the steps and dashed forward.

"She is my wife!" he panted hotly. "You not touch my wife!" He clawed at Von Holtz, and spun him round. "You big German pig!" he snarled. "My wife is not for you to kiss! You understand that? You touch her again and——"

"You call me the pig?" thundered Von Holtz, his good humour changing into violent fury. His fist shot out, and his hard knuckles thudded into Carlo's face. The lion-tamer sprawled over, half-stunned by the brutal force of that blow. As he lay on the ground, Von Holtz lifted his foot and kicked again and again.

"No, no!" cried Zena frantically. "You hurt him! You kill him!"

"If I hurt him, it is goot!" grated Von Holtz. "But I kill him—no! He call me the pig, so I teach him the manners—yes?"

He kicked again, and Carlo, groaning, fell back as he was trying to rise. Zena was helpless. Her own eyes were blazing, and one hand flew to her waist. Perhaps she carried a knife there; but, if so, she did not produce it. She stood back, breathing hard.

"Carlo is right!" she exclaimed. "You are the pig, Von Holtz! I hate you! You injure my husband—and you cannot do that in this country! I tell the police!"

"You threaten me?" bellowed Von Holtz. "Bah! Let us not make the trouble. We act like children." He turned and looked down at the prostrate Carlo. "If you do not like your job, you quit!" he sneered. "Lion-tamers, they are easy to get! You think I care? At the end of the week, you quit!"

"No, no!" cried Zena, who knew how difficult it was for her husband to obtain engagements. "That is not fair——"

"You both called me the pig, and that is enough!" interrupted Von Holtz. "You think I take that talk? Carlo is no goot, anyhow! I bring him the tiger, and he is afraid of the tiger! He call himself a trainer, but I could do better! So he goes—and you go, you little spitfire! You both go! At the end of the week, it is finish!"

He strode off, and one or two of the circus hands, who had drifted round, attracted by the altercation, went back to their work. They took very little notice. It was not the first quarrel that had arisen between the boss and the lion-tamer.

Von Holtz himself, when he got back to his own caravan, laughed. Some more drink restored his good humour. To-morrow he would see Carlo, and he would tell him that everything was all right. And why to-morrow? Why not now?

He stumbled out of his caravan, found Carlo, and clapped him on the back. Carlo was looking pale and shaky; he was badly bruised, and wracked with pain.

"Ach, we are foolish to quarrel, my Carlo!" said Von Holtz boisterously. "I say you quit, yes? Forget it, my Carlo!"

Carlo's eyes burned.

"You leave my wife alone!" he muttered.

"Ach, yes!" laughed Von Holtz. "You haf her—she is yours, my friend. And our little plan for to-night, it is all right, yes? We must not let this make any difference, Carlo."

"You have paid me—I keep my bargain," muttered Carlo.

Von Holtz laughed, and went off. But as he went he was followed by Carlo's baleful gaze. Von Holtz thought that everything was squared—but he was wrong.

He had quarrelled with Carlo once too often.

That talk of the tiger had put an evil, devilish idea into the lion-tamer's head. His hot Southern blood was aroused. Not only was he revengeful against Von Holtz, but he was revengeful against the St. Frank's boys.

"The big German pig!" breathed Zena, as she clung to her husband. "He hurt my Carlo."

"He will be sorry," said Carlo tensely. "Carrajo! Yes, he will be sorry, little Zena!"

"What do you think to do?" she asked, staring at him wide-eyed.

"Ask no questions, little one," replied Carlo. "Go now, and see to the rest of the work. Leave me."

"But, Carlo——"

"I must think," interrupted Carlo.

There was something in his tone which caused Zena to leave him to himself. She was uneasy, for she had good reason to know of her husband's revengeful, vindictive nature. She also knew that Carlo was burning with a wild jealousy. And it is jealousy which makes men do mad things.

Carlo sat in his caravan and brooded. The more he thought of the recent happenings, the greater became the intensity of the burning hatred in his heart. Von Holtz had insulted little Zena, and, on the top of that, Von Holtz had kicked him—knocked him to the ground, and kicked him like a dog!

"He shall pay!" muttered Carlo ferociously.

And then his mind, thus fevered, revolved round the plan that had been arranged for that night. The lion was to be let loose—into the St. Frank's camp. And those boys were there—those boys who had insulted him, too! They had not kicked him, as Von Holtz had done, but they had thrown him into that tank of waste oil.

Well, everything should be settled to-night.

It was all very simple. At the last moment, just as the circus was moving off, Carlo would take charge of the lion's cage. It was really a van, drawn by horses. When on the move, shutters were placed over the front of that cage, enclosing it completely. All Carlo had to do was to be "careless" with the shutter. Then, as the van was being driven past the Half Mile Meadow, he would lurch the van into the ditch. Easy enough then in the confusion to open the cage door. The lion would be out—over the hedge into the camp. And nobody would guess that it was anything other than an accident.

IT was nearly two a.m. when the circus was ready for departure. The two heavy traction-engines were already moving out, and the long line of wagons and vans and trucks and caravans was getting into motion. Otto von Holtz was practically sober by now, and he was bustling about attending to the final details.

He encountered Carlo, and Carlo was calm and quiet. Perhaps he was too quiet.

"You have it all arranged, yes?" murmured Von Holtz.

"It is ready."

"You know just what you must do?"

"I am no fool!" replied Carlo, with a shrug. "It is simple. I drive the van my-

self. The second van behind the big truck which carries the tent."

"The second van behind the tent," nodded Von Holtz. "Goot! I watch. I will be ready, and when the moment comes I will make the big confusion. You understand? It is better if there will be the big confusion. The old lion, he is so sleepy. If we make the big noise, perhaps he will roar in his fright. And his roar sounds goot, yes?"

"I will do my part," muttered Carlo.

"The rest I leave to you."

He went off and took his place on the driving-seat of that second van behind the big tent truck. His eyes were burning with a fierce hatred.

That second van! It was the exact replica of the first. How easy for him to make a little blunder at the crucial moment. The van containing the lion and the van containing the tiger were both of the same design, both of the same size, both of the same colouring. Was it not so easy for him to make the tiny blunder?

Later, he could plead that excuse. But Carlo, the lion-tamer, knew exactly what he was doing. He knew, as he sat upon the seat of that van, that there was no tame lion just behind him, but a savage, ferocious tiger.

Revenge!

By this one "slip," all could be accomplished. He would get his own back on those boys for what they had done to him. They would have an untamed tiger in their midst, and perhaps some of them would be mauled. And who would be blamed? Not he—not Carlo. Otto von Holtz was responsible. Thus the lion-tamer had planned to get his double revenge by one stroke.

CHAPTER 8.

A Tiger in the Camp!

AMOS WHITTLE, lurking at the edge of Bellton Wood, was a prey to every doubt and fear.

Those hours of solitude, during which he had had an opportunity of thinking, had passed like an age. He had watched the last of the camp lights extinguished; he had seen the final gleam die from the fires. Then the gloom of the summer's night had been softened by the rising moon.

Higher and higher the moon had climbed, until by now its silvery light was flooding the encampment. The white tents stood out clearly against a night-enshrouded background. Only occasionally had Whittle seen a movement, a sure indication that there were watchers in the camp. From Bellton he had heard nothing, not even the manœuvrings of the heavy traction-engines. For the great bulk of Bellton Wood blanketed all sounds from that direction. Whittle did not know whether the circus was preparing to move or not. He had



The terrified circus proprietor sought to bolt, but his way was barred by Nelson Lee.

grown more and more impatient. And now at last he was jumpy, nervous, and doubtful.

Perhaps he had been rash. In his desperation he had given fifty pounds to that rascally circus proprietor. The man was a scoundrel to have accepted the money—to have agreed to the scheme of letting a lion loose into a boys' camp.

Amos Whittle, seeing the whole thing in its right proportion, was rather appalled at his own villainy. Then the next moment he would call himself a fool for being so soft. Where was the harm? The lion was tame; he would do no damage. At the very worst, he would only cause a panic, and the boys would flee. And that was what Whittle wanted. Why should he have any qualms? It was all the fault of the St. Frank's boys for defying him so stubbornly.

Thus, drifting from one thought to another, Whittle waited.

He had almost come to a fresh decision. It was not yet too late to alter things. He would abandon the whole project; he would go to Von Holtz and tell him that the thing was off. He couldn't expect to get his money back, but at least his own conscience would be calmed.

Mansell was right. This was going too far.

Whittle paused in his thoughts. He strained his ears. Vague sounds were coming

to him out of the night now. He recognised them. The heavy lumbering of vehicles, the grinding of wheels, the puffing of road locomotives.

The circus was on the move—it was coming.

Amos Whittle trembled with apprehension. His hours of thinking had changed him somewhat; he had been brought to a realisation of his unscrupulous conduct. Yet in that same moment he gloated. His feelings were thus mingled. What a fool he was to have any doubts. Von Holtz would never allow that lion to escape if it was at all savage. And in one blow he would clear these boys out—he would get that meadow for himself. His great new saw-mills would become a reality instead of a dream.

Whittle fought back the impulse which prompted him to hurry to the lane and put a stop to the whole ugly business. No; he had paid his money, and he would get his money's-worth.

Little did Whittle realise the amazing consequences that were to result from his bargain with Von Holtz. Unknowingly, he had given Carlo the lion-tamer the opportunity for revenge he so much desired.

Even at that moment Von Holtz's circus was rumbling down Bellton Lane, and Carlo, sitting upon the driving-seat of the second cage-van, was looking out for a spot where he could put his scheme into effect

He could see over the low hedge; he could see the tents of the St. Frank's encampment. And he chuckled evilly as he saw that there was a deep ditch alongside the road here—a grass border, with the ditch beyond. Cunningly he commenced nodding, as though falling to sleep whilst driving. If some of the other men saw him they would assume that he had dropped off at his post. It was all so easy.

He was ready for the cage, too, ready to pull that shutter back and whip open the door. And then the tiger would be free—it would be out in the meadow and among the St. Frank's boys!

NIPPER, stirring in his sleep, rolled over. He was half-aroused, and he opened his eyes, blinked, and looked at the open tent flap, through which streamed the moonlight.

"What's all that noise?" he muttered, yawning.

