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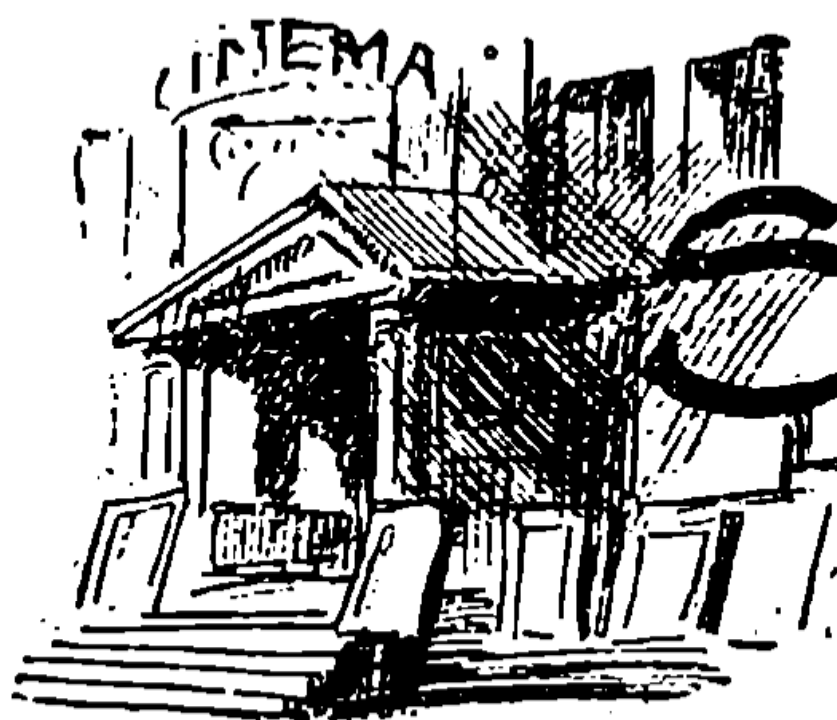
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(THE NARRATIVE RELATED THROUGHOUT BY NIPPER.)

CHAPTER I.

SOMETHING LIKE AN IDEA!

"SHAME!"

"We won't stand it!"

"Not likely! We'll jolly well ignore the Head's order!"

"Oh!"

There was quite a lot of excitement in the junior common room of the Ancient House at St. Frank's. Everybody appeared to be talking at once, and everybody was exceedingly animated.

Afternoon lessons were over, and it was not yet tea-time. As a rule, the juniors dispersed to their own studies as soon as lessons were over, but on this occasion the majority of the Remove fellows had come straight into the common room.

For a most important matter was under discussion.

"If you ignore the Head's orders, my son, you will find yourself in hot water!" remarked Reginald Pitt. "Take my advice, and accept the inevitable."

Owen major, who was inclined to be rebellious, snorted.

"Rats!" he said. "If we all ignore the Head's order, what can he do?"

"Nothing!" said Hubbard.

"Exactly—nothing!" agreed Owen major excitedly. "And that's what the Remove must do—stick together, and take no notice whatever of the Head!"

"Eh, what's that?" I exclaimed, entering the common room at that moment. "Who's preaching revolution?"

Who's agitating against our august and respected Head?"

Owen major glared at me.

"We don't want any interference from you, Nipper!" he snapped. "You may be the captain of the Form, but in this matter we're taking the lead."

"All right, my son, take it!" I said cheerfully. "But what is the discussion about?"

"The pictures!" said Pitt, grinning.

"Eh?"

"The Bannington Cinema, to be more exact," explained Pitt. "These chaps are jibbing because the Head has placed the cinema out of bounds."

"Why, that's stale news!" I said. "The Bannington Cinema has been out of bounds for three or four days. And a good thing, too; it's a beastly hole! Webb, the proprietor, makes a point of exhibiting rotten pictures——"

"Oh, cut off that!" interrupted Hubbard. "I'll admit the show last week was a bit offside, but they've got a grand show to-day. I've seen the bills—a jolly fine American Western drama, two good comedies, and some animated cartoons. What's wrong with a programme like that?"

"Nothing, as far as I can judge!" I replied. "But that's not the point."

"How do you mean?"

"Why, just because Webb happens to put on a decent film once in a while, it doesn't mean to say that the pictures will always be good," I explained. "It's a well-known fact that Webb has a par-

ticular liking for nasty, "unpleasant subjects. He fills his beastly theatre with the most undesirable crowd in Bannington. Now and again, I suppose, he can't get those kind of films, and so he puts up a decent show. But I absolutely uphold the Head in placing the cinema out of bounds. I wouldn't go to the place, even if they paid me!"

"Hear, hear!" said Pitt.

"Good for you, Nipper!" agreed Solomon Levi, the Jewish boy in the Remove.

Owen major and Hubbard glared.

"We didn't ask you to butt in, Ikey!" said Owen major. "You've got a jolly lot too much to say, for a new chap! You haven't been at St. Frank's a week, and you seem to think you've got as much right to interrupt and jaw at us as anybody!"

Solomon Levi grinned.

"Sorry!" he said cheerfully. "But I was under the impression that we were all equals in the Remove. As it happens, I wanted to make a bit of a speech——"

"All right; go and make it to yourself!" snapped Hubbard.

"Don't take any notice of those asses, Isaacs!" said Handforth. "If you've got something to say, say it. We shall give you full attention."

"Thanks!" said Levi.

He took no offence at the fact that he was called "Ikey," and "Isaacs," and all sorts of other names. He had grown accustomed to it by this time. Levi was a keen, well-built junior, with dark, active eyes. He had already made a place for himself in the Remove, and, upon the whole, he was fairly popular, although, when it came to financial matters, a great many of the Removites were inclined to distrust him. They considered that he was a bit too smart.

"It's no good jibbing against the Head, my dear chaps!" I exclaimed. "The Bannington Cinema is out of bounds, and we have got to accept that fact as it stands. As for ignoring the Head's order, it isn't to be thought of. If the order was unjust, I should be the first to put up an agitation; but it isn't unjust—the Head has got the right thing. It's a disgrace for any St. Frank's chap to enter that beastly show!"

"Hear, hear!" said Dick Goodwin.

"Then what are we going to do?" demanded Owen major warmly. "If we want to see some pictures, what can we do?"

"Go without seeing them!" said Pitt. "But that's rotten!" declared Hubbard. "The Bannington Cinema is the only one in the district; there's not another picture place until you get to Helmford, and that's over twenty miles away. So, in barring us from this place, the Head had barred us from seeing pictures altogether. I call it a bit thick!"

Solomon Levi nodded.

"Well, perhaps it is," he said; "but there is a solution to the problem——"

"Oh, dry up, Solomon!"

"Rats!" shouted Handforth. "Let him speak!"

"Thanks!" said Levi. "This talk of mine will be purely a business one. I want to put something before you chaps—before the whole Remove. It's a proposition that ought to go down well, and I've got an idea in the back of my head that you will agree with me and support my suggestion. It's a scheme that will surprise you a bit at first, but, believe me, it's the real thing!"

The juniors were rather impressed by Levi's tone, and they listened attentively.

"Go it, Ikey!" said Handforth. "What's the wheeze?"

"Well, you all know the fact about the Bannington Cinema," went on the Jewish boy. "You know that it has been barred, and that no St. Frank's fellows can enter that place. So far as I can see, there is only one remedy."

"And what's that?"

"We shall have to build a cinema of our own," said Levi calmly.

"Eh?"

"What?"

"Do which?"

"Build a cinema of our own!" repeated Levi. "If we do that, we can show decent, wholesome pictures, and, at the same time, we can reap the benefit from the place—we can all have shares in the concern, and those shares will be valuable. We shall obtain a nice interest on our money——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Good old Jew boy!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Always thinking about cash, and interest."

Solomon Levi smiled.

"It's just as well to begin thinking about money, even when a fellow is at school," he exclaimed. "And this idea of mine is a fairly decent one, I believe."

Anyhow, I mean to put it before you chaps, just to see what you think of it."

"Oh, but that's rot!" said Pitt. "How the thunder can we build a cinema on our own? Do talk sensibly, Levi?"

"We don't want to listen to this rot!" put in Owen major. "The ass is trying to pull our legs. Just as if we could build a cinema! Why, it would cost thousands and thousands of pounds——"

"Exactly!" agreed Levi. "I think you all know the old haunted house in the middle of Bannington High Street?"

"Of course we know it!" said Handforth. "It's been there as long as I can remember, and it's always stood empty and deserted. There was a murder committed there, or something, and the place has never been let since. It must have been standing empty for nearly twenty years. It's a huge place, too, standing in its own grounds, right there in the middle of the High Street."

"It belongs to somebody in Bannington, I believe," said Tommy Watson. "They can't sell the property—nobody will buy it, because it's got such a beastly reputation. The townspeople will tell you all sorts of yarns about ghosts!"

"But that makes no difference to my scheme," said Levi. "I suggest that we should buy that haunted house, put the builders in, and convert it into a picture-theatre—a palatial, magnificent place, about twice the size of Webb's hole. If we did that, we should simply work the opposition up, and Webb will be obliged to put up his shutters. Believe me, it's a good proposition."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Don't try to be funny, you ass!"

"My dear chap, I'm perfectly serious——"

"Oh, yes!" grinned Augustus Hart. "You're perfectly serious—I don't think! How do you suppose you'll be able to raise thousands and thousands of pounds in the Remove?"

Solomon Levi smiled.

"Well, I wasn't exactly hoping for that," he said. "But when I said that the cinema would belong to the Remove, I was speaking in a general way. We can all take shares in the company, when it is formed—that's my idea; then we shall all have a certain interest in the place. My scheme, in a nutshell, is to buy this property, form a company, and then build the cinema. After it's built, we shall

have a say in the running of it. And we shall be able to show decent pictures, and, in addition, we could arrange to have the hall for amateur theatricals, concerts, and all sorts of things like that. It will become practically a part of St. Frank's!"

The juniors began to pay attention.

"Oh, but it's rot!" protested Singleton. "It couldn't be done, Levi!"

"It's going to be done!" said the Jewish boy grimly. "There's no 'if's' about it. I've made up my mind on this matter, and nothing is going to stop me. You can bet your life that I'm as keen as mustard on this business, and it's going to be done properly, believe me!"

"It's certainly a good notion, Levi," I said thoughtfully; "but, at the same time, I can't quite see how you're going to manage it. First of all, this old house will have to be bought; after that, extensive alterations must be made, and the whole place will be rebuilt. Even then the expenses won't be over, because the electrical plant for running the pictures will run into hundreds, and there are all the seats, and a thousand-and-one other details——"

"If we have enough money we can do anything!" said Levi calmly. "Money is the main thing. With money we could do wonders; without money we are helpless. Therefore, the only way to get this thing through is to find money—heaps of it. And later on it will be doubled. Every bit of capital will be invested—make no mistake about that. Every pound put into this cinema will be doubled and trebled within a year—that's what I predict!"

"Yes, but it's only a possibility——"

"No; you're wrong!" said Levi. "It's a certainty! You can take my word for it that this cinema is going to be built. And I should advise all you fellows to invest every penny you've got in the company—get money from your people, especially for the purpose. If you can only invest a pound—well, leave it at that; but if you can invest ten pound, or twenty pound—or even fifty—put the money in this company! Your capital will be doubled——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Good old Ikey!"

"Nothing doing, thanks!" grinned Owen major. "I've heard of people losing money like that before!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It's not good enough, Solomon!"

It was evident that the Remove did not take Solomon Levi seriously. This proposition of his was altogether too big to be a reality. It was something in the clouds—in the minds of the juniors. They could not possibly picture this mythical picture-theatre of Levi's becoming a real thing. And when he started talking about promoting a company, and the Remove buying shares in that company—well, the juniors suspected something. As a rule, if they had any money, they preferred to spend it on a cert.

Levi remained quite calm and cool.

"I expected something of this kind," he said. "I know, of course, that you would not cotton on to this scheme right at first. But you don't seem to realise that it's a genuine opportunity!"

"We realise that you're dotty!" said Armstrong bluntly.

"Oh, rather!"

"Clean off his rocker!"

"As mad as a hatter!"

"Anyhow, the whole idea is impossible!" said De Valerie. "I would be one of the first to go into a thing of that sort, if I could see it being a success. But, dash it all, Levi, you must know that this thing is too big for you to handle!"

Levi shook his head.

"I don't see it at all!" he declared. "Nothing is too big for anybody to handle, providing they are capable of handling it."

"That's another way of calling yourself smart, I suppose?" sneered Gulliver.

"Of course it is!" said Fullwood. "We're sick of this chap's swank!"

The Jewish boy's eyes gleamed.

"By my life," he exclaimed, with a touch of spirit, "that's one thing I do detest—swank! And when I'm called a swanker by the biggest member of that brood in the Remove—well, believe me, I don't like it!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"That's one for you, Fully!"

"Good old Ikey!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Ralph Leslie Fullwood scowled.

"I don't want any of your cheek!" he snapped. "If you ain't careful, you Jewish cad, I'll teach you a lesson you won't forget in a hurry!"

"Not with your fist!" put in Pitt. "Levi is a regular terror at boxing, so you'd better look out, Fullwood, if you

challenge him to a scrap. He's capable of knocking you sideways!"

"Thank you!" said Fullwood sourly.

He turned his back, and pretended to take no further interest in the proceedings. Actually, however, he was listening with great attention.

"We won't waste any more time," said Solomon Levi. "As I was saying, this affair isn't too big for me to handle. I'm not boasting and I'm not bragging, but I'm confident. I'm perfectly sure that I shall be able to handle this affair as it ought to be handled. And don't forget one thing—I shall have my dad behind me."

"Eh?"

"Your dad?"

Levi nodded.

"Precisely," he said. "My father is pretty rich, and he's always keen to invest money in a good thing. I'm perfectly certain that he'll supply all the cash that's needed for this Cinema. At all events, he'll supply the bulk, and you chaps can come in on the ground floor."

"On the which?"

