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The ST. FRANK'S



FOUND—the key to the whereabouts of the buried Edgemore Treasure. At the moment of success comes a raid by rivals ; the precious parchment is stolen ; and to Lord Edgemore and his friends of St. Frank's everything seems—**LOST !**

CHAPTER 1.

At Dead of Night!

THE door of the cupboard at the end of the Third Form dormitory shook slightly ; a soft, slithery sound, as of something furry brushing against the woodwork, came from within.

The Ancient House, like all the other buildings of St. Frank's, was asleep. Not a light showed anywhere in the old school, and a bitter wintry wind was blowing with increasing strength.

There was a quarter moon, and occasionally it would peep out from behind the drifting cloud rack.. One o'clock had

long since chimed out, and within the school all was still.

Except in the Third Form dormitory of the Ancient House.

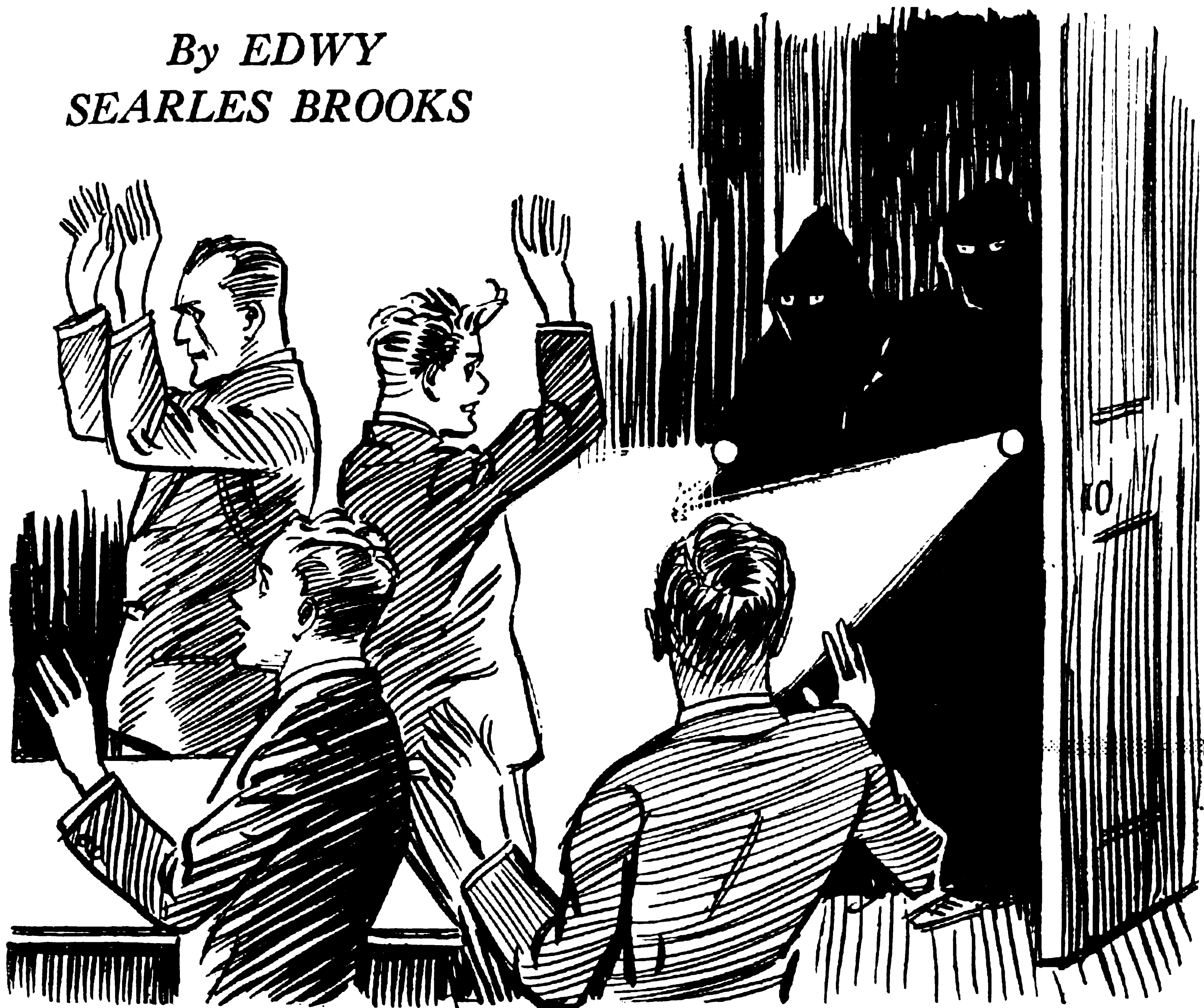
Slither-slither !

The sound came again ; soft, eerie, mysterious. It was not sufficient to awaken any of the fags. Even Willy Handforth, the alert skipper of the Third, was not disturbed—and he was the lightest sleeper in the Form.

There was silence for a full minute, and then came the unmistakable sound of sniffing, followed by that slither of a furry body brushing against the cupboard door.

FORTUNE-HUNTERS!

*By EDWY
SEARLES BROOKS*



Suddenly the door, under the pressure, swung half open. It had not been latched, but had been kept almost closed by means of a little wedge of wood. This had now slipped out of place.

A figure came forth cautiously—a black, lumbering shape, the feet and claws making a curious scratchy sound on the smooth lino. The creature moved out into a feeble moonbeam; and two luminous eyes glowed and burned eerily.

It was well that the fags were sound asleep, for the sight of this nocturnal prowler would certainly have scared them. Even the strong-nerved Willy might have been slightly startled. For, in the moonlight, the bear cub took on a somewhat fearsome aspect.

Yet, really, Bertram was harmless enough.

He wasn't a bit sleepy, and he had rooted objections to being packed away in

a dark and stuffy cupboard. In this desire to roam, Bertram displayed a singular lack of gratitude towards Willy Handforth, for the fag had prepared a really comfortable bed of old blankets in a corner of the cupboard; and he had purposely wedged the door slightly ajar so that Bertram should have plenty of air.

But Bertram scorned the bed, and, now that he had conquered the door, he came to the conclusion that a tour of exploration would not be amiss.

He was Willy's very latest pet, and so, in a way, he could be excused for his insubordination. He had not yet received that firm but kindly training which Willy's other pets had accepted as their natural lot.

Not that Bertram lacked gratitude; his feelings towards Willy were of the kindest, for Willy had rescued him from the cruel hands of Dr. Franz Ragozin, the

mysterious new tenant of Moat Hollow, the old house near the village.

Willy, as a matter of fact, had been somewhat concerned about Bertram. He had not liked to leave the little bear out in the pets' quarters; for Master Bruin was not yet on hobnobbing terms with Priscilla the Parrot, Marmaduke the Monkey, Septimus the Squirrel, and the other bright members of Willy's miniature menagerie.

Until the introductions could be properly made, Willy thought it as well to keep Bertram near at hand. Hence that temporary bed in the dormitory cupboards. The other fags had not cared much for the idea; but Willy always had his own way in the Third. He ruled the fags with an iron hand, and what he said "went." He had assured the dubious Third-Formers that Bertram would cause no trouble during the night.

And here was Bertram well and truly on the prowl.

He passed cautiously up the oblong dormitory, between the rows of beds, and now and again he paused to sniff inquisitively. When he came to Willy's bed he seemed to understand that he had found his new master; for he went sniffing along the edge, and he even raised himself on his hind legs, and placed his front paws on the counterpane. But so cautious were his movements, so soundless, that Willy slumbered on peacefully.

Bertram appeared to be satisfied after a moment or two, and he went on all fours again, taking a short cut under the bed. He found himself beneath a window, and he was intrigued by the fact that the window was partially open. Furthermore, a chair was standing close by, and Bertram's eagle eye noted that it would be comparatively easy to climb from the back of the chair on to the wide window-ledge higher up. The possibilities were fascinating.

Bertram was a surprisingly active creature; he mounted the chair without any difficulty at all, and after one or two unsuccessful attempts, he pulled his way up to the window-ledge, clawing securely. He made a fair amount of noise over this, too, but when he reached the ledge he cast a contemptuous glance back at the rows of sleeping figures in the beds. He soon learned, however, that it wasn't wise to be cocksure; for Willy not only turned over in bed, but he half sat up and looked round. Something had disturbed him. Bertram crouched low. And Willy, who had not fully awakened, sank back on to the pillow again and continued to slumber.

Bertram was in no hurry. He remained absolutely still for at least three minutes. Then, as no further disturbance came, he cautiously pushed his way out of the partially-open window. It was a bit of a squeeze, but he managed it.

He peered over the edge of the stone sill, and he was considerably startled. This new world wasn't so easy to reach. The ground was far below. The weak moonlight was sufficient to show Bertram that all thoughts of reaching the ground would have to be abandoned.

However, there was a stone ledge running all along the face of the building, and, at intervals, there were other windows. A stroll along that ledge might be interesting.

Bertram glanced back into the Third Form dormitory, satisfied himself that all was quiet, and then he ventured forth upon his voyage of discovery.

CHAPTER 2.

The Luminous Eyes!

MR. JAMES CROWELL, the master of the Remove, slept the sleep of the just.

He was a thorough man in all things; and he believed in sleeping with whole-hearted abandon. He was lying on his back, his mouth was wide open, and snores of the most aggressive character made the night, in his immediate vicinity, hideous.

Mr. Crowell's teeth were in a glass of water, on the wash-stand, and his open mouth, therefore, resembled a miniature Black Hole of Calcutta.

Bertram was frankly fascinated. Arriving at the open window, he gazed in upon the sleeper with apprehension and awe. The bed was comparatively close to the window, and it so happened that a feeble moonbeam played upon Mr. Crowell's decidedly unhandsome features. Bertram was startled. However, as there seemed to be no menace in this strange phenomenon, he plucked up courage.

There was a table close by, and Bertram found no difficulty in walking on to it; and from the table it would be just as easy to get on the bed.

But he wasn't interested in the bed yet. He sniffed inquisitively. Something told him that a brief stay here would be profitable. Nosing about, he soon located some biscuits on a plate; and, more interesting still, an open box of chocolates.

Mr. Crowell usually developed a slight appetite by bedtime, and it was a practice of his to read for about an hour in

bed, nibbling biscuits, eating chocolates, and finishing up with a pipe. Bertram thoroughly approved.

Biscuits and chocolates were not usually on his menu, but Bertram was broad-minded; he was willing to try anything once. He made short work of the biscuits, and he progressed very favourably with the chocolates until he happened to come across one which was filled with liqueur, and it not only burst in his mouth with surprising effect, but the liqueur, peculiarly pungent, caused him to sneeze.

The sneeze did not awaken Mr. Crowell, but it certainly disturbed him. At any rate, he ceased snoring and closed his mouth. Bertram stepped gingerly upon the bed, and he found it very soft and comfortable.

Whether it was the effect of the liqueur, or whether he concluded that he had done enough exploring for one night, he decided then and there that he had had enough of it. He curled up and dozed, snuggling warmly against Mr. Crowell's legs.

Mr. Crowell, who was a great believer in freedom, instinctively knew that something was wrong. He shifted in his sleep at first, and Bertram, raising his head, fixed his beady little eyes upon the sleeper.

And then, for some reason, Mr. Crowell awoke. His first conscious thought was that the bedclothes had somehow become disarranged. There seemed a lump—

At that moment Mr. Crowell saw the luminous eyes, which glowed and glimmered eerily in the faint moonlight. He fixed his own gaze upon them, and he was wide awake in a second. His heart thumped.

And then, after the first alarm, Mr. Crowell experienced a sense of relief. A cat! Of course! Some wretched cat had strayed through the window and had had the impudence to curl up on his bed.

"Shoo!" said Mr. Crowell severely.

Bertram stiffened. Somehow he recognised an unfriendly note in that voice. He partially rose, ready to bolt if the occasion demanded.

And Mr. Crowell felt his skin growing taut, and his hair went all prickly. For, unless he was in the midst of a particularly unpleasant nightmare, that thing on his bed was no cat! It was four times the size of a cat—a dark, shadowy, monstrous shape.

"Good heavens!" muttered the Form-master. "Extraordinary!"

He pulled himself together, and with a determined movement he switched on the electric light.

Only for one second did he blink at the unwelcome visitor, and then he leapt out

of bed with all the alacrity and speed of a trained acrobat. The yell he uttered so startled the unfortunate Bertram that he almost fell off the bed backwards.

"Help!" yelled Mr. Crowell wildly. "Help!"

He need not have been so alarmed, for Bertram, having reached the floor, had dodged behind the dressing-table in terror. Bertram, in fact, was very much more frightened than the Form-master. But Mr. Crowell had seen the scuttling figure, and he was in no position to know that Bertram was harmless. What he did know was that a strange bear had mysteriously got into his bed-room, and, on principle, Mr. Crowell had rooted objections to sleeping with bears.

He reached the door, tore it open, and leapt out into the corridor.

"Help!" he roared frantically.

In extenuation of Mr. Crowell's lamentable display, it must be said at once that he was fresh from sleep, and therefore hardly himself.

His shouts, however, had the desired effect, for within a couple of minutes all sorts of people were dashing out of bed-rooms and dormitories, asking where the fire was. Fenton of the Sixth came out, Edward Oswald Handforth, Nipper, Travers, and two or three other Removites made their appearance; and last, but by no means least, Willy Handforth emerged from the Third Form dormitory, with two or three other very scared-looking fags at his heels.

"What on earth's the matter, Mr. Crowell?" asked Fenton sharply.

Mr. Crowell, waving his arms like mill-sails, and gasping for breath, partially recovered his composure.

"A bear!" he gurgled. "In my bed-room! A bear!"

"A what, sir?" asked the school captain, staring.

He had never seen Mr. Crowell without his teeth, and the sight fascinated him.

"A bear, I tell you!" panted the frantic master. "Don't stare at me like that, Fenton! There is a bear in my room."

"Oh, my only hat!" groaned Willy Handforth, running forward. "That must be Bertram. I'd no idea that the little beggar would escape."

It was a considerable shock for Mr. Crowell when Willy dashed into the bed-room and appeared, a moment later, with Bertram in his arms. In fact, Mr. Crowell experienced a sudden desire to become completely invisible.

But as there was no hope of that miracle coming to pass, he turned fiercely upon

Willy, and he released the vials of his wrath.

CHAPTER 3.

The Figure of Mystery!

IN the midst of the tirade Mr. Crowell experienced some difficulty in pronouncing certain words; and it was then that he realised that he was minus his teeth. He gulped, turned red, and dashed into his bed-room. When he emerged again he was complete with teeth, and also a dressing-gown. He had had time to compose himself, and to realise that he had not cut a very dignified figure.

"Now, Handforth minor, I understand that this—er—animal belongs to you?" He frowned severely upon Willy. "In the first place, how dare you bring one of your wretched pets into the House? And in the second place, what perverted sense of humour caused you to admit the creature into my bed-room?"

"It wasn't my fault, sir," said Willy patiently. "Bertram escaped."

"Eh? Bertram? I'm not talking about anybody called Bertram——"

"Bertram is the bear, sir," explained Willy.

There were some chuckles from the others, and Mr. Crowell snorted.

"You see, sir, I haven't had Bertram long, and he's a stranger to my other pets," said Willy, before the Form-master could speak. "So I brought him up to the dormitory to-night and put him in the cupboard. I wedged the door, too, and I don't know how the little beggar escaped. He must have gone along the ledge and walked through your window. He's as harmless as a kitten, sir."

"I'm not sure that I shall take your word for that, Handforth minor," retorted Mr. Crowell. "However, harmless or not, I won't have bears wandering into my bed-room and disturbing me in the middle of the night. I shall not bother Mr. Wilkes now, but in the morning I shall be compelled to report this matter."

"I am sorry he scared you, sir——"

"Nothing of the sort," snapped Mr. Crowell. "I was—er—startled, nothing more. Do you realise that the animal was actually on my bed?"

"He only wanted to be chummy, sir," said Willy cheerfully. "Didn't you, Bertram, old man? I'll take you back to that cupboard, and this time I'll make sure that the door——"

"You'll do nothing of the sort," interrupted Mr. Crowell sharply. "I won't have that creature in the House a minute longer! You will take it out to the shed."

"Now, sir?" asked Willy.

"Yes, now! Put some clothes on and take that bear to the pets' quarters."

"I'd better go with him, sir," said Fenton.

"Certainly not! There is no reason why you should be troubled, Fenton," said Mr. Crowell gruffly. "You may go back to bed—and everybody else, too. Everybody, that is, with the exception of Handforth major."

"You're not going to blame me for my minor's rot, are you, sir?" asked Handforth, looking indignantly at his Form-master.

"You are this boy's elder brother, and therefore you will dress yourself and accompany him to the pets' quarters," said Mr. Crowell firmly. "And, Handforth, I charge you with the duty of making sure that the bear is securely locked away."

"Right-ho, sir!" said Handforth promptly. "That's different! You can leave Willy to me!"

The rest of the boys, chuckling, went back to their various bed-rooms, and Handforth and Willy donned some clothes and ventured out.

"All this giddy fuss in the middle of the night!" growled Edward Oswald Handforth, as they emerged into the cold outer air. "You ought to be ashamed of yourself, my lad!"

"Rats!" retorted Willy. "I never knew such a fuss over nothing. There's no harm in Bertram."

"The harm's in you," said his major sternly. "I suppose you realise that you've ruined my night's sleep? Here am I, dragged out of bed between one and two in the morning——"

Willy let him ramble on. They reached the big outbuilding where the pets' quarters were situated, and Willy made Bertram secure in a commodious cage which had been built for the benefit of Marmaduke the Monkey. Marmaduke didn't use it at night, and Willy could make other arrangements in the morning.

"Sure he'll be all right there?" asked Edward Oswald Handforth doubtfully.

Willy did not answer.

"Lost your tongue?"

"No, ass," growled Willy. "But what's the good of talking to you? How the dickens do you suppose Bertram can get out of this cage? Why don't you use your sense?"

"Look here, you cheeky young fat-head——"

"You're worse than Crowell, and that's saying a lot!" broke in Willy.

"Just for that, you young sweep, I won't speak to you at all!" said Handforth



Mr. Crowell awoke to find a bear lying at the foot of his bed. "Help!" yelled the startled Form-master, and leapt from between the bedclothes like a Jack-in-the-box.

coldly. "I won't say another giddy word!"

Willy felt inclined to thank him for this consideration, but he changed his mind. That was the one certain way of making Edward Oswald talk all the more.

Handforth maintained a stolid silence. He would teach Willy a lesson! They emerged from the pets' quarters and made their way back towards the Ancient House, and still the silence was maintained.

As it happened, this unwonted quietness between the two brothers was fortunate. Their slippers made no sound, and because of their lack of conversation they both heard the soft crunch of gravel in the Triangle. It was unexpected. Who could be walking in the Triangle at this hour of the night?

"What—what was that?" whispered Handforth abruptly.

"Don't know—somebody there," muttered Willy. "Come on, let's look."

There was never any hesitation about Willy; he padded softly towards West Arch, and, halting in the shadows, looked into the Triangle. Edward Oswald Handforth was by his side. And they both saw

the queer, ragged figure of a tramp in the faint moonlight.

CHAPTER 4.

The Ambush!

EDWARD OSWALD HANDFORTH gulped. In a flash he recognised that figure—the ragged clothing, the gaping boots, the unkempt hair.

"My only sainted aunt!" he breathed.

"Dry up, you chump!" warned Willy. "He'll hear you!"

There was not much fear of this, however, for the wind was whistling noisily through West Arch, and any sounds that the boys made were drowned.

"But you don't understand——" began Handforth.

"Rats! I understand that a tramp is wandering about the school," whispered Willy. "Ten to one he's thinking of breaking in somewhere. We'll watch him."

Edward Oswald Handforth experienced a glow. A sense of superiority came over him. For once he knew better than his

minor! He had met this tramp before, and he knew——

"The beggar's keeping to the shadows," murmured Willy, interrupting Handforth's thoughts.

"My dear kid, let me tell you a little story," said Handforth kindly. "This tramp——"

"I say! Look!" breathed Willy, pointing.

His eyes were sharper than those of the burly Removite. He had been watching the tramp as that individual passed silently along the Triangle towards Big Arch, and the mysterious figure was keeping fairly close to the school buildings, and in the shadows.

He was now passing beneath the leafless branches of the old chestnut trees. Some instinct had caused Willy to glance upwards, and a sudden gleam came into his eyes. Up there, in one of those trees, a shadowy figure was lurking—hovering, ready, as though preparing to leap down.

