No. 281.—Some Thrilling Adventures of Nelson Lee in London!

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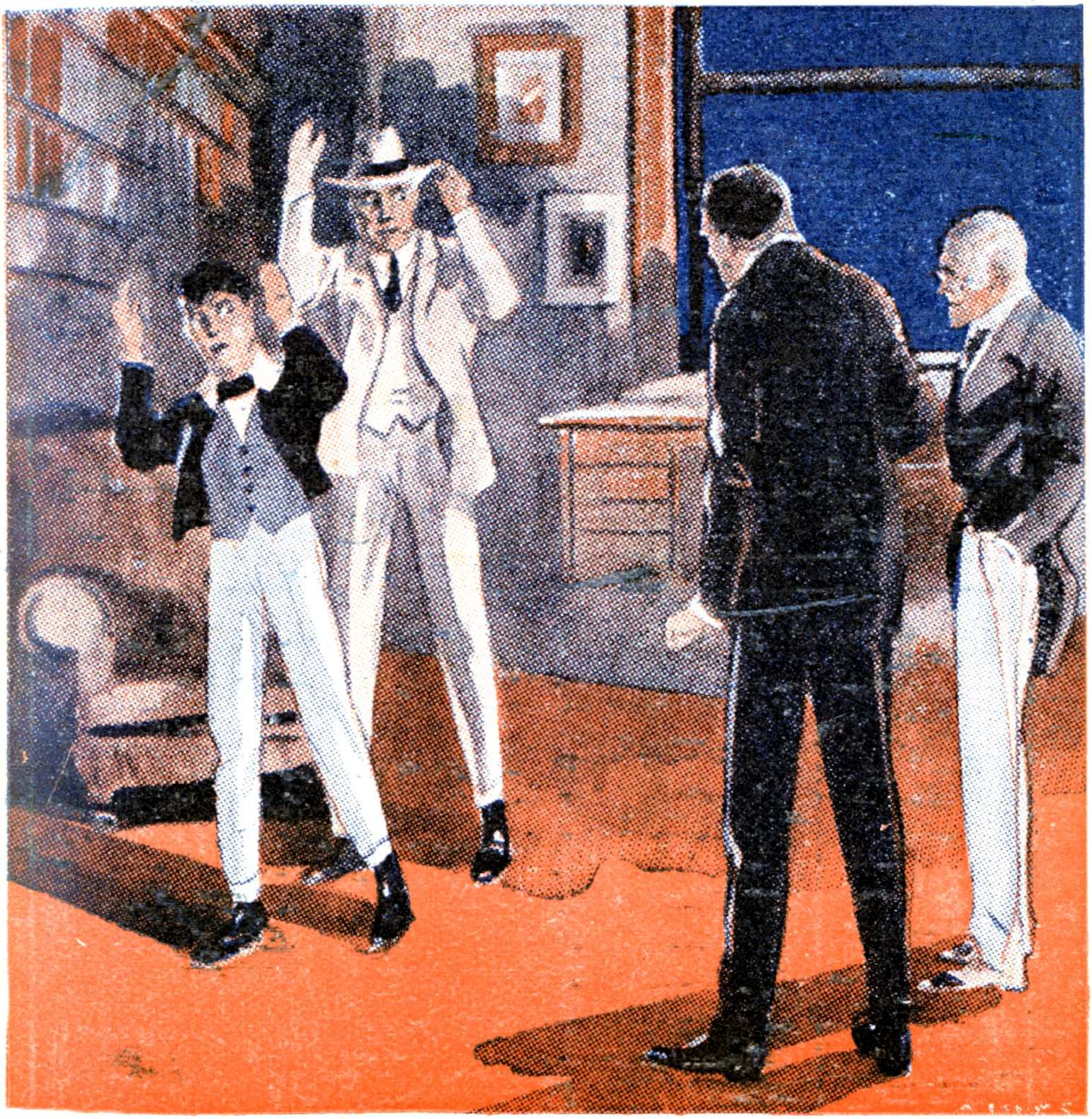

THE BOY INVENTOR AND HIS FATHER ARE TRAPPED.

THE SCHOOLBOY'S PATENT.

A Story of School Life and Detective Adventure at St. Frank's, introducing NELSON LEE and NIPPER and the Boys of St. Frank's. By the Author of "Missing from School," "The Clue of the Oil Trail," "The Ruined Lighthouse," etc.

October 23, 1920.

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(THE NARRATIVE RELATED THROUGHOUT BY NIPPER.)

CHAPTER I.

THE MYSTERY OF DICK GOODWIN.

"WE all know that Goodwin was kidnapped, and held a prisoner in the old ruined lighthouse," said Singleton of the Remove. "But why? That's the question. That's what we've got to get at, my children. Why? Why was Dick Goodwin kidnapped?"

"Echo answers 'Why,'" grinned Pitt.

"You ass! Echo would answer 'Kidnapped,' if it answered at all," said Cecil De Valerie. "But I don't see that this affair really concerns us. We needn't worry our heads about it."

"It concerns Goodwin, and he's a member of the Remove—and we're members of the Remove," argued Pitt. "Therefore it concerns us, too. Everybody must admit that the facts are jolly peculiar."

"We do admit it," said Singleton. "But what is the mystery? What is there about the Lancashire chap to make him worth kidnapping?"

The little crowd of Removites were gathered round the steps of the Ancient House at St. Frank's. It was a somewhat mild October evening, and the Triangle was growing dusky in the failing light.

Everybody was interested in the recent adventure—the startling adventure—which had befallen Dick Goodwin, the Lancashire boy in the Remove. He had been abducted by a trio of rascals, and had been held a prisoner in a lonely ruined lighthouse, just off the coast.

Nelson Lee, the famous schoolmaster-detective, had taken up the case and he had succeeded in bringing Goodwin back to St. Frank's—after rescuing him from a terrible predicament on the lighthouse. Goodwin had been left to die, bound hand and foot to the rusty iron ladder which led up to the lighthouse doorway. And Nelson Lee, at the risk of his own life, had swum out and had released the boy from his perilous position.

And now Dick Goodwin was in the sanatorium.

Two days had elapsed, and the junior was practically himself again. On the morrow he would take his usual place in the Remove Form-room. Everybody knew that, and everybody was speculating as to the meaning of the whole affair.

"It couldn't have been for ransom," said Jack Grey, of Study E. "Goodwin's pater is pretty poor, by all accounts, and the kidnappers wouldn't have got much money out of him. There must have been some other reason."

"That's obvious," said the Hon. Douglas Singleton. "It's my belief that there's a secret connected with Goodwin's study."

"Go hon!" said Pitt sarcastically.

"Well, it's a fact——"

"Of course it's a fact, you ass!" interrupted Reginald Pitt. "We all knew that weeks ago. There's been a

secret in Goodwin's study ever since he came to St. Frank's—at the beginning of term. The room has been locked and bolted, and the windows have been barred. I dare say these kidnappers wanted to discover the secret of Goodwin's study."

Pitt's guess was right on the nail, if he had only known it. Mr. Naggs—who had organised the whole rascally affair—had certainly been anxious to force Dick Goodwin to reveal the secret of his study. But the Lancashire boy, in spite of starvation, threats, and deadly peril, had remained obdurate. It had been impossible to crush his spirit.

"Yes, if we only knew what Goodwin has been doing in his study all the term," said Hart, "we should know why he was kidnapped. But it ain't our business, so we'd better leave it alone."

Fatty Little was looking dreamy.

"Perhaps he's been thinking out some new idea of making pastry, or buns—or even pork pies," he remarked. "These things need special ovens and all that. Perhaps Goodwin has been inventing something——"

"He's got more sense than to spend his time inventing anything of that sort, Fatty," said De Valerie. "I think it's quite possible that he's been merely swotting for a scholarship—and worked that dodge in order to be quiet."

"Hallo, what's this—a Council of Action?" I inquired, coming out of the Ancient House with my two chums. "Or are you merely discussing football?"

"We've been talking about Goodwin," said Pitt.

Timothy Tucker, the tame lunatic of the Remove, happened to be passing. He paused, cocked his head on one side, and blinked through his big spectacles.

"Dear me!" he exclaimed mildly. "What did I hear you saying, my dear sir—what did I hear you saying?"

"Oh, go away, fathead!" said Pitt, looking round.

"That is an insult," said Tucker stiffly. "That is an insult, my dear sir. Don't you know who you are talking to? Don't you know that I am he of the big head?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, that's what I said!" grinned Pitt. "I called you a fathead—and that's the same thing!"

"H'm! Is that so?" said Tucker, nodding to himself. "Is that so, my dear sir? Dear, dear, dear! I am exceedingly pained to find such a low condition of mentality. H'm! But we will let that pass—yes, we will let that pass. You were speaking just now, I believe, of a Council of Action?"

"I think I mentioned the words, Tucker," I put in. "Well, what about it?"

"It has reminded me of something," replied Tucker, blinking at me. "Yes, my dear Nipper, it has reminded me of something important. That is so. It has occurred to me that it would be an excellent idea for the Remove to organise."

T.T. coughed.

"It is this way," he said. "I suggest that we should form an equivalant to a trade union. Naturally, I shall be the president, and the entrance fee to this union will be sixpence per week. I shall also be the treasurer. Quite so."

"And collar all the tin, I suppose?" grinned Pitt.

"By no means, my dear sir—by no means!" replied Tucker quickly. "The funds will be kept by me in case of emergency. It will mean, as a matter of fact, a sum of money to keep by us to use in the event of strikes."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Having formed our union, we shall at once proceed to agitate!" went on Tucker. "We shall agitate for better conditions, my dear friends. Just think of the possibilities. Listen to me, friends and comrades and fellow sufferers! With this union we shall be able to agitate for better conditions all round—easier hours, and more leisure. Quite so! Having formed our plans, we shall at once send a delegation to the Headmaster, with our terms. If those terms are not immediately complied with, we shall strike—striking being our only weapon."

"It's a good idea!" I said thoughtfully.

"Eh?" exclaimed Pitt, staring. "You approve of this, Nipper?"

I nodded.

"Of course I do," I said. "Striking is a fine idea—especially where Tucker is concerned. I vote that we strike now—at once!"

"My only hat!"

"You must be dotty, Nipper!" exclaimed Tommy Watson.

"My dear sir, I am overwhelmed with astonishment," said Tucker, beaming

upon me. "I did not imagine that you had so much brain power as to appreciate the value of my suggestion——"

"Don't make any bloomer, my son," I interrupted. "I don't think my idea of a strike exactly coincides with yours. We're going to strike now—we're going to strike you!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Many willing hands grasped Timothy Tucker, and he was whirled into the air. He struggled and protested, but it was all in vain.