"I mean, you can buy shares while they're going cheap," explained Levi. "You needn't think that this is a joke, or that I'm simply spoofing you. I'm in deadly earnest. I mean to push the thing through—but it will be much easier for me if I have the support of the whole Remove. That's what I require. If only you fellows will enter into this affair with me—why, we can do wonders."

"Is this straight, Levi?" I asked.

"Absolutely."

"You seriously mean to get this cinema built if you can?"

"I do."

"Then I'm in with you," I said promptly. "I'll give you all the support I can, and I'm pretty certain that a good few other fellows will rally round."

"Begad! Rather!" said Sir Montie Tregellis-West. "You can rely on me, dear old boy!"

"Same here!" said Watson.

"Count me in!" declared Handforth.

A good many other juniors stated that they were willing to help in any way possible. Although, for the life of them, they couldn't see how this great affair was to be carried out.

Levi was very pleased with the result of his speech. It had certainly been a

very businesslike talk, and the majority of the Remove fellows were impressed. Some of them, of course, scoffed at the idea, and would not listen to reason.

Juniors like Hubbard, and Armstrong, and Owen major, openly declared that the idea was nothing more not less than a piece of madness, and they laughed at the whole thing as a joke. Fullwood and Co. sneered at it, and declared that Levi was only trying to obtain money by fraud. But the Jewish boy could afford to ignore such insinuations as these.

"Well, I'm pleased to find that the majority of you are in favour of this scheme," said Levi. "Personally, I think it's rather a decent wheeze, and if we can only push it through, it will be a chance for the Remove. I've asked my dad to come down to-morrow."

"What!" said Pitt. "You had the nerve to ask your father to come down especially?"

"Yes," said Levi. "There's no nerve about it, either. It's a business proposition, and my dad will be jolly pleased that I've introduced it to him. Of course, I don't know that he'll be able to come. It may be necessary for me to do a good bit on my own at first. Still, I have hope——"

Tubbs, the Ancient House page boy, put his head in at the door.

"Telegram!" he said briefly.

"My hat! Who for?"

"Who's the wire addressed to, Tubby?"

"Let's have a look at it!"

"It's for Master Levi, young gents!" said Tubbs. "It only come only three or four minutes ago."

The telegram was handed over to Solomon Levi. He took it quite calmly, tore it open, and read the contents. Then he looked up at the fellows with a smile. They were all regarding him curiously.

"Well, what does it say?" demanded Handforth, who was always very blunt.

"Only a few words," replied Levi.

"I'll read them out if you like—Scheme appears to be sound. Will be with you to-morrow afternoon.—Father. That's all it says."

"By George!"

"So your dad's coming down to-morrow?"

"Yes," said Levi. "I thought he'd do the sensible thing. He's a cute old boy."

CHAPTER II.

A SURPRISE FOR MR. WEBB.

RALPH LESLIE FULLWOOD paced up and down Study A. in a thoughtful manner.

"Yes, it's up to us to make a move!" he said. "And what's more, we've got to move at once!"

Gulliver and Bell, who were also in the study, regarded their leader curiously.

"What's the matter with you, Fully?" demanded Bell. "What's the idea of marching up and down like that muttering to yourself. What's worrying you?"

"Nothing," said Fullwood.

"Did you back the wrong gee-gee?"

"No, you ass!"

"Do you owe a bookie some money?"

"Don't be a fool!" snapped Fullwood. "I'm thinking about Levi!"

"Oh, rats to the chap!" said Gulliver.

"I'm blessed if I can see why you should make yourself thin thinking about Levi! Let the Jewish cad alone."

Fullwood looked at his two chums in rather a strange way.

"I'm not particularly fond of Levi," he said grimly. "The beast has got my back up, and I'm going to have my revenge. I don't forget the way he treated us the day after he arrived in school—the beast!"

"But what can you do to him now?" asked Bell. "How can you get your own back?"

"By messing up this scheme of his!" replied Fullwood. "That's how I can get my own back! Levi means to open up this new cinema if he can, and that will mean squashing Webb completely out of the thing. If a new picture theatre is opened in the Bannington High Street, Webb's place will be smothered out of existence. He won't get a soul near his show then. Therefore, it's up to Webb to put a spoke in Levi's wheel. Webb doesn't know anything about this, and Levi doesn't want him to know."

"I suppose not," said Gulliver. "If Webb does get to know about it, he'll probably do everything he can to stop Levi's little game. Or, as you say, if a new picture theatre is opened, the old one will go smash. Webb has everything his own way now; but, the new place would have everything its own

way, too, leaving Webb completely in the cold."

Fullwood nodded.

"Exactly," he agreed. "That's just the way I look at it. And I'm goin' straight off now to Webb—and I'm going to tell him all about this idea, and put him on his guard."

"But you can't go, you ass!" said Bell. "The cinema is out of bounds!"

Fullwood sniffed.

"Do you think I care about that?" he demanded. "I've only got to be careful—that's all."

"And supposing Webb isn't in?"

"He's bound to be in," said Fullwood. "The cinema opens at six o'clock."

"That doesn't mean to say that Webb will be there," put in Bell. "The best thing you can do, Fully, is to sneak into the perfects' room and get through to Webb on the telephone, and fix up an appointment. You'll be on the safe side then."

Fullwood nodded.

"That's a pretty good idea," he said. "By gad! I'll do it!"

Meanwhile, Handforth and Co. were just about to partake of tea in Study D, a little further along the passage.

"We're late!" said Handforth. "I know that, because I'm jolly hungry. Why, it's nearly six o'clock—in fact, it is six o'clock. It's all the fault of that fat-headed Levi!"

"Yes, he did keep us a good while in the Common Room," said Church.

"Never mind, we've got a better appetite for tea, and there's something specially good to-day, too. These pork pies are absolutely first class!"

"Rather!" said Handforth. And that idea of Levi's is pretty good, you know. It wouldn't be a bad idea to invite him in to tea—just to show that we approve. It would be particularly fitting, too, because we've got something special."

"You fathead!" said McClure.

"Eh?"

"You silly ass!"

"If you're calling me a silly ass, Arnold McClure—"

"I am!" said McClure. "You can't ask Levi to share these pork pies, you duffer!"

"Why not? We can't eat the three of them—they're big pies."

"That's not the question," said

McClure. "Don't you know that Jews mustn't eat pork?"

"What rot!" said Handforth. "But now you come to mention it, I have heard something of the sort."

"Why it's a question of religion!" said Church. "You'd offend Levi tremendously if you asked him to eat pork pie. It wouldn't be the thing, Handy."

Handforth nodded.

"Perhaps not," he said. "I'd forgotten all about that pork business for the minute. Oh, well, we shall have to invite him to tea when we've got something different—sardines or salmon, or something like that. I suppose Jews are allowed to eat salmon?"

"Yes, you ass!" grinned Church. "Didn't Levi have some for breakfast this morning, instead of bacon?"

"Why, yes, I believe he did!"

"My only hat!" interrupted Church suddenly.

"What's the matter, you ass?"

"Why, it's past six, and Fenton particularly told you to take those lines to him before six, or they'd be double!" said Church. "You'd better buck up, Handy!"

Handforth looked a bit startled.

"By George!" he said. "I'd forgotten all about those beastly lines. I'll rush along with them now. Thank goodness they're done!"

That morning Handforth had incautiously punched Gulliver's nose in the lobby, unaware of the fact, that Fenton of the Sixth was looking on. In consequence, Handforth had received fifty lines, and he had been instructed to take them to Fenton before six o'clock, or the imposition would be doubled.

Handforth had a great dislike for writing lines—a dislike which was shared by practically every junior in the Remove—and he therefore hastened with all speed to Fenton's study, taking the lines with him. But when he arrived in the Sixth Form passage, he found that Fenton's study was empty. The Captain of St. Frank's was not there.

Handforth left the imposition on the table, then he walked out of the study, and found himself face to face with Morrow.

"Hullo! What are you doing in there?" said the Prefect sharply.

"Keep your hair on!" replied Handforth. "I've only put some lines on

Fenton's table. Do you know where he is?"

"He was in the prefects' room when I saw him last," replied Morrow. "I thought you were attempting some game, Handforth. All right, you can cut off!"

"Thanks!" said Handforth sarcastically. "Awfully kind of you, Morrow!"

He stole down the passage, and decided to look into the prefects' room on his way to Study D. He just wanted to tell Fenton that the lines were done, and had been placed on the table. Fenton was in a bit of a snappy mood that day, Handforth remembered, and the junior wanted to be on the safe side.

He arrived at the prefects' room, and found the door closed. He opened it, and put his head in. He took one glance into the room, and then opened his eyes rather wide with astonishment.

Fenton wasn't there. In fact, the prefects' room was empty except for one individual. And that individual was a junior—in short, Ralph Leslie Fullwood, of the Remove.

"Well I'm jiggered!" muttered Handforth.

He was suspicious in an instant. For he knew well enough that Fullwood had no right in this apartment. It was quite obvious, in fact, that the leader of Study A had chosen this particular moment for his purpose, because all the Sixth formers were at tea.

Handforth was not the kind of junior to spy, or to eavesdrop. But, in this particular instance, he hesitated a few moments before withdrawing. For he had heard one or two words which interested him a great deal.

"Yes, I want to speak to him at once!" Fullwood was saying. "Of course—Mr. Webb. Please bring him to the telephone."

Handforth opened his eyes rather wide.

"Webb!" he muttered. "Why, that's that rotten cinema proprietor—that cad who runs the beastly picture show in Bannington!"

It puzzled Handforth considerably. Why was Fullwood communicating with Webb? What on earth could the leader of Study A want with such a man? Handforth hesitated, wondering what on earth he should do; and, while he was hesitating, he learned more.

"Is that you, Mr. Webb?" came Fullwood's voice quickly. "Oh, good! My name is Fullwood, I belong to St. Frank's——"

Ralph Leslie broke off, but went on rather hurriedly.

"No—no, Mr. Webb!" he exclaimed. "I'm not one of those cads—I'm absolutely on your side. And I've found out that somebody is trying to smash you up. They are going to close your cinema, if they can, it's a conspiracy against you, and I know all about it. I'd like to give you a word of warning."

Handforth took a deep breath.

"The awful cad!" he muttered. "He's going to tell Webb all about Levi's scheme. He's going to put Webb on his guard. The boastly traitor—the awful bounder!"

Handforth was about to rush forward with the intention of dragging Fullwood from the telephone, when he paused.

"Yes, that will do splendidly, Mr. Webb," Fullwood was saying. "In the left hand window seat at the Japanese Cafe. Right you are. I think I can be there at a quarter to seven, without any trouble. Anyhow, I'll do my best. We can have a chat in private there, and then you'll know all about it. Good-bye!"

Fullwood hung the receiver up, and when he stole out of the prefects' room, and found himself in the passage, he discovered that the passage was empty. There was no sign whatever of Handforth, and Fullwood had no idea that Handforth had been on the scene. As a matter of fact, the leader of Study D., had gone at once, not because he was afraid of facing Fullwood, but for reasons of his own.

Handforth was back in his own study, and he was looking at his chums in a curious manner.

Their hearts sank, for they knew that look. They knew well enough that Handforth was on the track of something, and that everything else would have to go by the board. That was just Handforth's way. Once he had got an idea into his head, nothing on earth would stop him.

"Come on, my sons!" said Handforth. "We are going off!"

"Going off!" said Church. "Where to? It's tea-time, you ass!"

"Never mind about tea!" interrupted

Handforth briskly. "We're going to Bannington!"

"But—but——"

"I don't want any objections, and if you start making a fuss, I'll punch your nose. Walter Church!" said Handforth darkly. "I've got on the track of something big, and I'm not going to lose it."

"But can't it wait until after tea?" asked McClure.

"No—it can't," said Handforth. "But you needn't worry, we'll have tea in the Japanese Cafe, at Bannington. It won't take us long to get there—and I've got pots of money. We'll have quite a decent spread—a regular blow out, in fact."

"But why?" asked Church. "We've got a splendid tea here—and I don't see why we should go right over to Bannington!"

"Are you going to sit there arguing or are you coming?" roared Handforth. "If you think I'm going to stand here all the giddy evening you've made a bloomer! Buck up, and follow me. If you don't, I'll knock you into a cocked hat!"

Church and McClure sighed, rose from the table and followed their leader out into the passage. There was no sense in arguing—they could jaw at Handforth until they were blue in the face—but it would make no difference to him. And if they protested much longer he would land out. The only alternative therefore, was to carry out his wishes.

And so, five minutes later, Handforth and Co. were on their bicycles, speeding away towards Bannington as fast as they could pedal. It seemed that the matter was one of great urgency—that is, by the way Handforth urged his companions to further efforts.

Handforth knew, of course, that Fullwood was probably getting out his bicycle too—he would come along this same road. And Handforth had no wish for Ralph Leslie Fullwood to know that he and his chums had already taken the route to Bannington. Handforth had an idea in his mind, and he wanted to carry it out. For once, it was quite a sound idea.

"Now, what's the wheeze, you ass?" panted Church, as they were riding along.

"I'll tell you now," said Handforth. "When I went into the prefect's room,

I found Fullwood there. And Fullwood was telephoning to Webb!"

"To Webb?" repeated Church. "The cinema chap?"

"Yes."

"What the dickens for?"

"He was giving Webb a warning—and arranging a meeting at the Japanese Cafe," replied Handforth grimly.

"Oh!" said Church. "So that's why we're going there?"

"Of course it is, you babbling ass!" said Handforth politely. "I mean to get there in advance—so that we shall be comfortably installed before Fullwood and Webb come along. I mean to find out what this means. I know that Fullwood means to tell Webb all about Levi's scheme, but that's not enough. I want the details, if I can possibly get them."

Church and McClure were beginning to be interested.

"The rotter!" said McClure warmly. "Fancy him ringing up Webb, and arranging a meeting. They mean to mess up Levi's plan, I expect—that's about the size of it. But what good can we do, Handy? It wouldn't be the thing for us to listen to what these rotters talk about——"

"Rats!" said Handforth. "A detective is privileged to do these things. He is allowed to listen to conversations of that kind—that's how things are found out."