The figure was black and shadowy. Instantly Willy recognised the peril of the situation. The tramp was about to pass under that very tree—and that crouching figure was waiting in ambush!

"What's—what's wrong?" asked Handforth, startled by his minor's tone.

"That tramp's in for trouble!" murmured Willy, still pointing. "See? Twig that rummy-looking black thing up in the tree? He's getting ready to drop——"

The next second Edward Oswald Handforth leapt into activity. Swiftly he ran out into the open.

"Hi!" he yelled. "Look out, there!"

The tramp spun round on the instant, and Willy, mouth agape, followed his major. He saw that ragged figure leap aside with the speed of lightning.

For the tramp, in that second, had become aware of his peril. Handforth's warning had been in the nick of time. Down came the shadowy figure from the tree—down, in a clean leap. The tramp caught a fleeting glimpse of a gleaming knife-blade.

The drama of that situation nearly took Willy's breath away—and Willy was not an easy youngster to startle.

As he and his major ran up, the tramp leapt at his attacker. He was a slippery fellow, however—slippery in more ways than one. Not only was he as agile as a monkey, but his only clothing consisted of a loin-cloth, and his body and limbs were greased. As the tramp clutched at him he wriggled his way free, for to retain a grip was next to impossible.

The knife had gone clattering down to the paved path near by, and now the greased man showed no inclination to pursue the tussle. The instant he freed

himself from the tramp's grip he made off. The tramp started in pursuit, but soon gave it up; for the other, reaching the wall, leapt up with incredible agility, and the next second he had gone.

"Well, I'm blessed!" said Willy blankly.

Edward Oswald had run straight up to the tramp, showing every evidence of anxiety.

"You all right, sir?" he asked. "I did my best to warn you——"

"And a very good best, too, Handforth," came a familiar voice. "Well done, young 'un! Thanks!"

"Crumbs!" ejaculated Willy.

For now he knew that the "tramp" was none other than Nelson Lee, the famous detective-headmaster of St. Frank's! In a flash, Willy understood the reason for his brother's surprising activity. Handforth, obviously, had known the truth from the start. And that, in itself, was surprising enough.

"We were only out here by chance, sir," said Handforth breathlessly. "My minor's pet bear got loose, and Mr. Crowell told us to take it to the pets' quarters. By George! As soon as I saw that rotter crouching in the tree——"

"As soon as *you* saw him?" interrupted Willy, staring.

"Eh? Oh, well, I believe you saw him first," admitted Handforth grudgingly. "But what difference does it make? I yelled out and gave the warning."

"Then you share the honours," said Nelson Lee gravely. "By Jove! That was a narrow escape! The fellow might easily have had me there. I certainly had no idea of his presence."

"What I can't understand, Ted, is how you knew that this—this ragged-looking specimen was Mr. Lee," said Willy. "You can't tell me that you saw through the disguise——"

"No, Willy—your brother and I met earlier," explained Nelson Lee quietly. "That same mysterious enemy entered your brother's dormitory on a thieving expedition; but I happened to be on the spot, and I spoilt his game. It was then that your brother met me in this rig-out."

"And by sheer luck I happen to be out of doors in the middle of the night," said Handforth, with a whistle. "Funny, isn't it, sir? If we hadn't heard your feet crunching on the gravel we should have gone straight indoors."

"I'm afraid I was careless," confessed Lee. "I should not have allowed my feet to crunch on the gravel—but, in the circumstances, I am glad that I did."

Willy looked helplessly from one to the other.

"This is all double-Dutch to me, sir," he complained. "What does it all mean?"

CHAPTER 5.

The Edgemore Treasure!

"COME indoors, both of you," said Nelson Lee briefly.

When they were in his study he heard further details of their own story; and they regarded him with open-eyed wonder. For Lee's get-up was so remarkable that they found it difficult to believe that they were not actually in the presence of a disreputable tramp.

"Now, Willy," said Nelson Lee quietly. "Since you have accidentally stumbled upon certain facts of this case, I have decided to give you some more details. But, remember, I am speaking in absolute confidence."

"Yes, sir," said Willy eagerly.

He was not unmindful of the compliment; for headmasters do not, as a rule, take fags into their confidence. But Nelson Lee was a very unusual headmaster—and, if it came to that, Willy Handforth was a very unusual fag.

"You remember the incident, some days ago, when a criminal named Tod Millar smashed through the wall of Moat Hollow?" asked Lee. "Although the car—a stolen one—was wrecked, Millar managed to elude the police."

"Yes, I know all that, sir," said Willy, nodding. "There was a Flying Squad car in chase, wasn't there? And when they arrived this crook had gone. My major was on the spot at the time——"

"Nearly got killed, too," grunted Edward Oswald Handforth. "That car only missed me by an inch."

"It seems that Handforth picked up a sheet of old parchment amid the debris of the wrecked wall," continued Nelson Lee. "He thought nothing of it until he happened to be at Edgemore Castle. You know, of course, Willy, that the Earl of Edgemore has recently suffered a great financial loss. There has been a big City crash, and Lord Edgemore is ruined."

"Yes, I heard about it, sir," nodded Willy.

"Do you think it's wise to tell my minor all this, sir?" asked Handforth dubiously. "I haven't said a word to him, and you're taking an awful chance. He can't keep a secret."

"I think I'll risk it," said Nelson Lee dryly. "It was quite by chance that

Skeets Rossiter—or, to be more correct, Viscount Bellton—mentioned the famous Edgemore Treasure. This has been lost for centuries, and it was because of his father's great misfortune that Skeets talked of the treasure."

"And is there really a treasure, sir?" asked Willy eagerly. "I mean, do you think that——"

"My dear young ass, there's Spanish gold on the Edgemore estate!" interrupted Handforth impatiently. "Pots and pots of it! Doubloons and pieces of eight! What's more, we chaps are going to find it—and restore Lord Edgemore's fortunes."

"You see, Willy, your brother happened to bring out that old piece of parchment, and Lord Edgemore immediately recognised the handwriting upon it," said Nelson Lee. "Extraordinarily enough, it was the handwriting of Captain Rossiter, a roving ancestor of the Edgemores who sailed the Spanish Main under Drake. Now, that sheet of parchment had been picked up by your brother at Moat Hollow—and it was merely one page of a manuscript. Where was the rest?"

"My giddy aunt!" said Willy. "I can see what you're getting at, sir! Those beastly people at Moat Hollow, eh? Dr. Franz Ragozin! He took Moat Hollow suddenly, didn't he?"

"Very suddenly," agreed Lee. "It is fairly evident, in fact, that that crook, Tod Millar, found the main portion of the ancient manuscript. This Dr. Ragozin is somehow connected with Millar—and there are other crooks there, too. Their object is to search quietly and find the treasure. It is for that reason that Dr. Ragozin has given out the story that he is starting a private zoo. He wishes to keep people away from Moat Hollow."

"I took that bear cub from Moat Hollow, sir," said Willy, with sudden spirit. "Dr. Ragozin was whipping the poor little thing, and I grabbed it. What's more, I dared him to come up to the school and take it away. I knew, from the first, that the man was a rotter."

"I am not inclined to take any action—yet," said Lee thoughtfully. "In fact, I am not prepared to take any action, for I have no definite proof. It is for that reason that I want you boys to keep this matter to yourselves. Ragozin somehow learned that Handforth had the missing page of manuscript in his possession, and he sent up that greased rascal to obtain it."

"Where's that page of parchment now, sir?" asked Edward Oswald Handforth.

"In my safe—where, I fancy, it is quite secure," replied Lee. "I might as well

tell you, boys, that I have just come from Moat Hollow; and I had a most unpleasant experience with a creature, half-animal, half-human. But I managed to get away, after a very hard fight. Dr. Ragozin saw me, but he did not guess at my real identity."

"That monster, eh, sir?" asked Handforth excitedly. "A horrible thing—like a gorilla! We saw it, too—once. Do you think it is a gorilla—or a man wearing a disguise?"

"I do not think—I know," replied Lee quietly. "It is a man—cunningly and cleverly made up. A creature devised by Dr. Ragozin to scare people away. Merely part and parcel of the plot."

"We're not going to let those rotters get that treasure, sir," said Handforth.

"It will be difficult to hinder them," went on the great detective. "Dr. Ragozin is the lawful tenant of Moat Hollow—and behind those high walls he has a perfect right to do almost as he pleases, so long as he does not transgress the law. However, they have not yet secured that missing page of the manuscript, and without it the crooks can do nothing. Now, boys, I want you to go back to bed, and to sleep peacefully. It is very late—or, to be more exact, very early—and you mustn't stay down here any longer."

Edward Oswald was frankly puzzled; he could not understand Nelson Lee's object in telling all this to a mere fag. But Lee was shrewd; he knew, in fact, that Willy was more to be trusted than his major. Indeed, he was convinced that Willy would keep Edward Oswald up to the scratch; but it was hardly diplomatic to mention all this to Edward Oswald!

Willy was wide awake, and it took him only a few seconds to "get" Nelson Lee's motive. He nodded coolly and grinned.

"All serene, sir," he said cheerfully. "I twig."

"Good lad," said Nelson Lee, nodding. "Off you go!"

"What the dickens do you mean?" asked Edward Oswald Handforth, staring.

"You wouldn't understand, old man," replied Willy blandly. "Come back to bed!"

the point of his chin. His horn-rimmed spectacles half concealed his piercing eyes.

"People are taking too much interest in me—and in Moat Hollow," he was saying with annoyance. "I don't mind the yokels, or even that tramp we frightened away an hour ago. But those infernal schoolboys worry me."

There was no trace of accent in his speech; although, when he conversed with strangers, he always spoke like a foreigner.

"The boys, they will not bother much," said the man who was with him. "At first they are inquisitive. But we frighten them much, yes? Soon they will come no more."

Dr. Ragozin grunted. He was in the sitting-room at Moat Hollow, and the apartment was astonishingly comfortable, considering that the old house had been vacant for years. There was a soft carpet on the floor, the furniture was of the best quality, and a big fire glowed and crackled in the old-fashioned grate. Electricity was laid on, and the lighting was excellent.

"Yes, Ivan, it is the schoolboys we did not bargain for," went on Dr. Ragozin impatiently. "Men I can deal with—but boys, no! What of that young wretch who actually took away that bear cub? What can we do about it?"

"Better let it rest," advised Ivan Hess, with a shrug. "The bear cub, it was of not much good. We are better without it."

Hess, an ex-lion-tamer from a circus, was an enormous man, shaggy and brutal-looking. His presence at Moat Hollow was logical enough, for everybody in the district knew of Dr. Ragozin's plans for making a private zoo.

"Well, you had better go to bed, Ivan," grunted Ragozin as he lit a cigarette. "I will wait for Goolah. I can't understand what has kept him. He should have been back long ago." He frowned. "I hope nothing has happened to the fellow."

"To Goolah?" said Ivan. "It was I who advised you to bring him here. I know him. He will return soon. Him, nobody can catch. He is slippery like the eel, yes. And he succeed, too. You wait."

"All right, get to bed," said the other impatiently.

Hess, with a gruff word of good-night, went out of the room. Dr. Ragozin smoked for some time in silence, then he glanced round as the door softly opened.

He might have been forgiven for starting back in horror, for the creature which entered was fearsome enough. But

CHAPTER 6.

The Menace of Moat Hollow!

DR. FRANZ RAGOZIN was an impressive-looking gentleman.

He was tall and sombrely attired in black, with an enormous black silken cravat. He favoured a small moustache and a tiny wisp of beard on



Even as Edward Oswald Handforth and his minor watched, the shadowy figure in the tree leapt down upon its unsuspecting victim. "Look out, there!" yelled E. O. Handforth.

Ragozin merely nodded and knocked the ash off his cigarette.

"Tired of it, eh?" he asked. "I don't blame you. No need to stop out there any longer to-night, anyhow; it's getting on for two o'clock."

"These are the most vital hours," said the newcomer in a soft, silky voice. "I confess I am a little tired, for this game is not to my liking."

That voice sounded utterly incongruous, for it was the voice of a cultured gentleman, yet it came from a monstrosity—a furry creature which looked like a cross between a gorilla and a man. In the full electric light it was grotesque rather than horrible, but in the gloom of a moonlit night that "monster" had a terrifying appearance.

"You will help me, Tod?" said the silky voice.

Tod Millar, alias Dr. Franz Ragozin, rose from the chair, and soon he was assisting his companion out of that disguise. It fitted closely—so closely that when the

wearer was completely encased in it, it was almost impossible to guess the truth.

A big headpiece came right away, and then the rest was removed like a boiler-suit. There emerged a smallish, elderly man—refined-looking, learned, intellectual. His forehead was high, his features clear-cut.

"Yes, I expect this is rather different from your usual line, Zingrave," said Tod Millar dryly.

Professor Cyrus Zingrave, one-time Chief of the notorious League of the Green Triangle, shrugged his shoulders.

"Life is full of ups and downs," he said philosophically. "I am not a man to grumble, Millar. My time will come. I am prepared to wait. Meanwhile, I must accept what the Fates have to offer."

"Well, they seem to be offering something fairly big at the moment," said Tod Millar, pushing the cigarette-box across the table. "If only we can lay our hands on this old treasure we shall be made. We share fifty-fifty—that's the agreement—and I shall be able to retire and live like

a gentleman. You"—he shrugged—"you can do as you please with your share. After we've clicked we can go our own separate ways."

"That is as it should be," said Professor Zingrave, nodding. "For the moment, my friend, we are partners, with an agreement that the partnership shall cease when this present enterprise is brought to a successful issue."

Tod Millar regarded him curiously.

"You're living only for the day when you can return to your former power, aren't you?" he asked. "But that's a long way off, Zingrave. You are an escaped convict, but, fortunately for you, the police believe you to be dead. If it wasn't for that fact you would have been nabbed long before now. There's no hue and cry after you, and we can go ahead with our plans without hindrance."

He suddenly frowned, and rose to his feet.

"Without hindrance, did I say?" he snapped. "What about those infernal boys? They worry me, Zingrave."

"Forget the boys," replied Professor Cyrus Zingrave. "Worry about the headmaster of those boys. He is the one man we must get!"

TOD MILLAR, confidence man, swindler, card-sharp, and smash-and-grab expert, looked at Professor Zingrave sharply.

"We'd better lay off Lee!" he said, throwing his cigarette end into the fire. "Lee's poison!"

"I agree!" nodded Professor Zingrave. "Leave him out of our calculations and our plans will be poisoned."

"Why worry about the fellow?" demanded Millar impatiently. "You've had Lee on the brain ever since we started this game. He hasn't even taken a remote interest in us. You say you saw him out in the road looking up at the walls? What of it? I saw him myself—I spoke to him. But he was no more interested than anybody else."

"I know him," murmured Zingrave. "If he has not already taken action he is preparing. And it is for us to strike first."

The meeting between these two had been extremely curious. Professor Zingrave, believed to be drowned off Shingle Head, had managed to make his way inland, and Moat Hollow, that deserted old house, had offered sanctuary. For days he had lurked in the cellars of the house, well nigh starving, and suffering from exposure.

Then Tod Milar, at the wheel of a stolen car, had crashed into Moat Hollow, wrecking one of the walls. Millar him-

self had miraculously escaped with only a few bruises.

The damaged brickwork had formed one of the original walls of Moat Hollow, which in the past had been known as Traitor's Lodge, and which was a part of the Edgemore estate. The collapsing wall had revealed a centuries-old secret—the hiding-place of Captain Humphrey Rossiter's vital manuscript relating to the whereabouts of the long-lost Edgemore Treasure.

Staggering out of the car, Millar had seen that manuscript, and had picked it up while still in a daze. Then he had met Zingrave, who had been brought up from the cellar because of the commotion.

In the first moment of the meeting Zingrave had recognised the other, for Millar had at one time served the Green Triangle organisation. Knowing that the police were close behind, Zingrave had taken the dazed man to a disused well out in the grounds. They had descended the rusty iron rungs, almost to the bottom. There, for hours, they had lurked, their presence unsuspected.

And when the coast was clear Professor Zingrave had set his wits to work. The dramatic coming of Tod Millar altered the whole situation. Zingrave, an escaped convict, without clothing, without food, had not dared to show his face outside of Moat Hollow, and not even his own friends knew that he still lived.

In Millar he found a willing colleague, and an examination of that ancient parchment excited them both. For Zingrave, at least, realised that it might be of incalculable value. It revealed that the ancient Edgemore Treasure was buried somewhere within the grounds of Moat Hollow—the old Traitor's Lodge.

It was Zingrave who had planned Tod Millar's secret trip to London; Zingrave who had altered his appearance, so that the trip should be less perilous. In London Millar had got into immediate touch with men—influential crooks—who were instantly ready to rally to Professor Cyrus Zingrave's support.

After that events had moved swiftly. Somebody had been sent to Moat Hollow post-haste, with clothing and food for Zingrave. Expertly assisted, Tod Millar had changed his appearance and had become Dr. Franz Ragozin; and in that character he had approached Lord Edgemore's agents, and had leased Moat Hollow for three years. Within two or three days he was in possession, and outwardly he appeared to be a highly respectable doctor, engaged upon some important research work. Indeed, he had given it out that Moat Hollow suited him because

of its enclosed nature; it was private. Everything appeared to be straightforward and above-board.

But hidden in Moat Hollow was Professor Zingrave—masquarading at times as that strange Monster. And it was Zingrave's brain which directed all the operations.

They found, to their consternation, that an ill-important sheet of the manuscript was missing; and they had discovered that the sheet was in the possession of a St. Frank's schoolboy—Handforth. All efforts to recover that sheet, so far, had failed.

To-night, however, the two crooks were hoping that the parchment would come into their possession. They had taken steps to secure it, but they did not know yet that Nelson Lee had also been active.

"I'm getting worried about Goolah," said Tod, looking at his watch.

"You worry about everybody, do you not?" asked Zingrave, with a smile. "You are impatient, my friend; and impatience, in our profession, is not a good quality."

Tod grunted.

"I am not at my best in the early hours of the morning," he snapped. "It is not a favourable time for lecturing me."

Tap-tap!

The soft sounds came from the door, and Tod Millar started jumpily. He strode across the room and flung open the door.

"Oh! You're back, then?" he said sharply. "About time, too! Did you succeed?"

The man who entered was brown-skinned—lithe, sinewy, and bare-footed. Underneath the old overcoat which was flung about his shoulders, he wore only a loin-cloth. His face was evil-looking, and an ugly scar ran from the corner of his mouth almost to his right ear.

He was Goolah Din—the greased man!

CHAPTER 7.

Zingrave's Outburst!

GOO LAH DIN was a lascar, and he had been picked up by Ivan Hess in the neighbourhood of the London docks. He had served Hess more than once. Working for years on British ships, he spoke the English language almost like a native.

"Master, I have failed," he said simply as he entered the room.

"A man who fails is no good to me," snapped Tod, glaring at the fellow. "Why did you fail? You had only to outwit an infernal schoolboy——"

"No, master, there was another," said Goolah Din unemotionally. "It was easy to enter the school, to find the parchment in the pocket of the boy. Thus far I succeeded. But when I reached the ground I was attacked by a man in rags. He looked like a tramp."

"A tramp?" repeated Zingrave and Tod in one voice.

"He took the parchment, and his strength was that of the lion," continued Goolah Din. "Had I not fled he would have seized me. But I waited—and I watched. This tramp-man did not leave the school, but he went to a distant building and entered. After that he emerged, and I followed him to this house, when I saw him fighting——"

"You saw that same chap fighting with me?" interrupted Zingrave, his voice almost hoarse. "A tramp, Millar! Do you understand?"

"I'm hanged if I do," said Tod Millar blankly.

"Tell me!" said Zingrave, swinging upon the Indian. "This tramp went to one of the school buildings, you say? Did he pass through a great arch, and then across an open space?"

"It is so," agreed Goolah Din.

"Lee—Nelson Lee!" shouted Professor Zingrave, his eyes blazing, his voice rising almost to a scream.

"Here, steady——" began Tod, alarmed.

"Lee—always Lee!" snarled Zingrave, his fury awful to witness. "What did I tell you, Millar? Lee has not waited—he is after us already! It was Lee who took the parchment from this man—it was Lee who came down here and entered these grounds—Lee!"

"It's bad, of course," agreed Tod Millar uneasily. "But you needn't get into such a rage about it. I think it's about time I started lecturing you, Zingrave. Confound it, man, control yourself! You're getting me nervy."

"I am sorry," panted Zingrave, pulling himself together with an effort.

"In any case, Lee cannot have discovered anything of importance," continued Tod. "He saw a man getting out of one of the school windows, and he naturally attacked. It's rough luck on us that he got that parchment back."

