

THE SCHOOLBOY INVENTOR!

By

EDWY SEARLES BROOKS



SCHOOLBOYS' OWN

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The SCHOOLBOY INVENTOR!

By EDWY SEARLES BROOKS



(Told by NIPPER of the Remove.)

When the secret invention of DICK GOODWIN, the newcomer to St. Frank's, falls into the hands of unscrupulous enemies, it leads to many thrilling adventures in London and Lancashire for NELSON LEE, NIPPER & Co.!

CHAPTER I.

In the Hands of Rogues!

SLOWLY and cautiously the big open tourer motor-car picked its way along the rough road down Branley Gap. Upon either side frowned the rugged cliffs, and straight ahead, and downwards, lay the shingle of the beach, with the waves of the English Channel beating unceasingly.

It was pitch dark, and the hour was between two and three o'clock in the morning. Everything was still and quiet—the whole countryside was asleep. Only the restless sea made any sound.

At length the motor-car came to a halt. It was now nearly upon the beach.

A man stepped out of the rear part of the car. He stamped his feet a trifle, and then walked round to the driver.

"Well, we've got here at last, Ratsby," said the man to the driver. "That infernal puncture delayed us a good bit, but it doesn't matter much. Perhaps it is just as well that we have arrived now—when everything is quiet."

"Oh, it doesn't matter much, Naggs," said the driver. "How's the boy?"

"Sullen," replied Mr. Naggs. "He hasn't said a word the whole time. The kid is sulky—and that's only to be expected. But we'll make him speak before long—don't you fear!"

Another man came out of the back of the car, and he stood there, just by the door.

"What's the plan now, Naggs?" he inquired.

"Bring the boy out," said Mr. Naggs. "We've finished with the car now."

Willis. Ratsby is taking the car direct to London, and he'll await us there—I expect we shall arrive some time to-morrow, after we have compelled Goodwin to speak."

Mr. Naggs went to the back of the car, and looked keenly at the boy who was sitting on the seat.

"Come along, my lad," said Mr. Naggs. "You've got to get out here."

Dick Goodwin, of the Remove Form of St. Frank's, made no reply. But he got up from the seat, and quietly stepped out of the car. He knew well enough that it was no good resisting—and, in any case, he was quite pleased to be able to stretch his legs. He had been sitting in the car for nearly two hours, and he was rather stiff. The junior was not sullen and sulky, as Mr. Naggs imagined; he was only determined not to yield to his captors' demands.

Goodwin had been kidnapped by Naggs & Co. from the vicinity of St. Frank's during the hours of the previous evening. The men required something of Goodwin which he positively refused to give up—and that something was the secret of a certain invention.

Ever since Goodwin's arrival at St. Frank's, at the beginning of term, he had been somewhat mysterious. Practically all the juniors in the Remove knew that the new fellow was engaged upon some special kind of work in his own study—which was always kept locked and bolted.

But the other fellows did not know what this work was. Apparently, however, Mr. Naggs & Co. knew the secret—and their object was to compel Goodwin to deliver up the secret. This the Lancashire boy refused to do. Therefore, he was taken prisoner—and he was being kept in captivity until he agreed to open his mouth.

"Now, my lad, we don't want to be harsh with you," said Mr. Naggs smoothly. "If you'll only do what you're told, you won't come to any harm. In the first place, you've got to walk along the beach with us. And if you make any attempt to get away, your

hands will be bound, and your feet tied together so that you can only hobble. That's just a warning."

"I understand," said Goodwin quietly.

"That's all right, then," said Mr. Naggs. "Well, we'll be going, Ratsby. Good-night!"

"Good-night!" said the car-driver.

A moment or two later he had turned the big automobile round, and it was slowly crawling its way up the gap towards the main road. Once there, it went speeding along in the direction of London.

Back on the beach, Mr. Naggs and Willis were stumbling along over the rough shingle, with Dick Goodwin between them.

The wind was cold, and now and again the air would be filled with soft spray. Goodwin was hungry—more hungry than he would have cared to admit. He had tasted nothing since the dinner-time of the previous day—although he had certainly been offered a number of sandwiches by Mr. Naggs. But those sandwiches were only to be eaten on condition that Goodwin "opened his mouth." Having declined to do this, the sandwiches had been withdrawn.

And now Goodwin was quite famished. But he would never ask these men for food.

"How far along the beach do we have to go?" asked Willis presently.

"Not far," said Mr. Naggs. "I think I can see a cave already."

Goodwin knew the truth then. It was quite clear that these men were going to place him in one of the caves which were plentiful in this part of the coast. The cliffs, in fact, were honeycombed with caverns, and apparently the boy was to be kept a prisoner in one of them.

After walking for a short distance farther, Mr. Naggs led the way up the beach towards the cliff's face. And now Goodwin could see a small, low opening. It was narrow, too, and might easily

have been passed by had he not been looking for such a thing.

"I'll go first with the torch," said Mr. Naggs. "The boy will come after me and you will bring up the rear, Willis. See that he doesn't try any tricks. If he once gets away here we might not be able to find him in the darkness."

"Leave it to me," said Willis grimly.

Mr. Naggs bent down and entered the cave, and Dick Goodwin was forced in after him, Willis bringing up the rear. For some few yards they were compelled to walk in a doubled-up position—for the roof of the rock tunnel was low. However, it soon widened out, and became higher. And presently the trio were standing upright in a fairly large cavern. Mr. Naggs was flashing an electric torch about. And it was obvious that this was not his first visit to the place; for by the side of the cave stood a small boat. And there were two or three other articles—a small box, a leather attache-case, and a few odds and ends.

"You can sit down on that box, young man," said Mr. Naggs. "I don't suppose you'll be kept here for long—the dawn can't be far off now. This isn't going to be a prison for you—not at all. I have a much better plan in mind. But if you will only speak now it will save any further trouble. Why don't you tell us what we want to know, and then—"

"I'm not saying anything!" interrupted Goodwin sulkily. "You can keep me for a month—but it will make no difference."

"I thought as much," said Mr. Naggs. "Still obstinate, eh? We'll take it out of you—we'll make you alter your tone. There's not the slightest chance of your escaping or of your being rescued."

Dick Goodwin made no reply. He was, in fact, wondering whether any help would come.

Goodwin remembered a little incident which had happened an hour or two since—when he had been placed in the motor on the main road between Bannington and Helmford. For some little

time the boy had been kept a prisoner in an old house, but his captors had taken alarm, and they had removed him to the seashore.

Goodwin, seizing an opportunity, had scribbled a few words on a piece of paper—indicating that he was being taken to Bramley Gap. Would that scrap of paper be found—and would any help come to him?

Goodwin was quite unaware of the fact—and Mr. Naggs was in ignorance, too—that no less a person than Mr. Nelson Lee himself had visited Bramley Gap only twenty minutes before Mr. Naggs' own car had arrived. For that piece of paper had been found by Nelson Lee. Montie Tregellis-West and Tommy Watson and I had been investigating Dick Goodwin's disappearance, and we had tracked him to the old house on the Helmford road. But by the time we had brought Nelson Lee and the police on the scene, Goodwin had been taken away.

But that scrap of paper had been found—giving us a direct clue to the junior's destination. Nelson Lee had lost no time. In his car he had gone straight to Bramley Gap, and we had accompanied him. But on arrival we had seen nothing. The beach had been deserted.

The explanation was simple.

Naggs and his confederates had taken a different route; they had met with a slight mishap—one of the tyres had punctured. It was while this repair was being effected that Nelson Lee had arrived at Bramley Gap—taking the other road. Thus we knew nothing of what had happened, and Naggs and his party were also in the dark. Nelson Lee had gone straight back to St. Frank's, telling us that he intended making full investigations on the morrow.

It seemed, therefore, that Dick Goodwin's hopes would not be absolutely in vain.

Goodwin was left quite to himself. Hour after hour passed, and Naggs and Willis spent the time in playing cards by the light of a candle. But at length

they put the cards away, and Mr. Naggs opened the attache-case. From this he produced some food, and he and Willis partook of it heartily. Goodwin was quite ignored. The lad was feeling rather faint from hunger, but he set his teeth and did not utter a sound. Never would he ask these men for a scrap to eat!

At length the dawn came.

It crept in, cold and grey, at the cave entrance. And as the minutes went slowly by the light increased, and Naggs and Willis became active. The small boat was hauled down through the narrow entrance of the cave, and out into the sea.

"Not a soul about, and there's quite a mist over the sea," Naggs remarked. "We shall be able to do the trick, and nobody will see us, Willis."

Willis nodded.

"It doesn't particularly matter if we are seen," he observed. "There is nothing suspicious in a boat putting out from the shore—people often go fishing in the early morning, Naggs. I think we'd better have the boy with us—there's no telling what he'll get up to if we leave him alone in that cave."

"He can't escape—that's one thing," said Mr. Naggs. "There's no other exit to that cavern and we can easily stop him if he comes out. But I think I'll do as you say—he might as well be with us. We'll go straight off!"

Mr. Naggs went into the cave and found Goodwin still sitting on the box.

"Come along, my lad!" said Naggs briskly. "You've asked for trouble, and you'll get it. You could save yourself all this bother, if you'd only be reasonable. But I'm not going to argue any more—it's entirely in your hands now. When you choose to speak, I shall be ready to listen."

Goodwin did not choose to speak. He said nothing. He rose to his feet and accompanied his captor outside into the open. The boy was quite glad, for he was stiff and cold—and the exercise made him feel better. He wondered

what Naggs was about to do now, and he looked about him with interest.

The beach was drab and quite deserted. Out at sea, just half a mile from the shore, projected a curious-looking object from the water. It was rather dim and hazy in the mist—but Dick Goodwin recognised it.

The object was the ruin of an old lighthouse.

At one time it had been a strong, stone structure, towering high above the sea. It was built upon jagged rocks, which were a death-trap for any unwary vessel which happened to come too close inshore.

Dick Goodwin was too young to remember the story of the Bramley Lighthouse. Over ten years earlier a fearful storm had raged, and the lighthouse had been struck by lightning. The entire upper portion of it had been destroyed, leaving only the base. This still stood there, impregnable, defying the sea to do its worst.

And a mile farther out to sea, on a much larger rock, there had been built a new lighthouse—a larger and stronger one. And the old ruin still stood there.

At low tide the rocks were uncovered, but when the tide was high, the sea came right up to the stonework of the building, surging furiously and impetuously against the stonework.

Was it possible that Mr. Naggs intended to take Dick Goodwin to this old ruin? At least, it seemed like it, for the boat was launched in the fairly calm sea, and Willis commenced rowing towards the rocks. The tide was low now, and the sea was not very heavy. Dick Goodwin sat in the centre of the boat, rather interested, but very cold.

All hope was now dying within him. For, once he was landed on that old ruin of a lighthouse, he knew very well that it would be quite impossible for him to make any bid for liberty. He must remain a prisoner until his captors decided to set him free.

And so, in the cold light of dawn, with the mist surrounding the whole

sea, the little boat went straight for the rocks, and at last it was safe enough for Willis to jump ashore. The rocks were treacherous, for they were covered with slimy seaweed. However, Willis managed to keep his feet, and he held the boat in position while Dick Goodwin climbed ashore. Mr. Naggs came last, then the boat was hauled up on the rocks into safety.

"Now, then, my lad," said Mr. Naggs. "I suppose you know what the plan is, eh? You are going to be kept in this very desirable residence. It is not half so dismal as you might think, from the exterior. In fact, you will be quite comfortable once you get inside."

Dick Goodwin nodded.

"I don't know why you are going to all this trouble," he said. "It doesn't make any difference to me, Mr. Naggs. I'll never say a word about that invention, ay, and I'll—"

"That's all right," interrupted Mr. Naggs. "We'll see about that later, my boy. I don't think you'll be able to keep up this obstinate spirit for very long."

They went over the rocks and at length arrived at the foot of the stone lighthouse. From the shore it had not seemed very large, but now it loomed above massively.

For some little distance the stonework was covered with green, slimy seaweed. And a rusty, iron ladder, fairly narrow, was affixed to the stonework. It led straight upwards to a doorway, which was quite a long distance from the ground. The doorway, of course, was above high-water mark.

Mr. Naggs grasped the ladder in order to climb up.

"The boy will come next," he said. "You will bring up the rear, Willis."

"Right!" said the other man. "Go ahead!"

They climbed up the ladder—a rather tricky business, for the rungs were slippery and treacherous. But, at length, Mr. Naggs arrived at the doorway. It was made of thick iron, and

it was some few moments before he got it open.

But at last he succeeded, and he stepped into the dark opening. Dick Goodwin followed him, and then came Willis.

The iron door closed, and it seemed to the Lancashire lad that all hope of rescue was cut off. He was indeed a prisoner now—marooned in this old ruin of a lighthouse.

CHAPTER 2.

MUCH EXCITEMENT!

TOMMY WATSON yawned.

"Well, I'm not feeling particularly bright this morning," he remarked. "We've had only a few hours' sleep, you know—and we had a pretty liring time of it last night."

"It won't hurt you, for once in a way, Tommy," I remarked. "We all feel rather heavy this morning, and that is not to be wondered at. Considering that we didn't get to sleep until four o'clock, and that we got up at rising bell, as usual, it's a wonder we're not doing all the time! How do you feel, Montie?"

Sir Montie Tregellis-West adjusted his pince-nez.

"Dear old boy, I don't feel quite up to the mark—I don't really," he replied. "At the same time, as you say, it won't do us any harm, for once. And I am worryin' about Goodwin. What has happened to him? Where is he now?"

"That's what we all want to know," I said. "We know that he was taken to Bramley Gap by Mr. Naggs and those other two men. But beyond that we are in a bit of a fog. We don't know what happened to Dick Goodwin after he was taken down to the beach. But the gov'nor will see to the matter—don't you worry!"

Breakfast was already over, and it would soon be time for morning lessons.

The whole school, of course, was busily discussing the kidnapping of Dick Goodwin. It was the one topic of conversation throughout St. Frank's—from the Sixth Form down to the smallest lads.

The police had been informed, and they were doing their utmost. But they had drawn a blank, as we already knew.

Goodwin's father had been telegraphed for, and it was fairly certain that he would arrive at St. Frank's that day. Meanwhile, everybody was talking, and making suggestions and telling everybody else how Goodwin ought to be searched for.

Handforth, of course, was to the fore. He considered that this was an opportunity where he could display his own remarkable powers of detection.

These remarkable powers were purely imaginary, of course, for Handforth was one of the biggest blunderers under the sun. He was the only junior in St. Frank's who was not aware of this fact.

"It's all rot to go on like this!" he declared, as he addressed an audience in the Triangle. "What we want to do is to organise and get up search parties. That's my idea, and if anybody here disagrees I'll punch his nose."

Nobody disagreed.

This was not very surprising, considering that Handforth's audience consisted solely of Church and McClure. There had been one or two others originally, but they had drifted away, leaving Handforth with nobody but his own chums to listen to what he had to say.

Handforth appeared to be unaware of the fact until he looked round.

"Oh, it's no good talking, Handy," said McClure. "Talking won't do any good. The best thing to do in this case is to leave it to the police, and to Mr. Lee. You can bet your boots that Mr. Lee is hot on the track. Anyway, he left St. Frank's about ten minutes ago, and I understand that he won't

be back during the morning. It's pretty certain that he has gone off somewhere in connection with Goodwin's disappearance."

Handforth glared.

"Where are all the other chaps?" he demanded warmly. "I thought I was addressing a crowd—not you two asses! All you can do is to disagree with everything I say!"

"My dear chap, we're not disagreeing," said Church soothingly. "But what on earth is the good of worrying your head about Goodwin? He'll be found before the day's out. You mark my words."

Handforth sniffed.

"A case like this is just where I can prove my ability," he declared. "As a matter of fact, I am thinking about going to the Head and asking him to let me have the morning off."

"What?" yelled Church and McClure.

"Oh, you can be surprised!" said Handforth grimly. "I mean it! It's almost certain that the Head will agree—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You cackling idiots!" roared Handforth. "There's nothing funny in what I said—"

"Isn't there?" grinned Church. "I think there is! Ha, ha, ha!"

"It's very funny!" chuckled the other junior.

"Of course, I knew you'd cackle!" said Handforth bitterly. "That's what you usually do—when I make a good suggestion. I'm going to the Head to ask him to let me have the morning off—and then I shall be able to investigate this case thoroughly. And I'll warrant that by dinner-time I'll bring Dick Goodwin back with me."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, Handy, you'll be the death of us!" grinned Church. "What's the use of asking for trouble? If you go to the Head, you'll only be punished for your cheek. Besides, why do you want to worry yourself over a petty

"Little case like this?" he added, with a wink at McClure.

"Petty little case?" repeated Handforth.

"Of course," said Church. "That's all it is. I'm surprised at you bothering about it, Handy. When you go on the trail, you want something big, something startling and difficult. There's nothing in this for you to bring your wonderful detective ability into operation. It's beneath your notice."

Handforth nodded.

"Well, as a matter of fact, it is rather insignificant!" he admitted. "I'm more at home in dealing with a big case. That's only natural. When a chap has a lot of detective genius, he needs something particularly mysterious to engross his attention. At the same time, I rather like Goodwin, and I think I shall go out on the trail this morning, and investigate the mystery!"

Church and McClure did their very best to remain serious. But it was utterly impossible, and the next moment they were yelling with laughter. They really couldn't help it. Handforth was altogether too funny.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You—you silly lunatic!" howled Handforth. "I'll teach you not to laugh at me! Take that!"

Biff!

Church took something which made him cease laughing. He sat down on the ground, and howled.

"And there's one for you, too!" roared Handforth, lunging out at McClure.

But the latter junior was rather too quick. He had seen the fate which had befallen Church. He dodged and ran for it.

Just at that moment Reginald Pitt and Grey and one or two others came up. They stood looking on with interest as Church picked himself up, tenderly holding his nose.

"You—you dangerous idiot!" he

shouted. "You're too jolly handy with your fists——"

"Well, I'm not going to take any insults!" said Handforth grimly. "I'm going straight to the Head, and I'm going to ask him to give me the morning off."

"What for?" inquired Pitt politely.

"I'm going to do some detective work," replied Handforth with dignity.

"Eh?"

"Some which?"

"Some detective work!" repeated Handforth. "The Head will give me the morning off, of course—that's natural. He knows what I am. And as soon as I tell him that I mean to investigate the mystery of Dick Goodwin, he'll——"

"Give you a good whopping, five hundred lines, and detention for a fortnight!" said Pitt. "That's what the Head will give you, my son, if you have the nerve to go to his study and ask for the morning off!"

"Rot!" said Handforth. "We'll see about that. I'm not going to waste my time in the class-room this morning, when I can do something a lot better. That's not my way."

And Handforth marched off, followed by the yells of laughter from the other juniors.

And, true to his word, he went straight to the headmaster's study. Dr. Stafford was in, and he listened patiently to Handforth for a moment or two. After that several things happened, and when Handforth emerged from the Head's study, he was rubbing his hands, his face was flushed, and his eyes were gleaming with rage.

The knowledge that he had to write five hundred lines did not add to his enjoyment. And it galled him to think that his own chums had been quite right in their predictions. After his failure to get leave Handforth did not care to go into the Triangle again. But when he got to the lobby, he found quite a number of juniors waiting there, in order to hear the verdict.

"Bless!" said Pitt, as Handforth appeared. "The great detective approaches!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Don't laugh at him!" went on Pitt severely. "He's probably deep in thought. He's thinking how he can get on the track of Goodwin."

"When are you going to start, Handy?" inquired Grey politely.

Handforth was not the kind of junior to stand chaff without retaliating. And the next moment he charged forward, with whirling fists. He was determined to do some damage—if only for the purpose of relieving his feelings. The juniors dodged wildly.

"Look out," shouted Pitt, "he is dangerous! Collar him!"

Before Handforth could land out any blows, he was seized by many hands, and then he was flung on the floor, flat on his back. All the wind was knocked out of him, and by the time he rose to his feet he did not feel particularly like fighting.

"Take it easy, Handy—that's the best way!" advised Pitt. "It's no good getting excited. Besides, it doesn't look well for a famous detective to go about punching noses!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Handforth breathed hard.

"I'm disgusted!" he said heavily.

"Not with us, I hope, dear old boy?" inquired Sir Montie.

"I'm disgusted with the Head!" said Handforth. "I think the Head is old enough to know better! I offer to spend all the morning in looking for Dick Goodwin, and all he can do is to cane me and give me lines! Is that what you call gratitude?"

"Well, hardly!" said Dr Valerio. "I should be inclined to call it a necessary duty!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, anyhow, I'm fed up!" said Handforth. "I'm not going to offer my services any more—I'm done with it!"

"Then it's quite probable that Goodwin will be found!" said Pitt sweetly.

Handforth marched off, very indignant, and the other fellows were highly amused. They could not see things in exactly the same way as Handforth saw them; but it was certain that Handforth was not going to occupy his great brain by doing any detective work.

Handforth marched out into the Triangle, and collided rather violently with somebody who was just coming in. He was a rather curious-looking individual with extremely bowed legs. His face wore an expression of perpetual gloom, and he possessed ruddy side-whiskers and red hair. This melancholy person was Mr. Josh Cuttle, who was employed on the household staff of the Ancient House.

"By hoker!" said Mr. Cuttle, as Handforth bumped into him.

"Sorry!" growled Handforth. "I didn't see you, Mr. Cuttle!"

"There was boys with eyes, and there was boys without eyes!" said Mr. Cuttle heavily. "I was no vision—I was solid; therefore it was easy for you to see me, Master Handforth. Why didn't you see me? Ask me! Because it was your nature!"

Handforth paused, and glared at Mr. Cuttle.

"No, you're not a vision!" he said. "You're a nightmare!"

"Which was an insulting remark!" said Mr. Cuttle gloomily. "But, talking about nightmares, this was one which we was living in. Where was Master Goodwin? That was something which was worrying everybody to-day. Master Goodwin wasn't at St. Frank's no more. And why not? Ask me! Because he was took away by villains—he was kidnapped."

"But you ought to be cheerful!" put in Tommy Watson. "You're only gloomy when everything is going right. Mr. Cuttle. Now that Dick Goodwin has vanished, I should think you'd be

going about chuckling and smiling all over your face!"

Mr. Cuttle shook his head.

"It was no time for smiling, Master Watson," he said.

And, shaking his head gloomily, Mr. Cuttle walked into the Ancient House. The juniors looked after him rather curiously. Handforth stalked away towards the gymnasium.

"Somehow I believe that Cuttle takes a particular interest in Goodwin," I said to my chums. "I can't quite get the hang of it, you know! I believe that he's even been guarding Goodwin, somehow. Don't you remember how we found him prowling about one night, and Goodwin was in his own study at the same time? I can't help believing that Mr. Cuttle is at St. Frank's for some special purpose—not merely one of the ordinary employees."

"That would account for his being gloomy now," said Watson. "I expected him to go about with a cherubic smile on his face. He's always been longing for something dreadful to happen, and now that Goodwin has been kidnapped, he seems to be more gloomy than ever. He's a queer old fish!"

Very soon after then the bell rang for morning lessons, and we made our way to the Remove class-room. Mr. Crowell had some little difficulty with the Remove that morning, for the juniors were unusually excited, and did not settle down to work as they ought to have done. But the Remove master was a reasonable man, and he did not take much notice of the subdued air of excitement which pervaded the Remove.

And when at last lessons were over, all the juniors were only too glad to escape from the class-room. They were eager to find out if any fresh news had turned up concerning Dick Goodwin.

There was nothing fresh, however. No news had come in, and the boy from

Lancashire was still missing. I was rather impatient for dinner to be over, for Tregellis-West and Watson and myself had already planned what we should do during the afternoon, which was a half-holiday.

Ordinarily we should have gone on to Littleaside, and we should have practised football, but there was something far more important to do on this particular afternoon. It was our intention to go to Bramley Gap as soon as possible on our bicycles.

"The guv'nor went hours ago," I said. "By this time he has probably found out all sorts of things. Well, we're going now, and we shall see what's been happening."

And so, as soon as dinner was over, we got on our bicycles and pedalled along towards Bramley. It was only a small fishing village, and it was situated along the coast, some twelve or fifteen miles away.

At the same time, Handforth, Church and McClure cycled off to Calisowe, where they intended to take out a boat. Church and McClure only went because Handforth insisted upon them going. It was better and easier to agree at once to the proposal. If they objected, it would only mean trouble, and Church and McClure had long since learned that it was far better to give Handforth his head, particularly when he was in a grumpy mood.

But that visit to Calisowe was to lead to quite unexpected things!

CHAPTER 3.

The Lancashire Lad's Peril!

NELSON LEE was in a somewhat precarious position.

He lay full length on the grass, and his head projected over the edge of the cliff. Right below him lay the beach, deserted and dreary, with the waves breaking noisily on the shingle. There was not a soul to be seen—not a house, and not a vessel. Only a few

gulls hovered about, and the wind blew keenly from the sea.

Nelson Lee had been in his present position for some little time. He was watching the beach carefully and closely. Away to his right lay Bramley Gap. But Lee had not thought it advisable to venture down upon the beach yet; he had decided to scrutinize the foreshore carefully from the top of the cliff. He was completely concealed there, for only his head projected over the edge.

Lee did not exactly know how to commence his operations. He was quite sure that Dick Goodwin had been brought to the beach at about this spot, and Lee was very interested in the old ruined lighthouse, which lay only half a mile from the shore. Somehow he naturally connected that old ruin with the fact that Goodwin had been brought here in the dead of the night.

It was just after noon now, and Lee was rather worried because he had not arrived earlier. But he had been delayed in Bannington, the police requiring his presence in connection with another criminal affair which had recently taken place.

At last, however, Lee had managed to get away, and he was now taking a few preliminary observations before getting to work.

It was extremely lucky that he did so, for, only a few minutes later, two men suddenly came within sight, almost immediately beneath the spot where Nelson Lee was crouching. The two men had appeared from a hidden cave-mouth, and they were, of course, Naggs and Willis.

The watching detective felt convinced that these were the men who had kidnapped Dick Goodwin.

He could see them distinctly down on the shingle. They were not local fishermen or inhabitants of the district—Lee could see that at once. The men were attired in ordinary lounge suits and bowler hats. They were, in fact, quite out of place on that lonely beach,

and their actions, as it happened, fully coincided with Nelson Lee's own convictions.

After looking up and down the beach in a keen way, Mr. Naggs and his companion re-entered the cave, and presently appeared with a boat. It was not a large boat, and it was quite easy for the two men to push it down the shingle, to the water. The very fact that this boat had been concealed in the cave told Nelson Lee at once that there was something sinister about the movements of these men on the beach. Had they been local fishermen, or local residents even, they would never have gone to the trouble of concealing the boat in a cave.

Very soon the little craft was bobbing about on the rather choppy sea, and Mr. Naggs was rowing vigorously. And the boat was being steered in a straight line for the old ruined lighthouse. Nelson Lee nodded grimly to himself.

"As I thought!" he murmured. "Goodwin is there—I'm quite certain of that. These rascals have imprisoned him in the lighthouse. Well, they will not have everything their own way much longer. To begin with, I shall get in this little cave."

The boat, as Lee had anticipated, went right round the rocks, until at last it disappeared from view. The detective had already gathered that the entrance to the lighthouse was on the other side—the seaward side.

And now, free from observation, he rose to his feet and walked quickly towards Bramley Gap. His walk presently broke into a trot, and he arrived on the beach within a very few minutes. Then, after assuring himself that the boat was still out of sight, he walked quickly across the shingle, near the cliff-face. He could see no cave opening whatever; but he judged that this was concealed. And he was right in this respect, for, quite suddenly, he came upon the cave entrance tucked away in a little cutting in the cliff-face.

Nelson Lee bent down and walked straight into the cave. He quite

realised that a third man might be there; but he was prepared for this, and, with a revolver in his grip, he went boldly into the cave. In his other hand he held an electric torch.

After passing through the narrow entry—which could only have been just big enough to allow the passage of the boat—he found himself in a fairly large cavern, with a high roof. And it did not take Nelson Lee long to discover that the cavern was completely deserted.

He looked round with interest, and for some little time he was busily engaged in examining the few objects which Mr. Naggs had left behind. It was obvious to Nelson Lee that the men had every intention of returning to the cave—and Lee, without much hesitation, decided upon a plan of action.

Meanwhile, Mr. Naggs and his companion had arrived at the lighthouse. The boat was drawn up on the slippery rocks, and both the men mounted the ladder, and entered the old ruin by means of the iron door.

They found themselves in a stone passage; but it was not dark, even with the iron door closed, for plenty of light came from the other end of the passage. Moving along, the two men presently came into what had once been one of the living-rooms of the lighthouse. It was now a ruin.

Overhead there was the dull sky, with masses of broken stonework lying everywhere. The jagged edges of the old wall projected upwards, forming a kind of pit. Everything was moist and damp with the spray from the sea.

They did not remain here for long. Over in one part of the floor a flight of stone steps led downwards, and all was darkness below. Mr. Naggs produced an electric torch, and, with this switched on, he passed down the steps, with Willis at his heels.

The stairs were circular, and presently the two men came upon a stout

door, which was bolted on the outside. The bolts were soon shot back.

Passing through the doorway, the two men found themselves in a large, cold apartment. It had been at one time a store-room. And now, seated on a large coil of old rope, was Dick Goodwin. The lad was looking rather pale and worn out; but, if his body had lost some of its strength, his will was as determined and as strong as ever.

"Well, my lad, how do you like solitary confinement?" inquired Mr. Naggs smoothly. "It is now nearly one o'clock and you have been here since dawn. How are you feeling?"

Dick Goodwin's eyes blazed.

"Let you care, you scoundrel!" he exclaimed, jumping to his feet, and clenching his fists. "If you think you can starve me into submission you have made a mistake. Aye, you have that!"

"Still obstinate, I take it!" said Mr. Naggs. "Very well, young man—I shall give you just ten minutes now—ten minutes in which to decide. If you will speak up, all well and good. But if you don't speak up—it will be bad for you!"

"I shall not say a word!" said Goodwin quietly.

"We'll see," said Mr. Naggs.

He nodded to Willis, and the pair of them moved out of the store-room, and closed the door behind them, rebolting it. Then they mounted the stairs until they were in the ruined chamber above, with the dull, cloudy sky overhead. Mr. Naggs uttered a curse, and lit a cigarette.

"The obstinate young fool!" he said. "I thought he'd be submissive this time—after remaining here since dawn. But nothing seems to break his spirit!"

"Well, we must do something!" said Willis. "The idea of starving him won't do—he'll stand out for days—perhaps over a week. We can't afford to remain here all that time, Naggs. The police are looking for the boy, remember, and they might be able to trace him here——"

"There's no need to tell me that, you fool!" muttered Naggs. "I know as well as you do that we must get this job finished at once. And I mean to make that boy tell us the secret this time!"

Willis looked at his chief curiously. "What do you intend to do?" he asked.

"I will tell you!" said Naggs. "If Goodwin is still obstinate—as I expect he will be—we'll bring him up and bind him to that iron ladder, on the outside of the lighthouse."

"But the tide comes over that ladder, Naggs!" said Willis, startled.

"Yes—I know that!"

"But, you don't mean to say——"

"Wait till I've finished," said Mr. Naggs. "We'll bind the boy to that iron ladder and row away again. The tide is fairly low just now—although it is coming in. In about two hours from now the tide will be fully up—and that ladder will be nearly submerged."

"But somebody else might spot him——"

"That's very improbable," interrupted Mr. Naggs. "The ladder faces seawards, and the other lighthouse is a good distance away. And it is quite impossible to see that iron ladder from the shore. There are no fishing boats about this district, and so we are quite safe."

"But what is the idea?" asked Willis.

"It will frighten the boy," replied Mr. Naggs. "When we come back, when the tide is nearly up, I think Goodwin will be ready to speak."

"Well, that ought to shift him!" said Willis. "It's not a bad scheme, Naggs, but we must be careful. The sea's rather rough, you know."

"Oh, that's nothing!" interrupted Mr. Naggs. "The sea may be rough, but that's all the better—it will scare the kid out of his wits. When we come back and ask him to speak up, he will be only too willing. It's the only way. We can't afford to waste any farther time."

He glanced at his watch.

"Only another two minutes," he said. "We might as well be getting down."

They passed down the stone stairs once more, and re-entered the store-room. Goodwin had apparently been walking about, for he faced his persecutors almost as soon as they entered the door.

"Well? What have you got to say now, Goodwin?" asked Mr. Naggs. "Are you willing to speak, or——"

"It's a waste of time!" interrupted the boy. "You'll never force me to tell you my secret."

Mr. Naggs frowned.

"Very well," he said grimly. "We'll see what we can do with you, my obstinate young man. I'm inclined to think that you will alter your tone very shortly. Take hold of him, Willis. We may as well rope him up here!"

Goodwin resisted vigorously, but in a very short space of time, he was bound helplessly. His wrists were tied behind his back, and his ankles were securely tethered. And then he was taken up from the old store-room to the semi-demolished chamber. And from there he was taken along the passage to the iron door. This was flung wide open, and Mr. Naggs looked out carefully.

"All clear!" he exclaimed. "Not a boat in sight, and it's quite hazy over towards the lighthouse. They can't see what's happening here. We're safe enough, Willis. Bring the boy out!"

Mr. Naggs was speaking in a very harsh, callous tone. He was adopting it purposely. By nature, Naggs was a scheming rascal, but he did not intend to injure his young prisoner. But, for the purposes of his present scheme, it was necessary for him to act the part.

Goodwin himself was rather startled.

"What are you going to do with me?" he asked huskily.

"You will see soon enough, you obstinate brat!" said Mr. Naggs harshly.

It was not long before Dick Goodwin found out the truth. For, after he had

been forced through the iron doorway, he was held in position some little distance down the iron ladder. And there, while Willis held him in position from above, Mr. Naggs securely bound the boy to the iron rungs of the ladder.

"Now, my lad, I'll explain the position," said Mr. Naggs grimly. "You have been bound here, and before long the tide will be coming up. The waves will come right over this ladder—right over your head! It rests with you whether you live, or whether you die in this miserable way. If you give me your word now that you will tell me the secret of your invention, I will cut the ropes. If you don't tell me, you will be left here."

"I will not tell you," said Goodwin firmly.

Mr. Naggs nodded.

"Very well," he said. "You will remain here—until the tide comes up. We are going away now, and we shall not return until you are nearly submerged. Then we shall ask you for the last time. Remember that, my lad—for the last time!"

"By gum!" shouted Goodwin, his eyes blazing. "I will never speak—not if you kill me!"

Mr. Naggs said no more. He was quite certain that, later on, when the tide was up, Goodwin would be of a very different frame of mind.

Two minutes later the boat was in the water, and Naggs and Willis were rowing away from the old ruined lighthouse. Dick Goodwin was left there, bound helplessly—and the tide was coming in rapidly.