"But how can we listen?" asked Church. "We shall be spotted——"

"Have you ever been in the Japanese Cafe?" asked Handforth.

"No, I don't think so."

"Well, I have," said Handforth. "And when you get there you'll understand."

When they reached Bannington, the three juniors garaged their bicycles at a shop, and then proceeded to the Japanese Cafe. They arrived at twenty-five minutes to seven—ten minutes before the appointed time for Mr. Webb and Fullwood.

Handforth was quite pleased.

"Good!" he exclaimed. "We've done it splendidly, my sons. Come on!"

They entered the place, and much to Handforth's satisfaction, the table he required was vacant. This was situated near to the window—in fact, the table next to one which stood against the window. Handforth knew that Webb and Fullwood would occupy that other table.

Therefore, the heroes of Study D were in very close proximity to the spot where the conspirators would meet. But they would remain unseen.

The Japanese Cafe was quite a comfortable place—a rather pretentious establishment, in fact. It was largely patronised, on chilly evenings, by courting couples. For each table was in a separate compartment to itself, and it could be closed off from the rest of the shop by neat little Japanese curtains.

Thus, after Handforth and Co. had been served with their tea, they were left quite alone—private. And when Mr. Webb entered the place a few minutes later he had no idea that these three St. Frank's boys were in the place.

And Fullwood, when he came in almost immediately afterwards, was similarly ignorant.

Handforth and Co., needless to say, kept very quiet. And, by listening intently, it was possible to hear a great deal of what was being said the other side of the little thin partition.

Mr. Webb and Fullwood did not whisper—there was no necessary to. Their conversation was not a criminal one, and therefore they could speak openly. They did not even lower their voices. And Handforth and his chums heard everything that passed.

Mr. Webb was looking somewhat impatient and suspicious as he sat down at the table opposite to Fullwood.

The cad of the Remove, on the other hand, was cool and collected.

"Well, what is it you want?" demanded Mr. Webb curtly.

"There's no need for you to adopt that tone with me, Mr. Webb," said Fullwood. "I'm dead against all this nonsense—about banning your Picture Theatre. It's a first class place, in my opinion—and the films are all serene. I'm not one of those snobs who made a fuss the other night."

Mr. Webb nodded.

"I think I remember you, my lad," he said. "You certainly appear to be better than the others. What was that you were telling me over the telephone?"

"As a matter of fact, I'm doing you a good turn," said Fullwood.

"Is that another way of saying you require a reward?" demanded Webb sourly.

Fullwood frowned.

"I haven't asked you to pay me anything," he said. "To tell the truth, I hate Levi, and that's why I'm doing this—just to mess up his game."

"Levi?"

"He's one of the chaps in the Remove," explained Fullwood. "He's a Jew."

"So I should imagine."

"How the chap's had the nerve to come to St. Frank's is more than I can imagine," went on Fullwood. "I call it a bit thick to have a Jew in the Remove with us. But that's nothing to do with the question. This chap is jolly keen on all business matters, I will give him that due. And, if possible, he's going to smash you up."

"What absolute nonsense——"

"It isn't nonsense, Mr. Webb!" interrupted Fullwood. "You know the old house in the middle of the High Street—that great old place that's empty and supposed to be haunted?"

"Of course, I know it," said Webb. "I've lived here enough years, at all events. What about it?"

"Well, this chap, Levi, has decided to buy that house," said Fullwood impressively. "He's going to buy it, form a company, and turn the place into a cinema—right there, in the middle of the High Street!"

Mr. Webb started.

"Preposterous!" he exclaimed, at length.

"That's what a lot of the chaps said," exclaimed Fullwood. "But I believe Levi is serious about it. His father has got tons of money—I suppose he swindled it out of somebody or other, and he's bound to be a keen business chap. Nearly all Jews are. Anyhow, Levi's pater is coming down to St. Frank's to-morrow—to fix things up. And if once they get going, and open that place as a cinema, your show will be absolutely eclipsed."

Mr. Webb looked thoughtful.

"Of course, I don't credit this story," he said. "I don't believe for a moment that this Jewish boy is in earnest. But I agree with you, my lad, that if a cinema were opened in the High Street, I should be swept out of it. At present I have the monopoly—there is no other Picture Theatre in Bannington. But, if another theatre did open its doors, my

dcors would be closed. That much is quite certain."

"Then you'd better look alive," said Fullwood. "Levi is in earnest—I can tell you straight from the horse's mouth. It's a good tip."

For a few moments Mr. Webb was silent.

"If this is really true, it is serious—for me," he said, at last. "It is extremely serious. I have always been on the look-out for the opening of a new cinema—but, so far, nobody has had the enterprise enough to start such a project. I should hardly imagine that a schoolboy of St. Frank's will set the ball rolling in that direction."

"Well, he has set it rolling," said Fullwood. "That's why I've come over here to give you the wheeze. That old haunted house is bound to be going cheap, and it's a ten to one chance that Levi's pater will snap it up. And once the property is bought you'll be helpless. They'll be able to build this cinema, and as soon as it is opened to the public, it will capture the whole population of Bannington. You'll be left absolutely in the cold, Mr. Webb."

Fullwood went on to explain everything that Levi had said—and, gradually, the cinema proprietor began to understand that this matter was really serious—that Solomon Levi was in earnest, and that this new cinema project was something real—something substantial. And with this realisation, came a feeling of alarm.

"Good gracious!" said Webb. "I must make a move at once—without the slightest delay. Thank you, my boy, for giving me this warning—it may be of the utmost value to me."

"That's all right," said Fullwood. "I've only done it to spoil Levi's little game. But what do you propose to do now?"

Webb looked at his young companion keenly.

"There's only one thing to be done this evening," he said. "I shall make immediate arrangements to buy this old house. Or, even if I do not buy it, I shall obtain an option on the property. That at all events, will stop Levi's scheme completely. That haunted house belongs to an old lady, Mrs. Cubitt, who lives about two miles away on the Helmford Road. I shall make a point of visiting her to-night, later on, and I shall see what can be done."

Fullwood's eyes sparkled.

"Good!" he said. "That'll put a stop to Levi's game, and no mistake! When his pater comes down, and they go into the affair, they'll find that you've got there first!"

Mr. Webb nodded.

"Exactly," he said. "That is the precise idea, Fullwood. Our Jewish friends will obtain a big surprise."

Five minutes later, quite unknown to Mr. Webb and Fullwood, three customers quietly left the Cafe. They were Handforth and Church and McClure. The three juniors had succeeded in getting out nicely, and once they were in the street, Handforth turned to his chums.

"By George!" he exclaimed. "Did you hear?"

"Yes—nearly everything!" said Church.

"The rotters!" exclaimed Handforth warmly. "They mean to diddle Levi! They're going to buy this property first—before Levi's pater can get down to St. Frank's. They're going to buy it to-night!"

"Not exactly buy it," corrected McClure. "They're going to get an option on it, or something of that sort—whatever it means."

"Well, I suppose they're going to fix the thing," said Church. "You know—they'll make a proposition, and leave it open, so that they can continue if they want to. At the same time, nobody else can step in. That's the idea, I suppose."

"Very likely," said Handforth. "In any case, Mr. Webb didn't reckon with me!"

"With you?"

"Yes!"

"But what can you do, Handy?"

"I can do a lot!" replied Handforth grimly. "In the first place, we've got to warn Levi of what's happened. We've got to rush back to St. Frank's as we've never rushed before. Then, it's quite likely that we shall be able to go along to this Mrs. Cubitt, and fix things up. Levi will come with us, of course—he'll do all the business. But it will be a terrific rush—and, even then, it's a ten to one chance that Webb has got there first. My hat! It's going to be a race!"

And, without any unnecessary delay, Handforth and Co. got their bicycles, mounted them, and hurried off towards

St. Frank's at a breathless speed. When they arrived, they rushed without ceremony straight to the Ancient House, to the end study in the Remove passage. Handforth burst in without ceremony. Church and McClure were close behind him.

The three of them were muddy, hot, and practically out of breath. They had been riding extremely hard, and they showed every sign of it.

"By Gum!" exclaimed Dick Goodwin, as Handforth and Co. plunged into the study.

"Where's Levi?" gasped Handforth. "Oh, there he is. Levi! I've got some news for you—important news!"

Solomon Levi was in the middle of his prep., and he looked up sharply. Just at that moment, noticing that something interesting was taking place in the end study, I looked in. I happened to be passing with my chums, and we all three halted.

"Some news?" repeated Levi. "What do you mean, Handforth?"

"Webb knows all about that idea of yours!" panted Handforth, breathing hard.

"That cad, Fullwood, has told him all about it—he's given the game away—he's let the cat out of the bag!"

Solomon Levi started.

"By my life!" he ejaculated.

"Not only that," said Handforth.

"But I've been investigating—I've been doing some detective work. And I've discovered that that property in the High Street at Bannington belongs to an old lady named Mrs. Cubitt. Webb is going to her to-night—he's probably on his way now—and he means to buy that property immediately—just so that you and your pater will be dished!"

"Begad!" exclaimed Sir Montie.

"That has certainly done it!" I exclaimed grimly. "Levi never anticipated anything of that sort!"

The Jewish boy smiled.

"Well, I thought it was just as well to be on the safe side," he remarked calmly. "Awfully good of you to go to all this trouble, Handforth, but it was quite unnecessary."

Handforth nearly choked.

"Un-necessary!" he gasped. "Why, you—you—"

"You see," explained Levi calmly, "I visited Mrs. Cubitt yesterday!"

"What?"

"Eh?"

"You—you visited Mrs. Cubitt?"

"Yes; and I fixed things up!" said the Jewish boy. "I've obtained an option on the property which does not expire until the last day of the year."

"Great pip!" said Handforth blankly.

"So, you see, the genial Mr. Webb is quite helpless!" smiled Solomon Levi. "I've got the option safely stowed away, and I don't care a snap of the fingers for Webb, or a hundred others like him!"

We all stared at Levi, and marvelled. Without the slightest doubt, the Jewish boy was as keen as mustard on business matters.

CHAPTER III.

NOTHING DOING!

MR. STANLEY WEBB was in a curiously unsettled state of mind after he had parted with Fullwood outside the Japanese Cafe, in the Bannington High Street.

The proprietor of the Bannington Cinema knew well enough that a crisis had arrived in his affairs. For a good many years he had had everything his own way in Bannington. He had coined money at his miserable little cinema; he had made quite a small fortune there. And, until this evening, he had fondly believed that he would be allowed to go on accumulating money at the same rate. His picture-theatre had always been well patronised—but only because it was the only cinema in the town.

If a new picture-house was erected, it would certainly be a much better one than Webb's, and it stood to reason that the public would patronise this new place in preference to the old one. It would be a large place, too, and there were not sufficient inhabitants in Bannington to keep the two places going.

This news concerning Solomon Levi had upset Webb considerably. He knew that he would have to move—and move quickly. But, although he knew the necessity was acute—although he was anxious to spoil Levi's game—he did not exactly see how he could do it on his own. He was certainly not going to risk every farthing he possessed on this venture, and, in any case, he did not possess

sufficient money to finance an ambitious scheme. It would require a small fortune to buy the old haunted house and to transform it into an up-to-date cinema.

But Mr. Webb had a card up his sleeve.

And it did not take him long to come to a decision. Shortly after leaving Fullwood, he turned his steps in the direction of the Grapes Hotel—the largest hotel in Bannington. Arriving there, Mr. Webb selected one of his cards, and requested that it should be sent up without delay to a certain Mr. Hooker J. Ryan. This gentleman was staying in the town at the moment, and Webb had already had an interview with him.

Webb did not know very much about Mr. Hooker J. Ryan, except that he was an American. And Mr. Webb suspected that Mr. Ryan was not a very straightforward person. He was a company promoter, particularly interested in cinemas—or, to be more exact, he was the representative of a big syndicate which had planned to open up picture-theatres all over the country.

This Mr. Ryan had approached Webb on the very subject only a day or two earlier, but Webb had turned it down. He was quite certain that the American syndicate would not bother about Bannington, and Webb had not given the matter much thought. Now, however, he was feeling very different.

He was soon escorted up to Mr. Ryan's private apartments, and he was ushered in.

Mr. Hooker J. Ryan was sitting down in an easy-chair, reading the evening paper. He was a large man—not particularly stout, but bigly made. His cheeks were flabby, and he was clean-shaven. There was something about him which reminded Mr. Webb of a fish. Certainly, Mr. Ryan was not a very prepossessing looking individual.

"I thought I'd like a few words with you, Mr. Ryan," said Webb, as he entered.

"Sure!" said the other. "Come right in!"

Mr. Webb entered, closed the door, and sat down in a chair opposite his host. The American was looking at him in a speculative kind of way, and Webb decided to waste no time in getting to the point.

"About that proposal of yours, Mr. Ryan," he said. "Do I understand that

you intend to push the thing forward? Are you thinking about giving this town serious attention?"

"I've settled on nothing definite yet," replied Mr. Ryan. "Bannington is a fairly large village, and I've got a notion that it could easily support a larger picture-theatre than yours, Mr. Webb. But I reckon it would be a costly matter to build a new cinema, and I'm not sure whether we should see our money back. Have you any suggestion to make?"

"I have!" replied Webb, leaning forward. "There's a site in the High Street which would do perfectly for a picture-theatre. Very likely you have noticed an old, empty house——"

"Sure," agreed Mr. Ryan, at once, "I have noticed that house, Mr. Webb. It struck me yesterday that a picture-theatre could be erected there quite easily; in fact, I have been giving the matter some attention, and I intend making inquiries about the property tomorrow."

"That is my idea exactly!" said Webb. "It would be advantageous to us both, I think, if we joined forces in this matter, Mr. Ryan. I am prepared to go into the matter seriously——"

"Have you any capital?" inquired the American.

"Yes, a certain amount," replied Webb, with reserve. "But we can go into those details later. In any case, I am prepared to supply a tidy sum of money towards the scheme. If we opened a picture-theatre on that site, right in the middle of the High Street, we should be on velvet."

