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(THE NARRATIVE RELATED THROUGHOUT BY NIPPER.)

CHAPTER I.

RAISING THE WIND.

"WIN? Of course we shall win!" said Ralph Leslie Fullwood languidly. "There's no question about that, you ass!"

Gulliver shook his head.

"That's what you said last time," he remarked. "But you lost about twelve quid in two hours, Fully!"

"Oh, don't rake that up!" growled Fullwood.

"You were practically skinned out," put in Bell. "Of course, we all had rotten luck, I know, an' it's not likely that we shall do as badly again. Still, there's no tellin'."

"We're goin' to rake in the cash this evenin'," said Fullwood grimly. "I've got a fiver to splash with, an' it won't take long to increase it to four fivers—at roulette."

"Not so loud, you duffer!" whispered Bell.

"Oh, there's nobody here to listen," said Fullwood carelessly. "Roulette is a jolly fine game for makin' money quickly, but if you ain't careful you can lose all you've got. This time I shall be careful."

Gulliver was not very enthusiastic.

"I'm comin' with you, but I shall be a spectator," he observed. "I've only got thirty bob, an' I'm goin' to stick to it. I don't quite see the sense of chuckin' it away, an' bein' left with nothin' to go through next week with."

Fullwood grinned.

"When you get into the roulette-room you'll change your mind," he observed. "You'll change it when you see me winnin' hand over fist, anyhow. I've got a sort of feelin' that I shall break the record to-night."

The young rascals of the Remove at St. Frank's were talking together in a corner by the gymnasium. It was evening, but quite early. Many of the juniors were still at tea in their studies. And Fullwood and Co. felt

quite safe in chatting upon a very private subject.

They were rather enjoying the school's sojourn in London. All the boys and masters had left St. Frank's in a body after the fire which had partially destroyed the College House, and the temporary quarters in London were so roomy and comfortable that many of the fellows would be sorry to leave.

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

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

Mr. Palmer had introduced them, after lights-out one night, to a flat in the West End. To the delight of Fullwood and Co., they found that the place was a gambling-den, where roulette was the principal attraction.

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

It is really amazing how a roulette punter will hope and hope for the luck to turn. In nine cases out of ten the punter is ruined by the time he has finished. And yet the fools with him continue the swindle; and they never realise that they are being swindled.

"We have arranged to meet Palmer at eleven o'clock to-night," remarked Fullwood, with a note of satisfaction in his voice. "We can easily get up at half-past ten, an'

be out in the alley in heaps of time. Tomorrow's Sunday, so we needn't worry about bein' late—we're always allowed to sleep longer on Sunday mornin's."

"I shall rely on you to wake me up at half-past ten," said Bell. "I always drop off to sleep quickly, an' I can't wake up unless— By gad! What's that? I—I saw a face—"

"What?" snapped Fullwood.

Bell was staring at a small window at the rear of them.

"Somebody was lookin' out!" he exclaimed huskily. "The rotter must have been listenin' to our talk—"

"Oh, don't be a fool," said Fullwood. "The gym's empty—I looked in there myself ten minutes ago. An' nobody's gone in since. Most of the fellows are at tea, an' the courtyard is deserted."

"I tell you I saw somethin'," persisted Bell.

"All right! Go an' look."

Bell and Gulliver moved round the angle of the gymnasium, and as they did so they heard a scuffle, and the next second a somewhat tubby form darted out of the open doorway, and scuttled across towards the school building.

"Long!" exclaimed Bell. "The biggest little sneak in the Remove! He must have heard what we were talkin' about! It'll be all over the school—"

"Collar him!" panted Gulliver.

They raced after the fugitive, and grasped him just as he was about to enter that side of the building known among the juniors as the Ancient House. Long gasped and yelled as he was seized.

"Lemme go, you cads!" he roared.

"If you yell like that," hissed Bell, "we'll half skin you!"

The sneak of the Remove was yanked across the Triangle. Gulliver and Bell were looking alarmed, and Fullwood's face was savage as he approached. Teddy Long was forced into the empty gymnasium.

"Please, Fullwood, I didn't hear anything!" gasped Long. "'Tain't fair to keep me like this! I—I've got an appointment—"

"You rotten little spy!" snapped Fullwood savagely.

"Oh, really—"

"You were listenin' at that window, you eavesdroppin' cad!" said Gulliver, shaking the prisoner's shoulder. "Own up to it, you little rat!"

"I wasn't listening!" howled Long.

"The window was open, and you were standing at the window," said Fullwood harshly. "I suppose you were just takin' the air?"

Long looked indignant.

"I've got a right to be in the gym, I suppose?" he demanded warmly. "I only went to the window to look at the sky! I—I thought it was raining! I didn't hear anything, you know!"

"You young liar!" said Fullwood. "If you don't tell the truth, I'll smash your face to a pulp!"

"I—I only heard you saying something about the—the cricket!" gasped Long. "That's what it sounded like, anyhow! I didn't hear anything about gambling, or roulette—honest injun, I didn't!"

Fullwood scowled.

"The little spy heard everything we were talkin' about," he said fiercely. "Look here, Long, if you breathe a word to any of the other fellows, we'll make your life a misery. Understand? We'll make you wish you were dead!"

"But I didn't hear anything, Fullwood," protested Long. "I can't tell the fellows about something I don't know, can I? Besides, I've got more sense than to jaw about gambling. I sha'n't say a word about Mr. Palmer, and I don't know anything about you going out after lights-out to-night!"

Fullwood's face was blacker than ever.

"You little fool," he said contemptuously. "What's the good of denying a thing when you give yourself away every minute? If you keep this to yourself, we'll give you a tip to-morrow. But if you breathe a sound to any of the chaps—well, you'll be sore for a month!"

Long was released, and he recovered himself with remarkable swiftness when he learned that he was not to be punished on the spot. He grinned amiably at the frowning Nuts.

"You can trust me to keep mum," he said calmly. "It wouldn't do me any good if I gave you away, would it? I should probably get into trouble—"

"You would," said Fullwood grimly—"with us!"

"But I'm not that sort of chap," exclaimed Long. "I can keep a secret, I hope! You needn't worry about me, you fellows. You're as safe as houses, and I might as well tell you that I'm with you right through. A bit of a spree now and again does a chap good. I won't give you away. I say, I suppose you couldn't lend me ten bob?" he finished casually.

"No, we couldn't," said Gulliver promptly.

"Of course, I mightn't be so careful if I'm forced to go hungry," said Long. "I'm stony, you know, and I haven't had any giddy tea yet. It's a queer thing, but when I'm hungry I'm liable to let secrets out unconsciously."

"You little blackmailer!" said Fullwood sourly. "If you think you'll squeeze some cash out of us, you're mistaken. You won't get a penny—and you can clear off while you're safe. An' don't forget what's goin' to happen if you sneak!"

Long's face fell.

"Oh, I say!" he protested. "You've got plenty of tin, you know! You might lend a chap ten bob. I could do with five bob, at a pinch."

"You won't get it!"

"Well, half-a-crown, then?"

"No!"

"A bob!" said Long plaintively.

"No!" roared Fullwood.

"Couldn't you make it a tanner?" asked Teddy pitifully. "You don't know what it's like to be broke, and——"

"Oh, here you are!" snapped Fullwood.

He produced sixpence, and Teddy Long snatched it as eagerly as if it had been the ten shillings he had originally asked for.

"I'll pay you back, of course," he said. "I never allow myself to be in any chap's debt. I say, I've been thinking about something——"

"Don't do it!" said Bell. "It'll give you brain fever!"

"Oh, really, Bell," protested Long. "I've been thinking about roulette. I'm considered to be jolly good at games of that kind. I've been wondering if you could take me along with you to-night——"

"Then you'd better wonder again," interrupted Fullwood tartly. "Do you think we'd be bothered with a little fool like you? Cut off, an' don't make a beast of yourself with that sixpence!"

"But, I say——"

"Cut off!" roared Fullwood.

And Teddy Long, realising that argument was useless, cut off without further delay. But he had overheard sufficient to make him dream of winning piles of money at the roulette-table.

Long had an idea that he was an extremely smart fellow—an idea which nobody else on earth shared. It amazed Teddy to find that fellows paid him no respect; but he set this down to their ignorance.

"I could make piles at roulette," he told himself gloomily. "But what's the good of thinking about it? A chap can't play roulette unless he's got some tin to splash about with. Even if I kept this tanner it wouldn't be much good! I don't suppose they'd let me play with a tanner!"

Long was probably correct in that surmise, and he wandered towards the gates absent-mindedly—meaning to spend the sixpence without delay. The courtyard of the school was at the rear, but there was a big archway, resembling a tunnel, which led right out into the roadway.

"If I only had some cash, I could follow those beasts to-night," Long muttered. "They couldn't very well send me back once I'd got there. And it would be ripping if I came home with a giddy fiver."

But Teddy Long was dreaming, and he knew that he was dreaming. There wasn't one chance in a million that he would be able to make any money at roulette. And as he came back to reality with a jerk he nearly bumped into two figures who were just entering the courtyard.

Long stared at them with interest. They were both boys—one about fifteen years of age, and the other a mere child of six. Both were very poorly dressed, and the elder boy was blind, and his poor little face was disfigured.

"Cheek!" muttered Long. "Coming in here!"

He saw a card on the blind boy's chest, and he read it inquisitively. It bore the

words: "Totally blinded in an air raid, 1917. Parents killed." Long's eyes became somewhat softer; even he was slightly affected.

"Poor kid!" he muttered. "If I had a ha'penny, I'd give it to him!"

Long felt better after having come to that amazingly generous conclusion—but he was rather glad that he had no change on him, all the same. He watched the pair enter the courtyard.