"Now, my tame Bolshevic!" I exclaimed. "We're going to knock some of these dotty ideas out of your head! One—two—three!"

Bump!

Timothy Tucker went to the ground with a thud—the first strike had taken place. By the time we had done with T.T., he was not feeling so enthusiastic as he had been at the commencement; and he finally crawled away, shaking his head dolefully, and muttering that we were a lot of conservative asses. There was certainly not much hope for an agitator in the ranks of the Remove.

"There was times when it done a boy good to treat him rough!" exclaimed a deep, melancholy voice. "There was boys what got wrong notions into their heads—and them notions caused trouble. Why did they cause trouble? Ask me! Because it wasn't right for no boy to know too much about politics. Politics was bad. Agitation was bad. Strikes was bad—excepting them strikes which I seed just now. Them strikes was good!"

We turned, and found that Mr. Josh Cuttle had come across the dusty Triangle, and had joined the group of juniors. Mr. Cuttle was looking as gloomy as ever. His face, with its quaint side whiskers, was set in an expression of dismal resignation.

"You're not looking very cheerful, this evening, Mr. Cuttle," I remarked, smiling.

"Cheerful?" repeated Mr. Cuttle. "What was there to make a man cheerful? Ask me! There was nothing to make a man cheerful!"

Mr. Cuttle shook his head dolefully.

"There was things as some folks don't understand!" he exclaimed. "Why was Master Goodwin kidnapped? Ask me! Because them willians was hup to mischief. That's why Master Goodwin was kidnapped! They were hup to mischief, and things would have been bad if Mr. Lee hadn't been equal to their dodges. But things wasn't all right, even now. There was danger—there was trouble coming!"

"What kind of trouble?" asked Pitt.

"It was trouble of the wust kind!" replied Mr. Cuttle, shaking his head gloomily. "I've seed things, and I know. Master Goodwin was safe, but them willians got away. Which was bad. Is Master Goodwin safe now? Ask me! He was not safe—there was trouble coming! And there was not only trouble, but danger—and evil doings!"

And Mr. Cuttle, having made this gloomy prediction, proceeded on his way on to the Ancient House. On the lobby he paused, filling his pipe.

"Cheerful sort of merchant, ain't he?" remarked Hubbard. "How does he know anything about Goodwin? How does he know that there's danger coming and all that sort of rot?"

"Goodness knows!" said Pitt. "But somehow, I've got an idea that Mr. Cuttle knows a lot more than we do about Goodwin."

I had an idea about that way, too. Cuttle was employed in the domestic quarters of the Ancient House. But, in the back of my head, I had an idea that he was connected, in some way or other, with the mystery which surrounded Dick Goodwin.

"Well, it's my idea that Mr. Cuttle is a rotter!" said Teddy Long. "I believe he's in league with the men who tried to kidnap Goodwin! He's a spy, or something of that sort!"

"Don't be a little young ass!" said Pitt.

"Well, Cuttle knows a dashed lot more than he would care to say!" declared Long. "I'm pretty certain of that! Who is he, anyhow? Why is he here, at St. Frank's? It's all spoof about him being employed at the back. Cuttle never does anything—he's only here to spy on Goodwin—that's what I believe, anyhow. He's up to no good!" And the sneak of the Remove strolled off feeling rather pleased with himself. He found Fullwood & Co., of Study A, at the bottom of the stairs; and the Nuts were watching Mr. Cuttle as he walked slowly through the lobby.

"That old chap's a bit of a mystery!" Fullwood was saying.

"Rather!" agreed Teddy Long. "He knows all about Goodwin—he knows why Goodwin was kidnapped, and what there

is in Goodwin's study. Old Cuttle could tell us a lot, if he liked!"

Fullwood nodded.

"Why not ask him?" he exclaimed. "Why not try the pumping dodge, Long?"

"It wouldn't be any good—Cuttle wouldn't say anything!" replied Long.

"He might!" exclaimed Fullwood, with a wink at his chums. "You're jolly smart at pumpin', Long—it's your speciality. You could make a stone statue talk, I believe—you've got such a wonderful way. Why not have a shot at pumpin' old Cuttle?"

Teddy Long looked rather keen.

"Well, I might have a try," he said. "There'd be no harm done, would there? And it's quite likely that I can get something out of him—as you say, I'm a jolly good hand at pumping. I can make anybody tell a secret if I want to. It's just the way a fellow gets to work, you know. He's got to ask his questions delicately, and with an air of innocence. I'm good at that. Old Cuttle wouldn't be able to keep his secret if I got on the job in earnest!"

"Good!" said Fullwood. "Why not get busy, then?"

Teddy Long was not aware of the fact that his leg was being pulled. He was the most conceited young ass in the Remove, and he fully believed that Fullwood was serious. He smiled in a superior kind of way, and nodded.

"Right-ho!" he said. "I'll go along and have a jaw with Cuttle. It won't be long before I know everything; after I've pumped him for five minutes he'll have told me the whole truth."

Long went down the passage, and Fullwood and Gulliver and Bell went out into the Triangle, chuckling.

They were fellows who thought it rather smart to indulge in betting, but they would not have been willing to wager much on Teddy Long's chances of getting any information out of Josh Cuttle.

The sneak of the Remove hurried down the passage and overtook Mr. Cuttle just as he was about to pass through the private doorway into the servants' quarters. Long hurried up and caught hold of Mr. Cuttle's sleeve.

"Hold on!" said the junior. "I'd like a word with you, Cuttle."

"You was welcome, young gent," said Mr. Cuttle obligingly.

"Jolly queer about Goodwin, ain't it?" said Long carelessly. "Those chaps who took him away from the school and kept him a prisoner must have wanted him pretty badly, eh?"

Mr. Cuttle fixed his gloomy eyes upon the junior.

"It was a mystery, Master Long!" he said heavily.

"Oh, a mystery to most chaps, I believe," replied Long. "But I'm not to be diddled, you know. I've drawn my own conclusions, and I know a lot more than the other chaps think. So do you, Mr. Cuttle? You know a good lot, don't you?"

"There was things I know, and there was things I don't know," replied Mr. Cuttle vaguely. "Sometimes it was bad to know too much."

"Of course, Goodwin was kidnapped because those rotters were up to some shady business!" went on Long. "That's obvious, Cuttle. I know all about it, as a matter of fact. But I wonder why Goodwin was kept a prisoner?"

"Ah!" said Mr. Cuttle.

"I suppose you know all about it, don't you?"

"There was things as I do know!" replied Mr. Cuttle.

"And Goodwin was kidnapped because—because—— Well, we both know, don't we?" said Long, with a confidential wink. "I've just been wondering whether you know the real truth, Mr. Cuttle. Perhaps you'd tell me your idea, and then I shall be able to compare it with mine. Why was Goodwin kidnapped—and why did those men hold him a prisoner in the old ruined lighthouse?"

Mr. Cuttle scratched his head, and a curious little glint came into his eyes. But he looked as gloomy as ever, and there was a doleful expression about the corners of his mouth. He removed his unlighted pipe, and gave a sigh.

"It was bad about Master Goodwin!" he exclaimed. "It was possible for us to talk, young gent, because you know all about it. Which was a surprise to me. There was no reason why we shouldn't have a few words in confidence."

"That's just it!" said Long eagerly. "That's my idea!"

"Which was good!" said Mr. Cuttle. "Master Goodwin came near to dying over that business. And was the game worth it? Ask me! It was not!"

"What game?" asked Long carelessly.

"Why, the game which Master Goodwin was playing," replied Cuttle. "A fine game, too! It wasn't likely to bring him no good."

"Rather not!" said Long. "A shady business, I call it!"

Mr. Cuttle's eyes narrowed for a moment, and he nodded.

"There was games which wasn't worth the candle, Master Long!" he exclaimed. "And making false Treasury notes was a risky business!"

Teddy Long started.

"False—false Treasury notes!" he gasped.

"It was easy to them as can use their fists proper!" said Mr. Cuttle. "But it was tricky young gent; and anybody what goes agin the law like that is always liable to fall foul of his confederates. If he don't keep faith with them, they're liable to pounce on him. Which was bad. Honesty was best, in my opinion. And, even after the false Treasury notes was made, it wasn't always easy to pass them as being genuine."

"No; it's awfully risky!" said Teddy Long breathlessly.

"A person what goes in for cheating the law like that must keep it secret," went on Mr. Cuttle. "It was necessary to work in a private room, and to allow nobody to see in. That was most important, Master Long. One hundred Treasury notes a week—it was a fair order. But, as I said afore, it was a wicked business; and them as goes in for it wasn't to be pitied when they get caught!"

The sneak of the Remove was fairly dancing with excitement.

"And—and do you mean to tell me that Goodwin has been making dud currency notes in his study?" he asked, forgetting that he knew all about it.

Mr. Cuttle sighed.

"Master Goodwin was careful," he said. "But even with the most careful, things was liable to go wrong."

And Mr. Cuttle passed through the private doorway into the servants' quarters. Teddy Long failed to observe that just a tiny gleam of amusement had begun to appear in the man's eyes. The door closed, and Long was left alone.

"Great pip!" he gasped. "A—a forger!"

Long could hardly contain himself. He did not seem to realise that Mr. Cuttle had not once referred to Dick Goodwin when he was talking about false currency notes. But Teddy Long, who was not at all a smart junior, jumped-to a conclusion which struck him as being fairly obvious. Never for a moment did he believe that Mr. Cuttle had been spoofing him.

"A hundred quid a week!" went on Long. "My only hat! The—the awful rotter! So that's why he kept his study locked—that's why he fell out with his confederates! He's been making dud notes, and we didn't know anything about it!"

Full to the brim with his startling news, Teddy Long raced back to the passage until he arrived in the lobby. The electric light was now gloaming, and quite a number of juniors were standing about in groups. Teddy Long burst in among them like a whirlwind.

"I say, you chaps, I've found out the secret!" he gasped. "I know all about Goodwin—I know why he was kidnapped, and what he's been doing in his study ever since the term commenced."

"You must know quite a lot, then!" said Pitt. "In any case, we don't want to hear any of your tales."

"But you must hear—it's jolly important!" panted Long. "Goodwin is a forger!"

"A which?"

"A what?"

"A forger!" repeated Long. "He's been engraving dud Treasury notes in his study—a hundred a week! And he was kidnapped by his confederates—the men who went about the country passing off the dud notes as genuine ones!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You—you silly little idiot!" shouted Handforth. "Who's been stuffing you up with that yarn?"

