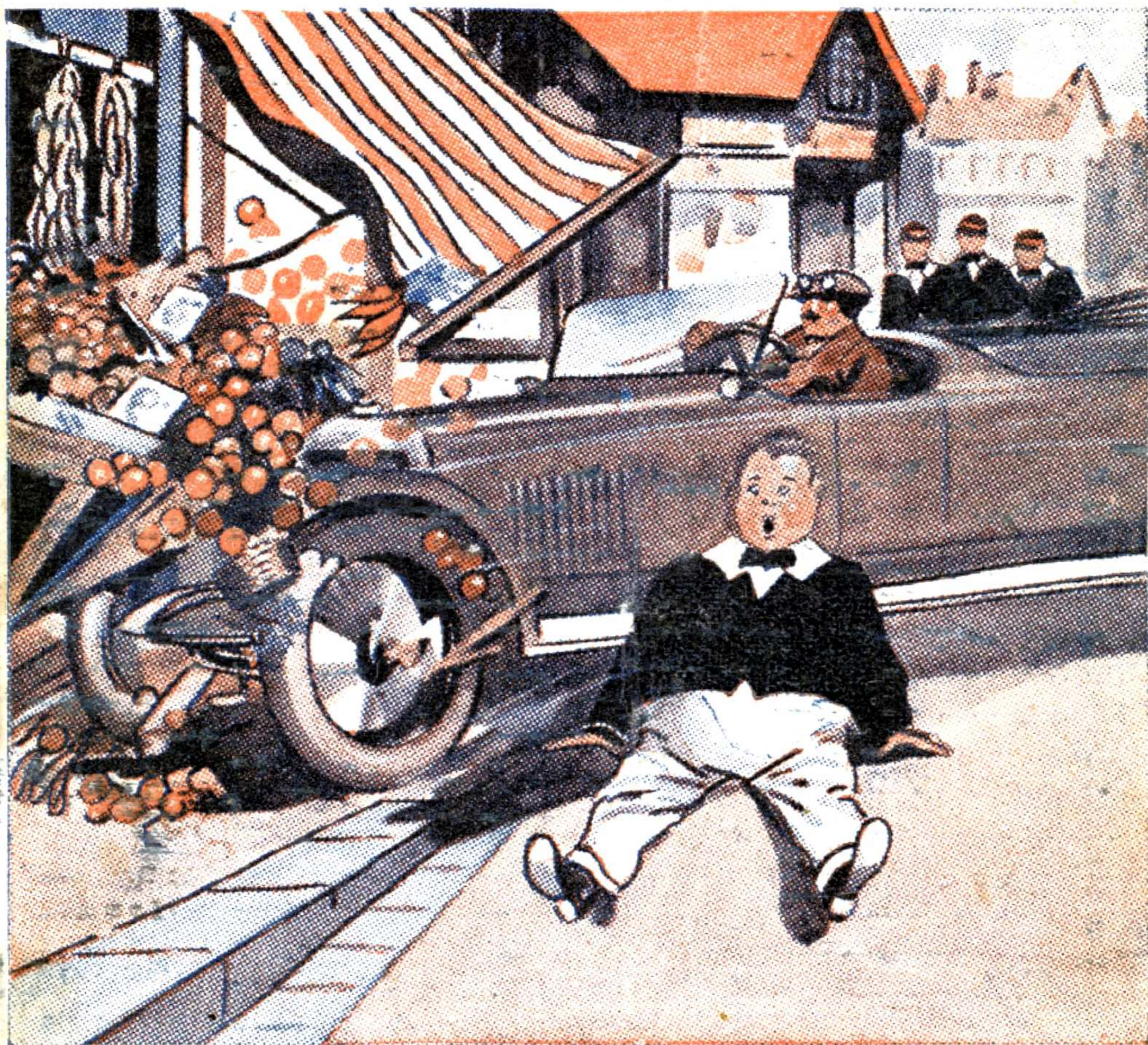


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(THE NARRATIVE RELATED
THROUGHOUT BY NIPPER.)

CHAPTER I.

FATTY LITTLE IN TROUBLE.

"**D**ISGUSTING, I call it!" exclaimed Fatty Little mournfully.

"Well, it might be worse—"

"Might be worse!" interrupted Fatty. "Great doughnuts! Nothing on earth could be worse than a terrific hunger and nothing to satisfy it with! I don't believe I shall be able to get back to St. Frank's—my strength won't last!"

Nicodemus Trotwood grinned.

"My dear old son, your strength is up to the mark all right," he said cheerfully. "You may think you're hungry, but you're not. Nobody can be really hungry on a hot afternoon like this. You're thirsty!"

The fat boy of the Remove snorted.

"You—you burbling ass!" he said, glaring. "Don't you think I know when I'm hungry? A thirst is nothing; you can quench a thirst without spending a farthing. Ginger-pop ain't necessary at all; cold water's fine when a chap's thirsty. But hunger's different. You've got to have grub, and grub costs money."

"But you had a terrific dinner——"

"Dinner!" echoed Fatty, in a hollow voice. "That was hours ago! Even then, I wasn't satisfied. I only had two helpings of pudding——"

"And half of my share and pretty nearly all of De Valerie's and every bit of Pitt's. The pudding wasn't popular to-day. You had about six helpings, all told. And then you complain about being hungry!"

"Well, I can't help it! I know when I'm hungry better than anybody else does," said Fatty obstinately. "I feel like on the point of fainting—my legs are shaky, and I'm weak all over!"

Trotwood grinned.

"I can understand your legs being shaky," he said. "Considering what they've got to carry, it's a wonder they perform the task at all! In any case, it's no good growling and grumbling. When we get back to St. Frank's, we shall be able to borrow some tea from somebody else's study."

Fatty Little groaned afresh. He wasn't worrying about tea-time, the sole topic of thought was the moment. He and Nicodemus Trotwood were in Bannington, and before they could partake of any tea they had to cycle back to St. Frank's.

It was half-holiday, and the pair had run over to the local town in order to make some purchases. They were study mates, together with Trotwood's twin brother; but Cornelius had stayed at school, preferring a quiet afternoon.

Fatty was rather short of cash—in fact, apallingly short. He had been well supplied at the beginning of the week, but the lure of the tuckshop had been too great for him. It always acted like a magnet, extracting the money from

his pocket in the shortest possible space of time.

The afternoon was warm, but a fresh breeze blew, and Fatty attributed his tremendous hunger to this wind. If there had been a dead calm, he would have attributed his hunger to some other cause—just as mythical.

Fatty lived for grub. Grub was in his thoughts constantly—morning, noon, and night. He went to bed thinking of eatables, he fell asleep and dreamed of glorious feeds, and his first thought in the morning when he awoke was of breakfast. During morning lessons he had day-dreams of dinner, and during afternoon lessons he thought far more of tea than of his work.

When it happened to be a half-holiday he looked upon it as a glorious opportunity to have an extra special feed. His one aim was to spend the whole afternoon sitting in a tuckshop, packing good things into his interior.

Yet Fatty Little was not exactly a glutton. He had a terrific appetite—an appetite which no other junior could fully understand. Fatty would never overeat himself; he would never eat for the mere sake of eating, and make himself uncomfortable. In fact, he could never reach that stage.

His constant lament was that nobody realised what an appetite he'd got, and that when he appeared to be greedy he was merely satisfying his hunger. And now, on this particular afternoon, the outlook was dark.

And it was really Trotwood's fault.

Fatty was hard up, but Trotwood had been well supplied with cash when the two juniors started off for Bannington. The plan had been to make the few purchases which Trotwood required, and then they would repair to a restaurant and "do the grand."

Unfortunately, however, Trotwood had entered a jeweller's, in order to purchase a tiepin for his cricket collar. And he had been tempted by a business-like salesman, and had fallen.

He came out of the shop with a new watch—and the grub money spent.

Trotwood had been wanting a new watch for some time, his original one having been damaged beyond repair in a recent scrap with the College House juniors. Somebody had trodden on Nicodemus while he was on the ground, and his watch had got into the way—with disastrous results.

He emerged from the jeweller's very satisfied with his purchase. But Fatty had had an appalling shock when he learned that the cost of the watch was fifty shillings. Trotwood had had three pounds to start with, and had already made one or two small purchases.

Fatty's consternation was even more pronounced when Trotwood reckoned up and discovered that he possessed only one shilling and ninepence. Fatty himself could boast of nothing more substantial than a two-shilling piece.

"Yes," said Trotwood, as they strolled down the Bannington High Street. "The only thing for it is to get back to St. Frank's, and invite ourselves to tea in some other study. Wait a minute, though! I think Corny's got a quid—"

"What's the good of that?" demanded Fatty. "Corny ain't here! I haven't got strength enough to pedal all the way to St. Frank's. I must have a feed!"

"Well, we've got three and ninepence—"

"Great kippers! What's the good of three and ninepence nowadays?" asked the fat junior plaintively. "It'll simply buy half a dozen jam tarts, a couple of buns, and a few cakes! It's not enough for a kid of five!"

"We must be thankful for small mercies—"

"Oh, don't talk rot!" said Fatty crossly. "The fact is, you were a dotty ass to buy that ticker! It ain't worth two pounds ten!"

"I've apologised fifty times for buying it, already," chuckled Trotwood. "The fact is, I forgot all about tea. I didn't realise that we should be hung up for funds. But it's no good making a fuss—"

"I'm not making a fuss," interrupted Fatty. "But I do think you ought to take that watch back, and get the money returned. Think of the grub we could have—think of the glorious spread!"

"It would last for about half an hour, the money would be gone, and I shouldn't have any watch to show for it," said Trotwood. "No, my son! For once you'll have to go hungry. But you have my sincere sympathy."

Fatty Little looked round despairingly, and automatically came to a halt when he found that the pair had drawn op-

posite a confectioner's. The window was full of pastry, cakes, and other good things. Fatty eyed them ravenously, as though he hadn't tasted food for days.

"I—I say, couldn't we have a spread on the nod?" he asked eagerly. "By chutney! That's a great idea! I hadn't thought of it before!"

"On the nod?" repeated Trotwood.

"Yes."

"But we don't know any of these shopkeepers well enough——"

"That doesn't matter," said Fatty.

"We can work it all right!"

"I'm afraid not," said the other junior, shaking his head. "As soon as we suggested having a terrific feed and leaving the bill owing there would be freezing shakes of the head, and nothing doing."

Little gazed at his chum almost piti- ingly.

"You brainless ass!" he exclaimed.

"Do you think I shall tell the shop- keeper in advance? Rather not! We'll simply swank him, and our college caps will be all the reference we shall need. We'll simply have all we can eat, and when the bill's presented, we can search our pockets, and then confess we haven't got enough to settle up. See the wheeze? They can't take the grub, because we shall have eaten it!"

Trotwood saw the wheeze all right, and he gazed at Fatty sternly.

"You swindler!" he exclaimed.

"Eh?"

"You—you robber!" exclaimed Trot- wood severely. "You burglar! Has your appetite deprived you of all sense of honour and honesty?"

"Oh, don't be potty!" complained Fatty, frowning. "We can promise to settle up the next time we're in town——"

"No, my son; it won't do. I put the ban on it!" said Trotwood curtly. "I was only joking when I called you a burglar, because I know you'd settle up. But you wouldn't settle up until you were forced to. The next time we come to Bannington with money you won't pay what you owe—you'll buy fresh grub. No, old man. Our best plan is to have a snack with the money we've got, and then get back to St. Frank's."

Fatty Little nodded gloomily.

His inventive powers were exhausted. He could think of no other method whereby a feed could be obtained. Trot-

wood regarded the whole affair as settled, and he stepped into a bootshop, to collect a parcel which he had left there. The juniors' bicycles were further up the street, at a garage.

Fatty mooched disconsolately along, waiting for Trotwood to come out. And suddenly he came to a halt. His gaze was fixed squarely upon a notice which was displayed prominently in the window of a small shop near by.

Fatty hadn't seen the notice before, probably because the shop had only been opened during the previous day or so. It had stood empty for some weeks, and had now opened with a bang, so to speak.

The place was a restaurant, an eating- house of the second class. It was not exactly the kind of establishment that the St. Frank's fellows usually patron- ised. Neither was it a common cook- shop.

It was something between the two— rather inclined towards the better class place, but still not quite the thing for St. Frank's juniors. However, times were hard, and Fatty was never particu- lar. Grub was the main thing.

And his attention was attracted by that startling notice in the window, a notice which sent a thrill of new-born hope down his spine.

He gazed at it in a fascinated kind of way, and read the words over and over again, to assure himself that there was no catch in it.

And this is what he saw:

"TRY OUR SPECIAL TEAS!

"EAT AS MUCH AS YOU PLEASE!

"TAKE IT AT YOUR EASE!"

It was pure doggerel, but it caught the eye, and Fatty Little was positively enraptured with it. Underneath there were some words in smaller type, which he read eagerly. They stated that, for the inclusive price of one shilling, any person could sit down in the restaurant, and eat as much bread and butter and drink as much tea as they required. Two slices of cake were provided.

But there was no swindle about the bread and butter part of the affair. It was quite plain that any customer could eat to his heart's content, with no extra charge. Fatty Little simply couldn't understand it; it seemed like a dream to him.

He didn't realise that any normal appetite could not manage to consume

one shilling's worth of tea and bread and butter at one sitting. The restaurant keeper did not display his notices for fellows of Fatty's type.

At the current price of things, the tea was probably cheap enough, but the new shopkeeper was evidently doing it as an advertisement.

Fatty Little came to himself with a jerk, and he realised that Trotwood would almost certainly put the ban on patronising the establishment. But this was an opportunity which could not be missed—and Fatty dodged into the restaurant before his chum emerged from the bootshop.

He would have preferred cakes and pastry, and other good things, of course—but when times were lean, bread and butter were satisfactory. It was grub, anyhow—and any kind of grub was acceptable to Fatty.

When Trotwood appeared he gazed up and down the street in vain. Fatty Little had vanished, and was nowhere on the horizon. It was not easy to miss seeing his enormous figure, and Trotwood wondered where he could be.

His first suspicion, naturally, was that he had vanished into a confectioner's. But there were only two in the vicinity, and Trotwood soon satisfied himself that Fatty was in neither of these. He did not even suspect the newly opened eating-house. He hardly glanced at the place.

After pacing up and down the High Street for some time he went to the garage, thinking perhaps that Fatty had gone straight on. But when he arrived he found there was no sign of Master Little.

