

THE MYSTERY OF ST. FRANK'S!

By
EDWY SEARLES
BROOKS



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THE MYSTERY OF ST FRANK'S!

By
EDWY SEARLES BROOKS

A thrilling yarn of School and Detective Adventure in London, featuring
NELSON LEE, NIPPER and the Chums of St. Frank's.

Narrated by NIPPER himself.

CHAPTER 1.

The Nuts' Night Out!

RALPH LESLIE FULLWOOD gazed into the darkness of the Remove dormitory in the Ancient House at St. Frank's.

"You chaps ready?" he breathed.

"Yes," whispered Gulliver and Bell, his chums.

"Good!" said Fullwood. "We'd better be movin'. It's a quarter to eleven already and we don't want to be late."

The nuts of the Remove moved down the dormitory towards the door. Every other junior in the long apartment was asleep, and darkness enshrouded all. From without came the ceaseless rumble and hum of London.

Fullwood & Co. were rather enjoying the school's sojourn in London. All the boys and masters had left St. Frank's

in a body after the fire which had partially destroyed the College House, and the temporary quarters in London were so roomy and comfortable that many of the fellows would be sorry to leave.

The school buildings were situated right in the heart of London—within a stone's throw of Holborn, in fact. And Fullwood & Co. were particularly satisfied with the new order of things. For it enabled them to indulge their desire for gambling to a greater extent than was possible at St. Frank's.

Only a few short days earlier they had become acquainted with a plausible gentleman who called himself Mr. James Palmer—and whose name was probably something quite different.

Mr. Palmer had introduced them, after lights-out one night, to a flat in the West End. To the delight of Full-

wood & Co., they found that the place was a gambling-den, where roulette was the principal attraction.

Fullwood rather fancied roulette, and he was not discouraged by the fact that he had lost practically all his capital on that occasion. He simply set it down to bad luck, and was certain that he would regain his losses on a second visit.

Fullwood & Co. were now preparing to keep their second appointment with Mr. Joseph Palmer.

It was Saturday night, and the nuts had arranged to meet Mr. Palmer at eleven o'clock in a little alleyway which ran beside the paddock or playing field.

Mr. Palmer was a gentleman, and he was not even connected with the gambling-house. He was taking the boys with him simply because he was a lover of sport. It wasn't possible for him to profit personally. And he was not in need of profit, for he was wealthy.

This, at all events, was what Fullwood & Co. fondly imagined. It would have surprised them, perhaps, if they had known that Mr. Palmer "ran" the gambling-den himself, and that he acted as his own tout. When things were rather slack Mr. Palmer wandered about in search of victims, and he had found three easy pigeons to pluck in the persons of Fullwood, Gulliver and Bell.

They were worth plucking, too—at least, Fullwood was. On this occasion he was taking five pounds with him, and his chums were far from moneyless. If Mr. Palmer raked in seven pounds from the three he would consider it a good deal, and well worth the trouble.

And the man was in no fear of being betrayed. Fullwood & Co. would never dare to speak, no matter what they suspected; for it would mean prompt expulsion for them. And Mr. Palmer was safe, in any case, for the nuts were in ignorance of the gambling-den's exact locality.

They were in high spirits as they crept out of the Remove dormitory.

Everything was quiet out in the corridor, but it behoved the trio to be cautious, for several masters were still out and about.

The sporting youths reached the window which overlooked the sloping roof of the gymnasium. They lost no time in creeping out. It was a simple matter to descend to the ground, for the gym roof was only a gentle slope, and the gutter overhung an old tree-stump.

"Good!" muttered Fullwood, as they all alighted. "All we've got to do is to slip over the gate into the paddock, and we're safe."

Bell looked round him rather nervously.

"I—I suppose we shan't see that awful figure again?" he murmured.

"Oh, rot!" snapped Fullwood. "Don't be such a nervy beast, Bell. You only fancied you saw somethin' last week."

"You saw it as well, anyhow!" sneered Bell. "I'll admit I was a bit scared—"

"You fainted!" said Gulliver sourly. "An' Nipper had to come down to fetch you in. But there was nothin' found or seen, an' the whole thing dropped. But if you get nervous, you'll see things again."

Fullwood & Co. hurried out of the courtyard. They had no wish to be confronted by the hideous-looking Chinaman who had appeared like an apparition out of the darkness several nights earlier.

Once over the gate into the paddock, the nuts felt better. And as they were scaling the rear wall a clock boomed out the hour of eleven. It was the time of the appointment, and Fullwood & Co. were punctual.

The wall at the bottom of the paddock overlooked a little alley, which ran from one quiet roadway to another. There were very few lamps, and at night the place was practically deserted.

"Well, we're here on time," remarked Fullwood, as he produced his cigarette-case. "I can't see any sign of Palmer, though. Smokin', you chaps?"

"Yes, rather!"

"Help yourselves," said Fullwood lamely. "I think it's a fine thing, the school 'bein' in London. I'd like to stop here for good. St. Frank's is a dull hole compared to this."

"There's somebody whispered Quiliver."

They waited expectantly. A figure was striding briskly down the alley, and after a moment the boys recognised it as belonging to Mr. Joseph Palmer. The man was tall, dark, and clean-shaven. He seemed a gentleman in all respects—to Fullwood & Co. A man of experience would have guessed Mr. Palmer's calibre without much delay.

"Ah, here you are, boys—prompt to time!" said Palmer genially. "Splendid! And now we'll have just a little sport—eh? I hope you've brought sufficient funds with you to play with?"

"About eight quid, between us," said Fullwood.

"Excellent!" declared Palmer, nodding with satisfaction. "You must use it carefully, and then you will be able to recoup yourselves. You have a lot of leeway to make up, my lads. You lost rather heavily last week—but, with a little more experience, you will be able to make small fortunes."

"That's the idea!" said Bell, rubbing his hands.

"Well, come along," put in Palmer briskly. "I've got a taxi waiting handy, and we can be at the scene of activities within ten minutes."

They walked along the alley, turned into a quiet road, and three minutes later were in Holborn. As Palmer had said, there was a taxi waiting just against the kerb.

"In you get, boys," said Palmer genially.

They piled in, and their guide had a few words with the driver. Fullwood & Co. didn't hear what their destination was to be. The taxi was soon bowling along, but the journey was only brief.

Fullwood knew that the vehicle went along High Holborn, into New Oxford Street, and then down Tottenham Court Road. But it turned so many

times after that that he couldn't follow the route.

It pulled up after a run of twelve minutes, however, and an open doorway was just in front. The street was dark, and there were several brass plates fixed against the doorway. Obviously, the place was a business address; there were offices in the building.

The nuts were hurried in, and they didn't particularly care where they were. They had come to play roulette—and that was all that mattered. Mr. Palmer opened a door on a landing, and all four entered.

A minute later Fullwood & Co. were in the roulette-room. They did not feel so strange this time—for it was their second visit. The room was blazing with electric light, and a good many people were present. They were a motley throng. Some wore evening dress, and others were the worse for drink. And the place was hazy with tobacco smoke.

Palmer was chatting with a man near the door. The man was in evening dress, and apparently a gentleman. But he was Palmer's partner, and several kinds of a scoundrel.

"You've brought those boys again, Joe," said the man softly. "Anything doing?"

"They've got about eight quid between them."

"Well, that's not so bad. You think it's safe?"

"Safe?" chuckled Palmer. "My dear man, where does the danger come in? Do you think these kids will blab? They don't know where the place is, anyhow—and they've got their own skins to look after. If the truth came out, they'd be kicked out of their school. Oh, it's safe enough!"

"I suppose so," said Rogan, lighting a cigarette. "But if we skin the young fools to-night they'll never come again."

Palmer grinned. "They're young fools all right," he said. "You wait and see, Spike."

He strolled down the room, past two or three tables where poker and

chemin-de-fer were in progress, and joined Fullwood & Co., who were watching the roulette-table—before plunging.

"Look at that chap!" whispered Bell. "Look at his bundle of quids!"

Palmer looked as well as Bell's chums. A young fellow, much the worse for drink, was playing with big sums. He held a thick bundle of currency notes in his hand, and he didn't seem to care how fast they went. Palmer smiled quietly to himself, and glanced at the croupier. That gentleman was an accomplice, but he looked a very genial, innocent individual.

"Yes, he's got a nice wad of notes there," murmured Fullwood, gazing curiously at the young fellow. "He'll lose it all, too!"

"Silly ass!" said Gulliver, with a sniff. "I wish I could handle a bunch of notes like that—I'd soon double it! By gad! If only Tregellis-West had some sense! He could rake in hundreds. He's rolling in money. But he looks upon this sort of thing as rot."

They continued watching the game. Palmer seemed pre-occupied. He had heard what Gulliver had said, and the words made him think. After a moment he touched Gulliver on the arm.

"Who were you referring to just now?" he asked casually.

"Eh?" said Gulliver, turning.

"You mentioned a name a moment ago—"

"Tregellis-West," put in Fullwood. "His full name is Sir Montgomery Tregellis-West, Baronet. He's a junior in our school—in the Remove, the same as we are. But we don't bother about him."

"Why not?" asked Palmer. "Is he poor?"

The nuts laughed.

"Poor!" chuckled Bell. "He's a millionaire!"

"Oh!" said Palmer slowly. "A millionaire, eh? You mean to say that he is the heir to a large fortune—"

"No, we mean to say that he is a millionaire—now," said Fullwood. "His people are dead. His uncle, the Earl

of Westbrooke, is his guardian, but he's an easy-goin' old bird, an' Tregellis-West can do pretty well as he likes. He's got his bankin' account, and can draw cheques for hundreds of quids if he likes."

Mr. Palmer was greatly impressed, although he appeared to be bored.

"Yes, some of these youngsters have a deal of luck," he observed. "I'd rather like to meet this young friend of yours—"

"He's not a friend of ours," said Gulliver. "The rotten snob won't look at us—I mean, we won't have anythin' to do with him," he said hastily. "He's a goody-goody ass, an' won't go in for anythin' sporty."

"Couldn't you get him to come here?" asked Palmer. "With a big sum of money to handle, he could win double and treble his capital—"

"He doesn't want to win anythin'," interrupted Fullwood. "He's got so much cash that he doesn't care a rap; when he's run through his supply he's only got to ask for more, an' he gets it."

"That's very handy," said Mr. Palmer, "very handy, indeed."

He strolled away, smoking, and a moment later he was talking to Mr. "Spike" Rogan in a quiet corner.

"Look here, old man, I've just heard a piece of news," said Palmer softly. "There's a kid at that school—a baronet—who happens to be a millionaire in his own right. It's a chance, Spike! We can rake in a cool five hundred if we're slick, probably a thousand!"

"What's the idea?" asked Rogan curiously.

The pair stood talking for five minutes, and then Palmer nodded and strolled back to the roulette-table. Fullwood & Co. were still hovering near, watching the play of the others.

"Had any luck?" asked Palmer genially.

"Yes—bad luck," growled Fullwood. "I've just lost a quid!"

"That's bad, but we'll soon see an alteration," said Palmer. "I'm inclined

to do you a favour, boys. I'm an old hand at this game, and you're fresh. If you give me your money I'll guarantee to treble it within half an hour."

The nuts looked at Palmer eagerly.

"By gad!" said Fullwood. "Do you mean it?"

"Of course I mean it," smiled Palmer. "But before we start, I've got a little idea to suggest. Not long ago we were speaking about that school-fellow of yours—Tregellis-West. Couldn't you manage to get him here?"

"Impossible!" said Fullwood. "An' even if it could be done, I wouldn't lift a hand to help. I don't like the cad. It's no good, Mr. Palmer."

The man was quite unmoved.

"You don't seem to catch on," he remarked. "You three boys are my friends—I'm pleased to acknowledge you as such. You've told me that Tregellis-West is a snob and an outsider."

"An' so he is!" declared Gulliver.

"Well, in that case, he's no friend of mine," went on Palmer. "I thought it would be rather a good joke if we could get him here by some little trick or other, and shock him. Once he was here, it would be easy enough to make him play roulette; and then you'd have the laugh over him."

Fullwood's eyes gleamed.

"An' a hold over him, too!" he exclaimed. "By gad! That's a rippin' idea, Mr. Palmer. If only we could get the cad here, an' keep him here for a bit, we should have him in our hands for good—an' that would come in useful at times. But, of course, it couldn't be done."

Palmer smiled. He was rather pleased with himself, for the nuts had fallen into the little trap quite easily. They did not realise that Palmer was attempting to make dupes of them. They did not guess that this plausible rascal had other and more sinister motives in desiring Sir Montie's presence. They merely thought it was rather a good jape.

"My dear lads, there are many ways

to get over the difficulty," said Palmer eagerly. "Tregellis-West is no friend of yours—therefore you can easily trick him without being particularly conscience-stricken. My suggestion is that one of you should return to the school immediately with me—we'll go in a taxi, and bring Tregellis-West back with us."

"It's no earthly good," said Fullwood. "He wouldn't come."

"Not if you did a little acting for the occasion?" suggested Palmer softly. "You can say that one of your friends has met with an accident, and Tregellis-West will—"

"Oh, I know what he'll do!" said Fullwood. "He'll wake up Nipper an' Watson, an' two or three others. Then where should we be?"

Palmer considered a moment.

"Couldn't you urgently request him to come alone, without waking the others up?" he suggested. "Any little excuse will suffice—and once he is outside, I will do the talking. We bring him here, and then you'll see some sport. What do you say? And don't forget that I'll treble all the money you've got."

"Do it, Fully," urged Bell. "Where's the harm? An' think how we shall be able to jeer at him afterwards."

"Right you are, Mr. Palmer," said Fullwood. "I'm with you!"

CHAPTER 2.

Caught in the Net!

MR. JOSEPH PALMER was evidently not a man to waste time. Within three minutes of Fullwood & Co.'s decision everything was ready. The nuts had been introduced to Mr. Rogan.

"I want you to see after these two while we're gone," said Palmer, indicating Gulliver and Bell. "They're rather fresh to roulette, old man, and if you play their money for them, you can make a good bit. See if you can

treble their capital by the time we get back."

"I'll do it!" said Rogan promptly.

"Oh, rippin'!" murmured Gulliver. "You'd better hand over your cash, Fully. Mr. Rogan might as well be playing with that, too."

"By gad, yes!" said Fullwood.

He readily surrendered his notes, and almost immediately afterwards he and Palmer took their departure. In this particular instance the two scoundrels were sincere; they meant to fill the pockets of their dupes. For they were quite certain that they would get it all back—through the medium of Sir Montie.

"It'll be a rare joke," chuckled Palmer, as he and Fullwood descended the stairs. "But you mustn't arouse anybody else, my lad. It's got to be secret. If by any chance some other boys do wake up, give up the whole thing."

"Naturally," said Fullwood.

They found the taxi waiting in the street. Fullwood thought that it was merely an ordinary cab, available for hire. But it was for the exclusive use of Mr. Palmer, and the chauffeur was a friend of his.

The pair jumped in before Fullwood could see where he actually was, and they were soon bowling along down quiet streets, until they turned into Tottenham Court Road. Then along New Oxford Street to Holborn, where the vehicle came to a halt.

"It's not very late," remarked Palmer, as he and Fullwood walked along the quiet road towards the alley at the back of the school. "You'll be able to get back in plenty of time for a good night's rest, and you'll be able to sleep with the happy knowledge that your pockets are well filled."

Fullwood grinned.

"An' Tregellis-West will be havin' blue fits!" he exclaimed.

Arriving at the wall of the school, Palmer promised to wait in the alley until Fullwood returned. He treated the whole matter as a huge joke. But

Palmer and Rogan were not joking; they had a rascally plot in mind.

Fullwood scaled the wall, and crossed the playing-field to the courtyard. Everything was quiet and still, for it was just after midnight. No lights were showing from any of the school windows.

It was an easy task for Fullwood to climb up the gymnasium roof to the corridor window. He slipped inside, and made his way cautiously and silently to the Remove dormitory.

Inside all was still. Fullwood moved forward like a shadow, and finally bent over Sir Montie's bed. The swell of the Ancient House was sleeping peacefully, but he shifted somewhat as Fullwood laid a hand upon his shoulder.

"Wake up! Tregellis-West—wake up!" whispered Fullwood.

Sir Montie turned over and opened his eyes.

"Dear old boy, we can easily do our prep later on— Eh? Begad! What the dickens is the matter?" he mumbled, looking round. "Really, I—"

"Hush!" breathed Fullwood urgently. "Not a word! For goodness' sake don't wake anybody else up! You're wanted, Tregellis-West!"

Sir Montie awoke fully.

"You awful bounder!" he exclaimed. "What's the idea of wakin' me up like this, Fullwood? Pray return to your own bed—"

"I've just come in from outside, an' you mustn't arouse the other chaps," hissed Fullwood. "I've been a fool, Tregellis-West; I went out on the randan with Gulliver an' Bell—"

"You frightful rascal!"

"I know—I know!" moaned Fullwood. "Gulliver met with an accident in the West End—he was knocked down by a taxi—an' they've taken him into a house there. He says he wants to speak to you—he won't say why—an' I've come as hard as possible. For goodness' sake hurry up!"

Sir Montie was rather startled. He hardly knew whether to believe Fullwood or not. But why should he come

to him in this way if the story was not genuine?

"I'm willin' to come, of course," he said quickly. "But wouldn't it be better to wake one of the masters, an'—"

"Mr. Lee is already there," said Fullwood glibly. "But I don't want you to wake anybody else in the dormitory—not even Nipper. It would only cause a rumpus, an' we should be delayed. It was Mr. Lee who urged me to fetch you, an' he told me to bring nobody else!"

"Is—is Gulliver badly hurt?" asked Montie in alarm.

Fullwood gave a kind of sob.

"I—I believe he is," he murmured brokenly. "He wants you, Tregellis-West. I think he wants to beg your pardon for something—to ask you to forgive him. You must come!"

Fullwood's acting was excellent, and Montie's doubts fled.

"Begad!" he muttered. "I'll be ready in two ticks, old boy!"

He slipped out of bed, and dressed in record time. In spite of his decision to go, there was still a queer kind of feeling in the back of his head that all was not exactly as it should be.

But he could think of no other explanation of Fullwood's conduct. Fullwood usually did things for gain, and what could he gain from this affair?

Thus, although Sir Montie was not positively satisfied, he decided to go. And within three minutes he was ready, and the pair stole out of the dormitory like shadows.

They made their exit without trouble, and reached the little alley at the bottom of the paddock. It was deserted when they arrived, but Mr. Palmer was waiting with the taxi in the side street.

"Ah, you have come!" he exclaimed briskly. "Good! You are Tregellis-West. I presume?"

"That's right, sir," said Montie.

"Well, I am a doctor, and Mr. Lee requested me to fetch you without disturbing anybody else in the school; that is why Fullwood came in the way

he did," said Mr. Palmer smoothly. "And now we must hurry."

The trio entered the taxi, and it was soon buzzing along towards the West End. Fullwood was chuckling to himself inwardly. Sir Montie had been captured with extreme ease, and it would be amusing to see his expression when he found himself in the gambling-den.

While Fullwood was still thinking thus, the taxi came to a halt.

"Here we are," said Mr. Palmer briskly. "You run up first, Fullwood, and warn Mr. Lee that I am following with Tregellis-West. Make all speed."

"Right you are, sir," said Fullwood.

He hurried on, and went up the stairs two at a time. On the landing he met Mr. Rogan, who had evidently been on the look-out.

"They're comin' up now," said Fullwood, grinning.

"Good!" declared Mr. Rogan. "Well, boy, you'd better come inside. You don't want to be seen by other people, do you? Palmer will be up with our guest in a few moments."

Fullwood passed into the flat, and he found Gulliver and Bell just within the lobby. They looked at him inquiringly.

"Did it work?" asked Gulliver.

"Easy as fallin' off a form," said Fullwood, with a grin. "By gad, we'll have a bit of sport in a minute! Great Scott! What the—"

Fullwood paused, for Gulliver was waving a big sheaf of currency-notes.

"Where did you get them?" asked Fullwood blankly.

"Winnin's!" explained Gulliver calmly. "It's partly yours, Fully. There's about thirty quid here, my son. Mr. Rogan put our money on winnin' numbers every time, an' we're in clover."

"Oh, good!" said Fullwood. "Hand over—"

He broke off abruptly as the outer door opened, and Palmer appeared, looking hot and cuffled and angry.

"The infernal little rotter!" he snapped.

"Why, what's the matter?" asked Fullwood, stepping forward.

"Matier!" snarled Palmer. "That confounded kid smelt a rat, or something, and just as we were coming up the stairs he wriggled away and bunked. I tried to stop him, but he was off like a flash of lightning!"

The nuts looked dismayed.

"I say, that's rotten!" declared Fullwood. "We can't have our bit of sport now, and Montie will know everything!"

"Hang the brat!" said Palmer, scowling. "But you needn't worry about his knowing anything. He didn't come inside, and I don't suppose he'd be able to find this place in the daytime. You boys had better be off; it's getting late, and your schoolfellows might raise the alarm."

Fullwood & Co. were not inclined to make any objections. They had raked in a large sum of money—thanks to Rogan's aid. And it was just as well to clear out of the place while they had that money in their possession.

Just as they were crossing the pavement into the taxi a gust of wind came along and neatly took Fullwood's cap off. It dropped just inside the doorway, and Fullwood turned back.

He recovered his headgear, and as he rose from a bending position his eye caught one of the brass plates, fixed just inside the doorway. The name upon it was Owen Salter, but Fullwood saw no more. It meant nothing to him, but in due course it was to mean a good deal to others.

The rascally nuts bundled into the taxi with Palmer, and in due course they arrived in the little street off Holborn. Palmer bade them good-night, and then vanished in the taxi. Fullwood & Co. made their way into the school.

"I expect we shall find Tregellis-West in bed," muttered Gulliver. "The silly idiot!"

"I think Palmer's the silly idiot," muttered Fullwood. "Why the dickens didn't he keep a tighter hold on the chap? It's a pity I went upstairs first. Tregellis-West couldn't have escaped from the pair of us."

"Oh, well, it's no good talkin'," remarked Bell. "We've made a good pile of tin out of the evenin', so we needn't grumble. I'm satisfied, anyhow."

"Same here," said Gulliver. "It's been rippin' sport."

They crept into the Remove dormitory at last. But, rather to their surprise, they found that Sir Montie's bed was empty. There was no sign of the swell of the Ancient House.

"He had to walk, remember," whispered Fullwood. "We came by taxi. I suppose he'll roll in soon. Rats to him! Good thing if he's lost himself somewhere in the giddy West End!"

The nuts lost no time in undressing and slipping into bed. They were not at all anxious about the absent Sir Montie. He would crawl in before long, and Fullwood & Co. slept peacefully and contentedly.

Meanwhile, Mr. Joseph Palmer had returned to his flat.

When he arrived he found that all the guests had been packed off by Rogan. The flat was empty, save for Rogan himself and the croupier of the roulette-table. His name was Halstead, and he was the third member of the little gang. These three men ran the place entirely.

"That was rather neat," said Palmer as he removed his overcoat. "Those kids believe that the youngster escaped, and they'll never be able to prove otherwise, no matter what they suspect. But Tregellis-West is upstairs—safe."

"Did you have much trouble with him?" asked Rogan.

"Very little," replied the other. "He walked up like a lamb, believing that everything was all right. I simply took him inside, and bundled a sack over

his head before he knew where he was."

"And what's the plan?" inquired Halstead.

Palmer smiled.

"It seems to me that we've hit upon a fine scheme for making a pile of money quick," he said. "We needn't fear those three boys; they suspect nothing. And we've got Tregellis-West in our hands, and we can keep him until we get what we demand."

"Well, that's your scheme," said Halstead. "I don't altogether agree with it, Joe. It might mean skipping, and this little place is a paying game just now——"

"If we can rake in a neat thousand we shan't mind skipping," declared Palmer grimly. "And we can probably get more than a thousand. It all depends. This kid is a millionaire!"

The rascally trio talked for some little time, and then Palmer donned a heavy black mask, and Rogan followed suit. The pair then left the flat and mounted to the floor above.

One minute later they were standing within a little attic, an apartment never used by anybody. It really belonged to the flat, and nobody ascended to that part of the building except Palmer or his companions. Above the second landing, in fact, the house was private.

Palmer switched on the electric light, and closed the door. The room was full of all kinds of lumber, and a door in the opposite wall led into a second attic. This door was locked, and Palmer turned the key.

He opened the door and entered. The light from the outer attic flooded through the doorway and revealed a mere cupboard-like apartment, with no windows. There was only a grating near the ceiling.

On the floor lay the unfortunate Sir Montie Tregellis-West. The upper part of his body was enclosed in a sack, and ropes were passed round his middle and round his ankles.

Palmer bent down and removed the cords. He pulled the sack off, and Tregellis-West blinked round him rather dazedly. He was hot and dirty—a condition which the junior disliked intensely. Furthermore, he had dropped his glasses, and he could not see very distinctly.

"Begad!" he murmured. "You—your frightful ruffians——"

"No harm will come to you, my boy," said Palmer in a deep voice. "All you must do is to agree to a certain little proposal I shall make. Your freedom will then follow in a few hours."

Tregellis-West stared at the two masked men.

"I don't know what your game is, but you are a pair of scoundrels," he said warmly. "I was got here by false pretences, an' Fullwood is a bigger rascal than I ever thought possible. When I meet him again I shall knock him down—I shall, really. As for you——"

"As for us, we are not inclined to be violent," said Palmer smoothly. "You don't know where you are, my lad, and there's no prospect of your escaping. Agree to what I say, and you'll be immediately taken back to your school."

Tregellis-West shook his head.

"I will agree to nothin'," he said. "You have kidnapped me, an' I have no intention of agreein' to any proposal."

Palmer smiled behind his mask.

"We shall see," he said. "If you want your freedom, Sir Montgomery, all you've got to do is sign a cheque for one thousand pounds. It must be an open cheque, and it will be cashed in the morning. When we have obtained the money you will be freed."

Sir Montie was startled, but he pretended not to be.

"Begad," he exclaimed, "you must be mad! Do you think I will give you a thousand pounds—for nothing? I utterly refuse. You can keep me here if you like. But you will get nothing for your pains. I should advise you to let me go at once—— Begad, what the——"

Palmer seized Montie's shoulder and gripped it hard. With the other hand he pressed a revolver against Tregellis-West's chest.

"We mean business!" snapped Palmer harshly. "Do you understand? You must agree to what I say, or you will suffer! Write out that cheque as I demand!"

"But I can't!" protested Montie. "I haven't got my cheque-book——"

"That's a matter of no importance, as you know," interrupted Palmer. "A plain slip of paper will suffice, providing it has the Revenue stamp affixed. Now, will you agree? You must write out that cheque at once!"

Tregellis-West shook his head.

"You may think that I'm awfully scared by that revolver," he said steadily. "But I'm not! I positively refuse to do anything. You can do your worst, you frightful rotter!"

Palmer removed the weapon and stared.

"Well, you've got a nerve, and no mistake!" he exclaimed. "So you refuse to do as we demand? Very well; there is another course open to us. You have refused to pay one thousand pounds; your uncle will be compelled to pay five thousand. You will not receive your liberty until the money is paid!"

Sir Montie compressed his lips, but said nothing. Somehow he had an idea that the men were bluffing. And Montie was not the fellow to do anything in a hurry. It would not pay his captors to harm him, so he was in no way alarmed.

It would be better to wait, and Tregellis-West watched with angry impatience as the two masked men prepared to bind him again. But Sir Montie was not such a helpless fellow as he looked.

With one clean, neat spring he was on his feet.

Crash!

His left hammered upon Palmer's nose, and the man staggered back with

a howl of pain and surprise. Sir Montie bounded to the door and grasped the handle.

But Rogan recovered his wits just in the nick of time. He hurled himself at Montie as the latter was tearing open the door.

"Hold him!" gasped Palmer. "Hold him, you fool!"

Rogan seized Montie fiercely.

"You infernal little brat!" he snarled, whirling the boy round. "By thunder! Hold still, confound you!"

The jumper was seized harshly, and bound hand and foot. Then he was left in the attic, helpless. He was a prisoner in the hands of crooks; and he wondered how the affair would end.

But Sir Montie was not perturbed. He had a feeling that everything would turn out all right in the end.

CHAPTER 3.

Mising!

"**W**HERE'S Montie got to?"

Tommy Watson yawned as he sat on the edge of his bed in the Remove dormitory. The sun was shining in at the window, and the morning was fresh and healthy. Only a few of the Removites were dressing, for the rising-bell had only just finished its unwelcome song.

"That's just what I was wondering, Tommy," I remarked, as I dressed. "He's an early bird this morning, and no mistake!"

"He didn't tell us he was going to get up early," said Watson.

Hart sat up in bed and yawned.

"Talking about Tregellis-West?" he asked. "I woke up at five o'clock, and his bed was empty then. He must have got up in the middle of the giddy night!"

I looked at Hart curiously.

"How do you know the time was five o'clock?" I asked.

"I got my ticker under the pillow," said Hart. "I noticed that Montie was

up, and I wondered what the time was."

"That's queer!" remarked Watson. "What in the name of wonder made Montie get up before five? Where's he gone to?"

Fullwood gave Gulliver a significant look, and Gulliver seemed to be a bit scared. They, of course, were wondering what had happened to the swell of the Remove. He had not returned!

"Do you know anything, Fullwood?" I asked sharply.

"Me? What the deuce should I know?" snapped Fullwood. "I don't take any interest in your pals!"

I felt rather worried.

By breakfast-time the whole Remove was talking about the absence of Sir Montie Tregellis-West. The prefects got to know of it, and then the masters. Nelson, my respected guv'nor, and the Housemaster of the Ancient House, ran across me in the hall.

"What is this I hear about Montie?" he asked. "Do you know anything, Nipper?"

"Nothing, guv'nor," I replied. "Hart says that Montie wasn't in his bed at five o'clock, and nobody saw him get up and go out. It's a bit of a mystery. I can't think why he should go off like that in the middle of the night."

Nelson Lee stroked his clean-shaven chin.

"Well, Tregellis-West must be found," he said gravely. "I don't like this affair at all, Nipper. Montie has never played such a trick before, and I cannot help thinking that it is not his own doing."

I stared.

"You mean to suggest that somebody took him off?" I asked.

"I don't know, exactly," said the guv'nor. "I shall wait until noon before I take any definite action, and——"

"Great Scott!" I gasped.

"What is the matter, Nipper?"

"I—I've just thought of that Chinese band of crooks, sir!" I exclaimed tensely. "You remember! Montie and I got down an old sewer and were

collared by Chinese rotters—a gang of drug smugglers. Then you came along and rescued us!"

"Naturally, I remember—considering that the adventure only occurred last week," said Nelson Lee dryly. "I will confess, Nipper, that I have a suspicion that Montie has been taken by those Chinamen. However, we cannot be too sure. I can tell you that our old friend, Detective-Inspector Lennard, has been keeping his eyes very wide open during this last week. The Yellow Band—as we have called the Chinese crooks—may be broken up at any hour."

"Why hasn't it been broken up already?" I asked.

"Lennard is anxious to make a complete job of it," replied Nelson Lee. "He doesn't want to nab a few underlings—as he is liable to do if he acts hastily. He is watching, and waiting for his opportunity to strike."

"And, meanwhile, Montie is collared!" I exclaimed.

"I am afraid so—but his disappearance may be entirely unconnected with the Chinamen," said the schoolmaster-detective. "I shall see Lennard this morning, and if nothing is heard of Montie by dinner-time—well, I shall act on my own initiative."

He wouldn't say any more, but I was glad to know that something was to be done. Morning lessons started, and still there was no sign of the missing Tregellis-West. I couldn't help noticing that Fullwood & Co. were ill at ease. Did they know something?

To question them would be futile, for they were expert liars. And they would not say a word if, by so doing, they gave themselves away. It was quite likely that the nuts had been on the "razzle" during the night; but they couldn't speak without acknowledging this.

Morning lessons were over at last, and Montie was still absent.

"This is getting serious," I said, as Tommy Watson and I walked along the corridor. "Poor old Montie! What

the dickens has happened to him? Look here! I'm going to see the guv'nor!"

"Good," said Tommy. "I'll wait for you."

I went along to Nelson Lee's study, tapped on the door, and entered. Nelson Lee was sitting in his chair, and a visitor was in the room. I recognised him at once.

The visitor was the Earl of Westbrooke—Montie's uncle.

"It's outrageous, Lee—positively outrageous!" the earl was declaring. "I didn't go to the police, because I thought you'd be able to give me some advice. What can I do? Pay the money? No—certainly not! I absolutely refuse to be victimised by a gang of scoundrels! The idea!"

His lordship snorted, and paced up and down.

"I am rather glad that you came to me, Westbrooke," said Nelson Lee. "Perhaps I shall be able to help you. Oh, is that you, Nipper? I am afraid I have no good news for you. Montie is still missing."

Lord Westbrooke turned round.

"Ah, Nipper!" he exclaimed. "Pleased to see you again, my boy. Infernal mess, this is! Montie kidnapped and a ransom demanded for his release!"

"A—a ransom!" I exclaimed. "Great Scott! These Chinese—"

"It is my opinion, Nipper, that the Chinamen have nothing to do with this affair," put in Nelson Lee. "Montie has been captured by quite a different gang. Lord Westbrooke received a letter this morning, by district messenger, demanding the sum of five thousand pounds for Montie's release. The money is to be handed to an agent in Piccadilly Circus—"

"Yes, and we could capture the man and force the truth from him!" snapped the earl.

Nelson Lee smiled grimly.

"You could capture the man, I agree," he said, "but I am afraid you would not force him to speak. And

you must remember that the letter threatens that Montie will be harmed if there is any attempt to interfere—"

"Bluff!" snapped Lord Westbrooke.

"Very probably—but we don't know," said Lee. "In any case, they won't trust to that one agent. There will be one or two others watching the spot, and if they see that the agent is arrested, they will probably remove Montie out of London altogether—and renew their demands. The position is a difficult one, Westbrooke."

His lordship nodded gloomily.

"Yes, it is—it is, indeed!" he exclaimed. "And poor Montie is held a prisoner. Would you advise me to pay this money, Lee?"

Nelson Lee shook his head.

"There is no need to speak of paying the money yet, Lord Westbrooke," he said quietly. "We have a good many hours before us, and much may be accomplished before the morning. If we can rescue Montie within the next twelve hours, all will be well—and I think it is possible that we shall succeed."

"Have you any clue?" inquired his lordship.

"No; I have not yet investigated," replied the guv'nor. "Please leave this matter in my hands. Say nothing to the police, but wait until the morning. The letter says that you must keep the appointment in Piccadilly Circus at nine-thirty in the morning. I will communicate with you before eight—so you will have ample time to make final arrangements—if such are necessary."