"It's the truth, I tell you!" roared Long. "I've been talking to Cuttle—and Cuttle knows all about it. I got the truth out of him just now, by pretending that I knew all about it too!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You—you cackling idiots!" howled Long. "I tell you it's the truth!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And I suppose the Head gave his consent to this?" inquired Pitt smoothly. "We all know that the Head is fully aware of Goodwin's secret—it was the Head who gave orders that Goodwin's study wasn't to be entered. I suppose

you're suggesting that Dr. Stafford is one of Goodwin's confederates? Perhaps he goes about the country passing off these faked Treasury notes?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"But it's true—I know it's true!" shouted Long. "Cuttle was telling me all about it."

"Well, it's the first time I knew that Mr. Cuttle had a sense of humour." said Handforth. "It's as plain as a pikestaff, you little idiot, that Cuttle was pulling your leg!"

"He wasn't! He was as serious as a judge."

"He's always serious," interrupted Pitt. "I should think you started pumping and tried to get some information out of him, and so he spoofed you. But you haven't got enough sense to know when your leg is being pulled. I suggest that we knock some sense into you now!"

"Good idea!" said Handforth. "Let's take him to the top of the stairs and bump him down to the bottom—two stairs at a time!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Hi! Leggo!" yelled Long, struggling wildly as several juniors grasped him. "Lemme go, you—you rotters! Ow—yarrooooh!"

In spite of his protests, Teddy Long was hauled to the top of the stairs. Not one of the juniors had believed a single word of his story—it was, of course, altogether too preposterous to be even considered. And Long was now being punished for his inquisitiveness.

Arriving at the top of the stairs, Long was sat down forcibly on the hard, unsympathetic linoleum. Two juniors were on the stairs, and they each held one of Long's feet. Two other fellows were above, holding the victim's hands. Then the punishment commenced.

Bump! Bump! Bump!

Stair by stair, Long was assisted to the lobby. He struck each stair with a terrific bang, and he suffered considerable pain—to judge by the howls which he uttered.

"Ow—yarooh—yow!" roared Long. "Oh, you rotters! Ow!"

Bump! Bump! Bump!

At last Long reached the bottom, and by that time he was nearly exhausted. He was allowed to go free, and he lay on the mat, groaning. The sounds he uttered were positively awful to listen to.

"I say!" muttered Church. "You went a bit too far, Handy! Long's injured!"

"Oh! Ow! I—I'm dying!" moaned Teddy Long. "All my bones are broken! Fetch the doctor! These—these cads have murdered me!"

"I didn't think we were so rough," said Handforth, winking at the others. "Poor chap! He seems to be in a bad way! We shall have to do something to cure him; and we must do it now, too!"

"What shall we do?" asked Pitt, in a nervous voice.

"Well, the best thing will be to take him to the top of the stairs and give him another dose!" said Handforth. "I think that will revive him, you know. We'll just give him another bumping. Lend a hand, you chaps!"

Teddy Long leapt to his feet with amazing alacrity—considering that he was dying.

"You—you rotters!" he howled. "You ain't going to touch me again!"

He fled down the passage like a hare, and the juniors in the lobby roared.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Teddy Long's recovery had been quite miraculous!

CHAPTER II.

NELSON LEE LEARNS THE SECRET

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

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

Nelson Lee smiled.

"As a matter of fact, Mr. Goodwin, I know quite a good deal regarding the lad," he exclaimed. "Dr. Stafford had told me a certain amount, although I must admit that I am not in full possession of the facts. I only know that your son has been engaged upon some very important mechanical work in his study. And this work, I believe, is somehow connected with the cotton industry."

"Ah, you've got that right, Mr. Lee," said the visitor. "But I'll go into more

details with you. It is only right that you should know."

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

Dick Goodwin himself, of course, was in the sanatorium in bed. The Lancashire lad had practically recovered from his recent experience, and he was only being kept in the "sanny" because his father wanted him to recover fully and completely. The boy had had rather a terrifying experience, and he needed rest and quiet. But Goodwin was a strong lad, and a complete rest had worked wonders.

As Nelson Lee sat there, waiting for Mr. Goodwin to speak, he took the opportunity of taking stock of his companion.

Mr. Goodwin was about fifty years of age, well built, but with slightly rounded shoulders. He was clean-shaven, and his hair was turning grey at the temples. His face, too, was rather lined—indicating that he had had much worry and trouble.

Mr. Goodwin was a hard-headed Lancashire man—a genuine, solid Englishman of the old type. It was possible to tell his home county through his speech, but it was really only a suspicion of a dialect—a soft, melodious method of talking which was extremely pleasant to listen to.

"You're a champion, Mr. Lee," said Goodwin's father, at length. "I shall never be able to thank you enough for the great service you rendered me. It was solely owing to your heroic efforts that my son was saved from a terrible death. My dear sir, I beg of you not to mention the matter again," said Nelson Lee. "You have already spoken of it far more frequently than I would like. And, after all, I only did my duty as a schoolmaster. Your son was in grave peril, and I did everything that was in my power to help him."

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

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

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

"I daresay you thought it was rather curious that Dick should have a study to himself, Mr. Lee," he exclaimed. "You thought it queer that he should lock himself up during every spare minute of his spare time, and confine himself to some secret work in his own little apartment?"

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

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

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

"Ay, I'm still carrying on," replied the millowner. "But it has been a hard grind. Things haven't been so easy with me as many workpeople thought. There have been minor strikes, agitations, and other worrying matters. Many of these people—honest and hard working though they be—don't realise the difficulties a master has to deal with. They think he takes all the profits, lives in luxury, and has no worry. But they are wrong—it is generally the master who has all the worry, and all the financial difficulty. If only the workpeople would realise that, there would not be so much discontent. But it is not my intention to talk about labour questions, Mr. Lee, you must forgive me for the digression. I want to talk to you about my son."

"I am very interested," said Nelson Lee.

"About the beginning of the year, my son was at school in Hollinwood," went on Mr. Goodwin. "Dick was always a sharp lad—he was always keen and painstaking. And he took a great interest in the factory. He was always among the machinery—always examining this piece of machanism and that. He could never be satisfied in that direction. It was machinery all the time with him—anything mechanical was the breath of life to him. And, one day in the spring, he brought me a suggestion for a machine—a new spinning machine which Dick claimed would supersede all others. I smiled at the boy at first, and told him not to worry me. He was rather disappointed, and went away."

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

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

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

"And he did so?" asked Nelson Lee.

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

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

"Yes, Mr. Lee—that is exactly the case," replied Mr. Goodwin. "One day I made a big discovery. Naggs was hand-in-glove with Mr. William Fordley, the owner of a mill which is some little distance from mine—a rival mill, as a matter of fact. Fordley is an unscrupulous scoundrel—I have always known him as such. He has performed many shady pieces of work which has resulted in bad business for my own factory. I would never descend to such methods as Fordley, and so I was left in the cold. Fordley is rich, and it was something of a shock to me to learn that Naggs was this man's paid spy. It did not take me long to put two and two together—and I discovered that Naggs was attempting to obtain Dick's plans so that he could show them to Fordley. Fordley, as a matter of fact, was very anxious indeed to see those plans. His object, of course, was to steal my son's invention—and he would have done so without compunction if he had had half the chance."

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

"Exactly," replied Mr. Goodwin. "The lad was pestered and bothered every day. Fordley had his agents everywhere, and there were one or two attempts to break into Dick's little workshop with the object of stealing those plans. At last, after this sort of thing had been going on for some time,

I decided to send the boy away—completely away—and a friend of mine suggested that Dick should go to a public school. It was for that reason he came to St. Frank's. I interviewed the Head Master, and I arranged matters with him—I fixed things up so that Dick could have a workshop here, in the school itself. But all my precautions, as you know, were in vain."

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

"Yes, Mr. Lee—Naggs himself appeared on the scene with two or three other men," said the millowner. "After Naggs had left my employment he showed his real character—and was my open enemy. I now know, from all that I have heard, that Naggs came to St. Frank's almost at once, and did everything to his power to get hold of Dick's plans. Mainly owing to your efforts, Mr. Lee, the man failed. They are determined, these rascals, and they were willing to go to almost any lengths in order to get what they required. Finally, as you know, they kidnapped my son, and held him a prisoner, thinking they would force him to speak. But Dick refused, and Naggs has received no satisfaction. But the man is free, and I am rather worried. At the first opportunity he will become active again."

"Take my advice, Mr. Goodwin, and do not worry any more," said Nelson Lee. "Your son is quite safe here—and his invention is safe, too. There will be no chance whatever of Naggs kidnapping Goodwin again—and he will certainly never find an opportunity of getting into the school. By the way, don't you think it would be a wise precaution to have this invention patented?"

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

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

"No, not up to the present."

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

"Yes, I will certainly do so," said Mr. Goodwin. "After this experience, I will leave nothing further to chance. And I know now, that Dick has triumphed—that his machine is not an impracticable freak. I must confess that I was very dubious at the first—but now I have completely changed. And I will do as you say, Mr. Lee—I will take Dick to London to-morrow, and we will set things in motion to have this machine patented without delay. Do you think it will be possible for me to take my son to London?"

"Most decidely it will be possible," replied Nelson Lee. "I am certain that the Headmaster will permit Dick to go with you to London. But you must be careful, Mr. Goodwin. There are many bogus patent agents about, and they are tricky people. I can give you an introduction to a reliable, honest man, if you care for the tip."

Mr. Goodwin leaned forward.

"Thank you, Mr. Lee—that will help immensely!" he said. "I'm afraid I'm not much of a match for these rascals. If you can help me in this way I shall be very grateful!"

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

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

And, later on in the evening, it became known that Dick Goodwin was to travel to London on the morrow. The juniors were rather excited when they heard it—for here was another mystery. Why was Goodwin going to London?

What business could possibly take him to the Metropolis now?

There was much speculation, and a good deal of jealousy.

"Like his blessed cheek!" said Handforth warmly. "That Lancashire chap is getting out of everything! First he has a terrific adventure by getting kidnapped, then he's made a prisoner, and nearly gets drowned on the old Bramley lighthouse, then he's rescued by Mr. Lee, and brought into the sanny—and as soon as he comes out, he's going straight off to London! He seems to be getting all the enjoyment!"

"I don't know so much about enjoyment, Handy," put in Church. "I shouldn't think it was very enjoyable to be kidnapped, and all the rest of it. And, dash it all, a chap can go up to London with his father, I suppose?"

"But what's he going for?" demanded Handforth. "That's what we want to get at—why is Goodwin going to London to-morrow?"

"It's no good asking me!" said Church. "You'd better ask Goodwin!"

Handforth sniffed.

"That would be a fat lot of good, wouldn't it?" he demanded. "It's no good asking Goodwin anything. He's like a giddy oyster—he won't say a single word. There's a blessed mystery here, and I don't like it. I think we ought to investigate matters!"

"Oh, my hat!" muttered McClure.

"Eh? What's that?"

"Nun—nothing!" stammered McClure hastily. "I—I was only thinking, Handy!"