The Lancashire lad's predicament was a terrible one!

CHAPTER 4.

Left in His Fate!

MR. NAGGS chuckled as he straightened up after passing through the narrow entrance of the cave. Behind him was Willis, and

the two men had only just finished hauling up their boat from the sea.

"That'll teach the young brat a lesson!" said Mr. Naggs presently. "By thunder, he'll speak after this, I'll warrant! When we go back to him in half an hour's time, he'll be ready to babble out the whole truth!"

Willis shook his head.

"I'm not so sure about that," he said. "The kid's obstinate."

"But think of the fright he'll get, man!" said Mr. Naggs, lighting a cigarette.

"Oh, he'll get a fright all right, I'm not questioning that!" said the other man. "At the same time, when he finds out that we don't mean anything serious he'll shut up like a mousetrap."

"But he won't find it out, you idiot!" said Mr. Naggs impatiently. "When we go back to him we shall make him believe that we intend to leave him there to die unless he speaks."

Willis stirred up the powdery sand with the toe of his boot.

"Well, I don't quite like the whole thing, Naggs," he declared. "It's a bit too risky, to my mind."

"Risky?"

"Yes, that's what I said," repeated Willis. "The sea is fairly rough this afternoon, and it will get rougher, I believe. The tide's coming in fast."

"It won't get rougher! Don't you be a nervous fool!" said Mr. Naggs politely. "And it won't do any harm if the sea is a bit rough; it'll scare the kid all the more. I'm absolutely sick of his obstinacy, and that's why I'm teaching him this lesson!"

Willis shrugged his shoulders.

"Well, it's your idea, Naggs, so if anything goes wrong, don't blame me!" he said.

"You needn't get the wind up, I shan't blame you!" said Naggs shortly.

The two stood there, waiting.

Twenty minutes or more elapsed, and then Willis crouched down, and passed out through the cave entrance. He stood there for some minutes, with

the wind blowing furiously in his face, carrying with it many drops of rain. The sea was now much rougher. Splashes of spray were dashing up on the lighthouse.

Willis watched the waves as they burst thunderously on the shingle, and there was an uneasy feeling within him. Their boat was a small one, and, with the tide coming in, it would be rather difficult to launch the little craft. The sea had become much rougher during the last fifteen minutes.

He turned, and re-entered the cave. "Look here, Naggs, I think we'd better go back at once!" he said quickly. "The sea's very rough—the waves are breaking on the shore with great force! We shall never be able to launch the boat!"

"You always were a bit of a coward, Willis!" said Mr. Naggs. "Don't show the white feather, man! We shall be able to launch the boat. There's no need for you to—"

"I tell you it's serious!" interrupted Willis fiercely. "I agreed to help you in this affair, Naggs, because you told me that you didn't mean to harm the boy at all. But this will be murder."

Mr. Naggs swore.

"Confound you, Willis, you're absolutely one mass of nerves!" he snapped. "There's no danger at all. The sea is a bit choppy, I'll admit, but I can handle a boat, and—"

"Come and look for yourself, if you don't believe me!" interjected Willis. "A squall has come down—and the wind is simply howling. The waves are double as big as they were twenty minutes ago!"

Naggs flung his cigarette and down.

"I'll come and have a look—but I'm not going out yet!" he said. "That boy must have a proper lesson."

Willis did not reply, and the two men bent down, and passed out through the low entrance until they were standing in the open air. The wind almost took Mr. Naggs' breath away as he stood upright, and rain beat furiously into his face. He was more

than a little alarmed. He had not expected such a change in the weather conditions in so short a space of time. The waves were breaking on the shingle with a roar which filled his ears.

"By thunder!" said Mr. Naggs between his teeth.

"Well," demanded Willis, "what about it? Don't you think we'd better go at once, Naggs? Unless we hurry we shall never be able to get the boat out at all—and that kid will die there."

"It's worse than I thought," said Naggs quickly. "All right—we'll go out now, Willis. But there's no need for you to be alarmed—we shall do it all right."

They hurried down the shingle, to the spot where they had left the boat. Then, with some difficulty, they pushed it down to the waves. It was a tricky business, launching the little craft, but, at last, they succeeded, and then, bobbing up and down in what seemed a very dangerous manner, the boat was pulled out towards the lighthouse.

The sea was far rougher than Mr. Naggs had imagined—now that he was on the water he knew this. It was very difficult to row, and the boat was tossed higher and higher.

Meantime, Dick Goodwin was in a terrible position.

At first, things had not seemed so bad. He was roped to the ladder, it was true, but the waves were a good way off, and he only received a burst of spray now and again. But then that squall had come down.

It burst with great force, and the waves were larger and more dangerous. The wind cut like ice, and Dick Goodwin was soon drenched from head to foot by the splashes of spray which came whirling up from the breakers.

Chilled with cold, half dazed by the spray, Goodwin could do nothing. He could not even protect his face, for his hands were bound behind his back. The ordeal he was passing through was an awful one.

He was desperate now, and he

wriggled and struggled—attempting to get free from his bonds. But this was a hopeless task. The ropes had been tied strongly, and they were now wet and hard. It was impossible to shift them even a fraction of an inch.

The minutes sped by—although, to the helpless boy, they seemed to be hours. The tide crept up, and the rocks all round were becoming covered. Dick vaguely wondered how long it would be before the water would submerge him entirely. Already it was level with his feet.

The lad had given up looking for assistance which never came. But the faint sound of oars in fowlocks came to his ears, and he looked up. Then he started, and a little gasp came into his throat. His eyes opened wide, and there was infinite relief in their expression. He swallowed something with difficulty.

"By gum!" he muttered.

For there, rounding the edge of the foam-encircled rocks, was a small boat! Dick recognised its occupants at once. They were Naggs and Willis. His captors had come to rescue him.

The boy knew that he would be still kept a prisoner, but this was of little consequence at the moment. He was about to be saved from a terrible death—and all else was insignificant.

However, a firm resolve came into Dick's heart. He would never give up the secret which Naggs was so anxious to obtain. This experience had not weakened his resolve.

He watched the boat with eager interest. It was tossing up and down on the waves like a cockle-shell, and it was only with extreme difficulty that Mr. Naggs succeeded in controlling it.

Willis, with nervous eyes, was watching the rocks.

"Not so near, you fool!" he shouted hoarsely. "If once we touch we shall be smashed to atoms! We can't get on to these rocks in this sea—"

"We might draw in close, and you

can grab the ladder," said Naggs. "I'll wait until the sea calms a bit, then we'll have a try—"

"No, no!" yelled Willis frantically. "We shall be drowned!"

"But we must—"

"The rocks—the rocks!" gasped the other man. "We can't get near, Naggs—we can't do it, I tell you! I told you what it would be—I knew all along that it was a mad idea! We can't get near the boy!"

"Stop that, you cowardly hound!" snapped Naggs. "We didn't know the sea would get so rough!"

Boom! Crash!

The waves broke with a deafening roar against the rocks. Naggs was pale, and his face was drawn. He was beginning to realise that Willis was right.

It was, indeed, impossible to get near the ladder.

Before either of the men could grasp the rusty ironwork, the boat would be lifted up and sent crashing against the walls of the lighthouse, or against the seaweed-covered rocks, which raised their ugly lips above water here and there.

"Not so close, you fool!" shouted Willis. "We shall be smashed! Look out! That wave— Oh, good heavens!"

The little boat was lifted up on the crest of a wave, and it was only by skilful oarsmanship that Mr. Naggs succeeded in averting disaster. That same wave smothered Dick Goodwin completely, and he was left dripping with water and gasping.

"Help!" he shouted huskily. "Be quick—"

The rest of his words were drowned in the roar of the surf.

"We can't do it, Naggs!" gasped Willis. "Let's get back. It's madness to stop here! We shall have to get right away, before the police can discover anything!"

Naggs nodded grimly.

And, a moment later, the boat was

heading for the shore as rapidly as Mr. Naggs could propel it.

Dick Goodwin, tied helplessly to that iron ladder, had been left to his fate!

CHAPTER 5.

A Swim for Life!

"YOU fool! You madman!" Willis was nearly frantic with alarm and terror. He and Mr. Naggs had just got into the cave, and Willis was chilled with cold, and the terror of the Law was in his heart.

"I knew what it would be!" he went on, almost sobbing with fright. "That boy will be drowned! Well, it wasn't my fault. I warned you all along. You are responsible, Naggs!"

"Shut up, hang you!" snarled Naggs, who was in no mood to listen to the wallings of his companion. "There's no sense in talking like that! How was I to know that the sea would get so rough?"

"Can't we do anything to rescue the boy?" asked Willis desperately.

"Nothing—unless you care to swim out," replied Naggs grimly. "That might be successful. A strong swimmer could do the trick, I dare say. But we're not great on swimming, Willis. I'm upset about this. I didn't mean to hurt the boy. - And now he'll be drowned out there!"

Willis turned suddenly, with a gasp.

"I—I—I heard something!" he stammered.

"Don't be a nervous fool!" snapped Naggs. "There's nothing—by thunder!"

A dim, gloomy form loomed up from the dense shadows at the rear of the cave.

"Hands up—the pair of you!" exclaimed a cold, grim voice.

Naggs uttered a furious, startled oath.

"Lee!" he hissed. "Nelson Lee!"

The men were right: it was Nelson Lee.

Nelson Lee, filled with horror and alarm and fury. He had been waiting for these men to come back with Dick Goodwin. He had been waiting until they rescued the boy from his perilous position. And now the great detective understood, by the few words he had already overheard, that the Lancashire lad had been left out there, bound to that old lighthouse, in a position of deadly peril. Goodwin, in fact, had been left to die!

And Nelson Lee, knowing that every second was of value, had emerged from his hiding-place. It was the only course, since it was necessary to take action immediately.

"Hands up!" repeated Nelson Lee curtly. "You are both covered, and at the first sign of treachery I shall fire!"

"Hang you!" snarled Naggs desperately.

He acted with the rapidity of lightning. The man was desperate. He knew very well that this would be the end if he allowed himself to be captured and for a second he "saw red."

Whiz!

The electric-torch which Naggs had held in his hand went shooting through the air. Nelson Lee had not been prepared for this rapid act on Naggs' part; but the detective dodged, for he caught a momentary glimpse of the torch as it came speeding towards him.

Crash!

Nelson Lee had been just too late, and the hard corner of the torch struck him a glancing blow. But it came with tremendous violence, and Nelson Lee staggered back, half dazed, and bowled completely off his feet.

Naggs and Willis were both in a state of mad panic, and they doubled up and passed swiftly out through the rock entrance. Then, arriving on the shingle, they dashed away along the beach—but not in the direction of Bramley Gap. They went the other way, following the base of the cliff, and they soon disappeared round one of the jutting points.

Nelson Lee had been left in the cave.

typical still and silent on the floor, but the great detective was only momentarily stunned. He sat up almost as soon as the two rascals had disappeared. Except for a slight dizziness and a large bump on his head, Nelson Lee was quite all right.

He struggled to his feet. He did not give a thought to the two men who had just escaped. Somehow or other, he had got to get out to the lighthouse, and not a second was to be wasted.

Lee flung his revolver down, and then bent low and went out through the cave exit at the double. He went dashing down the shingle, tearing off his coat and waistcoat as he did so. Arriving at the water's edge, he bent down and rapidly divested himself of his boots, and he was just about to plunge into the water when he heard a shout—or, rather, two or three shouts.

Nelson Lee turned, and saw three figures running over the rough, loose shingle. Those three figures belonged to Sir Mottie Tregellis-West, Tommy Watson, and myself. We had only just come down the Gap, and, upon arriving on the beach, we had seen Nelson Lee at once.

"Guv'nor!" I yelled, waving my hand.

"Hold on, sir!" shouted Tommy Watson.

Nelson Lee just gave us one glance, and then he waved his hand, and plunged into the sea without wasting a moment. A great wave broke over him, but he emerged amid the foam, and we could see him striking out powerfully and rapidly towards the old, wrecked lighthouse.

"Well, I'm banged!" I exclaimed breathlessly coming to a halt.

"He must be mad!" gasped Watson.

"Really, dear old boy——"

"But it's suicide to swim out in that sea!" went on Watson, horrified. "And what does it mean, anyhow? Mr. Lee must have gone off his rocker, you know."

"Don't you believe it," I interrupted. "He has a very good reason for swim-

ming out like this; you can be absolutely certain of that. I wouldn't mind betting he's gone out after Goodwin, to rescue the chap."

"My only hat!"

We stood on the shingle, excited and rather agitated. We watched Nelson Lee as he struck out against the incoming tide. I was surprised, for the guv'nor was fighting his way through the water as though his very life depended upon it. We could only see the guv'nor's head now and again, for the waves were big, and he was concealed for the most part of the time, and at last he disappeared altogether. Search as we would, we could see no sign of him.

Watson's face was rather pale as he turned to me.

"He—he's disappeared!" muttered Tommy. "Do—do you think——"

"That he's gone under?" I said.

"Rather not! He's vanished behind those rocks, Tommy, and there's no need for you to worry. The guv'nor has swum in worse seas than this before now—and greater distances, too."

But it was a very perilous undertaking that Nelson Lee had essayed. The sea was even rougher than he had supposed. But he fought against the waves grimly, and with an iron determination, and, foot by foot, he drew nearer to those foam-smothered rocks.

At last he had passed them, and then he struck out round to the other side of the wrecked lighthouse. And, through the spray, he could catch glimpses, now and again, of the iron ladder, and he could distinctly see Dick Goodwin's figure bound there. The lad was motionless, and Lee believed that he was insensible.

The sea, even when comparatively smooth, was now well over Goodwin's waist, and the waves were dashing over his head, smaking him and smothering him. Even now it would be touch and go. The detective struck out fiercely and powerfully for that ladder.

The sea had now covered the rocks,

and it was thus possible for the detective to swim right up close to the stonework of the lighthouse. But he had to be very careful, for if he happened to get caught in one of those waves, he would be dashed against the stonework.

And so he awaited his opportunity, and at last, in a comparatively calm sea, Lee swam rapidly forward. Even as it was a wave overtook him, and sent him whirling forward helplessly. It was a critical moment.

Almost by a miracle, it seemed, Nelson Lee escaped being dashed against the lighthouse. And now he was right close to the ladder. Three powerful strokes, and he grasped one of the rungs. He hauled himself up, and clung there desperately.

A wave came roaring up behind, and it broke with terrific force. Lee was flattened and bruised, but he clung there, and the water subsided.

He hauled himself up until he was immediately beside Goodwin.

"Thank Heaven you have come, sir!" gasped the boy weakly.

"Bear up, Goodwin! Do not despair," said Nelson Lee huskily. "We shall soon have you out of this predicament, lad. When I cut you free, make no attempt to swim. I will take you safely back to the shore."

"You—you can't do it, sir," said Goodwin faintly. "In—in this sea—aye, it's impossible, sir! Wouldn't it be better to get up into the lighthouse? We shall be safe there until the tide goes down."

Nelson Lee nodded.

"A good suggestion, Goodwin," he said. "Yes, we will get up into the lighthouse, into safety. But I must cut you free first."

Clinging there, Nelson Lee felt in his trousers pocket—a somewhat difficult task, considering that his clothing was clinging to him in a most uncomfortable manner. But after a while Lee succeeded in pulling out a sharp pocket-knife. Opening a blade, he proceeded to slash at the ropes which

bound Goodwin to the ladder, and at length the lad was free. But he was numbed with cold, and although he tried desperately to cling to the iron-work, he failed.

As the last band of rope gave way, Goodwin fell forward. Nelson Lee attempted to save the lad, and he would probably have done so, but just at that moment another big wave came along, and Goodwin was washed away from the ladder in the foam and smothered.

But Lee succeeded in grasping the boy's foot. And he, too, was carried away. A few seconds later they were both well clear of the lighthouse, and Lee was grasping the semi-conscious boy grimly. It was too late now to enter the lighthouse. There was only one possible course to pursue. Lee would have to get back to the shore, and, once clear of the rocks, this would not be such a difficult task.

But the trouble was in getting clear of the rocks. Lee was greatly handicapped by his burden. The pair were carried on the crest of a wave, helplessly, and unable to do anything.

Nelson Lee's efforts were quite in vain. The great detective felt a jar which went through his whole body. He almost lost his grip on the boy.

For his left side had struck against one of the jutting rocks. Fortunately that rock was smooth, and Lee had only just glanced it.

Even as it was, however, Lee's left arm was quite useless. It was numb and racked with pain. He could not use it at all.

And this was a disaster.

For Lee was seriously handicapped. He was holding Dick Goodwin with his right hand, and he had been using his left to strike out for the shore; but with his left hand he could do nothing.

It really seemed as though Nelson Lee's wonderful swim had been in vain. Not only would Dick Goodwin drown, but Nelson Lee himself would perish in an attempt to save the boy.

Fortunately, he and Goodwin were now clear of the rocks, and they were

being swept towards the beach. But Lee knew that long before they got there they would be submerged. Lee's strength was already giving way, and it seemed a terrible distance to the shingle. He would never be able to do it! he knew that.

As for Goodwin, the lad was beyond any effort on his own part. He hung limp in Nelson Lee's grip, and he was practically unconscious. He was a dead-weight upon his rescuer.

Nelson Lee's thoughts were bitter as he kept up that uneven struggle, that struggle which he instinctively knew would end in failure.

And then it seemed as though voices came to him. He heard shouts—excited, desperate shouts. But they were thousands of miles away, it seemed, and one of the voices was strangely reminiscent of Edward Oswald Handforth!

Lee turned his head and saw, not fifteen yards distant, a boat tossing in the angry sea. A sailing-boat, with the canvas torn to shreds round the mast, and with three figures plainly visible—the figures of Handforth, Church, and McClure! All three juniors were staring at Nelson Lee, and the boat was rocking about wildly, obviously out of control.

"Boys!" gasped Nelson Lee faintly. "Hang on, sir!" came a roar in Handforth's voice. "We're drifting towards you. We shall soon be alongside! Hang on, and we'll haul you in!"

Surely it was the Hand of Providence which had caused that helpless boat to drift to this spot!

CHAPTER V. All Serves!

HANDFORTH & CO. had had rather a terrifying time of it. Arriving in Calasowe, Handforth had decided that it was an ideal day to take out a sailing-boat. It wasn't, and, in spite of his chums' protest, he had had his way.

The result had been a minor catastrophe. Well out to sea, the sudden squall which had sprung up had caught them unprepared, and knowing little what to do to control the sailing-boat in the strong wind. The sails had very soon been ripped to shreds, and with their craft helpless and unmanageable, they had drifted with the sea; they had been tossed about, hither and thither, until they felt sick and chilled to the marrow.

But to their great joy they had found that they were getting nearer and nearer to the beach, and they had reckoned that they would just miss those treacherous rocks near the ruined lighthouse, and would go ashore in a fairly safe place. And then, quite suddenly, they had caught sight of Nelson Lee and Goodwin.

Now, thrilled with excitement, and forgetting all about their discomforts, the chums of Study D waited for a moment when they would be able to seize the pair in the water. They were drifting nearer and nearer—already they were within five yards.

"It's all right, sir; we can't miss you now!" shouted Handforth, between chattering teeth.

A wave sent the boat surging forward, and the next moment Nelson Lee and Goodwin were right under the stern. The boat would have swept by, but McClure gave a desperate leap, and his outstretched hand grasped the detective's shoulder. After that it was a comparatively simple matter.

Goodwin was hauled into the boat first. He was still conscious, but he sank into a heap on the floor of the boat. Nelson Lee was pulled in next, and the detective breathed a sigh of thankfulness.

"I don't pretend to know how you boys came to be here," he exclaimed, "but you arrived in the very nick of time, Handforth! You have saved my life and Goodwin's!"

"We're jolly glad to have been of help, sir!" said Handforth. "We didn't

know we were coming this way—it was just chance."

The boat drifted nearer and nearer to the shore. The tide was running in fast now, and it was inevitable that the boat would be cast ashore sooner or later.

It was going towards the shingle in an oblique direction, and with every big wave that came along, the boat was lifted and taken nearer and nearer to safety.

And on the shingle stood Tregellis-West and Watson and myself. We were watching excitedly. We had seen nearly everything, and we knew that the governor was safe, and that Dick Goodwin had been rescued. But we were certainly amazed to find Handforth & Co. there, in a boat which was beyond control.

Seeing that the little craft was coming ashore, we kept pace with it, and ran along the shingle, remaining opposite all the time.

At last the boat was quite close in-shore, and we believed that it would be sent safely on the shingle on the crest of a wave; but this was not the case.

Just at the critical moment the sea twisted the boat broadside on, and the next moment it was lifted high and flung down in the surf, overturning and flinging its occupants into the foam.

"Come on!" I yelled. "We can lend a hand here! If we don't, they'll be drowned!"

I charged into the water, fully clothed, and my chums came dashing in after me. We were nearly sent bowling by one of the great waves which came tumbling in. Everything was confusion for a moment or two.

Nelson Lee succeeded in getting himself ashore, and he had Dick Goodwin with him; but Handforth and Church and McClure were dazed and bewildered.

Tommy, Sir Montie, and I soon reached them, and succeeded in hauling them ashore. At last we were all standing beyond reach of the waves—exhausted, but triumphant.

Dick Goodwin was the only one amongst us who was not able to stagger to his feet. The poor chap was nearly done. Nelson Lee attempted to lift Goodwin in his arms, but he failed, and I noticed the look of pain on the governor's face as he lifted his left arm. "Anything the matter, sir?" I gasped.

"Yes, Nipper—my arm!" said Nelson Lee. "I was dashed against the rocks, and I am badly bruised, I believe. Help me with Goodwin, will you?"

"Right you are, sir," I said quickly.

"We must carry him up the Gap, and then make our way to a little group of cottages which stands about half a mile distant," said Nelson Lee. "We all need dry clothing, and we must not wait a moment here."

"But—but I don't understand, sir—"

"There is no time for explanations now, Nipper!" interrupted Lee grimly. "We must get these wet clothes off, and Goodwin must be attended to. The poor lad is in a bad way. Come!"

It was certainly impossible to go into any questions or details now, and so we staggered up the shingle towards Bramley Gap. Nelson Lee and I supported Dick Goodwin; Sir Montie and Handforth and the others came along behind. We looked a sorry party, indeed, but, in spite of our appearance, we were feeling elated.

For Dick Goodwin had been rescued, and Nelson Lee had been saved. Handforth and Co. had every reason to congratulate themselves, too, for, by sheer chance they had come in very useful.

At last, after passing up the Gap, we came within sight of the fishermen's cottages, and there we received kindly attention and grateful warmth.

It was impossible for us all to get into one cottage, but the Behrman's wives were very considerate, and they divided us up, so to speak.

Handforth and Co. went in the one cottage, and Tommy Watson and Tregellis-West and I went into another.

Nelson Lee and Dick Goodwin were accommodated in a third.

And very shortly we were between blankets, warm and comfortable, and feeling quite O.K. again.

Meanwhile our clothing was dried. This was rather a long business, and it was not until about tea-time that we were ready to leave. We all looked unshuffled, but our clothing was dry, and we had come to no harm.

Nelson Lee and Dick Goodwin were the only invalids of the party. Lee himself was suffering from a badly bruised shoulder; he had some difficulty in moving his left arm. And Dick Goodwin was well-nigh beaten. That terrible ordeal of his, on the top of his previous experience, had been rather too much for him, strong as he was. He had not tasted food for quite a long time, and he had been battered badly by the waves, and had also been chilled through and through.

It was hardly surprising therefore, that he was now in a state of slight fever; but he was not so bad as Nelson Lee had expected him to be, and some warm food, which was soon prepared, made him feel much better.

He was lying on an old couch when we were all ready and dressed. We were waiting for Church to come back from the village of Bramley, where he had been despatched by Nelson Lee. A motor-car would soon be at the cottage, and then we should be off to St. Frank's with no loss of time.

"Well, boys, I think that we may consider ourselves lucky on the whole," remarked Nelson Lee. "Our adventures have been rather hectic, but everything has turned out well. But for the fact that Handforth and his chums arrived in their boat at that particular moment, Goodwin and I should have been drowned."

"Yes, sir. I believe you would," said Handforth.

"By the way, Handforth how was it that you and the other boys got into such a predicament?"

Handforth looked rather uncomfortable.

"Well, the fact is, sir, we took a boat out at Calstowe," he said. "We didn't know the sea would be so jolly rough outside the bay, and the sail went to shreds. Not only that, but the oars were washed overboard, and we had to drift helplessly with the sea. It was a jolly good thing, too, because we drifted in the right direction."

"Exactly!" said Nelson Lee. "There is only one feature of the case which I do not quite like. The men responsible for Goodwin's terrible predicament have escaped. Mr. Nungs and his companion have got completely away, although I fancy they will not be at liberty for long."

"How did it all happen, sir?" I asked, with interest.

And Nelson Lee gave us all the details. He explained how he had gone into the cave, and how he had overheard the two men talking about Dick Goodwin's position. We listened intently and by the time the gov'nor had done the sound of a motor-car came from outside.

And then McClure came in; he had been outside, watching for Church.

"It's all right, sir," he said. "The car's here. We shall now be able to get back to St. Frank's right away."

And so, very shortly afterwards, we started off, watched with interest by the women and children of the cottages. They had been well repaid for all the trouble they had taken, and they were quite satisfied.

And so, about forty minutes later, our car turned into the Triangle at St. Frank's. It was now getting rather dusk, and there was not many fellows about. Being half-holiday that day our absence had not been noticed at all. But there was a great shout at once as soon as the news got round.

Everybody was excited, everybody was asking questions.

Handforth and Co. tumbled out, and Edward Oswald took it upon his own shoulders to relate the adventures of the afternoon.

Goodwin, of course, was taken

straight into the sanatorium. He was soon snugly in bed, and Dr. Brett had been sent for.

However, before the doctor arrived another visitor came to Goodwin's bedside. He was a quiet-looking man of about fifty, slightly grey at the temples, and with rounded shoulders. His clean-shaven face was lined, and bore the marks of many troubles. But there was a glad light in his eyes as he bent over Dick's bed.

"Aye, my boy, I'm glad to see you safe and sound!" he exclaimed softly.

"Dad!" exclaimed Dick delightedly.

The visitor was, indeed, Dick Goodwin's father, and he watched by his son's bedside during the remainder of the evening and practically all through the night.

And in the morning the lad was much better. The fever had left him, and Dr. Brett was cheerful. He declared that Dick would be able to resume his ordinary place in the school within two days. His terrible ordeal had not had any serious effect upon his constitution.

But if the Lancashire lad thought that he had finished with Naggs, he was rather mistaken.

CHAPTER 7.

Nelson Lee Learns the Secret!

MR. RICHARD GOODWIN accepted a card from the box on Nelson Lee's desk, and thoughtfully bit off the end.

"Aye, I'm glad to have this talk with you, Mr. Lee," he said. "I was thinking about letting you know the truth yesterday, but I didn't get a chance. I dare say you have been rather puzzled about my son?"

Nelson Lee smiled.

"As a matter of fact, Mr. Goodwin, I know quite a good deal regarding the lad," he remarked. "Dr. Stafford had told me a certain amount, although I must admit that I am not in full possession of the facts. I only

know that your son has been engaged upon some very important mechanical work in his study. And this work, I believe, is somehow connected with the cotton industry."

"Ah, you've got that right, Mr. Lee," said the visitor. "But I'll go into more details. It is only right that you should know."

Mr. Goodwin had not been in Nelson Lee's study long, and the pair were just settling themselves comfortably in the two easy chairs before the cheerful fire. It was Mr. Goodwin's intention to take Nelson Lee into his confidence completely.

Dick Goodwin himself, of course, was in the sanatorium in bed. The Lancashire lad had practically recovered from his recent experience. He was a strong lad, and a complete rest had worked wonders.

"I shall never be able to thank you enough for the great service you rendered me," said Mr. Goodwin. "It was solely owing to your efforts that my son was saved from a terrible death."

"My dear sir, I beg of you not to mention the matter," said Nelson Lee. "I only did my duty as a schoolmaster. Your son was in grave peril, and I did everything that was in my power to help him."

"Aye, it's just like you to treat it lightly, Mr. Lee," said Mr. Goodwin. "But the fact remains that you saved Dick's life at the risk of your own. And I'm grateful—I shall always be grateful, Mr. Lee. Thank Heaven that this is all right!"

"Yes, the lad has recovered wonderfully," said Nelson Lee. "I am delighted with the progress he has made. By to-morrow he will be quite himself again—and ready to take his place in the Remove."

Mr. Goodwin lay back in his chair, puffing slowly at his cigar.

"I dare say you thought it was rather curious that Dick should have a study to himself, Mr. Lee," he said. "You thought it queer that he should

took himself up during every minute of his spare time, and confine himself to some secret work in his own little apartment?"

"It is distinctly unusual for a junior boy to act in that way, Mr. Goodwin," replied Nelson Lee. "At the same time I knew there was a very excellent reason for your son's behaviour. Many of the other juniors, however, have been intensely curious, and they have had great difficulty in curbing that curiosity."

"Ah, I can quite understand that," said Mr. Goodwin. "Well, Mr. Lee, I'm going to tell you the truth about it. As you no doubt know I'm the owner of a cotton mill in Holliswood, near Oldham. It's not such a large mill, but for many years it was a good paying proposition. But then, when competition became keener, and when other firms obtained new machinery, I found myself being left behind in the race. During the last three or four years it has been a struggle all the time—a grim, never ending struggle."

"But you are still carrying on?" asked Nelson Lee.

"Aye, I'm still carrying on," replied the millowner. "But it has been hard work. About the beginning of the year, my son was at school in Holliswood. Dick was always a sharp lad, and he took a great interest in the factory. He was always among the machinery—always examining this piece of mechanism and that. He could never be satisfied in that direction. It was machinery all the time with him—anything mechanical was the breath of life to him. And, one day in the spring, he brought me a suggestion for a machine—a new spinning machine which Dick claimed would supersede all others. I smiled at the boy at first, and told him not to worry me. He was rather disappointed, and went away."

"And his idea was really good?" asked Lee.

"I am coming to that," went on the millowner. "For several weeks after-

wards, Dick did not say anything to me about that suggestion of his. But I knew he was busy on something. And, at last, he put before me some plans—carefully executed plans. They were wonderfully done, Mr. Lee, and I was impressed. I went into the matter at once, and I received an amazing surprise. For those plans of Dick's were sound. His machine was everything he claimed it to be—although there is no need for me to go into any details here.

"In brief, this idea of Dick's will enable me to double our output if only I can get the machine installed. Not only that, but there is an enormous fortune in the thing itself. I was so struck by my son's work that I told him to make a model without any delay. This was what he desired. He required money—fifty or sixty pounds—in order to buy all the necessary materials. Well, it was a bit of a tight squeeze for me, but I managed it and told the lad to work at his invention during every spare moment of his time."

"And he did so?" asked Nelson Lee.

"Yes, Mr. Lee," replied the other. "But now I am coming to the serious aspect of the case. The manager of one of my departments was a man named Naggs. I had always trusted this man, for I thought he was faithful to me. He had been a good workman, and a good manager. I think he was a Londoner—although this made no difference to me. He knew his work, and he performed it well—and that was all that mattered. And it appears that my son had spoken to him many times regarding the invention. Naggs gave Dick very little attention at first, but, gradually he began to see that the boy's idea was sound. He got to know a great deal of this invention, and I received several indications which led me to believe that Naggs was attempting to get Dick to show him the plans, and even to trust them in his keeping. But Dick wouldn't part with them—he would never let those plans go out of his possession."

"Naggs, I take it, had turned traitor?"

"Yes, Mr. Lee—that is exactly the case," replied Mr. Goodwin. "One day I made a big discovery. Naggs was hand-in-glove with Mr. William Fordley, the owner of the mill which is some little distance from mine—a rival mill, as a matter of fact. Fordley is an unscrupulous scoundrel—I have always known him as such. He has performed many shady pieces of work which have resulted in bad business for my own factory. Fordley is rich, and it was something of a shock to me to learn that Naggs was this man's paid spy. It did not take me long to put two and two together—and I discovered that Naggs was attempting to obtain Dick's plans so that he could show them to Fordley. Fordley, as a matter of fact, was very anxious indeed to see those plans. His object, of course, was to steal my son's invention—and he would have done so without compunction if he had had half a chance."

"Therefore, I take it, you sent Dick to St. Frank's?" asked Nelson Lee.

"Exactly," replied Mr. Goodwin.

"The lad was pestered and bothered every day. Fordley had his agents everywhere, and there were one or two attempts to break into Dick's little workshop with the object of stealing those plans. At last, after this sort of thing had been going on for some time, I decided to send the boy away, and a friend of mine suggested that Dick should go to a public school. It was for that reason he came to St. Frank's. I interviewed the headmaster, and I fixed things up so that Dick could have a workshop here, in the school itself. But all my precautions, as you know, were in vain."

"You mean that Fordley sent his agents down here?"

"Yes, Mr. Lee—Naggs himself appeared on the scene with two or three other men," said the millowner. "After Naggs had left my employment he showed his real character—and was

my open enemy. I knew now, from all that I have heard, that Naggs came to St. Frank's almost at once, and did everything in his power to get hold of Dick's plans. Mainly owing to your efforts, Mr. Lee, the man failed. They are determined, these rascals, and they were willing to go to almost any lengths in order to get what they required. Finally, as you know, they kidnapped my son, and held him prisoner, thinking they would force him to speak. But Dick refused, and Naggs has received no satisfaction. But the man is free, and I am rather worried. At the first opportunity he will become active again."

"Take my advice, Mr. Goodwin, and do not worry any more," said Nelson Lee. "Your son is quite safe here—and his invention is safe, too. There will be no chance whatever of Naggs kidnapping Goodwin again. By the way, don't you think it would be a wise precaution to have this invention patented?"

"I have been thinking of that for some time, Mr. Lee," replied Mr. Goodwin. "But, you see, I did not want to do anything until Dick has proved the efficiency of his machine. There are certain expenses to be met, and I found it necessary to be careful with every pound. And I did not imagine for a moment that there would be all this trouble. Dick has completed his model now, and it is a triumph!"

"But if these plans were stolen, and the machine was put on the market by another firm, there would be nothing to prove that it was invented by your son?" asked Nelson Lee. "It is not protected in any way?"

"No, not up to the present."

"Then take my advice, Mr. Goodwin, and have this invention registered without any further delay," said Nelson Lee. "Once it is registered, these men will be helpless. They will give up the whole game. I should not lose a moment if I were you. Go to London to-morrow."

"Yes, I will certainly do so," said

Mr. Goodwin. "After this experience, I will leave nothing further to chance. And I will do as you say, Mr. Lee—I will take Dick to London to-morrow, and we will set things in motion to have this machine patented without delay. Do you think it will be possible for me to take my son to London?"