"Are you such a fool?" asked Zingrave harshly. "Why should Lee disguise himself as a tramp? Why did he come here? Isn't it obvious that Lee suspects us? It is quite likely that he even suspects me!"

Tod turned to Goolah Din.

"This happened nearly two hours ago," he said sharply. "What have you been doing since? Why did you not report at once?"

"Master, I continued to follow the tramp," said Goolah Din, in that same unemotional way. "I thought it would be of service if I killed him. I reached the school in advance, and I placed myself in a tree, so that I could drop upon him. But it so happened that two of the boys were out, and they saw me. They shouted a warning, and I was compelled to run."

"And you tell me not to bother myself about those boys?" snapped Tod, turning back to Zingrave. "Those boys are worse than Lee himself! There's a nest of them all about us."

Zingrave snapped his fingers.

"The boys—pah!" he grated. "They can do nothing. It is Lee we must get! Before we can move another step we must wipe out Nelson Lee! It is he who has possession of that parchment——"

"I'm agreeing with you there," interrupted Tod Millar, his voice very grim. "Lee has the parchment—and we'll get it. But as for wiping Lee out—nothing doing! I won't agree to it. It's too dangerous. If he is found dead—murdered—the boys will be on to us like a swarm of hornets, and they'll bring the police on us, too."

"It can be done in such a way——"

"It shall not be done at all," insisted Tod. "You had your way the last time—you sent Hess out with a gun, and he fired point-blank at Lee. Yet Lee escaped! How in the name of miracles he did so, I can't understand! It was that affair, I believe, which started him off on us. It was madness—and we won't have any more of it."

"It is foolish for us to quarrel——"

"I'm not quarrelling!" said Tod loudly.

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"But I'm telling you to leave Lee alone. We're after that buried treasure, and if we go carefully we shall get it. Don't forget we're in this business fifty-fifty. And I hold the trump card."

"Indeed?" asked Zingrave, his eyes burning.

"I'm going to have my way," said Tod. "Don't forget that one word from me will be enough to put you back in 'stir' like that." He snapped his fingers. "You're an escaped convict, and you're badly wanted."

For a moment the two men glared at one another.

"Very well," said Professor Zingrave quietly. "You shall have your way, Millar—but I am again warning you that Nelson Lee is an acute danger."

"Even Lee can do nothing without evidence—and we'll see that he doesn't get any," retorted Tod Millar. "Leave this to me—I'll think of something. We'll have that treasure yet."

But Zingrave was not listening; he was making plans of his own, and he secretly resolved to deal with Tod Millar in his own way—and at his own time. For the moment it was to his advantage to keep the peace.

Thus this strange household of Moat Hollow went to bed.

CHAPTER 8.

The Treasure-Hunters!

IN the morning Edward Oswald Handforth was looking rather sleepy-eyed; for, after getting to bed in the early hours, his mind had been so disturbed that he had not slept well.

Willy, however, was looking as fresh as ever.

"You've got a fine Form-master!" he said disparagingly, when he met his major in the Ancient House lobby.

"Don't we know it?" retorted Handforth. "What's old Crow's-feet been up to now?"

"He kicked up an awful fuss with old Wilkey this morning," said Willy indignantly. "Just because Bertram happened to pop into his bed-room last night! If you ask me, Crowell made a proper ass of himself."

"That's why he's made such a fuss this morning," said Handforth, nodding. "I suppose he has made you get rid of that bear cub altogether?"

"Not likely!" said Willy. "Old Wilkey was severe, and he gave me a wiggling, and a couple of hundred lines, but he

hasn't taken Bertram away. Only I mustn't bring the little chap into the House again."

"Old Wilkey's got more sense than I thought," nodded Handforth. "Not that I'm against Bertram. I'm his pal. You bagged him from Moat Hollow—and good luck to you!"

Nipper came hurrying into the lobby.

"Oh, here you are, Handy," said the Remove captain briskly. "We want you—in Study H."

They went into the Remove passage, and Willy accompanied them into Study H—which was the abode of Vivian Travers, Sir Jimmy Potts, and Skeets Bellton.

"You can run along, Willy, my lad," said Nipper briskly.

"Rats!" retorted Willy. "This looks like a pow-wow to me—and I'm in it."

"Might as well let him stay," grunted Handforth grudgingly. "He knows all about the treasure—and everything. Mr. Lee told him. Like his nerve, butting in!"

"So Willy's one of us, is he?" asked Travers cheerfully. "Welcome to the fold, dear old fellow!"

The study was crowded, for others were in there, too—Tommy Watson and Tregellis-West; Church and McClure. These juniors were all "in the know." But it was, after all, a very select circle; and they had been warned to be cautious. It would never do to have the whole school—and that meant the entire neighbourhood—talking about the Edgemore treasure.

"Skeets has just arrived," said Nipper.

The young viscount nodded. He was a day-boy, living at home—at Edgemore Castle—with his father. It was so near at hand that it was unnecessary for him to board at the school.

"Dad's getting all hot about this treasure," he said confidentially. "As I told you once before, we've been dipping into the old family records for weeks—but we never really thought that there was any hope of digging up the Edgemore treasure until just recently. It was the finding of that old sheet of parchment which set dad off."

"The worst of it is, those crooks at Moat Hollow have the main manuscript," said Nipper.

"But they can't do anything without that missing sheet," said Skeets quickly. "Well, my dad wants you all to come over to dinner to-morrow night—Mr. Lee, too. Then we're going to have a good old pow-wow, and plan out some sort of campaign."

"By George! That sounds good," said Handforth eagerly. "So your pater is.

convinced at last, eh? We're going to have that treasure, my lad!"

Skeets' eyes glowed.

"Wouldn't it be just marvellous?" he asked softly. "I mean, we're practically broke; that City crash wiped dad out. Unless a miracle happens—unless we find the old treasure—we shall have to sell up and clear out. We shall have to go back to the old ranch in Canada."

"You'd better forget Canada, dear old boy," said Tregellis-West, beaming. "You're going to stay on at St. Frank's—you are, really. And your pater will continue the life of a country gentleman. That treasure is as good as found."

"I wish I could believe it," said Skeets. "It would be simple if we had that manuscript—and if we had the free entry into the old Traitor's Lodge. But we're up against Ragozin and his crew."

"Why shouldn't we go over to dinner to-night—instead of to-morrow night?" asked Handforth impatiently. "Why waste time?"

"There's no tearing hurry, I guess," replied Skeets. "Dad says to-morrow night—so we'll leave it at that. It's quite likely that Mr. Lee has an engagement for this evening. We can't rush him."

"And by to-morrow night, too, the guv'nor may have made some progress on his own," said Nipper confidently. "He was out on the job last night—and he's probably got something up his sleeve even now."

After breakfast Nipper happened to meet Nelson Lee in the Triangle; but they only exchanged a few words. Lee had gladly accepted Lord Edgemore's invitation, and he told Nipper that something definite would probably be settled.

"I made one important discovery last night, but I don't think we'll discuss that now, Nipper," said Lee. "I saved that sheet of parchment, too, and during the morning—whilst you are hard at work in your class-room—I shall have a look at it. I confess, I am becoming thrilled at the prospect of this treasure hunt myself!"

CHAPTER 9.

Nelson Lee's Visitor!

THE parchment was unquestionably genuine.

Nelson Lee, who had made a study of such things, was not to be deceived by any cleverly-faked imitation. He was satisfied that this old page of manuscript really had been written in the sixteenth century—approximately, in the year 1580. No doubt the full manuscript

bore the exact date, but this single sheet was singularly uninformative.

Lee, at his desk, was making a careful examination by means of a magnifying lens. He was going over every inch of that parchment; he was tracing the lines of the crudely-drawn plan. After only a very short inspection, he came to the conclusion that the plan itself was valueless without the written directions. And these directions were in the other part of the manuscript.

In just the same way, those directions were useless without the plan. So the situation was intriguing. As long as the two parts of the manuscript were separate, nobody could make any definite search.

Lee was thinking of that age-old story, as told in the Edgemore records. Captain Humphrey Rossiter, the younger brother of Sir Malcolm Rossiter, lord of Edgemore, had been a roving scamp, and a sore trial to his brother, who had been very religious. Humphrey, having incurred his brother's anger, had taken to the sea, and there he had prospered. As a fully-fledged captain, under the command of Sir Francis Drake, he had sailed for the Spanish Main. With Drake, he had looted many of the Spanish ports of South America along the Pacific coast; great Spanish galleons had been seized and plundered. And in triumph Captain Humphrey Rossiter had returned, bringing with him a ship which bulged with booty.

This ship, it was believed, had secretly put into a small port along the South Coast—a port which Lord Edgemore believed to be Caistowe. Sir Francis Drake, in the meantime, had arrived in Plymouth with the main treasure ship.

There was no doubt whatever that Captain Humphrey had brought his loot ashore, and had secreted it somewhere on the Edgemore estate. And, having so far succeeded, disaster overtook him. Sir Malcolm had refused to allow him within the walls of Edgemore Castle, and he had been banished to a small manor house, on the outskirts of the estate, known as Traitor's Lodge. Here he had quarrelled with the men who were to have shared the treasure with him, and in that quarrel he had been killed. He had died without revealing his secret. And thus, for centuries, the Edgemores had lost all trace of the treasure.

Now, dramatically, by a sheer accident, an amazing discovery had been made. Without doubt, Moat Hollow was the old Traitor's Lodge; and, in a secret receptacle in one of the walls, Captain Humphrey had hidden a manuscript,



Distracted by the opening door, the man turned ; and in that moment Nelson Lee acted. Hurling himself across the desk, he grappled with his antagonist.

giving full directions as to the hiding of the treasure.

Nelson Lee's ruminations were disturbed by a tap on the door, and in answer to his invitation Mrs. Jones appeared. Mrs. Jones was Lee's housekeeper—a kindly, motherly soul.

"There's a gent called, sir," she announced, proffering a card.

Lee glanced at his appointment tablet, and saw that it was blank. The card was inscribed with the name of "Mr. James Longcroft," of "Messrs. Longcroft, Martin & Longcroft, Lincoln's Inn, London."

"Yes, Mrs. Jones, I'll see the gentleman," said Nelson Lee, nodding. "Show him in, please!"

He did not know Mr. Longcroft, and had never heard of him. He rather wondered what the lawyer could want. But the headmaster of a great public school has many visitors.

Lee was in the act of putting the parchment away in the top drawer of his desk when Mr. James Longcroft was ushered in.

"It is very good of you to see me, Mr. Lee," said the visitor, half-apologetically. "I regret that I had no opportunity of

arranging an appointment. But the matter on which I have called is of some urgency."

He spoke in the precise manner of his profession, and he was a stoutish, pleasant-looking man. Nelson Lee had half risen, his hand outstretched, and Mrs. Jones had just retired, closing the door behind her.

Mr. Longcroft came forward, but instead of taking Nelson Lee's hand, he produced, with the adroitness of a magician, a long-barrelled automatic pistol.

"Sit just where you are, Mr. Nelson Lee—and make no sound!" he said, in a low, steady voice. "One yelp out of you and I'll drill you!"

Lee sank back into his chair, and his eyes never left the other's face.

"You do not believe in wasting any time, Mr.—er—Longcroft," he said quietly.

"Keep your hands on the desk, in front of you—where I can see them," said the other. "Don't try any tricks. All I want from you is a sheet of parchment, and if you're sensible you'll hand it over without any fuss."

"You mean this?" asked Lee, indi-

eating the sheet, which was half in and half out the drawer.

He had not been taken completely by surprise, as "Mr. Longcroft" believed. For, as the man had entered, Lee had seen the quick gleam in his eyes as he spotted the yellowish parchment.

And Lee, who had been expecting some move from the enemy—but who was astonished at the audacity of this daylight raid—half anticipated what was coming. But the automatic had menaced him before he could attempt to take any action.

"A little bluff, my friend—eh?" said Lee. "That gun looks impressive, but what do you think will happen if you fire it? I may be killed—I admit that—but do you suppose that you will be able to get away?"

"I don't suppose anything," retorted the visitor grimly. "This is no ordinary gun, Lee. It's an air-pistol, with an effective range of fifty yards. It hardly makes a sound—and at such close quarters as this it will drill you like a sieve. Now! Hand over that parchment!"

Nelson Lee shrugged hopelessly.

"Let us talk this over," he said. "You certainly have the advantage——" He

broke off, looking past the man towards the door, which at that moment had clicked and opened. "Ah, Fenton! Be careful——"

Longcroft spun round. There had been no mistaking that click, or the cold draught which struck him at the back. He saw the opened door, and it was in that second that Nelson Lee sprang.

CHAPTER 10.

Nelson Lee Triumphs!

MR. JAMES LONGCROFT was staggered to see—nobody. The door was open, but it had apparently opened by magic. Before the man could swing back again, Lee had acted.

In one bound the detective hurled himself right across the top of his desk. He took Longcroft in the middle, and no Rugger International could have done better. The gun thudded to the carpet, and the two men went sprawling.

With the agility of a conjurer, Lee produced handcuffs, and the next second they were snapped over his prisoner's wrists. The man seemed dazed by the suddenness and unexpectedness of it all.

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"Now, my friend, you may sit down—and we'll have a little chat," said Lee calmly. "An air-pistol, eh?" he went on, picking up the weapon. "Don't you think it was foolish to tell such a story. I could recognise a Browning a hundred yards off."

"Mighty smart, aren't you?" snarled the other, in rage and fear.

Nelson Lee closed the door, and he did not think it necessary to explain the little mystery to his visitor. He had tricked the man neatly. There was a little electrical device fitted to that door; the touch of a foot-button, near Lee's feet, had been sufficient to cause the door to open automatically.

"Now, Mr. — er — Longcroft, perhaps you'll tell me who sent you here?" went on Lee, as he unlocked the safe and put away the parchment. "You might also give me your real name."

"I'm saying nothing," muttered the other. "Nobody sent me—see?"

"Well, if you won't talk, you won't," said Nelson Lee. "How does the idea of a little ride strike you?"

The man's eyes opened wider.

"Look here, Mr. Lee—" he began in alarm.

"Oh, don't worry—the ride will be quite peaceful," said Lee. "Here's your hat. If you hold it over your hands nobody will see those bracelets. And don't make any attempt to break away—because it wouldn't be healthy."

They went out into the hall, where Lee obtained his overcoat and hat. The detective's own car was standing upon the gravel outside, and a minute later they were driving away.

Nelson Lee was taking no chances with this man. He drove straight to Bannington, and pulled up outside the police station. Inspector Jameson was considerably surprised when the pair marched into the building.

"I should like to know if you can identify this man," said Lee, getting straight to the point. "I want to charge him with attempted robbery with threats. This is his gun, and you had better take charge of it."

The prisoner, who had remained sullen and silent, now burst into a torrent of protest.

"Have a heart, Mr. Lee!" he exclaimed. "I didn't mean any harm. It was only a bluff. You can't charge me—"

"That'll do," interrupted Jameson curtly. "The less you say, my friend, the better. I've got to warn you—"

"Forget it," growled the prisoner.

"You can take him along, sergeant, and

put him in the cooler," said the inspector, after the charge had been made. "It ought to be easy enough to identify him, Mr. Lee. Stoutish build—old bullet wound mark on left ear—mole under chin—third finger of left hand badly crooked, indicating that it was broken some years ago and set without the aid of a surgeon. I'll get through to the Records Office at the Yard. They'll know something."

While they were waiting for information, Lee gave a few details of the attempted hold-up—but he made no mention of the parchment, or of the people at Moat Hollow. And "Longcroft" himself had maintained a stubborn silence regarding his motive. The police, therefore, assumed that his object had been plain robbery.

"Thought so," said the inspector, in a satisfied voice, as he left the telephone some minutes later. "Our friend is Walter Smiles, known as 'The Smiler,' and he was sent up for three years in 1925 for robbery with violence. This time he'll get seven. Glad you pulled him in, Mr. Lee. Smart work on your part."

"I'll bet that Smiler didn't know who he was up against, sir," remarked the sergeant with a grin. "Thought he was trying to rob an ordinary schoolmaster, eh? Gosh! I'll bet he got a shock!"

Nelson Lee took his departure almost at once, leaving the police to deal with the man. He knew that Walter Smiles had not made a random visit to St. Frank's; he had been paid to do that job by Dr. Franz Ragozin.

And, what was more, he must have been instructed by telephone—probably overnight. Lee knew that a telephone had been installed at Moat Hollow only the previous day.

"They're wasting no time," murmured the detective, as he drove back to the school. "Last night they grabbed the parchment, but I was lucky enough to get it back. This morning they send a man down to take it by force—out of my very study. There was no time to write, and I'll swear that Smiles had not been to Moat Hollow. So he must have been instructed direct by telephone, and he came down from London by the early train. H'm! The possibilities are intriguing."

CHAPTER 11.

The Black Shadow!

"BY George!" said Handforth abruptly.

It was nearly tea-time, and he was lounging in the Ancient House doorway. Church and McClure, his

faithful and long-suffering chums, were near at hand. All day, in fact, they had been his shadows.

He regarded this attentiveness as a mark of their friendship; and he would have been indignant had he known that they were unwilling to trust him out by himself.

"Hadn't we better go in to tea?" asked Church hopefully.

"Rats! Look over there!" said Handforth, pointing. "I've got an idea, my sons!"

"You're full of ideas, aren't you?" asked McClure, in a weary voice. "Dud ideas!"

Handforth took no notice; he was striding off across the Triangle, and his chums followed. Just round the angle of the gymnasium they overtook Willy, who was accompanied by Lightning, his sleek, well-groomed greyhound. Lightning was having his evening exercise.

"Just a minute, Willy," said Handforth briskly.

"All right," said Willy, resigned. "Out with it."

"Out with what?"

"The idea."

"How did you know I had an idea?"

"You're always getting them, aren't you?" asked Willy. "Besides, do you think I'm deaf? I heard you telling these chaps——"

"Well, we won't argue," interrupted Handforth, lowering his voice. "How about popping down to Moat Hollow after tea? As soon as it's really dark. I'm not suggesting that we should break in, or anything like that—but we can climb those walls and have a look into the garden. And my wheeze is that we should take Lightning with us."

"Well, I'm surprised," said Willy frankly. "Even you, Ted, can get a decent idea, once in a blue moon."

"Look here, you cheeky young sweep——"

"Lightning is as keen as mustard," continued Willy. "And when it comes to jumping, he can break all records. It might be worth while to drop him over into the Moat Hollow grounds, and see what happens."

"Too risky," murmured Church. "Those crooks might shoot him."

"You've forgotten my dog's name," replied Willy coolly. "Before they could even get their fingers to a trigger, he'd be gone. I'm thinking about that queer monster," he added slowly. "If he's prowling about the grounds, and Lightning comes across him, we shall make an interesting discovery."

"How do you mean?" asked Handforth eagerly.

"Why, if that gorilla-thing is an animal, Lightning will treat it with respect," replied Willy. "But if it's a man, wearing a disguise, we shall know in a second. Lightning won't be fooled—and he'll go for the beggar bald-headed. It might be an interesting experiment."

"Good egg!" said Handforth. "That's fixed, then? All right, Willy, my lad! We'll meet out here, in the Triangle, at six."

They went indoors to tea, and Church thought it advisable to slip into Study C and inform Nipper of the programme. Nipper promptly decided to accompany the expedition, and Tommy Watson and Tregellis-West were of the same mind.

At six o'clock, therefore, they met Willy in the Triangle, and the party set off.

"Better not go by the road," said Nipper. "The enemy might have a scout out—and we don't want to give ourselves away. I suggest that we cut across the Half Mile Meadow, and then go through the wood. In that way we can come upon the back wall of the Moat Hollow grounds without showing ourselves at all."

As they walked they discussed the latest development, and they were thoroughly excited. Nipper had been talking to Nelson Lee, and he had learned about that attempt to seize the parchment. This was the first the others had heard of it.

"By George, Mr. Lee was jolly smart to nab that gunman!" said Handforth admiringly. "What a sell! Fancy our being at lessons when the thing happened! Just our luck!"

"One thing's certain, you chaps," remarked Nipper. "Those Moat Hollow people will be kicking themselves. They'll know by now that their wheeze has failed, and that the guv'nor has scored a point."

"Yes, and they'll know that Mr. Lee is working on the case, begad!" said Tregellis-West. "That's not so frightfully good, dear old boy!"

"Don't worry about the guv'nor, he can look after himself," replied Nipper confidently. "Better go easy now," he added, lowering his voice. "We're getting into the wood, and the less we talk the better."