Lord Westbrooke agreed to the proposal, and shortly afterwards he took his departure. Nelson Lee warned me to say nothing to the other fellows with regard to Montie's fate; and I promised that I would tell nobody but Watson.

"It's awful!" declared Tommy, when he knew. "Poor old Montie kidnapped! Can't we do something, Nipper? Can't we get busy?"

"What can we do?" I asked. "The guv'nor's got this case in hand, and the

best thing we can do is to rely on him. We should only mess things up by butting in, perhaps. But I'd like to take a hand some way."

Watson scratched his head.

"But how did the rotters get hold of Montie?" he asked. "They must have come into the dormitory and collared him, and——"

"Easy!" I whispered. "Here's Handforth!"

Edward Oswald Handforth, of the Remove, came along, looking excited. Church and McClure, his chums, were with him, and they were both serious.

"What do you think of it?" asked Handforth bluntly.

"Eh? Think of what?"

"Montie being kidnapped!" said Handforth.

"My hat!" exclaimed Watson. "Who told you?"

"Rats!" I put in. "It's only one of Handy's fancies——"

"Fancies!" snapped Handforth. "It's true, you duffer! Montie was kidnapped during the night, and some awful scoundrels have demanded a ransom from his giddy uncle. Fifty thousand quid, or something."

"Five thousand, you ass!" said McClure.

I looked at Handforth & Co. grimly.

"Who told you this?" I asked.

"I heard it from Morrow of the Sixth," said Handforth. "Everybody's jawing about it. It's all over the school! Do you mean to say you don't know?" he added amazedly.

"Yes, I knew—but I thought it was to be a secret," I said.

It was obvious to me that Lord Westbrook himself had been talking. He had probably mentioned his troubles to one of the prefects; the latter had told some other Sixth Formers, and the news had naturally spread. In any case, it was a secret no longer.

The whole school knew what had happened to Tregellis-West, and there was a great deal of excitement. All

sorts of wild suggestions were put forward by the juniors—suggestions for the rescue of Montie. But they were not adopted by Nelson Lee.

The gov'nor spent some little time up in the Remove dormitory, but there was not much to be found there in the way of clues. The letter to Lord Westbrook was of very little value, for it told nothing. It seemed, in fact, that there was very little scope for investigation.

Meanwhile, a little discussion was progressing in Study A. Dinner was over, and afternoon lessons would soon be starting. Fullwood & Co. were not very happy-looking as they faced one another in their study.

"We can't do anythin'," Gulliver was saying. "Tregellis-West must have fallen into the hands of those rotters after he escaped from Palmer, on the stairs."

"Of course," agreed Bell.

Fullwood laughed sourly.

"I don't think!" he exclaimed. "I was wonderin' all the time why those chaps should be so anxious to get hold of Tregellis-West. They practically bribed us—although we didn't realise it at the time. As soon as they heard that the chap was rollin' in money, they wanted to get him there."

"To skin him at roulette," said Gulliver.

"Piffle!" exclaimed Ralph Leslie. "The game was deeper than that—although I didn't catch on at the time. Don't you see? Palmer told me to get upstairs in advance, after we'd arrived at the flat. Why? Because he wanted to collar him. Tregellis-West is bein' kept a prisoner in that gamblin' place—an' Palmer an' Rogan are a couple of crooks. That's the truth of the whole thing."

Gulliver and Bell were rather startled.

"My hat!" gasped Bell. "We shall have to keep mum! If it gets out that we visited the place, we shall be sacked!"

"We mustn't breathe a word," said Gulliver.

Fullwood sat on a corner of the table, looking thoughtful.

"We shall have to be careful," he said slowly. "But it seems to me that it's up to us to do somethin'. We let Tregellis-West into the cart—although we didn't know what the game was then."

"Then we can't be blamed," said Gulliver.

"We know what the game is now, don't we?" said Fullwood. "An' it's only right that we should do what we can to help the chap. He's in the hands of criminals, an' we know who those criminals are. I'm thinkin' of myself. Montie will tell everythin' when he's rescued—he'll be furious with us. But if we tell him we gave the information leadin' to his release he might keep mum."

"But you can't go to Lee an' tell him everythin'?" protested Gulliver. "What do you know, anyhow? Practically nothin'. You don't even know where the flat is situated, an' you'd get yourself into awful trouble—"

"I'm not quite such a fool as that," said Fullwood. "Do you think I mean to give myself away? The idea is to write Lee a letter givin' him the facts. That's the best we can do, an' we shall feel comfortable. I'll disguise my fist, an' I shan't sign the letter or anythin'."

"An' how is it goin' to be delivered?"

"Easily," said Fullwood. "There isn't time to send it by post—it ought to be in Mr. Lee's hands immediately. So the best thing would be to write the note, an' give it to some boy in the street to deliver. Then Lee won't know anythin'."

"My hat!" said Gulliver. "You do think of things, Fully!"

"It's a good thing there's somebody in this study who can think," said Fullwood sourly.

He sat down at the table and drew a sheet of notepaper towards him. He

gazed at it for a moment, and then placed it aside.

"That won't do," he remarked. "Lee might spot it as bein' school paper. I'll tell you what. Chuck over that magazine, Gully. I can write the message round the border of one of the giddy pages. Lee won't spot anything then!"

"Gad! That's smart!" Bell said admiringly.

A moment later Ralph Leslie Fullwood was laboriously writing the message—which was destined to mean so much. Fullwood was not all bad, and just at present his conscience was pricking him.

CHAPTER 4.

Learning the Truth!

NELSON LEE, just as it happened, was in the hall when a grimy little street urchin presented himself in the doorway. Such an event had not entered into Fullwood's calculations; he had supposed that the note would be taken to the Housemaster by Tubbs, the page-boy.

"Well, my lad, what do you want?" asked Nelson Lee.

"Please, sir, I gotta note," said the urchin.

"A note? Who is it for?"

Lee took the grimy envelope from the grubby hand and glanced at it. The writing was in pencil, and in scrawly characters. "Mr. Nelson Lee." The Housemaster glanced curiously at the messenger.

"This note is for me," he said. "Where did you bring it from?"

"I ain't gotta tell you, sir," said the boy.

"Indeed," said Lee. "I am quite anxious to know who gave you this note, and it will be worth a shilling to you if you will give me the information."

The urchin's eyes sparkled as he beheld the coin.

"It was give to me by a boy, just in Holborn, sir," he said. "'E was just

like these 'ere boys 'ere, with a blue and red cap. 'E told me to take the note, and 'e gave me a tanner. That's all I knows, sir."

"All right! Here is your shilling," said Nelson Lee.

The urchin went off happy, and Nelson Lee walked down the hall and made his way to his own study. Once there he tore open the flap of the envelope and drew out the contents—a single page, torn from a popular magazine. Round the wide margin were several lines of small, sprawling pencilled writing.

"H'm!" muttered Lee. "This looks interesting."

He read the words slowly:

"If you want to find Tregellis-West, he is in the hands of two men named Palmer and Rogan. They run a gambling den in a side-street not far from Tottenham Court Road. Tregellis-West was trapped by these men. The gambling-den is a flat on the third floor. Find this place and you will find Tregellis-West."

There was no signature, and no address. Nelson Lee read the words through for a second time, and then gazed thoughtfully into the fireplace.

"Somewhat crude," he murmured. "There is no doubt that this message was sent by one of the boys—it is a good thing I questioned the youngster who brought it. And the boy responsible is apparently one of Montie's Form-fellows. He knows more about this than he dares to admit."

After a moment or two Nelson Lee touched the bell, and almost at once Tubbs made his appearance.

"You rang, sir?" he asked, looking in.

"Yes, Tubbs," said Lee. "Please tell Nipper to come to me."

"Yessir."

Tubbs found me in the vicinity of the Remove Form Room—for it was nearly time for afternoon lessons. I went to

the guv'nor's study at a rapid pace, wondering if anything fresh had occurred.

"Oh, Nipper," said Nelson Lee casually, "do you happen to know where there is a copy of this month's 'Argosy Magazine'?"

I was rather indignant.

"Do you mean to say you sent for me —" I began.

"I want you to answer my question, Nipper."

"The 'Argosy Magazine'?" I said. "Yes, De Valerie was looking at one, but I think Somerton bought it."

Nelson Lee raised his eyebrows.

"Somerton and De Valerie!" he repeated. "H'm! That's rather——"

"Hold on, though," I broke in. "I think De Valerie lent it to Gulliver, and I expect it's in Fullwood's study now."

The guv'nor smiled.

"I should like you to fetch it, Nipper," he said smoothly.

"Yes, but what——"

"And please hurry," added Lee.

I couldn't make out what the game was, but I knew by the guv'nor's tone that he was not in a mood to be questioned. So I went off, and arrived at Study A. I was rather pleased to find that it was empty—for I didn't like asking favours of Fullwood & Co.

The magazine in question was lying on a side-table, and I seized it and carried it away to Nelson Lee's study. Why on earth he should want this magazine was beyond my comprehension.

"You have got it?" said Nelson Lee, as I marched in. "Good! Please turn to page 48, Nipper. I have an idea that you'll find it missing."

I turned the leaves of the magazine over.

"Page 48 isn't here, sir," I said—"it's been torn out. How the dickens did you know it was missing?"

"Because I have page 48 here," said Lee calmly.

He handed it over to me, and I gazed at it in wonder. Then I saw the words

written on the margin, and I read them.

"My goodness!" I exclaimed. "What does this mean, guv'nor?"

"It means, Nipper, that either Fullwood or Gulliver or Bell wrote that message," replied Lee grimly. "Fullwood is the author, I imagine—although he has disguised his writing quite cleverly."

Nelson Lee told me how the note had been delivered.

"But how did you know about Fullwood?" I asked.

"My deductions were of the most elementary character, Nipper," smiled the guv'nor. "I learned that a junior schoolboy had given the note to an urchin to deliver. The obvious inference was that the boy was a Remove junior, and it was also apparent that he was attached to the Ancient House. A current magazine is generally passed about among the juniors, and I realised that the author of the note had written it upon magazine paper in order to avoid detection. He was rather too clever there, for you were quickly able to tell me that the magazine was in the possession of Gulliver."

"Simple as anything—after you've explained it," I said. "But what does it mean, guv'nor? What does Fullwood know about this affair?"

"I intend to question Fullwood very closely," said Nelson Lee grimly. "Let me see, it is nearly time for afternoon lessons. Will you tell Fullwood that I want him at once?"

"I'd like to hear——"

"Of course you would, Nipper, but I would prefer to question Fullwood alone," interrupted Lee. "You might explain to Mr. Crowell I am keeping Fullwood. I will let you know everything later on."

I went along to the Form-room and encountered Fullwood just as he was strolling up with Gulliver and Bell.

"Mr. Lee wants you at once, Fully," I said briskly.

The nuts started.

"Mr—Mr. Lee w-wants me?" stammered Fullwood.

"Yes."

"What about?"

"How should I know?" I asked. "He simply told me to give you the word. You'd better buck up, my son."

Fullwood went off, after exchanging alarmed glances with his chums. I was quite convinced that Fullwood was the writer of the mysterious note.

He made his way to Nelson Lee's study, and attempted to compose himself as he went along. When he arrived there he was looking quite at his ease. He tapped on the door, and entered.

"You want me, sir?" he asked casually.

"Yes, Fullwood," said Lee. "Close the door, and stand by my desk."

Fullwood did so.

"What is this?" asked the Housemaster abruptly.

He thrust before the startled Fullwood the page torn from the "Argosy Magazine." Ralph Leslie stared at it, horrified. He gulped, turned pale, and his hands shook as he took the page.

"Well?" said Nelson Lee quietly.

"I—I don't know, sir," stuttered Fullwood. "I—I mean it looks like a page from a magazine, sir!"

"Precisely, Fullwood," said Lee. "It was not at all a bad idea on your part. But I should advise you not to deny a fact which is obvious. You wrote this note to me, and I want you to give me some further details."

Fullwood stared at the Housemaster in a dazed kind of way.

"I—I don't know anything, sir," he said weakly. "I've never seen this piece of paper before——"

"You will not help matters by lying to me," rapped out Lee. "Tell me the truth, Fullwood, and I may not find it necessary to report you to the headmaster. You have been visiting this gambling den you refer to. Admit it—you might as well be frank with me."

"I—I—I—— Will you let me off, sir, if I own up?" asked Fullwood uneasily. Nelson Lee shook his head.

"I will make no bargain with you, Fullwood," he said sternly. "It is not my intention to make you speak by bribery. You may tell me the whole truth, and when I have learned all, I will deal with you as I think fit. I am hoping that I shall be able to settle the question personally, without going to the headmaster."

Fullwood realised that frankness was his best policy. A pack of lies would only make matters worse for him. By speaking up now there was just a chance that Nelson Lee would be merciful.

"I—I've been a fool, sir," said Fullwood brokenly. "But it wasn't my fault, sir—it was all the doin' of that scoundrel Palmer."

"Tell me the facts."

Fullwood did not intend to give Gulliver and Bell away if he could help it; and he adopted an injured and humble attitude which was intended to deceive Nelson Lee, but which did not deceive Nelson Lee in the least.

"I happened to meet Palmer in Holborn, sir, some days ago," said Fullwood. "He told me that he'd give me a good time, and last night I broke bounds and went with him—to that gamblin' place. Then we got talkin' about Tregellis-West, an' Palmer suggested that I should fetch him——"

"One moment, Fullwood," interrupted Lee. "You are only telling me a portion of the truth. I want to know everything—and I intend to know everything. How did you lure Tregellis-West to that place, for I have not the slightest doubt that you were the prime mover in the abduction."

Fullwood looked alarmed.

"I didn't know anythin' about it, sir!" he exclaimed earnestly. "I thought it was only a jape—honour bright! We wanted to shock Tregellis-West by gettin' him into that gamblin' place. I didn't know anythin' about

the kidnappin', or I wouldn't have agreed."

"I think I can believe that statement," said Nelson Lee. "Well?"

In the end Fullwood was compelled to tell practically everything. There was really no escape. Nelson Lee was not the kind of man to be put off with a false story. And the agitated Fullwood confessed all.

"I am amazed, Fullwood, that you should sink to such depths as these," said Nelson Lee sternly. "I'm inclined to take a lenient view, and to assume that you were led away by the man Palmer. You have been a fool, and it is just as well that you have told me the whole thing."

"Shall—shall I be sacked, sir?" asked Fullwood huskily.

"Whether you are expelled or not, Fullwood, you certainly deserve to be," said the Housemaster. "For the present, however, I intend to take no action. I will not report your conduct to the headmaster, and will reserve your punishment until after Tregellis-West has returned. Your conduct, in the meantime, will be watched by me, and your final punishment will be dealt according to your deserts. For your own sake I advise you to keep your tongue still."

"I won't breathe a word, sir," said Fullwood earnestly. "And thank you awfully for treating me so leniently——"

"You need not thank me, Fullwood," interrupted Lee. "And do not imagine for an instant that you are to get off scot-free. Your punishment will be heavy. But it is in your own hands to lighten it. If I see signs of genuine improvement, I may be inclined to be generous. And now I want to ask you a few questions. Who are these two men, Rogan and Palmer?"

"I don't know any more than I've told you, sir."

"Well, where is this gambling establishment?"

"I don't know, sir."

"And yet you've been there on two occasions?"

"Palmer took me in a taxi, sir, and I only know that it's down some side-street off Tottenham Court Road."

"H'm! That is somewhat vague," said Nelson Lee. "Surely you saw the street when you emerged from the taxi? What kind of entrance is there to this flat?"

"It's only a narrow entrance, sir, and the street is narrow, too—a quiet place, by the look of it," said Fullwood. "The doorway of the place has got some brass plates fixed up, so I expect there were some business offices there."

"Brass plates," repeated Lee slowly. "Did you read them?"

Fullwood started.

"Now you come to mention it, sir, I did see the name on one plate," he said. "It was Owen Salter. I didn't see any more, sir, although there were a lot of small words on the plate besides."

Lee made a note of the name.

"That piece of information will help us quite a lot," he said. "It is a very good thing you wrote me that note, Fullwood. It may mean that we shall succeed in rescuing Tregellis-West from these scoundrels. You are mainly responsible for the whole affair, and it will be lucky for you if we are able to effect a prompt rescue of the victim of your folly. You may go now, Fullwood—and say nothing."

"Thank you, sir," said Fullwood unsteadily.

He left the study with mingled feelings of relief and anxiety. The blow had fallen, but there was just a chance that it would not be a knock-out.

CHAPTER 5.

An Old Pal!

BANG! Crash!

"Ow! Yow! Yaroooh!" It was only McClure of the Remove alighting in the passage on his neck, after having been hurled out

of Study D. He sat up, blinked around dazedly, and removed a portion of jam tart from his left eye.

"Yow!" he groaned. "Oh, my goodness!"

"And if you come in here again," said Handforth grimly, "I'll rub your silly face in the fender!"

I had been coming along the passage as it happened, and I witnessed the whole performance. Tommy Watson was with me, for we were bound for Study C, in order to partake of tea.

"Trouble? I inquired politely.

Edward Oswald Handforth glared at me.

"I didn't ask you to butt in," he said tartly. "Of course, there's not any trouble, you ass!"

"Sorry," I said; "I thought McClure looked rather mangled!"

McClure struggled to his feet.

"You—you burbling lunatic! he gasped. "You dangerous idiot! What the dickens do you mean by chucking me out like that?"

"That's enough," interrupted Handforth. "I'm fed up with you, Arnold McClure! You can go and eat coke!"

"I haven't had tea yet!" roared McClure.

"Well, you're not going to have tea in this study——"

"Hold on," I said. "What has the unfortunate youth done? How has he earned the displeasure of the mighty Handy?"

"Oh, don't rot!" snapped Handforth. "If you think I'm going to stand by and hear my face described as a gargoyle, you're jolly well mistaken!"

"And is that why you hucked McClure out?"

"Yes!"

"For telling the truth about you?" I asked mildly.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"By George!" roared Handforth. "I'll wipe you up——"

"My dear chap, your weakness is a tendency to become excited over nothing," I said gently. "Have you ever

looked at your face in the mirror? Have you ever considered how closely it resembles the carvings on the fire insurance building——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Nature is nature," I went on. "You can't be blamed for it, Handy. It wouldn't be fair to blame you, anyway. It's a sheer misfortune to have a face like yours, but you ought to make the best of it. It's silly to get wild when a fellow happens to tell the truth—— Look out, you ass!"

Handforth charged at me, but I dodged with ease, and walked into Study C, next door, Watson following me, chuckling.

And from next door came the sounds of strife. McClure, apparently, had forced his way back into Study D, and Handforth was still arguing—with his fists. However, the disturbance was only temporary.

"They seem to be quiet now," remarked Watson after a few minutes. "The row'll break out again in about two ticks. How those chaps stand Handforth is more than I can understand!"

"Oh, Handy's all right in the main," I said. "He's not half such an ass as he makes people believe he is. It's a bit rotten here without Montie, isn't it? Let's hope he'll be back to-morrow."

Tommy Watson looked serious.

"Do you think he'll be back by then?" he asked.

"He ought to be," I said. "If the guv'nor doesn't rescue him to-night Lord Westbrooke is going to pay the five thousand."

Watson continued his task of making the tea, and he was thoughtful for a while.

I gazed absently out of the window. We were too thoughtful to speak at the moment. The door opened, and somebody looked in; but we didn't glance round.

"When does the funeral take place?" inquired a familiar voice.

I jerked my head round—and gasped.

"Tinker!" I gasped, jumping towards him.

"Great pip!" said Watson, nearly dropping the teapot.

"How goes it?" asked the visitor genially. "I thought you were just going to view the body, or something. Is anybody dead? Why this thushness? Why the gloom and misery?"

I dragged Tinker into the study, and closed the door. He was an extremely welcome visitor. I hadn't seen him for weeks. Tinker, the assistant of Mr. Sexton Blake, the famous Baker Street detective, was my oldest pal.

"This is great!" I exclaimed enthusiastically. "I went round to Baker Street last week, but you and your guv'nor were in the country somewhere. I'm delighted to see you, old son. When did you get back?"

"Yesterday," said Tinker. "The case was rather involved, but the guv'nor wasn't whacked. He dug out the truth after investigating—— But I didn't come here to talk 'shop.' I've dropped in to tea."

"Good!" I exclaimed. "As it happens we've got a good spread."

"A little bird must have whispered to you that I was coming," said Tinker, sitting down at the table. "But isn't there something missing?"

"Missing?" I repeated.

"Something with elegant clothes and eyeglass," explained Tinker.

"Oh, you mean Montie," said Watson, looking serious.

"You're quick to notice things, Tinker," I said. "Montie is missing!"

"Missing!" repeated Tinker. "What's the joke——"

"There's no joke about it, my son," I broke in. "Tregellis-West was kidnapped by a gang of crooks, and he's a prisoner somewhere. His uncle, Lord Westbrooke, has received a demand for five thousand pounds!"

Tinker stared at me curiously.

"Are you trying to kid me?" he asked.

"No, you ass! It's true."

"And isn't anything being done?"

"The gov'nor is busy on the case—"

"Well, that's good enough," said Tinker. "If Nelson Lee is giving his attention to the affair, Montie will soon be back. But tell me how it happened."

While we had tea I told Tinker all that had occurred.

"It was a bit of a mystery to me," I said, "how Montie was taken out of the dormitory. Now I know how it was done."

"I don't see how you can know," put in Watson. "You were asleep, and you can only guess—"

"The gov'nor has since told me," I put in. "Nelson Lee knows practically everything, because the fellow who helped to kidnap Montie has confessed. That fellow, I may as well explain, is Fullwood."

"Fullwood!" yelled Watson, in amazement.

"Yes."

"Great Scott!" said Tommy dazedly. Tinker selected a bun from the dish.

"I don't want to be inquisitive," he said politely, "but may I inquire who the interesting gentleman named Fullwood happens to be?"

"Gentleman!" I grinned. "He's a rank outsider, my son, and he belongs to the Remove. He's only an Ancient House junior. I've mentioned him before to you."

"Yes, I do seem to remember the name," admitted Tinker. "He's started out on a new line, then? Kidnapping isn't usually a boy's game—"

"Look here, I can't believe it, you know," said Watson. "Fullwood may be several kinds of a rotter, but he's not bad enough for that! Dash it all, he wouldn't go in for robbery, and that sort of thing!"

"It is practically certain that Fullwood was spoofered," I said. "He got acquainted with a flash sort of fellow last week, by what I can understand. His chap's name is Palmer, and he in-

troduced Fullwood to a gambling place. I've got a pretty keen idea that Gulliver and Bell were in the thing, too, although their names haven't been mentioned."

"Silly fools!" said Watson contemptuously.

"They are," I agreed. "But Fullwood & Co. have always considered themselves to be sporty boys. Well, Fullwood was bowled out by the gov'nor this morning, and the cad was compelled to trot out the whole yarn."

"It'll mean the sack for him," said Tommy.

"I don't think so," I said. "He deserves the sack, but his information is pretty valuable, and that may be taken into consideration. I expect he'll get off with a jolly good licking. Well, it seems that Fullwood was at this gambling place last night, and Palmer got to know about Tregellis-West. I suppose Fullwood told the scoundrel that Montie is a giddy millionaire. Anyhow, he persuaded Fully to come here and fetch Tregellis-West. He spoofered Fullwood into believing that it was only a kind of joke."

"Fullwood seems to be a brainy person, remarked Tinker.

"Montie was persuaded to go with Fullwood," I went on, unheeding. "I suppose the cad told Montie some faked-up yarn. In any case, Montie went, and it's quite clear that he was collared and taken into some other part of the house. And it's a ten-to-one chance that he's there now."

"Where is this place situated?" asked Tinker. "The gambling house, I mean?"

"That's just what we didn't know—to begin with," I replied. "Fullwood could only say that there was a brass plate on the door with a name on it. He happened to spot that by chance. It only took the gov'nor half an hour to establish the fact that Palmer's place is a flat on the third floor of a block of offices. The address is No. 59a, Whitlock Street. It's a quiet sort of

road somewhere behind Tottenham Court Road."

"Then there's nothing simpler," said Tinker. "Mr. Lee has only to go to this place, and there you are. Why hasn't he acted already?"

"Because there's no certainty that Montie is there now," I replied. "The guv'nor means to set out after dark, later on. He's going to watch the place, and act as he thinks best. I asked him to let me go, too, but there was nothing doing. He gave me the frozen refusal."

"Hard lines," said Tinker. "Well, it doesn't seem to be much of a problem, and there's no need to worry."

"If you think the guv'nor's going to put me off like that, you've made a bloomer," I said. "I mean to be in this affair——"

"But Mr. Lee has refused," said Tinker.

"I can't help that. I'm going without permission."

"Naughty boy!" said Tinker, shaking his finger at me severely. "Do you think I ever disobey Mr. Blake's orders? Never, until I think it's necessary to assert myself."

I grinned.

"I'm asserting myself this time," I said. "By jingo, I'll tell you what!" I went on eagerly. "What are you doing to-night?"

"Sleeping, I hope," said Tinker.

"Not likely!" I declared. "You'll meet me at eleven o'clock at the top of Tottenham Court Road, just outside the Dominion Theatre. Then we'll go along and keep our eyes glued on this gambling place. If the guv'nor gets into any trouble we can fish him out of it. Are you on?"

"With both legs!" said Tinker heartily. "Good! I was just wondering what I could do with myself this evening, and now you've solved the problem."

"Good!" I said.

Having come to that arrangement we finished tea, and then Tinker took his departure.

Nelson Lee had the case in hand, but I didn't see any reason why we shouldn't play a part.

And, as events turned out, it was fortunate that we took the decision.

CHAPTER 6.

Rather Unexpected!

NELSON LEE nodded.

"Exactly, Lennard," he said. "For the present we will do nothing. The time for action will be eleven-thirty. You will then stand a good chance of roping in your prisoners."

Chief Detective-Inspector Lennard, of Scotland Yard, looked rather glum.

"At eleven-thirty we'll make the road," he said. "As a matter of fact, this fellow Palmer has been through our hands before now. We're glad of the tip, Lee. I hope we shall nab the whole bunch."

Nelson Lee smiled.

"You're quite aware, Lennard, that it won't interest me if you nab nobody," he said. "My object in getting you to raid the flat is to effect the release of young Tregellis-West."

"Selfish beggar!" said Lennard. "You only think about your own end, and you don't care a toss about me. Well, I hope we shall rescue the lad, and collar the rascals at the same time. I'll be here with my men at twenty past eleven."

After a few minutes' more conversation the pair parted. They had been chatting at the corner of Whitlock Street, and the hour was just after ten-thirty. Nelson Lee, apparently, was not leaving much to chance.

He had decided that it would be better to have the co-operation of the police. The gambling-den was to be raided and Tregellis-West rescued in one swoop. The schoolmaster-detective considered that it would be unwise for him to act alone in an affair of this character.

After Lennard had gone he walked slowly down Whitlock Street in the direction of the high building where Sir Montie was probably a prisoner. No. 59a was a big, old-fashioned house, with numerous offices on the ground, first and second floors.

The third floor was a private dwelling—ostensibly. As a matter of fact, it was the gambling-den run by Palmer and his partner, Rogan.

Judging by all the evidence which had come into his possession, Nelson Lee was convinced that Sir Montie Tregellis-West was a prisoner in that flat.

He walked along the street until he came to No. 59a. Then he turned down a little alley, and made his way round into some mews. Presently he found himself at the rear of the place which was to be raided.

All was dark now; not a light showed from any window.

"Shutters, I suppose," murmured Lee. "Either those or heavy curtains. It wouldn't do for them to show lights, night after night. Well, the little game will be finished very shortly. Mr. Palmer has over-reached himself on this occasion, I imagine."

Nelson Lee stood watching the old house casually, without any particular interest. He had nothing to do but wait for the police to arrive. The raid, he felt certain, would be a complete surprise.

For Palmer and Rogan considered themselves to be safe; they had no inkling that their game had been spotted. And, from observations which Lee had taken earlier, he was convinced that gambling was going on as usual.

And then, as Lee watched, he became aware of a change.

At the topmost window—an attic—the curtain had been pulled aside. The window was flung open at the bottom, and the head and shoulders of somebody appeared. The figure remained there for a moment or two.

"I wonder what——"

Nelson Lee paused, catching his breath in slightly. For, to his astonishment, the figure climbed out upon the window-ledge and stood upright. And there was a sheer drop in front of him.

Certain death lay below!

The first thought which sprang into Nelson Lee's mind was an obvious one. He believed that the figure was that of a gambler. Ruined, he had decided to throw himself to death.

But Nelson Lee was wrong—as he saw after a moment.

The figure, instead of flinging itself down, edged its way along the face of the building. To Nelson Lee it seemed impossible that any human being could cling there. The figure seemed like a fly on the wall.

Obviously, there was a ledge running right along.

In the gloom Lee could not see this, but it was there. And as he watched the figure his thoughts were busy. The walk was a terribly perilous one, and no living being would attempt it unless the circumstances were desperate.

Who could this figure be?

Who would take such a chance?

"Upon my soul!" muttered Nelson Lee, really startled. "That must be Tregellis-West! He has got free from the attic, and he is making a bid for liberty. The reckless idiot! He will kill himself!"

The detective watched with terrible anxiety. His first impulse was to shout out a warning—to order Montie to return.

But that course, he knew, would be the worst he could adopt. The junior would look down, his attention would be diverted from his perilous task, and he would probably lose his balance.

So Nelson Lee remained perfectly still, watching.

"By James," he muttered, "what a nerve the lad must possess! I didn't think he was capable of it."

Montie was nearing the end of the building by this time, where the ledge ended abruptly.

Lee rather wondered what he would do when he got to the end. By the look of things the junior would be compelled to return along the ledge, for there was no other window handy, and it was impossible to slide down the face of the building.

But something happened which almost gave Lee a turn.

Sir Montie, without any warning, leapt into the air! Nelson Lee turned sick for a second; he thought that the lad had plunged down to certain death. But then he saw what had actually happened.

The next building in the street stood only about six feet away. It was a smaller building, and the roof at the rear was practically flat. Sir Montie had leapt from the ledge on to the roof—a distance of five feet at least.

"Thank Heaven!"

Nelson Lee saw Sir Montie safe and sound upon the other roof, and the detective was inwardly amazed at the schoolboy baronet's nerve. That jump was a terrifying experience in itself.

And yet Tregellis-West had taken it without hesitation.

And now he was running across the roof as though with a definite object. Lee saw what the object was—a builder's ladder!

The place was being redecorated, and the ladder had been left in position—as the majority of such ladders are. It was Montie's salvation, for he descended the ladder two rungs at a time.

Nelson Lee made a move at once. He was in a tiny alley, and by moving along he could easily reach the yard of the building. He would be able to get to Montie's side almost as soon as the junior alighted on the ground.

The detective jumped at the wall and hauled himself up.

He was just in time to see Tregellis-West fall the last five feet. He had overlooked the fact that a plank was roped to the bottom of the ladder. In consequence Montie landed on the ground in a somewhat dazed heap.

But he picked himself up quickly enough.

Free!

He had got away from his captors!

And then a dim figure loomed up out of the gloom. Tregellis-West caught his breath and turned to flee.

"It's all right, Montie," came a voice. "Don't run!"

"Mr. Lee!" gasped Sir Montie. "Oh, begad! How rippin'!"

Nelson Lee grasped Montie by the shoulder.

"Are you in any way harmed, my lad?" he asked kindly.

"Nothin' to speak of, sir," said Sir Montie. "Just a little graze on the left hand, an' a big bruise on my knee. Some shockingly absurd person has been playin' tricks with this ladder!"

Nelson Lee gazed at Tregellis-West in real wonder. The lad was just as urbane and calm as ever. His terrifying experience had not affected him in the slightest, it appeared.

He stood there, untidy and dishevelled, but just the same old Montie—cool and collected.

"Upon my soul, young 'un, I don't know what to say to you!" exclaimed Lee admiringly.

"That's all right, sir—there's no need to say anythin'," said Tregellis-West. "But I hope you won't give me lines or a canin' for breakin' bounds. It wasn't my fault—it wasn't, really! I have been kept a prisoner by two rascally bounders who run a gamblin'-den—"

"And if you had only waited another half-hour, Montie, you would have been rescued by the police," said Lee. "A raid is to occur very shortly."

"Begad, that's a piece of frightful luck, sir!" said Montie, with a sigh. "All that trouble for nothin'! An' I was kiddin' myself I was beating the whole gang, you know!"

"How did you get free?" asked Nelson Lee.

"You see, sir, we had a bit of a scrap up there," said Montie. "Before I got

out of the window I threw part of my supper at Palmer, and then he stumbled through the doorway right on the top of Rogan, who was just coming up. I slammed the door, and locked the pair of them outside."

Nelson Lee started.

"Good gracious! You should have told me this at first, Montie!" he exclaimed rapidly. "I thought you had escaped on the quiet! Your captors know that you got away, then?"

"Yes, sir!"

"We must leave this place instantly," said Nelson Lee briskly.

He led the way to the wall, and hoisted himself to the top. Sir Montie was helped up, and Nelson Lee grasped him by the arm as he was about to jump down into the dark alley.

"Let me go first, my lad," said Lee softly.

"That's all right, sir."

And Tregellis-West, who was already half-way over, jumped lightly to the ground.

Thud!

Something struck Sir Montie on the head, and he fell to the ground in a heap. Nelson Lee, with a growl of fury, hurled himself down. Without being sure, he had half-suspected that danger was near.

As he jumped down a stick whizzed past his head with a deadly swish. He turned like lightning, noticing that poor Montie was motionless on the ground. Two others figures were there—both armed with sticks.

"Get him, you fool!" snapped a harsh voice.

But Nelson Lee was not so easy to get as Montie. He grasped the hand which wielded the stick, and his left smashed into the man's face with considerable force. At the same second Lee dodged.

He was only just in time, for Palmer had aimed a blow at him with deadly intent. It was Rogan who had gone down. But he was on his feet again almost at once, and a moment

later he and Palmer were attacking Lee with all their strength.

The fight was unequal.

Both men still retained their sticks, and although Lee had a revolver, he had no opportunity of using that weapon. In any case, he would not have resorted to firearms.

He delivered a good few blows, but the end was inevitable. Dodging this way and that, he avoided most of the slashes. But the stick wielded by Palmer caught him a glancing blow on the right arm.

He swayed slightly, and then something struck him over the head with terrible force.

It was Rogan's stick, and the force behind it was such that Nelson Lee swayed still farther, staggered, and then sank to the ground. He was beaten—and both he and Montie were prisoners.

Before Lee could recover, his feet were bound, and a handkerchief was secured over his mouth. Montie was treated in the same way.

"By thunder, we have done it now, Rogan!" exclaimed Palmer huskily.

"What else could we do?" said Rogan. "The brat was escaping, and we had to get hold of him again. Who is this chap, anyhow?"

"How should I know?" asked Palmer. "Some passer-by, I suppose. We've got to do something with the pair now—we can't let the fellow escape."