"Well, think to yourself, and don't mumble!" said Handforth tartly. "I don't like all this mystery about the place—it's upsetting. Why the dickens can't Goodwin be straightforward? Why can't he tell us all why he's been kidnapped, and what he's been doing in his study, and why he's going up to London? Where's the sense of all this secrecy? I think it's all tommy rot!"

"Well, after all, Handy, it's Goodwin's business!" put in Pitt. "It's nothing to do with us if he likes to be secretive."

"I'm not saying it is," replied Handforth. "I'm not curious——"

"Oh, no!" exclaimed De Valerie. "Not at all! We've noticed that, Handy!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I'm not curious!" repeated Handforth, in a louder voice. "Any fellow who calls me curious had better say so—and I'll jolly soon punch his nose. Curiosity is one thing, and a natural desire to know the solution of a mystery is another!"

"That's rather a fine distinction," grinned Pitt. "I think you're always anxious to find the solution of a mystery, Handy. Naturally enough, we'd all like to know why Goodwin is going up to London to-morrow. But, after all, we don't want to pry into his affairs. Perhaps his pater is just taking him up for the day—to go on the giddy spree?"

Handforth shook his head.

"Not likely!" he said. "Mr. Goodwin isn't that sort. Besides, there's something on—there's something special afoot. I know it—I can feel it in the air."

"Well, it's pretty certain that there's something of an unusual nature going on," remarked Pitt thoughtfully. "For example, Mr. Goodwin was with Mr. Lee for a couple of hours this evening—they were having a long talk together. And, after that talk, we learn that Dick Goodwin is going up to London to-morrow. Of course, there's something special afoot—it's obvious!"

"Something to do with those rotters who kidnapped Goodwin, I expect," put in Jack Grey. "I wish I was going to London for the day—I could just do with a nice trip of that sort. But nothing exciting has been happening to us at all—we go on in the same old way, from the beginning of the term to the end. It's queer how some chaps get all the luck!"

And curiously enough, most of the juniors agreed with Grey's sentiments. They apparently regarded Goodwin's exciting adventures as "luck." They thought it was fine sport to be kidnapped, and to have mysterious men on their trail. They only thought this, perhaps, because they had never experienced anything of the kind themselves. If they had done so they might not have been so enthusiastic.

At all events, Dick Goodwin had had quite enough excitement to last him for many a day. He was not anxious for any more.

But, in spite of his personal feelings, he was destined to get it!

CHAPTER III.

A STARTLING ADVENTURE.

DICK GOODWIN glanced at the station clock.

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

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

The Lancashire boy smiled.

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

"Well, you certainly look fit, Dick," said Mr. Goodwin, nodding. "You're a hardy youngster, and you've got over that ordeal splendidly. Good boy! I always knew you were plucky, and——"

"Oh, ease off, dad!" interrupted Dick, flushing. "I didn't do anything plucky, or brave. It was Mr. Lee who earned all the praise. He was wonderful, dad—ay, but it was champion the way he swam out in that rough sea and rescued me from the ladder!"

"Ah!" said Mr. Goodwin. "It was wonderful!"

The pair were pacing up and down the little station at Bellton. They were waiting for the train which would come in very soon and which would take them to London. It was the morning train, and it was destined to arrive at Victoria at about twelve thirty. The day was bright and cheerful, and fairly mild, considering the time of the year.

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

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

He, a junior in the Remove Form at St. Frank's, had produced a spinning machine which was destined, some day, to supersede all others in use. It was an achievement worthy of a veteran of forty years' experience.

Frankly, Mr. Goodwin could not understand it—he could not imagine how his son had hit upon the wonderful idea which was incorporated in the new machine. For it was a wonderful idea—something which had never been attempted before—something which was startling.

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

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

He knew they were bound for the station, and he knew they were taking tickets for London.

Bellton was a small place, and news soon got about. Quite a number of people in the village knew that Mr. Goodwin and his son were going to London that day.

After all the excitement of the previous week, Goodwin's name was known throughout the district—and the local people took quite a lot of interest in him.

The old gentleman in the village was an extremely genial-looking individual. he was scrupulously attired, and wore a pair of gold-rimmed pince-nez, and he was white haired.

He looked like an old University professor, and his fresh, pink face was a mass of lines and creases. And when he smiled his eyes twinkled infectiously.

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

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

This telegram was rather a curious one, and there could be no doubt that it re-

ferred to Mr. Goodwin and his son. But why had it been sent—and who was this curious old gentleman?

He was certainly interested in Dick Goodwin—there was no doubt on that point. For, having dispatched his wire, he lost no time in getting to the station.

He arrived three minutes before the train steamed in, and he paced up and down the platform, smoking a large cigar and beaming amiably upon anything and everything—including Dick Goodwin and his father.

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

A look of disappointment came into Dick's eyes, for he was hoping that they would have the carriage to themselves. And now this old gentleman had bustled in, spoiling everything.

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

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

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

The stranger appeared to be amiable, and Mr. Goodwin resigned himself to the fact that this talkative gentleman would be prominent during the whole journey.

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

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

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

"I'm pleased to meet you, sir," said Mr. Goodwin. "And I'm glad you've found your grandson in good health."

"Good health!" repeated Sir Walter. "Good gracious me! Health isn't the word for it, sir—the boy is simply bubbling with vim and vigour. There's nothing like this country air for growing boys—nothing!"

The old gentleman nodded to himself, and he continued talking in the same strain. He was affability itself—chatting on all topics of conversation, and keeping Goodwin and his father highly amused during practically the whole of the journey.

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

"East Croydon!" said Sir Walter, as they whizzed through a station. "We shall soon be at Victoria now, my dear Mr. Goodwin. I'm sorry—infernally sorry. I have enjoyed this trip immensely, and I shall not like to part from you and your delightful son!"

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

"The City!" interrupted Sir Walter. "I shall be travelling in the same direction. Perhaps we shall not find it necessary to part at Victoria, after all. We might be able to travel together for a short distance longer—eh? We'll hope so, at any rate!"

The train hurried through Thornton Heath, Streatham Common, and then through Clapham Junction to Victoria. And when it finally pulled up in the great terminus, Sir Walter Collison stepped out on the platform, and extended his hand.

"Well, good-bye, Mr. Goodwin. I

am delighted to have met you my dear sir!" he exclaimed heartily. "My only regret is that I must leave you now—— But wait! You are going to the City, I understand?"

"Yes," said Mr. Goodwin.

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

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

Once beyond the barrier, the trio passed out of the great exit, and into the station yard. There were many taxis there, waiting to be hired. Sir Walter bustled along, and finally beckoned to the driver of a taxi which was standing a little apart from the others. The driver was on the footpath, and he raised his hand the very instant he saw Sir Walter.

"Taxi, sir?" he inquired politely.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Sir Walter made an extraordinary noise in his throat, and the next moment he fell back, writhing among the cushions. His face was purple, and his eyes nearly bulged from his head. And his breath came and went in short, sobbing gasps. With one hand he clutched at Mr. Goodwin's coat, and with the other he fiercely gripped Dick's arm.

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

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

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

"Yes, my lad, we must!" said Mr. Goodwin sharply. "I'm afraid Sir Walter has had a stroke. We must lose no time."

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

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

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

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

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

you! I shall be better at home after this!"

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

They were extremely glad that Sir Walter's home was near by. And, at last, the taxi pulled up in a quiet backwater of Bloomsbury.

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

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

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

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

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

"Yes, it is——"

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

The butler relaxed at once.

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

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

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

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

They entered the lofty, dim room, and Dick had just passed through the doorway when he felt that somebody was behind him. He glanced round quickly, and saw a tall man there. At the same second the door closed with a slam.

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

"Naggs!" gasped Dick huskily.

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

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

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

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

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

CHAPTER IV.

WATCHFUL EYES.

THE taxi did not wait.

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

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

And if the taxi-driver thought that his movements were unobserved, he was considerably mistaken, for one man, at least, was quite interested in the movements of that taxi-cab. This man was some little distance up the road, conveniently concealed in a small alley way. He had a bicycle with him, and, as soon as the taxi moved off, this man jumped on his bicycle, and followed.

Who was this mysterious individual?

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

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

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

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

As he had already suspected, this little opening led into a small mews. It was a rather dilapidated-looking place, with only sufficient accommodation for one or two cars or other vehicles. At one time, no doubt, it had been used for the purpose of housing horses and cabs, but now it had been turned into a kind of garage.

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

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

He came to the conclusion that the taxi was a privately owned one—the driver was evidently his own master.

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

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

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

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

Had the man taken leave of his senses? Why had he deliberately punctured his own tyre in this way? What could his object be in so doing? It seemed such a senseless, pointless thing to do! But perhaps there was some method in the cyclist's madness.

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

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

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

As he was walking towards the garage, the taxi-driver observed him, and paused in his work. The man was making some minor adjustment to the engine, and there was a spanner in his hand. He was still looking at the cyclist as the latter approached.

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

The taxi-driver grunted.

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

"Yes, I know that," said the cyclist; "but I'm in a bit of a hole, you see. Something just punctured my tyre—a piece of glass, perhaps. Anyhow, I haven't got any repair outfit on the jigger, and I noticed this car standing

here, so I took the liberty of walking in. I'm quite willing to pay for——"

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

"Thanks!" said the cyclist.

He placed his machine against the wall, and lit a cigarette. He offered one to the taxi-driver, who accepted it. Within a few minutes the pair were chatting amiably. Meanwhile, the cyclist repaired his punctured tyre. Considering that he had a complete repair outfit in his own pocket, it seemed rather curious that he should have come in here bothering the taxi-man. What could his object be?

Although he did not seem to be at all curious, the cyclist had his eyes wide open and he gave quite a lot of attention to the taxi-cab. He did not appear to do so—indeed, the taxi-driver would have declared that the cyclist hardly glanced at the cab.

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

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

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

He had made a good repair, and he pedalled quite fast as he went along Theobald's Road.

He went straight down Kingsway, and turned to the right into the Strand. And his journey was soon at an end, for, arriving at Charing Cross, he made straight for New Scotland Yard. And, once here, he entered the Criminal Investigation Department, leaving his bicycle outside.

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

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

"Yes, sir!" replied the cyclist.

"All right—get busy!"