"Most decidedly it will be possible," replied Nelson Lee. "I am certain that Dr. Stafford will permit Dick to go with you to London."

Nelson Lee and his visitor sat talking for quite a considerable time after that—discussing Dick Goodwin's invention, and so forth.

Mr. Goodwin was enthusiastic. He assured Nelson Lee that as soon as Dick's machine was installed in his factory, the fortunes of the firm would be assured. Everything depended upon those new machines. Dick, in fact, would be the means of saving the factory from failure.

CHAPTER 8.

A Startling Adventure!

DICK GOODWIN glanced at the station clock.

"We've got nearly a quarter of an hour to wait," he said.

"Ah, it's just as well, lad," said Mr. Goodwin. "I always believe in getting to the station in good time for a train. Better be a quarter of an hour before time than a quarter of a minute after time. You're quite sure you're feeling well?"

The Lancashire boy smiled.

"Why, dad, I'm champion," he said. "I'm as right as anything now—I am, that!"

"Well, you certainly look fit, Dick," said Mr. Goodwin, nodding. "You're a sturdy youngster, and you've got over that ordeal splendidly. Good boy!"

The pair were facing up and down the little station at Belton. They were waiting for the train which would take them to London. It was the morning train, and it was due to arrive at Vic-

toria at twelve-thirty. The day was bright and cheerful, and fairly mild, considering the time of the year.

Father and son were looking quite well—Dick Goodwin particularly. All his old colour had returned, and he walked with a springy step, and his eyes were sparkling.

There was a very good reason for this. For Dick knew that his dreams were coming true. The machine he had designed and invented—the machine he had made a model of—was to be patented! It would be his patent—his invention! It was something to be proud of.

The pair had the station platform to themselves. There were very few people in Belton who used the morning train. Just one or two local tradespeople who went to Barnington—and they would not arrive at the station until a minute or two before the time of the train.

In the village, however, Mr. Goodwin and his son had passed an amiable-looking old gentleman. The latter had not been seen by the pair, for he had been gazing in a shop window. But the amiable old gentleman had certainly seen Goodwin and his father.

He saw they were bound for the station, and he discovered later that they were taking tickets for London.

The old gentleman glanced at his watch, nodded to himself, and then walked to the post office. Arriving there, he took up a telegraph form, and wrote some words upon it in pencil. And the message which the assistant received over the counter was this:

"Enne, c/o Walters Agency, New Oxford Street, London.—FATHER and son now off for London. Arrive Victoria twelve-thirty. Be ready.—Errr."

The telegram was rather a curious one, and there could be no doubt that it referred to Mr. Goodwin and his son. But why had it been sent—and what was this curious old gentleman?

Having dispatched his wire, he lost no time in getting to the station.

He arrived three minutes before the train steamed in, and he paced up and down the platform, smoking a large cigar and beaming amiably.

When the train came in, the pair stepped into an empty compartment. The old gentleman, who seemed to be rather fussy, toddled rapidly up and down the platform—and, at last, he seized a handle, turned it, and bounced into the compartment which was already occupied by Goodwin senior and Goodwin junior.

"Charming day, sir—charming day!" exclaimed the stranger, removing his glasses and polishing them upon a silk handkerchief. "Wonderfully mild, considering the time of the year."

"Ah, it is that!" agreed Mr. Goodwin.

"But I expect we shall pay for it later on," said the old gentleman, shaking his head wisely. "I know this month well—November is always a bit treacherous. But no matter—the English climate may be changeable, but there is nothing in the world to beat it! No, sir! I have travelled extensively, and I have come to the conclusion that you can't beat England!"

The stranger was very amiable, and Mr. Goodwin resigned himself to the fact that the old gentleman would talk during the whole journey.

"Your son, I take it, sir?" said the stranger, nodding towards Dick. "A fine, strapping boy! From St. Frank's, too! I dare say he knows my grandson—at the River House School. I ran down yesterday to have a look at the young rascal. Collison, of the Fifth Form!"

"I don't think I've seen him, sir," said Dick. "You see, I haven't been at St. Frank's long, and I've only met one or two of the River House fellows. And they've been the Fourth Form boys."

"Ah, that accounts for it!" said the old gentleman. "Yes, he's my grandson—a splendid boy, too. I hope I'm not pushing myself forward, sir?" he added, turning to Mr. Goodwin. "My name is Sir Walter Collison."

"I'm pleased to meet you, sir," said Mr. Goodwin.

The old gentleman nodded, and he continued chatting on all topics, and keeping Goodwin and his father highly amused during practically the whole of the journey.

By the time the outskirts of London was reached, Sir Walter was quite intimate with his new travelling companions. And by this time, too, Mr. Goodwin's reserve had been broken down. Dick's father was generally a quiet, austere man. But now he was in high, good humour, and was perfectly charmed with Sir Walter's personality. Dick, too, was similarly attracted towards the old gentleman.

"East Croydon!" said Sir Walter, as they whizzed through a station. "We shall soon be at Victoria now, Mr. Goodwin. I shall not like to part from you and your delightful son!"

"It is very nice of you to speak in that way, Sir Walter," said Mr. Goodwin. "Young Dick and I are going to the City—"

"The City!" interrupted Sir Walter. "I shall be travelling in the same direction. Perhaps we shall be able to travel for a short distance longer—sh? We'll hope so, at any rate!"

The train hurried through Thornton Heath, Streatham Common, and then through Clapham Junction to Victoria. It finally reached the great terminus, and Mr. Goodwin, Dick and Sir Walter Collison stepped out on the platform.

"Perhaps you will honour me by sharing my taxi?" asked Sir Walter genially. "You will, sir? Good! This is splendid! I will drop you down just where you wish—for I am going straight through to Moorgate Street."

He bustled off down the platform, Dick and his father following. They had had no chance to refuse the cordial invitation to share Sir Walter's taxi. Mr. Goodwin was slightly amused—the old gentleman was so brimful of high spirits and genial good humour.

Once beyond the barrier, the trio passed out of the great exit and into

the station yard. There were many taxis there, waiting to be hired. Sir Walter hustled along, and finally beckoned to the driver of a taxi which was standing a little apart from the others. The driver was on the footpath, and he raised his hand the very instant he saw Sir Walter.

"Taxi, sir?" he inquired politely.

"Yes, my man—yes!" exclaimed Sir Walter. "Drive straight through the City. We'll give you more explicit instructions later. Now, Mr. Goodwin, if you will honour me!"

Mr. Goodwin stepped into the taxi, and Dick followed him. Sir Walter climbed into the vehicle, and sat down, breathing rather heavily.

"I must be careful—all this hurrying is bad for me!" he puffed. Dear, dear—most incautious of me!"

"Is anything the matter, sir?" inquired Dick.

"Nothing, my boy—nothing to speak of," replied Sir Walter. "My heart—it isn't quite so young as it used to be, by gad! If I over-exert myself, I can feel it. Now, let me see, Mr. Goodwin, you wish to be dropped at the corner of Queen Victoria Street, I believe?"

"Yes, if you don't mind, Sir Walter," replied Mr. Goodwin. "Just at the Mansion House Underground Station, where Cannon Street crosses Queen Victoria Street. That will do splendidly."

Sir Walter nodded, and instructed the driver. Then the taxi went on its way, sliding in and out through the traffic.

Dick looked out of the window interestedly. He had not been to London many times, and it was rather new to him. The bustle and noise seemed tremendous after the extreme quiet of St. Frank's.

"Wonderful city, London!" exclaimed Sir Walter. "The most wonderful city in the world, my dear sir. I have visited all the great capitals of the world, but there is nothing to compare— Ah, eggh!"

Sir Walter made an extraordinary noise in his throat, and the next

moment he fell back, writhing among the cushions. His breath came and went in short, sobbing gasps. With one hand he clutched at Mr. Goodwin's coat, and with the other he fiercely gripped Dick's arm.

"Oh, what is the matter, sir?" gasped the boy.

"My—my heart!" whispered Sir Walter, with difficulty. "My—my— Oh, oh! Upon my soul, I—I—"

"Quick, dad, stop the taxi!" panted Dick. "We must do something—"

"Yes, my lad, we must!" said Mr. Goodwin sharply. "I'm afraid Sir Walter has had a stroke."

"Wait—wait!" gasped Sir Walter, struggling into a sitting posture and laying there breathing heavily. "I am better now—these attacks come sometimes—but they are of short duration. Dear me! I—I am better!"

"But, my dear Sir Walter, you must allow us to obtain a doctor—" began Mr. Goodwin.

"Not at all—nothing of the sort!" interrupted the baronet. "I am better. I tell you—these attacks are acute for the moment, and they leave me weak. But I shall be all right presently. Please—please instruct the driver to take me home. I cannot keep my business engagement now—it is impossible! Dear, dear! I am causing you terrible trouble—terrible nuisance! I'm sorry, my dear sir—"

"What instructions shall we give the driver?" asked Mr. Goodwin.

"Oh, yes, of course," panted Sir Walter. "Tell him to go to 59, Bramcourt Road, Bloomsbury, please. It will be hardly out of your way, Mr. Goodwin. Thank you, my dear sir—thank you! I shall be better at home after this!"

The driver soon had his fresh instructions, and the taxi altered its direction. Mr. Goodwin and Dick were really concerned, for Sir Walter looked bad—his face was unhealthily flushed, and his breath was short and gasping.

They were extremely glad that Sir

Walter's home was nearby. And at last the taxi pulled up in a quiet back-water of Bloomsbury.

It was an old house, large and rambling. Dick was out of the taxi almost as soon as it had stopped, and he ran across the pavement, pushed open the gate, and hurried up the steps to the front door.

Then he rang the bell vigorously. He could hear the peal as it rang out somewhere in the rear of the house.

Within a minute or two the big door was opened by a stately looking butler with side whiskers. He gazed down at the junior in a supercilious kind of way, and frowned.

"Well, young man—what is it?" he inquired stiffly.

"Is—is this the house of Sir Walter Colihon?" asked Dick quickly.

"Yes, it is—"

"Well, Sir Walter is out here—in a taxi!" interrupted Dick. "He has had a fit or something, and we have brought him home. Come and help my dad to assist Sir Walter in."

The butler relaxed at once.

"Another seizure, eh?" he exclaimed. "Poor old Sir Walter! It'll be once too often one of these days. Yes, my boy, I'll come at once!"

He hurried down the steps, and accompanied Dick to the taxi. Then Mr. Goodwin and the butler assisted Sir Walter out, and they helped him up the path to the steps. They entered the wide, gloomy hall, Sir Walter hanging heavily upon Mr. Goodwin and the butler.

"Thank you—I am better. It is wonderfully good of you, Mr. Goodwin!" he exclaimed jerkily. "I am all right now, my dear sir—quite all right. Thank you—it is an infernal pity— Yes, into the library, Rogers—into the library."

The butler opened one of the doors which led out from the hall, and he and Mr. Goodwin assisted Sir Walter into the apartment. Dick brought up the rear.

They entered the lofty, dim room, and Dick had just passed through the door-

way when he felt that somebody was behind him. He glanced round quickly, and saw a tall man there. At the same second the door closed with a slam.

"Very pretty—very pretty, indeed!" exclaimed a grim voice.

"Naggs!" gasped Dick huskily.

Standing with his back to the door was Mr. Naggs, the man who had kidnapped Dick Goodwin from St. Frank's. And the miser held a revolver in his hand!

"You will oblige me, Mr. Goodwin, by putting your hands above your head!" exclaimed Naggs curtly. "You, too, young man! You are trapped—and it will be quite useless for you to attempt any resistance!"

Mr. Goodwin uttered a hoarse cry, and stared about him.

"Yes, you'd better take it quietly, my dear sir!" exclaimed Sir Walter, having recovered with extraordinary rapidity. "You fell into the trap beautifully, and now there is no escape."

"No escape whatever," echoed Mr. Naggs in a grim, cold voice.

CHAPTER 8.

(Watchful Eyes)

THE taxi did not wait.

As soon as the door of No. 59, Bramcourt Road, closed, the driver of the taxi drove away. And it was rather curious that the little flag on his taxi-meter was still down—indicating that the vehicle was not to be hired.

The driver was smiling to himself, and he seemed to be very well satisfied with his lot. This was rather curious, too, considering that nobody had paid the cost of the journey from Victoria to Bloomsbury.

But if the taxi-driver thought that his movements were unobserved, he was considerably mistaken; for one man, at least, was quite interested in the movements of that taxi-cab. This man was some little distance up the road, con-

veniently concealed in a small alley-way the hind bicycle with him, and as soon as the taxi moved off the man jumped on his bicycle, and followed.

He was a short, thick-set man, attired in a quiet gray suit and a cap. There was nothing distinguished about him whatever, and why he should be so interested in that very ordinary-looking taxi-cab was something of a puzzle.

It was quite easy for the cyclist to follow the taxi, for the vehicle did not go at a fast speed, and, after passing through one or two quiet streets, it turned into the busy bustle and noise of New Oxford Street. Here it was stable play for the cyclist to follow the taxi, since the traffic was slow moving.

The taxi reached the end of New Oxford Street, but did not continue straight on into Hill Street. Instead, it turned to the left, and within a few moments it was bowling along Trenchard's Road.

The journey proved to be quite a short one, for, after going down Trenchard's Road for some little way, the taxi turned into a small side lane and vanished. The man on the bicycle pedalled hard, and arrived at the side turning just in time to see his quarry disappearing into a kind of alley. The cyclist did not hesitate. He went down the side turning, and pedalled slowly past the alley.

As he had already suspected, this little opening led into a small mews. It was a rather dilapidated-looking place, with only sufficient accommodation for one or two cars.

The taxi was standing there in the yard, and the driver was just scrambling down from his seat.

The cyclist did not allow himself to be seen, but went straight past, and dismounted three or four hundred yards farther on. And then he waited, rather undecided.

The minutes sped by, and nothing of any particular interest happened. The taxi remained in the garage, and it seemed fairly certain that it would not emerge again. And the man with the

bicycle began to grow somewhat impatient.

He smoked two cigarettes rather erratically, pacing up and down near his bicycle while he was doing so. Now and again he glanced at his watch, but he kept a constant look-out upon the entrance of the mews.

And at last, growing tired of this waiting game, the cyclist proceeded to act in a decidedly strange manner. To begin with, he looked up and down the road, and made quite certain that nobody was about, and then he produced a pocket-knife.

With one swift movement he jabbed the blade into his front tyre. There was a terrific hiss, and the tyre became deflated—badly punctured.

Then the man lost no time in unfastening the bag which hung from the back of his saddle, and produced a few tools, a repair outfit complete with rubber patches, a tube of solution, and all the other necessities.

This repair outfit the cyclist placed in his pocket, then he removed the cover from the front wheel, and took out the inner tube. Very naturally, he found quite a decent sized hole in the rubber.

The man smiled slightly to himself as he surveyed the damage that he had caused, then he lifted the front part of the bicycle, and wheeled the machine on its back wheel only towards the entrance of the mews. Arriving, he turned in, and found himself in the small yard.

As he was walking towards the garage, the taxi-driver observed him, and paused in his work. The man was making some minor adjustment to the engine, and there was a spanner in his hand.

"Awfully sorry to trouble you, old man," said the cyclist, "but can you oblige me with a patch and a drop of solution?"

The taxi-driver grunted.

"This isn't a public garage!" he exclaimed.

"Yes, I know that," said the cyclist;

"But I'm in a bit of a hole, you see. Something just punctured my tyre. Anyhow, I haven't got any repair outfit on the figger. I'm quite willing to pay for——"

"That's all right!" interrupted the taxi-driver. "You're welcome to a patch and a drop of solution, if you like."

"Thanks!" said the cyclist.

He placed his machine against the wall, and lit a cigarette. He offered one to the taxi-driver, who accepted it. Within a few minutes the pair were chatting. Meanwhile, the cyclist repaired his punctured tyre.

Although he did not seem to be at all curious, the cyclist had his eyes wide open and he gave quite a lot of attention to the taxi-cab.

But when, twenty minutes later, the cyclist took his departure, he had noticed many interesting things—for example, the taxi was a taxi no longer! The registration plate at the back had been removed, leaving only the ordinary number plate. Moreover, the taximeter was missing from the front of the cab, thus converting the vehicle into an ordinary private car.

The cab, in fact, had been a fake taxi.

Having performed its work, it had been brought back to this garage, and had been restored to its original state. The cyclist, in any case, seemed to be extremely pleased with himself and as he rode away he smiled to himself.

He pedalled along Theobalds Road, and went straight down Kingsway, and turned into the Strand. Arriving at Charing Cross, he made straight for New Scotland Yard. And, once here, he entered the Criminal Investigation Department, leaving his bicycle outside.

Passing down the passages, he at length arrived at a certain door, and he tapped upon it and entered.

"Oh, it's you, Vincent!" exclaimed a man who was seated at a desk in the room. "Well, have you anything to report?"

"Yes, sir!" replied the cyclist.

"All right—get busy!"

Chief Detective-Inspector Lennard sat back in his chair, and waited for the man to begin. Lennard was a somewhat burly individual, with a pleasant kind of countenance, and sharp, keen eyes. He had great faith in this assistant of his—Detective-Sergeant Vincent.

"I was at Victoria, sir, ten minutes before the train arrived," said Vincent. "It was quite easy for me to pick out Mr. Goodwin and his son. They were accompanied by a well-dressed old gentleman."

"Oh, were they?" said Lennard. "And who was he?"

"I can't tell you that, sir," replied Vincent. "In any case, this old gentleman seemed quite friendly with Mr. Goodwin and his son, and he took them outside, and they all got into a taxi-cab. This taxi at once started off in the direction of the City, and I followed."

"Good!" said the chief inspector. "Well?"

"I hadn't been on the trail long, sir, before the taxi altered its direction," went on the detective-sergeant, "and this time it passed up Shaftesbury Avenue, and made its way to Bloomsbury. Finally, it turned down Bramcourt Road, and pulled up in front of an old-fashioned, gloomy-looking house. The boy was the first out, and he ran up the steps, and rang the bell. I was watching from some little distance away, and very shortly afterwards the old gentleman was carried out of the taxi by Mr. Goodwin and a man who looked like a butler. They all went into the house, and the taxi drove off without the driver waiting to be paid."

"Hm-m! That's queer!" said Lennard thoughtfully.

"I continued following the taxi, sir," continued Vincent.

And he went on to describe how he had tracked the taxi down to the news

and how he had made his further discovery.

"Yes, Vincent, there's no doubt about it!" said Lennard. "There's been some foul play here—I'm pretty sure of it. Lee's suspicions were justified."

"I don't quite understand, sir," said Vincent.

"No, I didn't explain it at first, did I?" said his superior. "Well, the fact is, Vincent, Mr. Nelson Lee rang me up this morning from St. Frank's College. It seems that there has been some trouble down at the school connected with this boy—Young Goodwin. I don't exactly know what it all means, but Mr. Lee was very anxious that the boy and his father should be followed as soon as they got to London."

"I see, sir," said the detective-sergeant.

"Their true destination was an office in the City, just off Queen Victoria Street," went on Lennard. "Well, Bloomsbury is a good distance away from there, so it is fairly obvious that something has gone wrong."

"That's what I thought, sir," said Vincent. "It looks very suspicious, to my mind—especially that taxi being a fake. It's my opinion that that old man wasn't in a fit at all—it was just pretence, in order to get Mr. Goodwin and his son into the house."

Lennard nodded.

"You're probably right there, old man," he said. "Now, let me see—59, Brinscourt Road—that's the address, isn't it?"

"Yes, sir."

"All right, Vincent; you can leave it for the moment. I may want you later on, though—so hold yourself in readiness."

A moment or two later, Detective-Inspector Lennard was alone. He sat at his desk for a few moments, thinking deeply; then he reached out for the telephone and put through a call to St. Frank's. It did not take him long to get through.

"Hello!" he exclaimed. "Is that Lee speaking?"

"Yes," came the reply. "I think I recognise your voice—Lennard, isn't it?"

"Right first time!" said the chief inspector. "The line seems clearer than it was this morning, Lee. Well, I carried out your instructions, and have had a man put on the job, as you suggested. It seems to me that events haven't happened exactly as you anticipated—or, on the other hand, perhaps they have."

"I'm afraid I don't quite understand that remark, Lennard," came Nelson Lee's voice.

The chief inspector lost no time in giving Nelson Lee all the details. He described the whole sequence of events exactly as Detective-Sergeant Vincent told them to him, and Nelson Lee, seated in his study at St. Frank's, was looking rather grim by the time Lennard had come to an end.

"I'm very much obliged to you, Lennard, for the assistance you have given me in this matter," said Lee. "That man of yours—Vincent—appears to be a keen officer."

"Oh, Vincent's a good man," said Lennard. "That's why I put him on the job."

"I can tell you at once that there is something shady afoot here," went on Nelson Lee. "Mr. Goodwin and his son had no intention whatever of going to any address at Bloomsbury. I suspect the strange old gentleman, Lennard. There has been some trickery, and Mr. Goodwin and the boy have fallen into a trap. I have to thank you for—"

"Nothing!" interrupted Lennard. "My dear Lee, it was your idea from the very start. Well, what are you going to do—or what do you want me to do?"

Nelson Lee, at the other end of the wire, glanced at his watch.

"Look here, Lennard! I'm coming up to London immediately," he replied. "I find that there's a train leaving Belling within ten minutes—I shall just be able to catch it, if I rush. I'll be up at Victoria within two hours."

"Can you have four men ready for me?"

"Certainly, if you want them!" replied Leonard promptly. "You evidently anticipate trouble!"

"I do!" said Lee grimly. "I want to raid this house in Bramcourt Road, and I am fairly certain that we shall rescue Mr. Goodwin and his son from a difficult position. Not only that, but there are other matters involved. I will go into more details when I see you. Can I rely on you to have those four men ready?"

"Yes, of course!" replied the chief inspector. "I'll be on the spot, too. If you like—I shall be glad to see you again, Lee. We'll meet you at Victoria."

"Good!" said Nelson Lee. "Thanks very much, Leonard!"

Nelson Lee rang off almost at once, but just before he did so the door of his study opened, and somebody entered. That somebody was myself. I had come to the governor's study in order to ask him a few things about the mystery of Dick Goodwin. And I had found him talking with Chief Detective-Inspector Leonard, of Scotland Yard.

Lee hung up the receiver and turned. "I can't attend to you now, Nipper," he said briskly. "I'm off to London—at once!"

"What for, guv'nor?" I asked eagerly.

"I've every reason to believe that Mr. Goodwin and his son have fallen into a trap!" replied Nelson Lee, as he bustled about the study. "But don't spread the story, Nipper—keep it to yourself. I am going straight to London, in order to look into the matter."

"Can I come with you, sir?" I asked.

"No, that's impossible——"

"Why is it?" I asked. "There's nothing particular on this afternoon, and I can easily get back by this evening."

"My dear Nipper, I wish you wouldn't bother me——"

"But I might be able to give a hand, sir," I persisted. "If there's going to

be some excitement, I'd like to be in it. Dash it all, sir, I think you ought to consider me a bit! I've had a good deal to do with this case—I located Goodwin when he had been kidnapped last week, and——"

"Oh, all right—you can come!" interrupted Nelson Lee resignedly. "Anything to keep you quiet, Nipper."

"Oh, you're a brick, sir!" I exclaimed. "Thanks, guv'nor!"

"But you'll have to be ready within three minutes!" went on Nelson Lee. "The train leaves almost at once, so there's not one second to lose. I am going on, in any case. You can catch me up on the road."

"Right you are, sir!" I shouted, rushing to the door. "I'll overtake you before you get to Belton!"

I hurried out of the study, flew along the passage, and made my way to the cloak-room in the lobby. It did not take me more than thirty seconds to struggle into my overcoat and a plain tweed cap. I did not want to go about London dressed as a schoolboy. The overcoat completely concealed my Eton suit, and I was not conspicuous in any way. And a tweed cap was altogether better than a close-fitting college cap.

"Oh, there's heaps of time!" I muttered, as I re-entered the lobby. "I've got time to say good-bye to Tommy and Montie."

And I hurried down the passage to Study C.

CHAPTER 10.

Because of a Cuff-Link!

MR. GOODWIN paced up and down, his fists fiercely clenched.

"This is terrible, Dick, lad—terrible!" exclaimed the mill-owner. "Aye, what a fool I was! What a champion fool! I was deceived all along the line——"

"But, dad, how were we to know?" asked Dick. "That old gentleman seemed so genuine. How could we

possibly suspect that he was one of Naggs' accomplices, and that he had been stationed in Bolton so that he could travel up to London by the same train? It was all carefully planned out, dad, and I don't see how we could have avoided this——"

"We could have avoided it—if we'd had any sense!" interrupted the father. "I was at fault, lad—I was a poor idiot! Considering all that has happened, I ought not to have spoken to a stranger at all. And here we are, locked in this room, unable to do anything, and that scoundrel, Naggs, has got your plans!"

"Yes, dad, that's the worst part about it," said Dick miserably. "Naggs kidnapped me before, and tried to make me speak, but I wouldn't. This time he has got the pair of us, and he's got the plans, too."

Mr. Goodwin nodded, and his face was drawn.

"Those plans are unprotected, lad," he said quietly. "They have not been registered. By acting now, Naggs has delivered a master stroke, and we are absolutely helpless. Once he gets away with those plans we can do nothing—nothing at all. We cannot even prove that the invention was originally yours!"

Dick clenched his fists.

"Oh, dad, we ought to have asked Mr. Lee to have come up to London with us!" he said desperately. "Then everything would have been all right."

"Yes, we needed looking after—we did that!" said Mr. Goodwin. "Aye, lad, it makes me mad when I think of it. But we're not babies, and I didn't like to ask Mr. Lee to protect us."

Bolt! Mr. Goodwin and Dick were prisoners. They had been captured by Naggs, and there was no possibility of their getting away.

The room they were in was rather a large one, with a lofty ceiling. It was very poorly furnished, and the only light was a single gas-jet. No daylight was admitted into this apartment. And the reason for this was simple. For

behind a cloth blind the window was boarded up with planks right up to the wall, making it utterly impossible for anybody in the room to break through into the open. And shooting would be quite useless, for no sound would carry through that thick boarding. The door was a strong one, and it was provided with a heavy lock, which was quite incapable of being forced. Indeed, if the prisoners made any attempt to smash the door down, their captors would soon be on the scene.

Mr. Goodwin had walked round the room several times, and his spirits sank lower and lower. There was no way of escape—he knew that quite well. Mr. Naggs had beaten them at the last moment. And it was terribly galling.

There had been a bit of a fight at the outset. In spite of the revolver which Mr. Naggs held, Dick Goodwin and his father had put up a brisk fight for their liberty. But the man who had posed as Sir Walter had settled Dick. And Mr. Goodwin, who was not so agile, was quickly overcome by the active Mr. Naggs.

And now the two prisoners were alone in the apartment. They had been alone for the best part of an hour. Naggs, of course, had lost no time in searching through Mr. Goodwin's pockets—and also the leather attache case which Mr. Goodwin had carried. As the result, he had found the precious plans, and they were now in his possession.

Dick was near the door when he heard a footstep outside. He quickly beckoned to his father.

"There's somebody coming, dad!" he whispered. "Get here—right next to the door! We might be able to spring, and——"

It was unnecessary for Dick to say any more. Mr. Goodwin understood. And he quietly crept to the door and waited. A key turned in the lock, and the door opened. Mr. Naggs stood there, but he did not enter.

"Preparing a little surprise for me, eh?" he said pleasantly. "I am

very sorry, Mr. Goodwin, but it won't work. I am rather a cautious individual, and I believe in making sure before I act. You will kindly move into the centre of the room."

Mr. Naggs was holding his revolver, and he forced Dick Goodwin and his father back, until they were in the middle of the apartment. And Naggs had not come alone—for the two men who were his accomplices were standing in the doorway, ready to interfere if the necessity arose.

"I am very sorry to disappoint you, Mr. Goodwin," said Naggs, "but I'm afraid that you cannot leave just yet. I regret that you should be put to this inconvenience, but it is unavoidable."

"You—you scoundrel!" said Mr. Goodwin thickly.

Naggs shrugged his shoulders.

"I can hardly blame you for forming such an opinion of me, Mr. Goodwin," he said smoothly. "I have just come here now to inform you that you will be released from this unfortunate position exactly one week from to-day."

"You—you rotter!" shouted Dick furiously. "Are you going to keep us prisoners for a week?"

Mr. Naggs nodded.

"I am sorry, but I find that is necessary," he said. "You will be well looked after, you will be fed, and my assistants have instructions to treat you with every consideration. Only, of course, you will not have your liberty. It is essential to my plans that you should remain in obscurity for at least one week. I may add that your chief attendant during your imprisonment will be your old friend, Sir Walter. A splendid actor, isn't he?"

Mr. Naggs laughed, and it was well for him that he retreated from the room then, for Mr. Goodwin was in a terrible rage. A moment longer, and he would have flung himself at his former employee.

Naggs retired, and the door was re-locked. And it was practically certain that a man was stationed outside, in

the hall, on the watch. There was certainly no escape from this prison.

"Oh, dad, it's terrible!" exclaimed Dick. "After all our adventures, after all the trouble we have had—this is the result! I've worked hard on that invention. I've spent all my time making those plans."

"Dick, lad, don't speak about it!" interrupted Mr. Goodwin gently. "It won't make matters any better. My dear lad, this must be an awful blow to you, and I am sorry. It is my fault entirely."

"It wasn't your fault at all! It wasn't anybody's fault," said Dick. "But I do wish Mr. Lee had been with us. He wouldn't have been hoodwinked."

Mr. Goodwin did not reply. As a matter of fact, he felt very little like conversation, and Dick, too, was silent. With miserable thoughts, he wandered round the room aimlessly, hardly knowing what he was doing, and hardly caring. Everything was lost now—there was no hope of recovering the plans, or of defeating Naggs. Nothing in the world mattered.

Almost unconsciously, Dick put himself somewhat straight. For his collar was untidy, his tie on the skew, and his clothes were dusty.

And he discovered that one of his cuff links was missing. He had been wearing a soft shirt, and he remembered that the cuff link had flown off while he was struggling. Dick also remembered that this cuff link had flown behind a big bookcase, which stood against one of the walls. Dick had seen it glitter as it slipped between the bookcase and the wall.

"I might as well recover that link!" he muttered. "There's nothing else to do!"

It was a good cuff link—the pair had been presented to Dick by an uncle about two years earlier. They were gold, and Dick prized them considerably.

"Lend me a hand, dad, will you?" he asked. "I want to shift that bookcase."

"But what for, lad?" asked his father.

"One of my cuff links flew behind, that's all," said Dick. "If we move it out a bit, I ought to be able to put my hand in—"

"Oh, I see," said Mr. Goodwin. "All right, Dick, it won't take us long."

Inch by inch the heavy bookcase was moved out from the wall. At last one side was about two feet away from the starting, and then Dick saw his cuff link lying on the floor.

"It is all right, dad," he said. "I can see it now."

He bent down, reached forward, and recovered the link. And then, as he was rising, he saw something else. There, in the wall, where the bookcase had concealed it hitherto, Dick saw a cupboard-like fixture. There was a frame and a wooden door.

Dick tried to open the door and found that it slid upwards noiselessly, and a dark cavity was revealed. Dick squeezed behind the bookcase and looked into that cavity. Then he turned a flushed, eager face towards his father, who was looking on.

"Oh, dad," exclaimed the boy breathlessly, "I know what this is!"

"Merely a cupboard, Dick—"

"No, it's a lift," said the boy eagerly. "It's one of these little affairs, dad. They call them dumb-waiters, don't they? I suppose it leads down into the kitchen—which is probably in the basement."

"Mr. Goodwin's interest increased.

"A dumb-waiter, eh?" he said. "Yes, lad, that's a lift all right. They use them for taking dishes and small articles up and down. A lot of these big, old-fashioned houses are supplied with these lifts. But I'm afraid it won't help us in any way."

"I don't know, dad," said Dick, who had been looking down into the shaft. "It seems to me to be a pretty big one, and I believe I could squeeze down. If it leads into the basement, I might be able to get round and unlock the door, and then we could escape—"

"Eh, lad, it's a chance," said Mr. Goodwin. "Let me have a look at this lift."

The bookcase was shifted out a little farther, and then Mr. Goodwin squeezed his way in, and examined the dumb-waiter. It was, indeed, a large one, and the shaft was deep by all appearances. There was no sign of any lift, although there were three or four heavy ropes at the side of the shaft.

Mr. Goodwin touched these gingerly and pulled upon them.

Almost at once, with scarcely any noise, the lift ascended, and at last it was on a level, and when Dick had a look at it, he declared that it would be quite easy for him to squeeze in and lower himself to the basement.

"I'm going down, dad," said the lad grimly.

"I'm not sure whether I'd better let you—"

"Oh, but what difference does it make?" interrupted Dick. "Even if they see me and capture me, they will only put me back into this room with you. There can't be any harm done, dad. And we might be able to find a way of escape. You never know."

Mr. Goodwin agreed, and Dick lost no time in squeezing his way through the opening.

Both the prisoners realised why that heavy bookcase had been placed against the wall. It was there in order to hide this lift opening. Naggs had thought, probably, that his captives would never dream of shifting that piece of furniture.

And certainly they would not have shifted it had it not been for the fact that Dick's cuff link had flown behind the bookcase.

Dick was excited, and he did not think of any risks. He held the ropes firmly, and trusted to luck that they were strong, and that they would not break.

Squeezed up in the little lift, Dick at last pulled upon the rope. And, inch by inch, he commenced descending. He did not allow himself to go too quickly

—not because he was nervous, but because he was anxious to avoid any noise. If the lift was operated quickly, it would probably rattle or rumble. Therefore Dick proceeded with extreme caution.

Down he went, lower and lower. And, at last, he reached the basement. The lift gave a little bump as it rested upon the bottom of the shaft. And there, right in front of Dick, there was a duplicate of the sliding door in the upper room. It was closed, of course, but Dick knew that he would be able to open it with ease.

He was, in fact, just commencing to lift the slide when he paused. He heard voices, indistinctly at first, but then louder. And he remained absolutely motionless, hardly daring to breathe.

The voice suddenly became very loud—proving to Dick that the speakers had entered the room where this lift opening was situated—probably the kitchen.

"Yes, Willis, I'm going now," said Mr. Naggs briskly. "I shall have to hurry, too, or I shall miss my train."

Dick listened intently, eager and excited.

"Yes, Naggs, you've got no time to waste," said Willis. "Your train leaves King's Cross at four-fifty, doesn't it?"

"Yes," replied Mr. Naggs. "And I have one or two things to attend to before I start, but I shall catch that train all right, Willis, and I shall arrive in Hollinwood late in the evening."

"And when shall we hear from you?"

"Oh, you'll hear from me to-morrow," said Naggs. "You know exactly what to do, and I don't think you'll have any trouble of any sort. The police certainly won't trace the prisoners to this house."