They progressed in silence. Lightning had been well trained by Willy, and he would not utter a sound unless he received permission.

As they penetrated deeper and deeper into the wood they began to feel the tension; it was so dark here, so gloomy, so mysterious. And the very knowledge that they were nearing Moat Hollow affected them. Their hearts were beating

(Continued on page 24.)

Handy "takes the biscuit" when he burbles about pancakes!



HANDFORTH'S Weekly

No. 42. Vol. 2.

EDITORIAL STAFF.

February 6th, 1932.

PANCAKES

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

Clarence Fellowe tells you
how he has ceased to—

TALK IN RHYME

Ye Editor discourseth on ye curious olde custom of making pancakes, and showeth how ye scholars at Saint Frank's do make and eat these pancakes.

WELL, you fellows, Shrove Tuesday comes next week, though I forget what day it comes on—Friday, I fancy. And I expect you're all getting ready to scoff loads of pancakes. Greedy lot! I hate greed. I don't suppose that, at the outside, I shall eat more than twenty-five or thirty.

I have been trying to bag Fatty Little to fry some pancakes for Study D., but, of course, he's booked right up with requests. That's like the other fellows. Always thinking of themselves. Never give a thought to anybody else. And I went after Fatty early, too, in order to get in first.

Fatty's a wonder at pancakes. He can't toss them like I can, but he mixes them a treat. By George! It makes my mouth water simply to think of them.

If I can't get Fatty, I shall try to scrounge some pancakes down at Moor View. The girls cook pancakes really well. A fellow has to be careful what he eats, of course; but, on the whole, the Moor View cooking class is good. Perhaps if I flatter Irene a little, she'll make us some; though really we've hardly been on speaking terms since I put "feminine interest" into my WEEKLY a fortnight ago. It wasn't my fault that the silly asses wrote all that bilge.

The fact is, Irene's a ripping sort—she's jolly nice-looking, and—and—well, she's a good sportsman and—and what about one or two pancakes, old thing? We should really like them.

Yours hopefully,
E. O. HANDFORTH.

I THINK it's nearly time that I finished talking rhyme and began to speak in good, straightforward British; for every time I speak my admirers simply shriek and imagine I am trying to be skittish. I point out with dismay that it is my usual way of expressing my opinions on the matter, but I've not a single friend who can really comprehend that my very extraordinary chatter isn't actually done to create a little fun for the listeners who give me their attention.

So I'm going to persevere with the sensible idea of making an inflexible intention of never talking rhyme like a bally pantomime, and never writing anything poetic. And I'll keep upon that way, let it cost me what it may. I'll show the world I'm firm and energetic.

Unafraid and undeterred by derision or "the bird," I am quickly getting used to the position. For a week no rhyming word have my hungry critics heard, and they're now expressing generous contrition. At first they would not own I could leave the rhymes alone, but when they heard me speak they gasped and wilted, and I gave them each a fit—for, of course, I will admit that my speech is rather cumbersome and stilted. I have found it very hard just at first quite to discard all the rhymes I used to put into my phrases; but I've conquered the desire and my courage will inspire every fellow in the school to sing my praises.

In this article you'll see not a word of poetry. Not a single rhyming phrase makes its appearance. And when you've read it through I sincerely hope that you will decide I am a chap of perseverance.

DREADFUL DIARIES

By William Napoleon Browne

This week: **WILLY HANDFORTH**



Monday. Sprinkled a little aniseed on my trousers-legs this morning before I went out for a stroll with Chubby and Juicy. Several dogs sniffed the aniseed and followed me all down the road. Chubby and Juicy much amazed at my uncanny attraction for animals. Said it's wonderful how they all follow me.

Tuesday. Was bitten by a dog in Bannington Lane. Tried to stroke the brute, but it sank its fangs into me. Bound up the wound and said I had run my hand against something sharp. Didn't say what.

Wednesday. I have now taught Lightning, my greyhound, to take food from my hand without chewing a lump out of my paw. It took only seven months to train him. My power over animals is amazing.

Thursday. A circus has just come to Bell-ton. It's going away again on Saturday. The procession passed the school gates. I must go down to-morrow and see it. Had a wash to-day. Had to do something out of the ordinary to celebrate this treat.

Friday. Went down to the circus. Made friends with the animal trainer. He told me that the tiger was so old that he could hardly walk, and hadn't a tooth in his head. They have to feed him on rice pudding. Saw a grand chance to show my marvellous power over animals. Bribe the trainer with a ten-bob note (borrowed from my major) to open the tiger's cage as

the procession passes the college gates to-morrow. I want the fellows to see how bold I am with an escaped tiger. I am so excited. I can hardly wait till to-morrow.

Saturday. My reputation is made. Everybody looks at me with awe. It was a little difficult at first. The trainer opened the door of the cage, but the tiger merely lay down on the floor and yawned. Tried to get him out, but he wouldn't budge. Finally three men prodded him out with sticks, and then he simply flopped down in the lane and went to sleep. Terrible cry raised. "Look out! Escaped tiger!" Fellows came running out to see what was happening. I was in front, you bet. I went boldly up to the tiger and looked him in the face. As his eyes were closed he didn't see me, of course. I stirred him up with my foot, but he simply rolled over and snored. Fellows gasped with awe. Tiger still stretched out on ground. Wouldn't move! In the end a dozen men had to lift him up and put him back in his cage. My name is made for good now. That was ten bob well spent. (P.S.—In the evening went for a stroll and was bitten by a water-vole.)

OUR DICTIONARY

(More extracts from Reggie Pitt's Life Work. We wish him no harm—but may he have a short life!)

CRUMBS. An exclamation meaning: "I desire particularly to emphasise the fact that I am considerably startled."

CRUMPET. A fellow who is always "muffin" things is off his crumpet.

CUBE. A native of Cuba.

CURRENCY. A rare and valuable material which is sometimes seen even in the West House.

DAILY. Calamities which happen every day—as lickings and newspapers.

DANCE-BAND. See TORTURES (MODERN).

DASH. —

DEAF. An affliction which is often present when one tries to borrow money.

DEBT (With the B silent as in winter). A strange type of money transactions, which increase the more you contract them.

DECIMAL POINT. •

DECK-CHAIR. An instrument which collapses more frequently even than the American stock-exchange.

DEER. Thing with antlers.

DEPEND. When a master is very angry, he is said to "go off at the deperd."

DEFECTIVE. The brain of a detective.

DEIPNOSOPHIST. Fatty Little is one of these. It's a good job he doesn't know it. A guzzling cormorant.

AH, ME! AMEN!

Oh, Handy, you were very kind

To offer to arrange

A little loan; but now I find

Your manner has grown strange;

Although in funds, you have declined

To make me the exchange:

Oh, Handy, kindly change your mind

And let me mind your change.

C. DE V.

FATTY LITTLE
surprising
SHAL

YOU can see
Shakespeare
didn't know
and that
cakes! I know
he ever knew,
great writer if
thing about foot
portant thing in
Take just
poems for an ins

"When bicycles
And Dick the
nail—"

(By the way
trying to blow
Absolute rot, is
"And Tom bears
And milk
pail—"

What Shakespeare
here, of course, we
can see at once
tasted really good
have talked about
It must have been
Even Mrs. Hak
custard, and they
are pure cream
fathead?—E.O.H.

Then he talks
"When blood
foul—"

I should think
would know that
killed before I
nipped anybody
for not killing it

But in the sea
than ever:

"And Marj
raw

When road
bowl—

I should think
would know that
Fancy a roasted
are boiled, and

And what that
about crabs his
a crab hiss? I
been thinking of
a serpent. It's
serpent couldn't
had been roasted

NOTE by Mr
read these
marks of Little
terest, and
he would study
in my study
at 5.30 p.m.
of a small
my cupboard
him a little more
than he knows

FURIOUS FICTION

By Reggie Pitt

No. 2: NOVEL SHORT STORIES

IN these days the popular stunt is for every writer to try and be original. It is originality that pays—except when you write for a mag. like this, whose Editor doesn't pay anybody anything.

One way of being original is to be opposite. If you steadily do away with all the usual conventions in short stories, you would swiftly become a very original writer indeed.

Examine a short story. Analyse it. Dissect it. In fact, you can even read it, if you feel strong enough. Obviously the first thing to do is to cultivate your opposity—that's a good word; made it up myself—is to ring a few changes on the names of various characters.

You might start your story like this:

"Dear me!"

Silas Slugge, a tall, good-looking youngster of eighteen, who had just left College to the relief of the whole establishment, paused in surprise at the sight before him.

He had come downstairs to see if the clock was going, and if not, why not, when he saw a sly, furtive, masked villain, whom he instantly recognised as Frank Fearnought, the Cad of the College, who was so debased that he had been unanimously kicked out into the hard world.

Fearnought had just finished trussing up Slugge's dignified old butler named Chappy, and was now hitting him hard on the head with the grandfather clock.

"Stop, you villain!" cried Slugge angrily. "You'll ruin that clock!"

This is all fine, sharp action, with good, clean dialogue, and should go well. After all, there is no reason why a villain should not be named Frank Fearnought, any more than the hero should not be called Silas Slugge.

There are, of course, more ways than one of acquiring oppositableness—that's another home-made word. Another method is to tell the whole story from the villain's point of view. In this case, it is as well to keep to the original nomenclature. (Dear me! These words are getting better and better.)

This is the style of thing:

"Take that!"

As Silas Slugge raised the grandfather clock and hissed these words, he gave the miserable butler a dull thud on the conk with the jewelled lever-movement. What a splendid study he made as the clock rose and fell in his athletic grasp!

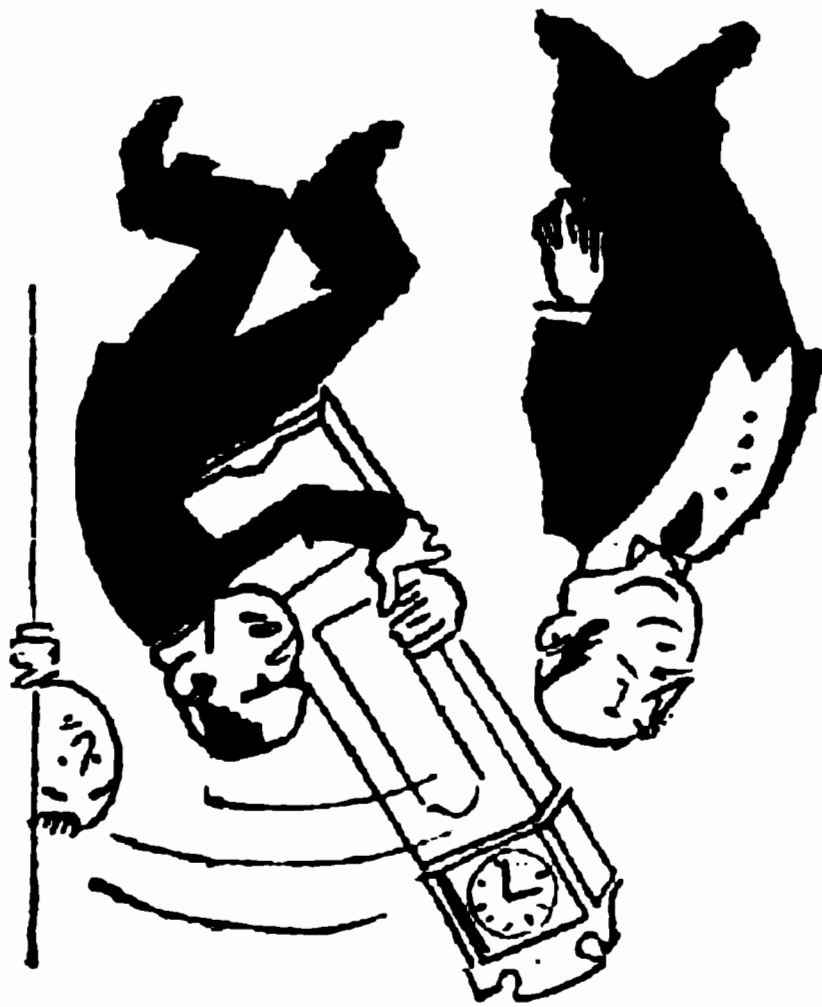
His figure was beautifully slinky and ill-formed, his look was nobly furtive and sly, and his whole appearance filled one with admiration.

Just then the sickening handsome hero came striding on the scene in his usual, interfering way.

"Stop that!" he cried, with a revoltingly pure voice, etc., etc.

After you have written a short story in this manner, you will want to know where to find an editor sufficiently weak-minded to print it. I teach this by correspondence. Fifteen guineas the course (or in ten monthly instalments of fifteen guineas). Send for your first lesson NOW.

Next Week: A MAN OF LETTERS.



(Pitt says we should be original, so I'm publishing this sketch upside down.—E. O. H.)

OUR WISE WRITERS

To the Editor.

SIR,

It may interest you to hear that I have made some investigation into the origin of pancakes, which I beg leave to put before you.

The word pancake came from a mixture of the Russian and Greek, and is usually called a Russo-Grecian word, though professor Pottlebrain proved it to be a Greeko-Russian expression. The Russian word *Pan* signifies a flat, metal cooking utensil, furnished with one or more tubular metal handles, which are called the pipes of

Pan. The Greek word *cake* (pronounced "cake") denotes a piece of confectionery made from milled flour, sugar, and eggs.

We see, then, that the combination of the words seem to suggest a piece of floury confectionery cooked in a flat utensil, and that, sir, is exactly what a pancake is.

The reason why we eat pancakes is not quite so clear, but my opinion is that it is because there is really nothing else we could do with them. A pancake is really of very little use for mending boots or putting patches on trou—, on garments.

Yours faithfully, "BUSTER."

P.S.—Could you make it convenient to lend me a bob till Friday week?

offers some
information about
PEARE

at you like about
you chaps, but he
much about food,
fact. Great pan-
about food than
it's no use being a
don't know any-
food's the one im-

of Shakespeare's
That one about:
on the wall
shepherd blows his

ancy a shepherd
nail! Ha, ha!
It goes on):
into the hall
frozen home in

was referring to
ice-cream, and you
that he had never
ees, or he wouldn't
milk being frozen.
rotten ice-cream.
ices are made of
Bellton Dairy ices
(Isn't that milk,

but:
npt and ways be

even Shakespeare
a fowl is usually
looked, and if it
as their own fault
st.

verse he's worse
nose looks red and

crabs hiss in the

even a playwright
crabs aren't roasted.
Ha, ha! Crabs
the delicious, too!
kens is all that rot
? Whoever heard
espeare must have
pents. A crab isn't
crab. And even a
y well hiss after it

WILKES.—I have
liarly learned re-
s with some in-
should be glad if
wait upon me
morrow evening
then, with the aid
ument I keep in
will try to teach
about the poem
present

The St. Frank's Fortune-Hunters

(Continued from page 20.)

more quickly. Even Lightning sensed that this was no ordinary run, and more than once, when Willy patted him, Willy felt that the dog was quivering.

"Easy, old fellow—easy," murmured Willy. "Nothing to get excited over yet."

They were emerging from the last of the trees and they felt relieved. Before them was a short stretch of rank grass and weeds, with the high back wall of the Moat Hollow grounds looming up near at hand.

The boys would have passed on without a suspicion; but suddenly Lightning came to a full stop, and Willy, bending down, felt that the dog was stiff and taut.

"What is it, old chap?" whispered Willy quickly.

Lightning, a ridge of hair standing up all along his spine, was staring upwards into the branches of one of the gaunt trees. Willy looked up, too, and gulped.

For there, dimly outlined against the evening sky, was a black, crouching shadow.

CHAPTER 12.

The Man in the Tree!

"WHAT is it?" whispered Nipper, instantly on the alert.

"Look!" breathed Willy.

"Lightning spotted him first! We should never have known!"

The faintest of suppressed whines came from the excited, but splendidly trained dog. Nipper and Handforth and the others stared upwards. They, too, saw that mystery figure perched up in the tree.

"Oh!" muttered Handforth hoarsely.

Every one of them felt rather scared. They were not ashamed to admit it. For that crouching figure, so black, so shadowy, was grimly suggestive of evil—of danger. The same thought occurred independently to every boy. Was that Thing up there the gorilla-like Monster of Moat Hollow?

"Wait!" said Handforth tensely "I've got an electric torch——"

And then things happened. The figure in the tree suddenly came to life; it swung down from the high branch, slithering with uncanny skill along one of the great limbs; then it swung outwards, caught a branch lower down and, like a monkey in its agility, it reached the next tree.

"You idiot, Handy!" hissed Nipper.

"That isn't the monster—it's a man! He heard you talking about an electric torch, and he didn't want to be spotted."

"But—but I never dreamed——" began Handforth.

He switched on his torch as he spoke, and for a second the beam of light played upon that escaping figure. The boys saw something black skimming down through the lower branches of another tree.

"He's down—he's on the ground!" muttered Church. "Oh, my hat! Supposing he comes for us?"

"We're ready," said Nipper. "There are plenty of us."

"Go it, Lightning—fetch him!" urged Willy, suddenly releasing the greyhound. "Get him, boy!"

With a whine of eagerness, Lightning streaked off through the undergrowth. By now the mystery figure had completely vanished, and the boys no longer considered the possibility of an attack. For they could faintly hear the breaking of dead twigs as the Black Shadow moved farther and farther away.

"He's bolted," said Mac, not without relief. "Crumbs, he gave me a turn!"

Several torches were flashing now, and the boys went plunging through the wood. There was little fear that their movements had been seen or heard from the grounds of Moat Hollow, and the danger was lessened as they penetrated deeper and deeper into the wood.

Suddenly Willy halted. He was well in the lead with Nipper.

"Hallo!" he exclaimed, in astonishment.

He was staring at Lightning. The greyhound, all his fire subdued, had come trotting back. At the sight of Willy, his ears fell and his tail drooped. He looked up apologetically into his young master's face.

"Well?" demanded Willy sternly. "What do you call this?"

Lightning wagged his tail feebly.

"I can't understand it," said Willy, frowning. "What made him give up the chase? He isn't hurt in any way, and I'll swear that that man could not have got away from him. Why did Lightning give up?"

"What else can you expect?" asked his major tartly. "Lightning's only a greyhound. He's not built for this kind of work, anyhow. Now, if you had a bloodhound as a pet, it would be a jolly sight more sensible."

"It's funny," said Willy slowly. "Something must have happened to make old Lightning give up the chase like that. He's never done such a thing before."

"Perhaps that Mystery Man had a bicycle or a car in the lane?" suggested

Tommy Watson. "Lightning would have been dished——"

"But the man hadn't time to get to the lane," interrupted Nipper. "Oh, well, we've lost him now. There's not an earthly chance of catching up with him, and, what's more, we're none too safe here in the wood. He may be lurking about somewhere, waiting for us."

"No need to worry about that," said Willy. "If he's lurking anywhere Lightning will sniff him out."

"I'm not so sure of Lightning now," growled Handforth. "I'm disappointed in that giddy dog!"

"Rats! He sniffed out the man the first time, didn't he?" retorted Willy.

But he was chipped unmercifully by the others; they concluded that Lightning's abilities had been greatly over-rated by his young master.

It was at Nipper's suggestion that they retraced their steps. They thought it advisable, in the circumstances, to abandon their programme as regards Moat Hollow. But Nipper wanted to have a closer look at the tree where the Mystery Figure had lurked.

"Hallo! This looks like something," murmured Nipper after a while.

They were searching the ground under the trees, and suddenly Nipper had come upon a soft patch of damp earth where a left footprint was clearly impressed. This was the very spot, no doubt, where the man had jumped down from the tree. He must have landed on one foot, for there was only a blurred mark, indicating where the right foot had touched. Thick grass lay beyond, and no footprints were visible.

"I say, this is worth examining," said Nipper, as he went down on his knees. "Look at it, you chaps. The blighter might have made it especially for us."

The imprint was that of a shoe which had been shod with a patented rubber sole, and the design was distinctive. Impressed in the earth were a number of star-pointed circles. There was only one star in the centre of the heel mark, but at the edge of the heel there was a pronounced ridge, proving that the actual heel of the shoe had a jagged cut in it—a cut which might easily have been caused by a sharp flint.

"No mistaking this footprint," said Nipper, as he took a piece of paper from his pocket and drew a rough copy. "It might be worth coming back with some Plaster of Paris, so that we can take a cast."

"By George, that's a good idea!" said Handforth eagerly. "We're not far from the village. Let's buzz there now, get some Plaster of Paris, and make the cast at once."

"But—but why?" asked Church. "What's the good of that footprint?"

"Every good," replied Nipper crisply. "If we can find a man with a shoe identical with this footmark, we shall have made a big discovery."