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

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

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

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

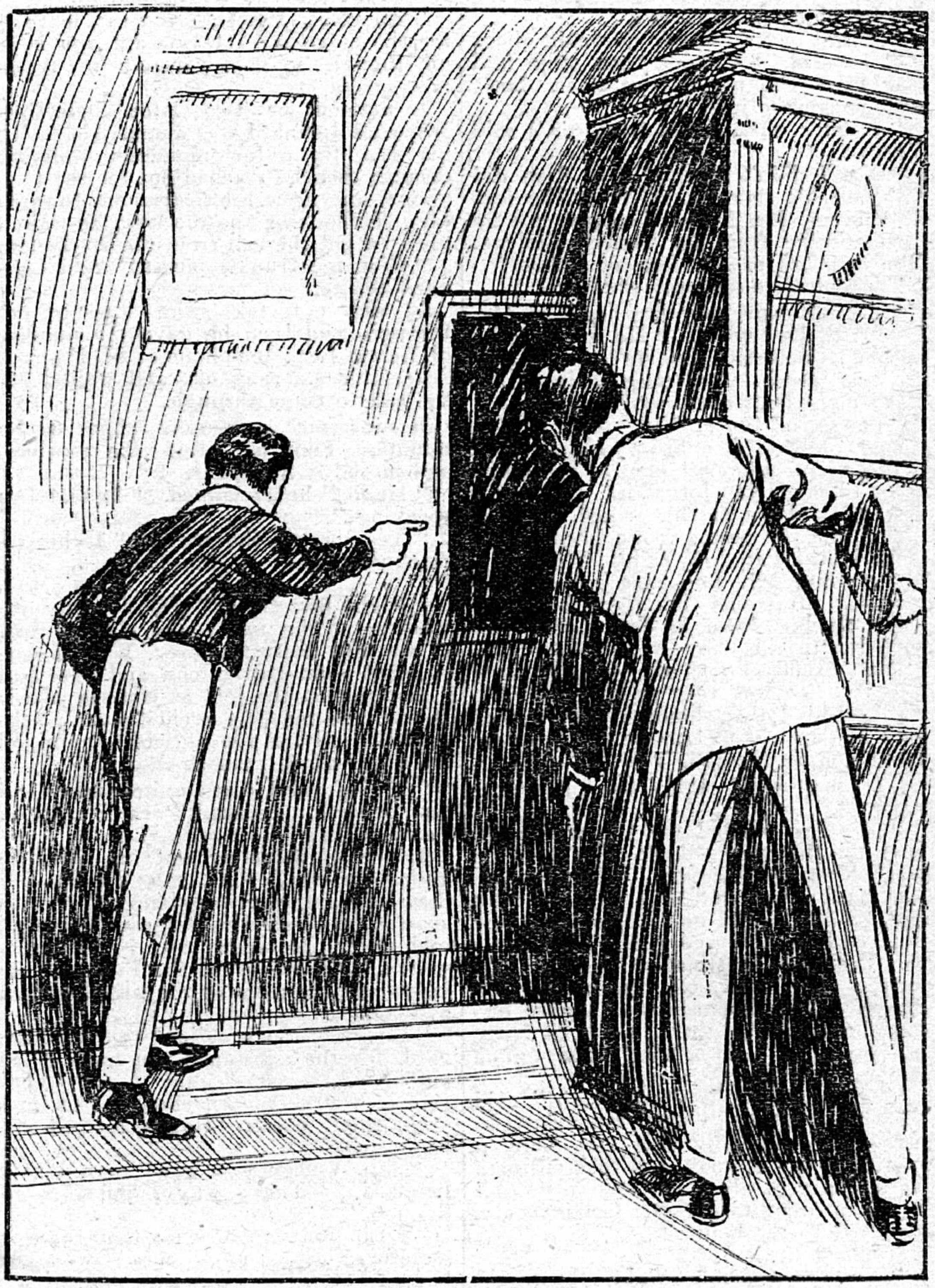
"Good!" said the chief inspector. "Well?"

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

"Hm-m! That's queer!" said Lennard thoughtfully. "Without waiting to be paid, eh? I don't quite like this, Vincent. You say that Mr. Goodwin and his son went into this old house, and they were carrying the stranger who had been in the taxi with them? It seems to me to indicate a kind of frame-up. Well? I suppose you followed the taxi? Or did you wait outside the house?"

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

And he went on to describe how he had tracked the taxi down to the mews, and how he had made his further discoveries. When he described that the taxi-meter had been removed from the vehicle, and all the other details, the



There, in the wall, where the book-case had concealed it hitherto, Dick saw a cupboard-like fixture.

chief inspector looked rather grim. He nodded and pursed his lips.

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

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

"No, I didn't explain it at first, did I?" said his superior. "Well, the fact is, Vincent, Mr. Nelson Lee rang me up this morning from St. Frank's College. You've heard of Mr. Lee, of course?"

The detective-sergeant smiled.

"I think everybody has heard of Mr. Lee, sir," he replied. "He may not be an official detective, but he's smart—he's the real goods. And he's helped the Yard more than once, too!"

"Scores of times, Vincent—scores of times!" replied Lennard. "Nelson Lee is one of the smartest men of the country, and don't you forget it! It's a pity he's stuck down at this school. At the same time, he seems to be keeping his hand in the game all right. Well, as I was saying, Mr. Lee rang me up this morning. It seems that there has been some trouble down at the school connected with this boy—young Goodwin. I don't exactly know what it all means, but Mr. Lee was very anxious that the boy and his father should be followed as soon as they got to London. That's why I put you on the job, Vincent."

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

"Mr. Lee wanted me to put a good man on the work—that's why I chose you," went on Lennard. "He said it was most important that Mr. Goodwin and his son should be followed and that it should be observed where they went to. Their true destination was an office in the City, just off Queen Victoria Street. Well, Bloomsbury is a good distance away from there, so it is fairly obvious that something has gone wrong."

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

Lennard nodded.

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

"Yes, sir."

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

A moment or two later, Detective-Inspector Lennard was alone. He sat at his desk for a few moments, thinking deeply; then he reached out for the telephone, and drew the instrument towards him. Unhooking the receiver, he waited until he got the call from the Exchange.

"Give me trunks, please!" said Lennard briefly.

It did not take him long to get through, and then he gave the number of Nelson Lee's telephone at St. Frank's. After that he rang off, and waited for the call to come through.

It was not long—only about seven minutes. Lennard lifted the receiver, and placed it to his ear.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"I can tell you at once that there is something shady afoot here," went on Nelson Lee. "Mr. Goodwin and his son had no intention whatever of going to any address at Bloomsbury. I suspect the strange old gentleman, Lennard.

There has been some trickery, and Mr. Goodwin and the boy have fallen into the trap. I have to thank you for——"

"Nothing!" interrupted Lennard. "My dear Lee, it was your idea from the very start. You rang me up, and requested me to put a man on this work. But for that we shouldn't have known anything. It was your suggestion, and all the credit is due to you. You evidently suspected foul play, and so you prepared for it. You always were a pretty thorough beggar. Well, what are you going to do—or what do you want me to do?"

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

"Look here, Lennard! I'm coming up to London immediately," he replied. "I find that there's a train leaving Bellton within ten minutes—I shall just be able to catch it, if I rush. I'll be up at Victoria within two hours. Can you have four men ready for me?"

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

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

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

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

Nelson Lee rang off almost at once, but just before he did so the door of his study opened, and somebody entered. That somebody was myself. I had come to the guvnor's study in order to ask him a few things about the mystery of Dick Goodwin. And I found him talking with Chief Detective-Inspector Lennard, of Scotland Yard. That made me prick up my ears, because I was fairly certain that something important was afoot.

"All right, Lennard—I'll look out for you at Victoria," said Nelson Lee. "I really cannot stop another moment now, or I shall lose the train. Good-bye!"

Lee hung up the receiver, and turned.

"I can't attend to you now, Nipper," he said briskly. "I'm off to London—at once!"

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

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

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

"No— that's impossible——"

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

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

"But I might be able to give a hand, sir," I persisted. "If there's going to be some trouble—some excitement—I'd like to be in it. Dash it all, sir, I think you ought to consider me a bit! I've had a good deal to do with this case—I located Goodwin when he had been kidnapped last week, and——"

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

"I—I can come, sir?" I exclaimed excitedly.

"I have just said so!"

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

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

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

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

"Oh, there's heaps of time!" I muttered, as I re-entered the lobby.

"I've got time to rush to Study C. and say good-bye to Tommy and Montie."

I was just crossing the lobby when Handforth & Co. appeared. They stared at me curiously, and Handforth pulled my sleeve.

"Hold on!" he said. "What's the game?"

"I can't stop—I'm in a hurry!" I replied briefly.

"Rats!" said Handforth. "What's the idea of putting that overcoat on, and wearing a tweed cap? What's in the wind, Nipper?"

"I'm going off—to London!" I explained, taking extreme pleasure in watching Handforth's face. "I'm going to London at once—with Mr. Lee."

"Oh, don't talk rot!" said Handforth. "You don't expect us to believe that yarn, do you?"

"My dear chap you can believe it, or disbelieve it just as you wish," I said. "I can't stop any longer now, so I'll bid you a fond farewell. I shall possibly see you late to-night, or to-morrow. When a fellow goes to London there's really no telling when he'll get back!"

And I hurried down the passage, leaving Handforth & Co. staring after me.

CHAPTER V.

BECAUSE OF A CUFF LINK.

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

"This is terrible, Dick, lad—terrible!" exclaimed the millowner. "Ay, what a fool I was. What a champion fool! I was deceived all along the line——"

"But, dad, how were we to know?" asked Dick. "That old gentleman seemed so genuine. How could we possibly suspect that he was one of Naggs' accomplices, and that he had been stationed in Bellton so that he could travel up to London by the same train? It was all carefully planned out, Dad, and I don't see how we could have avoided this——"

"We could have avoided it—if we'd had any sense!" interrupted the father. "I was at fault, lad—I was a rank idiot! Considering all that has happened, I ought not to have spoken to a stranger at all—no matter how pleasant and genial he looked. That was where the fault lay—we ought not to have gone into that taxi. Now I come to look over all the facts, I can see how easily it was planned—how easily we fell into the net."

"Yes, pater, it's always easy to see these things afterwards," said Dick. "But there was nothing to show us the truth while it was happening. And that fit of Sir Walter's! It seemed genuine, and—"

"Don't talk about it, Dick—don't talk about it!" interrupted Mr. Goodwin. "It makes me mad—it makes me furious! And here we are, locked in this room, unable to do anything, and that scoundrel, Naggs, has got your plans!"

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

Mr. Goodwin nodded, and his face was drawn.

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

Dick clenched his fists.

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

"Yes, we needed looking after—we did that!" said Mr. Goodwin. "Ay, lad, it makes me mad when I think of it. But we're not babies, and I didn't like to ask Mr. Lee to protect us. If I had only sufficient sense, this disaster would not have happened!" he added bitterly.

The word which Mr. Goodwin had used was the correct one. The occurence was, indeed, a disaster. Both Mr. Goodwin and Dick were prisoners. They had been captured by Naggs, and there was no possibility of their getting away. Neither was there any possibility of their being rescued—as far as Mr. Goodwin could see.

