

THE BEST SCHOOL-ADVENTURE PAPER!

THE NELSON LEE

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MENACE
of the
SEVEN
STARS!

One of the many dramatic incidents from this week's enthralling long complete school and mystery yarn, introducing the famous Chums of St. Frank's.

New Series No. 92.

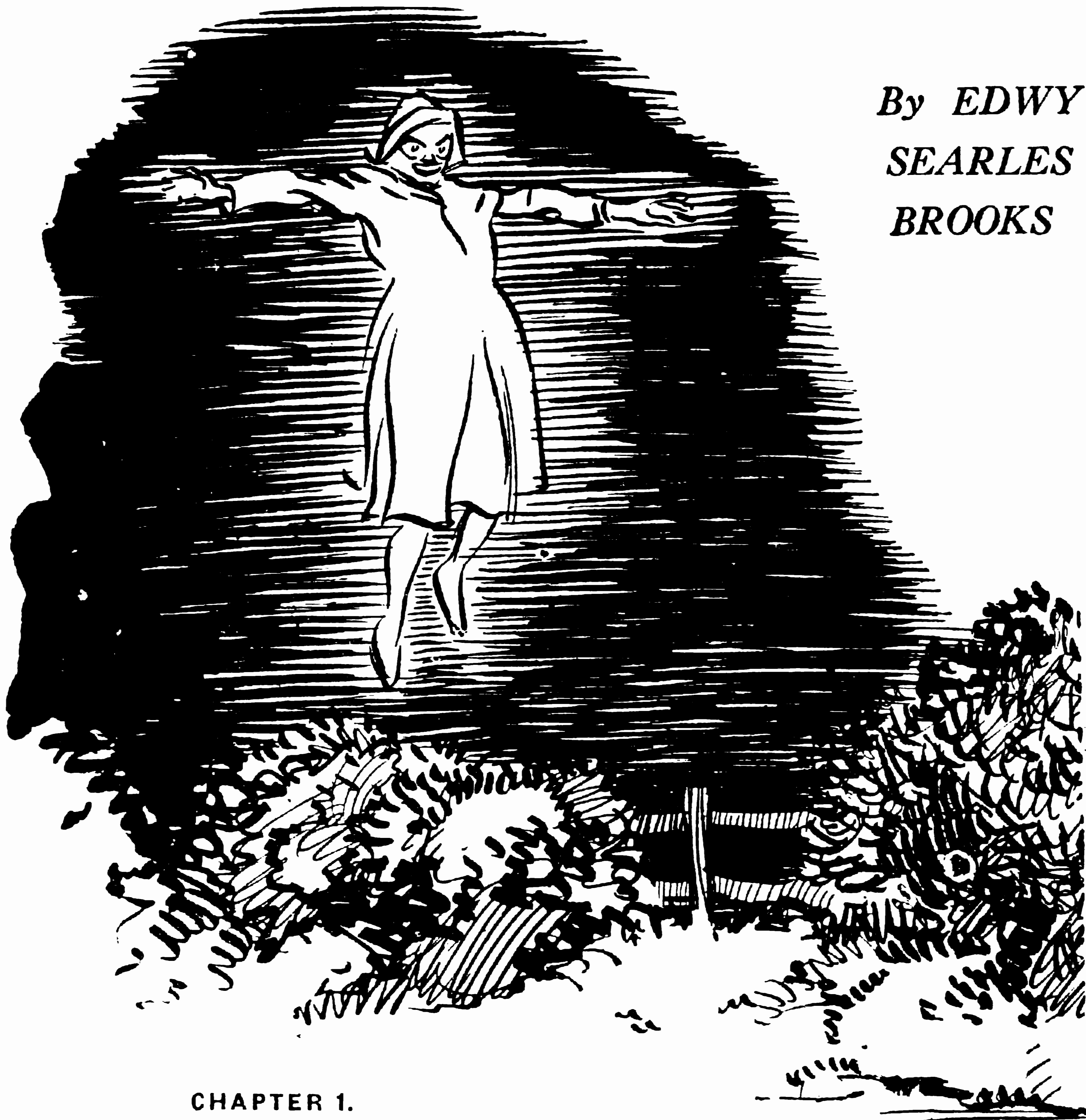
OUT ON WEDNESDAY,

October 24th, 1931,

What is the mystery of Vivian Travers' seven-starred ring?

The CURSE of

By EDWY
SEARLES
BROOKS



CHAPTER 1.

The Ring of Mystery!

"TRAVERS is coming out this morning!" said Jimmy Potts, with satisfaction.

"Good egg!"

"Jolly glad to hear it."

"Poor old Travers!"

There were many such comments from the Removites who were gathered in the lobby of the Ancient House. It was Tuesday morning, and since the previous Saturday afternoon Vivian Travers, of Study H, had been in the school sanatorium Jimmy Potts and Skeets Rossiter

were very bucked—for they were Travers' study mates.

"Just had it from Dr. Brett," went on Sir James Potts eagerly. "He says that Travers is so much better this morning that he can take his ordinary place in the school; but I fancy old Crowell will go easy with him in the class-room."

"He ought to be excused lessons altogether, I guess," remarked Skeets.

OSRA!

"If I know anything of Travers, he'd plain what happened to him," grunted rather not be excused," said Nipper, the Handforth. "Nobbody's been allowed to talk to him yet, and we're just as mystified as ever. Thank goodness nothing queer has been happening over the week-end."

"Yes, by George!" said Handforth, with a nod. "Somebody's birthday, isn't it? The girls are splashing a bit, I hear."

"Phyllis Palmer's birthday," nodded Jimmy Potts. "And Phyllis is rather keen on Travers, you know. She'll be tremendously bucked when Vera tells her that Travers and it had not yet suffered a home defeat."

Vera Wilkes, the Housemaster's daughter, was a day girl at the Moor View School; and it was certain that she would carry the glad tidings.

"Perhaps Travers will be able to explain what happened to him," grunted Handforth. "Nobbody's been allowed to talk to him yet, and we're just as mystified as ever. Thank goodness nothing queer has been happening over the week-end."

"That giddy match on Saturday, against the Grammarians, was queer enough," said Nipper, with a sigh.

The other St. Frank's junior footballers did not care to be reminded of that disastrous match. Hitherto, the Junior XI had done wonders in the St. Frank's League; it was at the top of the table, and it had not yet suffered a home defeat.



A

spectre of the
NIGHT

gives the Boys

OF

St. Frank's a

FRIGHT

—and you unlimited

THRILLS!



Then the match against Bannington Grammar School had come, coinciding with the arrival of a queer ruby ring from Egypt. There was quite a lot of mystery about this ring.

It had been sent to Vivian Travers by his father, who was amusing himself somewhere in the desert, making explorations at the ancient tomb of Osra. He had sent the ring as a curio; and on the very evening of its arrival seven blood-red stars had been seen in the night sky—seven blood-red stars corresponding to the seven blood-red stones in the ring. There had been even more—a ghostly, mystic figure of an ancient Egyptian priest. Four West House juniors had seen it, and Handforth had seen it on another occasion.

And then Ezra Quirke, the strange boy who lived at Market Donning, just beyond Bannington—and who was known to dabble in the supernatural and the occult—had come to the school, drawn, he declared, by the evil power of the ring. He had warned Travers and the other boys of its deadly influence, and they had laughed at him.

But it was an undeniable fact that strange things had happened. The Bannington match, which St. Frank's had expected to win easily, had apparently been cursed. From the very start, everything had gone wrong for the Saints, and they had lost the match by six goals to nil.

Their commonsense told them that it was absurd to put this disaster down to the seven-starred ring. It seemed too fantastic. The Grammarians had scored an early goal, they had pressed keenly, and all the luck had been with them. After the third goal had been scored, the Saints, thoroughly rattled, had gone to pieces. That was the logical, sensible explanation.

Yet even this could not explain why Vivian Travers had met with disaster. Travers—the boy who possessed the evil ring! In a desperate effort to score, during the last minute or two of the match, he had run clean through. At the last second, just as he was on the point of hammering in a certain scorer, he had staggered blindly, and had crashed headlong into one of the goal-posts.

So serious was his injury that he had been stunned; carried to the sanatorium, he had been put to bed, and he had not recovered consciousness until several hours later. Throughout Sunday and Monday he had remained in bed.

Why had he stumbled, thus crashing into that goal-post? Was it coincidence, or had that ancient ring some hidden, evil power?

“WELL, well!” said Vivian Travers amiably.

The fellows were crowding round him, glad to see that he was looking almost his old self. There was a large patch of plaster on his forehead, and his cheeks were just a little pale. But his grin was as goodnatured as ever.

“Glad to have you back amongst us, Travers,” said Nipper heartily.

“If you're glad, I'm gladder,” said Travers. “For the love of Samson, how long have I been in that blighting sanny? Two days—or two months? Everything's all right in the study, I suppose?”

“The study?” repeated Jimmy Potts, puzzled. “Of course!”

“The apartment hasn't been blown up by any chance?”

“No.”

“My highly-prized bureau hasn't fallen to pieces?”

“What on earth——”

“You and Skeets haven't met with any disasters in the study?”

“I think that blow on the head must have sent you dotty,” said Potts bluntly. “What the dickens is the matter with you?”

“I'm only thinking about that ruby ring,” said Travers coolly. “You see, I left it locked up in my bureau.”

“Oh!”

“I'm glad to hear that there hasn't been any further disasters,” continued Travers urbanely. “No unaccountable mysteries—no apparitions—no nothing! Fine!”

They could tell, by his tone, that he was ironic.

“Talking about mysteries,” said Handforth bluntly, “how do you account for your accident, Travers? What made you blunder into that goal-post?”

Travers shook his head.

“I spent the better part of yesterday thinking the matter over,” he replied. “On Sunday I was too dazed to think at all, but by yesterday my thick skull had lost an egg-like protruberance which had been greatly marring my natural beauty. And I found that my brain had called the strike off. Active as it was, though, I'm jiggered if I can tell you what did happen on Saturday afternoon.”

“Well, that's not very helpful,” said Nipper. “We all know that you didn't stumble, and I don't think anything hit you.”

“No; I did all the hitting,” agreed Travers. “If the goal-post had hoisted itself out of the ground and hurled itself at me, the effect could not have been more

admirable. All I know is that I seemed to go suddenly blind."

"Blind?" went up an interested chorus.

"Funny thing, but that's the impression I've got," said Travers thoughtfully. "I remember being horribly dazzled, and I couldn't see anything in front of me at all. Just a flash, you know. After that I must have banged into the post, because I don't remember anything else until I woke up in the sanny—with Nurse Dora holding my hand."

He smiled tenderly.

"On the whole, that cosh on the head was worth it," he went on. "There's no mistake about it, dear old fellows, Dora Manners is a corker! My only regret in leaving the sanny is that I shall miss her sweet smile."

"Cheese it, Travers!" said Jimmy Potts. "You're not so keen on Dora—she's too old for you, anyway. You've told us that something seemed to blind you, but that's no explanation."

Travers laughed.

"If you're expecting me to express an opinion that the ruby ring was responsible for my clumsiness, you're mistaken," he said coolly. "Why make a mystery over nothing? I told you all from the first that I don't believe that hokum about the ring. I was too eager to score, that's all; I stumbled, I blundered forward, and I received a little packet."

But even Travers, as he uttered the words, knew that there had been something more than clumsiness in that strange mishap of his.

CHAPTER 2.

Ezra Quirke's Warning!

SUDDENLY, Vivian Travers laughed outright; the fellows around him were all looking so solemn that he was amused.

"What's the matter with you, you owls?" he asked. "Forget that beastly ring! That mysterious chump, Ezra Quirke, is mainly responsible for your crazy ideas. By the way, what's become of that bird?"

"Quirke—or his owl?" asked Nipper.

"Both."

"He stayed the night at St. Frank's, but he left on Sunday morning," replied Nipper. "We don't know what happened to him after that, although he didn't return to his aunt's home, in Market Donning. He's still dodging about the neighbourhood somewhere. A mysterious chap, Quirke. He drifts in at odd times——"

"Talk of the devil!" murmured Travers abruptly.

A strange figure had just appeared in the gateway, and the other juniors turned and looked. It was Ezra Quirke himself.

"I'll bet he's come to inquire after you, Travers," said Nipper. "He seems very anxious about you."

"That's very nice of him."

"He came three times yesterday, and we don't even know where he's living," said Nipper. "He's not staying in the village, as far as we can discover."

The boy who was now coming forward was remarkable in appearance. There was nothing unusual in his attire, for he was dressed in a quiet, dark lounge suit. He was thin, almost skinny, and he wore no hat. His hair, black and lank, strayed untidily over his head, and a lock sprawled across his forehead. The face was almost expressionless; chalky pale, mask-like, with flat eyes which always gave the St. Frank's fellows a queer, uneasy feeling.

"Enter the Figure of Mystery—with owl hovering overhead," murmured Travers. "Very effective at night, but a bit feeble in the sunshine."

It was quite true. Fluttering near one of the chestnuts was a queer, greyish creature—an owl. It was Ezra Quirke's pet, and sometimes it perched itself upon his shoulder, and it would obey him like a dog.

"Ah, Travers, I am glad to see you looking so well," said Ezra Quirke, in his strange, toneless voice, as he came nearer. "I had feared——"

"Go it!" interrupted Travers. "You had feared that I was going to die—eh? What a nice, cheerful fellow you are, Quirke! I hope you were going to send some flowers to my funeral?"

Ezra Quirke looked at him almost sorrowfully.

"You speak lightly of funerals, my friend," he said. "Unless you heed the warnings which have been repeatedly given you——"

"I shall come to a sticky finish—eh?" said Travers, with a nod. "There's just one little correction I'd like to make, Quirke. I'll always acknowledge you as an acquaintance, but when you call me your friend—— Well, without any desire to offend, I rather think that's going a bit too far."

"You fool—you poor, pitiful fool!" said Ezra Quirke tensely.

"And that's going much too far," drawled Travers. "You'll kindly take that back, Quirke, or I shall be compelled, feeble as I am, to knock your block off."

A crude expression, but I've no doubt that you get my meaning?"

Although Travers' tone was bantering, there was a certain grimness behind it which made Quirke back away.

"I am sorry," he muttered. "I did not mean to insult you."

"That's all right, then," said Travers. "'Nuff said. By the way, Quirke, where are you living?"

"If only you would take this matter seriously——"

"That's no answer," said Travers. "I hear that you dodge in and out in that mysterious way of yours, and that you drift unexpectedly into the picture at odd moments. You can't be living at Market Donning, that's certain."

"You're not lodging in the village, either," added Handforth. "What are you doing, Quirke—occupying a cave, or a tree top, or something? Do you roost with that beastly owl of yours?"

Quirke looked round from one to another with a strange light in his eyes.

"You all mock me," he said bitterly. "You ignore my warnings. You attempt to make fun of me. But what further evidence do you need? Was not Travers nearly killed on Saturday? Do you really think it was an accident? No! The Curse of Osra is upon Travers—and upon everybody in this school! So long as you keep that evil ring, you will be courting disaster."

Vivian Travers yawned.

"I'm not feeling too peppy to-day, Quirke, dear old fellow," he drawled. "Do you mind putting on another record? That one is getting tiresome."

"Destroy the Ring of Osra," said Quirke impressively. "Do that, and the menace will be no more."

"There's another menace," said Travers. "It's one you haven't mentioned yet, Quirke. I'm not the only one who is in danger."

"You are quite right; all these other boys——"

"No; I mean you," said Travers. "Your danger, Quirke, is far greater than you realise."

"I? But I am a believer," said Ezra Quirke coldly, "and those who believe are immune. There is no danger for me."

"A very sad mistake on your part," said Travers. "There's a fountain pool here, and I can assure you that the water is not only wet but exceedingly cold. Any more of your warnings, and you'll make a swift acquaintance with that wet and cold water. Handy—Jimmy—Skeets! Do you mind doing your stuff?"

"It's a pleasure," said Handforth, roll-

ing up his sleeves, and Potts and Skeets followed his example after very deliberately relieving themselves of their jackets.

Ezra Quirke backed away, his eyes burning.

"I will go," he said fiercely. "All I get in return for my well-meant advice is scorn. You threaten me with violence. But wait! One day—and that day will be soon—you will bitterly regret this hour!"

He turned on his heel and walked off. He left many of the Removites full of uneasy fears. Others, such as Nipper, Handforth, and Travers, merely laughed.

"Theatrical fathead!" growled Handforth. "Does he think he can spoof us with his bogey-bogey tales?"

"If he does, he's an optimist," said Travers lightly. "And as for the accursed ring of Osra—well, it's remaining in my bureau."

He was an obstinate fellow, and Ezra Quirke's sensational warnings only made him all the more stubborn.

CHAPTER 3.

Two Important Letters!

BY the mid-day post two letters arrived, and two Removites were considerably worried—but from very different causes.

Travers was one of these fellows, and his letter was from his father, in Egypt.

"I am the last man in the world to be superstitious," read a passage of the letter, "but it is an undeniable fact that strange and unaccountable things have been happening to me of late in this desert camp. I have narrowly escaped death on two occasions—no need for me to go into details—and I have a feeling that some dread menace is threatening me."

Travers lost his good-humour. He was impressed. Strange things had been happening to him, too!

"Don't let this worry you, Vivian," the letter went on. "I have already told you that I am not superstitious, and I am certain that there is some logical explanation. There is a man out here, an American named Wilbur Druten, who is very bitter against me because I obtained the concession from the Egyptian Government for this exploration work. Druten thought he was ahead of me, but it was the slow Englishman who beat the hustling American. The hare and the tortoise—eh? Druten is now very definitely my enemy. By the way, I hope you received that curious ring all right."

Travers nodded to himself. There was no question that he had received the ring!

The juniors rolled up their sleeves and advanced threateningly upon Ezra Quirke. Quirke and his warnings of impending evil were not appreciated!



"It is queer that these misfortunes should have happened to me since I purchased that ring," continued the letter. "I told you, didn't I, that it was once the property of Raamses, the High Priest of the Temple of Osra? I now understand that it is supposed to possess a certain evil influence. People who have it in their possession meet with sundry disasters. All nonsense, of course, my boy. This strange country is knee-deep in superstition and folk lore."

There was nothing else in the letter of particular note. But Vivian Travers was sufficiently sobered.

"Raamses," he muttered. "I'd forgotten the old boy's name. So the Ring of Raamses is supposed to have an evil influence? H'm! And even the pater has been having some bother."

"Talking to yourself?" asked Jimmy Potts, who happened to look into the study at that moment.

He and young Viscount Bellton—otherwise "Skeets"—came in, and Travers showed them the letter. They were duly impressed.

"I say, I wonder if there really is something fishy about that beastly ring?" asked Jimmy. "I mean, dash it, your

pater says that his life has been endangered since he bought it. I don't believe in ghosts, but all this mysterious stuff——"

"It's deucedly worrying," said Travers slowly.

The other important letter was received by Bernard Forrest, the sporty young rascal who was the leader of Study A. Bernard Forrest was not merely worried, but distracted; and it took a good deal to disturb Forrest's complacency. The letter was from a gentleman who enjoyed the name of Valentine Vicks, and Mr. Vicks was not merely abusive but threatening.

"I want all your cash," said Forrest, going into Study A and confronting his pals, Gulliver and Bell.

"You're welcome to it," said Gulliver generously. "I'm worth exactly sevenpence-halfpenny."

"And I'm worth three bob," said Bell.

Forrest regarded them gloweringly.

"Well, I'm glad to hear that you fellows know your worth," he said sourly. "What's the matter with you? I thought you had two quid, Gully?"

"You're a nice chap to talk about my two quid," said Gulliver indignantly.

"Didn't you advise me to back that rotten

outsider, Bluenose? What are you looking so pale about? Somebody dead?" he added, noting the letter in Forrest's hand.

"Vicks is getting nasty," grunted Forrest.

"I don't wonder; you owe him a lot, don't you?"

"Fifty-three quid," muttered Forrest, sitting down, and lighting a cigarette.

"Fifty-three—what?" asked his pals, in horror.

"Oh, don't shout," snapped Forrest irritably. "I was well on the right side at the beginning of last week."