The two men stood still for a moment, breathing heavily.

"We'll have to take them both away," said Palmer at last. "Somebody else might have seen, and there may be inquiries later on. We're right in this affair now, Rogan, and we can't afford to drop it. If I'd known this trouble was coming I wouldn't have touched the brat. But now we've started we've got to go right on."

Rogan nodded.

"You're right there," he admitted. "It'll mean the bust-up of our little

place, anyhow, and if we drop the affair now we shall get nothing. But if we keep these two until the morning we shall get that five thou—and that'll make it worth while. I shan't care a toss then!"

"Well, lend me a hand, and don't jaw!" snapped Palmer.

The pair set to work, and Nelson Lee and Tregellis-West were dragged along the dark alley to a little doorway, which led into the enclosed yard of No. 59. This yard was empty and deserted, and the rascals were rather shrewd in selecting it. Their own—59a—was not so private.

And then and there, they made their plans.

CHAPTER 7.

On the Job!

MARVELOUS!

Tinker made that remark as he strolled up at eleven o'clock. I was just outside the Dominion Theatre, at the corner of New Oxford Street and Tottenham Court Road. Tinker grinned as he came up.

"Eh?" I said. "What's marvelous?"

"You're here on time," he explained.

"I don't want any of your rot, as Handforth would say," I remarked. "I've been here five minutes, as a matter of fact. Feeling fit?"

"Fit for anything," said Tinker. "I mentioned to the guv'nor that I was up to some game with you, but he didn't seem interested. He's busy with some smelly experiment in the laboratory, and I've left him to stew in his own niffs!"

I grinned.

"Well, let's get a move on," I said. "Whitlock Street is down this way."

Tottenham Court Road was by no means deserted. The hour was comparatively early for the West End, and buses and taxis were still lumbering and shooting about in all directions.

"So you left Sexton Blake in the

laboratory at Baker Street," I remarked, as we strode along. "Well, my guv'nor went off a couple of hours ago, and there's no telling what he's done by this time. He wouldn't explain anything to me before he left."

Tinker grunted.

"Just like my guv'nor," he said. "If Sexton Blake gets an idea into his head, I have to drag it out of him by force very often. At other times he'll jaw to me for hours when I'm trying to go to sleep. Guv'nor's are queer people to get on with, but I suppose we must make the best of 'em. How did you manage to get out?"

"I've broken bounds," I said.

"Wicked youth!" exclaimed Tinker. "You'll get swiped for that!"

"Rats!" I said. "Nobody will know anything about it, except the guv'nor. And he wouldn't swipe me. I slipped away after lights-out, and got out through the corridor window. To-night, my son, we're going to make things hum!"

"Let's hope so," said Tinker.

We walked along the streets, chatting as we went. At length we arrived in Whitlock Street. It was dark and narrow, and quite deserted. It was situated away from the main thoroughfare, and was probably quiet and still every evening after nine o'clock.

We walked right past the front of No. 59a. The door was closed, and there was nothing doing at all. I saw at a glance that it would be hopeless for us to attempt any investigation in that quarter.

"We shall have to get to the back somehow," I murmured.

Tinker nodded, and we continued our way onwards until we came to a little alley, which ultimately led us into a kind of mews. All unknowingly, we were following the same course that Nelson Lee had followed, barely half an hour earlier. And we soon came within sight of the dark rear of No. 59a.

The high, old house looked gloomy and deserted, and Tinker and I stood

for some little time wondering how we should act. We knew that it would be no good getting into the yard, for the only door leading into the house belonged to the ground floor. And we wanted the top of the building.

"Look here," whispered Tinker. "Isn't there a fire-escape along there, three or four doors away? Can't you see something?"

"It looks like one of those iron ladder affairs," I said.

"It leads right up to the roof," went on Tinker. "I vote we go in that direction, get on to the roof, and see if we can find a skylight. I don't know what we're going to do, but there's no sense in coming here for nothing."

"Let's go along and see," I agreed.

We made our way back along the alley, and then scaled a fairly high wall. Picking our way through a number of boxes and other rubbish, we eventually arrived at the foot of a permanent fire-escape—one of those spidery iron ladders affixed to the wall from ground to roof.

We mounted from platform to platform, and at length arrived upon the topmost rung of all. It was possible to reach the roof without any difficulty, and we both scrambled up and made ourselves comfortable on the tiles.

Then, after a breather, we edged our way along until we were on the roof of 59a. But now that we were there, we hardly knew what to do. There was no skylight, and no trapdoor.

"It seems to me that we shall have to get down again," I remarked. "A fat lot we can do up here—like a couple of old tom-cats! It seems to me, Tinker, my son, that we're decidedly off-side."

"Hold on," said Tinker briefly.

He climbed up on the roof, and clung to the chimney-stack. He was about to move forward again when he started, and leaned right over the chimney. Then he looked down, and beckoned to me.

"What's the matter?" I whispered.

"Voices!" hissed Tinker.

And then I understood. There were some people in one of the rooms of the house—probably the attic—and their voices floated clearly up the chimney. The occupants of the room were not likely to guess that people were on the roof.

I didn't suppose for a moment that we should learn anything. The chimney was an old-fashioned brick one, square, and solid. And as Tinker and I leaned over we could hear voices floating up into the outer air.

"The fellow is coming up the stairs now," said somebody.

"Good!" came another voice.

"You're here in good time, Greggs," said the first voice. "You've got your van with you?"

"Yes; it's outside," came a gruff voice.

"All right. You'll find two big packing-cases in the yard of number fifty-nine—next door. I'll come down with you to lend a hand. Be careful with the stuff, because it's breakable. You've got to take the cases to Reed's Wharf."

"Where's that?"

"I'll give you directions," said the other. "It's below London Bridge, on the north side of the river. But you'd better come down with me right away. The sooner the cases are taken away the better."

The voices ceased, and there was nothing further.

"Drawn blank," whispered Tinker.

"Seems like it," I replied. "Those people are innocent right enough, it seems. I don't suppose they're connected with Palmer's crowd at all."

"They sound like ordinary business people," remarked Tinker, "although it's rather a queer hour to transact business. It seems that some goods are to be sent down to the riverside."

I thought for a moment.

"You can't get over the fact that those men were talking in Palmer's house," I said. "This upper part of the building is all tenanted by Palmer,

I believe. The question is, was Palmer speaking just now, or Rogan?"

"That's a point we can't decide," said Tinker. "We've never seen either of the bounders, and we can't recognise their voices. But it's quite on the cards that they do a bit of business in addition to the gambling. Anyhow, we don't want to worry over what we heard; it's not worth the trouble. Everything seems quiet down in the room now."

We listened for a moment or two, but heard nothing. I pulled out my electric-torch, thrust my arm down the chimney, and pressed the switch.

"I say!" I exclaimed. "Look at this chimney. It seems to me that the grate in that room has never had a fire in it. The chimney is smooth and clean; there's not a sign of soot."

We inspected the chimney with interest.

"It's a good size, too," remarked Tinker. "Old-fashioned shafts of this kind are generally very big. My goodness!" he added abruptly.

"What's the matter?"

"An idea!" breathed Tinker. "A brainwave, my son!"

"Well, trot it out; don't keep me in suspense," I said.

"This chimney is big enough for a full-grown man to squeeze down," murmured Tinker. "You and I could slip down with ease! See the little notches in the brickwork here and there? It'll be dead easy, and we can get into the house—just at the right place!"

I gazed at Tinker admiringly.

"You've hit it, my son," I said approvingly. "That's the very wheeze we wanted. My only hat! We might be able to—"

"Better not raise any hopes," advised Tinker. "The thing is to get down, and see how the land lies. Who's going first? I think we'd better toss up for it," he added. "That'll save all dispute."

"I'm game," I said briefly.

We tossed, and I won.

"If you find somebody in the room when you get down there you'll probably have a packet of trouble," said Tinker. "If so, shove your head up the chimney, and yell. I'll buzz down like lightning."

It was rather a novel proceeding. To squirm down a chimney would have been impossible in any modern dwelling.

But this square shaft was old-fashioned, and for some reason it had never been used. So we should not become grimy during the descent. Having decided matters, we lost no time.

I entered the shaft first, and gradually edged my way down. It was rather a ticklish job, but it was not the first time I had descended a chimney-shaft. After I had lowered myself about six feet, Tinker commenced the descent. I looked up rather anxiously.

"You'd better be careful!" I hissed. "If you slip, you'll fall on me, and it doesn't take long to slip in a place like this!"

"Carry on!" said Tinker. "I shan't slip!"

I hurried my movements somewhat, and at length I found myself nearing the bottom of the shaft. When I was practically standing in the grate I came to a halt, and listened.

Everything was perfectly silent, and, what was more, the room was in darkness. This indicated that it was empty, and I felt that we were meeting with some measure of success, after all.

It struck me that the room might be sub-let to some business man. Even if this proved to be the case, Tinker and I would get into Palmer's flat, and that was the main thing.

It was not an easy job, squeezing through the fireplace into the room. In fact, I thought it couldn't be done at first, for the grate was not so old-fashioned as the chimney. I don't quite know how we managed to squeeze through, but we did it somehow.

Tinker arrived a few moments after me. He found me examining the room by the light of my electric-torch.

"Well, it's not a business office," I whispered. "I can't quite make out what's been happening here. It seems to be a bed-room, and yet everything is in a mighty queer state."

The room was practically bare. There was no covering on the floorboards, and the bed itself was a temporary affair of meagre dimensions. A small deal table and a kitchen chair comprised the other furniture. On the table stood the remains of a meal.

Although I did not know it at the time, that apartment was the room where Sir Montie had been held a prisoner. But we had no time to investigate.

While we were standing there we both became aware of a tremendous commotion in the house below. Shouts rang out, whistles blew, and doors slammed. Tinker and I stared at one another in astonishment.

"Sounds like a concert," remarked Tinker, "or jazz music!"

I strode to the door, and opened it.

The sounds were now greatly increased in volume. There was evidently a row of some kind proceeding. And just at that moment a figure came dashing up the stairs at breakneck speed.

It bolted into the attic, and I saw that the figure was that of a young man, attired in evening dress. He was scared out of his wits, and his face, in spite of his exertions, was as pale as chalk.

"Is there any escape this way?" he gasped hoarsely.

"What the dickens——" I began.

"You young idiots!" snapped the other. "If you don't move yourselves you'll be arrested! Isn't there a window here? The place is raided, and the police are swarming——"

"My hat!" I exclaimed. "So that was the gov'nor's wheeze! He's having the place raided by the police! That ought to wake the bounders up, and I expect Montie will be found, too."

The young man had been to the window, but he turned now.

"There's no escape this way!" he gasped frenziedly. "Why didn't you tell me, you young fools?"

"We can't help your troubles," said Tinker. "If you've been mad enough to frequent a gambling-den, you deserve to be collared. A few weeks in prison would do you a lot of good; but I expect you'll get off with a fine."

"I shall be ruined!"

Tinker and I did not wait to hear any more. We hurried to the door, and made our way along the landing. But just then three police-constables came hurrying up, and our path was barred.

"Now then, young fellers!" said one of the constables. "You'd better not try any monkey-tricks. Give in quiet, and you won't be hurt."

I couldn't help grinning.

"We're mistaken for habitués of the wicked gambling-den, Tinker," I said. "It's all right, constable. This young gentleman here is Tinker, the assistant of Mr. Sexton Blake, and I am——"

"Now then," said the policeman gruffly. "I don't want any yarns of that kind. Are you going to give in quietly, or not?"

"But——"

"Collar him, Jenkins!" said the other constable. "Don't stand there arguing."

"You silly chumps!" I shouted. "We're friends of Mr. Lennard!"

"You can tell that to the chief himself," interrupted Jenkins. "It's my duty to place you under arrest, seeing as you were found on these premises. Are you coming quiet, or do you want a taste of this?"

He showed us his truncheon, and we knew that he and his fellow constables were in no mood for argument. It was quicker to give in, and submit to arrest. In any case, we could do practically nothing now.

"I expect Montie is rescued by this time," I remarked. "We'd better go down like good little prisoners, Tinker."

Being arrested is a new experience for us."

Tinker grinned, and we were marched down the stairs with the man in evening dress between. He was scared out of his life.

On the lower landing, by great good fortune, we ran into Chief Detective-Inspector Lennard, of the C.I.D. He stared at us in amazement for a moment, and then the corners of his mouth twitched suspiciously.

"Three more of 'em, eh?" he said grimly.

"Yes, sir," said P.C. Jenkins. "They were hiding in the top room."

"March them away with the others," said the chief-inspector curtly.

"What the dickens—"

"Look here, Mr. Lennard—"

"Now then, no more of your bluff!" said the constable darkly. "Pretended to be friends of Mr. Lennard, didn't you? If I have any of your nonsense, I'll soon show you—"

"But we're not going to be arrested!" roared Tinker, struggling.

Lennard burst into a laugh.

"It's all right, constable," he said. "You can release those two youngsters."

"Release them, sir!" gasped Jenkins.

"They happen to be the assistants of Mr. Sexton Blake and Mr. Nelson Lee," explained Lennard. "It was only my fun, boys."

"Well, I'm blowed!" said the constable blankly, and he took his remaining prisoner downstairs.

"I don't know how in the name of wonder you got upstairs," said Lennard, "but I should like to know what you're doing here, you young rascals? What's the idea? How did you get in?"

"We'll explain that later," I said quickly. "Where's the guv'nor?"

"That's what's puzzling me," said Lennard. "Lee promised to be here with us, but he's failed to turn up—as far as I know."

"Have you found Tregellis-West?"

"No."

"But he's here—he must be here—"

"He isn't here," interrupted the chief-inspector. "The place has been searched throughout, and the boy isn't on the premises. An explanation has occurred to me, and I think it must be the correct one, because Palmer and Rogan have slipped through our fingers."

"An explanation?" repeated Tinker.

"It strikes me that the rascals knew something about this raid," said Lennard. "They got the wind up. And it's quite possible they took Tregellis-West away with them. In fact, it's about the only thing they could do. And Lee is on the track."

"By jingo!" I exclaimed. "That's about the size of it. The guv'nor must have smelt a rat. Perhaps he saw something suspicious, and followed. In that case, it's not much good remaining here."

"No good at all," said Lennard. "The best thing you can do is to go back to bed."

We bade the chief-inspector good-night five or ten minutes later, after satisfying ourselves that there was no sign of Montie on the premises. Tinker grinned at me rather curiously as we walked out.

"We came for nothing, after all," he remarked.

"Looks like it," I agreed. "But we've had a bit of excitement."

Although we didn't know it at the moment, our visit to No. 59a, Whitlock Street, was not to prove quite valueless, after all.

CHAPTER 8.

No News!

ANY news of Mr. Lee, sir?"

It was the morning following the raid upon Palmer's gambling-den, and I asked that question as I met Mr. Crowell in the hall. I had hurried over my dressing, and was down before anybody else.

"No, Nipper, I regret to say that

there is no news whatever," said Mr. Crowell gravely. "I understand that Mr. Lee went on a rather dangerous mission last night."

"I don't think it was exactly dangerous, sir," I said. "The idea was to rescue Tregellis-West; but the police raided the place, and didn't find a sign of Montie. And Mr. Lee had gone, too!"

"How do you know all this, Nipper?" asked the Form-master.

"I was there, sir."

"You—you were there?"

"Yes, sir," I said. "I went out last night especially, and got back just after midnight."

"Upon my soul!" ejaculated Mr. Crowell.

"I don't think Mr. Lee will punish me, sir, when he finds out," I said easily. "It was a special case, you know. I hope we shall get some news before long. The gov'nor ought to be here by now—Tregellis-West as well. It's a mystery."

Mr. Crowell hardly knew what to say, and he decided the matter by saying nothing. He walked off, and I went out into the courtyard.

It was my firm opinion that Nelson Lee was on the track of Montie. But I didn't know. And the uncertainty was disquieting.

I wondered what Lord Westbrooke had done.

Would he pay the five thousand pounds?

Somehow I felt sure that he wouldn't. In the circumstances, he would wait until he heard something further.

Tommy Watson came down soon after I had emerged into the courtyard, and he looked at me inquiringly. I shook my head.

"It's no good, Tommy," I said. "There's nothing doing. Yesterday Montie had vanished, and was missing. This morning the gov'nor's missing, too. There's not a word known of either of them."

Watson looked alarmed.

"But what's happened, Nipper?" he

asked. And what about last night? Did you go over to that gambling place—"

I explained to Watson what had occurred, for he had been fast asleep at the time of my return. He listened with great interest, and was inclined to agree with my view when I had finished.

"That's what it is—of course!" he declared. "Mr. Lee went off on the track of those two crooks. Anyhow, I shouldn't worry."

Breakfast-time came, and I went into the dining-hall with Tommy. I was not in the mood for eating, and when the meal was over I sought the open air again. By a piece of luck, the first person I saw in the courtyard was Detective-Inspector Lennard. He waved to me cheerily.

"Morning, young 'un," he said, as I approached him. "Mr. Lee turned up yet?"

"No," I replied. "Neither has Tregellis-West."

"H'm! That's rather queer," said the chief-inspector, stroking his chin. "I was almost certain that we should learn something further this morning. I was talking to Lord Westbrooke over the 'phone ten minutes ago."

"Has he paid that money?" I asked quickly.

"No. He's chancing it."

"That's the most sensible thing he can do," I said. "The position is different now. Palmer and Rogan are in flight, and I don't suppose anybody kept that appointment at all."

"Lord Westbrooke thinks it will be better to wait for the next development—whatever that might be. And I agree with him—because I've got a pretty keen idea that Lee is making the most of his time. Our men are doing their best to get on the track; but so far they have met with no success at all."

"Haven't you discovered anything at that place in Whitlock Street?"

Lennard smiled.

"My dear lad, the place was a miniature Monte Carlo," he declared.

"It's a good thing we seized the place. The only pity is that the chief culprits have slipped through our fingers. But they'll turn up—and Lee will turn up—and Tregellis-West will turn up."

Lennard was very confident, and he bucked me up quite a lot. When the time for morning lessons arrived I was feeling practically myself again. I went into the Remove class-room with the other fellows, and thrust all thoughts of Sir Montie aside during the work hours.

But I'll confess that I was very relieved when the bell clanged, announcing that lessons were over. Tommy and I at once rushed away, and sought information from everybody we met.

But there was still the same reply—no news.

"This is rotten!" I said grimly. "I was sure that something would have happened before this time, Tommy. I'm getting really anxious, and I've a dashed good mind to ring up Mr. Sexton Blake and ask his advice."

"Good idea!" said Watson. "There's a 'phone in Mr. Crowell's room."

We went along the passage, and tapped at the door of Mr. Crowell's study. Receiving no reply, I opened the door, and saw that the room was empty. The telephone instrument was standing on a side table.

"I'm going to use it!" I said.

But we had hardly reached the table before a footstep sounded out in the passage, and the swish of a gown announced the fact that Mr. Crowell was approaching. He regarded us in astonishment over his glasses.

"Dear me!" he exclaimed. "Are you waiting for me, boy?"

"We—that is, Nipper—" began Watson.

"I was just going to use your telephone, sir," I explained.

Mr. Crowell frowned.

"Indeed!" he said. "May I inquire who gave you permission?"

"Nobody, sir—"

"Then you will kindly leave my study at once," said the Form-master. "If

you want to use my telephone, Nipper, you must go about it in a different manner."

"I say, sir, I'm awfully sorry if I've offended you," I said earnestly. "But I'm so jolly anxious about Tregellis-West and Mr. Lee. I was going to ring up Mr. Sexton Blake, of Baker Street, and ask him for his advice."

Mr. Crowell looked less stern.

"That puts a different complexion on the matter, Nipper," he said. "Why did you not tell me your object straight away? I thought you wished to use the telephone for some mere commonplace purpose. You are at perfect liberty to use the telephone."

"Oh, thank you, sir," I said eagerly.

Mr. Crowell smiled and withdrew. It was very decent of him to take it in that way. I was soon talking to the Exchange. I got through to Sexton Blake's number quickly, and Tinker's cheerful voice was soon audible.

"Who's that?" he demanded.

"That you, old son?" I asked. "I'm Nipper."

"Oh, good!" said Tinker. "What's the latest?"

"You know it," I replied. "Nothing further has occurred since we parted last night. I haven't anything to tell you—except that Lord Westbrooke hasn't paid the five thousand. I feel jolly worried."

"Poor old josser!" said Tinker sympathetically. "It is a bit of a worry for you, I know. I say, why don't you run over here? It's a half-holiday today, isn't it? You told me—"

"Wait a minute," I interrupted. "I wanted to have a word with your guv'nor."

"He's out."

"Oh, that's rotten!" I exclaimed. "I wanted to ask his advice—"

"Then the best thing you can do is to come over—to lunch," said Tinker briskly. "You can cut dinner for once, and feed with us. I'm expecting the guv'nor to blow in at any minute. See if you can get here within a quarter of an hour. I'll time you."

"Good!" I said. "I'll do it!"

A moment later I hung up the receiver, and turned to Watson.

"He's asked me over to lunch," I said. "Don't you worry, Tommy. I shall be back during the afternoon, and I advise you to carry on as usual. Oh, by the way! Isn't Somerton getting up a party of some kind?"

"Yes, I think so," said Tommy.

"Well, if you're invited—go," I said. "Don't hang about for me. Go and enjoy yourself. I'd come along, too, but I've accepted this invitation to Baker Street."

And it was arranged like that. Tommy Watson didn't quite like it, but there was no sense in objecting. And less than two minutes later I had received permission to dine out, and I was hurrying into Holborn.

I managed to get a taxi at once, and was soon bowling along towards Baker Street. I arrived in good time, and found Tinker waiting on the step. He grinned cheerfully as I paid off the taxi.

"It's O.K.," he said. "The guv'nor's here."

"That's first rate," I exclaimed. "By jingo! It's jolly good to see you again, in your own quarters, Tinker."

He led the way upstairs, and I passed through the superbly furnished consulting-room into the dining-room. Sexton Blake, the celebrated criminologist, was reclining in an easy-chair, smoking and reading. He rose to his feet as I entered, and shook my hand warmly.

"I am very pleased to see you, Nipper," he said. "You are rather worried at present, but you mustn't concern yourself too much. Surely you can trust Mr. Lee to take care of himself?"

"Yes, sir, but—"

"There are no 'buts,'" interrupted Blake smilingly. "Tinker has frequently worried himself thin—although I'll confess his appearance doesn't give one that impression—because I have been absent on a case longer than he

expected. There's no necessity for you to grow grey hairs yet awhile!"

"I wanted to ask your advice, sir," I said. "When I rang up you were out—"

"Eh?" said Sexton Blake. "Who told you that?"

"Tinker did."

"Then Tinker, I regret to say, is guilty of a deliberate falsehood," said Blake. "I was in the very room when you were on the telephone—"

"Dash it all, you needn't have given me away like that, guv'nor!" protested Tinker. "I was in the consulting-room when you answered the 'phone, and I told Nipper that you were out. And so you were out—of the consulting-room!"

"That is merely twisting the truth," said Blake severely.

"And what was the idea of spoofing me, anyway?" I asked.

"My dear old ass, I wanted you to come over to lunch," explained Tinker. "If you had collared hold of the guv'nor over the 'phone you might not have come at all. These sort of things have to be worked."

We all chuckled, and shortly afterwards we were sitting down to a very appetising luncheon.

"No news, to quote an old adage, is good news," remarked Sexton Blake, as he tackled his food. "And you must never worry, Nipper, until there is sufficient cause. Tinker has given me the main facts of this case, and it seems to me that you both made one little mistake."

"And what was that, sir?"

"You did not give sufficient attention to the men who were discussing the removal of some merchandise," said Sexton Blake. "There were some packing-cases, I believe, bound for some wharf on the river? If I had been on the spot I should have sent one of you down to follow that vehicle with the packing-cases."

"But why, sir?" I asked wonderingly.

"Because it is always better to take

every precaution," replied Blake. "One never knows where a clue will lead to. However, I am quite content to leave this business in Lee's hands. I have no fear for his safety."

Sexton Blake cheered me up a great deal, and before luncheon was over I felt quite high-spirited. I had an idea that fresh developments would occur very shortly and I was not far wrong.

"If you require help at any time," Sexton Blake told me, "you had better ring up this number. If I am available, Nipper, I will come to you without a moment's delay. Don't forget to ring up if you want me."

"Thank you, sir," I said. I'll remember that."

CHAPTER 9.

The Duke's Treat!

"RIPPING!"

"First class!"

"A jolly fine wheeze!"

"Good for you, Somerton!"

"You're a brick!"

The Duke of Somerton smiled round him amiably. Dinner was over at the school, and Somerton, of the Remove, was talking with a crowd of fellows in the junior Common-room. The juniors were all talking at once.

"A giddy trip down the river!" said Handforth. "I've often wanted to go, but I haven't got tons of money like Tommy has. He's a brick, and I accept his invitation for Study D with many thanks!"

Somerton raised his eyebrows.

"That's awfully interesting," he said mildly. "But I don't exactly remember inviting Study D!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Handforth waved his hand.

"Don't mention it," he said casually. "I knew you were going to invite us, of course, and that's why I spoke. It'll be ripping to be your guests for the afternoon, old son."

"Pushing bounder!" growled Full-

wood. "I'm blessed if I'd have the sauce to invite myself like that!"

The Duke smiled.

"Even if you did invite yourself, Fullwood, I'm afraid you wouldn't come," he observed calmly. "But Handforth and Church and McClure are at perfect liberty to come along if they please."

"Good!" said Church and McClure. "Thanks awfully!"

"Of course, we don't want to come if you think we're imposing on you," said Handforth. "I wouldn't dream of letting Church and McClure go—"

"Eh?" said Church warmly. "You look after yourself!"

"I don't want any of your cheek—"

"Peace, children," said Somerton, holding up his hand. "There is to be no quarrelling. We start out in half an hour's time, and we shall all be back in time for tea. The trip will be short, but there's no reason why it shouldn't be interesting."

Somerton's idea was an excellent one—in the view of the juniors. He had hired a small river launch for two or three hours. He thought it would be an excellent way of spending the half-holiday—to cruise down the river for some distance, and to cruise back again.

There was no football on for the juniors, and Somerton could have taken sufficient guests with him to sink the launch.

However, he only favoured the decent fellows—those he was on friendly terms with. The party, when it started out, numbered sixteen. They were very cheerful and light-hearted; they meant to enjoy the afternoon.

Tommy Watson was there. He had made up his mind to be cheerful, and it was certainly easy to be cheerful in that sunny atmosphere. The fellows walked to the Embankment, and found the steam-launch ready against one of the little piers.

The captain was a young fellow of about twenty-five, and he grinned

cheerily as the juniors trooped on board.

Handforth & Co. managed to find a position for themselves right in the bows. This was considered by some of the juniors to be the best place. And it might as well be mentioned that Handforth only obtained that place by force.

Owen major and Griffith and Clinton had ensconced themselves right in the bows, just before Handforth & Co. had arrived. There followed a brief argument, one or two howls, and then Handforth & Co. had possession.

"Cheek!" said Handworth warmly. "It's likely we're going astern, isn't it? Those asses were nearly ready to fight!"

The three juniors in question would have fought valiantly had they been within the school grounds. But they didn't like to cause a disturbance on such an occasion as this. Handforth had no such scruples.

"This is ripping!" exclaimed McClure, as they gathered speed and glided down the river. "Oh, good! Somerton deserves well of his country for being so sporting. Good old duke!"

"Hear, hear!" said Church.

The party enjoyed themselves greatly. They glided down the river, under Blackfriars Bridge, and then along to London Bridge. Handforth seemed to imagine that he was the chief guide to the party, and he pointed out places of interest as they proceeded. In most instances he was totally wrong.

"There, on the left, you see the Tower of London," he exclaimed. "It doesn't seem quite the same as usual."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"That place is a warehouse, Handy," said Pitt, with a grin.

"Rot!" declared Handforth. "The Tower is just against the north side of London Bridge, and nobody has shifted it that I know of. That place is the only building on the spot, so it must be the Tower of London. I expect

they've been disguising it, or something."

"The Tower of London is next to the Tower Bridge, you ass," said Hart.

"By George," said Handforth. "I suppose it is."

They all grinned, and the launch slid beneath London Bridge, and then the real Tower of London was within sight, the low, old buildings looking sombre and imposing from the level of the river.

The launch slipped along beneath the great structure of the Tower Bridge, and then the scenery was not quite so picturesque. On either side lay wharves and warehouses—grimy and dirty.

The launch was to proceed as far as Greenwich, and then turn back and go right up to Richmond before returning to Blackfriars. The majority of the juniors were not very interested in the lower part of the river. It was too dirty and ugly to warrant much enthusiasm.

But an incident occurred which was destined to mean a great deal.

The launch was moving down the river smoothly and steadily. On the north bank there were wharves and warehouses in profusion. One of these Handforth noticed, had the name painted on the building at the rear, facing the river. The place was old and dilapidated, and the words were just distinguishable out of the grime.

"Reed's Wharf," said Handforth, reading the words. "That looks a pretty rotten show, I must say. Just have a look at that old crane. It's rusty and ramshackle, and it looks as if it hadn't been used for years."

"It's being used now, anyhow," said McClure.

The juniors watched the operations as they slipped by. A barge lay in the river immediately under the warehouse. And the crane was lowering a large packing-case into the hold of the barge.

There was another packing-case in the warehouse, ready to be lowered when the crane was free.

"Somebody would get hurt if that chain broke," remarked Handforth, as he watched. "It doesn't seem to be very strong, either. Why, that warehouse is practically a ruin! The windows are smashed and the walls are cracking. I wonder why it's being used in that condition?"

"You'll have to wonder, too," said McClure. "We can't tell you."

"I'll bet those cases contain stolen property, or something," went on Handforth, who was always ready to make wild guesses.

"Well, I expect they contain something—so you must be right," said Church. "Look at this tug coming along here. We shall roll a bit when we get into its wash. Mind you don't fall overboard, Handy."

Handforth was still watching the big packing-case as it was being lowered. Then, suddenly, he gave a start, and watched even more intently.

"I—I say!" he exclaimed sharply.

"Eh?" said Church. "What's the matter?"

"That's jolly queer," said Handforth, staring. "I can swear I saw one of the boards of that big box bulge outwards just now!"

"You saw it do what?"

"Bulge outwards—just as if something inside was trying to break it open," said Handforth. "There you are! There it goes again. Didn't you see it?"

Church and McClure gazed at the packing-case, but it descended into the hold of the barge just then, and disappeared from view. Handforth's face was flushed, but Church and McClure were grinning.

"You ass!" said Church. "It was only your fancy."

"Fancy!" roared Handforth. "Why, you—"

"Don't make a row, for goodness' sake," snapped Church.

"I tell you I saw that packing-case bulge open," declared Handforth. "You can say what you like, but you won't make me alter my opinion."

McClure sighed.

"We don't want to make you alter it," he said. "We simply want you to drop the subject, Handy. I expect the case warped a bit because the chain wasn't fixed round it properly. Anyhow, there's nothing to get excited about."

"I'm not excited!" snapped Handforth. "If you say—"

"Look out!" put in Church. "That tug's gone past, and we shall get the wash in two ticks. Better hang on tight. It would be a pity if you dropped overboard, Handy!"

The tug had been going at full speed up the river, and the wash it caused was considerable. The launch dipped as she struck the disturbed water. She heeled over, rolled, and dug her bows into the river.

A great mass of spray came inboard

"Hi! Look out!" yelled Church, with a gasp.

"Ow!"

Handforth & Co. were swamped.

"Ha, ha, ha!" howled Owen major. "How do you like the bows, Handy? It's a good thing you got there—instead of me!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Handforth was certainly paid for his high-handed action. After that he wasn't particularly anxious about remaining in the bows. And the incident drove the matter of the bulging packing-case out of his mind for the time being.

But, later on, when the river trip was nearing its end, Handforth thought of Reed's Wharf on several occasions. He tried to get one or two fellows interested, but they were not having any.

"I don't care what you say," declared Handy. "I'm pretty certain that there was something fishy about that wharf."

"Oh, give it a rest!" said Church.

"If I always took your advice, Walter Church, I don't know where I should be," said Handforth sourly. "Just consider the facts. That wharf is filthy and rusty with disuse. The

warehouse itself is nearly failing to pieces with decay. Why, therefore, were those two new packing-cases being lowered into an old barge?"

"The answer," said McClure, "is a lemon!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You—you silly ass——"

"Aren't you asking conundrums?" inquired McClure mildly.

"No, I'm not!" snapped Handforth. "I'm telling you that it's jolly queer—and I believe there's something fishy about Reed's Wharf. Those cases wouldn't bulge for nothing."

"It's got to the plural now," said Church. "I thought you only saw one case bulge?"

"Oh, go and eat coke!"

Handforth felt decidedly aggrieved. He had made up his mind that he had got on the track of a mystery, and it was rather annoying to find that his chums ridiculed him, and laughed at his suggestions.

The redoubtable leader of Study D was always ready to make a romance out of any unusual incident he happened to witness. In nine cases out of ten he was hopelessly at sea.

In this instance his observations were of enormous value, and his ideas concerning the packing-cases were correct. But he couldn't get anybody to support him. The juniors thought he was dotty—as usual.

But when Handforth got a thing firmly fixed in his mind it required a good deal of knocking out. When the river trip came to an end he was still looking rather thoughtful, and he forgot to thank Somerton for the afternoon's pleasure.

"Jolly rotten, I call it!" said Church, as they walked back to the school. "I think a fellow ought to have enough decency to express his thanks. But, of course, some chaps don't think of those things. They've got their heads full of packing-cases and barges, and——"

"Eh?"

Handforth looked at his chums sharply.

"Oh, so you're beginning to agree with me at last?" he asked. "When I got to the school, I'm going to tell Nipper. He won't sneer at me like you do, you rotters! That incident was significant."

"Oh, my goodness!" gasped Church.

"But we were talking about something else, Handy," remarked McClure mildly. "We were saying that it was rather rotten of you to forget to thank Somerton for the afternoon's enjoyment!"

"Don't talk twaddle!" said Handforth pityingly. "Is Somerton going to drop through the ground? Shan't I have plenty of chances of thanking him this evening? The most important things of the moment always occupy my mind at the—er—moment. And the most important thing now is that wharf incident. I tell you straight away that it was sinister—— Hi! I'm talking to you, you asses!"

But Church and McClure had walked away, and Handforth was left to stride along alone. After a wrathful snort, he quickened his pace, and caught up with Tommy Watson.

"I say, Watson, did you see that rummy business——"

"About the packing-case?" asked Tommy. "Don't trot that out now, there's a good chap. Everybody has been grinning at you, and I must say that you're a bit potty. How can there be anything fishy about a packing-case?"

"It might have been full of herrings!" remarked Pitt, who was near by. "Herrings are fishy enough."

