

THE KIDNAPPED SCHOOLBOY!

By
EDWY SEARLES BROOKS



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THE KIDNAPPED SCHOOLBOY!

By EDWY SEARLES BROOKS



Told by NIPPER of the St. Frank's Remove.

DICK GOODWIN, a newcomer to St. Frank's, has a strange secret to conceal—a secret which involves NIPPER & Co. in many thrilling adventures, and which is the cause of the new boy being kidnapped!

CHAPTER I.

The Boy from the North

"W HAT?" said Handforth fiercely.

"That's the question."

"Eh?"

"Why what, you silly ass?"

Church and McClure stared across the tea-table at their famous leader, and they found that Edward Oswald Handforth was leaning forward, and he was looking at them in a very intent manner. It was quite obvious that Handforth had something important on his mind.

"You want to know what the question is?" he snapped. "Don't you know? Isn't it the question that's being talked about up and down the whole Remove? You know as well as I do that Goodwin is a jolly mysterious

fellow. We're not going to stand it in the Remove—at least, I'm not!"

"Oh! So that's the trouble!" said McClure, stirring his tea. "My dear old Handy, there's no sense in making a fuss about Goodwin. He's a new chap, and he's got some peculiar ways, but there's no reason why we should get excited about him. You might pass me the tea-cakes, please."

Handforth jerked the dish of tea-cakes across the table with such violence that they were upset upon the tablecloth. When Handy was very busy thinking about something he cared very little about eating or drinking. And, at the present moment, his own meal was quite neglected.

"Tea-cakes!" exclaimed Handforth tartly. "All you chaps can think about

is feeding. You don't seem to realise that there is an important matter to be settled here, and it must be settled at once. It's all very well to let Goodwin go on as he's going on, but what does it mean? Why is he locked up in his own study, and why does he refuse to allow anybody to enter?"

"Goodness knows!" said Church.

"I should think the best thing would be to ask Goodwin," remarked McClure.

"You—you silly ass!" roared Handforth. "What on earth's the good of asking Goodwin? We've all asked him. We've been asking him until we're fed-up with him. He won't say a thing. And there he is in the end study with a Yale lock on the door, and with frosted windows and heavy shutters!"

Church nodded.

"I'll admit it's a bit of a mystery," he said. "Personally, I can't make out what it means at all. For a junior to have a study like that is a bit strange, you know. And the best part of it is, the Head has sanctioned it. In fact, Dr. Stafford gave Goodwin permission to lock himself in his study, and everybody else in the Remove is forbidden to enter. Some of the chaps are getting quite ratty about it—you, for example!"

"Yes, I am ratty—jolly ratty!" said Handforth. "In fact, I'm not going to stand it! I don't see any reason why the Remove should stand it, if it comes to that. We don't have secrets here. Directly after tea I'm going along to his study, and I'm going to force my way in."

Church shook his head.

"I shouldn't do it if I were you, Handy," he said, looking grave.

"Why not?"

"Because you'll only get yourself into trouble," said Church. "If you force your way into Goodwin's room, you'll simply be defying the Head's orders, and you'll get it in the neck."

Handforth glared.

"You—you silly ass!" he said pityingly. "Do you think I care anything

about orders? When I decide upon a certain course of action, I carry out that action, and I say rats to everybody. I know what I'm going to do, and I mean to do it!"

"Yes; but look here——"

"I don't want any arguments from you, Walter Church!" snapped Handforth. "I maintain that we, as members of the Remove, ought not to stand this curious behaviour on Goodwin's part. I'm against it all along the line, and I'm going to show my disapproval this evening."

"And I suppose the Head will show his disapproval by hauling you off to his study and laming you with a cane!" said McClure. "Still, it's your lookout, and if you get it in the neck—or elsewhere—it will be your own fault. Don't blame us!"

Handforth laid down a slice of bread-and-butter as he was conveying it to his mouth.

"What's that?" he said sharply. "I shall be lamed by a cane?"

"Most probably."

"And what about you?" demanded Handforth. "If I'm hauled over the coals, my sons, you'll be hauled over them with me. Don't forget that!"

McClure looked surprised.

"But why should we be hauled over the coals?" he asked. "Simply because you force your way into Goodwin's study it doesn't mean to say that we shall be punished. We shan't be there! We shall be——"

"You—you won't be there!" belled Handforth. "Oh, so that's the game! You intend to let me do this thing on my own!"

"Well, it's your own choice."

"That doesn't make any difference—not a ha'porth of difference!" declared Handforth. "If I go to Goodwin's study, you'll come with me. We're in this thing together. Study D always sticks together, and it will stick together on this occasion!"

Church and McClure exchanged glances.

"Yes, but look here, Handy! I don't see the sense of this!" protested Church. "I don't see that we should be dragged into this when we don't want to be! We're not supposed to take orders!"

"And you're not supposed to take this, but you've got it!" retorted Handforth grithly.

Biff!

His huge fist reached across the table, and it landed squarely upon Church's nose.

"Yaroooh!" howled Church wildly. "Ouch! Ow—wow!"

Church disappeared backwards, his chair toppling over with a crash, and the unfortunate Junior sprawled on the floor, with his cup of tea overturned in his lap. He sat up, looking dazed and bewildered.

"You—you dangerous lunatic!" he gasped.

"Eh? What's that?" said Handforth curly.

"Non-nothing!" said Church, staggering to his feet. "At the same time, I think you might be a little more careful with your fists, Handy. What was the idea of landing out like that?"

"It was just to prove to you that you sometimes get something that you don't want," said Handforth calmly. "And if I have any more of your nonsense, I'll give you another huff. It's all arranged that we shall go to Goodwin's study together, and if he won't let us walk in, we're going to force our way in! Is that understood?"

"Oh, quite!" said McClure promptly.

He thought it was just as well to agree. With Handforth in his present mood, he was capable of landing out without warning, and McClure had no desire to share the fate of his chum. Getting into a row with the Head was not quite so bad as accepting promiscuous punches from Handforth. So Church and McClure decided to choose the lesser of two evils, and they elected

to go with Handforth on his mission of inquisitiveness.

For that is what it really amounted to. There was really no reason why the chums of Study D should be so curious concerning Dick Goodwin, the new boy from Lancashire. But Handforth had made up his mind, and there was nothing more to be said. Handforth was not usually an inquisitive youth. But when he got a fixed idea into his head, a sledge-hammer could not drive it out, and, in this present case he was particularly determined to find out why Goodwin was acting so mysteriously.

But Handforth was not alone in that wish. The majority of the fellows in the Remove, to tell the truth, were very keen upon having a look inside that study. But Dr. Stafford himself had given orders that nobody was to bother Goodwin, and that he was to be left entirely to himself during his leisure hours. Any attempt to interfere with him would be at once reported, and the culprits would be severely punished.

But why was this? We were all very puzzled.

I had seen very little of Dick Goodwin, but I judged him to be quite a good fellow, although quiet and reserved in his manner. He spent nearly all his spare time in his study, the end one in the Remove passage. As soon as lessons were over he would disappear, and then he would only come out at meal times. Practically all the evening, when he was not doing his preparation, he was busy in that study.

Busy at what?

This was the question which interested us all, and to which we required an answer. Not that we were likely to get one. Dick Goodwin appeared to keep his secret well, and he would give no satisfaction when questioned.

At first many of the Juniors had been indignant, and they had attempted to storm the study, with the result that

they were surprised by Fenton of the Sixth, and they were all reported to the Housemaster. Liberal impositions were distributed, and after that the fellows were not quite so keen.

The majority, in fact, had half given it up, and they were content to let Dick Goodwin go his own way unmolested. But Edward Oswald Handforth was not one of these. He was grimly determined to find out the truth, and he did not worry himself about any possible punishment that would follow.

And Church and McClure, with inward alarm, realised that they would probably share Handforth's fate. It was quite useless to argue with him. It was far better to agree, and to leave the matter to chance. Possibly they would be able to get out of the affair when the actual time came. Church, who was anxious to put off the evil hour, had a suggestion to make, and he made it.

"Look here, Handy!" he said, as he stirred his tea thoughtfully. "This idea of yours is not so bad. But why not wait until we've been down to the Common-room after tea. We'll have a talk to the other chaps—"

"What's the good of talking to them?"

"I'll explain," went on Church. "There's rather a feeling in the Remoye that Goodwin has got a tremendous nerve to have a study to himself, and to lock himself in it as he does. If we can only put it to the chaps in the right way we shall probably get a good many followers. If there are ten or twelve of us battling into Goodwin's study, we shall be almost certain of victory."

Handforth nodded slowly.

"Well, it's not so bad!" he admitted grudgingly. "As a matter of fact, I was going to suggest something of the sort myself, only you took the words out of my mouth."

"Then it's a decent scheme?"

"Yes; I think we'll adopt it," said Handforth. "If Goodwin won't let us

in, we'll jolly well force our way in. He won't be able to hold back a dozen of us, will he?"

"Hardly!" said McClure, who was freezing on to Church's idea. "We'll wait until all the chaps are in the Common-room, and then we'll put it to them. After that, we'll go along the passage, and we'll get busy on the job."

"Exactly!" said Handforth, rubbing his hands. "We'll teach this silly ass to lock himself in his own study—we'll teach him to have secrets from us!"

He was quite satisfied, and so were Church and McClure, for they now saw quite clearly that it would be possible for them to escape the consequences. By remaining on the outskirts of the crowd, it would be just possible for them to vanish if a prefect or a master appeared on the scene.

As soon as tea was over, Handforth wanted to hurry away to the Common-room. But Church and McClure declared that it would be far better to get their preparation done. They considered that any delay was favourable. They pointed out that hardly anybody would be in the Common-room so early, and Handforth at last agreed.

And so, for the next hour, the chums of Study D were busy at their prep. And at last it was finished, and then Handforth rose with a sigh of satisfaction.

"You chaps ready?" he asked briskly.

"Just done," said Church.

"So am I," added McClure, putting his books away.

The trio left their study shortly afterwards, and went down to the Common-room. At least half the Remoye was present, standing in groups, chatting about the football and all manner of other things. I was there with Sir Montie Tregellis-West and Tommy Watson. And the very instant Handforth entered the room I knew he had something on his mighty brain.

"Hush!" I exclaimed, holding up my hand. "Hush, you chaps!"

"What have we got to hush for?" asked Reginald Pitt.

"Can't you see Handforth's face?" I inquired. "Can't you see those lines on his forehead? Can't you see the deep, thoughtful expression in his eyes? I can detect that the one and only Handforth has been thinking deeply, and he has come to a momentous decision. There is something on the board, and we must give Handforth our full attention."

"How Handforth!" said De Valerie. "We don't want to hear any of his rot!"

"Any of his what?" interrupted Handforth grimly.

"I didn't say 'what'—I said 'rot'!" said De Valerie.

"You'd better say it again—that's all!" declared Handforth grimly. "I'm not going to stand any of your cheek. I've come here to talk about Goodwin."

"Oh, give him a rest!" said Augustus Hart. "We've all been talking about Goodwin during this last two or three days. He's a bit of a mystery, and his study is an even greater mystery. But there's no reason why we should worry our heads about him—"

"Isn't there?" said Handforth. "I think there's every reason. There's not another fellow in the Remove who has secrets like this chap Goodwin. It's not right. We're not going to stand it."

"It seems to me that we are compelled to, my son!" I grinned. "Why can't you leave Goodwin alone? He's a peaceable fellow, and there is no reason why we should bother him like this. Let him bottle himself in his own study if he wants to. It's no concern of ours, after all!"

"Dear old boy, that is exactly what I think," put in Sir Montie Tregellis-West. "I don't like buttin' my nose into somethin' which does not concern me. It isn't good form—it isn't, really."

"That's all rot!" interrupted Hand-

forth. "In ~~the~~ matter of (his kind the Remove ought to stick together. Here is this new chap—a new kid, mark you!—occupying a study all to himself, and locking himself in. A fine state of affairs! I intend to go along to his study now, and I mean to demand admittance. How many of you fellows will back me up?"

Nobody answered.

"You—you miserable set of rollers!" said Handforth sourly. "Well, I know I've got Church and McClure on my side, at least. If any of you other chaps won't come along, we'll go by ourselves."

"Oh, we'll come along, Handy," said Pitt obligingly. "There's no reason why we shouldn't see the fun. And I dare say a good many other fellows will accompany us."

About twenty Juniors stated their willingness, and Handforth looked pleased. He did not realise that most of the Juniors intended remaining well in the background—merely spectators.

"Good!" said Handforth. "I thought you wouldn't turn out to be such weak-kneed bounders. Come on—follow me!"

The fellows grinned, and they followed Handforth out of the Common-room in a body.

"Do you agree with this, old boy?" asked Sir Montie, looking at me.

I grinned.

"My dear Montie, it's not much good disagreeing," I remarked. "Handforth seems to be looking for trouble—and it is quite certain that he will find more than he wants. We might just as well go along and see the fun. I don't see why we should be curious concerning Goodwin. If he likes to lock himself in his own study, it is his own business, and not ours."

"Exactly!" said Tommy Watson.

The other fellows had gone on, and we could hear them marching along the passage ahead of us. We were just about to turn out of the lobby, and to

follow the crowd, when we observed a somewhat curious figure entering from the Triangle. The figure was that of a man, attired in a long overcoat, and a bowler hat. The gentleman in question possessed round shoulders, and his legs were bandy. His face was clean-shaven, and it was long and wore a look of forlorn dejection. It was an extremely gloomy countenance.

We had seen the man several times before, for he was employed at the school—in the Ancient House. He had come at the beginning of the new term, and his job was somewhere down in the domestic quarters.

"Hallo! Here's old Cuttle!" murmured Tommy Watson. "I wonder if we can make him smile?"

We strolled over to the bow-legged man, and he paused in front of us, giving us a look of absolute misery.

"Good-evening, Cuttle!" I exclaimed cheerily.

Mr. Josh Cuttle shook his head, and rolled his eyes.

"There was clouds in the sky!" he said in a deep, rumbling voice. "And there was a wind. Why was there clouds in the sky? Ask me! Because there was going to be rain. There was going to be storm!"

"That's cheerful!" I exclaimed. "I was hoping that we should have fine weather to-morrow."

"There was fine weather in the Pacific Islands," said Mr. Cuttle solemnly. "But there was no fine weather in England. This was not the country for fine weather. Ask me? My rheumatism was bad; it will get worse."

"I hope not, Mr. Cuttle," I said. "It's always better to look on the bright side, you know. Your rheumatism may improve—"

"There was them as look on the bright side, and there was them as look on the dark side," said Mr. Cuttle. "The bright side was never no good to a soul. Why wasn't it good? Ask me!

Because it was always better to be prepared for the worst!"

And Mr. Cuttle, rubbing his hands together with an expression which denoted a kind of ghouliah satisfaction, passed out of the lobby, and along the passage. We looked after him, and then we grinned.

"Queer old bird!" exclaimed Tommy Watson.

"He's what one might call the super pessimist!" I grinned. "He only seems happy when everything is going wrong."

"Well, let's get along to Goodwin's study," said Watson. "Handy must be there by this time, and I don't want to miss the fun. There you are! Listen to that! I believe he's hammering on the door!"

Some unusual sounds had certainly come to our ears, and we lost no time in hastening along the Remove passage until we came to the far end, where the corridor was filled up with juniors, the majority of whom were standing by, watching.

Edward Oswald Handforth himself was at the door of Dick Goodwin's study, and he was hammering with a heavy fist upon the panels. Apparently he could get no reply.

"The silly ass!" grinned Reginald Pitt. "He'll only bring prefects on the scene by bashing away like that. Well, it's his own look-out. He seems to be scouting round for trouble, and it's pretty certain that he'll get some!"

"Yes, and he'll drag us into it if we're not careful!" said De Valeris. "We'd better be prepared to make a scoot for it, if necessary."

Bang! Bang! Bang!

Handforth hammered harder than ever.

"Open this door, you secretive rotter!" he shouted wrathfully. "If you think you're going to shut me out, you'll jolly well mistaken! I'll give you ten seconds to open the door!"

The door opened suddenly and Dick

Goodwin stood in the doorway. He was a well-built chap, with auburn hair, which several unkind juniors called ginger, and his face was freckled. He gazed at the crowd of juniors without any sign of anger.

"I thought you would be sensible!" said Handforth triumphantly. "Stand aside, you ass! We're coming into this study, and we're going to have a look round."

"Steady on, lad!" exclaimed Dick Goodwin quietly. "This study is private, and the headmaster has given orders that nobody is to force his way in, or to bother me."

"Have you any reason why we shouldn't see into your study?" demanded Handforth.

"Aye, I have that!" replied Goodwin.

"Well, it can't be an honest reason!" said Handforth. "No chap with a clear conscience would lock himself in his study and bar the window. We don't believe in that sort of thing in the Remove, and we're going to show you that it won't do, Goodwin."

"You'll have to put up with it!"

"Do you refuse to let us enter?" bellowed Handforth.

"Ah, I do that!"

"Oh! So that's your answer, is it?" demanded Handforth. "All right, my son! I'll soon show you that I'm not going to be messed about with! Take that!"

Biff!

Handforth's fist shot out, and before Dick Goodwin could dodge, he received a somewhat violent blow on the nose. He staggered back a couple of steps, and then sat down violently on the floor. He had not been at St. Frank's quite long enough to learn to be very wary of Handforth's fists. Edward Oswald had a disconcerting habit of landing out without the slightest warning.

"Now's our chance!" roared Handy. "Come on, you fellows!"

Before Dick Goodwin could get to his

feet again, Handforth charged into the study and round the screen. Many of the other juniors gave a shout, and followed suit. They crowded into the study excitedly, their curiosity getting the better of their caution.

Goodwin, seeing that it was quite impossible to stem the tide, stood well back, and allowed the fellows to enter. There was nothing else for him to do—and he accepted the situation with a good grace.

What the juniors expected to see they hardly knew; but, in any case, they were quite certain that they would find something of very unusual interest in the study of mystery, as it was already called.

As soon as Handforth got into the room, he came to a standstill, and stared about.

"Well, I'm jiggered!" he exclaimed blankly.

He looked round, but he could see nothing whatever to arouse any suspicion. It was, in fact, quite an ordinary study, although it was certainly rather well furnished.

In the very centre of the room stood a big table, covered completely with a rich tablecloth, its folds reaching to the floor on all sides. On the table were several books, a blotting-pad, an ink-stand, pens, pencils, and so forth. On the blotting-pad was an exercise-book—open, which clearly indicated that Dick Goodwin had been interrupted in the middle of his preparation.

On one side of the wall stood a well-built bookcase, nicely filled with volumes. On another side stood a cupboard, one door of which was partially open, revealing some crockery, and a portion of a cake. A large travelling trunk stood in one corner, and on the other side of the room there was rather a massive oak bureau.

But this was nothing; there was not a single thing here to arouse any curiosity or interest!

"Satisfied?" inquired a voice from the doorway.

It was Dick Goodwin's voice, and he spoke in rather an amused tone. Handforth glared across at him.

"You—yes giddy spoofer!" he exclaimed wrathfully. "There's nothing in it at all—nothing but some bits of furniture just as we might see in any giddy study!"

"What did you expect to find?" asked the new fellow.

"We didn't know what to expect, to tell the truth," said Owen major. "But we thought there was something queer about the place, and we find that we're mistaken. Personally, I apologise, Goodwin, and I hope you'll forgive the intrusion. Come on, you chaps! We'll get outside!"

"Half a minute!" exclaimed Handforth. "I want an explanation of this—"

"Cave!" came a husky whisper from the doorway.

There was a rush, and the juniors charged out into the passage, helter-skelter. Handforth being last.

"Stop—stop at once!" exclaimed a sharp voice. "I command you to stop, boys! What is the meaning of this disturbance?"

The juniors came to a halt, rather dismayed, for the voice was that of Mr. Crowell, the Remove master, and he stood there, looking rather angry. He had certainly caught the intruders red-handed.

"Oh, indeed!" exclaimed the Remove master. "It is quite obvious to me that you have been forcing your presence upon Goodwin. Who is responsible for this gross disregard of the headmaster's orders?"

Nobody answered, and then Mr. Crowell's eyes fell upon Handforth.

"Oh, I think I understand!" said the Remove master grimly. "Handforth, I presume that you are the leader of this escapade?"

Handforth shrugged his shoulders.

"Well, I don't want to get the other chaps into trouble, sir," he said. "It

was my doing all along. I hammered on Goodwin's door and demanded to be admitted—"

"One moment!" interrupted the master. "Why did you make the demand?"

"Because I wanted to see inside the room, sir."

"In order to satisfy your curiosity, I presume?"

"Well, it wasn't so much curiosity," argued Handforth. "I don't believe in a fellow locking himself in his own study—"

"It is hardly a question of what you believe in, Handforth," interrupted Mr. Crowell tartly. "The headmaster gave certain instructions and every boy in the Remove knew what those instructions were. Yet, in spite of that fact, you come to Goodwin's door and demand admittance!"

"Well, you see, sir—"

"I do not see!" interrupted the Remove master. "Did you punch Goodwin on the nose, Handforth?"

Handforth sighed.

"I gave him a tap, sir," he replied. "But, you see, the silly ass was obstinate—he wouldn't get out of the way when I told him to."

"I think I have heard sufficient, Handforth," said Mr. Crowell. "It is quite obvious to me that you used considerable violence. Perhaps you will gain some satisfaction in writing me five hundred lines!"

"But—but—"

"Do not argue, Handforth," said Mr. Crowell. "I shall require those lines by to-morrow evening, and you will please see that they are written carefully. The other boys will disperse at once."

And Mr. Crowell walked down the passage, his gown rustling. Handforth glared after him, and then he glared at the grinning juniors.

"Not quite a success, eh?" chuckled Reginald Pitt. "Poor old Handy! Everything he touches—everything he

attempts to do—goes wrong! Still, his curiosity is satisfied, and that's one thing!

But if Handforth's curiosity was satisfied, Handforth was not!

CHAPTER 2.

After Lights Out

FOR some reason or other, I awoke just as the school clock was chiming midnight.

I lay in bed, fully awake, listening to the last chimes of the old clock. When they had died away everything was still, except for the steady breathing of the sleeping juniors.

I was just about to turn over to compose myself to sleep again, when I heard a light sound. It came from my left, and I lifted my head again, and stared into the gloom.

As my eyes grew accustomed to it, I found that I could see right down the dormitory.

And then I gave a start.

For there was someone on his feet—somebody getting dressed, in fact! I immediately thought of Fullwood and Co., guessing that they were perhaps intent upon going on a midnight visit to the White Harp, down in Belton—for the nuts of the Remove were sometimes in the habit of breaking bounds after lights out, in order to indulge in a little gambling.

But I knew that this junior could not be Fullwood or either of his two companions—for the cads of Study A occupied beds in the very far corner of the dormitory—in the opposite direction.

I counted the beds, and then I discovered that the boy who was quietly dressing himself was—Dick Goodwin!

This caused me to think. Why was he getting dressed? For a new fellow to break bounds in the dead of night was almost unheard of—it was only the old hands who dared to go to such risks.

"This is strange!" I told myself.

"There's something queer about it, and I mean to look into the affair. It's not really my business, but if Goodwin is acting the giddy goat, and if he is in danger of getting into trouble, I'll make it my business to give him a friendly word of advice."

However, I did not act immediately. I was rather curious to see what Goodwin intended doing. A moment later, he walked softly down the dormitory and opened the door. Then he vanished out into the passage—closing the door behind him.

I was out of bed in about one second, and in the next second I was shaking the shoulder of Tregellis-West. He turned over in bed, half sat up, and blinked at me.

"Begad! What—what on earth—"

"It's only me, Montie," I whispered. "Rouse yourself, old man."

"Nipper, dear old boy!" exclaimed Montie. "Is anything the matter?"

"I don't know yet, Montie!" I exclaimed. "But Dick Goodwin has just dressed himself and gone out of the dormitory—"

"Begad! That looks frightfully suspicious—it does, really!" said Montie, in a concerned voice. "For a new fellow to go breakin' bounds after lights out is serious!"

"That's what I think—but he may not be breaking bounds, after all, Montie," I said. "I just want to see what he is doing, and so I'm going to follow him."

"I'll slip some clothes on, dear boy, and come after you."

"All right, then—buck up!"

I passed out of the room and quickly made my way down the corridor to the head of the stairs. For some few moments I stood there, listening. But I could hear nothing suspicious—Dick Goodwin had completely vanished, and it was obvious that he was not on the upper landing. He had gone downstairs for some reason. Had he gone out of the house?

I crept downstairs cautiously.

And, when I arrived at the bottom, I paused again and listened. But the lobby was quite deserted, and everything was dark and still. I moved forward until I came to the opening of the Remove passage. Here I paused, and peered cautiously down.

It was a long, straight passage, with doors on either side—and Goodwin's study was situated right at the end. In the gloom I could not see very distinctly, but there was a window at the end of the passage and a faint gleam of diffused moonlight was coming in through the glass. And then I stood stockstill, all attention.

For I saw the figure of a boy—Goodwin, of course. He was outlined against the window, and he stood there until another figure joined him—a taller figure, and apparently the figure of a man. And then faint voices came to my ears—whispers, but altogether too soft for me to distinguish.

They did not remain talking for long. After two minutes they moved slightly aside, and then I heard a key inserted in a lock. After that there was a very faint sound of a closing door, and a faint gleam of light appeared near the flooring.

"Well, I'm blessed!" I murmured.

Goodwin and his mysterious companion had entered the study, and they had switched the light on as soon as the door had been closed. The window, of course, was provided with shutters, which enclosed all light.

I found myself asking all kinds of questions. Why had Goodwin come down, and what was he doing in his own study after midnight?

Who was the man that had entered the study with him? What possible reason could they have for being down here at this hour, when all the others in the school were asleep?

It was certainly very mysterious, and it did not strike me as being exactly above board. Yet I could hardly think that Goodwin was the kind of fellow

to do anything wrong. He had always struck me as being upright and honest—and quite a decent fellow all round.

I moved cautiously forward—slipping along the passage until I arrived almost outside the door of Goodwin's study. I paused here, hardly liking to go nearer. I did not want to play the part of an eavesdropper.

And so I stood there, rather undecided. And then a sound came to my ears—a kind of metallic tapping. It continued for a moment or two, ceased, and then went on again. I pursed my lips, decidedly puzzled.

I remained quite still for two or three minutes, and then I came to the conclusion that it would be better for me to return to the dormitory and get to bed again. This was none of my business, after all, and if Goodwin preferred to act in a strange way, it was his own concern.

And so, at length, I moved forward, with the intention of returning straight to the dormitory. I reached the end of the passage and was about to turn into the lobby when a most remarkable thing happened.

Two big figures appeared out of the shadows.

They pounced on me before I was even aware of their presence. And, the next second, I was on the floor, face downwards.

"The sack!" one of the figures exclaimed in a rough voice.

And, just as I was about to yell out a hand was clapped over my mouth, to be almost immediately substituted for a thick scarf—which effectually gagged me. And then a thick sack was drawn over my head, and pulled tight at the waist, pinioning my hands to my sides, and making it almost impossible for me to struggle.

This was certainly an extraordinary development. Why had these men captured me? Who were they, and how had they gained admittance into the school?

I felt myself lifted up and carried

along—and then I was pushed through an open window. After that, I was taken across the Triangle—at least, I judged this to be the case, although I could see nothing.

I was quite sure that my surmise was correct a few moments later. For I felt myself being hoisted up, obviously over the school wall. I was allowed to drop, and I fell in a heap, among thick grass.

Once in the road I was carried along for about a hundred yards, and then taken on to the grass which bordered the lane. Here, almost in the ditch, I was laid on my back, and I heard the two men whispering together.

Meanwhile, Sir Montie Tregellis-West had not been idle.

His first task, after dressing himself, was to awaken Tommy Watson, and this required some little doing, for Tommy was a sound sleeper. But he got up at last in bed, blinked at Sir Montie in a somewhat irritable mood, and asked what the dickens was the matter.

"Dear old boy, Nipper has gone out of the dormitory, and we must follow him," explained Sir Montie. "You see —"

"No, I don't see," growled Watson. "Lemme go to sleep, you ass!"

"But, Tommy boy, listen——"

"If Nipper likes to go prowling about in the middle of the night—let him," said Watson, lying back on his pillow.

"But let me finish, dear boy!" put in Sir Montie, grasping Tommy Watson by the shoulder. "You see, Goodwin went out first, and Nipper is very curious about Goodwin."

"Nipper shouldn't be curious," said Watson. "If Goodwin wants to break bounds, let him break bounds. There's no reason why we should lose any of our sleep. We don't get any too much of it, as it is! The rising bell always goes about an hour too soon!"

Sir Montie sighed.

"I will give you exactly ten seconds to get up, Tommy," said Sir Montie.

"If you do not show a leg by that time, I shall be forced to try other measures. I shall see what effect a wet sponge will have on you!"

Tommy Watson groaned. "You won't give me any rest!" he complained. "I suppose I shall have to get up—just to please you!"

"It will be by far the wiser course, Tommy boy," said Sir Montie.

Once out of bed, Watson was all right, and he was soon slipping on his trousers over his pyjamas. Then he pulled on a jacket, and finally put on a pair of slippers.

"That'll be enough," he said. "You ready, Montie?"

"I'm waitin' for you, dear boy!"

"Good! We'll get off at once, then," said Tommy. "Goodness knows what we're going for—or where we're going to! It's a dotty idea altogether, if you ask me—but it's no good arguing with a gatepost. Come on."

Tommy Watson walked down the dormitory, and he happened to glance out of one of the windows before he reached the door. He suddenly came to a halt, and stared out into the Triangle intently. The moon had just come out from behind a bank of clouds, and the old Triangle was, for a few moments, quite brilliantly illuminated by the moonlight.

"My only hat!" Tommy exclaimed. "Look—look down there!"

"Dear old boy——"

Sir Montie paused, as he saw what had drawn Watson's attention. Down in the Triangle, three figures were visible.

Two of them were men, and between them they were carrying a smaller figure. Montie and Tommy were now at the window, and they looked down intently.

"Dear old fellow, I can't make it out at all!" murmured Sir Montie. "They are carrying somebody. I—I can see his feet."

"And those feet are kicking about, too!" said Watson. "My goodness! I

—I wonder if it can be Nipper? Perhaps he's fallen into the hands of some silly, fatheaded jaspers—"

"That's not likely, dear old boy," said Tregellis-West. "Who would be playin' a jape after midnight? An' those figures are men—not boys, begad! The best thing we can do is to go downstairs as quickly as possible, creep out, and make investigations. I don't think it would be advisable to raise the alarm until we know something more definite."

"Good wheeze!" said Tommy Watson. "Come on!"

Not another moment was wasted. The two juniors crept out of the dormitory, and then they sped down the stairs with great speed. Reaching the lobby, they were just about to enter the Remove passage, in order to creep out by the window of Study C, when Sir Montie came to a halt.

"Begad!" he muttered.

"What's wrong?" demanded Watson.

"The window is standin' wide open, dear old boy!"

Watson stared, and he saw that Montie's words were true. The tall lobby window, set rather high in the wall, was fully open, although, as a rule, the window was kept tightly closed, even during the day. The two juniors lost no time in examining the window, and they saw almost at once that it had been forced. The catch was smashed.

"Well, I'm blessed!" said Tommy Watson. "This—this looks serious, you know. Those chaps were burglars, Montie!"

"How frightfully alarmin'!" breathed Sir Montie, without looking at all alarmed. "But burglars generally make off with valuables—they don't carry people away with them, you know!"

"This is a case of kidnapping!" said Tommy Watson grimly. "That's about the truth of it, my son. Nipper has been kidnapped, and it's up to us to get on his track. We might not be

able to find him at all, if we don't move at once."

They scrambled through the window, and then crept across the Triangle quickly but silently. They reached the wall, climbed up, and dropped lightly into the grass on the other side. They were now in the road, and they were just in time to see the two figures of the mysterious men bending over their victim—which, of course, was no less a person than myself.

The men were holding me down, and one was attempting to pull the sack off. I did not understand his intentions at first, and I struggled vigorously. Then I realised that the sack was about to be removed, so I suddenly ceased struggling.

Meanwhile, Tregellis-West and Watson were watching from the other side of the road, near the school wall. They did not approach, but they crouched there, waiting and watching.

They saw the sack removed from my body, and the scarf from my face, and then came several startled exclamations. These exclamations were uttered by the two men who had captured me. They stared right into my face, looked surprised for a moment, and then proceeded to curse in low tones.

"What's the game?" I gasped. "What's the idea of treating me like this? I'll—I'll—"

I paused in great surprise, for the two men, without another look at me, rose to their feet, ran down the road as though demons were after them, and disappeared into the dense undergrowth of Belton Wood!

CHAPTER 2.

The Mystery of the MINT

"**B**EGAD!" Sir Montie Tregellis-West uttered that exclamation in a tone of astonishment, for he was really startled to see the two men rushing off

in that abrupt way, without any apparent cause.

"How positively amazing, Tommy boy!" he exclaimed. "I wonder if the fellows caught sight of us, an' took alarm?"

"I don't suppose we should cause them much alarm, Montie," said Watson. "It seems to me that they were startled by their prisoner—anyhow, they let him drop back into the grass. Let's rush and have a look."

The pair hurried down the road, and they reached the spot where I was sitting in the grass, just as I was commencing an extra large sneeze. They grabbed hold of me, and shook my shoulders.

"Are you all right, Nipper?" demanded Watson quickly.

"A-tish-oo!" I replied.