"But—but—fifty quid!" gurgled Bell. "It's—it's impossible!"

"I played the doubling-up game," grunted Forrest. "I was only five quid out last Wednesday, so I backed Tinkle Bell, in the two-thirty, for a tenner. Came in second. That made me fifteen quid down. I went easy on Thursday, and backed two horses for a fiver each."

"And they both lost," said Gulliver sourly. "Bell and I warned you——"

"Oh, rot. Both those horses ought to have won," said Forrest harshly. "But they lost, and I owed old Vicks twenty-five quid. Well, I didn't do anything until yesterday, and then I had a straight tip about Lady of the Nile, and backed her for twenty-five quid—to win. She lost by half a head, confound her! And now I owe old Vicks fifty quid and more."

"What does he say?" asked Bell curiously.

"Enough!" snapped Forrest. "Won't allow me any more credit, and says that if I don't settle up at once he'll do something unpleasant. The beast! I'm in a jam, you chaps. I must get the money by this evening."

"I say!" exclaimed Gulliver suddenly. "That's a bit queer, isn't it?"

"What's queer?"

"That horse—Lady of the Nile," said Gulliver, looking rather frightened. "The Nile's in Egypt, isn't it? Here you've been having all this rotten luck, and it just about tallies with the time that Travers' ring has been in the school."

"By gad!" said Forrest, impressed.

"That ring is Egyptian, and Lady of the Nile smacks of Egypt, too," went on Gulliver, with a shiver. "I tell you, there's something pretty awful about all this! There's a curse on the school, and everybody in the school!"

Even Forrest, who was quite level-headed, was uneasy.

"Yes, it does seem weird," he admitted. "I dare say it's only a coincidence—about Lady of the Nile, I mean—but it makes a chap think. Blow Travers and

his ring! I wonder how I can get some money?"

He went round the Remove studies—to Archie Glenthorne, to Travers himself, to the Hon. Douglas Singleton, and to several others. He pleaded that a distant relative was in a hole, and that he wanted to lend a hand. But Archie Glenthorne and the other Removites were "wise" to Bernard Forrest. They guessed exactly what the trouble was; and his quest was fruitless. Not a penny did he get.

"The cads—the mean, miserable, contemptible rotters," fumed Forrest, at the end of his hunt. "They've all got pots of money, and they won't whack out. What the dickens am I to do?"

"You'd better see Vicks and smooth him over," suggested Gulliver, not very hopefully.

For the rest of the day Bernard Forrest went about in a gloomy, depressed frame of mind. The more he thought of it, the more he blamed Travers for his troubles. It was very pleasant to blame somebody else.

A gloom had come over Travers, too. That letter from his father worried him considerably. He was also worried about the ring. Was it really cursed, as Ezra Quirke insisted? It seemed fantastic, but — Strangely, mysteriously, misfortune had befallen him and his father since their coming into possession of the ring.

Travers was still far from fit. He still felt rather weak after his accident, and his head never ceased to throb and ache. Strictly speaking, he should have remained in the sanatorium; but he hated idleness, and he had vigorously told the doctor that he was feeling better than he actually was. His depression was caused as much by his physical condition as by his mental worry.

"I'm not sure that you ought to come with us to-night, Travers, my lad," said Handforth, just after lessons were over for the day. "You're looking a bit seedy, you know."

"I'm all right," grunted Travers. "For goodness sake don't tell me I look seedy." He suddenly glared. "I know I'm seedy," he went on irritably. "Blow you! Why, for the love of Samson, can't you leave me alone?"

"Sorry," said Handforth, startled.

"I wouldn't miss Phyl's party for anything," went on Travers. "It's not late; we're going for tea, aren't we, and then there will be dancing afterwards? We've got to get back by seven, in time for prep. So what's the funk about? Don't you think I'm fit to be out until seven?"

Handforth was glad that Nipper came up just then, for he was not required to give a reply."

"No footer practice for you to-day, Travers, old man," said the Remove skipper. "But I'm keeping you in mind for next Saturday's match, you know. I think you'll be fit by then."

"Fit?" repeated Travers. "By Saturday I'll be ready to jump over a haystack! What's the match? Helmford Council School, isn't it?"

"Yes—away," nodded Nipper. "It ought to be a keen match. Those Council school chaps are as hot as mustard. Don't forget how Bannington Council School forced a draw—and we thought they were easy picking, too. By all accounts, the Helmford lads are even hotter."

"We'll have to do something pretty big," nodded Travers soberly. "I mean, after losing six-nil to the Grammarians, we need to get our prestige back. We can't take two lickings in succession."

He watched the footballers regretfully as they went off to Little Side for an hour's practice. He felt more gloomy than ever. In spite of the forthcoming party at the girls' school, he could not shake off his depression.

CHAPTER 4.

Up to Mischief!

"THEY deserve it!" said Irene Manners firmly.

"But we don't want to scare them too much," said Phyllis Palmer, in a dubious voice. "And don't forget that poor Vivian is still rather ill."

"Poor Vivian is out and about to-day, and a ghost isn't going to do him much harm," retorted Irene. "Besides, it's only a bit of fun. Why can't we girls have our japes just the same as the boys?"

There were some chuckles. A group of Moor View girls were talking gleefully in their Common-room. It was growing dusk outside, and the evening was closing in rapidly, with a murky black sky which promised a premature darkness.

The girls' Common-room was looking very festive. Two long tables ran down the centre, with chairs all round. There was snowy white linen, dishes of bread-and-butter, sandwiches, pastry, and cakes. The tables were decorated with flowers, and over in one corner of the room stood a gramophone, with a pile of dance records handy. After the feast, the tables and chairs could be quickly moved aside,

and the floor was already powdered for the dancing which would follow the spread.

It was Phyllis Palmer's birthday, and the girl was looking radiant. The only "fly in the ointment" was the indisposition of her boy friend. She had been very anxious about Travers over the week-end; but now she was delighted upon hearing the news that he was up and about again. It was especially cheering to learn that he was coming to the party.

But there was something else on the programme, in addition to the party.

Doris Berkeley, the biggest tomboy of them all, had been very busy with an old raincoat of hers. She had covered it with luminous paint, and she had treated a big mask in a similar way.

"It's not much of a jape, anyhow," she said. "It's a pity we couldn't think of something more elaborate. I'm only going to stand behind the hedge, and then suddenly appear in a gap as the boys come along. If they're not scared of me, I shall be dreadfully disappointed. They'll be horrid if they don't at least pretend to be scared."

Irene chuckled.

"I hope they run for their lives," she said. "I'm surprised at them. Big, strong boys, talking about mysterious Egyptian ghosts appearing out of nowhere! It's—it's so childish! And that silly story of the seven stars, too! Just because Vivian Travers happens to get an old Egyptian ring from his father!"

All the girls were sceptical. They were healthy-minded youngsters, and they steadfastly refused to believe in ghosts. They had heard many rumours from the St. Frank's fellows, and they were inclined to scoff because some of the boys seemed to attach real importance to the "Curse" of the Ring of Raamses.

So Doris thought it would be rather a good jape to spring a little ghost on the schoolboy visitors as they were on the way from their own school to Moor View.

The finishing touches were being put to the tables when Vera Wilkes came flying in. She had just arrived on her bicycle, and she was breathless.

"Buck up, you girls!" she panted. "They're coming!"

"Oh, my goodness!"

"They're starting a bit early," went on Vera. "Are you ready, Doris?"

"But we can't work the stunt yet, can we?" asked Doris, in dismay. "It isn't dark enough."

"Don't be silly," cried Vera. "It's as black as pitch!"

Doris ran to a cupboard, and quickly secured the raincoat, mask, and sou'-wester which she had prepared with the luminous paint. They looked quite normal in the ordinary light. The other girls gleefully followed her out into the chilly October evening.

Vera had been right about the darkness. Night had set in properly now. It was as black as pitch. There was only a slight wind sighing through the trees, but overhead the sky was completely overcast by a dense blanket of black clouds. The lane was a place of utter gloom.

"Now, you girls, wait here," whispered Doris breathlessly. "I'm only going along to the bend. There's a gap there, and I shall appear as soon as I hear the boys coming long. All you've got to do is to get ready to laugh—as soon as they're scared."

"Yes, if they are scared," murmured Marjorie Temple. "I'm not so sure of it yet."

"But look," said Doris. "Don't you think I'm sufficiently ghostly?"

She quickly donned the raincoat, the mask, and the sou'-wester. Then she retreated some distance into the darkness. The effect was certainly awe-inspiring. The luminous paint glowed with an eerie bluish-green effect, and all about the phantom-like figure was a halo of smoke—or so it seemed. The mask was particularly effective, for the face was hideous, with a leering, sinister expression.

"Oh, I say!" breathed Irene. "It's—it's simply awful!"

The other girls stared fascinatedly; for, even though they knew the identity of the "ghost," they felt a bit shivery.

"Hold!" came a deep, hollow voice from the apparition. "Pass not this way, foolish ones, or the Curse of Osra will strike ye down."

"Cheese it, Doris," pleaded Phyllis. "You're even scaring us!"

"Not so bad for an amateur ghost, was it?" chuckled Doris, in her ordinary voice. "Well, so-long! Don't make a sound, and get ready to laugh at the right moment."

She sped off, dived through the handy gap in the hedge, and vanished from sight. From some distance down the lane, well round the bend, came the faint murmur of schoolboy voices. The guests were coming along in force.

Doris Berkeley waited—ready to step forward at the critical moment. But she never did so. For something else happened—something unexpected and terrible.

CHAPTER 5.

The Unseen Hands!

DORIS, full of fun and mischief, had no thought of danger as she stood behind the hedge. She thought it was a rather good practical joke to play upon the boys.

She heard the voices getting nearer, and she prepared to spring out into the lane. Then something—she did not know what—caused her to look round into the meadow behind her, which was black and forbidding.

And she stood transfixed, for an unbelievable thing met her gaze.

Fully twenty feet up in the air, and coming down from the sky itself—for there was no tree near by—was a strange apparition. A redly-glowing figure, attired in quaint, Oriental robes. The figure of an Egyptian priest!

In a flash, Doris' mind flew back to the stories the St. Frank's boys had been telling. The Phantom of Raamses, the High Priest of the Temple of Osra!

From the sky itself the dread thing came swooping down. It was incredible—unbelievable, stupefying. Doris was plucky enough, but, after all, she was a girl. The apparition was descending near by—practically upon her. She stood as though paralysed—until, floating on the night air, she heard a hideous, ghastly laugh; then, with a wild scream of terror, Doris turned and fled.

She broke through the gap in the hedge, at the bend of the lane, and she ran madly, blindly—back towards the Moor View School. Her cry rang out alarmingly, bringing the crowd of Removites to a sudden standstill. They saw her figure—a greenish, glowing, unreal thing which fled round the bend in front of them.

"The ghost!" gasped Church.

"That was no ghost!" snapped Nipper sharply. "That cry we heard was a girl's scream."

"By George!" yelled Handforth.

He ran madly, and the others, after a moment of hesitation, dashed in his wake.

On the other side of the bend in the lane, Irene Manners, Vera Wilkes and the other girls were filled with amazement—which was soon to change to horror. They had heard Doris' terror-stricken scream; they saw her phosphorescent figure flying down the lane towards them.

They saw nothing else, and the boys saw nothing else. For the redly-glowing Egyptian priest had vanished like a puff of wind; even as Doris had run, screaming, the apparition became blotted out to nothingness in mid air.

And now there was a fresh development. As Doris was running, she felt, rather than heard, something behind her. Out of the blackness came bony, unseen hands. They gripped her, they held her, and she screamed again—this time a scream of unutterable fear. Those hands, coming out of the blackness, terrified the girl far more than the sight of the phantom figure.

The grip tightened, she felt her feet swept from the ground; she was lifted, up, up—

Up the lane and down the lane, in two different directions, the groups of boys and girls saw Doris in mid air; they saw her being carried up into the sky, and the thing which carried her was invisible! There was nothing but that greenish-glowing figure.

The girls, of course, knew it to be Doris; but the boys were utterly mystified.

Doris was nearly fainting by now. She gave one last scream. Then, dramatically, the grip was released. She fell—down—down—

Crash!

She fell heavily into the thick of a great bush which grew near the hedge. The fall itself was not considerable, for she had been descending when the grip was relaxed. But the shock was great.

"Doris—Doris!" cried Irene, rushing up madly.

"Oh, Doris, what's happened?" sobbed Vera.

They had seen her fall; they crowded round the bush, and in a moment they were extricating the poor girl from the mass of crushed and broken branches.

And then the boys came running up, excited, bewildered, and not a little scared, too.

"Oh, thank goodness you're here, Ted!" cried Irene, as she heard Handforth's familiar voice. "Quick—oh, quick! Help us!"

"But—but what's happened?" gasped Handforth. "We heard that terrible scream, and we saw—"

"It's Doris," interrupted Vera. "She—she was going to play a little trick on you; she put luminous paint on an old



Phyllis Palmer walked away in a huff, leaving Travers staring after her in dismay. He seemed to be having nothing but bad luck since coming into possession of that curious seven-starred ring.

raincoat and a mask, and she was waiting to scare you."

"Oh!"

"But something must have gone wrong," went on Vera quickly. "We heard her scream, and then we saw her being carried up into the sky—carried by nothing! Oh, it's terrible! There wasn't anything that could have taken hold of her."

"We'll talk about it later," said Nipper crisply. "Quick, you chaps—lend a hand."

It did not take long to get Doris Berkeley out of the bush, and it was only a moment's work to tear off the mask, the sou'wester, and the raincoat. She stood revealed in her ordinary school clothes.

"Thanks," she said shakily. "I—I'm all right now. No, no, there's no need to carry me. I can walk. Oh, what was it? What was it?" She shuddered. "I'm frightened."

She covered her face with her hands, and Reggie Pitt, of the West House, who had rather a soft spot—a special soft spot—for Doris, took her gently by the arm. The other girls crowded round comfortingly.

"Don't say anything now, Doris, old girl," murmured Reggie. "Let's get indoors—into the light. You'll feel better then. Are you sure you're not hurt?"

"Only—only a bruise or two," murmured Doris. "I believe my left knee is a bit scratched, and I've grazed my elbow. But it's nothing. Oh, nothing! I can't understand what took hold of me."

She was so shaken that she was glad enough of Reggie Pitt's arm on one side, and Handforth's on the other. And as they walked the short distance to Moor View, the others kept looking apprehensively into the sky, over the hedges, and behind them. The boys now understood the meaning of the greenish, luminous figure, but everything else remained a sinister mystery.

They escorted Doris into the junior Common-room without any of the mistresses seeing, or inquiring. The girls were glad. Miss Bond, the principal, would have frowned very heavily upon this ghost-faking jape. It was all the better for this thing to be kept amongst themselves.

"Never mind about my bruises and scratches," said Doris, who was thankful to be in the bright light of the Common-room. "They're nothing. Trifles. Oh, I can't believe it, you know! It all seems too fantastic now."

"But what happened?" asked half a

"I was waiting behind the hedge, when something made me look round, and I saw—I saw a dreadful figure coming down from the sky," whispered Doris, shuddering at the recollection. "A figure dressed in robes, like an Egyptian priest, all glowing redly—"

"Great Scott!" muttered Reggie Pitt. "That's what some of us saw the other day."

"We didn't see it," said Nipper quickly.

"There are some trees just there, and I expect they screened your view," said Doris. "I was so scared that I screamed, and then I ran. And after that—Oh, I daren't think about it! Horribly bony hands gripped me, and carried me into the air."

"Bony hands?" repeated Nipper. "But that's impossible, Doris, old girl!"

"The whole thing seems impossible," breathed Irene. "We saw her being carried up, don't forget. And there was nothing to carry her!"

"It's that rotten ring of yours, Travers," said Jack Grey, in a scared voice. "I'm—I'm beginning to believe that it is evil. Why don't you destroy it, as Quirke advises? There's been nothing but misfortune ever since the ring came into the school."

Vivian Travers, pale and wan, shook his head obstinately. There was a certain grimness in his bearing, in the expression of his eyes.

"Trickery—all trickery!" he said, shaking himself. "I don't know how it's worked, but you're not going to convince me that there's anything supernatural about these happenings."

"But how could any human being grip Doris and carry her off into mid-air, and remain unseen?" asked Pitt. "Hang it, I'm pretty hard to convince—"

"Ghosts are—well, they're ghosts," growled Travers. "And they don't grab people. The very fact that Doris felt those hands grip her proves that there's some human agency at work somewhere. It's all trickery, I tell you."

But even Travers' voice did not sound convincing.

CHAPTER 6.

Travers' Misfortune!

THE party was not a brilliant success. Doris Berkeley pluckily forced herself to be cheerful. She vanished for a few minutes, so that she could tidy herself and comb her disordered hair. When she returned she was

enough that it was forced. She had had a severe shock, and she was really in no mood for eating or drinking, or for dancing.

All the others, too, were uneasy—they were subdued. A shadow had been cast over this birthday party which would normally have been so happy.

Travers was particularly uncomfortable. At any ordinary time he was care free and genial. But now he was still very much of a patient, and his mental worries only increased his seediness. The excited run in the lane, too, had exhausted him. His head was aching vilely, and all he wanted to do was to get away from all this noise and commotion—to an armchair, in front of a cheery fire, where he could be quiet and think.

The feed itself was trying enough; but the dancing, afterwards, irritated him beyond measure. He danced once or twice with Phyllis. His head was swimming, but he did not let her know. After all, it was her birthday, and he would not have hurt her for the world.

She, on her part, did the wrong thing—all unconsciously.

With the very best of intentions, Phyllis felt that it was up to her to be gay and bright—and noisy. She wanted to dispel the gloom which—she felt—was ready enough to descend upon the whole party. So, although she didn't feel like it, and although it wasn't natural in her, she was boisterous.

"Come along, Vivian!" she cried, grabbing him. "Oh, glorious! Another one-step!"

The gramophone was blaring noisily—until Travers felt that his head would burst.

"Let's give it a miss, Phyl," he said.

"No jolly fear," retorted Phyllis, seizing his arm and pulling him violently. "Come on, everybody! What's the matter with this party? We've got to put some life into it!"

"For goodness sake, don't maul me about!" snapped Travers, exasperated.

He was sorry the instant afterwards; the words had escaped him unintentionally. Phyllis was looking at him in rather shocked surprise.

"Oh, Vivian, I didn't maul you about," she said earnestly.

"I—I'm sorry," muttered Travers. "I didn't mean to say that."

"You're not feeling well, are you?" asked the girl.

"Of course I am," replied Travers impatiently.

"Then you've jolly well got to dance," cried Phyllis, believing him rather too

readily. "What's that they say in America? Snap out of it, boy friend!"

The expression goaded Travers unreasonably.

"I wish you wouldn't talk like that, Phyl," he protested. "It doesn't sound right—from you. And, for the love of Samson, stop that rotten music! We don't want to dance. At least, I don't!"

"Not even with me?" asked Phyllis.

"Oh, don't misunderstand me, old girl," growled Travers. "Who's putting those records on? Why couldn't they choose something good, instead of that awful racket?"

"I think you're perfectly horrid," cried Phyllis, hurt.

Travers had certainly made an unfortunate blunder. That particular record was one which Phyllis herself had bought especially for the party—and she loved it. Travers would have enjoyed it, too, ordinarily.

"Oh, but look here——"

"You're doing everything you can to be nasty," continued the girl. "And on my birthday, too. You've never been like this before, Vivian, and I'm going to dance with somebody else. I'm sure I don't want you to waste your time."

She walked off in a huff, and Travers stared after her in dismay.

"Oh, I say, but listen——" he began.

She took no notice, and suddenly he became resentful. Why couldn't she be sensible? And why couldn't somebody stop that wretched din?

He glared round almost ferociously. He was angry because Handforth and Pitt and Nipper and the others were enjoying themselves so openly. The girls, too, were getting over the shock, and the party was livening up minute by minute.

"I say, Phyl——"

The record had finished at last, and Travers, approaching Phyllis, tried to gain her attention.