"You may well ask, old boy," came a voice from Sir Montie Tregellis-West's bed. "It's that frightful circus. On the move, you know."

"By Jove, yes!" said Nipper, now thoroughly awake. "I was dreaming, I suppose. What a terrific din! Traction-engines and motor-lorries, and goodness only knows what else!"

The tumult was certainly disturbing. Some scores of fellows in the camp were awakened

by now. The labouring of the engines and the rumbling of the lorries made the night hideous. But the boys turned over lazily in their beds, happy in the knowledge that the disturbance would soon be over.

"It's a pity these giddy circuses can't move in the day-time!" grumbled Handforth. "My only hat! What a din!"

"Give 'em a chance, Handy!" said Church. "They've got to move during the night—or they'd never get to their next pitch. What an awful life! Always on the move—traveling by night, shoving up the tent, giving a show, and pulling the tent down again. Then on the move one more. Thank goodness I don't belong to a circus!"

"Yes, I suppose it is a bit offside," agreed Handforth.

Suddenly there came a different sound—the sound of a minor crash, a shout of alarm, followed by yells of consternation. Then confused noises, suggestive of a sudden commotion.

"Hallo!" said Handforth, sitting up. "What the dickens was that?"

"Sounded like a collision, or something," said Church. "I say, listen to those yells! What on earth's the matter?"

Handforth leapt out of bed, and went to the tent entrance. The moonlight seemed dazzlingly brilliant, and the whole scene was clearly visible. Other fellows were appearing out of the many tents. But not one of



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

VERY BRIEF.

The teacher had told his pupils to write a brief account of a cricket match. All the boys worked hard except one, and they gave in their narratives. The teacher approached the desk of the laggard.

"If in five minutes that description is not finished, I shall punish you," he said.

The boy scratched a line on the paper and handed it in. It read: "Rain, no play."

(D. Parr, 36, Army Street, Clapham, S.W. 4, has been awarded a handsome watch.)

A SCARECROW.

Farm-hand: "An artist gentleman wants permission to sit in the first meadow and paint."

Farmer (eyeing ancient-looking artist): "No,

let him sit in the field we've just sown—he'll keep the rooks off fine."

(D. Ward, 49, Queen's Drive, Nottingham, has been awarded a penknife.)

THE BIGGER THE BETTER.

Old Tar (disgustedly): "What, fish again for breakfast!"

Young Tar: "Well, probably you've heard that fish makes brain."

Old Tar: "Then if that's the case you'll need a whale."

(L. Hobbs, 49, Ker Street, Devonport, has been awarded a penknife.)

TIME TO PAY.

Customer (to tailor): "I've brought that last pair of trousers to be re-seated; you know, I sit a lot."

Tailor: "Yes; and perhaps you've brought your bill to be receipted; you know, I've stood a lot."

(J. Graville, 33, Percy Street, Hull, has been awarded a pocket wallet.)

TO KEEP WARM.

Charlie (to father): "May I have an ice cream?"

Pa: "No, you may not; it is too cold for an ice cream to-day."

Charlie: "But I could wear my overcoat while I'm eating it, pa."

(A. Stocks, 160, Chorley Road, Sheffield, has been awarded a pocket wallet.)

those schoolboys saw what was happening just beyond the hedge.

They did not see Carlo, the lion-tamer, deliberately send into the ditch the cage-van which he was driving.

The shutter which covered the cage bars was aside; and Carlo, shouting excitedly and pretending to be alarmed for the safety of his charge, was deftly unlocking the cage door.

He allowed the door to swing open, then with one bound he raced back—but not before he had caught a brief glimpse of something tawny as it shot out of the open cage, took the hedge in a bound, and vanished on to the other side. The next second a defiant roar, fearsome in its note, echoed on the night air.

Carlo fled into his caravan, slamming and locking the door behind him. He was panting desperately, his limbs were trembling, his face was as white as a sheet.

"Carlo! What is wrong?" cried Zena, startled.

"The tiger—he is free!" panted Carlo tremulously.

"Oh!" breathed Zena, crossing herself in her agitation.

"There has been an accident," went on Carlo. "You understand, little one? An accident! It is not the lion which has escaped—but the tiger! And it is a mistake, my Zena—a mistake!"

She looked at him open-eyed.

"But why are you here?" she asked. "You must be out, Carlo! He must be recaptured!"

"Yes, yes, I will go," muttered the lion-tamer. "I should not have come here. But the tiger—he is dangerous! It is safer here."

The man was nearly off his head with feverish excitement. He hardly knew what he was doing.

And outside all was confusion.

The engines of the lorries had stopped, and men were running up and down; the majority of them having no idea what had actually happened. Otto von Holtz, coming out of his own caravan, grinned contentedly. He had been waiting for that commotion—and he knew what it meant.

Now was the time for him to do his own little piece of play-acting. In the camp, practically all the boys were awake. Those who had come out into the open caught a glimpse of the great creature which leapt the hedge, and which bounded in a series of long jumps to the centre triangular open space in the middle of the camp.

Their hair almost stood on end when they saw the tiger take a terrific jump over one of the tents, saw its gleaming fangs snatch away the hat from off the head of one boy as he peered cautiously through the tent flap to see what all the commotion was about.

And then the great brute crouched, growling ferociously deep down in its throat.

GOING, GOING, GONE.

Tough: "Wot time is it?"

Mild Gent: "Sorry, my watch isn't going."

Tough: "Isn't going? Your mistake. 'And it over."

(P. McDonald, 12, Penderal Road, Hounslow, has been awarded a penknife.)

WHAT A SELL.

Boss: "Bill, I am going to give you a rise."

Bill (eagerly): "Thanks, boss."

Boss: "Yes, you will work on the second floor instead of the first."

(J. Clay, 73, Gadsby Street, Nuneaton, has been awarded a book.)

SMASHED.

Small Boy (to grocer): "That egg you just sold me is no good."

Grocer: "Really, my son? And where is the egg now?"

Small Boy: "On the pavement outside."

(C. Wilkinson, 122, Crafton Street, Leicester, has been awarded a penknife.)

TRIPPED UP.

An officer was showing an old lady over the battleship.

"This," he said, pointing to an inscribed plate on the deck, "is where our gallant captain fell."



"No wonder," replied the old lady. "I nearly slipped on it myself."

(A. Dale, 2, Runcorn Street, Leeds, has been awarded a pocket wallet.)

HIS EXCUSE.

Boy (to father): "Here is my school report."

Dad: "I promised you sixpence for a good report, but this is the worst I have ever seen."

Boy (artfully): "Well, I wanted to save you a tanner."

(D. Railer, 87, Fairmont Road, Grimsby, has been awarded a penknife.)

PROOF.

The assistant in the wireless shop was endeavouring to sell a very expensive set to a customer.

"Can you get Barcelona with it?" asked the client.

"Oh, yes," said the assistant airily as he twirled the controls, but when he had set the tuning dial all that resulted was a fierce barrage of atmospherics.

"Oh, there!" exclaimed the customer delightedly. "Why, you can even hear 'em cracking nuts."

(G. Mees, Lynwood, Talbot Street, Brierley Hill, has been awarded a pocket wallet.)

Handforth, who was one of the nearest to the spot, gave a little gurgling gulp, and he rubbed his eyes.

"Here, I say!" he breathed. "Churchy! Mac! Come here—quick! Something's escaped from the circus!"

"Rot!" said Church, coming to the tent entrance. "Don't get any silly ideas——"

"But look!" gasped Handforth. "That giddy lion—or a tiger, or something! Can't you see it?"

Church and McClure looked, and they jumped.

"A—a tiger!" exclaimed Church.

At that moment the tiger, raising his head, gave vent to a mighty roar. The sound of it sent chills down the spines of the boys who were nearest.

"Crumbs!" babbled Church. "What—what are we going to do? We're not safe here—in these tents!"

"Run—run for your lives!" came a shout from a tent near by. "The tiger's free!"

"Oh, help!"

"Run—run!"

It was the beginning of a panic—just as Amos Whittle had anticipated. Then, to make matters worse, Von Holtz came charging over the hedge, waving his arms above his head. He was doing his own little bit!

"Run, boys—run for your lives!" he bellowed. "The man-eater, he is escape!"

Fenton, of the Sixth, who was near by, dashed up.

"What do you mean—the man-eater?" he asked sharply, grasping Von Holtz by the arm.

"The lion—the lion" bellowed Von Holtz. "The lion, he escape! Run, everybody! We capture him after you have gone! But if you stay, you might get killed!"

"Great Scott!" ejaculated Fenton, turning round and staring towards the open space.

Inwardly Von Holtz was chuckling. The thing was working well—far better than he had expected. He could see the signs of panic on every hand. Yet he knew that there was no real danger. That old lion——

And then Otto von Holtz received the shock of his life.

For he saw something leap forward in that open space, to crouch down again. A long, lean, tawny body; a sleek creature with savage, glowing eyes. But it wore no mane, and in the same second Von Holtz recognised the identity of that brute.

It was not the harmless old lion—but the untamed tiger!

show of courage, telling everybody to run for their lives whilst he himself remained to face the danger.

But now that he found the danger to be real—horribly, vividly real—he was the first to turn tail. He knew better than anybody else how ferocious the tiger was. He had bought the brute, and he had regretted his bargain ever since, for he had come to the conclusion that the tiger would never be tamed—never trained. It was savage, a constant peril to those who had to feed and attend it.

And here it was—out in the open—and at any second it might spring.

Von Holtz, panting desperately, ran for the hedge. He was pulled up short by finding his way barred by a grim-faced man. A hand shot out and seized him.

"One moment, please!" said Nelson Lee quietly.

"Run!" shrieked Von Holtz. "The tiger! The man-eater!"

"Pull yourself together, you fool!" said Lee sternly. "You are Von Holtz, are you not—the proprietor of this circus?"

"Yah!" gasped the other. "But the danger, it is terrible——"

"You are responsible for that tiger, my friend, and you must remain," interrupted Lee. "Good heavens! Would you run for safety, leaving all these boys helpless? Where is your trainer?"

"There has been an accident," muttered Von Holtz. "The cage—it upset. I thought it was the lion. But, see, it is the tiger!"

"That animal is really dangerous?" asked Lee sharply.