"Dear old boy, we were frightfully anxious about you!" said Sir Montie. "We saw you bein' carried across the Triangle, so we came out at once, with the intention of rescuin' you on the spot. But those two awful scoundrels took fright, or somethin', and they scooted off!"

I struggled to my feet, blew my nose, and then looked at my two chums.

"You—you saw them, then?" I asked.

"Yes, rather!" said Watson. "But who were they and why did they collar you—"

"How on earth should I know?" I interrupted. "It's most mysterious altogether, Tommy. Those men were masked, you know! They were wearing thick, heavy masks which concealed their faces."

"Bogus!"

"Well, I'm figgered!"

"There was no joke about it," I went on. "It was a really serious business—and there's something very queer about it. Those rotters sprang out on me when I was coming down the Remove passage. They were hidden in a kind of recess, and I expect they had broken in through the lobby window."

"Yes, that's how they got in," said

Tommy Watson. "We found the window wide open, with the catch broken."

"Dear old fellow, it is frightfully significant!" said Sir Montie, shaking his head. "It seems to me that these two men are two of your old enemies, you know, and they came to St. Frank's with the intention of kidnapping you —"

"I don't think you've got hold of it right, Montie," I interrupted. "If those men had wanted to kidnap me, they would have taken me off with them—right into the wood. But, instead of that, they removed the sack, saw my face, and then discovered that they had made a bloomer!"

"A bloomer?"

"Yes," I said. "I wasn't the chap they had wanted to kidnap."

My chums stared at me.

"Then, if you weren't the chap, why did they kidnap you?" asked Watson. "That's all rot!"

"They really intended to kidnap Dick Goodwin," I said quietly.

"Eh?"

"Really, dear old fellow—"

"It's the truth," I interrupted. "I was coming down the Remove passage from Goodwin's study, and these two men sprang out on me in the dark, and shoved the sack over my head before they could possibly recognise my features. It's as clear as daylight that they took me for Goodwin."

"Possibly you are right, dear boy; in fact, I think you are certainly right," said Sir Montie.

"But why were these men intent upon kidnapping Goodwin?" I said. "That's what we've got to find out."

"Don't ask me!" said Tommy Watson.

"If you chaps are game, we'll go into Belton Wood, and have a look round," I said briskly. "I'm jolly keen upon finding out what all this means, and I want to lose no time. If we go into the wood, we may possibly get on the track—we may find something that will give us a clue!"

"Ob, we're game!" said Watson.

"Yes, rather, dear old boy," agreed Sir Montie.

And so, without any delay, we hurried down the lane, broke through the hedge, and entered the deep recesses of Belton Wood. And then, quietly and cautiously, we picked our way through the trees, looking about us keenly, and listening every now and again for any sound.

But we heard nothing and we saw nothing.

"It's no good, my sons," I said. "We might spend all night going about like this, and we shall find nothing at all. The best thing we can do is to go back, and make investigations at the school."

"That's a rippin' idea, dear old boy," said Sir Montie. "It certainly seems useless for us to remain here!"

We made our way back to the lane, and then walked quietly up towards the school. The moon was not shining, but its radiance was diffused through the thin, filmy clouds which covered the sky, and we could see everything fairly distinctly.

Quite suddenly I came to a halt.

"Crouch down—into the ditch!" I whispered. "It's quite dry."

We all three dodged down into the dry ditch. Tommy Watson and Tregellis-West were quite puzzled as to the meaning of this move.

"What on earth's the matter?" breathed Tommy.

"Those two men—they are against the wall," I whispered keenly. "Didn't you see them?"

"Begad no!"

"Then look again—about twenty yards from the main gateway," I said. "Fortunately, we were walking quietly, and we were not talking, and so the rotters did not hear us approaching."

My chums raised their heads through the tangle of weeds and grass, and they gazed over towards the school wall.

There were two men there, and they were looking over the wall into the Triangle. They were talking in low tones, and one of them appeared to be making notes in a little book.

"Well, I'm blessed!" said Watson. "They're the men right enough, and they're writing, or something. Of all the awful nerve! Fancy coming back, after kidnapping you, Nipper!"

"I suppose they found everything quiet, and so they thought it would be safe," I said. "But don't jaw—they might hear a slight sound, and that would spoil everything. If they go into the Triangle, we'll soon follow, and pounce on them at the right moment."

We watched, and saw that the men were making notes and talking still. I noticed that a sheet of paper was torn out of the notebook, screwed up and thrown into the ditch. I mentally decided that I should recover that scrap of paper later on, when I got the opportunity. It might contain an important clue.

Then, to our surprise, the two strangers did not climb over the wall and go into the Triangle. They came out into the road, stood for a few moments talking, and then they walked down the lane briskly, right past the spot where we were crouching. They went on until they disappeared in the gloom.

"Are we going to do anything?" asked Watson.

"We're going to follow!" I said grimly. "But it's no good being in too much of a hurry, my son. Look here! We'll dodge through this gap in the hedge, and get into the meadow. Then we can slip down, parallel with the lane, without being heard or seen, and we can keep those men in sight all the time."

"Good wheeze!" said Sir Montie approvingly.

It did not take us long to get into the meadow, and then we hurried down on the soft grass, making no sounds whatever. And at length we arrived almost

opposite the old stile which led on to the footpath through Belton Wood. Here we came to a halt, for the two men were just crossing the stile, and it was their evident intention to pass through the wood.

"Go easy now, you chaps!" I breathed. "The chaps are going along the footpath, and if they keep on it all the time it will lead out on to the edge of Bannington Moor. We're on the track now, and we're not going to get off it!"

"Rather not!" said Watson. "We'll stick to 'em if we have to go right into Bannington itself!"

"Any old thing you like, dear boys!" said Sir Montie, with a sigh. "But I'm not dressed, you know—I haven't got any collar on, an' I'm in a frightful state. But, for the sake of assistin' justice, I will allow those things to pass!"

The precious pair entered the wood, and vanished from sight. There was no need for us to be so very careful now, for it was practically certain that the men would stick to the footpath, and would not branch off into the wood itself.

Of course, there was just a possibility of this, and, in order to be on the safe side, we crept along about one hundred yards in the rear of our quarry. We could hear sounds of their progress as they went along.

Eventually we found ourselves on the edge of Bannington Moor.

Coming out of the wood, the moor stretched out before us, far in the distance—a bleak, bare expanse of country without a tree, and with hardly any roads.

"I expect those chaps have got a motor-car!" I whispered. "They left it here, possibly, and then walked through the wood so that no attention would be attracted. That's about the size of it, I believe. So we shall probably meet with a reverse very soon, because we can't chase a motor-car on foot!"

"No, that would be rather too much of a task, old boy," agreed Sir Montie. But I was wrong.

The men did not make for the little moor road which ran across to Bannington. Instead, they cut across the moor itself, and I could see at once that they were making straight for the old mill.

This old building was practically a ruin, and it had been standing there for many, many years—probably over a hundred years. It was deserted now, and had been deserted for ten or fifteen years past.

The old mill was a ramshackle place, and it was not visited once in a blue moon by anybody. I clearly remembered a rather exciting adventure which had occurred months and months earlier, when some rascals had taken refuge in the mill.

It seemed now that the mill was again being used by people of questionable habits.

Both the men made for the mill, reached it, and entered by means of the rotting, ramshackle door. They passed inside, leaving the door wide open. And Sir Montie, Tommy and I crouched down behind a bush, and waited.

We saw a gleam of light inside—proving that a match had been struck. This light became brighter, and then I faintly saw a flickering candle held in the hands of one of the men. They did not remain there for long, but went up an old ladder into the upper portion of the mill. And then everything became dark.

"Come on!" I whispered. "We can go on a bit now. I'd give anything to know what these rotters are doing here!"

"Perhaps we shall be able to find out!" said Tommy Watson eagerly. "My hat! This is an adventure, if you like!"

Slowly and cautiously we made our way to the mill, and at length we stood in the doorway, listening intently,

and ready to dodge out at the least sign of an alarm.

But we heard nothing, and we stood there, with no sound reaching our ears except the soft rustle of the wind outside.

"They've gone upstairs—right into the mill itself," I whispered. "It's quite possible that they are at the top, and I don't think we can follow. We're dished, my sons!"

"Dished!" echoed Watson.

"Yes," I said. "There's a trapdoor in the ceiling up there, and there is a bolt on the other side. The trapdoor is closed, and we can't go any farther. I'll just creep up and make sure, though!"

It was exactly as I had anticipated. The trapdoor was secured, and it was impossible for us to pass through. I felt as though I had been swindled, for it was quite clear that there was something very strange going on.

Why were these men here—in this old building? Why had they come to St. Frank's, and why had they made an attempt to kidnap Dick Goodwin? For I was quite certain that a mistake had been made, and that I had been collared instead of the boy from the north.

"Well, it's no good!" I whispered. "We can't get any farther, so we had better go outside, and watch."

This was the only thing to be done, and we crept out of the doorway, and then went a little way back from the mill, turned round, and looked up.

"Hallo!" whispered Tommy Watson. "There's a light there, right at the top!"

"By Jingo!" I breathed. "So there is!"

We stared up. Right at the top of the mill, in the very uppermost window, a gleam of light could be seen. It was only a tiny window—just a little square, sunk deeply into the woodwork.

"So that's where they are!" said Watson. "Well, there's no hope of us

getting up there, my sons. We can't see a thing from here, and we might just as well get back to St. Frank's."

"Hold on!" I put in. "I'm not so sure about not being able to get up there and see. I'm going to have a shot at it, anyhow!"

"Dear old boy, what on earth is the use——"

"Every use!" I interjected. "Do you see these sails?"

"But—but you can't climb up them,——"

"I can," I said quickly. "They may be old, but they are pretty strong, and they make a jolly fine ladder. All I've got to do is to climb right up, and I think I shall be able to squint through the window by overhanging a bit. Everything depends upon this, you know. If only I can look into that room, and see what those rotters are up to, it may mean everything. At all events, I'm going to try."

Sir Montie and Tommy looked at me in rather a startled way.

"But—but you'll kill yourself if you fall, you see!" said Watson, in alarm.

"Dear old boy, don't be so rash!" pleaded Montie.

"I've made up my mind, and I'm going to do it," I said. "There's hardly any risk in it. You chaps stay down here, and be on the alert."

I did not wait any longer. I hurried forward to the mill, and then, by reaching, I was just able to grasp the lower woodwork of the sail which hung down. They had been idle for many years, and they were rotten and broken.

However, once on the sail, I found that it was a fairly easy task to climb upwards—providing I made sure of my foothold at every step. Foot by foot I went upwards, until, at last, I had completely climbed the sail to the axle.

But I found that I could not see into the window even now. The window was right away to my left, and the only means of looking in was to climb along

the next rail, almost horizontally, and then bend over, head downwards, and look into the opening of the window. For this second rail stretched right across the top of the window, and I decided to make the attempt.

It would be risky—for my position would be much more precarious than it had been. But I did not care. I had come up the sail, and I was not going down again without having accomplished something.

And so I crept along inch by inch, until I arrived at last right over the window. And then I hung down, so that I was only held by my legs. At that very moment the sail gave a movement, descending slightly lower.

My heart leapt into my mouth, and I clung there, rather scared. My weight had caused the sail to swing downwards.

But it was only a slight movement, and hardly made any sound. And it was all the better for me, for I was able to look into the window.

I saw the two men sitting there, smoking cigarettes. They were big, strong fellows, quite well dressed, and were certainly not ruffians. And they were talking together silently.

But I did not give them very much attention. I was more interested in the apartment itself. It was only a small place—a kind of store-room. But it had been considerably altered of late. I had been in that room myself on two or three occasions, and I knew that it was a tumble-down place, without any door, and with the window all cracked, and with the frame rotted through.

But it was different now.

A heavy, strong door had been fitted, and this door, I saw, was also supplied with a very powerful lock. The window, too, had a new frame, and thick plate-glass, with bars beyond—heavy iron bars, set together so that not even a monkey could crawl through.

There was some furniture in the place—a deal table, and a kitchen chair, and,

over in one corner, some shelves had been fitted. These shelves were simply filled up with tinned goods—corned beef, salmon, sardines, fruit, and goodness knows what else. Then there were tins of biscuits and cakes, and all manner of things like that—edibles which would keep.

At first I was puzzled. I could not make out what it meant. And then, all in a second, I knew the truth.

This old room at the top of the mill was being prepared for somebody—it was being converted into a prison.

There was not the slightest doubt about this. The heavy wooden door, the barred window, the stock of food all pointed to the fact that this place was made ready for the reception of somebody who was to be kept in prison. But who was that somebody? Obviously, Dick Goodwin!

I was surprised and startled. Why were all these preparations being made for holding Goodwin a captive? It was all very mysterious, and I was pleased at having found out so much.

For I realised at once that if Goodwin ever disappeared, it would only be necessary to look here, and we should be able to locate him. The night's investigations had passed off exceedingly well after all.

And then something rather startling happened.

The sail moved again—sluggishly at first, and then with a quick rush, causing a lot of noise.

Creak! Creak!

The sail swung down, carrying me with it!

CHAPTER 3.

Very Strange!

QUICK as a flash, I commenced climbing down the sail, even though it was in motion. I knew that everything depended upon my speed. If I was caught here by these men it would be serious. And even if I escaped after they had seen me it,

would be a disaster. For the rascals would know that all their plans were given away, and they would, of course, abandon the mill and find another spot. So it was up to me to act quickly and to conceal myself.

I jumped when I was still ten feet from the ground. I landed in a heap, rolled over, and my two chums came rushing up to me.

"Dear old boy——"

"Don't waste a second!" I gasped. "I'm not hurt! Get behind those bushes—hurry!"

We simply rushed to the bushes, crouched down, and lay there panting hard. We were completely concealed, and we were only just in the nick of time.

Within three seconds the trapdoor was banged back, both the men came charging down, and they rushed out into the open. They were obviously alarmed, and they looked about them with quick, keen glances.

"There's nobody here!" exclaimed one of them.

"There might be—we don't know!" said the other. "I was practically certain that somebody was clinging to one of the sails when it commenced moving——"

"It might have been the wind!" said the other man.

Just at that moment quite a heavy gust came along, and it whistled against the sails shrilly. It was the first real gust that we had felt during the night, and it had come at a very opportune moment.

"Yes, I suppose you're right," said the first man. "It must have been the wind, after all. That gust just now moved the sail a trifle."

The men searched about for some little time, coming perilously near to us on two occasions. But they did not search the bushes very carefully, and we escaped detection.

At length the two men returned to the doorway, quite satisfied.

"Those sails ought to be fixed in some way," remarked one of them. "It gave me quite a fright, I can tell you!"

"Why, I thought they were fixed with age—rusted through," said the other man. "I thought the strongest wind couldn't move them. Still, it doesn't matter. We shall know next time. We'd better get inside. And, by the way, that window up there isn't covered, and the light can be seen."

"What does that matter? Who is there about here to see?"

"It will be better to have it completely shaded," said the first man. "We can't be too careful—not even in a lonely place like this."

They passed into the mill again, went up the steps and through the trapdoor.

Sir Montie Tregellis-West and Tommy Watson and I crept out of our place of concealment, and lost no time in making tracks for the wood.

When we reached there, I paused.

"Well, you chaps, I've got something to tell you, anyhow," I said, in a satisfied tone.

"You—you reckless ass!" said Watson wrathfully. "We thought you were coming down head first!"

"It was a near shave; but everything's O.K.," I said lightly. "The main thing is that I discovered something which will be of great interest to the gov'nor. That top room in the mill is a prison!"

"A what?"

I explained to my chums what I had seen—the heavy door, the barred window, the stock of food, etc. And they listened with growing astonishment, and with some little excitement.

"But who is the prison being prepared for?" asked Watson at length.

"Goodwin, of course! Who else?" I said. "We know for a fact that those men kidnapped me in mistake for Goodwin, and here they are, in an old mill with a specially prepared room at

the top. It is absolutely obvious what it means. If they had managed to get hold of Goodwin to-night they would have brought him here, and the countryside would have been searched to-morrow in vain. For who would have thought of looking in that old mill?"

"Yes, it's a very good thing we came out to-night, dear old boy," said Sir Montie, nodding. "There is something frightfully queer about it. I don't like it at all, legged! Why should Goodwin have these enemies—why should they want to capture him?"

"And why has he got a study that must be kept so secret?" asked Watson.

"And why is this, and why is that, and why is the other?" I said. "We can ask all sorts of questions, Tommy, and we can't find any satisfactory replies. There is a mystery, and we must leave it at that. But I have every hope that within a few days we shall get to the bottom of it. The best thing we can do now is to go straight back to the school and get to bed. In the morning I will tell the gov'nor what has happened, and he will know the best thing to do."

"Hear, hear!" said Sir Montie.

"Leave it to Mr. Lee, and everything will be all serene!" said Tommy Watson.

And so, without any further delay, we made our way back through the wood, and arrived at St. Frank's in good time.

We were just about to climb over the wall when I thought of something.

"Hold on!" I said. "What about that sheet of paper the man tore out of that pocket-book? They threw it down in the ditch somewhere, and I want to find it!"

"Oh, that'll do in the morning——"

"It won't—it'll do now!" I interrupted keenly. "Six eyes are better than two, so lend a hand!"

We went to the spot where the two men had been standing, and we searched about among the weeds and grass. And at last I found the scrap of paper which had been thrown away. I straightened

it out and looked at it intently; but it was too dark to read the paper.

"Well, what is there on it?" asked Watson.

"I can't see here," I replied. "We'll wait until we get indoors."

We crossed over the wall, and within three or four minutes we were inside the Ancient House—having gained admittance by means of the lobby window—which was smashed.

"Now for a match!" I breathed. "Who's got one?"

"I have," said Watson. "Here you are!"

He struck a light, and we all looked at the scrap of paper, which I had spread out between my two hands. It was a ruled sheet, and we saw at once that upon it was a rough drawing of the Ancient House—or, at least, a portion of the Ancient House.

All the windows were shown there—the upper windows and the lower windows. And against one of them was a cross.

"Hallo!" I said keenly. "What does this mean? One of the windows is marked—the fourth one from the left."

"That's Mr. Crowell's bed-room," said Watson.

"By jingo! So it is!" I said. "Now, why in the world did those men mark Mr. Crowell's window with a cross? There's another mystery here, my sons. Hold on, though! I expect it was a bloomer. They put a cross against the wrong window, and so they threw the paper away. That's about the truth of it."

"I expect you are right, dear old boy," said Sir Montie. "In any case, we can do nothing more now. I vote we go straight to bed, and leave all further discussion until the mornin'."

"That's exactly what I intend doing," I replied.

We were just about to creep forward, in order to mount the stairs, when we heard the faint sound of a closing door down the Remove passage. I came to a standstill, intent and alert.

"There's somebody coming!" I breathed. "I wouldn't mind betting anything you like that it's Goodwin; he's just left his study. We don't want him to see us here, so we'd better dodge into the doorway of the cloak-room. Buck up!"

We slipped across the lobby again, and into the doorway of the cloak-room, and waited there.

And we were only just in time.

For a figure appeared out of the Remove passage—a figure which was certainly not that of a schoolboy. It was, in fact, a figure which I recognised in an instant—even in the dim light.

"It's Cuttle!" I whispered under my breath.

"Begad!"

The figure was certainly that of Mr. Josh Cuttle. We could tell that instantly, although we could not possibly see his face.

Why was Mr. Cuttle prowling about the Ancient House at this time of night—between one and two in the morning, rather? What could his object be?

I was suspicious on the instant.

The first thought which came into my head—a thought which was not entirely without foundation—was that Mr. Cuttle was a spy inside the House. He was a newcomer at St. Frank's, and we knew nothing whatever of him. He may possibly have got in with the deliberate intention of assisting in the kidnapping of Dick Goodwin. He was probably a confederate of the two men we had been following. If this were the case, we should be able to frustrate his game—for we were warned in advance.

But it was a disappointment to me. I rather liked Mr. Cuttle, and it was disconcerting to realise that he was perhaps a crook. But it was not wise to take things for granted.

It was only a suspicion, after all.

Mr. Cuttle walked through the lobby, and then turned down the passage which led into the servants' quarters—down into the domestic section of

the Ancient House. We heard a door softly close down the corridor, and then all became silent.

"My hat!" said Tommy Watson. "What on earth does this mean?"

"It looks suspicious, but it will be just as well not to take things for granted," I said. "Mr. Cuttle is a queer chap, and, for all we know, he may have been engaged as a kind of night watchman. His occupation is a bit of a mystery, in any case. If he is a night watchman, then he has every right to prowl about the Ancient House at this hour. We'll wait until the morning before we form any opinion. Come on."

We crept upstairs, but it was destined that we should not get to bed without another interruption. For we were just moving along the upper corridor when the door opened, and a brilliant gleam of light shot out into the passage. Nelson Lee stood there, attired in his dressing-gown and slippers.

"Who is that?" he demanded sharply.

"Oh, my only hat!" muttered Watson, in dismay.

"It's all right—this has just come right!" I whispered. "We wanted to tell the guv'nor everything, anyhow!"

Nelson Lee walked up, and he eyed us with a grim expression on his face.

"Oh, indeed!" he exclaimed. "Nipper, Tregellis-West, and Watson. I shall be very obliged, Nipper, if you'll explain to me what you mean by being dressed and out of your beds at this hour of the morning?"

I grinned.

"Come off it, guv'nor," I said cheerfully. "I—"

"Now, look here, Nipper, I am in earnest!" interrupted Nelson Lee. "I am your Housemaster now, and I will not put up with any nonsense, or weak excuses. If you have been breaking the school rules—"

"We have—we've smashed about a dozen of them!" I interrupted cheer-

nally. "Now, listen, sir, and I'll tell you all about it!"

And, without further delay, I told the gayer exactly what had happened from the very first. I explained how I had gone downstairs, and how I had been kidnapped. Then I went on to describe the other events which took place. Nelson Lee listened without comment to the last.

"Let me see that piece of paper, Nipper," he said finally.

He took it and examined it carefully.

"Well, sir?" I said, "you haven't expressed any opinion yet."

"I hardly know whether I have an opinion, Nipper," said Nelson Lee. "In any case, you boys are quite exonerated. In the circumstances, I think you were fully justified in acting as you did."

"That's one good thing, anyhow," I remarked. "But what is the meaning of all this mystery, sir? Why did those chaps want to kidnap Goodwin? Why have they got that place prepared—"

"It is quite useless asking all these questions, Nipper," said Nelson Lee. "I agree with you that those two men were obviously intent upon kidnapping Goodwin. There is no doubt upon that point. So it is necessary for us to be well on the alert, and to see that Goodwin comes to no harm."

"And what about Mr. Cuttle, sir?" asked Tommy Watson.

"Oh, I do not think Cuttle is implicated," said Nelson Lee. "He is not employed as a night watchman, I will admit, but it is quite possible that he was walking about for some perfectly legitimate purpose. You had better go to bed straight away, and obtain some sleep. You will be tired when the rising bell goes in four or five hours' time!"

And so, without any further discussion, we bade Nelson Lee good-night, and went to the Remove dormitory. We were soon in bed and fast asleep.

CHAPTER 8.

Fullwood is Amused!

"FULLWOOD & CO. seem to be very much amused over something, this morning," remarked Reginald Pitt, as he stood in the Ancient House doorway, looking out into the Triangle. "The rotters have been cackling away there for about five minutes—they appear to be interested in something in that newspaper."

"Oh, leave them alone!" said Jack Grey, in a tone of disgust. "It's a ten-to-one chance that they are laughing at somebody's misfortune. It's a queer thing, but Fullwood and Gulliver and Bell always seem to be highly delighted when somebody is in trouble."

A moment or two later I strolled out, accompanied by Tregellis-West and Watson. It was quite a fine October morning, and the Triangle was looking splendid in the bright sunlight.

I noticed that Dick Goodwin was out in the Triangle, and that was rather an unusual proceeding for him. He generally spent every spare moment of his time in his mysterious study. But this morning he was taking the fresh air, and he was apparently deep in thought.

For he paced up and down the Triangle on the far side, where it was quite deserted, and his hands were stuck deep in his trousers pockets, and he appeared to be quite oblivious of his surroundings.

Fullwood & Co. were over by the wall of the gymnasium. They were helping to prop it up, and they had a newspaper, which appeared to be causing them a great deal of fun.

Finally, some of the other juniors wanted to know what the laughter was about. Hubbard and Owen major and Singleton and several others strolled over, and made inquiries.

I was near by, and I stood still, watching. I saw that Fullwood's expression changed now, and his lip curled disdainfully.

"Oh, nothin'—noubin' much, anyhow," he said, in reply to a question from Owen major. "Only I think it's a bit steep to have a pauper in the Memorial!"

"A pauper?" echoed Hubbard.

"That's what I said—an' that's what I mean!" said Fullwood. "I'm not a snob!"

"Oh, no!" exclaimed the Hon. Douglas Singleton languidly. "Pancy you telling us that, Fullwood—something we know so well!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I'm not a snob!" repeated Fullwood grimly. "But I draw the line at a chap whose father is showed in the giddy county court for debts!"

"What!"

"Half a minute," I said, strolling up. "What's the discussion about?"

"Mind your own business!" snapped Fullwood savagely. "Who told you to interfere, Nipper?"

"A chap named Nipper told me to interfere," I replied deliberately. "I want to know what you're talking about. Who is this chap who's a pauper?"

"He's on full view, if you want to see him," said Fullwood sneeringly, with a jerk of his head.

I glanced round, and saw that Fullwood had indicated Dick Goodwin.

"You mean Goodwin, I suppose?" I said. "What's the idea of calling him a pauper?"

"So he is a pauper!" put in Gulliver. "I think it's a bit thick his bein' at St. Frank's—with his beastly father in the county court for debt. It's a disgrace to the school—it's a rotten shame that we should be compelled to mix with a chap like that!"

Handforth strode forward.

"It's a rotten shame that we should be compelled to mix with chaps like you and Fullwood and Bell!" he roared. "Even a pauper may be a gentleman, but you'll never be a gentleman if you live until you're two thousand years old!"

"Hear, hear!"

Fullwood scowled.

"Well," he declared, "I don't see why we should put up with a disgrace like this. It's a bit too thick! The chap ought to be kicked out of the school!"

"Neck an' crop," said Gulliver.

"And without any delay!" put in Bell.

"I thought there was something funny going on," said Reginald Pitt. "But all you rotters can do is to sneer and make insulting remarks about Goodwin!"

"They were only cackling and laughing in order to attract a crowd," I said. "Don't you know Fullwood by this time, Pitt? He and his pals always go to work in that way when they're got something particularly nasty to say. Even if this is true about Goodwin's father——"

"There's no question about it at all—it is true!" snapped Fullwood. "It's in this paper."

I grinned.

"Newspapers are not always absolutely truthful," I said dryly. "I think it is quite possible that you are making a mistake."

"Of course he's making a mistake!" said Handforth. "And he's going to pay for it, too, because I'm going to punch his nose!"

"Hold on!" I interrupted. "We'll read that news item first."

"You're quite welcome!" sneered Fullwood. "Here's the paragraph."

He handed the newspaper over, and several juniors grasped it. It was a London paper, and the item which had so interested Fullwood & Co. was half-way down the page, in the centre of the paper. It was only a very small paragraph. It ran:

"MANUFACTURER IN COURT.

"Mr. Richard Goodwin, the well-known manufacturer, of Bollingwood, near Oldham, was sued for a debt in the county court in Manchester yester-

day. The sum in question was one of £500, this sum being claimed by Messrs Bryant, Hudson & Co., Ltd., of Manchester. Mr. Goodwin admitted his responsibility, and pleaded that his business is in such low water that he has been unable to discharge all his debts. He requested time to pay, and this was granted him."

"I don't believe that this Mr. Goodwin is Goodwin's father at all. It's just a coincidence," said Handforth.

"Rats!" said Pullwood. "Of course it's Goodwin's father. A giddy line thing—I don't think! A chap's father being put into the county court, an' him' unable to pay his debts."

"Why don't you say all this to Goodwin himself, instead of talking to us?" demanded De Valeris hotly. "We'll catch Goodwin over here!"

Pullwood shrugged his shoulders. "Goodwin!" he roared. "I say!" Dick Goodwin looked round. "We want you over here!" bellowed Handforth.

Goodwin came over, looking rather curious. He had been so deep in thought that he had not noticed the crowd near the gymnasium. Handforth pushed the paper under his nose as he came up.

"Read that paragraph!" he said. "Then tell us what you think about it!"

Dick Goodwin read the item, and although his face went a trifle paler, he did not move a muscle.

"Well?" he said at last. "What about it?"

"Is that Mr. Goodwin your father?"

"Aye, he is that!" replied the new boy quietly.

"Oh!"

"What did I tell you?" sneered Pullwood.

"He's your pater, then!" said Handforth. "Brought into court for debt!"

Dick Goodwin's eyes flashed somewhat.

"Aye, my father has been brought

into court for debt," he replied quietly. "Is there any disgrace in that? Is there any disgrace in a manufacturer being unable to pay a debt?"

"My dear chap, you misunderstand!" said Handforth. "I'm all sympathy. It's rough luck on your pater, and I'm sorry. I wouldn't have interfered in this affair if I'd known. I hope your pater gets out of his trouble all right—that's all."

"Thank you!" said Goodwin. "Anything else?"

"Yes, there is somethin' else!" said Pullwood nastily. "I think it's a bit offside for you to be at St. Frank's! This is a school for the sons of gentlemen—not for the sons of people who can't pay their debts!"

"By gum!" said Goodwin, his eyes flashing again. "There is nothing disgraceful—"

"Nothing disgraceful, eh?" interrupted Pullwood sneeringly. "Well, I think there is—an' a lot of other fellows think so, too! It's a rotten shame that we should be compelled to mix with the son of a swindling Lancashire manufacturer who won't pay his debts!"

"Hear, hear!" said Gulliver and Bell.

"You—you cad!" roared Handforth. "H—"

"Hold on, Handy!" I interrupted. "Let Goodwin deal with the rotters!"

Dick Goodwin had turned very pale, and now he took a step forward.

"See here!" he exclaimed quietly.

"Was it my father you were calling a swindler?"

"Yes, it was!" said Pullwood. "He is a swindler, too—"

Crash!

Dick Goodwin's fist flew straight out from his shoulder, and it landed with terrific force upon Pullwood's nose. Ralph Leslie gave a terrific howl, staggered back, and measured his length on the ground. His nose was bleeding profusely.

"Yaroooooh! he bellowed. "Ow—ow!"

"Aye, and there'll be another punch if you say a word against my father again!" exclaimed Goodwin hotly. "By gum! I won't have my father insulted!"

"Good for you, Goodwin!"

"That's the style!"

"You—you miserable hound!" snarled Fullwood, getting to his feet. "I'll have you kicked out of the school for this! I'll have you pitched out neck an' crop—"

"One moment!"

Fullwood turned, gasping. For Nelson Lee had come up in the rear, and the Housemaster-detective stood there, looking very stern.

"I'm glad you've come, sir!" exclaimed Fullwood savagely. "Did you see what happened? That cad suddenly flew at me like a tiger—"

"I saw everything that took place, Fullwood," said Nelson Lee quietly. "Goodwin deliberately attacked you—and he ought to know that it is against all the school rules to fight in the Triangle. Goodwin, you will write me fifty lines for breaking the school rules."

"Yes, sir," said Goodwin.

"Fifty lines!" shouted Fullwood. "Fifty lines for knocking me down—"

"And you, Fullwood, will write me five hundred lines!" continued Nelson Lee grimly.

Everybody roared, delighted at Nelson Lee's keen sense of justice.

"Five—five hundred lines!" gasped Fullwood. "But—but—"

"You deliberately insulted Goodwin, and he had justification for punching you," said Nelson Lee. "I do not want to hear another word, Fullwood—and let me tell you this. If ever I hear you uttering insulting words about Goodwin again, I shall punish you with much greater severity. I have seen the paragraph in the paper which has caused you such amusement, and

my sympathy is all with Goodwin's father. For you to sneer and make fun of the gentleman's misfortune is despicable in the extreme, and you ought to be thoroughly ashamed of yourself!"

Nelson Lee walked off, followed by a cheer from the crowd. And Dick Goodwin, without a word, walked straight into the Ancient House.

But the new fellow in the Remove had made three enemies—Fullwood and Gulliver and Bell. They were bitter against him now, and they would seize any opportunity to do him harm.

As events were destined to turn out, Fullwood & Co. would have their chance very soon.

CHAPTER 6.

Fifty on the Jack!

TAP-TAP!

Tubbs, the pageboy of the Ancient House at St. Frank's, rapped lightly on the door of the study occupied by Dick Goodwin. But there was no response.

Tap-tap!

Tubbs used his knuckles again, and this time a key turned in the lock, and the door opened, revealing the lad from Lancashire himself. Goodwin looked rather surprised when he saw the uniformed figure standing before him.

"Oh, I thought it was some of the fellows trying to be funny!" he remarked. Well, Tubbs, what's wrong?"

"Nothing, Master Goodwin," replied the page-boy. "But I've been told to come here and let you know that there's a parcel for you at the station."

"A parcel?" said Goodwin eagerly.

"Yes, Master Goodwin. I thought you might like to know about it, because it won't be brought up to the school, in the ordinary way of delivery, until to-morrow."

"Oh, I see!" said Goodwin. "Thanks! I'll go down for the parcel at once, Tubbs."