Fullwood and Co. saw them at the same moment, and Fullwood frowned.

"What the deuce are these filthy urchins doin' here?" he exclaimed harshly. "By gad! A couple of slum rotters, sellin' bootlaces! Of all the infernal nerve!"

"One of em's blind," said Gulliver. "No need to let him hear you talkin'."

"Rot!" said Fullwood callously. "I'll teach the unclean seum to come into a decent place without bein' invited."

He strode over to the pair, and the child held out some bootlaces.

"Buy a pair, please sir?" he piped. "Me bruvver's blind, an' we ain't got no home. Please, buy a pair, sir!"

Fullwood laughed.

"I'll give you a clout!" he exclaimed sourly. "Take your confounded brother out of here before he's kicked out! Who told you to put your dirty noses into this courtyard? Buzz off!"

"Please, sir——"

"I don't want any cheek!" snapped Fullwood, taking the blind boy by the shoulder and giving him a push. "I'll give you two seconds to clear out!"

The poor boy stumbled as he staggered, and then fell to the ground.

"I say, steady!" muttered Bell. "Don't be a cad, Fully!"

"Do you think the little rat is really blind?" sneered Fullwood. "If he doesn't get up in two seconds, I'll kick him!"

The smaller boy's eyes blazed.

"Oh, you big brute, you!" he shouted shrilly. "If you kick my bruvver——"

Fullwood was enraged, and he grasped the blind boy as he was rising, and gave him another push. And at that very second I happened to emerge from the school building with Tregellis-West and Watson. Several other fellows were close behind us.

"Begad! What's happenin' over there?" asked Sir Montie languidly.

"I'll tell a policeman about you!" shouted the child sobbingly. "It's a shame to knock down my bruvver wot's blind! I'll go and tell a policeman, you big coward!"

I became suddenly grim.

"Did you hear that?" I asked. "Fullwood's been knocking down a blind boy!"

"The awful cad!"

I strode across the courtyard with rapid steps, and I arrived just as the blind boy was getting to his feet. I saw at a glance that he was no fake. He and his little brother had probably wandered into the courtyard, hoping that they would sell some of their bootlaces.

"You confounded cads!" I shouted furiously.

Fullwood twirled round.

"Mind your own business!" he roared.

Crash!

My fist thudded into his face, and he went over backwards with a howl. Gulliver and Bell were already running. They had taken no part in the assault, but they had stood passively by. And that made it almost as bad. They were captured by Handforth and a number of other fellows, and bumped on the spot.

Fullwood scrambled to his feet with his nose streaming.

"You interferin' beast!" he snarled. "I'll—I'll——"

"If you don't clear off, I'll knock you down again!" I said grimly. "And I don't mind who sees! If a master gets to know of this affair, Fullwood, you'll be flogged! You ought to be ashamed of yourself—knocking down a fellow who is incapable of defending himself!"

"We didn't ask the dirty urchins to come in here!" growled Fullwood.

He saw that other juniors were hurrying up, and he considered that it would be safer to retire. Meanwhile, the two intruders were making for the archway again. But I called them back.

"Hold on, kid," I said cheerfully. "There's no hurry—you mustn't take any notice of that cad who ill-treated your brother. You're selling bootlaces, I see? Well, I'll take a pair."

"Thank you kindly, sir!" said the blind boy.

I took a pair of bootlaces, and placed a shilling in the little pan which hung round the afflicted boy's neck. At the same time I put the laces back.

"Bogad, I've got an idea!" said Sir Montie, adjusting his pince-nez. "It's quite a brilliant idea—it is, really. Supposin' we make a collection? It's only fair that something should be done, after Fullwood's rotten behaviour."

"Good idea!" declared Pitt.

Sixpences and shillings rolled into the pan quickly, and I was glad to see that not one of the fellows hung-back. Sir Montie himself affected that he had no small change—and hurriedly stuffed a ten-shilling note into the pan. The younger boy's face glowed with joy as he watched.

"I—I don't know 'ow to thank you, young gents," he said, with a gulp. "We 'aven't 'ad so much money not since farver died! We shall be able to 'ave a swell supper to-night, Dick!"

The pair were escorted to the street by a kindly crowd of fellows, and they went off happy. They had received full compensation for Fullwood's caddishness.

"I reckon there must have been thirty shillings there—with Montie's ten bob," said Pitt. "Good luck to 'em!"

We strolled away towards the playing-field, and Teddy Long was left staring after

us. His eyes were gleaming, and his face was aglow.

"Oh my goodness!" he muttered.

For a mighty idea had occurred to Master Teddy—an idea which almost made him reel with excitement.

CHAPTER II.

NOT QUITE A SUCCESS.

"THIRTY bob," muttered Teddy Long feverishly. "Thirty bob in less than five minutes! My hat! That's the way to raise the wind!"

The sneak of the Remove was seated alone in Study B, which he shared with following Fullwood and Co. to the roulette to the arrangement, but it was not possible for him to keep Long out—and nobody else in the Remove would accept him.

Long's eyes were still gleaming. The more he thought of his wonderful idea, the better it seemed. His abandoned hopes of following Fullwood and Co. to the roulette chamber were abandoned no longer. He pictured himself lounging up to the table with two or three pounds jingling in his pocket.

Teddy Long didn't particularly care how he got the money—so long as he did get it. His usual state of finance was a state of barrenness. Five shillings was riches to him. And the very thought of possessing two or three pounds almost turned his head.

And he believed that he could obtain the money.

He had exhausted all ordinary methods of raising the wind long since. It was impossible for him to borrow any sum from his form fellows. On the first day of term, perhaps, he would be successful on new boys; but Long had a habit of forgetting his obligations, and there was never any second loan.

"It'll be easy!" he told himself. "All I've got to do is to wait until it's nearly dark. Then I can appear in the courtyard disguised. My aunt! What a brain wave! I can find plenty of clobber upstairs, and I can black my face, and make it grubby. In the gloom I sha'n't be recognised."

Long fairly hugged himself.

His scheme, of course, was based upon the episode of the blind boy. He had seen the fellows shelling out handsomely, and it struck Long's acute wits that they would shell out again in a similar cause.

But it certainly didn't occur to him that the idea was shockingly dishonourable. To pretend to be blind, and to collect money under false pretences, was an offence which no decent boy could be guilty of.

Long was not exactly wicked; he was extremely foolish. And he simply didn't realise the enormity of the offence he contemplated. All he thought was that he could get some cash into his hands—and then he would be able to play roulette.

Failure never occurred to him. Indeed.

how could the scheme fail? He had seen the very same thing succeed with his own eyes. It was only necessary to wait until the evening advanced, and then he would be able to start the collection.

"I shall sell matches," he decided, after a moment's thought. "I haven't got any bootlaces, anyhow. And I can easily bone some boxes of matches from the store-room! I sha'n't sell any, in any case—the fellows will chuck their money into the pot without taking anything for it."

Long went out into the courtyard again. He couldn't keep still, and he felt that he had to be doing something. It would be necessary to play his great trick before locking up—otherwise the fellows would suspect. For they would know that no outsider could gain admittance.

When dusk was falling, therefore, Long vanished into the house. He went right up to one of the box-rooms, and there made his preparations. He didn't occupy much time over this. He simply found an old overcoat, and commenced to tear it in various places, so that it would look ragged and worn. As the overcoat was not his own property, he didn't mind.

He found an old cap and scarf. Removing his collar and tie, he tied the scarf roughly round his neck, pulled the cap over his eyes, and turned up the collar of the overcoat.

His appearance was certainly greatly altered, and even his face looked grubby—although he hadn't prepared it yet. His face was only clean for a brief period after his weekly bath.

"It can't fail!" he chuckled gleefully. "My hat! I shall be able to work this dodge two or three times before we leave London!"

Before dirtying his face, he prepared the other details of his plan. A cardboard-box was quickly slung round his neck, and then he found another piece of blank cardboard, and scrawled upon it: "Totally blind. Homeless and starving."

"That ought to fetch 'em," he muttered, as he surveyed his handiwork. "Those other kids weren't starving, so I ought to collect even more than they did! It's bound to be a success."

Even now Teddy Long did not realise the unscrupulous nature of his scheme. If he had realised it he might have dropped the whole thing. But he was obsessed with the thought of getting cash in his hand.

At last he was ready.

He certainly blacked his face thoroughly. He smeared it with soot from the chimney until he resembled a sweep. It didn't occur to him that people might suspect things; he only wanted to disguise his own features.

Very cautiously he crept downstairs. And was relieved to find that the hall was empty. As quick as a flash he made a dive out into the courtyard and bunked across to the wall of the gymnasium.

"Good!" he panted. "Nobody saw me!"

It was nearly dark, and Teddy suddenly realised that the gates would be locked within another ten minutes. He would have to commence at once, if the game was to be a success.

Unfortunately, however, the courtyard was deserted.

"Oh, crikey!" muttered Long. "I—I can't go indoors—they'd spot me in a minute under the electric light! I don't know—Ah!"

A figure had just appeared in the doorway, and Long's heart gave a jump as he recognised it as the elegant form of Sir Lancelot Montgomery Tregellis-West. Montie stood in the doorway, taking in the fresh air. And Long hobbled forward, at a limp, his head hung down. He carried a stick, and he tapped it upon the ground as though he were feeling his way.

"Matches!" he croaked. "Buy some matches, sir!"

He fondly believed that his voice was disguised. And Montie undoubtedly seemed to be spoofed, for he moved forward with interest, and regarded the strange figure searchingly through his pince-nez.

"Begad!" he exclaimed. "This must be another poor blind fellow. How shockingly sad. Can't you see at all, dear old boy?"

"I'm blind, sir—I can't see nothing," said Long huskily.