"Right you are, Naggs—you'd better get off at once," said Willis.

Both the men left the kitchen, and all became silent again. Dick was attempting to open the door when he heard footsteps.

And he decided, then and there, that his best policy would be to go up to his

father again, to report what had occurred.

So, slowly and deliberately, he hauled on the ropes, and the lift ascended to the upper floor. Within three or four minutes Dick stepped out into the prison room, and found his father waiting anxiously.

"Aye, lad, I'm glad you've got back all right," said Mr. Goodwin.

"Of course I'm all right, dad!" exclaimed Dick quietly. "I've been hearing things, too. Naggs is going to Hollinwood by the four-fifty train from King's Cross."

"The scoundrel!" said Mr. Goodwin. "He's taking those plans with him—there's no doubt about that."

Dick explained all that he had overheard, and his father listened with interest.

"So you see, dad, if we're going to act, we shall have to do so at once," went on Dick. "I propose that we wait a few minutes until Naggs has gone, and then I'll go down the shaft again. There'll be only two men in the house, and it's just possible that we may be able to defeat them. By gum! If only we can get out and race Naggs to Hollinwood! We might be able to recover those plans."

"Aye, lad!"

And so they waited, both of them rather hopeful, in spite of all the difficulties that had to be dealt with; and a few minutes later they heard the front door slam. Evidently Mr. Naggs had just left, in order to catch his train at King's Cross.

Dick went down the lift again almost at once, but he found it impossible to do anything, for Willis and the other man were in the kitchen. So, very disappointed, Dick went up to join his father again.

And there they waited for at least half an hour. At the end of that time voices were heard on the other floor. Evidently the two men had come up from the basement, and were in the other part of the house.

Dick's eyes gleamed.

"Now's my chance, 'dad!' he exclaimed quickly. "I might be able to get down now!"

"Right you are, lad—have a try!" said Mr. Goodwin, also fired with hope and enthusiasm.

But, just as Dick was about to move towards the lift, both he and his father heard something unusual.

Down below, and seeming far distant, there came the vague sounds of hammering and banging. Not only this, but one or two shouts rang out. Almost immediately after this a man came tearing along the hall just outside the door where Mr. Goodwin and Dick were imprisoned. They heard him dash to the front door and fling it open. Then he uttered a hoarse cry.

Grin, cold voices sounded. There was more commotion, and everything appeared to be in a state of confusion.

Dick Goodwin and his father looked at one another wonderingly.

What could it mean?

CHAPTER 11.

Not on the Train!

"**B**EGAD!" Sir Montie Tregellis-West looked at me in mild surprise as I burst into Study C. He and Tommy Watson had been leaning against the table, facing the fire, and they both appeared to be quite surprised to see me in my overcoat and tweed cap.

"Tut-tut, you chaps!" I said briskly. "I'm off!"

"Off!" repeated Watson. "Where to?"

"Just running up to London," I said. "So long!"

"Hold on, you silly ass!" interrupted Tommy Watson. "What's the game?"

"Dear old boy, you surely cannot be serious?" exclaimed Sir Montie, adjusting his pince-nez and gazing at me with languid interest.

"I haven't got time to explain much!" I exclaimed. "You see, the

guy'nor has already left for the station, and the train goes in about ten minutes, so there's not a moment to lose. I'm going to run along and catch Mr. Lee up in the village. We're both going to London at once."

"But there's no train to London, you ass!" said Watson. "It's only a local that goes to Bannington—"

"Yes, but there's a connection at Bannington," I interrupted. "There's a ten-minute wait, and then the express for London comes in. I can't possibly stop any longer. Good-bye, my sons—"

"Hold on!" exclaimed Tommy, grabbing hold of me. "You're not going yet, you ass! Hold him, Montie!"

"Certainly, dear old boy!" said Tregellis-West, grasping my other arm.

"Let go, you asses!" I shouted. "If you detain me here—"

"Explain—explain quickly!" said Watson. "Of all the nerve! Do you think we're going to let you go off like this—without even telling us where you're going, or what you're going for? Not likely! Now then, get it off your chest!"

I breathed hard.

"This is what I get for coming here to say good-bye to you chaps!" I exclaimed warmly. "All right, I'll put it in a nutshell. Dick Goodwin and his paper have met with some adventure in London—Naggs has been up to some game or other, I believe. Anyhow, Detective-Inspector Lennard, of Scotland Yard, rang the guy'nor up. The net result is that Mr. Lee is going to London at once—and I'm going with him!"

Watson's eyes sparkled.

"An adventure?" he said eagerly. "My only hat! I say, Nipper, we can come, I suppose?"

"If you suppose that, your supposer is out of order!" I exclaimed. "It's impossible, old son! Mr. Lee gave me permission to go, but that permission doesn't include you chaps. It can't be done, I'm awfully sorry, but there you

and! Now, let me go, or else there'll be trouble."

"But really, Nipper, old fellow, this isn't playing the game!" protested Montie. "We want to come!"

"I tell you it can't be done!" I said. "Let go, you fathheads!"

I wriggled myself free and made for the doorway.

"We can't come, eh?" exclaimed Tommy Watson darkly. "You're going to leave us out in the cold, are you? All right, you'll see! We'll show you whether we can come or not!"

I didn't hear the last few words that Tommy uttered, for I was already speeding along the passage on my way to the Triangle. Arriving there, I raced out, and was soon going down Belton Lane at the double. Meanwhile, Tommy Watson and Sir Montie Tregellis-West were looking at one another in rather an excited way.

"Dear-old boy, what did you mean just now?" asked Montie. "You know it's quite out of the question for us to go——"

"Is it?" interrupted Watson. "We'll see about that, Montie! A piece of cheek—leaving us behind!"

Watson grabbed hold of Sir Montie's sleeve.

"Come on!" he exclaimed briskly.

"Begad! What on earth——"

"Don't waste any time!" said Tommy. "Buck up!"

He dragged Sir Montie out of the study, and they went along the passage. Montie was protesting all the time, for he had not the slightest idea what his chum intended. Meanwhile, I went down through the village. By running hard, I caught the guv'nor up just before he reached the station.

And even then we only arrived just in time to catch the train. It was steaming in even as we hurried into the booking-office.

Nelson Lee obtained two tickets, and we took our seats in the train. It was only a short journey to Basington, of course, and then we changed. Here we were obliged to wait for twelve

minutes, until the express to London came in. It was a fast train, with only one stop before it reached Victoria.

Nelson Lee and I got into a corridor coach, and we were soon comfortably seated in a smoking compartment.

"Now, guv'nor, I want to know all about it!" I said. "We haven't had much time for talking, so far. I want to know all about Goodwin."

"I have been waiting for you to ask questions, my lad," said Nelson Lee.

The guv'nor gave me all the details, and I was impressed. It was quite certain that Dick Goodwin and his father had met with some foul play.

We were still discussing the subject when I happened to look up. Something had moved along the corridor—somebody was peeping into our compartment, which we occupied alone. I looked up sharply, strange suspicions in my mind.

Were we being followed—shadowed? Were the agents of Mr. Naggs on our track? As I looked up, the figure drew back, and I nudged Nelson Lee.

"What on earth——"

"It's all right, guv'nor!" I whispered. "There's somebody there—out in the corridor. Somebody watching us!"

"Dear me!" said Nelson Lee. "Is that so, Nipper?"

I rose to my feet, and crept quietly across the compartment; then, with a rush, I flung back the sliding-door, and looked out into the corridor. There, facing me, were two figures—two youthful figures, attired in tweed overcoats and tweed caps. They stared at me, and I stared at them.

"Well, I'm jiggered!" I exclaimed, after a moment.

"Dear old boy, we——"

"You see, it was like this——"

"You—you bounders!" I shouted. "How the dickens did you get on this train?"

Tommy Watson and Sir Montie Tregellis-West were looking slightly nervous, for they knew that Nelson Lee was in the compartment, and they knew, also, that they would be required

to give a full explanation of their conduct. It was quite likely, indeed, that they would be sent back to St. Frank's. But this was a fast train, and it did not stop until it reached the outskirts of London, so my chums were hopeful that everything would be all right.

"You see, dear old boy, we wanted to come with you," explained Sir Montie. "We knew that the local train got to Bannington about twelve minutes before the express, so we got on our bikes, and rode like the very dickens. We only just arrived in time, and scrambled in as the train was going out of the station."

"Well, I'm blessed!" I said. "So that's the way you managed it! You must have scorching between Bellton and Bannington."

"We did!" grinned Watson.

"Very interesting!" interrupted a voice at my back. "Come inside here, boys—and give a full account of yourselves!"

Nelson Lee's voice was very stern, but I detected a slight twinkle in his eyes. Sir Montie and Tommy came into the compartment, and, in sheepish voices, they explained to Nelson Lee how they had got their bicycles out and rushed off for Bannington without any delay. And, having finished, they waited nervously for Nelson Lee's decision.

"It is very wrong of you boys to take matters into your hands like this," said the gov'nor sternly. "I shall have to send a telegram to the Head as soon as we reach London, and then you will have to return by the next train."

"Oh, sir!" said the juniors in dismay.

"You surely do not expect me to take you with me?" asked Nelson Lee. "Strictly speaking, I ought to punish you for this action; but I will say no more about it."

"Oh, thank you, sir!" exclaimed Tommy.

"At the same time, you must return to St. Frank's——"

"Let 'em come along with us, sir!"

I put in. "Dash it all, I reckon they deserve it after that!"

"We shan't be in the way, sir!" put in Tommy Watson. "And we might come in useful. We'll do anything we jolly well can, sir!"

Nelson Lee's expression relaxed, and he smiled.

"I am quite sure that you are sincere, Watson," he said. "At the same time, I don't know whether I shall be justified in allowing you to remain with Nipper until he returns to St. Frank's. As a matter of fact, not one of you ought to have come. I shall probably get into quite hot water with Dr. Stafford for this."

I grinned.

"Tell that to the Marines, gov'nor," I said calmly. "And, after all, there's a reason why we should be with you. We've been engaged on this affair of Goodwin's for some little time, and it's only right that we should be in at the finish, isn't it?"

Nelson Lee shrugged his shoulders.

"It seems that it is quite useless for me to argue, Nipper," he said. "The only thing I can do is to resign myself to the inevitable, and allow you all to come. But, mind you, you must behave yourselves."

"Then that's all right!" I said, sitting down again. "There's no need to worry, you chaps."

We arrived at Victoria at about half-past four, and there, sure enough, Chief Detective-Inspector Lennard, of Scotland Yard, was waiting for us. With him he had four men, including Detective-Sergeant Vincent.

"I found time to come myself, Lee," said the chief inspector, as he shook the gov'nor's hand. "I'm glad to see you, old man! It's ages since you were in London. How are things going?"

"We'll have a chat later on, Lennard," said Nelson Lee briskly. "For the moment we must get to Bloomsbury as quickly as we possibly can. I want to rait this house without delay. I am perfectly convinced that Mr.

Goodwin and his son are being kept there prisoners against their will."

"Well, I'm ready when you are," said Lennard. "I've got a car outside, waiting. Why, hallo! I'm hanged if Nipper isn't here, too!"

"As large as life, and as handsome as ever!" I grinned.

We all moved out of the station into the big yard. Here a powerful motor-car was waiting us, and we climbed in. Nelson Lee went with Lennard in the front seat, and Detective-Sergeant Vincent was there, too. The rest of us piled into the back, although it was a bit of a squeeze. There were nine of us all told, so it was fortunate that the car was powerful and roomy.

The chief inspector drove, and he did not seem to care much about speed-limits, for he sent the car whizzing along the busy thoroughfares at a fast speed.

However, we had no mishap, and at length we arrived in Bramcourt Road, Bloomsbury. It was quite a gloomy, old-fashioned road, with scarcely any traffic in it. There were only one or two people to be seen, indeed, when we pulled up outside No. 59.

On the way, Lennard and the gov'nor had been discussing the plan of action, so there was no delay now.

Quick as a flash, Lennard and the detectives were in the gateway, and they ran up to the house. Two of the men went straight round to the back, another stood midway between the rear and the front, on guard there. Nelson Lee and Lennard ran up to the front door, and hammered loudly upon the knocker, and Vincent made his way to the other side of the house, in case anybody attempted to get away in that direction.

"Bogus!" muttered Sir Montie. "They haven't lost any time, dear old boys!"

"It's better not to waste any time on a job like this, Montie," I said.

"Hallo!" said Watson excitedly. "I can hear a commotion 'round' at the back!"

We heard hammerings and bangings, and then one or two shouts. Evidently something exciting was going on. Sir Montie and Tommy ran off, in order to see what was doing, but I remained in the front, just at the foot of the steps.

And, a minute later, the door was swung open, and a man came tearing out. But the very instant he saw the chief inspector and Nelson Lee on the step, he staggered back, and attempted to rush into the house.

"Not just yet, my friend!" said Lennard grimly. "I'd like to have a word with you, if you don't mind."

The man was grasped, and, although he struggled fiercely for a time, he was at length secured. Finding that escape was absolutely hopeless, he attempted to bluster.

"What—what is the meaning of this?" he demanded, panting hard. "Who are you? What the deuce do you mean by smashing into this house—?"

"There's no need to get excited, old man!" interrupted Lennard smoothly. "If everything is all right, you won't get into any trouble. We've just come to have a look round—having received information that everything is not as it should be in this house. I am a police officer, and it will be as well for you to remember that anything you say will be used in evidence against you. Take it quietly, and you'll be all right."

The man clenched his fists, and cursed beneath his breath.

"There's nothing here—you won't find anything wrong in this house!" he muttered.

"I'm going to ask you a question—and you've got to answer it," said Lennard. "Do you know if a gentleman named Mr. Richard Goodwin is in this house?"

"I don't know anything about a Mr. Goodwin," the man exclaimed. "There's nobody here at all!"

"Neither Mr. Goodwin nor his son—a boy of fourteen?" asked Lennard keenly.

"No, there's not!" retorted the man.
 "There's no one here——"

"Help—help!"

The shout came from a room down the hall, and, at the same time, there was a loud hammering on the panels of the door. Detective-Inspector Lennard smiled, and Nelson Lee gave him a triumphant glance.

"So there is nobody here at all?" exclaimed Lennard smoothly. "That's very interesting, my friend. It is rather curious that you were unaware of the presence of that useful voice——"

"Hang you!" snarled the man. "There's no sense in keeping it up, I suppose. Yes—Goodwin and the boy are here."

"You'll come with us, and you'll unlock the door," said Lennard curily. "And don't forget—if you try any tricks, you'll regret it. Hurry up!"

But Nelson Lee was already at the door, and found a key in the lock. He turned this, and shot back a couple of powerful bolts. The door opened, and Dick Goodwin came bursting out, excited and flushed. Just behind him was his father.

"Mr. Lee!" shouted Dick joyously. "Oh, I am glad you've come, sir—I am that!"

"Aye, this is champion!" exclaimed Mr. Goodwin. "I never expected to see you, Mr. Lee. How did you know we were here? How did you know what had happened to us?"

It was not long before Mr. Goodwin and Dick knew all about it. Nelson Lee soon put them in possession of all the facts.

"Aye, I've heard you're a smart man, Mr. Lee, and now I know it," said the mill owner heartily. "Aye, but it was a gradual plan of yours! And you were right in thinking that I'm not capable of looking after myself. By gum, sir! I deserve to be kicked!"

Nelson Lee smiled.

"Well, hardly, Mr. Goodwin," he said. "It seems that these rascals perpetrated a very clever trick upon

you, and it was hardly possible that you should be aware of the truth. However, no harm has been done, and very little time has been wasted——"

"No harm done, sir!" echoed Dick, with sudden dismay in his voice. "But you don't know—the plans have gone!"

"Gone!" echoed Nelson Lee sharply.

"Aye, Mr. Lee, they've gone!" said Mr. Goodwin, shaking his head. "That secondel, Naggs, left about half an hour ago—and he's bound for Hollinwood. He's got the plans with him, the infernal rogue!"

Nelson Lee looked at Mr. Goodwin keenly.

"How do you know that he has gone to Hollinwood?" he inquired.

"I found it out, sir," put in Dick. "I'll just explain."

He soon told us how he had got down in the dumb-waiter, and listened with interest. When he had done, Nelson Lee patted him on the back.

"That was very smart of you, my lad," he said approvingly. "So Mr. Naggs left King's Cross by the four-fifty train for Hollinwood? It's five o'clock already, so we must think of something without any loss of time."

"But—but what can you do, sir?" I put in, tagging at the gov'nor's sleeve.

"There are very many things that I can do, Nipper," he replied grimly. "The main thing is to get to Hollinwood before Naggs. I want to meet him when he steps out of that train!"

"Aye, but that's impossible!" protested Mr. Goodwin.

"Of course it is, sir!" said Dick.

"No, it is not impossible," corrected Nelson Lee. "It may be difficult, I will grant—but not impossible. Mr. Naggs has gone by express train; but there are even faster things than expresses!"

"By jingo!" I exclaimed eagerly. "Do—do you mean an aeroplane, sir?"

"Exactly, Nipper!"

"My only hat!"

"Bagad!"

"An—an aeroplane?"

"Yes, an aeroplane!" repeated Nelson Lee. "It will not take us long

to get to Hendon. There is a motor-car waiting outside, which we can use; and an aeroplane will take us to Lancashire in just over two hours. We shall be able to arrive just before dark, if we hurry."

"That's a fine idea, guv'nor!" I said enthusiastically. "Why, you'll be able to get there long before Naggs, and you'll be able to meet him on the platform!"

"And catch him red-handed, begad!" said Sir Montie.

But Mr. Goodwin shook his head.

"Aye, it's a good enough idea, Mr. Lee," he said slowly; "but it can't be done!"

"Indeed! Why not?" inquired the great detective.

"Indeed! Why not?" inquired the great detective.

"Aeroplanes are expensive!" said Mr. Goodwin. "I'd give almost anything to save those plans of Dick's, but I haven't got the money to spend on hiring a 'plane."

"My dear Mr. Goodwin, there is not the slightest need for you to worry over that point," interrupted Nelson Lee crisply. "I have taken up this case on your behalf, and I intend to use every effort to frustrate Naggs. With regard to the cost of the aeroplane, I will see to that."

"Ah, but that won't do, Mr. Lee!" said the mill-owner. "I shall have to pay you——"

"If you insist upon the matter we can easily arrange it," interrupted Lee. "But we will not discuss that now, my dear sir. The main thing is to get to Hendon without any delay."

"May—may we come, sir?" asked Watson eagerly.

Nelson Lee pursed his lips.

"Well, since you have come so far, boys, you may as well come a little farther," he said. "Mr. Goodwin and I will go in the aeroplane to Hollinwood, and you boys must get back to St. Frank's as soon as you can. I leave you in charge, Nipper."

"Right you are, guv'nor!" I said. "That'll be all right—leave it to me. We'd like to come along to Hollinwood with you, but that's impossible. So we'll come to Hendon to see you off!"

"That's a ripplin' idea, begad!" said Sir Montie approvingly.

"Aye, it's champion!" said Dick Goodwin.

Having decided upon the course of action, no time was lost. Within a very few minutes we were speeding through London, in the direction of Hendon aerodrome. I should have loved the trip to Lancashire, but I knew that it could not be. The guv'nor would charter the fastest aeroplane available, and that would probably be a two-seater. So there would be no room for any other passengers.

"Well, never mind, you chaps," I said. "We shall see them off, anyhow, and we shall hear about everything to-morrow."

We lost no time on the journey to Hendon, and when we finally arrived we found the great aerodrome in a somewhat deserted condition, for it was evening, and a great many of the sheds were closed.

However, Nelson Lee set about making inquiries. While he was doing this we remained with Mr. Goodwin in the motor-car. And it was not long before Nelson Lee returned, with some interesting information—interesting from my point of view, at all events.

"I have done the best I can, Mr. Goodwin, and I find that there is no two-seater aeroplane available at the moment," said the guv'nor. "It is rather a bother, and I am surprised. A dozen machines could be got ready within the hour, but that won't do for us. We want one now, immediately, without delay."

"Aye, that's quite right, Mr. Lee," agreed Mr. Goodwin. "It won't do for the machine to be ready in an hour's time. And what is this one that can be had at once—a single-seater?"

The guv'nor shook his head.

"Quite the opposite!" he exclaimed.

"This machine, which is ready to leave the ground at once, is a powerful twin-engined Handley-Page, capable of carrying a dozen passengers if necessary. I have given instructions, and the machine will be ready for us at once."

Mr. Goodwin shook his head.

"Aye, but it will be expensive!" he exclaimed. "A big Handley-Page! It'll run into a mint of money, Mr. Lee—"

But the gov'nor brushed this matter aside, and was just about to turn away when I grasped his coat-sleeve.

"Hold on, sir!" I exclaimed tensely.

"Well, Nipper, what is it?"

"You're going to Hollinwood in a Handley-Page machine, sir?" I asked.

"Yes."

"And it is capable of carrying ten or twelve people?"

"Exactly!"

"Then there's no reason why we shouldn't all go on this trip!" I said.

"Begad!"

"Oh, my only topper!"

"By gum!"

Nelson Lee regarded me rather severely.

"Now, Nipper, you must not take advantage of the fact that this Handley-Page is the only aeroplane available," he said firmly. "You know well enough that I cannot take you and the other boys. You must get back to the school this evening—"

"But why, sir?" I put in eagerly. "Dash it all, now we've started on this adventure you might as well let us go through with it! Besides, I shall probably be useful up in Lancashire—there's no telling. Dick wants to go. I know—he'd love to go with his pater—"

"Aye, I would that!" said Dick Goodwin eagerly.

"I should like you to let the lad come, Mr. Lee," put in Mr. Goodwin.

"Well, since it is your wish that Dick should come with us, I will offer no objection," replied Lee.

"Oh, thank you, sir!" exclaimed Dick gratefully.

I grinned.

"Well, there you are, sir," I said. "Since you've allowed Goodwin to go, you can't stop us going—it wouldn't be fair. You must treat us all alike!"

"Yes, rather, sir!" said Tommy Watson.

"We're simply dyin' to go!" declared Tregellis-West.

Nelson Lee regarded us with a kind of grim amusement.

"Well, boys, in the circumstances I will not refuse," he said. "You may all come, if you like. As Goodwin is coming, and Nipper insists upon doing the same, it would hardly be fair to forbid the others. So you have got your own way. I only hope that Dr. Stafford will deal with you leniently when we get back to St. Frank's."

"Oh, the Head will be all right, sir!" I said cheerfully. "You'll explain everything, and there won't be any trouble at all. My zons, we're goin'—it's all serene! We're going on this trip to Hollinwood!"

"Hurrah!" exclaimed Tommy Watson excitedly.

"Begad! We're frightfully lucky!" murmured Sir Montie. "We are, really!"

Nelson Lee was a brick, and I could have hugged him. We were all going on this trip to Lancashire. It was splendid—we should be in at the end of the adventure.

And we waited impatiently and eagerly while the giant Handley-Page aeroplane was brought out of its shed and prepared for the flight. Not that many preparations were needed. This particular machine was tuned up, and her tanks were full. Both the engines were in perfect order—for the big plane had been tuned up for flight on the morrow. There was nothing to delay our immediate departure.

And, very soon afterwards, we entered the luxurious cabin of the aeroplane. It was quite a novel experience for us

It was a beautifully appointed cabin, with luxurious armchairs, curtains, cushions and big windows. The cabin was wind proof, and it was like stepping into a miniature drawing-room.

Nelson Lee, of course, came with us. The regular pilot was on hand, and he elected to take us to Hollinwood. I fancy the governor would have preferred to sit in the pilot's seat himself—for he was an expert aviator. But Nelson Lee did not press this matter—as long as we all got to Hollinwood, that was the main thing.

And presently the great engines roared out their song. And we rolled over the ground, took to the air gracefully, and soared aloft.

It was a splendid machine of its type, too. And, in addition, we were assisted very materially on our way by a following wind. This wind probably increased our speed by fifteen or twenty miles an hour. And every minute was of value in a case of this kind. The pilot found this wind much stronger at a height of six thousand feet. And so we soared along, high above the countryside, enjoying the trip immensely.

It was hardly like flying in an aeroplane. There was no more noise than one encounters in the compartment of a railway train. Conversation was quite possible. And we flew along steadily, without any particular vibration, and in ease and comfort.

And so we went on, racing towards Hollinwood. There was very little doubt that we should arrive long before the express which was carrying Mr. Naggs and Dick Goodwin's plans. Unless any unforeseen mishap occurred, we should certainly do so.

Nelson Lee had done everything possible—and now we were on our way to the North. Telegrams had been sent galore—not only to the police, but also to some aeroplane people in the Hollinwood district. It was necessary that everything should be ready for our reception when we landed in Lancashire.

"My sons, this is great!" I exclaimed,

addressing Sir Montie and Tommy. "This is simply gorgeous! I've got an idea in the back of my head that we shall defeat Mr. Naggs all along the line—and bring him to book! He's going to be wiped to a cocked hat this time!"

"Dear old boy, I sincerely hope so!" said Sir Montie Traggles-West. "It would be frightful if this scoundrel succeeded in stealing Goodwin's invention. He has got the plans for the moment, but that does not mean to say that he will keep them."

"Oh, leave it to Mr. Lee!" said Tommy Watson. "He'll do the trick!"

In any case, it was quite apparent that Mr. Naggs would not have everything all his own way!

CHAPTER 12.

Mr. Josh Cuttle Steps In!

THERE was a dreamy look of pleasure in the eyes of Mr. Naggs as that gentleman leaned back among the cushions in a third-class compartment and filled his pipe. The train was speeding northwards. Mr. Naggs had the apartment completely to himself. He finished filling his pipe, and then lit it.

"By thunder!" he muttered. "Everything's all right now—I've got the plans—and everything will be plain sailing from this minute onwards!"

Mr. Naggs patted his breast-pocket with a feeling of comfort. Just there, hidden from view, lay a large foolscap envelope. That envelope contained Dick Goodwin's precious plans. And now they were in the possession of this scheming rascal, and it was Mr. Naggs' intention to sell those plans for a large sum of money as soon as ever he arrived in Hollinwood.

"Yes, it'll be all plain sailing after this!" Mr. Naggs told himself. "I reckon I deserve this success—after all the darned trouble I've had. But nothing can go wrong now. Goodwin and the kid are prisoners, and they

can't escape from that house. They can't even be traced—and by the time they are released I shall have skipped out of the country altogether. Oh, yes, I'm on safe ground now."

Mr. Naggs chuckled with satisfaction. He was quite confident that nothing could prevent him winning through now.

When he arrived in Hollinwood he would go straight away to Mr. William Fordley, the rich mill-owner. Fordley, of course, would be only too pleased to receive the unscrupulous Mr. Naggs. The whole business would be concluded in an hour, Naggs told himself. Fordley would have the money ready, and he would hand it over. And when Naggs stepped out into the street again he would be free to go where he pleased. His position, he told himself, was safe and sound.

Naggs sighed with contentment as he drew lazily at his pipe. He had had a great deal of trouble to get hold of those plans, but he had succeeded, and there was something very pleasant in the sense of victory.

It was a fast train, and Mr. Naggs was soon feeling the effect of the rhythmic thudding of the wheels as they passed over the rail joints. The motion of the carriage was smooth and comforting. And the solitary occupier of the compartment closed his eyes with another contented sigh.

Within two minutes he was dozing, and he subconsciously took the pipe out of his mouth and thrust it into his pocket. Then he settled himself more comfortably and dozed once more. Within five minutes Mr. Naggs was sleeping soundly.

It was the effect of the train's motion more than anything else—but Naggs had had very little sleep lately. Owing to his chase after Dick Goodwin's plans, he had led a somewhat strenuous existence, and during the last forty-eight hours, at least, he had not more than four hours' sleep. Therefore, now that all worry was over, he took advantage

of the train journey to have a quiet snooze.

For ten minutes Mr. Naggs remained in solitude.

And then a mysterious stranger appeared.

He came stealthily. Walking quietly along the corridor, the stranger paused when he came to Mr. Naggs' compartment. He peered in through the window, and a gleam of satisfaction entered his eyes when he noticed that Naggs was sound asleep in the corner seat. Just for a moment or two the stranger hesitated. Then he pushed back the sliding door of the compartment and entered.

He walked over to Mr. Naggs, and stood immediately in front of him—and it was his evident intention to wake Mr. Naggs up. But he did not do so. Quite abruptly, a gleam came into the eyes of the stranger. For he had seen the corner of a thick, bulky envelope peeping out of Mr. Naggs' inner pocket. Owing to the position of the sleeping man his jacket was bulging slightly—and the envelope was thus revealed.

The intruder stood quite still for a moment or two, evidently coming to a decision. There was now a hard glitter in his eyes. And, reaching a hand forward, he placed his fingers over the envelope. Then, with infinite care, he withdrew the bulky package from Mr. Naggs' pocket.

He performed the task so quietly that the sleeping man had no knowledge whatever of what was taking place. He breathed evenly and regularly.

The precious package was in the grasp of the mysterious stranger—and the latter individual was creeping quietly and stealthily out of the compartment. Arriving in the corridor, he made his way to the next compartment, which was empty. Then, with rapid fingers, he opened the envelope.

"By-hokey!" he exclaimed softly. For one glance at the contents of that

envelope told him the truth. They were the plans—the priceless plans of Dick Goodwin's invention!

The mysterious stranger proceeded to act in the same deliberate, calm manner. He produced another envelope, and quickly folded some sheets of thick, blank paper. These he placed inside the envelope and sealed it up. To all intents and purposes, it was the same as the other. Certainly, Mr. Naggs would not be able to detect the difference by the exterior.

The mysterious stranger crept back along the corridor, re-entered Mr. Naggs' compartment, and once more bent over the sleeping figure. This time he acted with even greater caution. Slowly and deliberately he inserted this substitute package into Mr. Naggs' pocket. Then, with an expression of excessive gloom on his countenance, the stranger crept out of the compartment.

As he moved along the corridor he made one or two remarks to himself.

"There was men which was careful, and there was men which was careless!" murmured the man. "Them which was careful took care of their property—but them which was careless was made to suffer. By hokey! Mr. Naggs was a fool! And why? Ask me! Because nobody but a fool would go to sleep leaving them valuable papers in such a position that they could be easily took!"

The stranger re-entered his own compartment, still with the expression of gloom on his countenance. He did not appear to be at all satisfied with what he had done. But perhaps this was because it was natural for him to be melancholy—perhaps he did not know how to smile.

But, whatever his expression, there was not the slightest doubt that Mr. Josh Cottle was extremely pleased with himself.

And, meanwhile, the train continued on its journey towards Lancashire. Mr. Naggs awoke after a while, re-lit his pipe, and surveyed the landscape with

great pleasure. Now and again he touched his breast pocket. Certainly, Mr. Naggs had not the slightest notion of what had happened while he was asleep.

And, finally, the long journey was over. The train steamed into Hollinwood Station. The platform was busy, and the rascal found many people standing about when he alighted. It was quite dark now, but there was plenty of illumination on the platform.

"I'll be with Ferdley within half an hour," Naggs told himself.

But his thoughts came to an abrupt, jarring end, and he stood stock-still, an expression of utter, dumbfounded amazement on his face. His eyes almost started from his head, and he gasped, for there, standing on the platform, not ten yards from him, were two figures—the figures of Mr. Richard Goodwin and Dick Goodwin.

"By thunder!" panted Mr. Naggs. "It—it can't be true! It's impossible! Absolutely——"

The words choked in his throat.

His mind was in a state of chaos. He had left Dick Goodwin and his father in London, prisoners in that house at Bloomsbury. And he—Naggs—had hurried straight to King's Cross, and he had taken the fastest express to the North. And yet here, on the platform at Hollinwood, Dick Goodwin and his father were standing. They had arrived in Lancashire before him! And it was impossible—it simply could not be!

It was hardly to be wondered at that Mr. Naggs was so thunderstruck. He came to the conclusion that he must be suffering from some delusion—that his eyes were playing him false. But, as he was about to move forward in order to take a closer scrutiny, a hand was laid upon his arm.

Mr. Naggs swung round, with a gasp. "One moment, please, Mr. Naggs," said a soft, quiet voice.

The man found himself looking straight into the eyes of Nelson Lee.

"Good heavens!" gasped Naggs, panic-stricken. "I—I— What— Hang you!" He snarled. "Leave my arm alone—"

"It will be better, I think, if you do not make any scene, Mr. Naggs," interrupted Nelson Lee quietly. "You must surely realise that it is quite impossible for you to escape. You will be well advised to remain composed."

"What—what is the meaning of this?" demanded Mr. Naggs, attempting to bluster. "How dare you detain me? Who are you? What is the meaning—"

"I fancy you know who I am, Mr. Naggs!" interrupted Nelson Lee grimly. "This bluff on your part will not avail you anything."

Mr. Naggs was almost lost in his confusion, but he still kept up his pretence.

"I don't know what you mean—you must have made a mistake!" he exclaimed hoarsely. "My name is not Naggs. I am Mr. James Michel, and I have come from Derby. You are making a mistake if you think—"

"Pardon me, Mr. Naggs, but I am making no mistake," interjected Lee coldly. "Your name is—Walter Naggs, and you have in your possession at the present moment, an envelope containing some plans which are the rightful property of Master Richard Goodwin. I advise you to deliver that envelope to me without any further delay. I can assure you that it will be better for you."

Mr. Naggs looked round him desperately. But he was trapped—and he knew it. Nelson Lee was standing immediately in front of him, and there was no escape for the rascal. Not only that, but Mr. Richard Goodwin was there, too—and Dick Goodwin. I was standing just near by, and Sir Montie Tregellios-West and Tommy Watson were with me.

Mr. Naggs gulped something down in his throat. It seemed to him that the "hole of St. Frank's had come—he could see dozens of us—everything

swam before his eyes. Just when he had thought that he was safe—just when he had gained the complete victory—this disaster had occurred. In some miraculous manner Dick Goodwin and his father had escaped, and had arrived in Lancashire in advance.

Naggs came to the one obvious conclusion. Nelson Lee was the cause of this—of course! And Naggs was captured—beyond all hope of escape.

Our trip from London had been accomplished without mishap. We had arrived at a landing ground not far distant, and had come to earth in perfect safety. And then, without losing any time, Nelson Lee and all of us had come straight on to Hallowood Station.

Mr. Naggs' amazement was easy to understand. It must, indeed, have seemed like magic to him to find the Goodwins here. Naggs had left them prisoners in London, and he had come to Lancashire by the fastest possible express. And yet here we were, facing him when he alighted on the platform. No doubt it was a terrific shock for the rascal.