He closed the door, and the page-boy turned away. As he did so, he became aware of the fact that a stout form was in the vicinity, standing quite still, in an intent attitude. The form belonged to Patty Little, of the Remove, and Patty's ears were wide open and his eyes were gleaming.

"What's that you were saying, Tubby?" he demanded eagerly.

"I was just having a word with Master Goodwin," said Tubbs.

"I know you were—talking about grub, weren't you?"

Tubbs grinned.

"You see, sir, there's a parcel at the station for Master Goodwin," he said, "and I just told Master Goodwin about it. I know that these here parcels are best collected when they come, seeing that food won't keep fresh for long."

"Food—eh?" said Patty Little. "Good egg! So Goodwin has got a tuck hamper from home—eh?"

"I don't rightly know whether it's a hamper, sir—"

"It doesn't matter what it is, as long as there's grub inside!" declared Patty. "All right, Tubby, you can slide off."

Tubbs grinned again and walked away. He knew well enough that Patty Little was hoping that he would be able to have a share of the good things which were contained in Dick Goodwin's parcel.

As a matter of fact, Patty Little was hungry.

Not that this was very surprising. He was generally in a state of considerable hunger—it was an extraordinary thing for him to be satisfied at any time. His appetite was enormous; it was quite possible for him to demolish as much as any three ordinary juniors could comfortably manage.

It was evening now, and tea was over in the junior studies. Patty had shared quite a decent spread with the

Trotwood twins, whose study he shared. But Patty was still hungry; he was feeling in fine fettle to share in the contents of a tuck hamper.

And Dick Goodwin would be going down to the station almost at once to collect his parcel!

Patty decided to be on the spot. He would wait until Goodwin went out, and stroll down the lane and hang about until Goodwin came back. Then he would get into conversation with the new boy, make himself extremely pleasant and casually suggest that he was hungry. If Goodwin had any decency in him he would invite him to share the tuck.

So, two or three minutes later, Patty was hanging about the Triangle, keeping a sharp watch on the door of the Ancient House. The Triangle was rather deserted, for most of the juniors were away on Little Side, either engaged in practice or watching the others.

The St. Frank's juniors were booked to play Bannington Grammar School the following afternoon, when we should do our utmost to wipe up our old rivals. As skipper of the Remove eleven, I was making my men spend almost all their available time at practice.

And, while I was on Little Side, Patty Little remained in the Triangle, his thoughts far away from football. He was waiting for Dick Goodwin to emerge, and he did not have to wait long.

For five minutes later the boy from Lancashire appeared. He came hurrying out of the Ancient House, across the Triangle, and then disappeared down the lane towards Bellion.

"Good!" muttered Patty. "He'll be back again in about half an hour, and by that time I shall just be hungry enough to enjoy a good feed. Goodwin isn't such a bad sort, and he's bound to take pity on me when he sees that I'm starving!"

Patty strolled down the lane, and

decided that it would be best for him to wait near the stile which led into Belton Wood. This would give him quite a decent walk with Goodwin up to the school, during which time he could make his suggestion with regard to sharing the tuck.

Fatty took up his position as he had planned, and prepared to wait for the return of Dick Goodwin.

After a long wait he grew impatient, and continually glanced at his watch. But the minutes passed, and there was no sign of Dick Goodwin's return. It was growing dusk, too. In the lane, where the trees met thickly overhead, the gloom was quite deep, and it was only possible to see for a hundred yards or so in either direction.

The foliage of the trees formed a complete canopy overhead, although this canopy was not nearly so dense as it had been a month earlier. For the leaves were now falling, and they were thick underfoot on both sides of the road.

At last Fatty Little looked up with much satisfaction, for now, down the lane, he could see a solitary figure swinging along in the direction of the school. The figure was that of a junior schoolboy, and he was carrying a somewhat bulky parcel under his arm.

"Good business!" muttered Fatty. "It's Goodwin all right, and that parcel seems to be a pretty hefty one. Great doughnuts, I hope there's a plum cake and some jam-tarts, and—and—"

Fatty Little did not dare to think further. He waited, with all his thoughts centred upon the parcel.

And then suddenly Fatty stared harder than ever.

For something of a rather remarkable nature was taking place.

As Goodwin came swinging along the lane, two men suddenly emerged from the wood near by.

They came out in a determined manner, and it was quite obvious that they were not tramps. Both men were well dressed, and they jumped into the

front of Dick Goodwin's path. The junior came to a halt and eyed them uncertainly.

"Just a minute, youngster," said one of the men, in a soft but grim voice.

"By gum!" muttered Goodwin. "I'm in a hurry," he went on aloud. "I can't stop!"

"Yes, I think you can, young man," interrupted the man, grasping Goodwin by the shoulder. "That little parcel of yours. I think it would be better in our keeping."

"Aye, but I'm not going to let you have this parcel!" shouted Goodwin, clutching the parcel steadily. "If you touch me—"

"Don't be silly, young man," interrupted one of the strangers. "Take my advice and give in quietly. It won't do you any good to resist. Just hand that parcel over and we won't hurt you. But if you refuse we shall take it by force."

Dick Goodwin looked round him desperately.

"Help!" he shouted, in a tone of alarm.

"By thunder!" snapped one of the men. "Keep the kid quiet!"

They both stepped forward at the same time, and the next moment Dick Goodwin was fighting desperately. He had only one arm to use, for the other was clinging tightly to the parcel. And he hit out, and just for a moment or two he held his assailants at bay.

But it could not last; the men would overpower him in less than a minute.

Fatty Little could see exactly what was happening, and all his indignation came rising to the surface. His eyes gleamed and he clenched his fist.

"The rotters—the thieving, burgling bounders!" he gasped. "They're going to pluck Goodwin's tuck!"

This thought was absolutely appalling. He had been waiting all this time to participate in the grub, and now it was to be wrenched away from Dick Goodwin before his very eyes. Fatty Little went tearing down the lane

towards the spot where Dick Goodwin was fighting with his two enemies.

"All right, old man!" shouted Fatty, "hold on for just a tick—I'm here!"

"Help!" panted Goodwin. "Call the others; we shan't be able to fight these men alone!"

Fatty Little received a brain-wave.

"It's all right—don't worry!" he yelled as he came tearing along. "I say, you chaps, come on—show yourselves! Between the twelve of us we'll soon give these two rotters what for!"

The two men looked round in a startled manner. They saw Fatty rushing towards them, and it seemed that other juniors were near by. And they gave up the task as hopeless. Even as Fatty was just rushing up the men released Dick Goodwin and dodged helter-skelter into the dense recesses of Belton Wood.

When Fatty arrived on the scene Dick Goodwin was alone—hot, breathless and victorious.

The precious parcel was still in his possession!

CHAPTER 7.

Fullwood Gets Stung!

DICK GOODWIN looked at Fatty Little with a grateful expression in his eyes.

"Aye, but that was grandly!" he exclaimed, taking a deep breath. "You came up just at the right moment. In another two minutes those men would have stolen this parcel from me."

Fatty nodded.

"That's what I thought," he said. "I jolly well wasn't going to let them pinch your parcel, Goodwin!"

"It was jolly good of you, Fatty, to come up like that," said Dick. "This parcel is very valuable to me, and I wouldn't have lost it for anything. The scoundrels! They must have been waiting for me. But fortunately you were near at hand."

"I took good care of that," said Fatty. "I was waiting for you, as it

happens, Goodwin. By the way, do you know who those rotters were?"

The new boy seemed to hesitate.

"I—well, I don't exactly know them, Little," he replied slowly. "They—they—Aye, lad, but there's no sense in us standing here and talking. Those men might come back, tha' knows. We'd better be walking up to the school—and it would be just as well if we walk fast!"

"That's my idea," said Fatty. "Well, never mind about those two men—they've bunked now, and I don't care a hang about them, in any case. That parcel seems pretty heavy. I'll carry it, if you like."

"Oh, I can manage it, thank you," said Goodwin.

"Quite a decent amount of tuck in there, I suppose?" asked Fatty casually. Dick Goodwin smiled.

"There's nothing to eat in the parcel," he replied. "I'm sorry to disappoint you, Fatty. There are other things in this parcel—a little electric dynamo, and some things which I had especially made for me—metal things, and—"

"Metal!" roared Fatty Little, coming to a full stop in the centre of the road. "Metal!"

"Yes—"

"Doesn't that parcel contain grub?" demanded the fat boy warmly.

"No!"

"Great doughnuts!" said Fatty, in dismay. "Why, you—you spoofer! You—you swindler!"

"But, see thee here, lad—"

"I don't want to see anything!" roared Fatty indignantly. "I've been waiting for hours out in the lane here—waiting for you to come back! I thought that parcel was full of grub, you know—I thought it was full of good things to eat! Tubbs told me that it was a tuck hamper—at least, that it was grub—"

"I am afraid Tubbs made a mistake, Little," said Dick Goodwin. "I'm awfully sorry, of course. If I'd known

that you wanted tuck I should have brought some up from the village. But you can't be hungry, surely! We only had tea just over an hour ago—"

"Hungry!" echoed Patty weakly. "I'm starving, you ass! We were rather short in our study to-day—we only had one loaf of bread, and half a dozen jam tarts, and nine doughnuts, and two tins of sardines, and three pork pies!"

"Is that all?" asked Goodwin, with a smile. "Well, a third share of that lot seems to be pretty generous—and I expect you had more than a third!"

"Well, as a matter of fact, I had just over half," said Patty. "The Troilwoods couldn't eat any more, you know. But what's that amount to, anyhow? I was almost starving when I'd done—and now I'm feeling quite faint!"

"Well, let's get up to the school!" said Dick Goodwin, with a chuckle. "I don't suppose Mrs. Hake will be closed—and, if you like, I'll take you in there and stand you a feed."

Patty Little's face cleared, and he beamed.

"Ripping!" said Patty. "You're a brick! Come on—let's buck up! Mrs. Hake is pretty independent nowadays, and she doesn't keep open very late. We shall have to buzz!"

And Patty Little and Dick Goodwin hurried up the lane towards the school. Patty's disappointment was now completely dispelled. It didn't much matter to him where the grub came from so long as he got it.

Meanwhile, interesting events were taking place in Belton Wood itself.

As it happened, Ralph Leslie Fullwood, the cad of the Remove, was coming along the footpath through the wood. He had been on a visit to Bannington, and was on his way home. He was taking the short cut through the wood to Belton Lane.

Fullwood was not exactly in a pleasant temper. He had visited Bannington in order to interview a bookmaker—for Ralph Leslie Fullwood in-

dulged in gambling now and again. But the bookmaker failed to turn up, and Fullwood was in a nasty temper. He was angry because he had wished to place two pounds on a "dead cert." On the morrow, probably, he would be very pleased that the bookie had not turned up—for Fullwood would certainly be two pounds the richer.

But, at the present moment, he was in rather a savage mood as he strode along the footpath through the wood.

But he suddenly paused and looked keenly ahead, for he had heard the crackling of twigs, and he knew that somebody was approaching. To his surprise, he saw two strange men running along the footpath.

In the gloom Fullwood could not see them very distinctly, and he thought it quite possible that they were tramps, or suchlike. And Fullwood, who was dressed with his usual splendour, felt somewhat nervous. Right there, in the centre of the wood, it would be easy enough for two men to set upon him and rob him. And Fullwood was not possessed of much courage. He decided that it would be far better for him to dodge out of sight until these men had passed.

So he slipped back between two bushes, and found himself in a little clear spot. Fullwood waited there, motionless.

He expected the two men to come running by within a few seconds; but this did not happen. He listened intently, and he came to the conclusion that the men had slackened their speed considerably, and they were now walking along the footpath in a more sedate manner. In point of fact, they came to a halt quite near the spot where Fullwood was hiding, and they were talking—rather breathlessly.

"Just our infernal luck!" snapped one of the men, panting hard.

"Well, we had to come away—it was no good stopping there, with a swarm of kids around us!" exclaimed the other man. "It's not a bit of good,

Colmore; we can't interfere with the kid when there are any other fellows in the vicinity. It's got to be private, or not at all. You must realise that."

"Oh, I realise it right enough," said the other man, who appeared to be named Colmore. "It was just a piece of rotten luck, Naggs. In another minute we should have had that parcel from Goodwin!"

Mr. Naggs nodded.

"Yes. We ought to have got lower down the lane, and then there wouldn't have been any interruption. A cursed nuisance—that's what it was! Perhaps we shall have better luck next time."

"We may not get another chance to interfere with the kid in the lane," said Colmore savagely.

Pullwood stood listening, and he was now filled with wonder and curiosity. What did it mean? Who were these two men, and what was the parcel to which they referred? Why had they attempted to hold up Goodwin in the lane?

Pullwood was more than usually interested, because he hated Goodwin, and he would willingly have gone out of his way to do any harm possible to the Lancashire boy. He was quite disappointed to learn that the efforts of these two strangers had been in vain.

"We shan't wait until we get another chance of meeting Goodwin in the lane!" said Mr. Naggs grimly. "The next time we shall act in a different way, Colmore. We can't leave things to chance—there's no time to waste, and we've got to hurry up with this work. It won't do for us to get known in the district—we've got to perform our task, and then clear out."

"It's all very well to talk in that strain," said the other man. "But how on earth can we set to work? The first thing is to search that study in the school—as you know. And what chance have we got of doing that? It's one thing to talk about these things, and another thing to do them."

"Yes, but we can——"

"Yow—yarcocooch!" came a wild howl from near by.

The two men started violently, and stared into the bushes. That yell had come from a spot only a yard or two away, and the two men were thoroughly startled. They had believed themselves to be absolutely alone, and now it was quite obvious that such was not the case.

As a matter of fact, Pullwood had met with an unfortunate accident. Listening to the strangers, he had noticed that a tree stood just behind him, and Pullwood had leaned against it.

But he had failed to notice that an old wasp was crawling slowly along the tree. As Pullwood leaned against the tree the seat of his trousers came into contact with the wasp.

The next second the wasp retaliated, and its sting penetrated deeply into Pullwood's flesh.

It was a sharp sting, and most unexpected, and Pullwood simply yelled with pain and surprise. He jumped about a yard in the air, and then sat down with such violence that the wasp was annihilated once and for all. But it had done its damage—and Pullwood was in great pain.

"Oh, by gad!" he moaned, rolling over. "Yow—ow! I'm stung!"

And, as he lay there, the bushes parted, and two startled-looking men came into view. They entered the little clearing, and stood over Pullwood with grim expressions. The next moment Pullwood was grasped and yanked to his feet.

"So you were listening, were you?" snapped Mr. Naggs viciously. "All right, young shaver——"

"I've been stung!" howled Pullwood. "I—I sat on a rotten wasp!"

Colmore could hardly prevent a smile coming into his face.

"You sat on a wasp, eh?" he repeated. "That was a silly thing to do, kid!"

"I—I didn't do it on purpose, you fool!" roared Pullwood. "I—I leaned against that tree, and I didn't know the wasp was there!"

"What were you doing here, anyhow?" asked Mr. Naggs.

Pullwood glared.

"What the thunder has it got to do with you?" he demanded tartly. "I was comin' through the wood—that's all!"

"Oh, you were coming through the wood!"

"Yes, I was!" snapped Pullwood. "You don't happen to have bought it, I suppose?"

"I don't want any sauce——"

"An' I'm not goin' to be questioned by you!" interrupted Pullwood. "I've as much right in this wood as you have—an' you'd better not try any bullyin' tricks with me!"

The two men looked at one another.

"There's no need to get wild, young man," said Mr. Naggs, in a more amiable tone. "Oh, by gad!" cried Pullwood. "This—this sting is hurtin' me frightfully!"

Pullwood proceeded to dance up and down, in a vain endeavour to alleviate the pain. But it was a severe sting, and it was causing him considerable agony.

Pullwood was cunning, and he wanted to let these men know that he hated Dick Goodwin—for, if possible, Pullwood was quite prepared to lend the strangers a hand. It was obvious, from their conversation, that they were anxious to get into Goodwin's study for some reason of their own. Pullwood did not see why he should not take a part in the game, for he, too, was keen upon finding out the secret of the new junior's study.

"Oh, by gad!" he groaned. "This sting is awful! When I get back to the school all the fellows will howl—particularly that cad Goodwin!"

"Goodwin?" repeated Mr. Naggs sharply.

"Yes, the new kid—that rotter from

Lancashire!" said Pullwood savagely. "The beast ought never to have come to St. Frank's—he's not our class, in any case! If I could do anything to get him pitched out I'd jolly soon get busy on the job!"

The two men exchanged glances.

"You don't like Master Goodwin, then?" inquired Colmore.

"Like him?" exclaimed Pullwood savagely. "I hate the rotter—I detest him!"

"Well, it's none of our business," said Mr. Naggs carelessly. "Boys don't interest us much—unless they happen to be sporting fellows. Mr. Colmore and I are rather keen on anything in a sporting line, you know. It's our business, as a matter of fact, although you needn't tell that to anybody."

"Sportin'?" repeated Pullwood. "You aren't bookies, are you?"

Mr. Naggs smiled.

"Maybe we are, and maybe we're not!" he said non-committally. "But we like billiards, or snooker, or a nice game of poker now and again. You look a bit of a sport, my lad—perhaps you indulge in these games occasionally?"

Pullwood nodded.

"Rather!" he said. "I've got two pals who are keen on them, too. We're not good little Georgies, like a lot of the other fellows. We believe in enjoyin' life. There's nothin' like it!"

Mr. Naggs nodded and smiled.

"Quite right, too, young gentleman," he said. "Maybe we could arrange a little meeting? What do you say to the idea?"

"I'm agreeable!" said Pullwood. "Oh, my bat! This sting is simply frightful, you know!"

"Well, it will probably be better by to-morrow afternoon," said Mr. Naggs. "Now, let me see! To-morrow is Wednesday. I reckon it's a half-holiday at St. Frank's, isn't it?"

"Yes," said Pullwood.

"There's a nice little inn just on the

outskirts of Bannington," said Mr. Naggs reflectively. "A place called the Foaming Bowl. Quite a homely, comfortable inn, it is. What do you say to our meeting there at three o'clock to-morrow afternoon? We might be able to have a little game of poker, or nap, between us."

Fullwood looked quite pleased for a moment.

"That's all right," he said. "Nothin' I'd like better, except to have this sting seen to. Confound that rotten wasp! Well, we'll say three o'clock to-morrow afternoon, at the Foaming Bowl Inn."

"Right!" said Mr. Naggs. "We'll be there. We shall have to be going now, and you'd better get that sting tended, Master—Master——"

"My name's Fullwood," said the cad of the Remove.

"Right, you are, Master Fullwood," said Mr. Naggs. "We'll look upon that as settled. See you to-morrow."

Fullwood departed from the two strangers a few moments later. He was in great pain, and he wanted to arrive at the school as quickly as possible, in order to have the sting soothed in some way.

He hurried through the deep gloom of the wood. He found that it was impossible for him to walk in a natural attitude. He was compelled to hobble and even then every step caused him further pain. It was a stiff, unnatural stride, and Fullwood was very conscious of the fact. He hoped against hope that he would be able to get into the Ancient House without being seen.

He decided that it would be better to make straight for the window of Study A, and to get in by that means. Then it would not be necessary for him to cross the lobby to go down the Remove Passage, where there would certainly be juniors about to see him.

But Fullwood's hopes were dashed to the ground, for when he arrived in the Triangle he found not one or two juniors there, but at least a score.

Within a few seconds fellows were looking at him and passing comments.

"What's the matter with the ass?" exclaimed Handforth. "What's he walking in that fat-headed way for?"

"Goodness knows!" said McClure. "Perhaps he's torn his trousers somewhere!"

"You ass!" grinned McClure. "It's not that! He's hurt in some way. I remember Merrell walking like that last term—after he had been whopped by the Head."

Handforth & Co. strolled across the Triangle and intercepted Fullwood before he could reach the Ancient House. Tommy Watson and Sir Montie Tregellis-West and I were there, too. We had just come in from Little Side.

"What's the matter, Fully? You seem to be in pain," said Handforth. "What's wrong with your elegant walk?"

"Go an' eat coke!" snapped Fullwood savagely.

"A bit short-tempered, aren't you?" said Handforth, glaring. "If you can't answer me any better than that, my son, I'll give you a dot on the nose! You look as though you'd been stung!"

"I have!" snarled Fullwood.

"Eh?"

"I've been stung, you ass!" roared Fullwood. "A rotten wasp stung me in the rear, where I sat down——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Handforth & Co. howled, and many other juniors, who had heard Fullwood's remark, howled also.

"Very funny, isn't it?" snapped Fullwood fiercely.

"Yes, rather!" grinned De Valerie.

"Poor old Fully! You'll have to take your meals standing up all day to-morrow."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Let me get past, you fools!" snarled Fullwood.

"Is it swelling?" asked Reginald

Pitt, with exaggerated concern. "It's rather an awkward place——"

"Stand out of the way, confound you!" shouted Fullwood thickly. "I'm in agony, and I want to get indoors as quickly as I can."

"That's all right!" said Handforth, winking at his chums. "You want a rest, Fully; that'll put you right. You need to sit down—like that!"

With a quick movement, Handforth jerked his foot from under him. The next moment Ralph Leslie bumped to the ground with a jar, and he sat right upon the thing.

"Yaroooooh!" he howled wildly.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Fullwood's plight did not seem to concern the juniors very much. At all events, they roared with laughter as Fullwood wriggled on the ground.

"Let him get up!" I grinned. "A wasp sting is pretty painful, you know."

"Well, he's only got what he deserves," said Handforth. "As a matter of fact, Fullwood deserves about a dozen stings all over him, just to punish him for all his misdeeds!"

Fullwood didn't say any more. He jumped to his feet painfully, glared round, and then made a dash for the Ancient House, hobbling along in a manner which caused the juniors to burst into fresh roars of laughter. They certainly did not sympathise with the unfortunate leader of Study A.

CHAPTER E.

Saints v. Grammarians!

EVERYBODY ready?"

I asked that question briskly as I came out into the Triangle from the Ancient House doorway. It was the following afternoon, and I was attired in football togs, with a light overcoat thrown over my other things. The weather was fine, and there was very little wind blowing. It was, in

fact, quite an ideal afternoon for our big match against Bannington Grammar School.

"We're waiting for you, you ass!" said Handforth.

"Good!" I replied. "Let's get a move on, then!"

The Triangle was quite thronged with juniors, a good many of them being attired in football clothes, the same as myself. We were all going over to Bannington on our bicycles, and there were quite a number of other fellows who were coming along just to see the match. Among them I noticed Ralph Leslie Fullwood, who had now recovered from his sting, and Culliver and Bell, of Study A. The three nuts of the Ancient House were leaning on their bicycles, too.

"Hallo!" I exclaimed, looking at Fullwood curiously. "Are you coming over to see the match?"

"I thought about doing so," said Fullwood languidly.

"I'm glad to see it!" I said. "It's something new for you to take an interest in footer, Fully. It's never too late to mend, you know!"

A few moments later we started down the lane in a long procession, on the way to Bannington.

The team I had chosen for this match was made up as follows:

Handforth; Talmadge, Hart; Pitt, Watson, Yorke; De Valerie, Tregellis-West, myself, Somerton and Christine.

The Bannington Grammar School fellows were rather hot stuff, and I was a bit anxious concerning this match. I badly wanted it to be a win for St. Frank's. The Grammarians were our old rivals.

In due course we arrived at the Bannington Grammar School, and we were warmly welcomed by our opponents.

The skipper of the eleven frankly told me that he and his men were intent upon wiping us up completely, and sending us back to St. Frank's with our tails between our legs. To this remark I replied that we did not happen to be monkeys, and that, as a

matter of fact, we didn't intend to be wiped up.

Those Juniors who had come with us stood round the ropes with the Grammarians—ready to yell themselves hoarse when we scored. Fullwood & Co. stood by themselves, watching languidly, and with only a superficial show of interest.

"A bally bore—that's what I call it!" yawned Fullwood. "Why don't they start?"

"They're just tassin' up now," said Gulliver, who took some slight interest in the game. "Hallo! Good! Nipper has won the toss!"

"Has he?" said Fullwood. "A fat lot I care!"

"What about the appointment at the Peering Bowl Inn?" asked Bell. Fullwood had told his pals all about his meeting with Naggs and Colmore. "We musn't miss that, Fully!"

"My dear chap, there's over three-quarters of an hour yet," said Fullwood. "It's no good our gettin' there before time."

"Ob, well, it's all right," said Gulliver. "We shall nearly have time to see the first half before then."

They lounged against the ropes, watching idly. And just at that moment the referee gave his whistle a shrill blast.

"Good!" exclaimed McClure eagerly. "They're off!"

"Go it, St. Frank's!" roared Church. "Show us what you're made of!"

"On the ball, you chaps!" roared the Grammarians.

The game started well, although the home team did most of the attacking. For two or three minutes the ball was within the Remove's half of the field continuously, and Handforth was dodging about from post to post as though he were on hot bricks.

The Grammarians' centre-forward was a pretty keen player, and when the ball came to his feet he did not lose a second. He dashed forward, beating Watson and Pitt fairly easily.

And then he steadied himself and took a mighty kick

Slam!

The ball drove straight for the net, low and fast.

"Goal!" howled the Grammarians in triumph.

But those Juniors who shouted were somewhat too previous. For Handforth, flinging himself down full length, just managed to tip the ball round the post over the goal-line.

"Oh!"

"Hard lines!"

"Corner! Corner!"

Handforth picked himself up, looking pleased but breathless.

"Good old Handy!" I shouted. "That was topping of you! I thought the ball was in that time!"

"Not much!" said Handforth. "I'm not letting the ball get between these posts to-day, my son!"

But Handforth was wrong.

The Grammarian outside-right took the corner kick, and he lifted the ball beautifully, and it went skimming across the mouth of our goal just near the bar. Handforth punched at it, but he just tipped the ball and sent it spinning. Then one of the Grammarian's heads bobbed up, and the next second the ball was at the back of the net.

"Goal!"

"Oh, good!"

"Goal! Goal!"

The Grammarians fairly howled with delight. Handforth turned round and glared at the ball.

"Well, I'm hanged!" he exclaimed blankly.

"I thought you weren't going to let the ball between the posts this afternoon, Handy?" I grinned. "You can't be too sure in this game, you know!"

"But—but I—I don't understand!" gasped Handforth. "I sent the blessed thing out, you know——"

"Yes, and somebody else put it in!" I retorted. "Well, never mind! We'll equalise before long."

I kicked off, and the ball was passed

quickly in Tregella-West, and Sir Montie slipped it over to De Valerie. But our outside-right was a trifle too slow, and he was robbed of the ball just as he was racing down the touch-line. The leather swung back into mid-field, and from there a long shot sent it spinning over the St. Frank's goal.

Handforth took the kick, and it was a hefty one. The ball came half over the field, dropping practically at the feet of Somerton.

"Go at it!" roared the Remove fellows round the ropes. "Now's your chance, Sammy!"

The Duke of Somerton lost no time. He streaked down the field, and there were only the Grammarian backs to stop him. But one of them was rushing forward in a most determined manner. At the last moment, however, Somerton gave the leather a deft kick, and passed it beautifully on to me. I dribbled past the other Grammarian back, and then I had an open goal in front of me.

"Shoot! Shoot!"

"Go it, Nipper!"

Everybody watched breathlessly. The Grammarian goalkeeper came rushing out to meet me—and this was a bad mistake on his part. I pretended to shoot, but instead I passed the ball swiftly to De Valerie, who had come up on the wing. It met his foot, and he sent in a perfect oblique shot which just skimmed under the bar and went into the net.

"Goal!"

"Oh, lovely!"

"Hurrah!"

The other players came crowding round De Valerie and me, and they shook our hands warmly.

"Topping, dear boy!" said the Duke of Somerton. "We've equalised now!"

"You had the biggest share in that goal, my son," I said. "If we keep on at this rate we shall wipe up the Grammarians. What we've got to do is to keep up the pace."

"Rather!"

We lined up again, feeling extremely cheerful. But the Grammarians were now looking grim. We could see that they were determined to gain the lead again as soon as they could.

Round the ropes the onlookers were talking together excitedly.

"Blessed lot of fuss!" remarked Fullwood, yawning. "I'm hanged if I can see anything to go dotty about!"

"Oh, hang it all, Fully," protested Gulliver, "it's a ripplin' game! I'm not much of a football enthusiast, but I like to see a fast game like this. Our chaps are playin' up well!"

"It's nearly a quarter to three, so we shall be goin' soon," said Fullwood. "I'm fed up with this already. A nice quiet game of billiards—with a few bob on the result—is more in my line."

"Hear, hear!" said Bell.

Gulliver did not seem to agree, although he said nothing. He watched the game with interest, and followed the movements of the ball keenly after the game had restarted.

It was obvious that our opponents were out to gain the lead again. They came to the attack fiercely, and with very fine combination. Again and again they attempted to get the ball in the net, but every time Handforth was ready. And he was ably assisted by Talmadge and Hart, the backs. Not once was our defence beaten, although there were many narrow shaves.

And, just before half-time, there was a piece of excitement.

Bob Christine, on the left wing, managed to get away with the ball. He streaked down the field near the touch-line controlling the leather at his feet in a beautiful style. He was racing down to the corner in order to send in a centre.

Meanwhile, a Grammarian back was hot on Christine's trail, and he was robbed of the ball at the very last moment. But in doing so the back put the leather over the goal-line.

"Corner, corner!"

A corner it was, and Christine took the kick. He sent it out rather wide.

and I thought the ball was going to be cleared. But, somehow or other, Sir Montie dashed in, and he caught the ball beautifully. It simply went into the net like greased lightning. There was absolutely no chance of saving it.

"Goal!"

"Oh, hurrah!"

"St. Frank's! St. Frank's!"

The Grammarians were silent. It was nearly half-time, and there was very little hope of equalising before the whistle went. And their visitors were already one goal up! It was a bit startling for them, after they had expected to beat us hollow.

"Good old Montie!" I exclaimed, putting him on the back. "That was a ripping goal, old man!"

"Dear old fellow, I simply couldn't help it!" said Sir Montie modestly.

"Well, it looks like a victory for us now; but we mustn't be too sure about it," I said.

It was just as well, for immediately after the interval the Grammarians started attacking with terrific energy, and they were rewarded with a goal within the first five minutes.

The score now stood at 2-2. Again and again the home team attempted to add to their score, but they failed to do so.

And again and again the Saints stormed the Grammarian citadel, attempting to get the ball into the net. But the minutes passed rapidly, and still the score remained the same.

"It's going to be a draw!" declared Church. "I was hoping for a jolly fine win to-day!"

"There's plenty of time yet," said McClure. "We've got another twenty minutes!"

"But there won't be any more scoring if things go on like— My ball! Just look at Nipper!"

I had succeeded in getting away with the ball, and I shot down the field, and took no notice of various shouts of "Off-side!" from the Grammarian goalkeepers. I knew that I was outside,

and I kept on. The backs closed in on me in a most determined fashion, and I decided upon a long shot.

I kicked hard, and the ball went whizzing towards the top right-hand corner. The goalie made a desperate effort to save, but the ball eluded his hand and landed in the back of the net.

"Goal!"

The St. Frank's juniors simply shrieked themselves hoarse.

But this was absolutely nothing compared to the yell which went up about two minutes later. For De Valerie succeeded in adding another goal to the score, and that was by an individual effort which I have seldom seen surpassed. He took the ball right down the field himself, beating man after man, and finally slamming the ball into the net. The goalie was beaten to the wicket!

After that the game was a foregone conclusion. The Grammarians lost heart completely, and the rest of the match was easy for us. When the whistle finally went we had beaten the Grammarians on their own ground by four goals to two. It was a grand victory for the St. Frank's Remove.

CHAPTER 9.

Fullwood's Premier!

MEANWHILE, Ralph Leslie Fullwood and his two studymates were in the little rear parlour of the Foaming Bowl Inn, about half a mile down the quiet country road which passed the Grammarians' football ground.

The nuts of Study A had presented themselves at three o'clock to the minute. And there, standing in the little private doorway of the Inn, were Mr. Colmore and Mr. Nagga. Both men looked quite pleased when they saw their visitors approaching, and they welcomed Fullwood & Co. warmly.

"I knew you would turn up, young

gentlemen," said Mr. Naggs amiably. "Well, we're going to have a nice little time this afternoon."

"Billiards, I suppose?" asked Fullwood languidly.

Mr. Naggs shook his head.

"No, not billiards," he said. "They haven't got a table here. I vote we go into a little back parlour and have a game of poker. If you've got plenty of money you don't mind losing a bit, and if you're hard up you can't lose much! And you always stand a chance of winning some!"

"That suits me," remarked Bell. "I'm not very flush to-day, as it happens."

"Then perhaps you'll relieve me of a quid or so," smiled Mr. Colmore. "Come in, boys!"

They passed into the stone-paved passage of the inn, and then made their way into the comfortable back parlour—where they were quite private, and free from observation.

The game of poker was quite interesting—from the point of view of Fullwood and Bell. Gulliver was not quite so impressed with it. The nuts were all good players, and Mr. Colmore and Mr. Naggs soon discovered that they could not teach their visitors much.

After an hour's play, Fullwood was the richer by two pounds five shillings, and Bell had raked in thirty-six. Gulliver, on the other hand, was the loser by fifteen shillings—and he did not like it at all. He gave Fullwood an expressive look—meaning to convey the suggestion that the spoils should be shared later on.

"Well, I think we've had enough of poker, for the time being," said Mr. Naggs, stretching himself. "It's nearly half-past four, boys, and I could do with a cup of tea. What do you say?"