"I suppose that's meant to be funny?" sneered Handforth. "Well, I'm not in the mood for humour just now. Did you watch that packing-case as it was being lowered into the barge?"

"I hardly glanced at it," admitted Watson.

"Then you're not capable of giving any opinion," said Handforth. "Nip-

per's worth the whole lot of you. He'll tell me what he thinks, and he won't scoff and sneer, either."

And Handforth stalked ahead with his nose in the air.

The party arrived at the school just in time for tea, and with healthy appetites.

As it chanced, I arrived from Baker Street just a few minutes before. I had had my tea with Tinker, and I had hurried back to the school to seek the latest news. I heard nothing!

Not a word had arrived from Nelson Lee, and nothing was known of Sir Montie. I walked out into the courtyard, depressed and gloomy. I wanted to do something. I was anxious to help.

But how? What could I do? Where should I start? There was nothing for me to do, to tell the truth.

As the fellows came crowding into the courtyard, Tommy Watson spotted me at once and ran up. But he knew by the expression on my face that there was nothing to report.

"It's a 'mystery, Tommy," I said slowly. "I can't imagine—"

"Ah, here you are!" ejaculated Handforth, coming up briskly. "Just the chap I wanted to see!"

"Well, you can see me," I said. "Take a good look, and then buzz off!"

"Don't rot!" exclaimed Handforth.

"I want your opinion. It's rather an important matter, you must give me your full attention."

I regarded Handy curiously.

"Well you seem to be more serious than usual," I said. "What's the trouble? My opinion is yours, old man. There is no charge, and I'll give you my views on any given subject for nixes."

"I dare say you know that we've been down the river?"

"Yes, I know that."

"Well, we were down below the

"Well, we were down below Tower Bridge somewhere—opposite Rotherhithe, or Wapping, or Whitechapel," said Handforth vaguely. "I happened to notice a big packing-case being

lowered by a crane into a barge. There was another packing-case waiting to be lowered."

"I've got all that," I said. "Well?"

"As the box was being lowered," went on Handforth impressively, "I distinctly saw one of the side-boards bulge outwards!"

I stared.

"It bulged outwards?" I repeated.

"Yes. What was the explanation?"

"Is this a riddle?" I asked mildly.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The juniors who had collected round chuckled joyfully.

"No, it's not a riddle!" snapped Handforth. "You seem to be as silly as the rest of the crowd—"

"Hold on," I said. "The boards bulged outwards as the packing-case was being lowered. Why, there might have been something inside—something alive!"

"There you are!" roared Handforth. "That was my idea, but these chaps yelled at me when I suggested it! This wharf was dirty and disused, and all the windows of the warehouses were smashed. The whole thing looked fishy—just like you read about—"

"Do you read about Reed's Wharf?" grinned Pitt.

"Oh, dry up!" growled Handforth.

I started, and became intent.

"Reed's Wharf!" I echoed. "Is that what the place was called?"

"Yes."

"And two packing-cases were being lowered into a barge?"

"Yes."

"And you saw one of the cases bulge—" I paused as a startling thought came to me.

"What's the matter?" asked Watson.

"Great Scott!" I gasped. "Oh, my hat!"

Handforth's talk had suggested something to me which fairly made me excited.

I forgot everything in that moment. I turned round, and rushed into the Ancient House for all I was worth.

"He's mad!" gasped Handforth.

"Clean dotty!" agreed Pitt. "What's come over the chap?"

"Let's rush after him!"

They came pelting indoors; but I was in Mr. Crowell's study, busy at the telephone. I had not troubled to ask for permission.

I got through to the number I wanted quickly, but it seemed ages to me before Tinker's voice made itself heard at the other end of the wire.

"Tinker, I panted, 'is Mr. Blake there?'"

"Yes," said Tinker. "What's the matter? You're speaking in a queer tone, Nipper."

"I want you and Mr. Blake to meet me within a quarter of an hour from now!" I said rapidly. "Can you do it? Anywhere you like—say at the corner of Oxford Circus, near the Tube station?"

"But I don't understand——"

"I can't explain over the wire—but it's important!" I exclaimed tensely. "It's vitally important. I think I've got right on the track—and the whole situation is terribly urgent."

"Hang on for a second," said Tinker briskly.

I heard him talking to Sexton Blake for a moment, and then he addressed me again.

"You there?" he asked.

"Yes!" I panted. "Well?"

"The gov'nor and I will be at the Tube station at Oxford Circus in exactly ten minutes from now," said Tinker. "See if you can be there beforehand."

"Right!" I said. "Good enough!"

And I slammed the receiver back on its hook.

CHAPTER 10.

The Chase!

I ARRIVED at the meeting-place two minutes before Sexton Blake and Tinker put in an appearance. They jumped out of a taxi, and regarded me very curiously. Sexton Blake took my arm.

"I am convinced, Nipper, that you have something of importance to tell me," he said. "We will walk down Regent Street, and you can talk as we go. Well, young 'un, what is it that has made you so excited?"

"Do you remember what you told us about those packing-cases, sir?"

"That you ought to have given them more attention—yes," said Blake.

"Well, sir, we overheard that those cases were to be taken to Reed's Wharf, but we didn't think anything of it at the time," I went on. "This afternoon some of the fellows went for a trip down the river on a launch. And Handforth, as they were passing a certain place, saw a big packing-case being lowered into a barge. And that place was Reed's Wharf."

"Well, what about it?" asked Tinker.

"Handforth positively swears that he saw one of the boards of the packing-case bulge outwards as it was being lowered," I said tensely. "Handforth's suggestion was that somebody was inside——"

"Great guns!" ejaculated Tinker. "You—you mean——"

"I mean that we were a couple of blithering idiots last night," I said grimly. "I wouldn't mind betting all I possess that the gov'nor and poor old Montie fell into the hands of Rogan and Palmer somehow. They were bunged into those packing-cases, and taken to the wharf!"

Sexton Blake was quite unmoved.

"Your suggestion seems wild on the face of it, Nipper," he said. "But, taking all the facts into consideration, I'm inclined to believe that you have hit the nail on the head."

"It must be the truth, sir," I declared.

"Those men were desperate," went on Blake. "Lee apparently fell into a trap, and he was made a prisoner, in addition to the lad. Palmer feared to keep the pair of them in London, so he made plans for their removal. And it is easy enough to have an unconscious man taken from one part of

London to another in a packing-case. There have been many instances of such trickery. You know that those cases left the house in Whitlock Street last night. And, by pure chance, Handforth saw them to-day being lowered into a barge. That fact, in itself, is significant. I think we shall be justified in taking action."

I breathed a sigh of relief.

"That's why I rang you up, sir," I said. "Oh, I'm jolly glad you're here, Mr. Blake. I've got a kind of idea that we shall rescue the pair of them now. That barge can't have got far by this time."

Sexton Blake nodded.

"It would have been rather good if Lennard could have come with us," he said. "But we have no time to waste. We must get to the river at once, and speed downstream as fast as we can go."

"How, sir. I asked. "What shall we go in?"

"A River Police boat!" said Sexton Blake grimly.

Less than fifteen minutes later we were on board one of those tireless little launches which are constantly running up and down the Thames. There was an inspector on board, and he was well known to Sexton Blake. The facts were briefly described to him.

"We'll go down the river at once, Mr. Blake," he said. "It oughtn't to be difficult to pick out the barge. Reed's Wharf is not very far down. It's an old place that hasn't been used for a good many years now."

We were soon slipping down the Thames, and Tinker and I stood together, watching the murky waters ahead.

"It seems to me that we are going to do something this trip, old son," said Tinker. "I hope to goodness we succeed in getting hold of your governor."

"We shall succeed," I declared. "I can feel it in my giddy bones."

"Well, I hope your bones are right," said Tinker.

We continued on our way down the river, and we were feeling too eager to talk much. Sexton Blake stood with the River Police inspector, watching everything closely, and quite at his ease.

"Perhaps we ought to have had Handforth with us," I remarked. "He would have been able to spot the barge at once. But I think I heard Watson saying that it was a black barge with a red line running round the deck. It ought to be easy enough to pick up. There aren't many barges on the river just now."

"Oh, we'll spot said Tinker.

He was right.

When we reached that part of the river where Reed's Wharf was situated, we found that the place was deserted and bare. There was not a sign of any barge, and the whole warehouse was dilapidated, and in a state of decay.

"The birds have flown," said Blake. "But they can't travel fast on the water."

We continued slipping down the river, and before we had reached Greenwich we beheld several barges. We had passed them all, for they were full of coal, and other merchandise.

Just opposite Greenwich, however, we came upon a tug, running down the river with the tide, with a single barge in tow. The barge was a small one, and a man and a youth were walking about the deck. Everything was innocent-looking. I scanned the pair through my glasses, and then looked at the barge.

"That's got a red line round it," I said. "I wonder——"

"Yes, that's the one!" exclaimed Tinker. "We shall soon get at the truth now."

The police boat shot forward, and signalled to the tug to come to a stop. And then I gave a little yell, for on the tug were two men in civilian clothing. They were well dressed, and it was not mere guesswork on my part to

assume that they were Palmer and Rogan.

The scoundrels had no intention of giving in tamely.

Without warning, the hawser which towed the barge was cast adrift, and the tug shot ahead, whirling round, and making straight for the muddy bank at the side. The rascals were attempting to escape!

But the police launch was not to be beaten. It spun round, and immediately gave chase. If we had been uncertain before we were not uncertain now. The very fact that the tug had acted in this way was proof positive that something was radically wrong.

The police launch slipped alongside the tug.

"You'd better stop those games!" shouted the inspector angrily. "Slow down at once, or it will be all the worse for you!"

Whiz!

A heavy block of wood nearly struck the inspector, and he snapped his teeth angrily. He turned and gave some rapid orders.

The next few minutes were exciting.

The launch went right close in to the tug, and half a dozen river policemen, at considerable risk, leapt from one vessel to the other. They swarmed over the tug, and the next moment a fierce battle was in progress.

"My hat!" I exclaimed. "We weren't far wrong!"

The fight was short and sharp. It could not last long, in any case. Palmer and Rogan had scuttled below to the cabin, where they were found a few minutes later, cowering with fear. The skipper was also arrested, and the tug was taken in charge by the police.

But we, on the launch, were otherwise engaged.

Seeing that all was going well on the tug, we turned back, and chased after the drifting barge. The man in charge was doing his utmost to keep the barge in the middle of the river.

The launch slid alongside, and four or five of us boarded her. Tinker and

I were among the first to get across, and Sexton Blake followed with the inspector. The latter regarded the barge sternly.

"Any nonsense, my man, and you'll be handcuffed!" he said sharply.

"I won't cause no trouble, guv'nor," said the man. "I know when I'm beat, I do. Not as I've done anything that I can be punched for. I'm only in charge of this old tug, with Jim there as my mate."

"We ain't done nothin', sir!" whined the barge-boy.

"You've got two packing-cases on board," said Sexton Blake. "Where are they?"

"Well, they ain't in the cabin!" said the bargee sarcastically. "Two packing-cases? You'll find 'em down in the 'old—if they ain't fallen through the bottom!"

"Well, make yourselves useful," said the inspector. "Get those hatches off!"

The man sullenly obeyed, helped by the boy. And when the hatches were off we saw two huge packing-cases reposing in the hold, on the top of some gravel ballast. Both cases were securely screwed down.

"Spot the air-holes?" muttered Tinker.

"By jingo—yes!" I exclaimed.

Round the tops of the cases were numbers of small holes, bored through the wood. It was quite obvious, now we knew the truth, that these holes had been placed there in order to provide the prisoners with air.

I was relieved to find that the cases were so large. The inmates would not even be cramped. But I was quite sure that they were sick to death of their adventure by this time.

Sexton Blake and Tinker and I dropped down into the hold, and a screw-driver was produced by the bargee. Then, without delay, Blake commenced unfastening the massive lids. The screws looked big, but they came out easily enough.

And at last the lid was loose.

"Up with it!" I exclaimed huskily.

The lid was raised, and we all stared eagerly into the interior. The case contained either Nelson Lee or Sir Montie, we were sure of that. But then we received a sudden shock.

A man was in the box, certainly—but he was a stranger!

He was a coarse, beery-faced man, with a scrubby beard. He was bound hand and foot, and gagged. He looked at us fiercely. And we looked at him with absolute consternation.

"What—what the dickens does it mean?" I panted.

"I really don't know, Nipper," said Sexton Blake. "But it is an extraordinary state of affairs. We will open the other case."

This was soon done. We had hopes of finding both Nelson Lee and Montie in that case, for it was the larger of the two. But when it was opened we saw that this, too, contained a bound and gagged stranger! He was a youth of about eighteen, and he looked really frightened.

"It's more than I can make out," said Tinker, scratching his head. "Who the dickens are these chaps, and where can Nelson Lee and Tregellis-West be?"

A wild thought struck me that the rough-looking pair in the cases were actually the guv'nor and Montie, disguised. But a moment's close inspection told me that such a thing was impossible.

The whole thing was staggering.

CHAPTER 11.

All Scram!

THERE was despair in my heart as I turned to Sexton Blake.

"It seems that we've drawn blank, after all, sir," I said dully. "We've captured the crooks, but we haven't seen any trace of Mr. Lee or Montie. What shall we do? What can we—"

"There's no call for you to be so up-

set, young 'un," said the bargee, taking hold of my shoulder. "Haven't you got your wits about you?"

I shook the hand off.

"Keep your paws off me!" I snapped. "I didn't ask for your opinion—"

"And yet, my dear Nipper, you sometimes value my opinion quite highly," said the bargee coolly. "Don't look so startled, young 'un!"

"Begad!" exclaimed the barge-boy with a chuckle.

I thought I was going dotty for a moment, and Tinker was staring at the pair with startled eyes. Then abruptly Sexton Blake burst into a roar of hearty laughter. I dashed forward.

"Guv'nor!" I gasped. "You—you awful swindler!"

"I'm sorry, Nipper—"

"You spoofing fraud!" I yelled.

"That is no way to talk to your master," said the bargee sternly.

"And Montie, too!" I roared. "By jingo! What the dickens do you mean by it, you bounder?"

And I seized the barge-boy and waltzed him along the narrow deck.

The truth, startling enough, was that the bargee and his boy were none other than Nelson Lee and Sir Montie Tregellis-West. We could be pardoned for not recognising them at first. They were wearing dirty old clothes, and their faces were grimy and unrecognisable. Sir Montie was not even disguised—except by his clothing and by the dirt.

Nelson Lee, however, had altered his facial expression for our benefit. It was an easy matter for him to do that for a short period, although such a method of disguise could not be continued for long.

"You deceived us nicely, Lee," said Sexton Blake.

"And I must ask you to forgive me," exclaimed the guv'nor. "It was merely a joke. I saw that you were about to search the barge, and I told Tregellis-West that we would keep up the deception until you had opened the cases."

"But what does it mean?" I asked. "How did you manage it?"

"The story is quite simple," replied Nelson Lee. "I was unfortunate enough to fall a victim to Palmer and Rogan. They stunned me, and when I awoke I found myself in a packing-case. Food and water were handy, and there was plenty of air. Upon the whole, I did not suffer much discomfort. I guessed that Tregellis-West was stowed away in a similar case, and I discovered this to be the truth later on.

"We were placed in an old warehouse, and left in charge of this bargee and his boy. There's no need for me to go into details," said Nelson Lee. "The bargee was curious, and he thought he'd like to have a look at me. He did look, and I overpowered him. The rest was quite simple."

"You changed places with your captors?" asked Blake.

"Exactly," said Nelson Lee. "We bundled them into the cases, screwed them down, and calmly waited for events."

"Why didn't you escape while you had the chance?" I asked.

"Because I was anxious to get hold of the rascals," said Nelson Lee. "I didn't know where they were, or when they would be coming. By staying in the warehouse, I knew everything. Montie and I kept to ourselves as much as possible, and we succeeded in maintaining the deception. My plan was to go down the river with the tug, and to give the whole crowd in charge at the first stop."

"So our part in the game was really unnecessary?" smiled Blake.

"Not at all," the guv'nor said quickly. "You have rendered the utmost assistance, my dear fellow, and I thank you heartily. I am very glad, however, that Montie and I were not in the helpless position you expected to find us in."

"Didn't I tell you that your guv'nor could be trusted to make good?" asked Tinker, with a nod. "Still, it's been a bit of excitement, and I'm jolly pleased. We haven't worked together for months."

The explanations were soon completed.

We found it necessary to tell our side of the story, and Nelson Lee was pleased when he heard that the raid had been successful. The whole game was now wrecked. Rogan and Palmer were in the hands of the police, and their villainous scheme had fallen to the ground.

Sir Montie refused to return to the school until he had had a complete change of clothing. So, upon the whole, it was considered the best for us all to go to Baker Street.

The delay was not a long one.

And when Sir Montie was arrayed in a brand new outfit—which fitted him atrociously, according to his own ideas—we set out for the school. Nelson Lee was himself again, too.

We parted with Sexton Blake and Tinker, laughing and cheerful, and the three of us went off in a taxi in the direction of Holborn. A wire had been sent to Lord Westbrooke, and he would come to the school.

It was still daylight when we arrived, and the courtyard was thronged with fellows when we strolled in. Handforth was the first junior to spot us. He stood stock still for a moment, and then let out a yell which might have been heard in Holborn.

"Hurrah!" bellowed Handforth.

"Mr. Lee!"

"And Tregellis-West!"

"They've come back!"

"My only hat!"

There was a tremendous rush, and we were surrounded.

"Good old Montie!" roared Pitt.

"Glad to see you back!"

"Three cheers for Mr. Lee!"

"Hurrah!"

The ovation we received was tumultuous. Seniors came out in scores, and joined in the uproar. The courtyard was simply packed with excited fellows. Lee had the greatest difficulty in fighting his way indoors.

Handforth was in his element. He grabbed hold of me, and danced me round as though he had suddenly taken leave of his senses.

"What did I say?" he shouted. "Wasn't that information correct?"

"It was!" I said. "Handy, you're a marvel!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You needn't laugh," I went on, turning to the crowd. "It's your turn to look silly now. You laughed at Handforth when he was on the right track."

"Exactly!" said Handforth, nodding. "I knew what I was doing all right, and I knew that there was something fishy about that beastly wharf. And yet these duffers wouldn't take any notice of me. Huh! It seems to me that the Remove only contains two brainy chaps. Nipper's one of 'em!"

"Thanks!" I said. "And modesty, I presume, prevents you from naming the other brainy one?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

But Handforth was victorious for once. He had every reason to crow—and he certainly did it.

Before supper-time things were almost normal. Of course, Montie had to tell his story again and again, and there certainly would be no peace for him that evening. He was ordered to go before the Head, and the Head congratulated him.

After that his uncle arrived, excited and overjoyed. And, on the strength of his freedom, Montie was presented with a nice little fifty-pound cheque. He caused numerous cheers by announcing that he would provide a glorious spread on the morrow.

And, meanwhile, the end of the little drama was taking place—in Nelson Lee's study. There was only one other person present. And that person was Ralph Leslie Fullwood.

He stood before the Housemaster, quaking in his shoes. He was terribly afraid that he would be expelled. Nelson Lee looked stern and grim as he sat back in his chair and eyed the guilty Removeite.

"Now, Fullwood, I have to deal with you," he said quietly.

"Ye-es, sir!" faltered Fullwood.

"It was solely owing to your conspiracy with Palmer that Tregellis-West was captured," continued Nelson Lee. "The trouble was caused by you, and it is only right that you should receive a very severe punishment——"

"But—but I didn't know, sir," said Fullwood meekly. "I've been a fool, sir—I know. But I did come forward and give the information, didn't I, sir?"

"In a way, you did, and in consideration of that, I am prepared to treat you with leniency," said Nelson Lee. "I hope this will be a lasting lesson to you, Fullwood. You got into the hands of these men, and they made a tool of you. You will be flogged severely—now."

"Thank you, sir!" muttered Fullwood.

"Further, you will be confined to gates for a period of two weeks," continued the Housemaster. "Your half-holidays will be stopped, and I shall keep my eye on you, Fullwood."

"Yes, sir," said the culprit. "It's—it's awfully good of you not to take me to the Head."

"I can assure you, Fullwood, that if you are caught with such companions again there will be no mercy for you," said Nelson Lee. "I am only dealing with you lightly now, because I am convinced that you were led away."

Fullwood hung his head.

A moment or two later the punishment commenced. Ralph Leslie went through it with a vengeance. By the time the flogging was over he was so sore that his face was screwed up with pain. He yelped once or twice, but, on the whole, he took his punishment pluckily. Fullwood was not a coward.

When he went, he made straight to Study A in the Remove passage. Gulliver and Bell were there, shivering. They were in mortal fear that Fullwood would sneak and drag them into trouble as well.

"Did—did you give us away?" asked Bell huskily.

Fullwood's lips curled.

"You needn't squirm!" he said. "I didn't give you away, and it's all over now. I've often said a lot of rotten things about Lee, but he's not such a bad sort, after all."

"Haven't you got the sack?" asked Gulliver, staring.

"No."

"You've been flogged?"

"Can't you see it?" snarled Fullwood. "I'm racked with pain, and you ask me if I've been flogged. Lee laid it on with all his strength."

"Beast!" said Bell.

"I'm jolly lucky to get off so lightly," said Fullwood. "I'm gated, but that's nothin'. If you chaps had had a spark of decency, you'd have come forward and stood by me—instead of skulking here."

"Rot!" said Gulliver. "Where would be the sense of that? You wouldn't have been let off more lightly——"

"Oh, yes, I should," said Fullwood sourly. "It would have made all the difference to me. The punishment would have been divided up. But, on the whole, we haven't done so jolly badly out of the business. We got a good few quids from Palmer, an' we haven't spent it yet."

"Yes, there's that," agreed Gulliver. "By George, you won't find me messin' about with any of these gamblin' dens again. We thought they were safe in London, but we've had our eyes opened."

"We have!" said Fullwood grimly.

The next day everything was going on as usual. Sir Montie Tregellis-West seemed none the worse for his alarming adventure. I was startled when I heard how he had escaped from the attic.

"You reckless dummy!" I exclaimed warmly. "You might have been killed!"

Sir Montie smiled.

"Dear fellow, I wasn't killed, and everythin' is all serene," he said

languidly. "So what's the good of draggin' up the past? I saw a way of escape, an' I took it. That's all."

"And, incidentally, you proved that you're as plucky as——"

"Pray talk sense, old boy," interrupted Montie hastily.

He was very modest, and he considered that his action had been quite ordinary. And he was so tired of being praised up by the fellows that he threatened to cancel the spread if they didn't dry up.

And after that not a word was spoken on the subject.

That feed was a record one.

It was held in the Common-room, since there was no other apartment large enough to accommodate the crowd. The Common-room wasn't, if it came to that. The guests overflowed into the passages, and the uproar was considerable.

But the masters took no notice. It was a free and easy evening, and prep was not even thought about.

But if we imagined that our adventures in London were over we were mistaken. For we were destined to have some more excitement before we left London to return to the renovated St. Frank's.

CHAPTER 12.

The Apparition!

EDWARD OSWALD HANDFORTH glared round the Remove dormitory.

"Who's had my slippers?" he demanded warmly.

Nobody troubled to answer.

"Can't you hear me?" roared Handforth.

"As I was saying," remarked Pitt, "football in London is rather a temporary business. We can't do anything properly until we get back to St. Frank's. We shall have to buck up with our practice——"

"Where are my slippers?" bellowed Handforth.

"Begad! Will somebody kindly

smother that frightful ass with a pillow?" asked Sir Montie Tregellis-West languidly. "It ain't reasonable to suppose that a fellow can get to sleep with that noise roarin' through the dormitory."

But Handforth was not to be silenced. The Remove had come up to bed ten minutes earlier, and most of the fellows were between the sheets. I was already in bed, and I grinned as I waited for things to happen.

Handforth rose from his bed, looking grim.

"I want to know where my slippers are," he said. "They're a brand new pair, and I left them under my bed. It's a pity a fellow can't leave slippers under his own bed! Who's boned them?"

"I expect you left them somewhere else, you ass," said McClure. "I saw a pair of slippers in the study this morning."

"I brought those slippers up here this evening—and now they've gone," said Handforth. "I don't like to make a fuss—"

"You hate the very idea of it," remarked Hart sarcastically.

"I don't like to make a fuss," repeated Handforth, "but I'm not going to rest until those slippers are found!"

"And you won't let anybody else rest, will you?" said Pitt. "If you don't dry up, my son, we'll smother you with your own bedclothes. Can't you see that these chaps want to get to sleep?"

But Handforth was obstinate.

"When I start a thing, I always finish," he said firmly. "Some rotter has pinched my slippers, and I'm not going to bed without them!"

"My hat!" said Watson. "Do you sleep in your slippers?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"No, I don't!" bawled Handforth.

"Then what do you want them now for?"

"I want them because they're mine—I don't believe in robbery!" said Handforth bluntly. "I wouldn't mind betting that you took 'em, McClure. I

missed a necktie last week, and I found you wearing it!"

McClure sat up in bed.

"I've heard about that tie every day for a week. I've had it rammed down my throat from morning till night!" he said deliberately. "I'm fed-up with it—and I'm fed-up with you!"

"What!"

"I wouldn't touch your slippers if you begged me to accept 'em," said McClure sourly. "Go to bed, and let somebody else sleep! I reckon you ought to be gagged when you come up into the dormitory, you—your gramophone!"

Handforth laughed bitterly.

"Even my own pals turn against me!" he sneered. "All right, my son. I'll soon show you what's what! I'm blessed if I'm going to be jawed at by an ass like you, Arnold McClure!"

"Here, steady!" gasped McClure. "Don't you touch me—"

"Go easy, Handy!" I grinned. "If you're not careful, you'll have a prefect along—and then you'll receive a slipper in a place where you don't like it."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I'm going to wipe up the floor with this rotter!" said Handforth firmly.

He bent over McClure, and the next second there was a terrific uproar. Handforth, McClure, and a pile of bedclothes descended to the floor with a series of bumps. Legs shot out everywhere, and the noise was terrific.

"Yaroooh!" gasped McClure, fighting his way to the surface. "You—you babbling lunatic! If you aren't careful you'll have the Head here—and then we shall all be gated, or something."

"Drag the ass off before he does any harm," I said briskly.

Many willing hands seized Handforth. He was yanked up, lifted into the air, and planked down upon his own bed with sufficient force to break the springs. He floundered there for a moment, and then bobbed up like a Jack-in-the-box.

"I want my slippers!" he panted fiercely. "I shan't rest—"

Whiz!

Somebody's pillow caught Handforth in the mouth, but he thrust it aside.

"My slippers——"

"Oh, my hat!" said Pitt wearily. "Doesn't anyone know where his beastly slippers are? We shall never get any rest until they're found. I've never heard of such a pestering bounder in all my life!"

"Slippers!" exclaimed Cornelius Trotwood, catching a word of Pitt's. "Is anybody talking about slippers?"

The juniors gasped.

"Is anybody talking about slippers?" said Pitt weakly. "Oh, my hat!"

Cornelius Trotwood—the twin brother of the redoubtable Nicodemus—was extremely deaf, and he had been dozing during Handforth's earlier remarks. The commotion had awakened him, and he blinked round amiably.

"Do you know anything about 'em?" demanded Handforth.

"Eh?"

"My slippers!" said Handforth. "Have you taken them, you duffer?"

Cornelius looked surprised.

"Why should I suffer?" he inquired mildly.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Suffer!" gasped Handforth. "You—you deaf idiot! I'll make you suffer in a minute if you don't wake up! If you know where my slippers are, you'd better tell me before I roll you on the floor!"

"I really must ask you to speak a little louder, my good Handforth," said the deaf junior. "What was that you were saying about the door? You can't expect me to hear if you only talk in whispers."

Handforth breathed hard.

"I'm not going to punch you, Trotty," he said, "although I feel like it. You can't help being deaf, so I'll humour you. I always believe in kindness to fellows who aren't quite all there."

"Yes," said Cornelius. "I think it needs cutting!"

"Eh?"

"Your hair——"

"My hair!" gasped Handforth.

"You—dotty ass——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Have you seen my slippers?" roared Handforth.

"I understood you to say something about your hair, my good Handforth," said Trotwood mildly. "But how is your hair connected with your slippers? I saw your slippers this evening. They were downstairs——"

"Ah!" said Handforth. "The truth at last!"

"Why should I speak fast?" asked Cornelius.

"Oh, my goodness!"

"Your slippers were in Study B," went on Trotwood mildly. "I happened to see them when I went in there to speak to Hubbard. They were being worn——"

"What!" roared Handforth. "Hubbard was wearing my slippers?"

"No, Hubbard wasn't!" snapped the junior. "Don't jump to conclusions, you ass. Now I come to think of it, Long was wearing a pair of new slippers. He told me he'd paid five bob for 'em!"

"Go on!" said Handforth ominously.

"I didn't know they were yours," said Hubbard. "Long offered to let me have them for three-and-a-tanner——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"The awful young thief!" said Handforth. "I'll skin him for this!"

Handforth marched across to the bed occupied by Teddy Long, the sneak of the Remove. Long's tubby form was curled up, and he was breathing heavily and regularly. This was rather remarkable, for I had noticed that Long's eyes were open a minute earlier.

"You little cad!" said Handforth, grabbing Teddy's shoulder.

Snore!

"I'm going to skin you!"

Snore!

"And you won't get out of it by pretending to be asleep, you fat little burglar!" said Handforth, pulling the clothes back with one sweep. "I'll give

you one chance to confess," he added, administering a slap.

"Yaroooh!" howled Long. "I—I'm asleep!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You won't be asleep for long!" said Handforth sourly. "What the dickens do you mean by trying to sell my new slippers?"

Long blinked at him dazedly.

"Hailo! What's the trouble?" he said sleepily. "Gimme my bedclothes, Handforth. 'Tisn't time to get up yet!"

"What have you done with my slippers?"

"Your slippers?" said Long, puckering his eyebrows. "How the dickens should I know——"

"If you try this innocent stunt on me, I'll swipe you until you can't sit down," said the leader of Study D.

"I—I didn't know they were yours, Handy," said Long weakly. "I—I found 'em, you know. I thought they were mine. I—I had a pair just like 'em. They're in Study B, you know. Hubbard wouldn't buy 'em, the mean beast. I—I mean——"

Long was yanked out of bed.

"I'll teach you not to touch my property!" said Handforth grimly. "You'll go downstairs now, you young bouncer, and you'll fetch my slippers up here. Understand? Buzz off before I tan you!"

Teddy Long shivered.

"I—I'm not going now!" he panted.

"You are!"

"But—but it's all dark——"

"I don't care about that!"

"And I might meet a master——"

"If you meet a master, tell him the truth," said Handforth. "You won't get into a row for fetching a pair of slippers. Clear off, you shivering ass! If you don't buck up, I'll pitch you out on your neck!"

Teddy Long looked round appealingly.

"I—I say, you fellows," he pleaded. "It isn't right to make me go down now, is it? It's all dark, and—and I

don't know my way about properly—— Yaroooh! Leggo my ear, Handforth."

"You'd better cut off at once, Long," I said. "You took Handforth's slippers, and deserve a hiding for attempting to sell them. You'll be getting off lightly if you simply have to fetch them back."

Long was the most cowardly fellow in the Remove, and he shook as he edged his way towards the door.

"I—I shall complain to the Head about this!" he said falteringly. "The stairs are all black, and——"

"You rotten little funk!" said Handforth contemptuously. "I'll give you your choice, if you're afraid of the darkness. You'll either go and fetch those slippers, or you'll take a hiding on the spot. Which is it to be?"

Teddy Long knew what Handforth's hidings were like.

"I'll—I'll go!" he said, with a gulp.

He opened the door, gazed outside for a moment, and then took the plunge. The landing was in total darkness, and somebody was unkind enough to close the dormitory door.

Teddy Long groped his way to the head of the stairs, shivering with fright. At last he reached the stairs, and he descended them as hard as he could pelt, and made his way to Study B. By the time Long had found the slippers he was in a pitiable condition.

Quivering in every limb, he groped his way back to the hall, clutching the slippers fiercely. He fancied he saw grotesque shapes in every corner; but he had the strength of will to fight against the fear which was rapidly overpowering him.

He managed to get to the top of the stairs at last. He gasped with relief as he turned into the corridor. The dormitory was only a few yards now. He could see the slit of light beneath the door.

And then he stood stock still, frozen to the spot.

Right in front of him, about ten yards off, something was moving. Teddy Long gazed at it with his tongue cleav-

ing to the roof of his mouth, and with his hair bristling upon his head.

He was unable to move, and his gaze was fixed.

The something took shape, after one horrible moment. At first it had been a mere haze against the blackness. But then it changed in character. The haze disappeared—or, rather, it took on a definite shape.

Instead of a haze, Teddy Long saw an object which brought a gasp of absolute terror from his parched throat. It was a skeleton—and it was moving towards him slowly and deliberately.

And then, at the last second, Long recovered the use of his limbs.

With a wild scream, more husky than loud, he fled along the corridor, blundered into the dormitory, and collapsed in a heap on the floor.

"Great Scott!"

"What the merry dickens!"

"Shut—shut the door!" screamed Long. "It's coming in—it's coming in!"

"You young idiot! You're scared over nothing——"

"It's coming in!" shrieked Long.

Hubbard closed the door, after a somewhat nervous glance out into the darkness. All eyes were fixed upon Teddy Long. He crouched on the floor shivering in every limb. I jumped out of bed, for I saw that Teddy was in a really bad way.

"Get up, you young ass!" said Handforth. "My hat! Haven't you brought my slippers? I'll punch you——"

"Never mind your slippers now, Handy," I broke in sharply. "Long isn't fit to stand any of your nonsense. The little idiot is half-crazy with fear. Pull yourself together, Long—you're safe enough here!"

"Don't let it come in!" moaned Teddy. "Oh, it was ghastly!"

I pulled him to his feet, and sat him on one of the beds. His face was ashen, and there was a wild expression in his rolling eyes. The other fellows began

to see that the junior was genuinely frightened.

"Hand over some water," I said briskly.

Teddy Long gulped down a glassful of water, and sat panting heavily.

"Pull yourself together, kid," I said. "You needn't be scared now. What did you see? I expect it was your fancy——"

"It wasn't—it wasn't!" gasped Long. "I—I saw a—a skeleton——"

"A which?"

"A what?"

"A skeleton!" said Teddy fearfully.

"Oh, it was horrible! I—I saw it down the corridor. It was a kind of film at first—all hazy and indistinct. Then it grew into shape, and—and it was a skeleton! It came towards me with its arms outstretched, and—and there was an awful smell——"

"Rot!" interrupted Handforth. "The chap imagined it all!"

"Of course he did!" said Owen major.

And their view was shared by almost everybody in the Remove dormitory.

CHAPTER 13.

The Haunted Corridor!