"I tell you, you have made a mistake!" exclaimed Naggs harshly. "If you do not let me go at once I shall call the stationmaster, and have you arrested for obstructing me. You impudent fool! Why can't you—"

"Now, Mr. Naggs, be reasonable!" interrupted Lee calmly. "You know that you are bluffing, and it will not do. That kind of thing carries no weight with me. The game is up, and the only thing you can do is to deliver those plans at once. You can take your choice."

"My choice?" blustered Naggs.

"Exactly!" said Nelson Lee coldly. "You can either hand over those plans now, or you can be detained by force and handed over to the police. In the latter event you will be kept in custody, and ultimately sent for trial."

"And what if I hand over the plans at once?" demanded Mr. Naggs.

"It is not my intention to make any

"Again with you," said Nelson Lee. "I am not in the habit of doing such things with criminals. Come on, Naggs, admit your defeat, and hand over those plans. Or, better, still I will take them!"

Nelson Lee reached forward a hand, and before Mr. Naggs could stop him, he seized the bulky envelope. He snatched it out of Mr. Naggs' pocket, and the man uttered a snarl of fury.

"By thunder!" he shouted thickly. "You shan't have them! I've been working for weeks to get those plans, and——"

"Better take it quietly, Naggs," said Mr. Goodwin quickly. "You'll find it better!"

It was quite impossible for Naggs to escape. Mr. Goodwin had hold of his arm, and I was immediately behind him. Tommy Watson and Tregellis-West were in front. Naggs, in fact, was surrounded; there was no possible chance of his breaking away.

With deft fingers, Nelson Lee opened the flap of the envelope, and a moment later he had withdrawn the pieces of paper from within. He unfolded them, glanced at them quickly, and an expression of astonishment entered his eyes. He turned the sheets over, and glanced at their backs.

"Dear me!" he exclaimed. "Blank!"

"Blank?" exclaimed Mr. Goodwin.

"Blank?" roared Naggs frantically.

He stared at those sheets of paper with goggling eyes.

"Yes, blank!" repeated Nelson Lee. "What is the meaning of this, Naggs? I want those plans!"

"They are the plans—they are the plans. I tell you!" shouted Naggs hoarsely. "I put them in that envelope myself—I examined them beforehand. You must be mad to say those sheets are blank!"

"Aye, but this kind of bluff won't go down!" said Mr. Goodwin angrily. "We want the real plans, Naggs, and we are going to have them. If you try any trickery——"

"Trickery!" yelled Naggs. "There's no trickery about this! I put the plans in that envelope, and I've carried them with me all the way from London. They're not blank—they can't be! It's absolutely impossible!"

"The man is trying to spoof you, guv'nor!" I whispered.

Nelson Lee did not reply for a moment. As a matter of fact, he was rather surprised. Naggs did not appear to be acting now. At all events, if he was acting, he was doing it extremely well. He appeared to be positively staggered by this discovery.

"Look here, Naggs, the best thing you can do is to tell me the truth, without any further tomfoolery!" said Nelson Lee grimly. "The sheets in this envelope are blank, and this proves that you have the plans in some other pocket. You will deliver them to me at once. Do you agree, or must I take them by force?"

Mr. Naggs nearly choked.

"I haven't got them, you mad fool!" he raved. "The plans are in that envelope, don't I keep telling you? I haven't got them! I know they were the plans—they couldn't have been changed! It's absolutely impossible. I had them in my pocket the whole time——"

"It is obvious, Naggs, that you intend to keep up this tale all along!" interjected Nelson Lee curtly. "I have already told you that it will not do. Consequently, you will be handed over to the police without delay. If you do not choose to be reasonable, my only course is to call in the assistance of the law!"

Mr. Naggs found it absolutely impossible to speak. The words choked in his throat. He was amazed—flabbergasted. But he knew that he was to be arrested, and he knew that in some uneasy manner the plans had left his possession.

And just at that moment the train began to move out of the station. It had been standing against the platform for several minutes, but now the guard



Nelson Lee and Inspector Hammond stared in astonishment as they entered the room. Edward Oswald Handforth, looking somewhat knocked about, was standing there with clenched fists, triumphant. And lying on the floor in a dazed condition were Fordley and Naggs. "Well! I'm hanged!" ejaculated the inspector.

had blown his whistle, and the train was already moving. A sudden gleam came into Naggs' eyes. There was one way of escape for him.

And he did not hesitate.

Crash!

His fist thudded into Nelson Lee's chest. The detective staggered back, tripping over Sir Montie Tregellis-West as he did so. The pair fell upon the platform in a heap. Mr. Naggs rushed along at break-neck speed. The train was now travelling fast, and the last carriage had already passed the spot where we were standing. Mr. Naggs raced after it like a greyhound.

He simply leapt at the train. It was a risky proceeding, but he was so reckless and so desperate that he hardly knew what he was doing; he certainly did not realise the danger.

More by luck than anything else, he grasped one of the brass holds, and he was simply carried forcibly on to the footboard. Several shouts rang out from people on the platform, but Mr. Naggs wrenched open the door of the carriage, and pulled himself into the train.

He had escaped, and we were left staring after him on the platform!

CHAPTER II.

The Luck of Mr. Naggs!

MR. WALTER NAGGS breathed hard, his breath coming in great gasps. He had had a narrow escape, and he knew it.

By sheer chance, the compartment into which he had flung himself happened to be empty. He sat on the cushions, his chest heaving. But at length, as the train gathered speed, he commenced to collect his wits.

One thing was certain—he would be unable to visit Mr. William Fordley in the open. Nelson Lee was here, in Lancashire—and the police, too, would be on the alert. Everybody was on the watch, and Naggs knew that it

was up to him to be excessively careful otherwise he would come a cropper.

And then he started.

Why should he go to Fordley? What reason had he for going—now?

The plans!

They had gone; there was some startling mystery concerning those plans. Naggs was frantic with dismay and fury. He sat there on the cushions, thinking hard. He racked his brain, but he could arrive at no solution.

He tried to remember everything that had occurred since he had left the house in Bloomsbury. He had examined the plans, and he had sealed them up in the foolscap envelope. Then he had placed the package into his breast pocket; it had not left that pocket once.

How, then, had those sheets become blank? They were not even the same sheets—Naggs knew that well enough. The real ones had been taken, and these faked things substituted.

But how—how had it been done?

Naggs remembered that he had slept for a certain time during the trip; but he was convinced that nobody had entered the compartment. And who, in any case, would know that the bulky package contained anything of value? If Lee had been on the train, Naggs might have suspected something—indeed, if anybody who knew the secret had been on the train. But Naggs had been by himself—there had not been a soul on that express who knew anything about the plans. This was the same train now—Naggs had re-entered it, and was continuing the journey to Oldham.

The man hardly knew what to do. Everything had gone wrong; just when success had come to him, there was now nothing but failure! It was a shock for Naggs, and he was all the more exasperated because he could not discover how the disaster had taken place.

After a little while, he began to realise that his position was by no means as safe as he had first supposed. The next stop was Oldham, and the train would soon be there. Undoubtedly

Nelson Lee would send a telegram to the stationmaster, and Naggs would be detained when he stepped out on the platform. It was up to him to act at once, without wasting a second.

It was known that he had entered the last carriage. Many people had seen him jump on board; therefore, it would be the last carriage that would receive the most attention when the train pulled up at Oldham.

But it was a corridor train, and Mr. Naggs remembered this fact. Leaving his seat, he pushed the sliding-door back, and set off down the corridor, meaning to pass right to the other end of the train, if possible. Then he would jump out near the engine. It was just possible that he would be able to escape in the crowd.

He glanced into one or two of the compartments as he walked along. Most of them were occupied. And suddenly Mr. Naggs paused, for he saw a figure sitting alone in one of the compartments. It was a figure well known to him—a figure which sent a flash of understanding into Mr. Naggs' troubled mind.

For he recognised the man as Mr. Josh Cuttle!

Cuttle—on this train! Naggs knew well enough that Mr. Cuttle had been at St. Frank's ever since the commencement of the present term. He was there, presumably, as an employee; but Naggs knew that Cuttle was really at St. Frank's in order to keep his eye upon Dick Goodwin. He was, was as a matter of fact, a kind of bodyguard for the lad. And here he was, this bow-legged, gloomy countenanced old fellow—here he was, in this train! Obviously, he had been in it all the while. What could have been easier than for him to pass along the corridor, come upon Mr. Naggs when he was asleep, and take the plans out of his pocket? In a second Mr. Naggs knew that Cuttle was the culprit—Cuttle had got away with those priceless documents!

And Naggs went mad with fury for a

moment. He slammed back the sliding door of the compartment, and went in. Mr. Cuttle was on his feet in a moment.

"By hokey!" he exclaimed.

The next moment Naggs was upon him, and the pair were fighting fiercely. Cuttle was taken at a disadvantage. He was a much older man, and by no means so active as Naggs. Furthermore, the latter was aided by the strength which fury lent to him.

"By hokey!" gasped Mr. Cuttle. "It was a hostage!"

"You thieving meddler!" snarled Naggs. "You took those plans out of my pocket—and you're going to give them up to me—now!"

"There was trouble in the hair!" muttered Mr. Cuttle painfully. "By hokey!"

In all probability, Mr. Cuttle had meant to say "air," but it happened that Naggs had very appropriately grasped Mr. Cuttle's ginger locks. Naggs jerked his victim's head back, and held him helplessly against the cushions. Then, with rapid fingers, he searched through Mr. Cuttle's coat pockets. Almost at once his fingers encountered the envelope containing the plans.

"Ah, I knew it!" panted Naggs triumphantly. "You confounded thief! I knew you took them—you took them while I was asleep!"

"There was going to be trouble!" said Mr. Cuttle grimly. "Them plans was no more yours than they are mine! Them plans was the property of Master Goodwin, and if you think you're goin' to keep 'em, Naggs, you're mistaken!"

"Great Scott!" exclaimed Naggs suddenly.

He felt the brakes being applied to the train, and he was seized by a momentary panic. They were already running into Oldham! Naggs rushed to the other side of the compartment, flung down the window, and looked out. All was dark; the train was slowing up, certainly, but not at a station. Lights gleamed everywhere—street lamps, lights in windows; but there was no station near by.

And Naggs came to a sudden resolution.

He had the plans now; they were in his possession once more.

It was up to him to escape—to get clear away. If he went on to Oldham, he would probably be detained before he could leave the station. But here was a chance—here was an opportunity which would not occur again. The train was running slow, and it was more than likely that Naggs would be able to jump from it without doing himself any bodily injury. In any case, the rascal did not hesitate.

In his present excited state of mind he hardly realised the danger, and he opened the carriage door, got out on the footboard, and closed the door again. Then, taking a deep breath, he leapt into the darkness.

Crash!

Mr. Naggs landed on the gravel beside the track. He rolled over, striking his left shoulder hard. For a second or two he remained motionless on the ground, filled with agony. He really thought that he had smashed something, but, when he scrambled up and saw the red light of the train disappearing into the gloom, he soon discovered that he had broken no bones.

He was bruised, and he had several scratches about him, but he had come to no actual harm. And now a great feeling of victory filled the scoundrel. He had regained those plans from Cuttle, and he had also obtained his freedom. He would be able to visit Mr. Fordley, after all, and receive his money! If the unscrupulous mill-owner got into trouble afterwards—well, that would be his funeral.

Luck was certainly with Mr. Naggs—amazing luck.

He left the railway track, and presently found himself going down a small side-road, which led into a rather squalid district, where the lights were dim.

And, after waiting for perhaps twenty or thirty minutes, Mr. Naggs recognised where he was, for he knew

Oldham and Hollinwood well. As he walked, he made his plans, and he decided that he would go to some obscure lodgings, and lie low.

It would never do to visit Fordley to-night; he would have to leave that until to-morrow. And, even then, he would find it necessary to take every precaution.

He was a marked man now, and it would never do for him to be seen in the vicinity of Fordley's mill. He would have to arrange a meeting in some other place—right out of the district, if possible.

Once in his lodgings, Mr. Naggs examined the package he had taken from Cuttle. And he was soon satisfied that this package contained the plans. He had not been deceived. Once more the documents were in the possession of the rascal. And this time he did not intend to lose them!

Meanwhile, Nelson Lee was not inactive.

The famous detective had lost no time. There was no sense in wasting time by deploring the fact that Mr. Naggs had escaped. The only thing to do was to remedy matters.

Lee had little faith in telegraphing to Oldham. He decided that it would be far better to get to Oldham in the shortest amount of time possible. There was a powerful car waiting outside—the car which had brought them to Hollinwood Station from the aerodrome—and, in less than a minute, the party were seated in that car, and Nelson Lee was at the wheel. He drove like fury to Oldham.

There was just a faint hope that they might get there in time, for the train was slow after leaving Hollinwood, and there was a bare possibility that the pursuers would be able to arrive just after the train had done so.

As a matter of fact, they succeeded. Nelson Lee pulled up outside Oldham Station, and he and Mr. Goodwin hurried to the booking-office. I was clear at their heels, and we ran full tilt in—Mr. Josh Cuttle!

"My only hat!" I exclaimed in surprise.

"There was many strange things happening this evening!" exclaimed Mr. Cuttle gloomily. "It was queer, Mr. Lee. And things was bad."

"I won't ask you for any explanations now, Cuttle," said Nelson Lee quickly. "But can you tell me one thing—do you know anything of Naggs?"

"Naggs was gone!" said Mr. Cuttle, shaking his head. "Naggs has escaped!"

"Escaped?"

"Them was my words!" said Mr. Cuttle. "Mr. Naggs jumped out of the train, and he was gone—and he has took the plans with him. That man was a villain. And why? Ask me! Because he has stolen them plans—"

"Look here, Cuttle, I want you to speak plainly—not in riddles!" said Nelson Lee sharply. "You say that Naggs has escaped. How? When? How do you know this?"

"Them was questions which was easy to answer, sir!" said Mr. Cuttle. "Naggs come in the train, and he committed a heurtege. He took them plans, which was a villainous proceeding—"

"But how could Naggs take them from you, Cuttle?" said Nelson Lee. "You did not have the plans—"

"Which was wrong—begging your pardon, sir!" interrupted Mr. Cuttle. "Them plans was in my possession. And why was they in my possession? Ask me! Because I took them from Naggs afore the train got to Hollinwood. I took them while Naggs was asleep—"

"My only hat!" I exclaimed. "Them that explains why Naggs was so surprised to see those blank sheets, guv'nor! Mr. Cuttle substituted some duds in place of the real goods! Naggs didn't know anything about it, and he was telling the truth when he told us that!"

"Undoubtedly, Nipper," said Nelson Lee. "It seems to me that there has

been an unfortunate confusion over this matter. We knew nothing of Cuttle's presence here, and it seems that he has inadvertently ruined my plans."

Mr. Cuttle scratched his head.

"Which was bad, sir!" he said gloomily. "There was bad luck this evening. There was bad luck for us, and there was good luck for Naggs—which was even worse."

There was no doubt that Naggs had been lucky. The only thing to do now was to get on to his track again, but this promised to be rather a difficult task.

We knew that he had left the train somewhere between Hollinwood and Oldham. There was no telling where he had gone to—which direction he had taken. And, in all probability, he was now lying extremely low, waiting his opportunity.

It was not long before Mr. Cuttle explained his presence in Lancashire. And it was rather a surprising explanation, for it turned out that Mr. Cuttle had followed Dick Goodwin and his father to London on the previous day. He had seen them taken to Bloomsbury, and he had known all along that they were in that old house. He had watched diligently, and he had seen Mr. Naggs leave. Following the rascal Cuttle had gone to King's Cross, and he had boarded the same train. Cuttle, in fact, had stuck to the trail like a good 'un.

We had been at cross purposes, and that is why the mishap had occurred.

If Cuttle had been left to his own devices, everything would have been all right. Naggs would have got out of the train at Hollinwood, and Cuttle would have gone straight on to Oldham, with the plans. On the other hand, if Cuttle had not interfered, Naggs would have been defeated just the same, for Nelson Lee would have collared him on the platform at Hollinwood. Simply because both Nelson Lee and Cuttle had been engaged upon

the same game, Naggs had got away, and he had the plans in his possession. It was really an extraordinary state of affairs.

Nelson Lee did not show any sign of annoyance or anger. Blame could not be attached to anybody, so there was really no sense in getting angry. The gov'nor decided upon the best course to adopt.

"We must go to a hotel at once Mr. Goodwin," he said briskly. "I do not think it would be advisable for you to go to your own home. For the present stay in a hotel, and take the boys with you."

"Aren't you coming, sir?" I inquired.

"Yes, Nipper," replied Nelson Lee. "I will be there to begin with. We'll go at once."

It was not long before we were comfortably settled in the Maiden Arms Hotel, Oldham, which was in a rather quiet part of the town. It was now getting fairly late in the evening.

Personally, I did not see what could be done. Naggs had eluded us completely, and it would be an extremely difficult matter to get on his track again. Owing to the unforeseen circumstances, all the gov'nor's plans had gone wrong. It was a most exasperating business. Mr. Goodwin, of course, was greatly worried, and Dick himself was gravely concerned. But Nelson Lee told them not to worry; he gave them his assurance that everything would be all right before long. And this comforted them somewhat.

Very shortly afterwards, Nelson Lee took me aside, and we had a little chat.

"There is only one thing to be done, Nipper," said Nelson Lee keenly. "We have lost Naggs, and I do not see how we can get on his track. The only thing to do, therefore, is to watch Mr. William Fordley's house. Naggs is certain to go there, sooner or later. Possibly he will lose no time in visiting his chief—for there is no doubt that Naggs has been acting all along for Fordley."

"And you think that if we watch

Fordley's house, we shall see Naggs arrive?" I asked.

"It is quite possible, Nipper. In any case, it is the best thing we can do at the moment," said Nelson Lee crisply. "We will go at once!"

A few minutes later we had left the hotel, and were hurrying along towards the great mansion which was occupied by Mr. William Fordley, the rich mill-owner. Lee had discovered that he lived on the outskirts of Oldham.

"Events have not happened as I should like, Nipper, but there is no sense in grumbling," remarked Nelson Lee, as we walked. "And I do not altogether care for those boys being with us—Watson, Tregellis-West, for example. Strictly speaking, they ought not to have come."

"Oh, it doesn't matter, gov'nor!" I interrupted. "It won't do us any harm—we shall probably be back at St. Frank's by to-morrow evening."

"You are optimistic, Nipper," remarked the gov'nor. "I only hope that your optimism is justified."

"Why, don't you believe that we shall complete this case to-morrow?" I asked.

"I do; but it is very doubtful whether we shall be able to get back to that part of England by the evening," smiled Nelson Lee. "Now listen, Nipper. We must make plans, and we must stick to them. To begin with, we will scout round Fordley's house, and find out everything we can."

"That's the idea, sir," I agreed.

"I shall leave you on watch until about midnight," went on Nelson Lee. "You must take up your station near Fordley's house, and watch. If Naggs appears and enters the house, you must not lose one second in acting."

"How shall I act, sir?" I asked.

"You will go to the nearest police-station without delay," replied Lee. "We will find out where it is situated beforehand, and leave instructions there. If nothing has occurred by twelve o'clock, you will return to the hotel and go to bed. I will continue

the visit during the night. In the morning you will relieve me."

"Right you are, sir!" I said. "It seems to be the best thing to do, in the circumstances."

"I have other plans in mind, Nipper, but I will not discuss them now," said Nelson Lee.

We arrived at Fordley's house, after making full arrangements at the police station, which was fairly close by. It was a big house—a splendidly appointed mansion, in fact, proving quite conclusively that Mr. William Fordley was a very rich and influential man.

Nelson Lee left me almost at once, but I did not know on what mission he had started. At exactly midnight, however, he returned, and I had nothing to report.

Naggs had made no sign whatever.

What was to be done? Was it likely that Naggs would come to Fordley's house during the night? And, if so, would Nelson Lee be able to recover the stolen plans?

I was filled with doubt and uneasiness, but I returned to the hotel, as I had been ordered. I did not sleep well that night, however. I was too worried, and my mind was filled with uncertainties.

Everything had gone wrong, just as everything had been going right. It was extremely exasperating, and there was not the slightest doubt on one point. Mr. Walter Naggs was having all the luck at the moment.

But would that luck last?

CHAPTER II.

Handforth's Great Idea

SIR T. FRANK'S was aged.

Everybody was talking about Dick Goodwin and his troubles. The Remove, as a matter of fact, was greatly excited, for four of its members were absent, and it was already known that those four members had gone to London.

It was morning, and the juniors had

just come down from the dormitory. It was quite a bright morning, and the November sun was shining. Out in the Triangle, many groups of juniors were discussing the recent happenings.

"Well, I call it a cheek!" exclaimed Reginald Pitt. "It's about the biggest piece of nerve I've ever heard of!"

"What is?" asked Grey.

"Why, Nipper and Tregellis-West and Watson going off like that!" exclaimed Pitt. "Without saying a word to a soul, they go up to London yesterday with Mr. Lee. We didn't know anything about it till long afterwards. And there they are, having a fine old time, while we're stuck down here, doing lessons!"

"They will jolly well get it in the neck!" said Hubbard. "I bet they'll get into terrific hot water when they come back. The Head will see to that!"

"Don't you believe it, my sons!" put in Cecil de Valerie. "Those chaps are with Mr. Lee, and that's good enough. They won't get into any hot water."

Pitt nodded.

"Yes I expect you're right, old son," he said. "But what's happened to the bouncers—that's what we want to know? Why didn't they turn up last night? Where are they now?"

"Goodness knows!" said Fatty Little. "Let's hope they bring some grub back with them—something special from London, you know!"

"Oh, dry up!" said Pitt. "You're always thinking of your tummy, Fatty."

"Well, there's nothing better to think about!" said the fat junior. "Grub is everything! The world couldn't get on without grub. Grub is the life and soul of a people—and just because I take an exceptional interest in food, you chaps stare at me—"

"Oh, dry up!" interrupted Handforth. "We're talking about Nipper and those other asses! It's about the last word in cool cheek!"

"Hear, hear!"

"They go off on this investigation

with Mr. Lee, and they leave me behind!" exclaimed Handforth, full of indignation. "Isn't that absolutely the limit?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"There's nothing to cackle at, you duffers!" roared Edward Oswald Handforth. "Of course, they won't get on the right track—that's to be understood. They ought to have taken me with them, then they would have been successful——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Without you, there's just a chance that Mr. Lee might succeed!" said De Valeris. "But, if you'd gone, there's no telling what would have happened, Handy! We don't know what's in the wind, anyhow—we're in the dark. We can only suspect things—that Dick Goodwin had some plans, or something of that kind, and that some rotter was trying to pinch them——"

"Of course, that's the truth—we all know that!" said Handforth. "They're all in London now—the whole batch. And I've been left out of it——"

"How awful!" said Pitt solemnly.

"It's dreadful!" declared Grey.

"Shocking!" said De Valeris.

"Somebody had better write to the 'Telegraph' about it!" suggested Singleton languidly.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Handforth glared round.

"Oh, I expect you chaps to make fun of me!" he retorted. "That's all you can do——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Handy—I say, Handy!" came a voice from the Ancient House steps. "Just a minute!"

It was Arnold McClure who was calling, and he was waving something in his hand. Handforth looked round, just as he was pushing up his sleeves, preparatory to punching a few noses.

"I can't come now!" he shouted. "Wait a minute."

"It's a letter for you, old son!" shouted McClure. "From your pater, I believe!"

"Whoo!" roared Handforth.

He forgot all about his worthy intentions. As a matter of fact, Handy was rather hard up, and he had not thought of looking in the letter-rack that morning. But it was a letter, after all, and it probably contained a remittance. Handforth dashed up the steps, and snatched the letter out of McClure's hands. Church was there, too, and they both looked on interestedly while Handforth tore open the flap. They, too, were rather hard up. There had been lean times in Study D for the last day or so. Handforth extracted the letter from the envelope, and as he unfolded it he gave an exclamation of satisfaction. For there were two printed slips enclosed—postal orders for one pound each.

"Good!" said Handforth. "Two quid! Good old pater, I thought he'd turn up trumps!"

"He is a sport!" said McClure. "You don't mind lending me five bob, do you, Handy?"

"You can have ten, if you want it," said Handforth generously. "Here you are—take one of the postal orders and divide it between you. You can pay me back when you get a tip from your own homes!"

"Oh, thanks awfully!"

Church and McClure took the postal order with delight. Handforth was certainly too quick to use his fists, and he had a most exaggerated idea of his own importance; but nobody at St. Frank's could say that Edward Oswald was mean. On the contrary he was one of the most generous and open-handed fellows in existence. When Handforth had money, he always shared it with his chums. He was generous to a degree in that respect.

"Now let's see what the pater says," said Handforth. "A lecture, I expect, he generally tries to give me a dig when he writes."

Handforth scanned the letter, and as he did so his eyes grew larger, his face became flushed, and finally he let out a whoop of excitement. He fairly

startled Church and McClure, and they gazed at him wonderingly.

"What's the matter—bad news?" asked Church quickly.

"No, you ass—good news!" roared Handforth. "My only hat! Good old water! I only hope the Head agrees!"

"What is it, you ass?"

"What do you mean—the Head?"

Handforth gazed at his two chums in a kind of ecstasy.

"Read it—read the letter!" he exclaimed, with a gasp. "Great Scott! I never thought the water was such a brick!"

Church and McClure, who were thoroughly excited by this time, made such a grab at the letter, that they nearly tore it in half. But, fortunately, this catastrophe did not happen, and Handforth's chums read the letter with eager eyes. It ran as follows:

"Wayfarers' Club.

"Piccadilly,

"London, W.

"Dear Edward,—As you will observe from the paper, I am jotting down this note to you at the club. You will be pleased to hear that your uncle George is in London at the present moment. He only arrived from China yesterday, and he does not expect to be in town for more than three days. As he cannot find time to come down to St. Frank's and as he is rather anxious to see you, I am wondering if you can obtain permission from your Headmaster to allow you to run up.

"It will be quite nice if you can get two days' holiday, and come to London on the first train in the morning. If you are successful in obtaining this permission, wire me at once, and it is quite possible that your uncle will meet you at Victoria. It is, of course, quite beyond my powers of comprehension to understand why your uncle should express a desire to see you. But he has requested me to write this letter, and I am doing so now.

The enclosed money will be enough

to cover your expenses. By the way, if you may bring your two chums with you, by all means do so. There will be a little party here to-morrow night, and you will enjoy yourself much better if you have some people of your own age with you.

"Do your best, my boy, and don't forget to send that wire.

"Your affectionate

"Father."

"Great Scott!" gasped Church.

"This—this is great!"

"Two days in London!" exclaimed McClure, his eyes gleaming. "My hat! How ripping! What a piece of luck for you, Handy!"

Handforth nodded.

"Yes, rather!" he agreed. "Of course, the Head might not give me permission to take you with me."

"Let's go to the Head now—all three of us!" said Church excitedly. "If we go and show him this letter, he might let us go—"

"No!" interrupted Handforth. "I'd better go to the Head alone. I'll get permission, if he means to give it at all."

"Do your best, old son!" said McClure anxiously.

It was not yet breakfast-time, but Handforth did not lose a moment. He knew very well that a train left for London within an hour.

Church and McClure watched him go along the passage, and they were in a state of uncertainty. They hoped that the headmaster would allow them to go. At the same time, they had doubts—they feared that Dr. Stafford would not grant the request which Edward Handforth was about to make.

"Oh, it's no good—we shan't go!" said Church glumly.

"We might!" declared McClure.

"The Head's a good old sort—"

"That may be, but four Remove chaps are away already," interrupted Church. "If we go, there'll be seven of us away—seven members of the

Remove at one time. Oh, no, Charey, there'll be nothing doing!"

McClure nodded.

"That's what I'm afraid of," he admitted. "It's rotten, those other chaps being away just now. Just our luck! If they'd been here, we should have got permission all right. I wonder how long that ass will be?"

"Oh, give him a chance!"

But Church and McClure were impatient. They waited, minute after minute, and still there was no sign of Handforth's return. The juniors haunted the passage not far from the Head's study.

Meanwhile Handforth was doing his best. He arrived at the Head's study, and was about to walk boldly in, after knocking on the door, when he observed that the study door was slightly open. And voices came out to him. They were the voices of Dr. Stafford and Mr. Stockdale, the Master of the College House.

Handforth paused.

"Better wait a minute or two!" he muttered. "I don't want to butt into a private conversation, or I might get the bird! The best thing for me is to catch the Head alone, then I shall be able to wangle him all right!"

Handforth was certainly wise in this decision. The headmaster would not give him much attention if he entered while he—the Head—was engaged in conversation with the Housemaster.

So Handforth waited.

He could not very well help hearing the voices of the two men within the room. It was not Handforth's intention to listen. He was not the kind of junior who practised eavesdropping. But certain words came to him which made him prick up his ears, for the Head and Mr. Stockdale were discussing a subject which was of great interest to Handforth.

"My dear Stockdale, I really do not know for certain what has been happening," the Head was saying. "The facts I have at my disposal are

quite bare and vague. I do know, however, that Mr. Lee is in Oldham."

"That's rather a long way away," said Mr. Stockdale.

"It is, indeed!" agreed the headmaster. "Mr. Goodwin is there, too, and, needless to say, young Goodwin, of the Remove."

"And what of the other boys, sir—Nipper and Tregellis-West and Watson?"

"Strange as it may seem, Mr. Stockdale, those three juniors are also in Oldham," said the Head. "They are all staying at the Malden Arms Hotel. Why Mr. Lee has taken these boys with him, I cannot imagine; but I am certain that Mr. Lee has an excellent reason for so doing."

"And has Mr. Nelson Lee been successful, sir?" asked Mr. Stockdale.

"I fancy not," replied the Head. "Things have been going rather badly. I believe, and I know for certain that young Goodwin's precious plans have not been recovered. They are still in the hands of the rascal who stole them. But, as I said before, the whole affair is something of a mystery to me. We shall really have to wait until Mr. Lee returns before we know the actual facts."

"Yes, I suppose so, sir!" said the Housemaster. "A very queer business, to my mind."

Handforth's eyes were gleaming as he heard these words.

Nelson Lee had not been successful! The plans were still missing! They were still in the possession of the man who had taken them—Mr. Naggs! And Nelson Lee and all the others were staying at the Malden Arms Hotel, Oldham! Handforth knew all the facts—and he was thrilled.

A moment or two later, as he paced up and down the passage, the door of the Head's study opened, and Mr. Stockdale appeared. He was somewhat astonished to find Edward Oswald Handforth standing in the middle of the passage, gazing blankly into space. There was a smile of supreme hap-

ness on his face. And the next moment he proceeded to execute an elephantine dance.

"Handforth!" ejaculated Mr. Stockdale. "What on earth are you doing?"

Handforth came to a standstill, as if he had been suddenly frozen. His face was as red as a beetroot, however, as he looked at the master of the College House.

"Nun-nothing, sir!" he gasped, covered with confusion.

"What was the meaning of those extraordinary gyrations?" demanded Mr. Stockdale.

"I—I was just—just practising, sir!" panted Handforth desperately. "I—I was waiting to go into the Head's study, sir, but I knew he was engaged with you, and so I didn't butt in—I—I mean, I didn't interrupt!"

"Then you had better go into Dr. Stafford's study at once, Handforth," said the Housemaster. "He is about to go in to his breakfast, I believe, so you must be sharp!"

"Thank—thank you, sir!" gasped Handforth.

He fairly rushed into the Head's study, anxious to escape any further questioning by Mr. Stockdale.

"Good-morning, Handforth!" said the Head smoothly.

"Good—good-morning, sir!" said Handforth, with a gulp.

"Apparently you did not think it necessary to tap upon my door before entering, Handforth!" went on Dr. Stafford. "You must learn manners!"

"I—I'm awfully sorry, sir! I apologise!" said Handforth hurriedly. "You—you see, sir, Mr. Stockdale startled me a bit. Please—please forgive me, sir!"

"Since you have expressed your regret, Handforth, we'll let the matter pass," said the Head. "I fancy I know why you have come to see me. You have undoubtedly received a letter from your father this morning?"

Handforth looked blank.

"How—how do you know, sir?" he asked, in amazement.

"I do not pretend to be a thought-reader, and I have made no elaborate deductions, Handforth," smiled the Head. "That sort of thing is hardly in my line. The fact is, my boy, I have received a letter from your father by this morning's post, in which he informs me that he has written to you also."

"Oh, I see, sir!" said Handforth. "My—my pater wants me to go home for a couple of days, sir, if you'll give me permission——"

"Your father has explained the circumstances to me, Handforth," went on the Head. "And he has made it quite clear that this is a very special occasion. Therefore, I have decided to grant his request, and you may be absent from school until to-morrow night. I will grant you two days' holiday——"

"Oh, hurrah!" roared Handforth excitedly.

"Dear me! Really——"

"I mean, thank you, sir—thank you terribly!" gasped Handforth. "You're a brick, sir."

"My dear boy, there is no necessity for you to get so excited!" protested the Head, amused by the junior's expressions of joy. "You may leave as soon as you like, and do not forget to send your father a telegram. And you must be back before locking-up to-morrow night. Please remember that, Handforth."

"Yes, sir; I'll be back all right!" said the junior. "Thanks awfully, sir. Oh, I forgot——"

"You forgot what?"

"The—the pater suggested something about me bringing two other fellows, sir!" said Handforth hesitatingly. "I—I was wondering if you would allow Church and McClure to come up to London with me. A chance would do them good, you know——"

"I have no doubts on that point, Handforth," interrupted the Head dryly. "As a matter of fact, your father made the suggestion in his letter."

"Did—did the pater put it in his letter to you too, sir?"

"He did, Handforth," replied the Head. "And in the circumstances, I am rather inclined to be generous on this occasion. I am aware of the fact that you are a particularly dense boy, Handforth—"

"Eh?" gasped Handforth.

"You are surprisingly clumsy, too, my lad," went on the Head calmly. "You are quite capable of getting into the wrong train and over-running your station, or some such preposterous thing of that kind. Therefore, it will be perhaps all the better if you take Church and McClure with you—so that they may take care of you properly. Therefore, I will give you my permission for Church and McClure to go also. I trust that you will enjoy yourselves, my boy!"

"Thank you, sir—thanks awfully!" said Handforth, forgetting the insult which had been levelled at him.

He really didn't remember how he got out of Dr. Stafford's study. But he did so, somehow. Then he turned down the passage like a whirlwind. He turned the corner, and charged full tilt into Church and McClure—who had heard their leader coming. Crash!

The three juniors met, and the next moment two of them went bowling over. However, they were on their feet again in a moment.

"Well?" gasped Church. "Any luck?"

"We're going!" panted Handforth. "You clumsy asses—"

"All of us!" yelled McClure.

"Yes!"

"Oh, hurrah!"

Handforth suddenly yanked out his watch, and consulted it.

"My hat!" he exclaimed. "We shall have to hick up. The train goes in just over half an hour—and there's not another one for over two hours! If we get the early one, we shall have the whole day in London! We shall

have to change into our best togs like lightning!"