"He kill—he jump and he kill!" replied Von Holtz brokenly.

He was frantic with fear, but Nelson Lee's calm attitude somewhat restored him; the showman in him came to the surface.

"Guns—we need guns!" he said tensely. "You have a gun, yes?"

"We do not carry guns in a peaceful encampment," replied Lee. "But surely you have guns with your circus?"

"Yah, yah—somewhere!" said Von Holtz, thinking rapidly. "But I do not remember. Wait! I will see. Get your boys away!"

He ran off, not so much in fear now as in an earnest endeavour to cope with the situation. There was a rifle somewhere—two or three, in fact. But there had never been any occasion to use those weapons, and it might be an hour before they could be found. Even then it was possible that they would be unloaded, with no ammunition handy.

Nelson Lee strode towards the central space; he could see the tiger distinctly in the moonlight. The brute was crouching low, probably frightened by all the commotion, by all the tents and the moving figures. At any second he was liable to spring. He might spring upon any one of the boys—and once he had tasted blood there would be no holding him.

CHAPTER 9.

Triumph—and Terror!

VON HOLTZ'S first impulse, upon making that alarming discovery, was to bolt.

He had been bold enough when he thought that there was only the lion to face; he had come into this camp with a great

"Listen, everybody!" shouted Lee, his voice audible in every corner of that camp. "I call upon every master and prefect here to keep his head! And I want every boy, senior and junior alike, to remain calm and orderly!"

There was a hush. Lots of fellows had been running madly away, but they were checked at the sound of Lee's voice.

"There must be no rushing or hurrying," continued the schoolmaster-detective. "Any sudden rush might cause this tiger to make a spring. At the moment he is far more scared than we are. If we do not interfere with him he may not interfere with us. But once he runs amok there will be tragedy. So I call upon you all to behave with coolness."

The tiger, as though understanding Lee's words, lifted his head and roared angrily. But mercifully he showed no sign of movement. He still crouched there.

"Listen carefully!" continued Lee. "All boys on this side of the meadow will move quietly and deliberately towards the lane. All boys on the other side will retire and get to the lane by making a detour. Nobody must come near this central space. When you get to the lane, hurry—run if you desire. Get to the school and seek adequate shelter. But let there be no panic here, or it may end in tragedy. Now, begin moving. I am relying upon you to keep your heads."

"We're Boy Scouts, sir; we'll keep our heads!" sang out Nipper.

"Rather!" echoed Handforth. "Come on, you chaps. We're not afraid of a silly tiger!"

There were only a few who broke into a run, fellows like Teddy Long, Hubbard, Gulliver and Bell. Even Bernard Forrest, who was several kinds of a rotter, remained as cool and as courageous as Nipper himself. He was one of the nearest to the central space, but he moved away with all his usual languid swagger.

It was a tense, anxious moment. If the tiger sprang now nothing could avert the panic. One spring would be enough; the boys would bolt helter-skelter.

But the brute remained motionless, emitting fearsome growls and an occasional roar. He was still uncertain; he was bewildered and enraged by the sight of so many human beings all round him.

On every side the boys commenced the evacuation of the St. Frank's camp. Not one of them thought of Amos Whittle now. Not one dreamed for a moment that this was the outcome of Whittle's plotting. The camp was being deserted by all. It was the only safe way, for once the boys had gone, the circus men could enter and recapture the tiger.

Amos Whittle, watching from the Bellton Wood end of the camp, marvelled.

He had expected a great, overwhelming panic; he had even seen the beginnings of a panic. But Nelson Lee's calm handling of

the situation, his masterful personality, had changed everything. The boys were going quietly, and in an orderly fashion.

Whittle was not only relieved, but he gloated afresh. This was far better than he had expected. Nobody was in danger, and none of the boys was being hurt in the panic. They were going quietly, deserting that meadow without a thought of what it would soon mean.

Whittle called himself a fool for having had any qualms during his wait. Why, the thing was working like a dream. It was too wonderful for words. Without any panic the boys were leaving; they were being led by their masters. From the highest to the lowest, they were all tricked, just as Whittle had intended them to be tricked.

Yet it was a sterling exhibition of courage and discipline. One and all, those school-boys kept their heads. Even the funks, after that first moment of panic, were influenced by the conduct of their fellows, and they fought down their fears.

Once in the lane the boys felt fairly safe. There was not much risk of the brute following them out here. Rather would the tiger avoid the crowd and seek the shelter of Bellton Wood. Wild animals do not attack human beings, as a rule, unless provoked. There are one or two exceptions, of course, such as the rhinoceros, but even the most ferocious of tigers avoid humanity unless they are half-starving with hunger.

Nelson Lee knew all this, and he judged that the tiger had probably had a good meal not many hours since. Once the boys were clear of the animal, he would probably bolt for cover. So the danger, if any existed, was comparatively slight. At least, it would be slight after all the boys had been removed from the meadow.

Nipper was the first to think of Whittle in connection with this affair, and he paused uncertainly as he was about to leave the camp.

"I say," he exclaimed. "I wonder if—Oh, no, it can't be possible!"

"What can't be possible?" asked Tommy Watson.

"I was thinking of Whittle."

"Whittle!" ejaculated Handforth, with a start. "By George! I shouldn't be surprised——"

"But he couldn't have arranged a thing like this," said Nipper. "I was an ass even to think of it. Whittle's probably fast asleep in bed. How could he have let that tiger loose?"

"Besides," put in Church, "even Whittle wouldn't play a filthy trick of that sort."

"I wouldn't trust him!" said Handforth darkly. "By George! The whole camp is being deserted, anyhow."

"That's true," admitted Nipper. "Well, we shall have to chance it."

"But why?" asked Handforth excitedly. "Why shouldn't some of us stay? Dash it, we ought to be on the safe side——"

"You will be on the safe side," interrupted Morrow, of the Sixth. "You'll be on the safe side, and you'll get to the school. You're mad to think of staying here, you young asses. Didn't you hear Mr. Lee's orders?"

"Yes, but——"

"But nothing!" said Morrow. "And don't talk such nonsense about Mr. Whittle."

So they all left the camp—with his Majesty of the Jungle in sole and undisputed possession.

ALL along the hedge, dividing the camp from the lane, the circus men were standing. Many of them had armed themselves with staves of wood. They realised that it was their job to recapture the tiger. They did not relish the work, but they would not have been men if they had shirked it.

Von Holtz was amongst them, and Carlo, too. But Carlo took good care to keep clear of the proprietor. He was not ready to give any explanations just yet. No guns had been found, and were not likely to be found.

Von Holtz was in a fever. His one fear was that the tiger would escape into the wood, and then, being lost, it would roam the countryside. An advertisement of that kind would not do his circus any good. There would be a hue-and-cry, a panic extending for many miles. It would be a matter for the police; it would entail endless expense. Unless that brute could be recaptured now it might mean that hundreds of men would be required to hunt. Bitterly did Von Holtz regret his compact with Amos Whittle, and he was still bewildered by the fact that the tiger, and not the lion, had escaped.

Whittle, watching from his hiding-place, chuckled with delighted satisfaction. Here was success, overwhelming in its completeness!

He watched tensely now—waiting until the last boy and master should leave the camp. Then his moment would come!

It was for him to seize his chance when he had it. It would be foolish to wait—for the boys might return, and then the opportunity would be lost. Even at the cost of allowing the St. Frank's people to suspect his duplicity, he must act.

And what did he care, anyhow? It was the property he wanted—not the goodwill of St. Frank's! Let them think what they liked! They could prove nothing. And, once he had established his claim to the Half Mile Meadow, everything would be all right. He would have won his battle against the St. Frank's authorities, and against the boys. He could afford to laugh at their enmity.

By now Amos Whittle had practically forgotten the animal which had been "accidentally" released from its cage. He had heard nothing of the talk which had been going on, he was still under the fatal impression that the harmless lion was loose.

And that was really a most unfortunate state of affairs—for Mr. Whittle!

For when the last figure had left the Half Mile Meadow, Whittle moved forward. If he thought anything about the lion, he dismissed the thought immediately. He had been assured—and reassured—that the animal could not harm a child in arms. So he entered boldly. At a run, he approached the central open space. He was shouting with triumph.

Von Holtz, seeing him coming, guessed vaguely at the truth, and the circus proprietor was staggered.

"Go back, you fool—go back!" he shouted. "The tiger, he will attack you!"

"This meadow is mine—mine!" Whittle was shouting. "I call upon everybody here to witness that not a single soul connected with St. Frank's is on this property at this moment! So it becomes mine by law!"

He ran into the open space, unconscious of his peril. Nipper, Handforth, Travers and many others, hearing his voice, leapt up the bank in the lane and peered over the hedge.

"I knew it!" yelled Handforth. "It's Whittle! We've been tricked!"

"Whittle himself!"

"Oh, my only hat!"

"It was a stunt!"

"The cad—the rotter!"

"He's dished us!"

Angry, indignant shouts went up. Amos Whittle's presence here, in the middle of the night, could mean only one thing! He had been lurking in the background, awaiting his opportunity—and now the Half Mile Meadow was his!

By law, he could claim it. He it was who had worked the whole ugly business. Possibly the tiger was a fake; perhaps a man dressed in a tiger skin!

All sorts of wild theories were voiced—but only for an excited moment or two. For then came the dreadful climax.

Whittle, striding into that open space, did not even see the nature of his danger.

"I call upon you all to see that I am alone—alone on this property," he was shouting. "St. Frank's has lost its claim! I have——"

He was interrupted by a savage, terrifying roar. He half spun round, badly frightened. And then he stood as though rooted to the ground. Not ten feet from him crouched the tiger, its eyes gleaming greenly in the moonlight, its fangs showing horribly. In that fateful second, Amos Whittle knew that this was no harmless lion.

"Help!" he screamed.

He staggered, half broke into a run, and at the same moment the tiger sprang!

CHAPTER 10.

Retribution!

THOSE who watched felt sickened.

It was over in a flash. The great tawny body landed fairly and squarely upon the terrified Amos Whittle. Man



With a ferocious roar, the savage tiger leapt upon the fleeing figure of Amos Whittle.

and tiger rolled to the ground, Whittle undermost.