Breaking through into the lane, they hastened to the village; from Mr. Sharpe's, the ironmonger's, they obtained the necessary Plaster of Paris.

But when they arrived back in the wood they found that somebody had been there before them. That tell-tale footprint was completely obliterated!

CHAPTER 13.

The Expert from London!

TOD MILLAR looked at his watch almost nervously.

"He ought to be here now," he muttered. "Well, everything's ready. You'll keep out of the way, of course, Zingrave."

Professor Zingrave, who was seated at the table inspecting the fateful manuscript, sighed.

"You say such unnecessary things, Millar," he said. "Of course I shall be out of the way."

Tod Millar was not listening; he was looking round the comfortably furnished room, assuring himself that everything was in readiness. He touched a bell, and a quietly dressed man entered—a man who was very obviously a butler.

"Now, Ridley, you know what you've got to do?" asked Tod. "This fellow is due to arrive at any minute. You'll open the door to him and bring him straight here. If he asks you any questions, put him off."

"Leave it to me, Tod," said the butler cheerfully. "This guy is genuine, I understand? Nothing crooked about him, eh?"

"Don't be a fool," retorted Millar. "He is Henri Lebon, one of the cleverest mathematicians in Europe, with a big practice in London. The French police have sought his aid hundreds of times in the solving of ciphers. Scotland Yard has called him in more than once, too."

"Bit risky having him here, isn't it?" asked Ridley.

"Risky nothing," retorted Tod. "Where's the risk, you idiot? As Dr. Ragozin I am a highly respectable member of society. Why shouldn't I invite Lebon here if I want to? I have commissioned him in the ordinary way, and I'm paying him a big fee, too; so if he doesn't come across he'll hear something!"

It was the next day, and the crooks, after spending many weary, brain-fagging hours on Captain Humphrey Rossiter's old manuscript, had decided to secure expert advice. As Millar had said, it was not risky.

Zingrave had definitely declared that the manuscript was in code. And there was no key to it. Perhaps that key was given in the vital missing page, but the chances of recovering that page were growing more and more remote. It had occurred to Zingrave that Monsieur Lebon might be able to solve the cipher without that key. If so, the rest would be plain sailing.

"I think," said Zingrave softly, "that it is time for me to retire."

Tod glanced quickly out of the window. A big limousine had just glided through the open gateway. To the astonishment of the villagers, the big gates of Moat Hollow had been left standing open nearly all the morning. Millar and Zingrave had decided that it would be to their advantage to give Bellton the impression that there were no secrets in the old house. Tradesmen came and tradesmen went, and everything was normal enough.

The man who descended from the limousine was a typical Frenchman; well dressed, even dapper, he was a man considerably over middle age, with iron-grey hair and a small white moustache. His gold-rimmed glasses gave him a learned air.

He had no cause for suspicion after he had knocked, for the door was opened by a dignified-looking butler, and, having given his name, he was ushered through the well-furnished hall and taken to Dr. Ragozin's study.

"This is so good of you, Monsieur Lebon," said Tod, acting his part well, as he came forward with outstretched hand. "I am most grateful. This ancient manuscript, it wearies me. I tire my brain."

"We shall see what can be done," said Monsieur Lebon, smiling. "I gather the matter is of some importance?"

"To me it is so very important," replied Millar quickly. "That is why I am willing to pay you your own fee, monsieur, and to reimburse your expenses. I grow impatient—I grow frantic. No longer can I wait. See, this is it! You, with your expert knowledge, can solve the cipher."

"You are indeed in a great hurry," chuckled Monsieur Lebon, as he sat down and adjusted his glasses. "Oui! I see. Yes. So this is the manuscript. Bien! Most, most interesting."

He turned the crackly parchment sheets with almost loving care; this manuscript, to him, was a thing of beauty. At the

first glance his expert eye could tell that it was genuinely old. Here was a rare and valuable sixteenth century document.

"But this is wonderful!" he cried, looking up, his eyes aglow. "Monsieur, you have the perfect specimen——"

"Yes, yes," interrupted Tod, drumming his fingers impatiently on the desk. "I know the manuscript is of great value. But what of the writing? You can decipher it, yes? It has come into my possession after being lost for many generations. Yes, it is a family document, for I am distantly related to the Rossiters. But that is of no interest to you, Monsieur Lebon. It is the cipher you must solve. There is a message written here; but, as you will see, it does not read with any real sense. Something is hidden."

"Wait," said Lebon keenly. "I shall soon tell you."

He pored over the manuscript with the eagerness of an enthusiast; he turned the parchment sheets again and again. At last he looked up with sadness in his eyes, and he shook his head.

"But the key?" he asked, with a shrug. "There is a sheet missing, monsieur, and it is that sheet which contains the key to this cipher."

Tod nodded.

"Yes, I know," he replied. "It is because of the missing sheet that I have brought you here, Monsieur Lebon. A man of your cleverness, of your brilliance, can no doubt decipher the message without the use of a key."

Monsieur Henri Lebon sat back; with compressed lips he shook his head.

"You take me for the magician, but that I am not," he replied quietly. "Without the key, monsieur, I am as helpless as you."

IT was a blow for Tod Millar, although he did his best to disguise the disappointment he felt. In his rôle of Dr. Ragozin he thought it advisable to grow a little excited.

"You say you cannot do this?" he asked, waving his hands. "Are you sure? Look! Look again! You are too quick, my friend."

"I have looked—and, I repeat, without the key sheet I am helpless," replied the visitor.

"And I pay you the big fee for this?" demanded Tod.

"You are excited, mon ami, or you would not speak in that way," said Lebon. "You arrange for me to come, and I guarantee nothing. That was understood, was it not? By telling you the truth at once, I not only save my own time, but I save you some money. I should be the fraud if I pretended that I could do the impossible."

He was closely examining the manuscript again, and his eyes were hidden from Tod

Millar; and now there was a steely, menacing light in those eyes.

"I urge you, monsieur," said Tod earnestly. "You must look carefully——"

"You will come here, please," said Lebon, suddenly looking up and pointing to the manuscript. "You will see——"

As Tod Millar bent over, the point of his chin was thrust forward. The right-hander to Tod's jaw was extraordinarily neat. Monsieur Lebon knew exactly what he was doing, and his clenched fist was as hard as a sledge-hammer. There was apparently very little effort behind that blow, but its force was terrific.

Tod Millar took it on the point, and it was the most unexpected thing that had ever hap-

"I'm sorry, sir," said Ridley, in a flurry. "I didn't hear the bell——"

"The bell, it was not rung," said the visitor. "Monsieur Ragozin, your master, is very busy and is not to be disturbed. The door, please."

The audacity of the whole episode was startling. Ridley deferentially opened the door, and Monsieur Henri Lebon passed out. Without hindrance he escaped—taking that precious manuscript with him.



Excitedly, the boys examined the footprint of the dapper gentleman who had just passed. "My only sainted aunt!" gasped Handforth. "He's the Black Shadow!"

pened in his life. He went over backwards like a poleaxed bull, his knees collapsing. He sagged to the floor, and so soft was the carpet that he fell almost noiselessly.

"I am sorry, mon ami," murmured Monsieur Lebon coolly, "but it was necessary."

Very coolly, very deliberately, he gathered up the sheets of the ancient manuscript. He placed them in the inner pocket of his overcoat, buttoned up his coat, and then secured his hat and gloves. He glanced back at Tod Millar, who was decidedly "out"; then he opened the door, passed into the hall, and Ridley, the butler, appeared from another doorway.

"You will show me out, please," said Monsieur Lebon briefly.

The limousine had gone, but monsieur seemed in no way surprised. He turned out of the gateway, and a moment later he was walking briskly.

Back in Moat Hollow, Tod Millar slowly recovered.

His first sensations, upon sitting up, were unpleasant. His head was throbbing agonisingly; his jaw felt as though it had been dislocated. Then, as memory returned, he struggled unsteadily to his feet.

"What—what happened?" he muttered dazedly. "I don't seem to know——"

He looked round, his eyes staring. He was alone in the room. Monsieur Lebon had gone, and——

The manuscript!

It was no longer on the desk. And then it was that Tod Millar realised the truth. He had a fleeting recollection of Lebon's fist coming up— Yes, that was it! It was Lebon who had knocked him out!

Tod Millar staggered to the door and pulled it open. Ridley was just outside—Ridley being a somewhat inquisitive individual.

"Sorry!" he gasped. "I didn't know—I heard you moving about, and I wondered—"

"Never mind what you wondered," snarled Tod. "Where's that Frenchman?"

"Gone, of course," said Ridley, staring.

"Gone?" screamed Tod. "When? How long?"

"Why, nearly ten minutes ago, I should think," replied Ridley, in amazement. "What's happened, Tod?"

"You fool—you hopeless, blundering fool!" raved Tod Millar. "You let him get away! I don't know who he was, or what his game is—but he's got that manuscript! Knocked me clean out—and then he walked off the premises! And you let him go!"

CHAPTER 14.

The Footprint!

NIPPER and several other Removites hurried through the St. Frank's gateway. Morning lessons were over, and they were bent upon taking a brisk walk down to the village.

"It's a fact, you chaps," Handforth was saying. "I heard it from old Browne, who just came up from the village. The Moat Hollow gates are standing wide open. Yes, and somebody drove in with a whacking great car not long ago."

"Well, you can't exactly call that mysterious, Handy," said Nipper, with a chuckle. "Still, we might as well take a walk down and have a look."

"There's too much delay," growled Handforth. "Days go by, and nothing happens! Thank goodness we're going over to Edgemore Castle to-night. Mr. Lee, too. Perhaps something will be fixed."

Half-way down the lane they beheld a stranger; a smartly-dressed, dapper, elderly gentleman with a white moustache. He was walking with little mincing steps, and there was a jauntiness in his attitude which seemed to indicate that he was at peace with the world.

"Who's the old boy?" asked Handforth suspiciously.

"Oh, a desperate crook, I suppose," said Church, with a sniff.

"By George! You're probably right!"

"Fathead!" said Church. "You stare at every stranger you meet as though he were a criminal in the dock! Anybody can see, with half an eye, that this old fellow is harmless."

Monsieur Henri Lebon hardly glanced at the boys as they passed him; and they, for their part, only gave him a casual look.

Handforth was the exception; he scrutinised Monsieur Lebon with frank curiosity.

"There you are—I knew it!" whispered Church. "You rude rotter, Handy! Was there any need to stare like that?"

"I wasn't staring—I was only giving him a careful scrutiny," said Handforth. "And, what's more, I don't like the look of him! Did you twig his shifty eyes? Crook's eyes, if ever I saw any!"

"Oh, come on!" said Travers.

But Nipper was standing perfectly still, and he was staring fixedly down upon the road surface. Then, almost like a fellow in a dream, he turned and stared back at the retreating Lebon.

"What's up, Nipper?" asked Watson quickly.

"That stranger!" said Nipper in a tense voice. "He walked over this soft, muddy spot a few seconds ago. I distinctly saw him—because, at first, I had an idea that he would walk round it. Then I noticed this footprint."

"Eh? What?"

"Footprint?"

They all stared down—and gasped. For there could be no mistaking that impress. A shoe with a rubber sole had made that mark—and there were the unmistakable star-pointed circles. Yes, and there was even that little ridge at the heel.

"But—but this is idiotic!" protested Handforth blankly. "The man who left this footprint is the same— My only sainted aunt! He's the Black Shadow of Bellton Wood!"

"Not a doubt about it," agreed Nipper grimly.

"Oh, my hat!"

"But—but what are we going to do?"

"I'll show you what we're going to do," retorted Nipper. "Come on—everybody! It's just luck that we've hit upon him like this. I believe Handy's right—that man is a crook in disguise."

"I knew it!" gasped Handforth excitedly. "What did I tell you?"

"If we let him go now, we might never have another chance of grabbing him," said Nipper swiftly. "Come on! It's a golden opportunity."

They went racing up the lane, their minds more or less in a whirl. It seemed so fantastic—so unbelievable—that the creature of the wood could be the learned-looking, elderly gentleman who had so recently passed them. Yet how could there be any doubt? Those footprints were identical!

"We won't ask any questions—we'll just down him!" said Nipper, as they ran. "We can ask questions afterwards."

Monsieur Henri Lebon suspected nothing; even when the boys came running up behind him he only glanced back casually. Clearly, he believed that they were running straight on into the school premises. Then came the shock. For the Removites, with one accord, hurled themselves forcibly upon the stranger.

"On him!"

"Keep him down!"

"Hurrah!"

Monsieur Lebon went flying. He had no chance to escape. Juniors swarmed all over him and held him down.

"Wait—wait!" he panted. "You do not understand——"

"Oh, don't we?" said Handforth. "We understand all right! You're a crook, and we've bowled you out!"

Nipper, at this moment, had succeeded in tearing open the stranger's overcoat—and the first thing he saw was that precious, ancient manuscript.

"Look—look at this!" ejaculated Nipper, in wonder and joy. "It's Captain Humphrey's manuscript!"

"By George!" gurgled Handforth, breathless with excitement. "That's proved it, then! This man is one of those crooks."

Monsieur Lebon laughed.

"You youngsters are certainly enthusiastic," he said dryly. "And now, if you don't mind, I'd like to get to my feet."

Nipper stared at him in bewilderment.

"Guv'nor!" he gasped.

For the voice of Monsieur Henri Lebon was the voice of Nelson Lee!

CHAPTER 15.

Nelson Lee Explains!

IT was more than a surprise—it was a shock.

The boys leapt away from their prisoner as though he had suddenly become electrified. And "Lebon" rather painfully got to his feet.

"Except for four or five bruises, a grazed elbow, two loosened teeth, and a lump on the back of my head, I have escaped unharmed," said Lee.

"I say, guv'nor, we're dreadfully sorry——" began Nipper.

"It's all right—I'm not blaming you," interrupted Lee, his eyes twinkling. "I'll have that manuscript, if you don't mind, young'un."

"Look here—we'd better be careful," said Handforth. "How do we know that this is Mr. Lee? He may be trying to fool us——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Good old Handy!"

The others chuckled. They were perfectly satisfied regarding the "stranger's" identity.

"Fortunately, the little incident was not witnessed by anybody else," said Lee, glancing up and down the lane. "There is one thing I would like to know. Why did you boys suspect me? I don't mind admitting that I have received a jolt—in more senses than one. I fancied that my make-up was impenetrable."

"It wasn't that, sir," said Nipper. "It was your footprint."

"Oh?"

"Great Scott!" ejaculated Handforth, staring. "I'd forgotten about that footprint! How do you account——"

"We had better not talk here," put in Nelson Lee. "Come with me—straight to my study."

They followed him, freshly bewildered. Anybody who saw them crossing the Triangle and going into Inner Court thought nothing. Merely a handful of juniors escorting a stranger to the Head's house. Thus they came to Nelson Lee's study, and after they had crowded in, Lee closed the door.

"Wait just one minute," he said briefly.

He vanished behind a screen, was absent for a minute or two, and when he emerged the grey hair and the white moustache had gone; the lines and wrinkles had vanished. He was Nelson Lee once again.

"Now," he said, sitting down, "are you quite satisfied, Handforth, that I am not a criminal in disguise?"

"Yes, rather, sir," said Handforth sheepishly.

"First of all, I want to hear about those footprints," said Lee. "You suspected me, I understand, because of my footprint. Why was that?"

He listened interestedly while they told him of the adventure of the previous night; once he started, and nodded.

"That was very smart of you, Nipper," he said approvingly, at length. "So you took careful note of that footprint, and even tried to make a plaster cast of it? I'm sorry I spoilt your little game—for I returned soon afterwards, remembering that I might have left a tell-tale mark. It was I who obliterated it."

"You!" said all the boys, in one voice.

"I," nodded Lee calmly. "I, in fact, was the mysterious Black Shadow."

"Oh, crumbs!"

"Well I'm jiggered!"

"And—and we thought you were a crook, sir."

"Apparently, it is one of your hobbies to mistake me for a crook," said Lee, with a smile. "Yet I don't blame you. I knew who you were, of course, and the reason I bolted was because I wished to mystify you somewhat."

"I say, guv'nor, wasn't that a bit thick?" protested Nipper.

"No; it was necessary," replied Lee. "I could not risk any interference with my plans. If I had revealed myself to you then and there, you might have used my name—and we were very near to Moat Hollow. My one object was to get away, to distract your attention from that tree, and the attention of anybody else who might have been near at hand."

"But why distract our attention from that tree, sir?" asked Skeets, in wonder.

"You can tell your minor, Handforth, that Lightning is a very excellent dog," continued Lee. "Lightning caught up with me almost at once—and would, indeed, have given me a nasty two minutes. Fortunately, he recognised me at once. Lightning and I are great friends, you know. He went back at my word of command."

"Well I'm blessed!" said Nipper. "So that explains it! We wondered why Lightning had failed so miserably. Naturally, finding

that you were a friend, he just came back to us."

"With regard to that tree, I was, as a matter of fact, engaged in a somewhat nefarious business," pursued Lee, becoming serious. "I didn't intend to tell you boys about this, but you have forced my hand. I was breaking all the post-office regulations by listening-in to the Moat Hollow telephone."

"Oh, what an ass!" growled Nipper. "Why couldn't I have thought of a simple thing like that?"

"You see, that same morning—yesterday morning—I had a visitor," explained Lee. "He was a man who came to the school to steal that sheet of parchment. And he could have only received his instructions by telephone. That put an idea into my head. Perhaps the Moat Hollow people would make further plans by 'phone. It did not take me long to tap the wires, and to provide myself with a comfortable little cyrie in that tree."

"How long had you been there, sir?" asked Nipper.

"For a few hours—and I was prepared to listen-in for many hours longer," replied Lee quietly. "I was 'on the wire' when Ragozin got through to Monsieur Henri Lebon—a man, by the way, for whom I have the most profound respect. I recognised Lebon's voice at once, for he and I are old acquaintances. I knew, then, that there could be no crookedness in the transaction. Ragozin urged him to come down to examine an old manuscript,

and he offered to pay an extravagant fee. Lebon promised to come to-day."

"Then where is he, sir?" asked Handforth, in surprise.

"Monsieur Lebon is on his way to Berlin," replied Lee cheerfully: "and somehow I don't think the Moat Hollow people will now have any use for his services."

CHAPTER 16.

Preparing for Action!

AS Nelson Lee spoke, he tapped his fingers upon the precious Rossiter manuscript.

"Ye gods and little fishes!" ejaculated Nipper, his eyes gleaming. "I see what you mean, sir! Ragozin wanted this man Lebon to read that old manuscript. But it's no good now, because the manuscript is here."

"How did you get it, sir?" asked Skeets, in wonder and joy. "Oh, this is just marvellous! Dad will be tickled to death! Say, you're a wonder, sir."

"Yes, rather!" chorused the others

"It's—it's almost unbelievable," went on Skeets, his enthusiasm carrying him away. "Those crooks had this manuscript, and we saw no hope of getting it. And now, slick and clean, you spring it out! Shucks! I shall wake up soon."

Nelson Lee laughed.



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.

GIVING THE GAME AWAY.

Teacher (inspecting home-work): "Why do you do your sums in the old-fashioned way, Tommy? Smith's is quite different."

Tommy: Well, he has a father, and I've only a grandfather."

(L. Jarman, 12, Cross Street, Rhymney, Wales, has been awarded a handsome watch.)

ONE BY ONE.

It was Jimmy's birthday, and his aunt had given him a box of chocolates.

"Don't eat all those at once or you will be ill," warned his mother.

"No, mummy," replied Jimmy. "I'll eat them one by one."

(K. Shardlow, 7, Milner Road, Sherwood, Nottingham, has been awarded a penknife.)

A BLUNDER.

1st Burglar: "Any luck lately, mate?"

2nd Burglar: "No, I worked all night on a butcher's safe, and when I blew it open I found it was a refrigerator."

(J. Luck, 12, Barnet Lane, Barnet, has been awarded a pocket wallet.)

TOO HIGH.

Hard-up traveller: "What are the prices of your rooms?"

Landlord: "Ground floor one pound, first floor sixteen shillings, second floor twelve shillings."

Traveller: "H'm! I'll come back when you've added a few more storeys to your house."

(H. Ordhume, 42, Stock Orchard Crescent, Holloway, London, N.7, has been awarded a penknife.)

NEITHER.

Jones: "Is John's new dog a setter or a pointer?"

Brown: "It's neither. It's an upsetter, and a disappointment."

(S. Allen, 19, Fishergate, Magdalen Street, Norwich, has been awarded a penknife.)

CAUGHT.

Willie: "D'you know, I haven't slept for three whole days."