The American sat forward in his chair. "See here, Mr. Webb!" he said. "You appear to be in the right kind of mood for me, and I'll have a serious talk with you. Does that go?"

"I came here with that purpose," said Webb.

"Good! Then we can get busy!" said Mr. Ryan. "I'll tell you just the truth, Mr. Webb. The syndicate which I represent is willing enough to open up a new cinema in Bannington. And we should have settled on the thing without hesitation, but for one fact. That fact is—you!"

"I don't quite understand," said Webb.

"Say, it's fairly simple," went on the American. "We've been thinking it out this way. If we commence operations

on this new cinema, we shall have your opposition. That's how we looked at it. Get me? We know that you've got money behind you, and we were half afraid to start anything because of your money. For example, supposing we put up this cinema, it was quite on the cards that you would enlarge your place—enlarge it, improve it, and make it thoroughly up to date. If you did that, our new cinema would stand a chance, but, at the same time, it wouldn't be a big success. A great number of people would still patronise your place, seeing that it has been long established. If you brought your house up to the standard of ours—in comfort, and everything else—we should probably be on a loser. On the whole, the syndicate half decided to turn the thing down. But, if you're agreeable to come in with us—well, that's a different proposition."

"I am agreeable," said Mr. Webb promptly. "That is precisely my idea, Mr. Ryan. If we can go into this thing together, and build a magnificent new cinema in the High Street—why, I'll close my old place up completely. There'll be no opposition, and we shall have everything in our own hands."

"That's the right talk!" said Mr. Ryan, nodding. "We'll go right into this. Do you know who this haunted house belongs to?"

"Yes," replied Webb; "it's the property of Mrs. Cubitt, who lives about two miles away, on the Helmford Road. She's been trying to sell the place for years, but nobody would touch it."

"I guess it'll be going cheap?"

"It's bound to be."

"What do you estimate the figure would be?"

"Well, nothing above two thousand," replied Webb.

"Gee! That would be giving it to us!" said Mr. Ryan, sticking a cigar between his teeth. "The property is worth six times that amount, I guess. But it's got a bad reputation, and that's what makes it cheap."

"One moment!" interrupted Webb. "I haven't got to the point. I'm extremely keen to get ahead with this business at once—this evening."

"Say, you're a bit speedy, aren't you?"

"There's need to be!" replied Webb grimly. "Look here, Mr. Ryan, I'll tell

you the truth—somebody else is after that property!"

"What?"

"One of the boys at St. Frank's School—an infernal Jew—Solomon Levi—has been talking about buying that old haunted house," went on Mr. Webb. "His scheme is to turn it into a picture-theatre, and put me out of business. That's his idea, and I understand that he intends to approach Mrs. Cubitt with regard to the sale of the property without any delay."

"I don't reckon this scares me any," said Mr. Ryan, smiling. "A schoolboy! Say, my friend, there's no need to worry —"

"You don't understand," interrupted Webb. "There's not only this schoolboy to think about, but his father. Levi, senior, is coming down to Bannington to-morrow—and, from what I understand, he is a keen business man. He's a millionaire, too, and he won't let any grass grow under his feet once he arrives. You understand? If we mean to settle on this thing, we must settle on it now. There's no time for hesitation or delay. This St. Frank's fellow may be a schoolboy, but I can give you my word that he is alive. Once he and his father get going to-morrow, there'll be no stopping them, and we shall find ourselves in the cold. Once they secure that property, I might just as well close my doors."

Mr. Ryan nodded slowly.

"I guess you're right," he agreed. "We shall have to be slick if we mean to do anything, Mr. Webb. I've had a good deal of experience with Jews in business matters, and you can take it from me that they don't let any grass grow under their feet. No, sir! When it comes to a matter of business, I take off my hat to any Jew."

"So, you see, we must look sharp," went on Mr. Webb, rising to his feet. "This is a splendid chance, Mr. Ryan. If we co-operate, and put up this new cinema together, we shall have the monopoly in Bannington. My proposal is for us to go into the thing together in harmony. And it is only necessary for us to get to work straight away in order to push this confounded Jew right out of the running."

"What do you propose?"

"Well, I suggest that we should go up to Mrs. Cubitt now, this very minute," said the cinema proprietor. "We can open preliminaries—discuss matters on

the edge, so to speak. And perhaps we shall be able to obtain an option on the property—that would be the best thing. If we do that we shall be on safe ground. Levi and his father will be able to do nothing.”

“I guess you’re right!” said Mr. Hooker J. Ryan briskly. “We’ll get right along, Mr. Webb.”

They continued talking for a few moments longer, and then left the hotel. They walked briskly down the High Street until they arrived at a garage. Webb’s car was here; it had been having a new rear tyre fitted. It was ready for the road, and the two men lost no time in getting aboard and starting off in the direction of Helmford.

The journey was only a short one, and they soon arrived at a comfortable, old-fashioned house, which was set well back from the road, and standing quite by itself. Webb drove his car right inside, and the two men alighted opposite the front door.

Upon inquiry, they found that Mrs. Cubitt was at home, and was willing to see them. A few moments later they were ushered into a very comfortable sitting-room, and there, in an easy-chair, sat the owner of the old haunted house in the Bannington High Street.

She was an elderly lady, but quite active-looking. She fixed a keen gaze upon the two men as they entered, and she requested them to be seated. Mrs. Cubitt was rather stout, her complexion was fresh, and she wore spectacles.

“I must apologise, Mrs. Cubitt, for calling upon you at this hour of the evening,” said Webb. “I do not think it is necessary for me to introduce myself—I am the proprietor of the cinema in Bannington.”

“Yes, I know that, Mr. Webb,” said the old lady. “May I ask the reason for this visit?”

“Certainly,” replied Webb. “This gentleman is Mr. H. J. Ryan, and he represents a powerful syndicate. We are anxious to make inquiries concerning your property in the High Street—the old empty house which has been standing in that position for the last eighteen or twenty years.”

Mrs. Cubitt gave a little start.

“Dear, dear!” she exclaimed. “You are thinking of buying the old house?”

“Exactly,” said Mr. Webb. “If you will tell us your price, Mrs. Cubitt—”

“I am sorry, gentlemen, but this visit of yours will prove useless,” interrupted the old lady. “Negotiations for the sale of the property are already on the way!”

The two men exchanged glances.

“You—you have sold the place?” asked Webb quickly.

“No, I haven’t sold it yet,” replied Mrs. Cubitt; “but I am hoping that a sale will result within a few weeks. I have given an option on the property which does not expire until the thirty-first of December.”

“Say, we’ve been left!” said Mr. Ryan grimly. “I guess we have arrived too late, Webb.”

“One moment—one moment!” exclaimed Webb. “Can you tell us who has been negotiating with you, Mrs. Cubitt?”

“Well, I don’t see that it matters if I tell you,” said the old lady. “A young gentleman named Levi called upon me yesterday, and I have arranged to sell the property, freehold, for two thousand pounds. I am hoping that the business will go through all right, but, if it doesn’t, I shall be able to discuss matters with you—that is, after the option has expired.”

“Look here, Mrs. Cubitt,” said Ryan grimly. “We are willing to offer you the sum of two thousand five hundred pounds for that property—”

“Oh, dear!” said their hostess. “If I had only known of this earlier! If Mr. Levi decides to purchase the property, I shall be compelled to conclude the sale. It is most remarkable, gentlemen. For years and years, I have been unable to sell the place. I have tried every way possible, but nobody would buy it—nobody would offer a farthing over five or six hundred pounds. And, naturally, I wouldn’t let the house go at such a figure. And now, within two days, I get these offers. How could I possibly be prepared for anything of this nature?”

“See, Mrs. Cubitt, this is purely a business affair,” said Webb. “We have realised that the property is valuable for a certain purpose, and I do not think you need take Levi’s offer seriously.”

“But, Mr. Webb, he has my option!” said the old lady.

“But that isn’t valid.”

“Oh, but I am sure it is—”

“I do not see how it can be valid,” interrupted Webb. “The boy is under age, he is merely a junior of St.

Frank's. It is perfectly absurd for you to enter into any business negotiations with a more youngster like that. I think you can take it for granted, that the whole thing is more or less a joke. But we are here seriously—we mean business, and we will settle the deal at once, if you are agreeable."

But Mrs. Cubitt shook her head.

"You are mistaken, gentlemen," she said. "The option I gave to the lad is valid. Naturally enough, I should very much like to accept your offer, but I cannot do so. And this option was not addressed to the boy, as you imagine."

"Not addressed to the boy?" repeated Webb.

"Oh, no!" said Mrs. Cubitt. "The lad made it expressly clear that he was acting for his father, Mr. Isaac Levi, of Fenchurch Street, London."

"Well, I'm hanged!" said Webb blankly.

He sat back in his chair, fairly staggered. For it was becoming perfectly obvious to him, that Master Solomon Levi was as keen as mustard. The Jewish boy had fought the rogues at every turn. Levi had thought of everything.

"Oh, so this option has been addressed to Mr. Isaac Levi," said Ryan. "In that case, Mrs. Cubitt, there is nothing much that we can do, I am afraid. But, say, you've got to remember that this is to your advantage. If you close with us you'll get five hundred pounds extra. Is there any way in which you can revoke that option?"

Mrs. Cubitt shook her head.

"I'm very sorry, gentlemen, but I cannot do business that way," she said coldly. "In any case, the transaction was thoroughly legal. Master Levi brought my own solicitor with him. indeed, he arranged everything with the solicitor to begin with."

"At the time?"

"Yes," said the old lady. "My solicitor thought of all the details, and I merely signed the option. It is quite legal, I can assure you, and you are merely wasting your time by staying here."

Solomon Levi had taken no chance—he had done the thing thoroughly!"

A few minutes later, Mr. Hooker J. Ryan, and Mr. Stanley Webb took their departure. Outside, in the gloom of the

evening, they looked at one another rather grimly.

"By heaven!" rapped out Webb. "That boy is infernally smart!"

Mr. Ryan nodded.

"Just a little too smart for you, I imagine, Mr. Webb," he exclaimed. "It remains to be seen whether he is smart enough for me!"

CHAPTER IV.

FAIR MEANS—OR FOUT!

ANXIETY was written large on the faces of Webb and Ryan as they motored back to Bannington. They had suddenly realised, with something of a shock, that they were dealing with somebody who had his eyes very wide open.

Solomon Levi had obtained an option on that property in the Bannington High Street. And, with rare astuteness, he had had the option addressed to his father, Mr. Isaac Levi. And the whole thing had been done legally, in the presence of Mrs. Cubitt's solicitor. There could be no question about it—no tampering with it.

Both Ryan and Webb were beginning to understand that the haunted house idea was a fine proposition. The site was a wonderful one for a Picture Theatre, and Levi was first in the field.

"Confound!" exclaimed Ryan suddenly as they were entering the town. "Why didn't we move before, Webb? Why didn't we get on to this thing sooner?"

"How were we to know that this infernal Jewish boy would butt in, in this way?" exclaimed Webb. "Until this evening I didn't know anything about it. I never thought of any such thing."

Ryan nodded.

"Well, the boy has put one over you all right," he said. "There's no doubt about that, Webb. And I'm just beginning to get the hang of things. That Picture Theatre in the High Street, would be a gold mine. It would simply coin money hand over fist, I guess. Bannington is a pretty large place, taking it altogether, and it could easily support a big Picture

Theatre. There's money in pictures nowadays—big money. That's why we're over here, in your little island. Say, I'd like to bash this boy, if I could.

"We're going to bash them!" said Webb. "Do you think I'm going to let these dirty Jews invade the place? Do you think I'm going to have my cinema closed up? If this thing goes through I shall be ruined. There won't be a dog's chance for me."

"Well, it's up to you," said the American. "You know this district better than I do, Webb, and if you've got any suggestion to make, I shall welcome it. If there is any other site—"

"Man alive, that's the only possible place in the whole town!" interrupted Webb. "You ought to know that. The High Street is the only place for a cinema and that old haunted house is right in the very centre of the High Street, right in the busiest shopping area. Any Picture Theatre opened there would be an instant success. The thing is so obvious, that I can't possibly understand why I never thought of it before."

"I guess that's the way of things," said Mr. Ryan, nodding. "Until somebody else gets in on the job, you don't think anything about it. This has made you jump some, I guess. Well, it seems to me that the only course for us to adopt, is to approach the boy."

"Levi?"

"Sure!" said Mr. Ryan. "I am suggesting that we should go over to the school, now—right now."

Webb took a deep breath.

"That's a good idea!" he agreed. "In fact, it's the only idea that's any good at all. Levi's father won't be down until to-morrow, and the boy has probably got that option on him. If we could only get it away, we should be safe; and there's just a chance that we might be able to get it."

"We'll do our best," said Mr. Ryan.

"This boy is Jewish, and he would do anything for money!" went on Webb. "Jews aren't particular, and for money they'll go to almost any lengths. My idea is this. We'll go straight to Levi, and tell him that we know exactly what he has done. We'll ask him to hand over that option to us, and we'll offer him a fair price for it. Say fifty pounds."

"Not enough?" said Mr. Ryan firmly. "I'll allow fifty pounds is a tidy sum for a schoolboy, but we'll need to make it a hundred, Webb. One hundred pounds might do the trick. The boy will get that for himself, and he will probably hand over the option to us. It'll be worth every cent of the money, you can take it from me."

Webb was beginning to feel more optimistic. Of course, he had forgotten for the moment Solomon Levi was a Jew—and he would naturally jump at the chance of making a hundred pounds for himself. He would probably drop the whole thing at once when he received that offer. In any case, Webb and Ryan were absolutely helpless while that option was in existence. It wouldn't expire until the last day of the year—and, before then, Mr. Isaac Levi would probably conclude the sale.

Without the slightest doubt, Solomon Levi had been extremely cute in obtaining the option. For, without that option in his possession, he could have done nothing. Ryan and Webb could have gone over his head at once, without any trouble. But, with that option in Levi's possession, the enemy could do nothing at all.

The two men were quite right when they said that no time was to be lost. The only thing was to hurry up and see what could be done now—at the eleventh hour.