"I am sure you don't want to dance, Vivian," said the girl coldly. "The music is too noisy. But it's all right; there are other boys here who don't mind dancing with me."

"Chuck it, Phyl," protested Travers. "We don't want to have a beastly tiff, do we? It's your birthday——"

"I don't think you care much about my birthday," interrupted Phyllis bitterly.

Travers jumped.

In his preoccupation about his father's letter, he had completely forgotten Phyllis' present. He had bought it over a week ago—a beautiful gold-mounted

manicure set—and he had meant to send it by post, the day before her birthday. He had been in the sanatorium, however, and he had decided to take it along with him to the party.

"I say, Phyl, do forgive me," pleaded Travers. "I bought a present for you, you know, and I meant to bring it with me. Nothing much—a manicure set."

"I have one already, thank you," said Phyllis curtly.

She had not meant to be cruel, but she realised, a second after she had spoken the words, that they were unwarrantably ungracious. However, in her present mood she did not feel like expressing regret.

"I forgot to bring it," said Travers quickly. "If you'll let me pop back to the school, it won't take me long——"

"You needn't trouble," interrupted Phyllis. "It doesn't really matter at all.

As you forgot to bring me a present in the first place——"

The gramophone was blaring again, and as they were standing comparatively near to it, the rest of her words were drowned. Somebody claimed her for a dance, and Vivian Travers drifted away disconsolately.

His thoughts returned to that Egyptian ring. Ever since it had come into his possession there had been trouble. Fellows had seen ghosts; he himself had fallen downstairs; he had injured himself on the football field; he had forgotten to bring Phyllis' present, resulting in this tiff with his girl chum; and that letter from his father—— Oh, it was all so crazy, and yet, at the same time, nothing could alter the fact that things were going wrong.

He was startled to find himself wondering if there could be any truth in this theory that the Ring of Osra was cursed.



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CHAPTER 7,**The Meeting in the Lane!**

IF was not often that Bernard Forrest was in that condition which is known as blue funk; but he was in a blue funk this evening.

A reckless, daring junior, he was ever ready to take all sorts of chances in defiance of the school regulations. He rather prided himself upon his daring, in fact.

But for once he had gone too far.

It was nothing new for him to be in debt to a bookmaker. There were two or three bookies in the district who fought shy of him—since he had caused them a lot of trouble. On many an occasion he had owed sums like fifteen or twenty pounds, but he had invariably talked the bookies round, getting them to wait. Sometimes he had obtained the money to pay them; sometimes he had backed horses with other bookies, and had won the money. Generally, one way or another, he had “wangled” a way out of these scrapes.

But never before had he owed the large sum of fifty odd pounds—and that was the extent of his debt to Mr. Valentine Vicks.

Now, as he trudged moodily down Bell-ton Lane, with his hands thrust deeply into his overcoat pockets, Forrest brooded over his misfortunes.

“That blighting ring,” he muttered. “I haven’t had a winner since the rotten thing came into the school! It’s all Travers’ fault! Why couldn’t he destroy it, as Quirke advised?”

Forrest was superstitious—in so far as luck went. He had often told Gulliver and Bell that certain racecourses were lucky for him—and, curiously enough, he had some justification for thinking that.

A figure loomed up out of the intense gloom. It was very black in the lane, and Forrest could only see the black shape of the man; he could not recognise him. It was just as well to be careful.

“Good-evening,” he said casually, as he passed.

“Hold on, my young sport,” said a familiar voice. “Our very dear friend, Master Forrest, isn’t it?”

“Oh, it’s you, Vicks,” growled Forrest, halting. “I wasn’t sure. I didn’t want to make a mistake.”

“You got my ‘phone message, then, Nuisance?” asked Mr. Valentine Vicks, linking his arm into Forrest’s. “I suppose you know that this visit to your miserable neighbourhood is taking up a lot of my time? I haven’t come for nothing, have I?”

“Look here, Mr. Vicks, be reasonable,” said Forrest, trying to speak carelessly. “You know me. I’m a sport. I’ve had bad luck lately, but——”

“What’s all this? A preliminary to saying that you can’t pay?” interrupted the bookmaker bluntly. “Well, look here, young Handsome, I’m not taking any of that stuff. See?”

“But I tell you I haven’t been able to raise the money,” protested Forrest. “Confound you, Vicks, why can’t you give a fellow a chance? You’re too sudden. Give me until the end of the week, at least.”

“I’ll give you three hours—and that’s the limit,” said Mr. Vicks curtly. “Didn’t I tell you, over the telephone, that I wanted the money now—this evening? You’d better understand, right away, Useless, that I’m not standing for any of your bunkum. If you haven’t got the money yourself, what about the other kids? I’m told that there are plenty of youngsters at St. Frank’s with pots of money.”

“Don’t you think I tried to borrow from them?” asked Forrest resentfully. “The mean blighters wouldn’t lend me a penny!”

“Oh! They know you too well, do they?”

“No, they don’t!” snapped Forrest, although he knew that the bookie had spoken the truth. “Fifty quid is a lot of money, Mr. Vicks. I’ve had bad luck. That last horse ought to have won——”

“Don’t I know it?” interrupted Mr. Vicks. “I lost enough money on her, I can tell you! The second favourite won that race, and I caught a nasty packet. But that’s no reason why you shouldn’t pay up, and help me to even things a bit. Since the beginning of September you’ve had more winners than most of my customers, young Lucky. You’ve had between thirty and forty pounds out of me. This isn’t a one-sided game, you know. You win, and I pay. You lose, and you pay. So let’s have it.”

“But I can’t,” insisted Forrest. “If you’ll wait until the end of the week——”

“I’m staying in this one-horse village for the rest of the evening,” interrupted Mr. Vicks curtly. “You’ll find me at the White Harp until eleven o’clock. At eleven I’m leaving in my car—for home. If you haven’t arrived by then, bringing the money with you, I’m going to write to—— Well, perhaps you can guess?”

“Not—not the Head?” panted Forrest, in horror.

"Oh, no, Brainless; not the Head," said Mr. Vicks. "I know what's healthy for me. I don't want to get into any trouble with your school authorities. Besides, I shouldn't get a penny from your Head. No; I'm going to write to your father."

"Don't do that," urged Forrest. "Hang it, have a heart, Mr. Vicks!"

"Your father is a sportsman, and he'll pay up—and say nothing," went on the bookmaker. "Mr. Forrest is interested in horse-racing—he owns horses himself. I've lost plenty on 'em—and won plenty, too."

Bernard Forrest was frantic with alarm. His father, he knew, would settle the matter quietly; he would not let the school authorities know anything. But he would most certainly dock his son's pocket-money for the remainder of the term; and the prospect of being stony until Christmas appalled Forrest considerably. His father was very lavish in the matter of his son's pocket-money; but he was also a man of drastic decisions.

"It's up to you, of course," said Mr. Vicks. "You can get the money this evening—if you try hard enough."

"I tell you I can't."

"And I tell you I don't believe you," said the bookmaker. "Anyhow, that's my last word. Come down to the White Harp any time between now and eleven and hand me the money, and everything will be all right. If you don't turn up, I write to your father. Do you understand, Obstinate?"

Without another word, Mr. Valentine Vicks turned on his heel and vanished into the gloom.

CHAPTER 8.

Ezra Quirke's Advice!

UNKNOWN to Bernard Forrest, there were two other people in Bellton Lane just then—and not more than ten yards away.

It would be more correct to say that they were near the lane, for actually they were lurking behind the hedge. One of them was Ezra Quirke, and the other a strange-looking individual with a bent back and with one shoulder higher than the other. If there had been more light, it would have been seen that his face was hideous; it was a twisted face, with the mouth all askew. A face brown and wrinkled, with an ugly scar running across the right cheek.

"You heard?" whispered this strange man, cupping his hand over Quirke's left ear.

"Yes, I heard," breathed Quirke.

"Then do as I have instructed."

The Man with the Twisted Face slid off into the night, and Ezra Quirke broke through the hedge and stepped into the lane. As he did so, there came a fluttering of wings from somewhere overhead, and an owl dropped and perched itself on his shoulder.

"What—what's that?" muttered Forrest, turning round.

He had heard the fluttering of the wings, and now it seemed to him that there was a queer-looking figure standing in the middle of the lane, just ahead.

"Do not be afraid, my dear Forrest," came a soft, gentle voice. "You know me, I think."

Forrest gave a gulp—for he had been startled—and then strode forward.

"Quirke, confound you!" he snapped. "You fool! You startled me!"

"I am sorry, but——"

"What's the idea of lurking about here in the dark like—like a thief?" demanded Forrest impatiently. "I've never known such a fellow! You appear at odd times, in odd places, and in odd ways! I believe you think it's effective."

"I have my reasons," said Ezra Quirke, in his toneless voice. "Listen, Forrest. There is a proposition I desire to put before you. As a commencement, I may say that I overheard your interesting conversation with the—er—gentleman who has just gone to the White Harp."

"Why, you—you——"

Forrest paused, almost incoherent. He was seized with sudden fury. So Ezra Quirke, spying, had heard everything! He reached forward, gripping Quirke by the shoulders.

"I'll break every bone in your body!" he shouted. "You spying young beast! What's this—blackmail? Do you expect me to pay you something for keeping your rotten mouth shut?"

He backed away suddenly. Quirke had said nothing; but the owl, with a flutter of wings, had made as if to attack.

"Quiet, Beauty—quiet," said Quirke softly.

"You'd better keep that vile thing away from me," panted Forrest. "Ugh! You give me the creeps, Quirke—you and your night owl!"

"It is strange that other boys may keep rabbits, parrots, and monkeys as pets, and nothing is said of them; yet I, who have a perfectly harmless owl, am supposed to be evil and wicked."

"You needn't carry the owl about on your shoulder, need you—and in the dark?"



Ezra Quirke's pet owl made as if to attack Bernard Forrest. "Keep that vile thing away from me!" panted Forrest in terror.

"Let us not waste time on useless discussion," said Quirke quietly. "And I would suggest, Forrest, that you keep your temper. It is not my intention, or desire, to blackmail you. I require no money for—er—keeping my mouth shut. I merely seek this opportunity of serving you—and serving the school at the same time."

"Oh?" said Forrest, unconvinced. "You're in a generous mood, aren't you? Since you know so much about my affairs, perhaps you'll lend me fifty pounds?"

"I can do something—or suggest something for you to do—which will come to exactly the same thing."

"Oh? That's interesting."

"The other boys will not listen to me," went on Quirke, his voice quivering. "They laugh at me—they mock me. My warnings go unheeded. Yet my desire is to help St. Frank's—to remove the dread menace which broods hideously over the school and every living soul within it."

"By gad! If you're going to trot out that nonsense——"

"Nonsense!" exclaimed Quirke. "Always you call it nonsense! You are

as bad as the others, Forrest. Yet I tell you that the Curse of Raamses—the Curse of Osra——"

"Make up your mind which," mocked Forrest.

"The Curse is upon the school," said Quirke impressively. "Take that dread ring from Travers, and the menace will be removed."

"Oh! So that's the game?" said Forrest, interested at last. "You're after the ring, are you? I understand that it's pretty valuable—solid gold, with rubies."

"Do you think I care for the gold or the rubies?" asked Quirke contemptuously. "I do not want this ring for myself. I am not suggesting that you should take it and hand it to me. Oh, no! All I desire is that the ring should be removed from the school."

"And what do I do with it after I've removed it?"

"Give it to Mr. Valentine Vicks," said Quirke softly.

"Eh?"

"Do you not understand how I desire to help you?" went on the strange boy. "Vicks will be satisfied with the ring—in settlement of his account. It is worth

far more than fifty pounds, and thus you will not only solve your own problem, but you will save Travers from a terrible doom! You will save all the school."

Bernard Forrest listened in astonishment. It was certainly a solution—for he did not doubt that Mr. Valentine Vicks would accept that ring in full settlement. What puzzled Forrest was Quirke's apparent disinterestedness. He got nothing out of this at all.

"Then where do you come in, Quirke?" asked Forrest bluntly.

"All I desire is that the Ring of Osra shall be taken away from St. Frank's," replied Quirke quietly. "Then, and not until then, will the school be safe."

"And what of our mutual friend, Mr. Vicks? Is he immune from the curse, or what?"

"Are you so concerned about the safety of Mr. Vicks?" retorted Quirke. "He is a man—he can look after himself. And you may be sure that he will rid himself of the ring after it has brought him much misfortune."

"Well, I don't much care what happens to Mr. Vicks, and that's a fact," admitted Forrest. "And I don't believe a word of your tommy rot, either. That ring is no more harmful to Travers or St. Frank's than your flat-faced owl is! Very nice of you to help me—in fact, it's quite a brainy suggestion of yours. But there's nothing doing."

Quirke clutched at his arm.

"I thought you would be only too glad to save yourself," he whispered. "It will be so simple——"

"So simple for me to sneak into Travers' study and burgle his desk," nodded Forrest. "What do you think I am—a thief?"

"But this is not thieving," urged Quirke. "That is what I am trying to impress upon you. By taking that ring, you will render Travers a great service——"

"It doesn't matter how you put it, the fact remains the same," growled Bernard Forrest. "You're suggesting that I should steal the ring from Travers, and use it to pay my debt. Well, I may be in a pretty nasty fix—but I'm not a thief."

Forrest walked off, leaving Ezra Quirke glowering after him with burning, resentful eyes.

CHAPTER 9.

Vivian Travers Agrees!

HEAVY-HEARTED and wretched, Vivian Travers took his departure from the Moor View School with the other guests.

They were leaving a little earlier than they had intended; it was not yet seven. The party, in fact, had fizzled out. Try as they would, the girls and boys had not been able to work up a really convincing spirit of joy.

Two or three times Travers had tried to get into conversation with Phyllis again, but she had always managed to rebuff him. They parted now with hardly a handshake. The silly little tiff had developed into a real quarrel.

Nipper and Handforth and the other fellows had seen enough to show them that all was not right; and they were worried. Handforth was the only fellow who was rash enough to make any remark. But, then, he was renowned for his blundering.

"What was the matter with you two, Travers?" he demanded, once they were on the road.

"Eh? What do you mean?" asked Travers gruffly.

"You and Phyllis," said Handforth. "Glaring at one another like cat and dog! Her birthday, too! If you've been ass enough to squabble with her——"

"Perhaps you'll be good enough to mind your own business!" snapped Travers dangerously.

"What? I mean, oh, of course—— I didn't want to butt in——"

"Then don't!" muttered Travers.

He marched on alone, resentful with everybody. He felt weak, his head ached, and all he wanted was to be alone—so that he could think.

A silence fell upon them all. Out here, in the blackness, they vividly remembered the extraordinary incident which had happened only a few hours earlier. Doris Berkeley had been lifted by unseen hands. All the boys wondered if they would suddenly feel a grip on them—if they would be whisked away by some horrible, mysterious power. They instinctively hurried—they wanted to get indoors in the light and warmth.

"I'm not a superstitious chap," grunted Jimmy Potts at length, "but the more I think of this thing, the more I'm convinced that Quirke was right. It's that ring, Travers."

"You bet it is," agreed Skeets, Travers' other study mate. "Don't forget what happened to Doris! The ring's no good to you. Why don't you destroy it, before anything else happens?"

"Jolly good idea," growled Handforth.

"So you believe in the curse, too?" asked Church.

"No, I don't," growled Handforth promptly. "But I believe that ring is preying on all your minds so much that

you're all getting morbid! The sooner the ring is hammered to pulp, the better!"

"Something in that," said Nipper, with a smile. "It's a sort of mental curse. With the ring destroyed, Travers, it'll be off your mind."

They were near the school now, and none of them noticed the figure which joined them as they passed through the big, open doorway. Bernard Forrest had come up from the other direction, happening to meet the juniors as they were turning into the Triangle. In the gloom, they mistook him for one of themselves.

"Well, what about it?" asked Potts, giving Travers' arm a shake. "Do you agree?"

"Agree to what?"

"What we were just saying."

"I don't know what you were just saying."

"About the ring," said Potts. "What's the matter with you? Are you deaf? We're suggesting that you should destroy the ring."

"I'm not going to destroy it," replied Travers impatiently. "It was sent to me by my pater, and I'm keeping it. That's final!"

"And you don't mind what happens to people?" asked Potts, almost angrily.

"Even when poor Doris nearly gets killed, you stick to your silly, obstinate decision! If you won't destroy the ring yourself, perhaps you'll let us destroy it for you?"

Travers wasn't listening; he was thinking deeply again.

"Supposing we take the thing and put it in the fire?" asked Church. "That'll be different, Travers. You won't be doing it yourself, and if your pater is wild when he hears about it, you can blame us. It'll come to the same thing in the end."

"Yes," said Travers absentmindedly.

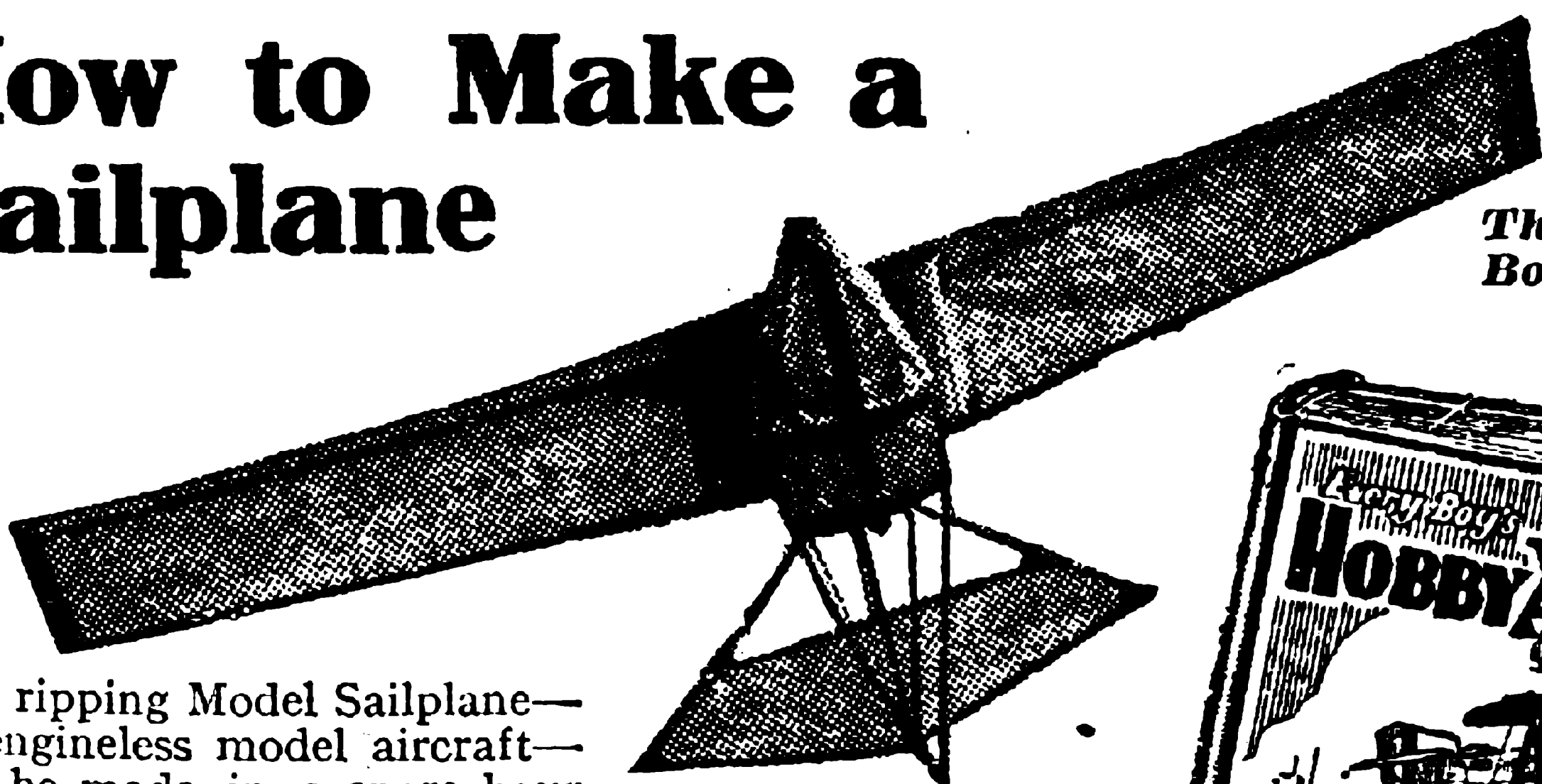
"You agree, then?" demanded Jimmy Potts. "You'll let us take the ring out of your desk——"

"Oh, do as you like," broke in Travers irritably. "What do I care?"