Billy: "You don't say! And why not?"

Willie: "I only sleep at night time."

(D. Campbell, 70a, Op De Bergers Street, Fair-

'You forget, boys, that I had all the advantage of the crooks,' he said.

'We don't forget that you took your life in your hands when you entered Moat Hollow—alone,' said Nipper gruffly. 'Guv'nor, it was awfully risky.'

'In my profession, Nipper, very little of value is gained without risk,' replied Lee.

'But why did those rotters want this Frenchman?' asked Handforth wonderingly. 'Why couldn't they read the manuscript themselves? It's not written in French, is it?'

'Monsieur Lebon is one of the world's greatest experts on secret codes and ciphers, Handforth,' explained Lee. 'Now, as I myself suspected, this manuscript does not read in a plain, straightforward way. It is, in fact, written in cipher.'

'Oh!'

'Our friends at Moat Hollow could make nothing of it—mainly because they were not in possession of the key sheet,' continued Lee. 'So they thought, by inducing Lebon to come down, that they might be able to make progress.'

'And you went there instead of Monsieur Lebon, sir?' asked Nipper.

'It struck me that the opportunity was too good to be missed,' said the detective. 'These people did not know Lebon, except by reputation. It was not even necessary for me to impersonate him. I went to London in the early hours, saw Lebon, and, although

he was not very much in love with the idea, he consented to what I proposed. So, you see, it was I who visited Moat Hollow—knowing, of course, that I should have that manuscript placed right into my hands.'

'How did you get out, sir?' asked Nipper eagerly.

'I am afraid my methods were crude,' said Lee, with regret. 'I—er—'socked' Dr. Ragozin on the jaw and then quietly walked off the premises.'

The boys listened in glee as they heard of that daring episode.

'The car I used was a hired one,' explained Lee. 'I had already told the chauffeur to drive away—for I should not need it any more. I reckoned upon getting well up the lane before there could be any alarm. And I judged that the crooks would not think of looking in the direction of the school. They would make inquiries concerning that car, and they would probably trace it, only to find that it returned to London empty. By that time I should be back in my own personality, and—'

'I say, that was brilliant, sir,' interrupted Nipper. 'Even now those crooks are searching, I expect. But won't it be a bit rough on Monsieur Lebon?'

'I think not,' replied Lee, with a laugh. 'It so happened that Monsieur Lebon had a very important engagement in Berlin to-day, which, in consequence of my arrangement with him, he was able to keep. He left

view, Johannesburg, S. Africa, has been awarded a useful prize.)

BROKE.

Molly: 'Mummy, do you know what Dick and I have bought you?'

Mother: 'I can't guess, dear.'

Molly: 'A rose bowl.'

Mother: 'But I already have one.'

Molly: 'Not now. We've broken it.'

(J. Ronald, 25, Bell Terrace, Westmorland Road, Newcastle-on-Tyne, has been awarded a pocket wallet.)

A ROTTEN REF.

Football referee (to severe and loud-mouthed critic): 'Who's refereeing this game—me or you?'

Critic: 'Neither of us!'

(A. Hill, 17, Richmond Hill, Luton, has been awarded a penknife.)

ONE BETTER.

Teacher (after telling class about famous inventors): 'Now, Bertie, what would you like to invent?'

Bertie: 'Well, sir, I'd like to invent a machine so that by pressing a button, all my lessons would be done.'

Teacher (severely): 'That's very lazy of you, my boy. Willie Wilson, what would you invent?'

Willie Wilson: 'Something to press the button.'

(E. Joslin, 44, Lower Anchor Street, Chelmsford, has been awarded a pocket wallet.)

UNSETTLING.

Boarder: 'Having this duck for dinner is like a summer's day.'

Landlady: 'Why?'

Boarder: 'It's very rare.'

Landlady: 'And your bill is like the weather we get now.'

Boarder: 'Why?'

Landlady: 'It's unsettled.'

(A. Jones, 79, Albany Road, Camberwell, London, S.E.5, has been awarded a penknife.)

THE PROBLEM.

The old gentleman had rubbed his coat against some railings which were being painted.

'Why don't you put 'Wet Paint' on these railings?' complained the man angrily to the painter.

'Well, if I'm not putting on wet paint, what am I doing?' retorted the painter in surprise.

(T. Langton, 135, Nightingale Lane, Hornsey, London, N.8, has been awarded a penknife.)



London early this morning. The crooks will discover, sooner or later, that the real Lebon was out of England at the time, and they will no doubt put two and two together and get at the truth. Meanwhile, we have this manuscript. Not one single sheet of it, but the whole lot."

The boys could only marvel at the detective's daring and resource. He was beating the crooks all along the line. Coolly, deliberately, he had been forcing his attack. And so successful had been his efforts that he was now in possession of the fateful manuscript.

"What's the next move, guv'nor?" asked Nipper.

"We'll wait until this evening," said Nelson Lee. "We'll have a talk with Lord Edgemore, and something definite, I dare say, can be arranged. You boys will realise, of course, that I could not have taken any official action with regard to the Moat Hollow people, because I had absolutely no evidence."

"That's where you have the advantage of the official police, sir," said Nipper. "You don't have to abide by rules and regulations."

Lee nodded.

"I might, of course, have obtained a search warrant—but I even doubt that," he said. "And searching the house, with the assistance of the police, would have been risky. The crooks, in their extremity, might have destroyed the manuscript. And I could not take that chance. Even now my evidence is flimsy; there is only my word against theirs. It is possible that we may be able to pounce tomorrow, or the next day, but I shall not be able to get a warrant for the arrest of these men until I can produce my proofs."

Skeets was bubbling with excitement.

"Dad and I will never be able to thank you for all you're doing, sir," he said huskily. "I guess it's just wonderful! But even now we're not on safe ground, are we? If the treasure is buried at all, it's buried at Moat Hollow."

"That's just it," said Lee slowly. "And Moat Hollow is lawfully leased by Dr. Ragozin. Still, Skeets, there may be some way of getting round that."

"And what about the cipher, sir?" went on Skeets. "How shall we be able to read the manuscript? Do you think you'll be able to solve that cipher?"

"We'll have a try," replied Lee kindly. "Somehow I think we ought to succeed."

"It's a cert, Skeets, old man," said Nipper. "When the guv'nor starts something, he always finishes it!"

CHAPTER 17.

The Secret of the Manuscript!

THE Earl of Edgemore welcomed his guests with all his old warmth and heartiness. Except for the haggard lines of his face, he showed little sign of the crushing blow which had shattered his fortunes.

Edgemore Castle was a fine old pile, one of the noblest in England. It would be tragic, indeed, if this ancestral home of the Edgemores was put up for auction. Yet this would undoubtedly happen unless—as the earl himself said—a miracle occurred. And the only miracle that *could* occur was the finding of the old treasure.

The fine dining-hall was warm and comfortable as the earl sat at dinner with his guests. The boys, of course, wanted to speak of the treasure at once; but Lord Edgemore and Nelson Lee turned the conversation into other directions. Nothing was said about the real object of this party until the dinner was over, and until they had all congregated in the comfortable library. Soft lights were glowing here, and a big fire was blazing in the old-fashioned grate.

"I guess you boys are just burning to talk of the treasure, eh?" said his lordship dryly, as he stood with his back to the blaze. "I wish I could be as enthusiastic as you. But I've seen a good deal of the world, lads, and I've had some grievous disappointments. I don't intend to be disappointed this time. That's why I've practically made up my mind that the Edgemore treasure will never be recovered."

"But, dad, you haven't heard!" said Skeets breathlessly. "Oh, shucks! I've been wanting to tell you ever since we arrived, but nobody would let me speak. Mr. Lee has got the whole manuscript."

The earl nearly dropped his cigar.

"You must be mistaken, lad!" he said hoarsely. "Those people at Moat Hollow——"

"Mr. Lee took it from them," interrupted Skeets. "Oh, it was one of the neatest things you ever heard of."

Nelson Lee laughed, and, without delay, he explained how the manuscript had come into his possession. Lord Edgemore's whole manner changed; he became flushed, his eyes glowed, and he examined the manuscript almost feverishly.

"This is different," he said. "Yes, with this manuscript in our possession, the whole situation is altered. Yes, yes, I see! The page which Handforth found fits in here. Exactly! Don't you think we'd better read it, Mr. Lee?"

"It would not be a bad idea," laughed Lee.

"Couldn't you read it out, sir, so that we could all hear?" asked Handforth eagerly.

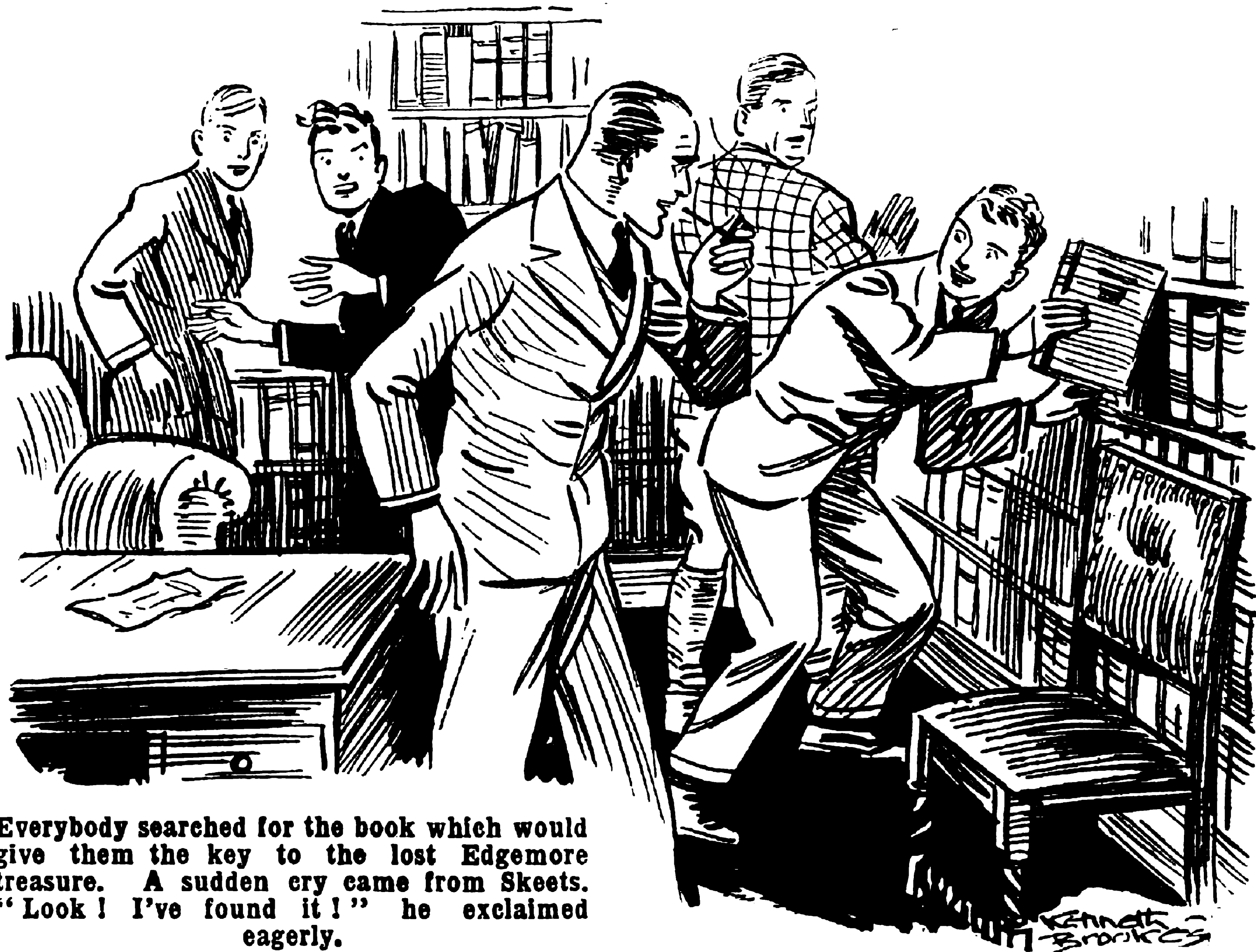
They were all fired by the thoughts of unearthing the treasure, and they could see that Lord Edgemore himself was beginning to share some of their enthusiasm.

Lord Edgemore and Lee sat at the desk side by side; they went over the pages of faded handwriting carefully, and the boys gathered round, watching and listening.

"This is bad," commented Lee after some time. "I'm afraid we were wrong about that separate page."

"Wrong, sir?" asked Handforth quickly. "Do you mean the one I found—the page with the plan on it?"

"Yes," replied Lee. "I had believed—and I think the crooks had the same idea—that



Everybody searched for the book which would give them the key to the lost Edgemore treasure. A sudden cry came from Skeets. "Look! I've found it!" he exclaimed eagerly.

that page contained the key to the cipher. But such is not the case. There is nothing here to lead us to the truth."

"Then—then we can't read it at all?" asked Skeets, in dismay.

The spirits of all the boys were dampened. Nelson Lee's announcement disturbed them.

"We can read everything that Captain Humphrey has written, but that does not mean a great deal," said Lord Edgemore, pursing his lips. "So far as I can make out, the whole thing is a rambling account of Captain Humphrey's voyage. There are certain references to treasure—to sea-chests, and so forth—but as for any directions, they are completely lacking. Once or twice, too, the Traitor's Lodge is mentioned. But it is all very involved—and very difficult to understand."

"Gee! Does that mean that we shan't get the treasure, dad?" asked Skeets.

His father did not reply. Nelson Lee was frowning as he read. Then he rose to his feet, and, lighting his pipe, he paced up and down.

"There is something more in this," he said after a while. "We cannot expect to progress very rapidly, boys. We must always remember that Captain Humphrey had hidden an enormous fortune, and he took extraordinary pains to keep the hiding-place a secret. Even in his directions as to the situation of that hiding-place, he maintained his caution. It might take days to discover the key to this cipher—and yet, on the other

hand, we may hit upon it within half an hour."

He went back to the desk, and once again he examined the plan and that crabbed, faded handwriting. After a few minutes, however, the detective rose to his feet, shaking his head.

"This is all extremely puzzling," he said, frowning. "If only we could get the clue. One moment," he added, as a sudden thought struck him. "By James! I wonder— Let me look at that first sheet again, Lord Edgemore."

He took it, and there was a new gleam in his eyes.

CHAPTER 18.

Skeets' Discovery!

"WHAT is it, guv'nor?" asked Nipper quickly.

"It may be nothing," replied Lee. "But it strikes me that there is something significant in this queer bit of doggerel verse."

"Queer?" repeated Lord Edgemore. "Slightly morbid, perhaps, but I don't see that it is queer."

"It is queer in the sense that it is apparently placed at the commencement of the manuscript without reason," explained Lee. "Why is it there at all? There is no further reference to it—and no logical reason why it should have been written at all."

The first page of the old manuscript was covered, at the top, with a lot of ornamental scroll work. There were the words, in printed characters, with many flourishes—"Spanish Treasure." Beneath this were the further words: "A Record of the Voyage of Captain Humphrey Rossiter."

The account which followed was an involved narrative, and it might well have been a mere account of Captain Humphrey's travels. But if this was actually the case, why had Captain Humphrey taken such pains to hide the manuscript? Hidden somewhere within this clumsily-written story was another story—giving the hiding-place of the treasure. Lee was convinced of this.

And he was particularly interested in the four lines of doggerel which appeared at the top of the actual narrative:

*"The night is black and still;
The churchyard lays ahead;
The shadow on the lonely hill;
Gives peace unto the dead."*

"H'm! It is certainly puzzling," said Lord Edgemore. "As you say, Mr. Lee, there is no valid reason for commencing the manuscript with that atrocious piece of verse."

"The very crudity of it is suggestive," said Lee. "It seems to me that it might hide something else—some inner meaning. Otherwise, why should Captain Humphrey have written it at all?"

Skeets was walking up and down with a look of concentration on his face.

"'The night is black and still; the churchyard lays ahead—' Gee! I've never heard that rhyme before, but there's something about it that seems reminiscent of something else. Now, where have I heard— No, I must be wrong, I guess."

"Do you think the treasure is buried in the old churchyard, sir?" asked Handforth eagerly.

"Hardly," replied Lee, shaking his head. "No, we must look more closely into this rhyme. The line which intrigues me most is the third one—'The shadow on the lonely hill.' What hill? And what shadow? And if the night is black, how could there be a shadow at all?"

"That's funny," said Nipper with a start. "I mean, those two words—'Black' and 'Shadow.' We chaps have been talking a lot about the Black Shadow, but we meant—"

"Jumping gee!" yelled Skeets excitedly.

"Really, my boy," protested his father. "What on earth—"

"Dad—dad!" gasped Skeets, his eyes blazing. "Don't you remember? I believe we've got it! Those two words—'Black' and 'Shadow.' Mr. Lee is right! They're the two words which are important in that verse. The Black Shadow! If you look carefully, you can see that the other words don't mean anything."

"That does not necessarily follow, young 'un," said Lee gently.

"Of course it doesn't," agreed Lord Edgemore. "Really, Skeets, I wish you wouldn't get me all jumpy like this."

"I'm wondering if it would be profitable to examine these raro volumes on your library shelves?" asked Lee, as he walked round. "You have some amazingly fine literary treasures here, Lord Edgemore."

His lordship shrugged.

"I'm a rancher, sir," he said simply. "I don't know much about old literature. To my mind they look like a fusty lot of old rubbish."

Skeets was almost dancing in his excitement.

COMING NEXT WEDNESDAY!



"Please listen to me, sir!" he said, grabbing Nelson Lee by the arm. "You've hit it again! You say that there might be something on these old shelves. Well, there is something. That's what I've been trying to tell you. A week or two ago, when dad and I were going over these books, we found a manuscript volume, hundreds and hundreds of years old. Do you know, sir, it was actually written by a Friar of St. Francis."

"Very interesting, Skeets, but—"

"Shucks! Do listen, sir," said Skeets. "Think of it—a volume written by a friar of the old monastery. That must have been before St. Frank's was even a school. St. Frank's was named after the monastery, wasn't it, sir?"

"Of course," agreed Lee.

"Well, sir, that book I am talking about is called 'The Black Shadow'! Now, what have you got to say, sir?"

Lee looked at him hard.

"Show me that book, Skeets!" he said, and there was a world of tenseness in his voice.

CHAPTER 19.

The Key to the Edgemore Treasure!

EVERYBODY was excited now. Skeets had certainly sprung a bomb-shell. Considering the nature of that doggerel verse, and the inclusion of

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those two fateful words, the discovery of a book called "The Black Shadow" was certainly significant.

There was a wild scramble; everybody was searching at once. Lord Edgemore himself was as keen as the boys. It was Skeets who found the volume, and it proved to be a sadly musty and dilapidated affair. But Nelson Lee discovered, soon enough, that it was intact.

The volume itself was of a religious nature—as was to be expected, considering that it was written by a friar. None of the searchers was interested in the text of the book, however.

"This writing, so interesting in itself, must have been quite old even in Captain Humphrey's day," said Lee, after a brief

inspection. "Well, we have progressed so far. Now we must try to find out just how this book affects Humphrey's manuscript."

"I can't see how it can affect it at all," said Lord Edgemore helplessly. "There's absolutely no connection. In fact, I believe that we're on a wrong trail. It is merely a coincidence——"

"No; there is a definite connection," interrupted Lee. "I have an idea that we shall discover that Humphrey was a cunning rogue. Let's get down to it."

Something of interest turned up at once. No sooner had they started a careful examination of the friar's book than they saw that certain words, at irregular intervals, were underscored. The original writing of the old friar was faded, but legible enough, and the underscoring had been done with an ink which had not lost its colour so much; therefore the underlining stood out prominently.

"This must be the real message, surely?" said the earl eagerly. "These underlined words, lifted from the rest of text, will probably convey a message——"

"I hardly think so," interrupted Lee. "That would be far too simple. Anybody opening this book would at once note the underscoring, and then the reading of the message would be child's play. Now, let us see. 'Heaven—but—notwithstanding—believe—mercy—it—word—truth.' You see, it is just so much jumble. It cannot mean anything."

"Then why are the words underlined, sir?" asked Nipper.

"In order to understand that, I think we must have a look at Captain Humphrey's manuscript again," said Lee, who was now thoroughly aroused. "If this friar's book is connected, we shall soon discover the connection."

He commenced reading Captain Humphrey's manuscript:

"Of my voyaging out to the great ocean I shall say little. But let it be understood that in one Spanish town the wall was of crude stone and of length full eighty yards. When I sailed farther into the west I was then fortunate enough to mark a most wondrous tree."