"That's rotten—it is, really," said Sir Montie sympathetically.

He withdrew a hand from his pocket, and a coin rolled to the ground. Long looked down on the instant, but remembered himself with a start. He saw, with great relief, that Tregellis-West was not suspicious.

The latter picked up the coin and dropped it into the box.

"There, my boy, there's a penny for you," he said kindly.

Long staggered.

"A—a penny!" he gasped. "I—I mean thanks awfully."

"An' now you must be cuttin' off," said Sir Montie. "The gates will be locked in a minute or two, an' you mustn't be in the courtyard then. Good-night, dear fellow."

"But—but—"

"You want me to take a box of matches?" asked Montie. "I wouldn't think of it, old boy. You can keep the penny for nothin'."

Long paused, gasping. He was dismayed, and for a moment his nerve failed him. A penny! And he had been dreaming of wealth! Before he could give himself away completely, a crowd of Removites appeared.

"You've just come in time to add your contributions, dear boys," said Tregellis-West mildly. "There is a poor blind boy out here, sellin' matches. I think we ought to do somethin' for him."

"Another blind chap?" asked Pitt, pushing forward. "Poor old son! Let's have a look at him!"

The crowd gazed at Long sympathetically.

"Totally blind, homeless, and starving," said De Valerie, reading the card. "I say, that's awfully hard lines. I've heard that people can starve and still look pretty solid."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Don't laugh at the poor chap," said De Valerie severely. "He can't help being tubby, I suppose. I expect he was twice this size before he started starving. I'm going to give him a whacking big tip—he deserves it!"

And De Valerie took a crisp slip of paper from his pocket and stuffed it into the box. Long's heart gave a jump as he caught a glimpse of it—in spite of the fact that he was blind.

"A ten-hob note!" he gasped.

"There you are, sonny," said De Valerie kindly. "You can run away and spend that money now——"

"Hold on!" said Pitt. "I want to contribute, too. I think we ought to do the best we can for this poor chap. He's in a much worse condition than that other blind boy who was here. This deserving fellow is starving and homeless. We ought to make an extra effort."

"Hear, hear!"

"Good for you, Pitt!"

"Fork out, my sons!" said De Valerie.

To Long's startled amazement, he heard the majority of the fellows rustling pound and ten-shilling notes! They were stuffed into the box one after another. Coins were dropped in, too—dozens of them. It was evident, too, that they were not copper coins.

At last the avalanche was over, and the cardboard-box was so full that it would scarcely hold any more. The juniors round Long were smiling kindly upon him, but he was too dazed with excitement to notice anything.

He could scarcely murmur his thanks. Somehow or other, he turned and hobbled towards the exit. But, to his secret annoyance, a number of juniors accompanied him, leading him to the outer gate.

"There you are, you'll be all right now," said Pitt softly. "Only just in time, too. The gates will be locked in a minute. Good-night!"

"I—I say," gasped Long. "I—I want to come in—— I—I mean——"

"That's all right," said Pitt. "Off you go!"

Long could do nothing but walk away—along the street. Under a lamp in the distance he could see a police constable, and his legs began to quake. It was absolutely imperative that he should get back into the school.

And the juniors had bundled him out—they had been altogether too painstaking for Long's liking. To his great relief he saw that the fellows had gone back through the archway—and the gates were still open.

With a scared glance round him, he slipped in, and he gave another sigh of

relief as he found himself within the courtyard. As he crouched against the wall, Warren lumbered to the gates with his key. Long had only just been in the nick of time! But he couldn't remain out there.

He slipped across the courtyard, and entered the house by a door which was only intended for the use of the servants. How Teddy Long got upstairs he hardly knew, but by a piece of great good fortune he arrived in the box-room without being spotted.

And he locked himself within the room, glowing with exultation and excitement. There was certainly nothing less than ten pounds in the box—he was sure of that. For he had counted at least twenty notes, and he believed that the majority of them were pound notes. And there were many coins, too.

"My goodness!" he muttered. "It worked gloriously!"

He switched on the electric light, and dived his hand in the box. When he withdrew it it was filled with paper, and he gazed upon the crisp slips with his heart beating rapidly against his ribs.

"I never thought that chaps could be so generous!" he murmured gleefully. "There must be quids and quids—— Why, what the—— Oh, crikey!"

Long stared at the handful of paper in a dazed kind of way.

"This—this ain't money!" he gasped, horrified.

Just for a moment Teddy Long thought that he was dreaming. He had been picturing himself strolling into the common-room, overflowing with cash; he had seen himself telling a story of a big remittance from his people, surrounded by a crowd of envious fellows.

But that vision faded away as he looked at the contents of his hand. The slips of paper were not currency notes at all! Now that the full light was upon them, they were revealed as—fakes!

"My—my goodness!" said Long huskily.

He still couldn't quite believe it. He turned one of the "notes" over, and saw that it was the correct size, and it felt very much like a currency note. But it was merely a portion of a page torn from some outfitter's catalogue!

All the other notes were of the same quality. The schemer of the Remove took a big gulp, and there was a kind of lump down in his throat. His disappointment was so great that he felt like bursting into tears.

"I've been swindled!" he muttered hoarsely. "Oh, the cads—the beasts! And—and I thought—— Oh, dear! What a rotten trick!"

His hopes were revived for a moment as he thought of the many coins which had been tossed into the box. Perhaps he wouldn't fail completely, after all. He tipped the box upside down, and out rolled the coins.

They were undoubtedly the most remarkable number of British coinage ever displayed. For they consisted, mainly, of old metal buttons, card counters, and articles of a similar nature. There was only one genuine coin among the whole collection—and that was Tregellis-West's penny!

"Great—great pip!" panted Long, aghast. "A penny! A rotten penny! And—and I thought that— Oh, but what's the good of living any longer? I've a dashed good mind to chuck myself out of the window!"

He sat down heavily upon a trunk, and stared before him, miserable and disillusioned. He had been spoofed! Somebody must have seen him dodge out, and Sir Montie had kept him engaged while the faked money was being prepared. And in the gloom he had not been able to see the fraud—even if the other fellows had seen the fraud!

"It's a swindle—a rotten, mean swindle!" muttered Long indignantly. "Making a poor blind chap think that he's got money, and then diddling him! They thought I was genuine enough, but they did that just out of spite!"

Long could not believe, upon second thoughts, that his disguise had been penetrated. He became convinced that the fellows had played the trick, believing that he actually was a blind beggar. But this view was quickly dispelled.

The sneak of the Remove removed his disguise, and went downstairs as quickly as possible. Now that he had come back to his senses, he remembered that there was prep. to be done. If it wasn't done, there would be a painful interview with Mr. Crowell in the morning.

Long strolled into the common-room before going along to his study. He went in quite unconcernedly, whistling. For, although his heart was heavy with disappointment, he pretended to be in his normal spirits.

"Just the chap I was looking for!" exclaimed Pitt briskly.

"Eh?" said Long. "Talking to me?"

"Yes, my son. I want to borrow ten bob!"

"You—you want to borrow——"

"Exactly," said Pitt calmly. "You're rolling in tin, ain't you? And what's happened to your neck? You forgot to wipe the soot off!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Everybody howled, and Long gulped as he looked round.

"I—I happened to touch the chimney in my study," he stuttered. "A chap can't always be spotless, you know. And what the dickens do you mean, Pitt? You know jolly well I'm broke!"

Reginald Pitt staggered.

"Broke!" he gasped. "Have you spent it already?"

"You silly ass!" howled Long. "I've had nothing to spend!"

"What about all those quids we gave

you? What about all those coins?" asked Pitt warmly. "You couldn't have spent——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The fellows couldn't contain themselves any longer. The expression of dismay and alarm upon Long's face was too rich for words, and everybody in the common-room doubled up and roared. Teddy Long knew in a moment that his secret was no secret at all, and he turned towards the door to flee.

But I was standing there with Tregellis West and Watson. I had been looking on rather grimly, and I hadn't been laughing with the others. I grabbed Teddy Long by the collar, and shook him.

"You young rascal!" I exclaimed severely.

"I—I—I——" gasped Long incoherently.

"You unscrupulous little swindler!" I said, shaking him again. "It's a good thing we spotted that rotten trick of yours and turned it into a jape. You ought to be flogged for attempting such a fraud."

"But—but——"

"You've got no excuse," I went on firmly. "You saw us make a collection for the poor kid who was in the courtyard earlier, and you thought you could swindle the fellows out of a lot of money. If I wasn't soft, I'd take you straight to the Head and report you for a flogging. You deserve it for being a young criminal!"

"You—you must be mad!" panted Long.

"I—I've done nothing! I've made no collection, you silly ass! I've been in the library for two hours past," he went on, gaining courage, and waxing indignant. "You'd better mind what you're saying, Nipper! I'm not going to stand——"

"All right—sit!" I said promptly.

"Yaroooh!"

Teddy Long bumped to the floor with a crash, as I swept his legs from under him. It was the signal for all the others to get busy. And the schemer found himself being bumped round the common-room until he was breathless and sore.

When, at last, he crawled away, Teddy Long had come to the conclusion that raising the wind by means of a bogus collection was not exactly successful. He had collected far more than he had bargained for!

CHAPTER III.

A REGULAR SCAMP.

R ALPH LESLIE FULLWOOD gazed into the darkness.

"You chaps ready?" he breathed.

"Yes!" came two whispers.

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

The Nuts of the Remove moved down the dormitory towards the door. Everybody else in the long apartment was asleep, and the darkness enshrouded all. From without came the ceaseless rumble and hum of London.

Fullwood and Co. were preparing to keep their appointment with Mr. Joseph Palmer. This gentleman was a total stranger to them—at least, he had been until a day or two earlier. Mr. Palmer had introduced himself, after seeing a bundle of notes in Fullwood's possession.