He moved away from the others, and hurried indoors. It was quite a little misunderstanding. He had not even heard, and he certainly had not realised that he had given them permission to take the Ring of Osra. And they, for their part, had no suspicion that he had given his consent unwittingly.

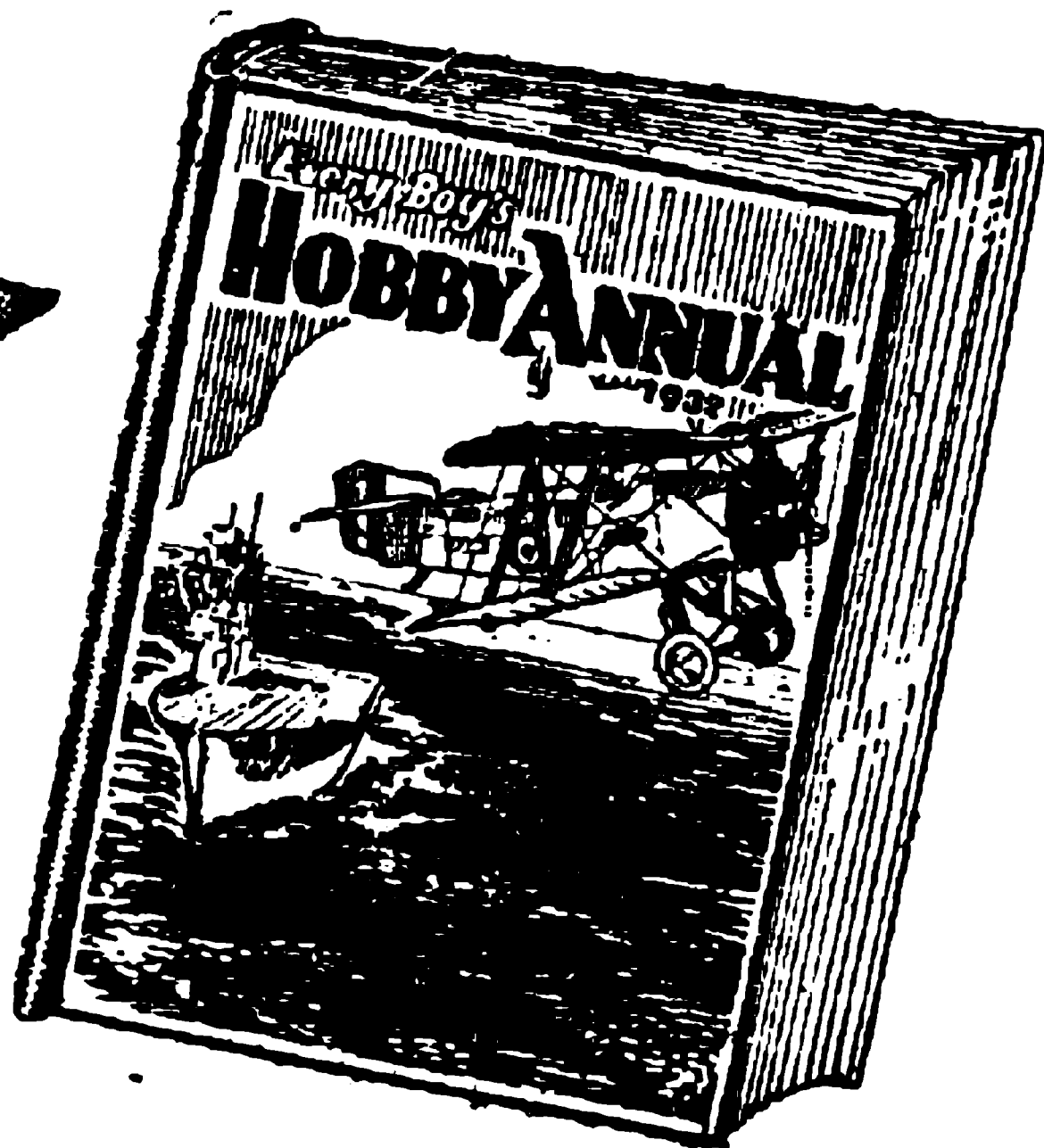
"That's all right, then," said Potts, with relief. "He's told us we can do as we like. I vote we go straight to the

How to Make a Sailplane



This ripping Model Sailplane—an engineless model aircraft—can be made in a spare hour for only a few pence. It will rival the performance of almost any self-powered model plane. You will find full details of how to construct this super-glider in the 1932 HOBBY ANNUAL, the finest book for the boy who is keen on making things and finding out how things work. This topping gift book is profusely illustrated with photographs and drawings that show "how" in the simplest way. There are also two large folding photogravure plates.

The book for the Boy with a Hobby



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study, get the ring, and chuck it in the fire."

"Hear, hear!"

"Good riddance to bad rubbish!"

"Rather!"

"Wait a minute," said De Valerie. "Putting it into the fire won't be good enough. An ordinary study fire isn't hot enough to melt gold, or to consume rubies—if they really are rubies. The ring would be a bit bent and twisted, but it would still be in existence."

"H'm! That's rather a drawback," admitted Potts. "I'll tell you what we could do," he added, as an idea occurred to him. "Why not leave it until after lights out?"

"What difference will that make?"

"We can sneak down, get the ring, and throw it into the boiler fire in the scullery," said Potts. "You know what the furnace is like—that one which heats the boiler to provide the school with hot water. It's a high-pressure furnace, and the heat in it is terrific. The ring will be destroyed absolutely and completely."

"Good enough! We'll do it," said Skeets. "That's a dandy idea of yours, Jimmy. After lights-out, then."

Nipper was not particularly interested, and he had no intention of joining in this affair. If Travers' study mates liked to take him at his word, all well and good. But Nipper really had no sympathy with it—since he was quite certain, in his own mind, that the ring was in no way responsible for the mysterious happenings. Still, its destruction might bring peace of mind to many of the fellows.

There was one Removite who remained in the Triangle, and his face was flushed, and his eyes were gleaming. That Removite was Bernard Forrest.

What he had just heard made all the difference to his decision. He was no thief, as he had told Ezra Quirke; but if these boys were going to take that ring and throw it into the furnace, he might just as well have it himself—to settle his debt. Better make use of it for a good purpose than ruthlessly to destroy it.

He frowned. It wouldn't be so easy. The other fellows would not let him have the ring, and if he took it in advance there would be a hue and cry when its loss was discovered.

Then suddenly an idea came to the scheming rascal of Study A. A smile overspread his face, and a minute later he was dashing for the garage to get out his motor-cycle.

He knew that he would be late for calling-over, but that was only a trifle. He wouldn't mind detention on the

morrow—or an impot. The scheme which had occurred to him had to be put into immediate effect, or it could not be carried out at all.

CHAPTER 10.

The Cunning of Bernard Forrest!

AS Forrest sped down the lane, he wondered if he would be in time. Some of the Bannington shops closed at six, some at seven, and some at eight. It was most important that a certain shop should be open when he arrived in the town.

Of course, he might be able to knock up the proprietor, but there was always a doubt. Far better for the place to be open. Anyhow, he couldn't be certain until he arrived. The thought of that, and something he had seen in the window on the previous Saturday, had come to him like a flash of inspiration.

It was one of those seedy jeweller's shops—not a glittering emporium, where diamond rings and bracelets and gold watches are displayed under a blaze of electric light. It was an old-fashioned establishment, and most of the stuff in the window was second-hand—an odd assortment of rings, trinkets, watches, clocks, and similar articles, all jumbled together. Forrest had an idea that the proprietor was also a pawnbroker, but it did not matter, one way or the other.

He fairly flew along the Bannington Road, riding recklessly. When at length he came into the High Street, he was dismayed to find nearly all the shops dark. A few confectioner's and tobacconist's were open, and there was a vivid blaze of light flashing across the street opposite the Palladium.

He rode on, and his heart gave a little jump as he saw the shop he required. There were still lights in the window, and the shutters were not up over the doorway.

"Good egg!" muttered Forrest, with relief.

He was inwardly excited. If he could only pull this thing off, it would make all the difference to his peace of mind. He would get out of his troubles with a minimum of discomfort—such a minimum, in fact, that he was not likely to learn a lesson from the experience. We only learn—and heed—when the experience is bitter.

Propping his bike against the kerb, he ran across to the window. A lanky youth was in the act of fixing the shutters.

(Continued on page 24.)

Exercise for your "dial"—every line a smile!



HANDFORTH'S Weekly

No. 27. Vol. 2

EDITORIAL STAFF.

October 24th, 1931.

EDITOR'S CHIN-WAG

By
The Editor.

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

NIPPER'S PUZZLE CORNER

MORROW of the Sixth has been good enough to suggest a few improvements for my ripping "Weekly." He says that I ought to model it upon the senior magazine.

"You don't want to put in a lot of rot, kid," said he seriously. "You'll give the country a wrong idea of the class of education practised at St. Frank's."

"Oh, yeah!" I rejoined.

"First of all you should have your school notes, containing a brief record of the various performances of the fellows during the week. Then the best scholars in the Form could try their hand at Latin prose. Of course, we shouldn't expect iambic or oratia obliqua or any other fancy stuff; but two or three simple Latin papers would give the magazine a tone."

"Ye-es! And the fellows are so crazy on Latin that they would love to do it."

"Exactly," he nodded, looking at me rather suspiciously. "Then you could have an essay or two upon some scholarly topic. In fact, I'll do you a paper on the Unities of the Greek Drama, if you like."

"Will you?" I said doubtfully.

"I'll be glad to help, of course. Take my advice. Cut out the rot and concentrate upon education. You'd soon see the result."

"I should. A letter from the Editor of THE NELSON LEE asking whether I'd gone off my onion. He lets me put my 'Weekly' in his paper because he thinks it will raise a laugh. Can't you imagine the readers shrieking at a Latin paper and wiping tears of mirth from their eyes after they have read your Drama of the Greek Unity? Some hopes!"

And since that time, Morrow hasn't been good enough to give me any more suggestions. Latin papers my foot! I don't suppose many of you could read 'em. ('Sh! Nor could I.)

E. O. H.

THIS week you may amuse yourselves by proving that:

- 1.—Fatty Little is the Editor of this magazine.
- 2.—St. Frank's is in Australia.
- 3.—Hussi Khan comes from Russia.
- 4.—Crowell whacked Snipe with a wireless pole.
- 5.—Handforth threw a king out of the window.

Yes, I know! You are saying to yourselves: "What the thump is he talking about? That's all rot. You can't prove rubbish like that." Is that so? Well, now try a little method which was invented by the Greeks long before ever you and I were born.

Have you heard of syllogisms? Of course you have. You can prove all sorts of things by means of syllogisms. For instance, we can prove that Fatty Little is the Editor of this magazine. This is how:

This magazine is edited by somebody;
Fatty Little is somebody—

Therefore this magazine is edited by Fatty Little.

Catch on? Good! Now try the other four.

You know how to do word-ladders? You put down the first word, and then make other words by changing one letter at a time until you change the word completely. For instance: Can you make RATS into MICK? It's done like this:

RATS
MATS
MATE
MACE
MICE

Now try to make WATER into WINES in six moves, and BELL into GONG in seven moves. They must all be proper words, don't forget. Solutions elsewhere.

FATUOUS FABLES

By Aesop Minor (Jimmy Potts).

No. 2.—The Boy and the Ape

MANY moons ago there lived a certain youth named Lancelot Vere de Vere Plantagenet Willoughby, who was known to all and sundry as "Monkey-face." And in very truth his features did greatly resemble those of the common ape which swingeth by its tail from a tree. And, behold, his schoolfellows and the masters that taught him, they had no mercy on him, but told him how much his face resembled that of an ape.

And this youth grew aggrieved within himself, and said: "Lo, I am undone! They mock me greatly, and call me 'monkey-face,' and my face it is no more like an ape than I am like a pudding of rice. What shall I do, therefore, that this mockery may cease?"

And he pondered long and earnestly upon the situation, and betimes an idea entered his brainbox where there was, indeed, much room for it, and he said:

"This I will do. There is a certain man living in this town who hath a pet ape which he caught in the jungle. I will hie myself to him and borrow the ape, and I will dress it in my clothes, and I will send it into class to-morrow morning in my place that the master and the boys also they will feel ashamed. Howbeit, I will tell no one of my intention."

And early in the morning he went to the man and borrowed the ape, and after he had smuggled it into the school he dressed the creature in his own clothes, and put upon its head a goodly cap, and in its hands he did put his books, and he thrust it down the passage nigh unto the class-room, and watched it go into the room with the other scholars.

Then did he laugh mightily within himself, and say:

"Now am I glad that I have done this thing. For lo, soon they will twig the ape, and they will feel mightily ashamed."

But behold, no cry came from the class-room where the ape was, and the youth began to be troubled, and said:

"Surely they do not think the ape is me? This can never be."

But there came no cry, and in good time the master dismissed the scholars, and they came forth. And outside, in the passage, Lancelot saw the master shake the ape by the hand, and say:

"Congratulations, Willoughby! You have behaved better to-day than ever before in your life."

And the youth cast himself into a river in despair.

MORAL: "Handsome is as handsome does."

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OUR OPEN COLUMNS

Dear Editor,—May I ask you to be good enough to insert the enclosed advertisement in your paper. I shall be pleased to pay you 5/- for doing so, and I send it herewith. Please acknowledge receipt.

LIONEL CORCORAN.

P.S. Blessed if I haven't clean forgotten to put in the five bob!

(Dear Modern Fathead,—I shall be pleased to insert your advertisement. You will find it on this page.

P.S. Blessed if I haven't clean forgotten to include it!—E. O. H.)

Dear Editor,—You will be glad to hear that yesterday morning I heard the cuckoo for 1935. Is this a record?

VIVIAN TRAVERS.

(Yes. A record fib.—E. O. H.)

Dear Ted-itor,—I don't think much of your paper, I don't think much of your brains, and I don't think much of you! You always hand out black eyes or thick cars when people talk to you like this, I believe. I dare you to give me one!

WHO-IS-IT?

(Dear Ena,—You needn't think I don't know your writing, because I jolly well do. Don't you be cheeky, or maybe I'll just publish a few stories of the things you used to do when you were a kid. Your pals at Moor View would love to read them, I fancy. Somehow I don't think I shall get any more cheek from you.—E. O. H.)

Dear Editor,—I can tell you a way to make your WEEKLY the most popular magazine at St. Frank's. Just publish a good construe of the week's Latin papers, and save us the fag of doing prep. I would pay sixpence for my copy. What about it? Will you do it?

CLAUDE GORE-PEARCE.

(Yes—prep. And so will you, you slacker!)

S. O. S.

LOST.—On the footer ground. A reputation for goalkeeping. Finder is asked to restore to "GOALKEEPER," Study D.

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REGGIE PITT relates the sad story of—

TIMID TIM

MR. STOKES has been telling us recently that it is a good thing to practice a little auto-suggestion now and then. You know the stunt. "Every day in every way I'm getting better and better and better." He says that auto-suggestion stimulates the brain and helps the nerve.

But this might be overdone. Listen to the story of Timid Tim.

When Tim was a little boy a kind gentleman called to see him, and said to his father:

"Well, well, well! And what is the little chap going to be when he grows up?"

"Judging by the look of him," answered his father gloomily, "he's going to be the World's Champion Fat-head."

This prophecy turned out to be correct. When Tim became a man he was such a pronounced fathead that he easily could have got a job as a circus clown.

He wasn't a clown, however. He was employed as a labourer by the firm which was erecting a new building on the outskirts of Bannington. This building was very high—so high that the men working on it looked like flies.

It was Tim's job to nail the girders to each other with a hammer and some tin-tacks.

The higher he got the more nervous he became. And when he was told to nail girders together at a height of about four miles above sea-level (at high tide) he turned as white as his shirt. (Whiter, in fact.)

"I kik-can't do it," he said to a friend of his. "I'm not funky, of course. I'm just afraid, that's all."

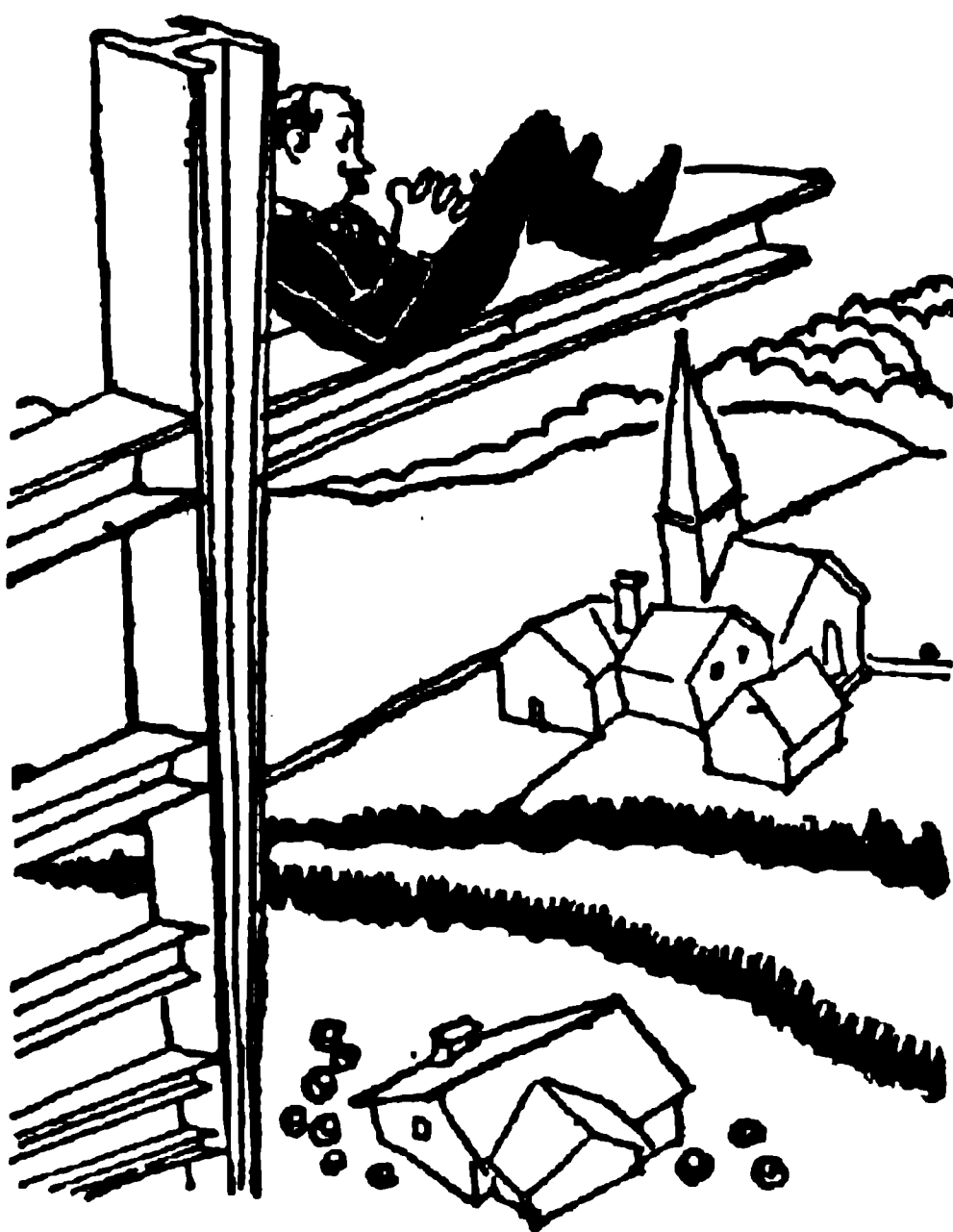
"Have you ever tried auto-suggestion?" asked this friend.