"Oh, I don't mind," said Fullwood. "But what's wrong with the game?"

"I dare say you find it very much to your liking," smiled Mr. Naggs. "However, I want to have a chat with you on another subject. And we can

chat during tea. They sell quite decent stuff here, and we can have a good feed."

The tea was ordered. As soon as the beverage was poured out, and the juniors were sipping at their cups, Mr. Naggs opened the subject uppermost in his mind. He looked at Fullwood thoughtfully as he selected a slice of bread-and-butter from the plate.

"By the way, Master Fullwood," he said, "there's a new fellow at your school, isn't there—a new boy in your Form?"

"Goodwin, you mean?" said Fullwood.

"Yes; that's the name," said Mr. Naggs. "Goodwin."

"You speak as though you've only just heard the name," said Fullwood, "but I bet you know a fat lot more about Goodwin than we do!"

Mr. Naggs smiled.

"I can see that you're a fly young gentleman," he said genially. "As a matter of fact, I do know a bit about Master Goodwin—a good bit. I dare say you've noticed that he's secretive, and that he keeps to himself?"

"He does!" said Gulliver. "He stays in his own study nearly the whole time, and he keeps it locked and barred, as though the place held about a thousand guilty secrets!"

"Well, I don't know about a thousand," said Mr. Naggs. "But that study of Goodwin's certainly holds one secret——"

"One guilty secret?" asked Bell, looking up.

"Well, it's not a very innocent one, at all events!" said Mr. Naggs grimly. "That boy comes from Lancashire, and his father is one of the biggest scoundrels who ever trod this earth!"

"By gad!" said Fullwood. "I thought as much!"

"An absolute rogue!" proceeded Mr. Naggs calmly. "I can't go into all the details, but I'll just put you in possession of a few facts. For example, Master Goodwin was sent to St. Frank's so that he could get on with

his underhand work without being interfered with. You see, boys, it's this way."

Mr. Naggs sipped his tea, and then leaned back in his chair.

"This boy's father, Mr. Richard Goodwin, is a manufacturer at Hollingwood, near Oldham," he went on. "Mr. Colmore and I were employed at Goodwin's factory, and we held excellent positions there. Well, we were pretty friendly, and we got our heads together, and planned out—after a lot of experiments—a new dye. This dye is our own idea entirely, and is something quite new to the commercial world."

"I see," said Fullwood, "Carry on."

"We trusted Mr. Goodwin, and we placed the formula for the dye in his hands, asking him what he could do with it," continued Mr. Naggs. "He promised us that he would push it forward, and that we should be rich men within three months. Well, Master Fullwood, things didn't turn out like that. Goodwin kept our formula, and when we inquired about it, he pretended to be ignorant—he knew nothing of it!"

"The dirty rotter!" said Gulliver.

"Those words aren't strong enough, my lad," said Mr. Colmore grimly.

"He's worse than a dirty rotter," said Mr. Naggs. "He kept our formula, and then professed ignorance of it. Well, to cut it short, he knew that we should do everything in our power to get our own property back, and so, in order to be on the safe side, he gave this precious document into the hands of his son, and sent him to St. Frank's. And that secret formula of our dye is now in Goodwin's study at the school. That's why he keeps his door always locked, and his window barred. We aren't to go near the place openly, because Goodwin would recognise us, and then he would have the formula placed in some other spot."

"But can't you go to the police?" asked Bell curiously.

Mr. Naggs laughed.

"The police?" he repeated. "What would be the good of that? Do you think that this cunning rascal, Goodwin, has allowed any evidence to collect against him? We trusted him, and we expected him to deal with us squarely. He didn't—and so we are in the cart. The only possible way in which we can get back our property—the only way in which justice can be done—is by taking the whole matter into our own hands. That's what we're doing—although it may seem to most people a questionable procedure. It can't be helped; we intend to get our rightful property back—and we're willing to go to any lengths in order to do so. We're not going to be robbed of our invention by this rascal and his son!"

"Rather hot," said Fullwood, who swallowed the whole yarn completely.

"Well, what do you propose to do? You can't break into the school, I suppose?"

"We shall break in if we're compelled to!" said Mr. Naggs grimly. "But we don't want to do that—we'd rather have the thing done quietly. After we've got our formula we shan't mind exposing this young rascal for what he is—and his father, too!"

"An' serve them right!" said Fullwood viciously. "Goodwin is a rotter—a cad! If I can help you in any way to bring about his downfall, I'll do it!"

Mr. Naggs and Mr. Colmore exchanged glances.

"That's the kind of talk, son," said Mr. Naggs heartily. "I was sure that we could rely upon you to lend us a hand, if it was any way possible. You and your friends here aren't the kind to see injustice done to honest working men—for that's what we are, after all!"

The two cunning rascals watched Fullwood & Co. closely. It was clear from the very first that the bright youths of Study A had accepted the story without hesitation. They did not

like Goodwin, and they were ready to believe anything bad against him. Otherwise they might have questioned the truth of this plausible yarn.

"You can help us—if you want to," said Mr. Naggs at length. "You can do a lot, Master Fullwood."

"How can I?"

"By helping us to get into the school—not to burgle it, you understand!" went on Mr. Naggs hastily. "I don't mean that. We just want to get into that study, so that we can find the formula. Nothing more. Or, better still, if you could find it for us, we would reward you handsomely."

"I don't think that's possible," said Fullwood. "We couldn't get into the study. But what is your idea of a handsome reward?"

Mr. Naggs considered.

"Well, you see, this formula is worth tens of thousands of pounds to us," he said. "We shan't get the money until later on, of course—until our dye is fully developed and put on the market. But if you can help us to get the formula, we'll give the three of you twenty pounds."

"Each?" asked Bell.

"Yes—each!" said Mr. Naggs promptly.

"Phew!" whistled Gulliver. "That's not bad, you know!"

"Jolly decent, in fact," said Fullwood. "But I'd rather you search for the formula yourself, Mr. Naggs. It is just possible that we may be able to work somethin' together—we might be able to let you into the school one night."

"It would be splendid if you could," said Mr. Naggs quietly. "I don't want you to think that there's anything underhand about it. You can watch us, if you like, all the time. You can see us into this study, and you can see us out—and we'll show you that we haven't taken a single article of value. All we want is that formula—nothing else. It's ours, and we have every right to it."

"Of course you have," said Fullwood. "And I promise you that we'll do the best we can."

It was hardly possible that the three young rascals of Study A realised exactly what they were doing. They did not grasp the full significance of the affair. Otherwise they might have hesitated before agreeing to let the two strangers into St. Frank's.

"I'll tell you what," went on Fullwood. "We shall have to arrange another meetin'!"

"Another meeting?" said Mr. Colmore sharply.

"Yes," said Fullwood. "Say, in a day or two. In the meantime we can be lookin' round, an' we might be able to hit upon some scheme by which we can let you into the school easily. A thing like this can't be arranged on the spur of the moment, you know. We've got to spy out the lie of the land, an' all that kind of thing. We'll try an' fix something up so that you'll be able to get into the school. An' if you're collared when you're inside the school, we don't know anythin' about it. That's understood."

"Oh, of course," said Mr. Naggs promptly. "If we're caught we shall have our own explanation—don't you worry. It's agreed then that we see you in a day or two?"

"Yes," said Fullwood. "We'll come here."

"Good enough," said Mr. Naggs, holding out his hand. "That's a promise!"

"Done!" said Ralph Leslie Fullwood.

When Fullwood & Co. returned to St. Frank's, they were not feeling quite so sure of themselves. They vaguely wondered if they had done right in promising to let those two strangers into St. Frank's.

But, as Fullwood said, who would know anything about it? Even supposing Mr. Naggs informed against them, they could deny the whole story.

—and their word would be believed sooner than the word of these strangers.

And so, upon the whole, Fullwood was feeling fairly satisfied. But the puts of Study A had not the faintest idea of the stirring times which were destined to occur at St. Frank's in the very near future!

CHAPTER 10.

The Secret Passage!

"It seems, dear boys, that the afternoon is messed up."

It was Sir Montie Tregellis-West who made the remark.

The rain was pelted down in torrents driven by a gale which whistled round the grey old buildings of St. Frank's.

And it was a half-holiday!

A House match had been arranged for that afternoon—Ancient House versus College House. But the wretched weather had knocked all sport on the head, and the fellows were obliged to remain indoors.

I was seated in Study C, thinking of something to do. Tommy Watson gazed morosely out of the window, and Sir Montie sat on the corner of the table, swinging his legs.

"The afternoon's absolutely spoiled!" snapped Watson. "What can we do on an afternoon like this? I don't want to read!"

"There are all sorts of things we can do," I said cheerfully. "We've planned out many programmes for wet afternoons—"

"Exactly, my dear boy, but we've forgotten what those programmes are," said Sir Montie calmly.

"Not all of them," I said. "For example, we promised ourselves that we'd explore the old passage, which leads from the tower down into the cellars. That's a dry job, and pretty interesting, too. What's wrong with the idea of exploring now?"

"Who wants to go down in that musty old place?" grunted Watson.

"Well, I do," I replied. "We've only been in that tunnel about twice, and I'm quite convinced that there are other discoveries to be made. So far we've only found the single staircase which leads from the tower to the cellar, and two short passages. There must be others, if we only look closely enough. And now there's a good time to explore—two hours, at least, before tea."

"I'm game, dear old boy," said Sir Montie. "Anything for a quiet life."

Watson agreed to the plan rather grumpily. He was disappointed about the football, and any other programme did not suit him. However, even the musty task of exploring the old secret passages of the Ancient House was better than lounging about doing nothing.

We did not advertise the fact that we were bent on this mission. Hardly any of the fellows knew about the secret stairway—we had kept it to ourselves. We made our way upstairs, along the corridors, until at length we arrived at the short staircase which led to the North Tower.

There was really only one tower at St. Frank's, but originally there had been two—a North Tower and a South Tower. But the latter had been demolished countless years ago.

We soon found ourselves in the circular apartment at the very top of the tower. The walls were bare, and there were two little slits of windows, without glass. The only doorway was that by which we had entered—at least, so it appeared.

The walls were tremendously thick. The circular stonework was of a wide circumference outside, but the apartment itself was small.

"Well, here we are," I remarked. "I've brought my electric torch, so we're well equipped for light. And you chaps had better be careful, because we pass several rooms as we go down

the staircase, and we don't want to be heard, or we shall be mistaken for ghosts or rats!"

"Oh, get on with it!" said Tommy Watson shortly.

I passed my hand over a section of the wall, and it did not take me long to find a tiny hole between two of the bricks.

I produced a long pencil and inserted it into the hole. Then I pressed hard, and a faint, sluggish click sounded. The next moment a portion of the wall itself swung back, revealing a dark cavity.

I stepped through the opening, and found myself in a low, narrow space, with a flight of stone steps leading downwards. This secret staircase had been constructed in the interior of the thick wall.

Nearly all the steps were well preserved, and the air was quite good, too. There was certainly nothing unpleasant or musty about it.

And so we went down, Tommy Watson bringing up the rear.

My electric torch was sufficiently brilliant to illuminate our path, and, after descending for some little distance, we saw a straight passage ahead of us. To the left the stairs continued downwards, but now in a straight line.

We had reached the bottom of the tower, and the staircase now continued on its course through the main wall of the Ancient House itself. But the passage was simply a little addition, with two doors giving access to the dormitory passage.

"There's no need to go along there," I murmured. "The best thing we can do is to continue on our way until we reach the ground floor. So far we only know about the exit in the cellar, but I'm pretty sure there must be another somewhere near the lobby."

We passed along the passage slowly. There was no hurry at all. We had practically the whole afternoon before us, and we could afford to do our exploring in a leisurely fashion. We had

not really examined this passage very carefully, but now a good opportunity presented itself.

I knew that we were in one of the walls of the Ancient House—for they were tremendously thick. It was quite possible that there were many other secret passages which we had not even dreamed of. And, as it happened, it was not very long before we made a discovery of the first importance.

We reached the end of the passage, and found a stone wall barring our path. There were no doors leading out of this passage whatever. It was simply a blind alley, so to speak. I flashed my torch round at the walls, on the floor, and on the low ceiling.

"Now, this seems rather strange!" I remarked thoughtfully.

"Strange?" repeated Watson. "This passage seems quite ordinary to me."

"Does it?" I said. "Here is this passage, leading away from the secret stairway, and it ends in a blank wall. It seems then, that this passage was built for nothing at all—just for fun!"

"Dear old boy, I suppose there must be some reason for it," remarked Sir Montie.

"Exactly," I agreed. "There must be some reason for it. Therefore, it stands to reason that there is an exit somewhere. There might be a door leading out into another tunnel, and our job is to discover that doorway!"

Watson scratched his head.

"That seems to be a bit of a tall order!" he observed.

"There's no telling," I said. "We might be able to find it within a short time, if we only look properly. Now, I'm going to begin this end, and I'm going to examine the walls from floor to ceiling, every inch. You chaps can help me."

For some little time our task was quite useless. We searched everywhere, we tested the walls by tapping, by pushing, and by pressing. But it was all solid, and there was no sign whatever of any opening.

"Oh, it's no good, Nipper!" said

Watson at last. "This is simply a waste of time. I vote we go down the stairs into the cellar——"

"Hold on!" I interrupted keenly. "I—by Jove!"

"Found anything?" asked Watson eagerly.

"Bogus! There seems to be something here, dear old boy!" said Sir Montie. "I distinctly heard——"

Tregellis-West broke off suddenly. For at that moment the floor practically at our feet commenced moving. I had been tinkering about with a little rough projection on the wall, hoping that it might prove to be of some significance, and then, without warning, the floor commenced moving!

"Hallo! This looks interesting!" I remarked.

A square of the floor slid right back beneath the wall, leaving a black cavity at our feet. It was quite large enough to admit any ordinary person, and when I flashed my light down I saw that there were some stone steps. They were short and narrow, and there were not many of them, for we could distinctly see the bottom. A draught of cold, damp air came up into our faces.

"Now I can understand what this passage is for," I remarked calmly. "It was built simply to lead to this secret doorway. There must be another tunnel just along here, my sons, and we are going to explore it at once."

"Yes, rather!" said Tommy Watson eagerly. "This is ripping, you know!"

Followed by Sir Montie and Tommy Watson, I went down the short flight of steps, and I soon discovered that another passage ran ahead of me, and this passage was very low and very narrow. One wall was of brick, but the other appeared to be merely panelling, and the ceiling was so low that we were obliged to crouch down.

"Don't speak loudly," I said; "there's only a thin panel between us and the interior of the house. We may be heard if we speak too loudly."

"Don't you worry, dear old fellow,"

murmured Sir Montie. "We'll speak in whispers!"

We passed along this narrow tunnel, and I kept my eyes well open for any sign of a secret door, but could find none—until, just as we were turning a corner, I came to a halt.

"Hallo!" I murmured. "What have we here?"

I paused in front of one of the panels, and I saw immediately that a section of it was movable. There were metal attachments, old and discoloured, and there was a neat little fastener, which was operated by a spring.

"It looks like a door!" murmured Tommy Watson.

"It is a door, I said. "We'll see if it will open. Hold the light."

Sir Montie took the electric torch, and I commenced fumbling the catch on the door. It was not long before I was able to push the spring back, and then a small panel, about three foot by two, came away loose, and a strip of daylight appeared.

"Quick!" I whispered. "Put the torch out!"

Sir Montie snapped it off, and we were in total darkness, for I had closed the panel again. Then, cautiously, I opened it slightly, until there was just a crack about half an inch wide. Through this I was able to peep, and I received a great surprise.

"Well, I'm jiggered!" I murmured. "This is a bit startling, my sons!"

"Let's have a look!" said Watson eagerly. "Where are we?"

"I dare say you will recognise the spot," I murmured.

Both Watson and Tregellis-West looked through the little crack, and then they uttered low exclamations of astonishment.

"Why—why, it's the Remove passage!" murmured Tommy.

"Bogus! So it is, dear old boy!" breathed Sir Montie.

"Exactly!" I agreed. "We are just at the corner of the Remove passage——"

only a few steps away from Study C. A bit surprising, isn't it? This door will prove jolly handy at times, if we can only discover how to open it from the other side."

"By Jingo!" murmured Watson. "Fancy coming out in the Remove passage! But where are we? I don't know where this secret passage fits in."

"Oh, that's easy!" I said. "The wall on this side of the passage is the outer wall, and we all know that it's tremendously thick."

"Well, look here," said Watson. "We might be able to make some more discoveries."

I secured the panel once more, and then we turned the corner in the secret tunnel. There was only a very short distance of the passage left, and we soon traversed this, and, at the very end, we came upon another door—for the catch was instantly obvious.

"Now, according to my sense of direction, this door ought to be right at the end of the Remove passage," I said softly; "either in the wall of the passage itself, or in one of the rooms. But what room is there?"

"The end study—Goodwin's study," whispered Watson.

"Yes, that's right!" I agreed. "There's only that one room at the end of the passage here. It isn't a study, really—it was only made one, especially for Goodwin. This room always used to be locked and bolted, and it was kept empty. It will be a bit queer if this door leads right into Goodwin's study!"

"Well, open it, and we shall soon see!" said Watson eagerly.

I was fairly sure that my calculations were correct. After all Dick Goodwin's precautions to keep his study secret, it would be curious if we found a way into that apartment by means of this secret passage. Not that we were at all anxious to pry into the Lancashire lad's concerns.

And as we stood there, looking at the door, we distinctly heard the faint sound of tapping. It came to our ears

distinctly, though vaguely—and I wondered.

And then I saw something else.

There was a section of the panel just opposite the level of my eyes which projected above the other woodwork. It was, in fact, a little slide provided with its own slot and with a knob. I knew what it was at once.

A spy-hole!

By moving that knob back, a small portion of the woodwork would slide away, revealing a tiny circular hole, through which it would be possible to see into the room beyond.

Just for a moment I hesitated. Would it be fair to push that slide back, and peep into Goodwin's room? Would it be acting straight? I came to the conclusion that no harm could be done, for, whatever we saw, we should not speak about it.

I touched the knob and put a little pressure upon it.

"What's happening?" whispered Tommy Watson.

"Hush!" I breathed. "Don't you see? This little slide is covering a spy-hole!"

"Begad!"

"I'm going to take a peep through," I whispered. "And, for goodness' sake don't make any noise. You'd better switch that lamp off, Montie."

A moment later and we were in darkness. I had taken the precaution to place my fingers upon the knob, and now all I had to do was to press slowly back. I proceeded to do this with extreme caution, for the slightest sound would probably attract attention on the other side.

The knob slipped back, and a tiny circle of daylight came right through into the black tunnel. The hole was larger than a marble. But by applying one's eye to it every detail of the room on the other side could be seen.

One glance was sufficient for me.

I knew in that first moment that my surmise was correct. I was looking right into Dick Goodwin's study—mystery!

CHAPTER 11.

Scaring Fulwood and Co.

TOMMY WATSON tugged at my sleeve.

"Well!" he whispered impatiently. "What can you see?"

"Hush!" I breathed. "You can have a look in a moment!"

I WAS, as a matter of fact, filled with astonishment, for I could see something which I had certainly never expected to see. Dick Goodwin was there himself, in his shirt-sleeves, and he was decidedly busy.

The table was a very curious contrivance. Upon the top there was a kind of shallow well, and in this well there rested a very complicated piece of machinery. It glittered as I looked at it, and I saw countless wheels and cogs.

The whole thing was made of polished steel, and Dick Goodwin was busily using a file. He bent over that piece of machinery as though he loved it, but what it was I could not for the life of me tell. I could only see that it was an extremely complicated machine, beautifully constructed.

It was fairly large, too, being about three feet square, and at least eighteen inches high.

"Well, I'm jiggered!" I murmured.

"Dear old boy, I suppose you know that we are fairly shaking with impatience?" inquired Sir Montie, in my ear. "We can't stand it much longer, really!"

I turned my head.

"Look!" I breathed. "But, whatever you do, don't make a sound!"

Sir Montie applied his whole eye to the spy-hole, and just for a moment I feared that he would utter an exclamation loud enough for Dick Goodwin to hear. But Montie checked himself and only a soft hiss passed between his lips. He stood there for some moments, and then he turned to us.

"Amazing, dear old fellows—absolutely amazing!" he murmured.

"Lemme look!" said Watson impatiently.

Two minutes later Tommy was satisfied—he had seen. Then I closed the slide, and I switched the electric torch on. We stared at one another in a wondering kind of way.

"Now, what on earth does it mean?" said Tommy. "What is this machine Goodwin has got in his study?"

"You might just as well ask one of these bare walls," I said. "I can't tell you, Tommy. It's a mystery. And I don't think we ought to inquire; we have discovered this by accident, and we've got to keep it strictly to ourselves. We mustn't breathe a single word to a soul!"

Sir Montie nodded.

"Dear old boy, you are quite right," he agreed. "It would be a frightful thing if we gave Goodwin's secret away."

"But what is that piece of machinery—that's what I want to know?" asked Watson.

"It seems to be a model of something," I said. "That's the truth about it, I think. Goodwin has evidently manufactured a model of some machine, and he seems to have done it extremely well. Whether it is of any value, I don't know. I'll have another look and see if I can recognise the style of thing."

Once more the torch was extinguished, and I slipped the slide back. I applied my eye to the hole, and received another surprise.

For now, when I looked through, the whole aspect of Dick Goodwin's study had changed!

The table was still there in the centre of the room, but there was no machine upon it!

The table was quite innocent of any object, except a small cloth, a little ink-stand, and a blotting pad. The study, in fact, looked ordinary in every way—just what a junior's study ought to look.

What had become of that complicated piece of machinery?

It did not take me long to get at the truth. I saw now that the table was one of those large pedestal affairs, with sets of drawers on either side, and with a thick, heavy top. I knew how that piece of machinery had vanished. It had simply sunk into the table, and the top had probably slid over, concealing the thing completely.

Dick Goodwin had evidently finished his work for the time being, and he had made his study look presentable again. Now I understood why he always kept his door locked, and why a screen was fitted round the doorway. The boy from Lancashire was doing something in his room he did not want anybody else to know about. And I felt rather guilty. I thought that we ought not to have looked through that spy-hole upon him.

But, really, we had not known for certain that that door led into the study, and we had only looked through the spy-hole in order to make sure. In any case, there was no danger of Goodwin's secret being spread abroad.

My chums had another look through the hole, and they were surprised, too. And after that I decided that it would be just as well for us to leave the vicinity, for Goodwin was alone, and he would easily hear any sound we might make, particularly now that he had stopped his own filing and cutting. And so we went softly along the passage to the little stairway again, and were very shortly up in the other tunnel.

"We'd better close this hole in the floor," I said softly. "We don't want to leave it open—"

But, while I was speaking, I found that it was impossible to close the opening. Try as I would, I could not get the section of the floor to slide back into its proper position, and so we were compelled to leave it open. Not that it mattered at all; nobody else would come down this way and explore.

"Now we'll go down the main stair-

case and into the cellars," I remarked.

"We might be able to discover—"

"Listen!" interrupted Watson suddenly. "I thought I heard—"

"Hegad!" breathed Sir Montie. "Somebody is coming!"

I started.

"But it's impossible!" I muttered. "I don't see how—"

"Listen, you ass—listen!" hissed Watson.

We all remained perfectly still, and then, quite distinctly, voices came to our ears. And with the voices we heard the sound of footsteps upon the stone stairway. Two or three people were approaching. This was extremely startling, and I hardly knew what to think; but, a moment later, we received a bigger surprise than ever.

"I reckon we'd better go back!" said one voice. "I don't like this at all, you know; it's awfully creepy, and there's no telling what we may come across!"

"Oh, don't be a funk!" came Fullwood's voice. "There's nothing to be afraid of here!"

I clenched my fists, and compressed my lips. What did it mean? Fullwood, Gulliver and Bell, the nuts of Study A, had managed to get into the secret stairway—the very last persons in the world whom I wanted to know the secret.

"How did they find their way into the tunnel—that's what I want to know?" I exclaimed. "They're coming down the stairs from the north tower. They didn't know anything about that secret door—"

"My hat!" said Watson abruptly.

"What's wrong?"

"I don't think I closed the door!" said Watson blankly. "I came down last, you know, and I can't remember pulling the door to—"

"Then that explains it!" I said gruffly. "You silly ass! Fullwood & Co. must have gone up into the tower for something and they found the door open!"

"And so they commenced exploring, began!" murmured Sir Montie.

"The best thing we can do is to conceal ourselves," I went on. "We'll let Fullwood & Co. come down the tunnel, and we won't show ourselves."

"What do you think we are—ghosts?" asked Tommy Watson sarcastically. "Where are we going to hide? In a narrow passage like this, those rats will see us in a moment."

"There is a recess only a few yards from here," I said. "And talking about ghosts has put an idea into my head. Come on!"

We slipped along the passage until we nearly came to the spot where the passage joined the staircase, and here, to our left, lay a big recess in the wall—a long slit, with a turn at the end. It was quite possible for us to squeeze into this little cavity and remain unseen. It was almost certain that Fullwood & Co. would walk right past without noticing the recess at all.

In any case, we would chance it. If Fullwood & Co. found us, then we would pitch the rotters out.

The Study A trio were not equipped with an electric torch; their only light consisted of matches, which were struck at intervals. They came along, Fullwood leading the way. At the junction where the passage joined the stairway, Fullwood came to a halt.

"Hallo! This looks rather interesting!" he said. "We'll explore this passage, you chaps."

"I call it a mad idea!" grumbled Gulliver.

"It—it's awfully creepy in this rotten place!" grunted Bell.

"Oh, don't be a couple of funks!" grated Fullwood. "There's nothing here to make any fellow afraid—just a mouldy old passage, which hasn't been disturbed for hundreds of years, probably."

Fullwood would have been somewhat surprised if he had known that three Juniors were listening to his words, only a few yards away.

The cad of the *Remove* struck another match.

"Come on!" he said briskly. "We'll see what there is at the end of this tunnel."

The nuts came along the passage, and as I had anticipated, walked straight past the recess—and by the time another one was struck, the trio had passed by.

We heard them creeping along, and at last they vanished down into the slightly lower passage, where Dick Goodwin's study was situated.

"Dear old boys, I'm afraid we're a set of frightful asses!" remarked Sir Montie softly.

"Why?"

"Because we have let those cads go along the tunnel," said Sir Montie. "They will see Goodwin's study, and they will find out the secret—"

"Exactly!" I agreed. "That is what I intended. If we had stopped Fullwood, Gulliver and Bell, we should have pitched them out; but they would certainly have explored this tunnel at another time, when we weren't handy, and then they would have found that secret door leading into Goodwin's study. I thought it was just as well to let them find it at once, while we're on the spot."

"But—but why?"

"Because we know for a fact that there is nothing in Goodwin's study to arouse any suspicion," I replied. "It looks quite an ordinary study—it's not likely that Goodwin will have got that machinery out again in this short space of time. He has put it away for the afternoon, by the look of things. And even if Fullwood & Co. peep through that hole, they won't see anything that they can make capital of."

"Dear old fellow, there is something in that!" admitted Montie.

"Well, I'm blessed if I can see it!" said Watson bluntly. "What's to prevent Fullwood & Co. coming down here to-morrow, or on the next day? They

will be able to look into Goodwin's study again——"

"No, they won't!" I interrupted.

"Why won't they?"

"Because, for one thing, that secret door will be blocked up!" I said calmly. "The spy-hole will be blocked up, too. I'll tell you my idea later on, when the position is more favourable."

We waited. Five minutes elapsed, and then we heard the sounds caused by Fullwood, Gulliver and Bell as they came through the opening in the floor of the passage. Once there—only a few yards from us—they paused, and they commenced talking. We could hear every word they uttered.

"By gad!" said Fullwood, in a voice which denoted triumph and gloating satisfaction. "Goodwin's study! This tunnel leads straight into Goodwin's study!"

"Well, what of it?" asked Gulliver.

"What of it? This discovery of ours makes everythin' as easy as winkin' an eye! We shall be able to arrange the whole thing with Colmore an' Naggs at once!"

"How do you mean?" asked Gulliver.

"Why, we can let those two men come into the school," went on Fullwood. "We've said that we shall see justice done. Goodwin has got the forelock belongin' to Mr. Naggs, an' we're goin' to see that the young cad is made to give it up to its rightful owner. So we are goin' to let those two men into the school. It would be risky in the ordinary way, but this secret tunnel makes it as safe as houses!"

"Yes, of course!" said Gulliver, rather doubtfully. "It'll be much better for those chaps to get into Goodwin's study this way; in fact, it's the only way they can get in!"

"That's what I was thinkin'," said Bell. "The window's barred, the door's locked—so it would be impossible for Naggs an' the other man to get in by

the ordinary way. What a stroke of luck, eh?"

"Rather!" agreed Fullwood, with great satisfaction. "This is what I call toppin', you know. Let's go back an' make sure of that door—I want to give Mr. Naggs full instructions."

Gulliver and Bell demurred at first, but then they accompanied their leader back to the other passage. Meanwhile, Tommy Watson and Tregolls-West and myself had heard all—and we were greatly surprised.

"Well, what do you think of it, eh?" said Watson grimly. "The rollers! They're talking about letting some men in to the school, so that they can get into Goodwin's study!"

"The asses don't know what they're doing, Tommy," I said quietly. "It's quite plain that these men have been spinning a yarn, and Fullwood & Co. have swallowed it whole. It's a very good thing that we allowed the nuts to come past, because we know everything now, and we shall be able to take proper measures!"

"What measures?" asked Tommy.

"I'll tell you later on," I said. "For the present we'll just have a little fun. I don't want Fullwood & Co. to go up to the tower again. I want them to discover that there is an exit in the cellar, because they will certainly use that exit as an entrance when they guide these two strangers into the place."

"Yes, but how——"

"You'll see!" I interrupted. "Come on—we'll slip out of this while we've got the chance!"

Before the nuts of Study A could return we left our place of concealment, crept along the passage until we came to the junction, and then mounted some of the circular stairs which led right up to the north tower. Then I called a halt.

"Dear old fellow, what is the idea of this?" inquired Sir Montic politely. "As soon as Fullwood & Co. came

Now they will discover us, an' they will know we have been listenin'. It would spoil everythin'—"

"I don't think it will, because Fullwood & Co. won't discover us, Montie," I said. "I want you chaps to be absolutely quiet—and I'm going to make a few noises."

"Noises?"

"Groans, horrible moans, and all the rest of it!" I explained. "Those chaps are pretty nervy already, and they were half-expecting to find ghosts and skeletons, and all that sort of thing. Well, it would be a pity to disappoint them. We'll provide an invisible ghost—to prevent them coming up these stairs again!"

"Oh, good wheeze!" said Watson.

We stood where we were listening for the return of Fullwood & Co. After about five minutes had elapsed, we heard the nuts coming along the passage, until at length they were on the stairs once more. By listening intently we could just hear what they were saying.

"Perhaps we had better explore further—"

"Rather not!" interrupted Bell. "We—we might find skeletons—"

"Oh, hang! All you can think about are skeletons an' ghosts an'—"

Fullwood paused abruptly.

"What—what was that?" came Gulliver's voice, in husky tones.

"I—I don't know!" said Fullwood uncertainly.

They stood stockstill, listening, with their hearts beating rather wildly, for, throbbing down the circular staircase, in the most eerie tones, came a blood-curdling moan.

"Oh, by gad!" exclaimed Bell, with chattering teeth.

Again came the moan—this time more throbbing and more terrifying than ever. I rather pride myself that I can take up a good groan when the occasion demands, and certainly my efforts on this occasion were entirely successful.

"Oh!" shivered Gulliver. "Oh, my goodness! Can—can you hear it, you chaps?"

"Y-y-ye-es!" stuttered Bell. "It's—it's a ghost, you know—"

"Don't be a fool!" snapped Fullwood, trying to be calm. "It can't be a ghost—it must be the wind in the staircase, or somethin' of that sort. There aren't such things as ghosts! Pull yourself together, you fool!"

Moan! Moan!

I kept it up, and Fullwood & Co. dared not come up the stairs. Even if Fullwood himself had had sufficient pluck Gulliver and Bell were certainly scared stiff. And, after a few more moments, they decided upon their only course of action. They pelted down the stairs as though demons were after them, and finally they reached the secret door which led them out of the tunnel into the cellar.

Here the nuts breathed sighs of relief.

Fullwood was now looking extremely pleased with himself, for he had noted how this cellar door could be opened, and he tested it once or twice to make sure.

"Rippin'!" he declared softly. "This means everythin', you chaps. We can easily direct Mr. Colmore an' Mr. Naggs into the cellar, here, and then they can go right up to Goodwin's study. There'll be nothin' to stop them."

"Nunno—of course not!" said Bell who was still a bit shaky. But—but I'm not comin' here at night, Fully—not likely!"

"Who's askin' you to?" interrupted Fullwood tartly. "There'll be no need for us to be here at night. We shall give Naggs full instructions, an' he an' his pal will have to find out the thing for themselves."

And Fullwood & Co., without wasting any further time, got out of the cellar, and returned to the more inhabited quarters of the Ancient House.

CHAPTER 12.

A Tip for Dick Goodwin!

"HALF-A-MINUTE, Goodwin!"

I was in the Remove passage, and it was nearly tea-time. Sir Montie Tregellis-West and Tommy Watson were with me—and Dick Goodwin was just passing along the passage. He paused and smiled at us. There was something very cheerful about Goodwin's smile.

"Aye, I'm in no hurry, Nipper," said the Lancashire lad. "What will you be wanting?"