SOMEHOW, I couldn't quite believe that Teddy Long was a victim of sheer imagination. He was fanciful and nervous, but he was not quite so nervous as all that.

"You'd better get into bed, my son," I said. "Go to sleep, and don't be scared any more. You're all serene here——"

"What about my slippers?" demanded Handforth.

"Oh, bother your silly slippers!" I snapped. "Give 'em a rest, for goodness' sake! If you want them so badly go and fetch them!"

"Yes, I will!" said Handforth. "And I'll give that little funk a hiding to-morrow, too!"

Teddy Long shivered afresh.

"Don't—don't let him go!" he



I rushed to the window, and what I saw brought a cry to my lips. "Guv'nor—guv'nor!" I panted. "You—you—" Nelson Lee's perilous position made me feel faint. He was lying on the roof, his head over the edge, gripping the Chinaman by the wrists.

panted. "That horrible thing will get him! Don't let him go! His slippers are at the top of the stairs, but—but that skeleton is there!"

Handforth laughed scornfully.

"Do you think I'm afraid?" he demanded. "I'm not full of fancies, Long. I don't believe in ghosts!"

He moved towards the door, and everybody watched him. A good many fellows, I knew, wouldn't have ventured out into the darkness just then. Long had made them feel creepy, and they were glad to be in their beds.

"He's going!" whispered Long fearfully.

"Let him go!" I said. "You snuggle down, Teddy, and make yourself easy. I'll go with Handforth, if you like, to keep him company."

"Oh, yes—do!" faltered Long.

"Rot!" snapped Handforth. "Do you think I'm a kid? Keep me company, indeed! I'm going alone, thanks!"

I grinned.

"Just as you like," I said. "I expect you'll come back whole. And when you've got your slippers, you'd better put 'em in a glass case, and seal the case up. They'll be famous for ever, after all this fuss!"

"I haven't made any fuss!" said Handforth warmly. "If you accuse

—"

"Oh, he's off again!" I groaned.

Handforth snorted, and strode to the door. A moment later he was outside, and the door was closed. Long sat in bed, watching the door with a fascinated gaze which made me feel rather uncomfortable.

Nobody spoke, except in whispers. A minute passed, and we all looked for Handforth's return. Then, suddenly, there was a scuffle outside the door. The next second the door burst open, and Handforth appeared.

His face was white, and his eyes were staring.

"Good—good heavens!" he panted, closing the door, and leaning against it.

"What's the matter?"

"Have you seen anything, Handy?"

"Tell us, you ass!"

"Speak up!"

Handforth took a gulp of air.

"I—I saw it!" he said shakily.

"Long was right! I saw something out there—a filmy kind of skeleton

—"

"You've been dreaming," said Pitt bluntly.

"I haven't!" gasped Handforth.

"I'm not the sort of chap to imagine things, am I? I scoffed at Long, because I thought he was a silly little ass—a scared baby. But there's really something out there!"

I jumped out of bed.

"Something!" I repeated. "Didn't you see it distinctly?"

"No—it was only hazy," said Handforth, sitting at the foot of his bed. "I thought it was my fancy at first, but then I saw that the blur took on a kind of shape, until it looked like a skeleton."

"That's — that's right!" faltered Long. "I don't want to stay in this school any more! I shall ask my people to take me home!"

"The rotten place is haunted!" said Gulliver, looking frightened. "The— the ghost may come in the dormitory next—"

"Dry up!" I said sharply. "There's no sense in scaring the nervous chaps, Gulliver. If you're afraid, keep it to yourself. I'm game to go out into the corridor to investigate. Who'll come with me?"

There was a pause before anybody answered.

"I'll come," said Watson, at last.

"Begad! An' you can reckon on me, dear old boy," said Montie.

"Good!" I said briskly.

"I'm game, too!" said Pitt. "We'll go out—"

"Thanks all the same, but I think the three of us will be sufficient, old man," I interrupted.

"I—I shouldn't mess about with it!" said Hubbard, hugging his knees in

bed. "The best thing we can do is to yell, and bring some masters and prefects here. What do you say?"

"Good idea!" declared Gulliver. "Help—help—"

"Chuck a pillow at that idiot!" I rapped out.

Swish!

Somebody obliged, and Gulliver subsided.

"That's the very way to get the whole dormitory into a panic," I declared angrily. "Keep calm, for goodness' sake. There's no danger, and we don't want the masters here until there's something worth bringing them for. I shouldn't be a bit surprised if the ghost is really a moonbeam, shining through the branches of a tree."

"Oh, rot!" said Handforth. "The sky's all cloudy, for one thing, and I'm not such an ass as all that! This thing I saw was at the end of the corridor, and I don't mind admitting that I bunked."

I looked round.

"Well, we mustn't bunk, that's all," I said. "We've got to find out what the thing is. Are you chaps ready?"

"Waiting for you, dear fellow," said Sir Montie.

"Come on!" I said.

"I hope you come back all right—that's all!" said Handforth. "I'm not the kind of chap to croak, but don't blame me if you fellows go dotty; it wouldn't be a difficult job to turn you dotty, anyhow!"

Several juniors grinned, and some of the tension was relaxed.

"Are you trying to comfort us?" asked Watson bluntly.

"I'm only giving you a word of warning," said Handforth. "If you see that thing, take my advice, and bunk. Everybody knows I'm not a coward, but when it comes to ghosts, I draw the line. I've seen this thing, and I know what I'm talking about. Go easy, my sons!"

For Handforth to use that tone was significant. He was the last fellow in

the world to advise a chap to bunk, and it proved that he had been really startled by what he had seen. The matter-of-fact Handforth was half-ready to believe in ghosts! The apparition must have been particularly awesome.

I led the way out of the dormitory before anybody could say anything else. The electric light was burning in the apartment, although, of course, it wasn't supposed to be. Morrow of the Sixth had seen lights out half an hour earlier, and had switched off the "juice." But, although the switch was a patent one—turned only with a key—several juniors were able to work the thing easily.

"My hat! It's dark out here!" muttered Watson.

The wide corridor was pitchy black, and it was well calculated to make even a strong-willed fellow nervous and touchy. A chill draught blew along from somewhere, and we shivered.

"Keep your pecker up, my sons," I whispered. "And don't forget that there are no such things as ghosts. Either some funny ass was playing a trick on Long and Handforth, or they imagined things. It's quite possible that Christine & Co. have been up to some of their rot!"

"I—I don't believe it," said Watson. "Christine couldn't scare a chap like Handy!"

We moved forward cautiously. I led the way, and my chums followed. Just near the head of the stairs the corridor took a turn, and a long section of it led away to the Third and Fifth dormitories.

I reached this turn before the others, and I felt my way round. I carried my electric torch ready to be switched on at any moment. But it would be no good looking for a ghost with a light burning. If possible, I wanted to take the thing by surprise.

Just round the bend I paused.

A window stood a little distance ahead, on the left, but scarcely any

light entered. And all was dark and still beyond. Then a sound came to my ears—a faint, dim sound. A board creaked. I set my teeth grimly, and waited. Genuine ghosts don't make boards creak!

I waited and watched, Tregellis-West and Watson remaining just in my rear. And as I stared down the passage, I fancied I saw something moving in the darkness—something lighter than the black surroundings.

It was so indistinct and hazy that for a few moments I thought I was mistaken. Then I stared harder. The haziness was fading, and the outline of a human skeleton became apparent.

And the awful thing was moving forward—towards us!

"Oh, my goodness!" muttered Watson. "Can—can you see it?"

"Begad! I—I——"

"Don't jaw, you asses," I breathed. "There's nothing to be alarmed about. That thing's no ghost—it's a fake! It's either a joke of somebody's, or something deeper. But it's human enough."

Montie and Tommy were relieved. But, at the same time, they were feeling rather uncertain. Personally, I was convinced that the apparition was a fraud. The skeleton looked horrible enough, but the proportions were all wrong. It was my opinion that somebody was dressed in a tight-fitting suit, with the skeleton painted on his clothes. Perhaps the paint was luminous, which accounted for the spectre being seen in the darkness. And the culprit only needed to wear a cloak to render himself entirely invisible. The mere opening of the cloak would exhibit the ghost at once.

"Yes, it's a fake," I repeated grimly.

And, without waiting for anything further to happen, I dashed forward, switching on my electric torch. The brilliant gleam of light revealed a black figure for a second, but then it van-

ished. And when I reached the spot there was nothing to be seen.

I came to a halt, puzzled and startled.

Then, without any warning, something soft seemed to envelop me. My strength ebbed away, and all I remember is sinking to the floor, dazed and dizzy, with my head whirling.

Sir Montie and Tommy did not know what was happening. They saw me dash forward, and they saw my light suddenly extinguished. But there was no assailant visible to them. They only knew that I had rushed forward, and that there was no sign of me.

"What—what's happened?" gasped Watson fearfully.

"Dear old boy, I can't tell you," said Montie, clutching at Tommy's arm. "But Nipper seemed to collapse, or something' Supposin' we go forward?"

I was there all right, but not in a position to answer. Watson and Tregellis-West went forward gingerly. They had no electric torch, and they were in total darkness. The whole experience was creepy and weird.

Their anxiety for me was greater than their fear, for they did not mind admitting afterwards that they were both in a state of blue funk as they went along that passage. Nobody really believed them, for they had proved themselves to be just the opposite.

"He seemed to vanish just about here," remarked Watson softly, as he felt his way forward. "I can't imagine — Great goodness! What—what's that?"

"What's what, dear fellow?"

"My—my foot touched something," said Watson huskily. "I—I say, Montie! We ought to have brought a light with us——"

"Begad! I've got some matches, breather Tregellis-West.

"Oh, good!"

Montie produced his box of matches, and within a few seconds one of them was flaring up. The weak light seemed quite brilliant to the boys after the in-

tense darkness. They only needed one glance ahead to convince them that something serious had occurred. A black figure was lying huddled on the floor.

"Oh, goodness! It's Nipper!" muttered Watson shakily.

"What's the matter with the dear boy?" asked Montie anxiously. "Begad! I've burnt my fingers now!"

He dropped the match-end, and struck another light. Watson grabbed hold of me, and pulled me over. My face was pale, I believe, and I looked rather awful in that flickering light.

"He must have fainted," said Tommy. "And can't you smell anything, Montie? There's a kind of nasty smell in the air—it's making me feel quite dizzy!"

Sir Montie nodded.

"The best thing we can do, old fellow, is to rush away to Mr. Lee's bedroom," he said. "This affair is too much for us to handle, an' we'd better let Mr. Lee know at once. Come on!"

Tommy Watson nodded.

"Yes, you're right!" he said. "We'll fetch Mr. Lee."

They hurried from the spot, excited and anxious.

It didn't take them long to reach the Housemaster's door. Everything was still and quiet, and there was apparently no sign of the ghost returning. Watson rapped upon the panels of the door sharply.

"Hallo!" came Lee's voice. "Who is that?"

"I, sir—Watson!"

"Watson!" exclaimed Nelson Lee. "What on earth are you doing out of your bed at this time of night? Wait one moment."

The door opened, and allowed a welcome flood of electric light to stream into the passage. Tommy Watson and Sir Montie Tregellis-West stood there, blinking at Nelson Lee.

"Tregellis-West, too!" exclaimed Lee. "What on earth is the meaning of

this? Why are you not in your dormitory?"

"It's—it's Nipper, sir," said Watson.

"He's unconscious!"

Nelson Lee stared.

"Nipper unconscious!" he repeated.

"Upon my soul! You are both as pale as death. What has happened?"

"It—it was the ghost, sir——"

"The ghost?"

"Yes, sir—the apparition," said Watson. "The skeleton——"

"Dear me!" exclaimed Lee smoothly.

"There is evidently something wrong. Come inside, and tell me exactly what has happened."

"Yes, sir!"

And the two juniors entered the Housemaster's bed-room, and the door was closed. Nelson Lee regarded Montie and Tommy keenly.

"Now," he said, "let me hear the trouble."

CHAPTER 14.

Nelson Lee's Promise!

TOMMY WATSON clutched at Lee's arm.

"But we want you to come, sir—now!" he exclaimed huskily. "Nipper is lying unconscious, and—and that awful thing might take him away, or do him an injury. You must come now, sir."

"Begad, yes!" said Montie. "There's no time to lose, sir!"

Nelson Lee regarded the pair keenly.

"Very well—I will come at once," he said. "But if you have been alarming yourselves needlessly, my boys, I shall be annoyed. Lead the way, Watson."

Watson dashed to the door, and went out into the passage. Montie and Nelson Lee followed. The Housemaster detective, who knew a great deal about boys, had no idea that the situation was so serious as Watson made out. Lee believed that somebody had been joking.

But his thoughts underwent a

change three minutes later. For, arriving in the long corridor, my chums were relieved to find that I was still lying there. Nelson Lee strode forward, and bent down beside me.

"Hold this, Watson," he ordered sharply.

Tommy took the electric torch which Nelson Lee handed over. The bright rays enveloped me, and perhaps the light helped to revive me. At all events, I stirred and opened my eyes.

"He's coming round, sir," said Watson. "Oh, good!"

"Hallo! What the dickens——" I paused, and looked round dazedly. "What's the matter here? And what's wrong with my head? It feels like a lump of lead, and it's throbbing—— Great Scott! Is that you, guv'nor?"

"Yes, Nipper," said Nelson Lee. "I am glad to find that you are all right——although, a moment ago, you looked extremely pale. I shall be very pleased to hear what has happened to bring about this state of affairs."

The guv'nor produced his brandy flask, and compelled me to gulp down one or two mouthfuls. My strength began to return.

Nelson Lee stowed his flask away.

"What is all this talk about ghosts?" he demanded. "Give me a full explanation at once, boys. It may interest you to know, Nipper, that you were bowled over by a drug. Do you know how the drug was administered?"

"No, sir, I don't," I replied. "And what was it——chloroform?"

"No, not chloroform," replied Lee. "I can't give it a name at the moment. It is some Eastern drug, and it is highly dangerous unless used with extreme caution. You are lucky to have escaped so lightly, Nipper—and the very presence of the drug proves that there is something grim and sinister about this affair."

"That's what I think, sir," I said. "We were out looking for a ghost, sir, and I saw the thing down this corri-

dor. It looked like a skeleton, but I am sure it was only a fake——"

"One moment," interrupted Lee. "Why were you looking for a ghost?"

"Because some of the other fellows saw it, sir," I explained. "The dormitory is awake now, and some of the fellows are scared out of their wits. Long saw the thing first, and he was nearly crazy with fear."

"Why was Long out of the dormitory?"

"That's hardly sticking to the point, guv'nor," I protested. "Long only went downstairs to fetch something. And on his way back he saw an awful-looking skeleton moving towards him. When he came into the dormitory he was as white as a sheet, and nearly off his head."

"Long is a nervous boy," said Lee. "He imagines things——"

"That's what Handforth said, sir," put in Watson. "And Handforth went out, as bold as brass, scoffing all the time. But after five minutes he was back, almost as badly scared as Long had been. He saw the thing, too."

"So you three came out to investigate—is that it?"

"Yes, that's right, guv'nor," I replied. "I caught sight of the ghost down this corridor. I was sure it was a fake, and I thought perhaps some silly ass belonging to the College House was responsible. So I charged at the thing, and it seemed to vanish into thin air. Anyhow, it faded away."

"Into a recess, probably," said Lee grimly. "And what then?"

"I don't remember much more, sir," I replied. "I felt myself become weak, and before I could yell I simply collapsed."

"H'm!" murmured Lee. "I should say that the mysterious marauder——probably a thief——sprayed you with this drug, and you consequently collapsed to the floor. But the whole matter must be thoroughly investigated."

"I can't imagine why anybody should

dress up as a ghost," I went on. "It seems such an idiotic thing——"

I broke off, for at that moment we all became aware of footfalls, and as we watched, the figure of Mr. Suncliffe hove into view. The Third Form master was attired in a dressing-gown and slippers, and he carried a lighted candle in his hand. His hair was looking like a mop, and he presented a somewhat untidy appearance altogether.

He stared down the passage at us.

"Really, how fortunate!" he exclaimed. "I was just about to arouse you, Mr. Lee. Is anything the matter here?"

"These boys have been seeing ghosts—that is all," smiled the gov'nor.

Mr. Suncliffe started.

"Ghosts!" he ejaculated. "Dear me!"

"Why, have you seen it, sir?" I asked.

"No, Nipper, I have not," said Mr. Suncliffe sourly. "I do not believe in ghosts, and what has come over the school is beyond my comprehension."

"But why were you coming to me, Suncliffe?" asked Nelson Lee.

"Why was I coming?" repeated the Third Form master. "I want you to come to my dormitory, Mr. Lee. The Third Form is awake, and some of the boys are in a highly nervous condition. They are only youngsters, and it seems that they are thoroughly frightened."

"But why, sir?" I asked.

"Because the boys have been kept awake by rappings on the walls," said Mr. Suncliffe grimly. "These rappings have continued, at intervals, ever since the lights were put out. I was called into the dormitory, and I must confess that the whole thing is very mysterious. The taps are most distinct, but it is impossible to locate them. The juniors also declare that they heard the sound of fiendish laughter—but that, I am certain, was pure imagination."

"My hat!" muttered Watson. "The whole school is haunted!"

Nelson Lee looked grave.

"Haunted by spirits of a very human type," he remarked. "These manifestations are occurring simultaneously, it seems, and the only object of the perpetrators can be to get the boys into a panic."

"But why?" asked Mr. Suncliffe.

"I'm not quite sure—although I have a suspicion," said Nelson Lee. "I will come with you to the Third Form dormitory, Mr. Suncliffe, after I have paid a brief visit to the Remove. There are some boys there, I believe, who need calming."

Nelson Lee led the way to the Remove dormitory. I was only too glad to get back into bed. We found that half the Remove had dropped off to sleep, and the others were much calmer now. A few words from Nelson Lee put matters right, and everybody was soon at his ease.

Then Nelson Lee departed with the Third Form master, and I fell straight off to sleep. I didn't waken until the rising bell clanged out—and I left my bed feeling almost as fresh as ever.

"Well?" I said, yawning. "What about the ghosts?"

Handforth sniffed as he looked out of the sunny window.

"We were asses last night!" he declared. "Ghosts? What rot!"

"Yes, it's easy to say that when the sun's shining," remarked Pitt, grinning. "But it's a different story at night, when everything is still and dark. You weren't so contemptuous of ghosts last night, Handy."

"I suppose it does make a difference," admitted Handforth. "But I've been thinking over things, and it's my belief that some silly ass was playing a trick on us last night."

"Bob Christine, perhaps?" suggested McClure.

I shook my head.

"The Monks had nothing to do with it," I said. "Most of you fellows were

asleep when Watson and Tregellis-West and I came back. Mr. Lee was with us, and I can tell you that something queer has been going on."

"Yes, rather," said Watson. "Why, Nipper was unconscious for ten minutes. He encountered the ghost out in the corridor, and we found him lying senseless on the floor."

"Unconscious?" asked Handforth.

"Didn't I say he was senseless?" said Tommy.

"Yes, but he's always senseless——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I was bowled right out," I said, grinning. "My head still aches a bit——"

"Fainted through fright, I suppose?" asked Fullwood, with a sneer.

"No, that's more in your line," I retorted. "Some kind of drug was sprayed over my face, and it's as clear as daylight that the ghost wasn't a ghost at all, but a fraud. Somebody was trying to get up a panic. The kids in the Third didn't escape, either."

"Why, did they see the ghost?" asked Pitt.

"They appear to have had a variation of the manifestations in their dormitory," I said. "They had spirit rappings—or something that was supposed to be spirit rappings. Perhaps somebody wants to clear us out of the school."

There was a good deal of discussion on the subject, and when the Remove went downstairs, they heard all about the Third's experiences. Owen minor was relating everything to an interested group of Removites in the hall.

"You chaps can talk about your ghosts all you like," he said. "But we had a rotten experience in our dorm. Not five minutes after the lights had been put out, something started tapping on the wall."

"Some ass playing a joke, I expect," said Owen major.

His minor glared.

"I knew you'd say that!" he snapped. "As a matter of fact, we did think

some funny idiot was having a lark. But after a while we knew that there was no joke about it. The rappings came from all sides. Jolly mysterious, it was!"

"And what about that fiendish laughter we heard?" asked Heath.

"And those hollow cackles?" said Lemon.

Owen minor shook his head.

"I didn't hear any laughter, and I didn't hear any cackling. I believe it was one of the kids snivelling," he said.

"Rot!" snapped Heath. "I heard as plain as anything."

"Well, it's pretty rotten," said Owen. "I'm blessed if I shall want to sleep in the Third dormitory again, if that sort of thing goes on. Half the chaps will be afraid to go to bed to-night!"

Owen minor was quite correct in this statement. And the same applied to the Remove. All the juniors professed to be contemptuous of ghosts and ghostly phenomena, but I was positive that when bed-time came there would be a marked reluctance on the part of the more nervous fellows to retire.

Nelson Lee, too, was of this opinion. He was greatly concerned over the whole matter, and he was summoned to Dr. Stafford's study during morning lessons. He found the Head looking worried.

"I am very glad that you are here, Mr. Lee," said Dr. Stafford. "What does this all mean? I am referring, of course, to the strange happenings which took place last night. Can you suggest any explanation?"

"I hardly know at the moment," said Nelson Lee. "But it seems that some evilly inclined person is making an attempt to frighten the boys——"

"You are of the opinion, then, that the ghost was the result of human agency?" asked the Head.

Nelson Lee smiled.

"My dear sir, there are no such things as ghosts," he said. "This affair was engineered by something very

human—and there can be little doubt that the object is to get up a scare—a panic."

"But why? For what earthly reason?"

"Probably to get us all out of the school as quickly as possible."

"Well, that will be achieved unless something is done," declared the Head. "I shall not be able to keep the boys here if we experience any more nights such as last night. The juniors, in particular, will be in a very nervous state when they go to bed to-night. And if any ghostly effect is produced there will probably be a panic. By the end of the week the whole school will be disbanded."

"I am glad that you realise the seriousness of the situation, Dr. Stafford," said Nelson Lee. "I quite agree with you. Something must be done—to-night—to put an end to this situation."

The Head tapped his desk agitatedly.

"Do you know, Mr. Lee, that I have received no fewer than fifteen applications from the boys this morning?" he said. "They want to be sent home—they are afraid to remain in the school. You may be sure that those boys will write home, and anxious parents will communicate with me—or call upon me. I am really in a great state of worry. Even the Fifth Form had a visitation last night. Several seniors have declared that their sleep was disturbed by uncanny sounds during the small hours. What is to be done?"

"It is my opinion that the whole trouble was caused by one man," said Nelson Lee thoughtfully. "Such a thing is possible—although, from the reports we have received, one might be excused for believing that a whole army of tricksters was at work. One man could have accomplished the various moves easily enough. First in the corridor, in the guise of a ghost. Then the rappings in the Third Form dormitory, and so on."

"But how did he cause the rappings?"

"There are several cupboards in the rear passage," said Nelson Lee. "I examined them closely early this morning. The rear wall of these cupboards is also the north wall of the Third Form dormitory. It would have been a simple matter for the marauder to move from one cupboard to another, and to rap upon the wall. The other sounds were caused in a similar way."

"And the ghost?"

"A fake," said Nelson Lee. "A ghost is the easiest thing in the world to fake—at midnight. And with a lot of boys to deal with, the task is even easier. I am glad that Nipper was awake last night. He did much to quell the fears of the Remove boys."

"But I am worrying about to-night, Mr. Lee," said the Head. "I do not know what to do. The boys will go to bed, I dare say, but they will be restless and uneasy. At the first sign of a ghostly manifestation there will be a panic—"

"I have a plan in mind," interrupted Nelson Lee. "I want you to leave this matter in my hands, Dr. Stafford. As I have told you, I have a suspicion of the truth. But to-night, with ordinary luck, I shall be certain. In any case, I promise you that the mystery will be cleared up to-night."

Dr. Stafford's relief was obvious.

"I trust you, Mr. Lee—I rely on you," he said. "You have eased my mind a lot, and I hope that you will be successful in your efforts."

Nelson Lee left the Head shortly afterwards, and he was busy until morning lessons were over. He sallied out into the City, and when he returned shortly before dinner, there was a look of quiet satisfaction in his eyes. I met him as he was coming in through the courtyard.

"You're looking cheerful, sir," I remarked. "Have you found anything about the ghosts?"

"My dear Nipper, you need not be afraid of any ghosts to-night," smiled the gov'nor. "Everybody can go to bed

in comfort and with easy minds. It is most improbable that there will be any further visitations."

"But aren't you taking any precautionary steps, sir?" I inquired.

The guv'nor shrugged his shoulders.

"What can we do?" he asked.

"Where would be the sense of setting people to watch the corridor? The most sensible thing for every boy to do is to forget last night's affair and go to sleep."

"Then nothing's going to be done at all, sir?" I asked.

"There is no sense in wasting one's time," replied Nelson Lee vaguely.

He walked off, and the other juniors who had overheard the remarks looked at one another with disappointed expressions.

"That's rotten!" remarked Owen major. "Nothing's going to be done!"

"I expect they're all afraid!" sneered Fullwood.

At the same time the majority of the fellows were disappointed to learn that Nelson Lee meant to take no action. They were assured, however, that if they went to bed quietly, everything would be all right.

Personally, I was rather puzzled. It was not like Nelson Lee to abandon a thing so tamely. And I wasn't ready to believe that he had done so. And my surmise was not wrong.

Shortly after tea that evening the guv'nor came across me alone in one of the passages.

"Oh, Nipper, I want you in my study," he said briefly.

I followed him along the corridor, and regarded him curiously when we were within the study with the door closed.

"What's the crime, sir?" I asked meekly.

"There is no crime, Nipper," smiled Lee. "I want a word with you privately. To get to the point, I shall require your assistance to-night at half-past eleven. When the other boys are asleep, slip your clothes on and peep out of the dormitory."

I was eager in a second.

"What's the game, sir?" I asked, bending forward.

"I should imagine you ought to guess what the game is."

"The ghost?"

"Of course," said Nelson Lee.

"But you told me this afternoon that no action was to be taken—"

"You will pardon me, Nipper, but I told you nothing of the sort," said the guv'nor calmly. "I did not give you a direct answer—for an excellent reason. I wanted the boys to talk; I wanted them to make it known that no precautions would be taken to-night. We, however, will be on the alert."

"Fine!" I exclaimed heartily. "And what's the programme, sir?"

"You'll find that out later—when the time comes," was Nelson Lee's reply.

CHAPTER 15.

Capturing the Ghost!

GOOD!"

I sat up in bed and murmured the exclamation with great satisfaction. Eleven-thirty had just struck, and everybody in the Remove, barring myself, lay asleep. The dormitory was quiet and still.

There had been no disturbances of any kind whatever.

The Remove had gone up to bed at the usual time—nine-thirty. The fellows had been rather unsettled after the lights had been put out. Until ten o'clock not a boy thought of sleeping.

But after that, one by one they dropped off. By half-past ten everybody was asleep, except the more nervous fellows. And as nothing took place between half-past ten and eleven, they fell asleep, too.

And now everything was quiet. I was the only wakeful fellow in the dormitory. I slipped out of bed, and quickly pulled some clothes on. Then I crept across the dormitory and slipped out-

side. At the end of the corridor, in a little recess, I found Nelson Lee.

"That you, Nipper?" he breathed.

"Yes, sir."

"Good lad!" said the gov'nor. "Not a word. Just wait with he."

He whispered a few other things, which I received with feelings of extreme satisfaction. And after that we waited.

The minutes ticked away slowly.

The whole school was now in a state of slumber, and it was a good chance for the "ghost" to begin his operations. Of course, there was no guarantee that he would begin at all.

It was quite likely that the man would do nothing that night—that he would allow the school to settle down once more. Then, on some other night, when everybody was feeling comfortable, he would begin again.

But it was just as well to be prepared.

I was expecting midnight to chime out at any moment when I fancied I heard a slight sound down at the end of the longer corridor. I had my hand on Nelson Lee's arm, and I felt him grow rigid.

He, too, had heard the sound.

And together we waited expectantly. Another faint creak came to our ears. And then, far down the passage, we saw something dim moving. Yet everything was pitchy black in the passage. The object which moved was lighter than the darkness—a kind of dull luminosity.

And as it grew nearer we faintly saw the outline of a grotesque-looking skeleton.

A slight thrill passed through me, but I was not at all scared. I was convinced that the thing was human, and that took all the terror out of it. We knew that we were dealing with a spoof ghost.

The thing came onwards, slowly and silently.

At last it was within twelve feet, and was just passing a small window set in the wall. And exactly as it drew level

Nelson Lee pulled with all his force upon a rope which he held in his hand. Swish!

There followed a clattering kind of thud, and a shrill cry of surprise and rage. Both Nelson Lee and I switched on our electric torches at the same second, and darted forward.

There, on the floor, lay the ghost—a captive.

He was struggling fiercely—struggling in the meshes of a powerful net! Escape from it was impossible, for the more he struggled the more he became entangled.

"I think we've beaten you, my friend!" said Nelson Lee grimly.

It had been the gov'nor's idea. The fixing of the net upon the ceiling had been a comparatively simple task. It had been slung aloft, and was arranged so that one tug would cause it to drop. We had simply waited until the ghost walked beneath the net, and the latter had dropped upon him.

And as our lights blazed upon him we saw that he was a Chinaman!

"Well, I'm jiggered!" I exclaimed. "A Chink!"

"Of course, Nipper," said the gov'nor. "What did you expect to see? I was convinced from the first that our Chinese friend was responsible for this little by-play. Have you forgotten the Yellow Band?"

I looked down at the captive with great interest. He was a smallish fellow, dressed in a closely-fitting black suit. Upon the surface of the material the skeleton was painted—as I had originally guessed.

A black robe over the top of this completed his attire. It was a loosely-fitting thing, and one sweep was sufficient to envelop him. This had the effect, in the darkness, of causing the apparition to vanish at a second's notice.

"I should advise you to submit quietly, my friend," said Nelson Lee grimly. "You won't do yourself any good by attempting to get away."

The Chinaman ceased his struggles with the net, and looked at us with his eyes glittering in the light of the electric torches.

"Me no meance harm," he said pantingly. "Me velly sorry!"

"It's rather late to be sorry," said Lee. "You have been attempting to cause trouble in this school by means of your somewhat crude fraud—"

"Me only play leetle jokee," said the Chinaman plaintively. "No tly to do any damage. Me no thief, boss. Lettee me go free, and I come back no more. Allee same big piece sorry!"

"Get up, my friend, and we'll talk afterwards," said Lee curtly.

We helped the Chinaman out of the net. But the cunning rascal was intent upon gaining his liberty—if such a thing was possible.

The very second he was free from the net he acted.

Although Nelson Lee was holding his arm, he wriggled round like an eel, slipped out of his cloak, and darted along the floor. The whole thing was unexpected.

"Now then, Nipper!" gasped the gov'nor.

I flung myself forward, and grabbed at the Chinaman's leg. To lose him in this tame way after capturing him so neatly would be galling in the extreme; and I did my utmost to prevent the rascal slipping through our fingers.

I seized his ankle, but he tore it away instantly. Nelson Lee was upon him. There was a quick tussle, and I saw the gov'nor attempting to hold the captive. But the fellow was amazingly agile, and it was almost impossible to retain a grip. And as I was rushing forward the Chinaman slipped away.

He went down the passage like a rabbit, with Nelson Lee in full pursuit. I went after him, and was quite certain that the fellow would be recaptured within a minute or two. He darted up a narrow staircase which led to the upper floor.

"Hold him, gov'nor!" I gasped.

This advice was rather unnecessary, because Nelson Lee was doing his utmost to get hold of the fugitive. The yellow man, however, was racing up the stairs as fast as he could go.

Even if we lost him, there was some satisfaction in knowing that the mystery was solved. My thoughts were curious as I rushed up the stairs. A good deal passed through my mind in those brief seconds.

I remembered a former encounter with this man and his rascally companions. There was a whole gang of them, and they were quartered far underground, in some old, disused sewers. The entrance to their lair appeared to be a manhole in the very courtyard of the school itself.

At least, this was one entrance, for I had entered by it with Sir Montie Tregellis-West; and we had only just escaped by a bare inch with Nelson Lee's timely assistance. It had been a risky experience.

I had supposed that Scotland Yard would act upon the information we had been able to supply. But the authorities had decided to hold their hand for a while—probably because they were anxious to capture the Chinamen "with the goods." There would be little use raiding the place merely to discover a common opium den.

For these yellow fiends were engaged in the drug traffic. They were responsible for the smuggling of considerable quantities of that deadly drug, cocaine.

I was pretty sure, in fact, that this yellow band had pretty nearly the whole cocaine trade in their hands so far as the West End was concerned. They supplied their wares by devious courses to certain depraved circles.

All this passed through my mind as I hurried up the stairs. And I wondered why the yellow brutes had played this trick upon the school. The obvious explanation was that their smuggling trade was hindered—perhaps stopped—by our presence. For years the great building had been empty, and

the Chinamen had had their own way. The coming of the St. Frank's crowd had changed everything.

Arrived on the landing, I just caught a glimpse of Nelson Lee diving into one of the upper rooms—a topmost attic. I was in the doorway myself a moment later. The Chinaman was just in the act of scrambling through the window.

A sickly kind of feeling came over me. Did the fellow intend to throw himself down to death? And then I remembered. These rear attic windows were built actually in the roof itself.

Immediately below the window-sill the tiled roof sloped away to the gutter. But it was a very steep slope, and it seemed impossible that any human being could escape by that means.

"Come back, you fool!" exclaimed Nelson Lee hoarsely.

But the Chinaman took no notice. He scrambled out upon the roof, and at that moment I joined the gov'nor at the window.

The night was not absolutely dark, and we could see our late quarry quite distinctly. He was edging his way along the roof, sideways. His intention, it seemed was to get along to the end of the building, and escape altogether.

"Shall—shall we go after him, sir?" I panted.

"Good gracious, Nipper, what are you talking about?" asked Lee. "It is practically impossible to obtain a hold on this roof. Only a man with the agility of a monkey—and in a state of desperation—would dare to attempt it. I fancy——"

"Good heavens!" I whispered.

For, as we watched, the Chinaman slipped. His feet failed to retain their grip, and he slithered for a clear foot, his fingers clutching at the tiles. Then for a second he paused.

But his hold was not strong enough, and again he slid. This time he gathered such speed that there was no possible hope of checking his downward course. He slithered down the tiles with a low, pitiful scream.

For he knew that certain death awaited him.

The building was high, and the walls were absolutely sheer, and far below there was nothing but the paved courtyard. The man would be dashed to death.

I closed my eyes in horror, not caring to see the last of the wretched man as he went over the edge of the roof to his doom. Then a curious, gasping cry came to my ears, and with it a metallic creak.

"Upon my word!" exclaimed Nelson Lee. "Look at that, Nipper!"