Those notes had changed hands very shortly afterwards; but Fullwood was not keen enough to see that he had been swindled. The fascination of roulette was so great that Fullwood put his loss down to a mere matter of luck.

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

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

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

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

They were in high spirits as they crept out of the Remove dormitory. Everything was quiet out in the corridor, but it behoved the trio to be cautious, for several masters were still out and about; and it would be very unfortunate if the Nuts happened to run into somebody on the way out.

This disaster, however, did not happen.

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

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

Bell looked round him rather nervously.

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

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

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

"You fainted!" said Gulliver sourly. "An'

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

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

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

The wall at the bottom of the paddock overlooked a little alley, which ran from one quiet roadway to another. There were very few lamps, and at night the place was practically deserted. It was one of those backwaters of London which the average man never sees or troubles about.

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

"Yes, rather!"

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

"There's somebody comin'," whispered Gulliver.

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

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

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

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

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

"Well, come along," put in Palmer briskly. "I've got a taxi waiting handy, and we can be at the scene of activities within ten minutes. You ought to have quite a splendid time to-night, boys."

"By gad! We'll make the fur fly!" grinned Fullwood.

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

"In you get, boys," said Palmer genially. They piled in, and their guide had a few

words with the driver. Fullwood and Co. didn't hear what their destination was to be. The taxi was soon bowling along, but the journey was only brief.

Fullwood knew that the vehicle went along High Holborn, into New Oxford Street, and then down Tottenham Court Road. But it turned so many times after that that he couldn't follow the route.

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

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

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

"By gad!" said Gulliver. "This is the life!"

They believed that they liked this; they revelled in the idea of being "goey" and doggish. In their hearts, perhaps, they were disgusted with the scene; but they would never admit it to one another.

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

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

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

"Well, that's not so bad——"

"We can't rake in fifties and hundreds every time, Rogan," said Palmer. "These fives and tens help to make up, you know."

"You think it's safe?"

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

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

Palmer grinned.

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

He strolled down the room, past two or three tables where poker and chemin-de-fer were in progress, and halted against Fullwood and Co., who were watching the roulette-table—before plunging.

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

Palmer looked as well as Bell's chums. A

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

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

"Silly ass!" said Gulliver, with a sniff. "I wish I could handle a bunch of notes like that—I'd soon double it! By gad! If only Tregellis-West had some sense! He could rake in hundreds. He always carries twenty or thirty pounds on him; and he looks upon this sort of thing as rot. The silly juggins!"

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

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

"Eh?" said Gulliver, turning.

"You mentioned a name a moment ago——"

"Did I?" said Gully. "Oh, I forget! Look at that idiot!"

"Just a moment," interrupted Mr. Palmer. "The name was Tregennis-something——"

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

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

The Nuts laughed.

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

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

"No, we mean to say that he is a millionaire—now," said Fullwood. "His people are dead, or somethin'. His uncle, the Earl of Westbrooke, is his guardian, but he's an easy-goin' old bird, an' Tregellis-West can do pretty well as he likes. He's got his bankin' account, and can draw cheques for hundreds of quids if he likes. He's rollin' in money, the lucky bouncer!"

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

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

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

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

"He doesn't want to win anythin'," interrupted Fullwood. "He's got so much cash that he doesn't care a rap; when he's

run through his supply he's only got to ask for more, an' he gets it."

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

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

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

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

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

"Had any luck?" asked Palmer genially.

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

"That's bad, but we'll soon see an alteration," said Palmer. "I'm inclined to do you a favour, boys. I'm an old hand at this game, and you're fresh. If you give me your money I'll guarantee to treble it within half an hour."

The Nuts looked at Palmer eagerly.

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

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

"Impossible!" said Fullwood. "An' even if it could be done, I wouldn't lift a hand to help. I don't like the cad, and it wouldn't please me to see him doublin' his money. But, apart from that, it's no good, Mr. Palmer."

The man was quite unmoved.

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

"An' so he is!" declared Gulliver.

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

Fullwood's eyes gleamed.

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

Palmer smiled. He was rather pleased with himself, for the Nuts had fallen into the little trap quite easily. They did not realise that Palmer was attempting to make tools of them. They did not guess that this plausible rascal had other and more sinister motives

in desiring Sir Montie's presence. They merely thought it was rather a good jape.

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

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

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

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

Palmer considered a moment.

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

"Do it, Fully," urged Bell. "Where's the harm? I'd give quids to see the cad in a place like this. An' think how we shall be able to jeer at him afterwards. He'll be scared to death of us."

Fullwood thrust out his hand.

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

CHAPTER IV.

CAUGHT IN THE NET.

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

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

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

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

"By gad, yes!" said Fullwood.

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

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

"Naturally," said Fullwood.

They found the taxi waiting in the street. Fullwood thought that it was merely an ordinary cab, available for hire; it certainly looked like one. But it was a fake taxi, and the chauffeur was a friend of Palmer's.

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

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

Fullwood grinned.

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

Arriving at the wall of the school, Palmer promised to wait in the alley until Fullwood returned. He treated the whole matter as a huge joke. But Palmer and Rogan were not joking; they had a rascally plot in mind.

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

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

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

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

Sir Montie turned over, and opened his eyes.

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

"Really, I—"

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

Sir Montie awoke fully.

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

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

"You frightful rascal!"

"I know—I know!" moaned Fullwood.

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

Sir Montie was rather startled. He hardly knew whether to believe Fullwood or not. He was as shrewd as any other fellow in the Remove, and he immediately suspected a trick. But why should Fullwood come to him in this way if the story was not genuine?

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

"Mr. Lee is already there," said Fullwood glibly. "But I don't want you to wake anybody else in the dormitory—not even Nipper. It would only cause a rumpus, an' we should be delayed. If you've got any feelin's in you, Tregellis-West, shove some clothes on, an' come with me. It was Mr. Lee who urged me to fetch you, an' he told me to bring nobody else!"

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

Fullwood gave a kind of sob.

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

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

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

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

But, try as he would, he could think of no reasonable explanation of Fullwood's conduct—unless Gulliver had actually met with an accident. How could there be any spool about it? Fullwood usually did things for gain, and what could he gain from this affair?

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

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

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

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

"Well, I am a doctor, and Mr. Lee requested me to fetch you without disturbing anybody else in the school; that is why Fullwood came in the way he did," said Mr. Palmer smoothly. "And now we must hurry."

The trio entered the taxi, and it was soon buzzing along towards the West End. Fullwood was chuckling to himself inwardly. Sir Montie had been captured with extreme

case, and it would be amusing to see his expression when he found himself in the gambling-den.

He would be compelled to play roulette, and Fullwood chuckled afresh as he thought of it. Tregellis-West would not dare to breathe a word afterwards, for his own position would be a rather delicate one.

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

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

"Right you are, sir," said Fullwood.

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

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

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

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

"Did it work?" asked Gulliver.

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

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

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

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

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

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

"The infernal little rotter!" he snapped.

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

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

The Nuts looked dismayed.

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

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

"We'll half slaughter the ass when we find him," said Fullwood savagely. "He's spoilt our little game—"

"Well, never mind that," interrupted Palmer. "Come with me; out of sheer kind-

heartedness I'll take you back in the taxi. Come along."

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

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

"What's wrong?" asked Palmer sharply.

"Fully's cap just blew off!" explained Bell.

Fullwood recovered his headgear, and as he rose from a bending position his eye caught one of the brass plates, fixed just inside the doorway. The name upon it was Owen-Salter, but Fullwood saw no more, and the name did not remain in his memory for long. It meant nothing to him, but in due course it was to mean a good deal to others.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

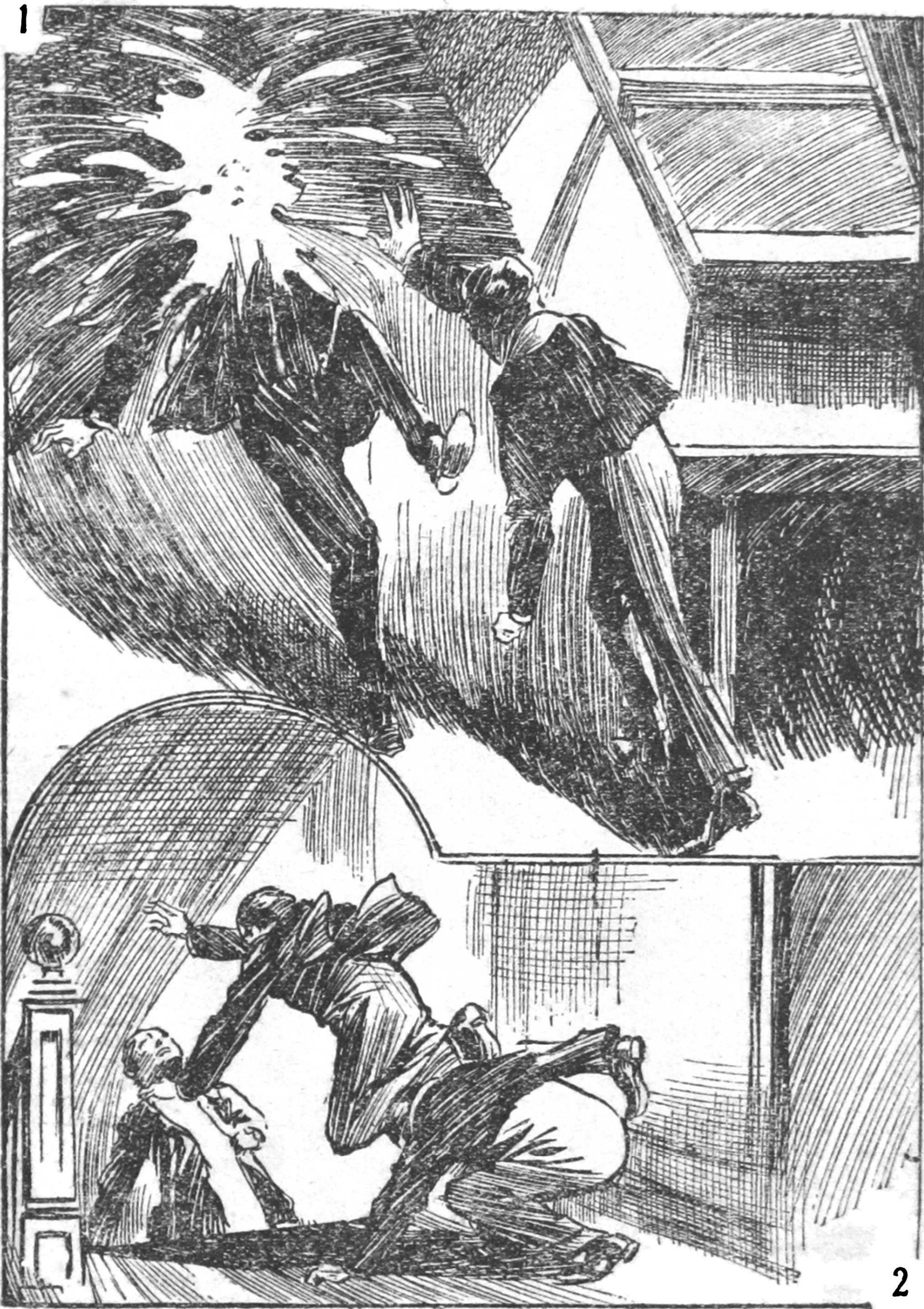
The Nuts lost no time in undressing and slipping into bed. They were not at all anxious about the absent Sir Montie. He would crawl in before long, and Fullwood and Co. slept peacefully and contentedly.