"I was going to invite you to tea in Study C—that's all," I said.

"Ay, that's champion of you," said Goodwin. "Thank you very much, Nipper. But I can't accept. I haven't got time to spare to have tea in any other fellow's study——"

"Oh, nonsense!" I interrupted. "Surely you can stop your swotting business for a half-hour now and again, Goodwin? I particularly want you to come to tea to-day, because there is something I'd like to tell you."

Dick Goodwin looked rather curious. "Something you'd like to tell me?" he repeated.

"Look here, I'll put it bluntly," I said. "It's very important that you should see us privately, Goodwin. If you don't feel inclined to accept our hospitality, then you can come along to Study C, and listen to me for five minutes. Surely you can spare five minutes?"

Dick Goodwin laughed.

"Aye, lad, but you make me feel uncomfortable," he remarked. "Of course I'll come, and thank you very much. I'll be in your study in about ten minutes' time—if that will do."

"It will do splendidly," I said.

Dick Goodwin passed along the passage, and my chums and I went into Study C.

"Well, he doesn't seem particularly anxious to enjoy our company at tea-time," remarked Watson.

"Oh, that's easy enough to under-

stand," I said. "He probably thinks that if he accepts ours, he will be compelled to ask us to tea in his study, in return. And he wants to avoid that—naturally. However, we'll make it all right when we explain things."

The tea we had prepared was certainly a very excellent one. When Dick Goodwin arrived, about ten minutes later, he eyed the table with approval. The Lancashire lad possessed a very healthy appetite.

"It's champion," he declared, as he sat down.

Tea was soon on the go, and Goodwin appeared to enjoy the meal immensely. I did not mention anything about the matter on hand until tea was nearly finished. And then I looked across at Goodwin.

"Now, look here, Goodwin, I've got something to say to you," I remarked. "There's no need for you to get alarmed. But I may as well tell you that I had a look into your study this afternoon."

Goodwin started.

"You—you looked into my study?" he said quickly.

"Yes," I said, "we all looked into your study, Goodwin, and we looked into it through a secret spy-hole. It may interest you to know that there is a passage through the wall of the Ancient House, and this passage is unknown to almost everybody in the school. It's an old passage, dating back for hundreds of years, and (here is a panel leading into your study, with a spy-hole covered with a slide!)"

"By gun!" said Goodwin, startled. "You—you must be joking——"

"I'm not," I said grimly.

And I proceeded to explain in more detail. Dick Goodwin listened to me with great interest, and with a certain amount of alarm in his expression. He seemed greatly relieved when I told him that we had seen him at his desk—with a blotting-pad and inkstand upon it. I did not think it necessary



I applied my eye to the spyhole in the woodwork, and found that I was looking right into Dick Goodwin's study of mystery! The new boy himself was there, in his shirt-sleeves, and he was seated at a table on which rested a complicated piece of machinery. "Well I'm jiggered!" I murmured.

to tell him we had seen other things. It would only make him anxious.

"But why have you told me this?" he asked at length. "I should have thought you would have told all the other fellows—so that they could come and look into my study. They are all curious, and they would give a great deal to find out why I have got the door locked, and all the rest of it. But I can't tell a soul, Nipper. It's a secret. One day you will understand, but I can't tell you now. I'm sorry."

"My dear chap, there is no need to explain anything," I said. "We are not fools. We have got you here to-night because we want to give you a friendly word of warning."

"It's champion of you," declared Goodwin gratefully. "I don't think many other fellows would have acted in this way."

"Oh, there are plenty of decent chaps in the Remove," I said. "Your business is not our business, Goodwin. You are at liberty to lock yourself in your study if you want to. And I am only telling you all this because there is great danger of your secret being discovered—and spread broadcast throughout the school."

"I—I don't quite understand."

"You will in a moment," I said. To be blunt, Fullwood, Gulliver and Bell know all about that passage, and they know all about the secret door, too."

"By gum!"

Dick Goodwin stared at us in real dismay.

"Still, no harm has been done yet," I went on. "Fullwood & Co. only saw what we saw—an ordinary study, with ordinary furniture. But there is this about it—they may go there at other times, and they may see things which you don't want them to see. So, if you take prompt measures, everything will be all serene. My advice to you is this—cover the door securely—"

"Cover it?"

"Yes," I said. "It is in the wall

almost opposite the window. If you like I will take you along, and show it to you, so that you can see the exact position. Then I should move a large piece of furniture over the door, if I were you, thus blocking the spy-hole completely, and making it impossible for anyone to get into the study, even if the door is opened. Either that, or you must nail some huge board across the wall—"

"Aye, but the furniture idea is the best!" interrupted Goodwin. "I've got a champion bookcase in my study—so heavy that it can hardly be moved. If I put that in front of the secret door, and nail it to the wall at the top, nothing can shift it."

"That's the idea!" I agreed. "Then you'll be absolutely private, Goodwin. It's the only thing I can suggest. I've told you about this now because I don't want those cads to be prying into your affairs. You can rely on us saying nothing."

Goodwin looked at us gratefully.

"It is good of you, Nipper," he said quietly. "I don't know how to thank you."

"There's no need to thank me," I said, smiling. "We know a decent chap, Goodwin, and we don't want those rotters from Study A to go interfering in your affairs. That's all. As soon as you've finished that cup of tea, we'll go along to the tower, and get into the passage. Then you will be able to see the door with your own eyes."

Dick Goodwin gulped down his tea at once.

"I'm ready now," he said quickly.

"Right you are," I smiled. "Come along!"

Sir Montie and Watson did not accompany us. There was really no need for them to come, too. And I took Dick Goodwin up into the tower, and then we were soon passing down the old stone stairs until at length we came to the junction where the little passage branched off.

Within three or four minutes Good-

win was looking through the spy-hole into his own study.

"Aye, it's marvellous!" said the Lancashire boy. "And I thought my study was private, too! Nipper, I don't know how to thank you for giv'ng me this warning—it means everything to me. All I've got to do is to shift that piece of furniture, and the door will be completely blocked."

I nodded.

"But how are you going to shift it?" I inquired. "It's a heavy bookcase, and you can't do it alone, Goodwin."

"No, I suppose not," said the Lancashire boy. "I shall have to obtain help."

"We'll give you a hand, if you like," I said. "Tregellis-West, Watson and me. What do you say? We can do it now—at once!"

"Aye, that would be gradeley!" said Dick Goodwin, without hesitation.

And so, about ten minutes later, Tommy and Montie and I were ushered into Dick Goodwin's study. And, without waiting any time, we set about moving the tremendously heavy bookcase across the room. We placed it against the wall so that the secret door was completely blocked up. There was no chance of anybody seeing into the room, or gaining admittance.

"That's all right," I remarked, eyeing our handiwork with satisfaction. "You are all serene now, Goodwin. Come along, you chaps, we'll depart from this forbidden apartment."

"Wait a moment," said Goodwin, touching my arm. "I—I feel that you ought to know something more about me, Nipper. You have been so good that it seems to be up to me to satisfy your curiosity."

"But, my dear chap, I'm not curious," I put in, smiling. "As I said before, your business is not ours—and we really don't want to interfere with it. There's no need for you to explain anything. Just go ahead as you are going,

and don't worry any more. I'm quite satisfied, in any case, that what you are doing is perfectly honest and straight-forward. Is that good enough?"

"Yes, of course it is," said Dick Goodwin. "And I know that you three fellows are friends—champion friends. I shan't forget this, Nipper."

His gratitude was real, and I knew that we had made a very sincere friend of Dick Goodwin.

Meanwhile, in Study A there was much satisfaction. Pullwood, Gulliver and Bell had just finished tea. Outside, the rain had almost stopped, and the Triangle was looking less like a lake, although there were great puddles of water everywhere. Pullwood & Co. were lounging back in their chairs, thoroughly at home.

"What is your plan, Fally?" inquired Gulliver.

"Well, my dear chap, that's obvious," said Pullwood. "This evening I'm goin' down to the White Harp. Naggs and Calmore are staying there now. It won't take me long to explain the position, an' to give those fellows the tip!"

"You mean to tell them ever'thin'?" asked Bell.

"Yes," replied Ralph Leslie. "Why not? We agreed to help them in their task, and we're not going to back out of it. This rotten Lancashire kid has stolen a formula belongin' to Mr. Naggs—at least, his father has, an' Goodwin is keepin' it in his study. We can't go searchin' the study ourselves, because it's too risky. But we can let Mr. Naggs come and have a look, without gettin' into any trouble on our own account. An' as soon as that paper is discovered in Goodwin's possession, it will mean disgrace for him an' his father."

"An' that's what they jolly well deserve!" said Bell viciously. "But all I say is this, Fally—we've got to go jolly easy. We've got to be cautious, because, if Naggs an' the other man

say anythin', we shall be in the cart ourselves."

"Rot!" said Fullwood, "If those men talk an' turn against us, we can deny everythin'! There'll be no proof against us—not an atom. I'll take good care of that! An' don't forget that we're goin' to get sixty quid between us—twenty quid each!"

"I haven't forgotten that," said Gulliver, with a nod.

"I'll be gettin' along as soon as it's dark," said Fullwood. "It wouldn't be wise for me to go before. The last time I saw Naggs we arranged that he should be in the little back parlour every evenin' from seven till eight, in case I came along with some information."

"Those two men expected to get into the school a day or two ago, but we couldn't manage it," said Bell. "Still, they've got to wait our pleasure. At the same time, it's much better for us to hurry up, or there may be no sixty quid at the end of it."

"That's what I was thinkin'," said Fullwood. "We mustn't allow those chaps any time to change their minds—it's rather important, in fact."

Nearly an hour later Ralph Leslie Fullwood, attired in his macintosh and cap, passed quickly out of the lobby into the wet Triangle. He fondly imagined that he had not been observed, but Fullwood was mistaken.

Two keen eyes had observed all his movements—and those belonged to myself.

I had seen Fullwood leave his study and go to the cloak-room, and I guessed at once that the cad of the Remove was intent upon venturing out with the intention of going to the men he had called Mr. Colmore and Mr. Naggs. I had no doubt that they were the same fellows Sir Montie and Tommy and I had followed the previous week.

I was suspicious, and I was determined to see this matter through.

CHAPTER 12.

At the White Harp.

TAP! Tap!

Mr. Naggs glanced sharply at the window.

"What was that?" he exclaimed softly.

"There's somebody there tapping. I think," said Colmore.

Both the men were seated in the little rear parlour of the White Harp Inn, just on the outskirts of Belton. It was not a very respectable inn, and Fullwood & Co. had frequently broken bounds at night in order to play cards in this little rear parlour.

Mr. Naggs rose to his feet and crossed over to the window. He pulled the blind aside, and stared out into the darkness. Then he started. A face was pressed close against the glass. Mr. Naggs instantly recognised that face—it belonged to Ralph Leslie Fullwood. He nodded quickly, and allowed the blind to drop back into position.

"It's Fullwood!" he muttered. "That kid from the school."

"Oh!" said Mr. Colmore. "Perhaps he's got some information for us."

"That's pretty certain," said Mr. Naggs. "He wouldn't come here for nothing."

Mr. Naggs went to the door, passed out, and then walked quietly down the tiny passage until he came to the rear door. He opened this, and found Fullwood on the steps.

"Good-evening, young man!" he exclaimed genially.

"Hush! Don't talk too loud!" whispered Fullwood, "I don't want everybody to know I'm here."

"Oh, there's no danger of being spotted," said Mr. Naggs. "You can come in—the coast is clear. You'll be absolutely private in the little parlour."

Fullwood followed his companion along the passage, and they entered the parlour. Mr. Naggs closed the door and looked at his young visitor.

"I've got somethin' to tell you—somethin' jolly important!" said Fullwood, without wasting any time.

He sat down, produced a cigarette-case, and lit a cigarette. Then he gazed at his two companions with an air of triumph.

"Now, look here," he said. "I have discovered a way in which you can get right into Goodwin's study without even bothering about the window or the door. It's a secret way, an' it will enable you to search the room without a soul knowing, and without the slightest alarm of danger. It will be child's play from start to finish."

The two men exchanged glances.

"Good!" said Mr. Naggs. "That's what I like to hear. Now, tell us all about it!"

"Hold on!" said Fullwood. "I think you agreed that if we did this for you, you would give us—that is, myself, Gulliver an' Bell—twenty pounds each."

"That's the agreement," said Mr. Naggs, nodding.

"Well, considering that we have planned everything so perfectly," went on Fullwood—"considering that we have made the whole thing safe, I thought you ought to give us something extra; in fact, I consider my present information is worth at least thirty quid each."

Mr. Naggs smiled.

"On the make, eh?" he remarked gently. "Well, let me hear your information first. If I think it is worth the extra money, there won't be any haggling about it."

Fullwood nodded.

"Well, I'll tell you as quickly as I can," he said, bending forward. "There is a secret passage leading up from the cellar to the north tower. All I have got to do is to leave a grating of the cellar open, and you can get in there, and your way into the secret passage, and get up into the very heart of the school without any possibility of being discovered."

"By thunder!" muttered Mr. Colmore, looking at Fullwood intently. "Is this honest, young man?"

"Absolutely!" declared Fullwood. "An' what's more, there's a secret door in this passage, an' it is situated right in Goodwin's study. You will be able to search the whole room at your leisure, without harrivin'!"

Mr. Naggs looked rather startled.

"Is this square?" he asked sharply.

"Of course it's square!" said Fullwood. "What do you take me for? Do you think I'd come down here an' spin a yarn?"

"I'm not doubting what you say," said Mr. Naggs gently. "But it seems too good to be true—that's all I mean."

"The best of it is," went on Fullwood, "nobody can possibly find you even if there is an alarm. This secret passage isn't known to the school servants, or to any of the masters. Who'd think of lookin' for intruders there? You'll be as safe as houses!"

"And how do we get into this secret passage?" asked Mr. Naggs practically.

"I'll tell you," said Fullwood. "Look here! I've got a piece of paper, an' here's a pencil. The best thing I can do is to draw a diagram; then you'll be able to follow the directions without any trouble at all."

"That's a good idea!" said Mr. Naggs, nodding.

Fullwood drew himself up to the table, and prepared his paper and pencil.

"Now, this line here is the rear wall of the Ancient House," he said, proceeding to get busy with the pencil. "Just here there is a grating—you can't possibly mistake it, because it lies exactly opposite a big outhouse. This grating is usually bolted on the inside—it isn't looked at for months on end, you know. Well, before goin' to bed to-night, I'll slip that bolt back, so that you an' Mr. Colmore can push the grating aside and get into the cellar."

"That's satisfactory," said Naggs. "Well, an' after that?"

"What I'm doin' now is to draw a plan of the cellar," said Fullwood.

"Here is the main passage leading from one of the cellars to the other. You'll run into this passage as soon as you get into the cellar. Well, turn to your left, and walk right up the passage, passing four doors. As soon as you have passed the fourth door, you'll come to a corner. A blank piece of wall is facing you, an' there seems to be no door there at all."

While he was talking, Fullwood was drawing on the paper, illustrating his meaning quite clearly and accurately. Mr. Naggs and Mr. Colmore watched with great interest.

"Now, you've got to be careful when you get to this piece of blank wall," went on Fullwood. "Measure exactly two feet three inches up from the floor, an' one foot four inches from the right-hand side. I'll put lines an' arrows on the paper to show exactly what I mean. And I'll put the measurements, too. Well, if you take these measurements correctly, and press on the spot you arrive at, you'll find that a big portion of the wall will slip back, revealing a hole."

"By thunder!" muttered Mr. Colmore.

"It does seem a bit startlin', doesn't it?" said Fullwood, enjoying the interest he was causing. "Well, when you get into that passage, all you've got to do is to go straight on, up the stairs, until you come to a passage on your left-hand side. You can't possibly miss it, because it is the only passage there. Walk along this passage until you come to a hole in the floor, then you go down a few steps, and the passage continues. At the end of this is the secret door leading into Goodwin's study."

"The secret door?" repeated Mr. Naggs.

"Yes!"

"But how can we tell which is the door, if it is secret?"

"Oh, that's easy!" replied Fullwood. "You see, the door is absolutely in-

visible from inside the room, but from the interior of the secret passage, the door is perfectly obvious—anybody with half an eye can see it. It is simply one panel with a catch—all rusty with age, you know."

"And how do we get in?" asked Mr. Naggs.

"Nothin' easier," replied Fullwood. "All you've got to do is to slip back the catch—you'll find out the way by looking at the thing for about ten seconds—and then the door comes open. You simply walk through, and you're inside Goodwin's study. The door is locked, and the window is barred. Not a soul will know that you are in there, and you will be able to search the whole place at your leisure. Don't you think it's easy?"

Mr. Naggs nodded.

"Yes," he said. "We are tremendously obliged to you, young man. This information of yours is of the utmost value to us."

"An' you'll pay up?" asked Fullwood.

"Yes—if we get into that study, as you say we can," replied Mr. Naggs. "Come down to this inn to-morrow evening, and I'll hand you ninety pounds in cash—that is thirty pounds each for you and your two chums."

Fullwood looked rather doubtful.

"I don't distrust you, or anythin' of that sort," he said, "but don't you think that that arrangement is rather one-sided, Mr. Naggs?"

"One-sided?"

"Yes," said Fullwood. "How do know that you'll be here to-morrow evenin'?"

"You've got my word for it!"

"I know I have. But you might take it into your head to go off during the night, after you have recovered the formula from Goodwin's study," said Fullwood shrewdly. "Then I should be left in the lurch, shouldn't I?"

Mr. Naggs shrugged his shoulders.

"Well, that argument cuts both ways."

young man," he said. "We've got to take your word—and you'll have to take ours. That's understood. You can't expect me to pay you until we've proved that your information is worth the money!"

"Well, perhaps not," said Fullwood. "At the same time, I think you ought to pay half now, and half to-morrow. That would be fair, wouldn't it? I suggest that you hand me forty-five quid now, an' the rest after you have done the job. Of course, I wouldn't agree to this if I didn't know that you were doin' somethin' right. We understand each other; but to an outsider it would seem as though I were lettin' you into the school for an unlawful purpose."

"Well, as a matter of fact, I suppose it is unlawful," said Mr. Naggs candidly. "But the law doesn't always deal out justice. Master Fullwood—that's why I'm taking matters into my own hands on this occasion. With regard to paying you the money, I don't think I shall be justified in doing so until we have got the formula. Therefore, we'll let the original programme stand. If I find that everything is as you have stated, you will receive the money to-morrow night."

"Well, let's suggest somethin' else," said Fullwood. "Supposin' I come down here early to-morrow mornin'—say, at about seven o'clock. Will you sub up then?"

"Certainly!" replied Mr. Naggs, without hesitation. "I'll pay you on the spot, Master Fullwood."

"Right you are!" said the leader of Study A, rising to his feet. "We'll leave it at that, then. I'll open that cellar gratin' for you to-night, an' to-morrow mornin', at seven o'clock, I'll be down here."

"Good enough!" said Mr. Naggs. "An' thank you for your information, young man."

Very shortly afterwards Fullwood took his departure, and he was feeling fairly satisfied with the result of his interview with the two strangers. He

realised that it would be impossible for them to pay any money over until they had some definite result.

At the same time, Fullwood was suspicious. He knew that these men were quite capable of leaving the district without paying up. And this proved quite conclusively that Fullwood did not trust the men, and he probably did not believe, right down in his heart, that their story of a dye formula was correct.

However, Fullwood did not worry his head over these matters. He was doing something against Dick Goodwin, and that was all his vindictive mind cared about.

The gates were locked when Fullwood arrived back at St. Frank's, but that did not worry him at all. He easily slipped over the wall, and managed to get into the Ancient House without being detected by Warren, the porter, or any of the prefects. He made his way straight to Study A.

"Well?" asked Gulliver and Bell.

"It's all serene," said Fullwood. "I've arranged everythin', an' we're goin' to get the cash to-morrow!"

"Good!" said Gulliver. "I'm pretty short just now, an' that money will come in handy. By the way, did those chaps promise to make it any more?"

"Thirty quid each!"

"Phew!" said Bell, with a whistle. "That's good! Thirty quid each, eh? Look here, you chaps, it seems to me that these men need that formula pretty badly. They wouldn't be willin' to pay ninety quid for nothin', you know! I can't quite believe it's square!"

"Neither can I," said Gulliver. "The rotters will trick us somehow, if we aren't careful!"

Fullwood nodded.

"That's what I think, too!" he said. "I've arranged to go down there at seven o'clock in the mornin'—"

"They may have scooted before then!" objected Bell.

"Quite so!" said Fullwood calmly.

"But I'm up to their dodges. I shall be awake to-night, and on the watch. An' when they leave the school, I shall be waitin' for them in the lane. You chaps will be with me, an' we'll get the money out of them at once—or raise the alarm!"

"That's a good idea!" said Gulliver. "There's nothin' like bein' on the safe side!"

Fullwood explained to his chums exactly what he had arranged, and, a little later, Fullwood made several attempts to get down into the domestic quarters of the Ancient House, in order to enter the cellar.

But he found it difficult.

Every time he made for the rear section of the Ancient House he met prefects or servants—in fact, everybody he wished to avoid. And at last bed-time came, and still Fullwood's mission was not accomplished—he had not unfastened that cellar grating.

However, there was no help for it, and Fullwood told himself that the only method now was to slip out of the dormitory after all the other fellows were asleep.

Fullwood waited until everybody was asleep—at least, he thought everybody was asleep. But in this supposition he was slightly mistaken. I remained awake, and I was fully aware of the fact that Fullwood was hastily slipping into his trousers and slippers. I was suspicious, and had remained on the alert. It was fortunate that I did so.

For, as soon as Fullwood left the dormitory, I was out of bed in a flash. Then, slipping a dressing-gown over my pyjamas, I went to the dormitory door, too, and passed out into the dark corridor. Fullwood was just creeping down the stairs.

At first I thought it was his plan to make his way out of the school, probably in order to meet Mr. Colmore and Mr. Naggs. But this was not the case. Fullwood merely went down into the lobby, and then he turned into the domestic quarters of the Ancient House.

I followed him silently, and did not give him any chance of discovering that his movements were observed.

Fullwood went straight to the cellar door, which was usually kept locked and bolted at night. But the key, as a general rule, was left in the door. Fullwood turned it softly, pushed back the bolts, and then he switched on the electric light. There was no danger of that light being seen from outside, for it only illuminated the long cellar passage.

However, it was not very convenient from my point of view, for it would be very risky for me to descend the stairs in the full glare of the light—my presence would be revealed at once if Fullwood happened to turn.

So I waited at the top, and listened carefully.

And this, I found, was all that was necessary, for I faintly heard a grating sound, and I knew at once that Fullwood was pulling back the bolts which secured the iron bars of the cellar grating. He was, in fact, making it easy for the two mysterious strangers to enter the school.

"The fool!" I muttered grimly. "The reckless idiot!"

The leader of Study A did not seem to understand that what he was doing was practically a criminal action. He was, in short, aiding and abetting burglary.

A few minutes elapsed, and then Fullwood came into view—and I dodged quickly back, and concealed myself in a recess. Fullwood switched off the light, and locked the cellar door as he bolted it. Then, after a moment's pause, turned and made his way back to the lobby. He slipped along the passage, entered the lobby, and then mounted the stairs with the evident intention of going straight back to the Remore dormitory. I shadowed him silently and with extreme caution.

But just as Fullwood reached the top of the stairs, a dim form appeared

at the shadows—a form with extremely bony legs. Fullwood paused, and attempted to press himself against the wall. And then came a deep though soft voice.

"There was somebody on the stairs," is exclaimed. "Why was there somebody on the stairs? Ask me! Because just there somebody was anxious to get to the top landing!"

"Mr. Cuttle!" I murmured. "I wonder what he's dodging about for at this time? This looks rather bad for Fullwood—he'll be reported in the morning, and that may land him in the cart properly!"

"There was darkness, and there was eyes in my head!" said Mr. Cuttle gloomily. "But them eyes wasn't able to see in the dark. Why wasn't they? Ask me! Because I wasn't a cat! Young man, I want your name—By hokey!"

Mr. Cuttle uttered that last exclamation in a tone of dismay and alarm, for Ralph Leslie Fullwood seized the only possible chance of regaining the dormitory without being recognised. Mr. Cuttle barred the top of the staircase—at least, he stood on the landing, and his broad person filled the whole space.

But Mr. Cuttle's legs were bony, and Fullwood made a sudden dive, and succeeded in worming his way between Mr. Cuttle's legs in less than two seconds.

"By hokey!" said Mr. Cuttle again.

By the time he recovered his balance and turned round, Fullwood had vanished into the blackness. And even if Mr. Cuttle entered the Remove dormitory now, it would be quite impossible for him to say which junior had been out of his bed.

Mr. Cuttle came downstairs muttering gloomily to himself. He went across the lobby, shaking his head, and disappeared from view.

I had taken cover in an obscure corner, and when Mr. Cuttle had gone I quickly remounted the stairs. But I

did not make the mistake of going back to the dormitory. Fullwood was certainly awake still, and he would see me enter, and would know at once that I might probably have been watching his movements. As matters stood, he had certainly made no attempt to investigate my bed, which was right at the far end of the dormitory. And Fullwood no doubt imagined that I was fast asleep.

So I waited, patiently and expectantly.

CHAPTER 14.

Provers in the Night.

MR. NAGGS nodded with keen satisfaction.

"The boy wasn't bluffing!" he muttered. "This grating is unfastened right enough, Colmore! We can get into the cellar without any trouble at all!"

"Good!" whispered Mr. Colmore. "But don't talk so much; we can't be too careful!"

Mr. Naggs nodded.

"I agree," he said. "But there's nobody about to hear us, and we can just take our time. The whole school's asleep, and it'll be child's play."

"Providing that we find that blamed secret passage!" said Mr. Colmore.

"Exactly—providing we find it!" agreed Mr. Naggs. "Well, we shan't be left long in doubt—that's one thing!"

They were soon in the cellar, and then, using a small electric torch—which only gave one tiny ray of light—they crossed over, and entered the little passage. Carrying out Fullwood's instructions, they passed along this until they arrived at the blank wall. Mr. Naggs looked at it rather doubtfully.

"It looks solid enough to me!" he murmured. "I can't see those great bricks moving back!"

"Neither can I!" said Mr. Colmore grimly. "It's my belief the kid was only spoofing, just to get the money out

of us. He didn't get a cent—and he ain't likely to, either!"

Mr. Naggs produced a small rule from his pocket, and proceeded to open it, while Mr. Colmore held the electric torch. Then, without wasting any time, Mr. Naggs took the measurements exactly as Fullwood had directed. When he had finished, his finger was upon one of the great squares of stone, near the edge, where it was somewhat rough.

Mr. Naggs pressed, and then uttered a gasp, for there, clearly visible, a crack had appeared in the stonework, and it was widening every instant! Naggs had felt the stone give slightly under his pressure, and then the whole square of brickwork commenced moving backwards, revealing a black cavity.

"Great snakes!" muttered Mr. Colmore, startled.

They stared at the doorway as though they could not believe their eyes.

"It's true, then!" exclaimed Mr. Naggs, in a quivering voice. "By George! The kid hasn't swindled us after all! This is a secret door all right, and it's a certainty that the rest of Fullwood's yarn is true, too! Give me that light!"

Colmore passed it over, and a moment later the two men were in the secret passage, and they were slowly mounting the stone steps which led upwards, right through the great wall, into the very interior of the Ancient House.

At length, after mounting a good many stairs, they came to a point where a narrow, low passage branched off to the left. The stairs continued straight on. Mr. Naggs came to a halt, his eyes gleaming.

"Yes, the boy was right!" he whispered. "There's the passage, just as he said. We've got to go along this until we come to a hole in the floor, and then we get down there, and go along another short passage. And at the end we shall find the secret panel leading into Goodwin's study!"

"Good!" said Mr. Colmore.

Mr. Naggs commenced moving forward, and his companion followed. They had not proceeded far along the passage before they came to a square opening in the floor which had been left by the secret trap. Sir Montie and Tommy and I had been unable to close that, and the hole was visible to any body who came along.

The two men passed down the three short steps, and then they found themselves in the other secret passage, which was much lower and much narrower.

They were compelled to bend almost double as they moved along.

"Yes, this is exactly as Fullwood described!" said Mr. Naggs intently. "Splendid! The boy is worth a hundred quid to us!"

The two rascals in the passage were quite pleased with themselves. But they would not have been quite so pleased, perhaps, if they had known that their presence was not so secret as they imagined.

In point of fact, three ears were pressed tightly against the panelling in the Remove passage—three very keen ears. They belonged to Tregellis-West, Watson, and myself. We stood in the Remove passage in a line, listening intently.

"Yes, they're there!" I whispered, after a moment. "Can't you hear them?"

"Begad! Yes, old boy, rather!" murmured Tregellis-West.

"We mustn't talk—we musn't breathe, even," whispered Tommy Watson. "If we can hear them, they can hear us!"

This was true enough, but we had only been speaking in the faintest of whispers. And now we stood away from the wall, and gathered together in a little group.

I had remained awake, and I had been alert and watchful. And after what had seemed an interminable time I had heard very faint sounds from below.

Without wasting a moment, I had awakened Sir Montie Tregellis-West and Tommy Watson. I satisfied myself that Ralph Leslie Fullwood was fast asleep. He may have desired to remain awake, but he had dozed off.

And so Sir Montie and Tommy and I crept out of the dormitory and descended to the Remove passage. I knew that if those men got into the secret passage they would betray themselves when they reached the panelling near Goodwin's study. For, by pressing our ears to the woodwork, we could hear any sound from within.

"Well, what's to be done?" whispered Watson eagerly.

"There's only one thing," I said. "We've got to go up to Mr. Lee's room and tell him!"

"Begin!"

"There's no need to be startled, Montie," I said. "We can't deal with this thing alone; the guv'nor must be told. He'll know what to do, and both those rascals will be trapped, if I'm any judge. Come on!"

And we hastened down the Remove passage, and mounted the stairs, until we arrived on the landing. Then we passed down it until we reached the door of Nelson Lee's bed-room. I tapped softly, and almost at once came the guv'nor's voice.

"Who is that?"

"It is me, sir—Nipper," I murmured.

"Oh, indeed!" exclaimed Nelson Lee. "Wait a moment, my lad!"

He was soon at the door, and he stood there in his dressing-gown and slippers looking somewhat curious and rather severe.

"Well, what is it?" he asked. "Upon my soul, three of you! What are you doing out here at this time of night?"

"There are burglars in the house, sir!" blurted out Watson excitedly.

"Burglars!"

"Yes sir!"

"I'll explain!" I interrupted. "Look here, guv'nor, it's this way. I—I hap-

pened to be out in the corridor and I heard a suspicious sound—"

And without going into very close details I told Nelson Lee all about it. I told him that the two men were in the secret passage attempting to make an entry in Goodwin's study. But I did not mention any names—I did not inform the guv'nor that Fullwood was the responsible party.

And Nelson Lee, probably realising that I had some reason for not going into the full facts, refrained from asking me. After all, it was quite sufficient for him to know that the two intruders were in the building.

"And so, Nipper, two housebreakers are even at this moment in the secret passage which leads to Goodwin's study?" said Nelson Lee. "Very well, we'll deal with them at once—and drastically."

"Good egg!" I exclaimed. "That's the style, guv'nor."

Nelson Lee went into his bed-room again, telling us to remain outside for a minute or two. When he reappeared he was attired in his coat and trousers, and I noticed that he held a small but serviceable revolver in his right hand.

"You have an electric torch, Nipper?" he asked.

"Yes, sir."

"Good," exclaimed Lee. "That is all we require, I think."

I looked at him keenly.

"What is your plan, sir?" I inquired.

"It is quite simple, Nipper," replied Nelson Lee. "You have told me that Naggs and Colmore cannot get into Goodwin's study from the secret passage. The panel is blocked up."

"That's right, sir."

"Very well. If we enter the secret stairway, and reached the junction where the narrow passage branches off, we shall completely entrap the precious pair," said Nelson Lee keenly. "They will not be able to pass my revolver, and they cannot escape at the other end. They will therefore be compelled to surrender."

"Yes—but we shall have to be quick," I said.

"Exactly. Come along!"

"Hold on, sir," put in Tommy Watson. "What about the door leading into the Remove passage? The rollers may get out that way."

"But I understood Nipper to say that that door was secured——"

"So it is, sir," I said. "The catch won't work, and you can't open the door. I opened it at first, but then it secured itself somehow. It's absolutely fast."

Nelson Lee nodded.

"That is all we need to know, then," he said. "We must go at once."

Not another moment was wasted. We passed along the corridor, and then went into the North Tower. It did not take me more than a couple of seconds to show the gov'nor the secret door, and then we passed through into the stairway—Nelson Lee leading.

"You boys must keep behind—a good way behind," he ordered. "There may be some firing. I hope not, but we cannot be too sure. Do not follow me closely, but remain well in the rear."

"Yes, sir."

I mentally resolved not to take the gov'nor's orders too literally. But I allowed him to get well in advance to start with. In case of need we could easily rush up.

At last we arrived at the junction, and Nelson Lee stood there for a moment or two in total darkness. He was listening, and his patience was soon rewarded. Along the passage came faint sounds of conversation.

Lee moved forward at last, and he soon arrived at the trap in the floor. Just for a moment he allowed his light to play upon the square, then he switched it off, and lowered himself into the low, narrow passage.

And now he could see what was happening.

Mr. Naggs and Mr. Colmore were at the panel leading into Dick Goodwin's study. And they were saying things.