Nelson Lee and others at St. Frank's might wonder when they heard nothing from Mr. Goodwin and perhaps enquiries would be set afoot. But where would they lead to? How would it be possible to trace the missing pair to this old house in Bloomsbury. Mr. Goodwin was quite unaware of the fact that Nelson

Lee had taken such precautions—or the millowner would have been more optimistic..

The room they were in was rather a large one, with a lofty ceiling. It was very poorly furnished, and the only light was a single gas jet. No daylight was admitted into this apartment. And the reason for this was simple. For behind a cloth blind the window was boarded up with planks right up to the wall, making it utterly impossible for anybody in the room to break through into the open. Probably there were other planks on the outside of the window. And shouting would be quite useless, for no sound would carry through that thick boarding. The door was a strong one—an old-fashioned affair, but thoroughly sound. And it was provided with a heavy lock, which was quite incapable of being forced. Indeed, if the prisoners made any attempt to smash the door down, their captors would soon be on the scene.

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

There had been a bit of a fight at the outset. In spite of the revolver which Mr. Naggs held, Dick Goodwin and his father had put up a brisk fight for their liberty. Dick, especially, had let himself go. Hitting out right and left, and wriggling like an eel, he had been difficult to hold. But the man who had posed as Sir Walter, soon settled Dick. They had him helpless after struggling for a minute or two. And Mr. Goodwin, who was not so agile, was quickly settled by the active Mr. Naggs.

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

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

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

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

"Preparing a little surprise for me, eh?" he said pleasantly. "I am very sorry, Mr. Goodwin, but it won't work—I am rather a cautious individual, and I believe in making sure before I act. You will kindly move into the centre of the room."

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

"I am very sorry to disappoint you, Mr. Goodwin," said Naggs. "But I'm afraid that you won't escape just yet. I am now leaving you—I am going out of London, to be exact. And you will remain here. I extremely regret that you should be put to this inconvenience, but it is unavoidable."

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

Naggs shrugged his shoulders.

"I can hardly blame you for forming such an opinion of me, Mr. Goodwin," he said smoothly. "Perhaps, in your eyes, I am a scoundrel. We will let that pass. I have been waiting for some little time to accomplish my object. I have done so at last. And I wish to thank you very heartily for your co-operation in this little matter. You fell into my trap very splendidly, and made the whole thing possible. I have just come here now to inform you that you will be released from this unfortunate position exactly one week from to-day."

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

Mr. Naggs nodded.

"I am sorry, but I find that is necessary," he said. "You will be well looked after, you will be fed, and my assistants have instructions to treat you with every consideration. Any request will be granted—any reasonable request, that is. Only, of course, you will not have your liberty. It is essential to my plans that you should remain in obscurity for at least one week."

"Why have you come here to gloat over us?" demanded Mr. Goodwin.

almost choking. "Go away! Go out of this room, you rogue!"

"I shall go almost at once," said Mr. Naggs obligingly. "When you are released, you will be able to walk out unharmed. And then, of course, it will be too late for you to trace me—or for you to trace the plans. I think I have engineered this little drama quite splendidly. I may add that your chief attendant during your imprisonment will be your old friend, Sir Walter. A splendid actor, isn't he?"

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

Naggs retired, and the door was relocked. And it was practically certain that a man was stationed outside, in the hall, on the watch. There was certainly no escape from this prison. And yet, only two or three hundred yards away, the busy London traffic was passing to and fro on its way. It was terribly exasperating for the prisoners to know that they were right in the heart of London—and absolutely helpless.

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

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

"Oh, Dad, don't talk like that!" interrupted the junior. "It wasn't your fault at all, it wasn't anybody's fault. We're in this position simply because Naggs is a cunning, clever scoundrel—that's all. How were we to know that that old gentleman was one of Naggs' accomplices? It was absolutely impossible that we should guess at such a thing. But I do wish Mr. Lee had been with us—he wouldn't have been hoodwinked!"

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

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

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

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

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

"Lend me a hand, dad, will you?" he asked.

"Eh? Lend you a hand, lad?" said Mr. Goodwin. "What for?"

"I want to shift that bookcase."

"Eh, lad, whatever has come over you?" asked his father. "Why should you want to shift that bookcase——"

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

"Oh, I see," said Mr. Goodwin. "All right, Dick, it won't take us long. Leave it to me, my boy—it is a heavy piece of furniture, and I do not think you are capable of the exertion."

However, Dick helped, and inch by inch the heavy bookcase was moved out from the wall. At last one side was about eighteen inches away from the skirting, and then Dick saw his cuff link lying on the floor.

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

He bent down, reached forward, and recovered the link. And then, as he was rising, he saw something else. There, in the wall, where the bookcase had concealed it hitherto, Dick saw a cupboard-like fixture. There was a frame and a wooden door. Dick looked at it without much interest, and he reached his hand forward.

He tried to open the door, and found that it slid upwards noiselessly. And

a dark cavity was revealed. Dick squeezed behind the bookcase, and looked into that cavity. Then he turned a flushed, eager face towards his father, who was looking on.

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

"Merely a cupboard, Dick——"

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

Mr. Goodwin's interest increased.

"A dumb-waiter, eh?" he said. "Yes, lad, that's a lift all right. They use them for taking dishes and small articles up and down. A lot of these big, old-fashioned houses are supplied with these lifts. But I'm afraid it wont help us in any way."

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

"Eh, lad, you mustn't get that idea into your head," interrupted Mr. Goodwin. "We sha'n't be able to meet with such success as that. However, there'll be no harm in seeing what you can do. Let me come and have a look at this lift."

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

Mr. Goodwin touched these gingerly, and pulled upon them.

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

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

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

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

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

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

And, certainly they would not have shifted it, had it not been for the chance fact that Dick's cuff link had flown behind the bookcase. It was purely because of that cuff link that this discovery had been made.

It merely helped to prove how seemingly unimportant, insignificant trifles may develop into matters of supreme importance.

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

Squeezed up in the little lift, Dick at last pulled upon the rope. And, inch by inch, he commenced descending. He did not allow himself to go too quickly—not because he was nervous, but because he was anxious to avoid any noise. If the lift was operated quickly, it would probably rattle or rumble. Therefore Dick proceeded with extreme caution.

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

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

The voices suddenly became very loud—proving to Dick that the speakers had entered the room where this lift opening was situated—probably the kitchen. At all events, the men were there, talking in ordinary tones, and every word that they uttered came through to Dick perfectly clearly.

"Yes, Williss, I'm going now," said

Mr. Naggs briskly. "I shall have to hurry, too, or I shall miss my train."

Dick listened intently, eager and excited.

"Yes, Naggs, you've got no time to waste," said Williss, who was the butler. "Your train leaves King's Cross at 4.50, doesn't it?"

"Yes," replied Mr. Naggs. "And I have one or two things to attend to before I start, but I shall catch that train all right, Williss, and I shall arrive in Oldham late in the evening. Nothing could be better for my purpose."

"And when shall we hear from you?"

"Oh, I'll write to-morrow," said Mr. Naggs. "Not that there's any necessity for me to write at all. You know exactly what to do, and I don't think you'll have any trouble of any sort. The police certainly won't trace the prisoners to this house. You'll probably have a very quiet week of it, and there's nothing to worry about. You've got all the money you need, and there's no need for me to waste any further time here."

"Right you are, Naggs—you'd better get off at once," said Williss. "I suppose you'll see the boss to-morrow?"

"Either to-morrow or late to-night. I'd rather see him to-night," replied Naggs. "I shall send him a wire, anyhow, and it's quite possible that I shall be able to fix things up completely before I go to bed. I hope so, anyway. I've got the plans, and I'll hand them over to him, and get the money. That's the main thing. I'm rather sick of this business, and I want to get completely out of it. As soon as I lay my hands on the cash, I shall be off."

"Oh, there's one thing I want to suggest to you, Naggs," said Williss. "I think we'd better have your advice on the subject."

"What is it?" asked Naggs.

"Well, about taking food to Goodwin and the kid," said Williss. "If we have to enter the room every time it might be a bit risky. They'll get desperate, as the days go by, and they might use some of the pieces of furniture to chuck at us. One never knows, and though we're armed with revolvers, we certainly sha'n't use them."

"Oh, you'll be all right," said Naggs. "They'll never pluck up courage to attack you—particularly when Ratsby comes along. I expect he'll arrive within a couple of hours, and you needn't enter that room until he gets here. The three of you ought to be able to manage that pair with ease."

"Yes, I know," said Williss. "But I've been thinking about this lift——"

"The lift?" repeated Naggs quickly.

"Yes—over there, in the wall," said Williss.

The two men walked across the room, and Dick's heart leapt into his mouth. He was absolutely sure that they were coming to the lift, and that they were going to open the door. Then he would be found there!"

"This is why I brought you into the kitchen," went on Williss. "You see, Naggs, this lift leads right up to the room where those two are imprisoned. If we shift that bookcase away from the wall everything will be all right. We shall be able to send up the food, and anything else that's required by this means. Then we sha'n't need to enter the room at all."

"But they might get up to some tricks," objected Naggs.

"That's impossible," said Williss. "There'll be one of us in the kitchen here all the time—and it'll be as easy as possible to guard this little opening. Nobody on earth could get down while there's somebody here, watching. Besides that, we can block this entrance up, if necessary."

"Just as you like," said Naggs. "I think it's safe enough. And it's certainly a good idea in one respect, Williss. As you say, you won't need to go into the room at all. Well, I'll be getting off now. I've wasted too much time already. Good-bye, I'll see you next week."

To Dick Goodwin's heartfelt relief, both the men left the kitchen, and all became silent again. Dick was attempting to open the door when he heard footsteps.

And he decided, then and there, that his best policy would be to go up to his father again, to report what had occurred.

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

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

"Of course I'm all right, dad," exclaimed Dick quickly. "I've been hearing things, too. Naggs is going to Old-

ham by the 4.50 train from King's Cross."

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

"And we're going to be left here for a week, with three men in chargo of us," went on the boy. "And, what's more, dad, they're going to use this lift."

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

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

"I keep telling you, Dick, not to get that idea into your head," interrupted Mr. Goodwin. "It's hopeless—we can't do anything."

"We can't do anything if we don't try, father," said Dick grimly. "I'm going to try, anyhow. There may be only one chance in a thousand, but it's worth going for."

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

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

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

Dick's eyes gleamed.

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

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

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

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

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

Dick Goodwin and his father looked at one another wonderingly.

What could it mean?

CHAPTER VI.

HOT ON THE TRAIL.

"BEGAD!"

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

"Tat-ta, you chaps!" I said briskly. "I'm off!"