I looked. And I thought that I was dreaming for a moment. The Chinaman's head was still visible above the gutter! In a last despairing effort, prompted by the instinct of self-preservation, the fellow had clutched at the edge of the gutter as he fell feet foremost over the edge of the roof.

And he had gained a grip—and was hanging there, between life and death.

"My goodness!" I muttered. "He's saved himself from certain death, sir! But what can we do? It's impossible to rescue——"

"Helpce—helpae!" panted the Chinaman, his voice cracked and shrill with fear. "Me be velly good—me tell you evelthing. Savee me! I slipped—I no hold longee! Allee samee dead!"

Nelson Lee turned to me sharply.

"Rush downstairs to the lower landing," he said anxiously. "In the second cupboard from the corner you will find a long coil of rope. Bring it here at once—and hurry."

"Right, sir!" I said briskly.

I went off like a streak of lightning, and fairly tumbled down the stairs four at a time. A human life was to be saved—and, even if that life was worthless, it was our duty to make every attempt to save it.

I found the cupboard at once, and the coil of rope hanging up as Nelson Lee had indicated. Seizing it, I pelted upstairs at top speed.

Meanwhile, something was occurring

on the roof which I had not anticipated.

After I had gone Nelson Lee half climbed out of the window, waiting impatiently for me to return.

"Keep cool!" he said rapidly. "A rope is being fetched, and if you can hold on for two minutes you will be saved."

The Chinaman gave a pitiful cry.

"Me no hold on," he panted. "Allee samee dlop down. One minute—him no good! Me dlop one piccee now. No holdce on!"

"Have courage!" said Lee sharply. "The rope is coming—"

"Me no hold—slippce allee time," gasped the Chinaman. "I go!"

Nelson Lee took in a deep breath. To see a fellow-creature plunge to his death before his very eyes was too much for him.

"Wait!" he rapped out. "I am coming!"

He climbed out of the window, and cautiously edged his way down the roof. It was a terribly risky thing to do, and if I had been there I should have screamed to him to come back. For it seemed like certain death.

One slip, and all would be over! Both he and the Chinaman would plunge to their doom!

Nelson Lee was risking his own life in order to save that of this worthless heathen. It was a mad thing to do; but that was just like the guv'nor. He never thought of dangers.

And he wormed his way down the roof head-first until his outstretched hands gripped the gutter. The position was enough to turn anybody faint with horror.

But Nelson Lee was absolutely cool. Even in a tense situation like this he kept his nerve. And, reaching out his hands, he bade the Chinaman grasp them.

"Do not pull too tightly, or we shall both plunge down!" he warned. "Help will be here almost at once!"

The Chinaman said nothing. He clung to Lee's hands as a drowning

man will clutch at a straw. And at that moment I rushed to the window. What I saw brought a gulping cry to my lips.

"Guv'nor—guv'nor!" I panted. "You—~~you~~—"

"It's all right, Nipper—keep your head!" said Nelson Lee, with icy calmness. "Throw the rope down cautiously so that I can grasp it. Then tie the other end to the door-knob—and hold it as well. Make haste, young 'un!"

The guv'nor's very position made me feel faint. He was lying on the roof, his head over the edge. And he was gripping the Chinaman's wrists.

In a perfect fever of anxiety and horror, I flung the rope down. The rest was merely a matter of physical exertion. Holding on to the rope with one hand, Lee was secure. And it was a simple matter for him to assist the Chinaman. Four minutes later both of them were safe and sound within the attic.

The rescued man, panting heavily, flung himself at Lee's feet.

"Me vellee grateful—allee samee your servant," he muttered. "You savee my life. Me do anyting. You my master—me obey your orders. Yen Sang vellee grateful. Me no betlay you. You savee my life!"

"Yes, and you weren't worth it!" I said huskily. "You must have been mad to get on to that roof like that! Nobody else but Mr. Lee would have had the courage to go down to your assistance."

"Yen Sang, you must regard yourself as my prisoner," said Nelson Lee. "You need not pretend to be surprised when I tell you that I am fully aware of your game. Your object was to frighten the boys of this school, so that big trouble would be caused. But you have failed, and I intend to hand you over to the police, with all the other members of your drug-smuggling band."

Yen Sang clutched at the guv'nor's feet as he grovelled.

"Me your servant!" he exclaimed. "Me no care whatee you do. My life is

yours, and I grateful. Me showee you how to find others. Allee samee help to catch bad Chinamen!"

"What does he mean, sir?" I asked.

"He is apparently intending to convey the knowledge that he is willing to help us to get hold of his comrades," said Nelson Lee. "I've saved his life, and he is anxious to make amends."

"But we can't trust him, sir," I said.

"You trust me allee light—me no betray you," said the Chinaman earnestly. "Me be dead if you no sayee me. Me sollee. Do muchee for you, blave Blitsher!"

Nelson Lee looked at the Chinaman very grimly. The fellow sounded sincere enough. But was there any truth in his statement? Would he help to round up the other members of his rascally band?

CHAPTER 16.

Yen Sang's Little Way!

NELSON LEE, I felt sure, was not likely to accept the yellow rascal's word. At the same time, there was just a chance that he was in earnest. He certainly ought to have been, considering that he owed his life to Nelson Lee.

"Well, sir, what are you going to do?" I asked.

"I hardly know yet, Nipper," said the guv'nor. "In any case, there is not much to be gained by going down into the old sewers. We have been there before, and we know what they contain. What I mostly require is to discover the secret hiding-place of the drugs these Chinamen have been smuggling. Cocaine and opium, for example. I want to know where I can lay my fingers upon the hidden store."

Yen Sang's eyes gleamed.

"Trust me," he said softly. "Me showee you evelything."

"Look here, my friend," said Nelson Lee, catching the Chinaman by one arm. "I want you to be straightforward with me—if such a thing is possible. You

must tell me everything you know, if you are anxious to help me."

"Me takee you down into tunnel," said Yen Sang. "Me showee you big piccee storehouse. Me vellee grateful, and no betlay you. Me betlay yellow men."

Nelson Lee considered for a moment.

"Very well," he said smoothly. "We will go with you, Yen Sang. And you must not be offended if I do not take your word. You will lead the way, and I shall follow immediately in your rear. I shall have a revolver, and it will be pointing at your back. At the very first sign of a betrayal, I will shoot!"

"That's the way, guv'nor," I said, nodding.

But the Chinaman shook his head, and smiled.

"No playee flicks," he said. "Me vellee thuthful. Me want to get away from my fiends. No more my fiends—me glad to levenge on them. Me heipce you, boss. No talkee out of hat. Me thuthful."

"Well, you sound fairly sincere," said Nelson Lee. "Lead the way, Yen Sang—but don't forget my warning. I am taking no chances."

"But you no trust me?" asked Yen Sang.

"I will trust you when you prove that you are worthy of being trusted," said Nelson Lee quietly. "Now get a move on."

The Chinaman nodded, and passed down the attic stairs to the floor below. We went along a corridor, and then down into the hall. Nelson Lee unlocked the door, and then we followed Yen Sang out into the dark courtyard. We found that he had made a habit of entering the school by means of a small window in the servants' quarters. The window was barred, and it had been considered impossible for any human being to get through. But Yen Sang was astonishingly slim, and extremely slippery. He had found no difficulty in negotiating the restricted passage between the bars.

Out in the courtyard there we

iron covering, which ostensibly concealed an ordinary drainpipe. The Chinaman lifted this covering, and a shallow basin was revealed. But it was only a fake.

One touch caused the basin to sink away, and a deep shaft was revealed—the shaft leading right down into the depths of the earth. There were iron supports fixed at regular intervals down the wall.

Yen Sang led the way, and the guv'nor and I followed.

I had been terribly afraid that Nelson Lee would forbid me to undertake the trip. But he had said nothing—and I naturally kept my tongue still. I was very anxious to be with him on this adventure.

We arrived at the bottom of the shaft, and found our new friend awaiting us. The Chinaman did really seem grateful, and it was his intention, it appeared, to betray his own friends as a mark of his gratitude.

"You follow me," he whispered. "We no wantee light."

"Lead the way, then," said Nelson Lee. "One moment, though. I should like to know exactly where you are leading us to?"

"Me showee you cocaine and other drugs—heap plenty of them," said Yen Sang. "Me no takee you to my fiends. Me showee you drugs, then you come back. Savvy? Allee same make big laid with police. Me no wantee go plison."

"I'll see that you escape punishment if the raid is successful," said Nelson Lee. "But go ahead now—and don't talk."

We proceeded along the old sewer in the darkness. It was quite cold down there, and we walked briskly. Nelson Lee kept one hand upon Yen Sang's shoulder, so that the man would not slip away in the darkness.

And I brought up the rear. We continued in this way for several minutes. Then came a slight turn in the tunnel, and a dim glow was visible ahead. Yen

Sang came to a halt, and the guv'nor and I bumped into him.

"Goe careful," whispered the Chinaman. "Store-loom close here—we no wantee go to place where my fiends are. Savvy? Me stop soon, and then you see. All one piece honourable."

"I hope you are," said the guv'nor.

Again we went on, and I understood what the programme was. The store-room, containing the smuggled cocaine and other drugs, was situated by itself, away from the apartments occupied by Yen Sang's yellow colleagues. The Chinaman's scheme was to show us the secret of the place, and then escort us away. He knew well enough that any trickery on his part would lead to disaster—for himself.

At last we came to a doorway set back in the tunnel. We could dimly see it in the light which was reflected from the room farther along. And Yen Sang paused, and came closer.

"Be prepared to lun!" he said. "No safee. If we seen we——"

"Great Scott!" I gasped abruptly.

A pair of lean, sinewy hands grasped my neck from the darkness behind. The next second I was pulled over backwards. Nelson Lee, before he could act in any way, was similarly attacked. And Yen Sang, with one swift movement, snatched the guv'nor's revolver out of his hand.

We had been captured!

Prepared for treachery as we had been, we had been taken by surprise. The guv'nor fought like a demon, but it was hopeless. Before we knew where we were, seven or eight of the yellow beggars were upon us.

There was a tremendous jabbering, and I noticed that Yen Sang was doing most of the talking. I bitterly realised that he was explaining to his friends how completely he had duped and deceived us.

There were many exclamations of satisfaction when he had finished. Lights were brought by others, and then the guv'nor and I were carried

along the tunnel until we arrived in a square stone apartment.

The place reeked of opium, and there were several flickering lamps burning in different corners of the dungeon—for it was really little better. Nelson Lee and I, each held by four Chinamen, had no hope of getting away. We had been disarmed, and to make any attempt to break away would be madness.

"Looks like trouble, sir!" I remarked breathlessly.

"I've been a fool, Nipper," said Nelson Lee harshly. "I ought to have had more sense than to let you come down here——"

"Oh, don't worry about me, sir."

"But I do worry about you, my lad," said the guv'nor. "I must confess that my judgment was at fault. I thought the fellow was really grateful to me, and that he meant to be true. And now we have to pay for our incautiousness. Yen Sang led me right into a trap."

"The yellow dog!" I said hotly.

Yen Sang came over towards us, leering triumphantly.

"Allee samee heap big plisoners," he said, in a gloating voice. "Me vellee pleased with you. Fallee into trap plenty good. Now you die. No escape from here. You dangerous—and you must die."

"You confounded rascal!" I roared. "I—I'll——"

"Don't lose you head, Nipper," advised Lee quietly.

"It makes no difference," said Yen Sang. "You no gettee away from here. Big piecee triumph for me. Savvy? We fixee up your death."

He walked away, still leering, and with his glittering eyes full of hatred and contempt. The fact that Nelson Lee had saved his life weighed for nothing.

In a very few moments ropes were brought, and Nelson Lee and I were bound together tightly and securely. Then we were left in the centre of the floor while the Chinamen collected in a group and talked in their native

lingo. The guv'nor was listening intently.

"Can you understand, sir?" I asked.

"Very little, my boy," said Lee. "I am acquainted with Chinese, but this particular dialect is new to me, and I cannot follow what is being said. Only one or two words are familiar to me."

"Do you think they'll harm us, sir?"

"My boy, I'm afraid they will," said the guv'nor quietly.

I looked at the yellow men curiously. They were attired in all sorts of weird costumes. Some wore European dress, others were in native attire; while still others wore a mixture of the two. And all were dirty and repulsive-looking.

And after their jabbering had proceeded for a few minutes, an agreement was apparently arrived at, for there were many nods and grunts of approval. Then Yen Sang came over to us once again.

"You wishee to know how you die?" he inquired softly. "Velly well. I tellee you. You go into black cavern and wait. Then a man him comes, and uses knife. You both die quick. Then you will be flung in sewer, dlop in liver, and float away. A mystery for the police—eh? Allee same big piecee joke!"

And Yen Sang laughed to himself in a manner which made my blood run cold. I had never believed that such a heartless, ungrateful scoundrel could exist. And there was no hope for us, no chance of making our escape. We were in the hands of these Chinamen, and it was their evident intention to get rid of us without any fuss.

"Stabbed and thrown into the river!" I muttered. "Oh, guv'nor!"

"Keep your spirits up, young 'un," urged Nelson Lee.

But I knew that he was only saying that in order to comfort me. He was quite convinced in his own mind that there was no hope for us.

Before we could say anything further we were seized by many hands and carried out of the apartment. Along several tunnels we went until, at

length, we heard the sound of running water. And then I noticed an opening in one of the walls. The sound of the running water came through this opening. I needed no telling that an active sewer lay beyond. Probably a sharp shower was pouring, and the streets were being emptied into the sewers.

Both Nelson Lee and I were set down on the floor near the hole in the wall. Our bonds were tightened up, and then we were left to ourselves. Total darkness surrounded us, and our captors vanished into the blackness.

"What's the meaning of this, sir?" I asked huskily.

"I presume it is the Chinese method of mild torture," said Nelson Lee. "We are to be left by ourselves for a time. And then, when we least expect it, the executioner will come along with his knife. I am afraid, Nipper, that we are in a hopeless position."

"It's not like you to chuck up the sponge, sir," I said. "We're alone now—can't we do something? Can't we make an attempt to get free?"

"My boy, such an attempt would be doomed to failure," said the guv'nor. "These knots are absolutely tight, and the more we struggle the tighter they will become."

"And—and do you really think we shall be stabbed?" I asked huskily.

"These yellow men have nothing to lose and everything to gain by getting rid of us, once and for all," said the guv'nor. "We are at the mercy of these fiends, and I fear that nothing can be done."

"What ghastly luck, sir!" I muttered.

"Luck!" Lee retorted bitterly. "We are faced with death solely because of my foolishness. I was idiot enough to trust Yen Sang. I prided myself that I knew something about human nature—but I was wrong. This man has betrayed us, even after we saved his life."

"The way Yen Sang leered at us made my blood boil," I said. "Yet it seemed such a safe proposition to start

with. We weren't going near the actual danger zone—"

I broke off with a slight gasp, for a sudden beam of light had sprung out of the darkness. I knew at once that it was caused by an electric torch, and my heart jumped.

But then I realised that the torch was my own, or the guv'nor's. The executioner had come to carry out his work. There was no need for any information to be given on this point.

For a yellow hand, with a knife in its grasp, was visible on the outskirts of the light. I gazed at that glittering blade with a kind of fascination, and the knowledge that we could do nothing in our defence galled me to the utmost.

A soft, thin chuckle sounded.

"Plepare to have the knife," came the voice of Yen Sang.

As he spoke he turned the light round, and revealed his own grinning, evil features. He was alone with us, and I told myself that our last five minutes on earth had come.

"Do your worst, you yellow rat!" I snapped fiercely. "If you think we're going to beg for mercy, you've made a mistake! We're not afraid of you!"

Yen Sang placed the torch on the floor, so that the light played upon us, and then stepped closer, his knife ready in his hand. Nothing in the world could save us; rescue from an outside source was impossible.

"You makee one big bloomer mistake," exclaimed Yen Sang in a soft, purring voice. "Me vellee solly—"

"Stop that kind of talk!" snapped Nelson Lee. "You treacherous—"

"Lettee me explain. Me no tlaitor," interrupted Yen Sang. "Chinamen comee unexpectedly in passage. Me surprised. No meant it to be likee that. Me solly if you catchee flight!"

"What are you getting at?" demanded Lee curtly. "You have come here to carry out the orders of your gang—so what do you mean?"

"Me ordered to knifee you," explained Yen Sang. "Me comee here to

kill you one piece quick. Then you go in sewer. Savvy? You floats down into liver. Me came on this work for special leason. Me no play any ticks."

"What do you mean?" I asked, a faint hope in my breast.

"All bluff—spoofee, as you call him," said the Chinaman. "Me velly fiendly. You save my life—me glateful. Me doee much for you. When we caught by yellow men me forced to aglee. They killee me one time mighty quick if I tell them thuth. So me turn against you—but only bluffee."

Nelson Lee caught his breath.

"He means, Nipper, that his friends surrounded us without his knowledge," said the guv'nor. "He was compelled to agree with them, or his own life would have been taken. His only course was to pretend that he had trapped us. And now he has come to carry out the orders of the band."

"No, no," said Yen Sang. "Me only pretend to. You escape—I cuttee your lopes, and you go flee thlough sewer. Savvy? All very simple. You comee back with plenty big police. I lettee you in. Big laid, and soon allee over."

"I see," said Nelson Lee. "So you are faithful, after all? I thought my original opinion of you could not be wrong."

The Chinaman grinned.

"Me your servant," he said. "Evellything I can do not enough. I never lepay you for saves my life. You can swim? Good! You soon get into liver, and then allee plenty good. Heap big police—"

"But how shall we get out?" asked Lee keenly. "In the school courtyard?"

Yen Sang shook his head.

"Me know better way," he said. "I give you dilections."

He proceeded to give his "dilections." There was another way into the secret tunnels, it seemed, from the other side. But this was not much used, because it was capable of being observed.

It was the best way for a police force

to enter, however, and Yen Sang gave us full instructions. He further informed us that he would have the door unfastened, ready for us to enter.

It seemed almost too good be true.

The Chinaman had not turned upon us, and escape was within sight.

CHAPTER 17.

The Smuggler's Downfall!

YEN SANG pointed with a bony yellow finger.

"You goee thatee way," he whispered. "All stlaight and no mistake. Dlop into liver heap quick. No piecee danger. Yen Sang him know, boss. Me goee that way once. All safee."

"I hope so," I remarked, looking into the sewer rather uncertainly. "What do you think, guv'nor?"

"We must chance it," said Nelson Lee.

We were standing just against the opening in the wall which led into the active sewer. Yen Sang had removed our bonds, and now he was waiting for us to go. There was no further doubt in our minds regarding the matter. He was truly grateful for what Nelson Lee had done, and was our friend.

"Me goee back—tell plenty yarn," grinned Yen Sang. "Tell fiends me killee you and thlow you into sewer. Allee samee good joke!"

He chuckled in his own peculiar way, and a moment later Nelson Lee and I took the plunge. The guv'nor carried the electric torch, and we felt much more content with the light in our possession.

The water in the sewer was muddy, and it was swirling along about knee deep. The tunnel itself was small, and the guv'nor and I were obliged to bend low as we walked. The sewer, according to Yen Sang, went right down to the river and emptied itself into the Thames.

It would be a fairly long run for us,

and the most difficult part of the undertaking would probably be when we were near the exit. For if the tide was in and high the exit would be under water.

This would mean a trying ordeal—a dive through water, chancing whether we got out alive. However, there was no sense in thinking of difficulties where there might not be any, so I dismissed the subject from my mind.

And we went on slowly, but surely.

"How long do you think it'll take us, guv'nor?" I asked, after a while.

"Oh, not so very long," said Nelson Lee. "One is liable to form a wrong estimate of the distance from Holborn to the river. In a direct line it is not so far, and we are travelling in a direct line."

But we met with a stroke of luck which was quite unexpected.

Not thirty yards farther on, where the water was slightly deeper, Nelson Lee came to a halt and looked upwards. I wondered why, for there was nothing that I could see, except the roof.

"What's wrong, sir?" I asked.

"Nothing," said the guv'nor. "But look here, Nipper."

I went closer, and then saw that a narrow shaft led upwards. And, eight feet above our heads, in the shaft, was the first iron footrest. Others could be seen higher up, and all were rusty and disused.

"My hat!" I exclaimed. "Do you think we can get out this way, sir?"

"I think we should be very foolish if we did not try," replied Lee. "We may have our trouble for nothing, for it is quite likely that Yen Sang knows nothing about this shaft, and so could not tell us. It ought to lead upwards to a manhole, and that will be far better than taking a plunge into the river."

"Rather, sir," I declared. "I wasn't looking forward to a swim very much."

I was hoisted up first—for, in order to reach the first support, the guv'nor

had to lift me on to his shoulders. I caught hold of the rusty iron, and then leaned down and assisted Nelson Lee up.

A moment later we were both climbing the shaft.

It was not so deep as we had expected, and when Lee directed his torchlight upwards we could easily see the underside of a covering of a manhole.

"The question is, can we lift it?" I said.

A test soon settled this question. I pressed against the covering with my shoulder, and heaved with all my strength. But the thing wouldn't shift. It had probably been untouched for years, and was jammed firm.

"Let me try, Nipper," said Nelson Lee.

He managed to get up beside me, and it was a good thing the iron supports were strong, for they had to stand the weight of our bodies, and also the pressure which we exerted.

And our united efforts shifted the covering at last, and it went up with a sudden, jarring jerk. One moment later it was clear, and the cold night air was blowing down on our heads.

"Thank goodness!" I murmured fervently. "We've really escaped!"

I scrambled out into the open, and Nelson Lee was soon by my side. We found ourselves in a very quiet street, apparently in the heart of the City. I wasn't sure where I was—and I certainly didn't care.

We heaved the heavy covering back upon the manhole, and just as we were finished a soft footfall sounded just behind us, and the light of a torch illuminated our dishevelled persons.

"Now, then, what's this?" demanded a gruff voice. "What's the idea of interfering with that manhole?"

"It's all right, constable," said Nelson Lee, turning round. "Nipper and I have been doing a little exploring. My name is Nelson Lee, and, as it happens, I need the co-operation of the police at once."

The constable was rather inclined to think that we were pulling his leg at first. But when he was really satisfied with regard to our identity, he was only too eager and willing to help.

And, exactly fifteen minutes later, we were seated in the charge-room at a small police station, and the station-sergeant was listening to the gov'nor with great attention.

"Yes, Mr. Lee," he said at last. "I think the best thing you can do is to ring up Mr. Lennard, of the Yard. He's engaged upon this smuggling case—and, as it happens, he's on duty to-night."

"That's very lucky," said the gov'nor. "I thought Lennard would be in bed."

"He is in bed, as a rule, at this time, sir," said the sergeant. "But there's been a murder over in Bloomsbury, I believe, and Mr. Lennard has been pretty active. He 'phoned us here twice."

Nelson Lee was soon through to Scotland Yard, and he got hold of Chief Detective-Inspector Lennard, of the Criminal Investigation Department, almost at once.

"Yes, Lennard, I want you to come over," said the gov'nor urgently, after a few preliminary remarks. "It's very important. You'll come straight away, won't you, old man?"

Lennard evidently answered "Yes," for when Lee hung up the receiver a moment later he was looking quite pleased.

Within a very short time the chief inspector arrived on the scene, and he greeted us cordially.

"Well, this is a nice time to find respectable people in the charge-room of a police station," he exclaimed. "You seem to be in a pretty fair mess, too! When did you clean your boots last, Nipper?"

"Never mind Nipper's boots," said the gov'nor. "We want you in connection with those cocaine smugglers. I can lead you to the exact spot, and show you the hidden store of drug. But

we shall want a good few men to help us in the raid."

Lennard was all eagerness.

"Splendid!" he exclaimed. "But I should just like to know what has happened?"

It didn't take the gov'nor long to explain.

"Fhew!" said the Yard man. "You seem to have had a pretty hot time of it—a case of extremes, too. First of all excitement on the roof, and then a nice little tussle underground. You fellows can't say that you don't see life!"

"We thought we were going to see death!" I put in grimly.

"Well, that Chink ought to get a medal," declared Lennard. "He's evidently a good sort, Lee. We'd better hustle as hard as we can—before the fellow changes his mind. We don't want him to give the others a warning."

There was considerable bustle in the police station shortly after that. Telephone messages were sent out urgently, and when Nelson Lee and I left we were accompanied by half a dozen powerful men. We picked up another dozen in the neighbourhood of Holborn, and then went to our destination.

This was a quiet alley in a backwater. There was a manhole here, which led directly down into the Chinese stronghold. But the yellow men did not care to use it, for it was in a public thoroughfare, and their movements would probably have been spotted sooner or later.

For us it did not matter, and we were soon descending a wide shaft. The police went first, headed by a sergeant. Then Lennard went down, and Nelson Lee and I brought up the rear.

It wasn't our job now, and we were quite willing to let the police do the fighting, if there happened to be any. The gov'nor and I were feeling rather worn out after our experiences.

There was some fighting.

We were aware of this before we reached the bottom of the shaft. When we arrived at the foot we found the

constables chasing about in all directions. Several Chinamen were prisoners, and others were fleeing into the sewers. It was only a matter of time before they would all be rounded up.

Yen Sang was among the first prisoners, for he had shown no resistance. Nelson Lee assured him that he would receive no punishment; but it was necessary for him to accompany his companions to the police station.

The raid was a complete success. Considerable quantities of cocaine were discovered, and a good many cases of opium, to say nothing of other forbidden drugs.

After the excitement was over Nelson Lee and I lost no time in returning to the school. There was nothing to remain for, and we were tired out after our night's adventures and thrills.

CHAPTER 18.

Little in Name Alone!

"THE elephant," remarked Reginald Pitt, "has arrived!"
"Eh?"

"Gaze upon it and wonder!" said Pitt.

"What the dickens——"

"You're not looking in the right direction," went on Pitt, grinning. "Outside in the road!"

Several juniors of the Ancient House were lounging against the archway which led into the courtyard of the temporary school buildings, situated just off Holborn.

The school was close upon the road, and the courtyard was reached by means of a tunnel-like archway. The main entrance, however, was in the front. And a big open motor-car had just pulled up.

"My hat!" remarked Jack Grey, of the Remove. "You're not far wrong in describing that merchant as an elephant, Reggie! Phew! What a

size! I wonder how much his suits cost?"

The other juniors grinned. "What's the humour about?" I inquired, coming up with Sir Montie Tregellis-West. "Anything special in the joke line?"

"Yes," said Tommy Watson. "There it is—look!"

I looked.

What I saw certainly made me stare in a manner which was not exactly polite. The gentleman who had just stepped out of the big motor-car was one of the fattest men I had ever set eyes upon. He was not particularly tall, but astoundingly stout. His body, his legs, his arms, his neck—all were of enormous size.

"Well, it's hardly fair to make fun of the poor chap," I smiled. "Don't let him see you grinning—he wouldn't like it. Did you notice the way the car jumped up after he'd got out? What a load off its mind!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Shush, you asses!" I said warningly.

"Gee whiz!" grinned Justin B. Farman, the American junior. "I'd sure say the guy was the biggest ever!"

The stout gentleman looked in our direction and then walked towards us. I was rather surprised to see that he didn't waddle, but walked briskly and easily, in spite of his enormous bulk.

"There you are!" I whispered. "I warned you not to laugh too loudly, you asses! You'd better stand your ground!"

Some of the fellows had begun to fade away, but they halted as I gave them the advice. And the fat gentleman paused before us, and smiled in the most genial manner possible. It seemed as though a house had suddenly sprung up, and we stood in its shadow.

"Well, boys, having a little smile on the quiet, eh?" said the gentleman amiably. "But you can't offend me—I know I'm fat, so what's the good of

worrying about it? I suppose you belong to St. Frank's, eh?"

"Yes, sir," said Pitt. "This is St. Frank's. Can we be of any assistance?"

"As a matter of fact," said the stranger, "I have been making arrangements with your headmaster, and with the school governors, for my son to receive his education amongst you."

"Oh, that's interesting, sir," said Pitt. "Is he a junior?"

"Yes, my lad, if you can call a boy of fifteen a junior," said the fat man. "He will soon be one of your school-fellows, although I can't tell you exactly in which Form he will be placed. I am very pleased to have made your acquaintance. My name is Henry Little—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Somebody cackled loudly—Handforth was the culprit, I believe—and some of the other juniors grinned. They really couldn't help it.

"Don't mind me, my boys—don't mind me," chuckled Mr. Henry Little. "My name is rather incongruous, eh? One of life's little jokes. And I suppose I really was little at one time of day!"

The fat gentleman nodded genially, and went to the front entrance. He vanished inside, and the grins broke out afresh among the juniors.

"Ye gods and little fishes!" said De Valerie. "Mr. Little! I reckon his name ought to be Mr. Monster!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And his son's coming to St. Frank's," said Pitt. "If he's built in the same proportions as his father, mercy save us! We shall have every passage in the school blocked up whenever the chap's about!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Still, Mr. Little is a jolly decent sort," I remarked. "Let's hope his son takes after him in his jolly manner."

That was the first we heard of the new junior—and Master Little himself

was destined to arrive much sooner than we had anticipated.

His father was interviewing the Head; and that worthy old gentleman was much concerned regarding his study furniture. There was really no chair in the room capable of accommodating the visitor.

"Yes, Dr. Stafford, I have made all arrangements with the Board of Governors," Mr. Little was saying. "My son is to be admitted to St. Frank's at once—and I can assure you that I'm very pleased."

The Head nodded.

"I understand that you have had some trouble with the lad?" he suggested quietly.

"Well, not exactly trouble," said Mr. Little. "James is one of the best boys breathing, but his will power dwindles away to nothing where matters of food are concerned. His appetite, my dear sir, is simply tremendous. It will be necessary to feed him far more liberally than the other boys—and, of course, I am prepared to pay the extra expense."

Dr. Stafford smiled.

"I do not think we need discuss that question just now, Mr. Little," he said. "Your son, I feel sure, will be well looked after at St. Frank's. The school will return to Sussex early next week, I may say. And I presume the lad will be introduced to his schoolfellows on that occasion?"

The fat visitor leaned forward.

"Well, Dr. Stafford, I wanted to ask you a favour," he said. "I should like my son to come at once—to-day, if possible. I want him to get acquainted with his new life here, in London—before he goes away into the country. I shall be able to see him almost every day for a few days, at least, and by the time he goes he will be comfortable and content."

"That is not a bad suggestion," said Dr. Stafford. "For my part, I have no objection to offer. You are quite at liberty to bring your son to-day, if you

wish to, Mr. Little. Tell me your plans definitely, and I will make all arrangements."

Mr. Little's face screwed itself up into a smile.

"Splendid—splendid!" he exclaimed. "How very good of you, my dear sir. I shall leave my son in your care with the greatest confidence. I feel sure that he will not get into any mischief while he is in your charge. He is a boy with a high standard of honour, truthful and chivalrous. If only he is in congenial surroundings he will be happy and contented."

Mr. Henry Little took his departure shortly afterwards, looking very good-humoured. And that afternoon, soon after lessons had commenced, Mr. Crowell made an announcement in the Remove Form Room.

"Boys," he said, "I have a little item of news for you."

The juniors regarded the Remove master with interest.

"About going back to St. Frank's, sir," inquired Owen major.

"No, my lad—that would not be news," said Mr. Crowell. "You all know, I dare say, that we shall probably return to the old school early next week. I wish to inform you that you will have a new Form fellow from to-day onwards."

"Which House, sir," asked Bob Christine.

"Not your House, Christine," said Mr. Crowell. "The new boy, whose name is James Little, will reside in the Ancient House, and I have decided that he shall share Study L with Trotwood minor and Trotwood major."

"Really, that is most interesting, my dear sir," said Nicodemus Trotwood, who was about five minutes older than his brother Cornelius. "My brother and I will be most delighted to welcome the new boy in our study."

"That is very nice of you, Trotwood," said Mr. Crowell dryly.

"I beg your pardon, my good sir, but did I hear my name mentioned?"

asked Cornelius, who was the exact counterpart of Nicodemus—so far as looks went.

"I was speaking to your brother, Trotwood minor," said Mr. Crowell. "You need not trouble. We will conclude the lesson."

Cornelius looked surprised.

"No, sir, I have not seen him to-day," he said mildly.

"Eh? You have not seen whom asked the Form-master.

"Jesson, sir——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I was not talking about Jesson of the Sixth!" shouted Mr. Crowell. "I said that we will continue the lesson, Trotwood. Please be silent."

"But, Mr. Crowell, I am not violent."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I did not say you were violent," roared Mr. Crowell. "I am sorry to say, Trotwood minor, that your affliction of deafness appears to become worse day by day. We have wasted enough time. Boys, continue your work."

Cornelius looked mildly astonished, and asked his brother in a whisper why Mr. Crowell should have referred to a Turk. Nicodemus grinned, but made no attempt to explain. He didn't feel up to it.

It was interesting to know that Master Jimmy Little was booked for the Ancient House Remove. I decided to be on the look-out for him after lessons—for, as junior skipper, I felt it my duty to welcome the new fellow.

We had learned that Little was likely to arrive at any time during the evening. And, having seen his father, there was a good deal of speculation regarding the new fellow's size.

Some of the juniors reckoned that he would be slim, for it was not at all certain that he would take after his father. However, the best thing was to wait and see. We should all know then.

Sir Montie Tregellis-West and Tommy Watson and I were just on the

point of going in to tea when we heard a shout from the archway. And at that moment Mr. Little's big motor-car rolled into the courtyard.

There was a rush at once, and the car was soon surrounded.

"My hat! They're a pair!"

"He's as big as his pater!"

"Great Scott!"

"Is that young mountain coming into the school?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

There were a good many yells, and some of the fellows were not at all particular whether they were overheard or not. Ralph Leslie Fullwood, for instance, regarded the motor-car and its occupants with a sneering smile on his face.

"Rotten swank!" he exclaimed sourly. "I'm blessed if I know what the school's comin' to! We don't want any beastly pork butchers here. Yaroooh!"

Fullwood sat down abruptly in the gravel. Handforth's fist was responsible; for Handforth was ever on the look-out for some excuse to use his knuckles.

"You insulting cad!" roared Handforth. "If you can't say anything polite when you open your mouth, you'd better clear off. St. Frank's sank pretty low when you were admitted!"

"Hear, hear!" said several voices.

Mr. Little apparently heard nothing of the squabble. His back was turned towards Fullwood and Handforth, and he beamed upon all in general. Beside him stood a second edition of himself—an edition in miniature, so to speak.

And yet he wasn't so miniature, after all. James Little was proportioned in exactly the same way as his father. His smooth, pink face had precisely the same jolly expression, and his eyes twinkled merrily. A tuft of fair hair escaped from under his topper, which, in spite of its size, seemed too small for him.