They were unable to get into the secret apartment—owing to the heavy bookcase which barred the way. And they were hot and dusty and impatient. In addition, they were angry.

"It's no blamed use," said Naggs savagely. "We can't open the thing——"

"Hands up—the pair of you!"

The voice cut through the air crisply and distinctly. Two startled oaths came from the lips of the rescuers, and their electric torch snapped out. But Nelson Lee's torch beamed down the passage—revealing the automatic in the detective's grasp. The situation was dramatic.

"Lee—Lee himself!" snarled Naggs. "By thunder!"

Nelson Lee's nerves were as steady as a rock.

"There is really no way of escape, my friend," he said grimly. "Your only course is to surrender—and I should advise you to do so quietly! Resistance is quite out of the question."

"Is it?" snarled Mr. Naggs. "We'll see about that! You won't dare to fire—(he revolver is only bluff! And if you think we're trapped in here, you've made a mistake!"

Mr. Naggs moved forward a few paces, until he was opposite the panel which led to the Remove passage. He had remembered this, and he thought that if it would be possible for him to open that door both he and Colmore could escape. But it was very doubtful—Nelson Lee was there, watching their every movement.

The two men reached the panel, and Mr. Naggs commenced fumbling the fastening of the secret door. Nelson Lee observed the movement at once, and a grim smile appeared at the corners of his mouth.

"Now, now, that won't do!" he exclaimed grimly. "You'll kindly see——"

that catch alone, my friends. Put your hands above your heads!"

"Hang you!" snarled Mr. Naggs furiously.

He was desperate; he was like a rat in a trap.

To open the secret panel in the ordinary way was impossible. But Mr. Naggs uttered a hoarse shout, and threw himself against the secret panel with every ounce of his strength.

Crash!

To his extreme surprise, he went right through that panel as though it had been made of cardboard. It was not excessively strong; it had not been made to withstand such a tremendous onslaught, and possibly the woodwork was rotten with age.

In any case Mr. Naggs went clean through, and landed in a tumbled heap in the Remove passage! And Mr. Colmore, without waiting to say anything, dashed through the opening which had been provided. He found Naggs just getting to his feet.

Nelson Lee had not expected anything of this nature, and he tore down the passage until he arrived at the smashed panel.

When he emerged into the Remove passage both the masked scoundrels had vanished.

CHAPTER 15.

The Capture!

THIS was a night of strange happenings.

While the excitement was going on within the house, other strange events were taking place outside, in the cold, blustery air.

It was very dark out in the Triangle, and the wind was whistling through the leafless elms and the old chestnuts.

Against the wall, which divided the Triangle from the road, two men were standing. Who were these two strangers?

It was a mystery. The two figures

climbed cautiously over the wall and dropped into the Triangle. Then they moved across the open space until they came to one of the tall chestnut trees. Here they halted for a time, and talked together in low tones.

"Do you think he is asleep?" said one man.

"He is bound to be by this time—and our plans ought to work out well," said the other. "You are ready for your part, I presume?"

"Yes; of course I am."

The other man nodded, and said no more.

He looked up at the tree, and then commenced climbing. Round his waist was bound a long coil of thin, strong rope. The man on the ground watched his companion as he climbed.

At last he reached the topmost branch of the tree, a stout young branch which was waving slightly in the wind. Securely perched on his branch, which projected far out beyond the other branches and twigs, the man proceeded to unwrap the rope.

At last he had the coil in his hands, and, steadying himself, he gave a tremendous swing, and the thin rope went flying through the air.

The end of the rope, in a loop, passed completely over a chimney-stack on the roof of the Ancient House. The man in the tree did not lose a moment in pulling it taut and securing it to the branch. Then he glanced down.

"Right!" he murmured.

The man below heard that word, and at once commenced climbing. Meanwhile, the man who was already in the tree commenced to perform an extremely hazardous task. He grasped the rope, and then swung himself across, far from the ground.

Hand under hand he went, dangling over space.

But he reached the parapet of the roof without mishap. Then, perfectly cool, although rather breathless, he pulled himself up into safety. But he

did not pause. He passed softly over the flat roof until he came to the chimney-stack. Here he unlooped the rope.

And in the tree the other man was waiting. He unfastened the rope from the branch, and it was drawn over on to the roof.

The man standing there waved his arm, and this signal was understood, for his companion climbed down the tree again until he reached the gravel of the triangle. And now he proceeded to perform a rather curious operation.

Picking up one or two small stones, the stranger walked towards the wall of the house, and then threw the stones up at a window, and they rattled noisily upon the glass.

It was the window of Nelson Lee's bed-room.

But, unfortunately for these mysterious men, Nelson Lee was not there. Nelson Lee was down on the ground floor of the Ancient House. He was, in fact, in the Remove passage, roundly abusing himself for having allowed Naggs and Colmore to escape.

Sir Montie and Tommy and I followed Nelson Lee out of the passage, and we were rather startled.

"They've escaped, sir!" I panted. "They've——"

"I know they have escaped, Nipper," said Nelson Lee. "What is the good of telling me that?"

He did not wait to say any more, but dashed down the passage towards the lobby. We followed him, and at that moment we heard the sound of footsteps. We simply dashed up at the double.

Meanwhile, Mr. Naggs had managed to get completely away, for he had not gone upstairs; he had made for the domestic quarters, and he had opened the window, and was now streaking across the meadow at the back of the school—making tracks for the wood.

But Mr. Colmore was not quite so lucky.

He had chosen the staircase in his panic. He had hardly known where he was going. And he rushed up, and then pelted along the upper corridor. He was desperate, and he dashed into the first open doorway he could find. And this, as it happened, was the doorway of Nelson Lee's bed-room, for the detective had failed to close the door when we had given the alarm.

Mr. Colmore breathed a great sigh of relief. He closed the door and ran lightly across to the window and threw up the sash.

It seemed to him that he had heard a slight rattle at the window, but he took no notice of this. He was too intent upon escaping.

The window was high, but Colmore thought it possible that he might be able to get to the ground.

He leaned far out of the window, searching for a pipe, or for some strong Ivy.

And then Mr. Colmore gave a cry of alarm.

For, at that moment, while he was leaning out of the window, a thin loop of rope came circling down. It swung itself over his head and shoulders, and then, with a sharp jerk, it became tight.

"Oh!" gasped the man.

He struggled fiercely, but it was no good. The rope was pinioning his arms to his side, and it was so tight that he could almost have cried out with pain. And then the rope became tighter and tighter, until, at length, Colmore was lifted right off his feet and swung clear out of the window into the air!

He dangled there, many feet above the ground.

Then, with a swiftness that was startling, he was lowered to the ground. It was almost a fall, and he arrived in a heap upon the gravel. He had descended the last six feet, in fact, in a sheer fall. He was hurt considerably.

Quick as a flash, the man who had been waiting in the Triangle dashed forward. He sprang upon the prostrate

Colmore, and proceeded to bind other ropes about him. Meanwhile the man on the roof had another rope handy, and he came slithering down this to the ground.

He ran lightly up to his companion. "Splendid!" he murmured. "We've got him!"

"He's a bit dazed, too," murmured the other. "That's all the better. We must lose no time—"

A head appeared out of the window above.

"Who is that down there?" came a sharp voice. "I am glad to see you have captured the rascal. I will be down in a minute!"

The two men in the Triangle muttered low oaths. The next second an electric torch flashed out, and it played upon the features of Mr. Colmore.

"Hang it all!" snarled one of the men. "We've made a mistake!"

There was untold fury and chagrin in his tones. But he and his companion did not wait a moment. They simply streaked across the Triangle, jumped over the wall, and vanished down the road.

They had, as a matter of fact, made a very bad bloomer indeed. For it was quite evident that it had been their intention to capture Nelson Lee. Instead of doing that, they had very kindly assisted Lee by capturing Mr. Colmore!

A moment later Nelson Lee came hurrying round a corner of the Triangle, and he was followed by Fregellis-West, Watson and myself. Colmore, at that moment, was attempting to struggle to his feet.

"You've got me!" he muttered as Nelson Lee bent over him.

"I am glad you realise that you are in a somewhat hopeless position, my man," said Nelson Lee grimly. "You are captured—"

"I am!" growled Colmore savagely. "I just looked out of the window, and a rope came swinging down, and it

lifted me right off my feet, and it threw me down here. I was lassoed!"

"Bogus!"

"He must be dreaming!" murmured Watson.

Nelson Lee looked rather keen for a moment.

"You say that you were roped as soon as you leaped out of the window?" he asked.

"Yes, I was!" said Colmore. "There was somebody on the roof with a rope, waiting. And directly I looked out of the window I was collared. Curse the luck!"

Nelson Lee looked at me.

"Dear me!" he exclaimed in a low voice. "This is quite remarkable, Nipper."

"How do you mean, sir?"

"Why, you heard what this man said," proceeded the guv'nor. "It is fairly evident that a little trap was set for my benefit—and Mr. Colmore fell into it. Those two men who were in the Triangle, bending over our prisoner, here, were enemies of mine. They thought it was I who looked out of the window, and they captured this rascal in mistake!"

"Well, I'm jiggered!" I exclaimed.

It was all a mystery to me, and I was decidedly puzzled. Colmore was quickly transferred to one of the cellars, where he was made a secure prisoner. It would be impossible for him to escape until the police arrived, when he would be charged with housebreaking and a few other things.

Fortunately, the school had not been aroused, and hardly anybody knew what had been taking place. The excitement was over, and there had been a great deal of it, too!

But what did it all mean?

Who were these two men—these two who had appeared so mysteriously with the ropes? Why had they attempted to kidnap Nelson Lee? Were they in any way connected with Colmore and

Naggs? Somehow, I felt quite convinced that they were not.

Nelson Lee told us to go straight up to bed, but we didn't do so immediately. We went down into the Remove passage with the guv'nor, and then we repaired the secret panel.

There was only one way in which it could be done at the moment without attracting attention. And that was to tear the remains of the smashed panel out and put another panel in its place. We did this by removing the secret door from Goodwin's study. It would not be noticed there, because the bookcase was in front of it. The matter could be easily attended to when there was more time.

But it was most important that there should not be a gaping hole in the wall of the Remove passage in the morning. The juniors would get very excited, and there would be a tremendous lot of discussion. And so all signs of the night's work were concealed, then we all went into the dormitory passage in order to get back to bed.

"Well, boys, we have had a little excitement," said Nelson Lee. "But it is over now, and if you will take my advice you will say nothing about it to the other boys."

"Oh, we shan't say a word," I said. "But who were those two fellows out in the Triangle, sir?"

"I don't know, Nipper."

"But they were after you—"

"Undoubtedly. It is fairly obvious that I must use extreme caution in the future. It will not do to take any risks. I have certain enemies prowling about the school, who are intent upon doing me an injury. And, in future, I shall keep a very strict watch."

More than that, the guv'nor would not say, and we returned to the dormitory and slipped into bed.

"Well, you chaps, I don't know what to make of it," I remarked as I hugged my knees under the bedclothes. "It's

all a giddy mystery, and the sooner it's cleared up, the better."

"Begad, rather!"

"Well, I'm sleepy!" yawned Watson. And he rolled over and composed himself for sleep.

It was some little time before I followed his example. For there was much on my mind. Naggs had escaped, but Colmore by this time was in the hands of the police.

They had failed in their attempt to search Dick Goodwin's study. And I knew well there was no secret formula—as Fullwood had imagined.

As for Fullwood, Gulliver and Bell, they had done their work, and no result had followed. In future, probably, they would steer well clear of Mr. Naggs. For, after what had happened, it was not likely that Mr. Naggs would feel very amiably disposed towards the nuts of Study A. He would probably take it for granted that they had led him deliberately into the trap.

But, out of the tangle of the night's events, I knew two certain things. Naggs and Colmore had been after something in Dick Goodwin's study.

The other two men were not at all connected with Colmore and Naggs. They were prowling about St. Frank's with the idea of kidnapping Nelson Lee. But why they should want to kidnap the guv'nor was a puzzle. And why Mr. Naggs and Mr. Colmore should want to search Dick Goodwin's study was another puzzle.

However, I had no doubt everything would become clear before long.

CHAPTER 16.

Inspector Jamieson Makes a Call.

TUBBS, the Ancient House page-boy, tapped Nelson Lee lightly on the arm.

"Beg pardon, sir," he said apologetically.

The schoolmaster-detective had been

about to walk down the Ancient House steps.

It was evening of the next day, and nothing had leaked out of the previous night's events. The governor had his own reasons for keeping it a secret for the present.

"Well, Tabbs, what is it?" asked Nelson Lee.

"There's a gentleman to see you, sir," said Tabbs. "He came in the other way, and I took him up to your study. He says it's most important that he shall see you."

"Did he give you his name, Tabbs?" asked Nelson Lee.

"Yes, sir," replied the pageboy. "The gent is Inspector Jameson of Bannington."

Nelson Lee nodded.

"Thank you, Tabbs—I will go to my study at once," he said. "Inspector Jameson, eh?" he mused as he went along the passage. "I wonder what has brought the worthy inspector over from Bannington?"

A minute or two later Nelson Lee entered his study. As he did so a burly, stolid individual, in the attire of a police-inspector, rose to his feet. He nodded to Nelson Lee in a somewhat pompous manner, and he extended his hand.

"Evening, Mr. Lee," he said. "Hope I'm not disturbing you?"

"Not at all, Jameson," said Lee. "Make yourself comfortable. I hardly thought that I should find you here this evening."

The inspector nodded again. He was a stolid man and Nature had not blessed him with a very large amount of brains. Nevertheless, Jameson considered that he was quite an able detective; in fact, his pet grievance was that he had not been transferred to Scotland Yard long ago.

"I dare say you are aware of the fact, Mr. Lee, that we have had a great many burglaries in this district

of late," said the inspector. "Not only in this district, but in many parts of England. It is fairly obvious, in fact, that a big organisation is at work."

"Yes, I am quite aware of that fact, Jameson," said Nelson Lee. "I have known for a week or two past that a crime wave has been passing over England. The police, it seems, are quite unable to cope with the deluge of robberies which have been occurring. And so things are rather bad in this district, too?"

"They are, sir," said Jameson, nodding. "At the same time I must say that we have matters well in hand—so far as Bannington is concerned, at all events. While I'm in charge there won't be many crimes undiscovered."

"Of course not," said Nelson Lee gravely. "With such a man at the helm as yourself, inspector, it is difficult to understand how any criminals can exist in this neighbourhood!"

Jameson looked at Nelson Lee sharply.

"They are a daring lot, Mr. Lee," he said. "And they have even had the audacity to burgle houses in the Bannington district. Please do not imagine that I have come to you now appealing for assistance. Nothing of the kind. I am acting under instructions from my superior."

"Ah, yes, of course!" murmured Nelson Lee. "And may I ask what you require of me?"

Inspector Jameson coughed.

"Well, the fact is, Mr. Lee, the Chief constable requested me to call upon you at the first opportunity. The Chief Constable would like you to investigate matters in this district, if you could spare the time. Of course, he doesn't expect you to interfere with the police in any way, but just to have a general look round on the off-chance that you might be able to help us."

Nelson Lee nodded.

"I quite understand," he said smoothly.

And he did understand. Jameson, as a matter of fact, had been making an unholy mess of his investigations of late. Burglaries had been taking place in and around Bannington, and the culprits had got off scot-free in every instance. The police had been absolutely helpless. Jameson, in particular, had acted with extreme wooden-headedness. But he would never admit this fact to a soul.

The Chief Constable, however, knew better. And there was something a little humorous in the fact that Jameson had been sent to Nelson Lee on this mission.

"I have certainly no objection to investigating any little matter which you may wish me to deal with, Jameson," said Nelson Lee. "I will run over to Bannington to-morrow, perhaps, and then you can give me more details. And you need not be afraid that I shall interfere with you in any way whatever."

Inspector Jameson rose to his feet.

"Thank you, Mr. Lee," he said gruffly. "Personally, I think your help is unnecessary. However, it will do no harm, I dare say, if you look into one or two matters."

Very shortly afterwards Jameson took his departure, leaving Nelson Lee vastly amused. It was fairly clear that Jameson did not welcome the great detective's investigations at all.

Lee decided that he would run over to Bannington as soon as possible, on the morrow probably—and then he would personally look into one or two of the mysteries which were puzzling the Bannington police. Lee was quite confident that he would be able to achieve some concrete results.

Very shortly after Jameson had taken his departure—at about a quarter-past eight to be exact—Nelson Lee happened to come across me in the lobby. I was just coming along from Study C with Sir Montie Tregellis-West and Tommy Watson. We had finished our prep, and we were on our way to the Common-room.

"Just one moment, Nipper!" said Nelson Lee.

"Right you are, sir," I replied. "Anything important?"

"Well, not exactly important," said the guv'nor. "It is just possible that I may be away for a day or two."

"What's the game, sir?" I inquired.

"I cannot tell you, my lad," replied the guv'nor. "You see, I may find it necessary to investigate certain matters in the district, and it might be necessary for me to go at a moment's notice. It is even possible that I shall leave late at night—after you have retired to rest. Therefore, if I am not to be found the next morning you must not worry—just wait for me to come back."

"Right you are, sir," I said. "But I think you might let me into the secret."

"My dear Nipper, there is no secret to let you into," smiled Nelson Lee. "Well, I won't delay you any longer."

A moment or two later I was back with my chums, and I told them what Nelson Lee had said.

"Jolly queer, I call it," I finished up. "The guv'nor has something in mind, evidently—but he doesn't want to tell me."

"Dear old boy, there is no need for you to worry yourself," said Sir Montie Tregellis-West. "Mr. Lee is quite capable of lookin' after himself."

"Oh, rather!" I agreed. "But, at the same time, if there's any excitement going, I'd like to be in it."

The next morning I was very forcibly reminded of what Nelson Lee had said to me the evening before. For it soon became known that the guv'nor was not in the school. He had slipped away during the night.

"It's quite evident that Mr. Lee meant to go all along," said Tommy Watson. "He just told you that last night, Nipper, to make you feel comfortable. He knew jolly well he was going."

"Well, I don't quite like it," I said shortly. "It's rather queer of the guv'nor to act this way. Where could he have got to?"

"It's no good askin' us that, dear old fellow," said Sir Montie Tregellis-West. "There are hundreds of places where Mr. Lee might have gone."

A moment or two later Mr. Crowell, the master of the Remove, came into sight along the passage. I went up to him at once.

"Do you know where Mr. Lee has gone, sir?" I asked.

The Remove master shook his head. "I am sorry, Nipper, but I cannot tell you," he replied. "It is rather mysterious, as a matter of fact. Mr. Lee went out for a walk last night between eleven and twelve—I know that for a fact, since I saw him in the Triangle. But after that nobody seems to know what became of him. He did not return to the school, and he is still absent."

"What does the Head say about it, sir?" I asked.

"Oh, Dr. Stafford is quite at ease," said Mr. Crowell. "You see, Mr. Lee had already mentioned that he would probably be away for a day or two—and Mr. Lee indicated that he might go off at a moment's notice even in the middle of the night, so there is no reason why we should worry ourselves. We can be quite satisfied that Mr. Lee had an excellent reason for acting in this way."

"Yes, sir, I suppose so," I said slowly. "But somehow I don't feel quite satisfied. Somebody told me that the electric light in his study was still on this morning."

"Yes, that is quite correct, Nipper," said Mr. Crowell. "The light in Mr. Lee's study was certainly on this morning—the housemaid found the light burning when she came down."

"Well, it's not like the guv'nor to go off in that way, sir," I said. "If he decided to leave St. Frank's on an in-

vestigation, he would surely put his light out before he went."

"He may have forgotten it, Nipper," said Mr. Crowell.

"Yes, that's possible—but Mr. Lee isn't the kind of man to forget things, sir," I said. "I'm rather worried."

The Form-master smiled.

"My dear lad, there is no earthly reason why you should worry," he said smoothly. "Mr. Lee is surely able to take care of himself. We shall probably hear from him during the morning."

I frowned as Mr. Crowell went down the passage.

"I don't like it!" I said firmly. "Even though the guv'nor spoke to me like that last night I'm still anxious. And I mean to go along to his study now and have a look round."

"Right you are," said Watson. "We'll come with you."

And so we went along the passages until we reached Nelson Lee's study. It was, of course, strictly prohibited for any juniors to enter a House-master's study without permission, and during the master's absence. But in Nelson Lee's case it was different. My relations with the guv'nor were not those of an ordinary schoolboy with an ordinary Housemaster.

We entered Nelson Lee's apartment, and I looked round with a searching gaze. I noted all sorts of things during the first minute—and they were things which did not tend to make me feel more comfortable.

"Well?" said Tommy Watson, after a moment or two. "There's nothing here to make you feel worried."

"Isn't there?" I said. "What about that ashtray on the table?"

"Well, what about it?"

"Use your eyes, my son," I said. "Don't you see that half-smoked cigar there? It was evidently laid down fully alight, and it continued burning for some time afterwards. That seems to indicate that the guv'nor went out of

his study in a hurry, and he intended to come back almost at once. You see, he left his cigar in the ashtray just for a moment. But he didn't come back—he remained away. And he left the light burning, and that cigar burning, too."

"Nipper, dear old boy, it certainly seems a bit strange," admitted Sir Montie.

I nodded.

"Strange!" I echoed. "Significant—that's what I call it. And then, look at the writing-pad. There's a letter there—a letter to a business firm in London—about some electrical supplies for the school. That letter's only half-written, and the guv'nor's fountain-pen is lying beside it. He broke off actually in the middle of a word." I went on, examining the letter closely. "That looks strange, doesn't it? And it substantiates all I have said—Mr. Lee went out of his study in a hurry, and he expected to come back almost at once."

"It certainly looks a bit that way, I must admit," said Tommy Watson. "Well, even supposing it is so—what does it matter?"

"It matters just this much," I said. "The guv'nor didn't go off on an investigation, as we imagined. He wouldn't leave the school at such short notice and he wouldn't leave his study in this condition. Everything may be all right, but, at the same time, I don't feel positively certain. And anything of an uncertain nature always makes me uncomfortable. It's a rotten feeling."

"I quite agree with you, dear old boy," said Sir Montie, nodding. "I say, look at these!"

Sir Montie was pointing to the floor, and I followed the direction. I saw Nelson Lee's shoes there.

"The guv'nor's shoes!" I exclaimed. "My only hat! He surely didn't go out without his shoes?"

"Oh, riss!" said Watson. "Mr. Lee has got more than one pair, you ass!"

"Perhaps so—but he doesn't keep them all in use," I said. "All his other shoes are in the store cupboard. And where are his slippers? It seems to me that he was sitting in his study, wearing his slippers, and he went out for something on the spur of the moment. Anyhow, we'll have a look round. If his slippers aren't here, it'll be absolutely certain that he's wearing them at the present moment!"

We searched the study all over, but we could not find the guv'nor's slippers. What did it mean?

Would Nelson Lee leave St. Frank's in order to go upon a long trip, wearing only a pair of thin slippers?

I was very anxious, and I could not help worrying.

CHAPTER 17.

The Code Telegram.

DICK GOODWIN, the new fellow in the Remove, stood on the steps of the Ancient House, looking thoughtfully across the Triangle. It was not yet tea-time, and the Triangle contained quite a number of fellows.

I was out in the Triangle, and I was feeling decidedly moody. I had been worrying about the guv'nor all day, and my fears were by no means at rest.

I could not satisfy myself that Nelson Lee had gone off willingly, attired in only a pair of slippers, and apparently without a hat. Where had he gone to so abruptly? What had called him away at a second's notice?

These were questions which were puzzling me, and I did not know what to think.

"Well, Nipper, it's nearly tea-time," said Tommy Watson, coming up to me. "Hallo! You're still looking absent-minded and broody. What's the matter? Worrying about Mr. Lee?"

I nodded.

"Yes, a bit," I admitted. "The fact

is, Tommy, I can't quite get the hang of things—that's all. Where's Montie?"

"Indoors, I believe," said Watson. "Probably indulging in a nap before the fire."

Just at that moment a figure on a bicycle entered the Triangle, and we recognised him at once as a telegraph-messenger. The boy dismounted from his machine, and came across towards the Ancient House steps, where a good many juniors were collected.

"Hallo! Who's the telegram for?" said Reginald Pitt. "Not for me, I suppose?"

The messenger shook his head.

"It's for Master Goodwin, sir," he said.

"Goodwin is here himself," said Pitt. "I say, Goodwin!"

"Aye, I can see," said Goodwin, looking down the steps. "A telegram for me?"

"Master Richard Goodwin, Remove Form, St. Frank's," declared the telegraph-boy.

"That's me," said Dick Goodwin. "Aye, but this is a surprise! I wasn't expecting a telegram from anybody. I wonder what it can be!"

He took the buff-coloured envelope, and quickly tore it open; then he folded out the flimsy sheet, and glanced at the words with rather a puzzled frown upon his clear, honest face.

"Bad news?" asked Hubbard curiously.

Goodwin shook his head.

"Nay, not bad," he said. He turned to the post-office boy. "All right, messenger, there's no reply."

The telegraph-boy departed and Goodwin turned and walked into the Ancient House without another word. He went to his study.

"By gum!" he muttered, as he closed the door. "This looks important! I wonder what it can mean?"

He went straight over to his desk, and sat down at the writing-pad. Then

he drew the telegraph-form towards him, and produced a pencil.

The telegram ran:

"Richard Goodwin, Remove Form, St. Frank's College, Belling, Sussex.—Will try to be very punctual in sending machine. Bannington on October 27. Am taking train for Scotland to-day, but will come back soon. On my return bicycle will receive very special attention. Important matters detain father now,—MOTHER."

"Now, let me see," he murmured. "The first word is all right, but I've got to cross out the next two—leave the fourth word, cross out the next two, leave the next word, and so on. Yes, that's right—that's the code!"

Goodwin had the telegram in front of him, and he placed a pencil line through the words "try to," then he crossed out "very punctual," then "sending machine," then "on October," and so on throughout the wording of the wire. He cut two words out, and left one in. And when he had finished there was indeed, a very different message to read. It was one which caused Dick Goodwin to open his eyes in some surprise, for this is how the telegram now read:

"Will be in Bannington 27 train to-day. Come on bicycle. Very important.—FATHER."

In its original form, the telegram had seemed of no importance whatever; but now it was very different. The telegram was from Goodwin's father, and Goodwin senior was evidently coming down to Bannington during the evening.

"Now I wonder what it can mean?" muttered Goodwin, to himself. "Why is dad coming down? And why did he take the trouble to wire me in this way? It must be something very important. Aye, but it's champion—I didn't expect to see dad for weeks and weeks!"

His eyes gleamed with pleasure for a

moment; then he looked rather troubled again, and very thoughtful. He could not help coming to the conclusion that there was a very serious reason for his father's sudden visit to St. Frank's.

The code which Goodwin senior had used was quite a simple one, but it was known only to himself, his son, and one or two of his most trusted employees. There was not the slightest doubt that Mr. Goodwin had a very particular reason in wishing his visit to the school to be kept a secret.

Dick had another look at the telegram. It was clear to him that the "27 train" meant the seven-twenty at Bannington. There was an express in from London at that time, as Goodwin very soon found out by consulting a local time-table.

Tea was over in Study C when there came a tap at the door, and Dick Goodwin presented himself. He stood there, hesitating in the doorway.

"Come in, my son," I said cheerfully. "What's the trouble?"

Dick Goodwin entered the study.

"I wanted to run over to—to the village," he said slowly. "Could you lend me a bicycle? It will be champion of you if you can."

"Well, my back tyre's punctured," I put in. "I'm afraid my machine isn't much use."

"That's all right," said Tommy Watson. "You can have mine, Goodwin. I shan't be using it to-day, and you're welcome to it."

"Thank you, Watson!" said Goodwin. "It is very good of you. Your machine is in the bicycle-shed, I suppose?"

"That's it," said Watson. "You can't mistake my jigger. It's enamelled dark green, you know, and both the tyres are new. Everything is in perfect order. You won't have any trouble at all."

"Ah— it's good of you. It is that," said Goodwin. "Thank you, Watson."

"Don't mention it," said Watson lightly.

The Lancashire boy passed out of the study, and there was a silence for a moment or two.

"Well, what do you think of it?" asked Watson.

"I think that we ought to get up a search for him," I said absently.

"Eh?"

"A search for whom, dear old boy?"

"Why, the guv'nor, of course!" I replied. "It's jolly mysterious!"

"I was talking about Goodwin, you ass!" said Watson. "I wonder why he wants to borrow my jigger? Why can't he walk down to the village?"

"My dear chap, it's no good asking me," I replied. "You've lent him your bike, and there's an end of it. I'm not worrying myself about Goodwin."

And, as a matter of fact, I hardly gave the Lancashire boy a thought. I was deeply concerned regarding Nelson Lee. He had not communicated with the school during the whole day. Nelson Lee had disappeared during the previous night, and nothing had been seen or heard of him since. I could not help worrying.

Meanwhile, Dick Goodwin was getting ready for his journey to Bannington. There was still plenty of time. It was, in fact, only just after six.

But Goodwin thought it would be just as well to get off at once. He could wait at Bannington.

And so, at about half-past six, Dick Goodwin started out on his journey. He went to the bicycle-shed, took Tommy Watson's machine from its place, and switched on the electric lamp, for it was dusk already. Dark, dull masses of clouds filled the sky, and there was a considerable wind. It seemed, in fact, that the night was likely to be a rather stormy one.

However, there was no rain, and the roads were comparatively dry; but in places where the trees overhung the road there were patches of mud.

Goodwin took it easily, and rode in a leisurely fashion down the lane into the village, and then took the main

road to Bannington. There was practically no traffic about, and the solitary cyclist had the road to himself. As he pedalled along, he was wondering why his father had taken this sudden trip down to Bannington. Why was Mr. Goodwin coming to see him? And why, above all, had he wired to his son in code?

It was rather a puzzle, and the Lancashire boy decided that it would be quite useless for him to conjecture.

Goodwin was just passing through a very quiet stretch of road. It was about half-way between Bellton and Bannington. The trees grew thickly on either side of the road, and the branches almost met overhead, in a kind of natural arbour. Within this stretch the darkness was intense.

Goodwin rode on easily, thinking only of the coming visit of his father.

And then, with startling abruptness, he saw a rope stretched from side to side of the road. It was a thin rope, which was drawn tight, its position being about three feet from the surface of the road.

"By gum!" muttered Goodwin, in alarm.

He applied his brakes, but there was no time to pull up. He had only seen the rope when he was almost upon it. The next moment he went straight into it and shot completely over the handlebars in a heap on the road, his bicycle crashing over, and the lamp being extinguished on the instant.

Goodwin was dazed by the shock of it. He attempted to pick himself up; but, even as he was doing so, two dark forms came towards him, one from either hedge. The next moment Goodwin was seized and held securely.

"Eh, what—what does this mean?" said the lad. "By gum, if you touch me!"

"Take my advice, young man, and don't struggle!" exclaimed a rough voice. "You can't possibly get away, and it'll only be the worse for you if you make a fuss."

Dick Goodwin was startled, but he was not scared, and the next moment he hit out with all his strength, for he was desperate. But it was quite hopeless from the start. Before Goodwin had struggled for long he was thrown to the ground, and a heavy knee was placed in the small of his back. Then his arms were secured with thick rope. Two minutes later his ankles were treated in a similar way. The junior was absolutely helpless.

And then, before he could speak, a thick muffer was forced round his mouth and drawn tight. Meanwhile, Goodwin himself was absolutely flabbergasted. He could not understand what this meant.

His captors did not speak any more. They carried Dick Goodwin through a gap in the hedge and deposited him on the grass beyond; then the bicycle was fetched, and the road was left dark and deserted.

CHAPTER 18.

REGINALD PITT'S DISCOVERY!

REGINALD PITT, of the Remove, gave a grunt.

"Buck up, Jack, my son!" he said. "We shall have to hurry, you know, or we shall be late for calling over. We must buzz like the very dickens!"

"Rather!" said Jack Grey. "Still, I think we shall just manage to do it all right."

The two juniors were on their way home from Bannington. They had been doing a little shopping, and now they were compelled to hurry in order to be at St. Frank's in time for calling over. It was very dark, and it seemed that rain was in the air.

The chums of Study E pedalled hard, and they had the road to themselves. They were already nearly half-way, and the brilliant electric lamp on Pitt's bicycle illuminated the road clearly for a good distance ahead.

They entered upon a dark stretch of road, where the trees met together overhead. It was the same stretch of roadway on which Dick Goodwin had been kidnapped.

The mud was rather thick beneath the trees, and the two juniors could not proceed so quickly. Suddenly Reginald Pitt uttered an exclamation.

"Hallo!" he said. "What was that?"

"What was what?" asked Grey.

"I thought I saw something glittering in the mud," said Pitt, applying his brakes. "In fact, I'm sure I did—something that looked like silver."

He dismounted, and Grey slowed up, too.

"Oh, it's nothing!" said Jack Grey. "This is only wasting time, Pitt."

"It can't be helped," said Pitt. "I'm pretty sure I saw something, and I want to investigate. It will only take two seconds."

He wheeled his bicycle back along the road, and almost at once he caught a glimmer of something lying in the mud. He bent down and picked the object up, and wiped some of the mud from it.

"A giddy pocket-knife," said Pitt—"a beauty, too!—Look at it, Jack!"

Grey looked, and he suddenly opened his eyes wider.

"Why, that belongs to Goodwin!" he said. "I saw him use it only yesterday. He was sharpening a pencil on the Ancient House steps."