As it happened, however, Trotwood found some other St. Frank's fellows—to be exact, Sir Montie Tregellis-West, Tommy and myself.

We had just ridden in, and were storing our machines—our intention being to have a decent spread at the swell tea-shop in the town. We were all well supplied with cash, Montie being particularly flush. Quids were all over him.

"Hallo; Trotty, old son," I said cheerfully. "Had tea?"

"No, not yet. Have you seen——"

"Good!" I said briskly. "You can come along with us. We're just going along to the Oriental Cafe. We'll stand you a ripping feed."

"Dear old boy, it's my privilege to

pay the exes to-day," said Sir Montie firmly. "I am rather flush, and I insist on doin' the honours!"

Trotwood grinned.

"Thanks," he said. "This has just come handy. As a matter of fact, I'm nearly broke, and I was going without tea. I suppose you haven't seen any signs of Fatty Little?"

"No; the last we saw of him was at St. Frank's, in Mrs. Hake's tuckshop," said Watson. "Perhaps he's still there—putting the finishing touches to the stock."

"He's here, somewhere," said Trotwood. "He was with me ten minutes ago, but he dodged off somewhere when I went into a bootshop."

"Oh, he's gorging somewhere——"

"Impossible," said Nick. "He's only got two bob on him."

"Begad! That's frightfully hard lines for Fatty," smiled Tregellis-West. "It seems that we have just come to the rescue in time. We must find Fatty, and take him with us into the café."

"He'll be an expensive guest," said Trotwood.

"Dear old boy, that doesn't matter an atom."

But Fatty Little was not to be found. We walked up and down the High Street twice and saw no sign of him whatever.

As a matter of fact, Fatty was enjoying himself.

Had he known the actual truth, he would have been furious with himself for giving way. But how could he guess that Sir Montie would come along with a pocket full of money inviting fellows to tea?

Fatty was sitting in the new restaurant, at one of the marble-topped tables, tucked round a little alcove. One plate of bread and butter, a slice of cake, and a big cup of tea had been placed before him.

These, needless to say, vanished in record time, and the somewhat untidy waitress looked astonished when Fatty asked for a second supply. But it was provided without question—four more slices of bread-and-butter, and another piece of cake, and another cup of tea.

The bread was new, and the butter good. Little demolished it with a heartiness which only he could show. He was really hungry, and he enjoyed the food tremendously. But it disappeared at a remarkable speed, and very soon

the second supply was exhausted. Fatty look round.

"I say, miss!" he called out.

The waitress gazed at him in surprise, and came over to his table. There were one or two other people in the place, and they were smiling.

"Another supply, please, miss," said Fatty briskly.

"Why, you've had two lots," said the girl.

"Two which?" repeated Fatty. "Two scraps, you mean! What's the good of bringing a chap three or four thin slices of bread-and-butter? I want something that I can see! Bring a decent lot this time—and some more tea."

"You can't have no more cake!" said the waitress.

"Why not?"

"You're having a shilling tea, ain't you?"

"Yes!"

"Well, you've had your two bits of cake—and enough bread-and-butter, I should think," declared the girl indignantly. "Still, I'll bring you some more."

"I should think you will!" said Fatty. "I haven't started yet!"

The girl stared hard, and the other people smiled very broadly. A few minutes later the waitress reappeared with a big plate of bread-and-butter, containing at least eight slices. She also brought another cup of tea. And she was smiling; she evidently saw the humour of the situation now.

As a matter of fact, she had reported the matter to the proprietor, who was at the rear, and the latter had instructed the girl to supply the junior with all he wanted. The thing was advertised, and had to be carried out—and it would be a good advert., anyhow. Fatty would never demolish the whole plateful.

"There you are, sir," said the girl, smiling. "How do you like this?"

Fatty Little eyed the plate indignantly.

"A scrap like that's no good to me," he exclaimed. "I came in here for a feed—not a snack! 'Eat as much as you please,' that's what you say! Well, I'm going to do it! You might as well be cutting some more bread-and-butter while I'm eating this."

The girl giggled.

"You will have your joke!" she tittered.

She walked away before Fatty could disillusion her. And the way in which

he got rid of those slices was really astonishing. They were thin and dainty, and each one was only a mouthful.

They had vanished within four minutes, and Fatty was looking round for fresh supplies. He beckoned to the waitress. At first she could hardly believe her eyes. Then she came over to the table with an unpleasant expression upon her face.

"Buck up!" said Fatty. "Why the dickens can't you keep me going?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The people at the other table laughed outright.

"Look here, you can't have no more!" said the waitress firmly. "You have had more than your shilling's worth, young man——"

"What!" roared Fatty. "I'm going to eat as much as I please!"

A big man at one of the other tables gently rapped upon his table.

"The youngster's quite right," he exclaimed. "You've got to keep to your bargain, you know. Bring him some more, if he wants it, miss."

"Oh, very well!" snapped the girl.

She whisked off, and soon returned with a plate containing three slices. Fatty did not gaze upon it in indignation; he gazed upon it in positive wrath, and rose to his feet, red in the face.

"What's the good of that?" he roared. "This is a giddy swindle! I asked for some more bread-and-butter—not for some crumbs! I want twenty more slices—not three! I'm not going to be fooled about like this! Bring me another big plate of bread-and-butter, and another cup of tea!"

"You've eaten more than enough for three already!" said the girl angrily. "We can't afford to supply food at this rate——"

"What about your notice outside?"

"That doesn't matter——"

"Doesn't it?" shouted Fatty. "If you don't bring me some grub I'll jolly well fetch it myself! A fine cheek! What's the good of a notice like that outside, if you don't mean to keep to it?"

"The lad's only demanding his rights, miss," said the man opposite.

The waitress looked round as if she would like to eat everybody, and then swept off to the rear of the tea-shop. She did not reappear, but a big, burly man came forward with another supply of bread-and-butter.

"You've got a pretty big appetite, haven't you," he asked, in an unpleasant voice. "Either that, or else you're playing some sort of a trick. Have you eaten everything that's been brought to you?"

"Of course I have!"

"The boy's right," said the other customer. "I've been watching him all the time. Mr. Hooker. A pretty big appetite he's got, too."

"And, what's more," said Fatty, "I can tell you at once that this bit of grub is only enough to start me going. What's the idea of bringing two or three scraps spread all over a plate? I want it piled up!"

"Well, you won't get it!" said Mr. Hooker firmly.

He walked away, and Fatty very quickly consumed the food which had been brought. He knew well enough that he was perfectly within his rights to demand as much food as he could eat—and he did not hesitate to do so. He rapped upon the table noisily, and clattered the plate.

Mr. Hooker came forward again.

"You've had your tea, young fellow," he said sharply. "The best thing you can do is to pay your shilling, and get out of my shop!"

"Here's your blessed shilling!" roared Fatty, tossing down his florin. "I want a bob change, and I want some more grub! A fine idea, advertising that you'll let anybody eat all they pleased—I don't think! It's only a swindle! A chap with a decent appetite is only given a few crumbs——"

"Why, you greedy young rascal, you've had five or six teas already," exclaimed the proprietor. "My notice outside only applies within reasonable limits—and not as you seem to think! I should be ruined if everybody was like you."

"Very likely," said Fatty. "But you've got to take the hard with the smooth. Tons of people only have six-pennyworth of grub, I'll bet! I'm taking you at your word, and I demand another plateful of grub!"

"You're not going to get it!" snapped Mr. Hooker, picking up the florin, and tossing a shilling on the table. "There's your change—hook it!"

"Why, you—you—— Great pancakes! I've never seen such a barefaced swindle in my life!" roared Fatty. "I wouldn't

have come into this hole if I'd known. I thought it was a square offer, and not a barefaced fraud!"

"Take care, sonny——"

"I'm going to speak my mind, and you won't stop me!" snorted Fatty. "By to-morrow everybody in the town will know about this swindle—and I don't suppose it'll do you much good!"

"Are you going quietly, or do you want to be chucked out?" bellowed Mr. Hooker furiously.

"I'm going when I please——"

"We'll see about that!" shouted the proprietor. "You'll come this way, young man! We don't want your sort in here!"

He grasped Fatty by the coat collar, and gave him a shove which sent the fat junior staggering across the floor. Fatty was a big weight to push about, but Mr. Hooker himself was built heavily, and Fatty found it impossible to withstand the onslaught, although he struggled gamely.

Crash!

He charged through the swing doors, roaring, and a final shove sent him spinning across the pavement. Fatty staggered out into the road, tripped up, and sat down.

A shout of horror arose from the passers-by. For a huge touring car was speeding down the High Street at a dangerous pace—and it was rushing straight down upon Fatty Little as he sat dazed in the roadway.

— — —

CHAPTER II.

A DISTINGUISHED GUEST.

"BEGAD!"

Sir Montie Tregellis-West uttered the exclamation in a tone of startled surprise. We were just about to enter the beautifully carved doors of the Oriental Café, having abandoned our search for Fatty Little.

But as we turned we received something of a shock.

Fatty had just appeared. He went spinning across the pavement, staggered over the gutter, and sat down in the middle of the road with a jar which shook him up considerably.

It was quite evident that he had not left Mr. Hooker's establishment willingly and of his own free will. He had been assisted out, and there was no doubt that violence had been used.

"Great Scott!" I exclaimed huskily. "Look there!"

We could see the huge touring car driving straight down on the helpless junior at a speed which made it impossible for Fatty to get out of danger. We expected to see him run down on the spot.

But something surprising happened.

The driver of the car was evidently a man in a thousand. He swerved across the road, his hand as steady as a rock. There was not sufficient time to pull up, although the throttle was shut off and the brakes applied.

The near-side wheels shaved Fatty by a mere inch, and—

Cra-a-ash!

The magnificent car charged full-tilt into a well-stocked greengrocery stall which stood outside a shop. The whole affair was wrecked in a flash. Fruit and vegetables were sent flying in every direction. The car tore its way into the heart of the wreckage. The big sun blind which had been stretched over the stall fell over the car like a blanket, and the driver was completely enveloped.

Fatty Little staggered to his feet, gasping.

Oranges, apples, potatoes, bananas, and all manner of other things came whizzing round him. The road was smothered with the debris of the stall. The whole spectacle was somewhat startling.

"My only hat!" said Tommy Watson. "That was a near shave!"

"Begad! Rather, old boy!"

We ran up, and other people crowded round. Shopkeepers came running out of their establishments, and there was general excitement. Fatty Little gazed round him somewhat dazedly.

"Great pancakes!" he ejaculated.

"Jolly lucky there's a sensible man at the wheel of that car," I said. "He didn't hesitate a second, Fatty, or you would have been laid out by this time! What made you sit in the road like that?"

"What made me——" Fatty Little paused, and his face flushed with indignation. "The rotter! The swindler!" he roared. "I was chucked out

of that beastly restaurant, and I hadn't finished my tea——"

"Oh, great Scott! Talking about grub, even now!" exclaimed Nicodemus Trotwood. "I believe he'd talk and think of grub if he were on the giddy scaffold! Look at the trouble he's caused!"

"I've caused!" bellowed Fatty. "Why, you—you silly haddock! I'll——"

"Hallo! The driver's appearing," interrupted Watson.

We transferred our attention to the motor-car. The sun-blind was moving, and a figure appeared. It was attired in a long dust coat, and a check cap. The face was somewhat red, and it was wearing goggles.

"He's not a chauffeur," I remarked. "A gentleman driver, I expect. I must say I admire—— Why, what—what—— Well, I'm hanged!"

"What's the matter?" asked Tommy.

"Look!" I yelled. "Look who it is!"

The motorist had just moved his goggles, and was gazing round with an air of calm unconcern which was somewhat comical. He sat in the midst of the wreckage, eyeing it all with perfect sang-froid.

"Begad!" exclaimed Sir Montie. "He's—he's Lord Dorrimore!"

"The one and only," I agreed.

I ran forward, and the others followed. It was impossible to get right up to the car, for the smashed fruit stall was all round, in bits of wreckage. The sun blind still lay in a tangled heap over the wind screen of the car.

"Dorrie!" I roared delightedly.

Lord Dorrimore gazed at me, grinned and nodded.

"Hallo, young 'un!" he said calmly. "What price this for a cinema stunt? I hope there were a few cameras on the job when I charged the fruit emporium. I don't think I could do the trick again if I practiced it for weeks!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Everybody laughed, and Dorrie proceeded to climb out.

"It's a frightful nuisance, all this beastly mess," he remarked. "Just as I was in a hurry to get to St. Frank's, too! But it was either the fruit or cruelty to animals—and I chose the fruit."

"Cruelty to animals?" I repeated.

"I nearly ran over the elephant!" explained Dorrie, with a nod towards Fatty Little.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The motorist's easy going calmness took away all the seriousness of the mishap, and people who had come up expecting to see the result of an awful tragedy, found themselves smiling with amusement.

It was just like Lord Dorrimore to take it easily. Of course, I knew him as well as I knew Montie and Tommy—with Nelson Lee; I had accompanied Dorrie to the far corners of the earth. He was one of Nelson Lee's greatest friends.

I had known that Dorrie was coming down, but it was news to me to see him now—I had not expected him for several days. He had turned up just in time to provide Bannington with a slice of mild excitement.

The proprietor of the fruit and vegetable stall was on the scene now. He was a somewhat elderly man, very excitable, and he was horror-stricken by the havoc which had been caused.

"I'll have the law on 'ee!" he shouted. "It'll cost pounds and pounds to put this right! Folks oughtn't to be allowed to go dashing about in them dratted motor-cars! I allus said they was a nuisance!"

"Hold on, Mr. Grubb," said one of the other shopkeepers. "It wasn't the gentleman's fault. He nearly ran over a boy, and the only thing he could do was to swerve. It was a marvellous piece of work, the way he steered into your stall!"

Mr. Grubb gulped.

"A marvellous piece of work, was it?" he shouted. "Well, it's a piece of work that'll cost a pretty penny! I can't afford to have my stall wrecked, and all my stock wasted by the first motorist that comes along—Hi! Leave them oranges alone, you young varmint!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The youth of Bannington had appeared with surprising alacrity, and was equally brisk to seize such a golden opportunity. Fruit and nuts were lying all over the road—but not for long.

Mr. Grubb's precious stock was soon transferred into a dozen or a score of grubby pockets—to be transferred, later, into healthy interiors.

"My dear old chap, what's the good of gettin' excited?" asked Lord Dorrimore languidly. "I accept full responsibility."