And, with this object in view, Webb drove his car swiftly along the road towards St. Frank's. And he and Ryan arrived just at about eight o'clock. It was now comparatively early, although the gates of the school were closed. Nearly all the juniors were in their studies, either finishing their prep., or reading, or chatting.

Mr. Josh Cuttle, the porter, opened the gates in response to a peal on the bell, and Webb drove his car into the Triangle. He did not particularly relish the idea of coming to St. Frank's, after the experience he had had of the boys. But, in this case, he cared for nothing. He was so anxious concerning that property that he would have risked anything.

But Webb did not forget the several encounters he had had with the St. Frank's fellows. They had shown him quite plainly that they did not like him, and that he was unpopular. He was



1. "Is that you, Mr. Webb? Oh, good! My name is Fullwood, I belong to St. Frank's—."

As he caught these words, Handforth drew back amazed and indignant.

2. Mr. Webb was collared, and almost before he knew what had happened a dozen hands grasped him and he was yanked off his feet.

therefore coming right into the lions' cage now.

As it happened, Tubbs, the Ancient House page boy, was in sight when the two men entered the Ancient House lobby. They called the page boy at once, and instructed him to direct them straight away to the study occupied by Levi of the Remove.

"Yes, sir," said Tubbs. "This way, sir!"

Tubbs addressed himself to Mr. Ryan, who was far better dressed than Webb. He had his eye on a tip, and he assumed that Mr. Ryan was the most likely customer.

"Here you are, sir!" said Tubbs, tapping upon the end study door, and opening it.

"Step in, sir."

Mr. Ryan stepped in, and Webb followed his companion. They found themselves in a comfortable little study, where a cheerful fire was glowing in the grate. A single electric light gleamed overhead, and in the centre of the room there stood a table, at which the juniors were seated.

"They both looked up as the visitors entered, and they were both very much surprised. For it was certainly a very unusual event for two juniors to receive visitors of this type.

"By Gum!" exclaimed Dick Goodwin, dropping his pen, and blotting his exercise book.

Solomon Levi smiled.

"Good evening, gentleman," he said calmly.

The Jewish boy knew at once why these men had come. He recognised Webb on the instant—but the other man was a stranger to him. But Levi was under no misapprehension regarding the object of their visit. Both the men were looking grim and determined.

"We haven't come here on a merely friendly visit," said Webb curtly. "This is a business matter, Levi, and I want to talk business to you. In addition, it's private."

"All right," said Levi. "Go ahead."

Dick Goodwin rose to his feet.

"Perhaps I'd better get outside——" he began.

"My dear chap, sit just where you are," said Levi. "There's no need for you to move. This matter isn't so private that you can't hear all about it. As a matter of fact, I suppose you

know pretty nearly all the details already. These gentlemen have come here to talk to me about the option I obtained from Mrs. Cubitt!"

Mr. Ryan nodded.

"You've hit it right," he said briskly. "That's exactly what we have come for. We have seen Mrs. Cubitt, and I guess you've been pretty smart. I understand you've got an option, in your father's name, for that property in the High Street of Bannington."

"That's quite correct," said Levi. "I can't understand why you have come here—I mean, I don't know what good this visit will do. But if you want to speak to me, well, go ahead. I've got some ears, and I'm listening."

The Jewish boy's coolness was rather irritating to the two men.

"Well, we're not going to waste any time," broke in Webb. "You've got that option, and as it happens, we particularly want to buy that property. Is that clear?"

"Perfectly," said Levi. "But you're not going to buy it. That's clear too, isn't it?"

"We're not going to quarrel with you, Levi," went on Webb. "We've come here on a matter of business, as I said before. If you will hand over that option to us we'll give you the sum of one hundred pounds—down! We'll give it to you in cash, at this very moment. But you must give us that option, and promise me that you will do nothing further in this affair."

Solomon Levi smiled.

"Nothing doing!" he said shortly.

"One hundred pounds——"

"You can make it one thousand, if you like," interrupted Levi. "It won't make any difference. I know when I'm on a good thing, believe me. And I'm not backing out of this concern. Business is business, and I've got on to a cert. That's all. Good-evening!"

Levi's manner was certainly disconcerting. There was no arguing with him. There was a note of finality about his voice which seemed to make it utterly ridiculous for his visitors to press the matter further. Levi was undoubtedly a schoolboy—but in business matters, he was as keen as any ordinary man of forty.

"Look here, my lad," said Mr. Ryan. "You'd better think over this matter carefully. This option isn't any use to

you—you must realise that. Even if your father takes it up, and buys the property, you'll get nothing out of it. I guess it's up to you to do the best thing—for yourself. Hand that option over, and you'll receive one hundred pounds——"

"You said all that before," interrupted Levi. "It's simply a waste of time to say it again. You want the option, don't you?"

"Yes," said Webb eagerly. "If you will give it to us, or, rather sell it to us——"

"Wait a moment," interrupted Levi, opening the drawer of the table, and producing a sealed foolscap envelope. "I'll tell you what my terms are."

"Good!" said Webb. "I thought you would be reasonable."

Both the men were eyeing that envelope greedily.

"Well, in a nutshell, I want the sum of five thousand pounds for this option!" said Levi calmly.

Both the visitors glared.

"I'm not joking!" snapped Webb. "I want to know your terms——"

"Well, I've told you my terms," said Levi. "Five thousand pounds—and not a farthing less!"

He was smiling, for he knew that this would serve as a dismissal for the men. Naturally he did not expect to get anything at all for the option—that is why he had named such a ridiculous price. He was merely pulling the legs of his guests.

"Look here, Levi——" began Webb.

"Say, Webb, we might as well be getting," interrupted Ryan. "This boy isn't taking any of it. He's made up his mind, and we won't shift him. The best thing we can do is to shift ourselves!"

"Exactly!" said Levi. "Good-evening!"

He fingered the sealed envelope for a minute or two, and then replaced it in the drawer of the table. He turned the key in the flimsy lock, and then placed the key in his waistcoat pocket.

"You've been beaten in this race, gentlemen!" he went on. "I happened to be there first—that's all."

Mr. Ryan and Webb said no more. They know well enough that they had been beaten, as Levi had said. There was nothing further to do—except go away. So, without a word, they turned to the door, and left the study.

They were both angry—not a second later their anger turned to something like surprise and consternation. For the Remove passage was filled with juniors. Somehow or other, the news had got about that Levi had visitors. Tubbs, no doubt, had spread the story. And the Remove had come upon the scene to learn the truth.

"My only hat!" shouted Handforth. "It's Webb—it's that rotter from Bunnington!"

"Great Scott!"

"Grab him!"

"Let's frog-march him out of the Triangle!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Of all the cheek!" roared Handforth. "Fancy that rotter having the nerve to come into St. Frank's—after what happened the other day! We'll jolly well show him that we won't put up with any of his beastly nerve!"

"Hurrah!"

"Lend a hand, you fellows!"

A crowd of juniors surged forward, with the intention of grasping Mr. Webb, and ragging him. The cinema proprietor backed away, and dodged behind his companion.

"If you dare to touch me, I will report you to your head master!" he shouted shrilly. "Go away—leave me alone, you infernal brats!"

"Infernal brats, are we?" bellowed Handforth. "Did you hear that, you chaps? Are we going to stand it?"

"No!" roared the crowd.

"Good!" shouted Handforth. "Collar him!"

Mr. Webb was collared.

Almost before he knew what had happened, a dozen hands grasped him, and he was yanked off his feet. Then, struggling and kicking, he was carried triumphantly down the Remove passage, through the lobby, and into the Triangle. Mr. Ryan was not interfered with. Nevertheless, the American hurried out as soon as he possibly could, and he made a bee-line for the motor-car. It did not take him long to start the engine, and drive the car out into the road. He felt that he was much safer there. Meanwhile, Mr. Webb was being frog-marched victoriously round the Triangle. This performance was being executed by a yelling crowd of juniors. And, by the time the affair was over, Mr. Webb was almost in a

state of exhaustion. He was almost on the point of foaming at the mouth with rage.

"You—you young dogs!" he snarled, when, at last, he found himself upon his feet. "I'll have the law on you for this! I'll—I'll——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Clear out of these grounds, you rotter!"

"We don't want your sort here!"

"Buzz off!"

"By thunder! You—you——"

Mr. Webb fled.

He had observed that several juniors were about to rush forward again, and he did not think that he could survive another ordeal. So Mr. Webb took to his heels, and quickly flew through the gates, into the road. Then he jumped into the car, and it at once went speeding away down the lane. It was followed by a howl from the juniors.

"I guess they seem a fairly lively crowd!" remarked Mr. Ryan, with a chuckle.

His companion nearly choked.

"The—the confounded young brats!" he snarled pantingly. "I wish we'd never come near the school! We've done no good at all—we've done nothing! That Jewish kid is as hard as iron. I'd like to horsewhip him!"

"I guess you've made a mistake, Mr. Webb," said Ryan. "Our journey hasn't been for nothing, as you seem to imagine."

"But we haven't got the option—and there's no chance of getting that confounded kid to sell!" snapped Webb.

"We can do nothing, man—absolutely nothing!"

The American did not speak for some little time. He was allowing Webb to adjust himself, and to cool down somewhat. And it was not until the motor-car was nearly half way to Bannington that Ryan spoke.

"I guess our visit was successful in one way," he remarked. "We didn't obtain the option, but we know where it is."

Webb started.

"What do you mean?" he said quickly.

"Say, you've got brains—use them!" exclaimed Ryan. "That option is only just inside a flimsy table-drawer. I don't believe junior studies are very well protected in these big schools. We were

willing to pay a hundred pounds for that option, Webb—but I fancy that we can obtain it for much less than that."

"When—how?"

"Between one and three o'clock in the morning—that's when!" replied Mr. Ryan grimly. "I'll leave you to imagine how!"

"Yes, but—but we couldn't do that!" exclaimed Webb huskily. "It would be too risky, Mr. Ryan. What if we were seen—or caught——"

"Say, there's no need for you to get scared any," said Mr. Ryan calmly.

"You don't figure that I'm suggesting that we should do this job? No, sir! I've got somebody who'll be quite willing to take any risks—and it won't cost us a hundred pounds. Twenty will be sufficient, Webb. Just leave it to me."

"If I leave it to you, you might think it necessary for me to be out of the thing altogether!" said Webb. "I don't want that, Mr. Ryan——"

"Say, don't get cold feet!" interrupted the American. "We won't leave you out of it, Webb. We need you. You'll be mighty useful later on."

And the two men continued their journey to Bannington. Their mission had failed, but they had not given up hope.

The one thing that mattered was that option.

And both Ryan and Webb were firmly determined to obtain that most important document before Mr. Isaac Levi appeared upon the scene. Having failed to accomplish their object by fair means, these rascals were not hesitating to adopt—foul!

CHAPTER V.

FATTY LITTLE ON THE JOB.

SOLOMON LEVI chuckled.

"Proof, my dear chap—proof!" he exclaimed calmly.

"Eh?"

"Proof of what?"

Levi and Goodwin were in their study, and a good many juniors had crowded in, too—just to ask a few questions regarding the late visitors. I was there with Sir Montic Tregellis-West.

"Well, there's only one thing that Levi can mean," I exclaimed. "The fact

that these two men came here this evening proves quite conclusively that Levi has done a very fine stroke of business in obtaining that option."

"Rather!" said Handforth. "It was a top-hole idea. We must admit that Levi is pretty wide awake!"

The Jewish boy smiled.

"One needs to be wide awake in these days, believe me!" he exclaimed. "You see, I obtained an option for my father, and I'm absolutely certain that the dad will agree when I see him to-morrow. It was a chance, of course; but business can't be done unless people are willing to take chances. See the result of this?"

"What is the result?" asked McClure.

"Why, these two men have come here, and they have offered me one hundred pounds for that option!" said Levi.

"Phew!"

"A—a hundred quid!"

"Great Scott!"

"Exactly!" smiled Levi. "They offered me a hundred pounds down, cash, if I gave them that option. Doesn't that prove that I made no mistake in getting busy on this cinema idea? That site in Bannington High Street is worth thousands more than I have got it for. These men know it, too."

"If they know it, why didn't they buy it first?" asked Church.

"Well, because they didn't realise it until now," replied Levi. "That's just the way of things. Property often lies idle for years and years, simply because people don't appreciate its value. Then somebody comes along, makes an offer, and about a dozen other people want it at the same time. Anyhow, I was first in the field—and the one who gets there first generally finishes first!"

"Well, we've shown Webb what we think of him!" chuckled Handforth. "I'll bet he's feeling pretty uncomfortable now. He dropped about ten bob out of his pocket, a bunch of keys, and a pocket-knife."

"What are you going to do with them?" I asked.

"They're already wrapped up and placed in an envelope," replied Handforth. "We're going to post them to-morrow. That little cad, Long, wanted to stick to some of the money, but I gave him a punch on the nose!"

The excitement had soon died down, and the juniors went back to their own

studies. And Dick Goodwin and Solomon Levi were left to themselves.

"I'm jolly pleased that this has happened, Dick," said Levi. "It's made me feel a lot more comfortable. I haven't made any mistake—I'm quite sure of that."

"Yes, you seem to be on pretty safe ground," said the Lancashire boy. "By gum! If your pater falls in with this idea, and this cinema becomes a reality, it will be a huge thing. But weren't you talking something about the fellows having shares?"

"Exactly," said Levi. "A preliminary company will be formed, you know, and there will be two thousand shares. I'm going to advise the chaps to buy all they can—as many as they can. They'll be tremendously valuable later on, when we turn the preliminary company into a big public concern."

"You mean they might be valuable," said Goodwin. "Shares go down sometimes, you know, Solly."

"Not shares of this kind," replied Levi. "Why, this thing is absolutely a certainty. Believe me, there's no chance about it at all. This picture-theatre will be a success from the very first night, and it will continue to be a success. Fortunes are being made in pictures every day. It's the best game going nowadays. You can take it from me—Come in!"

A tap sounded upon the door, and, in response to Levi's invitation, a hamper appeared—at least, so it seemed at first, but the two juniors soon discovered that Tubbs was in the rear of the hamper. The page-boy staggered in, and placed the hamper on the table with a thud.