I seemed to take to the chap at once. He looked the soul of good nature. His

fatness was rather startling, and his Eton suit bulged everywhere, although it was the largest Eton suit I had ever set eyes on. His figure closely resembled a barrel, and his arms were as fat as any ordinary fellow's thigh. I couldn't guess the size of his collar, and his neck simply filled it.

"This, boys, is my son—and, from now onwards, your schoolfellow," said Mr. Little genially. "I feel that I am really introducing two boys in one, for his bulk is considerable."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You needn't talk, dad," said Little junior. "And I'm not to blame for being fat, I suppose? Hallo, you chaps! Jolly pleased to meet you all. I hope we shall rub along all serene!"

Jimmy Little jumped out of the car. There were one or two murmurs of surprise, for the fat boy jumped out with wonderful lightness. There was nothing lumbering about him, in spite of his tremendous bulk.

I stepped forward.

"I'm pleased to meet you, Little," I said. "You'll excuse me, but I feel inclined to address you as 'Big.' 'Little' doesn't suit you at all—"

"It doesn't," agreed the new boy. "But when a fellow's born with a name of that sort, he can't very well change it, can he? I'm pleased to meet you, although I don't know who the currant bun you are!"

"Who the what I am?" I asked.

"You mustn't mind that sort of thing from Jimmy," chuckled his father. "His thoughts generally run on food, and he is in the habit of mentioning eatables in ordinary conversation."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, I see," I grinned. "Well, my name's Nipper, and I'm the captain of the Remove. You're coming into our Form, Little. As soon as you like, I'll show you round, and escort you to Study L."

"Thanks muchly," said the fat boy.

"Well, pater, you can clear off as soon as you like, you know. Don't let me

detain you. I dare say I shall be able to find some tea knocking about somewhere."

"Great Scott!" said his father. "I spent fifteen shillings on your tea not an hour ago!"

"A change of scenery always gives me an appetite, pater," said Little junior. "I reckon I shall be jolly comfortable at St. Frank's."

The new fellow evidently intended to make himself comfortable at all costs, and when his father took his departure Master Jimmy Little appeared to be quite at home. He was something novel in new boys!

CHAPTER 19.

Something Like an Appetite!

JIMMY LITTLE beamed round him with immensely good nature after he had been left to the tender mercies of the Remove. His fat figure looked something like a monument on the steps of the Ancient House—as we called that portion of the school the Fossils inhabited.

Little was quite at his ease. New boys as a rule were nervous and rather scared, but this new boy acted as though he had been at St. Frank's for a whole term. It was really impossible to dislike him.

His round face wrinkled itself up into smiles every time he spoke; and his great weight did not seem to bother him in the least.

"I suppose tea is served here?" the new boy asked rather anxiously.

I grinned.

"Eh? I thought you'd had tea?" I inquired.

"Well, I had a snack," admitted Little. "Nothing much, you know. Only a chop and vegetables, and fruit pudding, to start with. I had some fish and potatoes, of course, and five or six rolls with cheese afterwards. I finished up with a dozen pastries and a three-bob cake. But you can't call that much!"

"Much!" gasped Pitt. "It sounds like a meal for a dozen!"

"Something like an appetite!" grinned Watson.

"Well, I suppose it is," confessed Little. "Something—but not much! They do have tea here, don't they?"

I glanced at my watch.

"Too late, my son. Tea in hall is nearly over."

"Great doughnuts!" said Little, in dismay.

"But you needn't be alarmed," I went on. "We're allowed to have tea in our own studies—the fellows can provide what they like. You'll have tea with the Trotwood twins—it's their honour, you know."

"Oh, ripping!" said Jimmy Little. "Is tea ready now?"

"Never mind about tea!" exclaimed Handforth. "I want to ask you a few questions, kid. To begin with, why don't you tell your tailor to make you a decent suit? In a week's time you'll be oozing out of this one."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Dry up, Handy," I grinned. "Don't chip the new fellow now——"

"I'm asking him some plain questions," said Handforth. "They may be personal, but new kids are supposed to put up with that sort of thing."

"But tea——" began Little.

"Blow the tea!" roared Handforth. "I want to know all about you. Are there any more at home of your quality?"

"I'm awfully sorry, old chap, but I can't answer questions until I've been strengthened by a meal," said Little calmly. "You don't mind moving, do you? I don't want to be rude——"

"If you don't answer my questions in two ticks, you cheeky boulder, I'll jolly well punch you!" roared Handforth.

"Go ahead!" said the new boy calmly.

Handforth took him at his word.

His left swung round, and thudded upon Little's chest. Any ordinary junior would have been sent spinning.

But Little didn't even stagger. He apparently failed to feel the blow.

"Well, my hat!" said Handforth blankly.

Biff!

Again he landed out. Jimmy Little made no attempt to guard himself. He received the punches on his arms and chest with the smile still upon his face, and Handforth stood back and gasped.

"Aren't you hurt?" he asked.

"Hurt?" said the fat boy. "You don't think those taps hurt, do you?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Taps!" said Handforth faintly. "I was using all my strength!"

"He's armour-plated, Handy," I said.

"His face isn't!" roared Handforth. "And I don't stand rot from anybody." Swish!

Handy's fist lashed out—but it didn't land upon Little's face. The new boy dodged with amazing agility, and then simply walked forward. He collided with Handforth like a battering ram, and didn't pause in his stride. Handforth went staggering back, recovered himself, and then Little ran into him again. This time Handforth floundered over with a roar.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

It was really funny, and everybody howled. The fat junior simply walked into the leader of Study D, and Handy was knocked over as though a bus had collided with him. Little's weight was something to reckon with!

"Give it up, Handy," chuckled Pitt.

"The—the cheeky ass!" gasped Handforth, struggling up. "Aren't you chaps going to lend me a hand? Help me to bowl him over, you rotters! Back me up!"

A good many of the juniors were quite ready to join in the rag, and there was a rush at Fatty Little as he was about to enter the building. Three fellows bumped against him, and recoiled—almost as though they had struck against an indiarubber ball. But sheer weight told, and Little was sent spinning over.

He collided with the ground with a thud, rolled over, and rose to his feet unhurt and smiling.

"Is this a new game?" he asked politely. "It doesn't do a fellow's clothes any good—Frying steaks! Lock out!"

Over he went again, with a jar which ought to have shaken every bone in his body. But he was so extremely well protected by his fat that he was quite unhurt. And again he picked himself up.

"Sorry, but I'm going indoors," he said. "This is a silly game."

"Hold him!" roared Handforth.

A number of juniors planted themselves in the doorway, providing a thick barrier.

But Fatty Little walked into the group as though it didn't exist. He didn't even use his fists, but simply charged unconcernedly. The effect was rather staggering—and, most decidedly, it was funny.

The juniors were sent in all directions like ninepins, and Little walked through them without even pausing in his stride. A yell went up from the juniors who were watching.

"Oh, my hat!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Hubbard, who was one of those bowled over, scrambled to his feet rather dazedly. He looked round in amazement.

"Great pip!" he ejaculated. "That—that chap's a human tank!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I believe he'd walk through a brick wall!" grinned Pitt.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And, meanwhile, Jimmy Little was walking serenely down the passage, looking for Study L—and tea. I found him after a moment or two, and he was just as cheerful as ever.

"You're a holy terror, my son," I said. "I don't think you'll find many chaps anxious to have a scrap with you. By the way, can you box at all?"

"I'm pretty fair at it," said Little. "You see, although I'm fat, I'm quite

agile. Without boasting, I'll bet I could race a good many fellows over a measured hundred yards. I believe in keeping fit—and the only way to keep fit is to have plenty of grub."

"Grub again!" I grinned. "I'm afraid you'll starve at St. Frank's if you require grub in wholesale quantities. This is Study L," I added, as we halted outside the doorway. "You're going to share this with two fellows named Trotwood. They're twins, you know, and quite decent chaps."

"Three freaks in one study!" grinned Owen major.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

I passed into the little room with the new boy, and I noticed that his gaze was fixed upon the table. His smile vanished as he saw that the tea was not particularly plentiful. A loaf of bread was on one plate, and half a tin of sardines was on another plate. There was some jam and three or four cakes. The Trotwood twins themselves were not present.

"Is—is this my tea?" asked Little, in dismay.

"Begad!" put in Tregellis-West. "Your tea, dear fellow? That's for the three of you!"

Little gave a gulp.

"Three of us!" he gasped. "But—but that's only a mouthful."

"My hat!" I grinned. "I can see that the teas in Study L are going to be plentiful in future—with an appetite like this to satisfy. I hope your dad allows you about five quid a week for extra meals, Little?"

The fat boy shook his head sadly.

"No such luck!" he said, in a mournful voice. "I only get thirty bob a week pocket money, and it's always used up Tuesday. Then I have to starve until Saturday comes round again!"

"I wish I had thirty bob a week pocket money!" said Tommy Watson. "I reckon I'm lucky to get a quid—and I don't spend half that on grub. The school itself provides plenty to eat."

"Well, we'll leave you to it, old son,"

I said, slapping Little upon the back. "I hope you're still alive by six o'clock. It wouldn't look well in the newspapers to read that a skeleton of a chap had died through starvation at St. Frank's!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It's all very well to laugh!" said Little sadly. "But you wouldn't laugh if you had an aching void like I have! Just look what I've got to fill up every day! It's—it's the only worry in my life!"

We went our way, chuckling. I was inclined to believe that Jimmy Little was exaggerating a bit. He undoubtedly possessed an unusual appetite, but I couldn't quite believe that he was capable of eating much after the meal he had demolished earlier in the afternoon—if, indeed, he had tucked away as much as he had described.

I went along to inform Nicodemus Trotwood that the new boy was waiting for tea. Meanwhile, Little eyed the table in Study L with great disfavour. He cut himself two slices of bread, and disposed of them in record time, aided by a few sardines. Then with his mouth full, he went out into the passage.

He was looking for his new study-mates—because politeness forbade him to begin without them. But his appetite was a more powerful factor, and it won the day.

He happened to glance in Study M, next door. The door stood ajar, and the study was empty. Little's eyes grew round and gleaming as his gaze rasted upon the well-spread table.

Study M was occupied by the Duke of Somerton and Cecil De Valerie—but not at the moment. Augustus Hart was also in that study. The three juniors were in funds that evening, and they had provided themselves with a particularly fine spread. They didn't go in for quantity, but quality.

Hart had prepared the tea, and he had just gone along to find his study-mates. And the coast was clear!

Jimmy Little had a fight with himself for a moment.

But he knew well enough that his appetite would win, and he edged his way into Study M, as though fascinated at the sight of the table. On a plate were a number of delicious-looking little rolls. There were dainty pats of butter; a small tongue was set out appetisingly with parsley. A glass dish was filled with choice pastries. There were other delicacies, too.

"I must—I simply must!" murmured Little. "Oh, it's too good to be missed! And it's always allowable to raid another chap's study—it's always done in Public schools!"

His scruples went, and he closed the door and sat down at the table. The way the good things went was simply staggering. The rolls, the tongue, and the pastries disappeared at record speed.

Jimmy Little had just cleared the table to the last crumb, when the door opened, and three cheerful juniors marched in.

"A nice thing, being late," Hart was saying. "There you are, my sons! A feast for the giddy king—Why, what the—Great goodness!"

Hart paused and stared. He stared at Little, and he stared at the table.

"Where—where's all the grub?" he demanded huskily. "Where's the feed?"

"Old chap, that's rather an unnecessary question," said the Duke of Somerton. "The feed has gone like a glorious dream—although it's not far off. The new fellow has scooped the lot."

Hart and De Valerie grabbed the fat boy in righteous wrath.

"Have you eaten our tea?" roared Hart.

"Where is it?" shouted De Valerie.

"I—I—"

"You burglar!" yelled Hart.

"You gorging elephant!"

"But please let me explain—" gasped Little.

"There's nothing to explain, you burgling rotter!" said Hart fiercely.

"You've had the cheek to come into this study and wolf all the grub—"

"I—I looked in by chance, and I couldn't resist it," confessed the fat boy. "I'm awfully sorry, you fellows."

"It's no good saying you're sorry—now!" snapped Hart.

"But I am sorry, and I feel that I'm a greedy rotter!" said Little earnestly. "I do feel like that—afterwards. When I see the grub I forget everything, you know. If you'll allow me, I'll pay for another supply of fodder—and I hope you'll forgive my nerve."

The chums of Study M couldn't very well resist the new boy's manner.

"You'll pay for another lot just the same?" asked De Valerie.

"Yes—willingly," said Little. "It's only right."

Hart was already grinning.

"Well, you're a queer card!" he exclaimed. "You come here, scoff our grub, and then offer to pay for another lot! Dash it all, you chaps, one can't be wild with this merchant!"

Fatty Little looked relieved.

"How much?" he asked, pulling out his purse.

"A small tongue—tinned, a dozen rolls, a dozen mixed pastries, a jam roll," said Hart, naming a few other things. "That's how much. We don't want money, Fatty. We want the same as you scoffed. You can go out and buy the stuff."

"By Jove! That's rather a good idea, old chap," said Somerton. "It ought to teach you a lesson, Little. You've boned our tea, and now you've got to go and buy another one. Buzz off—we're hungry!"

The fat boy was given directions, and he went off cheerfully. The shops were only a short distance away, and the chums of Study M waited patiently for their tea. They felt that they had done right in sending the culprit.

At least, they felt that way to begin with. But after twenty long minutes had passed, and there was still no sign of Little, they began to change

their minds. Hart glanced at his watch impatiently.

"The ass ought to have been back before this," he said.

"Oh, he's new to this district," said De Valerie. "We oughtn't to have sent him, really. Still, he wolfed our grub, so he deserves to have the trouble. It doesn't do to let new kids get too fresh."

The door opened, and Pitt put his head in.

"Finished tea?" he asked cheerfully. "Good! I want you chaps——"

"Rats!" said Hart. "We haven't started tea yet."

Pitt stared.

"Where's the grub, then?" he asked.

"In Little's big tummy!" said De Valerie grimly.

"What the dickens——"

"The cheeky ass came here and burgled our tea!" said Hart warmly. "But he did the decent thing, I must admit, and offered to buy a fresh lot. He's out now, fetching the stuff."

Reginald Pitt chuckled.

"That chap's a masterpiece!" he remarked. "Fancy having the nerve to raid a study on his first giddy afternoon! You say he's gone out—— By George! I wonder——"

"Well, what do you wonder?"

Pitt's face broke into a broad grin.

"Well," he said, "five minutes ago I spotted the new kid in the courtyard, in a secluded corner. He was carrying several bags, and he was dipping into the bags pretty heavily. Rather suspicious——what?"

The chums of Study M jumped up.

"He's out in the courtyard!" roared Hart. "Eating?"

"Yes!"

"Great guns!" said De Valerie. "It's impossible!"

"Well, his jaw was going at express speed, anyhow," said Pitt. "I'd bet anybody that he was eating——although where he was putting the stuff is a bit of a problem. You said he had scoffed your tea——enough for three of you?"

"He did!" said De Valerie. "You

must be mistaken, Pitt. Even a giant couldn't eat any more——"

"I'm going out to see!" said Hart hastily.

De Valerie went with him and the pair fairly gasped when they saw Jimmy Little tucked in a corner of the courtyard, feeding his mouth with considerable rapidity from a number of bags.

"You—you glutton!" roared Hart wrathfully.

"Oh, I say——I—I——"

"Is that our grub?" bellowed De Valerie.

"Ye-es!" confessed Little. "You—you see, I—I couldn't resist it! I managed to keep myself in check until I got here, but the stuff was so jolly good that I couldn't help sampling——"

Little looked up, confused and guilty.

"But you were choked up with grub before you started!" yelled Hart.

"Oh, that was only a snack!"

"A—a snack!" said De Valerie faintly.

"That's all! I was hungry, you know——"

"Hungry!"

"Of course! The walk gave me an appetite——"

"Oh, my stars!" gasped Hart. "This chap will be the death of us inside a week! He—he was hungry because he walked into Holborn, after eating all that grub, too. Great Scott!"

De Valerie and Hart seized the bags, and found that there was very little left of the second feed. Their amazement was so great that they almost forgot to be angry.

In fact, they couldn't help seeing the humour of the situation—and they were good-natured fellows. They had entrusted Little with the task of purchasing the duplicate tea—and he had demolished that also!

"You're absolutely the limit!" declared Hart. "There's a moral to this, you chaps. Never in any circumstances, trust grub to this human food destroyer. He's not to be trusted!"

Fatty Little looked pained.

"It's true—I know it!" he said

mournfully. "I'm not to be trusted with grub. It's my weak spot, and I'm hopeless when there's any grub about. You see, I'm always hungry—and hunger makes criminals of us all!"

The juniors only stared.

"I'll pay for another lot, of course," went on Little. "It's a good thing I've got the cash—my pater tipped me a fiver this afternoon. But don't, for goodness' sake, let me go for any grub when I'm stony! I shall scoff it just the same, and then I can't pay for it!"

De Valerie laughed.

"Well, thanks for the warning," he said. "But as for this grub, you needn't pay for it, Fatty. It was worth the money, anyhow! You ought to go into a giddy side show, as a champion eater!"

The new boy was greatly relieved, and declared that the chums of Study M were bricks. They were. But if Little had really been like his name, he would probably have been bumped on the spot.

But to bump the fat boy was a task which three ordinary boys were not capable of accomplishing.

CHAPTER 20.

The Mysterious Stranger!

"O NE of the best!"

This was the general verdict concerning Jimmy Little.

I was quite in agreement with such an opinion. The new boy, apart from his craving for food, was a really decent chap in every way.

On the morning after his arrival he was apparently quite at home. It was a bit startling to go round a corner suddenly, and to find the passage filled with Jimmy Little. But that is what we experienced frequently.

And anyone who chanced to run into him by accident got far the worst of the collision. Jimmy himself wouldn't move—but the other fellow invariably staggered over backwards. It was like running into an elephant.

It was simply impossible to shift him, and he was not subjected to any of the little japes which were generally tried upon a new fellow. He was not an easy customer to tackle! Even Handforth thought it wiser to steer clear of Fatty, after his experience of the previous evening.

Just before morning lessons, I came across Little in the doorway. There was a sad expression upon his face, but he smiled immediately I came up. I slapped him on the back.

"Cheer up, old son!" I said. "Why the worried look? Homesick?"

The fat boy shook his head.

"I—I'm hungry!" he said plaintively.

"Hungry!" I gasped. "But you only had your breakfast a quarter of an hour ago—and you demolished three times as much as any other fellow!"

"I was satisfied for the minute," said Little. "But what's the good of a tiny meal like that? I believe in starting the day well, by having a jolly good meal. I shall starve at St. Frank's if things go on like this. It's awful! I don't know how I shall last out until dinner-time."

"Well, I don't suppose you'll die of starvation," I said cheerfully.

During morning lessons Little was cheerful and serene. When his mind wasn't on the subject of food he was the happiest of juniors. And he proved himself to be an excellent scholar.

Mr. Crowell was quite satisfied with him. There was some doubt as to whether the form upon which he sat would bear his weight, and Handforth facetiously suggested that a cast iron one should be made. That remark cost Handforth fifty lines, and he didn't attempt to be funny again.

As soon as lessons were over I caught hold of Little by the arm.

"Watson and I are going out into Holborn," I said. "Care about coming with us?"

"Yes, thanks—I'd like to come," said the fat boy.

"But we're not going for grub, mark you," I said warningly.

"Don't remind me of it," he said. "I'm all right when I'm not thinking about the stuff. I suppose everybody here thinks I'm an awful glutton—but I can't help it, you know. I was born with a terrific appetite. I am told that I used to eat as much as a full grown man when I was seven."

"I can quite believe it!" I said readily. "But come on—and mind you don't get in the way of a motor-bus. We don't want to have a bus overturned in Holborn, you know!"

Little grinned, and we passed out into the courtyard, and then into the street. He was a very genial companion, and Tommy Watson and I were kept quite amused as we walked along.

We were in Holborn, our objective being Gamage's. Tommy wanted to buy a new film, and we had plenty of time to accomplish the mission before dinner. We walked down the crowded pavement cheerfully.

And when we were nearing our destination I was rather interested in the behaviour of a total stranger who happened to be crossing the busy road. He caught sight of us, and simply stared at us in astonishment.

He reached the pavement, and then stood staring after us in a manner which could not be mistaken. I was quite convinced that he was interested in Fatty Little.

He was a coarse-looking fellow of about forty-five; a man dressed in a loud suit and wearing a bowler hat. As for his face, he advertised to the world at large that he and whisky were the greatest of friends. A small moustache adorned his upper lip. Altogether he was a coarse, horsey-looking customer.

"Come on, Nipper," said Watson, who hadn't noticed anything. "What the dickens are you staring at? We haven't got all day."

"Keep your hair on!" I said calmly.

We continued our walk, and I wondered if Jimmy Little knew of the stare which the stranger had bestowed upon him. It seemed that he was uncon-

scious of the man's attention, for his manner was unaltered.

When we came out of Gamage's, I glanced about me. And there, sure enough, stood the man in the loud suit on the opposite side of the road. As we moved up Holborn he kept pace with us on the other pavement.

I didn't say anything to Little—for I was not absolutely certain that he was the object of the man's interest.

When we turned down the quiet road which led to the school, I saw that the man was still looking at us. But after that I lost sight of him. Little was quite cheerful as we entered the courtyard of the school.

"Nearly dinner-time, isn't it?" he asked.

"Yes, in about ten minutes," I said.

"Ten minutes!" exclaimed Fatty. "Great cream buns! I can't wait till then."

But he did wait, for there was nothing else to be done. And during dinner he was the star turn. Even fellows from other tables craned forward in order to see "the gorilla eat," as somebody unkindly put it.

But Little didn't mind.

He beat all records in the Remove, and some of the fellows began speculating as to how much the school would lose on Little during a couple of terms. But these little pleasantries had no effect upon the new boy.

During the afternoon lessons I wondered who the mysterious stranger could have been. As it turned out, I was to see more of the fellow almost at once. And I was destined to be puzzled even more.

After school the courtyard was rather crowded with fellows. The air seemed heavy, and the sky was overcast. There was every indication of rain during the evening, and the juniors were making the most of the fine weather while it lasted.

Little was in his study, with the Trotwood twins. In all probability they were discussing tea. I happened to be

out in the courtyard, and Handforth & Co. were there, too.

Then I noticed a familiar figure entering under the archway. I paused in the middle of a remark to Tregellis-West, and stared. The newcomer was the stranger I had seen in Holborn.

He was already in conversation with Hubbard and Owen major. I strolled over, curious. Sir Montie looked after me rather indignantly.

"Really, old boy, you are frightfully rude," he protested. "What do you mean by walkin' away just in the middle of tellin' me about the footer fixtures——"

"I'll go on with that later, Montie," I said briskly.

"But, dear fellow——"

"Come on!" I said. "There's something special doing."

I regarded the flashily-dressed stranger with interest as I drew nearer. He was even coarser than I had supposed him to be. And yet, at the same time, his manners and his speech were quite polished. I was rather surprised at this, and concluded that he had come down in the world through drink.

"The boy I want to see is Master James Little," he was saying. "He belongs to this school, does he not? Will one of you run and tell him that a friend has called? Just run in and tell him that Mr. Montgomery Ford is here to see him. I'll give you sixpence."

Handforth fainted.

"Don't all run at once!" he gasped.

"Sixpence! What riches!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

I pushed my way forward through the crowd.

"What is it you want, sir?" I asked. "Keep quiet, you fellows!"

"I am glad to see that there is somebody here, with a little politeness," sneered Mr. Ford. "I want you to go indoors, sonny, and I want you to tell James Little that I've come to have a word with him."

"Are you a friend of Little?" I

asked. "I mean to say, is he expecting you, and does he want to see you?"

"That is none of your infernal business!" snapped the man. "Jimmy and I know one another quite well——"

"If so, why don't you apply to the Housemaster in the usual way?" I asked keenly. "I'm afraid Little isn't here at the moment——"

"I suppose he's hidin' away somewhere," sneered Fullwood. "I thought the kid was no class—if he's got pals of this sort."

"Dry up, Fully!" snapped Hart. "We don't want your rotten opinion—— Hallo! Little's on the steps now. You can't mistake that mountain."

Jimmy Little had just emerged from the school house, and he stood looking over towards us for a moment. Then he turned his back as though to go in once more.

"I say, Little!" I called.

But Patty took no notice; he went straight in.

"Very friendly—I don't think," remarked Handforth.

"Hold on—I'll go and see," I said.

I hurried across the courtyard, and made my way to Study L in the Remove passage. The door was ajar, and I pushed it open and entered. The fat boy was alone, and he was leaning over the table, apparently writing. He looked round in a rather guilty fashion, and nodded, trying to conceal his feelings.

"Hallo, Nipper!" he said. "Anything the matter?"

"There's a man out in the yard asking for you," I replied. "He says he's a friend of yours, Little, and he wants to see you."

The fat boy looked surprised.

"Oh, that's rot!" he said. "How should I know him?"

"He gave his name as Montgomery Ford," I added.

"Rather a high sounding name," said Little carelessly. "Perhaps he's made some mistake, Nipper. I don't want to see the fellow. You might ask him to go away, will you?"

"Then you do know him?"

"Eh?"

"And you're afraid to go out and see him?" I demanded.

"I'm not afraid!" said Little, with a troubled look. "Why should I be afraid? Not likely! I'll come with you if you want me to. But what's the good of seeing the fellow?"

He moved towards the door as he spoke, and I couldn't quite make out what the trouble was. But I did feel sure that this visitor was decidedly unwelcome, and that Little didn't want to have anything to do with him.

The fat boy walked briskly along the passage, his great form looming up in front of me so that the whole view ahead was obscured. We entered the courtyard, and Little broke into a run.

"Look out!" shouted Pitt. "Clear the way for the tank!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The juniors scattered, for they had come to learn that it wasn't wise to be in Little's way when he wanted to get through a crowd.

"Ah, here you are, Jimmy!" said Mr. Ford genially, extending his hand.

"How goes it? Pleased to see you again."

Little smiled blandly.

"I don't get the idea," he said. "Haven't you made a mistake?"

"Look here, you needn't pretend you don't know me—"

"Pretend!" said the fat boy, his manner changing. "Who's pretending? As I said before, you must have made a mistake. I should advise you to get out of this place."

"You—you young hound!" shouted Mr. Ford. "If you dare to deny that you know me, I'll show you up—"

"None of that!" roared Handforth. "You're a beastly fraud—and I believe that you're one of those rotten confidence men. How would you like to go out? On your feet, or on your neck?"

"You impudent—"

"You've got ten seconds to get out on your feet," said Handforth. "That's plenty of time, and if you don't choose

to clear, we don't mind obliging by chucking you out."

Little turned to Handforth.

"There's no need to be violent, old man," he said quietly. "The chap is harmless by the look of him. I'm sorry, Mr. Ford, but I should advise you to go. Good-afternoon."

He held out his fat hand, and Mr. Ford took it.

I was watching casually, and I rather wondered why the fat boy should have shaken hands. Then I ceased to wonder, for I spotted something which escaped the notice of the other juniors.

As the pair gripped hands, I caught a glimpse of something white. And then I knew the truth.

During that brief handshake a scrap of paper passed from Little to the stranger.

It was this paper, evidently, which the new fellow had been writing in his study. I needed no telling that the paper contained a message.

How was Little connected with Ford?

What was there between the two? I didn't quite like the look of things, for I was sure that Fatty Little was a thoroughly decent sort, and I was just as sure that Montgomery Ford was a rascal.

The latter had seen Fatty in Holborn by sheer chance, and he had lost no time in coming to the school. He was an acquaintance, and Little evidently did not welcome him.

The man tried to look unconcerned.

"If you don't choose to know me, I can't do any more," he said gruffly. "But I can tell you, Master Little, that you're not the boy I took you to be. I'm disappointed in you."

He carelessly turned away, and I saw him give a hasty glance at the paper. It was clumsily done, and I did not miss it.

When he looked up, there was a different expression on his face, and he placed one hand in his pocket.

"Well, I'll be going," he said briskly. "Maybe, I've made a mistake. Come to

think of it, you don't look just like the young gentleman now. Perhaps it's your brother, or your cousin, I'm thinking about. Well, good-afternoon!"

He turned on his heel, and went out. Jimmy Little looked relieved, and his face broke into a sunny smile.

"Now we'll see about tea," he said cheerfully.

"You can't diddle me," sneered Fullwood. "Those two know one another, an' it's my opinion that Little is a cad! He's pally with that horsy-lookin' bouncer, although he won't admit it. I'll bet the pair have been arrangin' a few bets, or somethin'."

Little turned on his heel.

"What's that you said, Fullwood?" he asked calmly.

"Nothin'—to you!" snapped the cad of the Remove.

"You said something insulting about me, anyhow," said the fat boy. "I don't allow that sort of thing."

"You—you don't allow it!" stuttered Fullwood.

"No, I don't!"

"Why, you cheeky new kid——"

"And I treat cads in this way," said Little grimly.

He seized hold of Fullwood, much to that junior's alarm. The other fellows watched with joy.

Fullwood was raised in the air like a feather. The next second he came down upon Little's knee, face to the ground.

Slap! Slap! Slap!

The fat boy's hand rose and fell, and the juniors yelled.

"Go it, Patty!"

"That's the stuff to give him!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, my hat! A spanking for Fully!" yelled Watson. "Oh, you naughty boy!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Slap! Slap! Slap!

Fullwood struggled and roared, but it was useless. He was held tight, and he received the ignominious punishment against his will. Finally, Little allowed him to go.

"I may be fat," said the new boy, "but I'm not helpless!"

"You—you—you——"

"Yah! Dry up, you cad!" hooted the crowd.

Little went indoors quite calmly. He had raised himself a good deal higher in the estimation of the Remove. It was quite evident that he was not willing to put up with any nonsense.

"Good man!" grinned Watson. "He's the right sort!"

"Begad! Rather, dear old boy," smiled Sir Montie. "I am beginnin' to think that Little is a decided acquisition to the Remove—I am, really! He's capable of lookin' after himself, anyhow!"

But what was the mystery concerning the unwelcome Mr. Ford? I'll admit that I was very curious. And I had an idea that I should be doing Little a good service by looking into the matter.

There was something wrong somewhere. But what?

And what was the message which Fatty Little had given to Mr. Ford?

CHAPTER 21.

On the Track!

TOMMY WATSON grunted.

"Drizzling," he said disgustedly, turning away from the study window. "I thought the weather was going to turn out rotten."

"Never mind about the weather," I said, bursting into the study. "Cleared away the tea things? Good! Get your coats and caps on, my sons. I've got a pass-out for the three of us from Fenton. We're O.K. until half-past eight. Fenton's a good sort."

"Really, old boy, what is the good of goin' out on an evenin' like this?" asked Sir Montie mildly. "I fail to see——"

"We're going to get on a motor-bus in Holborn," I explained, "and we're going to get off the bus at the top of

Kingsway. Then we're going to walk down to the Stoll Picture Theatre, and have an evening's enjoyment. How's that?"

"Oh, ripping!" said Watson heartily. Sir Montie beamed.

"I am willin' to admit that the idea is first-class," he said.

"Then get ready," I said briskly.

"What about prep?" asked Tommy Watson.

"We'll worry about prep when we come back," I replied. "If we hurry off now we shall be in time to get good seats before the crowd comes along. That place generally fills up between six and seven."

My chums lost no time, and, five minutes later, we sallied out in the drizzle and walked into Holborn. The evening was certainly a "beast." In addition to the drizzle, there was fog in the air. I looked up into the sky.

"The fog will get worse before long," I said. "I shouldn't be surprised if we have to walk back. The buses won't be able to run in thick fog."

"Well, don't anticipate trouble," said Watson. "And even if we do have to walk, the distance isn't far. In fact, it's hardly worth taking a bus now. If it was fine, I'd rather walk."

As Tommy had said, the distance was certainly not far. Only just up High Holborn, and we were at the top of Kingsway. We walked down that wide thoroughfare, and soon came to the picture theatre.

"Where shall we sit?" asked Watson. "Circle?"

"Oh, we'll go in the stalls," I said. "There's a queue waiting for the circle, anyhow, and I don't fancy standing in a giddy queue."

So we walked up the wide steps, and I purchased three stalls. Then we entered the great entrance-hall, and were soon down on the floor of the building.

We found three seats together seven rows from the front. They were right on the centre gangway, and we lolled

back in the luxurious chairs in comfort. Fortunately, a topical picture was showing, and then commenced a long "feature" film, imported from the United States. But it was a good one, and we were soon interested.

My whole attention was on the picture, a quarter of an hour later, when I heard a familiar voice quite close to me. Two people were passing down the gangway, and, as they had only just come in, they couldn't see distinctly. I could see them quite plainly, for my eyes were accustomed to the gloom.

"I think there are two together in the front row," said the familiar voice.

"Fatty Little!" I murmured, sitting up.

Then I saw that he was accompanied by Mr. Montgomery Ford. So that scrap of paper had arranged for a meeting here! It was a coincidence that I should be in the theatre at the same time.

They seated themselves in the front row, totally unaware of our presence. And it was quite evident that they were not interested in the screen. They sat together, talking in whispers.

"Did you spot 'em?" I breathed, turning to Montie.

"Eh? Spot whom, dear old boy?" asked Tregellis-West. "It is quite easy to see that frightful rascal, Julius Hartz, because he nearly fills the screen—"

"I wasn't talking about the characters in the film, you ass," I grinned. "Did you see the pair who just came in and sat down in the front row? It was Fatty Little and that coarse bounder, Ford."

"Oh!"

"Begad!"

"I don't like that chap, and I believe he's up to some shady business with that fat ass."

"Well, he's old enough and big enough to look after himself," remarked Watson. "If he gets into trouble, it's his own affair. Stop jawing, and look at the picture!"

Watson gazed at the screen intently, and lost all interest in his immediate surroundings. But the arrival of Little had a different effect upon me. I lost all interest in the picture, and centred my attention upon those two seats in the front row.

Little and his companion were still talking, although, of course, it was impossible to hear even a whisper. They spoke together in the lowest of low voices, in order to avoid disturbing their immediate neighbours.

I saw Little shake his head once or twice, and it struck me that Ford was arguing with him. This went on for about twenty minutes. Then, rather to my surprise the pair rose to their feet and prepared to leave.

"Bend forward, you chaps," I whispered hurriedly.

Tommy and Montie obeyed just in time, and when Little passed up the gangway he did not notice us sitting there. I looked round, thinking that the pair might be bound for the lounge, in the rear, where they would be able to talk in comfort. And I was right.

"Stick tight, my sons," I whispered. "I'm going to the back. If you don't see anything of me by the time the show's over, go home, and don't worry. But I expect I shall be back soon."

Without waiting for them to reply, or argue, I seized my cap and walked up the gangway. There was only one or two people standing at the back, and it was easy enough for me to take up a position where I could look into the lounge and remain unseen myself.