"Eh, wot's that?" said Mr. Grubb, becoming suddenly calm.

"I caused the damage, an' I suppose it's up to me to settle the bill," said Dorrie smoothly. "How much compensation do you require? There's no need to bring a thing like this into court—I believe in settlin' troubles as quickly as possible. What's your figure?"

Mr. Grubb considered rapidly.

"It'll cost me nigh on ten pund to repair that stall, an' the stock was worth another ten pund," he said. "I reckon it'll cost ye twenty, sir."

"My dear man, you're robbing yourself!" said Lord Dorrimore. "You'll never get on in the world at that rate. Here's thirty pound, an' we'll say no more about it. I'm havin' quite an enjoyable time!"

Mr. Grubb was eloquent in his thanks, but Dorrie took very little notice of him. He seemed far more interested in an altercation which was progressing on the other side of the road. Fatty Little was telling Mr. Hooker a few home truths concerning his "eat-as-much-as-you-please" restaurant.

"It's not my habit to make a fuss about things," Fatty was saying warmly; "but I'm not standing any treatment like this! Swindling me out of my grub wasn't good enough—you tried to kill me!"

"Don't be such a young fool!" roared Mr. Hooker. "I didn't know the car was comin', just then. I chucked you out of my shop because you were insulting—and I'd chuck you out again if you tried them tricks a second time."

Fatty fairly shook with indignation.

Then he appealed to the crowd. He explained what had happened, pointed to Mr. Hooker's notice, and gained the sympathy of his listeners. But Mr. Hooker was not inclined to stand there speechless.

"That notice don't apply to people with appetites like horses!" he shouted. "The young rascal ate four or five plates of bread-and-butter, and I wasn't going to give him no more. I can't afford—"

"That don't make any difference!" shouted somebody. "If you exhibit a notice like that, you ought to stand by it!"

"Hear, hear!"

"The thing's a swindle!"

"I'd have him in court, if I was you, young gent!"

Mr. Hooker received no sympathy, and he began to realise that he had made a bad mistake. His newly opened establishment could not have received a worse advertisement than the one it was giving.

Not only that, but the crowd stated their views in no uncertain terms, and added with great gusto that they would never patronise the place, and would advise all their friends, relatives, and acquaintances to taboo it.

Fatty Little was satisfied.

"Well, I've shown the swindler up!" he said. "That's good enough for me. I reckon we'd better get out of the crowd now!"

"I reckon so, too," said Trotwood firmly.

"If we had some more tin, we might be able to go into a decent restaurant," said Fatty, looking worried. "Great buns! Perhaps Lord Dorrimore could lend me a quid? I'm simply starving, and I shall never be able to get back to St. Frank's if I don't have a feed!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Lord Dorrimore strolled forward.

"Judging from what I've just heard, young man, I should imagine your bunkers were pretty well overloaded," he remarked. "However, we might as well drop into a cafe, an' have somethin' to prevent your vitality from oozin' away. I wouldn't like to see you get much thinner, my lad. Your clothin' is simply hanging in folds over your bally bones! It's a wonder you can exist!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Fatty Little grinned.

"I can't help being big, sir," he said apologetically.

"I think I remember you well, young 'un," said Lord Dorrimore, chuckling. "You were at that Christmas party of mine, unless my memory is growing decrepit. I tried to cure you of gorging; but I might just as well have tried to cure a high pressure furnace. It's your misfortune—not a fault!"

We all grinned, and Fatty looked supremely happy. A good feed was in sight, and it was quite sufficient for the fat junior. He didn't care who provided it—that was an unimportant detail. The main thing was the feed.

How he could find room for anything more was a puzzle which nobody could understand. Fatty Little's capacity was weird and mysterious. He appeared to have space for grub without ending.

After Lord Dorrimore's car was pulled out of the wreckage, it was found that the damage was quite superficial—merely some scratched paintwork, bent wings, and a dented radiator. His lordship eyed the damage complacently.

"H'm! Nothing much!" he observed. "It's an extraordinary thing, but whenever I buy a new car, I generally convert it into scrap iron within a week. This, I suppose, is the first stage. I paid four thousand for this 'bus only yesterday."

"Phew!" whistled Watson.

But Lord Dorrimore didn't care a rap. He was a millionaire, and money was like dust to him. He could buy another twenty cars on the spot, if he wished to—and probably pay for them in cash. He generally carried a fortune about with him, in notes.

The excitement was soon over, and we all entered the Oriental Cafe.

Tea was ordered by Dorrie—but Fatty Little was invited to study the menu, and to order what he required. When his tea was brought, we simply roared, for Fatty had ordered enough for half a dozen.

"Amazin'," said Dorrie. "You ought to be in a side show, youngster! 'The Human Hippo!' World's record appetite—"

"Oh, go easy, sir!" grinned Fatty.

"I won't chip you any more," said his lordship cheerfully. "Well, my lads, how have you been goin' on? Still up to all sorts of mischief, I suppose? How's the professor?"

"Do you mean M'sieur Leblanc, sir?" asked Watson.

"No; he means the guv'nor," I grinned. "Dorrie always calls him that. Mr. Lee is fine, Dorrie. Never been better. He mentioned to me that you were coming down this week. And, incidentally, he's removed all breakable trifles from his study. He knows what a clumsy bounder you are!"

Lord Dorrimore grinned, then frowned.

"Young man," he said sternly, "is that the way to address your elders? Is that the way to— By gad! Mind what you're doin' with that teapot, you young ass! Do you want to ruin my trousers?"

I had certainly been handling the teapot carelessly, but only a drop or two descended upon Dorrie's nether garments. He didn't mind the stains, but

he had a great respect for his legs. Hot tea is somewhat unpleasant.

"What brought you down, sir?" asked Sir Montie gracefully.

"The car!" said Dorrie.

"No; I mean——"

"I know what you mean," grinned his lordship. "Well, the fact is, it's a dead secret. I can't tell you anythin' at present. The holidays will soon be here, an' then there'll be rejoicin'. Have you fellows made any arrangements for the vacation?"

"Not yet," I said.

"Good!" chuckled Dorrie, rubbing his hands.

"Why, what's the idea?" I inquired curiously.

"Oh, nothin'—nothin' at all!" said his lordship. "But it'll be rather rippin' if we can all go off together—— Ahem! But it's a secret! I'm lettin' myself run riot!"

We listened with interest.

"I say, sir, are you thinking of going on a summer trip?" I asked. "We had a splendid time last year! That African holiday——"

"We're not goin' to Africa this time," said Lord Dorrimore. "In fact, we shall go in the opposite direction—— There I go again! If I continue at this rate, you'll know the whole bally scheme!"

"That's what we want to know," I said, smiling.

"I dare say you do, my son; but it doesn't suit me to go into any details just now," said Dorrie. "The fact is, I don't exactly know what the details are—and I sha'n't until I've consulted your esteemed guv'nor."

"Well, it's pretty certain that there's something good in store," I said complacently. "You always do things, properly, Dorrie. I've been hoping that we might be able to arrange a trip for this vacation—and now you come down, as large as life, and as handsome as ever——"

"That's enough!" interrupted his lordship severely. "I don't want any compliments from you, my lad! I'm suspicious of 'em! They remind me of Umlosi's compliments—the old rascal generally means something else."

I looked up.

"Yes, by Jove!" I said. "I'd forgotten Umlosi, for the moment. Is he booked to come with us?"

"You bet your sweet life!" said Lord Dorrimore elegantly.

I grinned.

"Ah! Then we are going on a trip?" I asked.

"Oh, by gad!" groaned Dorrie. "I'm tellin' you everythin'!"

"Rats!" I said. "You simply whet our appetites for more. Talking about Umlosi, I suppose you've left him in Africa—at the head of his own tribe—in Kutanaland?"

"Not likely!" said Dorrie. "Umlosi is in London and what the doose he'll get up to durin' my absence is more than I dare to imagine! I might mention that he's comin' down here in a day or two. I thought he might as well stir some life up at St. Frank's, just for a change."

"Begad! That will be frightfully interestin'—it will really!", declared Sir Montie. "I think Umlosi is a rippin' old chap. It'll be splendid to see him again, and all the other fellows will be delighted."

I had no doubt that Sir Montie was right.

Umlosi was a huge back man—the chief of the Kutanas—a king in his own country, and an extraordinary warrior. His feats of bravery and daring were too numerous to be remembered.

In addition, Umlosi was a cheerful, good-natured old sort, and he generally succeeded in making everybody feel comfortable in the most dismal circumstances. I was quite bucked up at the thought of seeing him again.

"Of course, I'm not goin' to drop any hints," went on Lord Dorrimore, as he sipped his tea. "But it's quite likely you remember the good old Wanderer?"

"Yes, rather," I said. "Your yacht?"

"Exactly."

"Do we remember her!" I went on. "Why, we had some fine adventures in that ship, Dorrie, and we're not likely to forget her."

"Well, my son, if there's anythin' doin' this summer, the Wanderer will take a leadin' part in the drama," said his lordship smoothly. "You see, I'm giving you hints all the time—which is just like me. I came here with the set intention of keepin' my tongue still. An' what do I find?"

He gazed at me and the other grinning juniors.

"I come here, an' I'm wrecked in the High Street," he continued. "I am lured into this cafe, and information is

dragged out of me by sheer force. I shall have to put my foot down hard—and seal my lips."

"But why the necessity of being secretive?" I asked.

"Well, it's not absolutely necessary, but I don't want to tell you anythin' that might fall to the ground," said Dorrie. "There's nothin' worse than raisin' a fellow's hopes over a mere dream. I've been idiotic enough to say somethin', so there'll be no harm in sayin' a bit more. Here you are, in a nutshell. I've got an idea. Personally, I think it's a first-class, gilt-edged, number one sized scheme."

"That sounds all right, then," I exclaimed.

Lord Dorrimore shook his head.

"Ah, but wait, my son—wait!" he exclaimed. "My judgment ain't logical. I think this idea is the finest wheeze that was ever—well, wheezed! It beats everythin' in creation. But before I decide upon it finally, I want the advice of the one man in the world who knows everythin'—an' that's the professor!"

"You mean Mr. Lee?" asked Watson.

"Right on the nail!" said his lordship eagerly. "I am visitin' St. Frank's with the sole intention of layin' my plans before Mr. Nelson Lee. If he approves—if he passes his august sanction—then everythin' will be rosy and sublime."

"And what if the guv'nor disapproves?" I asked.

"In that case, there'll be nothin' doin'," replied Dorrie. "If your guv'nor puts the lid on the idea, I shall be humbled and humiliated, and there won't be any trip. I might mention that it'll be a shcekin' disappointment if he puts the ban on the game. I shall only be fit to be wheeled about in a bath chair for the rest of my life—I sha'n't have enough energy to walk!"

"I reckon you've said enough to make me feel pretty keen," I remarked. "Your judgment's all right, and, if you've mapped out a programme, it's a ten-to-one chance that the guv'nor will agree."

"That remains to be seen," said Lord Dorrimore. "You're well aware of the fact that I am a hare-brained individual, and that I occasionally get ideas that ought to convince most people that I am only fit to take up a permanent residence in Colney Hatch. However, we'll see what the oracle says—the oracle, in

this case, being personified by Mr. Nelson Lee."

Dorrie paused, and stared over at Fatty Little's place.

"By gad!" he ejaculated. "Can it be true?"

"Eh?" said Fatty. "Beg pardon, sir?"

"Have you really demolished that frightful pile of grub?"

"Oh, that lot?" said Fatty, indicating the empty plates. "That was only a beginning, sir! I was just thinking about ordering some more—"

"Well, you'd better keep thinking about it, my son," interrupted Trotwood. "You're not going to have anything else just now! We don't want to have the horrible task of carrying you home!"

"It's all right! You'll all come in my car," said Dorrie.

We did. Our bicycles were left in Bannington that day, and we returned to St. Frank's in style. The distinguished guest was a very welcome visitor, and, somehow, I felt absolutely certain that his coming was to portend something of an extremely interesting nature.

CHAPTER III.

THE STORY OF THE WANG HI TREASURE.

"THIS is splendid, Dorrie—splendid!" exclaimed Nelson Lee heartily. "Man alive, why didn't you tell me you were coming to-day? I should have made proper preparations for your arrival—"

"That's exactly why I didn't send you word," explained Lord Dorrimore blandly. "If there's one thing I hate, it is to have people makin' special preparations for me. I prefer to dig anywhere; I'm not particular. I shall be here two or three days, an' you can shove me in the coal-cellar if you like!"

Nelson Lee chuckled.

"Same old Dorrie!" he smiled. "I think we can find you better accommodation than the cellar, old man! It's splendid to see you again. What wild-cat notions have you got in your head this time? Something bizarre, I'll be bound."

Dorrie turned to me and grinned.

"There you are—he's guessin' it before I've got time to open my mouth!" he exclaimed. "Well, never mind. If he doesn't agree to my plan first time, I'll think of some diabolical plot, drug him, and force him to agree."

We were standing on the steps of the Ancient House. The evening sunlight was still streaming over the Triangle, and Dorrie's car was standing a short distance away. We had only just arrived, and had attracted considerable attention already—at least, Dorrie had.

He was rather well known at St. Frank's, having paid several visits to the famous old school. Once seen, Dorrie was not easily forgotten. He was famous throughout the country as an intrepid big game hunter and explorer. Lord Dorrimore was a very well-known character, and at St. Frank's, among the the juniors, he was regarded as a kind of comedian, and he was tremendously popular. His free-and-easy style, his careless method of speech, made him a kind of hero.

"Well, let's get inside, to my study," said Nelson Lee. "We have lots to chat about, and I happen to have the evening free. I am pretty certain that you have a good deal to talk about, Dorrie."

"Oh, a shockin' amount!" said his lordship. "I shall either bore you to tears, or I shall send you into rhapsodies of eagerness. I've got a scheme that'll simply make your hair stand on end and remain there for good!"

"I sincerely hope not," smiled Nelson Lee. "Well, we will retire to the privacy of my sanctum. You boys won't be able to come, I'm afraid," added the guv'nor, addressing Montie and Tommy and me. "But if there's anything that you'll be interested in, I'll tell you about it later."

"Oh, good!" I said. "Thanks, guv'nor!"

Nelson Lee turned to enter the lobby, and saw that Mr. Clement Heath, the temporary master of the Remove, was standing there, looking on with interest. The young master made as if to pass.