Snarling with fury, the brute crouched there; Amos Whittle was on his back and he could feel the great paws of the tiger resting upon him—one on his chest, only a few inches from his face. The beast's hot, vile breath fanned his cheek. His brain reeled with disgust and terror.

Lifting his head, the tiger emitted another terrifying roar—as though defying anybody to come and take his prey away from him. That roar, throbbing in Whittle's ears, sounded like a death knell.

And now—when it was too late—the saw-mill owner realised his dreadful, his appalling mistake. It was no consolation to remember that he was alone responsible. This was a result of his own trickery—it was retribution!

All those along the hedgerows were dumb with horror. They saw what had happened—they expected to see worse. But as yet the tiger had not mauled his victim; he was crouching over him, holding him down, waiting, perhaps, for Whittle to make a move.

But Whittle made no move. He lay inert—not because he realised that any movement might be fatal, but because terror rendered him incapable of movement. Every muscle in his frame had become temporarily paralysed. Only his brain still functioned.

And his brain, as though to make up for the paralysis of his limbs, was doubly active. Perhaps Whittle's sensations were akin to

those of a drowning man, who is supposed to see his past life arising before him. For, in all truth, Whittle did not expect that he would emerge from this ordeal alive.

The one fact which stood out from amongst all these other dreadful facts was that there had been some ghastly mistake. He had arranged with Otto von Holtz that the harmless lion should be released. What had gone wrong? Why was the tiger at liberty? Until this moment Whittle had not even known of the existence of a tiger—or, if he had known, it had made no impression upon his mind.

The St. Frank's boys, seeing what had happened, were already reversing their original theory.

"We were wrong about Whittle!" said Handforth. "He couldn't have arranged this! It's a real tiger—a horrible brute, too!"

"Yes, rather!" said Fullwood, speaking in a whisper. "When Whittle ran into that meadow he hadn't any idea that there was a tiger there! So that more or less exonerates him! I expect he was just hanging about on the off-chance—and he seized his opportunity."

"Can't we do something?" asked Handforth, looking round. "Great Scott! We're not going to stand here and see him killed, are we? Let's all make a rush together!"

"No, no!" urged Church. "If we do that the tiger will attack us."

"But we can't leave him there—we can't!" said Handforth. "Why hasn't somebody got a gun? That brute ought to be shot!"

Von Holtz was shouting.

"No man must move near!" he called urgently. "You haf heard? The tiger waits—and while he waits the man is safe. But he will not wait if we go near. He will think we plan to rob him—and he will kill! Who has a gun? Is there no gun?"

Looking round, he suddenly caught sight of Carlo, and, with glowering eyes, Von Holtz bore down upon the lion-tamer.

"You!" he said thickly. "Pig und dog! You haf done this!"

Carlo attempted to wrench himself free from his employer's grip.

"It was the mistake!" he panted. "An accident, Von Holtz!"

"An accident that you let the tiger escape?" snarled Von Holtz. "You do this on purpose, yes? You think to get even!"

The truth, thus harshly spoken, robbed Carlo of his strength.

"A mistake, I tell you—a mistake!" he breathed. "I think it was the lion——"

"Liar and hound!" snapped Von Holtz. "I know now! I haf guessed. So! You shall go forward, Carlo. You shall save this man from the tiger!"

"No, no!" screamed Carlo. "The tiger will kill me!"

He sobbed in his terror, and he was such an abject creature that Von Holtz thrust him aside in disgust.

Meanwhile, Amos Whittle was passing through torment untold.

Seldom had a man had his misdeeds brought home to him as Amos Whittle was having his now. In his present extremity the Half Mile Meadow seemed a trivial, paltry prize. And owing to his crazy and dishonest plot to secure the meadow he was now at the point of death.

At any second he expected one of the tiger's paws to reach his throat, to feel those dreadful claws tearing at his flesh. It seemed an age to Whittle since he had been struck down. Yet in reality not more than one single minute had elapsed.

Tigers are uncertain creatures. This brute might spring into activity at once; on the other hand he might wait for ten minutes, twenty, thirty. He might crouch over his victim for a full hour, growling and snarling all the while. Much would depend upon the movements of those around.

Truth to tell, the tiger was too busy to give any particular attention to Whittle just now. He lay on the ground, his front paws on his victim, and his eyes were glowing in the moonlight, watching the distant figures. The tiger was on the alert, waiting for an expected attack.

And thus Whittle's life was still his.

"Look here, guv'nor, we can't stand this no longer!" said one of the circus men hoarsely. "We've got to do something, ain't we?"

"Yes, boss, let's do something!" said one of the other men.

There was a general movement; eight or nine of the circus men, strong, hefty fellows, pressed round Von Holtz. Many of the St. Frank's boys crowded round, too.

"We've got these 'ere sticks, guv'nor!" urged one of the men. "Like as not, if we make a sudden rush, we'll scare the crittur away."

"Let's have a try, mates!" sang out another.

"Good egg!" yelled Handforth. "Come on!"

Von Holtz leapt in front of them.

"No!" he shouted authoritatively. "You think I want men killed? I am responsible."

COMING NEXT WEDNESDAY!



I will answer. You attack as you say, and nothing can save that poor man!"

"But the tiger might be scared off, sir."

"It is too great a risk," interrupted Von Holtz. "The tiger, he will attack. He taste blood, and then he attack you, too. Haf you not seen a tiger when he attack? He kill not one, not two, but many! Himmel! I not let you go!"

The men, impressed by his words, hung back. Perhaps the boss was right. He knew better than they did, anyhow. And although they were plucky enough, and ready to do all they could, they saw that the situation was desperate.

Nelson Lee might have taken a hand here, but he was some little distance up the lane.

Everything had been happening so quickly that Lee was not yet aware of Whittle's peril. He had heard some commotion, but all the boys appeared to be safe, and Lee had another idea in mind. He was trusting to Mr. Wilkes and Mr. Stokes and the other masters to look after the boys. Lee himself was hurrying forward, bound for St. Frank's. He had automatic pistols there, and he wanted to obtain them. Lee was a dead shot, and once suitably armed he would make short work of the tiger.

But there was one person in that crowd of men and boys who felt that something effective could be done. That person was

"HIS MAJESTY OF THE REMOVE!"

By E. S. Brooks.

Clatter, bang, crash, bang!

The clanging of saucepan lids, the squeaking of tin whistles, and the squawling of mouth organs.

His Majesty, King Victor of Caronia, has arrived at St. Frank's. And the Removites have assembled to welcome their new Form-fellow.

Meet the schoolboy king in this rousing series of yarns which starts next week. Read how he japes the school—and how the school japes him.

A great story this, lads. Take a tip and don't miss it.

"The Phantom Foe!"

By John Brearley.

The Night Hawk for thrills—and next week's enthralling instalment breaks all records for sheer excitement.

"Handforth's Weekly!"

"OUR ROUND TABLE TALK."

ORDER IN ADVANCE!

none other than Willy Handforth, the cheeky, cool-headed leader of the Third Form.

Willy pushed his way amongst the men, and he faced Von Holtz squarely.

"What's the matter with you?" he asked fiercely. "You're the owner of this circus, aren't you? Why don't you do something to help that poor man?"

"I haf no time to talk with poys——"

"It's all very well to say that!" interrupted Willy. "But where's your lion-tamer? He's the man to go after that tiger."

Von Holtz cursed in German.

"My lion-tamer is a coward!" he snapped. "He has always been afraid of the tiger. Where is he, you ask? You think I know?

Skulking in hiding, I expect. Carlo, he is no goot!"

"Then aren't you going to do anything at all?" asked Willy in disgust. "Great Scott! All you men, and you stand here——"

"Ach, you do not understand!" broke in Von Holtz. "If we go near the tiger he attack the man. He kill him."

"Don't you believe it," said Willy. "Well, if all of you can't do anything to help Mr. Whittle, I shall jolly well have to do it myself. I'm jiggered if I can understand what the dickens you're afraid of!"

His voice was full of scorn. Without another word he turned and pushed his way through the hedge and dropped into the meadow.

Everybody was startled.

"Hi, come back, Willy!" gasped Handforth. "Where are you going, you ass?"

"To help old Whittle, of course," said Willy. "Somebody's got to help him."

"But you'll get killed——"

"Rot!" said Willy. "You don't think I'm scared of a tiger, do you?"

And with perfect coolness Willy Handforth advanced.

CHAPTER 11.

The Hero of the Third!

IT must not be supposed that Willy Handforth was acting in any sense of bravado, or that he was "playing to the gallery." It wasn't in Willy's nature to do anything of that sort.

But he was a blunt, outspoken youngster, and at the present moment he was filled with scorn for these circus people, who seemed to be so utterly helpless in an emergency. Willy knew, as well as they did, that it would be fatal to make a sudden rush. But surely there was somebody who could go forward and pacify that poor creature?

By "poor creature" Willy was thinking of the tiger, not Mr. Whittle. In fact, Willy was far more sympathetic towards the tiger than he was towards the saw-mill owner. He was going to Mr. Whittle's rescue, it is true, but at the same time he felt very sorry for the tiger.

Perhaps Willy was the only one who appreciated the fact that the beast was as much in need of sympathy as the victim. For many months the tiger had been kept in captivity. Then suddenly he had been allowed to have his freedom. All sorts of commotion had been going on around him. The brute was frightened, nervous, and if he was only handled right he would return quietly to his cage, only too glad perhaps to be back in safety. He had no real desire to maul Mr. Whittle. He had only attacked the man because he had feared that Mr. Whittle was going to attack him.

But the cool manner in which Willy Handforth strode forward towards that jungle creature was certainly an eye-opener.

Nipper and Travers and Handforth and the others watched him in dire apprehension. It was too late to get him back now. If they attempted to do so their action would probably precipitate the very tragedy they had been trying to avert.

Moreover, they were too fascinated by this sight to take any action at all. Von Holtz and his men watched in the same dumb-founded way. This boy—this mere fag—was going singlehanded to rescue Amos Whittle from the tiger.

But the St. Frank's fellows, at least, knew more than Von Holtz and his men. They knew that Willy possessed an uncanny influence over all animals. If there was one human being who could deal with that tiger, that one was Willy.

His understanding of animals was almost miraculous. Not merely domesticated animals, but savage animals, too. On more than one occasion, when abroad, Willy had demonstrated his astounding power.