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

"Just running up to London," I said. "So long! I will probably see you later——"

"Hold on, you silly ass!" interrupted Tommy Watson. "What's the game? What are you talking rot like that for?"

"I'm not talking rot——"

"Dear old boy, you surely cannot be serious?" exclaimed Sir Montie, adjusting his pince-nez and gazing at me with languid interest. "You cannot be serious when you say that you are going up to London?"

"I haven't got time to explain much," I exclaimed. "You see, the guv'nor has already left for the station, and the train goes in about ten minutes—so there's not a moment to lose. I'm going to run along and catch Mr. Lee up in the village. We're both going to London at once."

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

"Yes, but there's a connection at Bannington," I interrupted. "There's a ten-minute wait, and then the express

for London comes in. I can't possibly stop any longer. Good-bye, my sons ——"

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

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

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

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

I breathed hard.

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

Watson's eyes sparkled.

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

"If you suppose that, your supposer must be out of order!" I exclaimed. "It's impossible, old son! Mr. Lee gave me permission to go, but that permission doesn't include you chaps. It can't be done. I'm awfully sorry, but there you are! This is an important matter, and you've got to be good little boys, and stay here without grumbling. Now, let me go, or else there'll be trouble!"

"But really, Nipper, old fellow, this is frightfully upsettin'!" protested Montie. "We're dyin' to go with you, and if there's any trouble about Dick Goodwin, it's only fair that we should be in it. Mr. Lee wouldn't be wild, would he, if we went with you?"

"He'd be raving!" I said, impatient to be off.

"But, after all, he can only send us back——"

"I tell you it can't be done!" I interrupted. "Let go, you fatheads!"

I wriggled myself free, and made for the doorway.

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

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

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

"Is it?" interrupted Watson. "We'll see about that, Montie! A fine piece of cheek—leaving us behind! After all we've done about Dick Goodwin—after we've helped to get him out of trouble, and all the rest of it, we're going to be left out of this final piece of excitement! We're not going to stand it!"

Sir Montie shrugged his shoulders.

"Dear old boy, it seems that we have no alternative!" he said resignedly. "It's shockin'ly bad, but what can we do?"

Watson grabbed hold of Sir Montie's sleeve.

"Come on!" he exclaimed briskly.

"Begad! What on earth——"

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

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

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

Nelson Lee obtained two tickets, and we took our seats in the train. It was only a short journey to Bannington, of course, and then we changed. Here we were obliged to wait for twelve minutes, until the express to London came in. It was a fast train, with only one stop before it reached Victoria.

Nelson Lee and I got into a corridor

coach, and we were soon comfortably seated in a smoking compartment.

"Now, guv'nor, I want to know all about it!" I said. "We haven't had much time for talking, so far, but there's no reason why we shouldn't have a chat now. I want to know all about Goodwin."

"I have been waiting for you to ask questions, my lad," said Nelson Lee. "Well, if you are patient, I will tell you all about it. I am sure I don't know why I gave you permission to come with me—you will probably be more trouble than you are worth!"

I grinned.

"Oh, cut that out, guv'nor!" I protested. "You don't mean it—I know that. And, as you told me in the other train, you had time to have a word with the Head before you left, so everything's all serene. I want to hear about Goodwin."

Nelson Lee gave me all the details, and I was impressed. I was quite certain that Dick Goodwin and his father had met with some foul play. That taxi-cab, for example, had been a fake—we knew that for certain—and it was quite obvious that the pair had been deliberately kidnapped.

But, owing to Nelson Lee's foresight, we knew exactly where we could find the prisoners, and it was Nelson Lee's intention to raid the house in Bloomsbury the very instant he arrived.

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

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

"What on earth——"

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

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

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

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

"Dear old boy, we——"

"You see, it was like this——"

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

Tommy Watson and Sir Montie Tregellis-West were looking decidedly triumphant—at the same time, they were slightly nervous, for they knew that Nelson Lee was in the compartment, and they knew, also, that they would be required to give a full explanation of their conduct. It was quite likely, indeed, that they would be sent back to St. Frank's. But this was a fast train, and it did not stop until it reached the outskirts of London, so my chums were hopeful that everything would be all right.

"You—you fatheads!" I exclaimed. "You'll get in a terrific row for this! How did you get here? How did you manage to——"

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

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

"We did!" grinned Watson. "I've never known Montie to work so hard before!"

"Really, dear old fellow——"

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

Nelson Lee's voice was very stern, but I detected a slight twinkle in his eyes. Truth to tell, Nelson Lee was amused. He was rather annoyed, it is true, but his annoyance was not greater than his admiration at the smart piece of work which had been performed by Sir Montie and Tommy. They came into the compartment, and, in sheepish voices, they explained to Nelson Lee how they had got their bicycles out and rushed off for Bannington without any delay. And, having finished, they waited nervously for Nelson Lee's decision.

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

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

"You surely do not expect me to take you right into London?" asked Nelson Lee. "You surely do not think that I shall allow you to take part in this adventure, boys? Strictly speaking, I ought to punish you with great severity for this action; but I somewhat admire your pluck and ingenuity, so I will say no more about it."

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

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

"Let 'em come along with us, sir!" I put in. "Dash it all, I reckon they deserve it after this!"

"We sha'n't be in the way, sir!" put in Tommy Watson. "And we might come in useful if there's a fight, or—or something! You never know, sir! We'll do anything we jolly well can, sir!"

Nelson Lee's expression relaxed, and he smiled.

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

I grinned.

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

Nelson Lee shrugged his shoulders.

"It seems that it is quite useless for me to argue, Nipper," he said. "The only thing I can do is to resign myself to the inevitable, and allow you all to come. But, mind you, you must behave yourselves. You must do exactly as you are told, and you must not question any decision I choose to make."

"Then that's all right!" I said, sitting down again. "There's no need to worry, you chaps. How on earth you had the nerve to do this thing is more than I can imagine. I never thought you had so much initiative in you!"

As a matter of fact, my chums had done everything in such a rush that they had not stopped to think of the consequences. They had been excited, and they had ridden hard to Bannington, being only just in time to catch the train.

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

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

"We'll have a chat about generalities later on, Lennard," said Nelson Lee briskly. "For the moment we must get to Bloomsbury as quickly as we possibly can. I want to raid this house without any delay. I am perfectly convinced that Mr. Goodwin and his son are being kept there prisoners against their will."

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

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

"If door-knockers are handsome, you'd take a prize!" retorted Lennard calmly. "Somehow, young 'un, your face always reminds me of a gargoyle ——"

"And your face always reminds me of a gargle!" I put in. "That nose of yours, Mr. Lennard, is getting redder, and it might be a good thing if prohibition comes in, after all. I'm surprised at a respectable Scotland Yard official colouring his nose to such an extent ——"

At that point I found it necessary to dodge, for the chief inspector's hand was rather heavy. However, we were only having a bit of fun, and we were all grinning. It had always been a habit of mine to chip Lennard unmercifully—and, in return, he chipped me. Quite frequently we had wordy duels of this nature.

But there was no time for pleasantry just then, and we all moved out of the

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

The chief inspector drove, and he did not seem to care much about speed-limits, for he sent the car whizzing along the busy thoroughfares at a speed which was quite opposed to all rules and regulations.

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

On the way, Lennard and the guv'nor had been discussing the plan of action, so there was no delay now. Delay, indeed, might have been a grave mistake, for it was quite possible that the car had been observed from the windows of the house.

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

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

"It's better not to waste any time on a job like this, Montie," I said. "Of course, the house may be empty—the birds may have flown. That'll be rotten, but we have to get used to disappointments of this sort."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Williss—for this was the man—clenched his fists, and cursed beneath his breath.

"There's nothing here—you won't find anything wrong in this house!" he muttered. "I'll make you pay for this! I'll have the law on you! You've got no warrant, and whether you're a detective officer or not, you had no right to force your way in——"

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

Williss glared.

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

"Neither Mr. Goodwin or his son—a boy of fourteen?" asked Lennard keenly.

"No, there's not!" retorted Williss keenly. "You must be insane to think——"

"Help—help!"

The shout came from a room down the hall, and, at the same time, there was a loud hammering on the panels of the door. Williss bit his lips, and muttered an oath. Detective-Inspector Lennard smiled, and Nelson Lee gave me a triumphant glance.

"So there is nobody here at all?" exclaimed Lennard smoothly. "That's very interesting, my friend. It is rather

curious that you were unaware of the presence of that useful voice——"

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

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

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

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

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

It was not long before Mr. Goodwin and Dick knew all about it. Nelson Lee entered the room, which had lately been their prison, and he soon put them in possession of all the facts.

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

Nelson Lee smiled.

"Well, hardly, Mr. Goodwin," he said. "It seems that these rascals perpetrated a very clever trick upon you, and it was hardly possible that you should be aware of the truth. However, no harm has been done, and very little time has been wasted——"

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

"Gone!" echoed Nelson Lee sharply.

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

Nelson Lee looked at Mr. Goodwin keenly.

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

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

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

"That was very smart of you, my lad," he said approvingly. "Very smart, indeed. Owing to your keenness we now know that Mr. Naggs left King's Cross by the four-fifty train for Oldham. It's five o'clock already, so we must think of something decisive without any loss of time. But you need not be afraid—those plans will be restored to you."

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

"There are very many things that I can do, Nipper," he replied grimly. "The main thing is to get on the track of Naggs and to get him, if possible, before he arrives at Oldham."

. . . . . .

The episode was over, and Mr. Goodwin and Dick had been rescued, but now, it seemed, there was to be a chase—a chase after the stolen plans.

And, by all appearances, we should find ourselves before long in Lancashire, the county of cotton. If Nelson Lee went there, I should go with him—I was determined on that point.

The affair of the schoolboy's patent was by no means over!

THE END.

Thrilling New Serial of Brother and Sister Detectives!

KIT & CORA

Mysterious Detectives

A TALE OF DETECTIVE ADVENTURE IN LONDON.

INTRODUCTION.

LIN FLEET, a lad of fifteen, wrongfully accused of stealing, loses his job at a motor garage. His parents being dead, he lives with an unscrupulous pair known as Uncle and Aunt Pawley, the former being better acquainted with the thefts at the garage than he would care to admit. Lin meets a stranger in a grey suit, who takes an interest in him, and the boy nicknames him "Mr. Mysterious." The stranger sends him on an errand to deliver a packet to a Mr. Crawson-Crake, who, behaves like a madman and threatens to shoot the lad unless he discloses the name of his employer. Lin escapes and recounts his experiences to "Mr. Mysterious," at the latter's house in Hampstead. To test his honesty, he is given a valuable diamond pendant to take to a jewellers. His unworthy guardians discover the pendant on him, and try to get possession of it.