"Oh, one moment, Heath," said Nelson Lee. "Now that you are here, I should like to introduce you to Lord Dorrimore. Dorrie, this gentleman is Mr. Heath; he is taking charge of the

Remove during Mr. Crowell's temporary absence."

"Pleased to meet you, old man!" said Dorrie genially. "You have my deep sympathy, I can assure you!"

"Your sympathy, sir?" smiled Mr. Heath.

"You're in charge of the Remove!" explained his lordship.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The juniors laughed, and Mr. Heath smiled.

"They are rather a handful, perhaps; but I get on with the Remove quite well," he said. "I am greatly honoured to meet you sir, and I hope to have the extreme pleasure of having a little chat with you later on, if you will grant me that favour."

"My dear chap, I shall bore you to sleep," said Dorrie. "My conversation is limited. I can't talk about learned topics, such as algebra and Euclid, and all those funny intricacies. If I get talkin', I shall jaw about elephants an' tigers an' things of that kind. You'll wish you'd never set eyes on me!"

Mr. Heath smiled, and took his departure. Nelson Lee and Dorrie returned to the former's study, and soon made themselves comfortable.

Meanwhile, Mr. Heath was acting somewhat strangely. His movements were not seen by others, so he had no fear of anybody talking. Mr. Heath, to be exact, made his way back into the Ancient House, almost at once, and lost no time in going into a small box-room, upstairs.

He locked himself in, and stood thinking for a moment. Immediately beneath him was Nelson Lee's study, as he well knew. His next procedure was really astonishing. For, as quietly as possible, he took up a couple of loose boards, and gazed down upon the laths and plaster which composed the ceiling of Nelson Lee's study.

Right in the centre of the space there was a perceptible hole, and it needed no stretch of imagination to guess that it had once been filled up by a gas-pipe. When electricity had been installed at the school, the hole had been neglected.

Mr. Heath had found it very handy.

He could see very little, of course—merely a small circle of Nelson Lee's desk, to tell the truth. But he really had no wish to see. His object in coming here was a different one.

From a corner of the little box-room

he produced an old gramophone horn. This he placed, nozzle downwards, over the hole in the ceiling. Then he bent over the wide mouth. And the voices of the two men in the room below came up to him quite audibly.

But what on earth could be the meaning of this?

How was it that a respectable Form-master was deliberately eavesdropping in this secretive, ungentlemanly way? Was Mr. Heath a dishonourable man, or was it mere idle curiosity that led him to take this remarkable course?

As a matter of fact, it was neither.

Mr. Clement Heath was not personally curious, and he was far from being dishonourable. The young master was, indeed, a very excellent man in every way. He was being forced to take this course—forced against his own will.

There had been a good deal of mystery concerning Mr. Heath during the short time he had been at St. Frank's. Handforth and Co., the redoubtable heroes of Study D, had taken a tremendous interest in the new master.

Edward Oswald Handforth, who fancied himself greatly as an amateur detective, had been quite convinced for some little time that Mr. Heath was a forger, or something equally as criminal.

Handforth's only foundation for this surmise was the fact that Mr. Heath had been in the habit of secretly visiting a little cottage in the hamlet of Edgemore, about a mile from the school.

Handy's investigation, however, had resulted in a startling disclosure.

He discovered, in short, that Mr. Heath was his own brother-in-law! And the reason Mr. Heath visited the cottage was that his young wife—Handy's sister—was living in the cottage, with a faithful old couple as housekeepers.

Miss Edith had fallen in love with a straightforward young fellow named Arthur Kirby, but her parents had been against the match, and had forbidden Kirby to court their daughter.

As a direct result Edith had run away, and had married Kirby in spite of all. And, under the name of Mr. Heath, Kirby had accepted the temporary position as Remove-master at St. Frank's. Now that Handforth knew the secret, he was perfectly happy. He had been worried about his sister, and it was glorious to know that she was content and safe, and practically within a stone's throw of the school.

It also gave Handforth much satisfaction to know that he had discovered the secret by his own efforts. His father and mother knew nothing of it yet, and Mr. Heath, as it will be better to call him, had no intention of disclosing the truth until the end of the term.

Handforth, however, had not failed to observe that Mr. Heath had been very thoughtful and worried of late. He really could not understand why, for everything seemed to be so rosy and serene.

But Handforth did not know of a certain worry that was on the young master's mind. It was a worry which increased rather than decreased.

And it had all come about because of a chance meeting of Heath's with the Comte de Plessigny, a curious old fellow who lived on the outskirts of Bannington—a silky voiced, charming-mannered nobleman, of apparently foreign blood, who seemed to be rich and at peace with the world.

Mr. Heath had found an extraordinary diamond in Bellton Wood, a stone of truly magnificent brilliance and quality. Mr. Heath's first sensation was one of tremendous elation and light-heartedness.

He saw his troubles fading away. He dreamed wonderful dreams of success and wealth. He had built castles in the air galore. This was because the count, whose advice Mr. Heath had sought, declared that the diamond was worth every farthing of twenty thousand pounds.

The count, moreover, had promised to have the diamond cut and faced and polished. Mr. Heath hardly guessed that his supposed friend was really working up to a certain end, that the diamond was being used in that connection.

A bombshell had been exploded in the shape of a disclosure from the count that the diamond was stolen property, and that there was a reward of five thousand pounds offered for its return.

Mr. Heath did not know the exact details, but he heard sufficient to send him into a state of great worry. He had been informed by the count that his position was precarious—that if the police got to hear of the matter, he—Heath—would be in an extremely awkward position.

On the top of this, the Comte de Plessigny had disclosed his real character. He had told the young Remove-

master that Lord Dorrimore would shortly be visiting the school, and that he was anxious to learn the cause of Dorrie's visit. To put it briefly, he instructed Mr. Heath to discover all he could, and to keep the count informed as to any conversation he happened to overhear.

At first Mr. Heath had positively refused to undertake the task—and had only consented to do so after the cunning old count had threatened to inform the police about the diamond. He held the stone over Mr. Heath's head like a sword of Damocles. Mr. Heath, totally against his wishes, was forced to agree. If he refused, he would find himself in the hands of the police.

And this thought was appalling. With his young wife so near at hand, with his whole career at stake, he could not afford to be mixed up in any scandal, even though he were able to prove himself entirely innocent of wrong doing. Mr. Heath had been compelled to give his word that he would undertake to act as a spy. It was a hateful position, and the young master was greatly worried.

He was too innocent of the world's wiles to understand that the count was using him as a tool, and that his own position was by no means as serious as he supposed. He was nervous and uneasy, and extremely scared of falling into the hands of the law. So he consented to the count's rascally proposition.

Thus, when Nelson Lee and Lord Dorrimore found themselves alone in the schoolmaster-detective's study, Mr. Clement Heath was above, listening to every word they said. He had made his preparations carefully—cunningly—in anticipation of Dorrimore's visit. Mr. Heath's wits had been sharpened by the necessity of the moment, and his scheme for overhearing the conversation was a clever one. There was no chance of his being seen—there was no chance of the men beneath guessing that their words were not private.

Certainly there was no indication that a third party was listening.

Lord Dorrimore made himself very comfortable. He sprawled in Nelson Lee's easy-chair, with a cigarette in his lips, and with a glass of whisky-and-soda beside him. And he grinned at the detective amiably.

"So you want to hear the yarn?" he inquired.

"I should very much like to know what your scheme is," said Nelson Lee.

Mr. Heath, above, was relieved. He had not been able to hear the pair below at first. They had spoken in voices too low for him to understand, and he had begun to think that it would be impossible for him to become aware of the trend of the conversation. But now, somehow, every word was distinct.

"Well, this yarn is just about the limit," said Lord Dorrimore. "It'll really make your hair stand on end, as I said before. To begin with, would you very much like to have a million quid or so?"

Nelson Lee smiled.

"I should have no material objection," he replied.

"Good!" said Dorrimore. "I think I shall be able to put you in the way of pocketing that sum with very little difficulty. What I'm goin' to tell you may sound like a particularly awful nightmare. But I can give you my word that it's absolutely the limit in fairy tales."

"Fairy tales?" repeated Nelson Lee.

"I'll leave you to judge for yourself," said Dorrie. "The whole thing is so strange that it'll need a bit of believing. But you know me, Lee, an' you know that I'm not capable of tellin' you a string of lies. Personally, I'm too rich as it is, an' I don't want to add to my responsibilities. But if anybody else is hankerin' after a fortune, I've got the recipe."

"Well, get busy with the story," said Lee.

"Have you ever heard me refer to a cheerful merchant named Wang Hi?"

"I don't remember having heard the name before."

"Well, this gentleman, as you'll probably guess, is a native of that land which is generally illustrated on willow pattern crockery," explained Lord Dorrimore. "I think willow pattern crockery is Chinese, ain't it? If it's Japanese, I'm at sea. Anyhow, this old fogey lived in China."

"I assume that he is now dead?" asked Lee.

"Considerin' that he's been under the ground for about five centuries, your assumption is probably correct," said Dorrie smoothly. "I can't tell you the exact details now, because it'll take too

long. Anyhow, Mr. Wang Hi was a mandarin of the finest quality—a 'plenty big' chieftain. He was a kind of lord an' master an' tin god, an' everythin' else put together."

"A despot, probably?"

"My dear man, the word's too gentle," said Dorrie. "Wang Hi, if the stories I've heard are true, was about the most accurate personification of Mr. Mephistopheles that ever walked the earth."

"Very interesting, I'm sure."

"Quite so," said Dorrie. "Well, Wang Hi was able to have a few retainers put to death every day, just as a pastime. He probably had them tortured, an' went to see the show every evenin'. This kind of thing was all very well from Wang Hi's point of view, but not from the retainers. They didn't consider the affair entertainin' at all, especially when their turn came round."

"I don't quite see what you're getting at—"

"You'll see soon—unless you fall asleep in the middle of my discourse," said Lord Dorrimore. "I won't bore you more than I can help. Well, one day a nice little bunch of these chinks came to the conclusion that Wang Hi would be far more interestin' with a couple of daggers inside him. So they plotted a plot, the net result bein' that Mr. Hi took a speedy and gory departure from earthly realms."

"In short, he was murdered?" asked Nelson Lee.

"Exactly—but you put it so frightfully blunt," said Dorrimore. "I always prefer to talk of these things in a more entertainin' way. But I wouldn't dream of arguin'. Wang Hi was murdered—an', accordin' to all accounts, it wasn't half good enough for him."

"And where do we come to the millions?"

"I'm just gettin' to that point now," said Lord Dorrimore. "It seems that Wang Hi was a first-class thief in addition to his other accomplishments. For a great many years he had been in the habit of pinchin' things wholesale—particularly jewels. He had a collection of precious stones that would make a West End jeweller look like a rag-and-bone man."

"And this treasure, I presume, was hidden away?"

"It's amazin' how you guess these

things," said Dorrie; "but you've hit the nail on the head. Wang Hi concealed this treasure so closely that nobody knew where it was. An' it's remained hidden to this day."

Nelson Lee smiled.

"Are you suggesting that we should attempt to find it?" he inquired.

"I am."

"And it has remained hidden for centuries?"

"Yes."

"Then what hope have we of succeeding after so many have failed?" asked Lee.

"Ah! That's just where it comes in," said Dorrie mysteriously. "I have discovered a secret map—a piece of parchment which gives all the details, and all sorts of things. We've simply got to go to the spot, open up the treasure chamber—and there you are."

"It sounds ridiculously simple," said Nelson Lee. "But where does this spot happen to be?"

"Right in the heart of China."

"Hundreds and hundreds of miles from the coast, I imagine?"

"Not only that, but it's miles and miles from civilisation," said Lord Dorrimore. "These chinks are hostile, and if we take an expedition inland, we shall have to go jolly easy. Still, it can be done, an' as long as we take a handy crowd, well armed, we shall be all right. As a net result, we shall come away with barrels full of diamonds and rubies and emeralds. We shall be able to startle the world—and not a soul can dispute our right to the treasure. The first man on the spot gets it."

Nelson Lee looked thoughtful.

"I'm not sure that I entirely agree with your idea, Dorrie," he said. "We must think it over—we must discuss it in more detail. I am certainly impressed, but I must remark that the whole yarn appears to be flimsy."

"That's because I haven't told you the inner facts," said Dorrie. "I'll go into all those later on—when you feel strong enough to stand the strain."

Mr. Heath had listened throughout the conversation, and he was quite impressed. He would, at all events, have something to report to the Comte de Plessigny. At the same time, Mr. Heath was determined, sooner or later, to give Lord Dorrimore a warning that his plans were known to others.

Mr. Heath could hear nothing more of any interest, for the pair in the room below did not continue the conversation. So the eavesdropper left the box-room as quietly as possible, and went down to his own study.

CHAPTER IV.

THE COUNT'S RUSE.

THE Comte de Plessigny nodded. "Yes, show Mr. Heath in at once," he said, in his smooth, silky voice.

As a matter of fact, the count had been expecting Mr. Heath that evening, and he was pleased when his manservant informed him that the young St. Frank's master was waiting. Mr. Heath was soon ushered in.

"Ah, my dear young friend, this is a delightful pleasure," purred the count, as he walked forward with outstretched hand. "Sit down, my dear boy—make yourself comfortable. You are extremely welcome in my house."

"Thank you!" said Mr. Heath coldly.

"So? You do not appear to be cordial!" exclaimed Plessigny.

"I do not see why I should be," said Mr. Heath. "I have consented to undertake certain work for you, and that work is absolutely against my inclinations. However, you have forced me to do your will, and I am helpless. I have come because I have something to report—and I consider that it will be your duty to release me from all further promises."

The count rubbed his hands together softly.

"If you have obtained the information I require, you will be bothered no more," he said. "In short, your troubles will be at an end. Great good fortune will be yours, and there will be no danger from the diamond."

"I cannot help feeling that you have tricked me," said Mr. Heath. "Having got me into your power, you have compelled me to act in a disgraceful fashion. I do not care for eavesdropping, and for—"

"Tut-tut!" interrupted the count. "What you have done is for the good of humanity. Lord Dorrimore is not the gentleman he appears to be. If you knew the exact truth, you would be

heartily in favour of my own plans. Well, you must tell me what you have learned. Sit down, and take your time."

Mr. Heath did so, and, after lighting a cigar, he proceeded to tell the count of what he had overheard. He told everything, without forgetting a detail.

His host listened eagerly and interestedly, although he displayed no sign of emotion. And when Mr. Heath had finished, the count rose to his feet, and paced up and down for a few minutes.