Yet Willy himself claimed no credit for it; he took it all as a matter of course. He merely said that if you knew how to treat an animal properly, the animal would respond in the right way. Yet there was something more in it than that—something which even Willy himself did not understand.

Perhaps it was his fearlessness which helped him on such occasions as these. Perhaps it was friendliness towards the wild creatures which led to a mutual understanding between them.

He spoke, now, as he might have spoken to Lightning, his pet greyhound. He advanced slowly, confidently.

"Now then, old boy—now then!" he said, in a soft, soothing voice. "There's no need to make all this fuss. Poor old chap! Frightened, eh? Well, that's all right. We'll soon have you back in your comfy quarters."

The tiger eyed him steadfastly. A low growl sounded in his throat, and he shifted his paws slightly.

Whittle, underneath, shuddered. He could hear Willy's voice as though he were in a dream. He could not believe it. One of the boys—a St. Frank's fellow—close at hand! It was impossible—fantastic!

Yet, when Whittle turned his head, he could see Willy clearly in the moonlight. Willy—alone! Not only alone, but unarmed.

"Don't speak, Mr. Whittle," said Willy gently. "Don't move, either. If you do, our friend might give you a scratch or two. Just keep perfectly still, and leave the rest to me. I'll try to get him away, and if I do get him away, for goodness' sake don't leap to your feet and bolt. Keep absolutely still. It's your only chance!"

Whittle, hearing these words, could hardly believe the evidence of his own ears. But he obeyed. He remained motionless.

"Now, what about it, old boy?" asked Willy cheerfully, as he moved nearer. "You're not going to spring at me, are you? We're pals. Come along, now!"

He made coaxing noises—strange, animal noises. The tiger, still eyeing him steadily, lost some of his fearsome aspect. He was already beginning to realise, perhaps, that this was a friend. He sensed it rather than saw it.

And Willy Handforth, without any fear, moved right forward, bent down, and patted the tiger on his shoulder. Willy was not conscious of any heroism in doing this. His love of animals was so great that he never had any fear. People who had never seen Willy with a savage animal would never have believed that such a thing could be possible. But those who watched now thought they were looking upon a miracle. At any second they expected the tiger to attack—they expected to see Willy thrown down and mauled.

But, instead, the tiger gently moved away from Amos Whittle. He rose to his feet, and rubbed affectionately against the school-boy. At the same time, the great brute commenced a purring sound in his throat.

"That's better!" said Willy cheerfully. "All we've got to do now, old chap, is to walk quietly across to your cage and then you'll be all serene. Come along now."

"Himmel!" muttered Von Holtz, as he saw what was happening. "The poy is leading the tiger towards us!"

"Didn't you hear what he said?" exclaimed Handforth. "Get the cage ready. Here, let everybody else clear off! If not, the tiger might be scared!"

"Ach, yes!" said Von Holtz. "It is the goot idea! The cage is ready—the door open. We haf to go, so that we are not even seen. You understand, men? Quietly—quietly!"

They crept away, most of them only too glad of the opportunity. The tiger was coming towards them, and they were not extraordinarily keen upon meeting him at close quarters. Willy might be able to handle him, but they were not so confident of their own powers.

Amos Whittle, left alone in the centre of that meadow—that property he had plotted so cunningly to gain—was still sick with fear. In obedience to Willy's instructions, he had not moved. Even now he still lay flat upon his back, watching with burning eyes. He could see the tiger retreating; he could see Willy leading him. His impulse was to leap to his feet and run—to run as fast as his legs would carry him. But with a strong effort of will, Whittle remained just as he was. He had been saved. He was not even scratched—and he had that boy to thank!

It was a devastating thought.

He had revealed his enmity for these St. Frank's boys—he had schemed continuously against them. Yet one of their number had fearlessly come to his rescue. Amos Whittle felt shame at that moment.

Willy and the tiger were getting nearer and nearer to the hedge. The fag could see the animal's cage in the lane. His one object was to get the tiger there, and he had less trouble than he had anticipated. The brute

only hesitated once, when the hedge was reached. Perhaps he sensed the presence of other human beings—and human beings who were not so friendly. But Willy, going in advance, called in a crooning voice. The tiger responded.

Once through the hedge, Willy leapt lightly into the cage. He felt that he would be more successful if he got in himself—first. The tiger would follow, as a faithful dog follows his master.

With one leap, the animal got into the cage, and from beyond came the excited murmur of voices. In that second, Willy had his first and only moment of fear. Would those fools of men dash round and slam the door? If so, the tiger might well lose its docility and attack him.

Mercifully, the men were held back—not by Von Holtz this time, but by Carlo. For Carlo, of all those present, realised and valued the wonder of Willy Handforth's act. Carlo was a lion-tamer, and never in his whole experience had he seen any human being who had such an extraordinary influence over animals as Willy.

The fag gently eased himself out of the cage, and the next moment he had closed the door, tightly securing it.

He turned aside, walked round the cage, and he encountered Carlo and Von Holtz and the crowd of St. Frank's fellows, with the circus men in the background.

"It's all right," said Willy coldly. "Nothing to be afraid of now. The tiger's in, and the door's locked."

"This boy is the miracle!" ejaculated Carlo. "Carramba! Never have I seen anything like fit. He should be earning hundreds of pounds a week in the world's greatest menagerie."

"Rats!" said Willy. "What the dickens are you making all the fuss about? Wild animals are all right if you treat them properly. The worst of it is, most people are afraid of 'em."

"You—you giddy marvel!" gasped Handforth. "Oh, my hat! I thought it was all up with you, Willy! You reckless young ass! You blithering young fathead! You nearly gave me heart failure. By George, I'm proud of you! You're a young brother to boast about!"

"Fathead!" said Willy scornfully. "Here, chuck it, you Remove chumps!" he added indignantly. "What's the matter with you? Lemme alone!"

But Willy, in spite of his protests, was raised shoulder-high.

"Hurrah!"

"Good old Willy!"

"Three cheers for the hero of the Third!"

"Hurrah!"

When Willy was at last allowed to get down he was boiling.

"You—you dotty lunatics!" he roared. "Don't I keep telling you that I've done nothing?"

By this time the news had spread, as such news will. It had even reached the school,

and the boys, seniors and juniors alike, were streaming back into the Half Mile Meadow. They were running from all quarters. The tiger had been recaptured, and everything was all right.

But was it all right?

For the fellows remembered that Amos Whittle had seized the meadow, that he was in it still. Mingled with their relief was a sensation of anger. They felt that they had been tricked, or, at least, that Amos Whittle had taken a mean, contemptible advantage of the situation.

However, Whittle was not there—not the scoundrelly Whittle the boys knew. For he was a changed man now.

Boys commenced crowding round him—

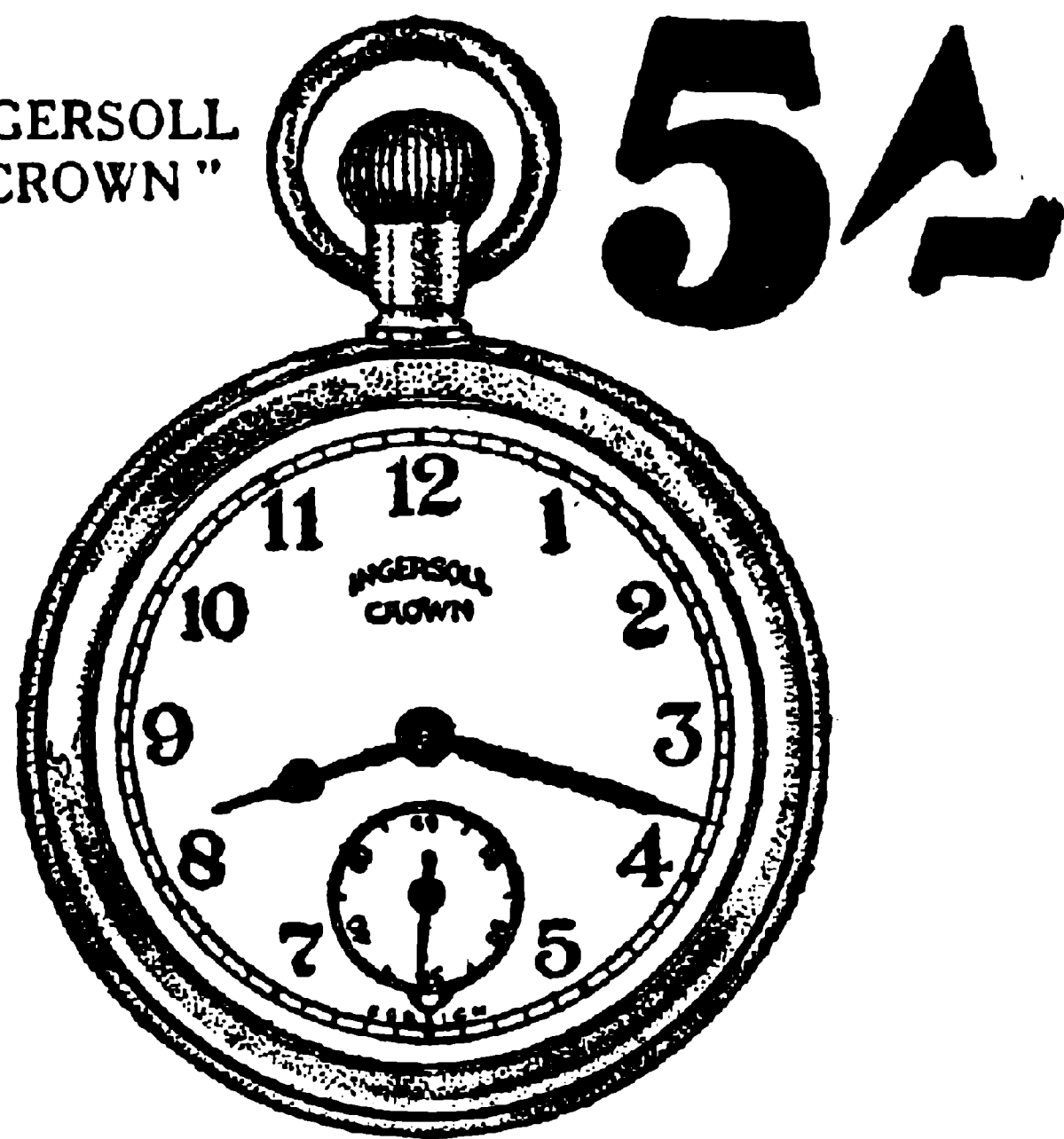
(Continued on page 44.)