"Nunno! What does it taste like?"

"Taste like? Nothing, ass!"

"Well, I don't like the taste of nothing, I don't."

"Chump! Auto-suggestion means that you keep on saying a thing to yourself until you believe it is true. F'rinstance, when you get up on that girder, you say to yourself: 'I'm just as safe as if I was in bed.' Keep on saying it, and you'll believe it in time."



So Tim got his hammer and tacks and climbed the ladders until he reached the topmost girder, which was so high that he had to look downwards at the aeroplanes which went by. He sat on this girder, shut his eyes firmly, and said:

"I'm just as safe as if I was in bed, I am. I'm just as safe as if I was in bed, I am." And he continued to say it until at length he lay back with a peaceful smile and snored like a carthorse.

He'd actually talked himself into believing that he was in bed. That says a lot for Barry Stokes' theory of auto-suggestion.

Unfortunately, when the hooter went for knocking off, Tim thought it was his alarm-clock buzzing, and he got out of bed!

The rest of this sad story had better be left unsaid, but it just shows what a fathead Tim really was.

Fancy jumping out of bed immediately the alarm-clock went off!

Solutions to This Week's
Puzzles

2. St. Frank's is in an island; Australia is an island, etc.
3. Hussi Khan comes from a far country; Russia is a far country, etc.
4. Crowell whacked Snipe with a length of wood; A wireless pole is a length of wood, etc.
5. Handforth threw his ruler out of the window; A king is a ruler, etc.

WORD-LADDERS.

WATER
WAGER
WAGES
WALES
WILES
WINES

BELL
BALL
PALL
PANT
PANG
GANG
GONG.

There may be alternative ways of getting from one word to the other. All would be equally correct.

THE CURSE OF OSRA !

(Continued from page 20.)

"Just a minute," said Forrest casually.

He bent over the window, inspecting the contents. Yes, there it was! An ancient-looking ring, set with some red stones in the form of a star. It was obviously imitation gold, and the stones were just as obviously made of paste—for the price ticket announced to the Bannington public that the ring could be secured for the absurdly low price of fifteen shillings.

But from Forrest's point of view this was a big advantage. He strode into the shop, and he was successful in beating the price down to twelve-and-sixpence. Which was all to the good, for Forrest only just had enough money—the last of his cash.

He went out, triumphant.

He had seen that ring in the window before—or, rather, Gulliver had drawn his attention to it, saying how closely it resembled Travers' "mystery" ring. Superficially, it was very much the same, but a close examination would never do. The one ring was a genuine antique, the other was a cheap imitation.

This imitation, too, had only five stones, instead of seven; but they were set in the form of a star, which was the main point.

"Easy!" chuckled Forrest, as he climbed back on to his motor-bike. "Easy as pie! I'll change the rings, and those silly fools will burn the wrong one—and they'll never know! Then I'll pop down to Vicks, and everything will be O.K.! Bernard, my son, you've got brains!"

He was so lighthearted that he felt like singing as he rode. All day he had been unutterably depressed—fearing that he would have to pay the price of his folly.

If he bucked up, he would be able to get back to the school only a few minutes after calling-over, and he might not get such a heavy imposition, after all. And there was always the chance, too, that Gulliver or Bell might have answered his name for him. Prefects were not too particular.

He was half-way along the road from Bannington to Bellton when his attention was distracted by a curious ruddy glow in the sky, immediately ahead. He had been concentrating his attention upon the road, where his headlamp splashed its brilliant light. But now he glanced up, automatically slowing, and his jaw dropped.

For there, hovering in the sky, winking wickedly, were seven blood-red points of fire!

Seven stars!

"By gad!" muttered Forrest huskily.

He had heard of the seven stars before—in fact, he had seen them. Once, when he and Gulliver and Bell had been out on the spree, the stars had appeared as they were getting back into the school.

And here they were again—an ominous, significant sign!

Only for a moment did Forrest glance down at the road, but when he looked up again the stars were no longer visible. They had become blotted out in just that one flash. By now Forrest was travelling very slowly, and he had a curious disinclination to go forward. Perhaps it was just imagination, but he felt nervous of going forward. Something was there—some danger lurking, waiting for him.

He shook himself.

"You idiot!" he muttered. "You're not getting scared, are you?"

The road ahead of him was black; not a vehicle of any kind was within sight—not a light. He glanced behind. Nothing but intense gloom. He touched the throttle lever, and the motor-cycle instantly obeyed.

At the same second Bernard Forrest screamed. Cold, bony hands had gripped his shoulders from behind!

He had heard no footsteps; only a second earlier he had glanced round, and he knew that nobody was in his rear. Besides, he had distinctly felt the hands descend upon him.

Forrest felt the cold claw-like hands creep up to his neck. He screamed again. The unseen menace was riding with him, clinging to him. It was a terrible, horrifying experience.

His machine wobbled, for instinctively he had applied the brake. Over it went, carrying Forrest with it. The handlebars jerked round, and the bicycle slewed broadside as Forrest fell off it. The headlight, cutting through the darkness, illuminated that section of the road which had just been in his rear.

And there was—nothing!

Sobbing with terror, Forrest leaped to his feet. His engine was racing, but he took no notice. He stared in front of him; he spun round, still staring. Only a few seconds had elapsed since he had felt those claw-like hands on his neck. Yet he was alone in the road—there was no living creature with him, or within sight of him. There was nothing!

He stared at the hedges, and into the sky. Whatever it was which had sprung upon his back, had gone—just as mysteriously as it had come. Forrest, trembling in every limb, nearly fainting with the shock, was almost afraid to move. One

thought was throbbing through his brain. The Curse of Osra was something real—something vilely real!

CHAPTER 11.

After Lights Out!

WITH all his faults, Bernard Forrest was no coward.

He was a rascal, a schemer, and a cad. But nobody at St. Frank's who knew him had ever questioned his courage.

Now, however, he was a trembling, babbling wreck. Even his strong nerve had failed him! This thing which had happened to him was not a thing which called for ordinary courage. It was something from the world of the occult! Sceptic though Forrest was, how could he think anything else?

His brain was feverish. A ghost could be easily faked—yes; but that thing which had leapt upon him had come from nowhere, and it had gone nowhere. Yet it had been something definite, something tangible.

He passed a hand up to his neck, and he felt a damp patch. He pulled away his hand. Blood! So those claw-like talons had scratched him!

"Oh!" he breathed, gazing fearfully from side to side. "Help! Help!"

He shrieked the word, for panic had seized him. But a moment later he knew the futility of his shouts, for not a living soul was near him. Shivering and shaking in every limb, he picked up his bicycle and clung to it. He was grateful for the light which the headlamp gave.

As he prepared to remount, he hesitated. Fresh horror seized him. The road was well illuminated in front, but what of the rear? It would still be as black as ink, and it was from the rear that the unexpected attack had come. He hardly dared ride on.

He tried to pull himself together. He remembered how, as a child, he had schooled himself to walk in the dark without getting any absurd fancies. For once a person imagines that something is following, it soon becomes an obsession—and that is the pathway to panic. And once the walk becomes a run, then the imagination sees stark terror stalking in the rear; and yet, all the time, there is absolutely nothing to be afraid of.

Forrest thought of these things as he straddled his machine. But this was different. There was something!

He could hardly operate the kick-starter, so great was his agitation, so in-

tense his fear. And then a babbling gulp of relief came to his lips. For, from the rear, he heard the thundering rumble of a big motor-coach—one of the regular coaches that ran between Bannington, Bellton, and Caistowe. He swung round in the saddle, and saw the welcome headlamps.

Feverishly, he started his engine, and as the coach drew nearer he moved off. He regulated his pace so that he kept about a hundred yards ahead of the rapidly-moving coach. Its headlamps displayed him clearly, and now he had a light ahead, and a light in the rear. His fears vanished. Light is a wonderful thing for dispelling panic.

By the time he reached Bellton he was master of himself completely. Here he was compelled to ride on without the coach, for the coach turned off to Caistowe. There was no service along the lane to the school. Some of his fears returned as he left the village behind and went up the dark lane, with Bellton Wood brooding so blackly on one hand.

It was only a short distance, and, bending low over the handle-bars, he opened his throttle wide. He scorched along madly. Panic was beginning to return. Everything was black behind him. He imagined a thousand and one horrors.

He swung into the Triangle so abruptly that he skidded broadside, like a dirt-track racer. Biggleswade, of the Sixth, who was coming out of the East House, jumped about a yard into the air.

"What the dickens——" began the prefect.

Forrest had pulled up, and, luckily, he had come to no harm.

"I say, you!" exclaimed Biggleswade angrily, as he ran forward. "What do you think you're doing? Oh, it's you, Forrest! Are you out of your mind? What do you mean by coming into the Triangle like that? You might have killed somebody!"

"I—I'm sorry," muttered Forrest, so glad of the human companionship of Biggleswade that he didn't mind what punishment he got. "The throttle jammed. Funny thing, too, because it's never done it before. It was as much as I could do to steer through the gateway. I thought it was going to crash."

"Oh!" said Biggy gruffly. "Well, you'd better have a look at that throttle, my lad! I suppose you have a permit for being out late?"

"Am I late?" asked Forrest, rapidly recovering.

"Oh! So you haven't a permit?" asked the prefect. "All right—report to my study later on."

He walked off, and Forrest put away his bicycle. He went into the Ancient House quickly, and the warmth of the electric lights gave him back his nerve. But he was looking pale and haggard, nevertheless. He met Handforth & Co. in the Remove passage, and they stared at him wonderingly.

"Great Scott!" said Handforth. "What's up? Have you been seeing ghosts, too, Forrest?"

Forrest hesitated. Should he tell—or not? He decided to do so. It would strengthen the juniors in their determination to destroy the ring.

"I've had a horrible adventure," muttered Forrest, passing a hand over his brow. "No, don't laugh—don't say I've been imagining things. I'm the last chap in the world to have fancies. I've always scoffed at ghosts."

"My hat!" breathed Church, awed. "What have you seen?"

"Nothing!"

"Eh?"

"That's just it," said Forrest. "I've seen nothing!"

"Then what the dickens are you scared about?" demanded Handforth, in wonder.

"Yes, I was scared," admitted Forrest defiantly. "I don't mind telling you that I was badly scared."

He described his experience—he described it graphically. Other fellows had come along by now, and they all listened with intense interest.

"Are you sure it wasn't your imagination?" asked Jimmy Potts, at length.

"Is this imagination?" said Forrest, pointing to the scratch on his neck. "That—that thing took hold of me there, and—and—— Gad! I don't like to talk about it."

He was satisfied that he had given the fellows a thrill. Many of them were looking scared.

Forrest went to his study, and Gulliver and Bell followed him.

"What was the idea of that yarn?" asked Bell bluntly.

"You silly fool, it wasn't a yarn!" snapped Forrest. "It really happened."

"Oh, come off it!" protested Gulliver.

"You needn't believe it unless you like," growled Forrest. "But I tell you it happened. I thought I was going mad. If you chaps had been there you would have fainted right away—you're both funks, anyhow."

"No need to round on us, is there?" asked Bell plaintively. "What are you doing about that money? Did you see Vicks?"

"I've arranged everything," said Forrest briefly. "It's all right."

He had no intention of taking his chums into his confidence—they were not to be trusted. They were surprised, but they knew better than to question him. When Forrest liked to be close, he could be as close as an oyster.

He sent them to the Common-room to make observations, and Bell came back to report that Travers and Potts and Skeets were all there. Bell was sent back again to rejoin Gulliver.

And Forrest, going quietly along the Remove passage, slipped into Travers' study. A breath of relief escaped him when he found that the flap of the bureau was unlocked.

It was only the work of a moment for Forrest to search through the drawers, at the rear. In one of them lay the Ring of Osra, its red stones winking wickedly. Remembering that experience along the Bannington Road, Forrest was almost afraid to touch the thing.

But he did so. He compared it with the ring he had bought. Not such a great deal of difference, unless one looked closely. At a casual glance the substitute would be mistaken for the original; but it would have to be no more than a casual glance.

"I shall have to be here, that's all," muttered Forrest. "It's the only safe way."

He was out of the study in a moment, and he was relieved. Nobody had seen him enter, and nobody saw him leave. It wasn't surprising that the bureau had been unlocked—for juniors in a big school like St. Frank's do not usually keep their drawers or desks locked.

For the rest of the evening Bernard Forrest kept his eyes and ears open. He was glad to find that none of the fellows was questioning Travers; and Travers himself was still gloomy and depressed, holding himself aloof and brooding silently over the tangle of mystery which surrounded the Egyptian ring.

CHAPTER 12.

Forrest Sees It Through!

TEN-fifteen chimed solemnly from the school clock. It was after lights-out in the Remove passage of the Ancient House, and most of the fellows were already asleep. Not that sleep came to them so easily as usual these nights. In bed, Ezra Quirke's fantastic warnings always seemed far more real than in the day-time.

Bernard Forrest was wide awake. Gulliver and Bell slept, for they did not know.



The ring was thrown into the glowing furnace, and at the same moment the juniors were startled to hear a weird moan.

of Forrest's plan. He was glad they were asleep; he did not wish to be bothered with them. But he was getting anxious. If he didn't turn up at the White Harp by eleven, Mr. Valentine Vicks might carry out his threat.

Supposing Handforth and Potts and the other fellows didn't make a move until eleven? Forrest daren't go down to the White Harp now; he had to wait until the juniors destroyed the ring, for unless he was there they would probably discover the substitution.

"Oh, rats! What's the good of supposing?" he muttered irritably.

He slipped out of bed, quietly dressed himself and waited again. To his intense relief he heard a board creaking outside in the corridor not three minutes later. He opened his door, and peeped out.

Handforth, Church, McClure, Potts, Skeets, and De Valerie were all there. Forrest quietly joined them.

"Hallo," grunted Handforth, in a hoarse stage whisper. "What do you want, Forrest? Who told you to butt in?"

"You don't mind my coming, do you?" said Forrest. "I want to see the last of that ring! It's evil—it's deadly! I

don't forget what happened to me this evening, and I want to be certain that it is destroyed."

"All right; come on," muttered Handforth. "You have as much right as the rest of us, I suppose."

They reached Travers' study without mishap, and Forrest was rather alarmed when Handforth switched on the light. The less light—from Forrest's point of view—the better.

"Do you think that's wise?" he whispered. "Hadn't we better keep the lights off? Somebody might spot us from one of the other Houses."

"Rot! We shall only be a minute," said Handforth.

"I suppose it's all right—bagging the giddy ring like this and throwing it in the furnace?" asked Jimmy Potts uneasily. "It does seem a bit thick, you know——"

"Don't be an ass!" interrupted Handforth. "Didn't Travers say that we could do as we liked? Well, we like to destroy it! Mind you, I don't believe in all that tosh about its being evil. But so many of you fatheads have got the wind up that the sooner the ring is destroyed the better."

"Oh, don't let's talk!" said Jimmy. "Let's get the ring and finish the job."

"That's what I say," murmured Forrest.

Handforth went to the desk, and pulled at the flap. But it was locked now.

"By George! Here's a snag," said Edward Oswald, in dismay. "What are we going to do? The silly ass has locked up his bureau!"

"Keep your hair on, partner," said Skeets.

He jumped on to a chair and felt along the top of the bookcase. He soon had the key, and the bureau was unlocked. It was Handforth who unlocked the drawer and took out the ring. Bernard Forrest watched him closely. He was ready for the emergency.

"Rummy looking thing," said Handforth, as he came over towards the light.

"Let's have a look at it," said Potts. "I can't believe——"

It was time for Forrest to act. If these chaps took a good look at the ring, the fat would be in the fire.

"Cave!" hissed Forrest suddenly. "The lights!"

Church dived for the switch, and plunged the study into darkness. They all stood tense, listening. But, of course, nothing had happened. Forrest crept to the door and opened it.

"What's the idea?" came Handforth's whisper. "There's nobody coming!"

"I'll swear I heard footsteps!" gasped Forrest.

"I didn't hear anything," said one of the others.

"Let's take that ring to the furnace—quickly!" went on Forrest. "Gad! I'm not usually scared, but this thing has got me down."

"Perhaps we'd better," muttered Handforth uneasily.

Forrest had worked the trick. The light was not put on again, and they all moved out of the study and passed into the passage. It did not take them long to reach the domestic quarters, and they passed through into the scullery. Here, in one corner, stood the immense furnace which supplied the Ancient House with hot water. It was glowing redly, and when Forrest pulled back the iron door, a white-hot mass of burning coke was revealed.

"By George! That ought to do it," said Handforth. "But, I say, now that we've got to the point, doesn't it seem a bit dotty? I mean, what earthly difference can it make? And it does seem an awful shame to destroy a valuable ring——"

"Don't delay—don't hesitate!" urged Forrest, peering nervously over his shoulder. "We don't know what might happen. Throw it into the heart of the fire. Handforth! This is no time to be squeamish. Destroy the beastly thing—and with it its evil influence!"

Handforth looked at the ring strangely, but in that light he could not see it very distinctly. As he had said, now that the crucial moment had arrived, he was doubtful about destroying something that was not his. But Forrest settled the matter. With a sudden move forward, he snatched the ring out of Handforth's grip, and with another movement he flung it into the heart of the fire.

Peering into the furnace, they saw the ring perched on a little mass of live coke; it seemed to stand out boldly. Then the formation suddenly collapsed, and the ring was swallowed up in the white-hot heart of the fire.

At the same moment a weird moan sounded in the blackness of the cellar—an agonised, wailing cry like that of a lost soul in anguish.

CHAPTER 13.

The Figure in the Road!

THEY were all startled.

"What—what was that?" panted Forrest hoarsely.

"Goodness knows," muttered Handforth. "It might have been the wind, but—but——"

"It was the death gasp of the evil spirit of Raamses," interrupted Forrest impressively. "Oh, you'll call me a fool for saying that, but—but I know! The danger is over now. The fire has consumed the ring, and the menace is at an end."

He thought it unnecessary to tell them that it was he who had produced that singularly alarming moan. Unseen by them, cupping his hand so that his voice appeared to come from elsewhere, he had produced the weird sound. Not one of them suspected him. But Forrest rather prided himself that it had added to the general effect.

He proceeded with the good work.

"Can't you feel the difference in the very air?" he asked, taking a deep breath, and stretching his arms. "We can go to bed in peace—and sleep soundly."

"I'm jiggered if he isn't right, you chaps," said Handforth, whose imagination was not unlike a piece of elastic. "There is a sort of—of difference in the air. I can't understand it, because I've never believed in evil spirits, anyhow."

They were all completely fooled. Not one of them had the faintest inkling that the wrong ring had been destroyed, for the actual Ring of Osra was in Bernard Forrest's

pocket. Yet these fellows were assuring themselves that a sense of peace and security had descended upon the school. What a complex thing is the human mind!

It was a quarter to eleven by the time they reached the dormitory passage again, and they went to their beds gladly. Bernard Forrest was out again within two minutes, and when he crept downstairs he was gloating. How cleverly he had schemed—how brilliantly he had brought off his *coup*!

But his satisfaction did not last long.

Outside, with the bitter October breeze blowing into his face, and the darkness enveloping him, he had a return of that panicky feeling. He strove to thrust it aside, but it was beyond his power. However, this was no time for turning back. It was nearly eleven, and he had to reach the White Harp.

And now he was beset with fresh doubts. Would Vicks accept the ring in lieu of the money? He had been very certain of it earlier in the evening, but he wasn't so sure now.

He did not know whether to be relieved or alarmed when a heavy bank of clouds drifted away, revealing a half-moon for a brief period. Perhaps the darkness was preferable to this weird half-light. For the shadows seemed blacker and more mysterious.

In spite of his intention to walk, he broke into a run. He had not covered more than a hundred yards before he found himself racing madly. A fear had possessed him that something was running behind, and try as he would, he could not shake off the impression.

Patter—patter—patter!

Yes, he could hear the footsteps. There was something following him—something—Fool! It was only the echo of his own footsteps!