"Good—quite good!" he declared.

"You are satisfied?"

"I did not say that," went on Plessigny. "I merely mentioned that your information is good. At the same time, it is scanty—it is meagre. It will not do. No, my dear young friend, it will not do."

"What do you mean?"

"Surely my meaning is obvious?" asked the count. "You have overheard much, and you have proved yourself to be ingenious. You overheard this conversation concerning Wang Hi and the fabulous treasure."

"And I have told you all about it," said Mr. Heath.

"I do not dispute the fact," said the count, in his purring voice. "However, we must not let the matter stand idle. I require much more information—"

"Eh?" exclaimed Mr. Heath, starting in his chair.

"Dear, dear! Did you imagine that I should be content with this mean supply of facts?" asked the count. "By no means, Heath. I must know more—I must know much more. I have no intention whatever of letting the matter rest."

Mr. Heath looked impatient.

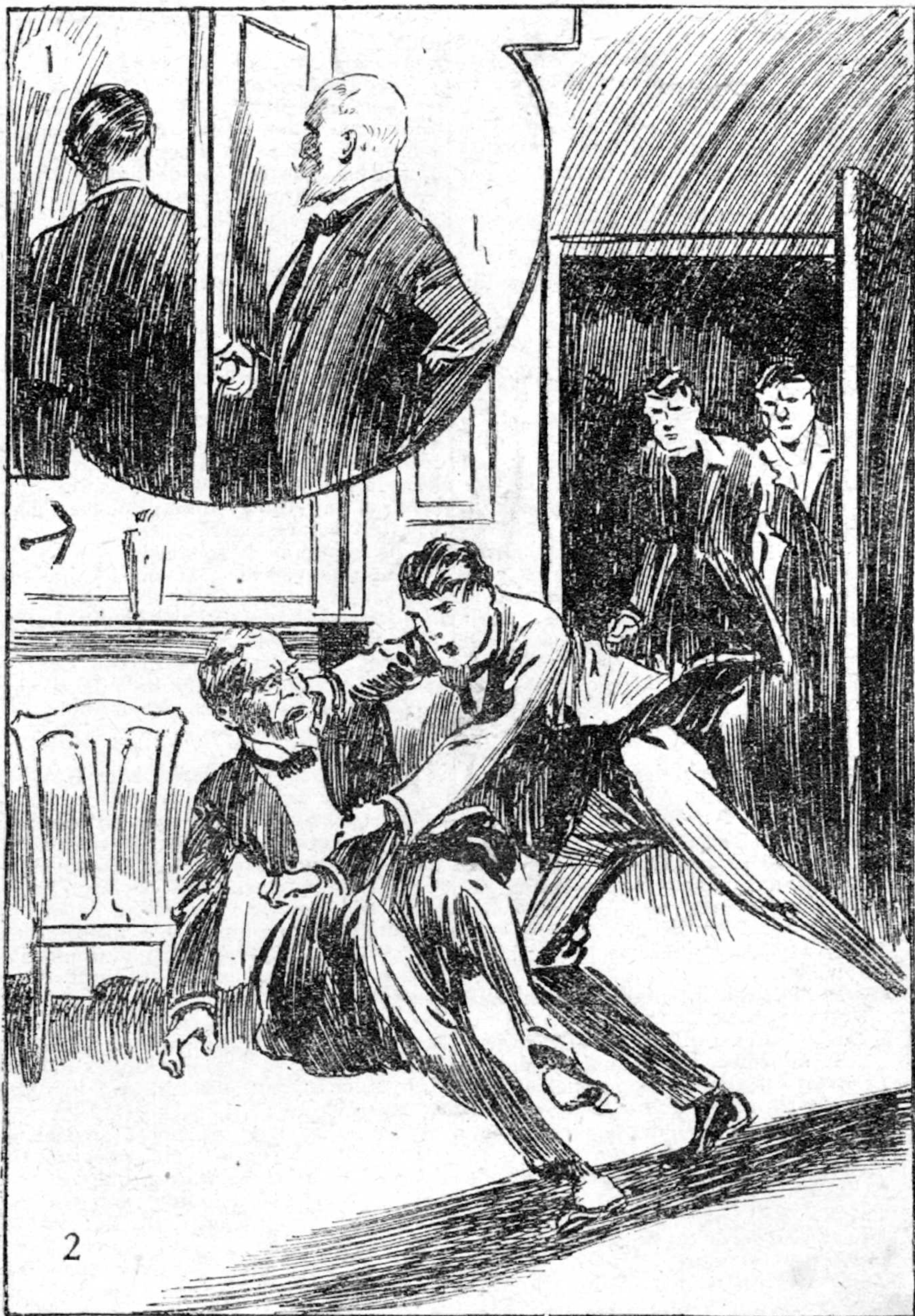
"But I've told you everything I know!" he declared.

"I do not doubt you; in fact, I am convinced that you are telling the truth," said the Comte de Plessigny smoothly. "But you merely talk of Wang Hi and a vast treasure—you tell me no actual information. Where is this treasure?"

"In the interior of China."

The count chuckled softly.

"My dear young friend, you might as well tell me that a shelled pea is in the centre of a cornfield, and request me to find it," he said. "It will not do. China is a vast place. Its population is enormous, and its towns, villages, and cities are legion. Do you know the name of the place where this treasure exists?"



1. Mr. Heath said nothing, but strode through the doorway.
2. "Help! Help!" shouted the count frantically.

"No."

"Then, as I said before, you have much more to learn," declared the host. "It will also be necessary for you to obtain the parchment Lord Dorrimore referred to—or, better still, a copy of it. It is absolutely essential that I should be acquainted with all the facts—and not with a mere outline."

Mr. Heath clenched his fists.

"But I have done my best——" he began.

"No doubt—no doubt!" interrupted the count. "But you have really had no time to perform your work thoroughly. You must come to me with the complete story; then I will release you from your position."

The Remove master rose to his feet.

"In plain words, you want me to continue this spying game?" he asked bluntly.

"I do not care to hear you speak in such bald language——"

"I don't feel inclined to beat about the bush now," interrupted Mr. Heath curtly. "I have been a spy—and you wish me to continue in that role. Is it the truth or not? I want a plain answer."

The comte shrugged his shoulders.

"Since you insist," he murmured, "yes, you must continue to—spy!"

"I refuse!"

"Come, come, my dear young fellow——"

"I tell you I refuse!" snapped Mr. Heath. "I've carried out your wishes, and I listened to a private conversation. I am not going to degrade myself further. You can say what you wish—do what you wish; but I am firm."

"You positively refuse to proceed?"

"I do."

The comte smiled genially, and rubbed his hands together.

"This is absurd—this is really ridiculous!" he murmured. "My dear Heath, you cannot afford to talk in that strain. You seem to overlook the fact that you tampered with a stolen diamond. You quite ignore your peril. One word from me, and you will be in the hands of the police——"

"And so will you!" interrupted Heath hotly. "You have the diamond——"

"Perhaps so—but this is of no matter," said the count. "I am a gentleman of wealth, and it will be quite easy for me to make use of the police as I wish. You are a mere nobody—a

nothing—and I can compel you to obey me."

Mr. Heath laughed harshly.

"You think so?" he exclaimed. "If so, you're mistaken! I have discovered, Plessigny, that you are an arrant scoundrel, and an unscrupulous rogue! I will have no further dealings with you—and you are at liberty to go to the police this very minute! Be hanged to you!"

"So? A revolt!" smiled the count. "This is indeed quite amusing—quite entertaining. I am afraid your revolt will be of no avail, my dear young man. You must do as I say——"

"And I declare that I will not!" shouted Mr. Heath hotly. "I would rather go to the police, and face the consequences of that diamond affair, than continue this infernal blackguardism. I have done nothing wrong—I am innocent of anything unscrupulous. Then what have I to fear?"

The comte bent forward.

"You have to fear—me!" he said softly.

"Indeed!" snapped the young master. "It may interest you to know that I do not fear you—not in the slightest degree! You can only do one thing—and that is, to tell the police about that diamond."

"You think so?"

"I know so," declared Mr. Heath.

"Then I am afraid you are living in a false paradise," said the comte softly. "I have other methods of compelling you to do as I wish. But, come! Why should we quarrel? Let us talk peacefully and quietly, my young friend. I am anxious to obtain this information, and you can supply it. Is that not sufficient reason that we should work together, peacefully and amiably? You are on the spot—you can obtain this information without the slightest difficulty. Personally, I can do nothing. Therefore, it is to your interest and to mine, to continue——"

"I will listen to no more!" exclaimed Mr. Heath curtly. "You will not influence me by these words, Plessigny. I have finished—I am going, and you can do your worst. That's all I've got to say. Good evening!"

Mr. Heath walked towards the door, his jaws set, and his eyes gleaming with determination. He reached the door, grasped the handle, and turned it. Then he received a slight shock.

The door was locked!

"What is the meaning of this?" demanded the visitor angrily.

"It is not my wish that you should leave me so soon," smiled the count. "I was most anxious to be on good terms with you. However, since that seems to be impossible, I suppose I must give way. Come, my friend."

The comte moved softly across the room, and went to another door. He opened it, revealing a lighted passage beyond.

"Good evening!" he murmured.

Mr. Heath said nothing, but strode through the doorway.

Immediately afterward the door closed, and it went with a click. Mr. Heath looked round, with a start. Then he saw that the place was not a passage, as he had first supposed, but merely a long cupboard, with no other exit.

He had been tricked!

A single electric light glowed high in the ceiling. And as Mr. Heath glanced up at it, the metal filament lost its glow, showed dull red for a second, and went out. He was plunged into darkness.

"The scoundrel!" he muttered thickly.

He thumped upon the door loudly.

"Let me out of this, you rogue!" he shouted. "If you think this kind of trickery will do any good, you've made a mistake!"

No reply came from the count. Mr. Heath paused, breathing hard, rather bewildered by this sudden turn of events. Then he heard a bell tinkle, and after that came a pause. He waited, filled with fury and anxiety.

"Let me out!" he shouted again.

Still there was no reply, and again he listened.

Then he heard voices penetrating the door from the room beyond.

"You rang, sir?" said one voice.

"I did, Duncan," exclaimed the count, smoothly. "I have a little commission for you, and I want you to attend to my instructions carefully."

"Very good, sir."

"You will make all haste, and you will go to the small village of Edgemore," went on the count. "Having arrived there, you will have no difficulty in locating a building known as Greyhurst Cottage—"

"I know it quite well, your excellency."

"That is splendid!" said the comte smoothly. "Very well, 'Go to Greyhurst Cottage, knock upon the door, and insist upon seeing Mrs. Heath. When you mention that you have come from her husband, she will see you. Tell her that Mr. Heath is in great need of her—urgently; tell her that the matter is extremely vital.'"

"Yes, your excellency."

Mr. Heath listened with growing fury and anxiety and alarm.

"I have not finished my instructions, Duncan," said the comte. "Having persuaded Mrs. Heath to leave the cottage with you, you will take her to the nearest station, and you will take her to London."

"I quite understand, sir."

"Good," said the comte gloatingly. "Once in London, you will take Mrs. Heath to this address, you will keep her there to await further instructions from me. That is all."

"Very good, your excellency."

"Oh, one moment, Duncan," said the comte. "Come back to me in five minutes time, I have something else to tell you."

"Yes, sir."

Heath heard the sound of a door closing, and then came silence. All his pent up feelings came to the surface. He thumped upon the door panels fiercely—feverishly. He was wild with anxiety.

The comte had won!

Knowing that he could not persuade Mr. Heath to obey his will, he was determined to play a scoundrelly trick upon Mrs. Heath in the Edgemore Cottage! And the very thought of his wife being mixed up in this dreadful business caused Mr. Heath to become nearly frantic.

"Let me out! Let me out!" he shouted thickly. "I will agree—I will do what you want!"

He heard the comte come to the door.

"What did you say, my young friend?" came the silky voice. "Do I understand you to intimate that you will obtain the further information that I require?"

"Yes—yes!" shouted Heath. "But you must cancel the orders you just gave to your manservant! I will not have my wife interfered with."

The count chuckled.

"Do as I wish, and your wife will know nothing. You must give me your

word of honour that you will continue to act as my scout——"

"As your spy!"

"As it pleases you—yes," said the comte. "Have I your word?"

"Yes," said Mr. Heath, between his teeth. "I give you my word!"

"Good—splendid!"

Mr. Heath heard the bell tinkle again. Had he been able to see through the door panels he would have been somewhat surprised. The count was standing in the middle of the room, a smile upon his genial face. He spoke.

"You rang, your excellency?" he exclaimed, in a changed voice.

"Yes, Duncan, I did," he said in his normal tones. "The instructions I gave you three minutes ago are cancelled. You must forget them."

"I will, sir," he said, in the other voice.

"All right—you may go!"

The comte walked across the room, opened the door, and closed it with a slight bang. Actually, of course, he had been alone from the very start. The manservant was an imaginary being.

But Mr. Heath could not know this. He could not guess that the Comte had merely performed the ruse in order to extract the promise from his dupe. Mr. Heath certainly thought another man had been present. The comte had gained his end in the easiest possible manner.

The door was unlocked, and Mr. Heath emerged.

"You—you rogue!" he said fiercely.

"Dear, dear, I object to that violent language!" said the comte softly. "I can assure you, my dear sir, that my intentions are all for the good. Do this little favour for me, and you will never regret it. You cannot refuse now, since I have your word of honour—and you profess to be a gentleman."

"Yes, you have my word of honour—and that is good enough," said Mr. Heath coldly.

"I will do my best to obtain the information you require. But, after I have succeeded, I shall act as I think best. I have given you no promise as to what I shall do later. If I remain here a moment later I shall lose my temper."

"The door is unlocked—you may go!" purred the Comte de Plessigny.

Mr. Heath went, and when he got into the open air, he took in several

long breaths, and glared round him fiercely and angrily.

There was no help for it. He was tied hand and foot, and he would have to do as the count told him. The position was galling—awful, but there was no getting out of it.

The master of the Remove was to continue his unwilling duty as—spy!

CHAPTER V.

TEA IN GREYHURST COTTAGE.

EDWARD OSWALD HANDFORTH looked mysterious.

It was the day following Mr. Heath's interview with the Comte de Plessigny, and lessons were over. It was, in fact, nearly tea-time, and Handforth and Co. had just entered Study D. in the Remove passage, in the Ancient House.

"My sons," said Handforth, "I've got a wheeze!"

"About tea?" said Church hopefully.