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

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

"That was rather neat," said Palmer, as he removed his overcoat. "Those kids believe that the youngster escaped, and they'll never be able to prove otherwise, no matter

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1.—Slap! The blanc-mange caught Palmer full in the face, his head being smothered with the sticky substance.

2.—Montie bobbed down and Palmer shot out on to the landing right at Rogan's feet.

what they suspect. But Tregellis-West is upstairs—safe."

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

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

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

Palmer smiled.

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

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

"If we can rake in a neat thousand, we shan't mind skipping," declared Palmer grimly. "And we can probably get more than a thousand. It all depends. This kid is a millionaire, and we shan't let him go for nothing."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Tregellis-West stared at the two masked men.

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

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

Tregellis-West shook his head.

"I will agree to nothin'," he said. "You have kidnapped me, an' I have no intention of agreein' to any proposal, because a proposal from you is bound to be a frightfully dishonest one. I suppose you want me to hand over my note-case, an' my gold watch. I refuse to do anythin' of the sort."

Palmer smiled behind his mask.

"I am afraid we should not be satisfied with so small a reward," he said. "We are after a bigger prize, Sir Montgomery. All you must do is to sign a cheque for one thousand pounds. It must be an open cheque, and it will be cashed in the morning. When we have obtained the money, you will be freed."

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

"Begad!" he exclaimed. "You must be mad, dear fellow—I mean, you rotter! Do you think I will give you a thousand pounds—for nothing? I utterly refuse to lift a finger. You can keep me here if you like. I can't exactly refuse to remain under the circumstances. But you will get yourselves into shockin' trouble. I should advise you to let me go at once— Begad! What the—"

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

"This is no comedy!" snapped Palmer harshly. "Do you understand? You must agree to what I say, or you will suffer! No more of this nonsense, boy! Write out that cheque as I demand!"

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

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

Tregellis-West shook his head.

"You may think that I'm awfully scared by that revolver," he said steadily. "But I'm not! I positively refuse to do anything. Do you understand? I won't give you a farthing. You can do your worst, you frightful rotter!"

Palmer removed the weapon, and stared.

"Well, you've got a nerve and no mistake!" he exclaimed. "So you refuse to do as we demand? Very well; there is another course open to us. You have refused to pay one thousand pounds; your uncle will be compelled to pay five thousand. You will

not receive your liberty until the money is paid!"

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

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

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

Crash!

His left hammered upon Palmer's nose, and the man staggered back with a howl of pain and surprise. Sir Montie bounded to the door, grasped the handle, and nearly succeeded in getting through.

But the odds were rather too heavy. He had made a bold bid for liberty, and he was almost victorious. But Rogan recovered his wits just in the nick of time. He hurled himself at Montie as the latter was tearing open the door.

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

Rogan seized Montie fiercely.

"You infernal little brat!" he snarled, whirling the boy round. "By thunder! You nearly beat us with your tricks! If you yell I'll swipe you to the floor with one blow! Hold still, confound you!"

Tregellis-West took a deep breath.

"Begad!" he murmured. "It was a near thing, you know. I nearly did the trick, you awful bounders!"

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

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

CHAPTER V.

MISSING!

"WHERE'S Montie got to?"

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

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

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

Hart sat up in bed, and yawned.

"Talking about Tregellis-West?" he asked.

"I woke up at five o'clock, and his bed was empty then. He must have got up in

the middle of the giddy night! What's happened to cause the miracle?"

I looked at Hart curiously.

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

"I've got my ticker under the pillow," said Hart. "I noticed that Montie was up, and I wondered what the time was. The exact hour, my son, was four-fifty-six. In other words, four minutes to five."

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

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

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

"Me? What the deuce should I know?" snapped Fullwood. "I don't take any interest in your snobbish pals! Rats to you, and rats to Tregellis-West. If he's wandered out and lost himself, all the better!"

I felt rather worried.

"It's a rummy thing I didn't wake up," I said. "If there's anything unusual going on in the dormy I generally wake up. But I was feeling a bit heavy last night—I had a beast of a headache—and I suppose I slept too soundly."

By breakfast-time the whole Remove was talking about the absence of Sir Montie Tregellis-West. The prefects got to know of it, and then the masters. Nelson Lee himself ran across me in the hall.

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

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

Nelson Lee stroked his clean-shaven chin.

"How is it you weren't aroused, my lad?" he inquired. "I thought you were easily awakened?"

"So I am," I said. "But I can't always feel fit, can I? When I went to sleep last night I was feeling rotten—headachy and seedy. I'm all right now—fresh as green leaves—but I expect I slept heavily. Anyhow, I didn't wake up until the rising-bell went."

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

I stared.

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

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

"Great Scott!" I gasped.

"What is the matter, Nipper?"

"I—I've just thought of that Chinese

band of crooks, sir!" I exclaimed tensely. "You remember! Montie and I got down an old sewer, and were collared by Chinese rotters—a gang of drug smugglers. Then you came along and rescued us!"

"Naturally, I remember—considering that the adventure only occurred last week," said Nelson Lee drily. "I will confess, Nipper, that I have a suspicion that Montie has been taken by those Chinamen."

"The scoundrels!" I panted. "The awful hooligans!"

"However, there is no evidence to substantiate my surmise," went on Lee. "I can tell you that our old friend, Detective-Inspector Lennard, has been keeping his eyes very wide open during this last week; and I am expecting a raid at any moment. The Yellow Band—as we have called the Chinese crooks—may be broken up at any hour."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"This is getting serious," I said, as Tommy Watson and I walked along the corridor. "Poor old Montie! What the dickens has happened to him? Look here! I'm going to see the guv'nor!"

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

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

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

"It's outrageous, Lee—positively outrageous!" the earl was declaring. "I didn't go to the police, because I thought you'd be

able to give me some advice. What can I do? Pay the money? No—certainly not! I absolutely refuse to be victimised by a gang of cut-throats and scoundrels! The idea!"

His lordship snorted, and paced up and down.

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

Lord Westbrooke turned round.

"Ah, Nipper!" he exclaimed. "Pleased to see you again, my boy. Infernal mess, this is! Montie kidnapped and a ransom demanded for his release! Huh! I won't pay a farthing!"

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

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

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

Nelson Lee smiled grimly.

"You could capture the man, I agree," he said, "but I am afraid you would not force him to speak. And you must remember that the letter threatens that Montie will be harmed if there is any attempt to interfere—"

"Bluff!" snapped Lord Westbrooke.

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

His lordship nodded gloomily.

"Yes, it is—it is, indeed!" he exclaimed. "And poor Montie is held a prisoner. There is no telling what hardships he is suffering! 'Pon my soul! I'm a brute—an unfeeling, selfish brute! I'm going to pay that money, Lee! I'll meet this confounded rascal at Piccadilly Circus to-morrow morning, and hand over the five thousand! Montie is worth it, dear lad!"

"But you just said you wouldn't pay a farthing, sir," I put in.

"I know I did, Nipper," said Lord Westbrooke. "But what can I do? It appears that poor Montie will suffer if I cause any delay—and that is the last thing I should desire. I will pay this money, get the lad back—and then we can act in grim earnest. By gad! We can expose the villains without fear of harm befalling Montie."

Nelson Lee shook his head.

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

"Have you any clue?" inquired his lordship eagerly.

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

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

"It's awful!" declared Tommy, when he knew. "Poor old Montie kidnapped! I expect he's down in some rotten cellar now—cold and hungry! Can't we do something, Nipper? Can't we get busy?"

"What can we do?" I asked. "The gov'nor's got this case in hand, and the best thing we can do is to rely on him. We should only mess things up by butting in, perhaps. But I'd like to take a hand some way."

Watson scratched his head.