As he ran, he glanced over his shoulder. There was nothing. He looked in front of him again, and his heart leapt. There, right across his path, lying in the roadway, was something which looked like an Egyptian mummy!

A choking cry escaped Forrest. He tried to swerve; he tried to pull himself up—but it was too late. He struck the dread thing which was lying in his path, and he tripped over headlong, crashing and turning a complete somersault.

The shock of the fall jarred every bone in his body. He leapt to his feet, terror-stricken, and his eyes almost started out of his head. For on the road there was nothing!

Nothing at all but the bare road, bathed in the soft moonlight! No mummy—no figure of any kind. And then the moon slipped behind another bank of clouds, and complete gloom enveloped the whole landscape.

"Am I going mad?" panted Forrest feverishly.

With a supreme effort of will, he ran back to that very spot. But there was nothing to be seen. Yet he knew that something must have been there, or he would

never have tripped. He had felt it soft and resisting against his foot as he had crashed over. Just like that other adventure, this was inexplicable.

In his mind's eye, he could see the object—yes, a mummy. Without doubt, a mummy from an Egyptian tomb! But the very idea of it was so outrageous, so fantastic—

Forrest pulled himself up. This was no time to think. The chimes were booming out from the school clock. He could hear them distinctly. Eleven! Perhaps Vicks would be gone!

He ran. Out of the darkness, a voice came to him.

"Forrest!"

It sounded soft and mysterious. He glanced round, but he could see nobody. Was it another trick of his imagination, or—No, there was something not far behind him, a black, shapeless figure.

"Oh!" sobbed Bernard Forrest.

Never in his life had he been more terrified. He ran—he ran madly. And this time he knew that there was no mistake. The footsteps in his rear were tangible, real. He could even hear the hard breathing of his pursuer.

"Forrest! Wait!" came the voice. "Why are you running?"

And then Bernard Forrest pulled up short, laughing hysterically. He had recognised that voice this time. His breath came and went in great gulps. What a fool he was! There, in the moonlight, was the strange but human figure of Ezra Quirke.

"My friend, you gave way to panic," said Quirke reproachfully.

"You!" breathed Forrest, touching his arm to make sure that he was real. "Oh, gad! I—I thought— Confound you, Quirke! Why didn't you say who you were at first? You gave me a horrible scare!"

"Unless your nerves had been in a bad condition, Forrest, you would not have been scared," said Quirke quietly. "Something has happened. What? You do not need to tell me that the Curse of Osra has—"

"Just now—farther up the lane—a mummy!" said Forrest incoherently.

"A—what?"

"I saw it—lying in the road—I tripped over it and fell," babbled Forrest. "I tell you I saw it—a mummy, all wrapped up, like you see them in the museums! But when I looked round, it wasn't there."

"Steady, my friend—control yourself," said Quirke sternly. "You need fear nothing now—for I am with you."

"You? Why am I safe with you?" asked Forrest. "Are you a talisman of security?"

"I am a believer—and believers are immune from danger," replied Quirke tonelessly. "There was no mummy, Forrest. What you saw was a form of the spirit of Raamses."

"But it couldn't have been," panted Forrest. "The Ring of Osra is destroyed! I saw it burning—"

"What!" interrupted Quirke sharply.

"I mean— Gad, no! I'm getting muddled," choked Forrest. "I've got the real ring in my pocket."

"The real ring?" said the other. "What do you mean? What have you been doing? What trickery is this?"

"The real ring," muttered Forrest. "That's why I'm in danger. I've got it on me, and the evil spirit— No, no! I can't believe it!"

He took a hold on himself, and in a few words he told Quirke of what he had done.

"So you have changed your mind, my friend," said Quirke softly. "You are taking my advice, yes? You are giving the ring to the man, Vicks? Far better would it have been if you had destroyed the real ring in the heart of the fire."

"I thought I'd take it—it's not thieving at all," breathed the cad of Study A. "They were going to destroy it—so why shouldn't I take it? What's the difference? St. Frank's will be rid of it, and—and—"

"Yes, you are right," said Ezra Quirke impressively. "Take it—now! Get rid of the accursed thing, and since you are afraid, I will accompany you to the White Harp. It is there, I think, that you are to meet this man?"

"Thanks, Quirke," said Forrest, swallowing something. "I'll admit I'm funky. You must come with me. If you don't I shall go mad."

For Forrest to admit such a thing was clear proof of his state of mind. Forrest

was both a disbeliever in ghosts, and a physically courageous boy. His adventures this evening, however, had unnerved him completely.

He detested Ezra Quirke—he held him in contempt, for he had always believed him to be a charlatan, a trickster, and a fraud. But now, as Quirke accompanied him down the lane, he began to readjust his views. Quirke's very presence was steadying. Forrest was grateful for the company.

They crossed the bridge, and came within sight of the little inn which was owned by Mr. Jonas Porlock—who was not really a very respectable member of the village community. Mr. Porlock was a bookmaker himself, and it was generally suspected that he dabbled in all sorts of things which would not bear the full light of day.

A motor-car was standing outside the door, and a light gleamed from the doorway itself. A man was just outside the porch.

"I will say good-night," murmured Ezra Quirke. "Fear nothing—once you have rid yourself of the fatal ring!"

He seemed to melt into the darkness, and Forrest found himself alone. He ran forward, and Mr. Valentine Vicks stared at him angrily as he appeared in the lighted doorway.

"Oh! So you've come, have you?" he asked grimly. "I thought you were giving it a miss, Stupid!"

"We—we can't talk out here, Mr. Vicks,"



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 and penknives are also offered as prizes. Address your jokes to "Smilers," Nelson Lee Library, 5, Carmelite Street, London, E.C.4.

THESE HARD TIMES.

Theatrical Agent: "Good news! I've booked your performing pigeons for a six weeks' tour."

Client: "Too late—I've eaten the act!"

(B. Laws, 5a, Wellington Road, Stoke Newington, London, N.16, has been awarded a handsome watch.)

VERY HELPFUL.

Small boy (to motorist who is pushing car): "Please, sir, can I help?"

Motorist: "What can a small boy like you do?"

Small Boy: "Well, I can grunt while you push."

(D. Upton, 2 Thrift Cottages, Otford, Nr. Sevenoaks, has been awarded a pocket wallet.)

ANTICIPATION.

1st tramp: "What are you looking so upset about?"

2nd tramp: "Work. Nothing but work—morning, noon and night."

1st tramp: "Hard luck. How long have you been at it?"

2nd tramp: "Start to-morrow."

(W. Hayday, 95, Old Ford Road, London, E.2, has been awarded a penknife.)

GONE FOR GOOD.

Passenger (after first night on board ship): "I say, where have my clothes gone?"

Steward: "Where did you put them, sir?"

Passenger: "In that little cupboard with the glass door."

Steward: "Great Scott! That's not a cupboard—that's a porthole."

(L. Smith, 126, Hoof Street, Grafton, N.S.W., Australia, has been awarded a pocket wallet.)

WANTED SOME FINDING.

Burglar (entering old gent's bedroom): "Hands up, guv'nor. I'm a desperate man looking for money in this house."

Old gent: "Good gracious! I'll come and help you find it."

(A. Hall, 15, Wellington Road, St. Albans, has been awarded a pocket wallet.)

muttered Forrest. "Somebody might see me. It's only eleven o'clock——"

"Nearly ten past," said the bookie.

"I'm sorry I'm a bit late, but I couldn't help it," went on Forrest. "What I mean is, one of the masters might be out. Eleven o'clock isn't late for a master, you know. And if I'm spotted——"

"Come inside," said Mr. Vicks.

He was hopeful. The boy's very presence meant that he had brought something with him. They went into the little parlour, Mr. Porlock giving Forrest a familiar nod. The pair were left alone.

"Well?" said the bookmaker. "What about the cash? Got it?"

"No."

"What's that? You haven't?" ejaculated the other. "Now, look here, Unconscious, if you think you're going to talk me round to giving you more grace——"

"I'm not," broke in Forrest. "Why can't you wait? I owe you just over fifty quid, don't I? Well, I haven't the money, but I've something else. Something worth a lot more than fifty quid. And if you'll accept it in lieu of the cash, I'm willing to make the sacrifice."

"Let's have it, Mysterious," said Mr. Vicks impatiently.

"It's this ring," said Forrest, who had now recovered some of his old coolness and urbanity. "I'm a fool really, for parting with it."

He handed the fateful ring over to Mr. Valentine Vicks, and the latter took it with interest. He went over to one of the lights, and stood beneath it. Mr. Vicks was no fool; he was something of an expert in jewels, too, judging by the diamond rings which flashed on his fingers and in his shirt-front.

"H'm!" he said non-committally.

Forrest waited, in a fever of anxiety.

"It's—it's really an heirloom," he explained glibly. "A present from my grandmother, you know. If I'm careful, she won't discover that I've parted with it—and if the worst comes to the worst, I can always say I lost it somewhere. It's worth lots of money, Mr. Vicks. I think you ought to pay me something in addition——"

"Not so fast," said the bookmaker. "This ring isn't so valuable, Useless. It's gold, and it's a bit of an antique. Looks Moorish to me."

"It is Moorish," said Forrest quickly. "My—my grandmother picked it up in Morocco, years and years ago."

"Then it's a funny kind of heirloom," said the bookmaker dryly.

"I—I mean——"

"I'm not going to ask too many questions," chuckled Mr. Vicks. "These stones are rubies—but pretty rotten ones. At a rough guess, the thing might be worth seventy-five pounds."

Forrest's heart jumped. His relief was enormous. He had expected the man to say

MOTHER WAS MUDDLED.

Mother: "Tommy, your father tells me you called him an old fool. Did you?"

Tommy: "Yes, mother."

Mother (distractedly): "Well, I'm glad you are truthful, anyway."

(H. Sherman, 38, Hout Street, Johannesburg, S. Africa, has been awarded a penknife.)

HE GOT THE JOB.

Shopkeeper (interviewing applicant): "What I want is a strong boy."

Boy: "That's all right. I knocked out the six other applicants just before I came in."

(S. Sweetman, 20, Shelley Square, South-end, has been awarded a pocket wallet.)

HALF AND HALF.

Stunt pilot (as 'plane goes into a hair-raising dive): "Half the people down there think we're falling."

Nervous passenger: "S-s-so d-d-do half the p-p-people up h-h-here."

(J. Martin, The Cottages, Castle Hill, Ipswich, has been awarded a penknife.)

PROUD.

Tom: "Our neighbour is so proud that she won't speak to anybody in our street."

Jim: "That's nothing. Our

neighbour is so proud she won't read a serial story because it means paying for it on the instalment system."

(J. Baker, 20 Reede Road, Dagenham, has been awarded a pocket wallet.)

MUSICAL.

Choirmaster (to small recruit): "You sing well. Do you come from a musical family?"

Choirboy (proudly): "Rather. Dad plays the drum in the town band, and even our dog wears a brass band round its neck."

(J. Kennard, 8, Critchmere Hill, Shottermill, Surrey, has been awarded a penknife.)

LOOKING AHEAD.

Tailor (to mother of boy who is being measured for new suit): "Do you want the shoulders padded?"

Boy: "No, mum, tell him to pad the trousers."

(P. Cooper, 6, Hill Farm Road, London, has been awarded a pocket wallet.)

"ILL-BRED."

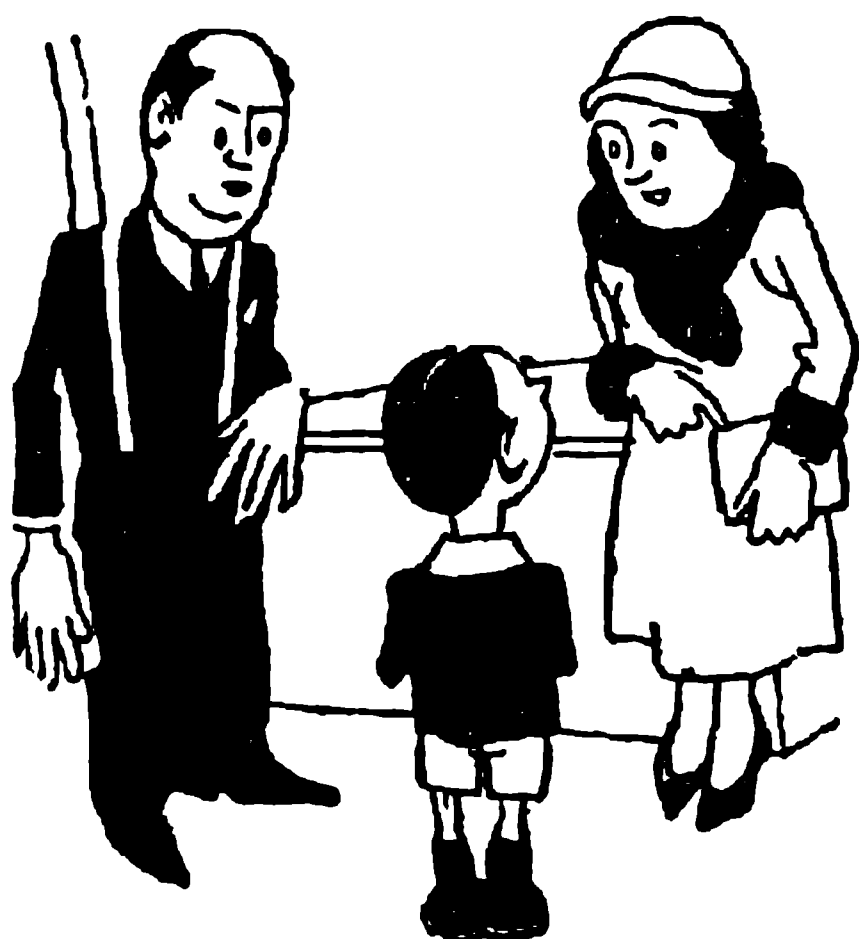
Officer: "Anything wrong?"

Private: "Yes, bread's wrong, sir."

Officer: "How?"

Private: "It contradicts the law of gravity. It's as heavy as lead and won't go down."

(D. Turner, Totteridge P.O., Totteridge—a penknife.)



that it was only worth a tenner, or some such absurd figure as that. Mr. Valentine Vicks knew well enough that he had named a very modest estimate of the value.

"Then—then if it's worth seventy-five pounds, perhaps you'll give me some money?" suggested Forrest. "I could do with a bit. I mean, we'll call the bill settled, and——"

"And you'll get nothing—and think yourself lucky," said Mr. Vicks coolly. "Any kind of precious stones, Ignorant, are risky things to buy. Nobody but a fool ever pays more than a third of their market value. If he does, he loses money when he tries to re-sell. What I ought to do is to allow you twenty-five pounds credit on your account, and make you pay me the rest. But I'm a generous man. We'll call it a bargain."

"That's all very well," grumbled Forrest. "You told me it was worth seventy-five pounds, and I think you ought to——"

"If you don't like it, you can have your infernal ring back," said the bookmaker curtly. "Here you are! Take it! And I'll write to your father——"

"No, no! I didn't mean that. You can have it," said Forrest. "I'm satisfied."

He escaped before the bookmaker could change his mind again—and after he had gone Mr. Vicks examined the ring more closely, chuckled, and put it into his pocket. In his opinion, he had made a good bargain.

Forrest was satisfied, too. He had wiped off his debt, and he had rid himself—and the school—of that Curse.

In fact, before Forrest jumped into bed, he was telling himself that he was a sort of public benefactor. He had done St. Frank's a good service, and the deuce of it was, he couldn't tell anybody about it!

CHAPTER 14.

All the Winners!

VIVIAN TRAVERS awoke with a clear head. The night's sleep had done him a world of good, and as he commenced dressing he called himself an arrant chump. That letter from his father was just a bit worrying, of course, but there wasn't any reason to suppose that anything terrible would happen. And as for that silly quarrel with Phyllis, he would soon put things right!

The sun was shining, and the day looked like being a glorious one. Travers dressed rapidly. He wanted to run over to the Moor View School before breakfast, and have a word with Phyllis. He had been feeling rotten the previous evening, and, very guiltily, he realised that he had been a boor and a brute. Just because he hadn't felt like dancing he had snapped her up; and all the time she had been trying to cheer him. What a cad he had been!

"You're looking pretty chirpy, Travers, old man."

Travers had been hardly aware of the existence of Jimmy Potts and Skeets. They

were dressing, too, and for some moments they had been eyeing him wonderingly. The change in him was so marked.

It was only natural, perhaps, that they should put this down to the destruction of the ring. At least, they thought it was destroyed. What had caused the difference in Travers was a clear, healthy brain after a good night's rest.

"Golly!" muttered Skeets. "I wasn't so sure of that gag working, Jimmy, but look at it! I'm feeling a whole heap better myself, I guess."

"What are you fatheads jabbering about?" asked Travers amiably. "Don't hinder me. I'm in a hurry. I must get along to Moor View and have a word with Phyllis."

"Good man," said Jimmy Potts eagerly. "That's the stuff! But—but I say——"

"Well?"

"There's—there's something we ought to tell you——"

"Leave it until after breakfast."

"It's rather important——"

"Nothing's so important as my getting to Moor View."

"It's about that ring——"

"Great Samson!" ejaculated Travers, exasperated. "Blow the ring! Dash the ring! Blither the ring! I'm fed up with the ring!"

"Well, I'm glad to hear that," said Jimmy. "Because the ring's gone."

"Gone!" yelled Travers, startled. "You—you mean that somebody's stolen it?"

"We burnt it—destroyed it—chucked it into the House furnace."

"You did—what?"

"Last night," explained Jimmy Potts, "Handy and Skeets here, and Church and one or two other chaps. You told us we could do what we liked with the ring, so we——"

"You're dreaming," said Travers. "I never told you anything of the sort. What do you mean? What are you trying to get at?"

"Why, last night, on the way home from Moor View, you told us we could destroy the ring, if we wanted to."

"I didn't."

"I tell you, you did—lots of chaps can prove it."

"One of them's here, I guess," put in Skeets.

Vivian Travers looked bewildered.

"If I did, I must have said it without realising what I was jawing about," he growled. "Well, it's too late now, anyhow. So you shoved the ring into the furnace? You needn't think that I believed any of that silly rot——"

"Whether you believed it or not, you're a different chap this morning," said Potts pointedly. "All your awful depression has gone, and why? Because that rotten ring has been destroyed."

"Rats!"

"If you don't like to believe it——"

"It doesn't much matter whether I believe it or not," said Travers, grinning. "It's no

good crying over spilt milk, dear old fellow. The ring's gone, and I'm going! So-long! See you at breakfast-time!"

They were glad that he had taken it so well, and when Travers returned, just before breakfast, he was looking cheerful and happy. He had seen Phyllis Palmer, and he had apologised; she had told him that he was an ass for apologising, and they had both laughed, and everything was all serene.

Whether it was the bright, sunny day—after a succession of dull days—or whether it was something else, it could not be denied that everybody seemed happier and cheerier this morning.

And as the hours passed, the juniors felt that they had been foolish to have all those superstitious ideas. Of course, it was puzzling—especially when they thought of such incidents as the one in which Doris Berkeley

Already panic-stricken, Bernard Forrest's terror increased when he saw an Egyptian mummy lying in the roadway.



had been lifted into the air by some unseen force. But Travers, at least, was convinced that there was some logical explanation.

There was another fellow in the Remove who was particularly happy—Bernard Forrest. Not only was he intensely relieved at the load which had been taken off his mind, but he had most amazing luck, too. Just after morning lessons, he telephoned to Mr. Valentine Vicks, and that gentleman readily accepted Forrest's commissions. There was no reason why he shouldn't, since Forrest had paid up.

At tea-time Forrest again rang up Mr. Vicks' office in Bannington, and he heard amazingly good news. He rushed to Study A, where Gulliver and Bell were preparing tea.

"Twenty-five quid, you chaps!" gasped Forrest, as he dashed in.

"What!"

"Twenty-five quid!"

"What are you babbling about?" asked Gulliver. "What's this rot about twenty-five quid—"

"I've just had it over the 'phone," grinned Bernard Forrest. "The luckiest day I've ever had, my sons! I backed Ginger Nut to win in the three o'clock—and Stamp Album to win in the three-thirty. And I'm jiggered if they didn't both romp home!"