"Yes!"

"Oh, good!" said Church. "We are all pretty hard up, and we've got nothing in stock that's worth eating. I'm feeling particularly hungry, too. What's this marvellous idea of yours, Handy?"

"There's nothing marvellous about it," said Handforth. "I was simply going to make the suggestion that we should go along to Greyhurst Cottage, and plant ourselves on Edith for tea."

Church and McClure stared.

"Impossible!" said Church.

"Absolutely impossible!" declared McClure.

"My dear chaps, you don't know what you are talking about," said Handforth, with a superior smile. "Sis won't mind at all, and it'll be a pleasant change for us—and for her, too. In fact, she'll be jolly pleased to have us there."

"That's quite likely," said Church. "But you seem to forget the whole thing's secret, and that we mustn't be seen near the place. We can't afford to take risks, Handy. It wouldn't be fair to your sister."

"Rot!"

"Churchey's quite right," said McClure firmly.

"Why, you rotters!" roared Handforth. "Don't you want to have tea with my sister?"

"Oh, don't talk rot," said Church. "There's nothing we'd like better. It's simply a question of taking the risk——"

"There'll be no risk, you ass!"

"Not for us, perhaps," said Church. "We can go where we like until locking up, and have tea where we like—we couldn't come to any harm. But supposing we're spotted going into the cottage, and supposing some of the chaps get to know about your sister, and supposing Mr. Heath is shown up——"

"My only hat!" groaned Handforth. "All you can do is to suppose! I've never seen a pair of worse growlers than you chaps! You jolly well get on my nerves! We're going to Greyhurst Cottage to tea, and there's nothing more to be said!"

"Yes, but——"

"Another word from you, Walter Church, and I'll punch your silly nose!" said Handforth darkly. "The subject is finished—we're going! And if you take my advice, you'll put clean collars on, and wash your necks!"

Church and McClure felt inclined to point out that Handforth's neck was in a far worse condition than theirs, but they manfully restrained themselves. They instinctively felt that if they revealed the truth in that manner, the faces would become sadly disfigured—thus rendering it quite impossible to partake tea in the company of a lady.

Handforth was very quick with his fists.

About ten minutes later the famous trio of Study D marched across the Triangle, spick and span. Their collars were clean, their neckties perfectly set, and they looked quite unusually smart.

Fortunately they met no other juniors on their way to the gates, or they might have had some awkward questions to answer. The Remove fellows were nearly all at tea, so the Triangle was deserted.

The chums of Study D took the short cut through the wood, and within fifteen minutes they were entering the little gateway of Greyhurst Cottage, in the hamlet of Edgemore. The cottage stood well back from the road, and was surrounded by thick trees.

It was only a temporary home for Handforth's sister—Mr. Heath had rented it furnished—but she was very

comfortable there. The young couple were, in fact, spending quite a novel honeymoon.

Handforth lost no time in slipping round to the back door. It was better than taking the risk of being seen while waiting in the porch. The back door stood open, and Handforth marched in as if he owned the place.

"Snakes, Master Edward, you give me quite a fright!" exclaimed an old lady appearing at the door of a little kitchen. "I'm real glad to see you, sir. The young mistress is in the front room."

"Thanks, Mrs. Miggs," said Handforth. "Come on, you chaps."

They passed down the cool passage, Mrs. Miggs, the old housekeeper, looking after them somewhat doubtfully. She was an orderly old party, and she probably feared the chaos which would be caused by three such visitors. Handforth, moreover, possessed a reputation for untidiness which had probably reached Mrs. Miggs' ears.

"Hallo, Sis—here we are!" said Handforth briskly, as he marched straight into the front room. "Just in time for tea? Good!"

"Why, this is lovely!" said Edith, rising quickly from her chair. "I didn't expect to see you to-day, Teddy."

"We—we didn't quite like coming, miss. Edith—I—I mean, Mrs. Heath—or—or, rather, Mrs. Kirby," stammered Church. "We thought you wouldn't like us coming without being invited."

"What rot!" said Handforth.

"Why, I'm only too pleased to see you, boys," said Edith, smiling. "This is really splendid! I was feeling ever so lonely, and you have come just in time to prevent me going into a fit of the blues."

"Ain't you feeling well, Sis?" asked Handforth bluntly.

"Of course I'm feeling well, you silly boy!"

"Then what's the trouble?"

"Well, I may be a little worried," admitted Edith.

She was strikingly unlike the big and burly Edward Oswald. Church and McClure, when first hearing of Handy's sister, had pictured a clumsy, ungainly girl, of the most pronounced plainness.

In reality, Edith was small, dainty, and extremely pretty. She was dressed in a white skirt, and a beautiful crêpe-de-chine jumper of exquisite design. She looked gloriously girlish and fresh.

Church and McClure positively could not look upon her as a married woman—as Mr. Heath's wife. The Remove master's real name, of course, was Arthur Kirby, but for very excellent reasons he had called himself Mr. Clement Heath.

And he would get into serious trouble if the truth came out. Not that he had done anything dishonest or dishonourable. Mr. Heath was as straight as a die.

"You may be a little worried?" repeated Handforth. "What about, Sis?"

"I don't want to bother you, Teddy—"

"Rats!" said Handforth. "Out with it, you ass—I—I mean—Sorry, Sis!"

Edith smiled.

"You needn't apologise," she said. "I suppose you've got so accustomed to calling those two nice boys wicked names that they come naturally to you. You're rather a terrible person, Teddy."

The juniors grinned, and Church and McClure were inclined to agree—secretly. Handforth was certainly terrible at times.

Tea was soon brought in—heaps of delicious bread-and-butter, cakes, pastries, and glorious hot tea. The juniors enjoyed themselves tremendously. And Handy's sister enjoyed herself, too. She had been accustomed to rather lonely teas, and these visitors were welcome.

"Well, Sis," said Handforth, as he was finishing his third cup of tea. "What's the idea of you being worried, and refusing to tell us anything about it? It's all tommy rot! You oughtn't to be worried at all—"

"Perhaps not, dear—but I can't help it."

Handforth glared.

"I say, Sis, draw it mild," he protested. "Don't make me look an ass in front of these chaps. 'Tain't right for a chap like me to be called 'dear,' and all that sort of rot!"

Edith smiled, and Church and McClure grinned.

"I'm awfully sorry, Teddy," said his sister. "I didn't think you were quite so susceptible. I'm really worried about Arthur."

"Mr. Heath?" asked Church.

"Of course she means Mr. Heath, you fathead!" said Handforth. "But why

should you be worried about him? Has he been knocking you about—"

"Oh, don't be so silly!" said Edith laughing. "You're so fond of fighting yourself that you think everybody else is the same."

"Well, then, what's the trouble?" asked Handy.

"It's really about a man named the Comte de Plessigny," said Edith, with a little frown. "I know that Arthur has been very much upset—"

"My hat!" interrupted Handforth. "The Comte de Plessigny! I know that joker, and he is a jolly queer old card. In fact, it's quite likely that he's not such an innocent merchant as he looks."

"But he's not a merchant, Teddy—he's a private gentleman!" said Edith.

Handforth smiled at her rather pityingly.

"Well, of course, you can't be expected to understand," he said, in a condescending voice. "When I call a chap a merchant, it doesn't mean to say that he is a merchant. It's just a way of putting it."

"I don't follow you at all, Ted," smiled his sister. "I'm afraid I must be silly."

"Of course you're silly!" said Handforth, with brotherly candour. "Girls always are silly—they can't help it!"

"You can tell them all sorts of simple things, and they won't know what the dickens you're jawing about."

Church nudged his leader, under the cover of the table.

"Don't be so rude, you ass," he whispered.

"Are you calling me rude, Walter Church?" roared Handforth.

"I—I—"

"If you ain't careful, you'll get a punch on the nose!" said Handy, rolling up his sleeves. "I don't feel inclined to stand any of your rot—"

"Oh, dear! Please don't start fighting, Ted!" protested Edith, looking alarmed. "Your friend wasn't doing anything wrong."

"He said I was rude!" snorted Handforth. "Well, what if I was? A chap can be rude to his sister, I suppose? The best thing we can do is to get back to the other subject, and talk about the Comte de Plessigny. I nearly arrested him once!"

"You—you nearly arrested him?" repeated his sister blankly.

"Yes—rather."

"Handy means that the count arrested him," grinned McClure.

Edith looked rather bewildered.

"I'm sure I don't know what you mean," she said. "How could Ted nearly arrest the count, and how could the count arrest Ted?"

Church grinned.

"Oh, that's an easy one, miss—I mean Mrs. Heath," he said. "You see, Handy thought that the count was a forger, or a burglar, or something. So he had us follow the old chap to Bannington, and then Handy got into the count's house. He meant to arrest the count on the spot, but he was spoofed, and when he came out, he'd got hand-cuffs over his wrists!"

"I really can't believe you!" said the girl, shaking her head.

"Oh, it's true enough," said Handforth. "But why on earth that idiot should blurt it out is more than I can understand. The count's a rotter! I'll admit he spoofed me, and he put the rotten hand-cuffs over my wrist, and pitched me out. Personally, I believe he's a wrong 'un."

Edith looked thoughtful.

"That's what I've been thinking, but I can't really believe it. I can't explain anything just now, but I've got an idea into my head that the count is forcing Arthur to do something dreadful. Oh, Teddy, I'm so worried!"

"That only shows that you're sillier than I thought," said Handforth frankly. "Fancy being worried! Arthur's old enough and big enough to look after himself."

"But you don't understand, Ted——"

"Then you'd better tell us what the trouble is."

"I'm afraid I can't," said Edith quietly.

She did not like going into all the details concerning the diamond, and how the count was compelling her husband to act as a spy—for, of course, the Remove master had told Edith everything.

She also felt she was not justified in taking the boys into her confidence. It was really Mr. Heath's business, and it was just as well that it should be kept as quiet as possible.

However, Edith felt that she could do something.

"I'm sorry I can't tell you everything," she said. "But I know instinc-

tively that the count is using a bad influence with Arthur. Perhaps you could do something for me, Teddy?"

"Do something?" repeated Handforth.

"Well, you might be able to watch over Arthur while he is at school," said Edith. "Although I don't suppose that will be much good," she added. "It's when he's with the count I'm worried—and I believe he means to go to Bannington this evening. There's no telling what that horrid man will do!"

Handforth's eyes gleamed.

"They're going to meet at the count's house this evening?" he asked.

"Yes, I think so."

"Good! Leave it to me," said Handforth calmly.

"Why, Teddy, what do you mean?"

"Just leave it to me, and everything will be all right," replied Handforth mysteriously. "There's no need to worry at all, Sis. I intend to look into this matter thoroughly."

Church and McClure were just as puzzled as Edith, but they asked no questions—then. They felt quite certain that Handforth had got some hare-brained schemes into his head. But it would have been disastrous to have opened an argument there and then.

The juniors took their departure from Greyhurst Cottage some little time later—after promising Edith that they would drop in to tea on another occasion. The trio walked briskly down the lane.

"Buck up!" said Church, consulting his watch. "We shall be late for calling over if we don't buzz——"

"Blow calling over," interrupted Handforth. "We're not going back to St. Frank's just yet. There's something important to be done first."

"Oh, rats! There isn't time——"

"If you chaps like to leave me in the lurch, and get to St. Frank's in time for calling over—well, you can jolly well go," said Handforth grimly. "It'll be a good riddance to bad rubbish! There's important work on hand, and even if we don't get in until bedtime, we shall only get a hundred lines each."

"But what's the idea?" asked Church wonderingly. "We'll come with you if you'll only give us a good reason——"

"The very fact that I have asked you ought to be enough," said Handforth.

"But if you don't choose to come—well, clear off! But before you go, I'll punch

you into pulp! You'd better realise that, you rotters."

Church and McClure sighed.

"Oh, we'll come!" said McClure.

"Any old thing for a quiet life!"

Handforth nodded.

"Good," he said. "That's the stuff! We're going to the Comte de Plessigny's place, in Bannington—it's only a short cut from here. We're going to watch the house, and going to expose the rotter."

"But what have we got to expose?" asked Church, in bewilderment. "And what's the good of watching the house? What the dickens do you expect to see? How do you know the count's at home?"

Handforth glared.

"Questions—questions—questions?" he roared. "All you can do is to ask questions! You've got to come with me and keep quiet. I'm leader—and I'm going to lead! If you don't choose to follow my instructions, you'll get punched!"

Church and McClure gave it up, and followed their obstinate leader. As a matter of fact, Handforth himself had no real, connected idea as to what his scheme was. All he thought was that it would be a good move to watch the count's house.

As it turned out, the trip was not to be in vain.

CHAPTER VI.

THE TRUTH ABOUT THE LAYHAM DIAMOND.

LORD DORRIMORE lay back in his chair.

"So you want to hear some more details about the decease of Mr. Wang Hi?" he asked lazily. "Right you are, old man—I'll get busy. The fact is, I don't exactly know where to begin, and the yarn is rather a difficult one."

"Tell it in your own way," said Nelson Lee.

They were comfortably seated in the latter's study in St. Frank's. It was evening—in fact, at that very moment Handforth and Co. were on their way to Bannington. Nelson Lee and Dorrie were intent upon having another chat.

And, above them, in the little box-

room, Mr. Heath was listening, as before. He had easily learned that Nelson Lee and Dorrimore were together in private—and he guessed the reason why.

So, soon after tea Mr. Heath had taken up his position, with the gramophone horn fitted over the gas-pipe. The voices of the two men below were amplified to such an extent that Mr. Heath did not miss a word.

"Of course, you want to hear all the inner details," came Dorrie's voice.

"Exactly."

"Good! Just sit tight, and don't interrupt," said his lordship. "I don't want you to say a word. Your job is to sit there and say nothing."

"That is quite understood," smiled Nelson Lee. "Go ahead."

"Well, this treasure, as I told you before, is hidden right in the interior of China," said Dorrie. "It's a vast undertaking; I can assure you—but any expedition will be well rewarded. For example, the danger will be practically nil—we shall only have the tedious journey to worry us. Of course, there may be one or two scraps with the chinks, but that's all in the order of the day."

Nelson Lee made no comment, and Mr. Heath listened eagerly.

"A scrap or two will help to make things lively," proceeded Dorrie. "Now, if you'll look at this chart, you'll follow my line of reasoning exactly. I maintain that we shall be able to get the booty without a ha'porth of trouble. You see, we start from the coast here, and then we work up this river, till we're stopped by rapids. Then it'll be quite easy to go overland, and to get to the spot. Just look here."