"You will notice that it is all disjointed and scrappy," remarked Lee, frowning. "Without any warning, he jumps from the wall of a Spanish town, and then refers to some tree. It may be, of course, that the man was a poor scholar—and that could be easily understood, since in those days the great majority of people could neither read nor write. But it seems to me—— One minute! By James! Why on earth didn't I think of it before?"

He turned quickly to the friar's book, and glanced at the front page.

"Count these words, Nipper," he said. "Which is the first under-lined word?"

Nipper carefully counted.

"The twenty-fourth," he said.

"The twenty-fourth," murmured Lee, rapidly counting the words on the manuscript. "Hallo! This is interesting, at least. The twenty-fourth word here is 'wall.' Now the next, Nipper—the next underlined word."

"There are two, sir," said Nipper. "The ninth and tenth after the first one."

"The ninth and tenth," repeated Lee, counting. "Yes, the ninth and tenth words here are 'eighty yards.' We're getting on, Lord Edgemore. It begins to read sense. You see? Wall, eighty yards."

"Upon my soul!" gasped Lord Edgemore. "You—you mean that if we go through this book and the manuscript in conjunction, and find the corresponding words— But let me think. The underlined words in the friar's book must be followed, and the corresponding words in Captain Humphrey's manuscript will read into the actual directions to the treasure?"

"That seems to be the case," said Lee. "At least, we are making progress. Now, Nipper, the next underlined word, please, counting from those last two."

"The seventh."

"The word here is 'west,'" nodded Lee. "Go on—the next."

"The third."

"And the next."

"The fourth—and the fourth again."

"We've got it," said Lee, his voice full of satisfaction. "Don't you understand, Lord Edgemore? Listen to this—'Wall, eighty yards west, then mark tree—'"

"Yes, yes, of course," said the earl in agitation. "It is amazing!"

"Go on, sir!" exclaimed Handforth.

"My dear chap, there's no frantic hurry," smiled Lee. "We seem to have got the key now, and the rest will be merely a matter of painstaking work. You see, without the key book, Captain Humphrey's manuscript is absolutely useless. It would be almost impossible to pick out the true message. In just the same way, the friar's book, with its underlined words, is of no use at all. The two must be put together. Now we can understand the meaning of that doggerel verse, at the commencement. It is the clue to the key-book."

"You were right about Captain Humphrey being cunning, sir," said Skeets breathlessly. "Gee! Whoever would have thought of a wheeze like that?"

Nelson Lee closed both the manuscript and the book, and placed one on the top of the other.

"Now, I think, we'll go back to St. Frank's," he said calmly.

"Oh!"

It was a shout of disappointment.

"It is getting very near to bed-time," said Lee with a smile. "There is no earthly reason why you boys should be up half the night."

"But it won't take all that time, sir," protested Handforth.

"It will at least take two or three hours," replied Nelson Lee. "Lord Edgemore and I can quite comfortably manage this little task. I am going to suggest, Lord Edgemore, that you should come along with us. Then we can go into this quietly in the seclusion of my study."

"Why not stay here, Mr. Lee?" asked the earl. "The boys can return to St. Frank's without you."

"Yes, perhaps it would be as well," agreed Lee. "Thank you. I will."

"There may be interruptions at the school," said the earl significantly. "Those infernal people have attacked you more than once—"

And it was at that moment that the lights went out.

CHAPTER 20.

The Figures in Black!

CRASH!

Before anybody could utter an exclamation, or move an inch, there came a devastating crash from the window. The glass splintered inwards, clattering noisily to the floor. At the same moment the door burst open and two shadowy figures entered.

Two more could be seen framed in the window. Like miniature searchlight beams, four dazzling electric torches concentrated their light upon the two men and the school-boys.

"Hands up—everybody!" rapped out a strange voice.

The surprise was complete.

"You—Lee!" went on the voice sharply. "Up with them! Make one false move, and you'll be dropped dead!"

Nelson Lee's hands went up without hesitation.

"Obey, boys—you, too Lord Edgemore!" he said, his voice full of urgency. "We are at a hopeless disadvantage."

Some of the boys half-expected Lee to leap into action. The detective had an automatic pistol in his pocket, but he knew that to reach for it would mean death. There was no escaping from those beams of light.

And behind them he could just glimpse the four black-gowned figures—covered so completely that even their faces and hands were hidden. Each held a pistol in his hand.

Lee was thinking quickly. These men must have been on the watch—they had seen Lee and the boys arrive; since then they probably had been listening outside the windows. Now they had gained an entry. There were very few servants at the castle—and these had either been dealt with, or they knew nothing of what was taking place.

Lee blamed himself for being surprised in this way; but it had never occurred to him that the crooks would take such a desperate risk as this. At Edgemore Castle, Lee had felt that he was safe from any attack.

One of the black figures moved forward, and Skeets uttered a cry. For the man had reached the desk, and with one movement he had seized the precious manuscript and the just-as-precious volume.

"Dad!" shouted Skeets. "They're taking —"

"Hush, lad!" warned his father. "We can do nothing."

Handforth emitted a sound like an overheated boiler, and he took a half-lurching step forward.

"Stand your ground, Handforth," commanded Lee sharply. "Steady yourself!"

And Handforth, gulping, obeyed.

In a moment the black figure had gone—passing out through the window.

"Stand just where you are," commanded one of the attackers. "Thank you, gentlemen. The little interlude is over. We are going—but I must warn you that if you show yourselves at the door, or at the window, we shall fire."

They backed their way out, still concentrating their lights upon the little party. Then, at a sharp word, the two men at the door flung themselves suddenly through, pulled the door after them, and locked it. Those at the window leapt, and as they did so their torches were extinguished.

"Quick—after them!" yelled Skeets.

"No—don't move!" ordered Nelson Lee.

The boys stood helpless—utterly miserable and dismayed. Then, soon afterwards, they heard the faint purring of a motor-car engine. It was Nelson Lee who strode to the window; in the distance he could see the lights of the car. It was rapidly gathering speed.

"It's a pity, but they had us completely at their mercy," said the detective regretfully. "Now we can see about some lights. The rogues have gone."

"And we did nothing to stop them," groaned Handforth. "Oh, Mr. Lee!"

"Why so reproachful, Handforth?" asked Lee. "Did you expect something better of me?"

"Yes, sir, I did!" burst out Handforth. "You did nothing at all! You let them grab those things and get away."

"For the simple reason, Handforth, that I desired to live—and I wanted the rest of you to live, too," replied Lee, his voice becoming sharp. "You do not seem to understand that those men were in grim earnest. There were four automatic pistols trained upon us, and it was touch-and-go whether those pistols were fired or not."

CHAPTER 21.

Nelson Lee is Not Downhearted!

TO Lord Edgemore and Skeets it was a terrible blow.

Just at the moment when the key to the treasure had been within their grasp, it was wrested from them. The enemy had triumphed.

When the lights were restored—they had been fused—there was a good deal of excitement in the library.

"Something's got to be done, of course," said Handforth, his eyes gleaming. "Why shouldn't we return the raid? What's the matter with going down to Moat Hollow in force—the whole Remove, say? We'll break our way in, and we'll——"

"You'll do nothing of the sort, Handforth," interrupted Nelson Lee. "Have you forgotten that I'm present?"

"Oh, rats, sir! I don't look upon you as my headmaster now," said Handforth recklessly. "You're—you're one of us! And you're just as much in this adventure as all of us. You're not going to let those crooks get away with this, are you?"

"The one consolation, as far as I can see, is that we now definitely know that the treasure can be reached," remarked Lord Edgemore. "I will confess that I had almost convinced myself that there was no possibility of getting at that Spanish Gold, but now I am beginning to hope."

"What's the good of hoping, dad?" groaned Skeets. "Those crooks are going to get that gold."

"They haven't got it yet," said Nipper. "Buck up, old man. The gov'nor will do something."

Both Lord Edgemore and Skeets were looking eagerly at Nelson Lee.

"I'm no magician," said the detective with a smile. "These people are very clever; we have no proof of the identity of the men who raided us a short time ago."

The boys stared.

"No proof, sir?" repeated Nipper. "But isn't it obvious that they were those rotters from Moat Hollow?"

"It is not obvious at all," replied Lee quietly.

"What!"

"The men were entirely clothed in black gowns, and it was impossible to recognise them," continued the detective. "I will agree that all the circumstances point to the



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Moat Hollow people being responsible. But that's not proof. If I were to take this story to the police, and ask for a warrant against Dr. Ragozin and his household, I should be laughed at."

"The gov'nor's right, you chaps," said Nipper. "You can't get warrants to arrest people unless there is pretty strong evidence against them."

"And even if we obtained the necessary warrant, of what good would it be?" went on Lee. "A raid on Moat Hollow would be utterly useless. After what has happened, we can be certain that the crooks will be on the watch. A raid could not be made without their having full warning, and by the time the police got into the house, the manuscript would be concealed. And what then? The crooks would have the laugh on us, the police would be disgusted with us, and the situation would be even worse than before, since we should have shown our hand."

Lord Edgemore shrugged helplessly.

"Then we can do nothing?" he asked.

"I didn't say that," replied Lee crisply. "We can do a great deal, Lord Edgemore. But, whatever we do, must be done unofficially. I am a man who is ready to take all sorts of risks—and even to trespass occasionally—so long as I do not break any law. These Moat Hollow people have virtually thrown down the gauntlet. Well, I am accepting the challenge."

"Good old gov'nor!" murmured Nipper.

"Hear, hear!"

"That's the spirit, Mr. Lee!"

"Rather!"

"These rogues need not think that I am going to take this lying down," continued Lee. "But we need not do anything hurriedly; we need take no action to-night."

"Oh!" murmured Handforth, disappointed.

"That manuscript, and the friar's volume, are perfectly safe," went on Nelson Lee. "They are so valuable that our friends of Moat Hollow will preserve them with every care. It will take them a considerable time to decipher that message—most of the night, in fact. To-morrow, they will be unable to take any action, for they cannot very well start digging for the treasure in daylight. That gives us until to-morrow night."

"By Jove, the gov'nor's right there, you chaps," said Nipper eagerly.

"And what we need just now is time," continued Lee with the utmost coolness. "We'll let the crooks think that we are dazed—baffled. We'll rest on our oars for a bit, so to speak. I am not at all sure that this move of the enemy's is not all to the good."

"Really, Mr. Lee," protested Lord Edgemore.

"I mean it," said the detective. "They think they have triumphed—and that is the spirit which will lead them into a sense of false security. They will become too confident. They will laugh at us, they will congratulate themselves upon their own cleverness. What is more, they will commence operations at the first possible moment, and, having located the exact spot where the treasure is buried, they will commence digging."

"Oh, my hat!" said Handforth.

"Let them dig," said Lee blandly. "Why shouldn't they? After all, digging is hard work. I see no reason why these crooks shouldn't do the hard work, Lord Edgemore; and then we can step in at the right moment."

Lord Edgemore roared with laughter.

"By gosh!" he ejaculated. "I hadn't looked at it in that way, Mr. Lee! We'll get the best of the rascals, after all!"

IT was certainly a cool suggestion. Let the criminals take all the trouble to decipher that message; let them rack their heads over those directions; let them find the spot where the treasure was buried; and let them do the digging!

"I want you to trust me in this matter, Lord Edgemore," said Lee smoothly. "I shall keep a careful watch on Moat Hollow. And, at the right moment, I shall be able to step in and take action. I give you my word that the old Edgemore Treasure will be yours—and not theirs."

The earl thrust out his hand.

"That's good enough for me, Mr. Lee," he said heartily.

He appreciated the astuteness of Nelson Lee's reasoning, and he was, indeed, "tickled to death" at the calm audacity of the detective's proposal.

But the boys had ideas of their own.

Handforth started blurting out something but Church and McClure managed to silence him—after Nipper had given them a look. Nipper knew well enough that in the presence of Nelson Lee, any objections from the Removites would be overruled.

"Well, we might as well be getting back," said Lee with a smile. "On the whole, our evening has not been wasted. It might be advisable, Lord Edgemore, for you to show yourself in the village to-morrow, and I want you to look as dejected as you possibly can."

"I'll do my best," promised the earl, laughing.

"You, too, Skeets," said Lee. "As for you boys, you had better forget Moat Hollow for the time being. If I require your help at any time, I will call upon you."

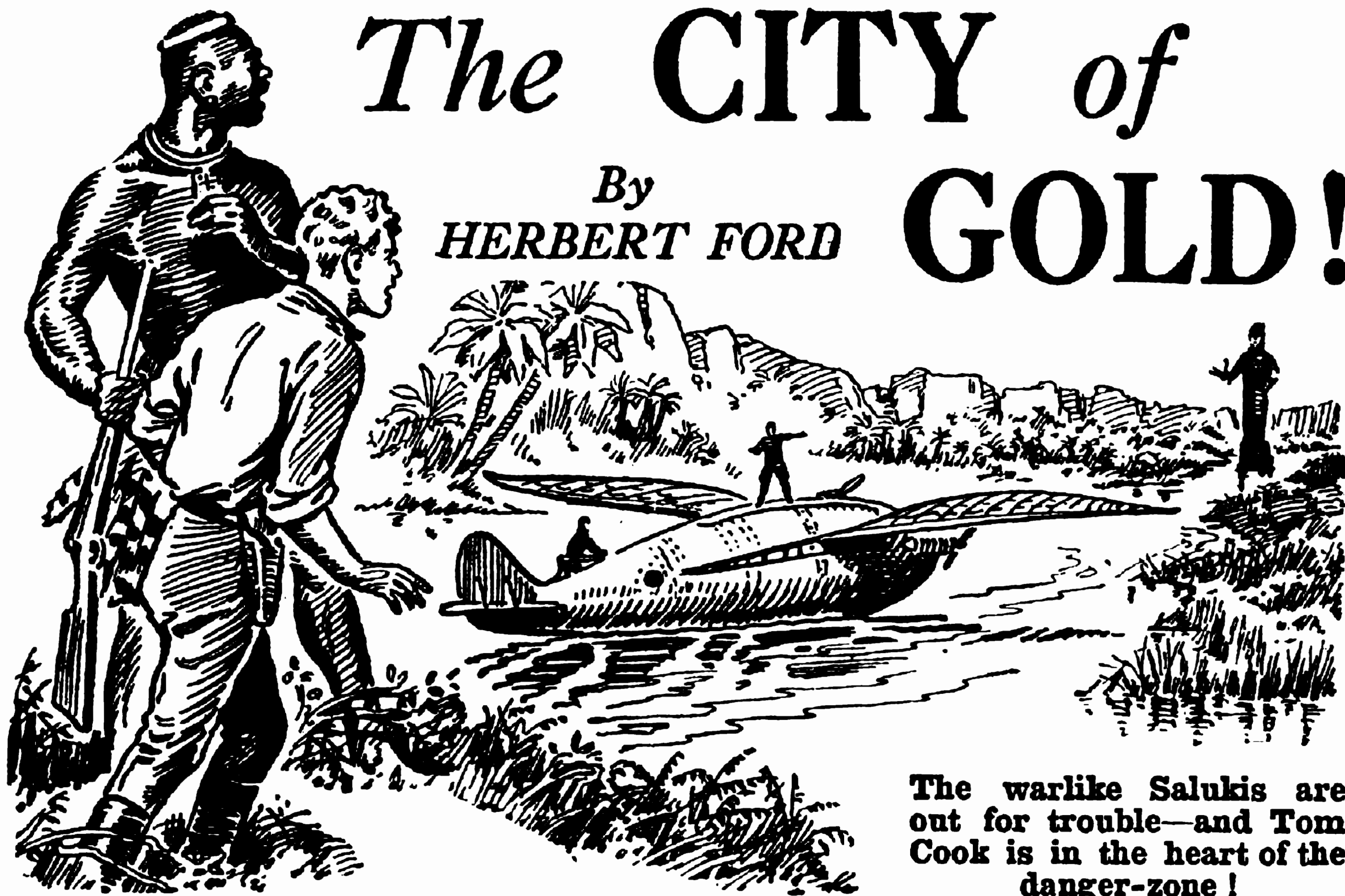
Soon afterwards they all went back to St. Frank's—all of them, that is, with the exception of Skeets. He stayed at home in the natural order of things. Nelson Lee bade the boys good-night in the Triangle, and after that it took the Removites about fifteen

(Concluded on page 44.)

Owing to pressure of space, "Our Round Table Talk" by the Editor has been unavoidably held out, but it will appear as usual next Wednesday.

The CITY of GOLD!

By
HERBERT FORD



The warlike Salukis are out for trouble—and Tom Cook is in the heart of the danger-zone!

Drums of War!

“**T**HOSE Salukis are making the dickens of a row, aren't they, Lulu?”

“They are, baas; they are enjoying themselves in their own uncouth way, filling their stomachs with raw meat and sweet 'taters, until they have that demoralised feeling when they can eat no more! Pah! These niggers give me the collywobbles—if you will pardon the expression, baas Tom!”

The speaker, a magnificent Zulu, took a large pinch of snuff, and thumped his enormous bare chest in utter disdain of the savages who were making all the noise away back there in the Zambesi forest.

Tom Cook did a quiet grin to himself. Lulu the Zulu's superior ways always amused him, but he knew better than to let the big man see him grin; for Lulu, otherwise Lulukumbula, a direct descendant of all the chiefs of Zululand, was a proud man. He could use more long words than a good many white men, and sometimes used them in the right places.

Tom Cook was the son of a Zambesi trader. He and his Zulu companion had been travelling for many weeks off the beaten track, opening up new trade amongst the lesser known tribes in the forests “at the back o' beyond”; tribes who would not leave their primeval homes to visit the trading stations, but who were perfectly ready and willing to barter ivory, furs, or what not, for the gaudy

calicoes, beads, gas-pipe guns, and the various odds and ends of an African trader's stock.

It had been Tom Cook's own idea—this trek into the wilderness—for of late trade at the station on the Zambesi had been a bit slack, and old Phil Cook was getting somewhat restive and talking about packing up and getting back somewhere nearer civilisation. This would not have suited Tom one little bit, for he was a son of the wild. He knew and loved every phase of the great veldt and forest, and would have been cramped to death in a town, or even a little “dorp” in South Africa. He knew the wide open spaces and loved them.

“Dad, I reckon it's a case of ‘If the mountain won't come to Mahomet—he'll have to go to the mountain!’” Tom had laughed when his dad was bemoaning the bad state of trade. “There's dozens of tribes back there in the forest who're too shy to come out and look for what they want, so it's up to us to take it to 'em. It's the white man's job to push trade and teach the natives what they really want, and, as we've got the goods to give 'em—forward, Cook & Son! Gee, dad, back in the forest there are tribes who'd just fall over 'emselves to grab some of our Brummagem goods, and it 'ud be doin' 'em a kindness to oblige 'em! Let's go, dad!”

The boy managed to persuade his father at last, and with a big trek wagon, a team of twenty “salted” oxen, and with Lulu and a half-Dutch Kafir as driver and handyman,

he set out for the wilds on his first trading expedition.

He had done wonderfully well, and now, on their homeward route, the big wagon was chock-a-block from end to end with the spoils. There was a varied and very valuable assortment of elephant, hippo, and rhino tusks, to say nothing of numerous "karosses" (which is the name for various rare skins made up into cloaks as worn by the chiefs). In fact, the lad had done better in his few weeks' trip than his father had done at his trading station in as many years.

No wonder Tom was feeling proud and happy as he lay stretched out on a magnificent kaross, in the shade of the wagon, drinking a cup of Hendryk's Boer coffee.

From the distance, in the depths of the forest, there came a continuous drumming sound. "Thr-r-rum, thr-r-rum, thr-r-rum!" He could hear the beat of tom-toms and the weird shriekings and howlings of the Saluki tribesmen, whose country he was now passing through.

He did not let it disturb him, though he knew he was going dead against his father's orders in coming so far north. But if he was not worrying, Hendryk was. The Kaffir would poke his shrivelled old face out from the tilt of the wagon now and again, and exchange muttered comments with the big Zulu.

It was common knowledge that the Salukis were getting out of hand. Formerly they had been kept in check by their wise old chief, Kalakalala; but he had died recently—from poison, it was rumoured—and his place had been taken by his arrogant, upstart nephew, who openly proclaimed his enmity towards the white men.

But Tom Cook had heard that the Salukis had a wonderful store of ivory which had been collecting for a generation, and he was determined to try and do some trade with the tribe—even if they did feel like killing white men!

He was relying upon his own knowledge of the natives, and his own diplomacy and "check," together with his up-to-date weapons and the support of Hendryk and the huge Zulu, who had forgotten more about warfare than the Salukis were likely to remember.