"Great Scott!" gurgled Bell. "And—and they were both outsiders!"

"Exactly," said Forrest. "I only backed a couple of quid—but the prices were so good that the net result to me is that I rake in twenty-five quid."

"I say, you know," said Gulliver, suddenly excited. "It does look a bit significant, doesn't it? Think of all the rotten luck you had while that ring was at the school! And now look at the change! The very first day that ring has been destroyed, you win as you've never won before!"

"I hope old Vicks dubs up," said Bell.

"He'll dub up all right—he's a good payer," said Forrest complacently. "Come along—on with the tea! We'll make merry this evening!"

He knew that the ring wasn't destroyed, of course—but it had left the school, and that amounted to the same thing.

But did it?

Outside, in the Triangle, Vivian Travers was with Jimmy Potts and Nipper and Hand-

forth and one or two others. Ezra Quirke had just drifted through the gateway in his usual mysterious way.

"I am glad to see you all looking so cheerful," he said.

"You bet we're cheerful," said Jimmy Potts. "We destroyed the Ring of Osra last night, and everything has been rosy to-day."

Quirke stared incredulously for a moment, and then he shook his head.

"You are wrong," he said quietly.

"What do you mean—wrong?"

"The Ring of Osra is not destroyed," replied Quirke.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You may laugh——" began Quirke.

"Thanks, we will," grinned Jimmy. "Not destroyed, eh? That's a good one, Handy! We saw it in the fire, didn't we?"

Handforth nodded.

"You may laugh," insisted Ezra Quirke, almost fiercely. "Do you think I don't know? I am susceptible to such things; I can feel the influences in the atmosphere. And I know that the Ring of Raamses is not destroyed. Do not fool yourselves. Evil is still abroad."

"It's a pity you don't go abroad," said Handforth, glaring. "And the farther abroad, the better! Timbuctoo or Alaska, or Siberia or Tooting, or some place like that."

"Ah, you mock me, as usual," said Quirke sadly. "But soon you will know better. Very soon, my friends!"

He drifted away again, shaking his head.

CHAPTER 15.

Vicks is Vindictive!

MR. VALENTINE VICKS was in an evil humour.

He was motoring home from the Helmford races, and he had had his worst day of the season. He had, in fact, lost hundreds of pounds.

Everything had gone against him. He had paid out heavily on every race, and he knew that things at his office would be just as bad. Two or three such days, in succession, would bankrupt him.

He was brooding. Before setting out for Helmford he had chanced to meet a young gentleman named the Hon. Aubrey de Vere Wellborne, who, in his own opinion, was one of the leading lights of the River House School. Wellborne, chatting amiably of this and that, had referred to the queer happenings at St. Frank's over the week-end; he had talked of the Ring of Osra, with its seven rubies, and of the evil influence it was bringing to the school.

Mr. Vicks had thought nothing of that at the time—except, perhaps, that Bernard Forrest was a tricky young beggar, and he rather wondered how Forrest had got hold of the ring. Not that it was really his business.

Later in the day, however, he had remembered the queer stories which Wellborne had

told. In a way, Mr. Valentine Vicks was a superstitious man, and this appalling run of ill-luck throughout the day set him thinking hard. He had been carrying that ring on his person from morning until evening!

As soon as Mr. Vicks reached his office in Bannington, he rang up St. Frank's, and was put through to the telephone in the Ancient House Junior Common-room. Within two minutes he was speaking to Bernard Forrest.

"Oh, hallo, Mr. Vicks," said Forrest easily. "Did you have a good day?"

Mr. Vicks nearly smashed the telephone.

"I want you, Cheerful," he said, striving

COMING NEXT WEDNESDAY!



to speak pleasantly. "Do you think you could manage to come straight over?"

"Well, I'm afraid——"

"I think there's some money for you here," added Mr. Vicks, with an effort. "I'd like to settle up."

"All right, then, I think I can manage it," said Forrest. "It's quite early yet. I'll be there in about twenty minutes, Mr. Vicks."

He was there in eighteen, and he found Mr. Vicks waiting for him in his private office, alone.

"Yes," said Forrest. "I rather caught you bending to-day, Mr. Vicks, eh? Those two winners——"

"We won't talk about them yet," interrupted the bookmaker. "I want to know where you got this infernal ring?"

He took it out of his pocket and laid it on the desk, where it gleamed redly in the electric light.

Forrest looked at it without much favour.

"I don't quite see that it matters how I got hold of it," he replied.

"Oh, doesn't it?" said Mr. Vicks loudly. "Well, look here, this ring was never bought by your grandmother in Morocco! I've heard a different story to-day. I hear that it was sent from Egypt to a fellow named Mavericks, or some such name as that."

"We had a little deal," said Forrest glibly. "You were pressing for your money, and —"

"THE MENACED SCHOOLBOY!"

By E. S. BROOKS.

Where is Vivian Travers?

During a football match he disappears—causing consternation at St. Frank's. Thus the remarkable mystery in which Travers has been the central figure, deepens and reaches a sensational climax.

Once again it seems that the curious Ring of the Seven Stars has worked its evil spell. Once again the Curse of Osra has manifested itself!

Look out for this enthralling yarn of the Chums of St. Frank's next week.

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"OUR ROUND TABLE TALK!"

ORDER IN ADVANCE!

"I'm not going to have this ring!" roared Mr. Vicks fiercely. "It's hoodoo! Do you understand? Hoodoo! Unlucky! I've lost hundreds of pounds to-day!"

"Hang it, Mr. Vicks, you're not trying to tell me that if you hadn't had that ring in your pocket, the results at the races would have been any different?" asked Forrest, staring.

"I don't know anything about that—but I'm not keeping this ring," said the book-maker. "That transaction of ours is off."

But Forrest was a wily youngster, and he calmly shook his head.

"Oh, no, it isn't, Mr. Vicks," he said coolly. "That transaction of ours was settled last night. You accepted that ring as payment for the debt, and I've finished with it."

"You young cub——"

"It's no good abusing me, either," interrupted Forrest. "You owe me a matter of twenty-five pounds on to-day's betting."

Mr. Vicks swallowed hard. He knew perfectly well that he could not bluff Forrest into calling off that other transaction. He saw that he would have to be careful.

"Well, look here, I'm a sportsman," he said, controlling himself. "I don't want this ring—see? And I don't want the bother of selling it. All I want to do is to get rid of it—and get rid of it quickly. You can have the ring back instead of your twenty-five pounds. That leaves me twenty-seven or twenty-eight pounds to the bad, but I've had enough of the thing."

Forrest thought quickly. He saw no reason why he should fall in with this proposal; yet his conscience had smote him once or twice during the day, in spite of his lightheartedness. He was ready to play a dirty trick on anybody—he was quite unscrupulous—but, although Travers was satisfied that the real ring had been consumed in the fire, nothing could alter the fact that Forrest had stolen it. And, bad as he was, he wasn't a thief. He saw a method of stilling that little Voice which had whispered to him so frequently during the day.

"I'm pretty well broke, Mr. Vicks," he said suddenly. "It won't be much good to me if I take that ring back—and I was rather counting on twenty-five quid from you. But, look here, how about splitting the difference?"

"What do you mean?"

"Pay me twelve-ten and the ring, and we'll call it a deal," said Forrest calmly.

Mr. Valentine Vicks stared at him.

"And I've been calling you Stupid and Unconscious!" he ejaculated. "By thunder! You've got all your wits about you, haven't you? What do you take me for—a mug?"

"If you want to get rid of the ring so badly, I'll take it," replied Forrest. "But you'll have to give me twelve-ten with it. If you don't like it, you can leave it—and I'll have my ordinary winnings in cash."

Mr. Vicks swore.

"Here's your money," he snapped savagely, as he took some notes out of a drawer. "Twelve-ten! And here's the ring. Now, get out of this office, and understand that I'm not doing any more business with you."

"No need to be nasty about it," said Forrest as he picked up the notes and the ring. "Do you think I care? You're not the only bookie."

He was rather pleased with himself when he found himself outside in the road. He had plenty of cash in hand, and he would be able to return the ring to Travers, and he would have nothing to worry about. Looking at it all round, Forrest felt that he had come out of the business well on top.

But there was one snag—which he did not quite realise until he was on his way home,

Somehow, the mere possession of that ring brought back all his old fears. It was dark, and he remembered that dreadful experience of his on his previous homeward ride. With the ring actually in his pocket, any disaster might befall him.

Then he remembered the motor-coach. One was just starting, and he was relieved. He kept his motor-cycle just ahead of the coach all the way to Bellton—and nothing happened.

He halted in the village, having spotted Dr. Brett's car. Perhaps the doctor would be going up to the school; if so, Forrest could carry on with the same dodge.

Somebody touched his arm as he stood astride his motor-cycle, waiting.

He turned and saw Ezra Quirke.

CHAPTER 16.

Terror By Night!

"WHAT a mysterious beggar you are, Quirke," said Forrest irritably. "You bob up at the most unexpected times."

"Would it be inquisitive for me to ask why you went to see Mr. Vicks?" inquired Quirke bluntly.

"You spying young blighter," growled Forrest. "How did you know I've been to see Vicks?"

"I merely saw you enter his office——"

"Oh, you did?" grunted Forrest. "You were deliberately following me, I suppose? Well, there's no reason why I shouldn't tell you. I've got that ring back."

Ezra Quirke uttered a hoarse little cry, and he clutched at Forrest's arm.

"You have it on you?" he whispered fearfully.

"Yes."

"Then get rid of it—throw it away—do anything!" urged the strange boy. "Oh, are you mad? What of my warning? Did I not tell you——"

"Oh, shut up," interrupted Forrest. "Perhaps I was a fool to take it, but—but—Well, it's too late now. I can tell you frankly, I don't want the thing."

"If you value your peace of mind—your very life—you will rid yourself of it," said Quirke. "Perhaps the best thing you can do—Yes, seize your opportunity and replace the ring in Travers' desk. It is his property, and to-day he mocked me. It is fitting that he should once again have the ring in his possession."

"That's what I thought about doing," said Forrest. "I'm tired of the whole rotten affair. I say, Quirke, it sounds silly, I know, but I wonder if you'd sit on my pillion and take a ride up to the school? I shall feel—well, safe."

"It is not silly—it is very, very sensible," said Ezra Quirke gravely. "Yes, I will come. Thus shall your safety be insured."

They rode to the school without a word,

and in the Triangle Quirke slipped off and went his way.

It did not take Forrest long to discover that Travers and Potts and Skeets were over in the Modern House, and it only took him a moment to steal into Study H and drop the antique ring back in that drawer in the bureau.

It wasn't until an hour later that the chums of Study H came out into the Triangle on their way back to their own House.

"Black as pitch," said Potts cheerily. "But what do we care?"

"Not a thing, dear old fellows," laughed Travers. "You're thinking about the Curse, eh?"

"No fear of apparitions this evening," said Skeets. "I guess we're immune now."

"It sounds awfully silly," said Jimmy, almost in a shamefaced way. "But I can't help thinking that it was a jolly good thing we put that ring in the fire. Everything has gone so splendidly to-day. That awful feeling of brooding evil has passed away from the school. The skies have been clear, and the sun has been shining——"

"The skies aren't clear now," murmured Travers dryly. "There are thick black clouds, and——"

He broke off abruptly, and halted.

"Look!" he said, in a queer, strained voice.

They were alone in the Triangle. And up in the sky, somewhere in the direction of the playing fields, seven blood-red stars were glowing mysteriously in the heavens; as before, they were in the form of a star, with seven points. It was the Sign!

"Oh, my hat!" stammered Jimmy. "But—but I thought——"

Even as he was speaking, every light in the school was suddenly blotted out.

"Here, what the—— Great Samson!" came a sudden gasp from Travers. "Let go! Help, you fellows! Help!"

His voice rose shrilly. Travers had the shock of his life—and he suddenly remembered Forrest's fantastic story of the previous night. For cold, bony hands had clutched at Travers from the rear, and he felt himself being lifted bodily—carried upwards and upwards through the air, just as Doris Berkeley had been carried!

"Help, help!" he gasped.

His two study-mates were bewildered—and frightened. Travers had vanished, and his voice came down to them from far above. He had been carried off under their very noses—taken up into the air by some mystic agency.

They did not know which way to turn. Voices were sounding now from all directions. Fellows were shouting, others were crowding outside. Everywhere was confusion.

Then, abruptly, all the lights of the school came on again. They hadn't been off for more than thirty or forty seconds. Boys were streaming out of every House.

"It was nothing," somebody yelled. "There must have been a failure at the generating station for a minute!"

"Help!" came a wild shout from Jimmy Potts. "Oh, quick, you chaps!"

Nipper and Handforth, who were on the Ancient House steps, dashed forward. Others came surging round, too.

"What's wrong?" asked Nipper sharply.

"Travers!" gasped Skeets. "He's gone!"

"Gone!"

"Right in front of our eyes—not a minute ago!" panted Jimmy Potts frantically. "We—we saw the seven stars, and then all the lights went out. Then we heard Travers shouting, and—and— Well, he's gone! He went upwards somewhere—he was carried into the air!"

"Oh, my hat!" said Handforth hoarsely. "But don't you know what took him? Didn't you see—"

"We didn't see anything," faltered Jimmy. "Oh, this is too awful! It's—it's so uncanny! What can we do? Where is he?"

"Look!"

It was a startled yell from Buster Boots of the Fourth. He was pointing, and everybody followed the direction. Clinging desperately, precariously to the parapet at the very top of the Modern House, with death yawning beneath him, was Vivian Travers. At the same instant seven blood-red stars again manifested themselves in the night sky, only to fade away almost immediately!

CHAPTER 17.

Mystery Upon Mystery!

"TRAVERS!"

"Oh, he'll fall!"

"Look! The Sign—the Sign of Death!"

"Hold on, Travers—hold on! We'll get a ladder!"

A dozen fellows were shouting at once. Others were wildly running about at random. Jimmy Potts and Skeets were too dumbfounded to do anything else except stare. How was it humanly possible for Travers to have got up there?

Even Travers himself did not know. He only remembered being carried up—up and up. Then, with a sickening sensation at the pit of the stomach, he had felt himself falling. But only for a few feet, and then he had struck the roof. Normally, he would have been safe, for the parapet rose well above the edge of the roof, and he could not have fallen over.

But it happened that he had caught his head on a part of the stonework, and he had received a blow on the very spot where he had been previously hurt. The effect was alarming. He staggered, reeled over the parapet, and nearly fell. Dazed and semi-stunned though he was, the instinct of self-preservation was uppermost; he clung to the brickwork with his bare hands—and that

was all he could do. There was no hold for his feet, and he knew that he could not cling on for long. Those below guessed that he was hurt, for he made no outcry.

"We'll never get the fire-escape to him in time," said Nipper. "If his fingers slip— Look here, I'm going up! There's ivy on that wall, and plenty of crevices. I can climb—"

"Don't you believe it," interrupted a crisp voice. "If there's one chap in this school qualified to do the human fly act, it's me! So don't you poach on my preserves."

Stanley Waldo, the Wonder Boy of the Remove—the son of the celebrated Rupert Waldo, who had inherited most of his father's amazing qualities—dashed at the wall, and in a moment he was climbing like a monkey. It was fascinating to watch—terrifying, too.

The way in which Waldo skimmed up that wall was breathless. Scarcely seeming to take hold, he climbed up and up—and he reached the top long before the volunteers with the fire escape arrived on the scene.

He was only in the nick of time, too. Travers' hold was loosening—he was hanging on with one hand—and Waldo seized him just as he was about to let go. He felt strong hands about him, and he was pulled up over the parapet.

"Hurrah!"

"Well done, Waldo!"

"Bravo!"

Cheers rang out from the onlookers below, who now included prefects and masters.

"Thanks!" muttered Travers dazedly. "I—I thought it was you, Waldo. You saved my life."

"Rot!" said Waldo uncomfortably.

"My head—I bumped it again," said Travers dully. "The wonder is I hung on at all. Did—did you see anything? I mean, did you see what got hold of me?"

"Nobody saw anything," replied Waldo. "Only Potts and Skeets were with you—and all the lights went out."

"It's horrible—horrible!" muttered Travers. "Something clutched me and carried me into

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the air, but I didn't see anything or hear anything. I only felt those terrible hands!"

"Well, don't talk about it now," said Waldo. "Here comes the fire-escape. We can get down."

When they reached the ground they were surrounded by an excited mob. Mr. Wilkes, the Housemaster, pushed his way through, with one or two prefects.

"May I be permitted to know what happened?" asked Old Wilkey mildly.

"Nobody seems to know, sir," said Nipper. "Something caught hold of Travers and carried him up to the roof."

"But that's impossible," said the Housemaster.

"Impossible or not, sir, it happened," replied Travers. "I'm—I'm all right now, thanks. For goodness' sake don't send me into the sanny again, sir; I'm not hurt a bit, really."

"You had all better get indoors," said Mr. Wilkes. "It's cold out here. I will inquire into this later."

The boys were glad that Old Wilkey did not press his inquiries on the spot. They did not feel like telling him of the mysterious Ring of the Seven Stars and the curse which was supposed to be attached to it. It would all sound so silly. So far, they had kept everything to themselves; nothing was known officially.

Vivian Travers was completely baffled. During the past few hours he had been thinking deeply. He had come to the conclusion that all the recent extraordinary occurrences must be the result of trickery, engineered by Ezra Quirke or by somebody with whom that amazing boy was in league. Perhaps it was all a big plot against himself, although for what reason was puzzling.

Yet this latest mysterious incident riddled that theory; it seemed impossible that Ezra Quirke could have been responsible for working such "magic."

"I'm not going to scoff at evil spirits any more!" said Potts hoarsely, when all the boys arrived back in the Common-room. "Human agency couldn't have done this! Travers was carried away into mid-air—and he was between Skeets and me when it happened!"

"But I can't follow it!" protested Handforth. "We destroyed that ring last night, and Quirke said that the evil influence would be destroyed with the ring! Oh, blow Quirke! I'm almost beginning to believe in that fool yarn of his myself!"

"To-day he told us that the ring was not destroyed," said Church.

"That's all rot," growled Handforth. "We destroyed it ourselves, didn't we? We put the ring in the fire——"

"Quirke must be right," interrupted Forrest, his voice low and strained. "Quirke's always right! I was the greatest sceptic of all—but I believe in him now. That ring must be in your desk, Travers. It's the only explanation."

"But it isn't," said Travers impatiently. "I was looking in the desk only this evening. Besides, if these chaps destroyed it——"

"It must be there—it must!" insisted Forrest. "How else can you account for this latest manifestation?"

He saw a method, here, of completely satisfying his conscience. Once the ring was re-found, his own responsibility would be over.

"Perhaps we'd better go and look," said Nipper sharply.

"But, my dear old fellow——" began Travers.

"It won't do any harm, and we shall at least satisfy ourselves," said Nipper. "Come on! Let's go to your study, Travers! We'll make sure of this now."

He was the first to run out, with Handforth and Travers and Potts close behind. Crowds of others blocked the passage when they reached Study H.

It was Travers himself who pulled open the bureau, and who extracted the little drawer.

"There you are——" he began, and then broke off with a gasp of dismay.

"Look—the ring is there!" gurgled Handforth. "By George! Yet we saw it in the furnace and—and——"

Words failed him. There, in the drawer, was the ancient Ring of Raamses, High Priest of the Temple of Osra. Its ruby stones winked and glittered, seeming to leer mockingly at the juniors.

Travers picked it up with a little shudder. He saw at a glance that it was the same ring.

"This mystery is getting beyond me," he said hoarsely. "It's not one mystery—but dozens! They keep piling one on top of another. What can it all mean?"

The juniors were staggered—with the exception of Bernard Forrest. He could clear up this little mystery if he chose to do so—but what was the explanation of all the other extraordinary occurrences? It was a bewildering, baffling riddle.

The Curse of Osra still brooded over St. Frank's!

THE END.

More mystery, more terror at St. Frank's next week!

"THE MENACED SCHOOLBOY!"

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The Editor's cheery chat with his chums.