Mr. Heath heard a chair shifting, then came silence. Obviously, Lord Dorrimore and Nelson Lee were examining the chart.

"See how easy it'll be?" came Dorrie's voice again. "My dear man, it'll be a splendid trip in every way, and there'll be a reward at the end of it that'll make us millionaires. Of course, I'm a millionaire already, but that's merely a horrible detail. Money doesn't interest me at all."

Mr. Heath turned abruptly. He fancied he heard a slight sound at the door. Then, as he faced round, he uttered a startled exclamation.

Nelson Lee was standing before him!

"Why, I—I——" The words froze on Mr. Heath's lips.

"You thought I was downstairs in my study?" asked Lee smoothly. "Quite so, Mr. Heath—quite so. I intended you to have that impression. You're somewhat novel contrivance interests me."

Nelson Lee indicated the gramophone horn, and during those few seconds Lord Dorrimore's voice still came floating up from the lower room.

"The arrangement is quite successful, I notice," said Nelson Lee. "I think, Mr. Heath, that an explanation is due from you. This behaviour of yours is hardly in keeping with the dignity of your appointment in this school."

Still Mr. Heath could not speak. He was staggered into dumbness. His face, during those few moments, had become haggard and drawn. He realised what this all meant. He was exposed as a spy—disgraced, ruined! He would never be able to lift his head up again.

"Mr. Lee!" he muttered hoarsely, "I swear I didn't want to listen——"

"I think it will be better if we have an explanation downstairs," interrupted Lee quietly. "We must have a little chat, Mr. Heath. I have caught you red-handed, and I think it is necessary for you to explain matters."

They walked downstairs, Mr. Heath apparently in a dream, and utterly and absolutely miserable. He hardly knew where he was walking, and he certainly didn't care.

"Oh, good!" exclaimed Lord Dorrimore, as the pair entered the study. "I was just beginning to dry up. I believe I made a hash of it, but it doesn't matter now."

Lee closed the door, and Mr. Heath sat down heavily.

"I can't tell you anything, Mr. Lee," he said in a whisper. "I'm sorry, but I have no explanation to offer. You will, of course, put the worse possible construction on my behaviour, and I can hope for no mercy."

Nelson Lee smiled.

"You are quite wrong there, my dear sir," he said gently. "Perhaps I know even more than you do. I advise you to be quite frank. To begin with, you were urged to undertake this unpleasant task by the Comte de Plessigny——"

"How do you know?" asked Mr. Heath, startled.

"I do know," replied Nelson Lee. "Furthermore, it may interest you to learn that I was aware of your little game from the very first, and allowed it to progress. The story about the Wang Hi treasure was a mere piece of fiction, invented by Lord Dorrimore and myself. I wanted you to take the count a false story. No such treasure exists, and Lord Dorrimore has no intention of going to China. We discussed the subject merely to hoodwink you."

"Good gracious!" said Mr. Heath blankly.

"Now, please be quite frank. I want to hear everything," said Nelson Lee. "I am quite convinced, Heath, that you are an honourable man at heart. This lapse was due to the fact that the count has a hold over you—or, at least, you fancy he has. Let us have the truth, and there will be no further complications."

Mr. Heath's eyes gleamed.

"By Jove! I will tell you the truth, Mr. Lee!" he exclaimed fiercely.

He did. He explained all the circumstances concerning the finding of the diamond in Bellton Wood; he explained how he had taken it to the count, and how the count had advised him to have it cut; then he went on to describe the count's disclosure that the diamond was stolen property, and that Mr. Heath was liable to find himself in the hands of the police.

Nelson Lee listened with great interest. He could tell that Heath was sincere, and that the young master was completely under the sway of the Comte de Plessigny. And Lee was inclined to be lenient.

"On my honour, Mr. Lee, I did not want to listen to your conversation with Lord Dorrimore," declared Heath earnestly. "At first I positively refused to undertake the task."

"And the count threatened you?"

"Yes, he did!" said Mr. Heath grimly. "He said if I refused he would see that I fell into the hands of the police. I was scared—mainly because of reasons which I cannot speak of now——"

"Such as your wife, at Edgemore?" asked Nelson Lee.

Mr. Heath started.

"You—you know?" he asked huskily.

"Yes," replied the schoolmaster-detective, smiling. "My dear fellow, it was quite an innocent piece of deception—and I do not blame you. It was natural that you should like your wife with you. However, we will discuss that matter later. With regard to the Comte de Plessigny, you have been needlessly alarmed."

"But he had injured me——"

"Nonsense, my dear fellow," said Lee. "You succumbed to his will, thinking that you were in his power. You are not in his power. I blame you for acting the part of a spy—but the circumstances are exceptional. If Lord Dorrimore feels inclined to let the matter drop, I will do the same."

"Count on me, old man," said Dorrie. "I'm an oyster."

"It is wonderfully good of you!" said Mr. Heath gratefully.

"And now, to tell you about the Comte," proceeded Nelson Lee. "He is a very clever man; an astute criminal who has never allowed himself to be mixed up with the police. Scotland Yard has suspected him of many clever crimes, but they have never been able to obtain evidence. The comte is a master-crook, and he always works alone. He is a charming individual, with a wonderful personality, and it is almost impossible to realise that he is not noble and good. I have had my eye on him ever since he came to Bannington—and I know why he came."

"To poke his nose into my affairs, by the look of it," remarked Dorrie.

"That was one reason, possibly," said Nelson Lee. "But he was mainly after the Layham Diamond. This wonderful stone was stolen over five years ago, by a man named Harding. He found the police on his track, and boarded a train bound for the south coast. Arriving at Caistowe, he eluded the detectives, and seized a bicycle that was standing outside the station. He was eventually captured at Bellton, but the diamond was not on him, nor would he speak."

"He was sentenced to five years penal servitude. Meanwhile, the Marquis of Layham offered a reward of five thousand pounds for any information leading to the recovery of the stone. That reward has not been claimed."

"I thought about getting it at one time," said Mr. Heath ruefully.

"I have been putting two and two

together," went on Mr. Lee. "I have discovered that Harding came out of prison a month or two back. He was knocked down by a car just outside London, and taken to hospital—where he died. Now, this is the significant point. That car was driven by the Comte de Plessigny!"

"By gad!" murmured Dorrie. "The plot thickens!"

"It is a simple matter to deduce that Plessigny obtained the story of the diamond from the dying man—as they were driving to the hospital, probably," said Nelson Lee. "In fact, Harding doubtless volunteered the information. Well, the comte came down here—and proceeded to search Bellton Wood for the diamond. It was certainly concealed there. He fell out of a tree, dropping the stone; then, when you picked it up, Mr. Heath, the comte allowed you to think the stone was yours. He did so in order to get you into his power."

"Yes, I can see that now," said the Remove-master.

"He wanted you to obtain certain information about Lord Dorrimore," went on Lee. "I have not the slightest doubt that the comte disbelieves the Chinese yarn—it is, as I said, a pure fake. He knows this, and wants to get the real information. My advice to you, Heath, is to ignore the comte entirely."

"But he will inform the police——"

"Nonsense!" laughed Lee. "Plessigny does not love the police, and he will not voluntarily approach them. Even supposing he did inform, he can do you no harm. You have not even got the diamond in your possession. To put it bluntly, Heath, you have been fooled. Take my advice, and have nothing more to do with the man. You are quite safe."

"It is very good of you——"

"Not at all," interrupted Lee quietly. "I have simply enlightened you with regard to the comte's true character. Do not see him again—go about your school duties, and do not worry. Leave the ingenious count to me."

Mr. Heath was overwhelmed with gratitude, and he could think of no adequate words to express his feelings. He passed out of Nelson Lee's study shortly afterwards, feeling a new man.

And he was filled with a great rage against the Comte de Plessigny.

CHAPTER VII.

MAKING AN ENEMY.

TEN minutes later Mr. Heath's mind was made up. His feelings were overpowering, and he was determined to face the comte at once. Hitherto, he had been the count's pawn; now he determined he would snap his fingers in the clever rascal's face.

It thrilled him, and he strode down the lane, with his eyes gleaming fiercely.

There was no doubt that Mr. Heath was determined this time. It was bad policy on his part to ignore the excellent advice of Nelson Lee. It would have been far better, perhaps, if he had ignored the count altogether, and let the matter rest.

In any case, Mr. Heath should have allowed Plessigny to make the first move.

But he simply felt he could not. Having been put in possession of the actual facts, Mr. Heath was filled with an overwhelming desire to go to the count, and to snap his fingers in the astute rascal's face.

Mr. Heath felt that he could not deny himself that pleasure. He did not stop to consider what the consequences might be. He had made up his mind, and that was enough.

He went to Bannington.

It was a brisk walk, and the evening was dull and growing dark with every moment that passed. It was quite late now, and the village was silent and deserted as Mr. Heath passed through.

The country folk were early risers, and they therefore retired early. It was the same on the Bannington Road beyond. Mr. Heath met nobody, except an occasional cyclist on his way home from the town.

The walk was not a long one, and at length Mr. Heath arrived at the house which was occupied by the Comte de Plessigny. It stood back from the road, and was surrounded by trees.

There were lights in two or three of the lower windows. Mr. Heath was pleased, and he did not hesitate to walk up the drive, mount the steps, and briskly rang the bell.

His ring was soon answered.

Duncan, the comte's manservant appeared.

"I want you to take me to the Comte de Plessigny at once," said Mr. Heath briskly. "Tell him that Mr. Heath has

called, and that he has some very urgent business to discuss. - Hurry yourself!"

"You will please wait here, sir," said the man.

Mr. Heath waited, but not for long. Within three minutes Duncan returned, and requested the visitor to follow him.

A few seconds later, the Remove-master was ushered into the comte's library.

The host himself was sitting among a pile of cushions upon the luxurious couch. He was attired, as usual, in a gorgeous smoking-jacket and a smoking cap, and he beamed good-naturedly upon Mr. Heath through his monocle.

"So soon?" he exclaimed. "I hardly expected you yet, my dear young friend."

"I have news for you," said Mr. Heath shortly.

"So I suspected—so I suspected!" murmured the count. "I am charmed to have you here, Mr. Heath. Sit down—take your time. I am filled with curiosity to hear the result of your further investigations."

Mr. Heath smiled.

"It won't take me long to put you in possession of the facts," he said. "To begin with, I've brought you no further details of that treasure story about China."

"Oh, indeed!"

"The reason is very simple," said Mr. Heath. "The story is a faked one—there is not a word of truth in it!"

"So?" murmured the count. "Please explain."

"Lord Dorrimore was not serious when he told that yarn to Mr. Lee," said the Remove-master. "His real scheme is totally different—but I am unaware of its nature. No doubt it is something of a shock to learn this."

"I am disappointed—but it is no shock," said the comte. "Proceed."

"Certainly," said Mr. Heath smoothly. "And it may interest you to know that I have come to another firm decision. I have no intention of progressing with this matter. I have decided to ignore you completely, and if you want any information, you will have to obtain it from another source."

The comte smiled and shook his head.

"Dear, dear! This is bad!" he said softly. "Another revolt, eh? Must I use further schemes to bring you back to reason? My young friend, you are altogether too headstrong; and I am sorry to see it. You must understand that I

require you to obey my wishes in all things——"

"And you must understand that I have no intention of doing anything of the sort!" snapped Mr. Heath. "As for the diamond, you can do your worst. I have come here, Comte de Plessigny, to speak my mind—and I intend doing so."

"So!" said the count. "Really, I——"

"You are nothing more or less than an unmitigated scoundrel!" exclaimed Mr. Heath fiercely. "You fooled me all along the line—but I'm not fooled any longer! I don't care a snap of the fingers for your threats. My eyes are opened, and I realise that I have been a fool."

His host removed his monocle.

"Perhaps it would be better if you realised that you are a far bigger fool now!" he said softly. "This outburst will do you no good, my impulsive friend. You appear to forget that I can exercise a control over you. You are responsible for that diamond——"

"I want to hear no more about the diamond!" shouted Mr. Heath angrily. "You duped me all along with regard to that stone. The police can do me no harm, and I have nothing to fear. I've finished with you for good—except for the fact that it would give me great pleasure to inform the police of your villainous activities. Unfortunately, I have no atom of proof, and the police can do nothing."

"It is well that you understand that," said the count. "But this rebellion on your part is deplorable. It pains me to see you acting in this absurd manner. You must surely appreciate the fact that I hold the trump card——"

"You hold nothing!" shouted Heath. "I have half a mind to knock you down as you stand, and I only refrain from doing so because you are so much older than myself. That is the only fact that saves you."

"Come, come——"

"I have said all that I came to say, and I'm going——"

"I think you are not!" snapped the count, his voice metallic and hard. "It is my turn to speak now. I am aware of the fact that your wife is living at Edgemore. I can easily inform your Headmaster——"

"Do so!" shouted Mr. Heath. "I don't care a rap! I don't care a toss!

The very worst you can do will not harm me!"

The Comte de Plessigny gazed at Mr. Heath steadily. And he knew, almost at once, that he had lost his dupe. Mr. Heath was no longer willing to obey his will. This revolt was no mere passing phase.

And the knowledge that his sole hope of discovering Lord Dorrimore's secret had vanished caused the count to burst into a flare of fury. It was an act totally opposed to his own character.

At all times Plessigny was calm, inscrutable, and positively immobile. It was all the more surprising, therefore, that he should burst out in this way. But he could not help himself at the moment—his fury was too great.

"You young fool!" he shouted thickly.

At the same moment he flung himself forward, and was upon the young master before he could move. Mr. Heath had not expected the attack, and therefore he was not prepared for it.

He reeled, but recovered himself almost at once.

"Help! Help! Help!" shouted the count frantically.

He was struggling fiercely with his visitor, but he was certainly in no peril—for Mr. Heath was not the kind of man to take advantage of another so much older than himself.

"What on earth——" he began.

But at that moment the door burst open, and Duncan appeared, accompanied by another man.

"Tear this ruffian away!" ordered the count harshly. "He attacked a moment ago, and I fear he has murderous intentions. Drag him away, and pitch him out of the house. Do not be gentle with him."

Mr. Heath, before he could realise it, was seized roughly from behind. But now the position was different. He was not struggling with an elderly man, but with two strong menservants.

And Mr. Heath let himself go.

Right and left he lashed out. His blows went home again and again, and Duncan and his companion had a somewhat lively time. One of the men went down, driven to the floor by a terrific punch which landed on the jaw.