Jimmy Little and Mr. Ford were sitting on one of the comfortable settees, talking together earnestly. Cups of coffee were brought to them, and they sipped this while they talked.

Then, apparently having come to a decision, they rose and passed through one of the exit doors. I made up my mind quickly, and acted.

I didn't follow them, but hurried up the main stairs to the big entrance

hall. I arrived outside, to find that the fog had increased already, and everything was looking drab and cold and miserable.

Exactly as I had expected, the fat boy and Ford emerged from one of the side exit doors. They saw nothing of me, and walked round to the front of the building, and set off up Kingsway, in the direction of Southampton Row.

I began to think that I had wasted my time, for it seemed that Little was on his way back to the school. However, it wouldn't matter much. Barely forty minutes had elapsed since Montie and Tommy and I had entered the picture theatre, and the show lasted about three hours.

The fog was not thick; I was able to shadow the pair up Kingsway without difficulty, and I kept fairly close. The fog, in fact, was a great help to me. I soon discovered that my surmise was wrong, for Little and his unsavoury companion turned into New Oxford Street and proceeded along that thoroughfare until they turned down a road to the right. Within a few minutes we were in Bloomsbury—quiet, dark and subdued. In the fog everything was still and ghostly. It seemed impossible that we had been in the bustle of the traffic only a few moments earlier.

I wondered what the game could be. Why was the fat boy accompanying Montgomery Ford to this quarter? There was evidently something "on" between the pair. I decided to watch closely, and I did not feel that I was taking an unfair advantage. I was certain that Jimmy Little needed advice and guidance. He was being led away by the smooth-tongued rascal.

After a short walk, the pair entered the doorway of a drab-looking building, which, I guessed, was a third-class hotel. They disappeared into the interior, and I watched from the open.

Gazing through the open hall, I saw the pair vanish into a doorway at the

rear. This, then, was Ford's temporary abode. He had taken Little home with him. What could this man want of a mere schoolboy?

There was practically no hope of discovering anything by remaining in front, so I took a stroll down a little alley, and after a few minutes I came within view of the hotel's rear.

There was a fairly big yard at the back, and the wall was not very high. I jumped up and looked at the building. It was indistinct and ghostly in the mist, but the lighted windows of several lower rooms were clearly visible.

I decided to risk it.

I dropped down from the wall, and crept along the yard until I neared the windows. They stood out much more distinctly as I approached. If any of the hotel servants happened to spot me—well, I could slip away in next to no time in that fog. I'd done things like that scores of times, while shadowing for the gov'nor.

But I was undisturbed. One of the windows was that of a room in a jutting out portion of the building. The blind was up, and the window itself was open at the top. As I watched, I caught my breath.

Montgomery Ford came to the window, and pulled down the blind. There was no chance of my seeing within. It was a dark blind, and the window was almost blotted out.

But I didn't mind.

There was nothing I particularly wanted to see. I was more anxious to use my ears. I glanced at the open window at the top, and I crouched under the sill. A murmur of voices came to me—but no distinct words.

"Well, there's nobody to spot me in this fog," I told myself.

Within three seconds I was on the window-sill, with my head on a level with the open space. And now the voices were clear and quite loud, and I found I could see through the chink between the blind and the wall.

CHAPTER 22.

The Fat Boy's Decision!

MR. MONTGOMERY FORD lay back in his chair and crossed his legs.

"Well, my lad, I'm glad you've come with me," he said genially. "We can talk comfortably here. That picture theatre was all right—but we've got business to discuss, and we want privacy."

"Yes," said Jimmy Little.

He looked round the dingy apartment rather anxiously. There was nothing but old-fashioned furniture, chipped ornaments, and a miserable bit of a fire in the ancient grate.

Mr. Ford grinned as he watched his young companion.

"Ah, I know your weakness," he said, with a chuckle. "You didn't get anything at the theatre, did you—barring a cup of coffee. Hungry, I suppose?"

"I'm a bit peckish," admitted Little eagerly.

"Well, we'll soon put matters right," said Mr. Ford, rising. "I've got a few good things in the cupboard, Jimmy. While you're eating, I'll talk to you—and point out the advantages of my little plan."

He rose to his feet and opened the doors of the sideboard cupboard. To Little's delight, he proceeded to take out dish after dish of expensive delicacies. The fat boy's mouth fairly watered as he gazed upon them.

"Oh, ripping!" he exclaimed. "Great cheese-cakes, what a feed!"

"It's nothing to what you'll have if you'll agree to my scheme," said Mr. Ford pleasantly. "Now, laddie, tuck in for all you're worth. I'll smoke."

Fatty Little needed no second bidding. He proceeded to "tuck in" at a rate which caused Mr. Ford to regard him with wonder.

Outside, in the fog, I was listening—unseen and unheard. My presence was not suspected, and the pair in the room

were confident that they were quite alone.

"It's this way, Jimmy, my lad," said Mr. Ford, as he lit a long, black cigar. "You and I are fairly old friends. We know one another thoroughly—and I think you rather like me."

Jimmy Little nodded and grunted—his mouth was too full for speech.

"It happened when you were at that private school, down in Kent," went on Mr. Ford reminiscently. "I brought the old circus to the town for two days, and I spotted you as you were sitting in the three-bob seats with some of your pals. That's right, isn't it?"

"Yes, Mr. Ford," said the fat boy. "We'd seen your circus advertised for a week before that, so when it came we paid up and went in. And, if you remember, we thought the show wasn't worth the money—"

"That's right, laddie—that's right enough," admitted Mr. Ford. "Several of my best turns weren't appearing that day, and the whole show was upside down. By jip, Jimmy, I was fairly knocked over when I saw you, because I knew you were just the fellow I'd been looking for for years. A real, genuine fat boy! No padding, no swindle—the real goods!"

Little grinned.

"No need to be personal," he remarked.

"Personal!" echoed Mr. Ford. "My dear fellow, this is a business talk—and the business mainly concerns your bulk. You're fat, and you mustn't take offence because I speak about it."

"I was only joking," mumbled Jimmy, with his mouth full.

"Yes, I was fairly astonished when I set eyes on you for the first time," went on Mr. Ford, laying back in his chair again. "As a circus proprietor of fifteen years' standing, I recognised in you the finest turn I could possibly have in my show. But you were a school-boy in a good school, and of good parentage, and I thought the case was hopeless—until I had a chat with you."

"I'm afraid it's hopeless now, Mr. Ford—"

"Now, none of that!" interrupted the circus proprietor. "If it's possible, I'm going to secure your services for Fordelli's Gigantic Circus. The whole show is on a better footing now—it's one of the most palatial concerns on the road."

"Why, is it bigger now?" asked Fatty.

"Bigger. Mr. Ford laughed heartily. "Why, laddie, I've added new capital to the business, and the circus is now simply a travelling palace. Luxury galore—a sumptuous life for any gentleman. By jip, you've only got to see it! The caravans are like royal coaches! I've had one made specially for your benefit—if you think well of my offer."

"Yes, but I don't think—"

"This caravan is the last word in luxury," went on Mr. Ford, rubbing his hands together. "Electric light, a natty little bed-room; a living-room furnished in polished mahogany; everything, in fact, conducive to comfort and ease. The larder itself in that caravan is almost as big as an ordinary living-room—and my order is that it shall always be full!"

The fat boy's eyes gleamed.

"Full of—what?" he asked eagerly.

"Food, laddie—the finest food obtainable," said Mr. Ford. "All the choicest eatables one can imagine, and a constant supply—that's what I've arranged for you. When we made that last arrangement, six weeks ago, times were bad. There's been a marvellous change since then."

"You've been pretty quick about it," remarked Little.

"We've had fifty men working on the job," said the circus proprietor. "I tell you, Jimmy, you won't know the show when you see it again. I offered you three pounds a week and all your food to appear in my show—and you agreed. Well, things went wrong—"

"Yes, the grub wasn't what you said

it would be," put in Fatty. "And after the first night I decided to clear off. Then my pater came along and took me home, and I was taken away from the school, too. That arrangement of ours, Mr. Ford, wasn't very successful, was it?"

"It wasn't. I've got to admit the truth," said the man. "But you didn't give it a fair trial, Jimmy. The food I ordered for you didn't come in, and before I could straighten things out your dad came along and took you away. I nearly got into trouble for that, too. But this time it will be different."

The fat boy made no remark; he had even ceased chewing, which was a clear indication that his thoughts were very busy. Ford sat watching him, wondering what effect his words had had.

And, meanwhile, I stood outside on the window-sill.

And now I had a perfect understanding of the whole position. I knew exactly why Jimmy Little had come with this man to such a dingy hotel. The pair were old acquaintances.

I was certainly astonished at what I had heard. Jimmy Little had run away from his former school to appear in a circus! It was amazing, and I could only find an explanation in the fact that the junior had been fascinated and blinded to the truth by the thoughts of the free and easy life he would lead, and the amount of food he would be allowed.

As I had learned, the attempt had failed, and Jimmy had been taken away. Now, by all appearances, Mr. Ford was intent upon persuading Jimmy to go to him for a second time. I guessed that Ford had seen the fat junior quite by chance, and had immediately taken advantage of the opportunity which had presented itself.

I listened more intently than ever, feeling that I was perfectly justified in acting the part of an eavesdropper.

For I knew that Montgomery Ford was a lying rascal.

Within the room, they were talking again.

"It's all very well, Mr. Ford, but I don't think I can accept your offer," said Fatty Little slowly. "I've just got to this new school, and my pater trusts me. It wouldn't be right—"

"Tush!" interrupted the man. "There's no question of right or wrong about it. You've got to think of your own interests in this world, Jimmy. I'll just tell you what my offer is, and you can accept it or refuse it—as you like. But I can give you my word that I am treating you very kindly. You happen to be valuable to me for the circus, and I'm willing to pay you well."

"Yes, but—"

"No, don't interrupt," went on Mr. Ford. "This is what I propose, my lad. As long as you're with the circus I'll give you five pounds a week in solid cash. It's quite likely that after a month or two I'll increase your pay to seven-ten. You'll have your own caravan—and you'll have all the food you want. You'll give your own orders to the chef, and he'll carry them out to the letter."

"It sounds all right," said Fatty, with gleaming eyes.

"It's absolutely fine!" declared Mr. Ford. "Why, in three years' time you'll be worth twenty pounds a week to anybody. I'll give you that money myself. And don't run away with the idea that there's anything degrading in circus life. This show of mine isn't a third-rate affair, remember. It's positively the biggest travelling circus on the road to-day. You'll be one of the most honoured members of my company. You'll have no work to do except to appear in the ring for ten minutes every evening. You'll lead a life of comfort and luxury, and you'll be able to put all your wages in the bank."

"My father wouldn't agree—"

"I don't suppose for a minute that he

would," said Mr. Ford. "But you needn't consult your father about it. Just come with me, and everything will be all right. I want you, Jimmy. You're valuable to me."

The fat boy shook his head.

"But what would be the good of it?" he asked. "My father is pretty smart, you know, and it wouldn't take him long to guess where I'd got to. Within three or four days he'd find out where your circus is located, and he'd come down."

"Precisely!" agreed Mr. Ford gently. "That's just the very idea."

"But pater would take me away——"

"No, sonny, that's just where you make a mistake," said the circus proprietor. "If you went to your dad now he would put the ban on the whole thing. That's why I'm going to work in this way. Mr. Little will come down, and he'll see the circus as it actually is. He'll see you in your own caravan, comfortable, happy and contented. I'll talk to him, and I guarantee that he'll be agreeable to your staying on. If he isn't—well, you can go away. There's really nothing in it. And what's more, Jimmy, I'm prepared to engage a private tutor to travel with you. So your father won't have a leg to stand on—he'll be bound to consent. But the main idea is for you to run away, and make him come down to the circus. It's the only way of proving to him that everything is above board. You see the point, don't you?"

"Yes, of course," said Jimmy. "I—I like the idea all right, Mr. Ford. It seems to me that everything will be fine. And now that you've explained things about my pater, I'm more inclined to agree. You're sure I shall have all the grub I want, aren't you?"

"You'll have more than you can eat," declared Mr. Ford. "Look here, laddie, let's decide this evening. There's no sense in delaying matters. The show opens to-morrow at Bristol, and I've got to go down by the mail train to-

night. I can't see you again, so we must settle the thing at once."

"But—but it means going away at once!"

"What of it?" asked the showman. "You're strange in this school—you don't know anybody. It'll be no wrench for you to run away. I'm going down to Bristol by the night express from Paddington. Meet me on the departure platform at a quarter to twelve. I'll have the tickets and everything. You can steal out of the school easily enough——"

"Oh, that'll be easy enough, I expect," said Fatty. "We go to bed at half-past nine, and I needn't sneak out until eleven. It'll mean getting up at about half-past ten. I'm game, but—but it's so sudden!"

"You mustn't let that worry you," said Mr. Ford easily. "Most great decisions are taken quickly. Hang it all, Jimmy, I'll be even more generous. If you'll agree to come with me for a year I'll give you six pounds ten a week, all the food you can eat, your home, and all your clothes. How's that?"

"Splendid, but——"

"But you're afraid I won't carry out my promise?" asked the showman. "We won't leave it to chance, any way. I'll sign an agreement, binding myself to carry out every condition. And you'll sign this little paper, promising to appear in my circus for a year. Now, Jimmy, let's have your final answer."

The fat boy sat still for a full minute and his gaze was resting lovingly on the food which still remained. Food was his one weakness, and the thought of having all that he desired fascinated him. And Mr. Ford was so plausible and so smooth that Fatty was caught in the net.

"All right," he said, after a long pause. "I agree."

The circus proprietor slapped the table.

"Splendid!" he exclaimed. "That's the way, my lad! Now we can talk properly. Just put your name to this

sheet of paper while I'm signing the agreement. We trust one another all right, but business is business!"

Fatty Little glanced at the piece of paper which was laid in front of him. The words were few, and merely consisted of a promise to serve Mr. Ford for twelve calendar months from the date of signing. Jimmy put his name to it without hesitation, and Mr. Ford pocketed the document.

"The agreement isn't quite ready yet," he said. "I've just remembered that's it's got to have a stamp—and I'll do it to-morrow, anyhow. Now, my lad, don't forget the arrangement. Be at Paddington at a quarter-to-twelve to-night. I shall have the tickets, and then everything will be rosy. You're in for a splendid life!"

Little rose to his feet.

"By chutney!" he exclaimed. "I shall enjoy myself tremendously after I've settled down to it," he said. "It's splendid, Mr. Ford! I shall keep all the money you pay me, and save it up."

"That's just the idea," said the showman. "How many lads of your age are able to earn ten or twelve pounds a week—for that's what it comes to, considering that you have free board and lodging. You've got to be thankful for your amazing luck, laddie."

The fat boy gazed down at his huge bulk.

"I'm blessed if I can understand why I'm worth so much!" he said. "Where the pork-pie is the sense of paying money to see me? The public seem to have queer ideas, Mr. Ford. It's a mystery to me."

"Well, we've got to cater for the public, and so long as we give them what they want—well, we needn't worry our heads," said Mr. Ford. "All right, Jimmy, you get back to the school before you're missed."

"Yes, I think so," said Fatty. "I'll find my way, anyhow."

The pair went out of the room.

And, outside, I didn't shift from my position. I couldn't possibly intercept

Little, even if I wanted to—which I didn't. My first concern would be to report the whole affair to Nelson Lee.

And there was no hurry about that. I remained on the window-sill, motionless.

And then I heard voices again.

"Yes, you can come in now, Bill," Mr. Ford was saying. "The kid's gone, and everything is settled."

I listened more intently, and was very pleased that I had remained. Now, in all probability, I should hear the truth. For I certainly did not accept Mr. Montgomery Ford's statement as honest truth.

"Settled?" said a gruff voice. I couldn't quite see the new arrival. "Did the kid swallow the yarn, then?"

"Whole!" chuckled Mr. Ford. "I piled it on so thick that I was almost afraid he'd rumble me," said Mr. Ford pleasantly. "But he took it all in—and a good thing for us he did. We've got him now, Bill, and he'll be worth all the trouble we've taken."

"You think he'll look all right in the circus?"

"As a fat boy he'll make a tophole turn," declared the showman. "You ought to know that, Bill, without asking me. Later on we can make him do some tricks. He was pleased about the caravan."

The other man chuckled.

"An' it's the dirtiest old box of rubbish I ever saw!" he remarked. "An' strictly speakin', the circus ain't even so good as it was, old man. Did you promise to pay the kid five quid a week?"

"It's settled at six-ten."

Bill roared.

"He'll be lucky if he sees the colour of a penny!" he exclaimed. "And the food won't be anything particular, neither. But you'll have to feed him pretty well, old man, or he'll get thin! And don't you think there's a chance that he'll write to his father as soon as he sees he's been done?"

Mr. Ford grunted.

"The brat won't have a chance," he

said. "As soon as we get to Bristol I'll take him straight on to the ship—pretending that I'm going to see a friend. Then I'll make him sleep there. When he wakes up after a few hours we'll be out to sea—and the next land he'll set eyes on will be South America!"

"It's easy," observed Bill.

"The whole thing came into my head when I spotted the kid in Holborn," went on Mr. Ford. "He's worth seven or eight quid a week to us, Bill. The show's not extra grand, and young Little will be able to fill one of the gaps. When we open in South America he'll be trained, too—I'll keep him busy on the voyage."

"You don't think he'll cause trouble out there?"

"How?"

"Well, he might complain to the police——"

"Not likely!" said Ford. "I'll see to that. And we shall have a really fine fat boy for the circus without paying him a farthing. It'll make pounds a show difference to us, once we're really on the road."

"Yes, I suppose you're right," said Bill. "Well, Ford, I don't need to stay here any longer. Everything's packed up and on board, and I mean to get down to Bristol by an earlier train. I'll see you down there in the morning."

"Right you are," said Mr. Ford.

They talked for a few minutes longer, but I was not interested.

I had heard all I wanted to know—I had learnt the truth. Ford was a bigger scoundrel than I had taken him to be. Under false promises he was getting Fatty Little to run away. Once on that ship at Bristol, he would be powerless. He would be taken to South America, and would be compelled to serve in the circus for years, in all probability. In a foreign land the boy would be helpless.

It was a deliberate case of kidnapping, and as I slipped down from the window-sill and made my way across the yard I felt very pleased with myself for having followed Ford and the fat boy from the

Stoll Picture Theatre. My little piece of detective work had rewarded me well.

What was the next move to be?

I glanced at my watch, and found that barely an hour had passed. Tommy and Montie would still be in the picture theatre, wondering what had become of me. I decided to pay again, and to fetch the pair out. Then we would go to the school, and tell Nelson Lee all about it.

A quarter of an hour later, I was telling Tommy and Montie what I had seen and heard, as we made our way back to the school.

Arriving there, I hurried along to the gov'nor's room and related the story once more.

"What will you do about it?" I asked afterwards.

"It seems quite simple," said Nelson Lee. "We will make our plans accordingly. You will remain awake in the

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dormitory, Nipper, and will prevent Little from leaving the apartment. Even if you should fail, it will not much matter, since I shall be at Paddington. It will be better, however, to prevent the lad from leaving the school. I think I can trust you and your two friends—Watson and Montie—to look after Master Little."

"We'll keep him in the dormitory, sir, even if we have to tie him down," I said. "And what will you do?"

"I shall consult the police at once." "Scotland Yard?"

"No, not Scotland Yard," said Nelson Lee. "I will walk to the nearest police station, and obtain the services of two officers. We will leave the station in time to arrive at Paddington by eleven-forty-five. Ford will expect Little—and we shall turn up in the boy's place. It will be rather an unpleasant surprise for the rascal, and he will take quite a different journey. For, instead of going to Bristol, he will accompany us to the lock-up."

"Good!" I said heartily. "That's ripping, sir!"

"And remember, not a single word to Little—don't let him guess for a moment that his plans are known to anybody else," said the gov'nor. "The boy is foolish, but I think he is a decent youngster."

"Yes, sir," I agreed. "He's as steady as a rock, and there's nothing wrong with him. He's simply an ass for listening to a man like Ford. Will you punish him?"

"I don't think he will need any punishment at all," replied the gov'nor. "No, Nipper, the boy is not to blame. He is young and inexperienced, and Ford has got him under his influence. However, there is no need for us to discuss this now. It will soon be bed-time for you—and I rely upon you to carry out your part of the programme."

"Right, sir!" I said. "I hope everything will be O.K."

After that I went back and reported to my chums—and they were fully determined to keep awake with me, and

lend a hand in keeping Jimmy Little forcibly in bed. We could trust Nelson Lee to deal with Mr. Montgomery Ford.

The gov'nor did not sally out upon his mission until after bed-time. It was just after ten when he entered the police station, and it was getting on towards eleven when he had explained matters to an attentive inspector.

"So you see how the matter stands," said Nelson Lee at last. "There is plenty of proof that this man is attempting an act of deliberate abduction. I want you to let me have two officers in plain clothes. My plan is to walk up the platform at a quarter-to-twelve, and to arrest Ford with as little commotion as possible."

The inspector nodded.

"Quite an excellent plan, Mr. Lee," he said. "But I shall have to let you have uniformed men. It really doesn't matter—you'll be able to get your man without difficulty. There will be no hitch."

The two men were brought in—a sergeant and a constable. They were informed of the plan, and everything was got ready.

A taxicab was outside the police station just after eleven, and Nelson Lee took his seat at once. The fog, however, delayed the trio, and it was midnight before they reached Paddington. And the express for Bristol was steaming out of the station.

They were too late!

CHAPTER 23.

Second Thoughts!

TEN o'clock had already struck, and the Remove dormitory was still and quiet. But three juniors were wide awake. One of them was myself, and the others were Tregellis-West and Watson.

I sat up in bed, and saw that my chums' eyes were open.

"It seems to me, dear old boy, that everything isn't goin' to pan out as we

thought," whispered Montie. "I believe the chap is sound asleep, begad!"

"Looks like it," I replied. "But don't jaw, old son. Little planned with Ford to meet him at Paddington to-night, and it's pretty certain that he'll go. As the guv'nor will be there, everything will be O.K. The fat ass won't get into any trouble, and he'll be brought back after Ford has been arrested. But dry up now!"

Ten-thirty boomed out at last, and, as the stroke died away, there came a movement from Fatty's bed. I looked up without making a sound. Tommy Watson and Tregellis-West were alert, too. Our plan was to prevent Little from going, and we meant to do it.

However, I wanted to see what the chap would do. He got out of bed, yawned, and proceeded to pull his socks over his fat feet. Then he prepared to remove his pyjamas. But he paused while doing so.

For a full minute he sat without moving.

Then he rose to his feet, paced up and down for a few minutes, and sat down on the edge of his bed. He repeated this performance three times. But at last he apparently came to a decision.

For, with a quick shake of his bulky figure, he pulled off his socks, and got back into bed again. And as he lay his head upon the pillow, he gave vent to a soft, low chuckle.

Fatty Little had recovered his senses at the eleventh hour!

He had realised how mad and foolish the whole project was. And he had determined to remain in bed, and to leave Mr. Montgomery Ford in the lurch.

My opinion of Fatty rose in a leap. He was the fellow I had first taken him to be, after all. His moment of weakness had passed. It was very gratifying to know that he had fought his own battle—and that he had won.

It was quite clear to me, however,

that the truth would come out. He would know that when he learned of Ford's arrest. So I slipped quietly out of bed, and went over to Little—watched curiously by my chums.

"Good man!" I muttered heartily.

"Great rock cakes!" muttered Fatty, sitting up. "What—what—"

"Give me your fist, old son," I said. "I'm jolly pleased with you! You've proved that you're made of the right stuff!"

Little was quite staggered.

"But—but I don't understand!" he exclaimed. "What's the idea, Nipper? What do you mean by grabbing my fist? I—I've done nothing—"

"You've decided not to run away on a fool's errand," I said quietly. "You've decided to leave Mr. Ford to his own devices."

Fatty stared at me, and gulped.

"You—you know?" he breathed.

"Yes."

"But how?" he asked, after a moment. "How did you—"

"I spotted you with Ford in the Stoll Picture Theatre, and I guessed that something was wrong," I said. "I knew jolly well that that fellow was up to no good. I followed you, and I was just outside the window when you were talking to Ford in the back room of that private hotel."

"You were—listening?" asked Fatty.

"Yes; and I don't mind admitting it," I replied. "Little, you don't know what you've escaped! After that chap had sent you away he spoke with another man, and then I heard the truth."

"The—the truth!"

"That rotten circus is going off to South America next week, and you were to have gone with it," I said grimly.

"Good heavens!" gasped Little.

"But—but he told me—"

"He told you a whole string of lies," I interrupted. "After he'd got you, he wouldn't have paid you a cent. On the ship you wouldn't have had an earthly

chance, and in South America you would be as good as dead!"

The fat boy stared at me in horror.

"And—and you knew all about it?" he asked.

"Yes."

"You knew it, and you were going to let me go?"

"Not on your life!" I replied promptly. "I may as well tell you that Mr. Lee knows all about it, and he's going to be at Paddington at two minutes to twelve, and he's going to have police with him, and Ford will be arrested for conspiracy and attempted abduction."

"Great doughnuts!"

"Tregellis-West and Watson and I were all ready to collar you," I went on. "As soon as you were half-dressed, we were going to spring out and keep you here by force. But what has happened is a thousand times better, Fatty. You made up your own mind, and you took the right decision."

For a few moments he said nothing. Then he gripped my hand, and held it between his own plump fingers.

"I've been an awful fool, you know," he whispered. "But it was the grub! Ford promised me six-ten a week and all the food I could eat, and—and when I get on the grub line I'm willing to agree to anything! But I saw the idiocy of the whole thing, and I chucked it up."

"You've done the best," I said. "That man is a crook——"

"Oh!" interrupted Fatty abruptly. "I've just remembered something!"

"What is it?"

"Didn't you say that Ford is to be arrested?"

"Yes."

"But he's got a paper I wrote out and signed—a paper promising to serve him for a year," said Little earnestly. "I was a mad idiot to sign it, but I didn't realise——"

"It doesn't matter," I said. "He can't make use of that paper."

"But the police will find it, and my

pater might get it!" said Fatty, in distress. "I—I don't want the pater to know anything, if it can be kept quiet. I'll tell you what—I've got an idea."

"Out with it!"

"I'll go to Paddington, after all——"

"Eh?"

"I'll go there, and see Ford," said Fatty eagerly. "I'll get him to show me that paper for some reason, and then I'll simply wait with him until Mr. Lee and the police arrive—so that he won't be suspicious. I'd like you to come, too, in case of accidents, but you'll have to keep in the background."

I made up my mind in a second.

"We'll all go—the four of us!" I said briskly. "There's no reason why we shouldn't be in this little coup. Dress yourselves as quickly as you can. There's not a minute to waste."

Tommy and Montie had been listening, and they raised no objections. Fatty Little was pleased and relieved, and he shivered when he realised what a narrow escape he had actually had.

We were soon dressed, and then we stole out of the dormitory, and got out of the school by means of the gymnasium roof.

We hastened along to Chancery Lane Tube Station, and went to Paddington by Underground. The fog had not interfered with the Tube service, and we arrived in the great terminus just after eleven-thirty.

"Splendid!" I said. "Tons of time! Now look here, Fatty. What time have you arranged to meet Ford?"

"Quarter to twelve, on the departure platform."

"He'll have the tickets!"

"Yes; I think so."

"And then you'll take your seats in the carriage," I said. "The best thing you can do is to use some soft soap. Keep Ford nicely spoofed until you catch sight of Mr. Lee and the police. Then you can show your real hand."

"And where will you be?" asked Fatty.

"In the nearest waiting-room to your carriage," I replied. "We shall watch you, and, if I get a chance, I'll give you a signal from the waiting-room door. That's all. You'd better hurry off now."

"Right," said Fatty. "And many thanks for what you've done!"

He hurried off, and we looked after him with feelings of gladness.

He found the departure platform easily enough, and there, as he had expected, he found Mr. Montgomery Ford. The rascally circus proprietor nodded genially as Little approached him.

"Good for you, my boy!" he said. "I knew you wouldn't disappoint me. I'm going to give you the time of your life, and before many weeks have passed you'll look upon me as your own father."

An empty compartment was soon discovered, and, after they had settled themselves down, Fatty leaned out of the window and looked down the platform. I saw him at once, and waved. He popped back almost immediately.

Then commenced a rather anxious time of waiting.

I was sure that Little would succeed in his object. The train was due to pull out at twelve o'clock precisely, and when the clock showed the time to be eleven-fifty-two I began to get anxious.

Where was the guv'nor?

Why hadn't he arrived?

I saw the guard getting his flag ready, and all the doors were already closed. Fatty appeared at the window again, looking up and down anxiously. He was obviously becoming alarmed. He didn't want to be taken away, after all!

"Begad! Somethin' has gone wrong!" muttered Tregellis-West.

"Come on!" I said. "We're going to take a hand— By jingo! Fatty's jumped out of the train! He's coming

"Ford's after him!" said Watson excitedly.

Little, knowing that there was only a few seconds left, had decided upon the only course. He jumped up before

Ford could hold him back. One leap, and he was out of the train. He streaked across for the waiting-room. And the circus proprietor ran after him!

Fatty burst in, breathless.

"Mr. Lee hasn't come!" he panted. "I've got that paper—I snatched it at the last moment! The train's going out in two ticks—"

Ford rushed into the waiting-room:

"You little fool!" he raved. "What's the matter with you? The train's going in— By thunder! What the—"

"On him!" I said fiercely. "We'll collar the scoundrel ourselves!"

"Good egg!"

Mr. Ford was overwhelmed in a moment. Fatty's weight alone was enough to hold him down. And as he lay on the waiting-room floor, the train slowly steamed out of the station.

Before it was quite lost to sight three figures came rushing to the barrier—Nelson Lee and two uniformed police officers. They had arrived too late, and, of course, I found out the reason shortly afterwards.

"Hold him tight!" I said rapidly.

I went outside, and waved my hands.

"Guv'nor!" I roared, careless of attracting attention. "Mr. Lee!"

Nelson Lee saw me and heard me, and— Well, there's practically nothing more to tell. Mr. Montgomery Ford was taken prisoner by the police and hauled away. Fatty Little went back to the school with us, and on the way the guv'nor gave him a quiet, kindly little lecture.

In the finish, the affair was hushed up, and I think Mr. Ford was brought before the magistrate on another charge altogether. Anyhow, we didn't see anything more of him.

And there is not the slightest doubt that Jimmy Little will listen to no more offers of employment—for the sake of grub! The fat boy of St. Frank's had learned his lesson!

BIG BANGS!

WHEN you decide, after deep thought, to blow your whole Saturday sixpence on one giant cannon rather than a mixed assortment of little squibs and jumping crackers, you probably think you've got something pretty powerful.

But do you know there are explosives so powerful that into the case of that sixpenny cannon could be packed enough to sink a battleship? And some of them are so sensitive that it doesn't need a lighted touch-paper to set them off; a fly settling on them will do that!

Handle With Care!

One of these is a form of picric acid. It isn't much use because it's far too dangerous to handle. Even expert scientists who are used to dealing with such things hardly dare to breathe when they are touching it.

Quite a lot of the most powerful explosives are very easy to handle, however. Dynamite you can carry about in your pocket, and unless you get too near a fire there's nothing to worry about. It's only when it's set light to in a confined space that dynamite really shows what it can do.

Gun-cotton is just the same. How would you like to have a piece of gun-cotton—cotton-wool, it looks like—placed on the palm of your hand and lighted? You'd be perfectly safe; you wouldn't even get burnt. There would just be a flash and the gun-cotton would have vanished. It would have burnt too rapidly to have harmed you. But shut up some gun-cotton in the detonator cap of a shell, and that's a different matter.

During the war the Germans used ammonal—an extremely powerful explosive—to bring down our balloon-strafting aeroplanes. They had to do something, because Allied planes were

shooting all their observation balloons out of the sky.

So they sent up a balloon with a dummy observer in the basket and enough ammonal on board to blow the balloon and anything near it out of France altogether. After a bit, a venturesome pilot was pretty sure to have a pot at it, and then, of course, the fireworks started. No pilot who put a round of Bellingham—as the special balloon-strafting ammunition was called—into an enemy sausage ever escaped with his life. But one can't really blame the Germans for using the trap. The idea was, of course, that once a pilot heard of another fellow being caught, he tended to leave all balloons alone.

Safe-Opening "Soup"!

In quite another sphere of life are men who also have to be experts in explosives. They are the skilled cracksmen who use "soup," as they call it, for opening safes. For most safes dynamite does the trick, but occasionally it is necessary to take a chance and use nitro-glycerine.

The story is told of how a gang of American safe-crackers, with their eyes on a big bank, decided to try nitro-glycerine for the first time. Since it would be impossible to experiment on the actual job, they made up their minds to try out the new explosive on the safe of a country post office.

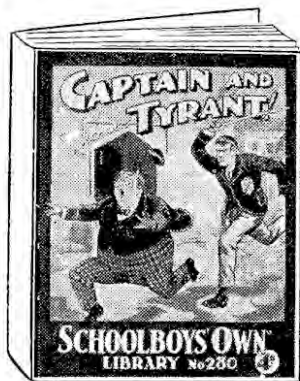
They got into the post office easily enough. But when the safe had been drilled and the time came to lay the charge, a problem arose. How much nitro-glycerine would it take?

A safe like the one they were opening would require five shots of dynamite, they argued. And nitro was a good deal more powerful. Try three!

Three shots were accordingly inserted, the fuses lit, and the cracksmen retreated—wisely, as it turned out—to a safe distance.

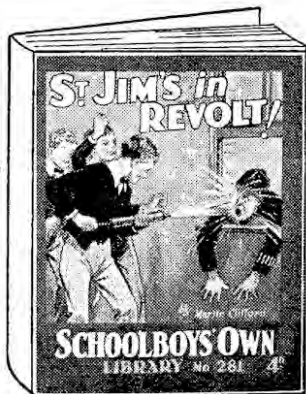
In a moment there came a blinding roar and the entire front of the post office was blown across the street!

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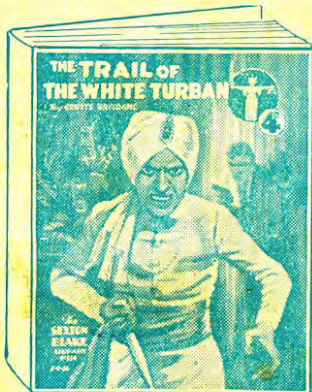
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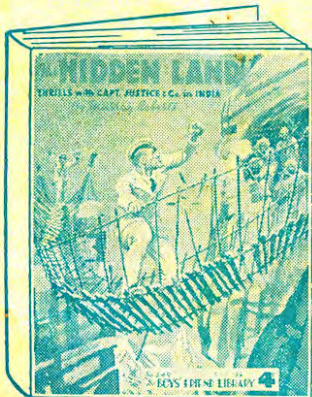
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