"What about breakfast?" gasped Church.

"Rats to breakfast!" said Handforth. "We don't want any brekker this morning. I couldn't eat any, anyhow!"

"Neither could I!" said McClure. "Come on!"

They rushed down the passage, and charged full tilt into the lobby just as several of the other juniors were about to leave.

"Hallo! What's the piddy excitement about?" asked Pitt. "Have you chaps gone dotty, or what?"

"We're going to London!" said Handforth importantly.

"Eh?"

"Which?"

"We're going to London!" repeated Handforth, enjoying the sensation he was causing.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Rats!"

"Rot!"

"Draw it mild, Handy!"

"It's a fact!" said McClure. "We are going—all three of us! We've the Head's permission to be in London until to-morrow evening!"

"What rot!" said Owen Major. "You can't spoof us like that, you ass!"

Handforth waved his hand.

"We can't stop arguing with you fellows—we're in a hurry!" he said loftily. "Come on, my sons—we've got to go up into the dormitory to change. And we'll have to buzz like the very dickens, or we shall lose the train."

Handforth & Co. raced upstairs, and went to the dormitory. The other juniors gazed after them in wonder, and at last began dully to realise that Handforth had spoken the truth.

When breakfast was half over, as there was still no sign of Handforth, Church and McClure, the other juniors were quite certain that they were to London.

Meantime, the three happy juniors just managed to catch the train at E.

ton. It was a local train, and it connected with the London express at Bunnington. And when the three juniors were comfortably seated in a third-class compartment of the London train, Handforth sprang his great idea.

"Now, look here, my sons," he said solemnly. "While I was waiting to go into the Head's study, I got a terrific idea—a real stunner. Mr. Stockdale saw me when I thought of it—and he thought I'd gone dotty, or something!"

"That's not surprising!" said Church. "Eh?"

"Oh, Stocky is always thinking silly things like that!" said Church hurriedly.

"Of course he is," declared Handforth. "Well, my marvellous idea is this. As soon as we get up to London—to Victoria—we shall find Uncle George on the platform. He is coming to meet us—and it's a penny to a pound that he'll give us some cash. He's got pots of money—he's a millionaire or something—and we can easily wangle five or ten quid out of him."

"Is this the marvellous idea?" asked Church.

"Part of it," replied Handforth. "Well, we'll get round Uncle George, and ask him to allow us to go off to Oldham."

"To where?"

"To Oldham!"

"Oldham!" repeated McClure blankly. "What the dickens for? Whatever do we want to go to Lancashire for, you silly ass?"

"To get on the track of Dick Goodwin's missing plans!" said Handforth triumphantly.

Church and McClure stared harder than ever. Then suddenly they saw the joke, and roared.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, jolly good!" grinned Church.

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled McClure.

Handforth tried to freeze them both with a glance.

"When you've finished," he said coldly, "I'd like to know what you're cackling at!"

The two juniors ceased abruptly.

"Isn't— isn't it a joke?" gasped Church. "Aren't we supposed to laugh, Handy?"

"No, you potty ass, you're not supposed to laugh!" snapped Handforth. "This is serious—it's not a joke!"

"Not—not a joke!" said McClure. "But—but you can't mean it really, Handy! You're not suggesting that we should go straight off to Lancashire—to Oldham?"

Handforth nodded.

"That's exactly what I am suggesting," he said. "We've got two days' holiday, and we've only got to get round Uncle George, and everything will be all serene. We can take the first train to Oldham, and then we can help Mr. Lee to get on the track of Naggs. Naggs has got some valuable plans belonging to Dick Goodwin, and Mr. Lee has failed to find them. That being so, it's up to me to go to the rescue!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What are you cackling at, Arnold McClure?" demanded Handforth, glaring.

"Nun—nothing!" gasped McClure. "Something—something tickled me, Handy!"

"We'll go to Lancashire, and we'll solve the problem," went on the leader of Study D. "There'll be nothing easier—once I'm on the spot. Nelson Lee has failed, and so I'm going to get busy. Think of the honour—think of the glory!"

"It's no good thinking anything of that sort!" shouted Church sourly. "You won't get the honour, Handy. You'll only get ridiculed. By the time we arrive, we shall simply waste our time—we shall go for nothing. I think you must be dotty!"

"Stark, raving mad!" said McClure.

Handforth shrugged his shoulders.

"Of course, I expected this—I was prepared for it!" he said bitterly. "I never expect to get any support from you chaps. All you can do is to sneer at everything I say, and disagree with everything I don't say! What for you

come or not, I'm going! We've got two days' holiday and we can go where we please. I'm absolutely firm on this point—and I'm not going to be turned aside. I mean to go up to Oldham—I mean to join in the hunt for Dick Goodwin's plane!"

And there was something about Handforth's voice which conclusively proved to Church and McClure that nothing would divert him from his intentions. Once Handforth got an idea into his head it could not be driven out, even with a sledgehammer.

And this particular idea, so far as Church and McClure could remember, was about the most insane notion that Handforth had ever conceived.

It was therefore rather singular that the consequent events should turn out as they did. For Handforth was destined to do some very wonderful things in the near future.

CHAPTER 15.

The Disappearance of Nelson Lee!

"SOMETHING," I said decidedly, "has happened!"

I was hanging about in the vicinity of William Fordley's house, in Oldham. It was morning—quite a bright, clear morning. This, in itself, was nothing unusual—for Lancashire. And although I had been on the spot over half an hour, I had seen no sign whatever of Nelson Lee. I had come to relieve the garrison—exactly as he had told me. But there was no sign of him. He had vanished completely—and he had not communicated with the hotel in any way.

Why had Nelson Lee left his post?

Why had he gone away—without communicating with me at all? Apparently there was only one explanation. Nelson Lee had left in a hurry—he was probably following Fordley, or Naggs. At all events, something had happened—I was quite convinced on that point.

I waited until pretty near an hour had elapsed. Then I realised that it was quite useless for me to remain here. Nelson Lee had disappeared—and he had obviously gone off on some special mission. It was simply a waste of time for me to hang about Fordley's house.

But I did not like going back to the hotel empty handed, so to speak. So, at last, I walked away and boarded a tramcar. After a short ride in the direction of Hollinwood, I dismounted and found myself near to Fordley's cotton mill. I was greatly interested in all I saw here.

There were many mills in this district—great, ugly buildings which were hives of industry. They were all humming with life, for work was going on at full swing.

I waited about near the entrance to Fordley's Mill for some little time. But there was no sign of Nelson Lee there—no sign of anything suspicious. I even managed to get into conversation with one of the mill employees. And this man informed me that Mr. Fordley had not yet arrived. This was rather unusual, for the mill-owner generally got to the works before ten o'clock every morning. Evidently something of a special nature had kept him away on this particular day.

But, since there was nothing else for me to do, I waited there—worried, and rather uncertain. I did not know what would be my best course. Why hadn't Nelson Lee communicated with me in any way? What was he doing now—where had he gone off to? These were questions which I could not answer.

And, meanwhile, Mr. William Fordley was at home. The millowner was a large, fleshy kind of man of about forty-five. He possessed a big face, with loose, clean-shaven cheeks, and rather watery eyes. Altogether, he was not at all a nice-looking specimen.

He was an unscrupulous man, and many of his business deals would not have borne the light of day. He was

successful—mainly owing to his shady habits—and he was extremely rich.

He was just about to leave his house when the telephone-bell rang sharply in his library. He went to the phone and lifted up the receiver.

"Well?" he demanded. "Who is it?"

"Naggs!" came the reply over the wire. "Is that you, Mr. Fordley?"

"Yes," said the millowner sharply. "What name did you say?"

"Naggs!"

"Oh!" said Mr. Fordley. "I didn't know you were in Oldham."

"I arrived last night," said Naggs. "I want to see you, sir!"

"Any success?"

"Yes!"

"You have obtained the—goods?" asked Mr. Fordley eagerly.

"Yes, sir—everything is O.K.!" replied Naggs. "In fact, I've got the papers with me!"

"Good man!" said the millowner. "I thought you would be successful, Naggs. You had better come to see me at once—without any delay. Why didn't you communicate with me last night?"

"For reasons which I can't go into now, sir," replied Naggs. "And I don't think it would be advisable for me to come anywhere near your house this afternoon."

Mr. Fordley pursed his lips.

"Well, what is the matter, Naggs?" he demanded. "Has anything—happened?"

"Yes, sir—and I must be very careful," replied Naggs. "Unless I go easy, somebody may get wind of this—deal. You understand what I mean?"

"Not quite," said Mr. Fordley. "What do you propose, anyhow?"

"Can you go to Brentlowe this afternoon, sir?"

"Brentlowe!" interrupted Mr. Fordley. "Where is that?"

"Oh, just about fifty miles away, sir—in the direction of London," replied Naggs. "I know of a little house there,

just outside the village. It's all quiet, and the house at the present moment is empty."

"Why on earth should you go to an empty house, Naggs?" demanded the millowner curiously.

"I will explain better, sir, when I see you," replied the other. "Although the house is empty, it is not unfurnished. It belongs to a friend of mine, and I have got the key from him—under the pretext that I want to take somebody to have a look over it, with a view to letting. If you can meet me there, sir, it will be all the better."

"Brentlowe," said Mr. Fordley. "On the road to London? All right, Naggs—if it is so important, I will put other matters aside and meet you there. What is the name of this house?"

"Rose Cottage, sir, and it is about half a mile from the station," replied Naggs. "I will be waiting there for you at exactly four o'clock this afternoon."

"I think I shall be able to manage that quite comfortably," said Mr. Fordley. "I will be there, Naggs. By the way, do I understand that you will bring the—er—contract with you?"

"Yes, sir—the contract," said Naggs. "And you, I take it, will bring some cash!"

"Yes, my dear fellow, I will bring some cash," he agreed. "I know precisely what you mean, and you need not worry on that point. At four o'clock, then, at Brentlowe. Good-bye!"

Mr. Fordley hung up the receiver, and then he paced up and down his library for some little time. There was a gleam in his eyes—a gleam which denoted keen satisfaction.

"Splendid!" he muttered. "Naggs has been successful—as I thought he would be. But something has apparently happened—something of rather an unpleasant nature. Otherwise, Naggs would not be afraid to come openly to my house. He must have been getting into trouble with the police—and it will

be rather uncomfortable for me for a time."

The millowner reviewed the situation, and finally he decided to keep the appointment. His own position at Oldham was so assured—he was such a big man there—that he would not be suspected of anything.

If, by any chance, his name became mixed up with something of an unpleasant nature, Mr. Fordley would be able to clear himself without any difficulty.

But he did not think this likely. He was going to meet Naggs fifty miles from Oldham, and it was most improbable that anything of a startling nature would occur there.

"It was rather a good idea of Naggs," the mill-owner pondered. "For him to meet me in an empty house, half a mile from a small village, was certainly an excellent suggestion."

Nobody would ever know of that interview, and no comment would be raised. Naggs would hand over those plans and he would receive payment for them. After that Fordley would be able to do exactly as he pleased.

In any case, he would wait for a month or two before bringing out the design as his own. But, provided he was thoroughly satisfied that he could manage the affair without getting into trouble, he would certainly do so. Mr. William Fordley was not troubled by any scruples.

Mr. Fordley paced up and down for some little time, then he sat down in his easy-chair, and rang the bell. It was answered by a neat maidservant.

"Tell Fletcher that he is to bring the car round at once," said the mill-owner.

"Yes, sir."

Very shortly afterwards a huge motor-car came round from the private garage and pulled up in front of the house. Mr. Fordley had been thinking, meanwhile, and he decided that he would leave Oldham at once.

There were several hours to spend before his appointment with Naggs, but

it would be as well, the millowner decided, to pretend that he was going round on a series of business visits. There was no reason why everything should not be open and above-board. Mr. Fordley had nothing to fear, and he decided he would act openly.

He could go straight to Macclesfield, partake of luncheon there, and then continue on to one or two towns, making innocent calls, then, at four o'clock, he would arrive at Brentlowe.

It would not take long to deal with Mr. Naggs. Then Fordley would return home—and those valuable plans would be in his possession. Once they were in his grasp, he would not lose them.

And at just about this time three youthful passengers were starting from London—from King's Cross. The express had just left the great terminus, and those three youthful passengers were fortunate in being in a compartment to themselves.

"Good!" exclaimed Handforth, rubbing his hands softly. "We're off, my sons!"

"Speak for yourself," grunted Church.

"En?"

"There's no need to include us," said McClure. "You may be off, Handy, but we're not. You're off your rocker!"

"I'm not going to punch your head—it's too much trouble!" said Handforth loftily. "Besides, I expect this sort of talk from two fatheads like you. You haven't got any imagination—you don't possess an atom of energy. Here we are, just starting off on an important mission, and all you can do is to growl and grumble. What about Uncle George? He knew jolly well that the thing was serious—and he dubbed up a fiver at once. Two fivers, in fact. My uncle's a brick!"

"He was spoofed by you, anyway," said Church. "He thinks this thing is important—that it's really vital. The way you talked to him was scandalous, Handy. And all because of that, we're bound for Lancashire, and when we get there we shall have nothing to do—ex-

rept come back. In my opinion, it's wasting the whole holiday!"

"Wasting it!" roared Handforth. "Aren't we going to the rescue of Dick Goodwin?"

"Oh, don't talk piffle!" said McClure. "What's the good of us fellows going to the rescue of Goodwin, when Mr. Lee is there—on the spot? Can't we trust Mr. Lee to do the thing? Is it necessary for us to butt in?"

"Even the best detectives are liable to go wrong now and again," said Handforth. "Even I make a bloomer at times."

"Go hon!"

"No!" said McClure, staring. "Impossible!"

"Not had bloomers, of course," went on Handforth, unsuspicious. "And it's quite likely Mr. Lee has got on the wrong trail, or something of that sort. Anyhow, Naggs has got away with the plans, and it's up to us to find them. That's why we're going to Lancashire."

Church and McClure knew it was quite useless to argue. And so they said very little. In any case, they were having quite a decent holiday, and Church and McClure were resigned. They knew well enough that argument was hopeless—and that it made no difference what they said.

They really hadn't the faintest idea what they were going to do when they arrived at Oldham. Certainly they would engage in no detective work. They were convinced on this point.

As Handforth had said, his uncle George had turned up trumps. They had "wangled" some money from Handforth's genial relative, and the net result was that the three juniors were now on their way to Oldham.

In his own heart, Handforth probably had very little hopes of doing anything towards recovering those plans of Goodwin's. But he hated to be left out in the cold. He loathed the very thought of being out of this great adventure.

And that was why he was travelling to Lancashire now—so that he would

be able to share in the glory when they all returned to St. Frank's.

Even if he hadn't got any glory of his own to talk about, he would probably find some belonging to somebody else. And reflected glory was better than none at all—in Handforth's opinion.

The long journey to the North was devoid of all incident—until the last lap had been entered upon. Handforth and Church and McClure were rather fond of travelling in railway trains—they had a boyish liking for it. But they were rather tired of the journey long before they were due to enter Oldham.

"Well, I shall be jolly glad when the trip is over!" remarked Church. "I'm just about fed up with railway trains for to-day, Handy. And what are we going to do when we get to Oldham? That's what I've been thinking about."

Handforth smiled.

"You leave it to me," he said. "When we get to Oldham I'll tell you what to do. In any case, we're going to get on the track. Mr. Lee has failed, so it's up to me to step into the breach!"

"Oh, of course!" said McClure. "I was overlooking for the moment that you're about four times as clever as Nelson Lee."

Church tried his utmost not to laugh, and only succeeded in making an extraordinary sound in his throat.

"Well, not four times, my son," said Handforth. "I'm not going to say that I'm four times as clever as Mr. Lee. But he's failed in this case, and I think it will only be sporting for me to put things right. I shall be the chief detective, of course, and you chaps are my assistants."

"Oh, good!" said Church. "And how do we assist?"

"I shall give you your instructions later on," said Handforth. "There'll be plenty to do. When we get to Oldham we shall probably find a gang of criminals there. And you'll have to

follow them—get on the trail, you know. It all depends upon——"

"Hallo! Another stop!" interrupted McClure. "I thought this train was an express?"

"Well, it was an express until half an hour ago," said McClure. "But now we seem to be stopping at every little station."

The train was slowing down, and a moment or two later it pulled up against the platform of a small country station.

Curiously enough, as it was doing so, another train, travelling in the opposite direction, came to a standstill against the opposite platform.

Both trains were in the station at the same time. There was nothing very peculiar about this, of course, but Handforth, who was staring at the other train, suddenly gave a tremendous start.

"Great pip!" he ejaculated.

"What's the matter, you ass?" demanded Church.

"Well, I'm jiggered!" said Handforth. "I—I saw—there was somebody in that train!"

"Go hon!" grinned McClure. "How tremendously startling!"

"If you're going to be funny, Arnold McClure, I'll jolly well punch your silly nose!" said Handforth grimly. "It was Mr. Naggs—Naggs himself!"

"Oh, rot!" said Church.

Handforth fairly danced.

"I tell you it was Naggs!" he shouted excitedly. "He's in that train. I saw him as clearly as I can spot you now. He was sitting in a corner seat, and he's just up near the front of the train! I've seen the chap two or three times at St. Frank's, and I'd know him in a thousand. He's on that train—and it's a ten to one chance that he's bent on mischief. Mr. Lee has lost the trail—but I've succeeded in getting on to it! That's where we score, my sons!"

"But—but we can't do anything, Handy," protested Church.

"Can't do anything! Can't we? You wait, my children. You wait! I'll soon show you whether we can do anything or not!"

CHAPTER 14.

Handforth Buys In!

THERE was nothing particularly startling in this peculiar situation.

Mr. Walter Naggs was, indeed, on that train—exactly as Handforth had said. He was on his way to Brentlowe, in order to keep his appointment with Mr. William Fordley.

It was certainly something in the nature of a coincidence that these two trains should pull up at the same station, and thus give Handforth the opportunity of recognising the rascal who had been operating for so many weeks in the vicinity of St. Frank's.

But, after all, it was merely a natural state of affairs. Mr. Naggs was going to Brentlowe on one train, and Handforth & Co. were on their way to Oldham on another train.

It was inevitable that the two trains should pass—but it was extremely fortunate that they should stop at that small station at precisely the same time. Mr. Naggs, of course, was totally unaware of the fact that he had been seen and recognised.

"I'll soon show you what I'm going to do!" repeated Handforth grimly. "Look here, my sons, there's not a second to lose! One of these trains will be going in half a minute—and we've got to change!"

"Change!" exclaimed Church. "What do you mean?"

"We've got to get into that other train!"

"But—but that's impossible!" said McClure. "There isn't time, Handy! We've got to get out, cross over the footbridge, and then——"

"Rot!" interrupted Handforth. "There's no need to go to all that

trouble. I'll show you how we'll do it. Follow me!"

Handforth grabbed his handbag, and then opened the off-side door of the railway carriage. Church and McClure stared at him in alarm.

"What—what's the idea!" said McClure.

"Why, we're going across into that other train," said Handforth. "The compartment just opposite here is empty—you can see that? We've only got to step across—My only hat! There goes the whistle!"

The guard's whistle was indeed blowing.

Handforth wrenched open the door, leaned over towards the other train, and in a second the door of the opposite compartment was open. Handforth leapt across, and he was followed immediately by Church and McClure, who were too excited to do anything else.

And they were only just in the nick of time. They only just had a bare second to close the two carriage doors before the train for Oldham moved out of the station.

"Whew!" whistled McClure. "We've done it now!"

"There's no need for you chaps to worry," said Handforth, becoming quite calm. "We're in this train—and Naggs is just a little farther up, in one of the other carriages. We're going to follow him all the way—until he gets out! We'll watch every station—"

"But—but he may be going on to London!" protested Church.

"All right—we'll go to London, too!"

"My hat!"

"You—you must be dotty!"

Handforth smiled.

"A good detective never worries about distances," he said smoothly. "Once he gets on the trail, he sticks to the trail—even though it takes him half across the world! We're going to keep on this train until Naggs gets out of it."

"And what about our tickets?" asked

"Leave that to me. I'll arrange it," said Handforth. "I'm in charge of this case, don't forget!"

Handforth was in his element. By sheer chance he had succeeded in getting on the track of Mr. Naggs. Certainly, no credit could be given to Handforth for what had occurred.

But Handforth took the credit. He proceeded to explain to his chums, with many details, how he had executed the clever manœuvre.

Credit was due to Handforth in one respect, however; he had shown commendable promptitude in acting. He had not hesitated for a moment, but had taken the only chance that had presented itself.

As events turned out, however, the journey was not a very long one. The train stopped at the very next station—which Handforth & Co. had whizzed through at full speed on the other train.

It turned out to be Brentlowe, and Handforth was looking out of the window keenly, even before the train came to a standstill.

One second later he withdrew his head, and his face was flushed and excited.

"He's got out—Naggs has got out!" he exclaimed. "Come on, you chaps!"

"But—but—"

Handforth did not give his chums any time to argue. They bundled out of the train, and they carried their handbags with them. Only one or two people had alighted from the train, and Mr. Naggs had passed out by the time Handforth & Co. reached the barrier. A youthful ticket clerk was there, and he regarded the three boys with interest.

"Leave it to me," whispered Handforth. "I'll wangle things all right!"

Of course, the juniors had no tickets—excepting their tickets to Oldham. And Handforth did not want to go into any long explanations now. He gave his handbag to the ticket-collector and smiled beamingly.

here until the next train comes in, do you?" he said. "We'd like you to take charge of our handbags, too. There's no need to show our tickets, because we'll be coming back presently. Thanks awfully!"

The ticket collector took Handforth's bag, and was about to speak. But Church and McClure piled their bags on to him as well. And before the surprised collector could say anything, all the three juniors were outside, hurrying away from the station.

Handforth had certainly managed the trick smartly.

"It was the only thing to do, my sons!" he said. "If we had explained matters, we should have been kept there for hours!"

"But—but where's Naggs?" asked Church.

"There he is—right down the road!" said Handforth. "Can't you see him?"

He nodded his head, and Church and McClure, gazing down the country road, distinctly saw the figure of Mr. Naggs. The rascal was quite unsuspecting—he did not even glance round to see if anybody else had got off the train. As a matter of fact, Naggs was perfectly confident in his own safety, and he did not even consider the possibility of being tracked.

And, even if he had looked round, he would not have seen anything suspicious. Merely three boys, strolling along the road. He was too far off to recognise their features—and they were not wearing the well-known St. Frank's caps. They had changed these for tweed caps and put on overcoats as they left the train.

But if Handforth & Co. continued on the trail as they were going now, Naggs would certainly suspect something if he saw the boys. Handforth, stupid as he was, had sense enough to realise this. But perhaps it is rather hard to call Handforth stupid. He was really impulsive and headstrong, rather than stupid.

"Your chaps had better fall behind," he said. "Leave this game to me—

I'll track Naggs down. We'll string ourselves out, so to speak. You get a hundred yards behind me, Church, and McClure can get a hundred yards behind you. Then, if Naggs looks round, he won't see anything suspicious—because we shall be able to dodge into the hedge before he can spot anything."

"Right you are," said Church. "We're game for anything. Handy."

As a matter of fact, Church and McClure knew that it would have been quite useless to offer any suggestions of their own, not that they had any. They were not quite so sceptical as they had been. Handforth had, at least, got on the track of something—although there was no telling what it would lead to. It was quite likely that this would turn out to be a wild-goose chase. But there was no telling.

Mr. Naggs went along the country road at a swinging pace, and after proceeding for some little distance, he turned down a small lane which was almost concealed by thick trees. Handforth had not been seen—he had taken care to follow Naggs quite near the hedges. Thus, when Mr. Naggs glanced round for a moment, he saw nothing but the bare, open road. Handforth had kept to the hedge, and Church and McClure were concealed by a turning.

"Good!" muttered Handforth.

He hurried forward, and when he arrived at the turning, he peered cautiously down. The road was straight for some little distance, and the figure of his quarry was in view. A small house was in view, too—standing quite near the road, and it had an open front garden. It was a small, old-fashioned place, with a great deal of creeper hiding the brickwork.

Rather to Handforth's surprise, Mr. Naggs turned in at the gateway, walked up the short path, and let himself into the house by means of a key. The front door closed, and Handforth pursed his lips.

"Run to earth!" he exclaimed, dramatically. "By George! It hasn't taken me long to do this little bit of

work! Naggs is in that house—and it's a ten to one chance that he is meeting his fellow criminals there. It's up to me to see what the game is—and to recover those plans of Goodwin's."

Church came up at that moment, and after waiting for a minute or two, McClure appeared.

"What's the game?" asked the latter.

"Have you lost him, Handy?"

"Lost him!" echoed Handforth. "No, you ass, I haven't! Naggs has gone into that cottage—he let himself in with a latch key!"

"Perhaps he lives there," suggested Church.

"Well, that's possible, but I don't believe it's true," said Handforth. "In my opinion, the house is empty—except for Naggs."

"How the dickens can you tell that?"

"Well, all the blinds are down, for one thing," said Handforth. "That doesn't seem as though anybody is in there, does it? It looks to me as if the house is empty. Anyhow, I'm going to scout round, and make investigations."

"You'd better be careful——"

"Oh, you needn't tell me to be careful," interrupted Handforth. "I know what I'm doing. You chaps have got to stay here on the watch. Or, better still, you'd better get behind the hedge, in case anybody else comes along—then you won't be spotted. You watch the house, and wait until I come back."

Handforth walked off without waiting for his chums to say anything. And he approached the house cautiously. At least, he imagined that he did so. But Handforth was not much good at this kind of work. He dodged about, from side to side, and by the time he arrived at the house, he had exposed himself on several occasions.

Finally, he reached the garden of the place, and managed to squeeze through a little gap in the hedge. Handforth did not believe in doing things by halves. He had come to have a look round this cottage, and he was going

to look thoroughly—at close quarters.

The blinds were down, so it was impossible for him to be seen. That is the way Handforth argued. He decided that it would be better for him to creep round to the back, for there might be a window there, through which he could glimpse.

With this object in view, he crept along, and passed round to the rear of the little house. But there was nothing to be seen here. All the blinds were drawn, and there was no door. This rather surprised Handforth. Surely there was a rear door to this house?

"It's rummy!" muttered the amateur detective. "Oh, I suppose there's a side door—round in the other wall? I'd better have a look in that direction."

If only Handforth had used his eyes earlier, he would have seen the side door—for it was in full view from the corner. Church and McClure could see it distinctly from the spot where they were hiding.

And, presently, they saw Handforth creeping round the corner of the house with exaggerated caution. Handforth's eyes gleamed as he saw the doorway. And, to his satisfaction, the door was slightly open.

Handforth believed in bold measures. He was always a ram-headed youth, and he decided, then and there, to creep up to the door, and to venture in. He would go into the very house itself—and, what was more, he would capture Mr. Naggs single handed.

"By George!" muttered Handforth, his eyes gleaming. "I'll do the trick—I'll collar the scoundrel!"

He arrived at the doorway, and he was just about to creep in, when something of a rather startling nature took place.

The door opened abruptly, and a hand reached out. It grasped Handforth by the collar before he could say anything, or do anything. The next second, Edward Oswald Handforth was yanked through the doorway with ter-

rise force. And the door closed with a slam.

Church and McClure, who had seen this little incident, gazed at one another in alarm.

"He's—he's collared!" gasped Church. "Oh, my only hat!"

"Nabbed!" said the other junior. "What—what the dickens shall we do?"

Handforth's chums were rather startled, and they were worried, too. For they knew that Handforth's impetuosity had led him into a difficult position. He had been captured by Mr. Naggs—who had probably been on the alert. And now, without the slightest doubt, Handforth was a prisoner in the cottage.

"Well, we shall have to go and rescue him!" said Church. "We simply must, you know. There are two of us, and I think we can manage the trick, if we go about it in the right way."

"Haden't we better tell the police?" asked McClure.

"The police—where are they?" asked Church. "There aren't any police about here, you ass. The only thing we can do is to take matters into our own hands, and——"

"Shush!" whispered the other. "There's a car coming!"

A large saloon car came along the main road, and then turned down this little side lane. Church and McClure watched it with interest—but they themselves were quite concealed. And, to their surprise, the car came to a halt outside that cottage. It contained two men—the chauffeur and a gentleman who was seated on the rear cushions.

This individual rose, stepped out of the car, and spoke for a moment or two to the chauffeur. Then he opened the gate, went up to the little house, and entered.

Almost at once the motor car turned about, by a series of manoeuvres, and came back along the road. It turned out of the lane, and soon vanished in

the distance. Church and McClure witnessed all this, and now they looked at one another rather doubtfully.

"It's no good, old son," said Church. "We can't go and rescue Handforth now—there are two men there—Naggs and this other chap. We shall only get ourselves into trouble, too, if we interfere."

"Then what shall we do?"

"I reckon the best thing to be done is for us to go back to the station, get on a train, and go on to Oldham!" said Church firmly. "We shall find Mr. Lee there, and all the others. We'll tell Mr. Lee all about it, and he'll know what to do. I don't feel like taking the responsibility."

"But that'll take hours!" protested McClure.

"It can't be helped—it's our only course," said Church. "Come on!"

And, as a matter of fact, their position was rather a peculiar one. If they went to the local police—provided they could find a policeman—what could they tell him? The representative of the law would probably laugh at their story, and would do nothing. They had no real evidence of any villainy, and it was practically certain that a country policeman would take no action. Therefore, it was better, on the whole, to go on to Oldham, and to tell Nelson Lee all about the whole adventure. It would take time, but that was unavoidable.

By a pure piece of luck, a train was due almost at once when Church and McClure arrived at the station. They did not worry about their handbags; they waited until the train was in the station, and then they dashed past the barrier, and into a compartment just as the guard blew his whistle. And before any action could be taken by the ticket collector, the train was off. Church and McClure had their tickets, so there was no swindle about this—they had only acted in this way in order to avoid lengthy explanations.

In well under the hour they were in Oldham—they were in that busy, teeming hive of industry. But Church and McClure had no time to take any interest in their surroundings.

They were intent upon arriving at the Malden Arms Hotel, and they only took casual interest in the thousands or sturdy figures that were everywhere to be seen—the mill workers on their way home, after their day's labour. And Lancashire lasses, with their shawls, only gained a scant amount of attention from the two schoolboys.

They found it necessary to make two or three inquiries before they were on the right road towards the hotel. But, at last, they arrived, and they were greatly relieved when they were informed that Mr. Nelson Lee and Mr. Goodwin and several others were staying at the hotel.

Without delay, the two juniors hurried up to the suite of rooms which had been engaged by the party. And when they arrived in the corridor, they came face to face with three juniors—Sir Montie Tregellis-West, Tommy Watson, and myself.

"Bogad!" ejaculated Montie, adjusting his pince-nez. "This is simply amazing, dear old boys!"

"Church!" shouted Tommy Watson. "McClure!" I exclaimed. "Where's Handforth?"

"He's a prisoner!" gasped Church. "Handy has been taken prisoner by Naggs—and we want Mr. Lee to go to the rescue!"

"What!" I exclaimed. "Handforth has been made a prisoner—by Naggs! Is this a joke? And what the dickens are you chaps doing here—in Oldham? How did you get here? Who told you to come? How did you manage to get leave from St. Frank's?"

"We can't answer all those questions now," said Church. "Where's Mr. Lee?"

"He's not here!"

"Not here!" said McClure blankly.

"No—he is missing!"

"Missing!"

"Well, we haven't seen anything of him since last night," I said. "Everything seems to be a bit upside down. But what's this you're saying about Naggs?"

Before going into any further details, Church and McClure were taken along to the apartment where Mr. Goodwin and Dick were seated. They jumped up as soon as we entered. And then commenced a long series of explanations.

Church was the spokesman, and he told us exactly what had happened. He explained how Handforth had got the letter from his father, how they had all come to London, and how Handforth had decided to hurry straight off to Oldham—to accomplish the work which Nelson Lee had failed to do. We simply roared with laughter at that—but, at the same time, we realised that Handforth had done something which we had failed to do.

The gov'nor had vanished—he had not turned up during the whole day. Personally, I believed that he was on the track somewhere—that he knew precisely what was going on, and was making arrangements of his own. At the same time, we didn't know—therefore, it was up to us to act upon this information.

I suggested that we should hurry off to the rescue of Handforth without any delay. Mr. Goodwin seconded this proposal, and before long there was a great deal of bustle.

Exactly ten minutes later we were off.

And, although we did not know it, Nelson Lee was extremely active. He had been doing much—and it was his intention to bring this affair to a satisfactory conclusion almost at once.

This was Handforth's plan, too—but Handforth had not managed things quite as well as he intended.

The climax of this case was near at hand!

CHAPTER 17.

Handforth Gets a Surprise!

"WOW! What the dickens——!" Handforth uttered that remark—and he did so while he was being suddenly hauled into the side doorway of that small house just outside Brentlowe.

As Church and McClure had related, Handforth had been captured; they had seen him yanked into the building by Mr. Naggs. And then the door had closed with a slam.

Handforth was considerably astonished to find himself in trouble. He had been prowling round the house, with the avowed intention of finding out a great many things. Not for an instant had Handforth anticipated that he would get into trouble.

And now, quite suddenly, Naggs had appeared in the doorway, and Handforth was hauled bodily into the building. As an amateur detective, he was not an unqualified success.

"You young brat!" rapped out Mr. Naggs. "I'll teach you to come prowling round here——"

"Leave me go!" gasped Handforth. "By George, I'll jolly soon show you what I'll do! If you think you can hold me, you've made a bloomer!"

"Steady, kid—steady!" smiled Mr. Naggs. "I know who you are. Your name is Handforth, and you belong to St. Frank's School. How you got here I don't know, but you're going to stay here!"

"Am I?" said Handforth. "We'll see about that, you ratter! I know what your game is—I know everything! You've got those plans belonging to Dick Goodwin, and you're going to sell them, or something! Well, I've come along to put a stop to your rotten game!"

He struggled fiercely, and Mr. Naggs found that he had a pretty large hand. Indeed, the man appeared rather startled to discover, a moment or two later, that he was incapable of holding his prisoner. Handforth was lashing

out wildly, and in a minute or two he would certainly regain his freedom.

And Handforth had all that intention. He was quite determined to give Mr. Naggs—free, gratis, and for nothing—several samples of his famous punch.

But then suddenly Handforth received a shock.

"Look here, Handforth," said Mr. Naggs sharply. "I didn't intend to reveal the fact to you, but you compel me to do so. Stop this struggling at once. Do you hear me?"

Handforth stopped.

"Why, what the dickens—you—you——"

"You apparently notice the difference in my voice, Handforth, eh?" said Mr. Naggs. "I think you know who I am now, don't you?"

Handforth seemed to gulp something down.

"Mr.—Mr. Lee!" he exclaimed huskily.