A breezy chat with readers conducted by the EDITOR. All letters should be addressed to The Editor.

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YOU ask "what has become of the old Mill on the Moor and the Pine Hill Reservoir," James S. Coulson (S.E.11). They are just where they always have been. Merely because they haven't appeared in the stories lately it doesn't follow that an earthquake has happened to swallow them up. When Mr. Brooks finds it necessary to mention one of them, or both in a story, he will do so. Bernard Forrest & Co., of Study A, are as full of rascality as ever, as you will find out in the series of stories now running.

* * *

Thumbnail pen-sketches of three more Sixth-Formers. **SIMON KENMORE.** A bad lad. The most unpopular senior in the school—or was. An ill-natured rotter. He is cunning, malicious, and, all round, a fellow of unpleasant character. Of late, however, has been showing slight signs of improvement. **PERCIVAL MILLS.** One of the lesser lights of the Sixth. An unobtrusive senior who keeps very much to himself. So unobtrusive, in fact, that his presence in the Sixth is sometimes forgotten. A decent chap in his own quiet way. **ARTHUR MORROW.** Head prefect of the West House, and one of the most popular seniors in the school. Edgar Fenton's closest friend. Morrow is a sound sportsman. Good-natured, kindly, and a giant on the cricket and footer field. Has a rare gift of understanding.

* * *

The names of all the prominent Moor View girls, with little "thumbnail" word-sketches of them, will be given in this Chat, J. Poole (Bristol), after we have dealt with all the St. Frank's boys. As you are keen on cerie stories, you will no doubt be pleased with the present school and mystery series.

* * *

You cannot expect to get an immediate acknowledgment of your letters, Ewart James Bain (South Harrow). It is not at all certain that you will even get an acknow-

ledgment, as there are so many letters from readers daily arriving at this office that only those containing matters of general interest to others readers can be commented upon, and only those enclosing stamped addressed envelopes can be replied to by post. If we were to publish a full list of the names and addresses of readers who write every week, a considerable part of this page would be occupied by them, and the general run of readers would only be bored.

* * *

It is not only possible for you to join our Round Table Talk, Jim Amer (Bermondsey), but this reply to you is proof that you have already done so. We welcome you heartily, and you are now one of us. Write again as soon as you like. Handy, of course, is editing his celebrated rag, "Handforth's Weekly," and if you care to write to him it will be in order, but I cannot undertake to forward letters to other St. Frank's characters.

* * *

Caronia is a small state in Central Europe, "Beatrice" (Wanstead). Dick Hamilton is Nipper's real name, but it is only used officially. All his friends call him "Nipper" quite naturally. Lord Dorrimore inherited a small fortune; but, owing to his fortunate investments in various odd corners of the world, coupled with ten years of hard, slogging work, he is now a multi-millionaire, and able to devote his life to exploration, big game hunting, and so forth. The Moor View School is very much smaller than St. Frank's, but none the less interesting because of that.

* * *

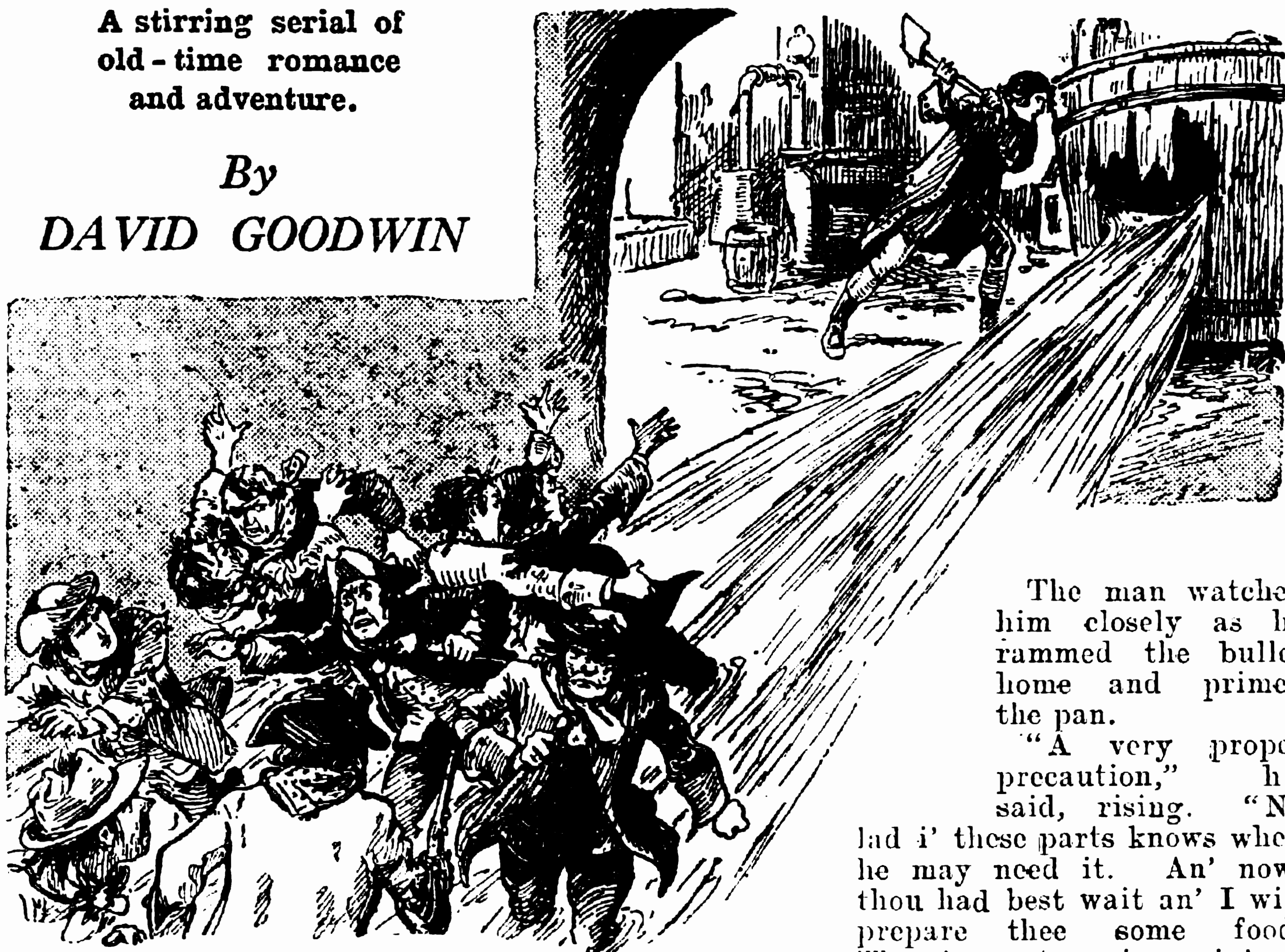
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Dick Forrester smashes his way to Freedom!

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The Plotters!

DICK realised that he was in a tight corner. Weak after his submersion in the flood torrent, he knew that he would stand little chance against the burly still-keeper if it came to a matter of blows.

Quickly he thrust one hand inside his coat and, before the man realised his intention, had brought out a small pistol, which the young outlaw always carried with him. Holding the butt, he swished it suggestively through the air.

Immediately the still-keeper lost his threatening attitude. He knew what Dick had intended to convey by that action. If he started any rough business he would feel the weight of that pistol on his head!

The weapon, of course, was soaked through by the water. Dick sat up, coolly withdrew the charge, cleaned and dried the small weapon carefully, and reloaded it from a small water-tight powder-horn.

The man watched him closely as he rammed the bullet home and primed the pan.

"A very proper precaution," he said, rising. "No lad i' these parts knows when he may need it. An' now, thou had best wait an' I will prepare thee some food. There's a stew simmerin' on

t'fire, and 'twill soon be warm enough to eat."

Dick thanked his host, and feeling a deep drowsiness creeping over him, lay back upon the floor again, the pistol-butt still in his hand.

The sleep of exhaustion overcame him almost at once, and he began to snore softly.

Hardly had he closed his eyes, when a form stole quietly into the cave from the tunnel below. It was a roughly-clad man in a fur cap, and he halted on seeing Dick.

The still-keeper laid his finger on his lips, and signalled to the stranger to come forward noiselessly.

"What ha' thou gotten here, Steve?" whispered the newcomer as he joined Dick's host.

"A prize, I'm thinkin'," said the other under his breath. "He came down on t' flood-water, tied hand an' foot to a cattle-post, an' nigher his death than he's ever been, I reckon."

"Sitha!" exclaimed the other. "What did tha' pull him out for?"

"He had good clothes to his back," said the still-keeper. "There should be somethin' to be made by him."

The stranger, who was the swarthy man's partner in the still, bent over the sleeping form of the young highwayman, and inspected him narrowly.

"He's been awake, then?" he said, pointing to the pistol.

"He drew t' thing oot an' reloaded it; an' by t' way he handled it 'twas plain to me he knows how to use a barker."

"Ah! Well, man, tha's done a good evenin's work. I can guess well who t' cub is. 'Tis one that Sweeny's after."

"Does tha' say!" exclaimed the still-keeper.

"I ha' seen two o' Sweeny's men to-night—half-drooned by t' flood, they were—an' they told me a gay bit o' news. Sweeny had a young highwayman by the ears that he's sworn vengeance on, an' was goin' to burn him up at t' old hut. There was a cloud-burst up in t' hills, an' t' flood came down and washed 'em all oot. T' whelp was drooned, they said, bein' tied oop to t' post, but by what thou ha' told me, this should be him."

"Ay, thou ha' nicked it!" muttered the other. "That's who he is. An' yon's good news, too. What will Sweeny pay for him?"

"A good price. Leave that to me!"

"Happen we might get more from t' young 'un to get him clear; or we might make somethin' by him, an' then turn him over to Sweeny after it," said the still-keeper, his cunning eyes glittering.

"Na! Does thou want to fall foul o' Sweeny, thou fule?" returned the other sharply. "He's no man to play tricks on. He's a good friend to the likes o' us, too, an' we'll sell this young gallant to him."

"Shall we tak' him to Sweeny, or let Sweeny fetch him?" asked the still-keeper, rubbing his hands.

"There's no better place than this," replied his partner. "I'll go to Sweeny an' get his price before I let him know

where t' whelp is. He sleeps sound, I see."

"He'll be no trouble," said the still-keeper. "Shall we put a length of rope round him?"

"Leave that to Sweeny."

"Or take yon pistol from under his paw while he sleeps?"

"Nay, it would mak' him suspicious. Better let him lie till Sweeny's here to take him; 'twill be less trouble. As to yon pistol, I'll show tha' how to settle that."

He stepped to a water-butt in the corner of the cave, took up a little water in a tin cup, and, stealing gently to Dick's side, poured it cautiously over the pan of the pistol.

"There, my mannie! T' primin's wetted, and thou may let him fire t' pistol at thy lug, for all t' harm 'twill do."

"But suppose he wakens an' wants to be goin' afore Sweeny comes?"

"Then tha've got to keep him here. Tha can easily settle him."

"Ay, or a dozen like him!" said the big man scornfully.

"Best have no noise aboot it. Give 'im a crack on t' head if he shows trouble-some, then tha'll be sure o' him."

"Ay," leered the still-keeper. "No need to teach me that trick!"

"I'll be goin' now. See, I'll show Sweeny an' his lads the way in below there, an' I'll enter mysel' by the upper passage, through the day-'ole."

"Go on, then; t' quicker t' better!"

Spirited Away!

THE man did not leave the cave by the path he had entered, but went up the sloping floor of the cavern, and through a dark passage at its upper end.

His back being turned, he did not see a bright, wakeful eye that watched him from under a half-closed lid as Dick lay snoring on the floor. The young highwayman looked as soundly asleep as any man

HOW THE STORY BEGAN.

DICK FORRESTER, formerly a young highwayman, has been deprived of his estate and fortune by the trickery of

HECTOR FORRESTER. This is only the beginning of Dick's troubles, for he next falls foul of

CAPTAIN SWEENY, the notorious leader of a gang of footpads, and is also wanted by the King's Riders for assisting his former comrade of the road,

RICHARD TURPIN, the famous highwayman, to escape capture. Dick is forced to become an outlaw, and he and Turpin ride off together. They are pursued by Riders, but make their escape after a fierce fight. Turpin goes off on a mission, arranging to meet Dick three days later. Dick is trapped by Sweeny, who ties him to a stake and then sets fire to some bales of straw. A cloud-burst saves the young outlaw from death. Still bound to the stake, he is swept along on the crest of the flood waters. He loses consciousness, but recovers to find himself in the hands of a villainous-looking man who runs an illicit still.

(Now read on.)

might who had been swept a mile on the breast of a moorland torrent.

Nor did the still-keeper, who was busy-ing himself about the cave, observe the same eye fixed on him and following his every movement.

Dick's fingers that grasped the butt of his pistol in a sleepy clutch moved gently along the water-soaked pan of the pistol.

Very gently those fingers raised the hammer to full cock, saving the click by keeping the trigger pressed till the hammer was well back. Cautiously the young outlaw cleared away the wetted, useless powder from the striking-pan, where the water had been poured over it.

An end of Dick's lace neckcloth, undone, was hanging down over his wrist, and with this his fingers quietly and thoroughly wiped the pan. The lace had dried in the heat of the cave, and served well.

The operation took some little time, and while it lasted Dick lay as still as death, still snoring busily, not a muscle of him moving save his agile fingers.

Once or twice the still-keeper glanced at him, and they became motionless till he went on with his work once more.

At last the pan was dry, and Dick's hand stole very quickly to his side-pocket, where the little powder-horn lay. Pressing the spring that opened it, he brought out a pinch of powder, which was cautiously placed on the pan where the flint strikes. The pistol was now primed and cocked.

To make sure, Dick's fingers stole to the powder-horn again for another pinch. The spring creaked slightly, and the still-keeper jumped round as if he had been stung.

In a moment he saw what was happening. With a savage oath, he whipped a long knife from his boot and sprang forward.

Bang!

The still-keeper plunged forward on to his face with a cry, and Dick leaped to his feet, the little pistol smoking in his hand.

In a moment he had the fallen still-keeper by the neckcloth, and pulled him to the upper part of the cave. The man was unconscious. The ball had passed through his shoulder, and the shock had knocked him senseless.

Dick kicked the knife across the floor; then he began to reload his pistol with lightning speed.

"I am still too weak for a rough-and-tumble," murmured the young outlaw with a grim laugh, "and the little barker has served me well. I think I am better

here than on the moor for the present, till I have checked yonder ruffians. Ah, here they come!"

Hardly was the pistol loaded before Dick heard voices at the lower entrance to the cavern.

"Tha'll find him on the floor, captain. Tak' thy men in wi' thee, an' I'll go in by the other way. Steve's there wi' him."

"Not so much noise, you fool!" came Sweeny's voice, in a whisper. "The cub's best asleep, for he has always a sting in his tail. Now, lads, forward!"

"Ay, forward!" shouted Dick. "On, my bold chicken-thieves—on!"

"He's awake!" cried Sweeny with a curse. "That fool has lied to us. All together, lads, and rush him!"

With a spring Dick snatched a long-handled axe that was hanging on the wall. The time had come to act, and his life hung on the swiftly-planned scheme he had thought out whilst lying on the floor.

With three crushing blows of the axe he broke in the side of the great vat, and an avalanche of raw spirit burst forth and rushed knee-deep down the sloping floor to the narrow entrance of the tunnel, through which were now charging Sweeny and his men.

Dick then sprang to the coal-oil lamp that stood in a niche of the wall, and, standing above the vat, dashed it into the flowing spirit.

In an instant there was a hiss, a roar, a sheet of flame, and a wild yell of terror. The torrent of liquid fire, sweeping all before it, rushed full upon Sweeny and his men.

Such a bellowing and roaring echoed through the cave that the pistol-shot which Sweeny discharged at Dick when the fiery flood first came down was hardly heard above it.

"Here's some liquor for you, you knaves!" cried Dick. "Come and take your fill!"

The pistol-ball grazed Dick's cheek, and Sweeny had no time for another shot. He was driven back pell-mell by the great rush of flaming spirit, and he and his men fled back through the tunnel, screaming and shouting, jamming each other against the wall in their hurry to escape.

"Make way for me! Let me out!" shrieked Sweeny.

With a fierce laugh, Dick wielded his axe again, and crashed it through two of the upright hogsheads, sending their contents rushing down with the rest.

By that time most of the footpads had reached the outer mouth of the tunnel again, where they scattered to safety

Meanwhile the flaming spirit licked and devoured everything, catching the wood-work, burning the distilling apparatus, and turning the whole place into a furnace.

Lurking Peril!

DICK dragged the unconscious form of the still-keeper above the reach of the flames. Then, gripping his little pistol, he sprang for the upper exit.

He had not forgotten that the man who had brought Sweeny here was to enter that way, while the footpads came in by the lower tunnel. His finger on the pistol's trigger, Dick ran swiftly up the narrow passage, and there, sure enough, he met his assailant coming down, a pistol in his hand likewise.

"You whelp, this is your work!" he cried with a curse.

His weapon was raised in the wink of an eye; but Dick fired first, and the man toppled forward heavily, blocking the passage. Dick pulled him out of the way hastily, and scrambled up through the passage.

It was like the bolt-hole of a rabbit-burrow, little wider than a man's body. Dick pulled himself through, and breathed in the fresh air thankfully.

Fifty yards below, down the slope, the blue-green flare of the flaming spirit which had run out through the lower entrance lit up the scene. The footpads, too busy with their own troubles to give a thought to any other matter, were rolling themselves in the wet heather to cool their scorched legs.

Dick did not stay to admire his handiwork. Where he was he had no notion, but the boulder-strewn moor lay before him. Running straight ahead, he made for a rise of ground that would hide him from the enemy.

As he ran he saw a man scrambling down into the hole he had just left, and a moment later he heard Sweeny's voice screaming furiously:

"Up with you, runagates, and don't lie squalling there all night! The whelp isn't here. He's shot Jack and Steve, and he's out somewhere upon the moor. Scatter, and find him!"

The moment he heard Sweeny's first words, Dick threw himself down flat among the heather, lest the glare from the fire should discover him. Once seen, his life would not be worth a goat's purchase, for he was poorly armed, and too exhausted and worn out to escape by running.

The footpads had extinguished the flames about their legs, and, though greedy for vengeance, they went very gingerly.

Running here and there, jumping on to boulders to get a view of the moor, they searched the whole neighbourhood.

Dick crawled along like a snake, the deep heather covering him, and made as fast as he could towards the crest of the valley, which he could see before him.

Once he could dip below the slope of it he would be out of the glare of the fire, which, good friend as it had been, now bade fair to be his ruin.

Twice Dick stopped and crouched flat, as a man ran past within a few feet of him.

Presently, when he was almost within reach of the valley, one of the footpads nearly trod on Dick in running past, and, catching a glimpse of him, turned sharply round.

Before the shout could leave the knave's lips, Dick had him by the ankle and brought him down.

The fellow's head struck so violently upon a flat stone in falling that he was instantly knocked senseless. Dick gained the friendly shelter of the valley, and after one quick glance behind, ran swiftly down the slope. Dodging and turning among the boulders, using every device to put himself out of sight of his searchers, Dick pushed onwards.

It was only by a great effort of will that he could keep on his legs at all, so sick and weary was he; he went forward mechanically, halting now and then behind a rock to glance back and make sure the enemy were not upon his trail.

"I've shaken them off at last," he muttered. "Now it remains only to go straight ahead. The sooner I get away from this open moor the better for my safety."

Automatically his legs still carried him forward, and he blundered on through the night. At last, as the dawn broke, he sank down in the heather, worn out, and his senses left him. Motionless, he lay, his face to the sky, his eyelids closed, oblivious to everything.

A dark, sinister form came creeping over the crest of the hill, showing black against the rising sun. It saw Dick, helpless and inert, and the man's face lit up with triumph. He drew a knife from his belt, put it between his teeth, and crept quietly towards the prostrate young highwayman!

(Completely unaware of his danger, Dick's life is in deadly peril. What happens? Read next Wednesday's exciting instalment—and order your copy of the Old Paper now.)

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