"I expect he dropped it as he was coming along this way," said Pitt. "It's a good thing we found it, my son. Goodwin will be jolly grateful to us."

Pitt slipped it into his pocket, and was about to continue his ride, when he looked upon the ground, and then his attention became fixed. Reginald Pitt was a very keen junior, and there was not much that missed his eyes.

"By Jove!" he exclaimed. "It seems there has been an accident."

"An accident?" repeated Grey, rather startled.

"Well, look for yourself," said Pitt. "Just see how the mud is disturbed

here. These marks are as clear as anything, and I'm pretty sure——"

"Hallo! What's this?" said Grey abruptly.

He bent down and picked up a small object from the road, and the two juniors had no difficulty in recognising it as a broken lamp-bracket. Its presence there was rather significant, for it clearly indicated that a smash had recently occurred on the spot.

"It seems to me that Goodwin came a cropper," remarked Pitt grimly. "He must have been riding along this way, and possibly he side-slipped in the mud. Anyway, he came over with a terrific crash—that's obvious."

"Well, where is he now?" asked Grey.

"It seems to me that the accident happened some little time ago," replied Pitt. "Perhaps Goodwin went on, walking. Anyhow, it seems that his bicycle was a bit bashed up. I think we'd better investigate this."

"Investigate it?" repeated Grey.

"Exactly!" said Pitt briskly. "We'll just put our bicycles against the hedge and take the lamps off. We shall have more freedom of movement then."

It was not long before the two juniors were back in the centre of the road, their bicycles reposing against the hedge. Both Pitt and Grey held their lamps in their hands, and they flashed the brilliant lights upon the surface of the roadway. It was now possible to see everything much clearer.

"Here we are—another clue!" said Pitt suddenly.

He bent down and cast the rays of his light fully upon some pieces of broken glass which were mixed up with the mud. It seemed obvious that they were from the lamp of a bicycle.

"It looks pretty serious," remarked Grey.

"Well, we don't know yet," replied Pitt. "But this mud is very disturbed. There's no doubt about that. Fortunately, it is thick and sticky, but

not wet. It has left the tracks clearly."

Staring keenly at the road, both the juniors could see the marks where Dick Goodwin had fallen. There were many tracks on the road—the marks of motor-car tyres and cart wheels. And they were all very clearly indicated. Walking along some little distance the two juniors examined the road with even greater care than before.

And Pitt came to a halt again, and stared eagerly down.

"Do you see these tracks?" he asked. "They were made by Watson's bicycle."

Gray looked rather surprised.

"How do you know that, Mr. Sexton Blake?" he inquired.

"Nothing easier," replied Pitt. "These tyres are special ones, they have a peculiarly studded tread. Don't you remember Watson fitting them to his machine last week?"

"Yes, I do remember," said Grey. "Then Watson must have come along this way, too?"

"Obviously."

Pitt retraced his steps, Grey accompanying him. And they once more got to the place where the accident had occurred. Passing along, Pitt continued to examine the surface of the road. And once more he came to a halt, and this time there was rather a startled expression in his eyes.

"Look down there!" he exclaimed. "What do you think of it, Jack?"

Jack Grey stared at the ground.

"Well, either I'm very dull or there's something wrong with my eyesight," he said. "I can't see anything startling."

"It's not what you can see—it's what you can't see?" said Pitt lucidly.

Grey stared.

"What I can't see?" he repeated.

"Where are the tracks of Watson's bicycle?" asked Reginald Pitt keenly.

Grey understood then, and he stared down quickly. No, there were certainly

no tracks now. Watson's bicycle had come to this spot, but had not continued past it. The mud could not be lying.

"Well, what about it?" said Grey, at last.

"There is only one thing to think," said Pitt. "Goodwin was using Watson's bicycle. He hasn't got a jigger of his own—we know that—so it is pretty clear that he borrowed Watson's. That's what I make of it, anyhow. We'll try to reconstruct what happened."

"My hat! You're quite a giddy detective!" exclaimed Jack Grey, smiling.

Pitt grinned.

"Not yet," he said. "I've often thought that I'd like to be a detective later on."

They went back along the road, past the spot where the accident had occurred, and then they made another discovery. The tracks of Watson's bicycle were single—that is, there were no returning tracks. This indicated that the bicycle had come to this spot, had not proceeded beyond—and had not turned back. Then what had become of it?

"Great Scott!" muttered Pitt, with a frown. "This looks queer, you know. Here are the tracks of Watson's bicycle—clear and distinct. The machine came along in this direction, and then Goodwin—who was riding the bike had a fall. He didn't continue his journey to Bannington, because there are no traces in the mud. We know that for certain. He didn't ride back to Bellon, because there are no return tracks in that direction, either."

"He might have carried the bike," suggested Grey shrewdly.

Pitt nodded.

"Yes, that's quite right," he said. "In fact, it is probably the only explanation. One of the wheels was buckled, no doubt, and Goodwin was forced to carry the machine. That's about the size of it, I figure. But I'm not satisfied."

"Why?"

"Well, it looks queer," said Pitt, scratching his head. "How did Dick Goodwin have a spill at this spot? Now I come to look at the mud, it is too thick for anybody to side-slip in. There might have been foul play!"

"Foul play!" repeated Grey, startled.

"Very likely," said Pitt. "Don't you remember the hints that have been going about lately? Goodwin has been a bit of a mystery ever since he came to St. Frank's—and on one occasion somebody kidnapped Nipper in mistake for him. Don't you think it possible that he was stopped on the road—pulled from his machine, or something? If that happened, it would account for the missing bicycle, and all the rest of it."

"But how can we be certain?" asked Grey.

"Well, we can have another look round and see if there are any more clues," said Pitt. "If Goodwin was pulled from his machine and made a prisoner, it's fairly obvious that he was taken through the hedge somewhere—and, probably, his bicycle was taken through after him. So what we must do now is to have a look at the hedges."

The two juniors passed along on the grass, near the ditch, and their lights illuminated the ground clearly. Jack Grey was rather sceptical; he did not exactly believe that Pitt's theory was correct. It was altogether too startling and extraordinary. But before long Grey changed his opinion.

For at a certain spot in the hedge Reginald Pitt came to a halt. He directed the rays of his lamp down upon the soft path. There, clear and distinct was a mark caused by a bicycle tyre!

"What do you think of it?" said Pitt steadily.

It was the same peculiar tread—a distinctive pattern. The bicycle wheel had touched on that spot just for a moment, as it was being carried

through the hedge. There were other marks, too—footprints. There was no doubt that Goodwin's bicycle had been taken through the hedge, and the junior had been taken through, too. There had certainly been foul play!

"Great Scott!" muttered Jack Grey. "This—this is serious, you know! What shall we do, Pitt?"

"Get back to the school as quickly as we can!" said Pitt briskly. "It's the only thing to be done, my son. We must give the alarm, and then search parties will be sent out. The police will also be informed. It seems to me that Goodwin has been kidnapped!"

"Oh, my goodness!" exclaimed Grey. "Perhaps we'd better go to Watson, to begin with. He might be able to tell us something. In any case, he'll know if he lent his finger to Goodwin."

"Yes," said Pitt. "That's rather a good idea. Well, come on, we've got to buzz like the very deuce!"

A moment later the two juniors were on their bicycles, and they were pedalling towards St. Frank's at top speed.

They arrived in record time, and, having placed their bicycles against the stone-work of the Ancient House steps, they dashed indoors, hot and breathless, and rushed straight down the Remove passage to Study C. They burst in and found Tommy Watson and Tregellis-West and myself busy at our prep.

"Begad!" exclaimed Sir Montie, laying down his pen. "What is the matter, Pitt?"

"I want to speak to Watson," said Pitt. "Did you lend your bicycle to Goodwin?"

Tommy Watson nodded.

"Yes," he replied. "What about it?"

"Well, I'm right in that respect, anyhow," said Pitt. "Close the door, Jack."

Grey quietly closed the door.

"What's the mystery?" I inquired, leaning back in my chair. "Why the need for privacy?"

"Something has happened," said

Reginald Pitt. "Something rather serious, I believe."

"To my jigger?" asked Watson, jumping up. "If that ass has had an accident with my bike I'll half slaughter him! It's a new one, and —"

"There's no need for you to be wild," interrupted Pitt. "I don't think for a moment that Goodwin has had an accident in the ordinary way. But it is fairly certain that he has met with foul play!"

I jumped up.

"What do you mean, Pitt?" I demanded sharply. "What reason have you got for saying that?"

Pitt looked at me straight.

"Every reason!" he replied. "Goodwin has met with foul play, and I believe that he has been kidnapped!"

"Bogus!" said Sir Montie mildly.

"I'll tell you exactly what we have discovered," went on Pitt.

And without any further delay, he proceeded to explain exactly what he and Jack Grey had discovered. We listened intently, and with growing alarm. And when Pitt had finished there was only one possible conclusion to come to, Dick Goodwin had met with disaster on the Bannington Road.

"This is jolly serious, Pitt!" I said. "As you say, there is no doubt that Goodwin was stopped, pulled off his bicycle, and made a prisoner. In short, he has been kidnapped."

Tommy Watson grunted.

"I was going to make a fuss about my bicycle," he said. "But if Goodwin has had trouble of that kind, it wasn't his fault. Well, what's going to be done?"

"It only took me a few seconds to decide."

"The guv'nor isn't here," I said. "Goodness knows where he is. The best thing we can do is to go straight to the Head, Pitt—you and I. You can tell Dr. Stafford exactly what you have discovered, and the Head will

decide what to do. I expect a party will be sent out at once in search. Come along!"

Pitt nodded.

"Yes, that's about the best thing to do," he said briskly.

We went out of Study C, and before long we were tapping on the door of Dr. Stafford's own private sanctum. We were invited to enter, and we walked in and found the Head chatting with Mr. Crowell.

"Well, boys, what is it?" asked the Head rather sharply. "You should not disturb me now——"

"I am sorry, sir, but this matter is of the utmost importance," I interrupted. "Goodwin of the Remove, has disappeared! He is missing!"

"Disappeared?" repeated the Head. "What do you mean, Nipper?"

Pitt proceeded to explain, and he did so as quickly as possible. The Head and Mr. Crowell listened with growing interest and alarm. By the time Pitt had finished, the Head was on his feet, and he was pacing up and down his study with agitated strides.

"Dear me!" he exclaimed. "This is most disconcerting—it is, indeed, startling! Judging from your story, Pitt, it seems only too clear that Goodwin has met with some disaster!"

He paced up and down for a few moments.

"What a pity it is that Mr. Lee is not here," he went on, at length. "He is just the man we need in such a crisis as this."

"Haven't you heard anything about the guv'nor, sir?" I asked anxiously.

"Not a word, Nipper," replied the Head. "To tell the truth, I am becoming somewhat uneasy about Mr. Lee. However, we cannot discuss that question now. You may go, boys—I will deal with the affair at once."

We took our departure from the Head's study, and very shortly afterwards we became aware that sudden activities were afoot. Morrow and Fenton of the Sixth appeared, accom-

panied by the Head and Mr. Crowell. There were two or three other prefects, and they came out into the Triangle, and were about to go to the gates when the headmaster beckoned to me.

I went over at once. The Head looked very worried.

"Where is Pitt?" he inquired. "I want Pitt to come with us so that he can point out the exact spot."

"Here I am, sir," said Reginald Pitt, coming up. "I'll show you the spot soon enough, sir. Perhaps Nipper had better come, too—he is rather a keen chap—"

"I don't think so, Pitt," I said. "I couldn't do anything, anyhow."

Pitt stared.

"You don't want to come?" he said. "That's rather unusual—for you!"

"Well, I suppose it is," I said. "But I have something else to do, old man. You will understand, perhaps."

Pitt was rather puzzled, but he went off at once with the Head and the prefects. And they disappeared out of the gateway and went down the lane at a sharp walk.

The spot where Pitt had found the marks in the road was about a mile and a half distant, and almost half an hour had elapsed before the place was reached. It was dark and dismal, and the wind was howling through the trees. Many electric torches had been brought, and Pitt lost no time in pointing out the many indications in the mud and in the hedge.

And Dr. Stafford came to the only possible conclusion.

Dick Goodwin had been kidnapped—he had been made a prisoner by some unknown assailant, and had been taken away. His bicycle had been removed with him. The meadows on both sides of the road were searched, but they were fruitless of result. It was impossible to tell which direction Goodwin's assailants had taken, and the searchers had to give up.

CHAPTER 17.

A Startling Surprise!

TOMMY WATSON grabbed my arm firmly.

"Now, Nipper, you've got to explain yourself!" he said grimly. "What's the meaning of it?"

"Eh?" I said. "What's the meaning of what?"

We were in the Triangle, and the search-party had already vanished down the road. A good many other fellows were in the Triangle, for the news of the kidnapping of Dick Goodwin had leaked out, and the juniors, in particular, were agog with excitement and interest. But I was very thoughtful, and I had been silent for some little time.

"Out with it!" said Watson. "Why didn't you go with the search-party, Nipper?"

"Yes, dear old boy, you really must explain," said Sir Montie.

I smiled.

"Well, as a matter of fact, I've another idea in my mind," I said. "Look here, you chaps. Come over by the gymnasium wall—where we can talk quietly. I want to have a chat with you. I've got something in my mind, and I want to ask you what you think of it."

"I knew there was something stirrin' in your brain, dear old fellow," said Sir Montie. "You've got some stirlin' idea. I know it, begad!"

We went over to the wall of the gymnasium, and we were then quite private. I looked at my chums thoughtfully.

"Look here," I said, "do you remember that old mill on the edge of Bannington Moor?"

"Remember it!" said Watson. "Of course we remember it. We were there last week. A new door had been fitted to the top room, and barred windows, and all the rest of it."

"Exactly," I went on. "In fact, it was clear that the place had been pre-

pared as a prison for somebody who had not yet been captured."

"Begad!" exclaimed Sir Montie. "You—you mean Goodwin?"

"My dear chap, isn't it obvious?" I asked quietly. "Even at the time we reckoned that the place had been prepared for Goodwin's benefit. And we made up our minds that if ever Goodwin vanished, we would look in that mill first off. Well, he has vanished. Perhaps you now understand why I didn't want to go with the search-party."

"By jingo!" said Tommy Watson. "So that's the wheeze—eh? I believe you're right, Nipper. I believe that Goodwin has been taken to that old mill. It's the only explanation, in fact. He must have been taken there, and he is being kept a prisoner. He was captured by these two mysterious men we followed to the mill last week!"

I nodded.

"You've hit it on the nail," I said. "It's a dead certainty that Goodwin is there, and we are going off now—to once—to have a look."

"But these two rotters may have changed their plans by this time," said Watson doubtfully.

"Why should they?" I asked. "They don't know anything about our visit. They simply prepared the place in advance, and kidnapped Goodwin to-night. It will be rather good if we rescue him at once!"

"Rather, dear old boy!" said Sir Montie. "Well, I suggest that we get off now. There is no sense in wastin' time."

Sir Montie was right, and almost at once we started off. But I took a little electric torch with me, and an empty revolver of the guv'nor's. I did not suppose for a moment that I should have to use it. But even an empty revolver is sometimes very handy. It is quite sufficient to scare an enemy.

We took the route through Belliton Wood. And, after following the narrow footpath right through the wood, we

at last came out upon the edge of the Bannington Moor. It loomed before us, dark and dismal, with the wind whistling across its undulated surface.

It was still comparatively early in the evening, but the whole scene was deserted. Not a light showed in any direction. One might have supposed that we were standing upon the edge of a wilderness. The sky was gloomy and overcast. But, outlined against the clouds, we could distinctly see the old mill.

It was dark; no light showed from any window, but we were not surprised at this. If Goodwin was a prisoner there, the fact would not be advertised.

It was really a splendid evening for our purpose. The noise of the wind made it a simple matter for us to approach quite close without being heard. So we crept closer and closer until at length we were within a few yards of the broken down doorway.

"Begad!" whispered Sir Montie suddenly. "I—I saw——"

"What did you see?" asked Watson.

"The glow of a pipe, or a cigarette," replied Freggils-West. "I am quite certain. There you are, dear boys! Look!"

I was already looking. And there, in the blackness of the doorway, I saw a red glow for a second. It was the glow of a cigarette, and this proved that there was a man on guard. This very fact caused me to thrill with excitement.

For it was now almost certain that Dick Goodwin was indeed a prisoner in the mill.

"There's only one thing to do!" I murmured. "We shall have to rush him."

"Begad!"

"We'll make a dash at the doorway, and overpower this chap before he can make a fuss," I went on. "We ought to be able to do it easily between the three of us. Then we'll bind him up, gag him, and leave him on the floor while we rush upstairs."

"But how can we bind him?" said Watson. "We haven't got any string or rope——"

"Yes, we have," I interrupted. "I brought a length of rope; it's always just as well to be prepared."

I took a coil of this, strong rope out of my pocket, and held it in my hand ready. Then, with the electric torch in my other fist, I gave the word.

"Now!" I breathed. "Creep up to the door, and then rush in!"

We left the bush under which we had been sheltering and crept quietly and cautiously towards the broken doorway of the old mill. And then, when we arrived, we dashed forward.

Crash!

Tommy Watson and I bumped forcibly into somebody who appeared to be sitting on an upturned box. Anyhow, he was sent flying, and he landed upon his back with a thud.

"By thunder! What—what the——"

"The light!" gasped Sir Montie.

Even as he spoke I switched on the electric torch, and the beam of light revealed the fact that a man was lying on his back beneath us. He was trying to struggle to his feet, but he found it impossible. The next moment I got busy with the rope. And before our prisoner could move, his wrists were securely bound, and then the rope was twisted tightly round his ankles. He struggled and kicked, but it was useless; we soon had him trussed.

He swore fiercely, but we soon put a stop to this—tearing the muffer from about his neck and binding it round his mouth.

"Good!" I exclaimed. "We've settled his hash, anyhow. And now to get upstairs!"

We left the man where he was, and I led the way up the wooden steps towards the trap-door in the ceiling, which admitted into the next floor of the mill. This trap-door was bolted, but we soon slipped back the bolt, and climbed through.

A glance showed that this apartment

was empty, and another ladder led up to the next floor. And so we progressed, until at length we were right at the top of the mill. We now found ourselves upon a little landing, only about a yard wide, and there, right in front of us, stood a heavy oaken door. Fitted to it, there were two enormously thick iron bolts. There was also a lock, and the key projected from it.

"Here we are!" I muttered. "Just as I thought! Goodwin is inside, and he is bolted and locked in. We will have him free in about two minutes!"

"There's a light in there, too!" whispered Watson. "I wonder we didn't see it from outside."

"There's obviously a shutter fitted to the window," I replied. "I expect it is on the outside—beyond the reach of the prisoner. Come on; there's no time to waste!"

I seized the top bolt of the door, and shot it back. Then I turned the key in the lock, and followed this up by pushing back the other bolt. But before entering I turned to my chums again.

"Be ready for another scrap!" I whispered. "There might be another man in here—with Goodwin."

I pulled open the door, and a flood of light came out upon us. Although I was momentarily doubtful, I dashed in, holding my empty revolver ready. And then I gave a great shout of absolute amazement.

For there, standing in the centre of the little room was—Nelson Lee!

"Guv'nor!" I roared.

"Well, I'm dashed!" gasped Watson. "We—we thought——"

"Dear me! This is decidedly interesting, Nipper!" said Nelson Lee smoothly. "I did not expect to have a visit from you this evening, my lad. Splendid—splendid!"

I simply stood there staring at Nelson Lee in a stupefied kind of way.

"But—but we thought we should find Goodwin!" I panted. "We had no idea that you were here, sir——"

"We were looking for Goodwin, sir," said Watson.

"I am exceedingly pleased that you were looking for Goodwin," said Nelson Lee. "For, by so doing, you have released me from a very unfortunate predicament. To tell you the truth, my boys, I have been kept a prisoner in this apartment, and your arrival is more welcome than I can possibly say."

"It's absolutely astounding, sir!" I exclaimed. "What does it mean? How did you get into this fix?"

Nelson Lee was quite cool.

"I regret to say, Nipper, that I acted foolishly," he said candidly. "I was caught in a very simple trap."

"I knew it!" I said. "I knew it all along!"

"You knew what, Nipper?"

"That you had met with foul play, sir," I replied. "The Head was not alarmed at first, and he made out that you had simply gone off on a secret investigation. That's what I thought, too, at the beginning, then I came to another conclusion. I thought that you had been collared by some rovers, and were being held a captive. And I was right, too."

"I will just explain how it happened, my boys," said Nelson Lee. "By the way, is there any chance of trouble from below?"

"Not a bit, sir," I replied. "There was only one man on guard, and we have made him quite helpless."

"Good!" said the gov'nor. "Well, my lads, it was this way. First, while I was in my study writing a letter, I was attracted by a somewhat suspicious noise in the Triangle. I went out to investigate, but I hardly had got out into the open before I was attacked from behind, and a sandbag or a life-preserver was brought down on my head, and I was rendered helpless."

"My hat!" said Watson.

"When I came to myself I was in this room, and here I have been ever since. There is really very little else to tell you."

"But who did it, sir?" I asked quickly. "Why were you brought here and made a prisoner?"

"Fortunately, I am able to tell you that, too," said Nelson Lee, in a voice which denoted great satisfaction. "My captors were very obliging, and they even went so far as to tell me their plans. Of course, they did not think it was possible for me to escape, otherwise they would not have been so incautious. To be quite brief, these men are the agents of a big criminal organisation, and an extra big coup is arranged for to-night."

"Where, sir?" I asked.

"At Bannington Manor—the residence of Lord Bannington," replied Nelson Lee. "In fact, this organisation intends to lift the whole of Lady Bannington's jewels — valued at twenty thousand pounds."

"Phew!" whistled Watson, in dismay.

"These men think that I am helpless," said Nelson Lee. "But they will find that they are wrong. For I shall now make careful plans to capture them red-handed. It is extremely fortunate that you turned up when you did."

"Rather, sir!" I said. "In a way, you know, it was a compliment to you — to make you a prisoner. It shows that they were afraid of you, sir!"

"Exactly, Nipper," smiled Lee. "They told me quite candidly that they did not wish to attempt the job until I was safely out of the way. The plan was to keep me here a prisoner until a week had elapsed. By that time the rascals would have got completely away, and there would have been no chance of my getting on their track. But now, thanks to you boys, I shall lose no time in making my own plans."

"But what about Goodwin, sir?" I asked quickly.

"Goodwin?" said Nelson Lee. "Has anything happened to him?"

It only took me a few moments to put Nelson Lee in possession of the facts.

"H'm! It seems rather curious!" said the gov'nor. "In fact, Nipper, we are in the midst of quite a lot of mystery and excitement. Who are these captors of Goodwin? Why have they taken him away? Two kidnappings within the space of twenty-four hours is decidedly startling, eh?"

"Rather, sir!" said Watson. "We— we want to get on Goodwin's trail!"

Nelson Lee nodded.

"And so we shall, my lad," he said. "I shall give Goodwin all my attention as soon as this other matter is settled. I have no doubt that we shall be successful. There is much to be done, and no time to be lost."

We left the old mill as soon as possible, taking the captured man with us. But Nelson Lee did not come back to St. Frank's. He left us to take the prisoner to Bannington police station, and also to make arrangements with Inspector Jameson to thwart the intended burglary on Bannington Manor that night.

Before Nelson Lee departed, however, I suggested that I should like to be on the scene when the police laid their trap for the burglars. But the gov'nor wouldn't hear of it. He told us to return to St. Frank's without delay, and warned us not to say a word to anyone.

But I was determined to be on hand at Bannington Manor, and on the way to St. Frank's I made plans with my chums for breaking bounds that night. Little did I dream what thrilling adventures were to be the outcome of our escapade.

CHAPTER 26.

The Light in the Wood!

HALF-PAST eleven! I said softly.

I was sitting up in bed, and the Remond dormitory was dark and still. Tommy Watson and Tregellis-West, by all appearances, were fast asleep. I had arranged with them

earlier that I should awaken them at half-past eleven.

Now the time had come for us to get to Bannington Manor in time to witness Nelson Lee's coup. The gov'nor was determined to round up the gang of criminals that night.

And I wanted to be on in that scene. I did not see any reason why I should be left out in the cold; there was to be some excitement, and I might come in useful.

With that idea in mind, I slipped out of bed, and was soon shaking Sir Montie's shoulder. He awoke at once, blinked at me for a moment or two, and then smiled.

"Dear old boy, what is the idea of this?" he inquired mildly.

"Get up, my son!" I said. "You know the arrangement."

"Nipper, dear fellow, you are departing from the arrangement—you are, really!" protested Sir Montie. "It was agreed that we should all start out at half-past eleven. Isn't that so?"

"Of course!"

"Then what is the idea of starting out now?" asked Tregellis-West. "The lights have only been out five minutes, so it can't be more than twenty minutes to ten—"

"My son, you have been dead asleep—that's certain!" I broke in. "It may interest you to know that the time is now about twenty-seven minutes to twelve!"

"Begad!" said Sir Montie. "You're joking, dear old boy!"

"No, I'm not, you ass!" I whispered. "Buck up and get your clothes on! We haven't got any time to waste!"

Montie was soon dressing, convinced at last that the time was actually after eleven-thirty. Tommy Watson did not much care for the idea of the trip now, but I was not having any of his nonsense. The suggestion that we should give up the whole project met with a very cold response. It would have met with a colder one—in the shape of a wet sponge, if

Tommy had not jumped out of bed with alacrity.

At last we were ready, and we stole out of the dormitory, passed down the stairs, and at length got to the bicycle shed. Here we removed our machines, wheeled them across to the wall, and transferred them to the other side. We did all this without being seen, and with as little noise as possible. And then we stood out in the lane, ready to start on our journey.

"What about the lamps?" whispered Watson.

"We're not going to light them," I replied. "It's too risky, my son. We'll chance it; I don't suppose old Sparrow is about, anyhow. He's the only policeman in the district, and there isn't much chance of us meeting him."

"Perhaps it will be safer to go without a light, old boys," remarked Montie.

We mounted our machines, and were soon pedalling easy down the lane. We did not go through the village, but branched off, and passed along the little lane which ultimately led into the Bannington road.

About half-way between Belton and Bannington we entered upon a stretch of the road where the trees met overhead in a kind of natural arbour, and here the road was thick with half-dried mud. I recognised the spot on the instant.

"This is where Dick Goodwin was thrown off his bicycle," I remarked, as we pedalled along. "Just about here, you chaps. The rotters who attacked Goodwin couldn't have chosen a better spot. It's pitch dark, and—"

I paused, and stared out across the hedge, over the dark meadows.

"What's the matter, dear old boy?" asked Sir Montie.

"I thought I saw a light just now—just a flash!" I said. "Over in that spinney. Can't you see it, Montie?"

That big clump of trees on the top of the rise?"

"I can see the trees, old boy," said Sir Montie; "but there is no light there— Begad!"

Just for a second a flash of light had appeared—a flash which might have come from an electric torch. In any case, it disappeared almost at once, and then came utter blackness. The light had appeared from the very centre of the little wood.

"That's queer!" I said slowly.

At the same time I applied my brakes, and dismounted from my machine. The others copied my example, and we stood there in the road, staring out across the meadows towards the little spinney. The wind sighed coldly through the trees overhead.

"What's the idea of this?" asked Watson. "I thought we were in a hurry to get to Bannington?"

"Never mind about Bannington now!" I said briskly. "Look here, my sons, I'm suspicious of this!"

"Suspicious?"

"Yes, I am!" I said grimly. "What is that light doing over there—in the wood?"

"It's no good asking me!" said Tommy.

"We all know that that spinney is deserted," I went on. "There's not a house in the district—not even a cottage for miles. We've explored all this country during half-holidays, when we have been for rambles, and we know that the spinney over there is as deserted as the centre of Bannington Moor. Who the dickens can be there, with a light? And at midnight! I tell you, you chaps, it's queer!"

"Begad! Do—do you think that Goodwin—"

"My hat!" said Watson.

"It's rather unwise to jump to conclusions," I said, "but we know that Goodwin has disappeared, and I

reckon that he is not far off. It's quite possible that Goodwin has been taken into this wood. As you can see, it's close and handy to the road—to the spot where he was attacked. Don't you think it's likely that his captors took him straight across the fields and concealed him in that wood?"

"But what for?" asked Watson.

"In order to lie low—until an opportunity occurred to take the chap out of the district," I said. "That's how I look at it, anyhow. And I mean to investigate this matter at once—the Bannington affair can wait."

"But if we waste any more time here, Nipper, we shall be late for the show—for Nelson Lee's coup!" said Sir Montie.

"That doesn't matter," I declared. "There's just a possibility that we might be able to get on Dick Goodwin's track, and we don't want to waste the chance. We've got to investigate that wood at once, so we'll get busy."

"Anythin' you like, dear old boy!" said Sir Montie. "I'm game!"

We had seen no recurrence of the mysterious flash of light, but I knew the exact spot—I had it fixed in my mind's eye. And, after we had placed our bicycles securely in the dry ditch, where they were concealed from the road, we passed through the gap and made out way across the first meadow.

On the other side of this we found ourselves facing a ploughed field, and we skirted round this until at length we were close upon the wood. It was only a small clump of trees standing almost at the top of the rising slope. The trees were rather dense, and there were masses of undergrowth, too, and the place was well-nigh impenetrable. Nobody entered that wood from the first day of the year to the last. It was always deserted.

Then why had that light appeared amid the trees?

Just before we got to the wood, I remembered something else—something

which added strength to my conviction that the mysterious light was somehow connected with Dick Goodwin's disappearance.

In the very centre of that spinney, surrounded by trees, there stood on old wooden hut. It was only a rough shanty, with a thatched roof. It had been lying deserted and useless for many years, and I suppose it had been used at one time by a wood-rustler. In any case, it was unused now. I remembered that Sir Montie and Tommy and I had once picnicked near that little shanty.

Very cautiously I entered the wood, my chums following in single file close behind. And we moved carefully, picking every footstep. And this was necessary, for a cracking twig or some other noise would certainly give the alarm to the enemy—supposing, of course, that an enemy existed.

We kept going, and at last I reckoned that we were nearing the centre of the wood, and the little hut would soon come into sight. The gloom here was intense; it was, indeed, pitchy dark, making it impossible for us to see even a yard ahead. We were compelled to feel our way.

And then, suddenly, after pushing aside a clump of bushes, I came to an abrupt halt. There, right in front of me, was a gleam of light! It was so close that I was practically taken by surprise.

There, only about ten yards ahead, stood the little hut, and the light was coming from a tiny window, which was covered by a thick piece of sackling or a rug. One little crevice, however, was not covered, and through this the tiny gleam of light escaped.

There was somebody in the shanty!

"For goodness' sake be careful, you chaps!" I breathed. "Look! We're practically——"

"My only hat!" muttered Tommy Watson, staring before him.

"Be quiet, you ass!" I hissed.

We stood there watching. We

hardly knew what to do now. No sounds had come from the hut so far. We had only just come to a halt, and our own movements had effectually concealed all other noises from our ears. But now we stood stockstill, absolutely silent.

We waited for a moment or two, and then a voice came to us.

"It's no good, Naggs!" exclaimed the voice. "The kid won't say a thing—he doesn't mean to."

"He'll say something later on—don't you worry!" exclaimed another voice. "If he won't speak here, he'll speak when we get along to that old house. We've got him now, and we're going to carry out our plans. Nothing is going to stop me, I can tell you."

I took a deep breath.

"Fine!" I whispered. "He's here, you claps—Goodwin's here!"

There was absolutely no doubt on the point. Mr. Naggs was the man who had broken into St. Frank's, and it was quite evident that he had secured another helper since the capture of Colmore.

A moment later another voice came to us—and this time it was the voice of Dick Goodwin himself.

"I dare say you think I'm at your mercy," said the Lancashire lad bitterly. "But you won't get anything out of me, you rogues. By gum! If you think I'm going to be forced to speak against my will—"

"The best thing you can do, kid, is to keep quiet!" interrupted Mr. Naggs. "Keep your mouth shut, and then you won't come to no harm. We don't want any of your nonsense!"

Nothing more was said, and we listened for three or four minutes in vain. And during that time I had been thinking hard.

There were two men in that hut with Goodwin—Mr. Naggs and another. It was quite obvious to me that Goodwin had been brought here into this wood until his captors deemed it safe for them to take their

victims farther afield. Mr. Naggs had intimated, indeed, that a prison had been prepared for the boy. But, for the time being, he was being held here, in this little hut, far in the depths of the wood.

The men probably thought that it would be safer than venturing upon the open road in the early evening. They intended taking Goodwin away at dead of night, when the roads were deserted, and when their movements would not be observed.

That, undoubtedly, was the scheme.

And I was thrilled by the whole affair. By sheer accident we had got on the track of Dick Goodwin. We had left the dormitory in order to go to Bannington, and now we were in a position to rescue Goodwin at once, for I was grimly determined to make a desperate attempt to get the Lancashire boy away from his captors. There were three of us—three strong juniors—and there were two men, it would be a big task, but we were ready to face it. We should attack by surprise, and it was possible that we should be able to defeat Mr. Naggs and his companion.

I whispered my plan to Sir Montie and Tommy, and they at once agreed. They were willing to do anything.

"We shall have to creep up quietly," I whispered; "then, as soon as we get to the door, we'll burst in with a rush—the three of us. Everything depends upon quickness. If we're lucky, we shall get Goodwin away at once."

"And what if we're unlucky?" asked Watson.