"Exactly!" smiled the man. "Now, Handforth, perhaps you will realise that your presence here is not absolutely welcome?"

"I—I—I'm awfully sorry, sir!" panted Handforth. "You—you see, I didn't realise——"

"I'm very annoyed with you, Handforth!" said Nelson Lee sharply. "You had no right whatever to enter this house, and to interfere in affairs which do not concern you!"

"But—but——"

"I do not want to hear any excuses, Handforth," interrupted Nelson Lee curtly. "I came to this house on a special mission, and I am exceedingly annoyed to find that you have forced your presence upon me. You must leave without any delay, Handforth; I cannot have you here!"

"I—I'm frightfully sorry, sir!" said Handforth, staring at Nelson Lee in a peculiar way. "But—but it seems so strange, you know! I know who you are, sir; but you look just like Naggs! It's a marvellous disguise, sir!"

Lee smiled slightly.

"I have a very good reason for adopting this disguise, Handforth," he said. "It is necessary that I should be quite alone in this house. Within a minute or two I am expecting a visitor. I have an appointment here with Sir Charles Rigny. It is on a matter of great importance—not unconnected with the affairs of Dick Goodwin. That is all I can say to you. I am angry with you for interfering, and you will hear more about this later on!"

"Oh, I say, sir!" protested Handforth. "I only acted for the best!"

"I do not want to hear——"

"I thought you were Naggs, sir, and I followed you because I wanted to get on the track!" said Handforth. "There was no harm in that, sir! Dash it all, I'll go at once if you want me to, and I'm perfectly willing to remain here and lend you a hand!"

"You will lend me a hand, eh?"

"Rather, sir!" said Handforth eagerly. "I'm rather good at detective work—this affair proves it. I'm not a chap to boast, but I think I was pretty smart on this job. If you had really been Naggs, I should have been on the track right off!"

"You would, Handforth—I agree with you there!" said the detective nodding. "Well, I do not feel inclined to waste any further——"

He paused, for at this moment came the sound of a throbbing motor-car.

"Ah, Sir Charles has arrived!" said Nelson Lee. "Wait here, Handforth, until I return. I must have a word with my visitor, and then you must leave at once. But there is just a chance that I may wish you to take a message to Oldham for me, so wait here until I come back."

"Right you are, sir!" said Handforth.

Nelson Lee left the room, and Handforth heard him open the front door. Then there followed a low mumble of voices for several minutes. Handforth looked about him without interest. He was rather disappointed with the result of his inquiry. He had expected

to do this thing off his own bat, and he had now discovered that Nelson Lee was on the job, too. It was a decided disappointment.

The door opened, and Lee entered once more. Behind him came another man—a gentleman attired in a thick overcoat, and he was wearing goggles—great goggles which acted like a mask.

"Oh, so this is the lad, Mr. Lee!" said Sir Charles. "Well, it doesn't matter—don't be cross with him. I dare say he was acting all for the best. Let him go at once."

"Just as you wish, Sir Charles," said the detective. "You do not wish him to take any message for you?"

"No, Mr. Lee, I think not."

Nelson Lee turned to Handforth.

"You must go at once, Handforth," he said. "The best thing you can do is to go straight to Oldham, and go to the Malden Arms Hotel. When you get there, wait for me. I shall probably be in Oldham later on in the evening. Good-bye, my lad!"

"Good-bye, sir!" said Handforth.

Handforth was about to turn away when he paused, and an expression of slight astonishment came into his eyes, for he suddenly noticed that Nelson Lee had extended his hand.

"Oh, I see, sir!" said Handforth.

He shook hands with the detective, and then Nelson Lee escorted him to the front door. And, somehow or other, Handforth appeared to be somewhat dazed.

There was a blank expression in his eyes, and his cheeks had become flushed. He walked out of the doorway, and walked down the short garden path, as though he were in a kind of trance.

His heart was beating rapidly, and within him he was tremendously excited.

As a matter of fact, Edward Oswald Handforth had made an astounding discovery.

It was so startling that he could hardly believe it at first. As he used

his wits, he realised that he had made no mistake. But he still walked on—he still walked away from that cottage.

In the first place, Handforth had been rather surprised at Nelson Lee's action in extending his hand. It was not the detective's usual custom to shake hands with junior schoolboys. Only on very special occasions would Nelson Lee offer his palm to Handforth, and this did not seem to be one of those special occasions.

But Handforth had not been actually suspicious because of this action. In taking Nelson Lee's hand, however, Handforth had noticed a deep scar on the detective's forefinger. It was not a scar that could be missed every easily.

There had been a wound on that finger two or three years earlier, by the look of it, and the scar was an ugly one. It was this disfigurement that was causing Handforth such a lot of mental agitation.

When he got some little distance down the road, he came to a halt.

"Well, I'm jiggered!" he muttered. "What the dickens does it mean? That scar isn't on Mr. Lee's hand! I've seen his forefinger dozens of times, and I know jolly well that he hasn't got a rotten scar on it like that!"

Handforth stared unseeingly before him, thinking rapidly.

"I've been spoofed!" he exclaimed, addressing the hedge. "I've been daddled—I've been dished! By George, it's a good thing I've got my eyes about me—it's a good thing I'm not a silly ass! That was Naggs after all, and not Mr. Lee——"

This was certainly a startling conclusion to come to, but it was obviously the truth. The man in the cottage was not Nelson Lee at all, but Walter Naggs. The rascal, finding Handforth had entered the house, had bluffed the matter out, in making Handforth believe that he was really Nelson Lee in disguise.

But for that forefinger incident, Handforth would probably have been deceived all along. But Naggs had made a mistake in offering the boy his

hand—a very big mistake, for it had given Handforth the direct clue.

Nelson Lee had no such scar on his finger, therefore this man could not be Nelson Lee!

"And now I come to think of it," muttered Handforth, "the chap didn't speak much like Mr. Lee, either. I was deceived at first, because I wasn't on the alert. But these rotters can't spoof me! Sir Charles Rigby! What rot! I'll bet that's not his name at all! He's probably the rotter that Naggs is going to sell those plans to!"

Handforth was certainly well on the scent, and he was firmly determined not to relax his efforts.

Handforth was furious, but he did not rush back along the road and burst into that house again. He had too much sense for that.

He stood there, quite still, thinking the matter out.

"The rotters!" he exclaimed wrathfully. "The confounded rotters! But they haven't been able to diddle me—not likely! I'll show them what I'm made of! I'll show them whether they can get rid of me in that way. Now I can understand why that other chap kept his goggles on all the time. He didn't want me to see who he really was, because I should be able to recognise him afterwards!"

For once in a way, Handforth was quite shrewd. He had seen through Mr. Naggs' little scheme. It was obvious to him that Naggs had pretended to be Nelson Lee in order to get the junior out of the way.

Meanwhile, Mr. Naggs was quite pleased with himself.

His companion, of course, was none other than Mr. William Fordley, the mill-owner. Naggs had explained the situation to Fordley as soon as he had admitted him into the house, and Fordley had acted his part. And now Handforth had gone, and it was pretty certain that he would go straight into Oldham.

"The young imp!" said Naggs harshly. "It's a good thing I got hold

of him, Mr. Fordley. It might have been a serious matter for both of us if I had not succeeded in throwing dust in his eyes."

"But do you think you have succeeded?" asked Fordley anxiously.

"Of course I have, sir!"

"Are you sure?" persisted Fordley. "If that boy knows the truth, Naggs, it will be terribly serious!"

"Don't you worry, Mr. Fordley," interrupted Naggs. "He has been duped completely, and by the time he gets to Oldham we shall have our business completed, and then we shall separate. There will be absolutely no possibility of Handforth giving any information that will prove to be of value."

"Well, I don't feel quite satisfied," Naggs said Mr. Fordley. "However, I don't suppose that it will make any difference if we discuss the subject. We had better get to business without any delay."

"That's my idea, sir," said Naggs promptly.

They were in the little back room, which was quite comfortably furnished. In the centre of the apartment stood a square table, with a long plush cloth covering it. Both Naggs and Fordley drew chairs up to the table, and sat down facing one another. This was the moment for which Mr. Naggs had long been waiting, and he was only slightly disturbed by the incident which had just taken place.

Naggs was quite certain in his own mind that nothing harmful would result from Handforth's interference; but, of course, Naggs looked upon the thing from a totally different point of view from what Fordley did. For it was known that Naggs had taken the plans, and once he had got rid of them, and received the money from Fordley, it would be all right. Even if he fell foul of the police, they could prove nothing, for he would have disposed of the plans by then, and, so far as he was concerned, everything would be straightforward.

But it was different with Mr. Fordley.

He was about to take those plans into his possession, and, if the police got any wind of what had taken place, it would be very awkward for the mill-owner. It was, therefore, not surprising that Mr. Fordley was rather worried.

"I don't feel at all sure about this, Naggs," said Fordley, frowning. "I don't like that boy being here, and I think it was a mistake on our part to send him away."

"Not at all, sir!" said Mr. Naggs. "It would have been a greater mistake for us to keep him here, for we should have been compelled to show our hand. We should have had to make him a prisoner, in order to keep him quiet."

"That might have been better," said Mr. Fordley grimly.

"I don't think so, sir," said Naggs. "That would have been a police job then. But there is nothing to prove that Handforth's word is true, if he takes his story to the police, even. It will be regarded, in all probability, as a pure fabrication."

"There is that, of course," admitted the mill-owner.

"You needn't worry at all, Mr. Fordley," went on Naggs. "We didn't mention anything about the plans, and Handforth hasn't the slightest idea of your identity. You were wearing those goggles, as I suggested, and it will be quite impossible for the boy to recognise you again. You were very well disguised."

"Oh, well, there is no sense in worrying about it, I suppose," said Mr. Fordley. "As you said, Naggs, anything that the youngster may report to the police will not do any harm. My own position is secure, and if there is anything spread against me, I can clear myself with the greatest of ease. I have already prepared a perfect alibi for myself to-day. At the present moment I am in Macclesfield—you understand? There are plenty of witnesses who will be able to prove that, if necessary."

Mr. Naggs smiled.

"I knew you were a clever gentleman, sir!" he exclaimed. "You'll be safe enough; there's no need to worry at all. And now we'll get to business."

"Right!" said Mr. Fordley. "You have the plans with you?"

"Yes, sir."

"Let me see them."

"Certainly!"

"I observe that you are hesitating," Naggs said Mr. Fordley. "There is no necessity for you to do that. We are sitting here, facing one another, and there will be no treachery on my part. I agreed to pay you a certain price for those plans, and you have got them. I shall not attempt to get out of that agreement."

"I trust you, Mr. Fordley, of course!" said Naggs, rather hurriedly.

He had appeared to be reluctant to take the envelope out of his pocket, but he did so now, mentally deciding that he was on the safe side. He was a more powerful man than Fordley, and if the latter attempted any treachery, Naggs would be able to deal with him.

The rascal took the envelope from his pocket, and passed it across the table. Mr. Fordley opened the flap, and then removed the contents. He was greatly interested, and he examined the plans intently. He gave them so much attention, in fact, that Naggs became somewhat impatient. Minute after minute passed, and still Fordley made no remark. He was examining those wonderful plans of Dick Goodwin's.

"Well, sir?" said Naggs at last.

"Yes, Naggs—yes," said Mr. Fordley. "We will go into the business in a moment or two. Man alive! This machine is wonderful—positively wonderful! I can hardly credit that it has been designed by a boy!"

"He seems to be a clever kid, sir!"

"Clever!" echoed the mill-owner. "I can assure you, Naggs, that this boy is a genius! He has solved a problem that has been worrying the experts for years. This machine, when built, will put every other machine out of the

market. It is positively the most wonderful instrument of its type that has ever been evolved. It will mean a fortune for the man who exploits this invention!"

"So I understand, sir," said Naggs. "That is why you are agreeable to pay me a good price."

Mr. Fordley looked across the table.

"Exactly, Naggs!" he said. "You have got those plans for me, and I am going to pay you well. But you must not overlook the fact that I am taking a good deal of risk in this affair. However, I think we are fairly safe now, and we will discuss—"

"Ting-ting-ting!"

The front door bell rang loudly. The bell itself was in the kitchen, just off the apartment where the two men were sitting. They started up, looking at one another in rather a peculiar fashion. Mr. Fordley went pale, and Naggs set his teeth.

What was the meaning of this interruption?

"Good heavens?" panted Fordley.

"Who—who is that?"

"I don't know, sir—I can't think!" said Naggs. "We are expecting nobody, and—"

"Go to the door at once—go and see who it is!" said Fordley. "If the police have come, about a warning—I may possibly be able to get away at the rear. Hurry, Naggs—but wait! I will come with you. I will be in the front room, and watch from behind a blind. I do not want to be trapped!"

Both the men were in a considerable state of agitation. This sudden interruption was unexpected. Who could the caller be? At any ordinary time both Naggs and Fordley would have thought nothing of a chance ring at the bell, but at the present moment, and with guilty consciences to worry them, they were both exceedingly trembled.

Mr. Naggs passed out of the room, and went along to the front door. Mr. Fordley followed him, but took up his position in the little front-room, close behind the open door. From there he

could see who the caller was, and would be able to get away quickly, if necessary.

Mr. Naggs opened the door, and he instinctively clenched his fists. If capture was coming Naggs fully intended putting up a fight before being taken.

And Naggs found himself looking upon a curious specimen of humanity. He stood upon the doorstep, ragged and dirty, a rather pitiful figure.

The man was a tramp, obviously. His clothing was torn, patched, and repaired in almost every garment. His boots were gaping, and they were secured by pieces of string. His head was adorned by a dilapidated old trilby hat, the brim of which was parting company from the crown.

And under the brim of the hat there could be seen a grimy, unshaven face. He was a gentleman of the road, and he looked up at Mr. Naggs with an appealing light in his eyes.

"Beg pardon, sir—" he began.

"What the deuce do you want?" demanded Mr. Naggs angrily.

He was relieved to find that the visitor was no more harmful than that. At the same time he was angry for being put into a flutter by a mere tramp. He glared at the harmless scarecrow rather furiously.

"Beggin' your pardon, sir, but I'd welcome a glass of water," said the tramp. "It's dry work—walkin' along the roads, sir. I ain't askin' for beer or money—or grub. All I want is a glass of water, if you'll be so kind as to let me have it!"

"Go away!" said Naggs curtly.

"Only a glass of water, sir—"

"You won't get any water here," snapped Mr. Naggs, preparing to close the door. "There are some other cottages farther down the road—they will give you water, perhaps. I haven't got time to attend to you now. Besides, the well here is out of order!"

"Only just a cupful, sir—"

Slam!

The door closed with a bang, and the tramp stood on the step, looking at

the panels of the door in a somewhat disappointed attitude. Then, without wasting a moment, he seized the knocker, and gave a sharp rattle. At the same time he pushed the electric-bell button.

Almost at once the door opened again.

"Confound you!" snapped Mr. Naggs. "What the deuce do you think you're playing at?"

"Only a glass of water, sir!" protested the tramp. "It don't matter if it's dirty. I'm thirsty, sir! There ain't any other cottages for a long way—"

"I told you to go away from this house, and if you don't go quickly, I'll throw you into the road!" exclaimed Mr. Naggs hotly. "And if you ring this bell again, I'll—"

"No offence meant, sir," said the tramp apologetically. "I'm a poor, harmless feller. Maybe, you can spare me a cup of water, sir? I ain't askin' for money, or grub, or beer!"

Mr. Naggs drew a deep breath.

"I'll give you just two seconds to get off that doorstep!" he snapped. "I've had just enough of your nonsense, my man, and I'm not going to stand any more."

The tramp shook his head.

"All right, sir—I beg your pardon," he said bumbly. "But I thought as how good, honest people wouldn't mind obligin' a poor feller with a glass of water. It seems I was wrong. I'm very sorry, sir."

He turned away, and as he did so, Mr. Naggs suddenly had an idea—an idea which rather startled him. He made up his mind on the instant.

"All right—hold on a minute!" he said quickly.

The tramp turned.

"Bed pardon, sir?" he exclaimed.

"Come here!"

The tramp stepped on to the door step, and as he did so Mr. Naggs reached out a hand, and pulled the dilapidated hat from the tramp's head. Then, quick as a flash, Mr. Naggs

grasped the man's hair, and gave a sharp and vigorous tug.

"Owl!" gasped the tramp. "Lumme, guv'nor! What the thunder——"

Mr. Naggs suddenly released his hold, and there was an expression of relief in his eyes. He looked into the tramp's face searchingly.

"Only a joke, my man," he exclaimed. "Look here, I can't stop to give you any water now, but here's half a crown, if it's any good to you."

The tramp's eyes opened wide.

"Thank you kindly, sir!" he said eagerly. "You're a real gent, sir!"

He turned away, walked down the path, and when he reached the gate he raised his dilapidated hat, and then went on his way. Mr. Naggs nodded, and closed the door. The very instant he did so, Mr. Fordley came hurrying along the passage from his hiding place.

"What the deuce did you want to waste all that time for, Naggs?" he demanded angrily. "Who was the fellow, anyhow?"

"Only a tramp, sir——"

"A tramp," snapped Mr. Fordley. "You ought to have got rid of him at once, and instead of that, you kept him hanging about all this time. What on earth were you thinking about, man?"

"Well, I'm cautious, sir," explained Mr. Naggs. "At first I only wanted to get rid of the fellow—he was so persistent asking for a glass of water."

"You ought to have shut the door in his face!"

"I did—at first," replied Mr. Naggs. "But, as you know, sir, he rang the bell again. And then something suddenly struck me."

"What was it?"

"Well, sir, I just wondered if the tramp was a 'lec in disguise——"

"Good heavens!" ejaculated Mr. Fordley.

"But I don't think he is," added Mr. Naggs, with a chuckle.

"How do you know—how can you be sure?" demanded the other huskily. "Man alive! That fellow may be a

Lee himself. I've heard that Lee is wonderful when it comes to disguises——"

"He's a bit of a marvel, sir," said Mr. Naggs. "That's why I kept that tramp waiting, so that I could make sure. But when I pulled at his hair, I was quite certain. His hair is coarse, reddish stuff, and there's a thick stubble on his chin. He's a genuine tramp, right enough. Mr. Fordley, there's no need for us to worry now."

The mill-owner breathed a sigh of relief.

"Good!" he exclaimed. "It's just as well you made sure, Naggs. Well, come along, we will get back into the rear room. I do not intend to remain here a moment longer than is necessary. We will get this business over at once."

"Good enough, sir," said Mr. Naggs. "Nothing will suit me better!"

They passed along the little passage, and re-entered the room at the rear of the house. Then they took their seats at opposite sides of the table, and faced one another. Mr. Fordley withdrew the plans from his pocket, and once more spread them out on the table in front of him.

"Yes, Naggs, these plans are extraordinary," he said. "I do not pretend to understand how a boy of fifteen could have evolved the intricate mechanism of this machine. I am more than pleased that I commissioned you to obtain these documents from Goodwin's son."

"It's been a rare trouble to get them, sir," said Naggs. "I had two men helping me all the while, and one of them—Colmore—got nabbed. He's in prison now, or, at least, in the police-station awaiting his trial. I've been pretty near being copped myself, so I reckon it's worth a pretty decent sum to you!"

Mr. Fordley nodded.

"You will not have any cause to grumble at the price I will pay you,

want I pay well. You are quite sure that these are the original plans."

"Quite sure, sir!"

"And there are no copies in existence."

"Not to my knowledge, Mr. Fordley."

"Well, it makes little difference, in either direction," said the mill-owner. "I shall produce these plans as my own when a short space of time has passed. I shall have them patented, then I can snap my fingers at Goodwin. He will know that such is the case, of course. But it will be quite impossible for him to bring any evidence against me."

"Of course it will, sir," said Mr. Naggs. "You're as safe as houses. There's no need for you to worry about anything, sir."

"Well, Naggs, we'll get to business at once, without any beating about the bush," said Mr. Fordley. "I am willing to pay you the sum of eight thousand pounds for your services in this matter. Will that be satisfactory?"

Mr. Naggs looked straight across the table at the other.

"Eight thousand pounds was the agreed upon figure, sir," he said. "But, in the circumstances, I think that a little larger sum will meet the case. I had far more trouble than I expected I should have, and a good deal of expense, too. I think it's worth more than eight thousand, Mr. Fordley."

"Well, I don't want to haggle with you, Naggs," said the mill-owner. "We will say nine thousand—"

"Hold on, sir!" interrupted Mr. Naggs. "That's uneven money. I don't care for uneven money, so what about making it ten thousand? That seems more like the figure, to my way of thinking."

"Look here, Naggs, I didn't think you were a grasping man of this sort," said Fordley irritably. "As it happens, I have brought ten thousand with me. I am not going to argue, and we shall not quarrel. I will pay you ten thousand as you wish."

"Done!" said Mr. Naggs, his eyes gleaming.

"Well, don't forget, Naggs, that this is the one and only payment," said Fordley. "If you come to me later on, in a month or two, and expect to obtain a further sum, you'll be disappointed. You'll be unable to blackmail me, either, because you will have not one atom of proof. I want you thoroughly to understand that now. I pay you ten thousand pounds, and that settles the deal completely."

"Quite right, sir," said Naggs. "I understand that perfectly. And I'm not the kind of man to attempt blackmail—it's rather too risky, to my way of thinking. Ten thousand settles the deal, as you say."

But, even while Naggs was saying these words, his thoughts were quite different. For, inwardly, Mr. Naggs was assuring himself he was on velvet. After a respectable interval, he would be able to go to Fordley again, and he would extract more money from the millowner. For Mr. Fordley would be unable to refuse. Naggs knew this well enough. He was cunning, and he intended to get all he could.

Naggs had not really expected to receive the extra two thousand. But it was evident that Mr. Fordley had prepared for such a demand. For he had brought ten thousand pounds with him, in cash.

It was a good stroke of business for him. He would give Naggs ten thousand pounds for obtaining the plans, and Fordley would make a fortune out of the invention. The millowner had the money behind him in order to exploit the new machine. And, before many months had elapsed, he would be raking in the profits, hand over fist.

So he regarded this ten thousand as a very excellent investment. And, it gave Fordley keen satisfaction to know that he would be delivering a death blow to Mr. Richard Goodwin.

But, although the transaction between Mr. Fordley and Mr. Naggs was nearly completed, it was somewhat

unwise of them to take things for granted.

There is many a slip 'twixt the cup and the lip.

CHAPTER 18.

Nelson Lee Makes His Plans!

ANDREWS drove sedately and steadily.

He was Mr. Fordley's chauffeur, and he was carrying out the instructions which his employer had given him.

Upon reaching Brentlowe Fordley had got rid of the chauffeur at once. He had no desire to have his car waiting about outside a small house, while he and Nagas were coming to terms.

So he had sent Andrews off to the nearest town, in order to obtain a supply of petrol. The man would be absent just about long enough to enable Mr. Fordley to complete his arrangements with Nagas.

Andrews appeared to be in no hurry. He drove very easily along the quiet country road, and at length he arrived in the town. He certainly went to a garage and obtained a supply of petrol. But instead of returning straight to Brentlowe, he occupied himself in another manner.

There was nothing very remarkable about this. Andrews knew well enough that it would be useless to return to Brentlowe yet; Mr. Fordley would not be ready. And the chauffeur, evidently had ideas of his own.

From the garage he drove his car along the High Street until he pulled up outside a grey stone building—a somewhat forbidding-looking place, with a few notices posted up outside the door. It was, in short, the police station.

Andrews stopped his engine, and got down from the driving-seat. Then he passed into the police station, and was soon talking to a constable.

"I should like to have a few words with the inspector," said Andrews. "Is he anywhere handy?"

"Yes, the inspector is in the charge-room, if you want him," said the constable. "What's wrong?"

"I would prefer to see the inspector," said Andrews.

A minute or two later Mr. Fordley's chauffeur was ushered into the presence of Inspector Hammond. This individual was a short, thick-set man, with close-cropped hair, and a bristling moustache. He looked a somewhat aggressive person, and he did not bestow a very kindly glance upon the chauffeur as he entered.

"Well, my man, what is it?" asked the inspector. "I'm busy at the moment, and I should like you to be quick!"

Andrews nodded.

"As a matter of fact, Inspector Hammond, I shall detain you for some little time," he said calmly. "My business is of considerable importance, and I must request you to give me your full and complete attention."

"Oh, indeed!" said the inspector, glaring. "And who the deuce do you happen to be?"

Andrews smiled slightly, felt in his waistcoat pocket, and produced a small slip of pasteboard. He handed it to the constable, who glanced at it before passing it on to Inspector Hammond. The constable glanced twice, and his second look was rather a startled one.

"Hut! What's this?" growled the inspector, taking the card. "What's the good of a tongue if you can't use it? I didn't ask you for your card—Why, what— Good gracious!"

Inspector Hammond stared at the slip of pasteboard in a curious, sceptical manner. He glanced up at Andrews, and then stared at the card again. Finally, he laid the little object on the desk in front of him, and leaned forward.

"Now, my friend, what's the game?" he inquired grimly.

"I think you have read the name—"

"I have read it, and it is like your infernal impudence to present me with

such a card!" snapped the inspector. "What's the idea of it, my man?"

"You do not seem to grasp——"
"Look here, I don't want any nonsense!" interrupted the inspector sharply. "And if you think you can palm yourself off as Mr. Nelson Lee, you have made a big mistake. Who are you? A chauffeur, by all appearances—and you had better be sharp about your explanation. I want to know what you mean by giving me this card?"

Andrews shrugged his shoulders.

"I simply thought you might be interested, Inspector Hammond," he replied.

"Interested!" spluttered the inspector. "Who are you? What is your real name?"

"You are already aware of my real name," said the chauffeur.

"Nonsense! Your name has not been mentioned——"

"It is before you on the desk at this moment!" interrupted Andrews calmly. "Really, Inspector Hammond, you do not seem to grasp the position."

The inspector glared.

"Are you attempting to make me believe that you are Mr. Nelson Lee?" he demanded curtly.

"I am Mr. Nelson Lee!" said the chauffeur.

"You are——" The inspector breathed hard. "Well, of all the impudence! If you are not careful, my friend, I shall detain you here while I make inquiries. I have never had the pleasure of meeting Mr. Nelson Lee personally, but I have seen his photograph on several occasions. You do not resemble him in the slightest degree——"

"Which is not at all surprising, considering I am wearing a slight disguise," interrupted the visitor. "Come, inspector, you must surely realise that you have made a mistake! I have presented you with my card, and I claim your full attention. I have come to you on a matter of great importance, and

I require your co-operation and help."

The inspector stared.

"But, good gracious!" he ejaculated. "I can't believe——"

However, after another three or four minutes had elapsed, Inspector Hammond did believe—he could do nothing else. And the worthy inspector was rather startled. His visitor—this rather common-looking chauffeur—was really no less a person than Mr. Nelson Lee, the celebrated crime investigator of Gray's Inn Road—and St. Frank's. It was hardly to be wondered at that Inspector Hammond was taken off his balance for a moment or two.

And there was no deception about it.

"Andrews" was, indeed, Nelson Lee himself. The famous schoolmaster-detective had been extremely busy, and now he was feeling very satisfied with himself, for he knew that all his plans had worked out well, and that he was in a position to catch Mr. William Fordley red-handed. Nelson Lee did not worry so much about Naggs. Naggs, after all, was only a tool of the greater villain. Fordley was the man whom Lee wanted to secure.

It did not take Nelson Lee long to explain matters to Inspector Hammond. It was necessary that he should explain, since he required help from the police. And the inspector, although a somewhat aggressive individual, was only too pleased to fall in with Nelson Lee's plans, when he learned of them. There would be some credit for Hammond himself in this job, and he was quite delighted at the prospect.

"So you see, inspector, I was compelled to act in a decisive way," Nelson Lee concluded. "I knew that Naggs had these plans in his possession, and I knew also that he would arrange a meeting with Fordley at the first opportunity. Reasoning matters out, I came to the conclusion that the pair would not meet in Oldham itself, but would, in all probability, go some little distance off. And I came to the

further conclusion that Fordley would use his motor-car."

"What made you think that, Mr. Lee?" asked the inspector.

"It is far easier to prove an alibi," replied Nelson Lee grimly. "As events turned out, my deductions were not far wrong. It was quite a simple matter for me to arrange affairs with Fordley's own chauffeur."

"I take it that you are impersonating the man?" asked the inspector.

"Not at all."

"But Fordley—does he not suspect?" asked Hammond.

"I think that Fordley is quite pleased with the arrangement," said Nelson Lee. "You see, his own chauffeur sent him round a message saying that he was unwell, and requested that I, who posed as his friend, should take his place for the time being. It was simply a chance, and it was successful. I am exceedingly pleased that I decided upon this form of action."

"But why should Fordley be pleased about it?" asked the inspector.

"I fancy he is pleased because I am not his regular man," said Nelson Lee. "Knowing nothing of Fordley's usual movements, I am not likely to question his procedure of to-day. In any case, Fordley did not suspect the truth, and that is the main thing. I know for a positive fact that Fordley is now in Brentlowe, discussing terms with Naggs. And they have the plans with them. It is only necessary for us to go immediately to this house, break in, and arrest the two men red-handed. That is what I have been working for, and I am extremely pleased that we shall be able to finish the affair without any further delay."

"And you require my help?"

"I do!" said Nelson Lee. "I want at least four police officers, inspector. I should like you to come yourself, also. These plans have been stolen from Mr. Goodwin, and Naggs and Fordley have enough to answer for. I can supply you with all the evidence necessary to convict the two rascals. And there must

be no delay—we must start off as soon as ever we possibly can."

"Very well, Mr. Lee, we will waste no time," said Inspector Hammond briskly. "I will have the men ready for you within five minutes."

"Good!"

The inspector was as good as his word. Exactly five minutes later the motor-car started off, carrying Nelson Lee, Hammond, and four police officers.

And, with Nelson Lee at the wheel of the car, the ground was soon covered. Lee drove quickly, for he was now rather anxious. He did not want Naggs to go before he arrived on the scene. Lee was most anxious to capture the two men together.

But, before reaching Brentlowe, a certain incident occurred—an incident which was satisfactory to all parties concerned.

As Nelson Lee drove the car at high speed, he became aware of the fact that another car was traveling along in front, also going in the direction of Brentlowe. Nelson Lee and the police were overtaking this car rapidly, and the great detective smiled grimly to himself as he recognised several forms in the other car. He sounded his hooter, and then opened the throttle wider. He simply roared alongside the other car, and then drew ahead. After that he applied his brakes and came to a halt.

"Anything the matter, Mr. Lee?" inquired Inspector Hammond.

"No; but I should like to have a word with these good people," said Nelson Lee.

He turned round, and held up his hand. The other car, which was just passing, was brought to a standstill. Of course, it contained Mr. Goodwin's party, including myself.

I looked at the police, and I looked at the driver of the car, without recognising him. But I was decidedly curious.

"By gum!" said Mr. Goodwin. "I thought we were going too fast—I did that!"

"Oh, we haven't been pulled up for speed, sir!" I grinned. "I believe these policemen have something to do with Fordley and Naggs. Anyhow, we shall know in a minute or two."

"Well, Nipper, what is the idea of this?" inquired Nelson Lee. "Are you going to Brentlowe, too?"

I stared.

"Why, great Scott!" I shouted. "It's you, guv'nor!"

"Precisely!"

The chauffeur nodded and smiled.

"Begad!" murmured Sir Montie Tregellis-West. "This is simply amazing, dear old boys!"

I was out of the car in a second, and I dashed across to the other motor. I jumped on the step, and stared into Nelson Lee's face.

"Well, I'm jiggered!" I exclaimed. "I didn't know you, sir! It's a jolly fine disguise! But what does it mean? Where are you off to, sir? Why are you taking the police with you?"

"I do not think it necessary for me to go into very precise details at the moment, Nipper," said Nelson Lee. "This car belongs to Fordley, and I am acting as his chauffeur at the present moment. I am just taking him a few visitors, although I am afraid that Mr. Fordley will not welcome them."

I grinned.

"Well, hardly, sir!" I said. "It's a jolly good thing we met you. We're off to Brentlowe too. And we might have bumped in where we weren't wanted. It seems that all roads lead in the same direction—to this part of Brentlowe."

"How did you know about it, Nipper?" asked Nelson Lee.

"Why, Church and McClure told us," I replied. "Handforth is there now—a prisoner!"

"That's right, sir!" put in McClure quickly. "We all followed Naggs to this house, and Handy was a bit too rash. He was pulled in all of a sudden, and we didn't see any more of him. I expect he's being held a captive by Naggs and that other rotter!"

"Handforth?" echoed Nelson Lee curiously.

"Yes, sir."

"But what is Handforth doing up here, in Lancashire?"

"He came up to investigate this case, sir," grinned Church. "He brought us with him, although we didn't want to come. You see, sir, we got leave from St. Frank's for a couple of days, to go to London to see Handforth's uncle. Handy persuaded his uncle to let us come along here!"

Nelson Lee smiled for a moment.

"I am afraid that Handforth is irrepressible," he remarked. "Well, it is just as well we met one another. We have joined forces, and we shall be able to go along to this house in Brentlowe in a body. I do not think there will be much chance of Naggs and Fordley escaping."

We were extremely pleased to see Nelson Lee, of course—that goes without saying—for now we knew why he had been absent; we knew what he had been doing. And when he recommenced the journey, we all had the conviction that the end of this affair was within sight.

The climax, in fact, was at hand.

CHAPTER 19.

Alone He Did It!

MR. WILLIAM FORDLEY pushed a bundle of notes across the table.

"Count them, Naggs," he said. "I think you will find them correct."

Mr. Naggs nodded, and there was a gleam of satisfaction in his eyes as he handled the crisp, crackling bank-notes. This was the moment he had been waiting for—this was the moment he had dreamed of. He was being paid for the trouble he had taken, and he was being paid handsomely.

Naggs looked up, after he had counted the notes.

"Yes, quite correct, Mr. Fordley," he said. "Ten thousand exactly."

Naggs folded up the notes, and stowed them into his pocket.

"Good!" he went on. "There's no signing to do, of course?"

"Not a word," replied Mr. Fordley. "We cannot afford to take any risks like that, Naggs. Our original agreement was verbal, and this settlement is verbal. We should be taking an unnecessary risk in putting anything into writing. The money is yours, and the plans are mine. I only trust that everything will be all right."

"How can it be otherwise, sir?"

Mr. Fordley shook his head.

"I don't know," he replied; "but I must be careful—very careful. If there is any possibility of this matter being found out——"

"But there is no possibility, sir—not the slightest," said Mr. Naggs, quite comfortable in the possession of the notes. "Goodwin's plans are unprotected; they have not even been patented or registered. There is not the slightest atom of evidence to show that they have passed into your possession, and, later on, you can produce the invention as your own."

"That is my intention," said Fordley. "But I am worrying about what might happen in the meantime."