(Now read on.)

A Jolly Good Friend!

JUST beneath the window-sill, down a narrow slant of tiles, was the rusty gutter; and to the left he could just see the rain-water pipe, zig-zagging in a crazy line down the wall until it was lost in the lower darkness.

The door behind him creaked again. He heard the flooring-plank give a sharp crack!

It was a desperate thing to try. But better risk a broken neck than have that diamond pendant taken from him!

He buttoned his jacket tightly over that inner pocket where he had again stowed the precious case, and setting his teeth hard, clambered through the window, and with his toes in the gutter, wriggled his way along the slimy slates until over the rain-pipe. Then, one foot first, he cautiously lowered himself over the edge, and, feeling for the pipe with his toes, let go of the gutter and descended, as rapidly as he dared, hand over hand.

It was a fearsome journey, and seemed interminable!

He had not descended many feet before a resounding crash from the attic above told him that the frail defences of the door had given way; and a moment later there were voices at the window he had just left. His uncle's voice, hoarse with amazement and baffled fury:

"Hanged if he hasn't got out o' the winder! Must have! He'll break his neck—and serve him hanged well right!"

"Be a judgment!" came the acid voice of Aunt Harriet.

"Don't care if he's smashed to jelly, s'long as he doesn't get away with that thing!" he heard in Blimber's throaty tones. Then was added: "But he can't 'ave got far down. I'll nab him yet!"

Lin could hear the fellow's hurried tread across the floor of the attic and down the bare, hollow-sounding staircase.

Yet the boy did not dare to hasten his movements. The crazy old pipe swayed, grated, and rattled alarmingly with each motion of his hands or feet. And about halfway down, as well as he could judge the distance in the gloom, one of the "hold-fasts" by which the pipe was fastened to the wall belied its name by drawing out of the rotten mortar, and dropping with a clang on to the stones far below a creepy hint of his own fate if the whole thing gave way!

And, sure enough, it did!

He heard the grating sound as another holdfast pulled out of the wall; then the length of pipe which just then bore his full weight suddenly sagged outwards, like the mast of a ship borne over in a squall!

The upper section of the heavy iron-pipe shot past him with a rattling noise, narrowly missing his head, then crashing into the backyard below!

It made a terrific noise, and woke the echoes far and near. To the hapless boy it might have been the crash of doom.

Clinging to the upper end of the length of pipe in sheer desperation, he felt himself borne outwards, and down, down through what seemed to be an interminable space! Then came a shock, as the pipe midway of its length struck some solid object with a thud, and jerked him off like a pellet of clay from the end of a stick.

It had fallen across the wall at the end of the yard, and shot him on his back into the narrow alley that ran behind. Half-stunned, he lay there for perhaps two or three minutes, until a medley of noises, dinning in his ears, helped to recall his scattered senses and remind him that he was not yet out of the wood

The crash of the falling pipe seemed to have roused the whole neighbourhood!

Windows were thrown up, doors flung open; men shouted, and women shrilly screamed across space in the foggy darkness. All were demanding to know what had happened, and none could answer.

Lin got unsteadily upon his feet. He was bruised, dazed, and badly shaken, but by a miracle of good fortune had escaped worse injury.

He heard Blimber's voice shouting within the house; then the rattling of the bolts on the back-door. He knew that he had not many moments to spare; and, shaking off the confused, sickly feeling produced by his heavy fall, he first made sure that the jewel-case was still safe in his pocket, then groped his way down the dark alley and out into the maze of narrow streets and turnings beyond, where he was soon safe from pursuit.

Safe! Lin's first sensations, when he realised that he had actually got clear away with that precious little leather case, were those of intense satisfaction—of exultation almost. His feet seemed to want to dance under him; he could have shouted or even sung, in his deliverance from the nightmare of losing the thing and being branded as a thief!

Long after he knew that he was quite safe from immediate pursuit he still walked on briskly. It seemed as though he could not put enough distance between him and that house in Cowl Street.

He had come to hate that dark little house and the dark ways of its people. He meant never to go back there again.

It was even a satisfaction, he thought, when he got to the other side of Blackfriars Bridge, to feel that the river flowed between him and that hateful part of his life. He wished it were the broad sea!

Always—ever since he started life "on his own," he had tried to make a character for himself; a clean character for honour and honesty. Because he had certain cherished ambitions, had Lin Fleet. He wanted to be something better than just an errand-boy or messenger. He wanted to get a job where there was a chance to rise, to pull out, to make good, and be something in the world. And he knew that a boy could not get that sort of job without a "character."

He had tried hard to win one for himself; but so far he had failed miserably, through no fault of his own.

His first start had been a failure, because his employer—a so-called "commission-agent," and a friend of Uncle Ben's, had no character himself; a fact which Lin saw just in time to get clear of the man before he was arrested for swindling!

Then, with difficulty, he got that job as odd-boy at the motor-garage. Things had looked quite hopeful there. He had contrived to please Mr. Spence, the manager, who seemed friendly, and inclined to help him on. Then had come that affair of the watch, and he was discharged in disgrace, —sacked without a character!

All owing to Uncle Ben!

And it would always be so. He could never make a clean name for himself, and keep it, as long as he was connected with such people—Uncle Ben, and Blimber; yes, and Aunt Harriet, too! He had always thought that Aunt Harriet was honest; even very strict and religious—she had always made out to be. But he could never forget the look in her eyes when she saw those diamonds, nor the way she snatched at the case and clutched it! It seemed as if she was as bad as the other two!

Well, he was clear of them and the place now. He would never go back again, whatever happened.

He walked on again with a brisk step, exulting in the thought.

Then it suddenly came over him that his plight was rather an awkward one, after all. He had escaped a great danger, and he was free; but he was homeless—on a winter night!

He was an outcast—self-made, it was true, but, all the same, an outcast. It was with a queer sensation, by no means agreeable, that the fact dawned upon him. Never before had London seemed so vast, and so desolate, as when he realised that the dark, louring sky was now the only roof above him.

For some few minutes the thought fairly daunted him.

What was he to do? He could not possibly wander the streets all night long, or crouch in dark doorways—as he had heard, or read, that such outcasts did—snatching a brief, fitful sleep, until the policeman's bull's-eye flashed in their faces, and his gruff voice ordered them to "move on!"

And sometimes they were "run in."

Suppose that happened to him, and he was searched, and that diamond thing found upon him! It would be awful! He couldn't explain; no one would believe him

No, it would never do to risk it. He must try to find some place where they would take him in for the night. He had money—a little of his own, without the remains of that five shillings given him by "Mr. Mysterious," which he was still determined not to touch if he could help it—he could afford to pay for a bed. The thing was—where could he get one?

Then he remembered: there was Sam Wade's coffee-shop in Red Lion Street. He might get a bed there.

They knew him at Sam Wade's. He used to get his dinner there during the time when he was in the employ of the shady "commission-agent"; and Jess, the waitress, had been jolly kind to him—something like a big sister might be, he thought, if a fellow had the luck to have one. She took an interest in him that nobody else had ever shown; and he used to tell Jess things which he wouldn't have dreamt of mentioning to his aunt or uncle. And Jess used to buck him up when he was a bit downhearted, and give him

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advice. Jolly sound advice it was, too, for she was a sharp girl.

It was a comfort to remember her; and with a lighter heart he set off briskly to Red Lion Street. His only fear was that Jess might have left the place.

It was late when he reached Red Lion Street, and the coffee-shop was closed. But as they let beds—in fact, it called itself "Wade's Private Hotel" on its bill-heads—there was a separate entrance, with a night-bell, for the convenience of lodgers, and this Lin, rather nervously, rang.

Somewhat to his dismay, Sam Wade himself answered his ring. Sam—a little fat man, with a very bald head and a very red face, as though he had burnt his hair off, and frizzled his face, by perpetual frying and toasting over the big coke fire at the back.

He was in his shirt-sleeves. No living creature had ever beheld Sam Wade with a coat on.

"Hallo!" he exclaimed, without recognising the boy. "What d'you want at this time o' night, young shaver?"

"I want a bed here, please, Mr. Wade," said Lin; adding quickly: "I mean to pay for it, of course."

But Sam Wade shook his head.

"How's it come about that a boy o' your age ain't in his own proper bed at home at this time o' night?" he demanded suspiciously. "I'm not taking in any runaway boys, and getting myself into trouble with parents and guardians, and maybe the police. Take my tip, lad, if you've been up to anything wrong, go back home and make a clean breast of it. Find they'll take you in with open arms."

"But I haven't done anything wrong, Mr. Wade!" Lin protested.

"All the same, you go back home, my lad! Home's the proper place for a boy o' your age," said Sam Wade, preparing to shut the door.

He was not at all a hard-hearted man, and he would not willingly have turned away a stray dog that had come scratching at his door for shelter. But he was proud of being a respectable tradesman, and keeping a thoroughly respectable establishment. His scruples were quite genuine. He did not remember Lin, and thought that there was something doubtful, if not downright suspicious, in a boy of his age wandering about alone, looking for lodgings late at night.

"Don't shut the door, Mr. Wade! It is quite all right! I have not been doing anything wrong," said Lin, rather desperately. "Only I've had to leave home because—because—well, because it was best," he added somewhat lamely. "And I'd nowhere else to go, so I thought you would let me have a bed here."

"And of course he can! Why, it's young Lin! He's all right! Don't you remember him, Mr. Wade? Let him come in, and shut that door. There's an edge on that draught sharper than your big carver!"

When Lin heard that voice his heart gave a little jump of relief. He knew things would be all right now. For it was the voice of his friend Jess, the waitress.

Manageress, she might have been called, for she was the brains of the establishment. Sam was a steady worker, but he had no head for business. And his wife—a shadowy creature, who lived upstairs, nursing a chronic cold, and everlastingly knitting something in wool that never got finished—was no sort of help. Without Jess the place would have cracked up long ago.

Sam Wade was fully alive to this. He kept up the pretence of directing things and of giving his orders; and he grumbled for form's sake, when Jess calmly ignored his injunctions and did things her own way—which was the case nine times out of ten. But he always submitted to her judgment in the end.

He had found it best.

He did so now; retiring into the house, growling under his breath, something about "Runaway boys . . . parents and guardians . . . trouble with the police," and so on. Which was only to relieve his feelings. He knew that it would not make the slightest difference; Jess would take that stray boy in.

And she did.

Jess was not one of the soft and sentimental sort, by any means. She was a young woman of rather the Amazonian type—tall, strongly built; good-looking, but sharp of feature, as she was sharp of wits and sharp of tongue. Yet it was wonderful how her bold eyes softened as, tucking the tablecloth she happened to be folding under her arm—her hands were never idle—she drew Lin into the lighted passage and shut the door.

(To be continued.)

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