"By gum! What's that?" asked Dick Goodwin, in surprise.

"Just come up from the station, Master Goodwin!" said Tubbs, mopping his brow. "My heye! It ain't arf a weight, too!"

"But hampers aren't usually delivered at this time in the evening!" said Dick.

"I know they ain't, Master Goodwin," replied Tubbs. "But this one is marked 'perishable,' so the porter brought it up, seeing that the night is rather mild. He's waiting outside now, Master Levi," added the page-boy significantly.

Levi chuckled.

"Waiting for his tip, I suppose," he said. "Well, it was jolly decent of him to bring it. I was expecting this hamper,

but I didn't think it would arrive until the morning. How much does the porter charge for this kind of thing, Tubby?"

"He don't charge nothing, Master Levi," replied Tubbs. "He just did it to oblige you—although, naturally, he wouldn't object to a bob or two!"

"Well, you can give him this half-crown," said Levi. "And here's a bob for you, Tubby."

"Thanks! You're a gent, Master Levi!" said Tubbs delightedly.

The page-boy had heard from several juniors that Levi, being a Jew, would be as mean as a miser over tips; but this did not appear to be the case. Of course, fellows like Hammaton or the Honourable Douglas Singleton would probably have given tips of double the amount, but they were an exception. The majority of the fellows would only have given a shilling or sixpence. Levi was quite generous.

"My only hat!" said Goodwin, after Tubbs had gone, and the door was closed. "What the dickens is in there?"

"Grub!" said Levi.

"By gum!"

"I expect my mother thinks that they are half starving me down here!" chuckled Levi. "Anyhow, the stuff will come in jolly handy. If we can't manage it all, I dare say some of the other fellows will give us a hand. My mam promised to send me a hamper like this pretty often!"

"Lucky beggar!" said Goodwin.

Levi proceeded to cut through the strings which bound the top of the hamper down. Then, after lifting the thing to the floor, a good deal of straw and shavings were removed, and then the two juniors commenced unpacking the contents.

"Good!" said Levi. "A roast chicken!"

The chicken looked very delicious. It was wrapped in white linen, and it was cooked to a turn.

"I'll bet the other chaps don't get hampers like this!" said Dick. "Why, I've never seen anything so extravagant before. Wine, too! I shouldn't have thought that the Head would have allowed—"

"It's not intoxicating wine, you duffer!" grinned Levi. "It's only fruit stuff—sweet and flat, you know. Still, it goes down all right. Look at the cakes here—and some home-made bread, too!"

By my life, we shall have a jolly nice spread to-morrow!"

The good things came out of the basket in rapid succession—cakes, several varieties of pastry, and quite a big assortment of fried fish. There was another type of fish which Dick Goodwin did not recognise, and he was rather mystified until Levi, with a chuckle, explained that it was stuffed in a particular way—a regular Jewish dish.

"You'll like it!" said Levi. "I could eat tons of it, you know. It wouldn't be a bad idea to sample some now, along with some of this bread. And look at these biscuits, too! Don't they make your mouth water?"

There was a splendid assortment in that hamper, and the two juniors commenced packing all the stuff away in the study cupboard. By the time they had finished the cupboard was nearly full, and Levi grinned afresh as he looked into the cupboard. He realised that it would be utterly impossible for Goodwin and himself to eat all that lot before it went stale, or bad. But there were plenty of other juniors in the Remove who would be willing, and quite eager, to lend a hand. Not one morsel of that grub would be wasted.

Goodwin and Levi sampled the stuffed fish, and Dick pronounced that it was first-class—after he had grown accustomed to the taste. But, on the whole, he preferred the good old-fashioned fried variety—it suited him better.

The two juniors took no notice of the supper-bell. They did not think it necessary to go into the dining-hall for supper—they had quite enough food in their own study. And a little later on the bell rang for bed.

Goodwin and Levi were among the last to enter the dormitory, and as they came in they were regarded somewhat curiously.

"Why didn't you come in to supper?" asked Pitt. "Have you lost your appetites, or what?"

Solomon Levi grinned.

"Oh, we had supper all right!" he replied calmly. "Didn't we, Dick?"

Goodwin nodded.

"Eh, we did that!" he replied. "A champion supper it was, too—it was that!"

"Ours wasn't a champion supper!" grumbled Fatty Little.

"There was nothing to eat, to begin

with—only bread and cheese, and some beastly warm cocoa. That's the worst of these public schools—they always try to starve anybody!"

De Valerie chuckled.

"Well, I don't think you're starved, Fatty!" he said. "You demolished your own supper, and helped about half a dozen fellows out with theirs. You packed away enough for a dozen!"

Fatty Little snorted.

"What rot!" he said. "Why, I'm hungry now; there's nothing sustaining in bread and cheese. But what's this champion supper Goodwin was talking about?"

"Levi had a hamper!" explained Dick. "It arrived this evening——"

"Great dough-nuts!" exclaimed Fatty. "A—a hamper?"

"Yes!"

"But—but I didn't see it come!" said Fatty, in dismay.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Poor old Fatty!"

"Has anybody got a piece of chalk?" grinned Reginald Pitt. "We might as well chalk this up, you know! A hamper arrived for somebody and Fatty knew nothing about it!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Was—was it a big hamper?" asked the fat junior eagerly.

"Yes, a huge thing!" said Goodwin. "It was packed full of grub, too—fish and chicken, and cakes and pastry, and——"

"Don't!" groaned Fatty. "I—I can't bear to hear you talk about those things now, when I'm nearly starving! And I wasn't there—I didn't know anything about it! When did the hamper come?"

"Tubbs brought it," said Levi. "It came a little while before the supper-bell rang."

Fatty groaned again.

"I was over in the College House then!" he said. "Some silly ass told me that Bob Christine was giving a feed. But it was only a yarn, because when I got over there I found nothing, and I was chucked out of the College House on my neck!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Never mind, Fatty!" smiled Levi. "I'll give you some grub to-morrow—as much as you can eat. I'll give you a feed that you won't forget for a long time. The study cupboard is packed full, and

we shall need you to help us to get rid of the stuff!"

"Great pancakes!" said Fatty. "Couldn't—couldn't we have something now, Levi? It wouldn't take me long to sneak down, you know, and I could easily bring up some of that fish, and some of the pastries, and some of the chicken, and some of the bread, and——"

"Why not bring the lot?" inquired Pitt, grinning.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"We'd better leave them till to-morrow," said Levi. "It's against the rules to bring tuck into the dormitory. Besides, we're not hungry now, and I'm sure Fatty will be better himself if he doesn't gorge himself just before he goes to bed. Sorry, old man, but there's nothing doing. Wait until to-morrow."

Fatty uttered a deep, doleful sigh.

"I suppose there's nothing else for it!" he said miserably. "But I don't know how I shall sleep through the night!"

He got undressed in a listless kind of way, and finally rolled into bed with such force that he nearly broke the spring.

Then he pulled the blankets and sheet over him, and went off into a deep sleep.

Apparently he suffered from nightmares before the lights were extinguished, for several of the juniors in Fatty Little's vicinity became aware of queer sounds from the fat junior's bed. Glancing round, they saw that Fatty was working his mouth up and down spasmodically, and he was engaged in a desperate wrestle with the pillow. Finally, he attempted to eat a corner of it, but, finding it unpalatable, he awoke with a start, spluttering.

"Satisfied?" asked Tommy Watson, with a chuckle.

"By chutney!" gasped Fatty, sitting up. "I—I—oh, I must have been dreaming!"

"Too much cheese—that's what's the matter with you!" said Handforth severely.

"What rot!" snorted Fatty. "I was having a lovely dream, you know. I dreamt that I was in Levi's study, and the whole room was simply packed full of roast chickens. They were everywhere—on the mantelpiece, in the fender, on the table, all over the couch, and they were hanging round the walls. And there was nothing else but roast chickens."

"Frightfully interesting!" remarked Singleton, yawning.

"I was having a terrific time!" went on Fatty, smacking his lips. "I'd made a bet with somebody that I'd eat all the lot, you know, and that I'd clear the whole room within an hour. But as soon as I started eating the first chicken, I found I couldn't get through it. It was like rubber; I couldn't get my teeth into it at all——"

"That was the corner of the pillow!" grinned Watson.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"This is what comes of being a glutton, Fatty!" I said. "You demolished such a lot of supper that you've been having nightmares. The best thing you can do is to turn over on your other side, and go to sleep peacefully. You'll have plenty of grub in the morning."

"I—I was wondering if we couldn't sneak down and get some of that tuck from Levi's study——"

"Rats!" I broke in. "There's nothing doing, Fatty. You've had quite enough for one day!"

Fatty groaned, lay down on his pillow again, and forthwith went to sleep. Everybody else went to sleep, too, and within half an hour the Remove dormitory was peaceful and quiet—at least, it would have been if Handforth had been absent, but Handforth was making the air vibrate with his famous snores. As everybody was asleep, however, Handforth caused no particular disturbance.

Midnight boomed out, and then the time slowly passed until the school clock chimed out the hour of one. The night was quite still and calm, and fairly mild, considering that the month was November.

But a slight breeze sprang up just before half-past one, and one of the blinds of the dormitory, catching a puff of wind, suddenly fell into place with a slight bang—it had been caught up, somehow.

Fatty Little awoke with a start.

He had not been sleeping very soundly—probably because he had eaten so much at suppertime; or, on the other hand, it might have been because he was worrying about the feed in Levi's study. If Fatty had anything on his mind he could never sleep very soundly.

The fat junior lifted his head, and looked up and down the dormitory. Everybody was asleep. Handforth had ceased snoring, and only the regular

breathing of the juniors came to Fatty's ears.

It seemed to him that there was an empty void in the region where he usually wore his belt, and Fatty thought of all that food in Solomon Levi's cupboard. His mind flew to it quite automatically—he simply couldn't help himself.

Actually, there was no void within him at all. He was well-filled; but the knowledge that all that food was down there, in the end study, made Fatty uneasy and unsettled.

"And I've got to wait until to-morrow morning!" he groaned dismally. "I sha'n't get another wink of sleep all night! How can a chap sleep, anyhow, when he's nearly starving? I call it a bit rough——"

"Great cokernuts!"

Fatty suddenly sat up in bed like a jack-in-a-box.

An idea had come to him—an idea which ought to have suggested itself instantly. He wondered why he hadn't thought of it before. Why shouldn't he sneak down now, in the middle of the night? He was hungry, and food was waiting in Levi's study—waiting to be eaten. Why shouldn't Fatty go down now, while everything was quiet, and feed himself to his heart's content?

"By pepper, I'll do it!" decided Fatty, after about one second's hesitation. "Levi won't notice that I've been there. There's such a tremendous lot of grub that I can have a tremendous feed without anybody knowing about it!"

This was a decidedly optimistic view on Fatty's part. Once he arrived on the scene it would be a very poor look-out for Solomon Levi's supply of tuck. But the fat junior considered that he was perfectly justified. There was nothing wrong in the fact that one junior raided the study of another. It was quite commonly done in the Remove. Fatty, in fact, was an expert at the job.

Within two minutes Fatty was out of bed, and had slipped into his dressing-gown. Then he pulled his slippers on, and walked silently down the centre of the room to the door at the end. He found himself out in the corridor at length, and then he proceeded towards the head of the stairs. Arriving there, he paused, listening.

But the Ancient House was asleep, and everything was quiet. Fatty chuckled to himself. He was filled with glee at the

thought of going down into Levi's study, and helping himself to anything that took his fancy. Such an opportunity as this very seldom occurred.

It was a glorious chance, and Fatty smacked his lips as he passed down the stairs.

He smacked his lips still more when at last he stood in the end study, in front of the open cupboard.

"Great doughnuts!" exclaimed Fatty, his eyes sparkling. "What a feed! What a spread! Why, I've never seen anything like it in all my giddy life!"

Fatty had not switched the electric light on; he considered this altogether too risky. But he had brought some matches with him, and he surveyed the contents of the cupboard by the aid of one of these. Not that a light was really necessary.

Fatty seized several pieces of fried fish, two or three dainty miniature loaves of bread, and then he sat down in the corner, near the open cupboard, and commenced munching away contentedly. He was in the dark now—he didn't need any light to find his mouth!"

"Gorgeous!" he mumbled, after a moment or two.

Fatty sat there, eating away with supreme content. And the knowledge that there was more food in the cupboard gave him an extra appetite. The fish was simply delightful; it was cooked to a turn, it was beautifully browned, and the bread was perfection itself.

Fatty decided that he would be able to eat at least half a dozen cakes and pastries without their absence being noticed. This meant, of course, that he would probably demolish a dozen before he had finished.

It did not take Fatty long to finish off the fish and the bread. Then he decided, after all, that he would have another two pieces of fish before starting on the pastry.

With this idea in view, he was just about to strike a match, when he was startled by a slight sound on the window. Fatty ceased eating at once, and he turned his attention towards the window with a start.

He was, in fact, considerably startled. Who on earth could be at the window at this time of night, between half-past one and two o'clock?

It was a most astonishing occurrence, and Fatty decided that a piece of creeper

had probably blown against the window pane, or something of that kind.

But, after a few moments had passed, the sound came again, and this time Fatty was quite certain that it was not caused by creeper. He was convinced, to tell the truth, that somebody was attempting to force back the catch.

"Great Scott!" gasped the junior. "I wonder what this can mean?"

He remained as still as a mouse. He hardly dared to move, and it was fortunate that the study was dark, for the person who was attempting to get into the room had no idea that it was already occupied. Fatty had been sitting in the corner, munching away, perfectly contented, in the dark. He had ceased eating now, and he watched the window closely.

His heart was beating with great rapidity, and he decided that he would wait in silence until something more definite took place. His first thought, naturally, was that somebody was determined to make a raid on Levi's tuck. Such a thought as this would naturally come to Fatty Little.

Probably it was one of the juniors from the other house—Christine might have got wind of the hamper, for example. If this proved to be the case, Fatty would lose no time in teaching the raider a well-needed lesson.