Mr. Naggs laughed.

"Nothing can happen, sir," he said. "What you must do, if you care to take my advice, sir, is to copy the originals as quickly and as quietly as you can. Then, when you have the copies, you can destroy those papers which are now in your pocket. Goodwin and the boy will know the truth, but they can prove absolutely nothing, and it will be an easy matter for you to put up a bluff. A man in your position can do that sort of thing easily."

"Yes, I suppose it will be all right, Naggs," said Mr. Fordley. "In any case, the transaction is settled, and we will let it stand at that."

Fordley had a last look at the plans before placing them finally in his

pocket. He was quite delighted with them, for he had seen at the outset that he had not paid his money for nothing. Dick Goodwin's invention was a wonderful one.

"There are immense possibilities in this machine, Naggs," said the mill-owner. "It will create a sensation when it is produced. And, although Goodwin will know the truth, I shall be able to snap my fingers in his face. Even if the fellow brings an action against me, it will be futile; I have the upper hand."

Naggs nodded.

"You have, sir," he agreed. "Well, I reckon we deserve this success, after all the trouble we have taken."

The two men sat for some moments while Fordley was looking at the plans. Naggs produced a packet of cigarettes, and they both lit up. Then Fordley folded the plans and replaced them in an envelope.

"You are quite sure, Naggs, that nobody knows of this visit of yours?" he asked.

"Not a soul, sir," replied Naggs. "Who do you think I should tell? I'm not quite a mug!"

"It is impossible to be too cautious," said Fordley. "This meeting of ours is unknown to a soul; but I cannot help worrying somewhat over that boy."

"Young Goodwin?"

"No, no!" said Fordley irritably. "I mean that boy who was here——"

"Oh, you needn't concern yourself about him, sir," said Mr. Naggs. "I spoofed him completely, and he's gone away to Oldham——"

"Has he?"

Mr. Naggs and Mr. Fordley started violently.

The voice came from somewhere beneath—apparently near the floor. It was the voice of Handforth! Just for a moment Naggs thought that his ears were deceiving him—that they had played a trick with him. And Fordley had gone as pale as a sheet. He sat

in his chair, clutching at the edge of the table.

Just for one brief second there was a tense silence; then everything became noisy and confused. Without the slightest warning the table heaved up from the floor! It rose in front of the eyes of the startled men, then it over-turned with a crash, right on the top of Mr. Naggs, who was sent flying backwards, his chair tipping up.

Mr. Naggs went over on the floor, and the table fell upon him, half-pinning him down. The rascal was momentarily stunned by the shock, and his lighted cigarette entered his mouth and nearly choked him.

Meanwhile, Mr. Fordley staggered back, breathing hard. From beneath the table had appeared Edward Oswald Handforth! And the junior was looking grim and determined; his fists were clenched, and there was a warlike light in his eyes.

"Now then, you rotters," shouted Handforth thickly, "I'm going to capture you—the pair! I've got you red-handed—I've heard everything! And when I hand you over to the police, you'll each be shoved into penal servitude for about ten years!"

"Good heavens!" gasped Fordley. "You—you young fool!"

Crash!

Out came Handforth's fist, and it landed fairly and squarely upon Fordley's nose. The mill-owner went over backwards with a tremendous howl. That punch had been a terrific one, and the man was dazed.

At the same second Handforth snatched the plans, which had still been held in Fordley's hand. In a moment Handforth placed those plans in his own pocket. He felt more secure then; he felt a glow of triumph running through his veins. This was what he had waited for, this capture. Alone he was dealing with these two rascals—alone he was finishing up the whole case!

But, if Handforth thought the fight was over, he was mistaken. Certainly

he was not disappointed when the two men showed signs of a fresh attack, for Handforth was a warlike individual, and nothing pleased him better than a terrific fight. He was certainly going to have his heart's content on this occasion!

"You—you young hound!" snarled Fordley, white with rage and fear.

"I know all about it, you scoundrel!" shouted Handforth, "I know what your game is; I've heard everything!"

"By thunder!" snarled Mr. Naggs.

"Everything!" repeated Handforth. "And I've got the plans, and I'm going to keep them! They belong to Dick Goodwin, and I'm going to make it my duty to hand them back to him! You rotters! You thieves! You burglars! You thought you were going to succeed, but you reckoned without me!"

By this time Naggs had got to his feet, rather dizzy and dazed, but very dangerous. He appeared to be incapable of any action, but suddenly, and without any warning, he seized an ornament from the mantelpiece and hurled it with all his strength at Handforth's head.

Whizz-z-z!

The ornament, a heavy pottery affair, just scraped Handforth's head by a fraction of an inch. It crashed into the wall and fell in a thousand pieces.

"You—you murderous rotter!" roared Handforth furiously.

He dashed forward, and the next moment he was fighting with Naggs, hammer and tongs. The man was pretty lively now, and he succeeded in getting in one or two punches which made Handforth feel rather queer. But he was by no means beaten.

Biff! Slam! Crash!

Again and again his blows went home, and then, once again, Naggs fell to the floor. By this time, however, Fordley had got to his feet, and he attacked Handforth, from behind.

It would have gone hard with the St. Frank's junior if he had not turned just in the nick of time. He twisted round, and found himself confronted

by Fordley; but the man's hands were already outstretched, and they gripped Handforth's throat.

"Grent pip!" gasped Handforth.

He gurgled and struggled, and the grip grew tighter and tighter. Then at last, mainly by chance, one of Handforth's fists crashed into Fordley's face.

With a wild howl, the man staggered back, and Handforth was released.

"So—so that's the game, is it?" gasped Handforth. "By George, I'll show you! I'll teach you to play those dirty tricks on me!"

And then Edward Oswald let himself go.

Both men were on their feet now, and they were getting ready to attack the youngster again, but before they could actually do so, Handforth called in. He did so with a vengeance.

He simply let himself go, and he gave Naggs and Fordley a tremendous time. Single-handed, Handforth was thrashing these two men as they had never been thrashed before. The junior was worked up to a tremendous pitch of excitement and anger, and he was not at all particular about his blows.

Handforth was enormously strong, and his punches were famous for their effectiveness. Try as they would, neither Naggs nor Fordley could avoid those blows.

Bang! Crash! Thud! Biff!

A perfect hail of thuds descended upon the two men. Handforth was like a whirlwind. His arms were sailing about in a manner which made it almost impossible to avoid them, and Naggs and Fordley had been driven into a corner of the room. And there, fighting with every ounce of his strength, was Handforth, battering the pair about until they were dazed and helpless.

Every one of his blows went home. Fordley was the first to give in. With one black eye, and with two of his front teeth knocked out, the mill-owner sank to the floor, moaning. He was beaten

to the wide—he was knocked out of time.

Naggs held on a little longer, in spite of numerous injuries, including two black eyes. He was vicious and he was desperate. He fought like a madman, kicking and biting if he could get the chance; but Handforth was prepared, and he kept the rascal at arm's length.

With a perfect snarl of fury, Naggs gathered all his remaining strength together, and simply hurled himself at Handforth. It was a fatal move on his part.

Handforth was ready, and he held his fists in such a position that Naggs rammed into them with the point of his jaw.

Crash!

It was rather a sickening sound, and Naggs received an uppercut which laid him out as flat as a pancake. He lay on the floor, groaning painfully; he was beaten to a standstill.

And Handforth stood there, panting hard, only slightly marked, and triumphant.

Alone he had done this thing!

Even Handforth himself could hardly realise it—it seemed too big, too amazing. But it was true. Handforth, of the Remove, had captured these two criminals. They were helpless at his feet, and he had not the slightest intention of allowing them to go. They were his prisoners, and he would keep them.

"You thought I was a mug, didn't you?" panted Handforth, glad of an opportunity of triumphing over his enemies. "But I'm not quite such a kid, Mr. Naggs! I'm not quite such an ass! You thought you had spoofed me, but you didn't!"

"Hang you!" snarled Naggs weakly.

"You're the chap who ought to be hung!" said Handforth. "Unfortunately, that won't happen to you; but you'll get years and years of penal servitude. You've got a lot to answer for, you scoundrel! You tried to kill Dick Goodwin by binding him to that

old lighthouse! You trapped Goodwin and his pater, and you stole their plans. My only hat! There's a whole lot of convictions against you!"

"You—you young fool!" snarled Naggs. "If you think you'll get away from this house, you've made a mistake! You can't prove anything against us—you can't do anything——"

"Oh, can't I?" interrupted Handforth grimly. "We'll see about that, you brutes! I've heard everything—I know all the details! And I dare say you're wondering how I got under that table?"

"I knew what it would be!" moaned Fordley. "I knew that boy was a spy, Naggs! He was here all the time, and you told me that you'd sent him away——"

"I did send him away!" snapped Naggs hoarsely.

"Precisely!" said Handforth. "You sent me away, but I didn't go far. And I'll tell you why, Naggs. I saw a scar on your finger, and I knew jolly well that that scar wasn't on Mr. Lee's finger! You diddled me about the voice—I'll admit that. I thought you were Mr. Lee for the moment, but not for long. So I made my plans!"

"A clever kid, ain't you?" sneered Naggs viciously.

"Well, I'm not the chap to boast, but I think I've been pretty smart this time!" said Handforth modestly. "I arranged with a tramp to come to your front door, and keep you busy."

"Good heavens!" exclaimed Fordley.

"I gave the chap strict orders to keep you at the door for at least three minutes," went on Handforth, "and while he was doing that, I slipped round to the back, and got in by a window. It didn't take me more than ten seconds to get under that table, and I was under it for over half an hour. I heard all your plans—I heard everything. You haven't got a leg to stand on, and when you're handed over to the police, you'll be——"

"You mad young fool!" shouted

Naggs furiously. "Do you think you're going to hand us over to the police? Do you think you'll be able to prove anything? By thunder, I'll—I'll——"

"You'll be down again!" said Handforth grimly.

Crash!

Just as Naggs was getting to his feet, Handforth landed another punch, and Naggs, with a hoarse cry, tottered over again, holding his nose with both hands. And then Fordley tried to get up a minute later, but he was treated in exactly the same way. Handforth had the pair down, and there was very little chance of their getting up again. Bruised and battered as they were, they had practically no fight left. And Handforth was full of fight; he was simply bursting to get busy again.

"Well, why don't you get up?" he demanded defiantly. "Why don't you attack me? Go on—I don't mind! I'm willing to knock you down again!"

"You—you infernal young hound!" raved out Mr. Naggs.

Bliff!

"That's for being insulting!" said Handforth, as he tapped Mr. Naggs on the chin. "I don't allow insults!"

The tap had been rather a heavy one, for Naggs went over backwards, and his head struck the floor with a terrific bang. Fordley swore viciously, and a moment later he wished he hadn't, for Handforth treated him in exactly the same way as he had treated Naggs. The junior had everything his own way. Both the men were severely battered, and they were unable to withstand Handforth's brute strength, for the junior was tremendously brawny, and his muscles were highly developed. In the art of punching, Handforth was a real champion.

The leader of Study D never paid much attention to science; he relied upon brute strength to defeat his enemies. When he had a fight he simply walked in, quite careless of any blows that he might receive. Blows had very little effect upon Handforth; he was

as hard as nails, and he could stand anything. So his main idea, when he had a scrap, was to charge in and do as much damage as he could in a short space of time.

On this occasion, certainly, he had excelled himself. Single-handed, he had beaten two full-grown men—two desperate men. Certainly Handforth had had the advantage to start with, and that made all the difference.

In ordinary circumstances, he would probably have failed; but now things were different. Handforth had been under the table, and he had taken both the men by surprise. Naggs, in fact, had been knocked out of time by the table itself, and at first Handforth had had only Fordley to deal with. The rest had been quite simple for him. And now it was quite impossible for either of the men to gain the upper hand.

And Edward Oswald Handforth stood now, with clenched fists, and with grim, determined eyes. He didn't exactly know what he should do now, but one thing was quite certain—neither Naggs nor Fordley would be able to escape. They were beaten; they were knocked out for good.

And Handforth had performed this amazing feat entirely off his own bat!

CHAPTER 20.

Handforth the Hero!

"THAT'S the house!" said McClure, pointing.

Our motor-car had just turned out of the main road, into the small side-lane a little way from Brent-lew, and there, standing by itself, was a small, rather old-fashioned house. We looked at it with interest.

"There's nothing particularly exciting about it, anyway," remarked Tommy Watson. "It looks just an ordinary common or garden house, and I shouldn't be a bit surprised if we find the birds flown when we arrive!"

"Dear old boy, you are frightfully cheerful, you are, really!" said Sir Montie.

"Well, there's no knowing!" said Watson. "These criminals have a way of slipping off, you know. And what's happened to poor old Handy? I'll bet he's put his foot in it somewhere! The clumsy ass is always getting into hot water!"

Church sniffed.

"And he thinks he's a detective!" he exclaimed witheringly. "Well, if he's done anything worth twopence this afternoon, I'll eat my hat!"

"I'll eat my giddy boots!" said McClure. "Handy is about as good at detective work as an inmate of Colney Hatch. I'll bet he's got himself into terrific trouble over this job!"

"Well, we shall soon know," I remarked. "There's going to be some excitement, I believe!"

By this time both the cars had arrived outside the house. Nelson Lee had advised Inspector Hammond what to do, and the Inspector had wisely decided to follow this advice.

Two of the policemen, without the slightest delay, hurried round to the rear of the house. Nelson Lee and the Inspector went to the front door, and hammered loudly upon it. Then, finding that the door was open—that is to say, unlocked—they marched in. By a piece of luck, I managed to get close behind, and followed them.

Nelson Lee glanced into the front room as they went by, but (his apartment was empty. Then we passed down the passage with the Inspector, and a moment later they stood in the doorway of the rear room—a kind of parlour.

And both men stared for a moment or two, rather astonished.

"Dear me!" exclaimed Nelson Lee softly.

"Well, I'm hanged!" ejaculated Inspector Hammond. "What on earth is this?"

The spectacle within the rear apartment was somewhat peculiar.

Edward Oswald Handforth was there—there was not the slightest doubt on that point. Handforth stood in the centre of the room. He was looking extremely warlike. He was somewhat knocked about, his hair tousled, but he was triumphant.

His collar was unfastened on one side, his necktie was streaming over his back. One eye showed signs of becoming blackened, and blood was trickling down from the left corner of his mouth.

"Oh, you've come, then!" said the warrior, glancing round somewhat carelessly. "Why, hallo, Mr. Lee! Glad you've arrived, sir. I've got your prisoners for you!"

"So I observe, Handforth!" said Nelson Lee quietly. "You have done well, my lad!"

"Oh, it's nothing, sir," said Handforth. "Merely a trifle."

There was a world of condescension in his tone, and it was quite obvious that Edward Oswald was suffering from an attack of swelled head already.

Nelson Lee glanced from Handforth to the corner of the room. And the famous detective could hardly prevent himself from smiling. For Mr. William Fordley and Mr. Walter Naggs were in a somewhat pitiable condition.

Both the scoundrels, far from being active, were decidedly incapable of action.

Fordley himself was sitting up, holding his head in both his hands. He did not seem to care what happened to him, and he was entirely uninterested in his surroundings.

Mr. Naggs, on the other hand, was glaring round with a look of fury and fear in his eyes. It would be more exact to say, perhaps, in one eye, since one of Mr. Naggs' optical members was closed for repairs. It would be likely to remain closed for some little time.

His nose, somewhat large by nature, was now double its usual size, and of a fiery red colour.

It was not difficult to guess that Mr.

Naggs had been in very close contact with Handforth's fists.

"There are the two men, inspector," said Nelson Lee crisply. "William Fordley and Walter Naggs. They are both implicated in this affair. No doubt if you search them you will find the plans, which are the rightful property of Mr. Goodwin and his son."

"That you won't!" interrupted Handforth. "I've got the plans safe. I collared them first. Here they are."

The inspector took them from Handforth.

"I think, Mr. Lee, that it will be better if I take charge of this property for the time being," said the inspector. "It will be necessary for the police to hold it until matters are somewhat straightened out."

"Quite right, Hammond," said Nelson Lee. "I should advise you to take your prisoners to the station without any delay. Later on Mr. Goodwin and myself will come along, and we will prefer the charge."

Meanwhile, Tommy Watson, who had heard nearly everything, had dashed into the hall, where Church, McClure, and Sir Montie Tregellis-West were waiting. Watson was very excited.

"My only hat!" he shouted. "What do you think, you chaps?"

"Goodness knows!" said Church.

"Handy has taken Fordley and Naggs prisoners," said Watson.

"What?"

"Eh?"

"Which?"

"It's about the most amazing thing I ever heard of," said Watson. "Handforth, single-handed, has given those two chaps a thorough hiding. They've got black eyes, swollen noses, thick ears, and all the rest of it! There's been a terrific scrap here, and Handforth has knocked both those scoundrels out!"

"Great Scott!"

"Dejad!"

"My only tepper!"

"Well, I'm jiggered!" said McClure. "It—it can't be possible, you know!"

Handy has captured these two crooks single-handed?"

"Yes."

"Oh, hold me up, somebody!" said Church faintly. "It's too much for me all at once!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It's staggering," I exclaimed. "We always thought that Handforth was a duffer. But there's no doubt that he's covered himself with glory on this occasion. He was alone in this house with these two men. And when we arrive, with a whole force of police, we find that we've got nothing to do. Handforth has made the capture in advance!"

"Dear old boys, it is amazin'—it is, really!" said Sir Montie. "It is the most astoundin' thing that I have ever heard of, begad! I think it will be necessary for all you chaps to apologise to Handforth. He has turned up trumps, after all!"

"And have they found the plans—Dick Goodwin's plans?" asked Church.

"Yes, rather!" replied Tommy Watson. "Handforth had them already. He's taken charge of them!"

"My hat!"

"There'll be no holding him after this!" said Church, with a sigh. "He's had enough at any ordinary time, but, after this, he'll go boasting about the place in the most insufferable manner."

It was clear that Church knew all about Handforth's little weaknesses. And this prophecy was not very wide of the mark. Indeed, even now Handforth was showing some signs of what we might expect later on.

Acting under Nelson Lee's advice, Inspector Hammond lost no time in getting away with his prisoners. They took Fordley's own car, and conveyed the two prisoners straight away to the police station. And we were left alone with Handforth, the hero of the hour.

Nelson Lee was surprised, and he did not mind showing it. At the same time, he was extremely pleased with Handforth, and rather amused at the junkie's triumphant tone.

Nelson Lee did not altogether blame Handforth for adopting this attitude. The Removite had done well, and he was quite aware of this fact.

"Good old Handy!" said McClure heartily. "My hat! You've done splendidly, old man!"

"Well, what did you expect?" said Handforth, staring.

"I—I— Oh, you see—"

"Didn't you think that I should bring off this coup?" asked Handforth. "You know what I am. You know that when I start on a thing I always finish it! I came here to arrest Naggs and Fordley. I came up to Lancashire because Mr. Lee had failed—"

"Shush, you ass!" said McClure.

"Eh?"

"Dry up, you ass!"

"If you call me an ass, Arnold McClure, I'll punch your nose through to the back of your head!" said Handforth aggressively. "I've put up with too much rot from you chaps in the past, and I'm not going to put up with any more of it. Understand? You've never shown me the respect which is my due. You've got to show it now, or you'll know something!"

"Oh, my goodness!" growled Church.

"We shall be in for a fine time after this!"

"There's no need to go into arguments, my sons," I said soothingly.

"Surely you don't want to do any more scrapping now, Hardy."

"I'm ready to punch any fellow's nose who chooses to be cheeky!" replied Handforth promptly.

"Well, I shan't be guilty," I said solemnly. "Now then, my son, tell us how it happened. Explain all the details. We're simply dying to hear the yarn!"

"Begad, rather!"

"Out with it, Handy!"

"Let's hear the story," said Watson. "Let's hear how you captured the villains single-handed!"

Handforth put his necktie straight, and swelled his chest out somewhat. He

reminded me of a very proud cockerel strutting round a chicken run.

"Yes, my boy, we are very anxious to hear your story," said Nelson Lee. "You must allow me to compliment you on your wonderful achievement."

"Yes, I was expecting you to thank me, sir," said Handforth candidly. "Of course, you've failed in this case, and I've succeeded. But I don't suppose there'll be anything in the nature of professional jealousy. One can't always be successful, sir."

Nelson Lee kept his face quite grave. "Of course not, Handforth," he said. "Yes, you have beaten me—certainly. And I should be exceedingly pleased if you will tell me how you managed it, my boy."

"Oh, it was easy enough, sir!" said Handforth. "Of course, I came round here especially to accomplish this piece of work. Church and McClure were against it—they said I was wasting my time, and that I should only make an ass of myself. But Church and McClure always have been a couple of silly duffers, so I took no notice of them."

"I sincerely trust, Handforth, that you did not take French leave from St. Frank's?" said Nelson Lee.

"Rather not, sir," said Handforth. "I had a letter from my dad, asking me to go up to London for a couple of days. You see, my uncle is in town at the moment, and he particularly wanted to see me. And the Head gave me permission to go up, and to take two of my chums with me. But when we got to London I told my uncle that I couldn't stop there. I said I had more important business in Lancashire."

"Oh, indeed!" said Nelson Lee mildly.

"Yes, sir," went on Handforth. "My uncle was pretty decent over it, and he paid the exes. So we all came up to Lancashire at once."

"With the intention, no doubt, of running Mr. Naggs and Mr. Fordley to earth?" asked the gov'nor.

"That's it, sir. That was precisely

the idea," said Handforth. "We knew that you had failed——"

"Eh? What did you say, Handforth?"

"Only that you had failed, sir——"

"He—he means that we hadn't heard anything about your being successful, sir!" put in Church hurriedly. "We told him not to come barging into the affair, but you know what he is, sir! And just by a piece of luck he happened to spot Mr. Naggs!"

"By a piece of luck!" roared Handforth. "Why, you—you fathead! There was no luck about it! I was on the look-out for Naggs."

"And how did you get on the track of the man?" asked Lee.

"Well, sir, our train happened to stop at the next station along the line—the one past Brentlowe, I don't

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remember what station it was, but that doesn't matter. Just at the same time another train was coming in from the opposite direction, and I spotted Naggs in that train and acted without delay. I got out of one train to the other, and followed Naggs to this house."

"That was certainly very smart of you, Handforth," said Nelson Lee. "And what happened?"

"I was captured, sir," said Handforth. "But, mind you, not really captured. I was having a look round, and then Naggs pulled me in. Of course, I could have knocked him sideways if I had wanted to, but that wasn't my policy. I was out to get all the information I could, and to pounce at the right moment. You see, I knew that nobody else was on Mr. Naggs' track, and so it was up to me to be careful!"

"You apparently imagine, then, that I was a nonentity in this particular place, Handforth?" asked Nelson Lee smoothly.

"Well, I knew you had failed," said Edward Oswald.

"Indeed!"

"And as you hadn't been able to get on the track, sir, I came to the rescue," said Handforth. "I really felt compelled to do so, because I didn't like to think of you being left in the cold. Even the best detectives can't always be successful. Sometimes, when they meet with failure, they have to give way for cleverer people!"

"Oh, corks!" muttered Church, in dismay.

"The boasting ass!" said Watson.

"Cleverer people! Is he trying to make out that he's cleverer than Mr. Lee?"

"Something like that!" I grinned. "Let him run on. It's funny! I know I shall boss out into a yell before long. And you needn't think that the gov'nor will be offended. He's highly amused."

But Nelson Lee did not appear so; he was quite grave.

"Please continue, Handforth," he said. "I am intensely interested. You

were captured, I understand, by Naggs?"

"Well, Naggs happened to spot me, that's all," said Handforth. "Then he tried to bluff the thing out, but I wasn't taking any. I pretended to, though, and walked out of the house and went down the road."

"And then?"

"Well, then, sir, I set my wits at work," replied Handforth. "I knew that something had to be done—something brilliant. Of course, that just suited me, and so I got busy. My idea was to get back into the house, and to overhear, if possible, what Naggs and Fordley were saying."

"Fordley, I imagine, had already appeared on the scene?"

"Yes, sir, and I was suspicious," said Handforth. "Well, anyhow, it didn't take me long to think of a wheeze. I found a tramp coming along the road, and I gave him five shillings, and instructed him to knock at the door and to keep there as long as possible. I wanted him to detain Naggs and Fordley at the front of the house."

"While you were gaining admittance at the rear, I presume?"

Handforth looked astonished.

"Yes, that was the idea, sir," he said. "But how did you get it?"

"I really cannot imagine, Handforth," said Nelson Lee gravely. "But even persons of such low intelligence as myself happen to get these flashes now and again!"

The governor was quite serious, and it was obvious to us all that he was pulling Handforth's susceptible leg. Handforth did not see this. He was always blind to leg pulling. It was the easiest thing in the world to spoof the leader of Study D.

"Yes, that was the idea, sir," went on Handforth. "While this cove was engaging the attention of the rotters at the front door, I managed to slip through a window at the back, and I got straight into the rear apartment and crept under the table."

"That was decidedly smart, Handforth."

"Well, it was rather clever," admitted Handforth carelessly. "Of course, I listened to everything, and I heard the rotters making plans about the money, and all that sort of thing. And then, when I thought the time was ripe, I lifted up the table with one heave, and then sailed into the rotters."

"In other words, Handforth, you attacked them?"

"That's the idea, sir," replied Handforth. "I knocked them both into the middle of next week. It was a glorious scrap—the best I've had for years! I was just thinking of taking my prisoners to the police station when you came along. I'm rather glad you arrived just then, sir."

Nelson Lee nodded.

"It was, perhaps, fortunate, my boy," he said. "But I am quite convinced that you would have been able to deal with the matter in a masterly fashion single-handed. It was perhaps as well that you were on the scene all the time, Handforth."

Edward Oswald stared.

"Perhaps as well, sir," he repeated. "Why, without me the whole thing would have been messed up."

"Really, Handforth?"

"Of course it would, sir," said Handforth. "Those rascals would never have been captured unless I had performed the trick. That's what I came from St. Patrick's for, knowing that you were in a bit of a mess. I came to the rescue. But you needn't trouble to thank me, sir, I take it all as a matter of course."

"That is very nice of you, Handforth," said Nelson Lee smoothly.

"Don't mention it, sir. Don't say another word about it!" said Edward Oswald. "Any time that you're in a bit of a difficulty, just come to me, I shan't mind lending you a hand, sir. Give me a call, and I'm there. When you find yourself at a loose end, and don't know what to do, I'll let you have

my advice. It won't take me long to put you on the right track, sir."

Handforth paused and glared at Church.

"What the dickens are you making those silly faces at me for, Walter Church?" he demanded.

Church turned very red.

"Oh, I—T—you— Oh, my hat!" gasped Church.

"I know what it is to be in a mess, sir," went on Handforth. "Of course, I'm never like that myself. When I start an investigation, I go straight through with it to the finish. And just because you failed this time, it doesn't make any difference. You can't always be successful, sir."

"Of course not, Handforth—of course not!" said Nelson Lee. "We are not all so fortunate as you. We are not all so exceedingly clever."

Handforth nodded again.

"Of course, cleverness counts a lot in this game, sir," he remarked. "I happened to be jolly smart, and you're pretty smart, too. At least, you are as a rule, sir. In this case you've been rather slow— Yow-yarrah!"

Handforth broke off with a wild howl, and danced about on one foot.

"You—you fatheaded ass!" he roared. "What did you want to clump my foot for, McClure?"

"I—I— Oh, you ass!" hissed McClure. "Why the dickens couldn't you keep quiet?"

"I'm not going to keep quiet while you tread on my feet!" said Handforth sharply. "I'm not surprised at it, of course. You've got feet like an elephant!"

Handforth was certainly insufferable.

He strutted about looking as pleased—as Church put it—as a dog with two tails.

Handforth talked with a superior air. He seemed to regard all the rest of us as mere nobodies—even including Nelson Lee himself. On two or three occasions I felt like seizing the boulder and gagging him.

Handforth didn't seem to realise in

the slightest degree that Nelson Lee would have captured Naggs and Fordley in any case—whether Handforth had laid his plans cleverly, and with much forethought. He had been aware of the game the whole time, and was not for a moment at a loss. This was proved by the very fact that we had all arrived on the spot soon after Handforth's fight with the two scoundrels.

But Handforth refused to see it.

He had made the capture; he had done everything, and everybody else had failed. That was the way he looked at it. And, of course, it was quite useless to argue with him.

To argue with Handforth was about as profitable as arguing with a dead mule. He had only gained his chance by a piece of luck, by just happening to be on the scene first. And even then, he had only got on to Naggs' track by catching a glimpse of the man in that other trap.

But, apart from all this, nothing could get away from the fact that Handforth had defeated the two crooks single-handed.

And he crowed over his success in a manner which made all the juniors feel exasperated beyond endurance. But they couldn't very well take hold of him and bump him there in the presence of Nelson Lee. They promised him a somewhat rough time of it afterwards, however.

After a little more talk, we all got into the car, and we drove straight off to the town, Nelson Lee intending to make the charge against Naggs and Fordley at once.

When we got to the police station Handforth insisted upon entering with Nelson Lee. He looked upon it as a right. The idea was simply absurd that he—Handforth—should remain outside while Nelson Lee went in!

I managed to go in, too, and during the proceedings the prisoners were brought in. Handforth regarded them with much enjoyment, and he noted with even greater enjoyment that their injuries were very apparent. He had

knocked them about in a terrific manner, and they knew it.

"Well, Mr. Lee, I am glad that this affair has been brought to a satisfactory conclusion," said Inspector Hammond, at length. "You must allow me to compliment you upon the clever manner in which you engineered—"

"Hold on!" interrupted Handforth, glaring. "What about me?"

"My dear boy—"

"It was I who made this capture. I did everything!" interrupted Handforth warmly.

The inspector laughed.

"You did well, Master Handforth," he said. "You did very well, indeed! But you mustn't get the idea into your head that nobody is deserving of any credit except yourself. Mr. Nelson Lee is mainly responsible for the capture of these two men—"

"What rot!" interrupted Handforth warmly. "Why, Mr. Lee didn't do anything. I captured the rotter. I tracked them down. I took the plans away from them. I sprang out at the right moment and fought the scoundrels to a standstill. I did everything—"

"Of course you did, Handforth," interrupted Nelson Lee soothingly. "We are not attempting to belittle your performance, my boy. You have done very well indeed, and you must be given due credit. Do not spoil the good opinion we have of you by boasting and bragging about your wonderful effort."

Handforth nodded.

"I'm not the kind of chap to boast, sir," he said. "But, at the same time, it's only fair to me to let everybody know that I handled the whole thing from start to finish. If it hadn't been for me, Naggs and Fordley would have escaped. But they couldn't get over me. Not likely! I settled their hash!"

"By thunder! You'll pay for it one day!" snarled Mr. Naggs severely.

"Oh, you needn't think that I'm

afraid of your threats!" said Handforth. "You can't do any harm to me. I'm equal to wiping you up any day you like—and half a dozen like you! I could knock you sideways in my sleep!"

"You—you young bratt!" shouted Naggs thickly.

Before anybody could stop him he sprang forward, goaded to violence by Handforth's arrogant tone.

It was more than Naggs could stand. To remain there, perfectly still, and to hear Handforth gloating, was more than Naggs could put up with.

Crash!

Naggs' fist struck Handforth fully on the nose, and the junior went flying backwards with a howl. He tripped, went down, and lay sprawling upon the floor, half dazed.

"Good gracious!" Inspector Hammand ejaculated.

Naggs was seized at once and held

firm. But he had got one good blow in, and he felt more satisfied.

Handforth was not feeling quite the same.

He had been practically knocked silly, and after that he was rather quiet. He did not feel inclined to boast quite so much.

And when all the formalities had been dealt with the whole party of us left for Oldham. Mr. Goodwin and Dick were so happy that they hardly knew what they were doing. Their mission in Lancashire had been successful, their plans had been recovered, and there was no more fear of their being stolen.

And early the next morning we all left for St. Frank's, all of us, that is, except Mr. Goodwin himself. Dick was with us, and he was returning a happy and a proud boy. The excitement was over, and two cunning rascals had met with their just deserts!



GREAT HOAXES

EVERYONE has met the practical joker, whether it's the kind of fellow who rigs up a whitewash bucket booby-trap over his school-master's study door, or the hoaxer who pulls a "fast one" over a whole nation.

The Bottle Hoax.

One of the most extraordinary practical jokes ever perpetrated was the celebrated bottle hoax. In the eighteenth century an advertisement was circulated all over London to the effect that a performer would take the stage at Drury Lane Theatre on a certain date and imitate every kind of musical instrument with the sole aid of a walking-stick. At the end of the performance, concluded the advertisement, the performer would climb inside a quart glass bottle, which any member of the audience would be allowed to handle.

Crowds flocked to Drury Lane to see this "magician." Even some of the most famous people were taken in, including the notorious Duke of Cumberland, of whom you have read in history books as "The Butcher of Culloden."

But the big crowd waited in vain for the promised performance. The whole thing was an elaborate, ridiculous practical joke, and when the angry crowd realised the fact, they vented their spite on the furnishings of the theatre, smashing everything they could lay hands on.

Getting His Own Back!

Most practical jokes are perpetrated for no apparent reason, but the story is told of a hoax which a flying pupil used on his instructor to cure the man of his rather hectoring methods.

The pupil was taken up by the instructor for his last training flight, and at two thousand feet the instructor

suddenly yanked his joystick from its socket and threw it overboard.

"She's all yours now!" he shouted through the headphones. "Take over!"

But the pupil only grinned.

"Hey! Watch this!" he called back, and next instant his joystick was also whirling down to the ground.

That was more than enough for the instructor. After one startled gasp, he leaped hurriedly to his feet and jumper from the cockpit, opening his parachute as he fell.

Imagine his mortification when he saw his pupil taking the plane calmly back to the aerodrome—the youngster had been prepared for his instructor's stunt, and the joystick he had jettisoned had merely been a spare one taken up for that very purpose!

The Talk of London.

At least one practical joke was arranged in order to win a bet. Two friends were passing a quiet respectable house when one of them offered to wager the other that within a few days he would make it the most famous house in London.

The bet was struck, and the practical joker promptly went to work. Every kind of tradesman was asked to deliver goods at the house in question; famous people of all kinds, from the Lord Mayor of London to the Archbishop of Canterbury, were invited to call on various pretexts.

The tradesmen's goods and the celebrities all arrived on the same day, and the piers of vehicles was soon so great that the whole street was blocked. The affair created a great deal of indignation, of course, but the practical joker had won his bet—that house was certainly the talk of London for weeks to follow!

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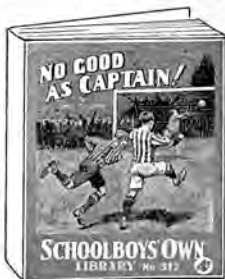


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