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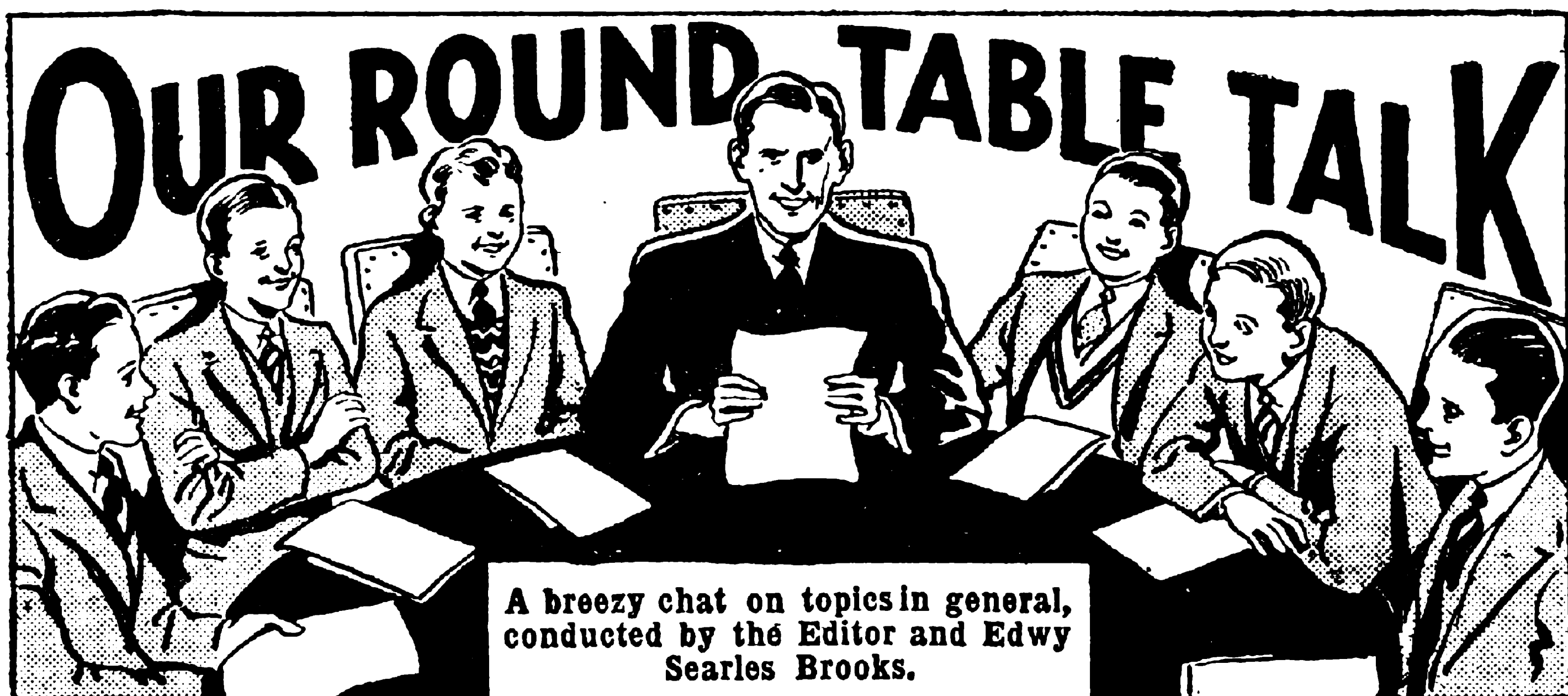
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Gather round, boys——the more the merrier!



EDWY SEARLES BROOKS wishes to acknowledge letters from the following readers: Horace Pryke (Walderslade), Jean Elder** (Mukden, Manchuria, China), Irene Mary Randall* (Sandwich), Ralph E. Clarry (Toronto), Winifred Harvey (Manchester), Norman Bowman (Saltcoats), Alex. W. Tustin (Birmingham), B. Sindlo (Balham), Walter S. James* (Georgetown, Demerara, British Guiana), Stanley J. G. Stockwell (Didcot), Wm. G. Paris (E.7), Barbara Ives* (St. Albans, Jersey), Francis Burrow (S.W.16), Victor S. Wilson* (Liverpool), I. Woolford (Kenton), Lincoln C. Farmer (E.12), Norman Pragnell (N.W.1), Fred Mansell (Birmingham), Wm. Gibb Huntley (Aberdeenshire), S. P. Crocker (Torquay), Ernest S. Holman (E.10).

Nipper is not much of a lad with the girls, Norman Bowman. But if he has any particular liking for any girl, he undoubtedly favours Mary Summers of the Moor View School.

As the St. Frank's stories have already told you, Wm. G. Paris, the twelve boys known as "K. K. & Co." have left St. Frank's, and have gone back to Carlton College. But this does not mean to say that they will never again appear in the stories. Kirby Keeble Parkington is very keen on fixing up cricket and football matches against St. Frank's, so these characters are certain to appear again on occasions—and it is just as certain that the enterprising K. K. will get in a jape or two against his former schoolfellows when the opportunity offers. And it is still more certain that Nipper & Co. will give him better than they receive. Yes, there are four extra studies in the Junior passage of the Ancient House; and four extra studies in the West House.

Vivian Travers first came to St. Frank's, Barbara Ives, in a story called "The Boot-Boy Baronet" (Jan. 21st, 1928), and he is

rather tall, inclined to be dark, well-dressed, and somewhat flippant in manner of speech—and a sound good fellow at heart. His home is Stapleton Towers, near Halstead, Essex. His girl chum at the Moor View School is Phyllis Palmer. By the way, the Moor View girls made their first appearance in the St. Frank's yarns in No. 436, Old Series (Oct. 13th, 1923), and the story was called "A Rod of Iron." No; Nipper does not possess blue eyes and fair hair. His eyes are deep grey, and his hair is dark. Doris Berkeley is the greatest tomboy at the Moor View School. Her hair is dark chestnut, and inclined to be wavy; her eyes are brown.

You have remarked, Cedric L. Woods, on the fact that Cecil De Valerie is sometimes herded with the rotters, and at other times he is quite clearly one of the best. This is not so contradictory as it seems. De Valerie's character is contradictory in itself. He is an inconsistent fellow, as the stories have proved. He is an uncertain quantity. In other words, unreliable. Generally he is quite a decent chap, but under the stress of excitement he is apt to throw in his lot with the cads—and to regret it later.

The best boxer in the Remove, William Slogan, is undoubtedly Nipper. But if you ask who is the best boxer in the Junior School, then Ernest Lawrence certainly heads the list. You may say that Lawrence doesn't figure enough in the stories; but if a phenomenal young boxer such as he were to be frequently given the limelight, you would get fed up with him. The St. Frank's stories are not primarily about boxing. Yes, the correspondent who told you that he was reading the St. Frank's stories fourteen years ago was not pulling your leg, for he was nearly right. The first St. Frank's story appeared nearly fourteen years ago—to be exact, on July 28th, 1917.

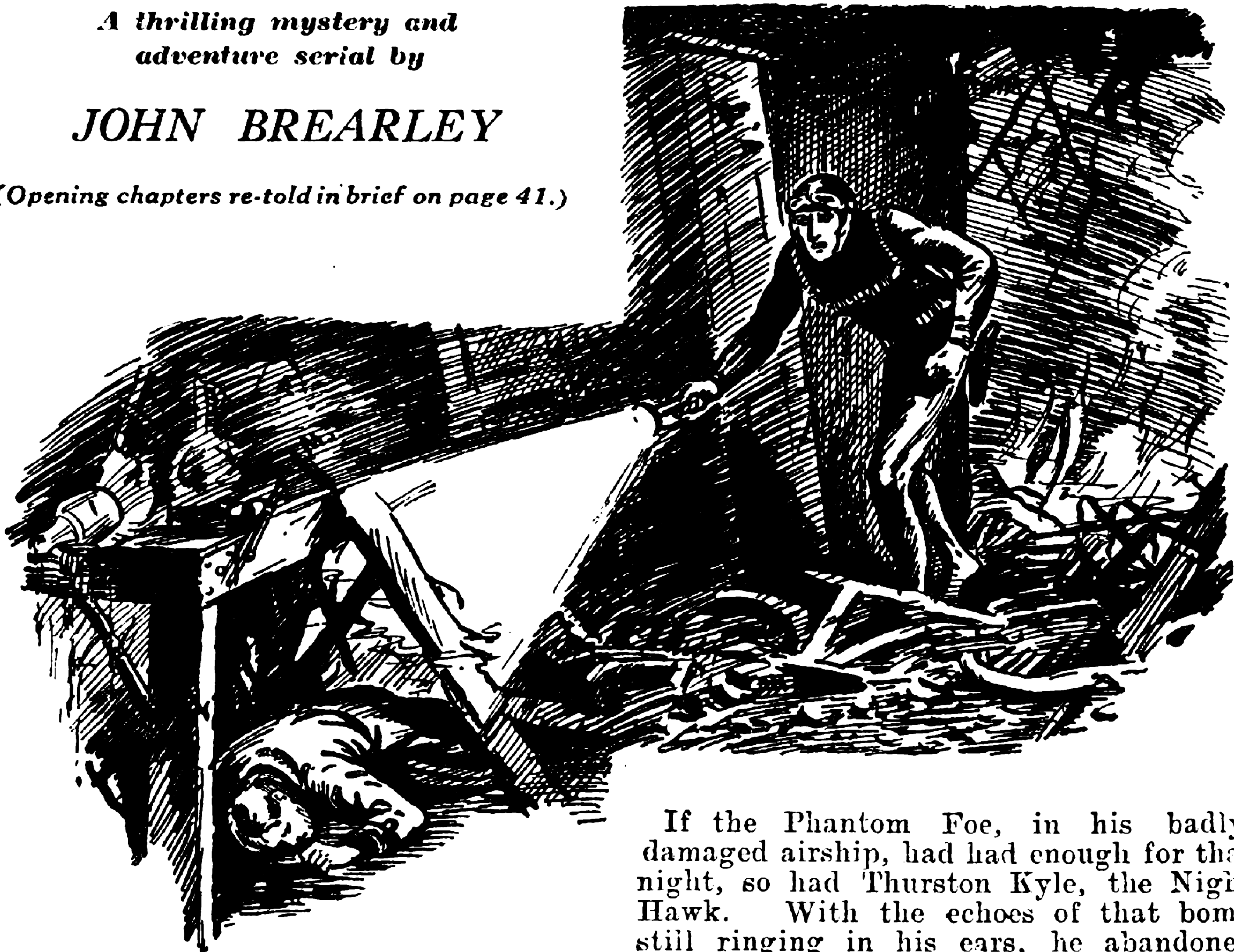
Another Full-of-thrills Instalment!