Until fairly recently it would have been a difficult matter for any would-be burglar to gain admittance into the end study. For the window had been barred, and the door had been fitted with a special lock. These precautions had been taken because Dick Goodwin, when he first came to St. Frank's, had been busy on a special invention.

But, when that affair was over, the bars had been removed, and the lock had been taken away. For it was not exactly the thing to have this study differ from the rest.

Fatty sat there, quite still, with a chunk of bread in one hand, and a piece of greasy fish in the other. At last, growing impatient, he recommenced eating—he didn't see any reason why he should stop.

And then, with a click, the catch went back.

And, as Fatty watched, the window was slowly pushed up. Dimly outlined against the bright sky, Fatty could see a black, indistinct figure.

CHAPTER. VI.

HARDLY SUCCESSFUL.

FATTY LITTLE was really startled. For he now saw that the intruder was not a junior. He was, in fact, a man—a man wearing a slouch hat and a long overcoat. And when the intruder stepped into the room, he stood quite still for at least half a minute.

It was a trying time for Fatty.

He thought that his lungs would burst in his attempt to conceal the sound of his breathing, for the man stood there motionless, apparently listening. But Fatty passed through the ordeal successfully, for when the stranger commenced moving again, he was evidently quite unconscious of the fact that the fat junior sat in the corner.

Fatty realised that he was at a disadvantage. If the man came over to the cupboard, intent upon raiding grub, Fatty would not be able to do much to defend himself, for he was sitting down. And so, blindly, he reached out a hand for a weapon. His fingers closed over a bottle, and he gave a little sigh of satisfaction. This, at all events, would prove of some use in a scrap.

But it seemed that the man was not intent upon the cupboard at all. He felt his way cautiously and carefully to the centre of the room until he arrived at the table. Then Fatty became aware of a scraping sound. This continued for some time until there was a sharp, crackling smash. And then the truth came to the fat junior.

The man was forcing open the locked drawer of the table!

He was evidently successful, too, for Fatty heard the drawer slide out. Then came a slight rattle, followed by a murmur of satisfaction.

The intruder, in fact, had seized the sealed envelope which Levi had displayed to Mr. Ryan and Mr. Webb! It was this sealed envelope, of course, that the man had come for. He had evidently had very precise instructions, for he had gone straight to the table, without hesitation.

Without troubling to push the drawer in again, the man crept away, and made his way towards the window. But Fatty now took a hand in the game. He did not see any reason why he should allow this marauder to escape with his spoils, whatever they happened to be.

Fatty gave one tremendous yell, sprang to his feet, and rushed across the room.

"Oh! O-oh!" gasped the man, nearly scared out of his life.

The next second Fatty was upon him every ounce of Fatty, in fact. The result was inevitable. The man went down with a crash, and Fatty fell on to him with all his weight.

"Help! Burglars! Thieves!" roared Fatty, at the top of his voice. "Help! Help!"

The fat junior was not uttering these cries because he felt himself in any danger. He merely wanted to attract attention. But he soon found that his prisoner was not content to remain a captive. The man struggled fiercely, cursing under his breath almost all the time.

He struggled and kicked and hit out right and left. In the darkness the pair fought a furious battle.

"You rotter!" shouted Fatty. "If you don't be quiet, I'll swipe you across the head with this bottle!"

"Curse you!" snarled the man. "Let me go! I'll half kill you if you don't —"

"Help!" bellowed Fatty desperately. • For at that moment the man had given a sudden, tremendous heave. Fatty rolled over, and the intruder managed to scramble up. The next second he brought his fist round with terrific force. It crashed squarely into Fatty Little's face. The fat junior gave one grunting cry, and collapsed backwards on to the floor. He remained quite still, completely knocked out of time.

With the agility of a monkey, the man leapt out of the window, and raced across the Triangle at full speed. And with him he took that sealed envelope!

Meanwhile, Fatty's shouts had been heard in other portions of the Ancient House. This was not very surprising, for he had uttered them in a tremendously loud voice.

I was the first to hear them in the Remove dormitory, and I sat up in bed, alert at once. Faint and far away came those yells for assistance. Before I could jump out of bed, however, Handforth was sitting up—and a good many other juniors, too.

"Great Scott! What's all that noise?"

"Who's shouting for help?"

"What's the matter?"

All sorts of questions were asked, and

the sleepy juniors were very alarmed. For, waking up in that abrupt fashion, they were somewhat confused.

Handforth, for once, was out of bed in a twinkling. He saw an opportunity here to distinguish himself.

"Come on, you chaps!" he shouted. "There's somebody in trouble—burglars, I expect!"

"What—what shall we do?" gasped Church.

"Go down!" replied Handforth.

"Come on! You, too, McClure!"

Handforth rushed off, without troubling to put any shoes on, or even a dressing-gown. And he pelted out of the dormitory, Church and McClure at his heels. I was just slipping into my shoes at the same moment.

"It's Fatty!" I exclaimed. "I've just noticed that his bed is empty. He's got into hot water, or something—I don't suppose it's much."

"Dear old boy, I dare say he went down to raid Levi's study!" suggested Sir Montie.

"That's about the size of it," I agreed. "Come on!"

Handforth and Co. were already half-way down the stairs. They pelted down so quickly that they nearly fell over one another. Arriving at the bottom, Handforth paused for just a second, switched on the light which illuminated the Remove passage. Then he and his chums went hurrying along. Even as they did so, there came a great crash from the end study.

"Come on!" gasped Handforth. "They're in Levi's study!"

"Oh, my hat!" said Church.

They dashed up, and Handforth entered Solomon Levi's study at the run. But, immediately inside the door, he came to a standstill with a jerk, and his eyes nearly stared out of his head. He uttered a low cry of horror.

"What's the matter?" asked Church.

"Look!"

There was something terrible in Handforth's tone, and he stood aside, allowing Church and McClure to see into the study. And what they saw caused them to shiver with apprehension and alarm.

For Fatty Little was lying on the floor, not far from the window. Fatty was still—deathly still—and his face was smeared with blood. Not only this, but a terrible, ominous red pool lay on the oilcloth which covered the study, and, as Handforth and Co. watched, this red

pool trickled slowly towards them. Fatty was lying in it, and he did not move.

"Good heavens!" panted Handforth. "Poor old Fatty—dead! He's been murdered——"

"Don't!" gasped Church. "What—what shall we do?"

"We—we must give the alarm!" stammered McClure, white to the lips. "Fatty—killed! What can it mean? Who—who has done it——"

Somehow or other, the three juniors had not sufficient nerve to stay there any longer. With one accord they turned, and pelted up the Remove passage as though a thousand demons were at their heels.

They were terrified, horrorstruck, by what they had seen.

And, before they had got half-way up the stairs, they encountered a crowd of other juniors, including myself. We saw at once that something of a very unusual character had happened.

"What's the matter, Handy?" I asked sharply.

"Fatty—murdered!" gasped Handforth desperately.

"What?"

"Begad! Don't be so frightfully ridiculous, Handforth——"

"It's true!" shouted McClure shrilly. "Fatty is lying in Levi's study—in a pool of blood——"

"Oh, good heavens!"

"It—it can't be true!"

"Boys—boys!" exclaimed a voice from the top of the stairs. "What is the meaning of this commotion? What are you doing out of your dormitory at this hour of the night?"

Nelson Lee came hurriedly down the stairs. He was attired in a dressing gown and his slippers. And he was looking rather severe.

"Didn't you hear Little yelling for help, sir?" shouted Handforth. "He's been killed—he's lying dead in Levi's study!"

"My dear boy, there surely must be some mistake," said Nelson Lee calmly. "I cannot possibly believe that what you say is true."

"But it is true, sir—we saw him!" said McClure, shivering. "There was a great red pool——"

"Boys you will stay here!" commanded Nelson Lee grimly. "Handforth you had better come along with me, and show me exactly what you mean. I cannot have the whole crowd

of you at my heels."

"But I can come, sir, surely?" I put in warmly.

"Yes, Nipper, you may come."

I was quite startled myself by this time. And we hurried down the stairs, and then went at the double down the Remove passage until we came to the end study. The door was still standing ajar, and the electric light was switched on. Handforth had switched it on as he had entered the room, at the first moment.

"He's—he's lying just by the window, sir," whispered Handforth. "I suppose we'd better fetch the police, and —"

"Handforth, you are a perfectly ridiculous boy!" said Nelson Lee grimly. "I have a mind to punish you severely for telling such a preposterous story. By what I can see, there is very little the matter with Little!"

"Wha—at!" gasped Handforth faintly.

I pushed myself into the study, and I could not help grinning. Fatty Little, far from being deceased, was squatting down near the study cupboard, and in one hand he held a huge chunk of cake. In the other hand reposed a jam tart. And Fatty's mouth was quite full up.

"Little!" exclaimed Nelson Lee sternly. "What is the meaning of this?"

Fatty swallowed something very hard. His face was certainly smeared with blood—there was no doubt about this—and a huge pool of red was visible on the floor.

"I—I had to have something, sir," panted Fatty. "I—I was bowled over, you know, and I needed some grub to revive me!"

"Well, I'm jiggered!" said Handforth blankly. "You—you awful spoofer!"

"Oh, really, Handforth—"

"You fat swindler!" roared Handforth. "I thought you were dead!"

"He's awfully sorry to disappoint you, Handy," I chuckled. "But by what I can see, Fatty isn't anywhere near being dead. Although I must say he seems to have been in the wars somewhat."

"Tell me what has happened, Little," said Nelson Lee grimly. "Be sharp, my boy—I am not disposed to be very patient with you."

"I just came down for a snack, sir!"

said Little, rising to his feet. "Then—then somebody came in through the window. A burglar, sir—he pinched something out of the table drawer, and I jumped on him."

"Who was this person—a man?"

"Yes, sir—an awful ruffian!" said Little. "I just got him down nicely when he sprang up, and gave me a terrific swipe on the nose. It made my nose bleed, too, and I was quite bowled over for about two minutes. I had to eat something to pull me round!"

"But—but your nose didn't bleed so much as all that!" shouted Handforth, in amazement.

"That!" snorted Little, pointing to the pool on the floor. "That's red currant wine, you silly ass!"

"Wine!"

"Of course—I knocked the bottle over just as I fell—I'd got it in my hand all ready to give the chap a swipe. But it fell over and smashed!"

I couldn't help grinning. And, after all, the mistake had been rather a natural one on Handforth's part. The wine was very red, and, when viewed in the light that Handforth had seen it, he naturally mistook it for gore.

"Did this man get out through the window?" I asked quickly.

"Of course he did, you silly ass!" said Little. "Where did you think he went—up the chimney?"

Nelson Lee was already at the window, and he went out into the Triangle, and scouted about for some little time. Finally, he returned after a fruitless search. He had been unable to find any sign of the intruder. This was not very surprising for the man had had a good start. By this time he was probably well away.

Solomon Levi had come down, and he had been told of the occurrence. I was rather startled—for I knew what this meant.

"By gum!" exclaimed Goodwin. "They've—they've been here, Solly!"

"So I should imagine," said Levi calmly.

"And they took that sealed envelope from the table drawer!" went on Dick.

"They've stolen it!"

"Precisely!" said the Jewish boy. "Awfully careless of me to leave it in such a place, wasn't it?"

In Bannington, Mr. Hooker J. Ryan and Mr. Stanley Wobb were waiting.

The time was nearly three o'clock in the morning. And the pair were waiting in the front room of Webb's house. Their patience was rewarded at last, for a shabby looking figure appeared outside, hesitated for a moment, and then tapped upon the front window. Mr. Webb was at the door in less than a minute.

"Well?" he exclaimed sharply.

"It's all right, sir—I've got it!" exclaimed the stranger.

"Good!" exclaimed Webb. "Give it to me, man—give it to me!"

The stranger took from his pocket a sealed envelope. He handed it across the table to Webb, and then with a nod, he walked away. All this had been prearranged, of course. The man would receive his reward on the morrow.

Webb closed the door of his house, walked into the front room, and there was a light of gloating triumph in his eyes.

"Splendid!" he exclaimed. "We've got it, Ryan—that idea of yours has been successful!"

"Sure!" said the American. "What you need in a case of this sort, Webb, is brains!"

Mr. Webb turned the sealed envelope over once or twice, and then inserted his thumb under the flap.

He opened the envelope, and then withdrew a sheet of notepaper. With gleaming eyes he glanced at it. Then, gradually the expression on his face changed. Instead of that light of satisfaction, there came one of consternation and fury.

"By thunder!" he exclaimed, at

length, in a voice which quivered with rage.

"Say, what's the matter——"

"Look—look at this!" shouted Webb savagely.

Mr. Ryan took the sheet of paper and his eyes opened wide as he read the words upon it:

"This piece of paper cost about a farthing. If it is worth more to you—well, you're welcome to it."

SOLOMON LEVI."

Mr. Webb looked at Mr. Ryan, and Mr. Ryan looked at Mr. Webb.

"Done!" snarled Webb fiercely.

"That's sure enough!" agreed Mr. Ryan. "The kid's put one over on us, Webb. Say, he's just about as cute as they make 'em. I'm darned if I don't admire him!"

Without the slightest doubt, Solomon Levi had proved himself to be the equal of his opponents. In fact, he had beaten them all along the line. Both the men had been quite certain that that sealed envelope contained the option of the property in Bannington High Street. And, instead, it only proved to be a worthless slip of paper. Levi had taken good care to place the real option in a position of safety.

But this incident only made the Jewish boy's enemies all the more determined to gain their end. And, before very many hours had elapsed, some further exciting adventures were destined to occur.

The battle, in fact, had only just commenced.

THE END.

TO MY READERS.

Solomon Levi loses no time in getting ahead with his cinema scheme, and, in order that the boys of St. Frank's will be able to run their own picture-palace, he offers them shares in the concern. His father hears of the scheme, and expresses his approval. Backed up by old Mr. Levi, himself a prominent business man, the shares are soon snapped up by the boys. But, in the meantime, Webb and his associate, Ryan, are not idle. Defeated by fair means, they decide to adopt other tactics. All this is related in a splendidly told story: "The Schoolboy Cinema Owners!" appearing in next week's number of "The Nelson Lee Library."