"Then we shall have to fight for it—and fight hard, too!" I said grimly. "These men won't stand on ceremony, so we've got to go all out. Come on!"

But just then, as we were about to move forward, I paused, for I had heard something which caused me to alter my plans.

Throb! Throb!

Clearly and distinctly there came to my ears the sound of the moist throb-

bling of a motor-car engine. It came nearer and nearer, until at length the car itself could only have been twenty or thirty yards away. Then the throb ceased altogether, and the door of the little hut opened.

As it did so, the light was extinguished—probably a candle I just caught a glimpse of a man's figure as he came out of the doorway, and then there sounded a crackling of the bushes near by. A moment later a man appeared, gloomy and indistinct.

"That you, Ratsby?" inquired Mr. Naggs sharply.

"Of course it's me!" replied the newcomer. "Who else do you think it would be at this time of night?"

"Well, it's just as well to be sure," said Mr. Naggs. "We can't be too careful at this game. We've got the boy here, and we've got to waste no time in getting him straight into the car."

"Oh, there's no hurry!" said Ratsby. "I want to come inside for a minute or two. I grazed my hand on the blamed radiator. It needs binding up."

The man entered the little hut, and Mr. Naggs followed him in. The door was closed once more, and then came the tiny streak of light, proving that the candle had been illuminated. All three men were now with Dick Goodwin in that old shanty, and the motor-car was left out in the open, alone.

"Well, this is a nice mess!" I muttered. "Just as we were going to rescue him, too!"

"Can't we have a shot at it?" asked Watson.

"My dear chap, it would be foolish to try!" I replied. "There are three men in there now, and we simply couldn't hope to win. They are powerful chaps, and we should be wiped up in less than five minutes. No, Tommy, we've got to think of something else."

"But what else can we think of?" asked Watson.

I couldn't answer that question at the moment.

CHAPTER 21.

The Punctured Oil Can!

SOMETHING had to be done—and quickly, too!

Within a very few minutes the three men would come out of the hut, bringing Dick Goodwin with them. And the kidnapped schoolboy would be taken straight to the waiting motor-car and driven off into the night. It would be impossible for us to follow.

"This is a bit of a teaser!" I remarked thoughtfully. "We've got to do something, my sons—and we've got to be quick about it. But it's difficult to decide what to do."

"Dear old boy, you are quite right," observed Sir Montie softly. "We can't rescue Goodwin, simply because there aren't enough of us to do the job. And once the car starts it will go altogether too rapidly for us to follow."

"We might be able to follow its tracks on the road!" said Watson brilliantly.

I shook my head.

"No good!" I said shortly. "If I remember right, there's a little lane leading from this spot up to the main road, near Bannington. It's the main road across the moor. Well, that road, as you chaps know, is all tarred, and it will be as dry as a billiard table, and won't show any marks at all."

Watson scratched his head.

"Well, it seems that we are done," he said. "And that's pretty rotten, too. We've located Goodwin—and we can't rescue him! We shall have to stand by and see him taken away!"

"We shall!" I replied. "There's no doubt about that; but before we do anything, it would be advisable to have a look at that car."

"Do you think we can conceal ourselves in it?" said Watson eagerly.

"I think I might be able to," I replied. "It's impossible for us all to try the trick. But let's have a look at the car, anyway."

We crept away through the trees.

and, although we went very slowly and cautiously, we made some slight sounds. But fortunately the men within the hut were not alarmed.

We arrived at the edge of the wood, and found ourselves in a meadow. Running parallel with one hedge was a wagon track, which was generally used by farm carts, and such like, and there, standing without any lights showing, was a big hooded motor-car.

"You fellows wait here!" I breathed. "I'll creep near—there might be somebody on guard."

I did not give Tommy and Montie time to protest. I left them, and crept forward as silently as a shadow, and, after a moment or two, I was right near the car. It did not take me more than two seconds to ascertain that it was deserted—that nobody had been left in charge. Nags and his men apparently thought that they were quite safe and unobserved.

I walked round to the back of the car, and stared into the gloom.

"Hist!" I whispered. "It's all clear!"

Sir Montie and Tommy heard my words, and they joined me a moment later, and there we stood at the back of the car. I was rather disappointed to find that there was no carrier—nothing, in fact, to which I could cling. All thought of going with the car had to be put aside.

"Well, it can't be done," I murmured. "We shall have to think of something else—and goodness knows what we can think of! Within a few minutes this car will be going, and we shall have to stand by and do nothing!"

"That will be frightfully gallin', old boy!" said Sir Montie.

"It'll be rotten!" declared Watson bluntly.

"It will!" I agreed. "But surely there is something that we can do! If we could only do something to make the car leave a trail, we should be O.K."

"Oh, we can't do anything in that line!" said Watson.

But just at that moment I gave a start. A daring idea had come to me. I turned to my chums with gleaming eyes.

"A brain wave, you chaps!" I whispered.

"Begad!" said Montie. "Did it hurt, dear old boy?"

"There's no time for joking now, you see!" I whispered. "Look at that can of oil!"

"Eh?"

"That can of oil fixed to the running-board!" I went on. "Can't you see it?"

My chums stared in the gloom.

"Do you mean this gallon can of engine oil?" asked Watson. "It's——"

"Yes, of course," I interrupted. "That can is full—it's a spare supply, I suppose."

"What of it, dear old boy?" asked Montie. "How will that can of oil help us?"

"In this way," I replied. "I have got a pocket screwdriver on me, and it won't take me one minute to jab a small hole through the side of the can at the bottom—where it can't be seen."

"A—a hole!" said Watson, staring.

"Exactly."

"But what for, you lunatic?" muttered Tommy. "What's the idea of puncturing that can of oil?"

"I'll tell you afterwards," I said. "There's no time now!"

I produced my pocket screwdriver. And then, going down on my knees, I gave a sharp jab in the side of the can, near the bottom. The point of the screwdriver went through the thin tin at once, making a small hole. And, as I placed my hand there, I felt the oil dripping out steadily. It was not a continuous stream, but a very quick succession of drops.

"Good!" I muttered. "That's all serene!"

"But what on earth——"

"Come on, we'd better get away," I interrupted. "Those men may be here any moment, and if we're spotted the whole game will be spoilt. We're going straight away, right across the meadows, back to the Bannington Road."

"Begad! What for?"

"To fetch our bicycles," I replied grimly. "I'll explain things as we go along."

"My chums were quite puzzled, but I would not tell them anything until we had left the vicinity of the little wood. And then, when we were plodding along over one of the meadows I explained.

"Can't you understand what I have done?" I asked. "I've made a hole in that gallon can of oil, and the oil is now dripping out in a rapid stream of drops. It will take about an hour—perhaps an hour and a half—for all that oil to drip away. And a motor-car can travel a tremendous distance in an hour and a half—particularly at night."

"But——"

"Wait a moment," I went on. "My idea is this: As soon as that car gets on the main road—on the smooth, tarred road—those drops of oil will be distinctly visible on the surface of the road—a drop every yard or so. Don't you see the wheeze? The car will make a trail for itself as it goes along, unknown to its occupants. And we shall be able to come along at our leisure, following that car."

"Begad!"

"My only hat!"

"Well," I said, "what do you think of the idea?"

"Nipper, old fellow, it's absolutely stunnin'!" declared Sir Montie.

"By Jupiter!" said Watson admiringly. "The clue of the oil trail. What a wheeze!"

It was a way out of our difficulty—a way in which we could follow the car containing Goodwin, and we could

follow it to its destination. For I felt certain that these men would not take the Lancashire boy very far away.

But, although the car would leave that trail for us to follow, it was necessary for us to waste no time. The sooner we got on the track the better. And so we hurried across the meadows, and at length arrived on the Bannington Road again. Our bicycles were still in the ditch, just as we had left them.

"Come on, my sons!" I said, panting. "There's no time to lose. We've got to hurry like the dickens!"

"Right you are, dear old boy—anything you like!" said Sir Montie. "We're hot on the track, and we're going to do big things to-night."

We soon had our figgers through the hedge. And, once in the meadow, we mounted, and rode at a fairly rapid speed. But it was necessary to be cautious, for there were many ruts and hillocks, and it would be quite easy to have a serious spill.

However, we reached the other side of the meadow in safety. And then we were obliged to bridle our bicycles over the ploughed field—riding was quite out of the question. We were nearing the farther end of the field when I came to a halt.

"Wait a minute!" I said sharply. "Listen!"

We all listened, and clearly on the night air, borne by the wind, came the steady throbbing of a motor-car. It grew fainter and fainter, and finally disappeared.

"They've gone!" I muttered. "Just as I thought, and we shall be on the spot within three minutes now."

We were.

And we found the little hut quite deserted, and the motor-car gone. I only stopped in the hut for about a minute, looking round carefully with the aid of my electric torch. But there was nothing there which would serve as a clue. The men had not left a single article behind.

Then we went to the spot where the motor-car had stood. All was dark, and we could not see the ground distinctly, of course. However, this did not matter. We knew that the car had followed the wagon track until the road was reached. And so we went this way. Finally, we reached the narrow road, the little lane which ran from the village of Edgmore to the Bannington main road. This road, naturally, was not the one we had been recently following—another main highway.

By the time we reached it we had our bicycle lamps switched on and showing a brilliant beam upon the road. It was quite safe to have our lamps alight now, for there was very little prospect of our meeting anybody. And Goodwin's captors, of course, were far ahead.

It was necessary for us to have the lights in order to follow the oil trail. And this was not at all difficult. It was in fact, far simpler than I had anticipated.

For there, on the road, were little drops of oil at regular intervals. At present they were only about a yard apart. But a little farther on the drops of oil were four or five feet apart.

"It seems to me that the supply is giving out," said Watson. "Anyhow, the drops aren't so close together."

"My dear fellow, there is quite a natural explanation of that," I said. "The car gathered speed—that is all. The faster it goes, the fewer the drops. That's obvious."

We rode on rapidly. The trail was clear in front of us. As long as those little splashes of oil could be seen we could follow the car.

We did not enter Bannington at all. The car had branched off just before the town was reached, had passed round several lanes, and had joined the main road to Helmford right along. Helmford was about eighteen miles distant, and was on the main road to London.

Our task had not been so easy in

the little lanes—where the surface of the road was stony and slightly muddy. But by going slowly we had made no mistake. And when the Helmford Road was reached, our task was again simple.

And so we went on, pedalling rapidly and steadily. Mile after mile was covered. Down hill and up hill we went, without a pause.

We had forgotten all about the governor and the affair at Bannington Manor. That was quite unimportant now. We were engaged upon a task which was altogether more to our liking.

"I say, this is getting a bit steep, you know," remarked Watson, as we put our backs into it up a hill.

"What do you mean—this gradient?" I inquired.

"No, you ass!" said Watson. "I mean, it's getting serious. We've travelled about ten miles, you know. We are not so very far from Helmford. And it must be past one—getting on for two, in fact. When the dickens are we going to get to the end of this trail?"

"There's no telling," I replied. "We may have to go right on through Helmford, and then farther on towards London. But we're going to stick to this trail until it gives out. I'm determined upon that, anyhow. We're going right on, my sons!"

"Well, it's the only thing we can do, dear boy," said Sir Montie. "Now that we are on the track it would be ridiculous to give it up. But I should enjoy the adventure much better if I had an engine on my bicycle."

We reached the top of the hill, and then went along a straight level stretch of lonely road. We knew it well, for we had passed that way during the day-time on many occasions—sometimes when we went by motor-coach to play football at Helmford College. And this stretch of road was particularly lonely, even by daylight. At night it was a gloomy, dismal piece of

country where not a soul was to be seen—and only one or two houses.

Very soon we passed one of these houses—one that I had seen many a time. It was a dilapidated old place, fairly large. And it had been standing empty for years, by the look of it. It stood some little distance from the road, surrounded by a big garden which was filled with trees and rank weeds. And just near the road a board announced that the property was for sale. It had been for sale for many years, by the look of it, and it would probably remain for sale for many more years.

We passed this old place at a good speed, and then continued on our way down the straight, level road. But we had not proceeded more than two hundred yards before I applied my brakes. Sir Montie and Tommy shot ahead. And by the time they had turned round I had dismounted, and was examining the surface of the road.

My chums wheeled their bicycles back to the spot where I was standing.

"What's the idea?" asked Tommy, wringing his brow.

"Look!" I said significantly.

I pointed to the road. It was smooth and clear, and perfectly dry.

"Well, what about it?" asked Tommy. "I can't see anything startling."

"It's not what we can see, it's what we can't see!" I said grimly. "Where are the spots of oil?"

"Begad!"

The oil trail, in fact, had vanished!

We had been following it for so long that we had not paid much attention to the road. Only here and there, as we pedalled along, we saw the spots of oil—and knew that we were still on the right trail. But soon after passing that old house I had noticed that the oil spots were no longer visible.

"By jingo!" I said gently.

I turned round and looked back along the brick road. I looked back to-

wards that clump of trees and the gaunt chimney pots of the old building.

"Don't you remember?" I went on. "We heard one of the men saying that Goodwin was to be taken to an old house? My sons, this is the place! We've tracked the robbers to their den! Dick Goodwin is in this old house!"

"By Jupiter!" muttered Watson.

There could be no other explanation. The motor-car obviously had come along until it reached the gateway of the house, and had then turned in. It was now concealed among the trees, or probably it reposed in an old out-building. And Mr. Naggs and his two assistants were with Dick Goodwin in the house itself.

"Out with the lights!" I whispered. "They might be seen!"

Our lamps were extinguished at once. And then cautiously we made our way back along the road until we arrived at the dilapidated, ramshackle gate. Here, on my hands and knees, I examined the ground which was fairly soft near the gateway. Quite distinctly I could see the marks of motor-car tyres, and they had passed only recently. To clinch matters there were drops of oil, too. The car had passed into the old drive.

"Good!" I muttered. "We've tracked Dick Goodwin down, we've reached the end of the trail!"

CHAPTER XX.

The Race to Bannington!

SUCCESS!

My plan had succeeded, and I was delighted and rather excited. There was not the slightest doubt about the matter. Dick Goodwin was here—in this dilapidated old building—and his captors were there, too. The fact that they had come here, and had closed the old gate after them, proved that they had reached the prison which

had been prepared for the schoolboy. They probably assumed that they would be quite safe there.

"This is splendid!" I muttered. "What do you think of it, you chaps? We've tracked the car down, and we know that Goodwin is here."

"But how are we going to rescue Goodwin?" asked Sir Montie mildly. "We couldn't do it in the wood because we were three boys against three men. Well, the position is exactly the same. If we couldn't rescue Goodwin from the old hut in the wood, how can we rescue him from this house?"

"That's a poser!" said Tommy Watson.

"My dear chaps, you don't seem to understand the game at all," I said. "I don't mean to rescue Goodwin; I don't mean even to try the thing. We should fail."

"Then what's to be done?"

"Oh, haven't you got any sense at all, Tommy?" I said. "We knew very well that those men wouldn't keep Goodwin in the hut. It was only a temporary hiding-place. But this house is a permanent one, and if we go away for two or three hours we can be practically certain that Goodwin will be here when we return. My plan is for us to race back to Bannington as hard as we can go, tell the governor all about it, and he will come back, and probably bring the police. The whole thing will be as simple as A B C. Nags and his friends will be collared, and Dick Goodwin will be rescued."

"Good!" said Sir Montie. "So that's the way you've planned it out, dear fellow? But we shall be frightfully tired to-morrow, begad! What with riding out here and ridin' back, and then comin' out again——"

"Don't worry about that!" I interrupted. "We've only got to race back to Bannington, and that won't be such a terrible task. We shall probably come out again the second time in a motor-car."

"And do you propose to start off now?" asked Watson.

"Not for a minute or two," I replied. "We'll just have a scout round and see if we can see any sign of the place being inhabited. I'm quite satisfied that Goodwin is here, but we might as well have a look."

We left our bicycles against the hedge, and then we slipped through a gap and found ourselves in the wilderness which had once been a garden. Then, creeping along, we made a detour until we were at the back of the old building.

The house was half-ruined. Many of the windows were missing altogether, and only black, yawning cavities greeted our gaze. In one part of the house half the roof was missing. Tiles were off, and the rafters were showing.

"Cheerful looking place!" muttered Watson, with a slight shiver.

"Perhaps so, but it's just the place they were looking for," I said. "Who would dream that Goodwin would be imprisoned here? If we hadn't got on the track in this way I don't suppose the police would ever have found the poor chap. We've been lucky, and we're going to follow up our luck."

We continued our examination, and then at last we met with success. One of the windows at the rear was very heavily shuttered—we discovered this by approaching fairly close to the building—and when we got to a certain angle we saw a tiny streak of light emerging where the woodwork was cracked and warped. That light was the first indication we had had that the old building was inhabited. But now there was no doubt left. The very presence of that light proved conclusively that Dick Goodwin and his captors were here.

"That's enough!" I whispered. "Now we'll buzz off like the wind. The quicker we are, the better. If we hurry we shall be in Bannington well within an hour."

Sir Montie and Tommy were excited, and they did not mind the exertion at all.

Within five minutes we were mounted on our bicycles and were tearing along the road, putting every ounce of our energy into the pedalling, and mile after mile was covered rapidly. Down hill we raced, reckless of mishaps, and at length we came within sight of the outskirts of Bannington. We did not go into the town, for this was unnecessary.

Bannington Manor, the home of Lord Banningstowe, was situated just on the outskirts, and not actually in the town. We were soon on our way to the big mansion, although we were not absolutely certain that Nelson Lee would be there. We only knew that he had planned to bring off a big capture there; but the time for that had already passed. However, it was just as well to go there at once.

And we were not wrong.

For when we arrived at Bannington Manor we found everything there in a state of uproar. Practically the whole household was awake, and the big building was blazing with light. Servants were running about. Lord Banningstowe himself was much in evidence, and Nelson Lee was there. The place simply swarming with police, too.

"Well, we've arrived too late to see the fun, but that doesn't matter much," I said. "We've done something a lot better than watch the capture of these criminals."

Nelson Lee's plan had been entirely successful, and the gang which had planned to rob Bannington Manor had been captured red-handed. There were four men altogether, and they were now safely in the hands of the police.

Lord Banningstowe was extremely grateful to Nelson Lee for having acted so promptly and with such effectiveness. Of course, Inspector Jameson was there—he was, in fact, exceedingly pleased with himself. He appeared to imagine that all the credit of the capture was

due to him, and yet, as a matter of fact, he had only carried out the suggestions which had been given to him by Nelson Lee. But that was just the inspector's little way. He hated to think that Nelson Lee—a mere amateur, in his eyes—should be able to do anything better than the police could do it.

We ran across Inspector Jameson before we could find the governor, and the inspector stopped us as we were going up the drive. He gazed at us severely and frowned.

"What are you boys doing here?" he demanded. "You ought to be in bed, and I don't expect your headmaster knows anything about this!"

"Keep your hair on, inspector!" I said quickly. "We want to see Mr. Lee."

"Oh, indeed!" said Jameson. "You want to see Mr. Lee, do you? I do not suppose that Mr. Lee is anxious to see you. Take my advice, my boys, and get back to school as quickly as you can."

"Look here, inspector, you don't understand!" I declared. "There's something important that we've got to speak to Mr. Lee about."

"I should hardly think that it would be advisable to see Mr. Lee," he said. "He is your Housemaster, and you will get into hot water if you are seen. But that makes little difference, because I intend to report the matter to——"

"Oh, rats!" I said gruffly.

I pushed past the inspector, and Sir Montie and Tommy followed me. Jameson was left there in the middle of the path, staring after us wrathfully. He called out something, but I took no notice. At that moment I had caught sight of the governor. He was strolling down the terrace and lighting a cigarette. He had just left Lord Banningstowe at the imposing main entrance of the mansion.

"Governor!" I shouted, running up. "We've been looking for you!"

Nelson Lee halted and looked at us severely.

"Oh, so you have been looking for me!" he exclaimed grimly. "What is the meaning of this, boys? I have no doubt you are the ringleader, Nipper, and I shall be very severe with you. I distinctly told you that you were not to come here to-night."

I glared.

"And I distinctly told myself that I should come, sir!" I retorted. "We released you from that old mill, and then you refused to let us come on this job with you. Rank ingratitude, that's what I call it! And, in any case, we arrived too late to see the fun!"

I thought I detected a slight twinkle in Nelson Lee's eyes.

"I may be your chief when it comes to detective work; but I am your Housemaster at St. Frank's, and it was against my wish that you should venture out to-night. If these escapades of yours are noticed by the other boys, they are liable to put a wrong construction upon your actions. Therefore I do not wish you to——"

"Oh, ring off, sir!" I protested. "There's no time to talk about these things. We want your help and the help of the police."

"My help?" repeated Nelson Lee sharply. "What for?"

"To capture three rogues, sir," I replied. "One of them is Mr. Naggs, the rotter who broke into the Ancient House last week. Well, I can lead you to the place where he is hiding with two other men. And that's not all!"

"Dear me! It appears that you have been busy on your own, Nipper," said Nelson Lee. "Well, go on!"

"I'm glad to see you've dropped that schoolmaster tone, guv'nor!" I said calmly. "And now prepare yourself for a little surprise. We have found Goodwin."

Nelson Lee did not seem so impressed as I had expected him to be.

"You have found Goodwin—eh?" he exclaimed. "Well done, my lad! That is certainly very excellent news. And

how did you manage to do the trick?"

I gave a grunt.

"It's never any good trying to surprise you, guv'nor!" I said. "Every time I've got something special to tell you, you simply stand there listening to it without moving a hair."

Nelson Lee chuckled.

"I'm sorry, Nipper!" he smiled. "As a matter of fact, I am surprised—and very pleased, too. You have located Dick Goodwin, you say? Where is he, and how did you get on the track?"

"Goodwin is being held a prisoner by Naggs and the other two men," I said rapidly. "They are in an old house on the Helmsford road, about ten or twelve miles from here. It's a jolly lonely spot, and we followed Naggs' motor-car there, and we know that possibly the men intend remaining in the house for the night. All we've got

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to do is to go along with a batch of police and nab the whole crowd, and bring Dick Goodwin back to St. Frank's with us."

"Quite a nice little programme, Nipper!" said the governor smoothly. "And now let me hear some details, please. I should like to know how you got on the track so promptly."

It did not take me long to explain all the details to Nelson Lee.

Nelson Lee was delighted.

"Splendid, Nipper!" he declared when I had finished. "That idea of yours regarding the dripping oil was most effective. I am pleased to find that you retain your habit of acting promptly and effectively in an emergency. But for that scheme of yours it would have been quite impossible to follow the motor-car, and then we should never have known what had become of Goodwin."

"And what are you going to do, sir?" I asked eagerly.

"There is only one thing to be done, Nipper, and that is to get off to this old house without a moment's delay," said Nelson Lee crisply. "I will interview Inspector Jameson now, and we shall probably be ready to start within twenty minutes. We will go there at once and raid the place."

"And—shall we be able to come, sir?" put in Watson tentatively.

Nelson Lee stroked his chin.

"Well, boys, I ought not to allow it, strictly speaking—you ought to be in your beds," he replied. "But after you have done so much I cannot very well refuse to allow you to see the game through. Yes, you may come along and join in the raid."

Nelson Lee left us, and he was soon in close conversation with Inspector Jameson. And then, after a little delay, two motor-cars were got ready. The inspector did not seem particularly impressed with the story that I had told. It was only because of Nelson Lee's insistence that Jameson consented to go on the trip.

"I hope the boys have told you right, that's all, sir," said the inspector at last. "If we have been taken on a fool's errand I shall make it my duty to—"

"Come, inspector, wait until this effort has met with failure before you start complaining," interrupted Nelson Lee. "There is no time to be wasted. The sooner we get off the better. We are taking a dozen men, I understand?"

"Yes, sir," said the inspector gruffly. "That is the number you suggested."

Five minutes later two motor-cars were howling along the dark road in the direction of Helmford. Sir Montie and Tommy and I were in the leading car, with Nelson Lee. And we were all fairly excited.

When we got within a mile of the old house all the lights of the motor-cars were extinguished, and then we continued our trip cautiously. Six or seven hundred yards from the half-ruined building the cars came to a halt, and they were left in the grass beside the road with one man in charge.

Nelson Lee, accompanied by Inspector Jameson, led the way on foot. I followed closely behind, with my chums. And the policemen marched along in the rear.

It would never have done to have taken the motor-cars straight up to the house, for Mr. Neggs and his confederates might have taken alarm.

It was Nelson Lee, of course, who planned the raid. He placed men in different positions, and very soon the whole house was surrounded. There was not a single portion that was not under observation.

And then Nelson Lee and the inspector, with three other men, moved on to the house with the intention of breaking in boldly.

There was very little chance of the three rascals escaping. The precautions were so strict.

Nelson Lee went straight to the front

door to begin with, and he grasped the handle and pushed. To his surprise the door opened without any trouble whatever. I was surprised, too, for I was just behind with my chums. And I gave them rather a significant look.

"Did you see that?" I whispered. "The door isn't even locked!"

"It's rather strange, dear old boy—it is, really!" murmured Sir Montie.

Nelson Lee and the inspector passed inside. And when they stood in the hall they remained absolutely silent and motionless—listening.

But the only sound that came to their ears was the sighing of the wind in the trees outside.

It seemed that the old house was absolutely deserted.

The inspector gave an expressive smirk.

"Just as I thought!" he exclaimed nastily. "A wild-geese chase—that's what it is, Mr. Lee!"

"We have not searched the house yet, inspector!" interrupted Nelson Lee curtly.

"They were at the back, sir!" I whispered. "At the back, on the ground floor!"

But it was not long before we knew the truth. The house was searched from roof to cellar, and every room was examined—every cupboard was entered.

But there was not a soul in the building. The birds had flown. During our hurried trip to Bannington, Mr. Naggs and his companions had gone, taking Dick Goodwin with them. I was greatly disappointed, for I had expected something very different.

Inspector Jameson was very sceptical, even after Nelson Lee had pointed out several obvious facts to him. For example, there were one or two candles there which had been used quite recently. But the inspector stated that it was not possible to tell whether they had been used that night or a week earlier.

However, Nelson Lee bowed out the inspector on one point. There was a storm lantern there, which had evidently been left behind in the hurry to get away, and the oil container was distinctly warm.

"I think you will admit, inspector, that this lantern has been used within the last half-hour," said Nelson Lee smoothly.

"Well, it certainly appears to be so," admitted the inspector grudgingly. "But where are these men now? Why did they go away?"

Nelson Lee shrugged his shoulders.

"Really, it is quite useless asking me these questions, Jameson," he said. "I do not know why the men have gone; I only know that they have taken Goodwin with them. It is our duty to get on their track, and as soon as possible."

I found an opportunity to have a word with the guv'nor after a moment, and I tapped him on the arm.

"Just a minute, sir!" I said.

"Well, Nipper, what is it?"

"These men have gone off in that car, I said. 'They didn't remain here long, and it's quite possible that that oil-can is still leaking—if they haven't discovered the hole in it. Don't you think we might be able to follow that oil trail again?'"

Nelson Lee nodded.

"I have been thinking of the same thing, Nipper," he said. "It is quite possible that we may be able to follow the trail for some distance; but that supply of oil cannot last for ever, remember. However, we will do our best. To begin with, we will go out in the road and examine the surface by the aid of our electric torches. We might be able to discover something."

"Yes, it's quite likely, sir," I agreed. "Come on!"

We passed outside, leaving the police to their own devices, and, with Nelson Lee leading the way, we went

out into the road and then slowly moved forward, carefully examining the surface as we passed along.

The drops of oil were distinctly visible near the gateway, where the car had turned in on its original journey; but, search as we would, we could find no signs of any oil beyond the house—on the way to London. This indicated that when the car had restarted its journey the leakage had been stopped.

"This is as I feared," said Nelson Lee. "No, Nipper, that idea of ours is useless. We cannot follow the car by means of the oil-drops."

"That's rotten, sir!" I grunted. "I been hoping that we might be able to—"

"Begad!" exclaimed Sir Montie. "I wonder what this is, dear boys?"

He was bending down and staring at something which lay on the road—a white slip of paper, which appeared to be rolled up. I flashed my torch upon the object and then picked it up. It was a roll of newspaper, and there was a stump of a pencil inside.

"Why, look at this, sir!" I said. "I wonder who dropped this piece of newspaper?"

I unrolled the paper, took the pencil out, and then saw that there were some words scrawled on the scrap of paper. These words were in pencil, and they were written right across the printing, making it rather difficult for the words to be read. However, after examining the paper closely under the light of Nelson Lee's torch, I made out the words, and I was filled with excitement.

"Grest Scott!" I gasped. "Look—look at this, sir!"

"There is no need to get excited, Nipper—"

"But there is, sir! Goodwin wrote this!" I shouted.

"Goodwin!"

"Begad!"

"My only hat!"

Nelson Lee took the paper from me and scrutinised it.

Sir Montie clutched at my sleeve.

"Dear old boy!" he said. "I'm simply dyin' with curiosity! What does it say on that paper?"

"Only a few words," I said. "Just these:

"Help! Being taken to Bramley Gap by scoundrels. Please come.—R. Goodwin."

"Begad! It is simply amazin'!" said Tregellis-West.

"Bramley Gap is a little opening in the cliffs, only a mile away from Bramley village," said Nelson Lee. "It is situated on the coast, about sixteen miles, roughly, from here. If this information is correct—as it no doubt is—we shall be able to effect Goodwin's rescue pretty quickly."

"And what about the police, sir?" asked Watson. "Will they help us?"

Nelson Lee looked thoughtful.

"I do not think I shall bother about the police," he said after a moment.

"Hear, hear!" I exclaimed. "We don't want that old idiot bothering about, sir."

A few moments later Inspector Jameson had been informed by Nelson Lee that we required one of the cars and that we were going out, in an endeavour to find out what had become of Goodwin. The inspector could not very well refuse, and, very shortly afterwards Nelson Lee was at the wheel of the car, and we were speeding away through the night.

We went on through the darkness, and at length, when we had nearly arrived at the little fishing village of Bramley, Nelson Lee turned off, and we went down a narrow little lane, which led to the Gap itself. By this time I was feeling exceedingly thrilled.

At length we came to the beach itself. We had been passing down along a deep gully, with frowning cliffs

on either side of us. It was steep, too, and it led straight down on to the shingly beach.

The place was bare and bleak indeed. There was not a sign in any direction of any human being or habitation. The lights on our own car were, of course, out, so there was no chance of our being seen, and the sound of the breakers effectually concealed the noise of the motor.

We searched in every direction, but without any luck.

Nelson Lee was not long in coming to a decision.

"Boys, we had better go back to St. Frank's," he said quietly.

"But why, sir?" Goodwin was brought here——"

"It is quite likely that Goodwin was brought here," agreed Nelson Lee. "But he is not here now, and we can do nothing in this darkness."

And so we returned to St. Frank's, tired out after our adventures, and somewhat disappointed at not having rescued Dick Goodwin from the kidnappers. But we felt fairly confident of being able to get on the track of the missing junior again. It remained to be seen, however, what the result of our further efforts would be to rescue the kidnapped new boy.

THE END



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"FREE as the air" is a phrase we all know, but would it surprise you to learn that the air which we think so little about is worth no less than a hundred million pounds every year to those who know how to make use of it?

Liquid Air.

The discovery that air could be liquified by freezing it to a very low temperature has made this possible. Liquid air is colourless, and looks like water, and is made by forcing compressed air through a very fine nozzle.

When this liquid air is warmed it evaporates rapidly, and first oxygen is released from it, then nitrogen. Oxygen is a valuable gas in many industries; it is used extensively in oxy-acetylene blow-lamps, for cutting through steel and other metals.

Oxygen is also, of course, used by doctors. Many sick people would die but for the life-giving oxygen supplied to them through mechanical breathing appliances. And there is an ever-widening field of use for this amazing gas in high-altitude flying; the pilot breathes oxygen instead of the rarefied air which is encountered high above the earth.

One per cent of the air we breathe is composed of a gas called argon. This is the gas used in those brilliant neon lamps used for advertising purposes; it takes forty-four tons of liquid air to make a single pound of neon.

In recent years scientists have discovered that there are all sorts of rare gases in our atmosphere. In 173 tons of air there is one pound of krypton; in 725 tons there is one pound of helium (the gas used for inflating non-inflammable airships); in 128 tons there is one pound of xenon.

All these gases may be used for filling electric light bulbs, and the light from the bulb can be varied by using different gases. Helium, for instance, makes a yellow glow, xenon a sky-blue one.

Useful Gases.

Nitrogen, which is the chief constituent of air, is used in a hundred different ways by modern industry. It forms the base of most of the artificial fertilisers used in farming, and also of most explosives employed in the manufacture of shells. Ammonia and nitrate, both of which can be made from the air, are also used for fertilising.

It is calculated that at least four million tons of nitrogen are taken out of the atmosphere every year. Most of it goes back into the air again eventually, and there is no danger of the supply running short, because plants are always giving off fresh quantities of this useful gas.

Before the war, nitrogen was chiefly obtained from mineral salts dug out of the nitrate mines of Chile, but German chemists, seeking new sources of supply when the German ships were kept in harbour by Allied warships, found what is known as the "fixing" of atmospheric nitrogen. That is why, to-day, every country is able to obtain its nitrogen supplies out of the air, instead of depending on the Chilean mines.

There is every prospect that still more products will be made out of the atmosphere in time to come. Scientists have already discovered a method of making limeum out of the dust floating in the atmosphere; now they are talking of making cloth by the same means.

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