The PHANTOM FOE!

*A thrilling mystery and
adventure serial by*

JOHN BREARLEY

(Opening chapters re-told in brief on page 41.)



The Shattered Mansion!

BRR-RROOM! Thunderous, reverberating, the smash of the bomb's concussion rent the air; the age-old garden trees bordering the lawn were split asunder like so many straws. Every window in the house was blown to atoms as though by a mighty gale, all lights went "phut" together, gaping rents appeared in the mansion's facade.

With the final murderous lash of his tail, the Phantom Foe had let loose Inferno. More, he had beaten off his pursuer. For, vengeance forgotten instantly in gnawing anxiety for Snub, the Night Hawk went flashing downwards like a dark, slender meteor. While above him the Phantom's airship, masked by its thick, brown smoke screen, rose and limped away like a monster writhing from desperate wounds.

For the time being, at least, he had had enough.

"The devil! The cur!"

If the Phantom Foe, in his badly-damaged airship, had had enough for that night, so had Thurston Kyle, the Night Hawk. With the echoes of that bomb still ringing in his ears, he abandoned the fight at once and hurtled straight for his ruined home.

Ruined it was; but how grim the damage he could not say as yet. Save for a lurid glare of flames licking at the splintered trees, the mansion was in utter darkness. The glow of fire, however, showed him gaping holes at the foot of the house, the whole of the left-hand corner in chaos, and a yawning crater where the smooth lawn had been. And Snub? Snub had been in the laboratory when the crash had come. The Night Hawk streaked for the little veranda that was his landing-ground.

It had vanished, of course; wrenched clean away. By the aid of his torch, he found a handhold on the tottery fragments and drew himself cautiously through the tattered French windows into the laboratory. Part of the ceiling was down, exposing the old oak beams; his cabinets, rows of phials and desk were smashed. Broken glass cluttered underfoot as he prowled in. Unstrapping his wings quickly, he thrust them into their

cupboard which leaned drunkenly against the wall. Then, flashing a pool of light everywhere, he searched for Snub in feverish haste.

The boy was lying in a heap beneath a stout bench that had protected him to some extent from the smashed furniture. He was utterly unconscious, and with a nasty scalp-wound where his head had cracked against the bench-leg. The Night Hawk had him gently extricated in a moment, laying the youngster out flat in a small clear space. Many anxious minutes passed while he examined him as best he could.

A pent-up sigh of relief burst from his lips at last to find that, beyond the wound and severe shock caused by concussion, Snub was not as badly hurt as he had first feared. The lad was still in his pyjamas, with a dressing-gown thrown loosely over them. Wrapping him up close, Thurston Kyle propped his head up on one of the scattered books around, and began looking for the first-aid chest somewhere amid the debris.

But something stopped him—a queer, muffled chorus of cries and yells from somewhere beneath the flooring. For a moment he paused to collect himself—ah, the madmen; the Phantom's ghastly raiders! So Snub had got them into the lift after all, and they were recovering from the fight, locked away between floors. Well, they were safe enough there; let them stay till he had time to deal with them.

There came other sounds now, however; the rush of motors beyond the wrecked shrubberies, excited voices and the faint thud of feet in the grounds below. Thurston Kyle bit his lip. The whole of the neighbourhood must have been aroused by the falling bomb; other houses, too, must have felt the shock. A stampede of curious thrill-seekers, the police and—ah, yes, there was the shrill syren!—ambulances, had flocked to the scene. He laughed harshly and shrugged. They could enter the grounds now; anyone could come in. The Phantom's bomb, in wrecking the house, had wrecked the defences, too.

Thurston Kyle acted quickly. Depositing the first-aid chest beside Snub, he then went along to his bed-room, wrecked during the battle with the terrible six, and replaced his flying-suit hurriedly by night attire. It would not do to be caught by outsiders in the strange gear he wore as the Night Hawk. Awkward questions might be asked, and he was in no mood to answer.

Apart from that, he did not care if all London swarmed into the grounds to-

night. He had a reason for not caring. Hardly had he changed and gone back to the laboratory, than, followed by three burly constables, a bewildered sergeant of the local police entered the house. The Night Hawk heard them rambling warily about in the ruined hall below, and, going to the door, shouted to them to come up.

"Good heavens, sir!" Sergeant Cole, leading his men into the great room at last, stopped dead at the sight of Thurston Kyle doctoring and bandaging his limp assistant, with fingers that were deft and cool as ice. The light of five torches made the scene more grim than ever. "What—what's happened, sir? It's Mr. Thurston Kyle, isn't it?"

"That's my name. What's happened, sergeant? That's obvious, isn't it?" jerked the scientist dryly. "Someone seems to have disliked me sufficiently to bomb my house!"

"Bomb it! Great Scott, sir; they've wrecked it. Is the boy sadly hurt? There's an ambulance outside, and the fire brigade has been sent for. Half your trees are burning!"

"Much of a crowd?"

"Hundreds, sir. Don't—don't you know anything, Mr. Kyle? Why, just before the bomb dropped, it sounded as though an air-battle was goin' on somewhere above this house. We started out right away, but then the bomb exploded. There's trees down across the road—we couldn't get by. And we fairly had to fight our way in through your gates. It—it——"

Plainly the sergeant was out of his depth. Putting the finishing touches to Snub's bandage, Thurston Kyle stood up and surveyed the policemen sombrely.

"Sergeant, pray don't think me offensive, but I'm afraid this is a matter for your superiors only. No protests, please; I take all responsibility. As you see, I can hardly answer questions to-night; you seem to know all that has occurred, in any case. My assistant will be all right if I put him straight to bed somewhere. You clear the crowd away like a good chap, and do whatever you think necessary outside. Make what report you please. I will do the same to Scotland Yard—in the morning. But meanwhile——"

He gave them another inscrutable look, clambered across to the little electric-lift shaft and pressed the button.

"Here are some interesting captives as a reward," he finished. "They will be better in a police cell. Draw your truncheons, men!"

The lift shot up to the lab. floor, and the little door slid open. One startled look the policemen gave at the passengers

inside; and then, as Kyle suggested, they whipped out their truncheons swiftly and sprang forward.

Just in time. The three survivors of the terrible six had recovered from their battering at Kyle's hands, and the moment the door was open they, too, sprang forward, with a demoniac yell that filled the room. In a second another storming fight was on!

It did not last long. The stalwart police, seeing at a glance what they were up against, were not gentle in their methods. There was a whirlwind, snarling rough-house that lasted less than two minutes; a bedlam of yells, shouts, and short, heavy thuds. At the finish, Sergeant Cole, recovering the helmet that had been smashed from his head, breathed hard and looked at Thurston Kyle. His expression made the watchful scientist smile faintly.

"I think you're right, Mr. Kyle. This case is too big a handful for me. Who—who are these beauties, anyway?"

"Madmen. sergeant; released by another madman from gaol some time ago!" said Kyle crisply. "See that they are treated properly, though, poor beggars. They are not responsible for this."

Quickly stepping past the sergeant, he bent over each limp captive in turn, pushing back their hair to study their faces, tilting their chins, examining their finger-tips minutely. He nodded to himself at last, a smile of bleak satisfaction on his face as he rose.

"You will find three others in the house—I will show you!" He led the way carefully from the room. "These will not need truncheons!" he said significantly.

He was right. And Sergeant Cole, with the biggest report of his career to make, had little more to say. Ten minutes later, Thurston Kyle had got rid of him and his party, all save one man posted in what had once been the front door. Putting Snub tenderly to bed, he lit a cigarette and walked back to his laboratory.

Under the hoses of the fire brigade, all danger of fire had been nullified; there seemed no fear of further collapse in the stout old house for a time. Beyond the gates, a cordon of police were steadily disbanding the crowd of wondering onlookers. Presently all was quiet and still again.

Lifting his head, Thurston Kyle looked up at the sky, a dark, impassive figure in the shattered laboratory. The Phantom was a hard hitter; he had won this round in spite of heavy punishment. But the final gong had not sounded yet.

Thurston Kyle—Quitter!

"GUV'NOR!" Scrapper Huggins, voice thick with anger, leant forward as he spoke. His great, muscular body was quivering. "Why don't you stop this rot? Gosh! I've told you who the Ace is—the finest and biggest gangster who ever walked. Recognised him the moment I saw him. You must be pretty sure by now that he's the Phantom, too. Me an' the boys are, anyway. You know where he is. Why don't you jump on him—right away?"

It was the morning following the bomb outrage. Thurston Kyle sat on the foot of Snub's bed, facing the giant leader of his Kittens, while Snub himself, propped up on pillows, frowned beneath his bandage. The little party were in one of the few rooms that had been voted safe. The rest of the house and grounds were in the possession of police, fire brigade, and other experts.

At the finish of Scraper's vigorous words, a thoughtful cloud of smoke curled from Thurston Kyle's nostrils.

"Ye-es, it's true that you've identified the Ace, Scraper!" he murmured pensively. "And we know that, if he isn't actually the Phantom, he is hand in glove with him. Yes, I could nail the Ace; unmask him before Scotland Yard, too. But supposing he is not the actual

HOW THE STORY BEGAN.