THE EDITOR.

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. Later Lin is employed to shadow Crawson-Crake on the embankment at midnight, in an interview with Cora, and give a low whistle when he sees danger. In his excitement Lin forgets to give the signal, and is thrown over in disgust by his employer. While looking for work, he gets into trouble with an old enemy.

(Now read on.)

Up Before the Magistrate!

IT happened that Lin did not set off early that third morning on his rather disheartening quest for work. He decided to try a few written applications, picking out the likely looking "Boy or Youth Wanted" advertisements in the newspapers.

Sam Wade's took in quite a large selection of papers for the benefit of its patrons, and Jess let him have the pick of these as they came in, fresh and early. Lin ran out and invested a bit of his capital in some stationery and the necessary stamps; then, retiring to the seclusion of his little room upstairs, made a desk of the tiny washstand and began his task.

It was not an easy one to him. He was not a practised penman, and being naturally anxious to do his best, the composition of each letter cost him not a little time and trouble—and spoilt paper. His handwriting was not so bad, and he could spell fairly correctly; it was putting the thing together that puzzled him. He knew that he could have spoken what he wanted to say easily

enough; the tough job was to put it down in writing!

He had only done one letter, and was wrestling with the opening difficulties of another, when Sam Wade, without knocking, pushed the door open and thrust his head into the room. All the colour had fled from his chubby cheeks, and he was so scared or angry, that the remnant of hair around the back of his neck stood out like the bristles of a deck-swab!

"Thought it 'ud come to this!" he gasped, from the doorway, in mingled agitation and breathlessness caused by a hurried climb up three flights of stairs. "Bound to come to this, the way you've been going on!"

"Come to what?" asked Lin impatiently. The interruption had ruined a hard-won sentence, and he would have to begin the letter all over again.

"Thought when you came in near on to one o'clock, night before last, that it 'ud come to this sort of thing sooner or later!" panted Sam, rolling his round, bald head solemnly. "And now it's come! And at my hotel, too! I wouldn't have it happen here for a thousand pounds! It'll get into the papers, and then what'll I do! Me, a respectable man, that never had a shadder of shame on his name before! And now it's come, and I'll be ruined!"

"What on earth is the matter?" asked Lin. "Is the place on fire—or what?"

"Fire—wish it was only fire!" groaned the little man. "Fires ain't shameful! Fires ain't disgraceful! No; it's the police! Oh, lor', it's the police!"

"Police?" repeated Lin, rather bewildered, for his mind still ran more upon his interrupted work. "What have they come for? What do they want?"

"What do they want? They want you!" Sam Wade burst out explosively. "They've come for you!"

"For me?" said Lin. "Then I'd better go down and see what they want."

And he actually stayed to gather up and put away his writing materials, and did not seem in the least degree panic-stricken by Sam Wade's awful announcement! Sam couldn't understand it, and probably put down the boy's unnatural calmness to hardened depravity. But the truth was that Lin saw nothing to be alarmed about. He

could not recall having done anything of a criminal nature; and his only likely idea of anything that the police might want him for was in connection with the arrest of Crawson-Crake.

He was rather more curious than alarmed, as he followed the agitated, jerky steps of Sam Wade downstairs.

The little man's words had rather suggested that there were a number of policemen waiting below. But there proved to be only one—a handsome young giant, about six-feet-two in his regulation boots.

To avoid his sensational appearance in the front shop, Jess had smuggled the uniformed giant into the kitchen-like department at the end, where he now stood waiting; looking rather red and uncomfortable, as though he did not much relish his errand. Which is no wonder, as Jess, whom he had long known and openly admired, was raking him rather badly with a cross-fire of her bright eyes and sharp tongue.

"Here he comes, the desperate character!" she exclaimed, as Lin came in, the scared face of the unhappy Sam appearing behind him. "You don't mean to say that you're going to try to take him away all by yourself, Mr. Policeman! Suppose he turns violent and attacks you!"

The young officer affected to ignore her, and glancing at a paper in his hand, turned to Lin and said, with a gruffness put on for the occasion:

"Your name Fleet? L-Lin Fleet?"

"That is my name," answered Lin. "What do you want me for?"

"You've got to come with me," said the policeman. "And look sharp! The court opens in half an hour, and your case is third down."

"Wh-what's the charge, officer?" faltered Sam Wade, from the background. "Is—is it anything very shocking?"

"Well, it isn't murder or manslaughter, nor yet arson or burglary," said the constable, with the nearest approach to a grin he could allow himself while on duty. "It's tampering with a motor-car to the common danger, that's what it is. Now look sharp, my lad! Don't do to keep his worship waiting!"

"Is that all it is? Not a hanging job this time!" laughed Jess. "Keep your pluck up, Lin! You won't get more than seven years!"

Nevertheless, she managed to draw her friend the policeman aside, as he turned to go, and to ask in a graver undertone:

"I suppose it will be all right, Joe? The boy is sure to clear himself. There's no risk of—of prison?"

P.-c. Joseph Dale shook his head doubtfully.

"Well, I don't know," he said. "It's old Bearham on the Bench, and he's always down on boys—specially since he had his own car fooled with by a gang of youngsters, one evening not so long ago, that he's not forgotten. Still, if the boy's got witnesses it may be all right."

When they had gone Jess began to feel troubled and anxious.

It was bad enough to see the boy marched off by a policeman, like a pickpocket, but to think of him sentenced and shut up in a cell was horrible! Witnesses—he had no witnesses; not even anyone to speak up for his good character! And she could do nothing to help him!

Stay! She suddenly remembered her visitor of yesterday, and the promise she had given. She got out the card the young lady had given her, and flew to the 'phone in Sam's little office. She luckily got the number without delay, but to her dismay she was told over the wire that Miss Twyford was out. It was the voice of a man that answered her. But something prompted her to give her message just the same; and she heard the brief, business-like response with quite a thrill of relief:

"What police-court? Thanks! Coming!"

Though only heard afar, that voice somehow inspired Jess with confidence. It gave the idea of strength and resourcefulness; the voice of a man who gripped things and bent them to his will! She felt that she had done all in her power to help the boy, and went about her work more hopefully, though still anxious, and glad that the bustle of the shop left her no leisure to brood in suspense.

In the meantime, Lin Fleet passed through an experience which, for sheer bitterness, excelled all that he had ever known in his none too smooth and comfortable life. It was the bitterness of shame!

To be led through the streets by a policeman, like a captured thief!

He had not thought of that, and when people turned their heads to stare at the big policeman and his boy-prisoner—for although P.-c. Dale did not even lay a finger upon him, Lin knew that they took him for a young miscreant being "run in"—he rather wished that a friendly earthquake would open the pavement under him and let him drop out of sight!

Fortunately it was not a long ordeal—that part of it, at least. The police-court was quite near, and Lin felt a sense of relief as he passed in with his guard, and the constable at the door waved back the crowd of small boys and girls, and not a few idlers of a larger growth, that had tagged on behind and followed, making audible remarks on Lin's personal appearance, the probable nature of his crime, and the length of sentence he was likely to get.

But although it was a relief to get inside and away from their hateful voices, the change was hardly for the better.

He was led into a large, bare room, with whitewashed walls, and high windows crossed by thick iron bars. It was not empty, by any means, there being a goodly company of minor "cases"—chiefly men, but with one or two women, and a sprinkling of boys. They were none of them criminals of the deepest dye, being petty offenders collected from the neighbouring police-stations.

and awaiting their turns to appear before the magistrate. Prisoners with graver charges against them were kept in cells by themselves until wanted in the dock.

But they were a very mixed lot in that detention-room, and some of the boys were of the lowest type—young criminals in the making; already hardened, and able to speculate with grin and coarse jest, on their probable luck before the “beak” that morning. Dreading that by word or sign they might try to claim comradeship with him, Lin shrank into an angle of the wall, as far from them as he could possibly get—intensely miserable.

It was the most wretched hour that he had ever spent.

One by one the “cases” were called, and the unsavoury company in the room gradually thinned. But it seemed as though his own turn would never come. The strain of waiting, the suspense, made him feel dazed and bewildered. It was almost like one in the meshes of a bad dream, that he got up at last, hearing his name called, and followed the burly officer who beckoned him from the doorway.

He was conducted in silence through a maze of evil-smelling, whitewashed passages, and up a flight of stone steps. Then a lock clicked; he was pushed forward, and found himself standing in a wooden box, with a row of iron spikes around him, a little below the level of his shoulders. The dock!

He looked round, bewildered, and still feeling that it was all part of a nasty dream.

The place reminded him of the dingy little chapel to which Aunt Harriet used to take him when he was smaller. There were seats not unlike pews in the space below him, and people sitting there, waiting, as if for the service to begin. And opposite to him was a wooden enclosure something like a pulpit. Within it, at a desk, was seated a severe-looking, elderly gentleman, whom Lin vaguely thought might be the magistrate. At another desk a little below him sat another elderly gentleman, his clerk. In a sort of gallery at the back were some more people—personal friends of some of the “cases” still to appear, or merely idlers with a taste for this kind of show.

Lin had a policeman behind him, and there were other policemen about—all without their helmets. And he thought curiously how strange they looked. He could never have imagined a policeman without a helmet!

Then a man with a sing-song voice called “Silence!” and he heard his own name. Then another voice. It was the clerk, reading out the charge.

He tried to fix his attention, and heard himself accused of having, on a certain afternoon—the date most precisely given, though he had completely forgotten it—maliciously tampered with the mechanism of a motor-car, causing it to run upon the public footway to the common danger.

The first witness was called.

This was one of the policemen who had been on duty near the spot. He described how he had heard the commotion, and hurried up in time to see a large car backed off the kerb into the road, and there come to a standstill. He saw the accused leap out of it and run away swiftly through the crowd. Yes; he was quite sure of the lad’s identity. He had been near enough to have a good view of him.

He was followed by a second constable, whose evidence was much the same. The driver of the car was next called, and Lin could not help feeling that the fellow favoured him with a half-grin of malice and cunning spite, as he stepped into the witness-box.

Aware that he had rather a raw, countenanced look about him, he took his line from that, and adopted the role of a simple, honest, and blunt young fellow, only anxious to show that he was not in the least to blame himself, but good-hearted, and quite unwilling to get anyone else into trouble if he could help it.

And he really did the thing extremely well; telling his tale with an air of simplicity that was quite engaging.

He was not used to London, he explained, having brought the car up to town for the first time that very day, and he thought it would be quite safe to leave it for two or three minutes, while he ran up the court to deliver a note. He knew that Master Percy, his employer’s little boy, would not meddle with the gear; he was such a very little fellow, and so good! And so it was a great shock to him, when he heard the shouting, and came running back, to see his car actually on the pavement among the people! Yes, he saw the big boy jump off the car as it backed into the roadway and stopped. He couldn’t get there quick enough to catch the boy, but he saw his face plain as anything. Was it the lad now standing in the dock? Yes; he was prepared to swear to that.

And the chauffeur, who had given his name as Ezra Lamb, left the witness-box, no doubt well satisfied with himself. For he had managed to get the sympathy of the court on his side, and make things look very black for the lad in the dock.

One more witness was called. This was a man who had chanced to be passing at the time, and who claimed to have seen the whole occurrence. But he had only seen part of it, or chose to suppress the rest. For he appeared on behalf of Ezra Lamb, and his evidence merely backed up the chauffeur’s story. He was some distance off when he heard the screams and shouting, but he turned and ran that way, in time to see the big motor-car glide backwards off the pavement, and a boy, very like the lad now in the dock, jump out of it, and make off very quickly.

There must have been some in the crowded Strand that afternoon who had seen the boy’s agile leap on to the runaway car,

(Continued on page 111 of cover.)

and who must have grasped the true purpose of that prompt and daring act. But no one came forward to speak a word for Lin!

As no more witnesses appeared, he was curtly told that he might speak, if he had anything to say for himself.

And then he discovered, to his dismay, that though he had plenty to say he didn't know how to say it! It was all so strange, so hateful, to be stuck there, and stared at, and frowned at as though he had done something dreadfully mean and wicked, while all the while he knew he hadn't!

He tried to tell his own story of the affair—to explain that he jumped on the car to prevent a bad accident, after the little boy had started it and made it run on to the pavement. But he got confused, and hesitated badly. He knew himself that it sounded as if he was making it up as he stumbled along. At last the magistrate sharply ordered him to be silent!

"You are merely trifling with the court,

and I shall not allow you to continue," he said very sternly. "There is no room for doubt that you are guilty of a mischievous exploit which might have resulted in an accident of the gravest character! You are of an age to know better, and I shall make an example of you. I will not give you the option of a fine—you need a sharper lesson. I shall send you to pri—"

He broke off angrily. There was some stir at the back of the court; a clear, strong voice sounded:

"Stay! One moment, your worship, if you please, or you may do that lad a grave injustice! I witnessed the whole of this affair, and I desire to give evidence."

Lin's heart gave a big bound. He knew that voice; and knew, too, the tall, athletic figure that now appeared at the bar of the court.

With a thrill of hope he whispered to himself, "Mr. Mysterious!"

(To be continued.)

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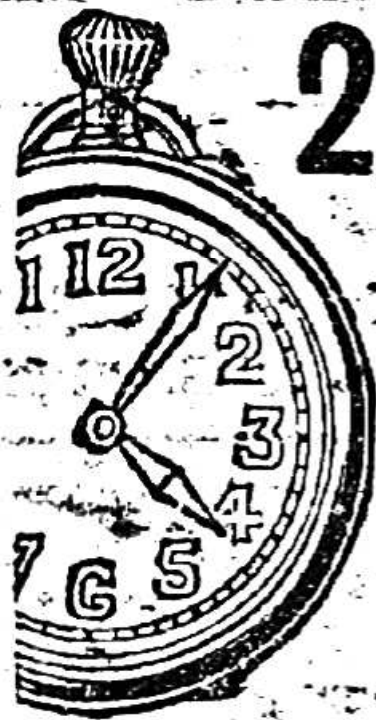
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