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

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

Edward Oswald Handforth came along, looking excited. Church and McClure were with him, and they were both serious.

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

"Eh? Think of what?"

"Montie being kidnapped!" said Handforth.

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

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

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

"Five thousand, you ass!" said McClure.

I looked at Handforth and Co. grimly.

"Who told you this?" I asked.

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

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

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

The whole school knew what had happened to Tregellis-West, and there was a great deal of excitement. Montie had been kidnapped! All sorts of wild suggestions were put forward by the juniors—suggestions for the rescue of Montie. But they were not adopted by Nelson Lee.

The gov'nor spent some little time up in the Remove dormitory, but there was not much to be found there in the way of clues. The letter to Lord Westbrooke was of very little value, for it told nothing. There was not even a finger-print on it, although Lee subjected the notepaper to every test.

It seemed, in fact, that there was very little scope for investigation. Personally, I was rather in favour of Lord Westbrooke's idea; to pay the money, and to obtain Montie's release. After that we could do our utmost to discover the culprits. But I said nothing to the gov'nor; I knew that he would act for the best.

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

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

"Of course," agreed Bell.

Fullwood laughed sourly.

"I never thought you had any brains," he sneered. "Haven't you got sense enough to guess the truth?"

"What do you mean?"

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

"To skin him at roulette," said Gulliver.

"Piffle!" snapped Ralph Leslie. "The game was deeper than that—although I didn't catch on at the time. Don't you see? Palmer told me to get upstairs in advance, after we'd arrived at the flat. Why? Because he wanted to play that piece of bluff on us."

"What piece of bluff?" asked Bell.

"Oh, you're as dull as snails!" said Fullwood impatiently. "Didn't Palmer come in an' say that Montie had slipped away? That was all bunkum. The rotter took

Tregellis-West further up the stairs. I expect, an' bundled him into an attic."

"Then why did he tell us——"

"Why—why?" said Fullwood sharply. "Haven't you got any wits at all? He wanted us to think that Tregellis-West had got collared by somebody else. But I'm not quite blind—even if you chaps are. Tregellis-West is bein' kept a prisoner in that gamblin' place—an' Palmer an' Rogan are a couple of crooks. That's the truth of the whole thing."

Gulliver and Bell were rather startled.

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

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

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

"I'm not a very soft chap," he said slowly. "But it seems to me that it's up to us to do somethin'. We let Tregellis-West into the cart—although we didn't know what the game was then."

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

"We know what the game is now, don't we?" said Fullwood. "An' it's only right that we should do what we can to help the chap. He's in the hands of criminals, an' we know who those criminals are."

Gulliver and Bell stared.

"Gettin' goody-goody all of a sudden, ain't you?" asked Gulliver.

"Oh, don't rot!" rapped out Fullwood. "You needn't think that I'm tryin' on the good little hero stunt. I'm thinkin' of myself. Montie will tell everythin' when he's rescued—he'll be furious with us. But if we tell him we gave the information leadin' to his release, he might keep mum. Don't you realise that Palmer used us as tools? He put us in the cart properly, the awful rotter! If we ain't careful we shall find ourselves nabbed!"

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

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

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

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

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

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

He sat down at the table and drew a sheet of notepaper towards him. He gazed at it for a moment, and then placed it aside.

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

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

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

CHAPTER VI.

LEARNING THE TRUTH.

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

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

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

"A note? Who is it for?"

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

"This note, my lad, is for me," he said.

"Where did you bring it from?"

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

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

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

"It was give to me by a boy, just in Holborn, sir," he said. "'E was just like these 'ere boys 'ere, with a blue and red cap, but dressed more swanky. 'E told me to take the note, and 'e give me a tanner. That's all I knows, sir."

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

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

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

He read the words slowly:

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

men. The gambling-den is a flat on the third floor. Find this place, and you will find Tregellis-West."

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

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

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

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

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

"Yessir."

Tubbs found me in the vicinity of the Remove Form-room—for it was nearly time for afternoon lessons. I went to the gov'nor's study at a rapid pace, wondering if anything fresh had occurred.

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

I was rather indignant.

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

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

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

Nelson Lee raised his eyebrows.

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

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

The gov'nor smiled.

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

"Yes, but what——"

"And please hurry," added Lee.

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

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

"You have got it?" said Nelson Lee, as I marched in. "Good! Please, turn to page 288, Nipper. I have an idea that you'll find it missing. At all events, I hope you will."

I turned the leaves of the magazine over.

"Page 288 isn't here, sir," I said—"it's

been torn out. But, of course, you knew it. You must have seen this mag. before."

"I've never seen it until this moment."

"What's the idea, sir?" I asked, staring. "Is it a new game? Or have you suddenly turned into a magician, for a change? How the dickens did you know that page 288 was missing?"

"Because I have page 288 here," said Leo calmly.

He handed it over to me, and I gazed at it in wonder. Then I saw the words written upon the margin, and I read them. By the time I had finished my heart was beating at a much more rapid pace.

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

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

Nelson Lee told me how the note had been delivered.

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

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

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

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

"I'd like to hear——"

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

I was not exactly satisfied, but it was not my place to grumble. So I went along to the Form-room, and encountered Fullwood just as he was strolling up with Gulliver and Bell.

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

The Nuts started.

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

"Yes."

"What about?"

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

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

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

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

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

Fullwood did so.

"What is this?" asked the Housemaster abruptly.

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

"Well?" said Nelson Lee quietly.

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

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

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

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

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

"I—I—I——"

"Your whole attitude is one of guilt, Fullwood, and a denial from your lips would be a mere farce," continued Nelson Lee. "I need not add that if this matter is reported to Dr. Stafford you will be expelled without a day's delay. It is just possible, however, that you may be able to help me in my search for Tregellis-West. If you can give some valuable information, all the better."

"Will you let me off, sir, if I own up?" asked Fullwood eagerly.

Nelson Lee shook his head.

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

Fullwood vaguely understood that frank-

ness was his best policy. A pack of lies would only make matters worse for him, for he would undoubtedly be expelled. By speaking up now there was just a chance that Nelson Lee would be merciful.

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

"Tell me the facts."

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

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

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

Fullwood looked alarmed.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"You need not thank me, Fullwood," interrupted Lee. "And do not imagine for a moment that you are to get off scot-free. Your punishment will be heavy. But it is in

your own hands to lighten it. If I see signs of genuine improvement, I may be inclined to be generous. And now I want to ask you a few questions. Who are these two men, Rogan and Palmer?"

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

"Well, where is this gambling establishment?"

"I don't know, sir."

"And yet you have been there on two occasions?"

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

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

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

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

Fullwood started.

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

Lee made a note of the name.

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

"Thank you, sir," said Fullwood unsteadily.

He left the study, and he took in several deep breaths as he walked down the passage. The blow had fallen, but there was just a chance that it would not be a knock-out.

CHAPTER VII.

MONTIE MEANS BUSINESS.

MR. JOSEPH PALMER lit a cigarette with ease.

"You see, sonny, you've got to take your gruel quietly," he remarked. "There's no sense in kicking, because you'll only kick yourself. If everything goes well, you'll be as free as the day by noon to-morrow."

Sir Montie Tregellis-West made no reply.

He was sitting up in the attic—his prison—and he was just finishing a meal. It was late evening, and Montie had spent the day miserably and hopelessly.

Palmer had not starved his victim, for he had brought up several excellent meals during the day. And only an hour since he and Rogan had fixed up a small camp bedstead for Montie's benefit.

"We don't want to be hard on you, youngster," said Palmer. "You've done us no harm, and we don't want to harm you. All we're after is some ready cash—and we mean to get it."

Tregellis-West looked up.

"You're a frightful scoundrel, but you've got an amazingly smooth tongue, begad," he exclaimed. "You won't get a farthin' out of me—not if you keep me here for months on end. I have rooted objections to bein' made the victim of a rotten swindle. Please refrain from addressin' me."

Mr. Palmer chuckled.

"I rather like you," he said frankly. "I thought you'd be snivelling all the time. You've got nerve, kid, and I admire you for it. It was plucky of you to refuse my demand for money——"

"Nothin' of the sort," interrupted Tregellis-West. "I should have been a shockin' coward if I had tamely agreed."

"Well, as it happens, you're dead in this act," said Palmer. "We're dealing directly with your uncle, and in the morning we shall receive a nice little sum of five thousand pounds. That's what you're costing, my lad."

"Lord Westbrooke won't pay it," declared Montie.

"Oh, yes, he will," replied Palmer easily. "He'll have to. He's not going to let you suffer. But we needn't argue the point. The best thing you can do is to get into bed—and be thankful that you've got one at all!"

Tregellis-West did not look very overjoyed.

"I'm feelin' frightfully miserable," he said dully. "I never realized that captivity could be so beastly monotonous. It is all experience, however. A fellow needs to go through one or two adventures—it makes things lively, you know. But I'm not feelin' lively just now."

And Montie yawned as he lay back in his chair.

"You're tired out, sonny—that's what's the matter with you," said Palmer. "Get undressed as quickly as you can, and slip between the sheets. You won't be disturbed in the night—unless you start making trouble."

"Begad! I hate to mention it, you ruffian, but I am in a bit of a difficulty," observed Montie. "I can't very well start undressin' with my ankles bound up. Perhaps you can explain how it is to be done?"

Palmer laughed.

"We'll soon get over that difficulty," he said. "I'm here, and I'll see after you while you get undressed. I'm going downstairs."

soon, but Rogan will be up to keep his eye on you during the night. We can't afford to leave you by yourself. You're inclined to be tricky."

Palmer helped Sir Montie to his feet. Then he bent down and loosened the ropes which bound Montie's ankles.