The Saluki chief had announced that he would sell all his uncle's collection of ivory and treasure of old ornaments to the highest bidder, and Tom Cook reckoned on being first in the field for the loot.

He had chosen his camp well, having the river behind him and a big clearing all round, with a semi-circle of giant boulders, making a good "zareba" in which his wagon and oxen were outspanned.

He had sent runners to the Salukis with friendly messages, and had received answer that the chief would meet him on the morrow, prepared to do much trade. But, having delivered the messages, the runners had bolted, and this had made Hendryk take a very gloomy look of things. He said as much

to Lulu the Zulu, who duly reported to Tom.

"Hendryk knows this tribe, and he does not like them," Lulu said. "The Salukis are treacherous, and Oboona, the new chief, wants arms and ammunition such as the white men use. He speaks with a smooth tongue, but do not trust him, baas! Hear the drums? Hendryk says the tribe are being primed for warfare. They already have some prisoners in their kraals, and those drums are war drums!"

"You scared, Lulu?" asked Tom, smiling up into the huge Zulu's face.

Lulu shrugged his shoulders.

"Not me, baas. You say 'fight,' I fight; you say 'trek,' and I trek. All one to me, baas. Death and me are old friends!"

"Well, don't get too pally with him, Lulu!" laughed Tom. "All right; tell Hendryk I'll keep my eye skinned. It won't be the first time that natives have tried to get the best of us and have lived to be sorry for it, eh, old pal?"

"That is so, Inkosi. If they reckon to catch us sleeping, maybe they'll be sorry; they will find that the foxes are all wide awake and takin' notice," said the Zulu complacently. "Pay no 'tention to Hendryk. He got the wind up, as you say, baas! But if he can handle that machine-gun like he says he can—what he gotta worry about?"

Tom grinned to himself. He had a notion that Lulu was just a bit jealous of the half-Kaffir's greater knowledge of the machine-gun, for Lulu had spent a lot of time watching old Hendryk clean and oil the weapon and practice with it. They had become possessed of the gun in a rather peculiar manner.

They had come upon a Belgian transport driver who was conveying stores from one Congo station to another. All his trek-cattle had died, and the unfortunate man was only too glad to barter the goods in his wagon—including a machine-gun and a few score belts of cartridges—for a lift to an outlying station and enough stores and money to see him safely out of the deadly forest district.

Outside the drumming went on and on in monotonous rhythm, and at last Tom Cook was lulled to sleep by the sound of the thrumming.

He was awake at the first streak of dawn, and called to Hendryk to get breakfast ready. For a time Lulu was nowhere to be seen, but returned later with a somewhat grave face. He squatted down by the fire to consume a bowl of mealy pap the half-Kaffir brought him.

They exchanged a few words in low tones, then Lulu gave a loud order.

"Get trade goods outer the wagon an' stand by with a trestle for 'em. You got that machine-gun handy, Hendryk?"

"Ya, Big Bull!" replied the Kaffir.

"Load 'm, keep 'm handy, train on trestle. See?" ordered the Zulu.

"Hey, what's the game? Why the gun, Lulu?" Tom demanded sharply. "Get it off your chest. What's up?"

"Baas, the Kaffir spoke truth," said the gigantic Zulu. "These Salukis mean

treachery. I have been into the forest a little way, and have seen the spoor of many men who have trekked between us and the big river. The Salukis may come trading, but it will be but to smell out our strength. Beware of them, baas!"

White Man's Magic!

TOM slept with one eye open that night, for he always heeded Lulu's advice, but after a while the thrumming of the drums had died down and all was quiet. They took it in turns to stand guard, but were not disturbed. Early in the morning the trestles were laid out beside the

follerin' out the Boy Scouts' motto you have told me about so often—"Be prepared!"

There came the sound of a single tom-tom from the forest, and the big Zulu strode forth. He had donned his full Zulu fighting rig, with a great plume of black and white feathers on his head, and a magnificent kaross flung over his broad shoulders.

He carried a repeating rifle and a peculiar-looking trumpet-mouthed weapon closely resembling an old-fashioned blunderbuss. This he had made himself during the night. He halted at the first row of trees, where he stood like a statue, not appearing to notice the mob of Salukis as they emerged from the forest.



Two shocks the Salukis had received from the electrified wires and the exploding fireworks. Now Lulu further demonstrated his "magic" by firing the contents of his home-made blunderbuss among the terrified natives.

wagon. On them were the odds and ends of goods which they hoped to trade.

Tom noticed that Lulu seemed very busy on some errands that took him to points between the wagon and the edge of the dense forest. Between those spots were clumps of boulders, and the big Zulu rigged up electric wires from the battery carried on the wagon to various points along the edge of the forest.

Then he carried a large gramophone to the highest boulder, and set it up on the top of a rock, attaching a wire thereto. He and Hendryk had a long whispered conversation, which seemed to amuse the Dutch-Kaffir immensely.

"What game are you two playing?" demanded Tom, as Lulu took up his rifle and prepared to set out for the forest.

"It is a'right, baas," said the Zulu, with a smothered grin. "Me and Hendryk on'y

Leading them was a small, but muscular native with an evil, crafty face. From his figure he looked to be young, but his face was like that of a withered monkey, shrivelled and wrinkled, with eyes set close together. This was Oboona, and alongside him walked a native, who held a gaudily decorated umbrella over the chief's head.

Behind Oboona came a pair of curious-looking figures arrayed in reed cloaks that jingled as they walked. Their faces were concealed by masks of a horrible pattern, with long horns rising high above their heads.

"Tchah! Voodoo medicine men! Old trick!" Lulu muttered contemptuously.

He stood stock-still until the chief himself came level with him, then he suddenly lifted his rifle in salute.

"Greetings, Oboona!" he rumbled, and

barred the way with his rifle held across his massive chest. "What seek ye?"

For a couple of seconds the eyes of the huge Zulu and those of the forest chief met, but it was the Saluki's which wavered first.

"I have come to trade; trade with the white man who ventures into Saluki land! We hear he has some trifles that perchance I may buy in exchange for ivory. Stand aside, black dog! We would speak with your master!"

"Not so fast!" replied the Zulu calmly. "My master will signify when he is ready to receive you. Until then—wait! Do not advance farther, Oboona, lest ye anger him. He sleeps at the moment, and beyond that line of boulders it is not well for you to stray!"

He took a pinch of snuff from the horn he always carried. It was a curiously carved ivory tusk, and he saw the chief's greedy eyes fixed upon it. With a lightning sleight-of-hand movement, Lulu exchanged his treasured horn for another which he concealed in his enormous palm.

It certainly contained snuff, but freely mixed with red pepper. He extended the horn to the chief, and that crafty nigger and his "medicine men" helped themselves lavishly. They sniffed the mixture up their expansive nostrils.

"Ow, ow, owowowowow!"

They coughed, sneezed and barked, while the tears rolled down their faces. Then they ran round and round, clawing at their streaming nostrils as the terrible mixture burnt their noses and throats.

"What ails ye?" asked the Zulu, as he changed the horns and took a leisurely pinch from his own private one. "Is the white man's snuff too strong for ye? I thought the Salukis were men! Hi there, brothers, go not over the line of boulders!"

He shouted at a couple of the tribesmen who had started towards the wagon. They only grinned at him in derision. Lulu lifted his right hand to his mouth—a signal to Hendryk.

The two natives gained the line at the edge of the boulders, and there they halted abruptly, uttering shrieks of pain and fright as a powerful current from the battery ran through and through their bodies from the thin plates of steel the wily Zulu had placed in the path.

At the same time the most hideous howls and snarls came from the top of the boulder, where he had hidden the gramophone. It was actually a record taken in the London Zoo at feeding-time, and the hideously discordant sounds were magnified by a loud-speaker which made the very rocks echo and re-echo.

For a few seconds the Salukis were paralysed by the electric-shock. Under cover of his kaross, Lulu had trained his high-pressure, trumpet-shaped air gun on the yelling, naked, and very frightened medicine men. A dose of bird shot, mingled with rock salt, peppered

their naked backs, and they leapt high in the air, yelping and screaming.

"Ye see, my master is not ready to receive ye!" said the Zulu calmly. "His spirits guard his camp, and no one can approach until he gives the word!"

Oboona peeped from his streaming eyes and whispered to the other two medicine men, who shook their masked heads very doubtfully. Lulu was watching, and picked up his cue without waiting a second.

"Would ye care to test your magic against the white man's?" he asked. "If so, wise men, doctors of the Salukis, weave a spell and cross the white man's boundary—if ye can!"

Oboona glared at the voodoo witch-doctors and snarled an order. They evidently did not feel much like obeying, but it was a case of do or die, and hesitatingly they advanced towards the boulder. The gramophone and the electricity had been switched off by Hendryk. Amidst a dead silence, the Salukis walked as far as the other men had been.

Again, at Lulu's signal, the terrible racket broke out; the priests felt the electric-shock; and this time, in addition, half a dozen rockets shot up into the air, and a hundred coloured lights flashed hither and thither. Coloured fires, "fizz-gigs," and crackers danced amongst the medicine men's legs, whilst Zulu let them have the rest of the contents of his air gun.

They threw themselves on the ground, yelping like puppies, their reed cloaks crackling and breaking under them as they writhed in contortions, mainly of fear.

"White man magic plenty strong enough, Oboona?" Lulu jeered. "Would ye like to cross the border line ere my baas bids ye?"

"No, big man," answered the chief, hastily and humbly. "When your master bids, then will I do trade with him!"

"Good! See that ye bring the best, lest he be angry," said Lulu loftily. "Best show me what ye have. He will not be content with any rubbish!"

In a Tight Corner!

OBOONA called up his bearers, and the Zulu solemnly inspected the ivory, and furs, and other articles the men carried. He gave many a "pish" and "tchah" of contempt at the fine tusks, and kicked many disdainfully aside, though it was with difficulty that he kept the sparkle from his eyes as he realised that here was an extraordinarily fine lot of bargains which would delight the heart of his young "baas."

At last one of the men held out a small ornament. It was a really beautiful piece of work, which Lulu could see was of solid gold, and which he weighed in his hand.

"H'm, a pretty toy!" he remarked casually. "If ye have more of these, ye may submit them to my lord. He may take a fancy to them for their shape—not for their value, which is nothing! Bring a score or so—or half a hundred. They may please him!"

He could see that the various images and ornaments were much discoloured, and that bits of earth and soil still clung to them. Lulu made a shrewd guess that these formed part of the treasure which had been buried by the former chief, and which Oboona had ruthlessly dug up after his uncle's death.

"By Cetewayo! The young baas make much money on this trip if he but trades a'right," mused the Zulu, as he watched package after package of the treasure being brought along. "But he too honest! If he let Lulu do the trading— These dogs not know what they hold is of such value. Tchah! What are they but savages; niggers from wild parts! Not civilised—no!"

The big Zulu was always very superior towards humbler black races. He considered that his tribe was the leader of all black Africa—which it undoubtedly was—and also by reason of his superior education.

Lulu bade the Salukis wait until he should give them permission to, approach, and carrying one of the images, he walked towards the boulders. He gave the secret signal to Hendryk; immediately the "Zoo" record started up again, and there came the roarings of lions and other wild beasts at feeding-time. Lulu halted and extended his hand solemnly.

"Peace, peace, O spirits!" he boomed in his tremendous voice. "Know ye not that I am Lulukumbula, the servant of my lord? Peace, and let me pass!"

Immediately the noise ceased as the "fluence" was switched off, and Lulu strutted proudly on to the trestles, where Tom was arranging the trading goods. The Zulu gave a deep salaam, and then, holding his rifle aloft, gave the "Royal Salute."

"Koom. koom, Inkoos! Bayetè!"

Tom stared at him with a perplexed look, but as the Zulu winked solemnly at him he knew enough to keep his face straight.

"Now then, you old tough, what have you been up to?" he asked. "I know you and your games! You've been spoofing these darkies, I'll gamble!"

"Nay, baas. I did but instil the fear into them and due reverence for the white man," replied Lulu complacently. "This Oboona feller gettin' too big for his boots, and he wants taking up a peg! It is necessary to make them treat you with dignity, baas!"

"I know all about that!" grinned Tom. "But why the fireworks and gadgets, to say nothing of the Royal Salute?"

"Just to make 'um mind 'um step!" responded Lulu, carelessly placing the golden image he was carrying down on the trestle table. "Take a look at this, baas. But have a care; do not let them think it is valuable!"

"By jinks!" exclaimed Tom, as he weighed the image in his hand. "It's solid gold, and beautiful workmanship, too! I shouldn't be surprised if it's hundreds of years old, and perhaps come from some ancient— How much do they want for things like this?"

"Jest as li'l as you like to give 'um!" whispered the Zulu, snatching the idol from Tom's hand, and chucking it aside as if the

white "baas" disdained it. "Baas, there are hundreds more of these images, and ivory tusks enough to fill the wagon twice over! You can buy dem for nothing if you play the game right!"

"That's just it, Lulu," replied Tom, sternly but quietly. "I do mean to play the game—I'll trade fair and not cheat even a savage. That's the way dad's always done business, and I'll do the same!"

Lulu looked disappointed, but he could see that Tom was in earnest. He shrugged his mighty shoulders.

"A'right, baas. I'll tell them that you are willing to do trade with them. But be warned—they're cunning. I'll make them leave their arms behind and come empty-handed but for the goods they have to sell. They may get funny if they have their toastin'-forks with 'um!"

He took the opportunity of shedding his home-made "blunderbuss" and substituting for it a large and capable automatic pistol—a weapon which threw a very heavy bullet, and with which he was an expert at close range.

Lulu then strode back towards the waiting chief. Without much difficulty he got Oboona to give the order for the tribesmen to "pile arms," and their spears, shields, and knobkerries were thrown into a heap some distance away from the wagon. Then Lulu made a speech to the effect that the white lord had come to their district with marvels of trade for the benefit of the Salukis, and they must show their appreciation of his condescension by appearing before him with empty hands.

"But mark ye, O men of the Salukis, the white man and I, his servant, can deal death from afar if it is called for. Yet we come as friends, desiring no harm to the Saluki tribe, bringing wonders such as ye have never seen before. Come! My lord awaits us. Bid the bearers bring forwards the best of the ivory and the images. Maybe if his heart is good he will give ye some of his wonders in exchange."

For the next half-hour Tom had a busy time exchanging his goods for the ivory, among it some of the finest tusks he had ever seen. Lulu tramped up and down behind the trestle table, keeping a wary eye on the natives, and prompting Tom now and again as to how much "trade" he should give in exchange.

Yet in spite of Lulu's watchfulness, he did not see Oboona and two or three of his men edge off to the other side of the wagon. He did not see them peep beneath the tilt, under which were packed the ivory and goods Tom had already collected on the trip, together with a number of rifles and boxes of ammunition which were ordered by a trader down river. And it was this slip on Lulu's part which was to cost the adventurers dear.

(Trouble is obviously brewing for Tom and Lulu with the warlike Salukis. Their first clash is vividly described in next week's stirring instalment of this grand new story.)

The St. Frank's Fortune-Hunters

(Continued from page 38.)

seconds to reach Study C, in the Ancient House.

A storm burst as soon as the door was closed.

"Hold on—hold on!" grinned Nipper. "Don't shout so much, Handy! Keep it down, you chaps! We shall have half the Remove here in a minute, asking what all the excitement is about."

They calmed down.

"Look here, Nipper, we're not standing it!" said Handforth fiercely. "See? By George! Did you ever hear such rot?"

"You mean—about letting the crooks dig for the treasure?" asked Nipper.

"Of course that's what I mean!" roared Handforth. "You could have knocked me down with a feather when Lord Edgemore said that it was a good idea. He and Mr. Lee think that it'll be funny to let the crooks do the searching, and then step in at the last minute."

"A perfectly dotty idea," said Travers. "Everybody knows that half the fun of treasure-hunting is the hunting itself. When the treasure is found, there's nothing in it."

"Exactly," said Handforth eagerly. "We want to hunt for that treasure ourselves, don't we? If you're going to raise any objections, Nipper—"

"Keep your hair on," said Nipper. "I'm just as keen as you are, Handy. I think that that idea of the guv'nor's is potty."

"Good! I'm glad you admit it!"

"But the guv'nor doesn't look at these things in the way we do," continued Nipper. "We're not going to be dished out of the search. We want to get hold of those directions, and then we want to work out the plan, locate the treasure, and dig."

"Hear, hear!"

"The digging will be most of the fun," said Jimmy Potts breathlessly. "Just imagine it, you chaps! Digging at night—with lanterns all round. And we get deeper and deeper—and then, suddenly, somebody's spade strikes against something solid!"

"And a whacking great chest is unearthed!" said Handforth with a gulp. "We open the chest, and we find eights and pieces of doubloons—I mean doubloons and pieces of eight!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What marvellous imaginations you fellows have!" grinned Nipper. "I only hope that everything turns out as you predict, Handy, old man. It'll be rather ripping to unearth a whacking great Spanish chest, and to open the lid and find it full of gold!"

"Anyhow, we're going to search—and we're going to diddle those beastly Moat Hollow crooks," said Handforth doggedly. "Let Mr. Lee and Lord Edgemore do what they jolly well like, but it's not good enough for us!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Of course, I don't quite see how we can do that digging," said Nipper slowly. "Ragozin has got hold of the parchment, and—"

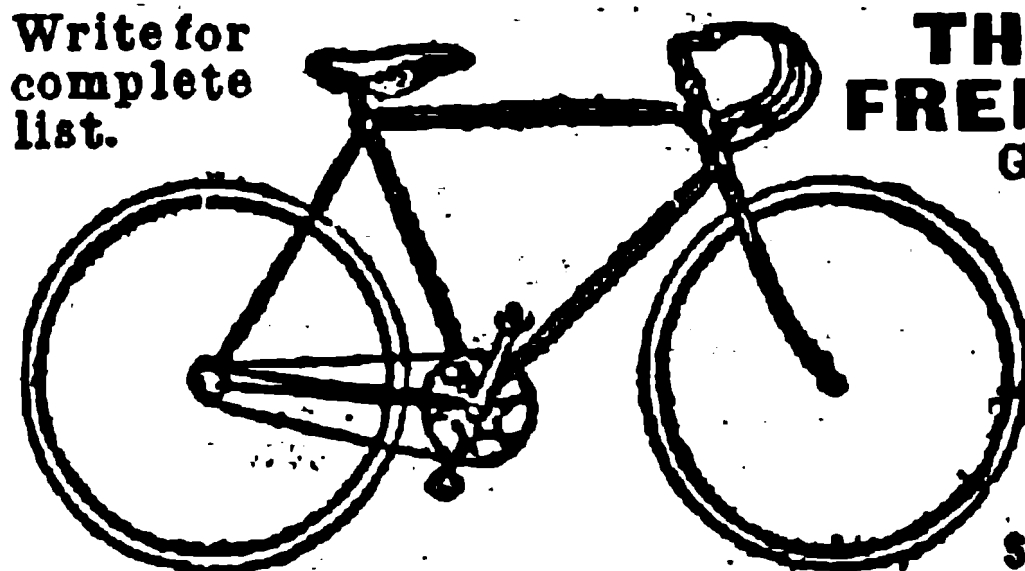
"We'll think of a way," broke in Handforth. "We'll act entirely on our own—without Mr. Lee knowing anything about it. It seems to me, my sons, that there's some pretty hectic excitement in the offing!"

And Edward Oswald Handforth, for once, was a true prophet.

THE END.

("Pirate's Treasure" is the title of next week's magnificent story, featuring the Chums of St. Frank's. Read all about Nipper & Co.'s thrilling adventures while digging for hidden gold! Don't miss this fine yarn—order your copy to-day.)

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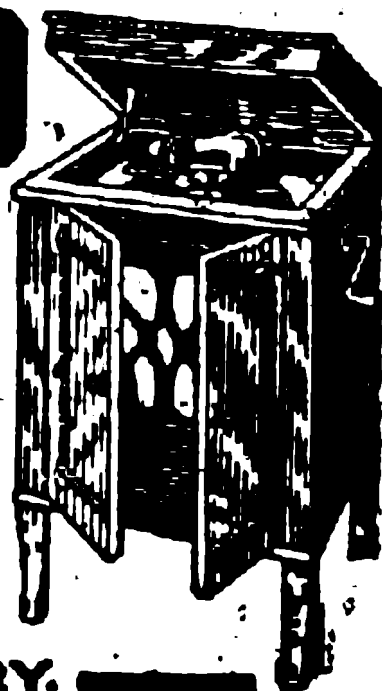
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