THE NIGHT HAWK, known to the world as Thurston Kyle, scientist, declares war on THE PHANTOM FOE, a ruthless criminal, who has commenced a reign of terror, killing, kidnapping, looting. Always he attacks amid a cloud of yellow gas, which stupefies his victims; then disappears literally into air, for he directs operations from an invisible airship. The Night Hawk discovers this, but in his first clash with the Phantom is defeated. Scotland Yard calls in Kyle, and he promises to assist them to bring the criminal to book. He outlines a plan to Captain Frank Arthurs, but, owing to a leakage of information, the Phantom outwits them. Then comes the sensational news that Lucius Pelton, of the Treasury, has vanished, and Arthurs immediately suspects that he is in league with the Phantom Foe. One night the crook sends six men to attack the Night Hawk, but Kyle and his young assistant, Snub Hawkins, defeat and capture them. Then the Night Hawk flies out on his wings and launches an attack upon the Phantom's airship, damaging it; but not before the Phantom has dropped a bomb which wrecks Kyle's mansion.

(Now read on.)

Phantom after all? I have not yet received the answer to a certain cablegram I sent over a fortnight back, remember!"

Scrapper wriggled his big shoulders obstinately. But Thurston Kyle went on unperturbed.

"There is something else you have overlooked," he drawled. "If we do catch the Ace and prove at Scotland Yard that he is the Phantom, what then? What would prevent him from immediately exposing me as the Night Hawk, in revenge?"

"Huh?" The startled Scrapper had not thought of that.

"Exactly. He knows me well enough," continued Kyle, with a hard glitter in his eyes. "His note about clipping 'my wings' proves that—as well as other things. No; I will do nothing to risk that secret becoming known. You know me too well for that!"

Rising to his feet, he paced the room restlessly.

"But we'll get the Phantom all right," he went on. "To-day I sever my connection with Scotland Yard, for reasons you'll understand. We'll make it an entirely private fight after this. And with no chance of our secrets leaking out, too!" A sudden smile crossed the Night Hawk's stern face. "By gad, it was lucky we shifted the Thunderer two nights ago. That is one weapon we still have—among others!"

The reason he had not cared whether the police entered his grounds or not was that his own great airship was no longer behind the house. It was down in a little tree-bordered paddock on the estate of his old friend, Sir John Alan, the famous explorer, beyond Reigate. Kyle's "partnership" with Scotland Yard had carried too many risks of official visits to Hampstead from Chief Detective-Inspector Lennard and Captain Arthurs; and he had grown uneasy lest by some accident they should learn of the Thunderer's presence there. Under cover of night, the Kittens had taken the ship to its new home, where



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Sir John, who had once adventured forth in it, would have died sooner than have betrayed its whereabouts.

It was hidden quite safely now in its frame-hangar; a slender, powerful craft, inferior only to the Phantom's, and only then because of the latter's secret of invisibility. The Kittens had had a difficult task shifting it without being seen, but, by hovering high aloft under the helicopters until the darkest hour before dawn, and then descending straight and fast as a plummet on to the signal fire Sir John had lighted, they had won through. No trace remained that an airship had ever lurked behind the secluded old Hampstead mansion.

A silence fell as Thurston Kyle finished speaking. Scrapper cleared his throat awkwardly, and Snub fiddled with his bandage. Both knew Thurston Kyle's views on his identity as the Night Hawk. At last Snub spoke.

"You're gettin' shut of Scotland Yard, guv'nor?"

"I am. But that Nelson Lee asked me, I would never have joined with them!" snapped Thurston Kyle angrily. "But for them the Phantom would never have known I existed. After to-day, though—"

The words died on his lips, and he swung round as a firm knock sounded on the door. In answer to his call, it opened. Captain Arthurs, of the C.I.D., in leather motoring-coat and with anxiety written all over him, burst in with hand outstretched.

"Mr. Kyle!" he gasped. "I've just been lookin' round; only got back to town half an hour back. My thunderin' Sam, it beats the goldarn' world. The—it was the Phantom, o' course?"

Thurston Kyle nodded.

"The Phantom, of course. My reward for assisting Scotland Yard, I presume!" he smiled dourly. "You have heard what occurred?"

The Canadian nodded his head.

"Gee! You see, I was in Liverpool last night, Mr. Kyle, followin' a line on that darn Pelton feller. The Yard 'phoned the news through to my hotel as soon as that sergeant reported last night. That would be about 2 a.m. You bet, I came down here like a prairie fire; hired a car and burnt the road some. Gosh, it's—"

"Did you find anything about Pelton?" asked Thurston Kyle sharply.

"Not a darn thing!" was the disgusted reply. "Aw, he's vanished O.K. That Liverpool clue blew up in my face!" He pounded one fist into the other. "We'll get Lucius Pelton when we get the Phantom Foe, Mr. Kyle!"

"Ah! You still think Pelton and the Phantom are one and the same?"

Arthurs' retort was a look that spoke volumes. Whereupon Thurston Kyle stroked his chin musingly. And sprang his bombshell.

"Well, as far as I am concerned, Pelton or the Phantom—wins!" he drawled. "Captain Arthurs, after last night, my connection with Scotland Yard in this case is—finished. Will you inform Sir Hugh Fletcher of that?"

"Hey?" A quick, cold light suddenly burned in Arthurs' eyes, as he digested the cool, utterly startling words; and he frowned heavily. "I don't get you, sir. You mean you've had enough, now that the party's gettin' rough? You're—quitting?"

"Just that!" Thurston Kyle spoke firmly. "I am a private citizen, not a public servant paid to take terrible risks. This is too stern a battle for my liking, Arthurs. The Phantom has learned that I am assisting you, as he has learned everything we have planned. No, Captain Arthurs, that isn't good enough. Tell Sir Hugh Fletcher that I resign!"

Captain Arthurs' face was a study in chagrin, surprise, and disbelief. It was plain that, to him, Thurston Kyle was a "quitter"—one who could not stand the gaff! And the glint in the Canadian's eyes, as well as the set of his big jaw, showed what he thought.

"O.K., sir. I guess it's your funeral. I'm sorry; I sized you up different. But now the Phantom's after you personally —" He stopped, holding out an indifferent hand. "I'll be goin'. I'll make the report. S'long!"

Pausing only to give the scientist a long stare, he went, every line in his stalwart figure stiff with disdain. Thurston Kyle—quitter! What a tale for Sir Hugh and the Yard in general!

"There goes a man who thinks I'm a coward, what?" said Kyle sardonically. "Scotland Yard will learn that, my spirit is broken, like my house. And"—he laughed harshly—"the Phantom Foe will learn it, too. Good! That was the hardest speech of my life, then. But it had to be done. You asked why I don't unmask the Ace just now, Scrapper. Then listen while I tell you my plans for settling the Ace, the Phantom, the invisible airship and the whole gang at a single blow!"

Roused by the fire in his voice, Snub and Scrapper gasped eagerly. And the crime-fighters, lawless and lone-handed once more, gathered round and listened to the Night Hawk's smashing plans.

(Another whirlwind instalment next week, chums—with the Night Hawk in fighting form!)

"PERIL CAMP!"

(Continued from page 37.)

boys with angry, indignant eyes. He looked at them through a sort of mist.

"What are you going to do, Mr. Whittle?" demanded Fenton of the Sixth. "You seized this meadow, but you took an unfair advantage——"

"Wait—wait!" muttered Amos Whittle, his voice hoarse and unsteady. "Where is the young boy who saved me? Nothing else matters. Where is that boy? I want to speak to him."

Willy was protestingly pushed forward. Amos Whittle looked at him for a moment, then impulsively took his hand.

"My boy—my boy!" he said brokenly. "How can I thank you for what you did? You saved my life. In return for all my mean and wretched plotting, you saved my life!"

"That's all right, sir," said Willy awkwardly. "I wasn't thinking of you any more than I was thinking of the rest. The only thing to do was to get that tiger back into the cage. For goodness' sake, sir, don't make a fuss about it."

"I understand, young man," said Mr. Whittle. "You are one of nature's true heroes—a hero who does not even know his own worth."

"Chuck it, sir!" growled Willy, glaring.

Whittle turned to Fenton.

"You said a minute ago that I had claimed this meadow," he said. "It is quite true, but that was before I realised what an unscrupulous rogue I had been. I withdraw my claim. I will make no further attempt to enforce my rights. The meadow belongs

to St. Frank's, and here, before you all, I confess that I have been a worthless trickster."

The fellows listened in the general hush. Here was a difference. Mr. Amos Whittle was humbled, his spirit was subdued by the terrible ordeal he had just passed through. It had done him a world of good.

"I want to see your headmaster," continued the sawmill owner. "I want to assure him that this camp need not exist any longer. You may all go back to your school. I will sign a document, relinquishing all rights to the meadow. It belongs to St. Frank's. For, in all truth, St. Frank's has earned it."

Mr. Amos Whittle was as good as his word. He had had a lesson which he would never forget. And so the boys returned to school, since the open-air camp was no longer necessary.

Their feelings towards Whittle were different now. He had proved himself to be a man, after all. He had admitted his fault, and no man can do more than that. They forgave him freely.

Thus the Half Mile Meadow became the absolute property of the school, and it would be many a long day before St. Frank's forgot the exciting tussle it had had to secure it. The Third Form, in particular, regarded the Half Mile Meadow as their own property, since Willy Handforth had done the trick when all had seemed lost.

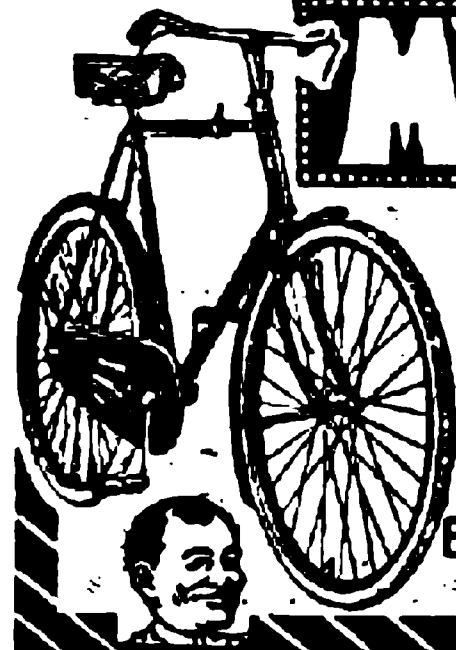
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