Heath had only the other man to deal drastically. Then came the disaster.

Duncan, who was on the floor, saw his

opportunity. He seized Mr. Heath's legs in a vice-like grip, and gave them a fierce pull. The Remove-master toppled over with a terrific crash, his head striking the floor.

"Now we've got you!" snarled Duncan.

And there was no doubt about the question.

With Heath down, and partially dazed, he was like a child in the hands of the two strong men. They hustled him roughly out through the hall, on to the steps, and then they pitched him forcibly down on to the gravel path.

Mr. Heath struck the gravel with a crash, and rolled over.

"Now, stop there!" snarled Duncan, panting hard.

"We'll pitch him into the road!" exclaimed the other man. "By Peter! I'm going to have a fine kick before the brute gets away!"

The men ran down the steps, their intention being to have some sort of revenge upon Mr. Heath as he lay on the gravel. But Duncan and his companion were unaware of the fact that some fresh enemies were near at hand.

Handforth and Co. were still on the watch!

Exactly why Handforth had decided to remain he, himself, didn't know. But it was extremely fortunate that he had come to that decision, for he and his chums were able to take a hand in the game at the most interesting moment.

The juniors had been concealed in the bushes, and they had been waiting for something startling to happen. Church and McClure, of course, were quite fed up, and they did not share Handforth's enthusiasm when Mr. Heath had put in an appearance.

"I tell you there's something in it!" declared Handy. "Why would my brother-in-law come here—to-night? After what he told us this evening, I don't exactly see why he should come. Anyhow, we'll wait."

"We shall miss supper!" muttered Church.

"You—you glutton!"

"Oh, rats! I'm feeling hungry——"

"And what the dickens does hunger matter compared to a jolly important investigation?" demanded Handforth warmly. "A good detective never thinks about food. When he gets fairly on the trail he ought to be willing to go

without food for days, if necessary. I'm like that!"

Church and McClure were by no means sure that this was the case. Handy had never been put to the test. However, there was no need to start an argument, so they remained quiet and still.

The wait was not a very long one.

The next thing they were aware of was Mr. Heath at the front door. Before they could dash forward to help, Handy's brother-in-law was hurtling down the steps. And then the two men followed—with violent intentions.

Handforth fairly bristled.

"Did you hear that?" he whispered fiercely.

"They're going to kick Mr. Heath——"

"They're not!" snapped Handforth. "I'll take a hand!"

"But we mustn't show ourselves!" whispered Church.

"Mustn't we?" exclaimed Handforth warmly. "We'll see about that."

Even while he was speaking, Duncan delivered a fierce kick at Mr. Heath's prostrate form. But before he could bring his foot into action again, something came hurtling out of the bushes near by.

The next moment Mr. Duncan wondered how many earthquakes were happening.

Handforth simply let himself go. Church and McClure ably supported him, and they let themselves go, too. The fight which resulted was truly terrific.

Duncan and his companion received blow after blow, and Handforth did most of the hitting. He was like a whirlwind. He never stopped, and simply landed out right and left in one continuous series of blows.

The fight was so fierce that it couldn't last long.

The two men, after receiving more than enough to satisfy most fellows, realised that the odds were against them. They fled howling.

"You rotten funks!" roared Handforth. "Come back!"

But the Comte de Plessigny's men did not come back. The door closed with a slam, and the three juniors were left outside on the steps. By the time they gave up the job as hopeless Mr. Heath was on his feet.

"Thanks, boys!" he said gratefully. "I didn't expect you to appear at such an opportune moment. Those rascals

took an advantage, and they would have injured me seriously if you had not continued the battle on my behalf."

"I was going to give the rotters a double dose!" said Handforth indignantly. "It was like their beastly nerve to bunk! The next time I see them I'll knock the pair of 'em into the middle of next week."

Mr. Heath shook his head.

"No, we'd better do nothing further," he said. "The ruffians got the worst of the fight, and we must be satisfied with that. As for the Comte de Plessigny, I have finally finished with him, and I only wish I could give the police some definite information."

They moved down the drive, and were soon out in the roadway. Then they walked towards St. Frank's in the dusk of the summer's evening. Mr. Heath told the chums a few details of his conversation with Nelson Lee, and they were greatly interested.

"Do you think it was wise to come here to-night, sir?" asked Church. "The count knows you're against him now—and he'll probably try and do you some harm. But if you said nothing, he wouldn't have interfered."

"Possibly I did wrong, but if I did I am pleased," said Mr. Heath. "It gave me an enormous amount of satisfaction to tell the count exactly what I thought of him. As for doing me any harm, I do not fear him in the slightest degree. I am rather pleased about the whole affair, boys. My worry is over."

"I hope so, anyhow," said Handforth doubtfully.

"You don't sound very cheerful, Edward."

"Well, as a matter of fact, I'm not," declared Handforth. "I don't forget the taste I had of the count! He's a terror, and he's as cool as ice always."

A man like that is capable of almost any rotten trickery, and it'd be simply awful if he gets hold of you in some way——"

"My dear lad, I can look after myself," said Heath. "I'm not exactly a child, and I shall be on the alert. Mr. Lee, too, is on my side, and he knows all about it. I feel easier in mind than I have felt for weeks."

He was somewhat bruised and battered, but by the time St. Frank's was reached he was almost himself again. Fortunately there were no marks on his face to cause any special attention.

Handforth and Co. went straight up to bed—for the Remove had already retired to its dormitory. Mr. Heath promised to see that the juniors would not get into any trouble. Somehow, Handforth could not help feeling rather anxious.

He was not far wrong, either.

For, while the Remove lay sleeping in their beds, the Comte de Plessigny sat in his study, with only the glow of a single shaded electric light in the apartment. The count was smoking, and he sat for a full hour without moving.

And by that time he had come to a decision.

Mr. Clement Heath had made a terrible enemy in the Comte de Plessigny. He was a dangerous man—a man whom it was not easy to floor. And the master of the Remove would shortly find that his troubles were by no means over.

In fact, the worst of all was yet in store!

However, in spite of all the Comte de Plessigny's wit and cunning he was no match for the astuteness of Nelson Lee. And in the battle which followed, the count was to find that his task was not easy.

Everything came right, of course—but not until there had been big trouble!

THE END.

TO MY READERS.

Those of my numerous readers who remember the holiday expedition to Africa last summer will warmly welcome the reappearance of Lord Dorrie and Umlosi in the above story. This big-hearted, sporting nobleman and his devoted follower, the dauntless African chief, have come to St. Frank's to discuss the plans for this year's summer holiday expedition, more details of which will appear in next week's story, "The Claws of the Count!" In this story, as the title suggests, you will read of the count's revenge against Mr. Heath.

THE EDITOR.

YOU CAN BEGIN READING THIS SPLENDID SERIAL TO-DAY!



A Tale of Life and Adventure in the North-West.

INTRODUCTION.

Two brothers, Jack and Teddy Royce, with their chum, Gerald Telford, are trying their luck in the wilds of North-West Canada. A plan of a gold mine is stolen from them by three ruffians—Connell, Olesen and Snaith. Teddy and Gerald follow the rascals, but are captured and forced to work for the men. In the last chapter they make a spirited attempt to escape.

(Now read on.)

The Boys' Fate.

CONNELL, the ex-cook, reached out, and seized Teddy by the arm. He rained several open-handed blows on the boy's head, until Teddy grew dizzy beneath them. Then he hurled the youngster to the ground, where he lay sobbing.

Gerald looked on at this miserably. He and Teddy had had their revenge, in a measure; but it looked a poor revenge, in view of the anger their action had aroused within their captors.

"I'll tie you both up and flog you for that, you young swine!" Connell shouted. "Our canoes, too! They've got to be fetched in! Go and fetch 'em, Olesen!"

"Vot!" asked the big Swede. "Fetch dem? How?"

"Swim for 'em, of course!" shouted Connell. "We'd look a lot of fools tryin' to carry on on foot."

"Vell, der boys upset 'em," grumbled Olesen. "Vy not—"

"Oh, you'll see a sight to reward you for your trouble," said Connell. "I'm goin' to flog those boys for this bit o'

work. You can do the floggin', Hank!"

The prospect seemed to gratify Olesen, and, as he was a good swimmer, he made no further demur, but prepared to re-enter the river to rescue the drifting canoes.

"But I lay him on, by Yumpiter," he said, "for dis! Ya!"

And he dived in.

Teddy and Gerald looked at each other wretchedly.

"What did we do a silly thing like that for?" asked Gerald.

"I don't know," said Teddy. "I felt I had to do something to show these beasts they weren't everybody. My hat! How long's this all going to last?"

They saw Snaith eyeing them, and there was a nasty smile on the black-browed ruffian's face as he looked at them. Snaith was busily wringing the water out of his saturated garments.

To rescue the canoes was not a big job. Olesen soon had them dragged ashore. They were turned up again, and drained dry of the water that filled them.

Then, under Connell's orders, everybody got aboard again.

"You'll pay for this!" growled the leader of the party. "You've lost us our rifles, and our kit's all drenched, with your funny work. But you'll pay!"

"Yes; you'll pay—to-night!" Snaith added; and Gerald thought, as he heard the words, Snaith's voice held far more meaning than Connell's did. But Gerald merely shrugged his shoulders wretchedly, and paddled on, until Connell finally picked on a place to camp for the night.

"Ven shall ve flog dem boys?" asked the big Swede, when they had their

camp-fire going, and the moose-meat was frizzling over the fire.

"After supper," said Connell. "No hurry. Let 'em think about it a bit."

The boys shuddered at the prospect of being flogged by this great beefy fellow, Hank Olesen. But it was plain that Connell was in no hurry to see the lads punished for their act of folly. Supper was eaten—and Gerald and Teddy had very little given to them—and when that was finished, Connell lit his pipe, rose to his feet, and gave a laugh.

"I'll go into the bush away," he said, "and I'll find a good willow to do the floggin' with. You two stay here an' watch the boys."

He turned away from the river. By this time it was getting fairly dark.

The two boys lay near the fire, shivering, for their wet clothes and their starved bodies made them feel the night chill keenly, although the time was summer.

"Durn that feller!" they heard Obed Snaith say suddenly to the Big Swede. "Say, Hank, we ain't goin' to have him bossin' the show much longer. Why won't he let us knock these brats on the head and drop 'em into the river? We don't want 'em here. It's just because he's squeamish about killin'. But I'm not!"

He rummaged in a pack of baggage for a moment and produced a revolver, which he played with for a few moments.

"Vot you do—shoot 'em now?" asked the Big Swede. "But not before we flog 'em?"

"No; but I reckon I'm gettin' dead sick o' Connell bossin' the show," said Snaith. "Say"—he rose to his feet suddenly—"watch them kids!"

Holding the revolver he also walked away from the river towards the bush-land that fringed the Little Slave.

"Ya! Dot's good!" the Swede called after him, then he rubbed his hands.

"He's—he's going to murder Connell!" Gerald gasped. "I could see it in his eyes. Oh, what—what a hole this is to be in!"

"Shoot op!" said the big Swede. "If you don't, I vill flog you meinself now! Here—ja! Shot op, you boys!"

Wretchedly the two lads lay there, too fatigued to move a limb.

Suddenly there was a dull report, coming from the bush-land. There was only one; but it caused Gerald to lift his head sharply. It also seemed to cause Hank Olesen to rub his hands with satisfaction. The boys waited for another shot, but it did not come. But a few minutes later Snaith returned, and there was a sullen look in his face.

"Shall we flog dem boys now?" asked the Swede.

The flogging seemed to be the only thing that mattered to him just now. The shot he had heard was a secondary matter.

"Guess that's all we'll see o' Connell," said the ruffian callously; and he ejected a spent cartridge from his revolver with a gesture that made the open-eyed boys shudder.

"Have you—have you killed him?" asked Teddy.

Snaith dealt the boy a savage kick in the body.

"To blazes with floggin' them kids!" said the black-bearded ruffian, slipping the revolver in his pocket. "I've got a better notion than that, Hank. We don't need to worry about Connell now, and we can manage our two selves in one canoe, so we sha'n't want 'em to help paddle. They lost us our rifles, and we'll have enough to do to feed ourselves on this trip, let alone two useless mouths."

"You kill 'em?" asked the big Swede.

"Yes." Snaith nodded.

"But flog 'em first," said Olesen. "I vos promised I should flog 'em!"

"Why trouble? A couple o' revolver shots, and——"

His shrug was expressive. The two boys listened to all this and shivered, although both considered they would welcome death to such a life as this. There was something so horrible, cold-blooded, about it all. It almost put the boys' teeth on edge to listen to it.

"But dot is too quick," urged the Swede.

Suddenly Snaith gave out an ugly laugh.

"We'll compromise, I guess," he said. "We won't kill 'em outright. We'll let 'em have a bit o' mental torture first. Yes! Good idea! We don't want two canoes now, do we?"

(Continued on page iv. of cover.)



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"Vot's der liddle game?" asked Olesen.

"We'll tie those two up fast, put 'em in the spare canoe, and leave the river to do the rest," said Snaith, talking as nonchalantly as though he were discussing the state of the weather. "We ain't travelled a day yet without buttin' up against at least one waterfall. Savvy, Olesen? Give 'em a sportin' chance for their lives!" He laughed cruelly. "There mightn't be another fall. I don't know whether there is or not. But if there isn't one, they won't go over it, will they?"

It was plain that he was talking now

with a view to tormenting the helpless lads. And, as they listened, their blood went cold, for they knew that the "sporting chance" mentioned by Snaith was not a dog's chance. For, even assuming there were no more falls to be launched over, what hope would they have up there, in entirely uninhabited country, tied hand and foot, in a canoe in midstream.

"But if they do it," muttered Teddy, "we can upset the canoe, and that'll put an end to our misery, anyhow. Oh, the fiends!"

(To be continued.)

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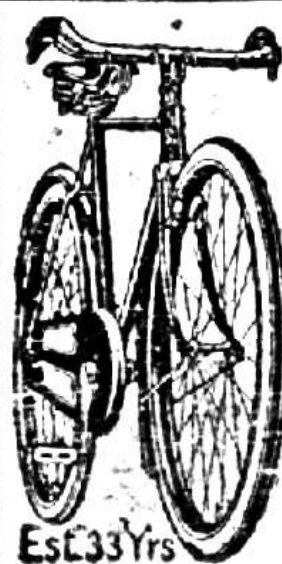
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