"You can finish the unfastening yourself," said Palmer, pulling a revolver from his pocket. "And when you're free, undress quickly. If you try any tricks you'll know that I'm here!"

He moved the revolver significantly. But Tregellis-West was apparently taking no interest in it; he untied the ropes, and then stretched his legs with a sense of great relief. But after a while he hobbled about painfully, and was compelled to seek support from the table.

"Pins and needles?" asked Palmer pleasantly. "That's the circulation returning, youngster. Rogan tied the knots rather too tight. You'll soon be better."

But Montie screwed his face up and clung to the table! Just near his hand a whole blanc-mange reposed on a plate. Montie hadn't fancied it, and the delicacy remained untouched.

"Begad!" gasped the prisoner. "I—I'm afraid I can't start undressin' yet!"

"I'll give you a few minutes' grace," said Palmer pleasantly.

Slap!

What happened in that second took Palmer utterly by surprise. In one swift movement Montie grabbed up the blanc-mange and flung it with all his strength into Palmer's face.

It smothered his features, and the man reeled back with a spluttering cry. His revolver fell to the floor harmlessly. The blanc-mange was in Palmer's eyes, his mouth, and his hair was a sticky mass.

Sir Montie was not a willing prisoner!

He dashed to the door, turned the key—which was on the inside—and flung the door open. Just as he was about to rush out he beheld the figure of Rogan ascending the narrow stairs.

"Oh, what frightfully rotten luck!" gasped Montie.

He stood still, disappointed and non-plussed. And at that moment he heard Palmer rushing at him from behind. The man came on like a charging bull—half mad with fury.

And Tregellis-West saw his chance.

He bobbed down just as Palmer was upon him. The man's outstretched hands met the air, his knees struck against Montie, and he shot head first out on to the landing—right at Rogan's feet.

Slam!

Montie closed the door in a flash, and turned the key in the lock. It was the only move possible in the circumstances. He had gained a brief respite, but he was almost certain that there was no escape for him.

"Begad!" he murmured. "This is exciting!"

The game was well worth playing, for he was alone, and a locked door separated him from his captors. There was still a vague chance that Montie would be able to gain his freedom.

He dashed to the window and flung it open. And his hopes sank as he gazed out into the night. He was far from the ground, and there was no means of descent. Immediately below him lay a square, enclosed yard, and opposite were the backs of other high houses and offices.

Everything was dark and still, and Montie knew that shouting would be useless. Besides, he was anxious to get free on his own account. His eyes grew accustomed to the gloom—but he saw no avenue of escape.

And from behind came the sounds of Rogan and Palmer forcing their way into the attic. The door was not over-strong, and it would soon give way before the combined efforts of the two men.

"I'm in a shockin' predicament—I am, really!" muttered Sir Montie. "There's nothin' to do! Those rascals will have me within three minutes, an' then they'll have somethin' nasty to say— Begad!"

He uttered the exclamation as he saw that a ledge, nearly a foot wide, ran round the building just below the window. Where it led to he did not know. But it occurred to him that he might be able to get into another window, further along. He would then be in another house! Escape would be easy—

Montie did not hesitate.

It was a terribly risky proceeding, in that gloom. But his nerves were of the strongest quality, and he was desperate. Just as the door rocked and splintered he slipped out of the window.

"By heaven," came a voice from behind. "the boy is throwing himself out— Come back, you young fool! You'll kill yourself — Oh!"

Montie disappeared

He had merely bent down, but Palmer, with a face as pale as chalk, thought that the boy had fallen to his death. He and Rogan had just entered the attic, and they hardly dared approach the window.

Montie was making the most of his chance. With steady nerves, he crept along the ledge, and his heart sank as he found that there were no other windows. At least, there were none within reach.

He approached the corner of the building, and he knew that he would be compelled to turn back—to walk into the hands of his captors again.

Had there been any onlookers they would have been appalled. For Sir Montie was clinging to the wall like a human fly. One slip, and he would go hurtling down to certain death.

At last he reached the corner, and his

fears were realised. The ledge did not continue right round the building. It ended abruptly, and there was nothing but a yawning chasm at Montie's feet.

But he saw something else. The neighbouring building was near—within six feet. And the roof was flat! It was a lower building, and the flat roof was just below Montie as he stood precariously on the ledge.

A startling thought came to him. Could he leap the gap? Would he be able to jump across to that flat roof? He wondered if it was worth the risk—until he caught sight of an object against the wall of the other building. And that object decided him.

It was a builder's ladder! If only he could reach that roof he would be able to descend swiftly and safely to the ground! Yes, it was worth risking! He was certain that he could succeed.

With his heart beating fast, but with his nerves still steady, he prepared himself for the leap. He did not hesitate; he did not hang back. Sir Montie, in spite of his dandified ways, was as brave as a lion.

He jumped!

Over he went, through the air. Just for a second it seemed that he would fall short—that he would topple back, and plunge to the ground, far below. But his feet struck the roof, and he hurled himself forward.

He fell—bruised a bit, but safe!

One minute later he was descending the ladder with all his speed. He reached the ground in a heap—for he overlooked the fact that most builders' men leave a plank tied to the foot of a standing ladder.

Montie trod on nothing, and fell the last five feet. He picked himself up rather dazedly, but there was a feeling of elation and triumph in his breast as he looked round him.

He had escaped! He had defeated his captors!

.

But, as it was destined to turn out, the trials and troubles of Sir Lancelot Montgomery Tregellis-West were not yet over!

THE END.

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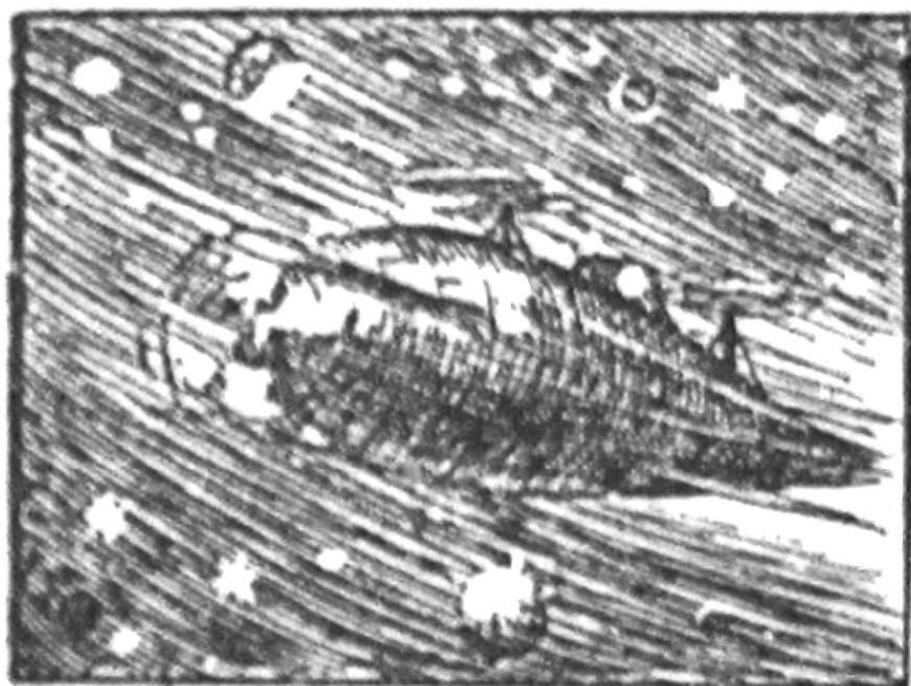
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INTRODUCTION.

ROBERT GRESHAM, an inventor, is rescued from cannibals in Central Africa by an exploration party consisting of

FRANK HILLSWORTH, his chum **MACDONALD GUTHRIE**, both sons of millionaires, their old college friend, **PROFESSOR MONTAGUE PALGRAVE**, a renowned scientist, and **ABBE**, a burly negro. Gresham tells his benefactors of his wonderful invention—a flying machine that will travel through space, and in recognition of their services invites them one and all to accompany him on a voyage to the solar planets. Since none of the party have any home ties and are ready for any adventures, they willingly accept the invitation. They all return to England, where for some months the flying machine, christened the "Solar Monarch," is secretly constructed. At last everything is in readiness for starting. All being aboard, Gresham pulls a lever and the Solar Monarch shoots up into space, heading for their first destination, the moon. Gradually the machine attains the tremendous speed of 2,000 miles an hour, and in a week the moon is reached. At first the planet appears to be destitute of life. On exploring some deep gorges or fissures, the party came suddenly upon the weird inhabitants of the moon. Before they can get into the daylight they are captured by these strange Lunar monsters, and are carried in the grip of powerful tentacles through dark tunnels.

(Now read on.)

The Escape.

THE last words the Scot uttered were spoken with reference to an object which had just appeared in view. The journey had evidently come to an end, for Frank could see that they were now in an immense cavern, and at one end a strange light burned with unusual brilliance. It was bright green, and for a moment blinded them. Immediately under this light sat a terrible-looking object—that of which Mac had spoken. It was of colossal size—fully ten feet in height and four in breadth; it was, in point of fact, a creature precisely

similar to those who carried the four captives.

To describe the thing would be well-nigh impossible—all I can do is to give but a hazy notion of its appearance. Its head, to start with, was perfectly round, and in the place where one would expect a nose to project shone a huge eye—apparently the only one it possessed. Of mouth and nose there was not the slightest indication, yet it must have owned such necessities. Out of either side of the head protruded a couple of horn-like articles—doubtless the Lunar equivalent for ears.

Its body looked for all the world like a mammoth football, so perfectly round was it. And, strangest of all, of legs, at first glance, it apparently had none. But on looking closer one could see three short, thick stumps all in a row—from front to back. Out of the centre of the football-like portion a long and snaky tentacle protruded. It was about six inches in circumference, and the owner of it continually kept waving it to and fro. To finish the description I may say that the whole was covered with a short fur—greyish in colour.

The four captives gazed at the weird monster in awe and amazement. It was quite evident that, had they chosen, their bearers could have squeezed the life out of them long since. But evidently it was not their intention to kill. Suddenly the Lunar being under the light—evidently a chief or ruler—uttered some sound or other. It was more than Frank could do to discover from what part of it it emanated. The order—if order it was—was instantly obeyed, for the adventurers were at once set upon their feet in a group. Gresham and the professor gave Frank and Mac a glance as they came together—a glance full of inquiry and wonder.

Having rid themselves of their burdens, the strange objects shuffled off. Their method of progress was peculiar. The three short legs worked with lightning-like rapidity, each being put to the ground in its turn—not unlike a caterpillar. They took up their stand against one of the walls. The place was a huge natural cavern, and there were no

(Continued on p. iii of cover.)

apparent signs of anything having taken up its abode therein, except for the strange light which burned so steadily and brilliantly.

Then commenced a conversation between the Lunar beings. The sounds they made are utterly indescribable, for they sometimes rang high and shrill, whilst at others they were low and faint. Being once again in touch, the four prisoners took the opportunity of exchanging opinions.

"We're in a pretty fix now," said Gresham sorrowfully. "And I can suggest no way in which to escape from these beggars' clutches."

"It would be best, I think," put in Palgrave, "to let them do exactly as they please with us. It is very evident they could kill us if they wished. But it seems that they don't wish, and there's no telling but what they may set us outside again, unharmed."

"I sincerely trust that it will be so," the inventor returned. "It would be a thousand pities to have our adventures cut off at such an early hour."

"What d'ye think they are, Mr. Gresham?" queried Mac. "Are they animals, or what?"

"That is a difficult question to answer, Mac," Gresham said. "I cannot say for certain, but it is my opinion that these objects are the inhabitants of the moon—I mean, in the same sense as we are the inhabitants of the earth. They may have animal life—again I cannot tell you—but I think it unlikely, otherwise we should have seen them."

"But they cannot be very thickly populated," put in Frank. "So far we have only seen these few."

"In all probability these in this cave are but one family out of thousands. Ah, they are making a move of some sort, evidently."

Two of the Lunarians had detached themselves from the others, and were coming towards them. When about a yard distant they halted and stood looking down upon the hapless prisoners. Then one of the two grasped Mac's arm with its tentacle and squeezed it hard. Mac yelled out and the thing relaxed its grip. No doubt the creatures were trying to find out what their visitors were made of. So far they had not appeared hostile, but there was no telling what they intended doing later on. Acting on a sudden impulse, Fran drew his revolver.

"Look here," he said swiftly. "Mac and I will tackle one, whilst you, Mr. Gresham, and you, professor, will endeavour to overcome the other. I reckon the best thing will be to fire straight into the brutes' eyes."

"It'll give us something to do, at all events," Gresham said grimly, and followed Frank's advice. Suddenly, four reports rang out, echoing and reverberating throughout the cavern. Almost immediately afterwards two truly awful cries rent the air, and Frank felt the whole floor quiver as the two Lunar beings toppled to the ground. At such range it was impossible to miss, and the bullets had found their way unerringly into each monster's gigantic eye.

They only gave one ear-splitting death-cry, then lay still. Doubtless their eyes were their one and only unprotected spot, for out in

the fissure the one they had met first had taken no heed of their fire. The whole proceeding had been so sudden that it was over almost before the prisoners had time to realise it. Then Mac pointed to the other dwellers of the moon.

"Look!" he said, in a low voice.

His companions did as directed, and saw the other huge objects collected under the light. They were perfectly still, and all staring down at their dead fellow-beings. They seemed dazed and unable to move. The professor took this opportunity to start hurrying towards the tunnel-mouth.

"Now is our only chance!" he cried. "Come, we will endeavour to escape before they can prevent us—this way!"

They followed him eagerly, and Frank suddenly remembered that in his pocket he had a little electric-torch. He produced this and went on ahead.

"Ah, that's much better!" cried Gresham, in an elated voice. "Upon my soul, boys, I believe we shall get away after all!"

"I'm no sae cartain o' that," Mac interrupted, shaking his head. "The beggar's will not be inactive for long. They'll wake up sunie, an' then we'll be kilt. Hark! That doesna sound verra much as if we're ganging tae escape, does it?"

They all paused involuntarily, for from behind them had come a number of yells. Without waiting for more they flew onwards again, helter-skelter, as fast as their legs would carry them. But in spite of their speed they could hear that their pursuers were gaining on them rapidly. The Lunarians' legs must have been going at a tremendous rate to enable them to keep up the pace. Gresham realised that they would soon be overhauled, so he called to the others to halt.

"Flatten yourselves against the wall!" he gasped. "There's a possibility that they might run past us in the darkness. Quick! They're here!"

His companions did as advised, and stood perfectly still, their hearts hammering against their ribs like mallets. They could tell by the sounds that their pursuers were very close now. A moment after they were abreast.

Would they pass? Would they go blundering on and fail to see them? No, it was not to be. The Lunar monsters came to a halt exactly at the spot where the adventurers were standing and let out several kinds of cries, evidently in token of triumph. It looked very much as though they could see in the dark. They pounced on the luckless humans, and Frank felt the cable-like arm being slowly wound around his body.

It grew tighter and tighter until he gasped. A cry came from the professor—a cry of agony, and Frank did his utmost to stifle back an answering one; but it came, nevertheless.

The Lunar inhabitants were slowly but surely squeezing the life out of their bodies! As that terrible grip tightened round

(Continued overleaf.)

Frank's ribs his senses reeled, and he expected every minute to hear a crack as one of them broke. The pressure was getting almost unbearable when he made a desperate effort to break away. But what was the use of pitting his puny strength against that of the gigantic Lunarian? It was as a kitten struggling in the grasp of a human being. But Frank's frenzied struggling was to save them yet.

As he flung his arms upwards his fingers clenched together convulsively, one of them pressing in the button of the electric-torch which he still held. The effect of his unconscious action was immediate. As the tiny shaft of yellow-light shot out the deadly grip which held him relaxed as if by magic, and his captor gave an agonising cry and reeled back.

Released, Frank almost fell to the ground, so exhausted and shaken was he. But he managed to keep upright, and played the light about, here and there. With a cry of surprise he saw that Mac, the professor, and Gresham had also been released and were now looking about them as if dazed. Of their late would-be murderers there was no sign.

Back to the Solar Monarch.

"WHEEL," Mac said slowly, "there's many things in the old world I canna understand; but, whisht, for sheer incomprehension this about takes the biscuit! How is it we're no dead? A little mair o' that pressure an' there would have been naething left of me!"

"I think we are all equally at a loss to understand their sudden change of front," the professor said, when he had somewhat recovered, "and it would be advisable for us to make all haste away before they can catch us up."

"By Jove! I believe I can tell you why the brutes bunked!" Frank cried suddenly, looking at the electric-torch in his hand. "It was this!"

He held it up and Mac laughed.

"Weel, I didna think a little scrap such as this would ha' turned your brain, Frank," he said. "What do ye mean? How could that licht have scared them?"

"I don't know about scaring them," replied Frank, turning to the professor. "It saved us, anyway. Directly I switched on this torch they let us go like hot bricks."

"I think you have hit it, Frank," said Professor Palgrave. "It is evident that these strange Lunar beings cannot live out in the open, or even as much as look on a yellow light. That is the explanation, doubtless, of our astronomers being unable to find

signs of life on the moon's surface. Certainly there may be small animals that wander abroad, but they would be, of course, too insignificant to be seen."

"I agree with you entirely," Gresham put in, "and we have to thank Frank for coming to our aid so opportunely. I have not the slightest doubt that had we been left in the dark we should have been by now cold meat."

"Don't thank me," laughed Frank. "The action was quite unconscious on my part."

They made their way onwards as fast as possible, feeling safe and exultant, until Mac put in one of his usual gloomy remarks.

"What if the battery in that torch gangs oot?" he suggested. "We'd be in as big a hole as ever."

"That's like you, Mac, to rake up what might happen," Frank said. "Wait until it does happen before you begin to worry. I never saw such a chap in my life!"

Mac grinned and said nothing.

At last they came to the tunnel-mouth and found themselves once more in the dark fissure. It was some relief to be out of that dreadful blackness, but still they said nothing until they emerged out into the open daylight, with the sun shining brightly above them, and the Solar Monarch glittering like burnished gold in the near foreground.

"Thank heaven we are out of that accursed place unharmed!" said the inventor fervently. "I tell you, boys, that for a time I gave up all hope of ever seeing the Monarch again. But now we are out of the wood, so to speak, we'll cast all gloomy thoughts from us and try to forget our weird adventure."

"The very idea!" cried Frank, for the time being as excited as a boy. "As for me, I'm going to ascertain how far it is possible to leap in this peculiar atmosphere."

Even the professor entered into the spirit of the thing, although lately he had been rather reticent and moody, the chums often catching him muttering to nobody in particular. After their recent experience, however, he felt quite elated at having seen the moon's inhabitants, and yet having emerged with a whole skin. The height they leapt into the air was really amazing. When jumping upwards it seemed, for a moment, that they were never going to stop. Then they would slowly float to the ground again. The sensation was delightful in the extreme, and impossible to describe.

When they reached the ship they found that Abbie had already prepared luncheon, and that he had begun to grow anxious about them. As he remarked:

"I tought dat yo' had all got chawed up by something, fo' suah! Deed, I was just a-gwine to search fo' you when Massa Frank he hopped on deck."

(To be continued.)